The Anglo-Saxon Traveller

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Just as the people of Britain during the Second World War had to find their way around without the benefit of signposts or place-names on shop-fronts, so did the Anglo-Saxon traveller have to find his way round the countryside in centuries past; but whereas we had the benefit of maps, the Anglo-Saxon did not. He did, however, have a keen appreciation of the meanings of place-names, and had only to memorize those along his route to have a good idea of its nature, the difficulties he might encounter, and the facilities he might find to ease his journey.

The Anglo-Saxons had a number of words describing roads and tracks; it is well known that Old English *strǣt*, as used in major place-names, relates to Roman roads, and names incorporating *strǣt* will be touched on later. OE *weg* 'way', however, usually refers to a non-Roman road. Map 1 (p. 15) shows the distribution of major place-names in -*weg*, as the roads alluded to in such names are the ones most likely to have been of regional or country-wide importance, and used by the long-distance traveller. Minor names such as Woodway, Greenway and Hayway are more likely to refer to shorter routes used locally, and are not considered here. The element *weg* is plotted on a relief map, as it had been noted on journeys between Oxford and Shropshire that 'ways' were often associated with 'edges'. For instance, Stanway (Glos.) and Broadway (Worcs.), at the foot of the Cotswold scarp, are near Aston- and Weston-sub-Edge, and a little further north, Radway (Warks.) is below Edge Hill. In Shropshire, Weo Farm (*weg* + *hōh* 'hill-spur') is below View Edge near Craven Arms, and Stanway is on Wenlock Edge. The map shows that *weg* is usually associated with hilly country, at least in western parts of England, e.g. with the Mendips, Quantocks and the hills of Devon and south-west Dorset.

Indeed, near most of these *weg* place-names, the O.S. map has arrows indicating gradients of one in seven or one in five on nearby roads. Farway (Devon; *fær* 'danger' + *weg*),[1] lies in a basin with seven approach-roads, five of which have gradients of one in seven or steeper. One road has two sets of double arrows and one single arrow! The correlation of *weg*-names with steep slopes is good in the western half of England, but in eastern England there are three Stanways which refer, unusually for *weg*, to Roman roads, and these are not steep. Stanway in Essex derives its name from the plural *stān-wegas*, and lies between two close and parallel stretches of Roman road as they approach Colchester. Great and Little Stainton (*stān-weg-tūn*) are on a Roman road in Co. Durham, and Stannington (Northumb.), another *stān-weg-tūn*, is on the Great North Road. Hollow (Court) (Warks.; *holh* 'hollow' + *weg*) seems to have neither a steep nor a deep-cut road nearby, and is somewhat of a puzzle. I am inclined to think the name refers to the west-to-east stretch of saltway which passes by Hollow Court, since Stanway (Glos.) and Broadway (Worcs.) are also on salt routes radiating from Droitwich. The hill at Barkway (Herts.) while not steep by western standards, does come as a surprise to a southbound traveller as he leaves the flat country around Cambridge bound for London. The element *stān* 'stone' is used to qualify eight major names in -*weg*, of which three, as has been seen, refer to Roman road. Of the others, miraculously, the *weg* at Stanway on Wenlock Edge (Shrops.) survives un-sealed, and is a trackway just wide enough for a Mini, having a slab-like limestone floor, since the angle of dip of the limestone is almost the same as the inclination of the track (grid reference SO 536895). Likewise, part of the *weg* at Stanway (Glos.) survives as a track through Lidcombe Wood (ST 075318). Here the track down the scarp slope is much more nearly at right angles to the dip, giving the bed of the track a ribbed appearance. The road at Stanway near Adforton (Herefs.) has been tar-sealed, but slabs of limestone outcrop in the high banks along the roadside, and it, too, must have had a rocky surface at one time. In Somerset, a stony track from Nether and Over Stowey leads up onto a saddle on the Quantocks, this being the col or pass referred to in the name Halsway to which the track then descends. A traveller knowing that he was in

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[1] This name will be discussed in Margaret Gelling, *Place-Names in the Landscape*, revised edition with Ann Cole (forthcoming).

the vicinity of a *stān-weg* must have breathed a sigh of relief, especially in wet weather, to think that, for a while at least, the going would be good and firm.

