LECTURE I

Racial Settlement

Of all the varied problems and possibilities which the study of place-names offers there are none perhaps which command wider attention than those concerned with early racial settlements in this island. The historical texts for that period are scanty and their authority has often been impugned. Within the last half-century or so we have realised however that there are still two sources of information open to us, as yet largely unworked, which should be invaluable in supplementing and checking the information found in the historical texts. These sources are archaeological remains and place-names. The importance of archaeology is illustrated by the entirely new theories as to the line of approach of the West Saxons—by the estuary of the Wash and the Icknield Way—which have been put forward by Mr Thurlow Leeds on the basis of archaeological evidence. Place-name students have not as yet advanced any theory so bold as this on the basis of their research. If they ever do, the important thing for all to remember—historian, archaeologist and place-name student alike—is that any reconstruction which is now advanced must be
consistent with the evidence derived from all these varied sources.

The first and perhaps the most popular problem is that of the fate of the Britons at the hands of their English conquerors. When Professor Ekwall published his Place-names of Lancashire in 1922, one realised what place-names might tell us on this score from his survey of the distribution in that county of names of British origin or containing British elements. He showed how in that county those names tended to form groups situated in areas which are or had once been wild hill-country, marshland, or forestland, suggesting clearly the conditions under which a British-speaking population might have survived for some time after the Anglian settlement.

Intensive study of other counties has yielded nothing parallel to this. In Buckinghamshire the Celtic element is confined to Brill, in which the first element is the same Celtic word for “hill” which we have in Bredon in Worcestershire and Breedon in Leicestershire; Chetwode, an example of a common hybrid type with British cet followed by English wood; Bernwood Farm in Claydon, the last relic of the name of an extensive forest, containing the British equivalent of Welsh bryn, “hill”; with the more doubtful Datchet in the extreme south-east of the county and Panshill, near Brill, which may contain the same wood-name as Pancett Wood in Wiltshire. A lost wood-name Moreyff, Moreyf, a parallel to the Staffordshire Morfe, is found in
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Westbury in the 13th century, while Brayfield in this county and Brafield-on-the-Green in Northamptonshire, ten miles away, on the other side of Yardley Chase, may contain the old Celtic name for that area as their first element. Hill and woodland names alone therefore, apart from the usual river-names, show evidence of Celtic origin.

Bedfordshire yielded nothing certainly Celtic either in place- or field-names, beyond one or two additional stream-names, notably a second Severn, which long survived in Severne Ditche in Bedford, another Camel river on which stands Campton, and a tiny Humber river. In Huntingdonshire yet another Humber was found. Apart from that we have one hill-name, Lattenbury in Godmanchester, OE Lodona beorg, which may contain the old British name for the fen country which lies at its foot.

One might have expected a rich harvest of Celtic names in Worcestershire as we approach the Welsh border. What do we find? Three Celtic hill-names—Bredon, Carton, and Malvern; five names containing British cruc, “hill, barrow”; Pensax containing Welsh pen, “headland”; a trace of Welsh mynydd, “hill,” in a lost Minton in Eastham-on-Teme; a Celtic marsh-name in Corse, Celtic Dorne, probably denoting a fort on the Fosse Way; many river-names which, after the fashion of the west and south-west, have at times given name to villages on their banks (e.g. Kyre, Laughern); Worcester itself; and a tiny residuum of names like Mamble and Tardebigge, as yet unsolved, which are probably Celtic.
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That is the total among some 1700 names which were studied.

Conditions in the North Riding of Yorkshire are more difficult to assess, for we do not know how far Celtic names may have survived the Anglian invasion but ultimately given place to new Scandinavian ones. The number of ultimate Celtic survivals is exceedingly small. Notable are Catterick and Crayke, but apart from these we only have river-names and a few names like Dinnand, of uncertain etymology, which may really be Celtic. If we may judge by the analogy of the neighbouring county of Durham, where Scandinavian influence was never very strong, it is not likely that Celtic names were much more numerous in this area even in Anglian days.

