

BURH AND BEORG IN DEVON*

The potential value of place-names derived from OE burh (dative sg. byrig) and beorg in indicating sites of interest to the archaeologist or historian has long been recognized, and has recently been summarized by Dr Gelling (1978). Quite apart from the problem of actually telling them apart, neither word is of course an infallible indicator of an archaeological site: beorg is often a natural hill rather than any man-made tumulus (ibidem, 133) and the range of possible shades of meaning for burh - from hill-fort to manor - is so extensive (e.g., Smith 1956, 58-62) that its value in identifying a site is of the most general kind. Nevertheless, archaeologists have regularly found sites of interest by looking more closely at places with berry/barrow/borough names; and, perhaps more often, toponymists and historians have located charter boundary-points or settlements by reference to visible antiquities such as hill-forts or prominent barrows which can tentatively be identified with such names in early documents.

In such cases, extant or recorded visible field-evidence for the hill-fort, barrow or manorial enclosure may be thought to be a prerequisite for the elucidation of a promising name, be it from burh or from beorg. Thus Gelling (1978, 143) states: 'It will be apparent ... that many names containing burh, byrig are not of special interest to the prehistorian, but it is not too difficult, in practice, to decide whether such a name refers to a hill-fort'. The present writer, however, arriving at this problem from the archaeological side of things (and a height of some 2000 ft), would like to suggest an area of information not generally used by the historian, who relies largely on mapped archaeological data, whether the one-inch or 1:25,000 map series, however early the map.

The present or recent survival of upstanding archaeological monuments, such as hill-forts, lesser earthwork-enclosed settlement sites, and barrows, which might be expected to have featured in place-name formation is highly variable throughout Britain and it is necessary here briefly to review the factors affecting this survival.

In agriculturally marginal or upland areas, or those areas with a tradition of permanent pasture, the state of preservation of many field monuments is often excellent: the land may have been under little pressure from cultivation almost since the construction of the monument. Other parts of the country, however, have been heavily cultivated for many years, resulting in the survival

of only the most robustly-constructed or unobtrusively-sited field monuments, and consequently there is a massive imbalance in the availability of archaeological information for these two different types of landscape. (The destruction of archaeological landscapes by agriculture, though frighteningly accelerated in recent years, is as old as agriculture itself, and many excavated sites show evidence of the destruction of earlier monuments before the end of the prehistoric period.) The variation in the survival of sites is often intensified by the materials available: a barrow is likely to be built of stone on the granite uplands but of turf in a stone-free area, and this affects its resistance to destruction. A division of land-use patterns such as the above is of course crude and somewhat misleading in relation to archaeology: our present-day 'marginal' landscapes can be shown to be in many cases the product of too much cultivation in the past (cf. Dimbleby 1962), but the imbalance in both the quantity and the quality of information surviving for the archaeologist and historian in differing environments must always be borne in mind.

For the archaeologist there are two main ways to try to get to grips with the 'ploughed-flat' landscape. One is by fieldwalking: the recovery of residual artefactual material by systematic examination of ploughed fields, where concentrations of finds may indicate sites, however interpreted. The other, of more potential use to the toponymist, is the use of aerial photography. Even though all upstanding traces of a field monument may long since have been obliterated, below-ground features which are deeper than the ploughsoil may survive - the pits, post-holes and ditches which are revealed in most rural excavations. While for much of the time these sub-ploughsoil features are undetectable except by geophysical survey, in certain climatic conditions they can be detected by their manifestation on the surface as 'cropmarks' or 'soilmarks'. This is not the place for detailed explanation of the processes involved in the formation of such marks (for which the interested reader is referred to Wilson 1982, from which Fig. 1 is taken): very briefly, an underground feature may show as a 'soilmark' through either direct erosion by the plough or differential drying of the ploughsoil above the feature causing a variation in soil colour, while a 'cropmark' is created by variation in crop growth above that feature (Fig. 1). Ironically, crops such as barley are particularly sensitive to crop stress and thus to cropmark formation, while permanent grass is far less revealing. The result of the process of cropmark formation is that under suitable conditions the positions of buried features, ditches and walls will be mapped out in a growing crop, and are of course best

