

**THE PLACE-NAMES
OF CAMBRIDGESHIRE.
NO. XXXVI**

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The Place-names of Cambridgeshire. No. XXXVI by Walter W. Skeat

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WALTER W. SKEAT

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BY THE

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
§ 1. PREFATORY REMARKS	1
§ 2. THE SUFFIX -TON :—Barton, Carlton, Caxton, Cherry Hinton, Chesterton, Clopton, Comberton, Coton, Croxton, Ditton, Drayton, Foxton, Girtton, Harlton, Harston, Hauxton, Hinxtton, Histon, Kingston, Linton, Long Stanton, Malton, Milton, Newton, Rampton, Royston, Saxton (Saxon Street), Sutton, Weston, Wilburton	5
§ 3. THE SUFFIX -INGTON :—Arrington, Doddington, Impington, Leverington, Litlington, Oakington, Trumpington, Wimblington—Ickleton, Sawston—Abington, Barrington, Conington	14
§ 4. THE SUFFIX -HAM :—Babraham, Badlingham, Balsham, Barham, Bottisham, Chettisham, Chippenham, Coldham, Cottenham, Downham, Dullingham, Fordham, Haddenham, Hildersham, Isleham, Newnham, Soham, Stretham, Swaffham, Teversham, West Wickham, Wilbrabam, Willingham, Witcham	19
§ 5. THE SUFFIX -STEAD :—Olmstead	25
§ 6. THE SUFFIX -WORTH :—Boxworth, Duxford (Duxworth), Elsworth, Kneesworth, Lolworth, Pampisford (Pampisworth), Papworth, Stetchworth, Wentworth	25
§ 7. THE SUFFIXES -WICK AND -COTE :—Benwick, Hardwick, Westwick—Coates, Caldecott	27
§ 8. THE SUFFIXES -BRIDGE, -HITH, -LOW, AND -WELL :—Cambridge, Pearl's Bridge, Sturbridge—Claythite, Aldreth, Earith—Bartlow, Tadlow, Triplow—Barnwell, Burwell, Knapwell, Orwell, Outwell, Snailwell, Upwell	29

	PAGE
§ 9. THE SUFFIXES CAMP, CHESTER, DIKE, HALE, HIRN, LODE, PORT, RETH, WARM:—Castle Camps, Shudy Camps—Chesterton, Grantchester—Ditton, Brent Ditch, Fleam Dike, Flendish—Mepal, Enhale—Guyhirn—Oxlode—Littleport—Meldreth, Shepreth—Upware	37
§ 10. THE SUFFIXES BEACH, BOURN, DEN, DOWN, EA, FEN, FIELD, FORD, HEATH, LEA, MERE, POOL, WADE:—Landbeach, Waterbeach, Wisbeach—Bourn, Bassingbourn, Fulbourn, Melbourn—Croydon (Crawden), Eversden (Eversdon), Gransden, Morden (Mordon), Gulden Morden, Steeple Morden—Whaddon—Anglesea, Barway, Coveney, Ely, Eastrea, Horningssea, Manea, Stonea, Stuntney, Swavesey, Thorney, Welney, Wendy, Whittlesca, Gamlingay, (Bungay, Hilgay, Wormegay), Shingay, Lingay—Fen Ditton, &c.,—Haslingfield, Nosterfield, Radfield—Armingford, Chilford, Dernford, Shelford, Stapleford, Thetford, Whittlesford, Witchford—Horseheath—Astley, Brinkley, Cheveley, Childerley, Eltisley, Graveley, Hatley, Madingley, Silverley, Westley, Wetherley—Fowlmire (Foulmire)—Wimpole—Landwade	44
§ 11. SOME OTHER NAMES:—Borough Green, Bourn, Burnt Fen, Chatteris, Elm, Kennet, Kirtling, March, Newmarket, Over, Prickwillow, Quy, Reach, Spinney, Stane, Staplow, Stow, Toft, Tydd, Wicken, Wrattling	68
§ 12. LIST OF ANCIENT MANORS	74
§ 13. CONCLUSION	75
INDEX	77

THE PLACE-NAMES OF CAMBRIDGESHIRE.

§ 1. PREFATORY REMARKS.

IN attempting to deal with some of the principal place-names in Cambridgeshire, with a view to obtaining some light upon their etymologies, I find myself at a disadvantage in one respect, but in another to have some hopes of partial success. The disadvantage is, that I have made no wide or extended study of English place-names in general; and it is obvious that, in many an instance, one place-name is likely to throw light upon another, though the places may be in different counties. On the other hand, I have had much experience in tracing the etymologies of most of the main words that occur in our

English Dictionaries; and the phonetic laws that regulate place-names are precisely the same as those that regulate other native words that are in common use.

