What, then, has happened to that comparatively small band of Scotsmen and Scotswomen who are bearers of surnames of Pictish origin and have telephones? Without being able to introduce into this discussion the hundreds of historical references, especially of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which I have on file, I would claim that a remarkable number of them have not moved very far.[20] Most of these surnames are, therefore, still found in former Pictish territory.[21] This is particularly demonstrable with regard to the Pittillos/Pattullos. Otherwise, Glasgow and Edinburgh and the areas surrounding them have been particularly attractive, mostly, one would think, because they have offered employment, largely of an industrial nature, over the last 150 years. The presence of the names in question further south, i.e. in the Lothians, the Borders, and the Scottish South-West, is sporadic, and follows no particular pattern. Much more spectacular, however, is the almost complete absence of such surnames in the Highlands and the Western Isles, and, with the exception of the prolific Abernethys, also from the Northern Isles. Westward and north-westward movement, involving the penetration of another culture area or the piercing of a formidable internal Scottish cultural frontier, appears not to have been on the list of priorities of people raised in the old Pictish territory; either that, or they immediately joined the system and became Macdonalds, Campbells or Frasers.

This is the image with which we are left, apart from the observation that, if one comes across an Abercrombie, an Abernethy, an Arbuthnott, a Pitcairn, Pitcaithly or Pitkeathly, a Pitbladdo, Pittendreich or Pattullo somewhere between the north shores of the Firth of Forth and the southern shores of the Moray Firth, one is most likely in the presence of someone who, even 1,000 years after the end of the Pictish kingdom and the death of the Pictish language, still has a drop of Pictish blood in his or her veins. For a Pictophile like myself, that is quite a fascinating thought.

---

[20] The historical movements of a single surname within Scotland require diligent and detailed research; for a group of names like the ones under discussion, the task is even more formidable. I hope to present this evidence in a subsequent paper at a later date.

[21] This limited mobility coincides with R. A. Mckinley's findings in England. See his *A History of British Surnames* (London, 1990), pp. 66–70, and also *Norfolk Surnames in the Sixteenth Century* (Leicester, 1969), pp. 21–23.

Personal-Name Studies: Bringing them to a Wider Audience

†*Cecily Clark*
Cambridge

Letters to the press—to *The Times* in particular—testify to a widespread interest in names: baptismal names, house-names, family-names, the names of the bogus 'counties' foisted on us in 1974, ships' names, nicknames, horses' names, brand-names, street-names, and so on. Topics range from political pressures affecting the naming of foreign places, thus:

> The erosion of well-established names takes place only in Asia and Africa: nobody tries to bully us into calling Finland *Suomi* or Greece *Hellas*. In an English-language newspaper primarily for English-speakers, headlines should surely be about Peking, Shanghai, Burma and even (dare I suggest it?) Ceylon [from Prof. D. Webb, *The Times*, 5.ix.91, p. 17 (my italics)]

to strange quirks of the human affections, thus:

> Sir, I was delighted to see the detailed account of the 1866 Tea Race in your letters column, especially the 'honourable mention' for Serica, who is usually ignored even though finishing so close to Ariel and Taiping. I would be interested to know if any other of your readers have been named after a tea clipper? [from Mrs Serica East, *The Times*, 10.iii.90, p. 13].

Such letters have, it seems to me, a bearing upon the purpose for which we are assembled today: the inauguration of a new society aiming to bring the findings, and also the principles, of scholarly onomastic studies to a wider public. They imply the existence of a

[This is the text of a lecture given in Manchester in October 1991 at the inaugural meeting of the Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland. It was written partly in bed, owing to Dr Clark's illness from which she was not to recover, and was read out by proxy since she was unable to attend the meeting. It is less positive in tone than her other writings, and the circumstances of its composition may have affected the contents. It seems nevertheless worth publishing, though references have had to be supplied, we hope accurately. Two other posthumous articles (cited below, notes 15–16) better represent her usual tone—Editors.]

potential audience far larger and more varied, although not as yet better-informed, than the one that the former Council and its journal *Nomina* have hitherto had; an audience, moreover, alive with curiosity and with enthusiasm. So can newspaper correspondence columns offer any pointers as to ways forward? What enthusiasms and what curiosities remain at the moment unsatisfied? What standards of verification and what principles of judgment remain to be established?

