CARDINAL TRANSPOSALS

DARRYL FRANCIS
Hampton, Middlesex, England

The cardinals (the number-names ONE, TWO, THREE, and so on) are always worthy of consideration when one is on the lookout for some new logical project. Some while ago, I had the idea of trying to find transposals of the number-names. Very little work seems to have been published on this subject, a situation this article attempts to rectify.

To give myself a chance of building a fairly full list of transposals, I considered all number-names from ONE to TWENTY, and every tenth number-name (THIRTY, FORTY, and so on) from there to ONE HUNDRED. One number-name in this series, EIGHTY, remains untransposed: I searched for possible words such as GITHEY, YEIGHT and YIGHTE, but all to no avail. Another number-name, FIVE, yielded a transposal which is not English but Old Norse! Although this goes beyond the bounds of what is logically acceptable, it seemed better to present some transposal, in any language at all, rather than again admit defeat. If anyone can find English-language transposals for these two number-names, please send them to the editor. (For that matter, any improvements or amendments to my list would be welcome.)

For the first ten number-names, I have listed every transposal that I know of; for the other number-names, I have listed only the best transposal that I am aware of.

1 There are six ways in which the letters O, N and E can be arranged, and all of these are words. The commonest of the five transposals is EON. Webster's Second contains NEO (an advocate of that which is novel) and NOE (a Biblical proper name). The Oxford English Dictionary gives us ENO (a 17th century form of enough) and OEN (an obsolete form of owe).

2 The commonest transposal is, of course, TOW. Webster's Third contains OWT (a dialect English variant of both aught and ought) and WOT (a verb meaning 'to know, to have knowledge of').

3 Of the nine transposals that I was able to find (the greatest number for any number-name), two, ETHER and THERE, are very common words. Webster's Second contains ERTHE (an obsolete variant form of earth) and RETHE (an obsolete adjective meaning 'severe, cruel'). The Oxford contains the remaining five, none of which will be instantly recognizable to the speaker of late 20th century English: HERTE (an obsolete form of hart, heart and hurt),
HETER (an adjective meaning 'severe, cruel'), REHET (cheer or entertainment), REHETE (a 13th century form of the past tense of the verb reach), and THEER (a 15th century form of there). Notice that HETER and RETHE have exactly the same meaning!

4 The only transposal which I managed to track down was ROUF, an obsolete form of both roof and rough appearing in the Oxford.

5 As mentioned in the introduction, the only transposal which I found is from the Old Norse language: VEIF (a flapping or waving thing), which appears in the etymology of waif in Webster's Third. I had hoped to find VIFE somewhere, possibly as an obsolete form of fife or wife, but I was out of luck.

6 The only transposal is XIS, the plural of xi, the 14th letter of the Greek alphabet. This plural is explicitly indicated in Webster's Third.

7 The commonest transposal is EVENS, a word I needn't define further. However, there are at least four other transposals to be found. Webster's Third allows the pluralization of nevē (a type of granular snow) to NEVES. Webster's Second has vene as an obsolete variant of vein and ween, which allows me to add VENES to the list. Finally, the Oxford allows EEVNS (a 17th century form of evens) and VENES (a 13th century variant of the verb vene, meaning 'to drive off, to impel, to flog').

8 TEIGH, listed in Webster's Second, is an obsolete word, the past tense of the verb tea, meaning 'to draw'.

9 There appear to be two transposals, both obsolete forms of everyday words. Webster's Second has INNE (an obsolete variant form of in and inn), and the Oxford has NEIN (a 14th century form of nine). (Most readers are also aware that NEIN is German for no.)

10 NET comes to mind at once. A second transposal, ENT, is given two meanings in the Oxford: an obsolete word for a scion or graft, and a metaphysical term for an existent unity.

11 LEVENE is a surname appearing in the 1970 printing of Webster's Biographical Dictionary: Phoebus Aaron Theodore Levene (1869 -1940) is a Russian-born American chemist. An examination of any large telephone directory will reveal a multitude of people with this surname. (Two variants that appear in the 1974 London telephone directory are Le-vene and LeVene.)

12 VELWET is a 15th and 16th century form of the common word velvet, according to the Oxford English Dictionary. Interestingly, the same dictionary gives WELVET as another old spelling of this word.

13 The Oxford gives THREITEN as a Scots form of threaten.

14 FOURTENE is a 14th, 15th and 16th century form of fourteen, ac-
cording to the Oxford English Dictionary, FORETUNE may exist as a variant spelling of fortune, but I couldn't find it anywhere.

15 FIFTENE is a 13th, 14th, 15th and 16th century form of fifteen, again according to Oxford.

16 The Oxford gives SEXTINE as a word, defining it as a type of poem.

17 SEVENTENE is a Middle English form of seventeen, and can be found in the etymology of the latter word in Webster's Third.

18 TEHEEING is the present participle of the verb tehee (meaning 'to titter'). This appears explicitly in Webster's Third.

19 The Oxford gives NINETENE as a 14th century form of nineteen.

20 Just one transposal came to light: TWYNTE, a variant spelling of twynt, a rare obsolete noun meaning 'a jot, a particle'. Twynt is a main entry in the Oxford, and TWYNTE is in boldface after it.

30 Of all the transposals in this article, TYRITH was the most difficult to find. Basically, this is the -eth form of the verb tyre, a 14th to 17th century form of tire (meaning 'to tear flesh with the beak'). TYRITH appears only in a 1486 quotation under tire in the Oxford: 'An hawke tyreth vpon Rumpys, she fedith on all manner of flesh'.

40 TROFY is a reformed spelling of trophy, in Webster's Second.

50 TIFFY is an adjective from Webster's Second meaning 'peevish'.

60 At first sight, one might think that this number-name is untransposable. However, Webster's Third contains the immensely useful word XYSTI, explicitly shown there as the plural of xystus (a walk lined with trees).

70 SEVYNTE and SEYVENT are both 14th century, north-of-England forms of seventh appearing in the Oxford English Dictionary.

80 This number-name has flummoxed me so far. If anyone can find a transposal of this word (even in some language other than English), please release the information to an anxiously awaiting world!

90 The only transposal which I found in my journeys was TYNNE, a 16th century form of tinny. It appears in the following 1576 quotation given at tinny in the Oxford: 'Let this be kept in a Sylver or Tynnie vesell'.

Although I was unable to find a genuine transposal for this number-name, I did manage to create the coinage UNDERHONED. Though the word doesn't appear in any dictionary, its meaning is obvious: 'not honed, or sharpened, sufficiently for the purpose required'.