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For the first time, abbreviations for counties, languages, county place-name surveys, and other frequently-cited publications can be found in the back of this volume.

The Bibliography for 2017 will appear in *The Journal of the English Place-Name Society* 51 (2019).

Medieval place-names in a landscape: Branscombe

John Torrance

Inspired by the approach of Margaret Gelling and Ann Cole to place-name studies, and taking Branscombe as an instance, the article seeks to locate medieval topographical minor names in a village landscape. Old and Middle English elements in the place-names are identified, although the antiquity of many names is very uncertain. The aim is to enlarge understanding of how this landscape was seen and lived in during the Middle Ages. The subjects discussed are the influence of topography on the parish boundaries, medieval names for valleys and hills, medieval and later names for the hamlets composing the village, medieval awareness of prehistoric remains, and medieval farm names that signposted routes in and out of the village.

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Introduction

This article was inspired by Margaret Gelling's studies of old topographical place-names in their landscape settings, which she built upon in work with Ann Cole (Gelling 1984; Gelling and Cole 2014). But while Gelling's and Cole's work studied pre-Conquest settlement names in order to generalize about nuances of meaning in Old English names of topographical features, this article will examine the landscape settings of medieval place-names in a single parish and village. Branscombe (SY 195885) in East Devon has been chosen because the author knows well both the place and the sources.

This miniature focus means that the aims and results of the article differ from Gelling and Cole's; the names studied are minor names, seldom evidenced before the thirteenth century, most of them only from the fourteenth. Old English (OE) elements from which these Middle English (ME) names ultimately derive are mostly recognisable, and will be given in parenthesis after a name's first mention. But the place-name itself could be either late ME or a ME version of a pre-Conquest place-name. Because

of this uncertainty caution will be exercised in using Gelling's and Cole's criteria to assess a name's fit with its landscape setting.

If OE nuances of meaning seem to persist, this might suggest either a pre-Conquest origin for the name, or that older nuances were preserved in ME naming; either would be interesting, but they are hard to distinguish. Where meanings depart from OE norms, much would depend on whether the naming looks likely, for other reasons, to date from before or after the Conquest, or whether such departures are known to have been common early on. The overall aim, however, will be to see how far medieval minor names afford understanding of how the inhabitants perceived and used the landscape they inherited, together with its place-names, from their ancestors.

The old topographical names we know of in Branscombe are only some of those that once existed, a selection biased towards those still in use. Place-names deriving from personal names will be largely ignored, but full use will be made of those medieval personal names, such as John *atte Slade*, that contain topographical place-names, for which they are often the only evidence.

The main sources used are reports of visitations carried out for the Dean and Chapter of Exeter Cathedral, as lords of the manor, in 1281, 1301, 1307, 1318 and 1330;[1] the Devon Lay Subsidy Rolls of 1327 and 1332;[2] and a Branscombe rental and custumal of 1339.[3] Retrospective clues to locations are found in a rental of 1506,[4] the Branscombe Manor Court Rolls, 1684–1732,[5] an estate map with a schedule of leasehold and copyhold tenancies of 1793,[6] and the tithe map and apportionments of 1840.[7] Names from all these sources are referenced in the text by date only, not footnoted; references for other sources of medieval names are given in the text or in footnotes.

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[1]   1281: Exeter D&C 3672a (trans. R. Bass in ECA). 1301 and 1307: Hingeston-Randolph 1892, 193–96, with English paraphrase in Hingeston-Randolph 1890. 1318: Exeter D&C 2850 (trans. R. Bass in ECA). 1330: Hingeston-Randolph 1894–99: **1** 574.

[2]   1327: The National Archives, E179/95/6 (partly transcribed by Christopher Wakefield, Ottery St Mary History Society). 1332: Erskine 1969, 43–45.

[3]   Exeter D&C 3683, with MS transcription by J. Y. A. Morshead in Branscombe 'scrapbook' in DHC.

[4]   Exeter D&C MS 3684, fo. 6.

[5]   DHC Z17/1/3/1–2. Translation courtesy of D. Robinson.

[6]   DHC 98/8785, and at <http://www.branscombeproject.org.uk>.

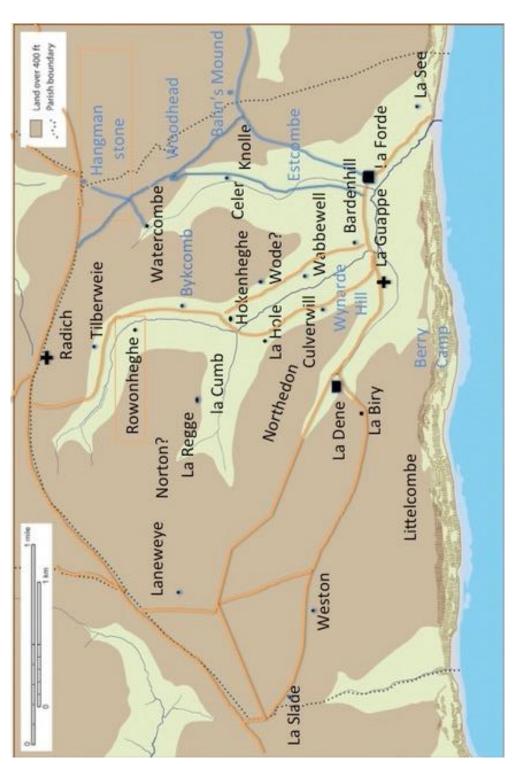[7]   At <http://www.eastdevonaonb.org.uk/dro/index.html>.

Figure 1: Branscombe parish. Fourteenth-century place-names are in black, later place-names mentioned in the article in blue. Medieval roads discussed in the article are in orange, other probable medieval roads in blue. Blank map kindly supplied by Sean Goddard.

