Foreword

This paper is a lightly-edited version of the talk delivered as my professorial (inaugural) lecture at the University of Sussex on 8 June 1993. It is intended mainly to present aspects of linguistic and onomastic research for a town and gown audience with general interests, rather particularly than to convey any contribution of my own to these disciplines. Whilst it is founded on my work in parts, I must acknowledge those other parts which are due to the work of Ann Cole and Margaret Gelling, and those ideas which I believe are my own but which have also been independently expressed recently by Fran Colman and the late Cecily Clark.

Readers in the know will recognize ideas from the mainstream of linguistics, philosophy and onomastics; those who aren't won't care very much - so *shtum* !

On these occasions it seems customary to acknowledge one's longer-term intellectual debts. I didn't do it on the public occasion, but I can conveniently and appropriately do it in the published version. In addition to my current colleagues in Linguistics at Sussex, those who have most profoundly influenced my thinking on language in general, by their ideas, their methods or by their example, and often in ways which may not be obvious to them, include Henning Andersen, Joan Bybee, Kenneth Cameron, Greville Corbett, Eugenio Coseriu, Wolfgang Dressler, Gerald Gazdar, Margaret Gelling, C.F. Hockett, Richard Hogg, Dick Hudson, the late Kenneth Jackson, Bill Lang, Roger Lass, John Lyons, James and Lesley Milroy, Pieter Seuren, Royal Skousen and Neil Smith. As an eminent linguist once commented on reading a roll-call like this on a paper by someone else, "No wonder you're confused." These debts are in addition to others which are self-evident, including to those who got me started: Roy Wisbey, John Trim and Andrew Radford.

I am very grateful to Linda Thompson, without whose skills this lecture would have remained a scrawl in a boxfile full of silverfish for ever.

Richard Coates
27 September 1993

LANGUAGE IN THE LANDSCAPE
Place-naming and language change

What do Icelandic linguists get up to during the long winter nights? One thing they probably don't do much of is place-name research. Research into place-name origins in Iceland is not terribly rewarding from a linguistic point of view, as the overwhelming majority of Icelandic names are recognizably made up of everyday words, and of personal names that are still in current use.

Neskaupstaður	'headland market town'
Akureyri	'cultivated-field gravel-bank'
Þingvallavatn	'water of (the) parliament fields'
Ólafsfjörður	'Ólaf's sea-loch'

These will not prevent the linguist from hibernating. For their full interpretation, only a little extra information is needed, and that is historical or contextual, not linguistic: for instance, who was Ólaf, and what exactly are 'parliament fields'?

The place-name scholar in England, by contrast, is privileged to tackle puzzles of real linguistic substance. Relatively few major place-names wear their origin on their sleeve, and the history of the most ancient can be very very tangled. A 2000-year-old place-name may have been formulated in Brittonic Celtic (the ancestor language of Welsh), possibly adjusted by Latin speakers, and transmitted onwards to the invading Anglo-Saxons, the speakers of Old English. In some areas of England, the name may then have been filtered through Danish, and everywhere then recorded in writing by speakers of Norman French who wrote in Latin, but not the variety of Latin which may have influenced the name a millennium before; or recorded in writing by English speakers trained in legal French and Latin and writing in these languages. Such a history is substantially true of names like those of York[1], Lincoln, Leeds, and Doncaster. But even names with a less complex history have regularly been ground down and adulterated in a way which leaves a double problem. The first problem is to decide in which language they were originally formulated - by no means always a straightforward matter. The second is to decide what the name originally meant - by no means always straightforward even when it is pretty clear what the language of origin was.

The hypothetical Icelandic linguist has no problem of deciding what language underlies old Icelandic place-names, for Iceland was virgin territory (apart from a few offshore islands - those called *Pápey* - inhabited by masochistic Irish priests) when Ingolfur Árnason settled in 870

internal change; what happens in linguistic borrowing; general second-language acquisition; medium-transfer; and often, the consequences of language death for the names formed in the defunct language.

