

“Hexham Road” in the City of Reading

—Hexham Derived from Anglo-Saxon *Hagustaldesham*—

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When the present author visited Reading in Berkshire in the summer of 1991, he found a strange spelling, *Yield Hall*, on the road sign which was set up on the roadside between St Lawrence's Church and Forbury Gardens, and he discussed the spelling in FOCUS No. 14; it is a local variant of the word *Guild hall*.¹ On his recent visit to the city in the spring of 1996, he located the original Hall of the Reading Guild; it is just behind the George Hotel and on the site is now built a concrete building for a car park.



The present author's interest this time centres on signs of names of roads; Hexham Road has caught his particular interest. The aim of the present article is to discuss the names of roads, especially that of Hexham Road, in the vicinity of Northumberland Avenue to

1 K. Tamoto, 'Yield Hall – A Variant of Guildhall', FOCUS No. 14 (Toyohashi: The Society for the Study of English and American Literature, Aichi University, 1992), pp. 45-51.

the west of Reading University.



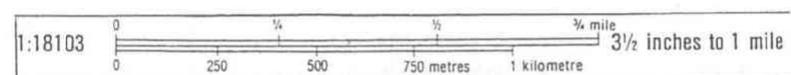
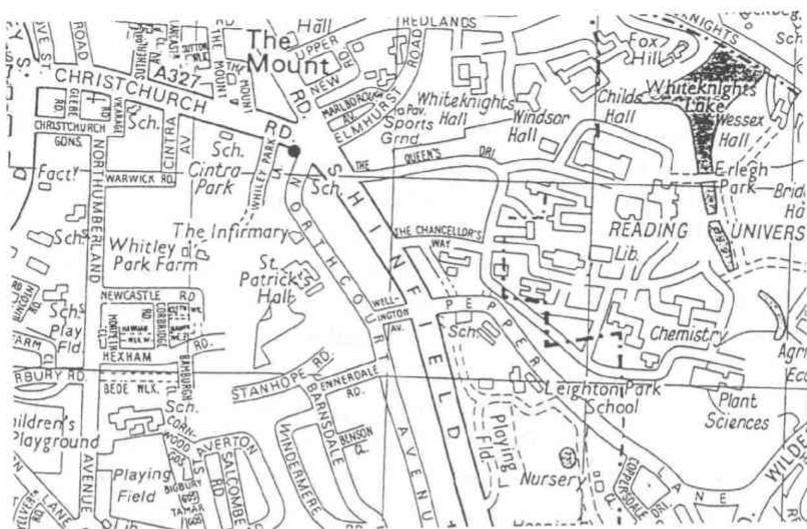
In the area about half a mile west of Reading University, as in the following map, Northumberland Avenue lies from north to south, and from the avenue branch off several roads with names of places which exist in Northumberland. There is Warwick Road. Is the road connected with the town of Warwick, the administrative centre of Warwickshire, or the place with that name in Cumbria, which lies about 4 miles east of Carlisle? The road seems more likely to be associated with the place in Cumbria, because in close vicinity to it there is a group of towns in Northumberland. Just below Warwick Road, there are Newcastle Road, Corbridge Road and Hexham Road. Corbridge is a town situated about 17 miles west of Newcastle upon Tyne, and about 3 miles east of Hexham.

Warwick (if it is the place in Cumbria), Hexham, Corbridge and Newcastle line up below Hadrian's Wall, which was built in 120-123 A.D. by the emperor Hadrian to prevent the Caledonian tribes from invading the territory of the Roman Empire. The association is strongly supported by a narrow lane called Hadrian Walk.

Hexham is an old town. It was there in the time of the Venerable Bede (?673-735), who tells in his *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* as follows:

Intrauit autem primo monasterium Mailros, quod in ripa Tuidi fluminis positum tunc abbas Eata, uir omnium mansuetissimus

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ac simplicissimus, regebat, qui postea episcopus Hagustaldensis siue Lindisfarnensis ecclesiae factus est, ut supra memorauimus; [He (= Saint Cuthbert) first of all entered the monastery of Melrose which is on the banks of the Tweed and was then ruled over by the Abbot Eata, the gentlest and simplest of men who, as has already been mentioned, was afterwards made bishop of Hexham or rather of Lindisfarne.]²

2 Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1969, repr. 1992), pp. 430-32. Addition in the parentheses mine.

