Bosworth battlefield: Notes on Associated Toponyms

Professor Barrie Cox FSA
April 2009

Abbreviations used throughout are:
OE   Old English
ON   Old Norse
ME   Middle English
LTD   *Liber de terris Dominicalibus* of Leicester Abbey (British Library,
                 Galba E III), dated 1467 x 1484
Margary   I. D. Margary, *Roman Roads in Britain*, London 1955

The Townships

Higham on the Hill (OE **heah** + **ham**, 'the high homestead, village') appears to have been settled earliest by the Anglo-Saxons. Lying on dry upland some half-mile from the Roman Watling Street (Margary 1g), it conforms perfectly to the pattern of place-names with **ham** as their generics in relation to Roman roads, Romano-British villas, rural settlements and cemeteries and to pagan Anglo-Saxon burial sites in the Midlands and East Anglia. Compare Waltham and Wymondham beside the Roman road Margary 58a across the Leicestershire Wolds in the north-east of the county.[1] One thinks of the formation of such settlements as belonging largely to the pagan period of c.400-650. Badlow (*badlowhyll* LTD 'Badda's burial mound', a name with OE **hlaw** 'a tumulus') is a pagan Anglo-Saxon thane's inhumation grave, presumably sited at and marking Higham's territorial boundary within view from the Mancetter to Leicester Roman road Fenn Lanes (Margary 57b).

Dadlington is a later foundation on a northward-pointing promontory overlooking the Roman Fenn Lanes. Such a place-name, constructed with the OE generic **tun** in its later sense 'village, estate', plus the connective particle **-ing-**, indicates the association of the place with a particular individual whose personal name forms the prototheme, hence 'the village, estate associated with a man called Dædel or Dædela'. Such names appear to belong to the eighth century and may indicate a developing Anglo-Saxon manorial structure. They are present in particular in a group in the west of Leicestershire, an area which was exploited comparatively late, where names such as Donington, Packington and Whittington recur.[2]

Stoke Golding was originally an outlying dairy/cattle farm (OE **stoc**) belonging either to Higham or to Dadlington. In the years immediately preceding the battle, Leicester Abbey was still using Stoke's uplands for the grazing of cattle and horses, as the recorded *þe abbotes byris* ('the abbot's cowsheds or byres') and the *stotfolde* (OE **stod** + **fald** 'the horse enclosure') testify in LTD. Stoke is earliest recorded in 1156 in an inspeximus of 1318.[3]

Ambion (OE **an** + **beam** '(the place at) the solitary tree') lay on upland which, at the date of the settlement's foundation, must have been clear of woodland. It is recorded as an independent township between 1261 and 1347.[4]

Shenton, Sutton Cheney, Upton, Fenny Drayton.[5] Of the associated townships, Shenton (OE *Scenc* + **tun** 'the farmstead, village on the Sence (Brook)') is recorded from c.1002, Sutton (Cheney) (OE **suth** + **tun** 'the south farmstead, village', presumably in relation to Market Bosworth) from 1086 and Upton (OE **upp** + **tun** 'the higher farmstead, village' on its ridge, probably in relation to low-lying Shenton) from c.1130. Fenny Drayton, sited near the point where Fenn Lanes leaves Watling Street, appears from 1086 but its prefixed ME **fenni** 'marshy' is not present in records before 1327. From the middle of the seventeenth century, it is also called Drayton in the Clay. Drayton (OE **dræg** + **tun** 'the farmstead, village where a drag or a portage is necessary') indicates that, even before the Norman Conquest, the Roman road had deteriorated badly here and was impassable for wheeled vehicles without considerable effort. One may speculate that the settlement developed to serve the needs of early transport. The modern road pattern shows that here the line of the Roman road was badly broken. The nature of the road's capacity for major through traffic in the medieval period is uncertain, although by the eighteenth century it had been improved to accommodate coaches.

