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Application of field-names in the Cambridge west fields

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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>

APPLICATION OF FIELD NAMES IN THE CAMBRIDGE WEST FIELDS.

In John Field's otherwise excellent introduction to his *English Field Names Dictionary* (p. xii) there occurs the following statement:

"Each furlong had its own name, but it is perhaps worth recording that the strip divisions did not, being referred to when necessary simply as the holding of a particular man within a named furlong." For the medieval period and in Cambridgeshire (the only area and period about which I can speak from first-hand documentary evidence) this is simply not the case, as I hope this article will show.

Starting with a good early terrier, and in particular with the Cambridge West Fields Terrier (C.U.L. MS. Add. 2601), and working backwards and forwards on complementary charter and estate-record evidence, to cover the period from c. 1200 to the eve of Parliamentary enclosure, it has proved possible not only to plot almost every field name on an outline map but also to ascertain with fair certainty to what it refers. In a fair number of cases it appears that there has been a shift in the actual application of a name by popular rationalisation, similar to that which is known have taken place in the forms of names.

Changes in the form of names, particularly where a name-element has become obsolete, are clearly explained by Field (p xiii). They are well authenticated in the West Fields (e.g. *Gritho* to *Grithowe* to *Greithow* to *Great Howe*), and some have already been noted by Reaney. One of the most easily explicable is perhaps *Stoupendecruchewaye*, which becomes *Stop-end-cruche* and *Stone-pound-cruch* in the 17th and 18th centuries, through misguided references to the later blocking of the way by defensive works in the Civil War and the building of a stone pound on Pound Green. Another name, found in the 14th c. on the outskirts of both the upper and the lower town and just outside the jurisdiction of the borough officials, is *Hores Hill*, variously mistranscribed by nice-minded clerics of the 19th c. as *Hares Hill* and *Horse Hill*; and perhaps to the same sense of decency we owe the disappearance of *Pissewellway* and *Fartwellbrook* in the Eastern Fields from later maps and terriers.

Considerable diversion of watercourses in the interests of field drainage had obviously taken place long before we have any real

maps, and the names given to some of these diverted streams and ditches can, with charter evidence, be linked to known persons or established as having been in existence by a given early date. But whereas names like *Seman's Ditch* and *Edwin's Ditch* continue, because their component elements have remained current, other names are wrongly attached to later local owners and office-holders. Only a sequence of related charter evidence can sort these out, and it is interesting to see *Beruolvesdik* on the Madingley boundary (c. 1190) reappear as *Barnardsdich* in the early 14th c. It is just possible that *Willowesdich* (14th c.), in its earlier form *Wlwysdik*, can be connected with a *Wlwrđ* found in some early 13th c. charters.

Similar transfer of title occurs with the names of the "doles", usually found on marginal land at the far boundary of the Cambridge Fields and probably divided on assart between the owners who had previously enjoyed intercommoning rights. Thus we have *Erlesdole*, correctly descending from the early 13th c. Lacy Earls of Lincoln to the Burwasse manor of Grantchester. But *Sheriffesdole* near by proves to be a later attribution to a 15th c. owner of that name, and we do not know what earlier name he replaced. The most interesting shift comes with the large dole of Merton, which appears in the earliest 13th c. Merton deeds as *Godivesdole* and *Godyevesdole*, written by 14th-century clerks (who could not understand the earlier letter forms) as *Goidzinesdole*, *Goidesinedole*, and finally *Goidesmedole* and *Goldesmithdole*, when a William *Goldsmith* became an owner of an adjacent strip in the 15th c. This dole is referred to in the Merton deeds as having belonged to Ailgar the noble and his wife. Perhaps she was the original Lady Godiva of Cambridge! All these "dole" names appear in the open fields as blocks or groups of selions, referred to in charters as "culture", and in very few cases form as much as a furlong.

Another term which, as appears from the map, may be applied in the 13th c. and 14th c. to a section of the arable, even when well out in mid-field, is *croft*. It is sometimes assumed that *croft* is always an enclosure withdrawn from the arable. But fairly intensive work on the term as used in the Cambridge Fields Terrier reveals that, to a Cambridgeshire man of any period up to about 1600, a *croft* was again a block of selions, usually less than a furlong, which often traditionally went with the ownership of a certain messuage, which *could be withdrawn from the seasonal shift at will of the owner*. This right would in most cases appear to be

