A COMMODITY OF GOOD NAMES

ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF MARGARET GELLING

Edited by O. J. Padel and David N. Parsons

SHAUN TYAS
DONINGTON
2008
The site of the battle of Brunanburh: manuscripts and maps, grammar and geography

PAUL CAVILL

In recent (and not-so-recent) years there has been much speculation concerning the whereabouts of the Brunanburh of the poem written into the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, s.a. 937. There are two particular areas of scholarly development since the edition of the poem published by Campbell in 1938¹ that have a bearing on this vexed question. These two areas of advance are, firstly, the publication of modern and more comprehensive editions of medieval texts which mention the place, giving more (or different) spellings; and, secondly, the work done by Margaret Gelling and Ann Cole on the particular landscape features denoted by place-name elements. In what follows, I aim to bring information from these two sources to bear on what can be deduced from the earliest records as to possible sites for the battle. It may be, of course, that ‘the site of the battle cannot be identified’,² but onomastic philology and topography may at least narrow down the possibilities.

1. Early spellings of the name Brunanburh

Campbell listed the spellings as follows:³

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Brunanburh</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Brunanburh</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Brunanburh</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Brunanburh</td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Brunanbyrig (dat.sg.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Brunanbyri (dat.sg.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O³</td>
<td>Brunanburh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Æthelweard</td>
<td>Brunandune (dat.sg.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ The Battle of Brunanburh, ed. Alistair Campbell (London, 1938).
³ Battle of Brunanburh, ed. Campbell, p. 60. The names of ancient writers cited by Campbell have been silently updated.
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Symeon of Durham  Et Brunnanuerc vel Brunnanbyrig
Weondune, Wendune
William of Malmesbury  Brunefeld (v.l. Bruneford)
John of Worcester  Brunanburh
Henry of Huntingdon  Bruneburh, Brunesburh
Gaimar  Bruneswere
Varies twelfth-century documents  Bruningafeld
Scottish Chronicle  Duinbrunde
Annales Cambrie  Brune
Annals of Clonmacnoise  Plaines of othlynn (v.l. othyn)

In a number of important respects, these authorities need to be adjusted.

The manuscript of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle B text is obscure at the top of folio 31v where the name occurs. The reading that Campbell gives, with -nn-, was also Whitelock’s reading. However, the latest editor, Simon Taylor, with the aid of the best available technology, reads Brunanb[ur]h. If this is correct, the evidence for the -nn-spelling consists of a later but undated addition to the A manuscript of the Chronicle, the reading of the mid-eleventh-C manuscript, and that of Symeon of Durham manuscripts in the twelfth century. This strongly suggests that the -nn-spelling is a variant and not an original early form: the tenth-century chronicle versions A² and B, and independently, the early eleventh-century manuscripts of Æthelweard, as well as all the later sources apart from Symeon, have a single -n-.

This means that the first element of the name Brunanburh is, on the evidence of the earliest spellings, brūna or brūne: the first most likely to be male personal name, the second possibly a river-name ‘dark, brown, or shining one’. Campbell felt obliged to consider several

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4 Campbell’s ‘Pictish Chronicle’ (following Skene). The Chronicle is edited from the Poppleton MS (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, latin 4126) by Marjorie O. Anderson, Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland (Edinburgh, 1970), pp. 235–60, with the reference to Duinbrunde at p. 251. I am grateful to Dr Oliver Padel for this reference, and for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.
5 Whitelock, English Historical Documents, p. 219 note.
8 The A and B (late tenth century, according to Taylor, p. xi) versions at this point are tenth-century; there are of course later additions.
10 David N. Parsons and Tanis Styles, The Vocabulary of English Place-Names (Brace-
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options to explain the forms with the -nn- spelling, which thus become unnecessary: 11

The form with nn is less easily explained: it may be the gen. s. of O.E. *brunne or *bronna, a form of burne ‘stream,’ without primitive metathesis, or of O.E. burne in a form in which the r has been restored to its former position by a later metathesis, and the medial n doubled by the influence of O.N. brunnr. 12

Symeon’s forms may well be influenced by ON brunnr. The run of spellings for the County Durham name Burnigill, ‘Hill called Bruning, the place named after the River Browney’, includes Brunnehill c. 1200, Brunnehill 1260, Burnehtill 1280; 13 the first of these forms may similarly show the influence of ON brunnr. It is doubtful that the C Chronicle scribe was so influenced, however. Scribe 2, writing the section here, sometimes doubles consonants where the vowel remains long: compare wiggis in the Brunanburh poem at lines 20 and 59 of the edited text.14 The possibility, even likelihood, is that we have here in the A edition and the C text an orthographical variant without phonological or etymological significance. At any rate, the original first element of the name Brunanburh is even less plausibly ON brunnr than it was before, and this effectively rules out Cyril Hart’s identification of the battle-site with one of the Bournes in Lincolnshire or Cambridgeshire. 15

The only spelling quoted by Campbell for Gaimar is Bruneswerce. This is the reading of a single manuscript of L’Estoire des Engleis; two others read Burneweste, and another Brunewerche. 16 We may take -weste as a scribal error for -werce in the exemplar of the two

Cester) (Nottingham, 2000), s.v. brun. It is important to note the caveats that Parsons and Styles express about identifying the meaning of the element. The first part of the present article aims to avoid being too specific about the meaning, which is uncertain, and to concentrate on the grammar and palaeography of the name Brunanburh and variants, which are more definite.

