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Creatures Great and Small: Excursions among English Field-Names

John Field

CECIL Frances Alexander's complete line alludes, of course, to 'all' creatures—a zoological inclusiveness not appropriate in the present circumstances. Field-names often suffer from the 'too-well-known-to-need-description' syndrome, and the comment 'self-explanatory' is not always helpful to the reader. Even though the meaning of such names as *Foxhole Croft*, *Cow Close* or *Pony Paddock* may be apparent from the modern form, the interpreter has a duty to indicate details in the use of the names which will expand the significance for the benefit of the enquirer. The intention of surveying these types of English field-name, which include such large numbers of what are often described as 'commonplace' names of supposedly obvious meaning, is to demonstrate a greater breadth and variety of reference than might at first be thought likely, and to ask some questions, possibly naïve questions, about the terminology.

Most of the references to the horse in field-names are predictable: there is a fair supply of *Horse Pastures*, *Horse Closes*, *Horse Crofts*, *Horseplots* and *Horse Meadows* to be found throughout the country. *Horse Meadow Field* was the name of one of the open fields of Aston Cantlow, Warks., in 1714, previously known simply as *the other field*. With the characteristic West Midland generic, there was a *Horse Leasow* in Oldbury, Worcs., a *Horse Leasowe* in Worcester in the time of Charles I, and a *Horselesowe* in Weston under Lizard, Staffs., in 1530. We learn from George Foxall that Shrewsbury livery-stable keepers pastured horses used in the coaching business in *Coach Horse Field*, and that in Broseley, in the same county of Shropshire, there is a piece of land called *The Blind Horse Field*.¹ *Packhorse Close*, in Ashleyhay, Derbys., and *Packhorse Ground*, in South Stoke, Som., remind us of a form of transport that was not dependent on first-class roads.

For many of these instances, a fairly recent origin can be suspected but *Horse Moor* in Croughton, Nthants., seems to be of longer standing, witness *Horsemor* c.1255. Other generics include *worðign*, as in *Horsadine* in Tibberton, Salop, and *gærs-tūn* 'paddock', as in *Horse Gussan Close* in Chinnor, Oxon., with an earlier form *Horsgarstone* in 1220. *Great Horsy* in Lydiard Millicent, Wilts., is not the breathless compliment to a race-winner that it seems; it was *Horsheye* in the thirteenth century and so is no more than yet another term for 'horse enclosure' (*hors-[ge]hæg*), also

found in other parts of England, e.g., in Staffordshire.²

The customary division of agricultural operations into arable and pastoral suggests that, as grassland and its management play as large a rôle in the rural economy as arable land, pasture land and meadows will be as productive of names as is the tilled area. One problem of interpretation is that it is not always possible to discriminate between the divisions by means of existing field-names. Some of the regional terms employed, such as *Park* (ME *park*) in the south-western counties, or *Leasow* (OE *lās*, obl. sg. *lāswe*) in the West Midlands, have a connotation of 'pasture' or 'grassland', but are found to be used in a general sense for any piece of enclosed land. Even what appear to be unambiguous references to grassland in the specific elements of names—for instance, in tithe apportionments—are not always factually borne out in the information given in the 'State of Cultivation' column therein, and there will be instances of *Grass Close* or *Pasture Close* which are labelled 'arable'.

On the other hand, a note in an early EPNS volume observes that the medieval form *Horsacre* suggests that *-acre* (OE *æcer*) 'was not always used of arable land'.³ To this example may be added a later name, in another county, *acra* voc. *Whitehorse* 1570, which may, however, actually have been applied to an arable field and may allude to the figure of a horse cut in the turf of some nearby pasture, rather than to a live, grazing animal in the *acra* itself (cf. *PN Wilts.*, 455). *Horse Acre* does not, in fact, very frequently occur.

We learn of horse bridges from such names as *Horse Bridge and Close* in Chadlington, Oxon., and *Horsebridge Close* in Steventon, Berks., which looks back to *Le Horse Bridge Acre* 1704, with earlier references to the bridge itself in *Horsbrugg* 1394-5 and *Horsbrydge* 1548. The *NED* provides a helpful definition of a horsebridge: 'a bridge for horses to pass over', but at least one of the quotations clarifies the term by alluding to a canal. This can hardly have been applicable to the bridge in Steventon in 1394-5, but doubtless the term was used for bridges over other waterways on which towing horses were used. The bridge replaced a ford at Horse Bridge, in Kingswood, Glos., which was *Horsfordbrigge* in 1315. Where the towpath changed sides on the Severn in Shrewsbury a boat was used to ferry the horses across; fields adjoining the ferry were *Boat Field* in Shrewsbury St Chad, and *Horse Boat Fields* in Shrewsbury St Mary. There was also a *Horse Boat Close* in Huddersfield, Yorks.WR.

Equine accommodation is recorded in such names as *Stable Mead* in Upton, Leics., or *Stable Meadow* in Somerford Booths,

Ches.; and their footwear provides shape names such as *Horse Shoes* in East Hanningfield, Essex, *Horse Shoe Field* in Fornsett St Peter, Norf., *Horse Shoe Ground* in Chieveley, Berks., and *Four Horse Shoe Field* in Reading, Berks. Allusions to racing are to be expected, and *Racepost Piece* in East Hendred, Berks., *Racing Field* in Folkton, Yorks.ER, and *Horse Race Piece* in Ivinghoe, Bucks., are examples. *Race Course Hill* in Bingley and *Horse Race End* in Warmfield (both Yorks.WR) have been discussed by Mrs. Atkin.⁴ Other names possibly commemorate successful race-horses: *Boldstart Copse* in Lambourn, Berks., has all the appearance of such a name, though documentation is lacking. Of *Gallop Field* in Shephall, Herts., the EPNS editors explain that 'a former owner of the Bury kept horses here for steeplechasing'.⁵ *Rubbing House Furze Furlong* in Newton Tony, Wilts., alludes to what was described in 1828 as 'a necessary part of a racing establishment'.⁶