the relic of very ancient custom, and the explicit statement of the terriers that "it might be land every year," shows that the general expectation was that it should be ploughed more, not less, than the rest of the surrounding arable. The enclosure of small pieces near to the houses of the town or village, for the purpose of keeping beasts or of making gardens and orchards, and also calling these *crofts* as well as *closes* has led to great confusion. But *close* is the more usual term in Cambridgeshire for this type of enclosure, with its permanent hedge, fence, or ditch. Some sort of temporary fence, if only a ditch with a permanent row of stakes, must have marked the boundary of the arable croft in the seasons when the owner was not observing the same shift as his neighbours, but the complications of working it must have been considerable. Consequently it is not surprising to discover that, out in *Middlefield* where the 14th c. terrier gives us various crofts, including *Sparwescroft* and the Prior of Barnwell's *Dukdole*, which were both arable, and *Thorpescroft*, which was a grove of trees, by 1617, it had become normal practice to put all these into the ordinary seasonal shift except the Prior's very low-lying *Dukdole*, which had been turned over to pasture, surrounded by ditch and quickset hedge, and was henceforward described as an enclosure, *in clausuris*. So by the 17th c. *croft* more or less means *close*, as we are led to expect by later maps, and *dole* having ceased to relate to a specific allotment, in some parts of North Cambridgeshire, is applied to the field path or access way leading to various portions of ground. Numerous instances have been noted by Dr. J. R. Ravensdale in *Landbeach and districts of the Fen margin*¹

A similar shift of meaning in popular usage occurs with the word *haveden*, which again, in North Cambridgeshire, comes to mean an access way by the 17th c. though etymologically it is an obsolete plural form of *head*. The link is obviously the use of headlands, where the plough turned, as access ways and vice versa. But in the name *Clinthaveden* (as quoted by Maitland in *Township and Borough*, p.172) the word is still in its older usage, describing a piece of arable which terminated at the 'Clint headlands', i.e. the Cambridge-Coton boundary along the ridge called the *Clint*. The same name in early Madingley deeds gave some trouble to Reaney, but could reasonably be thought to apply to similarly placed land further along the same ridge.

1. See his *Liable to Floods*, C.U.P. 1974.

Field names given to a fairly large portion of a furlong to denote some kind of separate usage have been mentioned in connexion with *dole*, *croft*, and *close*. Others found in Grantchester and Madingley are *hay* and *madive*, still applied when the land has become arable. Far more common, however, are names given to individual strips. These may refer to the size and shape of the strip as ploughed, *goredaker*, *sengilaker*, *cuttedrod*, *wanglond*; to the nature of soil, *blakaker*, *sponyaker*, to ownership, for which instances are legion; and to the uses to which the income from the strips was applied, as in *le Lampeaker* (the benefaction for this particular strip in the Cambridge *Carmefield* is found in the Hundred Rolls, and was for a lamp for the sick in the Hospital at night, given by Harvey Dunning). Dozens of such names, frequently compounded with *aker*, *buttes*, or *rod*, are scattered throughout the arable, and are the names given to the strip of one owner - or one *quondam* owner - neither to furlong nor to enclosure.

Names directly descriptive of *furlongs* are, however, almost rare by comparison, and the only one of any note in the Cambridge West Fields is *Brembilfurlong*, a derogatory name. Much more usual in all early charters is the identification of furlongs by existing topographical features, or by the routes to which they lie adjacent. In clumsy terms such as, *le long furlong in le Cley*, *the furlong in le Heerne*, *the furlong beyond High Cross*, the writers of the charters seem to be searching for a way to identify the furlong concerned. No such difficulty appears where topographical features, names of routes, or even names of former owners are concerned. A study of the numerous cases where a furlong and the route alongside it bear the same name in later documents, such as *Alfortheswaye furlong*, and *Ridgeway furlong* in Grantchester, suggests that it is more usual for the name of the furlong to be taken from the road, for many of the names are only meaningful as route-names.

The most striking shifts of application, however, are to be found when we come to look at the names by which the "Great Fields" of the classic open-field system were known at various dates. It is here that the process of rationalisation has gone the furthest and the dangers of assuming that "3 fields = 3 shifts = 3 names", as shown in many Enclosure Maps, are the greatest. For as one begins to look back into the charter and terrier evidence, it is clear that, even where there were probably three shifts of season in a given system, there were either more than

three "great" fields or fields of wildly differing acreage, and that the names of the fields and the areas to which they were applied had not, as some writers appear to assume, existed from time immemorial as they appear by c. 1800.

