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The Rev. Professor W. W. SKEAT, Litt.D., F. Brit. Acad., then read a paper on

GRANTCHESTER AND CAMBRIDGE.

A LITTLE more than twelve years ago, I read a paper at a meeting of the London Philological Society (May 7, 1897), in which I drew attention, for the first time, to the fact that the curious and extraordinary forms of spelling which are so conspicuous in MSS. of the thirteenth century can all be explained by the simple consideration that they must have been written out, not by native scribes, but by scribes who were familiar with Anglo-French, and spelt the English words phonetically, from a French point of view. I again drew attention to a similar phenomenon on May 3, 1901, in a paper entitled *The Influence of Anglo-French pronunciation upon Modern English*; and yet again, in my *Notes on English Etymology*, published in the same year; in my preface to *Havelok*, in 1902; and in my preface to the *Proverbs of Alfred*, in 1907. I also made considerable use of similar methods of explanation in my books on the *Place-names of Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Huntingdonshire, and Hertfordshire*. And now quite recently I have received from the author, Mr R. E. Zachrisson, who is a Swede, and hails from the University of Lund, a very remarkable pamphlet entitled *A Contribution to the Study of Anglo-Norman Influence on English Place-names*, published at Lund, 1909, in which he has subjected my views to a very searching examination, conducted according to strictly phonetic laws, and his conclusions are thus stated in his introductory remarks. "Hitherto the influence which Anglo-Norman may have exercised on English place-names has not been made the subject of any serious philological investigations. Only some special question in connexion with it has occasionally received some attention. Editors of several early records containing

place-names may have pointed out some 'curiously corrupted forms,' but it has not occurred to many that this corruption may reflect an Anglo-Norman adaptation, may be an attempt to express phonetically the various changes which many English place-names necessarily underwent in the speech of the Normans. In his above-mentioned works [meaning the *Place-names of Beds., Cambs. and Herts.*, there being no allusion to the *Place-names of Hunts.*] Professor Skeat has paid due regard to the possibility of French influence. In our opinion he considerably over-estimates this influence, and above all does not seem to make any clear distinction between the changes which are due to dialectal sound-development and those caused by French influence."

I am not careful to make any reply to what is here said. I will only say that I have not had occasion to deal with English place-names generally, and have merely attempted to solve such examples as came readily to hand. And I gather from another sentence in the author's introduction that, speaking broadly, he endorses many of my views. "Monographies," he says, "exist only for a few counties. Among these we have to note in the first place three works by Prof. Skeat (the *Place-names of Cambs., Herts., and Beds.*) which may well be said to form a new era in the history of English place-names study."

I beg leave, in return, to draw attention to this remarkable work, in which the author has taken a broad yet minute survey of the subject, and gives his solutions of at least 700 place-names, in a large number of different counties. It may safely be said that no future worker can afford to neglect Mr Zachrisson's investigations; and further, that he has made considerable additions to our knowledge of this subject, which is only now beginning to be scientifically understood. Surely this is worth knowing, and must be of considerable interest to many. I am conscious of doing a service to the Cambridge Antiquarian Society by drawing attention to this publication.

There is, at any rate, one point which we can hardly afford to neglect, as it comes home to us all at once. We here find clear proof that the Grantacaestir mentioned by Beda. is not

Grantchester, but Cambridge; and conversely, that the name of the village is practically modern, and that its old name was not Grantchester at all. As far as our older history is concerned, there never was but *one* real Grantchester, and that is the famous place of which we are all so proud.

It is best to take the case of the village first, and to show that its present name is surprisingly modern, and most probably arose from the blundering of some dictatorial pedant. It is by no means the only instance in which a place-name has been deliberately altered, in modern times, to suit a passing whim, or for the sake of brevity. There is the well-known case of Hull in Yorkshire, which is a mere abbreviation of Kingston-upon-Hull, where Hull is not the name of the town, but of the stream that here joins the Humber. Hull is merely a variant of *holl*, explained in the *English Dialect Dictionary* and in the *New English Dictionary* to mean a hollow place, an excavation, a ditch, a moat; and the Rev. J. Tickell, in his *History of Kingston-upon-Hull*, written in 1796, explains that the Old Hull and the New Hull were both originally ditches or sewers. In Pigot's map of Yorkshire, dated 1831, the name of the place is simply Kingston. Not far to the west of Hull, there is a place called Kirk Ella. I forget now the exact older form of the name, but I remember discovering that it has nothing to do with a *kirk*, nor yet with *Ella*. Within the last few years, a place in Essex, called Ugley, has been politely turned into Oakley, because Ugley was confused with a certain modern English adjective. Yet the name was quite harmless; the *Ug-* represents the Norse name *Uggr*, as in Ugborough; and *ley* is the common suffix that means "a field." There is a place in Hants. once called Lydshelf, but now called Litchfield, by a strange confusion with the name of a place in Staffordshire where there is a fine cathedral. This is not a recondite fact. The present incumbent is an old friend and pupil of mine, who very soon discovered the old name; and he tells me that the *shelf*, or long ridge, from which the place was named, is a most conspicuous object. All this helps to show that if the name of Grantchester is modern, there is nothing very unusual about the fact, and it is easy to

understand that it was renamed after the famous historical Grantchester which is now called Cambridge.

