```
.ig
.de UP
\u
.ps -2

.de DN
.ps +2
\d
..


.ps12
.vs15
.so macroschan
.rs



.MH
Foreword
.HM

.af % i
.fo’’’’
.he’’’%’
```

This paper is a lightly-edited version of the talk delivered as my professorial (inaugural) lecture at the University of Sussex on 8 June 1993. It is intended mainly to present aspects of linguistic and onomastic research for a town and gown audience with general interests, rather particularly than to convey any contribution of my own to these disciplines.

Whilst it is founded on my work in parts, I must acknowledge those other parts which are due to the work of Ann Cole and Margaret Gelling, and those ideas which I believe are my own but which have also been independently expressed recently by Fran Colman and the late Cecily Clark.

.pg

Readers in the know will recognize ideas from the mainstream of linguistics, philosophy and onomastics; those who aren’t won’t care very much - so

```
.ul
shtum\c
 !
```

.pg

On these occasions it seems customary to acknowledge one’s longer-term intellectual debts. I didn’t do it on the public occasion, but I can conveniently and appropriately do it in the published version. In addition to my current colleagues in Linguistics at Sussex, those who have most profoundly influenced my thinking on language in general, by their ideas, their methods or by their example, and often in ways which may not be obvious to them, include Henning Andersen, Joan Bybee, Kenneth Cameron, Greville Corbett, Eugenio Coseriu, Wolfgang Dressler, Gerald Gazdar, Margaret Gelling, C.F. Hockett, Richard Hogg, Dick Hudson, the late Kenneth Jackson, Bill Lang, Roger Lass, John Lyons, James and Lesley Milroy, Pieter Seuren, Royal Skousen and Neil Smith. As an eminent linguist once commented on reading a roll-call like this on a paper by someone else, "No wonder you’re confused." These debts are in addition to others which are self-evident, including to those who got me started: Roy Wisbey, John Trim and Andrew Radford.

.pg

I am very grateful to Linda Thompson, without whose skills this lecture would have remained a scrawl in a boxfile full of silverfish for ever.

Richard Coates

.br
27 September 1993

.af % 1
.bp1
.ps +4
.MH
LANGUAGE IN THE LANDSCAPE
.br
Place-naming and language change
.HM
.ps -4

What
do Icelandic linguists get up to during the long winter nights? One thing they
probably don't
do much of is place-name research. Research into place-name origins
in Iceland is not terribly rewarding from a linguistic point of view,
as the overwhelming majority of Icelandic names are
recognizably made up of everyday words, and of personal
names that are still in current use.

Neskaupsta\(d-ur	'headland market town'
Akureyri	'cultivated-field gravel-bank'
\(THingvallavatn	'water of (the) parliament fields'
\(O'lafsfj\(o:r\(d-ur	'\(O'laf's sea-loch'

These will not prevent the linguist from hibernating. For their full interpretation, only a little
extra information is needed, and that is historical or contextual, not linguistic: for ins tance,
who was \(O'laf, and what exactly are 'parliament fields'?
.pg
The place-name scholar in England, by contrast, is privileged to tackle puzzles of real linguistic
substance. Relatively few major place-names wear their origin on their sleeve, and the his tory of the
most ancient can be very very tangled. A 2000-year-old place-name may have
been formulated in Brittonic Celtic (the ancestor language of Welsh),
possibly adjusted by Latin speakers, and transmitted onwards to the invading Anglo-Saxons,
the speakers of Old English. In some areas of England, the name may then have been
filtered through Danish, and everywhere then
recorded in writing by speakers of Norman French
who wrote in Latin, but not the variety of Latin which may have influenced the name a millennium before; or recorded in writing by English speakers trained in legal French and Latin and writing in these languages. Such a history is substantially true of names like those of York\c
.UP
1
.DN
,
.fn
1 See Gillian Fellows-Jensen,
"York",
.ul
Leeds Studies in English
18 (1987), pp. 141-55.
.fE
Lincoln, Leeds, and Doncaster. But even names with a less complex history have regularly been ground down and adulterated in a way which leaves a double problem. The first

problem is to decide in which language they were originally formulated - by no means alway
s
a straightforward matter. The second is to decide what the name originally meant - by no
means always straightforward even when it is pretty clear what the language of origin was.
.pg
The hypothetical Icelandic linguist has no problem of deciding what language underlies old
Icelandic place-names, for Iceland was virgin territory (apart from a few
offshore islands - those called
.ul
P\(a'pey
- inhabited by masochistic Irish priests) when Ingolfur \(A'rnason settled in
870
.ps-2
AD
.ps+2
or so. He deals in names formulated in a language which, in the relevant
respects, has changed little since Ingolf's arrival. Moreover, Icelandic
place-names seem to bear little imprint of the domination by Danish-speaking
and -writing administrations. To a greater extent than the Icelanders, the
scholar of English names who is intent on discovering their original language
needs a knowledge of general historical linguistics as a check on the
plausibility of the creation myths which s/he
weaves on the loom of philological
developments in individual languages. The issues s/he
needs to confront include:
a general theory of language-internal change; what
happens in linguistic borrowing; general second-language acquisition;
medium-transfer; and often, the consequences of language death for the names
formed in the defunct language.
.pg
Though their activities are primarily linguistic, place-name scholars have to be responsiv
e to other
interested disciplines, namely history (especially social and political
history), ecology, agricultural history, geology and
topography. Sobering examples of failures to be responsive in this way litter
the intellectual
history of place-name-ology. The greatest of all English
place-name scholars interpreted one
Hampshire place-name as if it contained a supposed English word for the
gamebird the capercaillie, in
an area which can never have been suitable habitat for it.\c
.UP
2
.DN
.fn
2 This was Eilert Ekwall. See Richard Coates,
.ul
The place-names of Hampshire\c
, Batsford (1989), under
.ft B
Worldham\c
.ft R
, for a disappointingly prosaic alternative explanation.
.fE
At the other end of the scale of
academic respectability is an article in the presumably defunct and certainly not grieved-
over
periodical
.ul
Soviet Weekly\c
, in whose edition of 11/7/1981 is an article claiming that certain English
and Irish place-names are of Ossetian origin. Ossetian is a North-East
Iranian language of the Caucasus
mountains: the writer omits to bring forward any independent evidence

