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Richard Coates

University of the West of England
Bristol, United Kingdom

POPULAR BOOKS ON ENGLISH PLACE-NAMES — A SERIOUS ISSUE IN ONOMASTICS

This article reflects on a recent spate of books on English place-names produced by a non-professional writer, showing in considerable detail, for five counties, in what ways these books are deficient, and do not perform what ought to be the praiseworthy service of bringing the fruits of 90 years of academic research to an interested general audience. It also attempts an understanding of the reasons for this phenomenon. It is noted that toponymists these days are more adept at bringing their work to that wider audience, but their efforts are likely to be subverted by the flood of inadequate books already in the market-place. The relatively small number of credible, scientifically valid popular books produced by professional toponymists, on the one hand, and the opacity of their special publications aimed at historians and philologists, on the other, compel the non-professional audience to use low quality books that often provide unreliable information and contain numerous inaccuracies making those books useless, if not harmful. Until this gap is filled, the situation can hardly change for the better. The author suggests that new publicly funded toponymic projects ought, as a matter of course, to have a requirement built into them that the fruits of the work and new findings should be made accessible to a wide audience.

Key words: toponymy, place-names, English place-names, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Sussex, Somerset.

1. Introduction

The Survey of English Place-Names has been in progress since 1923, and is therefore approaching its centenary, having already published 91 volumes by January 2017. It is organized on a county basis. The individual county surveys consist of one or more

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volumes depending in part on the size of the county. The work is conducted by the English Place-Name Society (EPNS; an independent scholarly body, though based at present at the University of Nottingham). It is supported materially and morally by the British Academy, and more recently also by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The Survey was led in its first half-century by such significant scholars as Professors Allen Mawer, Frank Stenton, A. H. Smith and Kenneth Cameron, and acquired a strong reputation for good methodology and trustworthy scholarship, and therefore for academic soundness. One thing it has been less good at doing is making its work accessible (user-friendly) to non-philologists. From the outset, its county volumes have featured evidence presented in a dense and heavily abbreviated form, and with explanations based on words of Old English and other ancient languages referenced in such a way as to be more useful to academics than to laypeople. Most often these words are “explained” in the form of unglossed cross-references to words listed in an appendix but explained in a separate book, the second part of the first volume of the Survey, which is a place-name element dictionary (revised and expanded by A. H. Smith as volumes 25 and 26 [see Smith, 1956]). A typical entry for a single name with a complicated history is given below: the entry for the city of Bristol from the third volume of *The Place-Names of Gloucestershire* by A. H. Smith, which constitutes volume 40 of the Survey (published in 1964) [PN Gloucs, 3, 83–84]:

Even names with a simpler history are sometimes presented forbiddingly. Blea Wyke in Scalby (Yorkshire) is explained as:

‘exposed, cheerless sea-creek’, v. **blar**, **vik**.

(from [Smith, 1928, III], which constitutes volume 5 of the Survey). Without consulting the elements volumes just referred to, one cannot even tell in which language the name is formulated (in this case Old Scandinavian).

It must also be said that there is a second reason for differences in the number of volumes required per county. Scholars have had increasing access to vast amounts of local archival material; they have become systematically and progressively more interested in minor local names such as field-names, and they have incorporated these more fully into their work. This has had a major effect. In the 1920s and 1930s, scholars usually produced each year a volume comprising a whole-county survey; at most, a survey of a large county such as Devon extended into two volumes published over two years. As a result of the new interest and the new material, by the 1950s surveys had expanded further and volumes had proliferated. Cumberland was represented by three volumes, Gloucestershire by four, and Cheshire by seven. Lincolnshire halted on the death of its editor in 2001 with seven volumes completed (one of which was published posthumously), but with less than half of the county surveyed to completeness. Shropshire is represented by six published volumes (in January 2017), with a probable five more to follow.¹

¹ There are also three major national dictionaries respecting the same principles as the Survey, which have both benefited from and fed into the work of the Survey: [Ekwall, 1960; Mills, 1998b; Watts, 2004].

BRISTOL (156–5873)

to (of) *Brycg stowe* 11 ASC (D, s.a. 1052, A, s.a. 1063), to *Brycg stowe* 11 ib (D, s.a. 1067), to *Brieg stowe* 11 ib (E, s.a. 1087)
Bristov, -stou 1086 DB, *Bri-*, *Brystou*, -stow(e), -stowa 12 (1496)
 Pat, 12 ASC (E, s.a. 1126, 1140), 1148–79 Glouc, 1153 Berk, 1171
 BrCh 6, Hy 2 BM *et passim* to 1675 Ogilby, *Bristo* 1190, 1204 P,
 1300 Ch

