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# THE CODRETUM (WHATEVER THAT MAY BE) AT LITTLE ROBOROUGH 

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#### Abstract

The boundary . . . starts from the rivulet which flows into the Tamar on the north side of the port. Then, moving inland, it goes . . . to the corner of the hedge made by Walter Merchant, and along the hedge to the corner of the codretum (whatever that may be) at Little Roborough. . . . From Little Roborough the boundary runs to a boundary-mark under a forked oak; after which it moves eastward, the remaining points mentioned being: . . . the old road from the port; the codrum at the higher end of the houses; the eastern corner of a ditch . . .


Because it is no part of my present purpose to pillory any individual, living or dead, I refrain from giving an exact reference either for this, my main text, or for any other specimen held in the tongs. The excerpt comes from a commentary - first published in 1945 and then reprinted, tel quel, in 1952 and 1969 - on a grant, datable 1235-40, concerning Morwellham, a small port just north of Plymouth, on the Devon side of the Tamar. The extant document, a fourteenth-century copy, there described as forming part of the Duke of Bedford's muniments, has since been deposited in Devon Record Office. ${ }^{1}$

Two unexplained terms are involved, related ones, it would seem: codrum or codrus; and a presumably derived codretum. ${ }^{2}$ Both must have been at one remove, possibly two, from spoken usage. The range of possible meanings is limited by context: both terms denote landmarks, that is, outdoor features which, whether natural or artificial, are at once substantial and quasi-permanent. To anyone already knowing - never mind how - what these terms mean, the writer's throwing-up of hands seems naïve, and its cavalier manner scarcely forgivable. Yet, before indulging the urge to mock, anyone less than wholly confident of omniscience ought first to ask what excuse the writer, a respected scholar now beyond self-defence, may have had for ignorance so unashamed.

Some excuse there was, because the main Latin-English dictionaries were then silent on the point, and partly remain so. Under codr- Lewis and Short lists nothing remotely relevant; nor does the Oxford Latin Dictionary, in any case not available until 1968. ${ }^{3}$ Souter's Glossary of Later Latin has nothing to offer. ${ }^{4}$ Latham's Revised Medieval Latin Word-List, published in 1965 , offers in that alphabetical position nothing at all helpful, nor does his Dictionary
of Medieval Latin from British Sources, of which the relevant fascicule appeared in 1981. ${ }^{5}$ Niermeyer's Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus, published in 1976, is equally uninformative. ${ }^{6}$ Thus far, then, our commentator might have been throwing up his hands in fair company, and not only that of his own time. As for Du Cange, we shall come to that later.

Was throwing up the hands in fact the only possible course? Dictionaries are but products of philologists much like the rest except for a certain specialization; to cry off the hunt whenever their assistance fails is pusillanimous. The main, perhaps the only advantage that lexicographers enjoy lies in having to hand a representative, if not always comprehensive, collection of quotations. That apart, any competent medievalist ought to feel equal to essaying elucidation of an unusual word. Common sense, combined with a modicum of general experience, modern as well as medieval, and perhaps with a smattering of comparative philology, ought amply to compensate for lack of card-indexed quotations. Before tackling our main text, we may observe in action upon other cruces some possible modes of approach.

In 1975 an editor of The Boke of St Albans glossed as "'pressed mutton'?" a phrase occurring among recommendations for dosing a hawk afflicted with internal parasites: pressure made of a lombe that was borne in vatyme. Even apart from confusion of two ages of sheep, this interpretation is, as the editor's own question-mark acknowledges, unconvincing. OED is, however, silent as to alternative meanings for pressure, nor does its Supplement even now afford help; MED had not then reached pre-. ${ }^{7}$ Is there, then, an impasse?

Although conclusive evidence can come only from medieval sources, intermediate clues may legitimately be seized upon from anywhere whatsoever. The point has been made by Arthur Owen in his study of the topographical term Hafdic, where he says: "I recalled. . . (from a visit to Denmark and a little study of its language many years previously) that hav in modern Danish means 'sea'." ${ }^{8}$ In the present case too, what inspired an alternative interpretation of the therapeutic pressure was a term encountered during foreign travels: the legend lait présuré, to wit, "junket", observed on cartons in the chill-cabinet and subsequently on the family table. Modern French présure means indeed "rennet", i.e. a digestive enzyme found in a ruminant's fourth stomach and used by human beings in cheese-making and other processes.

