

John Aubrey, Pioneer Onomast?

Gillian Fellows-Jensen
University of Copenhagen

I had always looked upon John Aubrey simply as a kind of gossipy footnote to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature. Hard pressed, I could probably have cited his comment in *Brief Lives* on William Shakespeare: “He was wont to say that he never blotted out a line in his life. Sayd Ben Johnson [sic], I wish he had blotted-out a thousand”.¹ It was my late cousin, Malcolm Stuart Fellows, whose multifarious career and magpie-mind had made him a devoted fan of Aubrey, who pointed out to me that Aubrey was said to have written a book on the meaning of place-names. My interest was immediately aroused and I began my search for this book. I did not meet with immediate success but my appetite was whetted when I came upon accounts of Aubrey’s *Monumenta Britannica* and discovered that he had made an important contribution to the preservation of the prehistoric site at Avebury. I also found out that only one of Aubrey’s works, his *Miscellanies. A Collection of Hermetic Philosophy*, in which he discusses supernatural occurrences and the occult, had been published in his lifetime but I hoped that his study of place-names might have been among the volumes published posthumously. This proved not to be so, however. I should perhaps have taken this fact as a timely warning. Instead my enthusiasm was so fired that I wrote to the Bodleian Library and ordered a microfilm of the relevant manuscript, MS Aubrey 5. This was in 1989 and when the microfilm arrived, I added a study and possible edition of Aubrey’s *An Interpretation of Villare Anglicanum* to my list of projects at the Institute of Name Research.

This article is a slightly revised and expanded version of a paper read at Bangor in April 2000 to the annual conference of the Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland. I am grateful to R. Geraint Gruffydd, Hywel Wyn Owen, Oliver Padel, Pamela Porter, Mark Redknap and David M. Wilson for making suggestions, answering queries and helping me to obtain information, and to the Curators and Librarian of the Bodleian Library Oxford for the supply of the microfilm of MS Aubrey 5 on which my work has been based.

¹ O. L. Dick, *Aubrey’s Brief Lives* (London, 1987, repr. from 1949), p. 335.

Aubrey's handwriting is notoriously difficult to read. In 1675 the Earl of Thanet, one of Aubrey's generous patrons, wrote to him as follows: "I would have you in future to take more time in writing your letters, for the last was so ill writ that I had a great deal of trouble to read some part of it".² I did not actually find his handwriting much more difficult to read than my own but have to admit that I sometimes had problems with Latin and Welsh words. My work on the manuscript unfortunately ground to a standstill for various reasons and the project joined so many other lost causes in the queue for attention. Now I have taken it up again but it has turned out to be one of the great disappointments of my academic life. The *Villare Anglicanum* is unfinished. In fact, it is hardly begun. John Aubrey would seem to have set to work on his various projects in much the same way as my son did when working on a project at his junior school. First he spent a week or so drawing and colouring a decorative title-page and then the day before he had to submit his paper, he would hastily scribble down the required number of words. Aubrey has a title-page and a preface and a long list of the place-names that require interpretation. Only a small minority of these have been glossed. There is obviously no call for me or anyone else to make an edition of this unfinished opus but my hunt through the manuscript and through some other of Aubrey's works has produced a number of quite interesting sidelights on the attitude to place-names in the seventeenth century.

I shall begin my paper with a brief outline of Aubrey's life, proceed to a description of the contents of the manuscript containing *Villare Anglicanum* and conclude with a discussion of some of Aubrey's comments on place-names and an assessment of his significance as an antiquarian.

John Aubrey was born in 1626 in Easton Piercy, near Chippenham in Wiltshire, "very weake, and like to dye that he was Christned before morning prayer".³ Although a sickly child, he received a good education, being taught for six months by Robert Latimer, Rector of Leigh Delamere, one of whose former pupils had been the philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679). On a visit to his old school, Hobbes took note of the eight-year-old Aubrey because he had arrived not as the vulgar boys but riding "a delicate little horse". This meeting was the origin of a deep friendship between the two men, in spite of the difference in their ages, and

² Cited in A. Powell, *John Aubrey and his friends* (London, 1963), p. 163.

³ Dick, *Aubrey's Brief Lives*, p. 4.

Hobbes later became the subject of the first and longest biography written by Aubrey.⁴ Later Aubrey was sent to board at the prestigious grammar school at Blandford in Dorset, and then entered as a gentleman-commoner at Trinity College, Oxford, in 1642.⁵ His studies at Oxford were interrupted first by events in the Civil War and then by an attack of smallpox. In 1646 he was admitted a student of the Middle Temple in London and for the next two years he divided his time between Oxford and the Inns of Court.⁶ Early in January 1649, while staying at the home of Francis Seymour, first Lord Seymour of Trowbridge, in Wiltshire, Aubrey joined the hunt and the chase led them through Avebury and he saw the prehistoric monument there for the first time.⁷ Aubrey was greatly impressed by the stones and subsequently visited the place frequently. He was distressed to learn that the farmers round about were accustomed to split the stones with the aid of fire and a sledge-hammer and use them as building-material.