Note, please, that topics canvassed in this medium (letters to the press) hardly ever include major place-names—perhaps because these are seen as immutably fixed and immune from passing whim, perhaps because they are just taken for granted what seem most often to fire the amateur's enthusiasm and imagination are those kinds of name of which the choice, transmission, or, better still, creation, seem accessible and comprehensible; and this perhaps suggests that we scholars should broaden and diversify our range of themes, focussing less intensively than we have hitherto upon major place-names, and more upon, for instance, personal-naming in all its aspects.

These observations are by no means the preamble to any sort of plea for an unplanned or ill-prepared foray into any branch of name-study, least of all into that of personal-naming. One plank of my argument today is nevertheless the desirability of making far more readily available than hitherto to all enquiring minds, first of all, the findings from strictly scholarly work on names, and especially those from studies illuminating those aspects of naming that enter into daily life, and, secondly, the principles of investigation that underlie all valid work.

The public here envisaged is twofold, both of its elements to be henceforward subsumed under the term 'non-professionals'. First, there are the true amateurs, fired with curiosity and eager to learn how better to understand the ways in which our present-day personal-naming system arrived at its present form. Second, and in practical terms more urgently in need of enlightenment, are certain professionals in neighbouring disciplines, from our point of view unquestionably 'non-specialists'. Few indeed of these have the least notion of the nature of language, let alone of philology. Despite the fact that linguistic history in general, and onomastics in particular, furnish rich evidence for social and demographic history,[1] few

---

[1] For personal names, see C. Clark, 'The early personal names of King's

historians or archaeologists bother to acquire even the most elementary competence in our discipline, or even to become acquainted with the relevant reference-books, and they therefore constantly run the risk of grossly misleading their non-philological readers. There is, for instance, that archaeologist who, not so long ago, inclined to accept a suggestion that the name Whitstable might better be taken as French for 'oyster market', rather than as English for 'white pillar': had he but paused to reflect that the early medieval form of the French for 'oyster' did, in fact, when adopted into Middle English, give the ancestor of our modern word *oyster*, he would have realized that no form beginning with *w*, let alone with *wh*, could conceivably be a reflex of it.[2] Then, earlier this very year, there was an editor of conference proceedings who, in the course of his own paper, asserted, without citing either evidence or authority for his opinion, that an early-twelfth-century 'Robert Pavilli . . . may have been a kinsman of William Peveril I as his surname is a variant of the Peveril spelling (Robertus de Pavelliaco)', and who, later in the same article, spoke of 'a William Paveli, a possible variant of the Peveril spelling'. Never mind for the moment his illogical phraseology (where names are concerned, inability to distinguish between the signifier and what it signifies is endemic): had he but paused to reflect that *Peverel* has both the style of a nickname (i.e. consistently lacking any connective *de*) and also an acceptable etymology as such ('little pepper'), whereas the form consisting of *de* followed by a term ending in *-aco* not only looks like a toponymic, but in fact appears to involve the French place-name Pavilly (dép. Seine-Maritime), he might have been less bold.[3]

How can we, as professional onomasticians, effectively bring our discipline to the notice of a wider public—the discipline itself, that is, rather than merely the findings from it? How can we make it serviceable to such historians and archaeologists as have not yet grasped its principles? And to such politicians and bureaucrats as may be charged with renaming our world? Mainly, of course, by writing

