Clare, Clere, and Clères

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The name of Clare in Suffolk is one of the few major settlement names in East Anglia of unknown etymology. A similar mystery surrounds the Hampshire names Kingsclere, Highclere, and Burghclere, all containing the element *clere* which must have a single origin. Clères is a village north of Rouen in Normandy. There is a remarkable lack of variation on the early spellings of all these names, which are most often *Clara*, *Clera*, or *Clere*. The purpose of this article is to examine the hypothesis that these three place-names are identical in origin, and to discuss what that origin might be. To do this it is necessary to look at the history of each place, and of the noble families associated with them.

The known facts about Clare before the Conquest are meagre (Martin 1997; Thornton 1928*a*,*b*, 1963). An earthwork on the north side of the town (TL 769 458) is possibly of iron-age date, but might also be a purely Saxon-period thegn's *burh*. Archaeological investigation in the 1990s found only remains of medieval farm buildings. If the site of Clare had a strategic importance before the Normans, it must have been because of its location at the junction of the Chilton Stream with the Stour. The Stour forms the border of Essex, and this may reflect an ancient tribal boundary. The east-west road from Haverhill through Clare to Cavendish is probably Roman (Margary 1967: road number 34a).

In the mid-11th century Clare belonged to Ælfric son of Wihtgar (DB) who founded a church of St. John the Baptist and installed a college of seven secular canons. By 1066 Ælfric's son, another Wihtgar, held the estates, but lost them before 1086 to the first Norman lord, Richard, son of Gilbert of Brionne. Richard built a castle on the Stour, and was succeeded by his son, another Gilbert.

Our evidence for the pre-Conquest religious foundation at Clare is contained in some 13th century notes in a document known as the Bury Benefactors' List (BBL) (ECEE: 71, no.110). The original is unpublished; an edition is in preparation by Sarah Foot [1] who kindly supplied the following transcription from a version of this list in CUL MS Mm. 4. 19, The Black Register of the Vestry, part II, compiled after 1207. A slightly different version is in Hervey (1925: 2.290).

> *Tempore Etheldredi, Canuti et Edwardi regum Ælfric comes famosus filius Withgari dedit sancto Edmundo Meleford et ecclesiam sancti Johannis Baptistae apud Claram construxit et clericos ibidem collocavit*

> In the time of Kings Æþelred, Cnut, and Edward, the famous earl Ælfric, son of Wihtgar, gave [Long] Melford to [Bury] St. Edmunds and built the church of St. John the Baptist at Clare and installed clerks there

Hart (ECEE: no.110) dates the original to 1044x1065, but for our purposes the important fact is that we cannot conclude that Clare was known under that name before 1065. The compiler of BBL might just be saying that the church was built *at the place now [13th century] called Clare*.

In 1090 the younger Gilbert gave the church to Bec in Normandy, and it thus became an alien priory cell (Knowles and Hadcock 1971). It was moved in 1124 to Stoke-by-Clare. In 1248 a new Augustinian priory on a different site south of the Stour was founded by Richard de Clare. This survived until the dissolution, but was refounded in 1953 (Barnardiston 1962). In 1326, Elizabeth de Clare (de Burgh) founded Clare College, Cambridge. In the 14th and 15th centuries, Clare became one of the wealthy cloth towns of Suffolk.

The name Clare is first mentioned in the Domesday Book. The critical point here is that *no pre-Conquest document refers to Clare under that name*. DB also refers to the place now called Claret Hall, which is just to the south of Clare, in Essex. It must be assumed that this name has a French diminutive suffix: 'Little Clare'. A place-name *Erbury*, from OE *eorþburg* 'earth-fort' also occurs in the neighbourhood (in the 16th century in Thornton (1928a: App. 3)), and probably refers to the earthworks on the northern edge of the town, or perhaps

to the southern site on the Stour which later became the Norman castle. If so, this is evidence that Clare had an earlier or alternative name, leaving open the possibility that Clare is a new name transferred from France. It is not impossible that French place-names were used in England before the Conquest, although no example is known. Several French monasteries, especially Bec, had lands in England before 1066 (Chibnall 1951; C. P. Lewis 1995). Some names might be pre-Conquest, but we cannot be sure; for example, a charter of 1045x65 but surviving only in a copy in the 12th century *Liber Eliensis* has *nunc nomine Plassiz vocatur* for Pleshey, Essex (ECE: no.61). The word is OFr *plessis* 'fenced enclosure'. About half a dozen French place-names appear in DB (Briggs 2008: 116).

