

Hidden Gates

Richard Coates

University of the West of England

Several walled towns in the British Isles have, or had, a gate whose name either means or suggests that it was hidden. Such names also occasionally appear in great walled buildings such as abbeys and castles. This is an investigation of precisely what, if anything, ‘hidden’ gates might have had in common to justify the name.

Method and presentation

The bulk of the article consists of an annotated list of such gates, organized into two name-types: *Blind Gate* and *Dern Gate* (or similar); this is followed by a short note on London’s *Ludgate*. The dataset was created simply by consulting volumes of the English Place-Name Survey (EPNS), and using the Google™ search engine to locate other relevant names and online resources. In no case has the exact document in which the names appear proved to be a problematic matter, so simple dates of first and some subsequent mentions are quoted from the relevant EPNS county volume. Where there is no such volume, fuller bibliographical or archival details appear. The naming-context is given for each name in the form of a list of the other gate-names of the relevant town. A suggested interpretation of the notion ‘hidden gate’ will follow the list.

Blind Gates: general

It is well known that *blind* can be applied from the perspective of the percept rather than the perceiver, which makes its meaning tantamount to ‘obscure’, ‘unable to be seen’, ‘hidden’.¹ Note, for example, ‘Meeting noe bodie [they] searched .. everie blind corner’, in Philemon Holland’s translation of Suetonius.² In the numerous cases of its application to streams, the word may imply either ‘hidden by vegetation’, ‘dry’ or

¹ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn, edited by J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner (Oxford, 1989) [hereafter *OED2*], available online at <www.oed.com>, s.v. *blind* *adj.* III. 6.a., 8.a. and 8.b.

² *Ibid.* s.v. III. 6.a.

‘underground’, as with the Blind Yeo in Somerset³ (this stream is recorded as *the Blyndezoo* in 1320;⁴ its course has been interfered with in modern times and nothing can be deduced from its present appearance). *Blind* can also mean ‘closed-ended [of alleys, etc.]’;⁵ and it appears also in *blind gut* ‘[anatomical] appendix’ till relatively recently.⁶ Slightly different are the modern lexical expressions *blind junction* or *blind bend / corner*, where the sense is ‘junction or corner that renders the perceiver unable to see [something, e.g. other traffic]’.⁷

Blind can also mean ‘without openings’ or ‘windowless’,⁸ but this sense is not found till the seventeenth century and I assume it to be irrelevant for present purposes because the key names are found much earlier. A ‘flint blind gateway’ of this description is found at Greys Court, west of Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire.⁹

Five names of this form in the British Isles are known to me:

Blind Yate (later Gate), Bristol (first known mention 1285)¹⁰

This is rendered in Latin as *Orbam portam* (1296) and *portam cecam* (1492). *Orbus* is literally ‘bereft of parents or children’, hence more generally ‘deprived [of something valuable]’, and possibly used to mean ‘blind’ because of some fancied connection with *orbis* in the poetic sense of ‘orbit of the eye’ (as in Lucretius and Virgil). There is a mention in Anglo-Norman French of *horbes rues* ‘blind streets’ in Winchester which

³ *Ibid.* s.v. III. 9.a.

⁴ E. Ekwall, *English River-Names* (Oxford, 1928), s.n., but without comment.

⁵ *OED2* s.v. *blind adj.* III. 8.a. and 11.a., and *blind alley n.* *Blind Lane* is frequent as a local name in e.g. Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Lincolnshire.

⁶ See *The Vocabulary of English Place-Names (Á-Box)*, edited by D. Parsons and T. Styles with C. Hough (Nottingham, 1997), p. 115 and further references there for the range of the word’s application in place-names. What it might mean in relation to trees (*Blind Oak Field*, Abinger (J. E. B. Gover, Allen Mawer and F. M. Stenton, with Arthur Bonner *The Place-Names of Surrey*, English Place-Name Survey, 11 (Cambridge, 1934), p. 263)—if that is the way to parse this name) is a moot point.

⁷ Cf. *OED2* s.v. *blind adj.* III. 9.b.

⁸ *Ibid.* s.v. III. 10.a.

⁹ National Monuments Record (hereafter NMR) 1089983;<www.pastscape.org/hob.aspx?hob_id=1089983>, accessed 7th December 2009.

¹⁰ NMR 1005392.

approach the city walls rather than a gate.¹¹ The phrase presumably expresses a notion closely related to the gate-name, but the *horbes rues* were not blind alleys in the modern sense because they were actually thoroughfares which opened into a perimeter street below the walls. *Caecus* on the other hand is literally ‘blind’. Either the English name must be calqued on the Latin or vice versa; it is reasonable to infer that the Latin of 1492 probably translates the idiomatic English expression, since we have only a single late example.

According to A. H. Smith, the Bristol gate is recorded in Middle English (ME), first in 1285 (*le Bl(e)indezete*), then in 1350 (*-yate*), and in 1409 (*Blyndegate*).¹² William Worcestre, in 1492, mentions Tower Street, which ‘ys but a streyt way goyng by the old towne walle and the old toune yate called blynde yate by the auncient first yaate called pyttey yate ...’.¹³ The name is spelt so, or as (*le*) *blyndeyate*, *blyndyate*,¹⁴ and the gate’s measurements are briefly given.¹⁵ The quoted passage indicates that Worcestre believed it to have been constructed later than at least one other town gate (Pithay *alias* Aylward’s Gate). There are plenty of later mentions in documents, e.g. title deeds of adjacent properties, in the Bristol Record Office.¹⁶ Blind Gate was surmounted by the Dove Tower, leading to the occasional designation *Tower-Gate*, and the next-door buildings were eventually expanded to equal it in height (see Image 1a). It was also called *St John’s Arch*, but it was not *St John’s Gate*; the latter is the still-existing northern city gate at the end of Broad Street, passing under St John’s church, but the two are commonly confused in modern writings on the history of Bristol. It was called *St John’s Arch* for being

¹¹ J. S. Furley, *City Government of Winchester from the Records of the XIV and XV Centuries* (Oxford, 1923), p. 171; *Winchester in the Early Middle Ages: an edition and discussion of the Winton Domesday*, edited by M. Biddle, *Winchester Studies*, 1 (Oxford, 1976), p. 285.

¹² A. H. Smith, *The Place-Names of Gloucestershire*, 4 vols, English Place-Name Survey, 38–41 (Cambridge, 1964–5), III, 86.

¹³ *William Worcestre: Mediaeval Bristol*, edited by F. Neale, Bristol Record Society, 51 (Bristol, 2001), §45.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* §§62, 133–4, 155, 372–5, 412.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* §§134, 374.

¹⁶ ‘B’ Bond Warehouse, Smeaton Road, Bristol BS1 6XN.

close to St John's churchyard, not to the church itself; the churchyard was separated from the church. Blind Gate is marked, but not named, on James Millerd's map of Bristol (1673; Image 1b); the churchyard appears next to ('above') the word *lane* of *Tower lane*.

