

A NEW DICTIONARY OF FIRST NAMES

A review of LESLIE DUNKLING and WILLIAM GOSLING, Everyman's Dictionary of First Names, Dent: London and Melbourne, 1983, xvi + 304 pp., £9.50.

This dictionary deals with first names generally in use in the English-speaking world during the last four centuries. The most important feature is its basis in name-counts from a wide variety of sources, mainly British and American; with such an impressive statistical underpinning it is more informative and more reliable concerning recent and current usage than any comparable reference work. The authors claim that they deal with 'the first names borne by at least 95% of the English-speaking population' (p.xi). There are around 4500 entries, more than four times the number in its most obvious competitors, the Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names (3rd edition, 1977) by E. G. Withycombe, and American Given Names (1979) by George Stewart (reviewed in NOMINA VII, 141-4). A detailed examination of names beginning with the letter A revealed that Everyman's Dictionary contains about 250 names not discussed in Withycombe. These include names imported from other countries into the American name-stock; surnames used as Christian names; and many recent coinages, for example blends, clippings and diminutives (particularly among girls' names like Jeanine, Jolene, Lianne, and Sharolyn), as well as spelling variations such as Daran, Daren, Darin, Darren, and Daryn, a feature of current naming which, in Britain at least, testifies to an increasing permissiveness among clergymen and registrars of births during the last couple of decades.

As far as the general public is concerned, Everyman's Dictionary is bound to become the standard work on the subject, for its unparalleled comprehensiveness is attractively coupled with information about both origins and recent usage, much space being devoted to names made prominent by their use in literature, the cinema, and other types of popular entertainment. For the scholar, however, the dictionary is disappointingly less than it sets out to be. One of its declared aims is to state, whenever possible, 'to what extent the name has been used since its introduction and by which social groups' (p.x). Many entries, such as those for Ashley, Elvis, Hannah, Samantha, and Zarah, are model discussions in every respect except that of identifying the social groups in which the names have, or have not, occurred. Thinking of British names which I suspected of showing a fairly marked social bias, I consulted the entries for Georgina, Jennifer, Joanne, Tracy, Charles, Nigel, Craig, Dean, Lee, and Wayne, but with no better luck, for, as with the majority of names in this book, popularity is charted solely by the gross national statistics of usage, not by distribution among different socio-occupational groupings. Religious and ethnic affiliations receive better attention, although in unequal measure. We are told often that a name has been favoured by Puritans or by Black American Muslims; occasionally that a name has been current among Catholic families; rarely that it is common among Jewish families; never that a name has been popular among Methodists or was revived by the Tractarians. Names specifically used by Black Americans (like Dejuan, Kiana, and Ladonna) are regularly identified, as are the predilections of the Welsh, Scots, and Irish, but Australian, Canadian, and West Indian preferences get only the odd mention, while those of other ethnic or geographical minorities in Britain are unrepresented, as are names usages in several parts of the world where English is a mother tongue or is the language of education and government. To a large extent such inconsistencies only reflect the patchiness of the information available to the compilers of this dictionary, but it does suggest that in a future edition they might either qualify their declared aims

more carefully or else undertake the research that is necessary if this is truly to be an authoritative dictionary of first names in the whole of the English-speaking world.

Genealogical considerations are also somewhat neglected, both in regard to explaining the introduction of names into the stock and in regard to their regular and prolonged use within particular families. (Withycombe is more informative.) One may wonder, therefore, at the reason for including quite so many surnames (e.g. Knight, Painter, Porter, Watson) whose scattered occurrence as first names in nineteenth-century England usually reflects a wish to honour the maternal side of a family or to honour a godparent. Very few of these have attained the status of Ashley, Leslie, Sidney, and Stanley, for example, as full members of the British stock of first names.

My criticisms so far of this very useful book simply emphasise the substantial difficulties in fulfilling some of the tasks which the authors have set themselves. They are modestly aware that 'the compilers of a dictionary such as this are required to have a peculiar set of skills' (p.xi) and that 'since we are only human, we are weaker in some areas than in others' (ibid.). One would be wholly and sympathetically disarmed by such an admission were it not that a few weaknesses unfortunately occur in crucial areas and urgently need attention before the next edition appears.

