

Wokingham.

THE ORIGIN AND SPELLING OF THE NAME.

By ARTHUR T. HEELAS.

“ A pleasing, unpretentious, country town ”
 Some hold is all the writing on thy page ;
 But Hist’ry’s voice is one men may not drown—
 Thou hast a certain pride of lineage
 That glows on crooked gable and on roof,
 In mellow streets or unspoilt Market Place,
 Where yet no jerry-builder plants his hoof,
 And Age but serves to beautify thy face.

—*Jean Baxter.*

IN the past there has been much controversy with regard to the correct (and original) spelling of the name of the Forest Town of Wokingham. It will be of interest to give evidence to show that, apart from the derivation of the name, there are strong grounds for maintaining that the original spelling was the same as that in use to-day.

The evidence is definitely in favour of “ Wokingham ” as the original spelling, and the one that has been in general use throughout the centuries. This is the spelling in the Papal Confirmation of the rights of the Church of Sarum granted to Bishop Josceline (1146), The Testa de Nevill (1320), The Charter to the Town granted by Queen Elizabeth (1578) and that by King James I (1613), and the Survey of the Rectory (1650), and many other references.

“ Wokingham ” is the common form, with only occasional exceptions, in the Parish Church Registers from 1674 onwards. The slight modification, as seen in “ Wokyngham ” appears in “ The Roll of the Twentieth ” (1327), and in the Inquisitions Nonarum (1340). And the various other forms with “ W ” as the initial, which occur occasionally, are also an indirect testimony in the same direction.

Of the spelling with “ O ” as the initial, the earliest instances which the writer has come across are in the Chantry Certificates (c. 1548), where “ Oakyngham ” and “ Okyngham ” appear. “ Ockingham ” is the spelling in the Master Roll of Elizabeth (1602), and “ Oakingham ” occurs in the Parish Church Registers from 1722-1727 (all in one handwriting) and occasionally afterwards.

There are many other forms of spelling, but they probably express the idiosyncrasies of the individual writers.

The commonest form, other than "Wokingham," has been "Oakingham"; this form became very popular for a long period commencing in the seventeenth century and continuing until the middle of the last century, and although there were several ways of spelling the name with the initial "O" these variations were gradually dropped in favour of the corruption "Oakingham." Cartographers were great offenders, as the initial "O" is usually to be found on old maps; this is largely due to the fact that the making and publication of maps became more general during the period that the corruptions were in vogue.

A view that "Oakingham" was the original spelling seems to have gained support from the fact that the Corporation Seal consists of an acorn and oak leaf. While it is possible that the Seal may have been suggested by a spelling some time current, the older form seems undoubtedly to have been "Wokingham." And it is germane to note that the earliest known illustration of the Seal (1623) bears, as now, the word "Wokingham" round the acorn. The other view, sometimes put forward that the name was taken from the oaks in Windsor Forest in which the Town was situated, is merely a conjecture, and has no evidence to support it.

Further evidence in support of the initial "W" may be found in the probable derivation of the name. Various writers agree that the word is derived from the two Anglo-Saxon words, "Uuoccing" and "ham," Uuoccing or Uuoccinga being an Anglo-Saxon tribe, and "ham" meaning town or home: hence the place-name means "home of the Uuoccinga or Woccinga."

It is also acknowledged that very many places in existence before the Conquest seem to have derived their name from the existing occupants rather than from the signification of the word. Therefore it would seem that originally the name began with "Uu" or "W."

Investigation shows that old documents can supply at least 36 different ways of spelling the name of the Town, some of which are rather curious. Of several of these only one record is

known by the writer. These are given in the list below. Only a limited number of references has been quoted, as in some cases they are too numerous to reproduce.

Like many ancient places the spelling of the name has varied considerably throughout the centuries that have passed, but unlike so many ancient places the Town has retained its original name.

Although the list given below may not be complete it is of some interest as it helps to clear up a debatable question that has been long outstanding.

Table showing the different modes of spelling Wokingham from the State papers, and also official and legal documents, from the twelfth to the nineteenth century.

<i>Name.</i>	<i>Period.</i>	<i>References and remarks.</i>
Wokingham ...	1146 ...	Sarum Charter No. XIV. Papal confirmation of the rights, &c., of the Church of Sarum.
„ ...	1217 ...	Reg. of St. Osmund 11. 359.
„ ...	1241 ...	Assize Rolls. m 18.
„ ...	1320 ...	Testa de Nevill. Edward 11.
„ ...	1321 ...	Close Rolls. 476.
„ ...	1583 ...	Queen Elizabeth's Charter.
„ ...	1612 ...	James I. Charter. And many others.
Wokingeham ...	1160 ...	Reg. of St. Osmund I. 249.
„ ...	1220 ...	„ „ „ 279.
„ ...	cir. 1300 ...	Sarum Charters. ccc VII., &c.
Wokinge ...	1241 ...	Assize Rolls. m 18.
Woukingham ...	1241 ...	„ „ m 32.
Wokkynham ...	1267-71	„ „ m 10d.
Wokyngeham	1294 ...	Inquest Post Mort., III. 217.
Wokyngham ...	1297 ...	„ „ „ III. 491.
„ ...	1327 ...	Roll of the 20th. Edward III.
„ ...	1347 ...	Feet of Fines. Berks.
„ ...	1428 ...	Exch. Lay Subsidies. Berks 73/82.
„ ...	1533 ...	Brit. Mus. Charters. 38579.
„ ...	1535 ...	Valor Ecclesiasticus.
Wokynham ...	XIII. cent.	V.C.H., vol. III., p. 225.
Wokinghame ...	XVI. cent.	„ „ „ „ „