The Saxon town is believed to have had four gates approximately at the primary compass-points; the east gate was obliterated by the works which created the Norman castle, and the other three appear asterisked in the following list. The names of the gates in the post-Conquest walls were as follows: in the original circuit, clockwise from the north(-west): St John's Gate*, Blind Gate, Pithay or Aylward's Gate, Aldgate, Newgate, St Nicholas' Gate*, Baldwin Steps footgate, St Leonard's Gate*, St Giles' Gate. A later-medieval partial circuit enclosed ground outside the original walls on the north and east and separately on the south-west; the gates in this, again clockwise, were (north): Fromegate, Monken Gate, Alderich Gate and (east) Lawford's Gate, beyond the castle; (south-west) the Marsh Gate, Back Street Gate and Marsh Street Gate. The last new gate in the original walls, made in 1657, was Needless Gate, whose name expressed the jaundiced view of contemporary Bristolian ratepayers. The northern gate, St John's Gate, survives beneath the nave of St John's church; all the other gates have gone, Blind Gate being demolished as late as 1911 to accommodate Fry's new chocolate factory (as anticipated by Pritchard).¹⁷ The gates south of the Avon and the castle gates are omitted from the list just given. Bristol's walls were finally demolished around 1760.¹⁸

¹⁷ J. E. Pritchard, 'Bristol archaeological notes for 1907', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 30 (1907), 212–32 (pp. 230–2).

¹⁸ This account of the walls and gates is based on Aughton's digest of recent archaeological and documentary work (P. Aughton, *Bristol: A People's History* (Lancaster, 2000), chapter 1; p. 11 has been reproduced in Image 2a, below).



Image 1a. Blind Gate, Bristol (down to right), surrounded by later buildings, just before its demolition in 1911.¹⁹

¹⁹ Henry Hill in J. E. Pritchard, 'Bristol archaeological notes for 1911', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 35 (1912), 96–115 (plate included between pages 96 and 97).



*Image 1b. James Millerd's map of Bristol (1673).
The Blind Gate is the building above and to the right of the
end of 'lane' in the name Tower lane.*

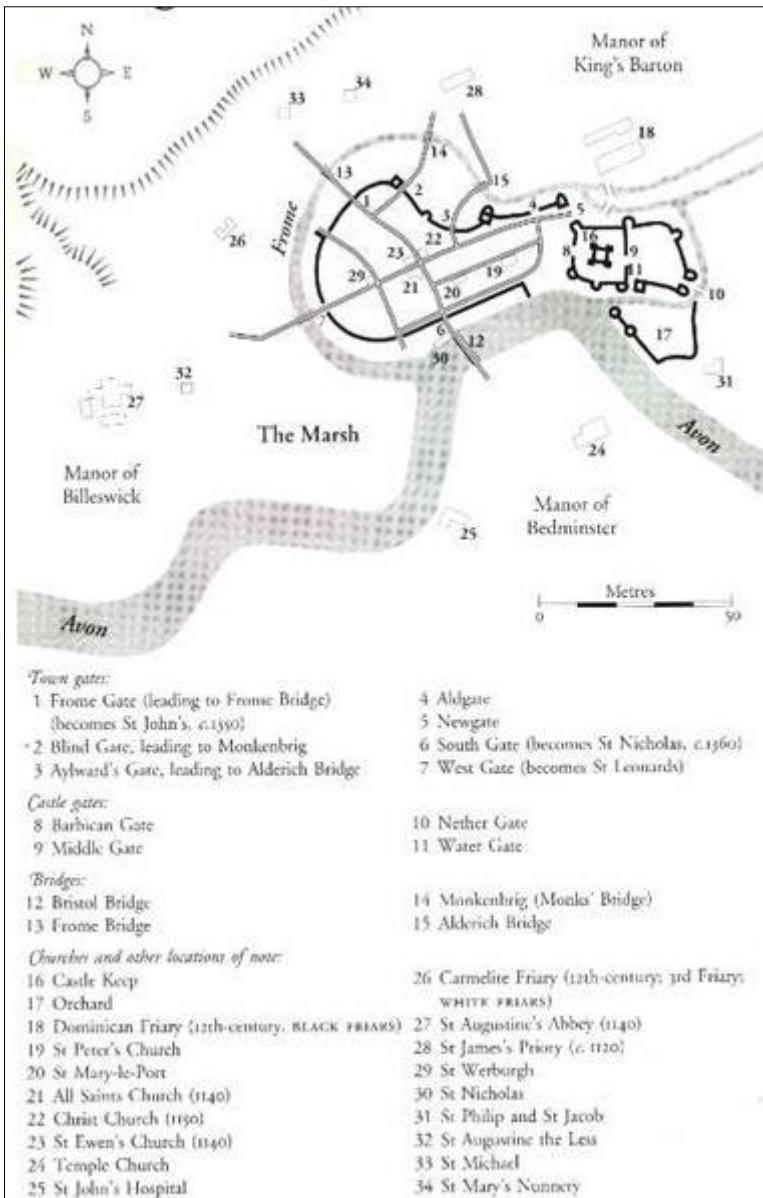


Image 2a. Aughton's mapped account of current thinking about Bristol's walls in the mid-twelfth century (see footnote 18). Blind Gate is no. 2.



Image 2b. Blind Gate, Bristol, being demolished.²⁰

²⁰ Image reproduced from the Fred Little archive (partly online at <www.fredlittle.co.uk/fb02.html>) by permission.

Blind Yate (later Gate), Gloucester (first known mention 1455)²¹

The lost location of this town gate is discussed by A. H. Smith and by Howes.²² Blind Gate is mapped by Herbert.²³ It was north of St Peter's Abbey precinct (i.e. that of the present cathedral). It is recorded as *the Blynde gate, yate, or gate* between 1455 and 1642, and probably as *the blynd Wyckett* in 1589.²⁴ Ways which led to and from it are specified as the medieval way later known as Dean's Walk and Chapel House Walk; and Watering(stead) Street, later known as St Catherine Street.²⁵ It was not on a high road out of the town, but on one which led towards the meadows of the old course of the Severn.²⁶

The names of the other gates of the original, essentially Roman, circuit were derived from the four compass points (the east also being known as *Ailes Gate*), with an unnamed postern at the north-east. There were two outer gates at crossings of the river Twyver: Alvin Gate and an outer north gate. The walls of Gloucester were slighted in 1662, and the gates taken down in the 18th and 19th centuries, Blind Gate in the eighteenth.²⁷

²¹ NMR 115469.

²² Smith, *The Place-Names of Gloucestershire*, II, 127; R. Howes, 'The medieval sieges of Gloucester, 1263-65 (Barons' War)', *Glevensis*, 35 (2002), 19-24 (p. 21); cf. also 'An unidentified early 18th-century Gloucester map' (p. 40).

²³ 'Medieval Gloucester: Topography' in *Victoria History of the County of Gloucester*, 11 vols (to date), edited by W. Page *et al.*, (Oxford, 1907-), IV: *The City of Gloucester*, edited by N. M. Herbert (Oxford, 1988), 63-72 <www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=42278> (accessed October-November 2009).

²⁴ Smith, *The Place-Names of Gloucestershire*, II, 127.

²⁵ 'Gloucester: Street names', in *Victoria History of the County of Gloucester*, IV, 364-368 <www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=42319> (accessed 14th May 2009).

²⁶ 'Gloucester: Outlying hamlets', in *Victoria History of the County of Gloucester*, IV, 382-410, <www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=42323> (accessed 14th May 2009).

²⁷ 'Gloucester: Bridges, gates and walls', in *Victoria History of the County of Gloucester*, IV, 242-245 <www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=42303>, accessed October-November 2009.

