

BREEDON ON THE HILL'S BERRY HILL

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ABSTRACT

Breedon Hill, in the civil parish of Breedon on the Hill, is a prominent feature of the landscape of north-west Leicestershire. To travellers on the major road, A42, and other nearby routes, it suddenly comes into view as a striking sight with church atop. It was clearly also seen as an important place in the past, having yielded finds from all periods of pre-history, with an Iron Age 'hillfort' enclosing about 9 hectares (22 acres) of the hilltop. From about AD 675 it was the base for an Anglo-Saxon minster controlling many square miles of this area of Leicestershire and south Derbyshire. From the early twelfth century to Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries, an Augustinian priory was based on the hilltop. Just 800 metres from its highest point, in a roughly south-easterly direction, is the top of the lesser Berry Hill. Some of the land here was given to the Priory towards the end of the twelfth century. However, Berry Hill also seems to have had some earlier history. Cropmarks on the site led to it being considered as containing possible prehistoric and / or Roman features. This article discusses the origins of the word Berry, as it appears in Berry Hill, in the several adjacent field-names containing 'Berry', and in Berry Avenue, given its name in the 1930s. The possible implications of the name, together with the cropmarks, are considered.

INTRODUCTION

In England the languages of Anglo-Saxon settlers largely displaced the pre-existing speech in the course of time. These languages developed into Old English, changing through the centuries into Middle English and Modern English.

Many place-names and field-names in England therefore demonstrate their naming origins to have been Anglo-Saxon in date. Small numbers of these names hint back to earlier times, for instance, by the survival of 'Celtic' word elements in their names. One obvious example is the first element, *bre-*, of Breedon on the Hill, which itself seems to have meant 'hill', with parallels in Primitive Welsh and British languages.

Because of the Anglo-Saxon settlement and the significant change of language, most place-names and field-names do not reveal whether a location was occupied in earlier times. However, there are a few words used by the Anglo-Saxons to signify earlier human occupation. Furthermore, surviving archaeology adds to our knowledge.

The Leicestershire / Derbyshire section of the middle Trent valley and hinterland is rich in Romano-British and prehistoric remains including sites such as the neolithic Aston Cursus (Aston on Trent) extending for over a mile in length. Breedon on the Hill's Iron Age 'hill-fort' is another example, although quarrying has removed a lot of it, and the surrounding lands have yielded stone axeheads (for instance during the building of Breedon school), flints, and other artefacts from prehistory.

The advent of aerial photography in the twentieth century, and nowadays satellite imagery, have added dramatically to the numbers of sites thought to contain unexplored archaeology. It is apparent that 'fortified' sites, revealed by indications of their former banks and ditches, routeways, and patterns of former field boundary ditches are quite widespread throughout this localised region.

While many place-names hint at their history, particularly Anglo-Saxon, and archaeological remains tell us of many more places which were occupied in early times, a very much smaller group can claim early documentary references. There are obvious reasons for this. Before the days of printing and photocopying, documents were hand-written, requiring the production of writing materials and the development of a class of people able to read and write. If you wanted a copy of a document a scribe had to write it out again. Of those documents which were produced – a laborious process – it seems inevitable that only a limited number of originals or copies would survive to the present day over a period of many centuries.

Places that had early ecclesiastical history, such as Breedon on the Hill, are often well represented by copies of early documents, not least because they provided evidence of the rights which they had been granted or which they bestowed on others. There are a few which relate to the two centuries of

the heyday of the major Anglo-Saxon minster at Breedon and many more covering the four centuries of the lesser Breedon Priory.

The implications of documents relating to the Breedon minster have been discussed elsewhere (Kelly 2009)¹ (Fawcett 2019)² – also see the Bibliography on page 14. This article discusses the implications of historic documents which mention that part of modern-day Breedon which is associated with the name ‘Berry’ (e.g. Berry Hill, the Berry field, and Berry Avenue), ranging from the twelfth century to the present day. It discusses these implications in the light of what is known of the archaeology of Berry Hill.

BERRY HILL – DOCUMENTARY REFERENCES

Most people living in the parish of Breedon on the Hill know of Berry Avenue, the earliest part of which was constructed in the 1930s to house quarry workers. Most of those brought up, or who have resided for a long time, in the parish can also identify the land which is normally referred to as The Berry Field. Berry Hill seems to be less well known, and other field-names containing ‘Berry’ are probably barely known locally any more.

Eighteenth-century Maps

Breedon, as with other members of the modern parish – Wilson and Tonge – is blessed with good maps containing field-names, from immediately prior to, and shortly after, the Enclosure Act (1759).

The pre-enclosure map of 1758³ shows all of the numbered strips of ridge and furrow in the four open fields (Great Field, Dam Field, Wood Field and Nether Field). Within the open fields the strips are grouped into blocks given field-names. The land lying outside the system of open fields was divided into enclosures, all of which are named on the map.

The post-enclosure map is undated but was probably from about 1761, or maybe a year or two later.⁴ The open fields, with their strips, have of course disappeared. Some newly enclosed fields had come into being in the process, so extra field-names appear albeit based on the previous names of larger areas.

From the two eighteenth-century maps the following locations are found: Far Berry, House Berry, Middle Berry, Great Berry hill, Little Berry hill, Far Berry hill, Berry Hill shoot.

