

A SELECTION OF NORTH SOMERSET PLACE-NAMES

BY A. G. C. TURNER, M.A., PH.D.

THE names discussed below have been chosen for their general interest, or for the light they shed on the early history of the county. A certain amount of new material has been adduced, and in some cases, fresh etymologies have been suggested.

If the tradition preserved in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is reliable, the town of Bath fell to the English in the year 577. The centre of the county, however, remained in British hands until 658, and it has been suggested elsewhere¹ that the Wansdyke may have been the boundary between the two peoples. This may explain the first element in MARKSBURY (8 *infra*), which is Old English *me(a)rc* 'mark, sign': also 'boundary, frontier, limit'.²

St Brannoc, whose name is preserved in the lost *Brannocmynstre* (2), is a link with the period of Celtic missionary activity in Somerset. Elsewhere in the county, St. Cai left his name in *Lantocai*, the pre-English name for Leigh in Street parish³; the name of St. Congar survives in Congresbury where, according to early tradition, he was buried⁴. A number of Somerset churches have Celtic dedications; St. Bridget is found at Brean and Beckery, St. Dubricius at Porlock, St. Congar at Badgworth, and St. Petrock at Timberscombe; the parish church of Street was formerly dedicated to St. Gildas.

The distribution of these dedications is interesting. The majority are found in or near coastal districts, and might indicate an area where the organisation of the Celtic church escaped the full impact of the West Saxon conquest. We may recall the entry in the *Chronicle* for the year 682: *On þissum geare Centwine gefliemde Bret wealas oþ sæ* 'in this year Centwine put the Britons to flight as far as the sea'. A small group of Celtic church dedications

1 *V.C.H. Somerset* i, 374-5.

2 It is interesting to note that place-names containing Celtic elements are rare to the north of the Wansdyke, but become more common to the south of it.

3 NSP 117-8.

4 F. Liebermann: *Die Heiligen Englands* (Hanover, 1889); *Donne rested sanctus Congarus confessor on Cungresbirig*.

also occurs near Glastonbury, and adds strength to the traditional claims of the monastery to be a British foundation.¹

At WEDMORE (11 *infra*) King Alfred completed the baptism of his former enemy Guthrum, and delivered his kingdom from the Danish menace. It is possible that the difficult first element on this name was influenced at a subsequent period by Old English *waedd*, *wedd* 'pledge, agreement, security, reconciliation'.

COXLEY (3) is 'land belonging to the cook'. It represents the holding of *Manasses coquus*, a cook in the household of William the Conqueror.

Abbreviations

(For abbreviations not shown here, see *Proceedings* xcv, 112-115)

- Æthelwerd *Fabii Ethelwerdi Chronicorum . . . libri quattuor* ; ed. Petrie and Hardy, *Monumenta Historica Britannica* (1848), 499-521.
- Asser W. H. Stevenson : *Asser's Life of King Alfred* (Oxford, 1904).
- BxiiH *Bundae Duodecim Hidarum*, the bounds of the Twelve Hides of Glaston ; MS. Trin. Coll. Cantab. 724, ff. 16, 16*b*, early 13th century.
- Domerham Adami de Domerham *Libellus de rebus gestis Glastoniensibus*, etc. MS. Trin. Coll. Cantab. 724, f. 21 onwards ; 13th and 14th centuries.
- FF(PRO) Feet of Fines ; original documents in the Public Record Office.
- Glast Inq J. E. Jackson : *An Inquisition of the Manors of Glastonbury Abbey of the year 1189*. (The Roxburghe Club, 1882).
- Gres For W. H. P. Greswell : *The Forests and Deer Parks of Somerset*.
- Lib Terr *Cartae contentae in Libro Terrarum Glastoniae*, etc. ; MS. Trin. Coll. Cantab. 724, ff. 77-8, c.1247 ; see Armitage Robinson, *So Hist E* 44-7.
- LL J. Rhys and J. Gwenogvryn Evans : *The Book of Llan Dâv (Liber Landavensis)*, Oxford, 1893.