Moor

OE **mor** could indicate low-lying wetland, boggy upland and dry (or barren) upland. Moor was an important factor in the economy of a medieval farming community. It was fully exploited for rough grazing for livestock and for its provision of various useful flora. It would have lain in most cases beyond the arable of the great open-fields towards the further reaches of a township's territory. Moorland is abundantly recorded in the medieval period throughout Leicestershire and is distinguished toponymically by its presence in compound names which make particular its nature, usage and ownership. Hence husbandry names such as *Gosmore* (OE **gos** + **mor** 'moorland where geese are herded'), *Cowmoor* (OE **cu** + **mor** 'moorland where cows are pastured') and *Ramsmoor* (OE **ramm** + **mor** 'moorland assigned to rams') are frequent. Ownership is signalled as in *Osbernmor* (with the OE personal name *Osbeorn*) and *Hunrikesmor* (with the OE personal name *Hunric*), while *Prestemor* (OE **preost** + **mor**) relates to moorland from the exploitation of which a religious community drew income and the later *Parkeresmor* (with ME **parkere**) indicates the perquisite of the keeper of a lord's local hunting park. Early in the Anglo-Saxon period and later, British survivors were reduced to scraping their livelihoods from moorland as the many known instances of *Walchemor* (OE **wælisc** + **mor** 'moorland of the British or Welsh') illustrate (in Leicestershire, known at least in Burton Lazars, Cosby and Croft). *Wildemore* (Dadlington and Tur Langton) indicates such land not yet brought into use.[6]

Redemore is of the low-lying, damp moorland the most important for the location of the 'Bosworth' battlefield (*Redemor in campis de Dadlington* 1283, *Redemore*, *Redesmore* 1485, *Redmore dyke* 1530 (with ME **dyke** 'a drainage or boundary ditch'), *Redemore*, *Red More* 1611. This is most probably OE **hreod** + **mor** 'reed moor'. The name recurs in Leicestershire in Barkby, Barsby, Burton Overy, Claybrook, Heather, Loughborough and probably in Plungar, always located in a low-lying situation.[7] The reeds would have been cut for floor coverings and for thatching. The loss of such a name would relate to period and to the processes of husbandry. *Redmore dyke* of 1530

hints at reclamation for pasture. The notion of *Redemore* as 'red moor' because of local clay soils is much less likely since not until the ploughing of some of this marginal land for arable in the later medieval period would the clays have been widely visible. The name was created pre-arable. It originally described moorland, not tilth.

Whitemore. A name that is often given to dry upland moor at the edge of a township's territory. The name also occurs in the county in Diseworth, Knipton, Markfield, Shenton, Thornton (all in dry upland locations) and importantly in Stoke Golding. The great open-field to the east of this township is called *Whytmorefelde* in LTD of 1467 x 1484, that is 'the common field bordered by the White Moor'. In the medieval period and later, *white* was used to indicate not only prevailing aspect/colour, but also dry, open pasture. It is uncertain whether the name *White Moors* south of Shenton, traditionally the site of Henry's encampment on the eve of the battle, is the legacy of William Hutton.[8] It appears on J. Pridden's 1789 plan of the battlefield published by Nichols.[9] That moorland was present here in the 14th century is indicated by *la More* in Upton in 1307, but its nature is not specified.[10]

