TOPOGRAPHY, TOPOONY AND TOPOGRAPHICAL TOPONYMS*

It is the aim of this paper to present a review of the use that has been made 1) of topography as the handmaiden of toponymy, 2) of toponymy as the handmaiden of topography, and 3) of toponymy and topography in the service of settlement history.

1. When Henry Cecil Wyld published his Place-Name of Lancashire in 1911, he stated categorically in the Preface 'that place names are here considered as elements of language, and their development as a purely linguistic problem', adding that the book was 'not concerned with the question whether the names fit the places to which they are attached, nor whether they ever did so'. Eleven years later Eilert Ekwall published his book on The Place-names of Lancashire, justifying the apparent duplication by a discussion of the limitations of the earlier work. One of the main objections of the earlier critics was of Wyld's omission 'to make sure the etymologies suggested suit the topographical conditions of the places they designate', an omission that resulted in such squalidities as the interpretation of Nythop as 'the middle valley', in spite of the fact that the place stands on a slight elevation in flat, marshy country.

Even though it was Ekwall's own study of the Lancashire names that was taken as the model for the early publications of the English Place-Name Society (EPNS) he nevertheless felt called in 1947 to criticise the comparative lack of attention the editors had paid to the topographical aspect of onomastic research. Among the criticisms he noted that the study of place-name elements, combined with examination of the sites of the places whose names contain these elements, could sometimes make a contribution to Old English (OE) or Middle English lexicography, revealing the existence of topographical appellatives that are not found in the surviving written sources. For example, a word that was originally an OE word *soll 'hill', for example, related to the recorded Scandinavian *rolla, is suggested by place-names such as Coleshill, Berkshire. Coleshill is situated on a prominent hill. It should be noted, however, that Margaret Oakeshott in her recent discussion of this name, considers that the OE word *soll is only the third of three possible sources for the specific, the other two being a river-name *Soll and a personal name *Coll.

While Ekwall criticised the EPNS editors for not paying enough attention to topography and for being too inclined to take the specifics of place-names to be otherwise unrecorded OE personal names, he was even more critical of a fellow Swede, R. E. Zachrisson, who had instituted a one-man crusade against the acceptance of abstruse and unintelligible derivations of place-names. Ekwall cited a string of words that Zachrisson considered to be unrecorded OE words for 'hill', namely, 'búde, budge, bute, bes, dis, dyd, döver, döden, dröden, dröden, dis (or död), dröver, kvad, tvad, and uron. The explanations of these words given by Zachrisson are indeed for the most part far from convincing. Zachrisson acquired a few rather half-hearted disciples in his lifetime but he died before he could convince the early EPNS editors that it was even worth considering the possibility of interpreting the specific of a name as a topographical element rather than an unrecorded personal name. I was myself inspired by Zachrisson's infectious enthusiasm to embark on a crusade on behalf of topographical terms as the specifics of ingón-names, a crusade that was fostered by my colleague, and the then President of the English Place-Name Society, Alan Hudson, for example, made an erudite and painstaking study of the place-names containing a postulated appellative *till or *tille 'slope, valley with a river', which is a model demonstration of the way in which, even when the number of place-name elements is not sufficient to contain a given element makes it extremely likely that such an element did in fact exist in OE, it is impossible to find any convincing etymological explanation for the element or to point to any topographical feature with which it can reasonably be identified. One of the basic problems with the study of the relationship between toponyms and the topography is, of course, that very few topographical features are so striking that an identification with a topographical appellative can be taken for granted.

