

Richard Jefferies' *Round About a Great Estate* - the naming of fields

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'This certainly has an appearance of truth, but it is scarcely possible to be too cautious in accepting an etymology.'

Richard Jefferies¹

In Richard Jefferies' *Round about a great estate* (1880), the narrator refers to a conversation with Hilary Luckett on the subject of field-names, which, he observes, 'are often very curious'. The passage continues:

Such names as Lea, Leaze, Croft, and so on, are readily explained; but what was the original meaning of The Cossicles? Then there were Zacker's Hook, the Conigers, Cheesecake, Hawkes, Rials, Purley, Strongbowls, Thrupp, Laines, Sannetts, Gaston, Wexils, Wernils, Glacemere, several Hams, Haddons and Weddingtons, Slades, and so on, and a Truelocks. These were quickly put down; scores of still more singular names might be collected in every parish. It is the meadows and pastures which usually bear these designations; the ploughed fields are often only known by their acreage, as the Ten Acre Piece, or the Twelve Acres. Some of them are undoubtedly the personal names of former owners. But in others ancient customs, allusions to traditions, fragments of history, or of languages now extinct may survive.²

This comment on the significance of field-names – now regarded by researchers as a valuable linguistic and historical resource - represents something of a pioneering initiative by Jefferies, since the study of these toponyms was still at a preliminary stage even in the early decades of the twentieth century. In the introduction to his dictionary of *English field-names* published in 1972,³ John Field comments:

Major place-names (ie the names of counties, towns, villages, etc) have been objects of scholarly interest for a very long time, but field-names received little attention until about forty years ago. The inclusion of lists of field-names in *The Place-Names of Northamptonshire* (1933) was regarded as a remarkable innovation. Subsequent volumes published by the English Place-Name Society have included longer and longer lists, and the seven or eight hundred field-names cited for Northamptonshire are now seen to be a very small beginning indeed when placed against those in recent volumes of the Society.

Many historical field-names were identified from the maps accompanying the apportionments made to each parish in accordance with the Tithe Commutation Act of 1836.⁴ Field-names are also to be found in monastic and manorial documents, grants and deeds, cartularies, glebe terriers,⁵ and the records of estates and individual farms. The process of elucidation then involves the process of tracing the field-name back to its earliest documented source, since the spelling of a toponym can change in the course of

¹ From the conclusion to Chapter II of Richard Jefferies' *History of Malmesbury*, which was published as a series of twenty-one chapters in the *North Wilts Herald* in 1867-68. The second chapter was published on 27 April 1867, p. 8, columns 3-6.

² Richard Jefferies, *Round about a great estate* (1880), introduction by John Fowles, illustrations by Graham Arnold (Bradford on Avon: Ex Libris Press, 1987), p. 102; hereafter abbreviated as *RGE*.

³ John Field, *English field names, a dictionary* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1972), pp ix-x; hereafter abbreviated as *EFND*. When referring to Old English etymons, the abbreviation OE is used throughout the text.

⁴ These records are held in the National Archives and are available online at *The Genealogist* website.

⁵ Documents listing the land holdings of a parish living.

time, as indeed can the name itself.⁶ Once the earliest version of a field-name and its variants have been analysed and a meaning established, then the researcher is able to assess the linguistic profile in terms of the wider significance of the field-name's geographical location and agrarian history, and also compare it with other similar toponyms. However, the narrator of *a great estate* claims to obtain his field-names from a primary source: they are orally communicated by a yeoman farmer, within the context of a narrative given a literary framework. In including a miscellany of field-names in his anecdotal and digressive discussion of an agrarian past,⁷ there can be no doubt that Jefferies was recording a vital aspect of the daily speech of the farming community, from the estate owner to the humblest labourer.

Edward Thomas, in 1909, was the first of Jefferies' biographers to identify the locations south-east of Swindon, which are featured in *a great estate* – Coate, the Burderop Estate, and Draycott Foliatt⁸ – but there is little indication in Jefferies' text of the provenance of the field-names.⁹ The linguistics of a field-name may be amenable to more than one interpretation, and in the absence of a location providing an historical, geographical, and agrarian context for further elucidation, the meaning can be elusive. However, a notable aspect of Jefferies' toponyms is the extent to which they conform with entries in scholarly, authoritative, and now readily available, field-name studies. A search of Gover, Mawer and Stenton's *The place-names of Wiltshire* (1939) and, supplementing his dictionary, John Field's *History of English field-names* (1993),¹⁰ can elucidate most of the toponyms of which Jefferies' narrator professes, or affects, ignorance. But, according to these reference works, Jefferies' field-names are not necessarily

⁶ See, for example, E. Kempson, 'Wiltshire Place- and Field-Names (III)', *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society Magazine*, Vol. 55, June 1953, pp. 70-74. This includes an interesting discussion by Geoffrey Grigson of the etymology of *Marlborough*; the first element, he argues, deriving from the Old English for marsh marigold, a wild flower of the Kennet water-meadows.

