

THE NAME "ROTTEN ROW."

By ARTHUR BONNER, F.S.A.

To most Londoners any consideration of this name has been connected with the well-known horse-ride in Hyde Park, and an "accepted" explanation of its origin has been that it is "a corruption of 'route du Roi.'" This etymological conjecture seems strengthened by the fact that, in the 18th century, the King's private road to Kensington did go through the southern part of Hyde Park; but it is disposed of by the two questions: (a) was it ever actually called "la route du Roi?" and (b) is such a corruption phonetically practicable or likely? the answer to each being in the negative.

The Hyde Park name, however, is but one of many, as enquiry shows that there are more than 60 cases of such a name recorded in England and Scotland from the 13th century to the present day.

In the modern study of Place Names, it has been found that with many of our recurring names it is desirable—or necessary—to collate the data concerning the whole group in order to arrive at a satisfactory etymology for a local instance, and I proceed upon this method with the "Rotten Row" group.

I trace 7 instances* in London and Middlesex: at Shoreditch, Kingsland Road, Goswell Road, Holborn, Hyde Park, Fulham, and Raton Lane, Dowgate:—

1. Shoreditch.—Mentioned by Stow (Survey of London, Kingsford's ed. ii., 74): "A row of proper small houses with Gardens for poore decayed people, there placed by the Prior of the said Hospitall (St. Mary's Spital) . . . after the suppression of the Hospitall, these houses for want of reparations in a few yeares were so decayed, that it was called Rotten Rowe." Stow locates it between the bars (without Bishopsgate) and Shoreditch; and he states that the property had been bought by a Draper named Russell, from whom it had become known as Russell Row.†

* An eighth instance is found among Tottenham records, viz.: "Ratonerowe" (1411), "Ratonrowe" (1467). See Robinson's "Tottenham," 2nd edit., pp. 177, 179 and 183.—EDITOR.

† By the date (1720) of the issue of Strype's edition of Stow's Survey, both "Rotten Row" and "Russell Row" seem to have been superseded, as, while Strype prints Stow's remarks, his references and maps do not show either name as still existent. They are absent from Ogilby's map, 1677, but the Row might have been too far north to be shown upon it.

2. Kingsland Road.—“In the liberty of Church End.” *Rotten Row*, mentioned in “New Remarks of London; or, a Survey of London . . . Collected by the Company of Parish Clerks,” 1732. (pp. 362 and 231).

3. Goswell Road, at the western end of Old Street (*ib.*, 362 and 170).—*Rotten Rowe* and *Retten Rowe* in 1537 (Inq. Post Mortem, Ldn., 325-6), and may be the “*Ratonsrowe*” in the will of J. de Tamworthe 1373 (Sharpe’s Wills ii., 167). Shown and named on Ogilby’s map of 1677, and on later maps until *c.* 1835.*

4. Holborn.—“*Ratonsrowe*” in 1336-7 (Hustings Roll 96/218), then consisting of 10 cottages. Possibly the *Ratonsrowe* of J. de Tamworthe’s Will of 1373 (*see* No. 3 above).

5. Hyde Park.—The ride was made in 1734, “as now, of loose material” (Wheatley’s *edn.* of Cunningham); but I have been unable to find the name “Rotten Row” attached to it before 1779-81, the date given by Cunningham and Wheatley, when Sheridan’s line, “the hack Buccphalus of Rotten Row” appears to introduce the name in print. On London maps of 1682 onwards I have not found the ride named until *c.* 1853 (Davies’ “London and Environs.”)†

6. Fulham.—Formerly a lane near Eelbrook (Feret’s “Fulham” III., 5); “*Ralon Rowe*” in a Court Baron Minute of 1455 cited by C. J. Feret in *Notes and Queries* (Ser. 8, X., 5, 1896).

There was also a Raton(es) Lane near Timberhithe, Dowgate, in the 14th century: “*Ralon Lane*” in a St. Pauls Deed of 1367, and “*Ratones Lane*” in 1343 (*Liber Custumarum*) and 1326‡ (St. Pauls Deeds).

* Called “Ragged Row” on 3 maps of late date: Wallis 1816, Cary 1838 and Cruchley 1850. “Rotten Row” in Hatton’s “New View of London” 1708 (Hatton confuses this with Stow’s Shoreditch instance), and in later 18th and early 19th century street-lists, up to Elmes’s Topographical Dictionary of London, 1831.

† From the large Rocque-Pine plan of 1746, and onwards, “the Kings old road to Kensington” is frequently attached to the road near the southern edge of the Serpentine, and “the Kings new road . . .” to the road which skirts the southern edge of the Park. These roads appear to date from Wm. III and George II respectively.

