WORCESTERSHIRE PLACE NAMES. PP. 1-183

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BY

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WALSALL.

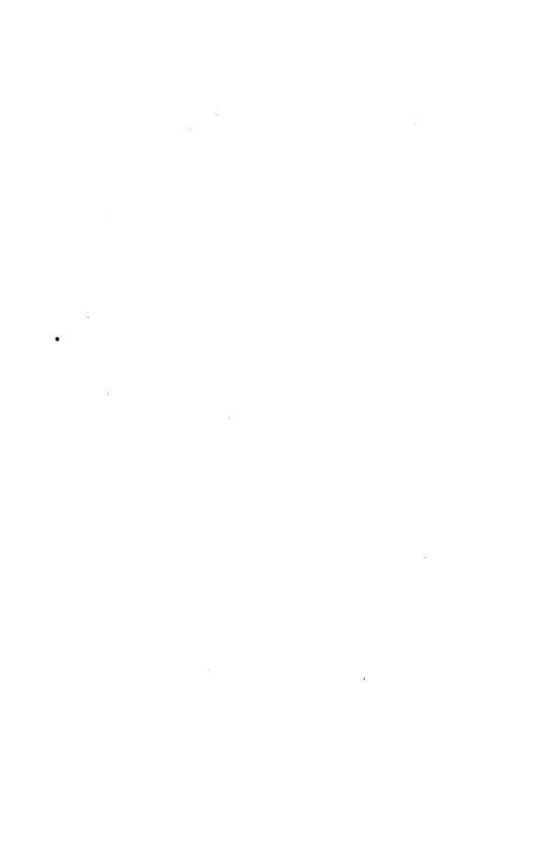# PREFACE

IN adopting the title 'Worcestershire Place Names' I refer only to those names which have a 'history.' I include hamlets and farms which appear to be ancient. Even fields could tell interesting stories; but their original names have generally been abandoned, or are so buried in the corruption of generations of tenants that, without access to the owners' deeds, it is rarely possible to construe them. Small places are frequently found to be of great antiquity, and many a name recorded in Domesday Book is concealed under its modern title.

After the publication of my 'Staffordshire Place Names' (1902) I was attracted to Worcestershire by the very large number of Anglo-Saxon charters preserved in the archives of the bishops of Worcester and the great monasteries of the county. The publications also of the Worcestershire Historical Society were another attraction, as they supplied much material.

Charters are of varying value; originals may be trusted; but the far greater number have only come down to us in post-conquest copies frequently made by a scribe imperfectly acquainted with Anglo-Saxon, and with a natural tendency to spell a name he recognized as it was written or pronounced in his day. Domesday Book is invaluable, but it is mainly

the work of Norman clerks upon the evidence of Anglo-Saxon records or witnesses, and is consequently impregnated with Norman French ; a twelfth-century record is generally more reliable.

Nearly all English place-names have their root in Anglo-Saxon ; the principal exceptions are rivers and hills, which frequently maintain their earlier names (especially large rivers), and then their construction is almost hopeless. On the west side of Severn a few names appear to be of Welsh origin (e. g. Malvern, Mathon, Pendock, Pensax, &c.), and should therefore be dealt with by a Welsh scholar.

Before commencing my work I was of opinion that the Norsemen had left no permanent traces of their invasions in Worcestershire ; but I now think it pretty clear they made a settlement in the neighbourhood of Clent and Hagley, probably on one of their raids up Severn. The same thing happened in North Staffordshire, where several place-names and words are clearly of Danish origin.

The Anglo-Saxons appear to have been a homely race, for their place-names have the simplest origins, very different to the Welsh, Irish, and Scotch, whose names largely savour of poetry, sentiment, and history.

