

Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland

Essay Prize

1. A prize of £100 will be awarded annually for the best essay on any topic relating to the place-names and/or personal names of England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Man or the Channel Islands.
2. Submissions are invited from all students and other researchers. The prize will normally be awarded to those who have not previously had work in onomastics published.
3. Essays should be about 5,000 words in length.
4. Essays should in some way make an original contribution to the subject.
5. Two copies of the essay should be submitted in clear typescript, double-spaced, and including a bibliography of source material used and of books and authors cited.
6. Entries will be judged by a panel appointed by the President of the Society, and may be considered for publication in *Nomina*.
7. Entries must be submitted by 31 August each year. Provided an essay of sufficient merit is forthcoming, the winner will be announced at the AGM the following year.

Entries should be sent to:

Miss J. Scherr,
 Hon. Secretary, Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland,
 c/o Medical Library, School of Medical Science,
 University of Bristol,
 University Walk,
 Bristol BS8 1TD

Commonplace Place-Names

Carole Hough
 University of Glasgow

A fundamental principle of place-name scholarship is that place-names are distinctive.¹ When first coined, the name identified an aspect of the settlement or its topography that was in some way unique, distinguishing that particular location from others within the same area. Thus a name such as Bristol is taken to indicate that this was the only local assembly place by a bridge; a name such as Berwick is taken to indicate that there were no other barley farms nearby; a name such as Bangor is taken to indicate that this was the only wattle-enclosed monastery in the vicinity; and a name such as Danby is taken to indicate that Danes were a minority group among the neighboring population.

This principle is routinely used as a criterion both for establishing etymologies and for exploring interpretations. In a lecture following the English Place-Name Society's Annual General Meeting of 2005, Professor Ray Page cast doubt on the derivation of Bisbrooke in Rutland (*Bitesbroch* 1086) from Old English (OE) **bitel* 'water-beetle', on the grounds that this is scarcely likely to have been the only local stream to contain water-beetles.² Although formally impeccable, the etymology is not distinctive, and is therefore open to question. A

¹ This is a revised version of a paper presented to the Fifteenth Annual Conference of the Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland, Bristol, 7–10 April 2006. I am grateful to those present for their comments, and in particular to Ellen Bramwell, Richard Coates, Peter McClure and Gavin Smith. I should also like to record my thanks to the University of Glasgow for granting me a period of research leave during which this paper was written. The final version has benefited from perceptive comments by John Freeman.

² R. I. Page, 'Impersonal names', paper presented at the Annual General Meeting of the English Place-Name Society, University of Nottingham, 6 July 2005. A version of the paper has subsequently been published in *Names Through the Looking-Glass. Festschrift in Honour of Gillian Fellows-Jensen July 5th 2006*, edited by P. Gammeltoft and B. Jørgensen (Copenhagen, 2006), pp. 151–64.

similar theme emerged in a paper given at the International Medieval Congress in Leeds the following week by Professor Judith Jesch. Discussing place-names in the Wirral and noting that the reference to Danes in the first element of Denhall identifies them as a minority group, she also drew attention to an instance of the common place-name Kirkby from Old Norse (ON) *kirkju-býr* 'village with a church', and asked, "How are villages with churches distinctive?"³

The answer, it seems to me, is that they aren't. As Jesch pointed out in her paper, the Anglo-Saxons had been Christian for a long time before the Scandinavians arrived, so there is every likelihood that all their villages would have had churches. What could be distinctive about a church, or a water-beetle? The next step for a place-name scholar is either to challenge the etymology, or to reconsider its interpretation. Thus the Kirkbys have been taken variously to designate established minster centres, satellite settlements to minsters, or estates in ecclesiastical possession;⁴ while a recent suggestion is that they may not even contain the 'church' word at all.⁵ Nevertheless, the consensus of opinion continues to return to what is on the face of it the most straightforward explanation. Reiterating her earlier views,⁶ Fellows-Jensen states firmly that "A name such as Kirkby would have been given to a settlement which already had a church when the Danes arrived", a practice which she attributes to the striking appearance of the buildings:

³ J. Jesch, 'Tracing Vikings: language and genetics', paper presented at the International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, 11–14 July 2005.

⁴ The first and second solutions are canvassed by J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 310–11 and fn. 104. The third was supported by Dr Margaret Gelling in the discussion following the oral presentation of this paper at the Bristol conference.

⁵ M. Spence, 'Does Kir(k)by always mean "village with a church"?', paper presented at a one-day conference on "The Church in Place-Names", University of Nottingham, 3 June 2006.

⁶ e.g. G. Fellows-Jensen, *Scandinavian Settlement Names in the North-West* (Copenhagen, 1985), p. 34: "It seems likely that the names [Kirby, Kirkby] were given by the Vikings to pre-existing English villages in which they found a church".

