

## OBITUARY

J.P. OAKDEN M.A., PhD, D.LITT

Dr James Parker Oakden, a senior member of the Council for Name Studies and editor of the English Place-Name Society's Staffordshire survey, died on 13 March 1988. He was born in Whiston, near Leek, and was educated at Leek Grammar School. Under W.J. Sedgfield in Manchester and for a year with Allen Mawer in Liverpool, Oakden was able to develop his interest in the place-names of his native county, earlier encouraged by his grammar-school headmaster, T.C. Warrington.

After a brief spell of school and university teaching in England, Oakden became a lecturer in the English Department of the University of St Andrews in 1931. He was later promoted to a senior lectureship, a post from which he retired in 1969. His collections of early forms of Staffordshire place-names go back to the beginning of his career. As long ago as 1936 his files were being consulted for comparative material, witness the acknowledgement in *The Place-Names of Warwickshire*.

The first volume of the *Place-Names of Staffordshire* appeared in 1984. He delayed the submission of the text for subsequent volumes in order to edit new material which has become available during the past few years from several archives in the Midlands. He was working on this to within a few weeks of his death.

James Oakden will be remembered for his conscientious scholarship, his readiness to seek and accept advice on toponymic matters, and his personal warmth and generous friendship.

JOHN FIELD

## NUGAE DE NOMINIBUS ELIGENDIS

If you, dear readers, were opening a café, or even a caff, would you call it *The Pits*? The mousehole-sharer, when shown (somewhere off the South Circular) just such a sign, opined that the target clientèle must be one whose spiritual home was Brand's Hatch. If you were in the fancy-soap business, would you call your chain of fragrant emporia *The Body Shop* (also a bit redolent of axle-grease)? From the complementary viewpoint, if you were a prudent Petriburgess, with even the haziest recollection of what happened in 1070, how would you feel about patronizing a shopping-centre dedicated to Hereward the Wake? Then there are those juggernauts whose legends set the mind a-boggling, such as *TNT Overnite* (? express delivery service for dyslexic terrorists) and *Gayfreight*.

As our title indicates, this year we're focusing on choices and their motivation. From now on, instead of just spilling our shreds and patches pellmell at your feet, we aim to fashion them into thematic quilts. We still, of course, wish to receive all the fruits of your observation as they ripen; but some will be set aside for a year or two to mature (or ferment). So please go on sending in every *trouvaille*, each triviality that the media may vouchsafe. Fret not that your special treasure be not instantly exhibited; rest assured that it will be stored against the day when its theme gets the spotlight.

### SLD up the creek

The onomastic non-event of 1988 had to be the reeling and writhing – not to say, *post-mortem* convulsions – indulged in by the *disjecta membra* of the erstwhile Misalliance as they strove to devise a poll-worthy appellation:

'The Social and Liberal Democrats voted overwhelmingly to use the name *Democrats* as a short working title; ... but a compromise aimed at averting a potentially damaging split in the party will enable local associations and candidates to continue using other names in their constituencies even though it risks causing further confusion among the electorate. The fear among opponents of the change of name is that without the word *Liberal* they risk losing support in their traditional heartlands. Throughout the emotional debate a succession of former Liberal MPs spoke of the dangers of using the name *Democrats* ...'

'Being *Ernest* in town but *Jack* in the country' has its problems, as a correspondent remarked when suggesting *The Bunbury Party* as an apposite name. Other suggestions included *£.S.D.* and also *The Whigs* (to show that at least they're united against the Tories). The SDP – the amputated appendage – was/were *pari passu* advised to 'rename themselves *The Republicans*, thereby underlining their increasing affinity with the Conservative Party' [*The Times*, 27.ix.88, p.4 – a report worthy of a 19th-cent. satirical novel; also Matthew Parris, *ibidem*, p.24, and letters, 30.ix.88, p.15]. One commentator opened the topic right up:

'Why debate only the name of the party? Why don't members debate their own names as well? For instance, whereas *Ashdown* is splendid, *Paddy* sounds unreliable; I favour *Michael* [but *Michael* = *Mick* = *Paddy*. – S.]'

### UnParliamentary?

The habit of attaching a name (frequently uncomplimentary) to a particular Parliament seems to have ended with the Convention Parliament which proclaimed William and Mary joint sovereigns. Names had ranged from the *Addled* to the *Wondermaking* (sometimes called the *Merciless*), taking in on the way a *Barebones*, a *Dunces*, a *Devil's*, a *Mongrel*, a *Rump*, an *Unlearned*, a *Useless*, and, in Scotland (unsurprisingly), a *Drunkard*. Could not Mrs Thatcher's third administration be called the *Bossyboots Parliament*? [letter

to *The Times*, 4.iv.89, p.13; *M. oxoniensis* prefers a reference to the class and subject of the PM's degree].

