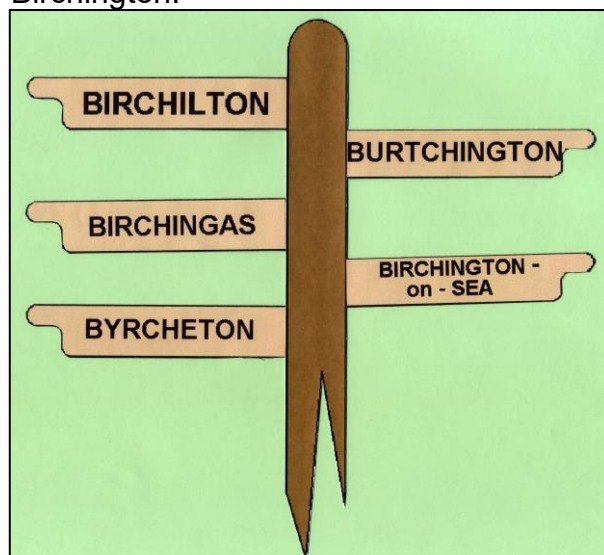


THE NAME – BIRCHINGTON

The origin and meaning of the name Birchington is referred to by nearly all historians of Kent. In most old documents relating to this place, such as the Churchwardens' Account Books, dating from 1531, the Poor Books, dating from about 1607, and documents relating to Birchington as a Non-Corporate Limb of the Cinque Port of Dover, Birchington is referred to as "The Ville of Birchington."



The word "Ville", or "Vil", or "WmVill" is an old Anglo-Saxon French word meaning a Village or Parish. It is a territorial unit or division under the feudal system consisting of a number of houses or buildings with their adjacent lands. It really corresponds to Parish.

The word Birchington is Saxon in origin. The authority on the Place Names of Kent is J. K. Wallenberg of Uppsala University who published in 1934 his book "The Place Names of Kent".

According to his book the earliest known document with the name is the Assize Rolls for Kent of 1240, when the name appears as "de Birchilton."

In the Assize Rolls of 1254 it appears as "de Bruchinton", "de Berchinton" and "Bircheton". In the Patent Rolls of the reign of Henry III, 1264, it appears as "Berchelton." In the Feet of Fines of Kent of 1274 it is "Byrchelton". In the Assize Rolls of 1278 it is "de Berchilton", and in the Feet of Fines of 1292 it appears as "Byrcheton".

From these Wallenberg suggests that the name is Old English.

"Bierce" is Old English for birch (trees).

"hyl" is a slight hill or rising ground.

"tun" is Old English and meant a village which grew up round a farm or manor.

So the name means the village on the rising ground in the birch trees. Birchington is on slightly rising ground and we still have Church Hill. The strange thing is, very few birch trees grow here naturally, because they need light sandy soil, not heavy chalky soil which is what Thanet mainly consists of. It must be remembered that in early times Thanet was much more wooded than now and in the immediate neighbourhood are Woodchurch (the Church of St. Nicholas at Wode), Acol or Acholte, the oak wood, Westwood, Northwood, Southwood. Hasted in his History of Kent says that "anciently there was much more woodland in Thanet and several viles still preserve the memory of these woods".

Philpott, who published his "Villara Cantianum" in 1670 considers the name was originally Bircheton, the enclosure where the birch trees grow.

The Oxford Dictionary of English Place Names by E. Kwall says of Birchington, "Bircheton", Tun among the Birches.

The change from Birchilton, to Burchenton, where the birch trees grow, can be accounted for by the Saxon manner of forming the plural by adding en, as in oxen, brethren, children, housen, and further change to Birchington would be a case of alteration in the spelling.

The following are some of the many different ways the name is spelt in the Churchwardens' Account Books, Poor Books and other documents in our archives –

Birchyngton, Byrchyngton, Byrchyntone, Bychenton, Byrchinton, Birchinyetonne, Birchingetonn, Bircheingetonn, Burchenyetonn, Burcheton, Burchenton, Birchenton etc.

In early days there was no standard spelling so whoever kept the Churchwardens' Books etc, and it was usually the Minister, spelt the name as he said it and thought it should be spelt.

Acol

Acol is also referred to as a Vill.

According to Wallenberg the name first appears in the Assize Rolls of 1270 as "de Acholt", also in 1304 Assize Rolls as "de Acholte", and in the Feet of Fines of 1343 as Acholte.

It is Old English made up of –

Ac – Oak, and Holt – Wood.

When the St. Mildred's Church of Acol was dedicated in 1876 by the Bishop of Dover, in his sermon he referred to the name, "in the oak wood".



In the earliest detailed map of Thanet by Thomas of Elmham, dated 1414, Woodchurch is shown within a wood and there are still stands of trees in the little community, including around the meadow where the old church once stood.