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

Ann Cole (pp. 39–46)

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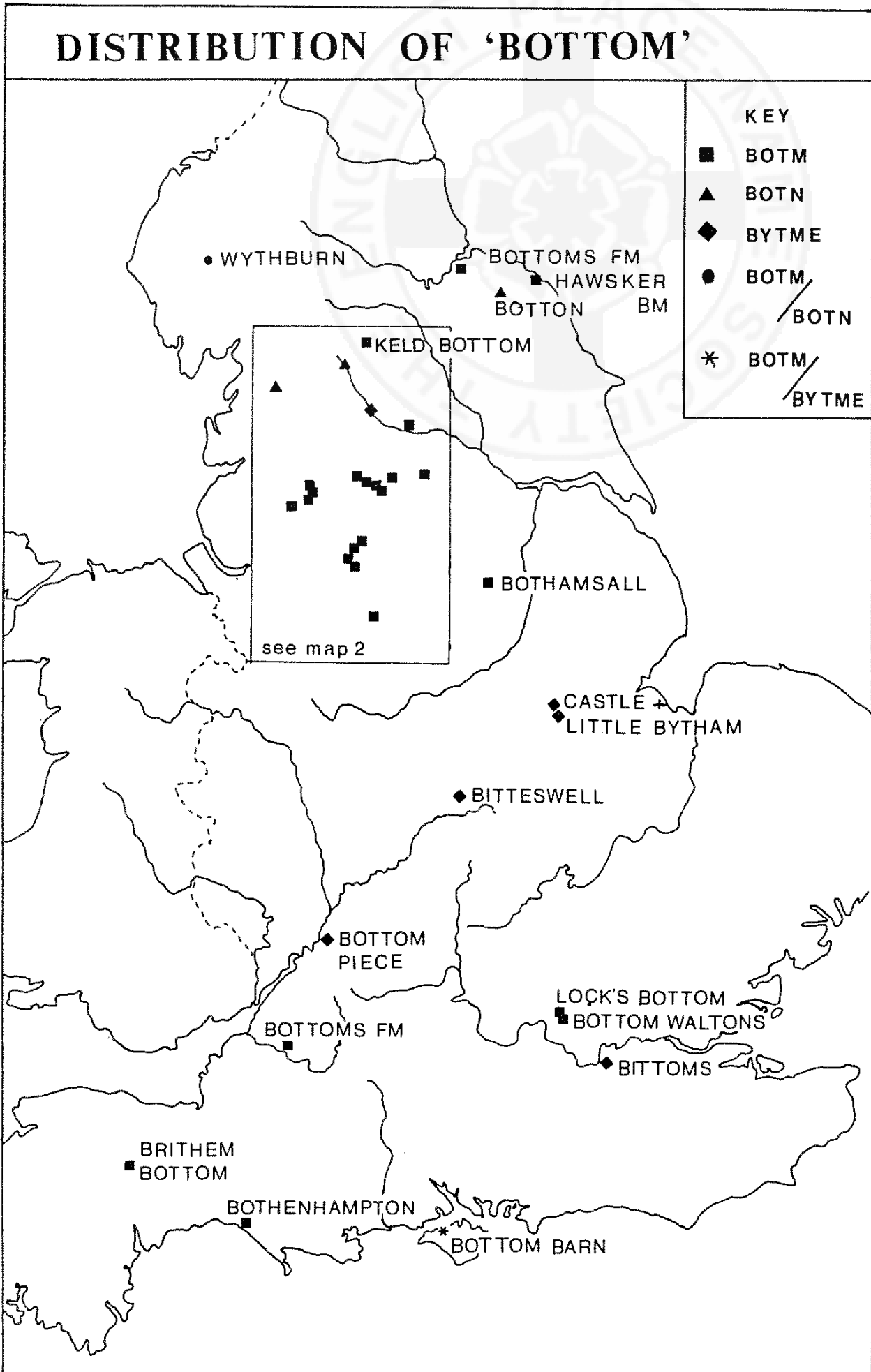
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ABBREVIATIONS OF COUNTIES AND EPNS COUNTY SURVEYS

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>



The Distribution and Usage of the Place-Name Elements *botm*, *bytme*, and *botn*

ANN COLE

Thirty-five examples of the elements *botm*, *boðm*, *bytme*, *bytne*, *byðme* (OE), and *botn* (ON) evidenced before 1500 have been noted, and these are shown on Map 1. In some instances confusion between the spelling of *botm* and *botn* and between *botm* and *bytme* occurs. Any or all of these elements will be referred to as 'bottom'.

