

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE FIELD-NAMES: ACRE AND HOME

English field-names have been coined for at least a thousand years, using a very rich vocabulary, so it is not surprising that there are hundreds of different types of name in the corpus now being collected for Buckinghamshire. Inevitably, many of the names are difficult to interpret or to locate in the landscape, having become obsolete over time, especially in the aftermath of enclosure between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. A selection of the more unusual elements found in Buckinghamshire field-names has been discussed in Records in recent years. This paper moves to the opposite end of the spectrum to examine two groups of names that occur in their hundreds: those using the form “X Acres” and those called “Home X”, which, although they occur throughout the county, do not do so in a systematic way and exhibit distinct geographical patterns. Thus, while the meanings of “Acre” – and “Home” – names are usually obvious, they are still of interest to students of field-names.

1. ACRE-NAMES

The Old English word *æcer* has undergone changes of meaning over the centuries. Its original sense was ‘plot of arable or cultivated land, a measure of land which a yoke of oxen could plough in a day’.¹ It is cognate with the Germanic **akraz* and the Latin *ager*, ‘field’. This sense survives in field-names where it is compounded with elements relating to crops and plants, soil types, structures and occasionally personal names. Its use as an areal measure of arable land probably arose with the spread of open-field agriculture from the ninth-tenth centuries. So far, only a few Buckinghamshire acre-names have been noted in medieval sources, the vast majority appearing from the seventeenth century onwards. These are principally associated with enclosure and the replacement of the open fields by newly-surveyed, rectangular blocks of land, although some represent bundles of strips or furlongs enclosed within existing boundaries. As such,

they merely denote land of a given area, rather than land that could be ploughed in a certain time. Indeed, much former arable land was converted to pasture during enclosure. In a few cases, two fields were subsequently merged and acquired names like “Five & Two Acres”.

The modern statute acre of 4,840 square yards is theoretically derived from “bundles” of strips measuring 220 yards long by 22 yards wide. An acre comprises four roods of forty perches each, hence the traditional notation of 2a 1r 22p, 7a 3r 10p, and so on. There were, however, many variations from the notional standard acre, principally because of the varying lengths of measuring rods.² The standard rod is 16½ feet in length, four of them making up the 22 yards of an acre-width. In earlier times, the length varied, usually in the range 15–18 feet, which would give acres varying between 0.82 and 1.19 statute acres. Hence, Ten Acres in parish A might be 45% larger or smaller than in nearby Parish B. The general use of standard 22-yard chains by surveyors from the sixteenth century onwards, however, means that most of the field-names discussed here bear a close, if not complete, relationship to the actual area on the ground.

Apart from the Chiltern region, where any open fields were small and interspersed with large areas of woodland, by *c.* 1200 much of Buckinghamshire was covered with vast swathes of communally-farmed fields, subdivided into furlongs (sometimes known as “shots” in the far south-east), and then into individual strips. The latter usually ranged from one-quarter to one acre, and did not acquire names of their own.

Given the vast range of written and oral sources, the collection of names for any database is by definition a never-ending process. The analysis in this paper represents the state of knowledge to date (late-2009), although the clear geographical variations in “Acre”-names suggests that subsequent data are likely to refine, rather than refute, the comments below. Discounting repeat occurrences of the same name, there are 1,354 Acre-names, covering 12,200 acres (*c.* 2.5% of the county total in each case).

TABLE 1

<i>Hundred</i>	1		+/-	3 <i>Size</i>	4 <i>Total Acreage</i>
	2 <i>Names</i>				
	<i>Actual</i>	<i>Expected</i>			
Aylesbury	65	73	-8	44	562
Risborough	28	35	-7	18	366
Stone	47	80	-33	34	500
Aylesbury Group	140	188	-48	96	1428
Burnham	448	156	+288	154	3541
Desborough	189	149	+40	82	1542
Stoke	188	81	+107	108	1502
Chiltern Group	825	387	+438	344	6585
Ashendon	30	62	-32	25	373
Ixhill	46	68	-22	35	422
Waddesdon	19	54	-35	17	162
Ashendon Group	95	184	-89	77	957
Cottesloe	35	72	-37	28	428
Mursley	26	77	-51	21	365
Yardley	35	55	-20	25	329
Cottesloe Group	96	203	-107	74	1122
Lamua	11	53	-42	9	87
Rowley	13	46	-33	10	136
Stotfold	24	64	-40	20	241
Buckingham Group	48	163	-115	39	464
Bunsty	40	78	-38	30	407
Moulsoe	64	77	-13	55	761
Seckloe	46	74	-28	37	473
Newport Group	150	229	-79	122	1641
<i>Grand Total</i>	1354	1354		752	12197

