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English medieval Latin **bellerīca*

Richard Coates (pp. 20–23)

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ABBREVIATIONS OF COUNTIES AND EPNS COUNTY SURVEYS

Co	Cornwall
Ha	Hampshire
He	Herefordshire
K	Kent
La	Lancashire
Nb	Northumberland
Sf	Suffolk
So	Somerset
Wt	Isle of Wight
CPNE	<i>Cornish Place-Name Elements.</i>
EPNE	<i>English Place-Name Elements, Parts 1 and 2.</i>
PN BdHu	<i>The Place-Names of Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire.</i>
PN Brk	<i>The Place-Names of Berkshire, Parts 1, 2 and 3.</i>
PN Bu	<i>The Place-Names of Buckinghamshire.</i>
PN Ca	<i>The Place-Names of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely.</i>
PN Ch	<i>The Place-Names of Cheshire, Parts 1–5.</i>
PN Cu	<i>The Place-Names of Cumberland, Parts 1, 2 and 3.</i>
PN D	<i>The Place-Names of Devon, Parts 1 and 2.</i>
PN Db	<i>The Place-Names of Derbyshire, Parts 1, 2 and 3.</i>
PN Do	<i>The Place-Names of Dorset, Parts 1–4.</i>
PN Du	<i>The Place-Names of County Durham, Part 1.</i>
PN Ess	<i>The Place-Names of Essex.</i>
PN ERY	<i>The Place-Names of the East Riding of Yorkshire and York.</i>
PN Gl	<i>The Place-Names of Gloucestershire, Parts 1–4.</i>
PN Hrt	<i>The Place-Names of Hertfordshire.</i>
PN Le	<i>The Place-Names of Leicestershire, Parts 1–6.</i>
PN Li	<i>The Place-Names of Lincolnshire, Parts 1–7.</i>
PN Mx	<i>The Place-Names of Middlesex (apart from the City of London).</i>
PN Nf	<i>The Place-Names of Norfolk, Parts 1–3.</i>
PN Nt	<i>The Place-Names of Nottinghamshire.</i>
PN NRY	<i>The Place-Names of the North Riding of Yorkshire.</i>
PN Nth	<i>The Place-Names of Northamptonshire.</i>
PN O	<i>The Place-Names of Oxfordshire, Parts 1 and 2.</i>
PN R	<i>The Place-Names of Rutland.</i>
PN Sa	<i>The Place-Names of Shropshire, Parts 1–6.</i>
PN Sr	<i>The Place-Names of Surrey.</i>
PN St	<i>The Place-Names of Staffordshire, Part 1.</i>
PN Sx	<i>The Place-Names of Sussex, Parts 1 and 2.</i>
PN W	<i>The Place-Names of Wiltshire.</i>
PN Wa	<i>The Place-Names of Warwickshire.</i>
PN We	<i>The Place-Names of Westmorland, Parts 1 and 2.</i>
PN Wo	<i>The Place-Names of Worcestershire.</i>
PN WRY	<i>The Place-Names of the West Riding of Yorkshire, Parts 1–8.</i>

English medieval Latin *bellerīca¹

The place-names *Billericay* (Essex), *Bellerica* (Witham Friary, Somerset and two other places in Somerset (cf. McGarvie 1978), *Billerica* (lost, Lympne, Kent) and the field *Belericay* (Longbridge Deverill, Wilts.) have caused considerable puzzlement to all previous writers on the matter (Reaney, PNEss: Ekwall, DEPN: Wallenberg, PNK). I shall now present a solution whose details are clear with the exception of a minor point about the application of the term proposed as source.

First, let it be said that none of these names is attested before the 13th century: that they defy analysis in British or English; and that the *-a* could scarcely be other than Latin, even if as an *ad hoc* latinisation of an existing place-name form. Since the *-a* appears in every single attestation of the two names which are recorded before 1500, it is impossible that it represents a mere formal latinisation. I therefore take it that the source is medieval; that it is purely Latin; and that it is a common noun, recurring as it does unassociated with other place or personal name elements.

Meaning

There is no record of a Latin word **bellerīca*, but its provenience is quite clear. Early modern English *belleric* denotes the myrobalan, the astringent fruit of an Indian tree *Terminalia bellerica*.