Fen

Unlike those with **mor**, names with OE **fenn** are comparatively few in the county and are mostly in simplex form, i.e. they show no indications of land ownership and very little of husbandry/agricultural implication. Such names are absent from the Gartree and Guthlaxton Hundreds in the south-east and south of the county and from West Goscote Hundred in the west. A few such names are recorded in the Wreake Valley in an area of early English settlement at Melton Mowbray, Great Dalby and Burrough on the Hill and in the East Goscote Hundred in Barsby, Hoby, Humberstone, Kirby Bellars and South Croxton. Otherwise, names with **fenn** are limited to Sparkenhoe Hundred in the south-west of the county, as at Dadlington, Shenton, Stoke Golding and at Groby, Ibstock and Kirby Muxloe. Only *Swinefen* ('fen where pigs are kept' in Ibstock) relates directly to farming practices. Usually, **fenn** refers to unusable wet land and by its nature would have defined parts of a township's territorial limits, such as those toponyms at the northern boundary of Dadlington. *Quakefen* (Burton Lazars, Hoby and Humberstone), compounded with ME **quake** 'shaking, trembling' and *Waverfen* (Burrough on the Hill) with OE **wæfre** 'unstable, shaking', indicate treacherous conditions underfoot, while a *Saltfen* (Barsby, South Croxton) is defined by the OE adjective **salt** in the sense 'salty, brackish' which supposes standing water.[11] It is not possible to quantify the past wetness of fen sites when simplex forms of such names are the only evidence. Variables to be considered are possible climate fluctuation as well as the processes of agricultural improvement by drainage. The Dadlington survivals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries point to such agricultural processes at work. As Holinshed noted in 1577, the wet land '*at this present, by reason of diches cast....is growne to be firme ground*'. *le fens* and *le fenes* of 1547 and 1555 may simply indicate marshland, but '*lees best' pasture called the Fennes*' of 1559 (i.e. 'the cattle pasture called The Fens') points at this date to enough drainage having been undertaken for the land to support grazing livestock. So does *le fenne feld* ('the Fen Field') of 1621. The old name remains but state and function change. Names such as *Fen Meadow* may either relate to former land which was once **fenn** but now dried out by ditching or may have distinguished viable pasture land

bordering the former **fenn**. Very little research has been undertaken on the microtopography of **fenn** except for Northumberland where frequently the term appears to have been used for narrow strips of waterlogged ground where there could never have been wide areas of marsh. *Fenmore* of 1529, *Fenmore field* of 1636, *Fenmore hedge* of 1536 to 1575 and *Fenmore pytt* of 1551 to 1597 refer to damp moorland bordering *le Fens*, ground which would have had an important function in the medieval farming economy and belong with the group of names with **mor** discussed above. It is uncertain whether *Fenmore field* of 1636 is a surviving name of one of the great open-fields of Dadlington or whether at this date it represents a small enclosure on the edge of fenland. It is notable that *Fenns Hole* seems to have been a small linear bog at the Dadlington parish boundary, with furlongs of arable (of which the selions are still visible) poised above it.

Fomer and *The Plash*

There are two very large 'water' features which lie in the west of the research area, *Fomer* south-west of Shenton and *The Plash* at the south-western boundary of Stoke Golding.

The name *Fomer* survives in Fomer Farm. *Fomer* is *Fowlismere* in 1307.[12] It is *Fomar* in 1578 (by which date it was meadowland) and *The Foomeers* in 1835.[13] The name is a compound of OE **fugol** 'wild bird' and OE **mere**, which was used of both 'large pool or lake' and 'marshland', hence 'the pool/lake frequented by wild fowl' or 'the marshland frequented by wild fowl', cf. Fulmer in Buckinghamshire of which in 1897 the following observation was made: 'an actual mere noted for its wealth of wild fowl existed here till more than half a century ago. It is now a worthless patch of land, full of springs and runlets'. The specific nature and development of the local *Fowlismere* is uncertain.

The Plash in Stoke Golding was a large feature, as the modern circumnavigating road testifies. The word is from OE **plæsc** 'a marshy pool'. Here, the whole feature seems to have once been in the nature of a great sump, a standing pool with a large area of surrounding bog. Such features are rare in the county. *le pitplassh* 1272 x 1307 (Wyfordby), *Le Plasshe* 1561 (Burton Lazars), *the Plashes* 1849 (Little Dalby) occur in the north-east, *Plasshe* 1735 (Cotes) and *Lokholmplassh* c.1474 (Barrow upon Soar) in the east and *Plash* 1591 (Dunton Bassett) in the south.[14] These are all that are known. As for **fenn**, names in **plæsc** are overwhelmingly simplex in form, with only an occasional locational prefix.

