

NICKNAME-CREATION:
SOME SOURCES OF EVIDENCE, 'NAIVE' MEMOIRS ESPECIALLY

Les surnoms villageois (...) sont précieux à étudier, car ils reflètent encore, à très peu près, la même mentalité qui, au moyen âge, forma les ancêtres des noms de famille, et ils servent, plus d'une fois, par comparaison, à éclairer l'histoire de ceux-ci.¹

From an historical hardly less than from a philological point of view, a tricky aspect of early surname-creation involves such forms as apparently sprang from nicknames. These, from the outset bedevilled by confusions with asyndetic uses of minor place-names² as well as with patronymic uses of baptismal names,³ too often remain obscure even after those confusions have been provisionally resolved (and in neither case would it often be wise to claim more than provisional solution); and so remain they must until scholars can imaginatively recreate the habits of mind and the social attitudes underlying their medieval origins.

Now and then medieval writers themselves proffer comments or explanatory anecdotes. For instance, the twelfth-century Chronicle of Battle Abbey tells how a monk of gentle birth had got the nickname Faber:

'... a monk of Marmoutier, one William, named "the Smith". He had picked up this name when he was a servitor of the Duke in former times, for once when he was hunting with some companions they ran out of arrows, and the smith they went to happened to be unfamiliar with work of that sort. William immediately took up the man's hammers, and improvising cleverly he fashioned an arrow. Some time afterwards he changed course and made profession at Marmoutier ...'⁴

Such enlightening comments are, however, all too rare; and the great bulk of medieval names occur in official contexts only, often in bare lists like the Subsidy Rolls.

* * *

Failing direct, medieval evidence, the would-be nickname-interpreter is driven to oblique, analogical approaches. Two of the most stimulating papers presented at Hull in 1981 treated of present-day name-creation: that by Alan Binns on fishermen's names for seamarks and, especially relevant here, Peter McClure's on some sociological aspects of nicknaming.⁵ Perhaps, as scholars like Dauzat long since asserted, present-day nicknaming might yield analogies, or contrasts, such as would cast at least a flickering light on medieval practices.

Assembling an authentically annotated corpus of modern nicknames will not be easy. Some surveys already attempted have been methodologically flawed. Certain types of flaw scholars can repair for themselves, as Peter McClure demonstrated by imposing order on the schoolchildren's nicknames assembled pell-mell by Morgan *et alii*; but others may be more fundamental, as, in that case, the invitation to fantasize implicit in questionnaires distributed to schoolchildren. Moreover, although nicknaming still thrives, its accurate and systematic study might seem to require acceptance in appropriate small, closed communities - not an option open to every philologist or socio-linguist. True, an outsider may sometimes encourage individuals belonging to such groups to reminisce: by this means I have learnt that half a century or more ago in the Cambridgeshire

village (now suburb) of Chesterton the many Taylor families were distinguished partly by the men's occupations, thus, Boatman Taylor and Policeman Taylor, and partly by physical or other characteristics, thus, Bandy Taylor, Long Nell Taylor, and the now-inexplicable Buttons Taylor. Too often, however, appeals to adult informants run aground (as we had occasion to note at Hull) on reticence.

Written sources may perhaps help to fill the breach. Many sporting and other public personalities are widely known by nicknames: some seem self-explanatory, others from time to time are annotated by the press. In this category specimens recently collected include:

'Frenchie Nicholson ... had been apprenticed in France, for his father worked over there, and that is how he got his nickname.' [Observer, 10.viii.80, 21]

'David Nicholson [son of Frenchie], known as The Duke to his friends because of his immaculate appearance.' [Field, 23.i.80, 150]

'To his friends [Prince Philip] was known as Flop, a nickname derived with prep.-school logic from his real name (Philip ... Flip ... Flop).' [Telegraph Sunday Magazine, 7.vi.81, 29]