¹ In *Cormac's Glossary*, compiled about the year 900, it is described as *Glasim-pere nan Gàidel* 'Glastonbury of the Gael'. A connection such as this would have been most unlikely if the monastery had been a purely West Saxon foundation.

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| Loc Princ | <i>Loca Principalia infra Duodecim Hidas</i> : MS. Trin. Coll. Cantab. 724 (f. 16b), early 13th century. |
| Mod E | Modern English. |
| Nat GR | National Grid Reference. |
| NSP | A. G. C. Turner : <i>Notes on some Somerset Place-Names</i> , in the <i>Proceedings of the Somersetshire Archaeological and Natural History Society</i> , xcv (1950), 112-124. |
| P | <i>Pipe Rolls</i> ; Pipe Roll Society. |
| Prop R | F. H. Dickinson : <i>The Proportion Roll</i> (1742) ; SRS, iii, 285-309. |
| RBE | <i>The Red Book of the Exchequer</i> ; Rolls Series, 1896. |
| Redon | M.A. de Courson : <i>Cartulaire de L'Abbaye de Redon en Bretagne</i> . (Paris, 1863). |
| Rental | C. J. Elton : <i>Rentalia et Custumaria Abbatum Monasterii Beatae Mariae Glastoniae</i> . (1235-61). SRS, v. |
| RH | <i>Rotuli Hundredorum</i> ; 1812-18. |
| Subs | The Subsidy Roll of 1327 for Somerset ; an original roll in the Public Record Office. |
| Wells Ch | Original charters, etc., in the possession of the Dean and Chapter of Wells. |
| Wells (HMC) | <i>Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Dean and Chapter of Wells</i> ; Historical Manuscripts Commission, 1907. |
| Wells (R) | <i>Liber Ruber</i> , MS. of the Dean and Chapter of Wells ; first section is 14th century onwards. |

1. BERYL, near Wells, is (*apud Berihal*)¹ 1206-42 Wells Ch (2), *Beriall* 1206-42 (c.1500) Wells (2), *Beral* 1303, *Berial* 1346 FA, *Beryhale* 1365-6 FF, *Beryall* 1428 FA. 'Nook or corner where berries grew' (OE *berige*, *berie* ; *health*). The present form of the name shows association with Mod E *beryl*.

2. *Brannocmynstre*, now lost, formerly the name of a place not far from Glastonbury,¹ was *Branuc* 851 (early 13th) Ant Glast (T),

¹ The monks had a fishery there. William of Malmesbury states that Athelbald the son of King Athelulf gave ten hides at *Branucmunster* to abbot Hereferth in the year 867, *ad capturam isiciorum ad ecclesiam vetustam beatae Dei genitricis Mariae et ad usum monachorum in Glestingensi monasterio* (Ant. Glast (T)). The site cannot have been far from the monastery. At an earlier period, Ine had granted a fishery to the monks at Shiplate on the river Axe, cf. Armitage Robinson, *So Hist E* 34 ; in 1086, the abbot of Glastonbury had several fisheries at Meare (DB).

Branok 854 (14th) BCS 472, *Branot* (sic) 854 (14th) Glast 202, *Branucmunster* 867 (early 13th) Ant Glast (T), *Brancmynstre* 973 (14th) BCS 1294, *Brannocmynstre* late 10th (c.1247) Lib Terr. 'The church or monastery (OE *mynster*) of St. *Bran(n)oc*' ; this Celtic saint is mentioned in Bishop Grandisson's *Ordinale et Martyrologium Exoniense*¹ as *Sancti Brannoci abbatis et confessoris*. OW *Branuc* (LL) and OBret *Branoc* (Redon) < Brit **Bran-āco-* are identical personal names.

3. COXLEY, on the road from Wells to Glastonbury, is described as *Cokesleg* 1207 Gres For 249, *Cokesleye*, *Kockesleg* 1269 Ass., *Cokkeslegh*' 1327 Subs ; the first element here is probably a personal name. In 1086, a woman called *Uxor Manasses* held two hides of land in the manor of Wells ;² elsewhere in the Domesday survey she is described as *Vxor Manasses coqui* (DB) and *Vxor manessei coci* (DB Exon, f. 480). *Manasses* was a cook in the royal household, for his widow is shown as holding land under the heading *Terrae Servientium Regis in Sumerseta*.³

At a later period there was confusion between the first element and ME *cok* (genitive *cokkes*) 'cock, male bird' ; this would have arisen after the quantity of the vowel in the first element had been changed, owing to trisyllabic shortening. The second element in the name is identical with OE *lēah* 'clearing, open land', etc.

