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### The English Place-Name Society 1923–73

Dorothy Whitelock (pp. 6–14)

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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>   |

## THE ENGLISH PLACE-NAME SOCIETY 1923-1973

It is a natural instinct to wish to know the meaning of the names of places with which one is familiar. In England it is seen already in the writings of the Venerable Bede in the early eighth century. Partly because he was not very far removed from the period when the names were given, but also because he was an honest scholar who did not let his imagination range beyond his evidence, his interpretations are almost always correct. One cannot say as much about his successors. As by normal linguistic developments the names moved further away from their original forms, erroneous interpretations become increasingly common, and continue right on into modern times. A ninth-century writer claims that Wimborne means 'fountain of wine', being named from the clarity and excellent flavour of its waters;<sup>1</sup> it only means 'meadow stream'. An early eleventh-century author says that the first element in Ramsey, Huntingdonshire, may be the Latin *ramus* 'branch',<sup>2</sup> whereas modern scholars allow a choice between *hramsan* 'wild garlic' and *Hræfnes* 'Raven's'. In the twelfth century we are told that Hunstanton is 'the vill of the honey-stone',<sup>3</sup> though it really gets its name from a man called Hunstan. Wild fancies can be found in the works of William of Malmesbury, as when he brings *Cernel* (Cerne Abbas) from Latin *cerno* 'perceive' and Hebrew *hel* 'God', with reference to an alleged vision seen there by St Augustine;<sup>4</sup> the name is derived from the river-name Cerne, probably with a Celtic ending *-ial*.

Lists of wrong, and often colourful, interpretations could be compiled from authors such as Leland. For example, he suggests that Marden, Herefordshire, is 'Martyr's hill', mentioning a local belief that St. Ethelbert was beheaded there.<sup>5</sup> He says that Maidenhead 'toke the Name of Maidenhed of a Hedde that they

<sup>1</sup> 'Life of St. Leoba', by Rudolf of Fulda, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores* XV, part 1, p. 123.

<sup>2</sup> 'Life of St. Oswald, archbishop of York', *Historians of the Church of York and its Archbishops*, ed. J. Raine, I, p. 432.

<sup>3</sup> *Gaufridi de Fontibus Liber de Infantia Sancti Eadmundi, Memorials of St. Edmund's Abbey*, ed. T. Arnold, RS. I, p. 100.

<sup>4</sup> *De Gestis Pontificum*, ed. N. E. S. A. Hamilton, RS, p. 185.

<sup>5</sup> *The Itinerary of John Leland the Antiquary*, ed. T. Hearne, 3rd edit., 1769, V, p. 67. Older forms suggest that the name, like that of Maund, may be connected with the Anglo-Saxon tribe, the *Magonsæte*.

sayd was one of the xi thousand Virgines, to the whiche Offering there was made in a Chapell'.<sup>6</sup> Isaac Taylor's *Words and Places*, published in 1864, and considerably expanded in a second edition in the following year, was one of the first works to foresee how important place-name evidence might be for the historian; but it was inevitable that at that date many false interpretations should be repeated or invented, e.g. that Gateshead is 'the end of the road'<sup>7</sup> (though already Bede had rendered it correctly as *Ad Caprae Caput*). A Roman legion is placed at Lexdon, Essex<sup>8</sup> 'Leaxa's valley', the British tribe *Regni* in Ringwood, Hampshire<sup>9</sup> (probably 'boundary-wood'), and the *Myrgingas* of *Widsith* in Meering, Nottinghamshire ('dwellers by the mere') as well as in other places.<sup>10</sup> Battles are located at places whose names begin with Lich-, Lack- or Leck-, on the assumption that the first element is *līc* 'corpse', though in Lichfield, Staffordshire, it is *lycced*, from a Celtic name meaning 'grey wood', and in Leckhampstead, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, and Lackford, Suffolk, it is *lēac* 'leek' — though Taylor could point to a battle fought at Lackford in 1173.<sup>11</sup> Naturally it was long assumed that names like Slaughter and Slaughterford denote sites of battles,<sup>12</sup> though such names contain *\*slōhtre* 'slough, muddy place', except for the Wiltshire Slaughterford, which means 'sloe-tree ford'. Though it would be unfair to judge Taylor merely from a selection of his errors, one can see why a reviewer of one of the Society's volumes in 1932 refers to the 'disreputable ways' of the study of toponymic philology in its youth.<sup>13</sup>

Most of these mistaken interpretations did little harm — and it must be admitted that the discovery of the truth robbed many names of colour and romance. Yet faulty historical conclusions were drawn from some of them, and also from the wrong identification of names in early sources with modern names with only an accidental resemblance.