Scandinavian marsh names

Marshland words introduced by the Danish invaders are few in the south-west of the county. The battlefield area was not one where they settled and such names as we find are due to dialectal drift. From ON **myrr** 'swampy ground' is *Calwell myers* of 1557 in Dadlington (prefixed by English **cald** + **wella** 'cold spring or stream') and in Stoke Golding is *Tough Mire* where the qualifier is from OE **toh** 'sticky'. *Carrpitt* of 1605 in Stoke is from ON **kjarr** 'marshy land overgrown with brushwood', but **pytt** 'a pit' indicates a small feature.

hæth

Names with OE **hæth** 'a heath' are found in the main in the west of the county. They indicate land overgrown with scrub and heather. Great extents of heathland lay south and west of Charnwood and gave names such as Donington le Heath, Normanton le Heath, Short Heath and Heath End.[15] In Higham on the Hill, heathland is recorded from 1638, with *White Heath* in 1773, *Brown Heath* and *The Heath* in 1774. In the west of Stoke Golding at the edge its *Garbrodfelde*, this same heathland is recorded as *þe brown heyth* in LTD of 1467 x 1484. With the specifics *brown* and *white* locally, the heathland refers to dry, barren raised land bearing the aforementioned flora. The area of heath hereabouts at the edge of rough grazing land does not appear to have been extensive.

Two other important battlefield toponyms

Crown Hill. Traditionally, Henry Tudor received the retrieved, battered crown which Richard III had worn on his helmet from Lord Stanley at what became known as Crown Hill in Stoke Golding. The hill has commanding views to west, north and east across the plain occupied by Sence Brook and the river Tweed. It has been argued that Crown Hill's name is the result of Tudor legend-making and that it has no relevance to the location of the battlefield. The three great open-fields of Stoke Golding are listed in LTD of 1467 x 1484 (i.e. a record immediately preceding the battle of 1485) as *Whytemorefelde* ('White Moor Field') to the east, *The Halmorefelde* ('The Hall Moor Field' (earthworks associated with the medieval hall surviving)) to the south and *Garbrodfelde* to the west (the name is from ME **garbrode**, **gorebrode** 'a triangular plot of land, land in a gore of a common arable field'. Selions in the gore were broad rather than long in order to produce worthwhile allotments of land in these wedge-shaped areas.) When next recorded in 1605, *Garbrodfelde* has been replaced by *Crownehillfield* (and *Crowne Hill Close*). *Garbrodfelde* is an unusual name for a great field in Leicestershire. Such fields are normally characterized by significant aspects of topography, either adjacent major physical features or those man-made such as mills, churches and halls. While runs of seventeenth and eighteenth century Glebe Terriers for a parish record the occasional renaming of one of the usual three common fields, such renamings relate to major features of the landscape and were perhaps the result of the redefining of open-field boundaries. They were names given by peasant farmers in response to their immediate concerns and environments. The smallish *Garbrodfelde* is unusual in that it was named from a minor arrangement of the field's selions. These may have been those located in the extreme west of the field where it tapers beside *Badlowhyll* or, more likely, those recorded *garbrodys* (with their abutting selions) which could perhaps have been seen from a vantage point on the high ground which later became Crown Hill. That such an inconsequential and uncharacteristic great open-field name should be replaced by one recording an event of major significance for the villagers seems very reasonable. It may well be that the change in name was directly related to the events on the battlefield. (A cautionary observation is that a *Crannell* is recorded in a 1737 deed relating to Higham on the Hill. This is either from an OE **cran** + **wella** 'crane or heron stream' or from an OE **cran** + **hyll** 'crane or heron hill'. Popular etymology could conceivably have

transferred the name as Crown Hill to the adjoining Stoke Golding. Much depends on the location of the *Crannell*. Even so, a crowning would seem to have been remembered.) It is occasionally possible to note early name change within the landscape if the feature whose name changes can be identified. So, for example, in the Langtons, the pre-English stream-name *Lipping* was replaced during the fourteenth century by the common English stream-name *Caldwell* (OE **cald** + **wella** 'cold stream'), a name which during the later eighteenth century was transferred to the range of high ground which runs beside the stream and is now called Langton Caudle. In other words, a stream-name is replaced, its replacement lost as a stream-name but then transferred to a hill. Before the advent of Glebe Terrier evidence, such instances of identification are rare indeed and it is unsafe to make generalizations about the processes of name loss.

