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Place-names from *hām*, distinguished from *hamm* names, in relation to the settlement of Kent, Surrey and Sussex

JOHN McN. DODGSON

The element OE *hām*, ‘a village, a village community, an estate, a manor, a homestead’,¹ is generally reckoned to belong to an early stratum of English place-names.² Within this stratum, and especially in the type in *-ingham* from OE *-ingahām*, it is associated with place-names from OE *-ingas* and *-inga-* (the genitive composition form).³ The same common antiquity is noted on the

¹ *EPN* 1, 226; *DEPN*, pp. 213–14. The following abbreviations are used in this article and its appendices: *Bach* = A. Bach, *Deutsche Namenkunde 11: die deutschen Ortsnamen* (Heidelberg, 1953–4); *BCS* = *Cartularium Saxonicum*, ed. W. de G. Birch (London, 1885–93); *BNF* = *Beiträge zur Namenforschung* n.F.; *DB* = *Domesday Book*, ed. A. Farley and H. Ellis (London, 1783–1816); *DEPN* = E. Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 4th ed. (Oxford, 1960); *EPN* = A. H. Smith, *English Place-Name Elements*, EPNS 25–6 (Cambridge, 1956); *EPNS* = English Place-Name Society; *JEPN* = *Jnl of the Eng. Place-Name Soc.*; *KPN* = J. K. Wallenberg, *Kentish Place-Names, a Topographical and Etymological Study of the Place-Name Material in Kentish Charters dated before the Conquest*, Uppsala Universitets Årsskrift 1931, *Filosofi, Språkvetenskap och Historiska Vetenskaper* 2 (1931); *Margary* = I. D. Margary, *Roman Roads in Britain*, 1 vol. rev. ed. (London, 1967): the numbers which Margary gives to Roman roads are used below, in both the text and maps; *NoB* = *Namn och Bygd*; *PN-ing*⁽¹⁾ and *PN-ing*⁽²⁾ = E. Ekwall, *English Place-Names in -ing*, *Skrifter utgivna av Kungl. Humanistiska Vetenskapssamfundet i Lund* 6 (1923) and 2nd ed. (Lund, 1962); *PNK* = J. K. Wallenberg, *The Place-Names of Kent* (Uppsala, 1934); *PNSr* = J. E. B. Gover, A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, with A. Bonner, *The Place-Names of Surrey*, EPNS 11 (Cambridge, 1934); *PNSx* = A. Mawer, F. M. Stenton and J. E. B. Gover, *The Place-Names of Sussex*, EPNS 6–7 (Cambridge, 1929 and 1930); *Sandred* = K. I. Sandred, *English Place-Names in -stead*, *Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Studia Anglistica Upsaliensia* 2 (1963); *Studies* (1931) = E. Ekwall, *Studies on English Place- and Personal Names*, *Kungl. Humanistiska Vetenskapssamfundet i Lund, Årsberättelse 1930–1: 1* (Lund, 1931); *Studies* (1936) = E. Ekwall, *Studies on English Place-Names*, *Kungl. Vitterhets-, Historie- och Antikvitetsakademiens Handlingar* 42:1 (Stockholm, 1936).

For help in the preparation of this article I am grateful to colleagues at University College London, and in the Survey of English Place-Names: Mr Kenneth Wass of the Department of Geography drew the maps; Professor Randolph Quirk obtained a grant for me from University College towards the cost of the preparation; Mr Alexander Rumble and Miss Joy Hubble verified the more difficult map-references from old editions of the Ordnance Survey maps; Mr Rumble corroborated the reading discussed below, p. 31, n.1; and Mrs Doris Lord made the typescript. To Professor Clemoes I am grateful for his lucid perception and patience as editor.

² *DEPN*, p. xv, (b), and *EPN* 1, 227, (2).

³ *DEPN*, p. xv, (b); *PN-ing*⁽¹⁾, pp. xix, 122–8 and 152–8; *PN-ing*⁽²⁾, pp. 117–73; and *EPN* 1, 227, (2) (iii).

