

## BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

### A POPULAR DICTIONARY OF CORNISH PLACE-NAMES —

by O. J. Padel. (Alison Hodge, Penzance. 1988. 214 pages paperback. £4.95.)

This book goes far towards meeting a need long felt by local historians in Cornwall, that for a scholarly and reliable work on the place-names of the county. The Historian of any parish or other area needs accurate knowledge of the development of its place-names and the meanings attributed to them, and Cornish historians have long been frustrated, first by the non-publication of J. E. B. Gover's work, and later by growing awareness of its unreliability. Mr Oliver Padel has been working for many years to meet this need and, if spared for a normal span, seems certain to do so. His first book, **Cornish Place-Name Elements** (1985), was forbidding alike in its technicality and its price, being aimed essentially at the specialist, and was probably the most important work on any aspect of Cornish studies published in our time. It is to be followed by full regional surveys, but in the meantime Mr. Padel has produced the present interim work, aimed both at the comprehension and the pocket of the general reader.

He lists and explains all the names, Cornish and English, settlements and natural features, which appear on the Ordnance Survey quarter-inch map of Cornwall; he also covers alternative names borne by these places, and additional names needed for comparative purposes, making a total of about a thousand names considered. There is an admirable introduction, covering such basic problems as the complex inter-relationships over the centuries between the Cornish and English languages, and between place-names and personal names. The book ends with lists of the elements, Cornish and English and from other languages, which form the names treated, and of the personal names found in so many of them.

The result is a most excellent book, meeting the needs of the general reader without compromising those of scholarship, which merits welcome and indeed acclaim. It would have been an even better one if more names had been treated, and if the author had made the selection himself instead of delegating this task to the Ordnance Survey.

Errors and omissions seem very few, but Townshend in Crowan takes its name not from the Dukes of Leeds (whose name was Osborne) but from a St. Aubyn-Townshend marriage in 1856. Gwennap Head, in St. Levan, is a modern and probably bogus name for the headland called Tol-Pedn-Penwith (a name not mentioned by Mr. Padel) at least since the seventeenth century. In mentioning Playing Place in Kea reference could have been made to the occurrence of the Cornish equivalent, Plain-an-Gwarry, in

Redruth and St. Hilary, and as a field-name elsewhere. But such minor criticisms in no way reduce the value and importance of this book, which will be of great use both to Cornish people interested in their history and to discerning visitors (if indeed there still be such).

It has been said that more nonsense has been written about place-names than any other subject, except perhaps personal names: writers on Cornwall have in the past contributed their full share of this, but now at last the tide has turned; Cornwall's debt to Mr. Padel is already great, and is likely to become immense.

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