

Unofficial place-names in nineteenth- and twentieth-century South Lancashire¹

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Among the incidental consequences of the floods which devastated Cockermouth and Workington in November 2009 was the coining of a new place-name. The tragic death of PC Bill Barker, following the collapse of the Calva bridge across the Derwent at Workington, led to an immediate groundswell of popular opinion that the replacement bridge should be named after him. The temporary structure which was erected a couple of weeks later was indeed known as ‘Barker’s Crossing’, and the permanent bridge now being planned may well bear his name. This is a rare instance of an exactly datable and well-documented new name emerging not as a result of an official decision, but through a ‘vernacular’ process instigated by the community and legitimised by popular usage. In the case of, for example, Spaghetti Junction, the name that was so much appreciated by Margaret Gelling was in use locally before it was more widely documented;² its acquisition of quasi-official status did not happen for some time.³ At Workington in 2009, however, the process was minutely observed by the media and its exact genesis is clear.

This paper looks at unofficial names—either those which have, or once had, a popular currency and yet never acquired official recognition, or those which, like Spaghetti Junction, only later acquired such a status. Some provide local alternatives to rarely-used official names for places or features, while others demonstrate the use of powerful and pungent dialect terms which came from vernacular rather than ‘polite’ discourse.

¹ This article is a revised version of a paper with the same title given to the SNSBI day conference at the University of Salford on 14 November 2009.

² ‘She liked to think that Spaghetti Junction, the giant intersection of roads just north of the city, was a solitary modern example of the will of the people expressed in a name’ (obituary in *The Economist*, 16 May 2009).

³ The interchange was approved in 1968 and opened in 1972, when *The Times* included an article headed ‘Spaghetti Junction—the gateway to London’ (25 May 1972, p. 2). however, not until the late 1970s did the name come into use on, for example, road traffic reports. Officially the junction was, and still is, known as Gravelly Hill Interchange.

The study area is South Lancashire (using the pre-1974 county boundaries) but unquestionably the processes and forms involved could readily be identified in almost any geographical area.⁴ The use of the terms ‘vernacular’ and ‘polite’, borrowed from the study of architecture and landscape, seems particularly appropriate in analysing this aspect of local linguistics, since many of the names specifically refer to landscape features.

The processes and patterns that can be identified pose interesting, if challenging, questions about the extent to which we can posit analogies with those which must have existed 1500 years ago, when so many of our place-names were created. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, though the precise relationships must remain a matter for speculation, there are close parallels with that earlier period—the spontaneous and fluid creation of names, the existence of multiple layers of naming, the use of names that are specific to a certain class, the ephemerality of naming and, conspicuously, the way in which the vibrancy and flexibility of the vernacular language was a driving force in name creation.

The names are often irreverent or ‘vulgar’, and there is no doubt that to at least some contemporaries, 150 or 200 years ago, they were considered unseemly and highly inappropriate. A classic example, not from Lancashire, is the vernacular and peculiarly apposite name Devil’s Arse for the feature more decorously known as Peak Cavern near Castleton, Derbyshire. We might contrast these with those manifestly respectable names that typified the Victorian emphasis on patriotism and national pride—the pub names and street-names which identified battles (always, of course, victories), colonial expansion, war heroes, and royal personages. The vernacular names are vigorous, often witty, drily amusing or unashamedly down to earth, and as such they are a reflection of a strong and dynamic popular culture which is comparably encapsulated in dialect poetry, ballads, oral tradition and community celebrations and festivals.

These names are rarely recorded in the formal literature or the official sources. Although some were eventually honoured by, for example, being shown on Ordnance Survey maps or in local government documents, many had a shadowy existence and would now be lost were it not for the

⁴ For a study which looks at comparable names on the other side of the Pennines, see Chapter 10 ‘Unofficial Place-Names’ in George Redmonds, *Names and History: People, Places and Things* (London, 2004) pp. 155–170.

published or manuscript autobiographies of individuals, or the powerful current of transmitted spoken testimony captured in our own time by the invaluable efforts of oral historians and of projects devoted to preserving community memory. But though they were the underclass of place-names, they were no less important for that—for these were the terms used in an everyday and informal way by generations of local people, and they merit an honourable place in the study of place-names.

The area shown in figure 1 lies in the curious no-man's-land at the meeting of Lancashire, Cheshire and the West Riding of Yorkshire. Mossley, a rural community which emerged as a cotton town in the early-nineteenth century and achieved municipal borough status in 1885, spanned the boundaries of the three counties. The map used in figure 1 is, like the others in this article, from the Ordnance Survey 6-inch to 1-mile sheets of the mid-1840s, the first systematic large-scale mapping of north-west England and a major source for the study of place-names. Within this area there are several types of minor name which reflect vernacular usage, providing type examples of those names which became accepted as official insofar as they were enshrined on Ordnance Survey sheets.

A distinctive category is those names which identify a simple topographical location for farms and cottages, using dialect forms. In this extract can be seen Top of Meadow, Top of Lane and Top of Heights, as well as the more standard Lane Head, Brown Edge and Broad Carr. Clearly the 'Top of' form, like its equivalent 'Bottom of', when combined with a very simple topographical term such as 'Meadow' or 'Lane', was historically comprehensible only to those living in the immediate vicinity, for the ubiquity of lanes, meadows and heights made frequent duplication of such names unavoidable.

There is circumstantial evidence to suggest that names such as these were late coinages, associated with the rapid population increase in marginal areas of upland Lancashire from the mid-eighteenth century. At Haslingden Grane in Rossendale these names tend to be found towards the upper margin of settlement, the high water mark of colonisation during the rural handloom-weaving phase of the county's post-1750 industrialisation.⁵ A classic example there is Top o'th' Knoll, a ruined

⁵ Alan G. Crosby, *The history of Haslingden Grane: a valley, its landscape and its people* (Preston, 1991).