---

Lynn: an essay in socio-cultural history', part I, 'Baptismal names', *Nomina* 6 (1982), 51–71; part II, 'By-names', *Nomina*, 7 (1983), 65–89.
[2] T. Tatton-Brown, 'The towns of Kent', in *Anglo-Saxon Towns in Southern England*, edited by J. Haslam (Chichester, 1984), pp. 1–36 (at p. 34).
[3] *OEB*, p. 326, s.n. *Peurel*; for Pavilly (*Pauliacum* in 837–38), see A. Dauzat and C. Rostaing, *Dictionnaire étymologique des noms de lieux en France* (Paris, 1989), p. 521.

the right sorts of book. For place-names, some splendid examples of what I have in mind already exist, in, for instance, Margaret Gelling's two complementary volumes, *Signposts to the Past* (1978) and *Place-Names in the Landscape* (1984); these expound, with precision yet with no more than the essential degree of technicality, not only the findings of recent place-name study, but also its methods and its principles. A further example of a like approach is Oliver Padel's *A Popular Dictionary of Cornish Place-Names* (1988), with its Introduction succinctly and straightforwardly setting forth the principles of place-name study. For surnaming, a shining example that springs to mind is Prys Morgan's paper on the history of Welsh family-naming published in *Nomina* 10; nor must we forget the dictionary that he and his father, the late Professor T. J. Morgan, published in 1985.[4] We must equally bear in mind Richard McKinley's recent *A History of British Surnames* (1990), into which he has distilled the findings from his own painstaking county surveys. For baptismal-naming, on the other hand, there is as yet no work I know of that meets similar criteria.

Exploring the genesis and the developments of baptismal names, Christian names, first-names, call them what you will, demands—not only from the writer, but to some extent from the readers too—an acquaintanceship (or, at least, some willingness to acquire one), first, with Romance as well as with Germanic philology (when working in terms of medieval Christendom, we can, perhaps, permit ourselves to gloss over the ultimate Hebrew origins of many 'baptismal' names), and, second, with demographic and cultural movements of the early Middle Ages.

Even writers purporting to provide, albeit in 'semi-popular' terms, reliable guidance as to the historical developments underlying our present name-system, commit gross errors of fact. I quote from three recent reviews by other hands: the first, by Peter McClure, of a book entitled *American Given Names: Their Origin and History in the Context of the English Language* (note what expectations of philological as well as historical depth this title arouses). Thus McClure:

> The worst parts of this book are the accounts of Anglo-Saxon and Norman naming. . . . It is astonishing to read that in Anglo-Saxon times 'there was no clear way of distinguishing between men's and women's

names' (p. 4). Fuzzy concepts and misinformation are rendered even less palatable by the sloppiness of the diction and syntax. . . . 'the peasants went on being [sic] Dene or Kragg or Cada' . . . (Not to mention *Wurth*, the 'Anglo-Saxon' name of a typical post-Conquest townsman, p. 5).[5]

The second, again by McClure, of Dunkling and Gosling's *Everyman's Dictionary of First Names* (again, a volume whose title might lead the unwary to take it for a reliable reference-work):

> 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. . . . *Segar* (m.) is wrongly ascribed to OE *Sigehere* (an impossible source); it would be from OE **Sǣgār*. *Adolphus*, imported into Britain by the Hanoverian royal family, is unaccountably attributed to both OG *Adalwolf* (sic) and OE *Æthelwulf*. . . . *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;[6]

and the reviewer goes on to list a good few standard reference-works that the compilers have ignored. The third review, by Gillian Fellows-Jensen, is of Leonard Ashley's *What's in a Name? . . . Everything you Wanted to Know* (1989):

> Not all of the miscellaneous information supplied about individual names is accurate. *Herbert*, *Osbert*, *Theodoric* and *Wat*, for example, were not names that were common in Anglo-Saxon England (p. 19) and *Gilbert* and *Hugh* are not to be explained as names of Old English origin (p. 6). *Alan* is not of Spanish origin (p. 5) but was brought to England by Bretons in the service of William the Conqueror.[7]

Lest anyone might think that, as a philologist myself, I regard philological orientation as a sufficient condition for excellence in onomastics, I hasten to point out that, over the last decade or so, there has appeared a string of studies in Middle English personal-naming, all

---

[4] T. J. Morgan and Prys Morgan, *Welsh Surnames* (Cardiff, 1985).

