Shoreditch and Car Dyke:
Two Allusions to Romano-British Built Features in Later Names containing OE *dīc*, with Reflections on Variable Place-Name Structure

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Shoreditch, Middlesex

Shoreditch (Middlesex) should be regarded as having an obscure first element. The English Place-Name Survey for Middlesex offers no solution;[1] Mills,[2] following Field,[3] suggests 'ditch by a steep bank or slope', from a hypothetical Old English (OE) *scora*, but adds: "Not surprisingly [presumably because of urbanization, RC], the precise topographical features originally referred to are no longer evident". The spellings in the record for Shoreditch alternate between having medial <e>, medial <es> or medial zero, and Mills's suggestion does not account for the range seen in the alternation. Ekwall[4] and Watts[5] identify the feature as the shore, but Shoreditch is not adjacent to the Thames waterfront, and the eastern part of the City of London intervenes; no ditch leading to the shore, as Ekwall and Watts would have it, is in evidence but that which formed part of the Roman city wall complex itself. Houndsditch, parallel with a section of the wall, was not made till the reign of John (1199–1216), and the name of Shoreditch is on record from *c.*1148. What follows suggests that it is very much older.

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[1] J. E. B. Gover, A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, with the collaboration of S. J. Madge, *The Place-Names of Middlesex apart from the City of London*, EPNS, 18 (Cambridge, 1942), pp. 145–46.

[2] A. D. Mills, *A Dictionary of London Place Names* (Oxford, 2001), p. 208.

[3] J. Field, *Place-Names of Greater London* (London, 1980), p. 85.

[4] E. Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 4th edn (Oxford, 1960), p. 419.

[5] *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names*, edited by V. Watts (Cambridge, 2004), p. 547.

The *Gododdin* poem of Aneirin, composed in the late sixth century, refers to the Brittonic precursor of Edinburgh, amongst other descriptions, as *eidyn ysgor* 'Eidyn the fort or rampart' (line 113).[6] The evident antiquity of the word *ysgor* allows us to project this word into the early history of another city entirely. The most economical explanation of Shoreditch is that it is an Old English name incorporating the ancestor **skor* of the Old Welsh element found in the *Gododdin*, in a morphologically variable Old English construction: **scor(-e(s)) dīc* 'ditch or dyke related to the thing or place called [in Brittonic] the fort or rampart', perhaps specifically the structure at Bishopsgate rather than the Roman wall of London in general, with **skor* serving, in effect, as a proper name for it. This form would regularly be adapted in such a form as to yield OE /Sor/, spelt <*sc(e)or>. It would be reasonable to assume an original relation between whatever gave its name to Shoreditch and the street presently called Shoreditch High Street (on the line of Margary Roman road 2a). The current line of this street begins some 500 yards from the course of the wall, and if projected southwards would enter the City at Bishopsgate having followed the line of the street presently called Norton Folgate (after the liberty of that name). The area beyond the wall near this point was occupied by Roman cemeteries, notably that of Spitalfields.[7]

With this solution, the need for a lost bank or slope disappears; the only topographical allusion is to a feature we know something about, namely the Roman wall or gate feature, whatever its exact nature. We still cannot know exactly what the ditch was. But material on English Heritage's web-site notes that in the East London cemetery, a little to the south-east of Spitalfields, south of the Colchester road (Margary road 3a):

> the dead were buried in a series of enclosures or plots to either side of a minor road, which ran south-eastwards out of the town and through the cemetery. The excavations uncovered all or part of 29 such plots,

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[6] I. Williams, *Canu Aneirin* (Cardiff, 1938), pp. 5, 103 (note); K. H. Jackson, *Gododdin: The Earliest Scottish Poem* (Edinburgh, 1969), p. 120.

[7] J. Wacher, *The Towns of Roman Britain*, 2nd edn (London, 1995), p. 89 map by R. Merrifield.

divided by ditches, some of which predated the cemetery, enclosing fields and sometimes quarries for extracting the local brickearth.[8]

These diggings, whether for brickearth or for burial-plots, were presumably visible to the incoming Anglo-Saxons, and the existence of similar linear features in the Spitalfields cemetery area might be sufficient to account for the second element of the name of Shoreditch.

