GODALMING AND OLD ENGLISH -INGAS NAME FORMATIONS
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Godalming has long been a place-name, but in origin the name is not that of a place, rather of a social group. It is an example of an Old English -ingas name formation, often labelled a “tribal” name-type. This characterisation may or may not be right, and is one of the issues I am investigating as part of my PhD research at the UCL Institute of Archaeology.¹ Formally, -ingas name formations are patronymic, i.e. they indicate the “sons of X”, but it is clear that they were applied beyond nuclear family units, so X need not always have been a “father figure” – or even a real-life person! A minority of -ingas place-names have as their X/first element (or prototheme) the names of topographical features: rivers, hills, and so forth, from which people could most certainly not claim direct biological descent. It seems to me that from an early stage -ingas carried a broader (or parallel) sense of a group whose shared identity was based upon current or “original” geographical proximity to the protothematic element. How best to translate -ingas in such instances without resorting to something very general and wishy-washy (place-name dictionaries tend to render -ingas as “people of, followers of”) is something of a headache for me!

In the case of Godalming, X is generally considered by onomasts to be an Old English male personal name, *Godhelm.² It is unattested in the Old English sphere (that is to say, one not found in any known textual source related to England in the period between the 5th and 11th centuries CE), but there is a well-attested Old German cognate, Godohelm.³ (Ekwall unconvincingly posited the same personal name to be present in the West Yorkshire place-name Goldsborough, but the philology fits better with another unattested personal name, *Godel.⁴ The name *Godhelm is dithematic - it consists of two “themes” or parts: god, “god”, and helm, “helmet; protector, lord”. There remains debate in linguistic circles about whether Old English dithematic personal names were deliberately coined to convey a particular meaning - hence “the god-helmet” etc. The balance of onomastic opinion considers that such pairings of elements were not meaningful, or at least not meant to have semantic significance beyond the individual intelligibility of their constituent elements.

It’s worth making a brief detour at this point to deal with the only source of dissent from the conventional interpretation of Godalming being derived from the name of a male figure named *Godhelm. This was pursued by a Swedish philologist, R. E. Zachrisson, who visited Godalming in the summer of 1932 or 1933 as part of a tour of England to gain first-hand experience of the places for whose names he proffered etymologies. In this technique Zachrisson was several decades ahead of his time, but in terms of his interpretation of Godalming, the game had already been won by the opposing side. His preference was for a topographical stem to the -ingas name – a characteristic of his work

¹ See http://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/people/research/briggs.
³ PNS, p. 195.
in general rather than something unique to Godalming, it should be added – for which he suggested first *gōd-w(ī)elm, ‘pure running waters’; and following his visit to the town *god-elm, ‘the elm trees near pool or swamp’. Neither of these is as credible as Zachrisson’s presentation of them would lead you to believe, and more importantly, they stray too far from the philological evidence, of which spellings like Godhelming(es) 1173, 1227 go a considerable way towards compensating for the ambiguities of earlier attestations. They do at least serve to show the necessity of balanced consideration of all relevant information in the analysis of place-names, without letting one type dominate to the diminution or exclusion of others.

Something that has received less critical examination is the notion, most recently expressed by leading names-scholar John Insley, that the dithematic nature of the prototheme makes *Godhelmingas look later in date than -ingas name formations like Woccingas/Woking and *Týtingas/Tyting, where the equivalent element stands for a monothematic personal name (*Týta, *Wocc(a)). The latter may represent shortened (or hypocoristic) forms of dithematic personal names, but the choice of a short-form is held to be characteristic of an early date of coinage for the respective -ingas formation. Following Insley’s observations, Godalming has the air of a name formed in the period circa 700-900, much later than the sixth- or seventh-century dates normally attributed to -ingas formations. This dating would dovetail with the earliest known record of the place-name, as (aet) Godelmingum in a section of King Alfred’s will that Sean Miller has dated to ?896 x 899; the will text is preserved in an apparently-faithful copy of circa 1000 CE. Of course, this is a terminus ante quem for the formation of the name.

