The distribution and usage of the place-name elements *botm*, *bytme* and *botn*

Ann Cole (pp. 39–46)

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# Abbreviations of Counties and EPNS County Surveys

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The Distribution and Usage of the Place-Name Elements \textit{botm}, \textit{bytme}, and \textit{botn}

\textbf{Ann Cole}

Thirty-five examples of the elements \textit{botm}, \textit{bo\textit{d}m}, \textit{bytme}, \textit{bytne}, \textit{by\textit{d}me} (OE), and \textit{botn} (ON) evidenced before 1500 have been noted, and these are shown on Map 1. In some instances confusion between the spelling of \textit{botm} and \textit{botn} and between \textit{botm} and \textit{bytme} occurs. Any or all of these elements will be referred to as ‘bottom’.

Mawer (1924) states that \textit{botm} and \textit{botn} are used in place-names ‘of the lowest part of a valley or of an alluvial hollow’, whilst Smith (1956) defines \textit{botm}, \textit{bo\textit{d}m} as ‘a bottom, a valley bottom’, \textit{botn} as ‘a bottom, the head of a valley, the innermost part of a valley’ and \textit{bytme} as ‘the head of a valley . . . a valley bottom’. Margaret Gelling, in her \textit{Place-Names in the Landscape}, gives an account of the distribution of these terms and suggests ‘broad river valley’ as their meaning. In fact it is possible to give a more exact definition than these, one which satisfies most, but not all, the examples of ‘bottom’.

Although Map 1 plots all 35 examples of ‘bottom’ the precise location of \textit{Keld Bottom} (YNR), \textit{Bottom Piece} (Gl), \textit{Bottom Barn} (Wt), \textit{Shipperbottom} and \textit{Shillingbottom} (La) could not be ascertained and they have had to be left out of most of this discussion. The greatest concentration of ‘bottom’ is in the southern Pennines—this is shown on Map 2, where it can be seen that they cluster in the river valleys that converge on Manchester, namely the Bradshaw Brook, Irwell, Goyt, Sett and Etherow, and along the Calder and Wharfe and their tributaries. A study of large scale OS maps and geological maps combined with field work shows that in the majority of cases the ‘bottom’ is a locally wider area of very flat, wet land adjacent to a river,
making up part of the flood plain or a river terrace. The flood plain or river terrace narrows almost to vanishing point upstream and downstream of the 'bottom'. None are large, being mostly about 0.5 km wide and less than 1.5 km long. In each case the valley sides rise abruptly and quite steeply from the valley floor, and the settlement, if any, is on rising ground—not on the valley floor. Map 3, a contour sketch of Beamsley’s 'bottom', illustrates these features. The scattered buildings of the village are mostly on the drier ground of the fan deposited by the Kex Beck. In some cases the 'bottom' is the land encompassed by one meander e.g. Ladyshaw Bottom and Broad Bottom (Ch). Occasionally a longer stretch of alluvium with the river winding across it is the 'bottom', e.g. Long Bottom and Bottom Boat. A few examples will illustrate these variations.

The village of Wythburn (formerly *Wythbottom) was at the southern end of Thirlmere in the Lake District. Streams flowing into this lake silted up the southern end producing an area of very damp, flat land—the 'bottom'. Some cottages were built along the road rounding the lake here, and some were built on a small fan to the SE of the lake. Since Thirlmere was dammed in the late nineteenth century the level has risen drowning most of the village. Starbotten in Wharfedale also lies on a fan and overlooks a silted-up pro-glacial lake, 6.0 by 0.4 km., one of a string along Wharfedale which existed in the closing stages of the Ice Age—the 'bottom' at Beamsley is another.

Along the Calder valley are long stretches of alluvium, sometimes up to 0.3 km wide and sometimes so narrow that they almost disappear. Broad Bottom and Long Bottom are descriptive of two of these stretches. Cromwell Bottom (*crumb wella botm—the crooked stream bottom) is by a very pronounced meander in the Calder, and Bottom Boat, further downstream, was originally called Stanliebothum, Boat being added about 1709 referring to the ferry across the Calder. The sides of the valley rise steeply and abruptly, and the main valley floor is not normally built upon, being too liable to flooding. Bottomley is similarly situated on a tributary of the Calder.

Botton (in Wray with Botton, La) lies in the hills of the Forest of Bowland. It is a dispersed hamlet in the valley of the
Hindburn, alongside which are flood plains and river terraces of variable width, very wet underfoot. *Botton* in Danby Dale, North York Moors, is a similarly dispersed hamlet. Here the patches of alluvium are very narrow. The 0.1 by 0.2 km. patch at *Botton Hall* although very small is flat and wet just like the other examples.

