

Rethinking Old English toponyms

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The analysis of English place-names has, for the last ninety years, been framed in post-Enlightenment Cartesian terms. Focusing on place-names formed in Old English, the language of the Anglo-Saxons, three aspects of this approach are challenged here: Cartesian reductionism which has informed how place-names have been grouped and subdivided; Cartesian dualism which has encouraged the idea that resulting categories of place-names are intrinsically different and opposed—especially topographical and habitative names; and Cartesian mapping which has dictated how place-names have been examined in spatial context. While these remain extremely helpful in developing etymologies for particular place-name elements, it is argued that since these names originated in a non-Cartesian world, current approaches create interpretative barriers that hinder a full understanding of the motivation lying behind place-naming and the role that place-names may have played in Anglo-Saxon society. Drawing on examples of indigenous naming practices from across the globe, where it can be shown that place-names are habitually designed to communicate critical aspects of Traditional Ecological Knowledge, a new way forward for English place-name studies is proposed that might operate alongside the existing paradigm.

Classifying Old English Place-Names

The majority of the place-names of England, both those in existence and those that have been ‘lost’, have their origins in Old English, the language of the Anglo-Saxons. Taking just major place-names—that is to say town-, village-, hamlet-, parish-, township-names etc.—the Old English name stock runs to several thousand. A small number of these are early recorded in texts pre-dating 731AD (Cox 1976), but far more are only formally attested later after the Norman Conquest in Domesday Book. If the names of minor landscape features which appear in the boundary clauses of Anglo-Saxon charters are included, the Old English place-name corpus runs into the tens of thousands. The dominance of Old English as the language of the early medieval landscape (as opposed to Latin, the language of secular and religious governance and authority) is further

reflected in the fact that it provides 90 percent of most commonly recurring elements in English place-names. The remainder belong to the Old Scandinavian languages (Watts 2004: xlii-xlix).

Given the sheer number of Old English place-names, those who have sought to bring sense and meaning to the toponymy of early medieval England have tended sensibly to begin by breaking the corpus down into more manageable parts. This was one of the underlying rationales for the geographical arrangement of the volumes of the English Place-Name (EPN) Survey where names have been examined county-by-county and hundred/wapentake-by-hundred/wapentake. Alternatively, place-names have been divided by type: settlement-names, for example, have been seen as different from river- and stream-names and thus dealt with independently (Ekwall 1928; Rumble 2011). This desire to disaggregate has also lain behind decisions to treat major- and minor-names separately. In parallel with these pragmatic considerations, and from the earliest days of the Survey (e.g. Sedgefield 1924; Mawer 1929), Old English place-names have also been categorized according to their basic points of reference. They have conventionally been considered to fall into three broad groupings: habitative-names referring to inhabited places and which often provide information about the early form, function, and status of these settlements and their inhabitants; topographical-names taking their cue from and describing aspects of the physical environment; and folk-names indicating the settlement of particular groups or tribes (e.g. Cameron 1988, 27-28). This division of the material has been undoubtedly useful and has undeniably helped to bring order to an otherwise complex data set.

A further guiding principle of place-name scholarship has provided yet another method of subdivision. This is the study of name-groups based on the foundational idea that individual names are best interpreted and understood when they are examined alongside and in the context of other names taking similar forms or using the same elements of vocabulary in their formation. This tradition, recently described ‘as old as the discipline itself’ (Carroll 2013, xxxvi), was codified in Smith’s (1956) treatment of the elements found in English place-names, foundations which are being built on by its successor, the *Vocabulary of English Place-Names* (Cullen unpublished; Parsons 2004; Parsons and Styles 1997; 2000). This mode of enquiry has brought considerable and often unexpected insights for individual habitative elements such as *burh* (Draper 2008; 2009), *hām* (Dodgson 1973), *torp/trop* (Cullen *et al.* 2011), and commonly recurring compounds such

as *wīc-hām* (Gelling 1967) and *upp(e)-tūn* (Jones 2012a). Equally it has proved effective in the consideration of folk-names, for example, names in *-ingas/-inga-* (Dogdson 1966). Unquestionably, however, the benefits of this kind of approach are best exemplified by Gelling (1984) and later Gelling and Cole's (2000) examination of topographical place-name terms. Their contextual exploration of elements such as *ofer* 'flat-topped ridge with a convex shoulder', *hōh* 'heel', and *beorg* 'rounded hill' now permit us to see the subtle contours of the Anglo-Saxon landscape through the eyes of its contemporary namers (Cullen 2013).

For the last ninety years, then, the study of Old English place-names has been conducted within a framework of separate yet interlocking classificatory systems designed to create discrete, manageable and meaningful subsets of the corpus. The logic behind this systematization is indisputable if one considers the principal aim of the study of place-names to be the establishment of robust etymologies. But arguably it has been far from helpful in elucidating the potential *motivation* behind early medieval place-naming, an aspect recognised to have been largely neglected by place-name scholars (Coates 2013). Indeed it might be suggested that by grouping names in the way place-name scholars have become accustomed to do, real obstacles to their full comprehension have been raised.

Behind the Classification of Place-Names

The current categorization of place-names reflects the discipline's philological origins. For those interested in establishing the meaning of names, in understanding their linguistic structure and vocabulary, ordering the material in the way it has been makes etymological sense. Dictionaries, alphabetical lists of elements, and glossaries are essential tools for those concerned with words. But it is equally clear that abstracting names in this way, by removing them from their geographical and historical context, is anathema to the principles of landscape history and archaeology whose main interest lies in trying to understand how place-names were used in real time and space. Take the example of Southwell NTT. In dictionaries its entry is preceded by Southwater SSX, Southway SOM, and Southweek DEV. It is followed by Southwick (five examples) and Southwold SUF (Watts 2004). Southwell has no connection with these places other than sharing the qualifier OE *suð* 'south'. The dictionary thus assists in understanding this place-name element, but tells us very little about Southwell the place. In the EPN

Survey volume for Nottinghamshire, which through its geographical arrangement might be thought to offer a better sense of spatial associations, Southwell is preceded by Oxton, Rolleston, and Sneinton, and succeeded by Stoke Bardolph and Thurgarton (Gover *et al.* 1940). In reality, however, Southwell is actually abutted by Hockerton, Upton, Rolleston, Morton, Halloughton, Thurgarton, Oxton, Edingley, Halam, and Kirklington. Sneinton lies 10 miles and Stoke Bardolph 9 miles southwest of Southwell, both sharing very little in common geographically with the town. Oxton, Rolleston and Thurgarton, while more proximate with Southwell, also share little in common historically since they were not part of the extensive early medieval estate of Southwell. This comprised eleven other members: Bleasby, Farnsfield, Fiskerton, Gibsmere, Goverton, Halam, Halloughton, Kirklington, Morton, Normanton, and Upton. It might be argued, therefore, that it is this last grouping which offers the best analytical context for these individual names. Clearly it is not difficult to reorder the material as presented to provide it with geographical and historical coherence. But this single example does exemplify how those wishing to approach place-names and place-naming from non-philological perspectives, particularly those interested in the motivation lying behind particular patterns or assemblages of place-names, are faced with rearranging material before they begin their task.

The current treatment of place-names, however, presents more profound philosophical challenges. It reflects how the world has come to be understood in Cartesian terms over the last three hundred years. Cartesian reductionism, in which the whole is seen as the sum of its constituent parts (Craig 2002, xiv), has been the dictating intellectual framework which has spawned the modern scientific approach to the building of all knowledge since the Enlightenment. As a paradigm, it has encouraged disciplinary specialization and within disciplines ever clearer definition of and focus on its component elements. Philology, and toponomastics in particular, has slavishly followed these principles.

Linked to this has been the notion of Cartesian dualism. Within place-name studies this is no more obvious than in the dichotomy maintained between topographical names on the one hand and habitative names on the other. This is classically Cartesian in two respects. First, both these categories, in and of themselves, are abstract concepts. They are useful to think with but have little or no basis in anything historically concrete (e.g. Feys 1987, 294-295; Lévi-Strauss 1966). Secondly, categorizing names in this way

responds to and helps to reinforce the Cartesian opposition between nature and culture. This decidedly artificial and uncomfortable division of place-names, and analytical barriers it has raised, have not gone unnoticed. Implicit in Gelling's observation that *lēah*-names ('woodland clearing, wood-pasture, isolated stand of trees, etc.') appear to be 'quasi-habitative' (Gelling and Cole 2000, xvii; Cullen 2013, 163), a view reinforced by Hooke (1998, 148), is the idea that these two categories are neither clear cut nor mutually exclusive. In other words, a false divide has been created which problematically means that some (perhaps many) place-names on record simply do not lend themselves to the neat categorizations imposed upon them.

