

WAS HÆGELISDUN IN ESSEX? A NEW SITE FOR THE MARTYDOM OF EDMUND

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THE QUESTION OF the location of the martyrdom of St Edmund has been one of the most debated issues in the early medieval history of East Anglia. Appearing as *Hægelisdun* or similar in the unique primary source, the site has been variously placed at Hoxne and Hollesley in Suffolk, Hellesdon in Norfolk, and Hellesden Ley in Bradfield St Clare in Suffolk.¹

The present situation seems to be a stalemate, as a recent book of essays on Edmund makes only a passing comment on the debate.² No analysis of the issues from the point of view of toponymic studies has appeared in the literature, and this paper will attempt such a study. The documentary sources are few and have already been examined by many scholars, but I would suggest that the place-name evidence has not been fully exploited. The outcome of my approach is the suggestion of a new candidate site near Maldon in Essex, and a by-product is a hypothesis for the location of *Hesberi* in the twelfth-century *Liber Eliensis*. If both my suggestions be accepted, I believe that a rather different picture of the role of Edmund in the Viking wars emerges.

Our source is the *Passio Sancti Eadmundi* of Abbo, written between 983 and 988.³ This was produced for Ramsey Abbey in Huntingdonshire at the instigation of Archbishop Dunstan, and was probably designed to initiate a cult of St Edmund, as part of incipient political moves to establish the abbey and town of Bury St Edmunds. Many derivative miracle collections were subsequently produced, but these have no independent evidential value. Each elaborates its predecessors, adding layers of legend, until we are left with hardly more than banal hagiography. Although none of these later documents helps us to locate *Hægelisdun*, they still contain useful linguistic evidence.⁴ But we must respect Abbo as a writer who was at least attempting to record a historical place-name; without this premise no progress at all can be made.

Abbo's *Passio* has been edited several times from different manuscripts and the spelling of the place in question varies. Some of these variations probably result from editorial mistranscription, but in any case they are not significant for the argument to follow. Abbo mentions *Hægelisdun* twice (chapters VI and XI), and in all editions the spellings of these two mentions differ. All translations in this paper are my own unless otherwise stated.

1. VI: *qui morabatur eo tempore ab urbe longius in villa, quæ lingua eorum Hagislidun dicitur, (aqua et silva vicina eodem nomine vocatur)* '[Eadmund,] who was staying at that time in a town far from the city, which in his language is called Hagislidun, (the stream and the wood nearby is called by the same name)'; XI: *in silva, cui vocabulum est Hagdesdum* 'in the wood, which is called Hagdesdum'.⁵

2. VI: *qui morabatur eo tempore ab urbe longius, in villa quæ lingua eorum Hægelisdun dicitur, a qua et silva vicina eodem nomine vocatur.* '[Eadmund,] who was at that time staying at some distance from the city, in a township which in the native language is called Hægelisdun, from which also the neighbouring forest is called by the same name'; XI *in silvam cui vocabulum est Haglesdun* (Hervey's translations).⁶

3. VI: *Hægelisdun, Hagilisdun ... (a qua et silva ...)*; XI: *Haglesdun*.⁷

4. VI: *Haegilisdun ... (a qua et silua ...)*; XI: *Haeglesdun*.⁸

Note the variation between a *qua et silva* 'from which also the wood' and *aqua et silva*. Though prepositions were sometimes joined to following words in medieval Latin, the second reading here is susceptible to the misinterpretation 'the stream and the wood', and this has

consequences for the topographical interpretation. The first reading, however, is almost certainly the correct one, since *vocatur* is singular and should have been *vocantur* if referring to the plural *aqua et silva*; and moreover *vicina* is feminine singular and could only qualify one of *aqua* or *silva*. The Anglo-Norman life by Pirus below repeats this variation, suggesting that it comes from a very early misunderstanding.

The later sources show a range of developments of the name *Hægelisdun*:

1. *Haeilesdune* Roger of Wendover (early 13th century).⁹
2. Two Anglo-Norman lives of Edmund refer to his place of martyrdom. Firstly, the life by Pirus of c. 1200 calls the place *Hailesdun* on line 2175, and lines 2197 to 2200 read:

*En Hailesdun, en cel hamel,
Ke ert loinz de burc e de chastel,
(Le Ham, le bois le ewe de le,
Tut est Hailesdun apelle.)*¹⁰

[In *Hailesdun*, in that hamlet/which was far from fort and castle/(The village, the wood and the stream nearby/all are called *Hailesdun*)).¹¹

Secondly, there is an anonymous *Passiun* of the early 13th century, in which verse 74 reads:

*La vile est loinz de la cité
E Englesdun est apelléd
Sicun le bois ki est deléd
El quel li reis fud puis penéd.*¹²

[The town is far from the city/and is called *Englesdun*/Thus also the wood by it/in which the king was tormented]. The place-name recurs as *Henglesdune* in verses 218 and 230. Grant comments that the *-n-* in the first syllable may reflect an influence from *Engleis* 'English'.¹³

3. *Eaglesdune* in the 13th-century chronicle attributed to John of Wallingford.¹⁴
4. *Eglesdone* Bodley MS Laud Misc. 108 (early 14th century).¹⁵
5. *Eggliisdoun* Ralph Higden (early 14th century).¹⁶
6. *heglesdene* Bodley MS 240 (c. 1377).¹⁷
7. *apud Eilesdone, quod alio nomine Hoxne dicitur* in the 14th-century Colchester chronicle.¹⁸
8. *Hegilsdon, Heglisdon* Bodley MS Tanner 15 (1499).¹⁹
9. *Æglestoun, Eglesdune* Leland 1544.²⁰
10. *Heglisdon* in the *Nova Legenda Anglie*.²¹