⁷ George Miller records: 'One direct source of Jefferies' old farming anecdotes was his father, who stayed with him at Surbiton for some weeks during the summer of 1879, when the notebooks record much activity in the collection of historical data.'; George Miller and Hugoe Matthews, *Richard Jefferies: a bibliographical study* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1993), p. 223. James Lockett Jefferies (1816-1896) owned a small dairy farm at Coate, near Swindon. His father's farm features significantly in Jefferies' writings; *Bevis, the story of a boy* (1882) and *Amaryllis at the fair* (1887), for example,

⁸ Edward Thomas, *Richard Jefferies* (1909) (London: Faber & Faber, 1978), with an introduction by Roland Gant, pp. 16, 17, 18, 23, and 39. For further, more detailed discussion of the locations of *RGE*, see Andrew Rossabi, *A peculiarly English genius, a biography of Richard Jefferies, Volume 1 – 1848-1867* (Foulsham: Petton Books, 2017), pp. 91-94 (Draycott), p. 547 (Burderop), and pp. 659-61 (Coate). The map, work of the late Mark Daniel, on pp. 6 and 7 of the Fowles edition, is also of assistance in identifying the area of Jefferies' *great estate*.

⁹ *Round about a great estate* was written after Jefferies had moved from his native county Wiltshire, and was living in Surbiton. George Miller has perceptively drawn attention to the influence of the Surrey landscape on Jefferies' work: 'It is well enough understood that *Round About a Great Estate*, like the other country books, is based on Jefferies' home territory, that the Chace is Burderop, Okebourne is Chiseldon, Okebourne Wick is Coate, and so on; and the characters too have been identified from Jefferies' family and early associations. But what is perhaps not so fully appreciated is the extent to which these memories are overlaid with recent experience, and to which the deep golden meadows of Cicely and the brook, and the cuckoo fields, are descriptions of the countryside around Surbiton.';

Miller and Matthews, *A bibliographical study*, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

¹⁰ J. E. B. Gover, Allen Mawer and F. M. Stenton, *The place-names of Wiltshire* (Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press, 1939); abbreviated hereafter as *PNW*; John Field, *A history of English field-names* (Harlow: Longman, 1993); abbreviated hereafter as *HEFN*. A. H. Smith's *English place-name elements*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956) was also consulted.

restricted to a north-east Wiltshire provenance and indeed, in some cases, the toponyms would appear to be identifiable with areas beyond the county boundaries.

Furthermore, not all the field-names answer to this kind of enquiry, and the few unusual and unattested field-names, it is suggested, may be coinages. In this respect, it is noteworthy that the narrative of *a great estate* not only identifies a number of field-names, it also exemplifies the naming of fields, and the word-formations associated with such names. Located just beyond the boundaries of Okebourne Chase is a quiet, little frequented, and neglected marginal area, which, it seems, the narrator makes peculiarly his own: ‘The cuckoos came so frequently to some grass-land just outside the Chace and sloping down to the brook that I gave the spot the name of the Cuckoo-fields.’ His resort during leisurely walks, it is also the territory of other birds, and the area is accorded an alternative name: ‘The meadow might have been called a plovery – as we say rookery and heronry – for the green plovers or peewits always had several nests in it.¹¹ . . . The monotonous and yet pleasing cry of the peewits, the sweet titlark singing overhead, and the cuckoos flying round, filled the place with the magic charm of spring.’¹²

The conversation with Hilary Lockett that introduces the field-names implies an archaeological context. There is speculation on the changes which can occur in a locality in the course of time and some ancient foundations beneath a meadow of Locketts’ Place are discussed. These were still observable, Hilary comments, as areas of shallow soil where the turf ‘turned brown or burnt up in squares’ in times of warm summer weather. An attempt at excavation had revealed ‘a hidden wall’, and elderly folk could recall a tradition that a village had once existed there.¹³ Following the enumeration of the various field-names, the narrator adds further non-specific archaeological comment: ‘There was a meadow where deep trenches could be traced, green now, but clearly once a moat, but there was not even a tradition about it.’¹⁴ Had Jefferies a particular location in mind? There are the remains of several deserted medieval villages in Wiltshire,¹⁵ but only the earthworks in the hamlet of Marten, seven miles south-east of Marlborough, also comprise evidence of a moat.¹⁶ There is also a possible linguistic link with one of Jefferies’ field-names. Marten is part of the parish of West Grafton, which also includes, as well as the hamlet of West Grafton and the village of Wilton, the hamlet of Wexcombe.

Field-names generally take the form of a two-word phrase, in which the first denominative word in some way qualifies the second generic term. Disyllabic single words are comparable since they usually represent a fusion of two contracted words. *Wexils*, which is not attested as a field-name, comes into this category, since the first element probably derives from OE *wæx* or *wex*, ‘beeswax’ and the second

¹¹ Jefferies here refers to the northern lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*), also called the peewit or green plover. Field-names based on fauna are not unusual, and include attested toponyms deriving from the lapwing; *HEFN*, p.76.

¹² *RGE*, pp. 77 and 78.

¹³ *RGE*, pp. 101-102.

¹⁴ *RGE*, p. 102.