[5] Peter McClure, in *Nomina*, 7 (1983), 141–44 (p. 143).

[6] Peter McClure, in *Nomina*, 8 (1984), 96–100 (pp. 98–99).

[7] Fellows-Jensen, in *Studia Anthroponymica Scandinavica*, 8 (1990), 120–22 (p. 120).

of which are marred precisely by the narrowness of their philological preoccupations. What such theses overlook is the fundamental consideration that names of all kinds differ from common vocabulary in having primary denotations that are extra-linguistic. Linguistic etymologies they do, of course, possess, and to that extent, it is legitimate to ask, with expectation of a linguistic answer, 'What does *London* mean?', 'What does *Reading* mean', 'What does *Mary* mean?', 'What does *Alfred* mean?'; but, in context, what *Alfred* may 'mean' is 'that man over there with the red face and the overloud laugh', or, alternatively, 'the man who was king of the West-Saxons from 871 to 899'. What, in more precise terms, a dithematic Old English name 'meant' to contemporaries was probably genealogical rather than lexical: thus, *Wulfstān*, as the name of the late-eleventh-century bishop of Worcester, 'meant' something like 'son of the man called *Æðelstān* and of the woman called *Wulfgifu*',[8] or possibly, though the point seems unverifiable, '. . . and maternal grandson of the man whose name incorporated the element *Wulf-* or *-wulf*; and this makes somewhat beside the point all those hyphenated translations so often proffered for such names, 'wolf-stone', 'wolf-gift', 'noble-stone', and so on.

Failure to grasp this methodological, as well as philosophical, point, has undermined much recent publication upon Middle English anthroponymy; for it has resulted in a misplaced linguistic 'purism' excluding all social, economic, prosopographical, and even familial background material. At its most crass, this refusal to admit any form of personal identification for name-bearers can lead to near-howlers. Thus, in a recent thesis on medieval English nicknames, we find cited under the headform *Louote*, which is referred to the French for 'wolf-cub', and so presumably pronounced [luvet], a supplementary reference to '*John de Bermyngeham, Earl of Loueth* 1318 Solihull', with, admittedly, as a saving grace, the comment that this 'example . . . seems to suggest local origin'; what makes the hamhandedness here inexcusable is the ready availability of the detailed guidance to all persons of title long since provided by Cokayne *et alii*, because this would, in a trice, have ·revealed to the writer that the personage concerned was the first and only holder of the Irish earldom of Louth.[9]

---

[8] *The Vita Wulfstani of William of Malmesbury*, edited by R. R. Darlington, Camden Society, 3rd series, 40 (1928), p. 4.

Another recent thesis manages to deal with a collection of medieval topographical bynames without even a passing mention of McKinley's repeated demonstrations that bynames of this type have a markedly skewed social distribution, being found predominantly among the settled peasantry, the villeins and the smallholders; the same author also manages, through blindness to prosopographical background, to make two separate topographical bynames out of a single toponymical one of French origin.[10] In general, this 'purist' approach to personal-name research deprives the findings of any import beyond the merely lexical. At its most extreme, blindness to background can even obscure the name-material itself, as when, for instance, patronymic bynames derived from well-known Old English personal names are treated as though they were instead new-minted nicknames characterizing their fourteenth-century bearers.[11]

The picture is thus becoming more complex. As well as our 'non-professional' public eager for enlightenment, we have identified at least three kinds of unreliable 'authority': on the one hand, specious popularizers, with small notion of social history and none at all of philology; and, on the other, two contrasting sorts of unenlightened academic, historians indifferent to philological considerations, and· conversely, alas, philological 'purists' blind to all extra-linguistic factors, whether prosopographical or ones of socio-economic stratification. What policies, if any, can our new Society and its well-established journal adopt in hopes of remedying any of these ills? Some people would, from the outset, see any such attempt as vain, on the grounds that error of the sorts described must be accepted as entrenched to the point of invincibility. If that is so, then our open Society would be better reverting to the former closed coterie.

