

PLACE-NAMES AND ANGLO-SAXON PAGANISM*

This thesis is an evaluation of four place-name groups believed to possess pagan Anglo-Saxon significance. The first consists of places incorporating the names of pagan Anglo-Saxon deities (Wōden, Thunor, Tīw). The second includes those names incorporating the elements wīg (wēoh) and hearg, represented as meaning 'temple, sanctuary'. The next group, the Grim's Ditch place-names, is thought to be related to the god-names above because of Odin's Grímr byname in Scandinavian tradition. Lastly, we have the hæðen byrgels 'heathen burial' group, a phrase found in charter boundary surveys. Though not of pagan origin, hæðen byrgels is believed to identify the location of pagan Anglo-Saxon gravesites as recognized by Christian observers.

The name groups are examined in conjunction with recent historical, archaeological and etymological evidence. The conclusion reached is that none of them seems to have been 'pagan' in the sense of relating to heathen Anglo-Saxon religious or burial sites. The god-names, probably coined during Christian Anglo-Saxon times, appear to have honoured the legendary remnants of euhemerised deities. The hearg/wīg names, though stemming from the pagan period, might have alluded to Romano-British structures by virtue of their stone appearance (hearg could mean 'stone rise or formation') or because pagan Anglo-Saxons either knew or believed such sites were places of Romano-British worship. Grim was commonly employed as a giant's name in northern European tradition. Hence 'Grim the giant' might have been appropriately nominated as the builder of the huge earthworks bearing his name. Hæðen byrgels, rather than referring to pagan Anglo-Saxon gravesites, could have named the graves of Vikings killed in battle on the English side of the Danelaw division.

NOTE

* This is a summary of the doctoral thesis presented at the University of Cambridge in 1983.

COLDHARBOUR - FOR THE LAST TIME?*

Few place-names can have had so much historical and archaeological weight thrust undeservedly upon them as Coldharbour. A range of the pre-scientific etymologies suggested for it was catalogued by Arthur Bonner in an Appendix to The Place-names of Surrey (1934), and readers wishing for a self-inflicted wince may look there for one (p.409). The persistent may consult the indexes to the first three series of Notes and Queries, for there was no more popular topic during the first decades of that periodical's existence.¹

My aim is to pull the loose ends of existing knowledge together. One loose end will not allow itself to be spun into the thread of the argument, namely that of the actual origin of the name-form. I propose, and surely uncontroversially, to follow Bonner in assuming that it is a derogatory name of the same kind as Starveall, Cold Comfort, Mockbeggar, and the rest. Having made this assumption, I intend to account for the enormous popularity of the name after 1600. There are well over 300 such names in the United Kingdom, almost exclusively in England. It is a commonplace that very few attestations of the name date from before 1600; I shall demonstrate that there is a good reason for this, and that the paucity of earlier mentions is no accident of transmission.

The most persistent fable about Coldharbour is that it denotes a Roman-period way-station in association with known or surmised Roman roads. Two among many representatives of this view are Payne (1880) and Scott Robertson (1880), from a period when this opinion was scarcely disputed. (Many earlier editors of volumes of the Victoria County History felt compelled to express an opinion on the matter.) Bonner rejected it quite firmly, and correctly; but it re-emerged in the influential book by the Viatores, published in 1964, and in a paper by Ogden (1967) which was backed by more sophisticated statistical methods than were available to Bonner (to Bonner's great good fortune). The evidence is available to dispose once and for all of this 'caravanserai hypothesis', or at any rate to make it most improbable. The implications of that hypothesis should be removed forthwith from OED (under harbour). We should remember that no-one has ever claimed to have discovered anything of archaeological interest in a systematic way at Coldharbour sites (though as Ogden points out (1967: 16) they could conceivably have been camping-sites rather than actual structures). This of itself ought to pour a fair amount of cold water on the 'caravanserai hypothesis'. Furthermore, no Coldharbour ever appears in an OE charter boundary, or any analogous ME document, so far as I know. I would not agree, therefore, with J. McN. Dodgson, PNCh 5(1: ii), p.222, that it is likely that there was a ME generic term *caldherber(g). The name-form would simply be yet another of the type Cold Kitchen, Coldcoats (Caldecott) and so on.²

The earliest structure known which came to be called Coldharbour is the tower of 1240 in the Tower of London, but it is not known for certain when the name was first applied to it: The first attestation is in 1533 (Henry VIII's Letters and Papers). Nobody will doubt the appropriateness of this name for a prison. (It was demolished during the Commonwealth.) The first place we know to have been so named is the messuage acquired by Sir John Abel in c.1317 situated in the London ward of Dowgate, which Robertson (1968: 45) refers to as an 'inn'. It was called Coldhakber (sic) in 1307 (Ekwall 1954: 150). Another Coldharbour turned up later in the century on another property of Abel's in Camberwell (Sr), as Bonner points out.

