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ABBREVIATIONS OF COUNTIES AND EPNS COUNTY SURVEYS

Co	Cornwall
Ha	Hampshire
He	Herefordshire
K	Kent
La	Lancashire
Nb	Northumberland
Sf	Suffolk
So	Somerset
Wt	Isle of Wight

CPNE	<i>Cornish Place-Name Elements</i>
EPNE	<i>English Place-Name Elements, Parts 1 and 2</i>
PN BdHu	<i>The Place-Names of Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire</i>
PN Brk	<i>The Place-Names of Berkshire, Parts 1, 2 and 3</i>
PN Bu	<i>The Place-Names of Buckinghamshire</i>
PN Ca	<i>The Place-Names of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely</i>
PN Ch	<i>The Place-Names of Cheshire, Parts 1–5</i>
PN Cu	<i>The Place-Names of Cumberland, Parts 1, 2 and 3</i>
PN D	<i>The Place-Names of Devon, Parts 1 and 2</i>
PN Db	<i>The Place-Names of Derbyshire, Parts 1, 2 and 3</i>
PN Do	<i>The Place-Names of Dorset, Parts 1–4</i>
PN Du	<i>The Place-Names of County Durham, Part 1</i>
PN Ess	<i>The Place-Names of Essex</i>
PN ERY	<i>The Place-Names of the East Riding of Yorkshire and York</i>
PN Gl	<i>The Place-Names of Gloucestershire, Parts 1–4</i>
PN Hrt	<i>The Place-Names of Hertfordshire</i>
PN Le	<i>The Place-Names of Leicestershire, Parts 1–7</i>
PN Li	<i>The Place-Names of Lincolnshire, Parts 1–8</i>
PN Mx	<i>The Place-Names of Middlesex (apart from the City of London)</i>
PN Nf	<i>The Place-Names of Norfolk, Parts 1–3</i>
PN Nt	<i>The Place-Names of Nottinghamshire</i>
PN NRY	<i>The Place-Names of the North Riding of Yorkshire</i>
PN Nth	<i>The Place-Names of Northamptonshire</i>
PN O	<i>The Place-Names of Oxfordshire, Parts 1 and 2</i>
PN R	<i>The Place-Names of Rutland</i>
PN Sa	<i>The Place-Names of Shropshire, Parts 1–6</i>
PN Sr	<i>The Place-Names of Surrey</i>
PN St	<i>The Place-Names of Staffordshire, Part 1</i>
PN Sx	<i>The Place-Names of Sussex, Parts 1 and 2</i>
PN W	<i>The Place-Names of Wiltshire</i>
PN Wa	<i>The Place-Names of Warwickshire</i>
PN We	<i>The Place-Names of Westmorland, Parts 1 and 2</i>
PN Wo	<i>The Place-Names of Worcestershire</i>
PN WRY	<i>The Place-Names of the West Riding of Yorkshire, Parts 1–8</i>

Recent publications on Northumberland place-names: Jonathan West, *The Place-Names of the Old County of Northumberland. The Cheviot Hills and Dales*. Blagdon: Northern Heritage 2017. ISBN 978-0-9957485-1-4. Paperback, viii + 116 pp. £9.99. With a note on books by Poulton-Smith and Beckensall.

As the first of a planned series of four, Jonathan West's 2017 book deserves detailed attention, and it is the main focus of this review, which also offers brief responses to Poulton-Smith 2014 and Beckensall 2016. There is much to like about West's book. It is clearly the product of a genuine affection for Northumberland and its history combined with expertise in historical linguistics and specifically in the history of both Germanic and Celtic languages. It is attractively presented and ambitious in scope, as the ninety-two densely-packed pages of its main chapters tackle names not previously discussed in print as well as major names covered in the scholarly literature (which for this county does not include an EPNS survey).¹

