



<http://kentarchaeology.org.uk/research/archaeologia-cantiana/>

Kent Archaeological Society is a registered charity number 223382

© 2017 Kent Archaeological Society

HISTORICAL RESEARCH NOTES

THE CELTS AND THE RIVER BEULT

The Beult, formerly rhyming with 'cult', but now pronounced 'belt', is entirely a Kentish river. It rises near Shadoxhurst and flows westwards past Bethersden, Smarden and Headcorn to meet the Medway near Yalding. The Beult is a placid stream, the one sensational event in its existence being near Staplehurst in 1865, when (after misunderstandings by a repair gang) a down express crashed at the bridge over it; an event that almost killed Charles Dickens, his lover, and her mother, who were in one of the carriages.¹

Unfortunately, the Beult's otherwise uneventful history has left scant information on its name. The first record is as late as 1612, when it figures as *Beule* in Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* (sometimes called the longest poem in English). In 1819 it appears as Beult on Ordnance Survey maps. These forms are described as 'unexplained'. Yet the Beult has a namesake to the west in the Bewl (TQ 6834), which runs northwards along the Kent-Sussex border and past Scotney Castle to meet the river Teise below Lamberhurst.² The Bewl provides a useful clue here, as we shall see.

These hydronyms cannot be English. The curious sequence B-L-T instead suggests comparison with Welsh. Builth Wells, a market town and former spa in Powys, is called *Buallt* in Welsh. This originally meant not the settlement but a region, the cantref in which the town is located. In older records it appears as *Buellt*, from early Welsh *bu* 'cow' plus (*g*)*ellt* 'grass', and so meaning 'cow pasture'.³ Cows being better yielders than sheep, the Builth area had advantages over more rugged parts of Wales. Hence the name. It is not the only place with a Celtic element meaning 'grass'. Near Stranraer in Scotland is the village of Leswalt 'grassy court', situated away from the coast, in a spot sheltered against south-west gales.⁴ The form is again Brittonic (not Gaelic), being from Cumbric, a language (similar to Welsh) that was spoken in southern Scotland and Cumbria until about 1100.

In the light of early Welsh *Buellt*, it seems that the names of Beult and Bewl can be taken as Brittonic ones meaning 'cow pasture'. Two circumstances add to the case for this. First, Builth in Wales is attested even in the twelfth-century *Book of Llandaff* as *Buell*, lacking the final *t*,

the Welsh perhaps finding the combination of sounds nearly as difficult to pronounce as the English did.⁵ Drayton's *Beule*, without *t*, is thus not a problem. Second, the Welsh word is also used of rivers. In Glamorgan is the Buellai (ST 1182), running into the Taff near Taff's Well, and having a name meaning 'cow-pasture (stream)'.⁶

The name of the Beult has been so obscure that it does not appear amongst recognized Celtic toponyms in Kent.⁷ Yet there seems reason to relate it to medieval Welsh *Buellt* and explain it as 'cow pasture'. It has many orchards on its lower course (though not usually on its banks), but there are also plenty of meadows, as one would expect in a region of Wealden Clay. This brings us back to the item on Dickens cited above. It quotes his letter of 13 June 1865, in which he gives a vivid account of the accident, mentioning an 'open swampy field' by the track, the pollard tree where he encountered a dying lady (by giving her brandy, he unwittingly helped kill her), and the complicated way that carriages were twisted among 'iron and wood, and mud and water'; the kind of landscape, one might think, suitable for cattle-farming.

There are three other points. First, the older pronunciation 'Bult' will show preservation of original Brittonic *u*, which in Welsh (despite the modern spelling) was, from the fourteenth century onwards, raised in the South to [i] and in the North to a retracted [i] (the latter having no equivalent in English).⁸ Second, as regards the translation 'cow pasture', the lower Bewl has one of the few areas of meadowland in a district of narrow valleys and thickly-wooded hills, as is clear from the map. It seems the regions of the Beult and Bewl were known for grazing, and the Celtic term for that was applied to the streams within them. Third, the interpretation set out here is supported by Tenterden (five miles south of the Beult) 'swine-pasture of the people of Thanet'. Sir Frank Stenton cited Tenterden as evidence of how the Weald provided pasture for more open parts of Kent and Sussex, with important consequences for their manorial systems.⁹ Tenterden is far from Thanet. But its grasslands were clearly valued there. In the light of present arguments, it would be interesting to know whether land-holding by the Beult and Bewl tallies with current views on their early agricultural history. Researchers on the question may wish to follow approaches set out long ago by Glanville Jones, who drew attention to Celtic symptoms in medieval Kent and Sussex records.¹⁰

