The Value of Field Names.

By Emma E. Thoyts.

ONE of the most important points of local history can only be elucidated by a careful study of Field Names, which are generally of immense antiquity, surviving changes of every kind. and dating back to the days of our earliest forefathers. In our Kennet valley, as far as I have traced, the derivations are entirely Anglo-Saxon; except *in the case* of names of former tenants which are easily recognised, although *generally* modern. Some of these are as old as the 15th or 16th century.

It is interesting to collect the old Names, for now they are fast fading from memory, The old boundaries broken down by steam cultivation, and the acquirement of the land by one large proprietor—tend to change names and divisions. Two centuries ago Berkshire was divided into innumerable little holdings or farms, even the tenantship was hereditary, passing from father to son, or son-in-law, as the case might be. Intercourse was entirely confined to the parishioners themselves; and the settlement of paupers and their removal back to their native village, all helped to keep people in restricted areas. Even now, the cottagers, especially the older people, know little or nothing of the next village or its inhabitants. The following names I think may be interesting, and I have given as far as I am able, the derivations of them. In Sulhamstead, I find Middle-hams and Wide Mead, both named in the Reading Abbey Charters. Tile Mill was so called in the time of Henry VIII. Ruckmore and Tibbets in

Ufton are also both names of very early date. Those names ending in *ham* may generally be accounted the oldest; *ham*, the Saxon home, homestead, field, farm, or village. There are here some fields known as the hams, and "wheathams" is a common field name, so too is "Lot mede" or the "Common field," usually called by the name of its village, pointing to the time when a large strip of land was let off in divisions, separated from each other by marebanks or ridges, and to make it fair, lots were drawn yearly to avoid dispute, so that no man held the same plot of ground consecutively. These Lot meads occur as far as I know, only in the valley, and it appears that the whole of the low lying meadows adjoining the river Kennet were let somewhat after this fashion. One strip in our Lot mead is entered as the "Abbas de Bere"—no doubt the Abbey portion. Perhaps, this too was the origin of "Berelands" in Aldermaston. Round Oak was known by that name in the time of Edward VI.

It would indeed tend much further towards proving local history-traditions, if, as has been suggested, the plan for adding the field names to the Ordnance Survey Map can be carried out. A hundred years ago, Berkshire, like all other counties, was principally farmed by small holders or husbandmen. In many cases, the tenants' names remained attached to the plots of ground, but more often still, the landlord or owner of the property, was the person whom it was called after. Parochial divisions seem to have somewhat altered; perhaps under one Lordship, village boundaries were of minor importance. Roman occupation may be traced through derivation. The Breach, Breaches, or Brech, appears several times about here, notably, on high ground in Burghfield parish, behind the hill known as Bennet's Hill, but more interesting is it to discover it in a straight line with the former in Sulham. Local tradition points out no precise spot as the battlefield where Saxon and Dane met in deadly struggle; and breach, though a word of Roman origin, tells of warfare and need of defence. I cannot be quite sure, but I believe the larger Ordnance Map gives a line of old fortifications crossing Folly Park just above Bennet's Hill, which would suggest a line of earthwork or road towards Silchester, the great Roman stronghold; if so, the survival of these ancient field names would go far to help to decide the long-argued course of the Roman *via* or way across the Kennet valley; in support of which theory, I may further add that

a few years ago, a Roman coin was discovered midway between Burghfield and Sulham, in the farmyard of Ford's Farm, at the point where formerly the old swing bridge stood; and from the name I should opine the river was here crossed, before canal or bridges were thought of. It is often extremely curious to search out the many variations a name undergoes through local pronunciation, one of our fields is now called "Upper and Lower Valentines," the name struck me as an unusual one, but in an older map, I found it as "Pollardtines," and further back still as "Palentines;" and though the registers go back to 1602, I cannot trace it, so perhaps it was the patronymic of some Elizabethan yeoman. Burghfield is very rich in curious names, Starveall, instead of the uninviting aspect, more probably gained it from Lord Stawell of Aldermaston. Little Fleet is pure Saxon and expressive of the brook which flows through it. Copyhold needs no explanation. Armits or Hermits would suggest the abiding place of some pious recluse, but what is the meaning of Bishop's Meadow?

In Grazeley, I made one very curious discovery; long it puzzled me as to where was the Amors Court named in Deeds of Lord Norris Lands, &c., till I found it in Amber Farm, *alias* Amblers, Amners, Armors, and Amors. Broad Street Common again sounds like a Roman track, as also does the Droveway, Sulhamstead. Edmunds says, except in Yorkshire the old name of Tything or Ridings is quite extinct; that is not so, for it is with us here a common field name.

Once pear-trees must have been much more frequent than now, and also crab-trees, from the frequency of the name.

Baredown Gulley in Ufton sounds Cromwellian, and it is said the troops lay in Ufton Wood during one of their marches across the country. Sequestrator's Close near Sulhamstead House is now called "Squeakers." "The Butts" was once the "five butts," a land measure, not an archery ground. Foxes Spring is sole survivor left to point out to us in the old moat-house near, Faxes Court, Foxle or Foxhalles Manor.

Copper Close, I am convinced, is only Cooper's Close or field, spelt in old Ufton registers as Coppow.

Velder veer reads like Dutch, veer is a ploughing term, perhaps for Velder it was formerly Wilder. The Hareway, Englefield, is a very curious find. Edwyn's or Edney's Mead too, I believe to be very ancient.

I could give volumes of queer names, and ramble on for pages in wild speculation as to the origin and derivation of each, but time and space forbid. I will only add this, that if any one possessing old property maps or records of field names, such as tythe books, farm accounts, &c., will be so good as to communicate with me, I shall be extremely obliged, as I am endeavouring to fill up the Ordnance Maps with all the field names I can gather together.

DISCOVERY OF AN ANGLO-SAXON BURIAL PLACE NEAR WEST SHEFFORD.—A correspondent writes to the *Times* as follows:—"About a quarter of a mile from the village of West Shefford, Berkshire, in the course of the Lamborne Valley Railway, has been discovered what appears to have been an extensive Anglo-Saxon burial place. The cutting where the bodies have been found is on a high ridge of land, on the left bank of the Lamborne, and not far from the high road to Newbury. Within the excavated space there were some thirty skeletons, both of male and female adults, and children, at about 2ft. 9in. below the surface. Unfortunately, owing to the want of early information, there has been no systematic exploration of the ground, and no doubt many of the relics discovered have been again entombed. Several of the articles have, however, fallen into the hands of Mr. WALTER MONEY, F.S.A. By the side of one of the male bodies was a broad straight-bladed iron sword, of the distinctive Saxon type, which is of itself undoubted evidence of the people to whom this burial ground belonged. The sword is double-edged, 2ft. 9in. in length and 2½in. wide, and had, apparently, been enclosed in a scabbard. Near it was an iron spear-head and two knives, known as seaxes, and on the left shoulder of one of the women was a cruciform fibula of copper gilt, 2½in. in length, the ornamentation of which is very elaborate, though rude. With this there was also a small necklet of amber beads and a pair of bronze tweezers, which had, apparently, been attached to a girdle. On the breast of another skeleton were two circular bronze discs, 2½in. in diameter, of the type usually found with Saxon interments in Berkshire, Oxfordshire, and Gloucestershire. It was not until the eighth century that the Saxons began to bury in churchyards, and the date of these interments may be assigned to the sixth or seventh century."