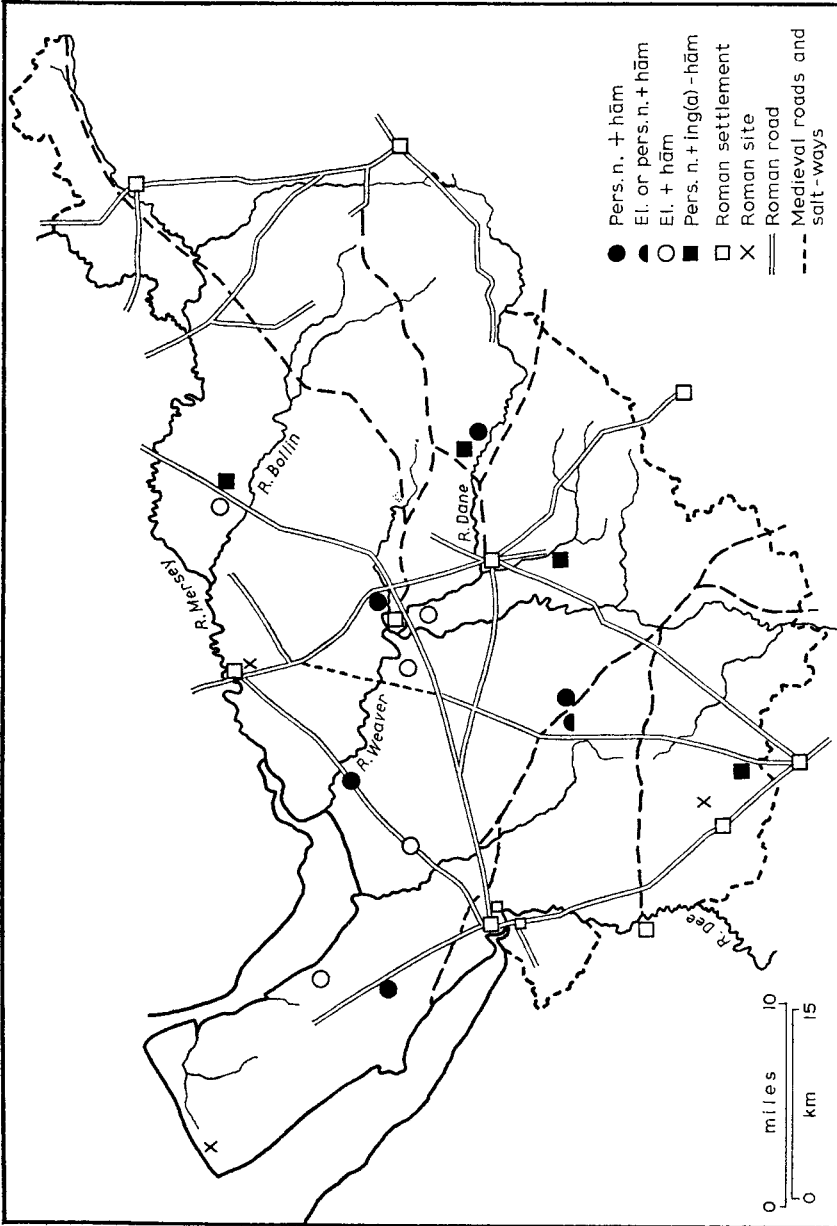


FIG. 1 Place-names from OE *hām* in Cheshire

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continent between place-names from OHG *-heim* and those from OHG *-ing*.¹ In recent years an attempt has been made at a re-appraisal of the value of the place-name from OE *-ingas*, *-inga-*, including the numerous *-ingahām* type, as evidence of the progress of the English settlements,² while other recent work has seen the beginning of an examination of the place-names containing OE *-hām* and the compounds *wīc-hām*, *hām-tūn*, *hām-stede*³ and *hām-st(e)all*: the distribution of the compound *wīc-hām* has been shown to be related very particularly to Roman roads and Roman archaeology,⁴ and it has been recognized that in Cheshire (see fig. 1), place-names in *-ham* from *-hām* and in *-ingham* (<*-ing(a)hām*) are distributed in a pattern based on the run of the Roman roads.⁵ This latter realization suggests a refinement upon Ekwall's observation⁶ that the distribution of place-names from *-ingahām* is related to Roman roads, for it is likely that in the *-ingahām* structure it is the *-hām* element that is to be associated with the distribution along the Roman roads, and not the *-inga-* element which interested Ekwall. Further work in progress on place-names in *-ham* from *-hām*⁷ provides yet more evidence of the existence in England of a relationship corresponding to that on the continent between OHG *-heim* place-names and settlement in Roman contexts.⁸ The accompanying general illustration of south-east England (see figs. 2 and 3) is sufficient to show that in, say, Sussex and Hertfordshire the *-ham* and *hām-stede* names are often close to Roman roads and to areas developed in Roman times, whereas in some parts of the