

Place Names of Stourbridge, The Black Country and their Environs: Origins, meaning and interpretation

by

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This is a short introduction, for non-specialists, to the subject of place names in the historical landscape. The article discusses the origin and interpretation of some of the commonest place-name elements and presents almost three hundred examples from the vicinity of the Black Country. Topics covered include: place-name chronology; ethnic, religious and cultural identity in place names; landscape terms; boundary perambulations; and place-name migration and mutation. Several place names around Stourbridge are examined in more depth. Brook Holloway; The Ham House and Ham Lane; Hungary Hill; Wynnall Lane; Catherwell (Meadow, House, Terrace, Field and Saw Mill); Hanbury (Yearnebarrowe) Hill, Pepper Hill, and local stream names are discussed together with other topics of local importance such as the Hwiccan kingdom; Kinver Forest; the Ismere Diploma; the province of the Husmeræ; the Swinford charter, and the origin of Pedmore.

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Unless otherwise indicated, counties and county boundaries mentioned in the text refer to those existing prior to 1974, when the Black Country boroughs were transferred from Staffordshire and Worcestershire into the West Midlands.

1. Introduction

The landscape is history's arena. It has provided opportunities for settlement, sustenance, community organisation and worship; and, since the Iron Age, land 'ownership' has come to underpin personal status, wealth and political power. The ancient landscape was, in short, fundamental to life, and for that reason it is a fascinating subject to study. Whilst the present-day countryside (including monuments and archaeological discoveries) can supply many clues to how the landscape was used, the labels that people gave to various places and landmarks provide an additional layer of complementary detail. Such appellations include the names of not only towns and villages, but also churches, farms, fields, hills, woods, pools, marshes, watercourses, bridges and roads.

Ancient place names contain information pertaining to many aspects of an area's geography, and it is remarkable just how much of the historical landscape can be reconstructed from this rich and varied source. One can, for example, garner insights into the patterns and chronology of settlements, road networks, field systems and religious sites, or begin to build a picture of early administrative regions, Anglo-Saxon estates and even earlier folk territories.

There have been a number of national and regional place-name studies, but few local surveys find their way into print. The wide-area studies usually consider only names that appear on a particular class and scale of maps (e.g. 1-inch Ordnance Survey maps); and many local names—such as those of small farms, fields, hills, streams and roads etc.—are necessarily excluded. Though such names are minor ones, they weren't necessarily insignificant in the past and they may well be highly informative with regard to local history. Whilst early forms of minor place names—which tend to be more clearly indicative of their original meaning—aren't always available, one can sometimes find clues in the landscape, and such information can be of great value in local studies.

What follows is a basic introduction to place names, and includes a few interesting fragments of landscape history that I have managed to glean from my own *ad hoc* studies of the area around Stourbridge.

2. A note on language and dates

Many of the ancient place names surviving in the west midlands region were formed during the Anglo-Saxon period and, so, derive from elements of Old English. However, a significant minority of names have their roots in other tongues as illustrated in figure 1.

All of the languages represented in this figure belong to the Indo-European family. The earliest that can be clearly discerned in English place names is Brittonic (or Brythonic) Celtic. This language (sometimes known as 'Old Brittonic', 'Common Brittonic' or, simply, 'British') developed within the British Isles during the Iron Age. It has its roots in a branch of the Celtic languages that had arrived from western Europe many centuries earlier and which is assumed to have supplanted an earlier non-Indo-European language, or languages, on mainland Britain. Unfortunately, such pre-British languages cannot be distinguished reliably from British in surviving place names (although traces of them are thought most likely to have survived in some river names).

By the end of the Roman occupation (early fifth century), the British language had been heavily influenced by Latin, particularly in the south and east. Latin was, of course, used in administrative and religious matters; and its influence is apparent in a few place names: e.g. Romano-British towns. It is thought, however, that Latin itself was not spoken widely by the general population outside the south-east, and this probably resulted in the relative scarcity of Roman place names in Britain. Elements of Latin that do survive tend to have been conveyed into place names either via later British or Old English words that had evolved under the influence of Latin during, and shortly after, the Roman occupation, or as a result of the administrative use of Latin during the late Medieval period.

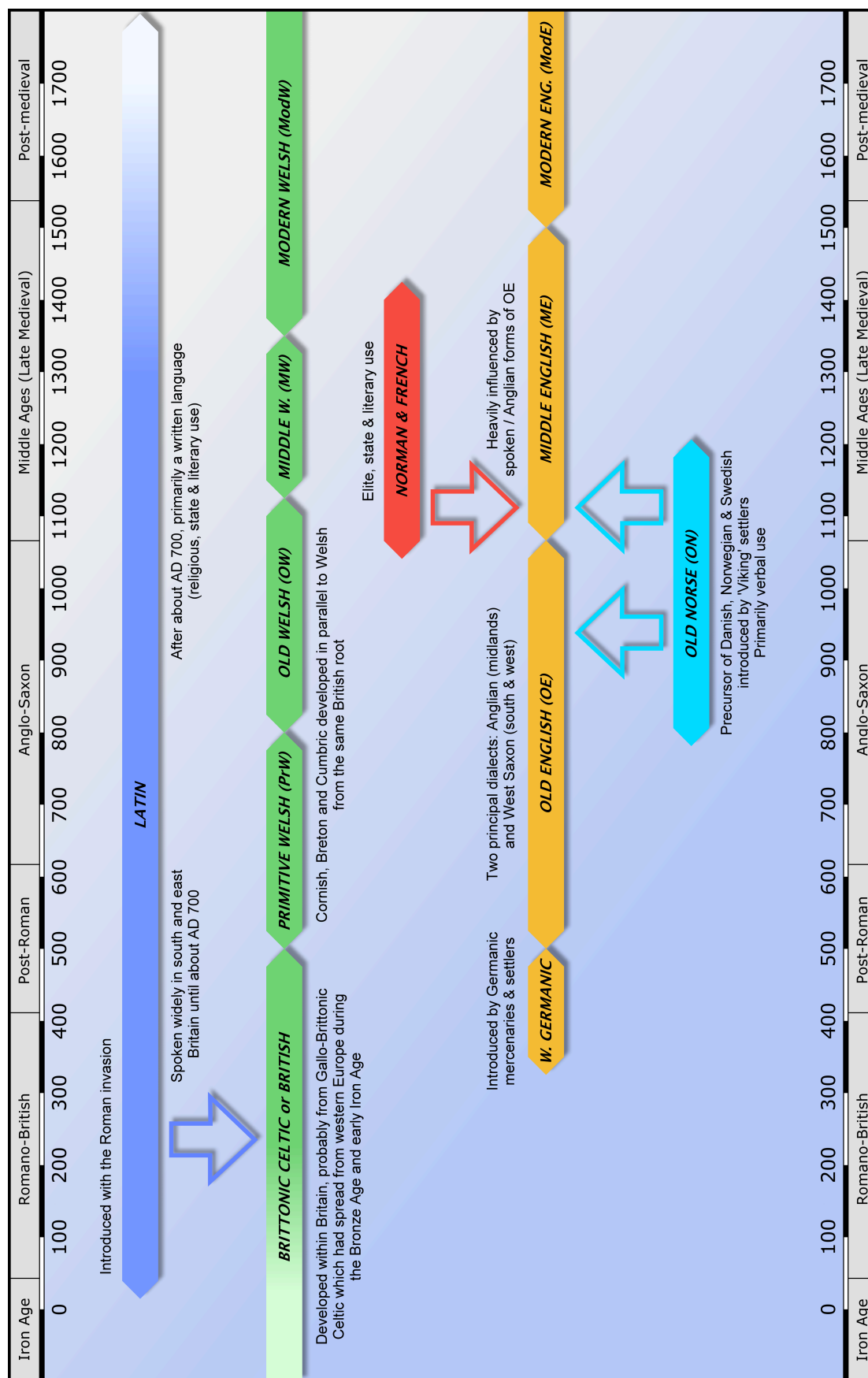


Figure 1. The main language groups contributing to English place names, together with approximate dates of usage. The arrows indicate major episodes of inter-language influence.

The groups of Angles, Saxons and Jutes who began to arrive in Britain during the fifth century AD, came from the region that now comprises north-west Germany and western Denmark. They spoke a dialect of West Germanic (known as North-Sea Germanic or Ingvaenic) that was very different from the language of the native Britons. Nevertheless, a great linguistic shift ensued (the reasons for which are not entirely understood) and the incoming Germanic language began to displace British, both geographically and culturally, while at the same time itself metamorphosing into Old English (OE). This was spoken in what was to become England throughout the Anglo-Saxon period and gave us many (if not most) of the place names we know today. Surprisingly, the OE lexicon was barely influenced by British although OE does seem to have absorbed some elements of the British sound system and syntax^[48]. British probably continued to be spoken for some time alongside OE, gradually declining and becoming confined to the western margins of the British Isles. In the early post-Roman period the British language had been taken by migrants to Brittany; and, by about AD 500-600, it had begun to split into four or five distinct regional languages: Breton, Cornish, Welsh, Cumbric and, perhaps, Pictish (although the latter might also have been partly of non-IE origin).

All of these languages continued to evolve, and significant stages in this process are denoted by the adjectives Primitive, Old, Middle etc. (figure 1). They did not evolve in isolation, however, and Old English took on elements of Old Norse (the forerunner of today's Norwegian, Danish and Swedish) which had been brought to Britain by the Vikings during the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries. And the Norman Conquest, of course, introduced further significant changes and additions to the language, heralding a rapid development from Old to Middle English. Throughout the whole of this period, Latin continued in use in official, religious and academic contexts, occasionally lending new words to the English lexicon.

Classifying a name and its linguistic roots can sometimes help to date it. Its ethnic origin is, of course, fundamental to this activity, but the elements used within each name can also be indicative of date^[25]. For a variety of reasons, however, dating a place name is far from straightforward. While the various elements of Old English (OE) place names were applied with great precision and purpose by Anglo-Saxon settlers, it is clear that the meanings of many of these elements evolved considerably over time. There also seems to have been significant regional variation in the temporal usage of some OE place-name elements, and this variation has yet to be comprehensively quantified. It should also be remembered that, whilst certain elements began to be used earlier than others, their presence in a name does not automatically indicate an early date.

Nevertheless, with care, one can sometimes make inferences about a place-name's date of origin. For example, the OE terms *ēg* and *hamm*, which both denote land enclosed by natural features such as water, are thought to be *early* place-name elements. Similarly the OE *burna*, *dūn*, and *hām* tended to be applied, respectively, to watercourses, hills and settlements early in the Anglo-Saxon period^[10], whereas their similes *brōc*, *hyll*, and *tūn* feature principally in later OE names.

Indeed, the two commonest OE terms for a settlement, *tūn* and *lēah* (§§ 3 and 6.2.2), rarely occur in the earliest place names (i.e. before about AD 730); and some of the later *-tūn* names are thought to have actually *replaced* earlier British settlement names. On the other hand, topographical place names (i.e. names which contain references to natural features such as hills and rivers) tend to be somewhat earlier than those referencing man-made features—although, in the Birmingham region and to the east of Birmingham, a small number of post-Conquest names are also of the topographical kind.

Topographical elements are commonly found in the names of important Anglo-Saxon estates (e.g. royal or minster estates such as Clent) which are believed to have been based upon earlier folk regions. Many of these early regions and estates persisted throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, eventually to become the tenth-century administrative areas known as hundreds. It is often the case that the central place or *caput* of these hundreds carries an ancient topographical name and represents the region's former moot-meeting site.

Within English place names, it is possible to distinguish elements from all of the languages depicted in figure 1; and some names derive from a mixture of languages. In the area around

Stourbridge and the Black Country, we mainly encounter British and Old English names, with the occasional contribution from Primitive Welsh (PrW), Old Welsh (OW), Old Norse (ON), Old French (OF) and Anglo-Norman (AN). The latter three languages were less influential in the west midlands than elsewhere; and it is interesting to note that an unusually high number of OE words, constructs and vowel sounds—particularly Anglian forms—have survived almost intact within the Black Country, becoming key components of the present-day local dialect.

3. Settlement names

Perhaps the majority of readers will be interested primarily in local settlement names. Many of these originate in the Anglo-Saxon period (sixth to eleventh centuries in the west midlands), and are mainly derived from five common OE name elements: *tūn*, *cot*, *lēah*, *halh* and *wīc*. Settlement names also incorporate many other elements that indicate places of human occupation as well as topographical elements such as *mōr*, *feld* and *hyll*. Some of these will be discussed in later sections, but limitations of space preclude a thorough coverage here.

3.1 Names in *tūn*

Tūn means an enclosure, farmstead, homestead, estate or village. This term tends to indicate an area of land that was somehow enclosed or fenced; and, indeed, that seems to be its earliest meaning. Although it appears to have been used primarily after about AD 730^[10], *tūn* remained an active name-forming element for an unusually long time, and its usage (and therefore meaning) has tended to evolve throughout the Anglo-Saxon and subsequent periods. In *roughly* chronological order it has meant an enclosure, an enclosure containing a dwelling or cluster of buildings (e.g. a farmstead), a hamlet, a village or, more latterly, a town. Occasionally *tūn* can refer to a whole manor or estate—as in Quinton near Halesowen, which derives from OE *cwēn-tūn*, meaning 'the Queen's manor'—but in most cases, a homestead or farmstead is probably the original meaning. These *tūns* sometimes acted as nuclei for later villages and estates which then took on the name of the original farmstead. There are indications that such farmsteads were often secondary (or later) settlements, lying away from the earliest centres of habitation.

The *tūn* element is very common throughout Britain (particularly in combination with personal names) and there are a few examples near to Stourbridge. Wollaston is thought to derive from *Wulflāf's Tūn*^[38, 14] or *Wulfgar's Tūn*^[13, 42, 23]; Whittington from *Hwitta's Tūn*^[49]; Harvington from *Herewynn's tūn*^[14, 38]; Netherton from OE *neoðera* (lower) *tūn*, and Stourton from the *tūn* on the River Stour^[14]. Further afield we have *Tibba's Tūn* (Tipton)^[14]; the *tūn* where honey is produced (Hunnington)^[38]; *Dēorlāf's tūn* (Darlaston)^[14, 49]; *ēast tun* (Aston)^[49], and the *tūn* of the *Bilsætan* (Bilston)^[14, 49] which I'll come back to in section 4.

Belbroughton is a compound of the place names Bell (from OE *beolne*, referring to the wild plant Henbane) and Broughton (from OE *brōc tūn*, 'the brook settlement')^[38]. Dunstall (Hill) near Wolverhampton is a relatively rare example of a place name beginning with *tūn*, and seems to represent OE *tūn-stall*, meaning 'the farmstead'^[49]; the *-stall* element means a place with a particular use (in this case the site of the *tūn*)^[44]. The nearby Oretton (Hill) probably derives from OE *ofer tūn* (meaning the '*tūn* on the hill spur'), while Wolverhampton itself arises from '*Wulfrūn's hampton*'^[24]. This was the estate given by Lady Wulfrūn to the church for the endowment of a monastery in c996; and, prior to this gift, the estate was known simply as *heantune*, 'the high *tūn*'^[49]. Another change of *tūn* name is to be found in Edgbaston. This derives from *Ecgbald's tūn*, but according to the Domesday survey the estate or vill had been known previously as *Ceolboldstone*, from *Ceolbald's tūn*^[49].

The majority of place names with endings derived from *-tūn* seem to have originated after the mid eighth century^[25], and many such names, particularly when compounded with a personal name, are considered to represent the renaming of pre-existing settlements (perhaps those of Romano-British origin) later in the Anglo-Saxon period.

3.2 Names in *cot*

Cot is a common term in parts of the west midlands, being especially prevalent in Stourbridge. It is thought to be a later form of settlement name than *tūn*, *lēah*, *halh* or *hām*, although the evidence for this is inconclusive. This element usually refers to a cottage or a basic dwelling, but occasionally it might indicate other things such as a travellers' shelter, a storage hut, a workshop or an animal den. Sometimes it is possible to work out which from the context. Local examples include *Amela's Cot* (Amblecote) and *Wulfhere's Cot* (Wollescote), as well as a few names that have almost fallen into disuse, such as *Bettu's*, *Betta's*, *Bettica's* or *Beda's Cot* ^[42, 22] (Bedcote, formerly an important settlement, but now just a street name) and *Preostes Cot* (Prescot, meaning 'priest's cottage' ^[13] and also now relegated to just a street name). Foxcote, named *Foxcotun* ^[27] in the tenth century, probably referred to a foxes' den rather than a human dwelling place that had simply been named after foxes.

Some *-cot* place names are known only from early documentary sources. Halesowen Abbey's monastic farm (or Grange) near Lye was known as *Pircote* or *Pyrecote* Grange. *Pir-* derives from pear trees (perhaps an orchard) in the vicinity ^[42], although it is not clear whether the 'pear-tree cottage' pre-dates the Grange or is contemporaneous with it. (This Grange, incidentally, gave its name to today's Grange Lane and Grange School). Another, now disused, *-cot* name is *Eostacote*, which we find referenced only in a single tenth-century written source. *Eostacote* was probably located somewhere near Old Ham Lane or Doctors Hill and seems likely to have originated from a misspelling of *éast cote* or *éastan cote*, meaning 'east cottage' ^[31], although other suggestions have been put forward ^[33].

Outside the immediate vicinity of Stourbridge, *cot* occurs less frequently, although it is still a fairly common place-name element. Two examples lie a few miles to the south: Hurcott, near Kidderminster, which seems to have originated as OE *hierde-cot(u)*, meaning 'the herdsmen's cottages' ^[38]; and Brockencote, near Chaddesley Corbett, which is thought to derive from a compound of OE *brōc* (brook) and *hām* (homestead or dwelling place) with *cot*, thus *brōc-hām cot* means cottage by 'the brook homestead' ^[38].