The topographical setting

The distinctive topography of Branscombe has influenced its settlement pattern, and even the somewhat semi-circular shape of the parish. (The reader may wish to refer to the map in Figure 1.) Its northern boundary is the Exeter–Lyme Regis road (A3052), running in an arc which culminates about two and a quarter miles north of the centre of Branscombe's four and a half miles of east-west coastline. This road, like the turnpike and highway that preceded it, follows the line of a prehistoric ridgeway curving between the Branscombe valleys to the south and the valley-systems of the rivers Sid to the north-west, and Coly to the north-east. It was used, and possibly improved, by the Romans, and has defined the northern span of Branscombe's parochial, manorial and civil boundaries since Anglo-Saxon times (Sheldon 1928: 28).

Most of the western half of this semi-circular space is a gently rolling plateau about 500 feet (160 metres) above sea level. In the eastern half, the plateau is deeply dissected by three valleys, each with a stream. The streams meet in a basin to the south, walled in from the sea by the cliffs of a coastal ridge, through which the unnamed little river formed by the streams has worn an outlet to the beach at Branscombe Mouth. This basin, which has the appearance of a broad, steep-sided valley opening up from the west and bending towards the sea, is presumably the *combe* in Branscombe, whose name first appears in King Alfred's will of about 880 as *Branecescumb* (DEPN 60). It will be referred to in what follows as the 'main combe'. More of a trough than a bowl, it is a fairly good example of the usage found for *cumb* names by Gelling and Cole (see below). Its shallower western slope provides the setting for the church, probably on the site of an Anglo-Saxon church, with its east end facing down the valley. (Higham 2008: 125). From most of the valley, the opening to Branscombe Mouth is invisible.

The village, always given more to farming than fishing, grew partly from settlements where the three valleys open into the main combe. It was hidden from both hinterland and sea, but although topographically and territorially contained and secluded, the village was not nucleated, but a scatter of hamlets and farms typical of the ancient countryside of East Devon.

Valleys

The three converging valleys in the eastern half of the parish are very conspicuous features on the map, but this appearance, a product of the mapmakers' abstract aerial viewpoint, is at odds with everyday perceptions now and in the past. The valleys are hidden rather than conspicuous, and

have remained nameless, referred to simply as the eastern, central and western valleys. Medieval place-names are numerous in the valleys because they were desirable settlement sites, but they designate different parts of the valleys, and refer to topographical characteristics as seen and experienced by those who walked and worked the land.

Foremost amongst these characteristics are perceived shapes of valleys. Old English had several words for 'valley', among them *cumb* (> combe, coomb) and *denu* (> dene, dean). Gelling and Cole (LPN 103–7, 113–15; Gelling 1984: 89, 97) have shown that these names tended to be given to valleys of different shapes: *cumb* is 'mostly used of shorter, broader valleys than *denu*, and these [*cumb*] valleys are usually bowl- or trough-shaped, with three fairly steeply rising sides'. On the other hand, *denu* 'is mostly used of long, narrow valleys with two moderately steep sides and a gentle gradient along most of their length'. This distinction applies quite well to Branscombe's three valleys.

The eastern valley

In the eastern valley, the two principal farm names are Eastcombe and Watercombe. By the eighteenth century (and possibly earlier) when there were more farms in the valley, these names were used to distinguish, respectively, the lower and upper parts of the valley, which are largely hidden from each other by a bend.[8] Eastcombe Farm was then renamed Lower House, and Watercombe Farm became Lower Watercombe with Higher Watercombe beyond it.

It is curious, since Eastcombe Farm was a major farm in recent centuries, owning valuable meadowland in the lower valley, that the name does not appear before 1506 (*Estcombe*). The reason may be that the farm stands at the foot of, and owns, the most striking feature in the lower valley: an especially steep-sided spur with a rounded summit, projecting from the plateau above, known as Knowle or Great Knowle (OE *cnoll* 'knoll'). This might have given the farm its earliest name: Roger *atte Knolle*'s holding in 1332 may have been the precursor of Eastcombe Farm.

According to Gelling and Cole (LPN 157), *cnoll* was originally applied to truncated conical hills, a classic example being Brent Knoll in Somerset, but was used more widely later. In this case, Knowle is a spur, not a freestanding hill; but viewed from the valley, or from the far side of the main combe, its shape is indeed that of a truncated cone—an interesting

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8   The first conclusive evidence that Eastcombe referred to the whole lower part of the valley, not just Eastcombe farm with its land, is a manor court roll entry in 1701 for 'that tenement ... known by the name of Scott Hayes, lying in East Combe'.

modification of the norm, since so conspicuous a feature may well have been named before the Conquest.

Watercombe is known from 1238 (Summerson 1985: 19). The medieval farm was a freehold, which suggests it was the result of medieval clearance and colonisation in a remote valley, undertaken on a promise of heritable tenure. The name may therefore be no earlier than the twelfth century, but (like the Domesday Book settlement name *Watercombe* in Dorset) it fits LPN's (30–31) criteria for both *cumb* and OE *wæter* 'water', since the prefix, meaning 'wet', suits the boggy floor and flood-proneness of the upper valley.

Other place-names in the upper valley show that its south-eastern slope was wooded, as it still partly is, and iron slag found in the stream suggests that the underwood was used for smelting. Sellar's Wood is a property on this slope known in 1269 as *Celer* (ME *celer* 'storehouse'), perhaps having an industrial purpose (Reichel 1912: **1** 367, **2** 17). The property was called *Sylnerwode* in 1506 and *Searles Wood* in 1660.[9] Woodhead, a farm on the plateau above this eastern side of the valley, close to the upper end of the wood, is recorded in the manor court rolls as changing hands in 1715, but the name, like some of the farm buildings, must be much older. It may have been the holding of Lucas *de Bosco* (1281), otherwise Luke *Attawode* (1307), unless this was at Woodhouse in the central valley (see below).

