

Richard McKinley
1921–1999

I. A Personal Appreciation

When I first met Richard McKinley, in 1972 on my first return to Leicester, it was through my wife, Suella, who had been accepted onto the University's Museums Studies Course. In those days, the social historians on that course attended seminars in the Department of English Local History, where Richard had been firmly established then for some seven years in his reincarnation as Marc Fitch Research Fellow. In addition to his work for the, by then, well established English Surnames Survey, he also taught palaeography in the Department, which is how Suella came into contact with him. It so happened that Alan Everitt included the Museum Studies people in his invitation to his house for his reception for English Local History. Being impecunious and without transport, we were dependent on others to get out there in the evening and Richard kindly offered us a lift. We had not travelled far when he asked us if we had noticed a change in the road surface and noise. We were intrigued, but had to confess that we had not noticed, upon which Richard explained to us that we had passed from the City into the County and then enlightened us further about the boundary extensions which had led to the inclusion of the sub-urban village into the City.

Everyone, I suspect, will have a similar story to recount about Richard's immense erudition which he shared quietly and modestly. It is only partly true to say that the learning was the accumulation of his years as an archivist in the south-west and as an editor for the Victoria County History for Leicestershire, for others have worked as archivists and not acquired a fraction of his learning or, indeed, displayed the same modesty.

Through the early 1970s, we incidentally came into contact, as when he brought the Museum Studies and English Local History people to the City Archives to experience the medieval records of the borough as an integral part of their introduction to medieval palaeography. He probably knew the records better than me, but he allowed me to make some comments. Then, when I was considering postgraduate research, he was a member of a 'reception committee' which made suggestions, his being an edition of the Seagrave cartulary, again reflecting his incomparable knowledge. When we moved to Rochdale in 1973, the ubiquity of his learning was impressed

further on me for I encountered his University of Manchester M.A. thesis, his edition of the cartulary of Breedon Priory, the MS of which is deposited in the John Rylands University Library. On reading his edition and the cartulary, I marvelled at the level of achievement and was astonished why it had not been awarded more than an M.A. I can only presume that the giants of that age had enormous expectations and standards and that Richard's modesty intervened again.

It was not until 1988 that I met him again, this time as a colleague as he inducted me into my present post, from which he had retired two years previously. He had not changed at all: still immensely erudite, modest and self-effacing. Whilst he left me to my own devices, he was always encouraging and he invited me to assist him with the organisation of the Council's conference at Leicester in 1991. Many delegates will fondly remember, amongst many other recollections, the coach trip which he led in east Leicestershire on the Sunday afternoon, despite the torrential rainfall.

These personal reflections have been recounted because his intellectual achievements are self-evident, but they must be remembered. By 1986, when he retired, he had researched for over twenty years for the English Surnames Survey, having been appointed in October 1965. During that time, he had produced initially one of the Department's Occasional Papers on *Norfolk Surnames in the Sixteenth Century* (1969), which was the prelude to his considerable publications for the Survey. Six years later, it was followed by the first of the ESS volumes, *Norfolk and Suffolk Surnames in the Middle Ages* (1975). Thereafter a regular stream of his ESS volumes appeared, commencing with *The Surnames of Oxfordshire* (1977), *Lancashire* (1981), and *Sussex* (1988), as well as encouraging the volume by George Redmonds on the *Yorkshire West Riding* (1973). At Alan Everitt's in 1972, we had discussed in some depth his work on East Anglia and his then current work on Oxfordshire, in which he developed intimations by Paul Harvey on the description of women and Eric Stone on the association of free status and 'locative' bynames in some regions of England. Sixteen years later, it was awesome for me to reflect back on how he had extended other innumerable concepts through clear analysis and succinct exposition (although his books in the English Surnames Series invariably ran to more than 300 pages). Along the way, he published in the *Genealogical Magazine* and *The Local Historian*, so that his research reached a wider, and very appreciative, audience. His concern for a wider understanding of his subject was realised finally by the invitation from

David Hey, as general editor of the series, to contribute *A History of British Surnames*, published by Longmans in 1990. As an aside, I remember the keenness of Bill Nicolaisen to acquire a copy at the conference in 1991, another reflection of the esteem for Richard's work. The last piece of work which he produced was perhaps fittingly for *Nomina* (14 [1992], 1–6), a discussion of medieval Latin translations of Middle English personal names.