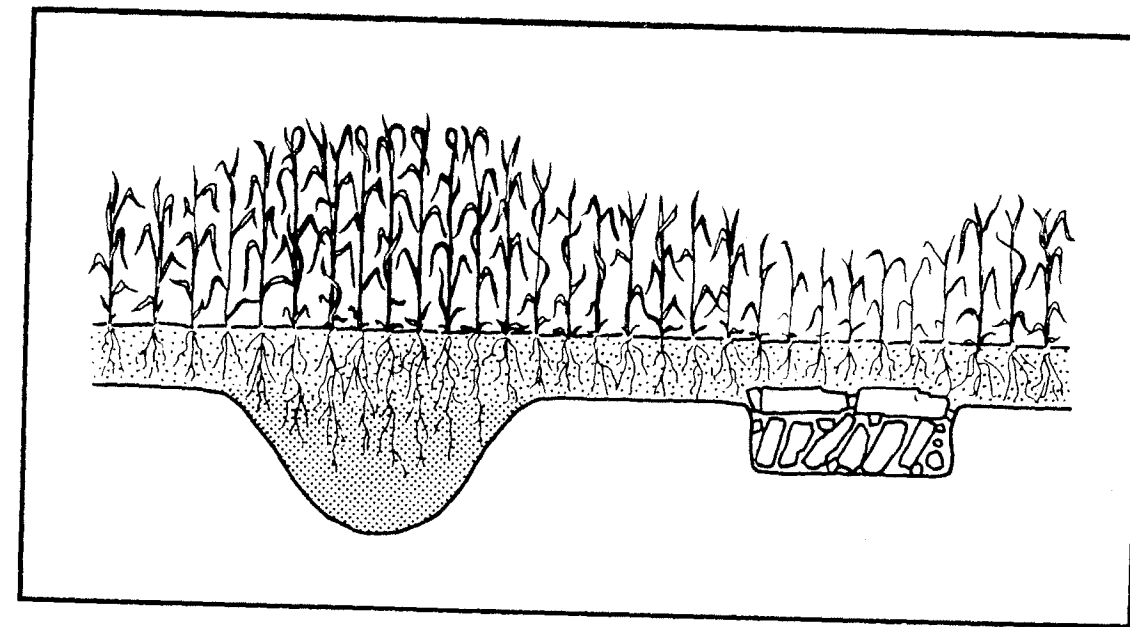


Fig.1 (after Wilson 1982). Differential crop growth caused by drought or other crop stress.

Left: more luxuriant growth over a moisture-retaining buried feature.
Right: the converse, stunting of crop over a buried wall.

recorded from a high vantage point or from the air.

Judicious use of air survey can therefore help the archaeologist to redress the balance in understanding the settlement-patterns of the apparently blank cultivated areas. Devon offers a prime example of the need for such work: for many years Dartmoor was believed to have been preferentially occupied in the prehistoric period, in comparison with the more fertile and comfortable areas of the county, because it contained such a high proportion of the upstanding archaeology of the county. Fieldwalking and air survey are beginning to alter our perception of the settlement-pattern.

By now the potential value of this branch of research to the place-name scholar will be apparent. If it is not possible to identify a place-name containing burh directly with, for example, the earthwork banks of a hill-fort or enclosure on the ground or on a map, the next best thing must obviously be to identify it with the ditches of that same site, surviving underground and recorded as cropmarks on an air photograph. In this century, and more especially since the Second World War, much work has been done by archaeologists and others in aerial reconnaissance for these long-lost sites, although it must be conceded that until recently the eastern part of Britain, being naturally drier and more favourable to cropmark production than the West, has received the lion's share of the air photographers' attentions. As yet only a small proportion of this wealth of material has achieved widespread synthesized publication; somewhat more has been published in the archaeological press; much, however, remains unpublished but available for public access in the archives of the Sites and Monuments Registers which now exist for virtually all counties and regions (usually to be found in the County Planning Department, Museum Service or Archaeological Unit). It is suggested that contact with the custodians of this material could on occasion be remarkably illuminating for place-name scholars.