Captains Close, in the tithe apportionment for Hallaton, Leics., *Captayns Closse* c.1666x71 in Preston Bagot, Warks., and *Captain Hearne* in Shephall, Herts., are instances of a name which occurs also in other counties and is evidently common in Shropshire; George Foxall noted that *Captain* was a popular name for a farm horse.⁷ Other terms for 'horse' also occur in field-names, such as *Capple field* in Preston Patrick, Westm., and *Capplesborough* 'horse hill' in Lupton, Westm., embodying ON *capall* 'horse, nag'. *Hestholme*, recorded in the thirteenth century in East Halton, Lincs., is a Scandinavian compound of *holmr* 'meadow, riverside pasture' with *hestr* 'horse', the latter of which is also found in the *Hesketh* names, referring to Scandinavian race-courses.⁸

Bayerdes Leyes, recorded in 1551-2 in Bruern, Oxon., and *Bayard Furlong*, mentioned in the 1777 enclosure award of Blackthorn, Oxon., embody the stock name for a bay horse, found also in a Yorks.WR field-name *Bayardacker* 1361; this element may also provide a clue to former race-courses.⁹ Another former recreational activity involving horses is alluded to in *Follifoot Carr* and *Ings* in Wighill, Yorks.WR; this English name, < *folā* + *(ge)foht*, refers to the Viking sport of horse-fighting. A full investigation of field-names referring to horses would shed some light on the significance of *horse* and related terms in earlier periods: Hemingborough, Yorks.ER, for instance, has no *Horse Close*, but it has a *Stot Piece* (OE *stot*; ME *pece*).

Several names appear to belong to the group, but in reality must be classified elsewhere. One of these is *Horselick's Field* in Foxton, Cambs., which means in fact 'muddy enclosure', having been *Ostlick Meadow* in the nineteenth century and *Oseloke* 1328,

< OE *wase* 'mud' + *loc(a)* 'enclosure, lockable area'. *Long Galloper Hill*, in the 1764 glebe terrier for Long Preston, Yorks.WR, may well have reached that form by association with Heskett nearby; it was earlier *Gawberhead* 1677, 1685, probably 'gallows headland or hill' (< ON *galgi* + OE *beorg* + OE *hēafod*), with which may be compared *Gallaber*, in Malham, Yorks.WR.

From the horse to the fox is an intelligible, if to many an emotionally-charged, shift of topic. Hunting men are among those responsible for some of the minor names on the map, many of these being of land viewed strictly from the rider's point of view, not the husbandman's, and containing no direct allusions to the fox itself. There are, of course, plenty of the latter, with reference to foxholes in medieval names persisting into modern times, as in *Fox Holes* in Steeple Morden, Cambs., which has earlier forms *Foxhole* in the thirteenth century and *Foxhofurlong* 1407. In the early thirteenth century one of the three open fields of Cottenham, Cambs., was *Foxholefield*. *Foxholes* in Church Lawford, Warks., has an even earlier antecedent, namely the twelfth-century *Foxholes*. *Foxhill* in Austrey, Warks., has developed from *Foxholes* recorded in 1213. Development to *Foxhill* occurred quite early in Melbourn, Cambs., where *Foxholes* 1267 is represented by *Foxhell* 1354 and *Foxhyll* 1492. Similarly *Foxhole* 1228 in Cottenham, Cambs., becomes *Foxell* in 1460, but *Foxall* in 1596. In Hothorpe Field, one of the open fields of Theddingworth, Leics., a furlong given as *Foxhole Leyes Furlong* in the 1674 glebe terrier and as *Foxholes* in that of 1679, had become *Foxhill Leyes* by 1690. *Foxcote* in Ilmington, Warks., dating from 1607, is a less usual term for a fox's earth; another is *Fox Grove*, as in *Fox Grove Wood* in Swinbrook, Oxon. *Foxborough Close* is found in Foxton, Leics., and *Fox Burgh* in Brooksby, Leics. In Watlington, Oxon., *Fox Burys* of the 1815 enclosure award was *Foxbury Close* a century before.

Fox Cover(t) is frequent among the modern names of many, if not most, English counties. Additions to this simple form may be illustrated from the East Riding field-names *Big Fox Cover* (Folkton), *Fox Covert Hill* (Kennythorpe), *Fox Covert Plantation* (Eddlethorpe, Folkton and Willerby), and *Fox Cover Bottom* (Bugthorpe).¹⁰ Elsewhere, picturesque arbitrary names have been applied to fox-covers, including *Australia Gorse* in Ridlington, Rutland, and the famous *Botany Bay Fox Cover* at Billesdon, Leics. Colin Ellis has suggested that *Botany Bay* was chosen for the latter (which had been a cow pasture until sold to the hunt in the 1790s), because it was about the furthest point to which the hounds of the Quorn had to go, and so a remoteness name of this type would be an obvious

choice.¹¹ It seems just as likely that the references to Australia and to the penal colony in these names of rough ground on the edge of the parish carry the implication of the possibility of transportation awaiting poachers of other game on the land.

Most of the names of fox-covers mentioned in Ellis's *Leicestershire and the Quorn Hunt* are of the ownership type, such as *Bridget's Gorse*, for a cover which 'used to be known locally as *Dalby Rough Field* but was made into a proper cover by Mr. C J. Phillips, who christened it after his niece, Miss Bridget Drake'.¹² Hunt records, for reasons of perhaps greater concern to sociologists than to onomasts, preserve far more of the details of such naming than other land documents, and it is therefore frequently possible to discover identities of the eponymous dedicatees. Some were owners, such as Thomas Gisborne, who made *Gisborne's Gorse*, near Charley, Leics.,¹³ or Nicholas Charlton who enclosed several acres of self-sown gorse previously known as *Thrussington Gorse*, two-thirds of a mile south of Six Hills; this became *Charlton's Gorse*. Others were slightly lower in the social scale. *Adam's Gorse*, half a mile south-east of Thorpe Satchville, was resown by Otho Paget for Lord Manners, and looked after for many years by the Underwood family; as *Adam* had been a Christian name in that family for several generations, it is probable that one of them gave the name to the cover. Sometimes a general term was used, such as *Parson's Thorns*, alluding to this cover being on Hickling Glebe, in the neighbouring county of Nottinghamshire, and *Curate's Gorse*, on the edge of the same glebe; we are told that the latter refers facetiously to *Parson's Thorns*, and that 'if the parson cannot perform the service, the curate will'.¹⁴