As explained in the Introduction (p. v), the genesis of the book was as a revision of Watson 1970 – a work which presents an engaging and spirited survey of Northumbrian history through its names but is unreliable in its philology and often shaky in its history (see Bailey 1971). Watson's book lacks systematic citation of early forms, detailed linguistic argument, and referencing, with the result that some highly questionable etymologies cannot be followed up. West's first volume is likewise very minimally referenced, but in other respects it is a very different and much more credible work than Watson's. The material proved too large for a single volume, and so the present volume, which covers 'the western uplands of North Tynedale, Redesdale, Coquetdale and Glendale' (a large tranche reaching well south of the Cheviots and corresponding fairly closely with the Northumberland National Park) will be complemented by three others covering 'the southern uplands of South Tynedale and Allendale; Tyneside and the Tyne Valley; and the Northumberland coastal plain between the hills and the sea' (p. v). The approach, which differs from Watson's loosely thematic one, is to take the reader on a series of journeys, mainly by road but sometimes on foot, and this enables West to put the names in a geographical context as well as giving momentum to the prose. To give a flavour of the book through a random example, a journey through a stretch of Coquetdale takes us here: 'BICKERTON NT9900 (*Bykerton* 1245) is on the other side of the river and was probably the location of a honey-farm

¹ It should be mentioned that I am myself working on a single-volume dictionary (Whaley in preparation).

(OE *bēocere* “bee-keeper”), sheltered from the prevailing wind by COTE HILL NT9900 (ME *cote* “cottage”)’ (p. 74).

In addition to the nine chapters, a four-page Introduction explains the book’s aims and conventions and outlines the languages found in Northumberland names, ‘Further Reading’ occupies one page, ‘Some Technical Terms’ two, and the Index of names with four-figure grid references, thirteen (some names discussed are not listed). Flaps opening out from the front and back covers provide lists of ‘Common modern place-name elements’, ‘Common derivations’, ‘Abbreviations’, and International Phonetic Alphabet symbols together with ‘A Guide to Pronunciation’. There are twenty-four pages of illustrations: mainly photographs of sites or early maps, but also details from some beautiful paintings by Frances Mitford (d. 1866), published here for the first time by kind permission of Lord Redesdale.

The target audience is a general one: ‘primarily visitors to the region’, although West also modestly imagines ‘some locals will be interested in the book’ (p. v). He adds that where names lack early spellings he has ‘tried to use comparison with other place-names to suggest a possible origin, but ultimately such speculation is just harmless fun. I can’t stress too much that this is meant to be a popular rather than an academic book’. In fact, this belies the seriousness and assiduity with which West approaches his subject, and indeed which readers coming from all starting-points, and the subject, emphatically deserve. He adds three useful caveats, which are addressed to ‘academic purists’, though necessary to everyone’s understanding: about the conventional citation of Old English etymons even where a name may be later, about the dangers of following published sources, and about the impossibility of visiting every place (p. vii).

The main question to be asked here is how well the book fulfils its stated intention ‘to help general readers discover the possible origins [...] of the names of towns, villages, rivers and other natural features in our region’ (p. v): what are its sources and methodology, and how successfully are these deployed? As already seen, the Introduction distinguishes between names with and without early spellings – which we could equate very roughly with major and minor names. Where (major) names are covered in Mawer 1920, Ekwall 1928 and 1960, Watts 2004 and other sources, West has drawn on their early spellings, normally citing at least one, and on their etymologies, usually without specific referencing. The resulting brief explanations are on the whole judicious and helpful. Anyone following Chapter 3’s journey from Hexham to Kielder will receive sound guidance on names such as Acomb (p. 33), Brunton, Haughton, Humshaugh (all p. 35) and Coldcotes (p. 39). Some cases may be