Clare is recorded as:

- *Claram (tenuit Aluricus)* 1086 LDB 389v
- *(Ricardus de) Clara* 1086 LDB 448r
- *Clare* 1195 (DEPN)

and in the hundreds of surviving Latin charters of the priories of Clare and Stoke-by-Clare, Clare is always spelt with *-a-*, quite often simply *Clar'* (Cla; Stk1; Stk2; Stk3). Claret (Hall) is recorded as:

- *Clare* 1086 LDB 28v
- *Clareta* 1165 (DEPN)
- *Claretta* 1199 (DEPN)

Richard de Brionne may have had a role in the naming of Clare, either because he already used Clare as a family name before 1066, or because he transferred it as a place-name from France. It is therefore necessary to look into his family background. The primary sources the chronicles of Orderic Vitalis (OV) and William of Jumièges (WJ)), and charters such as those in (RADN) and (RRAN)). Secondary sources include Mortimer (ODNB), G. E. Cockayne et al. (CP), Round (1899), Mortimer (1980), Ward (1988).

From these we learn that the Richard who founded the English branch of the family was born before 1035 and was the son of Gilbert de Brionne, known as 'Crespin'. This Gilbert was the son of Geoffroy, himself the son of Richard I,

Duke of Normandy. Richard also used the title *de Bienfaite* (modern St-Martin-de-Bienfaite-la-Cressonnière), but the main association is with Brionne, which is 40km south-west of Rouen, and no family connection with Clères or any other place with a similar name is apparent [2] .

Richard was among those present at William's assembly in Bonneville-sur-Touques early in 1066, but it is not certain that he was at Hastings. Nevertheless he received large estates in Kent, Surrey, Essex, and Suffolk. It is most likely that he was the builder of the motte-and-bailey castle at Clare, and possible that he planned the town, with its two parallel north-south streets enclosing the church and market-place, making use of the existing earthworks to defend the northern boundary. Richard married Rohese, daughter of Walter Giffard, lord of Longueville-sur-Scie (Longueville is near Clères; both are on the route between Rouen and the channel port of Dieppe). Of his several children, Gilbert was probably born just before 1066, and he married Adeliza de Clermont (-en-Beauvaisis) about 1086 [3] . This Adeliza was the daughter of Hugo (Hugues) of Clermont, who appears as *Hugo de claromonte* in the archives of Thorney Abbey (Clark 1985: 67) [4] .

The evidence is thus that Richard son of Gilbert was the first to use the name de Clare (or, rather, it was used of him), and this happened *only after arriving in England*, the first appearance being once in the DB (LDB 448r, in the section about Cavendish). The Clere families of Sussex (McKinley 1988: 43-4), Norfolk (McKinley 1975: 105) and Yorkshire may be related, but proof is lacking. For the Dorset Clares, see Dampier (1944). Loyd (1951: s.n. Clere, Clera) in fact claims to connect these names with Clères, but his argument is based only on the similarity of the names. Caistor Cleres in Norfolk (PN Nf 2: 4) received its name from a member of the Norfolk Clere family.

Three charters of Richard, all of doubtful authenticity, record his gifts to Bec (which is near Brionne); these are Chibnall (1951: nos.XXXIX-XLI). The first from before 1090 relates to Standon (Hertfordshire) and calls him *Ricardus filius Gilberti dominus de Clare*; the second and third from before 1086 and 1090 respectively relate to various estates and call him *Ricardus filius comitis Gil(le)berti dominus de Clare*. According to Vaughn (1974), Richard and Rohese arranged for a monk of Bec to head their new foundation at St. Neot's. This demonstrates their continuing connection to their ancestral home [5] .

Two charters of Gilbert son of Richard from c.1090 record his gifts: firstly of the church of Ashen to Clare (ECE: 46, no.107; Powell 1903: 478), and secondly of two freemen of Westley to Bury (Douglas 1932: 152-3, no.169). Two differing versions of the latter give his name as *Gilebertus de Clara*, and *Gilebertus de Clare*. A confirmation charter of 1136x43 concerning Gilbert's gifts to Bec appears in Harper-Bill and Mortimer (Stk1: item 70); it uses the spellings *(boscum de) Clara* and *(in villa) Clare*.