11 It is to be noted that the -nn- spellings (as in Campbell’s explanation quoted) generally support a riverine feature for the specific element in the name. The weaker evidence for this spelling argued above makes the riverine identification of the specific both less necessary and less compelling.
12 Battle of Brunanburh, ed. Campbell, p. 61.

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manuscripts having this spelling; but irrespective of this, we are left with a predominant grammatical form even in Gaimar representing the regular Middle English reduction of the OE weak genitive singular inflection ending -an to -e. The genitive -s- in Brunesweoros is an apparently conscious representation of the grammatical case, but an independent variant of the predominant form: that is, these spellings indicate that the -s- is a secondary genitive.

The significance of this becomes clearer when we consider the forms given by Campbell for the name in Henry of Huntingdon’s Historia Anglorum. Campbell gives two spellings from Arnold’s edition, Brunebrurh and Brunesburh. Arnold used the early thirteenth-century MS British Library Arundel 48, and the spelling of the second of these in the manuscript (noted by Arnold), at v. 19, is in fact Brunesburith.18 This is an interesting spelling in its own right, showing the attempt by the scribe to represent the genitive of the first element and what appears to be a current spelling or pronunciation of the second element. Parallels for the pronunciation of the final consonant [x] in burh, or its dative byrig, as [u], as represented by the spelling, are to be found in a wide range of place-names from Dorset north, including (perhaps significantly) the Cheshire Bromborough, Bramburh 1297 (15th), Bromboth 1291, 1348.20

The spelling Brunebrurh occurs twice in Arnold’s principal manuscript, MS British Library Arundel 48, once in v. 18, once in v. 32. Arnold also records the reading of Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS latin 6042, of the mid-twelfth century, Brunebiri, at v. 19. Thus, even in Arnold’s edition, we have evidence for three definite Brune-spellings against one Brunes-.

The latest editor of the Historia Anglorum, Diana Greenway, uses MS British Library Egerton 3668, written in two or more hands of the mid-twelfth century, for the base text of her edition.22 The Egerton text is preferred by the editor to the ‘corrupt and contaminated’ text of the

17 L’Eistoire des Engleis, ed. Bell, p. xxii, where the stemma derives D and L (burneoeuhte spellings) from an exemplar Y.
19 EPNS Dor, 1, 174, where 13th-century spellings of Winfrith Newburgh include ~ Neuburth, ~ Nouborthe.
20 EPNS Che, IV, 287. I have counted around two dozen examples, predominantly from the 13th century, in Devon, Dorset, Essex, Cambridgeshire, Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Cheshire, Yorkshire and Cumberland. The sound-change is specifically mentioned by EPNS YoW, VI, 3, in relation to Keldyce.
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Arundel MS. 23 Though Greenway does not specifically collate all the manuscripts (there are too many for this to be coherently presented), her readings for the name are Brunebirih (twice, once in v. 18, once in v. 19) and Bruneberi in v. 32. 24 Here once more is evidence that the -s-genitive is secondary in the 'contaminated' later manuscript, and in addition it is not as prominent in the tradition as Campbell's list would seem to imply. On this evidence, the Brunesburih spelling in MS British Library Arundel 48, v. 19, looks like a singularity, a one-off variant introduced by the scribe here, when elsewhere he used the more standard Bruneburh.

Cumulatively, then, the spellings of the name Brunanburh throughout the early sources point to the fact that the first element was historically a weak Old English substantive, either brūna or brūne, both of which have the genitive singular form brūnan. The possibility that we have an original metathesised version of Old English burna or burne, lacking primitive metathesis or with later metathesis, as Campbell suggests, 25 cannot be entirely ruled out, but for the latter we might expect some evidence of a duality of forms before, and in addition to, the garbled spellings Burneweste in manuscripts of Gaimar.