2. While toponymists have made use of place-names to identify topographical terms that are not recorded independently in OE sources, historical geographers have long used place-names to identify toponyms that have disappeared from the face of the land and for which there are no other records. Professor H. C. Darby, for example, has demonstrated the way in which place-names can reveal how widespread was the distribution of heath over England in the Middle Ages. Most recently, Professor Alan Everitt has made a study of wold settlements in south-east England, in which he argues that the word wold (OE *wæld) in this area definitely denotes woodland or forest and not simply the 'elevated stretch of country' which it is often said to signify. He remarks that during the centuries when the language of wold was used, it was also used for areas of continuous forest, noting that he has as yet no evidence for woodland on the Yorkshire and Lincolnshire Wolds. Unfortunately, in these areas place-names can only be of limited assistance in solving the problem. There are comparatively few surviving early names containing elements denoting woodland in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, if the ambiguous element *wæld itself is left out of account. This must partly be because in areas of such dense Scandinavian settlement, English place-names that might have been able to provide evidence of early topographical conditions have often been obliterated by the Vikings, whose settlement names were more likely to stress the fact of private ownership than to describe the site of the settlement.

3. A study of the distribution of various types of place-name can contribute to our knowledge of the progress of settlement in England, when the distribution pattern is plotted on a map that gives some indication of the topographical conditions of the landscape. It can be seen that a number of distinctive maps have been made of distribution maps in the study of place-names, reference can be made to a paper by Professor Kenneth Cameron.

The significance of topography and geology for the interpretation of settlement patterns had, of course, been acknowledged many years before they began to be exploited seriously. In 1920 Sir Allen Mawer drew attention to a paper by a Dr. Woolcott in the Geographical Journal for 1907, which pointed out that the surface geology of an area, which affected the way in which water could be obtained, had 'considerable influence in determining the position of minor places of settlement'. In the light of this paper Mawer had a fresh survey made of the topography of the sites of all places-names in Ington in Northumberland and Durham. The result of this survey was rather disappointing, although in eastern Northumberland a correlation could be pointed out between many of the names in Ington and sites not on streams but where geological circumstance would encourage the formation of lakes. It was not until fifteen years later in 1935 that a really serious attempt was made to discuss the settlement pattern of an extensive area in the light of the surface geology. This was Dr. L. W. B. Payling's study of the place-names of the Kesteven division in Lincolnshire. He pointed out that many of the place-names tend to favour sites on gravel spreads over Lias clay, where there would be good drainage and an adequate water-supply, or sites along the spring-ines, where the Lias clay outcrops below the Lincolnshire limestone. The wilts with Scarpis in Herefordshire, which seem to have been woodland in origin, are now in the districts that are likely to have been wooded. This fact led Payling to the conclusion that 'there was no general displacement of the native population during the Scandinavian invasion' but that as the demand for more arable land arose, with a population swollen by the advent of invaders and later settlers, these new settlers gradually cleared more woodland.
Thirty years later again Kenneth Cameron developed Payling's technique to map locations of the sites, of which many are located in the territory of the Five Boroughs. Cameron was well aware of the inadequacy of the small-scale geological maps for his purpose. The information contained in the maps could sometimes be shown to be misleading. At first sight this seems surprising as these maps reveal that much of this area is composed of light or well-drained soils and it was in such areas that the majority of the sites were to be found. John G. Evans has pointed out that there is evidence from various parts of Britain that the kind of medium soil which is best suited for settlement, with high fertility, is often used for arable farming, and an ability to withstand agricultural processes without serious deterioration, can be found overlying a wide variety of solid and drift geological deposits, ranging from chalk to boulder clay. This means that it is dangerous to build too much upon the inference of information from the location of sites which can be drawn from a small-scale geological map, unless confirmation has been sought from soil maps, personal observation or conversation with local farmers. It does not seem unreasonable, however, to base discussions of the types of sites enjoyed by groups of names as a class on the geological drift maps, as long as the limitations of the evidence are borne in mind.

In his three lectures Cameron argued that by and large the Grinstam-hybrids, that is names consisting of a Scandinavian personal name plus the OE habitation generic ðøm, represent English villages taken over and partly renamed by the Danes at an early stage of the Viking settlement in England. The Scandinavian ðøm-names, tend to lie in the valleys of the rivers and in the valleys of the rivers 50-60 km, on the edges of stretches of favourable land, or on much smaller patches of such land than do the English ðøm, and very often they lie on ground that is comparatively infertile or badly drained. The sites of the þorpe tend to be even less suited in this sense of the ðøm. Cameron established by the Viking settlers on the best available vacant land and the þorpe as dependent secondary settlements.