¹⁵ At Upper Upham in Aldbourne, Sheldon Manor near Chippenham, Gomeldon, north-east of Salisbury in the parish of Idmiston, and Yarnfield, until 1895 part of Somerset, now located in south-west Wiltshire.

¹⁶ The remains of the medieval village and the moat at Marten are a Scheduled Monument, list entry Number 1013104. The website of *Historic England* notes: ‘Around 6,000 moated sites are known in England many being contemporary with, and occurring within or adjacent to, Medieval village sites.’

element from a contraction of OE *hyll*, ‘hill’. The first element, *wæx*, has been interpreted figuratively in field-names to refer to ground that was heavy and sticky,¹⁷ a clay soil, perhaps, that adhered to the ploughshare and the labourer’s boot. The alternative meaning suggested here is based on a possible historical context.

Beeswax was traditionally used for a number of purposes: for candle-making, for providing longbows with a protective water-resistant coating, for strengthening and preserving sewing thread and cordage, and in the making of wind instruments to prevent their cracking and splitting.¹⁸ Candles and bell-ropes were required for the maintenance of a monastery or parish church, and *Wexils* could refer to an endowment of land yielding rent for this purpose.¹⁹ Thus this field-name may represent a coinage formed on the analogy of *Wexcombe*, whose derivation, from OE *weax* + *cumb*, ‘valley where wax (from bees) is found’, is not dissimilar.²⁰ It is interesting, too, that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, East Grafton, Marten and Wilton each had a chapel-of-ease, and by 1879, Wexcombe also possessed such a chapel.

Also revealing as to the significance and scope generally of the *great estate* of the book’s title, is *Purley*, denoting ‘specially a piece of land on the edge or the fringe of a forest’, and indicating a north-west Wiltshire provenance since there are fields called *Upper* and *Lower Purleigh* on the outskirts of Braydon Forest, at Charlton, just east of Malmesbury.²¹ Jefferies may have encountered the toponym during his researches for the *History of Malmesbury*. *Gaston*, a common Wiltshire field-name and derived, according to Gover, Mawer and Stenton, from OE *gaers-tun*, ‘grass enclosure’²² is also to be found in the Malmesbury Hundred.

Jefferies’ knowledge of the Malmesbury area can also perhaps elucidate the field-name *Glacemere*, apparently a compound of a word conjured from the OE adjective and noun, *glæs*, meaning ‘clear, bright, shining’ or ‘glass, mirror’, and OE *mere*, ‘pond, lake’.²³ *Glace* as the first element of a field-name is quite exceptional and not to be found in any of reference works cited.²⁴ The compound appears to be fictive, functioning in a similar way to ‘Overboro’, and suggesting a conflation of ideas.²⁵ This

¹⁷ English Place-Name Society; hereafter abbreviated as EPNS.

¹⁸ Source; Wikipedia.

¹⁹ *HEFN*, p. 202: ‘church equipment and supplies were also maintained from the rent of endowed land’; lamp-acre field-names ‘refer to endowments to provide lamps in the respective parish churches’.

²⁰ Patrick Hanks, Flavia Hodges, A. D. Mills, Adrian Room, *The Oxford names companion* (Oxford: University Press, 1998), p. 1240; hereafter abbreviated to *ONC*.

²¹ *PNW*, p. 453: ‘*Purley* is an anglicised form of the original French term and *purlieu* a re-gallicising of the pseudo-English *purley*.’; see also *EFND*, p. 175. This field-name is listed in the *OED* with the primary definition, ‘A tract of land on the fringe or border of a forest; *spec.* one formerly included within the forest boundaries and still partly subject to the forest laws, especially those relating to the hunting or killing of game.’ (sense 1a). The word came to mean ‘The outskirts or surroundings of any place; the environs, the borders.’ (sense 2).

²² *PNW*, pp. 432 and 460. The second element, the common *-tun* is OE for ‘enclosure, farmstead, village, manor, estate’.

²³ EPNS.

²⁴ Neither does the meaning of its *OED* entry appear relevant; ‘glace’, from French and Latin, is a rare and obsolete word referring to ice.

²⁵ Janice Lingley, ‘Jefferies’ *History of Malmesbury* and Overboro’, in The Richard Jefferies Society’s *Spring 2018 Newsletter*, pp. 22-25.

passage from the Malmesbury *History*, in which Jefferies approaches the nineteenth-century town from the east may be of relevance:

Upon the left will be noticed some fir plantations of considerable extent overshadowing with their dark and sombre foliage a broad sheet of water well known as Braydon Pond. This is an American nomenclature²⁶ - it would certainly be pronounced a lake by a visitor; and a most beautiful one too. Even the glimpse that can be obtained of it from the road is sufficient to show its great extent: - it is said to be 'three miles round', that is, it is a three miles walk around it. A piece of water of this size can scarcely be called a 'pond' in this post-diluvian age. When mammoths, leviathans, and behemoths crashed through primeval forests, wallowed in original mud or drank streams dry at a draught, it might have - had it then existed - been termed a pond. But now when things do not go upon such a gigantic scale Braydon Lake or Braydon Mere would be a far more elegant and fit appellation.²⁷