In the Middle English period, weak substantives in common usage lost their -an genitive endings and adopted the strong -es genitive endings. In compounds such as place-names often are, the internal inflectional ending often weakened from -an- to -e- to zero, though some names preserve the internal inflection. Old English compound names had by the time of this change become appellatives rather than combinations of meaningful elements, and the shift from the weak to the strong paradigm in substantives affects very few place-names. The Cheshire names Tittenley 'Titta's clearing or wood' and Budworth 'Budda's enclosure' illustrate these processes. Tittenley has spellings Titesle in Domesday Book 1086 and 1286, but the modern name preserves the original weak internal inflection. Budworth has spellings Buddeswurda c. 1115, Buddesworda 1154–60 (1329), Bodesworth, Bodisworth 1307, and the modern name has lost the weak internal inflection. 26 The two names, unusually, take occasional strong genitive inflections on the originally weak specific.

The scribal forms of Brunanburh with the unhistorical genitive -es- fit into this pattern of minor variants within an established series of spellings representing the weak grammatical form. The two -es-

23 ibid., p. clxi.
24 ibid., pp. 510, 532.
26 EPNS Che, III, 90, and II, 107–8 respectively. See also V, part 2, pp. 216–17.
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inflected variants, however, one in a Gaimar manuscript, one in a
Henry of Huntingdon manuscript, seem to point to analogical and indi-
vidual adaptation of the name, rather than a tradition where the place
was known to the scribes by a different spelling. On the balance of the
evidence, I suggest these variants are linguistic. In other words, I think
it more likely that Henry’s scribe thought or instinctively wrote as if he
had thought, ‘Brun(e) is probably somebody’s name so I’ll make it
possessive Brun(es), and I spell burh as burith’, than I know this place,
and it is now called Brunesburith’. The Gaimar tradition obviously
began from a different starting-point, probably *Brunesweor, but the
other spellings of the name similarly suggest that the form
Bruneswere is a single scribe’s linguistic adaptation rather than his
knowledge of a existing variant of the name.

Names consistently spelt with Burns- or Brun(e)- are naturally to
be derived from brü(n) or burn. These are strong substantives with the
genitive -es, and thus in a different class from the weak substantives
brūna or brūne, burna or burne, with the genitive -an. If these first
elements are in fact personal names, as is often assumed, both Brūn
and Brūna are reasonably well attested.27 Though we cannot doubt that
they are related, Brūn is not to be confused with Brūna; they are not
‘alternative form[s]’,28 and Redin lists them separately under ‘Strong
Names’ and ‘Weak Names’ respectively.29

To summarise the textual and general place-name evidence, then,
we can say that the early spellings of Brunanburh represent it as a
compound comprising a weak Old English substantive in the genitive
for the specific, and the element burh as the generic. A small number of
individual scribal variants show an unhistorical strong genitive inflec-
tion in the spelling of the specific, but these do not call into question
the basic grammatical fact that strong and weak substantives are
usually quite distinct. To most readers of the present volume, this point
of grammar hardly needs to be made — or made again, since Ray Page
outlined the issue very clearly a quarter of a century ago.30 While it is
not impossible that a name with modern spellings showing the internal
strong genitive -s- might derive from an original weak Old English

27 William George Searle, Onomasticon Anglo-Saxonicum (Cambridge, 1897), p. 117.
That Brūn is better attested than Brūna makes the insistent manuscript evidence for
a weak form significant, and the occasional drift on the part of scribes towards a
strong form all the more likely.

28 Alfred P. Smyth, Scandinavian York and Dublin: the history and archaeology of two
related Viking kingdoms, 2 vols (Dublin, 1987), II, 52.

29 Mats Redin, Studies on Uncompounded Personal Names in Old English (Uppsala,
1919), pp. 11 and 45 respectively.

Scandinavian York and Dublin), at pp. 344-5.
form, this must be thought unlikely. Without the support of evidence of earlier weak substantival inflection, arguments to the effect that names like Bromswold or Burnswark can be identified as Brunanburh (see further below) simply do not pass the first hurdle.

A great deal of current theorising about the site of the battle thus sits uncomfortably on the horns of a dilemma. Some people propose various sites dismissing what they disparagingly refer to as ‘the mere place-name’, yet they perhaps realise that without some plausible link to the name Brunanburh or its variants, any proposal as to the site is purely a matter of opinion and interpretation of the otherwise vague and varied information about the battle. It remains the case that most of the places suggested begin with B: from Hill’s recent shortlist of 21, some 16 or 17 do.

