# Hook Norton: Place Names



© Ordnance Survey, 2009

An insight into Hook Norton's history can be gleaned from its place names.  Spellings change over the years, but place names reveal their Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian, Norman French or Old English roots.  Samuel Johnson's famous dictionary of 1755 was a major force in standardising English spelling, but  250 years later we still have alternative spellings of common words, including standard-*ise* or standard-*ize*.

Margaret Gelling in *The Place-Names of Oxfordshire Part II*, devotes a section to the village which begins with a daunting number of variations on the spelling of Hook Norton:  from Hocneratune in *The Anglo Saxon Chronical* (925 AD) through a dozen or more variations such as Hochenartone  in the Domesday Survey of 1086 and Hogesnorton in the Calendar of Close Rolls in 1381.  Hook Norton was spelled as Hooknorton in deeds as late as the 1890s.

The village name is said to derive from Ōra – hill-slope:  tun or ton means homestead or village, so we have Hocca's homestead on the hillside.   The name Hokernesse, Hocca's headland, appears in *The Cartulary of Oseney Abbey*.  Hocca

would have been a Saxon leader, and his name gives us a hint of the village's origins.  Oseney Abbey was founded in 1129 by Robert II d'Oilly, lord of the manor, and became a major landholder with seigneurial rights in Hook Norton:  its written archives are an invaluable source of information on its possessions over the following four hundred years, giving details of donors, land ownership and field names.  But there are even earlier clues in the landscape itself.

John Blair in *Oxoniensia* once suggested the original village lay two miles north of its present site on an ancient track running southwest from Banbury, close to the iron age hillfort of Tadmarton Camp, the scene of a battle in 913 between Danish marauders and local Saxons.  (The hillfort is dissected by the road passing the entrance to Tadmarton Golf Course, and is shown in the right upper corner of the map.)   Blair points out that five parishes converge at this point, the hillfort is on a significant ridge, higher than the modern village, and that the original glebeland of Hook Norton church was in this area.  Local field names include **Priestfield**, confirmed in 1153-4 as part of the land given to Oseney Abbey in 1129.  Nearby (within the golf course) is a holy well; and there is a possibly Anglo-Saxon burial site to the west visible in the 19th century but which has since been ploughed over.  A field with an alternative spelling of Prestfield  Pasture existed as late as 1782.  Its location is said to be "next Wydecumbe", later **Withycombe Farm**.  (Withy is Old English for willow;  a combe is a narrow valley.)  Blair also refers to an 1808 map which shows a field called **Priest Top**, north of Nill Farm.  On an earlier (1773) map is a small field called Chapel Field.  A little further west along the same ancient track is **Nill Farm**, which was once called Rectory Farm and has a dovecote, a sign of secular wealth or religious ownership.  Nill might have been a personal name; Robert d'Oilly's brother's name is sometimes spelled Niel and it is quite possible that the alternative name, Nigel, found in contemporary documents was a French version of the Norman (Scandinavian) name Niels.  Margaret Gelling has a different interpretation:  that the name is derived from Old English cnyll, hill, or Middle English atten hill, land.  The owner, interviewed in 1986 for the BBC's *Domesday reloaded* project (http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/domesday), believed the word referred to a clump of trees.  In any event, what is now Nill Farm was glebe land and was later owned by the Bishop of Oxford after the dissolution of Oseney Abbey in 1539.

(Oseney (or Osney as it is now spelled) in Oxford, means Ōsa's Island.) Nill Farm was an important site; manorial court sessions were held there.

Within the present village St Peter's church has been much rebuilt over the centuries, but contains long and short quoins on the external angles of the nave, evidence of Anglo-Saxon building – which, as Blair admitted, possibly invalidates the suggestion that the original village lay up near the iron age fort.  However, the early Saxons did not build in stone, so it may well be that there was an earlier wooden church on a different site.  Opposite the church is a house named **Priestfield**, perhaps linked to the Priestfield in the north east of the parish.

Other ecclesiastical names include **The Glebe**, built in the 20th century on allotments that were once church land.