Notes: Col. 1, Total recorded number of fields with Acre-names; Col. 2, Number of Acre-names expected based on hundred area as % county total; Col. 3, Number of separate acreages occurring; Col.4, Sum total of the acreages, excluding Hundred and Thousand Acre names, NOT that of the fields as measured.

The distribution of Acre names bears little relationship to the size of individual Hundreds, or to their customary grouping into Triple Hundreds. The chi-square statistical test (χ^2) measures the probability that differences between the observed and expected distributions have arisen randomly. In this case, there is less than a 0.01% chance that this

is so, although that makes it no easier to explain why these differences have arisen.³

Despite not being classic open-field country, the Chiltern Hundreds account for 61% of all acre-names, more than twice the expected number, although they are concentrated on the dip-slope in Burnham and Stoke Hundreds, which have about

290 and 110 more Acre-names than would be expected from their size. By contrast, the Buckingham Hundreds have only one-quarter of the expected total, the Ashendon, Cottesloe and Newport groups about half, and the Aylesbury Hundreds three-quarters. Waddesdon, Mursley and the Buckingham Hundreds are the most conspic-

uous by the relative absence of such names. At a lower administrative level, some parishes were far more likely to use names of this type than others. For example, Chesham has 119 Acre-names, when only thirty-six might be expected from its size, while Burnham has 77 (eighteen expected).

Acre-names range in size from half-an-acre to

TABLE 2

<i>Acres</i>	<i>Ayl</i>	<i>Chilt</i>	<i>Ash</i>	<i>Cott</i>	<i>Buckm</i>	<i>Npt</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Date Range</i>
0.5	1	1					2	1523–1993
1	1	4		1			6	1756–1843
1.5	1	1					2	1839
2	3	32	2	3	1	2	43	1607–1977
2.5		1					1	1843
3	5	41	1	2		4	53	1608–1917
4	16	100	11	11		6	144	1300–1985
4.5		2					2	1628–1839
5	14	82	5	11	8	10	130	1265–1993
6	19	88	9	14	5	12	147	1413–1980
7	6	78	9	9	3	18	123	1218–1974
7.5		1					1	1840
8	16	88	7	12	6	14	143	1639–1985
9	6	57	5	3	5	5	81	1707–1977
10	18	72	25	3	7	27	152	1312–1977
11	3	35	4	2	2	5	51	1607–1977
12	5	44	5	5	6	9	74	1196–1985
13	1	11				1	13	1620–1881
14	2	21	1		1	8	33	1371–1974
15	1	12	2			3	18	1407–1941
16	7	8		2		3	20	1702–1933
17		5	1	2		2	10	1674–1974
18		8	1	2		7	18	1704–1974
19		3		1			4	1762–1844
20	4	13	1	1	3	6	28	1620–1993
21	1	1				1	3	1840–1978
22			1				1	1976
24		2				1	3	1753–1838
25		1					1	1837
27		1		1			2	1843–1965
30		5	2	3		3	13	1602–1974
40	7	2	3	3	1	2	18	1624–1974
50	1			1		1	3	1803–1838
60	1						1	1803
100		2		3			5	1635–1840
1000	1	3		1			5	1812–1844
<i>Total</i>	140	825	95	96	48	150	1354	

Note: Fields comprised of two separate acreages, e.g. Four & Five Acres, have been allocated to their component parts.

one thousand acres, although the latter and the few hundred-acre fields strictly belong to what might be termed ironic names, in that they are characterised by extreme smallness (see below). Equally, names of Two Acres or less denote little more than small paddocks. The effective maximum size of field adopting this type of name seems to be Sixty Acres, although the vast majority are between two and twelve acres (1,145 out of 1,354 or 85%). The principal data are summarised below by Triple Hundreds. Also shown is the range of dates of the earliest references so far noted for each acre-name.