Those who have, in the last few years sought to resolve this apparent mismatch between the historical reality and the contemporary analytical framework have approached the issue from two opposing directions. Rumble's (2011) proposal of an alternative or additional category of 'man-made landscape feature' to stand alongside topographical names and habitative names—a suggestion which from a landscape archaeologist's perspective is undoubtedly sound, practical, and justifiable—is, in its insistence on greater classificatory precision, clearly both modern and Cartesian in outlook.

Alternatively, the call for the dismantlement of the topographical/habitative dichotomy, achieved by emphasising the role played by all place-names irrespective of type or status, in ordering the landscape and people's lives, that is seeing them as aids to active *inhabiting* rather than passive *habitation*, is decidedly not (Jones and Semple 2012, 12-13).

Place-names in a non-Cartesian World

It is a major contention here that Cartesian approaches to the categorization of place-names, and Old English place-names in particular, are anachronistic. As a consequence, they might be considered to offer at best limited analytical potential; at worst they may actually be disruptive. For it is patently clear that Old English place-namers and users would not have recognised the categories now imposed on the formations they coined. The inhabitants of Broadwas WOR, for instance, would not have visualized their place-name as a topographical name opposing it against other names in the area of an habitative type. Certainly they would have been very aware that it was topographically and environmentally significant, the name means after all 'broad land that floods and drains quickly' (Broadwas lies on the floodplain of the River Teme). But they could not follow the additional step now taken to distinguish this type of place-name from others

because the natural and the cultural divide had yet to be established. Anglo-Saxon society was a more naturalistic world in which people were fully immersed and embodied in their environment (Jones 2013; Trudgill and Roy 2014, 223). Broadwas must be seen then simply as a name, a useful name at that, but one that was essentially no different to a neighbouring name such as Knightwick ‘the young men’s/retainers’ farm’, which we would now characterize as habitative. Both of these names belonged to a broader stock or assemblage of local names designed to be equally meaningful in their own different ways, that helped to map out the multiple and inalienable realities of the early medieval landscape.

Furthermore, it might be contended that the primary function of these place-names was to bring meaning to the whole and not simply its constituent parts. The environmental warning carried by Broadwas was certainly of local value, but the clear and present danger of flooding which gave birth to the name only has significance when set alongside other names which do not mention the possibility of inundation. In other words, Old English place-names may have originated as specific local descriptors (a Cartesian perspective) but together with others might equally have begun as relative evaluations of the wider environment (non-Cartesian). Certainly, the power of the messages they were intended to convey can only have become clear when they were seen to be different from other proximate names. And herein lies an interpretative paradox. Our understanding a place-name like Broadwas has been enhanced because it has been seen to belong to a wider group of other names in *-waesse*. Through the comparative study of this element in isolation it has been possible to demonstrate how the term was applied methodically in similar riverine contexts across the country (Gelling 1984, 59-60). But for an Anglo-Saxon, Broadwas gained its meaning only when considered against the backdrop of other local names irrespective of their types or the elements they contained. Seen through this lens, then, single name-group studies, valuable though they are in providing etymological insights that would otherwise remain beyond our grasp, have a restricted usage when dealing with the motivation for naming and contextualizing how names may have operated on the ground.

The spatial component to naming introduces a third aspect of Cartesianism yet to be mentioned, that of cartographic reckoning. Quite correctly, considerable efforts have been made to map Old English place-names and much is made of the resulting distributions of particular place-name elements when viewed at a national or regional

scale. But it must be questioned just how conscious the coiners of Old English place-namers were of the distributions they were contributing to making. At more local scales, notable advances have been also been made, for instance, in locating and plotting features named on Anglo-Saxon estate boundaries (e.g. Hooke 1999). If the resulting maps allow *us* to make sense of the geography of the Anglo-Saxon landscape, we are duty bound to ask how effectively they represent the geography of the Anglo-Saxons *themselves*. Can a textual description of a boundary, presumably originating in oral testimony, given by those thinking about space in non-Cartesian ways, be properly translated on to a map which obeys all the rules of Cartesian grid projection? What is lost or added by so doing? What becomes muddled, or changed, or misrepresented?

Here Broadwas can again stand as an example. The bounds of its estate are described in a charter purporting to record the gift of land by Offa, king of Mercia, to the monks of St Mary's church, Worcester drawn up between 779x790AD. Although the charter itself is considered untrustworthy, the description of the boundary (written in Old English) fits the geography of the estate as it can be securely reconstructed in the eleventh century suggesting it has a basis in reality (Hooke 1990, 90). In translation, the boundary is described thus:

‘From Teme stream to white/pleasant beck; from white/pleasant beck to wood moor; from wood moor to wet ditch; from the wet ditch to the ridges/lynchets; and from the ridges to the old ditch; from the old ditch to sedge’s pool; and from the sedge’s pool to the stream’s head; and from the head to thorn bridge; from thorn bridge to the stream; and along the stream to bridge over the brooks; from the bridge to the wet syke; from the watercourse to fox beck; from fox beck to the wolf pit; from the pit to the old stile; from the stile to Doddenham people’s pool/stream; from the pool back to the Teme stream.’ (S126; adapted from Hooke 1990: 87-90)

Several points of interest, many held in common with the majority of comparable boundary descriptions, emerges. No indication is given to the location of the start/finish point in relation to the estate itself or its principal settlement. No indication is given of the direction of travel—in this instance, and rather unusually, proceeding anticlockwise around the estate. No indication is given of the distance between chosen boundary

markers. Yet despite this, bounds such as this are conventionally mapped in Cartesian space (e.g. Fig. 1).

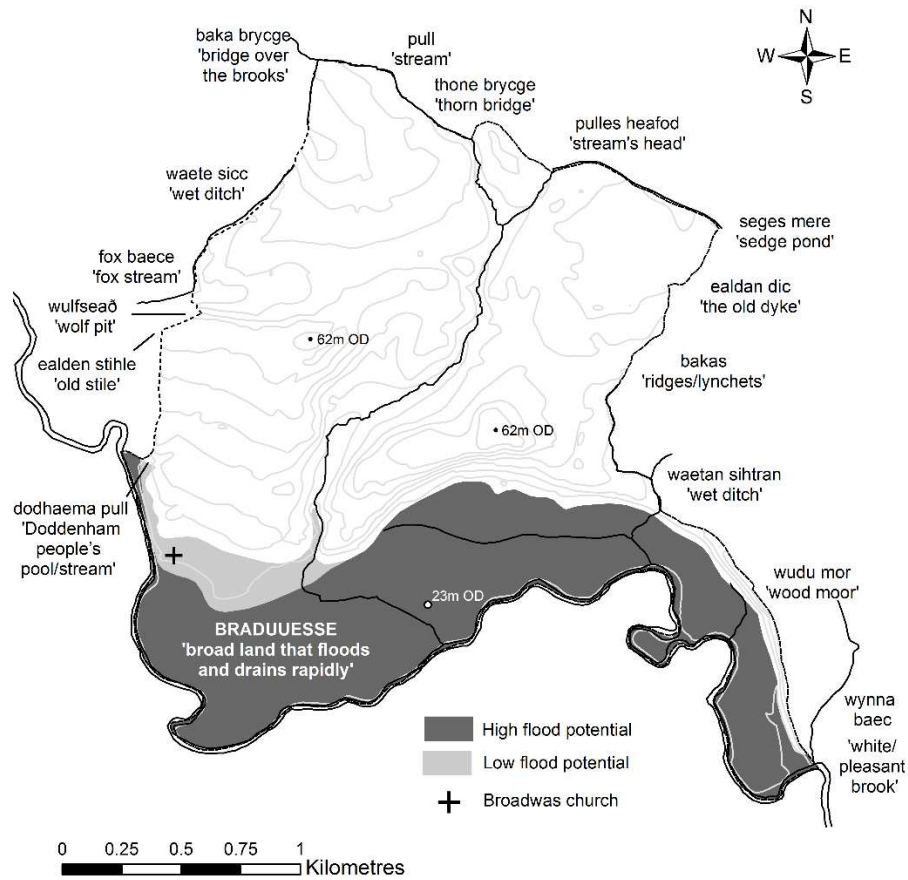


Fig. 1: Cartesian mapping of named features on the bounds of the Broadwas estate WOR (after Hooke 1990, 89 with additions).