Please to observe that the present name of the village contains an *h* after the *c*. Next go back a little in the course of time, and try to discover that *h* if you can; and you will not find it a very easy matter. Every now and then it might possibly occur, because the influence of the old name of Cambridge and of a certain quotation from Beda has always been a possible, perhaps a potent factor; but certainly the commonest form of the village-name is Granceter, with no *h* and even with no *s*. In the *Proceedings* of our Society for 1904, we find Mr Fordham's admirable lecture on the Maps of Cambridgeshire, and a few specimens are given. In Camden's map of 1617, at p. 113, we find Granceter; and the same in 1626, at p. 116. But in 1701, at p. 129, we come to Granchester at last, with only one *t*. In the sixteenth century, I find both Granceter (or something like it) and Grancester; but the form without *s* is the commoner, and the *h* does not appear. There are two good examples in Prof. Mayor's edition of *Baker's History of St John's*; in 1587, we find Graundcetour (vol. I, p. 427); and in 1557, Grauncester (vol. I, p. 382). In the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* (temp. Henry VIII), vol. II, p. 226, there is mention of "Chesturton et Gransiter," and an interesting allusion to "Gransiter mylles," i.e. mills. I have purposely given these rather late instances first, in order to show that the form always appears without an *h* down to the sixteenth century and even later; and having thus prepared the way, I give a series of earlier spellings.

There is nothing to show that the village is much older than the Norman Conquest. The earliest known spelling is really that in the *Inquisitio Comitatus Cantabrigiensis*, A.D. 1080, where it appears as Grenteseta. The spelling in Domesday Book, a few years later, is Granteseta, which is preferable. These French spellings represent an A.-S. form Grantā-sētan, where *sētan* is the nom. pl. of *sēta*, a settler; so that Grantā-sētan meant "settlers by the Grantā." In 1199 the form is Grantesete¹, where the final *-a* has become *-e*, of course fully

¹ Alicia de Grantesete; *Rotulæ Curiae Regis*, ed. Sir F. Palgrave, 1835.

pronounced as a separate syllable. After 1200, the final *te* in *Grante* is frequently dropped, though I have found it (see below) in 1271, 1284, and even as late as 1327. But the usual form is trisyllabic, with the final *-e* fully pronounced, as in *Granzete* (1285), where *z* is written for *ts*, as usual¹; *Gransete* (1302)²; *Graunsete* (1310-1 and 1322-3)³; *Gransete* (1311-2)⁴; *Grauntsete* (1330)⁴; *Gransete* (1331 and 1347)⁵; *Graunsete* (1428)⁶. Unfortunately, the Old English word *sætan*, later *sēte*, must have gone out of use, and could hardly have been understood in the thirteenth century. By that time the sound of *s* before *e* was often expressed, in the French manner, by *c*, as in the modern words *centre*, *century*, *certain*, *cessation*; hence a fashion set in of writing *-cete* for *-sete*. This occurs as early as 1271, in *Grantecete* (*Inq. p. Mortem*); *Grantecete*, in 1284 (*F. A.* 137); *Grancete*, in 1304 (*Inq. p. M.*); *Grantecete*, in 1327 (*Inq. p. M.*, vol. II); *Grancete*, in 1335 (*Ipm.* II), and in 1398-9 (*Ipm.* III), and even as late as 1425 (*Ipm.* IV). In the thirteenth century, the final *-e* began to drop off, and was by some entirely neglected, so that we begin to find the reduced form *Granset*, as in the *Testa de Nevill* (temp. Henry III and Edward I); *Granteset*, in the same; *Grenteshet*, with a curious mispronunciation of the *s* as *sh*, in 1210 (*Red Book of the Exchequer*); and the name Alicia de Graunsett in 1331, in the *Patent Rolls*⁷. But there were others who, instead of dropping the final *-e*, absolutely identified the dissyllabic *-cete* (pronounced something like the modern English *setter*) with the much better known suffix *-ceter* which represented the pronunciation of the form which was also frequently written *-cester*, as in Worcester, Leicester, and the rest.