4. EBBOR, pronounced [ebə], in the parish of St. Cuthbert Out, is *Æbbewyrð* 1065 (c.1500) Wells (2), *Ebbeworth* n.d. (12th) Bath, *Ebworth* 1284-5 FF ; 'Æbba's or Æbbe's homestead' (OE *wyrþ*). A similar personal name is found in *Ebchester*, *Durham*, cf. Ekwall, DEPN 152.

5. EDINGWORTH, situated in the marshes between East Brent and the river Axe, is *Iodenwrde* (sic) 1086 DB, *Iodena Wirda* 1086 DB Exon, *Edenewrth* 1235-52 Rental, *Edenewrthe* 13th Domerham, *Edeneswurthe* 1252-61 Rental, *Edeworthe* 14th. Domerham, *Yadenworth* 1316 (16th) FA, 1433-4 FF.

Formally, the early forms in *Ioden-* may be derived from an OE **Ēow-denu* 'yew valley', but as Professor Ekwall points out,⁴ this explanation hardly suits the locality.

1 MS. Corpus Christi Coll. Cantab. 93, early 15th century.

2 DB Exon, f. 157b: *Giso episcopus habet .I. mansionem quae uocatur Wella . . . De praedictis .L. hidis tenet .ii. hidas uxor manasses, sed non de episcopo.*

3 DB Exon ; cf. also R. W. Eyton : *Domesday Studies*, etc. (London, 1880), i. 136.

4 DEPN 154.

From the topographical point of view it might be more satisfactory to regard early ME *Ioden-*, later *Edene-*, as identical with CASTLE EDEN, Durham (*Geodene, Iodene* c.1050, *Edene* 1195 (1335) DEPN 153); this is a derivative of Brit *Itunā*, later **Idonā*, well evidenced as a river name, cf. Ekwall, RN 142-3.

In Somerset, the name may have applied to a locality rather than a stream, as Edingworth is situated adjacent to the old course of the river Axe. The meaning behind Brit *Itunā*, ME *Ioden-*, etc., in this case may have been simply 'water' or 'wet place', both of which would suit the locality.¹

The second element in the name is OE *worþ* 'homestead'.

6. *Leech Lake*, now obsolete, but formerly the name of a watercourse between Meare and Wedmore, is described as *la Liclake* c.1135 (13th) Loc Princ, *la Lithlake* c.1135 (13th) BxiiH, *lichelake* 1294 (14th) Secr Abb, *la Lythlake* 14th. Domerham, *fossatum quod uocatur Lichelake* 1327 Secr Abb, *la Lichelake* 1327 Wells(1).

The first element here is OE *lic* 'body, corpse', the second being OE *lacu* 'stream, watercourse', etc. Criminals may have been drowned here; we may note Du Cange, on late Latin *fossa* 'ordeal pit, drowning pit'; *Caverna, seu locus in terra defossus, aqua repletus, ubi feminae furti damnatae immerguntur*. But it is also possible that the stream was used as a receptacle for corpses denied Christian burial; there is a hint of such a custom in KCD 723, a 12th century copy of a document dated 1016.²

The modern form of the name is influenced by Mod E *leech*, a natural development if the stream in question was a muddy one. It is described by Locke as 'a well-known boundary on the Moors which divide Wedmore from Mere, the hundred of Glaston from the hundred of Bempstone'.³

7. LITTON, situated on the upper reaches of the Chew, near Chewton Mendip, is (*æt*) *Hlytton* c. 1053-66 (c.1240) Wells (1), *Hlittun* 1065 (c.1500) Wells (2), *Litune* 1086 DB, *Lituna* 1086 DB Exon, *Lutthunā* 1136-66 (c.1240) Wells (1), *Lutton* 1157, *Lidtona* 1176

1 For a similar name in this district, cf. *Tarnock*, NSP 122.

2 *Si quis forte auarus tyrannus, quod absit, hoc minusculum impie deo auferre conatur, caueat ne ipsi talis mulctatio accidat, qualem audiuius illi Wlfrico ripa accidisse, hoc est, quod corpori eius sepulto in Glastonia non licuit quiescere antequam in stagnum Fearniamere uocabulo proiiceretur*; on *Fearniamere*, formerly the name of the swamps near Mere, v. NSP 119.