Maps such as this, of course, are not without their utility. However imperfectly they do reflect something of the geographical perceptions of the Anglo-Saxons. The inclusion of contours, for instance, appears to be justified since there is an overriding body of evidence which proves that they thought about the land in three-dimensional terms. In this particular case, it might also be surmised from the name of the estate that water was a local issue. Mapping the extent of the Teme floodplain, which reveals how the church was placed at the very edge of the high water mark tells us something about how the Anglo-Saxons succeeded in co-existing with a mercurial river prone to overtop its banks. But there are other ways of mapping the same. Fig. 2 is an attempt to map the early medieval estate of Broadwas in non-Cartesian (perhaps more correctly semi-Cartesian) terms as a way of getting closer to historical reality. First the map has been reoriented: where the cardinal points played a role in marking space—as we know they did through

the many Old English directional place-names on record (Jones 2012b)—east was at the top of the Anglo-Saxon cognitive map. Interestingly, in this orientation, the start point of the boundary description locates at the topmost point of its course although perhaps not too much should be read into this coincidence. Secondly, an effort has been made to locate named features used as boundary markers for which often no physical evidence survives, in two ways. First, they have been established through the conventional examination of the actual topography—thus stream-names are collocated with watercourses as they appear on the ground. But secondly, the previously overlooked aspect of intervisibility has also been included in considerations. By creating viewsheds from securely located points on the bound, this has been used to suggest the location of those whose position is less certain. By way of example, individual viewsheds for markers on the northerly (originally lefthand to use a corporeal metaphor) edge of the estate are shown in Fig 3. This shows how the location of *pulles heafod* ‘stream’s head’ might be suggested by considering the maximum extent of visibility along the boundary from the preceding point, *seges mere* ‘sedge’s pond’. Following this principle, it can be shown that *thone brycge* ‘thorn bridge’ occupies a similar location in respect of ‘stream’s head’ at the limit of its viewshed. The restricted vista from the thorn bridge then seems to dictate the need for the marker known as *pull* ‘stream’ even though the distance between the two is very short. From this projected point, and despite some dead ground, the next point *baka brycge* ‘bridge over the brooks’ can be seen. In fact, working from the first named point, *wynna baec* ‘white/pleasant beck’, and following the sequence of the boundary description using both intervisibility *and* topography as determining factors in identifying the site of markers, each subsequent marker is visible from the one preceding it without exception. Intriguingly, the map also suggests intervisibility over the floodplain from the first and last named markers thus completing the circuit.

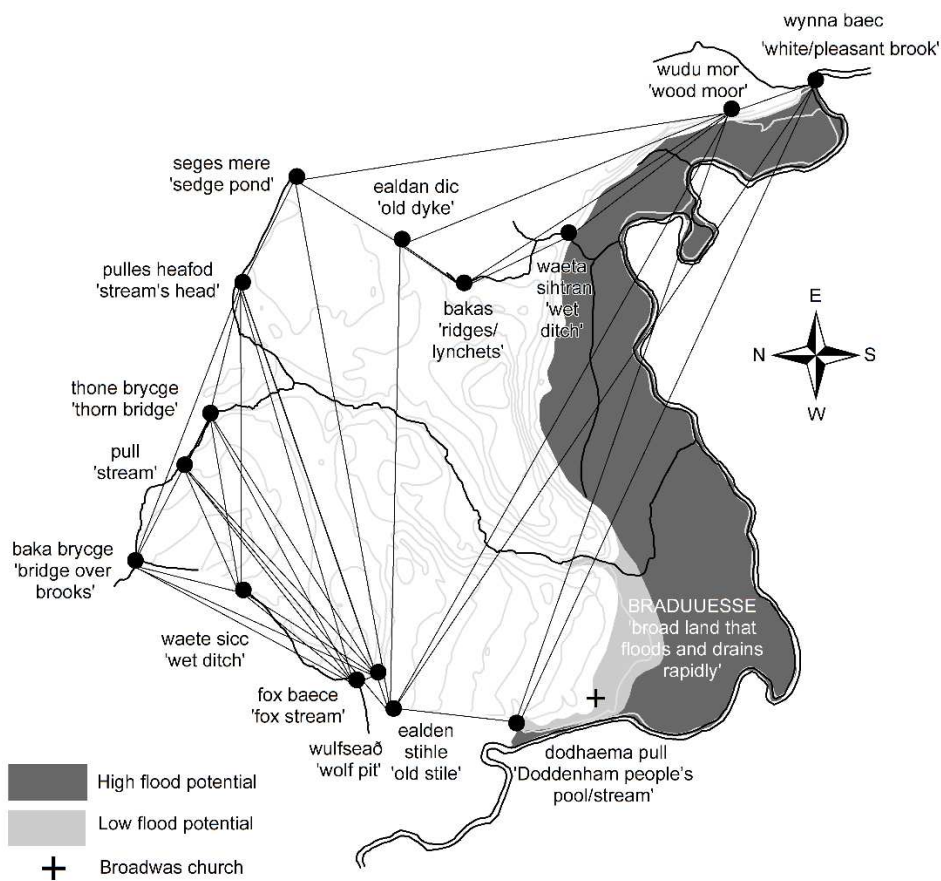
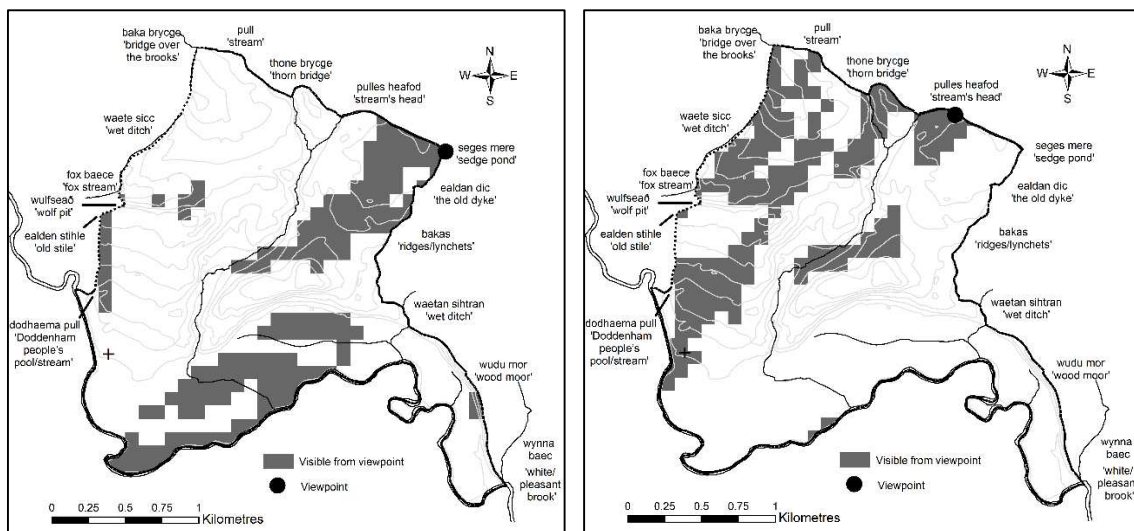


Fig. 2: An attempt to locate and depict named boundary markers using non-Cartesian geographical reckoning. Lines between markers indicates intervisibility



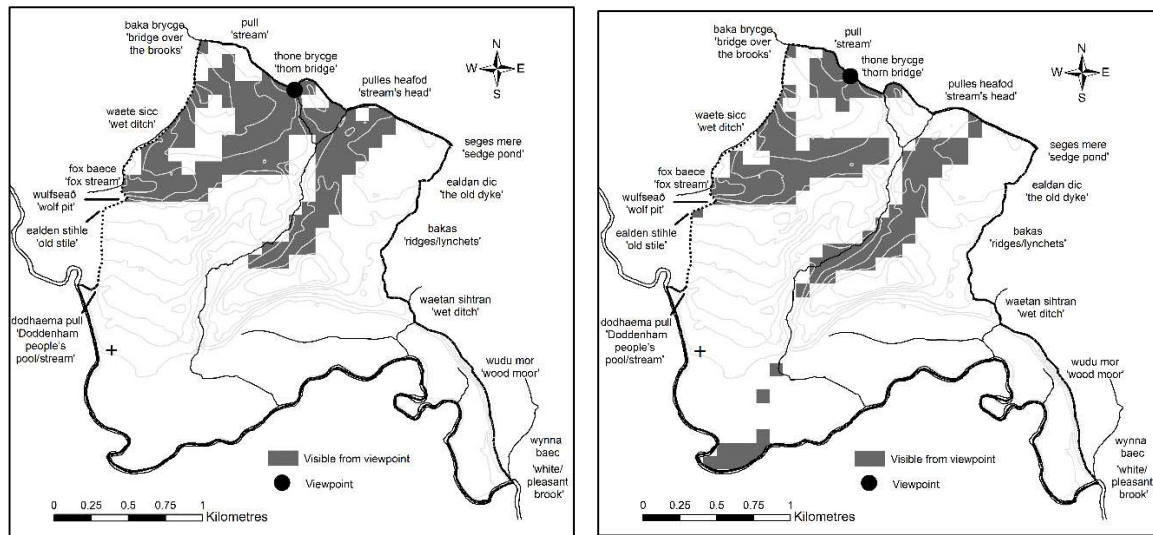


Fig. 3: Viewsheds generated in ArcGIS from named boundary markers: Clockwise from top left: from seges mor; from pulles heafod; from pone brycge; from pull.