Before the end of the nineteenth century a scientific attitude

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, VIII, p. 108. The meaning of this name, whose second element is *hŷð* 'landing-place', is discussed in *The Place-Names of Berkshire*, I, p. 53.

<sup>7</sup> *Words and Places*, 2nd edit., 1865, p. 253.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 300.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 301-2.

<sup>13</sup> F. Cottrell, reviewing *The Place-Names of Devon*, in *Archaeological Journal*, lxxxix (1923), pp. 316-9.

had begun to appear, since the development of linguistic studies had made possible an understanding of the types of phonetic change which names had undergone through the centuries. It was now realised that early forms of place-names were required before either identification or interpretation could be made with any degree of certainty. In this country the outstanding figures of this new approach were the philologist Henry Bradley and the historian W. H. Stevenson. Neither devoted any work of scale to place-names: their comments are scattered, but their exact and convincing notes introduced a new era in the handling of place-names.

Correct principles of philological study in the interpretation of place-names were used in the production of a volume covering the names of a county by the great pioneer, Walter W. Skeat,<sup>14</sup> commencing with the *Place-Names of Cambridgeshire* in 1901, followed by volumes dealing with Hertfordshire, Huntingdonshire, Bedfordshire, Berkshire and Suffolk. Other scholars also produced works on individual counties, outstanding among them being Allen Mawer's *The Place-Names of Northumberland and Durham* in 1920<sup>15</sup> and Eilert Ekwall's *The Place-Names of Lancashire* in 1922. Special mention should be made of a different type of study, *The Place-Names of Berkshire: An Essay*, in which, as early as 1911, F. M. Stenton illustrated important historical conclusions which could be drawn from the proper use of place-name evidence. In this work he made use of the names of other counties, and of unpublished material. Another important study of the historical value of place-name evidence was produced by Ekwall in 1918, his *Scandinavians and Celts*.

Allen Mawer followed his volume on Northumberland and Durham with a paper read before the British Academy on 26 January 1922, in which he made clear the need for the collection of early forms of names from unprinted records, and for a survey of names of the whole country, since there were many problems which could not be adequately dealt with on the material of a single county. As a result of this paper, he

<sup>14</sup> For an appreciation of Skeat, who had begun to publish notes on place-names as early as 1884, see E. Ekwall, 'Walter William Skeat, 1835-1912', *Onoma*, v (1954), pp. 45-8.

<sup>15</sup> Mawer had been using place-name evidence for several years previously. On his work, see F. M. Stenton, 'Sir Allen Mawer', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, xxix (1945), pp. 433-9; also E. Ekwall, 'Allen Mawer, 1879-1942', *Onoma*, vi (1955-6), pp. 35-6.

obtained both formal and financial support from the British Academy for a Survey of English Place-Names. From its inception, the English Place-Name Society has had reason to be grateful to the Academy for its support.<sup>16</sup> In 1922 Mawer published an interesting pamphlet on *Place-Names and History*.

Mawer had already for some time been obtaining the views of leading scholars on his project for a survey of English Place-Names. It was foreseen that not only would such a study produce information of value to the linguist, the historian, the archaeologist and the topographer, but would also require the help of experts in all these fields. Scholars consulted at this early stage included Felix Liebermann, Horace Round, William Farrer, Joseph Armitage Robinson, Gunnar Knudsen, Magnus Olsen, and of course Henry Bradley and W. H. Stevenson. Most important of all, Mawer secured the co-operation of F. M. Stenton, who aroused the interest of James Tait, F. M. Powicke and Canon C. W. Foster. Sir Israel Gollancz and Joseph Wright helped to put the case to the British Academy. Other early supporters of the scheme were G. Baldwin Brown, Miss A. C. Paues and Miss Bertha Phillpotts. The moment was a propitious one: as Stenton wrote in 1945: 'General interest in the subject was wide-spread; the fundamental principles of place-name study had been established earlier in the century, and a number of scholars were endeavouring to carry them into effect'.<sup>17</sup> Undertakings of this nature were already under way in the Scandinavian countries.

