

SURREY ETYMOLOGIES.

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RIVERS AND STREAMS, AND TOWNS ON
RIVERS, OR STREAMS.

IT may be taken as a maxim in the study of local Etymology, that the names of rivers and mountains were bestowed or acquired earlier, and have been retained longer, than those of any other natural objects. They are in many, indeed in most instances as regards large rivers, attributable to periods of remote antiquity—long prior to any written records, and have survived when many other distinctive appellations have either become obsolete, or so changed as to be no longer recognizable.

The rivers of Surrey are not numerous, but they will be found to form no exception to this general rule. The Celtic words denoting water or stream, are *an*, *ad*, *am*, *amh* or *av*, *au*, *easc* or *esc*, *oich*, *ok*, or *oke*;¹ and these syllables, either in themselves or their synonyms, are the roots from which many, or indeed most, of our principal river names are found to spring.

These original words, or syllables, however, are frequently, indeed almost always, found with certain prefixes or postfixes, and often with both. The exact use or purpose of the prefixes seems to be now utterly unknown; they are generally consonants placed before the proper names, all of which, it will be noticed, begin with a

¹ See G. Dyer, *A Restoration of the Antient Modes of bestowing Names on Rivers, Hills, &c.* Exeter. 1805.

vowel. Lhuyd, in his "Archæologia," after giving several instances of mutes and liquids thus prefixed, adds:—

"I have already recommended to the observation of the curious, whether it has not been heretofore the practice of other languages to vary their initial consonants after the manner still retained in the British and Irish. I must now further declare it my conjecture that, anciently, consonants have been occasionally premised to most words (if not to all) beginning with vowels and sequels, as has been observed of the letter G, and as it is yet practised in respect of T and N, in the Irish."

With regard to the postfixes, the case is somewhat different, for it seems evident that some were intended as diminutives, and some by way of augmentation.

THE THAMES.

THE REV. ISAAC TAYLOR, in his recent excellent work,¹ suggests that the word *tan*,—spreading, quiet, still, which seems to be related to the Welsh *taw* and the Gaelic *tar*, appears in the name of this famous river; and he attributes the postfix *es* to the *esc* in a reduplicated form—*isis*; thus making Thamesis—Thames, the broad Isis.

Notwithstanding the great weight which the opinion of so able a writer on this subject must carry with it, I venture to differ with him. In a long series of Anglo-Saxon charters in which this river is mentioned, ranging from four hundred years before the Norman conquest, the name of the river is never *Thamesis*, but almost always *Tamese* or *Temese*. Nor can it be said that this river is particularly wide, or spreading, or still; nor, indeed, can that character be given to numerous other rivers, the names of which have evidently the same origin. Upon the whole, it seems most reasonable to trace this name to the Celtic *amh* or *am*, with the consonant *T* prefixed, and to regard the postfix *es* as an augmentation, or the corruption of some ancient augmentation.

¹ *Names and Places*, pp. 206—213.

Synonyms.

TAMAR, Devon.	TEME, Worcestershire.
TAME, Cornwall, Cheshire, Lancashire.	TAMA, Selkirk. TEEN, Stafford.

THE WEY.

CAMDEN (Radnorshire) says this is evidently derived from the Welsh word *Gwy* or *Wy* (originally *Vie*), which, again, is probably derived from the Gaelic and Erse word *Uisge*, or *esc*, water. It is found in *Lhugwy*, clear water; *Dowdrwy*, loud water; *Edwy*, swift water, and many others. There can be but little, if any, doubt that this is the true origin of the name.

Synonyms.

WYE, Wales.	WEY, Dorset.
„ Derbyshire.	MEDWAY, Kent.
WEY, Hants.	SOLWAY, Cumberland.

THE WANDLE.

ON a former occasion¹ I ventured to suggest two derivations for the name of this river; viz., the Danish *Vand*, or water, with *el* as a diminutive, or that the second syllable was a modification of *dele* or *dell*, implying dale or valley—as a suffix; but I was then disposed to adopt the last etymology. On further consideration, however, I am satisfied that the true derivation is not indeed from the Danish *Vand* (although, perhaps, remotely from the same root), but from *an* or *ean* with the prefix *V*, or its relative *afon* or *avon* contracted by the omission of the initial letter. *D* or *T* is often found to be added after *n* in river names; and *el* would be added, as in several other instances, as a diminutive; *e. g.*, in the word

¹ *Surrey Archæological Collections*—“Surrey Etymologies.” 1865.

cockerel, and in the rivers Piddell, Ivel, and Camel. The Wandle, therefore, is Vandel, the *little* water or stream, by contrast, probably, with the *larger* river Thames, into which it falls.