(This is described by de Freitas (1963).) French and English forms of the word are found first in Palsgrave's Esclaircisement of c.1530, and frequently in the sixteenth century (OED). It was, however, known long before that. Latham (1965) extracts from English medieval Latin documents the following forms:

bellericus	13th century	(and in error <i>bel-bericus</i>)
belliricus	(before 1250 14th century)	(in a gloss)
belleregus	1652	(in a gloss)

We cannot believe that *Terminalia bellerica* was grown in the Occident in the thirteenth century: the word clearly therefore denotes a derived product or a substitute for it. The dried myrobalan is, in fact, a source of tannin, which until the discovery of the West Indies was the sole means of producing black dyes (Giles 1979: 1106). It is clear that *bellericus* is a term relevant to the dyeing industry or the tanning industry: a hypothetical **bellerīca* is presumably therefore (a) a learned documentary latinisation for 'dyehouse' or 'tanhouse'; or (b) a word denoting a dyehouse with a particular speciality (i.e. blacks).

This solution is consistent with medieval first appearance: none of the names being parishes; and persistent and consistent

There is clearly no way to decide for a source in -l- or -e- and my -e- is an arbitrary selection.

Essex: Billirica 1291, Bellierca 1382
 Somerset: Billierca 1535, Bellierca modern
 Kent: Billirica 1278, Bellirica 1293
 Wilts: Billierca 1549, Belliercary (sic) 1732

found in all four names:
 In many attestations, suffice it to say that variation between the two is
 As for the 'inconsistency' *bell- in the source form / Bill-

bellerca has been preserved.
 formational element was not transparent, and the regular Latin stress
Billericay presumably arose because the existence of -ic as a
catholic, heretic, lunatic, arithmetic, climacteric, turmeric.
 the syllable before -ic (in most adjectives, and in most nouns except
 clearly influenced by the general English pattern demanding stress on
 which conflicts with that of *Billericay*. However, the form *belleric* is
 A doubt might remain about the stress-pattern of *belleric*

and *Arcadia* (e.g. High Halden, K).
Bitrons (Patixbourne, K): *Quosquo* (= *Quousque*; Snath, WMR);
 classical allusions dating from the 16th century on are found in
 forms of the type (*Bedgebury*) *Pinetum* (K) are of course recent; and
 descendants of **bellerca* are without strict parallels still. All map-
 as opposed to French, except perhaps Brura:⁴ thus the
Montacute (So). In none of these cases was the name given in Latin
bruiere 'heath'). We also find the anglicized *Pontract* (WMR);
 maintained its Latin form (it is a latinisation of medieval French
 (Ches) (PN Ches 4, 175-6, which, like *Billericay*, has consistently
 the word 'causeway', and dates from the 12th century; and *Brura*
 preserves the ablative form of an aberrant but familiar latinisation of
 are excessively rare.³ I can think of Calceito Priory in Sussex, which
 Other medieval Latin place-name forms surviving in England
 available or in fashion.

The existence of a place-name which is Latin in form
 requires comment. It may suggest that the common-noun term had
 no recognized or remembered English or French translation in the
 way that, say, Medieval Latin *capella*, *hospitale* or *spinetum* could be
 rendered c(h) *apel(e)*, *sptel* or *spiney*. It must therefore have been
 perceived after its first application as a name rather than as a
 translatable noun. Certainly it was a fully-fledged place-name in 1343
 ("in the hamlet of Billirica" (1pm, Ess)). It can safely be assumed
 that the hypothetical word **bellerca* must have been only briefly

Form

Latin form.

Notes

(1) M. McGarvie's note (1978) was unknown to me when I wrote this article. He and his correspondent J. Harvey came to a conclusion which is in essence the same as mine. I publish mine firstly because the linguistic discussion is fuller and secondly to make the etymology available to a place-names readership. I have silently inserted two amplifying details into my article from McGarvie's which do not affect the discussion directly. Before reading McGarvie I thought my article was a trifle speculative. I am now firmly convinced I am right.

Note that the reference to McGarvie in the bibliography of JEPNS 12 is incorrect, and should be amended as below.

(2) The word itself is from Persian *baīlah* via Arabic *baīlaj*; probably mediated by French *belleric/belliric*, the variation in which is significant in the attested forms of our place-names, e.g. *Billerica*, *Billirica* (Kent, both 1278). It is reasonable to suppose the term was transmitted to Western culture during the Third or Fourth Crusades (1190–1204). Imports took place before c. 1250 (McGarvie 1978: 353).

(3) Discounting, of course, place-name modifiers of the type *Ashby Puerorum* (L), *Toller Porcorum* (DO), *Ludford Parva* (L), *Crux Easton* (Ha), etc. (Dickins 1935).

(4) This name replaces plain English Heath.

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