

The Wicken Tree

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Foreword

The following discussion purposes to deal with the general origin of Anglo-Saxon family names ending in "den" and particularly of the name Wickenden.

In order to permit better understanding of the subject, the early history and customs of this race will be sketched. Furthermore, in order to simplify matters the one name Anglo-Saxons will be used to apply to Jutes, Saxons, Angles, Frisians, etc., mentioned in various relations of their migrations to Britain.

Early History

In the dawn of our time, the forbears of the Anglo-Saxons and other Teutonic tribes, migrated from the North of India. Thence they crossed plains, deserts, ranges and possibly seas to the mouth of the Danube. From there they progressed up the valley of this river to its upper reaches whence they crossed, over the height of land, into the North Sea watersheds of the Weser, Elbe, Rhine, etc. There they settled for some ten centuries in the forests of what, is now Germany whence most of their descendants were to move over to Britain

From the part the North Sea coast stretching from Denmark to Holland their ships had made frequent visits and piratical incursions to Britain's southern shore even before the Romans left this island. So serious were these forays

that it was named Saxon Shore and it was specially provided with posts to give warnings and to repel raids

After the Roman legion left Britain and its inhabitants were abandoned without arms or military training, they were attacked by the Picts and Scots. In this emergency it is related that one of their chiefs named Vertingern appealed to the Anglo-Saxons for aid. At this time the people of Anglia and Saxony were not ignorant of the state of chronic turmoil in which

Europe was situated. Attila was on the rampage and though nominally an ally was scarcely less feared as such than if he were a foe. Moreover Roman pressure had been felt for centuries and constant warfare was carried on with the Franks. Vertingern's invitation and the temptation of rich spoils therefore came at the

right time and a group of Anglo-Saxons crossed the North Sea to the land and at the Isle of Thanet in Kent under chiefs Hengist and Horsa, about the year 449 A.D.

This, it may be noted, was some two years before the defeat of Attila at Chalons-sur-Marne in 451.

This first adventurous group made quick work at the Picts but in so doing perceived the weakness of the Britons and overpowered them. Thus the land of Kent was gradually occupied not only by the warriors of this first Anglo-Saxon expedition but by their families.

This first group was followed by others who occupied Sussex, Essex, etc. The movement was of such extent that, as Bede stated, Anglia, the Angles on the continent became practically deserted.

The Mark and the Dens

In his history of the Anglo-Saxons, John Mitchell Kemble draws attention to the systematic succession of place names in Kent ending in "den". He observes that these "den" places are located in the outlying forest regions which formed what he called the "mark". He further defines the mark having applied to the boundary region surrounding a main nucleus of cultivated lands tilled by the early Anglo-Saxon settlers, where groups of homesteads had names ending in ham, tun, stede, etc. The limits of the mark, he explains, were distinguished by striking features such as large trees, rivers, rocky cliffs, etc. Some of these were consecrated to tutelary gods after whom they were named, as for example Wonec, Woden's Oak.

This belt of forest land was at once a protection and a menace. To the invader not familiar with its trails and topography it presented serious impediments. On the other hand, it held many dangers for the settlers who ventured in it. There the raiding foe or the fabulous monster lurked ready to pounce on the unwary. As described in the poem Beowulf it contained "a hidden land amid wolf-haunted slopes and savage fen paths, nigh the wind-swept cliffs where the mountain stream falleth shrouded in the mists of the headlands". Or as in another poem:

"All the markland was
With Death surrounded,
The snares of the foe".

These features of the mark made it necessary to have vigilant men settled in it or close to it. They were the first line of defense of the community and the names of their settlements had the ending "hurst" or "den" as observed by Kemble. Dictionaries seem well agreed that the ending "den" means a place near a valley or a wood. It might also be called an outpost on account of its position in relation to other settlements.

