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Rev. J. Charles Cox LL.D., F.S.A.

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FIELD NAMES AND THEIR VALUE, WITH A PROPOSAL FOR
THEIR SYSTEMATIC INVESTIGATION.¹

By Rev. J. CHARLES COX, LL.D., F.S.A.

That a knowledge of the place-names of any country is essential to a right understanding of its history, topography, and antiquities is an accepted truth, although their systematic study is of very recent growth. The place-names of any district are the footmarks of the races which have occupied it, and tell of their pursuits and of the general conditions of life, as well as of the changes that may have supervened in the aspect or conformation of the country. These local names are never mere arbitrary sounds, bereft of sense or meaning, but as records of the comparatively near, or more often of the distant past, will always repay a careful historical investigation. Nor need we wait until we are skilled philologists, or are accurately acquainted with a variety of tongues, before we dare to approach a subject of this breadth, and of such indefinite ramifications. Some love of language and a knowledge of its changes, together with a study of the documentary evidence that exists of the immigration or emigration in historic times of the races or tribes in the district wherein we are interested, are essential ; but it is only as an ordinary investigator, with no more than an average acquaintance with the niceties of local etymology that I have the temerity to come before the members of the Institute on my present task. Experts in the science of language would, no doubt, easily detect flaws in some of the attempts I have made in the past to translate field and place names, into the vulgar tongue ; my present object, however, is not to embark in any possibly rash surmises as to the meanings of field or place names, but to strive to interest others in a fascinating and valuable pursuit, to point out

¹ Read in the Antiquarian Section at the Annual Meeting of the Institute, at Cambridge, August 12th, 1892.

how such knowledge may be obtained, and to urge the importance of a systematic enrolment of all such names in order that they may be studied on a wide and comprehensive basis.

When a mere boy, I became much interested in a treatise *On the Local Nomenclature of the Anglo Saxon*, as exhibited in the Codex Diplomaticus Ævi Saxonici, by Professor Henirich Leo, which was translated into English in 1852. When a few years later, a copy of the first edition of my now friend and neighbour Canon Isaac Taylor's *Words and Places* came into my hands, my tendencies in the direction of the study of place-names became much strengthened by that interesting book. So soon as I had settled down as a resident in the county of Derbyshire, I began to tabulate the place-names of that shire, and after a year or two had completed the extracting of the whole of the names from the Ordnance Survey Maps, comparing them with the orthography used at Domesday, and various other periods such as the taking of the Quo Warranto and Hundred Rolls, and classifying them, no doubt with a good deal of rawness and too hasty conjecture, into the different languages or periods of settlement to which they pertained. Not satisfied with this, and wishing to have my theories as to the colonising of particular dales or valleys of Derbyshire confirmed, I began to study the field names as marked on the parish or tithe commutation maps. I made the ambitious resolve to take out the whole of the field names of the county. But after I had accomplished rather more than a third of the county, giving much of the leisure of two years to the question, I found that considerations of time and expence prohibited my following up the scheme in its entirety. Journeys to this parish and that, were so often fruitless, owing to the map being mislaid or lost, or altogether wrongfully appropriated by the agents or lawyers of the great landowners, that I soon began to despair. In one instance I found that a drinking overseer had actually pledged the parish map to the village publican as a set off against his score, and the publican, who held no kind of parochial office, expected a fee from anyone desirous of inspecting it! At this time it was suggested to me that copies of almost all the Tithe Commutation Maps were probably in the custody of the

Tithe Commissioners. On enquiry at the offices, at 3, St. James's Square, I found this to be the case, but the short hours during which they could be consulted, and the half-crown fee for inspection, rigidly enforced for each map, prevented my consulting more than a portion of those of Derbyshire. The fee comes heavier than is at first sight apparent, for each township has as a rule its own map; thus in my own little parish of Barton-le-Street we have three townships, and if I recollect right the cost of inspecting the maps of some of the wide-spreading parishes in the north of Derbyshire, such as Glossop, ran into pounds. Then again, this is not work that can be done for you by any copyist or clerk (unless you have the whole map reproduced), because it is useless receiving a list or string of names unless you know the exact position of the field, and have some personal acquaintance with the locality. Probably, influence could be brought to bear, which was not at that time in my power to obtain, to induce a reduction or suspension of these fees for purely literary purposes. I had, therefore, to abandon the idea of working out by myself a whole county, even one so comparatively small as Derbyshire. When the Derbyshire Archæological Society was formed about ten years later, I endeavoured to get the idea taken up, and have repeated my efforts occasionally, but hitherto in vain.