#### Faith and hope

'The Roman Catholic Church in the US has launched its own credit card, called *Caritas*, run by a finance house named *Magna Carda*' [*The Times* 'City Diary', 3.iii.89, p.27].

#### Solemn commemoration

'Only in the land of the Blarney Stone could fund-managers persuade investors to pour savings into the Black Monday Anniversary Investment Bond' [*The Times* 'City Diary', 12.ix.88, p.23].

#### Quiddities

'Whatever else happens, the EEC currency unit must not be allowed the thoroughly French name *écu*. *Écu* was the name of the old French crown and its adoption in Britain would no doubt delight some of the more xenophobic French. However, the word is awkward and unpronounceable on British tongues. Would we Gallicize it on the lines of "ai-coo" [?] to rhyme with *coucou*, *fou*, *joujou*, *pou*, *sou*. - S.]? Or would it be Anglicized to "ee-queue"? Both are grotesque. Better by far to have a simple term like *pound*, which translates smoothly into all languages - *livre*, *pfund*, etc.' [letter to *The Times*, 10.vii.88, p.11; as for another name mooted, *emu* < 'European Monetary Unit', that suggests a different continent entirely].

'The failure of any of our new coins to acquire a popular nickname is the best sign of their general lack of acceptance: there are no bobs or tanners or joeys. ...When the £1 coin first appeared in 1983, there was a move among Labour MPs to christen it the *maggie*, on the grounds that it was hard, sharp-edged and trying to be a sovereign. Tories responded by dubbing it a *scargill*, since it was unpopular, rough around the edges and hard on the nation's purse or, alternatively, a *kinmock*, on the basis that it was in the pocket of the unions. There seem to be the makings of a parlour game here. What about calling it an *alliance*, given that it is small and easily forgotten? Or, better still, a *david-owen*, since it is losing value?' [*Telegraph Sunday Magazine*, 24.i.88, p.40].

'Two contenders so far for the crate of champagne offered by Don de Groot, one of Pineapple Group's non-executive directors, for the person who dreams up a new and original name for the company. Retired interior designer and one-time ballet dancer Frances Grant suggests *Pollyanas*, combining *Pineapple Poll* with Fr *ananas*. Meanwhile a GP from South Wales suggests *Quid pro Quo*: appropriate, given that Debbie Moore is being allowed to buy the *Pineapple* name and studios for £1' [*The Times* 'City Diary', 27.i.88].

#### It takes Allsorts

'Cadbury-Schweppes may have put its *Groovers*, *Thundercats* and *Jaws* brand-names up for sale, but it is good to know that it is keeping its *Nerds* and *Runts* ...'

Subsequently, we learnt that Bassett's of Pontefract plans shortly to launch Nerds upon the British public [*The Times* 'City Diary', 3.ii.88 and 1.xii.88]: not the first product-name calculated to put potential consumers right off (we're prepared to specify - for any marketing agency that makes it worth our murine while - a number of such; plus, though it's hardly relevant here, a good few TV adverts of like impact).

Whenever there are clients to be sweet-talked, applied onomatology comes into play. Marketing people can really agonize over questions of onomastic allure, witness one tale of 'a "brainstorming" lunch for a cheese-and-potato ball covered in breadcrumbs and nicknamed *Bouchées*' [*Telegraph Sunday Magazine*, 7.ii.88, p.53]. Over avocado sandwiches and chilled Chablis, inspirations flowed: *Boleros* ... *Cheese Truffles* ... *Ploughman's Munch* ... *Bouncers* ... *Bouchettes* ... *Cheese Encounters* (in three kinds) ... *Cheddar Gorgettes* - to the tune of some hundred-odd; and now 'Bouchettes in their smart bistro-style livery will be in a chiller cabinet near you shortly.' One brainstorming session where we'd dearly have loved to be behind the wainscoting was the one that excogitated *Niosôme* as the name for a face-cream; but that, perhaps, was just a stroke of the creative typewriter. Perhaps not, though, for there is that manufacturer of fitted furniture who has named his business *Farouche Kitchens*, after his wife's favourite perfume [*Observer*, 22.v.88, p.32; *Numéro Cinq*, on the other hand, might have been O.K.]. The erstwhile Embarrassments of Free Enterprise have gone sailing on, with bow-doors in the position expected, as Prides of ... Puddlehampton or wherever. The Marriage Guidance Council, anxious not to seem behind the times, now calls itself (? only) *Relate*.