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GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Brihstou 12 Ord, *Brigstou* 1100–35 (1496) Pat, *Bricstou* 1169 P
Bri-, *Bristol(l)*, -ollia, -(i)um, -ole 12 (1496) Pat, 12 Glouc, 1100–35
Tewok 71d, 1155 BrCh 2, 1185 Templar, 1189 GlastonInq, 1200
 BM, 1201 Cur *et passim* to 1675 Ogilby, (*ye citty of-*) 1630 PR
 16, (*cittie of-*) 1652 *ParlSurv*
Bristall(um) 1188, 1378 BrCh 8, 10, 91, 1424 Pat
Bristold' 1248 *Ass*
Brestol 1290 Ipm, *y^r Cetye of Brestol* 1620 PR 13
Bri-, *Brystuit*, -yt (in French documents) 1331–1401 RBBR (*freq*),
 1426 BrCh 119, 15 ECP
Bristoll' 1385, 1393 *Ass* *Bristell* c. 1560 *Surv*

'Assembly place by the bridge', *v.* *brycg*, *stōw*. The meanings of *stōw* 'place' best established by its compounds are 'place where folk assembled' and then an extended and more particularised sense 'religious place'; the former seems the more likely in Bristol. The bridge may have been one across the Avon (cf. Bristol Bridge 87 *infra*). The ME colloquial form of the name was *Bristow*, which continued in use for a long time but has not survived, having been supplanted by the Latinised form *Bristol(l)ia* and its modern colloquial form *Bristol*. *Bristol* is without doubt an AN inverted spelling, which could arise when OFr *-ol-* in certain conditions (namely before consonants) was vocalised to *-ou-* and so fell in with OE, ME *-ow-*, *-ou-*; the conditions for this change are not in fact found in *Bristol*, and we have to assume that the substitution of *-ol-* for *-ou-* was analogous to cases where they did appear. But spellings with unetymological *-l-* occur elsewhere (cf. IPN 95, 113, Feilitzen § 66, Förster, *Themse* 551 note, C.L. Wrenn, *Names* v, 65–70).

Figure. Example of an entry from [PN Gloucs, 3, 83–84].

Beyond England, an excellent series of county surveys for Scotland is now under way [Taylor & Márkus, 2006–2012; Márkus, 2012], and there are scholarly surveys for some of the traditional counties of Wales by Hywel Wyn Owen [1994] and by Richard Morgan [1998; 1999; 2001; 2005], and also for the Isle of Man by George Broderick [2006]. This last book is published by EPNS.

In itself, the relative obscurity or opacity of the published work was not necessarily a bad thing, because the Survey series was aimed at professional historians and philologists. Equally, massive coverage of microtoponyms is good for contextualizing major names and, of course, for comprehensiveness. But place-names, especially major ones, are interesting things at many levels, and are part of local history, so it is not surprising that they are also of interest to English local historians, many of whom are scholarly and industrious but lack a full academic training in philology. They needed — and need — appropriately condensed but authoritative guides to the linguistic history of local place-names, especially those of long-established towns and villages. It is only in the last 20 years that the EPNS, whose scholars are the people best placed to provide such guides, has begun to produce them. In 1998 the Society, under Victor Watts's direction, initiated a "Popular" series of county-based dictionaries with Kenneth Cameron's volume on the major place-names of Lincolnshire [Cameron & Insley, 1998], a foretaste of the full survey which remained incomplete at his death. Three others such popular volumes² have followed so far, in addition to Diana Whaley's dictionary of the place-names in the Lake District, an area covering parts of three traditional English counties [Whaley, 2006]. There will soon also be a series of local dictionaries focusing on the place-names within city regions, beginning with Bristol, Leeds and Brighton and Hove (forthcoming 2017).

A few popular county-based books outside the EPNS's publication series are written to modern scholarly standards while being aimed at a more general readership. These include [D. Mills, 1976; Padel, 1988; Coates, 1989; A. D. Mills, 1996; 1998a; 2001; 2014; Horovitz, 2005]. These are all based on appropriate consideration of archival sources and previous literature, build on evidence gathered using an appropriate methodology and presented for the reader's inspection, and show the necessary understanding of the philology of English and other relevant languages.

But all this means that there is still a substantial market gap to be filled. There are 39 traditional English counties; only six have EPNS popular dictionaries (plus Whaley's on the Lake District), and eight have come from other publishers. Even these might be viewed as somewhat formidable, because they present the evidence for their suggested etymologies in a condensed form, but there is probably no alternative way of doing it if the books are to be scholarly as well as moderately user-friendly and reasonably priced. That is also the compromise which will be evident in the city region volumes, in which discussion of the evidence in a manner comprehensible to the general reading public is also an explicitly adopted goal.

