

# Should dictionaries include toponym entries?

*Joshua Nash, now at the University of New England (Armidale), has contributed several articles to Placenames Australia dealing with the toponymies of Australia's island communities. In our September and December issues in 2013 and again in June 2015, he reported on placenames on Norfolk Island. In the March 2015 issue, he discussed some of the names on Kangaroo Island, South Australia. Dr Nash recently gave a paper at the 2015 AUSTRALEX annual conference in Auckland, in which he noted some benefits of placename databases such as his own material on Norfolk Island. The following remarks are an edited extract from that paper.*

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My Norfolk Island toponymy database, stored at the Norfolk Island Museum and downloadable from the Internet as my PhD thesis, is a placename listing which comprises the island's various historical periods. These placenames are an important part of the folk lexicon of the Norfolk island language, and raise the question of the proper place of toponyms in general dictionaries.

Jan Tent spoke about similar issues in theoretical fashion in his 2009 Australex paper entitled 'The Placename Dictionary'. [See our link to this paper on the ANPS homepage, [www.anps.org.au/about.html](http://www.anps.org.au/about.html)] Here I apply this question to a specific case study. What insights are available for lexicography, toponymic theory, and the compiling of placename gazetteers and maps when we access such a large database corpus as the Norfolk Island data?

The digital dictionary on my computer lists countless numbers of placenames—*Paris, Fleet Street, Mount Everest*. The question of what should and should not be included in dictionaries does not have a value judgment-free answer. The simple answer is: it all depends what the dictionary is meant to accomplish. In the case of presenting word lists and dictionaries in Norfolk and its relationship to the variety of English spoken on the island, because of their importance to the place and the language, placenames have traditionally been included. My work then fits in well within this 'let's-include-placenames-in-dictionaries-and-databases' aspect of writing about and documenting Norfolk. Peter Mühlhäusler's 3000+ entry lexical database of Norfolk and the Pitcairn Island language includes placenames. It seems I am in reasonable company.

Placenames do offer great value for dictionaries. However, lexicographers have long debated the difference between a dictionary and an encyclopaedia. If the distinction were to be maintained, one would expect scholars to consign placenames to an encyclopaedia if they mention them

at all. A similar distinction is incorporated in what Tent identifies as 'placename dictionaries' and 'dictionaries of places'—the former deal with the etymology and meaning of toponyms, whilst the latter primarily contain encyclopaedic information about the places to which the toponyms refer. Some placename publications are a blend of the two; and it's true to say that in the world of dictionaries in general, the distinction is only rarely maintained: most general-purpose dictionaries these days contain encyclopedic material.

The prime reason for this may well be a commercial one: publishers are well aware that readers want encyclopedic entries (that is, words that begin with a capital letter) in their dictionaries. But there are good linguistic reasons, too. Encyclopedic headwords, including those which are placenames, contain archaic or fossilised lexical and grammatical forms which may give insight into the non-toponymic lexicon. This is certainly the case with Norfolk. For example, several Norfolk placenames encode spatial description and locationals on Norfolk and in Norfolk—*Down-a-Town, Out ar Mission, Up in a Stick*. If included in a non-toponymically focused dictionary, encyclopaedia or word list, such placenames give more than mere toponymic information; they give insight into the pragmatics and history of spatial relationships in the presentation of other types of information. For example, the physical location of people's houses can be encoded grammatically, e.g. *Up Chat's*—'Up at Chat's place'. Including these linguistic relationships in dictionary listings is beneficial to general lexical documentation. Not including them can thus result in loss of information. And that seems a good enough reason to include encyclopedic entries, including toponyms, in general-purpose dictionaries.

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