I need scarcely say how valuable estate maps in private hands are to the student of field names. I am inclined to think that such maps, often of 17th century date, are commoner than is generally supposed. They are not only to be met with in the muniment rooms of our nobility and larger landowners, but are not infrequently in the offices of agents of smaller estates or of a single manor. But of course their occurrence is fickle and the opportunities of consulting them somewhat capricious. As an instance of their value, I may mention that among the Earl of Carlisle's papers, is a 1690 survey giving the plans of the cottages, public house, smithy, farmstead, and old castle, together with a drawing of the church, all pertaining to the village of Hinderskelf. This village was entirely swept away with

¹ Mr. W. T. Bensly, LL.D., of Norwich, kindly mentioned to me at the conclusion of this paper, that copies of the Tithe Commutation Maps are kept at the

Episcopal Registries of our Cathedral Cities, where they may be consulted at the 2s. 6d. fee.

a high hand in the beginning of Anne's reign, to make room for the lordly structure and domains of the Earls of Carlisle, now known as Castle Howard.

A series of maps, however, of an earlier date than those of the Tithe Commutation, which ought to be readily available, are those pertaining to the Enclosure awards. With regard to this, it may, in the first instance, be remarked that enclosures without parliamentary justification, and brought about for the most by the greed of the manorial lords to the general detriment of the community, became common towards the close of the fifteenth century. These enclosures did not, however, consist in the parcelling out of open common or wastes, but rather in the ditching and fencing in for pasture purposes of those common fields, usually found immediately adjacent to the town or village. The evils of these enclosures were so great that they attracted the attention of Parliament, early in the reign of Henry VII. In the year 1487-8, two Acts were passed, relative to this subject, stating that many towns and villages have been let down, and the fields ditched and made pastures for cattle. These Acts, which were confirmed and extended in 1514 and 1515, require that the decayed towns or villages should be re-edified. This is an important factor for the student of field names to bear in mind, and one which is generally overlooked by those parochial historians who give any attention to local nomenclature. The Black Death at the end of the fourteenth century, and the continued civil strife of the next century, coupled with the abandonment of tillage in favour of pasture on most of the demesne lands by the lords, brought about much of this village destruction. In many a parish traces of the former vill, or of groups of houses abandoned centuries ago, can be detected in the field names, as, for instance, is invariably the case with *toft*, not infrequently found away from all habitations, but which signified the *area domus vacua*, or the homestead. This one word in a field name has led to the detection of the site of a former vill, and to most interesting excavations.

The first real act of enclosure as we now understand the term, was passed in the eighth year of Queen Anne, and the next was in the twelfth year of the same reign. During the whole reign of George I, only eighteen Enclosure Acts

were passed, but whilst George II was on the throne they reached a total of two hundred and thirty-one. With the reign of George III, measures of this nature had become so popular with the governing class, that by the end of last century 2,500 Acts had been passed by which four millions of acres were enclosed. The earliest of these Acts provided that the award of enclosure, together with map or plan, should be enrolled with the Clerk of the Peace for the county, to the end that recourse may be had to the same by any person or persons interested therein, and a similar provision was made down to the time when enclosure was suspended in 1865. The Enclosure Act Consolidation Act of 1801, provided that the awards in the custody of the Clerk of the Peace, could be inspected at the charge of one shilling. Almost all these Acts, and all of a later date also require that a copy shall be deposited with the Courts of Record at Westminster, or with the Clerk of the Counsel of the Duchy of Lancaster, and that another copy shall be deposited in the parish chest of the parish church where the lands were situated. I suppose the official copies in London, are all forthcoming, and that they are to be found at the Public Record office, but I have made no inquiry. With regard to the awards and their accompanying plans that ought to be so easily accessible in their respective parish chests, the culpable negligence of the custodians and the illegal action of landlords, agents, and solicitors, have, alas, made away with the great majority, I believe, throughout England. In Derbyshire, this matter has been thoroughly sifted, with the result that out of a total of 146 Acts, only forty-four are in parish chests, or in the custody of the clergy or churchwardens.¹ But with reference to the depositing of the awards and plans with the Clerk of the Peace, I am glad to be able to report very differently. Since the muniments pertaining to the county of Derby have been of late thoroughly overhauled and arranged, out of these 146 Acts, all have come