Given the stated intention (p.x) to record precisely where, when, and with what intensity names have been in general currency, there are too many entries where some or all of this information is unaccountably missing. Under the letter A, for instance, this applies to Abishas (f), Admiral (m), Alayne (f), Alexis (m, f), Aley (f), Alison (f), Alix (f), Alpha (f), Althea (f), Ambrose (m), Anchor (m), Anders (m), Andra (f), Anouska (f), Ariel (m), Arley (m), Arrow (m), Ashby (m), Ashton (m), Asia (f), Athene (f), Atlantic (m), Auburn (m), Avery (m), and Avice (f). Even where dates of introduction and frequency of usage are provided, the information is usually expressed in formulae which are disappointingly imprecise considering that the exact statistics must be available from the authors' own name counts. Phrases like 'rare', 'little used', 'fairly common', 'quietly used', 'with reasonable frequency', 'used regularly', 'quietly but regularly used', 'well used', 'mildly popular', and 'very popular' leave the reader with only a vague impression of ill-defined relativity. All we get by way of definition is a statement (on p.x) that 'when a name is used "regularly but infrequently", as we often phrase it in this dictionary, we mean that an example occurs in our records every few years . . . Names which we also describe as "quietly used" fall into this category.' It appears from the succeeding comments on 'distribution of names in a particular year' (ibid.) that the standard by which frequency of usage is measured in any century is derived from twentieth-century configurations of recurrence. This makes no allowance for the great discrepancy between naming patterns in the period from the sixteenth to the early nineteenth centuries and naming patterns in the period from the mid-nineteenth to the twentieth centuries. In the earlier period the name stock was stable and relatively small, while the same top three names among children of each sex in the parish registers I have studied account for about fifty per cent of total usage. In the modern period the name stock has become less and less stable while increasing its size at a prodigious rate. By the twentieth century the three most popular names of each sex in any one decade account for only about fifteen per cent of total usage; there are rapid swings in fashion as to which are the most favoured names; and of course the number of children registered in any one year has increased by many times during the past century and a half. A phrase like 'mildly popular', which is never defined statistically, cannot mean the same thing for both eighteenth-century and twentieth-century usage.

It must be allowed that this dictionary is expressly aimed at 'parents with the pleasant task of choosing a name' and at 'browsers' (quotations from the dust-jacket), not at historians looking for statistical information on past naming practices. But this is not a justification for imprecision or for historical inaccuracy in a work aiming at authoritativeness. It is unnerving to be assured that 'E. G. Withycombe . . . made careful counts of names occurring in medieval records. Her remarks about that period are therefore completely reliable' (p. vi). In consequence, many of Withycombe's errors are given a further lease of spurious authority, as in the assertions that 'Ella was much used in the Middle Ages' (p. 80) and that 'Samson was a popular figure in the medieval mystery plays and these ensured that this name was well used in the 12th c.' (p. 249). Withycombe's assumption that the Reformation brought about a general decline in the popularity of non-biblical saints' names and of biblical saints' names associated with Catholic doctrines, can be disproven by many examples, as the entries in Everyman's Dictionary for Catherine, Christopher, Margaret, Mary, and Ursula demonstrate. Yet we are still told, on no better grounds, it seems, than unsubstantiated guesswork, that the popularity of Agnes and George was impeded by Protestant hostility to names of non-biblical saints, and that Peter suffered from 'anti-Catholic feeling'. There is altogether too much readiness to snatch at a convenient hypothesis without critically examining its general validity. Are we seriously to believe that the decline in occurrences of Lister, one of very many nineteenth-century surnames whose use as a first name was ephemeral and probably largely familial, was directly attributable to the growing fame of Joseph Lister (died 1912)? (Too antiseptic for some?) About Joan it is claimed that 'Its own popularity caused it to go out of favour in the 17th c.'. Were popularity (among the lower classes) sufficient cause for general unpopularity we would be hard pressed to explain the long-term popularity of Ann, Elizabeth, Mary, John, Thomas, and William.

