The First American Placename in England: *Pimlico*

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The London placename *Pimlico*, hitherto of obscure origin, is plausibly shown to have been copied from America and to be linked with Sir Walter Raleigh's abortive Roanoke settlements of the 1580s. Its place in the cultural contexts of Elizabethan Virginia and Jacobean north London is explored, and a possible alternative theory is shown, in fact, to reinforce the claim of an American origin.

Pimlico is first recorded as the name of what appears to have been an inn in Hoxton (Middlesex, now London N1). Numerous mentions of *Pimlyco* are found in *Pimlyco. Or, Runne Red-Cap*, a verse tract entered at Stationers' Hall on 15 April 1609, in which *Pimlyco* is called "that fond, sencelesse Name" (C1, verso). We should note that the *Pimlyco* of this tract is an ale, rather than a place which supplied it, but to pretend or assume that the metonymy which eventually yielded a placename happened as early as April 1609 will do no great harm. Some of the tropes in these verses picture Pimlico as a place, e.g., "the Well of Glee," "this Pimlyco Fort" and "the Continent of Pimlyco." Within that same year it had become a genuine placename, as illustrated in John Cooke's *Greene's Tu-Quoque (The City-Gallant)*, which contains the line "as farre as Pimlico"). In 1643 the name appears on the map annexed to the Parliamentary civil defense document for London, the *Manner of the march and embattelling of the trayned bands and auxiliaries of the City of London [etc.]* (see Herford, Simpson and Simpson 1950, X: 242). The public house is further recorded as *Pimlico House* in 1742 and *house called Pimlicoe* in 1745 (map by Chassereau). A space at or

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close to the same site called *Pimlico Gardens* is mentioned in 1799; this had been "a Bowling-green of good repute" (anon., no date [early eighteenth century]). It was commemorated by *Pimlico Walk* into the twentieth century, and there is a truncated alley called by the name on the site even today.[1]

The better-known Pimlico in Westminster is first attested somewhat later, in 1626 (Bird 1922, 84 and note), in the books of the overseers of the poor of St Martin's in the Fields, according to Bullen (1891, vii, note 1). C. T. Gatty (1921) says that it is found as *Pimplico* (1630, 1664), and there is a reference to *the king highway at Pimplico* in 1681, mentioned in the same source. The modern spelling of the name is found at a spot directly behind Buckingham House on John Rocque's *Plan of the cities of London and Westminster and the borough of Southwark [etc.]* (1747).

The immediate source of the name has been elucidated by Rimbault (1849), who draws attention to a tract of 1598 called *Newes from Hogsdon* [i.e., Hoxton], which contains the words "Have at thee then, my merrie boyes, and hey for old Ben Pimlico's nut browne." The mention in this tract had previously been alluded to by Nares (1822). Herford, et al. (1950, X: 109) are also aware of the tract, and transcribe the relevant nameform as *Ben Pemlicos*.[2] I do not know which spelling is that of the original, but it matters. *Pemlicos* is the *lectio difficilior*, and it is supported elsewhere in the record, as noted directly below. I am inclined to trust it, the more so because of the specious-looking apostrophe in Rimbault's version, and the general modernizing performed by Nares (followed by Sugden 1925, 412), and given the status of Herford, et al.'s work as the standard original-spelling edition of Jonson. I shall assume that it is the correct reading. But, as will be seen, that suits the case I want to press.[3]

Rimbault, followed by others, not unreasonably concludes that the person named was a well-known Hoxton publican whose name attached to his home-brewed and later to his house and adjacent alley. Hoxton was a resort of some renown around 1600-40, being celebrated in the literature of the day variously for pudding-pies, plum cakes and cream, spice-cakes, ale and cakes, cakes and Christian ale, custards, and Darby ale.[4] Hoxton became especially attractive to theatrical people upon the founding there of the first