'Harry (Scrubber) Dale ... got the nickname of Scrubber by accident. A sports paper used to publish pictures of schoolboy stars. Dale was known as Squibber at school because of his lack of inches, but in the picture-caption ... he was called Scrubber Dale by mistake and the name stuck.' [Hull Star, 24.x.80, 20: supplied by courtesy of the Editor]

"When you were young, your nickname was Dutch. Why Dutch?" "When I was a small boy, there was a hairstyle some mothers favoured for their sons called a 'Dutch bob', and my father used to refer to me as the Dutchman. It got shortened to Dutch. Nothing to do with nationality, no Dutch in me at all. I'm a mixture of Irish, English and Scots." [Observer, 26.x.80; interview with President Reagan]

'Mr. William Rees-Davies, Q.C., Conservative M.P., ... who is known as Count Dracula because of the black cloak he wears, ... said he was used to the nickname.' [The Times, 11.iii.80, 3]

'... a piercing-eyed naval chaplain (retired) known in clerical circles as Mr. Never-on-Sundays. ... Because it's a City guild church, there are no services on Sundays - hence the rector's sobriquet.' [Sunday Times, 8.iii.81, 4]

The last example, particularly, raises the question whether sometimes in such material a journalistic enrichment of reality may intervene. Besides, such references rarely make clear the status of the nickname: whether it is current in second or even first person, or only in third; and, if the last, how widely and in what contexts it is used. Apart from that, such items are rare enough to make assembling a worthwhile corpus slow and unpredictable. That goes, too, for the sporadic raising of such topics in the correspondence-columns of newspapers and magazines. We need more consistent seams to mine.

If fantasy must be eschewed, then fictional nicknames - for instance, those abounding in P.G. Wodehouse's novels - cannot be used. A safer source might perhaps be the sort of local history that deals in 'characters'. For instance, a booklet called Essèx Eccentrics purports to 'etymologize' several names:⁶

'Marmalade Emma (so called because of her great fondness for this preserve) ...' 10

'A solitary tramp ... was William Foster, better known as Torp-Torp. Attired in full hunting regalia he would walk along muttering to himself and occasionally shouting out, 'Torp torp torpee', hence the nickname. ... Another lone tramp was Ardleigh Ben, who originated from the village whose name he bore.' [12]

'A solitary highwayman who frequented the Epping district in the 1770s was John Rann, otherwise known as Sixteen-String Jack. He was a flamboyant coxcomb whose clothes were always outlandishly original. ... And his nickname came about because of the sixteen coloured ribbons that generally fluttered from the knees of his breeches.' [25]

But here, as the mention of the eighteenth-century highwayman implies and the bibliography confirms, the material is second-hand, having been assembled from earlier, primary memoirs.

Rather closer to the original sources may be George Ewart Evans's 'oral histories' of East Anglia, based on living testimony; some of these afford a modest harvest of nicknames:⁷

'The business of making whitening for decorating rooms, ... and so on, was carried on only by one family in Stonham Aspal - the Berry family. ... Later it went to one of the daughters who married a Stonham man called George Race. ... George soon acquired the distinctive name of Whitening-Maker Race.' [WBW, 54]

'Near us was a farmer who was known throughout this district as Slap-arse Wharton. If a boy had done something wrong on his farm he'd take down his trousers and tan him.' [WBW, 100]

'A drover would go out with, perhaps, a 1,000 sheep. ... Drover Green was one of these.' [WBW, 113]

'James Moore ... is one of the local cattle-drovers. ... "I'm known as Pinny Moore - that's what I go by. My father who was a cattle-drover too went by the same name."' [WBW, 134]

'My grandfather was John Edwards, Owd England. ... I reckon Owd England was born around about 1830.' [WBW, 208]

'Tiny Crane ... was a Lifeguardsman, and ... we hadn't got a shoe to fit him. ... They made his boots special for him; and Bass's have still got the last pair that wasn't issued to him. And that's a size fourteen! ... He used to say that when he got back home he'd sit on one side of the table and two of his children would sit opposite on each big toe.' [WBW, 272]

Already that little corpus parallels some regular features of medieval nicknaming: the prominence of occupational terms and the hereditary tendencies, as well as the use of anecdotal 'Shakespeare names'. Still, however, the material is second-hand. Perhaps greater authenticity should be sought, not in compilations of this kind, but in whatever individual memoirs might be available of people comparable with Evans's informants.

