

Place-names in thirteenth-century records

Richard Cassidy and Ben Wild, KCL

Place-names are seldom written out in full in thirteenth-century records. Older editions, such as the Rolls Series, expand these abbreviations, in a manner which must have relied largely on conjecture. The usual convention in modern editions of medieval texts is to leave names of places unexpanded in the Latin, and translated into their modern form in the index, and of course in English translations and calendars. It is thus usually unnecessary to know the full Latin form of a place-name – indeed, it is possible that the original writers did not know either.

Many minor place-names are plainly English names which a clerk is trying to spell phonetically – all the places ending –feud’ meaning –ford or –field, –ha’ for –ham, –burc for –borough, –m’e for –mere, and so on. Others are simply Latinized, and easy to recognize – Novum Castrum super Tynam and subtus Lymam. But there are many – unfortunately, particularly some major towns such as county towns, and the counties themselves – which are not so straightforward.

Counties

Many of the counties are indistinguishable from their county towns – only context indicates which is meant. Fossilized remains of some Latin county names survived until recently in the abbreviations used for postal addresses – Salop., Hants., Oxon. – and many others are easily guessed. Spellings are of course mutable, but forms like the following have been seen for each of the counties:

Bedfordshire	Bedeford’, Bedef’
Berkshire	Berkesyr’, Berkesir’, Bercsir’, Berkschir’
Buckinghamshire	Bukingeham, Bukingh’
Cambridgeshire	Cantebrig’, Cantebr’, Cantebrig’sir’
Cheshire	Cestr’ (both town and county), Cestrescir’
Cornwall	Cornubia, Cornub’
Cumberland	Cumberland’
Derbyshire	Dereby, Derebiscir’
Devon	Devonia, Devenescir’
Dorset	Dorsett’, Dors’
Durham	Dunolm’
Essex	Essex’, Essexia
Gloucestershire	Glovernia, Glouc’, Glocestr’, Glouernie
Hampshire	Suhamton’, Sudhamton’, Suhamtesir’, Suhampt’, Suhantescir’
Herefordshire	Hereford’ (in Wallia), Herefordsir’
Hertfordshire	Hertford’, Hertfordscir’
Huntingdonshire	Huntedon’
Kent	Kancia, Kantia, Cancia
Lancashire	Lancastr’
Leicestershire	Leicester’, Leicestr’, Leicr’sir’, Leycestr’
Lincolnshire	Lincoln’, Lincolnia, Lincolnescir’

London	Lond', London'
Middlesex	Middelsex'
Norfolk	Norf', Norfoch', Norfolk'
Northamptonshire	Norhamton', Norhant', Norhantescir', Norht', Nothampton'
Northumberland	Norhumberl', Norhumberland', Norhubr'
Nottinghamshire	Notingham, Notingehamscir'
Oxfordshire	Oxonia, Oxon', Oxonefordsir'
Rutland	Rotelande
Shropshire	Salopesyr', Salopescir', Slopesyr', Salop'
Somerset	Sumersett', Sumersete, Sum's'
Staffordshire	Stafford', Staffordsir'
Suffolk	Suff', Suffolk'
Surrey	Surreia, Surr'
Sussex	Susex', Sussex', Sudsex', Sudsexia
Warwickshire	Warewich', Warw', Warewicsir', Warewik'
Wiltshire	Wiltesir', Wiltesyr'
Worcestershire	Wigornia, Wigorn', Wirecestresir', Wygorn'
Yorkshire	Ebor', Eborac', Everwikescir'

Towns

Many towns are easily recognized beneath odd spellings. There are relatively few which are not so obvious, or which could be confused. Leaving aside the county towns covered by the above list, examples include:

Bath	Bathon'
Battle	Bellum (abbas de Bello)
Bridgnorth	Bruges
Canterbury	Cant', Cantuar' (not to be confused with Cambridge – Cantebr' etc.)
Carlisle	Carleol', Karleol', Karl'
Chertsey	Cerseye
Chichester	Cicestr', Ciscestr'
Cirencester	Cyrnecestr'
Droitwich	Wiz
Exeter	Exonia, Exon'
Great Yarmouth	Gernemue, Gernem'
Guildford	Geudeford', Guldeford'
Ipswich	Gipeswic', Gipewich'
King's Lynn	Lenn'
Lindsey	Lindes
Malmesbury	Mammesbiry, Mamesbir'
Marlborough	Merleberge
Newbury	Neubir'
Norwich	Nowic'
Peterborough	Burgus Sancti Petri, but often shortened, as in abbas de Burgo
Rochester	Roff', Rovecestr'
Salisbury	Sar', Saresberia
Sherburne	Chireburn', Shueburne

Shrewsbury	Salop', Salopesbir' (same as Shropshire – Salop' etc.)
Southampton	Sudht', Sutht', Suthmt' (same as Hampshire – Suhamton' etc.)
Tewkesbury	Teokesbir'
Totnes	Totenys
Winchester	Winton'
Windsor	Windlesor', Windes'

Adjectives

The adjectives formed from place-names are usually self-evident, and abbreviated just as much as the noun – there is no difference between *cives de Lond'* and *cives Lond'* so long as one doesn't have to expand it. Two common contexts in which adjectives are found:

surnames, like Walensis, or using French forms, like le Franceys;

titles of bishops, who are often episcopus Eliensis, Cantuariensis and so on.

Foreign Countries/Towns

The majority of foreign countries/towns are relatively easy to identify, given the context and allowing for clerks' phonetic spelling of the unfamiliar, but as with English place-names, one or two of the abbreviations can be more challenging.

Bourdeaux	Burdegal', Burd'
Brabant	Braibant, Braybant
Britanny	Britann'
Cambrai	Cambrey
Castile	Castell'
Cologne	Colon', Colocensis
Douai	Duay
Gascony	Wasconia, Wascon'
Guernsey	Gerneseye
Jersey	Jarnereye
Norway	Nowag'
Savoy	Sabaudia
Spain	Yspania
Tournai	Torneye
Poitou	Pict', Pictav'
Rouen	Rothomag'
Valence	Valent', Val'
Ypres	Yp'

Online resources

Martin's *The record interpreter* (pp 345-422) has a long list of British placenames, in full expanded forms. Also available online:

<http://comp.uark.edu/~mreynold/recint2.htm>

For foreign places, try Graesse, and the other links here:

<http://www.columbia.edu/acis/ets/Graesse/contents.html>

The online Gazetteer of Markets and Fairs is a very useful resource for places in England and Wales:

<http://www.history.ac.uk/cmh/gaz/gazweb2.html>

And the indexes to the online Calendar of Fine Rolls would also be useful guides to modern equivalents of personal and place names, if they were not so slow to load.

There are masses of possible resources in print (esp. the VCH and publications of the English Place Names Society, of course), but a good standby is the index to the *Book of Fees*, which lists masses of minor places, identified with their modern names and counties.

RJC/25.10.11