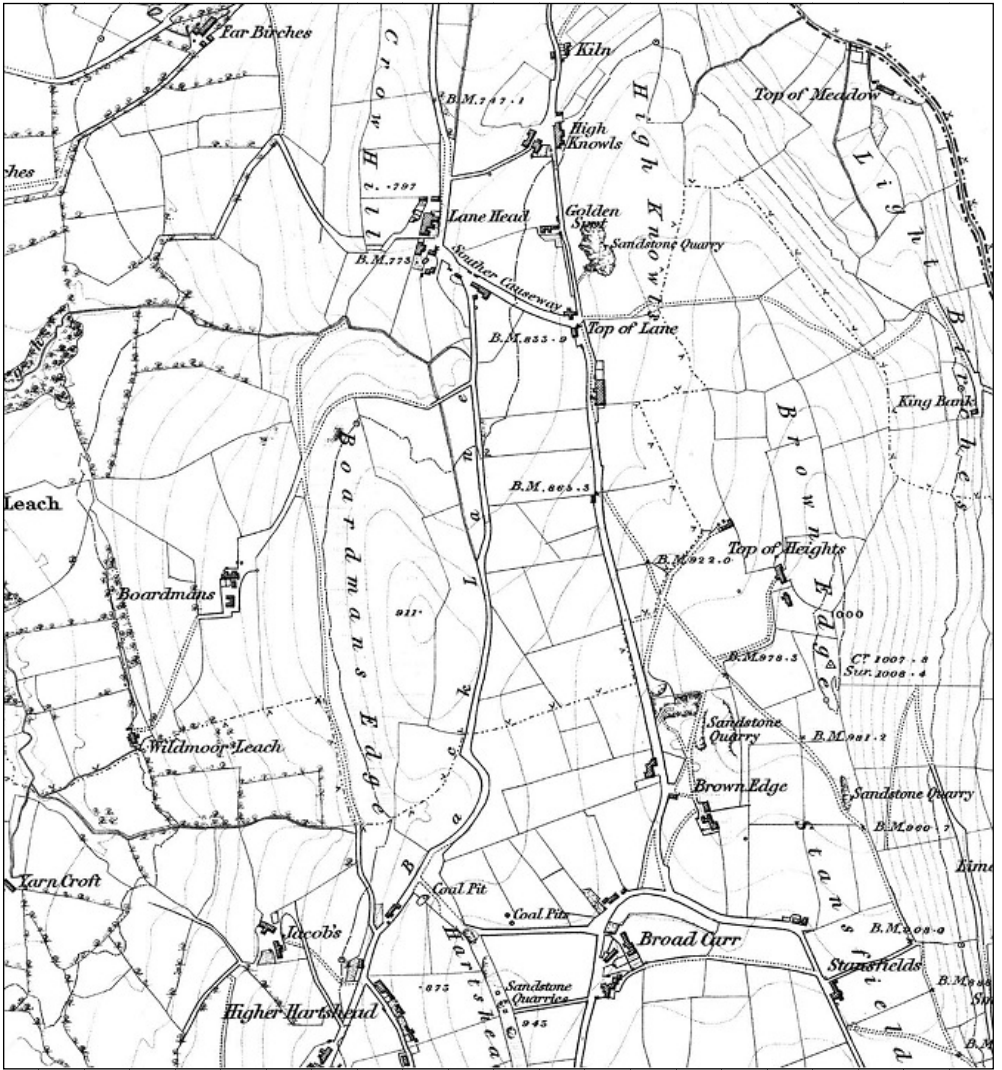


Figure 1: Extract from OS 6-inch map 1st edition Lancashire sheet 97 (published 1848) showing the area north-west of Mossley

farmhouse at 300 metres above sea level on a bleak and exposed north-east facing hillspur. In the valley below, the older settlement sites (from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) were often known by the name of the family which lived there for several generations—examples there include Bentley House, Lower Ormerods and Hartley House—but the newer and higher places had topographical names in the vernacular form.

The naming of farms and smallholdings after their occupants was a very widespread practice in Pennine Lancashire, and the Ordnance Survey includes numerous examples which bear family names. Thus, figure 1 includes Boardmans, Stansfields and Jacob's. In some instances documentary research allows such names to be linked with a specific family and period. For example, Hartley House in Haslingden Grane was occupied by the Hartley family as early as 1618, though by the time of the first detailed survey of the estate (made in 1798) the property had been subdivided and let to four different families. The name therefore originated at the beginning of the seventeenth century but was perpetuated long after the family had gone. The Ormerod family, of nearby Lower Ormerods, were prosperous clothiers who acquired lands there in about 1600, a time of commercial expansion in this part of Lancashire. Their new estate was immediately divided into two tenanted holdings (Higher and Lower) and though the family sold the 37-acre property in the early eighteenth century the name survived to the present day.

A third type of unofficial name represented in figure 1 is that which commemorates contemporary events—in this instance Port Mahon, the name of a small isolated holding. Port Mahon, the capital of Minorca, was captured by the British in 1798 and it is likely that the property was named at this time. A similar example is shown in figure 2, the area immediately south-west of Newton Heath on what was then the edge of Manchester. The use of the name Botany Bay is of course familiar, there being examples from many parts of the country, but why this name was used is unclear—was it for straightforward reasons of topicality, or because the places concerned were remote and distant, or (perhaps the most likely) because the people who lived there were regarded as disreputable and socially-inferior? Close by is a more challenging minor place-name, the row of five tiny cottages called Scutch Buttock. In Lancashire dialect the word *scutch* means 'to beat, thrash or tear open', and was traditionally associated with the linen industry, where the flax was

scutched to break down the fibres into tow, ready for spinning. A name which combines the dialect word for beating with the standard English ‘buttock’ must be the subject of considerable speculation—what personal tragedy is thus commemorated?