Figure 1 below shows the locations of Berry names on an overhead view generated using Google Earth Pro. In the Figure we see:

- A 1930s, and later, avenue of housing, between Berry Hill and The Berry field, which is named Berry Avenue.
- In a brownish shading, House Berry, Middle Berry and Far Berry which appear as closes (i.e. not part of any ploughed open field) on both the pre-enclosure and post-enclosure maps of Breedon.
- Without shading but with a green perimeter and pushpin, Berry Hill shoot (‘shoot’ being one of the names used for blocks of ridge and furrow strips) shown on the pre-enclosure map.
- In mauve shading and darker pushpins, Little Berry Hill, Great Berry hill and Far Berry hill shown as newly enclosed fields on the post-enclosure map.
- As a blue line, the course of the brook at the time of the two maps; it has since been diverted.
- The unshaded, triangular, area, between the brook and Great Berry hill which was labelled Meadow on the post-enclosure map – it was in two parts labelled Meadow (almost 2 acres) and Little Meadow (1¾ acres) on the pre-enclosure map.

¹ (Kelly 2009) – Kelly, S E, ed. *Charters of Peterborough Abbey*. Anglo-Saxon Charters 14. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

² (Fawcett 2019) – Fawcett, G. F. “The Land of Breedon Minster.” To be published shortly. 2019.

³ (Breedon 1758) – The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland, Ref. DG20/Ma/46/1, 1758.

⁴ (Breedon 1761) – The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland, Ref. DG20/Ma/46/4, c. 1761.



FIGURE 1 - BERRY FIELD-NAMES

Note that the post-enclosure extent of the two fields Little Berry hill and Great Berry hill stretches further uphill than the earlier ploughed land (Berry Hill shoot) and follow the ridge line. Beyond Great Berry hill to the east were two fields called “Top ‘oth Hill” but not containing the word Berry.

The area of Berry Hill and the names of fields incorporating ‘Berry’, with Berry Avenue in between, amounts to about 20 hectares (or 50 acres).

Medieval References

Professor Cox⁵ listed a number of documentary references to the location known as Berry or The Berry. While this location would have been within the lands controlled by the Anglo-Saxon minster there are no surviving relevant documents from that era. Six of the existing references deal with events from the time of the Augustinian priory at Breedon, which was a cell of Nostell Priory in Yorkshire – one of these is to be found in Nostell’s cartulary⁶, and the other five in that of Breedon Priory⁷.

Before examining these earlier references, it should be noted that their various spellings differ from ‘Berry’. Cox, however, considers all the variants to refer to the same general location. Brown⁸, in his paper about Andreschurch, also discusses one of the medieval references and concludes that *le Byri* is to be identified with The Berry.

Nostell Cartulary

The document in the Nostell cartulary (no. 931, a confirmation of William Pantulf from some date between 1155 and 1195) is a thirteenth-century copy of the original. Breedon Priory had been founded at some point before AD 1122 but, later in the century, the canons were given land which

⁵ (Cox 2016, 35-36) – Cox, Barrie. *The Place-names of Leicestershire, Part 7*. Vol. 91. Nottingham: English Place-name Society, 2016.

⁶ (Frost 2005, 766) – Frost, J A. *An Edition of the Nostell Priory Cartulary, London, British Library, Cotton Vespasian E XIX*. Vol. 2. 2 vols. York: Ph. D. thesis, University of York, History Department, 2005.

⁷ (Br Cartulary n.d.) – *The Breedon Cartulary*. Latin MS 222. The University of Manchester Library, 14th century.

⁸ (Brown 2003, 3) – Brown, A E. “The Lost Village of Andreschurch.” *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* 74 (2003): 1-11.

was first identified by name in this charter. The following text is taken from a transcript of the cartulary (Frost 2005, 766), as follows:

"concedo ... culturam que iacet inter duas vias sub Biri ad Fretheriche Wellam cum prato quod est inter rivum et culturam"

"I grant ... the piece of cultivated land which lies between two roads below [or 'up to the foot of'] (the) Biri at Fretheriche Wellam with the meadow which is between the brook and the cultivated land".⁹

Before moving on to other documentary references it is relevant to consider the two named locations, Biri and Fretheriche Wellam, in my translation from the Latin.

Firstly, let's consider the words 'sub Biri'. The Latin word 'sub' means 'below' when used with the ablative case of a noun; when used with the accusative it means 'up to' or 'up to the foot of'. However, the 'i' ending of 'Biri' is neither a typical ablative nor accusative ending in Latin. There is no ablative in Old English (OE) or Middle English (ME) but, after the OE word for below (which is *under*) the dative would be used to indicate location; if *under* were followed by the accusative there would be a sense of movement from one place to another. It seems likely, then, that 'Biri' is a rendering in the Latin charter of the dative case of the OE or ME name for a location. The meaning of this name, and the accusative and dative cases, will be discussed later.

Secondly, it should be noted that there was no word *wella(m)* in classical Latin; the two words Fretheriche Wellam would therefore appear to be a Latinised expression of probably the OE name for this particular geographical location. In Anglian OE there is the masculine noun *wella* (dative *wellan*), which in Mercian OE might be *wælla(n)* in which the 'æ' would probably have been pronounced like the 'a' in, for example, 'bat'. Although given a Latin accusative ending in 'm', appropriate after 'ad', 'wellam' comes not from classical Latin but from Old English into Middle English. It most often should be translated as a spring, which of course 'wells up', or a stream (Gelling and Cole 2014, 31), sometimes even a river but in such cases it was more likely to be used to refer to the upper reaches or source. The modern word *well*, as a source of water, also derives from these OE roots. The normal translation into Latin of the OE *wella* or *wælla*, when used to describe the feature rather than a place-name, would be *fons* (with accusative *fontem* and genitive *fontis*).

