

The name of the Hwicce: a discussion

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the evidence for the Anglo-Saxon ethnic name *Hwicce* borne by a people of the south-west Midlands, and reviews previous unsatisfactory attempts to explain it. It appears to be probably of British Celtic origin, and an etymology in two variants, consistent in etymological meaning with that of other early ethnonyms, is suggested.

The name of this well known people of the south-west Midlands in the Anglo-Saxon period has received no uncontroversial or widely accepted explanation. It is amply attested, in Latin and Old English texts dating from, or purporting to date from, before the year 1000, as follows:¹

in confinio Huiciorum et Occidentalium Saxonum c. 731 (MS *ad libitum* except as noted) Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica* II.2 (referring to the year 603; variants *u(u)iciorum* in MSS B, C), *Huiciorum prouincia* 4.13, *ad prouinciam Huiciorum* 4.21 (4.23), *prouinciae Huiciorum* 5.23

Hwinca uncertain date [seventh century?] (recension A, eleventh century), Tribal Hidage (variants *Hynica* [sic], *Hwynca*)

in prouincia Huiciorum 671 for 674 x 679 (fourteenth century), royal grant, Sawyer 70 (BCS 60)

gentis Huiciorum 743 x 745 (eleventh century), royal grant, Sawyer 99 (BCS 165)

metropolim Huiciorum (= Worcester), *diocesis Huuiciorum* mid-eighth (early eleventh century), episcopal grant, Sawyer 1254 (BCS 166)

(*Breodun*) *in Huic'*, *in prouincia Huiciorum* 772 for 775 (eleventh century), royal lease, and 780 (eleventh century), royal grant, Sawyer 109, 116 (BCS 209, 236)

¹ In references to charters, the following abbreviations are used: S = P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: an Annotated List and Bibliography* (London, 1968), with the number of the charter; BCS = *Cartularium Saxonicum*, ed. W. de G. Birch, 3 vols. (London, 1885–99); KCD = *Codex Diplomaticus Aevi Saxonici*, ed. J. M. Kemble, 6 vols. (London, 1838–48). A revised edition of Sawyer's catalogue is available online, as the 'Electronic Sawyer', at www.esawyer.org.uk.

(*duce propria gentis Huicciorum*, *HUICCIORUM (regulus)* 778 (late eleventh century), royal grant, Sawyer 113 (BCS 223)
in provincia Hwiccorum, (*monte quem incola [sic] nominant*) *Mons Huicciorum* 780 (eleventh century), royal grant, Sawyer 117 (BCS 236)
of Hwiccium annal 800 (MSS A, E), *of Hwiccum* annal 802 (MS D), ASC (MS A 891, MS D eleventh century, MS E twelfth century)
in provincia Huicciorum, *in regione Uicciorum* 825 (ninth century), record and settlement of land dispute, Sawyer 1436 (Council of Clifesho; BCS 384, 385)
(*ubi ruricoli nominantur*) *Huiccewudu* 841 (early eleventh century), i.e. the later forest of Wychwood,² royal grant, Sawyer 196 (BCS 432)³
at Hwicca wudu 872 (fourteenth century), royal confirmation of privileges, Sawyer 209 and 1782 (BCS 535)
(*subregulus*) *Huicciorum* 872 (fourteenth century), royal confirmation of privileges, Sawyer 209 and 1782 (BCS 535)
in Huicna gemære c. 890 (tenth–twelfth century), OE Bede 2.2, *in Hwiccum* OE Bede 4.13, *in Hwicca magðe* OE Bede 4.24, *Hwicna bisceop* OE Bede 5.22⁴
in meridiana parte Huicciorum 893 (?eleventh century), Asser chapter 57, line 6, in reference to the year 879⁵