‡ The calendar (in 9th Report Royal Commission on Histor. MSS., Pt. I, Appx. 1-72, 1883) prints the 1326 entry as “Katonnes lane,” but I take this “K” to be a misprint for “R.”

Of these, the 5th—viz., Hyde Park—is the most modern in date, and the only one now in use.

In the counties South of the Thames, the only instance I find is Rotten Row, a small group of cottages near Bradfield, Berks. At Elvetham, Hants, there is a Rotten Green: a similar group of buildings, judging from the Ordnance Survey ("1-inch" scale).

Northwards, however, the number increases, as will be seen by the list given below. For much of the information I am indebted to (a) *Notes and Queries*, in which the name received attention in 1852, 1865-6-7, 1896, and 1898, and a good many ancient spellings were adduced*; (b) Dr. David Christison's "Early Fortifications in Scotland" (Blackwood, 1898, pp. 318, 337) wherein 13 Scottish cases are listed, with ancient spellings, and some of the English instances are named; (c) Mr. Armitage Goodall's "Place Names of South West Yorkshire" (C.U. Press, 1914, pp. 237-8), in which are 10 Yorkshire cases, with ancient spellings of four of them) and 13 others are mentioned; (d) Prof. Allen Mawer's "Place Names of Northumberland and Durham" (C.U. Press, 1920, pp. 162-3), for 4 cases (with spellings) in those counties†; (e) "Place Names of Scotland," by Rev. J. B. Johnston (Douglas, Edinburgh, 2nd ed. 1903, p. 258), for additional spellings at Glasgow and Carnoustie, and a case at Menteith. The assistance gained from these sources is indicated by their initials—N.Q., C., G., M., and J., respectively—inserted between parentheses after various items. Naturally there was much overlapping of data, calling for careful collating. I have been able to add some further recorded instances, and some spellings from official and other sources. Ancient spellings, and cases in which the name is no longer in use, are printed in italics.

ESSEX.—Orsett: *Rotten Row*, a small group of cottages (Ord. Surv. 1840; replaced on current ed. by a farm or house named "Loft Hall").

BUCKS.—Hambleton: Rotten Row, farm? (Ord. Surv.)

GLOS.—Gloucester: 1460 "a house or houses called *Rotten Row* or Asschowcllys-place" (Rent Roll, cit. in P. Norman "London Signs" 179).

* Some of them without mention of their sources, unfortunately.

† Mr. Mawer is Professor of English at Liverpool University, and Director of the "Survey of English Place Names"—a very valuable movement which he has recently inaugurated under the auspices of the British Academy.

SALOP.—Shrewsbury. (G.).

Wyre Forest: *Rotten Row*, one or two cotts., $3\frac{3}{4}$ m. N.W. of Bewdley (Ord. Surv. 1832; replaced on later edns. by a residence named "Winwoods").

DERBYSHIRE.—Derby. (N.Q. 1898; and G.).

NOTTS.—Nottingham: *Rotten Row*, now Cheapside (N.Q.)
From the Records of the Boro' of Nottingham (5 vols., Quaritch, 1882 and later; an official publication) I extract these ancient spellings: *Ratoun-rowwe*, 1308; *Ratinraw*, 1315-16; *Ratunrouwe*, 1330; *Ratonrow-e*, 1395, 1396, and 1653; *Ratounrowe*, 1435; *Ratton Rawe*, 1446; *Rotenrowe*, 1543; *Rotten Row* 1653.

SUFFOLK.—Bury St. Edmunds. (N.Q.)* Ipswich. (G.)

NORFOLK.—Norwich. "Norwich long had its Rotten Row, S.W. of the open space 'Tomblaud' . . . in the 13th century, it was *Ratune Rowe*, afterwards *Ratones-rowe*, *Raton Rowe*, and *Rotten Row*." (N.Q. 1898). 1303, "a place in Norwich called *Tomland* and *Ratounerowe*"; 1304 "*Tomeland* and *Ratoumerawe*"; and 1305 *Ratunrowe* (Cal. Patent Rolls).

Marshland: *Rattan Row*, loc. (Census 1911 Index).

LINCS.—"Freiston and Bennington, and some other places in the same hundred of Skirbeck, formerly had a Rotten Row in Each." (N.Q. 1852). Spalding (N.Q. 1898; and G.). Winterton (N.Q. 1898).

YORKS.—Barnsley (near): *Ratten Row*†, "locality" (Census 1911, Index).

Doncaster: 1474 *Ratton Rawe*: 1747 *Ratton Row* alias *Roper Row*. (N.Q. 1866).

Howden: 1680 *Ratton Row*. (N.Q. 1898).

Knaresboro' (Forest): 1621 *Ratanraw* (G.).