It is probable that the men of the den were great prowlers of the mark whether for hunting or scouting and no doubt they told tall tales of what they found there. We can easily surmise that their inventions were the start of many a legend and story where figure monsters, goblins and fairies. Furthermore we can deduct that their training in foraging and

penetrating unknown wild places made them of great value in oversea ventures such as that of Hengist and Horsa. Hence the numerous traces of their lines of advance in Kent where the "den" names, when joined together form series of lines similar to those indicating on battle maps the progress or retrogression of forces engaged. On the map of Kent the first line seems to have encompassed a restricted area near the north coast including the Isle of Thanet. The second stage is farther inland and finally the line of "den" names covers the Southern boundary of the County.

The traces of this system of outposts were found not only on maps of Kent, as observed by Kemble, but also in and adjacent to the valley of the river Weser In Germany where a striking series of "den" place names was spotted on maps by the writer. These are also in the "mark" and follow the irregularities of the height of land between the Weser and the Rhine or Ems. The valley of the Weser down to the seaboard is the ancient Anglia referred to by the monk Bede. It also contains the city of Hanover, place of origin of the present sovereigns of Great Britain.

As examples of the survival of the ending "den" in Germany to denote a place near a wood or valley we find Emden at the mouth of the river Ems, Verden near the valley of the Weser (pronounced Vesper) and Linden, a suburb of Hanover, on the river Leine. It is also interesting to find a town named Bovenden near Hanover and its namesake Bovden in Kent; "Boven"^w and "Bove" being the ancient form of the word "above". Thus

did the ancient Anglo-Saxon tribes leave their trace in these place-names of the continent.

Occupations and organization of the early Anglo-Saxons

Within the mark, whether in Britain or in Germany the Anglo-Saxons of early times were busied mostly with agricultural pursuits when not engaged in forging expeditions. They bore the reputation of disliking cities and even went so far to avoid contiguous buildings. "Each lived apart", says Tacitus, "each by himself as the woodside, the plain or the fresh spring attracted him".

I do not think that this taste for solitude meant a totally unsocial nature. It implied rather intense dislike against crowding and an equally great appreciation of complete freedom. Indeed, we can judge by their organization, they had a very high sense of social order. Their tribal associations were composed of three classes: freemen, nobles and kings. None but recognized members of these had rights in these associations, the basic right being that of possessing land. This right probably exercised in common at first, then, later on, individually.

The freedom of the freeman was complete and he could carry his rights with him at any time he chose, wherever he pleased. In relations of that time he is called man, ceorl, mas, maistus, weapned man. He was born to arms and obliged to possess them, and exercised feud as a right when occasion demanded. In normal times his occupations were mainly to till his share of land for food. On his portion of arable lands he grew grain for bread and mead, and, in

pastures stock and horses for meat and transport. In this work he was helped by serfs if he owned them.

These were mostly prisoners of war or their descendants. From the story of Beowulf and the various sagas quoted in it one might be inclined to think that warfare was their main pursuit and indeed it probably occupied a large share of their time. Nevertheless we find many allusions to other occupations such as horse-racing on "yellow roads", hunting the stag and the boar and listening endlessly to the singing of Bards 'n the halls of their leaders while partaking of food and mead-

"At times bard sang,
Clear-voiced in Heorot.

It is also to be noted that while many songs of that period extolled feats of arms, the poem Havamal, the high Song of Odin also known as Proverb Song, mostly concerned with advice of a social and moral nature with repeated warnings against intemperance:

"Let a man hold the cup
Yet of mead drink moderately".

It also describes such peaceful occupations as hewing wood, courting, etc., but the influences of a life lived dangerously appear frequently with repeated advice to be on the alert against foes:-

"Leaving in field his arms,
Let no man go
A foot's length forward....."

From the poems of that time one can also conclude that for them seamanship was a second nature.

Religion and Totemism

Having thus covered the early history, land divisions, occupations and organization of the early Anglo-Saxons we are better prepared to understand their religion and the profound influence it had over the formation of their stock names.

On the continent and during the early period of their occupation of Britain they were worshippers of the old Norse Gods Odin, (Woden or Wotan) his consort Freya, (pronounced Teeoo), Thor etc., in a mythological system resembling closely that of the Greeks. From the names of their principal deities are derived the names of most of our week-days.