The vast majority of these names are recorded in the period since 1700, many of them orally from surveys conducted by the County Museum Archaeological Group from the 1970s. It is possible that the Acre-names which have arisen since the eighteenth century have replaced older names that had become unintelligible, or where fields have been divided or amalgamated and Acre-names offered an easy solution to farmers, part of a growing trend to use utilitarian descriptions such as Top Field, Far Meadow and so on.

Two significant clusters of Acre-names account

for more than three-quarters of the total: 547 of four-seven acres (40%) and 501 of eight-twelve acres (37%). All these are on the small side for arable farming, both in relation to medieval open-field furlongs and especially to modern ploughing requirements. They probably reflect the widespread conversion from arable to permanent grassland at enclosure. Even much larger fields may have been enclosed as extensive sheep runs, converted from arable furlongs. There are 107 fields smaller than four acres (8%). They occur most frequently in the Aylesbury and Chiltern Hundreds (8–10% of Acre-names), but far less so in the Ashendon, Buckingham and Newport Hundreds (2–5%).

The ironic application of very large acreages to very small fields is well-known,⁴ and local examples include Thousand Acres at Chalfont St. Peter (0a 3r 26p), Langley Marish (0a 2r 11p) and Cholesbury (0a 2r 9p), and Hundred Acres at Farnham Royal (0a 3r 33p), all from the respective Tithe Apportionments. A much earlier example, Hundred Acres at Upton-cum-Chalvey, occurs in 1635, qualified by the word Piddle, signifying trifling, very small.

TABLE 3
A. Number of Fields

<i>Acres</i>	<i>Ayl</i>	<i>Chilt</i>	<i>Ash</i>	<i>Cott</i>	<i>Buckm</i>	<i>Npt</i>	<i>Total</i>
0.5–3	11	80	3	6	1	6	107
4–7	55	351	34	45	16	46	547
8–12	48	296	46	25	26	60	501
13–20	15	81	6	8	4	30	144
21–30	1	10	3	4	0	5	23
31–60	9	2	3	4	1	3	22
100		2		3			5
1000	1	3		1			5
<i>Total</i>	140	825	95	96	46	150	1354

B. Percentage

<i>Acres</i>	<i>Ayl</i>	<i>Chilt</i>	<i>Ash</i>	<i>Cott</i>	<i>Buckm</i>	<i>Npt</i>	<i>Total</i>
0.5–3	7.9	9.7	3.2	6.2	2.1	4.0	7.9
4–7	39.3	42.5	35.8	46.9	33.3	30.7	40.4
8–12	34.3	35.9	48.4	26.0	54.2	40.0	37.0
13–20	10.7	9.8	6.3	8.3	8.3	20.0	10.6
21–30	0.7	1.2	3.2	4.2	0	3.3	1.7
31–60	6.4	0.2	3.1	4.2	2.1	2.0	1.6
Other	0.7	0.6	0	4.2	0	0	0.7

So far, few names that use acreages in the context of the open fields have been noted. The examples in the database predating 1500 are listed below, although, since medieval sources across the county have yet to be searched systematically, these names are best treated as a random sample.

TABLE 4

<i>Parish</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Name</i>
Eton	1523	Halfe Acre
Aston Clinton	c1300	Foureacras
Beaconsfield	14 th	Fifacres
East Claydon	1265x82	Fifacras
Shalstone	1288x9	Fifhaker
Stone	1413	Sixe Acres
Beaconsfield	1367	Sixacres
Wolverton	1458	Six Acre, le
Great Linford	1477	Sevenacris
Stone	1346	Tenacres, le
Long Crendon	1347	Tenacre
Sherington	1312	Tenacres
Newton Longville	1310	Tenne Acres
Stewkley	1196	Twelfacras
Westbury	c1280	Twelfaker

Apart from the half-acre at Eton, which was probably a small enclosure, all were probably furlong names. The size distribution of these names is similar to that of all acre-names discussed above, although as furlongs they would have been at the lower end of the size spectrum. Some may represent woodland clearance [assarts], added to the existing large fields on a piecemeal basis during the expansionist period between c.1100 and c.1300. These medieval names are consistent with later examples of acre furlong-names, of which there are fourteen, ranging in date from 1639 to 1814. There are clusters of Five (three) and Ten (four) Acre Furlongs, two Six Acre furlongs and one each of Seven, Eight, Nine, Twelve and Sixteen Acres. With the exception of Ellesborough and Princes Risborough all of the "Acre" furlongs are in classic open-field territory in north Buckinghamshire.

