A.D. Mills,

*A Dictionary of British Place Names.*


Reviewed by Richard Utz

Published 16.05.2004

A. D. Mills is known to specialists in etymology and historical geography as the author of highly valued volumes such as *The Place-Names of Dorset,* *The Place-Names of the Isle of Wight,* and *A Dictionary of London Place Names.* His new dictionary of British place names is a fully revised, updated, and slightly expanded version of his 1991 *Dictionary of English Place-Names* (second edn. 1998). In addition to the 12,000 entries in that predecessor tome, this edition includes what Mills somewhat vaguely calls "a good selection" (p. vii) of place-names from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, all compiled by Adrian Room, who also contributed the sections on Irish, Scottish, and Welsh place-names in the "Introduction" (Room is a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and author of about 30 other reference books, among them the *Penguin Dictionary of British Place Names,* also published in 2003). Most of the names are those of settlements, including the new towns of the twentieth century, but there are also those of the principal Roman roads, rivers, counties (taking into account the various major and minor changes of the political map of English counties made in 1974, 1996, and 1999), and districts. The main selection criterion for the place names is their appearance in all or several of the popular touring atlases that offer maps at three to four miles to the inch. This matter-of-factish approach probably makes virtue of necessity, since a more inclusive treatment would have demanded publishing the dictionary in more than one volume. Of course, a good number of names in densely populated areas, where cartographers have trouble representing all existing names on such maps, will fall prey to this decision. Perhaps, however, those who would like additional information or would simply like to double-check Mill's information can still consult either John Field's *Place-Names of Great Britain and Ireland* (1980; the most recent edition was published in 1990) or the still unsurpassed *Oxford Concise Dictionary of English Place-Names* (1935; the fourth edition was published in 1960) compiled by one of the giants of name study, Eilert Ekwall.

However, I am almost sure that the primary readership of this volume will not consist of place-name scholars, but of educated non-specialist readers who have an interest in learning about the etymology of the names in their own regions as well as in those in which they travel (specialists would, for example, prefer that the different variants of early stages of languages [Anglian, West Saxon, Old Danish, Old Norse, Anglo-Scandinavian, Norman-French, Anglo-French, etc.] be distinguished and not subsumed under umbrella terms such as Old English, Old Scandinavian, and Old French). Despite the transformation from an
"English" to a more comprehensive "British" dictionary, the paperback edition I received can still be carried around comfortably. The concise introduction is a perfect survey of the various kinds of cultural information fossilized in place names. The section on the "Chronology and Languages of Place-Names" provides a tour-de-force through the entire history of the British Isles and documents the astonishing longevity of place-names. Thus, Celtic, Roman, Anglo-Saxon, French, and the manifold post-medieval influences (including such entries as Waterloo or Westward Ho!) give a glimpse of what a reading of longer sections of the entire book has to offer. Mills also masterly categorizes the major different types and structures of place names (folk-names, habitative names, topographical names). I wonder if the added chapters on Irish, Scottish, and Welsh place names could not have been more profitably inserted into the earlier sections, since the principles of their formation and origins are not decidedly different from the English ones. Perhaps the decision to give each of these regions/countries their own section was a political one. The volume also contains complete lists of counties and unitary authorities, maps showing the historical counties of England, Scotland, and Wales, separate maps (in part for reasons of space, in part once again because of political sensitivities) showing the current counties and unitary authorities of England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, a wonderful glossary of common elements in British place names, and a helpful "Select Bibliography for Further Reading."

Like with any encyclopedic compilation, the next edition will have to revise some errors or omissions: Adrian Room's newly added sections on Irish, Scottish, and Welsh place-names present all place-names in italics, which is a great service to readers, but A. D. Mills's old sections do not. The Wash, Lincolnshire/Norfolk, received an entry, while The Wash, Rutland, does not. But these are minor oversights considering the great wealth of exact and illuminating information contained in this diligently edited volume. Folk etymologists will profit from finding out the truth about Great and Little Snoring (Norfolk); fans of Winnie the Pooh will be excited to find a connection with Banff (Aberdeenshire); inhabitants of the state of Baden-Württemberg, Germany, will detect unexpected links with Swaffham (Norfolk) and Swaffham Bulbeck and Swaffham Prior (Cambridgeshire); and I wonder if Baldock (Hertfordshire) may soon be under observation by security forces should it become general knowledge that the town's 12th-century name was chosen by the Knights Templars and used to be Baldoc, the Old French word for Baghdad (yes, that Baghdad!).

**KEYWORDS:** Place-names, Great Britain, Onomastics

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