NAUGHTY WORDS IN BRITISH PLACENAMES

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The source material for this article has been collected fairly casually over a number of years, with a few gaps filled recently by searching gazetteers of British placenames. At first blush, the material might seem more suitable for Dr. Reinhold Aman's Maledicta, the International Journal of Verbal Aggression. However, his journal is more concerned with the employment of words for male­dictive purposes, whereas Word Ways emphasizes the wordplay aspect of language— in this instance, the nesting of potentially-em­barrassing words in normal-appearing placenames. In response to my enquiry, the editor confirmed that material of this nature "could be published in Word Ways without embarrassment" if couched in a strictly logological format. (Blast! the whole idea of this mate­rial is that it is embarrassing!)

The idea for this article was sparked some years ago by the realisation that the British placename Scunthorpe had a naughty word embedded in it. I wondered how many other placenames contained obscenities, rude words, or subjects not fit for polite conversation. I make no claims for the collection given below being exhaustive. I could have gone on and researched many scores of additional such names, but I had to stop somewhere. 69 seemed like a good enough number to stop at!

In most of the examples, the offensive word directly appears within the placename. However, in a few cases it was necessary to resort to other forms of wordplay: adjacent letters in scrambled form, non-adjacent letters in proper order, or deletions (such as FANY for FANNY, or PIS, an obsolete variant of PISS). These are tagged with asterisks.

A few of the words used (BALLOCK for 'testicle' and QUAINT for 'female pudendum') are drawn from early English and probably unfamiliar to the average reader. Several placenames are more likely to offend British sensibilities than American ones. BRISTOL (Cities) is rhyming slang for 'titties', and (Hampton) WICK for 'prick'. BONK is British slang for 'copulate', found in the Longman Register of New Words (1989). CUNNY and PRAT are both defined as 'female pudendum' in Eric Partridge's A Dictionary of Slang and Unconvention­tional English. SOD has the British meaning of 'sodomite'.

I hope that no one will be at all offended by this rather pecu­liar itinerary of British places and geographical features. Perhaps one or two readers will be inspired to search for similar examples in the United States or other countries.
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r examples

ARSEnal an area of the London borough of Islington, and also
the name of a railway station in the area
CARSEburn a village in Forfarshire
mARSEtt a hamlet in North Yorkshire
tARSET a parish in Northumberland
AS sel a river in Ayrshire (almost homonymous with 'asshole')
BALLOch* a village in Dunbartonshire (homonymous with 'ballock')
BALL'S pond a district in Islington, London
BONKle a village in Lanarkshire
BOTTOMs a locality in West Yorkshire
broadBOTTOM a locality in Cheshire
pratt's BOTTOM a hamlet in Kent
BREAST an island in County Wexford, Ireland
BRISTOL a large town in Avon
BUMBLE hole a locality in Worcestershire
prettyBUSH a locality in County Wicklow, Ireland
high BUSTon a parish in Northumberland
COCKermouth a town in Cumbria
COCKfosters a district in Middlesex, and also the name of a railway
station in the area
COCKing a village in West Sussex
COCKs a locality in Cornwall
COCKshot a locality in Worcestershire
CRAPstone a hamlet in Devon
sCRAPtoft a parish in Leicestershire
CUNNYberry a fixed light in the sea-inlet of Lough Foyle, between
Counties Donegal and Londonderry
sCUNThorpe a town in Humberside
lower DICKer a hamlet in East Sussex
the DICKer a village in East Sussex
upper DICKer a hamlet in East Sussex
DIDDLEbury a parish in Shropshire
FANNYside a loch and moor in Dunbartonshire
FANNYville a seat in County Tipperary, Ireland
FANYbedwell* a hamlet in Denbighshire (an embarrassing image)
FARTHorpe a hamlet in Lincolnshire
FARTown a hamlet in Yorkshire
FELL gATE* a locality in Durham
UCKField* a town in East Sussex
GAYS a seat in Devonshire
MUFF a village in County Donegal, Ireland
For the final item, I propose TITESKIN, a parish in County Cork, Ireland, which is made up of two elements, neither embarrassing in itself, but combining into a most suggestive whole!