To settlers who were unaccustomed to seeing stone buildings, the Anglo-Saxon churches must have appeared very impressive.⁷

Most recently, Rumble defines the name unequivocally as 'estate with a church',⁸ and Whaley equally confidently as 'the village with a church'.⁹ With regard to Bisbrooke, the first element could alternatively be an Old English personal name *Bitel* or *Byttel*; although as Cox points out, it is not only rare for OE *brōc* 'stream' to combine with a personal name, but suspicious for the same personal name to appear in combination with another term for water in the field-name *Bittlewell*.¹⁰

As soon as we get rid of one water-beetle, however, we find its place taken by a dozen others. Respondents to Professor Page's paper at the English Place-Name Society meeting were quick to counter with examples of 'fish stream' in place-names such as Fishbourne in Sussex and the Isle of Wight and Fishburn in Durham (OE *burna* 'stream') and Fishlake in Yorkshire (OE *lacu* 'stream, water course'), pointing out

⁷ G. Fellows-Jensen, 'Scandinavian settlement in the British Isles and Normandy: what the place-names reveal', in *Scandinavia and Europe 800–1350. Contact, Conflict, and Coexistence*, edited by J. Adams and K. Holman (Turnhout, 2004), pp. 137–47 (p. 143). The striking appearance of the churches is endorsed by place-names coined by the Anglo-Saxons themselves. In the recurrent place-name Whitchurch in the English counties of Buckinghamshire, Devon, Dorset, Hampshire, Oxfordshire, Somerset and Warwickshire, OE *hwīt* 'white'—the only colour adjective to combine with OE *cirice* in English place-names recorded before about 1100—describes the stone used as building material. Similarly, Whithorn in the Scottish county of Wigtownshire, from OE *ærn* 'building', refers to a stone church built by St Ninian. (C. Hough, 'Colours of the landscape: Old English colour terms in place-names', in *Progress in Colour Studies*, vol. 1 *Language and Culture*, edited by C. P. Biggam and C. J. Kay (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, 2006), pp. 181–98 (pp. 184, 194–95).)

⁸ A. R. Rumble, 'The cross in English place-names: vocabulary and usage', in *The Place of the Cross in Anglo-Saxon England*, edited by C. E. Karkov, S. L. Keefer and K. L. Jolly (Woodbridge, 2006), pp. 29–40 (p. 32).

⁹ D. Whaley, *A Dictionary of Lake District Place-Names*, EPNS Regional Series 1 (Nottingham, 2006), p. 198.

¹⁰ B. Cox, *The Place-Names of Rutland*, English Place-Name Society, 67/69 (Nottingham, 1994), pp. 238–39.

that the presence of fish could no more have distinguished these streams from others than could the presence of water-beetles in Bisbrooke. There are many comparable instances of place-names that cannot realistically be taken to derive from an unusual or outstanding feature. 'Cold stream' is a recurrent description both in Old Norse place-names such as Caldbeck in Cumberland (ON *kaldr* + *bekkr*) and in Old English ones such as Caldwell in the North Riding of Yorkshire (OE *cald* + *wella*). It seems reasonable to think that most streams would have been cold, at least at certain times of year. A more distinctive name would be 'warm stream' as in Warmwell in Dorset (OE *wearm* + *wella*). Significantly, however, this is a less common formation.

Equally striking is the number of places called 'green hill', 'green valley' or 'green wood' in the various historical languages of the British Isles, from Glasgow in Lanarkshire (Cumbric) and Green Nap in Fife (Scots), to Glascoed in Monmouthshire (Welsh), Kilglass in Sligo (Irish), Greendale in Devon (Old English), and Grendon and Grindon in several English counties (Old English or Old Norse). Given that both grass and leaves are predominantly green, this can scarcely be taken to have been an unusual attribute. Turning to habitative place-names, the same applies to the ubiquitous names Easton, Norton, Sutton and Weston, referring in many parts of Britain to a farmstead or village east, north, south or west of another. These can no more have been the only farmsteads located in such a direction from the main one than can each of the many occurrences of Newton and Newby have represented the only new buildings in their district.¹¹ But once we admit the possibility that some place-names described features replicated in the surrounding area, we may be forced to reconsider the long-held belief that in order to identify a particular place, the naming feature must be one that distinguished it uniquely from others in the

¹¹ Except in a vanishingly small chronological and geographical framework. John Freeman (personal communication) comments: "a devil's advocate might argue that in the case of the Newtons and Westons temporal considerations might apply, in that the settlements so named were uniquely new and western at the time of the name-giving".

vicinity.

There is in fact an alternative viewpoint. Approaching the topic from the direction of onomastic theory, it has been suggested that one of the tests for a proper name as opposed to an appellative construction is the restriction to a single feature of a description which could equally apply to others. The Slovak name scholar Milan Majtán considers it a defining feature of a toponym—

If only one of two or more identical objects is called by an expression which could denote all of them (e.g. there are several fields beyond the forest, and only one of which is called 'Beyond the Forest').¹²

This offers a fundamentally different perspective from that traditionally held by name scholars in Britain. On this view, a defining characteristic of a name is precisely the opposite of the distinctiveness to which we cling as a mantra in our discussions of etymologies and interpretations. It seems to me that we sometimes do so in the face of the evidence. The purpose of this paper is to suggest that our cherished faith in the distinctiveness of place-names may be misplaced, and that it may be necessary to rethink our approach to certain groups of formations.

I wish to propose that names such as Caldwell, Easton, Fishburn, Greendale, Newby and so on are not distinctive but commonplace, and that this is an aspect of place-name formation that scholarship has so far failed to address.¹³ It may be possible that in some instances, the motivation for naming was to identify not exceptional features but prototypical ones. Recent work in cognitive linguistics has established the central role of prototypes in the cognitive process: information that has only emerged since the 1980s and hence was not available to the

¹² Cited in M. Harvalík, 'Common nouns or proper names? A view of the determination of the boundaries between them', in *Naming the World. From Common Nouns to Proper Names. Proceedings from the International Symposium, Zadar, September 1st-4th, 2004*, edited by D. Brozović-Rončević and E. Cafarelli, *Rivista Italiana di Onomastica*, International Series 1 (Rome, 2005), pp. 15-22 (p. 18).