² For issues relating to the former extent of Wychwood, see J. Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire* (Stroud, 1998), p. 50. Although the matter is independent of the philological point developed in this article, this may be the place to refloat the idea that Wychwood need not ever have been part of the territory of the Hwicce, as was proposed by C. Hart, ‘The Tribal Hidage’, *TRHS*, 5th ser., 21 (1971), 133–57. The royal land-grant of 841 (Sawyer 196) is a personal grant of land in Wychwood to the bishop of Worcester, and says nothing about how ‘Hwiccian’ the area might have been then or in earlier times. There is no direct evidence that it was ever part of the diocese of Worcester, though Blair (p. 50) weighs the idea that it might have been, before concluding that we should ‘trust the evidence of the diocesan boundary’, i.e. in effect that it never belonged to Worcester and therefore had never been Hwiccian. Gloucester Abbey, an establishment within Hwiccian territory, had endowments there in the ninth century (H. P. R. Finberg, *The Early Charters of the West Midlands*, 2nd ed. (Leicester, 1972), p. 162; and see D. Hooke, *The Anglo-Saxon Landscape: the Kingdom of the Hwicce* (Manchester, 1985), pp. 14–16, for some other pointers). But it seems onomastically natural to interpret it as a local name for that part of the polity east of the Hwicce (a Thames Valley Saxon proto-Oxfordshire, and Dorchester diocese) which abutted the boundary of the Hwiccian lands, i.e. a name given from a westward-looking perspective. Why should one particular wood peripheral *within* Hwiccian lands be called ‘the Hwicce’s wood’? Eilert Ekwall, however, admitted both possibilities (E. Ekwall, ‘Tribal Names in English Place-names’, *Namn och Bygd* 41 (1953), 129–77).

³ Cf. M. Gelling, *The Place-Names of Oxfordshire*, 2 vols. EPNS 23, 24 (Cambridge, 1953–4), II, 386.

⁴ *The Old English Version of Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 4 vols., ed. T. Miller (Oxford, 1890–8).

⁵ *Asser’s Life of King Alfred*, ed. W. H. Stevenson (Oxford, 1904).

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[*stagnum calidum* . . .] in regione *Huich*, ninth century (c. 1100), the location of Bath in Nennius, *Wonders of Britain* no. 3, MS A (British Library Harley 3859; variant *Huiccorum* in MSS D and E)⁶

Hwiccorum (*episcopus*) [*vel sim.*] episcopal documents, seven instances, Sawyer 1250, 1251, 1254, 1257, 1290, 1297, 1352; e.g. 714 (sixteenth century) catalogue of lands, Sawyer 1250 (BCS 130); 943 for 963 (eleventh century) lease, Sawyer 1297 (BCS 1108); to 985 (eleventh century) lease, Sawyer 1352 (KCD 649)

in monte *Wiccisca* 963/4 (early twelfth century) royal grant of privileges, Sawyer 731 (BCS 1135)

Wicciarum provinciarum (*dux*) 997 (twelfth century) royal restoration, in the witness list, Sawyer 891 (KCD 698)⁷

It will be seen that in Latin the name is recorded almost consistently in the genitive plural, as *Huiccorum*, *Hwiccorum*, with just one example of the radical abbreviation *Huic'* and a couple of late derivatives or variants (the last two items in the list). In Old English the name has a range of forms attesting the genitive (*Hwicna*, *Hwicca*)⁸ and dative plural (*Hwiccium*, *Hwiccum*), and a composition-form *Hwicce-* which is the only direct evidence for the name-form which is in general academic use to refer to the people. The exceptional form *Hwinca* in the Tribal Hidage⁹ is one of only two truly discordant forms in the record, and it is generally taken to be an error for a genitive plural form something like *Hwicce(e)a* or, with less emendation required, *Hwic(ce)na*, a simple transposition error; both of these forms are paralleled in the Old English translation of Bede. Many other tribal-name forms in the Tribal Hidage are in the genitive plural. The other discordant form is *Wictionum* (ostensible date 811, in the supposed foundation charter of Winchcombe Abbey, Sawyer 167 (BCS 338)), which could be taken as a simple copying error for *Wicciorum*, or less probably for **Wiccionum*, a genitive plural of an alternative otherwise unattested Latin form

⁶ *Nennii historia Britonum*, ed. J. Stevenson (London, 1838), p. 56; *Nennius: British History; and the Welsh Annals*, ed. J. Morris, *Hist. from the Sources* 8 (Chichester, 1980), 40 and 81.

⁷ Many of these mentions are brought together and contextualized by A. H. Smith, 'The *Hwicce*', *Franciplegius: Medieval and Linguistic Studies in honor of F. P. Magoun*, ed. J. B. Bessinger, Jr and R. P. Creed (New York, 1965), pp. 56–65, and Hooke, *Kingdom of the Hwicce*, ch. 1. The present list is the fullest known to the author, but does not claim to be complete.

⁸ A. Campbell, *Old English Grammar* (Oxford, 1959), p. 245. Both forms of the genitive plural, the quasi-weak *-(e)na* and the strong *-a*, are found in English tribal names. At least one other name is also found with both: *Eotena*, *Eota* 'Jutes', as Campbell notes, though the former form (*Beowulf*, lines 1072, 1088 and 1141 in Klaeber's edition) might be taken as confused with the (strong) genitive plural of *eoten* 'giant'.