for Ossetes having ever lurked
in these islands.
Incredibly, the list of Ossetian names includes
.ul
Southend\c
, yes Southend-on-Sea in Essex. The writer might have saved everyone’s
blushes if he had known that the place in question had grown up at the south
end of Prittlewell parish and that at the opposite end
of the parish was a place called
.ul
Northend
which never acquired patronage nor, for rather obvious reasons, a pier.
.pg
For place-name study, we can force the analogy of a murder mystery: place-naming is a kind of crime against the landscape - fixing an individual’s perception of a place at a particular
moment as if it were permanent and universal, whereas the nature of any place is liable to change
geologically, ecologically, and as the result of varied human activity.
Place-name scholars want to know whodunit; and having discovered that, what
they dunit with: they chase a suspect and a linguistic weapon. It
is also desirable to establish a motive: an extralinguistic reason
confirming the suitability of the linguistic weapon.
.pg
And so first to the WHOdunit - or as a child of my acquaintance memorably
expressed it - the /w#d ju:nit/.
.pg
My first theme tonight is place-names as evidence for the changing fortunes of different languages and
dialects in the linguistic crucible of
the British Isles. Discovering the language of origin of place-names
is the nearest we shall get, in most cases, to discovering who actually
dunit.
.pg
Let’s start with a quick introduction to the crucial languages. All of England
is now English-speaking; before the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons (who
brought Old English with them) it was all
Brittonic-speaking. (Brittonic is the name of the immediate ancestor-language
of Cornish and Welsh.) From the ninth century AD, certain
areas of England became largely
Scandinavian-speaking, as indicated in Map 1 (at the end of this document);
the Danelaw boundary, the limit
of the jurisdiction of the early Danish rulers, is shown, as is the
approximate extent of the deepest Scandinavian cultural and linguistic
influence. Many Scandinavian, or Scandinavianized,
place-names are recognizable, e.g. by including
the elements
.ul
toft\c
,
.ul
mire\c
,
.ul
by
or
.ul
kirk\c
; or by having the combination of sounds represented by
<sk> in spelling (as in
.ul
Skegness
or
.ul

Askrigg\c
). Cornish remained in existence till the later eighteenth century, and has left its mark in the numerous local place-names in
.ul
tre-\c
,
.ul
bos-\c
,
.ul
pen-
and
.ul
ros-.
Several other languages, have of course been spoken, especially in modern times, but never formed homogeneous blocks:
Irish, Norman (and later Parisian) French,
Latin, Flemish, Yiddish and recently the languages of the new Commonwealth.
These others have rarely given rise to place-names in England; some French names may be found, such as
.ul
Richmond
and
.ul
Belper\c
, but the major exception lies in the French and Latin specifiers of English names, as in
.ul
Stanstead Mountfitchet
(displaying a French family name) and
.ul
Ludford Parva
(with a medieval bureaucrat’s instinctive way of writing
.ul
Little\c
).
.pg
Occasional diverting quirks may be found. There are two nearly Spanish place-names in Sussex:
.ul
Carthagena
and
.ul
Portobello.
These are datable pretty precisely to
.ul
c.\c
1740. Admiral Vernon took these Caribbean ports from the Spaniards in 1739/40 (during the so-called War of Jenkins’ Ear), and their names were transplanted to Sussex in the wake of some media hype. Carthagena is a farm at Somerley near Chichester; it is said to be built of timbers from a barque of the Armada, but place-name scholars quickly get into the habit of ignoring tall tales like this. Portobello is the place near Peacehaven where the bowel movements of quarter of a million Brightonians meet the local prawn population. I have always thought this is a better commemoration of the odious Admiral Vernon than the numerous pubs that bear his name; for it was he that ordered the watering of the sailors’ traditional rum ration, later in 1740. Needless to say, these are not evidence for a Spanish speech-community in Sussex, just of Sussex’s contribution to eighteenth-century flag-waving.
.pg

For the serious business of this section of the lecture, I'll dwell on the replacement of Brittonic by English. The Anglo-Saxons coined vast numbers of names but also adapted some earlier Brittonic ones. Often these are, or are incorporated into, the names of major cities (\c
.ul
Exeter\c
,
.ul
Gloucester\c
,
.ul
Manchester\c
), though lesser places can also be spotted (\c
.ul
Penkridge\c
,
.ul
Lytchett\c
,
.ul
Penge\c
). These show no coherent geographical clustering, except that broadly speaking Brittonic names are more frequent the further west you go. It is generally assumed that this reflects the Anglo Saxons' denser settlement and more thoroughgoing administrative dominance in the east, and perhaps even some 'ethnic cleansing' (surely the most disgusting phrase of the 1990s).\c
.UP
3
.DN
.fn
3 The
.ul
Anglo-Saxon Chronicle
records that all the Britons in Pevensey were slaughtered by the Saxons in 491.
.fE
Nonetheless, some more leftover Brittonic names are occasionally found in the east, but they are usually discovered only because of the implausibility of explanations based on Old English words. An instructive case is that of
.ul
Leatherhead\c
, Surrey, the modern form of whose name is extremely misleading. The following early spellings of the name are on record\c
.UP
4
.DN
:
.fn
4 Taken from J.E.B. Gover
.ul
et al.\c
,
.ul
The place-names of Surrey\c
, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (English Place-Name Society volume 11 (1934)), pp. 78-9. Most unusually, the sole pre-Conquest spelling needs to be dismissed as being inconsistent with the medieval development of the name. Note the convention that an asterisk indicates a form which is not attested in the historical record, but which can be plausibly assumed to have existed.

```
.fE

.in +0.5i
.nf
.ul
(\(aet) Leodridan \c
880-5 \c
.ps -2
AD \c
.ps +2
(copy of \c
.ul
c.\c
1000 \c
.ps -2
AD\c
.ps +2
)
Leret \c
1086, \c
.ul
Lereda \c
1156
.ul
Ledred(e)\c
, \c
.ul
Leddred(e)\c
, the normal forms throughout the Middle
                    Ages
.ul
Ledered(e)\c
, frequent from the mid 12th to the early 15th century
.ul
Lerred \c
1212
.ul
Ledreth\c
, \c
.ul
Leddret \c
1255
.ul
Ledride c.\c
1270, 1327, 1391
.ul
Lethered \c
and similar from 1470
.fi
.in 0

The approved explanation until recently was that it derived from the
Old English
words
.ul
l\o"e\(rn"od(e)
‘people’
and
.ul
*ride
roughly ‘ford
suitable for crossing on horseback’. The first of these words appears in
only one known place-name:
.ul
```