The eminence of its given name did 'not necessarily bring prosperity to a new cover. Ellis tells us that in 1871 General E.S. Burnaby 'got the Prince of Wales (afterwards King Edward VII) to sow gorse seed and to plant a tree in the centre' of some land west of Baggrave Hall, Leics.; the plantation was duly renamed *Prince of Wales's Cover*. The seed, however, failed, and the land was subsequently, in 1884, replanted with thorn and privet.¹⁵

Our topic is, of course, creatures great and small, and no particular apology is required for references to these unfeathered bipeds. They may be mentioned later in connexion with various quadrupeds other than foxes and horses, after consideration has been given to some of the animals of the farm.

There the oxen were slaine, a 1322 furlong-name in Hoby, Leics., shows the importance of oxen to the medieval husbandman. This rather lengthy name (written, in the original, as a single word)

has not lasted, but another medieval Leicestershire name (in slightly misspelt Latin), *ubi Godwynesoxe morieabatur* 'where Godwin's ox died', survived at least until 1679 as *Goodins Ox*, to be found in the Great Bowden glebe terrier for that date. More frequently cited than either of these is the thirteenth-century furlong-name *thertheoxlaydede* in Northall, Bucks, 'a picture in miniature of a medieval farming tragedy' being the solemn comment of the editors of *PN Bucks*.¹⁶

For a possible reason for the demise in the fields of these draught animals we may turn to Ariosto. Sacripante, about to ravish Angelica, is frustrated by a white knight (a little later identified as the maid Bradamante). After a brief skirmish, in which lions, bulls and rams are called in to furnish matter for comparisons, the Tartar king fails to withstand the force of his opponent's charge and we are told that

The horse of Sacripante lay prostrate,
Its rider pinned beneath its lifeless weight.

Not unexpectedly, Sacripante finds some difficulty in getting to his feet, and his predicament is remarked on by the poet in an elaborate simile:

As when a ploughman, dazed with stupefaction,
After a thunderbolt has struck, aghast,
Slowly uplifts himself where by its action
Beside his lifeless oxen he was cast,
And views, dismayed, the shrivelling contraction
Of pine-trees stripped and withered by the blast,
So Sacripante rises to his feet,
The damsel having witnessed his defeat.¹⁷

The possibly fatal effects of lightning on oxen (and on a good many other things) exposed to it would have been quite as familiar in the open arable fields of England as in those of Ariosto's native Ferrara, and such meteorological accidents may account for the deaths of some of the animals referred to in these field-names. We may surmise that in Great Bowden it was only the ox that succumbed to the lightning stroke, but that Godwin himself survived, otherwise there would probably have been yet another *Dead Churl Furlong*.

Field-names alluding to draught oxen encompass the full range of generics, alphabetically from *Oxall* in Eastleach Martin, Glos., ('the *halh* or nook of land for the oxen') to *Oxyard* in Ashley Folville, Leics., which was probably where the working animals were prepared for their daily labours. Wainwright found numerous examples in Amounderness Hundred in Lancashire, with one or two instances each of *Ox Butts*, *Ox Close*, *Ox Croft*, *Oxen Croft* and

Oxenholme, but nearly a dozen cases of *Ox Hey*.¹⁸ Doubtless it was the importance of the animal in medieval agricultural operations that brought about the numerous settlement names that are indistinguishable from field-names: *Oxhey*, Herts., to be compared with *Oxhay Meadow* in Cadlington, Oxon.; *Oxenholme*, Westm., identical in form with *Oxen Holme* found in the tithe apportionment for Little Marton, Lancs.; and *Oxley*, Staffs., differing but little from the numerous examples of *Ox Leaze* in the field-names repertoire. The apparent compliment in *Great* and *Little Excellent* in Corby, Nthants., is diminished when an earlier form is found: in 1580 these two old enclosures were called *Great* and *Little Exlands*, and were probably pasture closes on which were kept the oxen of the parish.

Livestock management is reflected in numerous field-names. References to the driving of cattle from home fields to out-pastures may generate the names of fields adjoining drove roads, as in *Oxen Rake Meadow* (OE *hraca* 'narrow path'), in Malham, Yorks.WR, or may designate the grass-grown tracks themselves, e.g., *Neatgangs* 'cattle tracks', recorded in 1773 in Goxhill, Lincs. (OE *nēat* 'cattle'); this was an area of pasture, 250 acres in extent, beside the river Humber, and was divided at the Enclosure into six rectangular closes.

Beef and dairy cattle are mentioned in field-names in greater numbers than draught oxen are. The specific *Neat*, already mentioned, is not common, and some modern names had early forms clearly derived from ON *naut* rather than OE *nēat*. *Neat Marsh*, in Preston, Yorks.ER, for instance, was *Notmersk* in 1344, and alternative forms survived in *Neat- alias Nodgarth*, in Ambleside, Westm. Hugh Smith noticed the frequency of references to the bull in Westmorland field-names, and particularly the uncanny repetition of the name *Bull Copy*. He observed more than two dozen instances of this name in the county.¹⁹ At its first occurrence in the volume, in Casterton, he noted that 'according to Caxton, *The game and playe of chesse* (1474), 112, "a great bole is suffisid with right litil a pasture"; he continued, 'and after the enclosures this seems to have been the view of the local farmers'.

