names of hundred or wapentake meeting-places, as in Spellow, Lancashire (with *hlāw* 'mound') and Spelhoe, Northamptonshire (with *hōh* 'bank').[52] But the aim of this discussion has been to explain why Bede interprets the name as he does, and not to make pronouncements as to its true derivation. It is just as likely that none of the four names in *strēones-halh* refers to meetings at all, and as far as Bede was concerned, this fact was probably beside the point. Given his procedure elsewhere, it could be argued that Bede's explanation springs first and foremost from his desire to link Whitby in the minds of his audience with the historically significant event that happened there. The truth about the origin of names in OE *strēones-halh* may lie with any of the possibilities outlined here, or with none of them; but uncovering it has not been my intention here. On that score, I suspect, Whitby can expect many more visitors in years to come.[53]

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[52] *PN Northumbs*, pp. 131–32; Cameron, *English Place-Names*, p. 140; E. Ekwall, *The Place-Names of Lancashire* (Manchester, 1922), p. 115; Ekwall, *Dictionary*, p. 433; Smith, *Elements*, II, 136.
[53] An earlier version of this paper was read at the annual conference of the Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland at Bearsden, Glasgow in April 1997. I am grateful to all those who offered their comments on the paper at that stage, especially Oliver Padel, Peter Kitson, Margaret Gelling and Alex James, as well as to my colleague David Parsons, who encouraged me to write it in the first place. Special thanks are owed to Matthew Robinson for his help on matters Latin. Errors that remain are, of course, my own.

The Lancashire Place-Names Alkincoats and Heskin

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The following is an attempt to clarify the origin of the Lancashire place-names Alkincoats and Heskin, both of Celtic derivation. They are discussed separately.

Alkincoats

Alkincoats is a house on the northern fringe of Colne, an industrial town in north-east Lancashire. The house, located a mile from the Yorkshire border, is an old one, its name written in Gothic script on the Ordnance Survey map; but its name seems even older than its structure, as we shall see.

The name Alkincoats is attested as *Altenecote* 1201, *Altenecot* 1241. Ekwall describes the derivation as 'obscure'.[1] Since no convincing English or Norse etymology has been found for it, a Celtic one becomes a possibility. Cumbric (a sister-language of Welsh) was spoken in this region until at least the late seventh century, by which time the whole of modern Lancashire was in English hands.[2] A relic of this is the name Colne itself, originally a river-name (like its Wiltshire equivalent Calne), perhaps cognate with that of the Callan in Breconshire.[3] Another Celtic

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[1] E. Ekwall, *The Place-Names of Lancashire* (Manchester, 1922), p. 87; idem, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 4th edn (Oxford, 1960), p. 6.
[2] K. H. Jackson, 'Angles and Britons in Northumbria and Cumbria', in *Angles and Britons. O'Donnell Lectures*, edited by Henry Lewis (Cardiff, 1963), pp. 60–84 (pp. 70–71).
[3] R. J. Thomas, *Enwau Afonydd a Nentydd Cymru* (Cardiff, 1938), p. 46; Ifor Williams, *Enwau Lleoedd* (Liverpool, 1945), pp. 26–27; W. F. H. Nicolaisen, M. Gelling and M. Richards, *The Names of Towns and Cities in Britain* (London, 1970), p. 76.

relic is provided by Pendle Hill, rising to 1832 feet some four miles west of Alkincoats, since its name contains Brittonic *penn* 'head, top, end'.

The first element of Alkincoats, which is situated on a valley side, may therefore be identified as Brittonic **alt* 'hill, slope, cliff, height'.[4] This is represented by Modern Welsh *allt*, Old Cornish *als* glossing *litus* 'sea shore; river bank', Breton *aot*, Early Irish *alt* 'height, cliff', all deriving from a verbal root *al-* 'nourrir, élever'.[5] It appears elsewhere in Lancashire at Alt, where a stream runs through a gully on the south-east edge of Oldham; at Altbough and Altwint in Herefordshire (both in Little Dewchurch parish);[6] and at Bishop Auckland near Durham, where Auckland is from *Alclit c.*1050 'rock on the Clyde', *Clyde* apparently being an otherwise unattested former name for the river Gaunless below.[7] Dumbarton in Scotland was also formerly named *Al Clud, Alt Clud* 'Clyde rock, Clyde cliff' (the rock being described as a basalt volcanic plug of evident natural strength on the north bank of the Clyde).[8] *Allt* is a common name-element in Wales, as in Allt Tairffynnon 'Three Springs Hillside' (Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant parish, Denbighshire), or *Dduallt* 'Black Slope', a hamlet near Ffestiniog (Merionethshire), and elsewhere.

