

## River Roding

An air of great permanence attends the River Roding. It follows a twisting course and man has used it and adapted his living to the direction of its whims for all of recorded history.



Nine hundred years ago, men gathered pebble rubble from the river bed to build the church in which we worship today and a century later its waters began to turn the wheel of the new watermill to grind their corn. Even at that time, its flow was not constant and they raised a windmill close by to provide an alternative source of power. In the eighteenth century, it was the river which dictated the course of man's roads through this part of Essex; a story recounted in a separate article on this website dealing with the history of Fyfield Bridge.

Although the river has served us for so long, for hundreds of years man could not even decide what name to give it. Certainly it was not the River Roding a millennium ago. A mile or so upstream from Fyfield, Lambert de Buella's people called it a winding stream, for which they used the Old English word 'sceolh', and winding it truly is at the hamlet of Shellow Bowells which took its name from Lambert de Buella and the winding river by which he had settled.

Today, we are left with just Roding and Roothing and we sometimes argue about which is the correct one. The answer is that neither version has a special precedence over the other, nor over any of the other spellings, forty-seven of which predate them both. If we were truly purist, perhaps we would agree to revert to the original name, since all later spellings are corruptions of it, and we would call the river the Hrodinga because, contrary to popular opinion, the river did not give its name to the group of villages through which it passed but, instead, it adopted their common name.

Further downstream at Aungre – later Ongar – Lambert de Buella's eleventh-century contemporaries called the river the Angricesburne. At Aungre, the river was no longer winding, but a grassland stream or 'ric'; hence the inclusion of this descriptive word in the name they gave the river. From Aungre, the water flowed on through Lukintone (Loughton) and then to Ilfort. At Ilfort, the inhabitants knew the river as the Hile, meaning a trickling stream, and the name they gave their their settlement combined this word with the fact that at Ilford they had a ford by which to cross from one bank to the other.

But the names Angricesburne and Hile did not endure and, five-hundred years on, it was

to be a Saxon ancestor whose name would be adopted by all for the name of this lovely, useful river with all its variety of character and shade. A few miles north of Fyfield, Hroda's people, the Hrodingas had settled a large area, made fertile by the river winding through their newly-cleared fields. The area developed into nine villages, (Abbess, Ayethorpe, Beauchamp, Berners, High, Leaden, Margaret, Morrell, White) each of which had the same generic name which today we spell Roding. But in mediaeval times, as well as more recently, even the Roding villages could not agree the spelling of their common name and in the seven-hundred years between the Norman Conquest and the beginning of modern times, scribes, writing to their masters' dictation found about sixty different ways to spell the river's one name, setting it down the way that they heard it. Some of the spellings are illuminating commentaries upon the spoken dialect of their day.

And what of the sixty alternative spellings? Here they are, in the chronological order of their appearance in surviving records with the year of first occurrence in brackets. Lower-case spellings are those used for villages and other settlements and those printed in capital letters are the names recorded for the river:

Hroda (Saxon settler – people: Hrodingas), Rodyngas (date unclear), SCEOLH, Rothinges (10th C), HILAE (958), HILE (958), Rotinges (1042), Rodinges (1050), ANGRICESBURNE (1062), Rodincg (1086), Roinges (1086), Rothingas (1086), Rodingas (1100), Roing (1119), Roinge (1119), Roynges (1119), Rohinges (1198), Rohinga (1200), Royng (1212), Roynge (1212), Reyng (1235), Reynges (1235), Rochyngg (1235), Roeynges (1235), Rothingg (1235), Roynges (1235), Raynges (1236), Roying (1238), Roynges (1238), Rainges (1244), Roeing (1247), Rong (1247), Rothing (1248), Rothinge (1248), HYLE (1250), Roeng' (1251), Roenges (1251), Reinges (1254), Rothyng (1254), Rothynges (1256), Rouing (1274), Royinch (1274), Roynch (1274), Radyngas (1282), Rodyng (1291), Rothynge (1291), Rothyngg (1303), Wrothinge (1309), Rothyngge (1329), Rouchinge (1329), Rouchingge (1329), Rosynge (1400), Rowthyng (1462), Roding (1482), Redyng (1490), Roothing (1507), Rooding (1535), Rothynge (1536), Rodynge (1544), RODON (1576), IUELL (1577), Rodinge (1577), RODONUS (1577), RODING (1586), Roothinge (1593), Ruding (1688), Rooden (1690), Roodin (1697).

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