* The contributor to *N. & Q.* (1852) gives as an ancient spelling, *Rateen-rowe* in 1437, and he attributes it to a connection with the sale of rateen, a thick twilled woollen cloth. This word, however, is a late introduction in our language, from Fr. *ratine*, and it dates from the 17th century (N.E.D.). Probably the *N. & Q.* writer misread the 1437 entry, which is more likely to have been *ratun(e)rowe*—an error easily made by a novice in reading ancient MSS.

† Probably the *Ratten Row* described in the National Gazetteer of 1868 as a colliery village in the township of Stainborough and 2 miles S.W. of Barnsley.

Masham : " An old street has for the last 50 years borne the name of Rattou Row." (N.Q. 186)

Sheffield : 1770 (Map), *Ratten Row*, a little street or alley (N.Q. 1898).

Sowerby : 1545 *Ratton Rawe* (G.)

Wakefield : 1824, a Street " called Bread Booths, now *Ratten Row* " (Sissons Historic Sketch of Wakefield Parish Church, cit. N.Q. 1898). Now Bread Street (N.Q. 1867).

York : *Ratton Row*. (York Records, Davies, 240n, cit. in " Records of the Borough of Nottingham," i., 437).

Also at Beverley, Denby, Dodworth, Halifax, Holbeck, Lepton, Morley, Otley, Sedbergh (obs.), (G., & N.Q. 1867 and 1898).

Also Rattou Gutter at Langsett, and Rattou Royd (field) at Oulton (G.); and *Rotten Close* at Ecclesfield (Plan, 1764; N.Q. 1898).

LANCS.—Bury : *Ratunrowe* (Bury Wills, 8, 9, 231, cit. in Records Borough Nottingham, i., 437).

WESTMORELAND.—Kendal. *Rattonrawe*. (N.Q. 1898).

DURHAM.—Darlington (obs.) (N.Q. 1867).

Durham : 1306 *Ratten Rawe*. (M.)

Boro' of Elvet : In 1789 " a place there called *Rotten*, or *Rotten Row*." (Archæologia, X., 61).

NORTHUMBERLAND.—Bamburgh : 1430 *Ratonraw* (M.)

Elishaw : " Near Rattenraw " (N.Q. 1898).

Haydon. Ratten Row : 1257 Raturaw, and 1268 Raturawe (M.). 1343 and 1344 Ratonrawe (Cal. Close Rolls); 1479 Ratonraw (Surtees Soc., Memls. Hexham Priory, 1864-5, ii., 24)*.

Newcastle-on-Tyne. (N.Q., & G.).

Redesdale : Rattenraw (M.).

* An interesting entry : ". . . et i. acra jacet in campo de Raton-raw, ex parte orientali le lonyng ibidem, et vocatur le Cros-acre"; *i.e.*, the Cross acre formed part of a field called Raton-raw on the east of the lane of that name. This MS., " The Black Book of Hexham," was compiled c. 1470-79, largely from earlier records.

SCOTLAND.

ABERDEEN.—Aberdeen. (G.).

AYR.—Cumnock: Rattenrow. (C.). Mauchline: Rattenrow; 1557 *Rattonraw* (C.).

BERWICK.—Lauder, 1867: A street or lane called Rotten Row (N.Q. 1867).

E. LOTHIAN.—1372 *Ratonrav* (C.).

EDINBURGH.—Leith: 1497 *Rattounraw*, 1530 “*ane wynd called Raten raw*” (C.).

FIFE.—Dunfermline: Rotten or Ratton Row; c. 1487 *Rattenraw*; now West Queen Ann Street (C.)*. Earlsferry, street called Rottenrow in 1898, *anc. Ratton raw, Rattown raw* (C.).

Pittenweem, street, “Rotten Row” in 1898 (C.).

FORFAR.—Arbroath: 1496 *Ratounraw*. (C.).

Carnoustie: Rotten Row, farm: 1476 *Rattoune Raw*. (J.).

Kellie, Rottenrow: 1468 *Rattoune Raw* (C.).

Panbride: 1610 *Rottounraw* (C.).

GLASGOW.—Rotten Row, street†: 1283 *Ratonraw*, 1434 *Ratoun‡ rawe*, and 1452 *Vicus Ratonum* (J.); 1612 *Rattounraw* (C.).

MIDLOTHIAN.—1617 *Rottounraw* (C.).

PERTSHIRE.—Perth: 1550 *Rattounraw* (C.). Mentcith. (J.).

RENFREWSHIRE.—Paisley. (G.)

* Spelt *Rattinraw* in N.Q. 17/3/1866, and there cited from “Extracts from the Kirk Session Records of Dunfermline” by Dr. E. Henderson, then recently published.

† Said to have been in existence before A.D. 1100 (Annals of Glasgow, by Jas. Cleland, Glasgow, 1816, ii., 480).