Last and clearest in its evidence is the county of Sussex. Here, beyond a stray river or two, we have no certain Celtic place-names at all. It looks as if the statement of the Chronicle with reference to the storming of Andredescester or Pevensey, that “the South Saxons slew all who dwelled therein and there was not one Briton who survived,” may have been only too true of a great deal of the conquest of Sussex.

Taking the place-name evidence as a whole, it is clear that, in these counties at least, we can build little or nothing upon it in support of the idea of an extensive survival of a British population, still less of a British-speaking population, after the Saxon and Anglian Conquest.
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That view may be correct, but it must be supported, if at all, on other grounds. It should perhaps be added that this view of the preponderatingly English character of our place-nomenclature is strengthened in many ways by the great survey of English river-names recently completed by Ekwall, in which he demonstrates English origin for a much larger proportion even of these names than had hitherto been allowed or suspected. The evidence of all other counties, so far as it has been gathered for the Survey, tends in the same direction. Even in Devon, for which the material is almost complete, the Celtic element is, in proportion to the whole, surprisingly small.

Before we pass on to the English settlements themselves, something should perhaps be said about the group of names—Walton, Walcot(t), Walworth and the like—which have usually figured somewhat prominently in any discussion of the relations of the English with the conquered Britons. The generally accepted interpretation of these names has been that they denote “farms, cottages, enclosures of the Welsh (OE gen. pl. Wealu) or Britons.” Place-name students have however long since recognised that two important qualifications of this general view were needed. The first is that, as the term wealth came ultimately to be used in English of a serf generally, not necessarily of British birth, still less of British speech, we must not press these names unduly as evidence for actual survival of a British population. So far as they are really old they
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probably do suggest such a survival, but we have no means of gauging when these names arose. Some may date from a time when slaves were almost entirely of English birth. The other qualification is that noted (very tentatively) in the treatment of Walton in Buckinghamshire and Walton in Huntingdonshire, viz. that if the early ME forms show no evidence for a medial e between the l and the t, i.e. if we have Walto ne rather than Waletone, then one cannot interpret these names as going back to OE weala-tun but must rather interpret them as containing a first element weall, “wall,” or weald, “forest.”

Zachrisson, in his stimulating paper, Romans, Kelts and Saxons in Britain, recently published, has made a more serious attack on the use of these names as evidence for Celtic survival. In the case of the Walton-names at least, he is inclined to think that practically none of them go back to OE Wealatun, and he would interpret them, and many of the other Wal-names besides, as all containing either weall or weald. ME forms in Waletone he would take to be bad spellings, probably Anglo-French, for Walton. The only positive evidence of any strength adduced for this view is the case of a Wealtun in an original document of the 10th century, which Zachrisson identifies with a place called Waletune in the Suffolk Domesday. This identification is however exceedingly doubtful. The OE form is in the will of Aelfhelm Polga, who bequeathes property situated in Cambridgeshire, West Suffolk and
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North Essex. It is most unlikely that his property included one manor right away in the east of Suffolk, for the Domesday Waletune is Walton near Felixstowe. Wealtun is much more likely to be some lost place in the west of the county. At any rate it is clearly unsafe to build any large superstructure upon this one piece of evidence. The theory of an Anglo-Norman spelling seems equally doubtful. There is no evidence for such a development, and a widespread one too, of an e between l and t. We have plenty of examples of sealt and wealt (from earlier weald) in place-names. Anglo-French spellings with saut and waute are numerous; none have been found with salet or walet. One must still believe, I think, that forms with medial e are of real significance in the history of these names, while fully admitting that Zachrisson has done excellent service in making us scan all these names much more closely and carefully than we have perhaps always done in the past.