Since 1983 the writer has been engaged in a programme of aerial reconnaissance in lowland Devon, an area which had until recently received relatively little attention (Griffith 1983; 1984a; 1984b; and 1985a). Results, particularly in the drought of 1984, were exceptionally good, and have so far included the discovery of some 500 previously unrecorded archaeological sites, ranging from Neolithic ceremonial monuments to Roman forts and undated settlement enclosures. It was in the mapping of results using the modern 1:25,000 O.S. maps that the relevance of this new material to place-name studies started to

become clear. As each new site is indexed it is given a name - usually that of the nearest farm, wood, etc. shown on the map - and it soon became apparent that a significant proportion of the names of the farms were of the type Bagborough/Berry/Burridge/Burrow. Perusal of available sources suggested no explanation for many of these names in terms of extant earthworks of possible burh or barrow form: the cropmark itself was the answer. Perhaps the single most striking example of this was when the cropmark of what turned out to be a previously unrecorded hill-fort within five miles of Exeter (Griffith 1984a) was located on a hill whose name is 'Berber' on the present O.S. map, and Berberry on the Tithe Apportionment of 1841. (It is of course not only 'berry' names that cropmarks may elucidate: for the possible relevance of a cropmark to a series of *nemeto- place-names, see Griffith 1985b.)

Indeed, where the search for names is extended beyond the relatively small number recorded on the modern 1:25,000 maps, results are even more striking, though this work has not yet been possible for the whole sample of recently discovered sites. In Devon, as elsewhere, the Tithe Surveys record many more promising field-names than archaeologists can explain - Dr Gelling's strictures (1978, 133, 143, etc.) on alternative origins for such names are much repeated! It is therefore encouraging to be able to produce the site to match the name in at least some cases. Even more rewarding is to visit the site and its owner and to hear a helpful field-name from a farmer to whom it means nothing. Thus, a flat hilltop field in Tamerton Foliot is known as 'Glazenbury' and proved to contain three square cropmark enclosures of unknown date; similarly, it was entirely unclear to the owner of a field in a very small village in north Devon why the field should be called 'The Borough', until the cropmarks of a strongly defensive double-ditched enclosure appeared on the ground, closely followed by an archaeologist.

This unqualified use of names recorded only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries may cause disquiet. While it is of course a great benefit to have 2 volumes of the EPNS series for Devon (Gover *et al.* 1931-2), their age and relative slightness do mean that many sources for names that would now be used were not excerpted in their making, and consequently all additional available sources must perforce be used. (Of course some almost intuitive filtering of possible names takes place immediately: a farm name is obviously a better bet than a bungalow, for example.) It is hoped in the future to try to check back as many as possible of the modern names, and so to improve the quality of the database. But the innocence of the transmission of these names may be

helping us: virtually every farmer with a 'Berry Camp' thinks it is so called because of the brambles. It will be much harder to check back field-names, as opposed to farm names, before the Tithe Map. This is particularly sad in the case of 'castle' names, which in Devon very seldom occur in farm names but only in 'site' names, e.g. Cranbrook Castle (hill-fort), or field-names, where they are an excellent indicator of the hill-fort/defended enclosure type of site. It would be valuable to be able to arrive at a tentative date for this usage of 'castle': this has not yet proved possible for the writer. (Perhaps more puzzling, although not recorded in PN Devon, is Castle Park in Alphington [1841 Tithe Apportionment]. To the writer's knowledge all Devon's other 'castle' names, where identification is possible, are enclosure sites. Castle Park is, however, the site of one of our larger barrow and ring-ditch complexes: it would be interesting to know how early the name here is.)

Dr Gelling and others have expressed in some detail the toponymist's difficulty in disentangling place-names derived from OE beorg, burh and bearu (the latter meaning 'grove'), even where respectable medieval sources for the names are available. While the present writer is unqualified to contribute as a philologist to the solution of these problems, in some cases the identification of the monument apparently giving rise to a name must help in the understanding of its derivation. In attempting to address this problem an index was compiled consisting of the following: all beorg/burh/bearu names recorded in PN Devon; all -bury, -borough, etc., names recorded on recent O.S. maps; names of these types recorded on current 1:25,000 or six-inch maps and Tithe Maps; and other field-names of which the writer is aware (this last is a wholly incomplete and biased sample). This index was compared with all known earthwork and cropmark enclosures/hill-forts and barrow/ring-ditch sites in Devon (excluding Dartmoor).

