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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 1–7.</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>

English medieval Latin *bellerīca¹

The place-names *Billericay* (Essex), *Bellerica* (Witham Friary, Somerset and two other places in Somerset (cf. McGarvie 1978), *Billerica* (lost, Lympe, 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 *Esclaircissement* 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)
bellereus	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

Latin form.

Form

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)*, *spitel* or *spinney*. 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" (lpm, Ess)). It can safely be assumed that the hypothetical word **bellerīca* must have been only briefly available or in fashion.

Other medieval Latin place-name forms surviving in England are excessively rare.³ I can think of *Calceito* Priory in Sussex, which preserves the ablative form of an aberrant but familiar latinisation of the word 'causeway', and dates from the 12th century; and *Bruera* (Ches) (PN Ches 4, 115-6, which, like *Billericay*, has consistently maintained its Latin form (it is a latinisation of medieval French *brulere* 'heath')). We also find the anglicized *Pontefract* (YWR); *Montacute* (So). In none of these cases was the name given in Latin as opposed to French, except perhaps *Bruera*;⁴ thus the descendants of **bellerīca* are without strict parallels still. All map-forms of the type (*Bedgebury*) *Pinetum* (K) are of course recent; and classical allusions dating from the 16th century on are found in *Blifrons* (Patricxbourne, K); *Quosquo* (= *Quousque*; Snailth, YWR); and *Arcadia* (e.g. High Halden, K).

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

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

Essex:	Billirica 1291, Bellerica 1382
Somerset:	Billirica 1535, Bellerica modern
Kent:	Billirica 1278, Bellirica 1293
Wilts:	Billirica 1549, Bellericary (sic) 1732

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

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 *baīlāh* via Arabic *baīlāj*; 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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