

## Putney: *hȳð*, *lēah* or both?

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This paper examines the early documentary evidence for the name Putney and its possible meanings. As with many names first recorded in Domesday Book, there is a considerable gap before the next occurrence. In some cases the new form suggests a change of meaning. Often, such variation is attributed to scribal error or linguistic misunderstanding in 1086. This is the case with Putney. The Domesday form, *Putelei*, appears only once again with an added element, as *Putlewrth* in a document of 1222 relating to neighbouring Barnes. Putney itself next occurs as *Puttenhuth* in 1279, and a sequence of similar forms occurs until the present spelling finally appears in the early sixteenth century. The overlooked 1222 form is further evidence for a name with the generic *lēah* and means that the DB form may not be corrupt.

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### The evidence for Putney

The Domesday entry for Putney concerns a twenty-shilling toll from *uilla putelei* in the entry for Mortlake, an eighty-hide estate of the archbishop of Canterbury also known as Wimbleton and comprising the parishes of Putney/Roehampton, Sheen/Mortlake and Wimbleton (Taylor 2010: 203–30). Only Sheen and Wimbleton are on record before 1086 (Whitelock 1930: no. I). The toll is usually assumed to refer to river traffic, always a significant element in the local economy (Gerhold 1994: 14). Putney clearly has a pre-Domesday history, with evidence of Roman settlement near the Thames, and some Anglo-Saxon fish-traps and other foreshore finds.<sup>1</sup>

Setting aside attempts to derive *Putelei* from the Latin *puteal* ‘well’ (also ‘stone surrounding of a well’), it is clear that Putney has OE roots. The DB form, apparently with OE *lēah* ‘wood, clearing, open space’ has usually been treated as ‘scribal error’ (Rumble 1987: 79–97; Roffe 1987: 81–108).

The continuous, if rather sporadic, documentary evidence for Putney begins with *Puttenhuth* in 1279. Almost all versions to 1474 have *Putten-*

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<sup>1</sup> To date, the only Anglo-Saxon finds are fifth- to seventh-century fish-traps, and two seaxes and pottery fragments of the eighth to ninth century, <[www.wandsworthhistoricalsociety.org.uk/fishtrap\\_putney.htm](http://www.wandsworthhistoricalsociety.org.uk/fishtrap_putney.htm)> accessed 14 March 2019.

as the first element, while a contracted form *Putneth* occurs occasionally until 1538, PN Sr 27. *Putney* finally appears in 1503, though the older version occurs in *Putney al[ias] Puttenheath* as late as 1639. All the medieval forms point to this being a *hȳð*-name, one of a sequence along the middle and upper Thames. PN Sr glosses the name as ‘Putta’s landing-place or quay’ (27–28), and the first element is almost always interpreted as the personal name *Putta*, rather than the putative *\*putta* ‘hawk/kite’. This is further discussed below.

The rendition of OE names and sounds into Latin in DB led to considerable spelling variation, not least in names with <ð/p>. Although *Putelei* might display the common confusion of *n* and *l*, with loss of word-final /θ/, it is possible that instead it represents a *lēah*-name, subsequently replaced by *hȳð*. Alternatively, there may have been two local names with different generics and the same qualifier. Another, distinctly less likely option, is that the three elements were combined to produce the ‘landing-place at Putta’s/ kite’s clearing/meadow’.

### Place-names in *Put-*

Such names are relatively uncommon. Although the Domesday form of Putley (He), *Poteslepe*, suggests an original *\*slæp* ‘marshy place’, later forms such as *Putelege* c.1180, *Potteleye* and *Puttele*, all suggest a *lēah*-name, closely resembling DB *Putelei* (Coplestone-Crow 2009). Putnoe (Bd) is *Puttanho* c.1053 (13), *Putenehou* in DB, and consistently retains the *-n-*, S 1517 (PN BdHu 60). Other names possibly containing *\*putta* or *Putta* are Putford, PN D 106, 160; Puttenham, PN Hrt 50; while Pitney, So, DEPN 368, may contain a side-form *\*Pytta*. PN Mx 92 suggests that Pitshanger, *Putleshangre* 1222, may contain ‘OE *pyttel* “kind of hawk or kite, a diminutive of *putta*”’.