overstated, as when West considers it ‘probable’ that the Romano-British fort-name Cilurnum (now Chesters) survives in the neighbouring names Chollerton and Chollerford (p. 35), although popular etymology has to be invoked to avoid phonological difficulties; others have dismissed this possibility (Mawer 1920: 46; Rivet and Smith 1981: 307–8; and James 2014 2: 96, who, however, allows for some influence). Confidence can be undermined by slips in detail, such as citation of OE *mearc* ‘boundary’ rather than the near-synonym OE (*ge*)*māre* as a possible origin for Grey Mare’s Crag (p. 47); OE forms such as *beorgan* ‘castle’ (oblique case), *bōk* ‘beech’, *bolt* ‘dwelling’, *dāl* ‘valley’ and *heofoc* ‘hawk’ (pp. 36, 30, 45, 29, 53 respectively) that are non-occurring or very rare; confusion between *burh* and *beorg* (Sadbury p. 37); confusion or exaggeration over *heugh* (OE *hōh*) and *haugh* (OE *halh*) (pp. 27, 55); and mislabelling of Ekwall’s explanation of the river-name Coquet as generally accepted (p. 66). Reference to such sources as EPNE, VEPN and Gelling and Cole 2000 (which are not in Further Reading) would help with some such issues.

In his Introduction West remarks that alongside the ‘overwhelmingly English’ names ‘there are many more possible Brittonic names in Northumberland than I ever thought to find’ (p. viii), and indeed it seems very likely that undetected Brittonic place-names underlie more of our present name-stock than hitherto recognised (see, e.g. Smith 1980: 28 *et passim*; Coates and Breeze 2000), particularly in western and upland Northumberland. The problem is, of course, identifying and explaining them, and hence this is one of the most interesting and challenging aspects of the book. In discussing major names that are generally considered Brittonic West’s conclusions are (as with the OE ones) on the whole credible, though the detail of the argument may be less so. In favouring Brittonic **kagro-* (Welsh *caer*) ‘fort’ in the name Carrick (Heights) (p. 59), **altā* (Welsh *allt*) ‘hill’ in Ottercops (p. 19) and **trebā-* (Welsh *tref*) ‘farm’ (p. 20) in Troughend, West presents etymologies that accord both with the early spelling evidence and with recent scholarship (Coates and Breeze 2000: 323–24; James 2014 2: 67, 388; 2: 13, 159; 2: 203, 367, 370, 391 respectively; neither work listed in Further Reading). The discussion of Cheviot (p. 82) favours another well-accepted etymology, *cefn* ‘ridge’, but is long and quite convoluted (and highly technical, especially for a designedly popular book), and invokes comparanda including Chew Green, Coquetdale, in which West explains *chew* as ‘deep, narrow, valley’, presumably mooted as alternative etymology of Cheviot. A number of new Brittonic etymologies are proposed for minor names lacking early spellings, and it is to minor names that the discussion now turns.

As West notes, he tackles many names that have not been discussed in print, ‘and these tend to be both the more difficult ones and the ones without any history, even though this can be fraught with danger’ (p. vi). He explains, with strong caveats, that help can be obtained from ‘places with similar names in other parts of the country’ and from geographical and historical context (pp. vi–vii); he also makes frequent use of standard and dialect dictionaries. The result is a wealth of useful suggestions, as when Fawhope is given as ‘variegated valley’ (p. 10). Humble Law and Hill are explained from OE *hamel* ‘maimed, doddered or shaved’ (p. 61) and The Knares from ME *knar* ‘rugged rock’ (p. 45). For Crigdon Hill the meaning is given as “‘hill hill hill’!” (p. 67), which, as with similar instances, credibly translates the presumed elements, though it does not reflect the onomastic development of the name or acknowledge that no speaker would have understood it that way (see, e.g., Cox 1988–89).

West is normally cautious to a fault about taking apparently transparent names at face-value. Encountering Black Middens in the badlands of the upper North Tyne valley, he concedes that it ‘could well reflect ME *midding* “dung, refuse heap”, but I am suspicious, as every dwelling would have had a midden, and so offer the suggestion that this is a popular etymology of OE *(ge)mȳþ tūn* “settlement near where the waters meet” (as in the many places called MITTON)’ (p. 55). But it is surely more of a leap to postulate an Old English place-name for which there is no other evidence than to assume that Black Middens is a mildly figurative and derogatory name (as seemingly it is when applied to some tidal rocks in the Tyne estuary). Similar cases include the name of Witchy Nick, where proximity to an Iron Age fort seems to tempt West to consider OE *wīc* ‘settlement’ as a possible etymon, but this is a minor feature with first known record in 1865 (pp. 62–63).

