

The Ver- problem

Ver- (plus *vir-* and *var-*) are possibly the most diverse and confusing elements in ancient proper names. Over 20 distinct roots need to be considered as possible explanations, some of which have in the past been proposed with unjustified certainty.

Relevant early geographical names known from Britain include these, with our current guesses of the most likely roots in square brackets, some good, some bad:

[Veratino](#), Warrington [bend?]
[Verbeia](#), river Wharfe [bend]
[Vercovicium](#), Housesteads [work]
[Ουεργιουιος](#) *οκεανος*, sea area Fastnet [very strong]
[Verlucio](#), Sandy Lane [fare]
[Verlucio](#), somewhere in Kent [fare]
[Vernalis](#), in Cornwall [spring]
[Vernemetum](#), Willoughby on the Wolds [fare]
[Veromo](#), Bochastle [wary]
[Verteis](#), Brough Castle [wart]
[Vertevia](#), Okehampton [wary]
[Vertis](#), Worcester [[verto](#) 'to turn back']
[Ουερου\(β\)ιουμ](#) *ακρον*, [wear-up]
[Verturiones](#), Moray area [river island]
[Verolamium](#), St Albans [fare]
[Viroconium](#), Wroxeter [man]
[Virosido](#), Bainbridge [man]
[Alovergium](#), in south Devon [?]
[Durovernum](#), Canterbury [fare]
[Varis](#), St Asaph [varix]
[Ουαραρ](#), Farrar [urine]

Also to be considered are lots of Continental names, including some prominent personal names or titles: *Vercingetorix*, *Vergobret*.

The next page shows PIE roots possibly involved, demonstrating many of the problems in citing such roots. We follow Watkins (2011) for English definitions, for sub-numbering, and for typography (relatively few weird characters), but since Watkins is available only in print we go to the LRC (Texas) website for hyperlinks. Don't get fooled by the differences between the two! The page numbers are from Pokorny (1959), which can be looked up online [here](#). Pokorny's work is overdue for revision, for example to take account of laryngeals and Hittite, and it handles Gaulish badly. Neither Watkins nor LRC makes much effort to show Celtic forms, which are taken here mainly from Matasovic (2009), Falileyev (2010), and Delamarre (2003), with a nod to Evans (1967), Jackson (1956), and of course to R&S. We cite just a few English words to give a flavour of derived meanings: please follow up hyperlinks to get fuller details. The whole table is a work in progress, still full of inconsistencies and discrepancies. Its purpose is to hunt for likely meanings of old geographical names, not to argue over fine points of linguistic theory and terminology!

It is already obvious that there are problems with 'raised spot' versus 'cover' and with hyper versus para-

PIE	English	Celtic: Irish Welsh Breton/Cornish	Names
*wē-r- *wers- ² 78-81 water	urine, water	*uaro- <i>geir gwer</i>	Ovapap
*per- ² 816-7 to lead, pass over	fare, ford, firth, port, <i>ver-</i>	<i>rhyd</i>	Vernemetum, Verlucio Durovernum, Verulam
*uper- 1105 over	over, hyper, super	*uer- on, upon <i>for- gor-</i>	Vercingetorix
*wei- ¹ 1122 to turn, to twist	wire	*wēro- crooked <i>fiar gwyr</i>	
*wer- ¹ 1151-2 high raised spot	wart, varicose, verruca	*werro- better <i>ferr</i> (?)	Varis, Verteris
*wer- ² 1150 to raise, to lift	air, artery, aura		
*wer- ³ 1152 to turn, bend	ward, worth, version, revert		Veratino
*uer-b(h)- *suerk ^{w-} 1153 to bend, turn	verbena, warp, <i>weorpan</i>	<i>gwrym</i>	Verbeia
*wer-t 1156-8 to turn, wrap	avert, inward, worth	*werto- <i>gwerth</i>	
*wer- ⁴ 1164 to perceive, watch out	wary, warden, guard		Vertevia
*wer- ⁵ 1160 to cover	weir, garage, garment	*wertya- mound <i>fert gwerthyr</i>	
*wer- ⁶ 1166 to burn	samovar		
*wer- ⁷ 1166 squirrel etc	ferret		
*wera- ¹ 1165 wide	aneurysm	*ueru-?!	<i>Verulamium</i>
*wera- ² 1160 to find	eureka	*wer-V <i>-fuar</i>	
*wera- ³ 1162-3 to speak	verb, word		
*wēra-o ³ 1166 true	very, verity, aver	*wīro- true <i>fir gwir guir</i>	
*wers- ¹ 1169 to confuse, mix up, drag along the ground	worse, war, <i>wurst</i>		
*uer-(o)nā 1169		*werno- alder <i>fern gwern</i>	
*ueren- 1170 sheep, etc	αpvoς, <i>reno</i> , ?reindeer	?*uerbo- cow <i>ferb</i>	
*uerġ- ¹ 1168 to shut, close	—————	<i>fraig ach-wre</i>	
..... *werg ^{h-} to strangle, etc	<i>wearh</i> criminal		
*werg- 1168-9 to do, make	work, erg, irk, orgy	————-??	Vercovicium
*uerġ- ³ 1169 to abound, etc	orgasm	*werga- anger <i>ferc gwery</i>	
*wiro- 1177-8 man	virile, werewolf	*wiro- <i>fer gwr gour</i>	Viroconium, Virosido
*wesr- 1174 spring	vernal		