Mawer (1924) states that *botm* and *botn* are used in place-names 'of the lowest part of a valley or of an alluvial hollow', whilst Smith (1956) defines *botm*, *boðm* as 'a bottom, a valley bottom', *botn* as 'a bottom, the head of a valley, the innermost part of a valley' and *bytme* as 'the head of a valley . . . a valley bottom'. Margaret Gelling, in her *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'.

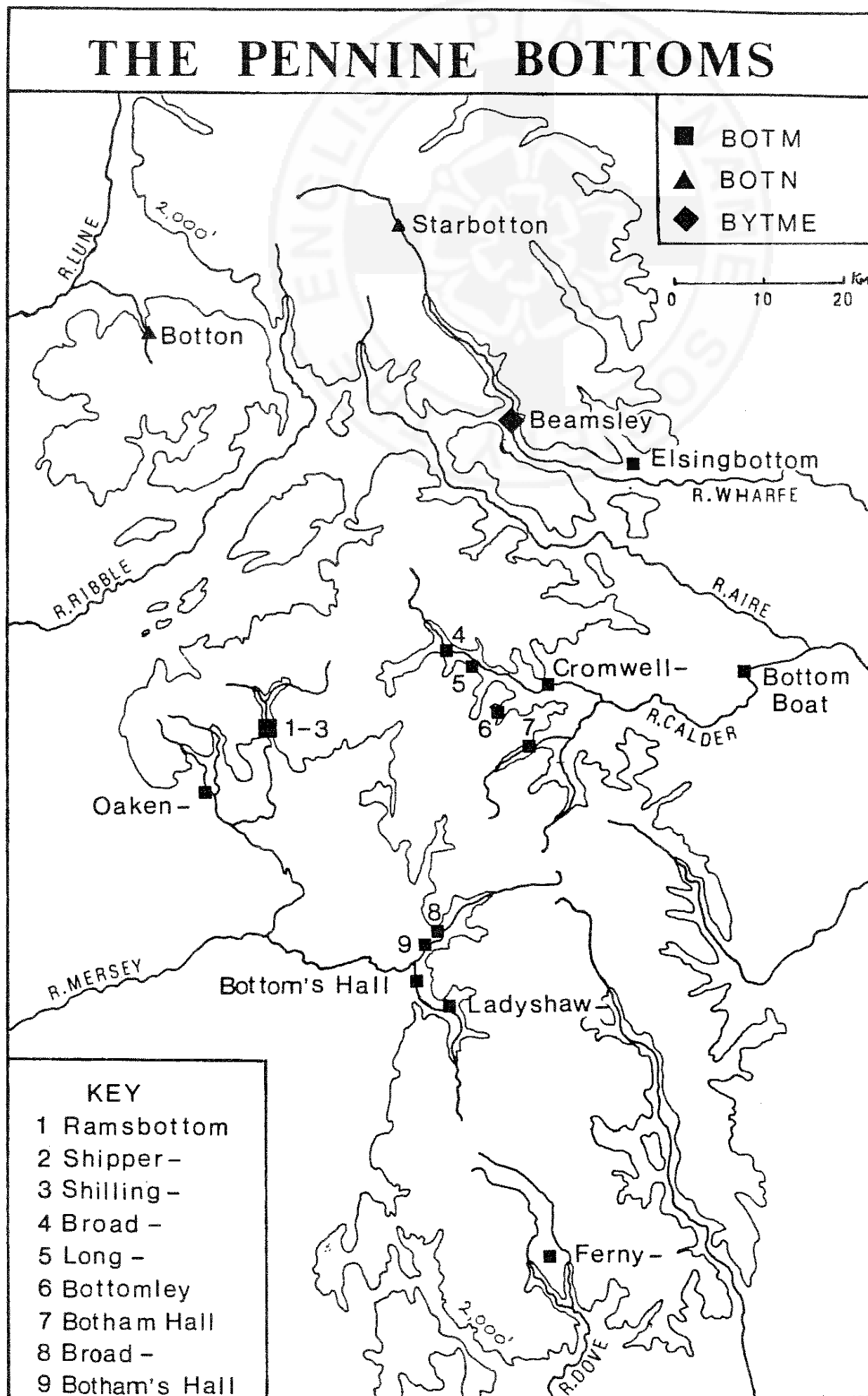
Although Map 1 plots all 35 examples of 'bottom' the precise location of *Keld Bottom* (YNR), *Bottom Piece* (Gl), *Bottom Barn* (Wt), *Shipperbottom* and *Shillingbottom* (La) could not be ascertained and they have had to be left out of most of this discussion. The greatest concentration of 'bottom' 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. *Starbotton* 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 *Stanleiebothum*, *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.

