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### The place-names Weybourne and Wooburn

O. Arngart (pp. 5–8)

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For further details or to join the Society, please contact:

Mrs Christine Hickling  
English Place-Name Society  
School of English  
The University of Nottingham  
NG7 2RD

Tel: 0115 951 5919  
Email: [name-studies@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:name-studies@nottingham.ac.uk)

## 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 1–7.</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 1–9.</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>

## THE PLACE-NAMES WEYBOURNE and WOOBURN

The origin of the place- and river-name Weybourne in Norfolk (*Wabrunna*, *Wabrune* 1086 Domesday Book, *Walbruna* 1158, *Wabrun* 1177, *Wabrunne* 1254, *Wauburn* 1275, 1318, 1319, 1333, *Waburne* 1281 *et passim* to 1428, *Wabrone* 1307, *Waubroun* 1328 etc.; see Sandred<sup>1</sup> for references) has attracted a good deal of attention lately.<sup>2</sup> Without going into details about the various theories that have been advanced, I could start by saying that I like Ekwall's and Sandred's approach the best, taking the first element to have contained an *r* in its OE form. At the same time I am not sure that either of them achieved a definite explanation. Ekwall derived the name from OE *\*Weargburna* 'felon stream',<sup>3</sup> and while this could be one of the "inspired guesses" for which he was justly noted, yet there is no confirmatory evidence in the early spellings themselves.

What made me think of an alternative solution to the problem was a sentence that Sandred adduces (p. 162) quite incidentally in his description of the site, evidently without realising its potential relevance to the etymology, namely, "It [the river Weybourne] runs from its fountainhead on the hill above the present village, through the village... to a mill pond... north of the church and the ruins of Weybourne Priory." Now there is in OE a well-attested element *wer* or *wær*, occurring in a considerable number of place-names and surviving in ModE *weir*. It is rendered by A.H. Smith<sup>4</sup> 'a river-dam, a fishing-enclosure in a river' etc. The word *wær* or a side-form *waru* also means 'a mill-dam or mill-weir' as in OE *mylenwaru*, where *mylen* is ModE 'mill', from Latin *molina*. The element *waru* is a feminine *ō*-stem, and as such regularly lost its thematic vowel in composition, appearing as *war-*.<sup>5</sup> All this could be taken to suggest that the river may originally have been named from a weir or mill-dam at Weybourne village. But we must also reckon with one of the other meanings given by Smith in his *Elements*. It is of some significance too that there was a priory at the place, for in a religious house Anglo-Norman influence was likely to be prevalent.<sup>6</sup>

If we start from the OE base *\*Wærburna* or *\*Warburna* 'stream with a weir, mill-dam and mill-pond' or the like, all the different forms of the name can be readily explained. The first *r* of it would be subject to dissimilation, due to the second, in one of two ways. Either it would disappear, as in the forms *Wabrunna*, *Waburne* etc., or it would be changed to *l*, as in *Walbruna*, through Anglo-Norman influence.

Several cases of dissimilatory loss of *r* in place-names have been fully treated by Ekwall,<sup>7</sup> namely Beard, Brading, Bredwardine, Bardwell etc., and he terms this loss of *r* "extremely common". He also notes that as a rule it is the first *r* of the two that disappears, but occasionally the second. I have myself added



a few supplementary remarks on Beard in a previous paper.<sup>8</sup> It is clear that this form of Weybourne (*Waburne* etc.) was the dominant and popular one, and it leads directly to the modern local pronunciation [wæb n], as noted by Sandred (p. 163).

But dissimilation of *r* could also result in *l*, as proved by many instances in place- and personal names.<sup>9</sup> The parade example is Salisbury, which was OE *Searobyrg*, but became ME *Salesburie*, changing its first *r* to *l* through dissimilation and differentiation from the second *r* under Anglo-Norman influence. It is clear that there was a real phonemic shift of *r* to *l* (for the *l* has remained up till our own days), and I take that to have been the case also with the *l* of *Walbruna* 1158. It is perhaps significant that this spelling occurs in a source belonging to the "Documents preserved in France",<sup>10</sup> but Anglo-Norman influence would continue to affect the form of the name, and it could account as well for the spelling *Wauburn* etc., in which *l* became vocalised to *u*, due to Anglo-Norman scribal practice. That variety of French influence on the spelling of English names is well attested in other cases too, for example in the common form *feud* of the name element *feld* 'field',<sup>11</sup> which is met with in the period when Anglo-French was in regular use. But the changes that occurred in *Wauburn* etc. did not operate on the popular form of the name as preserved in the present local pronunciation of it.

