

Windsor, *windofer* and Iverley: illustrating the place-name element *ofer in the Anglo-Saxon road network

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The place-name element *ofer* is related to hills, ridges or slopes. It has been conjectured to mean an eminence with a flat, or gently-sloping, top and rounded shoulders; and a subsequent analysis has suggested that it was also used as a travellers' landmark. It is argued here, however, that the defining characteristic of an *ofer* was not its profile *per se*, nor that it acted as a landmark, but that it provided a convenient and well-used route to high ground. The suggestion that *ofers* were, or became, parts of the Anglo-Saxon road network is supported by a cartographical analysis of eighty-seven *ofer* locations in England as well as a more detailed examination of the geography of two medieval *ofer* place-names: the tenth-century *windofer/windofre* near Iverley in Staffordshire, and the fourteenth-century *Wyndesouere* at Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire.

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1. Introduction

The Old English (OE) place-name element *ofer* (variant spelling *ufer*) is unattested in literary sources but is considered to appear in at least 98 English place-names.¹ Geographical studies show that this element is associated with elevated ground, and it has been interpreted to mean a hill or slope (DEPN 348). Extensive investigations by Margaret Gelling and Ann Cole have suggested that *ofer* is frequently related to hills or hill-spurs having a specific profile: i.e. a flat or gently sloping top and rounded shoulder (LPN 199–200; Cole 2013: 71). The same authors have also observed an association, in some regions, between place-names in *ofer* and

¹ Apart from at least six occurrences in Anglo-Saxon charters, England has 92 recorded place-names in *ofer* (Cole 2013: fig. 8.7; PN Le 6 317, 7 77; PN Sa 7 128, 328–30, 432–35, 467). A further 21 place-names—the so-called ‘directional *ofers*’ (Cole 2013: 72)—might also contain this term, but the alternative, *ofer*, has not been conclusively ruled out in these cases. In addition, there are another 21 possible occurrences in place-names such as Orton and Overton, but it is not possible, on the basis of later forms, to differentiate between *ofer-tūn* ‘settlement associated with an *ofer*’ and *uferra-* (or *ufera-*) *tūn* ‘higher settlement’ (LPN 200–202).

ancient, long-distance routeways (LPN 200, 204). Cole (2013: 68, 71–75) inferred that this is because hills of the proposed *ofer* shape were used as travellers' landmarks, and noted that *ofers* occur near the Droitwich salt-ways and certain other important locations such as royal palaces and sites of mineral extraction. Whilst Gelling's and Cole's field observations represent a significant and valuable body of work, their interpretation is not entirely beyond question; and this article attempts to address some of the difficulties inherent in the 'profile' and 'landmark' hypotheses.

Ofer may be related to the OE word *ōfer* 'border, margin, edge', which is used in literary sources to mean a bank, a river-bank or the sea-shore (EPNE 2 53–54). While *ōfer* might appear in some riverside place-names, the geographical context of most *ofer*-type names renders this word inappropriate; and, of course, *ōfer* cannot appear in names which early spellings indicate had a short initial vowel. These considerations led Eilert Ekwall, in 1936, to suggest the existence of *ofer* as a separate unattested place-name element (DEPN 348). The OE preposition *ofer* 'over, above, across' is known from literary sources; and, while the conjectural place-name element is probably related to this word (Gelling 1984: 174), the preposition itself is clearly unsuitable as a place-name generic.

The place-name element *ofer* seems to have been used in much the same way as another element, *ōra*, although their geographical distributions are, to a large extent, complementary: *ōra* occurs in the south of England (mainly in former Saxon territory); *ofer* was used (with a small number of exceptions) in the midlands and in some parts of the north, although a variant of *ofer*, i.e. *yfre*, appears in a few southern counties (LPN 202–203).

Many of England's *ofer* place-names survive today as settlement names, but some are no longer in use. Amongst the latter are names recorded only in the Anglo-Saxon charters; and two of these—*windofer* and *windofre*—occur near the southern boundary of Staffordshire (see Figure 1). In addition to their obvious similarity they are linked by two distinct geographical features and thus provide an unusual insight into the usage of *ofer* in OE place-names. The pairing, which will be discussed in sections 2 and 3, might help to resolve the aforementioned difficulties associated with Gelling's and Cole's hypotheses.

These authors have linked specific hill-shapes to various OE place-name elements, including *ofer*; but Nurminen (2011: 82), writing in relation to the north-east of England, notes that 'identifying the features the hill-terms refer to is often problematic and sometimes impossible', and she cites, as a case in point, the supposed *ofer*-shaped hill at Wooler in Northumberland which Gelling and Cole (LPN 199) reference as 'a good

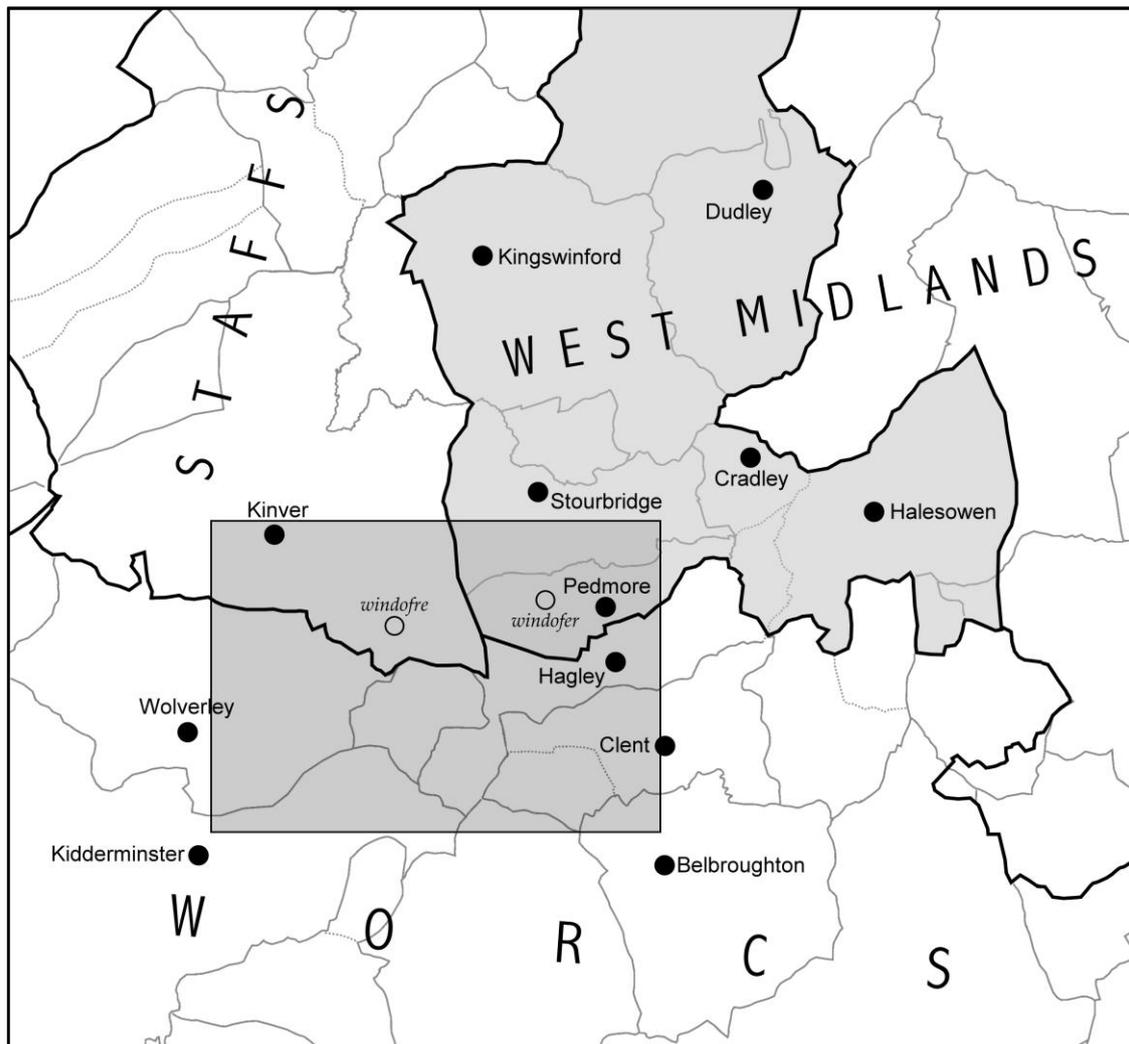


Figure 1: The Iverley study area (shaded rectangle) shown against modern county boundaries (black lines); the irregular shaded region represents Dudley Metropolitan Borough. The pattern of ancient parish and township boundaries is also depicted (grey lines).

