

No 4: Gosberton

Not many places in England have had two names in their history. One of those which has is Gosberton. The change here has not been as great as in the case of Peterborough, which started life as Medeshamstede, or Cambridge, which was originally Grantchester, writes Gordon Clark.

In the Domesday Book Gosberton was "Gosbertchirche and Gozeberdechirca" meaning "Gosbert's church". By 1212, apparently, Danish influence had altered the latter part of the word and it was now "Gosberkirke". This was using the Danish word for church "Kirk" which is still used in Scotland.

Originally it was probably the Old English "cirice" meaning a holy place, even in pagan times, but a church in the Christian era. In 1610 on Speed's map he only seems to name it "Gosbert's", though he does draw little sketches, apparently indicating the presence of a church in the village.

By 1836 it had its present name, so being an exception to the rule. We normally think of "ton (settlement)" as an Anglo Saxon ending. Though it may well be an Anglo-Saxon village, originally, as we have seen, this "ton" ending is only adopted in fairly modern times.

HAMLETS

G. J. Wilkinson, who wrote "Illustrated Lincolnshire" in 1900, said that Gosberton included the hamlets of Cheale, Belnie, Rightholt, Westhorpe and Risegate. Cheale seems as though it could be older than Gosberton. It was mentioned in written records in 852 when it was "Cegel" referring to the Old English "cegel", meaning a pole or a plank, probably the planks in a bridge.

Similar words gave rise to the names of Rasen (a planked bridge) and Bole, in Nottinghamshire (a tree trunk bridge). In the Domesday Book it talks about "Cheal in Gosberton", using the modern names. There is mention of a stream called "Cheyl Becke" in records issued by the Pipe Roll Society for Lincolnshire. In a thousand years the drainage has altered a great deal, probably more in this Fenland area, than anywhere else.

Belnie floors me as to its origin, at least in that spelling. But in the Directory of 1842 it was Bellney, so that the "ey" was probably the "island" ending found often, in this land of marsh and fen. Even Lindsey had that ending being a thousand years ago almost an island due to its river and fen boundaries. It might be "Billa's island" originally.

SCANDINAVIAN

Rightholt was "a wright's dwelling". Westhorpe is the west-thorpe (Danish for a subsidiary settlement) and is actually west of Gosberton, or it could have been the Saxon ending "throp (farm or hamlet)".

Risegate would seem to be "the way (Danish 'gata') through the brushwood". Though Danish names are thin on the ground towards this East coast, it would seem to have been a Scandinavian settlement. The road west through Risegate is leading to Dowsby, one of a line of the "by" settlements, taken as typical of Danish village name endings.

Wargate too has this same "gate" ending, possibly meaning "the way to the weir", not far away there is, what is now, Lampson's Clough.

Gosbeohrt is probably continental, a fact which probably accounts for its uniqueness, as a name. Virtually all other places beginning with "Gos", Gosbeck (Suffolk), Goscote (Somerset), Gosfield (Essex), Gosford (Durham), all have references to geese in the beginning of the name and "stream", "hut", "field" and "ford" at the end.

The church has a good deal of Norman work in it and more was discovered by excavations. At the time of Domesday 1086 the Bishop of Lincoln held land here. Perhaps the most interesting feature of the Domesday Book entries is the mention of salt pans.

Those belonging to the Bishop "rendered eight pence" and in a second entry about his lands he had



another "which rendered four pence".

Count Alan the Breton, too, owned land and "2 salt pans rendering 12 pence". As is common all over the area, the coast line and so salt water was much further west than now. Salt was of course so necessary then, because due to lack of winter feed, most animals were slaughtered in the autumn, and the carcasses salted down.

The Directory of 1842 talks about Gosberton as being "a large respectable village pleasantly situated a little North of the navigable drain called Risegate Eau (this latter name is more likely to come from the Old English, "ea — river", than from the French, "eau — water") . . . (and comprises) many scattered houses in the Fen with about 2,000 inhabitants . . . Dods and Calthrops have been here since the Norman Conquest."

In the 1937 Directory, the latest I can get hold of, the name Dods was still listed, but not apparently the Calthrops any more. The Fen is mentioned in the Directory of 1842 and is still marked on the OS map. There is also a Gosberton Fen Farm, though it is rather in the Hundred Fen, which poses a puzzle as to its name. The village, too, has its Marsh to the East and there is Gosberton Clough. Actually this part of Gosberton and parts of neighbouring parishes became a new ecclesiastical parish in 1912.