The early spellings of Weybourne thus point to two different developments, only one of which prevailed, while the other, represented by the series *Walbruna*, *Wauburn*, *Waubroun*, was due to Anglo-Norman influence, but had no permanent effect on the name.<sup>12</sup>

Weybourne has repeatedly been adduced in connexion with Wooburn in Buckinghamshire, and though I think there may be some relation between the names, yet it is not the one usually assumed. A full run of forms for Wooburn is offered in the Place-Name Society's Bucks volume,<sup>13</sup> e.g. *Waburna* c.1075, *Waborne* 1086, *Wauburn* 1200, *Woburne* 1201 *et pass.* to 1282, *Wouburn* c.1218 *et pass.* to 1301, *Wuburn* 1231 *et pass.* to 1247, *Woubourne* 1316, 1341, 1360, 1370, *Woghburne* 1331, *Woweburn* 1393 etc. The name seems to me to represent an OE *\*Wāhburna*, *\*Wāgburna*, as already suggested by A.H. Smith,<sup>14</sup> with *Wā-* > *Woo-* (modern pronunciation [u: b n]) like OE *twā* > *two* [tu:] after *w*.<sup>15</sup> But OE *wāg*, *wāh* means 'wall', and it is not immediately clear what its significance could be in combination with OE *burna* 'stream'. In ModE river-wall occurs in a specialized sense,<sup>16</sup> referring to the Norfolk Broads, and Smith speaks of a 'stream with its banks walled up'. However, it would also be possible to think of a wall running across from one bank to the other, in fact a 'river-dam'. And if that sense is acceptable, Weybourne and Wooburn, though descended from different OE bases, would ultimately mean much the same thing.

O ARNGART

## NOTES

- 1 Karl Inge Sandred, "Weybourne: a place- and river-name in Norfolk" in So many longages and tonges: philological essays... presented to Angus McIntosh (Edinburgh, 1981), pp. 161-5.
- 2 See also Gillis Kristensson, "The Place-Name Weybourne in Norfolk" in Sydsvenska ortnamnssällskapets Årsskrift (Lund, 1981), pp. 76-80. One might have wished that Dr Kristensson had somewhat more fully elucidated his expression "in a much earlier period", p. 78.
- 3 Eilert Ekwall, Studies on English Place- and Personal Names (PPN; Lund, 1931), pp. 91-4.
- 4 EPNS, XXVI (1956), s.v. *wer*, *wær*; see also Ekwall, DEPN, s.v. *wer*; EPNS, XV (1938), p. 206, s.n. *Ware*, etc.
- 5 Cf. e.g. OE *carful* 'careful', *caergēst* 'sad spirit', *carlēas* 'careless', *cearseld* 'home of care', from OE *caru*, *cearu* 'care', *giefstōl* 'throne', (*giefu*), *luffācen* 'love token' (*lufu*) etc; see e.g. Joseph Wright, Old English Grammar (Oxford, 1925), para 618.
- 6 One recalls Chaucer's Prioress, who spoke French "After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe", that is very probably old-fashioned Norman French, since French "of Parys" was unknown to her.
- 7 PPN, pp. 92f.; Studies on English Place-Names (Stockholm, 1936), pp. 133ff.
- 8 Namn och Bygd, 68 (1980), 10f.
- 9 See R.E. Zachrisson, A Contribution to the Study of Anglo-Norman Influence on English Place-Names (Lund, 1909), pp. 120ff.; EPNS, 1:1 (1924), p. 106; Olof von Feilitzen, The Pre-Conquest Personal Names of Domesday Book (Uppsala, 1937), para. 68.
- 10 A Calendar of Documents preserved in France, ed. J.H. Round (Rolls Series; London, 1899)
- 11 Zachrisson, *op. cit.*, pp. 146ff.; EPNS, 1:1, p. 113; von Feilitzen, *op. cit.*, para. 61.
- 12 The Modern name-form Weybourne is late, first appearing as WAYBORNE in Speed's map of 1610, and is explained, I think correctly, by Sandred (p. 163) as due to a spelling-pronunciation.
- 13 EPNS, 11 (1925), pp. 196ff.
- 14 *Ibid*, XXVI, (1956), s.v. *wāg*.
- 15 See e.g. E.J. Dobson, English Pronunciation 1500-1700 (Oxford, 1957), II, para. 153. Further examples include *ooze*, OE *wāse*; *womb*, OE *wamb wāmb*; *swoop*, OE *swāpan*; *who*, *whom*, OE *hwā*, *-m*, etc. I think Smith was right in deriving the first element from OE *wāg*, *wāh*. The early *a*-spellings cannot be disregarded, though Smith deferred to Ekwall who may have underrated the raising effect of the *W*- (enhanced by other labials as in *-burn*, *womb*). The change of *Wā*- to *Woo*- is illustrated clearly enough by the series of 13th century *Wu*- forms, which



are paralleled in Woburn Bd (EPNS, III, p. 143) from OE *Wōburna*. Those forms as well as others dropped the *h*, while the *Wāg-* alternative generated spellings like *Woghburne*, *Woweburn*. (For the *Wāg-*, *Wāh-* variation cf. e.g. OE *wāg-rift* 'wall-covering' with *wāh-* eleven times, *wāg-* only three times.)

16 OED, s.v. River, 4. a.