

Kent and Sussex village names and meanings

Simon Mansfield 15 September 2022

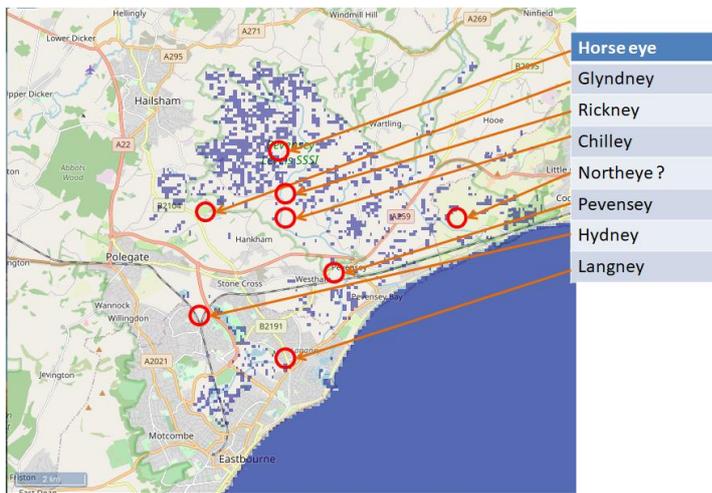
This talk was a fascinating look at places in an area between Eastbourne and Rye stretching inland to the Weald. Surprisingly their names are related to their geographical height above sea-level bearing in mind that the sea level has varied since Saxon times and is now considerably lower.

Simon originally discovered this by grouping the names by their endings. It is generally agreed by scholars that modern place names ending in *ay, et, ey, ly, ney, sea, ey, ye* or *is* are all derived from the Saxon word *æg* which is pronounced *ay* and means an island.

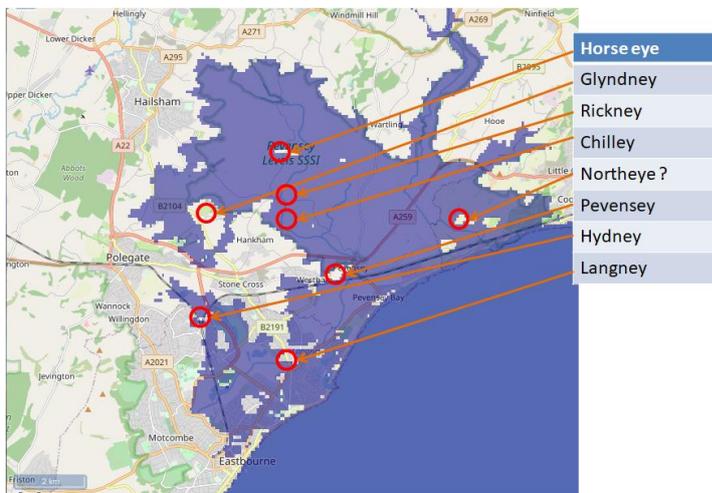
These are local places such as Rye, Winchelsea, Pevensey, Romney, Langney etc

Simon wondered why Pevensey is now landlocked when its name meant a Saxon island. He then showed us 5 maps all of exactly the same area but the coast varying as the sea-levels increased by a metre each time.

The first map was at Current sea-level with ‘Saxon islands’ ringed, all inland.



The last map, sea-level now 4 metres higher showing all the red rings as islands



Islands also appear in the same way at the Wash and the Somerset levels. Analysis of the sediments indicate that the coastline was 4.5 metres higher in late Roman – Early Saxon times.

Simon then backed up his theory with a scientific analysis of temperatures based on, among other things, Alaskan midge data and air bubbles in the Greenland ice-sheet! With the variation in temperatures he

could then predict a pattern for the variation in sea-level. He was pleased to discover that his theory of Saxon Islands correlated well with scientific data.

There are other clues that suggest the sea-level was once higher:

AD1546 - Henry VIII built a 300 ton warship the 'Great Gallyon' at Smallhythe, 8 miles inland from Rye. There must have been high tides to float it out to sea.

In AD1086 the Domesday Book recorded many salt houses around Pevensey implying nearby access to the sea.

In the Domesday Book there are no settlements listed in the area which would have been under sea-level at that time.

Apart from 'ÆG', Saxon Islands, there are 2 more interesting groups of Saxon names, -HAM and -TON. The only Saxon derivation that can explain -HAM is the Saxon word **hamm** which denotes a piece of land surrounded with paling, wicker-work, etc, and so defended against water, which would otherwise wash it away, hence a valley settlement. The other group of villages that have -TON in them are located on high ground such as Whatlington, Dallington, Wilmington, etc. Most of these villages are on hills and are predominantly on the South Downs. The only Saxon derivation that can explain -TON is the Saxon word **dun** which means hilly hence a settlement on high ground. All these -HAMs and -TONs are places listed in the Domesday Book which it is said was written in Latin by French monks having heard it spoken to them by Saxons!

Simon uses a Saxon dictionary from which he gathers 'snippets' which combine to give meanings to place names:

Pevensey	Festen ness æg	fortress island
Wadhurst	waad hyrst	forest clearing where woad is found
Tidebrook	Tid broc	The tidal stream
Etchingham	wecg hring hamm	metal mass valley fort – iron industry
Alfriston	<i>el fyrs dun</i>	the eel village on the gorse hill
Witherenden		Pig pasture land?

You can use the Anglo Saxon Dictionary at <http://www.bosworthtoller.com>

There are more of Simon's historic findings on <https://saxonhistory.co.uk>

Joan Grace