

Gannock in King's Lynn

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Last modified 2017-04-10 13:09

Submitted to *JEPNS* 2017-03-03.
Revised 2017-04-08.

The existence of numerous minor places called *Gannock*, a name of unknown etymology and meaning, has been a recognized puzzle of place-name studies since the early volumes of the English Place-Name Society. The names typically denote farmsteads, tenements, and fields. Some examples are:

1. Cambridgeshire: *Gannock* 1344 in Dullingham; two other unlocated examples ([PN C](#): 326).
2. Hertfordshire: *Gannock Green* in Reed, *le Gannok* 1335 (a *John atte Gannok* 1287 cannot be securely located to this place); *Gannock* in Sandon, *le Gannok* 1335; *Gannock* in Aldenham 1556 ([PN Hrt](#): 161, 164; [PN D1](#): liii).
3. Lincolnshire: *Gaunoke* 1402 in Bonby ([PN L2](#): 61); *Gannocks* in Great Grimsby ([PN L5](#): 56); Sutton *Gannock* (or Sutton St Edmund), mentioned by Hallam (1961, 1954: 39–40).
4. Middlesex: *Ganwick Corner* in South Mimms, *Gannokk* 1472 ([PN Mx](#): 77).
5. Shropshire: *Gannow Hill* in Ellesmere, associated with a *Ric. de Geannok* 1255–6 in [PN Sa5](#): 60.
6. Suffolk: *le Gannok* 1325, a field in Sibton (Denney 1960: 55); *Ganwick Farm* in Great Wrating, recorded as *Gannok* 1342 (Calendar of Court Rolls vi.367); and *Gannock Cottages* in Shimpling, marked on early OS maps.
7. Yorkshire: *le Gannock* 1372 in Sutton-on-Hull ([PN YE](#): 319); close called *le Gannok* in Hedon 1349 TNA DDCC/45/15.

In the first thorough discussion of the problem, McIntosh (1940) pointed out three occurrences of a word *gannokes* in the fourteenth-century *Chronicle of Thomas Castleford*,¹ where it apparently means ‘stronghold’ or ‘fortress’.² He connected this word to *gannok* in some manuscripts of the *Chronicle of Pierre de Langtoft*, which has variant readings *Talebot* and *galbot*. He argued that although *gannok* here was a textual corruption (with the variants being more correct), it was nevertheless one meaningful (as ‘stronghold’) to the scribe who wrote it.³ McIntosh then considered other places called *Gannock* in England, and rightly rejected the etymologies **gamen-āc* ‘game oak’ and **gamen-hōh* ‘game hill-spur’ given in [PN Wo](#): 341 and [PN Hrt](#): 164. He then suggested instead that the word comes from the name of Degannwy castle in north Wales, which is always *Gannoc* or similar in medieval Latin texts. But though this origin might explain the literary usage of *Gannock* for a fortress, it is hard to



Figure 1: The Gannock Gate in King's Lynn, looking east from inside the town. This present gate is something of a folly, being reconstructed from fragments, but it is likely to be in the same spot as the original Gannock Gate, and it is adjacent to Gannock Bridge. Photograph taken 2016-06-03.



Figure 2: The 1588 map of King's Lynn from BL 71. The site of the Gannock gate is immediately south of the Red Mount (a chapel on a mound, just outside the town defences), approximately half-way between the East gate, with a road leading to Gaywood, and the South gate. Reproduced by permission of the Norfolk Record Office.

