The Name 'Berkshire.'

By G. W. B. Huntingford.

We find not seldom that the name of a county presents greater etymological difficulties than most of the place-names it contains; and our own county is no exception to this. Two derivations have been proposed, one Keltic, the other Anglo-Saxon; and though there is no reason why we should not have a Keltic name here—the name of Wiltshire is derived from a Keltic river-name—yet there is more circumstantial evidence in favour of the Anglo-Saxon.

The early forms of the name are:—

Berrocscire (Asser, † 906).

Bearrucscire
Bearrocscire
Barrocscire
Barocessire
} (Florence of Worcester, † 1118).

Berruchshire (William of Malmesbury, † 1143).

Barocshire (Bromton, c. 1330).

A Keltic derivation was approved by the late Sir John Rhys, who said that "nothing serious stands in the way of the guess which identifies the name of the former [*Bibroci*][1] with the *Berroc* whence the modern name of the county of Berks is derived."[2] The transition from *Bibroci* to *Berroc*, though somewhat abrupt, is not impossible, if we compare the complete loss of b from *Eboracum*, modern York, which has come about through forms like *Kaerebrauc* (Geoffrey of Monmouth), *Iorforvik* (Corpus Poeticum Boreale, I. 272, 538), *Eoruorwic* (Henry of Huntingdon), and *Eworwic* (Simeon of Durham). The somewhat similar Gallic names *Bibracte* and *Bibrax* have become Beuvray and Bièvre respectively, and both b's are still represented. The *Bibroci* occur in Caesar as members of a group living between the Thames basin and the Severn, and thought to have been included

[1] Caesar, B.G. V. 21.

[2] 'Celtic Britain,'[2] p. 28.

in the general term *Atrebates*; hence one can suppose that their geographical position might warrant the survival of their name in the word Berkshire. But beyond this we have no evidence.

The second derivation proposed has more to support it. Lysons, quoting Asser, tells us "that this county derives its name from a wood called Barroc; he adds, that it abounded in box,[3] but it does not appear that this circumstance had any connection with the name."[4] Lysons thought that this Barroc wood, which is mentioned in a charter of King John, "was on or near the Downs . . . as the other estates mentioned in the same charter are situated in that neighbourhood,"[5] A 14th century historian, Bromton, however, gives us a somewhat different view. He speaks of "*Barocshire, qui sic denominatur a quadam nuda quercu, in foresta de Windesoure, ad quam solebant provinciales convenire*"[6] *Nuda quercus* means 'bare oak,' A.S. *baer ac*, and from this we are to understand the name as Bare-oak-shire.

Now, while the name may contain the word 'oak,' it should be noted that the second vowel in all the forms quoted is o or u, not a; and this leads us to the word *bearo*, the A.S. form of the O.H.G. *paro*, which was commonly used in ancient heathendom to mean a sacred grove or tree.[7] Bromton's statement may then be taken to mean that Windsor Forest (or part of it) was a sacred wood, in which there was one particularly sacred tree; to which we shall return later.

It has been shown of late years that many 'harrow-names' in England contain the A.S. *hearg*, 'temple,' which is synonymous with *bearo*;[8] for the most ancient idea of temple did not necessarily involve an actual structure. We have already in Berkshire at least one possible hearg-name—Harrowdown Hill in Longworth; and it is a matter of great interest to find that the name of the county may convey a similar meaning. Meanwhile, the *c* of *Berroc* is unexplained. Bromton's *nuda quercus* suggests

3 A.S., box; Lat. *buxus*.
4 Magna Britannia, vol. I., pt. II. 1813: Berkshire, p. 160.
5 Lysons, *loc. cit.*
6 *Decem Scriptores*, 801.
7 Grimm, 'Teutonic Mythology.'4; E.T., I. 69.
8 Grimm, *loc cit.*

that it represents ac, 'oak tree,' and we should therefore expect the whole word to mean "the sacred grove of the oak tree," if it can represent such a phrase in Anglo-Saxon. At least we may see *bearo* in the first syllable. There are other names, too, in Berkshire, which contain this element:

Bere Court, Pangbourne.
Bear Place, } Wargrave.
Bear Hill, }
Bear Wood, Wokingham.
Billingbear, Waltham.