There is room for more than one comment here, and at least one unanswered question. Why should the view of local farmers have been modified after the enclosures? The nature of cattle was not altered by the change in land distribution, and it is likely that a hedged or fenced area was already in existence for the restraint of the bull. It is noteworthy that all the examples are of the nineteenth century, but earlier forms, which would provide evidence of pre-enclosure husbandry, are notoriously lacking for Westmorland.

It must be said that, though Smith reported about 24 examples of the name, other observers, in particular Mary Atkin, have reached a different total.²⁰ Mary Atkin's records show that, in the 22 townships of Kendal barony alone, there were 45 fields bearing this name on the various farms; several townships had three or four of each, and one (Heslington) had seven.

It was obviously convenient to keep the tethered bull at the place where the cows were brought to him for service. But why should *Copy* have been the persistent generic? Smith did explain that this is the pseudo-singular form of *coppice*, but offered no opinion on the suitability of coppices as places to contain an animal notorious for its lack of docility. In fact, these enclosures are known to have usually been former coppice land, the remaining trees providing some shade from the sun, but not growing in sufficient numbers to cause any problems from flies.

Further, Smith did not mention, either in this or any other EPNS volume, that the term occurs elsewhere.²¹ In his own *Place-Names of the West Riding of Yorkshire*, a single example is indexed—among the minor names in Linton, in East Staincliffe wapentake. It is in this and the neighbouring West Staincliffe that the substantial number of instances of *Bull Copy* occur in field-names, with one or two in Ewcross wapentake, as well as *Bully Copy* in Rawdon, in Skyrack wapentake. Turning to a standard primary source, Mary Higham has counted no less than eleven examples in West Riding tithe awards, three each in the parishes of Bentham and Easington; in addition, she has found the name in North Lancashire, in eight places, one of which, Whittington, has as many as seven on its separate farms.²²

In the East Riding, *Bull Firth* in Walkington is annotated by the school field-name collectors: 'Parish bull kept here'. Another possible reinforcement of this use of coppices comes from the other end of England. In Pamphill, Dorset, *Starley* is recorded from 1598, as the name of a copse; the first element here is taken to be OE *stēor* 'steer'.²³

In the dozen or so places in Westmorland which have in their recorded field-names *bull* with generics other than *copy*, each of these generics, strangely enough, is a different one for each of the townships concerned. If the record is complete, which seems doubtful, it is almost as though a toponymist had been called in and been required to work through his repertoire of generics. Thus, Kentmere has *Bull Slack*; Kirby Stephen, *Bull Gap*; Crosby Garrett, *Bull Intake*; New Hutton, *Bull Hole*; and Kendall, *Bull Mire*. Not all of these imply smallness, but not a single one suggests the

opposite, apart perhaps from *Bull Ground* (in Morland), the generic of which is a term normally applied to spacious pasture land. Though a close called *Bull Copy* may be small, it must not be supposed that it was minute, despite the possible implication of the Caxton extract. Mary Higham has found that these fields vary between two and five acres in extent.

In addition to *Bull Copy*, Hartley also has *Bulles House*, apparently a development from earlier *Bullhouse Howe* 'bull-house hill', recorded in 1709. In Crosby Ravensworth, Smith related *Bullace Croft* to the term **bullace** 'wild plum', which is by no means impossible. However, the Hartley form offers an analogy, and *Bullace Croft* may also refer to a bull-house.²⁴ *Bull Pit*, which is not often recorded, is found in Peak Forest, Derbys., and *Bullpits* occurs in Wimborne Minster, Dorset. These, like *Bull Baiters* in Great and Little Leighs, Essex, and *Bull Ring* in Braithwell, Yorks.WR, in Cirencester and in Tewkesbury, Glos., may have been fields in which bull-baiting took place. *Bull Stake* in Hattersley, Ches., may involve a similar reference, though, as John Dodgson noted, it may also have been the place (like the numerous *Bull Copys* already mentioned) where cows were served.²⁵

A seventeenth-century document alludes to a custom in Whittlesey Rural, Cambs., where *The Constables Grass* was assigned to the village constables 'for the keeping each of them a common Bull and Boar for the use of the Inhabitants'.²⁶ *Bull Marfur* 'bull boundary furrow' is found in Stallingborough and other places in Lincolnshire; the characteristic generic *marfur* would be used of a not very extensive area of land. A number of generics occurring in many different counties may suggest small plots of land, such as *Bull Hern* in Reading, Berks., *Bull Acre* in Tabley Superior, Ches., and more especially its antecedent thirteenth-century form *Bullehalith* ('the bull's **halh** or nook of land'); and, in Leicestershire, *Bulls Nook* in Carlton and in Twycross, *Bulls Pen* in Glen Magna, and *Bull Gores* in the open fields of Kings Norton. But little weight can be put on the significance of these generics, first, because they are also used with other specific elements and, secondly, because other generics, such as *Crates*, *Croft*, *Dole*, *Field*, *Ings*, *Piece* and *Yard*, also used with *Bull* as specific, say no more and no less about their size. *Bulls Tail*, found in Wychwood, Oxon., and Donington, Leics., may indicate a small, curved piece of land, named from its resembling the tail of a bull, or from the bull's being kept on a remnant or tail of land, of no particular size, projecting from another field.

Cow Close, *Cowleaze*, *Cow Pasture*, and so on, are very frequently found, the generic sometimes varying according to the

region, for instance, *Cow Carr* being found in the Fens, and *Cow Park* in the South West. *Cow Leasow* may be expected chiefly in the West Midlands, though examples are found elsewhere, such as *Cowelesowe* c.1360 in Shifford, Oxon. The idiosyncratic spelling of *Coughgarth* in Hartley, Westm., may or may not be deliberate. The name *Cowleaze Thousand Acres* in Hampreston, Dorset, must not be overlooked, though the field may well be, as David Mills notes that it is very small.²⁷ *Cowgate*, 'the right of pasture of one head of cattle', is found occasionally, e.g. *Cow Gait* in Ashwell, Rutland. In *Cowholding*, in Glaston, Rutland, can be identified the rare field-name term *holding*, i.e. land on which holding-stock or breeding cattle were kept. *Cowhead* occurs in Dunham Massey, Ches.; although apparently the only example in the county, it is recorded without comment in *PN Ches*. There is in Arclid, Ches., a form *Cowshade*—so spelt, but perhaps to be broken down as *Cows Hade*, if it is to be grouped with other forms found in another north-western county, namely Westmorland. Work by Mrs. M. Atkin on these names is in progress.