Associated with the *wella* is the personal name 'Fretheriche'. The final letter 'e' would normally be the vocative case of the Latin name Frethericus. This vocative doesn't seem appropriate here, so it is possible that 'Fretheriche' is a corruption of the OE genitive Fretherices, making the full location name Fretheric's spring or stream.

So who was Fretheric? We know, from copies or transcripts of a document often called the Peterborough Chronicle, originally written by Hugh Candidus (c.1095 – c.1160)¹⁰, that St. Fretheric or Frethericus, in his Latinised form, was one of four saints said to have been buried at the minster on Breedon Hill probably at some point between the late seventh and late ninth centuries. It is also known (Kelly 2009, 178) that the original grants of large areas of land to Breedon minster in c. 675 came from a man of noble birth named Frithuric. It is not known whether the latter was or wasn't the same person as the saint. It seems clear, though, that a Frithuric or Fretheric gave his name to the spring or stream mentioned in this charter. The context of these named locations suggests that Fretheriche Wella was the name used in the twelfth century, and probably earlier, for the brook which passes through the modern village core of Breedon, or at least that section of it that flowed below Berry Avenue.

⁹ GFF - All translations are my own.

¹⁰ (Mellows and Mellows 1980) – Mellows, C, and W T Mellows. *The Peterborough Chronicle of Hugh Candidus*. 3rd. Edited by W. T. Mellows. Peterborough: Peterborough Museum Society, 1980. See p.32.

Breedon Cartulary

Returning to documentary references, the cartulary of Breedon Priory (Br Cartulary n.d.) contains the following:

“... *culturam sub monte vocat^o Biri que iacet inter (or intra) viam ex una parte [undeciphered word] versus Tongam*” which translates as “... the piece of cultivated land below the hill called Biri which lies between the road from one part / side [undeciphered word] towards Tonge”¹¹ – from a fifteenth century copy of a charter dating from between 1175 and 1195. The masculine ablative case of *vocat^o* or *vocatur* means that the Latin text is saying that the hill is called *Biri* rather than the cultivated land.

“... *confirmassi Johanni de Asyngtona ... duas acras terre et pertinenti · una cum tofto quod Adam filius Clementis de nobis tenuit in le Byri sub monte iacentes in longitudine juxta viam que ducit de Andreschircha versus Tungam ...*” which translates as “... have confirmed to John of Asyngton ... two acres of cultivated land and appurtenances · one with the toft that Adam son of Clement, from our manor, held in le Byri, below the hill, lying lengthwise next to the road which leads from Andreschirch [i.e. Breedon village] towards Tonge ...”. This comes from a fourteenth-century copy of an agreement, dating from between 1261 and 1293, in which the Prior rented out a ‘toft’, normally meaning a plot of land with a dwelling, to John of Asyngton for 11 shillings (55p in modern money!) per annum.

“*William de Ferrers confirmavit ... culturam sub monte ad fontem vocato Bery que erat*” which translates as “William de Ferrars confirmed ... the piece of cultivated land, at the spring / stream, which was below the hill called (the) Bery”. Note that the case of the participle ‘vocato’ is dative to qualify ‘monte’. From a fourteenth-century summary of a charter probably dating from about 1190.

“*De tenemento Johis Assigton juxta Byry*” is from a fifteenth-century copy of a Rental dated 1406 and means “from John Assigton’s tenement next to (the) Byry”.

“... *cultura sub monte vocat(?) Byry*” in which the ‘t’ of ‘vocat’ has an abbreviation mark over it. Unfortunately this could denote either a nominative feminine ‘a’, to qualify *cultura*, or a dative masculine ‘o’, to qualify *monte*. It therefore seems that the scribe is relying on word order, giving a translation “the piece of cultivated land below the hill called (the) Byry” – from a fifteenth-century document. Note also that the same document says that this amounted to 8 acres.

At this point the reader may be asking “how do we know that *Biri*, *le Byri*, etc. were referring to the same area as the later Berry?” One of the documentary references above refers to a toft at *le Byri* being next to the road leading from Andreschirch to Tonge. Tony Brown (Brown 2003) has provided convincing evidence that Andreschirch, which was mentioned in a number of other documents from the former Breedon Priory, was the name used in the twelfth century for the village now called Breedon, and lands associated with it. The place-name Breedon was, at that time, confined to specific locations associated with the church and Breedon Hill, but it gradually came to be applied to the village also, taking over completely in the sixteenth century.

The layout of the roads in the thirteenth century requires some speculation. Some historic roads, paths and tracks have gone out of use since the advent of powered transport, or earlier, as a result of changed settlement patterns etc. Others have changed their nature and remain as bridleways, footpaths, farm tracks or field boundaries. It should additionally be remembered that in the period of medieval open fields some trackways developed along unploughed headlands. Hollow ways also give clues as to former roads and tracks.