instance of' an *ofer*'s profile. This is not the only example of such difficulties. In many instances, the profile seen is highly dependent upon the viewing angle. This is certainly true in the case of the hill-spurs associated with the *windofer* and *windofre* place-names considered here. Indeed, the first of these, the *windofer* now in Pedmore parish, also illustrates another incongruity: it is not particularly conspicuous, even from a favourable angle, and the nearby eminence of Wychbury hill makes for a much more noticeable landmark from every angle of approach. Similar circumstances occur at a number of other *ofer* locations throughout England: e.g. Yarner in Devon (SX 777781), better landmarked by Black

Hill; Birchover in Derbyshire (SK 239621), by Bradley Rocks; Wychnor in Staffordshire (SK 176160), by the intersection of Ryknild Street and the river Trent; Scottsquar Hill in Gloucestershire (SO 842087), by a dyke, tumuli and multiple gullies; Burcher in Herefordshire (SO 334605), by Wapley Hill, and Hunsingore in Yorkshire (SE 428535), by the points at which the Great North Road and the Roman road through Cattal cross the river Nidd.

That many of the landforms associated with *ofer* are unobtrusive or unremarkable derives, in part, from the fact that their characteristic shape, as identified by Gelling and Cole (LPN 199), is extremely common. Of the many hills in England which possess this shape only a very small fraction are related to *ofer* place-names. The vast majority are not. Cole (2013: 68, 71–75) addresses this issue, and the observed distribution of *ofer* around some ancient routeways, by proposing that, in order to qualify as an *ofer*, a hill of the required shape had also to have been used as a traveller's landmark. Yet the two meanings seem rather too divergent for the combination to have been coined as a place-name element and employed consistently over several centuries. A variety of other geographical features (differently shaped hills, roads, brooks, bridges etc.) would surely have acted as landmarks, but there seems to be no evidence that they were given special place-name generics to denote such usage.

An additional problem is that *ofer* has been associated with hills of a very great range of heights. It is difficult to believe that elevations of less than about 10m, such as at Over in Cambridgeshire (TL 373706) and Overmarsh at Kings Marsh, Cheshire (SJ 421548), would be described by the same term as the eminences at Yarner, Devon (SX 775781); Birchover, Derbyshire (SK 239621), and at numerous locations in Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire and Gloucestershire, which rise 200–300m above their surroundings. Moreover, it is questionable whether the *profile* of very low hills would be discernible (let alone be recognisable as landmarks) amongst trees, scrub, hedges and other features of the landscape.

Gelling's and Cole's findings raise a number of questions, including:

1. Why would Anglo-Saxon travellers choose, as the basis for a widely used system of landmarks, a feature that possesses such a commonplace shape? That is, why did they not choose a class of hill or hill-spur possessing a more distinctive and recognisable profile (such as those associated with some place-names in *hōh* 'heel') as landmarks instead of, or in addition to, those having the supposedly characteristic *ofer* profile?
2. How is *ofer*'s root meaning related to the hill's shape or its supposed use as a landmark?

3. Where a place-name containing *ofer* is that of a settlement (as the majority are), how can we be certain that the *ofer* element referred to, or was transferred from, a nearby hill rather than from something else that was also associated with the hill?

A study of the geography of the aforementioned *windofer* and *windofre* locations suggests an alternative hypothesis which addresses these difficulties, helps to explain the significance of *ofer* in relation to the Anglo-Saxon road network, and is also supported by a wider review of other *ofer* locations in England.

2. The *windofer/windofre* pair and related places

Several related place-names occur in the vicinity of an irregularly shaped tract of high ground that spans the boundary between the parishes of Kinver, Staffordshire, and Pedmore, which was in Worcestershire until 1974 but is now part of the West Midlands. An apparently ancient track runs, for about 3.5 km (2.2 miles), along the crest of this high ground through an area known as Iverley (SO 881814); see Figure 2. The track is not named in its entirety but, for the purposes of identification, I will refer to it as the Iverley track. It begins at a hill-spur in Pedmore parish and ends at another in the parish of Kinver, although it also possesses a number of side branches and extensions, one of which descends to lower ground via a third hill-spur known today as High Down (in Wolverley parish, Worcestershire).

2.1 The Iverley track and its terminal hill-spurs

The tenth-century names associated with the first two hill-spurs were recorded, within about a decade of each other, in Anglo-Saxon charters representing proximate, though not contiguous, landholdings. A charter for Swinford (S 579 (951×59); Hooke 1990: 162–67) references the place-name *windofer*, which has been identified as lying upon the Iverley track's eastern hill-spur at SO 902823 in the parish of Pedmore (James 2014: 128, 133; James 2017: 25, fig. 7). Its counterpart, *windofre*, is recorded in another tenth-century document, a charter for *Culnanclif* 'Cookley' (S 726 (964); Hooke 1990: 169–74), and lies on a separate hill-spur (SO 871817) at the Iverley track's western end, now in Kinver parish (James 2018: 23–25).