A committee consisting of Tait, W. J. Sedgefield, Miss Paues, Stenton and Mawer met on 30 March 1922, and again, with the addition of O. G. S. Crawford, on 29 September, when plans for the introductory volume of the Survey and for some county studies were laid down. Then, on 9 January 1923, the same committee, reinforced by Sir Charles Close,<sup>18</sup> who had consented to act as treasurer, agreed that a society to be called 'The English Place-Name Society' should be formed. The make-up of its first council reveals the breadth of its interests. Its President was James Tait, its Vice-Presidents Henry Bradley,

<sup>16</sup> By greatly increasing its grant in 1969 it has enabled the Society to employ a research assistant.

<sup>17</sup> In his obituary of Mawer, cited above.

<sup>18</sup> Colonel Sir Charles (Frederick) Close, K.B.E., C.B., C.M.G., who changed his name to Arden-Close in 1938, was Director General of the Ordnance Survey, 1911-22. The Society has since maintained its contact with the Ordnance Survey through its Council members, O. G. Crawford and C. W. Phillips, who served successively as Archaeology Officer of the Ordnance Survey.

Horace Round (who wrote: 'between such names as Bradley and Stevenson, I shall feel like a nut between the crackers, being only a historian and topographer, not a philologist') and W. H. Stevenson; Mawer was the Director, and he and Stenton joint general editors; Close was Treasurer, and the rest of the Council consisted of the historians William Page and Canon Foster, who was able to enlist the interest of various local societies, the archaeologist O. G. S. Crawford, and the philologists W. J. Sedgefield and Miss Paues. E. Ekwall, Gunnar Knudsen, Adolf Noreen and R. E. Zachrisson were to be invited to be honorary corresponding members. Ekwall was soon after made a member of Council and for the rest of his life gave much help and advice to all the editors.<sup>19</sup> James Fraser was invited on to the Council about the same time, for it was clear that the assistance of a Celtic philologist was necessary. By 24 July 1923 the Society had a membership of 328 members, 77 institutional and 251 private members.

The introductory volume appeared in 1924, in two parts. The first contained chapters on methods, on the various elements in the nomenclature, Celtic, English, Scandinavian, French and Feudal, on the connections with linguistic study and with archaeology, and on personal names in place-names. All were written by experts, and are still valuable. Unfortunately the death of Henry Bradley on 23 May 1923 prevented the inclusion of a general introduction from his pen, and W. H. Stevenson, who was asked to supply in its place an appreciation of Bradley as a place-name scholar, did not feel well enough to undertake it.<sup>20</sup> The volume was dedicated to Bradley's memory. The second part was a list compiled by Mawer of the chief elements used in English place-names. It is an indication of how much more information than had been envisaged the survey was to bring to light to note that it was first thought that this could be kept to about fifty pages and perhaps be attached to each of the county surveys; when it was revised by A. H. Smith in 1956, from the original 67 pages it ran into two volumes, over 700 pages in all. The first county survey, that of Buckinghamshire, appeared in 1925.

Such were the beginnings of the Society. I can only touch on

<sup>19</sup> See A. H. Smith, *English Place-Name Elements*, I, pp. ix-x. This work was dedicated to Ekwall.