Though their activities are primarily linguistic, place-name scholars have to be responsive to other interested disciplines, namely history (especially social and political history), ecology, agricultural history, geology and topography. Sobering examples of failures to be responsive in this way litter the intellectual history of place-name-ology. The greatest of all English place-name scholars interpreted one Hampshire place-name as if it contained a supposed English word for the gamebird the capercaillie, in an area which can never have been suitable habitat for it.[2] At the other end of the scale of academic respectability is an article in the presumably defunct and certainly not grieved-over periodical *Soviet Weekly*, in whose edition of 11/7/1981 is an article claiming that certain English and Irish place-names are of Ossetian origin. Ossetian is a North-East Iranian language of the Caucasus mountains: the writer omits to bring forward any independent evidence for Ossetes having ever lurked in these islands. Incredibly, the list of Ossetian names includes *Southend*, yes Southend-on-Sea in Essex. The writer might have saved everyone's blushes if he had known that the place in question had grown up at the south end of Prittlewell parish and that at the opposite end of the parish was a place called *Northend* which never acquired patronage nor, for rather obvious reasons, a pier.

For place-name study, we can force the analogy of a murder mystery: place-naming is a kind of crime against the landscape - fixing an individual's perception of a place at a particular moment as if it were permanent and universal, whereas the nature of any p0 Tc 1 oit we-sp

or *Askrigg*). Cornish remained in existence till the later eighteenth century, and has left its mark in the numerous local place-names in *tre-*, *bos-*, *pen-* and *ros-*. Several other languages, have of course been spoken, especially in modern times, but never formed homogeneous blocks: Irish, Norman (and later Parisian) French, Latin, Flemish, Yiddish and recently the languages of the new Commonwealth. These others have rarely given rise to place-names in England; some French names may be found, such as *Richmond* and *Belper*, but the major exception lies in the French and Latin specifiers of English names, as in *Stanstead Mount-fitchet* (displaying a French family name) and *Ludford Parva* (with a medieval bureaucrat's instinctive way of writing *Little*).

Occasional diverting quirks may be found. There are two nearly Spanish place-names in Sussex: *Carthagena* and *Portobello*. These are datable pretty precisely to *c.*1740. Admiral Vernon took these Caribbean ports from the Spaniards in 1739/40 (during the so-called War of Jenkins' Ear), and their names were transplanted to Sussex in the wake of some media hype. Carthagena is a farm at Somerley near Chichester; it is said to be built of timbers from a barque of the Armada, but place-name scholars quickly get into the habit of ignoring tall tales like this. Portobello is the place near Peacehaven where the bowel movements of quarter of a million Brightonians meet the local prawn population. I have always thought this is a better commemoration of the odious Admiral Vernon than the numerous pubs that bear his name; for it was he that ordered the watering of the sailors' traditional rum ration, later in 1740. Needless to say, these are not evidence for a Spanish speech-community in Sussex, just of Sussex's contribution to eighteenth-century flag-waving.

For the serious business of this section of the lecture, I'll dwell on the replacement of Brittonic by English. The Anglo-Saxons coined vast numbers of names but also adapted some earlier Brittonic ones. Often these are, or are incorporated into, the names of major cities (*Exeter*, *Gloucester*, *Manchester*), though lesser places can also be spotted (*Penkridge*, *Lytchett*, *Penge*). These show no coherent geographical clustering, except that broadly speaking Brittonic names are more frequent the further west you go. It is generally assumed that this reflects the Anglo Saxons' denser settlement and more thoroughgoing administrative dominance in the east, and perhaps even some 'ethnic cleansing' (surely the most disgusting phrase of the 1990s).[3] Nonetheless, some more leftover Brittonic names are occasionally found in the east, but they are usually discovered only because of the implausibility of explanations based on Old English words. An instructive case is that of *Leatherhead*, Surrey, the modern form of whose name is extremely misleading. The following early spellings of the name are on record[4] :

> *(æt) Leodridan* 880-5 AD (copy of *c.*1000 AD)
> Leret 1086, *Lereda* 1156
> *Ledred(e)*, *Leddred(e)*, the normal forms throughout the Middle Ages
> *Ledered(e)*, frequent from the mid 12th to the early 15th century
> *Lerred* 1212
> *Ledreth*, *Leddret* 1255

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[3] The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records that all the Britons in Pevensey were slaughtered by the Saxons in 491.