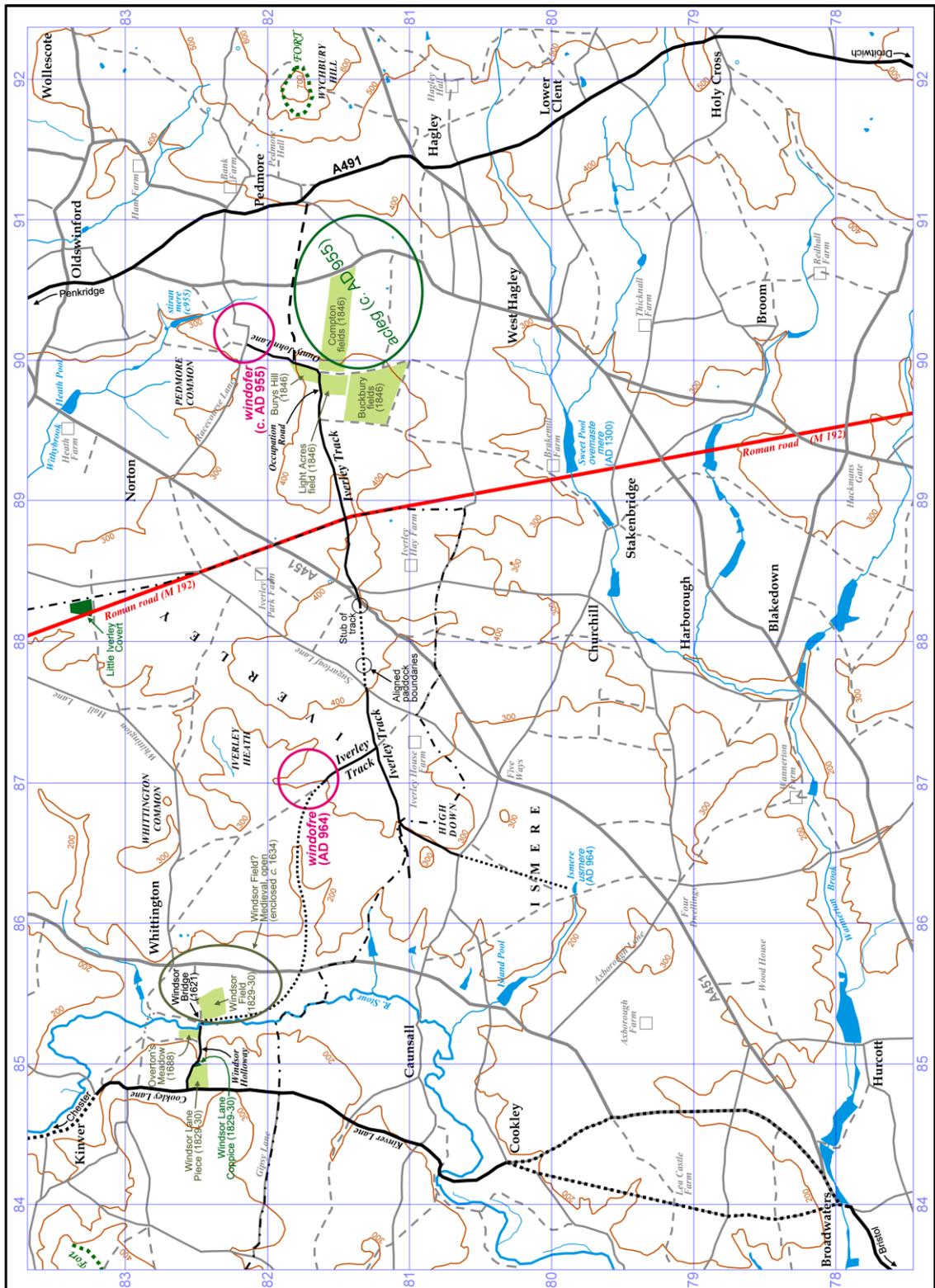


Figure 2 (opposite): The Iverley study area, showing places and features discussed in the text. The local road network is outlined in grey: dashed lines represent minor roads, tracks and paths. Roads and other features known to be modern have been omitted. The Iverley track, the Chester road and the Droitwich road are depicted in black; dotted lines represent inferred and approximate routes. The pre-1974 county boundary is delineated with alternate black dots and dashes. Contours are shown at vertical intervals of 100 feet. A high-resolution version of the map is available to download via the Contents section of the *Journal* website <<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/groups/epns/journal.aspx>>.

The two charter forms, *windofer* and *windofre*, clearly represent the same name, the latter appearing to contain the dative form of *ofer*. Apart from its duplication here, the name is unique amongst the Anglo-Saxon charters, and is not known to survive in any modern form except, perhaps, in one or two instances of Windsor, i.e. Windsor Holloway (Kinver) and Windsor Street (Stratford-upon-Avon). These are discussed below and in section 3, respectively. The pairing of an otherwise rare (if not unique) place-name, as well as its association with an apparently ancient routeway (the Iverley track) is noteworthy; and it is informative to consider the name's geographical and toponymical contexts.

There is some evidence for the Iverley track's antiquity. The field-names Burys Hill and Great, Barn, Lower and Long Buckbury depicted on the 1846 Pedmore Tithe Plan (WRO r760/508 BA 1572), together with two historical place-names, *sicanbyrig* (951×59) and *Feckebury* (1300), suggest medieval occupation in one or more strongholds nearby (James 2017: 9, 27–28, 52); and it is possible that the Iverley track was used to access these settlement sites.

Additionally, a cluster of fields named Upper, Middle, and Lower Compton were recorded on the Pedmore Tithe Plan near the Iverley track's eastern end (SO 902815). They abut a field named Light Acres (SO 898815) in which crop marks of a D-shaped enclosure and another sub-circular enclosure have been discovered.² The name Compton might derive from the OE elements *cumb* 'armchair-shaped valley' and *tūn* 'settlement, farmstead', the former element accurately reflecting the topography immediately to the north. This name may have referenced an earlier settlement in the vicinity, perhaps the very settlement which resulted in the adjacent crop-marks. Cole (2013: 66, 254) has noted that a

² The Dudley Historic Environment Record (no. 10602) provides an incorrect National Grid reference for these crop-marks. According to Mather (2014), they actually lie within the field that was labelled Light Acres on the Pedmore Tithe Plan.

statistically significant proportion of Comptons are found near to ancient long-distance routes. The presence of one such place-name here may be evidence for a nearby access track and through route dating back to at least the Anglo-Saxon period.

A section of the Iverley track immediately adjacent to Light Acres field (i.e. near SO 897816) was labelled Occupation Road on the Pedmore Tithe Plan. This might indicate post-enclosure occupation of adjacent former open-field strips (PN Le 6 119; Room 1992: 64). There could be other explanations for this name, but ditch-lines potentially related to early, unmapped field systems have been observed in crop-marks to the west, and there are also signs of medieval ridge-and-furrow agriculture nearby (Dudley Historic Environment Record: nos. 7657, 10597–99).

Those remnants of the Iverley track which are visible today give the impression that it linked Wychbury hill (SO 920818), the location of an Iron Age hill fort, and Ismere (SO 863798), the likely central place, or moot site, of the ancient province of *Husmeræ*. Indeed, that may have been one of its earliest functions: both of these putative endpoints were important sites in antiquity, although contemporaneous usage remains unproven (James 2018: 10–12).

2.2 Local through routes and Windsor Holloway

Of more relevance to the present study is the fact that the Iverley track also seems to have linked two ancient long-distance roads. To the east, the Droitwich to Penkridge road, now the A491, runs in a roughly north–south direction past Wychbury hill and Pedmore (Hemingway 2005). About 7 km (4.4 miles) to the west, the old Bristol to Chester route (also known as the Great Irish Road) runs north from Kidderminster through Broadwaters, Cookley and Kinver.³ In view of their termini, both of these roads may have served as salt-trading routes. Hemingway (2005) suggests that was true of the former road, at least, although it is not listed in, for example, the overview of salt-ways given in PN Wo 4–9. Cole (2013: 73) notes an association between place-names containing *ofer* and the salt-roads serving Droitwich. If this is a genuine correlation, rather than an

³ As pointed out by Scott (1832: 170), this road links up with Chester Road South and Chester Road North in Kidderminster (SO 842771) and with Chester Road on Enville Common (SO 836865). The latter was referenced as *Chestreway* in the 1300 perambulation of Kinver Forest (King 2006: 88–90). This section of the road also delineates part of the Kinver and Enville parish boundary and thus is likely to antedate the boundary line.

artefact of underlying geology or of name survival, it might imply that the Iverley track was used as a link road in the salt-way network.⁴

Indeed, a minor road beginning just south of Kinver (SO 848825) seems to have connected the Bristol to Chester road to the Iverley track's western *windofre*. That road is, today, known as Windsor Holloway and lies in a deeply worn recess above the west bank of the river Stour at Whittington (SO 857826), a sub-manor of Kinver from c.1200. The depth of erosion here suggests that Windsor Holloway is of some considerable age.

Windsor's *-or* ending is typical of the modern forms of place-names that had originally ended in *-ofer*. The fact that it occurs in such a propitious location just 1.6 km (1 mile) from the western *windofre* and, indeed, leads in the general direction of the latter, may indicate a connection between the two names. Additionally, an *Overton's Meadow*, abutting the eastern end of Windsor Holloway near the river Stour, was mapped by William Deeley in 1688 (SRO 1392). The apostrophe in this field-name suggests that Overton was, at this date, regarded as a personal name, but its origin and significance is unclear. If the genitival <s> is original, it may indicate an association with a (now lost) *ofer-tūn* somewhere in the vicinity; or, if Overton was originally a personal name, that itself may have derived from such a local place-name. Unfortunately, there is no evidence to substantiate either possibility and, while the juxtaposition of *Overton's Meadow* with Windsor Holloway could be purely coincidental, two place-names potentially related to *ofer* and lying in such close proximity is worthy of note.

