

THE PLACE-NAMES OF BARSETSHIRE

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Every literary history or encyclopedia describes The Warden as the first of the six Barsetshire Novels and yet, when Anthony Trollope (1815-1882) wrote it just over 120 years ago, it would have been difficult to predict that the year of its publication, 1855, was going to be regarded as the point in time at which the totally fictitious and yet totally real English county of Barset had been born. The name of the county is never mentioned in the novel; indeed, the reader is hardly aware of its existence since the location of practically all the events depicted, the cathedral town of Barchester, appears to be without any significant hinterland. Even the town itself is not sketched in any great detail, and the action, such as it is, is centered on and radiates from Hiram's Hospital, the alms-house built as a result of the will of one John Hiram, a successful fifteenth-century woolstapler.

Nevertheless, the presence and potential influence of Barchester is never in doubt. Acknowledged by the author to have been created with the Wiltshire town of Salisbury in mind¹ and modelled morphologically after Dorchester, the name Barchester serves basically as a kind of anonymous toponym. "Let us call it Barchester," says Trollope.² "Were we to name Wells or Salisbury, Exeter, Hereford, or Gloucester, it might be presumed that something personal was intended... Let us presume that Barchester is a quiet town in the West of England, more remarkable for the beauty of its cathedral and the antiquity of its monuments, than for commercial prosperity." Barchester, then, has no meaning except that of "cathedral town in the west of England," and the county name, when it makes its first appearance in the phrase "the ferns of Barsetshire" in the second and most famous novel of the series, Barchester Towers, shows itself to have the same kind of formational relationship to Barchester, as Dorset has to Dorchester, confirming our hunch about the morphological prototype.

Although Trollope claims to have had "its roads and railroads, its towns and parishes, its members of Parliament, and the different hunts which rode over it"³ in his mind, and although later, on the opening page of *Doctor Thorne*,⁴ he

refers to "its green pastures, its waving wheat, its deep and shady, - and let us add - dirty lanes, its paths and stiles, its tawny-colored, well-built rural churches, its avenues of beeches, and frequent Tudor mansions, its constant country hunt, its social graces ...," the Barsetshire of the novels never takes on the kind of haunting, vibrant, persuasive reality of, let us say, Hardy's Wessex with its forests, coppices, lanes, ploughed fields, river-valleys, hills, and the rest of its nestling, protecting, threatening, living landscape. Scarcely a natural feature is mentioned for its own sake, and the places which are identified and named are merely the man-made habitat in which human beings weave the threads of their lives, particularly as extensions of the narrow confines of the Cathedral Close into the diocese.

The Archdeacon of Barchester, for instance, is rector of Plumstead Episcopi. That the specific element Plum- in this name (it also occurs in the Cheshire parish name Plumstock in the novel John Caldigate, and in Plum-cum-Pippins, the name of a small church near Cambridge, in Widow's Mite) is not accidental is shown through contrast with the small living held by a minor canon, Crabtree Parva (not to be confused with Crabtree Canonicorum, by the way), whereas Puddingdale comes somewhere in between these two,

in the value of its benefits. The names of other rural rectories, like Goosegorge and Eiderdown, are indicative of a certain amount of featherbedding of the clergy, and there is also "Stogpingum, or Stoke Pinguum, as it should be written."⁵ In his pervasive, and frequently irritating, search for the witty lexical pun, which creates onomastic caricatures instead of believable names, Trollope does not limit himself to the naming of places. The rector of Puddingdale, who has twelve children, is called Quiverful, the young man and "strong reformer"⁶ who causes all the trouble in The Warden is appropriately named John Bold, the writer of thunderbolt-slinging editorials for the national newspaper, The Jupiter, rejoices in the name of Tom Towers (obviously not far removed from Mount Olympus), and the attorney-general is Sir Abraham Haphazard, a name which suitably matches what Trollope calls his "law-enlightened and law-bewildered brains."⁷ Almost outside the province of name studies are such tell-tale labels as Dr. Pessimist Anticant for a Scottish pamphleteer (said to be Carlyle) and Mr. Popular Sentiment for a contemporary novelist (supposed to be Dickens), and the allusions caused by the names of the archdeacon's three sons, Charles James, Henry, and Samuel, the effect of which an early reviewer found "now

and then amusing", because their "characters are taken from three bishops frequently before the public,"⁸ almost totally escape the modern reader.