Leatherhead.
The second is a word-form invented (not totally implausibly, I must admit) to account for the shape of the name
.ul
Leatherhead.
The resultant explanation gains credibility from the fact that the town stands at the point where an important early road from
Croydon to Guildford
crosses the River Mole. But no great skill in linguistics is necessary to conclude that the approved explanation is a bit flimsy. Looking a little further than the confines of the English language, we find that
.ul
Leatherhead
is interpretable
as Brittonic (actually Primitive Welsh in Jackson’s system of periods for the description of the Celtic languages)
.ul
*l\o"e\(rn"d r\(i:d
‘grey-brown ford’. This explanation has a range of advantages over the English one:

.in +0.5i
(1) it consists of two fully understood place-name elements

(2) the elements of the name appear in the order normal for an older Celtic place-name (an adjective-noun compound)

(3) the name is of a topographically plausible type: colour-word +
.ul
ford
(cf. the common
.ul
Redford\c
, and in Welsh
.ul
Rhydwen
(Radnorshire) ‘white/bright ford’ with the later Celtic element
.ne
order)

(4) it is geologically appropriate, as Leatherhead is on the Thanet Beds, consisting of light-coloured clayey sand

(5) Leatherhead is a major
place associated with nearby major
names of early Old English type in
.ul
h\o"a\(rn"m\c
, among which it is central
and is therefore probably ancient itself, possibly predating those early Saxon estates

(6) Leatherhead is the site of a minster church, and its position of importance in early ecclesiastical organization strongly suggests that it is therefore an ancient, possibly pre-English, foundation

(7) the spellings available support the hypothesis (this is a technical matter which I shall have to ask you to accept on this occasion)\c
.UP
5
.DN
.in 0

.fn
5 Coates, "Methodological reflexions on Leatherhead",
.ul
Journal of the English Place-Name Society
12 (1979-80), pp. 70-4.
.fE
The accumulated
evidence is in favour of Brittonic
origin. It is a sign of responsible interdisciplinary behaviour to believe
this.
.pg
Sometimes, one can only go so far as to cast doubt on the existing theory
without erecting
a totally convincing new one. Our own neighbour of Lewes is a case in point.
I was provoked into working on its name by the dissatisfaction expressed
with the current explanation by
Margaret Gelling in a lecture given in that very town a couple of years
ago. Its name is generally and popularly asserted
to derive from Old English
.ul
hl\(aewas
‘hills’; in fact, however,
.ul
hl\(aew
never means ‘hill’ in the south of England, but rather ‘artificial
mound’, especially ‘burial
mound’. It isn’t unreasonable to suspect Lewes of being named from
barrows, as they are frequent on the South Downs.
But if this story is right, the barrows in question were presumably
levelled when the lateish-Anglo-Saxon planned town was laid out. The
evidence, therefore, would have been
wiped out, unfortunately for place-name scholarship. However the story
doesn’t fully work on linguistic grounds.
If the name derives from
.ul
hl\(aewas\c
:

.in +0.5i
(1) it should, for technical reasons, be pronounced /lu:z/ or /lju:z/ in
modern times

(2) there should
be some initial <h>s in Old English coin inscriptions, but there aren’t

(3) Anglo-Saxon coin inscriptions often show
.ul
*L\(ae(h)we
or something similar, in which the occasional presence of an <h> in the
middle is a problem.
Here are some known spellings from pre-Conquest coins\c
.UP
6
.DN
:

.nf
.in +0.25i
LAE URB
LAEWE, LAEVE
LAWA, LEAWE, LAEEW, LAEWVE, LAEWWE,
LAEWENEN, LAEHWEA, LAEHWGE
.in -0.25i
.fi

.in 0

.fn
6 Taken from Ian M.
Stewart, "The Sussex mints and their moneyers", in Peter F. Brandon (ed.),
.ul
The South Saxons\c
,
Chichester: Phillimore (1978), pp. 89-137.
.fE
To cut a very long argument short, the shape of the place-name
is consistent with a derivation from Brittonic
.ul
*lexow\(i'\o"a\(rn"
'slope', which became Welsh
.ul
llechwedd.
.pg
Which story to
believe? If, as alleged in the
.ul
Anglo-Saxon Chronicle\c
, the Anglo-Saxons were prone
to exterminate the Britons
when they met them, an Old English-derived name is more plausible on
historic grounds. But the weight of linguistic evidence, though not fully watertight, give
s a
clear preference to a Brittonic
origin for the name of Lewes. In this case, the other relevant
disciplines should take careful note of the linguistic evidence. The general
trend of recent scholarship has
been to minimize the supposed discontinuity of the Welsh-to-English
transition,
and to regard events like the Pevensey massacre of 491
.ps-2
AD
.ps+2
as untypical. In tune with this development
has been a diminishing insistence among place-name scholars on trying to fit obscure place
-names into the
unsuitably tight trousers of Old English when the comfortable pyjamas of Welsh are
available.\c
.UP
7
.DN
.fn
7 Coates, "The name of Lewes: some problems and possibilities",
.ul
Journal of the English Place-Name Society
23 (1990-1), pp. 5-15. Also in Coates,
.ul
Some place-names of the downland fringe.
Brighton: Younsmere Press (1990), pp. 12-26.
Reservations about the claimed
consistency with Brittonic origin are spelt out in
this article.
The possibility remains that, if the extraordinary twin mottes in the bailey
of Lewes Castle predate the first Norman castle there, Lewes might have been
named from them, in English. No archaeologist has yet claimed that these
man-made structures are of Saxon origin.
.fE
.pg
Place-names
can then provide evidence for the former spread and the ultimate retreat

