Furze, gorse, and whin: an aside on Rutland in the Danelaw

Barrie Cox (pp. 3–9)

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### ABBREVIATIONS OF COUNTIES AND EPNS COUNTY SURVEYS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>County Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Co</td>
<td>Cornwall</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ha</td>
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<td>He</td>
<td>Herefordshire</td>
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<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Kent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La</td>
<td>Lancashire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nb</td>
<td>Northumberland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sf</td>
<td>Suffolk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So</td>
<td>Somerset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wt</td>
<td>Isle of Wight</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CPNE** *Cornish Place-Name Elements.*

**EPNE** *English Place-Name Elements, Parts 1 and 2.*

**PN BdHu** *The Place-Names of Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire.*

**PN Brk** *The Place-Names of Berkshire, Parts 1, 2 and 3.*

**PN Bu** *The Place-Names of Buckinghamshire.*

**PN Ca** *The Place-Names of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely.*

**PN Ch** *The Place-Names of Cheshire, Parts 1–5.*

**PN Cu** *The Place-Names of Cumberland, Parts 1, 2 and 3.*

**PN D** *The Place-Names of Devon, Parts 1 and 2.*

**PN Db** *The Place-Names of Derbyshire, Parts 1, 2 and 3.*

**PN Do** *The Place-Names of Dorset, Parts 1–4.*

**PN Du** *The Place-Names of County Durham, Part 1.*

**PN Ess** *The Place-Names of Essex.*

**PN ERY** *The Place-Names of the East Riding of Yorkshire and York.*

**PN Gl** *The Place-Names of Gloucestershire, Parts 1–4.*

**PN Hrt** *The Place-Names of Hertfordshire.*

**PN Le** *The Place-Names of Leicestershire, Parts 1–6.*

**PN Li** *The Place-Names of Lincolnshire, Parts 1–7.*

**PN Mx** *The Place-Names of Middlesex (apart from the City of London).*

**PN Nf** *The Place-Names of Norfolk, Parts 1–3.*

**PN Nt** *The Place-Names of Nottinghamshire.*

**PN NRY** *The Place-Names of the North Riding of Yorkshire.*

**PN Nth** *The Place-Names of Northamptonshire.*

**PN O** *The Place-Names of Oxfordshire, Parts 1 and 2.*

**PN R** *The Place-Names of Rutland.*

**PN Sa** *The Place-Names of Shropshire, Parts 1–6.*

**PN Sr** *The Place-Names of Surrey.*

**PN St** *The Place-Names of Staffordshire, Part 1.*

**PN Sx** *The Place-Names of Sussex, Parts 1 and 2.*

**PN W** *The Place-Names of Wiltshire.*

**PN Wa** *The Place-Names of Warwickshire.*

**PN We** *The Place-Names of Westmorland, Parts 1 and 2.*

**PN Wo** *The Place-Names of Worcestershire.*

**PN WRY** *The Place-Names of the West Riding of Yorkshire, Parts 1–8.*
Furze, Gorse and Whin: an Aside on Rutland in the Danelaw

BARRIE COX

_Ulex europaeus_, commonly known as furze or gorse or whin, is currently to be found in about fifty percent of Rutland’s area.¹ Both _furze_ and _gorse_ are in origin Old English words, _fyrs_ and _gors_ respectively. _Whin_ is from Old Norse _hvin_. In Rutland, minor names with _furze_, _gorse_ and _whin_ survive only from the seventeenth century and any form of the shrub’s name is absent from the county’s major place-names which, in general, have a much longer history. In addition to the noun forms, we find in a few minor names the adjectives _furzy_, _gorzy_ and _whinny_, each with the reflex of the Old English adjectival suffix _-ig_.

All known surviving instances of these words in Rutland minor names are listed in Appendix I. Their distribution is shown in Fig. 1. From appendix and map, several patterns are immediately obvious. First, the majority of surviving names in _furze_ belong to the eighteenth century. Second, the distribution of names with _furze_ is limited to a relatively small area in the south-west of the county. Third, names with _gorse_ have a wider distribution, lying in a broad band from north to south of the county and overlapping the region of _furze_ names to their west. And fourth, surviving _gorse_ names are in general recorded later than those with _furze_, being especially numerous from the beginning of the nineteenth century. They also tend to be compounded with parish names and on the whole represent extensive features. The forms dated 1800, 1806 and 1824 are taken from early county maps. Some may represent fox covers following the growth in popularity of fox-hunting in the

Fig. 1. Rutland, showing the distribution of *fyrs*, *gors* and *hvin*. Land over 400 ft in the north and west of the county is shaded (With acknowledgements to Anne Tarver, who has re-drawn the maps in this article)

Fig. 2. Rutland: the distribution of place-names in *tūn*
eighteenth century. In one or two instances, names in *gorse* are altered to *cover(t)* at a later date. Thus in Cottesmore, *Foxearth Gorse* of 1824 has become *Blackthorn Covert* by 1951, perhaps indicating additional planting to provide extra cover for the fox lairs or even for game, the foxes having been eradicated.

Two thirds of the *furze* names refer to enclosures. Indeed, *Ulex europaeus* was once sown as a regular horse and cattle fodder.² But an interesting fact is that the distribution of *furze* names coincides with the dense spread of major place-names in *tūn* (belonging most probably to the period c.750–c.1050) which is such a distinctive feature of the south-west quarter of Rutland (Figs. 1 and 2).³ This is difficult to account for other than to suggest that either *fyrs* was in vogue for *Ulex europaeus* when the region was being assarted and settled in the later Anglo-Saxon period and that this word survived here as a micro-dialectal feature;⁴ or alternatively that *gorse* has replaced *furze* across the breadth of the county.