¹ Anyone detecting a parish award map in private hands should insist upon its surrender to the proper authorities. The Act 3 and 4 Will. IV., cap. 87, sec. 5, enacts, "when any award is not deposited in the Parish Church in which the lands to which such award shall relate are situated, and shall not be in possession of any lord or steward of any manor, of

which manor an allotment shall have been made under such award, but shall be in the possession of any other person, it shall be lawful for anyone interested in any allotment to require the same to be deposited in the Parish Church, and the person in whose possession the same shall be shall deliver up the same to the minister and churchwardens."

to light with a single exception. Two years ago I was able to publish a complete calendar and brief analysis of them.¹ And yet, only a few years ago, the then Clerk of the Peace for Derbyshire assured me that he did not think he had a dozen such plans in his possession. These small rolls had got buried in masses of papers, or stuffed away in corners, or tied up improperly in the Sessional Rolls, so that their whereabouts were not known. The public can demand to search them on payment of the fee. Only last year a gentleman who asked my advice about the local nomenclature of his parish, applied to the Clerk of the Peace of his county for the award map, with the result that this old established solicitor assured him there was not such a thing in his possession of even a single parish. It would be doing an excellent service, on many grounds, if members of the Institute or others whom they could influence, would make inquiries after these enclosure awards at their respective county offices. So far as I have handled award maps, I can say that, though occasionally disappointing, they are usually fertile in field, or common, or waste names, and are most instructive and helpful, when compared with later tithe commutation or other maps. Sometimes there are schedules of names and owners referring to numbers on the maps, at other times names are written on the maps themselves. Briefly stated, the results to be obtained from award maps are, as a rule, of the highest value towards the due understanding of the development, or the decay of village communities, and of all the infinitely varied interests that accrue to local nomenclature. It is not a little strange how hitherto these maps have been for the most part ignored.²

Another source of information as to field names, not likely, perhaps, to occur to the ordinary antiquary, is the particulars of sales put forth by auctioneers, when estates or plots of land were in the market. These were usually advertised at length in the old county papers. I found many a lost Derbyshire field name in the files of the *Derby Mercury*, a paper which began its career early

¹ Three Centuries of Derbyshire Annals, appendix to vol. ii.

² With regard to the subject of early enclosures, the Inquisition of 1517 on the subject of enclosures and evictions, pub-

lished with a learned introduction by Mr. J. S. Leadam, in the 6th vol. (new series) of the Transactions of the Royal Historical Society (1892), should be consulted.

in the last century. Old-fashioned county solicitors are sometimes in the habit of storing up, or even binding together these particulars of sales. Occasionally they are found in county collections in our large libraries. For instance, the Wolley Collections (Add. MSS. British Museum) contain a large and valuable number of these printed details of Derbyshire estates, put forth by auctioneers during the last century.

Nor should oral tradition be neglected. Where parish maps and other printed or written sources fail, it will often be found that the parishioners in country places are possessed of a surprising amount of knowledge on field nomenclature. In that excellent book of Mr. Morris's *Yorkshire Folk Talk*, the author mentions how one old Yorkshire man was readily able to go through the whole of a township (Sutton-on-Ouse) of 2,300 acres, and give the name of every field. The variation of more modern use, or of earlier tradition, will also make the oral collections of such field-names interesting, even when all have been supplied from maps.

Antiquaries need not be reminded that from monastic chartularies, from feet of fines, and from several other classes of mediæval documents, the names of fields or wastes, of streams or moors, may be often gleaned. Manor Court Rolls, also, are sometimes a mine of wealth in field-name investigation.

