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The two Goxhills

Richard Coates (pp. 5–13)

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ABBREVIATIONS OF COUNTIES AND EPNS COUNTY SURVEYS

| | |
|---------|--|
| Co | Cornwall |
| Ha | Hampshire |
| He | Herefordshire |
| K | Kent |
| La | Lancashire |
| Nb | Northumberland |
| Sf | Suffolk |
| So | Somerset |
| Wt | Isle of Wight |
| CPNE | <i>Cornish Place-Name Elements.</i> |
| EPNE | <i>English Place-Name Elements, Parts 1 and 2.</i> |
| PN BdHu | <i>The Place-Names of Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire.</i> |
| PN Brk | <i>The Place-Names of Berkshire, Parts 1, 2 and 3.</i> |
| PN Bu | <i>The Place-Names of Buckinghamshire.</i> |
| PN Ca | <i>The Place-Names of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely.</i> |
| PN Ch | <i>The Place-Names of Cheshire, Parts 1–5.</i> |
| PN Cu | <i>The Place-Names of Cumberland, Parts 1, 2 and 3.</i> |
| PN D | <i>The Place-Names of Devon, Parts 1 and 2.</i> |
| PN Db | <i>The Place-Names of Derbyshire, Parts 1, 2 and 3.</i> |
| PN Do | <i>The Place-Names of Dorset, Parts 1–4.</i> |
| PN Du | <i>The Place-Names of County Durham, Part 1.</i> |
| PN Ess | <i>The Place-Names of Essex.</i> |
| PN ERY | <i>The Place-Names of the East Riding of Yorkshire and York.</i> |
| PN Gl | <i>The Place-Names of Gloucestershire, Parts 1–4.</i> |
| PN Hrt | <i>The Place-Names of Hertfordshire.</i> |
| PN Le | <i>The Place-Names of Leicestershire, Parts 1–6.</i> |
| PN Li | <i>The Place-Names of Lincolnshire, Parts 1–7.</i> |
| PN Mx | <i>The Place-Names of Middlesex (apart from the City of London).</i> |
| PN Nf | <i>The Place-Names of Norfolk, Parts 1–3.</i> |
| PN Nt | <i>The Place-Names of Nottinghamshire.</i> |
| PN NRY | <i>The Place-Names of the North Riding of Yorkshire.</i> |
| PN Nth | <i>The Place-Names of Northamptonshire.</i> |
| PN O | <i>The Place-Names of Oxfordshire, Parts 1 and 2.</i> |
| PN R | <i>The Place-Names of Rutland.</i> |
| PN Sa | <i>The Place-Names of Shropshire, Parts 1–6.</i> |
| PN Sr | <i>The Place-Names of Surrey.</i> |
| PN St | <i>The Place-Names of Staffordshire, Part 1.</i> |
| PN Sx | <i>The Place-Names of Sussex, Parts 1 and 2.</i> |
| PN W | <i>The Place-Names of Wiltshire.</i> |
| PN Wa | <i>The Place-Names of Warwickshire.</i> |
| PN We | <i>The Place-Names of Westmorland, Parts 1 and 2.</i> |
| PN Wo | <i>The Place-Names of Worcestershire.</i> |
| PN WRY | <i>The Place-Names of the West Riding of Yorkshire, Parts 1–8.</i> |

The Two Goxhills

Richard Coates

One of the few things that the two halves of the regrettable county of Humberside, created in 1974, have in common is an obscure parish name *Goxhill*. No-one doubts that both names have an identical origin. Several attempts to explain it are reported by Hugh Smith in *PN Yorkshire ER* (66-7) and Kenneth Cameron alludes to them in *PN Lincolnshire* (II: 119-21). Neither scholar comes down firmly in favour of any proposal, and Cameron (following Zachrisson 1927: 167) tentatively proposes that the name is a Scandinavianized form of an OE **Gēaceslēah* 'cuckoo wood', emphasizing the need for OE spellings, of which there are none.

