



## The Antiquity of Place-Names

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WAS recently engaged in the compilation, with two Herefordshire Archæologists, of a survey of Pre-conquest Antiquities found in that county, and in the course of the work some problems concerning place-names arose, which led me to communicate the subjoined paragraphs to the Woolhope Field Club, which is the Herefordshire Antiquarian Society. One of the problems concerns Cheshire, and it has therefore seemed to me worth while to reprint the notes in question with some additions, and to append to them certain observations with special reference to Cheshire. My notes are as follows:—

The survival of Romano-British place-names is a matter of considerable interest to the antiquary as well as to the historian. They form a part of the small legacy which we English in England have inherited from the Kelts who preceded us. In Herefordshire there appears to be only two such cases of survival. Ariconium, usually and plausibly located at Bolitree and Weston-under-Penyard, near Ross, probably survives in Archenfield. Magnae (or whatever was the nominative of the form known to us only in the ablative Magnis) may probably be traced in the name of a West Saxon tribe which occupied much of Herefordshire, the Magesæte. The oldest form of their name, as given in

a document of A.D. 811, is *Magonsaete*, that is the dwellers at *Magon*. The word is compounded like *Dorsaeta*, the dwellers at *Dur(novaria)* and in the land of the *Dur(otriges)*, now *Dorset*, and other Saxon place and tribe names. The evidence on the matter is set forth in the annexed letter written at my request by Mr. W. H. Stevenson, Fellow of Exeter College, Oxford, who is perhaps the first living authority on the subject of English place-names. I desire particularly to call attention to the fact that there is old and definite evidence in favour of the derivation, because mere similarity of modern forms goes for little. Nothing has been a greater source of confusion in the study of Romano-British topography than the attempts, made first—and worst—by Camden, to identify apparently similar names without tracing their history. It is absolutely necessary in all cases to research, and I believe that no better work could be done by local archæologists than a detailed examination of the significance, the origin, and the various forms and proper use of their local place names. How long, for instance, has the name *Watling Street* been applied to the Roman road from *Wroxeter* through *Leintwardine* to *Kenchester*? *Watling Street* is, of course, an old name in itself: is it an old name as used of this particular road? I cannot find out that any county historian has paid the least attention to the point. Yet, as the road is in many places a boundary, it is almost sure to be mentioned in some charter or map or terrier or estate-survey. So far as is known at present there is nothing to determine whether the name is old or was invented for this road by some antiquary (say) in the seventeenth century. There was at that time a good deal of such inventions. For instance, there are two *Morecambes*,

competing inventions for the site of the bay Moricambê mentioned by Ptolemy; the one is on the Solway, the other near Lancaster. Watling Street, in Herefordshire, may be a similar invention, but we need evidence of its age to decide. The matter is an important one. The meaning of the name 'Watling' is notoriously obscure, and one of the first conditions for deciphering it is a knowledge of its proper use. Was it applied only to one or two roads, or to many? At once we come to the question, how old the name is in Herefordshire? The problem is also important for students of the Anglo-Saxon roads, since the antiquity of the name probably corresponds to the antiquity of the road in actual use.

The oldest reference which I know to the use of the name "Watling Street," in Herefordshire, is in Horsley's *Britannia Romana*, p. 388. "The country people near Wroxeter give the name W. S. to the way which goes through the middle of Shropshire into Herefordshire (as I apprehend) to Kenchester." Horsley's book was published in 1732. I confess I should like older and more distinct testimony. As the road forms in some places a parish boundary, and often (I should imagine) an estate boundary, deeds, terriers, and charters, should exist which would take us back far beyond 1732. The only old name for the road which I can discover is 'Bot-' or 'Botte-street,' which Mr. Eyton mentions as used for the Shropshire part of the road in early times. The road itself seems to have been in use in Anglo-Saxon times as a road from Shropshire to Herefordshire—see Owen & Blake-way's "History of Shrewsbury" (London, 1825) i. p. 27, note.