The main point of this article is to observe that other authors who are not appropriately trained and knowledgeable have stepped in to fill the gap in the popular market. Although their existence testifies to the public's wish to have such information

² On County Durham, Leicestershire and Rutland (together), and Suffolk, together with other volumes covering regions of England.

in an attractive and digestible form, the public is not getting its money's worth.³ Reference is made here especially to a series of books by Anthony Poulton-Smith, a journalist from the English Midlands, who has produced works on the place-names of a very substantial number of counties. Their content derives in the main from the work published by the EPNS or from the national dictionaries mentioned above. Some additional material on particular types of name, such as inn-names, is sourced from more local authors or may be original. In the 1990s he published volumes on Staffordshire (1995) and Warwickshire (1996), and since 2003 a veritable flood has developed: Worcestershire (2003), Derbyshire (2005), Leicestershire and Rutland (2008), Gloucestershire (2009), Oxfordshire (2009), Hampshire (2009), South Devon (2009), Shropshire (2009), Nottinghamshire (2009), Dorset (2010), Northamptonshire (2010), Somerset (2010), Buckinghamshire (2012), Cheshire (2012), Herefordshire (2012), Warwickshire (again; 2012), East Sussex (2012), West Sussex (2012), Cambridgeshire (2013), East and West Kent (2013), County Durham (2014), Northumberland (2014), Bedfordshire (2015), Berkshire (2015), Cornwall (2015), Cumbria (2015), Essex (2015), Hertfordshire (2015), Isle of Wight (2015), Lancashire (2015), Lincolnshire (2015), Middlesex (2015), Norfolk (2015), North Devon (2015), Suffolk (2015), Surrey (2015) and Wiltshire (2015). These books have appeared with a variety of different publishers, the most recent also being available as e-books, though I have found it impossible to get an online sample view of any of those.

Readers will notice immediately that 15 books appeared in 2015; all of these have web-advertised publication dates between 28 October and 30 November! This is now not simply a flood but full-scale heavy industry with blast furnaces and rolling mills and Stakhanovite levels of production, transformed into electronic products. If we remember that, even using the *modus operandi* of the earliest research of the EPNS, it took a year to cover a county in a depth acceptable at that time, it is clear that the author is doing no personal research worth the name. The most he himself contributes is noted, with apparent self-satisfaction, in a specially prepared statement available as a pdf on the web-site of feedaread.com, on each of the county pages, for example: "The definitions (*sic*; not explanations! — R.C.) are supported by anecdotal evidence, bring to life the individuals and events which have influenced the places and the way these names have developed."⁴ Poulton-Smith is getting his information from somewhere, boiling it down and rearranging it to suit his chosen format, but the only respectable sources of information are the EPNS Survey volumes, the small number of other works mentioned favourably above, and the three major national dictionaries mentioned in footnote 1.

³ I do not really know to what extent this is a problem just for England, rather than for toponomastics in general. The problem here is identified as being due to the public's perceived need for, and interest in, the explanation of ancient and etymologically obscure names. Toponomastics, and public interest in it, works differently in countries whose place-naming is linguistically transparent!

⁴ Retrieved from: <https://www.feedaread.com/books/Hertfordshire-Place-Names.aspx> (accessed 6 December 2016).

In recent years I have reviewed four of Poulton-Smith's books [Coates, 2012; 2013], all dealing with counties that I know well, and whose onomastic literature I also know well. (Indeed, I have written a book myself on one of them, and published a fair amount of new research in article form on the other three.) I offer now a digest of those four reviews, and add some new remarks on a fifth (Somerset), indicating why the availability of books of this kind is a serious problem of English onomastics. The discussion that follows will necessarily concentrate (perhaps too much) on matters of detail, because that is the principal respect in which the books are deficient.⁵ But there is a broader conclusion to be drawn. The books fail to show the reader who buys them why toponomastics is interesting, but at the same time difficult, and they therefore fail to show why expert involvement is necessary. (But if the author had thought that, he would not have written the books!) They inevitably turn out to be unacceptably shallow, even for the purposes of the casual reader. No worthwhile conclusions are drawn from considering the material as a whole. There is nothing in the books to indicate how place-name scholars arrive at their conclusions from the evidence which is available, and nothing to indicate how they present differing degrees of certainty about suggested etymologies. Poulton-Smith in any case offers little of the relevant evidence. Indeed, at some points I will show that he makes understanding place-names more difficult than it needs to be because he presents even that small amount of evidence inaccurately. In my view, it is hard to find a single entry in these books that could not be criticized in one way or another, sometimes for quite trivial reasons, but often for some of the major reasons indicated below. It is hard to imagine anyone being drawn into the excitement of scholarly toponomastics through reading one of these books, but that is clearly not one of the author's aims. It is also hard to imagine readers having the feeling of eating a well-prepared, rich and satisfying meal.

At the end of the article, I will offer a more positive and hopeful reflection on what is required of scholars to combat the spread of material of this kind.

