

Source of the name DERBY

Most historians have had a go at explaining the source of the name 'Derby' and, it seems to me on reading the many history books written about Derby, these historians have quoted, re-quoted, interpreted and reinterpreted one particular comment to arrive at Deoraby, the place where deer pass by.

The first time the word 'Deoraby' appears in a popular 'travelogue' is probably in Britannia which was the work of William Camden. (<http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/travellers/Camden/20>). The first edition, written in Latin, was published in 1586 and numbered seven editions by 1607. The 1607 edition was the first one to include a set of English County maps by Christopher Saxton and John Norden. The first edition to be published in English appeared in 1610.

Under the heading “Darbyshire” section 4 Camden says that,

But where Derwent turneth somewhat Eastward, when it is once past Little Chester, that is, Little City, where old peeces of Roman money are oftentimes gotten out of the ground, Darby sheweth it selfe, in the English-Saxon tongued named Northworthig, and by the Danes (as Aethelward that ancient writer witnesseth) Deoraby, the chiefe towne of all this shire: which name, being taken from the river Derwent and contracted from Derwentby, it hath bestowed upon the whole County.

Although Camden was recognising the 'Deoraby' spelling in a Saxon Chronicle he was claiming that the source of the name was from the river. So lets take a look at the works he was talking about.

https://openlibrary.org/books/OL7024844M/Old_English_chronicles has a readable version of Ethelwerd's Chronicle, (spelled Aethelward by Camden), and on page 27 we find an account of the AD871 battle.

But duke Ethelwulf met them, and though his troops were few, their hearts resided in brave dwellings: they point their darts, they rout the enemy, and triumph in abundant spoils. At length four days after their meeting, Ethelred arrives with his army; an indescribable battle is fought, now these, now those urge on the fight with spears immoveable; duke Ethelwulf falls, who a short time before had obtained the victory: the barbarians at last triumph. The body of the above-named duke is privately withdrawn, and carried into the province of the Mercians, to a place called Northworthig, but Derby in the language of the Danes.

The English translation spells the name 'Derby' in the form that we are familiar with but Camden, who would no doubt have seen the Latin version, has quoted 'Deoraby'. I think Camden's view is plausible because even if Ethelwerd was writing in Latin he would most probably used the Saxon version, Deoraby, to describe the Viking pronunciation of their name for the town. It is unlikely, but possible I admit, that the Vikings wrote anything down in either Latin or Saxon. Their script was Runes.

This argument about the Danish Viking language takes us on to another view expressed by historians, that is, Deor means Deer in Danish. Having had a quite in depth discussion with a Danish person on this I find that the word Deor is not recognised by them. In fact their name for a deer is Hjort which is the source of our word 'Hart'.

A visit to [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hart_\(deer\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hart_(deer)) tells us that, “The word hart is an old alternative word for "stag" (from Old English heorot, "deer" – compare with modern Dutch hert and Swedish/Norwegian/Danish hjort, also "deer"). If the name of the town was derived from the Viking word for deer then it would have to be called Hartby.

If you google the word Deor you will arrive at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deor>

This site will tell you that *“Deor (or "The Lament of Deor") is an Old English poem found in the late 10th century collection the Exeter Book. The poem consists of the lament of the scop Deor, who lends his name to the poem, which was given no formal title; modern scholars do not actually believe Deor to be the author of this poem. In the poem, Deor's lord has replaced him. Deor mentions various figures from Germanic mythology and reconciles his own troubles with the troubles these figures faced, ending each section with the refrain "that passed away, so may this." The poem Deor begins with the struggles and misfortunes of a character named Weland. The poem consists of 42 alliterative lines”*.

What I have found in my research is that the 'eo' spelling in words like Deoraby are pronounced as a 'ah' sound, that is a softer 'a' sound than in Daffodil. A study of an Old English dictionary, many of which can be found online, will show that the 'eo' spelling is prolific and most of the modern versions of the words have the 'a' pronunciation. My own name, McKeown, contains an 'eo' combination which sounds like an 'a' sound when pronounced by people from Ireland where the name originates.

It also has to be recognised that the Old English spelling of the name for our river is Deorwentam and the alleged Saxon town is spelled Northweorthig. On the 1610 map by John Speed we see the spelling Darbye for the town and Darwen for the river. The 'dar' sound persists with Darley and Darley Dale and most likely Darfield. I remember the ribbing people from Duffield used to get when they pronounced it Daffeild in a 'posh' accent but I now think it was a folk memory of Darfield, that is, the field by the Dar.

Finally, I have speculated elsewhere that the Romans also recognised the local name for the river and the the 'lost' location of Lutadarum, the name found on lead ingots, simply means the clay city by the Dar.

Luto = clay; Dar = Derwent; um signifies a town.

Ron McKeown March 2014