This accounts for the first element of *Altenecot(e)*. The most obvious explanation of the last element is as an equivalent of Welsh *coed* 'wood', a Brittonic element represented on the map from Penge ('chief wood' or 'wood's end') in Surrey to Bathgate ('boar wood') in Lothian, and appearing elsewhere in Lancashire at Cheetwood, an inner part of

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[4] *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*, edited by R. J. Thomas and others (Cardiff, 1950–), I, 78.

[5] O. J. Padel, *Cornish Place-Name Elements*, Engish Place-Name Society, 56/57 (Nottingham, 1985), p. 4; J. Vendryes and others, *Lexique étymologique de l'irlandais ancien* (Dublin and Paris, 1959–), pp. A-63–64.

[6] B. G. Charles, 'The Welsh, their language and place-names in Archenfield and Oswestry', in *Angles and Britons*, pp. 85–110 (p. 94).

[7] Nicolaisen and others, *Names of Towns and Cities*, p. 53; Gaunless itself is a Norse name.

[8] K. H. Jackson, *The Gododdin. The Oldest Scottish Poem* (Edinburgh, 1969), p. 76; Leslie Alcock, *Arthur's Britain* (London, 1971), pp. 217–18 and plate 3.

Manchester.[9] The most likely interpretation of *Altenecote* as a whole is as what in Modern Welsh would be *Allt y Coed* 'The Slope of the Wood'. This is found as a modern Welsh minor place-name. Three miles south-west of Lampeter in north Dyfed is Allt-Tancoedcochion (SN 5444); five miles south-east of that is Allt Tan-y-Coed (SN 6139). In this context may also be noted Coed-yr-Allt 'Hillside Wood' in Dudleston, Shropshire. Recorded in 1363 as *Coydrallt*, it again shows *coed* and *allt* as name-elements naturally juxtaposed.[10]

Alkincoats (SD 877409) lies at the 650 foot contour on a hillside descending in about half a mile from a summit at 729 feet to the 500 foot contour on the valley floor. The road behind Alkincoats is a steep one, at two points steeper than 1 in 7; the hill crest (Colne Edge) is wooded, in a landscape where trees are scarce. The position of Alkincoats thus accords with the apparent meaning of its name 'The Hillside of the Wood'. If the derivation proposed above is correct, Alkincoats can be seen as providing an unusual instance of place-name survival in a Lancashire valley over more than 1,300 years.

Heskin

Heskin is a small rural parish in mid-Lancashire, four miles west-south-west of the town of Chorley. Ekwall derived its name, attested as *Heskyn* in 1257 and 1301, from the Cumbric cognate of Old Welsh *hescenn*, Modern Welsh *hesgen* 'sedge, rush', explaining the place-name use of this word as paralleled by that of Early Irish *sescann, seiscenn* 'marsh'.[11]

Ekwall's etymology is sound, but his account of the suffix of Heskin is insufficient. Welsh *hesg* 'sedges, flags, rushes' (cognate with Old Cornish *heschen*, Breton *hesk*, Irish *seisc, seisceann*) is a plural, the

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[9] W. J. Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1926), pp. 381–82; Nicolaisen and others, *Names of Towns and Cities*, pp. 48 and 210; Padel, *Cornish Place-Name Elements*, pp. 66–68 and 181.

[10] Charles, 'The Welsh in Archenfield and Oswestry', in *Angles and Britons*, pp. 85–110 (p. 103).