A Gauthier d'Auffay is named by Orderic Vitalis (OV: 6, 237), who calls him *consanguineus* of Roger son of Richard, who must be our Richard de Clare. Since Auffay is near Clères, this is an intriguing possible connection, but unfortunately it is impossible to verify this claim or recover any further details.

We turn now to French place-names. Clères is situated about 15km north of Rouen, on the stream now called *la Clérette*. The early history is obscure (Lemarchand 1901; Spalikowski 1936), but from before 1066 it was the seat of a barony. Typical early spellings, of a large number on record, are (DT Seine-Maritime):

- *(de) Clera* c.1050-66 and frequently later
- *Clara* 1148
- *Clère* 1386
- *Claire* 1431
- *Clères* 1454

It is apparent the the final *-s* is not organic, and is just the inflectional *-s* of obscure purpose commonly found in French medieval place-name records. The stream at Clères is recorded as (DT Seine-Maritime):

- *Fluviolus Clare* 1059
- *fluvius Clere* c.1060
- *Vallem Clare* 1277

Another river, slightly to the south at Maromme, was called *Rivière de Clarete* 1389-90, possibly by confusion with *la Clérette*. It flows into the Cailly at Deville-lès-Rouen. Note the similarity of the name to Claret in Essex.

The family of the barons de Clère(s) is of uncertain pedigree. The study of Lemarchand (1901) is appropriately cautious and identifies the generations

Roger (fl. 1090), Gislebert, Berenger, Renaud, Mathieu I, and Mathieu II. Of Roger de Clère it is thought that he was a vassal of the Toëni (later Tosny) family and the murderer of Robert de Beaumont in about 1050 (Lemarchand 1901: 20; Prévost 1862: I.163; OV: iii,426-7). The report on this event calls him *Roger de Clara*. A charter in his name gives land to two churches in Rouen (Prévost 1862: III.467) and was witnessed by Duke William. He is there titled *Roger de Clera* (Lemarchand 1901: 23) [6] . A Richard de Clères is named in a list of crusaders in 1191 in Goube (1815: 471); he cannot be connected to the Clare family.

The conclusion from this examination is that there is no known family connection of the Clares with Clères, and so no likelihood that the name Clères was transferred to England, either as a place-name or via a family name. Nevertheless, there has certainly been confusion between Clères and Clere: Shore (1895: 198-9) describes correspondence in 1895 with the cathedral authorities in Rouen, which established that some charters they held refer to Kingsclere, not Clères as had been long assumed.

We must next consider the Hampshire names in -clere. These are recorded in twelve pre-Conquest charters (Table 1), the spelling generally being *cleara*. It is apparent that the name is nearly always inflected as a weak masculine noun. Furthermore we have two charters (S: 360, 377) compounding the name with *flōde* 'spring'; the second of these is problematic as no spring or stream can be identified at the implied location (Grundy 1927: 172). Nevertheless, these names are evidence that a name existed which is identical to that in the -clere names. In DB, Kingsclere is always written *CLERE* (GDB 39r, 43r, 45r, 50v). Coates (1989: s.n. Clere) has a valuable discussion of the Hampshire names, which is, however, ultimately inconclusive.

With the facts now before us, let us consider possible etymologies for the place-name Clare. It is not English; Eilert Ekwall (DEPN) suggests a Celtic river-name. Against this are the facts that no other ancient river-name even vaguely similar is known in England or Cornwall; and further most pre-English river-names each have multiple instances (Avon, Thames/Thame/Tame, Stour, Ouse, Severn, Humber).