Regardless of the age of *Godhelmingas as a name formation, Old English -ingas place-names which have a dithematic first element are rare. Another is found in King Alfred’s will: Angmering (Sussex), seemingly from a male personal name *Angeñmǣr. Land at Wittering in Sussex is the subject of a South Saxon charter of the period 733 x 765, but the spelling of the place-name, Wystryng (for Wygtryng?) represents a probably 14th-century modernisation, and so it is on the basis of other attestations that the case for the name to be a combination of the attested Wihthere + -ingas has been made. Place-names in -ingas corresponding to Insley’s “early” type are found in earlier charters (such

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7 PNS, p. 195.
as *Getinges* circa 670 x 675, preserved in the name of Eaton Farm/Park in Cobham\(^\text{13}\) but not in great numbers. Consequently, the evidence for *Godhelmingas* being coined in the eighth or even early-ninth century is suggestive but far from conclusive.

The spelling of *-ingas* as *-ingum* is because the latter represents the dative inflection of the former (both are plurals of a singular *-ing*). Another leading names scholar, Richard Coates, has noted how such dative plural endings seem to have a residual influence over later spellings of the place-name. He cited nearby Eashing and Binton as examples from Surrey,\(^\text{14}\) but would have done well to consider Godalming alongside them, particularly as early spellings of its name are on much more plentiful record. For my Master’s dissertation looking at all possible *-ingas* and *-ingaham* place-names in Surrey, I collected a dataset of early name spellings for Godalming that exceeds the one published in *The Place-Names of Surrey* in 1934.\(^\text{15}\) These forms seem to show the influence of the Old English dative plural inflection persisting after the end of the Old English period – usually defined as circa 1100 CE, although when dealing with fluid things like language such boundaries are in practice impossible to define – well into the early Middle English period (albeit the name forms are to be found in texts written in Medieval Latin). Quite what significance we should attach to this is unclear – it’s another thing I’m hoping to shed some light on in the course of my PhD research.

*Godhelmingas* may be a not-unfamiliar name to some because of its use by John Blair as the eponym of an early *regio* or territory encompassing the three Hundreds (Farnham, Godalming, Blackheath) of the south-west corner of the historic county.\(^\text{16}\) This has been widely adopted by other scholars,\(^\text{17}\) to the point where its entirely hypothetical basis has become (or at least runs the risk of becoming) obscured. Nevertheless, even if there is not a shred of direct historical evidence for the existence of *Godhelmingas* as an early Anglo-Saxon polity, it does not mean the idea is null and void.

A working hypothesis of my PhD research is that *-ingas* groups first gave their names to territories and only later to specific settlements without the need for a compounding element such as *hám* or *worth* to make clear its status or function – possibly through the


\(^\text{16}\) First in published form in John Blair, ‘Frithuwold’s kingdom and the origins of Surrey’ in *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, ed. by Steven Bassett (Leicester: University Press, 1989), 97-107 (p. 99 Figure 7.1, 100, 105; later in John Blair, *Early Medieval Surrey: Landholding, Church and Settlement before 1300* (Stroud and Guildford: Alan Sutton and Surrey Archaeological Society, 1991), p. 14, 23 Figure 8.

\(^\text{17}\) For example, Bruce Eagles with Rosamond Faith, “‘Small shires’ and *regiones* in Hampshire and the formation of the shires of eastern Wessex’, *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 19 (2015), 122-52 (p. 136, 141 Figure 2).
establishment of “family” minsters at such places. What seems clear even at this stage is that there is no compelling reason to elevate *Godhelmingas* to the status of a “regional” eponym superior to other -ingas names in the locality. If we are to prefer a single extensive territory in what was to become the south-west corner of the historic county over multiple smaller territories known by -ingas and/or other names, then pound-for-pound nearby Eashing (Old English *Æscingas, *Escingas) arguably gives greater grounds for being the namesake of any early territory hereabouts. It was – uniquely – both a royal estate bequeathed in King Alfred’s will and the site of a stronghold according to the so-called Burghal Hidage, with proximate evidence for mid- or late-Anglo-Saxon execution burials plus a possible outlying daughter settlement at Ashington (from Old English *Æscingatun?) in the Sussex Weald. By the middle of the tenth century, however, Eashing most probably had come to be overshadowed by Godalming and the new proto-urban burh at Guildford, and the bias of the documentary evidence of the 11th century and later towards Godalming in particular has undoubtedly had a distorting effect on perceptions of their relative statuses in the ninth century and earlier.