Thus, the Mossley area and Newton Heath provide examples of three types of vernacular coinage which acquired the ‘official’ status of inclusion on the Ordnance Survey mapping in the 1840s: the very localised topographical names; the family names used for farms and smallholdings; and the names which derive from nationally-publicised contemporary events.

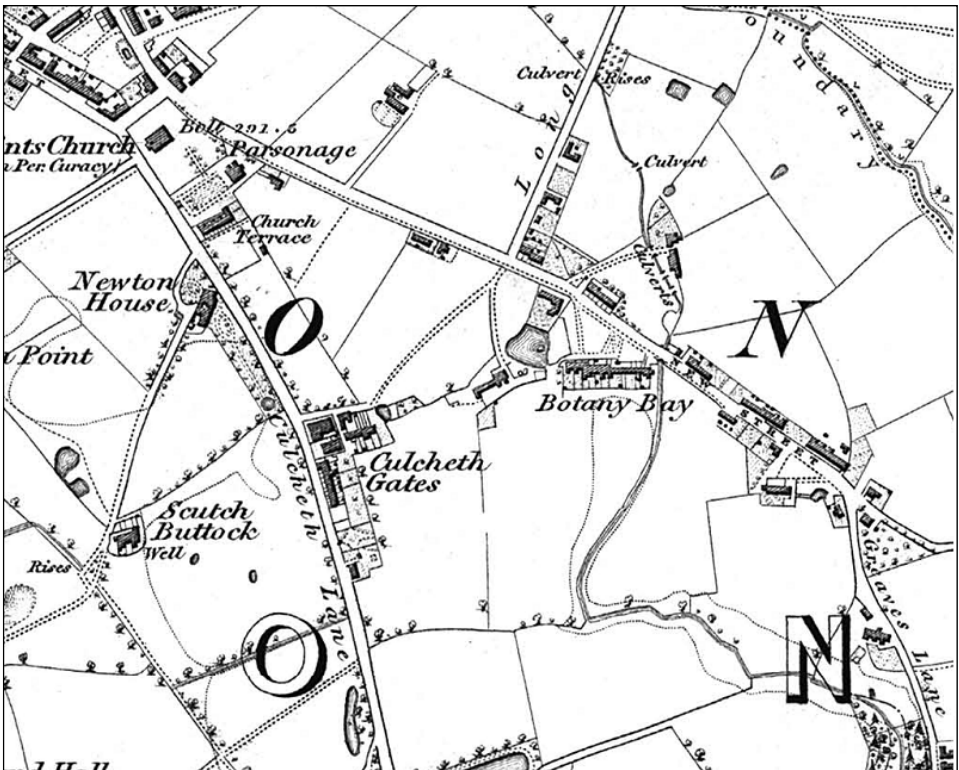


Figure 2: Extract from OS 6-inch map 1st edition Lancashire sheet 104 (published 1848) showing part of Newton Heath, north-east of Manchester

A fourth category of names which became officially-accepted can also be identified—those which derived from a specific dialect term which was still current in the past three centuries (and indeed may be so even today) and which are likely to have been of relatively recent origin. An example is Boggart Hole Clough, a small but deeply-incised valley at Blackley, on the north side of Manchester (see figure 3). The stream flowing through the clough is called Boggart Hole Brook, but its name is evidently a back-formation from that of the valley. In Lancashire dialect a *boggart* is a ghost or evil spirit, and a variety of more-or-less fanciful local legends, recorded by antiquarians and folklorists in the nineteenth century, refer to the existence of a ‘hole’ or cave in this valley, wherein a boggart was said to have dwelt.⁶ This vernacular name survived the encroachment of urbanisation and the valley is now an attractive park amid the urban sprawl.

Another place-name where a current dialect term was used is The Thrutch, between Bacup and Rawtenstall. There the valley of the river Irwell narrows sharply, constricting the flow of the river so it rushes through a short gorge before opening out again. The dialect verb *thrutch* is still current. It means to shift restlessly, to fidget, or to push. Here, too, a legend arose: the upper valley was once a lake, in which the Devil, who had his residence at nearby Hell Clough, would bathe. One day the lake overflowed and began carving the narrow channel, draining the bathing-lake. The Devil gathered an apronful of rocks to make a dam. The apron strings broke, and the tumbled rocks fell above the river where they can be seen today. The overflow channel remained, and there the river *thrutches* its way through the narrow space.⁷

⁶ See Alan G. Crosby, *A Lancashire dictionary of dialect, folklore and tradition* (Ilkley, 2000) p. 26.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 197–198.