If the Beult and Bewl (with early switching of vowels?) are namesakes of Builth or *Buallt* (formerly *Buellt*) in Powys, we may add them to the select number of Brittonic place-names in Kent, like Dover, Lympne, Reculver, Sarre, and Thanet. They also tell us a little about Celtic communities in the county. The lack of archaeological evidence for Anglo-Saxon settlement in Low Weald and High Weald is well known.¹¹ Yet the Beult and Bewl show that parts of the region supported cattle, and that speakers of British remained there long enough for these toponyms to be borrowed

by English. They hence indicate the survival of Britons in Anglo-Saxon England; useful evidence for a problem which, as a recent book shows, is not easy to deal with.¹²

ANDREW BREEZE

¹ Christopher Howse, *The Daily Telegraph: How We Saw It 1855-2005* (London, 2004), 90-1.

² *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names*, ed. Victor Watts (Cambridge, 2004), 53.

³ Hywel Wyn Owen and Richard Morgan, *Dictionary of the Place-Names of Wales* (Llandysul, 2007), 56.

⁴ W.J. Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1926), 180.

⁵ John Lloyd-Jones, *Geirfa Barddoniaeth Gynnar Gymraeg* (Caerdydd, 1931-63), 83.

⁶ R.J. Thomas, *Enwau Afonydd a Nentydd Cymru* (Caerdydd, 1938), 23-4.

⁷ Richard Coates and Andrew Breeze, *Celtic Voices, English Places* (Stamford, 2000), 315-16, 360-6.

⁸ D. Simon Evans, *A Grammar of Middle Welsh* (Dublin, 1964), 1-2.

⁹ F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 1971), 283.

¹⁰ G.R.J. Jones, 'Multiple Estates and Early Settlement', in *English Medieval Settlement*, ed. P.H. Sawyer (London, 1979), 9-34.

¹¹ *Map of Britain in the Dark Ages*, 2nd edn (Southampton, 1966).

¹² *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Nick Higham (Woodbridge, 2007).

THE DETAILS OF KENT SHOWN ON THE MID FOURTEENTH-CENTURY GOUGH MAP

This map takes its name from Richard Gough, an eighteenth-century antiquarian collector. It is the earliest surviving map to show routes across Great Britain and to depict England (at least) with a coastline which is readily recognisable. Its quality and detail ensured that it remained the model for cartographers for 200 years. The originator(s) and the purpose(s) for which the map was drawn are not known and a matter of continuing debate.

The work of compiling the Gough map can be dated to within a couple of decades in the mid fourteenth century. The earliest possible date is 1355, the year work started on the town walls of Coventry which are depicted on the map. According to major studies (Parsons 1958; Millea 2007) the latest date of origin, in the mid-late 1360s, relies *inter alia* on some Kentish evidence – Queenborough Castle and its new town alongside are clearly depicted on the map. (But see below the discussion of Queenborough/Sheppey.)

Among the Gough map's many intriguing features is the network of red lines showing routes criss-crossing the country linking many, but not all,

of the 600-odd towns and other settlements marked, with figures in Roman numerals indicating distances written between each stopping point. This has led some to dub the Gough map as 'the earliest road map of Great Britain'. But there are many glaring omissions of well known routes, not least the busy section of Watling Street across north Kent. Nor are the two other main routes across Kent at this time shown – London-Hythe; London-Rye/Hastings (see *Historical Atlas of Kent [HAK]*, p. 51).

The places labelled on the map are accompanied by vignettes, simple drawings of a house, church, castle, town wall, etc., singly or in combinations. London's vignette is the most elaborate. York is also shown in fine style – oddly, outclassing Canterbury.

Kentish Details on the Gough map

Nineteen (possibly twenty) towns and smaller settlements in Kent are marked on the Gough map. **Table 1** lists these with a brief description of the accompanying vignette. Among the counties of England only Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and, rather surprisingly, underpopulated Northumberland