As the authors rightly say, compilers of a first name dictionary 'must have specialized linguistic training' (p. xi). Unfortunately it is in this department that their own work is most seriously defective. Part of the entry for Boniface reads as follows: 'Change in spelling from Bonifatius to Bonifacius by 13th c. presumably due to the pronunciation -fashjus. . .'. Where and by whom was this supposed pronunciation used? In Middle English there was a shift of -ti- from /sj/ to /ʃ/ but this is not recorded before the fifteenth century. In any case the re-spelling (and etymological re-interpretation) of Bonifatius as Bonifacius was French, occurring as early as the eighth century, and was made possible by the phonetic convergence of -ti- and -ci- as /tsi/; see M. -T. Morlet, Les noms de personne sur le territoire de l'ancienne Gaule du VIe au XIIIe siècle, II (Paris, 1972), 28-9. As for etymologies, there are some terrible muddles, particularly in the handling of Old English and Old Germanic derivations. Many of Withycombe's long-discredited etymologies are repeated, sometimes in a form which compounds the original error. Norman names of Germanic origin such as Ralf, Randolf, Reynold, Robert, and Roger are given OE etymons. Aldous (m) is treated as an OG masculine name, whereas it is actually a transferred surname derived from a hypocoristic form of an OE feminine name. Segar (m) is wrongly ascribed to OE Sigehere (an impossible source); it would be from OE *Sægār. Adolphus, imported into Britain by the Hanoverian royal family, is unaccountably attributed to both OG Adalwolf (sic) and OE Æthelwulf. Similarly Albert is ascribed not only to OG Adalbert but to OE Æthelbeorht. Because modern Elwin is regarded as a variant of Alvin, its OE source (Ealdwine) is also mistakenly allocated to Alvin (correctly from OE Ælfwine). Charles is not from OE ceorl 'man, husbandman',

and the failure to mention when the name is first recorded in England points up the etymological gaff. Emerson (m) is said to be 'Old English "descendant of Emery" '; are we to understand that Emery is an OE name (it is actually from OG Amalric and was introduced by the Normans) or, worse, that the patronymic Emerson is Old English instead of late, and probably northern, Middle English? It is stated that Emerson has been 'a surname since the 13th c.'; this might be true, but Reaney's earliest example in his Dictionary of British Surnames (2nd edn, 1976) is dated 1411. When, in the next entry, Emery is said to be the 'English form of German Emmerich "home-power"', the uninformed reader could be forgiven for concluding that 'Old English' and 'Old German' are interchangeable terms. Likewise Ethelinda, s.n. Ethel, is wrongly listed as an OE personal name; more confusingly, s.n. Ethelinda we are told that it is 'Old German athal linde' and an 'Anglo-Saxon name revived in the 19th c.'. Perhaps not surprisingly in view of the foregoing, there is no consistency in the presentation of linguistic origins. Sometimes we are given an etymological form (commonly the one in Withycombe, with attendant errors), more usually just the 'meanings' of the elements. These are now and again formulated as if they were meant to make sense as compounds, as with Eric 'Old Norse "ruler of all" or "always ruler"', and Walter 'Old German "ruling people"', where the elements are also partly misinterpreted. One of the worst examples of confusion occurs in the entry for Seward: 'Surname "sea-victory" or "sea-guardian" used as a first name especially at the end of the 19th c.' Besides failing to note that Seward occurs as an early ME Christian name (which therefore could possibly have been revived in the nineteenth century) the authors get their lines horribly crossed by combining in 'sea-victory' the 'meanings' of the first elements of the two (or three) pre-Conquest names from which Seward derived: OE Saeweward and OE Sigeward / ODan Sigwarth.