* * *

One autobiography through which a fine gathering of nicknamed eccentrics stalk and caper their way is Laurie Lee's Cider with Rosie:⁸

'Cabbage-Stump Charlie was our local bruiser. ... He would set out each evening, armed with his cabbage-stalk, ready to strike down the first man he saw. ... And he would take up his stand outside the pub, swing his great stump round his head, ... and challenge all comers to battle. ... Albert the Devil was another alarmer - a deaf-mute beggar with a black-beetle's body, short legs, and a mouth like a puppet's. He had soft-boiled eyes of unusual power which filled every soul with disquiet. It was said he could ruin a girl with a glance and take the manhood away from a man, or scramble your brains. ... Percy-from-Painwick, on the other hand, was a clown and a ragged dandy, who used to come over the hill, dressed in frock-coat and leggings, looking for local girls. Harmless, half-witted, he wooed only with his tongue. ... Then there was Willy the Fish, who came round on Fridays, mongering from door to door, with baskets of mackerel of such antiquity that not even my family could eat them. ... The Prospect Smiler ... was a manic farmer. Few men, I think, can have been as unfortunate as he; for on the one hand he was a melancholic with a loathing for mankind, on the other, some paralysis had twisted his mouth into a permanent and radiant smile. So everyone he met, being warmed by this smile, would shout him a happy greeting. And beaming upon them with his sunny face he would curse them all to hell.' [35-6]

'The Head Teacher ... was a bunched and punitive little body and the school had christened her Crabby; she had a sour yellow look, lank hair coiled in earphones, and the skin and voice of a turkey.' [49]

But the cultivated originality of diction here (the man is a poet) warns that the line dividing autobiography from fiction may be somewhat overstepped. Less 'literary' memoirs might better, more safely, serve the turn.

Of course, no truly unsophisticated book or writer, has ever existed; for, as William Matthews observed à propos of dialect-writings, 'a pen gives whoever holds it a sense of style and, therefore, modifies his native colloquialism.'⁹ Nevertheless, if at some risk of taking a street-lamp for a will o' the wisp, perhaps the search for authenticity may be pursued through certain 'naive' memoirs - written, that is, by people with little pretension other than to record the traditions of their own communities.¹⁰ Thus, Bob Copper, in his Early to Rise: A Sussex Boyhood, specifies nicknaming as a characteristic practice of the village lads:¹¹

'Nicknames, often handed down from one generation to the next, were almost universally used for boys and it was usually a sign of affection or at least acceptance into a gang. My cousin Charles was known as Chaulker, which he had inherited from our uncle Charles. Cousin Ron was first Marzi, a contraction of marzipan, and later Wigan. My first nickname was Agony which was my reward for parodying a popular song of the time into The Sheik of Agony (Araby), but afterwards, because of my well-covered frame, I became known as Plumpy. Later still as the puppy fat diminished this was modified to Plunky.' [65]

Disappointingly, not many further nicknames are cited here, partly because the writer (a one-time barber's assistant) tends to refer to his elders and betters by official names, with handles; a few good explanations are, however, given:

'... the Penny Lady who offered many of the miscellany of items she carried in her basket for that modest sum.' [18-19]

'"How did ol' Steady get his nickname?" I asked. ... "Wal, one night 'e 'as a tidy ol' wet, ... an' when 'twas time t' go 'ome 'e was all over the road. ... Next mornin' ... they arsts 'im 'ow 'e got on goin' 'ome the night before. 'Oh,' 'e says, 'instead o' goin' round th' road, I takes th' ol' gal down Smuggler's Track - "' ... the precipitous side-hill which ... was far too steep for wheeled traffic ... "' That put a tidy ol' strain on the breechin's, I can tell ye,' he says, 'But I lays well back an' kips sayin' t' th' ol' mare, "Steady! Steady! Steady, ol' gal, steady!"' An' ol' Charlie's been Steady ever since.' [107-8]