purpose-built theater in London, Leicester's Men's *The Theatre*, which lasted 1576-98 (Bolitho and Peel 1952, 66). This theater was succeeded by one nearby called *The Curtain*. St Leonard's church there became known as the actors' church; it contains the graves of James Burbage and others. Hoxton was apparently also the location of an inn called the *Eye-bright* whose reputation was eclipsed by the establishment called by the name of *Pimlico/Pimlyco*, the praises of whose ale are first sung in what Herford, Simpson and Simpson (1950, X: 109, 111) refer to as a "black-letter drollery", called *Pimlyco. Or, Runne Red-Cap. Tis a mad world at Hogsdon*. This was, as we have noted, registered at Stationers' Hall on 15 April 1609. It was further reissued by A. H. Bullen in 1891.[5] The year 1609 seems to have been critical in the fame of the place, since a (hastily-composed?) ballad entitled *Haue with you to Pimlico* was also registered at Stationers' Hall on 24 April 1609. The theatrical connections of Hoxton, and therefore the Pimlico within it, also gave rise to mentions in less ephemeral literature in the same year and shortly following. Pimlico is dignified by mentions in Dekker's *Work for armourers* (1609), in Cooke's *Greene's Tu-Quoque* (1609 [published 1614]), in Jonson's *The alchemist* (1610 [published 1612]), in Middleton and Dekker's *The roaring girl* (1611), in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (1614 [published 1631]), his *The devil is an ass* (1616 [published 1641]), and his posthumously published poems *Under-woods* (1640 [xliv, 21 *Pimblicoe*]), in Glapthorne's *The lady-mother* (1635 [III.ii *Pimblicoe*]) and *Wit in a constable* (1640 [II.i *Pimblico*]), in Mayne's *The city match* (1639), and in Massinger's *The city-madam* (1658 [IV.iv.39 *Pemlico*]). It is apparently also mentioned by Shirley (Bullen 1891, vi), but I have not been able to trace where.

It has been generally presumed that the Westminster name was copied from the Hoxton one, especially since the relevant part of Westminster was virtually unpopulated until the nineteenth-century building boom in the newly-drained area between the Thames and Buckingham Palace (from which time dates *Pimlico Road*). There is no direct evidence for this presumption, but the dates mentioned above, along with the nature and timing of the early fame of Hoxton, make such a conclusion inescapable. Only Bebbington (1972) dissents, proposing a copying in the opposite direction.

It is firmly established, then, that the Hoxton name is the original one. It is alleged that it derives from a surname. There is no

particular reason to disagree. But the source of this apparent surname needs to be addressed. It is otherwise unknown and it is opaque. It is said by Bolitho and Peel (1952, 66), without corroboration, to be Italian. The consonant cluster *-ml-* does not suggest Italian. So there is not even a *prima facie* case for an Italian origin.

The name is so similar to that of *Pamlico Sound*, the belt of water enclosed by the chain of islands forming the Outer Banks in what is now North Carolina, that further investigation seems desirable. This drowned estuary, delimited in the east by Cape Hatteras, has a crucial place in the history of America, for at its northern end is the island of Roanoke, where the abortive first English settlements of Raleigh's Virginia were planted in 1585 and 1587. It receives, among others, the Pamlico river, generally now known as the Tar-Pamlico, which in turn takes its name from an extinct Native-American people (perhaps better recorded as the *Pamticough*) who lived along its banks. Virginia was much in the news from 1584 to 1590. In October of the latter year reports were received in Plymouth of the disaster that had presumably befallen the Roanoke colonists. Raleigh's return from his expedition to Guiana in 1595-6 must have renewed interest, since he declared that bad weather had prevented him from making a landfall in Virginia to resume the search for the settlers. These events make the date of the tract *Newes from Hogsdon* (1598) particularly interesting and strengthen the case for pursuing a connection between *Pamlico* and *Pimlico*, especially in view of the fact that the first mention of the name of the innkeeper in Hoxton actually shows a vowel intermediate between those of the two names we are attempting to link, assuming Herford, et al.'s transcription to be correct. Rimbault's and Gover, et al.'s mistranscription of the name in the document as *Pimlico* obscures the similarity between the American name and the one under consideration; in fact, the form *Pemlico(e)* is recorded for both the American and the English name. The name appears to have been copied from London to Dublin as well, and the first record of the Irish name known to me is in the Earl of Orrery's state letters (to the Duke of Ormonde, 5 February 1663), significant also because of the spelling *Pemlicoe* (C. H. 1849); the modern form of the street name is *Pimlico*.