I believe it is possible to get further than this. I shall not rehearse earlier proposals fully here, but dip into them selectively as the need arises. Most of them, I think, share the methodological fault of trying to incorporate an explanation for a series of spellings foreshadowing (or, as I believe, causing) the modern pronunciation, of which the current spelling is a reasonable rendering. It is quite clear that this pronunciation is of modern origin, at least as far as the world outside legal offices is concerned; the local version at the end of the nineteenth century was recorded as /gɔuzl/ (Lincolnshire) and /gɔuz(ə)l/ (Yorkshire), see Forster (1981: 104). For the Yorkshire name, Hope (1882) gives *Gousill*, which Forster renders as /gauzil/, and Ross, Stead and Holderness (1877: 17) give [gaow'zl], which appears to amount to much the same. But it seems to me that this is a relatively minor phonetic variant on /gɔuzl/. All these are certainly quite distinct from /goks(h)il/. It is true that some spellings from the fourteenth century onwards, for both names, suggest the modern pronunciation, but as the lists which follow show, they are in an underwhelming minority until very recently, and often offered as an alternative, almost invariably in second

or "alias" position, to the *Gousill/Gowshill* type. This implies to me: "I, the scribe, have found this form in an earlier document, and I append it here for the sake of legalistic caution, not necessarily because I have faith in it." In fact, for both places, there is a fairly small range of quite comprehensible variation in the early spellings, and if scholars were to confine themselves, for their first task, to their normal procedure of accounting for the bulk of those early forms, an inventive but not very problematical solution would soon emerge.

Here are the forms collected by Smith and Cameron:

EAST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE

Goxhill

GOXHILL [gouzəl]

Golse 1086 DB

Gosla 1135-9 (p), 1154-91 Bridl, 1155-7 YCh 1148

Gousla 1179-89 Bridl, *Gousl'* 1195-1225 *Dods* vii, 244

Gousele 12th *Meaux*

Gousle 1197-1210 *Melsa*, 1204 Ass (p), 1246 Ass, FF, 1251 Ass, 1260 *Rental*, 1285 KI, c. 1400 *Melsa*, *Gowsle* 1210-20 ib.

Gowcell 13th *Nunkeel*

Gowsell' 13th *Meaux*, *Gousel* 1209 FF, 1276 RH (p), 1349

Meaux, *Gowsel* late 13th *Nunkeel* (p), *Gowsell* 1580 FF

Gousill t. Hy 3 YD, c. 1265 KF, *Gousil* 1289 Ebor, *Gowsyll* 1504 Test

Goushill, *-hyll* 1297 LS, 1334 FF, 1341 *Extent*

Goulshull 1316 *NomVill*, *Gowlsle* c. 1400 *Melsa*

Gouxhill 1375 FF, 1483 *Ipm*, 1610 FF, *Gowxhill* 1537 *Dugd*

Gouxill 1512 FF, *Gocksall* 1589 FF

Gux-, *Geuxhyll* 1549, 1552 FF, *Goxell* 1611 FF

Goxhill 1567 FF *et freq* to 1828 *Langd*

THE TWO GOXHILLS

LINCOLNSHIRE

Goxhill

GOXHILL

Golse 1086 DB (5x), 1175 P (p), 1182, 1183, 1184, 1190 ib, 1191, 1192 ib both (p)

Golsa 1086 DB, c.1115 LS, c.1141 BMFacs (p), 1142-51 Dane (p), 1143-47, a 1150 ib, 1164 P (p), 1165 ChancR (p), 1166, 1167, 1171, 1172 ib all (p) *et passim* to 1178 ib (p)

Gausa 1148-52 LAAS vi, c.1150 Dane (p), *Gousa* 1143-7 ib (p),

Goussa c.1155 ib (p), *Gouse* 1203 P (p)

Gosla 1135-39 (e14) YCh ii (p), c.1145 Dane (p), 1155-57 YCh ii, 1193, 1194 P, *Gosle* 1199 FF, 1267 Pat, 1312 (e14) Bridl, 1312 Pat

Gosel 1194 CurP

Goxa 1147-68 YCh iii, *Gossa* 1165 P (p)

Gousle 1135-40 (e14) YCh ii (p), 1194 (e14) Bridl, Hy2 Dane (p), 1200-12 (e14) YCh iii (p), e13 *HarlCh*, 1204 P (p), 1205 Cur (p), 1209, 1210, 1211 P (p), 1212, 1213, 1214 Cur *et freq* to 1311 (e14) Bridl, *Gousle alias dict' Goxhill* 1549 *LindDep* 67, *Gouslee* 1214 Cur, *Goussle* a1147 Dane (p)

Gousla 1143-47 Dane (p), 1149-50 (e15) YCh iii (p), 1152 ib iii (e14) (p), 1179-89 (e14) ib iii, 1182 ib iii (p) *et passim* to 1304 Pap