Coate Water, located in the area in which *a great estate* is nominally sited, also comes to mind, especially Jefferies' description of the *New Sea* in early morning sunlight, in *Bevis the story of a boy*:

Southwards, looking seawards, instead of the long path of gold which wavelets strew before him, the sun beamed in the water, throwing a stream of light on their faces, not to be looked at any more than the fire which Archimedes cast from his mirrors, melting the ships. All the light of summer fell on the water, from the glowing sky, from the clear air, from the sun. The island floated in light, they stood in light, light was in the shadow of the trees, and under the thick brambles; light was deep down in the water, light surrounded them as a mist might; they could see far up into the illumined sky as down into the water.²⁸

On the subject of family names, Jefferies emphasises the credence that is to be given to the testimony of the landfolk in the following account of a conversation between two Wiltshire yeomen – his 'primary source', Hilary Lockett, and a visiting acquaintance, concerning another farmer in the area:

To listen to the zest with which they entered into the minutest details of the family affairs of so long ago, concerning people with whom neither had any connection – how they recollected the smallest particulars – was astonishing. This marvellous capacity for gossip seemed like a revelation of a totally different state of society. The memory of country people for such details is beyond belief.²⁹

Several of Jefferies' field-names are expressed as plurals, but it would appear that in only a few cases does the final 's' express possession, and thus indicate a surname.

Hawkes is of particular interest, since two fields, designated 'pasture' and named *Great Axe* and *Little Axe*, but 'commonly known' as *Great Hawke* and *Little Hawke*, were identified as part of the 'Freehold and Compact Estate Situate at Coate, in the Parish of Chiseldon, Wilts.', on an auction poster for the sale of the estate in June 1877. The estate was stated to be 'for many years in the occupation of Mr. James

²⁶ The *OED* defines 'pond' (sense 1a) as 'a small body of still water of artificial formation' and records the definition 'a lake or reservoir of any size' (sense 1c) as chiefly North American in origin.

²⁷ Chapter XIX 'Modern Malmesbury'; this chapter was published in the 14 September 1867 edition of the *North Wilts Herald*, p. 2, columns 4-6.

²⁸ Richard Jefferies, *Bevis, the story of a boy*, illustrated by E. H. Shepard, with an introduction by E. V. Lucas (London: Jonathan Cape, 1932), p. 323.

²⁹ *RGE*, pp. 83-84.

Jefferies', the father of the author. The fields' colloquial names referred to the tenant, one Robert Hawkes, a Wiltshireman born in 1818. The stone which marked the Hawkes' fields, inscribed with the initials 'R. H.' and the date '1837', is now an exhibit at The Richard Jefferies Museum.³⁰

Truelock is an English surname found in the counties of Wiltshire, Berkshire and Sussex. An early seventeenth-century bearer of the name was Georg Truelocke, of Purton in Wiltshire. It is a nickname, from ME *treu(e)*, 'faithful' and OE *loc*, 'lock of hair', denoting a loyal person.³¹ The initial *z* of *Zacker* is almost certainly dialectal. The surname *Sacker* is an occupational name for a 'maker of sacks, bags, or sackcloth' and derives from OE and Old French.³² *Rials*, from OE *ryge*, *rye* + *hyll*, 'hill where rye is grown',³³ points the difficulty, in the absence of any contextual data, of distinguishing between a field-name and a surname, since a locative surname is the derivative of the place-name. *Rial* could be the name of a farm, or the farmer, or both. *Rye-* field-names are common throughout the country, and usually expressed as two words, *-hill* and *-lands* being the most frequently occurring generic second elements,³⁴ so the assumption is that a surname is indicated here. The surname has a Wiltshire provenance, since it is not infrequently found in the nineteenth-century genealogical registers for the county.

Sannetts, however, is unattested as both a surname and a field-name, and appears to be quite unique. It could be interpreted as historical, supposing the first syllable to derive from ME *Seynt*, 'Saint', and the second to represent a contraction of 'Neot'. The twelfth-century church of St. Andrew at Boscombe, north-east of Salisbury, was originally granted to St. Neot's Priory in Cambridgeshire, and was known as St. Neot's up to about the mid-eighteenth century, so this Cornish saint's name is not unknown in Wiltshire.³⁵

Though unattested in Wiltshire, *Cheesecake*³⁶ occurs frequently as a field-name in central England.³⁷ It may have originated in the plant lore with which country children were familiar. Common mallow, *Malva sylvestris*, a perennial herbaceous plant growing freely in meadows, hedgebanks, fallow fields, and

³⁰ Thanks to Mrs. Jean Saunders, Honorary Secretary of The Richard Jefferies Society, for this information.

³¹ Patrick Hanks, Richard Coates and Peter McClure, *The Oxford dictionary of family names in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); hereafter abbreviated as *ODFN*. The name is listed as a variant of *Trulock*.

³² *ODFN*; the entry for *Sacker*.

³³ *ODFN*; listed as a variant of *Ryall*, and stated to be a 'locative name from any of several places named 'rye hill'.'

³⁴ EPNS.

