

A Breath of Fresh Air through Finkle Street

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The English street-name and minor rural place-name Finkle Street recurs frequently, with minor variations in spelling and/or pronunciation and in choice of generic term. Thirty-five lost or extant instances are known to me at the time of writing. It is therefore one of the most frequent street-names of medieval origin apart from High Street and the compass-point names. It is regularly, though not quite exclusively, applied to fairly short streets that are not major thoroughfares. Only one rural or formerly rural place so named is large enough to figure in the Ordnance Survey and Bartholomew's gazetteers (the one in Wortley, in the West Riding of Yorkshire).¹ Despite its relative insignificance, the name has been much discussed, but I believe that sufficient light has not yet been cast on its origin. I shall defend a partly new view of its origin in some detail.

As the first sentence of this article implies, I believe that all instances of the name Finkle and the like to be discussed are of identical origin, despite minor variations in spelling and pronunciation. This presumption means that there is therefore a single problem to address, rather than two or more problems identical in form, which would impose an extra strain on the credulity of those reading the proposed solutions. The currently accepted view appears to allow for multiple origin of the term, one source meaning 'fennel' and the other 'bend'.² But the weight of evidence presented will clearly support the idea of a common origin for the expression Finkle Street.

¹ Ordnance Survey, *Landranger Gazetteer* (Southampton, 1985); *Bartholomew Gazetteer of Britain*, compiled by O. Mason (Edinburgh, 1977).

² A. H. Smith, *English Place-Name Elements*, 2 vols, English Place-Name Society, 25-26 (Cambridge, 1956), I, 169-70; henceforth cited as Smith, *PNElements*; other EPNS volumes are cited in the text with standard abbreviation of the type *PNX*, where *X* is the county name, abbreviated conventionally.

The distribution of the name

Finkle Street has an essentially north(-east)ern distribution. It is known from Northumberland, County Durham, the North, East and West Ridings of Yorkshire and the city of York, Westmorland, Cumberland, Lincolnshire (Kesteven, Lindsey and the city of Lincoln), Nottinghamshire, Rutland and Norfolk. It has been recorded in the following towns or villages; references to the relevant documentary evidence should be sought in the appropriate EPNS volume except where noted otherwise:

- Alnwick (Northumberland)—actually Fenkle Street here on the testimony of Heslop.³
- Appleby (Westmorland; lost).
- Barton on Humber (Lincs.)—actually Finkle Lane here.
- Bentley (Arksey, Yorkshire WR).
- Brighouse (Yorkshire WR)—actually Finkil Street here.
- Carlisle (Cumberland).
- Clough, between Luddendenfoot and Sowerby (Yorkshire WR).
- Gildersome (Batley, Yorkshire WR)—actually Finkle Lane here.
- Grimsby (Lincs., Lindsey; lost)—noted by Kenneth Cameron whilst preparing the Lincolnshire survey.
- Hull (Yorkshire ER).
- Kendal (Westmorland).
- Knaresborough (Yorkshire WR).
- Lincoln (lost).
- [Long] Bennington (Lincs., Kesteven)—on the testimony of Reaney.⁴
- Louth (Lincs., Lindsey; lost).⁵
- Malham (Yorkshire WR).
- Newcastle upon Tyne (Northumberland)—actually Fenkle Street here; on the testimony of Heslop and modern street-maps.⁶
- Norwich (Norfolk)—actually Finkelgate here now.

³ R. O. Heslop, *Northumberland Words: A Glossary of Words Used in the County of Northumberland and on the Tyneside* (London, 1892-94), p. 281.

⁴ P. H. Reaney, *The Origin of English Place-Names* (London, 1960), p. 234.

⁵ See Robert S. Bayley, *Notitiae Ludae, or Notices of Louth* (Louth, 1834), as mentioned in *PNNotts*, p. xli; Irene M. Bower, 'The Place-Names of Lindsey (North Lincolnshire)' (University of Leeds, unpublished doctoral dissertation, 1940), p. 238.

⁶ Heslop, *Northumberland Words*, p. 281.

- North Leverton (Notts.)—actually Fingle Street here.
- Nottingham—actually Finkhill Street here.
- Oakham (Rutland)—actually Finkey Street here.
- Owersby (Lincs., Lindsey; lost).
- Pontefract (Yorkshire WR).
- Portinscale (Above Derwent ward, Cumberland; lost).
- Richmond (Yorkshire NR)—information from two correspondents.
- Ripon (Yorkshire WR).
- St Bees (Cumberland).
- Sedbergh (Yorkshire WR)—information from one correspondent.
- Selby (Yorkshire WR).
- Southwell (Notts.).
- Stockton on Tees (Durham)—noted on current local street-maps.
- Thorne (Yorkshire WR).
- Workington (Cumberland).
- Wortley (Tankersley, Yorkshire WR)—actually Finkell Street here in *PNYorksWR* but Finkle Street in the gazetteers (see footnote 1).
- York.

Heslop notes the name in 'Newcastle, Alnwick (etc.)' in that county, adding a little cryptically that 'most of our old towns' have such a street-name.⁷ Its apparent absence from the North Riding—there is no instance in *PNYorksNR*—is an artefact of the smaller degree of attention formerly paid to minor names in EPNS county surveys; it is found among the streets of Richmond. It seems to be authentically absent from Cheshire and Derbyshire, to judge by the completed EPNS surveys of those counties. It is not known for certain whether any have been observed in the Border counties of Scotland. According to Ekwall,⁸ W. G. Collingwood, in a handwritten note in Ekwall's copy of Mawer's *Place-Names of Northumberland and Durham*,⁹ stated that the name occurs in south-east Scotland, but no corroborated instances have surfaced yet. There may be other examples waiting to be announced, as there are no published EPNS surveys as yet for the other northern and north-midland counties of Lancashire,

⁷ Heslop, *Northumberland Words*, p. 231.

⁸ E. Ekwall, *Etymological Notes on English Place-Names* (Lund, 1959), p. 49 (cited hereafter as *Etym.Notes*).

⁹ A. Mawer, *The Place-Names of Northumberland and Durham* (Cambridge, 1920) (cited hereafter as *PNNbDu*).

Leicestershire, Durham and Northumberland; and those for two other counties known to have contained instances of the place-name, Lincolnshire and Norfolk, are incomplete. As for Leicestershire, I am informed by Barrie Cox, on the basis of research done for his doctoral dissertation,¹⁰ that it is absent from the city of Leicester; and on a relevant name in Loughborough, see below, p. 26.

The earliest records

The earliest records of the name-type that are known to me include:

13th century (Barton), *semita de Vinkel*.¹¹

1370 (York), *Fynkullstrete cum mercato Iovis* (PNYorksER, p. 286, Ekwall, *Etym. Notes*, p. 47); then 1400 *Fenkelstrete*, 1487 *Fynkelstrete*.

1415 (Hull), *Fynkelstrete* (PNYorksER, p. 211).

1452 (Appleby), *Fynkilstrett* (PNWestm., II, 92).

1455 (Lincoln), *super viam regiam vocat' Fynkelstrete* (PN Lincs, I, 65-66); then 1589 and 1607.

1460-62 (Knaresborough), *Fynkelstrete* (PNYorksWR, V, 111).

1469 (Grimsby), *Fynkelstrete [by] le cornmarket* (Kenneth Cameron, in correspondence).

1504 (Kendal), *Fynkelstrete* and other spellings (PNWestm. I, 116).

1506 (Norwich), *Fenkelstreet* (PNNorfolk, I, 104); then 1508 *Fenkelgate*.

1540 (Carlisle), *Fynkelstrete* (PNCumb., I, 47-48).

1582 (Southwell), *Finkell Streete* (PN Nott., p. 175).

1610 (Oakham), *Finkle street* (Speed's town plan; cf. PNRutland, pp. 105 and lxxxvi); sometimes later *Finkell Lane* and the like.

1624 (Luddendenfoot), *ffinkell strete* (PNYorksWR, III, 139).

1657 (Wortley), *Finkell street* (PNYorksWR, I, 299).

1664 (Owersby), *a Street commonly called y^e finckle Street* (PNLincs, III, 90).

1682 (St Bees), *Finkeld* (PNCumb., I, 47).

¹⁰ B. M. Cox, *The Place-Names of Leicestershire and Rutland* (University of Nottingham, unpublished doctoral dissertation, 1970).

¹¹ Bower, 'Place-Names of Lindsey', p. 97, citing the Bardney Abbey cartulary (BL MS Vespasian E xx); Smith, *PNElements*, I, 170; not cited at PNLincs., II, 38, where the attestations of this name date only from 1704 onwards.

