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# ENGLISH GAZETTEERS: THEIR HISTORY AND PRACTICAL USE IN GENEALOGY

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#### INTRODUCTION

#### Gazetteers – What are they?

Gazetteers are best described by their synonyms: "geographical dictionaries" or "topographical dictionaries".

At their simplest, gazetteers are just alphabetical indexes of place names with a map reference. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, most English gazetteers have contained significantly more information, much of it of interest to family historians.

#### Gazetteers - What use are they?

- identifying a place name found in a record in order to pursue further research
- distinguishing between similar or even identical place names
- establishing the jurisdictions (civil or ecclesiastic) applicable to genealogical records
- identifying changes in jurisdictions affecting the location of records
- determining nearby jurisdictions, suggesting the best focus for further research
- learning about the local history and economy at the time of our ancestors and the likely impact on them

#### Origin of the Word (not universally accepted)

- *gazzetta*, an early 17<sup>th</sup> century Venetian coin, also the price of the earliest newspapers, and hence by 1620 popular vernacular for "newspaper"
- *gazette*, by 1631 a French newspaper
- *Oxford Gazette*, the official newspaper of Britain, established in 1665, from which "gazetteer" soon meant "newspaper writer"
- *The Gazetteer's, or Newsman's, Interpreter*, a 1693 geographical dictionary, soon shortened to "Gazetteer", a title which was applied generically to its successors

#### HISTORICAL REVIEW

#### **Gazetteers in Ancient and Medieval Times**

- There may have been gazetteers (under a different name) in the ancient world (Egypt, Greece, China) and there certainly was one for Byzantium in the 6<sup>th</sup> century.
- There weren't any in England. But there were several strong societal forces that generated a modicum of gazetteer-like information:
  - the monarchical urge to generate taxes and raise armies (viz. Domesday, organized by place name with selected descriptive information)

- the chorographical (i.e., local history and geography) tradition promoted by antiquarians, often with a special focus on the county, viz. the Venerable Bede (8<sup>th</sup> century), William of Malmesbury (12<sup>th</sup> century) and others
- burgeoning patriotism and a desire to celebrate the country (viz. Leland's "Genethliacon illustrissimi", 1543, a birthday poem in Latin for the Prince of Wales, celebrating places in his realm)

### Renaissance England— "Proto-Gazetteers"

- Compiled between 1566 and 1570, William Lambarde's "Dictionarium Angliae Topographicum & Historicum" was not published until 1730. Notwithstanding the title, the publication is primarily in English and represents the first conception of an English gazetteer. In keeping with chorographical tradition, it mixes place information with biographies of historical figures.
- William Camden's "Britannia", published in 1586, was reprinted again and again over the next quarter of a millennium, right into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was a thematic forerunner of the Victorian County History series. Places were described in the context of their county setting in long-standing chorographical tradition.
- In the 1590s, John Norden published a short series of county studies that featured the first published geographical listings of English place names, with Middlesex, Hartfordshire [sic], Essex, Cornwall and Northamptonshire all covered.
- In 1611, John Speed published "The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine", a series of maps, including town plans, that were ground-breaking. In the following decades, these maps were elaborated and often included for each county an alphabetical index of place names. These indexes became the raw material for the first recognizable English gazetteers.

#### Commonwealth and Restoration Gazetteers—Form without Content

- In the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, Sir Henry Spelman and Matthew Simons both merged Speed's county-by-county indexes into the first national English gazetteers. These addressed a problem with Speed's work. How do you find a place on a map if you don't know its county? Still, other than location, there was no useful information.
- In 1680, John Adams, recognizing that indexes such as Spelman's were pretty useless for small places, published "Index villaris" (literally, "an index of country places") with a view to establishing their exact locations. Subsequent editions attempted to improve accuracy. The term "index villaris" became generic and was used by several authors over the next century to describe an index of villages.
- In 1692, Laurence Eachard or Echard published "The Gazetteer's or Newsman's Interpreter", an otherwise forgettable listing of place names around the world. But it did give rise to the use of the word "gazetteer" for an alphabetical listing of places.