To go back to the beginning: When Anthony Trollope published The Warden in 1855, it would have been difficult to predict that this was the year in which the English county of Barsetshire was born, for if the author emerges as anything at this point, it is as a somewhat clever, though psychologically successful, painter of portraits and not as an accomplished landscape artist - not a very hopeful situation for the student of literary toponymics!

Nor does this situation change much in the subsequent five novels of the series, despite a gradually expanding vision of Barsetshire. As it turns out, The Warden is the most prolific purveyor of place-names, with a total of twelve. Barchester Towers (1858) adds five new names, and Doctor Thorne (1858) ten. Framley Parsonage (1861) and The Small House at Allington (1864) provide another six and three respectively (these last three in a neighboring county, however), and the extensive Last Chronicle of Barset (1867) has a meagre four names to add (while referring in some way or other to every name already established in the earlier novels) making a total of forty place-names,⁹ apart from the town name Plumplington

which is supplied by the much later novelette Two Heroines of Plumplington (1882) , a kind of postscript or footnote to the series. The fact that out of this total place-nomenclature almost half, fourteen, are parish names and other names with ecclesiastical connections, and that another thirteen refer to castles, manors, lodges and the like, demonstrates very effectively the social environment of the Barsestshire Novels. Only in Hoggle End do we come across a name for a community of brickmakers (Last Chronicle of Barset), and only in Rosebank are we, very amusingly, introduced to the social aspirations of the Lookalofts for whom the original name of their farm, Barleystubb, was no longer good enough (Barchester Towers). The family name in this instance also contrasts poignantly with the names of other farmers whose onomastic labels never leave any doubt about their occupations, like Greenacre, Stiles, and Subsoil, just as the sexton is appropriately called Clodheve, and local doctors answer to colloquial compound names of the "scarecrow" variety, like Rerechild, Bumpwell, Ambleoff, and Fillgrave (all in Barchester Towers), while their eminent London colleagues cloak their professional superiority in such sequential Greek letters, majuscules presumably, as Sir Lamda Mewnew, and Sir Omicron Pie.

These are mostly anthroponymic, sometimes toponymic, labels which underline in their own way the astute observation made by an early reviewer of Barchester Towers, that Trollope's "characters are frequently rather abstractions of qualities than actual persons."¹⁰ The writing of a lesser author would probably not have survived such caricaturing, abstracting onomastic labeling techniques, but Trollope usually gets away with it, perhaps because he never raises the reader's expectations beyond their potential fulfillment or, and this maybe the stronger argument, because the satiric, caustic, witty, dissecting English prose, which he employs as the vehicle for both his narratives and his comments, is stylistically admirably suited for the purpose. There is also no denying that, when he does not deem it necessary to employ ludicrously meaningful nicknames, Trollope creates very convincing place-names quite appropriate for the West Country, whether by choice of the dialectally right English generic, as in Barchester, Chaldicotes, Greshamsbury, Allington, Guestwick, Hazlehurst, Hamersham, Framley, Silverbridge, or by reference to non-Anglo-Saxon linguistic and social influences such as Courcy Castle, seat of the Earls of de Courcy, and the Grange, both differently indicative of a Norman French adstratum.

Nevertheless, neither quantitatively nor qualitatively, are the Barsetshire Novels an impressive hunting ground for the onomastically inclined. There is primarily the toponymic Diocese of Barchester; the presence of the County of Barset in its names is less real and largely restricted to toponyms associated with the aristocratic or "quality" layer of society. Apart from three hill-names, one of them a secondary settlement name (Mill Hill), and one reference to Goshall Springs (Last Chronicle), natural features are not named at all; rivers, streams and lakes in particular do not seem to exist.

