REVIEW


The introductory volume to the English Place-name Society series in 1924 has long been the only authoritative book on English place-names to discuss the various aspects of the subject. Since it was published much work has been carried out in this field, and the Society's county surveys have accumulated a great amount of material. A key to unlock this onomastic treasure was provided in 1956 by A. H. Smith's English Place-name Elements, and so it is not surprising that in quick succession there have recently appeared two books on English place-names by distinguished contributors to the Place-name Society series.

Dr. Cameron's volume covers much ground in its 20 chapters, and it is good to see separate and full treatment of settlement names, names of roads and ways, river-crossings and marshland, hills and valleys, woods, clearings and open land, street-names, and minor names and field-names. Throughout the chapters are well furnished with lists of illustrative names, and much effort has been expended in assembly and arrangement. There is a useful appendix on common elements to help readers interpret names in their present spelling, and some interesting plates show documents and early maps. This well-written and scholarly book will find a secure place on the shelves of every specialist in English place-names, and will be read with much profit and great appreciation by all interested in the subject.

It is naturally not difficult to find gaps in a work which has to select from the wealth of material available, and every place-name scholar will have his own views as to what else should have gone in. For instance, the section on hill-names could have included knot, pike, and scout, and referred to Celtic elements. The chapter on Celtic place-names misses some opportunities, such as comment on the contrasts between Helston (Henlistone DB) "old hall" (+OE tun) and Lesnewth (Lysnewyth 1238) "hall new", or the triplet Penge, Penketh, Pencoyd, or reference to Uenition to explain some of the forms. Apparently no use was made of Gover's unpublished Place-names of Cornwall.

The general appearance of the book is a credit to the publishers, but unfortunately ideas about the looks of a page, and a pessimistic view of what the reader can take, have led to regrettable sacrifices. There are neither footnotes nor chapter-notes, references in the text rarely extend beyond the scholar's name, and "treated elsewhere" is a typical form of cross-reference. In spite of the stress laid on the value of early spellings, their citation is comparatively restricted, so that the reader with an inquiring mind must use Ekwall's Dictionary of English Place-names to see the evidence for the interpretations he would otherwise have to take on trust. The kind of person who is prepared to read through such a book will surely not be satisfied to leave Butterby "beautiful find" at that, but will wish to experience the delight of recognition afforded by Beutroue 1242.

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