The place-name Windsor itself is certainly of some antiquity. A *Windsor Lane Piece*, *Windsor Lane Coppice* and *Windsor Field*, all of which lay adjacent to Windsor Holloway, were recorded in a survey of Kinver parish dated 1830 (SRO D891/3, D891/4: 69, 72, 75); and the 1774 Kinver Enclosure Award (SRO D891/1, D891/2: 6) notes that the fields here were, in the eighteenth century, considered to be old.

⁴ While Droitwich salt seems to have been traded primarily to the south-west of the west midlands during the Iron Age, it undoubtedly also penetrated northwards in the Anglo-Saxon period (Cunliffe 2005: 513–14). During the Iron Age, the Cornovii salt-producing centres (later in Cheshire and named Middlewich, Nantwich and Northwich) are known to have supplied salt as far south as north Gloucestershire (then Dobunnic territory). Much of this trade may have been conveyed along the Chester road; and, indeed, some of it certainly came to north Worcestershire (now Dudley Metropolitan Borough): the Dudley Historic Environment Record (no. 12247) details the discovery, near Hodge Hill in Pedmore, of an Iron Age briquetage associated with Cheshire salt.

In the medieval period, land in the vicinity had been occupied by one of Whittington's three open fields (also called *Windsor Field*), the first surviving mention of which occurs in 1634; much of it had been enclosed by 1657 and the area was fully enclosed by agreement in 1680 (Greenslade 1984: 138). The open field's date of origin is unknown; it may have been 'the field of Whittington' referenced in 1303–4, but this is by no means certain.

However, the name Windsor undoubtedly existed in the vicinity by 1621 when a Windsor Bridge was mentioned (Greenslade 1984: 125). An Indenture of 1707 (EHEA B/1/3/12 Box 2) indicates that the bridge was located at Windsor Holloway's intersection with the river Stour. Though not mapped in 1688 (SRO 1392), the eastern portion of Windsor Holloway, running between the Stour and the Kidderminster to Wolverhampton road (the A449), seems to have existed by 1707, and certainly by 1774, although one or more routes leading generally eastwards probably radiated from this crossing point even before the construction of Windsor Bridge. The local topography suggests that the river channel here would have been relatively wide and shallow, and thus a good site for fording the Stour.

Mill ponds and leats were mapped immediately to the north and south of Windsor Holloway during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵ Whittington had at least three mills on the Stour by 1581. One of these, which was mentioned as early as c.1200, was converted into a forge in 1619, and its remnants survive as Old Forge Cottage in Windsor Holloway (Greenslade 1984: 125, 144).

The foregoing indicates that Windsor Holloway was in use before c.1200 and that the name itself dates back at least as far as 1621. It may well be older. This does not, of course, rule out the possibility that Windsor is a transferred name, but it is improbable that a place-name of such pedigree would have been reassigned merely to a road or an open field rather than to a settlement of some significance, and no such settlement is known to have existed anywhere in the vicinity.

It has not been possible to demonstrate, from earlier forms of the place-name Windsor, a toponymic link with *windofre*. And, of course, Windsor's <s> requires explanation (see section 3.1). Yet it would seem premature to discount the possibility of a connection between these two place-names: such evidence as exists is consistent with the suggestion that Windsor

⁵ Kinver parish survey of 1830 (SRO D891/3); Ordnance Survey 25-Inch County Series, *Worcs. Sheet VIII.4* (Southampton 1902), and Ordnance Survey 25-Inch County Series, *Staffs. Sheet LXX.16* (Southampton 1903), the OS maps being accessed via the National Library of Scotland online map database.

Holloway was so named because it led from the main Bristol to Chester road (at SO 848826) towards the Kinver *windofre*.

2.3 Iverley

The name Iverley is almost certainly related to the *windofer/windofre* pair. The earliest known forms of this name are spelled *Everlegh* in 1292 (TNA SC 2/202/64: line 4) and *Iverley* in 1603–4 (SRO S.H.C. 1940 65: line 19). These examples suggest a derivation from *yfre* and *lēah* ‘wood or open space in a wood’.⁶ As already mentioned, *yfre* is a variant of *ofer*. An interchange between the two has been noted in Middle English forms of another place-name deriving from *yfre*, Bignor (SU 982146) in Sussex (LPN 202). A similar interchange would appear to have occurred in Iverley, as its woodland was referred as *Ouerley Wood* in 1577, and *Oueley Wood* in 1610 and 1665.⁷ Both forms seem to recall the root element *ofer*.

An *acleg* ‘oak wood’, recorded in 951×59 immediately to the south-east of the Pedmore *windofer*, may have been a cultivated fragment of an earlier, more extensive, woodland around Iverley (James 2014: 128–29, 133–34). The granting of sixty oaks from Iverley Hay to the Bishop of Worcester in 1232 (Greenslade 1984: 142) probably represents one stage in the woodland’s fragmentation.

Iverley was contained entirely within Kinver forest in 1300; and Iverley wood’s oak content may be the reason that it, or part of it, was recorded as *ovemaste* (in the place-name *ovemaste mere*) in the forest’s perambulation that year. The *-maste* component (OE *mæst* ‘swine-pasture’) referred to acorns, or perhaps beech nuts, on which pigs would be allowed to forage; and the *ove-* prefix probably comes from OE *ofer*. The *mere* ‘pool’ in this

⁶ Horovitz (2003: 389–90) comes to the same conclusion but for the wrong reason. For Iverley’s earlier spelling he cites the ‘Iverley’ referenced in the Victoria County History (VCH) of Staffordshire (Greenslade 1984: 126), yet this volume appears to modernise place-name forms in its pages. The source referenced in the VCH, P.R.O. SC 6/202/64, is now housed at The National Archives in Kew under a slightly different number: SC 2/202/64. This document is dated ‘the feast of the apostles Peter and Paul’ (i.e. Monday 30 June) 1292 and provides the spelling *Everlegh* rather than Iverley.

⁷ Spellings of Iverley on early maps include: *Ouerley (Wood)* 1577 (Christopher Saxton, Worcestershire map in e.g. Ravenhill 1992: 58–59); *Oueley (Wood)* 1610 (John Speed, Worcestershire map in e.g. Nicholson and Hawkyard, 1988: 190–91); *Oueley (Wood)* 1665 (Joan Blaeu, Worcestershire map in e.g. Blaeu and Krogt, 2006: 202–3); *Ivelley* 1682 (Joseph Browne, Staffordshire map in e.g. Richardson 2000: 8); *Ivelley* 1749 (Emanuel Bowen Staffordshire map in e.g. Richardson 2000: 14); *Iverley* 1775 (William Yates, Staffordshire map in e.g. Richardson 2000: 19); *Iverley* 1831 (OS sheet 54 N.W.); *Iverley* 1836 (J & C Walker, Staffordshire map in e.g. Richardson 2000: 29); *Iverley* 1840 (A Fullarton map of Staffordshire in e.g. Richardson 2000: 32); *Iverley* c.1847 (S Hall, Staffordshire map in e.g. Richardson 2000: 31).

place-name has been identified as Brake Mill Farm's Sweet Pool, which is located over the county boundary in Hagley parish, Worcestershire, at SO 892798 (James 2017: 51–52, fig. B1). This pool is 1.8 km (1.1 miles) south of the Iverley track, yet the perambulation indicates that it was within Iverley's woodland, or lay upon its edge. Today, the area known as Iverley extends to Little Iverley Covert some 3.8 km (2.4 miles) north of Sweet Pool.