south-east these name-types and Anglo-Saxon pagan burial-sites appear to exclude each other. The *-ham* names of Hertfordshire, Middlesex and Essex still await detailed attention,⁹ but it is expected that the problems of distribution and typology in these counties will be less difficult than they are in Sussex, Surrey and Kent. The distribution of names in *-ham* in Essex is selective and regional, an effect discernible even in P. H. Reaney's distribution-map of '*ham(m)*, *hamm* and *-ingham*' in Essex,¹⁰ which lacks the

¹ Bach, pt 2, §§463, 477–8 and 581–5.

² A. H. Smith, 'Place-Names and the Anglo-Saxon Settlement', *Proc. of the Brit. Acad.* 42 (1956), 67–88; J. McN. Dodgson, 'The Significance of the Distribution of the English Place-Name in OE *-ingas*, *-inga-* in South-East England', *MA* 10 (1966), 1–29, and 'The English Arrival in Cheshire', *Trans. of the Hist. Soc. of Lancashire and Cheshire* 119 (1967), 1–37; and Sarah Kirk, 'A Distribution Pattern: *-ingas* in Kent', *JEPN* 4 (1972), 37–59.

³ For *hām-stede* see Sandred, pp. 65 and 88.

⁴ Margaret Gelling, 'English Place-Names Derived from the Compound *wīc-hām*', *MA* 11 (1967), 87–104.

⁵ Dodgson, 'The English Arrival in Cheshire', pp. 10 (fig. 2) and 15.

⁶ *PN-ing*⁽¹⁾, p. 163; cf. *PN-ing*⁽¹⁾, pp. 155ff.

⁷ Dr Barry Cox is expected to bring out in *JEPN* 5 (1973) the eagerly awaited results of a study of Midland place-names, in which the distribution of names from OE *hām* in an extensive tract of country is examined in detail. This will enable us to ascertain whether the Roman road pattern governs this distribution in the larger area as consistently as it does in Cheshire.

⁸ Bach, pt 2, §§477–8.

⁹ Work on these, and on the Chiltern region, is in hand.

¹⁰ EPNS 12 (Cambridge, 1935), end-pocket.