Gousel 1127-35, 1189-1217 (e14) YCh iii both (p), a1202 RA viii (p), 1210-12 RBE, 1238-43 Fees, 1254 ValNor *et freq* to 1314 YearBk, *Goussell* 1286 Ipm, 1376 Orig, 1376 Pat, 1471 Fine,

Goussell 1475 Pat

Gousele 1163 RA i, 1185-87 Dane (p), 1212 Fees, 1213 Cur, 1230 P, *Gousel'* 1185 RotDom (p), 1210-11, 1256 FF, 1265 RRGr,

Goussell' 1281 QW

Gausle c.1150 (e14) Guis (p), 1150-60 YCh ii (p)

Gausla 1154-68 (e14) YCh iii, c.1155, 1157-63. c.1160 Dane all (p), 1160-66 ib, e13 *HarlCh*, 1260 *NCot*

Gausel Hy2 Dane (p), *Gausal* (sic) c.1160 ib (p)

Gausele 1145-60 YCh iii (p), 1150-60 Dane (p)

Gousil 1242-3 Fees, 1268 Ch, (*in Lyndeseye*) 1303 PR, 1314 YearBk, 1316 FA, 1329 Inqaqd, *Gousill* 1353, 1363 Ipm 1392 Pat, 1428 FA, *Gousyl* (*in Lindesay*) 1301 Pap, 1303 FA, *Gausill* 1398 Cl
Gowsill "or" *Gouxill* 1349 Ipm, *Gowsill otherwise Gowxill* 1681 Yarb, *Gowsyll* 1422 Cl, 1557 Pat, *Gowshill otherwise Gowxhill* 1720 Yarb
Gowesell 1465 Pat, *Gowsell* 1545 LP xx
Goushill 1263 FF, 1291, 1294 Ipm, 1312, 1314 Cl, 1314 Ipm *et passim* to 1440 Pat, *goushill* 1601 Terrier, *Goushille* 1314 YearBk, 1386 Cl, *Goushyll* 1340 Ipm, *Goushill(e)* 1399 Pat, 1399 Cl, *Goweshill in Lyndeseye* 1401 Pat, *Gousehill* 1358 Pat
Goushull 1287 Ipm, 1292, 1294 Pat, 1295 Cl, 1312 Inqaqd *et passim* to 1428 FA, *-hulle* 1313-14 Inqaqd, *-ul* 1242-3 Fees
Goushill ("on" *Humbre*) 1331 Ch, 1338 Ipm, 1341 Pat, 1346 FA, 1347 Cor, 1378 Pat *et passim* to 1566 ib, *Gowxhyll* 1539 LP xiv, *Gouxhyll* 1549 Pat
Gouxull' 1332 SR, *Goxhull*(') 1332 *ib*, 1346 Pat, 1346 FA, 1541 LP xvi, 1549 Pat, *Gouxshull* m16 Cragg
Gouxill 1462 Pat, 1528 Wills ii, (*alias Goxhill*) 1564 LindDep 67, 1566 BT, 1576 LER, (*alias Goxhill*) 1604 LindDep 67, *Gouxyll* 1519 DV
Goxhill 1462, 1550 Pat, 1576 Saxton, 1577 BT (*alias Gowsell*) 1582 AD v, 1610 Speed *et passim*, *-hyll* 1547 Pat, *-hull* 1535 VE iv, 1653 WillsPCC
Gowksell alias Gouxhill 1562 BPD

The sequences of forms (a) without *l*, and (b) with *l* before *s*, appear to me to be aberrations due to the wrestlings with a foreign language performed by the scribes of *Domesday Book* and the *Pipe Roll* and similar "central" documents. Like previous commentators, I shall discount both these traditions since neither feeds into what was clearly the normal local pronunciation during the period 1130-1800. Forms such as *Gosla* are contemporaneous with the abortive (b)-sequence *Golsa* type.

