Clare, Clere, and Clères
Keith Briggs (pp. 7–25)

This article is from the *Journal of the English Place-Name Society*, an annual peer-reviewed journal issued free to members of the Society. The *Journal* welcomes contributions of articles and notes on subjects of relevance to English place-names.

The English Place-Name Society (EPNS) was established in 1923 to conduct a county-by-county survey of the place-names of England. To date, the Survey has produced 90 volumes. Almost all English counties have been surveyed, at least in part, and work to complete the Survey is ongoing. The Survey is used by researchers, academics, and those interested in the origins, meaning, and significance of English place-names.

The research work and the publication of the Survey are financed by the annual subscriptions of members of the Society, with the help of grants from the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the British Academy. Since the progress and success of the Survey depend largely upon the strength of the membership, the Society always welcomes new members, both personal and institutional.

In return for the annual subscription, members receive free of charge the current issue of the *Journal* as well as the volume of the Survey allocated to that year’s subscription. They are entitled to order, in addition, any available volume of the Survey at a concessionary price. Associate Members pay a reduced subscription, for which they receive the *Journal*.

Annual subscription prices (correct as of April 2017):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Within the UK</th>
<th>Outside the UK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>£40 (full)</td>
<td>£45 (full)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£15 (associate)</td>
<td>£18 (associate*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*increased prices reflect increased postage cost.

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
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Co</td>
<td>Cornwall</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ha</td>
<td>Hampshire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He</td>
<td>Herefordshire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Kent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La</td>
<td>Lancashire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nb</td>
<td>Northumberland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sf</td>
<td>Suffolk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So</td>
<td>Somerset</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wt</td>
<td>Isle of Wight</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPNE</td>
<td>Cornish Place-Name Elements.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPNE</td>
<td>English Place-Name Elements,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parts 1 and 2.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN BdHu</td>
<td>The Place-Names of Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN Brk</td>
<td>The Place-Names of Berkshire,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parts 1, 2 and 3.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN Bu</td>
<td>The Place-Names of Buckinghamshire.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN Ca</td>
<td>The Place-Names of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN Ch</td>
<td>The Place-Names of Cheshire,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parts 1–5.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN Cu</td>
<td>The Place-Names of Cumberland,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parts 1, 2 and 3.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN D</td>
<td>The Place-Names of Devon,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parts 1 and 2.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN Db</td>
<td>The Place-Names of Derbyshire,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parts 1, 2 and 3.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN Do</td>
<td>The Place-Names of Dorset,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parts 1–4.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN Du</td>
<td>The Place-Names of County Durham, Part 1.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN Ess</td>
<td>The Place-Names of Essex.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN ERY</td>
<td>The Place-Names of the East Riding of Yorkshire and York.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN Gl</td>
<td>The Place-Names of Gloucestershire, Parts 1–4.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN Hrt</td>
<td>The Place-Names of Hertfordshire.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN Le</td>
<td>The Place-Names of Leicestershire, Parts 1–6.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN Li</td>
<td>The Place-Names of Lincolnshire, Parts 1–7.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN Mx</td>
<td>The Place-Names of Middlesex (apart from the City of London).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN Nf</td>
<td>The Place-Names of Norfolk,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parts 1–3.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN Nt</td>
<td>The Place-Names of Nottinghamshire.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN NRY</td>
<td>The Place-Names of the North Riding of Yorkshire.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN Nth</td>
<td>The Place-Names of Northamptonshire.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN O</td>
<td>The Place-Names of Oxfordshire, Parts 1 and 2.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN R</td>
<td>The Place-Names of Rutland.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN Sa</td>
<td>The Place-Names of Shropshire,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parts 1–6.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN Sr</td>
<td>The Place-Names of Surrey.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN St</td>
<td>The Place-Names of Staffordshire, Part 1.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN Sx</td>
<td>The Place-Names of Sussex,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parts 1 and 2.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN W</td>
<td>The Place-Names of Wiltshire.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN Wa</td>
<td>The Place-Names of Warwickshire.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN We</td>
<td>The Place-Names of Westmorland, Parts 1 and 2.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN Wo</td>
<td>The Place-Names of Worcestershire.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN WRY</td>
<td>The Place-Names of the West Riding of Yorkshire, Parts 1–8.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Clare, Clere, and Clères

Keith Briggs

The name of Clare in Suffolk is one of the few major settlement names in East Anglia of unknown etymology. A similar mystery surrounds the Hampshire names Kingsclere, Highclere, and Burghclere, all containing the element clere which must have a single origin. Clères is a village north of Rouen in Normandy. There is a remarkable lack of variation in the early spellings of all these names, which are most often Clara, Clera, or Clere. The purpose of this article is to examine the hypothesis that these three place-names are identical in origin, and to discuss what that origin might be. To do this it is necessary to look at the history of each place, and of the noble families associated with them.