Examined in this way, further credence is given to the fact that the rather floating, fluid, and relational (from a to b; from b to c...) non-Cartesian geography reflected in the description of the boundary clause, was born from deep familiarity with the lie of the land and the social and cultural embeddedness of the Broadwas community in their natural surroundings. This is not unexpected, of course, but given that early medieval perceptions of geography followed different rules to those used in the modern world, the possibility that the role played by place-names in the marking of the Anglo-Saxon landscape will not accord with modern expectations must also be acknowledged. Yet this is rarely considered in the existing literature. To break the hegemony of Cartesianism which so profoundly colours current interpretations of Old English place-naming, it is useful to turn to other parts of the world where non-Cartesian worldviews persist.

Old English place-names as Traditional Ecological Knowledge

Despite the obvious dangers of uncritical cross-cultural borrowings, examining the creation, application and use of place-names within non-Cartesian cultures holds the potential for provide insights into Anglo-Saxon naming practices. Such is the case among many indigenous communities, where place-names are seen to belong to a wider repertoire of local understanding known in the literature as Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) (Inglis 1993; Berkes 1999). TEK has been defined as:

‘a cumulative body of knowledge, practice and belief, evolving by adaptive processes and handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment.’ Berkes (1999, 8)

Those societies most closely associated with TEK tend to preserve and rely upon oral traditions and actively use material objects and symbols to communicate. While Anglo-Saxon society became progressively more literate from the ninth century AD, text was not the primary medium of communication for the majority. From later evidence we know that story-telling and the oral tradition played a central role in early medieval society, so too the use of material culture as a means of spreading ideas and establishing identities (Scragg 2003). Despite considerable separation in time and space, then, such cultural parallels between contemporary indigenous practices and the Anglo-Saxon world should not be overlooked and encourage the view that similarities of place-naming practice might also exist between the two.

Indigenous and First Nation peoples, from the Inuit of the Canadian Arctic to the desert nomads of Oman, ubiquitously use place-naming as a powerful and effective means of communicating TEK. The resulting name assemblages serve as cognitive maps where individual and collective experiences of the physical, social, cultural and spiritual worlds of communal space are brought together and preserved (Davidson-Hunt and Berkes 2003). This mixing of what would be considered to be separate spheres is a defining feature of TEK. Within the TEK communicative inventory—which includes the recounting of stories, myths and legends; the performance of rituals; the creation of law; the structuring of language; and a range of daily practices—place-names enjoy particular significance since they allow ecological knowledge (defined broadly to include human and supernatural dimensions) to be attached to specific locations where it can be made available and drawn upon in spatially relevant ways. On Baffin Island in the Canadian Arctic, for example, Inuit place-names such as *Iqalufgalik* ‘Arctic cod here’; *Ukalialuk* ‘where rabbits are plentiful’; *Ullirjuaq* ‘resting place for walrus’; *Ukkusitsarjuaq* ‘stone that Inuit used to make “qulliq” stone lamp’; *Ingiuliktuuq* ‘the water in this place always wavy’ have a direct bearing on cultural and subsistence practices (<http://www.ihti.ca/eng/iht-proj-plac.html>). These are neither poetic nor fanciful names (although they may have been born from story-telling traditions), but rather

names which map out vital sources of protein, raw materials for use in manufacture, human activity, and areas of danger in a challenging environment.

Although seen to incorporate a similar range of ideas, Old English place-names have not previously been considered in TEK, in part, perhaps, because of their prosaic and perfunctory form; in part perhaps because they map out a temperate and comfortable environment in which human survival is not a prime concern; in part because the Anglo-Saxons cannot be considered to be indigenous to Britain; in part because we are dealing here with a broken rather than continuous tradition. Thus a transparent name such as Oxford has conventionally been interpreted on the literal basis of the two elements that make up the name: *oxna* ‘oxen’s’ + *ford* ‘ford’ and no further dimensions to the name have been explored. However, it is a short but radical analytical step to interpret Oxford, a name dismissed by early place-name scholars as ‘trivial’ (Stenton 1911 quoted in Cullen 2013) not simply as ‘oxen’s ford’, but as ‘the place where oxen cross the river’. Indeed the form of name should encourage this approach for it is clear that it began as a descriptive expression rather than as a ready-made bestowed place-name (Coates 2013, 145-147). By taking this interpretive step, the name becomes activated. It immediately has the capacity to offer new layers of meaning. If interpreted as ‘place where oxen can be driven over the river’ the name speaks of human experience; if seen as ‘place where oxen commonly cross the river’ the name communicates something of the natural behaviour of animals; and if read as ‘place where the water is sufficiently shallow for oxen to cross the river/so deep only oxen can cross the river/place offering safe passage for oxen across the river’ it speaks of the physical characteristics of the river itself.

The ramifications that flow from this shift in emphasis, which foregrounds the dynamic rather than static aspects of place, are profound. And it certainly helps to align Old English place-names much more closely with indigenous naming practices known from elsewhere. Viewed this way, it is not difficult to find among Old English place-names analogies for the Inuit examples already cited: Elmer SSX could surely be read not simply as ‘eel pond’ but ‘pond where eels to be found’ and likewise Harley SHP ‘the hare clearing/wood’ might have spoken of the abundance of hares available for trapping. Assuredly Selsey SSX ‘seal island’ resonates with the Inuit’s ‘resting place for walrus’. Quorndon LEI ‘hill where quern-stones are obtained’ matches the Inuits’ *Ukkusitsarajuaq*, while Gussage DOR ‘the gushing stream’ must have warned the local community of the dangers of water just as *Ingiuliktuuq* does.

Thought of thus, Old English place-names fulfil all the expected criteria of TEK-encoded place-names (e.g Davidson-Hunt and Berkes 2003):

1. They provide rich descriptions of the physical landscape, showing deep understanding of the subtleties of topography and texture, and knowledge of the opportunities it provides and the limitations and dangers the environment imposed.
2. They conventionally offer detailed information about the management and exploitation of the land, the availability of natural resources, its flora and fauna, local agricultural practices, and even track the seasonal movements of people and animals.
3. They mark the location of permanent settlements and temporary camps. They map out social worlds through references to named individuals and specific groups of people, on occasion identifying prevailing social hierarchies, patterns of ownership, and administrative spaces.
4. They provide historical depth to the landscape by recording past events and human activities, names preserve memory and help in acts of remembering.
5. And finally, they mark out the spiritual geography of the land and its people.

Purely on the basis of shared cross-cultural semantics, then, there are good grounds to treat Old English place-names as a storehouse of TEK *and* to believe that they may have been created and applied in ways very similar to those observed in other parts of the world. Critically, as studies of TEK-names have shown elsewhere, it is not how a name operates individually that matters, but how they are assembled together to bring order and meaning to the totality of the environment within they are encountered.

TEK in the Anglo-Saxon Landscape

Since TEK-names, as they have been defined, are designed to communicate a wide range ideas which map out entire ecosystems as experienced at a human scale, the task of describing the role played by Old English place-names across the whole of the Anglo-Saxon landscape is daunting. Here, for simplification, water is used as a point of departure before a broader evaluation of TEK naming patterns is explored in a single local case-study.

The foundations for the systematic study of English place-names with watery connotations were laid down by Gelling (1984) and later expanded by Gelling and Cole (2000). The material they gathered was organized into three basic groups—‘rivers and springs, ponds and lakes’; ‘marsh, moor and flood-plain’; and ‘river-crossings and landing-places’. In a more recent study of hydrological toponyms found in the deserts of Oman, the researchers similarly began by arranged these names into particular categories based on the type of physical features to which they refer (Kharusi and Salman 2015). The organisation of these names is shown in Fig. 4.