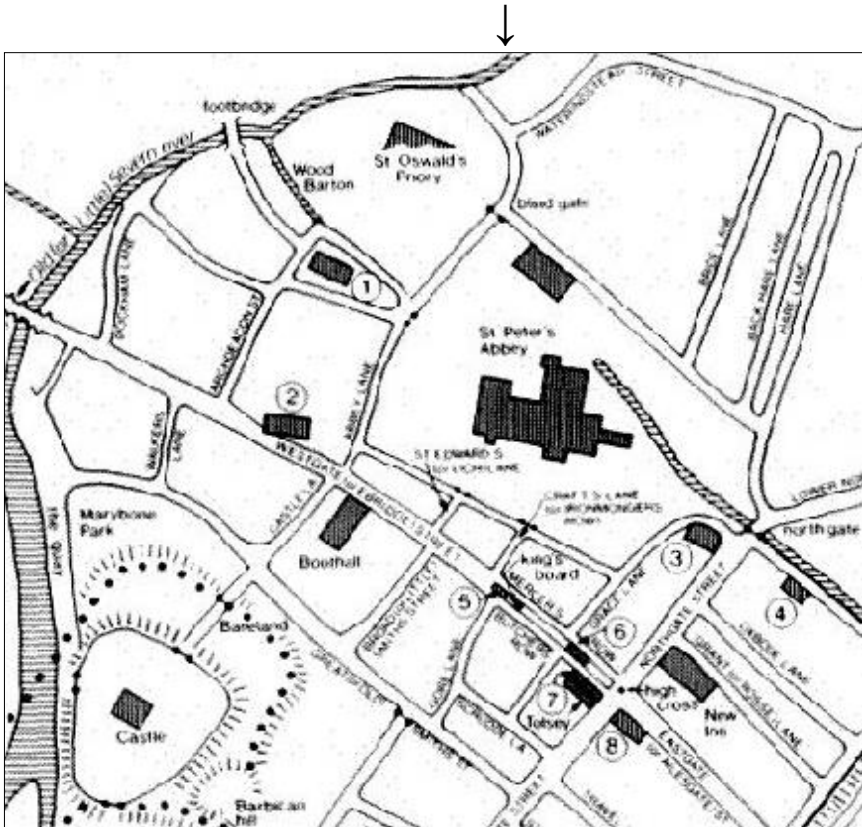


Image 3. Excerpt from map of Gloucester c.1500. For Blind Gate, scan directly down from the arrow to the road junction north of the abbey.²⁸

²⁸ Reproduced from *Victoria History of the County of Gloucester*, IV, 68, by permission of the Executive Editor.

Blind Gate, Kinsale, Co. Cork (uncertain date; walls 12th century with the castle?)

This gate, demolished in 1790, is said locally to be one of the gates erected to prevent smugglers entering the town. However, the town was fortified very early—its walls were ruinous as early as 1334²⁹—and the landward walls were slighted in 1690 after the town's injudicious flirtation with the former James II and VII. Trade between Bristol and Kinsale (also as a limb of Cork) is amply documented.³⁰

Three gates outlasted Blind Gate: Nicholas Gate, Friars' Gate and Cork Gate, demolished 1794-1805.³¹

Blind Gate, Drogheda, Co. Louth (uncertain date; 1334 on completion of the walls?)

The Blind Gate was one of eight gates of Drogheda; it was ordered to be taken down in 1785. Blind Gate House still exists in Bachelor's Lane. Its name may not be totally independent. Bristol's connection with Drogheda in the later Middle Ages is well documented; in fact it was colonized from the Bristol area by Hugh de Lacy, and name-copying may also be demonstrated by the fact that Drogheda had a *Tholsel* (i.e. ME *tolseld* 'guildhall, exchange, market house'), or in Irish *Tólsail*, like The Tolsey in Bristol and Gloucester.³² But see Assessment and Conclusion below.

²⁹ S. Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* (London, 1837), s.n. Kinsale, translating the preamble to the town's charter of incorporation of that year; online version <www.failteromhat.com/lewis/kinsale.htm>, accessed 23 November 2009.

³⁰ See e.g. *Early modern Ireland, 1534-1691*, edited by T. W. Moody, F. X. Martin and F. J. Byrne (Oxford, 1991), p. 10; *Bristol's Trade with Ireland and the Continent, 1503-1601*, edited by S. Flavin and E. T. Jones, Bristol Record Society, 61 (Dublin, 2009), *passim*.

³¹ Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*, s.n. Kinsale.

³² The earliest *Tholsel* recorded in Ireland was in medieval Dublin, a major trading partner of Bristol, and the term is seen also for example in Galway (1486), Athlone (1587), New Ross (1749), Kilkenny (1761), Drogheda (1770, replacing a medieval wooden building), Carrick-on-Suir, Carlingford (where it names a tower), and Limerick (*Tholsel Court Books* from 1773, Limerick City Archives L/OC/6/1; the building reputedly of 1449). There may be a specific model in Bristol's Tolsey (or Tolzey; *Tholseld* in 1285); or it may simply represent a westward extension into Anglo-Irish, via the western English ports, of a (south-)western English dialect word, since it is found as a name for public buildings in e.g. Burford, Marshfield, Tetbury and Tewkesbury (Gloucestershire), Sherston (Wiltshire), Witney (Oxfordshire) and Lud-

Drogheda's gates were, starting on the north side of the wall-circuit: West-gate, Fair-gate, Sunday's (popularly the Cow-gate), St. Lawrence's gate and Catherine's, and on the Meath side, the Dublin or St. James's gate, the Blind gate, the Duleek gate, St. John's gate, and Butter or Buttress gate, all still in existence up 'till "about 60 years since"' when D'Alton published his *History of Drogheda*, from which these spellings are taken.³³ Only two survived when he wrote: St Lawrence's and Butter Gates.³⁴ The Butter Gate is still there, as is St Lawrence's, which is actually a barbican.³⁵

Blind Gate, Coleraine, Co. Derry/Londonderry (1611)

This was the south gate of the town, part of the defences constructed in 1611 along with the King's Gate, which was the north gate. The ramparts are still traceable, but the gate has disappeared, leaving its name in Blind-gate Street. It was slightly, but noticeably, off the line of the north-south axial road of the town (see Image 4; in its last days the Bristol Blind Gate was approached by a roadway with a similar kink, see Image 1a, but how old that state of affairs is is not clear). Local sources consulted offer no explanation of the name; the suspicion of copying from Bristol cannot be completely ruled out because of Bristol's trading links with Ireland, though there is no obvious *local* motivation for such a copying. The idea gains further credibility, however, from the repetition of the name in the fortifications of Drogheda and Kinsale, both of which, like much of eastern Ireland, show substantial historical and archaeological evidence of trade with Bristol and, directly or indirectly, with Gloucester.³⁶

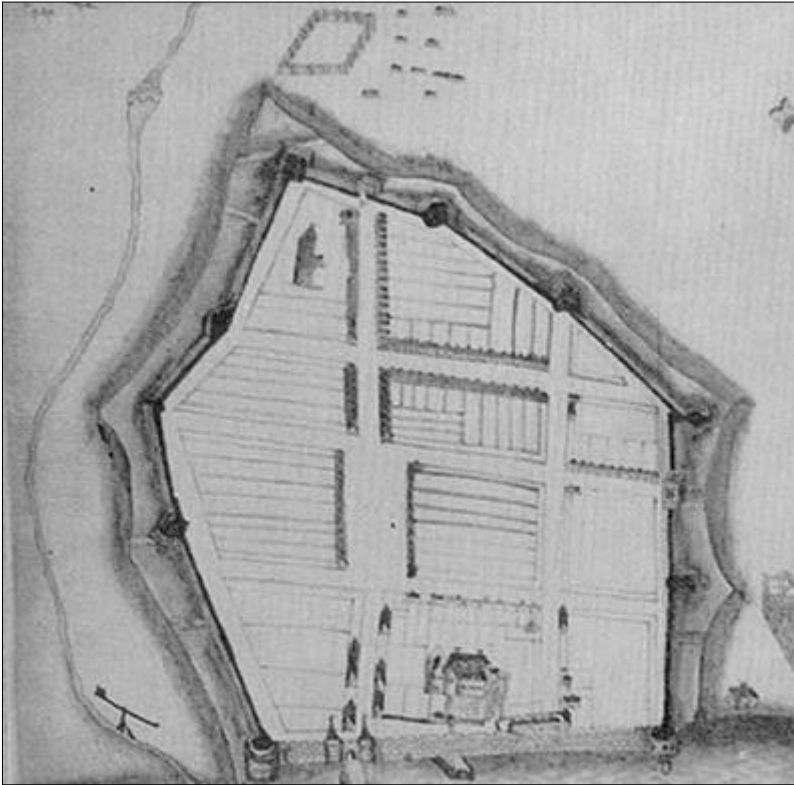
low (Shropshire). [The dates for the Irish buildings are taken from local sources of varying credibility. Some may replace older structures.]