The known facts about Clare before the Conquest are meagre (Martin 1997; Thornton 1928a, b, 1963). An earthwork on the north side of the town (TL 769458) is possibly of Iron-Age date, but might also be a purely Saxon-period thegn’s burh. Archaeological investigation in the 1990s found only remains of medieval farm buildings. If the site of Clare had a strategic importance before the Normans, it must have been because of its location at the junction of the Chilton Stream with the Stour. The Stour forms the border of Essex, and this may reflect an ancient tribal boundary. The east–west road from Haverhill through Clare to Cavendish is probably Roman (Margary 1967: road 34a).

In the mid-11th century Clare belonged to Ælfric son of Wihtgar (DB) who founded a church of St John the Baptist and installed a college of seven secular canons. By 1066 Ælfric’s son, another Wihtgar, held the estates, but lost them before 1086 to the first Norman lord, Richard, son of Gilbert of Brionne. Richard built a castle on the Stour, and was succeeded by his son, another Gilbert.

Our evidence for the pre-Conquest religious foundation at Clare is contained in some 13th-century notes in a document known as the Bury Benefactors’ List (BBL; ECEE: 71, no. 110). The original is unpublished; an edition is in preparation by Sarah Foot, Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History at the University of Oxford, who kindly supplied the following
transcription from a version of this list in CUL MS Mm. 4. 19, The Black Register of the Vestry, part II, compiled after 1207 (a slightly different version is in Hervey (1925 2: 290)):

Tempore Etheldredi, Canuti et Edwardi regum Ælfric comes famous filius Withgari dedit sancto Edmundo Meleford et ecclesiam sancti Johannis Baptistae apud Claram construxit et clericos ibidem collocavit
[In the time of Æbelred, Cnut, and Edward, the famous earl Ælfric, son of Wihtgar, gave [Long] Melford to [Bury] St Edmunds and built the church of St John the Baptist at Clare and installed clerks there.]

Hart (ECEE: no.110) dates the original to 1044×1065, but for our purposes the important fact is that we cannot conclude that Clare was known under that name before 1065. The compiler of BBL might just be saying that the church was built ‘at the place now [13th century] called Clare’.

In 1090 the younger Gilbert gave the church to Bec in Normandy, and it thus became an alien priory cell (Knowles and Hadcock 1971). It was moved in 1124 to Stoke-by-Clare. In 1248 a new Augustinian priory on a different site south of the Stour was founded by Richard de Clare. This survived until the dissolution, but was refounded in 1953 (Barnardiston 1962). In 1326, Elizabeth de Clare (de Burgh) founded Clare College, Cambridge. In the 14th and 15th centuries, Clare became one of the wealthy cloth towns of Suffolk.

The name Clare is first mentioned in the Domesday Book. The critical point here is that no pre-Conquest document refers to Clare under that name. DB also refers to the place now called Claret Hall, which is just to the south of Clare, in Essex. It must be assumed that this name has a French diminutive suffix, so ‘Little Clare’. A place-name Erbury, from OE eorþburg ‘earth-fort’ also occurs in the neighbourhood (in the 16th century; Thornton 1928a: App. 3), and probably refers to the earthworks on the northern edge of the town, or perhaps to the southern site on the Stour which later became the Norman castle. If so, this is evidence that Clare had an earlier or alternative name, leaving open the possibility that Clare is a new name transferred from France. It is not impossible that French place-names were used in England before the Conquest, although no example is known. Several French monasteries, especially Bec, had lands in England before 1066 (Chibnall 1951; Lewis 1995). Some names might be pre-Conquest, but we cannot be sure; for example, a charter of 1045×65 but surviving only in a copy in the 12th-century Liber Eliensis has nunc nomine Plassiz vocatur for Pleshey, Essex (ECE: no. 61). The word is OFr plessis ‘fenced enclosure’. About half a dozen French place-names appear in DB (Briggs 2008: 116).

Clare is recorded as:
Claram (tenuit Alricus) 1086 LDB 389v
(Ricardus de) Clara 1086 LDB 448r
Clare 1195 (DEPN)

and in the hundreds of surviving Latin charters of the priories of Clare and
Stoke-by-Clare, Clare is always spelt with -a-, quite often simply Clar’
is recorded as:

Clare 1086 LDB 28v
Clareta 1165 (DEPN)
Claretta 1199 (DEPN)

Richard de Brionne may have had a role in the naming of Clare, either
because he already used Clare as a family name before 1066, or because he
transferred it as a place-name from France. It is therefore necessary to look
into his family background. The primary sources are chronicles (Orderic
Vitalis (OV) and William of Jumièges (WJ)) and charters (Fauroux (RADN),
Bates (RRAN)). Secondary sources include Mortimer (ODNB), G. E.
Cockayne et al. (CP), Round (1899), Mortimer (1980), Ward (1988).

