

Richard Coates, *Your City's Place-Names: Bristol English Place-Name Society City-Names Series 1* (Nottingham, EPNS 2017). 219pp., 17ill., 6 maps. Cardcovers, [ISBN: 9780904889963]

Can we judge this book by its cover? Perhaps, if we are ready for a welcome new look at the place-names of the Bristol area: “reworking” what is already known, and surprising us with unexpected and sometimes humorous insights. The beautiful cover image of the Clifton Suspension Bridge leaves us uncertain where we are standing, and momentarily confused by a negative view “through the looking glass”. Whether this effect was accidental, or whimsically deliberate, it is bound to catch the potential reader's attention!

This attractive volume, printed by 4word, Bristol, is the first of a new venture published by the English Place-Name Society. Professor Richard Coates (of the University of the West of England, Bristol) is currently the Society's Honorary Director and General Editor, as he modestly omits to tell us on the back cover. Pinpointing a gap in the place-names market, Coates is deliberately aiming for a new readership in large centres of population: Brighton and Hove, and Leeds, are also available now in this city-names series.

Here we have names chosen from a 'greater Bristol', including the city itself. There are some 200 Gloucestershire names, 100 from Somerset, and the remaining 40-odd are from historic Bristol proper. Coates' selection is admittedly subjective: there is no coverage as far out as Aust, Bath, Clevedon or Thornbury, but Almondsbury, Backwell, Chipping Sodbury and Pensford make the grade. Much of Coates' previously published local research finds an accessible home here, in entries as varied as Arno's Vale, Christmas Steps, The Dings, The Malago, Penpole, Sea Mills, Shirehampton, and Whiteladies Road. Minor and modern names of parks, roundabouts, shopping centres and water features, are discussed, as well as the expected major, historic names (including the occasional 'disused' name). Thus we go from Abbey Wood to Yeo, with a pause at Nowhere (in Stoke Gifford) and a concluding supplement on The Nails in Corn Street, Bristol.

The English Place-Name Society's Survey has been issuing county volumes since 1923, and nowadays the coverage of a single county can expand into six or seven parts. Latterly, the Society has introduced handy-sized, single volume, county dictionaries, making short interpretations of major and historically-important names more easily available to the general interested reader.



However, these single volumes continue the Society's practice of listing spelling forms, annotated by abbreviations which identify the original published and unpublished sources. This custom is recognised by historians, but can be daunting to others in different disciplines and particularly to anyone new to the topic.

Hence we can see that Coates, in his new-style city dictionary, is being helpful when he lists, for example:

“on Cumtúne 990 Kemble: Codex Diplomaticus 675/ Sawyer1362 [copied in the 11thC]” instead of the shorter “990 (11th) KCD 675” which has been the Society's preferred option. But the reader who wishes to go further in checking this source still has some untangling of Anglo-Saxon charter references to manage.

Nevertheless, Coates is trying to reduce the barriers of 'jargon'. He provides short, straightforward notes on the linguistics involved and on how to read an individual entry; and

he explains where the original sources may be found in his Preface. He adds a careful narrative explanation to the all-important list of forms (when available), and supplements these by historical commentary, and a useful list of secondary sources. The whole book is generally more readable, and easier to follow, than its predecessors.

There is one new symbol for this series -  - taking the place of the usual '(p)', which implies an early form from a surname derived from the place-name (as in Wrockeshale  6-1225 Somersetshire Pleas, from Wraxall). The ground-breaking Oxford Dictionary of Family Names in Britain and Ireland (FaNBI) edited by Patrick Hanks and others, appeared in 2016. As it happens, Coates was the lead for the AHRC-funded project team based at UWE, Bristol, which amassed the data for FaNBI. Some of this new surname information appears in the entries for Baptist Mills, Colliter's Brook, Crews Hole, Flowers Hill and Wickham Bridge, for example.

More fundamentally, Coates is re-interpreting, and adding to, previous work on place-names in the area. For Bristol and Gloucestershire, Coates takes as his starting point Part 3 of Smith's Place-Names of Gloucestershire (published for the Society by CUP, 1964). Since the 1960s, not only have county and national archives expanded, with new catalogues and indexes available on-line; but increasing numbers of historical reference works, original and secondary, are available in digital format. This makes the work of collecting new information much speedier for the whole area under investigation.