3.3 Names in *lēah*

Examples of *lēah* place names are particularly numerous around parts of the Black Country. Again, the precise usage of this element tended to vary with date and context: *lēah* could mean a wood, a woodland glade or a man-made clearing (usually in a wood). Often, where the term is compounded with a tree species, it is clear that the former meaning applies, yet other instances of *lēah* names seem to indicate a clearing for cultivation, pasture or settlement. Locally we have: the *lēah* of *Wulfweard's*, or *Wulfferd's*, people (Wolverley) ^[14, 13], 'the wolf-guard's *lēah*', or possibly, again, *Wolffweard's lēah*, (Wordsley) ^[49], *Dudda's lēah* (Dudley) ^[13, 14, 19, 49], *Secg's lēah* (Sedgley) ^[14, 49], *Secg's lēah* again, but this time probably meaning woodland (Seckley in Wolverley) ^[25], 'the *lēah* where the *Hyme*le (hop) plant grows' (Himley) ^[14, 49], *hors lēah*, 'the *lēah* where horses are pastured' (Horseley, after which the Heath was named); *hramsa lēah*, meaning 'wild garlic clearing' ^[14], or *ramm lēah*, meaning 'rams' clearing' ^[49] (Romsley); *rūgan lēah*, meaning 'rough clearing' (Rowley, the Regis appellative having been added later to signify royal ownership of the manor); *weorf lēah*, meaning 'cattle clearing' (Warley) ^[14], and *Col(l)'s lēah* ^[49] or 'charcoal burners' wood' ^[14] (Coseley).

Cradley probably comes from either the personal name *Crad(d)a* or from *cradol*, which means a hurdle or fence. The latter might indicate a wood where the raw materials were cut or a clearing within which the product was manufactured ^[14, 49]. Bromley (in Kingswinford) probably derives from *brōm lēah*, meaning 'the clearing where broom grows'. The personal name *Hlūda* (from the OE word for loud, *hlūd*) might explain the origin of Lutley ^[38], and a lost stream name, *Worv*, may have lent its name to Warley (*Worv lēah*) ^[38] (cf. the alternative interpretation in the preceding paragraph).

Hagga lēah, 'a haw wood', is most likely the origin of Hagley^[14, 18, 49]. It has also been suggested that Hagley might derive from a personal name, *Haecga*^[38], or from OE *haga*, a fenced enclosure around or within a wood^[40]. The latter possibility does not seem unreasonable as such enclosures are thought to have connections with hunting; and they are frequently found adjacent to royal estates^[26]. Clent, immediately to the south of Hagley, is known to have been in royal ownership prior to the Domesday survey and, indeed, the legend of St Kenelm (which one might expect to be underpinned by a few strands of truth) refers to a royal hunting expedition there during the ninth century.

Iverley, labelled *Oueley* on Christopher Saxton's 1577 map of Worcestershire^[45], probably derives from the unattested OE element *yfre*, a variant spelling of *ofer* which seems to be related to hill-spurs with convex or gently sloping shoulders^[19] and/or which facilitated access over high ground. It is likely that the *ofer* / *yfre* in this name is the *windofer* referenced in tenth-century charters for Swinford (S579, AD 951x959) and Cookley (S726, AD 964).

Other examples around the Black Country area include: Great and Little Wyreley near Pelsall (*wīr lēah*, meaning 'a woodland glade in which bog myrtle grew', the ME *Great* and *Litel* being pre-pended in the late medieval period to distinguish the two parts of the estate^[49]); Yardley (*ġerd lēah* meaning yard, pole or rod wood, i.e. 'the wood where rods were cut')^[14, 49]; Langley (*lānga lēah* meaning long *lēah*)^[49]; Selly (Oak) (*scelf lēah* meaning shelf—in this case plateau or ledge—*lēah*)^[14]; Stirchley (*stīrc lēah* probably signifying a 'calf clearing', i.e. a clearing where young bullocks or heifers were kept)^[14, 49]; Bartley (Green) (*beorc lēah* meaning 'birch wood')^[38]; Claverley (*clæfre lēah* meaning 'clover clearing')^[49], and Upper Areley (*earn lēah* meaning 'eagle wood', the 'Upper' prefix being added in the late medieval period for distinction from the nearby Areley Kings)^[49].

Many names in *lēah* also include personal names, and in most of these cases it is difficult to ascertain whether *lēah* refers to a wood, a woodland glade or a clearing for settlement or for some other purpose. Local examples include the names *Bill*, short for *Bilheard*, (Billesley)^[14]; *Franca* (Frankley)^[14, 49] and *Hēahburh*^[49] or *Hēapburh*^[14] (Habberly). In a few instances the personal name is not attested elsewhere, but is assumed (on sound linguistic grounds) to be a correct form. In this category fall *Tyssa's* wood or clearing (Tyseley); *Illa's*, wood or clearing (Illey, although the possible alternative name *Hilla* is attested)^[49]; *Trympa's* wood or clearing (Trimpeley)^[14, 49], and *Ċeadder's* wood or clearing (Chaddesley Corbett, the latter appellation being appended in the late medieval period after the Corbet family who held the manor then)^[49]. It should be noted that pre-English alternatives (OW *cateir*, chair, and PrW *cader*, hill fort), combined later with OE *lēah* have also been suggested as origins for Chaddesley^[14]. In a few instances it is not clear whether a *lēah* place name includes a personal name or not. Bordesley, for example, may represent *Brordes lēah* (*Brorde's* wood or clearing) or *bord lēah* ('wood where boards were cut')^[14]; and Moseley (south of Birmingham) might be derived from OE *mūsa* (in which case it would mean a wood or clearing infested with mice) or from the personal name *Mūsa*^[49].

Finally we return to the Stourbridge area with the place name Lye which is a direct derivative of *lēah*. It is thought that simplex forms such as this tend to be later names (possibly post-conquest) which refer to a piece of open land or a meadow rather than woodland or a clearing therein^[44].

3.4 Names in *halh*

Another place-name element which is fairly common, especially to the east of Stourbridge, is *halh* (and its dative form, *hale*). The closest modern word for this is probably nook; and often this nook consisted of a hollow or a semi-enclosed space bounded by watercourses (e.g. a loop in a river). The sense of a remote or isolated place is also embodied by this term, and sometimes *halh* is used to indicate administrative isolation: typically a place separated, or projecting, from its parent estate^[18, 19, 43].

Oldnall, near Lye, seems to be one example. Because it is situated upon a hill, rather than in a hollow, (and for a number of other reasons) I have previously suggested that Oldnall might

derive from this 'administrative' meaning^[33]. There are, however, other plausible explanations for the name. The original settlement may have been located in a valley-like depression (hollow) that exists nearby (on the north-west side of the hill) and has since moved across the hill-side as new buildings became established at the edges of the landholding, or the site could have been named for reasons similar to those pertaining at Codsall (*Cōd's halh*), which lies upon high ground partly surrounded by streams^[49].

Gornal is likely to be a corruption of OE *cweorn halh*^[14], meaning 'mill in a hollow' (probably a stream valley). The Anglo-Saxon settlement of *Conn's halh*, meaning 'Conn's nook', became Caunsall, and in this instance *halh* probably refers to land enclosed by the bend or loop of a river (i.e. the Stour). Many similar place names include Anglo-Saxon personal names, such as Walsall which derives from *Walh's halh*^[14, 49], Pelsall from *Pēol's halh*^[14, 49], Tettenhall from *Tēotta's halh*^[49], and Willenhall from *Willa's halh*^[49]. Lapal (*Hlæppa's hol*^[38]), near Halesowen, contains OE *hol*, which means 'hollow' and is closely related to *halh* in its topographical sense. Halesowen itself also originates from OE *halh* or, more correctly, from its dative form, *hale*. The name is thought to reflect the terrain of the area, which incorporated multiple settlements within small valleys and hollows. In the twelfth century the manor of Halesowen was known as Hales Regis (the latter word signifying crown ownership), but gained its '-owen' designation when the Welsh prince Owain ap Dafydd became lord of the manor in 1204^[49]. The nearby Hawne also derives from the same root^[38].

Balsall, Wribbenhall and Blakenhall probably come from *Bælli's*, *Wrybba's* and *Blaca's halh* respectively^[49], although the latter might possibly be derived from OE *blacan halh*, meaning 'black hollow'. Rushall, near Walsall, represents *risc hale*, 'rush hollow', and most likely refers to a wet hollow overgrown with rushes^[14, 49], and Ettingshall (near Wolverhampton) seems to be derived from the conjectural OE word *et(t)inges* plus *halh*, which means 'nook at the grazing place'^[49].

3.5 Names in *wīc*

The OE place-name element *wīc* is a loan from the Latin *vicus* which tends to signify a village or a collection of buildings used for a special purpose. Typically, *wīc* refers to some kind of productive special-purpose farm, industrial site or trading establishment, often (though not exclusively) a dairy farm^[44]. Places designated as a *wīc* were often outlying components of an estate or manor which provided some particular service or product. This is also apparent on a larger scale as evidenced by the high proportion of parishes having names in *wīc* that are located well away from the administrative centres or minster parishes of their parent estate (see § 5.2 for more on estate structure and minster parochia).

Several examples of names in *wīc* are to be found around the Black Country. Bloxwich seems to contain the unattested personal name Blocc and means, simply, *Blocc's wīc*^[49], and Smethwick probably means *smeotha wīc*, 'the smith's dwelling or workplace'^[49]. It is more certain that Aldridge derives from *alor wīc*, 'alder-tree *wīc*'—i.e. 'the farm or dwelling amongst the alders', although it is not clear exactly what purpose this farm served. West, Little and Castle Bromwich all derive from OE *brōm* plus *wīc*, meaning 'the *wīc* amongst broom shrubs'. The West, Little and Castle appellatives are all late-medieval additions to distinguish different parts of the estate.

Droitwich probably derives from the OE verb *driten*, to be dirty, and means simply 'the dirty *wīc*'. The area is low lying and known from historical documents to have been a muddy and dirty place. During the Anglo-Saxon period, Droitwich was called *sealt-wīc* (salt *wīc*) because of its long-established salt-making industry. This had been active since at least the Iron Age and would probably have added to the muddiness of the environment.

Witton, near Aston, is an interesting example of a *wīc* place name, although its origin is not obvious at first sight. Here, *wīc* appears as the first element of the name and is combined with *tūn*. This means the *tūn* at the *wīc*, and might indicate some ongoing development at the site of the earlier *wīc* or perhaps a re-occupation of a disused *wīc*.

3.6 Other elements of settlement names

A discussion of all known settlement name elements is beyond the scope of this article, but a few of them warrant a brief introduction.

3.6.1 *Hām*

The OE element *hām* meant a homestead, a dwelling place, a group of dwellings or a village. Its root meaning was 'a safe dwelling place'. It was used from the very early Anglo-Saxon period (i.e. the so-called migration period) up to about AD 700, and is often found near to Roman roads and/or associated with Romano-British settlements. This has been taken to indicate instances of the Anglo-Saxons taking over regions that had been developed during the Romano-British period^[10]. Pattingham ('the homestead at *Peatting*')^[49] might be one such example. Domestic Roman artefacts have been found nearby at Bonningale; and Pattingham seems to have developed into an important centre early on, subsequently becoming the site of a minster or early independent chapel.

Hām is not an uncommon place-name element, although relatively few examples are to be found in the Black Country. It never occurs as a simplex element (i.e. on its own) in place names; and this is sometimes a useful way to distinguish it from *hamm* (which has a different meaning - see § 6.4). While *hām* is unusual as the first element of a name, it does occur in compounds like *hām-stall* ('the place where the *hām* stands') and *hām-tūn* ('the *tūn* at the homestead'). A third example of such a compound is to be found near Handsworth: i.e. Hamstead, which comes from OE *hām-stede* and means the 'site of the *hām*'. All three of these forms probably represent 'small habitation sites or agricultural building complexes within a large(er) estate denoted by *hām*'^[10]. While the scope of *hām* names tended to be narrower than those of *tūn*, it is certainly clear that places with names in *hām* could sometimes also develop to mean an entire manor or estate. Indeed many places with *hām* names ultimately grew to become large settlements and towns, Birmingham being one such example (see § 3.6.3).

3.6.2 *Worþ* and *worþiġn*

In contrast to *hām*, the OE place-name elements *worþ*, and its synonym *worþiġn*, are thought to be of later origin, being used typically from the seventh or eighth century onwards. (The letter *þ*, known as the thorn, is pronounced with a hard 'th' sound as in 'the'.)

The range of meanings embodied by *worþ(iġn)* overlapped with those of *tūn* and *hām*, but seems, generally speaking, to have embodied more of a sense of enclosure. Indeed, while their meaning varied slightly with geographical context and date, both of these elements tended to refer to an enclosure, an enclosure fence, an enclosed homestead, or an area of ground such as a courtyard within a defined region such as a village. Like *hām*, the meaning of *worþ* (and *worþiġn*) was more restricted than that of *tūn*; and place names containing these elements usually signify relatively small settlements—often late examples near the periphery of large estates.

However, it appears that *worþ(iġn)* was also used of some important midland sites—e.g. Tamworth—early in the Anglo-Saxon period, its sense of enclosure there taking on a meaning more akin to a fortification or *burh*^[39] (see § 6.3 for more on *burh*). Notwithstanding this significant local example, names incorporating *worþ* or *worþiġn* are fairly unusual in the area around the Black Country; where they do occur, they are normally compounded with a personal name. For instance, the masculine name *Hūn* appears in *Hūnes worþ* ('*Hūn*'s enclosure'), and this is thought to have given rise to the name Handsworth.

3.6.3 *-ing* and *-ingas* elements

Modern place names containing *'-ing-'*, or *'-ing'* are interesting as they embody a variety of earlier meanings. Indeed, their interpretation is sometimes difficult or controversial as they can derive from either of two different OE elements: *-ing* or *-ingas*.

In some early OE place names, *-ing* was simply appended to a topographical word as a place-name-forming suffix or sometimes used as a stream-name-forming suffix. More often, however, it was used as a connective particle between a personal name (or other appellative) and elements such as *tūn* or *hām*—e.g. Bobbington ('the *tūn* named after *Bubba*')^[49]. The precise significance of this element is, however, not fully understood; and interested readers are referred to the publications listed in section 10—particularly the Glossary of Victor Watts' *Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names*—for a more detailed discussion.

The *-ingas* element in place names seems to have had a simpler and more specific meaning. When prefixed by a personal name it generally signified: 'the people or followers of...' that person (presumably a founding father or clan leader). Essington, for example, means '*tūn* of the *Esningas*'^[49] or '*tūn* of *Esne*'s (or *Esn*'s) people'^[14]. And Birmingham is thought to have derived from the *hām* of the *Beormingas*, or 'the *hām* of the people named after *Beorma*'^[49]. River names sometimes contained *-ingas*, and the same element was also often combined with terms for other landscape features (e.g. a hill) to mean the 'people residing at, or associated with' that feature. It had been suggested that some names containing *tūn* are actually contractions of names in *-ingatūn*, meaning 'the *tūn* of the people of...'^[14]. Additionally, it used to be thought that names in *-ingatūn* originated with the first wave of Anglo-Saxon settlers in the fifth century. This latter school of thought has now been rejected by many place-name specialists, although some names in *-ingahām* could perhaps represent a secondary settlement phase in which named Anglo-Saxon groups expanded away from their primary settlement sites. In contrast to *hām* (see section 6.3.1), *-ingas-* seems to have been used only from about AD 600 onwards; and names containing this element generally lie away from the Roman road system^[10], suggesting expansion away from a primary settlement core.

4. Indicators of race and culture

So far we have discussed place names that are based mainly upon OE words of the Anglo-Saxon period. That was, of course, the era during which many of today's settlements were founded, but some place names originate in earlier (or later) periods. By considering the known chronology of name-element meanings and forms—perhaps together with other contextual information—one can sometimes obtain a rough idea of a place name's date of origin and whether it originated with the ancient Britons, the Anglo-Saxons, the Danes or the Normans etc. Indeed, place names can occasionally tell us a surprising amount about the clan, race or culture of the people who coined the name.

4.1 Pre-English watercourse names

Watercourses are of particular interest to place-name historians, as a large fraction of their names are pre-English—sometimes with adaptations or extensions added by the Anglo-Saxons—and they might, therefore, throw light upon early settlement.

Ismere (south west of Stourbridge) is an interesting example. It was probably a moot site (i.e. a location for community or religious meetings) belonging to the *Husmeræ*. The *Husmeræ* were a group that once lived in the Stour valley around Kidderminster and Wolverley. Their name survives as Ismere, a location near the Wolverley-Churchill parish boundary. Although the full extent of their territory is unknown, it seems that they date from the early Anglo-Saxon period or before^[27], perhaps having sub-Roman or Iron-Age origins. While the name *Husmere* contains the Anglo-Saxon word for pool (*mere*), the *Hus-* element seems to be much older and probably derives from the same word as the watercourse name Ouse. It is believed that

this name has very ancient roots indeed, and might date back to the Iron Age or even earlier: cf. the entry for the River Ouse in North Yorkshire in the excellent *Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Place Names*, where Victor Watts suggests that Ouse may have pre-Celtic or even pre-Indo-European origins, thus dating from up to 7000 years ago.

Place-name scholars of the early twentieth century assumed that the ancient 'Ouse-mere' was near Broadwaters in Kidderminster^[13, 38], implying that the Ouse would actually be Wannerton Brook. The suggestion was that the modern Ismere had been named after the extended area of the *Husmeræ* and may not be representative of the province's central place. However, this seems improbable. Wannerton Brook is named after the settlement, Wannerton (now a farm), through which the brook flows. In turn, Wannerton, recorded in 1275 as *Wenfertone*, takes its name from *wenferð tūn*^[38] (the *ð* is pronounced as a soft 'th', as in 'thistle'). The name *wenferð* was recorded in a ninth-century charter for Seckley in Wolverley parish, and probably derives from the Primitive Welsh (PrW) elements, *winn* and *ffrwd*, meaning 'white, fair or holy stream'^[44]. *Wenferð* and *Ouse*^[19] are both British stream names, and it is unlikely that the same brook would be known by two different names, particularly when one of them (the *Ouse*) was so important that it gave its name to the entire tribal province, *Husmere*. It seems much more likely that Ismere's present location is representative of *Husmere*'s original 'central place'. The ancient 'Ouse-mere' would, in that case, have been the expanse of water now known as the Island Pool near Cookley, and *Ouse* the stream that flowed through it.