¹³ With the honourable exception of W. F. H. Nicolaisen, 'Burnside of Duntrune: an essay in praise of ordinariness', *Names*, 33 (1985), 29-38.

early generation of place-name scholars in whose footsteps we still tread.¹⁴ The implications in relation to onomastics have not yet been fully explored,¹⁵ but are potentially far-reaching. It is at least suggestive, for instance, that a study of colour vocabulary in Anglo-Saxon place-names reveals a strong predominance of primary colours, as opposed to the more extensive and closely differentiated corpus of terms recorded within the same semantic field in literary Old English.¹⁶ The same applies to Gaelic colour vocabulary in the place-names of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, where again there is a high incidence of a small number of terms, both in close compounds and in phrasal names.¹⁷

Prototype theory is the notion that some members of a class are more typical examples than others. For most speakers of English, for instance, a robin is a more prototypical bird than an ostrich or a penguin, a chair is a more prototypical item of furniture than a chaise longue or a Welsh dresser, red is a more prototypical colour than

¹⁴ Pioneering work in this field was carried out by Eleanor H. Rosch: see for instance her 'Natural categories', *Cognitive Psychology*, 4 (1973), 328–50, 'Cognitive reference points', *Cognitive Psychology*, 7 (1975), 532–47, and 'Principles of categorization', in *Cognition and Categorization*, edited by E. Rosch and B. B. Lloyd (Hillsdale, Mich., 1978), pp. 27–48. Useful overviews of prototype theory appear in most introductory textbooks of cognitive linguistics, including W. Croft and D. A. Cruse, *Cognitive Linguistics* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 77–92; J. R. Taylor, *Linguistic Categorization*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 2003), pp. 41–83; and F. Ungerer and H.-J. Schmid, *An Introduction to Cognitive Linguistics*, 2nd edn (Harlow, 2006), pp. 7–63.

¹⁵ That is, not as regards the etymological approach to names which generally forms the focus of onomastic research. Studies of naming taxonomies within the linguistics literature are closely informed by prototype theory. See for instance the discussion of the relative prototypicality of different classes of names in J. Anderson, 'On the structure of names', *Folia Linguistica*, 37 (2003), 347–98 (esp. p. 365).

¹⁶ Hough, 'Colours of the landscape'.

¹⁷ I am grateful to Peter Drummond for this information, and for letting me see a copy of his paper, 'Islay and Jura, home of inversion compound mountain toponyms?', presented at the Eighth International Conference on the Languages of Scotland and Ulster, Islay, 5–8 July 2006.

crimson or magenta, and *walk* is a more prototypical verb than *contemplate* or *exaggerate*. This may offer an alternative to the unlikely hypothesis that each occurrence of 'fish stream' designated the only stream containing fish in the vicinity, that each 'cold stream' entailed the nearby presence of warmer streams, or that Bisbrooke was remarkable for a unique and confined colony of water-beetles. These and similar formations may rather have been regarded as the prototypical, or 'best examples', of their kind.

It may also be relevant to draw attention to Nicolaisen's suggestion in relation to the Scandinavian place-names of northern Scotland that some of them may have been introduced as ready-made names by colonising settlers.¹⁸ The same practice may have been adopted by Anglo-Saxon and other incomers. If so, this would imply not that each 'fish stream' was the only stream containing fish in the area, but that it was the first to be named as such, perhaps because it was regarded as the prototypical fish stream—the one with the most fish, or the one that was best for fishing. The name would then be unavailable for further use in the immediate vicinity.

The notion of ready-made place-names suggests a parallel with the corpus of personal names, which were similarly introduced either as actual names or as name types by successive groups of incomers to the British Isles.¹⁹ Again, personal names are highly repetitive yet served to identify individuals.²⁰ They also contribute to the "socio-onomastic strategy of naming" discussed by Nicolaisen in relation to Orkney farm-names potentially dating to the earliest period of Viking settlement, where the use of personal-name qualifiers to indicate individual ownership of the farms—

¹⁸ W. F. H. Nicolaisen, 'The Viking settlement of Scotland: evidence of place-names', in *The Vikings*, edited by R. T. Farrell (Chichester, 1982), pp. 95–115, discusses the potential transfer not only of "whole names with identifiable counterparts in Norway but of name types, including particular name models" (p. 97).

¹⁹ Perhaps significantly, personal names are regarded as prototypical of the class of names by Anderson, 'On the structure of names'.

²⁰ I owe this point to Peter McClure.

does not orient in the way in which descriptive names and those expressing relationships to other features give orienting guidance. In the initial phases of the existence of such names, one has to know who owns or farms what land in order to recognise the designation and to be able to locate the places in question; that is, one has to be knowledgeable within the society that uses the nomenclature.²¹

Here the act of naming is clearly central to the process of acculturation. Thus whereas the established scholarly paradigm, as recently stated by Peder Gammeltoft, holds that "The sole function of a place-name is to single out one locality from all other localities",²² this is only true as regards the function of a place-name at the present day. It should not be confused with the original function when the name was coined.

I do not wish to dispute that many place-names were distinctive, nor even that names of this type may account for a majority of formations within the British Isles and elsewhere. However, I do wish to suggest that the reasons behind name-giving are varied and complex, so that we should no longer assume that a name which could also have applied to other places in the locality has either been falsely derived or misinterpreted. Bisbrooke may perfectly well designate a stream containing water-beetles whether or not other streams were similarly infested. Kirkby may still mean 'village with a church' no matter how many villages had churches.

A further corollary is that the interpretation of certain groups of names may require revision. As noted above, folk-names used as place-name qualifiers are generally taken to designate minority groups, on the grounds that they would not otherwise have been distinctive.

