THE COLDHARBOURS
OF BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

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This paper considers a group of names that have been the subject of scholarly attention since the earliest days of the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society, as well as by many place-name scholars and antiquaries. The name Coldharbour occurs throughout England, albeit with wide geographical variations. The paper first examines previous discussions of the distribution, origin and significance of the name, before discussing the evidence for local Coldharbours.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The name Coldharbour has been the subject of research, analysis and debate for more than two centuries, though attempts to achieve consensus as to its meaning and significance have not met with universal agreement. This section summarises the periodic bursts of interest in the name, before turning to consider Buckinghamshire Coldharbours. This intriguing name occurs in substantial numbers across England from Northumberland to Cornwall, but rarely in Wales and apparently not in Scotland. (There are also examples in the US and Canada.)

Coldharbours attracted the attention of pioneer members of this Society as early as 1855, while a paper on the subject appeared in the *Antiquaries Journal* in 1922, followed by a brief but significant survey in the Surrey volume of the English Place-Name Society in 1934. As was often the case in the early days of unscientific discussion of place-names, nineteenth-century antiquaries and others let their imaginations run riot over a host of possible linguistic origins, often Classical or Celtic. Not until Arthur Bonner's painstaking analysis of *all* the Coldharbours depicted on Ordnance Survey Six-Inch maps do we have a real idea of the size of the corpus, as well as a better appreciation of the meaning of the name, albeit not necessarily of its precise significance when applied to any given locality.

Apart from a brief notice in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in the 1790s, drawing attention to the cognate German name *Kalt[e]herberg*,[1] the first substantive contribution to the study of Buckinghamshire Coldharbours appeared in *Records* in 1855, when Archdeacon Edward Bickersteth (1814–92)

published a letter he had received from the polymath Admiral William Henry Smyth, then living at Hartwell and the author of *Ædes Hartwellianae*.[2] Smyth had previously published a note in the *Proceedings* of the Society of Antiquaries in 1849.[3]

Smyth stated that 'procuring a list of all those place so called in the County would be worthy of your Society, as an illustration of archaic geography, – especially as they seem so connected with the Roman roads and *diverticula* (byroads)'. He considered that 'so derogatory an adjective as '"Cold"…could hardly be applied to some hundreds of places utterly unlike each other', although that clearly begs the question as to the wider significance of 'Cold' across a wide spectrum of English place-names qualifying a wide variety of name elements, as we shall see. Smyth considered that Coldharbour derived from [Latin] '*caula arva*, in British *Cobail*, meaning enclosed or cleared spaces for cultivation in the woods and forests which formerly covered England' (*sic*). He continues, with reference to Laȝamon's *Brut* (c.1190), '*Herberwe* seems to have signified a station where soldiers rested on a march'.[4] Chaucer uses the term in a more general sense of 'shelter, lodgings' in several of the *Canterbury Tales*.[5] There follows what can best be described as a flight of linguistic fancy, in which Coldharbour is derived from Latin *Collis Arborum* 'hill of trees', denoting a place where idols were buried when their sacred groves were cut down! Smyth adduces 'immemorial folk-verses' starting "Some say the Devil's dead/And buried in Cold Harbour". This is but one of a number of variants of the rhyme, however, and is said to have been used by children in north Buckinghamshire and adjacent areas in the 1870s.[6] Smyth ends his letter

by saying that 'a collection of details may lead to a satisfactory result, and clear away what must be considered a curious archaeological puzzle'. We are still awaiting a finally-agreed solution!

Smyth's earlier contribution to the Society of Antiquaries offers a more detailed discussion of the significance of Cold- in place-names, correctly saying that it cannot relate to [char]coal, as names from that source contain no -d-. His preferred etymology appears to be from Latin *coluber*, 'snake, serpent' denoting a change of course in a Roman road necessitated by a slope. Needless to say, such a fanciful chain of reasoning is completely unproven, not least because of the extreme rarity of English place-names directly based on a Latin root. The presence of several hundred Coldharbours across England, most of them with no known Roman connection, and many on low-lying ground clearly suggests that we are looking for a more prosaic source.

