

CELTIC INFLUENCE IN DERBYSHIRE PLACE-NAMES.

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THE three volumes of Dr. K. Cameron's monumental work constitute one of the most interesting and exciting pieces of research work, which has ever been undertaken in relation to the county of Derby. The tentative speculations which follow are offered in a purely constructive spirit in order to provoke further research into matters where most of the foundations have been so well and truly laid by Dr. Cameron and those who have collaborated with him.

While it is only natural that researches undertaken on behalf of the *English Place-Name Society* should tend rather to equate place-names with English roots, there are those, myself amongst them, who incline, rightly or wrongly, to seek out where we can roots of an earlier epoch. When Zachrisson listed by counties the names of certain natural features such as hills and woods, he found the Celtic element well represented in Derbyshire.¹ Just as the Victorian Ordnance Surveyor, when faced with the local vernacular, which he did not really understand, produced the variation of "Toad" lane or "Toad" moor, when he was being told by a native that the place-name was "T'owd" lane or "T'owd" moor, i.e. "the old" lane or moor, so I think did the Anglian, Saxon and Norman scribe unwittingly give fresh and very often misleading variations of more archaic names.

To my mind the outstanding examples are some of the "Ash" names. No doubt there have been ash trees, some of them prominent ones, in our county from time immemorial, but I doubt whether they were sufficiently important in more than a few cases to provide the name

¹ R. E. Zachrisson, *Romans, Kelts, and Saxons in Ancient Britain*, Uppsala, 1927.

of a place. What was of far greater significance than a growing ash tree was the presence of water, upon which an early settlement may have depended for its very existence. The best example is Ashford near Bakewell, now officially called Ashford in the Water. Here the earliest form recorded in 926 is (*æt*) *Æscforda*. In spite of this form, which by the time of Domesday Book has degenerated under the influence of the Norman scribes to *Aisseford*, Ekwall interprets it as "ash tree ford". Yet in dealing with river-names under *Exe*, which he describes as a British river-name identical with *Axe*, *Esk* and *Usk*, he writes, "British *Isca* became *Esca* whence Old English *Esce* and *Æsce*, which gave *Esk* and with metathesis *Exe* and *Axe*. The name is identical with Old Irish *esc*, Irish *easc* 'water' and probably comes from *pid-ska* or *pit-ska* the root being *pi-* in Greek *piduo* 'to gush forth'."²

In this connection it is worth noting that the word "ford" did not originally mean a road through water but simply "road". Ashford was therefore the settlement at the place where the road (in this case the Port Way) ran through the waters of the River Wye, a more significant name than merely a settlement at a water-crossing where ash trees happened to grow.

Monyash in my view signifies the place of many waters, now tapped by underground lead mining operations and levels, and One Ash nearby the place where a single stream of water debouches into the dale. Ashover similarly may be the settlement over the waters of the River Amber, and Ashbourne a form of tautology signifying a stream of water. I would add that in studying field-names I have found, in looking at a field bearing an "Ash" name, that there is almost invariably some spring of water or water hole, which is its chief characteristic. An especially good example is High Ashes Farm, north of Ashover, where a considerable spring of water issues forth on high ground a little to the east of Spancarr.

This interpretation fits in with the analysis of the river-names of the county made by Dr. Cameron, which shows that not only the names of its main rivers but also those

² E. Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 4th ed., 1960, 171.

of their tributaries have a Celtic or earlier origin (p. xx). It would be surprising therefore if significant springs or flows of water had not also left the ancient root word for water embedded in the place-names, rather than a series of mere ash trees. Professor Kenneth H. Jackson in his *Language and History in Early Britain* says, "Roughly names of Romano-British towns, the larger rivers and some hills and forests are found preserved in all parts of England.³ Area II (which includes Derbyshire) differs in including not only these but also more and smaller rivers and more hills and forests". But having made my point, I do not wish to dogmatize to the extent of suggesting that wherever an "ash" name occurs it must inevitably be related to water. The student must be left to choose, guided by a knowledge of local topography, which is more likely to be valid in any particular case, bearing in mind Jackson's opinion that "many of the British village names in England are not really such at all but are those of rivers, hills and woods, which have become attached to villages".⁴

Another archaic loan word in Old English is the word "Torr" signifying a rock. Dr. Cameron comments (p. xxiii) that the almost isolated use of "torr" in Derbyshire in relation to the rest of England outside the south-west is remarkable. It may be a little less remarkable when one realises that few of the neighbouring counties have such a profusion of prominent rocks and peaks as has the area known from Anglo-Saxon times as "Peakland", to which the name "torr" would be appropriate. But there are certainly rocky areas other than Derbyshire and the south-west where the name "torr" could equally well have been used had it been part of the local vernacular; Dr. Cameron does well to remark the survival of the word in Derbyshire. Ekwall treats it as of British origin, adopted by the English and used in forming place-names.⁵ Dr. Cameron accepts that the word was native in Derbyshire (p. 710), though it was a loan word from Primitive Welsh into Old English, and

³ K. H. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain*, Edinburgh, 1953, 225.