**Bromswold**

Two of the more recent and prominent suggestions as to the site of the battle are Bromswold or Bruneswold (a stretch of ancient forest particularly along the borders of Northamptonshire and Huntingdonshire), and Burnswark (Dumfries). These both immediately fall into

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31 Proving a negative is difficult. There are occasional examples of change of grammatical ending in the conversion of Scandinavian names to English forms, for example Rotherby, Leicestershire, has predominant spellings reflecting the Scandinavian name Hredbær, but two thirteenth-century spellings with an -s- English genitive: *EPNS Leic.*, III, 121–2. There are occasional names which have apparently different grammatical forms where the specific is obscure in meaning (and may have been in the Middle Ages also), for example Woodford in Dorset, which has parallel spellings with and without the -s- genitive from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries: *EPNS Dor.*, 1, 185–7. (Mills notes the specific may be the personal name Wigeheard or wierde ‘beacon’; in his *A Dictionary of British Place-Names* (Oxford 2003), s.n., he adjusts this to the personal name *Weard*.) *EPNS Essex*, p. 169, suggests that the -s- in a small number of spellings in the record for the name Shenfield ‘is pseudo-genitival’. I do not know of any name reliably interpreted as deriving from an originally weak substantive in the specific where the modern form has the characteristic -s- of the strong genitive: Erik Tenstad, *A Contribution to the Study of Genitival Composition in English Place-Names* (Uppsala, 1940), for example, does not mention this as a process in name formation.


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the category of names which do not accord with the grammar of the predominant spellings of Brunanburh.\textsuperscript{35} Certainly it is not true to say, as Smyth does, that 'The name Bruneswald is happily consistent with the linguistic requirements set out so rigourously [sic] by Professor Campbell.' He goes on:

The first element is the genitive of the personal name Brun of which an alternative form, Bruna or Brune, occurs in the placename Brunanburh. Henry of Huntingdon has the form Brunesburh (and Brunebrh) in his account of the battle, not only preserving the older form of the first element, with one n, but also giving a nominative Brun (rather than Bruna) which is the same as that in Bruneswald.\textsuperscript{36}

The matter of the second sentence here has been covered by the discussion above: the variations in spellings of the stem are not necessarily significant; and the nominative form Brun as apparently used in the spelling Brunesburmith may be the same as in Bruneswald, but it is an unhistorical variant from one scribe in one place in relation to Brunanburh, not the form (so far as it can be deduced from the manuscript tradition) that seems normally to have been used by medieval scribes in Henry's work.

The fact that no reference to the battle uses a name with \textit{w(e)ald} might also be regarded as making this theory particularly fallible. It is clear that the topographical features \textit{feld}, \textit{dün}, and probably \textit{ford} are associated with the site of the battle and the first element \textit{bruna} or \textit{brane} in the sources. These generic elements may be represented in names in the vicinity of Bruneswald, but it cannot be assumed this is the case. In other words, while it is perfectly possible that there were other \textit{Brunes-} names in the area of Bruneswald, it should not be assumed either that these could include any generic (on which see further below), or that they have anything to do with Brunanburh.

\textsuperscript{35} Similar flaws are to be found in the argument for Brinsworth, suggested by Cockburn, \textit{The Battle of Brunanburh}, and supported with detailed argument by Michael Wood, 'Brunanburh revisited', \textit{Saga-Book of the Viking Society}, 20 (1980), 200–17, and \textit{In Search of England: journeys into the English past} (London, 2000). Brinsworth is recorded from 1086 Domesday Book as Brinesford. Though manuscripts of William of Malmesbury record a name for the place of the battle \textit{apparently containing} the element \textit{ford}, \textit{Brune(f)ord}, the personal name in Brinsworth is acknowledged by Wood to be \textit{Bryni}, but he maintains that 'the evidence of the place-name is not decisive' ('Brunanburh revisited', p. 211). Still, the -\textit{s} genitive cannot be reconciled with the overwhelming weight of evidence for a weak substantive as the first element.

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Burnswork

The case for Burnswork was first made seriously by Neilson, ‘Brunanburh and Burnswork’, and it was not ruled out by Smith. It has been reasserted most recently by Kevin Halloran. One of the more enticing facets of the theory was that the name could apparently be reconciled with the form given for the battle in one of the historical sources, Gaimar, and there was also some similarity with one of Symeon’s forms. Thus Nielson, isolating the site on the Solway, writes, ‘Gaimar names it Bruneswerc, Bruneswerche, and Simeon of Durham calls it Brunanwerch.’ Likewise, but more assertively, Halloran writes: ‘There is no doubt that early forms of the place-name Burnswork would fit with both Etbrunnauncwerc and Bruneswerc.’

While Burnswork and the names in Gaimar and Symeon share an element ultimately from Old English *weorc*, neither the predominant spellings in Gaimar manuscripts nor Symeon’s *-brunna-* allow for the *-s-* genitive of Burnswork to ‘fit’ or identify it with those historical forms. In the present state of knowledge, there is in addition no evidence for the metathesised Br-spelling in the name Burnswork. In short, the similarity of the one manuscript spelling of Bruneswerc in Gaimar and the name Burnswork must be regarded as a coincidence.