From these dates an origin for the name-type in the mid-to-late Middle English period might be inferred, but an earlier origin is not ruled out. Hull's Finkle Street was *Hale strete* until 1415, and the renaming may testify to the officialization of an unofficial name for the street, or to the application of a name consisting of a pre-existing idiomatic descriptive phrase (these two things not being incompatible with each other). The wording of the (albeit rather late) Owersby attestation, with the definite article (*y^e finckle Street*), suggests a descriptive phrase, though Kenneth Cameron informs me that the use of the article is common in names in local terriers of this period (the seventeenth century). At all events, the Hull renaming confirms the existence of the expression prior to 1415. The Louth instance appears to involve a late renaming. Bayley records *Finkle Street or Padehole*; the latter being recorded since 1317, and the former recorded for the first and last time in his book (1834), thus carrying a suggestion of unofficial status about it.¹²

Previous attempts at interpretation

1. The 'bend' theory

Heslop isolated a lexical word *fenkle* 'bend, corner',¹³ and concluded that Finchale (pronounced /fɪŋkl/) in County Durham (actually from OE *fincan halh* 'finch land-in-a-river-bend')¹⁴ embodied it. On this view, Finkle Streets were named because they were streets with marked bends in them; as, presumably, in past or present Carlisle, Kendal, Newcastle, Portinscale (Above Derwent) and Wortley—and the streets in York, Knaresborough and Gildersome have slight bends on the modern maps. Bower, alerted of course to Mawer's views (see the next section), mentions specifically the 'very noticeable bend' in Finkle Lane, Barton on Humber.¹⁵ Against the view is the fact that Southwell has a Finkle Street, but it also had a Crink Lane full of significant bends, and the meaning 'notably bendy street' seems therefore to have been pre-empted by an expression other than the one which presently interests us. Ekwall was also sceptical of the suitability

¹² Bower, 'Place-Names of Lindsey', p. 238.

¹³ Heslop, *Northumberland Words*, p. 231.

¹⁴ E. Ekwall, *Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 4th edn (Oxford, 1960), s.n.

¹⁵ Bower, 'Place-Names of Lindsey', p. 97.

of many of these streets for a name of such a meaning, pointing out especially that the York instance is not itself remarkably crooked, but is adjacent to other streets that are or were.¹⁶ I suspect that Heslop may have interpreted the name Finkle Street for himself, inferring from crooked streets known to him in Northumberland that it had to do with bends, and produced the rabbit of a word meaning 'bend' from the hat of obscurity; though in fairness to him he may have known of the similar Yorkshire dialect word applicable to bends in rivers as well as to those in paths (on which see further below, theory 5).

2. The 'Finchale' theory

The next attempt was that of Allen Mawer in his *Place-Names of Northumberland and Durham*.¹⁷ Noting that Finchale Priory stood in a large bend of the Wear, he stood Heslop on his head, proposing that *finkle* came to mean 'bend' in commemoration of the site of the priory, and was used thereafter in local names (with or without detailed knowledge of the site of Finchale on the part of the namer). I find it hard to imagine that Finchale was ever well enough known to be a type-site in this way. But worse for the theory is that sites like Finchale which are shaped in such a way as to be named from *halb* are typically surrounded on three sides by water.¹⁸ They therefore do not inhabit the right shape of bend for their names to give rise to a word suitable for application to a bend in a street, except by some unpardonable licence or by some unaccountable freak of town (un)planning. Worse still, for this as for the previous theory, is the discovery that some Finkle Streets are and were bendless, as far as can be judged from the historical or archaeological record; for instance in Hull, Selby, Lincoln and Norwich¹⁹—and the possibly relevant Finkle Hill in Sherburn in Elmet is a stretch of Roman road! Moreover,

¹⁶ Ekwall, *Etym. Notes*, p. 50.

¹⁷ Mawer, *PNNbDu*, p. 86.

¹⁸ Cf. Dodgson's establishment of *hamm* type 1: J. McN. Dodgson, 'Place-names from *hām*, Distinguished from *hamm* Names, in Relation to the Settlement of Kent, Surrey, and Sussex', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 2 (1973), 1–50; and note Gelling's discussion of modern dialect *haugh* 'land in a river-bend' in the north-east: M. Gelling, *Place-Names in the Landscape* (London, 1984), p. 108.

¹⁹ Unless special pleading is accepted in the Norwich case about exactly which modern street(s) the name denoted; cf. *PNNorfolk*, I, 104.

place-name transfer of any kind is virtually unknown in England, except in the vicinity of London, before the wholesale commemorative naming of provincial city streets after London ones, which is characteristic of the nineteenth century especially. A notable exception, the widespread Coldharbour, derives, originally around 1590–1600, from a prominent building on a prominent site in the capital of England,²⁰ which is quite a different matter from a remote Benedictine house generally housing only around nine brothers, which served mainly as a holiday home for jaded monks from St Cuthbert's in Durham.²¹ The fact that Finchale contained the pilgrim shrine of St Godric increases the plausibility of such a transfer somewhat, but Godric's was essentially a local cult; 81% of pilgrims came from within thirty miles of Finchale, and were typically female and lower class; and the great majority of Godric's posthumous miracles occurred in County Durham.²² Strikingly, however, the attested Finkle Streets cluster in Yorkshire rather than in Durham (see Map 1, p. 32).²³

As Smith notes in *PNElements*,²⁴ a possible parallel for such a medieval transfer is afforded by ME *gannok*. This is said by Angus McIntosh, not altogether implausibly, to be an anglicization of the name of Degannwy castle, Caernarfon;²⁵ but the etymology is still open to grave doubt, and for an alternative idea, broadly compatible with Smith's final sentences in the entry for *gannok* in *PNElements*, see *PNLincs*.²⁶ I shall return to the matter of name-transfer below (pp.

²⁰ R. Coates, 'Coldharbour—for the Last Time?', *Nomina*, 8 (1984), 73–78.

²¹ *Victoria County History of Durham*, II, 103–04.

²² R. C. Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (London, 1977), pp. 126–27 and 166–69; and see Fig. 1 and Map 2, pp. 33–34 in this article.

²³ In the light of what will follow, it is of interest, though strictly irrelevant, to note that the popularly-hallowed Godric posthumously informed a sleeping devotee of his displeasure at the stench of the latrines near his tomb. See Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims*, p. 34; and for an enlightening view of what this shows about popular hagiology, see S. Medcalf, 'Motives for Pilgrimage: *The Tale of Beryn*', in *Harlaxton Medieval Studies*, III: *England in the Fourteenth Century*, edited by N. Rogers (Stamford, 1993), pp. 99–110, especially pp. 101–04.

²⁴ Smith, *PNElements*, I, 193–94.

²⁵ A. McIntosh, 'Middle English 'gannokes' and Some Place-Name Problems', *Review of English Studies*, 16 (1940), 54–61.

²⁶ *PNLincs*, II, 61.

26–28), because it is likely that transfer is indeed involved in the history of Finkle Street, but not in the way envisaged by Mawer. The view I shall espouse, however, is consistent with the pattern of those relatively few transfers that can be securely identified.

3. The 'Finnkell' theory

Harald Lindkvist²⁷ proposed that the name included the Scandinavian personal name *Finnkell*. He apparently did not know of the occurrence of Finkle Street outside York, otherwise he might have marvelled at the ability of so many Finnkells to manoeuvre so adroitly on the property scene as to get themselves commemorated in local names, unlike the less enterprising Thurkells and Sweins. On the other hand, it must be conceded that the distribution of the name is remarkably Scandinavian, respecting both the Danish heartland and the Norwegian areas in the north-west of England. Ekwall was able to construct a version of events which renders this history less improbable than it might seem at first sight, and we shall return to it below (p. 27)²⁸. But the supposed parallels among York street-names which Ekwall relied on are in fact both constructed with the Scandinavian element *gata* (Goodramgate, Davygate), and are therefore presumably of earlier origin. This fact decreases the plausibility of his version.

4. The 'fennel' theory

The first linguistically tenable interpretation with any serious plausibility was proposed by Hugh Smith.²⁹ He argued that the name included ME *fen(e)kel* 'fennel' (*Foeniculum vulgare*), and that it denoted a place where fennel grew or was sold. This is decidedly more credible; words for herbs and spices in street-names are not unknown (Spiceal Street in Birmingham, Pepper Lane in Caernarfon and Coventry and Pepper Street in Nottingham, *Garlic Fair Lane* (lost) and the separate Garlic Row in Cambridge, Saffron Hill in Holborn, London, Land of Green Ginger in Hull). They probably allude in at least some cases to the traditional sites of booths or stalls at major fairs. However, I find

²⁷ H. Lindkvist, 'A Study on Early Medieval York: Topography and Place-Names', *Anglia*, n.s. 38 (1926), 345–94, especially p. 366.

²⁸ Ekwall, *Etym. Notes*, p. 52.