### Georgian England—Better Information and Theft of Intellectual Property

• In 1741, Stephen Whatley published the three-volume "England's Gazetteer", the first truly modern-looking English gazetteer. Consider this sample entry: "*Alderbury*, (Wilts.) 2 m. from Salisbury, on a healthy hill, in a good sporting country and near the Avon. As it gives name to a H[undred] it was probably more considerable heretofore than it is now." Whatley's words would still be quoted a century hence.

- In 1762, Richard Brookes picked up on Spelman's tradition of intellectual "borrowing" and published a worldwide gazetteer that cribbed extensively from Whatley for the English entries. Even so, Brookes' work was immensely popular, remaining in print for decades. Most other gazetteers for the next half century added similarly little to Whatley's work.
- The inexorable growth of government led to the publication in 1808 of two paradigmchanging gazetteers. Nicholas Carlisle worked in the office that processed poor returns and realized he had both the need and the means to develop a new "index villaris". His "Topographical Dictionary of England" added hard facts to each entry, viz. population, money raised by parish rates and so on.
- At the same time, Benjamin Pitts Capper worked in the office processing the "Population" statistics, i.e., census returns. His "Topographical Dictionary of the United Kingdom", also published in 1808, included fresh information but was not as detailed or as accurate as Carlisle; and he was not above cribbing from Whatley and others, as in calling Alderbury "good sporting country". Still his work was popular.

### Victorian England—The Heyday of Gazetteers

- Samuel Lewis' "Topographical Dictionary of England" antedated Victorian times by six years. But at a cost of almost fifty thousand pounds and at half a decade in the making, it set new standards in comprehensiveness and reflected the confident, expansive Victorian age. Frank Smith (see below) judged the 1831 and 1833 editions as the best ever for details of importance to genealogists, especially with their attention to places of worship, so important for pre-1837 record-keeping. Here we learn, for example, that Alderbury had a Wesleyan-Methodist congregation.
- For the next decade the publishers of Lewis' work were in copyright battles with the publishers of John Gorton and James Bell's gazetteers, the former case unsuccessful, the latter resulting in an injunction with consequences on availability that persist to this day. Bell's gazetteer, while definitely derivative, also included new content.
- The Victorian era also saw specialty and novelty gazetteers, e.g. the "Diamond Gazetteer" that was "not larger than a silver snuff-box", and "Beeton's British Gazetteer", touted as the "cheapest gazetteer in the world" at one shilling. You got what you paid for.
- With urbanization, a blossoming of patriotism, the growth of railways, a new commercial class, and reorganization of ecclesiastic and civil administrative units, the next half-century provided ample opportunity for ever more elaborate gazetteers that would break not only your foot but the floorboards if you dropped them. Some of note:
  - Fullarton's "Parliamentary Gazetteer", initially published in 1840-43, was predicated on drawing as much information as possible from official sources.
  - The justly forgotten C.W. Leonard in 1850 boasted of his innovation of organizing his gazetteer county by county! There's nothing new under the sun.
  - James Sharp's "New Gazetteer" of 1852, perhaps unjustly forgotten today, systematically pilfered from *every* previous gazetteer, thereby achieving a shady but useful comprehensiveness.

 John Marius Wilson's "Imperial Gazetteer", first published in 1866-69 and conceived as a successor to the "Parliamentary Gazetteer" by the publisher Fullarton, was so thorough that FamilySearch used it as the basis for Locality Search in the Family History Library Catalog. The entry on Alderbury extends to six column-inches of dense type.

