

Notes and Queries

Sheppeck and Sheppeck-Stale

Cotswold Tales is a collection of Cotswold dialect tales edited with notes by Alan Sutton. Most of the tales come from three books, one of them first published by Sydney Savory Buckman in 1890, the others by George Edmund Hall in 1915 and 1921. Here I merely mention Sutton's note on one expression in Buckman's story "Autumn". The note is entirely typical of Sutton's input. Any comment from me would be superfluous.

Of a farmer's crop it is said in the story: "His carn did stand up strait as a schoppeck-stael."¹ Sutton's note on this reads as follows: " 'Schoppeck-stael'. For this term I have to admit defeat. It is either blindingly simple and I am missing it, or it is so totally obscure that no reference or dialect book quotes it. What is a 'schoppeck'? Presumably we are looking for a 'schoppeck's' tail?"²

Compare now *sheppeck/sheppick*, "pitchfork", traced back to 1602 in *OED*, where the suggestion is that it represents **sheaf-pick*.³ Also relevant is *EDD sheppeck* and variants, recorded for locations in the west Midland counties of Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Herefordshire, Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire, with the gloss "A hay-fork; a pitchfork". There follows *schoppeck-stael*; "the handle of a pitchfork", with the above citation from Buckman, identified as belonging to Gloucestershire.⁴ The second element, *stael*, corresponds of course to Standard English *stale* for "handle".

Interestingly, *sheppeck* for "hay-fork" survived well into the twentieth century, to be recorded by *SED* for parts of Worcestershire, Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire.⁵ Although since the late nineteenth century it had thus lost ground to the north-west and north-east, with Herefordshire and Warwickshire no longer represented, this is otherwise entirely consistent with the pattern recorded by *EDD*.

References

1. Sutton, Alan, ed., *Cotswold Tales*, Stroud, Alan Sutton, 1991, p. 119.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 233.
3. Simpson, J. A., and E. S. C. Weiner, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989, Vol. 15, pp. 243-244.
4. Wright, Joseph, *The English Dialect Dictionary*, 1898-1905, rpt. London, Oxford University Press, 1970, Vol. 5, p. 378.
5. Orton, Harold, and Michael V. Barry, *Survey of English Dialects*, Vol. 2, *The West Midland Counties*, Part 1, Leeds, E. J. Arnold, 1969, pp. 106-108, I.7.11, "Hay-Fork".

J. B. Smith

Query: Flies at Elstow Fair

Elstow Fair in Bedfordshire was on 3 May Old Style, and subsequently on 15 May. A common saying in many parts of Bedfordshire, when flies first began to be troublesome on meat and fish, was: *The flies have been to Elstow Fair to buy their bellows*.¹

There is of course a pun here. Bellows were commonly bought and sold at fairs, and bellows are used for blowing. Applied to flies and other insects, *to blow* also means “to deposit eggs”, as in the expression *fly-blown*. In *OED* this is sense 28 of *to blow*, which is placed among “senses of doubtful position”. The reason for doubt is that this sense of *to blow* “has nothing to do with the notion of blowing or inflating meat, but is apparently connected with old notions of natural history”.² What these notions might be is not stated. Can anyone suggest what they might have been?

References

1. Apperson, G. L., *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Proverbs*, Ware, Wordsworth, 1993, p. 181, quoting Hone, *Year-Book*, 1831.
2. Simpson, J. A., and E. S. C. Weiner, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989, Vol. 2, p. 317.

J. B. Smith

Query: Reverend

The topic in question is the use of the term “reverend” with reference to a clergyman. My recollection from my youth (half a century ago) is as follows:

- a. One might say “Rev. John Smith”, “Rev. Mr. Smith” but not “Rev. Smith”.
- b. One did not employ “reverend” when addressing a clergyman, i.e. one addressed him as “Mr. Smith” but not as “Reverend Mr. Smith”.
- c. Exceptions: Rev. Smith was an Americanism; the address “Reverend sir” was archaic.

My experience was based in Scotland but I was not aware of any distinction in usage between Scotland and England.

My reason for raising this question is that I have come across in the media cases where these conventions are broken, i.e. reference to a clergyman as “Rev. Smith” and addressing him as “Reverend”. This might be regarded simply as changing customs. However, when they occur in, say, period drama, they could be considered as anomalous. For example, if someone in Victorian England addresses a clergyman as “reverend” this would be an example of anachronism, if I am right about the former conventions.

I would be grateful for your comments.

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