



Map 4. Areas where *finkle* is attested as a lexical word.

## A Desert-Island History

*Fran Colman*

University of Edinburgh

Review of *The Cambridge History of the English Language* (general editor Richard M. Hogg), vols I, *The Beginnings to 1066*, edited by Richard M. Hogg, and II, *1066–1476*, edited by N. F. Blake. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1992; £60 and £65.

### 1. Introduction

The General Editor's Preface to *The Cambridge History of the English Language* (I and II) states an aim to 'provide a solid discussion of the full range of the history of English both to the anglicist who does not specialise in the particular area to hand and to the general linguist who has no specialised knowledge of the history of English', and, in addition, to be of use to anyone with any reason to be interested in the history of English—i.e. what is commonly known as 'the general reader'. The difficulties of addressing a mixed audience need not be dwelt on; and the general editor of a multi-authored work has the difficulties multiplied by a further mixture: that of different theoretical frameworks in which the authors feel comfortable. The decision to avoid a 'party line' on linguistic theory, resulting at times in 'contrasting views of the same topic' is aptly justified by the success with which contrasts and contradictions emerge as 'stimulating and fruitful' (I, xviii), and by the rigorous cross-referencing between contributions to the volumes.

If there is such a thing as the 'general reader', I cannot, however, pretend to be a 'general reviewer'. What follows reflects the expectations of one of only one (the anglicist) camp of the intended audience as to the nature of a 'solid discussion covering the full range of the history of English'.

I will take a 'solid' account of a language as one that makes strong (testable) claims about the systematic structure of the various levels of the grammar (phonology, morphology, syntax), in terms of the contrastive units or categories, their possible combinations (sequential

or componential), and their means of expression, or exponents. It will also describe the orthographic system(s) in which early stages of the language are recorded. Descriptions of languages no longer spoken are susceptible to different analyses depending on theory, in the same way as even directly observable present-day languages (e.g., vocalic length in Received Pronunciation may be treated as phonemic or subphonemic).<sup>1</sup> In addition, even an account of early orthographies as primary potential evidence for stages of the language rests on reconstruction. A 'solid' account will therefore acknowledge controversial or alternative analyses that may impinge on the picture presented.

The 'full range' of the history of a language invites expectation of coverage of all recorded diachronic variation (*Cambridge History*, I and II, from the beginnings of English to 1476). And the treatment of this type of range is appropriately guided by the principle that 'synchrony and diachrony are intertwined'. Most chapters in *Cambridge History* I and II overtly offer synchronic accounts for earlier and later stages as bases for reconstructing the types of changes that occurred between them. This relates to other aspects in which 'range' is to be expected: observations, or claims, about what changes have occurred naturally invite observations or theories about why languages change. Answers to this invoke, among other topics (such as perceptual and/or auditory factors in language acquisition), reconstructions of variation other than diachronic: the volumes recurrently focus in particular on regional and social variation. Each chapter is concluded by suggestions for further reading on the topic. A full bibliography is supplied at the end of each volume, along with a Glossary of Linguistic Terms.

What follows offers summaries of the import of each of the non-onomastic chapters, before turning more detailed attention to the treatment of Old and Middle English proper names.

## 2. Non-Onomastic Chapters

### Volume I.

Chapter 1, 'Introduction' (Richard Hogg), is important not merely as a 'scene-setter', but for information that underpins and informs reconstructions of the language offered in the ensuing chapters.

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Heinz J. Giegerich, *English Phonology. An Introduction* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 57.

Chapter 2, 'The Place of English in Germanic and Indo-European' (Alfred Bammesberger), offers, in the traditional presentation of italicised and asterisked forms, the time-honoured Neogrammarian concepts of 'regularity of sound-change and the systematic character of diachronic change in general' (p. 27). The treatment of inflectional morphology focuses on the noun, adjective, and verb. That of word order (under syntax) prompts some quibbles about the types of evidence invoked by Bammesberger (e.g. the order of elements in the first line of a poem—*Aeneid*, 'Arma virumque cano'—may not be universally accepted as evidence of Latin as a language with 'object-verb' word-order). The lexicon is discussed in the context of rigorous search for cognates. Chapter 3, 'Phonology and Morphology' (Richard Hogg), offers precise claims and precise notation about systematic changes from pre-OE to late OE, with admirable information on and evaluation of sources of evidence. Particularly welcome (and notably absent from existing reference works) is the evidence for the paradigm as 'the dominant feature of inflexional morphology' in OE, summarised as: 'the paradigm . . . was able to control, cause or restrict particular instances of linguistic change during the period' (pp. 123–24). Honours students have found this chapter irresistible, along with Chapter 5, 'Semantics and Vocabulary' (Dieter Kastovsky). Here, again, are strong claims: about the preservation of ablaut (resulting in stem-variability) as a feature of the OE derivational morphological system, and the transition from 'stem-based to word-based inflexion and derivation' (p. 397) in ME, brought about by the 'collapse of the OE morphophonemic system because of its rapidly growing opacity' (p. 298).