From these we learn that the Richard who founded the English branch of
the family was born before 1035 and was the son of Gilbert de Brionne,
known as ‘Crespin’. This Gilbert was the son of Geoffroy, himself the son of
Richard I, Duke of Normandy. Richard also used the title de Bienfaite
(modern St-Martinde-Bienfaite-la-Cressonnière), but the main association is
with Brionne, which is 40 km south-west of Rouen, and no family connection
with Clères or any other place with a similar name is apparent.1

Richard was among those present at William’s assembly in Bonneville-sur-
Touques early in 1066, but it is not certain that he was at Hastings.
Nevertheless he received large estates in Kent, Surrey, Essex, and Suffolk. It
is most likely that he was the builder of the motte-and-bailey castle at Clare,
and possible that he planned the town, with its two parallel north–south streets
enclosing the church and market-place, making use of the existing earthworks
to defend the northern boundary. Richard married Rohese, daughter of Walter
Giffard, lord of Longueville-sur-Scie (Longueville is near Clères; both are on
the route between Rouen and the channel port of Dieppe). Of his several
children, Gilbert was probably born just before 1066, and he married Adeliza
de Clermont (-en-Beauvaisis) in about 1086.2 This Adeliza was the daughter
of Hugo (Hugues) of Clermont, who appears as Hugo de claromonte in the
archives of Thorney Abbey (Clark 1985: 67).3
The evidence is thus that Richard son of Gilbert was the first to use the name *de Clare* (or, rather, it was used of him), and this happened only after arriving in England, the first appearance being once in the DB (LDB 448r, in the section about Cavendish). The Clere families of Sussex (McKinley 1988: 43–4), Norfolk (McKinley 1975: 105) and Yorkshire may be related, but proof is lacking (for the Dorset Clares, see Dampier 1944). Loyd (1951: s.n. *Clere, Clera*) in fact claims to connect these names with Clères, but his argument is based only on the similarity of the names. Caistor Cleres in Norfolk (PN Nf 2: 4) received its name from a member of the Norfolk Clere family.

Three charters of Richard, all of doubtful authenticity, record his gifts to Bec (which is near Brionne; these charters are Chibnall 1951: nos. XXXIX–XL). The first, from before 1090, relates to Standon (Hrt) and calls him *Ricardus filius Gilberti dominus de Clare*; the second and third, from before 1086 and 1090 respectively, relate to various estates and call him *Ricardus filius comitis Gil(le)berti dominus de Clare*. According to Vaughn (1974), Richard and Rohese arranged for a monk of Bec to head their new foundation at St Neot’s. This demonstrates their continuing connection to their ancestral home.  

Two charters of Gilbert son of Richard from c.1090 record his gifts: firstly of the church of Ashen to Clare (ECE: 46, no. 107; Powell 1903: 478), and secondly of two freemen of Westley to Bury (Douglas 1932: 152–3, no.169). Two differing versions of the latter give his name as *Gilebertus de Clara*, and *Gilebertus de Clare*. A confirmation charter of 1136×43 concerning Gilbert’s gifts to Bec appears in Harper-Bill and Mortimer (1982: item 70); it uses the spellings (*boscum de*) *Clara* and (*in villa*) *Clare*.

A Gauthier d’Auffay is named by Orderic Vitalis (OV: 6, 237), who calls him *consanguineus* of Roger son of Richard, who must be our Richard de Clare. Since Auffay is near Clères, this is an intriguing possible connection, but unfortunately it is impossible to verify this claim or recover any further details.

We turn now to French place-names. Clères is situated about 15km north of Rouen, on the stream now called *la Clérette*. The early history is obscure (Lemarchand 1901; Spalikowski 1936), but from before 1066 it was the seat of a barony. Typical early spellings, of a large number on record, are (DT Seine-Maritime):

*(de) Clera* c.1050–66 and frequently later

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clara</td>
<td>1148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clère</td>
<td>1386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>1431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clères</td>
<td>1454</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is apparent that the final -s is not organic, and is just the inflectional -s of obscure purpose commonly found in French medieval place-name records. The stream at Clères is recorded as (DT Seine-Maritime):

Fluvius Clare 1059
fluvius Clere c.1060
Vallem Clare 1277

Another river, slightly to the south at Maromme, was called Rivière de Clarete 1389–90, possibly by confusion with la Clérette. It flows into the Cailly at Deville-lès-Rouen. Note the similarity of the name to Claret in Essex.

The family of the barons de Clère(s) is of uncertain pedigree. The study of Lemarchand (1901) is appropriately cautious and identifies the generations Roger (fl. 1090), Gislebert, Berenger, Renaud, Mathieu I, and Mathieu II. Of Roger de Clère it is thought that he was a vassal of the Toëni (later Tosny) family and the murderer of Robert de Beaumont in about 1050 (Lemarchand 1901: 20; Prévost 1862: I.163; OV: 3, 426–7). The report on this event calls him Roger de Clara. A charter in his name gives land to two churches in Rouen (Prévost 1862: III.467) and was witnessed by Duke William. He is there titled Roger de Clera (Lemarchand 1901: 23). A Richard de Clères is named in a list of crusaders in 1191 in Goube (1815: 471); he cannot be connected to the Clare family.
The conclusion from this examination is that there is no known family connection of the Clares with Clères, and so no likelihood that the name Clères was transferred to England, either as a place-name or via a family name. Nevertheless, there has certainly been confusion between Clères and Clere: Shore (1895: 198–9) describes correspondence in 1895 with the cathedral authorities in Rouen, which established that some charters they held refer to Kingsclere, not Clères as had been long assumed.