²¹ W. F. H. Nicolaisen, 'Viking place names in Scotland', in *Vikingetidens sted- og personnavne*, edited by G. Fellows-Jensen and B. Holmberg (Uppsala, 1994), pp. 31–49 (p. 41). While noting that "it cannot be proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that any of these specific names go back to the Viking period itself", Nicolaisen observes: "There is ... no reason why the personal-name specifics ... could not have been those of the original owners, for every single one of them also occurs in the same capacity in Norwegian farm names" (pp. 40–41).

²² P. Gammeltoft, 'Scandinavian influence on Hebridean island names', in *Names Through the Looking-Glass*, edited by Gammeltoft and Jørgensen, pp. 53–84 (p. 55).

This view appears to be supported by the language of the generic or defining element, which is often that of a different racial group and is thus taken to indicate that the place was named not by its inhabitants but by its neighbours, the dominant group in the area. Examples include Ingleby 'farmstead or village of the English' from ON *býr*, Normanton 'farmstead or village of the Norwegians' from OE *tūn*, and Walton 'farmstead or village of the Britons' again from OE *tūn*. All are names found in several English counties. Where the generic is from the same language as the folk-name in question, as with Danby in the North Riding of Yorkshire, Normanby in Leicestershire and the West Riding of Yorkshire, and Saxton in the West Riding, these neighbours are identified as a different group of speakers, so that Danby is taken to indicate a Danish settlement within a predominantly Norwegian area, Normanby a Norwegian settlement within a predominantly Danish area, and Saxton a Saxon settlement within a predominantly Anglian area.²³

Such an interpretation may well be appropriate in some—perhaps most—instances.²⁴ It need not be axiomatic in all. Responsibility for naming did not always lie with neighbours. Other interested parties

²³ Still more problematic are place-names such as Denby in several English counties, where the vowel suggests a derivation from OE *Dene* rather than ON *Danir* despite the use of an Old Norse generic. The most recent discussion supports the view that this reflects the borrowing into Old English of ON *býr* (L. Abrams and D. N. Parsons, 'Place-names and the history of Scandinavian settlement in England', in *Land, Sea and Home*, edited by J. Hines, A. Lane and M. Redknap (Leeds, 2004), pp. 379–431 (pp. 398–99)). It may be worth noting, however, that the place-name Denby in Dumfriesshire is recorded in 1304 as *Daneby* (W. F. H. Nicolaisen, *Scottish Place-Names. Their Study and Significance*, new edn (Edinburgh, 2001), p. 145), raising the possibility of a similar but undocumented vowel change from <a> to <e> in names south of the present border between Scotland and England.

²⁴ Noting that "The name *Normanby* apparently refers to an isolated settlement of Norwegians in an area where most of the inhabitants were of other nationalities", for instance, Fellows-Jensen points out that "Most of the Normanbys are found in eastern England, where the Scandinavian settlers were predominantly Danish" ('Scandinavian settlement in the British Isles and Normandy', p. 143).

could include political administrators and legal officials,²⁵ as well as the inhabitants themselves.²⁶ Comparison with place-names containing personal names may be relevant here. It is well known that at least one major group of place-names used personal names to affirm possession. The Grimston hybrids of north-east England, comprising a Scandinavian personal name with OE *tūn*, have been identified as existing Anglo-Saxon villages taken over and partially renamed by the Danes.²⁷ The same name-type appears in southern Scotland, in place-names such as Oxton in Berwickshire 'Ulfkell's farmstead or village'. In these instances at least, the places appear to have been named not by neighbours but by the incoming possessors, and for a definite purpose.²⁸

²⁵ These are discussed for instance in H. Wyn Owen, 'Old English place-name elements in Domesday Flintshire', in *Names, Places and People: an Onomastic Miscellany in Memory of John McNeal Dodgson*, edited by A. R. Rumble and A. D. Mills (Stamford, 1997), pp. 269–78; G. Smith, *Surrey Place-Names* (Loughborough, 2005), p. 34; B. E. Crawford, 'Houseby, Harray and Knarston in the west Mainland of Orkney. Toponymic indicators of administrative authority?', in *Names Through the Looking-Glass*, edited by Gammeltoft and Jørgensen, pp. 21–44; and C. Hough, 'Naming and authority in Anglo-Saxon law', in *Kingship and Power in Anglo-Saxon England*, edited by G. Owen-Crocker (Woodbridge, forthcoming).

²⁶ Such a practice is generally taken to be exceptional. Some readers may recall that in a paper on 'The survival of Celtic place-names in Kent' presented to the Sixteenth Annual Study Conference of the Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland, Dublin, 31 March–3 April 2007, Dr Paul Cullen referred to "unusual self-naming" in connection with Canterbury. It may, however, be less unusual than has hitherto been assumed to be the case.

²⁷ K. Cameron, 'Scandinavian settlement in the territory of the Five Boroughs: the place-name evidence. Part III: The Grimston-hybrids', in *England Before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, edited by P. Clemons and K. Hughes (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 147–63, repr. in *Place-Name Evidence for the Anglo-Saxon Invasion and Scandinavian Settlements*, edited by K. Cameron (Nottingham, 1975), pp. 157–71 (p. 170).