Chapter 4, 'Syntax' (Elizabeth Closs Traugott), primarily compares ninth-century Ælfredian with tenth- and eleventh-century Ælfrician syntax, offering in conclusion a summary of diachronic differences in term of 'tendencies rather than radical changes' (p. 281), in an approach acknowledged as 'relatively informal' (p. 286). Chapter 6, 'Old English Dialects' (Thomas Toon), rather belies the implied scope of its title. Some of the information on origins of OE dialects overlaps with that in the more critical survey in Hogg's 'Introduction', and not all dialects are treated in equal detail. The focus, as in Toon's *Politics*,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Toon, *The Politics of Early Old English Sound Change* (New York, 1983).

is on the period of the Mercian hegemony, in an interpretation of spelling variation as direct evidence of phonetic change. While 'a review and re-evaluation of the methodological assumptions that determined the direction of previous studies of the earliest Old English dialects' (p. 434) is welcome (although I miss any reference to de Camp's work on socio-economic factors in putative spreads of dialect features),<sup>3</sup> admonitions about taking manuscript spelling variation 'seriously' (p. 445) seem at odds with some of the interpretations of OE spellings. For instance, back-spellings such as *hlaƿ* for *laƿ* 'remainder' are more plausibly interpreted as evidence of the development of a phonotactic constraint on initial /h/ + /l/ (despite the resulting loss of a minimal pair with *hlaƿ* 'loaf') than of the scribe's representation of a 'sub-phonemic level in his orthographic habits' (p. 443; see further Colman, 'What is in a Name?', on 'overliteral' interpretations of spelling variation).<sup>4</sup> (A sense of unease is encouraged by the repeated reference to 'Anderson' 1972 (p. 436, and Bibliography) for 'Andersen'.) Chapter 8, 'Literary Language' (Malcolm Godden), discusses both verse (including a description of metrical patterns and alliteration, and the associated use of lexical variation and repetition, as well as collocation) and prose (again dealing with vocabulary as well as grammar, as well as the role of rhythm and alliteration in the prose of, for instance, Ælfric), and assesses possible evidence from translations from Latin, as well as from prose into verse (e.g. by Ælfric), and the influence of classical rhetoric. Evidence is offered 'both of individual experimentation and of individual concern about language choice' (p. 491). Interesting questions are sometimes unanswerable: for instance, the interpretation of the preface to Ælfric's Latin Grammar as evidence that 'literary prose was quite distinct from the ordinary spoken language'.

### Volume 2

Limitations of space restrict the following to a simple list of contents. Chapter 1, 'Introduction' (Norman Blake), includes a survey of the history of ME studies. Chapter 2, 'Phonology and Morphology'

<sup>3</sup> David de Camp, 'The Genesis of the Old English Dialects: a New Hypothesis?', *Language*, 34 (1958), 232-44.

<sup>4</sup> Fran Colman, 'What is in a Name?', in *Historical Dialectology*, edited by Jacek Fisiak (Berlin, 1988), pp. 111-37.

(Roger Lass), takes a reconstructed late OE phonological system as the input to the various ME systems. Inflectional morphology embraces identification of major syntactic classes. Chapter 3, 'Middle English Dialectology' (James Milroy) offers, as the title promises, discussion of alternative theories and methodologies, with sections on geographical variation and on variation-theory invoking the role of individual speakers in language variety. Chapter 4, 'Syntax' (Olga Fischer), relates changes in ME syntax to, among other things, changes in inflectional morphology, dealing with phrases within the clause, as well as with various types of sentences (including composite ones). Chapter 5, 'Lexis and Semantics' (David Burnley), deals with types of word-formation (including loan-words) and semantic change. Chapter 6, 'The Literary Language' (Norman Blake), covers early and later ME literature, with a section devoted to selected features of the literary language.