of languages; Brittonic was spoken throughout England, has left
its traces, and is no longer spoken there. Another
particularly dramatic example appeared before me when I was researching my book on the
names of the Channel Islands.\c
.UP
8
.DN
.fn
8 Coates,
.ul
The ancient and modern names of the Channel Islands: a linguistic history\c
,
Stamford: Paul Watkins (1991).
.fE
First, I need to tell you that virtually every Guernseyperson believes that
in Roman times their island was called
.ul
Sarnia.
The botanical name of the Guernsey lily is
.ul
Nerine sarniensis\c
,
and the unofficial national anthem of the island is "Sarnia ch\(e’rie" which
was also used as the original manuscript
title of Gerald Edwards’ novel
.ul
The Book of Ebenezer Le Page.\c
.UP
9
.DN
.fn
9 G.B. Edwards,
.ul
The book of Ebenezer Le Page\c
,
London: Hamish Hamilton (1981); Harmondsworth: Penguin (1982).
.fE
Practically every club and society on Guernsey is "Sarnia
this" or "Sarnia that". Unfortunately, this is all hooey. It’s true that
.ul
Sarnia
appears in two Renaissance manuscripts of a late Roman-period text,
the so-called
.ul
Maritime Itinerary.
But the majority of manuscripts of this text show
.ul
Sarmia\c
, not
.ul
Sarnia\c
, and
what
.ul
Sarmia
might denote is fortunately clear. Let’s start with this form, assuming it
to be stressed on the first syllable, and
put it through the sound-changes know to have affected Brittonic in the late
sixth century.

.in +0.5i
.nf
[sarmi\o"a\(rn"]
[sermi\o"a\(rn"] by \c

.ul
i/j-\c
affection (\c
.ul
c.\c
500 \c
.ps-2
AD\c
.ps +2
)
[serm] by loss of final syllables (\c
.ul
c.\c
500-550)
[herm] reflex of Common Celtic \c
.ul
*s- \c
becomes [h] (\c
.ul
c.\c
550)
.fi
.in 0

Hey presto! Not Guernsey, but its closest neighbour
.ul
Herm.
Before you conclude that this linguistic history is
about on the level of Ossetes in Southend, let me explain why I have appealed to late Brittonic, when the Channel Islands
are not known as a hotbed of Celtic culture. The first known
permanent inhabitants of Herm were a colony of monks transplanted in the sixth century from the
monastery on Sark, where the leading light was Maglorius.
He was an Irishman who had
trained at the great Welsh monastery
of Llanilltud fawr under St Illtud himself. Maglorius had
spread the Gospel in Brittany - presumably using the Breton language, which was simply the variety of Brittonic
spoken in the new colonies which had been settled from southern Britain. The
leader on Herm was Tudgual, a saint with a clearly Brittonic
name (modern Welsh
.ul
Tudwal\c
). There is therefore a
strong presumption that, whatever name was used by Guernsey folk for Herm, the version of it used by its Brittonic-speaking
monks was the one which eventually prevailed. I think this
is a dramatic instance of the convergence of historical and linguistic evidence at
the micro-level, and it can be taken as an indication that linguistic
evidence alone may serve as a reliable witness of unrecorded historical
events.
.pg
I’ll say something briefly about a related, though apparently very different, phenomenon, namely the ebb and flow of modern dialect across the landscape. In general, regional diale ct
in place-names, especially local pronunciations of them, is in retreat everywhere.
Local pronunciations for names spelt with <-sh-> in the middle, as in
.ul
Horsham\c
, have changed almost everywhere from a pronunciation with /s/ to one in
/\(is/, on the basis of the spelling (\c
.ul
Bosham

being a striking exception). The old pronunciations of
.ul
Hove
/hu:v/,
.ul
Chichester
/t\(isidist#/ and
.ul
Selmeston
/simps#n/ are pretty well dead.
One curious phenomenon has only partly shared this oblivion.
There is evidence that once a good number of Wealden Sussex place-names had final stress
(\c
.ul
Etchingh\(a’m\c
,
.ul
Ardingl\o"y\(aa"\c
); predictably all of these seem to have reverted to a form compatible
with standard English stress patterns in place-names (\c
.ul
\(E’tchingham\c
,
.ul
\(A’rdingly\c
). The final stress is not
dead, however; it has moved house. Many people from rural Sussex moved to the Brighton
area as the town developed, and several Brighton-area place-names show new final stress
(\c
.ul
Moulsec\(o’omb\c
,
.ul
Rottingd\(e’an\c
). We know that it is a recent innovation in some cases:
Moulsecoomb was recorded as /mausk#m/
in the Sussex volumes of the Survey of English Place-Names in the
late 1920s. The status of the phenomenon has
changed; where it was probably once a true regionalism, it is now a feature of mainly
sociolinguistic importance. Those who identify closely with the Brighton area tend to use
final
stress; it is an indicator of local patriotism. The same appears to be true for certain na
mes
in the East Grinstead area.\c
.UP
10
.DN
.fn
10 Coates, "A phonological problem in Sussex place-names",
.ul
Beitr\(a:ge zur Namenforschung
(new series) 15 (1980), pp. 299-318; Michael J. Leppard, "Final stress: a
closer look",
.ul
Bulletin of the East Grinstead Society
52 (1993), pp. 4-8.
.fE
.pg
The examples discussed up to now are about place-names as evidence for the existence of sp
eakers
of particular languages and dialects in particular places and for their migrations; and th
at
completes my brief survey of whodunit.
.pg

My second theme is the difficulty of identifying the weapons and motives: the actual words out of which names were constructed, and their applicability in the contexts in which they were used. A serious hindrance to the interpretation of place-names is the fact that, over the centuries, perceptions of the world have changed, especially in relation to topography, and the vocabulary for describing it has not remained constant. At the risk of caricature, I would suggest that the basic layperson’s perception of landscape is that it consists of hills or mountains and valleys, or flat land; and that it is crossed by rivers and streams. This is the primary Modern English topographical, geomorphological, vocabulary. The corresponding vocabulary of Old English seems to have differed, both in the actual terms and in the structural relations among them. Old English seems not to have had a single word like
.ul
hill
applicable to all eminences, and certainly not a special word like
.ul
mountain
for a specially big hill. On the other hand it had numerous words which are most naturally translated by ‘hill’ in many contexts:
.ul
hyll\c
,
.ul
h\o"o\(rn"h\c
,
.ul
hrycg\c
,
.ul
ofer\c
,
.ul
\o"o\(rn"ra\c
, and in certain parts of the country
.ul
hl\o"a\(rn"w\c
,
.ul
*dodd.
These terms all seem to have been more specialized than
.ul
hill\c
, and were applied with great precision.
.ul
D\o"u\(rn"n\c
, an ancient borrowing from Celtic, seems to have applied to hills with smooth outlines, like
.ul
dunes
(\c
.ul
duin
being the form which the ancient word achieved in Dutch, and it was applied by the Dutch to sandhills since they had nothing grander to use it for; the English borrowed it from