All of this helps to build a picture of Iverley's woodland being quite extensive at an early date, as it undoubtedly still was in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (according to contemporary maps) despite the large-scale felling that had taken place in the preceding decades (Greenslade 1984: 142). Thus, it is quite conceivable that, at the time of its naming, the woodland of *yfre-lēah* (Iverley) was large enough to encompass the locations of both the Pedmore *windofer* and the Kinver *windofre*.

The occurrence of *yfre* in Iverley is interesting in itself, as this place-name element is otherwise confined to southern counties (Gelling 1984: 178–79; Cole 2013: 74, 270). Cole (2013: 72) suggests that outlying examples of the elements *ōra* and *ofer* (terms which are often found in the vicinity of well-frequented, long-distance routes) may have resulted from sustained usage by travellers. It is tempting to suggest a similar origin for Iverley's *yfre*, since the landscape feature which it represents is very likely to have linked two long-distance roads (Bristol to Chester and Droitwich to Penkridge). Nevertheless, only a relatively small number of place-names in *yfre* is known. For this reason, the original limits of its distribution cannot be stated with a great deal of confidence, and it may be unsafe to assert that the appearance of *yfre* in Staffordshire's Iverley is anything other than a result of local influences. While the map evidence cited above reflects a subsequent mutation in favour of *ofer* (at least, amongst map makers), *yfre* has remained apparent in local instances of the name until the present day, perhaps indicating an acceptance, if not a more general usage, of this term in south Staffordshire.

3. The meaning and significance of the *windofer/windofre* place-names

These place-names occur on separate hill-spurs at opposite ends of the elevated, 3.5 km (2.2 miles) long Iverley track. There can be only four reasons why two virtually identical place-names might appear in such close proximity:

1. Pure coincidence, with no causal link.
2. One site accidentally acquired the same name as the other, e.g. as a result of one hill-spur being confused with the other.

3. One site was deliberately named after the other or after some characteristic which they had in common.
4. The two recorded place-names refer to different parts of the same extended feature: the elevated landmass and/or the track that ran across it.

The first possibility seems highly unlikely, particularly as the name *windofer/windofre* is very rare, if not unknown, elsewhere in England. The second explanation is equally improbable: oral perpetuation of place-names by the local community is seen usually to have preserved them with remarkable precision over many centuries (Gelling 1988: 61–62). A deliberate duplication of the name also appears unlikely. It is difficult to imagine any feature (denoted by the *wind-* prefix) which the *windofer* and *windofre* locations might have in common, yet which is not shared by *ofers* elsewhere in the country. Any such duplication would also have the potential to cause confusion, which would probably have been quickly resolved by the addition of a qualifying term or by a complete change of name.

That leaves only the notion that *windofer* and *windofre* represented separate points on a single extended landscape feature. We have seen that Iverley's woodland is likely to have been extensive and may have completely enveloped the *windofer* and *windofre* locations. This lends an additional sense of unity to the area around the Iverley track; and it may be that the *yfre-* element in Iverley is a reference to the aforementioned landscape feature in its entirety.

3.1 The *wind-* qualifier

The qualifier in *windofer/windofre* might help to explain the place-name's unusual pairing and/or its use on the Iverley track. In previous discussions, the *wind-* element has been interpreted as representing a movement of air, rather than being related to something spiral or winding.⁸ This might be wrong. It is clear that a weather-related meaning would almost certainly make the name's *wind-* element redundant: the hills associated with most *ofer* place-names, being moderately-sized eminences, would be subject to blustery weather at their tops. Thus, a prefix meaning windy would not necessarily help to identify one *ofer* from the next. On the other hand, an element related to a winding topographical feature might lend an altogether more plausible meaning to the prefix. It could, however, be applied only to a linear feature (it would be difficult to understand it referencing just a

⁸ For example: Grundy 1928: 74; Chambers 1978: 56; Hooke 1990: 165; Pritchard 1997: 14; James 2014: 133; and James 2017: 25.

region of high ground); and it seems most likely that *wind-* described a routeway, probably the Iverley track, running between the *windofer* and *windofre* locations.

The place-name Chetwynd (SJ 735214) in Shropshire (PN Sa 1 79) is considered to include, as its second element, the OE noun (*ġe*)*wind*, one example of which is recorded as a translation from the Latin *circuitus ascensus* ‘a winding ascent’ (Bosworth-Toller). That interpretation, of course, implies the involvement of some form of winding routeway (EPNE 2 268). It seems most likely that *windofer/windofre* is simply a compound of this noun with *ofer*, in which case it would be reasonable to infer a less specific meaning, ‘*ofer* associated with a winding (and perhaps ascending) routeway’, than if the name had originally incorporated an adjectival prefix. Here, ‘associated with’ could mean ‘belonging to’, ‘possessing’ or ‘possessing characteristics of’.

The mechanism by which *windofre* might have become Windsor (as in Windsor Holloway, Windsor Field etc.) requires confirmation, but if the noun (*ġe*)*wind* does indeed occur in *windofre*, it does not seem impossible for a genitival <s> to have become attached to this prefix at a later date, particularly if the term *wind* had formerly been used as a topographical place-name in its own right; see Gelling 1984: 168 for a discussion of this mechanism.

The present-day landscape around the Iverley track’s *windofer* and *windofre* shows no sign that roads and tracks climbing either hill-spur followed an especially winding course. Indeed, the topography at the Pedmore *windofer*, at least, would seem to make such a course impracticable. And, if we allow for some minor deviation from the lines of present-day roads and tracks, it would have been quite possible to follow gradients of less than 1:20 up these hill-spurs without recourse to winding or zig-zag trajectories. Thus, it is likely that the feature which was considered to wind was the entire routeway running over and between the two hill-spurs, rather than just the ascending and descending portions at its ends.

Indeed, most of the Iverley track’s central section which, since at least the nineteenth century,⁹ has cut directly across seventeenth-century fields, may have previously taken a less direct route. As noted in section 2.1, there is some evidence to indicate that an open field existed in the vicinity during the medieval period. If that assessment is correct, users of the Iverley track

⁹ OS One-Inch Old Series, *Quarter sheet 54 N.W.* (1831) and OS One-Inch Old Series, *Quarter sheet 62 S.W.* (1834). Accessed via the National Library of Scotland online map database.

would probably have been required to navigate a more winding course around the field's headlands and furlongs.

3.2 Stratford-upon-Avon's *Wyndesouere forlong*

The name *windofer/windofre* is rare, if not unique. Only one potentially related example is known, and, although its etymology is unclear,¹⁰ it is worthwhile comparing the geography of the two sites.

Land just outside Stratford-upon-Avon (SP 200552), presumably part of the town's medieval open-field system, was recorded as *Wyndesouere forlong* in 1317. The *-ouere* ending appears to derive from *ofer* (PN Wa 240–41). As is likely the case with the Iverley track's *windofer* and *windofre*, *Wyndesouere* seems to have been associated with the salt-way network. Running between Bidford (SP 100518) and Warwick (SP 282648), an ancient road known as the Warwick Way was recorded as *ða sealt stret* 'the salt street' in an eleventh-century lease for Bishopton (1016; S1388; Hooke 1999: 121–24). Parts of the salt-way are still in use today: north-west of Stratford (SP 181559) the route is called Bishopton Lane and as it surmounts the escarpment immediately north of Stratford (SP 199577) it becomes known as King's Lane. The latter proceeds north-eastwards for several kilometres along a ridge of high ground towards Warwick. Both lanes demarcate elements of the local parish boundaries, which suggests they antedate the parishes and perhaps the townships here. There is archaeological evidence that *ða sealt stret* was a surfaced road (Hooke 1985: 207); and the presence, along its course, of a hamlet called Drayton (OE *dræg tūn* 'settlement where something is, or can be, dragged') may be a further indication of its importance as a main long-distance route in the Anglo-Saxon period (Cole 2013: 51–53, 216).