Functional names in which the word *cow* is not used, include *Milking Close*, in Abney, Derbys., and *Milking Plot*, in Fife Neville, Dorset. In Soyland, Yorks.WR, *Baitings*, from ON *beiting* 'pasture', was the summer pasture for cattle in the medieval vaccary at Saltonstall.²⁸

The place-name survey of Lincolnshire has produced two compound names of some interest. In Lincoln itself is *Cow Paddle*, adjoining the river Witham, but the fairly obvious sense of *Paddle* here is not recognized in the dictionaries. In Stallingborough, in the North Riding of Lindsey,²⁹ instances of *Cowdam* occur. The term has not so far been noted elsewhere, and the specific connexion with cattle is not so obtrusive that the elements in *Horse Cowdam* (which is found in the same tithe apportionment) should be considered mutually exclusive. It is, of course, possible that the first element here is not *cow*, just as that in *Cowpits*, in Horley, Surrey, is plausibly to be identified with the sixteenth-century *Colpytt* 'charcoal pit'. In this a dialect feature of a very dark [ɫ] may be involved, as it may also be in Cottingham, Yorks.ER, where *Cowcrofts* was earlier *Coltscroft* c.1325, evidently intended for young horses rather than cattle.³⁰

Field-names alluding to calves have a range of specific forms. Both singular and plural occur in modern names: there are numerous *Calf Closes*, but also *Calves Close* in (among other places), Windsor, Berks., East Allington, Devon, Breedon, Leics., and Tooley Park, Leics. The genitive plural is found in *Calurecroft* c.1250 in

Gloucester, in the modern *Calver Croft* in Alderwasley, Derbys., and elsewhere, and with a possessive *-s* augmenting the plural genitive ending in *Calvers Close* in the 1626 glebe terrier of Medbourne, Leics.

This may be the right moment to consider the question: how were the closes associated with the animals to which their names refer? The impermanent state of cultivation of tracts of land called variously *meadow*, *leasow*, etc. has already been mentioned. The impression is given, particularly when one is presented with a range of early forms going back seven or eight centuries, that cows have fed on Cow Pasture, calves in Calf Nook, bulls on Bull Ings, and horses on Horsecroft, uninterruptedly from time immemorial. For the fact that this is not so there is abundant documentary evidence ranging from medieval terriers, through seventeenth- and eighteenth-century leases, to enclosure and tithe-commutation documents of more recent times. H. L. Gray quotes a 1611-12 terrier from the survey of Macclesfield manor and forest. In it is to be found 'One other arrable called the Calfe crofts by estimation 3 acres'.³¹ From this and a number of similar references it may be inferred that the use of the name of a grazing animal clearly did not imply that the land was permanent pasture. However, there are animals with at least a semi-permanent connexion with named pieces of land, whether enclosed or not, as we shall now discover.

1988 was for landscape archaeologists and agrarian historians the Year of the Rabbit. An attack on the theory of the post-Conquest introduction to England of this mammal was mounted in the February issue of *The Local Historian* by John Warry.³² A vigorous reply appeared in the May issue from the pen of James Bond, who included among his arguments the largely negative, but well-marshalled, place-name evidence in favour of the traditional view.³³ In the meantime, in the first issue of the *Agricultural History Review* for the year, Michael Bailey published a paper on East Anglian medieval land management, which included rabbit-farming, on which he provided many interesting details.³⁴ This was not the first time that the topic had been discussed in these journals. About three decades earlier, Elspeth Vale had written 'The rabbit in England' in the *Agricultural History Review*,³⁵ and John Sheail contributed 'Historical material on a wild animal—the rabbit' to *The Local Historian* in 1970.³⁶ In a correspondence which followed the latter article, Arthur Britton presented, in chronological order, early forms of *coninger*, assembled from the volumes of the Survey of English Place-Names published by that time.³⁷

The term *rabbit* is relatively rare in field-names, one reason for this being, of course, that historically *coni* or *coning* is the specific English term for the animal, and *rabbit* for its young. There is a *Rabbit Berry* in Stonehouse, Glos., and *Rabbit Field* is among the names collected by the Women's Institute in Kingswear, Devon.³⁸ *Rabbit Bank* in Agden and in Wincle, and *Rabbit Borrow* in Dodcott cum Wilkesley are among the few instances in Cheshire, a county well provided with other onomastic evidence of numerous warrens. *Rabbit Croft* occurs in Mytholmroyd, Yorks.WR, *Rabbit Field* in Eddlethorpe, Yorks.ER, *Rabbit Ground* in Pamphill, Dorset, and *Rabbit Holes Meadow* in Burton Overy, Leics. There are a few examples in Rutland, such as *Rabbit Burrows* in Ryhall and *Rabbit Close* in Pickworth. An unusual variant is *Dying Rabbit Field* in Kirby Underdale, Yorks.ER. This was recorded about 1936, and so does not allude to the great post-war outbreak of myxomatosis.