³³ J. D'Alton, *The History of Drogheda*, 2 vols (Dublin: 1844), I, 84–5.

³⁴ Curiously, elsewhere in his *History* (p. 235), D'Alton refers to 'the old blind door of an orchard' where the context makes clear that this is the Blind Gate referred to previously. However, I do not understand the text quoted; Bachelor's Lane, and therefore Blind Gate/door, is clearly north of the river Boyne, not on the Dublin side.

³⁵ *OED2* defines *barbican* as: 'An outer fortification or defence to a city or castle, esp. a double tower erected over a gate or bridge; often made strong and lofty, and serving as a watch-tower', s.v. *barbican* n. 1.a.

³⁶ T. B. Barry, *The Archaeology of Medieval Ireland* (London, 1987), pp. 97–99. The Gate of Fortitude in Dublin Castle is sometimes referred to in local literature as



↑
*Image 4. Early seventeenth century map of Coleraine
Blind Gate is arrowed at the bottom.*³⁷

having been a ‘blind’ or dummy gate. This provides no evidence that *blind* was ever part of the name, nor that this sense of *blind* has anything to do with that seen in other medieval and postmedieval names.

³⁷ Coleraine Historical Society website <www.colerainehistoricalsociety.org.uk>, accessed August-November 2009.

Derngates, Dirngates and Durngates: general

Like *blind*, the Old English (OE) adjective *derne*, *dierne*, and its ME successor could also mean ‘secret’, ‘serving well to conceal, ... out of the way, dark’, perhaps implying ‘private’.³⁸ As regards place-names, Smith presumes that this too is consistent with the object in question being covered by vegetation; no application to gates, or any other man-made object, is suggested, except one instance of a compound with *stall*.³⁹ In the *Middle English Dictionary* entry for the adjective, we find two references to gates:

c.1330 (?a.1300) *Sir Tristrem* (Auch), line 2489: Þai hadden adern gat,
þat þai no man told.

a.1425 (?c. 1350) *Ywain* (Glb E.9), line 2996: He soght and fand a
dern weket..and in he zede.⁴⁰

There are other ME mentions of *derne* rooms and ways, and generic places (*stede/stude*). In OE, we find in *Beowulf* a mention of a *dryhtsele dyrnne* ‘hidden/secret splendid hall’.⁴¹ There is therefore plenty of evidence for the word in topographical expressions, and there is no doubt that it meant ‘hidden, secret’; the issue for us is what that could have meant when applied to town gates.

It has long been believed in some quarters—a belief probably triggered or reinforced by de Wilde’s contribution to *Notes and Queries*⁴²—that in some names the first element represents the source of Welsh *dŵr* ‘water’ (< Brittonic **duþr*). This idea is completely untenable

³⁸ *OED2* s.v. *dern* *adj.* A.3. and 4.

³⁹ A. H. Smith *English Place-Name Elements*, 2 vols, English Place-Name Survey, 25–6 (Cambridge, 1956), I, 131.

⁴⁰ The *Middle English Dictionary*, edited by H. Kurath *et al.* (Ann Arbor, 1951–2001) [hereafter *MED*], s.v. *derne* (*adj.*) <quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>, accessed March–October 2009.

⁴¹ *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, edited by F. Klaeber (Lexington, 1950), p. 87, l. 2320.

⁴² G. J. de Wilde, ‘Deritend, Birmingham’, *Notes and Queries*, 4th series, 8 (July–December 1871), 4–5.

in the light of the set of recorded spellings, but the myth is perpetuated, e.g. in recent documents from Northampton's Planning Department.⁴³

Durngate, Winchester (first known mention 1165)

This is the best-recorded of all the names under consideration, as well as the oldest-attested (*Derniata* 1165, *Dernegata* 1166, *Dernegate* 1167, in early Pipe Rolls).⁴⁴ It denoted a gate thoroughly discussed in scholarly work co-ordinated by Martin Biddle and Derek Keene.⁴⁵ Its original purpose is obscure, but it is reckoned to be 'on a by-pass route between a heavily occupied quarter of the city, and ... the suburb of Winnall, and the main road to London ...',⁴⁶ and it may have provided access to what was later called Durngate Mill. It survives as a street-name, and also in Durngate Place and Terrace. It was one of Winchester's six historic gates, and stood at the north-east corner of the walled town. From an interpretation of the 1148 survey in the Winton Domesday, mapped in *WEMA*,⁴⁷ it appears that no major street approached it directly; it could be reached only by using streets running alongside and within the wall.

Four of Winchester's other gates were named from the compass points, and there were also, in the southern wall, King's Gate and an unnamed gate from the grounds of Wolvesey Palace. Other gates were made in the walls later as military needs became less pressing. The walls fell into neglect after the sixteenth century.⁴⁸ Most of their length is fragmentary at best, but their course is traceable on the ground.⁴⁹ Durngate

⁴³ E.g. <www.northamptonboroughcouncil.com/councillors/Published/C00000243/M00003083/AI00002521/att7.pdf>, section 2.1, accessed 30th October 2009.

⁴⁴ Cf. J. E. B. Gover, *The Place-Names of Hampshire* (unpublished typescript in the care of the EPNS, 1961).

⁴⁵ M. Biddle and D. J. Keene, 'Winchester in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries' in *Winchester in the Early Middle Ages*, edited by M. Biddle (Oxford, 1976) [hereafter *WEMA*], pp. 241–450 (pp. 275–6); 'The Early Place-Names of Winchester', compiled by M. Biddle and D. J. Keene, with contributions by K. Cameron *et al.* in *WEMA*, pp. 231–40 (p. 237).

⁴⁶ Biddle and Keene, 'Winchester in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries', p. 276.

⁴⁷ *WEMA*, p. 289.

⁴⁸ D. Keene, Derek (1985) *Survey of Medieval Winchester*, 2 vols, Winchester Studies, 2 (Oxford, 1985), p. 45.

⁴⁹ B. Cunliffe, 'The Winchester City Wall', *Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society*, 22.2 (1962), 51–81.

has vanished, like most of Winchester's gates, but the medieval West Gate and King's Gate remain.⁵⁰



↑
Image 5a. Winchester walls and gates in the twelfth century (fig. 27, WEMA; copyright Winchester Excavations Committee). The location of Durngate (enlarged in Image 5b) is indicated by the left arrow, and that of Kingsgate by the vertical arrow. The dark lines which are not obviously the city walls are the courses of the river Itchen.

⁵⁰ Assessment based on Biddle and Keene, 'Winchester in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries', pp. 272-7; Keene, *Survey of Medieval Winchester*, pp. 42-48.