TABLE 1. THE KENTISH PLACES MARKED ON THE GOUGH MAP

Gough map spelling		Style of vignette	Gough map spelling		Style of vignette
<i>appeldre</i>	Appledore	house	<i>maideston</i>	Maidstone	house, spire
<i>ashford</i>	Ashford	house	<i>ospring</i>	Ospringe	house
<i>Cantuar'</i>	Canterbury	town wall, castle, cathedral, church	<i>otford</i>	Otford	house
<i>cheryng</i>	Charing	house	[not labelled]	[Queenborough]*	castle+houses
<i>dertford</i>	Dartford	house, church spire+cross	<i>Rowchestr</i>	Rochester	town wall, castle, cathedral
<i>dovor</i>	Dover	town wall, castle, house	<i>Rumy</i>	Romney	house
<i>fevarsham</i>	Faversham	house, church spire+cross	<i>sandwych</i>	Sandwich	house **
<i>graveshend</i>	Gravesend	house	<i>sithingborn</i>	Sittingbourne	house
<i>heth</i>	Hythe	house	<i>tunbryg</i>	Tonbridge	castle, house
[not labelled]	[Leeds] *	?	<i>yawhour</i>	Yalding	house

* See text for discussion of Queenborough and Leeds.

** The thirteenth-century castle at Sandwich is not indicated; its town wall post-dates the Gough map.

have more locations shown. Obviously the scale of the map and the size of the labels, not to mention the bulky vignettes and the space taken up by the exaggerated way rivers are shown, put a limit on the number of places that can readily be squeezed into any county. **Fig. 1** (p. 390) shows how Kent is depicted on the Gough map (east at the top) with a 'translation' below.

As far as routes are concerned and, as mentioned above, the Kentish section of Watling Street is not depicted by a 'red line' as such. Nevertheless, its importance is clearly indicated by the marking of well-known stopping points along its course between London and Canterbury – Dartford, Gravesend, Rochester, Sittingbourne, Ospringe. Furthermore, the bridge over the Medway at Rochester is clearly depicted. Maybe the cartographer had not got round to marking the line or the crowding of the place names and their accompanying vignettes in north Kent precluded showing it? On the London-Hythe route, Maidstone and Ashford are marked (crossing points of the Medway and Stour); similarly, Tonbridge is a key Medway crossing point on the route to Rye.

The only 'red line' route shown in Kent is that which apparently ran between Southampton and Canterbury, through Sussex. It makes its way from Rye to Canterbury and passes very close to the Appledore vignette – whereas for most of the Hampshire and Sussex places (like Chichester, for example) the red line is shown passing right through the middle of the vignette. It is not clear therefore whether the cartographer thought the route bypassed Appledore, though it almost certainly did not. It is tempting to surmise that this Southampton-Canterbury route was a popular one for pilgrims from the coastal districts of central southern England to Becket's shrine.

Between Charing and Maidstone, and next to the cartouche within which the County name *Kant* appears, is a semicircle of four small roundish marks with an indecipherable label alongside. Its geographical position suggests that it may possibly relate to Leeds castle/priory. Alternatively, it may be that these four marks have been placed deliberately next to the County name to represent something symbolically – the four Cinque Ports of the County maybe? One other interpretation is that the marks represent the Medway megaliths which would have been conspicuous features in the fourteenth century, before their slighting (but see Alexander, 1961).

Of the Kentish rivers shown on the Gough map only the Medway has a decipherable name – *fl med* Starting near London those also shown are:

the Ravensbourne and Darent; the western branch of the Medway at Yalding is the Teise and the eastern one the Beult; the tributary shown at Maidstone is the Len. Oddly, Robertsbridge (*Pons Roberti* in Sussex) is shown on the Beult which has been confused by the

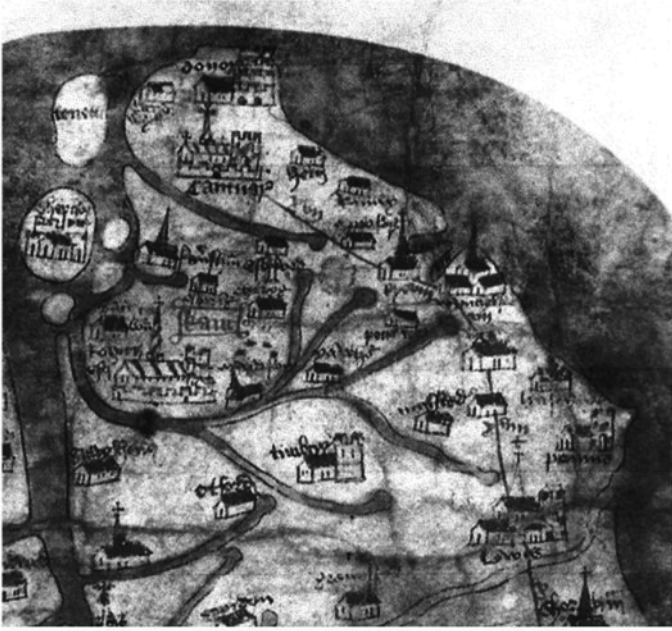


FIG. 1 (Above) The depiction of Kent on the Gough map. (Courtesy of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, detail from MS. Gough Gen. Top. 16).