Looking at the pre-enclosure map (Breedon 1758) it seems very likely that, earlier than that, an old road leading from Andreschirch (rather than Breedon Hill or Breedon Church) to Tonge, may have

¹¹ GFF – I had some difficulty interpreting one or two elements of this extract from a manuscript copy which was written in what appears to be an early fifteenth-century script which made heavy use of abbreviations. The original charter would have dated from the late twelfth century. The word *vocat^o*, having a superscript letter ‘o’, would normally imply that there were additional omitted letters. However, the only possible word would appear to be *vocatur*, which is a future active participle (ablative case) implying a future application of the word ‘called’. The word *vocato*, without superscript ‘o’, translating as ‘called’ (ablative case) appears to be more sensible. There is also a Latin word that I have been unable to decipher!

started from Worthington Lane south of the brook, which was crossed via a ford until the twentieth century. The route would then have been able to keep on the south side of the brook all the way to Tonge. It is suggested that it would have roughly passed along what is nowadays a public footpath to join a short section of Doctor's Lane that aligns with Berry Avenue. This residential avenue, built in the 1930s, follows what had been the headland of part of one of Breedon's open fields (the Dam Field) known as Berry Hill shoot. The field boundary and headland in question join and align with Tonge Lane. This helps to explain the peculiar kinks in Doctor's Lane and Tonge Lane. The route followed by motor vehicles today is very indirect and would not have been a sensible choice on foot or horseback.

The described route passes through the middle of the block of 'Berry' field-names. There are no other field-names between the two places, whatever the route, that bear any similarity to *Biri*, *Byri*, etc.

SUMMARY OF THE MEDIEVAL REFERENCES

From the preceding six extracts the following conclusions may be listed:

1. Three of the references say that there was a hill called (the) Berry (Byri, Biri, Bery, Byry). Two others merely implied that the location name referred to the hill. The remaining reference says 'next to Byry' without qualification as to whether or not it was a hill. In all probability, then, the name was originally just applied to the hill.
2. There was a piece of cultivated land below Berry Hill that was owned by Breedon Priory. In one of the references it was said to amount to 8 acres.
3. The piece of cultivated land lay between two roads.
4. The Priory also owned meadow between the cultivated land and the brook. The latter was probably, at one point, known as 'Fretheric's spring or stream'.
5. The Priory had tenants (Adam, later John) at a 2 acre piece of land which included a 'toft' (house). This lay lengthwise next to a road from Andreschirch [i.e. Breedon village] to Tonge.

The suggested locations of the 'piece of cultivated land', the meadow, the 'two roads', the 'road from Andreschirch to Tonge', and the 2 acre tenement with a toft, are shown in Figure 2 below.



FIGURE 2 - MEDIEVAL LOCATIONS

In the Figure, superimposed on the current satellite view of the area around Berry Avenue and Berry Hill are:

- a blue line showing the line of the brook (Fretheric's stream?) as it appeared in 1758;
- an orange line passing approximately through Berry Avenue which may have been the road from Andreschirch to Tonge;

- two orange lines approximately 350 metres apart, either side of the high point of Berry Hill, which may have been the ‘two roads’ mentioned in the reference from the Nostell cartulary;
- an area of about 8 acres shaded green, which may have been approximately the location of the *cultura*, the ‘piece of cultivated land’;
- the triangle between the *cultura* and the brook which may have been the meadow mentioned in the reference from the Nostell cartulary (it was ‘Meadow’ and ‘Little Meadow’ on the 1758 map); and
- an area of roughly 2 acres shaded purple (corresponding approximately to the ‘Meadow’ of the 1758 map), which may have been the thirteenth-century tenement with toft. (Note that the adjoining ‘Little Meadow’, not shaded, which was possibly also Priory land, may have been separately occupied).

BERRY HILL – IMAGERY EVIDENCE

In June 2003 evidence of Roman or Prehistoric activity on Berry Hill was discovered in aerial photographs. The site is numbered 1433526 in Historic England’s National Monument Record. Two oblique photographs showed a trackway and rectilinear enclosures, of possible Roman or Prehistoric date, visible as cropmarks. At the corner of one of these enclosures was a circular cropmark, about 20m in diameter which was said to be consistent in size with either a hut circle or a small Bronze Age barrow.

A larger set of cropmarks appears to be a large enclosure – possibly over 3 hectares (about 7 acres) in area – consisting of a large ditch with inner and outer banks. This is visible also in satellite imagery – see, for instance, Google Earth Pro, 24 July 2006. Historic England describe it as “irregular” in shape but this may simply result from the fact that it broadly follows contours surrounding the hilltop. The breadth of the cropmark, from outer edge of outer ‘bank’ to inner edge of inner ‘bank’, is fairly consistent at about 30+ metres. This type of construction and its dimensions are typical of a former univallate (i.e. single ditch) enclosure of the Iron Age, often called a hillfort. (Despite their name, hillforts were not necessarily forts in any military sense and may have had a variety of uses).

Figure 3 below has been prepared from the aerial photographs and from Google Earth Pro historic imagery (24 July 2006) whose copyright is respected. The view has been tilted to enable comparison with the aerial photographs held by Historic England. Berry Avenue can be seen on the left; the blue



FIGURE 3 – TILTED VIEW OF BERRY HILL

line passing through its south western end is the line of the brook in 1758 – it has since been diverted. The Cloud Trail (former railway line) passes through the upper right of the picture.