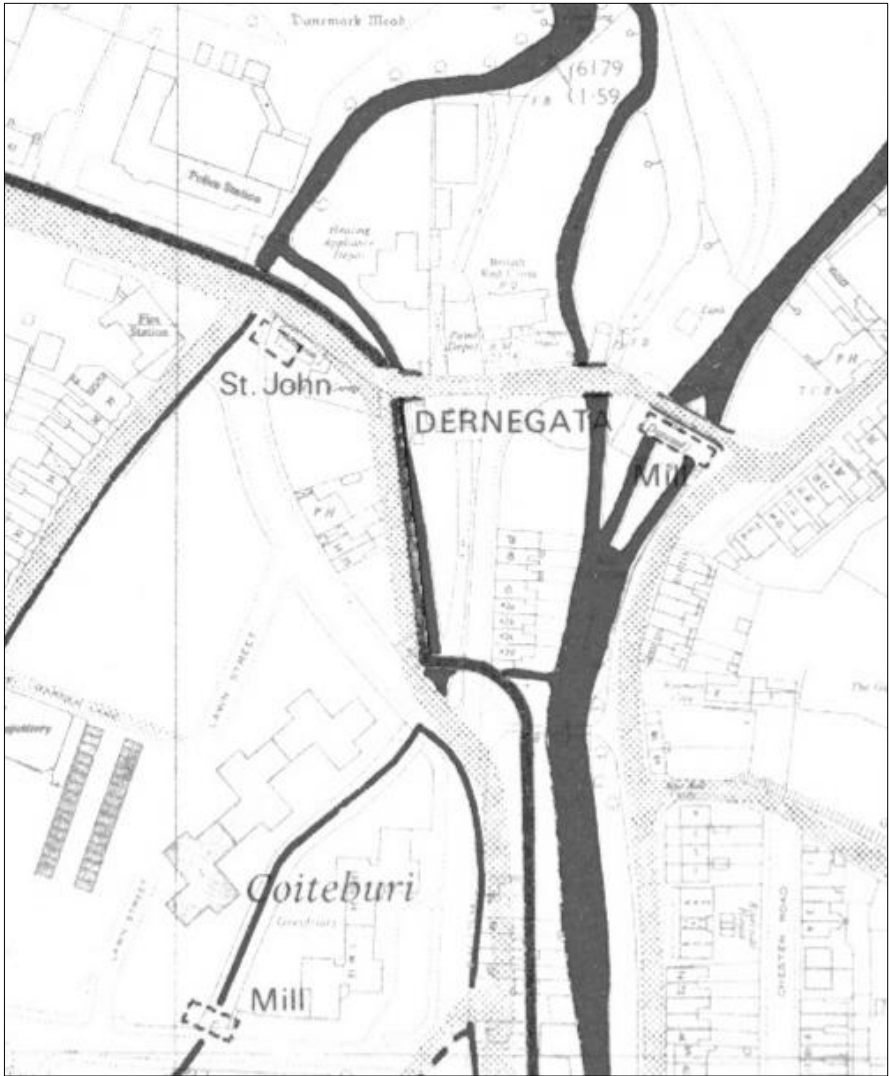


Image 5b. The location of Durngate, Winchester, enlarged.

Derngate, Northampton (first known mention 1274)

This was one of the town gates. The second element sometimes appears later with initial <y>. Gover, Mawer and Stenton offer the expected etymology but say explicitly that ‘the origin of the epithet is obscure’.⁵¹ The name has now been transferred to a street, formerly *Swynewellestrete*, and there was a now lost *Derne Lane* in 1545 whose relation to the gate seems to be unknown.⁵² It is referred to as a postern once in a rental of 1504;⁵³ it may have come to surpass the earlier East Gate in importance, as it spanned the Bedford road.

The other gates were named from the four compass points, with the addition of *Cow Gate*. There was an apparently unnamed postern between the East Gate and Derngate, and another one referred to as *Marvell’s Mill postern*, which indicates that it served a local right of way.⁵⁴ What remained of the walls of Northampton was slighted in 1662.

⁵¹ J. E. B. Gover, A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Northamptonshire*, English Place-Name Survey, 10 (Cambridge, 1933), p. 7.

⁵² *Ibid.* p. 8.

⁵³ ‘The borough of Northampton: Description’ in *Victoria History of the County of Northampton*, 6 vols (to date), edited by W. Ryland *et al.* (Oxford, 1902–), III: *Northampton Borough, Polebrook, Navisford, Huxloe Hundreds, & Higham Ferrers Borough*, edited by W. Page (Oxford, 1930), 30–40 (p. 30) <www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=66254>, accessed 14 August 2009.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 30.

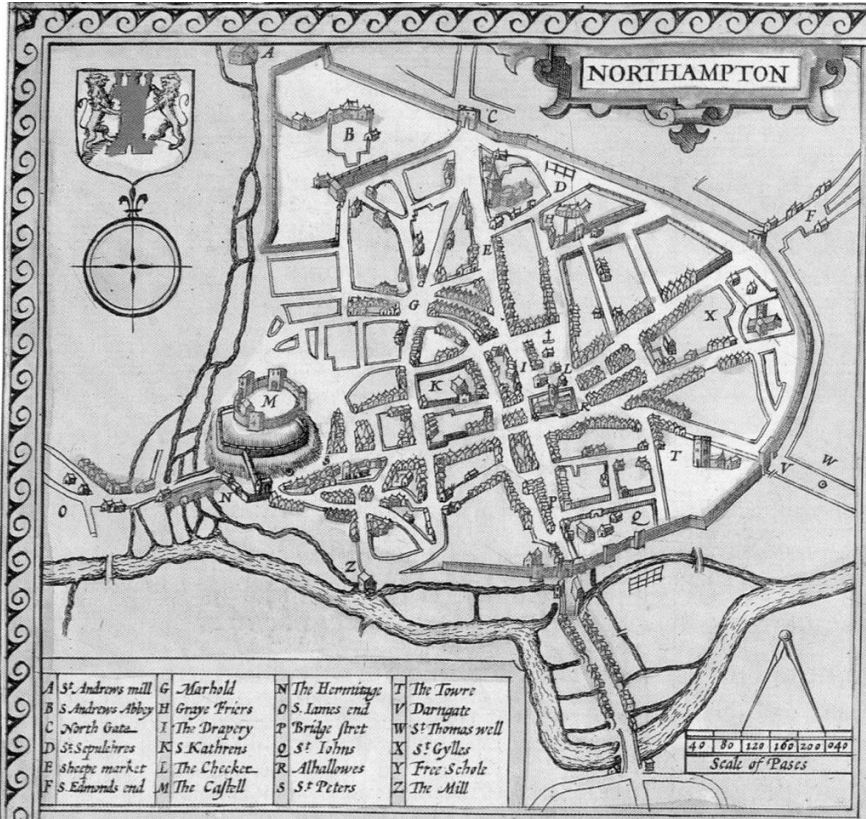


Image 6: Speed's map of Northampton (1610/1). Derrigate is V. (North Gate is C, the East and South Gates are unlabelled, and any early western gate has been obliterated by or subsumed into the Castle works.)

Durngate Street, Dorchester (first known mention 1394-5)

The first known Dorchester reference is to (*la/le*) *Durn(e)lane*, which approached *la Durnegate* (1395). There may have been more than one medieval lane designated in this way. The gate was described as ‘one of the two east gates’ in 1642, and it has been taken as a ‘back gate to Fordington’.⁵⁵ It was on a street not one of those forming the main cross-pattern of the town’s streets (as can be seen on Speed’s map of 1610–1, reproduced in Image 7; it is the more southerly of the two eastern exit-routes). Note the complication that the Roman walls of Dorchester had been breached by 1610, and that the positions of the Roman gates must be inferred from the street-pattern. A reconstruction can be found in Wachter;⁵⁶ as will be seen, the exact site of the north gate is a minor problem in the present context because the northbound street has been obliterated, but the ancient east, south and west gates can be located with reasonable certainty.

