

REVIEWS

A NEW DICTIONARY OF ENGLISH FIELD NAMES

Paul Cavill

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Any student of field-names will recognise the name of John Field, the father of English field-name studies. This is a complex, detailed and challenging subject that unlocks the past by illustrating how people lived and worked on the land around and within the natural environment. In 1972 John Field published 'English Field-Names; A Dictionary'. Over the years this became a very elusive volume which can now only be found in the very best libraries. This new dictionary brings the corpus of work up to date and, hopefully will be more readily available to the researcher.

Until his death in 2000, John Field was the clear leader on this subject publishing in turn 'Fields in the English Landscape' in 1975 and later, 'A History of English Field Names' in 1993. Before he died, John Field was working on an improved dictionary and had produced notes and drafts of around 120,000 words. We need to be thankful to Paul Cavill who has taken up the baton where John Field left it and, under the aegis of the English Place-Name Society, has rendered this down to about 2,500 headwords to cover 45,000 field-names. The debt owed to John Field is humbly recognised and appreciated in this volume.

Rebecca Gregory has also written a brief but very instructive introduction to Field-Name Studies at the start of the dictionary. This touches on the content, use, decoding, vocabulary, language, lexicography and archaeology implicit to field-name analysis. This is followed by a useful bibliography which includes references to this publication.

How does one review a dictionary? There is always the old joke that it will explain itself as

you read it, but the real test is how does it work as a research tool? It is recommended that the researcher reads the Notes of Arrangement before using the dictionary as understanding these is essential to a beneficial outcome.

The entries are arranged in alphabetical order by the headword. These principal field-names are the most common, and largely drawn from nineteenth-century title awards. This gives the dictionary an initial superficial appearance which is very misleading. The explanation of the headword flows from these more recent forms, working slowly through similar names towards the original meaning. This is often rendered in Old and Middle English or in Old Norse, as appropriate. There is also a glossary of the original words at the rear of the volume where these archaic elements are listed in alphabetical order.

Of most value to the researcher are the generous cross-references to similar and similar sounding words, illustrating the fullest possible context that can lie behind a field-name. It is amusing to note that 'th' pronounced as 'f' has bedevilled the English language for so long across such a broad swathe of the country.

This dictionary is a very solid research tool that will ably serve both the new and established practitioner in field-name studies. It is to be hoped that its publication will mean that more libraries across the land than previously will have it for reference use to guide the enquirer. The robust hardback binding looks designed to sustain heavy usage.

Nigel Robert Wilson

STOKE MANDEVILLE WILLS AND INVENTORIES 1552–1853

Edited by Honor Lewington

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non-members £30.

Stoke Mandeville Old Church and churchyard are among the most prominent of the sites affected by HS2, and the planned archaeological investigation of church and churchyard has prompted the publication of this volume. Stoke Mandeville's parish register entries survive patchily from the 17th century and in continuous series only from 1699, and there are no glebe terriers, so the corpus of 128 wills and 25 inventories, and transcriptions of 14 gravestones, is a key resource for the history of the parish. The 134 testators include a mere 7% of those buried in the churchyard during the period of the continuous parish registers, but the index of names contains more than a thousand entries, and so the proportion of parishioners who feature somewhere in the corpus must be much higher.

The editorial method is conservative: unambiguous abbreviations are expanded, and a more uniform system of capitalisation has been imposed, but otherwise the documents are transcribed as written. A full introduction analyses the documents and explains the context, there is a helpful glossary, and there are indices of names, places, and subjects.

For archaeologists investigating the site, the volume should greatly assist in identifying the burials they encounter – Francis Brudenell, for example, in 1601 requested burial in the chancel of the church – and increase proportionately the value of what can be learnt from analysis of the remains. It is very rare to encounter an opportunity to investigate the skeletal remains of an entire community across time, and we must hope that this opportunity will be seized to the full, and that the individuals will then be appropriately reburied in consecrated ground. It will be interesting to compare the spread of animal bones from the site with the animals mentioned in the documents, and to compare recovered botanical remains with the

crops encountered in the documents.

The volume of course sheds light on the wider life of Stoke Mandeville. Edmund Brudenell in 1642 bequeathed to his nephew his sword and short hanger, his instruments of music, all his books, his muskets, birding pieces, pistols, fishnets, and the trunk marked with his name. Books also appear in the inventory of Henry Harding, weaver, dated 1620. Ann Harris, widow, bequeathed a silver watch in 1758, and Thomas Kingham, cordwainer, bequeathed a clock and case in 1770. Robert Theed in 1618 provided for a single payment of 40s to the poor on the day of his burial, while Francis Ledgingham in 1693 provided for 40s to be paid to four aged poor blind persons annually on the anniversary of his burial. William Mortimer in 1603 bequeathed his dog to his landlord. John Ledgingham, whose inventory of 1618 recorded 10s worth of cheese vats and 5s worth of cheese, and John Browne, whose inventory of 1628 recorded 43s 4d worth of bacon and cheese, were both surely making cheese.

The significance of many of these details will become clearer when we become able to compare them with a much wider selection of Buckinghamshire wills, as the number of wills transcribed and published grows. Indices such as those in this volume are exceptionally helpful, and we must hope that as transcription and publication, doubtless online, proceed, provision will be made for digital search of the growing corpus.

This volume is an important step forward and a model for the future: we owe a debt of gratitude to Buckinghamshire Record Society, Honor Lewington, and her fellow members of the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society's Palaeography Group.

David J Critchley