

REFLECTIONS ON A REVERSE DICTIONARY OF ENGLISH PLACE-NAMES

Reverse dictionaries of any kind are a rare species in lexicography; there is one for the English language (as well as one each for Russian and German, viz. M. Lehnert, *Rückläufiges Wörterbuch der englischen Gegenwartssprache* [English subtitle: *Reverse Dictionary of Present-Day English*], Leipzig 1971, based on various Modern English dictionaries and word-lists.

A reverse dictionary of English place-names could be a novel contribution to English toponomastics. What can you expect from such a dictionary? Entries in a reverse dictionary are listed in reverse alphabetical order; thus the first entries in Lehnert's dictionary are a, baa, sahaa, maa, taa, etc., and the last entries are sizz, buzz, fuzz. His dictionary claims to be indispensable for decyphering spoilt words in dispatches and books, when the first letters of a particular word are missing; it will be useful for the linguist working on types of word-formation and on the frequency of particular suffixes and word-terminations; it can also be a dictionary of eye-rhymes.

As to a reverse dictionary of place-names, such a work could serve similar purposes; a simple list of names arranged in reverse alphabetical order will present the frequency of all modern place-name terminations. Given the etymology of the second element of the name in addition to that list the dictionary will also show the phonological development of place-name elements in unstressed syllables and it will indicate which place-name elements have become homophonous (or rather homographs) in that position. Having in turn a list of homograph place-name terminations the reader will be able to trace the various origins of these endings, whose etymology may be disguised and have become uniform either by regular sound changes or by folk etymology; thus modern -ington-names can be traced to their respective etymologies, viz. -an-tun (i. e. gen. sing. n-class), -ing(a)tun, -n-tun (n being part of the root of the first element), etc. With a county reference with each name the geographical distribution of linguistic phenomena (morphological or phonological) can be illustrated. Such a list will also indicate which first elements go with any particular second place-name element.

Time permitting, the present writer would like to take up the task of compiling a reverse dictionary and invites any suggestions that could be helpful.

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GILLIAN FELLOWS JENSEN, *Scandinavian Settlement Names in the East Midlands*. Academisk Forlag: Copenhagen, 1978, xxiv + 406 pp. + 14 maps. No price stated.

This has been a long, hard read; at times I have only been kept going by the knowledge that everything published by Dr Fellows Jensen must be read and digested by anyone intending to keep abreast of English onomastic studies. The book is full of interesting and significant material, but the presentation is probably calculated to appeal more to Scandinavian than to English scholars. English readers expect something to be left to the imagination, and prefer the author to have a definite thesis. The Scandinavian tradition (at any rate as represented in onomastic studies) is that all points, even the most obvious, must be laboured, and all interpretations, even the most improbable, must be explored.

Dr Fellows Jensen's previous book, *Scandinavian Place-Names in Yorkshire*, was written from a definite point of view. There she accepted Professor Kenneth Cameron's findings in his work on Viking settlement in the East Midlands, and sought to demonstrate that these were valid for Yorkshire. Since then she has retreated, not so much to a different or opposing position, as to an attitude of overriding caution. One instance must suffice to demonstrate the reluctance to draw conclusions or to adopt a definite stance. On p.341, after a section which presents the results of a fascinating exercise in Domesday statistics, she says:

In summary it can be said that the assessments reveal that the English-named vills tended to be rated higher than the býs and the býs higher than the þorps, while the vills with hybrid and scandinavianised names tended to have the same kind of assessments as the vills with English names. This is also true of the býs in some areas. The suggestion has earlier been made that the differences in assessment might reflect differences in age, with the youngest vills having the lowest assessments. This is not the only possible explanation, however, nor even the most likely one. What the assessments actually reflect is differences in the value of the resources available to the vills. At some stages of development marginal land for grazing sheep or the supply of wood for fuel or building must have been as valuable as the best arable land. An instance of this is provided by the exceptionally high assessments of some of the þorps on the Yorkshire Wolds, assessments which probably reflect their exploitation of sheep. For the dating of settlements, then, the evidence of the assessments is of limited value.

For my part I shall cheerfully accept the tables on p.338 as confirmation of the general soundness (which is not to say the 100 per cent validity) of Cameron's findings.

Professor Cameron's conclusions probably were more definite and more simple than the evidence warrants; a new synthesis usually is. But Dr Fellows Jensen seems to me to have leant over further than the evidence requires in her determination to explore every conceivable alternative explanation to Cameron's for the presence of a dense layer of Scandinavian