⁴ Jackson, 227.

⁵ Ekwall, xxxiii.

also notes that the names now surviving are not likely to date from pre-English times since the word "torr" almost invariably appears as a second element with an English word as the first (xxiii). This shows how strong was the influence of the old native word for these rocks, which were outstanding topographical features, upon the English invaders, and again suggests that the old native language was by no means wholly submerged.

The name Eccles from the British *eclēs* means church or place of assembly for Christian worship. Dr. Cameron quotes three examples, one north-west of Chapel-en-le-Frith, one near Hope, and the Ecclesbourne river flowing down from Wirksworth. He quotes Jackson as saying that such names indicate "the existence of some sort of British population centre with organized Christian worship", but adds that in relation to the Ecclesbourne river "there is no indication of the site of the Eccles, which gave its name to the river". I think it is reasonable to seek the site of that church at Wirksworth near to where the bourne rises, and where two of the ancient Port Ways are now discovered to have crossed; in other words, where Wirksworth parish church, with an early dedication to the Blessed Virgin Mary, is sited to this day. I hope to elucidate the lines of these two Port Ways in a book now in course of preparation.

Though I am not familiar with the site to the north-west of Chapel-en-le-Frith, the Eccles cross, near Hope, is very well known to me. Only the gritstone base now remains a little to the south of Hope church, by the side of a road which I have identified as a continuation of Doctor's Gate.⁶ Sited close to the Roman fort of Navio, the cross may well represent the focal point of missionary activities, while the region was still under the dominion of the Roman Empire, as exemplified by the small garrison in the neighbouring fort. It is not without significance that excavations at Navio in 1959 proved one of the structures, outside the walls of the 2nd century fort, to be of 4th century date or later. Sealed beneath a pitched road was a coin bearing the legend SOLI INVICTO and minted by Constantine prior to the date when he decreed

⁶ *Derbyshire Countryside*, no. 9, 19-20; no. 10, 39-40.

that Christianity should become the official state religion: Christian symbolism began to appear on coins *circa* A.D. 326. In passing I note that the Causeway Meadow referred to by Dr. Cameron (p. 49) is not associated with Batham Gate, as he states, but with the road "over Eccles" between Bradwell and Hope, already mentioned as a continuation of Doctor's Gate.⁷

Finally, despite the publications of the English Place-Name Society, I find it hard to believe that in so many cases the place-name must be interpreted in relation to some English personal name. To my mind it is more usual for people to derive their names from places or occupations than for places to derive their names from people. It is not difficult to surmise how John, who lived at the end of a town, became John Townsend, or how John, who thatched roofs, became John Thacker. In like manner, I surmise that the person who settled by the ruins of the small natural warm bath left by the Romans at Bakewell was known by the name of Bath or Bade. The scribe, responsible for the entry in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in 924, might well have turned the then significant name of Bath Well into a much less significant form, which suggested that it was a well belonging to Badeca. The Domesday clerk had a better idea when he wrote *Badequilla* in 1086. Nearly a century later further editing produced *Bathecwella*. In 1254 *Bathewell* is recorded in the Lichfield Register, while at the same time the name is degenerating into the *Bauecwell* form. So we have the present name of Bakewell, which is nothing whatever to do, strange as it may seem, with that most popular confection the Bakewell pudding. I call here in aid Ekwall, who admits that "frequently a definite etymology cannot be attained without a study of the local conditions of the place",⁸ even though I am constrained to admit that, had we not got records of the early forms of the name Bakewell, a study of present local conditions would inevitably lead us to its connection with puddings! Such are the perils which confront the student of place-names.

⁷ *Derbyshire Countryside*, no. 9, 19-20. See map and comment identifying the positions of the Causeway Meadow and Causeway Bridge.

⁸ Ekwall, ix.

And now, having temporarily put myself outside the pale of accepted English place-name philology, I return repentant to express once again my sincere admiration for all that Dr. Cameron and the English Place-Name Society have achieved, and for the stimulating way in which their work has been set forth in these three volumes for the edification and assistance of scholars, antiquaries and archaeologists.