them in this sense). The word
.ul
d\o"u\(rn"n
in England regularly evolved into
.ul
down
but became
.ul
-don
in place-names by virtue of being unstressed. A typical
.ul
-don
village occupies a relatively level
site on top of a hill or on a ledge. There aren’t many of them in Sussex, because a villag
e
on top of a chalk down would have no reliable water supply.
Willingdon
and
Slindon
occupy shelves lower on hillsides, near the foot in fact.
.ul
Ecclesden
is probably an old
.ul
-don
name for Highdown Hill above Ferring, but the site of the manor bearing the
name is like that of the two just mentioned.
.pg
A
.ul
hyll
was a hill of middling height with a less smooth outline: a
.ul
h\o"o\(rn"h\c
, literally ‘heel’, was
an eminence sticking out abruptly into lower land; a
.ul
hrycg
was a ridge; an
.ul
*ofer
name was
given to a village on the tip of a flat-topped promontory; and
.ul
\o"o\(rn"ra
was a southern English word
for a hill with a shoulder-shaped end (though it had other applications too). All these
elements, except
.ul
hyll\c
,
could denote hills over a great range of heights.
.ul
*Ofer
and
.ul
\o"o\(rn"ra
came to
be confused a good deal, but the others seem to have been co-equal terms,
not hyponyms of another,
i.e. they were not covered by another more inclusive term. Clearly what was crucial to the
invaders in namegiving was the shape of the eminence and its suitability for the positioni
ng
of dwellings or farms; rather than, as in Modern

English, the size of the eminence.\c
.UP
11
.DN
.fn
11 On words for hills, see especially Margaret Gelling
.ul
Language in the landscape\c
,
London: Dent (1984), chapter 5; Ann Cole, "The meaning of the Old English place-name element
.ul
\o"o\(rn"ra\c
",
.ul
Journal of the English Place-Name Society
21 (1987-8), pp. 15-22, and "The origin, distribution and use of the place-name element
.ul
\o"o\(rn"ra\c
",
.ul
ibid.
22 (1989-90), pp. 26-41.
For valley-words in the following paragraphs, see Gelling,
.ul
op. cit.\c
, chapter 4.
.fE
.pg
As for depressions in the ground,
.ul
valley
is now the generic term, of French origin, supplemented by the equally French
.ul
vale
in poetic contexts and in some fancy names.
It generally replaces the following earlier common terms:

.in +0.5i
.ul
denu\c
, denoting a long sinuous main valley, with two steep sides and a gentle gradient; in modern usage restricted to poetic contexts and names such as the
.ul
Fairydean
of Galashiels football club

.ul
cumb\c
, borrowed from Welsh to denote a type of valley not characteristic of Schleswig-Holstein and the North German Plain where the Anglo-Saxons came from, namely a short straight one, precipitous on three sides, bowl-shaped, often at head of a long valley or forming a side-valley; reborrowed in modern times by mountaineers as
.ul
cwm

.ul
d\(ael\c
, originally meaning ‘pit’, apparently, but later influenced by the Scandinavian borrowing
.ul
dalr

‘valley’

.ul
botm\c
, a broad river-valley, thereafter the wettest part of a damp valley floor, enclosed by high sides
.in 0

The fact of a depression’s existence is nowadays more important than the earlier distinction between different landforms, exploitable in different ways. It may be of significance that quite a few
.ul
denu-\c
names have a first element denoting a group of people, whilst
.ul
cumb-\c
names rarely if ever do; but this remains to be investigated properly.
.pg
A comparable semantic readjustment of perception has happened in the case of stream-names. There were five common Old English words:
.ul
str\o"e\(rn"am\c
,
.ul
burna\c
,
.ul
br\o"o\(rn"c\c
,
.ul
\o"e\(rn"a\c
,
.ul
wyll.
I have never found the first of these in an old place-name, with the possible exception of a micro-hamlet near Williton (Somerset), and a lost medieval pond-name in Cambridgeshire. Whilst its modern derivative is the dominant word for a non-navigable body of flowing water of less than national importance, that job was divided up in Old English between
.ul
burna
and
.ul
br\o"o\(rn"c.
In general,
.ul
str\o"e\(rn"am
denoted sterner stuff, being used in Old English literature of the Humber, Trent and Thames - as you might expect of a word whose German relative
.ul
Strom
is applied to the largest rivers of Europe. A prototypical normal-sized river (by our perceptions) was
.ul
\o"e\(rn"a\c
, a word which has now vanished from the language.

.ul
Burna
and
.ul
br\o"o\(rn"c
are of special interest as illustrating a radical shift of viewpoint on the
applicability of words.
They are the ancestors of
.ul
b(o)urn
and
.ul
brook\c
,
both of which are, from the point of view of
standard English, generally seen as regional and/or
picturesque synonyms for
.ul
stream.
However, where local conditions permitted it, the words
were sharply distinguished in Old English. A
.ul
burna
was a stream of seasonally-varying flow between
well-marked banks, typically with clear water and frequently full of
.ul
hyse.
(\c
.ul
Hyse
seems to have been a trailing water-plant, probably canary-grass
(Phalaris arundinacea).)
Watercress and crowfoot
could also be expected in a
.ul
burna.
A
.ul
br\o"o\(rn"c
on the other hand was
a relatively silty stream with a slower flow, often in a hollowed bed with potentially uns
table
banks, typically with lots of standing vegetation including reeds and rushes, also
brooklime,
and very little plantlife which lives submerged.
A
.ul
burna
is usually spring-fed and a
.ul
br\o"o\(rn"c
is
mainly fed by the runoff of rainwater from land that is clayey. These distinctions, admira
bly
clarified by the geographer Ann Cole, are clearly reflected in the philology of the
terms.\c
.UP
12
.DN
.fn
12 Cole, "\c
.ul
Burna
and