3 Locke, *Survey of Somerset*; F. M. Ward, *A Supplement to Collinson's History of Somerset* (Taunton, 1939).

(14th) Wells (R), *Lutton* 1247, 1270 Wells (1), 1298, 1366, 1388 Wells (HMC i. 255, 269, 298), *Litton* 1742 Prop R.

The first element here may be OE *hlid*, a side-form of *hlid* 'a slope, hill-side', etc., v. further Ekwall, DEPN 231; a meaning such as 'tūn or farm on a slope' would be suitable. A number of the forms, however point rather to OE *hlyd* (also *hlid*) 'gate, opening'; the village is situated at the mouth of a narrow valley, the course of which is followed by the main road from Litton to Chewton Mendip.

8. MARKSBURY (6662 Nat GR) is *Merkesbuŕ* 926 (13th) Ant Glast (T), *Merkesburi* 936 (14th) BCS 709, *Merkesbiŕ* 963 (13th) Ant Glast (T), *Merkesbyri* late 10th (c.1247) Lib Terr, *Mercesberie* 1086 DB, *Mercesberia* 1086 DB Exon, *Merkesburia* 1132 (14th) Secr Abb, *Merkesburi* 1189 Glast Inq, *Markesberi* 1201-2, *Merkesbiŕ* 1227-8 FF(PRO), *et passim*.

As Dr. Grundy pointed out¹, the village of Marksbury received its name from the ancient earthwork on Stantonbury Hill,² described as *merces burh* 941 (early 12th) BCS 767, (*on*) *þa byrug* 963 (early 12th) BCS 1099, *merces burh* 972 (early 12th) BCS 1287. A possible meaning would be 'boundary fortress' (OE *me(a)rc, burh*), perhaps a reference to the Wansdyke, on which the stronghold is situated. For an identical name elsewhere in Somerset, cf. MAESBURY CASTLE (*Merkesburi* 705 (14th) BCS 112), which is traversed by the common parish boundary of Croscombe and Dinder.

9. SALT FORD, pronounced [sɔ'lfəd], is *Sanford* 1086 DB, *Sanford*, *Sanfort* 1086 DB Exon, *Salford* 1228-9, (*in*) *Salford'* 1248-9 FF(PRO), *Salford* 1276-7 RH, *Saltford* 1303 FA, 1305-6 FF, *Saltford'* 1327 Subs. Probably OE *Salh-ford* 'ford with willow-trees', with later confusion between the first element and the common noun *salt*; there are still many willow-trees here, growing on the banks of the Avon. For a similar name, cf. Salford, Lancashire (DEPN 383). The Domesday forms, which point to OE *sand* 'sand, gravel' as the first element may be corrupt.

10. SPARGROVE, situated in Batcombe parish on the river Alham, is described as *Spertegrave* 1166 RBE, *Spertegraua* 1175-6 P, (*de*) *Spertegrave* 1191 (14th) Glast, *Spertegrave* 1232-3, (*in*) *Spertegraue* 1255-6 FF (PRO), *Spertegraue* 1263-4 (14th) Secr Abb, (*manerium de*) *Spertegrove* 1284-5 FA, (*de*) *Spertegraue* 1327 Subs, *Spertegraue*

1 GrSo 202.

2 It is marked as *Stantonbury Camp* on the Ordnance six-in. map.

1334, 1335 Wells (RRS), 1342 Glast Feod. The first element is OE *spyrtē, sperte*, etc., 'wicker basket', the second being OE *grāf(a)* 'grove, copse'; the name may have referred to a copse where osiers were cut for basket-making. Cf. *Spurtemed'* c. 1235-6 Wells (1), the name of a piece of land near Wellington.