Another example of a pre-English water name is *Tresel*. This is the old name for the Smestow Brook (now River, since recent dredging) and lends its name to the villages of Trysull and Trescott. The former is also a parish in South Staffordshire, possibly representing a fairly early settlement site. *Tresel* is probably a combination of OW *tres*, meaning commotion or turmoil, and the stream-name-forming suffix *-ell*^[49]. This stream name is first mentioned in a tenth-century Anglo-Saxon charter, but it is clearly several centuries older than that, at least.

The river name Stour may also be pre-English in origin^[14]—possibly deriving from the PrW *dwr*^[13], or the unattested British term *udso*^[27], for water—although an early Anglo-Saxon origin has also been proposed^[49]. On the other hand, the river names Tame, Sow and Trent, are certainly pre-English. Tame may even be pre-British, possibly stemming from a Celtic word related to Old Irish *temen* meaning dark^[14]. (Old Irish derives from Goidelic, another Celtic language that developed from Common Celtic in parallel to the Brittonic languages.) A more recent interpretation of Tame is that it derives from an ancient (conjectural) Indo-European root *ta*, meaning 'flow'—a root which is thought to underlie many other river names such as Teme, Thame, Thames and Taf^[49]. Cole, Arrow and Alne are also considered to be pre-English river names, and are thought to have originated, respectively, from PrW *coll* ('hazel trees'), British *Argwy* ('bright' or 'shining'), and the unattested old European river name *Alaunā* ('flow' or 'flowing')^[49]. And Dowles, a brook north of Bewdley (which, from the 6th century, probably formed part of the boundary of the Hwiccan kingdom—see § 4.2) is also a pre-English name which derives from the British *dubo*, 'black', and OW *glais* for stream^[14].

Much more is understood about the Severn, one of England's major rivers. It seems to have been well known across Europe for a very long time and various cultures have recorded its name over the centuries. The name probably derives from a pre-Indo-European root connected with the unattested word *sab* meaning liquid. In the Roman and sub-Roman periods it was known as *Sabrina*, which is probably the name of the Roman deity connected with the river. The name was adopted by British / Welsh speakers and the Anglo-Saxons. The Welsh development saw the name become *Habren* by c800 and *Haffren* by c1150, while English forms included *Sæbrine* in 816 and *Saverne* in 1130^[49]. It is believed that, in the Welsh development of the name, the initial S had mutated to H before the Anglo-Saxons had reached the River in the sixth century, yet the English form retains the earlier S. It would seem that either the Anglo-Saxons arrived in the west midlands earlier than thought or the river name was known to these Germanic peoples before their penetration into this part of the country.

Although I have concentrated here on pre-English river names, it should be remembered that some river names are known to be considerably younger. The name Penk, for example, is a

back-formation from the settlement name Penkrige (see § 4.3). The river was recorded as *Pencric* in AD 958 and has since become shortened to Penk^[49]. The river name Rea, near Birmingham, seems to have arisen as a result of an error during the Anglo-Saxon period. (The river probably had had an earlier name, but this is now lost.) Rea derives from the OE term *ēa*, meaning a river or stream; and seems to have originated in the phrase *aet þære ēa*, ('at the river') which, over time, became wrongly divided and resulted in the ME form *atte rē*. The latter word then developed naturally to ModE Rea^[14].

4.2 Pre-English hill names

Hills also often carry pre-English names: the British words *pen* and *breiga* are both common name-forming elements. The former (or the conjectural PrW equivalent *penn*) is seen in the settlement and parish name Penn, south of Wolverhampton, and in Pensnett. In the latter name, the ending seems to derive from *snæd*, an OE term for an area of land (often a wood) that is regarded as a separate or distinct element in the surrounding landscape^[44]. In this case the name is thought to denote a wood on a hill. *Breiga* manifests itself in the place names, Brewood (Staffordshire) and Bredon (Worcestershire). In the latter example it is combined with the Anglo-Saxon (i.e. OE) term *dūn*, which also means a hill. Presumably, the Anglo-Saxons did not appreciate that the *Bre* they heard when native Britons referred to their local hill was not a proper noun. This mistake has been repeated in a relatively modern era: the name Bredon Hill is a tautology twice over!

Kinver also seems to derive from *briega*: the original form is thought to be British *cunobriga*, meaning 'dog hill'^[51]—a name which later became corrupted by the Anglo-Saxons who substituted the OE element *cyne*, meaning 'royal', for *cuno*^[49]. Sometimes the element *briega* indicates the presence of a fortification upon the hill^[25] and, indeed, the remains of an Iron Age fort do exist at the northern end of Kinver Edge.

Although the name Churchill, a small village between Stourbridge and Kidderminster, seems superficially to be wholly English in character, it probably derives from a compound of the PrW *crūg*^[38, 49] (meaning 'pointed hill', 'mound' or 'tumulus') and OE *hyll* ('hill'; see 6.7). It is assumed that early Anglo-Saxon settlers mistook *crūg* for (or at least replaced it with) the OE word *ċiriċe*, meaning 'church', and the name developed from there. If this interpretation is correct, it is likely that a tumulus existed somewhere on the higher ground north of the present village.

Whilst British hill and watercourse names don't tell us exactly where people settled, they do tell us that people were nearby at an early date: where a watercourse or hill has a British name, there must have been British people in the vicinity to name it and, just as importantly, to subsequently perpetuate the name. Indeed, many places of British origin were named after rivers, hills and other topographical features; and this tendency carried forward into the early part of the Anglo-Saxon period. When we see a purely, or partly, topographical place name—even one containing OE elements—it is often likely to be an early name.

Throughout history, the occupants of the local area have used many different words to denote a hill. A British element *barr*, meaning 'hill top' or 'summit', exists in Perry Barr and Great Barr. The Perry and Great prefixes are English in origin (Perry, comes from OE *pirige* meaning 'pear tree') and it seems that these locations were occupied by Britons before the Anglo-Saxons settled the area. Malvern derives from the PrW elements *moil* and *brin* (sometimes written *brinn* or *bryn*), meaning 'bare hill'. Clent is probably a later name which, it has been supposed, comes directly from the OE word *clent* for a hill^[49]. This word is probably related to the Old Swedish word *klinter* or ON *klettr*^[14], meaning 'hill' or 'rocky hillock', but the OE form is thought to have arrived in the midlands via Anglo-Saxon settlers. Dunclent, a medieval manor and settlement cluster several miles to the south-west, is likely named after Clent hills, but the precise relationship is obscure. The Anglo-Saxons had distinct words for different shapes and types of hill, and some of these are discussed in § 6.7.

4.3 Ethnicity and folk groups

Place names often embody the names of individuals or groups. Occasionally, personal names can help to identify the origin of the place-name (and perhaps to date it—see § 7.2), but most of the individuals referenced are now, regrettably, lost to history. Nevertheless, the names of folk groups, when included in place names, can be altogether more informative, perhaps pointing to their ethnic origin and/or the geographical extent of their territory.

For example, the name Wyre (Forest) and the first element of Worcester derive from the conjectural name of the British tribe who inhabited the area prior to the Anglo-Saxon period: the *Weogoran* or *Wigoran*; and it is clear from surviving place names that these people occupied a fairly extensive area^[25]. It has been suggested that the tribal name could have its roots in a Gaulish river name, *Vigora*, (possibly meaning winding river) and that this might be an early name for the Piddle Brook^[14, 25].

Many sites with OE names actually pre-date the Anglo-Saxon period. I have already mentioned Churchill, but another, perhaps more obvious, example is Wychbury Hill. This is the location of an Iron-Age fortification, yet it is named after people who occupied the area in a much later period. The 'Wych' element refers to the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of the *Hwicce*, which encompassed the regions we now know as Worcestershire, Gloucestershire and west Warwickshire from the late sixth to the early ninth century.

A significant fraction of place names contain a mixture of British and OE terms and this, in itself, can tell us something about the relationship between these two ethnic groups. It must have been English speakers who formed these place names, but they obviously did so with reference to the pre-English nomenclature used for British settlements and geographical features. Such names imply that the British population was allowed to retain a degree of its ethnic identity and might indicate a degree of peaceful co-existence with the incoming Germanic settlers.

Some of the native British, whom the Anglo-Saxons referred to as *walh* (originally meaning 'foreigner' and later 'Welshman' or 'serf') or *cumbre* (a more respectful term for a native Briton or Welsh person), as well as groups of Angles and Saxons, settled outside their native territories; and isolated groups of one ethnicity or culture living amidst another can be discerned from some place names. British settlements within the predominantly Anglian local region are denoted, for example, by Walton (*walh-tūn*) Hill in Clent^[38] (which probably dates to some time before about AD700^[8]) and by the field names Wall Ridding^[47], Wall Croft^[27] and Wallcroft^[2] between Pedmore and Wollescote. Walsall, *Walh's halh*, probably includes a personal name derived directly from *walh* rather than word *walh* itself^[49]. Comberton, near Kidderminster, contains the OE words *cumbre* and *tūn*, and possibly represents the settlement of a fairly high status or respected native Briton.

The manorial name Pensax (a few miles west of Stourbridge) might be evidence for early settlement by Anglo-Saxon migrants. The name means 'hill of the Saxons' and, as it includes the British element *pen*, it must have been coined by British speakers. It, therefore, seems to indicate a Saxon enclave within British territory. Obviously, the British name was perpetuated over time and this probably indicates a degree of isolation, tolerance or even respectful coexistence between the British population and the Germanic settlers. Indeed, around the Black Country area—particularly to the west and north of the region—there is a relatively high number of British settlement names (sometimes including Latin loan words); and a particularly high density of these occurs in southern Staffordshire. This would seem to indicate British ethnicity and culture surviving here until a relatively late date. It is probably also relevant that the same region includes a concentration of topographical place names—i.e. names containing references to the natural landscape rather than to man-made features. This class of names, which includes elements such as *burna*, *feld*, *ford*, *dūn* and *ēg*^[10], is known to be characteristic of early Anglo-Saxon settlements as well as those of native Britons.

There is also an interesting cluster of British and apparently early English names fossilised in the region's parishes. The cluster overlaps the south-west fringe of the Black-Country and extends some way beyond it, as shown in figure 2. These parish names are, at least partly,

topographical. The element *halh* may have a topographical or administrative meaning (§ 3.4), but it is not known with certainty which sense applies to the parishes Halesowen and Willenhall in figure 2 (although a topographical meaning is suspected in both instances). For this reason, and because a significant proportion of names in *halh* are thought to be of relatively late origin, such parishes have not been indicated in figure 2 as having early names.

The potentially early parish names include: Churchill (PrW *crūg* + OE *hyll*); Clent (OE *clent*); Pedmore (OE *Pybba's mōr*); Oldswinford and Kingswinford, together formerly known as Swinford (OE *swīn* + *ford*) or variants thereof; Kinver (Brit *cunobriga*), and Enville, formerly *Efnefeld* (OE *efn* + *feld*). Ashwood was in Kingswinford parish; and Amblecote probably split from Kingswinford *manor* some time after 1016 to become part of Oldswinford parish. It is likely that these places were originally components of an estate or territory represented (approximately) by the northern division of Clent Hundred (outlined in red on figure 2). Kinver and Enville *may* have belonged to this putative territory; and whilst this has not been proved beyond doubt, an association between these places has been postulated^[34]. As noted in § 2, many important Anglo-Saxon estate centres possessed topographical, or partly topographical, names; and these estates are thought, in some cases, to have developed from earlier folk territories. The cluster of early / topographically-named parishes in and around Clent Hundred supports the impression of a British, or early Anglo-Saxon folk group (perhaps both) in the region; and the survival of these names might imply continuity of both occupation and folk traditions as well as, perhaps, an ongoing recognition of the group's territorial integrity.

To the north-west of Clent Hundred there are several more parishes with seemingly early names: Wombourne (OE *wōn burna*, 'winding stream'); Penn (PrW *penn*, 'hill'); Pattingham (OE *Peatting hām*, 'homestead at *Peatting*'), Patshull (OE *Paetteles hyll*, '*Paettel's* hill'); Rudge (OE *hyrcg*, 'ridge'), and Worfield (OE *Worfe feld*, 'open land near the river *Worfe*'). However, it is unlikely that any of these parishes were associated with the supposed Clent Hundred territory. Indeed, there is evidence that these parishes developed from separate ecclesiastical estates; and, of course, they ended up within Staffordshire and Shropshire rather than Worcestershire (to which the Clent Hundred belonged).

It may be relevant that almost all of the parishes with apparently early names lie on, or very close to, the Iron Age salt-way linking Droitwich and Penkridge, or to Roman roads (figure 2). Those in Clent Hundred connect with both road systems, whilst the groupings around Pattingham and Penn were served by the Roman roads leading to Redhill (Uxacona) and Penkridge (Pennocrucium) respectively. The early-named parishes to the east clearly lie near the road servicing the Roman fort at Metchley (today adjacent to Birmingham University's campus). It is not surprising that the sites occupied by the first Anglo-Saxon settlers would be on land which lay close to the existing road network and which had already been developed by Romano-British and post-Roman farmers.

It is also worthwhile noting here that another parish with an early name, Tardebigge, was, in the late Anglo-Saxon period, associated with three of the parishes in the aforementioned cluster. In 1016, Kinver, Clent and Tardebigge were granted to the church at Worcester, only to be seized back from the church by the Sheriff of Staffordshire. As a result, they are recorded in the Domesday survey as paying their renders in Kingswinford (which was then in Staffordshire but, in all probability, in Worcestershire prior to 1016). Tardebigge, has a name of pre-English origin—possibly a ME-corrupted form of the MW *Ardd y Byg* (meaning height of the magpies), which in turn may have derived from PrW *arrrd* (hill) and a Latin loan, *pica* (magpie)^[4]—and was probably linked via major roads to Swinford and the early-named parishes within the Clent Hundred. The coincidence of these early and late links might, perhaps, indicate a long-standing connection between Tardebigge and some of the territory in and around Clent Hundred.

Though having geographically-related origins, the Anglo-Saxons, were not actually one homogenous group; and, after settling in Britain, the Angles and Saxons remained, to some degree, culturally separate peoples. This ethnic inhomogeneity sometimes left its fingerprint in place names. The parish and medieval-hundred name Seisdon (from OE *Seax-dūn*)^[14] means hill of the Saxons, much like Pensax (§ 4.3), but the former is a wholly OE name and thus points to the presence of Saxons within a predominantly Anglian territory.

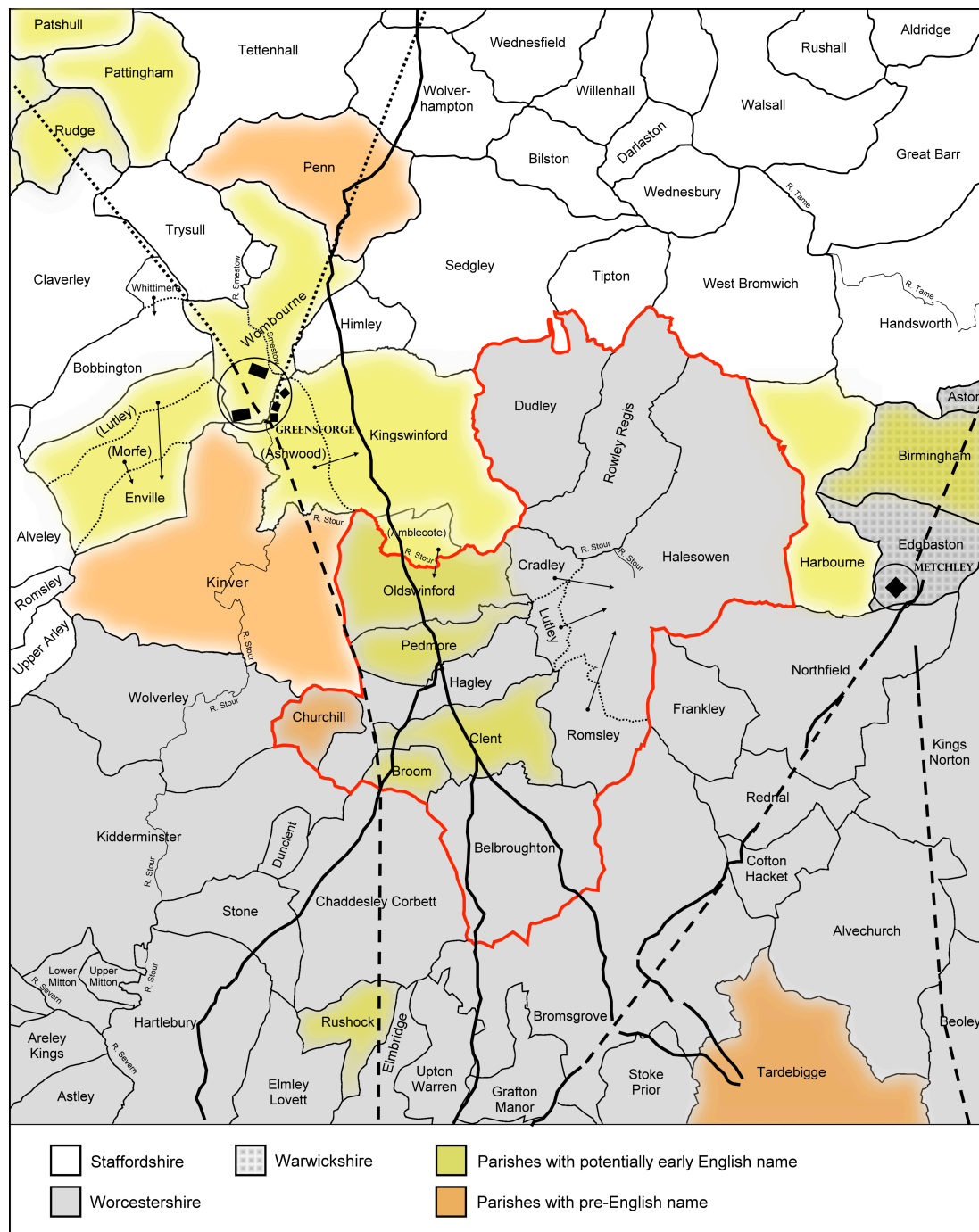


Figure 2. Local parishes possessing British and potentially early English names. Important ancient routes are also shown in black: the dashed lines represent Roman roads (uncertain sections are shown dotted); the solid lines represent other early routes. Some of the road data is taken from King^[35]. The county affiliations indicated are, as far as can be ascertained, those which existed in the pre-Conquest era. Manor (or township)-to-parish linkages are represented by arrows. The region bounded in red belonged to the northern division of the (probably tenth-century) Clent Hundred.