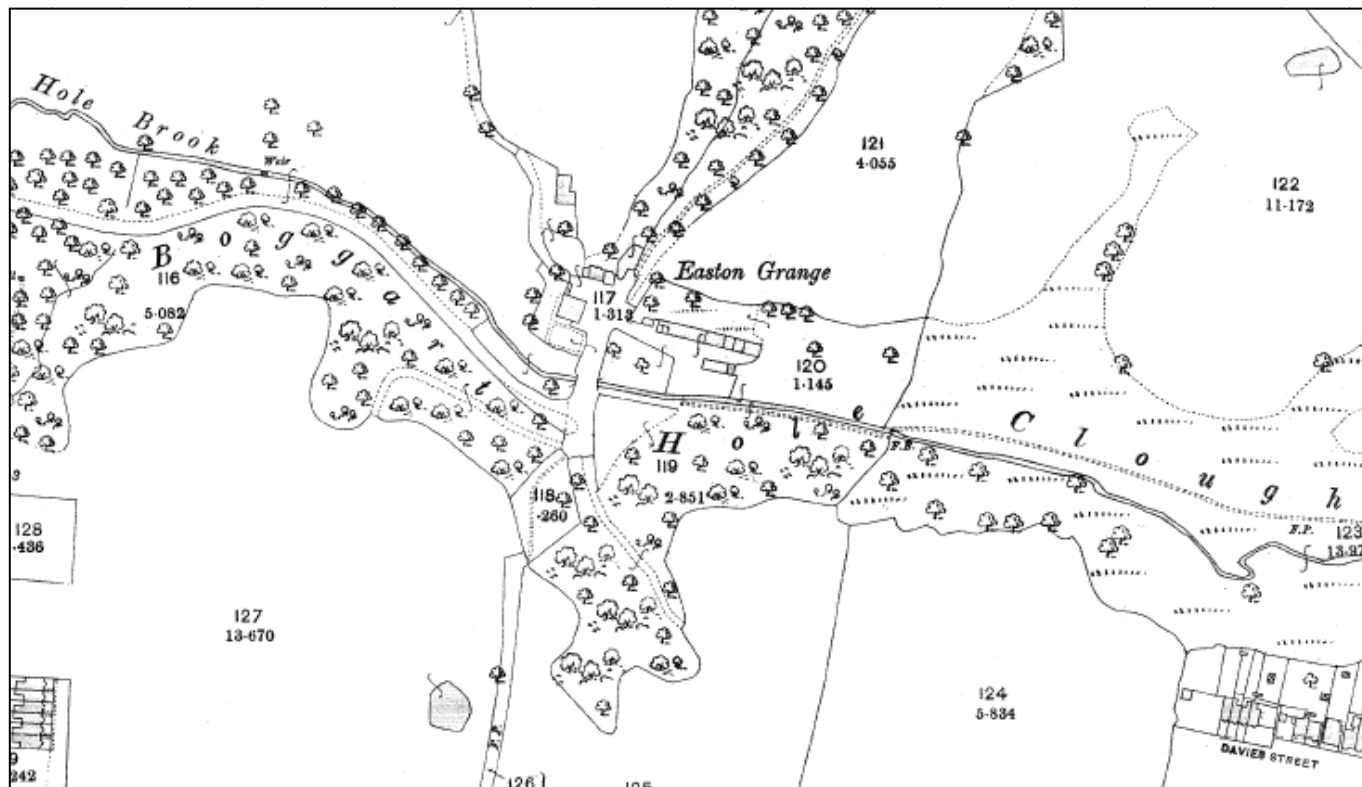


Figure 3: Extract from OS 6-inch map 1st edition Lancashire sheet 96 (published 1848) showing Boggart Hole Clough

So far so good, for all the names considered above have been immortalised by the Ordnance Survey. But there are many other names in the vernacular which are much harder to pin down, surviving only by chance in written form or, more ephemerally, in oral tradition. Such names are—or were—known to all concerned in the locality, but escape the notice of those recording formal or official nomenclature. In Lancashire during the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries the consumption of treacle was associated with grinding poverty.⁸ The result was that ‘Treacle Row’ became a common colloquialism for the poorest terraces and the most destitute areas of a community. However, the use of the term which was once so widespread has now ceased—a universal vernacular phrase two generations ago has become merely an object of local historical curiosity today, remembered only through oral history and anecdotal reminiscence, or simply as a joke. There is not a single entry for the word ‘Treacle’ in the current large-scale street atlases of Lancashire and Greater Manchester.

My mother was born in Openshaw, on the east side of central Manchester, in the mid-1920s, and my grandparents lived in the same terraced house for the next fifty years. As a child I often visited them and on one occasion was taken for a walk along Clayton Lane (the name of the street, embedded deep within the densely built-up inner city, recalling the ancient memory of a winding country byway between green fields), past the decrepit and tumbledown former cotton mill, by then a cardboard box factory, where my grandmother worked. This dark and dismal building was universally known, to everybody in the locality including my family, simply as ‘The Corrugated’, which I now realise is itself a pleasing instance of a vernacular place-name. The object of the walk was a short stretch of dark polluted water, which emerged from a stygian culvert beneath the embankment of the main railway line to Sheffield, then flowed sluggishly for a few hundred yards in the open air between scrubby rubble-strewn banks, before disappearing into another sinister tunnel under streets and houses. This was the ‘countryside’ where my mother had played as a child, and this unappealing watercourse was, I was told, the Black Brook.

⁸ For example, William Robertson, in *Old and New Rochdale and Its People* (Rochdale, 1881) discusses the use by the very poor of a tiny quantity of treacle, to provide a touch of sweetness in a large communal bowl of thin porridge (pp. 24–25).

Decades later, as a local historian, I looked at this land of my fathers (or mothers), and found that the Black Brook was not its proper name. Officially, this watercourse, which rises on the borders of Gorton and Audenshaw, was the Cornbrook, and it gave its name to the district of Cornbrook, close to the confluence with the River Irwell near Old Trafford. The name Cornbrook, redolent of a vanished agricultural past, had long been superseded in popular usage by a title far more accurately descriptive of its industrial present. In fact, the brook in this area had a third name, Gorton Brook, which is clearly indicated by the 6-inch map of 1845 (figure 4) which marks, for example, Gorton Brook Potteries and Gorton Brook House.

Thus, we have a minor watercourse (albeit one of which a significant part was followed by township boundaries) that in one stretch of less than a mile had the official name used throughout its length; a specific and separate locative name derived from the township; and a vernacular name resulting from its appearance. Black Brook, the most recent of these names, was the only one in everyday use by local people, and Cornbrook was unknown to them—or at least they knew the name only as that of a place five miles away.