These later sources are clearly derivative, and their narrative descends either directly or indirectly from Abbo. But it is curious that Pirus has a phonetically regular *Hailesdun*, whereas the anonymous Anglo-Norman *Passiun* has a corrupt form *Englesdun*. The legend of St Edmund was very likely transmitted in both oral and literary forms; *Englesdun* must result from textual corruption, presumably by an author with no knowledge of any real place about which he was writing, but *Hailesdun*, as we shall see, is the expected outcome, by regular phonetic processes, of the name *Hægelisdun*. A twelfth-century user of the name *Hailesdun* very possibly had a real place-name in mind; one still in current use in his time.²²

Of the various interpretations, *Hoxne* has long been recognised as certainly not a linguistic successor of *Hægelisdun*, despite it being assumed identical by Arnold.²³ In a footnote, Hervey gives the correct etymology 'Hægel's hill', but then suggests that this is Hollesley, which is also impossible on linguistic grounds.²⁴ Ekwall, in his very influential place-name dictionary,²⁵ said that 'Hægelisdun ... is obviously Hellesdon' [in Norfolk], and this was reproduced uncritically in the later dictionaries of Mills and Watts.²⁶ A summary of these options has been given by Brooks.²⁷

The identification of *Hægelisdun* and Hellesdon was also accepted by Whitelock, in a sober and reliable review of the entire Edmund legend.²⁸ Whitelock's crucial statement (p. 220) is '*Hægelisdun* [...] is the correct form for Hellesdon, Norfolk, and for no other surviving name'. The word 'surviving' here should presumably be taken to mean 'known to me (Whitelock)', for taken literally it is irrelevant to the argument. Winterbottom states in a footnote (p. 73) that *Hægelisdun* is 'apparently Hellesdon in Norfolk', and Keynes also suggests '?Hellesdon, Norfolk' for *Haeglesdun*.²⁹ Evans argues that the historical tradition associating Edmund with Hoxne from about c. 1100 should be given considerable weight, whilst admitting that there is no proof of the connection.³⁰ On the other hand, she thinks (p. 182) that Whitelock's verdict (based on the linguistic argument) in favour of Hellesdon is decisive.³¹ Edgington has shown how Bishop Herbert Losinga tried to promote Hoxne as a cult site for Edmund in about 1100, in order to tempt pilgrims away from Bury and instead towards a place outside the Liberty of St Edmund.³² But no author championing Hellesdon as the site of *Hægelisdun* has been able to produce any evidence of a historical connection with Edmund or a battle with the Danes at that site.

69	Alderman Ley	do
72	The Grove	Wood
73	Wood Field	Arable
74	Eight Acres	do
75	Hellesden Ley	Pasture
76	Garden	Garden
78	Briggs Field	Arable
79	Stub Ley	do

FIG. 81 – Hellesden Ley in the 1843 Bradfield St Clare tithe apportionment (reproduced with the kind permission of the diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, ref. SROB T105/1).

The most recent suggestion is by West,³³ who noticed the field-name *Hellesden Ley* on the 1843 Bradfield St Clare tithe apportionment and thought this might be *Hægelisdun* (Fig. 81). West also gave some weight to the fact that near Bradfield St Clare are places called Sutton and Kingshall Farm, and Sutton is stated to be the burial place of Edmund in the account of Hermann of Bury of c. 1095. I would prefer to consider these to be of little significance, since the source dates from two centuries after the events it records, and the place-name Sutton is common. Perhaps we should rather see Hermann as giving us a faint memory of Sutton Hoo as an ancient burial place of kings.³⁴ The opinion of Gransden was that etymologically the name Hellesdon is closer to Abbo's spelling which has *-dūn* for its last element, and the termination *-den* of Hellesden has a different meaning.³⁵ Though strictly true, this is a very weak point upon which to base an argument, as *-den* represents an unstressed syllable with an indistinct vowel (schwa), which could descend either from *-dūn* 'hill' or from *-denu* 'valley'. The modern spelling of Hellesden has no bearing on the etymology of its final element; earlier