On occasion, OE place names give us clues as to the identity of specific groups—possibly extended families, clans or followers of a certain individual—who settled the area. I have already mentioned the OE folk-name-forming suffix *-ingas* and its use to signify the followers of certain named individuals (§ 3.6.3), but there were also other terms which referred to discrete groups of people.

OE *ware* means 'the dwellers of' a particular place. The name Ridware (seen in the villages of Hamstall Ridware, Hill Ridware, Pipe Ridware and Mavesyn Ridware a few miles north of Lichfield) probably means 'dwellers at the ford', the Rid- component of the name originating from the British word *ritu*, meaning 'ford'.

The early OE term *-sætan* had a meaning similar to *ware*. It is represented in folk names recorded in a number of surviving place names, in Anglo-Saxon charters, and in a (probably) seventh-century document known as the Tribal Hideage. Bilston is a good local example; the name appears to refer to the tribe or clan who settled there: the *Bilsætan*. Bilston (recorded as *Bilsetnatun* in 996; *Bilsatena* in 985 and *Bilsetune* in 1086) means 'the *tūn* of the *Bilsætan*'. The term *sætan* is Anglo-Saxon, but names in *sætan* seem to have been coined in order to refer to groups of people distinct from those who gave the name. Such names might, therefore, refer to people of a British origin. Some *-sætan* groups appear to have held large territories and have ultimately given their names to whole counties (e.g. Somerset, Dorset and Wiltshire, the *-set* ending of the first two coming from *-sætan*). The *Bilsætan* folk group derives its name from either OE *bill*, meaning 'sword', 'edge' or 'ridge', or from OE *bile*, meaning 'bill' or 'beak'^[49]. Bilston is located upon a ridge of high ground, so the former interpretation would seem the most plausible. A similar folk group gave its name to Lilleshall ('*hyll* of the *Lilsætan*') in east Shropshire^[49]. In some cases a folk group and a settlement were named after the same geographical feature. The *Tomsætan* and Tamworth were both named after the River Tame; and the *Pencersætan*, the river name Penk (around which the *Pencersætan* dwelt) and the settlement name Penkridge, all appear to come from the same British words: *penn* ('a headland' or 'chief') and *crūg*^[49] or *crouco*^[14] (a tumulus). The modern name Penkridge developed under Anglo-Saxon influences from its Romano-British incarnation *Pennocrucium*. Based upon the sound changes inherent in this transformation, place-name scholars have estimated the Romano-British form of the name may have survived until around the seventh century.

5. Indicators of religious sites and practices

Religion was a key element of community life for Anglo-Saxon settlers as well as their British predecessors; and the place names they left behind are sometimes indicative of their sacred sites and beliefs.

5.1 Pagan sites

The post-Roman British inhabitants of the local area were largely Christian, having been converted during the early fourth century during the Roman occupation. The incoming Anglo-Saxons, however, worshipped pagan gods; and the absence of place names derived from the late British term *eglēs*, meaning church, has been used to chart the spread of Anglo-Saxon paganism into British Christian areas.

No such *eglēs* place names exist within the Black Country, which might indicate there was little survival of British Christianity in the region. The closest are Exhall near Alcester, another Exhall near Coventry, and Eccleshall in Staffordshire. All three are combined with *halh*; and Margaret Gelling has proposed that, in the first case, at least, *halh* might have been used in the sense of an administratively isolated place or 'land not included in the general administrative arrangements of an area', which she suggests might have been appropriate to the area around a British Christian centre^[20].

There is, however, place-name evidence of possible pagan worship to the immediate south of the Black Country around Wolverley, Hartlebury and Chaddesley. Anglo-Saxon charters for these areas include several names containing the OE element *hlāw*, which means 'hill' or 'tumulus' and tends to be associated with pagan burials^[25]. And a ninth century charter for Cofton Hackett, near the Lickey Hills, mentions the place name *tyesmere* which probably contains the name of the Germanic pagan god, *Tiw*^[25, 27].

In addition, the Black Country itself, as well as the Birmingham region, possesses several pagan place names: Wednesbury and Wednesfield get their names from the Anglo-Saxon god *Woden* (i.e. *Woden's* fortification and *Woden's* field, respectively); Tysoe means *Tīw's hoh* or '*Tīw's* hill spur'; and Weeford (near Sutton Coldfield) and Weoley (south of Birmingham) come from OE *wēoh* meaning a heathen shrine^[25]. It is thought unlikely that these pagan names were coined during the first phase of Anglo-Saxon settlement. It is more probable that they represent the survival of isolated pockets of paganism in the region for some time after the Mercian conversion to Christianity in the second half of the seventh century^[25].

5.2 Early Christian sites

From about the mid-seventh century, Christian beliefs began to replace the Anglo-Saxons' earlier paganism. New chapels were erected, in many cases on former pagan sites; and place-name evidence sometimes indicates where those sites were located. An example might have existed in the vicinity of Hanbury Hill and Union Street in Stourbridge. Prior to the twentieth century Hanbury Hill had been known as Yarnbrough^[50], and previously Yearnebarrowe Hill^[42]. The latter names possibly derive from either OE *earn*, meaning eagle, or the personal name *Earn(a)*. The ending of this name comes either from the conjectural pre-English word for hill, *barro*, or from the OE *berg* (the Anglian form of *beorg*) meaning an artificial mound, a tumulus or a hill (§ 6.7).

The juxtaposition of this supposed ancient barrow or tumulus with the nearby Catherwell Meadow^[9], Catherwell House^[50], the medieval Catherwell Field^[22], and other names in Catherwell is interesting, as it might be indicative of an early religious or spiritual site. Catherwell is a contraction of St. Catherine's Well. The term Well, which comes from *wella* or *welle* in the Anglian dialect of OE, often meant a natural spring, rather than a man-made hole for water abstraction^[44]. In this case, the spring was located on the north-east side of Hanbury Hill near the site of Oldswinford Hospital School and fed a small stream that flowed close to Union Passage, Hemplands and Queen Street, before joining the Stour near Bradley Road. St. Catherine's was commonly a dedication applied to sixth-to-eighth-century Christian sites (e.g. chapels) that had been built upon even earlier sites of pagan worship—particularly those near springs^[1]. Such pagan ritual sites were, of course, often located at tumuli or barrows. Only archaeological evidence can confirm whether the names Yearnebarrowe and Catherwell are connected in this way, but the prospect is interesting nonetheless.

Another place-name element that sometimes has religious connotations is *stōw*. Generally speaking, this OE term means 'place where people assemble'. In some instances it refers to an ancient moot meeting site. (This might be why *stōw* became a common element in the names of Domesday hundreds, some of which were probably based upon earlier folk territories.) In many cases, however, *stōw* came to mean a place where people congregated for religious purposes; and there are a couple of local examples. Kenelmstowe (a hamlet near Clent, deserted in the sixteenth century) was named after the Mercian saint Kenelm and has obvious religious (and mythical) associations. And a few miles to the north-west lay a now lost place name, *Belstowe*. This was recorded in a charter of AD 994 which indicates it was located somewhere in the Smestow valley south of Ashwood, perhaps near Spittle Brook^[24] or Dawley Brook^[33]. *Belstowe* is probably derived from OE *bæl stōw*, the former element referring to a funeral pyre; and in view of *stōw's* likely meaning of a religious assembly place, *Belstowe* could have been a funerary site.

Generally speaking, topographical place names tend to represent early settlements—some, perhaps, having a history of occupation dating back to the Romano-British period or before. A number of such sites developed into the central places of large estates and, during the Anglo-Saxon period, many of these became the parochiae of early minsters. Near the Black Country, Clent, Tettenhall, Wombourne, Pattingham and Sedgley are likely candidates for mid-Anglo-Saxon minster churches. The reasons for this statement are beyond the scope of this article, but it is interesting to note that the first three places each have a potentially early topographical name, and the fourth has a name containing the early (pre-730) element *hām*. Kidderminster, of course, was also a minster site which, according to the Ismere Diploma (see

§§ 4.1 and 6.5) dates from the eighth century^[27]. The minster estate was created within the then ancient province of the *Husmeræ*, perhaps with the intent of serving this extended community of (probably) British descent. The minster's parochia may, thus, have coincided with the former territory of the *Husmeræ*. Dr Della Hooke suggests that it might have also been coterminous with the medieval Rural Deanery of Kidderminster^[25], which extended northwards to encompass the northern division of Clent Hundred, including the areas around Stourbridge, Belbroughton, Halesowen, Rowley Regis and Dudley.

6. Indicators of Anglo-Saxon landscape and land use

We have seen that place names might indicate the name of the person or folk group who settled there, and sometimes they also have something to say about the ethnicity, culture or religion of those settlers. In addition, it is clear that many place names—particularly minor local ones—also reflect the landscape experienced by the Anglo-Saxon incomers and tell us something about the way that landscape was used.

6.1 Further examples of *halh*

Two examples of minor *halh* names illustrate this point. The first is Wynnall Lane (and Wynnall Lane South), at Foxcote. Judging by the convergence of medieval estate boundaries in this area, it seems that land here was, at some point in the tenth or eleventh centuries, shared out between the estates of Oldswinford, Pedmore, Cradley, Lutley and Hagley. Some of this land, particularly that adjacent to the nearby watercourses, was undoubtedly meadow land, and it is likely that the first syllable of 'Wynnall' came from *winn*, the OE word for a meadow^[44]. The *halh* ending clearly reflects the fact that the meadowland lay in a broad valley or hollow. The second example is Sensall Road, which adjoins Wynnall Lane. It was named after fields in the vicinity which, in the nineteenth century, were known as *Sensalls* or *Sensalts*. Old maps show a small stream cutting through these fields; and the name might have developed from OE *scenc*. This word referred to a drinking vessel and was used for streams that provided a supply of clean drinking water^[44]. In this case the apparent *halh* ending probably signifies the valley (or hollow) through which the stream ran down to Ludgbridge Brook.

6.2 Trees and woodland

Much of the region around the Black Country appears to have been heavily wooded during the Anglo-Saxon period—a characteristic which also seems to have pertained at many other locations in Britain at that time. However, it is very unlikely that any of the woodland encountered by the Anglo-Saxon settlers would have been untouched primeval forest. By then, Britain had been occupied for millennia, and man's presence would have strongly influenced the pattern and nature of surviving woodland. There is evidence, for example, that some of this woodland may have sprung up on formerly cultivated sites that had been abandoned in the decades following the Roman withdrawal.

Generally, the woodland which the new settlers encountered was not dense or unbroken. It would have had numerous glades and open areas, and much of it would already have been used for many centuries to pasture pigs, cattle and sheep. Pigs feature prominently in west midland charters and place names (usually via the OE element *swīn*, meaning either 'domesticated pigs' or 'wild boar'); and oak woodland in particular would have been a valuable source of mast (fallen acorns) in the autumn^[25].

Animals were herded seasonally to their woodland pastures, which were often located several miles away from the main settlement centre; and it is believed that this traditional pattern of transhumance later came to be represented by the various estate linkages recorded in eighth- to tenth-century charters^[25-28]. The Anglo-Saxons seem, to some extent, to have perpetuated this way of life. Yet throughout the period there was undoubtedly an increasing pattern of

clearance and colonisation of wooded areas. This involved a fairly intensive management of surviving tracts of woodland, and given its continuing importance—not just for animal husbandry, but also for hunting game and as a source of timber, woodland herbs and fuel—it is not surprising that the Germanic immigrants felt it necessary to introduce a variety of quite specific words to describe woods and the woodland landscape.

6.2.1 Woodland terms used in place names

In contrast to British woodland terms (the commonest of which gave us PrW *coid* and ModW *coed*, meaning 'a wood'), Old English words for woods are relatively abundant in west midlands place names. Surprisingly, however, only one of them could be considered to be particularly plentiful here: i.e. *lēah*, which is discussed in § 6.2.2.

Of the remainder, perhaps the most frequently encountered is *wudu*, which means, simply, 'a wood'. Its usage seems often to have been quite non-specific, although, in some cases, this element is used of a particularly large tract of woodland. Worcestershire examples include Westwood, near Droitwich, and Walkwood and Woodrow, near Redditch^[18]. Further south in Oxfordshire, Wychwood (referred to as *Hwicca wudu* in AD 876) means 'the wood of the Hwicce', and this is thought to represent an extensive area of land that had been lost from this short-lived kingdom. The loss almost certainly occurred sometime before about AD 680, the date when the Hwiccan boundaries became fossilized in the outline of the Worcester Diocese (which had been brought into existence specifically to serve the Hwiccan people).

Small woods, particularly coppiced woods, were often referred to by the OE term *grāfe*. This place-name element might be related to OE *grafa*, which meant 'digging' or 'trench', the association of meanings having become established because coppiced woods were often surrounded by an earth bank and ditch^[18]. Bromsgrove contains *graf(a)* and the unattested personal name *Brēmi*. Originally, in the Anglo-Saxon period, the name is thought to have been *Bremes graf(a)*, 'Bremi's thicket'^[19], the personal name then being replaced in the late medieval by *brōm*, meaning 'broom'^[49].

Other OE terms for a small wood included *bearu* (which, in modern place names, is sometimes difficult to separate from OE *beorg*, 'hill'). Single-species woods were often called a *holt*; and a wooded hill a *hyrst*. The latter is thought to be of fairly late origin^[18]. The element *hangra* indicates a wood on a, usually steep, slope. Timberhonger, near Bromsgrove, is one example; and Hungary Hill in Stourbridge may be another (see § 8.3).

In many cases, these small woods were managed for the benefit of a single estate or manor, and would have had fairly well-defined boundaries. But at the other end of the size scale were very extensive woodland regions (or what one might, today, call a forest). These were often denoted by the OE term *wald*, although, as with many such place-name elements, the meaning of *wald* evolved over the centuries and eventually came to signify an extensive tract of elevated open land.

The Anglo-Saxons also used other words to denote specific types of woodland such as *fryth* ('land overgrown with brushwood') and *sceaga* ('small wood'), but a full discussion of these elements is beyond the scope of this article. Interested readers are referred to the books by Margaret Gelling and Ann Cole^[18-21]. However, as implied previously, there is one woodland term which deserves particular attention here: *lēah*. It was so widely used, and the information it conveys, is potentially so important, that the following section is devoted solely to this topic.

6.2.2 The significance of *lēah* place names

Place names in *lēah* have already been introduced in § 3.3. They are very common in many parts of Britain (particularly in north Worcestershire and south Staffordshire), but *lēah* is rare in names originating before about AD 730. The term indicates 'woodland which was in existence and regarded as ancient when English speakers arrived'^[19]. Indeed many place names in *lēah* are thought to denote an earlier British settlement that had been renamed (and perhaps taken over) by the incomers^[18, 19].

Broadly speaking, such names have been interpreted as referring either to a wood or to a man-made or artificial clearing in a wood. Often the distinction is not clear from the place name alone, but local topography and historical sources can sometimes help. *Lēah* undoubtedly had one or more specific meanings, and several details of how it was used are now understood. Where the term is compounded with a tree species (especially when recorded in Anglo-Saxon charter perambulations—see § 7.2) it usually indicates a wood rather than a clearing^[26, 28]. And some additional findings arose from a 1974 study conducted by the noted place-name scholar, Margaret Gelling^[17]. She concluded that when the term occurs in clusters of place names it probably refers to clearings for settlement within a generally wooded area. Conversely, where an isolated occurrence of *lēah* is found—especially when it is surrounded by habitive place names such as those in *tūn*—it tends to indicate the presence of a smaller (probably managed) wood, meadow or pasture^[21]. The latter two senses of *lēah* are relatively infrequent and late (perhaps post-Conquest) developments^[19]. This study showed that the spatial relationship between settlement names in *lēah* and *tūn* is profoundly significant, in that the two types of name are, to a large extent, mutually exclusive. The former seems to have been used in predominantly wooded areas, and the latter in predominantly open countryside^[19, 21]. Dr Gelling presented a (now well known) map of the distribution of *lēah* and *tūn* names around the central part of the west midlands^[17]. This illustrated how these place names were often grouped into very distinct clusters and regions, which reflected the general extent of wooded and open land at the time that the names were coined (typically AD 750 to 950 for *lēah* and *tūn*; both of these elements are rare before about AD 730^[10]).

Figure 3 is based largely upon Dr Gelling's data (albeit over a much reduced geographical area), re-plotted with reference to the first edition 1" OS map of c1830. Rather than showing the locations of individual place names, this figure employs smooth boundary lines, drawn equidistant (in most cases) between places having *lēah* and *tūn* names. The diffuse edges of the resulting *lēah* and *tūn* regions in figure 3 reflect the fact that this process can only provide an approximate illustration of woodland coverage. Indeed, the figure probably exaggerates the contrast between wooded and open regions: the former would almost certainly have had numerous small clearings and glades within it, and the latter would have contained scattered pockets of woodland, but it seems likely that figure 3 provides a reasonably representative overview of the large-scale tree cover during the mid-Anglo-Saxon period.

It is interesting to compare figures 2 and 3. With the exception of Penn, (most of) Wombourne and perhaps Rushock, the early-named parishes of figure 2 all seem to have lain within predominantly wooded regions. It would appear that these early settlements did not result in large amounts of woodland being cleared prior to the mid-Anglo-Saxon period.

Perhaps it should also be noted, at this point, that Dr Gelling's original figure showed that some of the open, non-wooded regions—which had presumably been cleared and settled well before the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons—lay in river valleys, particularly in those parts of the Stour and the Severn between Kidderminster and Worcester.