The Glebe

Packer
© Oxfordshire History Centre
Ref. D243169a

**Rectory Road** is a relatively new housing estate, which includes the small modern rectory.  **Osney Close**, another 20th century development, faces what might be the site of the original manor court where **Talbots** House now stands (the Earl of Talbot was the Lessee of the Bishop of Oxford, successor to the Abbot of Oseney) in the 1770s.  The Canons of Oseney had a house in Hook Norton, probably in that area:  **Oseney Mill**, however, is on the parish boundary with Swerford.  **The Shearings** was church property until 1774 and was the centre of many village events until built over in the 20th century.

Hook Norton seems to have been two administrative areas for some time. **Southrop**, the southern hamlet first mentioned in 1316,  may be from Old English, or

even possibly a corruption of the Danish word thorp: an early Danish grave was found there in the 19th century.   (Martin Biddle and John Blair, *Oxoniensia*.)

There are three "ends" in the village:  **East End** and **Down End** simply refer to their situations.  A scot is a tax, so **Scotland End** was taxable land.



Scotland End

Packer
© Oxfordshire History Centre
Ref.  D243148a

Within the village various street names refer to local crafts.

The Nettings

Packer
© Oxfordshire History Centre
Ref. D243142a



**The Nettings** (sometimes called The Knittings in old documents) appears to refer to rope-making as does **Rope Way**, but net can mean wet in Old English and the Nettings is at the bottom of **Watery Lane** which runs south from **The Bourne** (an old term for brook).

The Bourne council houses
erected in the 1920s

Packer Collection, Simms,
© Oxfordshire History Centre
Ref. D243382a

**Middle Hill** was once known as Blacksmith's Hill, and the house at the top of the lane is now called **Anvil House**. Other street names appear to be simply topographical: **Clay Bank**, the Bourne and Bourne Lane. **The Butts** linking Rectory Road to Bourne Lane may once have been an area where archery was practised, or where fields abutted. A row of thatched houses here was once known as Rag Row, presumably a reference to the state of their roofs.



Sibford Road

Packer Collection, Simms
© Oxfordshire History Centre
Ref. D243241a

**Sibford Road** was originally The Horsefair but has also been known as **Haydon's Lane** which may refer to a hay way.

A tite refers to a place where water collected naturally. There were four tites in Hooky; the bottom of **Tite Lane** at Down End was one, and Down End was once called Tite End.

The charity founded in 1522 by the Duke of Suffolk, then lord of the manor of Hook Norton, to provide shelter and aid for the poor was based in **Garret House**. Garret Lane, beside it, was renamed **Queen Street** in honour of Queen Victoria. What was once **Workhouse Lane** in the East End of the village became Norton Holt, but now Norton Holt is simply a house name.  Well into the 20th century, the lane was known as Lane End but it is now simply part of East End.



Workhouse Lane/Lane End/
Norton Holt
(the house name can just be seen by the gate)

Photograph: © Gill Geering

On the south side of the high street just beyond the Baptist church is a building  called **The Manor** which was built in the seventeenth century. Pevsner cites the bay window date stone as 1636, and it was probably never a true manor house.



The Manor House

The Packer Collection
© Oxfordshire History Centre
Ref. D243160a

It is likely that  the original Manor House would have been  north of the church.

**Burycroft Lane** probably refers to a croft belonging to the manor but is sometimes called Betty Craft Lane locally, and there is a house with that name on it. It leads to **Croft Lane**.

A holly tree at the bottom of what is now **Hollybush Road** was where village processions used to assemble on high days and holidays.



Looking north from the top of Brick Hill over Bridge House to the church
Packer Collection, Simms, © Oxfordshire History Centre, Ref. D243266a

**Brick Hill**, like Bretch Hill in Banbury, refers to ground newly broken for cultivation.

The oldest house in the village, traditionally  called **Reeves' House**, was built in the 16th century.   A reeve was a medieval administrator.  Richard Reeves (whose family name might have derived from his forefathers' trade) lived there in the eighteenth century.  Recently re-named The Thatch it stands just west of the Sun Inn, opposite the church, next to Priestfield.