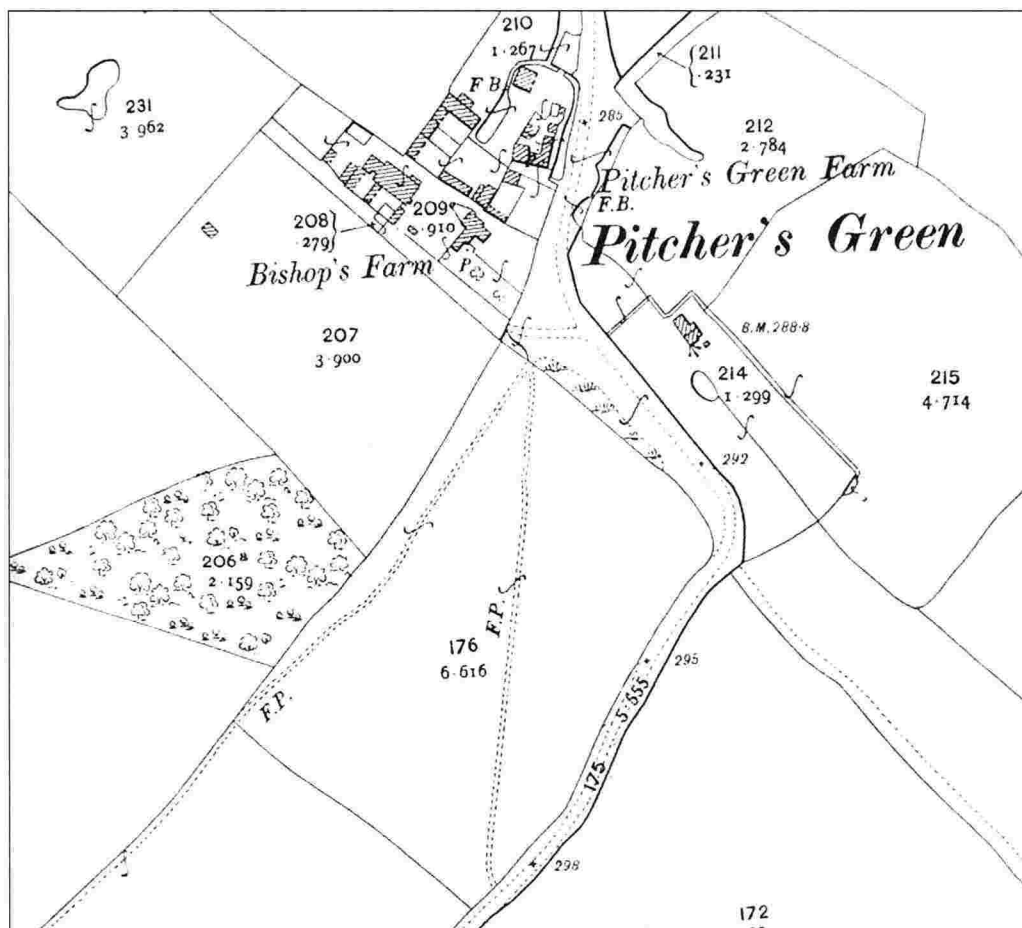


FIG. 82 – Pitcher's Green (TL914584) in Bradfield St Clare on the 1904 OS 25-inch map. Hellesden Ley in the 1843 tithe apportionment is field 176 here. The wood 206 was called Elding Wood in 1783. Spot heights (in italics) are in feet

spellings, which are unavailable, would be needed to decide this. Hellesden Ley has the possible advantage of being near Bury, but I will now put forward several arguments against this identification.³⁶

Firstly, Hellesden Ley (field 75 on the 1843 Bradfield St Clare tithe map) is adjacent to Pitcher's Green (Fig. 82). If Hellesden Ley is a genuine ancient topographical name and continues *Hægelisdun*, there must have been some notable feature to merit the term *dūn*, which typically referred in place-names to a 'low hill in open country', according to Gelling.³⁷ In literature, *dūn* was more often 'mountain'. But the land of Bradfield is quite flat (as implied by the name, meaning 'broad open land'), varying between 89m and a maximum of 95m near Bradfield St Clare church, and the slopes are very gentle. There is not even a low hill.

Secondly, all my attempts to find other records of the place-name Hellesden in Bradfield St Clare have failed. There is an unpublished *Extenta manerii de Bradefeld Sencler* in BL Add. MS 14849 fol. 83v. This is dated 12 Edward [1], that is, 1283/4, but is believed to be a fifteenth-century insertion into the manuscript.³⁸ It does not mention any place with a name similar to Hellesden. I have examined many deeds, leases, conveyances and other documents from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries relating to Bradfield St Clare in the Suffolk

Record Office branches in Ipswich (SROI) and Bury (SROB).³⁹ Many mention field-names, but Hellesden never occurs. Nor is Hellesden Ley mentioned in the discussion of Bradfield St Clare manor in Copinger's *Manors*.⁴⁰ A c. 1759–1808 estate memorandum book from Bradfield St Clare lists many field-names, some of which can be connected to later records.⁴¹ But Hellesden Ley is missing. One field is *Hare'm-Scare'm*, which conceivably could later have been misheard by a tithe surveyor and reproduced as Hellesden. It is a typical derogatory field-name. On the other hand, Hellesden Ley is next to a wood called *Elding Wood* on Hodskinson's 1783 map.⁴² I believe that these are two versions of the same name, and this must mean that one or both of the forms Elding and Hellesden are very corrupt. A possible intermediate form from which they could have both been derived (probably by ignorant or careless map-makers) is *Elsden*, which indeed was the name of a prominent Bury family. Several seventeenth-century members of the Elsden family of Bury are mentioned by Tymms.⁴³ The Bradfield Estate was sold in 1927, but the detailed maps and lists of fields in the sale catalogue do not mention Hellesden.⁴⁴ The English Place-name Society holds a large collection of Suffolk place-name material taken from historical records, which I have searched without success for Hellesden or similar names.⁴⁵

Thirdly, if Hellesden were a place-name in the Bradfield St Clare area, surnames deriving from it would be likely to appear in medieval records. There is a slight positive result here: an *Agnes de Halisden* in the Pinchbeck Register was a tenant in *Brodefelde' Stok' Ken'*.⁴⁶ This item is a copy made c. 1330 of a survey of c. 1286. It is not known what *Stok' Ken'* refers to,⁴⁷ but the location is not identical to Bradfield St Clare, because that place occurs later in the survey as *Bradefelde de Sancto Claro*.⁴⁸ But *Halisden* could derive from Hellesdon in Norfolk or the *Halesdun* in Essex which I discuss below. It is unfortunately impossible to draw any conclusion of a link between *Halisden* and Hellesden Ley unless other records are found bridging the gap between 1286 and 1843. *Halisden* is irrelevant to the question of *Hægelisdun* if it has another origin, or fatal to the theory that Hellesden Ley is *Hægelisdun* if it derives from Hellesden, as it would prove that Hellesden is a genuine *-denu* name, not a *-dūn* name as *Hægelisdun* certainly is. Rye's Calendar of the Feet of Fines for Suffolk has a *John de Heylesdon* on page 245 under the year 49 Edward 3 [1375/6], and the index indicates a *de Heylesdene* on page 102, but this does not appear.⁴⁹ If it really occurs, it would be under the years 26–28 Edward 1 [1297–1300]. However, these names are not located to the Bradfield St Clare area. The surname Helsdon has been common in Norfolk in the last few centuries, and very likely comes from Hellesdon near Norwich.⁵⁰ Ancient toponyms rarely survive on the Suffolk tithe maps. The name *Braggs Field* occurring near Hellesden Ley is likely to be connected to the family of a widow Bragg buried in 1626.⁵¹ This is a very typical situation – proper names for fields often denote a former owner or occupier, and this is the most likely explanation for Hellesden Ley too. I thus conclude that Hellesden Ley does not solve the problem of *Hægelisdun*. It probably derives from an unidentified surname, quite possibly Elsden or Helsdon.