And, since big sharks have lesser sharks ... (or should it be the other way round?), firms of name-brokers, themselves with names like *Interbrand* and *Namebreak*, have sprung up to service this market: a trade whose real-life operations are barely distinguishable from Miles Kington's satirization:

'When a shop comes to us, we have to know exactly their likes and dislikes, otherwise we'd find ourselves suggesting to a photocopy shop a name like *Mr Kipling's Photo-Parlour* or offering *El Seed* or *Oat Cuisine* or *Nut Case* to a health-food shop' [*Independent*, 22.xi.88, p.28, for which grateful thanks to a correspondent claiming crustacean connections; cf. *The Times*, 25.iii.89, p.15, under the by-line of Deyan Sudjic].

#### Méthode champenoise; or, Caveat Potator

'*Champneys* is the latest entrant in the booming British mineral-water market. Mr Denis Ward, who has been extracting the water for three years, used it in mushroom growing and to fill a swimming pool before selling it as mineral water' [*The Times*, 2.ii.88, p.28; *ut saepe*, condensed, but not distorted].

#### Rotten Show

Having various South-Saxon connections, we chortled happily over a wood-preservative ad. that depicted a signpost with a shabby left-hand finger pointing to Rottingdean and a spruce right-hand one indicating Goodwood. Alas, the good people of Rottingdean felt themselves to be unjustifiably defamed and got it banned [(Brighton) *Evening Argus*, 1.vii.88, p.13; with grateful thanks to our faithful Master Ratoun].

#### The mere truth

Place-naming can bear on marketing strategies in more ways than one. Do you remember \**Waterfenton*, the name of a new settlement mooted for the Fens [*ante*, XI, 155]? There's now a further proposal, the name suggested this time being \**Westmere*: not too bad, you may think; almost able to pass for a traditional form, though it's not listed in *PN Cambs.* or marked on a half-inch map. But wait: this is not, narrowly speaking, a 'settlement-name', is it? Both names suggested allude indeed to the choice of flood-plains as building sites, 'water features' being in each case among the potential amenities canvassed [*Cambridge Evening News*, 18.xi.88, p.27, 1.xii.88, p.27, and 22.iii.89, p.19; cf. two letters over different names but patently by the same hand, *ibidem*, 24.xi.88, p.6, and *The Times*, 25.xi.88, p.17]. Debate continues, on demographic and environmental lines rather

than onomastic ones.

#### Ordering new estates

Still in the Fens, we note a development at Milton called *The Sonnets*: a paradise, no doubt. *Cavalry Park*, March, strikes one as a bit forced (and the typewriting produced a most inapposite transposition), but it sets the fancy dancing: \**Sousa Street*, \**Radetsky Avenue*, \**Tin Soldiers' Way* ...

Mostly though, street-namers play only too safe:

'A nine-house scheme at Great Shelford railway station will be known as *Station Court*. Three cul-de-sacs [funny way to form the plural. - S.] on a site north of Butt Lane will be called *Starling Way*, *Woodman's Way* and *David Bull Way*, after a well-known local farmer who died this year. A development next to Manor Farm in Cottenham High Street will be named *Manor Farm Court* [*Cambridge Evening News*, 26.x.88, p.17].

All unremarkable as can be, except for the use, now general, of way to denote a *contrario* an impasse.

At Greenwich, however, they've been in an uproar over a proposal to name a road after a parliamentary candidate who recently contrived to lose the previously safe seat: a proposal coming, at that, from the injured Party [*Sunday Telegraph*, 22.i.89, p.12]. Sometimes, too, an existing name can spring unpredictably to life, as when *Rowntree Way* at Saffron Walden was relabelled by graffitists as *Nestlé Way* [*The Times 'City Diary'*, 6.vii.88, p.25]. And some quarter-century ago a vicar based in Suez Road, Cambridge, demanded a name-change on the grounds that the current form commemorated (a) an out-dated Empire and (b) an unfortunate political episode: 'Suez', he intoned, 'is a dirty word.' But local householders, some resident there for fifty years, stood out against him, and won [*Cambridge Evening News*, 1.xii.88, p.22].