³⁵ *HEFN*, p. 181: 'From the early Middle Ages to the immediate pre-Reformation period, the monasteries became greater and greater landowners. Grants, purchases and other transfers would all be carefully recorded. In addition to the estates surrounding the abbeys, and the granges or out-stations, there would be individual plots of land bequeathed to monastic communities by pious individuals. It is not surprising, therefore, that religious owners or occupiers are referred to frequently in field-names.' It is to St. Neot that the legend of King Alfred and the Cakes is attributed in an anonymous tenth-century manuscript recording the story in its earliest form; Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and other contemporary sources* (London: Penguin, 1983), pp. 197-202.

³⁶ From OE *cese*, **ciese* + ME *kaak*, *kake*, Sc. *caik*, the latter originally referring to a small flattened loaf of bread baked on both sides; enhanced with sugar and spices, etc., it acquired the meaning 'fancy bread'. The compound word, referring to a tart made of cheese and eggs, dates back to the fifteenth century (*OED*).

³⁷ For a possible alternative meaning, referring to the shape of the pasture land, see *HEFN*, p. 139.

wasteland, was known in rural areas as ‘Cheese-cake’ or ‘Pick-cheese’, because of its edible segmented circular fruits: ‘As children playing in the fields we would eat the ‘fruit’ of wild mallows – the seeds – and call them cheeses.’³⁸ The plant was also valued as a versatile medicinal herb. Cicely, Hilary Lockett’s daughter, is portrayed roaming about the farm as a child, and learning the habitats and properties of the flora she finds;³⁹ her contact with the village children is also instructive.⁴⁰

The Conigers, meaning a ‘rabbit warren’, occurs in Wiltshire in a variety of forms from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries.⁴¹ Though not now frequent in modern English, the word *conegar* was formerly common. The field-name is mentioned elsewhere in the narrative of *a great estate* in connection with the first wheeled wagon to come to The Idovers. According to the recollections of elderly hamlet men this wagon, of a primitive construction, had to be hauled to a large field called ‘the Conigers’ to turn the vehicle round,⁴² which gives some idea of the extent of the warren that gave the field its name, and also the rabbit’s erstwhile commercial value. The toponym derives from Anglo-Norman and Old French. Rabbits were introduced to Britain by the Normans and were farmed intensively in dedicated warrens not only as a food source, but also for their fur, used in hat-making.⁴³ The word *coney*, referring to the rabbit, has the primary meaning ‘rabbit skin’ (*OED*). There is a field called *Conygre Mead* in Malmesbury which, in the medieval period, provided a source of meat for the monks of the Abbey.⁴⁴

Haddons does not appear as a field-name in the references consulted, but is listed in the *Oxford names companion* as a not uncommon English place-name deriving from OE *hæth* + *dun*, ‘heath hill, hill where heather grows’.⁴⁵ In the opening chapter of *a great estate* Jefferies recalls formerly open land ploughed up for the growing of turnips:

Waste lands all glorious with golden blossoming furze, with purple foxglove, or curious orchis hiding in stray corners; wild moor-like lands, beautiful with heaths and honey-bottle; grand stretches of sloping downs where the hares hid in the grass, and where all the horses in the kingdom might gallop at their will . . .⁴⁶

The final element of *Weddington*, *-ington*, from OE *-ingtun*, ‘tribal or ancestral settlement’, is commonly a suffix of place-names, but nearly always refers to major settlements, and, since the word

³⁸ Roy Vickery, *A dictionary of plant lore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 229; the oral communication quoted originated in Christchurch, Dorset, and the recollection is dated May 1991.

³⁹ *RGE*, pp. 28-30, 31, 32-34.

⁴⁰ *RGE*, pp. 29-30.

⁴¹ *PNW*, p.427. The original 1880 edition of *a great estate* included the citation of some correspondence from a reader who attested the meaning of ‘The Conigers’ as ‘a rabbit warren’ from his knowledge of the toponym’s occurrence in ‘Scottish local nomenclature’. This correspondence is reproduced in the 1987 Fowles edition; *RGE*, p. 115.

⁴² *RGE*, p. 73.

⁴³ Eric Jones and Patrick Dillon, *Middle ridgeway* (Salisbury: Wessex Books, 2016), with paintings by Anna Dillon, pp. 35 and 61.

⁴⁴ Charles Vernon, *An historical guide to Malmesbury* (Malmesbury Civic Trust, 2005), p. 4.

⁴⁵ *ONC*, p. 271.

⁴⁶ *RGE*, p. 19.

here is a field-name, a likely derivation is OE *hwæten-dun* or *-tun*, meaning ‘wheat hill’ or ‘wheat farm’.⁴⁷ This field-name might plausibly be assigned, for example, to the wheat fields on Idober Plain, the land farmed by Old Jonathan Luckett. The narrator walks up on the hills to see the hamlet where this ‘Farmer of the Olden Times’ once lived and gives this description of the view:

On either hand hills succeeded to hills, and behind I knew they extended farther than the eye could reach. Immediately beneath in front there was a plain, at its extreme boundary a wood, and beyond that the horizon was lost in the summer haze. Wheat, barley, and oats - barley and wheat and beans, completely occupied the plain. It was one vast expanse of cereals, without a sign of human life; for the reaper had not yet commenced, and the bailiff’s cottages were hidden among the ricks. There was an utter silence at noonday; nothing but yellowing wheat beneath, the ramparts of the hills around, and the sun above.⁴⁸

