Why are so many East Anglian fields called Harrow?

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Place-names and landscape: recent research
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Outline

- Background to the study of English place-names
- The etymological method
- Microtoponymy
- Harrow, heathenism, and archaeology
- Harrows and Harrow fields
- Theories
The study of English place-names

- Walter Skeat 1835–1912
- Eilert Ekwall 1877–1964
- Allen Mawer 1879–1942; English Place-Name Society 1923.
  “handmaiden of historical study, . . . to illuminate the gaps in the written historical record, especially of the pre-literate Anglo-Saxon period” (ODNB)
- Margaret Gelling 1924–2009

Disciplines linked: Linguistics — settlement history — landscape history — agricultural history — archaeology — paleobiology
The etymological method — an example

Newbourne in Suffolk:

*Neubrunna* 1086
*Neubrounia* 1158-62
*Neubrunne* 1254, 1286
*Neubronne* 1286
*Neubroune* 1286, 1316
*Neubroun* 1291
*Neuburne* 1291
*New(e)bourn(e)* 1327
*Newborn* 1524
*Newborne* 1568, 1674
Microtoponymy — an example: Babraham (13th)

Aldestrete; Berelond; Bitherholm; Badestoneshel; Blaclond; Brademede; Brademedwe; Brichtive; Chalchenho hill; Chesewic; Clay; Coppelowepad; Cron; Cronles; Cumade; Flegges; Fueberewes; Fulburnedene; Furcas; Godrichesweie; Grundlefeld; Hevivemere; Hundeshelle; Landimere; Longhil; Longland; Magghesil; Moroluespitt; Munkespad; Pikedaker; Portweye; Rencheshofeld; Shepherdesdene; Slo; Stapele; Stichepes; Stonhil; Tailgore; la Tertre; Walentreas; Wichweie; Wronge.

(Cartulary of Hospital of St John, ed. Underwood 2008)
Harrow, heathenism, and archaeology

Harrow < OE *hearg* is traditionally taken to denote a pre-Christian temple or shrine:

- Dickins (1934); Stenton (1941); Gelling (1962, 1977); Bronnenkant (1983); Wilson (1985); Meaney (1995); Bailey (1996).

- Known from glosses:

  - *lupercal*: *haerg*
  - *lupercal*: *hearg*
  - *sacellorum*: *haerga* ‘temples’ gen. pl.
  - *sacelli*: *heargs* ‘temple’ gen. sing.
  - *simulacris*: *hergum* ‘icons’ dat. pl.
  - *lucum*: *hearga* ‘sacred grove’
  - *fana*: *heargas* ‘fane’
  - *fanatice*: *heahrlicre* ‘pertaining to a temple’
  - *Capitolii*: *dæs heafodlican hearges* ‘of the chief temple’
  - *Amphitrioniadæ, id est, Herculis sacello*: *hearge*
  - *Hercules*: *hearge*
Harrow on the Hill, Middlesex and others

The first three places are on prominent hills.

- *gumeninga hergæ* S:106, a charter of 767
- *Besinga hearth* S:235, a charter of “688”
- Great and Little Harrowden, Northamptonshire *Hargedone* 1086
- Peper Harow, Surrey *Pipereherge* 1086
- Harrowden, Bedfordshire *Herghetone* 1086
- Harrow Fields in Cheshire: archaeological evidence has been found which might support the interpretation of a hill-top shrine associated with pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon ritual activities (Vipond 1993; Semple 2007).
Harriden’s Farm, Kingsclere

Robert de Harwedon 1304 occurs in this area
Warner (1985) finds heathenism in Sutton Hoo in Suffolk solely on the basis of three field-names in a 17th century manorial survey:

- Harrough pightle
- Thurstow went
- Hellond

Warning: this is reading far too much into the data.
Harrow — the agricultural implement

- Classical Latin *hirpex* (*occo ‘I harrow’*)
- Old English *egeþe*
- Medieval Latin *herpex, harpex, herpica, harpica, hercia, herchia, harcia, hacia, hertica*
- Middle English *haru, harou, harewe, harwe, harrowe, harrow*
  < Old English *hearwe*?
- *For plogh and haru [harwe, harou] cuth he dight* a1300 Cursor Mundi
- *Emma le Harewere* early 13th (Flixton near Bungay, Suffolk)
A harrow in the Bayeux Tapestry
East Anglian fields
East Anglian fields 1