²⁹ *PN YorksER*, pp. 211 and 286.

the multiplication of the name, and its overwhelming outnumbering of names of similar apparent meaning, hard to square with this origin. Surely also not all the places listed can have had fairs worth the name. On the positive side for this theory is the very important point of the dialect distribution of the modern derivative of ME *fen(e)kel*, viz. *finkle*. James Britten and Robert Holland, in their *Dictionary of English Plant-Names*,³⁰ have the variant forms *finkel*, *finkle* and *fynkle*, and ascribe the word to the north, Yorkshire and Scotland on the authority of Halliwell, Holloway and Jamieson respectively.³¹ Jamieson's *Scots Dictionary* ascribes *fynkle* also to Lincolnshire. Joseph Wright, in his *English Dialect Dictionary*, reports the word from dialect dictionaries (and comparable texts) of the North Country, Yorkshire (four texts), Lincolnshire and Kent.³² Geoffrey Grigson, in *The Englishman's Flora*,³³ probably directly following Britten/Holland and Wright, notes it from Kent, Lincolnshire, Yorkshire, northern England and Scotland. With the exception of Kent,³⁴ this distribution bears rather close comparison with the distribution of the

³⁰ J. Britten and R. Holland, *A Dictionary of English Plant-Names*, 3 vols (London, 1878).

³¹ J. O. Halliwell[-Phillipps], *Dictionary of Archaic and Provincial Words*, 2 vols (London, 1846–47); W. Holloway, *A General Dictionary of Provincialisms, etc.* (Lewes, 1838); J. Jamieson, *An Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language*, edited by J. Longmuir (Edinburgh, 1879–80). The word seems to have been current in Scots by 1549 and obsolete by the late nineteenth century, on the testimony of the *Scottish National Dictionary* and the *Concise Scots Dictionary*. I have not been able to determine the word's distribution within Scots territory.

³² J. Wright, *The English Dialect Dictionary* (Oxford, 1898–1905). The texts mentioned include: S. O. Addy, *A Glossary of Words Used in the Neighbourhood of Sheffield* (London, 1888); J. T. Brockett, *A Glossary of North Country Words* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1825; 3rd edn 1846); W. Carr, *The Dialect of Craven, in the West Riding of the County of York* (London, 1828); A. Easter, *A Glossary of the Dialect of Almondbury and Huddersfield*, edited by T. Lees (London, 1883); J. Hunter, *The Hallamshire Glossary* (London, 1829); C. Clough Robinson, *A Glossary of Words Pertaining to the Dialect of Mid-Yorkshire (with Others Peculiar to Lower Nidderdale)* (London, 1876).

³³ G. Grigson, *The Englishman's Flora* (London, 1958).

³⁴ But its use in Kent is confirmed in W. D. Parish and W. F. Shaw, *A Dictionary of the Kentish Dialect and Provincialisms in Use in the County of Kent* (London, 1887), s.v.

name-element, which is essentially northern, as already observed. This etymology in 'fennel' is one of two eventually endorsed by Hugh Smith in *PNElements*.³⁵ O. K. Schram also accepted it for the instance in Norwich.³⁶

I have noted a surname *Fenkell* which I take to relate to this meaning, especially since the corresponding surname *Fennell* is known elsewhere.³⁷ I have found two instances of *Fenkell* in a Border muster of 1584; the men involved were mustered in Ellingham and Horton (presumably the one near Doddington; both in Northumberland).³⁸ Interestingly, some instances of *Fenegle*, *Fenigle*, and *Fynegle* are known from Wilmington in east Sussex in the first half of the fourteenth century, and this surname can be shown to have evolved into *Fennell* or some of its local variants.³⁹ Though there is a phonological difficulty in the voicing of the /k/,⁴⁰ the early forms may represent a westward continuation of the Kentish *finkle* referred to above. But it must be noted that the Sussex surname was topographical in origin, since it is frequently preceded by *atte*.⁴¹ Presumably therefore it meant 'fennel-patch'. Of most interest is that it was clearly regarded as equivalent to the word *fennel* as the surname evolved. In a general way, a surname from a herb- or spice-name is plausible; compare *Garlick*, *Hocleeve* (though this might be for the place-name Hockliffe in Bedfordshire rather than from the regional word for 'mallow'), *Marjoram*, *Pepper*, and *Woodruff*.

³⁵ Smith, *PNElements*, I, 169.

³⁶ O. K. Schram, 'Place-Names', in *Norwich and its Region*, British Association for the Advancement of Science (Norwich, 1961), pp. 141-49, especially p. 148.

³⁷ M. T. Löfvenberg, *Studies in Middle English Local Surnames* (Lund, 1942), p. 62; R. McKinley, *The Surnames of Sussex* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 189-90; P. H. Reaney and R. M. Wilson, *Dictionary of English Surnames*, 3rd edn., with corrections and additions by R. M. Wilson (London, 1991), s.n.

³⁸ J. Bain, *The Border Papers, I: 1560-94* (Edinburgh, 1894), document 259.

³⁹ McKinley, *Surnames of Sussex*, pp. 189-90.

⁴⁰ A. Campbell, *Old English Grammar* (Oxford, 1959), § 530.

⁴¹ Löfvenberg, *Local Surnames*, p. 62; McKinley, *Surnames of Sussex*, pp. 189-90.

5. The Danish 'corner' theory

The fifth theory, first propounded by Hargrove nearly 200 years ago,⁴² but given renewed credence by being taken up by Smith in *PNYorksER*, relates *finkle* to Danish *vinkel* 'angle, corner', and is elaborated in the way noted in relation to the first and second theories: the name supposedly denotes a street with a marked bend. However, as others have noted,⁴³ Danish *vinkel*, or rather its ancestor (if it really were North Germanic and not a borrowing from Low German as Ekwall believed),⁴⁴ should have yielded English **winkle*. Smith notes a lost place-name *Winkel* in South Cave, recorded in a foot of a fine in 1231;⁴⁵ if he is right that this represents Danish *vinkel*, he effectively undermines his own etymology for Finkle Street, as *Winkel* shows the expected development of the initial consonant. (In any case, *Winkel* may be from OE *wincel* 'nook, corner' in this part of England.) But Smith goes further and suggests that Danish *v-* can actually, sporadically, yield English *f-*, adducing the place-name Falsgrave (Yorks North Riding). This comparison is misleading, however, as the first element in Falsgrave is the Anglo-Scandinavian relative of ON *hvóll* 'isolated rounded hill', i.e. a word with initial *hv-*, not *v-*. The view that Finkle can descend from *vinkel* has no support and should therefore definitely be rejected. Smith also reckons with the possibility that the borrowing of the Low German relative of *vinkel* might account for initial *f-*, but such a widespread distribution of a word for a non-portable object reduces the credibility of a Low German borrowing. Other probable Low German borrowings in English are clearly linked to seamanship, travel and trade (e.g. *freight*, *keelson*, *kink* (in a rope), *train(-oil)*, *tow* 'flax fibre', *sled*). Moreover I know of no Low German dialect with early devoicing of Germanic initial *w-*; neither did Ekwall.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, we must recall that Wright records a word *fenkle* 'a bend, angle, corner of a street, river, &c.'⁴⁷ If it were a really ancient

⁴² W. Hargrove, *History and Description of the Ancient City of York* (York, 1818).

⁴³ For instance Smith himself, *PNElements*, I, 169; Ekwall, *Etym.Notes; PN Lincs*, I, 66.

⁴⁴ As reported in *PNYorksER*, p. lx.

⁴⁵ *PNYorksER*, p. 286.

⁴⁶ Ekwall, *Etym.Notes*, p. 49.

word, it would have to be taken seriously as a contender for the etymology of our street-name; but it is absent from ME records as an independent word. Whilst noting that absence, Smith endorses the possibility; Reaney, however, prefers to suspend judgement on the same grounds.⁴⁸ Smith denies the possibility of the relevant word deriving from the name of Finchale (see above, theory 2), but accepts that the existence of Finchale and knowledge of the topography of the place may have influenced its sense-development.

In the present writer's view, the dialect distribution of the word for a winding path (even if genuine) is far too limited to account for the numerous instances of Finkle Street all over the Danelaw and the North Country. *Fen(e)kel* 'fennel' is by contrast a well-known and well-attested common lexical word of the whole north(-east) and it may not even have been felt to be an incorrigible dialectalism. It was mentioned without explanation or commentary as *fenkell* by John Maplet in *A Greene Forest*, suggesting that not even Maplet's Cambridge education could eradicate all traces of a north-eastern upbringing.⁴⁹ Hendrick Hexham's *Het groot Woorden-Boeck* of 1658 glosses contemporary Dutch *Venckel* as English 'finckle', and Stephen Skinner's *Etymologicon linguae anglicanae* of 1671 also uses such a form.⁵⁰ The weight of attestation is definitely in favour, therefore, of 'fennel' rather than 'winding path' for the northern place-names.

As noted earlier, Smith's position, expressed in *PNElements* and *PNYorkER*, introduces the unhappy possibility that the various Finkle Streets might be of different origins: 'fennel' in St Bees and Selby, and in Finkle Hill in Sherburn, for instance, where no bends are on record,

⁴⁷ *English Dialect Dictionary*, s.v., following Heslop's *Northumberland Words* and a single glossarist from Leeds, Yorkshire (West Riding), C. C. Robinson; see the latter's entry *fenkill* 'a winding-pathway' in *The Dialect of Leeds, and its Neighbourhood [etc.]* (London, 1861 or 1862), of whatever origin that may really be. (Ekwall, in *Etym. Notes*, pp. 50–51, was prepared to go so far as to doubt the existence of this word; I arrived independently at the serious misgivings expressed above in the discussion of theory 1.)