11. WEDMORE, situated on rising ground above the flood-plain of the river Axe, is described as *Weþmor* 878 ASC(A), *Wedmor* 880-5 (early 11th) BCS 553, *Wædmor* c.894 Asser, *Vuedmor* c.1000 Æthelwerd, *Wethmor* late 10th (c.1247) Lib Terr, *Weodmor* (MS. sic) 1043-66 (c.1240) KCD 837, *Weddmor* 1065 (c.1500) Wells (2), *Wetmore*, *Wedmore* 1086 DB, *Wetmora*, *Wedmor*, *Wedmora* 1086 DB Exon, *Wedtmora* 1100-35 Bath, (*in*) *Wedmor'* 1100-1135 (c.1240) Wells (1), *Wethmore* c.1135 (13th) BxiiH, *Wedmor* 1157, *Wedmora* 1176 (14th) Wells (R), *Wedmore* 1178 (c.1500) Wells (2), (*de*) *Wedmor* 1209-10 FF(PRO), *Wedmor* 1310 Secr Abb.

As Professor Ekwall points out,¹ the testimony of the early forms is conflicting. He suggests that the first element may be an OE **wæþ*, a side-form of *wāþ* 'hunting', etc.; in this case, the name would mean 'moor for hunting'.

But another explanation of the name can be suggested. When the topography of the district is considered, it is possible that the first element was originally OE *wæd* 'ford, shallow water', etc.; a meaning such as 'mōr or swampy ground liable to floods' accurately describes the marshy tract between Wedmore and the river Axe.

At an early period, however, the name was influenced by popular etymology. In 878 the Danish king Guthrum completed the ceremony of his baptism at Wedmore,² and it seems likely that after this time the original first element may have been confused with OE *wædd*, *wedd* 'pledge, agreement, security, reconciliation'. Later still there was further confusion of the first element with OE *wēod* 'grass, weed, pasture' and OE *wæt* 'wet, moist', as some of the excerpts show.

12. WILMINGTON, in the parish of Priston, is (*on*) *Wynma dune* 931 (early 12th) BCS 670, (*on*) *Wynlmæddune*, *Wulmæddune* 963 (early 12th) BCS 1099, (*on*) *Wynmedune* (MS. sic) 965 (early 12th) BCS 1164, *Wimedone* 1086 DB, *Wimmadona* 1086 DB Exon,

¹ In DEPN 479.

² The *Chronicle* states that he put off his baptismal dress here: *his crism lising was æt Weþmor*.

Wilmedune post 1086 (12th), *Welmendonam* (oblique) 1154-9 (13th) Bath, *Welmedona* 1156, *Wylmyndon* 1280 (c.1500) Wells (2), *Wulmingdone* c.1330 Secr Abb, *Wylmyngton* 1346 FA.

The earliest forms of this name are conflicting. Professor Ekwall suggests that the first element may be an OE personal name *Winela* or *Willa*, or OE *will* (*wiell*) 'spring', the last two elements being OE *mæd* 'meadow' and *dūn* 'hill'.¹ The regular appearance of *-l-* in the post-Conquest forms supports this explanation of the name.

On the other hand, early forms in *Wynma*, *Wynme-* cannot be explained in this way, unless they are regarded as corrupt. Formally OE *Wynma* may be derived from a Primitive Welsh **Winnma*(3) < Brit **Uindo-mago* 'white-plain', possibly referring to the flat-topped hill on which Wilmington is situated; the compound is well evidenced as a place-name, cf. Gallo-Latin *Vindomagus*, Irish *Finnmhagh*, Modern Welsh *Gwynfa*.² It may be noted that place-names containing a Celtic first element are common in this part of Somerset.

If this explanation of the name is correct, the *-l-* would be intrusive, the result of popular attempts to associate the first element with a familiar personal name or topographical term.

1 In DEPN 496.

2 It also occurs as a common noun in Modern Welsh *gwynfa* 'paradise'.