A county map of the Barsetshire of the mind,¹¹ then, - at least as created for us by Anthony Trollope - is neither topographically nor toponymically detailed and precise in the density of its features; yet its fictitious reality has not remained confined to the middle of the nineteenth century to which it originally belongs - and here lies the real fascination for the name scholar, as well as for the social historian. In 1939, Angela Thirkell (1890 - 1961), daughter of the Scottish classical scholar J.W. Mackail and born eight years after Trollope's death, in a novel called The Brandons, chose to revive Trollope's Barsetshire, and especially the area around Barchester, as a setting for her narrative, in this way

providing a historical continuity for the county which few other places of fiction have been allowed to enjoy. Naturally, a writer engaged in the production of creative fiction at the outbreak of the Second World War cannot be expected to be a somewhat belated Victorian, nor will anybody want to make the claim that the names Trollope and Thirkell will in future be accorded equal rank in the annals of English literature, but The Brandons and the seventeen other novels which followed to create what the publishers fondly call the "Barsetshire saga" (the last volume, Enter Sir Robert, appeared in 1955), display a Trollopesque preoccupation with people and their relationships on a social level not dissimilar from that of the original series, while employing, at their best moments, a fine sensitivity for the delicious foibles of the human species and for the subtly humorous possibilities of language as a fitting expression for such delightful characteristics. In general terms, therefore, this twentieth-century continuation of the chronicle of life in Barsetshire is not unworthy of its nineteenth-century predecessor.

This putting together of a new Chronicle of Barset is, however, so much more than just a skillful rejuvenation of a clever idea. If the Thirkell series had been merely re-creative without any creatively imaginative innovations of its own,

there would have been hardly any justification for a paper like this; but, if Angela Thirkell's use and adaptation of place-names may be considered an index to her reshaping of somebody else's idea, than it will become quickly apparent that the Barchester country of the 1940s and 1950s is a literary county much closer to Hardy's Wessex¹² than to the Barsetshire of the 1850s and 1860s. Barchester is, of course, still the cathedral town with Close and Deanery, and even Hiram's Hospital is still there, location of the momentous events initially related in The Warden, but the city is now directly or circumstantially known to have an infirmary, a War Hospital, a museum, a cinema (the Odeon), a cricket ground, an amateur dramatic society, a county council, a bank, a co-op, a high school, a railway station, tram lines, a country club, a labour exchange, a town hall, swimming baths, and the Salvation Army, while serving as a domicile and a place of work for hosts of tradesmen, merchants and professionals. It is no longer just "remarkable for the beauty of its cathedral and the antiquity of its monuments," it is a fully functioning modern city. The archdeacon, it is true, still lives at Plumstead, and the de Courcys are still at Courcy Castle, and the Omnium estate around Gatherum Castle, Greshamsbury, Silverbredge, and Hogglestock still survive (the last of these

now a large engineering works), but the events depicted now take place at "Stories, a charming early Georgian house at Pomfret Madrigal"¹³ or at Brandon Abbey (The Brandons) or at Laverings (Before Lunch) or Southbridge (Cheerfulness Breaks In) or Hallbury (Miss Bunting), with numerous other names creating a toponymic network which, together with more detailed and more lovingly sketched topographic descriptions, gives the reader the impression of a truly lived-in natural and cultural landscape, with considerable historical and even pre-historic depth. Water-courses now exist and have names, like "the winding course of the Rising,"¹⁴ Rushwater, and river Woolram; smaller geographical features are noted like Patcher's Lane, Thumble Coppice, a field called Bloody Meadow where bones were found and a battle is thought to have been once fought, or - a real touch of post-Hardyan awareness of the folk-cultural dimensions of the landscape - the "Hangman's Oak, a large, blasted tree near the common, known historically to have been so called because a certain Lucius Handiman, Gent., had in 1872 planted a number of acorns brought back by him from Virginia, of which this was the only survivor, but naturally connected in the popular mind with gibbets and a mild form of magic."¹⁵

Name etymologies are explored in semi-serious fashion like that of the infamous "Pooker's Piece"¹⁶ (Before Lunch) or of "Gorwulf-Steadings", now said to be surviving as Guestings.¹⁷ The most delightful of these toponymical investigations is, to my mind, that of the church name St. Hall Friars which, especially in a journal engaged in the pursuit of Literary Onomastics, bears recounting in full, not the least as a vivid example of Angela Thirkell's stylistic accomplishments:¹⁸