The reader will not fail to notice the very large number of place-names which have their root in Anglo-Saxon personal names. All personal names, in their inception, had meaning, and were Christian names only, family names being extremely rare before the thirteenth century. They had never more than two stems, and were masculine and feminine as with us. The prefix was common to both, but the suffix was strictly masculine or feminine. The meaning of the

stems, apart, is generally plain, but the combination
is frequently untranslatable, as certain stems were
common to a family, and one would be after a father,
another after a mother or other relation.   Then
nicknames, short and pet names, were common, and
in the course of ages the spelling greatly varied,
having a tendency to shorten.   It is, therefore, some-
times extremely difficult to ascertain the exact
personal name, and one has to be guided by recorded
forms, frequently meagre or conflicting.   A modern
popular *pronunciation* is often of great assistance ; the
uneducated have been the preservers of Old English,
the educated its main corrupters.   They knew Greek
and Latin, but until fifty or sixty years ago Old
English was a despised and neglected branch of
learning.   For this reason the etymologies of old
writers have little value, and few of them had reliable
materials to work upon.   The opinion of county,
and even national, historians before, say, 1840 are
entitled to little respect.

The Church, before the Dissolution, owned a large
portion of the county (the bishop alone about a third
of it), and appear to have been just and beneficent
landlords.   Their tenants were evidently better off
than those of the laity, and their manors were more
populous.   The bishop in his manors, in addition to
his ecclesiastical jurisdiction, had great powers in
civil and criminal matters, and appears to have ruled
with a kindly hand.   The ideal government is govern-
ment by the wise and good, and government by the
clergy was government by the wisest and best men
the age produced.   They softened the rigours of
feudal law ; they gave sanctuary to the politically

persecuted, and even to the criminal ; were enemies to all tyranny and injustice, and opposed to serfdom.

A name compounded of two languages is exceptional, and requires cautious acceptance ; but such combinations exist where a country has been occupied by successive races. The Romans adopted native names, clothing them in Latin garb, or adding native terminals. The Anglo-Saxons unquestionably fraternized, more or less, with the people they dominated or displaced, and naturally adopted many of their names or stems. Norman-French had enormous influence on Old English, and the changes which took place in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries must also, to some extent, have had their parallel in Saxon days.

Though it is sometimes impossible to arrive at the meaning of a place-name, yet a collection of its earliest forms frequently enables us to correct false constructions which have passed current, perhaps for centuries, and led to false history. To learn that the meaning is *not* what we have been taught is a step toward truth.

The charters contain numerous references to tumuli, or burial-mounds (A. S. *hlæw*, v. Low). They were commonly adopted, like streams, hoar-stones, or notable trees, as territorial boundaries. They are frequently termed 'heathen burial-places'—a pregnant name—for it has been assumed, I think on insufficient grounds, that many of these mounds were 'constructed' by the Anglo-Saxons. I believe they are entirely the work of an earlier and heathen race. It is most improbable that an A.-S. scribe would apply the term 'heathen' to his own race, however applicable

it might have been at some remote period. He is evidently referring to an earlier and extinct race, 'heathen' as compared to his Christianity. We do not know when Christianity was first introduced here, but we do know that it is recognized in our very earliest records as the common faith of the people of the midland and southern parts of England. It is possible that, for a short period, isolated families of the Saxons should have remained pagan, or adhered to old customs, and consequently may have used (not constructed) these mounds as burial-places; but the practice would have been totally opposed to Christian doctrine. The Romans buried their dead as we do, and I treat all tumuli as pre-Roman and pre-historic, confining myself to the southern half of England; for in the north Scandinavian influence was great, and has to be taken into account.

The inhabitants were probably not much troubled by wolves, but the charters occasionally refer to them. Wolf-pits (*seathe*) are mentioned as existing in Bredicote and Broadwas, and a wolf *hagan* in Longdon. Domesday Book records also a *haia* in Kington, 'in which wild animals were captured.' As late as 1167 the sheriff pays three shillings to a hunter for destroying wolves in Feckenham Forest. The price seems very moderate; but in 1233 the sheriff of Shropshire paid only fifty-seven shillings to Richard of Myndtown for the heads of fifty-seven Welshmen whom he caught marauding at Church Stretton—and Richard appears to have been content.

The recent Ordnance Surveys, 1 in., 6 in., and 25 in., are inferior to the original survey, and appear to have been made by a lower class of surveyors. Old names