One final point worthy of note is that, in certain places, there is a high degree of correspondence between the mid-Anglo-Saxon woodland boundaries illustrated in figure 3 and the pattern of later parish boundaries, especially in the vicinity of Wolverhampton and Bilston, and along the southern boundaries of Wombourne, Penn, Wolverley, Churchill and the western projection of Hagley. (This is not due to the author deliberately following the parish boundaries when drafting the figure. The apparent coincidence of woodland and parish boundaries seems to be a genuine characteristic of the raw data when plotted as described.) If it is not to be ascribed to random chance, there can be only three explanations: (a) there was a practice (or policy) within some early estates of clearing large swathes of land up to their boundaries; (b) some estate boundaries were established along the edges of pre-existing woodland, or (c) the choice of a *lēah* or *tūn* name reflected the economy of the settlement's parent estate as a whole. Indeed, it is conceivable that all three of these practices played a part in producing the observed correlation. With regard to the latter, Dr Gelling discusses the concept of a woodland estate developing from a region of wood-pasture within an earlier parent estate^[17]. She suggests that *lēah* names might have been allocated

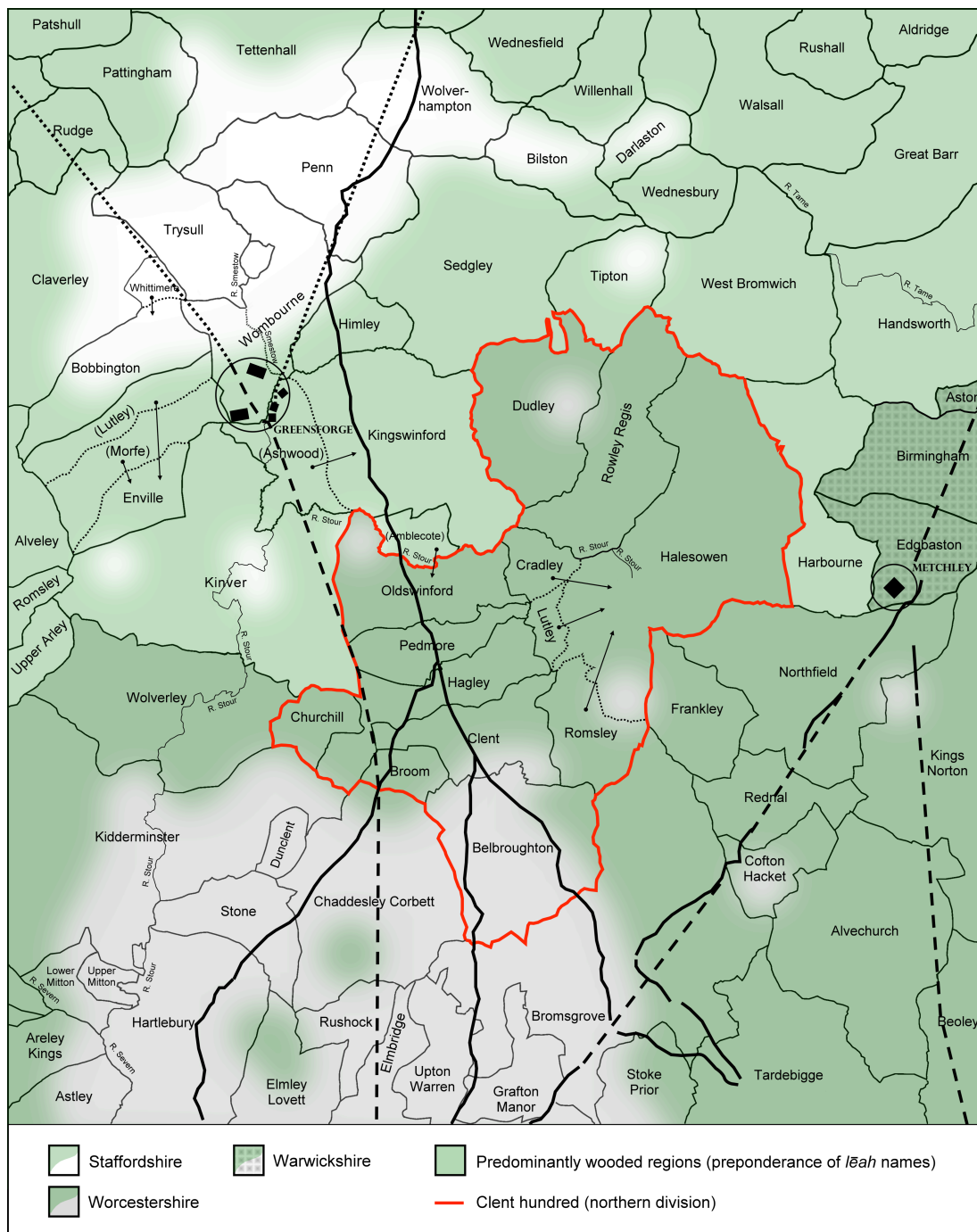


Figure 3. Approximate extent of mid-Anglo-Saxon woodland in the local area inferred from the distribution of place names in *lēah* and *tūn* re-plotted from Gelling^[20]. The local parishes and important early routes are also shown in order to facilitate comparison with figure 2. Some of the road data is taken from King^[35]. The county affiliations indicated are, as far as can be ascertained, those which existed in the pre-Conquest era. Manor (or township)-to-parish linkages are represented by arrows. The region bounded in red belonged to the northern division of the (probably tenth-century) Clent Hundred.

mainly to the principal settlements within this type of woodland estate, as such names are found less frequently within woodland common to multiple vill^[20]. Usage of *lēah* (or *tūn*) names on an estate-by-estate basis does not seem inconsistent with the apparent correlation observed between some of the parish- and woodland-boundary lines in figure 4.

It would be interesting to employ this kind of presentation with Dr Gelling's data over a wider region. If similar parish-vs.-woodland boundary correlations can be found, they might indicate very early boundary lines and thereby help to highlight groups of parishes and manors that resulted from fragmentation of a single larger estate.

6.2.3 Wood and forest names

The term 'forest' should not be confused with 'wood'. While it is certainly true that large tracts of the Norman forests were heavily wooded, there were also extensive clearings and significant areas of heath-land within the forests. The designation of an area as forest simply meant that it was reserved for the King's sport, and very specific laws applied within it. Chases were, in some respects, similar to the royal forests except that hunting rights in chases could be held, not just by the Crown, but also by the King's subjects.

Figure 3 encompasses several areas that were later to become Norman forests and chases. The region around Wednesfield, Willenhall, Darlaston, Wednesbury and west Walsall was later in Cannock Chase, while Amblecote, the majority of Kingswinford and the southern half of Dudley were in Pensnett Chase^[36]. And, in 1300, Kinver Forest occupied north-east Kidderminster, Dunclent, the western half of Chaddesley Corbett, the eastern half of Wolverley, Broom, Clent, Hagley, the western fringe of Pedmore, the north-west tip of Oldswinford (i.e. Wollaston) and the western fringe of Kingswinford, as well as Ashwood, Kinver, Enville and the southern part of Wombourne (see § 7.1). With the exception of the southern tip of Kinver Forest (around Chaddesley Corbett and Kidderminster), all of these areas seem to have been predominantly wooded in the mid-Anglo-Saxon period. On the other hand, Pepperwood Forest lay mostly within the cleared region south and west of Belbroughton, although its eastern edge did extend into the more densely-wooded landscape around Tardebigge and Alvechurch (part of the vast Arden woodlands). This perhaps emphasizes the fact that royal forests were far from being continuous tracts of woodland.

The forests reached their maximum extent in the Norman period, but their foundations seem to lie in the tenth and eleventh centuries. They were usually named after woods or important settlements within the forest bounds, and many of these names have British origins.

Kinver Forest was named either from the wood or the settlement there which, as we have already seen (§ 4.2), derives from the British *cunobriga*, meaning 'dog hill'^[51]. The wood itself probably lay entirely to the west of the Stour, in the area around Kinver Edge^[34] and was, therefore, somewhat smaller than the later forest, whose extent is outlined above and in § 7.1.

Another Norman forest with a pre-English name existed to the north-west of Kinver. The forest of Morfe covered part of Claverley, as well as Worfield and Quat to the west^[36]. Morfe was also the name of a moderately large manor located to the south-east of Claverley which, in 1086, occupied the areas that subsequently became the parishes of Lutley, Morfe and Enville shown in figure 3^[34]. The origin of the name Morfe is uncertain, but it might derive from OW *morfa*, meaning 'marsh'^[12], or it could be a contraction of OW *mor-dref* which means 'big village'^[14]. The name has been taken by some^[14, 16] to be a development of *Moerheb*, a wood referenced in the Ismere Diploma of AD 736, but geographical inconsistencies^[34] appear to rule this out. I will return to this subject in § 6.5.

The woodland in and around Wyre Forest was referred to as *weogorena leage* in a charter of AD 816^[25]. This term contains the folk name *Weogoran* or *Wigoran*, the same name that gave us the first element of Worcester^[49] (§ 4.3). While the Norman forest occupied the region between Upper Areley, Lindridge, Pensax and Areley Kings, the pre-Conquest woodland of the *Weogoran* may have been more extensive^[25], perhaps extending onto the eastern bank of the Severn towards Worcester. It is probable that the Norman incarnation of the forest was actually a chase, since the Mortimer family (who held large parts of north-west Worcestershire and south-east Shropshire, and who I'll revisit in § 6.2.4) also had hunting rights there in the fourteenth century. The chase probably became known as a forest in the fifteenth century after the Mortimers' rights reverted to the crown.

The largest afforested region in the locality was the Forest of Arden, which lay on the high ground of north-west Warwickshire between Birmingham, Stratford-on-Avon, Coventry and Tamworth. It appears to have been the core of an even-larger, earlier woodland that extended into east Worcestershire around Kings Norton and Alvechurch (figure 3). The name Arden seems to derive from the unattested British term *ardua* (which, in turn comes from the Celtic word *árdvos*), meaning 'high'^[49]. Its origins are probably related to those of The Ardennes, a heavily wooded region covering much of Luxembourg and south-east Belgium.

The Arden was not penetrated by Roman roads and its boundary is, even today, defined with reference to those roads which first skirted its edge two millennia ago: the Fosse Way, Icknield Street and Watling Street. The Domesday survey shows it to have been sparsely populated in 1086. It was clearly an area of very late colonisation; and this seems to be reflected in the place names of the region, which are mostly topographical, rather than habitive, in nature. This is interesting as, in most locations, topographical OE names are believed to represent *early* Anglo-Saxon settlement. Margaret Gelling's explanation^[20] is that, by the end of the Anglo-Saxon period "the most widespread habitive place-name element, *tūn*, was felt to mean 'estate' rather than 'farm'" and other habitive words like *wīc* and *worþ(i)gn* were "either obsolete or restricted to specialised senses like 'dairy farm'".

6.2.4 Individual trees and tree species in place names

So far we have discussed the ways in which tree-related place names are correlated with the distribution of woodland and forests. But in more open countryside, *individual* trees could be useful landmarks after which to name a settlement, especially if the tree was particularly prominent or its species unusual in the locality.

Where place names refer to a tree (or groups thereof), they usually also incorporate a personal name. Coventry, for example, contains the conjectural OE personal name *Cofa* and was derived from *Cofan trēow*, meaning simply '*Cofa*'s tree'. Often the inference is that the tree either belonged to the named individual, perhaps marking his land or commemorating a particular event to which that person had been linked.

In some cases, when accompanied by a word for buildings or other constructions, *trēow* has been interpreted to mean a post or a beam rather than a living tree. Presumably this indicates the use of tree trunks or branches as obvious components of the structure^[18]. In other cases, place names seem to indicate the use of trees (or posts made from trees) to mark specific locations or to act as commemorative or religious monuments.

During the Anglo-Saxon period, it was not unusual for important settlements to be given place names containing OE *trēow*. Indeed, references to trees often appear in the names of hundreds, Doddingtree (*Dudda*'s tree) and Hussingtree (*Husa*'s tree) being just two examples in Worcestershire. As indicated previously (§§ 2 and 4.3), some hundreds seem to have been developments of earlier land units or folk territories, and were named after the traditional meeting place (often marked by prominent trees or rocks) at which hundredal assemblies gathered.

In many cases, place names specified a particular species of tree, and there are several examples in the vicinity of the Black Country.

I have already mentioned Hagley, near Stourbridge, which might contain a reference to Hawthorn (OE *hagga*)^[14, 18, 49]—although other suggestions have been put forward^[38, 40]—and Aldridge which derives from the OE for alder: *alor wīc* means 'farm or dwelling amongst alders'^[49]. Another reference to alders occurs in Alrewas, near Lichfield, which developed from *alor wæsse*, meaning 'alder marsh' or 'alders in a wet place (perhaps a river bank)'^[14, 49]. Aggborough, an area of Kidderminster, is derived from OE *āc berg* meaning 'oak hill'^[38], Perry Barr from OE *pirige* meaning 'pear tree' (plus Brit *barr* meaning hill), and Bartley Green from OE *beorc-lēah* meaning 'birch wood' (the Green being a later addition)^[14].

Hawthorn, oak and alder are not uncommon in west midlands place names, and willow occurs almost as frequently. This presumably reflects the fact that willows were of considerable utility, the young branches (withies) being widely used for weaving hurdles etc. The Wergs near Wolverhampton means, simply, 'the willow trees'. It contains OE *wīthig*, 'a willow', and is actually derived from the plural form *wīthigas*. This OE word remains almost unaltered in a number of place names; and examples of this near Stourbridge include Withymoor in Amblecote (Whittymore in the eighteenth century), and the Withybrook, a stream that rises on Pedmore Common and flows through (or, more correctly now, beneath) Norton and Swan Pool Park to join the river Stour near Lowndes Road.

Another tree which is relatively common in place names is the ash. It is often found as a simplex name or combined with an OE word for a wood (see § 6.2.1). Ashwood, west of Kingswinford is an obvious example of the latter; and this place name is discussed in more detail in § 8.3. An ash tree also features, along with a personal name, in Franche, near Kidderminster. This place name probably derives from *Frēan aesc* and means 'Frea's ash tree'.

And west of Kinver, near the Staffordshire-Shropshire boundary, are two more (probably later) place names that refer to ash trees—i.e. Six Ashes and Four Ashes. These places lie about a mile apart on the Kinver-to-Bridgnorth road (the A458), and it is likely that their names recall the ash trees that were described in 1405 as:

"...the ash-trees commonly called in the Cambrian or Welsh language Ouuene Margion, which grow on the high way from Bridgenorth to Kynvar..."

This quote comes from a supposed agreement made between Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, Sir Edmund Mortimer, Son of the Earl of March (who held much of the land in the region), and the Welsh leader Owain Glyndŵr during their attempts to overthrow King Henry IV. This so-called Tripartite Indenture is considered dubious by some historians, but it does seem that the three men were, at least, accused of planning to divide England and Wales into three separate provinces. The new border between southern England and Wales was allegedly intended to run up the river Severn to Worcester, through Six Ashes (or Four Ashes), and then north—possibly via the ancient Droitwich-to-Penkrudge salt-way—to the source of the river Trent near Biddulph, before turning west to follow the *river Meuse* (Mersey) to the sea. If the plot had proceeded, Herefordshire, Shropshire, west Staffordshire and north-west Worcestershire would all have been subsumed into Wales.

6.3 Fortified and defensive sites

In the Anglo-Saxon period, fortifications that were then considered to be ancient were often denoted by place names derived from the OE *burh* or *burg* (or their dative form *byrig* or *byrg*), which mean, simply, 'a fortified place'^[43]. These elements usually appear as 'bury' or 'berry' in modern place-name forms. Some names in *burh* are potentially early (though generally not as early as names in *hām*, for example^[10]). However, the term evolved throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, and in post-conquest use it might mean a town or the area around it—i.e. a borough.

Sometimes names in *burh* denote a castle, a fortified manor house or an Anglo-Saxon fortification, but often the reference is to an even earlier structure such as an Iron-Age fort or a Roman encampment. Iron Age forts exist at Berry Ring (near Stafford), Berrow Hill (Martley) and Woodbury Hill (near Abberley); and Wednesbury and Oldbury are also thought to be examples of Iron Age fortified sites^[34], although the latter has not been verified archaeologically.

Closer to Stourbridge, there are two interesting examples of 'bury' names: Wychbury and Burys Hill. Clear signs of ancient fortifications are to be found on the summit of Wychbury Hill. The name itself is Anglo-Saxon, but the earthworks are thought to have been constructed during the Iron Age, or even late Bronze Age^[41]. The site is associated with the adjacent prehistoric salt-way linking Droitwich to Penkrudge and Stafford (now the A491). Burys Hill and

nearby fields named Great, Barn, Lower and Long Buckbury (shown on the 1846 Tithe map of Pedmore parish^[47]) suggest that a fortification of some kind once existed on the high ground at the south end of Ounty John Lane in Pedmore. Crop marks, which might be related to the fortifications, have been seen in aerial photographs of the area^[11, 37]; and the place names *Sicanbyrig* and *Feckebury* (mentioned, respectively, in a tenth-century charter and in the 1300 perambulation of Kinver Forest) are probably references to the same fortified structure^[33].

There are many formerly-fortified sites in the locality. Hartlebury Castle is one example. Though called a castle, it is, in fact, a fortified manor house built in the mid-thirteenth century. The name Hartlebury, however, has a more ancient origin. It was recorded as *Heortlan byrig* ('Heortla's fortified place') in the ninth century so it is likely that there was some pre-conquest fortification there—perhaps now partly underlying the manor house.

OE *burh* and the British term *briega* (§ 4) aren't the only place-name elements to indicate a former military or defensive purpose: Wassel Grove, Wast Hills, Wassel Wood and Warshall Top Farm near Kidderminster all derive from the OE term *weard-setl*, which meant a watch place, watch tower or guard house. The location of such watch-place names has been used (with additional information) to infer the approximate position of the Hwiccan kingdom's northern boundary in the sixth to eighth centuries^[34].