### The Modern Age—Print's Decline and the Transition to Online

- Arguably the last major new print gazetteer ushering in the modern era was Bartholomew, which was published intermittently with minor title variations, from 1887 through the . FamilySearch recommends the 1986 edition, edited by Oliver Mason, for modern names. Road atlases, and more recently online mapping, have pretty much rendered the traditional gazetteer economically unviable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- Cassell and Brabner, both first published in 1893, were the swan song for gazetteers heavier than bricks.
- Frank Smith's "Genealogical Gazetteer of England", first published in 1969, distils the genealogical essence of Lewis' 1831 entries and supplements them with material about the pre-1812 parish registers drawn from other recognized authorities. Here's the entry for Alderbury: "ALDERBURY parish 1673 Wilts 3 miles se Salisbury comp chapelries Farley, Pitton pop 1,323 pec Treasurer in Cathedral Church of Salisbury Wesl Meth".
- Some genealogy database companies provide online access to digitized historic gazetteers, although searching can be cumbersome:
  - Ancestry offers online versions of Phillimore (see below), Cassell (1898), Lewis (1845), the "Imperial Gazetteer" and volume 1 (selected counties only) of an obscure 1831 gazetteer by Pigot. They appear in two different places in the card catalog: "Maps, Atlases & Gazetteers" and "Reference, Dictionaries & Almanacs". There are two ways to find a specific place within a given gazetteer: browse alphabetically and scroll; or search by keyword and then select the principal article for your place (from among the other articles in which it's mentioned). Paradoxically, searching by location will give you unusable results.
  - British Origins allows searches on Brabner (1895) and also supplies atlas images from the same source.
  - I have been unable to find gazetteers on FindMyPast or The Genealogist. That doesn't necessarily mean they aren't there.
- "A Vision of Britain through Time" provides an online gazetteer that is actually a composite of the "Imperial Gazetteer" and Bartholomew's first edition. Jurisdictional relationships are determined by Youngs (see below) and Richard Cheffins' *Parliamentary Constituencies and their registers since 1832* (British Library, 1998), with similar authorities for Wales and Scotland. "Vision" is the public face of the Great Britain Historical Geographical Information System (GBHGIS) at the University of Portsmouth.

### The Digital Age—"Native" Online Resources

- Various online gazetteers or gazetteer-like resources now exist, including: the GENUKI gazetteer, which cannot be recommended with so many better options available as it offers wildly inconsistent place-name coverage from county to county
  - various official or restricted databases that may have future utility for genealogists (but not now), e.g. the National Land and Property Gazetteer, the National Street Gazetteer
- One of two breakthrough properties is The "Gazetteer of British Place Names", presented by the Association of British Counties, an advocacy group promoting the historic counties of Britain. It boasts an online database of some 50,000 place names, each associated with latitude, longitude, grid coordinate on OS maps, historic county and current administrative units. The database is strong on variant names and informal settlements. To the degree that these places existed in our ancestors' days, the database can be helpful in identifying jurisdictions that might hold historic records. Despite being around since 2001, it is insufficiently well known by family historians.
- The other online gazetteer that promises to be a landmark is "The Historical Gazetteer of England's Place-Names", based on 86 volumes published since 1922 by the English Place-Name Society. News about the project is difficult to come by, as are current coverage statistics. Some counties seem fairly complete, others not at all. At the moment this is a hit-or-miss tool for identifying the location and associated geographic features of English places. When completed, it will be offer substantially coverage more than any other tool, e.g. geographic entities as minor as fields, streams.

# OTHER GAZETTEERS AND GAZETTEER-LIKE FINDING AIDS

### **Specialty Gazetteers**

- Search under "English gazetteers" in any card catalogue and you will find a host of specialty volumes, e.g. literary or ecclesiastical or archaeological.
- Prominent among these will be county and regional gazetteers. As noted above, this is the oldest tradition in gazetteer-making in England and continued side by side with national gazetteers until modern times. If you are doing in-depth research in one or two counties, it would be wise to familiarize yourself with what's available.
- A special sub-class of regional gazetteers are those dealing with the streets, byways and constituent parts of London, perhaps helpful if your ancestors lived there, especially if you need to reconstruct how a part of the city differed from modern times.
- Gazetteers of the entire world have their own name "Special Geography". They were numerous—probably more numerous than English/British gazetteers. In the historical review of gazetteers above, Echard and Brookes are both "special geography", but are included here because of their historical significance in the development of English gazetteers.