On his father's death in 1652 Aubrey inherited quite considerable estates but these would seem to have been encumbered by debts and the feckless and credulous Aubrey never managed to extricate himself from his financial entanglements, which were made more serious by the lawsuits upon which he recklessly entered, including ones with Joan Sumner, a woman whom he had once desired to marry, and his younger brother William. He persevered with his scholarly pursuits, however. In 1662 the Royal Society received its first charter and John Aubrey, who had already been associated with the founding group for over a decade, was nominated as a Fellow in May 1663.⁸ Nominated on the same occasion as Aubrey were such eminent figures as the poet John Dryden, the architect Sir Christopher Wren and the physicist Robert Hooke. Nomination to a fellowship was a signal mark of recognition of Aubrey's contribution to scholarship, diffuse though that was. With his customary instinct for public relations, Aubrey exploited his acquaintance with King Charles II through the Royal Society to interest the king in the fate of Avebury. In 1663 he showed the monument to King Charles and his brother the Duke of York, subsequently King James II, and was

⁴ Powell, *John Aubrey and his friends*, p. 20.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 39 and 44.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 48–58.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 60–61; John Aubrey, *Monumenta Britannica*, annotated by R. Legg (Sherborne, 1980–82), p. 17.

⁸ Powell, *John Aubrey and his friends*, p. 105.

commanded by the king to give an account of the old camps and barrows on the plains.⁹ It was these papers describing Avebury and Stonehenge that eventually formed the basis for the opening chapter of Aubrey's *Monumenta Britannica*, where he uses comparative evidence to show that Avebury, Stonehenge and the like predated both the Danes and the Romans and were Pagan temples.¹⁰ Aubrey entitled this section of the work *Templa Druidum*, although the monuments were of course considerably older than this. The title originally suggested for the whole work had been *Monumenta Druidum* but Aubrey changed this to *Monumenta Britannica* under the influence of the Danish Scholar Ole Worm (1588–1654), whose works he greatly admired and who had published *Monumenta Danica* in 1643.¹¹

Fellowship of the Royal Society obviously had its advantages for Aubrey but unfortunately, convivial drinking after the Society's weekly meetings contributed to the tapping of both Aubrey's energy and his diminishing fortune. After his mother died in 1686 and her heavily-mortgaged property had been disposed of, Aubrey became dependent on his friends and patrons for a place to live and money to live on. In spite, however, of his sickly childhood, his attack of smallpox, as well as one of some form of venereal disease, several falls from horses, the frequent danger of being arrested for debt and a mugging in London in 1693 that left him with fifteen wounds in his head,¹² John Aubrey lived to be seventy-one and it would seem that he died suddenly in 1697, probably while on a journey. He was buried in Oxford, where he had spent the happiest years of his life and where his manuscripts had already been deposited in the Ashmolean Museum.

Aubrey summed up his own school career as follows: "Never riotous or prodigal; but (as Sir E. Leech said) Sloath and carelesnesse are equivalent to all other vices".¹³ His upbringing had no doubt fitted him best for the life of a gentleman of leisure, a life which his fortune in the long run proved unable to support, but he can hardly be accused of sloth. His mind would

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 107–08; S. Piggott, *Ancient Britons and the Antiquarian Imagination* (London, 1989), 113–15.

¹⁰ Aubrey, *Monumenta Britannica*, pp. 14–228; G. Daniel, 'Edward Lhwyd: antiquary and archaeologist', *Welsh History Review* 4 (1966–67), 345–59 (p. 348).

¹¹ Aubrey, *Monumenta Britannica*, p. 614.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 639–40; Powell, *John Aubrey and his friends*, pp. 226 and 244.