Finally, it is important to remember that some -bury names, particularly later instances, do not indicate a fortified site at all. Bushbury (near Wolverhampton) is a good example which contains a later extension from the OE root *burh* that came to mean something more akin to a town or borough. Bushbury was an ecclesiastical estate and, in this case, the name derives from *biscope's byrig*, meaning 'the Bishop's manor'^[49].

6.4 Agriculture

Unsurprisingly, many place-name elements reflect some aspect or another of agricultural land use. The modern word 'field' in a place name is usually self-explanatory. The word itself derives from the OE *feld*, although this originally meant a tract of open countryside. During the Anglo-Saxon period, it came to mean land for agricultural use, and, in the fourteenth century, the meaning developed to one of an enclosed area of (usually agricultural) land^[43]. Many place names containing *feld* or field are not particularly old; and where they don't today refer to a specific field, they often name a settlement built on or near a former field, for example: Priestfield and Millfields near Bilston, Bloomfield at Tipton and Sandyfield near Sedgley.

Although few field names date from the Anglo-Saxon period (most originated in the late medieval or after), they can still be informative to the local historian^[15]. Unfortunately though, widespread urbanisation means that many fields have been obliterated so one often has to look to seventeenth-to-nineteenth-century plans for their names. Such field names might refer to their (usually wealthy) landowner (e.g. Foley's Meadow off Norton Road, Stourbridge and Jestons Land in Lye) or indicate a former industrial site (e.g. Mill Field at Bedcote, Stourbridge, the nearby Stuart's Piece, named after the glass-making company, and Brick Kiln Piece and Engine Piece in Lye). Others, like Gorsty Piece in Oldswinford, Clover Field in Amblecote, Broomy Leasow in Lye and Barkers Oak, Oak Leasow and Mile Oak in Pedmore, refer to nearby vegetation. The latter three field names have proven to be valuable evidence in locating an ancient oak wood, *acleg*, referred to in a tenth-century local charter^[31] (§ 7.2). In Oldswinford, *Old Field* might represent the original core of that settlements' medieval open field system^[41]. And names ending in the plural *-lands*, such as Longlands (from which the school in Brook Street, Stourbridge got its name^[42]) and Farlands (a road, and formerly a house, near the far edge of Oldswinford's former open fields) describe the selions (ploughed strips) into which each settlement's open fields were divided, (although sometimes *-lands* was used in the more general sense to mean just agricultural land). Terms relating to elements of the ploughed field, such as furlong and headland, are sometimes to be found in field (and other) names. Fields called *Hades* (of which there are several examples within a few miles of Stourbridge) probably refer to a headland, the region of mounded-up soil accumulated at the end of the ploughed furrows.

Amongst the local field names there are numerous examples of *Crofts*, small areas of land that were originally used as family plots much like domestic vegetable patches today. *Closes*, *Pieces* and *Leasows* tended to be larger agricultural enclosures. Outside the west midlands, the latter normally indicates pasture land, but around the Black Country *Leasow* was used in a more general sense to mean any enclosed agricultural land. *Inhedge* is a particularly interesting term. It was applied to land taken from the former open (or common) fields of the community and hedged for private use. Such names usually date from the period when the open-field system was falling into disuse^[15]—probably around the fifteenth century in Stourbridge.

Field names can also be indicative of local high-status sites such as manor houses, deer parks and manorial complexes. The fields named Upper Park, Lower Park and Park Piece (together with the shape of their collective boundaries) depicted on the 1845 Tithe map of Cradley parish^[46] are clear indicators of a medieval deer park. Park field names are common, and one has to be careful when interpreting them. Some examples which originate from the OE term *pearroc*^[44], or the related OF *park*, simply mean a small enclosure or a paddock, and do not necessarily indicate a former high-status site. However Stourbridge's Park Piece (in the vicinity of today's Stepping Stones, Junction Road and Parkfield Road) probably *does* belong to a former manorial complex as evidenced by its proximity to Coneygre Hill^[9] (which refers to a medieval rabbit warren managed for meat production). Indeed, it may be that Bedcote's medieval manor house was located somewhere in this vicinity. (Judging by the pattern of early tracks and irregularities in the nearby field boundaries^[5, 9], it would not be surprising if it had occupied a site close to the later Parkfield house, just north of Red Hill School.)

Returning finally to OE names, there is one more term that might usefully be interpreted in an agricultural context: *hamm*, although in some respects it is more closely related to natural topography. While this OE word usually refers to an area of land bounded by natural features such as a bend in a river or a steep slope, the enclosing feature can sometimes be an artificial structure. The enclosed land often seems to have been a water meadow. Old Ham Lane in Pedmore (which was named after Ham Farm) probably derives from *hamm*. Some historians have suggested its name comes from the OE habitive term *hām* which was used to mean a homestead, village or estate, but this is unlikely. A building in the vicinity of Ham Farm was labelled 'The Ham House' on Ordnance Survey preliminary drawings of the area in 1814^[5]; yet *hām* is always found in combination with other place-name elements, never in simplex names. The local geography also strongly supports the notion that Ham Lane derives from *hamm*: the location is bounded on three sides by watercourses (now partially diverted underground) and on the fourth side by the slope of a hill. *Hamm* is actually quite a common place-name element. Audnam, for example, is probably derived from the Anglo-Saxon personal name *Aude* and *hamm*^[22].

6.5 Watercourses and wet ground

I have already introduced some of the locality's more significant river and watercourse names (§ 4.1), but minor streams and brooks are also of interest as they help to build a more complete picture of the ancient landscape. The Anglo-Saxons used a variety of terms to describe watercourses^[18, 19]. While a full account is beyond the scope of this article, I'll discuss the commonest of these place-name elements.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the OE term for a brook, *brōc*, is widespread; and a few examples have already been mentioned. The word usually signifies a stream of moderate capacity, somewhat smaller than a river (OE *ēa*). Originating in many areas after about AD 730, *brōc* is a relatively late OE term. It is common in minor names, though less so in major settlement names, often occurring as the first element and, less frequently, as a simplex name. In many cases, it is preceded by an element which describes the nature of the brook, and local examples include the Witherbrook (the brook where withies were cut), which runs from Pedmore Common (now Stourbridge Golf Club) through Mary Steven's Park and Swan Pool Park to the Stour; Ludgbridge Brook, probably named after the small bridge, *lūs brycg*, that spanned it and which flows from the north-east slope of Wychbury Hill and past Wollescote

Hall to join Shepherd's Brook south of Hay Green; and the Salt Brook which delineates the eastern boundary of Oldswinford parish near The Hayes at Lye.

Until fairly recently, another example of a name in *brōc* existed near Stourbridge—i.e. a cluster of fields just south of Brook Holloway named (according to Nigel Perry^[42]) 'Brockhill Meadow, and Little, Long, Nether and Barn Brockhill'. These had been identified, by Dr Deborah Ford^[16] as deriving from an eighth-century estate called *brochyl* (in a wood called *Moerheb*—§6.2.3) which had been mentioned in the so-called Ismere Diploma, a charter that granted lands for the foundation of a minster at, or near, Kidderminster. (It is clearly this minster which is embodied in the place name.) The Diploma's reference to *brochyl* implies a long-standing link with the (Kidder)minster estate, and this has since been one strand of evidence reproduced in a number of Dr Della Hooke's publications^[25, 26, 27] in support of the idea of early linkages, and possible transhumance, between agricultural settlements and distant woodland pasture. Whilst this theory as a whole is certainly not in question here, the identification of *brochyl* with the 'Brockhill' fields is undoubtedly wrong on two counts. Firstly, the Ismere Diploma makes it clear that *brochyl* is situated to the west of the main estate; yet the 'Brockhill' fields are several miles to the north-east^[34]. Secondly, an earlier reference to the fields^[2] actually lists their names as Brockall rather than Brockhill—i.e. Brockall Meadow and Little, Long, Nether and Barn Brockall. In addition there was also a Sidan Brockall and a Brock Furlong close by. Dr Ford notes these earlier spellings in her paper, but then inexplicably (and perhaps recklessly) ignores them, giving credence only to the later -hill forms. All of these fields are located on the valley-side adjacent to Ludgbridge Brook; and it seems very likely that the earlier Brockall names are (a) more representative of their original form, and (b) come from OE *brōce halh*, 'the brook hollow'. This is, of course, entirely in keeping with the adjacent road name, Brook Holloway. Indeed, it might indicate that Brook Holloway itself should not be interpreted as, the hollow-way leading to the brook, but instead should be thought of as 'Brook-hollow Way', the road or way (OE *weg*) leading to the brook hollow. Brook Holloway is, apparently, a post-seventeenth-century name (presumably deriving from the surviving Brockall field names): in 1699 the road was called Lusbridge Lane^[2].

In contrast to *brōc*, its simile *burna* seems to have been in use well before AD 730^[10]. It is fairly common across most of the former Hwiccan kingdom (i.e. Worcestershire and Gloucestershire), but appears less frequently in Warwickshire and in Staffordshire. Nevertheless, our first local example, Wombourne, *does* reside in Staffordshire. This name derives from OE *wōn-burna*, which means winding stream. And, if the name Coalbournbrook (a stream in Amblecote) originated in Anglo-Saxon times (as seems likely), it probably started out as OE *col-burna*, 'the coal stream'. This watercourse would have cut through several coal seams which ran close to the ground surface along its course. The suffix -brook was probably added at a relatively late date to form the modern tautological name. *Burna* is also a component of the name Stambermill (between Stourbridge and Lye). This name originates from OE *stan* ('stone' or 'rock'), *burna* ('stream') and *mylen* ('mill'), although, as in the previous example, the final word could have been added in its ME or ModE form at a considerably later date. Clearly, *stanburn*, was an old name for Shepherd's Brook (or, less probably, a section of the river Stour), yet it has survived as part of a later settlement name.

The OE term *bæce* was also sometimes used for a stream or small stream valley, although its later incarnation, *batch*, seems to have been applied with less discrimination—at least in the vicinity of Stourbridge, where we have two examples. The Kowback (or Robache) was a minor tributary of Shepherd's Brook and is discussed further in §§ 8.2.3 and 8.3; while the Clatterbatch was either the brook which runs past Oldswinford Church and Red Hill School or a section of the River Stour apparently bypassed by an artificial channel (perhaps a mill leat or straightened section of the river). I believe it was probably the latter, but in any case, neither of these watercourses is as small as one might expect for the original meaning of *bæce*. This meaning is probably attested more accurately by two examples near Stourbridge mentioned in the tenth-century Swinford charter (§ 7.2): *holan bæce* (hollow brook), being the Salt Brook, and *suðeran holan bæce* (southern hollow brook), being the south-western arm of the brook which flows through Ham Dingle. Both of these watercourses would seem to be in accord with the generally held usage of *bæce*—i.e. describing a stream that flowed in a small water-incised valley or depression.

Very small streams, including those which had a tendency to dry up during the summer months, are often represented in Old English by the term *sīc*. In the north of England this manifests itself in the word 'sike', but in southern counties, the variant 'sitch' is more usually seen^[18]. Despite the small flow of water implied by this term, it also has the connotation ravine or ditch, and seems to indicate water flowing in a cleft or small rocky channel, perhaps on a steep hill side^[7, 19]. Stourbridge has one, or arguably two, examples of this name, neither of which is used today. The first is Ravensitch. On nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century OS maps, this small settlement is shown on the hill-side near Amblecote manor's eastern boundary. Today the site is occupied by the modern housing development around Kittiwake Drive and Nightingale Crescent. The watercourse flowed down a narrow, steeply sloping, valley to the Stour. A second (possible) example is the name *sicanbyrig* which was recorded in a tenth-century charter for an estate in the vicinity of Stourbridge. This referred to a fortified site which has been interpreted variously as being near a dry stream bed or associated with the personal name *Sica*^[26, 33]. A small ravine-like cleft that might conceivably become a minor watercourse in wet weather begins at the proposed location of *sicanbyrig*^[26, 31] and runs down a steep slope for a considerable distance to the south. *Sicanbyrig* has already been mentioned in § 6.3 and is discussed further in §§ 7.1 and 8.3.

Another water-related OE term which is common around the west midlands is *bæth*, meaning bath. It occurs mainly in the widespread name Digbeth which is normally associated with low-lying, watery locations. The examples of Digbeth in Birmingham and Claverley are well known, but as Digbeth usually occurred elsewhere as a minor place name, many examples, like that near Northfield, have fallen into disuse. Stourbridge also had a Digbeth which was located near the bottom end of Lower High Street^[42], presumably on or near the Stour. The origin of the name is uncertain but it might have originated as *dīc bæth*, a pool or watery site surrounded by a dyke (i.e. earth bank), or as *dūcena bæth*, 'duck bath', probably meaning a duck pond^[18].

Another very common term for a pond or pool is OE *mere*. A couple of examples near Stourbridge are known from the tenth-century Swinford charter: *grendels mere*, which seems to have lain on the brook between Oldswinford Church and Red Hill School grounds, and *stiran mere*, which is probably the same pool that today resides at the end of Peartree Drive near Pedmore Common. The former *mere* may have been named after the mythical monster in Beowulf, while the latter probably obtained its name from a more mundane source: the OE word *styr(g)an*, means sturgeon—a fresh-water variety of which is known to have been farmed in medieval times. The Swinford charter is discussed in more detail in § 7.2.

The place-name element *mere* can sometimes be confused with the OE word *mere* (a mare) or *gemære* (boundary); and it often evolves into 'moor' or 'more' in modern place-names. For example, Monmore (Green), near Wolverhampton, derives from OE *manna* and means 'the man's lake' (i.e. 'the man's *mere*')^[14]. At one site in Stourbridge, the converse may have happened. The low-lying parts of the former heath-land between Norton Road and Heath Farm Road was known, in the twentieth century, as 'The Mere' even though no pool is known to have existed there. The closest pool was in the lower-lying land around the Withybrook. It is possible that 'The Mere' represents a case of name transference—see § 8.2—but if this can be ruled out, the name would seem to have indicated nothing more than a wet, boggy site.

However, *mere* should not, in general, be confused with terms for wet and marshy ground. The Anglo-Saxons had several such terms^[18, 19], all but two of which are beyond the scope of this article.

The first element that I'll discuss is *sol*, which means a muddy place. It is not particularly common, but an instance of it is to be found near Kinver. Blakeshall derives, not from *halh* as one might initially suspect, but from *blace sol*^[49]. It is thought to mean 'the black mire' or 'black mirey pool'^[38] and a hollow which, except in the driest of periods, is filled with dark-grey or black mud still exists nearby today^[49].

The second term for a marsh is the OE word *mōr*. This could indicate either a low-lying wet area or an upland region unsuitable for occupation or agriculture. It is not known whether the sense of wet ground or barren ground is foremost in the meaning of this place-name element

as examples of both are to be found. Indeed, it is possible that the emphasis of the word changed over time and from place to place. Around Stourbridge, there are three examples which might have been considered marshy or barren regions. Withymoor in Amblecote probably comes from *mōr* (see also § 6.2.4). And the tract of land that extends northwards from Norton Covert down to Bigmoor playing field, Mary Steven's Park and Gig Mill was, in the 1733 Oldswinford Parish Registers, referred to as 'The Moor'. Although the southern part of this land is fairly elevated it was, until being drained in the twentieth century, crossed by numerous small streams and possessed many marshy areas. The south-eastern extremity of this tract was known locally as 'The Bogs'. The name Pedmore also derives from *mōr* (see § 7.2) and represents a (probably seventh-century) settlement situated amongst several small streams that emanated from the spring line on the western flank of Wychbury Hill.

Mōr is a common place-name element and several instances can be found in the Black Country and surrounding areas. Bradmore, near Wolverhampton, probably comes from OE *brād*, meaning broad, wide or spacious, although it is uncertain whether this name's ending derives from OE *mōr* or *mere*. To the south of the Black Country we have Uffmoor (Wood) which seems to mean Offa's or Huffa's moor or marshland^[38]; and to the west Eymore (now the name of a farm and wood adjacent to a small island in the river Severn) derives from OE *ēg* and *mōr*. Here, *ēg* signifies an island or an area of higher, dry ground in a marsh. In this case the *ēg* element probably refers to the island in the Severn rather than a dry place in the marsh.

6.6 Fords

Names containing the OE element *ford* are very numerous throughout the whole of England, and the Black Country is no exception. Its meaning is the same as in modern English—a place for crossing a river or stream—and this term has been in use since the beginning of the Anglo-Saxon period. Indeed, *ford* is one of the earliest place-name elements to survive from Old English.

Most place names in *ford* must have arisen from the crossing points of innumerable local tracks and watercourses which later became the focii of Anglo-Saxon settlements. Only a minority of these settlements eventually developed into villages, town and cities; most remained minor settlements, were reduced to just field names or disappeared altogether. Mapping the surviving minor names in *ford* is potentially important as it might provide clues to the location of early local route-ways.

By the Anglo-Saxon period, some of the tracks that forded streams had long since developed into long-distance routes, and our first example derives from a ford on such a route. Oldswinford and Kingswinford both lie along the line of an Iron Age salt-way which ran from Droitwich to the ancient regional centre of Penkridge. (The A491 now follows much the same line through Stourbridge and the Black Country.) These settlement names are manorial in origin and arose as a result of the division of a single region which was recorded as being named *SPinford* and *SPynford* in the middle of the tenth century. (The letter *P*, the Wynn, is pronounced as a W sound, as in 'well'.) The name of this region derives from OE *swīn*, meaning 'swine' or 'pig', and probably references the place where the ancient salt-way forded the river Stour^[27, 31, 33]. It seems that the two fragments of *SPynford* were subsequently remodelled producing the pair of Domesday manors we are familiar with today. The prefixes 'Old-' and 'King-' were added to the manorial names in the late medieval period to distinguish between them, and their central villas were then endowed with these names as well. This topic is discussed further in §§ 7.2 and 8.2.2. Sometime in the eleventh or twelfth century, *SPynford*'s ford was replaced by the bridge (OE *brycg*) that ultimately gave Stourbridge its name.