The first of these Dr. Grundy explained as from A.S. *baere*, "woodland providing pasture for swine."[9] This, of course, may be so; but when there is a possibility of a derivation from *res sacrae*, it probably comes before a derivation from commonplace things. The words, however, are the same; and a later meaning of "woodland pasture" is exactly parallel with Lat. *lucus* (first, a sacred grove, then an ordinary wood), Goth. *láuhs*, O.H.G. *lôh*, A.S. *leáh*, which has acquired the secondary meaning of "meadow," for, as Grimm has it, "not only the wood, but wooded meadows were sacred to gods."[10] Bear Wood is more explicit, for the redundant 'Wood,' added after the meaning of Bear had been forgotten, calls attention to the original meaning of 'sacred grove' rather than merely 'wood.'

The name Billingbear in Waltham St. Laurence appears as Pullingbere in the *Rotuli Hundredorum*.[11] The last syllable is probably bearo; the first part looks as if it might contain the word *Phol*, which was one name by which the Teutonic god *Balder* or *Paltar* was known—a god whom Grimm identifies with the Keltic *Bel* (*Belenus*, *Belinus*), a god of light and fire.[12] Although this name may be looked for in such English place-names as Fulbrook, Fulburn, Fulham,[13] there is not, I think, any serious reason why we should not see it also in Pulling. We are told that *Phol* was worshipped chiefly in Thuringia and Bavaria,[14] part of which at least was anciently known as Suevia; and in this

9 *Berks, Arch. Journ.*, XXXI., 116.
10 Grimm, Teut. Myth., I. 69, n.
11 f. 14 B. (13th cent.).
12 Grimm, I. 228.
13 Grimm, IV. 1359 (note by translator).
14 Grimm, I. 228.

connexion the occurrence of a '*Swaefes heale*,' or Suevian's hollow[15] in a White Waltham Charter (Birch, Cart. Sax., 762) is of some importance, as it indicates at least the possibility of a place in this district being called after the Suevian god.[16]

We have already referred to a sacred 'bare oak' in Windsor Forest. It is almost impossible not to connect this with Herne the Hunter's 'blasted oak' in Windsor Little Park, near Frogmore.[17] The *locus classicus* for this is "The Merry Wives of Windsor," IV. 4, where we read,

> There is an old tale goes that Herne the hunter,
> Sometime a keeper here in Windsor forest,
> Doth all the winter-time, at still midnight,
> Walk round about an oak, with great ragg'd horns;
> And there he blasts the tree, and takes the cattle,
> And makes milch-kine yield blood, and shakes a chain
> In a most hideous and dreadful manner.

Here we have plainly a story relating, not to a real man, but to a mythical personage; for the numerous and very similar stories from Germany are all traceable finally to heathen deities;[18] though in some cases they are referred to a man. But behind the man is always a god. Nor is Herne peculiar to Windsor, for Horne [19] the Hunter, or Harry-ca-nab, hunts with the Devil near Bromsgrove in Worcestershire.[20] And Shakespeare's description, 'with great ragg'd horns,' makes it possible, if not probable, that in Herne we have to do with the horned god *Cernunnos*, recorded in Gaul, who may go back to the horned god of Palaeolithic times, represented, like Herne, with antlers in a French cave-painting,[21] whose name, like Herne or Horne's, describes him: 'The Horned One.'

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[15] See Dr. Grundy's note *ad loc.*, *Berks Arch. Journ.*, XXXI. 132.
[16] Bulmarsh in Sonning may be another Phol-name.
[17] Lysons, Berkshire, p. 433.
[18] See Grimm, III. 918–950; Herne, p. 942.
[19] The Quartos add to this scene from M.W.W., after line 42, a line which spells the name Horne.
[20] Grimm, IV. 1591.
[21] Dr. M. A. Murray, "The Horned God" (summary), in MAN, 1932, 269.

NOTE.—Owing to the fact that the author of the above article is in Kenya it has not been possible to give him the opportunity of checking the proof of his contribution.—[ED.]