2. Gloucestershire

Poulton-Smith's technique is to take entries from the standard academic works, in this case the four EPNS volumes for Gloucestershire [PN Gloucs]; to extract and repeat from these a couple of old spellings; and to paraphrase the entries using strange wordings, e.g. that the recorded forms "reveal," "speak of" or "tell us of" what is denoted. He then sometimes adapts material selectively from work of knowledgeable local writers, mainly on pub names and street-names, and includes this material under

⁵ What follows is based on the analysis of five books by A. Poulton-Smith: *Gloucestershire Place Names* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2009), *Hampshire Place Names* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2009), *Somerset Place Names* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2010), *East Sussex Place Names* and *West Sussex Place Names* (Derby: DB Publishing, 2012). With the apparent exception of *Hampshire*, all are currently (13 December 2016) available in e-book format.

the relevant town or village name, along with a few of the more prominent minor names (which are sometimes promoted to main entries, giving rise to duplication, as we shall see). For major place-names in this county, therefore, he is relying on opinions over 50 years old, but he does not inform readers that he ignores more recent work such as Watts's monumental, if flawed, *Cambridge dictionary* [Watts, 2004], Mills's *Oxford dictionary* (1991, second edition [Mills, 1998b]) or the material in the forty annual volumes of the *Journal of the English Place-Name Society* which had been published before 2009. He is not even familiar with the classic 1960 (fourth) edition of Ekwall's *Concise Oxford dictionary* [Ekwall, 1960], though if he had read [PN Gloucs] carefully, that would have led him to Ekwall. In his bibliography, the local experts may also get short shrift even where partially acknowledged. One work, on Berkeley, appears without any author being credited; it is presumably the self-published booklet by M. Williams [1986]. If I could find this out, so could Poulton-Smith; books do not write themselves. The author of one of his sources (James Hodsdon) gets his surname mis-spelt. On the few occasions when Poulton-Smith strikes out on his own, away from the scholarship of [PN Gloucs], he is prone to inconsistency, claiming that "river names are invariably descriptive" (p. 127), but having forgotten that eight pages earlier he appeared to derive **Severn** from the name of a "deity or water spirit."

Despite its debt to [PN Gloucs], the selective information in Poulton-Smith's book is nowhere near as reliable as what can be found in its source. There are even errors in the headforms of the entries: **Hidcote Boyce** appears as *Hidcote Royce* and **Downend** as *Dowend*. The text of the former entry might serve as a general warning about the standard of the book: "The addition (i.e. the supposed "Royce". — R. C.) here seems a little superfluous, for there are no similar place names anywhere near here." This is immediately after the entry for **Hidcote Bartrim**! Hidcote Bartrim is less than one mile from Hidcote Boyce; the two Hidcote place-names are distinguished by including the surname of a former tenant of the manorial farms at these places. For the Bartrim holding, the author has an entry in which the village of Hidcote Bartrim does not feature at all, but the tiny former tenement of West Heys, no longer appearing on modern maps even at a scale of 1:25000, does appear. The next sentence under Hidcote "Royce" is grimly comical, and almost worth paying the cover-price of £12.99 for: "Perhaps this is the work of an egotistical lord of the manor, and yet perhaps *they should have ensured that the name was recorded properly* for there is evidence of a de Bosco family and a de Bois family during the thirteenth century" (the italicization is mine. — R.C.). *De Bosco* is the Latin form, and *de Bois* the French form, of the surname *Boyce* which Poulton-Smith has failed to record properly.

The author often fails to cite accurately the historic spellings in [PN Gloucs], which is the evidence crucial to supporting a suggested etymology. Under **Gloucester** he writes *Colonaie Glev* for *coloniae Glev*, under **Rendcomb** *Rindessumbe* for *Rindecumbe*, under **Taynton** *Tetinton* for *Tetinton*, under **Whaddon** *Wadvve* for *Wadvne*, and one could go on with other examples. He makes mistakes in citing Old English

or Welsh name-elements, as in Great **Witcombe** (“*wid-cum*” for *cumb*), **Smear Hill** in Farmington (“*smeone-hyll*” for *smeoru-*, the river **Avon** (Welsh “*affon*” for *afon*), and sometimes fails to give a coherent account at all (as where there is a contradiction between the claimed source-form and the etymological meaning of **Charfield**: “from Old English *ceart-feld* and describing ‘the open land by a curved or winding road’”; here he has failed completely to understand the full entry in [PN Gloucs] which evaluates the possibility that the name includes either *ceart* ‘(heath)land with rough vegetation’ or *cearr* ‘bend’).