Wyndesouere forlong seems to have lain close to the north or north-east edge of Stratford, near a hill-spur that projects from an extended ridge of high ground. According to PN Wa 241, this place-name is preserved in Windsor Street (SP 199551), a road which leads from the centre of the town north-north-east towards the hill-spur. An extrapolation of this road would

¹⁰ PN Wa 240–41 suggests that Windsor Street in Stratford-upon-Avon and the earlier (now lost) form *Wyndesouere (forlong)* come from *ofer*. However, Gelling (1984: 181) asserts that these place-names (like Windsor in Berkshire, the Winsors in Devon and Hampshire, and Broadwindsor and Little Windsor in Dorset) derive instead from the compound *Windelesōra*. This statement is repeated in Gelling 2010 (172–73) and LPN (208). That the latter name's generic component might be *ōra*, rather than *ofer*, makes for a significant and confusing disparity. This is only exacerbated by the fact that *Wyndesouere* does not possess an <l>; and nowhere in the aforementioned publications does Gelling cite specific evidence for a development from *Windelesōra*.

have led (probably) through, or around, an open-field system, then up along the hill-spur's most favourable gradient, passing the later Clopton Tower, to the break of slope near the top. At this point (SP 205570) one may turn left onto an ancient track which runs along the ridge top (and which also delineates a parish boundary) before eventually joining the salt-way at SP 199576. The traveller would then turn right to follow the salt-way to Warwick. The winding nature of the route may have been responsible for the place-name's qualifier, *Wyndes-*, this element's terminal <s> perhaps having the same genitival origin as suggested for that in Windsor Holloway (section 3.1).

There is insufficient toponymic evidence to say conclusively that the etymologies of Kinver's Windsor Holloway and Stratford's Windsor Street are related, but the geographical contexts of the two places – their connection to the salt-road network, and an associated track's winding course over high ground, and, perhaps, around (or through) an open field – exhibit remarkable similarities.

4. The significance of the place-name element *ofer*

If the Iverley track's *windofer* and *windofre* were the only examples of place-names in *ofer*, it would be difficult to avoid the conclusion that *ofer* referred to a hill which facilitated access to high ground, or even to a routeway running over such ground. A single example is insufficient to draw any conclusions, but it does raise the question: could the same interpretation be applied to other places in England that bear names containing *ofer*? In other words, would it be reasonable to say that the defining characteristic of an *ofer* was not a hill's profile *per se*, nor that it acted as a landmark, but that it carried a useable and perhaps well-used routeway up and over elevated terrain?

4.1 A new hypothesis

By virtue of their topography, hills and hill-spurs with flat or gently-sloping tops and rounded shoulders—the definition of an *ofer* suggested by Gelling and Cole (LPN 199)—would have been particularly amenable to the development of low-gradient tracks leading up to high ground. Other hill profiles, with steeper and more irregular gradients, may have been less conducive to the same development. In fact, it would be very surprising indeed if gently sloping hill-spurs, like many of those previously identified as *ofers*, were not used preferentially to access elevated land.

If such access routes (or '*ofer* routes' as I will call them) were actually key elements of the road network (even sometimes forming segments of major long-distance roads, as several appear to do), this might help to

explain why the distribution of surviving *ofer* place-names is, to some extent, correlated with ancient roads and other important locations (Cole 2013: 71–75). It is likely that those of the *ofer* routes near to such places would have been more frequently used by more people (and perhaps by more influential people); and this would, almost certainly, lead to a statistical bias in favour of the coining and perpetuation of *ofer* place-names in these localities. In other words, the greater density of travellers on main roads may have promoted the siting (and longevity) of settlements upon nearby *ofer* routes, settlements which would carry the *ofers*' names forward to the present day. If this view is correct, place-names in *ofer* would have been more likely to develop and survive close to main roads as well as near other well-frequented sites such as royal palaces and places of mineral extraction.

The same hypothesis might also account for another of Cole's observations (2013: 73), i.e. an apparent connection between some place-names containing *ofer* and river or stream crossings. That association might have arisen simply because *ofer* routes tend to begin, and often end, in relatively low-lying areas: places in which one naturally finds rivers and streams. Thus, a nearby river crossing may not necessarily be the reason that a place was given a name containing *ofer*. And the fact that a crossing is found where an *ofer* route meets a watercourse is only to be expected: the *ofer* route would likely have no purpose if it was obstructed by an impassable body of water. This apparently coincidental association between *ofer* and watercourse can be observed at about twenty places, e.g: Ashover (SK 348631) and Edensor (SK 250698) in Derbyshire; Old Radnor (SO 294590) in Radnorshire; Condober (SJ 494057), Overs (SO 392062) and Wentnor (SO 383926) in Shropshire, and Longnor (SK 088649) in Staffordshire. Place-names which Cole (2013: 72) refers to as 'directional *ofers*' (in which the generic component is prefixed by one of the cardinal points, North-, South- etc.) are excluded from this group, as most of them seem to be genuinely related to nearby river banks or crossing points. Moreover, the majority of directional *ofers* occur in territory where *ōra* was employed instead of *ofer*, and this might indicate that these place-names derive from a different word, probably *ōfer* 'river-bank'.

4.2 Geographical review of England's *ofers*

The notion that place-names in *ofer* are associated with hills traversed by well-used routeways is supported by an examination of England's non-directional *ofers* (most of which lie in the midland and northern counties). Generally speaking, the juxtaposition of *ofer* place-name, a nearby hill or

slope, and a routeway running over the latter suggests that *ofer* conveyed some sense of travel over high ground.

Roads and paths that were obviously modern were, of course, disregarded in this assessment, but it was necessary to assume that the fundamental pattern of roads and settlements shown on the earliest Ordnance Survey (OS) maps had remained largely unaltered since the date at which the *ofer* place-name had been coined. It is impossible to assess the validity of this assumption without detailed historical and/or archaeological analysis of each location. However, it is worth noting Christopher Taylor's conclusion that the basic framework of 'our present road system was virtually complete by [the eleventh century]' and, at that date, it was 'perhaps centuries old' (Taylor 1979: 110). Additionally, the findings described here are consistent, in terms of three almost independent indicators (elucidated in sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2), with the view that many, if not most, *ofer* routes antedate their associated place-names.

4.2.1 Cole's data-set

Cole (2013: 267–69, fig 8.7) provides a table of 86 place-names that are believed to contain *ofer*. A few of them are lost names (i.e. are no longer mapped or otherwise in use); and in one case, Oversley Green in Warwickshire, the grid reference quoted is incorrect: it should be SP 094569. Nevertheless, I was able to locate all but six (i.e. 80) of the places referenced on OS 1:25,000 maps dating from 1937 to 1961 (a series which depicts contours and watercourses especially clearly) and to cross-reference the local road patterns to earlier one-inch Old Series and six-inch and twenty-five-inch County Series OS maps dating from c.1830 to c.1910 (National Library of Scotland).

At 88% of the 80 locations examined, it was possible to identify, as a likely *ofer* route, a *single* road, track or path (or a co-linear combination thereof) leading up to high ground. Indeed, the real percentage of places with a credible *ofer* route might be slightly higher than 88% as only those places having a single candidate for an *ofer* route were counted. Four places (i.e. a further 5%) possessed multiple *ofer*-route candidates, but these were discounted since assuming any one of the routes and associated hill to be related to the *ofer* place-name would bear a 50%, or greater, risk of being wrong. The remaining 7% of locations possessed no clearly discernible *ofer* route.

One might suspect that there are so many roads, tracks and paths to choose from that it would be easy to find at least one potential *ofer* route in most cases. It is, therefore, important to put the findings of this review into context. If many of the places examined had been found to possess

more than one plausible *ofer* route, this would have indicated that ‘road + hill’ combinations conforming to the expected configuration are excessively common or, conversely, that the criteria used for identifying *ofer* routes were insufficiently specific. On the other hand, if many places had no potential *ofer* route at all, this would again have suggested problems with the hypothesis or indicated that a large fraction of *ofer* routes had been obliterated by development on the ground since the Anglo-Saxon period. Thus, it is encouraging that so many (88%) of the places checked have one, and only one, plausible *ofer* route.