'Mr. Adkins, the boss, as his nickname Porky implied, as in appearance inclined towards the porcine.' [176]

'Buck Alce ... was an old farm hand and had been a bit of a reprobate in days gone by.' [195-6]

Another 'etymology' or two can be gleaned from The Decline of an English Village by Robin Page, son of a Cambridgeshire farmer:¹²

'One man, with a red face, was called Happy. Another, older man, with a wooden leg, looked like a pirate, and when out of earshot we called him Peg Leg.' [22]

'All his life Mr. Holben had been a keen sportsman; when in the army he had ridden horses and become an expert in lancing pegs while at full gallop. For this feat he was called Pegger, a nickname that stayed with him all his life.' [40]

An especially rich crop of annotated nicknames comes, not from one of these rural milieux, but from the urban one depicted in the serial memoirs of F.T. Unwin¹³ - himself a Cambridge character, selling his neat paperbacks door-to-door from a shopping-trolley and signing them with a flourish. Like many who people his pages, he had himself as an orphan boy had a nickname which his foster-father gave him and he himself soon invested with a ramifying symbolism:

'"You remind me of a lovable circus clown I once knew; he had red hair, thin legs, and dimples, Pimbo, that was his name, and that's what I'll call you, my boy - Pimbo." ... Besides, thought Bob, was it not the fashion to give a foster-child a nickname? It saved a lot of questions - and was kinder to the boy.' [P, 9]

'Pimbo, surprised at hearing his real name, paused for a second. Since Bob Freestone had dubbed him Pimbo, everyone thought he had no other name. ... Pimbo wondered whether the nickname meant that perhaps he oughtn't to be alive - it might be just a name to get him by. Then again he liked the name ... ' [P, 12]

'"Why does my foster-father call me Pimbo? ... He says I remind him of a clown." ... "Pimbo was a wonderful clown, he brought laughter and tears to the world. The public knew him only as Pimbo, no-one wanted to know his real name." [P, 20]

'Somehow from the moment Miss Bragg had called him Pimbo, [his foster-mother] felt things were going to be all right.' [P, 37]

'[The foster-father speaking] "I guess I've stopped kids calling you Ginger. Maude tells me Pimbo has stuck since the first day." [P, 59-60]

'Pimbo, whose nickname had stuck with him since a small child, ...'
[DF, 7]

'It was then and there that Pimbo lost his identification. He was now Student Nurse J. Freestone, the nickname Pimbo no longer existed. It was amazing how the name had caught on at Fulbourn Hospital, he supposed it was easy around the tongue.' [DF, 54]

But here again reality may be partly overlaid by fiction: for instance, not only is J. Freestone substituted for F.T. Unwin, but dialogue is freely invented, often with a didactic cast, and the chronology of the series shows inconsistencies. The preoccupation with nicknames itself recurs so often as almost to kindle suspicions of artifice. On the other hand, the undoubted ulterior purpose seems to be social and humanitarian rather than literary. What in itself may speak for the authenticity of the name-record here is that attempts to engage the author in anthroponymical discourse have so far foundered on his strong identification of names with their bearers. The critical standing of these books is of some moment because, if reliable, they constitute a nickname-treasury. Apart from a Dickensian Golden Dustman [P, 90-1] and an occasional rarity (thus, 'the well-known barber shop of Chatty Collins ... [so called] because of his regular use of dirty towels' [P, 14], where the 'etymon' is chatt 'louse'),¹⁴ the name-glosses here seem to offer straightforward insights into the popular mind:

'[Banger Day, a policeman, speaking] "Can you tell me why he [Dollar Smith, a young thief]'s called Dollar?" ... Nicknames seemed to be very common after all, [Pimbo] thought. Bobby had once told him that Banger was nicknamed as such because of his threat to bang naughty boys' heads together. ... "It's because he's always betting people. In an argument he says, 'I'll bet you a dollar I'm right.'" [P, 57]

"Why do they call you Old Jack?" ... "Old Jack, don't seem much of a name. I reckon that goes for the lot of us - just a symbol of all drunks," replied the tramp.' [P, 95, cf. 63-4]

'Harry the Beast was a popular figure on the Market Square, here he peddled, earned enough to keep himself. ... Harry, the Beast was Harry's own brain-wave. ... [He] chose a name like that because it was the exact opposite to his real personality. ... The heading in the local paper, Harry the Beast Found Dead, was right up Harry's alley - that was the way he wanted to go.' [DF, 112 and 114]

'... Irish Molly. Her pub had a very bad name among the local residents. Known as the "George the Fourth" it boarded Irish labourers, and Molly needed nerves of steel to keep in order the drunken, brawling Irishmen.' [OC, 17]

'The Salvation Army allowed David on all their marches, and very proud indeed was David to be seen walking alongside the flag. It was a pity, thought Pimbo, that boys teased him and called him Jug-of-Water.' [OC, 18-19]

'Lightning the news vendor ... was very astute at picking peak times for selling. He would charge from one cinema queue to another, frequent seasonal festivities, and was not afraid of hard work.' [OC, 23-4]

'... a workman known as Slipper; his daily footwear was a pair of white slippers. ... Boys told of Slipper's relentless chasing; at

the first call of his nickname he would chase a boy from one end of the town to the other.' [OC, 70-1]

'Paul Bootlace, whose nickname Bootlace was a derivative from Boutilier. Paul was a product of a fleeting romance during the days of the war, after which, having lost his father, the boy was left with a name of French origin, hence the ready-made nickname of Bootlace.' [OC, 104]

'Hokie lived in York Terrace, ... a man of very slow movement, with a slight slobbering round his mouth. Children used him as ready bait, and cried out, "Hokey, pokey, penny a lump - the more you have the more you jump." ... "I tried everything to get a living. Then it came to selling ice-cream. ... So they called me Hokey-pokey, penny a lump - and they've called me Hokie ever since.'" [OC, 116 and 121]

'Mr. Haynes, ... affectionately known as Hummer Haynes, as throughout his entire serving procedure he would be intently humming a current song theme.' [OC, 126; cf. 15, 'Mr. Haynes, the humming grocer']

'Whoop Gurner. ... [His mother speaking] "My George's a good boy, like his Dad - not afraid of work. Me husband was called Whoop because he became excited at the idea of any kind of challenge - a funny little noise he'd make - like a whoop, I suppose.'" [KD, 27]

'... a thin, tallish, witch-like woman. ... Wearing a black, wide-brimmed hat, with black dress, stockings and shoes to match, she presented the kind of character portrayed by a Dracula thriller. "Who's she?" asked Pimbo. "Known as Black Sally, some call her Black Bess. ... The mistress here lets her in once a week - reckon they get up to a little bit of black magic!"' [KD, 96-7]

Those are just the best-annotated among the nicknames abounding in these recollections of working-class Cambridge life in the 1930s.

These memoirs illustrating nickname-usages have all represented similar backgrounds, that is, close-knit communities, urban no less than rural, and especially one near the heart of cosmopolitan Cambridge. In London, too, such quasi-villages lie embedded, and there, too, nicknaming has thriven. A recent popular booklet brings this out, suggesting that

'A number of Cockney practices and sayings have country origins - for example, nicknaming: old people in East Anglian villages recall the time when everybody around them had a nickname, and in East London (with more varied material to hand) the habit has persisted.'¹⁵

Perhaps life in Poplar (East London) has not differed too greatly from that in Barnwell (East Cambridge).