The central valley

The central valley, biggest of the three, has two parallel branches, created by two streams running from west to south-east, one north of the other. These branches are self-contained valleys hidden from each other. The northern, or upper, branch turns south after about a mile, and about two-thirds of a mile further south its stream is joined by the stream flowing out of the southern, or lower, branch. Below the confluence a single valley continues southwards.

The upper branch is long and narrow, a typical *denu* shape not matched by its name, Youngcombe. It is wooded, has had no known habitation, and may have had no medieval name. Youngcombe has not so far been found earlier than 1729 and probably dates from a time when *combe* meant 'valley' regardless of shape. [10]

An early name in the upper branch is *Rowonheghe*, a farm held by *John Rocke* in 1339. It can be identified with a farm on the west side, just below the point where the valley bends south, known as *Rokynhen* in 1506, and

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subsequently as Rockenhayne. Apparently, therefore, it came to be named after the Rocke family. The older qualifying element *rowon,* however, may have been topographical, and an explanation that would fit the terrain is *rūh*, dat. *rūhan*, *rūwan*, 'rough'.[11] The generic *heghe* or *hayne* (OE *(ge)haeg* 'enclosure') is particularly common in East Devon, where the ME form *hei(e)* came to mean little more than 'farm' or 'holding' (PN D 129). However, *Rowonheghe*, like Watercombe, was a freehold in the fourteenth century, which suggests it was a medieval assart. If so, it would be odd for its name to contain an inflected OE adjective. On the other hand, if it was really an OE name, its obsolescence might have assisted the change to Rockenhayne.

The lower branch of the central valley has a different character from the upper. Two streams that rise and meet at its western end have broadened it out into a steep-sided trough containing valuable grassland. This trough was referred to as *La Cumb* and *La Coumbe* in an undated deed of about 1294, by which the Dean and Chapter granted to Richard de Brankescombe land 'outside our park there'.[12] A later farm called Poole Lands may have been a relic of this 'park': it contained a field called *combe ground* (1793, 1840) and two hillsides at the head of the valley, called *south warren* and *old warren*, corrupted by 1971 to *old woman*.

Richard de Brankescombe had already been granted the nearby tenement and land of Edge, confirmed in 1296 as 'in free socage by right of inheritance forever'.[13] Edge Barton Manor (as it is now called) stands on a shelf in the steep north slope of the lower branch valley. The name was written *La Regge* in this and other deeds of the 1290s, but in 1339 it was spelt *Ecg* and in 1374 *La Egge*, both consistent with derivation from OE *ecg* 'edge' (Hingeston-Randolph 1901–6: **1** 356). The house is on an almost cliff-like edge, not a ridge, and OE *hrycg* 'ridge' would not have become *regge*. The intrusive <r> looks like an erroneous transcription of speech, either by misdivision of a ME phrase such as *at ther ecg*, or perhaps from interpolation due to the difficulty of saying *La Egge*. This would not

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[11]   As suggested by a peer reviewer of this article. The tree-name 'rowan', of northern origin, can be ruled out here. *Rowonheghe* might have been the 'croft called *La Rewe* in the parish of Branscombe' that Richard de Branscombe acquired from John Rocke, according to a deed of 1368 (DHC 123M/TB 259). *Rewe* (OE *ræw* 'row, e.g. hedgerow') is a place-name elsewhere in East Devon—a somewhat unlikely qualifier, however, for *heghe*.

[12]   Exeter D&C 682.

[13]   Exeter D&C 681, 684.

be the last such misunderstanding: on Donn's map of 1765, and on the first OS map of 1809, it is called *Hedge*.

The stream from this lower branch meets the stream running southwards from the upper branch on land that once belonged to a farm whose eighteenth-century name was *Hooknell* (1710).[14] The name was probably a contraction of 'Hooken hill', just as eighteenth-century *Barnell*, further down the valley, evolved from fourteenth-century *Bardenhill* (see below). *Hooknell* was apparently the name given to an amalgamation of the two holdings in 1339 of *John Hokenleghe* and *William Hokenheghe*, which is identifiable as a single unnamed farm in the 1506 rental. John's farmhouse was probably on the site called *Little Hooknell* on the 1889 OS map, reached by a ford through the stream above the junction, and now a platform known as 'gamekeeper's cottage' after its last tenant. John would have had the grassland west of the stream (*leghe* from OE *lēah,* meaning '"light area" (amidst or surrounded by woodland)' (Wager 2017: 118). William's farmhouse was probably on the site of the now ruined and overgrown *Hooknell* farmhouse on the slope east of the stream, with enclosed land (ME *hei(e)*) on the hillside above.[15]

Hook (OE *hōc* 'hook'), present in both ME names, was used of 'various topographical features resembling a hook: a bend in a river, projecting corner or bend in a hill, hill-spur, etc.' (DOE; cf. EPNE). The stream from the lower branch valley makes a bend here, before the confluence, and the lower branch valley itself would appear to someone walking up from the south to bend away to the left. Either might be described as hook-like. However, the recurrent *-en* in *Hokenleghe* and *Hokenhegh* is a ME plural derived from an OE dative plural, suggesting a hypothetical OE **hocum* '(place at) the hooks'.[16] A nearby feature having three hook-like bends is the sinuous zigzag road up the hill behind *Hooknell* farmhouse, a striking feature on the 1793 map. It is now overgrown and barely passable, but was then the main road east from this part of the central valley. It forms the southern boundary of the farm, which suggests a medieval origin. It would be of interest if this gave rise to the place-name, for two reasons. First, since the ME form echoed an OE inflection, it may point to a man-made feature of the pre-Conquest landscape. Secondly, it invites a search for

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[14]   The last syllable of Hooknell probably embodies 'hill' and refers to the steep eastern hillside above the farm. Compare the evolution of *Bardenhill* (1339) into Barnell.

[15]   The 1332 lay subsidy lists John *Hokeneheyne*. The Hooknell farmhouse, ruined in 1793, was repaired and used until the twentieth century.