I suggest, therefore, that the name means 'ditch or ditches associated with the feature called *Skor* [Brittonic for 'fort, rampart']'. The nature of the association is not self-evident, which may account for its variable realization in the morphology of the name. The diggings may have been perceived as AT/NEAR the site of Bishopsgate, as STRETCHING TOWARDS the site of Bishopsgate, or as NAMED FROM the site of Bishopsgate. The medieval record is too late to be conclusive, but it is tempting to infer that the medieval variation between a stem-compound and a compound with a genitivally-inflected first element (Tengstrand-compound) was not originally casual, and that it signified a conceptual opposition of the sort just sketched.

Car Dyke (Kesteven, Soke of Peterborough, Isle of Ely)
Car Dyke (rarely now Car Dike or Cardyke) is a feature stretching from the river Witham about four miles east of Lincoln through Kesteven via the Soke of Peterborough probably to the Cam near Waterbeach in Cambridgeshire, though its course through Fenland is not certain at all points. Despite not being preserved for its entire length, the monument is generally agreed to be a single entity; but note that Watts divides it into two sections whose names he apparently believed to have different origins.[9] It is also generally accepted that it

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[8] English Heritage (apparently 1995) <www.eng-h.gov.uk/ArchRev/rev94_5/eastcem.htm> (accessed 11/08/2004).

[9] *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names*, p. 115. Watts's death whilst the *Dictionary* was in proof denied him the opportunity to reconsider the relation between these entries. Some sections of the southern Car Dyke have alternative names which are fully discussed by P. H. Reaney, *The Place-Names of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely*, EPNS, 19 (Cambridge, 1943), pp. 33–34, who offers no opinion about Car Dyke itself.

is a Roman canal (better, also a major drainage ditch) serving as a catchwater for streams flowing from the Lincolnshire Heights into the fens of the Witham valley and allowing the fens to be put under the plough, though its precise purpose outside modern Lincolnshire is less clear. A recent report suggests that the archaeological evidence proper for Roman date within Lincolnshire may not be entirely robust,[10] but the consensus is still that it is a monument of Roman engineering, if only on the grounds that no-one else had the technical knowledge to build anything so vast and skilful.

Its name has not been satisfactorily explained. The second element is accepted by Ekwall and Watts as being OE *dīc* 'major linear earth-work', influenced phonologically by Scandinavian, though Cameron suggests that it is actually the Scandinavian word *dík*, which normally however denotes a mere ditch in the modern sense. If there is a current orthodoxy about the first, it is that its original form contained a Scand-inavian personal name *Kár-* (or perhaps the weak form *Kári*) in the associative (genitive) case.[11] This raises questions and leaves them unanswered. In what sense could a long canal or drainage ditch be privately possessed, or what other kind of relationship between an individual and a canal or dyke might there be? Who was Kár- or Kári? Why should a Roman feature acquire its current name at a period when Danish given-names were available and/or fashionable? Some early spellings are given by Cameron[12] and repeated below on this page.

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[10] P. Cope-Faulkner and G. Taylor, *The Lincolnshire Car Dyke: Past Work, Management Needs and Future Possibilities* (Lincoln, 1996). Summary available online at www.eng-h.gov.uk/archcom/projects/summarys/html96_7/1814anl.htm (accessed 09/08/2004).

[11] Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, p. 86; J. E. B. Gover, A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Northamptonshire*, EPNS, 10 (Cambridge, 1933), p. 5; K. Cameron, *A Dictionary of Lincolnshire Place-Names* (Nottingham, 1998), p. 28; *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names*, edited by Watts, p. 115—though Watts gives modern dialectal *carr* 'marsh overgrown with brushwood' as the source of the name of the Cambridge-shire section, which cannot apply to the Lincolnshire one because the medieval spellings for that are unsuitable.

[12] *A Dictionary of Lincolnshire Place-Names*, p. 28.