It has, at all events, to be admitted that, judging from much recent publication in the field, one strategy that our journal has consistently adopted seems not thus far to have impinged upon its intended target. Not that we propose on that account to abandon it; for the policy in question is that of publishing full and searching reviews—in some cases, extensive and constructive review-articles—of all works falling within

---

[9] Ingrid Hjertstedt, *Middle English Nicknames in the Lay Subsidy Rolls for Warwickshire* (Uppsala, 1987), p. 137.
[10] [Noted by Richard McKinley in *Nomina*, 14 (1990–91), 126.—Editors.]
[11] [Noted by Peter McClure in *Nomina*, 5 (1981), 96.—Editors.]

our purview. I must, in particular, draw attention to the reviews by Peter McClure already quoted, particularly to his long and seminal review-article based upon J. Jönsjö's *Studies on Middle English Nicknames*.[12] This article is among the most perspicacious pieces ever written on the topic; but, sadly, the insights it offers and the principles of study it advocates seem, so far, not to have been taken on board by those most in need of the lesson. Those who do, however, study McClure's various reviews will find there valuable warnings against unreliable popularizers and equally against ill-conceived PhD. theses.

Judicious reviewing can indeed do much towards establishing and publicizing both principles of scholarship and criteria for assessing published works; but it does need supplementing by more overtly instructional approaches. To say that is not, of course, to suggest that either the Society's conferences or its journal should henceforward be given over predominantly, let alone exclusively, to elementary pedagogy; but rather that we should, from time to time, when inviting speakers or commissioning articles, encourage scholars to present, not only the detailed findings from their research, but also, with some emphasis, its underlying methodological principles. Such a policy would have the twofold function of enabling all our readers the better to assess the reference-works and the treatises they find on library shelves, and also, perhaps, of suggesting to some of them valid ways to plan projects of their own. And perhaps such papers might, in the fullness of time, be collected to form the basis of a handbook for all embarking, for whatsoever reason, upon a course of onomastic study.

The basic question, that of source-material, has already been tackled by Dr Alexander Rumble in an all-too-short paper entitled 'The status of written sources in English onomastics'.[13] This question has two aspects: (a) how to evaluate potential source-materials, and (b) whether to base one's project upon a single source or homogeneous group of sources, or whether to take a particular topic—say, survival into the Middle English period of Old English individual names—and pursue it through a wide range of sources. Both approaches have much to commend them; but, for my own part, the more research I attempt, the more convinced I become that the more rewarding course is to choose a single source and to explore this in all its dimensions,

including (in so far as accessible) those of its tenurial and prosopographical background.

For anyone not already versed in medieval palaeography, any source chosen must necessarily be a printed one; and this in itself poses problems. Materials presented solely in translation or else in calendar form should, in general, be eschewed, unless, that is, the translator or editor expressly claims to give all name-material in exact diplomatic form. Even, however, with what purport to be accurate editions of the original texts, problems may not be at an end: there are all too many revered editions by scholars of high repute in which some name-forms, especially ones of Old English origin, are hopelessly garbled. A counsel of perfection would be always to verify every spelling against the manuscript original; but, even for those versed in medieval handwriting, that is not always a practicable procedure. More realistic advice is to be wary, and, when confronted with an improbable form, to endeavour to interpret it in the light of the confusions possible for modern readers of the relevant style of medieval script; and I must again recommend a piece by Dr Rumble: that is, the chapter on palaeography he has contributed to the latest edition of *The Local Historian's Encyclopedia* (edited by John Richardson, 1986).