A further tantalizing detail is found on p. D2, verso, of the tract of 1609, associating Pimlico with Virginia, where we read: "You

therefore that do trade in Cans,/(Virginians, or Cracouians)...." It might be going too far to suggest that these lines connect Virginia and Pimlico in a satisfying bond, as Pimlico and Kraków are equally well-linked by them, but the juxtaposition achieves greater significance in the context of the accumulation of other evidence presented here. Rocque's *Plan* (1747), in addition to listing a *Pimlico*, also shows a *Virginia Row* a little to the east of Hoxton Square.

It must be acknowledged that no document or map concerning the original Roanoake settlements mentions Pamlico Sound by that name. On James White's maps, BM [BL] Prints & Drawings 1906-5-9-1(2) and (3), it is nameless, as is the Pamlico River. On John Smith's map of 1612 (Arber 1910, opposite 342) it is called *Greenevills rode* (i.e., the roadstead of Sir Richard Grenville, whom Raleigh had entrusted with the establishment of the colony), and on Velasco's map of 1611 it is *P[uert]o Grinuil.* Several names in these and other early documents (all collected in Quinn 1955) bear a passing resemblance to *Pamlico*. But they refer there to a people, a king, and a village, and only one instance (that of the people) is sufficiently similar to warrant bringing it into the discussion. These people are the *Pomouik* mentioned by Barlowe in Hakluyt (1600, 130).[6] The first secure mentions by name of a location called *Pamlico* begin to emerge in the later seventeenth century, and the first use of the name for an administrative area is as late as 1696, when what is now Bath County, North Carolina, bears the name (Lefler and Powell 1973, 56).[7] There was a "mortality" (smallpox) there in about that year which came close to annihilating the Pamlico people. A settlement was established around 1699 and a precinct of Bath County (now the separate Beaufort County) was known as *Pampteco-ugh* from 1705-12. The Pamlico people were mentioned in 1711 when they participated in a local uprising against the colonists. They were exterminated in the same year by the portion of the Tuscarora allied with the English.[8]

The ethnic name is presumably of Algonquian origin. The meager records of their language indicate that the Pamlico people were a southern limb of the eastern branch of that stock (Lawson 1709). The name itself is of unknown meaning (Swanton 1952, 83; Feest 1978, 20). Superficially, it could be argued that, suffixed by *-ehtek-o:w-*, the complete name means 'person from the *Pam-river'.

This does not, however, appear to square with the variants in *-l-*. /t/ for Proto-Algonquian */l/ is known, and is in fact diagnostic for the Powhatan dialects of Virginia and the Carolinas (Goddard 1978, 75); however, /l/ for */t/ is not known. The spellings of the type *Pamptecough* are accepted by scholars as representing a genuine variant of the name *Pamlico*; justifiably, as the nature of the spelling variation in the list below clearly demonstrates (cf. also Stewart 1970, 356). The following spellings of the name (as applied to the people, administrative district, river or sound) are all recorded before 1720 (Hodge 1965, II: 197; Lefler and Newsome 1963, 50ff; Lefler and Powell 1973, 66ff):

Pomouik (??) 1585	Pamtico 1704
Pantico 1638 (Dutch source)	Pamptecough 1705
Pemptico 1671	Pemlicoe 1707
Phampleco 1676	Pemlico 1708
Pamphleco 1676	Pampticough 1709
Pampleco 1676	Pamptego 1711
Pemplico 1681	Pamptaco river[s] 1711
Pampticoes 1696	Pamptico 1713
Pamplicoes 1699	Pamlicough 1718

The possible representation of Proto-Algonquian */l/ by /t/ in the Powhatan dialects is discussed by Geary (1955, 882-3). The variation in the record is most likely to be accounted for by the colonists' having heard the name from speakers of different Algonquian dialects (possibly mediated in one or the other case by speakers of a local Iroquoian or Siouan language).