Irrespective of whether Putney derives from *\*putta* or *Putta* and *hȳð* or *lēah*, all medieval records apart from DB have a medial *-n-*. This is however frequently omitted in DB, as evidenced locally by Balham (*Bælgenham* 957, *Belgeham* DB) and Fulham (*Fulanham* 704, *Fullanhamm* 879, *Fuleham* DB), where the *-n-* reappears sporadically in later sources but is now lost.

Consideration is now given to the alternative origins of the name Putney, whether derived from *Putta* or *\*putta*.

### Putney as woodland, clearing or meadow

The spectrum of meanings of OE *lēah* is from ‘wood’ to ‘glade, clearing’ and ‘pasture, meadow’ (EPNE 2 18–22; LPN 220–21, 237–42, 312–14). All are suitable habitats for kites, scavengers favouring broadleaved

woodland, valleys and wetland edges (Holden and Cleeves 2014: 97). It is likely that the OE personal name is derived from the bird-name. It is worth noting, however, that there are few *lēah*-names close to the Thames itself in the London area.

DB frequently renders OE *-lēah* as *-lei*, the ending used for *Putelei*, although spellings display significant regional variation, partly but not exclusively related to the county ‘Circuits’, as the following demonstrates.

DB Spelling	Circuit 1	Circuit 3	Circuit 4	Essex	Total
<b>Total</b>	152	100	129	163	444
<b>lei/leia/leie</b>	65.8	24.0	39.5	44.4	45.7
<b>lai</b>	2.6	67.0	7.8	9.5	19.6
<b>lie</b>	11.2	3.0	20.9	–	10.6
<b>lege/lega</b>	10.5	5.0	10.9	7.9	9.0
<b>lea</b>	0.7		11.6	36.5	8.8
<b>le</b>	5.2		4.6	1.6	3.4
<b>others</b>	3.9	1.0	4.6	–	2.9

Circuit 1: Brk, Ha, K, Sr, Sx; 3: Bd, Bk, C, Hrt, Mx; 4 pt.: Lei, Nth, O, St, Wa.  
The spelling figures represent percentages of the total.

*Lei* and its variants *leia/leie* represent two-thirds of the total in the south-eastern counties, whereas *lai* accounts for the same proportion in the northern Home Counties. In the south Midlands and Essex, *lei* and variants account for around two-fifths of the total. Overall, almost half of all *lēah*-names appear in DB as *lei/leia/leie*.

The Domesday evidence suggests therefore that there is no *prima facie* reason to reject *Putelei* as representing OE *\*puttan lēah*. The so-called ‘Domesday of St Paul’s’, an inquisition of 1222, is a source overlooked by earlier authorities including PN Sr; it clearly indicates the existence of the name *\*Putley* locally (LMA CLC/313/L/F/001/MS25514; Hale 1858: 103). In 1222 most services due from Barnes were agricultural. A marginal comment on 32d due at Midsummer *per terris de putlewrth et aldeland et hetha* ‘for the land of Putleworth, Oldland and [the] Heath’ is therefore exceptional. The heath is Barnes Common, which adjoins Putney Lower Common. *Aldeland* may denote long-cultivated or former arable while *Putleworth* appears to be a compound of DB *Putelei*, and OE *word* ‘enclosure’. It is possible that it represents the nineteen detached acres of

Putney located by the Thames opposite Chiswick.<sup>2</sup> Putney, Wimbledon, Sheen and Barnes all once belonged to the see of London. Apart from Barnes, they were lost after the death of bishop Theodred in 951, possibly when his successor Dunstan was translated to Canterbury in 959 (Taylor 2010: n. 1).<sup>3</sup> Whether the parent settlement still bore the name \**Putley* is impossible to tell.