[4] Taken from J.E.B. Gover *et al.*, *The place-names of Surrey*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (English Place-Name Society volume 11 (1934)), pp. 78-9. Most unusually, t

*Ledride c.*1270, 1327, 1391
Lethered and similar from 1470

The approved explanation until recently was that it derived from the Old English words *lēod(e)* 'people' and **ride* roughly 'ford suitable for crossing on horseback'. The first of these words appears in only one known place-name: *Leatherhead.* The second is a word-form invented (not totally implausibly, I must admit) to account for the shape of the name *Leatherhead.* The resultant explanation gains credibility from the fact that the town stands at the point where an important early road from Croydon to Guildford crosses the River Mole. But no great skill in linguistics is necessary to conclude that the approved explanation is a bit flimsy. Looking a little further than the confines of the English language, we find that *Leatherhead* is interpretable as Brittonic (actually Primitive Welsh in Jackson's system of periods for the description of the Celtic languages) **lēd rïd* 'grey-brown ford'. This explanation has a range of advantages over the English one:

(1) it consists of two fully understood place-name elements

(2) the elements of the name appear in the order normal for an older Celtic place-name (an adjective-noun compound)

(3) the name is of a topographically plausible type: colour-word + *ford* (cf. the common *Redford*, and in Welsh *Rhydwen* (Radnorshire) 'white/bright ford' with the later Celtic element order)

(4) it is geologically appropriate, as Leatherhead is on the Thanet Beds, consisting of light-coloured clayey sand

(5) Leatherhead is a major place associated with nearby major names of early Old English type in *hām*, among which it is central and is therefore probably ancient itself, possibly predating those early Saxon estates

(6) Leatherhead is the site of a minster church, and its position of importance in early ecclesiastical organization strongly suggests that it is therefore an ancient, possibly pre-English, foundation

(7) the spellings available support the hypothesis (this is a technical matter which I shall have to ask you to accept on this occasion)[5]

The accumulated evidence is in favour of Brittonic origin. It is a sign of responsible interdisciplinary behaviour to believe this.

Sometimes, one can only go so far as to cast doubt on the existing theory without erecting a totally convincing new one. Our own neighbour of Lewes is a case in point. I was provoked into working on its name by the dissatisfaction expressed with the current explanation by Margaret Gelling in a lecture gi

never means 'hill' in the south of England, but rather 'artificial mound', especially 'burial mound'. It isn't unreasonable to suspect Lewes of being named from barrows, as they are frequent on the South Downs. But if this story is right, the barrows in question were presumably levelled when the lateish-Anglo-Saxon planned town was laid out. The evidence, therefore, would have been wiped out, unfortunately for place-name scholarship. However the story doesn't fully work on linguistic grounds. If the name derives from *hlæwas*:

(1) it should, for technical reasons, be pronounced /lu:z/ or /lju:z/ in modern times

(2) there should be some initial <h>s in Old English coin inscriptions, but there aren't

(3) Anglo-Saxon coin inscriptions often show *Læ(h)we* or something similar, in which the occasional presence of an <h> in the middle is a problem. Here are some known spellings from pre-Conquest coins[6]:

> LAE URB
> LAEWE, LAEVE
> LAWA, LEAWE, LAEEW, LAEWVE, LAEWWE,
>   LAEWENEN, LAEHWEA, LAEHWGE

To cut a very long argument short, the shape of the place-name is consistent with a derivation from Brittonic *$\overline{lexowia}$* 'slope', which became Welsh *llechwedd.*

Which story to believe? If, as alleged in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the Anglo-Saxons were prone to exterminate the Britons when they met them, an Old English-derived name is more plausible on historic grounds. But the weight of linguistic evidence, though not fully water-tight, give sa clear preference to a Brittonic origin for the name of Lewes. In this case, the other relevant disciplines should take careful note of the linguistic evidence. The general trend of recent scholarship has been to minimize the supposed discontinuity of the Welsh-to-English transition, and to regard events like the Pevense g r o u n d s . B u l p r e s e n o . 2 4 4 1 0 o n

Edwards' novel *The Book of Ebenezer Le Page.*[9] Practically every club and society on Guernsey is "Sarnia this" or "Sarnia that". Unfortunately, this is all hooey. It's true that *Sarnia* appears in two Renaissance manuscripts of a late Roman-period text, the so-called *Maritime Itinerary*. But the majority of manuscripts of this text show *Sarmia*, not *Sarnia*, and what *Sarmia* might denote is fortunately clear. Let's start with this form, assuming it to be stressed on the first syllable, and put it through the sound-changes know to have affected Brittonic in the late sixth century.