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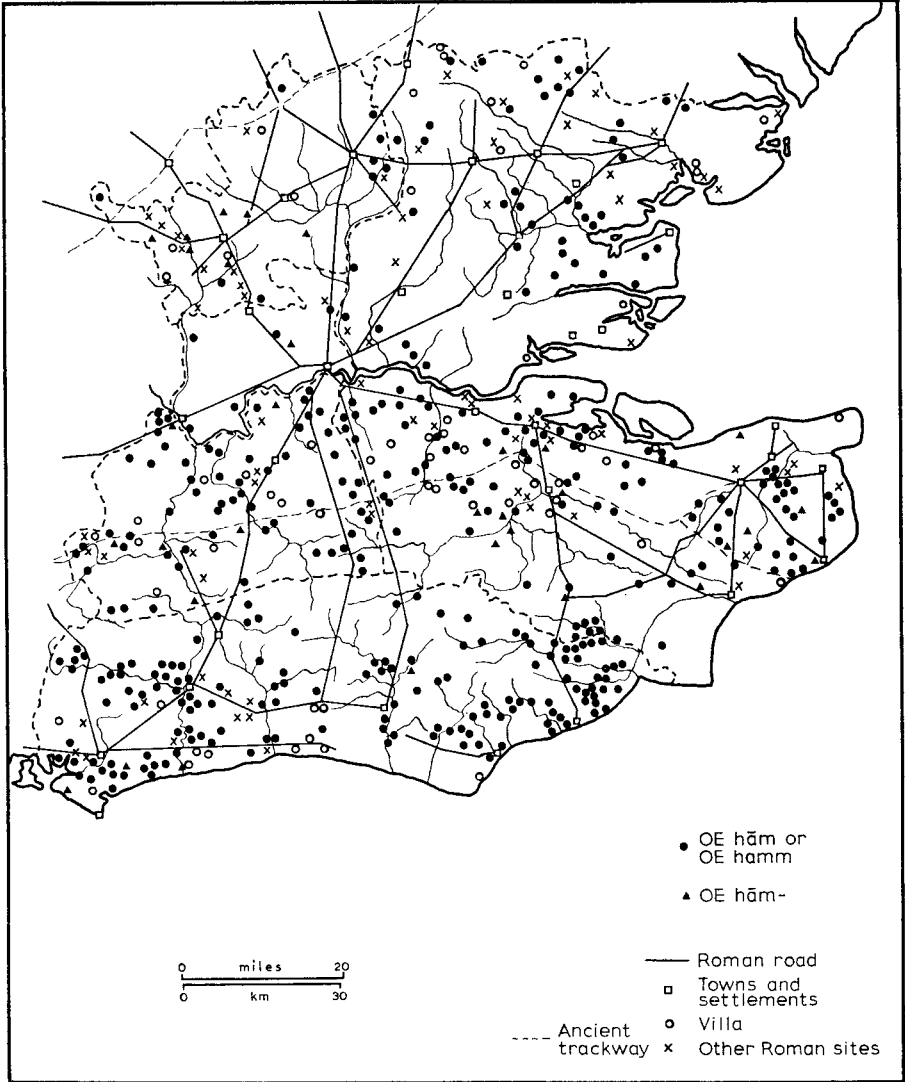


