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### Derogatory field-names

John Field (pp. 19–25)

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## ABBREVIATIONS OF COUNTIES AND EPNS COUNTY SURVEYS

Co	Cornwall
Ha	Hampshire
He	Herefordshire
K	Kent
La	Lancashire
Nb	Northumberland
Sf	Suffolk
So	Somerset
Wt	Isle of Wight
CPNE	<i>Cornish Place-Name Elements.</i>
EPNE	<i>English Place-Name Elements, Parts 1 and 2.</i>
PN BdHu	<i>The Place-Names of Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire.</i>
PN Brk	<i>The Place-Names of Berkshire, Parts 1, 2 and 3.</i>
PN Bu	<i>The Place-Names of Buckinghamshire.</i>
PN Ca	<i>The Place-Names of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely.</i>
PN Ch	<i>The Place-Names of Cheshire, Parts 1–5.</i>
PN Cu	<i>The Place-Names of Cumberland, Parts 1, 2 and 3.</i>
PN D	<i>The Place-Names of Devon, Parts 1 and 2.</i>
PN Db	<i>The Place-Names of Derbyshire, Parts 1, 2 and 3.</i>
PN Do	<i>The Place-Names of Dorset, Parts 1–4.</i>
PN Du	<i>The Place-Names of County Durham, Part 1.</i>
PN Ess	<i>The Place-Names of Essex.</i>
PN ERY	<i>The Place-Names of the East Riding of Yorkshire and York.</i>
PN Gl	<i>The Place-Names of Gloucestershire, Parts 1–4.</i>
PN Hrt	<i>The Place-Names of Hertfordshire.</i>
PN Le	<i>The Place-Names of Leicestershire, Parts 1–7.</i>
PN Li	<i>The Place-Names of Lincolnshire, Parts 1–7.</i>
PN Mx	<i>The Place-Names of Middlesex (apart from the City of London).</i>
PN Nf	<i>The Place-Names of Norfolk, Parts 1–3.</i>
PN Nt	<i>The Place-Names of Nottinghamshire.</i>
PN NRY	<i>The Place-Names of the North Riding of Yorkshire.</i>
PN Nth	<i>The Place-Names of Northamptonshire.</i>
PN O	<i>The Place-Names of Oxfordshire, Parts 1 and 2.</i>
PN R	<i>The Place-Names of Rutland.</i>
PN Sa	<i>The Place-Names of Shropshire, Parts 1–9.</i>
PN Sr	<i>The Place-Names of Surrey.</i>
PN St	<i>The Place-Names of Staffordshire, Part 1.</i>
PN Sx	<i>The Place-Names of Sussex, Parts 1 and 2.</i>
PN W	<i>The Place-Names of Wiltshire.</i>
PN Wa	<i>The Place-Names of Warwickshire.</i>
PN We	<i>The Place-Names of Westmorland, Parts 1 and 2.</i>
PN Wo	<i>The Place-Names of Worcestershire.</i>
PN WRY	<i>The Place-Names of the West Riding of Yorkshire, Parts 1–8.</i>

## DEROGATORY FIELD-NAMES

To students with a taste for the picturesque, field-names relating to fertility and tractability present a large and colourful collection. Fanciful names are not, of course, limited to this category; many instances are provided also among names relating to the remoteness of the land, as well as those referring to area and configuration.<sup>1</sup> Inevitably, names in the classes just alluded to are superficial in their reference; names relating to fertility or profit, whether complimentarily or regretfully, are closer to the soil and the activity of those working it.

Many derogatory terms are not fanciful at all, but literally descriptive of land the inferior nature of which deserves to be placed on record in a name. Thus, boggy land is referred to in straightforward names like Bog Field, Winkfield Brk, Bog Piece, Cromford Db, or The Bogs, Dutton Ch, Harley Sa, and Solihull Wa. To these may be added Foul Quab, Mickleton Gl and Foul Slough, Aldham Ess. Similarly, Dirty Hole, Austray Wa, is uncomplimentary in a literal form of words, as are Hard Acre, Bollington Ch, and Hard Meadow, Aston Db. But fanciful names relating to Bogginess or hardness seem to be more plentiful than the literal examples. *Pudding* names relating to boggy soil are well known, examples occurring in many counties. *Pudding Poke* (i.e. 'pudding bag') names seem to be restricted to the North Midlands and the North West, e.g. Pudding Poke, Scarcliffe Db, Tideswell Db, Laxton Nt, Bradfield WRY, North Elmsall WRY, and Pudding Poke Close, Darrington WRY. *Honey* names are ambiguous, but some may refer to muddy land, and so can be considered derogatory. Instances occur in all parts of the country.