The fact that 'a name's "meaning" today has very little to do with its original meaning, unless the latter is obvious' (pp. viii-ix) in no way releases the compilers of this dictionary from the obligation to provide reliable etymologies, as they readily acknowledge. But the protestation that 'the etymologies are as accurate as we can get them' (p. viii) is unacceptable. The omissions in their bibliography bear out the conclusion that they have not yet taken sufficient trouble to check English and Germanic etymologies in up-to-date specialist reference works. Relying on Withycombe will not do, and it is simply untrue that 'Professor Weekley's various books on names, especially his Jack and Jill [1939], are probably the best source in English for a second opinion on etymologies' (p. vii). This matter ought to be put right in the next edition. Appropriate works by Forssner, Förstemann, Morlet, Seltén, and von Feilitzen should be consulted; failing that, a more thorough inspection of works already listed in the bibliography (Reaney's Dictionary of British Surnames (but the second edition, not the first as listed there) and Basil Cottle's Penguin Dictionary of Surnames) would at least remove the worst of Withycombe's mistaken etymologies for many of those Anglo-Saxon and Norman Christian names that gave rise to surnames. I cannot safely judge the reliability of the etymologies given for Gaelic and biblical names, but I notice that some of those cited by Dunkling and Gosling do not correspond to those given in the most recent scholarly dictionaries - Gaelic Personal Names by D. Ó Corráin and F. Maguire (Dublin, 1981) and the Dictionary of Proper Names and Places in the Bible by O. Odelain and R. Séguineau (New York, 1981; London, 1982).

I am aware that complaints about Everyman's Dictionary of First Names have occupied most of this lengthy review, and it would be unfair to leave the impression that this reflects the balance of achievements and shortcomings. In its coverage of names currently in use and in its sometimes very detailed charting of cultural influences

upon naming fashions in recent centuries, this book makes a significant contribution to our knowledge of first names in most parts of the English-speaking world, and it will surely be plundered by other compilers of first name dictionaries. The foundation of this publication's chief strength is well illustrated in the four last pages where are listed the top fifty names in England and Wales for the years 1925, 1950, 1965, 1975, and 1981, and the top fifty in the U.S.A. for 1925, 1950, 1970, and 1982 (white and non-white separately). But only when the more serious weaknesses have been remedied can the publishers justifiably claim that this is 'the most authoritative, up-to-date and thorough dictionary of first names to have been published' (quotation from the dust-jacket).

A handful of textual errors should be noted: p.x, for 'pages XX-YY' read 'pages 301-304'; p.5, s.n. Ailie, for 'Poet form of Ailis' read 'Pet form of Ailis'; p.16, smn. Ann, Anna, 'Apocryphal' is twice mis-spelt; p.27, s.n. Bartholomew, for 'Nathaneal' read 'Nathanael'; p.119, s.n. Hephzibah, l.10, for '10th c.' read '20th c.'.

PETER McCLURE

NILS WRANDER, English Place-Names in the Dative Plural, Lund Studies in English No. 65: Lund, 1983, 171 pp., no price stated.

Thematic studies are much needed in place-name research, as they complement the standard approaches of regional survey and dictionary compilation. Dr Wrander's monograph on English place-names in the dative plural is the latest of a number of distinguished contributions of this type from Swedish universities. Particularly useful features are the distribution map on p.171 and the section in the Introduction entitled 'Previous Research'. This last combines Swedish thoroughness with something approaching English brevity.

My main criticism of the book is that Dr Wrander does not always use the most recent works of reference, and does not always distinguish between recent and out-dated authorities. The bibliography does not include Barrie Cox's article 'The Place-Names of the Earliest English Records' (JEPNS 8). Consequently Herotunum and Hugabeorgum, the two dative plural settlement-names recorded by A.D. 730, are not included in the study. These two instances are important as showing that although this is mainly a late manner of forming place-names it is also evidenced at an early date. The section in Chapter I which deals with relevant names in charter boundaries cites long-discarded locations and identifications by Birch and Grundy. Dr Wrander mostly follows these with comments such as 'Grundy's identification is of little value', but there is really no point in saying about BCS 834 'According to Birch the county is Brk' when everyone now agrees that the document in question (Sawyer 525) refers to Washington Sx, and there is no reason why a primarily philological study should quote Grundy's etymologies. Ekwall's English River-Names (also missing from the bibliography) might have been consulted for Aln (recte Alham) and for Treselcotum in this section.