¹³ Dick, *Aubrey's Brief Lives*, p. 15.

seem to have been in a permanent ferment of activity and both his antiquarian studies and his need to accept invitations in his later years involved him in a good deal of travelling and the undertaking of rather trivial and boring tasks. What he surely did need, however, was some external discipline, as he himself willingly acknowledged. "If I had but either one to come to me in a morning with a good Scourge, or did not sett-up till one or two with Mr Wyld, I could doe a great deal of businessse".¹⁴ I think he would have thrived as a University professor with able and willing postgraduate students whom he could have set to work on sub-projects. On fol. 8b of MS Aubrey 5, for example, Aubrey notes: "I wish that somebody would take the paines (which would not be great) to runne over a good English-Latin Dictionary; and make a Collection of the Primitives, sc. English, French, and endemized Latin words: with what few British & Danish that are yet retain'd in our Language: and then to number them, and reduce them to their least Termes: to see, what proportion they doe beare to one another. I doe guess the Latin will beare the greatest proportion: or as great as the true English. I have since the writing of this, donne it myself: it is at the end of my Miscellan[ie]".¹⁵ It was, however, rare for Aubrey to take up his own suggestions. Also on fol. 8b he notes that a Mr Kygwin in Cornwall "is a great master of the Cornish language: & would be persuaded to make a Cornish-Dictionary: he hath several MSS in the Cornish tongue e.g. the N. Testament I think) in Cornish wise. and some histories of those parts". Another potential contributor is referred to lower down on the same folio: "An ingeniose young man, a natif of Scylly, who perfectly understands the Cornish language, lived some time in Catalonia, and about the Pyrenaen hills: &c. he assured me, that he found there many Cornish words". On fol. 87a Aubrey writes: "I would have the names of Places, & proper-names, disrobed/undrest of their Roman masquerade, sc: Latin terminations, & false writing/spelling: to let them appeare in their puris naturalibus". A personal contribution is found on fol. 82a–b at the end of the list of place-names: "A Collection of so many British words as occur/come to my memorie that are endemized and now current English: and have escaped the fury of the Saxon Conquest". According to Oliver

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹⁵ In my quotations from MS Aubrey 5 abbreviations have been silently expanded. Words or letters worn or torn away from the manuscript are enclosed within square brackets.

Lawson Dick, Aubrey added a further comment here: “How these curiosities could be quite forgott did not such idle fellows as I am putt them downe!”¹⁶ It was originally this comment, which I have not been able to locate in the manuscript, that inspired this idle Fellows to put together these words about Aubrey’s contribution to the study of place-names.

The manuscript Oxford, Bodleian Library, Aubrey 5 contains 125 numbered leaves. A modern handwritten note on fol. 125 reads: “Really 129 for ff. 19, 20, 96, 106 are double”. Most of the leaves are approximately 17.85 x 29.5 cm but ff. 9–16 are smaller, approx. 14 x 18.5 cm. A number of small slips are bound in at various places in the manuscript. The binding was done at the command of Edward Lhuyd, who had become Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum in 1690. There is a letter from Lhuyd to Aubrey dated in March 1693 noting that “I have got all your pamphlets in the museum bound”.¹⁷ On fol. 2a of the manuscript there is a letter from Aubrey to Lhuyd which reads as follows:

London April 21.

1691

Mr Llwyd!

Among other things that I have sent to Mr Anth[ony] Wood, is my Villare, which I would entreat you to deposit among my other things in the Museum. There is no body else I know, that is so fitt to goe through with that Designe as your selfe. If you doe undertake it, I hope you will doe me the Right, to make mention of me. The Taske will be extreme easy to you, and it will be delightfull to ingeniose persons to peruse.

When you have donne that: I wish you would take the like paines for France: there is a Villare of that Kingdome, which I have seen, and speake of in the Preface. If you did dedicate it to the King of France, ’tis likely He might make you an honourable Present. Buxhrenius (a learned man) hath been tampering at and fumbled at it Gaulish Etymologies, but, though as to other Languages a man may help himself by Dictionaries: ’tis not so (you know in the British language) because of the British way of altering the initial letter in

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

¹⁷ Powell, *John Aubrey and his friends*, p. 225.

oblique cases, which a stranger can never understand. Thus wishing you much happinesse I rest Sir your affectionate & faithfull friend & servant Jo: Aubrey.

As always, Aubrey underestimates the difficulty of the tasks that he wants others to perform.

Fol. 3a contains some scattered comments on place-names from various sources. Fol. 4a is headed “This Paper I had from my worthy friend Mr Lloyd the Chymist Anno Domini 1675”. Fols 4–5 contain a glossary of Welsh words with translations into Latin and English. Meredith Lloyd of Montgomery was a frequent informant of Aubrey.¹⁸ Fols 6–7 seem to have been bound in in the wrong order. At the head of fol. 7 there is a note: “This paper I had from Mr Edw: Lloyd of the Museum at Oxford 1689”. It is a trilingual glossary of Irish, Latin and British (Welsh) words, prefaced by some aids to pronunciation, and provides a small sample of the kind of material that Edward Lhuyd was later to print in his *Archaeologia Britannica, Volume 1. Glossography* (Oxford, 1707). Aubrey was himself of Welsh extraction, had some knowledge of Welsh and inherited claims on land in Breconshire. He often stayed with his cousin, Sir John Aubrey, baronet, at Llantrithyd in Glamorganshire.¹⁹

Fol. 8a is the title page and reads: *An Interpretation of Villare Anglicanum*, and fol. 8b contains the dedication: “To his truly honoured Friend Edmund Wyld of Glasly-hall [in Shropshire] Esq., R.S.S (Fellow of the Royal Society)”. Edmund Wyld (1618–1695) had sat in the Long Parliament and was a horticultural experimenter. He opened his house in Bloomsbury to the homeless Aubrey and spent much time drinking with him in taverns. There are also a few notes on this leaf about the meaning of place-names.