Because of the relatively small number of place-names recorded in PN Devon the majority of 'matches' with sites concerned recently-recorded place-names. This is gratifying, and suggests that these names should not be dismissed as useless to the archaeologist. It does not, however, help the historical toponymist very much. From this point of view, the relatively small number of matches with names recorded in PN Devon is more illuminating. A number of beorg names, now 'Burrow', 'Barrow', etc., can satisfactorily be identified with existing barrows or groups of them - e.g. Burrow (Stoke Canon par.; PN Devon, 448), Henderbarrow (Halwill par.; ibidem, 141), Burrow (East Worlington par.; ibidem, 402), Burrow (Ashwater par.; ibidem, 128), and others. Even

barrows, if they were ditched, can leave a cropmark. A 'ring ditch' is a circular ditch, either the only surviving element of a ditched barrow or else a related Neolithic/Bronze Age ceremonial feature that never had a central mound. Thus ring-ditch cropmarks can also help with beorg names. One Devon ring ditch discovered through air survey at grid reference SS 976143 appears on the other hand to elucidate the name Pedehael (1086; 'Peada's Hill', PN Devon, 543). The writer would like to suggest, in view of the local non-hilly topography, that OE hyll here means barrow or mound. Its usage for a burial mound is not given by Smith (1956, 274-5), though he gives a ME meaning 'heap of earth, sand or other material' which may be relevant, and Gelling (1984, 171) cites two possible compounds with OE byrgen 'burial'. One comparable case is known to the writer in Cornwall, where an extant barrow lies at a farm now known as Pinnockshill which was Pinnochesburge in c.1170 (Sheppard 1977, 144).

Of the burh names listed in PN Devon, the largest number (23) can be identified as existing hill-forts. (At least 35 out of some 80 hill-forts - whether recorded in PN Devon or not - still have some 'berry' element in their names. No less than 24 Devon parishes take their names certainly or probably from hill-forts - all of them having names in burh except for one, Trentishoe, in OE trendel.) A further 22 of the burh-names in PN Devon can be identified, with some degree of confidence, with earthwork or cropmark enclosure sites of varying dates. One must remember, however, that many of the burh-names probably relate not to a nearby earthwork but to the enclosure itself (manorial or other) of the settlement-site that bears the name (Smith 1956, 59-60). Most, if not all, of the six inland 'berries' in Hartland parish recorded in PN Devon - Titchberry, Tosberry, Berry, Blegberry, Butterberry and Newberry - probably come into this category: the first four are now single farms in strong enclosures. Butterberry eventually became a farm called Golden Parks. Medieval contraction of settlement in Hartland has recently been discussed by Fox (1983) who has demonstrated that many single farms were once substantial hamlets. (Embury and Windbury, also in Hartland parish, are, on the other hand, Iron Age promontory forts.) Paradoxically these surviving sites are likely in many cases to be less 'visible' to the archaeologist. Recent work at 'Berry Meadow' in the heart of Kingsteignton village suggests that the burh here is the enclosure of the Anglo-Saxon royal manor (Weddell and Henderson 1985).

More disconcerting to the mere archaeologist are the occasions when there appear grounds for doubting the derivations suggested in PN Devon. In every case but one this occurs where beorg is given as the etymon (always translated as 'hill'), but where burh looks more probable to the archaeologist, there being a burh-type site lying within a few hundred metres in an accessible location. (The exception is Burscott (Holsworthy par.) first recorded by PN Devon (149) in 1330 as Burstenyscott and interpreted as 'Beorhtwine's cot(e)' but lying close to an extant earthwork enclosure at SS 341075. This does not appear to be capable of resolution at present.) The other cases where a burh-type enclosure lies adjacent to a name suggested to derive from beorg are at Borough (Alverdiscott par.; ibidem, 113), Clannaborough (Throwleigh par.; ibidem, 453), Weekaborough (Berry Pomeroy par.; ibidem, 506), Burrough (Drewsteignton par., ibidem, 433) and Bagborough (Sandford par.; ibidem, 413). (Other suggested beorg- names may belong to the 'extant hidden' burhs mentioned above.) What is very striking about all these questionable names, each first recorded as -burgh(e) or -bergh', is that none is first recorded earlier than 1249: the dates are 1333, 1498, 1305, 1330 and 1249, respectively. (PN Devon [55] also derives Roborough [Pilton par.] from beorg, but since the place lies immediately next to a large earthwork enclosure at SS 569352, mentioned five lines earlier, and the name is not recorded until 1679 [Rowborowe], this is simply perverse.)