A further difficulty is the late evidence for the Dumfries name, a regrettable, but not uncommon situation for Scottish names. At present, the earliest known spelling is from 1542, *Burnyswarke*; Neilson also lists *Burniework* (1608), *Burneswrack* (1623), *Burnswark* (1661). Johnston explicitly invokes Neilson’s interpretation of the name (s.n. Burenswark) in his definition ‘Bruna’s work’, and is followed by David Mills in his Dictionary: “Bruna’s fortified place”. OE masculine pers. name + *weorc*. This interpretation is not beyond the bounds of possibility, but it assumes rather a lot: metathesis of the *-r-* and change of grammatical form or a secondary genitive *-s-* in the first element. The spellings of the place-name give no warrant for the interpretation ‘Bruna’s work’: it is based on the prior assumption that this place is Brunanburh.

The *wark* in Burnswork is unquestionably the Roman camp on the hill. But there is no compelling reason to suppose that the first element of Burnswork refers to anything other than the other dominant feature of the area. The number of burns and burn-names is remarkable:

38 Neilson, ‘Brunanburh and Burnswork’, p. 49.
41 Mills, *Dictionary of British Place-Names*, p. 87.
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Gimmenbie Burn, Ecclefechan Burn, Burnhead Burn and Staney Burn among them. At least two springs rise on the hill and there are numerous others in the vicinity. Just over a mile to the north of the hill is Burnhead, a similar distance to the south is Burnside. The earlier spellings *Burnys- and Burns- thus plausibly represent the genitive singular or plural, or nominative plural, of burn. There is, then, the possibility that Burnswark means ‘fortification of the burn’, ‘burns-fortification’ or ‘fortification (in the area) of the burns’, and certainly the spellings of the name are consistent with the Scots and Middle English elements *burn and wark.*

The attempts, analysed above, that have been made to accommodate names such as Bromswold and Burnswark to the early spellings of the names given to the place of the battle, founder on the palaeographical and philological evidence. The assumption or assertion is persistently made that these place-names fit the evidence when it becomes clear, upon examination, that they do not. We cannot assimilate either of these place-names with the predominant forms of the battle place-name Brunanburh.

**Burh**

In order to privilege another version of the name and alternative sites for the battle, Halloran has argued that the *burh* element was not original, but an invention of the Old English poet: ‘There remains the real possibility’, writes Halloran, *that Brunanburh never existed as a place, but that in constructing his panegyric the author invented a variant of the real place-name that was poetically more satisfying.* Like Hart, he supposes that all the *burh* forms derive from the Old English Chronicle poem, and that metre dictated the particular dominant form that we have, ‘providing ... the bonus of alliteration’. In other words, it is suggested that the Anglo-Saxon poet made up the place-name *Brunanburh* because it was necessary to his metre. The line of the poem reads (in the A Chronicle, but there is no metrically significant variant in the other versions):

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ymbe Brunanburh bordweal clufan
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As far as the structure of Old English verse is concerned, the syllable *Brun- is the one which carries the necessary alliteration to bind with the head-stave of the line, bord-. Thus Brunandun, Bruneswerc, Brunefeld, or Bruneford would equally well supply the structural

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42 All these are clearly to be seen on the OS Explorer Map 322, Annandale.
alliteration. The metrical objection to burh thus proves specious.\textsuperscript{45}

It should be noted, moreover, that though the earliest recorded forms of the name are found in the Old English poem, the Chronicle entries in E and F are not poetical. E and F, and the Latin of F, have a prose entry, which reads (in the Old English of E): ‘Her Ædelstan cyning lædde fyrd to Brunanbyrg’,\textsuperscript{46} ‘in this year King Athelstan led an army to Brunanburh’. Both E and F used an exemplar which entirely omitted the tenth-century verse entries of A, B, C and D.\textsuperscript{47} There would be no reason for these chronicles to give the burh form unless the place was known with that element.

In addition, Campbell noted that ‘dun’ in Gaelic place-names is equivalent to burh,\textsuperscript{48} and we might refer to the Gaelic name of Edinburgh, Dunedin, by way of illustration. The Scottish Chronicle form of the place of the battle, Duinbrunde, thus suggests a burh in the name of the place, and demonstrates that this was known to a non-English writer. There is no suspicion that this writer was borrowing from the Old English poem: Marjorie Anderson points out that he was translating into Latin what appears to have been an Irish source.\textsuperscript{49} It is impossible to be sure, but this name, like the reference to Athelstan in the following sentence, ‘Adalstan filius Aduar rig Saxan’,\textsuperscript{50} may represent the simple copying of the form of the name from an earlier Irish original, with the implication that the Irish tradition translated Brunanburh from a knowledge of the English place and its name. It seems unlikely that the Scottish chronicler would casually Gaelicise a