Another place-name, like Hellesdon linguistically identical with *Hægelisdun*, has been missed by previous commentators. It is *Halesdunam* recorded in Dengie Hundred in Essex in the Little Domesday Book (LDB), which can be connected to records of a place-name surviving to 1368 and located at Hazeleigh (TL836037) near Maldon:⁵²

Halesdunam 1086 LDB 53v

Hailisduna after 1272

Haylesdon 1318

Halesdene 1323

Aylsdon 1368

Hazeleigh itself has these records:⁵³

Halesleia(m) 1086 LDB 73v

Halesheia(m) 1086 LDB 73r

Heylesle(y) 1212

Hailesle 1212

Heilesle 1222

Helesle temp. Hy3

Haselee 1300

Haseley 1777

Furthermore a *Haylesput* 1285 occurs, the last element meaning ‘pit’. The final *-a* in the Domesday Book *Halesduna* is merely a scribal Latinisation. It makes *Halesduna* look like a first-declension noun, which is grammatically appropriate as *dūn* is feminine in Old English (OE), and this is made into a Latin accusative by the final *-m* in *Halesdunam*. I will take *Halesdun* as a normalised form. The place-names of the Hazeleigh area were studied by Dodgson (1991), who did not note any of the connections which I make here.⁵⁴

These forms prove that an *-l-* has been lost in the modern form Hazeleigh (*Hailesley might have been expected; compare the pronunciation of Hollesley as ‘Hozoley’) and that the place-names Hazeleigh, *Halesdun* and *Haylesput* all derive from the same personal name.⁵⁵ *Halesheia* may even represent a fourth place, but is more likely a scribal error for *Halesleia*. Reaney derives these from an OE personal name **Hægel*,⁵⁶ which is unrecorded in isolation, but of which the existence is proved by other place-names such as Hayling Island in Hampshire, Healing in Lincolnshire, and Hailsham in Sussex.⁵⁷ The name **Hægel* is formally identical to the OE form of the word for ‘hail (icy rain)’, but is derived by Cameron⁵⁸ from the word *haga* ‘enclosure’. **Hægel* does not have a hard *-g-*, but rather a palatal spirant (hence

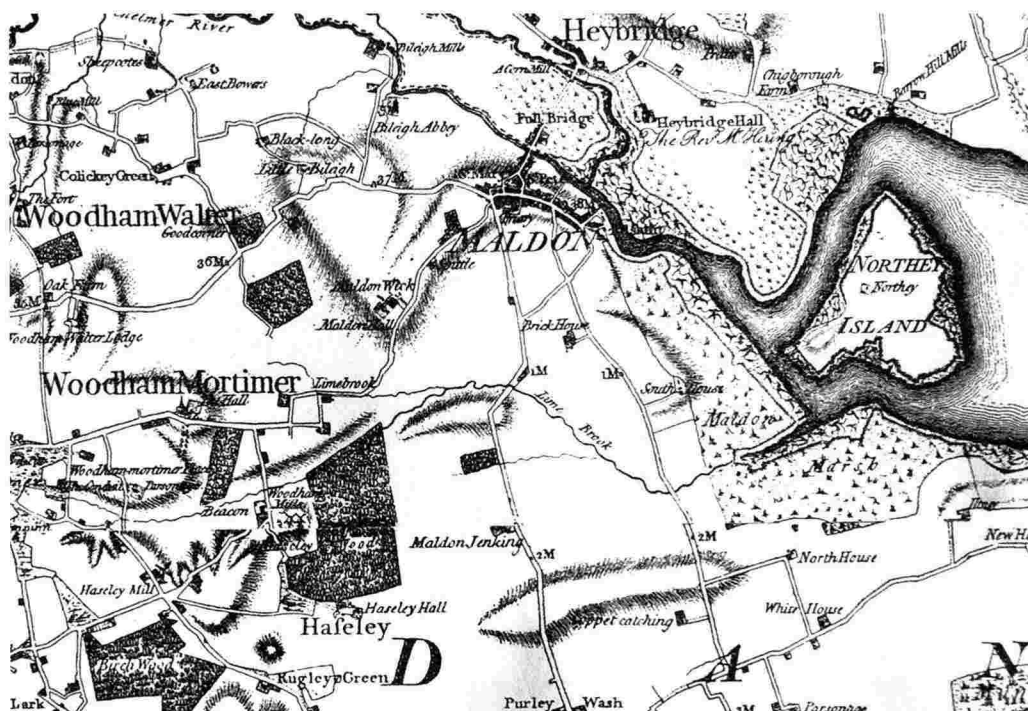


FIG. 83 – Maldon and Hazeleigh (Haseley) on the 1777 map of Essex. Rettendon is off the map to the south-west (Chapman and André 1950, by permission of Essex County Council).

the overdot),⁵⁹ and would have sounded not very different to modern ‘hail’, but with greater separation of the two components of the diphthong, and with a more open first vowel. The type may survive in the surnames of *Johanne Hayl* c. 1330, *Johanni Hayl* 1363–64, and *Hayl* x5 in the 1327 Suffolk Subsidy Roll.⁶⁰ *Halesdun* clearly has the same etymology **Hægeles dūn* ‘*Hægel’s hill’ as Hellesdon in Norfolk, which is recorded as *Hailesduna* in LDB 271, and later as *Hailesdon* 1180 and *Heilesdon* 1199.⁶¹ Hellesdon, in contrast to Hazeleigh, has suffered shortening of the vowel in its first syllable, which commonly happens in trisyllabic place-names.⁶² *Halesdun* must have denoted one of the hills near Hazeleigh (Fig. 83). There are several hills which merit the name *dūn*; the highest, at 56m, is now called Loddart’s Hill (TL826040). It forms an excellent look-out point over the Blackwater estuary. It is even possible that *Halesdun* names the same *dūn* as does Maldon itself.

