**Introduction**

The benefits and limitations of place-name tracing for tracking the origin and migration of Anglo-Saxon tribes and clans are well known.[1] This paper utilizes the techniques of micro-level tracing (of a small kinship group), retrospective tracing (beginning back at the point where they crossed from the Continent), and migration mapping (using Google Maps to follow their route) to identify and track the Wicken, a previously unknown clan of Angles.[2]

The name *Wicken* may have been derived from the proto-Indo-European root word *weik-* and Old English *wicing*.[3]  The Wicken clan were most likely an early group of Vikings, an ethnically heterogeneous group from Scandinavia who affiliated with the Angle tribe in Germany long before the Viking invasion of Britain.   Based upon the singular form <Wick>, the linguistic form <Wicken> developed later from what Richard Coates has described as a pair of new Middle English analogical plural-forms, strong -es and weak -en, "which fossilized before the spread of northern -(e)s plural forms  and were no longer thought of or treated as semantically plural, and Wicken remains where it has become established" (2013, 102).

***Thesis***

The Wicken are a previously unknown tribal group who migrated from Angeln down to the coast of the Netherlands and crossed to Britain near the Isle of Thanet.  The questions that motivate this research include: (1) By what route did the Wicken migrate across Kent? and (2) What kind of places derived their names from the Wicken?  The thesis of this paper is that after settling on the Isle of Thanet, the Wicken migrated past Canterbury, through the Stour Gap and

on across Kent, following Roman roads and Jutish droves into the Weald, where they established a number of farms, dens and other settlements.

### Study Design

This paper uses place-name tracing to track the Wicken from where they entered Britain near the island of Thanet on the northeast coast of Kent.  It follows the clan as they migrate from settlement to settlement, giving their name to a number of farms, dens and woods deep in the Weald, including some in the southwestern corner of Kent and just over the current border into Sussex.

### Research Methods

Since the dynamics of place-name tracing depend upon the evidence of historical documents to describe the direction as well as the time period during which a tribe may have migrated, the paper will begin with information about the relevant phase of Anglo-Saxon history.  This historical information will be followed by a description of Wicken place names and an analysis of their migration.  Of course, the Wicken may have migrated at times without leaving evidence in the form of derivative place names, and some settlements may have names that were derived from homonyms of the name of the tribal group. However, if a sequence of similarly derived place names matches the historical evidence, it is assumed to document the migration route of the tribal group. Since some of these places have been "lost" to history, related locations must be utilized as approximations to map the direction and speed of their migration.  Also, since the Wicken are a previously unknown clan of Angles, the possible

derivation of place names from the name of the clan must be weighed against evidence in support of other conjectures regarding the etymology of these names.

### *Anglo-Saxon History*

The migration of Germanic Tribes across Kent described here will follow the second of two phases discussed by Peter Hunter Blair (1977). These phases can be summarized as follows:

1. The arrival of Angle-Saxons, service as mercenaries for Vortigern, and settlement on Thanet;

2. The revolt of the Anglo-Saxons against the British, battles in Kent and near London, and fallback to eastern Kent.

The second phase of the Anglo-Saxon Settlement of Britain began with a revolt of those who had been invited to Britain as mercenaries and given land on Thanet. The British mounted a response to the revolt with Vortigern and his son Vortimer besieging the invaders three times on the island of Thanet. Thereafter, *Historia Brittonum* (traditionally attributed to Nennius) reports and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* implies that Hengist, leader of the Anglo-Saxon mercenaries, again took the initiative and advanced westward across Kent. According to Nennius, Vortimer died soon after and following treachery at a peace conference called by Hengist, further territorial concessions were forced on Vortigern. Later, according to Michael Wood (1987),

> the British organized resistance against the invaders. Under the leadership of Ambrosius they fought a number of successful battles culminating in a great victory in the 490s at a place called Badon Hill. This battle, says Gildas, gave

forty years of peace to Britain.  After the revolt, the great raid, and the war of the Saxon Federates which ended shortly after the siege at '*Mons Badonicus*', the Saxons went back to 'their eastern home' (45).

