

British Places and Rauf de Boun's *Bruit*

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Le Petit Bruit is a short prose chronicle in Old French, written by Rauf de Boun in 1309 and setting out the rulers of Britain from Brutus to Edward I. It survives only in London, British Library, MS Harley 902, of the later sixteenth century. Yet it has its place in the trilingual literary culture of medieval England, which (somewhat unexpectedly) it transcends by concern for the national community (Summerfield with Allen 344). Not all problems in the text of *Le Petit Bruit* have been solved, despite a modern edition (Tyson 1987), for a copy of which the writer thanks Ad Putter of Bristol. Many of them are due to gross scribal corruption, so that Lincoln (for example) appears as *Nichole*. This major deformation of so familiar an English place-name may be recalled as we look at less familiar ones discussed by the editor (Tyson 2000).

Diana Tyson says of *Gurmoundcestre* (where the defeated king Gurmound took refuge after the battle of Huntingdon) and *Scardisbornz* (founded by the giant Scardius) that these names, deriving from those of fictional characters, allow “no basis for any even marginally fruitful guesswork.” Yet the first of these is surely Godmanchester, a mile from the town of Huntingdon (now in Cambridgeshire), and attested in 1086 as *Godmundcestre*, the Roman fort of a man called Godmund or Guthmund. (Ian Kirby of Lausanne pointed out, when this paper was read at IAUPE’s Malta conference of 2010, that Godmund or Gurmound is mentioned by Layamon.) The second is almost as certainly Scarborough in North Yorkshire, recorded as *Escardeburg* in about 1160, and understood as “Skarthi’s stronghold” (Watts 254, 530).

Next come *Gillisland*, *Cupland*, *Anandirdale*, and *Wyrhale*, all domains of the British king Waleys in the early Anglo-Saxon period. They were “outr Humbre,” so would be in northern England or southern Scotland. Dr. Tyson is right in taking the first as the area around Gilsland in north-east Cumbria, a moorland district rich in Celtic toponyms. But *Cupland* puzzles her. However, it is surely Copeland Forest, a bleak, rugged, treeless region (despite its name) between the rivers Derwent and Esk in south-west Cumbria (Watts 156). *Anandirdale* is also considered obscure, but will be Annandale in south-west Scotland. This valley of the river Annan, giving its name to the town of Annan, is recorded as *Annandesdale* in 1179 (Nicolaisen). Diana Tyson thinks *Wyrhale* could be Weardale, west of Durham. That is unlikely. Weardale is on the other side of the Pennine Hills from the other territories of Waleys, and the forms *Wer* and *Were* recorded in medieval documents are less suitable than those for Wyresdale, where the river Wyre appears early on as *Wyr* or *Wyre* (Watts 657, 707). The river Wyre

runs through north Lancashire to enter the Irish Sea at Fleetwood. Wyresdale is in the north-west, like Gilsland, Copeland, and Annandale. If *Wyrhale* in MS Harley 902 is a corrupt form of *Wyresdale*, Waleys would have ruled the modern Lake District and territories north and south of it. The reference is hardly to the Wirral Peninsula, facing modern Liverpool across the Mersey Estuary, since this lies farther south and remained a wilderness into the middle ages.

After England and Scotland, Wales. Rauf states that Edward I granted David of Wales seneschalship of all castles in *Bretland*. Diana Tyson suggests this is an error for “Breckland,” an extensive heathland (much of it now an army range) near Thetford in eastern England. But this is unfounded. “David of Wales” is Dafydd ap Gruffydd, brother of Llywelyn (d. 1282), last native Prince of Wales. By the Treaty of Aberconway of 1277, Dafydd (who died a traitor’s death at Shrewsbury in 1283) was granted territory in north-east Wales, but not Breckland (Rees plate 43). *Bretland* means exactly what it says: “land of the Britons” (=Wales). It is nothing to do with East Anglia.