.ul
br\o"o\(rn"c.
Problems involved in retrieving the Old English usage of these place-name elements",
.ul
Journal of the English Place-Name Society
23 (1990-1), pp. 26-48. See also Gelling,
.ul
op. cit.\c
, chapter 1.
.fE
.ul
Burna
is related to German
.ul
Brunn(en)
‘spring’,
.ul
br\o"o\(rn"c
to German
.ul
Bruch
‘bog’. The crucial onomastic
distinction to our forebears was, as with hills, not one of size (as it is with our present distinction
.ul
river-stream\c
). Rather they were interested in water quality and reliability and of suitability
of streamside land for grazing for livestock. You managed your farm differently depending on whether a
.ul
br\o"o\(rn"c
or a
.ul
burna
flowed through it. You might have placed your house
differently. If placed too near the stream,
.ul
Bournside
might have got flooded in the winter and
dried out quickly; but
.ul
Brookside
could have had a frequently boggy plot whose edges were choked with vegetable matter.
.pg
The fifth term,
.ul
wyll\c
, was vague in application between the present meanings ‘spring’ and ‘stream’, also ‘well’; showing, as with
.ul
burna\c
, that the modern distinction between a phenomenon and
its cause or source did
not trouble the practical geographical sense of the Anglo-Saxons.
A
.ul
burna
meant good
fresh water with a possible summertime need for sparing exploitation (a Dark Age hosepipe ban); a
.ul

wyll
meant good fresh water all the year round. There are many
.ul
Holywell\c
s; only one
.ul
Holybourn
has come to my notice; and
no
.ul
Holybrook\c
s.
.pg
Only one word seems to have referred specifically to springs. Significantly this was a loanword
from Latin,
.ul
funta\c
, which is generally thought to have been applied when the spring showed signs of human
intervention: a building, a bucket, artificial channelling or whatever. It was applied to very strong artesian water supply, as at
Havant, Boarhunt and Fontley in Hampshire, where strong springs emerge as a result of penetration of
the Eocene beds which overlie the base of the chalk ridge of Portsdown.
.pg
Modern laypeople’s perceptions of the English landscape are therefore not a reliable reflection to the practical
precision exercised by our Anglo-Saxon
ancestors when they took over the island of Britain.
You will look in vain for similar precision in modern topographical place-names.
The street-names of Westdene in Brighton are a farrago of vales, valleys, deans and glens,
hills, brows, rises, banks and ridges.
.ul
Glen Rise
there, along with
.ul
Coombe Rise
in Saltdean, is an eyebrow-raiser with a suggestion of contradiction about it; tautologous are
.ul
Coombe Vale
close to Coombe Rise,
.ul
Valley Dip
in Seaford and
.ul
Hillbrow
in Westdene. Misleading to an evil degree are
.ul
Roedale
near Hollingdean, appearing to partly duplicate
.ul
Roedean
with a different - and not characteristically Sussexian - valley-word\c
.UP
13
.DN
.fn
13 Old English
.ul
d\(ael

is occasionally found in Sussex, as in
.ul
Hendall\c
,
.ul
Summersdale\c
; but never in Downland. Moreover its earliest meaning in Old English
appears to have been ‘pit’ rather than ‘valley’.
.fE
(\c
.ul
Roe
is actually from a surname here), and
.ul
Catherine Vale
in Woodingdean - actually a straightforward application of the name, given
name plus surname, of a former Tory councillor.
.pg
My third and final theme is the contribution that place-name study can make to linguistics
in general.
Most often proper names have not been thought to be of great theoretical interest. But rec
ent
work has suggested that there is more to them than meets the eye; and this is first and
foremost because there is less to them than meets the eye.
.pg
I’ll help you out of that conundrum by
pointing out that proper names
.ul
had
meanings - indeed, that
is what the drift of the second part of my lecture was concerned to
establish.\c
.UP
14
.DN
.fn
14 See more fully in Coates,
.ul
English proper names since 1776: a theoretical and historical survey\c
,
Brighton: University of Sussex (Cognitive Science Research Paper 175 (1990)).
.fE
But the essence
of their properhood is that they have ceased to mean in any relevant sense of the term.
.ul
Lewes
clearly once meant something, whether ‘barrows’ in English or ‘slopes’ in
Welsh. But the
fact that I was able to discuss this earlier in an inconclusive
way demonstrates clearly that
.ul
Lewes
is meaningless except as a label for a piece of ground, which is arbitrary for its users.
.ul
Lewes
doesn’t mean anything as a word in the mouths of Modern English speakers.
The matter is identical,
though rather less obvious, for names which, unlike
.ul
Lewes\c
, have retained some transparency.
Lewes has a quarter called
.ul
Cliffe\c

, or
.ul
The Cliffe.
The origin of the name is obvious to anyone
except the blind, and the constitutionally cautious historical linguist. But if I
say:
.ul
I have a shop in The Cliffe\c
, I am claiming nothing which trades on the meaning of the word
.ul
cliff.
Even ignoring the trivial difference in spelling,
.ul
cliff
is not
.ul
Cliffe.
It happens to be true that
.ul
The Cliffe extends to the river
and false that
.ul
The cliff extends to the river.
It may be helpful to you, in some practical way as you try to guide yourself
around Lewes, to be able to work out that The Cliffe’s name originates in the
ancestor of
.ul
cliff\c
, but that is a very different matter from claiming that
it means ‘cliff’. Transparency is not meaningfulness. Being able to say something truthful
about
.ul
The Cliffe
doesn’t depend on appealing to its original sense.
.pg
If you will accept my point
that names are, from the systematic point of view,
meaningless, some interesting things follow.