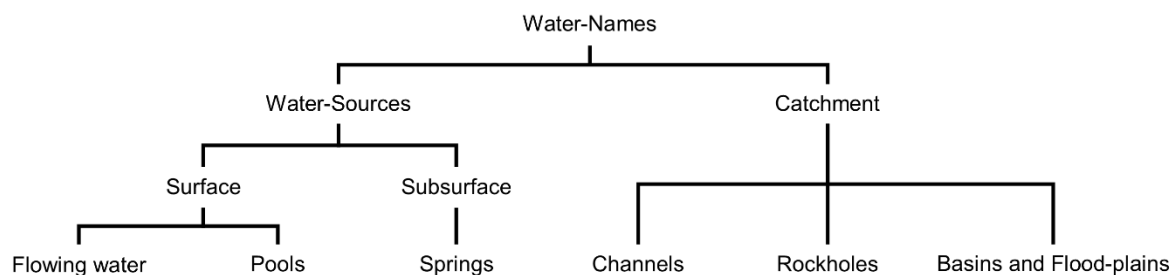


Fig. 4: Classification of Arabic hydrological terms found in Oman (after Kharusi and Salman 2015, 23).

There are striking correspondences between this classificatory system and that proposed by Gelling and Cole for early medieval English place-names. In both cases, the arrangement is logical and sound when viewed from within the Cartesian paradigm. Indeed, using the Omani study as a template, the categorization of Old English water-names can be developed more fully than previously attempted. The corpus can be divided, for instance, between names which directly refer to water in a range of forms; and those names that establish the presence of water through indirect inference (Fig. 5).

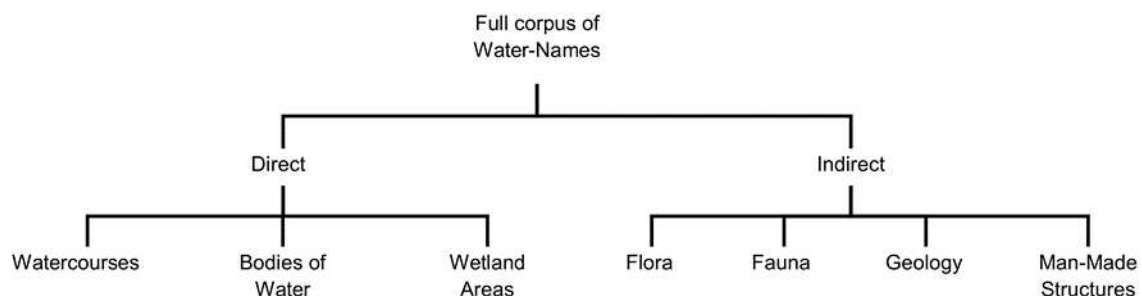


Fig. 5: A basic classificatory systems for Old English place-names indicating the presence and characteristics of water.

These can then be subdivided into smaller categories which in turn can be examined for the kinds of information they may have sought to convey. A distinction can be drawn, for instance, between place-name elements referring to ‘natural’ watercourses (e.g. *brōc* ‘brook’; *burna* ‘bourne’ etc.) and those that indicate ‘artificial’ channels (e.g. *adela* ‘sewer’; *Prūh* ‘conduit’ etc.). Furthermore, when carefully examined it can be shown how indirect references, such as those containing the names of water-loving flora, intersect with the three categories of direct reference giving the sense of some real form of coherence underpinning the overall classificatory system (Fig. 6).

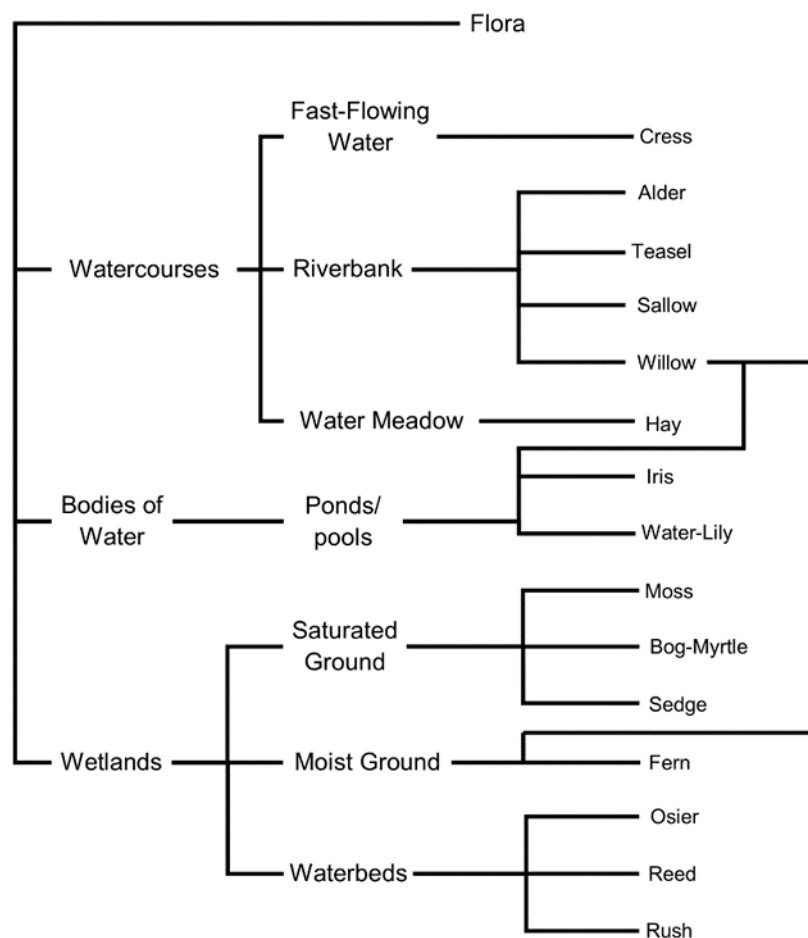


Fig. 6: The relationship between the fifteen most commonly occurring water-loving tree and plant species used in Old English place-names and the particular habitats with which they are associated.

This framework thus established, it is possible to suggest some basic Anglo-Saxon ‘rules’ used to describing the presence, behaviour, and characteristics of water. It is clear, for instance, that Anglo-Saxons conceptualized rivers and streams as whole entities (Fig. 7). Size, including length and breadth was clearly an important criteria in establishing

appropriate headwords for watercourses (*brōc*, *burna*, *ēa* ‘river’, etc.’; e.g. Cole 1991). Names given to rivers themselves were demonstrably descriptive of the physical or behavioural attributes that held true along the entire, or at least the greater part, of their course. Among these it is possible to see an Anglo-Saxon concern for their morphology hence such names as the river Hamble HMP from **hamol*/**hamel* ‘crooked’, the river Manifold STF from *manigfald* ‘many bends’; and the river Ray WLT earlier known as the *uuoft* from **werf*/**weorf*/**worf* ‘winding’ (Ekwall 1928; Watts 2004). Also common were names which communicated a sense of gentleness and mildness, hence the many river Blythes NTT, NTB, SUF, WAR derived from *blithe* ‘gentle/merry’, the river Idle NTT, from *īdel* ‘idle, slow, lazy’ and the river Tove NTH from **tof* ‘dilatory, laggardly’ the two latter signalling the sluggish nature of their respective flows. At the other end of the spectrum belong the river Bollin CHE from *hlynn* ‘torrent, noisy’, the river Goyt DER from *gyte*/**gōte* ‘rush of water’, and the river Lud LIN from *hlūd* ‘loud one’.