A harder problem is *Counté de Marchancie/Merchancie d’Engleterre*, allegedly granted by king Egbert, and then William I, to favored kinsmen. It was not a wealthy area and Diana Tyson links it with March, Cambridgeshire. However, although Old French *mareschaucie* “office of a marshal” (see the *Oxford English Dictionary* entries for *marshalcy* and *Marshalsea*) relates to a king’s marshal (an office now held by the Duke of Norfolk), this does not help locate this territory in the fenland March or on Welsh or Scottish marches. There is no etymological link between a marshal, whose business was originally with horses, and a march or frontier. Another approach seems better. Dr Tyson associates the region with Alan the Red, who was the Conqueror’s second cousin and the first Norman holder of the Honour of Richmond, in North Yorkshire, where he began building the impressive castle in about 1071. The region was later known as Richmondshire. It is possible that *Counté de Marchancie* is a bad corruption (yet still with the grapheme *-ch-*) of *Counté de Richemunde*, the exact Old French equivalent of “Richmondshire.” *Merchancie d’Engleterre* may likewise be from *Richemunde d’Engleterre*, Richmond of England, as opposed to places in France called *Richemont* (Watts 499). Richmondshire was not actually rich. Its initial strategic importance, at a time when the Scottish frontier coincided with the present border separating Yorkshire from Cumbria, gave prestige to Earl Alan. But the area was hilly and uninhabited, and he would make more money from his lands in Lincolnshire, East Anglia, and south-west England. That tallies with Rauf’s remarks. Drastic emendation hence appears to make sense of this reference, which seems later on to have been misunderstood as an allusion to the king’s marshal.

More straightforward is the whereabouts of Rauf’s *la maison de la Seint Croys* at Winchester. Diana Tyson says that she has discovered “no foundation of that

name in Winchester," but it is fairly easy to see it as the hospital of St Cross, a mile south of Winchester Cathedral in the suburb of St Cross. It was founded not (as Rauf claims) by king Athelstan for the soul of Guy of Warwick, but by Henry of Blois, bishop of Winchester 1129–71 and brother to king Stephen. The large church and other medieval buildings are there to this day, even if little can be seen from the time of bishop Henry himself (Pevsner and Lloyd 706–13).

Difficulties return with some castles. According to Rauf, the legendary king Eboracus built two of them, the *chastel de pucelis qi est en Escoce* and *le chastel Sidemound dolorous qe homme appelle ore le chastel de Notyngham*. On the "castle of maidens," often taken as Edinburgh Castle, there is now a comprehensive recent discussion by Richard Coates. The second is more obscure. It is hardly the real Nottingham Castle. A solution lies rather in an account by R. S. Loomis. He listed *la cité de Snauedun* from Gaimar, *roi de Sinadoune* from Biket, *cité de Sinaudon* from Renaud de Beaujeu, *Isneldone* from Beroul, and *Kynke Kenadonne* from Malory (here using a French source). Loomis regarded them as one and the same place, the city of "Snowdon" or Caerseint, site of the Roman fort of Segodunum on the fringes of Caernarfon in north-west Wales (Loomis 1956: 10–15). This place makes an earlier appearance in literature in the *Mabinogion* tale of Branwen, written in the 1120s or slightly later. When the king of the Isle of the Mighty is holding court at Caerseint, a starling sent by his sister Branwen in Ireland lands on his shoulder and reveals a letter telling of her ill-treatment there (Breeze 104). As regards Rauf's *Sidemound*, this appears to be a corruption of *Sinadoune*, which has the same number of letters and the sequences *Si-* and *-oun-*. As for "Notyngham," this may also be due to confusion with Snowdonia, Rauf perhaps having tried to explain obscure *Sidemound* (correctly) as *chastel de Snowdonie*, but with the explanation again being obscured. It would be easy for a scribe to confuse Snowdonia with Nottingham, since the later retained its original initial *s* as late as 1275 or so with the form *Snotyngham*. Hence (it appears) a confusion of Snowdonia and (S)Nottingham, places with little in common except castles.

Finally, Cornwall. Geoffrey of Monmouth tells how Gorlois, duke of Cornwall, tried without success to protect his duchess from the unwelcome attentions of Utherpendragon. Rauf gives the duke's name instead as *Bodemound*, adding that he built *Chastel Bedmound*. The latter replaces *Dimilihoc* in Geoffrey's text, the spot where Gorlois was killed by Utherpendragon's men at the very moment that his duchess was being seduced (and king Arthur being conceived). What has happened is this. *Dimilihoc* is Domellick, a hamlet near St Dennis in the Cornish china-clay region (Padel 165). Knowing nothing of this, Rauf substituted for it Bodmin, the ancient religious centre and modern county town eight miles east of Domellick. It will be from Bodmin that duke and castle take their name.

Diana Tyson's paper is thus of unusual interest. Although Rauf de Boun's *Le Petit Bruit* is a little-known text of scant literary value, it offers attractions

to textual scholars, like the poetry of Manilius. It may thus be recommended to researchers, who can exercise their wits in rectifying the errors of the single corrupt manuscript in which it survives.

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