Readers will see that the most typical early forms which do not display obvious Latin declensional suffixes are *Gousel* or *Gousle*. No English solution is apparent, but a Scandinavian one is obviously possible in this region. The Icelandic place-name *Geysir*, the location of a famous gushing hot spring which has lent its name to our common vocabulary, requires a Common Scandinavian stem **gaus-*, seen also in the ON verb *geysa* 'to gush, rush', in ablaut to that seen in Icelandic *gjósa*, of comparable meaning. The existence of a suffix *-il-*, as seen in ON *beytill* 'beetle, hammer', *lykill* 'key', *skutill* 'harpoon', can be clearly demonstrated (Kluge 1926: 48, para. 90). This suffix derived words for instruments from related verbs (here 'to build', 'to lock', 'to shoot'); such derivatives might be more generally glossed as 'means of performing the action denoted by the verb'. In view of this, a form **gaus-il-* is clearly possible meaning 'means of achieving gushing; (therefore, particular sort of) spring'. Its nominative singular **gausilaR* would have yielded historic-period **geysill* (cf. precisely *beytill* from *bauta*), and its dative singular **gausilē* would have become **gausli*. Its nominative plural **gausilir* would have become **gauslir*. Either of these two latter forms would be a suitable ancestor in England for *Gousel/Gousle*, which evidently is capable of representing a set of pronunciations including /gouzl/. Scand. *au* has a range of orthographic reflexes in English, including ME *ou*, *au*, whose detailed dialectal distribution is not fully understood (Björkman 1900: 68, 78-81).

There is no topographical reason to favour the plural. It seems totally credible, therefore, that we have here two instances of a Scandinavian name meaning 'gusher, spring' (in the dative case)¹. A stream flows from a point beside the moated site of the manor-house at the southern end of the Lincolnshire Goxhill (TA 111205) to join East Halton Beck; one flows from close to the church at the East Riding Goxhill (TA 185448) to feed Hornsea Mere. The latter is described by Smith as "intermittent", suggesting a good enough reason for the use of a word other than the normal *kelda* or *bekkr* — now you see it, now you don't, just like the Geysir.

This solution is, as far as the root is concerned, that of Lindkvist (1912: 142), who adduces *gjósa*, Norwegian *gaus* 'outflow, stream of liquid', and Cumbrian dialect (credibly to be derived from the ancestor of the Norwegian word) *gowze* 'rush or gush of fluid' (see also Björkman 1900: 299, note 1).

However, Lindkvist treats the name as a compound rather than as a suffixal derivative, and is reduced to postulating Scand. *á* 'river' as the second element, with the addition of the strange and not satisfactorily explained final *-l* seen, allegedly under Anglo-Norman influence, in such names as *Pevensey* (Sussex, *Pevenesel* in *Domesday Book*; where however there was a medieval castle and the centre of Norman regional administration). Needless to say, I prefer the solution given above which requires no special pleading on the basis of language contact.

The pronunciation with /z/ presumably derives from normal English intervocalic voicing of the Scand. fricative /s/, as in *Lazenby* from *leysingi* 'freedman' (or a corresponding personal name).

The spellings in *u* and *i*, followed closely in time by an unetymological *h*, are evident attempts to rationalize the second syllable, consisting of a syllabic /l/ or an /l/ preceded by the "obscure" mid-central vowel, as an element deriving from *hill/hull* and require no special comment; for this, the history of the hill-less *Bexhill* (Sussex) offers a convenient parallel.

The most serious problem with this name is not, therefore, to account for its origin, but to account for the late-medieval to modern series of spellings with *x*, suggesting a pronunciation /ks/ rather than /z/. It has come to be accepted as actually representing such a pronunciation, which has taken over completely, at least in the Lincolnshire instance. (The writer was born and brought up a few miles from here and never heard the old pronunciation used.) Such spellings are found from 1332 (Lincolnshire) and 1375 (Yorkshire; discounting a formally unclear isolated *Goxa* in 1147-68). Surely Hugh Smith was right to point out (*PN Yorkshire ER* 66) that several place-names which in modern times have *x* derive from forms which never had an etymological /k/ - e.g. *Moxby*, *Roxby*, *Throxenby* (*PN Yorkshire NR* xxxii, 29, 90, 110), and one might add those listed by Smith in *PN Yorkshire WR* VII: 90-1. Here, Smith explains: "ME *-ks-*, *-ghs-* and *-x-* often become later dialect [s, z], spelled *-z-*, *-x-*, as in the spellings of Barkisland and Barsey ([*PNY WR*] iii, 57, 58, *Bars-* 1368), Dowshill (vi, 79), Feizor (vi, 226) [etc. ..., RC]; the spellings with *-x-* in Flaxby (v, 15, *Flax-* 1407), Kexbrough (i, 318, *Kex-* 1402) and Kex Moor (v, 209, *Kex-* 1822) are inversions that arose after this development had taken place." The name of Flaxby derives, for instance, from the personal by-name *Flat*,