Hagustaldensis is the Latin name of Hexham of those days. On the map, there is Bede Walk just below Hexham Road. Bamburgh Close is fascinating. Bamburgh was the chief royal residence of Bernicia, the ancient kingdom of north Northumbria. It is situated about 6 miles south-east of Lindisfarne or Holy Island, where St Aidan, who was summoned from his monastery in Iona by King Oswald of Northumbria, founded a monastery in 635.

Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* was translated into Old English about 150 years later by an anonymous author. The Latin account quoted above was translated as follows:

7 ærest eode in Mailros ðæt mynster, þæt is geseted on ofre Tuidon streames. Ðæt mynster þa heold 7 rihte Eata biscop, se wæs milde wer 7 monðwære, 7 se æfter wæs gewarden biscop in Hægstealdes æ 7 in Lindesfarona æ, swa swa we beforan gemyngodon.

[And first he went into the monastery of Melrose, which lies on the banks of the river Tweed. This monastery was then swayed and directed by bishop Eata, a man of mild and gentle character, who subsequently became bishop at Hexham and Lindisfarne, as already mentioned.]³

The Old English *Hægstealdes æ* corresponds to the Latin '*Hagustaldensis*'. The Old English *æ* or *ea*, which follows *Hægstealdes* in the genitive case, means 'stream'; the place-name, which literally means 'the hagustald's stream', thus originally refers to the stream at Hexham.⁴ The first mention of this place-name in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is made in the passage for the year 681:

681. Her man halgode Trumbriht biscop to Hagustaldes ea. 7

3 Thomas Miller, *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, EETS OS 95, 96, 110 and 111 (London: Oxford University Press 1890, 1891, 1898, 1898; repr. 1978, 1978, 1988, 1988), Part I, 2, pp. 360-61.

4 Eilert Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1960), p. 237.

Trumwine Pihtum forþan hy hyrdon þa hider.

[681. In this year Trumberht was consecrated bishop of Hexham; and Trumwine was consecrated bishop to the Picts, because then they were subject to us.]⁵

The Old English form of the place-name here is *Hagustaldes ea*, which has *ea* as in the above passage quoted from the Old English version of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*. This place-name, however, occurs with another name in the passage for the year 685 of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*:

685. Her hæt Ecgferð cining ge halgian Cuðberht to biscope. 7 Theodorus archieþs hine ge halgode on Eoferwic þam forman Eastor dæge to biscope to Hagustaldes ham. for þam Trumbriht wæs adon of ðam biscop dome.

[685. In this year king Ecgfrith had Cuthbert consecrated bishop, and archbishop Theodore consecrated him bishop of Hexham at York on the first day of Easter, for Trumberht had been removed from the episcopal see.]⁶

Here the place-name in question is *Hagustaldes ham* with *ham* meaning 'inhabited place', which is the second element of the modern form of the place-name, Hexham. Eckwall states that the original name was *Hagustaldes ēa* and was later refashioned to *Hagustaldes hām*.⁷ *Hagustald*, the first element of this place-name, gave name also to *Hegstealdcumbe*, a place in Somerset, which is found in the following passage from the *Codex Wintoniensis*:

7 þæt land æt Hegstealdcumbe Esne bisceop lende his mæge Wynsie on þa gerád þe ealle þa gerihta eodon into ðere stowe

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5 Charles Plummer, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1892-99), Vol I, p. 39. George N. Garmonsway, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Everyman's Library (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd. 1953, repr. 1990), p. 39.

6 *Ibid.*

7 Eckwall, p. 237.

þe þæt land togebyrað, þæt is Tantun.

[And Bishop Esne leased the estate at Hestercombe to his kinsman Wynsige, on condition that all the dues went to the place to which the land belongs, that is Taunton.]⁸

Turner regards *Hegstealdcumbe* as Hestercombe in the parish of Cheddon Fitzpaine.⁹ *Hegstealdcumbe* means 'the valley of the *hegsteald*, or *hagustald*'.

