

## **HOBBIT PLACE-NAMES**

Review by Joris de Moel

Hobbit Place-names. A Linguistic Excursion through the Shire by Rainer Nagel; Walking Tree Publishers, Cormarë Series 23, 2012. No longer available through Amazon. Barnes & Noble \$24.30, Tolkienshop €17.95 + shipping, [www.tolkienshop.com](http://www.tolkienshop.com) Softcover, grey-blue green cover, cover art by Anke Eißmann. Contents: "Foreword by series editor", "Introductory remarks", "A Glossary of Shire place-names", "A Glossary of other place-names in the Shire", "A Glossary of Breeland place-names", "Bibliography". [Reviewed "Beyond Bree" Apr'12. Ed.]

This book started life as a series of lectures on the etymology (or toponymy or onomastics) of the place-names of the Shire and was comprehensively reworked into the present volume over a number of years, each time updated to take into account the latest insights and research. Shire place-names have gotten short shrift compared to Elvish names in the study of "Tolkienymics" for various reasons, but Nagel rightfully points out that both from the viewpoint of Middle-earth studies and source studies a closer look at these names is both useful and enlightening.

The introduction leads one through the basics of toponymy, of course especially that of England. The place-names of England were influenced by the various migrations and invasions (equating various Hobbit migrations with Angles, Jutes and Saxons) and things such as the Great Vowel shift. As the original audience [for Nagel's work] was German there is some attention paid to some of the vagaries of the German translations of especially The Lord of the Rings. I found this quite interesting, but I have read the Carroux translation and part of the Krege translation.

It is part of Nagel's intention to show the depth of Tolkien's sub-creation: the influence of the history of language and invasions of England and how he implemented those in the Shire, as the entrance to the stage of Middle-earth, much as he used the Hobbits as the more recognisable everyman, the gateway to the narrative as a whole. The place-names used in The

Shire are, if not identical, similar enough to real ones to be immediately familiar to those who are familiar with place-names in Britain. It should come as no surprise that Tolkien took great care in conceiving of these names.

There is a brief diversion into common Hobbit names, stating the commonly held ideas about what they mean, or Tolkien might have meant by them. If I may be forgiven a bit of tongue in cheek: J. Redding Ware in Passing English of the Victorian Era: a dictionary of Heterodox English Slang, and Phrase (London, 1909, reissue 2013, Bodleian Library) gives "Bagger, bag-thief" as "a stealer of rings by seizing the hand."

After the introduction, the book is divided into three parts, "A Glossary of Shire place-names", "A Glossary of other place-names in the Shire", "A Glossary of Breeland place-names". Though I can understand the divisions, especially between Bree-land and the Shire, I don't think it would have done harm to integrate the other two under something like "place-names, water-names and locations of the Shire". I found the content of the glossaries is both enjoyable and interesting to read. Even if I was slightly disappointed to read the confirmation that Standelf is likely a stone quarry and not a tin mine. From the Cornish *stannaries*, Latin *stannum*, "tin", which might have been an additional economic reason for the expansion into Buckland as well as a bit of support for the tin coinage mentioned in The Return of the Shadow. (p. 227)

I found the book well researched and readable, and I feel that it offers sufficient in the way of introduction to the subject of place-names that it should be interesting and understandable to readers who have no knowledge of toponomy at all. Those not interested in the parts about the German translation can easily skip those sections.

I do feel the book would be improved by the addition of a general index, or an index of meanings and perhaps in a second edition such might be added.

On the whole it is a book I would recommend both to researchers and those who merely want to know a bit more about how Tolkien felt the Shire hung together and what the names tell us about the place.