via **Flats-* (spelt *Flaceby* c.1185). The local, and obsolescent, pronunciations of *Moxby* and *Roxby* are /mouzbi/, /rouzbi/. Both these names are convincingly derived from Scand. personal names with /t/ in the position just before the /s/ at the relevant time: *Moxby* is **Móðulfs-bý* > **Mólfsbý* > **Mólsbý* with epenthetic /t/ between /l/ and /s/, and the resultant /ts/ spelt, at least optionally, z, as in *Molzbi* in *Domesday Book*; *Roxby* is **Rauðs-bý* > **Rautsby* with /ts/ spelt z again, as in *Rozebi* in *Domesday Book*. The letters z and x interchange reasonably frequently in ME, and some early spellings in x can therefore credibly be construed as representing /ts/ without the need to assume a medieval local sound-change /ts/ ⇒ /ks/.²

In due course, some of these names, such as *Moxby*, underwent voicing assimilation in the consonant cluster, with /tsb/ becoming /dzb/ and simplifying to /zb/. Insofar as -x- spellings were still used in *Moxby*, they could be seen as representing the phoneme /z/ or the string /wz/ (where /w/ here stands for the second element of the diphthong /ou/). Inversely, it must have been possible to spell /z/ or /wz/ as x; hence its use in *Goxhill* (/gouzl/).³ Once this usage was established, it is a simple matter to see that spelling-pronunciations become fixed in the usage of the literate classes, and through them in the usage of the children who passed through the board schools, in all the relevant names.

Why the spelling with x came to be preferred is not understood. Possibly it was because scribes were aware that some instances of x in other names represented a genuine but recessive pronunciation in /ks/, and inferred (in some sense correctly) that alternative pronunciations in /s/ or /z/ were slack rustic corruptions of this; they then assumed this to be the case for *Goxhill* and invented a /ks/ pronunciation. Be that as it may, the x spelling came to dominate in the early-mid sixteenth century in the Lincolnshire name and some time in the same century in the Yorkshire one. As can be seen from the lists of forms above, the pronunciation /ks/ is unambiguously indicated in an (alias) form of 1562 (Lincolnshire) and in a (non-alias) form of 1589 (Yorkshire), but, as already noted, did not take over till far more recently.

The evidence mentioned so far suggests that these orthographical shenanigans were a Yorkshire phenomenon, and I seem to have simply allowed it to be assumed that they occurred in the Lincolnshire name too.

However, some of the relevant conditions really are found south of the Humber; the spelling *x* for /s/ is found in *Stroxton* (Lincs.)⁴, and the pronunciation of historical /ks/ as /s/, the condition on which such inverse spellings rest, is found in *Croxton*, *Horkstow*, *Torksey* (Lincs.), and *Sproxton*, *Croxton Kerrial* and *South Croxton* (Leicestershire). Irregular emergences of spellings in *x* and (crucially for us here) the consequent novelty of a /ks/ pronunciation are also found in *Clixby* (Lincs.), *Woolfox* (Rutland), and *Cuxwold* (Lincs.; partly parallel with *Coxwold* (Yorkshire NR))⁵.

I believe, then, that the origin of the name *Goxhill* is an unattested Scand. **Gausli* '(at the) gushing spring'.

Notes

1. It is not unthinkable that an analogically-reformed nominative singular **gausill* existed, or a lexical word of the same form created after the period of *i*-umlaut. But since name-forms in the dative case are known, including Yorkshire ones, there is no special reason to pursue these possibilities.
2. It is hard to evaluate the role in this story, if any, of the Holderness euphemism *Gox* for *God* reported by Ross, Stead and Holderness (1877: 69). The word establishes, if nothing else, that syllable-final /ks/ was available as the output of conscious phonological transformations.
3. This recalls the usage of the medieval tachygraph resembling an *x* for the declensional *-us* of Latin. But the two usages are probably unrelated.
4. But this may be an analogical spelling resting on that of *Sproxton* (Leicestershire), close by, itself pronounced in modern times /sproun/, see Coates (1987: 329).
5. For the first of these, see again Coates (1987: 329). The case of *Cuxwold*/*Coxwold* is problematic and deserves a paper in itself (Coates, *infra*).

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