But before I can proceed, I am afraid that I shall have to explain that such spellings as Worcester and Leicester are

¹ *Inquisitiones post Mortem*, vol. I. Also denoted by *Inq. p. M.*, or *Ipm.*

² *Feudal Aids*, 146. Also denoted by *F.A.*

³ *Inq. p. M.*, vol. I.

⁴ *Calendarium Rotulorum Chartarum*.

⁵ *Inq. p. M.*, vol. II.

⁶ *Feudal Aids*, 194.

⁷ *Calendarium Rotulorum Patentium in Turri Londinensi* (1802).

deceitful, and contradict the evidence. They suggest that we pronounce the *s* that happens to be written before the *t*, though we have clear evidence, in the case of Exeter, written Execestre in the Domesday Book, to show that we do not. One of the most interesting passages in Mr Zachrisson's book is one at p. 73, where he shows that, although names of this class are now usually spelt with a final *-cester*, which is in fact merely pedantic, they were often spelt phonetically in former times *without* the *s*, for the simple reason that the *s* was not really sounded. In the case of Worcester and Leicester, the *s*-sound that meets the ear is really that which is written *ce*, though the *e* is not sounded. We might denote this by writing the names as Worce'ter, Leice'ter, or Wo's'ter, Leis'ter. Mr Zachrisson gives a large number of spellings, from various writers and documents, to support this contention. Thus Layamon has Glocetere, Leycetere; Robert of Gloucester has Excetre, Gloucetre, Leicetre, Wircetre; the *Index to the Charters* in the British Museum has Glousetre, and the poem of William of Palerne has Glouseter. Capgrave has Excetir, Glouceter, Cicetir, Leycetir, Wycetir, Bysseter; the *Paston Letters* have Worceter and Worseter; and other similar spellings are found even in the sixteenth century, when the silly mania for inserting useless letters so far prevailed that we now have to insert a *b* into *doubt* and *debt*, and a *c* into *victuals* and *scent*.

The result really was this; that when the ending *-cete* in Grancete was confused with the ending *-ceter* (which was a common phonetic spelling of that which we now write as *-cester*), the change really amounted to no more than the addition of an *r* at the end of the word; the resulting form being really Granceter, as it very often actually appears. But it made a good deal of difference all the same. It definitely preserved the original dissyllabic pronunciation of *-set-e*, and entirely stopped the tendency to reduce it to *-set*, which had actually set in, and was quite regular; just as we have reduced the A.-S. Sumersætan to the modern Somerset. Mr Zachrisson shows that the same suffix occurs also in Whisson-set, Norfolk. Besides that, this added *r* definitely identified the suffix, though

by help of a false etymology, with the suffix seen in Worcester and Leicester, ultimately due to the A.-S. fem. sb. *ceaster*, which did not really, as is so commonly supposed, represent the Latin *castrum*, but rather the Latin plural form *castra*. The A.-S. form was feminine, because *castra* was taken to be a feminine singular. There are many examples, in French etymology, of a like change of gender.

The net result was that, after the addition of *r* to the end of the name, we find two sets of forms, one ending in *-cestre* or *-cester*, and the other in *-ceter*, *-cetour*; the earliest date for the added *r* being after 1300. Examples are: Grauntcestr', 1327-30, *Patent Rolls*; Antonio de Grancester, 1348, *Annals of Gonville and Caius College*, ed. J. Venn, p. 2; Grancestre, 1373, *Inq. p. M.*, vol. II; Grancestr', 1426, *Inq. p. M.*, vol. IV; Grauntester, error for Grauncester, 1436, *id.*; Grancestour, 1457, *id.*; Grauncester, 1549, *Index to Charters*; Grauncester, 1557, Baker's *Hist. of St John's*, I. 382; Grancester, *Magna Britannia*, I, 267 (1720). Without the *s* we find Graunceter, fifteenth century, *Catalogue of Ancient Deeds*; Grawnceter, Graundeceter, sixteenth century, *id.*; Gransiter, *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, II, 226 (temp. Henry VIII); Graundcetour, 1587, Baker, I, 427; Granceter, maps of 1617 and 1626. But I find no example, down to this last date, of the use of *ch*, which is apparently later than 1630 at the earliest.

I now give, in a brief form, a sufficient account of the chronology of the spellings.

(1) With the suffix *-seta*, *-sete*, 1080-1428; spelt *-cete*, 1271-1425.

(2) With the final *-e* lost; spelt *-set*, *-shet*, *-sett*, 1210(?) - 1331.