Looking at Godalming as a space rather than a place – so in terms of its historic manorial and parochial extents rather than as a single settlement – certainly suggests it enjoyed something of a floruit in the ninth century. In addition to its mention in King Alfred’s will, the evidence consists of a coin of King Egberht of Wessex, dated to the latter part of his reign (828-39), ‘dug up’ somewhere in the Godalming locality in 1856, the two carved stone fragments of a possible baptismal font in the parish church, dated to the latter half of the ninth century by John Blair, and arguably ‘mid-Saxon’ pottery from the Co-op Wholesale Society (now Waitrose) site, discussed in detail but not tightly dated by Phil Jones (but for which a subsequently-mentioned period of circa 800-1200 is relevant, at least in terms of a terminus post quem). Perhaps the earliest of the Priory Orchard burials now might also be cited in this regard.

Earlier material to counteract the impression that the Godalming area was one in which “Anglo-Saxon” culture was late to arrive is at a premium, but there is one exception, and potentially a very important one at that. Circa 1985, an unusually large and well-preserved iron spearhead was found during the construction of a new garage close to the centre of Farncombe, across the Wey to the north of Godalming. It was donated to Godalming Museum in 2007; not long after, it was recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme. In its PAS entry, the spear is identified as an example of Swanton type H3 by Kevin Leahy, who postulated a Scandinavian origin, but this is questioned by Helen Geake; both agree that it was an object dateable to the late-fifth or early-sixth centuries. The entry goes on to

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19 *CDEPN*, p. 21.
posit that ‘the spear lay in a grave which was not recognised’, making it the first (and to date only) piece of early Anglo-Saxon mortuary archaeology from the Godalming area.\textsuperscript{24} Although its find-spot is certain, there are question marks over the absence of any other artefacts found at the same time (or reported all those years later), and the very good state of preservation of the spearhead. More research is needed on the spearhead to confirm it is indeed an early Anglo-Saxon artefact derived from a grave; ideally, this should include radiocarbon dating of the remnants of wood inside the socket. For the purposes of this paper, I will proceed on the assumption that the expert identifications and interpretations contained in the PAS entry are correct.

In their brief accounts, Leahy and Geake draw attention to remarkable size of the Farncombe spearhead – it may very well be the lengthiest example of its type found in England. Geake mentions what at the time was an unpublished find of another very long H3 spearhead, from Grave 22 of the early Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Blacknall Field in Wiltshire. The full excavation report of this cemetery has now appeared,\textsuperscript{25} and the information concerning Grave 22 largely bears out Swanton’s comment that ‘it is no accident that spearheads of this kind characteristically accompany the richer and more remarkable sixth-century burials’.\textsuperscript{26} The Blacknall Field spearhead (which had an opposing ferrule) came from a ‘wealthy grave of the oldest male buried with weapons’ – the other weaponry consists of a sword and scabbard, shield, and knife – dated to the early- to mid-sixth century.\textsuperscript{27} This is slightly later than the period of 450-510 favoured by Geake for H3 spearheads, although curation of such obviously important weapons may mean they were inherited and only deposited decades after their manufacture. Given the Farncombe spearhead is lengthier than its Blacknall Field analogue (610mm versus 566mm),\textsuperscript{28} with or without any known evidence for skeletal remains or other grave goods, in itself it represents a weapon of obvious size and implicit of high status. The male interred alongside the assorted weaponry in Grave 22 at Blacknall Field was doubtless a senior member, in age and status, of the burial community.

Could we make a credible link between the spearhead, its one-time owner, and *Godhelm, the eponymous figurehead of the *Godhelmingas? Almost certainly not, however attractive making such connections might be! What the object does at least go a small way towards demonstrating is that there were social conditions prevailing in the Godalming locality in the earlier sixth century in which someone – presumably male, given the associations of the furnished graves – owned or was otherwise associated with an important and arguably symbolic weapon. It would not be unreasonable to suppose this person was the leader or senior member of a family or kin-group; precisely the sort of context from which -\textit{ingas} group identities most likely emerged, possibly later in the sixth century (although there may have been considerable variation over space and time). Nevertheless, on the basis of the range of evidence presently available, we are still some way off being able to make a positive, credible link between the name of Godalming and the archaeology of the town and its hinterland.

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\textsuperscript{24} ‘SUR-244FA4’.
\textsuperscript{27} Annable and Eagles 2010, p. 82 Table 12, 83.
\textsuperscript{28} Compare ‘SUR-244FA4’ with Annable and Eagles 2010, p. 201.
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