⁹ J. Insley, 'Hwinca', *Hoops: Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, vol. XV, ed. H. Beck, D. Geuenich and H. Steuer (Berlin, 2000), col. 296b.

**(H)wiccones*. We return to the single ninth-century Welsh record, embedded in a Latin text, below.

In addition to *mons Huiciorum* and *Wychood*, mentioned in the form-list above, A. H. Smith¹⁰ suggested that two other West Midland place-names contain the name of the Hwicce: *Wichenford* in west-central Worcestershire (*Wiceneford* in the eleventh century; despite the lack of early spellings in <Hw->),¹¹ and *Whichford* in southern Warwickshire (first recorded in Domesday Book, according to *The Place-Names of Warwickshire*,¹² although those responsible for this volume do not associate it with the Hwicce, because early spellings in <Wh-> are outweighed by earlier ones without <h->). Neither of these etymologies can be regarded as secure. Among later commentators, Margaret Gelling and Ann Cole, following Eilert Ekwall, accept *Whichford*.¹³ David Mills¹⁴ allows the ‘probability’ of this solution for *Whichford*, and Victor Watts¹⁵ cautiously allows the same as a possibility. From its location close to Warwickshire’s boundary with Oxfordshire, Whichford might plausibly be interpreted as an entry-point to Hwiccian territory (on the extent of which see below, and n. 2 above).¹⁶ These recent commentators reject the claims of *Wichenford*, preferring an etymology in OE *wice* ‘wych-elm’; and indeed the stream alluded to by the name has no obvious claim to be a boundary stream despite being only about three miles from the traditionally understood Hwiccian boundary, the river Teme. Other possibly relevant place-names outside the historic habitat of the Hwicce, in Staffordshire, Rutland and Northamptonshire, are first listed in the Worcestershire volume of the Survey of English Place-Names and discussed further in later work.¹⁷ These appear to provide evidence for personal names related to the tribal name, **Hwicci* and **Hwiccea*, and most likely derived from it, and/or for outlying groups of people identified as Hwiccian, as plausibly suggested by Ekwall, Hooke and Cox.¹⁸

¹⁰ Smith, ‘*Hwicce*’, p. 59.

¹¹ A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, with F. T. S. Houghton, *The Place-Names of Worcestershire*, EPNS 3 (Cambridge, 1927), 179.

¹² J. E. B. Gover, A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, with F. T. S. Houghton, *The Place-Names of Warwickshire*, EPNS 13 (Cambridge, 1936), 301.

¹³ M. Gelling and A. Cole, *The Landscape of Place-Names* (Stamford, 2000), p. 75, following E. Ekwall, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 4th ed. (Oxford, 1960), cols. 512b–513a.

¹⁴ A. D. Mills, *Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1998), col. 375b.

¹⁵ V. Watts, *Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names* (Cambridge, 2004), cols. 676b, 671b.

¹⁶ Especially if the Anglian (i.e. Hwiccian) dialectal boundary ran a short distance inside modern Warwickshire, as suggested by Gelling, *Oxfordshire*, I, xix.

¹⁷ A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, *Worcestershire*, p. xv.

¹⁸ See further (1) *Wichnor* parish, Staffordshire, in Ekwall, *Concise Dictionary*, col. 516a; (2) *Whissendine* parish and *Wichley Leys* therein, *Witchley Warren* in Edith Weston, all Rutland, in B.

Ekwall's pioneering article on tribal names in place-names offers no etymology.¹⁹ The first attempted explanation known to the writer is that of Smith, who suggests that the name has a pejorative descriptive origin, comparing the Old Norse *hvikari* 'coward' found in *Karla-Magnus saga*.²⁰ This word has no attested counterpart in Old English, and the comparison does not account for the consistent geminate <-cc-> in the name. Elsewhere, Smith declares that the origin of the name is unknown, but he clearly believes it to be English, saying that 'it is a very ancient type of folk-name', and that '[i]n view of the absence of any OE cognate it may well go back to the pre-migration period'.²¹