> [sarmiā]
> [sermiā] by *i/j*-affection (*c.*500 AD)
> [serm]   by loss of final syllables (*c.*500-550)
> [herm]   reflex of Common Celtic **s*- becomes [h] (*c.*550)

Hey presto! Not Guernsey, but its closest neighbour *Herm.* Before you conclude that this linguistic history is about on the level of Ossetes in Southend, let me explain why I have appealed to late Brittonic, when the Channel Islands are not known as a hotbed of Celtic culture. The first known permanent inhabitants of Herm were a colony of monks transplanted in the sixth century from the monastery on Sark, where the leading light was Maglorius. He was an Irishman who had trained at the great Welsh monastery of Llanilltud fawr under St Illtud himself. Maglorius had spread the Gospel in Brittany - presumably using the Breton language, which was simply the variety of Brittonic spoken in the new colonies which had been settled from southern Britain. The leader on Herm was Tudgual, a saint with a clearly Brittonic name (modern Welsh *Tudwal*). There is therefore a strong presumption that, whatever name was used by Guernsey folk for Herm, the version of it used by its Brittonic-speaking monks was the one which eventually prevailed. I think this is a dramatic instance of the convergence of historical and linguistic evidence at the micro-level, and it can be taken as an

indicator of local patriotism. The same appears to be true for certain names in the East Grinstead area.[10]

The examples discussed up to now are about place-names as evidence for the existence of speakers of particular languages and dialects in particular places and for their migrations; and that completes my brief survey of whodunit.

My second theme is the difficulty of identifying the weapons and moti

the philology of the terms.[12] *Burna* is related to German *Brunn(en)* 'spring', *bro*

essence of their properhood is that they have ceased to mean in any relevant sense of the term. *Lewes* clearly once meant something, whether 'barrows' in English or 'slopes' in Welsh. But the fact that I was able to discuss this earlier in an inconclusive way demonstrates clearly that *Lewes* is meaningless except as a label for a piece of ground, which is arbitrary for its users. *Lewes* doesn't mean anything as a word in the mouths of Modern English speakers. The matter is identical, though rather less obvious, for names which, unlike *Lewes*, have retained some transparency. Lewes has a quarter called *Cliffe*, or *The Cliffe*. The origin of the name is obvious to anyone except the blind, and the constitutionally cautious historical linguist. But if I say: *I have a shop in The Cliffe*, I am claiming nothing which trades on the meaning of the word *cliff*. Even ignoring the trivial difference in spelling, *cliff* is not *Cliffe*. It happens to be true that *The Cliffe extends to the river* and false that *The cliff extends to the river*. It may be helpful to you, in some practical way as you try to guide yourself around Lewes, to be able to wo r

people *covert* is pronounced with a long vowel in the first syllable, like its antonym *overt*; the Middle English word *femele* has become *female* by association with its contradictory *male*; Old English *wermōd* has become *wormwood* because it is a *woody* plant; and an earlier *umble pie* has been reformed into *humble pie*, in the expression *to eat humble pie*, because of the association of its sense, 'to grovel', with the sense of *humble.* In some cases, though, the influence may seem unprincipled. The compound word *nerve-racking*, which clearly once recalled the *rack* as an instrument of torture, has for many users of English become associated instead with the moribund word *wrack* 'wreckage', with the result that we often find *nerve-wracking* as the written form these days. But the only relationship that place-names may have to each other, if they are indeed meaningless, is proximity in real-life or commonsense geography. And we find that this fact sometimes induces analogical reformation too: *Bormer*, a farm in Falmer parish, is now spelt *Balmer*, under the influence of the parish name (which reminds us that the authentic local pronunciation is /f#:m#/). *Tur Langton* and *Shangton* in Leicestershire originated as **Tyrhtelingtūn* and **Scanctūn*, but have their modern form because they are adjacent to *(Church) Langton. Misterton* and *Mosterton* are a couple of miles apart on the Somerset/Dorset boundary. They originated as **Mynstertūn* and **Mortes born* respectively, and their present similarity can only be due to their proximity. The original form of the modern name of Guernsey was *Grenerey*, if transcripts of the oldest documents relating to it can be trusted; and its present name is clearly due to the influence of *Jersey*, which is near enough to it from the perspective of legal offices in far-off London.[17]