Many of these modern *Rabbit*- field-names may well denote land on which rabbits have been particularly numerous, though not systematically farmed in a *coninger*. Without other evidence, it is not possible to judge the antiquity of the name *Rabbit Warren* in Northenden, Ches., and in Holt, Leics. It has been suggested that names like *Rabbit Hill* in Birdsall, Yorks.ER are merely 'land on which rabbits are found', whereas at least some names including the plural *Hills* may refer to relics of medieval warrens.³⁹

The most frequent field-names associated with rabbits consist of *cony* with a generic, or with one of the numerous variants of ME *coninger*. Among the faunal field-names this Middle English term, normally alluding to medieval or later rabbit warrens, gives rise to even more spelling variants than Modern English *sainfoin* does among the herbal ones. In collecting examples, the not entirely serious aim of finding 57 varieties was soon shown to be a serious underestimate of the possible total. Here is a fine case of specimens of mishearing, miscopying, metathesis, metanalysis, reconstruction, and replacement. The changes rung on *Coney*, *Coning*, *Conny*, *Cunny* and *Cunning*, in combination with *Gear*, *Gare*, *Gayare*, or *Gore*, *Greave*, *Grey*, *Grave* and *Grove* or *Groove*, would be the envy of every campanological team from Berwick unto Ware---and beyond. They exhibit phenomena to delight the etymologist, the phonologist, the psycho-linguist, and the obsessive collector of picturesque field-names, who would doubtless make a special note of forms like *Gunnery* in Egleton, Rutland; *The Gunneries* in Griffydham (Worthington), Leics.; *Gunnery Field* in Hordley, Salop; *Kunegar* in Chinnor, Oxon.; and *the Kunniger* in Bisbrooke, Rutland. The street-name contrivers have taken their usual inept toll. In one

garden city, *Cony Dell*, characteristic of its county, was evidently not regarded as sufficiently inviting to potential house-buyers, and so has been transformed into the more spacious-sounding, but otherwise unrecorded, *Coneydale*.⁴⁰ A more restrained transfer is found in Chipping Norton, Oxon., where *Conygree Terrace* is traceable to *The Conygrees* of the 1770 enclosure award.

We are told that of the two Old French terms for a rabbit-sanctuary, *coniliere* and *coniniere*, only the latter passed into English, the second /n/ evidently immediately dissimilating to /ng/ or being modified to a normal /ing/, as the termination /-in/ would have been felt to be unacceptable.

The earliest quotation for the alternative term *conyng-erthe* is dated 1430, whereas *conyger*, *conynger* is on record from 1292. The *NED* treats *conyng-erthe* as an independent form, briefly discussing its corruption to the later *cony-garth*, quite reasonably mentioning the /g/ of the first component as being transferred to the second. It would have been formed on the model of *fox-erthe*, an early (but unstable) compound found in major names, such as *Foxearth* (Essex), recorded in Little Domesday Book as *Focsearde*,⁴¹ and occasionally in field-names, e.g. *Foxearth Gorse* in Cottesmore, Rutland. The *conynger* entry in *NED* is to be commended both for its succinct discussion of the convoluted variations brought about by 'obvious striving after a meaning', and for its acknowledgment of 'local field- and farm-names'.

The warren was a sufficiently distinctive feature in the medieval countryside for it to be a landmark from which the furlongs, and even the great fields themselves, were named. There is a reference in 1520 to the *Great Felde otherwise called the Conyngrefield* in Great Chesterton, Warks., and the 1605 glebe terrier for Loughborough, Leics., gives the name of one of the open fields there as *Fallows alias Conygree*.⁴² In 1708, the alternative name for the South Field in Waterstock, Oxon., was *Conygere Field*.⁴³

From time to time we are given an account of the relationship between the rabbit warren and the main stream of the agrarian economy of a place. Kerridge remarks on the numerous and extensive rabbit-warrens of the Yorkshire Wolds, where sheep and conies shared the grazing.⁴⁴ This fact is not noticeably reflected in the recent field-names of the East Riding, in which *coninger* is relatively rare. In Elmswell there is a *Conny Garth*, but the term has been completely replaced in Brackenholme-with-Woodall, where a close called by the shape name *Leg o' Mutton* has its alternative description in parenthesis, '(Cunny Green)'.

To a surviving name in the Lincolnshire Fens, however

—*Coneygarth Farm*, just south of the Old Seabank between Holbeach Horn and Holbeach Bank—the narrative of its medieval past can be fitted. We are told that here the abbot of Crowland's warren comprised 60 acres of enclosed sheep pasture in the late thirteenth century. On such land, the management of the warren proceeded alongside the care of the pasture, and maintenance conditions can be found written into the leases of several centuries later.⁴⁵

Reaney remarked that in Cambridgeshire

'coninger ME (n) is rare. We may note the forms *Conynger* (1287), the *Conynger* (1407), *Cunigera* (1388), *Conyger* 1549'.⁴⁶

As was customary in the EPNS volumes at the time, he omitted to name the parishes in which these forms occur. The spellings, apart from *Cunigera* (which seems to be Latinized form), can be matched in other counties. In his earlier volume, *PN Essex*, Reaney had declared *conyger*, *conynger*, *conygarth* (grouped together) 'fairly frequent', and he included some forms, such as *le Conewer* (1350), *le Conyverslade*, *Conyfer Slade* (1539, 1546), and *Conyver* (1598), which are decidedly unusual,⁴⁷ and it would be interesting to know in which parishes they occur. With these the modern form *Coney Fare* may be usefully compared, with the further question whether these *fare* forms are perhaps modified from medieval spelling with initial palatal spirant. In the Essex parish lists of field-names, examples are very few; Reaney noted *Coney Burrow Field* in Bocking, with *le Conyngere* 1417 for comparison, and *Coney Fare* in Felsted (*Conyngere* 1487-9) and in Stebbing, with early comparative forms including *le Querconyngere* 1422 and *le Conyngertthe* 1487, but it should be remembered that he used a small selection from his main source of modern names, Waller's tithe award transcriptions (themselves comprehensive but not exhaustive) published at the turn of the century.⁴⁸

