ENGLISH FIELD NAMES

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England is an onomastician's paradise: over the years, detailed studies of many different kinds of English names have been compiled and published. English place names have been previously discussed in Word Ways ("Curious British Placenames" in August 1974, "Piddle-trenthide" in May 1975); in addition, it has reviewed books of house names (May 1972), surnames (May 1980) and personal nicknames (August 1979). But did you know that the English have also made a practice of naming all the pieces of land forming part of the agrarian economy of a village? These 'field names', as they are called, have been quite thoroughly documented by the appropriately-named John Field in English Field Names: A Dictionary, issued in many editions (the material below can be found in the 1972 Gale Research Company edition). Most are modern names, being taken from the Tithe Awards (c 1840) or later documents; however, the practice goes back many centuries.

I have enjoyed browsing through this book, and hope that Word Ways readers will share my enthusiasm after reading the following sample (two for each letter of the alphabet). Following Field, the parish and county of the land cited is given.

AMERICAN MEADOW Brimington Derbyshire transferred name alluding to remote pieces of land
APPLE PIE PIGHTLE Mapledurham Oxfordshire land on which the hairy willow-herb grew
BARLEY ARRISH Ilsington Devon land on which barley was grown
BROAD ARSE PIECE Fenny Bentley Derbyshire wide piece of land
CANADA ALLOTMENTS Ashley Cambridge transferred name for distant pieces of land
CUT THROAT COPPICE Solihull Warwickshire land on which a murder took place
DIRTY SHANKS Pilling Lancashire all the land is good for is to soil the legs of those working on it
DUNGY LEAZE Almondsbury Gloucestershire land to which manure was applied
EGYPT Wheatenhurst Gloucestershire transferred name for a remote piece of land
EIGHTEEN PENNYWORTH Altrincham Cheshire land valued at the stated sum of money
FEelly MEADOW Bulthy Shropshire marshy land
FLAISHET Howell Dorset swampy or waterlogged land
GIG FIELD Norton Cheshire land containing pools in which flax was retted
10. Kiss Arse Rainow Cheshir: may refer to a particular topographic feature...a buttock-shaped hill.


13. MAMMOCKS Yate Gloucestersh and: hummocklands, untidy heaps.

14. MARKHOS W LANE Cotgrave Nottinghamsh and: land on which hares were seen.

15. NEAT MARSH Preston East Riding Yorksh and: cattle marshland.

16. NETTLE SLACK Kendal Westmoreland: place where nettles grow.

17. OWLER HAG Derwent Derbysh and: land on which alder trees grew.

18. OYSTER END Little Haddam Hertfordsh and: land on which a sheepfold was sited.

19. PEAS BONGES Hope Derbysh and: land on which peas were grown.

20. PISS FURLONGS Warborough Oxfordsh and: land on which peas were grown.

21. QU RSSERS HEY Dutton Cheshir: bleaching ground.

22. ROOD PIECE East Dereham Norfolk: land a quarter of an acre in area.

23. RUSHEY PIDDLE Mortimer Berkshire: land abounding in rushes.

24. SALTPIE Sutton Downes Cheshir: land containing a lean-to shed.

25. SPITTLE CROATS Ardeley Hertfordsh and: land owned by a hospital, or on which a hospital was built.


27. TOOTLE Paulerspury Northamptonsh and: land on a lookout hill.

28. UPPER WONG Hoby Leicestersh and: land above a similarly named feature.

29. VETCH BUTTS Pownall Fee Cheshir: land on which vetches are grown.

30. VIXENDELL Durley Hampsh and: land on which foxes are found.

31. YES FIELD Swerford Oxfordsh and: S-shaped piece of land.


33. ZIDLES All Cannings Wiltsh ir: hilly land at the side.