⁴⁸ Smith, *PNElements*, I, 169; Reaney, *Origin of English Place-Names*, p. 234.

⁴⁹ J. Maplet, *A Greene Forest, or a Naturall Historie* (s.l., 1567; reprinted [London], 1930).

⁵⁰ H. Hexham, *Het groot Woorden-Boeck* (Rotterdam, 1648–58); S. Skinner, *Etymologicon linguae anglicanae* (London, 1671).

and 'bend' in other places. A unitary solution would clearly be more palatable.

6. The 'lovers' lane' theory

Eilert Ekwall, in his *Etymological Notes on English Place-Names*, rather surprisingly throws out the 'fennel' theory as well as the 'bend' theory, allows that Lindkvist's appeal to *Finnkell* had some merit, and then attempts to cut the knot by suggesting that all these names originated in an unattested but plausible ME **finkle* 'to cuddle, pet', and that the name denoted a kind of urban lovers' lane.⁵¹ But the Lincoln Finkle Street is described as a *via regia*! One wonders what the attraction of such a place might have been, when copses and green lanes can never have been more than a few hundred yards away from the middle of a medieval town. Perhaps we are to imagine a brothel in these places, but one well-known and durable enough to suggest a street-name in a small town or village would also have been of interest to churchwardens, voyeurs, constables, Puritans, headboroughs and general busybodies, and its viability would have been sporadic, to say the least. Moreover, this theory requires a whole street to have been named from just one establishment, unless Knaresborough, Lincoln, Ripon, Southwell, Workington and the rest all had their little Reeperbahn. Readers will form their own views on the plausibility of Ekwall's theory. There is not a single shred of philological evidence to back it up in English or any other Germanic language; only an *a priori* argument about the frequency of 'lovers' lane' names, such as the *Grope(cunt) Lane* in at least ten medieval towns and villages. A whole taxonomy of medieval sexual practices in public places seems to have gone unexplored here; Ekwall assures us that 'the narrow and dark Finkle Street in York might have been suitable for love-making',⁵² but it would be instructive to know how it differed from the *Grappcunt Lane* of the fourteenth-century Close Rolls (now Grape Lane) in the same city, and how groping differed from finkling. Nevertheless, this interpretation seems to be generally accepted among toponymists writing today.⁵³ I cannot swallow it.

⁵¹ Ekwall, *Etym. Notes*, pp. 47–53.

⁵² Ekwall, *Etym. Notes*, p. 52.

⁵³ B. Cottle, *Names* (London, 1983), p. 181; *PNLincs.*, I, 65–6; *PNNorfolk*, I, 104; A. Room, *The Street Names of England* (Stamford, 1992), pp. 48–49.

7. The 'rubbish heap' theory

Ekwall, in the same article, also toys with the idea that the word derives from unattested OE **finincel* or conceivably **finwincel* '(rubbish) heap, laystall', reduced to a disyllable by haplology; this is surely over-elaborate and wrong (it cannot account for spellings with -e- in the first syllable), but he hits the right sort of nail with the wrong hammer, as we shall see.

The 'fennel' theory revisited

Ekwall was, in my view, too quick to reject the 'fennel' theory. It is very significant that in some of these names—especially in the north-west—the words *fennel* and *finkle* interchange. The Workington *Fennell-street* of 1725 is *Finkall Street* or *Fennal Street* in 1775. An early record of the instance in St Bees is also actually *Fennell Street* (1739). In Carlisle, a local historian in 1890 recorded Finkle Street as 'corruptly Fennel Street'. Taken with the existence of Fennel Street in Warrington (Lancs) and Manchester, these data presented in *PN Cumb.*⁵⁴ might suggest that the original word in names in the furthest north-west was *fennel*, and that it was becoming displaced by the essentially north-eastern *finkle* (which had a foothold by the mid-fifteenth century already in Westmorland, to judge by the place-name evidence, presumably having spread via the Dales) until the process was arrested by the emphasis placed on standard vocabulary through mass education from the later nineteenth century onwards. (See Map 3, p. 35.)

The anthroponymic, literary and scientific record confirms the equation of the two words. We have already noted the apparent equivalence of these divergent forms in the evolution of a Sussex surname. Different manuscripts of Langland's *Piers Plowman* have one word or the other according to where they were written; manuscripts of the A-tradition usually, but not invariably, have *fenel* and the C-tradition *fenkel*.⁵⁵ The probably fifteenth-century Stockholm medical MS excerpted by Stephens opens with clearly northern dialect features and uses the word *fenkel(e)* (e.g. lines as printed 58 and 420), but after a prose interlude loses those features and goes on to discuss *fenell* (lines as

⁵⁴ *PNCumb.*, I, 47–48.

⁵⁵ For example, A, passus V, line 156; C, passus VI, line 360.

printed 1334–47).⁵⁶ The compiler of the *Promptorium Parvulorum* (1440) already equated *fenkylle* and *fenelle* (e.g. 155 and 156), as did Turner in his herbal of 1548, adducing *fenel* and *fenkel*.⁵⁷ The *Phyala Lachrymarum* printed by Nares, as cited in the OED, contains the line 'Nor fennel-finkle bring for flattery'. (Why the plant should have become a symbol of flattery, as it undoubtedly did, is obscure.) Rowbotham's *Gate [of] language un[locked]* (1659), again as cited in the OED, gives the disjunction *fenil* or *finkel* (XII, 132).⁵⁸

The phenomena in the previous paragraphs, showing that until the nineteenth century, at least, *finkle* was understood as being synonymous with *fennel*, should lead us to believe that the 'fennel' theory of the origin of Finkle Street is essentially correct. We must now consider in more detail why such a proposal has any plausibility.

One of the most striking characteristics of the plant is its smell. The present writer does not find it unpleasant (less so than rue, for instance), just as Milton did not.⁵⁹ But the fragrance is hardly subtle and others with more delicate olfaction might take offence at it (it is 'not particularly pleasant', according to Ian Hepburn).⁶⁰ It is significant that the stinking camomile or mayweed (*Anthemis cotula*) has the alternative dialect name *dog-fennel*; there is a slight resemblance between the early shoots of the plants, but a more striking common factor of a powerful odour. Others have found the association of its smell with its medicinal uses vexatious. Grigson observes: 'Crush the leaves . . . and they may remind you of that horrifying stench of liquorice powder, from which modern children with upset insides are fortunately delivered.'⁶¹ It is implausible that literal references to fennel in place-names should outnumber so enormously references to all other herbs and spices taken together, as Reaney justly noted,⁶² so

⁵⁶ G. Stephens, 'Old English Medical Manuscript', *Archaeologia*, 30 (1844), 349–418. Stephens does not identify the MS, and claims it to be of the fourteenth century.

⁵⁷ *Promptorium Parvulorum*, 1499 (facsimile reprint, Menston, 1968); W. Turner, *The Names of Herbes*, edited by J. Britten (London, 1881).

⁵⁸ I have found no other reference anywhere to this work and my reconstruction of the title is conjectural.

⁵⁹ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, IX, 581.

⁶⁰ I. Hepburn, *Flowers of the Coast* (London, 1952), p. 178.

⁶¹ *Englishman's Flora*, pp. 235–36.

⁶² *Origin of English Place-Names*, p. 234.

clearly some readjustment of interpretation away from the literal is required. The association of its smell with other smells—though not quite in the way suggested by Grigson—represents a plausible way forward.

The best clue to its application lies in various pre-Renaissance medical texts. The second Old English leechbook edited by Cockayne,⁶³ for example, advises us as follows:

Wip apundenesse & epunge magan . finoles wyrtruman &
merces ofgeot mid scire wine ealde . . .

Cockayne translates: 'For puffing up and blowing of the maw; overpour roots of fennel and marche [smallage (wild celery)—R.C.] with clear old wine . . .' Other entries continue the association between fennel and the abdomen; it may be administered 'gif wamb forweaxe on men' (ibid., fol. 90a) 'if a man's belly swell up', for example. This remedy is continued in a prose recipe-book of c. 1450 preserved in Stockholm,⁶⁴ which instructs us (111/13):

For swellynge in þe stomak. Take fenell-rotis . . .

This is presumably what lies behind Langland's 'a ferthyng-worth of fynkelsede, for fastinge-daies y bouhte hit' in *Piers Plowman*—a cure for wind.⁶⁵ The Stockholm verse medical MS informs us that:

Ye sed is good fastende te etc.⁶⁶

Fennel was still in the *British Pharmaceutical Codex* as a carminative till 1973, and still registers in *Martindale's*; the fennel's job in *Pulvis glycyrrhizae compositus* was to prevent griping.⁶⁷ The inferences to be drawn from these OE and ME texts are made more explicit in John Harington's English rhyming version of the medical-herbalistic tract

⁶³ The so-called 'Bald's leechbook' (BL MS Reg.12.D.XVII, fol. 70b): *Leechdoms, Wortcunning and Starcraft*, edited by T. O. Cockayne, 3 vols (London, 1864–66), II, 189; new edition by Charles Singer (London, 1961).