### *Wicken Place Names*

As a result of the revolt and subsequent battles, it is apparent that the initial understanding that restricted Anglo-Saxon settlements to the Isle of Thanet was broadened to include most of Kent as well as other territory in southeastern Britain.  Therefore, whether or not they were directly involved in any of these conflicts, it is likely that during this second phase of the Anglo-Saxon settlement of Britain, the Wicken living around Thanet began to move west into this new territory.  Of course, as they did so the Wicken may have settled in many of the named towns and villages previously established by the Britons, the Romans, and by other Anglo-Saxons.  However, there are a number of places in and around Kent whose names appear to have been derived from settlements of the Wicken.  The fundamental question to be explored here through place-name tracing concerns the basic route or routes along which the Wicken migrated.  Beginning near the Isle of Thanet, there are three main possibilities as they headed west:  (1) migration by boat up the Thames Estuary, settling on either shore; (2) migration by land along the southern shore of the Thames, following Roman roads through well-established towns towards London; and (3) migration across the ancient trackways and down the Jutish droves, penetrating deep into the Weald.

### *Along the Thames Estuary*

To begin with, there are two places along the Thames Estuary, accessible via the Wantsum Channel, whose names may derive from the Wicken:

**Wickford.** Some evidence may be provided by a town called Wickford to the north of the Thames, just off of the Estuary and accessible by way of the River Crouch. According to Eilert Ekwall (1940, 516), the place-name Wickford is first attested in a Saxon charter of 995, where it appears as *Wicford*. It appears in the Domesday Book of 1086 as *Wincfort*. The name means 'ford by a wych elm or ford by a dairy-farm'. According to Rayment (2013), there was a Roman military marching camp on the Beauchamps Farm site, which was succeeded by a Roman villa. The author notes other spellings including Wygford and Wyckford. However, Margaret Gelling (1988: 247–48) notes that several names for river fords, such as this one, Wickford (in Essex), Whitford (in Mitcham, Surrey) and Wigford (in Lincoln, Lincolnshire), whose Roman-period credentials are compelling, may resemble *Wickham* in being derived from the Anglo-Saxon appellation /wic/, which was applied at that time to numerous similar settlements.

**Wicham Cottages.** This is a place name in Strood parish on the Medway River which flows into the southern side of the Thames estuary. It is also mentioned by Gelling (1967), who notes that this location meets the requirements for those places whose name is an appellation applied by the early Anglo-Saxons.

The etymology of these two names suggested by Gelling is convincing and generally accepted, so while variations in spelling suggest that derivation from the name of the Wicken is a possibility, without further evidence the conclusion must be reached that the Wicken do not appear to have accessed, explored and settled along the shores of the Thames in such numbers and in such places as to leave any definite evidence of their presence. In addition, there are no other place names to be found along the southern shore of the Thames that may have been

derived from the Wicken, so evidence is lacking to demonstrate that the Wicken followed either of the first two possible routes west.

*Wicken in the Weald*

In contrast to these first two possible routes, however, there is ample evidence for the third, the migration of the Wicken diagonally across Kent from Thanet into the Weald using the ancient roads, trackways and droves shown in Figure 1.   There are numerous place names which were possibly derived from the Wicken and which, according to Witney (1976),  were tied to Lathes (ancient administrative subdivisions or districts in Kent) and Manors (estates under a lord enjoying a variety of rights over land and tenants) located throughout the Weald.

[Please insert Figure 1 about here.]

Moving from east to west, these place names include the following:

**Wick Farm**.   In the Lathe of Sturry, the earliest written records are references in charters of King Wihtred and King Offa to Wick Farm, 724 AD in Headcorn (1358). Maps also show a **Wick Hill** nearby. Both places appear to be small farmsteads, so if they were founded by a single family, the names may have been derived from the head of that family, using the singular form of the clan name, *Wick*.  They may both have been part of a den called *Wick* which became a tenement of the manor of Westgate in the parish of Headcorn, what Witney describes as "the Westgate den of Wick in Headcorn" (1976, 173).

**Wycherindenn.**  In the Lathe of Faversham, according to Witney (1976, 253), the Hundred Rolls of Edward I record actions with regard to a messuage (a principal dwelling, outbuildings and surrounding land) at this den.  Many of those who settled in Kent, drove their animals down through the commons into the Weald to forage for acorns in the fall and subsequently established seasonal and then permanent dens.  These dens often took their names from the folk who established them, and the folk then took their surnames from the dens.  Numerous other Wicken-related place names in the Weald suggest a similar reference to a den (or clearing) in the hurst (or wood) or to the hurst itself.

**Winchenden.**  Further to the west in the Lath of Sutton-at-Hone, this place is the land described in the gloss of the fourteenth century Kentish *Book of Aid for the Knighting of the Black Prince*.  Witney (1976, 227) notes that this area is marked under that name in Hasted's map of the hundred, just to the east of where Tonbridge railway station is now; and appears there on the Tonbridge tithe map as *Wissenden*.