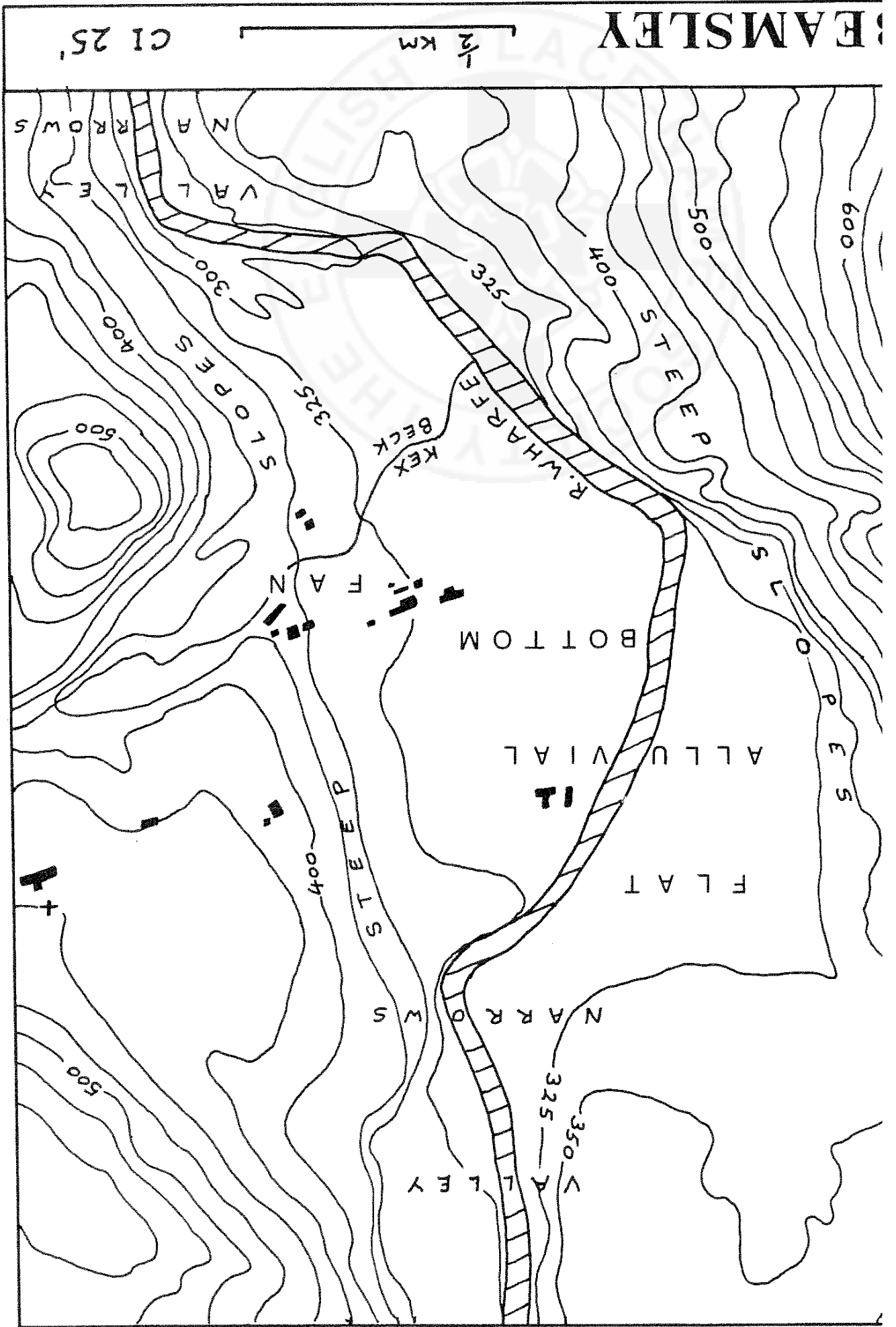
However three 'bottoms' in northern England do not conform to this pattern. They are, first, *Ferny Bottom* in Hartington Town Quarter (Db), which lies on a limestone hillside some 1000 feet up, overlooking the deepcut valley of Biggin Dale whilst the village of Hartington is in the valley of the Dove (*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.

Bothamsall in Nottinghamshire is similar; the village is on rising ground overlooking a large expanse of alluvium between the rivers Meden and Maun. This flat area is some 1 km. wide but of considerable yet indeterminate length.

The Bittons in Surrey refers to a lowlying area of fertile brickearth 0.7 km. wide bordering the Thames. *Bottom Waltons* and *Lock's Bottom* in southern Buckinghamshire are on gently sloping land in a valley bottom where springs rise making the area damp though not nearly so wet as most 'bottoms'. *Castle* and *Little Bytham* in Lincolnshire are on rising ground above a very narrow strip of alluvium along the R. Glen. This widens a little near the castle, whilst at *Little Bytham* it is very wet and supports marsh vegetation. The village of *Bitteswell* in Leicestershire is on a rise overlooking a small tributary of the R. Swift. There are no springs in the vicinity so the 'well' (*well*) (*well*) evidently refers to the stream. Here there is no marked flat floor to the valley. Ridge and furrow run down the slope from the village towards the stream but stop generally some 15 metres from it where the ground becomes too waterlogged for cultivation—the soil is an ill-drained boulder clay. This streamside strip is the *bytime* of the name *Bitteswell*.