Acid soil, and land which is unduly stony or hard are referred to in names describing these conditions literally. Such epithets as *sour* (or *bitter*), *stony*, and *hard* occur in numerous field-names in every county. On the borderland of the fanciful are the terms derived from the unrewarding labour associated with such land. Hard Work, Corney Cu, Hard Labour, Coombe Keynes Do, and Work Hards, Drayton Leonard O, doubtless sum up the bitter experience of many years. Descriptive terms of a more abstract

1. For a discussion of names relating to area and configuration, see J. Field: "Size and shape in English field-nomenclature", *Names* (Journal of the American Name Society), Vol. 23, No. 1, March 1975, 6-25.

type are also applied: Dreadful and Terrible are two separate fields in Dunham Massey Ch; Hopeless, Compton Brk and Deane Ha, Little Content, Milford Ha, and Heartache, Swansmore Ha, show that this pattern of naming is found elsewhere, as does Troublesome, Oldland Gl. Irksom Close, Elkstone Gl, Hopeless Meadow, Bootle Cu, and Pityful Meadow, Bakewell Db, are further examples. Misfortune Field, Heskett Cu, may allude to the general bad luck of possessing such land or to a calamity of the kind recorded in Goodins Od, Great Bowden Lei 1679, earlier (1343) known as *ubi Godwynesoxe morieabatur (sic)*. Misery, Pilton R, has a variant in Mount Misery, Porchester Ha, and other derogatory names are also prefixed by this dignified term. Mount Poverty is found at Ashton on Mersey Ch, while fields named Mountain of Poverty occur at Forton La and Nether Alderley Ch. Mount Folly possibly belongs to this group, examples being found in Boarhunt Ha and Southwick Ha, and another pseudo-geographical name certainly does - Isle of Want, Hodnet Sa. .

The connexion between unproductive land and such names as Bare Arse is perhaps felt rather than intellectually grasped. There is, of course, a logical chain: unproductive - unprofitable - no surplus for clothing, however essential. But these names seem to symbolize rather than declare their significance. Examples of Bare Arse have been collected from Cheshire, Lancashire, Leicestershire, West Riding, and Hampshire; also to be noted are the spelling variants Bare Ass, Lotherton WRY, and Bare Harse, Horsforth WRY, and a pre-enclosure example, *Bare Arse Furlong*, Claybrook Lei 1674. Similar anatomical references occur in Bareleg(g)s, Buriton Ha, Long Sutton So, Melksham W, Bare Knuckles, Great Eccleston La, and Bare Bones, in half a dozen southern counties. Bare Scaup, Ingleby Greenhow NRY, 'bare scalp', signifies poor sward with no growth. Despite the spelling of the adjective, Bear Shoulder, Askham Nt, also belongs to this group.

Physical pain and discomfort are alluded to in such names as Pinchgut(t), Blunsden W, Lacock W, and Biggleswade Bd; Raw Bones, Tandrige Sr, suggests a painful erosion of flesh by hard work on unproductive land, but Knaw Bone, Bratton W, though doubtless alluding to similarly infertile land, belongs rather to the names referring to food, cf. Hunger Hill, below. Bitter Nails, Millington Ch, indicates a cold situation. In other names *Bitter* signifies land with acid soil. Bitterlands, Westbury on Severn Gl, however, is a complimentary name; the early forms *Butreland* 1420

and *Bytтыrland* 1492 point to a meaning 'rich pasture, likely to produce good butter'<sup>2</sup>

Heartache, Swanmore Ha, and Breakheart, West Pennard So and Potterne W, are doubtless not to be taken literally, but neither is Break Back, Broughton WRY 1654, Stanton by Bridge Db, Chaceley Gl, Marshchapel L 1598. Broken Back, Wroxton O, was *Break Back Furlong* 1768, but Broken Back, Broughton Hu, seems to have a topographical reference, if the 1293 form, *Brokenhyl*, is a direct ancestor.

