

The Place-name Repton

The first mention of Repton occurs in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, under the year 755. Referring to "the slaughter" of King Ethelbald, King of Mercia, one out of the six MSS(*) relates that it happened "on Hreopandune," "at Repton"; the other five have "on Seccandune," "at Seckington," near Tamworth. Four of the MSS. spell the name "Hreopandune," one "Hreopadune," and one "Reopandune."

Under the year 874, when the Danes came from Lindsay, Lincolnshire, to Repton, "and there took winter quarters," four of the MSS. spell the name "Hreopedune," one "Hreopendune." Again, under the year 875, when they left, having destroyed the Abbey and the town, the name is spelt "Hreopedune." The final e represents the dative case. In Domesday Book it is spelt "Rapendune," "Rapendvne," or "Rapendvn." In later times, among the various ways of spelling the name, the following occur: — Hrypadun, Rypadun, Rapandun, Rapindon, Rependon, Repindon, Repingdon, Repyndon, Repington, Repyngton, Ripington, Rippington, &c., and finally Repton; the final syllable *ton* being, of course, a corruption of the ancient *dim* or *don*.

Now as to the meaning of the name. There is no doubt about the suffix *dun*, which was adopted by the Anglo-Saxons from the Celts, and means *a hill*, and was generally used to denote a hill-fortress, stronghold, or fortified place. As to the meaning of the prefix "Hreopan," "Hreopen," or "Repen," the following suggestions have been made: —

- (1) "Hreopan" is the genitive case of a Saxon proper name, "Hreopa," and means Hreopa's hill, or hill-fortress.
- (2) "Hropan or Hreopan," a verb, "to shout," or "proclaim"; or a noun, "Hrop," "clamour," or "proclamation," and so may mean "the hill of shouting, clamour, or proclamation."
- (3) "Repan or Ripan," a verb, "to reap " ; or a noun, "Rep, or Rip," a harvest, "the hill of reaping or harvest."
- (4) "Hreppr," a Norse noun for "a village," "a village on a hill."
- (5) "Ripa," a noun meaning "a bank," "a hill on a bank," of the river Trent, which flows close to it.

The question is, which of these is the most probable meaning? The first three seem to suit the place and position. It is a very common thing for a hill or place to bear the name of the owner or occupier. As Hreopandun was the capital of Mercia, many a council may have been held, many a law may have been proclaimed, and many a fight may have been fought, with noise and clamour, upon its hill, and, in peaceful times, a harvest may have been reaped upon it, and the land around. As regards the two last suggestions, the arrival of the Norsemen, in the eighth century, would be too late for them to name a place which had probably been in existence, as an important town, for nearly two centuries before they came.

The prefix "ripa" seems to favour a Roman origin, but no proofs of a Roman occupation can be found. If there are any, they lie hid beneath that oblong enclosure in a field to the north of Repton, near the banks of the river Trent, which Stebbing Shaw, in the *Topographer* (Vol. II., p. 250), says "was an ancient colony of the Romans called 'Repandunum.'" As the name does not appear in any of the "Itineraries," nor in any of the minor settlements or camps in Derbyshire, this statement is extremely doubtful. Most probably the camp was constructed by the Danes when they wintered there in the year 874. The name Repandunum appears in Spruner and Menke's "Atlas Antiquus " as a town among the Cornavii (? Coritani), at the junction of the Trent and Dove!

* MSS - The Mercian Register is a short series of annals concerned chiefly with Mercian affairs during the reign of Edward the Elder and incorporated into certain manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle - annals A-F*.