Chapters II and III, in which the remainder of the material is set out, are appreciably sounder than Chapter I, though Chapter III includes two names, Flitton Bd and Wycombe Le, which recent studies have shown not to be dative plurals. Chapter IV gives a list of elements found in this type of name, with the examples in which they occur. There is a final chapter of 'Conclusions', with a table of statistics for the counties in which dative plural names are found. These statistics are inflated by the counting of (e.g.) Hotham Carr and Hotham Moor and Laytham and Laytham Grange as separate items. In Yorkshire, Wharram Percy and Wharram le Street are counted as two names, though Wharram is generally agreed to be the name of the valley in which both settlements lie. This manner of counting doubles the figures for Derbyshire, and of course it makes a great deal of difference to the distribution map. The map does, nevertheless, give a true impression of the distribution, and it brings out a marked tendency to cluster, which may be important for regional settlement-history. The discussion (p.132) of the extent to which this manner of name-formation is to be associated with Old Norse influence is admirably sensible.

Dr Wrander's book is a useful collection of material, and care is taken throughout to distinguish between ambiguous and certain examples. Most of the etymological discussions are summaries of previous opinions, but one new suggestion deserves careful consideration. Ilam St is tentatively ascribed to ON hylr 'pool, deep place in a river'. If accepted, this will be of considerable significance for the history of the settlement. There are other ON names (Swinscoe and Thorpe) in the immediate vicinity, but the hitherto accepted view of Ilam has been that suggested by Ekwall, which is that it preserves the pre-English name of the River Manifold.

MARGARET GELLING

K. RUTHERFORD DAVIS, *Britons and Saxons: the Chiltern Region, 400-700*, Phillimore: Chichester, 1982, xiii + 172 pp., 7 plates, 11 maps, £9.95.

The author introduces this work by stating that he aims to use all available evidence to elucidate what happened in the 'Chiltern region' in the period 410-c. 700. Superficially the aim appears to be fulfilled, but the picture presented cannot be accepted as plausible. It is stated, with regard to British survival, that 'an element of speculation is unavoidable', but more than just an element pervades the whole book.

Our suspicions are aroused early by the handling of the place-names - normally cited without details of first record and with eccentric forms for the elements, e.g. the plural tuns for tūnas, and the erratic use of length marks. Some elements are incorrectly defined as habitative by selecting one only of their possible meanings (pp. 68-9, 84), while on Map 5 just the first part of the modern form of each name is given, not the elements involved. Rutherford Davis believes that place-names constitute an objective form of evidence (p. 1), but they are only as objective as their users, and their formation and distribution is governed by factors as complex as is the human bias in literary sources.

There is a lack of adequate references throughout (e.g., pp. 1, 34, 137-45) and a cavalier attitude to the work of others; Skeat is cited in the text but is not in the bibliography, while there are no references for the derivations given for the names on pp. 153-7. Are they from the relevant EPNS volumes, from Professor Kenneth Jackson, or entirely the author's own? It is also surprising to see a discussion of Beneficcan (pp. 114-15) without reference to Jackson's work, and many sources cited are out of date; worst perhaps is the serious acceptance of Beddoe's 1885 hypothesis that a British racial strain could still be detected in the Chilterns 1,300 years later, totally ignoring all recent work on the effects of intermixing of peoples.