They also held in reverence or worshipped a host of lesser gods, and among these, wells, springs and trees as has already been hinted by their consecration of boundary landmarks to tutelary gods of which the example of Wonac, Woden's Oak was given. Their resultant addiction to totemism is therefore not surprising. It may not be amiss to state here that totemism is a word derived from the Ojibway word totem, its equivalent in the roots of European languages having apparently disappeared. Though the word is of Indian origin, Totemism was practiced from immemorial times by the all the races of the world. On this subject the Encyclopedia Britannica under "Names" states "a group of individuals would claim descent from some animal, plant, tree or thing and would name themselves after it, wolves, bears, oak, etc."

The ancestral animal, tree, etc., would naturally be much revered by its namesakes who used it as a badge. From it was evolved the art and practice of Heraldry.

The Encyclopedia states further, "In Europe, among Teutonic races, the stock names, probably totemistic in origin, survived in English local names which speak of the "ton" or "ham" of the Billings and Tootings. An examination of these names as collected in Kemble's Anglo-Saxons, proved that they were derived as a rule from animals or plants."

Further, under the caption "family" the Encyclopedia notes that group bearing the same stock name would be "scattered from North to South, through all the local tribes, so that tribes would contain many stocks each claiming a distinct origin and a distinct mythical ancestor."

Bearing this in mind and remembering earlier statements in regard to the suffix "den", we find in surnames that the part is the stock portion and the ending such as ham, ford, ton, den, etc., indicates the kind of place where that branch of the family dwelt. Thus in the London Directory we find that the families named after the Oak are called: Oak, Oaks, Oakes, Oakham, Oakhill, Oakhurst, Oakley, Oakenden, Oakden.

As a last remark on the practice of totemism it may be stated that those bearing the stock name derived protection from their mythical ancestor and probably felt imbued with its chief virtue. Thus the Bordens would get courage from the boar, the Oaks strength from the Oak and the Hardens speed from the hart.

Survival of family names

Kembel observes that his list of stock-names were collected from a few poems, a small surviving fragment of those written or sung in those early times.

Nevertheless we can add this list the many names of localities on maps derived from stock names and also a host of surnames found City directories. In the transmission of these names through the centuries we have to observe variations in spelling due to changes in pronunciation in various parts of the country and also to different interpretations of sounds by early recorders. We may easily infer that when the Anglo-Saxons came under the influence of Christianity they also came in contact with more widespread knowledge of writing. Originally they had used runes but so few knew anything about them that runes were credited with magic properties. It is not surprising therefore that difficulties were encountered in turning strange Teutonic syllables into Latin alphabetical equivalents with many resultant diversifications of spelling of the same word or name.

Evolution of the dens

As time went on life became less militaristic and peaceful pursuits assumed the ascendancy. The warlike colonists developed into quiet, agriculturists and relinquished the habits and feelings which had united them as military adventurers.

The forest was gradually thinned out under the axe and the dreaded somber wastes of the mark turned into pastures. In process of time the markland composed of dens was partitioned out to private

estates in such a way that a certain amount of it went with parcels of land classified as arable.

Thus Kemble mentions an old grant of the tenth century which a mill is conveyed with a "den" or portion of markland. The dens apparently outlived many an old right and custom of Anglo-Saxon origin. Nevertheless they too, in time, were called upon to disappear. The past record of their identity appears in the journal of a Sir Robert Twisden who refers to his duties as magistrate of the "Court of Dens" at Aldington, Kent, about 1650. This was a court of the little marks or dens, held periodically long after the meaning of such marks was forgotten. In this court were settled disputes between owners of dens or their tenants.

Thus the site of the first landing of the Anglo-Saxons was also to see the last survival of their customs. All that is left now is a trace of those far off days embodied in the succession of "den" names on maps.

Analysis of the name Wickenden

The preceding discussion of names ending in "den" of the early bearers of these names permits the following deductions in reference to the name Wickenden.

(1) It is a Kentish name. It is the name of a small place in the moors of this County. It is therefore obvious that the bearers of this name moved into Kent with the first Anglo-Saxon expedition of Hengist and Horsa about 450 A. D.

(2) The name is composed of two parts, "Wicken" and "den", of which the first is a stem or stock name and the

second indicates that those bearing it dwelt in a den, or outpost in the mark.