Margaret Gelling suggests a possible application of the common noun *hwicce* 'ark, chest, locker', alluding to a possible perception of the heartland of their territory as a flat-bottomed valley between the Cotswolds and the Malvern Hills, but I do not find this persuasive because the essence of an ark is to be fully enclosed, that is lidded.²² Stephen Yeates has fancifully interpreted the name as being from the same lexical source but having the sense 'cauldron, sacred vessel', with a double allusion to the shape of the Vale of Gloucester and to a local cult of a goddess with a bucket or cauldron, whom Yeates identifies as a *Mater Dobunna* of the Romano-British Dobunni tribe of southern Gloucestershire.²³ At the most sympathetic, this might be described as an idiosyncratic overinterpretation of the standard dictionary meaning, and the interpretation is unattributed. Yeates also seems to believe that *Hwicce* can be linked with the ancestor of the word *witch* (OE *wicce*), but this is impossible for a simple phonological reason: the inexplicable presence of /h/.²⁴

Most scholars take the territory of the Hwicce to be essentially the same as

Cox, *The Place-Names of Rutland*, EPNS 67–9 (Nottingham, 1994), 55–6 and 61, 221–2), also the two former *Witchley* Hundreds mentioned in the Northamptonshire Geld Roll of c. 1075, but lost post-Domesday, in Cox, *Rutland*, p. 222; and (3) *Whiston* parish, Northamptonshire, in J. E. B. Gover, A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Northamptonshire*, EPNS 10 (Cambridge, 1933), 152–3. For the speculation that *Witchley* double hundred represented a Hwiccian presence left from the settlement period, forming an exclave distant from their later heartland, see A. H. Smith, *The Place-Names of Gloucestershire*, 4 vols., Survey of English Place-Names 38–41 (Cambridge, 1964–5) IV, 42.

¹⁹ Ekwall, 'Tribal Names', p. 143; Hooke, *Kingdom of the Hwicce*, p. 14; Cox, *Rutland*, pp. 55–6.

²⁰ Smith, 'Hwicce', p. 62, n. 1.

²¹ Smith, *Gloucestershire*, IV, 33, n. 4.

²² M. Gelling, 'The Place-Name Volumes for Worcestershire and Warwickshire: a New Look', *Field and Forest: an Historical Geography of Warwickshire and Worcestershire*, ed. T. R. Slater and P. J. Jarvis (Norwich, 1982), pp. 59–78, at 69. See also J. Insley, 'Hwicce', *Hoops: Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, vol. XV, ed. H. Beck, D. Geuenich and H. Steuer (Berlin, 2000), col. 295b.

²³ S. J. Yeates, *The Tribe of Witches: the Religion of the Dobunni and Hwicce* (Oxford, 2008), and *A Dreaming for the Witches: the Recreation of the Dobunni Primal Myth* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 3–4.

²⁴ Reviews of Yeates, *Tribe of Witches*, by D. Hooke, *Brit. Archaeol.* 104 (2009), 53, and S. Rodway, *Britannia* 40 (2009), 397–8.

the later diocese of Worcester, founded in 679–80.²⁵ This consisted of what became Gloucestershire (including the dismantled Winchcombeshire²⁶ but excluding the Forest of Dean), most of traditional Worcestershire, and south-west Warwickshire, but including very small areas of adjacent counties. This geography opens up another etymological possibility which is less problematic, both onomastically and where relevant phonologically, than those just mentioned. It is credible that a dynasty and/or a people in this area of England should have a Brittonic name, comparable with those of Ergyng (Archenfield) and the possible **Magon* of the Magonsæte,²⁷ both areas largely or wholly in adjacent Herefordshire, but the possibility raises historical questions about the Hwicce which it is not possible to solve without new evidence. However, it can hardly be ignored that a bishop of those nearby ‘qui ultra amnem Sabrinam ad occidentem habitant’ (‘who live to the west beyond the river Severn’) was named or by-named *Ualcbstod*, literally ‘interpreter’.²⁸ Nothing speaks clearly against a ruling dynasty in this area with Brittonic linguistic roots – to say nothing about the vexed question of linguistic continuity in the general population – and this suggestion does not contradict the opinion of Damian Tyler that the Hwicce and other West Midland tribes were ‘in the mid-seventh century ... ethnically British’,²⁹ which is based on archaeological considerations.³⁰

²⁵ E.g., Smith, ‘*Hwicce*’, pp. 59–60; M. Wilson, ‘The Hwicce’, *Trans. of the Worcestershire Archaeol. Soc.* (3rd ser.) 2 (1968–9), 21–5, at 21, citing the common assumption; C. Hart, ‘The Kingdom of Mercia’, *Mercian Studies*, ed. A. Dornier (Leicester, 1977), pp. 43–62, at 47; C. Dyer, *Lords and Peasants in a Changing Society: the Estates of the Bishopric of Worcester, 680–1540* (Cambridge, 1980), p. 7; Hooke, *Hwicce*, pp. 12–15; S. Bassett, ‘In Search of the Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms’, *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, ed. S. Bassett (Leicester, 1989), pp. 3–27, at 6–17, and obliquely in ‘Church and Diocese in the West Midlands: the Transition from British to Anglo-Saxon Control’, *Pastoral Care before the Parish*, ed. J. Blair and R. Sharpe (Leicester, 1992), pp. 13–40, at 14; M. Gelling, *The West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1992), pp. 80, 98–9.