However, it remains true to say that in the south-eastern counties of Essex, Middlesex, Kent, and Surrey, modern names recognizably derived from *coninger* are very rare or entirely absent: from the limited amount of evidence it would be imprudent to be more definite. In Middlesex, it is not surprising that there should be no trace today of *Conyngerfield* 1597 in Holborn, and forms of *Cony Green* in Hillingdon go back no further than 1659. The recorded history of *Conyborough Hill* in Edmonton is only a year older. *Cony Berry Field* occurs in Blechingley, Surrey, where there was also a *Clappers Field*, perhaps embodying the dialect form *clapper* 'rabbit burrow', identified in, for instance, *Clapper Close* in East Garston, Berks.⁴⁹ *Coneygre Pightle* in Ricklin appears to be the only survivor of the form in Essex, *Coney Burroughs* or *Burrows*

being the forms frequently found in that county. *Little* and *Great Coneyborough* on a 1782 map of Chingford are traceable to *Conniborrow Feild* in a 1627 document, and modern *Coney Burrows*, in Wethersfield, perhaps goes back to *Coneygreth* 1489. There is a *Cony Furrows* in the tithe apportionment for Little Braxted, *Coney Pightle* in Rawreth, *Coney Hill Field* in Rayleigh, and *Coney Marsh* in Tollesbury. In Hertfordshire, *Coney Dells* prevails, with rare alternatives, such as *Coney Grove*, in Cheshunt, the modern reflex of the sixteenth-century *Cunnygrove*.

The single instance of *Connygate* (in *two Connygates* 1605) in Odd Rode, Ches., is noteworthy, as this term is supported by only one rather cryptic quotation in the *NED*: 'This weasel-monger, who is no better than a cat in a house, or a ferret in a cony-gat', from a speech to Queen Elizabeth. A *weasel-monger* is said to be a 'mole-catcher', though the imagery is confused, as weasels were also used to catch domestic mice. The sense of *gate* here would be 'an areal unit of pasture', as in *Cowgate* or *Sheepgate*, rather than 'a road' (ON *gata*). However, arguing partly from its rarity, it may be wondered whether *Connygate* is not a form of *Cony-garth*. It is worth noting that when other generics are found, the specific is often *cony*, variously spelt, rather than *coning*, but that early forms are often varieties of *coninger*, *conigre*.

There are some *Cony-* names derived from other specific elements, particularly ODan *kunung*, ON *konungr* 'king', the principal element in major names such as *Coneythorpe*, Yorks.WR, *Coneythorpe*, Yorks.NR, and *Coney Weston*, Suffolk. Some fairly certain instances of the surname *Cony* also occur, e.g. *Coney Acre* in Cranborne, Dorset, and perhaps *Coneyhook* in Ewhurst, Surrey.

Even when precise parish locations are not given, information in the EPNS glossaries is of some value in establishing the earliest recorded date of this term, e.g., in *PN Warks.*, 'The earliest example is *le Conyngger* (13th)'. The earliest form in Cambridgeshire, though noted without such a comment, is from 1287; in Nottinghamshire, 13th century; in Derbyshire, 1298; and in Hertfordshire, 1423.⁵⁰ There are similar references in other EPNS county volumes. No conclusions at all about the date of the rabbit's arrival can be drawn from these dates, which are obviously based on fragmentary evidence. Now that the agricultural historians and landscape archaeologists have shown the way into the rabbit-warren, it is clearly time for toponymists to explore the rather uncertain linguistic history of *coninger*.

NOTES

This is a revised version of the paper read on 1 April 1989 at the XX1st Annual Study Conference organized by the Council for Name Studies in Great Britain and Ireland, held at the University of St Andrews.

¹ H. G. Foxall, *Shropshire Field-Names* (Shrewsbury, 1980), 43.

² Examples noted in *PN Staffs.*, I, include *Horsehey* 1570, *Horse Hays* TA, Cannock (p.65), *Le Horsey* 1401, Castle Church (p.79), and *Le Horshey* 1434, *Horsey* 1462, Coppenhall (p.84).

³ *PN Beds. & Hunts.*, 292.

⁴ M. Atkin, 'Viking race-courses', *JEPNS* X (1977-78), 26-39; at 35.

⁵ *PN Herts.*, 283.

⁶ *NED*, s.v. *rubbing* 4 (b).

⁷ Foxall, *Shrops. Field-Names*, 44-5. Warks. and Worcs. field-names have been kindly provided by Mr. M. Beacham.

⁸ Discussed by Mrs. Atkin in 'Viking race-courses'.

⁹ Baynard's Green, earlier *Bayard's Green*, on the boundary of Northamptonshire with Oxfordshire, was probably the site of tournaments held by Richard I in 1194 and by Henry III in 1249 and was described in 1646 as 'a large greene or downe, where often is horse-racing, six myle long', cf. *PN Oxon.*, 238. D. M. Owen, *Church and Society in Medieval Lincolnshire* (Lincoln, 1971), notes Bayard's Leap (precise location unspecified) among extra-parochial pieces of land. Such land might well be used for horse-racing.

¹⁰ These and other East Riding examples in the paper are recorded in the unpublished field-names collections (now in the Brynmor Jones Library of the University of Hull) made by pupils in East Riding Schools. The survey, directed by Professor King and organized by Mrs. 'Espinasse, was made about 1936.

¹¹ C. Ellis, *Leicestershire and the Quorn Hunt* (Leicester, 1951), 199.

¹² *Ibid.*, 200.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 201; for *Parson's Thorns*, v. *ibid.*, 204.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *PN Bucks.*, 259.

¹⁷ L. Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso* I, trans. B. Reynolds (Harmondsworth, 1975), I, 65.

¹⁸ F. T. Wainwright, 'Field-names of Amounderness Hundred', *Trans. Historic Soc. of Lancs. & Cheshire* XCVII (1945), 182-3.

¹⁹ 'Bull Copy (a frequent f.n. in We (27 examples)..)', *PN Westm.*, I, 29-30, cf. *ibid.* II, 243.

²⁰ Based on a personal communication from Mrs. M. Atkin.

²¹ The nearest approach to such a mention comes in the Introduction to *PN Yorks.WR*, VII, 67-8, where Smith observes that the 'fringes of forest-land were

cleared by the pasturing of swine, sheep and cattle, which prevented the natural replacement of the forest trees...'

²² Based on a personal communication from Mrs. M. Higham.

²³ *PN Dorset*, II, 172.