From time to time, the traveller would have had to cross rivers, streams and ill-drained areas, and so the terms for crossing-places will be considered next. Margaret Gelling has estimated that there are *c.* 550 major names in *ford*, and there must be many hundred minor ones, too. It is a huge and hardly-touched topic. Map 2 (p. 16) shows the distribution of *strǣt-ford* place-names, places where Roman roads cross rivers, and it can be seen that they are absent from the Fosse Way, since it follows a ridgeway for most of its length, whereas Watling Street has several such names along its course. It is quite unusual for a ford to survive in a place with a 'ford' place-name, but a few have been located. Chalford in Enstone (Oxon.) is a deserted medieval village where a hollow way runs down to a ford with a nice firm limestone base. Chalford in Aston Rowant (Oxon.) is named from the two small fords in the course of the Icknield Way along the foot of the Chilterns. At Twyford (Bucks.) the two streams referred to in the name survive, but a mill-stream has been diverted to flow along the track which linked these two fords, and so the old route cannot be followed in its entirety. Sharnford (Leics.), 'the muddy ford', lives up to its name in wet weather, when rills of muddy water drain off the Fosse Way and into the stream at the site of the ford, creating mud-banks on either side of the little bridge. There is clearly scope for a lot more work to be done on *ford* as a place-name element.

There are two terms whose meaning, in place-names, is inferred to be 'difficult crossing-place': *gewæd* and *gelād*. *Gewæd* is largely eastern in distribution, and includes three crossings of tidal water, two in Kent and one in Suffolk: St Nicholas at Wade leading to the Isle of Thanet, Iwade leading to the Isle of Sheppey, and Cattawade on the Stour estuary, Suffolk—all obviously places where particular care had to be taken.

Place-names containing *gelād* are found mostly in the Upper Thames and Severn valleys, and six of them were visited during the severe flooding in February 1990, December 1992 and January 1994. The salt route from Droitwich to Gloucester parallels the left bank of the Severn, and between Apperley and Wainlode Hill (Glos.; *wægn* 'waggon' + *gelād*) has to traverse a low-lying area criss-crossed by

drainage ditches and the River Chelt. The area is very liable to flooding. In 1990, a little over half a mile of the salt route was under flood water. Some four miles further south, the route crosses two other left-bank tributaries, the Hatherley and Horsbere Brooks, at Abloads (Court) (Glos.; personal name *Abba* + *gelād*). This area, too, was under flood waters, with Abloads Court itself standing on a site just above flood level. The salt route is thought to continue south of Gloucester, possibly going through Framilode (river-name *Frome* + *gelād*) before crossing the Severn to Awre, which had salt rights at Droitwich. The coastal road at Lower Framilode (SO 743104) used to be subject to frequent, fairly regular flooding before the building of an embankment beside the river. The flood risk was greatest at the time of the equinoctial spring tides, especially during the passage of the Severn bore. A strong south-westerly gale could make flooding even worse. The River Frome, in its deep-cut channel, showed no sign of flooding in January 1994, when the salt route was affected at both Wainlode Hill and Abloads Court owing to prolonged heavy rain. The cause of the difficult passage near the Frome, therefore, seems to be the unusual tidal conditions. Clearly, traders along this salt route faced considerable difficulties at times.

Two of the other flooded *gelād*-names lay on saltways: one is where a causeway crosses the River Evenlode between the villages of Evenlode and Broadwell (Glos.), and the second is at Lechlade (Glos.), where a salt route reaches the Thames, and can now cross it by means of St John's Bridge. This was built in 1228, and at one time had a long causeway of twenty arches on the approach from Buscot, and two large and two small arches over the river itself, an indication of the amount of flood-water it sometimes had to accommodate. Although the name refers to the River Leach, which has its confluence with the Thames close by St John's Bridge, it probably means 'difficult crossing near the Leach', rather than 'difficult crossing over the Leach'. *Gelād*-names are occasionally associated with Roman roads: Aqualate (Staffs.; *āc* [?] + *gelād*, 'the difficult crossing by the oaks'?) is a case in point, as the Roman road crosses some very soggy ground near Aqualate Mere in an area with well-grown oaks in the hedgerows. A more certain *gelād* is Cricklade (Wilts.), where both the Roman road and the causewayed diversion through the town traverse ground that suffers extensive flooding; indeed, flooding is welcomed, in

moderation, to maintain the habitat of the fritillary meadows. Map 3 (p. 17) shows the extent of the 1947 floods, the Roman road having to cross nearly one and a half miles of flooded land. By way of contrast, the crossing of the Coln at Fairford (Glos.), some four miles from Lechlade, really lives up to its name, being a firm, shallow, easily negotiable crossing, where very little flooding was evident on the same occasion in 1992.