Fols 9–15 contain extracts dealing with place-names from *The Breviary of Britayne*, written in Latin as *Commentarioli Descriptionis Britannicae Fragmentum* by Humphrey Lluyde of Denbigh (1527–68), shortly before his death, and published in Cologne in 1572. The translation into English by Thomas Twyne (1543–1613) appeared in 1573. Fol. 16 contains a brief glossary of British words occurring in place-names with translations into English.

¹⁸ Aubrey, *Monumenta Britannica*, p. 1124.

¹⁹ Daniel, ‘Edward Lhwyd’, p. 347.

The preface to the *Villare* proper begins on fol. 17 with a quotation from chapter 5 of Richard Verstegan's *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence in Antiquities* (Antwerp, 1605, reprinted London 1653), to the effect that the invading Anglo-Saxons left few of the British names untouched but replaced them with names of Germanic origin. Aubrey then explains that the list of names was originally compiled by the appointment of Sir Henry Spelman (c.1564–1641) from John Speed's maps of England and Wales, which had been published in 1608–10. Aubrey's original intention had been only to pick out names containing British elements but he had been persuaded also to include names containing hard, obsolete Saxon words. These principles of selection must account for the omission from the list of the names of several prominent settlements. Aubrey admits that no one individual would be fit to undertake the task of interpretation of all the names because this would require a mastery of several languages. He regrets that none of his learned Welsh friends who mastered French had been willing to make a start and determines to find out whether a Biscayan dictionary exists. He seems to be convinced that Greek elements in Welsh reflect the presence of Greek colonies in Wales and that there are Persian words mixed in with the German but he is sceptical about the possibility of finding British words derived from Hebrew.²⁰

The list of place-names, which occupies fols 22–79, contains roughly about 5,500 names. Although very scantily annotated, it is not without value. It sometimes reveals, for example, seventeenth-century pronunciations of place-names not recorded elsewhere. Scagglethorpe in Yorkshire, for example, is recorded in the form *Scagglethrope* fol. 58. There are now two Scagglethorpes in Yorkshire, one in the East Riding and the other in the West Riding.²¹ The metathesis in the generic of this name is not recorded in the written forms of either of these names in the modern editions but it is reflected in the recorded local pronunciation of the East Riding

²⁰ Cf. the text of the Preface printed as Appendix I below. With respect to the influence of Hebrew, Aubrey refers specifically to a paper by Charles Edwards printed in 1675. He may also have been thinking of John Davies' *Antiquæ Linguae Britannicæ Dictionarium Duplex*, published in London in 1632.

²¹ A. H. Smith, *The Place-Names of the East Riding of Yorkshire and York*, English Place-Name Society, 14 (Cambridge, 1937), 139, and A. H. Smith, *The Place-Names of the West Riding of Yorkshire*, 8 vols, English Place-Name Society, 30–37 (Cambridge, 1961–63), IV, 258.

name.