The first element of *Wernils* is probably formed from Welsh *gwern*, Cornish *guern*, ‘an alder swamp’, and the second element OE *hyll*, ‘hill’, and thus signifies ‘hill by a swamp’. *Gwern*- toponyms are to be found along the Welsh border frequently combined with English elements,⁴⁹ as here, so this is an example of a British field-name. *Wernils* could be applied to the sloping meadow land that reaches down to the brook which the narrator of *a great estate* names ‘the Cuckoo-fields’:

Along the lower part of these meadows there was a brook, and the brook-sparrows were chattering ceaselessly as I walked among the willow-stoles by it one morning towards the end of June. On the left hand the deep stream flowed silently round its gentle curves, and on the other through the willows and alders the grassy slope of the Cuckoo-fields was visible. Broad leaves of the marsh marigold, the flower long since gone, covered the ground; light-green horsetails were dotted thickly about; and tall grasses flourished, rising to the knee. Dark shallow pools were so hidden under these grasses and plants that the presence of the black and yet clear water could not be perceived until the foot sank into it. . . .

Hilary had drained away much of the water that used to form a far larger marsh about here . . .⁵⁰

As well as *Gaston*, previously discussed, *Lea*, *Leaze*, and *Ham* appear to come within the category of what is designated, in Jones and Dillon’s *Middle ridgeway*, ‘neutral grassland’:

The fertile clays and loams of the river-valleys support a different plant community known as neutral grassland. There is a number of co-dominant grasses, including cock’s foot, meadow fescue and perennial rye-grass, which have a fine growth and when grazed interweave to form a grassy mat. Neutral grassland is traditionally managed either as ‘pasture’ – grazing for sheep, cattle or horses – or ‘meadow’ where it is grown as a crop for mowing and producing hay. Both forms of grassland are rich in wild flowers and until the advent of industrial farming and under-drainage were waterlogged for part of the year. Until quite recently, pastures and meadows contributed substantially to the visual tapestry of the Upper Thames Valley as viewed from the Middle Ridgeway.⁵¹

⁴⁷ *EPNS*. The initial consonantal digraph *hw-* is a common feature of Old English; both letters were pronounced.

⁴⁸ *RGE*, p. 71.

⁴⁹ *EPNS*.

⁵⁰ *RGE*, pp. 80 and 81.

⁵¹ Jones and Dillon, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

The permanent pasture of Lockett's Place produces fine cheese: 'Hilary, returning to the subject of the cheese, said that the best was made when the herd grazed on old pastures: there was a pasture field of his which it was believed had been grazed for fully two hundred years.'⁵² The following beautiful passage in *a great estate* evokes such a pasture:

In the next meadow the cows had just been turned into fresh grass, and were lazily rioting in it. They fed in the sunshine with the golden buttercups up above their knees, literally wading in gold, their horns as they held their heads low just visible among the flowers. Some that were standing in the furrows were hidden up to their middles by the buttercups. Their sleek roan and white hides contrasted with the green grass and the sheen of the flowers: one stood still, chewing the cud, her square face expressive of intense content, her beautiful eye – there is no animal with a more beautiful eye than the cow – following Cicely's motions. At this time of year, as they grazed far from the pens, the herd were milked in the corner of the field, instead of driving them to the yard.⁵³

Gover, Mawer and Stenton denote *leaz* - from OE *laes*, 'pasture' - 'perhaps the commonest of all field-name elements in Wiltshire'. It functions as a generic term, and is also frequently a component of modern field-names; *Cow Leaze*, *Larks Leaze*, for example.⁵⁴ The 'great discussion', quoted previously, between Hilary Lockett and a visitor, concerning the family history of two farmers of their acquaintance, makes clear the distinction between *leaze* and grassland assigned to the production of hay:

They could not agree either as to the kinship or the date; though the visitor was the more certain because he so well remembered that there was an extraordinary cut of 'turvin' that year. The 'turvin' is the hay made on the leaze, not the meadows, out of the rough grass and bennets left by the cows.⁵⁵

The importance of refraining from walking on meadow grass is a point made in more than one of Jefferies' novels. Here is an extract from *Greene ferne farm* (1880):

Geoffrey Newton looked at [the lambs] from the other side of the hedge, where indeed he had no business to be. He had carelessly wandered in a day-dream from the footpath, and was now in the midst of the mowing-grass, to walk in which is against the unwritten laws of country life, because when trampled down it is difficult to mow.⁵⁶

The *Oxford English dictionary* defines *Lea*, from OE *leah*, as 'open ground, either meadow, pasture or arable land'; this word subsequently acquired a poetical and literary ambience. In Middle English, *Lea*, and its variants *Ley* and *Lay*, came to refer more exclusively to pasture or land under grass, and retains this sense. The generic toponym *Ham*, generally common, and frequent in Wiltshire, occurring mostly in

⁵² *RGE*, p. 89.

⁵³ *RGE*, p. 30.