### Putney as landing-place

OE *hȳð* ‘landing-place, quay’ (Germanic \**hūthjâ-*) appears to be restricted to northern Germany and southern England. It occurs widely in the Thames valley, with clusters near London and Chertsey. The former includes Erith, Stepney, Rotherhithe, *Ætheredes hyth* (later Queenhithe), Lambeth, Chelsea and Putney. Some are compounded with personal names: Stepney (*Stybba*, PN Mx 149–50), Queenhithe (earlier *Æðeredes hȳð*, Ekwall 1954: 35–36), and Putney (*Putta*, if not from \**putta* ‘kite’).<sup>4</sup> Other names relate to trade (lambs at Lambeth, cattle at Rotherhithe and, possibly, chalk at Chelsea), or to local environmental features (Erith).

*Putta* does not figure prominently in surviving sources. Examples include a seventh-century bishop of Rochester/Hereford, three Worcester charter witnesses, and a landmark in the bounds of Bedwyn (W) (Searle 1897: 391). While personal-name origins were once almost a default option in the interpretation of names, many could equally derive from the common nouns behind the personal names: \**putta* ‘hawk, kite’ in the case of Putney, albeit not recorded independently in OE (EPNE 2 75; Ekwall 1936: 91f). Red kites were certainly found in the London area in post-medieval times.<sup>5</sup> Apparently synonymous terms for kites appear in names: OE *glente* ‘kite/hawk’, the qualifier in Glanty near Egham; and OE *glida* ‘kite’, occurs in Glead Marsh in Battersea (*Glydemarshe* 1474, PN Sr 121, 372).

All medieval spellings of Putney post-Domesday consistently feature <-n->, representing the OE genitive, and <h> representing the initial consonant of OE *hȳð*. Not until after 1639 is the <h> lost. Similar

<sup>2</sup> Later a lot-meadow for Putney and Roehampton virgate-holders, it may represent the site of a fishery allegedly set up ‘by force’ (*vi construxit*) by Harold ‘on Kingston and St Paul’s land’ (DB I, 31r).

<sup>3</sup> An echo of St Paul’s ownership is found in DB I, where the Canons of St. Paul’s held 8 hides at Barnes which gelded with the Archbishop’s manor of Mortlake (DB I, 34r).

<sup>4</sup> The name Putney has been the subject of considerable debate locally in the *Wandsworth Historian* (WH). There is an online *Index* at <[www.wandsworthhistory.org.uk/publications.htm](http://www.wandsworthhistory.org.uk/publications.htm)> and a DVD Digital Archive.

<sup>5</sup> Shakespeare described London as a ‘city of kites and crows’ in *Coriolanus* (Act 4, Scene 5).

sequences occur at Stepney (*Stybbanhyþe* c.1000 > *Stibenhed* 1086 > *Stebbunhuth* 1323 > *Stebeneth alias Stepney* 1466, PN Mx 149–50; and Chelsea (*Celchyth* 789 (10th) > *Cealchithe* 1071–75 > *Chelchuthe* 1309 > *Chelsey* 1523, PN Mx 149).

The ‘transmission error’ theory for Putney may be tested by comparing DB spellings of place-names containing *hȳð*, and the consistency with which they were used. DB often has <h> and <d> in undisputed *hȳð*-names: e.g. Chelsea (*Chelchede*), Stepney (*Stibenhede*). Just before DB, Lambeth appears as *Lambhyð* (1041) and *Lambehyðe* (1062). The /y:/ sound in *hȳð* is often rendered *huthe* by the thirteenth century (e.g. *Puttenhuth[e]* 1279). On this basis, one might expect \**Putnede* or \**Puttenhede* for Putney in DB, or, if the scribe followed the example of nearby Lambeth (*Lanchei* 1086, PN Sr 22), *Put[n]hei*). In that case, *Putelei* may possibly represent a ‘slip of the pen’.

### **Putney as landing-place and clearing?**

Retention of a qualifier with a new generic is not of course unknown. In some cases, the change marks a shifting settlement focus, for example Middle-Saxon *Lundenwic* replaced by *Lundenburh*, and *Hamwic* by *Hamtun* (Southampton) (Leary et al. 2004; Brooke 1975: 15–26, 58–64; Holdsworth 1984: 331–43).

Alternatively, two adjacent settlements with the same qualifier may have coexisted, with only one named in DB. At Putney, the focus of settlement underwent a major rearrangement when a planned village was laid out along High Street in association with an open-field system. Unfortunately, there is no documentary evidence for when this occurred (Bailey 1986: 1–8; Gerhold 1987: 8–13). By 1279, the settlement at ‘Putta’s or kite’s clearing’ could have been abandoned, while the landing-place remained a key focus in the local economy, in which both agriculture and river traffic were important.