Both copyediting and proofreading have been badly done (if at all): material on e.g. the hamlets **Beachley**, **Latteridge**, **Saul** and **Tockington** is duplicated between entries for the parishes to which they belong and independent entries; worse, perhaps, **Awkley** appears both under Olveston (correctly) and, two entries later, under Owlpen (incorrectly). The author warns the reader not to infer that **Sevenhampton** is named from the river Severn (p. 117), but the village-name carelessly appears as *Severnhampton* on p. 31.

Carelessness and ignorance of Old English philology lead the author into etymological errors such as those found regarding *Culkerton* (under **Rodmarton**), where he cites a verb (*cylcan* ‘to belch’) as the source rather than a noun derived from it, in addition to misspelling it as *cyclan*. Bizarrely, the name **Culkerton** reappears in an entry of its own on p. 50 and the content of the two entries does not match up. Confusing name-elements with name-forms, he does not see why explaining **Hinton** or the base name in **Hampnett** as deriving from “OE *heah-tun*” is insufficient because of his lack of knowledge of, or inattention to, Old English grammar — where do the instances of medial <n> and <m> come from in these names? For **Rodborough** he gives *rodd-beorg* without understanding why it should be the *roddan-beorg* which is proposed in [PN Gloucs], for reasons to do with the grammar of compounds in Old English.

Lack of familiarity with place-name studies leads him into out of date and/or underresearched pronouncements on, e.g., **Bourton**, **Pitchcombe**, **Westbury** and **Aust**, which have been discussed fully by Margaret Gelling, Carole Hough, Simon Draper and the author of this article, respectively. And *batch* (p. 106) does not, as claimed, mean ‘boggy area around a stream’ in Gloucestershire and other counties of the west of England, but ‘low hill, rise, slope’. It is true that [PN Gloucs] gets this wrong, but even the Wikipedia article on “West Country Dialects” gets it essentially right, and a little curiosity on the author’s part could have unearthed the truth.

The reader will be left little the wiser in the many cases where no motivation is offered for the suggested etymologies, not even the ones in [PN Gloucs]. Is there actually a *bury* or fortified place (OE *burg*, dative case *byrig*) at **Oldbury**, **Sodbury** or **Henbury**? (There is, in each case.) Was it too much trouble to check an Ordnance Survey map or the wealth of historical material now available on the web? We do not learn, as we could have done from the author’s sources, what is especially locally or historically interesting about such names as that of the house called *The Chantry* in Berkeley (from

a plot of land the revenue from which financed a chantry chapel in Berkeley parish church), or what the distinguishing additions in **Stanley Pontlarge** and **Hidcote Bartrim** are — namely, surnames of medieval feudal tenants of the farming estates in question. Since Poulton-Smith believes that the names of feudal tenants usually precede the base place-name, as he tells us under **Wickwar**, it is perhaps unsurprising that he has not recognized the surnames of these two medieval families for what they are.

Importantly, we do not learn what is or might be difficult or problematic about some of the proffered explanations, so we are presented with certainty where there is doubt among experts, a matter which Poulton-Smith's sources, including [PN Gloucs], explain clearly. We do not learn what is or might be difficult or linguistically problematic about the proffered explanations of, for example, **Andoversford**, **Chaceley**, **Dumbleton** or **Hailes**, so we are sold short. The elements he suggests for *Dumbleton*, for example, are a dialect word *dumble* 'wooded valley', whose true home is the more northerly Midlands, plus the Old English word *tūn* 'farm, village', even though some of the earliest forms suggest *tā* 'toe'. No hint of any of that difficulty is given. The Celtic etymology he selects for *Hailes* is arbitrarily chosen from two given, diffidently, in [PN Gloucs], without the reservations expressed in that book. There are other defects of omission: some familiar historically important questions, such as that of a connection between the name of the **Cotswold** hills and **Cutsdean**, or the possible (or claimed) significance of **Aust** in the christianization of England, are not referred to at all.

At the same time as making basic errors, the author makes remarks which appear to claim his own authority for his pronouncements: "Domesday's listing of Sistone (meaning **Siston**. — *R. C.*) confirms our original suspicions that this is from Old English 'Sige's *tun* or farmstead'" (p. 122); **Sharpness** is "undoubtedly from 'the headland of a man called Scobba'" (p. 120). Such implicit claims to be writing on his own authority are undermined by the level of incomprehension and inattention to detail pointed out above. He tells us that **Naunton** is "a name we would expect to find more often than it does" (sic!), without realizing it is simply a dialectal form of the widespread *Newton* with an inflected first element. Olympian pronouncements coupled with basic inaccuracy and incomprehension leaves the writer very heavily exposed to the cold wind of ridicule.