### 3. Onomastics

Cecily Clark's chapters on 'Onomastics' (I, 452-489, and II, 542-606) are full of information and critical assessment of existing views, with a particular focus on what might be deduced about socio-economic and political situations reflected in the types of name forms (e.g. I, 453, 456 and 461-462; II, 545 and 569). And, of course, reconstructions of such situations in turn inform interpretation of early name-forms. On the one hand, for instance, distribution of familial by-names, 'especially frequent among peasants' (II, 569), may offer insights into social stratification. On the other, hypotheses about, for instance, the currency (or not) of French as a first or second language after the Norman Conquest influence interpretations of spelling (and phonological) forms of middle English personal names (II, 548; and see further below).

An account of the major sources for OE and ME name-forms is followed in each volume by a description of name-types relating to anthroponymy and toponymy. Anthroponyms are subcategorised as idionyms (including 'nicknames'), bynames, and family-names, the last of which do not become established until the ME period (see II, 567, for criteria for classifying a name as a family one). Toponyms can be either habitative or topographical (see I, 473, on overlap of these categories). For OE, the corpus selected as the focus is that represented

in Bede's *Historia*; for ME the London Lay Subsidy Rolls are the major source used. But constant comparison is made with data from sources of other periods (see e.g. I, 461), in keeping with the concerns of the volumes with diachronic variation, and important for attempts to trace changes in fashions in types of nomenclature.

The treatment of proper names identifies two related properties of 'Names', both of which are significant for any assessment of the role of early English forms of proper names as potential evidence for reconstructing the history of English. In the introduction to each chapter, two crucial points are made. One is the ultimate derivation of names from common words (even if not those 'of the language they currently grace' II, 542), and their function as part of the everyday language (I, 452). The significance of this is worth emphasising: that OE proper names were formed from elements cognate with current common words allows the present-day linguist access to potential evidence of phonological variation, akin to that gleaned from spellings of common words. The second point concerns the specialised semantic function of proper names, specifically as 'pointers', which correlates with their syntactic and morphological behaviour. This function may account, too, for phonological (and concomitant orthographic) obscuration of the relationship between a proper name and its ultimate common-word cognate. (On the deictic function of personal names, and arguments against assigning 'sense' to them, see Colman, 'What is in a Name?' and *Money Talks*.)<sup>5</sup>

Recognition of the specialised function of proper names hints at the concept of an onomastic system, different from the system of common words. Such a concept presumably underlies the important suggestion (II, 593) that we 'postulate a non-standard, indeed specifically onomastic, branch of English phonology, compatible rather than identical with the general one and owing its more far-reaching operation to the special semantic status of names' (see the examples of native assimilatory and reductive processes in place-names, II, 593-594). Elsewhere, too, phonological behaviour of proper names (personal and place) is attributed to 'loss of denotation', or 'semantic emptying' (e.g. II, 582). But this concept of an onomastic system is not overt at the outset as an underlying principle: it emerges late in the

<sup>5</sup> Colman, 'What is in a Name?', pp. 117-21; Fran Colman, *Money Talks. Reconstructing Old English* (Berlin, 1991), pp. 67-69.

discussion. So, for instance, 'sporadic palatalisation and assibilation of -ing(-) > [indʒ]', in, e.g., Wantage < OE *Waneting* is cited as a 'complication', open to various 'explanations' (I, 476), rather than as a possible clue to the independent behaviour of names. The significance of the observation that OE personal-name themes 'were based upon roots also used for forming nouns and adjectives' (I, 457) is twofold: it accords with an analysis of proper names as declension-class words, primarily as the most 'basic' type of noun ('naming word'); and it implies an inventory of identifiable units within the onomastic system, (in origin) overlapping with, but much more restricted than, the units within the morphological and syntactic systems in which common words function. That the system may be defined further in terms of combinatorial possibilities of the units is hinted at (I, 459) by the notice of certain forms in Bede's *Historia* as occurring only as deuterothemes or as protothemes in dithematic names (perhaps, then, at odds with the claim in II, 554, of an 'endless variety' of OE personal name permutations; see further Colman, *Money Talks*, pp. 25-28, on combinatorial possibilities of themes in late OE personal names). The suggestion that, for OE personal name elements, 'Semantic classification is revealing' (I, 457) does not specify what might be revealed. Yet attempts at semantic classification can be vital for attempts to unravel contested etymologies. And etymology is vital for the interpretation of a spelling form of a name-element as potential evidence of phonological variation. So, for instance, Smart's rejection of *seoloc* 'silk', on taxonomic grounds, as an etymon for an element spelled *seolc*,<sup>6</sup> supports interpretation of *c* as evidence of strengthening of the fricative [x] to a stop [k], in the form of an element cognate with *seolh* 'seal' (see further Colman, *Money Talks*, p. 112). It is, of course, important to distinguish the significance of semantic classification for present-day onomasts and linguists from any implication that proper names themselves have sense (see above); and the appropriate observation is made that 'compounding of themes into compounds was ruled by onomastic, not semantic choice' (I, 458).