(Below) The Kentish places and named islands on the Gough map. No attempt has been made to reproduce the vignettes. The mysterious four roundish marks are shown adjacent to the County name. The red line route is shown approaching Canterbury from the south-west.

cartographer with the Rother which flows into the sea at Rye; the Great Stour on which Canterbury and Ashford stand.

Off the north coast of Kent the islands of Sheppey (*Shephey*) and Thanet (*tenett*) are depicted and labelled, together with three unnamed islands, representing Grain, Elmley and Harty. Between Rye (Sussex) and Appledore is a circular symbol which probably represents the Isle of Oxney.

Selection Criteria

Certain places of primary importance to the contemporary geography of Kent were bound to be marked on the Gough map:

the Cathedral cities, Canterbury and Rochester;
the Cinque Ports of Sandwich, Dover, Hythe and Romney; to which may be added another major port, Faversham, formally just a 'limb' of one of the headports (Dover) but by far the most significant of all these subordinate members of the confederation.

Is it possible to discern any patterns in the selection of the dozen or so other Kentish places shown on the Gough map? Their claim(s) for inclusion are briefly set out below (in alphabetical order):

Appledore: was an important inland port, river crossing and market centre for Romney Marsh (see G. Draper, *HAK*, pp. 56-7). It is very likely that the red line route, following Appledore water up from Rye, passed through this settlement.

Ashford: located on the main route from London to Hythe at the Stour crossing point.

Charing: also on the London to Hythe route; one of the archbishop's palaces located here.

Dartford: on Watling Street at the Darent crossing; interestingly, its vignette has a cross on the spire (denoting monastic status) which is overwritten – the Dominican nunnery there was founded in 1356 which falls neatly into the estimated time period of the Gough map.

Gravesend: on the Thames, another stopping point on Watling Street: Tilbury, on the Essex side of the river, is also marked on the Gough map which may suggest that this was an important ferry route.

Leeds: [if indeed it is marked] a substantial castle and monastic house.

Maidstone: crossing point of the Medway for the London-Hythe route; an archbishop's palace.

Ospringe: stopping point on Watling Street.

Otford: an archbishop's palace; local crossing point on the Darent.

Queenborough: newly-built castle and settlement.

Sittingbourne: stopping point on Watling Street.

Tonbridge: major castle, monastic site and crossing point on the Medway for London-Rye route.

Yalding: local crossing point on the Medway/Teise.

It seems apparent from an examination of the salient features of these other places that there are four factors of particular significance – the presence of bridge(s)/ferry; a castle stronghold; a monastic house; an archbishop's palace (see **Table 2**). The importance of river crossing facilities is not surprising given the Gough map's general emphasis on lines of travel. Although there were many defended sites in Kent at the time (see *HAK*, pp. 53-5) the castle locations shown on the Gough map – Tonbridge, Leeds and Queenborough (not forgetting Dover, Rochester and Canterbury)

TABLE 2. ATTRIBUTES OF THE KENTISH PLACES MARKED ON THE GOUGH MAP

	Cathedral City	Major Port	Castle	Archbishop's palace	Monastic site(s)	River crossing*
Canterbury	/		/	/	/	/
Dover		/	/		/	
Faversham		/			/	
Hythe		/				
Rochester	/		/		/	//
Romney		/				
Sandwich		/			/	
Appledore						/
Ashford						/
Charing				/		
Dartford					/	/
Gravesend						//
Leeds			/		/	
Maidstone				/		//
Ospringe						
Otford				/		/
Queenborough			/			
Sittingbourne						
Tonbridge			/		/	//
Yalding						//

* // major (Medway/Thames) crossing; / minor crossing.

– were probably the most important. But as far as monastic houses are concerned there were a number of important examples such as Lesnes and Boxley which are not marked on the Gough map (*HAK*, p. 43).