Scagglethorpe is a name coined by the Danes. Although Aubrey mistakenly claimed to be able to distinguish between Roman circular camps and Danish ones on the basis of their shape,²² he made no claims to any knowledge of the Danish language. Occasionally, however, the information he gives about a name of Scandinavian origin is correct, as when he says of the place-name The Inges in Westmorland fol. 43a: “An Ing: a common pasture, a meadow: a word borrowed from the Danes. Ing [*recte* eng] in that language signifying a meadow”. He attributes the information to one of his regular correspondents, John Ray the naturalist (c.1627–1705). It was also John Ray who was responsible for the gloss fol. 32a: “Carre: a wood of Alder, or other trees in a moist boggy place” to the place-name Carram (*recte* Carham) in Northumberland. The explanation of *carre* is correct. It is a Scandinavian loanword from *kjarr*. It is not this word that is found in Carham, however, but rather the dative plural of the English word *carr* ‘rock’, itself probably a late loan from British. Another gloss from Ray is to Garton in Yorkshire fol. 39a: “A Garth is a yard or Backside, a croft: from the Saxon word Geard a Yard”. The definition of the word is correct but the pronunciation of the place-name and its spelling show that the specific is the Scandinavian cognate to Old English *geard*, namely *garðr*. For some names containing Scandinavian elements Aubrey’s glosses are wildly wrong. Irby, for example contains the Scandinavian word for ‘Irishman’ and not, as suggested by Aubrey fol. 43a, British *yr* ‘gold’. There is no such word. Aubrey was presumably thinking of *aur*. Sinderby in Yorkshire is strangely said on fol. 59b to be “from old Roman Cinders” instead of as correctly from the Old Danish comparative adjective *syndri* ‘southern’, although it must be admitted that Old English *sinder* ‘cinder, ashes’ was once suggested as a possible specific of Sinderby by a youthful Fellows Jensen.²³ Oddly enough, there is no etymological relationship between the Germanic words for ‘cinders’ and Latin *cinis* or *ciner*. The last error with respect to Danish that I shall mention here is in Aubrey’s gloss on the place-name Ampthill in Bedfordshire fol. 23a, which he correctly interprets as meaning ‘anthill’. He goes on, however to say that the Danish word for this insect is *Embet*, a remark for which I can find no justification.

²² Aubrey, *Monumenta Britannica*, p. 615; Piggott, *Ancient Britons*, p. 119.

²³ G. Fellows Jensen, *Scandinavian Personal Names in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire*, *Navnestudier* 7 (Copenhagen, 1968), p. 241.

Occasionally Aubrey is too anxious to identify a British element in an English place-name. Treeton in Yorkshire, for example, which he spells Treton, he considers to be tautologous fol. 68b, presumably because he takes the specific to be British *tre*, whose range of meanings is close to that of the generic, Old English *t_n*, rather than the correct identification, Old English *tr_o(w)*, while he is unwilling to accept the obvious and correct interpretation of Bridgenorth in Shropshire as a pseudo-manorial form meaning ‘the northern bridge’ and says fol. 30b that it is a corrupted form from *Bridge-morth*, in which the defining element is *morth* meaning ‘palus, a marish’. He has obviously been influenced, here as elsewhere, by the antiquary John Leland, who recorded in his itinerary (c.1540) a belief that the suffix is the forest-name *Morfe*.²⁴ Aubrey makes frequent references to Leland. Occasionally Aubrey gets led away by his enthusiasm for a topic. In the *Monumenta Britannica* fol. 227, for example, he ventures an interpretation of the place-name Wigan in Lancashire as containing the word *wig*, which the antiquary Thomas Gale (1636–1702) considered to mean ‘temple of the Druids’ and points out that Mr Edward Lhuyd informs him that *gw_g* or *w_g* [*recte gwig*] in Welsh signifies a wood and hence that there might be something in Gale’s idea that some places with *wig* in their names might have been consecrated to the druids. The name Wigan in Lancashire is undoubtedly problematical. Ekwall suggested that it might be an elliptical form of a Welsh **Tref Wigan*,²⁵ while Denise Kenyon has more recently argued that it is an English dative plural **w_cum* ‘at the dwellings’, probably referring to the fact that Wigan had been a Romano-British *vicus*.²⁶ Either of these explanations is to be preferred to Aubrey’s sacred groves.

One good feature about Aubrey’s interest in the meaning of place-names is the way in which his interest spreads beyond the boundaries of an individual county or even country. Within his limits and those of his correspondents he is a comparative onomast. To the already cited letter to Edward Lhuyd dated April 21. 1691, entrusting his manuscripts to Lhuyd’s care (fol. 2a), Aubrey appends a note reading as follows: “Pray tell me in

²⁴ Cf. M. Gelling, *The Place-Names of Shropshire*, Part 1, English Place-Name Society, 62/63 (Nottingham, 1990), 59.

²⁵ E. Ekwall, *The Place-Names of Lancashire* (Manchester, 1922), p. 103.

²⁶ D. Kenyon, ‘Notes on Lancashire place-names 2: the later names’, *Journal of the English Place-Name Society*, 21 (1988–89), 23–53 (p. 46).

