

Early South-Saxon Place-names

Although I am interested in history, my only resources are those I found online. As with anything else, it is possible that I might have been misled by people who wish to promote an idea.

Caveat lector!

Introduction

I have spent most of my life on the Sussex coast just West of Brighton, and for a long time I have been aware of the many ‘-ing’ place-names which derive from *-ingas* : the followers of. It is generally noted by experts in Anglo-Saxon names that many of these Sussex names were no-longer in use by the seventh century, and so they are a link to the earliest settlements. However, the use of *-ing* names continued throughout the Saxon period [Dodgson, 1966, p. 2] and I cannot usually be sure which names really are early, although a few such as Lancing (*from Wlenca*) are well-documented. Thus, there is a possibility that some of the names I mention here are from later in the Saxon period.

History is written after the event, sometimes much later

There are no written records from this time. The accepted view is that the kingdom of the South Saxons began with the invasion of Ælle in 477, and that he landed with his three sons Cissa, Cymen and Wlenca at Cymensoara which is generally taken to be somewhere South of Selsey and now under the sea (the Sussex coast has been swept away by the sea over the years). This is stated in the Anglo-Saxon chronicle [A.-S. Chron.], but that was written several hundred years later and (presumably erroneously), calls Wlenca Wlencing. But Roberts notes many possible personal names ending in *-ing* or *inga* [Roberts, 1914].

Recently I have become aware of different, or more nuanced, opinions about the arrival of the South Saxons.

One of the alternative views considers that the sea level was higher in Saxon times and that Cymensoara could have been at the mouth of the Adur, with its name changing through Cymen soraham and then Soraham to become Shoreham. (‘villagenet’) Certainly there are many places named *-ey* or ‘island’ which are now surrounded by dry land, and also the Adur was navigable as far as Steyning at the time of the Norman Conquest. Coincidentally, Roberts says “Earle, on p. 12 of vol ii of the A.-S. Chron, says in a note that Wlencing came over with Ælle, founder of the South Saxons, and gave his name to the place where he landed.” [Roberts, 1914, p.99] To me, that adds circumstantial evidence for identifying Ælle’s settlement with Shoreham, but then raises the problem of why Cissa’s landing south of Selsey was so far to the West. For a

different view, see 'glaucus'.

There is also a suggestion that the first South Saxon settlements were in the Ouse and Cuckmere valleys from circa 410, with the saxons employed as mercenaries. ('spanglefish') The current wikipedia entry for the Kingdom of Sussex accords with this, mentioning an initial settlement in the Ouse and Cuckmere valleys, followed by a subsequent spread westwards. (wikipedia [c])

In this essay I will assume that the Saxons first arrived in Sussex circa 410 (as mercenaries employed by the Britons) and were taking the land by force by the year 477.

A convenient end point for this early period might be circa 600, but in the absence of hard evidence my conjectures may be very wide of the mark.

The landscape was different from today

It is important to remember that in the early Saxon period the Weald was heavily wooded and provided a barrier to communication. The A.-S. Chron. records that those Britons who survived Ælle's onslaught at Cymensoara fled into the Weald. It seems to me that *-ing* place-names in the Weald are unlikely to reflect *early* Saxon settlements. For example, Ditchling is first mentioned in the eighth century, long after Sussex had been conquered by the West Saxons. Also, at the time of the first Saxon settlements the areas to the East (Hastings) and West (Hampshire border) had been or were being settled by Jutes.

Later in the Saxon period, things were very different - much of the Weald had been cleared, or had Drove Roads through it, and many of the villages had areas of land in the Weald, either for summer pasture or for timber. (wikipedia [b])

Also, the coastline has changed a lot - much has been swept away in recorded times, and the mouths of the Ouse and Adur have moved.

Place-names and locations

1. *-ing* names

I would like to begin by looking at those settlements where the name ends in just *-ing* without a suffix. These seem to be the oldest settlements.

The area around the Ouse and Cuckmere contains Meeching (now part of Newhaven), Tarring Neville, and Malling.

The Cuckmere contains no plain *-ing* names, but to the NE (beyond the Downs) is Filching and some way to the East is Birling - Birling Gap is now at the very cliff-edge on the coast, but Birling farm is on the Downs just South of East Dean.

West of Shoreham is the main concentration of -ing names: Lancing, Sompting, Worthing, then a southern line through West Tarring, Goring, Ferring, Angmering and across the Arun to Climping, and slightly more inland from Worthing are Patching and Poling. Heading inland from Shoreham are Upper Beeding and Steyning, Perhaps the names along the foot of the scarp are part of this initial settlement (Perching, Fulking, Poynings) or perhaps not - they are somewhat separated from the others. I will note that Roberts gives modern spellings starting with Faulking (and pronounced with a silent l and silent g : the Sussex dialect has died, we now pronounce both those letters) and suggests that while Fulc (or Folc) may be a patronymic, the *-ing* might alternatively be Old English *ing*, *incg* : water meadow. [Roberts, 1914, p.66] In this case, it is situated on the spring line at the foot of the scarp and I suppose that might have been a possible origin of that name.

Wikipedia says that Angmering dates from about the end of the sixth century, which would make it somewhat late for an early Saxon plain *-ing* name. (wikipedia [a])

The earliest records of Steyning are *much* later, but it was a port before the Norman conquest and for some centuries after. and therefore easily accessible to Saxon invaders. The general view is that it silted up (I do not think that necessarily conflicts with a higher sea level).

The settlement at, or South of, Selsey has left few plain *-ing* names: North and South Hayling, East and West Wittering, East and West Ashling, Oving. In particular, there are no *-ing* names between Climping and Selsey. That would fit with an initial pattern of mostly coastal settlements which later got taken by the sea.