The ‘bottoms’ near Manchester, namely *Oakenbottom, Ramsbottom, Botham’s Hall* (Ch), *Broad Bottom* (Ch), *Bottom’s Hall* (Ch) and *Ladyshaw Bottom* (Db) all refer to flat, wet, alluvial, locally wider, valley floors, bounded by steeply rising slopes, easy to pick out once you get your eye in.

However three ‘bottoms’ in northern England do not conform to this pattern. They are, first, *Ferny Bottom* in Hartington Town Quarter (Db), which lies on a limestone hillside some 1000 feet up, overlooking the deepcut valley of Biggin Dale whilst the village of Hartington is in the valley of the Dove (*Bracken Bottom*, first recorded in 1696 is in a very similar situation above Horton in Ribblesdale). Secondly, *Hawsker Bottoms* lie in a broad, gently sloping hollow lying some 250–300 feet OD opening to the North Sea. High Hawsker village is on a ridge above. Thirdly, *Bottoms Farm*, Ormesby (YNR), is on a wide expanse of almost level, heavy, wet land near the Tees estuary. There is no trace here of a confined flat area.

Let us turn now to examples of ‘bottom’ south of the Pennines, bearing in mind that the valleys of lowland Britain are less steep-sided and deep than those of the uplands. *Bottoms Farm* in Wick and Abson (Gl) overlooks a level patch of alluvium beside the R. Boyd. Downstream the river flows through a small gorge and the alluvium appears to have been deposited in a temporary lake. This ‘bottom’ is like the majority of the Pennine ‘bottoms’, but on a gentler scale. The hamlet of *Brithem Bottom* in Devon overlooks quite a large expanse of alluvium 0.7 by 1.5 km., deposited in the Culm valley just before the river passes through a constricted part of its valley. It is flat, lowlying and easily flooded as the roadside signs here bear witness. *Bothenhampton* in Dorset overlooks the silted-up estuary of the R. Brit. Here is a flat-floored, lowlying, easily flooded area some 0.5 by 2 km. with abruptly rising sides.
in western counties, and it would seem that 'Bottom' developed a
been settled later since they are in the heart of the Peninsulas of
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closer look at these groundpins shows that the areas where
everywhere. 'Bottom Farm',珥mary is not in a valley at all. A
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the stakes of *Spartation* came from willows too. Several describe places: willows (*Mühlen*), cress (Ramson/ *Ramsdall*), and perhaps resonant, *Sillington*. The form described is typical of damp country, and one which is shared by two broad bottoms, one long bottom, and one short. The element is usually descriptive of the position, or the area. Therefore, *Wraig* with *Button* is usually combined with another element that *Wraig* and *Button* were in rather sparsely settled, difficult conditions, and were villages with parish status. *Buttonham* and *Bothamham* are all villages with parish status. Most of the few that do occur are in the lower lands where there is more room of expansion and growth. *Buttonham*, *Bytham*, and *Wraig* are rarely named in both or by themselves.

From the other.

The characteristic, by which it can be identified and distinguished, has in common botanical, hydrological, and perhaps botanical, has in common geographical, hydrological, and perhaps botanical, has in common geographical, hydrological, and perhaps botanical.
these elements and for her subsequent help.

I should like to thank Margaret Gelling for kindling my interest in

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

A. H. Smith, English Place-Name Elements, Part I, English Place-Name
A. Mawer, Introduction to the Survey of English Place-Names, Part II,
86–87.
Margaret Gelling, Place-Names in the Landscape (London 1984), pp.

REFERENCES

boim, bottom, or its form. Bytyme appears to be an Mercian variant of
but sometimes compounded with elements descriptive of the
name, Bottom. Bytyme and boim were often used uncompound
restricted settlements usually forming small, often farms or
side, and were located on dry sites overlooking the bottom
meant a far, restricted stretch of valley floor with abrupt rise
originally referred to damp valley floors, but which came to
In conclusion, both, bytyme and boim are terms which perhaps
in addition all at the heads of valleys as Smith implies.
boim are in addition all at the heads of valleys, although the possibilities of
have the same meaning, although the possibility of
from place to place, and all three terms could be considered to
than that imposed by the natural environments in these landscapes
occurs elsewhere. There is no discernible difference between the
Viking invaders. While bytyme occurs in areas dominated by

Boim (ON) occurs predominantly in the areas settled by the

Saxon Bottom). Only one has a personal name—
woods of cleaving (Bottomley and Beaconsley), and a shay
several describe the countryside: a shell (Boothamshall), two
water; a spring (Keld Bottom), two streams (Cromeshill Bottom).