Moreover, this was a name widely used in this part of Lancashire for any filthy watercourse. While writing this paper, I reread the autobiography of an old friend of mine, a boiler-maker born and bred in nearby Ardwick, in which he writes that in the late 1950s:

I used to play on the banks of the river Medlock, which us locals called ‘The Black Brook’, and I can recollect that on certain days the little river that began its long tortured journey high in the Pennines, would run purple, or bright red, or yellow and green because of the effluents discharged from the numerous dyeworks, bleacheries or chemical factories sited on its banks. The Black Brook was no pretty Pennine watercourse once it had entered Manchester’s heavily polluted eastern suburbs ... [its] banks here in Ardwick consisted only of hard-packed ashes tipped here by generations of firebeaters from the nearby factory boilerhouses; millions of broken and crushed bricks from long forgotten demolished dwellings; and heaps of sticky, mucky-white coloured limy clay dumped by the factory from down nearby Lime Kiln Lane.⁹

⁹ Alan McEwen, *Chronicles of a Lancastrian boilerman* (Cowling, 1998) p. 6.

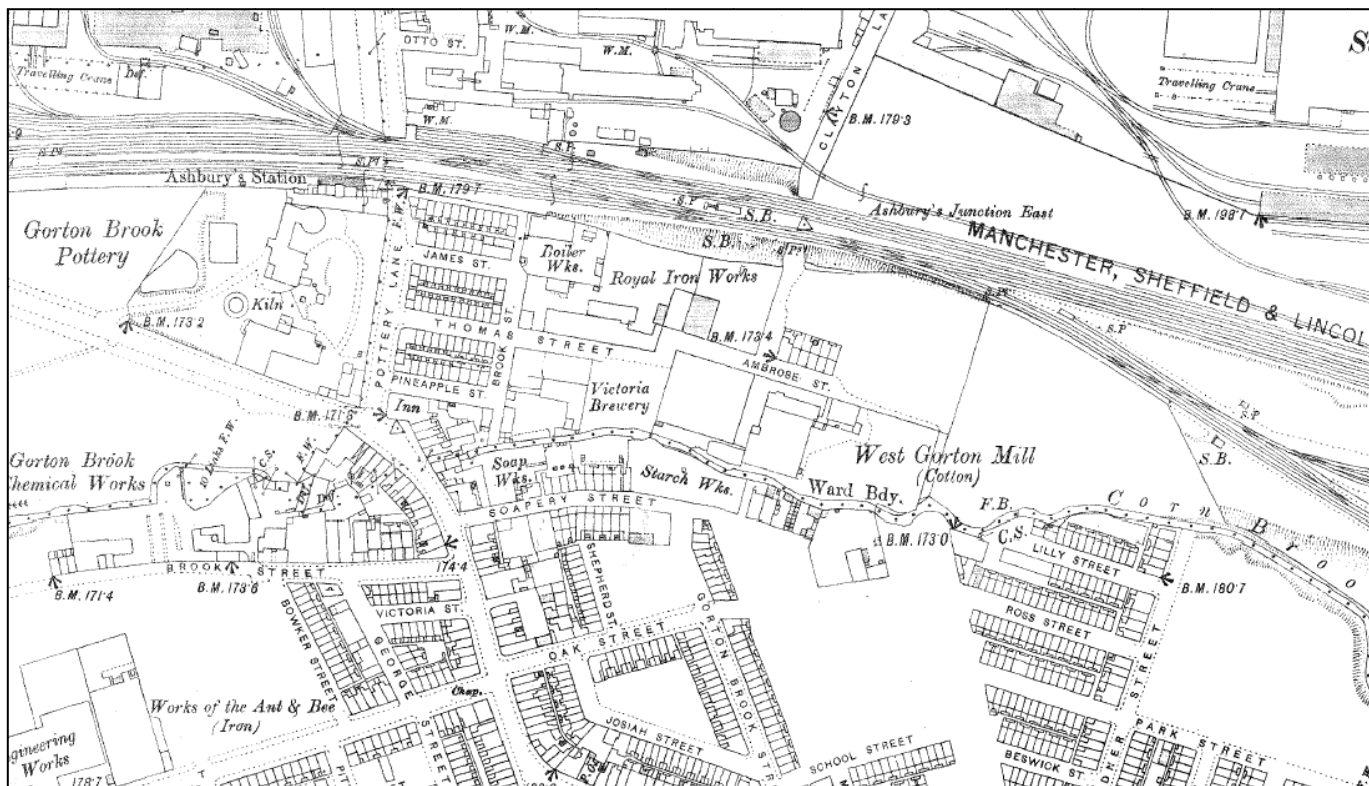


Figure 4: Extract from OS 25-inch map 1st edition Lancashire sheet 104/12 (published 1893)

Like Black Brook, many unofficial names recall distinctive topographical features. Such names, as in the above examples, are known only to ‘us locals’ and to nobody else. Indeed, it might be argued that they were part of the private language of places and classes, helping, like a badge, to identify those who were ‘of us’ and those who were not. Sometimes the origins of such names are very simple, as with Black Brook, but new layers are then added. For example, the term ‘The Hotties’ is still in general use to describe the place where the almost boiling wastewater from the Pilkington’s glassworks at Ravenhead in St Helens discharges into the canal. The name was obviously coined to describe the gushing hot water, but has now been transferred additionally to the place itself.

The evidence for these local names comes from conversations with local people. Published and unpublished working-class autobiographies are also an invaluable source. As already noted, formal documentation of these names is a rarity, but occasionally an autobiography or a reminiscence of a place ‘as it used to be’ will provide a larger trawl of examples, perhaps with some explanation of the origin of the names, and a degree of social and cultural context. An excellent instance is *Memories of an Atherton Pitman*, subtitled *Atherton: It’s [sic] way of life and characters in the early part of the 1900’s*.¹⁰ Published in 1990, this is a rich resource for the study of working-class culture, including dialect and naming patterns, in the South Lancashire coalfield.