Three-quarters of Acre-names appear in the simplex form [The] X Acres, without qualification. However, there are 218 names (16% of the total) in which the X-acres element qualifies one of the usual elements describing a field. Field, Close,

Piece and Mead/Meadow are the most frequent of these, accounting for 162 names (74%). *Piece* in field-names has the sense of a limited portion, usually enclosed or otherwise marked by bounds.⁵ Eighteen elements occur only once or twice, although many of them are not common with any type of qualifier. Acre-names also appear with qualifying elements, usually indicative of their position where the same acreage is used more than once in the immediate vicinity. There are 117 of these names (8.6%). Two-thirds are Upper/Lower and Hither/Further/Far doublets. In part this reflects a lack of imagination on the part of surveyors and farmers during the enclosure process, hardly surprising given the thousands of new fields requiring names in a very short time. There is a small scattering of fields with alternate

TABLE 5

<i>Acre Name</i>	<i>Occ.</i>	<i>Qualifier</i>	<i>Occ.</i>
Field	49	Lower	27
Close	43	Upper	25
Piece	39	Further	13
Meadow	21	Hither	13
Furlong	14	Long	10
Mead	10	Little	9
Lee	6	Great	7
Wood	5	Middle	2
Ploughing	4	North	2
Croft	3	Short	2
Moor	2	Beneath	1
Pightle/Picle	2	Bottom	1
Shot	2	Far	1
Spinney	2	First	1
Spring	2	Old	1
Warren	2	Second	1
Bit	1	Under	1
Butts	1	<i>Total</i>	117
Common	1		
Covert	1		
Dell	1		
Elms	1		
Grass	1		
Grubbed Ground	1		
Hedge	1		
Hills	1		
Lot Mead	1		
Plat	1		
<i>Total</i>	218		

names, and it likely that many more have assumed Acre-names in place of some earlier form in the last two centuries of increasingly impersonalised agriculture. Two examples from Chesham illustrate the point. Here Four Acres and Six Acres are alternatively Further and Hither Austins.

Acre-names form only a small part of the total corpus of Buckinghamshire field-names, but they constitute the largest single group and are of greater interest than appears at first sight. They are not uniformly distributed geographically, although it is impossible to explain at this stage why this should be so, in part because they represent centuries of name-giving by myriad largely anonymous farmers, surveyors and others, whose motivations are long since lost, and probably never recorded. The thousands of new regular fields created at enclosure doubtless led to the easy choice of names based on size. The major clusters in certain areas suggest that copying the neighbours must have been significant, even if it led to a confusing array of very similar names in a small area. Elsewhere, such names are unusual, with many parishes having as yet produced no examples.

2. HOME NAMES

The second largest group of Buckinghamshire field-names recorded to date are those using the word *Home* as a qualifier, generally referring to proximity to a farmhouse or a manorial complex. There are 1,066 of them, about 2% of the total after discounting duplication. Given that Home-names could occur on any of the thousands of farms across the county, this total is considerably less than one might expect, although the repeated use of identical names within a parish would doubtless cause confusion. Not only are these names not ubiquitous, but, as with Acre-names, there are distinct geographical variations in their occurrence.

There is far less divergence between the observed and expected numbers of Home field-names than is the case with Acre-names (Table 6), and the names are more evenly distributed across the county. In Risborough, Burnham, Ashendon and Yardley Hundreds, the observed and expected numbers of names are virtually identical.

