

CLAVERING VILLAGE SIGN & VILLAGE NAME

The Clavering Village Sign at Blacksmiths Corner, unveiled in 1997, has a wooden design of clover and buttercups, with blacksmith's strap-work on the sides, and the village name in a mixture of old and new lettering. It was designed by Carol Wilkinson, carved by Michael Fisher, painted by Lyn Merrick and with a plinth of flints picked from the local fields and constructed by Tony Revell. The clover links to the earliest forms of the village name, *Clæfring*, but there has been much discussion on what it actually means.

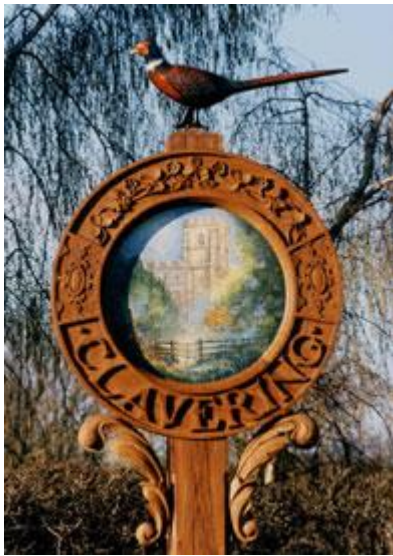


Photo © Gordon Ridgewell taken when the sign was new

You still find all over the Internet the mistaken interpretation of 'violet meadow' - an 18th century idea which came from an Old Norse word *'eng'* meaning meadow/pasture, but where the violets got into it, is not very clear.

In the past, people have thought it must be topographical - in some counties the ending *-ing* attaches to the name of a stream. There is a book that suggests it means *'place of the sons of Clavel'*, allegedly someone who came over with William the Conqueror. It would be exciting if the village was named after a person, but alas no documentary evidence of this.

But in Norfolk there is another Clavering, an ancient territorial unit, which Tom Williamson in his book on *The Origins of Norfolk* says was named after a primitive tribe, the *Cnaveringas*, and means 'the people of Cnaval or Cnebba', linked with Cnobheresburg (Burgh Castle) which is named after Cnobheri, son of Icel from whom it was claimed the 7th century kings of Mercia were descended. This is not accepted by a place-name expert whose advice I once sought.

She said that, although there are lots of places whose names end in *-ing*, philologists (place-name experts) find they have different derivations depending on whether singular or plural in the original form. The Norfolk Clavering presumably derives from the double *-ingas*, which meant 'people of', while the Essex Clavering comes from a less common single form, *-ing*, meaning 'place of'.

This was added to an Old English (Saxon) word *clæfre* meaning clover, and hence the true derivation, 'place where clover grows'. This was given in P. H. Reaney's *Place Names of Essex* in the 1930s, and confirmed more recently after much scholarly study by Margaret Gelling in her book *Signposts to the Past*.

The clover seems a rather humble origin but, although now regarded largely as a lawn weed, the clover family covers various species that form one of Nature's super-plants: they attract bees who make clover honey and help pollination, they form a useful fodder crop and they have a vital nitrogen-fixing role in the soil - long appreciated by farmers.

The Saxons must have realised this, for here at the junction of two valleys they found an abundance of clover and named the settlement thus.

Where were those ancient fields of *clæfre*? Bury meadow is still full of clover, and is near the ancient village centre so that is possibly the place - but it could be that clover grows well in soils all over Clavering. No one knows, but how lucky we are to live in the place where the clover grows!

There is no end to joy in things

For those with eyes to see -

Here, in the place where the clover grows,

Is the place that smiles for me.

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