<sup>20</sup> For an appreciation of Bradley as a place-name scholar, see E. Ekwall, 'Henry Bradley, 1845-1923', *Onoma*, vii (1956-7), pp. 185-7.

the main landmarks of its subsequent history.<sup>21</sup> From its first location in Liverpool, where Mawer had become Professor in 1921, it moved with him to University College, London, on his appointment as Provost in 1929. After his death in 1942, when Stenton followed him as Director,<sup>22</sup> the Society's headquarters were at the University of Reading until Professor Bruce Dickins became Director in 1946 and moved them to Cambridge. It moved back to University College when Professor A. H. Smith<sup>23</sup> took on the Directorship in 1951. Following his death in 1967, the posts of Hon. Director and Hon. Secretary were divided. The general administration under the Secretary, J. McN. Dodgson, was housed at University College, by its courtesy, while the new Director, Professor Kenneth Cameron, conducted his side of the work in rooms generously allotted by the University of Nottingham; but since Mr. Dodgson now finds himself unable to continue as Secretary, the two offices have recently been re-combined, and the whole business of the Society is now carried on under Professor Cameron at Nottingham. In 1929 J. E. B. Gover was appointed assistant editor and did a great deal of work for most of the volumes from then until 1942, when the war-years ended his appointment; he has remained on the Council, and has now generously made available to the Society his collections for Cornwall and Hampshire.<sup>24</sup>

Meanwhile, Tait was succeeded as President by Sir Charles Close in 1932, and he by Sir William Craigie in 1936. When Craigie resigned in 1946, Sir Frank Stenton succeeded and retained office until his death in 1967, when I was elected. As early vice-presidents and members of Council died or resigned, their place was filled by other leading scholars such as H. M. Chadwick, R. H. Hodgkin, F. Norman, Kenneth Sisam, and P. H. Reaney, whose work on place-names began before the Society was formed and who edited the volumes for Cambridgeshire and Essex. Again, in recent years, we have received very valuable assistance with our volumes from our Scandinavian Vice-Presidents M. T. Löfvenberg, O. von Feilitzen and J.

<sup>21</sup> This account may be supplemented by that of B. Dickins, 'The Progress of English Place-Name Studies since 1901', *Antiquity*, xxxv (1961), pp. 281-5.

<sup>22</sup> On his services to place-name studies see D. Whitelock, 'Sir Frank Stenton, 1880-1967', *Onoma*, xii (1966-7), pp. 272-4.

<sup>23</sup> See J. McN. Dodgson, 'Albert Hugh Smith, 1903-67', *ibid.*, pp. 266-71.

<sup>24</sup> The Society is also grateful for the collections of material for Norfolk, made by Dr O. K. Schramm, for Suffolk, made by Dr Reaney, and that for the City of London, made by Professor A. H. Smith, deposited with it after the death of these scholars.

Kousgård Sørensen, as well as from the Council members Kenneth Jackson and Melville Richards. Tribute must be paid to valuable service rendered as treasurers by Sir Ralph Wedgwood and F. T. Wainwright, and in more recent years by B. J. Lucas.

As the work of the survey proceeded it became increasingly clear that minor names and field-names had important information to offer. Field-names were first more fully recorded and arranged by parishes in the Northamptonshire volume in 1933, when the co-operation of school-children had helped to discover the current names of fields. More and more space has had to be allotted to minor names and field-names. Their value cannot be doubted, but an inevitable result was to make the surveys bigger, so that counties could soon no longer be covered by a single volume. This has meant a great delay before some counties can be reached, and it was partly for the sake of members whose interests lay more in the names of these counties than in the material provided for various scholarly disciplines that the Society launched on a new venture, the annual publication of a small journal, which could include notes and articles concerned with the counties for which a volume could not appear for several years, as well as keep members of the Society in touch with the more important recent work on place-names in general and with later developments concerning the names of counties already dealt with. Its first issue appeared in 1969.

The expectation that the Society would produce valuable evidence in various fields of study has been amply fulfilled. Some of the results for the historian were brought together by Sir Frank Stenton in a series of presidential addresses to the Royal Historical Society called 'The Historical Bearing of Place-Name Studies' in 1939-43,<sup>25</sup> while in 1946 he wrote: 'The study is still advancing . . . it has done much to provide an accurate setting for the Old English historical scene'.<sup>26</sup> It has made possible more accurate identification of place-names in chronicles, charters and other sources. Though hitherto it is Anglo-Saxon historians who have made most use of the material supplied, it has value also for later periods. Professor Barley,

<sup>25</sup> Published in the *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th Series, xxi-xxv, and re-issued in *Preparatory to Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. D. M. Stenton, 1970, pp. 253-324.

