

The Secret of Field Names



Fig.1. Berry Close (36) and Barrow Park (field 37a) (Cornwall). In this instance the field name 'Barrow' is more likely to be associated with meaning as a field on a hill rather than a burial mound.



Fig.3. War Fields (Essex). Does this field name commemorate an ancient battle site?

Fig.2. The Ringlemere Cup found at the Ringlemere Barrows.



Did you know that nearly all fields have a name? Sometimes a field's name is an archaeological indicator of its past use. Once you master the 'hidden meaning' behind place and field names, you will soon be seeing particular field names as bright neon alerts guiding you to the wares lying just beneath the surface.

Unlocking the meaning of field names can be used to reveal the locations of previously unknown historic and ancient sites. I focus in on them extensively when I research an area. However, I can't research all the archaeologically significant fieldnames I have found – there are just too many.

Therefore, work has now begun on adding these archaeologically significant field names to the ARCHI UK database at www.archiuk.com so that others can. The names have been transcribed from the Tithe Apportionments created in the mid-19th century and also many older documents dating back to the 13th century. It is hoped that this data may lay the ground for the discovery of previously unknown historic and ancient sites and further our knowledge and understanding of Britain's history.

So, how do you learn to recognise

those wordy sign roads to the past? If you want to unlock the secret of a field's name, put yourself into the shoes of the farmer who originally named that field. Imagine you need to tell your workers to harvest the crop in the field with the 'circular mound'. What would you call the field to distinguish it from all your other fields?

One thing to remember though, and it is critical, is that the person who first coined the field's name may well have spoken in a forgotten dialect and used words no longer part of our modern language. So, an awareness of the meanings of those ancient words – which luckily for us have been fossilised in place and field names – is going to reap physical and intellectual rewards.

Burial Mounds, Moots & Rounds

Through my research I have found fields containing mounds to have names such as Mound Field, Coney Field, Moot Field, Barrow Field, Rounds and other similar names. In Cornwall fields containing the name 'Round' are often the sites of small Iron Age Celtic settlements. 'Coney' is the old word for rabbit.

In Anglo-Saxon times and into the medieval period 'moots' were places

where people would meet for business and even settle court cases. Bronze Age burial mounds are commonly known as 'barrows'. Later on in the Anglo-Saxon to medieval periods, these ancient barrows were often also used as 'moots' possibly because of their prominence in the landscape and the ability for a speaker to gain an elevated position overlooking a group of listeners.

As suggested above, fields which contain the 'barrow' or similar name element often indicate the locations of Bronze Age barrows. An example is Field 37a in Fig.1., which is a section of the 1839 Tithe Map for Fowey, Cornwall.

Sometimes a barrow will have been completely ploughed out with no visible remains. However, its presence may still be fossilised in the field's name. To highlight the significance of these sites, just think of the Ringlemere Gold



Fig.4a. Tregayre Hills/Tregear field names (Cornwall). In Cornish and Breton *tre* means house and *gayre/geare* means fort.

Cup (Fig.2.) found at the location of the Ringlemere Barrow in 2001. Thanks to the finder, Cliff Bradshaw, the site was subsequently identified as a previously unrecognised Early Bronze Age burial complex. The finder received a very substantial reward for the gold cup and it continuously inspires those who see it on display. Coupled with the fact that Bronze Age barrow sites have often seen subsequent use as meeting places since Anglo-Saxon times, those 'barrow' field names could indicate a rich history lying beneath the surface of such a simple name.

Battle Sites, Ancient Warriors & Tribal Chiefs

Many field names associated with battle sites are self-explanatory. A while ago I found a field in Essex called 'Bloody Fields' which the farmer believed was associated with an English Civil War battle. Further into Essex I found another site called 'War Fields' (Fig.3.).

However, it was not until I took an interest in etymology, which is the study of the origins of words and the way in which their meanings have changed throughout history, did I realise that I had overlooked many field names during the course of my research. I did not realise that many of those fields I had originally dismissed actually had archaeologically significant elements in their names.

