

LOCAL PLACE NAMES.

Everybody would like to know how they came by their surnames. Sometimes it is very easy to learn how you obtained your name. For instance, if you have a name like Webber, Smith or Farmer it is not difficult to understand how one of your ancestors got it, but sometimes a surname is so unusual that it is almost impossible to understand its meaning or derivation to use the right word. Often, a surname has changed through the centuries so that several hundred years ago it was very different from what it is today. So it is with the names of places and therefore, if you want to understand the meaning of a place-name you have to find out what it was centuries ago. To do this one has to examine old documents and the most important and helpful one is the Domesday Book.

In 1084 King William I called a council at Gloucester and it was decided that a survey should be taken of the whole kingdom to find out how much the King could expect to receive from the manor or estates. Every manor was visited by the King's clerks and when they had completed their inquiries the results were bound together to form the Domesday Book. Fortunately, we still have this book which is kept at the Records Office in London. Although it is not very easy to study the actual book there are plenty of opportunities to study copies of it. The Victoria Histories usually include a copy of the records of the manors of various counties. Of course, the name of the manor is always mentioned and sometimes we find that it has changed a good deal.

Local Village Names.

Bampton.

It is never very easy to discover when a village was first established, and this is the case with Bampton. It is believed that there was a village here in Roman times because pottery and other objects have been dug up in the village belonging to that period. We do not know what it was called in those days, but whatever it was when the Anglo-Saxons conquered this area, the new owners changed its name to an English one.

The earliest reference to Bampton that can be found is in a charter of 1070 confirming the grant of some land to Bishop Leofric of Exeter. In this charter Bampton is called Bempton which is not very different. Then, in the Domesday Book (1084) it is called Bentone. Other documents of the Middle Ages give place names such as Bentona and Bamtona. All these are very alike and Professor Ekwall suggests that they are derived from Beam-tun, or the tun or settlement made of beams. This does not seem a very good explanation of the derivation of the name because it may be applied to any Anglo-Saxon settlement, as most houses were made of wood in those days. However, no other explanation can be found, so we must be content with this one.

Aston.

A mile and a half to the east of Bampton, is the village of Aston, or Aston Bampton. Aston has always had very close connections with Bampton, because, until about 1830, it was not a parish of its own, but part of Bampton parish. In fact, it might be said that Aston is a daughter village of Bampton.

There are many places in England called Aston, and the name was originally East-ton, and it came about in this way. During Anglo-Saxon times, the population of a village often grew so much that the land was not sufficient to support it. When this happened, the older people in the village would suggest to the younger ones that they should move away from their village, and establish a new one a few miles away. The new settlements were often given names which showed the direction in which they lay from the parent village, so we find any amount of villages called Aston (East-ton) Norton (North-tun) Weston and Sutton (West-tun & South-tun)

Brize-Norton.

The village of Brize-Norton lies two miles to the North of Bampton, and, like Aston, is a daughter village. He is not a well-known saint nowadays, but he was very popular in Anglo-Saxon days, his name was Saint Brice or Saint Britius, and it is where Brize-Norton got its name. Very little is known about him. He was Bishop of Tours about the year 400 A.D. and he is remembered for the quarrel he had with the famous St. Martin of Tours. In this country he is remembered because on St Brice's Day 1015 Ethelred the Unready caused the leaders of the Danish army in England to be murdered. Why the village chose St. Brice as its saint, we do not know. We have not been able to discover any other place in England called after him.

Lew.

Lew is another village which was once part of Bampton parish. Actually, it is only a hamlet and still has to share certain things with Bampton. For instance, although it has a church it has no vicar of its own and the vicar of Bampton has to take the services in the church. There is no school and the children come to Bampton. There is difficulty in finding out what its name means. In early times it was called Hlaewe, which is ~~Anglo-Saxon~~ and means a hill, and Lew is on the highest piece of ground for some miles around. ↑ *Celtic*

Clanfield.