Again the writers' varied purposes pose some problems of source-criticism. Jo Anderson, for instance, who records in her Anchor and Hope the vanished life of London's Dockland, telling of characters 'whose nicknames filtered through Grandad's front-parlour door of a Sunday tea when old times were discussed',¹⁶ also takes local social history far further back than living memory could reach (she would not thank me for classing her as 'naive'). Such widened scope need not, on the other hand, be incompatible with an accurate recording of gossip and folk-memory. This is a serious book, and if not all the nicknames quoted are as fully 'etymologized' as could be wished, that might in itself bear witness to a scrupulosity forbidding invented explanations. In the event, the material here is richer in communal traditions than in individual fancies:

'... the little "cocks", fast-scudding boats operated by the Robinson clan of Bankside (which is why the Robinsons are known as Cockies to this day).' [31; cf. 60]

'The up-river lightermen belonged to a tight-knit community - often tracing their ancestry back to the most distant recorded time, and within the community families are still known by early nicknames: the Robinsons are Cockies still; the Blyths Nellies; the Hopkins Pollies; and the Marshes are variously Stackys, Stiltys, Rum or Pegs.' [60]

'... Bankside characters going by the robust names of Podge, Willow-Eye, Wiggy, Titchy (who was 6' 2"), Mad Brady, Moaner, Whisper Rivers, and Wooden Heights, who supplied coal by lighter and whose speciality was swinging heavy sacks of the stuff as if they were bags of feathers.' [61]

'Big Nibby - he was a mountain of flesh, fat everywhere, which made the eyes appear small; he was very nimble of foot considering his bulk.' [65]

'... the "casuals" ... Many of them were without boots, so they bound their feet in rags, hence their nickname of Toe-rag.' [72]

'Loopy Thomas, ... who used to run along Riverside in a white sheet trying to scare courting couples till one night someone tripped him over; mad as a hatter he was.' [136]

'Poor old Mother No-Nose had a grey porcelain nose tied on with tape round the back of her head.' [136]

'Mrs. Richards, the Sweet; she used to make her own toffee.' [137]

'... the local copper, his name was Warby, Bluebottle we called him.' [137]

'Nitty Nora searching everybody's hair with the same comb.' [139]

All the more valuable for being less wide-ranging are the more personal Dockland memoirs offered by Grace Foakes in My Part of the River,¹⁷ where every nickname cited belongs within the writer's own experience:

'My brother William, having very fair hair, used to look bald when he had his hair cut this way, shaved close, and much to his disgust the other children used to call him Claudie Whitehead.' [19]

'The gym slip was meant to reach the knees but my father insisted on it being longer and larger, so that I could grow into it. When I put it on it nearly reached my ankles, but I had to wear it and I felt awful. ... I was laughed at by the other children. ... I was named Polly Long Frock.' [46-7]

'Now I had heard of a place ... where unwanted cats could be taken, so each time I could entice a cat into our house I would put it in a large bag and carry it until I reached this place. ... The neighbours found out and called me Queen of the Cats.' [50]

'... one policeman, ... a very large man with big feet and a big nose. I don't remember his proper name, but we could always give a name to anybody and we called him Bootnose.' [59]

'... a short, fat man ... His nose was very red, with a large growth on either side giving the impression that he really had three noses stuck together. With the cold logic of children, we named him Old Three Noses.' [59]

'One poor woman who was a widow ... was nearly always partly intoxicated. ... Each time we children saw her we would shout at her; we called her Old Mother Born-Drunk.' [59-60]

'... a surly, grumpy man. He was a cripple and walked with a limp. ... We knew he could not run, so we stood at a safe distance and shouted "Grumpy Lloyd", and by this name he became known.' [60]

'There was a searchlight operated by a local man affectionately known as Searchlight Charlie.' [72]

'Finally she returned home from hospital and was a hunchback for the rest of her life. We all knew her as Little Edie, for she never grew taller than a five-year-old.' [180]

* * *

The books just excerpted are merely a random few out of the scores published; neither geographically representative, nor selected on any principle. The florilegium could be, perhaps will be, indefinitely extended. Meanwhile, it is time to take stock, asking whether such a modern nickname-corpus offers anything beyond a folkloric interest; whether it would provide medievalists with any useful analogies.