Amongst this 88%, the position of the *ofer* route in relation to the topography is variable. Nevertheless, the *ofer* routes tentatively identified have some characteristics in common: they all lead from a settlement, major road or watercourse up and/or over higher ground. The *ofer* routes often take a longitudinal course along a hill-spur’s crest or parallel to it, but in several cases they climb up a hillside valley, and occasionally (particularly with rounder, less elongated hills) they follow a lateral path. The main feature which these routes share is unsurprising: they usually ascend along the lowest-gradient course compatible with maintaining a reasonably direct line around watercourses and other obstacles.

In over 20% of the 80 places investigated, the likely *ofer* route is either a Roman road or a road branching directly off a Roman road towards higher ground. Examples can be seen at Ashford Mill (SP 384156) and Shotover Hill (SP 564062), both in Oxfordshire; Tansor (TL 053908) in Northamptonshire, and Spernall (SP 086621) in Warwickshire. A further 10% connect to the known salt-ways around Droitwich and in Cheshire. Both of these observations are broadly consistent with those first made by Cole (1990). A significant proportion of the remaining place-names, such as Gattenshelve (SJ 409015) in Shropshire and The Nower (TQ 157485) in Kent, is likely to be associated with other ancient roads and ridgeways, or branches thereof, but the exact fraction is difficult to quantify as the age of many of these roads is not known.

It is noteworthy that landforms at several of the locations examined—e.g. Longnor (SK 088649) and Okeover (SK 158481) in Staffordshire, and Gravenor (SO 374940), Hazler (SO 467932) and Overs (SO 392062) in Shropshire—consist of complexes of hills and hill-spurs matching Gelling and Cole’s *ofer* profile, yet it happens that the single hill-spur which seems most closely associated with the *ofer* place-name is the one which carries the locale’s principal road over elevated ground.

4.2.2 *Ofer* as a routeway

So far, I have concentrated on the possibility that *ofer* meant a hill or a hill-spur which facilitated access to high ground. For many decades, *ofer* has been considered to mean a hill or a slope of some kind, largely because most *ofer* place-names occur near to hills (despite the fact that some of these hills are extremely low). But there seems to be no reason why *ofer* could not have referred instead to roads which ascended over hills, i.e. the roads I have thus far called ‘*ofer* routes’. So did the place-name element *ofer* actually mean, or come to mean, a road running over a hill? Perhaps the question is best re-framed as: if Anglo-Saxon travellers chose to bestow a name (*ofer*) that embodied the concept of movement over high(er) ground, as the 88% figure discussed above would seem to imply, would they have been more likely to allocate that name to the routeway facilitating such movement, or just to the associated hill? I suspect it would have been the former.

Indeed, the notion that *ofer* meant a road traversing a hill is the principal conclusion to be drawn from the example discussed in sections 2 and 3. Here, the name *windofer/windofre* appears to refer to an extended winding feature that could only be interpreted as the routeway running for two miles over the high ground of Iverley.

Moreover, in most of the other locations examined, a settlement (farm, hamlet, or village) bearing the relevant *ofer* place-name is located directly upon a routeway which leads to, or over, high ground. While one would expect roads to service settlements, it is probably relevant that, in over 85% of the places investigated, the *ofer* route is a through road which does not deviate significantly as it passes through, or near, the *ofer*-named feature (e.g. settlement); and 66% do not deviate at all.¹¹ Later realignment may account for some of these apparently non-deviating roads, but it is quite conceivable that many of them represent pre-existing *ofer* routes, around which settlements had become established. In that scenario, of course, the settlement may well have taken its name from the road rather than the hill.

In a few cases, the road which ultimately leads to high ground does not actually climb a nearby hill or hill-spur. At Hazler (SO 467932) in Shropshire, for example, both the road and the settlement lie in a valley between two steep hills, and the road leads over a saddle point before

¹¹ The difference (19% of the 80 locations examined) is attributable to cases in which the proposed *ofer* route is a through road that deviates to some degree as it passes through the *ofer*-named settlement, but which maintains the same general direction of travel. The deviation in many of these cases may be explainable by later reorganisation of the settlement’s internal roads to, for example, circumnavigate field boundaries, church enclosures, residential plots, etc.

branching off towards higher ground more than a kilometre away. As the settlement marks the beginning of the route up to high ground—rather than actually sitting upon a hill-spur—it may be that the routeway was as relevant as the distant slope in the coining of this *ofer* place-name, an inference which may also be made from similar examples such as Calver (SK 242745) and Codnor (SK 419495), both in Derbyshire; Nover’s Hill, Shropshire (SO 454951), and Sperrall, Warwickshire (SP 086621).

4.2.3 Additional *ofers*

It is interesting to apply the results of the foregoing analysis (sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2) to places that were not listed by Cole (2013). PN Le 6, PN Le 7 and PN Sa 7, which were published later (in 2014, 2016 and 2018 respectively) catalogue several additional place-names that might contain *ofer*.

These volumes suggest that Orton on the Hill (SK 304039, PN Le 6 317–20), Coleorton (SK 403175, PN Le 7 77–82), Oretton (SO 652807, PN Sa 7 467–71) and The Novers (SO 596738, PN Sa 7 328–30) probably derive from *ofer*; and, indeed, it is possible to identify single, credible *ofer* routes at each of these locations.

Over’s Farm in Shropshire (SO 686958) is another interesting example. PN Sa 7 128 quotes Margaret Gelling’s notes that the farm ‘is poised at [the] top of [a] steep slope—much more dramatic than [the] 1" map suggests’, and thereby infers that this place-name ‘goes back to *ofer*’. While I would not disagree with the conclusion (the place lies within about 350m of a possible *ofer* route running longitudinally over two nearby hills), it is worth noting that the topographical description attributed to Gelling is incorrect. Over’s Farm is actually located less than half-way up a 30m hill, upon a fairly modest (approximately 1:30) slope.

The present hypothesis is less helpful with Overton (SO 665865) in Shropshire: PN Sa 7 483–84 remains undecided between *ofer* and *uferra* ‘higher’; and while there are two possible *ofer* routes here neither is particularly convincing.

It is more informative, however, in the case of the *ofer* associated with Shropshire’s place-name cluster Overwood Farm, Overwood Common and Overcott (near SO 685795). PN Sa 7 432 suggests, on the basis of the associated hill’s profile, that *ofer* ‘does not seem entirely appropriate’ here, and favours a derivation from *uferra* instead. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify a plausible *ofer* route in this location. It begins at the road which passes through the Roman fort at Wall Town (today the B4363), possibly with a separate spur beginning at Wall Town Bridge to the east, and runs over the hill-top near Overwood Farm towards Walton Farm, the likely

assembly site of the Domesday hundred of *Condetret* (PN Sa 7 xvii, 61–62), and Stottesdon to the north. The route's connection to a hundred meeting place and a road of possible, or indeed probable, Roman origin (which, the above analysis indicates, occurs in at least 20% of *ofer* place-names) would seem to lend additional weight to the impression that Overwood and Overcott, derive from *ofer* rather than *uferra*.

Of the seven locations discussed in this section, six have only one credible *ofer* route; and in each of these cases the route does not exhibit any significant deviation as it passes through or near the site which bears the *ofer* place-name. This is broadly in line with the foregoing assessment of the 80 *ofer*-place-names from Cole (2013: 267–69). Thus, aggregating the two sets of figures produces almost unchanged statistics: number of place-names, 87; percentage with single plausible *ofer* routes, 87%; percentage with no significant *ofer*-route deviation, 85%; percentage with no *ofer*-route deviation at all, 68%; percentage associated with known Roman roads, 20%.