<sup>26</sup> 'Early English History, 1895-1920', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th Series, xxviii, p. 19; *Preparatory to Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 356.

reviewing the Derbyshire volumes in 1959, said that the historian and the archaeologist were presented with an immense body of raw material relating to the medieval settlement after the Norman Conquest.<sup>27</sup> Information is also included on the history of agriculture and of early crafts and industries.

Mawer emphasised in an article in *Antiquity* in 1927 the use of the survey in supplying archaeologists with evidence for the sites of burial-places, fortifications, watch-towers and meeting-places, and for the courses of roads, saltways and other tracks.<sup>28</sup> Barley, in the review cited above, advises archaeologists to excavate at small settlements with names ending in *burg*, and in a recent study by Martin Biddle on the need for archaeologists to make full use of written evidence place-names are not forgotten; for instance, he suggests that field-names may preserve local traditions of the sites of former palaces.<sup>29</sup>

Professor H. C. Darby in 1963 supplied to a volume of studies in honour of A. H. Smith an illuminating article on the value of the survey for the geographer,<sup>30</sup> showing how descriptive names, surviving after the features they described have disappeared, help in the reconstruction of the primitive landscape; they are especially valuable in areas where industrial development has obscured earlier conditions.

Scientists interested in the earlier state of vegetation and fauna need the help of place-name scholars, for modern names are no safe guide. There is rich material for these studies in the Society's volumes, especially in the field-names. It is only the early forms of names which will show whether Alder- in modern names is the tree, or whether it conceals a personal name such as Æthelwaru, Aldred or Aldhere; or whether Bar- goes back on *bere* 'barley', or *bār* 'boar', or *beofer* 'beaver' or *beorg* 'hill'; or which allow one to identify obsolete words like *ācweorna* 'squirrel' or *ælfitu* 'swan'.

The survey has already allowed the linguist to locate more securely the areas of dialect features; and it has made large contributions to English lexicography. Sometimes it has

<sup>27</sup> *Medieval Archaeology*, iii, pp. 340-2.

<sup>28</sup> 'Place-Names and Archaeology', *Antiquity*, i, pp. 151-8.

<sup>29</sup> 'Archaeology and the Beginnings of English Society', *England before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. P. Clemoes and Kathleen Hughes, 1971, p. 401.

<sup>30</sup> 'Place-Names and the Geography of the Past', *Early English and Norse Studies presented to Hugh Smith in honour of his Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. P. G. Foote and A. Brown, 1963, pp. 6-18.

thrown light on difficult words in Old and Middle English texts.<sup>31</sup>

It is clearly highly desirable that the English-Place-Name Society should be able to continue its collection and publication of material of such worth for so many disciplines; it needs the support of persons interested in any of these fields of study to help, by becoming members of the Society, to provide the financial backing.

Having sketched in outline the usefulness of the volumes, I should like to conclude with a word or two on the pleasure they can give. A reviewer of the Worcestershire volume in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1927 said: 'Rightly viewed, the study of place-names has all the excitement of a detective story'; Sir Maurice Powicke wrote in 1934: 'The volumes . . . are books to be turned over again and again, to be savoured and sampled. They are full of exciting scholarship and of surprises'.<sup>32</sup> Four years later he advised every teacher of history in schools and universities that the possession of the volumes will enable him 'to teach his pupils and also to stimulate their interest and intellectual capacity to a surprising sense of reality and excitement'.<sup>33</sup>

In this year when the Society celebrates its jubilee, it is to be hoped that many persons will consider its past performance and help with its future by becoming members.

DOROTHY WHITELOCK

<sup>31</sup> See A. H. Smith, *English Place-Name Elements*, I, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv.

<sup>32</sup> In a review of *The Place-Names of Northamptonshire, History*, N.S., xix, pp. 54-5.

<sup>33</sup> In a review of *The Place-Names of Surrey*, *The Place-Names of Essex* and *The Place-Names of Warwickshire*, *ibid.*, N.S. xxii, pp. 348-50.