J.C. Hahn contributed two brief notes on the linguistics of Coldharbours to *Notes & Queries* in 1865, but the next detailed attempt to explain the significance of the name appears to have been by Lt-Col John Karslake, who delivered a paper to the Society of Antiquaries in March 1922, entitled *On Coldharbours*.[7] Karslake (1868–1942) was a barrister by profession and a long-standing member of the London County Council. Like most commentators on Coldharbour, he was an interested amateur, who came to the subject following work at the Roman town of Silchester. He dismissed the idea that the name denoted the use in recent times of ruined Roman buildings as temporary shelters, there being no evidence of Roman remains at *any* Coldharbour (my italics). He also discounts the association with travellers' rest-houses (*mansiones*) on Roman roads, given that there is no close connection between Coldharbours and Roman roads. Despite the fact that Karslake only included Coldharbours south and east of a line from Wiltshire to the Wash in his analysis, around half of the total number, his generalisations are generally valid.

Karslake appreciated that apart from some field-, road- and wood-names, Coldharbours are generally farms, situated at some distance from the nearest settlement. The great majority have no known Roman remains. (The medieval Coldharbour in the City of London is of course an obvious exception to this rule, on record from the fourteenth century, far

earlier than most rural examples.) Based on some linear earthworks at the Silchester Coldharbour and analogous features in Yorkshire that had been interpreted as droveways for cattle, Karslake suggested that these locations had originated as shelters and fodder stores for cattle. He notes the presence of Coldharbours in areas of salt-marsh grazing in Kent and Sussex, and considered that this form of grazing dated from the Belgic 'invasion', sometime in the late centuries BC. This hypothesis naturally raises the question of the extent and antiquity of transhumant grazing in areas where Coldharbours occur. The name equally often occurs in closely-settled country, where most parishes had areas of meadowland and pasture for feeding livestock, as well as fallow-grazing in whatever type of field system operated locally.

Among the audience at Karslake's 1922 lecture was master-printer Arthur Bonner (1862–1939), who 'welcomed a fresh treatment of an old problem'.[8] Bonner said that ten years previously he had compiled a list of Coldharbours from the OS maps (apparently the Six-Inch 1:10,560 series), and found no fewer than 240 examples across England, from Northumberland to Cornwall, a much wider distribution than that presented by Karslake. Bonner had noted in each case the distance from any Roman road and the altitude, but found only five Coldharbours actually on such roads and six 'within a short distance'. He noted that although the name Coldharbour clearly indicated a Germanic origin, it was not on record in England before the thirteenth century. Bonner's view was that Coldharbour was a farm-name and formed part of a group which were descriptive of the site of characteristics of the place, and that its meaning was 'cold shelter' (compare Caldecote and Cold Comfort Farm).

Arthur Bonner was for many years active in the Surrey Archaeological Society, and instrumental in collecting material on that county's place-names. His work formed the basis of the English Place-Name Society's Surrey volume, published in 1934, to which he also contributed a generic note on Coldharbour-names.[9] This offers an altogether more measured view than that favoured by Messrs Smyth and Karslake, resulting as it does from a painstaking count from hundreds of maps. Bonner now recorded 303 Coldharbours, with only six counties having no examples. He reiterated his view that the name was invariably attached to farms or individual homesteads. (It should be noted that

there are other Coldharbour-names not shown on Six-Inch maps, and therefore excluded by Bonner. For example, Coldharbour in Wendover occurs in some early Census returns, part of Clay Lane.)

The geographical distribution of Coldharbours is far from even, as the following summary shows. To facilitate comparison, the number of Coldharbours per 1,000 square miles has been calculated.

It will be seen that Coldharbours are heavily concentrated in south-east and south-central England, especially in the Home Counties which have 158 of the examples found by Bonner (52%) in only 21% of the area. Coldharbours are even more prevalent in Kent, Sussex and Surrey, with 74 examples (24% on 7% of England). This has important implications when one considers the significance of the name and its distribution.

Bonner firmly rejected the suggested link between Coldharbour and Roman roads and other features that had attracted earlier commentators. Of his 303 Coldharbours, only nine were immediately adjacent to a Roman road, while four or five others lay within a quarter-mile (together 4.3% of the total). Even though a large number of Roman-period sites and new sections of road have been added to the tally available to Karslake and Bonner, the latter's conclusion does not appear to have been invalidated. Bonner discussed at greater length the City of London Coldharbour, the earliest

known example by a considerable margin, being on record from the early-fourteenth century.[10]

The Coldharbour debate was reignited in the mid-1960s, following the publication of the Viatores study of Roman roads in the south-east Midlands, including Buckinghamshire.[11] (Ivan Margary had earlier resurrected the link in an unpublished study of Coldharbours in Kent, Surrey and Sussex.) The greatly expanded network of subsidiary roads claimed by the Viatores inevitably led to many Coldharbours finding themselves in close proximity to such routes, which prompted T.L. Ogden to conduct a statistical analysis to "prove" the link once and for all.[12]