FIG. 2 Place-names in *-bam* and Roman sites in south-east England

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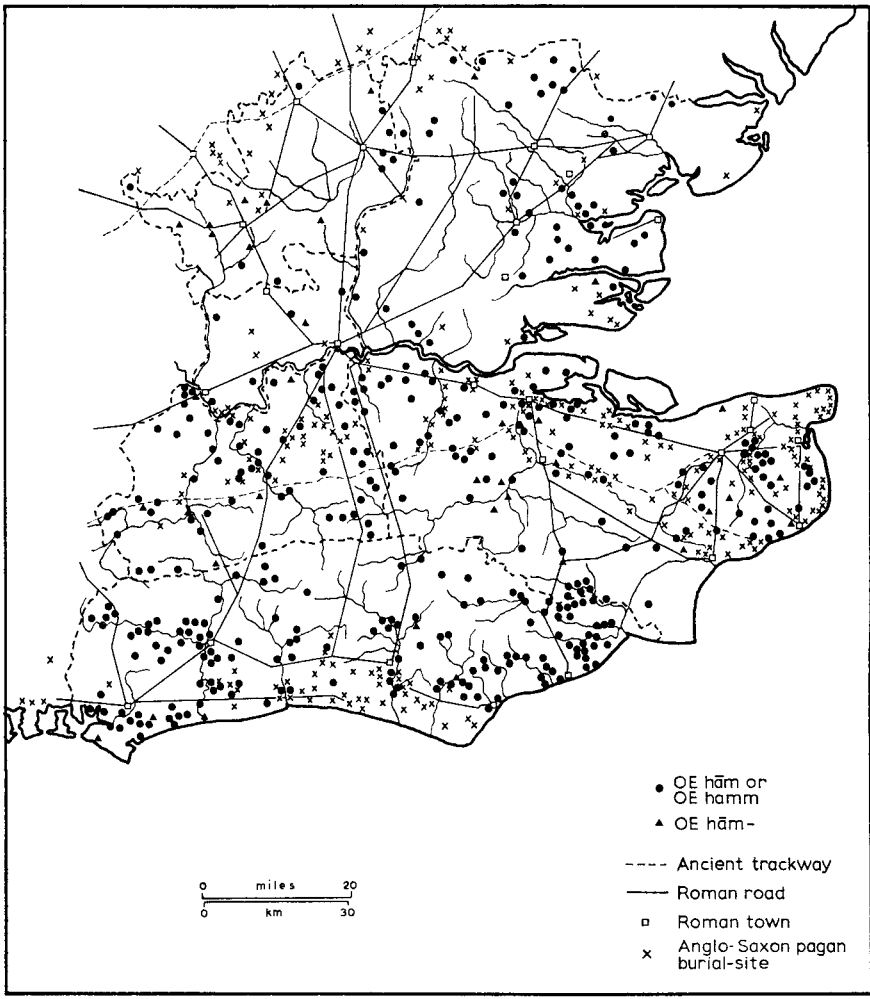


FIG. 3 Place-names in *-ham* and Anglo-Saxon pagan burial-sites in south-east England

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Roman archaeological information which would have more readily explained the pattern. The purpose of this essay, then, is, as an experiment, to identify the place-names in *-ham* from *-hām*, and the place-names from the compounds of *hām*, in an area of early English settlement – Kent, Surrey and Sussex – and to discover whether their geographical distribution is controlled by that of Roman roads and Romano-British sites or by that of Anglo-Saxon pagan burial-sites.

The difficulty in the way of this exercise is the occurrence of the place-name formed from OE *-hamm*, which is open to confusion with the place-name from *-hām*, since both elements in unstressed final position in a compound place-name have a similar pronunciation [-(h)əm] which is likely to be spelt *-ham*. The element OE *hamm* has been considered to have meanings ‘an enclosure, a meadow, a water-meadow’¹ and ‘meadow, especially a flat, low-lying meadow on a stream’, and also ‘an enclosed plot, a close’,² while in continental Germanic place-names the element OHG *hamm* appears with the meanings ‘a pasture, or meadow, surrounded by a ditch’, ‘a piece of enclosed land, a meadow’, ‘a dead arm of a river’, ‘the bend of a river’.³ But Dr Gelling has demonstrated⁴ that the meanings of OE *hamm* which are discernible in English place-names are more specifically (1) ‘land in a river-bend’, (2) ‘a promontory’, (3) ‘a river-meadow’, (4) ‘dry ground in a marsh’, and (5) ‘a cultivated plot in marginal land’. It is interesting to observe in this series of meanings the range and the contrast between natural features and man-made development, and between lowland, flat, waterside sites and those that are upland, ‘dry’ and high-relief. Confusion between the two types of place-name, those from OE *-hām* and those from OE *-hamm*, is likely to arise if a *hām*, village, type of settlement was sited in a *hamm* topography (say, in any of Dr Gelling’s senses 1, 2 and 4), or a *hamm* (in sense 5) was created at a *hām*, or a *hamm* (in any of senses 1–4) came to be thought the most distinctive feature about the site of a *hām*. For any place in which all these topographical conditions cannot be definitely excluded there are grounds for deriving a name in *-ham* from either *-hām* or *-hamm*.