(1) Since they are meaningless, they form a pattern of relationships differing
from those
of ordinary words, and this pattern is characteristically less dense.
This amounts to saying that, granted that you know whether the object you’re hearing
is a proper name or an ordinary word, you need less information to reidentify it
accurately if it’s a proper name. Among the names of my experience,
.ul
Leeds \c
needs to be distinguished, in the initial sound of its spoken form, only from
.ul
Meads
as a place-name, whereas the plural noun
.ul
leads
needs to be distinguished from fifteen, or possibly seventeen,
other nouns, and the verb pronounced in the same way from
ten other verbs.\c
.UP
15
.DN
Your signal needs to be much better to convey information
with certainty about ordinary vocabulary words than about proper names.
.fn
15 The noun
.ul

leads
contrasts with
.ft B
beads seeds deeds meads needs reeds weeds feeds breeds creeds steeds speeds screeds swedes tweeds
.ft R
and for some people also
.ft B
gleeds greeds.
.ft R
The verb contrasts with
.ft B
feeds heeds reads seeds weeds needs bleeds breeds pleads speeds.
.ft R
.fE

(2) The obverse of this fact about the clarity of signal needed to reidentify a name is that less care and effort needs to be expended to ensure that listeners reidentify a name from a signal you produce. In the historical dimension, this means that names are able to undergo amounts of erosion that couldn’t be tolerated by ordinary words, and the murder weapon therefore gets harder and harder to identify.\c
.UP
16
.DN
.fn
16 Notice that many of the pronunciations in the lists that follow are dialect pronunciations, i.e. the results of genuine local linguistic changes, many of which have been reversed by the fondness of newcomers for pronouncing according to the spelling instead of following local custom.
.pg
Notice also that the substance of this section is based on ideas which, although independently arrived at, bear an affinity with certain ones put forward by Fran Colman,
"Numismatics, names and neutralizations",
.ul
Transactions of the Philological Society
88 (1990), pp. 59-86, and
.ul
Money talks: reconstructing Old English.
Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter (1992), chapter 2; and by Cecily Clark,
"Onomastics",
in Norman F. Blake (ed.)
.ul
Cambridge history of the English language, vol. 2: 1066-1476\c
, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1992), chapter 2, section I.
.fE

.nf
(i) Grotesque gross reductions may be found, with whole syllables lost:

.bp
Brighthelmston > Brighton
Woolfardisworthy > /wulz#ri/
Watchetford > Washford
Letheringsett > /l#:nset/
Martinsthorpe > /m#:str#p/

(ii) Extreme attrition affecting consonants that aren’t normally lost in the history of English words:

Happisburgh > /heizbr#/
Folkington > /f#uint#n/

Swalecliffe > /sw#:kli/
Slaithwaite > /sluit/
Mattersey > /m#:si/

(iii) Weakenings (lenitions) are found which are unexpected, i.e. absent from the local dialect:

Stoke Courcy > Stogursey
Chagley > Chailey
Watch(et)ford > Washford

(iv) Regular processes of historical change may be found, but having unusually extended domains:

Congresbury > /ku:mzbri/

In this case the lip-articulation of the /b/ has leaped over the /z/ to change earlier /n/ into the lip-articulated /m/

Coggeshall > /k#ksl/

In this case the voiceless /h/ has come to devoice first the /z/ which preceded it, then the /g/ which in time came to precede that

(v) Others, such as

Felmersham > /fensm/

appear to show both a gross reduction, as per (i), and a merger, possibly unique in English, of the position and manner of articulation of /l/ and /m/ to produce /n/

.fi

(3) It’s well known that semantically-related words which partly resemble each other in form may influence each other’s form over time. This is technically called
.ul
analogical reformation\c
, or in many instances (most often when it causes amusing effects)
.ul
folk-etymology.
By some people
.ul
covert
is pronounced with a long vowel in the first syllable, like its antonym
.ul
overt\c
; the Middle English word
.ul
femele
has become
.ul
female
by association with its contradictory
.ul
male\c
; Old English
.ul
werm\o"o\(rn"d
has become
.ul
wormwood

because it is a
.ul
woody
plant; and an earlier
.ul
umble pie
has been reformed into
.ul
humble pie\c
, in the expression
.ul
to eat humble pie\c
, because of the association of its sense, ‘to grovel’, with the sense of
.ul
humble.
In some cases, though, the influence may seem unprincipled.
The compound word
.ul
nerve-racking\c
, which clearly once recalled the
.ul
rack
as an instrument of torture, has for many users of English become associated
instead with the moribund word
.ul
wrack
‘wreckage’, with the result that we often find
.ul
nerve-wracking
as the written form these days.
But the only relationship that place-names may have to each other,
if they are indeed meaningless, is proximity in real-life or
commonsense geography. And we find that this fact sometimes induces analogical reformation
too:
.ul
Bormer\c
, a farm in Falmer parish, is now spelt
.ul
Balmer\c
, under the influence of the parish name (which reminds us that the authentic
local pronunciation is /f#:m#/).
.ul
Tur Langton
and
.ul
Shangton
in Leicestershire
originated as
.ul
*Tyrhtelingt\o"u\(rn"n
and
.ul
*Scanct\o"u\(rn"n\c
, but have their modern form because they are adjacent to
.ul
(Church) Langton.
.ul
Misterton
and
.ul
Mosterton
are a couple of miles apart on the Somerset/Dorset boundary. They originated
as
.ul

*Mynstert\o"u\(rn"n
and
.ul
*Mortes \(thorn
respectively, and their present similarity can only be due to their proximity.
The original form of the modern name of Guernsey was
.ul
Grenerey\c
, if transcripts of the oldest documents relating to it can be trusted;
and its present name is clearly due to the influence of
.ul
Jersey\c
, which is near enough to it from the perspective of legal offices in far-off
London.\c
.UP
17
.DN
.fn
17 For fuller, and more theoretical, discussion of these and other
cases, see Coates,
"Pragmatic sources of analogical reformation",
.ul
Journal of Linguistics
23 (1987), pp. 319-40.
.fE
.pg
We can also find parallels for the unprincipled
.ul
nerve-wracking
kind of change. Old English
.ul
*Candelwyrhtenastr\(aet
in London contained a word amounting to the plural of ‘candle-wright’,
but that word was, early in Middle English, replaced by
.ul
chandler.
The street-name thus became opaque, and this is mirrored by some pretty
abysmal attempts to spell it in the later Middle Ages, like
.ul
Candelwikstrete
(fourteenth century) and
.ul
Canyngesstrete
(1480). The ward to which
the street gives its name became, and remains,
.ul
Candlewick.
Just before the Great Fire, some genius ended the struggle by putting
.ul
Cannon Street
instead; which solved the formal problem by using a familiar word, even though
.ul
cannon
had no appropriate associations with the street. (By that time, neither did
.ul
candlewright.\c
) Pepys took up this form in his
.ul
Diary\c
, and
.ul
Cannon Street
it remains.\c
.UP