A reasonable conclusion is therefore that *Hægel* was a prominent figure in the Hazeleigh area in the earlier Saxon period who owned a large estate, and three landscape features were named after him. Before considering the historical consequences of this assumption, I would like to propose that another place-name be added to this cluster deriving from the name *Hægel*, namely *Hesberi*. *Ratendune et Hesberie* occur together in the *Liber Eliensis* as lands of Byrhtnoth given to Ely.⁶³ *Liber Eliensis* is a mid-twelfth-century compilation, here reciting pre-Conquest land transactions. Byrhtnoth was the ealdorman of Essex killed in 991 at Maldon and the famous hero of the OE poem on the Battle of Maldon.⁶⁴ I suggest that

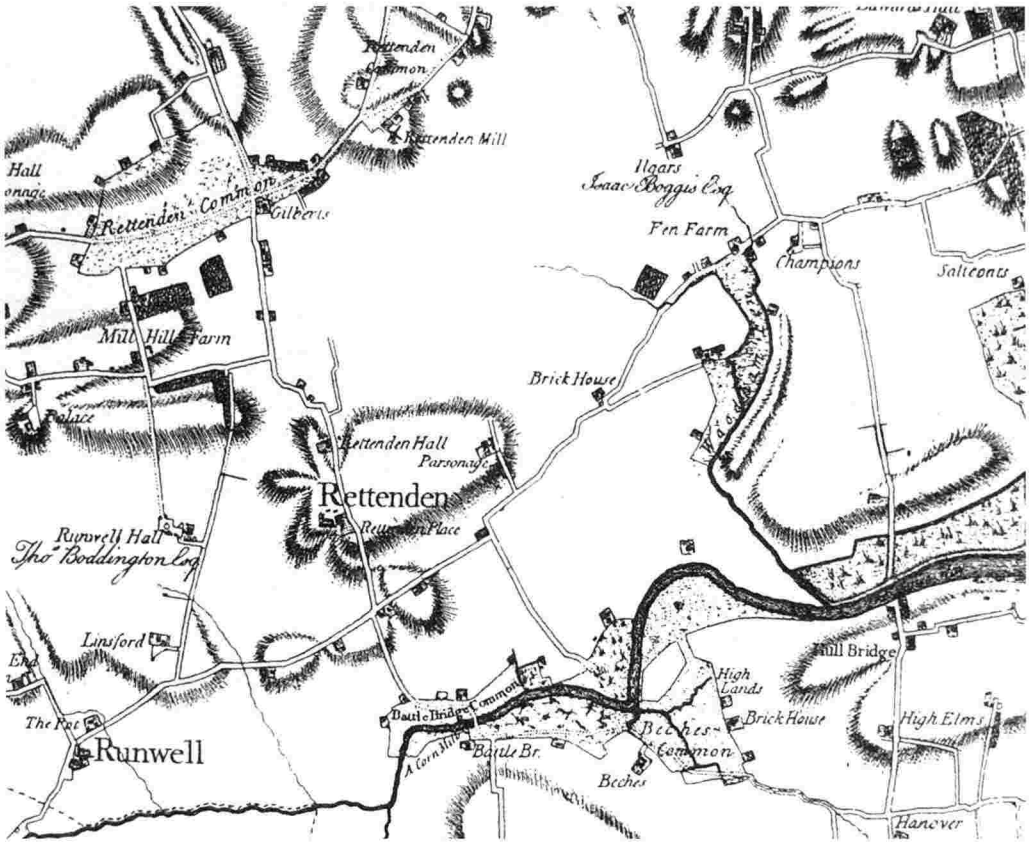


FIG. 84 – Rettendon (Rettenden) at its earlier location in 1777 overlooking the Crouch estuary (Chapman and André 1950, by permission of Essex County Council).

Byrhtnoth was a successor of Hægel in the same estate. The spellings used in *Liber Eliensis* are *Hesberi* and *Hesberie*. No author has yet located this lost place: Blake says that the place *Hesberi* is unidentified; while Locherbie-Cameron places *Hesberie* in Cambridgeshire, but gives no reasons for this placement.⁶⁵ *Ratendune* is modern Rettendon (another *dūn* name), which is 7km to the south-west of Hazeleigh, at the head of a tributary of the River Crouch (Fig. 84). Rettendon is currently marked on the map at TQ763982, which is 2km to the north of its site in 1777, when the village was centred on the church at TQ770960. This is the site of Rettendon Hall and Rettendon Place, which must be the original location of Rettendon.

Rettendon and *Halesdun/Hesberi* are therefore a natural pair; each overlooks a strategic estuary and a tenth-century ealdorman such as Byrhtnoth would have surely have been keen to control both places. In fact we know of no site for the *caput* of the Essex ealdormen, so we are free to suggest that it was precisely here. Domesday Book says that Siward of Maldon held Rettendon and Hazeleigh of Ely.⁶⁶ This is further evidence that Hazeleigh had some association with *Hesberi*. The current existence of a Bury Farm at Hazeleigh (TL849044) is intriguing, and at first sight a good candidate for the site of *Hesberi*. However, this farm appears as Jenkin's Farm on all nineteenth-century Ordnance Survey maps, and as Maldon Jenking in 1777. It would be very useful to determine the reason for the current name Bury Farm; if it could be shown to be a revival of an ancient name we would have a case for siting *Hesberi* here. Topographical and strategic considerations, however, would favour the known *burh* at Maldon as the site of *Hesberi*.