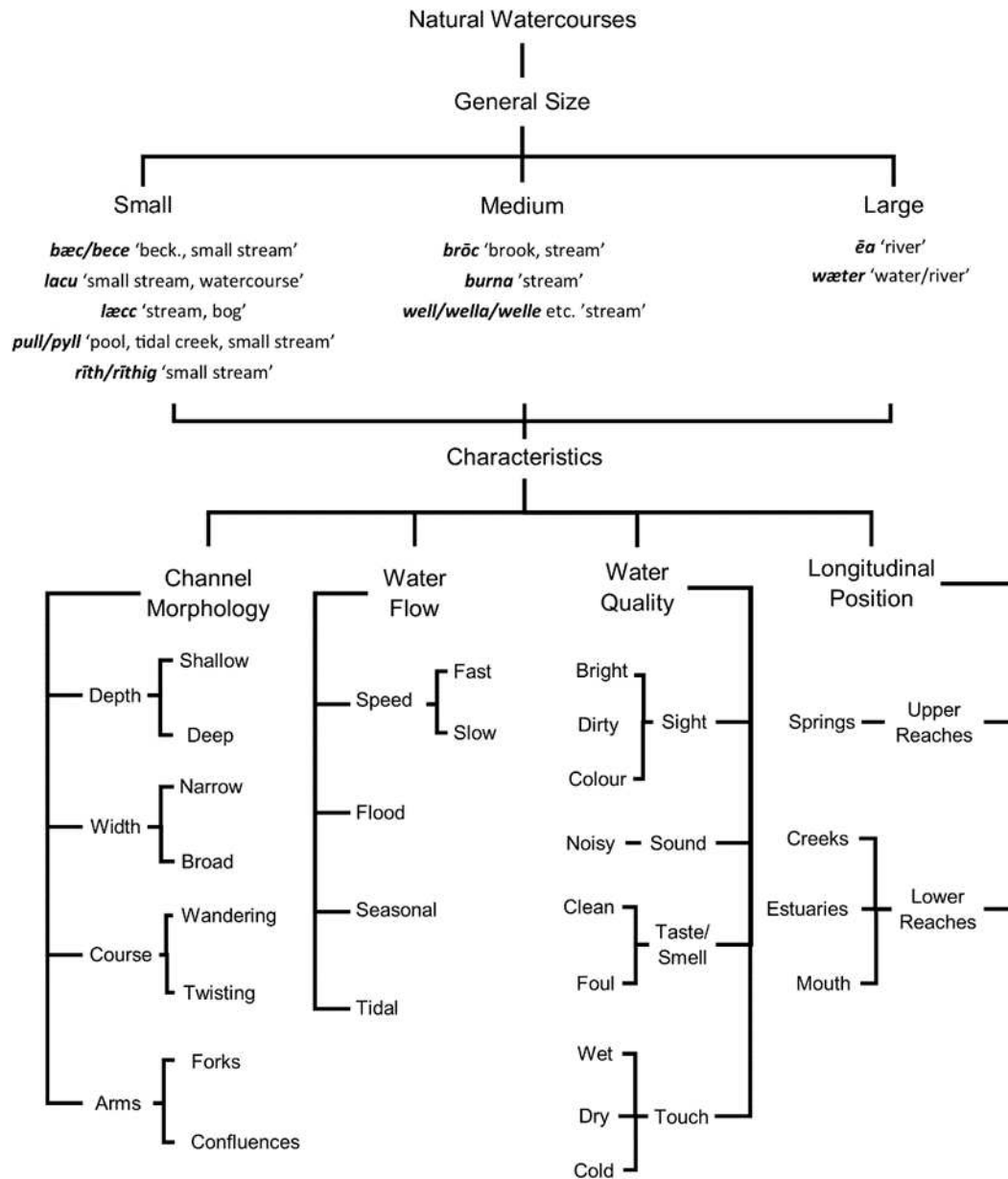


Fig. 7::

However settlement-names, taking their cue from nearby watercourses, appear to have been deployed in a slightly different fashion. Because of their more localized specificity, the behaviour and characteristics of river channels and the water they carried could be broken down into smaller units. Through this disaggregation, a second tier of more detailed information was described and transmitted. Among the corpus can be found names which reveal a consciousness of longitudinal position along watercourses (e.g. *celde* 'spring' to *muða* 'mouth'). The changing shape of channels could also be expressed, many names referring to particularly convoluted stretches of water (e.g. *hūc* 'hook';

wrǣsel* ‘twisted’, ‘knotted’; *wōh* ‘crooked’) or to forks (creowel*; *clawn*; *clēa*; *gafēluc*; *gafol*; *twisla*) and confluences (*ēa-mot*; (*ge*)*myðe*). Places where the channel narrowed or broaden, shallowed or deepened could be identified. Place-names such as *winterburna* described seasonal flows, while the terms *Pyrre* ‘dry, withered’ and *drȳge* ‘dry/dried up’ must have signalled intermittent flows. Elements such as *pyll* ‘estuary, creek’ and *flōd* ‘flow, flood, tide’ indicated tidal reaches. Freshwater could be distinguished from salt-water, and critically clean water from dirty. *Fūl* ‘foul, dirty, filthy’ was one of the most commonly compounded terms with other water generics giving, among many others, Fulbrook OXF (with *brōc*), numerous Fulfords, Fulham MDX (with *hamm* ‘land enclosed by water, water meadow etc.’), and Fulwell DUR (*wella*).

Along the full length of rivers these kinds of name acted in concert to describe the whole system. This can be demonstrated from water-names found along the middle and lower reaches of the river Trent (Fig. 8). Working from its mouth, *flēot* ‘tidal estuary’ mark out the tidal mud flats. There is a notably group of *hȳð* ‘landing-place’ names approximately 30km upstream still within the tidal reach. Averham (Fig. 9), from *ēagor* ‘at the floods’ speaks of the dangers of inundation at the upper limit of the tidal flow. Interspersed among these names are those identifying fording places, islands ‘*ēg*’ and steep embankments ‘*clif*’. Other names mark out the waterlogged nature of the ground (e.g. the Mortons and Fenton) or riverine soils (e.g. Girton from *grēot* ‘gravel’); while names like Sawley and Wilne contain references to water-loving trees sallow and willow. Names in *hām/hamm* have not been named on this map because they cannot formally be distinguished in the part of the country. They are shown, however, as white dots where they can be seen to cluster at the point where the river turns to the southwest. Close study of their floodplain location revealing that many occupy positions that might be apposite for the element *hamm* ‘land hemmed in by water, water meadow etc.’ (Fig. 9) perhaps point in this direction.

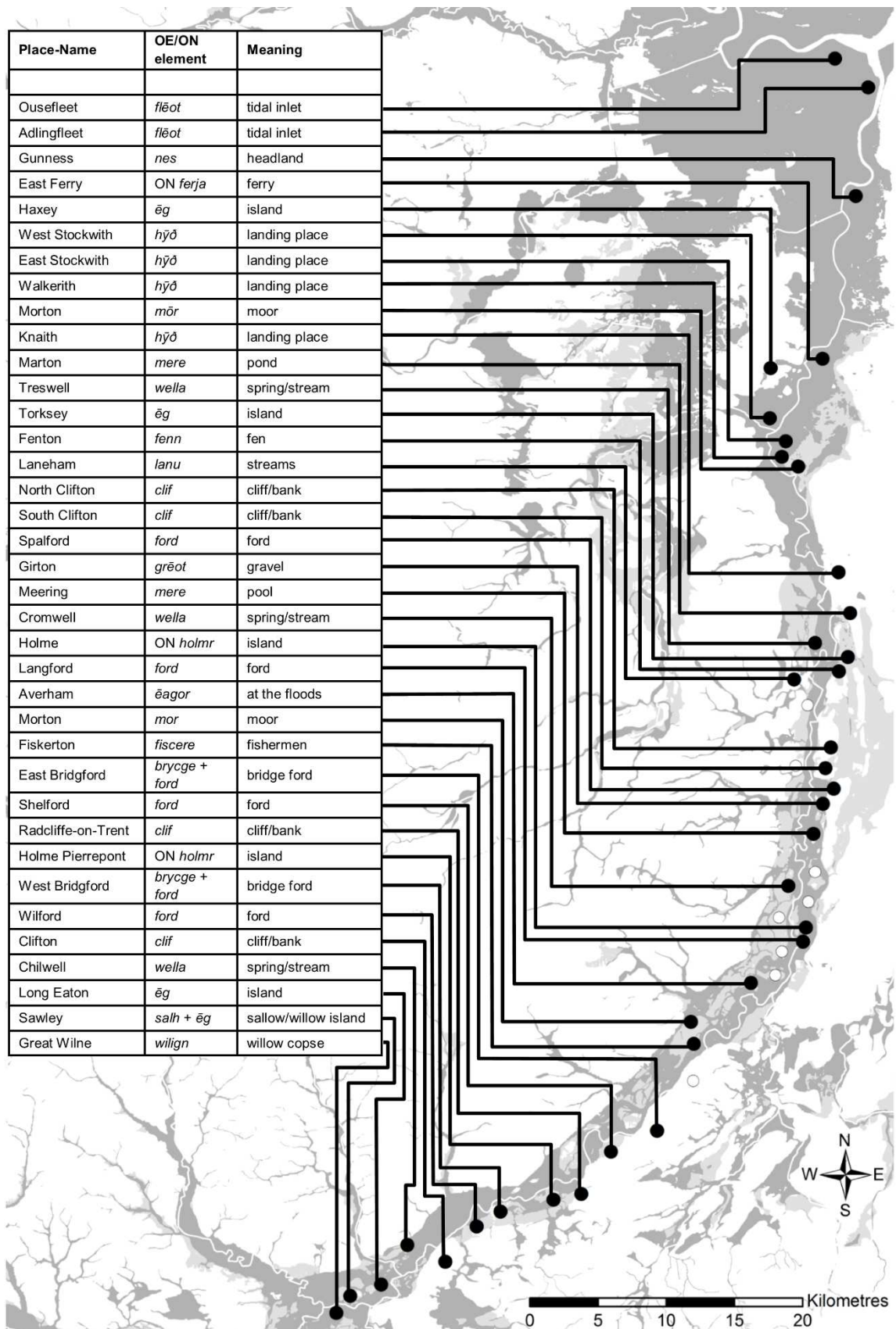


Fig. 8: Water-related place-names along the middle and lower reaches of the river Trent.