²⁸ John Freeman (personal communication) observes that it remains formally possible that the local English population renamed the places by substituting the name of the new lord, who happened to have a Scandinavian name, but comments: "there is the point that they form a reasonably well-defined group, which might

The same may apply to other types of formations. As regards the corpus of names from pre-Conquest England, it is now recognised that Anglo-Saxon personal names in place-names are not necessarily those of the 'founding fathers' of the village, as was thought by early scholars such as Stenton, but are sometimes those of later owners of the estates.²⁹ As Gelling comments:

It is possible to point to a growing and quite impressive number of instances in which an 'x's *tūn*' place-name is firmly connected with a man or woman mentioned in a charter of tenth- or eleventh-century date, or with an overlord who appears in the Domesday Survey.³⁰

For instance, Wolverhampton in Staffordshire, first recorded in 985 as *Heantune* 'high farmstead', is recorded from c.1080 with the feminine personal name *Wulfrūn* of the lady to whom the estate was granted in 985.³¹ East Garston in Berkshire (*Esgareston* 1180) is named from an official of Edward the Confessor, and Aughton in Wiltshire from the widow of a tenth-century land-holder.³² In southern Scotland, the *Leving* whose name comprises the first element of Livingston in West Lothian appears in twelfth-century charters;³³ while the Borders place-name Eddleston is recorded within the space of about eighty years in Cumbric, Gaelic and Old English, documenting changes of ownership from *Penteiacob* 'headland of James's house' to *Gillemorestun*

suggest a more deliberate policy aimed at expressing the new social and political realities".

²⁹ A useful discussion appears in K. Cameron, 'Stenton and place-names', in *Stenton's Anglo-Saxon England Fifty Years On*, edited by D. Matthew (Reading, 1994), pp. 31–48 (pp. 37–38). Implications for the position of women in Anglo-Saxon England are discussed in C. Hough, 'Women in English place-names', in *'Lastworda Betst': Essays in Memory of Christine E. Fell with her Unpublished Writings*, edited by C. Hough and K. A. Lowe (Donington, 2002), pp. 41–106.

³⁰ M. Gelling, *Signposts to the Past. Place-Names and the History of England*, 3rd edn (Chichester, 1997), p. 181.

³¹ E. Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 4th edn (Oxford, 1960), p. 529.

³² Gelling, *Signposts to the Past*, p. 124.

³³ Nicolaisen, *Scottish Place-Names*, p. 33.

(twelfth century) and *Edulfstun* (a.1189).³⁴ It seems likely that in at least some instances, the personal names were incorporated into the place-names in order to back up the claim represented by charter evidence and to make a public affirmation of ownership. With regard to minor place-names from the early medieval period, I have suggested elsewhere that renaming may have been a deliberate strategy to record changes of ownership for small land-holdings that were not sufficiently important to be documented by charter.³⁵

Renaming is, of course, not limited to the substitution of personal names. In a number of place-names, ON *býr* 'farmstead, village' is known to have replaced OE *burh* 'fortification'. The two words have different meanings, so the reason would appear to be related to affirmation of ownership rather than to the description of a distinctive feature.³⁶ Instances cited under the headword entry for OE *burh* in *The Vocabulary of English Place-Names* are Badby (*baddan byrg*, *baddan by* 944 [10th]) and Thornby (*Torneberie* 1086, *Thirnebi* c.1160) in Northamptonshire, Greasby (*Gravesberie* 1086) in Cheshire and Quenby (*Qveneberie* 1086) in Leicestershire.³⁷ OE *burh* itself was used to replace Cumbric *din* 'fortification' in *Din Eidyn*, captured by North-

³⁴ I. Fraser, 'Borders place-names', in *The Borders Book*, edited by D. Omand (Edinburgh, 1995), pp. 179–92 (p. 182).

³⁵ Hough, 'Naming and authority in Anglo-Saxon law'.

³⁶ As John Freeman points out to me, phonetic similarity was no doubt also a factor in the substitution. Again, the role of sound symbolism, and in particular of phonaesthesia (the development of traditional associations between phonemes and meanings), in the development of language has only recently come to prominence in historical linguists, partly as a result of an influential discussion in M. L. Samuels, *Linguistic Evolution with Special Reference to English* (Cambridge, 1972), esp. pp. 45–48. The implications for place-name study have not yet been fully addressed, although P. R. Kitson raises the possibility of phonaesthetic influence on Indo-European river-names ('British and European river-names', *Transactions of the Philological Society*, 94 (1996), 73–118 (p. 107)), and R. Coates presents a detailed examination of the influence of phonological similarity on the development of place-name forms ('Pragmatic sources of analogical reformation', *Journal of Linguistics*, 23 (1987), 319–40).

³⁷ D. N. Parsons and T. Styles, *The Vocabulary of English Place-Names (brace-cæster)* (Nottingham, 2000), pp. 74–85.

umbrian Angles in the early seventh century and renamed Edinburgh. Similar substitutions have taken place further afield, as for instance with the imposition of English names in other parts of the British Isles and the former colonies as a means of enforcing political dominance, and the transfer of European place-names to various parts of the world by early explorers.³⁸ This suggests another possible explanation for the Kirkbys. They may have been ready-made names applied by the incoming Scandinavians to affirm their ownership of the erstwhile Anglo-Saxon villages.³⁹ The distinctiveness or otherwise of villages with churches doesn't come into it.

Something similar may be represented by names of the Danby, Normanby, and Saxton type. Rather than being minority groups, the eponymous Danes, Norwegians and Saxons may have been the first group of such settlers to arrive in the area, naming the settlement after themselves in order to stake their claim. Negative evidence is always problematic, and it seems to me unsafe to assume that a reference to one racial group implies the more dominant presence of another. Danby testifies to a settlement of Danes, Normanby to a settlement of Norwegians, and Saxton to a settlement of Saxons. They tell us this much, and no more.