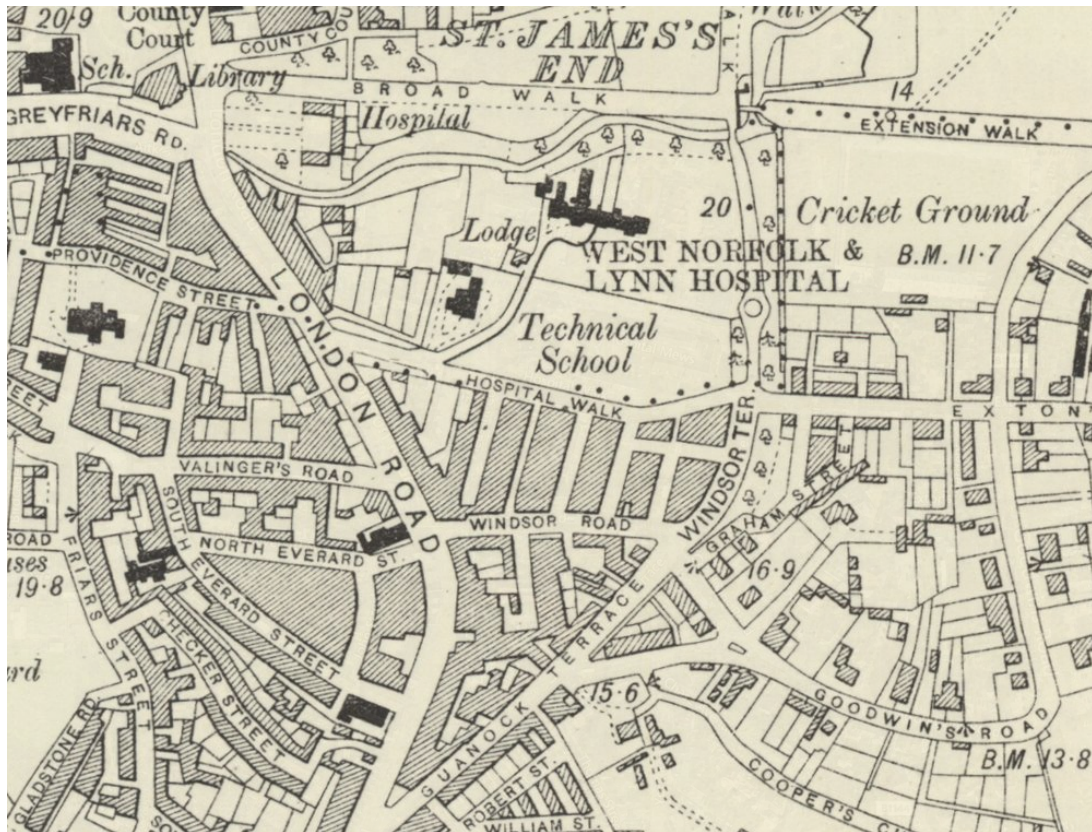


Figure 3: Part of the 1906 Ordnance Survey 6" map of King's Lynn. The Gannock gate and bridge are at the point where Broad Walk meets Extension Walk. The surviving street Guanock Terrace is marked to the south. Reproduced by permission of the National Library of Scotland.

see why it should have been applied to fields and other unfortified places, so the problem was not fully solved by McIntosh.

The question was most recently reviewed by Gelling, while examining the name of Gannow Hill in Shropshire (PN Sa5: 60–1). She noted that *Gannok* is found in southern and eastern counties but apparently interchanges with an equivalent *Gannow* in the west; both are unexplained but a connection between them is likely. She furthermore was not convinced by the case made by Horovitz and Coates, in their discussion of Gnosall in Staffordshire, for an origin in Welsh *genou* ‘mouth of a valley’ (Coates and Breeze 2000: 184–92). She concluded that “for the moment, both terms can be considered to lack definitive explanation”. Gelling noted briefly the instance of *Le Gannok* in King’s Lynn but without pointing out that it is a surviving name.⁴ It is therefore the purpose of this article to assemble the documentary evidence for this place, and to argue that it was by far the most significant of all the examples in England, denoting as it did a major location in an important town. Although we will not solve the problem, new directions for further research are indicated.

The major medieval port of King’s Lynn possesses a large archive of town muniments.⁵ The locality called (*le*) *Gannok* is especially well recorded from 1316 onwards; the instances here listed show that the name was applied to a gate with a *clavis* ‘key’, a bridge (*pontis*), a causeway (*calcetum*), a sluice (*clouse*), and a pasture.⁶ These places were all located on the eastern boundary of the town, with the Gannock Gate (Figure 1) at grid reference TF624197, as may be determined from maps in Andrews (2013); see also Figures 2 and 3.

