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, "Piddles" 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
FEGGY MEADOW Bulthby Shropshire marshy land
FLAISHET Howell Dorset swampy or waterlogged land
GIG FIELD Norton Cheshire land containing pools in which flax was retted
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GOLDFINDER Little Stretton Leicestershr complimentary name for a profitable field
HAPPERSNAPPER Froxfield Hampshir enclosure with a wicket gate
HOPPITS Eastwick Hertfordshir a small enclosure
ICE HOUSE PLANTATION Mere Cheshir copse near outbuilding used as a cold store
ITCHINGS, THE Acton Burnell Shropshir part of field cultivated while the rest lies fallow
JEWs TRUMP Kilbum Derbyshir land shaped like a Jew's harp
JILLYWOODS Rowley East Riding Yorkshir woods of St Giles
KISS ARSE Rainow Cheshir may refer to a particular topographic feature ... a buttock-shaped hill
KNAPP HILL Ampfield Cheshir land containing a hillock ('hill hill')
LEMON DOLES Tuxford Nottinghamshir land with artificial watercourses
LOUSEY MEADOW Enbourne Berkshir land with a pig sty
MAMMOCKS Yate Gloucestershir hummocklands, untidy heaps
MAWKNISHAW LANE Cotgrave Nottinghamshir land on which hares were seen
NEAT MARSH Preston East Riding Yorkshir cattle marshland
NETTLE SLACK Kendal Westmoreland place where nettles grow
OWLER HAG Derwent Derbyshir land on which alder trees grew
OYSTER END Little Haddam Hertfordshir land on which a sheep-fold was sited
PEAS BONGES Hope Derbyshir land on which peas were grown
PISS FURLONGS Warborough Oxfordshir land on which peas were grown
QUABB Dymock Gloucestershir boggy land
QUISTERS HEY Dutton Cheshir bleaching ground
ROOD PIECE East Dereham Norfolk land a quarter of an acre in area
RUSHEY PIDDLE Mortimer Berkshir land abounding in rushes
SALTPIE Sutton Downes Cheshir land containing a lean-to shed
SPITILLE CROATS Ardeley Hertfordshir land owned by a hospital, or on which a hospital was built
TEN FARUNDELS Clanfield Oxfordshir ten quarters of land
TOOTLE Paulerspury Northamptonshir land on a lookout hill
UPPER WONG Hoby Leicestershir land above a similarly named feature
URCHINS DUMBLE Ansley Warwickshir land on which hedgehogs are seen
VETCH BUTTS Pownall Feo Cheshir land on which vetches were grown
VIXENDELL Durley Hampshir land on which foxes were found
WANTCATCHER'S HOOK Adderbury Oxfordshir land assigned to the mole-catcher
WINTER BEER Spelsbury Oxfordshir land on which barley was planted in winter
YES FIELD Swerford Oxfordshir S-shaped piece of land
YESTERS Baschurch Shropshir land by or containing sheepfolds
ZETTS, THE North Perney Gloucestershir parcels of meadowland
ZIDLES All Cannings Wiltshtir hilly land at the side