date	S	donor	estate	text	reference
749	258	Cuthred	Highclere	*Clearan …Cleran*	Grundy ([1926](): 133-7)
spurious	383	Edward	Highclere	*de Clera …Cleran*	Grundy ([1926](): 133-7)
873 x 888	1507	Alfred	Kingsclere	*æt Clearan*	S. Miller ([2001](): **1**)
931	412	Athelstan	Ecchinswell	*to Clearan …æt Cleran …* *to west cleran …to Cleran*	Grundy ([1924](): 94-103)
943	487	Edmund	Burghclere	*æt Clearan …to Cleran*	Grundy ([1921](): 130-4)
951 x 955	1515	Eadred	Kingsclere	*Clearas*	S. Miller ([2001](): **17**)
955	565	Eadred	Highclere	*æt Cleran …Cleran*	Grundy ([1926](): 133-5)
955 x 958	1491	Ælfsige	Burgh- or Highclere	*æt Cleran*	S. Miller ([2001](): **18**)
959	680	Edgar	Highclere	*æt west clearan …æt West Clearan*	Grundy ([1926](): 136-7)
963 x 975	819	Edgar	*Clearan*	*æt Clearan*	Keynes ([1994](): 1122)
900	360	Edward	Micheldever	*to cleara flode, ponne of cleara flode*	Brooks ([1982](): 198)
909	377	Edward	North Waltham	*æt clearan floda …to clearan floda*	Grundy ([1927](): 172-7)

Table 1: Pre-Conquest Hampshire charters mentioning *cleara*.

A common Brittonic word is generally assumed to exist (CCCR: 17) on the basis of Welsh *claear* 'kind, gentle, pleasant, lukewarm' (recorded from the 13th century [7] ; Welsh *claer* 'bright, shining, fine, clear' is presumably a derivative with a slight semantic development), Breton *klouar*, and possibly Cornish *clor/clour* (though the last is not in Padel (PN Co)). The element *claer* appears in several minor Welsh place-names, such as Claerddu, Claerhau, Claerllys, Claerwch, Claerwen and Claerwenid, but none of these is known to be an ancient name (AMR). The earliest citation for Claerddu in AMR is *Clarduy* 1536-9. Afon Claerddu paradoxically seems to mean 'clear-dark'; Afon Claerwen is more plausibly 'clear-light' (D. G. Lewis 2007: 8). But the scarcity and modernity of these names raises serious doubts as to their applicability to Clare and Clere. In any case *claear, claer* are adjectives and only appear in compound place-names.

Mac Mathúna (2004) discusses Irish *clár*, one meaning of which is 'plain'. Possible toponymic usages of this in early literature are *clár Gairigi* 'the plain of Gáirech'; *trí Coirp Clári* 'the three called Corp from Clár'; and *Clármide* 'the plain of Meath'. Chláir/Claregalway belongs here too. In Wales we have Clarach Llangorwen and Afon Clarach (SN 605 835). According to D. G. Lewis (2007: 56), these are from Irish *claragh* 'plain'; AMR gives *Clarach* 1115-30, *Clarauch* 1120. Falc'hun (1982: 91-4) tries to derive all French names in Cler-, Clair- etc. from a Gaulish word *clar* meaning 'plain'. But he completely fails to make his case, not giving early forms for any name, and his maps on page 126-7 show that most of his examples are in hilly country. This word is Goidelic only, and neither Clare nor the Cleres are on a plain.

Clères is generally accepted to be Latin *clāra*, either elliptically for *aqua clāra* 'clear water', or simply a substantive use of the adjective. This is highly plausible, since the characterization of a stream as 'clear, pure, clean, bright' is one of the most fundamental types of hydronymy. In England and Cornwall we find examples such as

- *fluuium Fresca* c.710 Bede (ERN: 165). This is from OE *fersc* 'fresh'; the same word appears in Freshford (Somerset).
- Brightwell, Suffolk (*Brihtwella* DB, Baron (1952)) [8]
- Brightwell, Berkshire (*æt Brihtanwylle* 854 S:307, (PN Brk 1: 516; ECTV:

38-9))
- Sherborne, Dorset (PN Do 3: 355)
- Sherborne, Gloucestershire (PN Gl 1: 203)
- Sherborne, Warwickshire (PN Wa: 222)
- Shirburn, Oxfordshire (PN O 1: 91)
- Whitwell, Isle of Wight (*Quitewell* 1212, *Whytewell* 1255; Mills (2001: 109))
- Fentriga 'bright well' (PN Co: 37; Padel 1982: 18)

The charter S:523 apparently has a Latin rendering of the name Brightwell as *declaratam fontem*. This might be literally 'the declared spring' or 'aforementioned spring', but more probably is just a fancy multisyllabic way of saying *clarum fontem* 'clear spring'. Similarly Sherborne in Dorset is called *clarus fons* in Leland's Itinerary (L. T. Smith 1906: i, 296; PN Do 3: 356). Both Latinizations suggest that the sense of the names was correctly understood. Other examples with similar meanings in ERN include Glen (Nb), Shire, and Whitewater. There are ME and ModE names with similar origins: Clarborough, Pembrokeshire (*Clarebrooke* 1611; Charles (1992: 451)), Clearbrook Farm (Somerset ST 765 602); Whitewell (near Suffenton, Cornwall); and Clearwell (Newport, Gwent) [9] .