\textsuperscript{45} W. Pearson, ‘Bramham Moor and the Red, White and Brown Battles’, \textit{Yorkshire Archaeological Journal}, 67 (1995), 23–50, at p. 28, also makes the suggestion that metre enters into the choice of name, though with a better understanding of the metrical features of Old English verse. Even so, Pearson’s claim that Brunanburh gives better alliteration than ‘Bruno(n)have’ would be unfounded; it merely adds decoration or effect, the significance of which is unclear. I owe this reference to Sarah Foot. I am grateful to Professor Foot for making a draft of her paper, ‘Where English becomes British: rethinking contexts for Brunanburh’, forthcoming in \textit{Myth, Rulership, Church and Charters: essays in honour of Nicholas Brooks}, ed. Julia Barrow and Andrew Wareham, available to me in advance of publication. This article makes clear the significance of the battle for Athelstan and his rule and trenchantly discusses the proposed sites from the perspective of political history. I am also grateful to Professor Foot for a range of helpful comments on the present paper.


\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Battle of Brunanburh}, ed. Campbell, p. 61 note.


\textsuperscript{50} Anderson, \textit{Kings and Kingship}, p. 251 (Anderson’s expansions in italic).
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place-name, and the earlier example of 'Tinemore', interpreted by A.O. Anderson as (presumably English, though of uncertain location) 'Tyne-moor', confirms this.

Finally on this point, the passage from Symeon of Durham cited by Halloran to dismiss Brunanburh as the original name appears to be misconstrued by him and actually demonstrates the opposite of what he is arguing:

Quarto post hec anno (hoc est nonentesimo tricesimo septimo Dominico Nativitatis anno) apud Weondune, quod alio nomine Aet Brunnanwerce uel Brunnanbyrig appellatur, pugnauit contra Olaf...

'The fourth year after this (that is the year 937 of Our Lord's Nativity), at Weondune which is called by another name Aet Brunnauerc or Brunnanbyrig, he fought against Olaf...'

Halloran writes:

That the burh form is placed last is surprising. So too is the fact that Simeon does not link the form to the other two by simply using a conjunction. Instead he adds an extra verb, pointedly stating that though the place is named Weondune and Etbrunnanuerc it is also called but not named Brunnanbyrig.

This is nonsense, as the precise translation of Rollason shows. Symeon so identifies the names Aet Brunnanuerc and Brunnanbyrig that he thinks of them as one, hence alio nomine, singular, for the two. This phrase from Symeon gives the most explicit support for Dodgson's statement that 'the -werce(e) forms are no more than a paraphrase of Brunanburh (burh) replaced by the almost synonymous (go)weorc).

The notions that 'the burh form may be a poetic paraphrase of the werce(e) original' (Halloran) or that 'burh [was] added to make up the metre and alliteration' (Hart), do not bear examination. There can be no doubt that the place of the battle, for all the alternatives which

81 ibid.
82 Alan Orr Anderson, Early Sources of Scottish History A.D. 500 to 1286, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1922), I, 446, note 4.
85 EPNS Che, IV, 238. The notion that the elements burh and weorc in the names are broadly synonymous has some support from Newark Priory, originally Aldebury, as noted by EPNE, 11, 254.

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appear in the later tradition, was widely and prosaically known as Brunanburh.

2. Landscape features
Among Margaret Gelling’s many significant contributions to onomastics are her two volumes on the diversity of Old English terms for landscape features.\(^{56}\) These necessitate a reconsideration of the variant names given in the ancient sources for the place where the battle of Brunanburh took place. The two main elements that appear besides burh and weorc are dün and feld.

Æthelweard, a near-contemporary witness for the place of the battle, gives the dative Brunandune, and Symeon gives dative forms We(o)ndune. Two different and apparently independent place-names containing the element dün are thus given for the site of the battle, and for this reason I propose to treat the names which contain the element dün as genuine variants for the battle-site rather than later ‘made-up’ names. There might be more doubt about the feld names, these being evidenced later. And the fact that feld and its later variant field remained in currency for a battle-field might mean that the names containing feld were given in recognition that it was a battle-site rather than being pre-existing names. Against this, the twelfth-century forms, Bruningas- ‘of the Bruningas’, seem to point to an early clan name, and feld thus looks to be the landscape feature ‘open land’ rather than ‘battle-field’.\(^{57}\)

Dün
Margaret Gelling has analysed the early dün names, and her analysis has direct relevance for the location of the battle-site.\(^{58}\) Though dün combines with burh in names, thus demonstrating that a Brunandun or We(o)ndun could refer to the same place as Brunanburh, or could be nearby such a place, ‘there is certainly no connotation of defence, and the word is not used to describe great prehistoric hill-forts’.\(^{59}\) There is,

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\(^{56}\) Margaret Gelling, *Place-Names in the Landscape* (London, 1984) and Margaret Gelling and Ann Cole, *The Landscape of Place-Names* (Stamford, 2000).