3. Hampshire

By the time he gets on to Hampshire, Poulton-Smith has discovered A. D. Mills' national dictionary [Mills, 1998b] and the present writer's work on the county (1993, paperback edition of [Coates, 1989]), the only previously published work dedicated to the county's place-names. Since I might be seen as too much of an interested party or biased competitor, I will not dwell at length on the same kinds of weakness as have been pointed out in relation to Gloucestershire, all of which could be exemplified and multiplied, but we should note that the author cannot always even be bothered to spell

the headforms of the place-name entries correctly (note the errors “*Headborne*” Worthy, King’s “*Sombourne*,” “*Warash*,” “*Wherewell*,” for **Headbourne**, **Somborne**, **Warsash** and **Wherwell**). He could have noted that in my book the main source of the information I used is spelt out prominently on the title-page (“Based on the collection of the English Place-Name Society”), the origin of the ideas about many names being discussed with acknowledgement of their originator(s) in the body of the book and not dismissed in a deficient bibliographic reference (with no date or publisher) on the last page as in Poulton-Smith’s book. He gives no explicit acknowledgement of any of my ideas (repeated under e.g. **Calshot**, **Froyle**, **Swarraton** and **Swaythling** and, with those of my predecessors, travestied under **Boldre** and **Litchfield**), but then he does not work like that.

4. East Sussex and West Sussex

Like *Gloucestershire* and *Hampshire* published three years previously, these two books contain a lot of recycled material. The author’s technique is still to take the substance of entries from standard works, namely the EPNS volumes for Sussex [PN Sussex] (Survey volumes 6 and 7) or Ekwall’s or Mills’s dictionaries [Ekwall, 1960; Mills, 1998b], to give a couple of old spellings, and sometimes to expansively paraphrase one or more entry. As regards major place-names, therefore, he is dealing with opinions often between 57 and 88 years old, and he takes no account at all of respectable recent work such as Watts’s dictionary [Watts, 2004], Forsberg’s book on the name *Lewes* [Forsberg, 1997] or the vast amount of new material and reinterpretation in the 11 years of the *Sussex Locus focus* series [LF, 1996–2007] and the *Journal of the EPNS* [JEPNS], let alone Barrie Cox’s work on pub names [Cox, 1994]. This leads him into etymological howlers such as that found under **The Weald**, in which the early spelling *Andredesweald*, which Poulton-Smith even mis-spells, is interpreted as including a man’s name, rather than as a development of the British Celtic name of the Roman fort of Pevensey; the howler is duplicated in both of these Sussex books! He is also led into out of date pronouncements on e.g. **East Grinstead** and **Firle**, both of which had received new interpretations, by Michael Leppard and the present author respectively, before the date of publication.

Again, the reliability of the book does not match up to that of the elderly sources, and there are quite a number of dreadful failings. The entry for **Eastdean** (East Sussex) mentions the minor names *Open* and *Closed Winkins*, which are really in the completely separate place called East Dean in West Sussex. The river **Limden** is in the wrong book (West Sussex), having been associated with the wrong river Rother, of which there are two in Sussex, one East and one West. Excruciatingly, the first two lines of the entry for **Kingston by Lewes** (East Sussex) are really about **Kirdford** (West Sussex), illustrating a truly lamentable standard of copyediting. The entry for **Arundel** (West Sussex) contains material concerning **Ashburnham** (East Sussex), and the same judgement

applies in this case. **Langney** (East Sussex) appears in both volumes with identical wording. These facts suggest clearly that this was originally one book on Sussex which has been carelessly divided into two with an eye on profit. The same impoverished preface appears in both.

As regards philological and other accuracy, there are transcription errors comparable with those seen in *Gloucestershire*, such as those in the names or words which give rise to the first elements in **Landport** (St John Without, Lewes), **Iping**, **Dunton** and **Raughmere** (Lavant) and the whole names of **Heene** (Broadwater) and **Worth** (and many others), indicating a disdain for accuracy. **Pulborough** is explained invertedly as ‘the pool by the hill or mound’, in a curious parallel with the way *Dunkirk* in *Gloucestershire* is explained with inversion of the two elements which comprise it. Sometimes unsophisticated readers are likely to be led off into unlit territory, as with **Maresfield**, where alternative etymologies are given but it is left to readers’ expertise or indifference to decide how *mere feld* can give rise to the current name with its <s>. Even where there is basic accuracy, the reader is sold short — no clue is given that various interesting questions might be asked about **Marden**, **Westham**, **Barcombe**, **Newhaven** or **Frostbourne** in Fairlight (for example, very basically, what was the border referred to in Marden, or why was a new haven made at Newhaven? wouldn’t that information help to explain the names?), and no clue is given about how the Domesday Book spelling *Cloninctune* can possibly be relevant to **Donnington**.