They are buttressed by those found in the Soke of Peterborough.[13] Note, however, that in the southernmost part of Kesteven and in the Soke the name is (also) applied to a Roman road which strikes off more or less due south from the course of the canal at Baston (Margary no. 26, otherwise known as King Street), and *The Place-Names of Northamptonshire* makes no mention of a canal at all, including the name in its section on road-names. There has evidently been confusion in an area where the course of the canal is ill-defined because of the impact of massive post-medieval Fenland engineering projects. In the Isle of Ely the name does not seem to have been used of the Roman canal until modern times when its connection with the Lincolnshire feature was conjectured archaeologically.[14]

Spellings taken from the sources in footnotes 12 and 13 are:

> *Karesdic* late 12th
> *Karesdich* 1255 x 1280
> *Karisdik* 1245
> *Karesdik* 1245
> *Karesdik* 1276
> *Carisdik'* 1276
> *Karisdic* 1327
> *Carisdick c.*1340
> *Caresdyke c.*1500

These spellings do not contradict the proposed solution, but they do not enforce it either, because there is another possibility, developed below. The associative (genitive) case-marker in *-es/-is* is absent in forms of similar date to those given above (and in the current form), and forms with an enigmatic <e> are found which presumably have been thought to contain the Scandinavian weak associative case marker *-a* proper to *Kári*, though that would be odd if the generic really is English implying that the name was originally formulated in English:

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[13] Gover *et al.*, *The Place-Names of Northamptonshire*, p. 5.
[14] Reaney, *The Place-Names of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely*, pp. 33–34.

Caredich 1135–54 (after 1259)
Caredic 1161
Caredic Hy II (late 13th)
Cardik Hy II (after 1259)
Cardik 1234
Car Dyke/Dike modern form[15]

These mean that we cannot simply accept, with the editors of the English Place-Name Survey for Northamptonshire, that there is "almost universal genitival *s*",[16] even though such forms are in the majority. Cameron's account implicitly claims that the English associative case marker has got lost in the forms in the second list, but note that, at least as regards ostensible dates, forms without *-s* occur earlier than those with *-s* (Henry II's reign was 1154–88), and certainly have an at least equal claim to original status; the *-s* forms could have a so-called "secondary" Middle English associative case marker replacing the Scandinavian *-a*. But the forms with no medial syllable still need to be explained, and the alternative name-forms could equally mean that there was more than one way of conceptualizing the relation between the dyke and whatever was meant by *Car*.

I suggest that the first element is an Old English rendering of Primitive Welsh (PrW)*kair '*civitas*, city' (of disputed origin), applied to Lincoln as a kind of informal name or pro-name, first used in just the same way as when we say nowadays "I'm going into town".[17]

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[15] e.g. T. Codrington, *Roman Roads in Britain* (London, 1903), p. 141 (*Car dike*). Other forms are from Cameron, *A Dictionary of Lincolnshire Place-Names*, p. 28.

[16] Gover, Mawer and Stenton, *The Place-Names of Northamptonshire*, p. 5.

[17] John Dodgson appears to suggest that the modern Welsh name *Caer* for Chester is a recent abbreviation of the formal Welsh name of the place, *Caerllion Fawr* (*The Place-Names of Cheshire*, 5 vols, EPNS, 44–48, 54, 74 (Cambridge and Nottingham, 1970–97), V.I:i, 5–6), rather than a survival of a usage similar to the one proposed. However, Prof. Max Wheeler points out to me privately that Dafydd ap Gwilym (1320–*c*.1370) in the poem "Y cwt gwyddau" ["The cottage of the geese"] writes: "Pei gatai arglwyddiaeth/ *gwŷr Caer* a'u gwaerau caeth,/ gwnawn i'r famwydd ...." (*Gwaith Dafydd ap Gwilym*, edited by T. Parry (Cardiff, 1979), no. 126, ll. 39–41), which Rachel Bromwich translates "If the lordship *of*

