

SOME ADDITIONAL NOTES ON THE NAME
OF "RISBOROUGH"

BY

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In the "Place Names of Buckinghamshire" Messrs. Mawer and Stenton accept the suggestion of Prof. Eckwall that the first syllable of Risborough denotes brushwood and is derived from the Old English word "Hris" meaning scrub, brushwood or bush. The word, however, persisted in Middle English as "Rise" and, it seems, still persists in Northumbrian dialect to-day. Chaucer uses it with an adjective attached that defines it more clearly.

Among the Canterbury Tales is that of the Miller who, in describing the parish clerk, Absolon, is made to say:

And thereupon he hadde a gay surplys,
As whit as is the blosme upon the rys.

This suggests that at the close of the 14th century it was understood that the rise was a bush with a white flower and presumably meant either the hawthorn (whitethorn) or the sloe (blackthorn), both of which are very common in the part of the Vale where the two Risboroughs lie, but are not nearly so common on "Chilternes Eaves," as the Chiltern escarpment was called by the Saxons.¹

In a charter of A.D. 903, in which some land at East Risborough was granted to a Saxon Lady named Ethelgyth by her father, Ethelfrith, a charter

¹ In 1548 William Turner wrote "Oryza is called in english Ryse, in duch and french ryze. Ryse groweth plentuously in watery myddowes betwene Mylane and Pauia." *The Names of Herbes*, ed. by Jas. Britten in 1881, p. 58. Britten gives the scientific name as *oryza sativa*, which is the modern "rice." It is not suggested that this ever grew at Risborough, and the word "rise" is certainly that to which the *English Dialect Dicty.* gives considerable space with the meaning "brushwood, undergrowth, twigs or thorns used for hedging."—[Editor's note.]

witnessed by King Edward the Elder and many aldermen, bishops and thegns—presumably his Witan—the landmarks of the estate are recorded and many of them may still be identified with the bounds of Monks Risborough, though they fail to do so with those of Princes Risborough.²

In this charter two hedges are mentioned, one in the Vale, near the Lower Icknield Way, is called the "black" (? blackthorn or sloe) hedge, while the other, on the side of the Chilterns, is spoken of as the "rah" (roe deer) hedge and was probably of a more mixed type.

Then comes the question whether the "borough" part of Risborough refers to the brush covered Chilterns, a mile away, rather than to the "beorh" which meant an artificial mound, as well as a natural hill. There are so many places with names ending in "bury" or "borough"—*e.g.* Canterbury or Loughborough—situated on river banks, that one is hardly justified in assuming that some neighbouring hill is always suggested.

A Saxon thegn, when he received a grant of land, usually raised a mound or "beorh" on which he placed his stockaded, wooden "hám" close to which the Church, when it arose, always stood. Sometimes the name of the builder of the original homestead forms part of the name, at others the bury is identified by some local feature connected with it; in this case white flowering brushwood, possibly blackthorn.

It seems likely that Princes, rather than Monks Risborough, was the site to which the name was first given, because of its important situation in the mouth of the gap, its history as a Royal Borough, as well as the need for calling its neighbour "East" Risborough, and the authors of the "Place Names of Bucks" indirectly recognise it as being in the Vale when they describe the adjoining parish of Horsenden as: "Lying on the flat, in the centre of Risborough Gap."

² A facsimile of this charter is reproduced in *Old Records of Monks Risborough*, published by the Church Council there.

Here the soil is essentially that of the Vale and the brushwood differs a good deal from that of the Hills, where beech scrub predominates and fewer white flowering bushes are found. Incidentally it is worth noticing that the part of Princes Risborough that adjoins Horsenden is still called "The Park" or "Manor Park," and in the 14th Century—perhaps much earlier—was the Royal Stud Farm. May it not be that this park originally included Horsenden—the "Horse dene" of Domesday Book—and that it owes its name, not to Horsa, but to the King's horses which were bred and trained there?