Parts of the names, though, were in

'old languages' such as Old English, Cornish, Breton etc., which I didn't appreciate until I had familiarised myself with some of the publications of the English Placenames Society.

Once armed with this knowledge I understood 'Harefield' in the context of Old English and this field name took on a whole new meaning. I originally thought that this just meant that the field was known for an abundance of hares. However, I now learned that 'Hare' can mean to Harry and is associated with ancient warriors. Think of 'Hereford', which means ford where an army can cross. Maybe it's more than a coincidence that the SAS have their headquarters in Herefordshire!

Moving South West to Cornwall I came across the place-name element 'geare' which at the time I had no understanding of. However, referencing my dictionary of the Cornish language I found that this was the Cornish word for 'Fort'. I still haven't searched the wood I found in Cornwall with this placename element (Tregear's Wood) but I did have a look at the area around a collection of 'geare' related field names (Fig.4a.) and I discovered and found the remains of a hilltop enclosure reminiscent of a small Iron Age hill settlement. There is actually the remains of a medieval castle in this parish but it is doubtful that they are related (Fig.4b.)

Another 'wildlife' name which I had

Fig.4b. Castle Parks (Cornwall) next to the medieval castle remains. Often medieval castles were built over earlier Roman military sites.



previously dismissed was 'Henfield'. Again I just thought that this was probably where the farm's chicken runs had always been. However, later on I discovered that particularly in the South West the placename element 'Hen' means 'Old'. So, maybe the next 'Henfield' I come across in Cornwall will be a long-lost settlement of an ancient Bretonic speaking tribe!

Gold & Silver Fields

We can be forgiven for ignoring field names containing the words 'silver' or 'gold'. Surely, they are just too obvious? In some cases this is correct. I once came across the name 'Goldfelde' in an ancient document. After much further research, though, my enthusiasm was deflated when I found that this was the surname of a landowner and wasn't the 'Gold Field' I had hoped for.

On the other hand, think back to that farmer. Imagine that his great-grandfather had found a silver coin in one of his fields and named the field 'Silver Field'. Maybe this is the story behind the find of Viking silver in a field called 'Silver Field'?

Religious Sites

Once you start to understand the hidden meanings of place names, facts like the presence of the Roman temple at

The Secret of Field Names

Number referring to the Plan.	NAME AND DESCRIPTION OF LANDS AND PREMISES.	STATE OR CULTIVATION.	QUANTITIES IN STATUTE MEASURE.		
			A.	R.	P.
		Brought forward	76	1	26
101	Lower Beggar field	Arable	8	3	23
105	Lower Castor field	d.	9	1	11
106	Great d.	d.	23	3	6
107	Upper d.	d.	16	3	1
114	Upper Long Croft	d.	16	1	36
166	Further d.	d.	11	1	37
167	Capps	d.	2	1	5
171	Lower Long Croft	d.	18	2	2
181	Eight-acre Castor field	d.	8	1	36

Fig.5. Tithe Apportionment from 1839 listing 'Castor' Fields (Essex).

Fig.6b. Ordnance Survey map showing 'Castor' Fields adjacent to a major Roman Road (Essex). Note that the field numbers on this Ordnance Survey map here are not the same as the field numbers used on the earlier tithe map.