Other local names in *ford* include Ribbesford, near Bewdley, and Kingsford, north of Wolverley. The former derives from the OE words *ribbe*, *bedd* and *ford*, and means 'ford overgrown with, or near to, a bed of Ribwort'. Kingsford seems to have originated from the conjectural folk name *Cēningas*, 'the people named after *Cēn* or *Cēna*' (see the discussion of the *-ingas* element in § 3.6.3). The name *Cēninga ford* subsequently mutated to *Keningeford*

in the twelfth century, the more regal *Kingeford* in the thirteenth, and finally *Kingsford* from 1346 onwards.

To conclude the discussion of names in *ford*, we have one with a somewhat less dignified origin: Shatterford. According to the eminent place-name historians, Sir Allen Mawer and Sir Frank Stenton, Shatterford means 'sewage ford'^[38]; and it is clear it relates to either animal or human excrement. The name could be a reference to a dung heap near the ford, but, more probably, it indicates a ford through a brook that was used as a sewer. This would almost certainly be the nearby Horseley Brook (*horsa brōc* in the tenth century) or a canalised extension of it. Recorded as *Sciteresforda* in AD 996, Shatterford comes from the OE words *scitere* and *ford*, which (I hope) should need no further explanation. Clearly, the Anglo-Saxons were not shy about naming places with words that, today, one would hesitate to use in polite company. While it is not surprising that streams would be used as sewers in the Anglo-Saxon period, one wonders why *Sciteresforda* did not quickly become *Sciteresbrycg*.

6.7 Valleys and hills

Most of the terms for valleys which we find in place names around this region derive from Old English. The Anglo-Saxons had several different words for valleys, each with a fairly specific meaning.

The common place-name element *denu* was used for long, open, and sometimes sinuous, stream valleys or depressions. It often results in modern place names ending in -den, -dean or -dun; and the latter type of name can be difficult to distinguish from names in *dūn* which refer to a hill (see below). Few place names in *denu* exist today in the vicinity of Stourbridge, but two examples were recorded in the tenth-century (see § 7.2): *deonflincford* (probably 'valley-ridge ford') seems to have been located where the Lye to Dudley road crosses the Stour) and *cudan dene* (*Cuda's valley*) was the valley of Lutley Gutter near Foxcote.

I have already mentioned the valley-related element, *halh*, which meant a nook or an isolated place (§ 3.4). *Halh* is connected to OE *holh*, meaning 'hole' or 'hollow', and this sense of *halh* was commonly used for short, but fairly open depressions in the landscape—i.e. those that were more open than a *cumb* (see below), but shorter than a *denu*—regardless of whether they carried a watercourse.

Few of the other OE valley names are apparent in major place names around the Black Country. However, readers with specific local knowledge might encounter them in some minor place names and field names, so I'll briefly introduce two of the more common terms: *dell* and *cumb*. The former was used for very small valleys and sometimes for man-made hollows, while *cumb*, which gives us the modern English word 'coombe', tended to represent valleys which were shorter than a *denu*, but wide in relation to their length. *Cumbs* generally had three steep sides, giving them a bowl or trough shape. This element may be a loan from the unattested British term *kumbos* (from which we get the Welsh *cwm*), or it could be that Anglo-Saxon settlers simply used a word from their existing vocabulary to describe such valleys: OE *cumb* also meant a cup or a vessel. There were several other valley words in the OE lexicon, like *hop*, *slæd* and *dæl*, but unfortunately, there is not space to discuss them here.

The Anglo-Saxons also had a surprisingly large number of words for hills, ridges and elevated ground. It is quite likely that the subtleties of meaning they embodied are not fully understood, but, thanks to the painstaking studies carried out by place-name experts over recent decades, some of the differences between these elements are gradually becoming clear.

Perhaps the commonest OE place-name element for a hill is *dūn*. This is known to have been used from the earliest phases of the Anglo-Saxon migration, and may be a Celtic loan word coming from the Brit *dūno* which was used abundantly in place names during the Romano-British period. *Dūn* usually means a gently rounded hill with a moderately-sized, level summit; and it is thought that use of this term is related to the summit's good potential for settlement^[18, 49]. While Staffordshire and Warwickshire each possess a number of major place names in *dūn*, there are relatively few in Worcestershire, although Bredon, which was mentioned in §

4.2, is a prominent example in that county. And more locally, we have Wilden (near Stourport) which derives from either *wifela dūn* ('beetle hill')^[49] or the personal name *Winela*^[38]. *Dūn* was also used twice in the Swinford charter's boundary clause (§ 7.2). In the first instance (*7long dune...*), it referred to a long escarpment (co-linear with the boundary) that accommodated settlement and open arable fields along its flat top. In the second, (*...to lusedune*) the term meant a small rounded peak on the edge of an already elevated plateau. The prefix *lus-* (meaning literally 'louse', or, figuratively, 'something small or insignificant') in the second example makes it clear that a smaller-than-usual *dūn* was being referenced.

OE *berg* and *beorg*, have already been introduced (§ 5.2). The Anglian form, *berg*, is more likely to have been used in the region around the Black Country. This can mean either a natural hill or an artificial mound (barrow or tumulus). In the former case it generally refers to a low hill, smaller than a *dūn*, having a smooth profile with a gently rising and falling, perhaps elongated, outline, although in some instances it may have had a moderately pointed summit. It is thought that use of this element can sometimes reflect occupation on, or near, the hill: typically the summit is occupied by a single feature of significance such as a farmstead or a village church^[49]. Aggborough, near Kidderminster, sits upon a small, fairly rounded prominence. Its origin is probably *āc berg*^[38], although it is not clear whether the *berg* referred to the hill itself or to a barrow or tumulus upon it. Rubery is thought to derive from OE *rug(g)a berg*, 'rough hill'^[49], the rough adjective probably signifying vegetation upon the *berg* or the rockiness of the topography.

At several sites in the region, there are examples of the OE place-name element *hlāw*. Though sometimes used of a small hill or mound, its original sense was probably 'burial chamber' or 'tumulus'^[49] and it may be that this word was employed in preference to *berg* or *beorg* in cases where the mound had been used, or reused, for pagan Anglo-Saxon burials. Indeed, such burial places with *hlāw* names seem to have marked important early folk meeting sites. These locations often retain names in *hlāw* and later forms of their names tend to end in -low. Drakelow near Kinver, for example, probably derives from OE *draca* (dragon) and *hlāw*^[38]. In several cases entire folk regions were centred upon these important *hlāw* places, and some of these regions survived to become the basis of ninth- or tenth-century hundreds. The Domesday hundred of Oswaldslow (in the vicinity of Worcester) is a good example. It was formed in AD 964 from three earlier hundreds: *Winbergetrowe*, *Cuðbergelawe* and *Wulfereslaw*^[25], the latter two of which contain references to *hlāw* meeting places (the first contains -*trowe*, which refers to a tree which was also a common moot-site marker). And the Oswaldslow triple hundred itself takes its name from 'Oslaf's mound', known as *Oslafeshlau* in the tenth century^[25].

A similar shape of hill may be inferred from the less abundant OE place-name element *hocer*, which seems to have referred to a small rounded hill or mound or to a hill with a hump on it (although in some cases this element has been taken to be an appropriation of the OE word *hocer*, meaning contempt, to indicate land in dispute)^[44]. In contrast to *hlāw*, *hocer* was generally used for a natural, rather than man-made formation. Hocker Hill, near Tipton may contain this term, although its meaning is uncertain. It could, perhaps, be another hill-related tautology.

The modern English word 'hill' (which is rather non-specific) comes from the OE *hyll*. The Anglo-Saxons, however, tended to use the word for a well-defined hill shape. Typically, the summit of a *hyll* was more pointed, pronounced or irregular than that of a *dūn* and, therefore, less suitable for habitation. This distinction is, however, not always observed, particularly in instances of *hyll* originating later in the Anglo-Saxon period. *Hyll* is found abundantly in place names throughout England, particularly in minor names and field names, one local example being Coleshill, which probably means 'the hill near the river Cole'^[49]. It has also been suggested that Coleshill includes a British place name, *Coll*, derived from the PrW *coll*, meaning hazel trees, and that the river name Cole might actually be a 'very early back-formation'^[14]. *Hyll* is, however, thought to have been used rarely before about AD 730^[10], but quite commonly thereafter, so Coleshill could represent the survival of a Celtic name for three centuries after the first waves of Anglo-Saxon immigration and for more than a century after the Germanic immigrants settled the area that would become south Staffordshire.

In addition to those terms already described, the Anglo-Saxons used a variety of more specialised words to describe hills and elevated land having specific topographies. *Ēg*, for example, meant 'island' or 'raised area of dry ground in a marsh' (see §6.5). And the unattested element *ofer* referred to the tip of a promontory, a flat-topped hill spur or to an elongated flat-topped ridge with convex shoulders^[49]. Oreton (Hill) near Wolverhampton may be one example derived from this element; and *windofer*, a landmark recorded in the tenth century near Ounty John Lane in Pedmore certainly is. The element *hoh*, as in Tysoe (Warwickshire), also meant a hill spur, but one having a particular shape: an asymmetrically pointed profile akin to the shape of a human heel. A more generic term for a ridge is represented by OE *hrycg*. This is very common in both major and minor place names. Rugeley, for example, means 'the ridge wood' (or 'the ridge clearing'); and *ruggesende* in the AD 1300 perambulation of Kinver Forest meant 'the end of the ridge' (in that case it referred to Wollaston Ridge, west of Stourbridge, which formed part of the Forest's boundary—see § 7.1). *Cnoll*, meaning 'knoll', was used for a small rounded hill, and *scelf*, 'shelf', (already mentioned in § 3.3 in relation to Selly Oak) referred to a plateau or a ledge.

OE *clif* is an interesting place-name element. Today we think of a cliff as being a precipitous rocky slope or edge, but its original OE meaning encompassed a range of topographical features. The term had three possible meanings: a slope (often, but not always, steep); a river bank, or a small, irregular ridge or break of slope. Although Austcliff (*Ealhstān's* or *Ælfstān's clif*^[38]) near Cookley (which is itself discussed in § 8.1) overlooks the river Stour, its geography would seem to indicate that *clif* is used here in the first-mentioned sense.

There are, in addition, many other OE hill-related place-name elements, like *ōra*, *hlenc*, *hlinc*, *copp* and *ecg*. These are, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this article, but as always, interested readers can find a great deal more information on the topic in Margaret Gelling's publications^[18, 19] some of which are listed in section 10.

7. Place names and perambulations

Before maps became widely used, the boundaries of estates and other regions of import were recorded as written descriptions of the places and landmarks encountered along a perimeter walk (a so-called perambulation). An understanding of place names is obviously very useful for tracing these perambulations; and the results of such research can help in reconstructing the ancient geography of a site, leading to a whole range of fascinating insights. I'll discuss a couple of local examples, both of which are depicted in figure 4.

7.1 The royal forest of Kinver

The first is the Great Perambulation of the Norman Forest of Kinver undertaken in 1300^[5]. Several workers have attempted to interpret this perambulation^[3, 36, 41], but their results have differed somewhat. Fortunately, it has since been possible to clarify a number of its landmarks in the vicinity of Stourbridge^[33]. These include: *Ruggesende*, meaning ridge's end (specifically the northern end of Wollaston ridge near Vicarage road); *Wolfeswrosne*, the glacial hillocks near Norton Covert on the A451 (*-wrosne* is derived from the OE *wrāse* or *wrāsen*, which referred to broken, contorted ground, hills or knolls^[44], as in Wren's Nest, Dudley); *Feckebury*, a fortified site near Burys Hill in Pedmore parish, and *Ovemaste mere*, a pond located near the Droitwich-to-Greensforge Roman road (either at Brakemill Farm, Hagley or at Broom Mill near Blakedown) and within the extensive medieval *Oveley* (Iverley) wood^[45].

This type of analysis can be very informative. In the case of Kinver Forest it has shown, firstly, that much of its south-eastern boundary between Hagley and Chaddesley Corbett, followed the Droitwich-to-Greensforge Roman road. Clearly, that section of the road, at least, had survived (and was presumably in use) some 1200 years after its construction. Secondly, the fortified site *Feckebury* is probably identical with *sicanbyrig* (Sica's fortification^[27] or the fortification by the dry stream bed^[7]) recorded in the perambulation of a local tenth-century Anglo-Saxon estate^[31] (§ 7.2). Although no remains of the fortification can be seen above

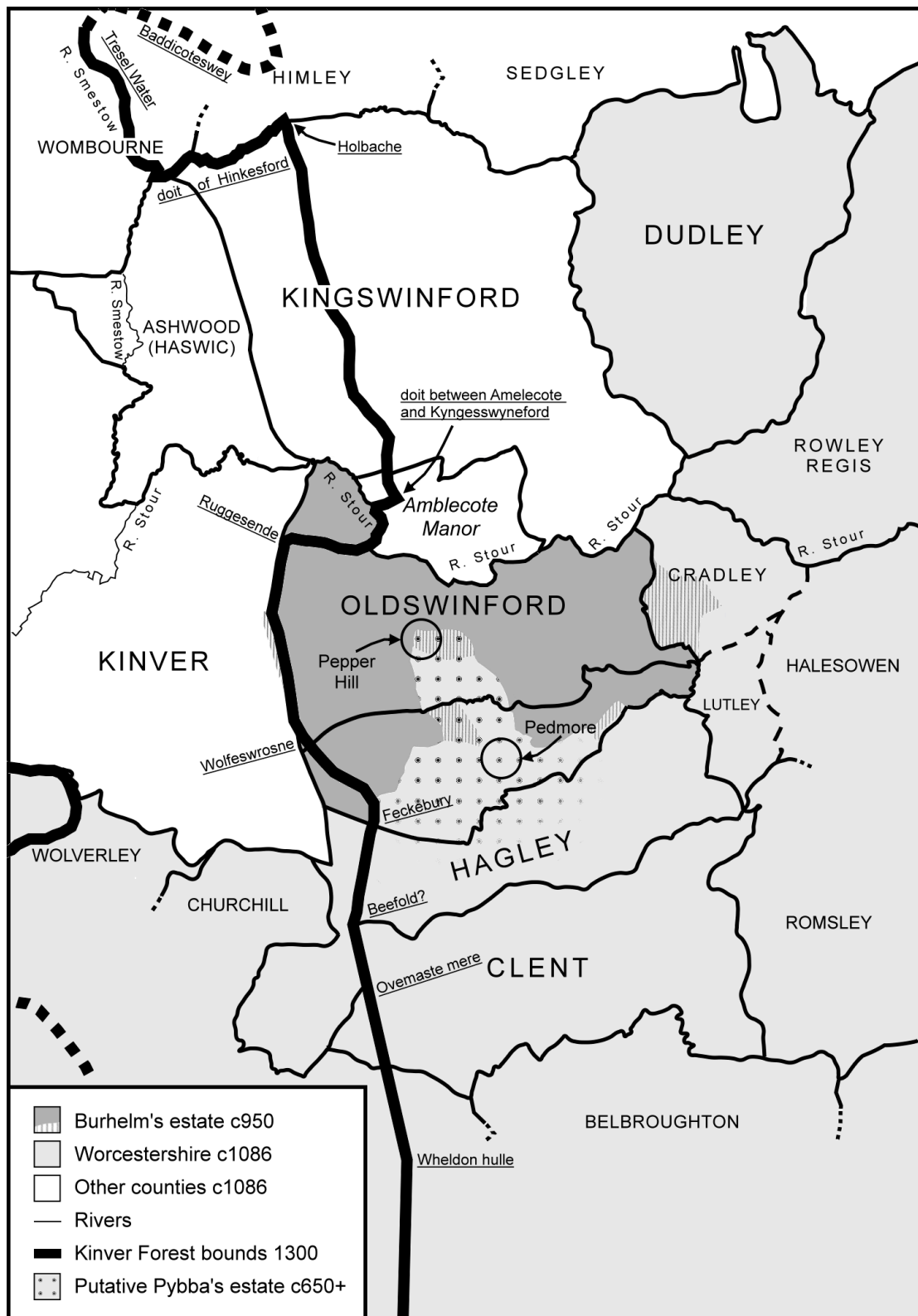


Figure 4. Two local boundary perambulations: Burhelm's estate described in the Swinford charter of c AD950, with the neighbouring conjectural Pybba's estate; and the AD1300 boundary of Kinver Forest with the perambulation's waypoints underlined.

ground today, it must have been substantial enough to survive for at least the 350-year interval between the two perambulations. Thirdly, much of Iverley Wood and the entire vill of Wollaston were enclosed within Kinver Forest. This might have led to the latter being seen as

a separate estate, distinct from the rest of Oldswinford manor, and this could help to explain why various documentary sources, between 1442 and 1676, implied that Wollaston had been a separate manor (or sub-manor of Oldswinford), even though no court books, manor rolls or other concrete evidence of its supposed manorial status actually survive.

7.2 The Swinford charter and the putative Pybba's estate

Another instance in which place-name studies have helped to elucidate an ancient perambulation is the so-called Swinford charter^[29-31, 33]. This charter granted a tract of royal land in the vicinity of (the later) Stourbridge to a nobleman named Burhelm; and by matching the names of perambulatory landmarks to the local landscape I have been able to trace the outline of this early estate. The resulting map shows, amongst other things, that the local manor bounds must have been laid out some time after the charter estate boundaries, and it thereby helps to establish a rough chronology for the formation of the local manors and parishes. The same study also allowed me to estimate the tenth-century extent of Oldswinford's open-field system and to identify several important features of the late Anglo-Saxon landscape (a large oak wood, *acleg*, fishponds named *grendelsmere* and *stiran mere*, and an ancient quarry or stone-working site, *stancofan*)^[31, 33].

More interestingly, however, the perambulation provided hints of an earlier neighbouring estate and its relationship to the settlement of Oldswinford. The boundary of Burhelm's estate circumnavigated, and thereby excluded, the vill of Oldswinford (or whatever it was called then) and Pedmore. Indeed, it seems that the estate's boundary ran around a peninsula of land which occupied much the same ground as these two settlements' field systems. This 'peninsula' was centred on the ancient Droitwich-to-Penkridge salt-way (now the A491), and projected northward from the vicinity of Pedmore and Hagley (figure 4). On this basis, I have since suggested that the vill of Pedmore and Oldswinford could once have been part of a single landholding^[33].