Although only documented from the late fifteenth century, some later field- and furlong-names offer clues to lost settlements in Putney. Examples include Nether and Upper Thunstall (1497; from OE *tūnsteall* ‘site of a farm, a farmstead’). These lay next to Putney Common at the west end of Thames Field. Tunstall was regularly used to indicate lost or abandoned settlements, EPNE 2 198. Another possible settlement site is Cadd Haw (OE *Cadanhaga* ‘Cada’s hedge/enclosure’). This was close to the landing-place and to the Roman settlement (Fuentes and Greenwood 1993). East of the Putney (High) Street lay Baston Field, one of six common fields. The generic is clearly *tūn*, though the qualifier is problematic. It may be a personal name (*Basa/Bassa*), or OE *bæst* ‘lime

tree', EPNE 1 16, VEPN 1 61–62 (cf. modern 'bast', lime bark used in rope-making).<sup>6</sup> The proximity of Thunstall to Barnes parish may tilt the balance of probabilities towards it being the site of *puttan lēah*, the 'kite's clearing'.

If there was only one late-eleventh-century settlement site by the Thames, the qualifier may have referred to not one, but two distinct features, as in *Putleworth*, discussed above. A putative *\*Puttanlēah-hyð* 'landing-place at Putta's/kite's clearing' could readily lend itself to reduction as Putney.<sup>7</sup>

### Roehampton

The origins of Roehampton, always administratively subordinate to Putney, are equally obscure. Lacking the important landing-place that ensured Putney's appearance, DB ignored Roehampton. It first occurs as *Est Hampton* in 1318/1332 and *Hampton[e]/Hamton'* in 1332/1350. Between 1350 and the appearance of the modern form in 1645 came *Rokehampton*, *Roughampton*, *Rowhampton* and *Rouhampton*, *inter alia*. The first element might be *hrōc*/ ME *roke* 'rook', or ME *ruze* 'rough' (OE *rūh*), PN Sr 28, EPNE 2 88. PN Sr opted for *roke* 'rook' + *hāmtūn* 'home farm', although *hammtūn* 'farm in an enclosed area' seems equally appropriate (Gerhold 2001).<sup>8</sup> Roehampton had its own field system with twenty virgates, half as many as at Putney, suggesting deliberate planning in both cases, concentrating hitherto scattered settlements into new villages.

### Conclusion

The clusters of *hyð*-names along the Thames, along with a readiness to accept the DB form as 'scribal error', has resulted in little consideration being given to possible alternative origins of Putney. Analysis of Domesday forms of known *lēah* names shows that *-lei* and its variants are the commonest form in south-east England. This is supported by the overlooked record of *Putleworth* in 1222, a source available in print since 1858.

It is of course possible that, given the significance of river traffic, a landing-place called *Puttanhyð* long pre-dated Domesday Book. This was always little more than a beach-landing on the Thames gravels, with no formal quays. The admittedly limited medieval evidence raises the possibility that 'Putta's or kite's clearing' or 'Putta's or kite's landing-

<sup>6</sup> Lime Grove, an estate on Putney Hill indicates that the tree grew locally.

<sup>7</sup> I owe this suggestion to Paul Cavill, pers. comm.

<sup>8</sup> DEPN does not mention Roehampton, while CDEPN opts for *hāmtūn*.

place' were distinct settlements, rather than alternative names for the same location.

At the end of the day, the absence of written evidence between 1086 and 1279 makes it impossible to know whether or not *Putelei* (from OE *\*puttanlēah*) is an error for *Puttanhyð*. Taking the admittedly patchy evidence, however, it seems likely that there were two small settlements close to the Thames, both named from *Putta*/*\*putta*. These were superseded by a planned medieval village and open-field system whose main thoroughfare ran south from the landing-place. Another solution to the conundrum posed by Putney is that it represents a triple compound, *\*Puttanlēahhyð* 'landing-place at kite's clearing', a tongue-twister ultimately reduced to Putney.

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