We must next consider the Hampshire names in -clere. These are recorded in twelve pre-Conquest charters (Table 1), the spelling generally being cleara. It is apparent that the name is nearly always inflected as a weak masculine noun. Furthermore we have two charters (S 360, S 377) compounding the name with flōde ‘spring’; the second of these is problematic as no spring or stream can be identified at the implied location (Grundy 1927: 172). Nevertheless, these names are valuable evidence that a name existed which is identical to that in the -clere names. In DB, Kingsclere is always written Clere (GDB: 39r, 43r, 45r, 50v). Coates (1989: s.n. Clere) has a valuable discussion of the Hampshire names, which is, however, ultimately inconclusive.

With the facts now before us, let us consider possible etymologies for the place-name Clare. It is not English; Ekwall (DEPN) suggests a Celtic river-name. Against this are the facts that no other ancient river-name even vaguely similar is known in England or Cornwall; and further most pre-English river-names each have multiple instances (Avon, Thames/Thame/Tame, Stour, Ouse, Severn, Humber).

A common Brittonic word is generally assumed to exist (CCCR: 17) on the basis of Welsh clæar ‘kind, gentle, pleasant, lukewarm’ (recorded from the 13th century; Welsh clær ‘bright, shining, fine, clear’ is presumably a derivative with a slight semantic development), Breton klouar, and possibly Cornish clor/clour (though the last is not in CPNE). The element clær appears in several minor Welsh place-names, such as Clærddu, Claerhau, Claerllys, Claerwch, Claerwen and Claerwenid, but none of these is known to be an ancient name (AMR). The earliest citation for Clærddu in AMR is Clarduy (1536–9). Afon Clærddu paradoxically seems to mean ‘clear-dark’; Afon Clarerwen is more plausibly ‘clear-light’ (Lewis 2007: 8). But the scarcity and modernity of these names raises serious doubts as to their applicability to Clare and Clere. In any case clæar, clær are adjectives and only appear in compound place-names.

Mac Mathúna (2004) discusses Irish clár, one meaning of which is ‘plain’. Possible toponymic usages of this in early literature are clár Gairigi ‘the plain of Gaírech’; trí Coirp Cláiri ‘the three called Corp from Clár’; and Clármide ‘the plain of Meath’. Chláir/Claregalway belongs here too. In Wales we have Clarach Llangorwen and Afon Clarach (SN 605835). According to Lewis
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>date</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>donor</th>
<th>estate</th>
<th>text</th>
<th>reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>749</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>Cuthred</td>
<td>Highclere</td>
<td><em>Clearan</em> … <em>Cleran</em></td>
<td>Grundy (1926: 133-7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spurious</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>Edward</td>
<td>Highclere</td>
<td><em>de Clera</em> … <em>Cleran</em></td>
<td>Grundy (1926: 133-7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>873 x 888</td>
<td>1507</td>
<td>Alfred</td>
<td>Kingsclere</td>
<td><em>at Cleran</em></td>
<td>S. Miller (2001: 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>931</td>
<td>412</td>
<td>Athelstan</td>
<td>Ecchinswell</td>
<td><em>to Cleran</em> … <em>at Cleran</em> …</td>
<td>Grundy (1924: 94-103)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>to west cleran</em> … <em>to Cleran</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>943</td>
<td>487</td>
<td>Edmund</td>
<td>Burghclere</td>
<td><em>at Cleran</em> … <em>to Cleran</em></td>
<td>Grundy (1921: 130-4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>951 x 955</td>
<td>1515</td>
<td>Eadred</td>
<td>Kingsclere</td>
<td><em>Cleran</em></td>
<td>S. Miller (2001: 17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>955</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>Eadred</td>
<td>Highclere</td>
<td><em>at Cleran</em> … <em>Cleran</em></td>
<td>Grundy (1926: 133-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>955 x 958</td>
<td>1491</td>
<td>Ælfsige</td>
<td>Burgh- or Highclere</td>
<td><em>at Cleran</em></td>
<td>S. Miller (2001: 18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>959</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>Edgar</td>
<td>Highclere</td>
<td><em>at west cleran</em> … <em>at West Cleran</em></td>
<td>Grundy (1926: 136-7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>963 x 975</td>
<td>819</td>
<td>Edgar</td>
<td><em>Cleran</em></td>
<td><em>at Cleran</em></td>
<td>Keynes (1994: 1122)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>900</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>Edward</td>
<td>Micheldever</td>
<td><em>to cleara fōde, bonne of cleara fōde</em></td>
<td>Brooks (1982: 198)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>909</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>Edward</td>
<td>North Waltham</td>
<td><em>at cleara fōda</em> … <em>to cleara fōda</em></td>
<td>Grundy (1927: 172-7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Pre-Conquest Hampshire charters mentioning *cleara*. 
(2007: 56), these are from Irish clárach ‘plain’; AMR gives Clarach (1115–30), Clarauch (1120). Falc’hun (1982: 91–4) tries to derive all French names in Cler-, Clair etc. from a Gaulish word clair meaning ‘plain’. But he completely fails to make his case, not giving early forms for any name, and his maps on pages 126–7 show that most of his examples are in hilly country. This word is Goidelic only, and neither Clare nor the Cleres are on a plain.