It may be still more controversial to suggest that where folk-names used as place-name qualifiers are demonstrably those of minority

³⁸ Instances of places "renamed to reinforce the authority of a ruling power" are briefly discussed in C. Hough, 'Place names', in *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, 2nd edn, edited by K. Brown, 14 vols (Oxford, 2006), IX, 613–20 (p. 617), as are transfers of European place-names to America, Canada, South Africa and Australasia (p. 614). See also J. Everett-Heath, *The Concise Dictionary of World Place-Names* (Oxford, 2005), esp. p. viii.

³⁹ In this connection, it is interesting to note Rumble's suggestion that Crosby 'estate with crosses', another recurrent place-name in north and north-west England, and (in the metathesized form Corsby) south-west Scotland, "apparently represents the term used by the Vikings for an estate with a (pre-existing) Christian site, but one without a church. If the latter were present they would have used *kirkju-bý* 'estate with a church'" ('The cross in English place-names', pp. 31–32). According to this view, Crosby and Kirkby would be a complementary pair of ready-made names, covering between them the two main possibilities for recognisable Christian sites.

groups, these place-names too may have been coined by the inhabitants themselves as an affirmation of identity. The main argument against this is that in all such instances, the generic is from the majority language.⁴⁰ The most numerous are place-names from OE *w(e)alh* 'Briton' such as Walcot, Walton and Walworth, shown by Cameron to represent surviving enclaves of Britons within a predominantly Anglo-Saxon population, and containing generics such as OE *cot* 'cottage', OE *tūn* 'farmstead or village' and OE *word* 'enclosure'.⁴¹ A more recent suggestion by Pelteret is that *w(e)alh* may have had the sense 'foreigner' in some place-names:

pockets of settlers of diverse origins, such as Flemings, Norsemen, or Normans might account for a number of *wealaton* forms, and dwellings of outsiders, such as traders, would explain the place-name *wealacot*.⁴²

This seems to me less likely, especially as qualifying elements tend to comprise low-level hyponyms rather than superordinate terms. I have argued elsewhere that place-names draw predominantly on basic level vocabulary;⁴³ and a reference to a particular group such as Britons would be more in keeping with the general pattern of formations than an unspecific reference to foreigners. At any rate, the names in question were clearly coined by speakers of Old English, and it has therefore appeared to follow that they were coined by Anglo-Saxons rather than by Britons or the more diverse groups of settlers postulated by Pelteret.

However, there may be an alternative explanation. Recent work on language contact has established that a minority group would have had

⁴⁰ The argument may thus become somewhat circular, the language of the generic being taken to indicate the majority language and hence to identify the folk-name as that of a minority group.

⁴¹ K. Cameron, 'The meaning and significance of Old English *walh* in English place-names', *Journal of the English Place-Name Society*, 12 (1979–80), 1–53.

⁴² D. A. E. Pelteret, *Slavery in Early Mediaeval England from the Reign of Alfred until the Twelfth Century* (Woodbridge, 1995), p. 320.

⁴³ C. Hough, 'Place-names and cognitive linguistics', paper presented at a day conference of the Scottish Place-Name Society, Govan, 4 November 2006, and summarised in *Scottish Place-Name News*, 22 (Spring 2007), 2–4.

to acquire some proficiency in the majority language, and may have used it in the formation of place-names.⁴⁴ Indeed, Cameron himself suggested that the surviving Britons would have become bilingual.⁴⁵ Naming a place after themselves as a means of affirming their right to it would have involved using the majority language in order to communicate that statement to their more powerful neighbours. It would have been pretty pointless to use a language that those neighbours did not understand. The same could apply to names such as Ingleby and Normanton, where again the majority language may deliberately have been used to affirm the rights of a minority group.

Most striking of all are place-names, such as Cumberhill in Derbyshire, Cumberwell in Wiltshire, Cumberwood in Gloucestershire and the county name Cumberland, from Old English generics in combination with *Cumbre*—“the Celts' own name for themselves”, as Fellows-Jensen points out.⁴⁶ With a distribution mainly but not exclusively in the west midlands of England, these are usually attributed to an OE **Cumbre*, a putative borrowing from the Brittonic ancestor of Welsh *Cymro* 'Welshman'.⁴⁷ Brittonic loan-words are, however, rare in Old English,⁴⁸ while the use of topographical generics is particularly characteristic of Celtic naming practices. A further

⁴⁴ See for instance R. A. V. Cox, 'Norse-Gaelic contact in the West of Lewis: the place-name evidence', in *Language Contact in the British Isles: Proceedings of the Eighth International Symposium on Language Contact in Europe*, Douglas, Isle of Man, 1988, edited by P. S. Ureland and G. Broderick (Tübingen, 1991), pp. 479–93; A. Grant, 'A new approach to the inversion compounds of north-west England', *Nomina*, 25 (2002), 65–90.

⁴⁵ K. Cameron, *English Place Names*, new edn (London, 1996), p. 32.

⁴⁶ G. Fellows Jensen, 'Place-names and settlement history: a review', *Northern History*, 13 (1977), 1–26 (p. 17).

⁴⁷ As for instance in A. H. Smith, *English Place-Name Elements*, 2 vols, English Place-Name Society, 25–26 (Cambridge, 1956), I, 119–20, s.v. **Cumbre*; Cameron, *English Place Names*, p. 47.