With respect to exponents of categories within a system, Clark's treatment identifies processes of compounding and affixation in the

<sup>6</sup> Veronica Smart, 'The moneyers' names', in *Sylloge of Coins of the British Isles*, 19: *Bristol and Gloucester Museums*, edited by L. V. Grinsell, Christopher E. Blunt and Michael Dolley (London, 1973), pp. 115-19 (at pp. 116-17).

formation of personal and place-names, and raises interesting problems of potential interest for morphology and phonology. The observation that in compound personal names inflections are added only to the deuterotheme (I, 457), true also of common-word compounds in both early and present-day English, brings to mind forms such as *Burewine* (*Burgwine*), *cildabyrde* ('child minder'), and the question of the function of the medial vowel. In the latter form, *a* just could represent a genitive plural inflection; but *e* in the name form is clearly 'inorganic', suggesting that such medial vowels can be taken as 'compositional' (Colman, *Money Talks*, p. 43, and references there). That place-names appear with inflected first elements (e.g. *Ebbes ham*, 'Epsom', I, 474) is connected with observation about the blurred distinction between place-name and descriptive phrase (I, 471). There may be a clue here, that if the first element of a place-name is inflected, then that 'name' is not a compound place-name, but a syntactic phrase.

With respect to suffixes on monothematic personal names, e.g., *Brorda*, the problem of distinguishing inflectional from derivational status is well addressed (I, 459): does the *a* represent a weak feminine inflection, or a hypocoristic form? Suffixation can also be related to root modification: notably, modification of the vowel by *i*-mutation, as in, for instance, *Styr*, cognate with North Germanic *styrr*, noun, 'struggle'. That an element such as *ing* can follow theme-forms lacking *i*-mutation, e.g. in *Duding*, invites discussion of productivity of suffixes after the time of the sound-change, and, indeed, whether *ing* is to be taken as a suffix or a deuterotheme in a compound structure. It would be interesting to be able to assess whether 'ablaut' was as strong a characteristic in the morphology of OE proper names as in that of common-word derivation (cf. Kastovsky, 'Semantics and Vocabulary', *Cambridge History*, I, chapter 5).

The two chapters cover an impressive range, charting changes in types of nomenclature (e.g. the introduction of by-names and the development of family names), with persistent critical assessment of the putative role of external influences, and attention to the problems of identifying native versus foreign names.

If not always organised in a way transparent to this reviewer, the onomastic chapters constitute a 'solid' account of early English onomastics, covering a 'full range' of types of nomenclature, and the

types of variation (diachronic, socio-political, regional) to which they were (and are) susceptible.

Due attention is given to the nature of the evidence for reconstructing OE and ME onomastics: notably, problems of interpreting orthography. For example, the use of *t* and *d* for [θ] and [ð] in fourteenth-century tax rolls, seen in the light of a Latin-based orthography, may be a matter of 'graphic decorum rather than in any sense connected with pronunciation' or attributable to 'the inability of the French scribes to pronounce these sounds' (II, 548–549: and see here too, for the important warning against reliance on modern translators and indexers, rather than original texts, for attributing onomastic status to Latinate or Anglo-French forms). In particular, reconstructions of early English proper names are tested against possible present-day versions (see, e.g., II, 565), with all the appropriate consideration of possible spelling pronunciations (e.g. 'local ['sauθ,wel] reported for the Nottinghamshire ['sʌð] Southwell': II, 594), and mergers of historically discrete name-elements (e.g. *-hamm* and *-holm*: I, 487). 'Anecdotal evidence' for choices of personal names (such as the instigation of being mocked for the Northumbrian to change his name from *Tósti* to 'the more up-to-date *William*': II, 560) is aptly invoked where available.

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There are some books that anyone working on English historical linguistics has to take to that island, whether desert or Greek, or to whatever area of the house is used as a study, simply because they are there: because they provide the fullest available source of portable information, and, if in parts not consistently, a satisfying and illuminating account. *Cambridge History* I and II are desert-island books.