In France, apart from Clères, there exists Clarbec (Calvados), the name of a stream and a commune. Clarbec was *Clerbec, Clarus Beccus* 14th (DT Calvados), in which an explanatory *bec* has been added by the Normans to an originally simplex stream name. We also have Duclair, on the Seine downstream from Rouen, which was *Duroclarus* before 811 and *Durclarum* 1025 (TGF: ¶6024). All these river-names are likely to have the same origin as Clères. There is also a river La Claire in Honfleur, but this may be recent, as early forms seem to be lacking. An element of similar meaning, apparently 'pure water', appears in La Pure (Osnés, Ardenne), which was *super fluvium Puram, . . . ad villam que vocatur Pura* 911-23 (TGF: ¶5125), and there are also Petits Purebecques and Grandes Purebecques, near Merville (Nord). In later medieval French, the adjective *cler* continued to be productive in place-names such as Clairfontaine.

Given the ubiquity of this name type, I suggest that it lies behind Clare and Clere also. As already explained, it is not likely that these are transferred

from France, so the conclusion must be that these are stream-names given in the Roman period and adopted by the first Anglo-Saxon settlers. Since the adjective *clārus* was not borrowed into the general lexicon, my hypothesis is that these were proper names, borrowed without understanding of meaning.

As parallels for Latin borrowings in OE place-names, we have the obvious *strǣt<strāta* and *cæster<castra*. Much rarer is *camp<campus* 'field' (M. Gelling 1988: 75ff.); Coates (1998: 5; revised as 2000*a*: 44) has proposed that Firle (Sussex) is *ferālia* 'wild places', and that the district-name Lyme is *līmen* 'threshold' (2004: 39). Speen (Berkshire) is *spīnis* 'thorny place' (PN Brk 2: 260; Coates 2000*b*: 40-43). Catterick (Yorkshire) is possibly Latin *cataracta* 'waterfall' (LHEB: 409). Other words of Latin origin appearing in place-names are *funta <* oblique stem *font-* or *fontāna* 'spring', *foss < fossa* 'ditch' and *wīc < vīc-* 'settlement' [10] . A further curiosity is *Wytfont bregg*, recorded in a Clare charter of 1334 (Cla: no.83), apparently containing 'white' and 'font' in some sense. These words are all *tatsamas* — words taken over whole from a foreign source, with adjustments to the morphology of the borrowing language.

The expected phonetic development is that Latin *ā* becomes OE /ɛː/, most often written *æ* (or with length-mark *ǣ*), as in *strǣt* and in *nǣp<nāpus* 'turnip' (OEG: §504). The later development would be via ME /klɛːrə/, as seen in the DB spellings *Clere*, which is also the normal one in the Latin portions of the OE charters; this spelling remained the conventional one but the pronunciation evolved regularly to modern /kliːr(ə)/ and /kliːə/.

This much seems satisfactory, but there is a potential problem with the charter spellings *Cleara*. These seem to imply a breaking of *æ* which is only expected after palatal consonants, or, when followed by /r/, by another consonant as well. My theory will fail if this cannot be explained. In fact, ⟨ea⟩ is an occasional spelling for OE *ǣ*; in the entire OE corpus [11] the word *strǣt* (including inflected forms) occurs 455 times in that spelling; 140 times as *stret*, and 18 times as *streat*. However, I will not invoke this as an explanation of *cleara*; I believe that a better explanation is possible in terms of the orthography of the charters in question, which, though internally consistent, is abnormal. The Latin spellings *Cler-* strongly support the view that the pronunciation was always with some variety of /e/ which all other evidence would suggest is long, and not with a diphthong; we need to see whether the OE spellings can be made

to fit this view [12] .

