GLOUCESTER AND DISTRICT ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH GROUP

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~ THE NAMES OF GLOUCESTER ~

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The Roman name *Glevum*, pronounced Glay-wum, has evolved into *Gloucester* through four different languages. The sounds represented by G, L and V have persisted, but every other vowel in the alphabet has been tried in place of E.

The conquering Romans generally looked to the Britons to name their sites. Modern scholarship confirms that *Glevum* Latinizes a lost British word *glaivon* related to Welsh *gloew*, 'bright'. This need not mean that the name is pre-Roman. The Latin ending *-um* can be inflected *-i* and *-o* to convey the additional meanings 'at', 'of' and 'from'.

The name is located at Gloucester by the *Antonine Itinerary*, a third-century road book in the corrupt form *Clevo*, a scribe's error for *Glevo*. In the Ravenna Cosmography, a gazetteer based on fourth-century sources, it appears as *Glebon colonia, Glebon* being a lapse into the patois of the author's native Ravenna.

Oddly, the standard spelling appears only in inscriptions to men of Glevum who moved elsewhere. A lost tomb stone at Bath had *coloniae Glev*, a tombstone at Rome has *Glevi* with *Ner*, in allusion to the emperor Nerva, and a soldier's discharge certificate of the Antonine era (149-190) from Colchester has *Glevi* alone. The full form of the name can be restored by analogy as *colonia Nerviana Glevensis*, or *-ium*, 'the Nervian colony Gloucestrian' or 'of the Gloucestrians'.

The people of Roman and dark-age Britain wrote Latin but spoke British. Nennius, a Welsh priest of the late eighth century, gives the British name *Cair Gloiv*, 'bright citadel', alongside a Saxon equivalent, *Britannico sermone Cair Gloiv, Saxonice autem Gloecester*. In the mid-twelfth century, Geoffrey of Monmouth said that the name *Kaer Glov* was still current, but the contemporary *Chronicle of the princes (Brut y Tywysogion)* adopted the modern Welsh form *Kaer Loyw*.

The Saxons captured the place in 577. They assimilated the name to their word *gleaw*, 'wise' and, as usual at a Roman site, added the suffix *ceastre*, 'city'. *Gleaweceastre* is the usual form in Anglo-Saxon charters and pre-conquest versions of the *Anglo-Saxon chronicle*. In the eleventh century this was commonly modified to *Gleweceaster*, especially on pennies of the local mint where it is spelt *Glece* - with a runic wyn substituted for W.

A few pennies of Harthacriut (1035-1042), apparently under British influence, spell the name *Gleov*. Variants of this form were favoured by the Norman conquerors, who followed their usual practice in changing *-ceastre* to *-cestre*. Domesday Book, in 1086, has *Glowecestre*. Title deeds collected in the *Cartulary* of Gloucester Abbey show that the modern spelling prevailed from about 1100, initially Latinized as *Gloucestria*.

Since then the spoken name has diverged from the Anglo-Norman written name. The loss of the middle syllable is first documented by phonetic spellings *Glowster* in Thornbury parish register for 1618 and *Gloster* in Leonard Stanley parish register for 1666. The shortening of the first syllable may be documented by the spelling *Glocester* or *Glocestria* which has recurred sporadically since it first occurred in the *Tewkesbury Annals* for 1148.

Today most people pronounce it short but the city's rugby football club supporters' chant *Glou-ster, Glou-ster* preserves an older pronunciation of the ancient name.

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