Other stretches of road could present problems to travellers in wet weather. The terms *fenn* 'marsh' and *fennig* 'marshy' are quite often used to describe parts of routeways, for instance at Fenny Stratford (Bucks.), Fen Stanton (Hunts.) and Fen Drayton (Cambs.) (the latter two where a Roman road passes by the margins of the Fens), Fenny Drayton (Leics.), near Watling Street, and Fencot (Oxon.), where a Roman road crosses Otmoor. In these miry places, travellers, especially those with wheeled vehicles, could easily get bogged down and would need help to extricate themselves. Ekwall, in an article on *dræg*, an element frequently used to qualify *tūn* and *cot*, concluded that it meant 'place where things were dragged'.[2] He did not, however, comment on the large numbers of names (over half the total) containing *dræg-tūn* and *dræg-cot* along well-known routeways, especially at river-crossings. For instance, Fen Drayton is half a mile and Fen Stanton a quarter of a mile from where the Roman road dips and crosses the flood-plain of the Ouse on the margin of the Fens. They are one and a quarter miles from each other. Fenny Drayton is on a Roman road one mile from its junction with Watling Street and one and three-quarter miles from Mancetter, where Watling Street crosses the River Anker. Drayton (Leics.) is three-quarters of a mile from the Roman road-crossing of the River Welland. Two Roman roads join at Thrapston (Northants.), to cross the River Nene. On the far bank is Islip (river-name *Ise* + *slæpe*, 'slippery place beside the River Ise', an old name for the River Nene), and Draycot (Park) is sufficiently near for its inhabitants to have aided travellers unable to negotiate this slithery crossing on their own. By no means all *dræg-tūn* and *dræg-cot* names are associated with river-crossings. For example, Drayton Beauchamp (Bucks.), is where Akeman Street rises to pass through a wind gap in the Chilterns, and perhaps where additional draught-animals were needed to haul loads

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2   E. Ekwall, 'The English Place-Names Drayton, Draycot, Drax, etc.', *Namn och Bygd*, 20 (1932), 46–70.

up the hill. Others are associated with less-certain examples of Roman roads or with ancient tracks. There is, for instance, the Roman road identified by the Viatores leading from Dorchester (Oxon.) to Alconbury House (Hunts.), and passing close to the Thame, a river particularly liable to flood. The road is believed to have crossed it at Hayward Bridge (SU 602977), one mile from Drayton St Leonard: there is also a ford across the Thame in the village. The road crossed the Thame a second time three-quarters of a mile east of Draycot in Waterstock (Oxon.). This crossing, now lost, had been replaced before 1237 by Ickford Bridge about three-quarters of a mile downstream, the name suggesting that it was the site of an earlier ford. Because of the width of the flood plain which could be inundated, and the strength of the current, one should consider the possibility that some sort of ferry was available to haul travellers and goods across these rivers when the ford was impassable. In any case, the *dræg-tūn* and *dræg-cot* names would repay further study, particularly the hypothesis that their inhabitants were called upon by travellers to help drag loads where or when extra traction was needed.

By now, our traveller and his animals, having slogged up the steep *wegs*, negotiated the difficult *gelāds* and been dragged out of the fenny places, must have been dirty, tired, hungry and thirsty, and in sore need of an overnight halt at a place catering for such traffic. The obvious candidates for such a function are the *stræt-tūn* names. Map 2 (p. 16) shows their distribution. There is a fine series along the Fosse Way at fairly regular intervals, a convenient cluster at the major crossroads with Watling Street at High Cross (Leics.), and a useful series along the Welsh Marches. Others occur on the approaches to Lincoln. Perhaps Stainton and Stannington (above, p. 8) perform a similar function in the North. In an earlier article, it was suggested that places with names in *mere-tūn* (*mere* 'pond' + *tūn*) beside Roman roads, especially those with man-made ponds, might also perform some useful function in connection with road traffic, most likely serving as watering-places for animals and as overnight halts, perhaps of a less luxurious nature than the *stræt-tūn* places.[3] In fact, two of the *mere-tūn* names were on the sites of Roman roadside settlements. An examination of the functions of places whose names contain *mere* as a

