

**A BRIEF HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE
ANCIENT NAME AND FAMILY OF
BLITHE, BLYTHE, OR BLYTH, IN THE
COUNTIES OF WARWICKSHIRE,
DERBYSHIRE, & NORFOLK**

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WILLIAM BLYTH

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A BRIEF HISTORICAL SKETCH
OF
The Ancient Name and Family
OF
BLITHE, BLYTHE, OR BLYTH,

IN THE COUNTIES OF
Warwickshire, Derbyshire, & Norfolk,

BY
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P R E F A C E .

I N fulfilling my intention, as indicated in the title page, I had to consider from what sources I could expect to get my materials. Of course, first of all, one would suppose that family history would be best learnt from family oracles—the most elderly members thereof—according to the expression in other applications, “the oldest inhabitant,” or, “within the memory of man.” In the course of my researches, however, I met with the following useful and awakening hint, by an experienced writer on genealogical studies. “It is curious to observe how little accuracy there sometimes is in families, respecting their own descent; and how liable the genealogist is to be misled, when he has to trust to oral information unsupported by documentary evidence.”—*Hunter's Deanery of Doncaster*, vol. ii. p. 413.

It is even so. A lady, suppose, somewhat enthusiastic in regard to the honor of a certain connection, writes, “I have every reason to believe that my grandmother was”—what a glance at the

Church Register shows at once she *was not*. Or some venerable octogenarian gent. assures me, that "his father had no brothers, because he never heard of any uncles," whereas *three* are named in the grandfather's Will! Certainly we must not build on the "oral information" of infirm memories. Still, the living voice and family tradition serve well in supplying a clue to investigation, and will be as both a starting and directing post to point the way.

What I have herein printed is not without good evidence and proof, derived from various monumental sources. These are chiefly the Libraries of Cambridge University, and Trinity College, two Public Libraries in Norwich, as well as the Probate Office there;

"And other dusty heaps

"Of ancient ledgers, books of evidence,

"Old blazoned pedigrees, and antique rolls,

"Torn parish registers, probates and testaments!"

With these recommendations I ask my readers to give me their confidence, whilst I trust they will find some little pleasure in the following plain, but I fear somewhat disjointed, pages. The compilation is for the most part a family record, but, peradventure, it may also interest even some outside friends.



1. My humble "task" shall begin with a pleasant satire upon the very object of my undertaking, by the author of the popular ballad, "John Gilpin," whose mortal remains are with us to this day at East Dereham, written in one of his happiest intervals of *blithesome* humour.

"Oh! fond attempt to give a deathless lot
To names ignoble, born to be forgot!
Lethæan gulfs receive them as they fall,
And dark oblivion soon absorbs them all.

So, when a child, as playful children use,
Has burnt to *cinder** a stale last year's news;
The flame extinct, he views *the roving fire*.—
There goes my lady,—and there goes the squire!
There goes the parson, oh! illustrious spark!
And there, scarce less illustrious, goes the clerk!"—*Cowper*.

* Children of the present day, since the invention of our admirable lucifers, ought to be shewn the application of this natural phenomenon of the "roving fire," and how we used to get our light, with some trouble, out of old rage, by the sharp contact of flint and steel.

they often embalm for us the guise and fashion of speech in eras the most remote."

5. "Our Saxon ancestors did not, for the glory of a short continuance, name the places of their conquest after themselves, but even according to nature's self. And a most general way of naming towns among the Britains was from their RIVERS; and even many of our Counties and Hundreds have derived their names from the same original. Such are everywhere memorials of the earliest races, whether Anglo-Saxon or Celtic. They survive where other names have often changed, and where towns and cities have so entirely passed away, as to leave scarce an indication of their very sites."—See Parkin, in *Blomesfield's Norfolk*, vol. vi. p. 4.

6. Throughout England there is hardly the name of a town or village which is not of Celtic origin. The root may be either a substantive or an adjective. The substantival form is probably the most common. Of the adjectival, the words meaning "rough," "smooth," "gentle," "glad," "gay," "broad," "swift," "clear," and the like, are, found in many river names.

7. One of these "other like words" is BLITHE, a word of very great antiquity in our language; and the facts and appearances of natural history testify to its appropriate adoption.

In the Etymological Dictionary of the Rev. W. W. Skeat, M.A.,

of Christ's College, Cambridge, and Professor of Anglo-Saxon in that University, and probably the best living authority on the subject, this old word is defined as from the A. S. "*blīd*" or "*blīde*,"—"glad," "happy," "bright," "shining" (as said of the sky);—and its derivatives are "blithesome," "blithesomeness," &c. One sense of it, moreover, spelt "*bleith*," was "merciful," as appears from the Gothic translation of Luke vi. 36—"Be ye blithing" (*bleith*), "so as your Father blithe is;" (*bleith ist*.)

In kindly replying to me the Professor writes, "the word '*blyth*' can hardly be other than the adjective '*blithe*.'" "It is a Teutonic word of unknown age—at least four thousand years—as may be inferred from what is known of the history of the Aryan languages. As a fact it occurs in Gothic A.D. 350, but it was an old word then, and there is no other Teutonic word that I know of in any way resembling it, except its derivative, *bless*."

Its simple force and point perhaps could not be better seen than in the following pretty stanza, descriptive of the bright, natural, happy spirit of little children—

"The heart of childhood is all mirth,
They frolic to and fro,
As free and *blithe*, as if on earth
Were no such thing as woe."

8. The antiquity then of the word, as well as its meaning, is well established, and its application in nature to a river, in the sense of *bright* and *fair*, may be readily allowed.

"Flow on, thou *shining* river."

Now, we find that there are in England no less than three rivers bearing this name. One of them is in Northumberland, and another in Suffolk, both falling into the German Ocean; a third is in Warwickshire, joining the Tame a little below Coleshill, and with it running into the Trent. Anciently the name was *Blith* or *Blithe*, and the later substitution of "y" for "i" in the spelling means that the "i" originally is long, as in *bite*, and not as in *bit*, or as it might seem to be in *blith*.

9. In bringing out the word into further technical or topographical use, these rivers have given their name to several towns or villages which have been built on or near them. Some of them are called by the simple monosyllable BLYTH; others have added a suffix for distinction, either Roman or Anglo-Saxon, as "burgh," "field," "ford," "ham," or "ton." Of these we have *Blithfield* in Derbyshire, *Blyburgh* and *Blyford* in the Hundred of *Blithing*, Suffolk; and *Blyton* and *Blyborough* in the county of Lincoln, all unmistakable in the origin of their names.

10. BLYTH (original BLITH) is a small seaport town in