Whether this clue would lead anywhere relevant remained to be seen. Certainly, Medieval French presure/prisure, like Medieval Latin pre(n)sura, also meant "rennet". ${ }^{9}$ In the event, search among medieval cynegetica soon unearthed a French hunting-treatise that specified, also as a medicine, la presure ou caillon d'un jeune cerf tué dedans le ventre de la biche. ${ }^{10}$ Although not exact, the parallel seems close enough, with its reference to another sort of young animal stillborn, to justify our assuming that the Middle

English pressure to be obtained from a lamb was likewise caillon, that is, "rennet". ${ }^{11}$

Inspiration for our second gloss has been less autobiographical. A calendar, published in 1961, of thirteenth-century coroners' rolls from Bedfordshire offers under 1276 the following entry:

> About midnight on 12 Aug., when John Clarice was lying near his wife Joan daughter of Richard le Freman, as was his custom, in his bed in the chamber of his house at Houghton Regis in the liberty of Eaton Bray, madness took possession of him, and Joan, thinking that he was seized by death, took a small scythe (falxsiculum) and cut his throat. She also took a weapon called 'vonge' (sc, a bill-hook) and struck him on the right side of the head, so that his brain flowed forth . . .

Without the Latin text no comment can be ventured on inconsequentialities in the main plot. But here too the editor himself betrays unease, by bracketing the term translated as "scythe". To share that unease one hardly needs to be a medievalist, let alone a philologist; simply to visualize the scene. At close quarters the implement called in Modern English a "scythe", with a handle as tall as a man, would make an unwieldy weapon. ${ }^{12}$ A medieval bedchamber that doubled as tool-shed to the extent of offering one ready to the hand would surely have furnished also something more compact.

A scythe may no longer be an everyday object; but a medievalist whose life has been so sheltered or so over-mechanized as never to have afforded sight of one in action might be expected to have enjoyed, in compensation, some familiarity with the Labours of the Months. These regularly depict, as an element in the hay-making scene characterizing (according to the cycle's geographical affinities) June or July, the size, shape and lawful modus operandi of a scythe: the best-known illustration may be that for June in les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry, but this is only one among scores of such scenes. ${ }^{13}$ Even those to whom medieval art remains a closed book might recollect the size and shape of the emblematic implement that old Father Time bears over his shoulder. Speaking in Modern English of "a small scythe" comes close to being a contradiction in terms.

True, Latin falxsiculum (to retain the speliing cited) represents, morphologically speaking, a diminutive of falx, one meaning of which is "scythe"; but, apart from the fact that etymology is an unreliable guide to meaning, the simplex term itself (of dubious origin) shows a wider range of meaning than does English scythe, being rendered in the Oxford Latin Dictionary as "an agricultural implement with a curved blade, hook, bill, scythe, sickle".

As with pre(s)ure, an initial approach may be tried through
modern usage. Latin falx gives Modern French faux, nowadays certainly indicating the same sort of long-handled tool for cutting grass as is depicted in the hay-making scenes in Books of Hours a "scythe", that is (as with junket, I have in real life marked word and thing together); modern encyclopaedias show design and modus operandi as scarcely changed since medieval times. ${ }^{14}$ As for the several Modern French diminutive forms, none means simply "small faux".

The term faucille denotes a tool that is - or, rather, was used, not for mowing grass, but for reaping corn; illustrated encyclopaedias show it as not just far smaller than a faux but as distinctively shaped, with a short handle set at a different angle. ${ }^{15}$ In Modern English this is called a sickle; a schematic depiction of it is familiar in the Soviet emblem. Medieval use of a similar tool is amply confirmed by reaping-scenes representing the Labour for July or August. ${ }^{16}$ The form faucille already existed, with the same meaning, in Old French; ${ }^{17}$ and, give or take grammatical gender, this might be thought to correspond passably well with Latin falxsiculum. Yet, though handier by far than a scythe, a sickle still does not seem the ideal throat-cutter.