John Archdale's account of 1707 mentions the *Pemlicoe* Indians (Salley 1911, 286), a spelling of much significance for our purposes when compared with those recorded for *Pimlico*, and the more so since it is not isolated (see the forms dated 1671, 1681, 1708). The American historians Pomfret and Shumway refer to Pamlico Sound as *Pimlico* (1970, 16). I cannot tell whether this is a genuine variant of the name or a simple mistake based on the name(s) in England (perhaps encouraged by the success of the 1948 film directed by H. Cornelius called *Passport to Pimlico*, which was based on the conceit of the declaration of independence by the place in Westminster). More likely still, however, is that it is a misplaced recollection of the

name of the racetrack near Baltimore, which is possibly a copy of the London name.

The first party of Roanoke settlers returned to England with Drake in 1586. There now follows a short fantasy which, if it were true, might account for the appearance of the name *Pemlico* in England. One settler had acquired a nickname (better, a by-name) from an orally transmitted "Virginian" river-name or ethnic name, as a result of incidents of an undiscoverable sort — perhaps he tried to learn a local Algonquian language for trading or peacekeeping purposes, or copied a local hairstyle. Or perhaps he simply brought knowledge of such a name home with him. We know from the anonymous *Tiger* journal account of Grenville's voyage that the settlers of 1585-6 got as far as Secota(n), a village close to the mouth of the Pamlico River, in preliminary explorations, on 15 July 1585 (Hakluyt 1600, 137; Quinn 1955, 191; Feest 1978, 272, maps). This adventurer, having adopted this distinctive and perhaps amusing name, became a publican in Hoxton. We have evidence (Hakluyt 1600, 138-9; Quinn 1955, 194-7) that there were two men named *Bennet* on the original passenger list: Bennet Chappell and Bennet Harrye. Was one of these our Ben Pemlico?

A possible reason for the apparently sensational novelty value of the Hoxton establishment was the newly-imported tobacco, first smelt in England in 1565 and brought after that from the Caribbean. In Jonson's *The alchemist* (V.i.5), one of the Neighbors reports that "*Tabacco*-men" have been seen at a certain resort, to which another directly responds: "Another *Pimlico*." Thomas Harriot, who had accompanied the Roanoke expedition of 1585-6, published his *Briefe and true Report of the new found land of Virginia* in 1588 (second edition 1590), on page 14 of which he makes much of this *Vppówoc* or tobacco and its medicinal and spiritual virtues. (This part of North Carolina is still a major tobacco-growing area).

Like many other minor names of London, the name has spread around England (cf. the further instances in Room [1992, 177]; Ekwall [1954, 76-7]; Coates [1984]).[9] Twelve further instances are now known to me including the one in Dublin already mentioned. These are listed in the appendix.

It thus appears that *Pamlico/Pimlico* is the first authentic American placename to be copied to Britain, and certainly the first

such name formed in a Native-American language (even though a number of etymological details remain unclear). It is followed at a respectful distance in time by numerous examples of such as *New York* (after 1664), *Georgia* (after 1732), and *Bunker('s) Hill* (after 1775). It illustrates a real impact of the events in the New World on the everyday life of the Old Country in the 1590s. This practice continued into the next century, as evidenced by the satirical "Virginia voyage" in the comedy *Eastward ho!* by Chapman, Jonson and Marston (1605, see esp. III.iii.17-22).

Caveat: a chink of gloom in the light, revealingly dispelled.