#### Displaying some address

'*Inglewood*, *Deepdene*, *Orchardlees*, and *Greenaways* - what essence of the English rural dream breathes in the house-names of Boars Hill! ... Some hunt butterflies here, but you can collect house-names with equal pleasure, and then minutely order them. First, there is the Sylvan-Substantial genus - *Gorselands*, *Pinecraft*, and *Brackenhurst* - which have a robustness and heathery toughness and would make excellent names for furniture ranges and household deodorizers. Then you encounter the Rustic-Romantic family which dwindles to the twee and dimity world of faery, the sub-Tolkien world of the country-garden gnome - *The Rustlings*, *Windswept*, and *Tinkerbelle*. "Enough nonsense!" barks a third class; as clipped as colonels, these bristle with briskness - *Grainings*, *Downings*, *Haltings*, and *Sprivers*. Finally, after the Animal House category (a whole warren of badgers' holts and foxes' combs), come the Exotics, named for idiosyncratic or sentimental reasons; oddly, these often sound like racehorses ("And at the finishing line it's *Lamorna* neck-and-neck with *Craigellachie*, with *The Shieling* in third place and *By the Way* trailing badly in fourth") [Peter K. Snow, 'On the Hill', *Oxford Magazine* 40 (8th week of Michaelmas Term, 1988), p.5].

For all that, many regard it as not quite the thing to name one's house. A traditional name - be it *Windsor Castle* or *The Vicarage* - may pass, but not a fancy appellation bestowed on a terrace-house or a semi. A name's usually redundant, anyway (though not on Boars Hill, still innocent of numerotation); for postmen and taxi-drivers necessarily go by the numbering, seeing that there's no convention requiring \**Chatsworth* (by transference) to precede *Dunroamin*, with *Xanadu* at the far end of the street. Perhaps, though, 'fancy' puts it unfairly: the Halifax Building Society found, on running through the computer the fifteen million addresses on its books, an overwhelming preference for the simplest

descriptive forms, such as *The Bungalow*, *The Cottage*, *Hill Crest*, and so on [*Bristol Evening Post*, 25.i.88, with thanks again to our ever-attentive squirrel].

#### Eschatonymy

'Wandering through a suburb of a suburban town, where every street-corner boasted a Retirement Home where old folks, their life-long labours done, were systematically pauperized and abused, I chanced upon The Everest Rest Home, and that set me recording, and supplementing, this delicate area of nomenclature: *The Everest Rest Home*, *The Averest Home*, *The Fall Flowers Inn*, *The Autumn Crocus*, *The Nightshade*, *Winter Harvest*, *The Late Crop*, *Medlars*, *Mangoes*, and *The Long Home* (proprietrix Mrs Long). The poshest place was called *Darkling Plains*' [Eric Korn, in *TLS*, 7-13.iv.89, p.369].

#### Longueurs

'A restaurant chain - *Henry J Bean's But His Friends All Call Him Hank Bar and Grill* - lost its place in the *Guinness Book of Records* as the pub with the longest name to a bar bearing the 55 letters of *The Old Thirteenth Cheshire Astley Volunteer Rifleman Corps Inn*. Not to be outdone, the proprietor plans to call his latest bar *Henry J Bean's, But His Friends, Some Of Whom Live Down This Way, All Call Him Hank Bar and Grill*. If they attempt to retaliate, he will insert *But His Friends, Some Of Whom Live Down This Way And Are Called Susie, Mary, Linda ...*' [*The Times 'City Diary'*, 21.iii.89, p.27].

#### Acronyms Anonymous

Those who don't know a CV from a VC, let alone the CVCP, should perhaps be reminded that, whereas the AA is for motorists, AA is for those chronically unfit to drive. And some may find it handy to know that Saffron Walden's emergency medical service, or Action Group, has changed its acronym from SWAG to MEDICS, viz. Mid-Essex Doctors' Immediate Care Scheme [*Cambridge Evening News*, 1.xii.88, p.21].

#### Tax-free investment?

'My racing adviser Captain Threadneedle has put me on to a horse called *Mister Lawson*. I was curious to know why *Mister Lawson*, described in *Timeform* as "spare and unfurnished-looking", was so named. The Captain draws my attention to the breeding: by Blushing Scribe out of Nonpareil' [*Spectator*, 27.viii.88, p.18].