The authenticity and interdependencies of the charters listed in Table 1 are very difficult questions, and as only three have been edited in the Anglo-Saxon Charters series, good answers to these questions are not yet available. Several are known to be outright forgeries (360, 377, 383); some are suspicious (819); whilst others are collocations which have sections obviously copied from others (258, 565). Let us consider one of the earliest which is believed to be genuine, S:412 (931). Clere is cited as follows:

> *Ðis is seo landboc . x . hydæ to Clearan þe Eþelstan cing bocodæ Ælfricæ biscope on ece yrfæ* [This is the charter [of the] 10 hides at Clere which King Æþelstān gave ("booked") to Bishop Ælfric in perpetual inheritance].

In a more normal spelling of 10th century West Saxon, this would be

> *Ðis is seo landboc . x . hida to Clearan þe Æþelstan cing bocode Ælfrice biscope on ece erfe.*

It is apparent that the scribe used ⟨æ⟩ for both inflectional *-e* (dative singular and preterite) and *-a* (genitive plural), perhaps because they had weakened and fallen together, and I suggest that this left ⟨æ⟩ unavailable for the sound *ǣ*; for this reason ⟨ea⟩ was used instead. This would also explain the ⟨E⟩ for ⟨Æ⟩ in Æþelstan. After a Latin section, S:412 continues with bounds in OE, in which Clere is written *Cleran*, and ⟨æ⟩ is again regularly avoided in the spelling *paþ* for *pæþ*. Further abnormal spellings (*gæ-, þæ, þægn*) are found in other versions of this formula in:

· S:487 (943) *Þis is þara . xv . hida boc æt Clearan þæ Edmund cing gæbocodæ Ælfswiþæ on ece yrfæ*
· S:565 (955) *Ðis is þara . X . hida boc æt Cleran þe Eadred cing gæbocodæ Ælfsigæ biscopæ*
· S:680 (959) *Ðis is þara . X . hida land boc æt west clearan þæ Eadgar cyning gebocodæ Ælfwine his þægne on ece yrfæ*

It must be the case that one of these charters was an original from which this phrase has been copied with slight alterations. Together they are sufficient evidence that *Cleara(n)* became a conventional spelling, and it thus appears in the

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earliest (11th century) copy of King Alfred's will of 873x888. Also in support of this interpretation is the fact that the authentic S:1491 (955x958), which has a text independent of all the other charters, uses only the spelling *æt Cleran*. S:360 is shown to be a forgery in Brooks (1982: 198), and so strictly speaking *to cleara flode* therein is of no evidential value. S:360 is similarly indecisive with regard to the spelling of /eː/: *to Bearcelea, þonne of Bercelea forð*. The word *flōde* (distinct from *flōd*) is defined by Kitson (KGCB: §6.20.3) as "the point in a large dene at which when the chalk aquifer is full the water bursts out". In principle the qualifier *clearan* could be a lexical term, a survival of the Latin adjective, but the absence of a definite article suggests that we do in fact have a proper name, a real compound place-name. Other comparable cases in Hampshire with adjectives do have the article, such as *to þære readan flodan* 'red' S:488 and *of þære hwitan flodan* 'white' S:693.

For Clare in Suffolk, the Latin spelling *Clara* has prevailed, and this has affected the modern pronunciation. Similarly, numerous French place-names in *Cler-* or *Clair-* appear in Latin documents as *Clar-*. There is, however, an eastern development in which OE *ǣr* gives /ar/; see E. Ekwall (1963: 143), where the example *ar* 'ere' from a text of ca. 1274 is given. This may be part of the reason why we have Clare in Suffolk, but Clere in Hampshire. To conclude the phonetic discussion, there appears to be no major barrier to my proposal.

In the case of Clare, I suggest that the referent was the north-south Chilton Stream (Figure 2), not the Stour, since that is an ancient name probably meaning 'dark', perhaps also 'strong, violent, gloomy' (Coates 2006); with this assumption we thus have a plausible natural contrast [13] . Note that Satchell (2003) proposes that the chapel at Wentford on the northern edge of Clare is a former leper chapel. Perhaps its siting is due to a former belief in the healing powers of the water of the Chilton Stream?