From this account it can be seen that all the Pennine examples of 'bottom' but one, and the western 'bottoms' of *Brihem Bottom*, *Bothenhampton* and *Bottoms Farm*, Wick, conform to the same pattern, namely a flat alluvial area, restricted in size, moist and often easily flooded and with a marked change of slope at the valley sides. However in the southern Pennines *Ferry Bottom* is not in a valley at all, but on a hillside, whilst in eastern England *Hawsker Bottoms*, *The Bittons*, *Bitteswell*, *Castle* and *Little Bytham*, *Bottom Waltons* and *Lock's Bottom*, although in valleys, do not have the distinctive flat floor and abrupt change of slope. *Bothamsall* has the flat, moist valley floor but it is a much larger expanse than elsewhere. *Bottom Farm*, Ormesby is not in a valley at all. A closer look at these groupings shows that the areas where 'bottom' was used to mean flat alluvial floor were likely to have been settled later since they are in the heart of the Pennines or in western counties, and it would seem that 'bottom' developed a



much more exact meaning in the course of time, becoming associated with old lake beds and silted-up river valleys rather than the damp but variably shaped valleys of the more eastern examples.

There are other terms describing moist valley floors. In the West Midlands *zæsse* is used to describe valley floors subject to sudden short-lived floods. *Winn* and *wisce*, meaning moist meadow, are most frequently found in areas south-east of a line from Exeter to The Wash, but *mæd*, as used in names of settlements, is most frequent in the Home Counties and South-West but apparently rare in north-east England. All are uncommon where 'bottom' is frequent. There is considerable, but not total, localisation of all these terms. It may be that each has its own topographical, hydrological and perhaps botanical characteristics by which it can be identified and distinguished from the others.

Large settlements are rarely named in *botm*, *botn* or *bytme*. Most of the few that do occur are in the lower lands where there was more room of expansion and growth. *Bitteswell*, *Bytham*, *Bothensall* and *Bothenhampton* are all villages with parish status. *Ramsbottom*, in a restricted site, grew up as a result of expansion during the Industrial Revolution. *Wythburn* and *Botton* (in *Wray with Botton*) were in rather sparsely settled, difficult environments and never grew very large although they too became parishes. Eight or nine of the other examples are farms or halls, small places in restricted sites, hemmed in by the floodable land below and the steep hillsides above. Six, and perhaps as many as ten, refer only to patches of land.

Botm, *botn* and *bytme* frequently occur as simplex terms; (eight examples). Because so many of the settlements bearing this name were so small and known only locally there was little need for any distinguishing affix, hence the numerous Bottom Farms. Where 'bottom' is combined with another element that element is usually descriptive of the 'bottom' or its flora. There are two broad 'bottoms', one long 'bottom' and one which is resonant, *Shillingbottom*. The flora described is typical of damp places: willows (*Wythburn*), ramsons (*Ramsbottom*) and perhaps the stakes of *Starboton* came from willows too. Several describe

water: a spring (*Keld Bottom*), two streams (*Cromwell Bottom* and *Bitteswell*) and a place to wash sheep (*Shipperbottom*). Several describe the countryside: a shelf (*Bothamsall*), two woods or clearings (*Bottomley* and *Beamsley*) and a shaw (*Ladyshaw Bottom*). Only one has a personal name—*Elisingbottom Farm*.

Botn (ON) occurs predictably in the areas settled by the Viking invaders, whilst *bytime* occurs in areas dominated by Mercia and may be a Mercian variant of the Saxon *botm* which occurs elsewhere. There is no discernible difference between the type of landform of places named in *botm*, *botn* and *bytime* other than that imposed by the natural variations in these landforms from place to place, and all three terms could be considered to have the same meaning, although the four possible examples of *botn* are in addition all at the heads of valleys as Smith implies.

In conclusion, *botm*, *bytime* and *botn* are terms which perhaps originally referred to damp valley floors, but which came to mean a flat, restricted stretch of valley floor with abruptly rising sides, damp and easily flooded. Settlements avoided the 'bottom' and were located on dry sites overlooking it. As the sites were restricted settlements usually remained small, often farms or hamlets. *Botm*, *bytime* and *botn* were often used uncompounded, but sometimes compounded with elements descriptive of the 'bottom' or its flora. *Bytime* appears to be a Mercian variant of *botm*.

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