Ogden described the long-lasting debate as an 'intractable minor controversy' in archaeology, and states that Bonner's rejection of the 1930s had received 'unequivocal support' from the Viatores. His analysis is based on 223 Coldharbours, essentially those lying south and east of a line from the Severn to the Wash. Ogden supports Bonner's view that most are very small places, with few on record before 1700, and only twenty in the eighteenth century. He cites Ekwall's definition of Coldharbour, which states that it was '(formerly) a common name for a place of shelter from the weather for wayfarers, constructed by the wayside'. (Watts' more recent Dictionary only cites the specific example of a Surrey Coldharbour, signifying an

TABLE 1 Regional Distribution of Coldharbours

Region[1]	No.	Density[2]
North [Nb/**Du**/Cu/We]	4	0.75
Yorkshire/**Lancashire**	11	1.38
East Midlands [Li/Nt/Db/**Le**/**Ru**/Np]	31	4.71
West Midlands [Ch/Wo/Sa/He/**St**/**Wa**/Gl]	20	2.75
East Anglia [Nf/Sf/Cam/Hu]	17	3.57
Home Counties North [Bed/Bu/Hrt/Ox/Mx/Ex]	58	13.11
Home Counties South [Kt/Sr/Brk/Ha/Sx]	100	16.54
South West [Wi/Do/So/De/Co]	62	7.79
TOTAL	303	6.02

Notes:
1. Counties shown in **bold** have no Coldharbours; 2. Coldharbours per 1,000 ml^2

'inhospitable dwelling'.[13]) According to Ogden, the Viatores identified fifty-seven Coldharbours west of Ermine Street, of which 57% lay within a half-mile of a Roman road, 24% between half- and one-mile, and only 8% more than two miles. He compared this with the distribution of fifteen Caldecot[e]-names, 70% of which lay within half a mile and the remainder within one mile of a Roman road.

Ogden then analysed the relationship between Coldharbour and Roman roads in south-eastern England, 'to ascertain whether the distribution is random or not'. His tally is 115 'definite' and ten 'probable' Coldharbours in an area of 10,600 square miles. His criteria are considerably less rigorous than those of Bonner and the Viatores, however, with bands of 0-2 miles, 2-4 miles and more than four miles from a Roman road, though he admits that even two miles is a long way from a road to look for a night's lodging! It is also the case that where there is a dense mesh of known or putative Roman roads (and also important prehistoric routeways, which never seem to have featured in the long-running debate), it is more than likely that any individual Coldharbour will lie within the catchment of one or more such roads. Ogden used the chi-square test, which compares observed and expected frequencies, to see whether the distribution of Coldharbours based on his definition could have arisen by chance. He concluded correlation between the whole road network and all Coldharbour-names was significant at the 0.5% level, but that Margary's more restricted Wealden region sample is significant at the 5% level.[14]

Ogden's paper duly reignited the debate, notably a paper by place-name scholar Richard Coates, entitled 'COLDHARBOUR – for the last time?'[15] Coates begins by stating that 'few place-names can have had so much historical and archaeological weight undeservedly thrust upon them as Coldharbour'. He agrees with Bonner that the name is a derogatory term, in line with Starveall, Cold Comfort and Mockbeggar, etc., applied to fields and farms associated with poor location and soils, stating that Coldharbour 'enjoyed enormous popularity' after 1600. Noting that Bonner's rejection of the Roman road connection had been challenged after 1960, Coates states that 'nobody had ever claimed to have found anything of archaeological interest in a systematic way at Coldharbour sites', at the same time acknowledging that few if any such sites have been excavated. That assertion begs naturally the question of how many random finds made during centuries of ploughing were never reported. (Karslake's work at Silchester appears not to have been known to Coates.)

Coates notes that although there may be an Old English root underlying the Middle English generic term *caldherber[g]*, the term never occurs in an Anglo-Saxon charter boundary clause, nor any equivalent Middle English document, 'as far as is known'.[16] Both Coates and Ekwall consider that the Coldharbour in the City of London, on record from 1307, is the key to understanding how the name became so widely diffused. Only six other examples are on record before 1650, including two in Essex. In the early fourteenth century, the City Coldharbour was held by Sir John Abel, several of whose estates in Kent and Middlesex contain Coldharbours. It was acquired by Sir John de Pulteney (d.1349), four times Lord Mayor. In the 1590s, the original Coldharbour was demolished and redeveloped as small tenements by the earl of Shrewsbury.