Four gates named from the compass-points are on record,⁵⁷ but there were ‘two east gates’, ‘two west gates’ and ‘three south gates’ in 1642, all easily discerned on Speed’s town map (see Image 7).

There is no question of any relation between this name and the Romano-British name of Dorchester, *Durnovaria*. As can be seen, the first syllable of this ancient name is authentically preserved in *Dorchester*, and the *Dur-* of Durngate is inconsistent with that.

⁵⁵ All details from A. D. Mills, *The Place-Names of Dorset*, 4 vols (to date), English Place-Name Survey, 52–53, 59/60, 86/87 (Cambridge and Nottingham, 1986–), I, 351.

⁵⁶ J. S. Wachter, *The Towns of Roman Britain*, 2nd edn (London, 1995), p. 325.

⁵⁷ Mills, *The Place-Names of Dorset*, I, 354.

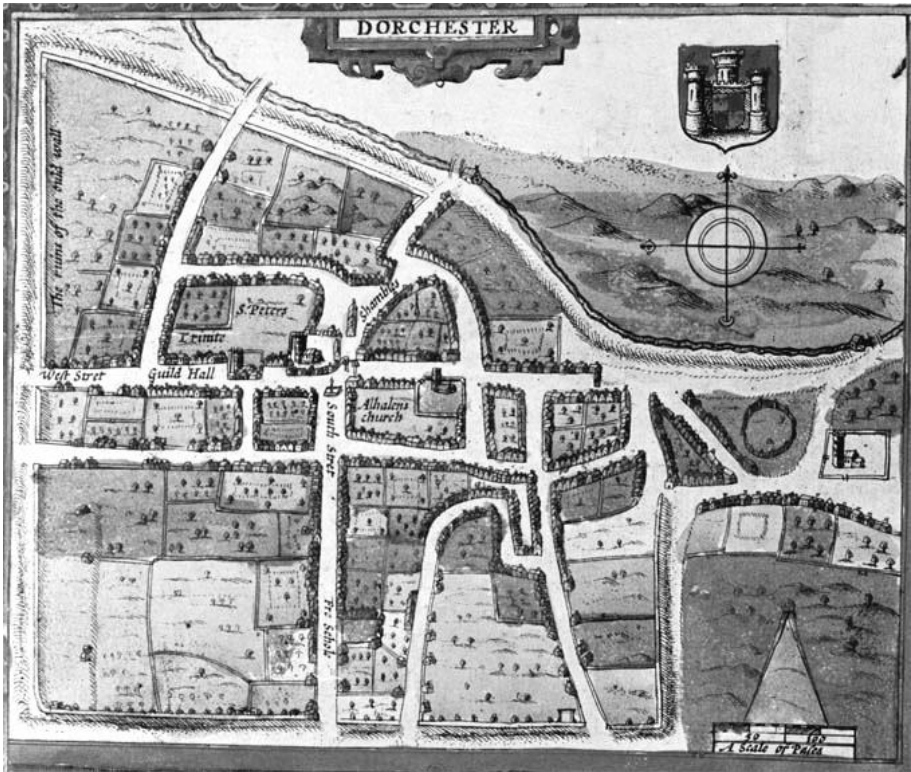


Image 7: Speed's map of Dorchester (1610/1). Durngate once spanned the more southerly eastern street leaving the town, south-east of the High Cross.

Derngate, Coventry (first known mention 1411)

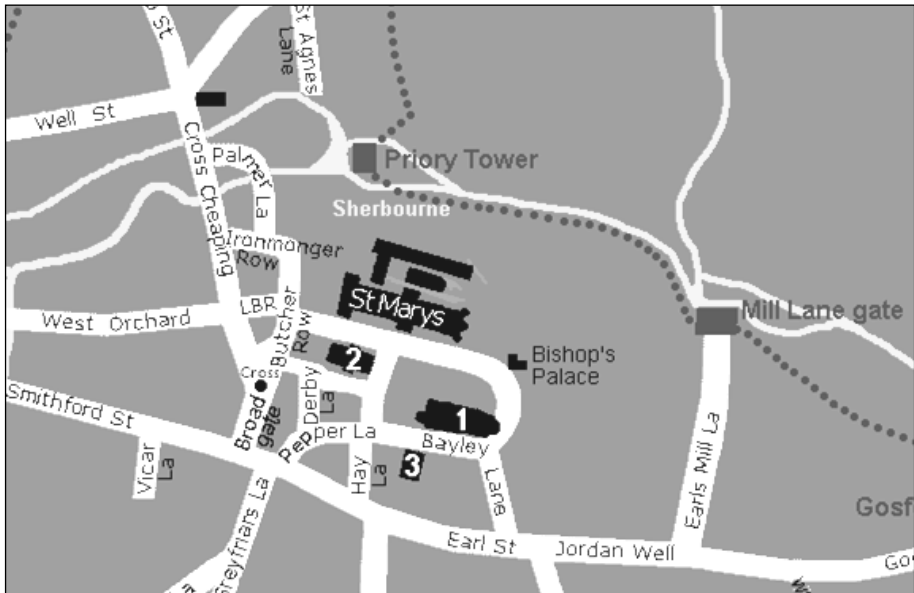
This is one of the twelve gates in the 14th-century city wall, recorded as *le Derne gate* 1411, *the Derne yate called the Bastell* 1480, and later simply as *the Bastile Gate*. Gover *et al.* offer no further comment except a cross-reference to Northampton.⁵⁸ On Speed's map of 1610, but in mod-

⁵⁸ J. E. B. Gover, Allen Mawer and F. M. Stenton with F. T. S. Houghton, *The Place-Names of Warwickshire*, English Place-Name Survey, 13 (Cambridge, 1936), p. 161.

ern spellings (and essentially as given in Gover *et al.*), the gates were as follows, clockwise from the north:

Bishop gate, Cook Street gate (sometimes referred to as *Tower gate*, and also previously called *Davy Yate*; still standing), Swanswell gate (also known as *Priory gate*; still standing), Derngate (later known as *Bastil(l)e gate* and then *Mill Lane gate*; rebuilt in 1512-14 and finally demolished 1849), Gosford gate, New gate, Little Park gate, Cheylesmore gate, Grey Friars gate, Spon gate (also called *Bablake gate*), Hill Street gate, and Well Street gate.

As at medieval Bristol, there were no gates named from the compass points. As at Gloucester and Northampton, the walls were slighted in 1662.



*Image 8: Coventry c.1400. Derngate is mapped as Mill Lane gate, its final name, but anachronistic on this map.*⁵⁹

⁵⁹ <www.historiccoventry.co.uk/covmaps/allmaps.php>, accessed 20th August 2009.

The Derngate, Berkhamsted Castle (1337)

Not in Gover, Mawer and Stenton.⁶⁰ According to Cobb, '[a]n early survey [i.e. that of 1337, RC] mentions the 'derngate' leading to the park, no doubt a postern at the north-west corner of the inner ward ...'.⁶¹ No other mention of the place or of the document has been found apart from two uses as a proper name also in Cobb's *Lectures*.⁶²

The Dern Yett, Arbroath Abbey (uncertain date; before 16th century?)