²⁶ J. Whybra, *A Lost English County: Winchcombeshire in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries*, Stud. in AS Hist. 1 (Woodbridge, 1990). There are tantalizing hints that Winchcombe may have been the, or at least a, royal centre of the Hwicce; see S. Bassett, ‘A Probable Mercian Royal Mausoleum at Winchcombe, Gloucestershire’, *Ant J* 65.1 (1985), 82–100, at 82–5, and ‘In Search of the Origins’, at 6–7. The ‘hill of the Hwicce’ referred to in Sawyer 117 was in Cutsdean, about three miles east of Winchcombe, but this term may also have denoted a wider area, as argued by Smith, *Gloucestershire*, II, 8 and xi.

²⁷ J. Freeman, ‘The Name of the Magonsæte’, *A Commodity of Good Names: Essays in honour of Margaret Gelling*, ed. O. J. Padel and D. N. Parsons (Donington, 2008), pp. 101–16.

²⁸ Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, in *Venerabilis Baedae opera historica*, ed. Charles Plummer (Oxford, 1896), V.23. And the Magonsæte and the Hwicce were both originally served by the bishop of Worcester, if the Appendix to the Chronicle of John of Worcester, a twelfth-century text, is to be credited (Freeman, ‘Magonsæte’, p. 102).

²⁹ D. J. Tyler, ‘Early Mercia and the Britons’, *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, Manchester Centre for AS Stud. publication 7, ed. N. J. Higham (Woodbridge, 2007), 91–101, at 93.

³⁰ Cf. more cautiously Hooke, *Kingdom of the Hwicce*, pp. 8–9, and P. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England 600–800*, CSASE (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 22–3.

Steven Bassett has argued persuasively for the survival in the West Midlands into Anglo-Saxon times of British Christianity and its ecclesiastical organization, ministering at first to a British population.³¹ He claims plausibly that one element of this entity was anglicized into the Hwiccian diocese of Worcester. The one thing we can be sure of is that the ethnic origin of the Hwicce cannot be reduced to one of the six scenarios involving only English-language explanations envisaged nearly fifty years ago by Wilson.³² The current most cautious summary position on Hwiccian ethnicity is that articulated by Christopher Dyer: 'It is possible that the Hwicce were a political entity created by the kings of Mercia, who installed a ruling dynasty over a mixed British and Anglo-Saxon population.'³³

Bearing this probable British ethnic presence in mind, we can begin an explanation of *Hwicce*. It can readily be understood as a Brittonic name consisting of the ancestor of Modern Welsh *gwyb* 'excellent' with the positive prefix *hy-*, i.e. something like 'the most excellent'. Presumably the name was first and foremost that of a ruling dynasty rather than that of the population at large, but that is not a necessary assumption; Bassett's view just cited could be taken as supporting a more inclusive applicability.

Before coming to a semi-firm view about the shape of the Brittonic or Proto-Welsh form in question, we need to confront an uncertainty. For the editor of *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*,³⁴ the most likely etymon of *gwyb* (adjective and noun, plural *gwybion*, later also *gwbion*) is a Proto-Indo-European form **yesyā*, *yesyo-s* (i.e. **wesnā*, *weswo-s*; cf. Old Irish *feb* 'excellence', in origin a nominalized adjective, and Sanskrit *vásu* 'good, excellent'). This is semantically and phonetically credible, though without convincing formal parallels elsewhere in Celtic beyond this single lexical item.³⁵ If *GPC* is correct, medial **-sw-* must have been treated like the **-sp-* which had become [sϕ] and merged with the reflex of **-sk-* as [xs] (later the voiceless velar fricative [x] alone), 'at some period between the fourth and sixth to seventh centuries', according to Jackson.³⁶ Jackson envisaged an extended process which still allowed

³¹ Bassett, 'Church and Diocese', pp. 16–20, and 'How the West was Won: the Anglo-Saxon Takeover of the West Midlands', *ASSAH* 11 (2000), 107–18.

³² Wilson, 'The Hwicce', pp. 21 and 24.