[16]   As suggested by one of the peer reviewers of this article.

parallels: are there *hōc* place-names elsewhere associated with bends in roads, and plural forms associated with zigzags?[17] A number of stretches of road in England are now called *Zigzag Hill*, but 'zigzag' was a new word in the early eighteenth century (OED), so what were they called before?

After widening at the confluence, the central valley narrows again quite dramatically as the stream flows south.[18] Hole House, part of which is of fourteenth-century date, stands on a shelf at the spring-line on the western slope, and was the home of Richard *de la Hole* (1238) and his descendants (Hingeston-Randolph 1901–6: **1** 356). The name, from OE *holh* or *hol* 'a hollow place', would have referred to the deep, narrow valley below, known as Hole Bottom and containing the eighteenth-century Hole Mill, which may have had a medieval antecedent.

Woodhouse Farm, on a gentler eastern slope opposite Hole House, may have been the *Wode* (OE *wudu* 'wood') held by Luke *Attawode* (1281, 1307) unless he held Woodhead in the eastern valley, as suggested above. Gelling and Cole (LPN 258) note that the recurrent name Woodhouse may indicate a 'building which housed people who had functions connected with the management of woodland', and a William *Wodeward* was a juryman at Branscombe in 1307.

Where the valley widens below Hole, there were two medieval holdings on opposite sides, *Culverwill* (1339) and *Wabbewell* (1238) (Hingeston-Randolph 1901-6: **1** 356). *Culver* lingered on after the Middle Ages as a later form of OE *culfre* 'dove, pigeon'; possibly there was a medieval dovecote here, although there is no evidence of one. In the eighteenth century these properties were called *Culverhole* and *Little Culverhole*, but *Wabble* reappeared on the first OS map (1809) and the house-names are now Culverwell and Wobble.

The well in these names (OE *wella*) is a piped spring, typically called a 'shute' in other parts of the village, where the water flows out for public use. All the farmhouses on these slopes, as elsewhere in the village, lie on spring-lines where the porous upper greensand of the Early Cretaceous rests on impermeable Late Triassic mudstone, a geological unconformity which here is near the 80-metre contour line. Possibly the first element of *Wabbewell* refers to a movement or sound of the water.

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[17]   *Hooken Cliff*, for example, between Branscombe Mouth and Beer Head, may have had a zigzag path down to the sea. But if so, it would have been destroyed by a major landslip there in 1791.

[18]   Middlecombe, a name for the lower part of the central valley, including Hooknell, has not been found before its occurrence in the manor court roll in 1680, DHC Z17/1/3/1.

Where the central valley joins the main combe, it appears as a wide gap between hills on each side. This was *La Guappe* in 1339, when land 'supra *La Guappe*' was rented by John *atte Brygge* on the west side and by another tenant on the east side.

The western valley

The western valley is unlike the other two. From below, the western end of the main combe appears to be closed by hills behind the elevated view of the church in its churchyard, and of Church Living Farm, opposite, which until 1463 was the mansion used by canons acting as stewards of the manor for the Dean and Chapter.[19] In fact, the western valley opens from here, but invisibly, round a bend, and then makes a long straight ascent towards the north-west. It is narrow, steep-sided at first, and a few settlements clinging to its northern slope are post-medieval; then, as it mounts into the western plateau, it shallows out and becomes slightly sinuous. On the way there is an important interruption, where a steep side-valley joins it from the south, creating a fairly level triangular area occupied by the hamlet of Street. Above Street, both the western valley and the side-valley are dry, but a copious spring-line at Street, piped into three shutes, feeds a stream that flows on down through the lower part of the valley, past the church, and powers the mill.

This upper part, from Street upwards, was *La Dene* in 1339. This was also the name of a large freehold pasture, probably a sheep-run, on the plateau to the south of the valley head, known later as *Deanelandes* (1596)[20] and *Higher Dean*. A farm established at Street in the early sixteenth century took the name Lower Deane. The holdings of John and Henry *de la Dene* (1294),[21] Richard *in the Dene*, senior and junior (1339), and Lucas *in the Dene* (1339) were either at Street or, more probably, in the western valley above it, where there were several small farms in later years.

With its gentle gradient, this long valley conforms to Gelling's and Cole's (LPN 122) definition of *denu*-type names given above, and the use of the name *Dean* here, in a county where it is uncommon, may well date from before the Conquest.

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[19]   Exeter D&C 6017/2.
[20]   DHC 123M/L1282. Cf. 'five closes called *Deanelandes*' (1607) in DHC 123M/L768.
[21]   Exeter D&C 681.

A fourth valley

A fourth valley formed the western boundary of the parish, separating Branscombe from Salcombe Regis. It is the only natural feature that interrupts the high plateau west of Street; but for its existence, the hamlet of Weston, nearer to Salcombe than to Branscombe, might have been Easton, and part of Salcombe parish.

This valley also has two different parts: the lower part turns into a ravine falling steeply to the sea, contained in a wider half-bowl-shaped valley whose current name is Weston Combe. The gentler upper part was called *La Slade* in the Middle Ages. Slade House stands near the head of the valley on the Salcombe side, close to the Exeter–Lyme Regis road, and the lane from there to Weston is called Slade Lane. Thomas *Attaslade* (1307) and John *atte Sclade* (1339) held land on the Branscombe side.

Slade is OE *slaed*, often used for minor flat-bottomed valleys shorter than a *denu* but lacking the shape of a *cumb*, and often damp (Gelling 1984: 122; LPN 141). The landforms in this case suggest a damp valley in the past, but the spring-fed stream shown on OS maps is now a winterbourne, running beside the footpath. Brimclose Hill, lower down the valley, was *Browme Close* in 1525 and may have been the holding of John *de Bromelegh* (OE *brōm* 'broom' and ME *ley* 'meadow') in 1307 (PN D 621).