The Church, one of the many beautiful and unpretentious stone churches of these parts, with a tower and battlements, was called St. Hall Friars. The origin of this name was rather obscure. Early local antiquarians with simple enthusiasm had decided that Saint here stood for Holy or Blessed, and referred to a suppositious hall or lodging house for monks from the great abbey at Brandon, now utterly lost. As there was known to have been a church on that spot in one form or another since the conversion of Wessex, and no indication of the monks from Brandon Abbey having ever lodged there or anywhere but in their own house and in any case monks are not friars, this theory was held up to ridicule in the Barchester Mercury (one of England's oldest provincial papers, now incorporated with the Barchester Chronicle) in about 1793 by a notorious freethinker, Horatio Porter, Esq., who subsequently died of a stroke while having a debauch in his kitchen with his cook. Such was Mr. Porter's profligacy, and such the weakness of the owner of the Mercury who was heavily in debt over cards, that his letter was printed entire, with an ingenious suggestion that for Hall Friars, Hell-Fire should be read. Mr. Porter's death (accompanied by a violent thunderstorm and the birth of a calf with six legs at Brandon Abbas) so shocked the public that the whole matter dropped until a disciple of John Keble, digging among old papers in the Bishop's library at Barchester, found that a certain rude

swineherd named Aella had been slain by the bailiff of the monastery to which he was attached for refusing to drive the pigs afield during Lent, owing to which saintly action, most of the pigs (six weeks being a long period) had died of hunger and thirst, while the swineherd was in due time canonized. As there was no corroboration of any kind for this story it obtained great credence and even caused a weak-minded young gentleman of good family to draw back from Rome. Under the influence of Bishop Stubbs a variety of further research was made, leading nowhere at all, and there the matter rests. It is true that the Hallbury branch of the Bassetshire Mother's Union has a banner heavily embroidered in gold representing St. Aella in mauve and green robes with a shepherd's crook, but the present rector, Dr. Dale, is rather ashamed of it and keeps it reverently in tissue paper in case the gold should tarnish.

Who could claim after this quotation that our scholarly interest does not have its refreshingly entertaining aspects!

While this passage also establishes without any doubt the author's very sophisticated perception of names and their function, it illustrates in addition the same tendency to caricature and to nickname which we noticed in Trollope's naming practices. It is little surprising therefore that Angela Thirkell's ecclesiastical parishes are known by such humorously suitable names as Pomfret Madrigal (to be distinguished from Pomfret Abbas and Pomfret Towers, of course) and Little Misfit, according to the value of their endowments; that a stretch of wasteland is called Starveacres; and that in true English naming tradition - with a touch of the proverbial - a village is named Foxling-in-Henfold. The most

amusing, and perhaps also most abusing, toponymical tour de force in this respect is woven (and I am using this term advisedly, despite the glaring mixed metaphor) into the place-nomenclature created by Mrs. Thirkell for the setting of the events in the novel Before Lunch, number two of the series. When we first hear that Lord Bond makes his home at Staple Park, no information of significance seems to be extractable from that fact; when we are then told that Staple Park is near Skeynes, the first raised eyebrow signals recognition of more than coincidence; and when other places in the neighborhood turn out to be bearing names like Worsted, Winter Overcotes (there is another Odeon cinema here), High Ramstead, and Overfolds, when the watercourse near Staple Park is the river Woolram; when there is a plot of land in Worsted called Lamb's Piece; when the two public houses in Skeynes and Worsted are named "The Fleece" and "The Woolpack," respectively; when one takes this cumulative evidence into account, then the inter-relatedness of this web of names becomes (painfully?) clear. Even the living of Skeynes Agnes, with its folk-etymological connections with Latin agnus "lamb," and the superficially opaque place-name Beliers (with Beliers Abbey), for which the forewarned reader now suspects an underlying French belier "ram," make lexical sense in this context.