The imbalance of the entries on major towns in Sussex can be judged by the entry for **Eastbourne**. It is 15 pages long. Yet it has just three lines on *Eastbourne* (whose content is essentially correct, but omits to say that the contrasting and far less well known **Westbourne** is not even to be found in the same book), then about two pages on streets and minor places (largely adapted from a book published in 1995 by John Milton, acknowledged in the bibliography), and about five pages on pubs. A further nine pages are adorned by gloomy black and white photos, some irrelevant, like that of Warren Hill, whose name is not even discussed in the entry. For East Sussex’s county town (capital) **Lewes**, far more is said about birds, the woodcock which give their name to *Cockshut Road*, than about the name of the town itself. This is dismissed in a bare two lines, including a mistake because Poulton-Smith does not investigate the relevant history; much that is new about the town’s history has appeared in print recently, and was available before the publication of his books.

As noted under *Gloucestershire* above, the author is prone to present himself as more authoritative than he really is, as witness such remarks as: (**Cowfold**) “Found as Coufaud in 1232, this early record is easy to see as Old English *cu fald* and ‘the small enclosure for cows’.” He would not have found it so easy to see, and be sure of his ground, without the knowledge of early English gained by his predecessors.

Instead of this farrago, the reviewer would recommend the out of print, and by no means faultless, single-volume popular book by Judith Glover (especially the unextended first edition [Glover, 1975]) as much superior to Poulton-Smith’s pretty-covered

but pretty depressing books, which are regrettably already available in e-format and in the bookshops frequented by visitors to some Sussex stately homes.

5. Somerset

The EPNS does not yet have a volume, popular or otherwise, for this county. Poulton-Smith published his in 2010, and, like others, it is now available as an e-book (2013). Despite the current lack of an EPNS volume, enough material is available for cautious judgements to be made about the history of a significant number of names. I have examined, below, the entries for ten names about whose documentary record I know something.

Bagborough is explained from a given name plus OE *beorg* ‘hill’, without mention of the well-known fact [Gelling & Cole, 2000, 145–151] that this word often refers to a burial mound, which is surely a possibility here, as Poulton-Smith’s next entry, for **Baltonsborough**, implies. Under **Barton St David**, he is content with deriving the base-name from the Old English for ‘barley farmstead’, without mentioning that it also comes to mean ‘outlying farm, grange farm’, and develops into the common south-western dialect word *barton* ‘farmyard, large farm, demesne farm (farm held for the lord’s own use)’, which is surely relevant here.

Poulton-Smith associates **Flax Bourton** with flax-growing; however, the first element of the name really relates to the possession of its manor in medieval times by Flaxley Abbey in Gloucestershire.

Under **Bath**, Poulton-Smith misses the interesting and relevant fact that the place was originally called *Hot Baths*, OE *Hat Bathu* in 676 C.E. (in a document copied in the 12th century).

Under **Bicknoller**, Poulton-Smith asserts, remarkably, that “the Saxon personal name has a genitive ‘n’, a grammatical feature more often associated with American English today.” I am still trying to puzzle out what on earth this refers to. He correctly derives **Godney** from the Old English personal name *Goda* (in the genitive case with *-n*, though we are not told this) + *eg* ‘dry ground in wetland’, but describes it an “an unusual name”; this authoritative-sounding judgement has no basis for what is a completely routine Old English place-name (compare *Bardney*, *Blakeney*, *Hackney*, *Rodney*, *Stickney*, *Witney* and many others). A reference to the genitive <n> that he claims to identify, but presents as alien, in **Bicknoller** would complete the etymological picture.

Poulton-Smith appears to be troubled by the fact that **Brent** (from an element meaning ‘high’ or ‘steep’) is referred to in Domesday Book as *Brentemerse*, from the Old English for ‘marsh’, implying low ground, thinking that both the 7th-century spelling *Brente* and the Domesday form must refer to the same place. He does not appear to grasp that the latter is ‘marsh at or near or belonging to Brent’, which resolves the altitude problem.

Poulton-Smith displays an almost pathological capacity for mistranscription when he says, under **Corston**, that the name derives from “an Old Celtic river name from *mors* and meaning ‘marsh’.” Or perhaps he really thinks that is the true origin. Mistranscription is also evident when he cites the Domesday Book spelling of **Glastonbury** as “*Glaesngeberia*” instead of the correct *Glæstingeberia*. The head-form in the entry for **Barrow Gurney** is mis-spelt as *Barrow Gurnay*.

In other words, the sins identified in the discussion of the other four books above, notably inaccuracy in detail, the missing of substantive information altogether, misunderstandings and misplaced claims of authority, all appear just as markedly in the Somerset book. That is despite the opportunity that could have been taken to improve them before they were issued as e-books. In partial compensation, many public houses seem adequately researched here.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this article is not merely to give a negative and nit-picking reflection on this especially prolific writer’s products, though I have done that. These books are spectacularly inadequate as sources of useful information; but there are inadequate books by other authors too (though not on such an industrial scale), as well as basically rational ones whose approaches and conclusions I happen to disagree with. My further purpose is also to reflect on the duty of scholars towards their potential audiences.