John *atte Sclade* rented 'ab antiquo' a further eight acres at *Blakelond* (black land) adjacent to his main holding. Early medieval names ending *-land* were sometimes applied to newly cleared arable, in this case perhaps brought into cultivation by an ancestor (Gelling 1984: 245–48; LPN 279). 'Black' may refer to soil darker than Branscombe's brown flinty clay, possibly darkened by earlier settlement.

A fifth valley

A fifth valley, known as *Littelcombe* in 1238 and now Littlecombe Shoot, is a small hanging valley scooped out of the cliff-wall west of Berry Camp (see below) (Summerson 1985: 17). It affords precipitous access to the sea.

Hills

Branscombe's three deep valleys are separated by spurs and ridges, but apart from Knowle, discussed above, old hill-names are elusive. In 1339, John *Le Taylor* had a holding 'on *Northedon*'. The name *down* (OE *dūn*) was usually given to low, flat-topped hills (Gelling 1984: 148; LPN 164). A farm called Taylor's persisted until modern times on the broad flat-topped ridge between the upper part of the western valley (*La Dene*) and the lower branch of the central valley (*La Cumb*). *Northedon* reappears as *Nordone* in 1506, tenanted by Charles *Holcombe* of Hole House, which lies

below the ridge on the north side.[22] The name *Northedon* must refer to its position north of Street; it is not in the northern part of the parish.

The rental of 1506 listed 'half of *Wynarde Hill*', which can be located by field-names. The same document attributed to Church Living Farm, in the lower part of the western valley, four acres called *wynaryes*, and in 1793 this acreage comprised two fields called *great* and *little winnard* on the south-facing slope above the farmhouse, overlooking the main combe. It sounds as if this was a vineyard (< OE *wīn-geard*; ME *winyerd* is a common reflex (MED)) in the balmier climate of the earlier Middle Ages, producing wine for sacramental use in church or for the pleasure of the canons in Exeter. This 'Vineyard Hill' forms the lower, eastern end of the same ridge as *Northedon*; it lies between the lower parts of the western and central valleys, and was known later as *Culverwell Hill* and *Clapps Hill*.

This ridge ends at the mouth of the central valley, called *La Guappe* in 1339, when Stephen *de Bardenhill* had a holding (William *Berdenhill* in 1327, *Bernhill* in 1506, later Barnells) on the hillside beyond (later known as Margells Hill or Castle Hill). *Bardenhill* (OE *hyll* 'hill') was presumably the name of this hill, but the qualifier is obscure unless it comes from an OE personal name such as **Bearda* (as in Barnstaple: PN D 25).

There is a similar problem with the 1339 holding of Thomas *Bykenhill*. *Bike-* or *Byke-* is a common first element in Devon place-names, thought to embody a well-recorded south-western Saxon personal name *Bicca*, so '*Bicca's* hill' (PN D 125). But might Thomas's name have meant simply, in ME, that his holding was 'by Ken Hill'? *Ken-* is also a common element in Devon names, and is also often traced back to an OE personal name.

Locating Thomas's holding is another problem, for no later form of *Bykenhill* has survived. On the other hand, the comprehensive 1339 rental contains no medieval version of Beckham (*Bykcomb* in 1495, *Bickham* in 1840), which is a farm in the upper central valley, on the eastern side below Rockenhayne. Beckham's farmland was on the hill above, so a change of name from 'hill' to 'combe', from *Bykenhill* to *Bykcomb,* between 1339 and 1495, is not impossible. If it occurred, one might have to entertain the notion, unlikely as it may seem, that Anglo-Saxon personal names, **Bearda* and *Bicca*, clung to these two hills for nearly three hundred years after the Conquest. Both are part of the long spur separating the central and eastern valleys. [23]

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[22]   A neighbouring parcel of land was called Northern Edge in recent centuries.

[23]   An unidentified hill name is Blakedon (Blackdown), where Leticia Symthos had a holding in 1339.

Four hamlets

Branscombe village straggles between two main hamlets, currently called Street and Square. Street is nearly halfway up the western valley; Square is at the mouth of the eastern valley and open to the main combe.

Their story is inseparable from that of the winding road that linked Street and the church, in the western valley, to the mouths of the central and eastern valleys and the sea. During the Middle Ages this was more than just a road. The 1840 tithe apportionments annotate as 'barton land' the land that was part of the medieval demesne, and this shows that the road was the boundary between demesne land, or the home farm, and 'native land', let to tenants. The floor and southern slopes of the main combe, including the best meadowland, the 'lord's wood' (1307), the 'lord's mill' (1339), and a plantation later called *withy beare* (OE *bearu* 'grove') were all part of the demesne, with access to the sea. The home farm was divided into tenant farms in the fifteenth century, so farm-names in this area are post-medieval.

The most important stop on the road, after the two hamlets, the church, and the canons' mansion facing it, was Bridge, at the mouth of the central valley. It has never quite been a hamlet, although here, as at Street and at Square, roads enter the village. Although the names of the two hamlets have changed from time to time, the name of Bridge (OE *brycg*), found in the names of John and Walter *atte Brygge* in 1339, has stayed the same since the first bridge was built.

Street

The side-valley that joins the western valley at Street contains a road leading uphill to Berry Barton Farm, at its head, which is on the site of the medieval home farmstead, *La Biry* (see below). The hamlet, surrounded on three sides by demesne land, must always have been closely connected with the home farm, whose arable, where much of the tenants' labour service was performed, lay on the high ground above Street, to the west. Conceivably the hamlet began as a settlement of the five bordars listed at Branscombe in Domesday Book, who would have been the main labour force on the Anglo-Saxon equivalent to the home farm, the *inland* (DB 284; Faith 1997: 70–74). The existence of a medieval hamlet here has recently been confirmed by a limited archaeological investigation, which found vernacular pottery dating from the eleventh century, but mostly from the period 1250–1400.