### **Important Gazetteer-Like Publications**

- Think of the "Phillimore Atlas & Index of Parish Registers" as a gazetteer to parishes with a focus on parish register availability. Author is Cecil Humphery-Smith and publisher Phillimore & Co. Ltd. You want the third edition published in 2003, available from Phillimore, Global Genealogy and other vendors. NB You can search Ancestry for Phillimore maps. You can also identify the pre-1851 registration district for any parish and the parishes within any registration district.
- The definitive academic work on the interrelationships between England's major administrative units over time (from the development of parishes up to 1974) is Frederic A. Youngs, Jr.'s "Guide to the Local Administrative Units of England", published in two volumes by the Royal Historical Society (Volume 1, Southern England, 1980; Volume 2, Northern England, 1991). Warning: So much information is compacted into each listing that it takes an hour or two of study to learn how to read the entries. Searches are available free on the "Vision of Britain" site. You will need to explore the second-hand book market to find the actual books. Here is the entry for Alderbury: "AP Incl chaps Piton, Farley, sep CP 1866 as 'Pitton and Farley',<sup>3</sup> sep EP 1874 as 'Farley with Pitton',<sup>4</sup> LG Seq 1. Parl Seq 9. Eccl Pec jurisd Treasurer in Prebend of Calne (until 1847), Seq 1 thereafter. Eccl bdry: 1969.<sup>5</sup>" Don't say you weren't warned.

### **Other Useful Geographical Finding Aids**

- If you have a place name and need to know where it is and what jurisdictions it falls into, e.g. Registration District, Poor Law Union, and so on, FamilySearch offers a terrific search, mapping and geolocation function based on 1851 information. You can also identify nearby places within a defined radius, as well as contiguous parishes and other jurisdictions.
- If you have a parish of interest, you can find the registration district in Dr. Penelope Christensen's "Parishes & Registration Districts in England & Wales", published by Heritage Productions in 2001. Unlike similar facilities elsewhere, Christensen's book covers a broader period, 1837-1930. It tells us that the parish of Alderbury was in the Registration District of Alderbury from 1836-1895, then Salisbury 1895-1930.
- If you can't find the birth (or marriage or death) you're looking for in your target registration district, what are the adjacent districts? Ray Wiggins' "Registration Districts" will tell you. The third edition was published by the Society of Genealogists in 2001 and is out of print. It tells us that the Registration District of Alderbury had sub-districts Britford and, wait for it, Downton!, and was adjacent to Amesbury, Fordingbridge, New Forest, Romsey, Salisbury, Stockbridge, Wilton.
- If instead you're working with parish registers, GENUKI has a similar capability for listing nearby churches. Unfortunately it is incomplete in some (many?) counties. Within 3 miles of Alderbury, it tells us there were 10 C of E churches, one Roman Catholic, and three chapels serving Baptists, Primitive Methodists and Wesleyan Methodists. the GENUKI Church Database—enter the name of a place and get all the parishes within 3 miles (at least, all those in GENUKI's very patchy database)
- Similarly you can download a Parish Locator program, largely based on parishes appearing on OS maps. This privately developed facility will give you a list of parishes within a set distance of an identified parish.