⁵⁴ *PNW*, p. 438.

⁵⁵ *RGE*, p. 83. Centuries earlier, the annal for the year 777, in the Peterborough manuscript of *The Anglo-Saxon chronicle*, makes a similar distinction: *Pa let he Cuðbriht ealdorma[n] x bonde-land at Swines heafde mid læswe & mid mædwe* / 'then [he] leased to Ealdorman Cuthbert 10 holdings at Swineshead, with pasture and with meadow'. The translation is from Michael Swanton, *The Anglo-Saxon chronicles* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), p. 52.

⁵⁶ Richard Jefferies, *Greene Ferne Farm* (Longcot: Petton Books, 2009), p. 12; cf., *The dewy morn* (1884) (Longcot: Petton Books, 2009, p. 109, and *Amaryllis at the fair* (Longcot: Petton Books, 2009), p. 183.

the north-west of the county,⁵⁷ can be ambiguous. Gover, Mawer and Stenton remark: ‘In this county as elsewhere it is very difficult to distinguish names in *ham* ‘homestead’ from those in *hamm* and again to distinguish those in which *hamm* denotes an enclosure and those in which it denotes a river-meadow’.⁵⁸ A riverside meadow was capable of producing an especially good crop of lush grass since, traditionally, such fields were irrigated by skilled craftsmen known as ‘drowners’ or ‘floaters’.⁵⁹

The sense of *Laine*, from Middle English, and ‘common and characteristic of Wiltshire’ is unknown, but ‘probably it denotes land which is periodically allowed to lie fallow by being sown in regular lains or divisions’.⁶⁰ Also commonly found in Wiltshire as a field-name is *Croft*. Deriving from OE *croft*, it is defined as ‘a piece of enclosed ground, used for tillage or pasture: in most localities a small piece of arable land adjacent to a house.’ This generic is usually qualified by a first element indicating the crop grown, soil type, shape, etc., for example, *Heycroft*, *Sandcroft*.⁶¹ *The Cossicles*, from OE *cotsetla*, ‘cottager’, refers to a cottage held in return for services rendered on the farm for one day a week, usually a Monday. This field-name appears in documents held by Merton College, Oxford, relating to the tithes for Stratton St. Margaret, Swindon, and occurs elsewhere, as well as Wiltshire.⁶² *Thrupp*, from OE *throp*, deriving from Old Scandinavian *thorp*, signifies a ‘secondary settlement, an outlying farmstead or hamlet’.⁶³ The final element of *Burderop*, the location of Okebourne Chace, has a similar etymology. *Slades*, from OE *slæd* and common in major as well as minor names, denotes ‘a shallow valley or depression’; usually in the form *slade*.⁶⁴ The derivation of the second element of *Zackers Hook* is most likely to be OE *hoc*, ‘hook or corner of land, land in a bend’, which occurs frequently both in field-names and major place-names as a generic term.⁶⁵

The unattested, perhaps fictive, *Strongbowls* is the most perplexing of the field-names Jefferies presents us with, since the meaning of each of the two word elements appears transparent, and yet their significance in juxtaposition seems contradictory. *Strong-* as a denominative field-name element is exceedingly rare. It occurs in Lincolnshire, in the area of Goadby, in the form *Strongland*, with the

⁵⁷ *PNW*; see the endpaper map for its distribution; it occurs frequently throughout the county with the exception of the area just to the south of the central region.

⁵⁸ *PNW*, p. 416 and pp. 433-434; see the endpaper map which shows the distribution of these field-names; *ham(m)* occurs more frequently.

⁵⁹ Jones and Dillon, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

⁶⁰ *PNW*, p. 439.

⁶¹ *PNW*, pp. 427.

⁶² *PNW*, p. 427; *HEFN*, p. 175.

⁶³ *ONC*, p. 1264. See *PNW* for the endpaper map of its distribution; *-thorp* occurs seven times in the area of north-east Wiltshire; there are three other occurrences, one in the south of the county and two in the north-east. There are more than 500 instances generally of this Danish generic, which dates from England’s Viking period; Gillian Fellows-Jensen, ‘The Scandinavian background to English place-names’, in Jayne Carroll and David N. Parsons, *Perceptions of place, twenty-first century interpretations of English place-name studies* (Nottingham: English Place-Name Society, 2013), p. 89. David N. Parson’s article ‘Churls and æthelings, kings and reeves: some reflections on place-names in early English society’ discusses the occurrences of *-thorp* as outlying settlements in areas where the open-field system and nucleated villages developed in the Anglo-Saxon period; (pp. 66-69).

⁶⁴ *PNW*, p. 446.