My linguistic supposition will be that the place-name *Hesberi* has the etymology *Hægelesbyri* 'Hægel's fort' (in the dative case), of which a better Latinisation would be *Helsberi*, but that an *-l-* has been lost in the simplification of the triple consonant cluster *-lsb-*.⁶⁷ *Hesberi* would thus be that fortified centre of Hægel's extended estate; he surely needed such a site. We have seen that an *-l-* is also lost in Hazeleigh, but that is not a close parallel, because there the loss is aided by dissimilation against the second *-l-*, as well as attraction to the common word 'hazel'. The name *Hesberi* also occurs in a fourteenth or fifteenth-century manuscript in the Bodleian Library,⁶⁸ which carries the rubric *Complementum tractatus Misini super tribus praedicamentis Hesberi, secundum Gayetanum de Thienis*. This, however, is a reference to William of Heytesbury, but it proves that my suggested triple consonant simplification (in this case of *-tsb-*) really can happen.⁶⁹

Groups of place-names like this, all derived from the name of a single individual, are rare, but do occur occasionally. A perfect parallel (even with the same personal name) to my suggestion that the place-names *Haegilisdun* and *Hesberi* derive from the same person Hægel is given by the case of *Haylswong* 1366–67, *Heylstow* 1422, *Hailestrowe* 1627, all in the parish of Hemsby in Norfolk.⁷⁰ The generics here are Old Norse *vangr* or OE *wang* 'garden, meadow, field', *stow* 'place', and 'tree'. Another parallel, with a different personal name but similar phonetic development to *Hesberi*, is the group *Balsdean*, *Bazehill*, *Balls furlong*, and *Balsway* in Rottingdean in Sussex. The personal name is OE *Beald* and gives rise directly to the first two names; almost certainly only one individual is involved. *Balsdean* is recorded as *Baldesdene* in 1091–98 and *Bazehill* was *Baldeshelde* in 1091–1125.⁷¹ The origin of the names *Balls furlong* and *Balsway* is less certain, but very likely these also are named from the same person. Note that *Bazehill* has lost the *-l-* of *Beald*, offering a close parallel to my explanation of *Hesberi*.

There are thus two recorded places with names certainly identical in origin to *Hægelisdun*: the surviving *Hellesdon* in Norfolk, and the non-surviving *Halesdun* in Essex. *Halesdun* thus surely deserves more examination, especially as my hypothesis regarding *Hesberi* places it in a politically significant area. It is phonetically a perfect match to *Hægelisdun*, even to the extent that *Piramus' Hailesdun* of c. 1200 agrees with *Hailisduna* 1272. It is entirely possible

that Piramus (thought to have been a Bury monk) still knew the true location of *Hægelisdun*. We have seen that Hellesdon in Norfolk has no historical claim to be *Hægelisdun*; we need to see whether *Halesdun* has any such claim.

Though it is a minor point, note first that *Halesdun* has a wood with the same name, namely Hazeleigh, which means 'Hægel's wood', with second element OE *lēah*. This accords with Abbo's description of *Hægelisdun*: '*a qua et silva vicina eodem nomine vocatur*', and if we prefer the alternative (but inferior) reading *aqua et silva*, then there is water here too, though not currently named from Hægel. But I would like to argue from the much stronger basis that the Hazeleigh area was strategically important in the period of the Viking attacks, and therefore a likely place for a battle in which Edmund was involved. We know this was true in the tenth century, with recorded attacks in 917 and the famous Battle of Maldon in 991.⁷² Is the historical record consistent with a battle here also in 869? I believe that a plausible case can be made. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle reports the events of the year 869 (but recorded under 870):

Her rad se here ofer Mierce inman Eastengle 7 wintersetl namon. æt þeodforda, 7 þy wintra Edmund cyning him wiþ feaht, 7 þa Deniscan sige namon, 7 þone cyning ofslogon ...

In this year the [Danish] army rode across Mercia into East Anglia and took winter quarters there at Thetford and in the winter Edmund fought against them and the Danes took the victory and killed the king.⁷³

This is all we know for certain; we are not even told the site of the battle in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Abbo, however, has a different account: the Danes are said to have come by sea from the north with a large fleet, and burnt a city (*urbs*) before the fatal encounter with Edmund at a *villa*. If this is correct, the city may well have been Ipswich, the important Saxon emporium known to have been sacked subsequently in 917. Or, two separate detachments of Danes may have moved south, one across land and one by sea. In any case, if we accept Abbo's version, a battle near the Essex coast is likely. The sea-borne Danes would certainly have wanted to penetrate as far as possible inland by using an estuary such as the Blackwater, and it would have been necessary to capture *Hesberi* before proceeding to Witham on the strategically critical Roman road to London. Abbo's use of the word *villa* is consistent with the idea of the fight occurring at or near a royal vill, that is, the headquarters of the *ealdorman* of Essex, who would therefore have been an unknown successor of Hægel. The fact that battles occurred at Maldon in 917 and 991 suggests that the estuary was a strategic vulnerability in the Saxon defences; indeed this was known to the defenders who therefore fortified Maldon in 916–17, perhaps while the memory of an attack in 869 was still alive. Haslam has proposed that Woodbridge was also fortified in 917 (indeed with a wooden bridge, hence the town-name), as part of a centrally organised response to the Viking attacks.⁷⁴ This response was a consequence of Edward the Elder's conquest of East Anglia and building of defences in several of the estuaries.⁷⁵

The geography of the Maldon area is crucial to the arguments here. Its position at the head of the Blackwater is comparable to that of towns on every Suffolk and Essex estuary: from the north we have Woodbridge, Ipswich, Manningtree, Colchester, Maldon, and (though small) Rettendon. Maldon is known to have been provided with a *burh* (a fortified enclosure, probably with earth ramparts and a timber palisade) by Edward the Elder in 916–17, and likely archaeological traces of this fort have been found in the London Road area of Maldon (to the west of High Street, and to the north of the hospital), centred at TL846070.⁷⁶ My hypothesis is thus that the Maldon *burh* is identical with *Hesberi*.