There are many statements which reflect serious ignorance of recent research in archaeology and landscape history; for reasons of space, however, the present review will limit itself to pointing out the main errors in the place-name sections. There is, for example, no reason to suppose that the bulk of the place-names were formed as the result of a steady expansion of population (p. 100); even a small population will require names for nearby features. The whole chronology of names proposed by Rutherford Davis is open to grave doubts. Firstly, he uses them to throw light on the settlement period without relation to their first date of recording. No real reason is shown why the tūn names should be ascribed to the eighth-ninth centuries (p. 81) as the element could have continued in use throughout the Anglo-Saxon period; in fact the whole discussion of the relationship of tūn names to other elements (pp. 70, 80) is quite unsound. It is also extremely dangerous to assume that most of the names not recorded until a later date were already in existence in 1086 (p. 80) or that the use of affixes such as 'new, north', etc, always shows late formation. An 'impression of antiquity' (p. 81) is not sufficient for the dating of worth names (including the one third of them recorded after the eleventh century; p. 70) to well before the eleventh century. There is also no reason why tūn names should denote English communities already existing in 571 (p. 63), especially since the term could have been applied to British as well as to English groups. It is this outdated concept of the Anglo-Saxons coming into an empty landscape, which the author himself rejects elsewhere (p. 3), which partly lies behind the belief that topographic names should be earlier than habitative ones (pp. 70-1). This may have been true of early prehistory, but is less certain in a landscape already well-provided with Romano-British settlements.

There is some confusion about the nature of -inga-, -ingas names. It is suggested that the personal names involved commemorate actual individuals who led the early communities (p. 70), whereas these could be family names given on the Continent or else later eponymous ancestors. This leads to the suggestion that the occurrence locally of the same personal-name in more than one place-name points to an early estate (p. 79), but that there was subsequently a social change, with the formation of tūn names by groups of fairly equal status (p. 80), although the material presented shows no such thing. Just because -ingtūn names are not numerous there is no reason to suppose that they must have been coined over a short period of time (p. 79), especially as names are included (p. 149) which are not -inga- names of the early type as defined by J. McN. Dodgson. Most incredible of all is the attempt to date most of the -ingas names to a time span of less than fifty years (p. 78), despite the author's own earlier strictures on such dating (p. 76).

To take but a few examples of the many other points on which one must differ from Rutherford Davis: it is not unusual for river names to be Celtic (p. 42); it is dangerous to assume that eccles names must refer to a Christian community (p. 119) rather than to an abandoned earlier church; and why repeat John Morris's erroneous view that wealh meaning 'slave' was restricted to West Saxon (p. 126), while an early wealhstod translating from British to English is more likely to have been of British than English stock (p. 123)? Saxon burgas could have been 'old' well before pre-1086 names were formed for them and so need not relate to Iron Age sites (p. 83), and other burh names may related to single fortified residences known from the law-codes rather than to large defended settlements (p. 83). Names relating to heathen practices need not have been given while the customs involved were still actively pursued (p. 35); and 'head' names need not refer to places of sacrifice.

At one extreme the author heaps up all material, relevant or not (e.g., p. 152), and includes late-recorded names which may not have been formed until after the Norman Conquest but which strengthen his case, as when he includes all woodland names recorded up to 1350, not 1086, to delineate pre-Conquest woodland (p. 16). At the other extreme he is very selective, taking awkward hām names to be hamm names simply because the area where they occur has few other early names (p. 72). The treatment of Dorchester-on-Thames highlights this special pleading; there is no evidence that the AS Chronicle means Dorchester when it says Bennington (pp. 65, 108). This illustrates another technique employed, of putting forward an idea which is then silently assumed as proven fact on which further hypotheses are then constructed. Thus we move from the possibility that the Taepa of Taplow is the man buried there, to discussion of the size of his dominion (p. 74) and eventually to the incredible statement that 'about 600 the Slough district was ruled by a local magnate called Taepa who was richly buried in a barrow at Taplow' (p. 108).

The author compounds the problems of his book by moving outside his own region into areas (e.g. the East Anglian dykes, p. 49) and periods with which he is less well acquainted. The Danish settlement among the English is not a valid comparison to that of the Anglo-Saxons among the British, as the Vikings spoke a language similar to Old English. The suggestion that if adequate records were not available 'we would be perplexed to understand its nature' (p. 123) illustrates the author's confusion; we are perplexed to understand the nature of the Danish settlement. On the other hand, the similarity of physical appearance of the British and English made intermarriage acceptable, unlike the Africans, whose colour ensured their survival as a distinct group in American society (p. 113). The medieval parallel for the role and status of Verulamium