Nor do problems end with handwriting. A point that has several times been made—e.g. by Hunnisett in relation to the *Inquisitiones post mortem* and by McClure in relation to the Lay Subsidy Rolls—is that, unless the document concerned is a genuine original, not a 'fair copy', then it may well be unreliable in some of its detail; both scholars have demonstrated, from the few instances when a locally-produced draft for a governmental record happened to survive, that all too often the Westminster copyist, unfamiliar with local conditions, has made a dog's breakfast of the personal names and place-names involved.[14] A messy-looking draft by several hands may thus be preferable to a neatly presented one; and, of course, any printed edition based upon a manuscript of the latter kind will perpetuate its inaccuracies. Again, alas, McClure's voice has been one crying in the wilderness, and certain schools of research continue to rely, even for dialectological purposes, upon Exchequer-produced fair copies. If, for the place and

---

[12] *Nomina*, 5 (1981), 95–104.
[13] *Nomina*, 8 (1984), 41–56.

[14] Peter McClure, 'Lay Subsidy Rolls and Dialect Phonology', in *Otium et Negotium: Studies in Onomatology and Library Science Presented to Olof von Feilitzen*, edited by F. Sandgren (Stopckholm, 1973), pp. 183–94.

date at issue, original records prove scarce, then the best substitutes are documents locally copied and preserved, for instance in cartularies belonging to an abbey (or other landholder) in the locality concerned. Again, of course, this caveat bears not only upon choice of material for one's own research, but upon the credence to be accorded to the publications of others.

Thus far, the counsels and the caveats have applied to choice of source-material in general—that is to say, for toponymical and dialectological research as well as for that into personal-naming. This latter purpose involves, however, further considerations, chief among them the range of information available. Personal-naming being, above all, a familial matter, the best types of source-material are ones which show the individuals named in their family contexts, with parents, grandparents, siblings, and so on, all named; and this is a further reason, to add to that already given, why for our purposes the Lay Subsidy Rolls, which list individuals in isolation and characterized by nothing more personal than the level of their tax-assessment (not that even that is, as some seem to think, a matter devoid of import), are among the less fruitful sources for our sort of research. It may, furthermore, be advantageous if the source embraces more than one social stratum, thus affording opportunities for checking how far fashions favoured by aristocracy and gentry may have been imitated by the peasantry. It is likewise advantageous to have a range of records involving the same locality at successive dates, so as to be able to chart whatever patterns of change there may have been.

However wisely chosen the source-material, perplexities are not at an end. Questions of palaeography aside, interpretation may remain problematic. The first question is one of language. For any medieval administrative document, this is usually Latin: not the Ciceronian kind, but the lively, infinitely adaptable dog-Latin, kitchen-Latin, of the medieval scribe. Usually, therefore, names are at least perfunctorily Latinized, so that, for instance, the equivalent of modern *Ralph* is set down as *Radulfus* or even as abbreviated *Rad'*. This limits the information to be garnered, so that we cannot, in the case mentioned, know whether the true vernacular form were *Rawl, Rauf, Rafe* or *Raw*, or perhaps a diminutive like *Rawlin*. Patronymics may likewise be Latinized: we cannot therefore be sure whether a patronymic phrase like *filius Radulphi* is a scribal description supplied in the absence of a vernacular byname, or whether it renders one of the many possible vernacular ways of expressing 'son of Ralph'. Occupational terms, too, were regularly Latinized, thus *Rad' textor*; and here it is often hard to know whether to take *textor* as a simple descriptive by-name, as in 'Ralph the weaver', or as a rendering of what was already an hereditary surname, not necessarily any longer literally applicable, thus 'Ralph Weaver'. For anyone committed to translating such an ambiguous text, the matter cannot be dealt with otherwise than Gordian-knot fashion. So likewise with topographical by-names: *Rob' sub bosco* may stand for 'Robert who dwells below the wood', or perhaps for 'Robert Underwood', with a surname no longer literally true. Some of the simpler nicknames get the same treatment, e.g., *Will' longus, Rob' parvus, Joh' cum barba*. These ambiguities are inescapable, unless, that is, there happens to survive parallel evidence to clarify the situation. One frequent misinterpretation is, however, less inevitable: obviously a Latinizing scribe confronted by the English preposition *of*, which meant 'from' as well as 'belonging to', rendered this as *de*, thus *Henr' de Benneberi* 'from Banbury', a simple enough matter to grasp, one might have supposed; and yet we find some commentators referring, in contexts where the place-name is a purely native one, to 'the French preposition *de*' and some translators retaining the documentary form as though this were the normal colloquial one among the ordinary English citizens and countrymen of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