The apparent emphasis given to archbishop's palaces is perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the selection. Charing, Maidstone and Otford all had such residences (as did Canterbury). There were other places in east Kent similarly endowed but not marked (see *HAK*, p. 64). Nevertheless, reinforcing the apparent significance of these locations for the Gough map is the fact that Croydon (Surrey) and Mayfield (Sussex), the sites of two other important palaces, both appear, perhaps like Otford and Charing, with no other particular claim for inclusion. Tatton-Brown (2000) describes a typical journey in stages by the archbishop from his London palace at Lambeth to Canterbury, firstly southward to Croydon and then travelling eastward with stops at Otford, Maidstone and Charing. On his visits to Sussex he would stay at Mayfield in the east of the county and then move on to the string of manors and estates he owned in the environs of Chichester; presumably the archbishop's agents would also have been regular users of the 'red line' route to Canterbury.

The Sheppey Question

In 1361 Edward III purchased land on the Isle of Sheppey (at a place then called Bynnee) on which a castle was to be built. Construction began in 1361 and was completed *c.* 1367. In a charter of 1368 Bynnee was formally replaced by the Royal borough of Queenborough which was newly laid out to accompany the castle and named after Edward's wife, Philippa of Hainault. Records of work associated with the construction of the new town appear in the castle accounts from 1366 onwards, suggesting that it was already under construction before the charter was granted. In 1368 the wool staple was transferred to Queenborough which encouraged its rapid growth over the next ten years (Birbeck and Chelu 2008).

The compiler of the Gough map shows the outline of the Isle of Sheppey and has drawn a vignette, one of the more elaborate in the County, showing a castle and two houses. The whole is labelled *Shephey*. It would appear, therefore, that the mapmaker was very well aware of the recent developments on the island with the building of a castle and the two houses representing the growing new town. The point at issue is whether the cartographer in using the label *Shephey* was merely naming the island (as he had done for *tenett* Thanet) or thought the name referred to both the island and the development at Queenborough. Insofar as he had signalled the existence of a substantial town by the style of the vignette it seems unlikely that he didn't know its new formal name. The cartographer may merely have omitted to write in the Queenborough label!

In the circumstances it seems unsafe to assume (as Parsons and Millea

do) that the use of the Sheppey label indicates that the map could not be later than the foundation date for Queenborough (1366/8). Indeed statements about Sheppey/Queenborough and the Gough map in Parsons (1958, p. 24), repeated in Millea (2007), are misleading:

Off the north coast are three unnamed islands, probably Grain, Elmley and Harty, and beyond them another island, with a large castle named *Shephey* Sheppey. Sheppey castle was entirely rebuilt in the reign of Edward III and in 1366 its name was changed to Queenborough in honour of his queen Philippa.

It is, of course, incorrect to say that a *rebuilding* and change in name of a castle took place, nor does this description mention the important development of the new town alongside the castle.

CONCLUSIONS

The Gough map shows all the most important places in Kent at the period; the majority of settlements marked are situated on main lines of travel thus conforming to the view proposed by Sir Frank Stenton (1936; 1958). The major route of Watling Street, while not marked by a red line, is nevertheless clearly discernible by the series of well known stopping places along its length between London and Canterbury. Two of these places – Sittingbourne and Ospringe – have no other claim for inclusion on the Gough map apart from sitting astride this road.

It is noteworthy that various places shown in Kent are the locations of archbishop's palaces (with other examples in neighbouring Surrey and Sussex). The red line route from Southampton to Canterbury was presumably a significant Pilgrims' way.

Research continues nationally into the various mysteries of the Gough map as a whole. It is hoped that this note looking at its Kentish details contributes something to the effort.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank Jonathan Fryer for his advice on the Sheppey details in this note.

TERENCE LAWSON

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- J.H. Alexander, 1961, 'The excavation of the Chestnuts megalithic tomb at Addington, Kent', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, lxxvi, 1-57.
 V. Birbeck and R.A. Chelu, 2008, 'Geophysical Survey and Evaluation trenching at Queenborough Castle, Isle of Sheppey', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, cxxviii, 378-86.
 T. Lawson and D. Killingray (eds), 2004, *An Historical Atlas of Kent*, Chichester.

HISTORICAL RESEARCH NOTES

- N. Millea, 2007, *The Gough Map. The earliest road map of Great Britain?*, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
- E.J.S. Parsons, 1958, *The Map of Great Britain circa AD 1360, known as the Gough Map. An introduction to the facsimile*, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
- F. Stenton, 1936, 'The Road System of Medieval England', *Economic History Review* (reprinted in Parsons 1958).
- T. Tatton-Brown, 2000, *Lambeth Palace. A History of the Archbishops of Canterbury and their Houses*, SPCK.
- T. Tatton-Brown, 2001, 'The evolution of Watling Street in Kent', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, cxxxi, 121-134.