Where *kair* appears early in English names, this element takes the form <Car>, even where later Welsh spellings for names in England confirm the diphthong and where spellings in sources dating from after the appearance of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britannie* tend to use Welsh-type spellings like <Caer>. Chester is *Carlegion* in Bede (*HE* 2, 2) and *Karlegion* in Florence of Worcester's twelfth-century chronicle (*a*.908), where the Welsh writer Nennius has *Cair Legion*.[18] The Brittonic descendant of the Romano-British name *Luguvalium* is compounded into English Carlisle,[19] which over-whelmingly shows spellings in <Car-> in the earliest texts of England, along with a very few examples of <C(h)aer-> which after about 1138 might be ascribed to the influence of Geoffrey's conventions.[20] This word *kair* came to be applied to much more modest settlements such as those denoted by Cornish *ker*, Breton *kêr*.[21] Other Cumberland names which uncontroversially contain the element, and which denote such modest places that have no known pre-Roman or Roman pedigree and no mention in Welsh literature, show almost uniformly <Car> in

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Chester's men, with their obstructing tricks, were to allow, I would to that mother-goose ...." (Dafydd ap Gwilym, *A Selection of Poems*, new edn (Harmondsworth, 1985), no. 39 "Y Cwt Gwyddau", pp. 140–41). In a note on p. 159, she attributes the suggested meaning to Thomas Parry and calls the passage "obscure". Dafydd's poem no. 127 "Y Pwll Mawn" ["The peat pool"] also refers to *Caer* (ll. 37–38): "Llygrais achlân f'hosanau/ Cersi *o Gaer* mewn cors gau[.]", i.e. 'I completely ruined my kersey stockings *from Chester* in a treacherous bog'. Wheeler suggests that it may nevertheless be an anglicism; Welsh-speakers aware that English *Legeceaster* was shortened to *Chester* (so to speak), as it was from the mid-eleventh century, might produce a calqued abbreviation of *Caerllion* to *Caer*. If, however, this use of *Caer* in fact represents ancient usage, then it is exactly what I am proposing in the case of Lincoln.

[18] Dodgson, *The Place-Names of Cheshire*, V.I:i, 2–7.

[19] A. M. Armstrong, A. Mawer, F. M. Stenton and B. Dickins, *The Place-Names of Cumberland*, 3 vols, EPNS, 20–22 (Cambridge, 1950–52), I, 40–42.

[20] The only flies in the ointment, i.e. digraphic spellings before 1138, are two spellings with <C(h)aer-> in the 1130 Pipe Roll. The others are in such evidently Geoffreyan later texts as Lawman's *Brut*.

[21] O. J. Padel, *Cornish Place-Name Elements*, EPNS, 66/67 (Nottingham, 1985), pp. 50–54.

their English record: Cardew, Cardurnock, Carlatton, Carwinley (with a single <Caer-> from 1281 in the fourth of these).[22] The same applies to some Cornish names such as Cardinham and Carharrack, suggesting that they were known to the English before the Cornish monophthongization which results in *ker, but they are certainly on record before the late Middle English change of [er] to [ar] in a syllable-rhyme, which begins in the north in the fourteenth century and comes to be consistently represented in spelling during the course of the fifteenth:[23] Cardinham in the twelfth and Carharrack from 1408.[24] If a recent account of the name Carburton (Nottinghamshire) is accepted,[25] here too the first element is *kair and it too is rendered uniformly as <Car->.[26]

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[22] Armstrong *et al*, *The Place-Names of Cumberland*, I, 131–32, 123–24, 73–74, 52–53. Carrick (Northumberland) is of uncertain origin (A. H. Mawer, *The Place-Names of Northumberland and Durham* (Cambridge, 1920), p. 40). It may contain *kair, but the very fact that some of its medieval spellings resemble the Welsh more than the English tradition which the evidence presented here illustrates leaves it open to suspicion of antiquarian tampering.

[23] K. Luick, *Historische Grammatik der englischen Sprache*, edited by F. Wild and H. Koziol, vol. 1, part 1 (Stuttgart, 1914; repr. Oxford, 1964), pp. 477–78.

[24] O. J. Padel, *A Popular Dictionary of Cornish Place-Names* (Penzance, 1988), p. 65.