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[3] Anne Cole, 'Distribution and Use of the Old English Place-Name *mere-tūn*', *Journal of the English Place-Name Society*, 24 (1991–92), 30–41.

generic found that many of the major places of this type with man-made ponds (often in chalk country) lay on routeways.[4] Unlike *mere-tūn* names, which occur by Roman roads but not ancient trackways, the *-mere* names occur by both types of route. Imber (Wilts.) lies on the Great Ridgeway in the dry heart of Salisbury Plain; Ashmore in Dorset lies close to the meeting point of three tracks, the Great Ridgeway, the Harrow Way and a Roman road, Fimber is on a Romanised ridgeway over the Yorkshire Wolds, and Finmere (Oxon.) is where a Roman road crosses an old route, possibly a saltway. The ponds are thought to be very ancient, and could have served travellers in pre-Roman times. For instance, Ringmoor, by the Great Ridgeway in Dorset, is associated with the prehistoric settlement on Turnworth Down. There are five cases where a *-mere* name has apparently had *-tūn* added. These are Tadmarton (Oxon.) and Farmington, Rodmarton, Didmarton and Tormarton (Glos.), all of which are near routeways. Tormarton no longer has a pond, because it was filled in following the provision of a fountain in 1855, supplied from nearby Bidwell Springs (*byden-wella*). An article by Alex Rumble on the meaning of *byden*, as it occurs in *byden-wella* and *byden-*funta*, concludes that it meant a vessel for holding water.[5] He quotes a passage from Bede describing how King Edwin of Northumbria

> [for] the comfort of his people . . . in many places where he observed clear springs near to public cross-roads, there for the refreshment of travellers, posts having been erected, he ordered bronze drinking-vessels to be hung.

Rumble comments that 'the passage at least shows that in England in the year 731 it was thought that the supplying of drinking-vessels at a convenient water-supply was a useful public service'.[6] Map 4 (p. 18) shows the distribution of *byden-wella* and *byden-*funta*, and although none are known in Edwin's kingdom, eight of the eleven place-names containing *byden-wella* (nine listed by Rumble and two other examples) are within five-eighths of a mile of a Roman road. With a random distribution, one would expect only one or two to be so close, so this

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[4] Ann Cole, 'The Distribution and Use of *mere* as a Generic in Place-Names', *Journal of the English Place-Name Society*, 25 (1992–93), 38–50.

[5] Alexander R. Rumble, 'A Bedan Gloss on Bedfont, Bedwell, etc.', *Nomina*, 12 (1988–89), 123–30.

[6] Rumble, 'Bedan Gloss', p. 126, citing Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, II, 16.

would seem a significant correlation. Bidwell (Farm) near Titchmarsh (Northants.) is both at a junction (i.e. a 'public cross-roads') and only 250 yards from the nearest Roman road (the Old English version of Bede's account uses the term *strǣt*). Beardwell (Wilts.), east of Bath, is 500 yards from a Roman road. Many of the springs in question appear to be small and not necessarily perennial, and it may be that the flow is so slow that a collecting-vessel or trough was kept permanently at the site, so that water was constantly accumulating drip by drip, and could be collected for use as and when required. Those *byden-wellas* by routeways would, therefore, supply a traveller with clean drinking water, but perhaps little else. The place-names containing *byden-*funta*, along with most other names in **funta*, have already been shown to be near routeways.[7]