It seems therefore that the Hazeleigh/*Halesdun*/*Hesberi* estate was long-lasting, and might rightly be called a royal vill, the caput of a succession of Essex ealdormen. According to my

hypothesis, it was created and unified under Hægel and contained a *burh*; it was attacked by Danes in 869; the fortress was moved to Maldon in 916–17; it later was held by Byrhtnoth who gave it to Ely before 991, and was tenanted by Siward in 1066. This single hypothesis would thus solve the several mysteries of the location *Hesberi*, the time and mode of its acquisition by Ely, and its subsequent fate after the record in *Liber Eliensis*.

After the battle of 869, the Danes proceeded to occupy London in 871–72, where they met colleagues who had been at Reading. If the battle of 869 were at *Halesdun/Hesberi*, a natural interpretation of the entire campaign of these years is that it was an organised pincer movement, with the ultimate aim of capturing London by simultaneous attacks from both directions along the Thames. Edmund's role might then have been to repel the Danes from *Hægelisdun* as they travelled along the coast, or else he might have been chasing them from the interior of Essex or Suffolk as they retreated to their ships in the Blackwater estuary. In this picture, he was well away from his home territory, and probably just aiding an Essex ally, the unknown current *ealdorman*. Hart identifies possible Essex ealdormen from charters of this period as *dux* Ealdred 860–67 or later, and Beorhtwulf 903–9.⁷⁷ The name of the latter (with its identical prototheme) suggests that he might have been of the same family as Byrhtnoth.

To conclude, I have used two pieces of factual place-name data: the existence of *Halesdun* in Essex which I identify with Abbo's *Hægelisdun*, and the existence of *Hesberi* in the *Liber Eliensis* which I place nearby, together with some historical speculation, to argue that Edmund was killed at *Halesdun* near *Hesberi*, and that this was part of a coordinated plan for a Viking attack intended to gain control of both Essex and London. The names of Hellesdon in Norfolk and *Halesdun* in Essex have identical origins, and either neither is *Hægelisdun*, or just one of them is. If the latter is the case, then the distinction can only be made on historical grounds, and on this basis *Halesdun* is the much more likely candidate. My suggestion concerning *Hesberi* is not essential to the argument, but does provide extra indirect support. I suggest that this picture provides a unified explanation of all the place-name evidence and historical facts with minimal assumptions. We might ask why this site, subsequently made into a place of martyrdom by Abbo, was forgotten. A possible answer is that the place-name Maldon is etymologically *mæl-dūn* 'hill with a monument' and is first recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle under the year 913. The monument was likely to have been a Christian cross, though such an object had the more precise Old English name of *Crīstesmæl* or *cyrstelmeæl*.⁷⁸ If *Hægelisdun* referred to the same hill as Maldon, then the monument may have been a marker of the site of Edmund's death. If this is right, then the place-names Maldon and *Hægelisdun* must have co-existed for a period. The dating is compatible, and this would provide a good explanation of the disappearance of the name *Hægelisdun* as well as giving a reason for the monument at Maldon. The churchmen of Bury St Edmunds would have been happy to allow (or even encourage) this change of name, so that pilgrims would come to their abbey church rather than Maldon.⁷⁹

Regardless of whether any of my arguments be accepted, the tenth-century forms *Hægelisdun* etc. from Abbo need to be removed from the next editions of the place-name dictionaries under Hellesdon.⁸⁰ They have no right to be there unless someone can prove that Hellesdon is *Hægelisdun*.

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NOTES

- 1 Hoxne: Arnold (MemStEd); Vaughan 1958. Hollesley: Hervey (CSE). Hellesdon: Ekwall (DEPN); Whitelock 1969; Winterbottom 1972; Watts (CDEPN); Mills (ODBPN). Hellesden Ley: West 1983; Dymond and Northeast 1995, 32; Plunkett 2005, 211; Warner 1996, 139–43; Hart 1992, 41. In a reprint of her 1969 article (Whitelock 1980, 220), Whitelock changed her view after hearing of the discovery reported in West 1983: ‘Mr. Stanley West has come across a field-name Hellesdon [*sic*] in Bradfield St Clare, about five miles from Bury St Edmunds which is a more likely site than the Norfolk Hellesdon’. Plunkett 2005, 211 mis-cites Hellesden Ley as ‘Hellesdon Wood’.
- 2 Bale 2009, 3.
- 3 Hervey (CSE, i.22); see Pfaff 2004 for a biography of Abbo.
- 4 More general points on the nature of kingship and martyrdom and medieval myth-making are made by Ingham 1973. Rollason 1982 has an overview of murdered royal saints.
- 5 MPL, v.139, 510, 515.
- 6 CSE, i.22, 36.
- 7 MemStEd, i.10, 16.
- 8 Winterbottom 1972, 73, 79.
- 9 CSE, i.180.
- 10 Ravenel 1906.
- 11 The edition of Kjellman 1974 has here *Le ham, le bois, l’euwe delé/Tut est Hailesdun apellé* (line 2199).
- 12 Grant 1978; Grant 1979.
- 13 Grant 1979, 129.
- 14 Vaughan 1958, 24.
- 15 CSE, i.362.
- 16 CSE, i.372.
- 17 CSE, i.398.
- 18 Liebermann 1879, 158.
- 19 CSE, i.562.
- 20 CSE, i.645, 647.
- 21 Horstman 1901, v.1, 326.
- 22 Gransden 1985 points out earlier models and parallels for Abbo’s *Passio*, but makes no comment on the location of *Haeglesdun* or *Haegilisdun* (p. 4). Further background on the later lives of Edmund is provided by Thomson 1977, Phelpsstead 2009, and Hayward 2009. Another view is that of Cavill 2003.
- 23 MemStEd.
- 24 CSE, liii–liv.
- 25 DEPN.
- 26 ODBPN; CDEPN.
- 27 Brooks n.d. [c. 1990], 8.
- 28 Whitelock 1969.
- 29 Manuscript notes on Bury St Edmunds, c. 1993, pers. comm.
- 30 Evans 1987.
- 31 Evans (1987, 182) mis-cites Whitelock 1969, 220 as “‘Haegilisdun” [*sic*] is the correct form for Hellesden [*sic*], Norfolk, and for no other surviving name’.
- 32 Edgington 2006, 274.
- 33 West 1983.
- 34 A royal vill of *Suttun* occurs too in the legend of Ethelbert, who was also associated with Bury St Edmunds, and whose lives have some similarities to those of Edmund (Brooks n.d. [c. 1990], 31).
- 35 Gransden 2004.
- 36 Abbo’s *Passio* was first published as long ago as 1575 (Surius 1575), so a conspiracy whereby an educated Bury man named a field Hellesden to try to claim a link with Edmund cannot be ruled out.
- 37 PNL, 140; LPN, 164–73.
- 38 Bury Arch, 134.
- 39 Documents examined at SROI were HA61/436/691, HA61/436/709, HA61/436/778, HA93/4/179, HA119/2/2/2/1/1 (Messuage next to Pitchers Green), HA119/3/1/2/2, HA119/3/1/2/3, HA119/50/3/228, and HA119/562/341. Some of these catalogue numbers denote bundles of large numbers of deeds.
- 40 Copinger 1910, 259–60.
- 41 SROI, HA119/50/3/226 = HA119/3/1/2/342 Hod.
- 42 Hod.