Perhaps there is no subject of study that is, generally speaking, in so neglected a state. The wild and ignorant guess-work of the eighteenth century, and even of the nineteenth, has filled our books of antiquities and our country histories with many misleading theories; and the results of these unconscionable inventions have not unfrequently found their way even into the ordnance-maps. However, the principles of phonetics are beginning to make progress. It is now recognised that, if it is necessary to look to our spellings, it is still more necessary to know what those spellings mean, and not to talk at random about words until we have at least learnt how to pronounce them. For it is, after all, the spoken word that

matters; the spellings are merely symbols and guides, and will only guide those who understand them.

It is only of late years that the phonetic laws which govern the gradations and mutations of Anglo-Saxon words have been intelligently investigated; and hence it is that it is quite impossible for such as know nothing about such laws to realise their intricacy, and the certainty with which, in the hands of the student, they point to the original sounds. And there is yet another matter which is of vast importance and has nevertheless received far too little attention; viz the now well ascertained fact that many of our spellings are Norman or Anglo-French, and cannot be interpreted even by the student of Anglo-Saxon until he has further realised what such symbols mean. I beg leave to say that this is a point which I have carefully studied; and I have now in the press a fairly complete statement of the 16 Canons whereby the spelling of a Norman scribe is distinguished from that of a Saxon one. Many of those who have hitherto investigated the spellings of Domesday Book have sometimes, I fear, been in almost complete ignorance of the sounds which such spellings denote. Whilst I offer these remarks by way of showing that I have considered the matter seriously, and have avoided frivolous guesses, I by no means suppose that all the results here obtained are final. Some are obvious; others are reasonably certain; but some are doubtful. Which these are, I shall usually endeavour to indicate, by the introduction of such words as 'probably' and 'possibly,' and the like.

I wish to express my sincere thanks for help received. I do not think I should have undertaken the present task but for the kindness of Mr C. Sayle and Mr J. E. Foster. Mr Sayle supplied me with the alphabetical list of the principal place-names in the county, nearly all of which are here considered; whilst Mr J. E. Foster did me inestimable service by ascertaining the old spellings of our place-names as they are given in the Red Book of the Exchequer, the Ely Registers, the Feudal Aids, the Pipe Rolls, and the like, supplying in every case the exact reference, and (wherever it was possible) the exact date. Only the philologist wholly realises the helpfulness of such

data; and it is sufficient to say that, without such material, the work could not have been undertaken at all. I shall frequently give the dates of various spellings below; but I wish it to be understood that, in every case, the exact reference is known, and the evidence can always be produced. When, for example, I say that Chesterton is spelt *Cestretone* in 1210 and in 1130, it is meant that Mr Foster has found that spelling under the date 1210-12, in the Red Book of the Exchequer (Rolls Series), p. 529, and under the date 1130-1 in the Pipe Roll.

I am also much indebted for many hints and corrections to Mr W. H. Stevenson, Fellow of Exeter College, Oxford; but it will be understood that he is in no way responsible for the results here given.

The chief authorities which I have myself consulted are not many. I may instance the very valuable work entitled *Inquisitio Comitatus Cantabrigiensis*, ed. N.E.S.A. Hamilton (London, 1876), which is practically the *original* of the Domesday Book as far as relates to Cambridgeshire, with the *Inquisitio Eliensis* appended; the Domesday Book for Cambridgeshire; the Ramsey Chronicle and the Ramsey Chartulary (in the Rolls Series); the printed charters as edited by Kemble, Thorpe, Earle, and Birch; Sweet's *Oldest English Texts* and his *History of English Sounds*; the *New English Dictionary* and the *English Dialect Dictionary*; the *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* by Bosworth and Toller; and other helpful books of a like character. For the spelling of Anglo-Saxon names, I have depended on Kemble's *Index of place-names* in his sixth volume, and Searle's *Onomasticon Anglo-Saxonicum*. I have also obtained various useful information from Miller and Skertchly's book entitled *The Fenland Past and Present, from a History of Cambridgeshire* dated 1851, and from the more recent *History of Cambridgeshire* by Conybeare.

The result of a study of English place-names can hardly prove to be other than extremely disappointing, especially to the sanguine and the imaginative. Speaking generally, we can only satisfy our curiosity to a very limited extent; and we have borne in upon us the fact, which any reflecting mind might have anticipated, that names were conferred upon places quite