Our traveller, then, having learned the sequence of place-names along his route, would have had a fair idea of the nature of his road, the crossing-places along it, places that might be difficult to negotiate, where he could call for assistance, and where he could obtain refreshments or overnight lodging. Of course, other topographical names along the route would have indicated the nature of the countryside he was traversing, and helped to keep him on course. In short, place-names were to the Anglo-Saxon what the map is to the modern traveller.
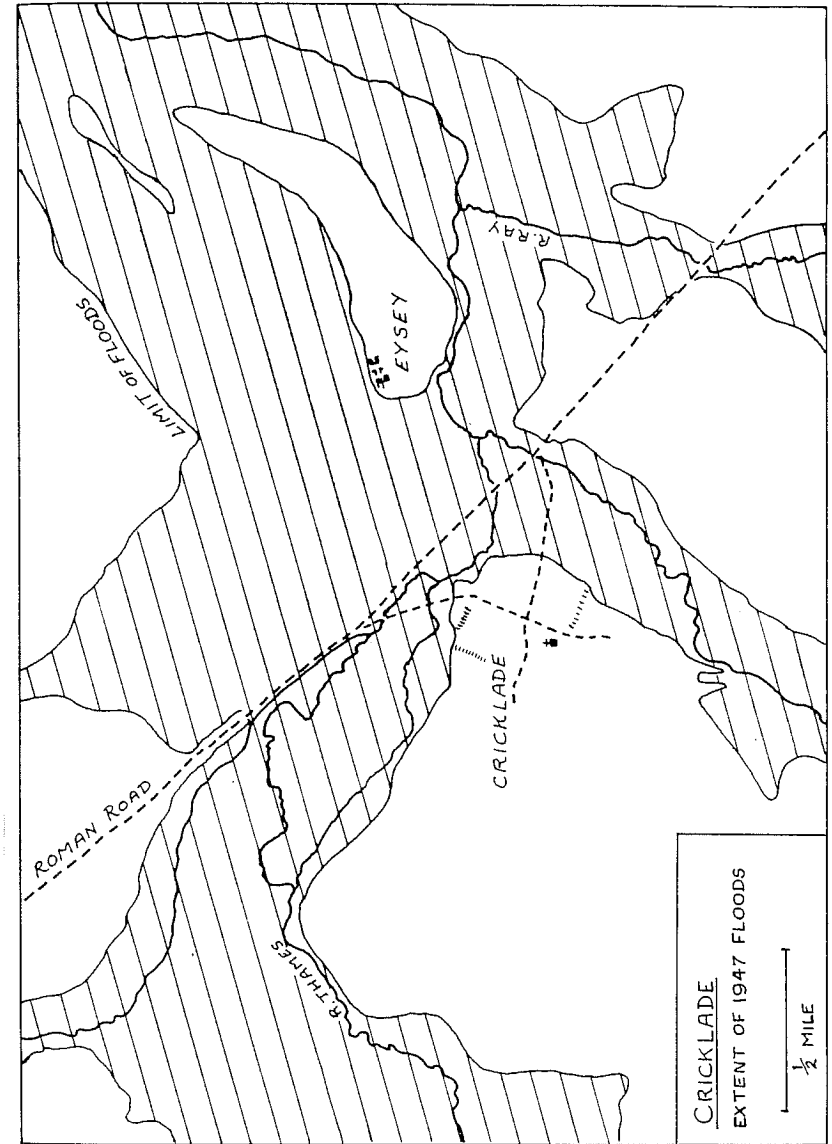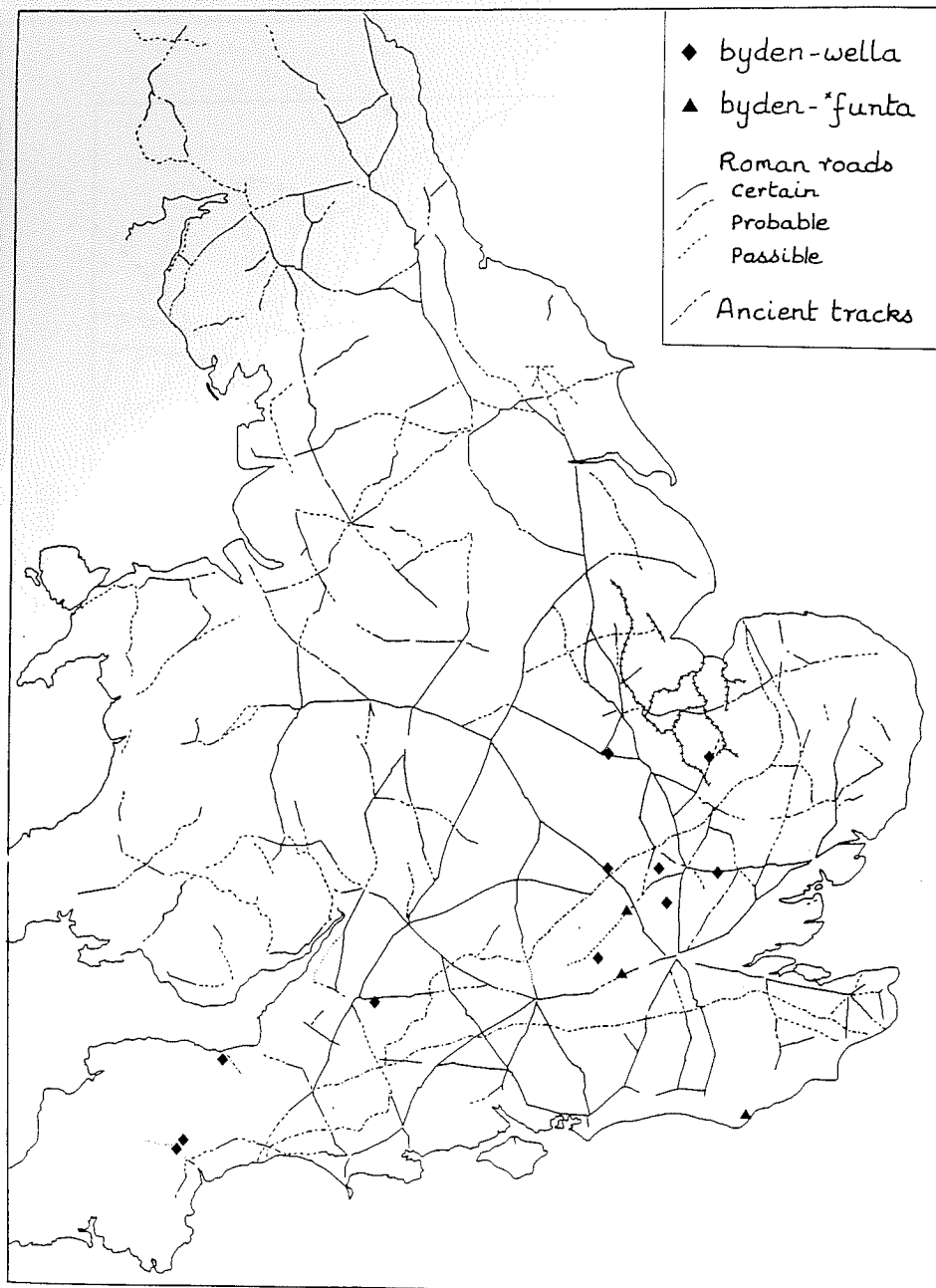
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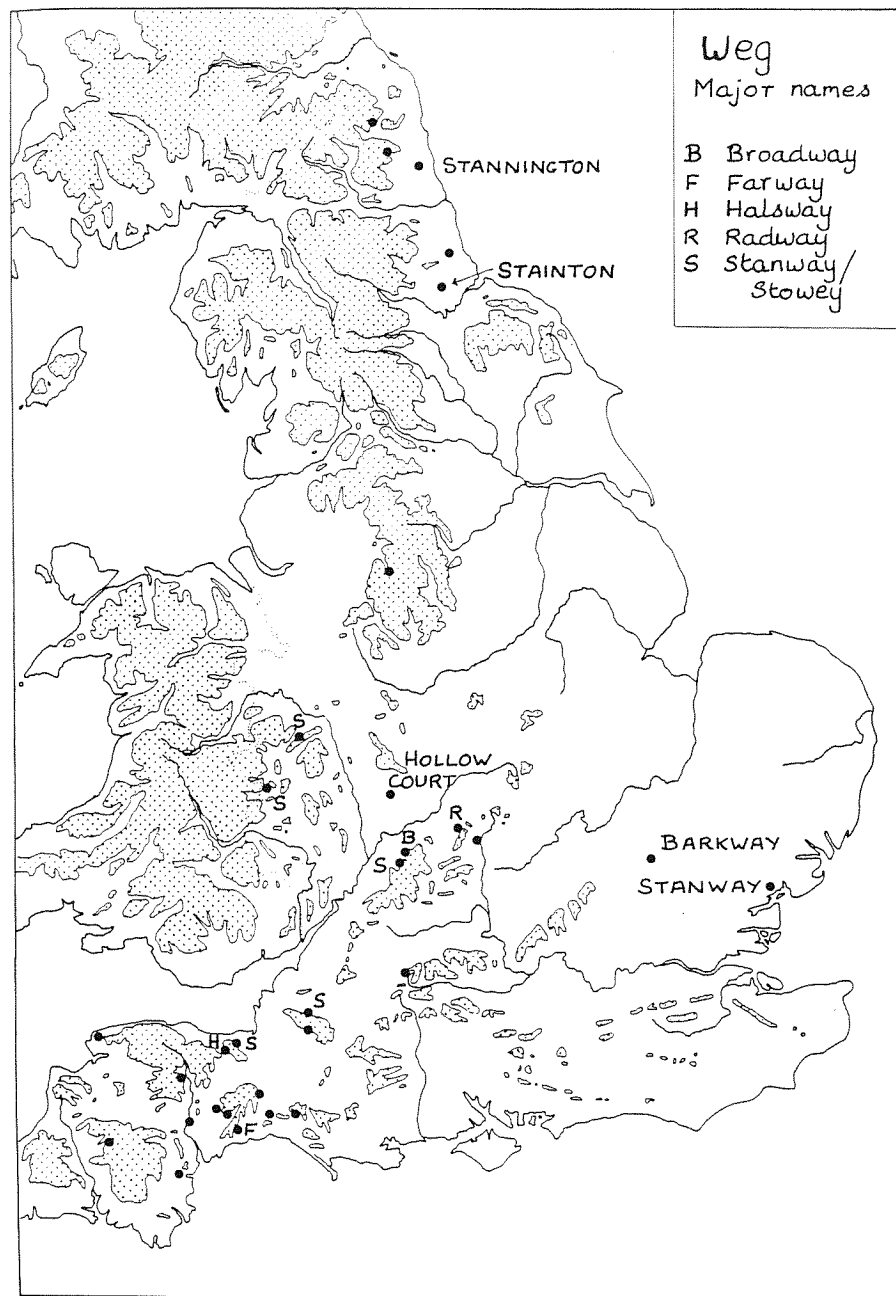
[7] Margaret Gelling, *Signposts to the Past* (London, 1978), pp. 83–86; Ann Cole, 'Topography, Hydrology and Place-Names in the Chalklands of Southern England: **funta, ǣwiell* and *ǣwielm*', *Nomina*, 9 (1985), 3–19.