1 unam aliam peciam prati que vocatum Harewe 1208, Shadingfield, Suffolk
2 le Harwe t. Henry III [1217-1272], Cretingham, Suffolk
3 le Harwe 12 Edward I [1283/4], Hickling, Norfolk “jungerie”
4 (piece of moor called) Harwe late 13th, Edingthorpe, Norfolk
5 (turbaries in) le Harwe 1313, Ormesby or Burgh, Norfolk
6 una pecia terre vocata le Harwe 1325; unum pictellum nativum vocatum le Harowe in Sibton 1484; Sibton, Suffolk
7 (meadow and pasture in) le Harwe (beside the stream) 1350, Bocking, Essex
8 (meadow at the) Harwe (in the Turfpits) 1303-50, Walsham le Willows, Suffolk
East Anglian fields 2

9 Harewe 1409, Dilham, Norfolk (fen)
10 le Harwe in Langenok 1421, Lannock, Baldock
11 Harowpightyil 1465, Hasketon, Suffolk
12 le Harrowe 1466, le Harrows 1677. Repps with Bastwick, Norfolk
13 a crofte called le Harwe 1471. Elmswell, Suffolk
14 Harlowes alias Harowes 1499, Barnham, Suffolk
15 a piece of land called the Harow 1506, Wantisden, Suffolk
16 (pightle called) le Harowe 1518, Mendham, Norfolk
17 le Harowe 1553, Fundenhall, Norfolk
18 le Harowe 1557, Gillingham, Norfolk
19 Harrow 1594, 1823, Shotley, Suffolk
20 (Little and Great) Harrow 1627, 1637 Clippesby, Norfolk
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Harrowe Close 1629-30, Garboldisham, Norfolk</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Le harrowe 1544; (wood called) The Harrow 1631, Harrow Wood 1735</td>
<td>Freston, Suffolk</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Harrough Pightle 17th., Sutton Hoo, Suffolk</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>Harrowe Pightle 1700, Shropham, Norfolk</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>(a close called the) Harrow 1724, Brockford, Suffolk</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>The Harrow 1735, Harkstead, Suffolk</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>Harrow Pightle 1811, Uggeshall, Suffolk</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>Harrow Street Farm, Stoke-by-Nayland, Suffolk</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>The Harrow 1840, Chelmondiston, Suffolk</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>Upper Harrow Hill 1840, Bradfield St. Clare, Suffolk</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>Harrows c.1840, Debenham, Suffolk</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>(piece of enclosed land called) Harrow 1853, Burgh, Suffolk</td>
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Theories

- Is a Harrow field one where a harrow is normally kept?
- Or one first broken-in or cleared by harrowing?
- Extended meanings: hearse, bier, candelabrum
- *The plough and harrow* public house
- a gate
- a cry of distress
Harrow – a gate

- *Paid for ye harrow of a gate* 1528 (Canterbury)
- “the hinder upright timber of a gate by which it is hung to its post, the ‘harr’ ” (EDD)
- 2a. A frame with pegs or spikes on which skins were stretched to dry, a parchment-maker’s frame; 2b a sledge or sled 2c ?some kind of hurdle or wickerwork frame. Most of the citations for 2a are from religious texts and liken Christ’s body on the cross to a parchment stretched on a harrow. (MED)
Haro! Alas!

- a1400 Sche... gradde ‘Harrow!’ with gret rage.
- 1481 I crye out harowe on them that so falsely haue belyed me.
- ‘Out! help! allas! harrow!’ he gan to crye c.1400
- Rather late and harwe forms not found
- Cf. fields called Hungry Hill, Hare’m-Scare’m, Pity Me, Rotten Row etc.

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Gelling, Margaret (1962). “Place-names and Anglo-Saxon paganism”. In: *University of Birmingham Historical Journal* 8, pp. 7–25.