We can also find parallels for the unprincipled *nerve-wracking* kind of change. Old English **Candelwyrhtenastræt* in London contained a word amounting to the plural of 'candle-

it actually has. If it is meaningful, you will be committed, in using it, to everything entailed by the meaning of its parts. If you had named a place *Coldharbour* after the famous London one in about 1600, when the spread of the name began, you would have used its transparency to provide a suitable abusive name for a wretched, inhospitable house. You would not have been committed to the house you named in this way actually being a 'harbour', i.e. a shelter or dosshouse. Transfer trades, therefore, on transparency or etymological meaning not semantic meaning (if I may use that rather odd phrase).

I mentioned earlier that in addition to the semi-principled effects of adjacent names, place-names also often show the arbitrary influence of totally irrelevant words, as in the case of *Cannon Street* from *Candlewrights' Street* These resemble the case of *nerve-wracking* that I alluded to earlier on. They are of general theoretical interest as a reminder that the effects of analogy may be too readily dismissed as 'inexplicable', and that the data that they offer, being wild, woolly and unprincipled may be overlooked. A serious point emerges from this. Historical linguistics is in the business of reconstructing the languages which are the remote ancestors of those presently spoken; but secure reconstruction depends on regular systematic correspondences between word-shapes in languages presumed to share a common ancestry. The place-name evidence reminds us that local disturbances to individual words can disrupt the regularity of correspondences and hide the degree of relatedness possessed by a group of languages, and therefore jeopardize successful reconstruction.[20]

Ancient linguistic theory was a battleground between analogists (this term nowadays being somewhat misleading), who believed in the regular, principled, nature of language, and anomalists, who accepted more calmly the obvious irregularities and pattern-holes.[21] Modern linguistic theory, by its nature, has tended to stress the regular; I believe the balance should be tilted back a little to incorporate more fully the role that the unprincipled (or less-principled) has to play in the dynamic phenomenon of natural language.

With these cautionary remarks about the basis of historical linguistics, I conclude the main part of my talk.

Name-research rarely shows dramatic advances. Its progress could be characterized by the original motto of *Woman* magazine: "Forward, but not too fast".[22] In this lecture, I have offered some of the slow-grown fruits of recent research in the intersection of linguistics and name-study, some of it done by myself and some by others. None of it will cure AIDS, improve the surface of British motorways, foster ears of wheat two feet long, or even perfect a mousetrap. It belongs in the nebulous area which some call the frontier of knowledge (though they don't specify on which side of the frontier knowledge lies - a slightly interesting point!) The knowledge gained in this case is non-applicable, except in the service of other academic disciplines such as the various branches of history. No-one would, or could, pay for the research to be done if the only way of funding it was by commercial contract. Yet the number of people in this lecture theatre tonight - not all of you my stooges, by any means - suggests that the topic is one which generates wide interest.

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[20] For some judicious remarks on analogy in general, and its relation to sound change, see Raimo Anttila, *Historical and comparative linguistics.* Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins (1989, second edition), chapters 4 and 5.

[21] See, for instance, R.H. Robins, *A short history of linguistics*, London: Longmans (1990, third edition), chapter 2.

[22] I thought that would take a few seconds to sink in. Arnold Bennett was the first editor of *Woman*, and he may have coined this.

In the end, the contribution of research to some abstract higher goal - the establishment of new outposts on that frontier of knowledge - should only be judged by those who are fully committed to the whole of the academic process: that relentless pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, the acquisition of techniques for mastering that knowledge, and the planning of research to change that knowledge. The committed are not just academics in universities, but all those who beaver away in their own time on projects which very often feed and complement the projects of academics, and also all those who are interested in seeking and consuming the fruits of specialized knowledge: those certainly not mythical "general readers and listeners". The applicability of research, in the narrow sense in which this term is usually understood, will only ever be one among several justifications which people at large will find acceptable. The others embrace the satisfaction of less material interest and curiosity. I hope that universities will continue to stand firm in defence of the idea of universal research: the idea (1) that no subject matter is exempt or foreclosed from rational inquiry, (2) that the general skills of information-g