The outer edge of the red band enclosing the centre of the picture is the 75m contour, as interpreted by Google Earth Pro, and the inner edge is 30cm (1 foot) higher – to give an idea of steepness or shallowness of slope. The red line at the outer edge of the green band is the contour at 79m and the inner edge of the green band is 30cm higher than this. The boundary of the brownish filled area has been positioned to mark what would be the ditch of the possible enclosure discussed above, based on the cropmarks. The area has not been extended south of the footpath where the plough direction changes, since the cropmarks are not clear beyond that line. The shaded area amounts to 3 hectares (7 acres). Cropmarks of the former ridge and furrow are visible in the lower right quadrant of the view.

There is a pushpin positioned approximately where the “hut circle” or “barrow” appears on the aerial photographs. The double orange lines are approximately the trackway described in the Historic England data. The other orange line is also drawn from reference to the aerial photographs. Other possible lines from that source, that may form small enclosures, have been omitted because of possible confusion with the plough and drill lines of the crop at the time of the photographs.

The aerial photographs are not shown in this article, for copyright reasons. However, by comparison of the brownish shaded area in Figure 3 with Figure 4 below, some idea of the cropmarks of the possible large enclosure may be gained.

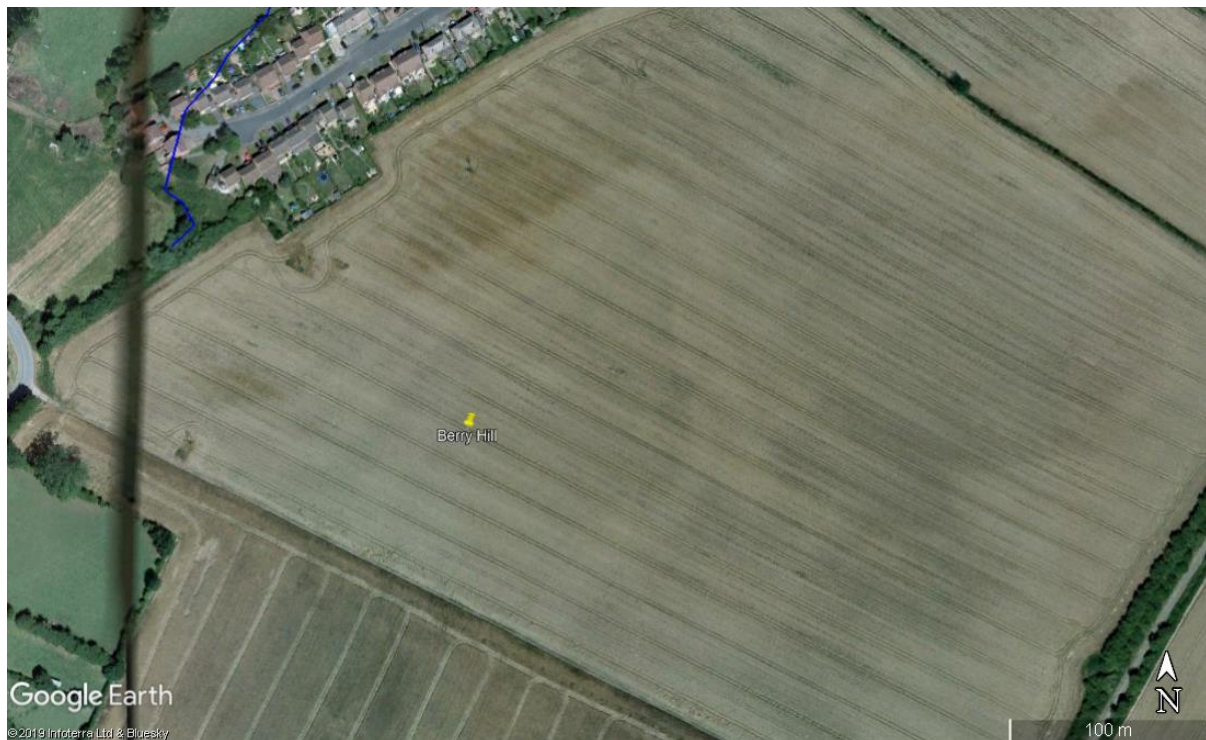


FIGURE 4 - CROPMARKS ON BERRY HILL

Another good satellite image of these cropmarks (i.e. the possible large enclosure) has been taken from the hillforts website (Lock and Ralston 2017)¹² – see Figure 5 on page 9 below. (Image © Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, DigitalGlobe, Microsoft). This shows the possible large enclosure cropmarks as well as others, including quite a lot of the former ridge and furrow, corresponding with the (Breedon 1758) map.

A note of caution is included here since there is a suggestion in the Historic England data that the possible “large enclosure” may be geological in origin! However, the data makes no mention of, and

¹² (Lock and Ralston 2017) – Lock, G, and I Ralston. *Atlas of Hillforts of Britain and Ireland [ONLINE]*. 2017. <https://hillforts.arch.ox.ac.uk> (accessed January 10, 2020). <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>



FIGURE 5 - ANOTHER VIEW OF BERRY HILL CROPMARKS

its author seems to have been unaware of, the name of the hill on which the “large enclosure” stands which, as will be explained in the next Section, had a particular meaning to the Anglo-Saxon. Furthermore it is hard to envisage what sort of geological explanation there could be for such a contour-following feature having such typically man-made size and consistent dimensions. Without archaeological investigation on the ground the “geological” possibility remains, albeit a weak one in the more detailed context.