Poulton-Smith has been producing would-be popular books on the counties of England, including five in 2009 alone (Nottinghamshire, Shropshire, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, Hampshire), at a remarkable rate. As noted above, he produced no fewer than 15 e-books in the space of five weeks in 2015: shamelessly so, in the light of the negative reviews in the *Journal of the English Place-Name Society* and in *Sussex Past*, the Sussex Archaeological Society newsletter, on which the remarks in this article are based, for nothing about his approach, technique and sources has changed. His productivity tells us everything about the depth of his involvement with the subject matter: the properly researched books on which he relies take insight and years of detailed hard work. There is clearly a genuine need for proper popular books on English counties and regions, but Poulton-Smith is not the man to fill the gaps, because his books are inaccurate, misleading, skimped, underresearched and carelessly produced, as I have demonstrated in detail above. So far as I can judge, most of them contain no original content beyond the arrangement, or at least, no original *linguistic* content, which is the main necessity in a book on English place-names. That would not in itself be a damning criticism if what he presented were accurate and reliable. But since it is not, it does a serious disservice to the praiseworthy idea of making academic findings accessible to a popular readership.

I would be the first to agree that the standard books on English toponymy can appear formidable to outsiders, whether we are thinking of the Survey volumes or

the national dictionaries. As I said at the beginning, the EPNS has not until recent years produced something more accessible (user-friendly) to the general reader than its academic tomes, and there are many significant gaps in its popular coverage, including all the counties reviewed here (with allowance made for the present writer's non-EPNS book on Hampshire). With the particularly striking exception of A. D. Mills, English scholars were slow to conclude that their work should be not only available to, but also be made suitable for, the needs and interests of the people who pay their taxes to support their endeavours, and not just the needs and interests of that sub-group whose inclinations are academic. It would be fair to advocate building into every bid for a research grant a plan to publish the findings which the research has produced in two formats. That is: not only in formats recognizable to traditional scholarship but also in less heavily academic forms. Those forms may be different, on paper or in e-publications, although such works should be no less carefully prepared and presented than their fully academic counterparts. This is already well on the way to becoming established good practice in the humanities in the United Kingdom, including now in the EPNS, and the public profile and credibility of onomastics will be the better for it. With luck, such good practice will also result in the out-competing of poor work deriving from the scholarly endeavours of onomasticians but not authored or authorized by them.

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ABBREVIATIONS

OE — Old English

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Coates, Richard

PhD, Professor, Department of Arts and Cultural Industries
University of the West of England
Coldharbour Lane, Bristol BS16 1QY,
United Kingdom
E-mail: Richard.Coates@uwe.ac.uk

Коутс, Ричард

PhD, профессор, факультет искусств и креативной экономики
Университет Западной Англии
Coldharbour Lane, Bristol BS16 1QY,
United Kingdom
E-mail: Richard.Coates@uwe.ac.uk

Р. КоутсУниверситет Западной Англии
Бристоль, Великобритания**ПОПУЛЯРНЫЕ КНИГИ ПО АНГЛИЙСКОЙ ТОПОНИМИИ —
СЕРЬЕЗНАЯ ПРОБЛЕМА ОНОМАСТИКИ**

В статье рассматривается проблема популярных книг по английской топонимии, написанных неспециалистами и наводнивших в последнее время полки книжных магазинов Соединенного Королевства. На примере книг, посвященных топонимии пяти графств Великобритании, автор детально рассматривает недостатки подобных публикаций и демонстрирует невозможность донести с их помощью результаты научной работы топонимистов за последние 90 лет до заинтересованной широкой аудитории. В статье предпринимается попытка осмыслить причины этого феномена. Отмечается, что сегодня именно профессиональные топонимисты должны распространять результаты собственных исследований, однако их усилия сводятся на нет наплывом некомпетентной популярной литературы. Относительно небольшое число авторитетных, научно фундированных популярных книг, написанных специалистами, с одной стороны, и недоступность их научных публикаций, предназначенных для историков и филологов, с другой, подталкивают широкую аудиторию к тому, чтобы пользоваться низкокачественными книгами, содержащими порой недостоверную информацию и множество ошибок, которые делают эти работы бесполезными, если не сказать вредными. До тех пор, пока эта лакуна не будет заполнена, ситуация едва ли изменится к лучшему. Автор вносит предложение: всякий исследовательский проект по топонимии, претендующий на государственное финансирование, должен подразумевать публикацию результатов исследований в популярной форме, доступной широкой аудитории.

К л ю ч е в ы е с л о в а: топонимия, географические названия, английские топонимы, Глостершир, Гэмпшир, Суссекс, Сомерсет.

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