‡ “Ratown” in Dr. Christison’s book—probably a printer’s error.

Arranging in chronological order the forms of the first element in the name, we have :—

1. *ratun,-e*, 13-14th centuries.
2. *raton*, 13-17th ..
3. *ratoun*, 14-15th ..
4. *rattoun,-e*, 15-17th ..
5. *ratton*, 15th and later.
6. *rotten*, 16th ..

with later variants *rottoun*, *retten*, etc. Nos. 1 to 6 are normal English spellings of the old French word *raton*, a rat. The *t* became doubled and the word is still in use as *ratton* and *rottan* (= rat) in northern England and lowland Scotland.

For the second element, *raw,-e*, and *rowe* are M.E. forms of the familiar word "row," a number of objects set or arranged in a line. In northern England and Scotland it also signified "a street (especially a narrow one) formed by two continuous lines of houses" (N.E.D.)—a sense which extended to the South also, to some extent: *e.g.*, Paternoster Row, Goldsmith's Row, the Rows at Yarmouth, etc.

Prof. Allen Mawer in his "Place Names of Northumberland and Durham," dealing with the ancient spellings of the instances at Haydon, Bamburgh, Durham, and Redesdale, concludes: "All mean 'rat-row,' from M.E. *ratoun* (O. Fr. *raton*) = rat. This name is fairly common in Northern England, and it was probably used in contempt of a row of houses so wretched that they might be imagined to be given up to the rats alone." This etymology agrees with the ancient forms given above; and it may be regarded as a strong probability in respect of most, if not all, of the other instances, whose history has not yet been traced, and on which accordingly no final conclusion is yet attainable. It was suggested by Prof. Skeat in 1898 (N.Q.).

It may be noted that the Scottish cases are all Lowland, and their mediæval forms agree with the contemporary English spellings. The Latinised rendering of the Glasgow Rottenraw in 1452, "Vicus ratonum" (the street of rats, or Rats Street) is significant. A conjectured Gaelic origin (noted by two Scotsmen in *N. & Q.* 1866-7) that the name is "a corruption of the Gaelic

Rathad'n Righ, the King's road" can hardly be maintained in face of the facts which have since been adduced.*

The rat has been commemorated in other place names: e.g., Rats Hill (Rateshull in 1186-98, printed in Maj. Heales' "Records of Merton Priory," p. 42) near Stanstead, Herts; Rats Hill, near Wantage, Berks; Rat Alley, Eastcheap, London (Ogilby's map 1677, and Rocque 1746); Rats Castle, a farm (?) 2 m. S.S.W. of Headcorn, Kent (Ordn. Surv., 6-inch scale); Rats Castle, a farm (?), which formerly occupied part of the site of Paddockwood Station, Kent (Ordn. Surv. 1819); † Rat Farm, 1 m. N.N.W. of Battle, Suss. (*ib.*); Rats Galley, Echinswell (*nr.* Kingsclere), Hants. (Ordn. Surv. 6-inch); and the Raton or Ratones Lane, Queenhithe, mentioned above. The first seven of these appear to represent the O.E. word *ræt*, and not the later importation from France, *raton*. *Raton* also appears in mediæval records as a personal name, and *ratoner* (ratcatcher) also; and this fact may be of assistance in explaining some of the place names.

While the "rat" etymology applies or may apply to most of the group, it does not seem appropriate to the Hyde Park case. Here the name was bestowed at a late date, and its earliest spelling (1789-91) is *rotten*, and there is no historical or philological reason against connecting it with M.E. *rotin*, *roten*, later *rotten*, a term applied to ground or soil which was "extremely soft, yielding, or friable by reason of decay" (N.E.D.). Stow's Shoreditch Case indicates this word in its more frequent sense of decay, and his account of the nomenclature seems to be contemporary, or nearly so, and likely enough in that instance; and "Rotten Wood," 3 m. N. of Ludlow, Heref. (Ordn. Surv. 1832), may well be another case of this significance.

* Another Scots conjecture, cited in *N. & Q.* 1898), appeared in a paper by David Murray, LL.D., president Glasgow Archaeological Society, on The Rottenraw, Glasgow, viz., that it may have been the "site of a native stronghold, with its encircling *rath* (pronounced *raw*) or vallum" on the line of a Roman road: a three-deep conjecture! His brother Scots Archaeologist, Dr. Christison (then Secretary Society Antiquaries Scotland), in his "Early Fortifications" cited above, also considered the *rath* possibility, but had to reject it in face of the early forms known to him of the name at Glasgow and elsewhere in Scotland.

† Near this Rats Castle were two farms named Cats Place and Cock Crow (Ordn. Surv. 1819).