The Modern French double-diminutive faucillon denotes, not "a small faucille", but another distinct kind of tool, to wit, "a pruning-knife". ${ }^{8}$ Again the term was already current in Old French, evidently with the same sense. ${ }^{19}$ Pruning, although recognized as one of the Labours for March, was less consistently chosen for illustration than were mowing and reaping; some Books of Hours, Les Très Riches Heures among them, do none the less show vines or other bushes being trimmed by means of a short, stout curved blade such as might be effectively wielded in confined space, even by a feminine hand. ${ }^{20}$ Although the vocabulary of medieval agriculture is not easy to investigate, such a pruning-knife is probably what medieval French-speakers denoted by the terms faucillon and fauchoun. ${ }^{21}$

Of the Old French terms cited, only fauchoun seems to have been borrowed into Middle English, and then mostly to denote a weapon of war. ${ }^{22}$ A few late-fifteenth- and sixteenth-century instances, on the other hand, show not only agricultural context ("plowemen . . . with their staues and fauchons" - Caxton) but also specific use for cutting wood ("Let thy bright fauchion lend me cypresse boughes" - Drayton). ${ }^{23}$ The tool in question, presumably similar to those shown in pruning-scenes in Books of Hours, seems, however, more often to have been called in English a bill or billhook. ${ }^{24}$ What thirteenth-century Bedfordshire peasants did indeed call their pruning-knives and hedging-bills may be at present unascertainable; ${ }^{25}$ but it seems safe to assume that they had such tools, and used them as need arose. In the case in question the coroner's clerk, we may surmise, found himself called upon to Latinize a term for "pruning-knife". If that term were fauchoun, choice of falxsiculum might be natural. If it were some native Middle English one, such as bil, one sense of which was "pruninghook", perhaps he first rendered it mentally as fauchoun or faucillon, then cast about for a Latin equivalent (few can have
named agricultural implements directly in Latin). At all events, visualization of the crime has gained in verisimilitude, with a compact pruning-knife replacing the supposed "small scythe". (In case any should wish to know the outcome of the case, Joan was sentenced to abjure the realm, viê the Dover road.)

As to the terms from which this essay began, one surely unassailable assumption has been made: that codretum is derived from codrus/codrum. The rôle of the suffix -etum might, from its occurrence in "English" words like arboretum, be guessed even by someone with little Latin, let alone by a student of charters.: It is, as the Oxford Latin Dictionary says, added "to names of plants to denote the place where they grow". That makes codrus/codrum a plant-name; and, in so far as a single specimen can serve as a landmark, the type of plant must be a tree.

A détour through modern usage, although feasible, can on this occasion be dispensed with, because medieval studies alone readily furnish all the clues we need. Marie de France uses for naming the twin sister of her heroine Le Fresne, herself named from the ashtree under which she had been found, the form La Co(u)dre. ${ }^{26}$ Those seeking to persuade Le Fresne's lover to discard her and marry La Codre pun on the names in a way implying that the latter too is a tree-name:

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Pur le freisne que vus larrez
En eschange le codre avrez;
En la codre ad noiz e deduiz,
Li freisne ne porte unke fruiz: (337-40)
(In exchange for the ash-tree that you will leave,
you shall have the codre; from the codre come nuts
and delights, but the ash-tree bears no fruits at
al1!)
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Marie's use of a corresponding common noun confirms this interpretation. In Laüstic, when traps are being set for the nightingale,

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N'i ot codre ne chastainier
U il ne mettent laz u glu. (98-9)
(There is no codre or chestnut-tree where they
fail to lay a snare or some bird-lime.)
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In Chievrefoil it is a codre from which Tristram cuts a wand on which to carve a message (line 51), and the same species of tree that in his message serves as symbol of a true lover:

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D'euls deus fu il tut autresi
Cume del chievrefoil esteit
Ki a la codre si perneit:
Quant il s'i est laciez e pris
E tut entur le fust s'est mis,
Ensemble poënt bien durer;
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> Mes ki puis les voelt desevrer, Li codres muert hastivement Et le chievrefoilz ensement. "Bele amie, si est du nus: Ni vus sanz mei, ne jeo sanz vus." (68-78) (It was for the two of them just as for a honeysuckle clinging to a codre: once it has entwined and fixed itself there and coiled itself all about the trunk, thus united both may thrive; but, should anyone try to part them, the codre will straightway die, and the honeysuckle too. "Fair sweetheart, so it is with us: you cannot live without me, nor I without you.")