⁶⁴ G. Müller, 'Aus mittelenglischen Medizintexten: die Prosarezepte des stockholmer Miszellen Kodex X.90', *Kölner anglistische Arbeiten*, 10 (1929).

⁶⁵ C-tradition, Huntington MS HM 143, VI. 360.

⁶⁶ Stephens, 'Medical Manuscript', line 1342 as printed.

⁶⁷ Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, *British Pharmaceutical Codex 1973* (London, 1973); *Martindale, the Extra Pharmacopoeia*, 29th edn., edited by J. E. F. Reynolds (London, 1989); Grigson, *Englishman's Flora*, p. 236.

Regimen sanitatis Salernitanum, published in 1607 under the title *The Englishman's Doctor; or, The Schoole of Salerne*.⁶⁸ Harington writes:

In Fennel-seed, this vertue you shall finde,
Foorth of your lower parts to drive the winde.

(The original Latin was, if anything, even more uninhibited: 'Semen foeniculi fugat et spiracula culi.') This was considered a medical necessity, and was therefore a less censured public phenomenon than today; Harington elsewhere notes that:

Great harmes have growne, & maladies exceeding,
By keeping in a little blast of wind:
So *Cramps* & *Dropsies*, *Collickes* have their breeding,
And *Mazed Braines* for want of vent behind:
Besides we finde in stories worth the reading,
A certaine *Romane Emperour* was so kind,
Claudius by name, he made a Proclamation,
A *Scape* to be no losse of reputation.

When Falstaff said of Poins, 'He plays quoits well, and eats conger and fennel,'⁶⁹ he was alluding to fennel(-sauce) as an antidote to the notorious indigestibility of conger. Whilst the seed (or the root, according to some authorities) was a carminative, the whole plant had other 'vertues': the expulsion of poison, the cure of agues, the cleansing of the stomach (to be associated with its use as a carminative), the releasing of the flow of urine and the care of the eyes (the last one being the virtue most commonly emphasized in those herbals which most slavishly followed the ancients Dioscorides, Pliny, Apuleius, Macrobius and Isidore of Seville). In the earliest times, for instance according to Pliny, it was good against scorpion stings and snakebites. None of these properties is the stuff of typical place-names, but if our street-name genuinely alludes to fennel, as seems inescapable on philological and dialectological grounds, we are left with the possibilities, (a) that it denoted a place where fennel was grown, processed or sold, i.e. a place with a physic garden and/or an apothecary's; or (b) that it named a place that stank, probably without

⁶⁸ J. Harington, *The Englishman's Doctor; Or, The School of Salerne* (1607); edited anonymously (Salerno, 1957).

⁶⁹ Shakespeare, 2 *Henry IV*, II. 4. 245.

allusion to the smell of the plant itself, but having a derogatory metonymic name amounting to 'fart(ing) street', playing euphemistically on a well-understood relation between the plant and one of its major medicinal uses (the last use for which it regularly appeared in pharmacopoeias). Neither is inherently unlikely. Literal reference to fennel is almost certainly found, as in the name for the small plot Fennel Pleck in Isley Walton (Leics), and Finkle Close in Gildersome (YorksWR), both mentioned below. But the repetition of the collocation Finkle Street or -gate, its association (though not exclusive) with towns, and the well-understood existence of a category of allusive and humorous derogatory minor names,⁷⁰ especially of street-names, makes (b) the far likelier option for the name which is our main concern here. Finkle Street might therefore be seen as a sort of loose northern equivalent or cousin of the abusive London names *Stinking Lane* (later King Edward Street) and *Fowle Lane*, of Full Street 'foul street' in Derby, of the *Stinkand Vennel* in medieval Glasgow (now New Vennel), rather than of the lusty *Grope Lane* as Ekwall would prefer. It may not be entirely coincidental that Finkhill Street in Nottingham was a continuation of the medieval *Raton Row* (now prettified into Walnut Tree Lane), just below the castle.

The questions of the generic and of similar names

It might be argued that the variation in the generic between *street*, *lane* and *gate* is a simple reflection of differences in microtopography (or rather in people's perceptions of it) or of differences in ethnic history. However, the more one examines this matter, the more the problem of the generic evaporates. There are two instances of Finkle Lane and one of Finkelgate. The Finkle Lane in Barton on Humber is an anomaly and will remain so under my proposal; however the other instance, in Gildersome (Yorks WR), is apparently modern, and relates to a Tithe Apportionment (1851) field-name Finkle Close. This gives rise to the suspicion that the field was one in which fennel was grown, and that the name is roughly analogous to Fennel Pleck in Isley Walton (Leics).⁷¹ As we have seen, and shall note again below (p. 28), Finkelgate in Norwich was earlier a clear instance of Finkle Street.

⁷⁰ J. Field, 'Derogatory Field-Names', *Journal of the English Place-Name Society*, 9 (1975-76), 19-25.

⁷¹ J. Field, *English Field-Names* (Newton Abbot, 1972), p. 76.

(Finkey Street in Oakham was sometimes Finkell Lane in the records, but clearly originated as Finkle Street.) With only one exception, therefore, the instance in Barton, the names compounded with a true street-name generic were originally called Finkle Street. During the preparation of this article, the following names with topographical generics were observed: Finkle Edge (Thurlstone, Yorks WR), Finkle Hill (Sherburn in Elmet, Yorks WR), Finkle Holme (Moor Monkton, Yorks WR), Fink Hill (Barkisland, Yorks WR, and Horsforth, Yorks WR). Two names with considerable similarity to Finkle Street/Lane were also noted: Finkin Lane/Croft/Avenue (Stanley, Wakefield, Yorks WR) and Tinkle Street (Grimoldby, Lincs.). It is quite possible that not all of these places are relevant, and I have nothing conclusive to say about those in Thurlstone, Moor Monkton, Barkisland, Stanley and Grimoldby. I suspect, though I am not able to demonstrate, that the Stanley name-cluster is analogous to the example from Gildersome noted above, showing distant nasality assimilation of /ŋ/.../l/ to /ŋ/.../n/; and that the Grimoldby name has arisen through a confusion of initial capital T and F inversely paralleled in the history of Follers Manor in Alfriston (Sussex).⁷²

The philology of *finkle*

The ME word *fen(e)kel* for 'fennel' cannot, evidently, come directly from the OE masculine noun *finol* (*Ælfric's Glossary*, most manuscripts, and Bald's Leechbook), or its feminine counterpart *finugl* (*Épinal* and *Erfurt Glossaries*), *finulae* (*Corpus Glossary*).⁷³ These forms are subtly replaced by Old French *fenoil* to yield modern *fennel*; or rather, since there was a rarer OE variant with *e* in the first syllable,⁷⁴ perhaps the English and French forms may be said to have merged. *Fen(e)kel* for 'fennel', however, with its alternative trisyllabic pronunciation, clearly derives from the ancestor of Danish *fennikel* (much less likely from that of Middle Dutch *ven(ne)kel*), or of the

⁷² *PNSussex*, pp. 415-16. Kenneth Cameron notes in correspondence that no mention of this Lincolnshire name has yet been found in historic documents, but also that the collection of spellings for Grimoldby is not yet complete.

⁷³ *Ælfrics Grammatik und Glossar: Text und Varianten*, edited by J. Zupitza (Berlin, 1880); *Leechdoms*, II, 189; *The Oldest English Texts*, edited by H. Sweet (London, 1885), pp. 63 (*Corpus*, line 880) and 64 (*Épinal* and *Erfurt*, line 451).

⁷⁴ *Ælfric's Glossary*, BL MS Cotton Julius A II.

dialectal Danish *fennekål*, which has parallels in Swedish and Low German (cf. the intermediate forms Old Saxon *fenucal*, Old High German *fenihhal*), suggesting an areal distribution underpinned by Hanseatic trading activity).⁷⁵ A Danish origin of this well-attested ME word is entirely consistent with the distribution of dialectal *finkle* (barring Kent; see below, p. 30, and Map 4, p. 36) and with *Finkle* in street-names which show no alternation with *Fennel* (Map 1, p. 32). The word is known from the Harleian vocabulary of around 1265 in the form *fenecel*, and from the *Alphita* of around 1400 as *fenkele*, *fenicle*.⁷⁶

The relative rarity of the word *fennel* in street-names, and the fact that the three instances known to me are on the fringes of the northern *finkle* area (Fennel Street, Loughborough (Leics; from 1624), Manchester and Warrington (Lancs); see Map 3, p. 35), suggests that the entire idiom *Finkle Street* originated in the area once covered by the Danelaw, however universal the medical lore was which licensed it (compare Maps 1 and 4, pp. 32 and 36, showing the distribution of the name Finkle Street and the dialect word *finkle*). If we discount the exceptional mention from thirteenth-century Barton on Humber, the list of early attestations leaves open the possibility that the expression was coined, frozen in the form with the generic *Street*, and used as a street-name first in mid-to-late fourteenth-century York, the greatest city of the area, and that in its place-name use it was transferred to other parts of the area in which the word *fen(e)kel* was understood. This view was seriously considered by Ekwall.⁷⁷ It would account for the clustering of these names (15 of the 35, and 6 of the 7 with generics other than those denoting street-names) in Yorkshire where they are culturally fully 'at home'. This is because borrowing effects tend to

⁷⁵ This Danish word and its relatives are a folk-etymological reinterpretation of a kind common in the vernacularization of learned plant-names; Latin *f(o)eniculum* 'hay (diminutive)' has been vernacularized as 'fen cabbage'. See F. Holthausen, *Altsächsisches Wörterbuch* (Münster and Cologne, 1954), s.v. *fenucal*; F. Kluge, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*, 19th edn (Berlin, 1963), s.v. *Fenchel*.