[25] R. Coates, 'Carburton, Nottinghamshire', in *idem* and A. Breeze, *Celtic Voices, English Places. Studies of the Celtic Impact on Place-Names in England* (Stamford, 2000), pp. 150–52.

[26] If an Old English form *car were accepted, it would provide a possible means of accounting for the problematic Carisbrooke (Hampshire / Isle of Wight; H. Kökeritz, *The Place-Names of the Isle of Wight* (Uppsala, 1940), pp. 103–05). No pre-Roman remains have been identified on the prominent hill at Carisbrooke, but any there might well have been obliterated by the works for the Roman fort (A. D. Mills, *The Place-Names of the Isle of Wight* (Stamford, 1996), p. 37) and for the medieval castle. There is no evidence that the Roman remains themselves were reckoned as a *civitas*. In the absence of suitable remains, it may thus be safer to assume some other origin. OE *carr* 'crag' is possible here, though there are only eight spellings in the record before 1350 with <rr>, six of them in a patent roll in the single year of 1224 which also fails to show medial <s> in each instance. *Cear 'gorge' has also been proposed, following a possible German parallel (*The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names*, edited by Watts, p. 116), as has a

<Car-> is also what shows up in traditional English versions of Welsh names in *Caer-* denoting Roman towns. Caerleon shows such forms from 1222 and Carmarthen from 1309.[27] By later analogy, perhaps, this spelling was extended to Carnarvon and Cardiff, though it is just possible that these may also testify to the effects of the Middle English change of [er] to [ar] if *caer* was ever rendered */ker/.[28] Where Scottish names have early medieval spellings (say before 1400), they also show regular <Car->, whilst the occasional <Caer> may be due to antiquarianism: Cramond (Midlothian; earliest <Caramonth>), Carriden (West Lothian), Caerlaverock (Dumfriesshire; earliest <Car->), possibly Carlowrie (West Lothian), and Carruthers (Dumfriesshire), which although <Caer Ruther> in 1350 may be compared with the lost *Carruderes* (Berwickshire?), probably of identical origin.[29] Comparable names with a later first appearance in the record often also show <Car-> in their first record, e.g. Cardrona (Peeblesshire), Carwinning (Ayrshire) and Caerlanrig (Roxburghshire; 1610 <Carlanerik>).[30]

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river-name corresponding to *Cary* (Somerset; Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, p. 87) presumably thought to be that of the *brook*. No certainty is possible about this name, and the position taken on Car Dyke does not depend on it.

[27] M. Richards, Welsh entries in W. F. H. Nicolaisen, M. Gelling and M. Richards, *The Names of Towns and Cities in Britain* (London, 1970), pp. 59, 62.

[28] Asser uses the spelling <Cair> in place-names (*Asser's Life of King Alfred*, edited by W. H. Stevenson (Oxford, 1904)), but he was an educated Welshman and clearly familiar with contemporary written Welsh.

[29] However, Carmichael (Lanarkshire) is an exception to this with <Ker->, <Kare->, and it might contain Gaelic *ceathramh* 'quarter' (on which see W. J. Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1926), p. 366), though the implied phonetic reduction is early and drastic for this word.

[30] On these names, see Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*, pp. 365–71. The distribution of the element is mentioned by W. F. H. Nicolaisen, *Scottish Place-Names*, new edn (Edinburgh, 2001), p. 208. Apart from Carmichael, Cathcart (Renfrewshire) is the only Scottish name which has been strongly proposed as a **cair* name and which nevertheless has medieval spellings in <e> (Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*, pp. 366–67). In fact, the range of spellings makes it better to leave its origin an open question: not only <Ker-> (the earliest), but also <Kat->, <Ket->, <Kath->, <Chat->,

Taking all this into account, we can safely say that at all times in the early history of English, in England (including Cornwall and Cumbria), Wales and Scotland, the normal rendering of *kair* and its descendants in English was *Car*.