⁶⁵ *EPNS*; cf. *Braydon Hook*, in north-west Wiltshire; *PNW*, p. 353.

etymology OE *streng*, and ON *strangr* ‘strong’, and the meaning ‘used of firm, compact soil’.⁶⁶ If a more figurative meaning is assumed, it could refer to the vitality of the land in terms of the quality and yield of its crops, and the productivity of its livestock.⁶⁷ The physical stamina and power of the English farm worker is a recurrent theme in Jefferies’ writings. Hilary Lockett and Tibbald the Miller in *a Great Estate* are both exceptionally strong men and this strength is illustrated by their ability to lift heavy weights. ‘Now this great strength was not the result of long and special training, or, indeed,’ says Jefferies, ‘of any training at all; it came naturally from outdoor life, outdoor work, plain living (chiefly bacon), and good bread baked at home.’⁶⁸ His portrait of the farm labourer, John Brown, in ‘My Old Village’⁶⁹ is comparable, and the essay, ‘Strength of the English’,⁷⁰ also expands on this theme.

Recreational field-names are common,⁷¹ and the second element of the compound suggests a rural sport or leisure activity such as the traditional village game of nine-pin bowling. However, this game, and others similar to it, would not seem to be relevant here, since they involve skill rather than strength.

For the spelling of the field-names listed in *Round About a Great Estate* we are reliant on the narrator’s ability to accurately represent what he heard, so perhaps the second element is a pun on the word for a tree trunk, ‘bole’.⁷² In the first chapter of *a great estate*, the trees of Okebourne Chase and their felling is a principal theme, and the tossing or pitching of a heavy log, or wooden bar, such as the axeltree of a wagon, was a rural sport of yesteryear, not unlike the caber-tossing that still features in the Highland Games of the present day. *Strongboles*, then, could refer to a field where this game of strength customarily took place. If this interpretation, based on the notion of word-play, is acceptable, then the ambiguity created by the pun may be understood as a subtle and ironic reference to the effects of enclosure. In his book titled *The sports and pastimes of the people of England*, published in 1801, Joseph

⁶⁶ Barrie Cox, *The place-names of Leicestershire: part four: Gartree Hundred* (Nottingham: English Place-Name Society, 2009), p. 364. Goadby, deriving from an ON personal name and ON *-by* ‘farmstead, a village’, means ‘Gauti’s farm or settlement’; *Key to English Place-Names*, the website of the Institute of Name Studies at the University of Nottingham. Goadby is a small village about eight miles north of Market Harborough; its church dates back to the thirteenth century.

⁶⁷ In this sense, *Strongland* is comparable with the original etymological meaning of ModE ‘mainland’, which derives from OE *mægen*, ‘great strength’ + OE *land*, ‘earth’. *Mægen* is a thematically significant word in the Old English epic poem *Beowulf*, and characterises the great supernatural strength of the Geat warrior hero in his contest with the cannibalistic giant Grendel. In the poem, Grendel is closely identified with the legend of Cain, builder of cities and the slayer of Abel, tiller of the soil.

⁶⁸ *RGE*, pp. 99-101.

⁶⁹ Collected in *Field and hedgerow* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1889), pp. 312-313. ‘Young Aaron’ in *RGE*, p. 30, is considered to be based on John Brown; Rossabi, *A Peculiarly English Genius*, *op. cit.*, footnote, p. 377.

⁷⁰ Collected in *The old house at Coate* (1948), edited with biographical notes by Samuel J. Looker and wood engravings by Agnes Miller Parker (Bradford on Avon: Ex Libris Press, 1985), pp. 130-141.

⁷¹ *HEFN*, the section on ‘The Playgrounds of Rural England’, pp. 242-249.

⁷² Jefferies was familiar with the word. It occurs in his essay ‘A King of Acres’, first published in 1884, in *Chambers’s Journal of Popular Literature, Science, and Art*, (1832-1956), and subsequently collected in *The hills and the vale* (1909), introduced by Edward Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 95-96: ‘In the woods it is still the past, and the noisy mechanic present of this manufacturing century has no place. Enter in among the round-boled beeches which the squirrels rush up, twining round like ivy in ascent, where they nibble the beech-nuts forty feet aloft, and let the husks drop to your feet; where the wood-pigeon sits and does not move, safe in the height and thickness of the spray.’

Strutt, referring to such sports as wrestling, leaping, running, throwing the sledge,⁷³ and pitching the bar, in relation to urban growth, observed:

The general decay of those manly and spirited exercises, which formerly were practised . . . has not arisen from any want of inclination in the people, but from the want of places proper for the purpose: such as in times past had been allotted to them are now covered with buildings, or shut up by enclosures, so that, if it were not for skittles, dutch-pins, four corners, and the like pastimes, they would have no amusements for the exercise of the body and these amusements are only to be met with in places belonging to common drinking-houses, for which reason their play is seldom productive of much benefit . . .⁷⁴

The book's opening chapter is concerned with a discussion of the trees of Okebourne Chace, and the action involved in the felling of timber is putatively explored by the narrator with a strange avidity, conveying the sense of the living tree as a beleaguered and threatened species, suggesting an analogy perhaps with the plight of the yeoman farmer and his labourers.⁷⁵

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⁷³ Defined by the OED (sense a) as 'A large heavy hammer usually wielded with both hands, especially the large hammer used by a blacksmith.'

⁷⁴ Joseph Strutt, *The sports and pastimes of the people of England, including the rural and domestic recreations from the earliest period to the present time* (1801) (London: Thomas Tegg, 1845), p. lxii.

⁷⁵ *RGE*, p. 21.