**Wichenden.**  This is a place recorded in 1202 in Frittenden parish, which Witney indicates is now spelled Whitsunden, an example of "the frequent conversion of the vocable 'tch' or 'ch' - usually rendered by 'c' or 'cc' In pre-Conquest documents - into 'ts' or 'ss' because of the inability of the Norman-French to pronounce the sound" (1976, 214).  According to The Frittenden Historical Society (True Web Design, 2020), the village of Frittenden is first named in a charter of 804, so Wichenden was most likely established by that date.

**Wickhurst.** Continuing to cite from Witney (1976, 225), in the manor of Sevenoaks (the archbishop) there is this place, where "hurst" indicates a wood.

**Winkhurst**. According to Witney (1976, 225), another wood is recorded in the manor of Sundridge (the archbishop). These two names may identify Wicken settlements at the eastern and western edge of the same forest south of Sevenoaks.

**Wingindene.** In the Lathe of Wallington, Ewing (1927, *47)* indicate that five dens appear in a charter of 1044 (KCD 771), as granted by King Edward to Lewisham (St. Peter's, Ghent). Of these Wingindene is Wickenden, which lay around Claydene. The Den was located near a Roman road and just off the Roman-era Spode Lane, down which the Wicken may have traveled.

**Wickens.** Ewing (1927, 47) notes that in the parish of Cowden there is also a farm by this name. The den and the farm provide evidence of the presence of Wicken in the area, and there are other spellings of the original name found in historical documents concerning Cowden. For example, a contract for founding Bell No. 5 in the tower of Cowden Church with 12 pounds was witnessed by John Wickinge and Nich. Wicking, among others (Ewing, 1927, 213). All these names suggest that the village and parish of Cowden became a location to which several Wicken family groups were attracted.

**Wych Cross.** On current maps, this crossroads is located in Ashdown Forest, 10 miles to the south of Cowden. The etymology of the place name, also spelled <Wytch Cross> and <Witch Cross>, is uncertain. Of course, given the prevalence of similar names in the area, it might have derived from the presence of members of the Wicken clan.

**Wickens Woods**.  Located two miles southwest of the settlement of Wych Cross is this wood whose name is clearly derived from the Wicken.  There is also a large, old manor house named Wickenden Manor, three miles from Wych Cross, that now serves as a conference center. These names would suggest that either the ancient border between Kent and Sussex has moved or the Wicken did not stop moving into the Weald at the very edge of Kent.

**Analysis**

Because some historic places have been "lost" and their names cannot be located using Google Maps, the route by which the Wicken moved across Kent was mapped by finding (1) place names (e.g., dens, woods, farms, settlements, tenements or villages), (2) the names of related parishes or manors within which these places were situated, or (3) the names of major villages within the Lathes where these places were situated, in that order, as shown in Table 1.

[Please insert Table 1 about here.]

Therefore, the route that is mapped below includes some locations that are not as geographically accurate as others.  Also, many place names in England occur in multiple locations, sometimes far apart.  Therefore, when Google picks up multiple places with the same name, the one which appears to correspond most closely to the prevailing route has been chosen. Finally, place names are sometimes replicated with small variations within the same area.  In this case, only one of the names is used for mapping.

Given these choices, most places on the route appear to be located within a one- or two-day trip by foot from each other.  The average distance is 10.2 miles, with the longest

being the first 28 miles from Wingham to Wissenden (Winchenden) and the shortest being 2

miles from Wick Hill to Headcorn (Wick Farm), from Wingindene (Wickenden) to Wickens, and

Wych Cross to Wickens Woods.  Since the Wicken would have had no specific goal or timeline

for migrating across Kent after the revolt against the Britons, it is not surprising that they

appear to have made a major move when they first left Thanet, crossing through the settled

area around Canterbury and then moving more slowly and incrementally, while still avoiding

other scattered tribal settlements.

[Please insert Figure 2 about here.]

Starting with the Faversham Lathe and traveling across and through the Sutton-on-Hone

Lathe, the Wicken were moving away from the chalk hills and farmland of the North Downs and

into the primeval oak forest of the Weald.  All the place names are either farms (Wick Farm and

Wickens), forests (Wickhurst, Winkhurst, and Wickens Woods), or dens (Wycherindenn,

Winchenden, Wichenden, and Wingindene) formed as Wicken family members moved with

their animals down the droves from one settlement to another. There are many other similar

names for farms, forests and especially dens to be found along the route.