[11] Ekwall, *Place-Names of Lancashire*, p. 130; idem, *Dictionary of English Place-Names*, p. 236.

singular form being *hesgen* 'a sedge, a rush'.[12] *Heskin* hardly derives from this singular form. Another explanation of *-in* here must thus be sought.

The solution seems suggested by Ifor Williams. Discussing the Anglesey place-name Penhesgin (two miles from Menai Bridge, and figuring in the fifteenth-century *Record of Caernarvon* as *Penesken*, *Peneskyn*, *Penheskyn*, and *Hesgyn du*), he cites Cwmhesgen in Merionethshire, near the source of the river Mawddach, and (in a document of 1670) 'Lloyn *heskin* otherwise Lloyn *heskerne*' near Newtown (Montgomeryshire); he took the *-yn* of the *Record of Caernarvon* as representing *-in*. This he compared with *Bwlchderwin* 'Oak-trees pass' near Clynnog (Caernarvonshire), and *Dinas Guernin* 'Fort of Alder-trees place', attested in Lives of St David as the Welsh for Ferns, in Ireland (Irish *fearn* 'alder').[13]

The suffix *-in* is common in Welsh. It occurs in personal names, like *Aneirin* and *Taliesin*; in nouns denoting persons or agents, like *brenin* 'king'; and in other nouns such as *byddin* 'army', *cribin* 'rake', *elin* 'elbow', and *gwerin* 'populace'. But the clue to *Heskin* perhaps lies in the common use of *-in* to form adjectives from nouns. Hence *aur* 'gold', *eurin* 'golden'; *brwydr* 'battle', *brwydrin* 'pugnacious' (also used as a noun 'battle, conflict'); *cath* 'cat', *cethin* 'dusky; savage'; *gwydr* 'glass', *gwydrin* 'made of glass', and so on. Beside this, many Welsh streams have names ending with *-in*.[14] This adjectival ending, also attested in Old Breton (e.g. *meinin* 'stony'), derives from Celtic **-inos* and is cognate with Greek *-īnos* and Latin *-īnus*.[15] As regards *hesg*, this would suggest an adjectival **hesgin* 'sedgy', applied as a name to marshy places. The Old Welsh *hescenn* quoted by Ekwall, in the boundary of a grant of land (possibly by Howick, near Chepstow, Gwent) recorded in the twelfth-century Book of Llandaff, may (as Ekwall and Padel note) be an instance of *hesgen* in the sense 'marsh', rather than a singular of the

[12] *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*, II, 1861; Vendryes, *Lexique étymologique*, p. S-76; Padel, *Cornish Place-Name Elements*, pp. 130–31.

[13] Williams, *Enwau Lleoedd*, p. 47; *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*, I, 1645.

[14] Thomas, *Enwau Afonydd*, pp. 198–214.

[15] J. Morris-Jones, *A Welsh Grammar* (Oxford, 1913), p. 257; Thomas, *Enwau Afonydd*, p. 198; *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*, II, 2019.

noun *hesg*.[16]

As Ekwall notes, a name **Hesgin* 'sedgy place' accords well with the geography of Heskin, located in flattish country between 100 and 200 feet above sea level, with streams (bordered by rough grazing) running north-west, where after a mile they enter Croston Moss, a drained marsh some 30 feet above sea level; scenery resembling that of Penhesgyn 'end of the sedgy place' in Anglesey, on the 200 foot contour above the marshes of the river Braint. *Heskin* may thus be accepted as a British name borrowed by English on the seventh-century Anglo-Saxon occupation of Lancashire, within a century of the Brittonic sound change *s-* > *h-* that gave Welsh *hesg*.[17]

[16] *The Text of the Book of Llan Dâv*, edited by J. Gwenogvryn Evans and J. Rhys (Oxford, 1893), p. 143; *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*, I, 1861; Wendy Davies, *The Llandaff Charters* (Aberystwyth, 1979), p. 97; Padel, *Cornish Place-Name Elements*, pp. 130–31, but the evidence given above renders unnecessary his equation between the endings *-enn* and *-in*.

[17] On the sound change, see K. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain* (Edinburgh, 1953), pp. 517–21, where it is dated to the later sixth century.