Sandeford (OE **sand** + **ford** 'the sand-bottomed ford'). The traditional relationship of an authentic *Sandeford* to the battle has been questioned. It appears in Henry Tudor's first Royal Proclamation of 1485. There are several major survivals of this particular name, principally in the Midlands and in the south-west of England, but no other Sandford (if *Sandeford* is authentically located here) has survived in Leicestershire. The spelling of this early instance is quite acceptable as a fifteenth century survival, with the presence of the intrusive medial *e*. Concerning place-names with OE **ford**, crossing places of both major and minor streams are indicated, usually between villages, but **ford** names are common on long-distance medieval trade routes as the many instances of Saltersford (with ME **saltere** 'a salt merchant') and Salford (with OE **salt** 'salt') testify. A *sandford*, like a *stoneford* (often now Stamford or Stanford) referred to the nature of the footings of a ford. Such names as Barford ('barley ford') and Heyford ('hay ford') alluded to common seasonal agricultural use. The notion of a *sandford* as 'ford for the carriage of sand' would be unique and unlikely. Indeed, this name appears to be a hypothetical construction by James Hollings in 1858, taken from a road between Shenton and Sutton Cheney known as 'The Sand Road' which crossed a stream.[16] A ford was not a causeway, but a causeway may have carried a road through marshy land up to and away from a ford. The OE word for a causeway was **brycg** (modern 'bridge'). Hence the common place-name Bridgeford would have indicated a ford with a made-up underwater footing and not a ford later superseded by a bridge. It seems unlikely that the Roman Fenn Lanes would have been aligned simply to take advantage of a minor patch of sand at a stream crossing. A reinforced footing for such a road across a stream would have been likely. Of course, centuries of usage may have badly damaged the structured Roman road as it evidently did at Fenny Drayton. In a Dadlington Court Roll of 1530 one finds '*they will that merebridgis should be made that week on pain of 12d*'. These 'bridges' were no doubt causeways consisting of laid brushwood or furze across wet ground and which needed seasonal repair. In the 15th and 16th centuries, they may well have formed part of the structure of Fenn Lanes. Indeed, *Sandeford* may have been a name given to a perceived unit of such combined causeways and ford.

References

1. Barrie Cox, 'The Significance of English Place-Names in *hām* in the Midlands and East Anglia', *Journal of the English Place-Name Society*, vol. 5 (1973), 15-73. Reprinted in *Place-Name Evidence for the Anglo-Saxon Invasion and Scandinavian Settlements: Eight Studies*, ed. K. Cameron (Nottingham 1975), 55-98.
2. Barrie Cox, *A Dictionary of Leicestershire and Rutland Place-Names* (Nottingham 2005), *passim*; and Barrie Cox, 'Aspects of Place-Name Evidence for Early Medieval Settlement in England', *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, vol. 11 (1980), 35-50.
3. *A Dictionary of Leicestershire and Rutland Place-Names*, 98.
4. *ibid*., 2.
5. *ibid*., passim.
6. Barrie Cox, *The Place-Names of Leicestershire*, English Place-Name Society, vols. 75, 78, 81 and 84 (Nottingham 1998-2009; in progress), passim.
7. *ibid*., passim.
8. William Hutton, *The Battle of Bosworth Field* (Birmingham 1788).
9. John Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester* , vol. 4, pt. 2 (London 1811), plate 89, 556.
10. *Calendar of Close Rolls 1302-1307* (London 1908), 544.
11. *The Place-Names of Leicestershire*, passim.
12. *Calendar of Close Rolls 1302-1307*, 544.
13. Ordnance Survey, first edition one inch map, Sheet 43 (London 1835).
14. *The Place-Names of Leicestershire*, passim.
15. *A Dictionary of Leicestershire and Rutland Place-Names*, passim.
16. J. F. Hollings, 'Scene of the Death of Richard III', *Notes and Queries*, 2nd series, vol. 6, no. 150 (1858), 391-2.