Many of the Wicken place names line up in a manner which suggests that the clan

migrated down to the Weald in a stepwise fashion, moving west from one settlement over to a

drove and then up or down to a new settlement.  The first, and longest stretch appears to reach

to the southeast past Canterbury, down along the Stour River valley and through the Stour Gap,

one of several entries into the Weald which allow the traveler to avoid climbing over the Chart

Hills with their steep south-facing scarp slope.  Only on the stretch from Wichenden in

Frittenden parish to Wickhurst in the manor of Sevenoaks (the archbishop) did the Wicken move to the northwest.  On Witney's map in Figure 2, Wichenden is near to Cranbrook, Town #1, and Wickhurst is near to Tonbridge, Town #2. The map shows the web of major and minor droves which, together with the Roman road from London to Hastings (A to B), connects these two towns and continues on to Sevenoaks. From there the main drove in the Sutton-at-Hone Lathe would have taken the Wicken in a southerly direction until they reached the Manor of Cowden Lewisham in the Lathe of Wallington.  In this way, they followed a stepwise migratory path through Kent from the Wingham Cluster in the northeast to the village of Cowden in the southwest, from which location they moved southwest once again, just over what is now the border between Kent and Sussex.

**Discussion**

Perhaps by moving in this manner the Wicken deliberately avoided crossing into the territory of the Jutes to the south and east, the Saxons to the north and west, and the Romano-Britons who may have located along the south shore of the Thames.  The Wicken who migrated deep into the Weald may also have been geographically isolated from the Anglo-Saxon insurrection, the battles that occurred along the Thames Valley, and the subsequent incursions of the Vikings, the Danes and the Normans.  Many of these small settlements are now "lost", but some of them appear to have been more permanent than others, with descendants of the original Wicken maintaining and expanding their settlements.  In some cases, they took their surnames names from these homesteads and then moved out across the country and eventually to other countries around the world.

One example of this growth is the Wicken family who established a den in Cowden that became known as the Wicken Den. According to Ewing (1927), the occupants took their surname from the den and after the Norman Invasion become known, for example, as 'Martin de Wiggendenn.' As the Wickendens moved to other homesteads in the village, that surname was contracted and additional locations were attached, such as Thomas Wickenden de Bechinwoode, Wickenden de Ludwell, Thomas Wickenden de la Hole, and Thomas Wykenden de la Streete. In the succeeding centuries the Wickendens established and then occupied a dozen homesteads across the village of Cowden, with many descendants moving out to other villages across Kent and to other counties of southern England. The original homestead of Wickenden was leased out by 1461 and disappeared from parish records by 1623. The map in Figure 3 shows the number of Wickenden births listed in parish registries in each county between 1700 and 1800 (Wickenden, 2020c).

[Please insert Figure 3 about here.]

In 1997, Halbert's Family Registry printed *The World Book of Wickendens*, including names and addresses of Wickendens around the world. The statistical information in Table 2 was included.

[Please insert Table 2 about here.]

So, by that time, some 19 centuries after the den was first established, and within the limits of this registry, the Wickendens were nearly three thousand strong and were living in 10 countries around the world.

**Conclusion**

This paper uses place names and the techniques of micro-level tracing, retrospective tracing and migration mapping to track the movement of a previously unknown clan of Angles named Wicken. It appears from an analysis of the patterns formed by these names that after crossing the Channel and settling near Thanet, the Wicken grew in numbers and spread out across Kent. Some kinship groups may have settled in named villages around the Thames Estuary, but other Wicken established a number of new homesteads as they moved along the Roman roads and down the Jutish droves into the Weald toward Sussex. Utilizing this model of Anglo-Saxon migration and these techniques of place-name tracing, further research may shed light on the role of the Wicken in other counties and on the contribution of this and other tribal clans and kinship groups to the complex history of Medieval Britain.

**Notes**

[1] For example, the book by William Bakken (1998) has a section on Place Name Studies. Peter Hunter Blair (1977) also writes about the evidence of archaeology and place-names (18-24).

[2] The origin of the Wicken and their migrations on the Continent are described in an earlier paper by the author (Wickenden 2000a). The arrival of the Wicken in Britain, their settlement in a cluster of hamlets near Thanet, and the establishment by the Wicken of a den on the Isle itself is described in another paper by the author (Wickenden 2000b)

[3] According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary (*Harper*, 2001-2020)*, the Old English word *wicing* and Old Frisian *wizing* "probably derive from *wic* 'village, camp' (large temporary camps were a feature of the Viking raids), related to Latin *vicus* 'village, habitation' (from PIE root *weik-* (1) 'clan')."

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