Miller gives the following topographical account of part of Arbroath Abbey:

At the Church steeple the precinct wall turned to the east and ran up to Hay's Lane, at a few yards' distance from what was then the high road to Montrose, the intervening strip of ground (on which the Parish Church, the houses in Academy Street, and others are built) being known by the name of the 'Derngate Rig'; while this part of the wall was styled by the Abbots—our Red Wall'. The Dern Yett, or private gate, stood at the south-east corner of the 'precinct'. Part of the stonework of this gate existed till within five or six years ago. From the Dern Yett the wall ran northward along Hay's Lane, where a portion of it may yet be seen ...⁶³

The online edition of *A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*, gives *derne*(e), *darne*(e), as having a range of meanings similar to that of the OE/ME word, and it is found applied to places, e.g. caves and roads.⁶⁴ There are two literary instances of its application to gates: Gavin Douglas

⁶⁰ J. E. B. Gover, Allen Mawer and F. M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Hertfordshire*, English Place-Name Survey, 15 (Cambridge, 1938).

⁶¹ J. W. Cobb, *Two Lectures on the History and Antiquities of Berkhamsted*, 2nd edn (London, 1883), p. 123 (<www.archive.org/stream/twolecturesonhis00cobb_rich_djvu.txt>, accessed August 2009).

⁶² *Ibid.* pp. 108, 110.

⁶³ D. Miller, *Arbroath and its Abbey; or the Early History of the Town and Abbey of Aberbrothock* (Edinburgh, 1860), chapter 6.

⁶⁴ *A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*, edited by W. A. Craigie *et al.* (Chicago, Aberdeen and Oxford, 1931–2001) [hereafter *DOST*]; available online as part of the *Dictionary of the Scots Language* <www.dsl.ac.uk>, accessed 20th August 2009, s.v. *derne*(e), *darne*(e) *a*.

(briefly—and coincidentally or not?—abbot of Arbroath in 1514) refers to ‘A small wykket ... , or entre dern, A litil zet clepit a postern’ in walls at Troy),⁶⁵ perhaps guided by the need for a rhyme; and it seems to have been a (temporary) favourite word of the sixteenth-century poet John Rolland, who uses it three times within 150 lines in *Seven Sages*, most interestingly for us in ‘The Quene come hir dern gait’.⁶⁶ It seems to have become rare in later Scots, as in English, though the nineteenth-century poet Andrew Lang uses it to describe a gate in the following verse from ‘The Young Ruthven’:

And she’s run in by the dern black yett,
 Straight till the Queen ran she:
 ‘Oh! tak ye back your siller band,
 Or it gar my brother dee!’

We might infer that this literary gate was in some important building like a palace.

Miller seems to have been not precisely correct in suggesting that it meant ‘private’, although that sense is obviously related, and might be implied in other uses.

Dern Gate and/or Dirngate, Cheshire (first known mention 17th/18th century)

A field called *Turngate Loons* in Preston on the Hill township, Daresbury chapelry, a member of Runcorn parish,⁶⁷ perpetuates the *Dern Gate* recorded in 1743. I have not been able to discover what the nature or purpose of this gate might have been. A field called *Guests Meadow* was leased by Sir Willoughby Aston to Thomas Taylor for Mr Taylor’s lifetime on 25 March 1687, at a place called *Dirngate*.⁶⁸ I have not been able

⁶⁵ *Virgil’s Aeneid Translated into Scottish Verse* by Gavin Douglas, Bishop of Dunkeld, edited by D. F. C. Coldwell, 4 vols (Edinburgh, 1957–64), II, viii, 31; cited in *DOST* s.v. dern(e, darn(e a.

⁶⁶ *John Rolland: Seven Sages*, edited by D. Laing (Edinburgh, 1837), l. 7151.

⁶⁷ J. McN. Dodgson, *The Place-Names of Cheshire*, 5 vols, English Place-Name Survey, 44–47, 48/54/74 (Cambridge and Nottingham, 1970–97), II, 157.

⁶⁸ University of Liverpool Special Documents collection, ref. no. SPEC AD/I/219; <sca.lib.liv.ac.uk/ead/html/gb141ad-p4.shtm>, accessed 12th August 2009.

to trace this place, but the Aston family were major landowners in the Runcorn area, and it is possible that there is some connection between this Dirngate and the field in Daresbury chapelry. There was also a piece of pasture-land (Tithe Award no. 163) called *Turn Yard* in Dutton, which is adjacent to Preston on the Hill, and it is not out of the question that this provides a further connection.

“Derngate, Market Basing, Holmshire” (19th century invention)

The name-type has been exploited in fiction. This street appears in the novel *Ready-Money Mortiboy* by Walter Besant and James Rice.⁶⁹ The full address suggests that the authors leant on antiquarian knowledge of Hampshire; see **Durngate**, Winchester, and its early spellings, above.

A Derngate in Kent? (sole mention 1274-5)

The Latin text of the Kent hundred rolls of 1274-5, Boughton hundred, gives the name of one Philip *de Deregate*, i.e. Dargate, although the translation unaccountably gives *Derngate*.⁷⁰ Like the previous one, this alleged instance can be discounted as fiction. There is a Dungate in Rodmersham,⁷¹ which is probably irrelevant, and there is no other similar name in Kent.

A Durn Gate in Surrey? (sole mention 1765/8)

On Rocque’s 1765/8 map of Surrey we find *Durn Gate* at map reference VII, K5.⁷² There are other eighteenth-century references to it as *Durngate*. But the earliest is *Durdengate* in unpublished subsidy rolls (1664),⁷³ which makes it certain that it does not contain *derne*. Probably the element is a surname, though *Durden* has no known special association with the Weald. The place is now Dungate Farm, on the boundary between Dunsfold (Surrey) and Plaistow (Sussex) near Durfold

⁶⁹ W. Besant and J. Rice, *Ready-Money Mortiboy* (London, 1872).

⁷⁰ <www.kentarchaeology.ac/khrp/hrproject.pdf>, accessed 12th August 2009.

⁷¹ J. K. Wallenberg, *The Place-Names of Kent* (Uppsala, 1934), p. 263.

⁷² J. Rocque, Map of Surrey (1765/8) <www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~engsurrey/maps/s7a6.jpg>, accessed 12th August 2009.

⁷³ Gover, Mawer and Stenton with Bonner, *The Place-Names of Surrey*, p. 237.

(Hall) Farm.⁷⁴ The present name has presumably been influenced by the Surrey parish-name.



Image 9: Durn Gate Farm, Dunsfold, on Rocque's map of Surrey (1765/8, excerpt; at the bottom).

Ludgate

In an earlier note, I suggested that Ludgate in London might originally have been a 'hidden gate', comparing *Derngate* and the like in other towns, but was uncertain about what that might mean.⁷⁵ In the light of the evidence presented in this article, I would like to suggest again for philological reasons that the name contains a relative of the OE verb

⁷⁴ National Grid reference of the Ordnance Survey (NGR) SU 997329.

⁷⁵ R. Coates, 'Ludgate', *Nomina*, 29 (2006), 129–32.

lūtian ‘to skulk, lie hidden’, related by ablaut to the short-vowelled one seen in *lot* ‘guile, craftiness’ and *lytig* ‘crafty’, shortened in the closed stressed syllable of a polysyllabic word. But the concept involved needs to be different from that expressed by *Blind Gate* or *Derngate*, since Ludgate could hardly be in a more conspicuous place: it is approached by heading due west from St Paul’s, and the road straddled by the gate is the Bath road, London’s main east-west Roman road (Margary number 4a). We need to consider the possibility of its being a gate where someone might hide or lurk, in addition to revisiting Ekwall’s suggestion that the name involves the root of OE *lūtan* in the sense ‘bend forward, stoop (to the ground)’.⁷⁶

Assessment

The authentic ‘hidden gates’ dealt with in this article are almost exclusively urban, the sole exception being in rural Cheshire.