Reaching, at the end of the book (p. 100), the now romantically ruined farm of Blawearie West feels that the apt derivation from ‘blow weary’ ‘ignore[s] the other places with the same name in the borders’, and therefore proposes an originally Brittonic name akin to Welsh *Blaenwern*, meaning ‘edge of the moor’ (also very apt), invoking popular etymology to make the phonology work. But it is hard to see why multiple occurrences of this name make a Brittonic origin more likely, and Blawearie surely belongs to a recognisable class of ‘verbal place-names’, typically dating from the early modern period and given with wry humour to marginal fields and settlements (see Taylor 2008); and as it happens the name is recorded as ‘Blow-weary’ in the Ordnance Survey Name Book for Eglington (1861: 22). Mounthooly, of which West counts five instances in Northumberland, belongs to the same class and means ‘climb carefully’

(Taylor 2008: 282, considering three Fife examples), and hence derivation from OE *mnt* ‘mountain, hill’ or Brittonic **montyo-* ‘hill’, plus OE *holegn* ‘holly’ (pp. 91–92), assuming a peculiar structure either way, is likewise unnecessary. Again for Click ‘Em In and variants (p. 31), where West draws a blank, there is an explanation to hand: ‘hook them in’ (Taylor 2008: 279).

Some further instances of avoidance of the obvious involve possible references to people. Watty Bell’s Cairn, for instance, looks as though it commemorates an individual, here using a hypocoristic forename (from Walter) and surname, as do many minor topographical names in this and other regions (and the Ordnance Survey Name Book for Alwinton (1861: 56) records a local tradition that this was an English officer slain by Scots), but West finds ‘little hope of deciphering [it]’, unless it contains *bell* ‘hill’ and ME *wodi* ‘woody’ (p. 64). Similarly, in Goodwife Hot (= *holt* ‘wood’), the specific could be the well-attested noun *goodwife*, but this possibility is not mentioned. Rather, West suggests an OE female personal name *Godwif* or, ‘[g]iven the widespread tendency to duplicate place-name elements, we could (using the magic wand of popular etymology) just about derive Goodwife from a first element Britt. **kaito-* “wood, forest” (Welsh *coed*, etc.) and a second element *baedd* “wild boar”’ (p. 26). For Countess Park, formerly owned by the Duke of Northumberland, West proposes a river-name akin to Kennet as a ‘just possible’ alternative to the word *countess* (p. 26), and for Cadgerford (p. 38, cf. Cadger Ford p. 44) he suggests ‘possibly ME *cald* “cold” + *chere* “face” hence “cold cheer ford”’, whereas a reference to a typical user of fords, a *cadger* ‘carrier, itinerant dealer’, would be more in line with the naming of fords elsewhere (EPNE 1 183; Gelling and Cole 2000: 75; and cf., e.g., Cadgerford, Kinross-shire, Taylor et al. 2017: 222, 648).

West’s scepticism about face-value interpretations extends to elements as well as individual place-names. Of Greystead he says that it ‘perhaps ... contains OE *græw* etc. “grey”, but the *Grey-* element usually turns out to be something else in place-names, so OE *grāf* “grove” is more likely, together with OE *stede* “place, site of a house”’ (p. 45). The word ‘usually’ here seems something of an exaggeration, and ‘so’ turns an unprovable possibility into a likelihood. Other claims may well be overstated, as when ‘most names containing *hall* turn out to reflect OE *halh*’ (p. 35).

In these and other instances, West rightly draws attention to some of the well-attested phenomena that can interfere with the smooth development of a name, obscuring its true origins – phenomena such as popular etymology, pleonasm, confusion of similar elements, and phonological processes including metathesis and the vocalisation of [l]

before a vowel – but has a tendency to over-apply them. Less frequently recognised in his etymologies are patterns and types of naming, i.e. toponymic/toponomastic (and not merely linguistic) phenomena, and without that recognition some ‘face-value’ interpretations are missed or deemed improbable. These tendencies result in some etymologies which, though not impossible, are arguably so unlikely that it is unhelpful to mention them, especially in a work of this kind which does not have space for detailed argument.