For comparison, we may examine the DB or earlier occurrences of these names which are discussed in PN Devon. Twenty names are derived there from burh; of these, fourteen appear (in ExonDB) as -beria or -biria and the remainder appear as -burh (one occurrence), -beri/biri (three), and -birig (two). Of the twenty names, twelve are probably identifiable with extant burh-type earthworks, two more can probably be identified with cropmark enclosures, and six have no archaeological information recorded at present to help elucidate them. Two further names appear in ExonDB as -berga (the present parishes of Roborough and Clannaborough); one appears both as -berga and as -borga (Sedborough in Parkham par., SS 3621; GDB -berge); and one, according to PN Devon (564), appears as both Blacheberia and Blac(h)aberga (Blackborough in Kentisbeare par.; GDB Blackeberge). For these four names PN Devon suggests derivation from beorg. This leaves us with three -beria names in ExonDB - Olveberia, Bac(h)etesberia and Teweberia - for which PN Devon suggests beorg as the derivation, possibly in view of thirteenth-century forms in -bergh for all three. It should be added that these three places - Wolborough (par.;

PN Devon, 524; GDB -berie), Battisborough (Holbeton par.; PN Devon, 276) and Thuborough (Sutcombe par.; ibidem, 168) are sited on or next to hills, and Thuborough is, in addition, not far from a prominent barrow that lies on the parish boundary. Of the forms for burh and beorg recorded earlier than 1086 (whose number is admittedly very few according to PN Devon), not one is believed to be inappropriately used.

This fairly small sample (from a total of 75 probable matches of sites with entries in PN Devon) would suggest that in the years up to and including the Domesday Survey the origins of these names were well recognized and hence usually properly recorded, but that by the middle of the thirteenth century the burh/beorg confusion was fairly well established in the state in which it has remained until this day (cf. Gelling 1978, 133; and Griffiths 1983). Similarly, in east Cornwall, O. J. Padel informs me that the earliest record of Crafhole (SX 3654) is as Croftilberwe 1314. This form might be taken to imply 'Crafhole hill' (beorg); but, since the place was a medieval borough and there is not a notable hill at the site, it is far more likely to imply 'Crafhole borough', with confusion between the elements.

The use of archaeological information may help to refine the dating of this confusion, in suggesting (but no more than that) a 'true' or original form for a given site, and hence in determining the accuracy of a given form. For the large number of burgh', berghe and similar forms not recorded until the fourteenth century, the writer is tempted to suggest that, at least for Devon, only an external source of information, archaeological or otherwise, is likely to produce an explanation of value in helping to disentangle the burhs and beorgs. (Archaeological evidence for bearu is always going to be difficult.)

This small piece of work, which emerged quite unbidden from the writer's programme of aerial reconnaissance, can perhaps indicate some further directions of study. Clearly there is still considerable scope for further work on earlier place-name sources and in particular Devon's relatively rich collection of Anglo-Saxon charters (see e.g. Pamment 1985), which do not appear to have been fully covered in PN Devon. There does appear to be a case for systematic cross-checking of all relevant archaeological data with all appropriate place-names for specific site-types. (One might add that analysis of settlement types by topographical and soil/geological characteristics is regularly undertaken by archaeologists, and this, if compared with similar studies by toponymists [e.g. Watts 1976] could perhaps produce exciting results.)

Though information derived from aerial survey may not readily be available in the library to the place-name scholar, there may be considerable benefit in seeking it out. And, if approached with appropriate care, place-names and field-names recorded only in recent times may usefully be exploited if a possible archaeological context can help to elucidate their origins.

EXETER, Devon

NOTE

*This is a revised version of part of the paper given on 4th April 1986 at the XVIIIth Annual Conference of the Council for Name Studies held at the University of Exeter. I have benefited from discussion with and comments from Oliver Padel, but all mistakes remain my own. The air survey from which this work sprang has been supported by HBMC, RCHM, Devon County Council (my employer), the Devonshire Association and various private sponsors, to all of whom my thanks are due. I am grateful to David Wilson for permission to reproduce Fig. 1, and to Pam Wakeham for typing the final draft of the text.

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