your next, the meaning of Crickhowill (a towne near Abergavenny). Howill is a proper name but what is Crick? [I]s it not a contraction of Kerig? So Cricklade, Lechlade, in Wilts.” Lhuyd took his time replying. The text of the reply is on a slip stuck into the manuscript between fols 34b and 35a, opposite where *Crekelade, Wilt* stands in the alphabetical list of names. It is headed *Mr Lluds letter. 1693. re Villare*. The original letter dated Nov. 16. 1693 is quoted in the edition of *Monumenta Britannica*, p. 330. The text runs as follows: “Sir you askt me formerly what was the signification of *Crig*, or *cric*: for the explanation of the names of Cricklade, Crickhowell &c: which I could not then solve. I have seen at least twelve ancient Tumuli this journey in severall places, which are called all *crigan*, whereof one particularly in Carmarthenshire is called *crig y Dyrn*, on the top whereof, of late yeares, by digging, a large stone chest (for so they called it) was discovered: which chest was covered with rude stones of 3 or four tun weight. My conjecture is, that some Prince was anciently buried there: or his bones at least putt into that stone coffin: my reason is, because the words *crig y Dyrn*, signify verbatim Tumulus Principis. It’s true tyrn is not at present in use: but Tyrnas, or Teirnas (a Kingdome) is common with all people, & the only word we have. Yours &c: Edw: Lhuyd”. Beside the form *Crekelade* in the list (fol. 34b), Aubrey has added, presumably before receiving Lhuyd’s belated reply, “Cricklade, from Kerig stones & glâd, a country, s(c) a stony country, and the country is of that nature”. Lhuyd makes it clear that the element in question is Welsh *crug*, while Aubrey sticks to his original suggestion that it is *kerig*, which is, in fact, a plural form of Welsh **carreg* ‘rock’. The element *lade* in Cricklade is most likely to be Old English *ge(l_d)* ‘river crossing’.²⁷

The place-name Avebury is not included in the list of names for interpretation on fol. 26 but Aubrey’s comments on it in *Monumenta Britannica* fols 37–38 are deserving of notice for the light they throw on his attitude to proper names:²⁸

As to the Etymologie of the word *Aubury*; it is vulgarly called *Abury*: and is writt of late times by ignorant scribes *Auebury*: (the *e* quiescent

²⁷ O. J. Padel, *Cornish Place-Name Elements*, English Place-Name Society, 56/57 (Nottingham, 1985), 41 and 73–74; A. D. Mills, *A Dictionary of English Place-Names* (Oxford and New York, 1991), p. 96.

²⁸ Aubrey, *Monumenta Britannica*, pp. 41–42.

being interposed after the old fashion). But in the Legierbook of Malmesbury Abbey it is writt *Aubury*; and so it is in the Records of the *Tower*. But here (me thinkes) I see some reader smile to himselfe, thinking how I have strained this place to be of my own name: not heeding that there is a letter's difference, which quite alters the signification of the words. For Aubery (Alberic) is a Christen name, as *Godfrey* or *Rowland* &c the *l* before a consonant is frequently turned into *u* by the Northern people. But begging pardon for this digression to obviate the scornefull smile, I come back to the Etymologie; What bury (borough) signifies, every one knows: but I was at a great losse, for the meaning of the first syllable (au) till Mr Johannes Heysig (a learned Suede) enformed me, that *Aå* signifies amnis, fluvius, fluentum in lingua Suecicâ. *Au* is not to be found in the Dutch, or Saxon dictionaries: but he affirmes, that *Au* is alwaies fluvius, and that *eau* in French comes from *Au* or *Aå*; as also *ea*, as in Eaton, which is a name given to many Waterish Townes, e.g. Eaton near Windsor, Water Eaton in Oxfordshire. So likewise *ey*, and *ay*, as Ayton in the North: Chelsey, Chertsey &c. So Breda, that is Broadwater. At this Townes end (sc. Aubury) by the church, is a watery place which (I thinke) is the source of the River Kynnet. But after all that hath been sayd, I have a conceit that Aubury is a corruption of Albury that is, Oldbury, or the Old Borough: changing (as aforesayd) *l* before a consonant, into *u*: and well agrees with the nature of this old Place.

These comments show that Aubrey was clear about the origin of his surname and the generic in the place-name Avebury. His explanation of the specific as the adjective 'old', however, is incorrect. This seems most likely to be the personal name *Afa*, although there are those prepared to agree to some extent with Aubrey's Swedish correspondent.²⁹

If Aubrey had succeeded in glossing all or even most of the names in his list, he would have made a lasting contribution to onomastic studies by giving us a picture of what an intelligent and cultivated man thought about the meaning of the place-names of England towards the end of the

²⁹ Mills, *A Dictionary of English Place-Names*, p. 18; J. E. Gover, A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Wiltshire*, English Place-Name Society, 16 (Cambridge, 1939), 293–94.