In conclusion, Dr West has undertaken a daunting task with energy and initiative and his book contains a wealth of material, most of which is correct, useful and interesting. It provokes thought, not only about individual names but about the general problems of explaining names, especially those for which early forms are currently lacking, and it may be that the discipline itself should seek to articulate more comprehensively how these can be approached. Meanwhile, readers seeking reliability and consistency in this book need to be aware that, even more than the frequent caveats would suggest, the etymologies present a spectrum from the virtually certain to the highly speculative or almost impossible, and that the plausibility or implausibility of interpretations may look different when viewed in the light of the morphological, semantic, chronological and typological patterns that research in place-names has importantly revealed. If the etymologies at the more dubious end of the spectrum were to be filtered out the book would be less frustrating and (still) more rewarding, and there is perhaps an opportunity for this in the remaining volumes of this very welcome series.

Turning briefly to two other recent publications on Northumberland place-names, Anthony Poulton-Smith’s *Northumberland Place-Names* (2014) is one of a very large number of similar county volumes by the same author, which have received highly critical reviews (see especially Coates 2017). Even before we reach the alphabetical dictionary that constitutes the main part of the Northumberland volume, alarm bells are sounding. Four thumbnail photos on the cover include the Angel of the North, which is not in Northumberland, the Contents page is incomplete, and the one-page Introduction is naive and sometimes incoherent and misleading. The book ‘will reveal all. Not only will we see Saxon and Scandinavian settlements, but Celtic rivers and hills, Roman roads and even Norman French landlords who have all contributed to the evolution to some degree to the names we are otherwise so familiar with’ (p. 7). In the first two entries in the alphabetical section (or partly alphabetical, since main entries often contain coverage of a rather random selection of nearby place-names, pub-names and historical anecdotes), the woman’s name *Alhburh* is given as *Alhnurh*

(p. 11) and the explanation of Brainshaugh as ‘derived from “the clearing of a man called Bregn or Bregwine”’ appears to elide vital points in Mawer’s entry (1920: 29), and takes no account of more recent suggestions. The third entry devotes several lines to a 2011 pub sign showing the Queen’s Arms sporting a tattoo (p. 12). These and countless similar instances bear out Coates’s (2017: 155) description of this author’s works on toponymy as ‘inaccurate, misleading, skimped, underresearched and carelessly produced’; we could perhaps add ‘embarrassing’. Ekwall [1960] and Mills [1998?] are listed in the five-item Bibliography, the other items being popular works on street- and pub-names, so insofar as the book is based on the work of reliable scholars it does contain material that is interesting and useful. However, the quality is so mixed that nothing can be relied upon, and readers as well as Northumberland and its names are being sold very short.

Finally, Stan Beckensall’s *Place Names and Field Names of Northumberland*, first published by Tempus in 2006, has appeared in a new edition (‘This edition’ (p. [4])) from Fonthill, and therefore deserves brief mention. It contains among other things a tabular list of major place-names based mainly on Mawer 1920, Ekwall 1960 and Watts 2004; a rich array of field-names collected from early maps by the author; and discursive overviews of place-names and field-names, in which the emphasis on semantic categories is especially welcome. The colour landscape photographs in the centre sixteen pages are almost entirely new in this edition, and often quite beautiful. For the rest, the volume is virtually unchanged. Page size is very slightly smaller, with some consequential changes in pagination; the text is clearer, but the black-and-white photos are paler (at least in my copy). In the text itself I have found next to no significant changes. Errors noted in Whaley 2007, often involving OE forms or resulting from misreading of sources, are still there, and one or two new printing errors have crept in (e.g. ‘Locker’ for ‘Lucker’, p. 63). Nevertheless, as an attractive, readable and mainly reliable book which covers this whole large county, this is a very good option among books on Northumberland place-names designed for a modern, general readership. Meanwhile, for readers who seek fuller ranges of spellings and of scholarly opinion, Mawer 1920 and Ekwall 1960, though unavoidably dated, remain the classic sources, together with the monumental Watts 2004, which adds some early spellings to theirs and is always worth consulting for interpretations of names.

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