³³ Dyer, *Lords and Peasants*, p. 7. Bassett, 'How the West was Won', pp. 115–16, suggests this was the result of essentially peaceable activities of Penda's successors.

³⁴ *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*, ed. R. J. Thomas, 4 vols. (Cardiff, 1952–2001), cols. 1747c–1748a [hereafter *GPC*].

³⁵ R. Matasović, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic* (Leiden, 2009), *s.v.* The raising of *[e] to *[i] under this proposal has received no final explanation. I am indebted to Paul Russell for discussion of the possible connection with **u₁esu₁* and of the rest of this paragraph and the next two.

³⁶ K. H. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain* (Edinburgh, 1953), p. 539.

the borrowing of a Brittonic place-name **Penn Saxson* ‘[literally] head of the Saxons/English’, in what became Worcestershire, in the early seventh century; this was recorded as *Pensaxan* (dative case) in a twelfth-century document.³⁷ Old English [xs] becomes [ks] at more than one period, and could therefore have affected a borrowing from Brittonic either directly as a phonetic change or through phonemic substitution.³⁸ However, it seems that such a [ks] arising within English could not be palatalized as a phonetic consequence of the same morphological process which gives rise to the tribal name *Mierce* ‘Mercians’ with [tʃ], from *mearc* ‘boundary’ with final [k], namely plural suffixation in accordance with original *i*-stem noun inflection (< West Germanic *-īz). Whilst there is no clear parallel *i*-stem noun with stem-final [ks] to show whether [ks] could be palatalized to [cʃ] (> [tʃ]) in such grammatical circumstances,³⁹ no palatalization is seen in inflected forms of the verb *weaxan* ‘grow’ such as the third singular present indicative *wieẏð* recorded in early West Saxon (i.e. we do not find **wieced* or similar).⁴⁰ If this is indeed the origin of *gnych*, we must conclude that it cannot be involved in the origin of *Hwicce*.

An alternative possible origin of *gnych* is admitted by *GPC*, based on the *-vecc-* or *-vicc-* [sic] (whose meaning has not been independently established) attested in the continental Celtic personal names *Vecco*, *Vecorix*. Accepting this phonologically simpler possibility would permit an interpretation of the unexplained Gaulish element as ‘excellent’ or something similar, at the cost of detaching *gnych* from the semantically related words in other languages mentioned above, or of treating the Gaulish name-element as unrelated to *gnych* and unexplained whilst still linking it with *Hwicce*.⁴¹ In either case, the palatalization of the geminate [kk] when borrowed into English is explicable, as having been triggered by the same morphological process which gives rise to the tribal name *Mierce* with [tʃ], from *mearc* with [k].

Following up this second possibility, we can reconstruct a Brittonic or Proto-Welsh **Hæ-wikk*, from **Su-wekkī* or **Su-wikkī*. If such a British name appeared in Latin sources, it would no doubt be found as **Suvecci* /**Suvicci*, and thus also

³⁷ E. Ekwall, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1947), *s.n.* The modern name is *Pensax*.

³⁸ A. Campbell, *Old English Grammar* (Oxford, 1959), §§ 416, 481.4 and note 1, the former instance in the pre-literacy period but after Breaking, the latter as late as Late West Saxon.

³⁹ I do not know of a native Old English *i*-stem noun whose stem ends with [-ks-]. It is generally believed that [ks] in the tribal name *Seaxe* ‘Saxons’, an apparent counterexample to this suggestion, was an original *a*-stem, not an *i*-stem, absorbed into the latter class (as indicated by the recorded declined forms) after palatalization had occurred (Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, § 204 (5)).

⁴⁰ Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, § 200 (3).

⁴¹ The element **wikk-* cannot be directly connected with the element *-vices* ‘conquerors, warriors’ found in certain Gaulish tribal names, e.g. *Lemovices* (for this see e.g. P.-Y. Lambert, *La langue gauloise* (Paris, 1997), p. 35) and in British e.g. *Ordovices*.

with *Su-* in Gaulish ones.⁴² The form of the British prefix is taken to be **su-*, following the reasoning of Schrijver and Zimmer.⁴³ Its vowel, being pretonic, reduces (centralizes) in the sixth century,⁴⁴ before the period of contact with Anglo-Saxons, and retains some perceptible lip-rounding after centralization which was no doubt also encouraged by the following labiovelar [w]. Jackson's symbol for it, <ǣ>, which indicates rounding, is therefore used below.

