

## PLACE-NAMES AND ANGLO-SAXON PAGANISM\*

This thesis is an evaluation of four place-name groups believed to possess pagan Anglo-Saxon significance. The first consists of places incorporating the names of pagan Anglo-Saxon deities (Wōden, Thunor, Tīw). The second includes those names incorporating the elements wīg (wēoh) and hearg, represented as meaning 'temple, sanctuary'. The next group, the Grim's Ditch place-names, is thought to be related to the god-names above because of Odin's Grímr byname in Scandinavian tradition. Lastly, we have the hæðen byrgels 'heathen burial' group, a phrase found in charter boundary surveys. Though not of pagan origin, hæðen byrgels is believed to identify the location of pagan Anglo-Saxon gravesites as recognized by Christian observers.

The name groups are examined in conjunction with recent historical, archaeological and etymological evidence. The conclusion reached is that none of them seems to have been 'pagan' in the sense of relating to heathen Anglo-Saxon religious or burial sites. The god-names, probably coined during Christian Anglo-Saxon times, appear to have honoured the legendary remnants of euhemerised deities. The hearg/wīg names, though stemming from the pagan period, might have alluded to Romano-British structures by virtue of their stone appearance (hearg could mean 'stone rise or formation') or because pagan Anglo-Saxons either knew or believed such sites were places of Romano-British worship. Grim was commonly employed as a giant's name in northern European tradition. Hence 'Grim the giant' might have been appropriately nominated as the builder of the huge earthworks bearing his name. Hæðen byrgels, rather than referring to pagan Anglo-Saxon gravesites, could have named the graves of Vikings killed in battle on the English side of the Danelaw division.

## NOTE

\* This is a summary of the doctoral thesis presented at the University of Cambridge in 1983.

## COLDHARBOUR - FOR THE LAST TIME?\*

Few place-names can have had so much historical and archaeological weight thrust undeservedly upon them as Coldharbour. A range of the pre-scientific etymologies suggested for it was catalogued by Arthur Bonner in an Appendix to The Place-names of Surrey (1934), and readers wishing for a self-inflicted wince may look there for one (p.409). The persistent may consult the indexes to the first three series of Notes and Queries, for there was no more popular topic during the first decades of that periodical's existence.<sup>1</sup>

My aim is to pull the loose ends of existing knowledge together. One loose end will not allow itself to be spun into the thread of the argument, namely that of the actual origin of the name-form. I propose, and surely uncontroversially, to follow Bonner in assuming that it is a derogatory name of the same kind as Starveall, Cold Comfort, Mockbeggar, and the rest. Having made this assumption, I intend to account for the enormous popularity of the name after 1600. There are well over 300 such names in the United Kingdom, almost exclusively in England. It is a commonplace that very few attestations of the name date from before 1600; I shall demonstrate that there is a good reason for this, and that the paucity of earlier mentions is no accident of transmission.

The most persistent fable about Coldharbour is that it denotes a Roman-period way-station in association with known or surmised Roman roads. Two among many representatives of this view are Payne (1880) and Scott Robertson (1880), from a period when this opinion was scarcely disputed. (Many earlier editors of volumes of the Victoria County History felt compelled to express an opinion on the matter.) Bonner rejected it quite firmly, and correctly; but it re-emerged in the influential book by the Viatores, published in 1964, and in a paper by Ogden (1967) which was backed by more sophisticated statistical methods than were available to Bonner (to Bonner's great good fortune). The evidence is available to dispose once and for all of this 'caravanserai hypothesis', or at any rate to make it most improbable. The implications of that hypothesis should be removed forthwith from OED (under harbour). We should remember that no-one has ever claimed to have discovered anything of archaeological interest in a systematic way at Coldharbour sites (though as Ogden points out (1967: 16) they could conceivably have been camping-sites rather than actual structures). This of itself ought to pour a fair amount of cold water on the 'caravanserai hypothesis'. Furthermore, no Coldharbour ever appears in an OE charter boundary, or any analogous ME document, so far as I know. I would not agree, therefore, with J. McN. Dodgson, PNCh 5(1: ii), p.222, that it is likely that there was a ME generic term \*caldherber(g). The name-form would simply be yet another of the type Cold Kitchen, Coldcoats (Caldecott) and so on.<sup>2</sup>

The earliest structure known which came to be called Coldharbour is the tower of 1240 in the Tower of London, but it is not known for certain when the name was first applied to it: The first attestation is in 1533 (Henry VIII's Letters and Papers). Nobody will doubt the appropriateness of this name for a prison. (It was demolished during the Commonwealth.) The first place we know to have been so named is the messuage acquired by Sir John Abel in c.1317 situated in the London ward of Dowgate, which Robertson (1968: 45) refers to as an 'inn'. It was called Coldhakber (sic) in 1307 (Ekwall 1954: 150). Another Coldharbour turned up later in the century on another property of Abel's in Camberwell (Sr), as Bonner points out.