Twistgut, Boxwell Gl. is an awful warning to the labourer against extreme or ill-considered exertions on intractable land, but Greedy Guts, Pyrton O, introduces the connexion between infertile land and hunger. Hunger Hill and similar names constitute a large group, with early forms of some examples dating from the thirteenth century. Even the variant *Hungary* is of some antiquity: Hungry Bottom, Soulby We, goes back to *Hungary* 1684. Other allusions to Hunger include Hungrell, Pontesbury Sa, Hungrill, Anderton Ch, Hungolds, Ash Sr (*Hungerhulle* 1385), Hungry Guts, Knebworth Hrt (cf. Greedy Guts, above), and Hungrstarve Meadow, Withington Gl. *Starvation* perhaps represents the next step after *Hunger* and underlies a group of names nearly as large as those based on the latter. Starve All is frequent in Gloucestershire and Wiltshire, with individual instances in three or four other counties. Starve Acre also occurs in Gloucestershire, but is more frequent in Hampshire. Land which cannot feed birds is alluded to in Starve Crow, Westbury on Severn Gl, Starvecrow Field, Great Hornmead Hrt, Starve Goose Close, Girton C and Bourn C, and Starvelarks Field, Little Berkhamsted Hrt.

*Famish* names are relatively few; three have been recorded in Shropshire - Famish Park, Stanton Lacy, Famish Croft, Sutton, and Famish Leys, Monkhopton. In Somerset Famish Acre occurs, in Marksbury, and in Wiltshire Famish Beggart, in Corsham. The unwelcoming aspect of cold food is reflected in the names Cold Kitchen, Shere Sr, and Cold Roast, Merstham Sr (*Cold Rost* 1662). To these may be added a Westmorland name, Cold Tale, Underbarrow, in which the dialectal *tale* 'pottage', occurs as second element.

2. Cf J. Field: *Compliment and commemoration in English field-names* (Council for Name Studies and Dacorun College) 1973, 7.

The unprofitable nature of infertile land is alluded to in a large group of names, of which Never Gains, West Littleton Gl, and No Gains. Soberton Ha, are typical. Small Gains is frequent in Wiltshire and Hertfordshire, but occurs also in Gatcombe Wt, Kintbury Brk, Lambourn Brk, and Steeple Morden C. Bare Gains, Oxenhall Gl, also belongs here, and so may Ungaines, Hartlebury Wo. if this is not in fact an ownership name incorporating the surname *Engaines*. Small Profit is recorded in Watlington O and Beer D, but for Little Profit one must return to Wiltshire, in which county occur also four instances of Little Worth<sup>3</sup>. The last name is found also in Oxfordshire (Benson, Bletchingdon), Berkshire (East Garston, Wantage) Gloucestershire (Brimpsfield, Pucklechurch), and Nottinghamshire (Harby).

Infertile land is also characterised as an imprudent investment in such names as Dear Bought, which occurs frequently in Cheshire and Lancashire, with a few instances in Gloucestershire and the West Riding as well. A modern variant may be noted - Dear Bolt. Clifton Ch - as well as the thirteenth-century forms. *Derebouth*, Chatteris C. *Dereboch't*, Kirkheaton WRY, and *Derebought*, Sall Nf. Hard Bargain, Bitterley Sa, possibly alludes simultaneously to hard soil and unprofitability, and shallow soil, an abundance of flints and unprofitability are probably all referred to in Skinny Flints and unprofitability are probably all referred to in Skinny Flint, Bottle Cu. Good for Nothing, Monks Coppenhall Ch, belongs to this group but has a marked affinity to the entirely literal derogatory names in the same county - The Worst I Ever Came In, Tilston, and The Worst That Ever Was SEen, Duckington.

Beggary. Eaton Socon Bd (*La Beggerie* 1227), represents the end of the process of farming unproductive land. It is difficult, indeed, to separate the literal from the figurative use of *beggar* but neither sense can be regarded as complimentary.

Desperate unprofitability is also indicated in Losing All Field, Colerne W, and the similar Looseall, Garford Brk. Pickpocket(s), occurring in Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, and Hertfordshire, assigns to the land a more positive role in the ruin of the husbandman. Spendthrift, Bingley WRY, may also be regarded as a name of desperation, and this type of dispraise is placed on the personal

3. Cf "Size and Shape ...", 11.

level in Thieves Acre, East Dereham Nf, Thieves Wood, Sutton in Ashfield Nt, Thieves Close, Brooksby Lei, and similar names. Thieves Den, Harthill Db, may well have been an abode of robbers, but the appellation is still uncomplimentary, as is Usurers Meadow, St Chad Sa.