There are other matters of possible relevance to the ‘Berry’ discussion that arise from the pre-enclosure map (Breedon 1758). Firstly, there was a ‘road’, now just the public footpath over Berry Hill, which was described on the map as “Road along the Hall Balk to Belton”. This ‘Hall Balk’ may have implications in relation to the subject of the ‘Berry’ but, to avoid confusing matters, it is discussed separately in Appendix 1 starting on page 12. Secondly, although geographically within one of

Breedon's ridge and furrow open fields, i.e. the Dam Field, there was an area of 23 acres which was seemingly left untilled. It included the higher ground of Berry Hill. Did this develop because there had been earthworks to be avoided? (See next Section).

THE MEANING OF 'BERRY'

Considering *Biri*, *le Byri*, etc., it should be noted that Latin does not include definite or indefinite articles such as 'the' or 'a / an' – when translating into modern English these have to be inferred, where they can be, from the context. One of these references, *le Byri*, appears to be using a Norman French version of the English name in the Latin agreement of the late thirteenth century. The point is that the location seems to have been known as 'the Byri', a phrasing that has continued to be used locally into the present day – i.e. local people will say 'The Berry' and 'the Berry field' rather than just 'Berry field'. One may surmise, therefore, that although we have no charter written in Old English (which might have contained the definite article), the translation of the Latin *Biri* and *le Byri*, etc., into modern English should include the definite article. This may have significance when considering the meaning of the place-name.

It seems likely that the early spellings of the locations that are nowadays called 'Berry' tell us that we originally had *byrig* – the dative case of *burh*. But before discussing that in more detail, there is a contrary suggestion – Professor Cox has said (Cox 2016, 35-36) that *Biri*, *Byri*, *Bery*, *Byry*, *Berry* derive from OE *bȳre*, meaning 'a byre, a cowshed'. This seems to have difficulties for several reasons:

- The second letter – the long 'y' (i.e. \bar{y}) – seems to have been less likely to develop into an 'i', 'y' or 'e'; and
- The terminal e, which is not silent, is a very different sound from *ig* and is less likely to have been responsible for the later 'i' or 'y'; and
- It seems unlikely that a name that was used to refer to a hill and to other locations spread over about 50 acres of land would be commemorating a cowshed.

Known variants of OE *bȳre* in ME, as well as the unchanged spelling, include *byr*, *bere*, and *bier*. The word continues as the dialect word 'byre' in Modern English. There is no indication that this might ever have transformed into 'Berry'.

The Old English word *burh*, however, becomes *byrig* in the dative case, the form that would be used after prepositions such as 'to', 'at', 'in', 'of', 'from', 'by', 'below' etc. It is important to be aware that the final 'g' was not pronounced like it would be in Modern English – the pronunciation of the terminal *-ig* was like a long 'y', as in the modern word 'many'. The meaning of *burh* / *byrig* was 'a defended / fortified place'.

Furthermore the OE word *burh* / *byrig* is known to have varied in Middle English (let's say twelfth to fifteenth centuries) with examples of *beri* (12th), *birie* (12th & 13th), *biri* (13th), *huri* (12th & 13th), *bery* (14th). See dictionaries.¹³

One of the most respected twentieth-century specialists in place-name studies was Margaret Gelling OBE and a good summary of the use of this OE word is given in one of her books.¹⁴ There are some key points in her summary which are paraphrased as follows:

- As an element in place-names, the nominative *burh* is most likely to have become 'borough' or 'brough' in Modern English, and the dative *byrig* is most likely to have developed into 'bury' or similar.
- The standard Old English term for a hill-fort was *burh*, dative *byrig*.
- Apart from hill-forts, other meanings of this OE element in place-names were 'a defended manor-house' and, in late OE, 'a town'.

¹³ (Stratmann and Bradley 1891, 1974) – Stratmann, F H, and H Bradley. *A Middle English Dictionary*. 1974. Oxford: OUP, 1891, 1974. And

(ME Compendium 2000-2018) – McSparran, F et al., ed. *Middle English Compendium*. University of Michigan. 2000-2018. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary> (accessed January 21, 2020).

¹⁴ (M. Gelling 1997, 145-148) – Gelling, Margaret. *Signposts to the Past: Place-Names and the History of England*. 3rd. Chichester: Phillimore, 1997.

- There is some evidence that *burh* / *byrig* included amongst its meanings that of a minster (i.e. a monastery of the Anglo-Saxon period).

She, of course, discussed examples of these latter three meanings. Generally speaking the *burh* / *byrig* towns that were fortified in the late tenth century onwards are well attested and Breedon's Berry Hill doesn't seem to fit into that category. In Mercia in the early tenth century, Æthelflæd fortified, or strengthened the fortifications of, a number of important towns, including Tamworth – some of the others include the '-bury' element. However, they were named in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and, although there might have been others that were not so recorded, it seems highly unlikely that Breedon's Berry Hill could have been such a place.

So, could Berry Hill have been a *burh* / *byrig* which consisted of a fortified manor-house? The fact that Breedon, and many square miles surrounding it, was in the control of Breedon minster, a major ecclesiastical landholding, from the late seventh to maybe the late ninth century, makes it seem very unlikely that any fortified manor-house of that period could have been there. Feasibly there is a short period after that during which a fortified manor-house could have been constructed and subsequently abandoned.

Thirdly, the possibility that Breedon's Berry Hill referred to the minster is remote. There is good evidence that the minster's precinct was on Breedon Hill and, since the minster acquired 66 hides of land, it seems additionally unlikely that any of the numerous hills within that land, especially one so close to Breedon Hill, would have attracted the name 'minster hill'.

