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Peter G. Spackman, *An A–Z of 1001 Field-Names and their Interpretation (Etymologically Referenced)* (Witham: Greenlight Publishing, 2016). ISBN 978 1 897738 59 7. Paperback, 347 pp. £15.00.

This book promises a great deal, and in its introduction Spackman makes clear that ‘the main aims of this publication are the etymological references and the resulting interpretations’ (p. 9). The book is laid out as a dictionary, with a brief introduction (pp. 6–8) and short section on methodology (pp. 9–10) preceding the main entries, and a concluding discussion (pp. 340–41) and bibliography (pp. 342–47) following them. The dictionary section (‘Interpretations’, pp. 14–339) is laid out alphabetically, with a field-name heading each entry, followed by a paragraph of discussion including a suggested etymology or etymologies.

There are two significant pitfalls which immediately present themselves in these discussion sections. The first is the lack of information about the locations of the fields discussed. The author states plainly that ‘The actual location of these fields are purposely omitted’ (p. 9). This decision on the part of the author is his prerogative, and if common field-names and their usual, or likely, interpretations are being provided, then such presentation is not unreasonable, but in places it results in confusion: it is clear, for example, that the name Higher Ditchlings (p. 138) is a single example of this field-name, with the discussion referring to ‘an identical “Ditchlings” in the county of Sussex’. It would be useful to the reader to know whether the two Ditchlings are close together, and therefore whether they might be connected or represent a pattern, but such information is not provided.

The second, and most problematic, omission from the discussion sections is that of historic spellings of the field-names discussed. In the vast majority of cases, no indication is given of the earliest forms the author used (an exception is Ditchley (p. 79), for which a single Fine Roll form is presented, although it appears this is taken from Ekwall’s *Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*). This does not appear to be simply a matter of presentation, as the lack of locations are: there is no mention in either the introduction or the methodology section of using historic forms at all. This leads the reader to one of two conclusions: either the author has neglected to mention this part of his methodology, which misleads any reader unfamiliar with the practice of place-name research as to the requirements of the discipline; or he is unaware that reliable etymological work must make use of the earliest form(s) of a name available.

Spackman’s advice to the reader is that field-names ‘must be approached with caution, inquisitiveness, an open mind, [and] a pile of reference books’ (p. 6). His own use of reference materials and secondary sources is varied, and certainly indicates consideration of scholarship from a number of disciplines; however, his selection of linguistic and onomastic sources appears at best haphazard. One of the author’s ‘main interpretational aids’ is Onions’ *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (1966), and indeed most of the field-name entries contain etymologies essentially derived from this work, with some reference to other publications. Limited use is made of Gelling’s *Place-Names in the Landscape* (although not of Gelling and Cole’s *The Landscape of Place-Names*), and Ekwall’s dictionary is used on occasion along with selected volumes of the EPNS. Onions’ dictionary is over fifty years old, and is relied upon rather too heavily. No use is made of EPNE, nor of *The Vocabulary of English Place-Names* (Parsons, with Hough and Styles, 1997–2004); the only dictionary of Old English used is Sweet’s *The Student’s Dictionary of Anglo-Saxon* (1896). No Middle English dictionary is referred to at all.

Effective use is made, however, of many other kinds of scholarship. The author provides supplementary information within his field-name interpretation which is both useful and appealing to those interested in the history and character of the landscape. The entry for Thistley Meadow (p. 300), for example, discusses the different varieties of thistle present in English fields and the growing conditions each one prefers: such information is, as the author rightly points out, a ‘useful means for

identification of past environments'. Photographs are also provided to illustrate some names, providing visualisations of the features the author describes.

While this book cannot be recommended as a source of field-name etymologies, what is to be commended is the author's enthusiasm and his vivid depictions of the land he describes. The book speaks throughout of intimate engagement with the landscape, and of many years devoted to investigation of its fields; Spackman is let down by his sources, and perhaps by his methodology (or his explanation of it), but certainly not by his passion for his subject.

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