Map 1. Major place-names in -*weg*
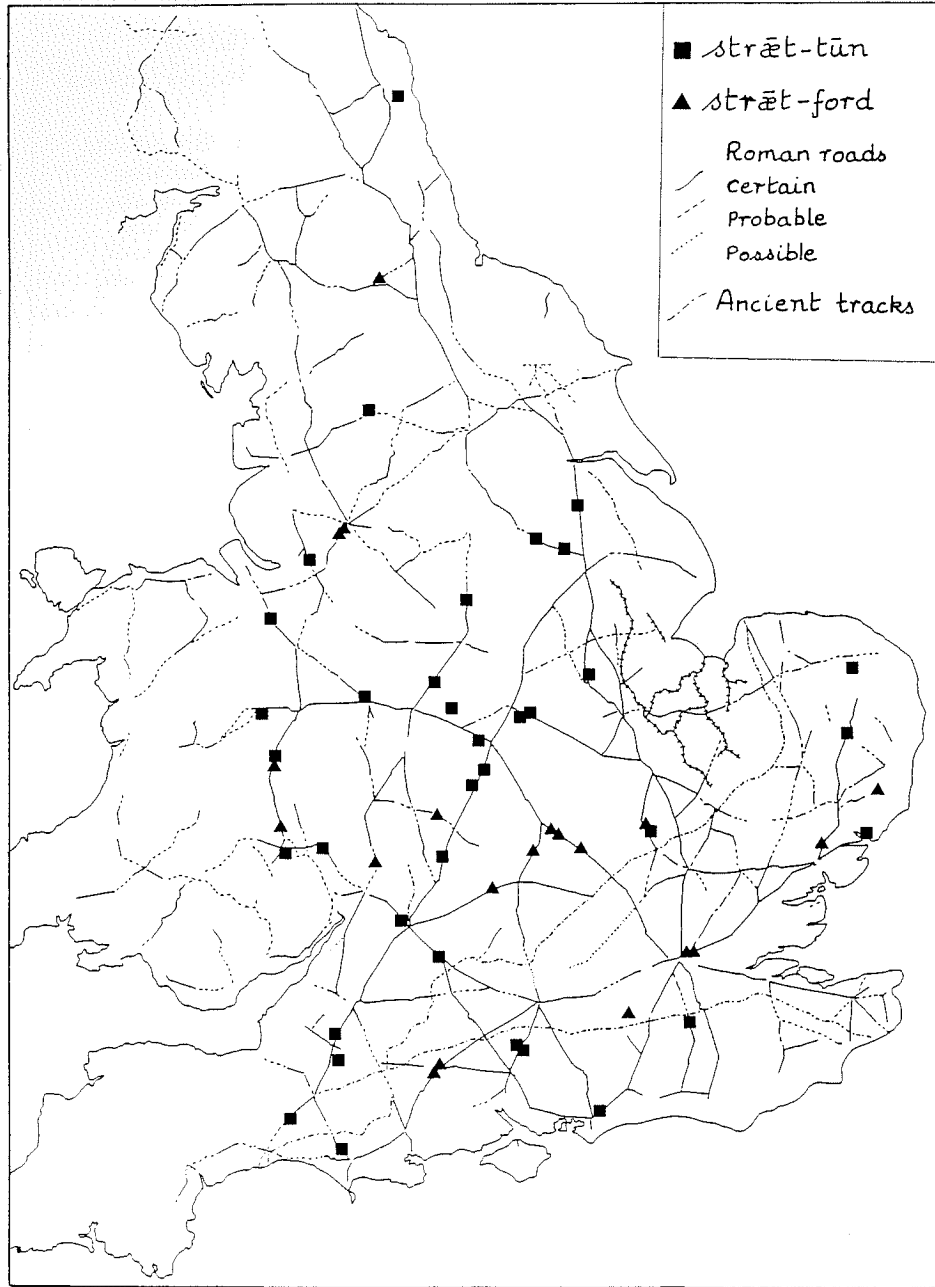
Map 2. Place-names derived from *stræt-ford* and *stræt-tūn*