In the West Cambridge Terrier (MS. Add 2601) the names of the Great Fields are given as *Grithowe*, *Middle*, *Little*, and *Carme Fields*, and these names (except for the alternative use of *College Field* for *Carme Field* in St. John's College) were current from the late 14th c., when the Terrier was written (NOT 1480, as Reaney states throughout his Cambridgeshire Place-name volume) to the time of Parliamentary Enclosure, c. 1805. With them were two subnames, *Dedale* and *Little Carme Field*. The first surprise for anyone who compares the Terrier with the map made for Corpus Christi College in 1789 is that *Little Field* has moved from its place in the 14th c. description to that piece of *Middle Field* which, for reasons of maintaining balance, is put on the annual shift with *Carme Field*. Where *Little Field* was, *Dedale* (sic) is now written, and in the former *Dedale* is a close marked *Merton College Esq.*, and the last adjacent furlongs of *Middle Field* are *the new Little Carme Field*. So much for apparent continuity of name and discontinuity of application.

But more surprises are in store, for none of the four Great Field Names given as titles to the main sections of the Terrier in c. 1365 are found on examination to have been in use as the main Field Names a century and a half before, when the charter evidence begins. That is to say, if the names exist they are applied to a limited topographical area, and not to the whole field. This is a point which Maitland picked up, when he realised that the name *Carmefield*, if it came from the *Carmelites*, could not antedate their arrival in Newnham, and must have been comparatively new when it was used in the Hundred Rolls (c. 1280).

Middle Field is found in isolated use quite early, but only for the area of the *Long Furlong in the Clay*, which joined the older fields near the town with the assarts at and beyond High Cross. It may even originally have been thought of as intermediate between these groups lying East and West, rather than intermediate between the other two great Fields to the North and South. The name normally used for the whole central area was *the Portefield*, and this name was also used for those parts of the later *Carmefield* furthest from Newnham village.

The name *Grithow* or *Gritho* existed, but was applied to the *Gritho* itself, namely, the tip of the gravel ridge running out from Girton (*Grit-tūn*), which was almost certainly marked by an ancient tumulus. The Terrier refers to a piece of land, a single selion of the Clerks of Merton, at the end of which "lies the *Grithow*", and in the margin is a sketch of the same, looking like an inverted thimble. In older usage all the arable customarily farmed from the Upper Town was simply called *Cambridge Field* (or *Fields*) and subdivided into parts "towards *Grithow*", "towards *Howescroftes*", "at *Asshwykston*", "by *St. Neot's Way*", etc., for identification. The extension of the use to the whole of the Northern area cropped as one season seems to have been a later development, barely established by the end of the 13th or the early 14th c.

The name *Carmefield*, as has been indicated, came from the Carmelites, who arrived in Newnham about 1250 and worked the demesne lands of the Newnham manor which came to bear the name *Carmedole*. After their removal across the river, this dole and much other land fell to the Hospital of St. John, and we find the name *Spitaldole*, foreshadowing the later use of *College* for the area in which St. John's was dominant. But prior to the arrival of the Carmelites there does not appear to have been any single name for the area covered by the most southerly of the later great Fields. Instead, there is evidence of a smaller-scale, self-contained field system based on Newnham. These fields are known in general as *the fields of Newnham* (various spellings), *Newenham Crofts* and *Eldeneuenhamfeld* forming part of them. Beyond the area covered by *Newnham Field* to the west lay detached portions of arable reckoned as part of the *Portefield* (or *Town Fields*) and designated by terms such as "towards *Portebrigge*". In the low-lying area through which ran *Edwin's Ditch* was *Le Dale*, alternatively *Dedmannesdale* or *Deddale*, containing three furlongs reckoned as part of *Middle Field*.

Finally, there was the arable on either side of the watercourse, now called the Binn Brook but originally just *the Brook*. These were, as Maitland indicated, called *Binbrok* and *Butebrok*, that is "within (or this side of) the Brook" and "without (beyond) the Brook". Latin charters of the 13th c. often give *super le broc* for the area which later formed the lower part of *Little Field*. But for some reason *Binbrok* became the normal name both for the area of arable lying on the Newnham side of the brook and for the brook itself. When the name *Carmefield* overtook all *the Southern Field*,

Binbrook, or *Bimebrookes*, was left as name for the brook alone.

From these instances, taken from West Cambridge, it should be apparent that the nomenclature of the fields was no more stable than their extent or their cropping arrangements. That is to say, some names were fixed early, chiefly those relating to topographical features, but all those which depended on human activity on a given piece of ground were liable to change, particularly in the periods when the fields themselves were being formed or changing in their use. At any time the appearance of a new owner, a new activity, or a new feature of the landscape (e.g. a windmill or a gravel pit), could wipe out an old name completely. Where there was continuity over a long period, names were subject to the twin processes of popular misapplication and mispronunciation. To chart the vagaries of the one, as of the other, a close study of the available documentary evidence from all periods is essential.

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