(3) With added *r*; spelt *-ceter*, *-cetour*, *-siter*, 1300(?) - 1626.

(4) With *s* before the *t*; spelt *-cestre*, *-cester*, 1327-1720.

(5) With *ch* for *c*; Granchester, 1701.

I have entered thus minutely into particulars in order to make it quite clear, even to such as are not accustomed to deal with dated examples, that it is quite impossible to connect the old form Grantacaestir mentioned by Beda, who died in

735, with the Middle English Grauntecestre, which cannot be found before 1300; and still less, with the modern Grantchester. When once this impossible equation has been set aside, we can contemplate, with freedom from all bias and prejudice, the true meaning of Beda's words.

The famous passage occurs in Beda's *Ecclesiastical History*, bk. iv., c. 19. I quote from the edition by Mayor and Lumby, p. 128:—"uenerunt ad ciuitatulam quamdam desolatam non procul inde sitam, quae lingua Anglorum Grantacaestir uocatur; et mox inuenerunt iuxta muros ciuitatis locellum de marmore albo pulcherrime factum," etc. The story is that the abbess Sexburh, who had succeeded her sister Ætheldr̄yth at Ely, had taken her predecessor's bones out of the wooden coffin, 16 years after burial, and was seeking for a new coffin in which to place them. To quote from the translation by Dr Giles, "She ordered some of the brothers to provide a stone to make a coffin of. They accordingly went on board ship, because the country of Ely is on every side encompassed with the sea or marshes, and has no large stones, and came to a small abandoned city, not far from thence, which in the language of the English is called Granta-caestir; and presently, near the city walls, they found a white marble coffin, most beautifully wrought, and neatly covered with a lid of the same sort of stone." Dr Giles adds in a note, very justly:—"the coffin found here was a relic of ancient Roman art." Is it not clear that this Granta-caestir is obviously the same word as the British *Caer-grant*, mentioned in § 7 of the history by Nennius, written at an uncertain but very early date? The words are identical, and both mean "Roman town beside the Granta." Where else but at Cambridge can we look for the site of an old Roman town beside the Granta, which, though deserted in the seventh century, could still furnish a fine specimen of old Roman art, exquisitely wrought and made of pure white marble? Notice in particular the mention of the city walls; the coffin was found "iuxta muros ciuitatis." It is amusing to find how Dr Giles has changed his mind as to this. In his translation of Beda, in 1859, he tells us that the place meant is "Grantchester, near Cambridge"; but, in 1875,

in his translation of Nennius, he had found out the truth, and says that Caergrant is "Grantchester, *now* Cambridge." It just makes all the difference.

The fact is, that we can trace Beda's name at later dates. There is a charter printed by Kemble, No. 563, and dated 970, which is written partly in Latin and partly in Anglo-Saxon. The English portion is good and valuable, but the Latin portion is of doubtful authenticity. The former refers explicitly to Beda's story, and to the white marble coffin; the latter is chiefly remarkable for containing the expression "in prouincia Grantaceaster," meaning the county of Cambridge or Cambridgeshire. There is no reason against such a use of the phrase; and, luckily, it is confirmed by a charter of Edward the Confessor, No. 907, in which Norfolk is called "comitatus Northfolc," Suffolk is called "comitatus Sudfolc," and Cambridgeshire is called "comitatus Grantecestriae," which is as much as to say Grantchester-shire.

In Chapter 3 of the Anglo-Saxon life of St Guthlac, there is a reference to "the city [*cestre*] which is named Granteceaster." Next, in an Anglo-Norman poem by Gaimar, who lived in the time of William Rufus and narrates his death, we find, at l. 1605, a description of the kingdom of the Southumbrians, which (he says) included Lincolnshire, Rutland, Huntingdonshire, and "la meite de Grantcestre," literally, "the half of Grantchester," where it is obvious that Grantchester is equivalent to Grantchester-shire, i.e. Cambridgeshire. And lastly, as Mr Zachrisson notes on p. 81, the whole matter is settled by Henry of Huntingdon, who has:—"Kair-Grant, id est, Granteceastria, quae modo dicitur Cantebri-gia"; see *Monumenta Historica Britannica*, p. 692. In other words, Caergrant and Granta-caestir and Cantabrigia are merely varying names of one and the same place; as every one knew in the year 1150.