Initially lost for an explanation for such dense and overwhelmingly woolly naming, we are incidentally informed by the author that "Staple Park, the seat of Lord and Lady Bond, had been built by Lord Bond's great-great-grandfather Jedediah Bond, a Yorkshire manufacturer of woollen goods who had come south to spend part of his vast fortune and found a family."¹⁹ Whether this explanation is enough to satisfy an onomastically-minded reader or whether he would still feel that the wool has been pulled over his eyes, is another question. It should, however, be pointed out in all fairness that names like Worsted, Skeynes, Beliers Priory, and the river Woolram, when incorporated singly, or at least less densely, into later novels, like Miss Bunting, blend into the texture of the Bassetshire place-nomenclature (I am doing it now!) without causing offense. It should also be noted that the majority of names - we have already mentioned Southbridge, Hallbury and Brandon, but could add Marling Hall, Harefield, Northbridge, Littlehampton, Nutfield, Frinton, Norton Park, Monk's Porton, Colney House, Calston, Tidcombe Halt, and many others - are not distinguishable from names found elsewhere in that part of England, and simply serve to make the county of Basset convincingly English.

In this and in other ways - Angela Thirkell's genealogical strategies are similar to her onomastic ones - Bassetshire becomes re-established as a literary reality almost a century after its initial creation. There are echoes of the old Bassetshire but there is also plenty of evidence of the new, i.e., of a county which has literally survived the Second World War. For the student of literary onomastics the continuing existence of the "Barchester country," whether as the result of survival or revival is little matter in the 1950s, is a most satisfying phenomenon, and even if the story were to end here would not lose any of its attractiveness. What obviously surpasses this same student's fondest dreams, however, is the even later re-appearance of this survived, revived "Barchester country" as part of yet another author's literary landscape. In 1967, William Golding, probably best known for his Lord of the Flies, published a novel entitled The Pyramid²⁰ whose action takes place in a village called, not inappropriately, Stilbourne. Where is the nearest railroad station for Stilbourne, where do Stilbourne couples go if they want a cathedral wedding, where do ambitious Stilbourne singers join a first-rate choral society, where do Stilbourne students browse in bookstores? In Barchester! Indeed, "it was said you could see the very

tip of Barchester spire from the crest of Pentry Hill,"²¹ on the outskirts of Stilbourne which appears to be situated about half way between Omnium and Barchester²² and is therefore another addition to the settlement nomenclature of Barsetshire. And are not those conversant with the parishes of the Barchester diocese, as laid out by Trollope and Thirkell, reminded of something familiar when Golding tells them that the "incumbent of Bumstead Episcopi"²³ plays the double bass for the Stilbourne Operatic Society? Only it was Plumstead, was it not, and the pun shows us that the usually so serious Mr. Golding, too, can enter into the Trollopian spirit of things, in what one critic has described as his "move into what is for him a new fictional terrain, the thoroughly realistic novel."²⁴ Perhaps names like Barchester and Omnium and Bumstead Episcopi help us to put this perceived realism into perspective, in so far as it locates Stilbourne and its inhabitants, and especially those paraded before us by the author, in a literary landscape which, because of its previously documented and willingly accepted existence, removes them from the realm of "pure" fiction. Who would question a claim made by Golding in 1967 when it had been corroborated in advance by Trollope and Thirkell? The "new fictional terrain," therefore, is that tongue-in-cheek,

fictitious reality whose plausibility relies heavily on borrowed authority, an authority for which these three place-names serve as onomastic cross-references.