4.2.4 Charter *ofers*

Ofer place-names occurring within charter boundary clauses represent a separate, but potentially useful, data-set. Indeed, the analysis outlined in section 2 is based upon the tenth-century charters for Cookley and Swinford. In these two cases there is a high degree of confidence that the relevant boundary perambulations have been interpreted correctly. But, as analysing a charter's boundary clause can be a time-consuming, error-prone and sometimes impossible exercise, it has proved impracticable to undertake a comprehensive investigation in the present study.

Nevertheless, it is instructive to sample a few charter occurrences of *ofer*. The following have been chosen for no better reason than that reliable translations and analyses of the relevant charters' boundary clauses are readily available in published sources. Thus, in other respects, these charters may be considered to have been randomly chosen (notwithstanding the fact that they all occur within a fairly small area of the midlands).

In an eighth-century charter for Tredington, Warwickshire (SP 257436; S 55 (757); Hooke 1999: 36–41) the reader is instructed to move *ondlong pone ofer* 'along the *ofer*'. A similar phrase, *ondlong ofre* 'along (the) *ofre*', appears over two centuries later in a charter for the lost *Geneofre*, Worcestershire (near SO 860540; S 1374 (975×78); Hooke 1990: 297–99). This *ofre* seems to be separate from that in the charter estate's name and may have been *pan readan ofre* 'the red *ofre*' referenced in a charter for the adjacent estate of Battenhall (SO 869527; S 1327 (969); Hooke 1990:

282–84). It would seem that, in both of the examples quoted here, the *ofer* was regarded as a linear feature, and this may lend support to the hypothesis that *ofer* represented a routeway over high ground rather than just a hill or hill-spur.

A *geahes ofer* is mentioned in a tenth-century charter for Beoley, Worcestershire (SP 065696; S 786 (972); Hooke 1990: 219–22). While this charter's boundary clause has not been fully solved, it is likely that *geahes ofer* was (or was associated with) a hill-spur at SP 083695 which today has a path running up along its crest. The path aligns with a road running east from Ryknild Street (Margary 18b) to Holt End; together they link Ryknild Street to The Portway (now the A435) at SP 091699. This apparent connecting, by an *ofer* route, of two major roads has parallels with the Iverley track discussed in section 2.

4.3 Other considerations

It is helpful to look at the usage of *ofer*, and the related term *ōfer*, from a phenomenological point of view; i.e. to ask whether the hills, slopes and river-banks associated with *ofer* and *ōfer* place-names were regarded by the Anglo-Saxons as obstacles or opportunities.

As previously noted, the word *ōfer* meant a border, margin or edge, and OE literary sources indicate that it was used for river banks and the sea shore. But how would Anglo-Saxon travellers have viewed these edge- or border-like features? Did they see each one as a barrier or as something that they could exploit to facilitate their journey? Clearly, in the instances that were most important to most Anglo-Saxons it was the latter: seafarers landed on beaches and on other convenient parts of the shore-line, and boatmen on the inland waterways disembarked at river banks. They were features that facilitated onward travel. That people moved *over* them is concordant with Watts' (CDEPN xlvi) comment that 'the sense [of *ōfer*] is "that which lies beyond" ...'. Whether on river or coast, landing places must have been served by roads and tracks that led onwards over higher ground; and it may be this aspect of their function which links the place-name elements *ōfer* and *ofer*.

Of course, the same phenomenological question should also be asked of *ofer* itself: would the Anglo-Saxons have regarded a hill with a flat top and rounded shoulders, and thus with relatively gentle gradients, as an obstacle or as an opportunity to reach more elevated terrain? Again, it is clearly the latter.

The place-name element *ofer* is probably related to the OE literary *ofer* 'over, above, across' and, thus, would seem rather more suited to this view of a hill or slope than it would to a mind-set in which the hill is seen as an

impediment or an unusable geological form in the landscape. Travellers could have come to associate this term, which may have embodied a sense of ‘moving up and over’, with roads that facilitated their journey over high ground.

Ofer occurs in literary sources only as a preposition or adverb particle. Gelling and Cole (LPN 202) point out that, as such, it cannot be the generic component of a place-name or appear in simplex names. That is grammatically correct, but English speakers have always adapted the language for their own purposes. This is especially so where certain groups wish to impart specific technical meanings to words or compounds. The Modern English adverb and preposition ‘over’ developed from OE *ofer*; and several instances of the modern word’s conversion to a noun are on record. Most of the nouns thus formed have specialist or technical meanings. One of them is especially pertinent to the present discussion: namely, the obsolete hunting term ‘over’ (OED), which meant an object, such as a fence, that must be leapt over. Its senses of ‘movement through the landscape’ and of ‘surmounting an object that would otherwise impede such movement’ are both shared with the postulated ‘road over hill’ meaning of *ofer*; and it is, perhaps, not unreasonable to suppose that *ofer* resulted from a similar functional shift (from adverb to noun) occurring amongst groups of Anglo-Saxon travellers.

5. Summary and conclusion

The pairing of the *windofer* and *windofre* charter place-names near Iverley implies that they, and the term *ofer* in this case, referred to the two-mile long track which linked them. Indeed, the name Iverley appears to reference, via *yfre*, these place-names as a pair; and it seems that the routeway which I have previously termed the Iverley track was, in the tenth century, known as *windofer* (probably meaning ‘*ofer* associated with the winding (and perhaps ascending) routeway’). The nearby place-name Compton suggests that this routeway was part of the long-distance Anglo-Saxon road network. With apparent connections to main roads serving both Droitwich and Chester, it may also have been part of the salt-way network. Windsor Holloway in Kinver, which seems to have formed part of the Chester-road link, might be related toponymically to the charter place-name *windofre*, although this is not proven.

There are notable similarities between the pattern of roads and place-names in this vicinity and that near to Windsor Street and the (lost) *Wyndesouere forlong* in Stratford-upon-Avon. Both examples imply that *ofer* referred to a hill which facilitated access to high ground or, more probably, to a routeway traversing such a hill.

This interpretation of *ofer* is supported by a cartographical review of eighty-seven (non-directional) *ofer* place-names which still survived to be mapped by the OS in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In 87% of these places, the juxtaposition of contours, roads and place-names in *ofer* is such that a single candidate for an *ofer* route is identifiable in each case. In about one fifth of the places assessed, the *ofer* route is related to a known Roman road, often being a side branch leading up to, or over, high ground. Further examples are probably related to prehistoric ridgeways and other pre-Anglo-Saxon roads, although the exact number is difficult to determine. In 85% of the locations examined, the course of the *ofer* route through the surviving *ofer*-named place, usually a settlement, seems to indicate that the latter developed around an existing through route and, thus, may have been named after the routeway rather than the associated hill.

The foregoing is consistent with the finding that *ofer* frequently occurs near hills with flat tops and rounded shoulders (LPN 199–200; Cole 2013: 71), insofar as such hill-shapes tend to have sufficiently gentle and uniform gradients for roads to develop over them or along hill-side valleys. Moreover, the same hypothesis could help to explain the associations observed by Cole (2013: 71–75) between *ofer* place-names and ancient long-distance routes, river-crossings, sites of mineral extraction, royal palaces and other well-frequented locations.

Whilst linguistic and phenomenological cases can also be made in support of the hypothesis outlined above, this is certainly not the whole picture and a number of questions remain. Could *ofer* have been used in a more specific way than meaning simply a hill-spur or road that facilitated access to high ground; for example, could it have denoted an ascent that was especially suited to a particular mode of transport such as a cart? Could it have referred to a specific class of route such as a branch road leading from a main road over high ground (as numerous examples imply)? And to what extent might this hypothesis also apply to *ofer*'s southern counterparts, *yfre* and *ōra*?

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