As for genuine and incontrovertible instances of French terms found amidst a basically Latinized text, these can be ambivalent. We must not, of course, as some commentators have done, classify as 'French' terms which, by the date in question, were well-established loanwords (the case, no doubt, with my own surname, Clark). On the other hand, there were bynames current in medieval England that were genuinely French, in the sense of being apparently unrepresented by any equivalent in English common vocabulary: hence, for example, the modern surname *Rous(e)* beside vernacular *Read(e)*, northern *Reid*, all meaning 'red'. This makes any documentary form such as *le Rus* potentially ambiguous: was the individual commonly known under the French form, being perhaps descended from an immigrant merchant, or was it just that, at that moment, French *rus* 'roux' came more readily to the scribe than Latin *rufus*? Only the existence of

parallel records can solve problems of this sort. A main point to bear in mind throughout all such problems is that, except in the generation immediately following the Conquest, scribes would normally have had English as their mother tongue, and would have been consciously striving to distance their work as far as possible from that vernacular, by Latinizing, or, if they were not up to that, Gallicizing the record as thoroughly as possible.

There are, too, problems arising from Middle English usages themselves: problems of variable spelling, and also of dialect variations in pronunciation and in vocabulary. Because these are so manifold and so complex, I refrain from tackling them here, and can only recommend those concerned to bear these problems in mind and seek professional advice when needed.

Having made an informed choice of source-material and familiarized oneself with the skills and the methodological principles required for its interpretation, there remains to be considered the choice of project. And here I must enter a potential caveat: one that may indeed be superfluous to anyone who has conscientiously observed the preliminaries just described, but which most urgently applies to many non-professionals active in the field. Among the sorts of project most eagerly undertaken by non-specialists, what seem to predominate are ones involving surname-history. Partly, of course, this is due to a widespread fascination with genealogy: a fascination that many commercial groups shamelessly exploit. ('Just tell us your surname and we will supply you with an illuminated scroll displaying your coat of arms.') The less gullible set off for St Catherine's House, and there expend immense amounts of time and energy.

Surname-study is, however, of all the branches of personal-name study, that least accessible to an untrained enthusiast. Apart from the basic knowledge and skills already detailed—that is, the ability to interpret medieval and early modern records and to be at home, not only with medieval Latin, but also with Old and Middle English and with medieval French—surname-study demands familiarity with the entire gamut of name-studies. Surnames, as is well known, fall into four categories: (a) familial—those based upon parentage, or, occasionally, upon other relationships; (b) occupational; (c) local—those based upon present or former residence; and (d) characteristic—mainly comprising what are generally known as

'nicknames'. These categories are not, in fact, clear-cut, in so far as some apparently local forms, e.g. 'at the mill', probably carried occupational implications, as likewise did some nickname forms, e.g., *Wendut* 'fare forth', that is, 'voyager, seafarer'; and this, in practice, complicates interpretation. The point is, however, clear: any and every would-be student of surnames needs a wide competence, both in onomastics as well as in lexicography. The most numerous type of surname is that involving proper place-names, e.g. *Hastings, Trowbridge, Barton*, and so on; and so the investigator needs fair competence in this field—not, of course, the high and complex skill required for editing one of the English Place-Name Society's county surveys, but experience enough to link medieval forms with their modern equivalents, and, in the case of non-unique forms like *Barton* and *Kir(k)by*, to determine which of the several places of that name best fits the context.