Clères is generally accepted to be Latin clāra, either elliptically for aqua clāra ‘clear water’, or simply a substantive use of the adjective, This is highly plausible, since the characterization of a stream as ‘clear, pure, clean, bright’ is one of the most fundamental types of hydronymy. In England and Cornwall we find examples such as:

- fluuium Fresca c.710 Bede (ERN: 165). This is from OE fersc ‘fresh’; the same word appears in Freshford (Somerset).
- Brightwell, Suffolk (Brihtwella DB, Baron 1952)7
- Brightwell, Berkshire (æt Brihtanwylle 854 S 307, PN Brk: 516; ECTV: 38–9)
- Sherborne, Dorset (PN Do 3: 355)
- Sherborne, Gloucestershire (PN Gl 1: 203)
- Sherborne, Warwickshire (PN Wa: 222)
- Shirburn, Oxfordshire (PN O: 91)
- Whitwell, Isle of Wight (Quitewell 1212, Whytewell 1255; Mills 2001: 109)
- Fentriga ‘bright well’ (CPNE: 37; Padel 1982: 18)

The charter S 523 apparently has a Latin rendering of the name Brightwell as declaratam fontem. This might be literally ‘the declared spring’ or ‘aforementioned spring’, but more probably is just a fancy multisyllabic way of saying clarum fontem ‘clear spring’. Similarly, Sherborne in Dorset is called clarus fons in Leland’s Itinerary (Smith 1906: 1, 296; PN Do 3: 356). Both Latinizations suggest that the sense of the names was correctly understood. Other examples with similar meanings in ERN include Glen (Nb), Shire, and Whitewater. There are ME and ModE names with similar origins: Clarborough (Pmb; Clarebrooke 1611; Charles 1992: 451), Clearbrook Farm (So; ST 765602); Whitewell (near Suffenton, Co); and Clearwell (Newport, Gwent).8

In France, apart from Clères, there exists Clarbec (Calvados), the name of a stream and a commune. Clarbec was Clerbec, Clarus Beccus 14th (DT Calvados), in which an explanatory bec has been added by the Normans to an originally simplex stream-name. We also have Duclair, on the Seine downstream from Rouen, which was Duroclarus before 811 and Durclarum
1025 (TGF: ¶6024). All these river-names are likely to have the same origin as Clères. There is also a river La Claire in Honfleur, but this may be recent, as early forms seem to be lacking. An element of similar meaning, apparently ‘pure water’, appears in La Pure (Osnès, Ardenne), which was super fluvium Puram, ... ad villam que vocatur Pura 911–23 (TGF: ¶5125), and there are also Petits Purebecques and Grandes Purebecques, near Merville (Nord). In later medieval French, the adjective cler continued to be productive in place-names such as Clairfontaine.

Given the ubiquity of this name type, I suggest that it lies behind Clare and Clere also. As already explained, it is not likely that these are transferred from France, so the conclusion must be that these are stream-names given in the Roman period and adopted by the first Anglo-Saxon settlers. Since the adjective clārus was not borrowed into the general lexicon, my hypothesis is that these were proper names, borrowed without understanding of meaning.

As parallels for Latin borrowings in OE place-names, we have the obvious strāet < strāta and cæster < castra. Much rarer is camp < campus ‘field’ (Gelling 1988: 75ff.); Coates (1998: 5; revised as 2000a: 44) has proposed that Firle (Sx) is feraīa ‘wild places’, and that the district-name Lyme is limen ‘threshold’ (2003–4: 39). Speen (Brk) is spēnis ‘thorny place’ (PN Brk: 260; Coates 2000b: 40–43). Catterick (YN) is possibly Latin cataracta ‘waterfall’ (LHEB: 409). Other words of Latin origin appearing in place-names are funta < oblique stem font- or fontâna ‘spring’, foss < fossa ‘ditch’ and wic < vic- ‘settlement’. A further curiositas is Wyfont bregg, recorded in a Clare charter of 1334 (Harper-Bill 1991: no.83), apparently containing ‘white’ and ‘font’ in some sense. These words are all tatsamas — words taken over whole from a foreign source, with adjustments to the morphology of the borrowing language.