The name-types are in dialectal complementary distribution; *Blind Gate* is (south-)western English and Anglo-Irish; *Derngate* and the like is found in all other areas from Winchester to Arbroath. Consistently with this, the two ME manuscript uses of the latter compound or phrase are from the ‘*dern*’ area: *Sir Tristrem*, whether this text is northern or south-eastern, and *Ywain and Gawain*, a north(-east)ern text.⁷⁷ I should emphasize that the complementarity is that of the *name-types*; it is not suggested that *blind* and *derne* themselves were dialectally complementary.

A term meaning ‘hidden gate’ can be found applied to gates in Roman walls (Gloucester, Winchester, Dorchester) or to gates in medieval walls (Bristol, Northampton, Coventry), including also rebuilt successors of Roman walls at the three ‘chesters’.

There is some topographical consistency about the names, at least in England. They appear on the north side, or in the north-east quadrant, of the town at Bristol (original circuit of the walls), Gloucester, Coventry and Winchester. They are just south of the east gate at Northampton and Dorchester, and on the east of the old town centre, north of the Boyne, at

⁷⁶ E. Ekwall, *Street-Names of the City of London* (Oxford, 1954), p. 91.

⁷⁷ *Lancelot of the Laik and Sir Tristrem*, edited by A. Lupack (Kalamazoo MI, 1994), introduction; Braswell, Mary Flowers, ed., *Sir Perceval of Galles and Ywain and Gawain* (Kalamazoo MI, 1995), introduction.

Drogheda. All the identifiable town gates are therefore on the north or east side, except at Coleraine and Kinsale.

In some towns (Gloucester, Northampton, Winchester, Dorchester), the name is of one of only a small number of early gates not named from the compass-points.

Access to a mill was an important consideration at Winchester and Coventry, but there is no consistent pattern implying that gates with these names served a particular economic activity; there was a gate leading to a mill at Northampton but it was not Dergate.

It appears that only the castle and abbey gates at Berkhamstead and Arbroath were posterns,⁷⁸ i.e. secondary gates constructed deliberately for secrecy, though Dergate at Northampton is so called once in a relatively late document. Only at Arbroath is there a clear suggestion that the gate so named was private.

Conclusions

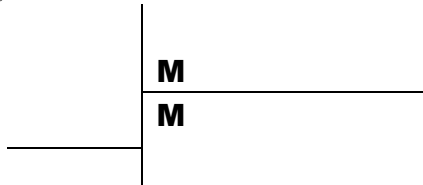
A recurrent feature of medieval walled towns (including successors of Roman towns) is that at their centre was a high or market cross from which straight streets followed the line of highways or through-routes, generally in a cross-pattern and aligned more or less on the cardinal compass-points (with concessions to topography), and led to four principal town gates. This arrangement is:

- especially clear in medieval and early-modern evidence at Bristol (original circuit of the walls) and Gloucester;
- certain, though the evidence is somewhat obscured to the north by medieval developments, at both Winchester and Dorchester,

⁷⁸ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, edited by J. Simpson, 3rd edn, *OED Online* (2000-) <www.oed.com> s.v. *postern n.* defines the term as: (A.1.a.) ‘A back or side entrance; any door, gate, etc., distinct from the main entrance, *esp.* one which is private or unobtrusive’; (A.1.b.) ‘*Fortification.* A secret tunnel or concealed exit from a fortified building (as a castle, etc.)’ [though this sense is only recorded from about 1700, RC]; (A.2.) ‘extended and *fig.* use. An (*esp.* hidden) entrance to or exit from something; *spec. (a)* a way of escape, a refuge; (*b*) a means of entry other than the usual or honourable one [from about 1475, RC], now archaic’. It appears that only A.1.a is relevant to our concerns.

and at Winchester the ancient north-south road is to the west of the symmetry axis of the walled city;

- pretty certain at Northampton, though there the main streets left from the corners of the medieval market place (known as *The Chequer*; marked as **M** in the schematic plan below; labelled L on Speed's map) creating a pattern which was not a conventional cross, and required the viewer to move around the market-place to have a chance of seeing the compass-point gates (with the reservation about the western works expressed in the caption to Image 6);



- fairly but not immediately clear at Coventry, where the intrusion of the castle, probably where Broadgate and Cathedral Lanes now are, complicated the town's layout.

A hypothesis consistent with the evidence from these older towns is that names of the types *Blind Gate* and *Dern Gate* were given to gates not approached by one of the main thoroughfares, and which were literally hidden from the position of the market cross—and probably also from the king's highway the nearer one got to the town. This is an acceptable conclusion for Bristol, Gloucester, Northampton (subject to the caveat above: that the main gates themselves may not have been easy to see from the market cross), Winchester and Dorchester. The situation involving the main thoroughfares has been obscured at Coventry, but as we have seen Derngate was not approached by any of them, and the map in Image 8 shows that it was well off the beaten track except for people going to the mill out to the east of the town centre.

As for the fairly consistent appearance of the name on the north and east of a town, there may simply have been a preference for applying the name away from the side which was sunward for most of the daylight hours; travellers would tend not to arrive in the early morning, so these

gates would have tended to be in shadow most of the time for most arrivers. Such considerations may not have applied in great private buildings; the postern at Berkhamsted appears to have been on the north-west of the castle, but that at Arbroath at the south-east of the abbey.

The early record of some, and the fact that they are in some towns one of only a small number of non-compass-point names, suggests that the referent is an early breach in a wall-system with four original gates, or at least an abnormally positioned gate whose oddity was onomastically acknowledged from the start. The case of Coventry is untypical; its walls were acquired late, in 1355, and amply provided with gates from the start.

They were probably constructed for practical reasons to do with access to resources rather than for military ones, and whilst some may have had postern-like features there is no clear suggestion that they were intended as secret entrances or occasional sally-ports. However, the type *Derngate* may have been reinvented for a small number of non-town gates built deliberately hidden and therefore ‘private’.

No firm general suggestion can be offered about the names in Ireland and rural Cheshire, but the oblique relation of the Coleraine *Blind Gate* (and perhaps that at Bristol) to the street which approached it could be significant in the light of the point made above about invisibility. Otherwise in Ireland, the type *Blind Gate* in Drogheda and Kinsale (and less likely Coleraine) may simply have been copied from Bristol, but that is speculation.

The names in rural Kent and Surrey are ghosts.⁷⁹

Finally, one might argue that there is no need for a single topographical reason to underlie these names, and that one or other nuance may have been responsible in different localities. This paper is offered for the pleasure of attempting to discover an overriding pattern.

⁷⁹ My thanks are due to Paul Cullen and Kay Muhr for information dealing with Kent and Coleraine respectively, and to a *Nomina* reviewer for helpful suggestions. Thanks also to Bristol Museum and Art Galleries for permission to reproduce the segment of Millerd’s map (Image 1b), to Peter Aughton for the use of Image 2a, to Gavin Roberts for permission to reproduce images from the Fred Little archive (Bristol; here, Image 2b), to Martin Biddle for the use of Images 5a/5b, and to Rob Orland for Image 8; and also to James Russell for alerting me to the existence of certain Bristol images. Images 1a, 4, 6, 7 and 9 are believed to be in the public domain, though Image 1a is used by courtesy of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society and Image 4 by courtesy of the Coleraine Historical Society.