This might be supported by some circumstantial place-name evidence. It is widely accepted that the name Pedmore (written *Pevemore* in 1086; *Pubemora* in 1176; *Pebbemore* in 1291 and 1346, and *Pebmore* from 1297 to 1327^[14, 49]) derives from OE *mōr*—meaning a barren upland, a moor or a marsh^[19]—and the personal name *Pybba*. *Pybba* (also written *Pypba* or *Pyppa* in some sources) was the name of a late-sixth-century Anglian king (c593-c600) who belonged to the dynasty that ruled Mercia during its westwards expansion into this region. In the wider south-west midlands there is an exceptionally high concentration of places incorporating royal names from this dynasty, i.e. *Creoda*, *Penda*, and *Pybba*. It is likely that these personal names grew popular during, and shortly after, each of these kings' reign, and that various locations had acquired their names from more lowly settlers who happened to bear these royal appellations. Pedmore's *Pybba* may well have been the person—perhaps the head of an Anglian family or clan—who, in the first half of the seventh century, drained and settled a tract of land in the vicinity of the present-day village.

Other nearby examples of place names in *Pybba* or *Pyppa* include: Pepwell (*Pybba*'s spring), a farm in Hartlebury; Pepper Wood (*Pybba*'s wood or clearing) near Belbroughton; and Peplow (*Pybba*'s hill or mound) near Hodnet in Shropshire^[52]. That today's 'Pep' or 'Pepper' elements are sometimes derived from the name *Pybba* is interesting because there might also be an example of this descent between Stourbridge and Oldswinford: i.e. the route-way now called Pepper Hill. There is no known modern source for this name; and, in his very comprehensive survey of the street names of Stourbridge, H Jack Haden^[21] also considers the possibility that Pepper Hill could be derived from the Anglian name *Pybba*. It is possible, of course, that the name derives from pepper processing or from plants such as peppermint or pepperwort growing upon the hill, but if Pepper Hill *does* come from the same Anglian royal name as Pedmore, this might indicate a very early (perhaps seventh-century) link between these two places. They could even have both been parts of the same land holding, which might explain why the Swinford charter bounds seem to have circumnavigated all of the land between Pedmore (*Pybba*'s *mōr*) and Pepper Hill (presumably *Pybba*'s *hyll*) as though it had been one contiguous block.

8. Pitfalls and cautions

So far we have discussed the origins of some settlement names within the Black Country and adjacent regions. We have also seen how place names can provide an insight into ancient cultures, religion and land use, especially where other historical sources are available to help contextualize the name. But, of course, all this requires us to interpret each place name correctly, and that is not always as straightforward as it might initially seem.

8.1 Recognising a name's original form

Unless we have access to early forms of a place name, it can sometimes be very difficult to interpret its meaning. I have already touched upon the problem of differentiating between names in *hām* and *hamm* (§ 6.4), and Blakeshall's derivation from *sol* rather than *halh* (§ 6.5) but these are not the only difficulties. The modern forms of all kinds of ancient place name tend to be ambiguous, and we usually need other sources of evidence (documentary, archaeological or topographical) to understand their original meanings. Another example may be found in the modern name Cookley (near the village of Wolverley). This would, at first, appear to be a simple *lēah* name, but ancient documentary sources reveal that it actually developed from *Culnan clif* (meaning *Culna's Cliff*) in AD 964, through *Culleclive*, *Culla clife*, *Colecliff* and *Cookcliffe* to the form we know today^[38]. It is regrettably the case that many minor place names which might well be of some antiquity have no known earlier forms, and trying to ascribe an early meaning to them can lead to highly erroneous conclusions.

Conversely, some names having little known history might actually be relatively modern, and incorrectly presuming a greater age is obviously to be avoided. This pitfall is amply illustrated by Oakleigh House which was depicted on nineteenth century Ordnance Survey maps in the vicinity of Love Lane near the Oldswinford-Pedmore parish boundary. The -leigh element (from OE *lēah*) means a wood; and, although the house is known to have been built only in 1870^[21] upon a former medieval open field^[2] rather than in a wooded area, and no other references to a nearby oak wood are known, the name has, quite understandably, misled a number of researchers over the last century into believing that it represented the site of *acleg* (oak *lēah*) mentioned in the tenth-century Swinford charter (§ 7.2). This superficially convincing 'red herring' made it almost impossible for these researchers to construct a coherent boundary line from the remaining landmarks in the charter's perambulation.

8.2 Migration of place names

It should not always be assumed that early instances of a place name correspond to the same geographical location as its modern counterpart.

8.2.1 Physical movement

It is not unknown for farmsteads and other settlements to seemingly move across the landscape as new buildings are constructed at their margins and old buildings fall into disuse elsewhere. Short-distance migration of some entire villages may have resulted from economic pressures that caused a gradual movement of householders away from the original village core—e.g. to a site on a nearby through road—and in some instances disease, famine and changes in farming practice (e.g. from arable to less labour-intensive pastoral) are known to have caused wholesale depopulation of a village, sometimes to be followed by resettlement some distance away. Whilst such movement is thought to have been comparatively rare, the possibility of site relocation should always be borne in mind when interpreting ancient place names.

8.2.2 Natural transference

In addition to physical movement of a settlement, place names themselves sometimes get transferred to a distant location. One circumstance in which this can happen is when the name comes to refer to an extended region. I have already mentioned Ismere (§ 4) which, in the early 20th century, was thought to be an example of this kind of transference^[13, 38] (although this is now doubted by some). Another more definite example is illustrated by the names Oldswinford and Kingswinford. These are manorial names which were later conferred upon each manor's principal settlement (whereas, in most other cases, the manor is named after its main settlement). In the Domesday survey, both of these manors were known by essentially the same name, Swinford (actually *Suineford* and *Swinesford*, with Kingswinford being distinguished by the words *Rex tenet*, 'The King holds'); and it is clear from the Swinford charter (§ 7.2) that they were originally named after a ford that existed on their dividing boundary (the River Stour). Thus, these names ultimately derive from a place that is 1 and 2½ miles, from their respective settlement centres. They are interesting for that reason: as we have seen, most other settlements are named after a feature that existed at, or close to, the settlement site. Even the names of other nearby manorial centres in north Worcestershire and south Staffordshire, seem to have originated from features local to each manor's central place, and only later were the names applied to the manor as a whole. Oldswinford and Kingswinford are different, and this might be indicative of their mechanism of origin. Indeed, the Swinford charter *does* suggest that Oldswinford manor and its neighbour Pedmore resulted from an artificial division and restructuring of older land units^[31, 33].

There are also many modern examples of place name transfers resulting from the conscious decisions of local authorities: Yarnborough Hill, a modern form of Yearnbarrow Hill (which is an old name for Hanbury Hill in Stourbridge), was transferred in 1966 to a new residential road between Oldswinford and Norton^[21]. Similarly, Lusbridge Close, a small development between Foxcote and Colley Gate, took its name from the pre-twentieth-century form of Ludgbridge, a settlement and brook located over a mile away to the west. Obviously one must try to rule out any such modern transfers before reading too much into what might initially seem to be an old place name.

8.2.3 Unintentional transference

Modern name transference is usually quite obvious. But in a small fraction of cases it is less so—particularly when a documentary reference to an old place name becomes misinterpreted by modern historians and thereby applied to the wrong geographical location. One such example lies near Stourbridge: i.e. the brook currently labelled Kowbatch on Google Maps. The name—or more accurately its 'original' form, *Kowback*—is known only from a perambulation of Bedcote sub-manor that was compiled by Bishop Charles Lyttelton in 1754 from the proceedings of a Court Baron of Thomas Jervois held in 1622. It has been supposed by certain researchers that *Kowback* referred to the brook which flows through Oldswinford village. However, a careful analysis of Bishop Lyttelton's perambulation shows that the *Kowback* was, instead, a minor tributary of Shepherds Brook that sprang from the hill side near Hatfield Road, Lye (the site of the former monastic farm, Pircote Grange)^[32] as illustrated in figure 5. Regrettably this misattribution has since been reproduced in a number of online publications and services including Google Maps and Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council's web site—sources which may well be viewed uncritically by the majority of users. (Google Maps, incidentally, doesn't have a good record so far as its naming of local watercourses is concerned: when I viewed it in April 2016, the label 'River Stour' was wrongly attached to the Staffordshire-and-Worcestershire Canal, Smestow River *and* to Wannerton Brook!)

8.3. Place-name mutation

Place names mutate over long periods of time. The origin of the river name Rea has already been mentioned (§ 4.1), but the vast majority of place names mutate via more natural linguistic processes. Factors such as dialectal changes have, at various times, influenced both vowel sounds and consonants; and this is most noticeable when there has been a

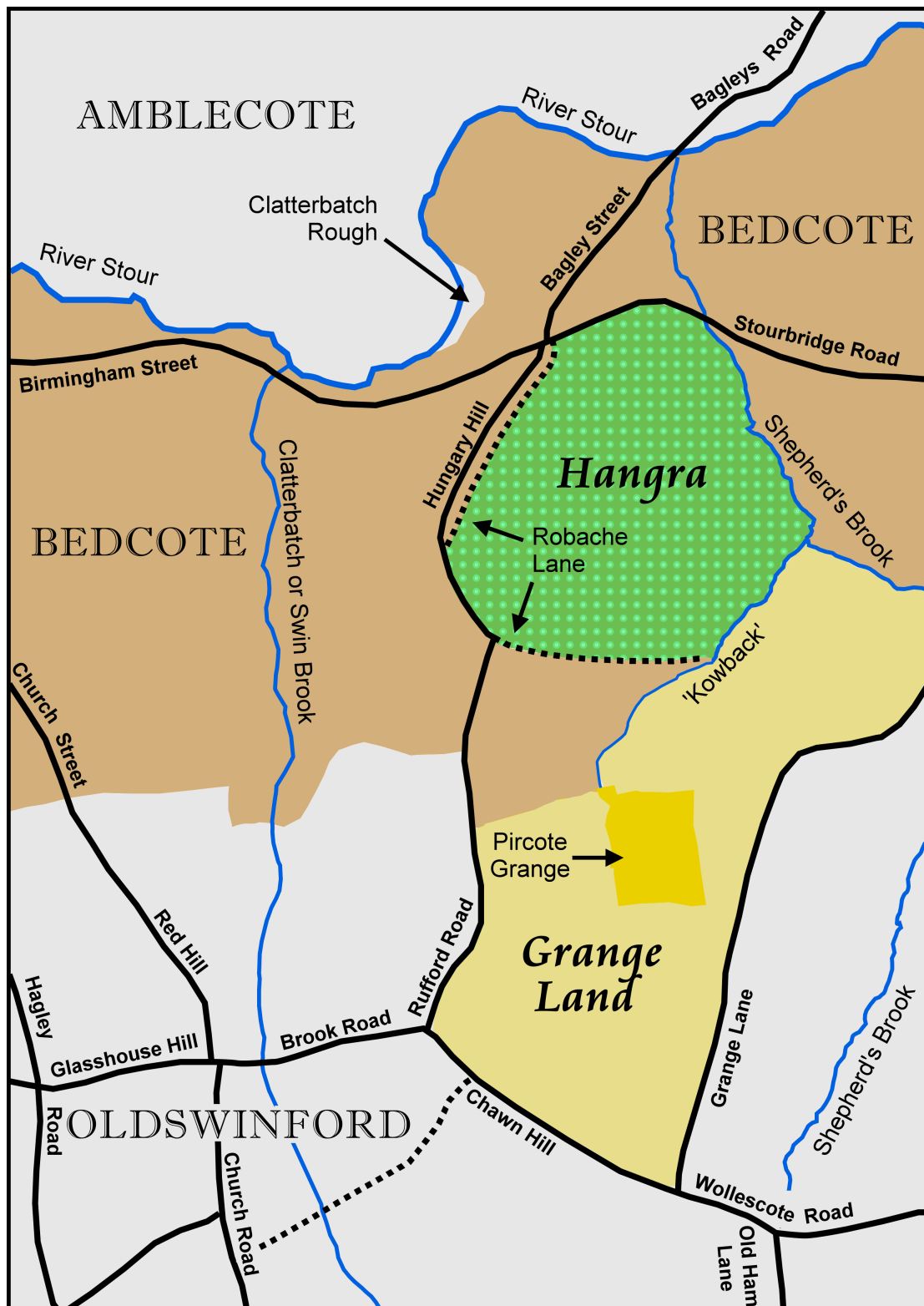


Figure 5. The location of the 'Kowback' as described in Bishop Charles Lyttleton's 1754 perambulation of Bedcote sub-manor, and the roughly contemporaneous Robache Lane.

significant cultural transformation such as accompanied the Anglo-Saxon settlement and the Norman invasion. In most cases, scribes would not have had access to earlier written examples of a name, and they would, instead, spell each one phonetically. They would have had to interpret name elements as they heard them, and it was natural for them to do this in line with their own cultural and linguistic norms. The name Enville, for example, originated

before 1086 as *Efnefeld* (from OE *efn* for smooth and *feld* for open land or field), yet its *-feld* ending was later discarded in favour of the Norman *-ville*^[14] by post-conquest scribes.

Having access to ancient spellings illustrates the progression of vowel and consonant sounds over the centuries, and this can be a great help in disambiguating the form and meaning of a place name.

In the last few hundred years, place names have been recorded more frequently and their spellings have tended to stabilise. Unfortunately, however, written references can also be prone to misinterpretation. This is apparent in the example of the *Kowback* mentioned previously (§ 8.2.3). The Oldswinford manor court roll of 1630 refers to a route named *Robache Lane*, which can be identified as the modern Hungary Hill^[42]. It is clear from local maps that *Robache Lane* provided access to the *Kowback*, and one suspects that both of these names refer to the same geographical feature. Indeed, apart from the initial letter, the word *Robache* is strikingly similar to *Kowback*. The second elements of these names, *-bache* and *-back*, are simply variant spellings derived from the OE *baece*, meaning either a stream or a 'fairly well marked, but not dramatic, (stream) valley'^[18, 19, 43]. The letter *w* in *Kowback* is probably not significant given that phonetically-based spelling was common. That leaves only the different initial letters of the names to be explained. In some seventeenth-century handwritten scripts, the letters *K* and *R* look remarkably similar, particularly in the elaborate upper-case Gothic forms that were prevalent then (indeed, some early scripts do not even include a letter *K*); and it is not inconceivable that a misreading or transcription error—either historical or modern—has resulted in two different versions of the same name making their way into modern printed works. Perhaps the most convincing reason for believing that *Kowback* and *Robache* represent the same name arises from the question: if the *bache* in *Robache* did not refer to the *Kowback*, what brook did it refer to? There certainly seems to have been no other watercourse in the vicinity.

As far as the name *Robache* is concerned, its first element probably comes from OE *rūh* or *rūgan*, meaning rough^[44]. The latter commonly produces modern place names beginning with a 'Row' syllable (i.e. either a *ræu* or *rau* sound). The 'rough' adjective could have arisen because the land through which the brook flowed was probably wooded in the medieval period (the place name and road name Hungary Hill may have derived from OE *hangra* or *hongra*, which means a wood on a steep slope^[32]) and the ground around the brook might therefore have been ungrazed and overgrown.

A similar mis-spelling or transcription error seems to have occurred in the case of *Feckebury* listed in the AD 1300 perambulation of Kinver Forest^[33]: it was, in all probability, the same monument as the Swinford charter's *Sicanbyrig*, as noted in § 7.1.

Of course, a small minority of place names did change in antiquity—i.e. the underlying meaning of the names changed. The now lost name, *Mortune* (in Bredon parish), which meant 'marsh *tūn*', became *Upthorp*, 'the upper hamlet'. And Evesham probably started out as *Cronohamme*, meaning 'cranes' *hamm*', before its name was changed to *Eof's hamm*^[25].

Some such changes might reflect alterations in the place's status or function. Ashwood, for example, has been identified with the Domesday survey's *Haswic* and with *Eswich* referenced in a charter of AD 994 (but erroneously dated 996). Both *Has-* and *Es-* can be equated to the modern Ash- (tree), but the *-wic* and *-wich* endings are more problematic. The change from the *-wic(h)* to the *-wood* ending probably arose because, by the time of the Domesday survey, *Haswic* (formerly *Eswich*) had been absorbed into the royal Forest of Kinver and was listed as waste. Woods were, however, also recorded at Haswic and it is likely that, in subsequent decades, the manor came to be known by reference to its extensive Ash woods rather than its long-abandoned *wīc*.

9. Concluding remarks

Despite the inherent difficulties in place-name study, the subject can be highly rewarding. Perhaps its greatest value is in supplementing, and helping to interpret, the information contained in historical literature (ancient charters, surveys, inventories etc.); and it is a particularly powerful tool when combined with an analysis of the modern-day topography. Some of the examples given here have demonstrated just how much of the ancient landscape can be reconstructed with these techniques. I have concentrated upon the area around Stourbridge, but I hope this article might move one or two readers to look more deeply into the corpus of place names in their own locality.

Good books help, of course, and several are listed in the *References* section below. Dictionaries of place names and place-name elements^[14, 43, 44, 49] are indispensable. While Victor Watts' *Cambridge Dictionary of English Place Names*^[49] is extremely comprehensive and the most up-to-date work available, the texts by Smith^[43, 44] and Ekwall^[14] are also essential classic works. In addition, I would wholeheartedly recommend Margaret Gelling's books on place names in the landscape^[18-20]. The aforementioned books deal with the whole of England, but for coverage of more minor local place-names one currently has to look to relatively old, though still invaluable, texts such as those by A Mawer and FM Stenton^[38] or WH Duignan^[12, 13]. In addition to his dictionary of *English Field Names*^[15], John Field has written several other books on the subject, and all are well worth reading.

If nothing else, place names are interesting curiosities. But in many cases they can open up a completely new dimension of local history. Why not take a closer look at your own area: you never know what you might discover.

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