clavis del Gannok 1316 April 16 RRL 5.
le Gannoc 1321 in Norfolk Record Office DCN 61/14.
pontis del Gannok 1342 September 9 RRL 127.
pro ponte del Gannok 1342 September 10 RRL 135.
calcetum vocatum le Gannok mid 14th (Owen 1984: 154).
Cannokyate 1392 Pat Sandred.
Gannockgate 1421 Lynn Guild Hall R Sandred.
Gannock Gates 1426 Lynn Hall Books Sandred.
Gannockbrigge 1426 (Owen 1984: 195).
Gannok clouse, Gannokyate 1430 (Owen 1984: 216).
Southegannok c.1445 (Owen 1984: 155).
Gannok Bank 1487 (Gaywood, along Middleton Stop Drain) Terr Sandred.
pasture at Old Gannok callid the Hill 1557 Rental Sandred.
Gannock gate(s) 1575 Survey Sandred.
Gannock pasture 1575, 1577 Survey Sandred.
Gannock Gates 1577 Survey Sandred.
pasture at Gannok by the Mownt 1557 Rental Sandred.
Gannock sluice 1577 Survey Sandred.
Ould Gannock 1577 Survey Sandred.
Gannok without, Gannok within c.1577 (Owen 1984: 199).
Gate of Ould Gannock 1588 Lynn C.51 Sandred.
Gannock Gate 1588 Lynn C.51 Sandred.

The name survives (or, more likely, has been revived) as Guanock Terrace, leading to the old south gate of the town. The odd spelling has apparently been taken from Hillen (1907: 18), where the absurd derivation “*Gua* is of the same origin as war, and *knock* is the British for

hill” is mentioned. The place-name also gave rise to a well-recorded surname, in particular that of a prominent *Thomas atte Gannok*, who held lands in Lynn and Tatterford in the early fourteenth century, and is often described as a clerk or chaplain.⁷

As no other etymology is apparent, a re-examination of McIntosh’s suggestion of a connection to Degannwy Castle is called for. The site, at the mouth of the Conwy River, was of high strategic importance in marking the boundary of the lands of the princes of Gwynedd to the west, and the lands of the kings of England to the east; this was especially so during the reign of Henry III.

The name of the Welsh castle is first recorded in the form *Gannok* in 1211, in a very significant charter of King John in which Llywelyn ap Iorwerth quitclaims the castle of Degannwy, along with much other property, to John (Pryce 2005: 386–8). This charter had the bishop John de Grey of Norwich as principal witness and guarantor;⁸ its historical significance is discussed by Smith (1984). Thenceforth only the spellings *Gannok*, *Gannoch*, or *Gannoc*⁹ are used in Latin documents from England; they are especially common in records of the 1240s such as the Fine Rolls of Henry III, and in the Patent Rolls and Close Rolls.

Archeological work has found evidence of repeated destruction and rebuilding of the castle (Alcock 1967). Despite the agreement of 1211, the castle was regained by Llywelyn in 1213. In 1240 or 1241 it was slighted by Dafydd ap Llywelyn before a threatened recapture by the English, which was successful. In the years 1245–50 Henry III undertook a major strengthening operation; this work was (perhaps significantly) known to the late-thirteenth-century Norwich chronicler Bartholomew de Cotton; under 1245, he writes *Eodem anno dominus rex firmavit Castellum de Gannoc, quod Wallensibus est quasi spina in oculis* [In this year the king fortified the castle of Degannwy, which to the Welsh is like a thorn in the eye] (Luard 1859: 125).¹⁰ Llywelyn ap Gruffydd captured the castle in 1263 and demolished it (Alcock 1967: 192). It is less well known that Henry made an unsuccessful attempt to create a borough at Degannwy, issuing a charter to that effect in 1252 (Bateson 1902: 287–8).¹¹

The name Degannwy is derived by Owen and Morgan (2007: 120–1) from the tribal name *Decantae*, with the *Gannok* forms arising by re-interpretation of the initial syllable *De-* as the Latin preposition *de*. What is not made clear by Owen and Morgan, however, is the origin of the forms with a final stop consonant. Most likely they are from the Welsh suffix *-og* (Richards 1965), and indeed in the truce agreement of 1260 between Llywelyn ap Gruffudd and Henry III, the spellings *Cannowe* and *Cannok*’ are found together in the same document (Pryce 2005: 510).¹² A close parallel is provided by early spellings for Glamorgan, which alternate between forms such as *Morgannou* and others such as *Morgannoc* (Owen and Morgan 2007: 166). Thus, although the difference in meaning (if any) between these two types is unclear, there may well be an explanation here for the alternation between *Gannok* and *Gannow* noted by Gelling in Shropshire.