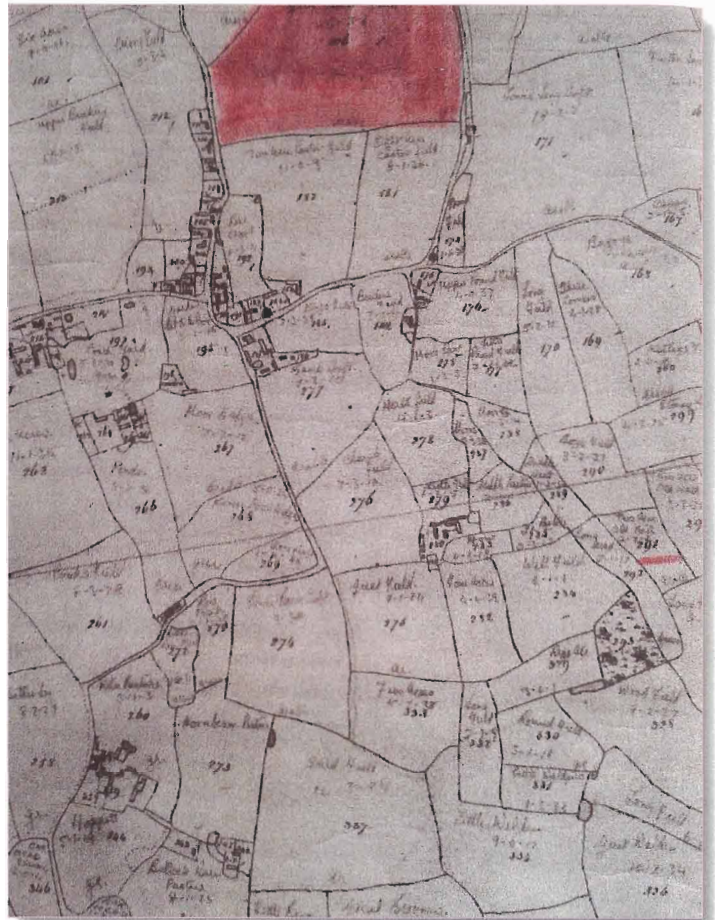
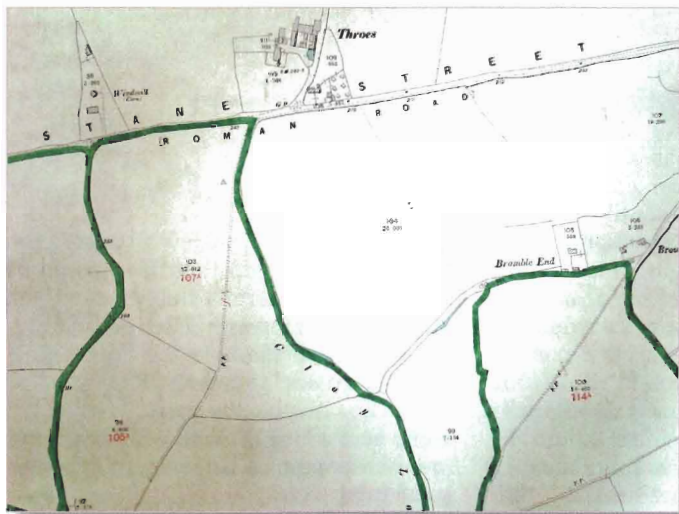


Fig.6a. Tithe map copy with 'Castor' Fields (Fields 106 & 181).

188	Barn Field	de
189	Long Mead	Grass
190	Black Lands	Arable
191	Black Lands Hoppet	Grass
192	Homestead	
193	Black wood d.	

Fig.7. Entry in the Tithe Apportionment for a parish in Essex containing Black Lands and Black Lands Hoppet, field numbers 190 and 191.

Harlow, Essex come as no surprise. Har has a special significance in the context of ancient religious sites.

The place name Harrow is another example. With respect to 'Har' field names they become even more interesting when they are the name of a field on a Parish border. Parish borders were often used in older times as places for trade. There are various theories for this.

My favourite is to do with the ancient belief that spirits were present on Parish borders. Given that our ancestors had ingrained superstitions into their mentality, one can easily see why you are less likely to be taken badly in a deal if the spirits are watching over the transaction and ready to haunt any of those thinking to do wrong to you.

Another field name which particularly interests me is 'Stowe'. This name

is often associated with places of religious significance.

Roman Fields

Most of us are familiar with the word 'chester' in a place names such as Manchester, Cirencester, Alcester and many others. In most cases this word is derived from the Roman word 'castra' meaning a defended military settlement. The field-name element 'Castor' is also reminiscent of these kinds of sites (Fig.5. and Figs.6a & b.)