The Old English *hagustald*, the first element of the place-names, *Hagustaldes hām* and *Hegstealdcumbe*, deserves special mention. This Old English compound is composed of *haga* (a weak masculine) "a place fenced in, an enclosure, a haw, a dwelling in a town" and *-steald* "dweller, owner" (there are Old English *stealdan* "to possess" and Gothic *ga-staldan* "to possess, gain"); thus its original meaning is "an owner of a place fenced in".¹⁰ The *Supplement* of Bosworth & Toller's *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (abbreviated to BTS), under *hægsteald*, gives an explanation that *haga*, the first element of the word *hagusteald*, is "a small piece of land insufficient to maintain a household". MacGillivray's comment, which is made from the viewpoint of the ancient Germanic law, is an interesting key to interpretation of the explanation in BTS, and also of further sense development in this word. He remarks:

8 A. G. C. Turner, 'Some Old English Passages Relating to the Episcopal Manor of Taunton', *Proceedings of the Somersetshire Archæological and Natural History Society*, for the year 1953, Vol. XCVIII (Taunton: Goodman & Son, Ltd. 1955), p. 119, p. 123.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 123.

10 Jacob Grimm & Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (Leipzig: Verlag von S. Hirzel, 1854-85), vierten Bandes zweite Abtheilung, s.v. 'Hagestolz'; Joseph Bosworth & T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1st ed. 1898, repr. 1973), *Supplement* by T. N. Toller (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1921, repr. 1973), with *Enlarged Addenda and Corrigenda* by Alistair Campbell (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1972, repr. 1973), s.v. 'haga', 'hago-steald', 'hæg-steald', '-steald' and 'stealdan'; Christian W. M. Grein, *Sprachschatz der angelsächsischen Dichter* (Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung 1912), s.v. 'hagu-steald'; Ferdinand Holthausen, *Allenglisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung 1934), 'haga' and 'hagu-steald'; Hildung Bäck, *The Synonyms for "Child", "Boy", "Girl" in Old*

Peculiar to the North-Merc. is the interesting compound *hehstald*, 'virgin', W. S. *hago-stéald* (Germ. *Hagestolz*), a bachelor. The fundamental notion is 'possessor of a haw or hedge' (*haga*), and refers to the ancient Germanic law of primogeniture, according to which the oldest son inherited the homestead, the others receiving only a small patch of land ("haw").

As the latter were thus brought into a state of dependence upon the bounty of the elder brother, they were unable to marry.¹¹

Thus developed in this word the sense of "(young) warrior" who was attached to the lord as a retainer or a liegeman, "unmarried person, bachelor", "virgin", and "youth". All the above senses are exemplified by Bäck.¹² An interesting sense development is that of "virgin". Aldred, the tenth-century Northumbrian glossator, employed this word as the term for rendering Latin *virgo*. The Old English word, therefore, occurs as a gloss for Latin *virgo* in the following Argumentum of the Lindisfarne Gospels:

ðe godspellere ân of ðeignum godes se ðe
 JOHANNES euangelista unus ex discipulis ðei qui
 heh-stald gecoren from gode is ðone of hæmdum † of
 uirgō electus á dæo est quem de nuptis
 brydlopum þ̅ lust uifes gemana eft-geceigde god his †
 uoluntem nubere reuocauit deus cuius
 ðæs hehstaltnisse in ðis tuufald cyðnisse in
 uirginitas in hoc duplex testimonium in
 godspell gesileð 7 ðissum moder his miððy foerde
 euangelio datur et huic matrem suam iens

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English; An Etymological-Semasiological Investigation (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerups Förlag 1934), p. 171; Ekwall, s.v. 'Hestercombe'.

11 Hugh S. MacGillivray, *The Influence of Christianity on the Vocabulary of Old English* (Halle a. S.: Max Niemeyer 1902), p. 34.

12 Bäck, pp. 171-76.

to rode bebead god þte ða hehstald hehstald
ad crucem commendauit deus ut uirginem uirgo

gehealde
seruaret¹³

(Li Jn I. 1-4; 203Va 1-14)

The Old English *hehstald*, which originally signified “an owner of a small patch of land” and thus came to mean “young warrior”, was applied to a female virgin, the Blessed Virgin Mary, as well as to a male virgin, St John.

13 Walter W. Skeat, *The Holy Gospels in Anglo-Saxon, Northumbrian, and Old Mercian Versions* (Cambridge: University Press 1871-87), St John, p. 1. Underlines and boldface type mine. '(This is) John the Evangelist, one of the disciples of God, who was chosen by God a virgin, whom God called from his marriage, when he was desirous to wed. A twofold witness is given to him of virginity in the Gospel, (first, that he is called beloved by God above the others,) and secondly, that God, when going to the cross, commended His Mother to him, that the virgin might be guarded by a virgin.'—translation by Dom John Chapman, *Notes on the Early History of the Vulgate Gospels* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1908), p. 228. Parentheses mine.