Map 3. The extent of flooding at Cricklade (Wiltshire), 1947.

Map 4. Place-names derived from *byden-wella* and *byden-*funta*

Some Ghost Entries in Smith's
English Place-Name Elements

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A. H. Smith's *English Place-Name Elements* was published in 1956, at a time when only twenty-four volumes of the English Place-Name Survey had appeared.[1] The Survey is now at a much more advanced stage, having reached its sixty-sixth volume in 1993, and a new edition of *PNElements* is currently in preparation as part of a major research project funded by the Leverhulme Foundation.[2] The information given under individual headword entries is being updated in the light of recent research, with many new elements being added from post-1956 volumes of the Survey. Conversely, some existing headwords will be deleted, as their occurrence in place-names can no longer be substantiated. The purpose of this article is to examine the criteria for deleting headword entries, and to discuss a few selected examples. It will not be concerned with headwords which were challenged in reviews of the 1956 edition of *PNElements* and were subsequently cancelled in the Addenda and Corrigenda published in the first volume of the *Journal of the English Place-Name Society*,[3] but rather with those entries which have not stood the test of time.

Smith's edition of *Elements* includes a number of headwords which are of only doubtful occurrence, having been proposed as tentative etymologies for problematic place-names. These had a role to play in 1956, alerting future county editors to a range of alternative

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[1] A. H. Smith, *English Place-Name Elements*, 2 vols, English Place-Name Society [= EPNS], 25–26 (Cambridge, 1956) [henceforth *PNElements*]. Other county surveys of the EPNS are cited as '*PN*' + abbreviated county-name.
[2] The project is known as 'A Survey of the Language of English Place-Names', and is taking place at the Centre for English Name Studies, University of Nottingham.
[3] Examples include -*ce* (*JEPNS*, 1 (1968–69), 14: 'doubtful both in form and meaning and should be deleted'), **hvass* (ibid., p. 26: 'the el. should be deleted'), *micge* (ibid., p. 32: 'This el. should be deleted'), and **sanden* (ibid., p. 34: 'the el. could well be deleted').