⁷⁶ BL MS Harl. 978, fol. 24v.; *Anglo-Saxon and Old English Vocabularies*, edited by T. Wright and R. P. Wülcker, 2nd edn (London, 1884) I, 554-59; *Alphita. A Medico-Botanical Glossary from the Bodleian MS., Selden B.35*, edited by J. L. G. Mowat, *Anecdota Oxoniensia, Modern and Mediaeval Series*, 1 (2) (Oxford, 1887).

⁷⁷ Ekwall, *Etym. Notes*, p. 52.

weaken as they disperse from a central point.⁷⁸ It is hard to disagree with Hans Kurath's view,⁷⁹ though it was not primarily formulated with onomastic, or even lexical, material in mind: 'Frequent and intimate communication facilitates diffusion.' The geographical subtext for this view can be supplied easily by the reader: there is a direct relationship between intimate communication and both proximity and accessibility. The Milroys' diffusion model provides a more sophisticated understanding of the same point. Diffusion of cultural innovations—including linguistic items—from group to group depends on weak social ties functioning as bridges, and for successful diffusion to occur the number of such bridges must be relatively large.⁸⁰ The trading relation constitutes a weak tie (in the sense originated by A. Granovetter), and the number of such weak ties clearly varies inversely with geographical distance, other things being equal. If the name originated as a mildly coarse joke in York, and if its spread is dependent, as I believe, on traders' activity there (a view I arrived at before discovering that Ekwall had already articulated it), it is not surprising that the incidence of the transferred name declines with distance from York. Somewhat differently, it is also not surprising that the name appears in larger, more mercantile places (Hull, Appleby, Lincoln, Knaresborough, Grimsby, etc.) earlier than in more rural places; but it must be conceded that this may simply reflect the generally lower probability of minor rural place-names' being recorded before the seventeenth century, when the production of terriers and estate-maps became a more frequent occurrence.

If the name did in fact spread from York, i.e. from a single fountainhead, it must be conceded that Lindkvist's formally impeccable explanation from the personal name Finnkell could be correct, but we have already noted the weakness of the analogues used by Ekwall to bolster it; and the balance of probability suggests that these usually short urban alleys derived their name from some aspect of their physical makeup which made its use appropriate in other towns.

⁷⁸ Cf. for instance J. K. Chambers and P. Trudgill, *Dialectology* (Cambridge, 1980), chapter 11, especially pp. 196-202; H. Kurath, *Studies in Area Linguistics* (Bloomington, 1972), chapter 8, especially pp. 125-31.

⁷⁹ *Area Linguistics*, p. 122.

⁸⁰ J. Milroy, *Linguistic Variation and Change* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 175-83.

The anomalous thirteenth-century Barton form does not necessarily invalidate the explanation offered above. The Barton instance could be an independent application not of the frozen expression but of an analogous one. Latin *semita* usually renders *lane*, which is precisely the word that appears in the modern name.⁸¹ The major spread of the frozen form of the name must postdate its use in York, where it would have caught the ear of the greatest number of people. A fourteenth-century date would also account for the preponderance of forms in *street* rather than *gate*, for York would have been thoroughly English by this date even on the wildest view of how late Scandinavian was still spoken in England. Barrie Cox (in correspondence) notes that the Oakham example stands out as a *street*-name among the usual early *gate*-names in Oakham, also suggesting a significantly post-Danish interpolation. The same is true in Grimsby; virtually all the street-names of old Grimsby are formations in *gate* (Brighowgate, Deansgate, Flottergate, Wellowgate and so on). The instance of *gate* in Norwich would be ascribable to analogy with previously-existing street-names (Colegate, Cowgate, Fishergate, etc.). In fact, the record supports this directly and patently, because Finkelgate is recorded first with *street* in 1506; *gate* appears in 1508, and appears to yield again to *street* until rather recently (*PNNorfolk*, p. 104, is not clear on the precise time of the re-emergence of *-gate*). There is no instance at all with *-gate* in the other heavily Danicized counties.

If this picture is correct, then there must have been some lexical ebb and flow in the north-west of England. If the expression was coined in the Anglo-Danish linguistic area, the expression must have been taken across the Pennines; its sense must have been understood there and the local ME word *fenel* substituted on occasion. But we have already seen how the chronology of place-name attestations in Cumberland suggests a resurgence of the older expression before the eventual, and definitive, spread of the modern standard word *fennel*.

Danish herbals, like English ones and the ancient ones which inspire them, treat fennel as a wonderful kind of panacea. One recurrent feature of relevance to the present thesis, however, is its

⁸¹ Bower, 'Place-Names of Lindsey', confuses the question of the use of *street* and *lane* by incorrectly referring to the Barton instance as Finkle Street in two cross-references (pp. 44 and 238), and by indexing the Louth one as *Finkle Lane*.

prescription for abdominal pain. An anonymous herbal of c. 1300 says 'drikkes . . . med vand mod maveonde' ('it is drunk with water against belly-"evils"'); Pedersen's of 1533 remarks that it is a 'komponent i . . . salve mod tarmvrid og sidesting' ('ingredient in an ointment against twisting of the guts and the stitch'), that it 'drikkes mod maveonde', and that 'afkog af fennikel og anis renser maven' ('a decoction of fennel and aniseed cleanses the belly'). Henrik Smid's herbal of 1546 ff. recommends fennel tea, for it 'fordriver mavens unaturlige hede' ('expels unnatural heat from the belly'). Simon Paulli, in 1648, notes that 'lægfolk véd, at gravide kvinder, som lider af tarmluft, skal spise fennikelkonfekt' ('lay people know that pregnant women suffering from wind should take a confection of fennel'). Later remedy-books and pharmacopoeias also note the seed's 'vinddrivende' properties ('*vindvand* gives børn med mavekneb', "'windwater" is given to children with colic' (in Vendsyssel), and so forth predictably), and most recently 'gives nu mod tarmluft' ('it is given now for wind').⁸² Whilst it is easy to be over-selective about which properties of this remarkable plant to focus on, there is little doubt that in Denmark, as in England, its various parts have had long-standing value as a cure for wind. There is nothing in the general cultural background of post-Danelaw England that suggests the implausibility of a name alluding to this virtue, therefore.

It seems to the writer that there is only one plausible alternative to the above solution, and that is closely related to the one offered. Renaissance Danish herbals often say of fennel that it is *urindrivend* (e.g. those of Pedersen, Smid, and Paulli mentioned above), the common theoretical factor being its ability to expel (in Smid's words) 'al flegmatisk sej vædske' ('all phlegmatic viscous liquid').⁸³ If this is an authentic Danish vernacular tradition, one which is not stressed in English herbals (but mentioned in passing by Trevisa in his translation (1398) of Bartholomaeus Anglicus' (Bartholomew de Granville's) *De proprietatibus rerum*),⁸⁴ and not mentioned by Harington, then it may be permissible to treat Finkle Street as analogous, in a metonymic way, to late-medieval London's *Pissyng Lane* and/or one of its three *Pissyng*

⁸² All this information is taken from V. J. Brøndegaard, *Folk og flora: dansk etnobotanik*, 4 vols (Copenhagen, 1979), pp. 305-06.

⁸³ Brøndegaard, *Folk og flora*, pp. 305-06.

⁸⁴ BL MS Add. 27944.

Alleys, and the thirteenth-century *Mibindelone* in Gloucester.⁸⁵ It is not necessary, however, to appeal to Denmark proper for a judgement about how plausible any particular interpretation of the word *finkle* is in its onomastic context; place-name scholars have not yet discovered any instance or analogue of the name in Denmark. We should continue to believe that the word *finkle*, though of Danish origin, was applied as an English word in an English cultural and ethnobotanical context.

A glimmer of another alternative is available in Lelamour's *Macer* (24a): 'drinke hit [finell], and it . . . inhansith lechery' (1373 (MS before 1425); quoted in MED).⁸⁶ This is however the only reference to such a property that I have found in the whole literature of fennel. There is too little here to support another, different, 'Love Lane' theory of the origin of Finkle Street.

There are no doubt other names of recent more genteel origin commemorating fennel simply as one plant among others, e.g. Fennel by itself, at High Fell, Gateshead (Co. Durham) and Fennel Road, at Bouchall, Stourbridge (Worcs), or containing the surname, e.g. Fennell Street, at Woolwich (Kent). The appearance of the word *finkle* in Kent remains a puzzling anomaly, and a connection with Middle Dutch *ven(ne)kel* here, rather than with Danish, should not be ruled out.