An elaborated form of Margaret Gelling’s typology of *hamm* sites is used in this essay, the elaboration being the result of my observation of the sites. My classification comprises:

- hamm* 1 ‘land in a river-bend’
hamm 2a ‘a promontory of dry land into
marsh or water’

¹ EPN 1, 229, *s.v.* *hamm*.² DEP, p. 214, *s.v.* *ham(m)*.³ DEP, *ibid.*, and Bach, pt 1, §§296, 302, 314 and 375.⁴ Margaret Gelling, ‘The Element *hamm* in English Place-Names: a Topographical Investigation’, *NoB* 48 (1960), 140–62.

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- hamm* 2b 'a promontory into lower land,
even without marsh or water';
perhaps hence 'land on a hill-spur'
- hamm* 3 'a river-meadow'
- hamm* 4 'dry ground in a marsh'
- hamm* 5a 'a cultivated plot in marginal land'
b 'an enclosed plot, a close'
- hamm* 6 'a piece of valley-bottom land hemmed
in by higher ground'.

This set of meanings gives figurative extension to the basic sense of 'a surrounded, hemmed-in place'. Based on these values for *hamm*, an analysis of the place-names in *-ham* in Kent, Surrey and Sussex produces three categories: first, the names whose Old English or Middle English spellings (*-hamm*, *-homm*, *-ham(m)e*, *-hom(m)e*) show the geminated consonant of OE *hamm* or the dat. sg. *-e* inflexion which is regular for OE *hamm* but not for OE *hām*; second, the names which appear likely to be from OE *-hamm* on account of the site or status of the places to which they refer, although spelling is not indicative; and third, the names which do not fall into either of these categories.

By this process of distinction and elimination it is possible to isolate the few names in *-ham* which do not have the spellings of the *hamm* element and which do not refer to sites with *hamm* characteristics and to use these as representatives of the type from *-hām*. But, of course, the process is artificial and the distinctions made may well be too arbitrary. A few names written off as probably from *-hamm* will have been *-hām* names. In a number of instances there is uncertainty, both in fact and in opinion. My method has been first to isolate the names in *-ham* which demonstrate distinctive spellings from *-hamm*. These are listed in Appendix I. These names are useful in two ways. They show that the range of first elements combined with *-hamm* is very similar to the range of first elements which is found with *-hām*; and they mark the sites which may be used as topographical models to help the recognition of a *hamm* behind a non-committal *-ham* spelling in another name. My second step (very arbitrary, but nonetheless effective in prospecting a mass of material) has been to assume that any name which exhibits only *-ham* spellings and never *-hamm*, *-homm* etc., is from *-hām*, provided that (1) the place is an ancient manor or an ancient parish or is otherwise historically distinguished as an important centre of settlement, (2) it is on record before, say, 1300–50 as something more than a field-name or boundary-point and (3) the site does not have a topography which might be that of a *hamm*. These names are listed in Appendix II, along with those from the compounds of *hām*. My third stage has been to try to assess the relative probability of derivation from *-hamm* or derivation from *-hām* in

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each doubtful case. The supposition of a *-hamm* origin is to be preferred if a name refers to an unimportant and obscure hamlet, farm, piece of land or physical feature, even if the name is recorded early. Similarly it is to be preferred – since it seems improbable historically that a new place-name would be formed in *-hām* in late Old English – if a name in *-ham* is first recorded after, say, 1300, unless there are special considerations in favour of admitting the possibility of *-hām*, such as composition with an Old English monothematic personal name of an archaic type, or an ancient manorial status of the place, or a topography not describable as a *hamm*. Appendix III contains the names which I consider (1) more probably from *-hamm* than from *-hām* and (2) more probably from *-hām* than from *-hamm*. Correspondingly the distribution-maps (figs. 4–6) carry four kinds of symbol: one for the names whose spellings indicate that they are from *-hamm*, another for the names considered to be from *-hām*, a third for those names that are probably from *-hamm* but possibly from *-hām*, and a fourth for those names that are probably from *-hām* but possibly from *-hamm*. The choice between categories (1) and (2) in list III, and, more fundamentally, the choice between list II (so far as it concerns names in *-ham*) and list III, are a matter of judgement, both in field work and map-reading. It has to be emphasized that unless there are unequivocal OE and ME *-hamm*, *-homm* spellings, even the most obvious topographical evidence justifies only a statement of probability. The list of *-ham* names in Appendix II and lists III₁ and III₂ therefore depend on the exercise of a fallible expert judgement.