One should, of course, not forget that the major settlement in the West was at Chichester or “Cissa’s Camp” built on the site of the Roman Noviomagus.

2. *-ington* names and other variations

Anybody familiar with this area can tell you that the majority of *-ing*-derived place-names are actually *-ington* (*-ton* is sometimes translated as an enclosed settlement) . I surmise that these names indicate a process of expansion away from the initial settlements.

Then there are some *-ingham* names : Roberts notes that while the obvious derivation of ham is from ham, a homestead, it can sometimes derive from hamm, either an enclosure or a bend in a river - it is these latter which seem relevant) [Roberts, 1914, p.187].

There are also Rottingdean and Ovingdean (*-dean* : valley) to the West of the Ouse on the way to Brighton. Again these might be related to the early Saxon settlers (see above for Oving near Chichester).

Around the Ouse are Beddingham and perhaps Wellingham (Barcombe). There is also Piddinghoe - Roberts discounts this as an *-ing* personal name, as he does with so many others, but derives the second element from O.E. *hōh* - hough, hill, ridge : the parish of Piddinghoe used to include part of what is now Newhaven, and Peacehaven, and still includes Lodge Hill [Roberts, 1914, p.123]. At Seaford (East of the Ouse) Dodgson has identified Chyngton. [Dodgson, 1966, p.23]

Along the Cuckmere are: Litlington, Lullington, Arlington. Heading East and then towards Eastbourne are Wilmington, and Folkington. Near to these is Wannock - certainly not an *-ing* name, but Roberts derives it from *Wēāla hnōc* which he translates as “the nook of the foreigner” and he says “ There is a glen at Wannock, Wannock Glen, a well-known feature of the place. This is certainly the *hnōc* referred to. Possibly the inhabitants took refuge in this glen, and held it for a time against the English.” [Roberts, 1914, p.165] That would certainly make some neighbouring *-ington* settlements early - in this area perhaps the plain *-ing* names were from the initial mercenary settlements and the *-ingtons* show their occupation of the lands formerly held by the Britons. Continue through Filching to Jevington. However, I find it odd that there is an absence of plain *-ing* names along the Cuckmere itself, particularly so given that Filching and Birling are further to the East. Heading West from the Cuckmere is Chalvington.

Dodgson also identified two places in the East of what is now Eastbourne as ‘lost’: Beverington and Yeverington [Dodgson, 1966, p.24] although Roberts identified Yeverington with Jevington. [Roberts, 1914, p.96] Being so separated from the other settlements, these might be later.

Inland along the Adur valley are Erringham and Annington, and slightly to the East perhaps Tottington might be from this time, and then to the west Washington, Sullington, Storrington and perhaps Ashington to the North of Washington.

From Worthing heading West are Offington, Salvington, Durrington, Rustington, Toddington, and across the Arun are Tortington and Atherington (now on the coast, South of Climping).

Around the Western area are Funtingdon, which Roberts in 1914 spelled -ton, and Warblington. There are many more such names in West Sussex, but I can see no evidence that they reflect early Saxon settlements.

My hypothesis is that *-ington* names in the East may well date from the early Saxon period, but for the rest I think it is likely that they are mid or late saxon. Beyond these there are, or were, many other *-ing* names - near me were Atlingworth on the Downs North of Portslade, West Blatchington to the East of Hangleton, and Aldrington on the coast East of what was Copperas Gap (now usually just called South Portslade) - I should note that Dodgson considers

Aldrington to be derived from a personal name [Dodgson, 1966, p.24]. I think it is extremely unlikely that any of these date from the *early* saxon period.

Index

- ÆLLE, 1, 2
- Adur river, 1
Adur, river, 1, 2, 4
Aldrington, 4
Angmering, 3
Annington, 4
Arlington, 4
Arun, river, 3, 4
Ashington, 4
Atherington, 4
Atlingworth, 4
- Beddingham, 3
Beverington, 4
Birling, 2, 4
BRITONS, 2
- Chalvington, 4
Chichester, 3
Chyngton, 4
CISSA, 1, 3
Climping, 3
Cuckmere river, 4
Cuckmere, river, 2, 4
CYMEN, 1
Cymensoara, 1, 2
- Ditchling, 2
Durrington, 4
- East Ashling, 3
East Wittering, 3
Erringham, 4
- Ferring, 3
Filching, 2, 4
Folkington, 4
Fulking, 3
Funtingdon, 4
- Goring, 3
- ing suffix*, 2
- ing suffix*, 1
ingdean suffix, 3
ingham suffix, 3
ington suffix, 3
- Jevington, 4
JUTES, 2
- Lancing, 1, 2
Litlington, 4
Lullington, 4
- Malling, 2
Meeching, 2
- Norman Conquest, 1
North Hayling, 3
- Offington, 4
Ouse, river, 2–4
Oving, 3
Ovingdean, 3
- Patching, 3
Perching, 3
Piddinghoe, 4
Poling, 3
Poynings, 3
- Rottingdean, 3
Rustington, 4
- Salvington, 4
Selsey, 1, 3
Shoreham, 1
Sompting, 2
South Hayling, 3
Steyning, 1, 3
Storrington, 4
Sullington, 4
- Tarring Neville, 2
Toddington, 4
Tortington, 4

Tottington, 4
Upper Beeding, 3
Wannock, 4
Warblington, 4
Washington, 4
Weald, the, 2
Wellingham, 3
West Ashling, 3
West Blatchington, 4
WEST SAXONS, 2
West Tarring, 3
West Wittering, 3
Wilmington, 4
WLENCA, 1
Worthing, 3
Yeverington, 4

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