- 43 Tymms 1850, 168–70.
- 44 SROB, HD1750/120.
- 45 The English Place-name Society is based at the Institute for Name-Studies, University of Nottingham.
- 46 PR, ii.97.
- 47 Edward Martin (pers. comm.) suggests that *Stok' Ken'* is a misreading of *Hoketon*, and refers to Bradfield Combust. This is based on the fact that there is a Feet of Fines suit of 1214 between *Gerebert de Sancto Claro*, plaintiff, and *Henry de Cokefeld*, defendant, over the advowson of the church of '*Hoketon' Bradefeld*' (Dodwell 1956, 270).
- 48 PR, ii.100.
- 49 FF Sf. 19.
- 50 <http://www.doun.org/transcriptions/surnames.php?surname=helsdon>.
- 51 SROB, FL532/4/2.
- 52 PN Ess, 215.
- 53 A *Haylesle* 1235 is mentioned as belonging here in (PN Sx 2, 435).
- 54 The *Robertus Haseleya* (canon of Hereford) mentioned in Hervey (CSE, i.207) more likely came from Haseley in Warwickshire, which is a name from OE *hæsel* 'hazel'.
- 55 A slightly different interpretation of these groups of names with identical first element is possible, which does not affect my conclusions. An initial place-name (such as *Halesdun*) may have been created, and then the first element abstracted after its origin in a personal name had been forgotten, and used to form new place-names like *Halesleia*. We may still correctly say that the same personal name occurs in both names.
- 56 Reaney (PN Ess, 215). A * prefixing a word indicates a hypothetical or reconstructed form, not directly attested.
- 57 Coates 1991, 24–26; PN L 5, 103; PN Sx 2, 435.
- 58 PN L 5, 104.
- 59 Campbell 1959, par. 429.
- 60 PR, i.225; SibEst, 113; Sf 1327.
- 61 CDEPN.
- 62 There is further discussion of these and the related place-names Hailsham in Sussex and Healing in Lincolnshire in PN Sx 2, 435, and Ekwall 1962, 43, 66.
- 63 Blake (LibEl, 133, 135, 422). The full list (LibEl, 133) is *Spaldewich, Trumpintune, Ratendune, Hesberi, Seham, Fuulburne, Theversham, Impentune, Pampewurde, Crochestune, Fineberge, Tripelaue, Herdewich, Sumeresham*.
- 64 Scragg 1991a. For the life of Byrhtnoth, see Hart 1992, 131–35 and Abels 2004; an important primary source is the Ramsey Chronicle (Macray 1886).
- 65 LibEl, 422; Locherbie-Cameron 1991, 258.
- 66 LDB 19r, 73r, 73v, 75r.
- 67 Or even a quadruple consonant cluster *-ylsb-*, if we count the *-y-* which develops from *-g-*.
- 68 GOXFBCC278/00.
- 69 If my etymology is not correct, it is hard to think of another; it could be that *Hesberi* contains the hypothetical OE **hæs* 'brushwood' suggested by Smith (1956, 218) to explain Hayes in Kent and Middlesex and several other place-names.
- 70 PN Nf 2, 55.
- 71 Coates 2010, s.n. Balsdean.
- 72 The 917 attack is recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (ASC); for the Battle of Maldon see Scragg 1991b; Cooper 1993.
- 73 ASC.
- 74 Haslam forthcoming.
- 75 Haslam 1997 has further discussion of the general defensive strategies of this period.
- 76 Thornton *et al.* 1999, 19.
- 77 Hart 1992, 116–17.
- 78 For Maldon see Reaney (PN Ess, 218). Other place-names of identical origin are Malden in Surrey (PN Sr, 64) and Maulden in Bedfordshire (PN BdHu, 80), neither recorded before Domesday Book.
- 79 Slight additional support for my hypotheses comes from the fact that two churches dedicated to Edmund in Essex are not far from Hazeleigh: East Mersea (TM050141), and Tendring (TM143241). The only other (which is not close) is Abbess Roding (TL571114).
- 80 CDEPN; ODBPN.

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