In the case of Clere, I suggest that the referent was the stream at Kingsclere, which issues from a strong spring at SU 520 578. This became the name (perhaps already in the Roman period) of a large estate including the present Kingsclere, Highclere, and Burghclere. Parts of this were in royal ownership in the Anglo-Saxon period; indeed King Alfred leaves Kingsclere in his will (S:1507) to his daughter. This is in fact a natural unit, bounded on the south by the Roman road from Salisbury to Silchester (Margary 1967: road number 4b), and on the

north by the River Enborne (Shore 1895; Crawford 1922: Appendix E).

These two streams, and the Clérette, all have similar characteristics: they are shallow with a clear gravelly bottom, with an absence of mud or silt, and with a noticeable flow. If Latin *clāra* was essentially a technical term when applied to streams, I suggest that it denoted these characteristics. Perhaps the most significant aspect was potability.

The derived OFr word *cler* (the source of English 'clear') remained a favourite in OFr and Anglo-Norman literature in application to water (*clere ewe* etc.), and perhaps there is an echo here of the ancient meaning. For example, we have it in St. Modwenna (Baker and Bell 1947: line 489): *Funtaine clere e serie* [Spring clear and pleasant], and in the History of the Frankish Kings of Philip Mousket (Waitz 1882: 726, lines 2445-7): *Carles regarda viers seniestre / Et trouva une autre fontaine, / Ki clere estoit et froide et saine.* [Charlemagne looked towards the left / and found another spring / which was clear and cold and pure.]. It also appears in the Anglo-Norman life of St. Edmund (Ravenel 1906: lines 1526-29): *Dulces funteines par aïr / Od dulz curs, od clere gravele / Nul ne puet choisir la plus bele / Cuntrecurent vers la mer* [Sweet strong springs / With sweet course, with clear gravel / None could look more fair / Running down to the sea] [14] .

In summary, I have suggested that the Latin stream-name *clāra*, which is certainly recorded in northern France, was also used in Roman Britain and was borrowed in three instances by the first English settlers, and is thus the origin of the English names *cleara*, Clere and Clare. The nature of the evidence is such that a certain conclusion will probably never be reached; I am merely interested to throw another plausible etymology into the continuing debate.

Appendix: red herrings.

There are numerous places named after a saint whose name derives from Latin *Clārus*, such as Sanclêr/St. Clears (Carmarthenshire), St. Cleer (Cornwall), and dozens of places called Saint-Clair in France, the best known being Saint-Clair-sur-Epte (Val d'Oise). The saints here are all more or less obscure, and in some cases probably purely mythical. A brochure distributed in the church of Clères incorrectly attributes the origin of the village's name to a St. Clair. In none of these cases is there any connection to a simplex name of the type Clare. A family name is behind Heighton St. Cleres (PN Sx 2: 361), Bradfield St. Clare (Suffolk), and Clare Park in Crondall, Hampshire (Coates 1989: 57).

Claro and Clareton (PN YW 5: 14) appear to incorporate a personal name *Clare* of continental Germanic or Norse origin, perhaps ultimately from Latin *Clārus*; this element also appears in the common Clarenbald. Clare in Oxfordshire is *clǣg-ōra* 'clay slope' (PN O 1: 89).

County Clare in Ireland is sometimes said to be named after the Clare family (who certainly had Irish lands), but there is no proof of this. In the Irish Placenames Database [15] the more reasonable suggestion is made that the county takes its name from Clarecastle (4km south of Ennis), and the castle is named from a plank bridge (another sense of Irish *clár*) used to reach it.

Sandred (PN Nf 2: 191) equates Sloley (TG 292 247) with the otherwise unidentified *Clareia* in DB. The argument relies on assuming that C was a spelling for *S-*, and a dissimilation of *l-l* to *l-r*. This is just about possible, but it might be simpler to assume that the DB scribe was completely confused by the place-name, and wrote a name which he knew from elsewhere.

Numerous French names derive from *Clār(i)ācum* 'estate of Clārius/Clārus': Claira, Clairac, Clara, Clarac, Claracq, Clary, Clayrac, Clérac, Clérey, Cléry, Cléré (*Clareia* 1096, TGF: ¶8166), Clerques, Clarques, Klerken. The last three are in former Germanic-speaking areas and show stress-shifting.