This, then, is maybe the most rewarding and satisfactory observation - discovery would be too dramatic a term - derived from our little investigation: The creation of cultural and historical continuity in the "landscape of the mind" - through the use of names. If we are permitted to make Trollope's divine, the Rev. Obadiah Slope our starting point, of whom it has been asserted, according to the author, "that he is lineally descended from that eminent physician who assisted at the birth of Mr. T. Shandy and that in early years he added an "e" to his name, for the sake of euphony"²⁵ - if we take this assertion at face value and extend the genealogical connections of Trollope's Rev. Obadiah Slope to Laurence Sterne's Dr. Slop - if we further regard Little Gidding in Angela Thirkell's *Hallbury*, despite the explicit denial {"nothing religious, only the name of a lane, pre-Domesday as far as my father knows"},²⁶ as a little onomastic luxury by courtesy of Nicholas Ferrar via T.S. Eliot - and if we also grant potential Dickensian provenance to William Golding's first-person narrator Oliver (after all, which conscious literary artist can call his hero Oliver now without the cry

of "I want some more" in his ears) - if we draw therefore Dr. Slop, Little Gidding, and Oliver (Twist) into our net, then the world of fictitious reality created by the place-names of Barsetshire in the hands of three authors in the years between 1855 and 1967, emerges as something broader both in chronological and literary terms, linking the creative minds of at least six, and perhaps seven, writers from the middle of the eighteenth century to the present. In that kind of expanded context, the "Barsetshire of the mind" turns out to be much more than a fictitious county in the West of England with strong London and Oxford connections: It becomes the fitting metaphor for that mental constituency in which reality and fantasy are one, in which time itself is timeless, in which fiction is not a distortion of truth but becomes truth itself, and in which the, by definition, denotative act of naming becomes the most connotative process of all.

Remember, Angela Thirkell called the house in which the Brandons lived "Stories."

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NOTES

- ¹Anthony Trollope, An Autobiography (1883;rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 92.
- ²Anthony Trollope, The Warden (1855; rpt. London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1907), p.1.
- ³Trollope, Autobiography, p. 154.
- ⁴Anthony Trollope, Doctor Thorne (1858; rpt. London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1908), p. 1.
- ⁵Trollope, Warden, p. 192.
- ⁶Trollope, Warden, p. 17.
- ⁷Trollope, Warden, p. 121.
- ⁸Unsigned notice, Examiner, 6 January 1855, p. 5.
Reprinted in: Donald Smalley, Trollope: The Critical Heri
Heritage (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), pp. 30-31.
- ⁹Since the Barsetshire place-names included in Winifred Gregory Gerould and James Thayer Gerould, A Guide to Trollope (London: Oxford University Press, 1948) are not a complete listing, the numbers here presented are based on my own count in the six Barsetshire Novels. The total includes two names, Scarington and Melton, which are mentioned only once without any details as to their location; they seem to be in Barsetshire, however.
- ¹⁰Unsigned review, Spectator, 16 May 1857, xxx., pp. 525-526. Reprinted in : Smalley, p. 42.

¹¹An attempt to draw such a map was made by Florence W. Ewing in Gerould and Gerould, p. 2, as well as by George F. Muendel in Spencer Van Bokkelen Nichols, The Significance of Anthony Trollope (New York: McMurtrie, 1925). Trollope himself indicates that he "made a map of the dear county," when writing Framley Parsonage (Autobiography, p. 154); this ms. map is reproduced in James Pope Hennessy, Anthony Trollope (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1971), p. 12.

¹²Compare W.F.H. Nicolaisen, "The Place-Names of Hardy's Wessex," Literary Onomastics Studies, 2 (1975), pp. 58-82.

¹³Angela Thirkell, The Brandons (1939; rpt. New York: Pyramid Books, 1972), p. 11.

¹⁴Thirkell, Brandons, p. 30.

¹⁵Angela Thirkell, Before Lunch (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940), p. 254.

¹⁶Thirkell, Before Lunch, p. 57.

¹⁷Thirkell, Before Lunch, p. 68.

¹⁸Angela Thirkell, Miss Bunting (1946; rpt. New York: Pyramid Books, 1972), pp. 15-161

¹⁹Thirkell, Before Lunch, p. 87.

²⁰William Golding, The Pyramid (1967; rpt. London; Faber and Faber, 1969).

²¹Golding, pp. 97-98.

²²Golding, p. 157.

²³Golding, p. 113.

²⁴Howard S. Babb, The Novels of William Golding (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 1970), p. 171.

²⁵Anthony Trollope, Barchester Towers (1857; rpt. London; J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd; 1906), p. 24.

²⁶Thirkell, Miss Bunting, p. 77.