It is regrettable that no such forms are recorded, of course, especially the fact that there is no recorded Welsh **hynych* or a form ancestral to it. But we do have Nennius' *Huich*, an Old Welsh form (in a Latin text) of the name of the Hwicce themselves, which appears to be compatible with the suggestion made above, representing a perhaps unexpectedly archaic Old Welsh form **Huich* (in later Old Welsh something like ***Hi(g)uich* might have been expected).⁴⁵ There are also close formal and semantic parallels such as *hydda* '(very) good', *hynaws* 'good-natured', *hlywydd* 'successful', *hywin* '(very) worthy' and *hynwlydd* '(very) generous' (recorded in Middle Welsh, the last two in the fourteenth century, *hynaws* in the thirteenth and *hlywydd* perhaps as early as the twelfth),⁴⁶ which prompts the feeling that the present suggestion is a shot into the mist rather than in the dark. The proposed elements are well known (if not, in the case of **wekk-*/ **wikk-*, fully understood) and well attested individually, the structure is credible, and the etymological meaning of the proposed name is comparable with bombastic British tribal names of the Roman period, such as *Ancalites* 'the very hard ones', *Catwelllauni* 'the battle-excellent ones' or *Brigantes* 'the high ones'. The relation of such a name to the known Old English form(s) poses no phonological difficulties. The vowel of the unstressed initial syllable of **Hæ-wikk* would already have been reduced during the Brittonic period, as we have noted, and, given that it remained, or could be perceived as, rounded,⁴⁷ its loss in Old English before a consonant with a bilabial element in the onset

⁴² Gaulish *su-* is not found in any known tribal names, but it is attested in personal names, as is the corresponding form in Irish. The prefix may also be found in Irish in the name of the people called the *Soghain*, from Goidelic **So-gan-ī*, apparently supported by an ogham inscription MUCOI SOGINI from Muskerry, County Cork (but called the *Sodhain* in later writings). They were traditionally found scattered in ancient Ireland, though particularly associated with Tír Sogháin in County Galway. See e.g. J. Mannion, 'The Senchineoil and the Soghain: Differentiating between the Pre-Celtic and Early Celtic Tribes of Central East Galway', *Jnl of the Galway Archaeol. and Hist. Soc.* 58 (2006), 165–70.

⁴³ P. Schrijver, *Studies in British Celtic Historical Phonology* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 333–4, and S. Zimmer, *Studies in Welsh Word-Formation* (Dublin, 2000), p. 250, arguing against the view of Jackson, *Language and History*, p. 659, that it was **so-*.

⁴⁴ Jackson, *Language and History*, pp. 667–70.

⁴⁵ Nennius, ed. Morris. This reasoning follows what is implicit in Jackson, *Language and History*, pp. 387, 659 and note 2, and 678.

⁴⁶ GPC, s. *vv*.

⁴⁷ Jackson, *Language and History*, p. 659.

of a syllable bearing the stress in the source language would not be in any way surprising, given also the prior existence of initial <hw-> in Old English. The Brittonic development of [kk] to [x] may have been a change of the mid to late sixth century, according to Jackson (though there is uncertainty about the dating), so English speakers may well have become aware of the name before then.⁴⁸ Other British/Welsh polities of this period have names derived from inherited apparently geographical names (Gwent, Gwynedd), but one (Powys) is named from a tribal name, though of a semantically different sort from the one proposed here.⁴⁹

Such early knowledge on the part of the English is credible, if we credit the *Chronicle*. We know that they were in the region in question at the time of their victory over the Britons at Dyrham in southern Gloucestershire in 577.⁵⁰ The early existence of a group called the *Huicciorum* (genitive case) is assured by Bede's report of the famous meeting which took place in 603 at Augustine's