Somewhere, we may read of "a strange bird the Pemlico, which presageth storms," from Barbados, quoted without a source by Bullen (1891, vii, footnote 1), which I have not found mentioned elsewhere in Jacobean literature. There is a small island called *Pimlico Island* west of Eleuthera in the Bahamas, about which I can find no dating or etymological information whatever. An alternative account of the Hoxton Pimlico could be constructed from these mentions, namely that the tavern (and the island, presumably) took its name directly from a Caribbean and North Atlantic seabird, or indirectly through the use of the word as a personal by-name. John Smith's account of Virginia (1624, V, 171), quoted in the *OED* (second edition), under *pemblico*, says: "Another small bird there is, because she cries Pemblyco they call her so," and she/it is a harbinger of bad weather. *Pemblico* is said by the *OED* to be an obsolete American name for the "dusky shear-water or cohoo *(Puffinus obscurus)*." Recent works of systematic ornithology allow no such fowl;[10] what seems to be meant is *Puffinus l'herminieri l'herminieri* Lesson, now known in the vernacular as Audubon's shearwater, which nests in the Caribbean and is found more widely spread at different seasons, regularly as far north as North Carolina and occasionally Long Island. Is the account presented in this article, after all, an elaborate fabrication based on a misleading mere similarity of form between *Pimlico* and *Pamlico*?

I do not think so. The gaff is blown by the second illustrative quotation in the *OED*. There is a British Library Sloane manuscript (750, lf. 4b), entitled *The historye of the Bermudaes or Summer Islands*, which, according to its editor Lefroy (1882), dates from

around 1630 and may be the work of Captain John Smith himself. More recent scholarship attributes it to Nathaniel Butler, governor of Bermuda from 1619-22, and is able to show that Smith borrowed from it when writing book V of the *General History of Virginia*, published in 1624 (see Barbour 1986, II: 25-475). The manuscript has a passage beginning exactly like Smith's but continuing much more revealingly: "Another smale Birde ther is, the which, by some Ale-banters[11] of London sent ouer hether, hath bin tearmed pimplicoe, for so they Imagine (and a little resemblance putts them in mind of a place so dearely beloued) her note articulates." The shearwater was so named, therefore, because it appeared to call out the name of the age's most famous tavern in London's satellite village.[12] The name can be seen migrating back towards the west whence it came. The *-e-* registered in some of the *OED*'s cited forms, and in the quotation from Smith, give further support for the belief in a direct etymological connection between the Virginian and the London placenames.[13]

Appendix

Occurrences of *Pimlico* in England

Items are presented by name, location, source and earliest known date.

PN X denotes the relevant county volume(s) of the English Place-Name Survey. The last two names are taken from the *Ordnance Survey Gazetteer*.

Pimlico Sands	Arlingham, *PN Gloucestershire* II 176 (Sondes 1584; first mention including Pimlico: date uncertain)
Pimlico	Dublin (1663)
Pimlico Cottages	Nutfield, *PN Surrey* 304 (1749)
Pimlico	Syersham, *PN Northamptonshire* 60 (1791)
Pimlico Farm	Hardwick with Tusmore, *PN Oxfordshire* I 217 (1794)
Pimlico Place	Harpenden, *PN Hertfordshire* 40 (c.1840)
Pimlico Firs	Redlynch, *PN Wiltshire* 396-7 (c.1840)
Pimlico	Denchworth, Berkshire (not in *PN Berkshire*; a field? cf. Field [1993, 152])
Pimlico Farm	Great Limber, *PN Lincolnshire* II 223
Pimlico House	Hadley Green, Monken Hadley, Hertfordshire (formerly Middlesex)
Pimlico	Clitheroe, Lancashire (National Grid reference SD 7443)
Pimlico House	Sibsey, Lincolnshire (National Grid reference TF 3448)

Notes

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1. The first, third and fourth mentions are from the Shoreditch volume of the former London County Council's *Survey of London* (1922), also cited in Gover, et al. (1942, 148, 171). Cf. also Chalfant (1978, 143).

2. I have not seen the original tract, nor do I know where it is, and I cannot find a copy entered in either the British Museum or Library of Congress catalogues. It is not entered (at least, not in the expected place) in the register of printed material maintained at Stationers' Hall (Arber 1875). It was also unknown to Bullen except through Rimbault's report. He says: "I should have been inclined to regard the quotation [about Ben Pimlico] as spurious if Rimbault had not expressly stated that he wrote with the tract before him" (1891, v). The fact that Nares and Herford, et al. appear to have seen it should give us confidence in its existence.