The expected phonetic development is that Latin ā becomes OE /eː/, most often written <æ> (or with length-mark <ǣ>), as in strāet and in nēp < nāpus ‘turnip’ (Campbell 1959: §504). The later development would be via ME /klee:ɾə/, as seen in the DB spellings Clere, which is also the normal one in the Latin portions of the OE charters; this spelling remained the conventional one but the pronunciation evolved regularly to modern /kliːt(ə)/ and /kliːə/.

This much seems satisfactory, but there is a potential problem with the charter spellings Cleara. These seem to imply a breaking of <æ> which is only expected after palatal consonants, or, when followed by /t/, by another consonant as well. My theory will fail if this cannot be explained. In fact, <ea> is an occasional spelling for OE; in the entire OE corpus the word stræt (including inflected forms) occurs 455 times in that spelling; 140 times as stræt, and eighteen times as streat. However, I will not invoke this as an explanation of Cleara; I believe that a better explanation is possible in terms
of the orthography of the charters in question, which, though internally consistent, is abnormal. The Latin spellings Cler- strongly support the view that the pronunciation was always with some variety of /e/ which all other evidence would suggest is long, and not with a diphthong; we need to see whether the OE spellings can be made to fit this view.\footnote{11}

The authenticity and interdependencies of the charters listed in Table 1 are very difficult questions, and as only three have been edited in the Anglo-Saxon Charters series, good answers to these questions are not yet available. Several are known to be outright forgeries (S 360, S 377, S 383); some are suspicious (S 819); whilst others are collocations which have sections obviously copied from others (S 258, S 565). Let us consider one of the earliest which is believed to be genuine, S 412 (dated 931). Clere is cited as follows:

Dis is seo landboc .x. hydæ to Clearan þe Æpelstan cing bocode Ælfriceæ biscope on ece yrfae
[This is the charter [of the] 10 hides at Clere which King Æpelstan gave ("booked") to Bishop Ælfric in perpetual inheritance.]

In a more normal spelling of 10th-century West Saxon, this would be:

Dis is seo landboc .x. hida to Clearan þe Æpelstan cing bocode Ælfrice biscope on ece erfe.

It is apparent that the scribe used <æ> for both inflectional -e (dative singular and preterite) and -a (genitive plural), perhaps because they had weakened and fallen together, and I suggest that this left <æ> unavailable for the sound; for this reason <ea> was used instead. This would also explain the <E> for <Æ> in Æpelstan. After a Latin section, S 412 continues with bounds in OE, in which Clere is written Cleran, and <æ> is again regularly avoided in the spelling pæb for pæb. Further abnormal spellings (gæ-, þæ, þægn) are found in other versions of this formula in:

- S 487 (943) Ṣis is þara . xv . hida boc æt Clearan þæ Edmund cing gæbocæ Ælfswiæ on ece yrfae
- S 565 (955) Dis is þara . X . hida boc æt Cleran þæ Eadred cing gæbocæ Ælfsegæ biscope
- S 680 (959) Dis is þara . X . hida land boc æt west clearan þæ Eadgar cyning gebocæ Ælfwine his þægne on ece yrfae

It must be the case that one of these charters was an original from which this phrase has been copied with slight alterations. Together they are sufficient evidence that Cleara(n) became a conventional spelling, and it thus appears in the earliest (11th-century) copy of King Alfred’s will of 873×888. Also in
support of this interpretation is the fact that the authentic S1491 (955×958), which has a text independent of all the other charters, uses only the spelling at Cleran. S 360 is shown to be a forgery by Brooks (1982: 198), and so strictly speaking to cleara flode therein is of no evidential value. S 360 is similarly indecisive with regard to the spelling of /e/: to Bearcelae, ponne of Bercelea forð. The word flode (distinct from flōd) is defined by Kitson (KGCB: §6.20.3) as “the point in a large dene at which when the chalk aquifer is full the water bursts out”. In principle the qualifier clearan could be a lexical term, a survival of the Latin adjective, but the absence of a definite article suggests that we do in fact have a proper name, a real compound place-name. Other comparable cases in Hampshire with adjectives do have the article, such as to þære readan flodan (‘red’ S 488) and of þære hwitan flodan (‘white’ S 693).

For Clare in Suffolk, the Latin spelling Clara has prevailed, and this has affected the modern pronunciation. Similarly, numerous French place-names in Cler- or Clair- appear in Latin documents as Clar-. There is, however, an eastern development in which OE r gives /ar/ (see Ekwall 1963: 143), where the example ar ‘ere’ from a text of c.1274 is given. This may be part of the reason why we have Clare in Suffolk, but Clere in Hampshire. To conclude the phonetic discussion, there appears to be no major barrier to my proposal.

In the case of Clare, I suggest that the referent was the north–south Chilton Stream (Figure 2(c)), not the Stour, since that is an ancient name probably meaning ‘dark’, perhaps also ‘strong, violent, gloomy’ (Coates 2006); with this assumption we thus have a plausible natural contrast. Note that Satchell (2003) proposes that the chapel at Wentford on the northern edge of Clare is a former leper chapel. Perhaps its sitting is due to a former belief in the healing powers of the water of the Chilton Stream?