References to the devil in field-names may stem from the supposed haunting of secluded places, or from the need to explain some unexpected difficulty in cultivation, or infertility. Devils Dole, Enfield Mx, Devils Acre, Hadlow Mx, and Devils Den, Coulsdon Sr and Chart Sutton K, are representative examples. Devil's Neck, Harpenden Hrt, and Devil's Nick, Lamberhurst K, probably reprove the land not so much for infertility as for its awkward shape. Many *Goodman* names may be similarly interpreted, though the surname Goodman accounts for a few of them; Good Mans Hey, Northern Etchells Ch, if the spelling is significant, almost certainly alludes to the devil<sup>4</sup>. A similar name occurs in Fulshaw Ch - Goodman's Acre, with which *Gudamons* 1393 may be compared. Allowing land to go to the devil is hardly the same as describing it as hellish; the former generates names suggesting helplessness or despair, whereas *Hell* names seem to imply dogged persistence in spite of extreme lack of response. Hell Croft occurs in Bradford WRY, Hell Nook in Compton Bishop So, Hell Hole in a number of places in Cheshire as well as in Farnsfield Nt, Elmley Castle Wo, and Pauntley Gl, and Hell Holes in Chapel en le Frith Db and Wadsworth WRY. The possibility of some of the *Hell* -names being in fact shape terms, alluding to L-shaped pieces of land (cf Ell Pightle, Easton Sf, Ell Piece, Peasmore Brk, Ell Close, Alderwasley Db, etc) cannot be overlooked, but those with *Hell Hole(s)* are undoubtedly derogatory. Hell Fire Piece, Bibury Gl, and Hell Fire Gate & Lotts, Lower Swell Gl, also belong here.

Purgatory, suggesting land not quite so extreme in its painful intractability, occurs in Lancashire and Oxfordshire (several times in each), Wentnor Sa, Minety W, and elsewhere in central and southern England.

Terrestrial analogues of these places of suffering are also commemorated. The Cities of the Plain were punished with fire-induced sterility, a fact referred to by the names Sodom, Holwell

4. Cf J. McN. Dodgson: *The Place-Names of Cheshire*, I,xxi, acknowledging a suggestion by Professor Bruce Dickins.

Do, Holbeck WRY, Sodom Field, Brampton Db, and Gomorra Close, Snaith WRY. Other derogatory names with a biblical origin include those alluding to Cain and to Job. Cains Ground, Heddington W, Cain's Moor, Soberton Ha, and Cain's Piece, Tottenham Mx, no doubt commemorate the curse of infertility laid on whatsoever land Cain should plough. The misfortunes that befell Job, however, were more numerous and varied than any that are recorded as visited on any other just man. The entire loss of his cattle and crops - not to mention the deaths of all his children - is more often remembered than his final recompense. Job's Balk Furlong, Tackley O, Job's Piece, Bosley Ch, and Job's Close, North Aston O, probably celebrate Job's singular ill fortune as an agriculturist, or - at a different figurative level - allude to his heroic patience, characterising the land as requiring that virtue.

The appeal to the picturesque implied in these names was mentioned at the beginning of this article. This aspect - together with the gathering of the names into a categorized, rather than a localised, group - may seem to justify the frequent charges made in relation to field-name study, that it is a trivial pursuit, that a treatment such as this pays no attention to geographical and historical context, and that these names have only a minimal role to play in onomastics generally.

If field-name studies begin and end in the collection and publication of curiosities, the charge of triviality must stand. Unless names are related to the things named, their recital may have a poetic - but hardly an onomastic - value. It should not really need to be said that detailed localisation is called for in respect of field-names as of any other toponyms, yet all too often in the past, names 'of etymological interest' received no more precise location than their county; in some general works, indeed, even this reference was denied. Typological grouping, so long as location and date are not lost sight of, can be a valuable aid to interpretation generally and to an appreciation of the local pattern of name-giving in particular. Of course it must be admitted that the names in the category now being studied tend to be modern, but early instances of such names were occasionally noted even in the volumes of the Survey which set little store by the names of fields. By drawing attention to names by category, it is hoped that similar names, previously overlooked, may in due course be collected and published. Properly documented, all names can then be studied in geographical and historical context, and more useful



conclusions about the pattern of naming will be possible than with the merely fragmentary information of the present time.

JOHN FIELD