Perhaps it is only appropriate to note briefly in this journal Richard's earlier contribution to scholarship as an editor for the Victoria County History before his appointment as Marc Fitch Research Fellow, but it is significant that he assisted in the compilation of one of the pioneering interpretive volumes, which involved Hilton, Thirsk, Hoskins, Kerridge and other luminaries, as well as a topographical volume. Equally, however, his own oeuvre in the volumes was massive, encompassing civic life, the forest, political developments, and social and administrative history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Additional to that career with the Leicestershire VCH was his employment as an archivist in Exeter.

Members of the Council and Society will appreciate better than me the contribution which Richard made to their organisation, but great esteem is reflected in his selection as Chairman in 1988. That regard was shared by his colleagues here and most significantly by the late Marc Fitch, an astute judge of people, who had a fondness for Richard which was reciprocated by Richard's piece on the distribution of some surnames from Yorkshire towns published in the festschrift for Fitch in 1976.

Richard McKinley died on 23 May 1999.

David Postles

II. An Intellectual Appreciation

I first came across Richard McKinley's work in the summer of 1974, when he was kind enough to send me a copy of his 1969 work *Norfolk Surnames in the Sixteenth Century*. At this time, I was engaged in collecting material for what became my Nottingham Ph.D. thesis of 1980 and my book of 1994 about Scandinavian personal names in Norfolk. I was at once struck by the precision of Richard's work and by his intimate knowledge of the source

material. For me, it was fascinating to note that such surnames as *Downing* (< OE *D_ning*), *Osbern* (< Anglo-Scandinavian *_sbeorn*) and *Thurkill* (< ODan *Thurkil*), which belong to personal names that I knew from my research on medieval records, occurred in Norfolk in the sixteenth century (the sources being the 'Military Survey' of 1522 and the returns for the subsidy of 1523). This survey is still an important study for a most intractable period, the Early Modern Period, where further work is urgently needed. McKinley's approach was that of a historian, and all his work was permeated with a deep knowledge of English social and economic history and a formidable command of the sources. His Victoria County History training and the methodological stringency associated with that work are readily apparent. The historical approach is still the most common form of research on surnames, and in the hands of a scholar like McKinley it was very effective indeed, as is revealed by his English Surnames Series volumes on Norfolk and Suffolk (1975), Oxfordshire (1977), Lancashire (1981) and Sussex (1988). This is not to say that there is no place for a linguistic approach—on the contrary, generations of scholars, starting with such illustrious names as Erik Björkman, Max Förster, Eilert Ekwall, Olof von Feilitzen, Mattias Löfvenberg and Hugh Smith have managed to combine language and history in the analysis of medieval personal name and byname material. When we turn to later material, and surname material is essentially later material, we are confronted by different sets of problems. The Great Vowel Shift together with the establishment of an orthographic system largely corresponding to that of the period 1400–1430 meant an end to the correspondence between the written and spoken languages characteristic of the earlier periods of the history of English. This means that modern material needs even more exact documentation to ensure that etymologies and the tracing of phonological development and divergence is accurate and reliable. This becomes painfully clear when we look at the surname research carried on by Herbert Voigtl and his pupils, which can be characterized as a narrowly linguistic approach largely based on secondary authorities. This is not the place to go into the shortcomings of Voigtl's work,¹ but they only serve to emphasize that all linguistic work on surnames must be based on sound documentation buttressed by knowledge

¹ For further discussion, see J. Insley, 'Recent trends in research into English bynames and surnames: some critical remarks', *Studia Neophilologica*, 65 (1993), 57–71 (pp. 61 and 63–64).

of the primary sources.

I became more closely acquainted with Richard McKinley's work when I reviewed his Lancashire volume for *Nomina* in 1982.² At that time, I criticized the volume for not giving enough attention to the linguistic aspects of surname research, but, at the same time, I indicated what could be done with the large amount of material it placed at our disposal. In this context, we should also add that the important chapter on locative surnames is a first rate source for place-name research. It is also an important work for the personal nomenclature of medieval Lancashire. McKinley underlines the conservatism of Lancashire by pointing out the persistent survival of the personal name *Thurstan* (< Anglo-Scandinavian *Purst_n*) into the Modern period. The same could be said of OE *_htrd*, reflexes of which are attested in Lancashire as late as the early sixteenth century. McKinley's four English Surnames Series volumes have provided a solid foundation on which future surname research must build. In particular, their meticulous attention to the primary sources is exemplary and a crucial element in ensuring their lasting value both for historians and for philologists. They are an impressive intellectual achievement and a fitting memorial to a remarkable scholar.

John Insley

² *Nomina*, 6 (1982), 93–98.