Basically, Coates' thesis is that during the seventeenth century, Coldharbour was 'applied as a fashionably derogatory term for a miserable (isolated) house'. It was used as a proper noun in the way that many houses have names unrelated to their physical setting and characteristics, and does not necessarily denote a 'cold shelter' as such, neither does it have connotations of antiquity.[17] As such, the name was exported to English colonies in North America, probably in the seventeenth century, with examples in Virginia, New York and Nova Scotia. Coates suggests that there were no more than nine 'original' coinings of the name Coldharbour, rather in the way that Mockbeggar became popular as a derogatory place-name after appearing as *Mockbegger Manour* in a 1622 poem *The Water-Cormorant* by the 'water-poet' John Taylor (1578–1653).[18]

As Coates doubtless hoped, given the title of his paper, he appears to have had the last word on the significance of Coldharbour, although he did not suggest a mechanism to account for its transmission from London to the furthest extremities of England, far beyond its Home Counties epicentre. The regional distribution (Table 1) does, however, indicate a classic centre-periphery situation, in which the number and density of Coldharbours decline rapidly from the suggested point of origin. It would merely take one visitor from Northumberland or Cornwall to London, perhaps a lawyer or M.P., to account for its appearance in those counties.

COLDHARBOUR IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND ITS NEIGHBOURS

Now that we have followed the literary trail of this name from the days of Archdeacon Bickersteth and Admiral Smyth to Professor Coates, it is time to consider the Coldharbours to be found across this county, and those in neighbouring shires within fifteen miles or so of its boundaries (Table 2). A perusal of the two earliest relia-

bly-surveyed county maps drawn to a decent scale reveals a scatter of Cold Harbour/Coldharbour names, most of them houses or farms away from the main centres of population within their parishes.[19] Thomas Jefferys (1770) has examples in Amersham, Hartwell, Mursley and Shenley Brook End, to which Andrew Bryant (1825) added Brill, Iver, and Wavendon. Other sources, mostly from the late-18th and 19th centuries, provide further examples in Great Marlow, Hanslope, Ilmer,

TABLE 2 Coldharbours in Buckinghamshire and Environs

Name	Parish	NGR	Date[a]
Coldharbour Farm	Amersham	SP957958	1770
Coldharbour Farm	Brill	SP663148	1825
Coldharbour	Great Marlow	SU837889	1796
Coldharbour [lost]	Hanslope	SP824486	1815
Coldharbour Farm	Hartwell	SP809138	1770
Coldharbour [lost]	High Wycombe	SU865914	1875
Cold Harbour [lost]	Ilmer	SP757050	1779
Cold Harbour [Farm]	Iver detached	TQ015894	1825
Cold Harbour	Mursley	SP823275	1770
Coldharbour Farm	Shenley Brook End	SP851352	1770
Cold Harbour	Sherington	SP885477	1917
Coldharbour Close	Stoke Hammond	SP878299	1950
Cold Arbor Farm	Wavendon	SP931383	1825
Cold Harbour	Wendover	SP871081	1851
Coldharbour	Whitchurch	c.SP799213	1975
Coldharbour Farm	Radstone, Northants	SP599401	
Coldharbour Hill	Harrold, Beds	SP930565	
Coldharbour Farm	Woburn, Beds [lost]	SP946316	1879
Coldharbour Farm	Mixbury, Oxon	SP604318	
Coldharbour Farm	Crowmarsh, Oxon	SU633891	
Coldharbour	Rotherfield Greys, Ox	SU736824	
Cold Harbour	Harpenden, Herts	TL140160	
Cold Harbour Farm	Bushey, Herts	TQ139954	1766
Coldharbour Plantation	St Stephens, Herts	TL1200	
Coldharbour Farm	Berkhamsted, Herts	SP988113	1766

Note: [a] Earliest reference

Sherington, Stoke Hammond, Wendover and Whitchurch, giving a total of fourteen examples ranging from the far north to the south-east of the county.

These twenty-five Coldharbours represent a geographically-specific sample of the name from the northern fringes of its greatest concentration. It remains to consider what, if anything, they share in topographical terms other than their name.

Apart from Coldharbour Plantation in St Albans (now swallowed up by building at Bricket Wood) and Coldharbur Hill in Bedfordshire, all are names of farms or isolated houses. Three of the Buckinghamshire examples have been lost, two of them as the result of name-changes in the last century or so. Coldharbour in Hanslope has become Yew Tree Farm, and Cold Arbor in Wavendon is now Eagle Farm. There may have been other Coldharbours, now lost, either abandoned or subject to name-change.