3. Gover, et al. (1942, 171) quote the extract from Rimbault and (almost) in his spelling, but give an incorrect source for his note. I gain some confidence in my trust in Herford, et al. from the fact that they spell and punctuate the title of the 1609 tract precisely as in the original (see note 5).

4. Respectively, Massinger, *City-madam* (IV.iv.39); Glapthorne, *The lady-mother* (III.iii [*Pimblicoe*]); Middleton and Dekker, *The roaring girl* (IV.ii.12); Beaumont and Fletcher, *Knight of the Burning Pestle* (IV.interlude.53-4); Glapthorne, *Wit in a constable* (II.i); Mayne, *City match* (II.vi); Cooke, *Tu Quoque* (556). Jonson, in *The devil is an ass* (III.iii.169-70), has a character note that one might "take in *Pimlico*, and kill the bush,/ At euery tauerne." There is a convenient small menu of the cuisine of seventeenth-century Hoxton in Sugden (1925, 412). These literary mentions of Pimlico are also tabulated at least in part by Sugden (1925, 412) and Chalfant (1978, 96, 143-4).

5. The spelling and punctuation given are from Bullen's facsimile reprint of 1891. Herford, *et al.* reproduce it correctly. Rimbault (1849) and Sugden (1925) give it incorrectly as *Pimlyco: Or Runne Red Cap., 'tis a mad world at Hogsdon.* The Stationers' Hall entry reads: *Pimlico or Runne Red Capp* tis a mad world at *Hogsden.*

6. The other names alluded to in Hakluyt's text are those of the king *Piemakum* or *Piamakum*; and the village of *Pomeiooc(k)/Pomeiock* (White's maps and commentary, and Hakluyt's translation of the commentary). Swanton (1952, 83) accepts *Pomouik* as a version of *Pamlico*. They are, however, called *Ponouike* in the earlier printing by Hakluyt of Barlowe's account (1585; see Quinn [1955, 113], following Hakluyt [1589]; compare and contrast Hakluyt [1600, 130]). Some uncertainty about this early record must be acknowledged. Feest (1978, 281) merely allows a possible identity between the earlier- and later-recorded ethnic

names. Geary (in Quinn 1955, 870, note 74) provides an etymology for the village name: **poma:waki* 'they take refuge', which is clearly incompatible with the form *Pamlico*.

7. This is not the modern Pamlico County, around Bayboro, which was formed as late as 1872.

8. On these events around 1700, see Lefler and Powell (1973, 56-7, 66-9).

9. I intend to demonstrate in forthcoming work the significant role of travelling companies of players in spreading London names to the rest of England.

10. There is an element of confusion — which I cannot clear up — about which bird is meant, because *cahow* is a name now applied to a Bermudian bird, the Bermuda gadfly petrel (current taxonomic status not discovered). The word *pemblico* may therefore have been separately applied to two dark-coloured seabirds with a tendency to be driven onshore in and around stormy weather. Whichever bird is meant in the passages quoted, the ultimate outcome of my discussion remains unchanged.

11. Barbour (1986, II, 343) prints *hanters*, i.e. 'haunters'.

12. Barbour (1986, II, 343, note 1) says that the same process took place in the naming of an Australian bird in the 1840s (*Philemon spp.*). Published descriptions of the calls and songs of both Audubon's shearwater and the Bermuda gadfly petrel do not allow me to judge fairly whether one would need to be drunk already to hear them calling "Pimlico."

13. *Pimlico* seems to have been used in various expressions in the nineteenth century, the import of which is as obscure to me as it was to correspondents J. W. J. and Herbert Hardy in *Notes and Queries*, fifth series, 8 (1877), p. 168, and seventh series, 12 (1891), p. 227. To keep something in Pimlico was a nineteenth-century phrase from Devon meaning 'to keep something spick and span' (Wright 1898-1905). Partridge (1961) records *to walk in Pimlico* as meaning 'to be smartly dressed', saying that the expression comes from "Pimlico-Path near the Globe Theatre" — clearly a misunderstanding of the Tudor/Stuart theatrical connection.

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