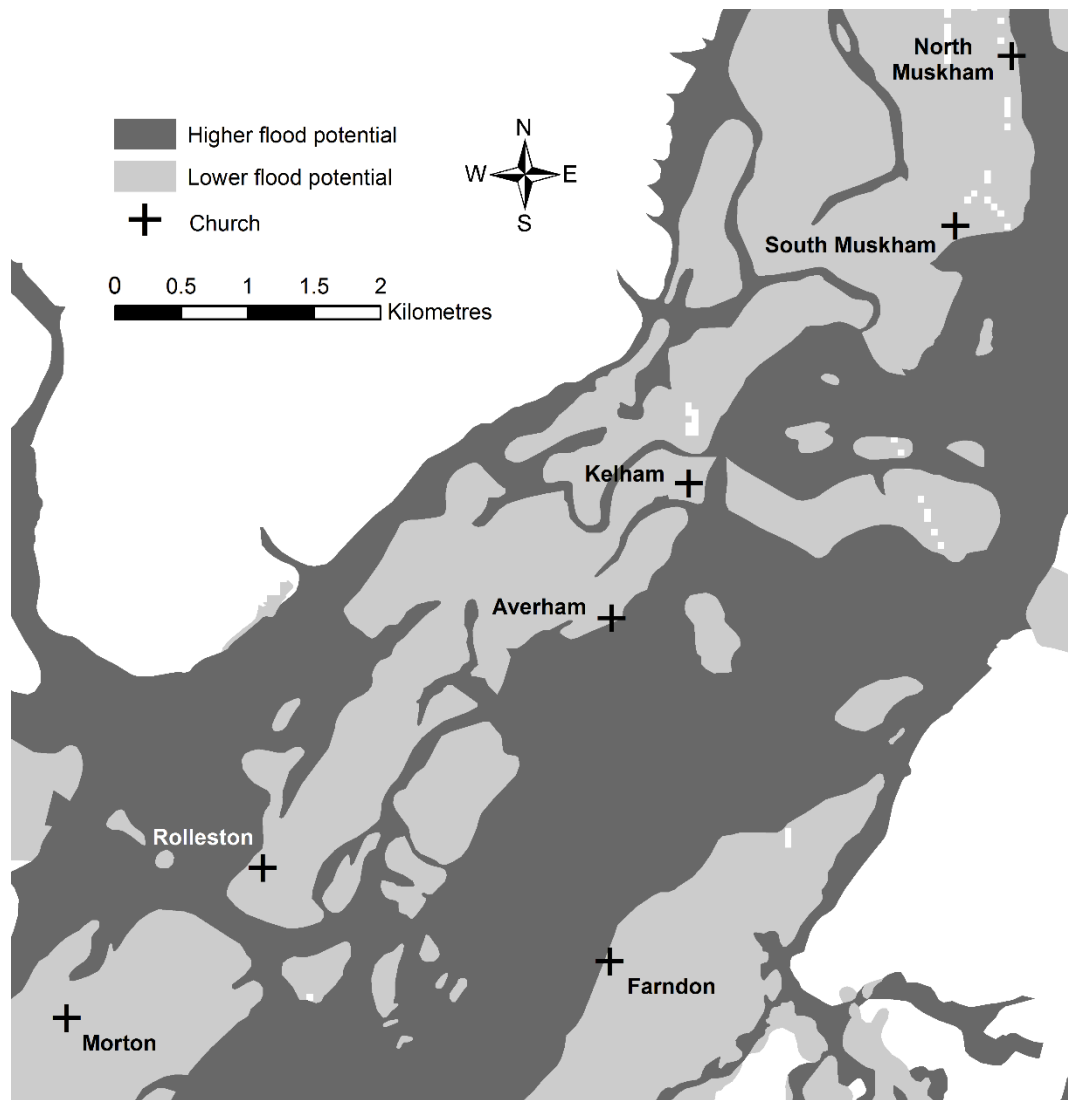


Fig. 9: Hām/hamm-names on the river Trent flood-plain near Newark NTT. Each occupies slightly raise ground with their churches located at the edge of ground now deemed at high risk from flooding appropriate for hamms 'land hemmed in by water, water meadow etc.'. Averham '[settlement] at the floods' is also marked, together with Farndon 'the fern hill' and Morton, 'marsh settlement'.

Riverine place-names such as these attest, then, to the fact that the Anglo-Saxons possessed and operated a highly sophisticated system for classifying river systems. Names were coined and applied methodically, hence why certain place-name elements can be seen to occur in very similar environmental contexts. The vocabulary available to place-namers was extensive and precise. And the same holds true for water in other states. The Anglo-Saxon's were equally exact in their description of standing water, low-lying wetlands, and upland moor. The information encoded in these names, much of which was clearly of practical use to those who lived with water, and which was made available through them where it mattered most, elevates these names beyond pure

topographic descriptors (as they have so often previously been regarded) to become critical components in the communicating of TEK. But it is in this latter context that the Cartesian classificatory system begins to demonstrate its limitations.

One key conclusion drawn from examining the construction of TEK within some indigenous cultures is that:

‘Adaptive learning does not occur in the abstract. It emerges through individual action situated in a social-ecological environment. A person does not learn a classification of habitats in the abstract, but learns about habitats through experiences on the land. Places on the land are not just described as a category of habitat, but as a place with attributes of biophysical characteristics and history. These places become known as a person travels within the land.’ (Davidson-Hunt and Berkes 2003).

This has serious implications for how we should approach Old English place-names. Unquestionably the Anglo-Saxons were highly conscious that theirs was a landscape comprised of different environmental components. Hence in *Beowulf* can be found the description of Grendel as the ‘notorious prowler of the borderlands, who held the wastelands, swamp and fastness (*mære mearcstapa, se þe moras heold, / fen ond fæsten*; ll. 103-4; Swanton 1997, 38-39); or Felix’s description of Crowland LIN surrounded by ‘trackless bogs within the confines of the dismal marsh.’ in his *Life of St Guthlac* written c. 730-740AD (Colgrave 1985, 89). And this type of compartmentalization is reflected, at least in part, in the different place-name vocabularies deployed in certain physical settings. But that said, it is moot whether the Anglo-Saxons conceptualized the wider landscape as a mosaic of discrete habitats—in the characterization of Gelling and Cole as ‘rivers, spring, pools, and lakes’, as marsh, moor and flood-plain’, as ‘trees, forests, woods and clearings’, and ‘ploughland and pasture’.

One aspect of Old English place-naming which has gone largely without comment, but demands attention, is just how comfortably a single place-name name can accommodate several aspects of a place at one and the same time. And very often this is information drawn from opposite sides of the nature/culture divided. Into this category would fall the Trent names Aldingfleet ‘tidal inlet of the princes’, Gunness ‘Gunni’s headland’, and Torksey ‘Turoc’s island’ where a topographical feature is qualified by a socio-cultural dimension. And this might also work in reverse, hence Morton ‘marsh estate’, Girton

‘gravel estate’ and Fenton, ‘fen estate’ where the habitative term *tūn* is presented with reference to its physical attributes. Or to take an individual element such as *mersc* ‘marsh’. In major place-names nationwide it appears in simplex form on five occasions. It appears as a first element in names where it compounds with *tūn* frequently as we have seen, and more rarely with *hām* ‘settlement, group of houses etc.’ and *wudu* ‘wood’. As a second element it is found in association with personal names, occasionally with the names of birds and types of vegetation, and with a range of descriptive terms indicating soil type, colour, and size (Gelling 1984, 53). The broad range of name-forms in which ‘topographical’ terms of this kind appear is characteristic of the Old English place-name corpus as a whole. This constant blurring of these different spheres of human experience—whether physical or social—in place-naming, it should be stressed again, is reflective of the integrative rather than disintegrative worldview of the Anglo-Saxon namers and the existence in early medieval England of a ‘socio-ecological’ environmental unity. And it also points to the fact that these names were intended to communicate a bundle of sociospatial concepts simultaneously rather than operating as simple habitat indicators.