However, what would you think if you came across a field called 'Black Lands'? This is probably the first name that sets my heart racing if ever I'm lucky enough to come across it while reading an historic document. Field names containing the place name element 'black' are very heavily associated

with Roman sites in rural locations. The reasoning behind this is that continuous occupation and/or industrial activity darkens the soil to the extent the field distinguishes itself by its contrast with the surrounding fields.

Hence when farmers much later on had to name fields like this for legal or administrative purposes they would have used the name which was associated with its original main distinguishing feature which had been passed down through the ages (i.e. its black colour). An example is the Roman settlement at Stretton Grandison in Herefordshire which was found on a field called

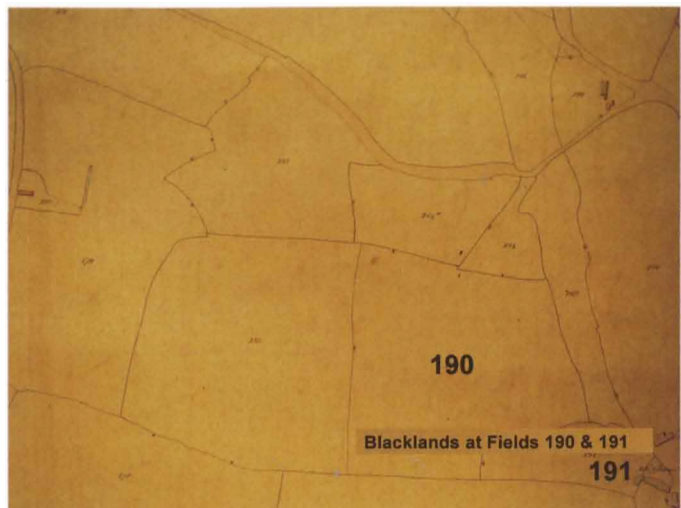


Fig.8. Extract from tithe map for Black Lands and Black Lands Hoppet, field numbers 190 and 191.



Fig.11. Roman plate brooch found at the bottom of field 190 next to the course of an old stream.



Fig.12. Roman coin from Black Lands.

Fig.9. Roman building material from the field to the left of field 190.



Fig.10. Roman mount depicting a Roman cavalryman with flowing cape riding his horse.



Fig.13. Roman bracelet partefacts from Black Lands.



Figs.14a & b. Anglo-Saxon sceat from the vicinity of Black Lands.

'Black Lands'. To test this theory for myself I located a field called 'Black Lands' in Essex, which had no known Roman archaeology in the vicinity (Fig.7. and Fig.8.). Upon arriving I immediately saw Roman grey ware strewn all over the field and a quick eyes-only search revealed Roman building material (Fig.9.). A subsequent survey revealed a number of Roman coins and brooches (Figs.10-13.). A surprise find was the Anglo-Saxon sceat shown (Figs.14a & b.).

I did locate what appeared to be the darkest patch of the field and this held a large quantity of coke. Hence, I assumed that the soil had been darkened from some sort of Roman industrial activity. Incidentally, the location of the field was at first a complete surprise because there was very little known Roman archaeology in the close vicinity.

In retrospect its elevated position, overlooking a major river tributary and near to the projected course of a Roman

road, made it clear why the site was where it was. However, there are many locations like that in the UK so without recognising the field name for what it was; it is very unlikely that anyone, including myself, would have bothered to search the field.

Sometimes a field is older than the name suggests. Examples of this are some fields which contain the words 'Hall'. Take for instance, the 'Old Hall Field' I came across in Essex (Fig.15. and Figs.16a & b.). At first glance this name suggests that the farmer who had

originally named the field had come across the foundations of an 'old' building. The question though is how old? The presence of the word 'Hall' in the field name might lead one to think that the hall referred to a medieval hall. However, when I cross-referenced the location of this field with the data in ARCHI UK (www.archiuk.com), I found that this field was the site of a Roman villa complex! (Fig.17.)