In the book the memoirist, Arthur Griffiths (1895–1977) draws our attention to the complex geography of vernacular naming, creating at times the impression of a parallel shadowy world of communities and places whose names appeared on no map and were recorded in no official document, but were universally understood. Thus, the roughest quarter of the small mining town of Tyldesley, the part where the Irish community lived, was known to everybody as Jig Broo. The latter word is ‘brow’ (throughout south Lancashire, pronounced ‘brew’), meaning ‘a slope approaching the top of a hill’. The first word derives not from any humorous reference to the Irish, but from the ‘jig’, an inclined plane used to haul coal trucks up a tramroad from the pit. Similarly, the minimum-standard company housing built to accommodate the colliers and their families in the early Industrial Revolution, which by the 1920s had

¹⁰ Arthur Griffiths (ed. Evelyn S. Finch), *Memories of an Atherton Pitman* (Leigh, 1990).

become a notorious slum, was invariably called ‘t’barricks’, a name which goes back to the eighteenth-century and is found in other parts of the county,¹¹ suggesting that it was (perhaps in the way that the union workhouses were widely called ‘the bastille’), part of a broader working-class irony.

Griffiths recalls how the ‘rough, tough’ colliery village of Howe Bridge had two unofficial halves, divided by one of those important boundaries which people instinctively recognise but which are invisible to officialdom—a demarcation of territory not by the administrative units of wards or parishes but by sides of a street or unobtrusive landmarks on a road. In this instance there was Uplone, a group of about 200 houses and a village club, focused on the colliery housing built in 1870–1875 by Fletcher’s, the local coal company. The residents here were mainly ‘in-comers’, brought in by the company from Wales, the Forest of Dean and Staffordshire.¹² There was also, therefore, Downlone, formed of older cottages, some of them in an L-shape with ‘Owd Tabby’s’ public house (that being the vernacular name for what was officially the *Oak Tree Root*),¹³ a common yard, allotments and smallholdings, and an entrance to the Day Eye coalpit. This was where those ‘mainly of old Lancastrian stock’ lived.¹⁴ Uplone was therefore perceived as socially inferior, and Uploners and Downloners did not get on: ‘they would not even sit with them in the taprooms of the five village pubs [and at weekends] after 11 p.m. on Saturday nights there would be at least a dozen or so fights going on between “up Loners” and “Down Loners”’.¹⁵

In his long and intricate text Griffiths also emphasises the central importance of the unofficial naming of people as well as places. Here, and elsewhere in the region, general use was made of nicknames or the patronymic string name-forms ubiquitous in Lancashire until the early-twentieth century. Thus, a man might be known as ‘Tom o’Dick o’Jim o’Tom’, recording the Christian name diminutives of four generations.

¹¹ For example, The Barracks, a row of pitmen’s cottages adjacent to Clifton Moss Colliery, between Bolton and Manchester, is named on the 6-inch map of 1846.

¹² Griffiths, *Atherton Pitman*, pp. 16–17.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 30, discusses the naming of the pub; one family which lived there was known as ‘Roots’, though their official surname was the more exotic Pasquil.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 38–41, discusses the two communities in detail.

His surname, used for official documentation, would rarely be employed by people in his own community. This was particularly apparent in areas such as Rossendale, where surnames such as Hargreaves, Hartley and Lord were extremely numerous, shared by many different families. Among those which Griffiths records at Tyldesley are Tum o' Nan, Dick o' Liza, Jim Splitty, Fat Dick, Ponkey, Swappy, Nebby, Cracky, and Pecky. Widely in the county, such names were transferred to small farms and cottages, not (as in the examples from near Mossley discussed earlier) using the simple surname but instead the vernacular naming form: Owd Bob's, Fred'rick's, Owd Gerry's. In Haslingden Grane the farm referred to earlier, with the vernacular topographical name Top o'th' Knoll, also had a parallel vernacular personal name, Owd Andrey's, after its tenant in the late nineteenth-century. There, perhaps we have a distinction between 'refined' vernacular and 'common' vernacular? Other features could also acquire names from this process—for example, the stone quarry known as Old Joseph's Delph at Whittle le Woods near Chorley.

It would be a mistake to separate, academically, the process of vernacular naming, which employs dialect terms and speech forms, from all the other uses of dialect. The exceptionally rich vocabulary of dialect words of course shows no such artificial divides, so we should consider these names in the same light as, for example, the term 'slancing' (taking out another man's wife for immoral purposes), or 'skrike' (the particular type of screams uttered by a wailing child) or 'jolloping' (to take a very effective purgative ... and its consequences). These words and phrases were woven into the very fabric of everyday life, and the place-names were all part of the raucous vibrancy of a 'rough tough' community.

A detailed account of how one specific naming process operated is provided by Richard Ridyard, in his *Memories of Lowton* (1935). Lowton, near Leigh, had many affinities with places such as Atherton and Tyldesley, though mining was less dominant as an employment. Ridyard noted how plots of land locally were known by the Lancashire dialect term 'fold' (in Lowton, pronounced 'fowd').¹⁶ But whereas in the areas further north and north-east the fold was a group of cottages and small farms clustered around a central green or yard, in Lowton even individual cottages were given the name. Ridyard quotes some examples, each in

¹⁶ Richard Ridyard, *Memories of Lowton* (priv. pub. Leigh, 1935) p. 22.

the vernacular naming tradition: Thowd Fowd, Shuttles Fowd, Mangle Fowd. He also records the names of the lanes and crofts on which the 'fowds' had been built: Thowd Lane, Deawn Fieldt ('down the field'). But he also pinpoints an exact naming process: "'Mangle Fowd" derived its name from an old woman named Betty Mather, but who was best known locally by the sobriquet, Betty Chathy or Betty Mangle. She earned her living by mangling the clothes of the villagers'.¹⁷ Ridyard also notes the very widespread use of nicknames, many of which also involved vernacular place-names. Of, for example, 'Jem at Joes Jacks', or 'Bill at Dickey Yates', he says 'I never learned or heard them spoken of by their correct names'.¹⁸

