



Wyre Forest Study Group

PLACE NAMES OF WYRE FOREST

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The Wyre Forest is a very ancient forest. It was in existence as a named forest in Celtic times and was known as the forest of the Weogoran, the Celtic tribe that occupied this area. The town of Worcester has the same derivation. It was the fortress (Castra) of the Weogoran tribe. You will still see Worcester written as Wigorn in some documents.

The old boundaries of Wyre Forest were roughly Bewdley, Ribbesford, Rock, Far Forest, Cleobury Mortimer, Kinlet, Stottesdon and Chorley. The first Norman Lord of the Manor of Bewdley arrived there and said, 'quel beau lieu' (what a beautiful place). The Saxons nearby thought this was a new name so they called it Bewley, which later became Bewdley.

In Rock there was an ancient preaching oak, which tradition says was the site where St Augustine met the Welsh bishops, though there is no positive historical evidence. The area was named after the tree which, in Saxon, was called Ther Ak. Old Rock people still speak of The Rock. Incidentally, the river Rea has a similar derivation. The river was first called the Neen, but the Saxons called it Ther Ea, the stream. This became The Rea.

The name Ribbesford means *the river's ford*. Bewdley has always been part of Ribbesford manor and parish and there were fords at Lax Lane and also by Blackstone Rock.

The Wyre Forest was divided into three parts; Town Forest, by Bewdley, The Parks (where deer were enclosed for breeding and for easy killing for meat), at Callow Hill, (which, by the way, means *bare hill*), and the edge was Far Forest. The Mortimers owned the manor of Cleobury, which means the town by the *cliffu* (a steep hill). The town then had the Mortimer's name added. The manor of Kinlet had been owned by Edith, wife of Edward the Confessor, so it was King's Let, land in the control of the King. Land in the control of the county was called shire-let.

Stottesdon means *the hill of the herd of horses*. Chorley is made up of two parts. The Saxon *leigh*, later spelt *Lea* or *Ley*, means land cleared from the forest. *Ceaorl* was a carl or peasant, so Chorley is the clearing belonging to the peasants. Lye Head has a similar derivation Lye is the same as *leigh*, and the end (or head) of the lye was by the Coppice Gate.

We now come on to places within the Forest area. Earnwood, part of the manor of Kinlet was *the heron's wood*. Hawkbatch similarly commemorates a bird, the hawk. *Batch* was a tree-lined valley of a stream, a common name in Shropshire. The valley was not the Severn Valley, but the steep sided stream that then runs into the Severn. To return to Earnwood, the locals used to call that area *Clogs Bank* because the Button Oak wives could hear the clogs of their miner husband as they returned from Kinlet pit, and they knew to put on the potatoes!

Charcoal burners used to live in tent-like shelters called booths or *boothens*, while they were burning. This was the origin of the surname Booton and Button Oak and Button

Bridge. Most villages had a pinfold or pound in which straying animals were kept until claimed by their owners, who then had to pay a fine. This is probably the origin of Pound Green – the green where there was a pound.

There is a coppice by the Frank Chapman Centre called Burnt Wood, presumably after a serious fire. Similarly there is Brant Lodge Coppice, the site of a burnt lodge or forestry official's dwelling.

I am intrigued by the name Dog-hanging Coppice. Near Stratford-on-Avon there is a Dog-hanging Meadow, where a hound, which killed a child, was treated like any other murderer. I wonder if this was the derivation of our coppice. In some places there are Bell meadows, where the income from the land was used for the upkeep of the church's bells. Bell Coppice is in Cleobury parish so, if the same applies here, the money would go to Cleobury bells. Seckley means a boggy clearing. Evidently it was later re-afforested.

John Ruskin, the essayist and social philosopher, started a colony of people who were to be self-supporting from the land, hence Ruskin land. He believed that King John was much mis-judged, and St John's Lane is named for King John. Beucastle was built by George Baker, a wealthy industrialist, Mayor of Birmingham and friend of Ruskin. The name is made up, meaning *beautiful castle*.

Silligrove House was named after the grove or wood of willows (sallows), and Heightington was the tun or settlement of Hyht's people. Buckeridge, to my disappointment has nothing to do with deer, but it is the ridge of beech trees. There do not seem to be any there now, and yet we have Beach Hay very near. Another disappointment about deer is Stagborough Hill. A stag is a spur of a hill, and the borough was a fortified camp, possibly an Iron Age fort. I can remember the bare top of the hill, but I cannot remember any ditches, probably because I never thought to look for them.

Dowles Brook has a name made up of two different ethnic roots. *Dow* or *dhu* is Celtic for Black, but the 'les' comes from the Saxon *glais* or stream. Douglas in the Isle of Man has the same derivation. The brook is made up of three lesser brooks, Baveney Brook, for which I have not been able to find any derivation, Mad Brook, which may be named because these short streams respond very rapidly to heavy rain, rising suddenly. The third brook is Lem Brook, which means the clear brook, the same derivation as the Leam, which flows through Leamington. The odd thing about this brook is that about a mile from Dowles it is known as Tanner's Brook, presumably because there was a tan-yard on the brook. The only building of any age on the stream is the house now known as Tanners Bow. Presumably that was the site. There would be plenty of oak bark nearby to help in the tanning process.

One place that has completely defeated me is Bliss Gate. There is a similar word to Bliss which means a bare spot, so possibly Bliss Gate is the gate at the bare spot. I should be very glad if anyone could come up with a better theory.