Other changes have occurred in the landscape itself in the last half-century. The passage of time in Bristol and south Gloucestershire is particularly marked by the growth of new suburbs and estates. Bishopston, Downend, Henleaze and Lockleaze barely merited a line in 1964. The village of Charlton, demolished in 1946 to enlarge Filton airfield, was first 'replaced' by Charlton Mead to its south in the 1970s, and latterly by Charlton Hayes, currently being built over part of the same former airfield. On the other hand, Berwick and Elmington, both in Henbury, might be judged to be shrinking settlements.

There is no Society county survey for Somerset. Coates therefore depends on the existing national dictionaries produced by Ekwall (OUP, 1960), Mills (OUP, 1998) and Watts (CUP, 2004), expanded by A G C Turner's 1950 Cambridge PhD thesis on North Somerset. Coates has also had sight of relevant draft entries prepared by the late Colin Turner and Jennifer Scherr for a dictionary of Somerset place-names in progress.

The reader can now find authoritative data and explanations for difficult names such as Dundry, Failand and Regil (but not the often-quoted Nempnett Thrubwell!). Bristol's southern suburbs are all explained: Bedminster, Bishopsworth, Filwood, Hartcliffe, Knowle, Long Ashton and Whitchurch. Coates suggests that Penpole hill in Shirehampton is the oldest name (apart from river-names) that he deals with in the book. On the Somerset side, he proposes that Dundry may be as old. He tentatively departs from the problematic Old English explanation and derives it instead from British Celtic \*Dúnoderkon, meaning 'viewpoint near the hill-fort', with reference to the huge Maes Knoll Iron Age hillfort at the eastern end of the ridge of Dundry Hill. When we turn to the entry for Maes Knoll itself, we learn that this apparent usage of Welsh *maes*, 'field', is doubtless an antiquarian invention. The earliest record so far is Mays-knoll 1791 Collinson: History of Somerset, probably therefore alluding to the surname May.

Elsewhere Coates uses \*\*\* to warn us against explanations which have been put forward in the past but which can be shown to be incorrect. Bedminster does not contain a Welsh word for baptism; there is no St Keyne at Keynsham; no salt at Hallen; and no alcohol involved with Totterdown!

Some of the oldest recorded names in Old English which Coates covers are Bitton, Dyrham, Henbury, Pucklechurch, Wansdyke, and Westbury-on-Trym, all of which pre-date Bristol's first appearance. The detailed entries for Portbury and Portishead allude to the fact that Old English port derives from Latin portus and may in both cases refer to a Roman dock or harbour: Coates notes fields called Portbury in Sea Mills, where there was also a Roman dock.

Set against these oldest names in the area, we are offered modern artificial creations such as Avon Forest and Western Approach Distribution Park. Cheswick in Stoke Gifford, a misleadingly accurate-looking invention, may survive as long as the houses now established there, but hopefully the unofficial Turbo Island, in Stokes Croft, will not be needed as a gathering point for the homeless for too long.

Turbo Island, along with Ursa the Barton Bear, and Lamb Chop (by Duncan Craig for 'Shaun in the City' by Aardman Animations in aid of the Bristol Children's Hospital) are some of the unexpected illustrations which enliven this volume. Coates also includes some more traditional views to add to the evidence for Druid Stoke, Hanging Hill, Hotwells, Knowle, Pill, Redcliffe and Stanton Drew. The maps of Bitton, Kingswood, the Sea Mills estate, and the parishes within the former area of Avon are perhaps less successful on a small scale.

Further research may well turn up earlier material. Fifteenth century forms for Woollard (Wolwade, Wulwade) are in fact available in Humphreys' Somersetshire Parishes (1906), as used by Coates: the second element may thus have been Old English (ge)wæd , 'ford, difficult crossing', rather than ford. Netham is recorded at least in 1769, on the same Bristol map as Cotham, and either may turn out to have older origins. Those with local knowledge will be able to provide new and additional commentary, perhaps including other informal names as quoted here (El Dub for Lawrence Weston; Bemmie for Bedminster). Coates in his Preface admits to doubts over his coverage of the Kingswood area: Hopewell, Soundwell and Speedwell are there, but what about Teewell Hill? We might also ask how Bristol Parkway and The Portway slipped the net.

All in all, this book should become the first point of reference for local students of place-names, citizens, residents and visitors alike. Whilst there are still public libraries in the region, let there be a loan copy in every branch! The first in the city dictionary series has introduced a modern, wide-ranging approach, whilst maintaining the high standards of the English Place-Name Society. An enthusiastic readership will help determine whether there is an appetite for this type of coverage in other parts of the country.

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