Before the Enclosure Award transformed the landscape from strip farming in common fields, when people went out of the village to work their land, there were many farmhouses within the village.   At that time the houses, some of which had crofts, were more widely separated than is apparent now.  **Redlands Farm**'s name refers to the iron-rich soil which stretches north and east of Hook Norton; **East End Farm** and **Southrop Farmhouse** were built in the 17th century before Enclosure; **Park Farm** leads from **Park Hill** and **Park Road**, and – like **Grounds Farm** - was once part of the lord of the manor's personal holdings, his desmesne.

When the redistribution of land by Enclosure created consolidated holdings, houses were built on the new outlying farms.  Many of them were named after famous victories: **Belle Isle Farm**, for example,  just north of The Gate hangs High refers to the British capture in 1761 of the French island of Belle Isle during the Seven Years War; **Brooklyn Farmhouse** at the south western edge of the village may be named after the Battle of Brooklyn in the American War of Independence in 1776.  Some farm names are self-evident: **Six Ash Farm**, **Cowpasture Farm**, **Duckpool Farm**; **Leys Farm** is named for its grass, **Bacon Farm** for its livestock; **Oatleyhill Farm** produced oats.

**Old Lodge Farmhouse**, formerly Hook Norton Lodge, built in 1646, was once a public house and a stop-over point for drovers and provided a pound for their animals.  The public house, **The Gate hangs High**, further west, was also a drovers' inn and there were gates across the road there to retain the animals but allow free passage to travellers.  "The gate hangs high and hinders none; Refresh and pay and journey on."

**Sugarswell Farm** derives its name from the Old English for robbers' spring or stream.  No doubt a drovers' road was a good place for thieves to lie in wait.  **Lodge Farm** has a cottage called Turpin's Lodge, a perhaps fanciful allusion to the famous highwayman.

Other farm names include:

**Berryfield Farm**:  An old inclosure. Berry might come from burh,  a manor house, hill or barrow.  The farm lies close to an ancient track and has a fine view over towards the present village so the name may mean "open country". Dickins, quoting Beesley's *The History of Banbury*, refers to a beacon point there and to the boundary between two British tribes.  Now it is close to the boundary between Oxfordshire and Warwickshire.

**Cradle** and **Cradle House Farm**: Possibly from Old English for scythe handle.

**Fanthill Farm**: Possibly from Old English font, spring or well.

**Fanville Head Farm**:  May be connected with Fant, i.e. spring or well.  The Ordnance Survey map had Fanbullhead Fm until 1922 .  Dickins suggests a connection with Fayrewell in the former commonly farmed West Field and Fanthill.

**Gilden Farm**: Gilden may correspond to gylde/golde, meaning in this context rich or productive.

**Manor Farm** was formerly known as as Lampetts or Lampits Farm.  The Lampetts were a local well-to-do family.  Gelling suggests their name might relate to Loam pits.

**Rollright Heath Farm**: Hrolla is a proper name; the second part of the farm name relates to heath, i.e. open, uncultivated land

**Butter Hill** presumably refers to the excellent pasture; **Council Hill** was sometimes called Counser Hill: William Counser was mentioned in the Oseney Cartulery in 1521; a George Counser received 119 acres in the Enclosure Award. **Stapenhull** is the steep hill.

And there is a legend that **Traitor's Ford** on the very edge of the parish may be linked to the English civil war of the 1640s.



Traitor's Ford
Photographs: © Gill Geering

A more prosaic explanation is that "traitor" is simply due to a consonantal shift from "trader": the green way beside the ford is an ancient track.

© Gill Geering
November 2014

## Further Reading

Margaret Dickins,  *History of Hook Norton 912 – 1928* (Banbury, 1928)

John Blair, "Hook Norton, regia villa", *Oxoniensia*, Vol LI, 1986, p.63.

Martin Biddle and John Blair, "The Hook Norton Coin Hoard of 1848: A Viking Burial from Oxfordshire, *Oxoniensia*, Vol LII, 1987, pp 186-195

Kate Tiller, *Hook Norton Village Trail*. Also: "Hook Norton, Open Village" in *Rural England, an illustrated history of the landscape,* ed. Joan Thirsk (Oxford, 2000)

Margaret Gelling, *The Placenames of Oxfordshire* (Cambridge, 1953)

*The Cartulary of Oseney Abbey*, ed. H Salter  (Oxford, 1929-36)

www.hook-norton.org.uk/history