He lamented the loss of the vernacular names, and in doing so revealed the way in which the lively vernacular forms were suppressed by a more sober and unimaginative officialdom: 'Winwick Lane which leads from Newton Road, near the Chapel to Winwick, is best known to the older generation of Lowtonians as Dolly's Lane ... how the Lane came to be called Dolly's was related to me many years ago by an old Lowtonian who worked on the Manchester-Liverpool railway during its construction' [that is, 1827–1830]. Ridyard explains that Dorothy (or Dolly) Ridgeway lived in a cottage close to the new railway, and turned her cottage into a grocery store for the navvies: 'food or drink, tobacco, matches, shoelaces, buttons, thread etc., they soon found that Dolly would supply their requirements, and her home-brewed herb beer was known to the men ... for miles along the line'. The lane thereby acquired its name, and the bridge over the line was called 'Dolly's Bridge', and 'by this name the lane and bridge have been known for a hundred years, but in recent times the old Lane has been modernized and named Winwick Lane by an unromantic District Council'.¹⁹

Such 'improvement' by local authorities is frequently encountered. At Longridge near Preston, for example, a hamlet of 26 cottages was purpose-built in the early-1830s to accommodate handloom weavers, and was immediately christened Newtown. Its main street was named Pump Street, for obvious reasons. Referring to the restoration and conservation of this historically-important site in the 1980s, Joseph Till, the historian

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 46–47.

of Longridge, observes that ‘Unfortunately, the vanity of the times has caused the name of the humble but respectable Pump Street to be changed to Southern Close’.²⁰

With the Industrial Revolution came successive waves of migration into Lancashire, creating a growing cultural diversity and, in the fast-expanding urban areas, enclaves associated with people of particular ethnic origin. The inevitable labelling followed: the numerous Little Irelands, found in most Lancashire towns, were well-known by the middle of the nineteenth century, even before the massive influx of destitute Irish as a result of the 1845–1848 Famine. The most famous example of all was that described by Friedrich Engels in his classic work of 1844, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. That ‘Little Ireland’ lay alongside the River Medlock on the south side of Manchester city centre, and was for Engels symbolic of the degradation of the human condition. As such it played a not unimportant part in the formulation of the theories of global Communism, but while Communists from Pyongyang to Lenin-grad knew all about it, the Ordnance Survey never recognised its existence. Significantly, of course, Liverpool had no Little Ireland, for it was Large Ireland—of all cities only Dublin had more Irish-born in the later nineteenth century.

Other ‘Littles’ emerged, of which the most familiar in Manchester was Little Italy, a compact and clearly delineated block of streets in Ancoats, north-east of the city centre. Some 2000 Italian-born residents lived there in 1914, compared with about 600 in 1891, and the area seems to have acquired its name in the 1890s. It was used not only by outsiders but also by the Italians themselves when dealing with the same outsiders—but in fact the Italian community recognised its own sub-divisions, seeing the area not as a homogeneous unit but as a microcosm of the territoriality in Italy itself, dividing particularly into areas known as *Genovese* or *Nap* [Neapolitan].²¹

A popular street ballad sung in Ancoats in the 1930s highlights the ethnic diversity and territoriality of Manchester between the wars:

²⁰ J. M. Till, *A history of Longridge and its people* (Preston, 1993) p. 80.

²¹ A detailed account of Little Italy, with valuable reflections on territoriality and naming, is given by Paul di Felice, ‘Italians in Manchester 1891–1939: settlement and occupations’, *The Local Historian*, 30.2 (May 2000) pp. 88–104.

Why do you want to join the army?
 What do you want to join the army for?
 Take a trip down Ancoats Lane, you're in Italy so grand
 Take a trip down Oldham Road, you're in Ireland
 China and Japan are in Upper Brooke Street
 Germany's in Greenheyes so they say,
 If you want to go further still
 Palestine's in Cheetham Hill,
 What do you want to join the army for?²²

In Manchester the Jewish community, the second largest in Britain, had grown very rapidly in the late-nineteenth century with refugees fleeing the pogroms in Eastern Europe and the Russian Empire. The older, more prosperous Jewish community, dating back to the eighteenth century, had moved outwards to the middle-class suburbs. Thus, although 'Palestine' might have been 'in Cheetham Hill', the traditional Jewish heartland, by the late 1920s the tram conductors would call out 'Palestine Road, Yidsbury' when they reached Palatine Road, Didsbury, in the leafy southern suburbs of the city, and by 1939 that nickname was in everyday use.²³

At the opposite end of the social scale, but also reflecting the cultural diversity of the Manchester conurbation, Robert Roberts (born 1905), author of *The Classic Slum* (1971) and *A Ragged Schooling* (1976), two of the greatest working-class autobiographies, recalled how Waterloo Street, which ran from the Salford slums down to the new docks on the Manchester Ship Canal, was known to everybody locally as The Barbary Coast. With its 22 pubs over a measured quarter of a mile, The Barbary Coast, 'haunt of men home from the sea', had a wild reputation for which its piratical name was entirely appropriate.²⁴

²² Quoted by di Felice, p. 88.

²³ See, for example, Tom Rosenthal, 'Howard Jacobson: the day The Holocaust came to Manchester' (*The Independent* 2 July 2006) and Julia Maine, 'The Jewish community of the South Manchester suburb of Didsbury 1891–1914: a socio-economic comparison with the Northern sector of the city's Jewry' [Unpublished Open University dissertation 1996, now updated and available on-line at: <<http://www.webpalette.co.uk/jewishresearch.htm>>].

²⁴ Robert Roberts, *A ragged schooling: growing up in the classic slum* (Manchester, 1976) p. 125.