A late-thirteenth-century English gloss to the term co(u)dre occurs in Walter of Bibbesworth's manual for teaching Anglo-Norman, where it is rendered "hasil". 27

Once the trail has been followed thus far, dictionaries afford ample confirmation of the findings; some at least of them would have done so already in 1945. True, the necessary fascicule of the Anglo-Norman Dictionary appeared only in $1977 .{ }^{28}$ But Godefroy in his second volume (1883) listed as collectives the forms coudreel, coudrete (more probably a diminutive) and coudriere; in his ninth (1898; Complément) he gave in fact coldre "coudrier, noisetier" and its derivative coldraie. Tobler-Lommatzsch, the relevant volume of which appeared in 1936, likewise gave coudre "Haselstrauch", together with the diminutives coudrele and coudrete and the collective coudroie "Haselgebüsch". Dictionaries of Modern French, such as the Dictionnaire Robert, also give coudre "noisetier" alongside the more usual coudrier and the collective coudraie. With old French co(u)dre thus established as meaning "hazel-bush", little remains but to pursue it to its lair.

Easier said than done. Even for the Romanist, Old French coldre/couldre/coudre/codre proves an awkward customer. A Frankish etymology can instantly be ruled out, because (as the German glosses just cited imply) the relevant common Germanic root is the same hasl- as underlies our English term. ${ }^{29}$ The Latin cognate is (as a nurseryman's catalogue might suggest) cory̆lus, with a collective corg̈letum: near enough to coldre to raise hopes of finding some link, distant enough to make such endeavour a daunting one. Reflexes of cory̆lus prove in the event fairly scarce, apparently because over much of the Romance area this term was soon discarded in favour of neologisms spread by medieval marketing-men. ${ }^{30}$ Such reflexes of it as are attested mostly imply an intermediate stage showing metathesis, probably to *colurus. Whether or not to attribute such metathesis to contamination by the Gaulish cognate, probably *coll- < *cosl-, seems a matter of opinion. ${ }^{31}$ After metathesis, development from Common Romance to Old French followed a normal path, with the unstressed medial vowel syncopated, a dental glide generated between [1] and [r], and then the nowpreconsonantal [1] velarized and finally vocalized to [u]: *colür$>$ *colr- > coldr-> coudr-. ${ }^{32}$ The derivative cory̆Ietum "hazel-copse"
followed a parallel path, giving old French couldraie (and variants).

Thus, our codretum represents use, in place of the classical cory̆letum, of a relatinization of its Old French reflex co(u)draie. Now, when we scarcely need them, Latin dictionaries begin to serve us better. True, neither Lewis and Short nor the Oxford Latin Dictionary appears to have any truck with such latter-day corruptions; nor has Souter's Glossary. But, under cory̆lus, Latham's Revised Word-List - admittedly published rather late in the day for our original commentator - gives both a simplex form coudra, referred to old French coudre, and a derivative coudreium; his Dictionary lists both coudra and coudreicum independently. One authority not so late in the day was, however, Du Cange; under Codra he had all along, albeit cryptically, given the essential clue:

> Interpres Gallicus Codra reddit per Codres, vocem mihi non magis notam, nisi forte sit item quod Gallis Coudre vel Coudrier, Corylus ${ }^{33}$

- all in a nutshell.

The same conclusion might have been reached by another route that would at the same time have shown Old French coudraie figuring on English soil in contexts other than those of courtly romance. There is in Sussex (as polo-fans in particular will recall) a place called Cowdray Park, likewise a Cowdry Farm. ${ }^{34}$ These place-names represent old French coudraie, regularly used in France itself for forming toponyms. ${ }^{35}$ There seems, however, no evidence for any Middle English borrowing of *cowdray as a common noun. So, when similar forms appear outside Sussex seemingly as topographical bynames, ${ }^{36}$ the question becomes delicate. As Reaney pointed out, some at least of these medieval by-names probably referred back to continental localities so named; and modern family-names like Cowdr (a)y may thus go back either to continental origins or to the places in Sussex. ${ }^{37}$ On the other hand, a Staffordshire occurrence c. 1300 of a by-name de la Coudrey/del Coudray ${ }^{38}$ might represent scribal translation of a native English Hazelgrove, Hazelwood or Hazlett; but without further documentation no more can be said. For all the uncertainties, there seems, however, little reason to doubt that among literate English people of the mid-thirteenth century old French co(u)dre and co(u)draie could have been familiar enough to have sprung to the mind of a dog-Latinist improvising terms for landmarks.