I followed Cameron's lead in my own study of Scandinavian settlement names in Yorkshire and my conclusions largely agreed with his. I noted, however, that there are in all sixteen Grinstam-hybrids in Yorkshire whose situations are demonstrably inferior to those of neighbouring English ðøm and that five of these sixteen ðøm are actually called Grinstam. This means that five out of six places in yorkshire actually called Grinstam have comparatively unfavourable situations and thus form exceptions to Cameron's view of Grinstam-hybrids. I suggested that these names might contain the mythical name ðerþa, a by-name of ðerþ, that may have been used as a pseudonym for the Devil after the conversion of the heathen Germanic peoples to Christianity, rather than the Scandinavian personal name ðerþ. The compound Grinstam would then have had a derogatory sense and the name could have been given to places with unfavourable situations, in the same way as names such as Devil's Hole, Devil's Dale, Cains Grindale, and Grinstam in the West Riding and Job's Close were given in later times to fields that were infertile or difficult to cultivate.

I would now wish to make a radical revision of my views on the Scandinavian settlement. In our treatments of the place-names in relation to toponymy, neither Cameron nor I drew a sharp enough distinction between the age of a settlement and the age of its name and neither of us was willing to recognize the primary desirability of the sites only indicates the order in which they are likely to have been occupied and does not provide an absolute dating for their occupation. A settlement on an unfavourable site might be of considerable antiquity. I would now argue that the ðøm and þorpe reflect not so much conversation in the strict sense as the fragmentation by incoming settlers of large estates into smaller units. Some of these units were probably able to retain their English names, while others were partly or wholly renamed by the Danes and the new names are of course those of ðøm, which may be found in the territory of the Five Boroughs, elements which may or may not have been deserted. These new settlements suggest that there had been an influx of settlers which brought about an intensification of cultivation of the available land, with reclamation of marginal areas, re-occurrences of the kind of settlement simply in terms of the greater areas and sub-division of the old estates into numerous smaller units of settlement.

What kind of names were borne by these large estates or their foci? Some had names of which is is hard to find any hint in the OE. Some names were less generic in the Gothic area and a generic that was often used for districts rather than for individual settlements. Its earliest recorded use is by the historian Strabo (born c. B.C.). His geography of the Rompn Empire contains a reference to the name of Bohemia, 'the country of the Bohemians'. That Ahoban is the OE is suggested by the fact that the Latin version of Bede translates the term by urbs rather than villa (the word used for tin) or urbe (the word used for burh), and that the Latin term used to describe the places bearing Ahoban names in Bede is castrum. The fact that the name is of any interest is that it is more generic in the Gothic area or villa. Assuming that the medieval parishes were sometimes coterminous with older parishes, I have made a study of the kinds of names that were borne by these parishes in Yorkshire and the East Midlands. This shows that there are 55 medieval parishes with names in Ahoband with names in Ingaham. This means that 70% of the Ahoban names and no less than 92% of the Ingaham names are borne by medieval parishes. These figures can, for example, be compared with that for the ðøm-names, of which only about 44% are borne by medieval parishes.