(3) The spelling of this name would be subject to variations according to the interpretation of sounds by early recorders, the letters W, Q, G and K being used to express the same sound.

QU particularly is used for W or vice-versa, C, G and K are also interchangeable. Relating to the stem Wicken, we find in the Oxford Dictionary of the English Language that it is another form of Quicken derived from;

Anglo-Saxon	CWICIAN
Old Norse	QUICKNA
Swedish	CWIKNA
Common	GWIWO
Sanskrit	JIWA

The forms Wicken and Quicken are synonymous, probably contemporaneous. QU is a purely Latin form of spelling whereas W is the old runic letter WEN. Probably either was used according to the interpretation of early recorders. The same may be said of the letters K and G.

We find In the London Directory the stem Wicken alone, or with the addition of an S: Wickens or with a suffix indicating a place: Wickenden. Relating to the possibility of other combinations indicating a locality we find on the map near Lincoln the town of Wickenby. In the London Directory we also find the alternative synonymous Quickenden.

For the meaning of Wicken the Oxford Dictionary of the English Language refers us to the synonymous form Quicken, under which we find; -

- (a) The verb to quicken, meaning to animate to give life to, to vivify
- (b) The substantive quicken, wicken, quitch or couch applying to a grass.
- (c) The substantive quicken, wicken, whicken, whighen, wiggin, meaning the mountain ash also known as rowan tree and quickbeam (quick baum). This noun is derived from the verb to quicken. Its meaning is therefore tree of animation or of life as exemplified further by the Old English form CWIC TREOW very close to, if not the original Anglo-Saxon form.

Still further back we find the mystic ash YGDRASIL. R.B. Anderson in his book "Norse Mythology" claims the derivation of this name is IGGR, Odin, and DRASIL, horse or carrier. This meaning is questioned by the Oxford Dictionary of the English Language and further searches have convinced me that YDRASIL means Tree of Life as follows. Since the letter Y is derived from U or W (also V) as shown by its name WU and since G and C are interchangeable as noted above, we get for YG the pronunciation WIC (Also note VIG is vigor, same root). This does not contradict either the fact that one of Odin's names YGGR may have meant his role as spirit of animation.

In regard to DRAS I find, starting with old Sanskrit, close to the original Aryan, that DRU meant Tree; in Greek Tree was Spus (Drus). Other Northern languages use D instead of T for

their equivalents of TREE. The root of these languages is the same as for Teutonic languages, they have a common Aryan base.

So far we have analyzed YG- DRAS or WIG- DRAS and note its closeness to the old English CWIC-TREOW. There remains the ending SIL which has an old English equivalent, SYL meaning pillar or column.

Summing up, therefore YGDRASIL, means Tree-pillar of Life which is the actual role it plays in Norse Mythology. The stories of YGDRASIL are too many to mention. It covered the whole universe, the upper, middle and nether worlds. On it Odin hung for nine days and nights to gain wisdom. At its foot flowed Mimer's fountain for a drink of which Odin gave an eye for the sake of obtaining knowledge.

Another curious association is that the mountain ash is a ROSACAEE to which family belongs the apple-tree one of which I have heard it said was the tree of life in Eden.

We can easily lose ourselves in conjecture regarding the common source of these legends and words which go so deeply into the early periods of the race.

As a result of all these mystic associations it is not surprising that the mountain-ash was reputed to be a specific against magic, witchcraft and evil generally. Its ancestry, virtues and associations made it very desirable as a family emblem

and ancestor just as the oak of the Oakes, Oakhams, or Oakdens or the boar of the Borhams or Bordens.

I am therefore of opinion that Wicken, the name of the mountain-ask is the stock part of Wickenden. The ending "den" indicates that this branch of the family inhabited or held a "den" in the mark.

Thus history, legends, myths and words in their formation, like blazes on a overgrown trail, have led me back to an age so remote that the men living in it were even more primitive than the Eskimos or the aborigines of Australia. And among these men a small group is found. Their emblem and ancestral tree hangs bright with red berries, and all are the fruit of the mountain-ash, once known as the wicken tree.

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