Presumably this is a simple, though early, instance of name-transfer, or perhaps the Camberwell place was treated for certain purposes as part of the City manor. The only other Coldharbours known before 1600 are in the parishes of Hopton (Db, 1334), Romiley (Ch, 1510), Stoke Gifford (Gl, 1540), Westbury (Gl, 1541) and Wennington and High Ongar in Essex (cf. PNEss 139, 74).³ Both of these last two have attestations in the sixteenth century. In the light of the paragraphs that follow, readers will see that these were probably independently coined.⁴ I suspect that they, and they alone, are not derogatory in origin in the same way as the later names are. They will be original, but not necessarily ancient, coinages of the same type as Caldecott and the like.

According to Bonner, there is just one literary mention dating from before 1600, by Skelton (temp. Henry VII); however, a diligent search of the past and present canon of Skelton's works has not revealed it. Curiously, the quotation as Bonner gives it is verbatim identical with a Nova Scotian folk rhyme reported by correspondent X in Notes and Queries for 17/6/1865.

A key figure in the story of the name's dispersion is Sir John de Pulteney (variously spelt; his name survives in the name of St Lawrence Pountney parish in the City). He was the next person to hold the title to the messuage in Dowgate ward after Abel. He was a wealthy London merchant who was Lord Mayor four times, and sufficiently rich to build himself a magnificent house which took its name from the messuage. Five of Pulteney's Kent and Middlesex estates also have Coldharbours, according to Bonner - more cases of name-transfer, possibly, though there is actually no evidence that they were so named in his time. This great house, after Pulteney's death in 1349, passed through several noble and royal hands (cf. Stow 1603: 236-7) and was a place fit for royalty to stay in; Richard II dined there in 1397 and Henry VII's mother stayed there in 1501 (cf. London Chronicle, BL Cotton MS Vitellius A XVI (3); Stow; and Norman 1901: 261). It eventually fetched up in the hands of the sixth Earl of Shrewsbury in the later sixteenth century. By now the house was fairly elderly, and Shrewsbury had other places to live in. In 1590 (Norman 1901) he had it taken down and 'in place thereof built a great number of small tenements, now letten out for great rents to people of all sorts' (Stow in his 1603 edition) which soon became a byword for poverty, they not having the means to buy coal to make its chimneys smoke (cf. Heywood and Rowley's Fortune by Land and Sea (III, 1) of 1655). So many authors refer to Coldharbour in the period immediately after c.1600 that it is hard to know when to stop citing them.⁵

The cliché value of the expression may have persisted at least till the middle of the seventeenth century, for Evelyn appears to allude to it in his diary under c. May 1646, when amongst the snows of the Alps, in a remark which appears to have been opaque to modern commentators (e.g. de Beer in his 1955 edition). As already stated, Heywood and Rowley mentioned it in 1655. The tenements disappeared for good in the Great Fire of 1666; Evelyn and Pepys mention the destruction of Thames Street in which it stood; two documents in Jones (1966; A4 and B1056) contain proposals for the rebuilding of the site.

By 1608-9, the London property had come to be known as a common law sanctuary, apparently for debtors (Middleton Trick II, 1; Jonson Epicoene II, 5). Significantly, OED, under sanctuary, mentions that certain places, including mainly 'actual or reputed precincts of former royal palaces', were used as sanctuaries till 1696-7; let us recall that the London Coldharbour had had royal owners (Stow 1603: 236-7). Its privileges were revoked in 1608 by James I's second charter to the City.

However, it is obvious that not all our Coldharbours can have been sanctuaries valid under common law, and the existence of sanctuary rights at one is not at all likely to be relevant in accounting for the names of the others.