The question thus arises of whether the name of the Welsh castle might have been transferred to King’s Lynn or other places in England. We note that no English *Gannock* has a name recorded before *Gannok* as a reference to Degannwy, so proposing such a transfer is chronologically consistent. Finding hard evidence of motivation of transfers of place-names is notoriously difficult, but a connection through the activities of John de Grey may be suggested. We have seen that Grey witnessed the agreement between King John and Llywelyn ap Iorwerth in 1211; in fact Grey had been a close associate of the king throughout most

of his reign (Harper-Bill 1990: xxxvii–xxxix). He was responsible for obtaining a charter of privileges for King’s Lynn from the king in 1204,¹³ and thus in effect becoming the principal founder of Lynn as a port and market town. To oversee these commercial activities, Grey built a bishop’s palace at Gaywood just outside the town to the east; there is a report of this by Bartholomew de Cotton: *Johannes de Gray ... fecit aulam et totam choream ædificiorum apud Geywude* [John de Grey built a house and all its precincts at Gaywood] (Luard 1859: 393). The house was one kilometre east of what came to be called the Gannock gate of Lynn. Our hypothesis will thus be that the name *Gannok* was at first applied to some part of the town wall and fortified gate in the region of the Gannock gate, and this was because of some resemblance to the eponymous Welsh castle, as perceived by John de Grey.

We must also consider a separate *Gannok* in Norwich; it is not mentioned in PN Nf1. Blomefield and Parkin (1805–1810: iii, chapter 19) quote “a certain wharf in [the River] Wensum against the *Gannok*” from a document of 1429. Norfolk Record Office holds records from 1547 referring to a close in Thorpe near Norwich called *Gannock*,¹⁴ and a lease from 1673 referring to *le Gannok* outside Bishopgate.¹⁵ Bishopgate is to the east of the cathedral, and this *Gannok* was very likely across the Wensum in the Thorpe area of Norwich. It seems certain that there has been some confusion in the secondary historical literature between the two places, arising from the fact that both were properties of the tightly coupled Norwich establishments of the cathedral and the priory. But there seems to be a clear distinction: *Gannok* in Lynn belong to the bishop, and *Gannok* in Norwich belonged to the cellarer of the priory. It may thus now be possible to clear up some of this confusion. Saunders (1930: 95) claimed, based on unspecified entries in cellarer’s rolls from the priory, that a place called *le Gannok*, which he assumed to be in Lynn, was “evidently a farm, as stipends were paid to a Keeper and a *porcarius* there”. This statement led Gelling (PN Sa5: 61) to believe that there was pig-keeper at *Le Gannok*, and she thus followed Saunders in believing that *Gannok* could denote a farm. However, an examination of the extensive set of fourteenth-century cellarer’s rolls reveals that the entries more precisely take forms such as *Magro’ Porcar’*, *Magistr’ porc’* (‘master pig-keeper’), and *custodi porcor’* (‘keeper of the pigs’).¹⁶ The cellarer had no interests in Lynn, and there is no proof (and little likelihood) that *le Gannok* referred to in his rolls was in that town. It seems rather that Saunders was unaware of the second *Gannok* in Norwich and so assumed that these references were to *Gannok* in Lynn, and this error was perpetuated by Gelling. It is not yet possible to say why or how the Norwich *Gannok* received its name, though it appears to be a later echo of the Lynn *Gannok*.

It is important to note that there was also a word *gannoker*, traditionally taken to mean ‘taverner, ale-seller’,¹⁷ but now known to have had the earlier and probably primary sense of ‘regrater’, one who resells ale or bread at a profit; the term *gannoker* was very likely derived from a verb **gannoken* ‘to grate’ (Briggs, Hoppitt, and Ridgard 2016). This behaviour infringed local regulations, and such *gannokers* were frequently fined in manorial courts. Parkin (1998) discusses medieval regrating in detail, and cites (p.149) an example from a Wisbech court roll in which a list of regraters is headed *Gannok’*. The earliest known examples occur in East Anglia, so a speculation may be offered that the first *gannokers* were so named from the activity of regrating at the Gannock gate in Lynn, and it would then be specifically the bishop’s local regulations which were being violated. Susan Maddock (personal communication) has found numerous people described as *gannokker* or *gannocker’* in a