The modern form *finkle*, with an *-i-*, virtually universal in attested spellings in alternation with the equivalent *-y-*, suggests a common sort of raising of /e/ before velar consonants, especially the velar nasal /ŋ/, cf. *sprinkle* from earlier *sprenkle* and *link* from ON **blenkr*. Its immediate cause will have been the syncopation of the original medial syllable vowel, resulting in the juxtaposition of /n/ and /k/, the assimilation of the positional features of the former to those of the latter, and the consequent creation of the sequence /eŋk/, illegal or marginal from time immemorial in English. The /e/ remained unraised in Northumberland, however, as the Alnwick and Newcastle street-names testify; this is corroborated by the surnames from the Tudor Border musters mentioned on p. 16.

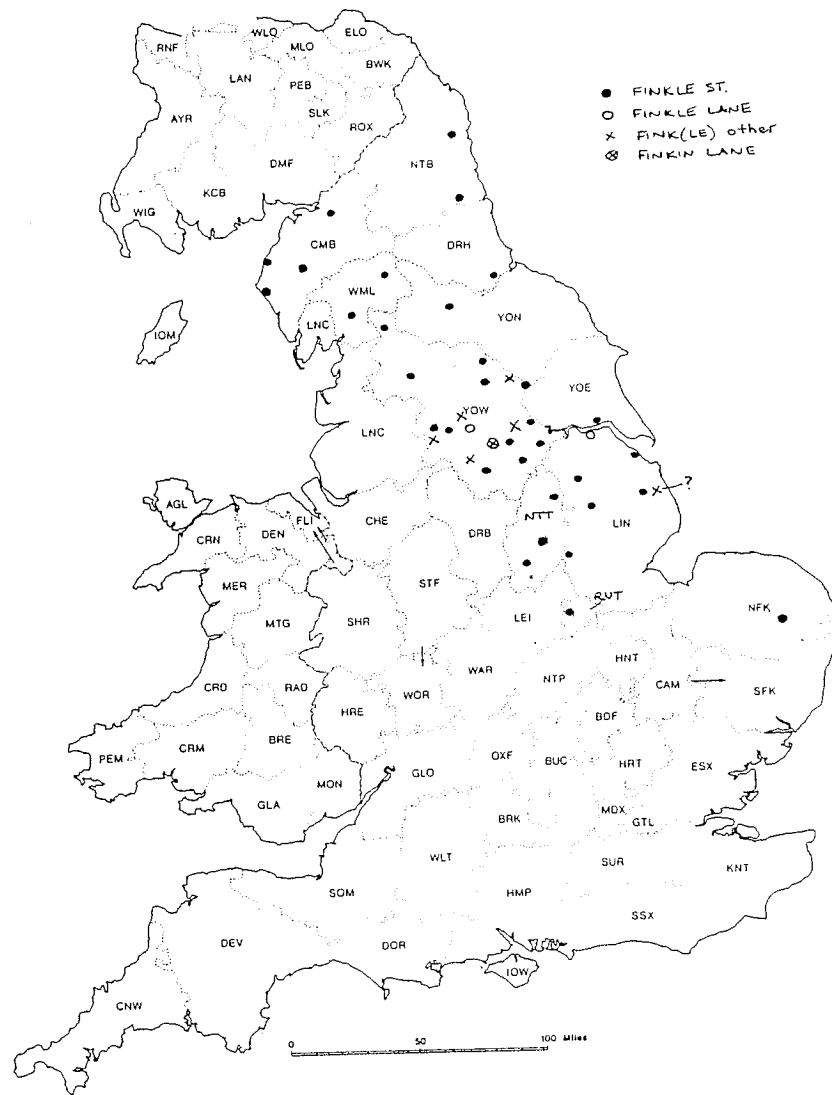
⁸⁵ See E. Ekwall, *Street-Names of the City of London* (Oxford, 1954), pp. 166 and 176.

⁸⁶ An English version of the *Floridus de viribus herbarum* attributed to Æmilius Macer, BL MS Sloane 5; cited in *MED* from Alianore Whytlaw-Gray's M.A. dissertation, University of Leeds.

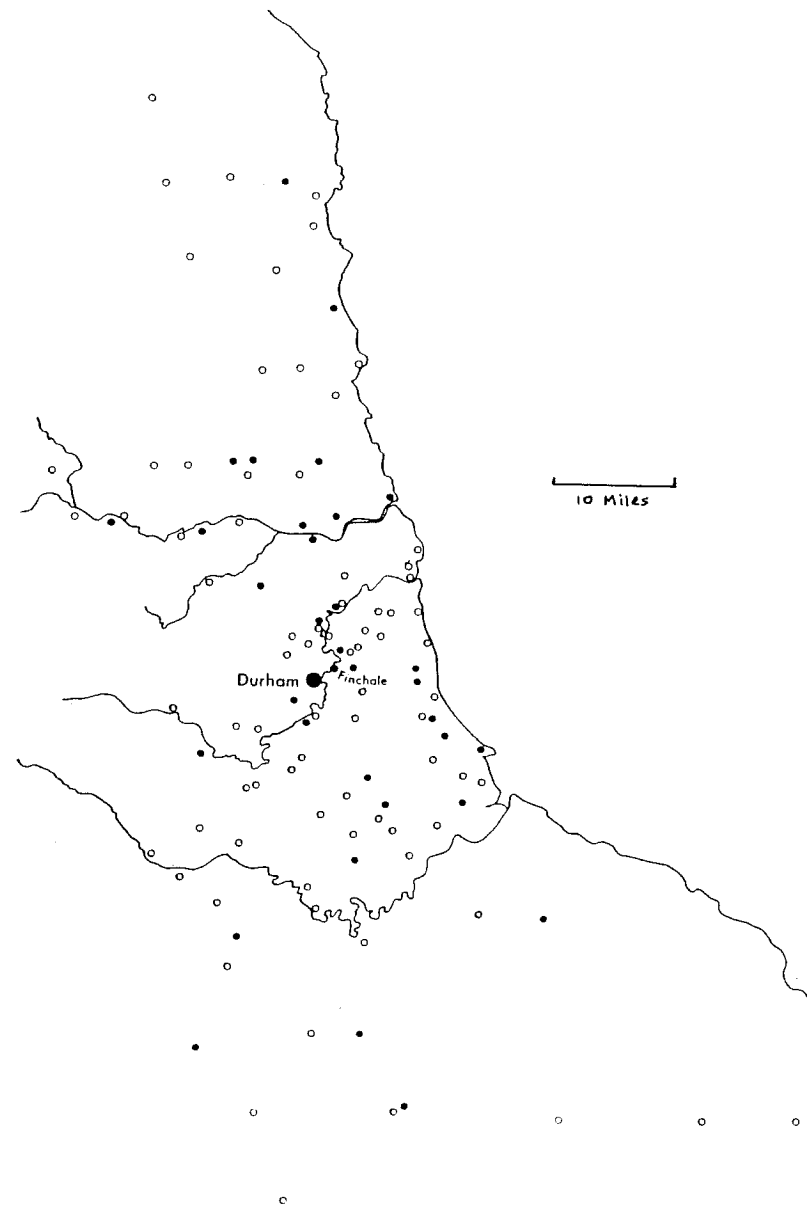
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Figure 1 and Map 2 are taken from R. C. Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims*, published by Dent (1977), with permission. Maps 1, 3 and 4 derive from the base-map in M. Gelling, *Place-Names in the Landscape*, also published by Dent (1984), with permission.



Map 1. The distribution of the name Finkle Street and others resembling it.



Map 2. A local cult: St Godric of Finchale.
Open circle = town or village with one person affected by St Godric's miracles; solid circle = two or more people affected.