Equipped with this discovery I searched the field names listed in the mid-19th century Tithe Apportionments

Fig.15. Tithe Apportionment entry showing 'Old Hall' field-names.

295	Widelys field	d.	10	5	9
296	Garden and Barn	Garden and Barn	-	1	10
297	Old Hall pasture	Grass	2	2	16
298	Three acre Old Hall	Arable	3	3	38
299	Stoney ley	d.	11	7	25



Fig.16a. Tithe map extract showing 'Old Hall' field 291 (marked in red) in the context of the village in 1839.



Fig.16b. Tithe map extract showing 'Old Hall' field names 291, 297 & 298.

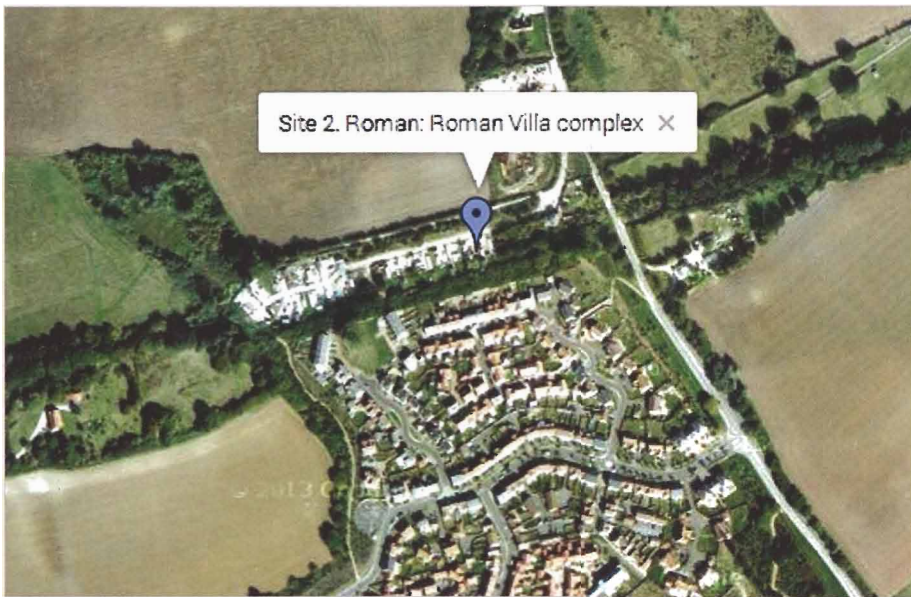


Fig.17. Modern satellite photo marking the officially reported co-ordinates of the Roman villa complex indicated by the 'Old Hall' Field names.

for Essex, looking for field names containing the words 'Old Hall'. I also wanted to find previously unknown sites so I cross-referenced the locations of any prospective field names with ARCHI UK to ensure that the field didn't have any archaeology associated with it. A long while later I found another field with this name. It had no record of archaeology in the immediate vicinity and had no signs of there ever being a Roman building or Iron Age Celtic settlement there; but it was strewn with Iron Age and Roman pottery.

Field Name Updates To ARCHI UK

You can keep informed of the forthcoming field name (and all other ARCHI UK updates) by registering with the ARCHI UK database. To do this just carry out a search at www.archiuk.com entering your email address as a password and you will automatically be added to our newsletter. TH



**LOCATIONS OF 170,000 UK
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES**

ARCHI

WANT TO MAKE THAT SPECIAL FIND?
TRY A SEARCH OF THE 'ARCHI UK' DATABASE AT:
WWW.ARCHIUK.COM
AND SEE FOR YOURSELF WHY SO MANY
SUCCESSFUL DETECTORISTS SUBSCRIBE TO IT

**CASH for all ANCIENT and
ENGLISH HAMMERED
COINS, SPANISH COBS
and ARTEFACTS**

**All other detecting finds considered.
Will travel for good items or collections.**

**CALL BEN 07788 253345 any time
Or email benjamin.prince2@gmail.com
100% discretion assured**