It would have been gratifying, especially for this nontoponymist, to have rounded off this survey by reporting that maps of the Morwellham district offered a *Cowdray, a *Hazlett or a *Nutley in just the right place. Alas, that is not so. Despite the most patient and generous help from the staff of the Map Room at Cambridge University Library, no map, at any scale, has been found that vouchsafes any even remotely appropriate microtoponym. ${ }^{39}$ Woodlands still abound, but to the cartographer mostly remain nameless.

1 Now Wl258M/Bundle D 39/5. I am grateful to Mrs M.M. Rowe and the staff of Devon Record office for locating this document and arranging for me to receive a photocopy of it. I should also like to thank the Curator of Woburn Abbey, Miss Lavinia Wellicome, and the Archivist of the Bedford Estates, Mrs M.P.G. Draper, for their courteous replies to my enquiries.
The readings are: ad angulu(m) codreti; ad codru(m).
C.T. Lewis and C. Short, A Latin Dictionary (Oxford, 1900); Oxford Latin
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Sources (London, 1965); idem, Dictionary of Medieval Latin Erom British
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J.F. Niermeyer, Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus (Leiden, 1976).
Middle English Dictionary, ed. Hans Kurath, Sherman M. Kuhn et alii (Ann
Arbor, 1954-). Fasc.P6, copyrighted 1983, gives under pressūre n. (2)
"rennet" only this quotation from The Boke of St Albans.
A.E.B. Owen, "Hafdic: a Lindsey name and its implications", Journal of the
English Place-Name Society 7 (1974-1975) pp.45-56, esp.49-50.
F. Godefroy, Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue frangaise, lo vols. (Paris,
1881-1902) X (Complément), s.v. presure; A. Tobler and E. Lommatzsch,
Altfranzösisches wörterbuch (Berlin \&c., 1925-in progress) s.v. presure.
Cf. Latham, Word-List, s.v. presura.
Jacques du Fouilloux, La Vënerie et l'Adolescence, ed. G. Tilander,
Cynegetica 16 (Karlshamn, 1967) p.44, and gloss p. 201.
See further Review of English Studies, new ser. 28 (1977) p. 202.
Encyclopaedia Britannica: Micropaedia IX (London, 1974) offers on p.la
nineteenth-century photograph of a scythe in use.
J.C. Webster, The Labors of the Months in Antique and Medieval Art to the
End of the Twelfth Century, North-Western University Studies in the
Humanities 4 (Evanston and Chicago, 1938) pp.37-8, 43-5, 55, 70, and plates
33b, 50, 72, 94, 95, \&c.. Also: F. Wormald, The Winchester Psalter (London,
1973) plate 112; L.F. Sandler, The Peterborough Psalter in Brussels and other
Fenland Manuscripts (London, 1974) plate 11; J. Longnon et alii, Les Très
Riches Heures du Duc de Berry (London, 1969) plate 7.
See, for instance, Larousse du $X^{e}$ siècle, III (Paris, 1930) p.425, and
Grand Larousse encyclopédique, IV (Paris, 1961) p.932. Cf. nn. 12 and 13
above.
Larousse du $X X^{e}$ siècle, III, p.420; Grand Larousse, IV, p.922.
Webster, Labors, pp.38, 44, 70, and plates $50,62,72,92,93,94,95 ;$