The building, by then called Shrewsbury House, can be seen on Norden's plan of London of 1593. It has a waterside frontage. There is a clear picture, of doubtful origin, in Besant (1900: 115). The ancient name for the messuage appears to have been revived for it and it is visible with the name Coldharbour (in various spellings) on Norden's Civitas Londini of 1600, on Ryther's 'aerial-view' map of 1604 and on Visscher's famous view of the Thames dated 1616; on the latter it is by far the tallest building on the waterfront, not excluding Baynard's Castle. As Watermen's Hall, in later years, it is shown on Wilkinson's view (after Hollar, c.1650) on Plate XXXV attached to Norman's article. I should point out that there are considerable discrepancies among the representations of the building in the pictures mentioned, and that I am assuming that they are all intended to represent the tenement block.

The reason for the popularity of the name after c.1600 is now immediately apparent;⁶ the Earl of Shrewsbury's 'investment' was clearly the talking point of London in the early 1600s - a slum created at a stroke from a noble property in straitened circumstances. Holdsworth (1984) also argues that there is an additional allusion in the name in the eyes of our seventeenth-century forebears, namely to the word coal 'bawd, pander', which occurs in Marston's The Malcontent (redone by Webster in 1604), and as is inevitable the poor have the assumption of sexual licence foisted on them too, just as the inhabitants of the Seven Dials did by the time of John Gay and those of Whitechapel by the mid nineteenth century.

To conclude: the name Coldharbour was applied from c.1600 till c.1666 as a fashionable derogatory term for a miserable house (usually, it appears, at some distance from others). Some of these may have been wayside shelters of the kind envisaged by Ekwall (in DEPN, fourth edition; he is more circumspect in 1954) and many others. The form of the name in itself being suggestive either literally or in the seventeenth-century sense I have just mentioned, must have encouraged its application in that way. But, taking the historical background into account, it is now quite clear that the name-form Coldharbour does not of itself mean such a shelter. The later, even nineteenth-century, applications that Bonner reports must date from a time when the allusion was no longer topical, but when the literal sense of the elements in the name was paramount. The date suggested as crucial seems also to be consistent with the appearance of the name in Virginia (the site of the battles by Richmond in 1832/4), Nova Scotia and New York State (cf. X (1865: 484)), since these areas were in the throes of colonization precisely then (i.e. mid seventeenth century).⁷ I believe that my suggestion is the only way of accounting in a simple manner for the predominantly south-eastern distribution of the name in England (see the map in Ogden 1967); for the overwhelming preponderance of Coldharbour over other derogatory names for inhabited places; and for the date after which the majority are first recorded - in the first instance, before 1600, there were no more than nine original coinings, so far as we know at present. The only similar massive upsurge in the use of such a name is in the case of Mockbeggar, which I believe became popular after being used as a literary device by Taylor the water-poet in 1622 in The Water-Cormorant (C2b) (the quotation is in OED under mock-beggar).

APPENDIX

WITHOUT COMMENT

In the Ravenna Cosmography (269, 1; 336, 13) there is mention of a place called Tabernis frigidis on a Roman road near Pisa. It is the only occurrence of the Latin word frigid- 'cold' that I know of in a place-name. It is possible that another name of the same form needs to be reconstructed on a Roman road in Mauritania (162, 14/16; 345, 7/9). It is curious that the name appears to mean 'at the cold booths or shelters', exactly analogously to Coldharbour, with due allowance for grammatical number and case.

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NOTES

- * I am very grateful to Alexander Rumble and to John Field for help in improving the original draft of this article.
1. The matter seems to have been opened for the first time by R. Colt Hoare in his Ancient History of Wiltshire, vol.1, of 1810, and was pursued by C. H. Hartshorne in his Salopia Antiqua of 1841, pp.255-8. The literature burgeoned after W. H. Smyth's letter to the editor in Archaeologia 33 (1849), pp.125-8, and a series of articles in the Freemasons' Magazine around 1858 by H. Clarke.
 2. Reaney, in PNC, wants to treat it as implying remoteness or exposedness, which seems to me not entirely necessary in the light of what follows.
 3. Ogden also claims thirteenth-century origins for one in Lower Heyford (O), but this is probably a late reformation of a different name (PNO 219).
 4. It is just possible that the High Ongar name could have earlier roots; there was a coleboge welle in or near the parish (KCD 813; Sawyer 1036), but this seems unlikely to be relevant.
 5. Hall, in his Satires (V, 1), mentions it, and Bonner ascribes the mention to the date 'c.1598', with which Norman concurs. Middleton in his Black Book of 1604 (vol. viii, p.14 in Bullen's edition) and A Trick to Catch the Old One (II, 1) (1608) - cf. Holdsworth 1984: 243, 247; Jonson in Epicoene, or the Silent Woman (II, 5 in Beaurline's edition) (1609); Webster in Westward Ho (IV, 2) (staged in 1605).
 6. It is instructive to compare the number of Coldharbours known from the four centuries before 1600, namely nine, with the number emerging for the first time in the seventeenth century. Those known to me are eleven in number: Warminster (W 1609), Poplar (Mx, 1617; = Ogden's Blackwall (K, 1617) ???), Hatfield (Hrt, 1626), Box (W, 1630), New Mills (Db, 1641), Salehurst (Sx, 1659), Witley (Sr, 1666), Capel (Sr, 1675). Finchley (Mx, 1675; = Ogden's Friern Barnet (Mx, 1675) ???), Bletchingley (Sr, 1680) and East Hoathly (Sx, 1697). Even allowing for the upsurge in the keeping of records, and taking due account