#### New-Year's pantomime

'The household was celebrating the arrival of four new chickens, and I was invited to christen them. How many Dames are there now at Westminster? Three or four? Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman, who once hit your sketchwriter with her handbag; Dame Jill Knight, fur-coated and motherly; and Dame Peggy Fenner, brisk but pleasant, an ex-minister. Only three? But we had four birds to name. One was a soft-feathered and substantial hen, with a placid nature and a comforting cluck: a *Jill*, surely. The second was a sprucer bird, economical in her cluck, with a business-like pecking action: *Peggy*. The third was a rogue-hen, given to sudden, unpredictable squawks and quick to attack other chickens; she answered eagerly to *Elaine*. But where was the symmetry if our fourth new arrival, a bonny bird with lustrous feathers, timid nature and gentle call, could find no damesake at Westminster? It was then that our wireless crackled to life: a fourth Parliamentary Dame was to be created: Plymouth's Miss Janet Fookes, the demure and pretty ex-Chairman of the RSPCA' [Matthew Parris, in *The Times*, 11.i.89, p.22].

## Cynonymy

'The little bitch [viz. a black labrador puppy] came to us from one of the Queen's keepers at Sandringham and, because of her royal connection, we have named her *Maj*, short, of course, for *Majesty*, and you can't get any more pompous than that. When I told my father over the 'phone, he threatened to disinherit me: "*Madge*," he shouted, "You can't call a gundog *Madge*; you'll be the laughing-stock of East Anglia" [(Cambridge) *Town Crier*, 25.iii.89, p.2].

'While *Ross* and *Prince*, new last year, have strengthened their position, *Bengy* makes its first appearance, and *Oscar* and *Marcus* failed to make the grade. The top ten reads: *Sam*, *Ben*, *William*, *Ross*, *Prince*, *Jamie*, *Max*, *Harry*, *Jason* and *Bengy*. In the ladies' world, the list runs: *Emma*, *Gemma*, *Susie*, *Penny*, *Daisy*, *Kim*, *Sally*, *Meg* and *Sheba*. The Duchess of York may be interested to note that *Fergie* is winning increasing favour, although there is still no sign of *Beatrice*. One betting man named his dog *Lester*, and *Edwina* the poodle was so called because her bark was worse than her bite. Novelty names included *Truffle* ("black and expensive") and *Porridge* ("he spent some time inside Battersea Dogs' Home") ['Peterborough', in *Daily Telegraph*, 27.xii.88, p.15; but the source-material and methodology underlying these findings are nowhere specified].

'The fact that these days dogs are as likely to be called *Polly* and *Sam* as *Rover* and *Spot* is an indication of our changing attitude towards them. "People bring the dog into the family truly as a member of the family," says Britain's leading consultant in animal behaviour; "In the old days dogs were quite distinctive from humans, but today people cease to see their dog as a dog" [*The Times*, 9.ii.88, p.14].

## Abrupt conclusion

*Nihil humanum* this year; or so we almost said, until recollecting that everything reported had emanated from some human mind. And there's plenty more of like import, such as the software so name-unfriendly as not only to emend *Gaelic* to *Gallic* but even to transmute *Editor* and *Edinburgh* alike to *Edible* (a term not greatly favoured by anyone whose ancestry includes a strain of dormouse) [*The Times*, 2.ix.88, p.11, and 5.ix.99, p.11]. Again, BR used to use *Capitalcard* as the name of their passport to the heady delights of the metropolitan transport-system, but they now call it just a *Travelcard*, less precisely as well as less evocatively. As for Report-Title of the Year, that has to be *The Importance of Sex in Multiples* [*The Times*, 28.xi.88, p.3].

Nothing anthroponymical was what we meant, but without the faintest discriminatory intent. We've sheaves of splendid material waiting to be set up; but just now the journal lacks the space (each page, they tell us, costs nearly a subscription and a half). So our anthroponymical harvest must be stored until next year, some of it perhaps for the one after that. But do not be discouraged from sending in your finds: not only do our aspirations towards omniscience persist unchecked but we hope more spacious days may soon return.

## Talepiece

*A fortiori* a moratorium on risible coincidence (such as the Reverend J. Bent being sent down for applied paedophilia [*The Times*, 6.x.88, p.3] and Mr Curley convincing the Jockey Club that, as is common knowledge, he's straight as a die); those suffering unendurable withdrawal symptoms can meanwhile get a hefty fix by resorting to Andrew Moncur's 'Diary' in the *Grauniad*, 3.i.88. Still, we can't sign off for the year without retailing one splendid case of *nomina transmogrificata*: items to be performed at the obsequies of a distinguished

musicologist included a Bach chorale, instructions to which effect were relayed by telephone, but what fell upon the mourners' ears was an excerpt from *The Tales of Hoffman* [Bernard Levin, in *The Times*, 9.ii.89, p.16]. Ah well, send three-and fourpence ...

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