⁴⁸ As noted for instance by R. Coates, 'The significances of Celtic place-names in England', in *The Celtic Roots of English*, edited by M. Filppula, J. Klemola and H. Pitkänen (Joensuu, 2002), pp. 47–85 (p. 47): "whilst the Angles and Saxons seem content to have taken some place-names from the Britons ... they took practically no ordinary vocabulary".

difficulty is presented by Cummersdale in Cumberland, where the putative Old English loan word is found in combination with ON *dalr* 'valley'. The possibility should perhaps be considered that the qualifying element may be not an unattested Old English loan word but the Celtic term itself, and that the place-names were coined by the Celtic inhabitants rather than by their Anglo-Saxon or Anglo-Scandinavian neighbours.

In addition to affirming ownership, place-names have a role in defining the legal status of land-holdings. Examples from England include the recurrent place-names Buckland, from OE *bōc-land* 'charter land', Charlton or (Scandinavianized) Carlton, from an OE **ceorla-tūn* 'farmstead of free peasants', and Kingston, from OE *cyninges tūn* 'king's estate'. All three terms have a straightforward interpretation based on their occurrence in written sources. The Toronto *Dictionary of Old English* defines *bōc-land* as 'land held by charter in hereditary possession, exhibiting various characteristics stipulated in the charter',⁴⁹ and defines *cyninges tūn* as 'the king's residence or estate',⁵⁰ while seventh-century West Saxon law makes specific provision for land held in common by men of the *ceorl* class. The problem faced by scholars is how the corresponding place-names could have been distinctive, given that the *ceorl* was the largest class of freeman in Anglo-Saxon society, that a high proportion of land was held by charter in hereditary possession, and that places named Kingston are not infrequently found in the vicinity of other royal estates. In order to resolve this dilemma, suggested interpretations have focused on the attempt to identify specialized meanings for the place-name usages, in contradistinction to the attested meanings of the compounds in literary Old English.

As regards Buckland, for instance, Rumble points out that the extent of *bōc-land* holdings by the early tenth century means that the criterion of distinctiveness could only have been met during the early Anglo-Saxon period:

⁴⁹ *Dictionary of Old English A-F*, version 1.0 (Toronto, 2003), CD-ROM, s.v. *bōc-land*.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, s.v. *cyning*, *cyng*, I.A.6.c.

If ... the names in Buckland were in each case given solely to distinguish an estate of *bōc-land* from ones held as *folc-land*, one might assume that, in order to have sufficient particularising force, they would need to have been given at a time when *bōc-land* tenure was fairly rare in the area concerned.⁵¹

As he goes on to demonstrate, however, the surviving evidence does not support such a hypothesis, and it is therefore necessary to find some other characteristic to provide the place-name with the requisite "particularising force". Rumble's preferred solution is that the estates in question may have represented new land units created for the purposes of the grant:

Estates called **Bōc-land* may have been distinct from their neighbours because of the way that they had come into existence, rather than merely because of the tenure under which they were held, a tenure which they may well have shared with adjacent estates.⁵²

While a valiant attempt to account for the occurrence of an estate name which could quite clearly also apply to others in the surrounding area, this hypothesis is, as Rumble acknowledges, "difficult to prove with certainty", and relies on evidence which is "both circumstantial and conditional".⁵³ A more economical solution may be that the purpose of the name was to confirm the status of a particular holding as *bōc-land*, and that this took priority over the selection of a unique naming feature.

The same may apply to other types of land-holdings. An OE **ceorla-tūn* 'farmstead of free peasants' gives rise to about one hundred occurrences of the place-name C(h)arlton in England. The *ceorl* was almost certainly the largest as well as the lowest class of freeman in Anglo-Saxon society, described by Charles-Edwards as the

⁵¹ A. R. Rumble, 'Old English *boc-land* as an Anglo-Saxon estate-name', *Leeds Studies in English*, 18 (1987), 219–29 (p. 221). Rumble's article forms the basis of the entry for OE *bōc-land* in *The Vocabulary of English Place-Names (ā-box)*, edited by D. Parsons and T. Styles with C. Hough (Nottingham, 1997), p. 120.

⁵² Rumble, 'Old English *boc-land* as an Anglo-Saxon estate-name', 222.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

“normal freeman”⁵⁴ and by Faith as “the great residual category of the population ... the mass of the independent peasantry owing tax and public service and participating in the public courts”.⁵⁵ Proposed interpretations, summarized under the headword entry for *ceorl* in the latest fascicle of *The Vocabulary of English Place-Names*,⁵⁶ have focused around the issue of how such a name can have been distinctive.

Dating is also problematic, since although none of the place-names is recorded before the tenth century,⁵⁷ there is a possible link with seventh-century law. Clause 42 of the West Saxon laws of Ine, preserved only as an appendix to the law-code issued by Alfred the Great c.887–93 but apparently issued during the late seventh century,⁵⁸ contains a detailed statement of responsibility for damage caused by livestock to a *gærs-tūn* ‘grass enclosure’ held in common by a group of *ceorls*.⁵⁹ On the face of it, this suggests a rationale for the place-name. According to the traditional scholarly paradigm, however, the interpretation is plausible only if, as Parsons puts it, “such arrangements were—though common enough to be legislated for—rare enough to be

⁵⁴ T. M. Charles-Edwards, ‘Kinship, status and the origins of the hide’, *Past and Present*, 56 (1972), 3–33 (p. 9).

⁵⁵ R. Faith, ‘Social class’, in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, edited by M. Lapidge, J. Blair, S. Keynes and D. Scragg (Oxford, 1999), p. 424.

⁵⁶ D. N. Parsons, *The Vocabulary of English Place-Names (ceafor–cock-pit)* (Nottingham, 2004), pp. 19–26 (pp. 20–23).

⁵⁷ With the possible exception of a charter occurrence discussed in *ibid.*, p. 21.