In comparison with Old English *fyrs* and *gors*, the Scandinavian word for the shrub *Ulex europaeus*, *hvin* (giving *whin*, *whinny*), is very rare in the minor names of the county and appears only within one mile of Rutland’s boundaries (Fig. 1). Its absence reinforces in a remarkable fashion the evidence of the county’s major place-names which indicate that at the time of the Viking incursions, Rutland kept its English integrity intact and that there was no Danish expropriation of land within its borders.⁵ The few examples of *hvin* appear to be linguistic echoes across the frontiers from Danish occupied territory.

As they stand, of course, although dramatically distributed, the *hvin* names are only very slight evidence for Danish exclusion. But when we add to them the surviving examples of minor names containing the unequivocally Scandinavian *lyng* ‘heather’ (Appendix 2), we find that Rutland’s marginal distribution of *hvin* names is underwritten (Fig. 3), despite the slightly further spread of *lyng* names from the county boundaries.⁶ In the north, a few *lyng* names show linguistic drift from Leicestershire/Lincolnshire, in the east from the Danish borough of Stamford and in the south, perhaps from Danish Northamptonshire, although one must remember the possible
Norwegian settlement at Glaston which may be responsible for the group. Significantly, *lyng* names relate closely to those very areas having names in *hvin* and to the locales of surviving major place-names in *horp* (Fig. 4).

Even the evidence of the late minor names reinforces the argument that Rutland, although it lay in what was to become the Danelaw, remained English during and after the Viking incursions and that Danish settlers were long kept outside its frontiers, at the very least until such time as when Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians were living peaceably together in a kingdom of England following the reconquest of this region by Edward the Elder.

NOTES

1 K.G. Messenger, *Flora of Rutland*, Leicester Museum 1971, p.54 and Map M13j. The weight of modern distribution is in the southern half of the county.
6 The modern incidence of *ling* in the county appears rather differently distributed from earlier times according to the evidence of minor names: Messenger op. cit., Map M29b.
7 Cox, ‘Rutland and the Scandinavian settlements’.
8 Ibid.
FURZE, GORSE, & WHIN IN RUTLAND

Fig. 3. Rutland, showing the distribution of *hvin* and *lyng*

Fig. 4. Rutland: the distribution of place-names in *horp*. G = Glaston; S = Stamford. Roman roads are indicated. Land over 400 ft is shaded.
Appendix 1

Names in furze, furzy:

Belton  
Glaston  
Gunthorpe  
Hambleton  
Lyndon  
Oakham  
Preston  

Names in gorse, gorsy:

Burley  
Cottesmore  
Glaston  
Greetham  
Gunthorpe  
Hambleton  
Lyndon  
Market Overton  
Pickworth  
Pilton  
Preston  
Seaton  
Stretton  
Teigh  
Tixover  
Edith Weston  
Whissendine  
Whitwell  

The Furze 1786, Furze Furlong 1786
Furze Close 1855
Furze Close 1796, 1837, Furze Meadow Close 1796
Furze Close 1785, 1792, Furze Meadow late 18th century,
Furzy Close 1729, 1785, Furzy Lyndon Hill 1729, 1785
Furze Close 1654, 1658, 1662, 1681, 1715
The Furze Hill 1739
The Furze 1713

Campions Gorse 1800, Gorse Cover 1824, Hentons Gorse 1800,
Mill Gorse 1800 (> Mill Cover 1824), Watkins Gorse 1824
Foxearth Gorse 1824 (> Blackthorn Covert 1951), Jacksons
Gorse 1800 (> Laxtons Gorse 1824 > Cottesmore Gorse 1951),
Warren Gorse 1800
Glaston Gorse 1800
Goss(e) Hedge 1652, 1787, 1790, Goss Hedge Close 18th
century, Gossedge furlong 1652
Gunthorpe Gorse 1800
Sharpins Gorse 1800, Sharplands Gorse 1806
Woodward Gorse 1806
Hopkinson’s Gorse 1824, Gorse Pit c.1942
The Gorse c.1942
Pilton Gorse 1800 (> Pilton Cover 1824 > Pilton Fox Covert
1951)
Wing Gorse 1800 (> Wing Cover 1824)
Seaton Gorse 1800
Bottom-, Top Gossy Close 1904
Gorse Close 1844
Tixover Gorse 1800
Ketton Gorse 1951, The Gorse 1951
Goss Hedges c.1942
Dixon’s Gorse Field c.1942
Names in *whin, whinny*:

Lyddington  *Winnigates Furlong* 1649, 1673, *Wingate Furlong* 1669
Market Overton  *Winsell Close* c.1760, *Winsell* c.1942
Ryhall  *Wingate Hill* 1799

**APPENDIX 2**

Names in *ling*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashwell</td>
<td><em>Lingmore</em> 1650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrow</td>
<td><em>Linge furlong</em> 1652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisbrooke</td>
<td><em>le Lyngges</em> 1335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Casterton</td>
<td><em>the Lynges</em> 1545, <em>Casterton Lings</em> 1806, 1824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Casterton</td>
<td><em>Linges t. Henry III</em> (1216-72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cottesmore</td>
<td><em>Lyngefurlongs</em> 1422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empingham</td>
<td><em>the Linges</em> 1698, <em>Ling's Spinney</em> 1893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glaston</td>
<td><em>The Linges</em> 1612, <em>The Linges</em> 1614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pickworth</td>
<td><em>Lyngh</em> t. Henry IV (1399-1413)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tinwell</td>
<td><em>Tynewell Linges</em> 1347</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The forms presented in the above appendices are unambiguous. In order not to overburden a brief article, it was considered inappropriate to provide detailed source references. Apart from late forms taken from various printed county maps, other examples are drawn chiefly from the Ancaster Muniments in the Lincolnshire Archives Office, Lincoln.