William *atte Strete*'s name in 1333 testifies to the age of the place-name (PN D 621). *Strete* (OE *strǣt*) probably designated only part of the medieval hamlet, which in the fourteenth century seems to have shared the

name of its valley, *La Dene*. This was certainly the case later. Manor court rolls between 1682 and 1706 mention cottages 'in *le Deane*',[24] which must mean the hamlet rather than the valley, and its name was *Dean* on Donn's map (1765) and in parish registers until 1824. Then *Street* was used until 1838, when *Dean* again became normal until 1866. The 1841 census called it *Dean*, but from 1851 onwards the enumerators broke the hamlet down into separate groups of cottages. At that time the cottages called *Dean* held only two families, while a row of cottages called *Pound Tenement* (possibly built on land probably tenanted by Roger *atte Punde* in 1339) held ten, and nine were listed under Street. By 1861 Street, with twenty families, was becoming the hamlet's regular name, and after 1866 only Street was used.

Square

The earliest name (1269) of Square was *La Forde* (OE *ford*): the village road forded the western valley stream here, now culverted. It was in that year that Branscombe's first vicar, Lawrence of Sidbury, was given a vicarage and a glebe, called *Personesheghe* ('parson's enclosure', ME *hei(e)*) carved out of demesne land (Hingeston-Randolph 1889: 35). There was also a farm at *La Forde* in 1339, held as a freehold by John Rocke, which became *Fordelond* in 1506 and *Fords Ground* in 1660; at that time it belonged to the heirs of William Wotton, and was known thereafter as *Wootons*, still a house-name nearby.[25]

There has been no archaeological dig to discover whether a hamlet already existed at *La Forde* in the Middle Ages. However, the Historic Landscape Characterisation map of Devon shows open-field farming on Stockham's Hill, to the east, and this is where the cultivators would have lived.[26] The hamlet's name has changed: *Vicarage*, its name in the 1841 census, was replaced by *Village* from 1881 to 1911; Square seems to have been a mid-twentieth-century coinage.

Weston

This hamlet's name, in the western half of the parish, first appears in the holding there of John *de Westone* in 1307. Field-names and field-shapes suggest that his holding was largely surrounded by an open field, possibly called The Dean's Field, and a hamlet may have housed the strip-farmers (Torrance 2012: 47). By the eighteenth century it had become little more

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[24]   DHC Z17/1/3/1.
[25]   Exeter D&C 6018/1/4.
[26]   The HLC map of Devon is available at:
<http://gis.devon.gov.uk/basedata/viewer.asp?DCCService=hlc>.

than a group of farmhouses, and by 1840 the farms' names—Mitchel's, Ash's and Jenkins' Weston, Lower Weston, etc.—had spread the name Weston over much of the western part of the parish.

Norton

Norton (OE *norð tūn* 'north settlement') is a lost hamlet in the north of the parish. In 1294 the Dean and Chapter granted to '*Jordan*, our clerk' land at *Norton* formerly held by five villeins.[27] At about the same date Richard *de Brankescombe* received land at *Norton* previously held in villeinage, and in 1301 the parishioners complained that land at *Norton*, whose rent was reserved for poor relief, had been granted to the vicar Thomas Faitcoul at too low a rate. In 1339 John Pymor held a freehold at *Norton* and other land there, held recently by William Pymor, was in the hands of the manor.

It seems that the hamlet, probably with an open field, had become depopulated by the late thirteenth century. Its likeliest site is at SY179904, where the lane from Edge Barton reaches the head of the lower branch of the central valley, near the modern Edge Farm. Nettles grow profusely in this area, a fairly reliable sign of earlier habitation (Rackham 1986: 108–9). A now truncated track north from here would have led to Branscombe Cross and Honiton, while a road westwards, continuing as a green lane, joins the road from Street to Slade, leading to Exeter. The name of a former villein inhabitant, John *of La Lynche* (OE *hlinc* 'ledge' or 'terrace') could refer to a natural terrace north of the lane, where there is a spring.

Remains of prehistory

The only trace left in place-names by Branscombe's Dumnonian inhabitants is the personal name preserved in the name of the village. The early form *Branecescumb* is usually explained as 'Branoc's valley' (PN D 620). *Branoc* was a Brittonic name, but the OE *-es* genitive shows this to be an Old English formation, an Anglo-Saxon record of a landowner bearing a Brittonic personal name.

The incoming Anglo-Saxons found two big landmarks left by the Dumnonians of pre-Roman times. Berry Camp is an earthwork on the cliff-top at a high mid-point of the coastline. The Anglo-Saxons apparently recognised and named it as a fort (OE *burh* 'fortification'), because the farm that owns it, Berry Barton, was called *La Biry* in the Middle Ages, after the fort. As already mentioned, *La Biry* (1301) became the headquarters of the medieval home farm, hence the later addition of

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[27]   Exeter D&C 683.

'Barton'. A Roman sarcophagus and Roman coins and ornaments found nearby suggest fairly continuous high-status occupation since prehistoric times.

The Anglo-Saxons also found a massive Iron Age bank and ditch, or cross-dyke, dug across the highway at the northernmost point of the parish boundary. Their name for it, *Redic* (OE *rēad* or *hreod dic* 'red' or 'reed ditch'[28]) appears in Domesday Book, because where it extended north of the road, in the once royal manor of Colyton, land had been given as a 'manor' with this name to two thegns before 1066. The name was in fact applied to land on both sides of the road, because the earthwork stretched right across the ridge. On the Branscombe side it occurs as *Ridic*, the site of a chapel in 1280 and 1307, and in the name of Richard *de Radich* (1280). In 1392 a farm in *Raddych* was leased to John Lacy,[29] and the stretch of highway north of Branscombe was known as *Raddis Lane* until merged in the Exeter–Lyme Regis turnpike in 1758. *Raddish* and *raddiss* were field-names on both sides of the road in 1840, and Radish Lane still exists on the north side, now in Southleigh parish (Torrance 2008: *passim*).