The word Home is used to qualify thirty-three name elements (Table 7). Almost nine-tenths of these names are based on just four generic elements: Close (37%), Field (21%), Ground

(20%) and Meadow/Meadow (11+2%). They are quintessentially names of the century between 1750 and 1850, when the enclosure movement reached its peak and a large number of new farm-houses were erected in the centre of newly-enclosed fields. Only fifty Home field-names first occur in the period between 1500 and 1750 (5%),

TABLE 6

<i>Hundred</i>	<i>Names</i>		<i>+/-</i>
	<i>1</i> <i>Actual</i>	<i>2</i> <i>Expected</i>	
Aylesbury	69	58	+11
Risborough	27	27	0
Stone	69	63	+6
Aylesbury Group	165	148	+17
Burnham	122	123	-1
Desborough	107	118	-11
Stoke	20	64	-44
Chiltern Group	249	305	-56
Ashendon	50	49	+1
Ixhill	72	53	+19
Waddesdon	32	42	-10
Ashendon Group	154	145	+9
Cottesloe	77	56	+21
Mursley	76	61	+15
Yardley	41	43	-2
Cottesloe Group	194	160	+34
Lamua	22	41	-19
Rowley	55	37	+18
Stotfold	64	50	+14
Buckingham Group	142	128	+14
Bunsty	42	61	-19
Moulsoe	71	61	+10
Seckloe	49	58	-9
Newport Group	162	180	-18
<i>Total</i>	1066	1066	

Notes: Col. 1, Total recorded number of fields with Home-names; Col. 2, Number of Home-names expected based on Hundred area as % of county total

TABLE 7

<i>Affix</i>	<i>Occ.</i>	<i>Affix</i>	<i>Occ.</i>
Close	394	Park	3
Field	221	Quality	3
Ground	213	Croft	2
Meadow	115	Leys	2
Piece	23	Paddock	2
Mead	20	Plat	2
Pasture	14	Shaw	2
Pightle	8	Chance	1
Hill	6	Chase	1
Wood	6	Down	1
Ploughing	5	Green	1
Farm	4	Grove	1
Furlong	4	Spinney	1
Land	3	Stripe	1
Orchard	3		

Note; Ground and Piece include one each of Home Ploughed Ground and Piece

143 from 1751–1800 (13%) and 105 from 1801–1830 (10%). There is then a massive upsurge to 494 names in the two decades after 1831 (46%), coinciding with the age of the Tithe Map and its associated Award, a period when many field-names of all types enter the written record. The century from 1851–1950 is characterised by relatively low number of new Home field-names (150), followed by another peak between 1961 and 1980, which coincides with a concerted attempt to gather field-names orally, principally by the CMAG in the 1970s and 1980s. It is probable that many of these names date from the age of enclosure, but were not recorded earlier for some reason. Some may have been coined in the twentieth century as replacements for older names (*cf.* Acre-names above).

Field-names with Home as a qualifier are vastly more common than Home Farms, of which there

are only around forty across Buckinghamshire at the present time. In theory, one might expect a Home Farm in any of the 210 parishes in the county. They are infrequent in the southern half of the county and only common in the belt of country from the Great/Little Horwood to Stowe, and to a lesser extent in the north-east. Manor Farm, with eighty Buckinghamshire examples, is much more common. Ten parishes have both Home and Manor Farms.

As with Acre-names, it is difficult at the present stage of data collection to account for the observed distribution of Home-names. Neither as a field- nor as a farm-name does it seem to be used in a consistent fashion. Relatively small numbers of farms appear to employ Home to describe the paddocks and fields lying close to the farmhouse complex, while Home Farm is likely only to arise in the context of a landed estate, a modern equivalent of the medieval demesne, although not necessarily identical with it, either in size or location. The rationale behind the use of either of these commonly-used types of field-name is likely to remain obscure until many more parishes have been studied in depth.

Keith Bailey

REFERENCES

1. A.H. Smith, *The Place-Name Elements* (Cambridge, 1956), pt.I, 2–3.
2. R.E. Zupko, *British Weights & Measures* (Madison, 1977), 21.
3. D. Ebdon, *Statistics in Geography* (2nd ed., 1985), 65–71.
4. J. Field, *History of English Field-Names* (1993), 128, 261–2.
5. See entry for *Piece* in Oxford English Dictionary.