of the insignificance of the places concerned, this post-1600 activity seems striking to me.

7. However, I do not know whether all the New World names are really instances of our name; thus the Nova Scotia Cole Harbour is genuinely a harbour in the modern sense of the word, and in an area not settled till 1749. Cole Harbor in North Dakota is on a lake, and, by virtue of being in North Dakota, of late origin.

AN UNTAPPED SOURCE FOR IRISH PLACE-NAMES

Remarkably little use has been made of cartographic evidence in the elucidation of Irish place-names, partly because textual material is so plentiful but also because most scholars in this field have had a linguistic rather than a geographic perspective. Yet it is precisely for the later period, when textual material was becoming sparser and linguistic change more pronounced, that the map evidence is most prolific. The many European and English maps dating from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries have been used to trace the evolution of town and village names in a handful of Irish counties,¹ while the same type of evidence has formed the basis for an (as yet unpublished) paper on the English versions of the names of Ireland's principal physical features.

The Ordnance Survey (6" to 1 mile) first editions for the various Irish counties date back to the period 1833-1846, though of course the actual surveying was completed rather earlier.² The Survey maps provide a cornucopia of place-names, thanks largely to the herculean efforts of John O'Donovan who garnered tirelessly while the tide of the Irish language ebbed around him. O'Donovan's work is preserved in part on the 6" Survey maps themselves but also in the various Name-Books and Letter-Books kept in the Irish Ordnance Survey in Phoenix Park, Dublin and in the Royal Irish Academy in Kildare Street, Dublin.³

For the period between the completion of Petty's survey in the mid-seventeenth century and the publication of the Ordnance maps in the years around 1840 a great void exists. This chasm is filled in part by the maps attached to the Reports of the Commissioners on the Nature and Extent of the Bogs in Ireland. These sheets were prepared by various surveyors including J. Alexander Jones, David Aher, Alexander Nimmo, Richard Griffith, and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, and were published in limited editions in the years between 1810 and 1814. Relatively few copies have survived, but sets are preserved in the National Library of Ireland, Dublin, the Geography Department, University College, Galway, and elsewhere. Since Irish bogland is so widely distributed at least half of the Irish counties were covered in part by these surveys which were drawn out on various scales, usually either 1½" to 1 mile or 2" to 1 mile.

Despite the high reputation of some of the surveyors, the quality of the surveys varies considerably and in some instances the degree of accuracy is so low that the identification of places can prove difficult. Nevertheless these maps do contain a great corpus of place-name material which has never been explored.

In order to test the nature and extent of this material and its value from an onomastic viewpoint one small district (that covered by Plate XIII No.4) was selected for intensive scrutiny. The district in question is located immediately to the east of Athenry town in Co. Galway, and covers an area of approximately 220 square miles. It lies between the town of Athenry and the 'villages' of New Inn and Tiaquin. J. Alexander Jones was the engineer who levelled and surveyed it in the year 1812, though his map was not printed until 1814.

Jones recorded a total of 55 names for this area - not a very high number by Irish standards, but it must be remembered that the boglands were negative areas from a settlement viewpoint and so contained a relatively low density of place-names. Jones's versions of the names are set out below, followed by the Ordnance Survey versions (where available) and the numbers of the County Galway 6" Ordnance Sheets on which they occur.