It is scarcely necessary to say anything more to the members of the Institute, with regard to the importance of field names. True, many of them have become so twisted and mangled in the course of time that they have almost passed beyond recognition, and are occasionally very deceptive. True, also, that others, that at first sight seem to tell a most noteworthy tale of the past, turn out, on more careful examination, to be of provokingly modern matter-of-fact origin. Nevertheless, it is surprising how brimful of interest many of them are, and what a clear tale not a few of them have to tell. Field names will often establish the sites of disused chapels or decayed manor houses, of prehistoric burials, or Roman roads and settlements, as well as help to decide the nationality of the colonists that predominated in the district at different epochs. Some of

these names will tell of a change of physical features, of swamps and islands where all is now drained and far removed from waters, or of forests and underwood where the blade of corn is now the highest vegetation; whilst others will point to the existence and arrangement and peculiar cultivation of the great common fields. Some will indicate the foolish ways in which special crops were attempted to be forced by law upon the people, for it is few parishes in some districts that have not a "Flax Piece" as a witness to the futile legislation of 24 Henry VIII, and of legislative bonus bribes of a later date; whilst others tell of trades now extinct or of metals long since worked out. Some speak of those early days when the wolf or bear roamed through our woods and dales, when the beaver dammed up the streams, and when the eagle swooped down upon its prey; whilst others tell of the weapons, whereby these and other fauna were rendered extinct. Scarcely a township can be found where some field is not termed "the Butts," names that not infrequently date back as far as Edw. IV. when it was enacted that every Englishman should have a bow of his own height, and that butts for the practice of archery should be erected near every village, where the inhabitants were obliged to shoot up and down on every feast day, under penalty of being mulcted a half-penny.

The most unpromising and ordinary looking field names often, too, have a good deal of teaching. Thus, "The Acres," or with some numeral affixed, such as "Nine Acres," "Ten Acres," or the like seem almost meaningless. But often fields with these names, as is the case in my own parish, are now and have been long in pasture. Yet where they occur, they refer back, as a rule, to the parallel slips of an approximate acre or half acre of the common arable fields of the old community, and possibly to the great national change from arable to pasture in the fifteenth century. Acre used to be an equivalent term for the corn land; thus, in the Anglo Saxon version of the Holy Gospels, our Lord is said to go "through the acres" on the Sabbath day, which we render "corn-fields"

In my own parish, in two places, nearly three miles apart, occurs the field name Bell Bottom, which has much puzzled me; for in one place the field is on very high ground, and in

the other place on a dead level in Ryedale. In one instance the name has given rise to a curious legend, about the big bell of Kirkham Abbey having been dropped in a swampy pool and sent there, when being removed, at the time of the Dissolution. But a few months ago I found the solution in Canon Atkinson's charming book *Forty years in a Moorland Parish*, wherein he shows that the term "bottom," in his parish, is a corruption from botton or bottun, a Scandinavian term for a division, dole, or allotment.

If the provincial Archæological Societies, of which most of us are members, would but take up this question in a thorough fashion, much of the greatest interest and value to both our local and general history might eventually be attained, whilst the result would be priceless so far as philology or ethnology are concerned. Now that almost the whole of these associations have placed themselves "in union" with the Society of Antiquaries of London, such joint action becomes a possibility.

Meanwhile, before the councils of our different county societies urge the matter upon us, it might be well if all those who take an interest in the question, possessed themselves of the large ordnance maps of their own parish or district, and filled up on them the field names, distinguishing (say) by T, the tithe commutation map; by A, the award map; by P, private maps; by S, information from particulars of sale; by C, charters or chartularies, and by O, oral tradition. Each county society should possess a complete set of such maps, which would eventually be duly filled up, and duplicates for the whole of England should be deposited in the rooms of the Society of Antiquaries at Burlington House. Let it be our aim, with the limited knowledge we may possess, to carefully gather up and record the details round our own doors, and at last those greater minds will be forthcoming who will be able to formulate wise and sound deductions of a general character, from the materials thus collected.