\(^{57}\) I intend to consider these names in more detail elsewhere.

\(^{58}\) The self-imposed limits of Gelling’s work should be mentioned: the distribution of, and statistics relating to, the elements she considers concern a restricted corpus of ancient and major names: names in use before the Norman Conquest and important because of settlement or continuation of use. There may be later attested and minor names containing the elements discussed (see further note 77 below), but Gelling’s discussion gives a stark picture of the pre-Conquest patterns so far as they can be discerned.

\(^{59}\) Gelling, *Place-Names in the Landscape*, p. 144, for names like Burdon and Berrington with burh, and p. 141 for the lack of ‘defence’ connotation.
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moreover, a distinct type of hill denoted by this element dān, and the element itself has a fairly clear distribution in place-names. Gelling writes, “This word is consistently used in settlement-names for a low hill with a fairly level and fairly extensive summit which provided a good settlement-site in open country”; typically, but not invariably, a dān name refers to a settlement ‘on hills of 200ft–500ft’; where the hill itself is not settlement-friendly, the settlement might lie at the foot of, or beside the hill. There are clusters of dān names in the south Midlands and in Essex.60 There are good numbers of dān settlement-names in the north of England east of the Pennines, and there are smaller numbers of dān settlement-names west of the Pennines and south of the Ribble. But north of the Ribble in Lancashire, in Westmorland and Cumberland there are no settlement-names containing the element.61 A recent investigation by Stella Pratt into names in Scotland has confirmed the general pattern proposed by Gelling and Cole: “There is a high degree of consistency in sites of villages with dān names, with most examples on hills of 200–500ft.”62

Part of the argument for Burnswark as the site of the battle is the fact that it is ‘a prominent hill’, ‘a conspicuous hill’.63 So it is: ‘it rises to an altitude of 920 feet above sea level’, with ‘a tabular summit’.64 It is generally supposed that this qualifies it to be the dān in Æthelward’s Brunandun and Symeon’s Weondun. But though the summit of Burnswark is level, it is not extensive; and while it is eminently defensible, it would not be suitable for a settlement of any size; and no settlement of any size is to be found beside or at the foot of the hill. Burnswark is higher than a typical dān, and indeed it is a more dramatic hill than the majority of dāns, not rounded or with gently-sloping sides. In addition, it is in an area where there are dozens of hill names, but where dān names are sparse if not absent.65 All this must

60 Gelling and Cole, The Landscape of Place-Names, pp. 164–5.
61 Gelling, Place-Names in the Landscape, pp. 155–8. Gelling writes, ‘The extreme rarity in the north west [of dān names] ... may be due to the comparative late establishment of English [sic] speech in that region’ (p. 142).
65 One cannot be dogmatic on this point in the absence of proper data for the names of the area, but it might be noted that the dān names in Scotland discussed by Pratt, ‘Summer landscapes’, are all in the east, namely in Berwickshire, Roxburghshire, around Stirling and in Fife.
raise doubts that the place-names Brunandun and We(o)ndun can reasonably refer to Burnswark.

Feld
The other main element used in forms of the place-name is feld. William of Malmesbury has Brunefeld,66 charters and chronicles from the twelfth century have Bruningfeld,67 John of Fordun from the fourteenth century, followed by Walter Bower, have variants of Brouynfeld.68 Of the element feld Margaret Gelling writes:

The word is used in literary texts to describe unencumbered ground, which might be land without trees as opposed to forest, level ground as opposed to hills, or land without buildings. In many references there is a contrast between feld and areas which are difficult of access or passage. The contrast most often recorded is that with woodland, but contrast with hills is also well evidenced ...69

Gelling notes that not all feld names refer to settlement sites, but 'include sites of battles and synods'.70 In these cases, it is likely that the unencumbered and accessible nature of the ground was what made the site suitable for the purpose of military or ecclesiastical encounter.

Now if we are to take seriously those sources which refer to the site of the battle in a name containing the element feld, it will be important to have regard for the type of land covered by that designation and the distribution of names which contain the element. Professor Smyth writes:

the great forest of Bruneswald or Bromswold which covered a vast stretch of country north of Watling Street on the borders of Northamptonshire and Huntingdonshire suggests itself as the general location for the great battle ... It covered much of the country between Huntingdon and Peterborough and may have

67 Battle of Brunanburh, ed. Campbell, pp. 63–4 and notes.
69 Gelling and Cole, The Landscape of Place-Names, pp. 269–70.
70 ibid., p. 272.
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merged in with the other great forests of Northamptonshire. Its main axis, however, seems to have coincided with the high ground along the Northamptonshire and Huntingdonshire border.\textsuperscript{71}