Returning now to Car Dyke, we may suggest that the waterway and its earthworks were known by the directional name expressed alternatively as "Lincoln's Dyke" or "Lincoln Dyke", hence alternating in the record between a case-marked first element in the compound and a bare-stem compound. The structure, and the alternation it displays, is paralleled in the record of Shoreditch (Mx; above, pp. 23–25). The bare-stem form would be analogous to the many instances of Portway or Portstreet 'way or road to the town',[31] and to such Old English road-names as *akemannestraete* 'the road to Bath' (though note here a possible epenthetic <e> in the large consonant cluster) and *lunden weg* 'the way to London'; the existence of the case-marked form suggests that the name *Car* in due course was no longer understood (unlike the lexeme *port*), and was interpreted by the Onymic Default Principle as a full proper name, specifically as a personal name and therefore preferentially in the associative case, since it is a well-known folk-etymological tactic to interpret obscure elements in place-names by way of real or invented personal names.[32] This view has the merit of accounting for

<Kerth->. Watson's view that the first form represents *caer* and the others *coet* does not carry conviction (although endorsed by Nicolaisen, *Scottish Place-Names*, p. 208), but I have no alternative to propose.

[31] See e.g. J. E. B. Gover, A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, in collaboration with F. T. S. Houghton, *The Place-Names of Warwickshire*, EPNS, 13 (Cambridge, 1936), pp. 9–10.

[32] The Onymic Default Principle is the principle that the default interpretation of any string of linguistic units is a proper name (R. Coates, 'A new conception of properhood', in *Proceedings of the 21ˢᵗ International Congress of Onomastic Sciences, Uppsala, August 2002*, vol. 1, edited by E. Brylla and M. Wahlberg (Uppsala, 2005), pp. 125–37). We can see it at work in the required way, producing interpretations amounting to personal names within place-names, in the early association of Ludgate in London with the legendary King Lud (ultimately thanks to Geoffrey of Monmouth; Mills, *A Dictionary of London Place Names*, p. 143), of Shoreditch with Jane Shore, mistress of Edward IV (a ballad in Pepys's collection), and of Edinburgh with King Edwin of Northumbria (Symeon of

the alternation of zero with *-es/-is* and its apparent chronology; the traditional view accounts better for forms in *-e.* The new explanation also serves to help account for why the name is better attested in mentions of the Lincoln end of the feature than of the Cambridge end.

As readers will expect, I believe the account given above to be at least as plausible as what I called the "current orthodoxy", but it does not win by a knockout. However, there is one further local name which provides unexpected support. The extensive Withamside land to the west of the modern city, the former horse-racing ground, is known as Carholme.[33] The first element is not Middle English *ker* 'carr', as it has uniform <a> from the earliest record in *c.*1200, and it can hardly be the Scandinavian personal name *Kári* as Cameron suggests because there is no trace, in sixteen records before 1410, of a medial syllable representing the associative case marker. I suggest this is an early OE *Carhamm 'riverside land associated with [the] *Car [i.e. Lincoln]', and that its medieval and modern form is to be explained by the replacement of *hamm* by *holm*, a borrowed Scandinavian word commonly used in Lincolnshire for 'raised land in marsh'[34] and sharing a range of applicability with *hamm* which encourages the confusion or blending of the terms.[35] It is structurally parallel with one of the renderings of Car Dyke, namely the stem-compound.

Durham; Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*, pp. 340–41), which was <Eduenesburg> 1120—and indeed in the general facility with which place-name scholars in England have, as a last resort, invented Old English personal names unsupported by the Old English onomastic system.

[33] K. Cameron, *The Place-Names of Lincolnshire*, vols 1–6 (ongoing but suspended), EPNS, 58, 64–66, 71, 73, 77 (Nottingham, 1985–2001), I, 20.

[34] See *ibid*.

[35] John Insley, in *ibid*, II, 193–94, suggests an almost exactly parallel case: the parish-name Killingholme appears to contain *holm* for its entire medieval record, but the grammatical form of the name suggests that it was originally English and that the second element is likely to have been originally *hām*. In Modern English, of course, *hām*, *hamm* and *holm* come to be phonologically identical when unstressed.