seventeenth century. As it stands, however, it is of little use. Aubrey's lasting contribution to scholarship must first and foremost be reckoned to be his work for the conservation and preservation of antiquities, including written texts. As a child at the Latin school at Yatton Keynel, he had noted that the school books were given a protective covering of parchment from old manuscripts "which I was too young to understand; but I was pleased with the Elegancy of the Writing, and the coloured initial letters. I remember the rector here... He was a proper Man and a good Fellow, and when He brewed a barrell of Speciall Ale, his use was to stop the bung-hole (under the clay) with a Sheet of Manuscript; he sayd nothing did it so well; which me thought did grieve me then to see".³⁰ Later the Rector's sons, who were gunners and soldiers, scoured their guns with the last of the manuscripts. Despairing of the survival of culture, Aubrey wrote "In my grandFather's dayes, the Manuscripts flew about like Butter-flies. All Musick bookes, Account-bookes, Copie bookes, &c, were covered with old Manuscripts, as wee cover them now with blew Paper, or Marbled Paper. And the Glovers at Malmesbury made great Havock of them, and Gloves were wrapt up no doubt in many good pieces of Antiquity. Before the late Warres a World of rare manuscripts perished here about".³¹ It was not, of course, only the manuscripts that perished, so did many of the religious houses in which they had been kept. Aubrey was only eighteen when he showed himself to be a true antiquarian by paying a man to "drawe the Ruines of Osney [Abbey] 2 or 3 wayes before 'twas pulled down". One of these drawings was later reproduced in Sir William Dugdale's *Monasticon Anglicanum*.³²

For those of us who love cats as well as books and manuscripts, it is pleasant to know that Aubrey was also concerned about a change in the animal population. He noted that William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, "was a great lover of Catts. He was presented with some Cypruss-catts, our Tabby-catts, which were sold, at first for 5*li* a piece. This was about 1637, or 1638". Aubrey seemed to be sorry that the old breed of cats had been displaced. "I doe well remember that the common English Catt, was white with some blewish piednesse: sc. a gallipot blew. The race or breed of them

³⁰ Dick, *Aubrey's Brief Lives*, p. 13.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 22.

are now almost lost³³.

Aubrey also grieved over the fact that the bones of the dead were not allowed to lie quiet in consecrated ground. In London, he claimed, the earth from the burial grounds was cleared out once every ten years or so and carried to the dung-wharf. He left instructions for a marble tablet to be erected in memory of himself after his death and his design for this memorial has been bound in as the fly-leaf of MS Aubrey 5 (fol. 122a), but the site of his grave in Oxford is unmarked and his real memorial is formed by his own manuscripts, which he had ensured were deposited in the care of Edward Lhuyd in the Ashmolean Museum, from where they were subsequently transferred to the Bodleian Library.

Appendix

The Preface on folios 17–19

The Villare Anglicanum (which is an Alphabetical Catalogue of the names of Townes, Rivers &c:) was made by the appointment of Sir Henry Spelman, out of Speed's Mappes. [Marginal note: Printed by R. Hodgkinson dwelling in Thames-Street near Baynard's-castle, 1656]. But in the Mappes are many Names false written which are so transcribed; with the addition of severall errata by the Printer. I perused this Booke with an intention only to pick-out the small Remnant of *British* words, that have escaped [the] Deluge of the Saxon Conquest; and to interpret them by the help of Dr Davies Welsh Dictionary: as also by the friendly assistance of Mr ... Evans of the Bridge-house at London but I have been since persuaded to write-out also the hard obsolete Saxon words, and to render their Interpretation out of Wheelock's Saxon Dictionarie. Graines of allowance are [to] be given to these Etymologies. There were (no doubt) severall Dialects in Britaine, as we see there are now [in] England: they did not speake alike all over this great Isle:) just as the South, or North-Welchmen doe now; who also diff[er]. Besides a thousand years & (a foreign language be[ing] settled) will make a great alteration in pronunciation which will much disguise words, as we well know how names of men & Places are so by the Vulgar. Some n[ames] are made-up of two languages, e.g. Saxon &

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 29; Powell, *John Aubrey and his friends*, p. 38.