Lynn borough leet roll of c.1361, so the term was certainly used in the town.¹⁸

The proposals made herein may thus be summarized: Gannock in King's Lynn is certainly the most significant of the English examples of the name, though it has not previously been discussed in the place-name literature. It is the only example in a town, it has the most extensive records, and it is the earliest explicitly recorded as a place-name, since the 1255–6 and 1287 examples noted above are surnames which might in principle come from Wales. Furthermore, a potential connection to Degannwy castle is available through the person of John de Grey, even if a transfer of the name is not proven. But even if these points are considered plausible motivations for this specific case of Gannock in King's Lynn, the problem of all the other minor places called *Gannock* remains. Gelling (PN Sa5: 61) preferred to think that *gannok* had an unrecorded meaning 'shelter', but this option has been derived by extrapolating backwards from *gannoker* = 'taverner' to *gannok* = 'tavern, inn, shelter'. This deduction is unjustified if the argument that *gannoker* does not principally mean 'taverner' is accepted. Perhaps rather the small *Gannocks* were simply places where *gannocking* was carried out. In any case more evidence on the usages of the verb **gannocken* and the noun *gannoker* just might help clarify the whole picture; I suggest that these lexical items and the place-names are connected in some way still mysterious.

Acknowledgement: I thank Susan Maddock for sharing her extensive knowledge of the history and topography of King's Lynn, and for discussions which led to the clarification of a number of points; Richard Morgan for providing details and advice on early spellings of Glamorgan; and Frank Meeres for much help in the Norfolk Record Office.

Notes

- 1 *Gannokes* occur in lines 27165, 34437, and 38059 in the edition of Eckhardt (1996).
- 2 McIntosh (1940: 58) adds the additional Bedfordshire examples of *The Gannock* late 16th in Tempsford; *Gannock Field* 1669 in Kempston.
- 3 This scribal corruption had already been pointed out by Bradley (1898), and the debate over the word and its meaning was noted by Hillen (1907: 18).
- 4 But see below for the point that Gelling may in fact have been mistaken, and her *Le Gannok* might have been in Norwich.
- 5 The Lynn town archive was re-installed in 2016 in a new facility in the ancient Guildhall. For details of the Lynn MSS, see Harrod (1874), Jeaffreson (1887), and Ingleby (1922), and especially Owen (1984).
- 6 RRL is the *Red Register of Lynn* (Ingleby n.d). "Sandred" denotes items in the collection of Norfolk place-name material in the Institute for Name-Studies at the University of Nottingham.
- 7 *Thomas atte Gannok* appears in 1313/4 in Feet of Fines (Rye 1881: ii.239 no.394), and later in Norfolk Record Office DCN 44/76/17 (quitclaim by William de Brunchon burgess of Lynn to *Thomas atte Gannoc de Tatterford*) 1334. He was dead by 14 March 1351 (Calendar of Patent Rolls, 25 Ed III). For more examples of *atte Gannok*, *del Gannok* etc. as a surname, see Carlsson (1989), though Carlsson has nothing useful to say.
- 8 For more on John de Grey (or Gray), who died in 1214, see Haines (2004) and Harper-

Bill (1990: xxxvii–xxxix).

9 And once corruptly *Gannuot* (Pryce 2005: 498)

10 This translation, and the subsequent one from Cotton, are my own.

11 For the political background to the charters mentioned here (which form part of the events leading up to Magna Carta), see Smith (1984).

12 Sporadic spellings with initial *C-* in place of *G-* are found; some of these may simply be mistranscriptions.

13 King's Lynn Borough Archives KL/C 2/1; Owen (1984: no.412)

14 DCN 41/1–7.

15 DCN 48/2.

16 Norfolk Record Office DCN1/2/16 (1329–30) and 1/2/19 (1350–1); I thank Frank Meeres for identifying these entries (which I have myself confirmed), which are probably the same as those seen by Saunders.

17 Thus in OED and MED. The OED entry for *ganneker* (not revised since 1898) gives its earliest citation from c.1380; while MED starts with a *Beatrix le Gannoker* from 1330, without providing any evidence for the sense of the surname.

18 King's Lynn Borough Archives, KL/C 17/7. The earliest example of *gannok*' as a verb in Briggs, Hoppitt, and Ridgard (2016) is of 1315, from Redgrave in Suffolk.

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