



# Wyre Forest Study Group

## Place Names in and around the Wyre Forest

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Dr Margaret Gelling OBE FBA, doyenne of English place-name studies, died in April 2009, age 84. Until taken ill in September 2008, she had been working steadily through the Place-names of Shropshire, volumes 1 to 5 already published and volume 6 in press, and was making good progress on volume 7. I had pleaded with her to do the area of the Wyre Forest next, but she stuck to her plan. She was, however, happy to comment on names within and around the forest, Worcestershire as well as Shropshire.

The method of place-name studies is to search documents for the earliest recorded and subsequent spellings of a name, and to apply a knowledge of language and the way it changes, from Anglo-Saxon through Old English to modern times. One of Margaret's most important advances was to get out of the archives and go and look at places, and so she recognised that the many different place-name elements Anglo-Saxons used for, for example, hills and valleys, each had precise application to different land forms (Gelling 1984). They would thus have helped people move around. She even added to the vocabulary of the Anglo-Saxon language: by going to places with the 'hop' element in their names, e.g. Hopton Wafers and all the '-hope' hamlets in Shropshire and Herefordshire, she found that they are all secluded settlements in places where land-form limited their growth, so being well hidden, and deduced that the monster Grendel's 'hopu' in Beowulf, the only occurrence of the word in Anglo-Saxon literature, was a hidden place.

Another of Margaret's major contributions refers to the 'erne' (Anglo-Saxon earn) place-names lying close to rivers Severn, Thames and Mersey (Gelling 1987). Place-name scholars had assumed it was the Golden Eagle that was referred to, assuming that to be the common British eagle. Margaret argued that where 'erne' names occur along rivers and the other component refers to woodland or clearings in woodland, the sea eagle is the more probable. In the course of her enquiries, she corresponded with Derek Yalden, and was delighted by the catalogue of archaeological findings of White-tailed Eagle bones which support her argument (Yalden 2007). Our sea eagles are commemorated in Earnwood and Arley.

For Worcestershire we have Mawer and Stenton's Place-names of Worcestershire, published in 1927 and reissued, but not revised, in 1969. This is fine as far as it goes, but it does not include Margaret's innovations or other scholars' recent work. Margaret referred me to this work for those names for which interpretation still stands, and I have incorporated these into the list below, with the reference PNW.

Some of our local names particularly intrigued Margaret: Pensax, hill of the Saxons, is unusual for a settlement name here, being in Welsh, so there must have been Welsh speakers in the area when the Saxons settled; Church Hill, with its Welsh 'crug' on the northern end; Carton Farm - Margaret didn't know that it nestles against a cliff, nor did the authors of PNW, but their tentative reference to the Welsh word for a cliff appears to me to be apt, making it another in the cluster of Welsh names very close together. Margaret said she was defeated by Button Oak and Button Bridge: they are only recorded from the seventeenth century onwards; 'button' occurs occasionally in field names as a dialect word for tansy and teasel, but not otherwise in settlement names. More historical work is needed if Bill Elliot's (2001) suggestion that it derives from the charcoal burners' booths is to hold. Margaret was fascinated by Dowles Brook, from Welsh for black, making a determined effort to get a photograph of it looking 'black'.

I have not included names which are personal names, 'so-and-so's place'.

### Villages, hamlets

Callow Hill - bare hill

Buckeridge - beech ridge

Clows Top - either an enclosure, or a narrow pass; the latter might fit, since the adjacent deep valleys diverge from a narrow area, providing a way through.

Gorst Hill - gorse hill.

Pensax - the hill of the Saxons.

Ribbesford - possibly the ford where houndstongue, old name for ribwort, grows.

### Farms

Arbour Farm - could be an earthwork

Bannut Tree - walnut tree

Baveney - Domesday manor, Babba's island: both Upper and Lower Baveney are on hills largely hemmed in by streams

Carton - in Domesday book. Farm by the cliff.

Culverness - dove nest

Deasland - sp. Dethesland 1275, apparently deathland - haunted?

Meaton - earliest spelling found is Methene in 1281; no meaning suggested.

Holbeache - hollow stream valley, but query whether it is an old name.

Nib Green - possibly projecting land

Norgrovesend - north coppice; north in relation to what?

Merridale - looks like a modern name (in fact, the tithe map shows this as Rotten Row Farm, the present farm of that name being just Rotten Row)



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Rotton Row - rat row: recurrent name for scruffy houses  
The Riddings - clearings  
Silligrove - could be willow coppice  
Winwoods - well recorded from 1292 on, winn: pasture

## Coppices/copses

Blackgraves - black coppice, graves from graefa, grafa, grove, OF coppice  
Brandwood, Brandlodge - burnt, probably charcoal burning.  
Coachroad - possible refers to Woodcock, with their roding flight  
Earnwood - erne: sea eagle  
Fastings - perhaps dense, one sense of 'fast', found also in Wychwood  
Hawkbatch - well recorded from c.1170, hawks' stream valley: could this be Goshawk?  
Longdon - long flat-topped hill.  
Malpass - bad passage; unusual here in coming from French, but could this have been named by the French iron workers getting to and from the Baveney Brook furnaces?  
Shelfheld - shelf, a broad area of fairly level ground, rather than 'shelving' or sloping (which has a different etymology), often projecting from or lying below a hill, as Shelfheld does below the Callow Hill ridge.

## Woods

Eyemore - island marsh. The name refers to the farm which disappeared under Trimpley reservoir, and lay opposite an island in the Severn (shown on the first edition OS map). The whole of the land in the bend of the river occupied by the reservoir was probably marshy.

Seckley - erroneously connected with a charter name in PNW, with doubt about attribution to a personal name.

Wassell - weard-setl, look-out seat, used of hillforts, appropriate here.

## Commons/heaths

Sturt - well recorded from 1292 on, projecting piece of ground, literally 'tail'.  
Hedgewick - may be simply 'heath settlement'. Name only of a farm now.

## Physical features

Dowles - from Welsh for black, perhaps referring to black, carbonaceous, rocks in the bed of the brook.  
Church Hill - from the Welsh crug, OE cruc, a hill with an extra nobble on top.

These are just a few of the place-names I was able to discuss with Margaret or have pursued in PNW and other references, with some comments and suggestions of my own.

## REFERENCES

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View of the Severn valley and Arley from Hawkbatch viewpoint, 27th December 2009

Rosemary Winnall