There was no natural rupture of the landscape to dictate Branscombe's eastern parish boundary with Seaton; it was a matter of tracing a line across the plateau from the Exeter–Lyme Regis road to a point on the coast. At least one prehistoric monument was used as a landmark, possibly more. Unfortunately, the perambulation in the Seaton charter of 1005, which might have supplied early names for them, covers only Seaton's eastern boundary.[30]

The boundary left the road at the Hangman Stone, known as such at least since the seventeenth century (Ravenhill and Rowe 2002: **1** 141; Torrance 2009: 246), which stands at the roadside about a mile east of the cross-dyke, where the parishes of Branscombe, Seaton and Colyton once met. The stone's prehistoric origin is conjectural, as is the possible siting there of a medieval gallows. Neither is improbable, but nor is the claim that it was a Saxon boundary stone (Morshead 1903: 146–55). Three-quarters of a mile south-east of the Hangman Stone, the boundary passes a prehistoric burial mound, sometimes called Balin's Mound. The field on the Branscombe side was called *billinsborough* (1793) and

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[28] 'Red ditch' according to PN D 631. However the soil is not red here, and the site has modern evidence of waterlogging, found also at an early date in a recent excavation of the ditch, so 'reed ditch' may be preferable, even though ME names beginning *rad-* would usually point to OE *rēad* (Quinnell and Reed 2012: 91–92).

[29] Exeter D&C 6017/1.

[30] *æt Fleote*, S 910.

ballingsborough (1840), names recorded too late to tell us how the barrow was perceived or named by medieval people beating the bounds.[31] Before reaching the coast the boundary borders a field named *stone burrow close* (1793), possibly once the site of another burial mound.

Ways in and out

Branscombe was by no means isolated in the Middle Ages. The obligations of unfree tenants in 1339, for example, included carting and carrying 'between Exe and Axe'. Clues to some of the routes by which they travelled can be found in medieval farm-names ending in *-way* (OE *weg* 'road'), which appear to indicate where old roads left the parish, and may also have named the roads, or stretches of them.

A turning off the Exeter–Lyme Regis road, just west of the Radish cross-dyke, leads north to Ottery St Mary and Honiton, following the line of a 1758 turnpike and an ancient trackway. (Sheldon 1928: 28; Grundy 1932: 200–1). Nearly opposite this junction, on the Branscombe side, a lane called Nine Acre Lane turns off to the south, runs beside a field (called Raddish) to a barn, and stops. These fields by the road belong to Elverway Farm, whose ending *-way*, suggests that Nine Acre Lane is the remnant of a medieval route out of Branscombe, and that there was once a crossroads at this point.

Elverway Farm lay on the north slope of the central valley's upper branch, where it bends southwards from the west. The old farmstead burned down in the early twentieth century, and the farm was rebuilt on the plateau above, to the east. The original valley site lay at the end of a road that comes north, up the upper branch of the central valley, from *Hooknell*. The road turns east now, to the new Elverway Farm, but the 1793 and 1840 maps show it turning west, past the old Elverway farm and then northwards towards Nine Acre Lane. On the 1809 Ordnance Survey map it continues into Nine Acre Lane and joins the Exeter–Lyme Regis road near the Honiton turning. It was in fact a route from the centre of the village outwards to the north, for the road up from *Hooknell* is a continuation of two roads running north from near Bridge, which meet at *Hooknell* after following either side of the lower central valley, past Hole and Woodhouse respectively.

The 'Elver' in Elverway is probably no older than the seventeenth century; in 1506 it was *Ilboro Way*, which appears in personal names as *Tilberweie* in 1339, but as *Hilberweie* in 1327. The first element here is

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[31]   Bishop Lacy's register (1438) puts Bovey House, east of this line, in Branscombe rather than Beer, probably by mistake (Hingeston-Randolph 1909–15: **2** 109).

obscure, but if the initial *T-* was not original, OE *hyll* 'hill' might be possible.[32] The second element may derive from OE *beorg* (often 'barrow' or 'mound': compare *Ilboro* with *billinsborough* above). Since the road led uphill to a point near the mound of the cross-dyke, 'hill-mound road' might not be a wholly implausible interpretation.[33]

Two farm names ending in *-way* in the medieval sources have not survived and are hard to locate. Four householders bore the locative place-name *Healleweye* (1327) or *Healdeweye* (1339). This could be a property called *Healway*, listed next to Watercombe in the 1506 rental and therefore probably near Watercombe. OE *helde* or *heald* 'slope' may account for the first element, and this, with *-weye*, might well have been applied to a road that climbs west from Watercombe over a crossroads to join the Lyme Regis road at the Hangman Stone. From there a medieval road, now a green lane, led to Colyton. An early need to travel to Colyton is evident from a fourteenth-century deed releasing Branscombe from its ancient obligation to send twenty-one men to attend the hundred court there, and from 1208 Colyton held an annual fair (Lysons 1822: **2** 129).[34]

Another 'way' name, borne by Stephen and Richard *de Holleway* (1302) and William *de Holeweye* (1339) must have indicated a sunken road (OE *holh*, *weg*) near their holdings. *Holway*, where Bartholomew Abbot was a tenant in 1506, was probably the same place, and since it was listed near Eastcombe it seems to have been in the lower eastern valley. Two roads lead out near Eastcombe towards Colyford, Colyton and Beer, one past Sellar's Wood and one up Vicarage Hill. Neither is a true holloway now, but they have some sunken stretches and the name might have referred to one or other of them.

Getting in or out of Branscombe's deep, sheltered valleys would have been difficult and dangerous for horses or oxen with carts or waggons. Gelling and Cole (LPN 95–96) have emphasized that settlement names containing *weg* often have very steep access roads, and in these cases the name 'serves as a warning to carters and waggoners to avoid the route'; one of her examples, near Branscombe, is Farway. The road out of Branscombe through Elverway was indeed steep at the beginning and end, and also around *Hooknell,* and the roads suggested as referents for *Healdeweye* and *Holeweye* are steep too. However, as Gelling and Cole

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[32]   Since *Tilberweie* is known only from personal names, its origin in *at* [*h*]*ilberweie* is quite likely.