The antithesis of this in every sense was the humorous use of the name Canaan to describe the area of Higherford, at Barrowford in East Lancashire, because of the dominance of Methodist chapels in the area. There were comparable examples in other Lancashire towns, and though these were unofficial there are clear parallels with the emergence of Bethesda as an official name not only for parts of Welsh communities but also for a whole town in Caernarfonshire. Richard Ridyard noted how at Lowton an area was generally known as ‘Thowd Work Heause’, the parish poorhouse having been constructed there in 1817, but that it had since become ‘Mount Tabor’. Here, again, he captures from oral tradition the reason for a name change. The inhabitant of one of the cottages, a devout Methodist, complained to a visiting preacher about the inferior name. He agreed with her that it was undesirable, and suggested she should rename her house ‘Mount Tabor because “I feel every time I come amongst you that I am with the brethren”’.²⁵ Perhaps we might also contrast this use of Biblical virtue with the name which Arthur Griffiths records for the roughest part of his home town, Atherton. It was known simply, and to everybody, as Little Hell.

We can thus pick out particular themes within the generality of vernacular or unofficial names: the labelling of places by local topographical locators; the use of personal names and surnames, especially nicknames; the description of locations with distinctive physical or visual features; the names which relate to relative position, as in ‘Downlone’; and the places named for the qualities of their inhabitants, whether their virtues or their vices. All of those described above are essentially unselfconscious coinages, in which there is no overt attempt to be clever or amusing. But in Lancashire there are also examples of such apparently vernacular names which have a journalistic quality, where it is not clear that local people themselves used the expressions on a regular basis, but instead there are suggestions that the name was a consciously amusing creation for the purposes of newspaper articles, ballads, comic routines or even the early versions of tourist department publicity.

An example is Hollingworth Lake, a feeder reservoir for the Rochdale Canal. The lake, which is about three-quarters of a mile long, lies in the foothills of the Pennines north-east of Rochdale, and from the mid-nineteenth century was a destination for day outings and Sunday after-

²⁵ Ridyard, *Lowton*, p. 58.

noon walks—like many such places, it acquired tea gardens, beerhouses and other entertainments. At some point it apparently acquired the joking name of ‘th’ Weighvers’ Seaport’, and this is often quoted in local literature, contrasted humorously with, for example, Blackpool or Southport. In reality, local parlance would not say ‘seaport’ but ‘seaside’, and it must be doubted whether this is other than a journalistic invention.²⁶ The most famous such name is, however, Wigan Pier, which in origin is genuine—or at least, ‘pier’ was authentic Wigan dialect for the wooden jetty which projected into the canal basin on the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, used for loading coal onto barges. As the popularity of seaside holidays and excursions grew, and the pleasure piers at Blackpool and Southport gained wider fame, the existing name became a joke, exploited by the makers of humorous postcards and by music hall comedians, and eventually immortalised, in a quite different context, by George Orwell.

Lest it should be concluded that the process of vernacular name coinage is only of historical interest, the examples quoted in the opening paragraph may be cited to demonstrate that it is not. But no less intriguing is the evidence that shows that neither is it confined to what might loosely be termed ‘the working classes’. The vernacular is alive and well among the middle classes too, as the following three examples illustrate. The first was told me by a student who was born in the late-1940s at Bollington, Cheshire. She grew up on a small suburban estate in that attractive Pennine-edge town, living in a road which had a proper name but was known to all local people as Bedstead Avenue. This was because, when the estate was being built in the 1930s, the ground was found to be too soft to bear the weight of the road. Consequently, old iron bedsteads were laid across the spongy terrain (rather as, a century before, George Stephenson had laid brushwood hurdles to carry the Liverpool & Manchester Railway across Chat Moss). The scheme worked, the road was built—but for a generation it bore a vernacular name of its own.

The second example is very recent, but recalls the naming of ethnic districts apparent before the Second World War. Since the 1970s Manchester’s Indian community has concentrated particularly in the Rusholme district on the south side of the city centre. There, along Wilmslow Road, has arisen a remarkable and visually spectacular zone of Asian restaurants, takeaways and clubs. This stretch of the road is now known,

²⁶ I am willing to be corrected on this point, but remain sceptical.

not only in popular parlance but also in the city's tourist literature, websites and guidebooks, as [The] Curry Mile, and there seems little doubt that this unofficial name has now made the grade.²⁷ It has gained that elusive honour, official recognition and acceptance: 'in January 2008, Manchester City Council officially put signs up bearing that title'.²⁸

But perhaps the most interesting instance of a middle-class coinage is from Crosby, on the coast just north of Liverpool. The shore there is now famed for the presence of Antony Gormley's haunting 'Another Place', one hundred life-sized casts of his own body standing along a two-kilometre stretch of the beach. It is backed by sand-dunes, part of a magnificent belt of dunes extending from the very edge of Liverpool docks northwards for fifteen miles to Southport. In the very early 1970s, in common with a large number of the young men of Crosby and their girlfriends, a friend of mine used to drive his Morris Minor down to the shore to do his courting. There they would park in a space in the dunes at Burbo Bank, Blundellsands, where the onshore winds had blown a large open clearing or depression in the sandhills. The local name for this place was powerfully evocative of O-level geography lessons at grammar school: it was known to all concerned as The Erosion.²⁹

²⁷ See <<http://www.rusholmecurry.co.uk/>>.

²⁸ A summary history of Curry Mile, where the first Indian restaurant opened in the late-1950s, is given at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/manchester/content/articles/2009/05/12/curry_mile_history_feature.shtm>.

²⁹ I should like to thank those who provided the conversational evidence which has been used in this paper: Janet Cole, Elsie Crosby, Margaret Hanrahan, and Mike Pennington. It would have been a great pleasure to have discussed the contents with my friend Mary Higham: alas, that could not be, but I hope she would have enjoyed it—and I suspect she would have contributed some pithy East Lancashire examples of her own!