A word may be added as to the alternative possibilities of weald and weall which are, as we have seen, fully admissible and indeed probable in those names for which we have persistent ME Waltone or, as in the case of the Wealtun just discussed, have the luck to have an unambiguous Old English form. Weall is clearly right wherever we can interpret Walton as "farm by the wall,"

1 This point has been made independently by Professor Ekwall in a paper published in Studia Neophilologica i, 106-7.
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e.g. Walton Savage (DB Walstone) in Shropshire might, if it were rather nearer Wall Town (DB Walle), where there is a Roman encampment, contain OE weall as suggested by Zachrisson (op. cit. 74), but it is a good two miles away up hill and down dale, and in any case beware of assuming too readily the existence of such walls in England now or at any time. The interpretation of wealltun as “farm or enclosure with or made by a wall” is of course a possible one (cf. the common Stanton), but we cannot, as has been suggested, take weall in the sense “steep hill, cliff,” for this is a purely poetic development, not found in prose.

When we turn to the story of the English invaders themselves the counties with which we have to deal can be grouped as follows according to historical tradition: (i) Bedfordshire, Huntingdonshire and the North Riding of Yorkshire, as Anglian settlements, the two former in the district later known as Mercia, the last in Northumbria; (ii) Sussex, as an independent settlement by the South Saxons; (iii) Worcestershire, as a settlement made in the first instance by a people called the Hwicce, who were closely related to if not identical with the West Saxons, but later passed under the dominion of Mercia; (iv) Buckinghamshire, a settlement clearly occupying a border position between West Saxons, Anglians, and Middle Saxons. What has the study of the place-names of these counties done to reinforce, correct, or make more precise these general views?
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In Worcestershire the existence of Wichenford, six miles north-west of Worcester, probably bears witness to the presence of the mysterious Hwicce. The place was perhaps so called because it was the first ford in Hwiccan territory reached by a traveller from the territory of the Magasetan (the present Herefordshire) to the west. Pensaex must contain the name of the West Saxons themselves, and the most likely interpretation of the name is that put forward by Ritter (and independently by Zachrisson), viz. that it means the “Pen-Saxons,” i.e. the Saxons who settled on this particular pen or headland. They would be appropriately so called as against their neighbours to the west of the Teme who dwelled in what has always been regarded as Anglian territory.

Worcestershire passed under Mercian rule in the 7th century. How far this meant an Anglian immigration into the district is a moot point. One or two place-names suggest that some such immigration did take place. In Worcestershire we have three examples—Newbold-on-Stour, Wychbold and Boughton near Worcester—of the word bold, “building”, only found elsewhere as a place-name element in what is known to have been Anglian territory. It is used in the laws of Ine in the compound boldgetal, “collection of houses”, but as the element is never found in place-names in what is known beyond question to have been West Saxon territory, it was presumably already an archaic term among the West Saxon settlers, and was
never used in their place-name formations. Boughton is a compound of bold and tun, apparently the Mercian equivalent of the common Northumbrian Bolton from bod tun, both alike meaning “enclosure with a building on it.”

More interesting than these are Phepson in Himbleton, six miles north-west of Worcester, and Whitsun Brook in Flyford Flavell, three or four miles from the eastern border of the county. Phepson is OE Fepsetnatun, i.e. farm of the Fep-settlers, whatever be the interpretation of Fep-, and must certainly be brought into relation with the Fepingas of Bede, who lived in Middle Anglia, and with the Ferpingas of the Tribal Hidage, who probably belonged to Western Northamptonshire. A migration westwards of some of these Fepingas is the most reasonable explanation of the name Phepson, Fepsetnatun being just the name which we should expect to arise under such circumstances, the suffix se te being added to the first element of a name, regardless of its significance. Even more clearly, Whitsun Brook (OE Wixena broc) must be associated with the East- and West-Wixena of the Tribal Hidage, who were settled in the neighbourhood of the Lincolnshire fens. Some small band of them must have migrated to Worcestershire.

The story of the settlement of Buckinghamshire has been considerably affected by the new alignment given to the West Saxon advance in 571 by the discovery that Lygean-bury is Limbury near Luton and not Lenborough near Buckinghamshire. This gives a line Limbury-Aylesbury-