As Fox shows, and Gelling agrees, early *wald* names refer to wooded areas: ‘where the element occurs in names first recorded before about 1200, ... we can be sure that a woodland context of some kind is implied’.\textsuperscript{72} Smyth's proposal thus strikingly argues that the battle should be located in an area which is named in direct contrast to the denotation, as outlined by Gelling, of one of the main variant elements in recorded names of the site, *feld*.\textsuperscript{73}

Smyth is not suggesting that the battle took place in the forest, of course, but in the general vicinity of the forest. The area is broadly east of the river Nene between Bedford and Peterborough.\textsuperscript{74} It is a notable fact, however, that major ancient *feld* names are in remarkably short supply in the specified area: there are none at all in Huntingdonshire, only two in Cambridgeshire (neither near the *Bruneswald* area, one a meeting site now lost), one in Bedfordshire (not in the specified area) and six in Northamptonshire (again, none in the specified area). There are rather more *dün* settlement-names in these counties (though only two in Huntingdonshire, of which one is Huntingdon itself), but the distribution is markedly similar: these names do not occur in the *Bruneswald* area.\textsuperscript{75} Recognising the meaning of the elements *feld* and *dün* and their distribution in names, we must conclude that the area of *Bruneswald* is not a strong candidate location for the battle.

Conclusion

Palaeographical and grammatical evidence has been brought forward to show that the majority spelling of the place of the battle of *Brunanburh* reflects a weak substantive first element, *brūna* or *brūne*, compounded with the element *burh*. On this ground, one can be quite


\textsuperscript{73} The contrast with some of the features of *dün* as outlined earlier, is also notable.

\textsuperscript{74} See further the map in Fox, ‘The people of the Wolds’, p. 80.

\textsuperscript{75} These data are compiled from the information in Gelling, *Place-Names in the Landscape*, pp. 236–46, and from searching ‘The Key to English Place-Names’, <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/english/ins>, accessed 30.10.06. Gelling, *Place-Names in the Landscape*, p. 241, notes, ‘in the part of south-east Midlands occupied by [Bedfordshire], [Huntingdonshire] and [Cambridgeshire] *feld* is very rare in ancient settlement-names’.

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dogmatic that in the present state of our knowledge neither Bromswold nor Burnswark can be accepted as certainly reflecting the original first element of Brunanburh. The topographical evidence provided by Margaret Gelling’s and Ann Cole’s studies, too, tells against any simple identification of Burnswark or Bromswold with the recorded variant names for the area of Brunanburh containing the elements dūn and feld. Here one has to be less dogmatic, not least because place-name records are inevitably incomplete. But the facts that ancient names containing dūn are particularly sparse in the north west and Solway regions, and that Burnswark itself hardly fits the dūn type; and that early feld names were given in specific contradistinction to wald and dūn names, and are particularly sparse in the area of the ancient Bruneswald — these facts make it especially difficult to believe that Brunanburh, Brunandun or Brunefeld is to be located near Burnswark or Bruneswald. Without the support of the place-name evidence, accurately interpreted, any localisation of the battle of 937 will be dependent on vague impressions as to the political significance of possible sites, and over-reliance on suspect detail from sources such as Egils saga. I have shown that the onomastic and topographical evidence provides no clear support for the claims of Bromswold or Burnswark to be the site of the battle. There is more to be said about that site and the Old English poem on the conflict, but I hope this essay, in using her work to elucidate some of the onomastic and topographical issues, might give some small pleasure to the volume’s dedicatee.

76 The fact that dūn and feld are apparently topographically incompatible, yet both occur in the variant names of the battle-site, is a matter that requires further comment. For the sake of brevity, and assuming the variant names were not simply made up, I suggest that in these names feld refers to an area of land on or near which there was a fortified site and a modest hill. To my mind this is different from claiming that Burnswark can be identified as the dūn of the variant names, or that Bruneswald also comprised an ancient feld area.

77 The emphasis on ‘ancient’ and ‘settlement-names’ is important. There are, for example, many minor names with field (i.e. modern names referring to enclosed, usually arable, land) in the area of Bruneswald; but as Gelling shows, Place-Names in the Landscape, pp. 236–7, this reflects a change in farming practice occurring around the middle of the tenth century. She concludes, ‘the sense “arable land” need not be reckoned with in ancient settlement-names’ (p. 237).

78 Campbell (ed.), Battle of Brunanburh, pp. 69–70, completely dismissed the saga as a reliable source for details of the historical battle. The approach taken by Ian McDougall, ‘Discretion and deceit: a re-examination of a military stratagem in Egils Saga’, in The Middle Ages in the North-West, ed. Tom Scott and Pat Starkey (Oxford, 1996), pp. 109–42, is to show that the account in the saga is a literary topos in which topography is adapted to and dependent on literary convention.