British, or Saxon and French. No one man (perhaps) is fitt/able to u[nder]-take this work: for, as to the understanding of the Saxon he ought also perfectly to understand the German tongue, and as to the British, he ought not only to be a mast[er] [17b] of that language, but also of the Greek. It is now above 30 years since I perused Dr John David Rhees's Welsh Grammar, and the little then learnt I have almost forgott: but those whose curiosity would lead them to examine these Etymologies, ought to have recourse to it. It were to be wisht (.. Desiderata) that there were a Dictionary of the Highlanders language, as also of the Mankish, and Irish languages. There is a little imperfect one (12°) of the Armorican or Brittaines language in France. [Note on an inserted slip 18a: Dictionaire et Colloques François-Breton. Traduit de François en Breton, par G. Quiquer natif de Roscof. Livre tres necessaire pour l'entelligence de deux Langues. Reveu, corrigé & augmenté en cette dernière Edition. A Quimper-Corentin chez Guillaume le Blanc Imprimeur & Libraire du College 1671. in 12^{mo}. neer an inch thick.] The Franks did overrun Gaule and settled the French language: but the old Gallick names of Rivers, Townes &c: (I think) are not so much obliterated/lost as here: & the present French language does retaine many Gallick words: which I have heretofore desired some learned Friends of mine of Wales, who were masters of the French tongue, to collect out of the French Dictionary, or French Janua Linguarum: but I could not persuade them to undertake it, though so easie a Taske. Quære if any one has made a Villare Gallicum? Buxhornius has made a Tentamen for the Interpretation of the names of severall Townes, and Rivers in France: for which he deserves praise, but no body can doe it as it should be; but a Welshman, that is master of the French tongue; of which there are many that are. It would be delightfull to curious persons, and Lovers of Antiquity, to unde[r]stand the meaning of antiquated words, now un-intelligib[le] which may give light to many things.

This ancient language (that is now crept into Corn[wall] and disesteemed) was hertofore the current Speech over a[ll] Brittain, & Gaule: from the Orcades and the northern Isles to the Appenine-hills; (nay the very name (Pen) seems yet to speake it.) and to the Pyrenean-hills: and though it be so out of fashion; is in it selfe, as significant & copious as a[ny] of the modern languages, which the learned that understand doe assert. It was also the Language of Ireland, for the speech of the Highlanders, & Manks, doe well agree with Irish. In the heate of the civil-warres A(rch) B(ishop) Usher P Primate of Ireland retired for some time at Llantridded in Glamorganshire

with Sir J. A. He did much divert himselfe by talkinge with the old women & labourers in the Garden: and did affirm that he did find a great affinity between the Welsh and British languages. Quære whether there be a Biscayan Dictionary, and examine if any British words are found there.

[19a] The Romans were settled here, & mixt with the British.....hundred yeares, in which time many Latin words crept in amongst them, and became naturalised, e.g. *can*, from *candidus*, &c.but I am assured by severall learned Gentlemen of Wales: as Capt. Rob. Pugh è soc. Jesus, Sir Llewelin Jenkins (Secretary of Estate) & Mr Meredith Lloyd, that there are more Greeke words intermixt with the British, than there are Latin. I would have another Sample or Collection to be made of the Greeke words yet remaining in the Welsh; which would afford good Evidence (without being beholding to Historie) that there was a time, when the Greeks had Colonies here. Sir John Price in hissaies, that Walsingham acquaints the Pope, that upon a carefull search of ancient Records, he found that the Britons are descended from the Trojans/Brute, for about the time of Samuel v. Dares Phrygius (Aleksander and also Hercules came out of Greece into Italia as Ovid hath recorded it in his Festivalls): There are severall Persian words mixt with the German, which shewes that there has been an Incursion of them into these northern countrys but no Historie tells us when: Time and Oblivion have obliterated it. There is one sheet of paper [marginal note: entitled: *Hebraismorum [recte Hebraicorum] Cambro-Britannicorum Specimen* by Carolus Edwards] printed London December 24. A. Dom: 1675 writt by Carolus Edwards a Welshman who derives a number of British words from the Hebrew: but he forces it too much, and draws the thred beyond the Staple. The Phoenicians & Tyrians were great Merchants, and traded to Britain for Tinne, & Lead, and were Colonies of the Carthaginians, who spake the Punique language, and might, likely, leave some of their words here. e.g. as at Wapping &c: by the sea side, the Inhabitants doe use many outlandish words, which they endemize by their frequent converse with owtlandish men: but that Writer hath forced, & strained his Etymologies.

Mr Humphrey Lloyd in his Breviarie of Britaine hath gonne a little after this way, but there is not enough of it. John Davies SS TH.P. did doe well in publishing his Welsh Dictionary 1631, but it is very imperfect: But in the Librarie of Howel Vaughan of Hengwrt in the County of Merionith Esq is a Welsh Dictionarie in Manuscript that hath two thousand words more than Dr Davies's. This, if printed, would be of great use for the retriving of

Etymologies, Rivers, Townes, &c in England, France, Ireland & Scotland. In this Librarie are also a great many other Manuscripts in the British tongue, as Histories, Lawes &c, all which are now in the Custodie of Wi(lIAM) Williams Counsellor at Lawe of Grays Inne, the Late [19b] Speaker of the House of Commons. There was a Law-suite about this Librarie: which hath hindred so far the publishing of them. Tis a great pity they are not put in Print. (Mr Meredith Lloyd hath seen and perused them.)

Octob. 31
1687

Jo. Aubrey R.S.S.