18
.DN
.fn
18 Eilert Ekwall,
.ul
Street-names of the City of London\c
, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1954), pp. 79.
.fE
.pg
In the light of the alleged meaningless of names, the existence of place-name
.ul
transfer
is likely to seem
anomalous. Why transfer a name from one place to another if it has no meaning?
Some place-names have multiplied across the English landscape to an extraordinary extent
- for instance
.ul
Little London\c
,
.ul
Coldharbour\c
,
.ul
Mockbeggar\c
, and locally,
.ul
Smock Alley
and
.ul
Mount Noddy
in the country; and
.ul
Gropecunt Lane
(usually tippexed to
.ul
Grope
or
.ul
Grape
Lane) and
.ul
Finkle Street
in towns.\c
.UP
19
.DN
.fn
19 On some of these names, see Coates, "Coldharbour - for the last time?"
.ul
Nomina
8 (1984), pp. 73-8; Kenneth Neale, "Smock Alley",
.ul
Sussex Archaeological Collections
114 (1976), p. 334; Leppard, "Mount Noddy",
.ul
Bulletin of the East Grinstead Society
46 (1989), pp. 9-11; Coates, "Mount Noddy again",
.ul
ibid.
47 (1990), pp. 8-10; Coates, "A breath of fresh air through Finkle Street",
forthcoming in
.ul
Nomina.
.fE

Clearly the names were meaningful in the act of naming the original
place from which the others have borrowed the label.
And equally clearly the other, later, places were named from the earlier once because the
name was felt to be appropriate. For a full understanding of the process, we need to
distinguish, as before, between meaningfulness and transparency. If an expression is
transparent, you can work out why it has the form which it actually has. If it is meaningf
ul,
you will be committed, in using it, to everything entailed by the meaning of its parts. If
 you
had named a place
.ul
Coldharbour
after the famous London one in about 1600, when the spread of the
name began, you would have used its transparency to provide a suitable abusive name for a
wretched, inhospitable house. You would not have been committed to the house you named
in this way actually being a ‘harbour’, i.e. a shelter or dosshouse.
Transfer trades, therefore, on
transparency or etymological meaning not semantic meaning (if I may use that rather odd
phrase).
.pg
I mentioned earlier that in addition to the semi-principled effects of adjacent names, pla
ce-names also
often show the arbitrary influence of totally irrelevant words, as in the case
of
.ul
Cannon Street
from
.ul
Candlewrights’ Street
These resemble the case of
.ul
nerve-wracking
that I alluded to earlier on. They are of general
theoretical interest as a reminder that the effects of analogy may be
too readily dismissed as
‘inexplicable’, and that the data that they offer, being wild, woolly and unprincipled may
 be
overlooked. A serious point emerges from this. Historical linguistics is in
the business of reconstructing
the languages which are the remote ancestors of those presently spoken; but secure
reconstruction depends on regular systematic correspondences between word-shapes in
languages presumed to share a common ancestry. The place-name evidence reminds
us that local
disturbances to individual words can disrupt the regularity of correspondences and hide th
e
degree of relatedness possessed by a group of languages, and therefore
jeopardize successful reconstruction.\c
.UP
20
.DN
.fn
20 For some judicious remarks on analogy in general, and its relation to
sound change, see Raimo Anttila,
.ul
Historical and comparative linguistics.
Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins (1989, second edition),
chapters 4 and 5.
.fE
.pg
Ancient linguistic theory
was a battleground between analogists (this term nowadays being somewhat
misleading),
who believed in the
regular, principled, nature of language, and anomalists,

who accepted more calmly the obvious
irregularities and pattern-holes.\c
.UP
21
.DN
.fn
21 See, for instance, R.H. Robins,
.ul
A short history of linguistics\c
,
London: Longmans (1990, third edition), chapter 2.
.fE
Modern linguistic theory,
by its nature, has tended to stress the regular;
I believe the balance should be tilted back a little to incorporate more fully the role th
at the
unprincipled (or less-principled) has
to play in the dynamic phenomenon of natural language.
.pg
With these cautionary remarks about the basis of historical linguistics, I
conclude the main part of my talk.
.pg
Name-research
rarely shows dramatic advances. Its progress could be characterized by the
original motto of
.ul
Woman
magazine: "Forward, but not too fast".\c
.UP
22
.DN
.fn
22 I thought that would take a few seconds to sink in. Arnold Bennett was the
first editor of
.ul
Woman\c
, and he may have coined this.
.fE
In this lecture, I have offered some of the slow-grown fruits of recent
research in the intersection of linguistics and name-study, some of it done by
myself and some by others. None of it will cure AIDS, improve the surface of
British motorways, foster ears of wheat two feet long, or even perfect a
mousetrap. It belongs in the nebulous area which some call the frontier of
knowledge (though they don’t specify on which side of the frontier knowledge
lies - a slightly interesting point!) The knowledge gained in this case is
non-applicable, except in the service of other academic disciplines such as
the various branches of history. No-one would, or could, pay for the research
to be done if the only way of funding it was by commercial contract. Yet the
number of people in this lecture theatre tonight - not all of you my stooges,
by any means - suggests that the topic is one which generates wide interest.
.pg
In the end, the contribution of research to some abstract higher goal - the establishment
of
new outposts on that
frontier of knowledge - should only be judged by those who are fully
committed to the whole of the academic process: that relentless pursuit of knowledge for i
ts
own sake, the acquisition of techniques for mastering that knowledge, and the planning of
research to change that knowledge. The committed are not just academics in universities, b
ut
all those who beaver away in their own time on projects which very often feed and
complement the projects of academics, and also all those who are interested in seeking and
consuming the fruits of specialized knowledge: those certainly not mythical
"general readers and listeners". The applicability of research, in the narrow

sense in which this term is usually understood, will only ever be one among several justifications which people at large will find acceptable. The others embrace the satisfaction of less material interest and curiosity. I hope that universities will continue to stand firm in defence of the idea of universal research: the idea (1) that no subject matter is exempt or foreclosed from rational inquiry, (2) that the general skills of information-gathering, evidence-weighing, position-taking and the communication of findings can be honed in pursuit of any sort of knowledge, and (3) that research is the natural outcome of the acquisition of those analytic skills and the justification for their acquisition by the largest possible sector of the population.

.bp
.FN