I now subjoin Mr. Stevenson's very valuable letter on the forms of the name of the Magesaete:—

“The earliest form of *Magesætan* is in an original charter of 811 (Cartul. Saxon, i., 462, line 1): ‘on Magonsetum æt Geardcylle’ (Yarkhill, co. Hereford). *Setum* is dat. pl. of *Sete* (W. Sax. *sæte*). This form is important, and I think supports the derivation from *Magn(is)*. A like form occurs in a 14th cent. copy of a Glouc. charter (C.S. ii. 152), which I believe to be genuine: ‘in *Magansetum* iiii. manentias [hides] on Briencandafelda.’ The latter is a corruption or misreading of O.E. letters representing a form of Irchingfield, as the Gloucester chartulary says that the grant was in *Erchenefeld*. In 959 (C.S. iii., 242, 20) it is *pagus Magesætna* (gen. pl. of *Magesætan*). This charter shows that Staunton-on-Arrow and Hay, county Hereford, were in the district of the *Magesætan*. Chronicle 1016 *Magesætan* (dat. pl., the people, not the district), 1041 *Roni Magesetensium* (comes); Florence of Worcester, ed. Thorpe, i. 265. This chronicler (i. 289), says:—*Et quia civitas Wigornia, tempore quo regnabant Brytones vel Romani in Brytannia, et tunc et nunc totius Hwicciae vel Magesetaniae metropolis extitit famosa, &c.* Here *vel* must be copulative, since *Hwiccia* and *M.* were not identical. Flor. (i. 238) has a list entitled ‘*Nomina praesulum Magesetensium sive Herefordensium.*’”

To these notes I may add the following observations. I am afraid that in Cheshire there are very few demonstrable survivals of Romano-British place-names. *Deva*, of course, lives in *Dee*, but it is the solitary exception. The late Mr. Watkin put *Condate* at *Kinderton* and *Veratinum* near *Warrington*; and, if these sites could

be proved to be what he thought, the slight similarity of the names would no doubt be significant. But I am afraid that the identifications are extremely doubtful, and I am inclined to think that it was mainly the similarity in names which led Mr. Watkin to suggest them. We ought then to discard them, or at least to treat them as wholly doubtful, and therefore we must content ourselves with only one Romano-British name surviving—Dee. On the other hand, Cheshire possesses a Watling Street, and the purpose of these paragraphs is to enquire, or to set others enquiring, what is the age of the name. The name Watling Street is, of course, a well-known one, and a very old one. It is used, and has been used since Saxon days, to denote the great Roman road from London, by St. Albans and Lichfield, to Wroxeter, near Shrewsbury. It is used also to denote the Roman road which runs through Durham county, crosses the Roman Wall, and passes across Northumberland, over the Cheviots to the immediate neighbourhood of Jedburgh and Melrose. I believe this is also an ancient use, at any rate in England, but I have no direct evidence before me on the subject. These two are the chief uses of the name Watling Street, but they are not the only uses. There are certainly three other cases, all in the western half of England. One is in Herefordshire, as noted above; a second is in Lancashire, near to Preston; the third is in Cheshire, between Chester and Manchester. The antiquity of the name in Herefordshire is discussed above: it may be as old as 1732, but on the other hand, it may be also a mere extension southwards of the name as used between London and Wroxeter; for Horsley's words seem to imply that he knew the name only near Wroxeter, as applied to the Wroxeter and Kenchester

road. The antiquity of the Lancashire example I have not been able to ascertain, and everyone seems to be equally in the dark as to the age of the name in Cheshire. Now that Archæological Surveys of Counties are in active preparation on many sides, it may not be amiss to call attention to such ignorance, and to suggest that it should be met by a careful exploration of deeds, charters, and the like. Each county Society should endeavour to compile a list of the place-names in the county in question, with a careful statement of their oldest ascertainable forms, their proper uses, and other such information. Such an historical dictionary of topography is one of the principal things which the student of early Britain (British, Roman, or Saxon) needs at the present moment.