Many old estate centres have toponymical names. In Yorkshire and the East Midlands there are no fewer than 521 medieval parishes with OE topographical names and it is not mentioned in the only part of the saxon belonging to the Danes which was probably coterminous with Biewbury Hundred as it was in the tenth century. Another OE names for villages and settlements within the estate are probably younger, Aston demonstrably so, since it is no called because of its position to the east of Biewbury. The same kind of relationship between a topographical estate name and younger habitation names for individual units within the estate can be found elsewhere in Cromford. In the district of the West Riding, for example, the name of Newcledon, Newcledon was found in the old document of the Archbishop of York. Domesday Book merely records the joint assessment for Sherburn with its 521 inhabitants, neither specified nor numbered, but the source of a later, or an OE document dating from 1030 which describes the estates of the archbishop and names the sherburns of Biewbury. Together they cover about two-thirds of the upland of Birkaton Ash, and in the whole of the area concerned only Birkaton is mentioned as the only part of the saxon belonging to the Danes. The area around Sherburn is still well wooded and that there must have been more woodland in earlier times is shown by the names of the sherburns. There are sixteen places with thirteen different topographical names. Of these, seven have generic indicating woodland: wald (Wood), Lea or clearing in wood-
land' (Flaxley, Barlow), byre 'clearing made by burning' (Burn), birken 'place growing with birch-trees' (Bitkin), and byrast 'wood' (two Hirsts). Of the genealogy place with habitative names, three have specific indications of woodland: *styla 'stump' (Steeton), selw 'willow copse' (Selby), and Scandinavian land 'wood' (Lumby). The only one of the berewick names which puts any difficulty in the way of the suggestion that its bearer originally belonged to the estate of Sherburn is Ledsham, an old name in led whose specific is the British place-name Leeds. Leeds lies some ten miles north-west of Ledsham and Hugh Smith has no administrative connection between the two places is known and therefore he suggests that Ledsham and Ledgemoor mentioned by Bede may have extended into this part of Elmet. Glanville Jones considers that Ledsham, which has an eighth-century Anglo-Saxon church, may originally have been the church focus of a regio Lidoth that would have been co-extensive with the watertakes of Barkston Ash and Skryack.

Sherburn is not by any means the only West Riding estate centre of which we have early evidence. From among the estates whose existence is indicated by Domeday Book and other early sources can be mentioned Bradford, Gomersal, Kippax, Otley, Snaithe and Wakefield, all places with OE topographical names. Estate centres with other types of names do occur, such as Ripon, a tribal name, and Laughton en le Morthen, a habitative name in ten, but the majority of the old estate centres in the West Riding would seem to have had topographical names.

The last kind of topographical toponym that I want to discuss is the x-ing type place-name in which the x is a topographical term or the name of a plant or animal. Examples are Culling in Kent (an OE *cull 'rounded hill') and Clavering in Essex (OE *cildere 'clover'). Such names are comparatively rare in England although they are common in Scandinavia, and I have argued, that they very often lie behind the commoner English place-names in xing. I have suggested that the x-ing name may originally have denoted a large area of land, for example that covered by a present-day parish or even a hundred. As more settlements came to be established within this area or perhaps as subsidiary units within the estate came to be recognised as independent settlements, the common habitative generic ten may have been added to the x-ing name to form a name for the estate centre. It is noteworthy that the majority of the ingten-names in England are borne by parish villages. In the East Midlands and the North and East Ridings of Yorkshire, for example, the percentage of ingten-names borne by medieval parishes is 66.

When arguing for the existence of the x-ing type of name, I acknowledged that some of my suggested xing-names were less certain than others and Margaret Gelling has subjected six of my suggested examples from Berkshire to a detailed investigation. For one of the names, Elvington, she accepted my suggestion that the specific is gelling, probably an appellative denoting an 'eel fishery', while she demonstrated convincingly that my suggested etymologies of Brightwalton and Steventon are less satisfactory then her interpretations involving personal names. For the names Sprott, Donnington and Evington, it would seem at the moment to be a question of taste whether they are to be interpreted as containing personal names or as containing topographical names formed from *grm, a hill-name, dan 'hill' and efnor 'boar'. I would merely plead that the toponymist should bear both possibilities in mind when confronted with an x-ing place-name. And with this renewed plea for an open mind and a willingness to contemplate alternative explanations of difficult names, I will conclude this review of topography, toponomy and topographical toponym.