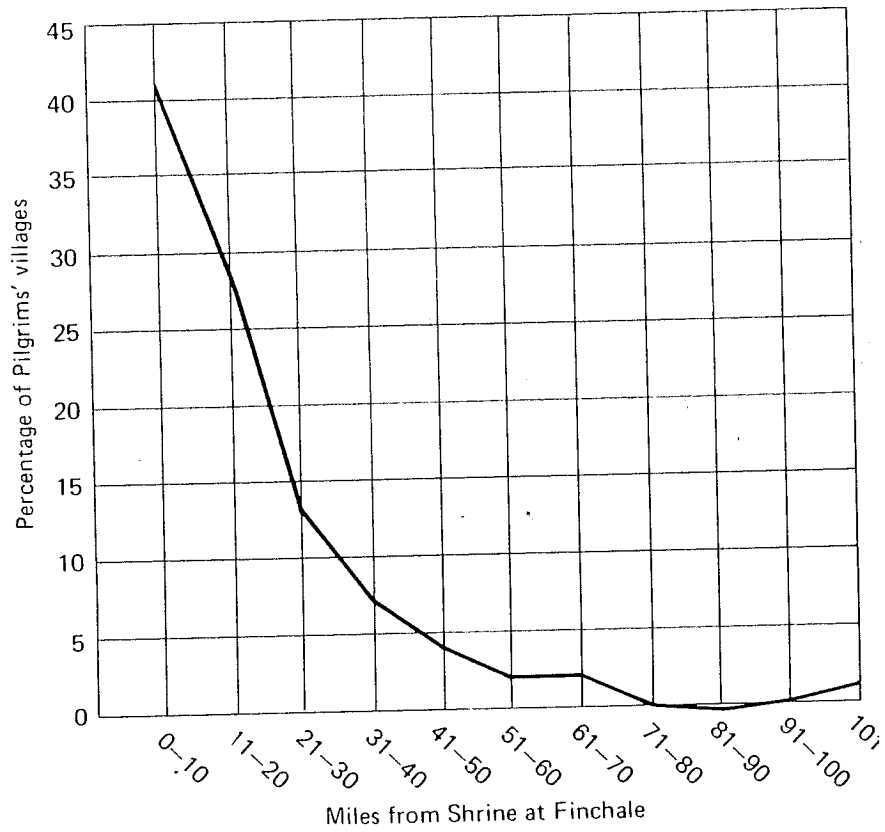
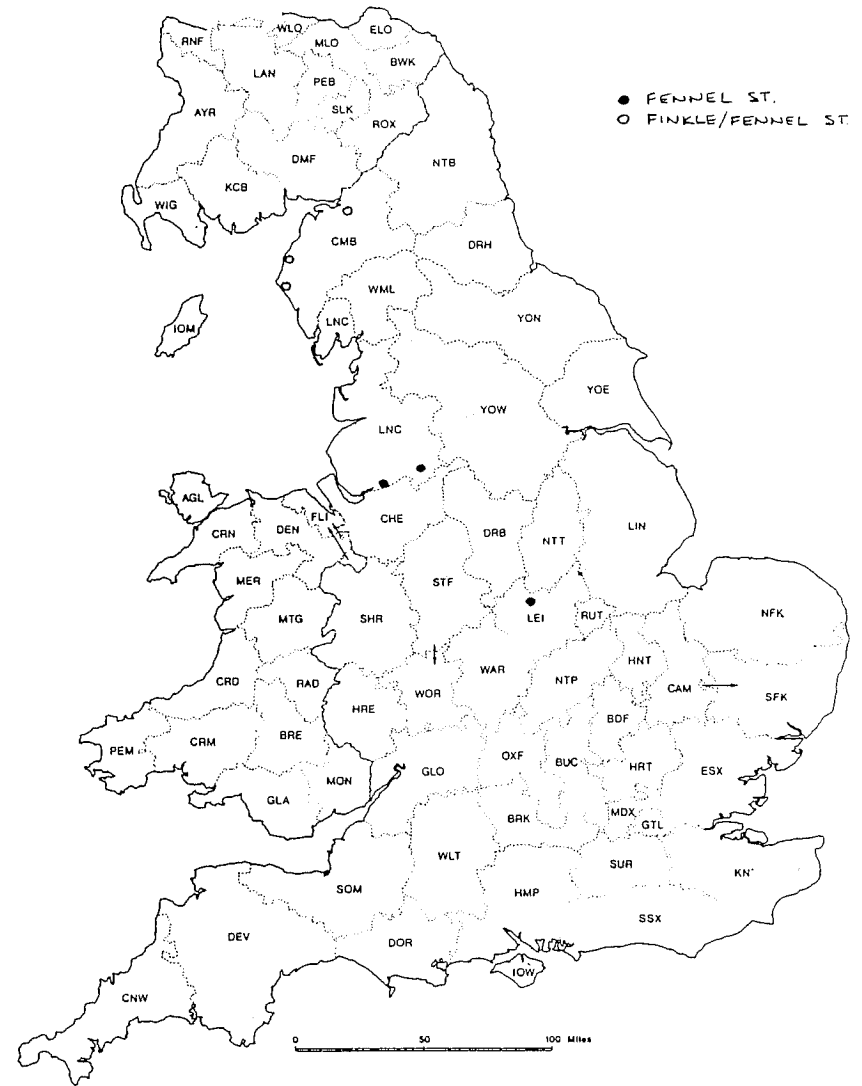
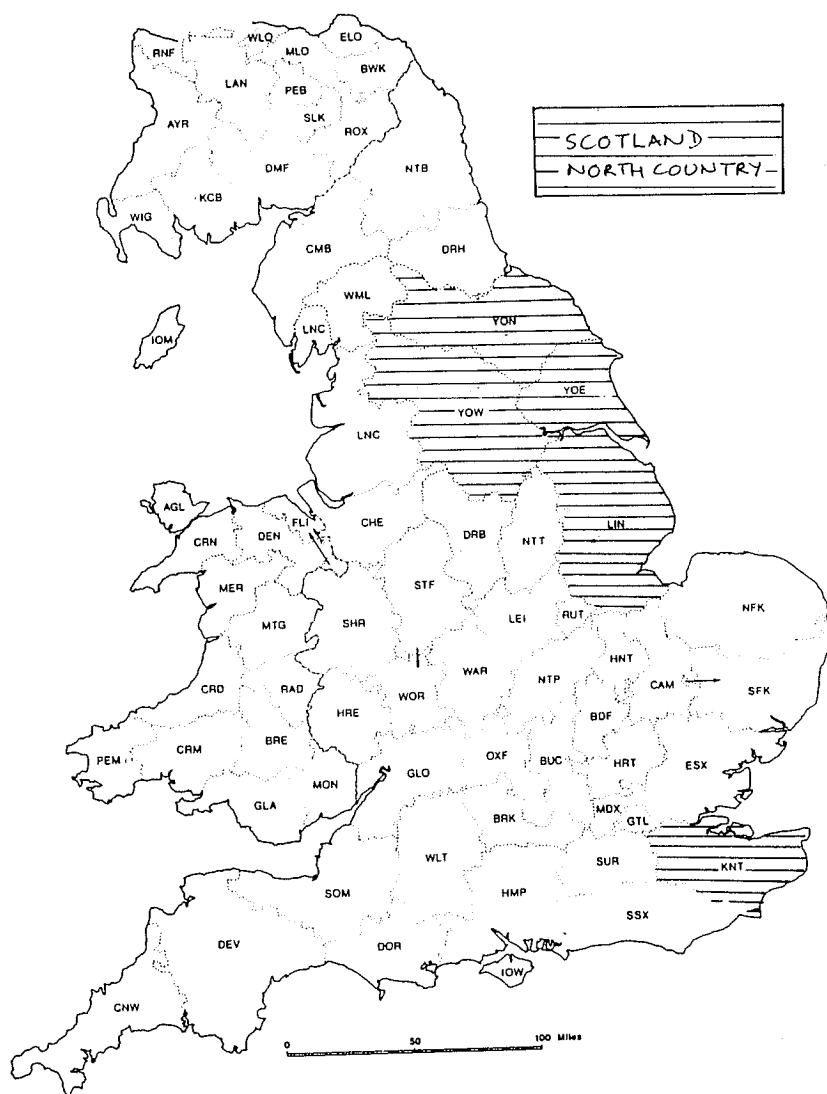


Figure 1. Geographical distribution of 204 pilgrims' villages in a 'local' twelfth-century saint's cult (St Godric of Finchale).



Map 3. Distribution of *Fennel Street*, and of *Finkle Street* occasionally attested with *Fennel*.



Map 4 . Areas where *finkle* is attested as a lexical word.

A Desert-Island History

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Review of *The Cambridge History of the English Language* (general editor Richard M. Hogg), vols I, *The Beginnings to 1066*, edited by Richard M. Hogg, and II, *1066–1476*, edited by N. F. Blake. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1992; £60 and £65.

1. Introduction

The General Editor's Preface to *The Cambridge History of the English Language* (I and II) states an aim to 'provide a solid discussion of the full range of the history of English both to the anglicist who does not specialise in the particular area to hand and to the general linguist who has no specialised knowledge of the history of English', and, in addition, to be of use to anyone with any reason to be interested in the history of English—i.e. what is commonly known as 'the general reader'. The difficulties of addressing a mixed audience need not be dwelt on; and the general editor of a multi-authored work has the difficulties multiplied by a further mixture: that of different theoretical frameworks in which the authors feel comfortable. The decision to avoid a 'party line' on linguistic theory, resulting at times in 'contrasting views of the same topic' is aptly justified by the success with which contrasts and contradictions emerge as 'stimulating and fruitful' (I, xviii), and by the rigorous cross-referencing between contributions to the volumes.

If there is such a thing as the 'general reader', I cannot, however, pretend to be a 'general reviewer'. What follows reflects the expectations of one of only one (the anglicist) camp of the intended audience as to the nature of a 'solid discussion covering the full range of the history of English'.

I will take a 'solid' account of a language as one that makes strong (testable) claims about the systematic structure of the various levels of the grammar (phonology, morphology, syntax), in terms of the contrastive units or categories, their possible combinations (sequential