Synonyms.

AVON.—Gloucestershire, Somerset, Hants, Warwickshire, Devon, Monmouth, Wilts, Mayo, and many others.

EWELL.

THE river which flows through, or rather from, this town is sometimes known as the Ewell and sometimes as the Hogg's Mill river. It seems doubtful if the town gave name to the river, or the river to the town. If the Ewelle is indeed the ancient name of the river, it is probably derived from the Gaelic *au*, changed into *eu*, or from *Uisge* contracted to *Eu*, and *el*, postfix diminutive, as in Vandel.

If the latter view be adopted, the word will be synonymous with the numerous rivers known as *Ouse* and *Eske*, and their relatives.

It should be noticed that our county historians derive the name Ewell from *Etwelle*, on the authority of "Domesday," and say that it means *At, well*, from its situation at the *head* of the stream. This explanation is by no means satisfactory, inasmuch as the name *Etwelle* is not found in any document earlier than "Domesday." In several charters of a far earlier date the name is uniformly given as *Euel* or *Euelle*.

THE MOLE OR AMELE, EMELE OR EMLEY.

For by all these names has this river been known, and the origin of each seems involved in obscurity. Notwithstanding the researches of many able writers, it seems still uncertain whether the river was known by either name indifferently at one and the same time, or whether one is not a corrupted form of the other; and

if so, which is the earlier. The name *Mole* does not occur in any ancient record; the earliest appellation is *Amele*, or its equivalent *Emele*. This may very easily have been converted into *Mole*, and very possibly may have been derived from *am*, Celtic for water, with the postfix *ele*, *le*, or *ley*; but the exact meaning of either of these as applied to a river is not very evident. There is a river *Mole* in Devon, on which the towns or districts of Mollond, Molton, Moliton, Mollington, &c., are situate. Dyer, in the work above referred to, derived this name from *ar*, water, with *m* prefixed, and the final *r* changed to *l*, which, as he says, was commonly done. The name of the Surrey river may possibly have been formed in the same way; but as this assumes that its *ancient* name was the *Mole* (which is doubtful), and as Dyer's explanation seems to be merely conjecture, it is safer, at present at least, to adopt the derivation from the Celtic *am*.

It will thus be seen that in the names of all the principal rivers of Surrey the Gaelic or Cymric elements are more or less present. In the few other rivers and streams no traces of these languages are observable; probably they were too unimportant to acquire or retain any distinctive names until the Anglo-Saxon era. The *Tillingbourn*, the *Bourn*, and the *Blackwater*, are names undoubtedly of Anglo-Saxon origin. The *Blackwater* is, probably, *Blác*—shining or glittering,—stream, the *Bourn*, the well-known name for any small river or brook. Judging from the second syllable, *Tilling* is not probably a Saxon patronymic denoting the district of the *Tillings* or *Terlings*. There was also, formerly, a stream in Chertsey, known as the *Water of Redewynde*, which (if it still exists) no longer bears that name—and is supposed to have been what is now known as the *Bourn*. Whatever may be the interpretation of the word *Redewynde*, it seems to have no reference to a river or stream. Probably it was the name of some manor or place near the water.

There are, I believe, no rivers in the county bearing

distinctive names except those above mentioned, and it remains only to notice some villages and towns which seem to take their names from their position with regard to streams.

MOULSEY, formerly *Molesham*,—the house or dwelling by the *Mole*, or *Amele*.

EGHAM, formerly *Egeham*,—on the edge or bank of the Thames.

CHERTSEY is described in old charters as *Cerotig's ai* (or island).

BERMONDSEY, or BEAMOND's *ai* (or island).

MERTON, from *mere*, a lake or marsh.

WISLEY, probably the lea or meadow near the *Uisge*, or river; as in *Wissey*, Norfolk; *Wistow*, Hunts; *Wisbeach*, Cambridgeshire.

DURFORD may, perhaps, be the ford over the *dur*, or *dwr*, water.

OKEHAM may be the dwelling-place near the *Ock* or *Oke* river, as in *Ock*, Oxfordshire; *Oke*, Devon.

GUILDFORD.—This name is often said to be derived from *Gilde* or *Guild*, a trading company or fraternity; but the name was known long before it is probable that any such company could have been settled here, and, as I think, long before the word *guild* or *gilde* was used in this sense. For want of a better derivation, may it not have been *Geleht*—the wet ford, possibly from the muddy and moist character of the river-bank; or, what is still more probable, may it not be the *Geld-ford*, implying that some toll or local tax was here payable? Camden says that in some Anglo-Saxon charters the name is spelt *Gegld-ford*.