But, bearing in mind that we have a 'Berry Hill' (having earlier spellings of *Biri*, *le Byri*, *Bery*, and *Byry*, cf. *byrig* from which -bury derives) with cropmark evidence, it may be relevant that (M. Gelling 1997, 145-6) had this to say:

“If a name in -borough or -bury refers not to a settlement but to a hill, it is virtually certain to contain the element in its archaeological sense”

and

“There are many examples of defended hills called Borough Hill or Bury Hill, and the existence of such a name for a hill with no visible ramparts almost certainly indicates that fortifications were formerly to be seen there.”

There appears to be very little evidence of the Romano-British or early Anglo-Saxons creating fortified sites. The use of the OE word *burh* / *byrig* was generally used in that early period to describe pre-existing fortifications of the Iron Age (or earlier) which were then still visible.

A recently published online database¹⁵ has numbered the known 'hillforts' in England at 1,224. These seem to have had a variety of uses and varied considerably in size (for instance most are less than 3 hectares but some may cover more than 50 hectares). Many of these are not named on modern OS maps.

Another website¹⁶ lists about 530 of the named English hillforts, 180 of which were derived from *burh* / *byrig*. Of the latter, about 39 are derived from *burh*, such as '-borough' and the other 141 from *byrig*. Most of these *byrig*-derived place-names include 'bury' in the modern spelling but 11 are 'berry' – perhaps not surprising as many people would say that the two words are pronounced identically!

Amongst known earthwork enclosures (which might nowadays be classified as hillforts, hilltop enclosures, or enclosed settlements for instance) but which are not specifically named on OS maps, Allcroft¹⁷, who produced illustrations of over 200 sites, included a 12 acre site at Cholesbury on pp. 134-5. He pointed out that: “Locally it is merely known as The Bury” (cf. Breedon's “The Berry”).

Just before ending this section it seems appropriate to consider whether two Iron Age fortified enclosures could have existed so close to each other as Breedon Hill and Berry Hill. (Allcroft 1908, 207-8) discussed occurrences of two, sometimes three, such earthwork enclosures in near proximity. The examples he gave are generally in localities where preservation has been good, i.e. limited

¹⁵ (Lock and Ralston 2017) – Lock, G, and I Ralston. *Atlas of Hillforts of Britain and Ireland*. 2017. <https://hillforts.arch.ox.ac.uk> (accessed January 10, 2020).

¹⁶ (Hillforts 2019) – *List of Hillforts in England*. 2019. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_hillforts_in_England (accessed January 10, 2020).

¹⁷ (Allcroft 1908) – Allcroft, A H. *Earthwork of England*. London: Macmillan, 1908.

ploughing or other development. For instance, the fortified sites at Gallox Hill and Bat's Castle are 1600 feet (500 metres) apart between the outer edges of their respective earthworks.

Perhaps only archaeological investigation can determine whether such seemingly grouped sites were contemporaneous. If they were, their uses may have been different – for instance, dwellings in one with another mainly used to protect livestock.

SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

The background of spellings known from medieval documents, plus the indications of possible Romano-British or prehistoric enclosures on Berry Hill, strongly suggest that the name derives from the OE *burh* / *byrig*.

So, if Berry Hill, etc. are so derived, which of the four meanings given by Gelling should be inferred? There is no indication that one might ever have seen 'a town' at Berry Hill or the Berry Field. But, in all four meanings, the unifying factor is the fact that the Anglo-Saxons would have seen a site that had been enclosed, or structurally defended, in some way. Such a site might be surrounded by a bank and ditch, palisade, or some other form of enclosure. If it were to be classified as a 'Hillfort', the distinction is more or less a matter of the scale of the earthworks (banks, ramparts and ditches).

The conclusion, then, is that the development of the name, seemingly originating from *byrig*, implies that there had been a visible early defended or fortified enclosure, probably on the hilltop. The aerial photographs indicate small bank / ditch enclosures on the hilltop as well as a possible more monumental enclosure that might be classified as a hillfort. The latter also appears in satellite imagery of Berry Hill.

APPENDIX 1. THE 'HALL BAULK'

The pre-enclosure map (Breedon 1758) shows what is now a public footpath over Berry Hill labelled "Road along the Hall Baulk to Belton".

The age of the 'road' is not known but it may have been one of the two '*vias*' (i.e. roads) mentioned in the twelfth-century document in the Nostell cartulary. It feasibly could be older bearing in mind that it joins two locations having known prehistory – Belton has a probable 'banjo enclosure' which would normally date from between "circa 400 BC and roughly AD 43".¹⁸

So, what was "the Hall Baulk"?

Meaning of 'Baulk'

The word 'baulk' derives from the OE *balca*, originally meaning a bank, or ridge, which sometimes came to be used of 'banks forming boundaries between larger land units' (Cox 2016, 294). He didn't include 'the Hall Baulk' in his discussion of locations in Breedon.

Meaning of 'Hall'

Cox 2016 (p. 36) mentioned Breedon Hall and refers on to the Anglian OE word *hall* (p. 318) in this context, meaning 'a hall, a manor-house'. (Other OE spellings include *heall* or *healle*).

