

SEPTEMBER MEMBERS' FORUM

Place, Field and Road names in the Landscape

by Joy Gadsby

AFTER POINTING OUT that interpreting names was not an exact science and she did not profess to be an expert, Joy pointed out that almost certainly our hunter-gatherer forefathers had names for places, but none have come down to the present day. She had invented her own names for particular places.

The earliest recorded names are Celtic and some are still in use, although few locally—

Penge may derive from 'pen' = at the edge (in this case of the Great North Wood?).

'Cwm' = a steep sided valley and there are local examples such as Coombe Lane, Coombe Cliff, Pebblecombe.

Nearly all river names are Celtic in origin, including the Thames.

The Romans did not leave many names behind them, considering they were in England for 400 years. There is 'caster' or 'castra' = a camp appears in Cirencester, Doncaster, etc. and perhaps even Caterham, for which the derivation is unsure. The name 'coldharbour' occurs in the area in a village near Leith Hill, Coldharbour Road in Croydon and one or two field names. All these 'coldharbours' are close to Roman roads and probably refer to temporary overnight shelters.

Joy explained that it was the Vikings and Anglo-Saxons who finally dominated the landscape and named the places where they settled – names which have stayed up to the present day. North of a line drawn roughly along Watling Street, that is north of the Thames to Chester, many names end in 'by' = in current Scandinavian meaning a (usually small) town, hence Derby, Crosby, Grimsby and the village of Gaddesby, from which she takes her surname. The south-east is dominated by Anglo-Saxon names, for example Sanderstead from 'stead', a sandy place and Banstead, perhaps a place where beans were an important crop. 'Dun' meaning a hill, ridge or plateau top occurs in Selsdon, Coulsdon and Chaldon. Joy went on to explain the 'hams', 'tons' = home and settlement combined with 'ing' = people of 'Leigh' relates to forest clearance, thus Farleigh = a ferny clearing.

Field names are numerous and some are obvious, such '100 acres', 'Long field', 'Barnfield', 'Limepit field'. There are some fanciful ones on the *Bainbridge map* of Coulsdon–

Old Peter's three acres = who was Old Peter?

Stoney field = flint picking for road works was often more remunerative than farming.

Wimple stimple = a country name for a stiff grass used for making straw hats.

Ibbet's piece = We don't know anyone named Ibbet, but locally there are families of Ibbetsons.

On the *Rowed map*, there is a field called '9 corners' and it has. There is 'Colliers Down', which relates to charcoal burning, as does 'Burntwood Lane'. We still look for local or historical connections when naming new roads.

Joy said she was sad to see the re-naming of pubs, for example the *Blacksmith's Arms* at the bottom of Coombe Road now has a new name, but it was on the site of the blacksmith. *Royal Oaks* are numerous, in honour of Charles II, but how about the *Goose & Firkin* or the *Dog & Duck*.

The members of the large audience at the Douglas Brunton Centre gave Joy's explanations close attention and no doubt hope, as I do, that they will be able to put to good use the examples that Joy gave and be able to go out and interpret some of the fascinating names that occur in the district. Her talk was warmly applauded.

Gwyneth Fookes