### **CONCLUSION: GAZETTEER STRATEGIES**

- For simple look-ups (e.g. where is it? which one is it?):
  - Use Smith if you have a copy at hand. It's short, succinct and was put together for genealogists. Unfortunately it doesn't appear to be available in e-book form and is not offered online that I have found. Check with Global Genealogy or other vendors for the print version—typically \$40-50.
  - o Otherwise, try the "Gazetteer of British Place Names" as it's free.
  - If you are habitually logged into Ancestry, become proficient in searching and browsing either Lewis or the "Imperial Gazetteer" for such look-ups.
  - You can also do free look-ups on the Vision of Britain site or download Lewis or one of the other 19<sup>th</sup> century gazetteers from Google Books or the Internet Archive.
- If you're trying to correlate different jurisdictions, e.g. parishes and poor law unions or registration districts, try Family Search mapping if 1851 falls within your date range. Otherwise refer to Youngs, cited above, on the "Vision of Britain through Time" website.
- Similarly if you think your parish/registration district/poor law union, etc. may have changed boundaries (with consequences for location of records), check Youngs.
- If you're looking for masses of background information about a place, the "Parliamentary" and "Imperial" Gazetteers will keep you busy. Both can be found with a little trouble on the Internet Archive.
- If you need information specific to the era, consider Whatley for the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Carlisle for the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Lewis for the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and Wilson (Imperial) for the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- The 1986 edition of Bartholomew is recommended if you need a contemporary gazetteer, although mapping software, road atlases and the "Gazetteer of British Place Names" may all do nicely.
- If you need access to parish records, use Phillimore in conjunction with conventional gazetteers.
- Supplement gazetteers with FamilySearch mapping, Christensen, Wiggins or GENUKI to focus or expand the geographical scope of your research within or beyond an identified place.
- For obscure place names that don't turn up elsewhere, look at the "Historical Gazetteer of England's Place-Names" and hope that coverage extends to the area you're researching. As this database becomes more complete, it will supersede many of the above recommendations.

### **APPENDIX 1 – TRADITIONAL GAZETTEERS ONLINE**

NB For print publications, check local library catalogs, including university libraries, as well as WorldCat and your Family History Center.

Ancestry Lewis Wilson (Imperial) Cassell Pigot, vol. 1 Phillimore

British Origins Brabner

#### Google Books (not recently updated)

Leland Lambarde Camden Norden (except Cornwall) Spelman Whatley (incomplete) Brookes Robinson & Baldwin Luckombe (incomplete) Crosby Brown Capper Lewis Cobbett Gorton Bell (incomplete) Parliamentary Leonard Clarke Sharp Beeton

Internet Archive (not recently updated) Norden (Essex only) Whatley Brookes Crosby Carlisle Lewis (incomplete) Cobbett Gorton (incomplete) Bell (incomplete) Leonard Clarke Sharp Virtue Wilson (incomplete) Bartholomew Cassell (incomplete)

#### *Vision of Britain through Time* Wilson (Imperial) Bartholomew Youngs

### **APPENDIX 2 -- LINKS**

<b>Online Look-Ups</b> (NB "\$" signifies a subscription site.)
Ancestry (\$)
Lewis (1831): http://search.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=7170
Wilson (1872): http://search.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=7254
Cassell (1894): http://search.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=7305
Phillimore: http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=8830
British Origins (\$):
Brabner (1895): www.origins.net/BritishOrigins/Search/Place/BOPlaceSearch.aspx
FamilySearch Mapping: http://maps.familysearch.org
Gazetteer of British Place Names: http://www.gazetteer.org.uk/index.php
GENUKI:
Gazetteer: www.genuki.org.uk/big/Gazetteer/
Church Database: www.genuki.org.uk/big/churchdb
NB The quality of GENUKI searches varies wildly by county.
Historical Gazetteer of England's Place Names: <u>http://www.placenames.org.uk/</u> (partial
coverage only at this time)
Parish Locator software: http://www.parloc.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/ParLocDL.html
Vision of Britain through Time:
Gazetteer: www.visionofbritain.org.uk/
NB A place-search facility provides entries from either Wilson (1872) or Bartholomew
(1887). It's unclear how it is determined which gazetteer's content will be supplied in a
given case.
Youngs' "Administrative Units": www.visionofbritain.org.uk/units
Downloadable Full-Text Books

Google Books: http://books.google.com Internet Archive: www.archive.org

#### Library and Archives Catalogues

Cambridge University Library Online (John Speed proof maps): www.lib.cam.ac.uk/deptserv/maps/speed.html Family History Library: https://familysearch.org/catalog-search WorldCat: https://www.worldcat.org/

### New, Used & Antiquarian Books, CDs, etc.

Abe Books: www.abebooks.com Alibris: www.alibris.com Amazon: www.amazon.com or www.amazon.ca Chapters/Indigo: www.chapters.indigo.ca Genealogical.com (formerly Genealogical Publishing Co.): http://genealogical.com Global Genealogy: http://globalgenealogy.com Heritage Productions: http://www.genealogystore.com/eng/gstore.html Phillimore & Co.: www.phillimore.co.uk/acatalog/ordcat.html S&N Genealogy: www.genealogysupplies.com

#### **NOTE TO READERS**

If you are aware of any errors or omissions, I would be grateful to hear from you.