Gelling 1997 (p. 99) discussed another Anglian OE word, *halh*, that developed into 'hall', as a place-name element, particularly in a part of Mercia that included Breedon. She pointed out that it was usually a topographical term. The most common use of the element is as a sheltered place often with reference to a small valley or hollow. This doesn't fit the context here but she mentioned another meaning – 'land in the projecting corner of an administrative unit'. She suggested that one of the earlier meanings of *halh* might have been 'land not included in the general administrative arrangements of an area'. Then, in Gelling & Cole 2014 (p. 125), a similar meaning is proposed: 'a piece of land projecting from, or detached from, the main area of its administrative unit'. Because Gelling 1997 was discussing places named Eccleshall and Exhall, whose first element in OE is borrowed from a Primitive Welsh word meaning 'church', she proposed that this last meaning of *halh*

¹⁸ (Historic England 2018) - *Banjo Enclosures: Introductions to Heritage Assets*. Swindon: Historic England, 2018.

might be appropriate to an area surrounding a Celtic Christian centre. She qualified this last comment (i.e. a Celtic connection) by saying that it was “highly conjectural, however”.

There is another field-name which possibly derives from *halh* just half a mile outside Breedon parish, inside the north-eastern boundary of Melbourne (Derbyshire) where it meets the south-western boundary of Castle Donington (Leicestershire) at Donington Park. This is ‘All Hooks’ which, according to Cameron¹⁹, was documented as *Hallholdes* or *Halhockes* in 1589 and as *Hallehokys* in 1415. The county boundary which passes along the northern edge of All Hooks, only came to be there in the 1960s when it was altered to include the whole of Donington’s deer park. However, the county boundary also passes along the eastern edge of All Hooks, along a line that is not known to have changed since the formation of the counties. (Such a change would appear to have been unlikely, since the boundary follows the prehistoric routeway that went to / from the Trent via Forty Foot Lane (Melbourne / Donington then Melbourne / Wilson), Green Lane (Melbourne / Wilson then Melbourne / Breedon), Staunton, to Packington / Ashby and possibly further). As All Hooks was always on the Derbyshire side of the boundary yet is nowhere near any Hall associated with Melbourne or Kings Newton, one of the meanings of *halh* is likely to be involved. Its eastern edge might be thought of as following a small valley, but it is also very much ‘in the projecting corner of an administrative unit’.

Possible Implications – ‘Hall Baulk’

The possible origins of these two words may be considered in the context of the location in this case – in the vicinity of the public footpath (former ‘road’ to Belton) over Berry Hill. To what might the name be referring? Starting from the most recent and working backwards, possibilities include:

- A (boundary) bank between land associated with the incumbent of Breedon Hall and land in some other person’s holding. However, it must be remembered that Breedon Hall didn’t take its current form until perhaps 1777, under Nathaniel Curzon. (It is an earlier map of 1758 that includes the words ‘Hall Baulk’). Further research would be necessary to see whether any earlier form of the buildings on the Breedon Hall site, acquired by the Curzons in about 1620, was known as a ‘Hall’.
- A (boundary) bank between land associated with the lord of an earlier manor-house, or hall, in the parish and land in some other person’s holding. (It is known from a court roll of 1656²⁰ that the site of some of the thirteenth century manor buildings, which other documentary evidence tells us included a house / estate centre and a chapel²¹, was still identifiable in the Plashetts, on the western side of the road to Wilson. This may have remained the base for three centuries or more.).
- A (boundary) bank between land associated with the lord of the manor and land held by Breedon Priory prior to the dissolution. (It is clear, from documentary evidence above, that the Priory had been given land in the ‘Berry’ area in the late twelfth century. Bearing in mind *halh*, this would then have been outside the manor’s administration).
- A (boundary) bank between land directly used (i.e. in demesne) by the Abbot and minster (seventh to ninth centuries) and land used by ‘tenants’ or the men of Breedon.
- A (boundary) bank separating the pre-minster estate centre’s directly-used land from that used by others. (The 66 hides of land acquired by the Abbot in the early years of the minster, in the late seventh century, included a district, named Bredun, of 20 hides – perhaps 15 sq. miles.²² The name Bredun suggests that, preceding this, the administrative centre of Bredun’s 20 hides was somewhere at Breedon).
- A (boundary) bank of a Roman, Iron Age, or prehistoric defended enclosure.

However, it is in the region of the possible southern edge of the large ‘enclosure’ described in the Section headed “Berry Hill – Imagery Evidence” beginning on page 7; so was there an ancient bank here? Did it mean a bank that defined the southern edge of the unploughed area described in the

¹⁹ (Cameron 1993) – Cameron, Kenneth. *The Place-names of Derbyshire, Part 3*. Vol. 29. Nottingham: English Place-name Society, 1993.

²⁰ (Court Roll 1656) – “Court Roll.” The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland, Ref. DE1982/181, 1656.

²¹ (Br Cartulary n.d.) – *The Breedon Cartulary*. Latin MS 222. Manchester: The University of Manchester Library, n.d. – see for instance memorandum on image JRL20020310.jpg

²² (Fawcett 2019) – Fawcett, G. F. “The Land of Breedon Minster.” To be published shortly. 2019.

previous bullet point? Further research might establish whether this was an unploughed boundary of a block of land belonging to Breedon Hall.

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[Author's note – as a retired applied scientist and engineer, rather than a historian, archaeologist, or place-name philologist, I apologise for any failings in the above. Communications on the content sent to garry@thelittlehouseatorhez.com will be considered for a future revision – Dr Garry Fawcett MBE].