In the case of Clere, I suggest that the referent was the stream at Kingsclere, which issues from a strong spring at SU 520578. This became the name (perhaps already in the Roman period) of a large estate including the present Kingsclere, Highclere, and Burghclere. Parts of this were in royal ownership in the Anglo-Saxon period; indeed King Alfred leaves Kingsclere in his will (S 1507) to his daughter. This is in fact a natural unit, bounded on the south by the Roman road from Salisbury to Silchester (Margary 1967: road 4b), and on the north by the River Enborne (Shore 1895; Crawford 1922: Appendix E).

These two streams, and the Clérette, all have similar characteristics: they are shallow with a clear gravelly bottom, with an absence of mud or silt, and with a noticeable flow. If Latin clāra was essentially a technical term when applied to streams, I suggest that it denoted these characteristics. Perhaps the most significant aspect was potability.
Figure 2 (a): the stream at Clères.

Figure 2 (b): the stream at Kingsclere.
Figure 2 (c): the stream at Clare.

Figure 2 pictures show the clear water and gravelly stream-bottom in all cases.

The derived OFr word *cler* (the source of English ‘clear’) remained a favourite in OFr and AN literature in application to water (*clere ewe* etc.), and perhaps there is an echo here of the ancient meaning. For example, we have it in *St. Modwenna* (Baker and Bell 1947: line 489): *Fontaine clere e serie* ‘spring clear and pleasant’, and in the History of the Frankish Kings of Philip Mousket (Waitz 1882: 726, lines 2445–7):

Carles regarda viers seniestre
Et trouva une autre fontaine,
Ki clere estoit et froide et saine.
[Charlemagne looked towards the left / and found another spring / which was clear and cold and pure.]

It also appears in the Anglo-Norman life of St Edmund (Ravenel 1906: lines 1526–29):
Dulces funteines par aûr
Od dulz curs, od clere gravele
Nul ne puët choisir la plus bele
Cuntrecurent vers la mer

[Sweet strong springs / With gentle course, with clear gravel / None could look
more fair / Running down to the sea.]^{13}

In summary, I have suggested that the Latin stream-name *Clāra*, which is
certainly recorded in northern France, was also used in Roman Britain and
was borrowed in three instances by the first English settlers, and is thus the
origin of the English names *cleara*, Clere and Clare. The nature of the
evidence is such that a certain conclusion will probably never be reached; I am
merely interested to throw another plausible etymology into the continuing
debate.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for helpful responses to queries from Sarah Foot, Christopher
Harper-Bill, Simon Keynes, Chris Lewis, Edward Martin, Richard Morgan,
Oliver Padel, Daniel Power, Max Satchell, Patrick Sims-Williams, and Paul
Tempan. Andrew Sihler gave valuable advice on Latin etymology. I
acknowledge the use of material from Professor Melville Richards’ place-
name research archive deposited at the University of Wales Bangor, accessed
through the Archif Melville Richards database (AMR), a project funded by
grants from the University of Wales Board of Celtic Studies and the Arts and
Humanities Research Board.

Appendix: red herrings

There are numerous places named after a saint whose name derives from Latin
*Clārus*, such as Sanclèr/St Clears (Carmarthenshire), St Cleer (Co) and dozens
of places called Saint-Clair in France, the best known being Saint-Clair-sur-
Epte (Val d’Oise). The saints here are all more or less obscure, and in some
cases probably purely mythical. A brochure distributed in the church of Clères
incorrectly attributes the origin of the village’s name to a St Clair. In none of
these cases is there any connection to a simplex name of the type *Clare*. A
family name is behind Heighton St Cleres (PN Sx: 361), Bradfield St Clare
(Sf) and Clare Park in Crondall (Ha; Coates 1989: 57).

Claro and Clareton (PN YW 5: 14) appear to incorporate a personal name
*Clare* of continental Germanic or Norse origin, perhaps ultimately from Latin
Clārus; this element also appears in the common Clarenbald. Clare in Oxfordshire is clǣg-ōrā ‘clay slope’ (PN O: 89).

County Clare in Ireland is sometimes said to be named after the Clare family (who certainly had Irish lands), but there is no proof of this. In the Irish Placenames Database\(^1\) the more reasonable suggestion is made that the county takes its name from Clarecastle (4 km south of Ennis), and the castle is named from a plank bridge (another sense of Irish clār) used to reach it.

Sandred (PN Nf 2: 191) equates Sloley (TG 292247) with the otherwise unidentified Clareia in DB. The argument relies on assuming that <C-> was a spelling for <S->, and a dissimilation of l-l to l-r. This is just about possible, but it might be simpler to assume that the DB scribe was completely confused by the place-name, and wrote a name which he knew from elsewhere.