None of the Coldharbours which appear in earlier maps and documents seem to predate 1700, at least under that name. In the light of the earlier discussion of the relationship between Coldharbours and Roman roads, whether or not the latter continued in use in the medieval and later periods, it seems unlikely that any of these places owed its origin to some kind of overnight shelter for medieval or earlier travellers. The closest link is at Cold Arbor (now Eagle) Farm, Wavendon, which stands immediately next to a road described as *ealde strate* in a charter boundary perambulation of Aspley Guise made in 969.[20] The meanings of OE *stræt* include 'paved track', by extension a Roman road in the context of the tenth century.[21] Even if this were once such a road, the link with Coldharbour is purely fortuitous. The name is best considered the use of an appropriate, possibly ironic, description of a house or farm, often without knowledge of or reference to its precise meaning. (Other examples include Botany Bay, and the field names Hundred or Thousand Acres.)

Given that Coldharbour-names seem to have arisen independently of any local factors, and that they have little genuine correlation with Roman roads or important medieval routeways, are there any other characteristics that connect them? Two are examined here. First, the location of Coldharbours in relation to parish churches, and their proximity to parish boundaries. Secondly, the type of soils found at these places. The straight-line

distance between the local Coldharbours and their parish churches averages 1.07 miles (Bucks. 0.87 miles; other counties 1.26 miles). Coldharbours lie significantly closer to parish boundaries, however, on average 0.32 miles from the nearest point on the boundary (Bucks. 0.27 miles; others 0.37 miles). Most local Coldharbours are clearly peripheral, on average three-four times further from the parish church than the parish boundary. Taken together these admittedly crude measures underline the peripheral position of Coldharbours and support the views of several scholars discussed above. Equally, they are independent of any putative relationship to prehistoric or Roman features.

Since local Coldharbours may represent a fashion in name-giving characteristic of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it is possible that some were farms newly built in peripheral locations following enclosure. Other names indicative of remoteness were also applied to such farms. Coldharbours are also found in the Chilterns, however, a region where large-scale open-field farming and late enclosure were much less common. Coldharbours are only a small fraction of all place-names, and some may have been coined with reference to their immediate physical environment, since any name containing the element Cold- carries implications of difficult to work or unproductive soils.[22]

The balance of evidence points towards peripheral location in a parish as being the key determinant in the use of Coldharbour. The original meaning of the term in German-speaking countries and the reason for its use in fourteenth-century London would almost certainly have been unknown to those using it in the northern Home Counties after 1700. The concentration in the Home Counties suggests that point of origin was indeed the London Coldharbour, which may have been named with reference to German *Kalt[e]herberg*. That the London base of the Hanseatic League, the Steelyard, was located by the Thames, only fifty yards from Coldharbour, and the Hansa were granted formal status by Edward in 1303, only four years before the first recorded occurrence of Coldharbour in the City, are highly suggestive.[23]

CONCLUSION

As is often the case, local place-names, even of locations as insignificant as most of the Coldharbours discussed here, have a fascinating, if

problematic story to tell. These names have attracted a great deal of attention over the last 170 years, with a wide spectrum of interpretations, often conditioned by the contemporary intellectual framework. In the Victorian era, the bias was towards a Celtic or Roman origin for Coldharbour, motivated in part by the apparent correlation of the name with Roman roads. During the twentieth century, it became clear that the word was ultimately of German origin, but did not appear in England until the early-fourteenth century, when it was applied to buildings in a lane just upstream from London Bridge. Coldharbour may have originated with the German merchants locally prominent by c.1300, although why that particular spot was a 'cold lodging' is now unclear.

Equally difficult to explain is the transfer of Coldharbour across England from between c.1600 and c.1850 once known direct links between the City of London and other localities in south-east England have been exhausted. None apparently existed in the case of Buckinghamshire and its neighbours. Once Coldharbour began to spread, any local occurrences may relate to straightforward copying, or soil-type, though in relation to the totality of farm-names this is as a weak an explanation of the phenomenon as the Roman road theory.

Proximity to parish boundaries, and remoteness from villages and churches appear to be more significant in the corpus of twenty-five Coldharbours considered here. Whether that is true of other parts of England where the name occurs, however, would require an updating of the analysis undertaken by Arthur Bonner.

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