The names in the categories ‘*hamm*’, ‘*hām*’, ‘probably *hamm*’ and ‘probably *hām*’ are plotted in figs. 4–6 in relation to the Anglo-Saxon pagan burial-sites listed in Meaney¹ and in *Medieval Archaeology*, the Roman villas, potteries, buildings and settlements (but not the small or isolated finds) from the *Ordnance Survey Map of Roman Britain*,² and the principal Roman roads.³ It will be observed that the place-name material available for Sussex is greater than that for Kent or that for Surrey. This may to some extent be due to differences in the degree of intensity of coverage attained by the various place-name surveys,⁴ but it probably also reflects differences of terrain and dialect. New work on these three counties will probably alter the balance a little by revealing hitherto unknown minor names in *-hamm* or in *-ham* from *-hamm*, but it is unlikely that the information on major names – those of parishes and ancient manors – will be much altered.

The distribution-map for Kent (fig. 4) shows that names in *-ham* of whatever origin lie mostly north of the Weald – no farther south than the sands and

¹ Audrey L. Meaney, *Early Anglo-Saxon Burial Sites* (London, 1964).

² *Map of Roman Britain*, 3rd ed. (Ordnance Survey 1956).

³ Taken from Margary.

⁴ *KPN*, *PNK*, *PNSx*, *PNSr* and *DEPN*.