Clanfield lies two miles to the west of Bampton. In the Domesday Book it is called Chenefelde, but in other documents it is called Clenefeld or Clanefeld. This is thought to mean 'clean field' and very likely does. By a clean field is meant probably an open space or clearing in a wood. We know that a great wood once existed around here and the early settlers probably chose this space in the wood as a suitable place for a settlement.

Radcot.

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Radcot is a mile beyond Clanfield and is well-known for its ancient bridge over the Thames. There has always been a river crossing at this point of the river even in prehistoric days and it was a common thing for a settlement to be established at a ford or a bridge. Radcot is not mentioned in the Domesday Book, as it has always been part of Grafton. It has been difficult find very early references to this place. The prefix 'Rad' may either mean 'road' or 'reeds'. There are a lot of reeds by the river bank even nowadays. So the name might mean either, the cottages by the road or the cottages by the reeds. There are quite a number of places around here whose names end in 'cot', for example, Kencot, Alverscot, and Kelmscot. Professor Ekwall suggests that all those place names contain the names of some early chieftains who, either established the villages or owned them at some time or other.

BlackBourton.

This is a very mysterious name and no one seems to be able to suggest an explanation of its name. Bourton probably comes from burgh-ton. Burgh usually means a fortified place and usually a place with that name is to be found on a hill or at the foot of one., such as Edinburgh. Blackbourton is situated on a flat piece of countryside and it is difficult to think of any reason why a fortified place should ever have existed there. Why the word 'Black' should have been added to the name no one can say. *Also called Burton Abbot's*

Cote.

Cote is a hamlet now part of Aston Parish. It is famous for having one of the most famous Baptist Chapels in England. The name has a simple explanation, a collection of cottages.

Chimney.

This name causes strangers a good deal of amusement and mystifies them too, but it is a very good example of a name which has changed during the past. To begin with, the 'ey' is Anglo-Saxon for island and is to be found in the names of several places around Bampton; e.g. Witney, Rushey, etc. It does not mean that these places were islands surrounded by water. Usually, they were patches of dry land surrounded by swamps or marshy land. In the same charter of 1070 which mentions Bampton, Chimney is mentioned and it is written Ceommenige. Ceomme was probably the name of the owner of the place in Anglo-Saxon times.

Weald.

Joining Bampton is Weald, which in the time of the Domesday Book was a separate place and was called Welde. The name means woodland and appears in several parts of the country. It was in this wood, between Bampton and Clanfield, that St. Frideswide and her companion are believed to have hidden from Alfgar, a chieftain of Leicestershire who was seeking to marry her against her will.

Local Farms.

Some of the farms around Bampton have interesting names but most of them are modern because the parish was not enclosed until 1812.

Mount Owen Farm.

This farm lies on the hill between Bampton and Lew and its name was given to it by the man who first occupied it in 1812. He explained its meaning to Dr. Giles, who wrote a History of Bampton, in the 19th C. He called it 'Mount' because it was on a hill, and he added the 'Owen' in honour of one of the vicars of Bampton at that time.

Coalpit Farm.

This farm is a neighbour of Mount Owen Farm, being at the bottom of the hill. No-one is able to explain how this farm got its name. It has been suggested that the person who used to bring coal up the River Thames for sale in Bampton stored it there and that is how it got its name. But this is only a suggestion and we really don't know.

Coldoniter Farm.

This farm is in Weald and used to be known as Backhouse Farm. The present owner is building up a pedigree herd of Guernsey cows and thought that the farm should have a 'posher' name so that it could be used for the herd. He has three sons called Donald, Colin and Terry, and so he took the first part of their names and joined them together to make Coldoniter. Mr. Owens uses this name as an example of how careful one should be when looking for the explanation of a name. He says that it is quite likely that the derivation of the name will be forgotten in time, and then someone, in a couple of hundred years, may be studying local place names and make a wonderfully clever suggestion as to how this farm got its unusual name, whereas the real reason is a perfectly simple one. It is a warning that we should not be too confident of ourselves.