The real minefield for the unwary consists, however, of surnames derived from the baptismal names of ancestors (or, sometimes, other relatives). There is, as yet, no text-book of medieval English personal-naming, although I am bound to hope that, for the time being, my own brief digest of pre-Conquest usages in Volume I of the *Cambridge History of the English Language*,[15] and the corresponding treatment of post-Conquest usages to the fifteenth century in Vol. II of that compendium[16] will, taken in conjunction with the bibliographies of the volumes in question, serve some purpose. There is, meanwhile, for the Late Old English period, the reliable stand-by of von Feilitzen's *Pre-Conquest Personal Names of Domesday Book* (1937), out-dated in certain respects though it now is, and uninformative about the peasantry as it by definition could not avoid being; and for both the late Old English period and the immediate post-Conquest one, there is now the same author's onomasticon to the Winchester Domesday.[17] For the Middle English period in general, there is, on the other hand, no single safe guide that I can call to mind, perhaps because, daunted by the sheer mass of documentation, no-one has yet essayed a

[15] Chapter 7, 'Onomastics', pp. 452–89, at pp. 456–71.
[16] Chapter 7, 'Onomastics', pp. 542–606, at pp. 551-87
[17] 'The personal names and bynames of the Winton Domesday', in *Winchester in the Middle Ages*, edited by M. Biddle, Winchester Studies I (Oxford, 1976), pp. 143–229.

comprehensive survey of baptismal-naming from 1066 to, say, 1400; nor, I suspect, is anyone likely to attempt one in the near future. A few good monographs do exist, notably Ekwall's *Early London Personal Names* (1947) and his *Two London Subsidy Rolls* (1951); and there are good articles upon specific points. But most of the rest of the monographs dealing with this period are too unbalanced to afford useful information, except on occasional matters of detail. It is in circumstances like these that *Nomina* might afford assistance, by publishing from time to time *bibliographies raisonnées* on particular topics, bibliographies as exhaustive as possible (for in this context, the dud publications need perhaps even more attention than the exemplary ones), and with commentary as frank as the law permits.

I began by considering, as I thought, ways of bringing to a wider public reliable information about the history of English personal-naming. Soon, however, what I found myself discoursing upon were the principles underlying valid research. For this I make no apology. It is not that I expect readers of *Nomina* each at once to take unto himself or herself a medieval estate-survey and instantly set about analyzing the personal-name system it records. Far from it. My point is that, without a basic understanding of the methodological principles that validate a piece of research, the user of any treatise or any dictionary will lack criteria for evaluating that work, and so will run the risk of being taken in by many a spuriously academic-looking publication.

Place-Names in -þorp:
in Retrospect and in Turmoil

Gillian Fellows-Jensen
University of Copenhagen

In his study of the þorp-names in the territory of the Five Boroughs, Kenneth Cameron demonstrated convincingly that places with names in -þorp tend to be settlements of lesser importance than those with names in -bý and to have inferior situations.[1] Linking these facts with the sense that the generic is known to have had in the Danish homeland 'secondary, dependent settlement', Cameron argued that the þorp-names are a reflection of Danish colonisation in the strict sense, that is of the bringing under cultivation by the Danes of less attractive land that was not being exploited at the time of their arrival. The fact that there was a cognate OE word þrop/þorp of similar meaning to the Danish generic is only mentioned by Cameron in passing, but he does make the very reasonable suggestion that the use of the Scandinavian element in the East Midlands may have been encouraged by the existence of the English cognate.

My own work on the þorps in other parts of England has not hitherto led me to modify Cameron's conclusions in any significant way. The only direct attack on the use of the þorp-names as evidence for Danish settlement has come from Niels Lund, who argued that 'there are reasons for believing that the element found in the Danelaw is the OE word, not the ODan one'.[2] He pointed out, quite correctly,

---

[1] K. Cameron, 'Scandinavian settlement in the territory of the Five Boroughs: the place-name evidence, part II: Place-names in *thorp*', *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, 3 (1970), 1–49.

[2] N. Lund, '*Thorp*-names', in *Medieval Settlement. Continuity and Change*, edited by P. H. Sawyer (London, 1976), pp. 223–25.