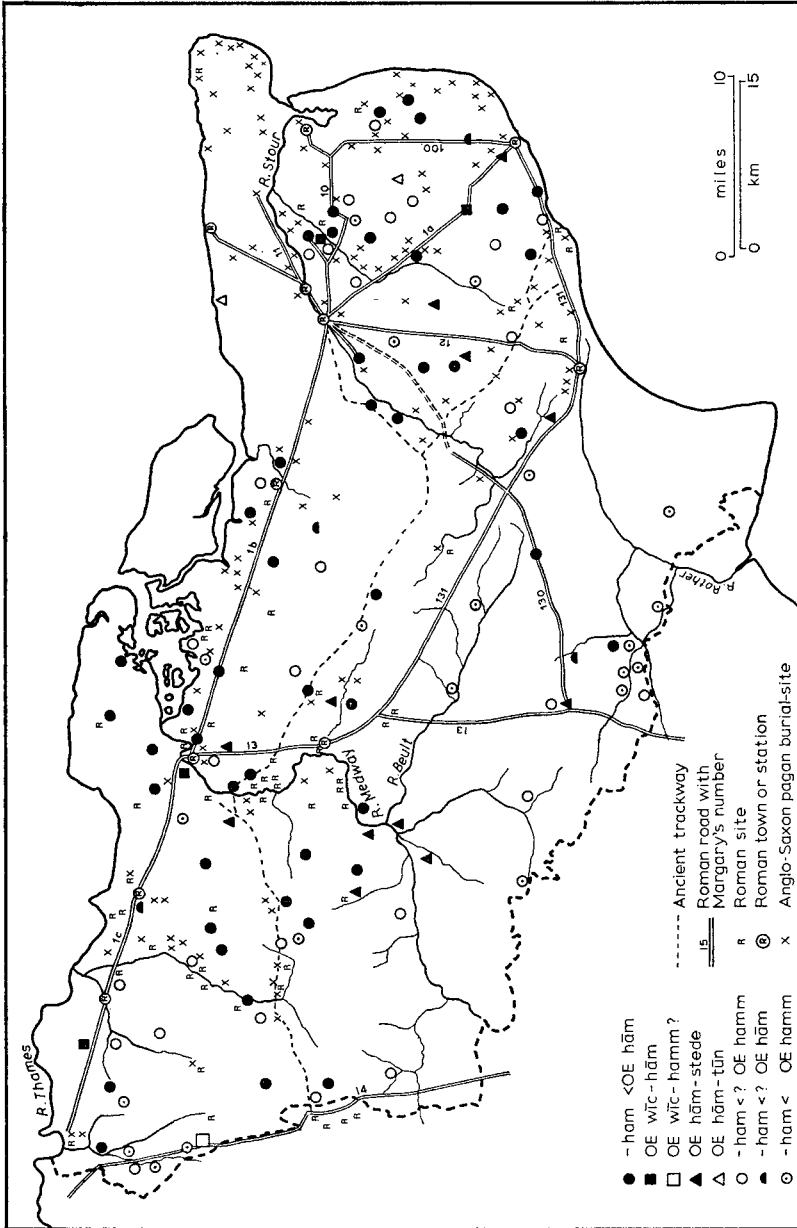


FIG. 4 Place-names in -ham in Kent

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sandstone ridges which extend along the north edge of the Weald parallel to the south-facing chalk scarp of the North Downs. The line of this boundary is represented in west Kent by the distribution of Westerham, Ightham, Wrotham and Offham, in middle Kent by that of Otham, Bearsted and Lenham and in the south-west part of east Kent by that of Mersham and the lost *Stanstede* (marked as a *hām-stede*) in Aldington.

Among the relatively few examples in the Weald, there is in the extreme south, on the north-east border of Sussex, a cluster of names from *-hamm* which mark a concentration of riparian and formerly estuarine sites along the Rother and Brede levels (cf. the Sussex map (fig. 6) at this sector). The names of uncertain origin at this end of the Weald are probably also from *-hamm*, e.g. Farningham (Cranbrook), Freezingham (Rolvenden) and Ethnam (Sandhurst). The two latter are obviously *hamm* sites by topography. Farningham in Cranbrook is not a reliable instance of any sort. *Langham* (now Halden Place in Rolvenden) may be thought ambiguous. Isolated to the west of this group there is Highams in Goudhurst, which, being plural in form, is likely to be a *hamm* name.

Hemsted in Benenden at the junction of the two Roman roads, Margary 13 and 130, is a *hām-stede*; the next instance to the east, *Langham* (i.e. Halden Place), may be a *-hām* name (see below, App. III1, p. 37); and further to the east along the Roman road Margary 130 there is the isolated example Great Engeham in Woodchurch (Little Engeham is half a mile due south of it). These three sites are obviously related to the line of the Roman road through the Weald. Further west there is a group of four *hām-stede* and two *-hām* names on the middle reaches of the Medway and its tributaries, south of the sandstone ridge. The more westerly of the two *-hām* names is Peckham – West Peckham, East Peckham being 3 miles further south-east on the north bank of the Medway. This group of names, East and West Peckham, Tutsham (West Farleigh) and the *hām-stede* names, Hamptons (West Peckham), Whetsted (Capel), Hampstead (Yalding) and Nettlestead, is distributed in relation to the river system and to the valleys in the sandstone ridge which the river has cut, and also to the Roman archaeology of the middle Medway region. To the north-east there are the Roman villa sites of East Barming and Teston; adjacent to West Peckham and Hamptons there is the Roman villa site in Plaxtol. The north edge of the area in which these *hām-stede* names lie was obviously developed in Roman times, but the *Map of Roman Britain* reveals no villas or settlements farther south than these. It looks as if these *hām-stede* and *-hām* names south-west of Maidstone, at the confluence of the Medway, Beult and Teise, indicate settlements in the north edge of the deep Weald along the river-line, extending southwards from the limit of the Romano-British development.