<i>Name.</i>	<i>Period.</i>	<i>References and remarks.</i>
Bokyngham ...	1321 ...	Close Rolls. 476.
Vokyngham ...	1533 ...	Brit. Mus. Charters. 38579.
Woking ...	1583 ...	Queen Elizabeth's Charter.
Wokinghome ...	1590 ...	Grant of Arms to Thomas Albey. (Carrington, Wilts, Arch. Jour., p. 58).
Wookingham ...	XVI. cent.	
Okyngham ...	1535 ...	Valor Ecclesiasticus.
„	cir. 1548 ...	Chantry Commissioners Certif's. 3. No. 5.
Oakyngham	cir. 1548 ...	„ „ „
Okingame ...	1553 ...	Doc <i>re</i> Seizure of Church Goods.
Ockyngham ...	1566 ...	Visitation of Berks. Harl, vol. I, 33
Okinghame ...	1572 ...	I.L. II.
Okingham ...	1598 ...	Muster Roll, 41, Eliz. Also frequently used about this period.
Okyngeham ...	XVI. cent.	V.C.H., vol. III., p. 225.
Ockingham ...	1602 ...	Muster Roll. Eliz.
„	... 1640 ...	Archbishop Laud's Deed of Gift. Also in many documents of this and later periods.
Ockhingham ...	1602 ...	Will of Thomas Harrison, Esq.
Okenham ...	1634 ...	Visitation of Berks. Harl, vol. II., p. 227.
Oakingham ...	XVII. to XIX. cent.	In common use during these centuries, references too numerous to quote.
Okeingham ...	1634 ...	Visitation of Berks, vol. I., p. 80.
„	... 1699 ...	Expulsion Order of Drapers' Co., Lucas' Hospital.
Okehingham ...	1644 ...	House of Lords' Cal. 6th Report, Hist. MSS., p. 37.
Woakingham ...	1650 ...	Parliamentary Survey of Rectory. Copy of Deed at the Rectory.
Wokenham ...	1665 ...	The Curfew Charity, p. 98.
Workingham ...	1672 ...	Licence issued under Declaration of Indulgence.
„	... 1692-5, &c.	Parish Church Registers.

<i>Name.</i>	<i>Period.</i>	<i>References and remarks.</i>
Wokingham ...	XVII. cent.	On trade tokens, &c.
Wokeingham ...	1706 ...	Parish Church Burial Register.
" ...	1712-13	" " " "
Wokemgham ...	1706, 12, 13	" " " "
Wokamgham ...	1764 ...	Parish Church Marriage Register.
Oakamgham ...	1764 ...	" " " "
Ookingham ...	1826 ...	Parish Church Burial Register.

NOTE.—The writer wishes to acknowledge the kind assistance he received, whilst compiling the list, from Major J. de C. Laffan, who is engaged in research work with Prof. F. M. Stenton, of Reading University, on the place-names of England ; these will be published separately under the various Counties to which they belong. The work will be a valuable addition to English literature when it is published.

Also from Mr. J. H. Sacret, Lecturer in Modern History at Reading University, for his extracts from the "Valor Ecclesiasticus" ; and from the Rev. B. Long, R.D., Rector of Wokingham, for his extracts from the Parish Registers.

THE COMMON SEAL OF THE BOROUGH OF WOKINGHAM.



Corporation Seal.

The ancient Borough of Wokingham has never obtained a Grant of Armorial Bearings, but has used the Corporation Common Seal instead ; the latter is very old, having been in use for several

hundred years ; there is an accepted idea locally that it is too old to trace back, whether this is correct or not the fact remains that its origin is still unknown.

The Seal is referred to in the Charter of James I. (1612), which confirms the privileges, liberties and freedoms "used and enjoyed" by the inhabitants of the Town granted by the "Charter of the Lady, late Queen Elizabeth, as by the Charters of diverse other our progenitors and predecessors formerly Kings of England." This and other references in the Charters prove that the Municipal body is of great antiquity.

The reference to the Seal in the Charter of King James I. is as follows:—"And that the aforesaid Aldermen and Burgesses of the aforesaid town of Wokingham and their Successors have for ever a Common Seal to serve for doing of whatever causes and businesses of theirs and their Successors, and that it may and shall be lawful for the said Aldermen and Burgesses and their Successors, at their own pleasure from time to time to break, change and to renew that Seal as it shall seem best unto them."

Unfortunately after the Incorporation of the Borough in 1885 (and it may have been before that year), the Town authorities did not follow the original design of the Seal, although they used the Seal, without its setting, for stamping legal and official documents ; in place of the original design they substituted on their stationery and other notices an acorn and leaves the wrong way up and in a distorted form within a double oval ring, in this ring were inserted the words "Borough of Wokingham."

This substitution of the ring for the elegant and heraldic design in which the old Seal was set (as illustrated at the head of this article) and the distortion of the design of the Seal itself robbed it of its more important appearance and reduced it to a commonplace badge.

A few years ago badge the wrong way the late Mrs. Tyndale of the Berks Archæological Society the mistake was the acorn and its position was made in



THE BADGE.

the error of using this up was pointed out by W. Heelas, a member logical Society, and rectified by reversing leaves, but no alteration the debased design.

However, since the Great War neither the badge nor the Seal have been used on the official stationery, and the whole question has been allowed to sink into oblivion.

Now that the Borough has been extended and the Town has grown into an important residential centre the time is ripe for the Council to seriously consider the question of adopting the original Common Seal with its beautiful setting for all official purposes.



This is a reproduction of the Seal that has always been in use for stamping in wax legal documents, licences, etc. ; it is, therefore, difficult to realise how such an error as the one illustrated could have crept in.

The design at the head of this article is to be found in the "Topographical Dictionary of England," by Samuel Lewis, published about one hundred years ago.