With this in mind we might usefully return to the Southwell estate with which we began. Here four actual Anglo-Saxon journeys can be followed where knowledge of the landscape and its people was enshrined in place-names. These journeys were made to describe the boundaries of the Southwell itself, and three of its member estates: Normanton, Upton and Fiskerton. They were recorded when part of the royal estate at Southwell was granted to Osketel, archbishop of York in 956AD (Lyth 1982; Lyth and Davies 1992). Taken together with the major names and the river-name Greet, from *grēot* ‘gravel’, 43 names have been passed down over a millennium. From simplex names describing in shorthand some of the physical attributes of the land (marsh, cottage, grove etc.), to compound names where two general attributes of a place have been brought together (names like *miclan beorh* ‘big hill’ and *hocer pudu* ‘hillock wood’), together these might be seen as the foundational building blocks of a local TEK repertoire. Among these are the water-names which, unlike their artificial isolation when discussed in the context of the Trent, can be seen here to be fully integrated into a more complex encompassing local nomenclature. Distributed across the area are other names which speak of intimate knowledge with the land and human interaction with it: names such as *dil halle*, ‘dill hollow’ and *fule fleot* ‘foul creek’. Individuals are associated

with estates and settlements, but also with landscape features (e.g. *Gypesmere* ‘Gippe’s pond’). Time depth is provided by reference to the *ealda stream* ‘old stream’, *ealdarn treot* ‘old street’, and *nipa tunes broc* ‘new farm’s

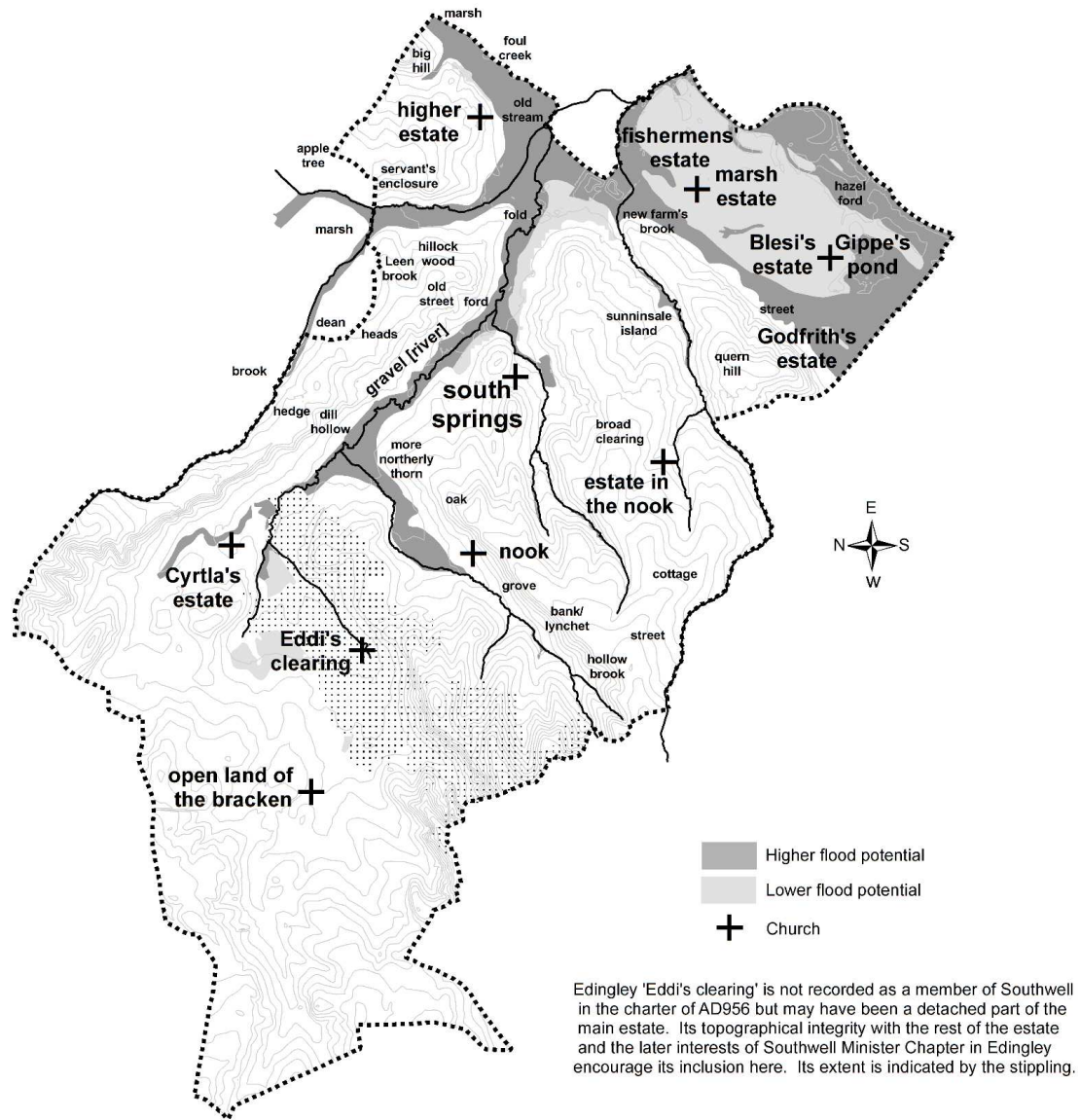


Fig. 10: The Southwell NTT estate as described in AD956.

brook’ marking loss and addition of both natural and man-made elements of the landscape. Other names reflect the hierarchical nature of, and economic specialization within, Anglo-Saxon society as appropriate for royal estate setting (e.g. *dreng haga* ‘servant’s enclosure’ and *Fiscertune* ‘fishermens’ estate’). Coexisting and collocating, these names perfectly reflect the notion that for the Anglo-Saxons ‘[p]laces on the land [were] not just described as a category of habitat, but as [places] with attributes of biophysical characteristics and history.’

Conclusions

It is quite clear that considerable etymological benefits have accrued from separating out place-names into small discrete subsets. This has allowed, and continues to allow, an intensity of study that would otherwise be unattainable. Significant advances in our understanding of individual place-name elements that have been achieved using this approach. It would be foolhardy to abandon this mode of enquiry. However, the philosophical underpinnings of the current framework within which place-names are studied and their implications for analysis should be carefully considered. In several respects they can be seen to be problematic because of the interpretive obstacles they impose. It is for this reason that the adoption of alternative perspectives has been encouraged here.

In particular, attention has been drawn to what might be called the Cartesian contradiction. The modern study of place-names owes everything to Cartesian thinking, and yet most names—and in particular the Old English place-names treated here—were themselves coined within, and were designed to map out a world conceived in very different ways. If we are to understand the motivations that lay behind early place-naming, rather than simply seeking etymological clarification for a name's meaning, then our challenge is to think like the original place-namers. To do so we must be prepared to abandon or at least suspend our reliance on Cartesianism. We must be prepared to question the current classification of names based on anachronistic abstractions and oppositions that have no historical basis; and we must look for new ways of thinking about place-names in non-Cartesian space.

It is suggested here that TEK offers one way forward for studies of historical place-naming practices. What emerges from these contemporary studies is that societies that do not acknowledge a division between the natural and the cultural, and who acknowledge and foster complex, deeply intimate and sympathetic synergies with their surroundings, formulate and deploy place-names in ways that differ significantly from modern Western expectation. The commonalities that emerge from examining historical name-sets such as the Old English corpus in parallel with indigenous place-naming

practices encourage the view that this approach has both validity and considerable potential. That Anglo-Saxons place-names and naming practices should align more closely with those adopted by indigenous peoples than modern western notions of what the role and function of a place-name should be is a further reflection of the gulf that exists between our world and theirs and the intellectual revolution that occurred better or for worse during the Age of Enlightenment.

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