In one respect at least this will not be so: modern nicknames, forming part of a system where the family-name dominates over the individual name, necessarily have a 'syntax' totally different from the medieval one. Nowadays sobriquets of all kinds, when not used independently, are commonly prefixed to surnames, so that, far from qualifying 'individual' names, as in the medieval mode, they usurp their place: thus, Squibber (Scrubber), Dale, Hummer Haynes, Grumpy Lloyd, Frenchie Nicholson, Bandy Taylor, as well as Cocky Robinson and its like. When a nickname does qualify a 'first' name, then still, whatever its own structure, it is prefixed, adjective-like, more often than suffixed: thus, Little Edie, Marmalade Emma, Nitty Nora, Searchlight Charlie, and Sixteen-String Jack, beside Polly Long Frock and Claudie Whitehead.

In certain instances, moreover, the naming-structure is less straightforward than at first appears in so far as the bearers' official 'first' names have been displaced by conventional ones that have evolved halfway towards common nouns: Polly Long Frock's real name was Grace, and Claudie Whitehead's, William. Similar usages underlie Laurie Lee's Percy-from-Painswick, and probably also Nitty Nora and some at least of the several Charlies. 'Christian names' used like this belong to the nickname-vocabulary no less than do conventional epithets like Dusty (Miller) and Lofty - and for that reason may become less favoured for official christenings. What analogous shifts may have taken place in medieval times would prove hard to check in the sorts of record extant; but, if ascertainable, they might help to explain some losses of popularity.

Semantic analogies may be more apt than structural ones. Admittedly, the sharpest lesson for medievalists comes from those anecdotal names, like Agony, Dollar, Pegger and Steady, whose genesis, if not recorded, could hardly have been guessed;¹⁸ to how many of our early forms this may apply we shall never know. But not all hints are so negative. For instance, when the many medieval nicknames based on terms for food¹⁹ find an apparent parallel in

Marmalade Emma, it may, or may not, be relevant that this marks its bearer as eating the delicacy to excess, and perhaps constantly talking of it, rather than as making or selling it. More generally, the range of interpretations acceptable for any date must allow for the cruelty frequent here and never sparing the half-witted or the deformed: Bootsnose, Mother No Nose, Old Three Noses, Old Mother Born-Drunk. Even names fairly innocuous on paper, like Claudie Whitehead, could be hurtfully meant; and Grace Foakes in particular stresses the harshness, the 'cold logic', not only of the nicknames other children gave her but equally of those she joined in giving to others. Some victims of taunting nicknames - Grumpy Lloyd, Peg Leg, Slipper - were even roused to physical retaliation.

Such reactions raise, in its acutest form, the question already mooted of nickname-status: whether given forms are strictly third-person (the classic case being children's names for their teachers), with the only possible second-person applications hostile ones; or whether they are acceptable in the second-person, and perhaps adopted in the first (like Pimbo). Even with contemporary nicknames this can rarely be resolved for forms not current in the observer's own circle. But, again, the matter may be germane to the genesis of transmissible family-names.

Surprisingly perhaps, these modern names do, as already remarked, sporadically exemplify an hereditary principle, as with Whoop Gurner and Pinny Moore, as well as all the fixed clan-epithets like Cocky Robinson. This implies a turn of mind comparable with that underlying the medieval creation of family-names.

Another link with medieval practices occurs in the way all the memoirs consulted show publicly-recognized nicknames as distinctively masculine; Bob Copper specifically connects them with boys' gangs. Feminine examples found here have never referred to 'respectable' women but only to raffish characters and aged grotesques - Irish Molly, Black Sally, Mother No Nose, Old Mother Born Drunk; and this is so whether the memorialists themselves are men or women. The feminine seclusion this implies shows indeed at its strongest in Winifred Foley's two volumes, A Child in the Forest and No Pipe-Dreams for Father, depicting the women's side of life in a Forest of Dean mining-village, for these record hardly any of the nicknames a priori to be expected in so small and isolated a community.²⁰ This agrees with the general impression from records of all types, dates and origins that women's naming and men's are governed by partly differing social conditions and conventions.