It is curious that this is not really new. Not only did Dr Giles say this in 1875, but it was clearly perceived nearly a century ago. Mr G. Dyer, who wrote a *History of Cambridge* in 1814, refers to the above passage and understands it rightly. Henry of Huntingdon died about 1155, and this is the last we hear of Granteceastria. This old name of Cambridge, and

afterwards of Cambridgeshire, utterly died out at least 150 years before the notion of turning Grantese^{te} into Granceter arose. The reason is obvious enough; for by the ninth century a permanent bridge had been built over the Granta, and the newer name Grantebrycg appears in the A.-S. Chronicle under the date 875, and has lasted ever since. The old name Granta-caestir lingered for a time as a name for the county, but was naturally superseded by the new name Grantabrycg-scir, which occurs as early as 1010¹. Having thus become useless both as a name for the town and a name for the county, it is certain that it would never have been heard of again, but for the curious accident that a village-name which ought to have become Granset (conformably with Somers^{et} and Dor^{set}) had its name perverted in the fourteenth century by scribes who confused the suffix *-sete* with the *-ceter* which was frequently written *-cestre* and was known to represent the Latin *castrā*. The modern Grantchester owes its name solely to a false identification and to popular etymology.

I beg leave to append a word of warning. To make a false identification may seem a small matter, but it is absolutely amazing to observe how far from the truth a man may travel, when he is once out of his way. A *History of Cambridgeshire* appeared in 1753, written by Mr E. Carter². He was persuaded that Grantacaestir meant the village of Grantchester, but he saw at the same time that it had once denoted a place of some importance, and rushed to the conclusion that it was once a place of immense size. With his own words staring him in the face—that Grantchester was named from the river Granta—he proceeds to declare that the true sense of Grantchester was the “grand” or great city. “How far (he says) this city extended itself is uncertain; some say it not only reached Grantbridge, now corruptly called Cambridge, but northward beyond the castle....About the year of Christ 700,

¹ *Place-names of Cambs.*, p. 29. Our town-bridge is, in one respect, the most celebrated in England, since it is the only one that has given a name to a shire. Among the shire-names we find no less than five fords, viz. Bedford, Hereford, Hertford, Oxford, and Stafford.

² I quote from the reprint of 1819.

it were a doubt (says a learned author) whether this city and the town of Cambridge were not united, or a part or member to that city; or if it was not one continued city, is a great uncertainty. Yet it may be thought, that while this city flourished, Cambridge had but small reputation; and that after the destruction of this city, Cambridge began to flourish, and grow out of the ruins thereof. That whatever was spoken by ancient historians before, or immediately after the coming of the Saxons, must be intended of this city of Grantchester; but after the ruin thereof, must necessarily be meant of, and attributed to Grantbridge or Cambridge, where now the town and university is seated [*sic*]; though some will have it that the university was first placed in this city, and afterwards translated to Grantbridge." I may add, parenthetically, that the "learned author" whom Carter followed was Dr Caius.

It is easy to reduce all this strange farrago to plain sense by remembering two facts. The first is that Sigeberht, king of the East Angles, had nothing whatever to do with the founding of our university, in spite of the boastful, but mendacious affirmation made in our Commemoration of Benefactors; for there was nothing here that could be called a university till long after the Norman Conquest. The other is that, whatever ruin befell the old Grantchester, there is no doubt that Cambridge flourished in its stead; not because it was "translated" from one place to another, but rather because, like the celebrated phoenix, it arose once more, with renewed vigour, from its own ashes.

The net result is most satisfactory, as the past history of Cambridge now becomes quite clear. It was called Granta-brycg or Granta-bridge in the ninth century, after the bridge had been first built. In the eighth century, however, it was called Grantacaestir; and such must have been its name also when St Ætheldryth founded a monastery at Ely. And this name was merely the English form of the British Caergrant, a name which indicates a Roman origin.

Professor Hughes, in responding to the invitation of the President to propose the vote of thanks to the author for this very interesting Communication, which they had just listened to, said that he had always

appealed to Dr Skeat in such philological subjects, and that it was not the first time that they had had the use and origin of the word Chester brought before them¹.

There were, however, some other questions incidentally raised on which he would ask for further information. If the name of Grantchester owed its present form to a late pedantic assimilation of the Saxon word GRANSET to Grantacaestre the name of Cambridge which was indirectly derived from the Roman form, what was the name of Grantchester in Roman times? There were, he thought, almost as many traces of Roman occupation around Grantchester as there were around Cambridge—was Grantchester then deserted between the times of the Romanised British and the early English occupiers of the site, so that no inhabitants were left to hand on the ancient name? It seemed to him that a correct understanding of the archaeology of Grantchester was of the greatest importance in all attempts to explain the early history of Cambridge, and they were much indebted to Dr Skeat for laying so clearly before them the evidence to be derived from the names.

¹ See *Proc. Camb. Ant. Soc.*, Nov. 26, 1894, p. 26.

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