⁵⁸ Ine’s laws are datable on internal evidence to between 688 and 694. However, there is reason to believe that they may have been issued separately in several series, in which case the dating parameters would apply only to the first twenty-six clauses, and clauses 27 onwards could date from any point up to the end of Ine’s reign in 725 or 726. A further issue is whether and to what extent they were revised for inclusion in Alfred’s code. The evidence is summarized in C. Hough, ‘Legal and documentary writings’, in *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature*, edited by P. Pulsiano and E. Treherne (Oxford, 2001), pp. 170–87 (p. 175).

⁵⁹ The standard edition is *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, edited by F. Liebermann, 3 vols (Halle, 1903–16), I, 106–08.

distinctive”.⁶⁰

A counter-argument is that it is difficult to believe that anything common enough to be legislated for could simultaneously be rare enough to be distinctive. It is indisputable that other land units mentioned in seventh-century law are represented in place-names, as with Kingston from OE *cyninges tūn*, which I have discussed elsewhere.⁶¹ A substantial body of legislation survives from Anglo-Saxon England, some of it relating directly to aspects of the agrarian economy.⁶² It can only have functioned effectively if there was an accepted means of determining the legal status of individual holdings. Otherwise an offender guilty under the provisions of Ine 42, for instance, could have claimed that the land in question did not comprise a **ceorla tūn*, and thus avoided the penalty. Recent work presented at conferences of this Society and elsewhere has tended to emphasize the functional value of place-names,⁶³ and the legal system is an area where naming could play an important role. Just as boundary markers—some of which have developed into place-names—were used to delimit estate boundaries in the corpus of Anglo-Saxon land charters,⁶⁴ so too place-names may have served to identify the legal status of different types of land-holdings, irrespective of how common or otherwise those holdings may have been.

⁶⁰ Parsons, *The Vocabulary of English Place-Names (ceafor–cock-pit)*, p. 21.

⁶¹ C. Hough, ‘The place-name Kingston and the laws of Æthelberht’, *Studia Neophilologica*, 69 (1997), 55–57.

⁶² An interesting comparison with Danish law appears in A. Hoff, ‘Law and landscape’, in *Land, Sea and Home*, edited by Hines and others, pp. 433–42.

⁶³ For instance, A. Cole, ‘The Anglo-Saxon traveller’, *Nomina*, 17 (1994), 7–18, demonstrates the role of topographical place-names in helping people to find their way around the country. Despite the title, P. Gammeltoft, ‘In search of the motives behind naming: a discussion of a name-semantic model of categorisation’, in *Proceedings of the 21st International Congress of Onomastic Sciences Uppsala 19–24 August 2002*, vol. 1, edited by E. Brylla and M. Wahlberg in collaboration with V. Dalberg and W. F. H. Nicolaisen (Uppsala, 2005), pp. 151–60, is concerned with classification models rather than with the functions of names.

⁶⁴ An illustrated summary of the material is presented by J. Jenkyns, ‘Charter bounds’, in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, edited by Lapidge and others, pp. 97–99.

In conclusion, I would suggest that it is overly simplistic to assume that place-names functioned as literal descriptions of distinctive features. The early settlers of the British Isles may have placed less emphasis on uniqueness than modern scholars, and they undoubtedly had a range of other priorities which affected naming patterns. Name choices may have been driven by economic, political, legal or social considerations, some of which can no longer be reconstructed. This paper has focused on a small selection of name types in order to explore some of the implications of this line of argument. Many other groups of names may also be affected, and remain to be examined.

Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland

Sixteenth Annual Study Conference

The sixteenth annual study conference of the Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland was held at St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin, from 31 March to 3 April 2007. The programme was organized by Mr. Dónall Mac Giolla Easpaig of the Place-Names Office, Dublin. The opening lecture, by Dr. Nollaig Ó Muraíle (Galway) covered 'Name studies in Ireland: a review'. Professor Thomas Clancy (Glasgow) spoke on 'Logie bared: an ecclesiastical place-name element in eastern Scotland'. He held that parish-names in *Logie* do not contain a Gaelic word for 'hollow' as similar local names do (cf. OIr. *lac*, Sc.G. *lagan*) but a derivative of Latin *locus* 'place' used to name ecclesiastical places in much the same way as OE *stōw* for monastic centres in eastern England or Cornish and Breton *loc* for chapelries (Welsh *llog*, he said, while found in lexical compounds is not productive in place-names). Dr. Micheál Ó Mainnín (Belfast) started from the exploits of a tenth-century king 'Navigating the *Dabhall*: the river and its influence on the topography of North Armagh', relating names of parts of the Blackwater river system to the local topography.

Dr. Paul Cullen (Nottingham) spoke on 'The survival of Celtic place-names in Kent' with specimens including a field-name *Jetties* (< OE **Cethyrst*) relic of a continuous *coed* 'wood' from Blean west to Chatham and Chattenden, and *Winfield Bank* whose first syllable is a reflex of the Roman way-station at *Vagniacis*. His *pièce de résistance* was the argument that the qualifier in the Old English river-name *Rūmenes ēa*, etymon of Romney Marsh, is not as usually thought the Latin personal name *Rōmānus* (phonetics as in OE *Rūm* 'Rome') but the Latin common noun *rūmen* 'throat, gullet, oesophagus' as name of a tidal lagoon supposed to have existed there. The rationale would be that its Romano-British namers fancied a likeness between the movement of waters in it and the bringing up of the cud by ruminant animals. The presentation was not in this reviewer's opinion well served by Dr. Cullen's choice of map, one showing large areas of