This present study is simply a pilot one putting forward such material as has randomly come to hand. Apart from any entertainment value, it at least illustrates social and onomastic attitudes in communities of sorts now fast vanishing. How far such recent usages will offer helpful analogies to medievalists remains to be seen. Certainly, any such are likely to concern individual interpretations rather than systems. Moreover, as already remarked, some 'etymologies' cited here inspire, more than anything, great scepticism towards academic efforts in this line, showing up for the thin stuff it is the mere dictionary-work with which some nickname-students have been contenting themselves.²¹ Were that the only lesson, surveying these sources would have been worthwhile.

NOTES

1. A. Dauzat, Les noms de personnes (Paris, 1925; repr 1944), 172; cf. 105, also idem, Les noms de famille de France (Paris, 1945; repr 1977), 180.

2. See the review article by Gillian Fellows Jensen based on J. Jönsjö, Studies on Middle English Nicknames: I - Compounds, Lund Studies in English LV (Lund, 1979), and published in Namn och Bygd LXVIII (1980), 102-15, esp. 111-12.
3. See my own review of Jönsjö, Studies - forthcoming in English Studies.
4. E. Searle, ed. and tr., The Chronicle of Battle Abbey (Oxford, 1980), 36-7.
5. Printed on pp.20-7 and pp.63-76 of the present volume of NOMINA.
6. A. Barnes, Essex Eccentrics (Ipswich, 1975). Note that on all quotations from this and other sources a standard 'style' has been imposed.
7. George Ewart Evans, Where Beards Wag All: the Relevance of the Oral Tradition (London, 1970; pb 1977); not all this author's works are equally rich in name-material.
8. Laurie Lee, Cider with Rosie (London, 1959; Penguin, 1962).
9. William Matthews, Cockney Past and Present (London, 1938), 1-2.
10. Cf. my earlier paper, 'Some early-twentieth century Aberdeen nicknames', Aberdeen University Review XLVIII (1979), 195-9.
11. Bob Copper, Early to Rise: a Sussex Boyhood (London, 1976).
12. R. Page, The Decline of an English Village (London, 1974; Corgi, 1975).
13. F.T. Unwin, Pimbo (Ilfracombe, 1976) [P]; idem, Dew on my Feet (Ilfracombe, 1976) [DF]; idem, Pimbo and Jenny in Old Cambridge (Cambridge, 1978) [OC]; idem, Knock on any Door with Pimbo and Jenny (Cambridge, 1979) [KD] (the other volumes so far published in this series happen to be less rich in nicknames).
14. See E. Partridge, A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English, 3rd edn. (London, 1949), 142, s.v. (I owe this interpretation to Mr. G. Stannard of the University Library, Cambridge).
15. R. Barltrop and J. Wolveridge, The Muvver Tongue (London, 1980), 94; but the few specimens quoted p.90 are disappointingly conventional.
16. Jo Anderson, Anchor and Hope (London, 1980).
17. Grace Foakes, Between High Walls (London, 1972) and My Part of the River (1974), combined under the latter title in a Futura paperback (London, 1976).
18. The point is not new: cf., for instance, P.H. Reaney, The Origin of English Surnames (London, 1967), 219-23, and Dauzat, Les noms de famille, 180-1, also Les noms de personnes, 97-100.
19. Cf., for instance, H. Carrez, 'Le vocabulaire de l'alimentation et les noms de personnes dans la région dijonnaise du xii^e au xv^e siècle', Annales de Bourgogne X (1938), 173-88; also Reaney, Origin, 183-4.
20. Winifred Foley, A Child in the Forest (London, 1974; Futura, 1977) and No Pipe-Dreams for Father (1977; Futura, 1978).