²⁴ Bullace Grange, in Thurlstone, Yorks.WR, was also known as Bullhouse Hall, with early forms *Bulehuses*, *Bolehuses* in the 13th cent. and *Bullhouse* in 1647 (*PN Yorks. WR*, I, 339).

²⁵ *PN Ches.*, I, 308.

²⁶ *PN Cambs.*, 371.

²⁷ *PN Dorset*, II, 228.

²⁸ *PN Yorks.WR*, III, 63.

²⁹ Forms for the Yarborough Wapentake of Lincolnshire are quoted by permission of Professor Kenneth Cameron from the volume he is preparing for publication.

³⁰ In a private communication, Mr. Stanley Ellis has kindly confirmed that the transformation is quite feasible. Not only may [oɫ] become [ou], but there would regularly be a loss of [s] before another consonant.

³¹ H. L. Gray, *English Field Systems* (Cambridge, Mass., 1915), 249 n.3.

³² J. Warry, 'The ancient history of rabbits', *Local Historian* XVIII (1988), 13-15.

³³ J. Bond, 'Rabbits: The case for their medieval introduction into Britain', *Local Historian* XVIII (1988), 53-7.

³⁴ M. Bailey, 'The rabbit and the medieval East Anglian economy', *Agricultural History Review* XXXVI (1988), 1-20.

³⁵ E. M. Veale, 'The rabbit in England', *Agricultural History Review* V (1957), 85-90.

³⁶ *Local Historian* IX (1970-71), 59-64. Sheail also wrote *Rabbits and their History* (Newton Abbot, 1971).

³⁷ *Local Historian* IX (1970-71), 173-4.

³⁸ From the Devon & Cornwall Women's Institutes' field-name collection in Devon County Record Office, Exeter.

³⁹ The suggestion was put forward during an informal discussion at the conference.

⁴⁰ The street-name referred to is in Welwyn Garden City.

⁴¹ In the discussion of *Foxearth* in *PN Essex*, 429, Reaney noted the variety of forms, e.g. *-(h)erde*, *-(h)erthe*, *-eyerde*, *-herne*, and *-horne*, as well as early substitution of *-hol*, the root of most surviving names alluding to foxes' dens. The earliest recorded form of *Fox's Yard*, in Haughton, *PN Ches.*, III, 310, *le fox yearthes* 1574 had become *þe foxyardes* by 1637.

⁴² M. W. Beresford, 'Glebe terriers and open field Leicestershire', *Trans. Leicestershire Historical & Archaeological Society* XXIV (1948), 77-120; at 109.

⁴³ H. L. Gray, *English Field Systems*, 492; cf. *PN Oxon.*, 148.

⁴⁴ E. Kerridge, *Agricultural Revolution* (London, 1967), 63.

- 45 H. E. Hallam, *Settlement and Society: A Study of the Early Agrarian History of South Lincolnshire* (Cambridge, 1965), 179.
- 46 *PN Cambs.*, 316.
- 47 *PN Essex*, 576.
- 48 W.G. Waller, 'Essex field-names', *Trans. Essex Arch. Soc.* V (1894-96), 144-81; VI (1896-98), 60-85, 258-77; VII (1898-99), 65-92, 285-327; VIII (1900-02), 76-103, 199-222, 295-323; IX (1903-05), 68-100, 156-79.
- 49 *PN Berks.*, II, 332, cf. *ibid.*, III, 858, s.v. **clapper**. See also *PN Surrey*, 397, where the Blechingley field-name is associated with a clapper bridge.
- 50 For these examples see *PN Warks.*, 323; *PN Cambs.*, 316; *PN Notts.*, 278; *PN Derbys.*, 721; and *PN Herts.*, 251.

Shaw/Shay Revisited

Victor Watts

IN a note appended to Mary Higham's article on *shay* names in the previous issue of this journal, Dr Margaret Gelling discussed the phonological problem of the relationship of *shaw* to *shay*.¹ There can, as she says, be no doubt that *shay* derives from OE *sceaga* as a doublet of the more usual *shaw*. The explanation of the development of *shay* to which she refers is that of A.H. Smith in *The Place-Names of the West Riding of Yorkshire*: he suggested that the various spellings *-ay-*, *-aigh-* might be due to occasional failure of OE *-aga-* (i.e. [aya]) to diphthongize to *-aw-* (i.e. [av]), and that instead it lengthened to *-āge* (i.e. presumably [a:gə]) in the open syllable, whence late ME *-ā(g)-* spelt *-ai(g)-*, *-ay-*.²

Dr Gelling is rightly uneasy about this account, but her own suggestion that

'In the case of Shay it has to be presumed (though Smith does not say this) that there was late diphthongization of the new raised vowel which caused *-age* to become *-aye*'³

is also unsatisfactory, since on the one hand it describes no more than the normal development of ME [a:] (*viz.* raising and eventual diphthongization to [ei]) and on the other does not explain the loss of the consonantal element, presumably [g], of the hypothetical late ME *-āge*.

In fact, *aw/ay* variation is a very well attested phenomenon in English.⁴ On the one hand, the usual development of ME [av] in words like *claw*, *draw*, *slaughter*, *hawk* and *haunt* seems to have involved assimilation of the two elements of the diphthong to produce the monophthong [ɔ:] by about 1600, although diphthongal pronunciations continued to be recognized as late as 1685.⁵ By the time of this monophthongization ME [a:] was generally represented by a high front vowel [ɛ:] and there was no possibility of the new monophthong becoming associated with ME [a:].⁶

On the other hand, in some varieties of English there was a monophthongization of ME [av] so early that it did become associated with ME [a:] and consequently developed as a front vowel accompanying ME [a:] through successive raisings to [æ:], [ɛ:], [e:] and eventually diphthongizing to [ei].⁷ In the history of English phonology it is important to think not of once and for all historical sound-changes but rather of tendencies or repeated or recurrent operations.⁸ Thus, in some varieties of (non-standard) English the same development seems to have occurred at a later period and to