### APPENDIX 3-NATIONAL GAZETTEERS OF ENGLAND

(in order of date of publication of the first edition)

NB List also includes gazetteers of Britain and the UK. List does not include county or specialty gazetteers, gazetteers of Scotland or Ireland, or "special geography" except for publications of historical importance in the development of English gazetteers.

Title	Author/Printer	Date
Speculi Britanniae	John Norden	1593
The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine	John Speed	1611
Villare Anglicum, Or a view of the townes of England	Sir Henry Spelman/ Hodgkinsonne	1656
A book of the names of all parishes, etc.	Matthew Simons	1657
England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland described	John Speed	1662
Geographical Dictionary	Edmund Bohun	1688
Index villaris	John Adams	1690
The Gazetteer's, or Newsman's, Interpreter	Lawrence Eachard	1693
England's gazetteer	Stephen R. Watley	1741
The general gazetteer	Richard Brookes revised by J.A. Smith	1762 1869
A chorographical description of the fifty-two counties of England and Wales, placed alphabetically	J. Samuel Charrier	1772
The complete gazetteer of England and Wales	Robinson & Baldwin (printers)	1775
England's gazetteer	Philip Luckombe	1790
The new gazetteer; or, modern geographical index	David Ramsay (printer)	1793
Crosby's Complete Pocket Gazetteer of England and Wales	Crosby	1807
A Topographical Dictionary of England	Nicholas Carlisle	1808
The Union Gazetteer for Great Britain and Ireland	Thomas Brown	1808
A topographical dictionary of the United Kingdom	Benjamin Pitts Capper	1808
Gazetteer of England and Wales	Thomas Potts	1810

Title	Author/Printer	Date
Topographical Dictionary of England	Samuel Lewis facsimile edition	1831 1996
Pocket Topography and Gazetteer of England	James Pigot	1831
A geographical dictionary of England and Wales	William Cobbett	1832
A Topographical Dictionary of Great Britain and Ireland	John Gordon	1833
A New Comprehensive Gazetteer of England and Wales	G.N. Wright	1834
A New Comprehensive Gazetteer of England and Wales	James Bell	1834
Gazetteer or Geographical Dictionary of the World	George Landmann	1835
The Diamond Gazetteer of Great Britain and Ireland	E. Bellchambers	1835
The Parliamentary Gazetteer of England and Wales	A. Fullarton (printer)	1840-1843
The Little Gazetteer	Samuel Maunder	1846
Leonard's Gazetteer of England and Wales	C.W. Leonard	1850
The British Gazetteer	Benjamin Clarke	1851
The Topographical Dictionary of Great Britain and Ireland	Francis Stephens	1867
The National Gazetteer: A Topographical Dictionary of the British Isles	Virtue & Co.	1868
The Imperial Gazetteer of England and Wales	John Marius Wilson	1866-69
Gazetteer of the British Isles, Statistical and Topographical	Bartholomew	1887
most recently, "Bartholomew Gazetteer of Places in Britain"		1986
Cassell's Gazetteer of Great Britain and Ireland		1894
The Comprehensive Gazetteer of England and Wales	J.H.F. Brabner	1895
A genealogical gazetteer of England	Frank Smith	1969
Domesday gazetteer [medieval place names]	Darby & Versey	1975
Gazetteer of British Place Names (online)	The Association of British Counties	2001
Historical Gazetteer of England's Place-Names (online)	Jisc/English Place- Name Society	in development