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Winchester Psalter, plate 113; Peterborough Psalter, plate 12; Les Très
Riches Heures, plate 8.
Godefroy, S.v.; Tobler-Lommatzsch, s.v.
Larousse du XX siècle, III, P.420; Grand Larousse, IV, D.922.
Godefroy, s.v.; Tobler-Lommatzsch, s.v., where one quotation shows as
evidently interchangeable "ou sarpe [= Modern Frenci serpe] ou faucillon";
also s.v. sarpe, where quotations make use for trimming bushes cleax. See
further n. }21\mathrm{ below.
Webster, Labors, pp.70, 89, 175-8, and plates 50, 62, 97; Les Très Riches
Heures, plate 4. Another good illustration occurs in the Bedford Book of
Hours (British Library Additional MS 18850, French, c.l423) f.3r; this aiso
has clear depictions of scythe and of sickle.
As noted above ( n .19 ), French sarpe/serpe seems more or less synonymous with faucillon, and Larousse du XXe siècle, VI, p.313, offers s.v. serpe illustrations of pruning-knives with varying degrees of curvature, some of which resemble those in the medieval depictions cited.
MED, s.v. fauchoun.
OED, s.v. falchion, sense 2.
See MED, s.v. bil, and OED, s.vv. bill sb. \({ }^{1}\), sense 4, and bill-nook. The editor in fact supplies the term bill-hook in the passage quoted, but as a gloss for Latin vanga, normally rendered "space" or "mattock" (Lewis and Short; Souter; Latham, Word-List); for the purpose in question a spade would have been the more appropriate tool.
For modern Bedfordshire dialect, H. Orton et alii, Survey of Engiish Dialects (B) The Basic Material, III, ii (Leeds, 1970) p.441, gives only bill.
Les Lais de Marie de France, ed. Jean Rychner, Les Classiques Erançais du Moyen Age 93 (Paris, 1966) p.54, line 335.
Le Traite de Walter de Bibbesworth sur la langue française, ed. A. Owen (Paris, 1929) p.69, line 250, where coudre croule is glossed "hasil quakes" (Cf. MED, s.V. hāsei).
L.W. Stone et alii, Anglo-Norman Dictionary (Londion, 1977- in progress) s.vv. coudre, coudrei.
J. Pokorny, Indogermanisches etymologisches wörterbuch, 2 vols. (Bern and Munich, 1959-1969) I, p.616, s.r. kos(e)lo-; F. Kluge, Etymologisches wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache, 20th edn. rev. W. Mitzke (Beriin, 1967) s.v. Hasel; F. Holthausen, Altenglisches etymologisches wörterbuch (Heidelberg, 1939) s.v. hesel.
V. Bertoldi, "Una voce moritura: ricerche sulla vitalita di coryius (> *colurus)", Revue de linguistique romane 1 (1925) pp.237-61. Cf. the review article by M[atteo] B[artoli] in Archivio glottologico itailano 20 (1926), sezione neolatina, pp.172-80. Cf. W. von Wartburg, Französisches etymologisches wörterbuch (Bonn, 1928- in progress) II, ii, pp.1240-2 (Basel,
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1946) s.v. corylus.
Bertoldi, pp.240-1; but cf. B[artoli], p. 175 .
See M.K. Pope, Erom Latin to Modern French, 2nd edn. (Manchester, 1952)
    }§250, 370, 382.2, 385, 387, 389-90.
    Charles Du Cange, Giossarium Mediae et Infimae Latinitatis, lo vols.
    (Niort and London, 1884-1887).
    A. Mawer et alii, The Place-Names of Sussex, 2 vols. continuously paginated,
    EPNS 6 and 7 (Cambridge, 1929-1930) pp.17, 81. Cf. A.H. Smith, English
    Place-Name Elements, 2 vols., EPNS 25 and 26 (Cambridge, 1956) I, p.llo,
    s.v. coudraie.
    A. Dauzat, Dictionnaire étymologique des noms de lieux en France, 2nd edn.
    rev. Ch. Rostaing (Paris, 1978) s.n. Colroy; also Charles de Beaurepaire,
    Dictionnaire topographique du département de Seine-Maritime, ed. Dom Jean
    Laporte, 2 vols. continuously paginated (Paris, 1982-1984) pp.271-3.
    G. Kristensson, "Studies in Middle English local surnames containing
    elements of French origin", English Studies 50 (1969) pp.465-86, esp.473.
    P.H. Reaney, A Dictionary of British Surnames, 2nd edn. rev. R.M. Wilson
    (London, 1976) s.n. Cowdray.
    See n. 36 above.
    A fortiori, nothing relevant is to be found in J.E.B. Gover et alii, The
    Place-Names of Devon, 2 vols. continuously paginated, EPNS }8\mathrm{ and }
    (Cambridge, 1931-1932).
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