[33]   In 1729 there were two standing stones on the north side of the road about here, known as the Two Sisters, which possibly marked a crossing (Torrance 2009: 256–58).

[34]   Exeter D&C 686. The grant of the fair is in the Courtenay deeds in DHC 1508M Devon/TD51.

(LPN 95–96) also add, *weg* was 'the general OE term for a road' and Branscombe, as will be seen, provides an example of a level 'way'. In fact, steepness may not have been a consideration in minor names, for villagers, knowing the village roads, would have needed no warning, and strangers would be unlikely to hear minor village names before their arrival. So *weg* as a warning to waggoners might be more typical of major settlement names, which would be known to travellers.

A level western route to and from Exeter was especially important for Branscombe in the Middle Ages. Donn's map of 1765 shows the present road from Berry Barton as the main road west out of the village, and it would have been the main road in the Middle Ages too. By 1765 there was heavy traffic to and from Berry Barton's lime kilns, but the medieval role of *La Biry* as the home farm, sending goods to the canons in Exeter and visited by their officials, made similar demands on waggoners. The medieval route—probably from before the Conquest, for Branscombe had belonged to the monastery of St Peter at Exeter, and later to the Bishop, since about 950—must have approximated to the present road through Weston and Slade Lane, reaching the Exeter road at the top of Trow Hill. To that point it was level.

Another route west, avoiding the steep lane from Street up to Berry Barton, follows the gentle incline of *La Dene*, the western valley above Street, and joins the road from Berry Barton at Slade, leaving the parish. Before that, however, a branch turns north to reach the Exeter road by Gatedown Lane, passing a former farm called Landway. In 1710 *Lanewaye Downe*, here, was described in the manor court book as 'gorse and heath', and Landway farmhouse was shown as a ruin on Law's 1793 map. Early forms of the name, such as *Laneweie* (1238), suggest derivation from OE *lane* 'lane', possibly because it led to the western end of *Raddis Lane* (see above), although no such early instance of that road-name has been found (Summerson 1985: 17; Hingeston-Randolph 1889: 293; Reichel 1912: **2** 814; DHC Z17/1/3/2).

A good reason to go by Gatedown Lane is still apparent: a green lane on the opposite side of the Exeter road runs north-east from Kingsdown Tail to join the road to Honiton. A turning off the road from Berry Barton, before Weston, also leads to Gatedown Lane. By taking these level routes, waggoners between Branscombe and Honiton could avoid the steep gradients of the more direct Elverway road.

Conclusions

With regard to the antiquity of these minor names, it will have been noticed that some of them are ME common nouns, preceded by *La* or *the* and thus converted into proper nouns. Some of these may have named landmarks that were familiar, conspicuous or singular enough to be recognisable without a qualifier, and these would be candidates for an Old English origin. Six simplex names of this kind were actually used as place-names in the sources*: La Biry*, *La Cumb*, *the Ecg*, *La Guappe*, *La Forde*, *La See*; seven more have been inferred from their use in personal names: *the Knolle*, *La Dene*, *La Slade*, *La Hole*, *the Wode*, *La Lynche*, *the Brygge*.

Of these, it is safe to say that *La Biry* originated as an OE name, and that *La Brygge* probably did not. *La Guappe* appears to be ME *gappe*, and can probably be discounted. *La See* was the 1339 name for Branscombe Mouth, and extended to the holding of William *atte See*, nearby to the east, which became *Seagrounde* (1506), *Sea Tenement* and is now Great Seaside Farm. So eleven names stand for landmarks that were arguably distinctive enough for them to be considered as ME versions of OE place-names: *Biry* as the headquarters of the home farm, *Cumb*, *Dene* and *Slade* as valley names; *Lynche*, *Ecg*, *Hole*, *Wode* and *Knolle* as prominent landmarks in their valleys, *Forde* as a road junction and hamlet, and *See* for the river mouth. To these might be added the 'hooks' of *Hooknell*.

In general, the sheltered deep valleys contain more old place-names than the windswept plateau in which they are scored, for the well-watered alluvial meadowland of the valley bottoms, with slopes suited to pasture and orchards, attracted settlement more readily than the dry stiff clay of the uplands; naming and settlement went hand-in-hand. It is striking that in 1339 two large freeholds, occupying three carucates (nominally 360 acres) of rough grazing or wood pasture between the head of the western valley and the sea, could only borrow their names from valleys at their northern and southern extremities: *La Dene* and *Littlecombe*.

The names of the two hamlets composing the village show a trend from topographical to habitational reference, from nature to culture. *La Dene* or *Dean* first shared its name with the valley where it nestled, but as population grew and cottages multiplied it became Street, a built environment. *La Forde* was at first a spot where men and animals splashed through a stream; then came a vicar and the hamlet was *Vicarage*; when the vicarage was moved and became less important than the pub, and shops and houses were rebuilt around a square, Square was the preferred name. *Norton* and Weston were named from their positions in the parish relative to Branscombe itself, with the church no doubt perceived as its centre.

Finally, farm names ending in '-way' help to identify old routes in and out of the village. To gain a more complete picture of medieval travel, the origin of three existing access roads—one leading in past Bulstone, another (Locksey's Lane) over Woodhouse Hill, and a third giving access to Rockenhayne, would need to be ascertained. There are reasons to think all three are post-medieval. If so, the main medieval routes in and out would have been from Berry Barton or Street to Exeter via Weston and Slade, from Berry Barton or Street to Honiton via Landway, from Bridge to Honiton via Elverway, and perhaps from Square eastwards via *Holeweie*, and from Watercombe eastwards via *Healdeweie*, to Colyton and Beer.

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