Numerous French names derive from Clāri(ā)cum ‘estate of Clārius/Clārus’: Clair, Clairac, Clara, Clarac, Claracq, Clary, Clayrac, Clérac, Clérey, Cléry, Cléré (Clareia 1096, TGF: ¶8166), Clerques, Clarques, Klerken. The last three are in former Germanic-speaking areas and show stress-shifting.

The Roman fort of Clareanna recorded in the Peutinger Table (Kastell Donnstetten, Raetia; Miller 1988), possibly has a Celtic name. Gaelic cleireach ‘cleric’ appears in Achnaclerach (Highland) ‘field of the clergyman’. The Spanish Clares (Guadalajara) probably means ‘clearings’.

48 Heathfield, Martlesham Heath, Suffolk IP5 3UB. E: Keith.Briggs@bt.com

Notes

1. Badier (DN: s.n. Clère) does in fact graft the Clares onto the family of the barons of Clères, but the dates given are impossible — Geoffroy/Godefroy is said to be living in 921, when he actually was not born until 953. All other dates are fifty to a hundred years too early, and this source must be disregarded. Delavalade, d’Harcourt, and Marcel (1982) is equally unreliable.
2. We could speculate that it was Gilbert who named Clare, in honour of his wife, by taking the first element of the name Clermont. But there is no precedent for this type of naming.
3. For the later history of the Clare family, see Altschul (1965).
4. Other places in England taking their name from Bec are Tooting Bec, Weedon Bec, and Bekesbourne.
5. Prévost (1862: I.162) raises doubts that the name refers to Clères, and thinks it might rather be a fiefdom of Clerre in Bailleul-la-Vallée (Eure). The place-name Clerre appears to be lost, but Clercy and Clairemare appear on the modern map about 2 km north of Bailleul-la-Vallée. On the whole, a connection to Clères appears far more likely.
7. In an unpublished cartulary of the Priory of SS Peter & Paul in Ipswich (Suffolk Record Office HD226/4253/3, f. 36v) reference is made to via `regia' q `tendit de Gip` ap `birchtewele` `the royal road which reaches from Ipswich to Brightwell`. This may hint at some former importance of Brightwell, and possibly this was the fresh water of the stream there. It is next to Newbourne with its `nine springs` (Briggs 2006).
8. But not Clearwell (PN Gl 3: 236), which is `clover well`.
9. On these see Gelling (1988: ch. 3). In a paper presented at the 2007 Dublin conference of the Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland, Paul Cullen further proposed that Romney in Kent contains Latin rūmen in the sense `throat, gullet` (P.R.K.: 2007).
11. Occasional inverse spellings such as cæs for cēas `chose` may provide further clues relevant to this problem.
12. Cole (1991) has suggested a similar contrast between OE bróc and burna, the first denoting a muddier stream, and the second a clearer one. But this is rejected by Kitson (KGCB: §6.30.3.2).
13. Curiously, a 20th-century owner of Clare Priory was called de Fonblanque (Martin 1997), with a similar meaning to the one we must assume for (aqua) clara.

References

AMR = Richards, Melville, Archif Melville Richards, Archives Department of the University of Wales Bangor.
CCCR = Lewis, Henry and Holger Pedersen (1937), A concise comparative Celtic grammar, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.


Hervey, F., ed. (1925), The Pinchbeck Register, London: OUP.


KGB = Kitson, Peter (forthcoming), Guide to to Old English charter boundaries, Nottingham: EPNS.


LDB Sf = Rumble, Alex, ed. (1986), Domesday Book Suffolk, Chichester: Phillimore.


Mac Mathún, Liam (2004), ‘Continuity and change in early Irish words for ‘plain’: exploring narrative and place-name divergence’, Ériu LIV, 149–70.


Miller, Konrad (1906, rpt 1988), Itineraria Romana, Bregenz: Gertrude Husslein.

Miller, Sean, ed. (2001), Charters of the New Minster, Winchester, Anglo-Saxon Charters vol. 9, Oxford: OUP, for The British Academy.


Le Prévost, Auguste (1862), Mémoires et notes pour servir à l’histoire du département de l’Eure, Evreux: Hérissaey.
RADN = Fauroux, Marie, ed. (1961), Recueil des actes des ducs de Normandie de 911 à 1066, Complété d’un index rerum par Lucien Musset, Caen: Caron.
Ravenel, Florence Leftwich, ed. (1906), La vie Seint Edmund le rei, Philadelphia: John C. Watkins Co.
S (followed by number) = Sawyer, P. H., ed. (1968), Anglo-Saxon charters. an annotated list and bibliography, London: Royal Historical Society.
Smith, Lucy Toulin, ed. (1906), Leland’s itinerary in England and Wales in or about the years 1535–1543, London: George Bell and Sons.
Spalikowski, Edmond (1936), Clères: le château, le parc zoologique, le bourg, 2nd ed., Rouen: Editions Maugard.
—— (1963), A Short History of Clare Suffolk, Brentwood: Minerva Press.