The Roman fort of Clarenna recorded in the Peutinger Table (Kastell Donnstetten, Raetia; K. Miller (1988)), possibly has a Celtic name. Gaelic *cleireach* 'cleric' appears in Achnaclerach (Highland) 'field of the clergyman'. The Spanish Clares (Guadalajara) probably means 'clearings'.

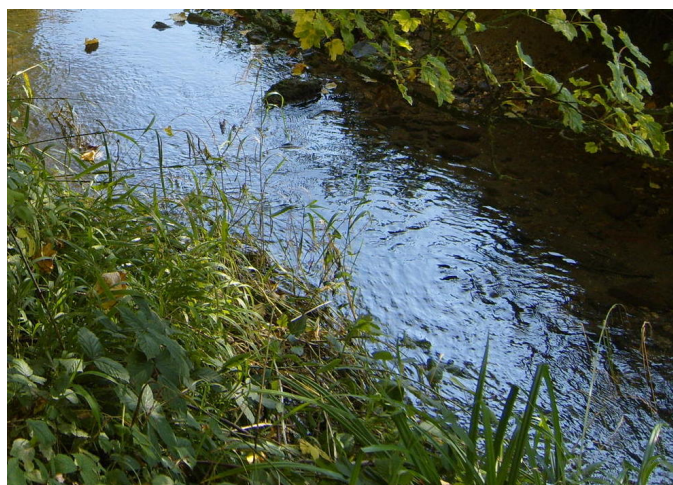Figure 1: Clères. The late 18th-century map of Cassini.

Figure 2: The streams at Clères, Kingsclere, and Clare, illustrating the clear water and gravelly bottom in all cases![16](NB: there is little point printing this figure in monochrome.)

Notes

[1] Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History at the University of Oxford

[2] Badier (DN: s.n. CLÈRE) does in fact graft the Clares onto the family of the barons of Clères, but the dates given are impossible - Geoffroy/Godefroy is said to be living in 921, when he actually was not born until 953. All other dates are 50 to 100 years too early, and this source must be disregarded. Delavalade, d'Harcourt, and Marcel (1982) is equally unreliable.

[3] We could speculate that it was Gilbert who named Clare, in honour of his wife, by taking the first element of the name Clermont. But there is no precedent for this type of naming.

[4] For the later history of the family, see Altschul (1965).

[5] Other places in England taking their name from Bec are Tooting Bec, Weedon Bec, and Bekesbourne.

[6] Prévost (1862: I.162) raises doubts that the name refers to Clères; and thinks it might rather be a fiefdom of Clerre in Bailleul-la-Vallée (Eure). The placename Clerre appears to be lost, but Clercy and Clairemare appear on the modern map about 2km north of Bailleul-la-Vallée. On the whole, a connection to Clères appears far more likely.

[7] Y Geiriadur Mawr; http://www.aber.ac.uk/~gpcwww/gpc_pdfs.htm.

[8] In an unpublished cartulary of the Priory of SS Peter & Paul in Ipswich (Suffolk Record Office HD226/4253/3, f.36v) reference is made to *via' regia' q' tendit de Gip' ap' birchtewele* 'the royal road which reaches from Ipswich to Brightwell'. This may hint at some former importance of Brightwell, and possibly this was the fresh water of the stream there. It is next to Newbourne with its 'nine springs' (Briggs 2006).

[9] but not Clearwell (Sling (PN Gl 3: 236)), which is 'clover well'

[10] On these see M. Gelling (1988: ch.3). In a paper presented at the 2007 Dublin conference of the Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland (P.R.K. 2007), Paul Cullen proposed that Romney in Kent contains Latin *rūmen* in the sense 'throat, gullet'.

[11] Complete corpus of Old English, http://ota.ahds.ac.uk/headers/0163.xml

[12] Occasional inverse spellings such as *cǣs* for *ceās* 'chose' may provide further clues relevant to this problem.

[13] Cole (1991) has suggested a similar contrast between OE *brōc* and *burna*, the first denoting a muddier stream, and the second a clearer one. But this is

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rejected by Kitson (KGCB: §6.30.3.2).

[14] Curiously, a 20th century owner of Clare Priory was called de Fonblanque (Martin 1997), with a similar meaning as we must assume for *(aqua) clara*.

[15] Bunachar Logainmneacha na hÉireann (Placenames Database of Ireland); http://www.logainm.ie

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