⁴⁸ More recent work by Patrick Sims-Williams challenges this date in relation to [kk], and places the change earlier; see P. Sims-Williams, 'Dating the Transition to Neo-Brittonic: Phonology and History, 400–600', *Britain 400–600: Language and History*, ed. A. Bammesberger and A. Wollmann (Heidelberg, 1990), pp. 217–61, at 248–50), and *The Celtic Inscriptions of Britain: Chronology and Phonology, c.400–1200*, Philological Soc. publication 37 (Oxford, 2003), 134–41. He suggests rather that the /k(k)/ in Old English *broc(c)* 'badger' could be a sound-substitution for an already-developed Brittonic or Welsh velar fricative [x]. Applying his conclusion here would mean that **Hæ-wīkke* was already pronounced **Hæ-wīx* and that the English geminate /kk/ which underlies the consistent recorded geminate postalveolar affricate in *Hwicce* is a sound-substitution for [x]. I find this difficult from the English perspective, i.e. in relation to *broc(c)*, whatever its merits within Brittonic. The (little) Old English evidence (e.g. in *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, ed. J. Bosworth and T. N. Toller (Oxford, 1898), and supplements (1921, 1972)) suggests that the word and its derivatives had a geminate, and that seems to suggest that the Brittonic source must have been geminate, whether as [kk] or as [xx]. Sims-Williams compares the Herefordshire place-name *Moccas*, which is *Mochras* 'pig moor' in Welsh. But there is no certainty about when *Moccas* was first known to English-speakers, and its /k/ (never spelt as a geminate in the record before the fourteenth century, according to the evidence in B. Coplestone-Crow, *Herefordshire place-names*, BAR, British ser. 214 (Oxford, 1989), p. 147) may be a late, even post-Conquest, sound-substitution with an unknown relation to the irregular loss of the /r/, which tells us nothing about the early relations between Brittonic and Old English. See also Jackson, *Language and History*, pp. 569–70.

⁴⁹ This is most likely to be from Latin *Pāgenses* 'people of the country or district (*pāgus*)', as first proposed by J. Lloyd-Jones, 'Rhai geiriau benthg o'r Lladin', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 2.4 (1925), 297–8, and explained by T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons, 350–1064*, *History of Wales* 1 (Oxford, 2012), pp. 15–16, as alluding to the western, non-urban, district of the Cornovian polity of Wroxeter (and acknowledging Marged Haycock for the germ of the idea).

⁵⁰ T. Jebson *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Old English text of MSS A, D and E online (2006) at <http://asc.jebbo.co.uk/a/a-L.html>, <http://asc.jebbo.co.uk/d/d-L.html> and <http://asc.jebbo.co.uk/e/e-L.html> (accessed 15 November 2012). Whether the victory had permanent effects or not is another matter; see, e.g., Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, pp. 23–4.

Oak on their boundary with the West Saxons,⁵¹ and by the 7000 hides' liability assigned to them (as the *Hwinca*) in the Tribal Hidage (dated by Davies and Vierck to 670–90 and half a century earlier by Higham).⁵² Their later status with respect to the Mercian kingdom is analysed by Smith⁵³ and others; it does not need to be discussed here.

I suggest therefore, that the origin of the name *Hwicce* is to be found in Brittonic **Hæ-wikk*, etymologically 'the most excellent [ones]', with the final geminate consonant anglicized by palatalization as would be expected given the addition of the Old English nominal nominative plural suffix *-e* (earlier **-i*) descending from West Germanic **-īz*. It is also possible that, instead, the base of the name is to be compared with a known but so far uninterpreted Gaulish element, whose elucidation would be advanced a fraction by noting that it can be modified by the prefix **su-*.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, II.2. David Higgins has recently identified this place, cautiously but plausibly, with the site of St Augustine's abbey, now the cathedral, in Bristol; see D. H. Higgins, *Saint Jordan of Bristol: from the Catacombs of Rome to College Green at Bristol*, Bristol Branch of the Hist. Assoc. local history pamphlet 120 (Bristol, 2007), 4 ('cannot be proved . . . cannot be ruled out'), and 'Which Augustine? The Naming of the Abbey and Church of St Augustine, Bristol', *JEH* 63 (2012), 18–30, at 19 ('a persistent Bristol legend'). His suggestion revives one originally made by the Bristol historian Samuel Seyer (S. Seyer, *Memoirs historical and topographical of Bristol and it's* [sic] *neighbourhood* (Bristol, 1821), pp. 226–31). The meeting-place has more traditionally been associated with a tree in Down Ampney (Smith, *Gloucestershire*, IV, 33, n. 1), or, philologically indefensibly, with the village of Aust, some eight miles north of Bristol (*ibid.* vol. III, 127–8).

⁵² W. Davies and H. Vierck, 'The Contexts of Tribal Hidage: Social Aggregates and Settlement Patterns', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 8 (1974), 223–93; N. J. Higham, *An English Empire: Bede and the Early Anglo-Saxon Kings* (Manchester, 1995), esp. pp. 74–111.

⁵³ Smith, '*Hwicce*', pp. 58–9.

⁵⁴ I am very grateful for comments on a draft of this article by Della Hooke, Oliver Padel, Paul Cullen, Steven Bassett, Paul Russell and Richard Dance. Responsibility for the use made of their comments and for errors is of course mine.