who enjoy looking through dic-

tionaries were the real prize-winning
teachers’ pets, and I speak as one
who has the word ‘perspicacious’ on
her year 10 report card, so I should
know. I even like Scrabble—probab-
ly because it’s the one competitive
game I invariably win. I didn’t get
called ‘Butterfingers’ or, less politely,
‘Fuckwit’ while playing Scrabble at
Templestowe High, which will be
my abiding memory of all officially
sanctioned ball-sports. That’s before
I discovered the trick of avowed
near-permanent menstruation as a
means of opting out of Sports Days
forever.

I purchased a dictionary the other
day: A Dictionary of Eponyms by Cyril
Leslie Beeching (Oxford $14.95). This
is the ideal present for the pedant in
your family. It contains all sorts of
words which I didn’t even suspect
were the names of actual people. For
d example, did you know that the
word boycott, as in secondary, refers
to Charles Cunningham Boycott
(1832-97), a British officer targeted by
the Irish Land League “who at-
tempted to shut him off from all so-
cial and commercial activities”? I bet
you didn’t. Or that Jean Nicot intro-
duced tobacco into France, hence
nicotine and, I suppose, Gauloise. I
have been totally unbearable since I
found this useful font of trivia.

How do eponyms relate to the more
recent phenomenon of famous
people relying on their image in one
area to sell goods in another? Eliza-
tabeth Taylor’s image of worldly
glamour sells White Diamonds per-
fume, for example. Paul Newman’s
venture into food products is less
easy to explain. Perhaps fame in one
field is now enough to carry over into
any other, as there is nothing about
Paul Newman that immediately
brings salad dressing to mind. Who
knows, perhaps the sentence ‘Pass
the Paul Newman’ may remain cur-
rent long after the actor has passed
away, and an eponym will be born.

I received a rather strange example
of the Famous Person’s book for
review the other day: Linda
McCartney’s Main Courses and Linda
McCartney’s Light Lunches (both by
Linda McCartney and Peter Cox,
Bloomsbury, $11.95). Both these
small cookbooks are bowdlerised
(Thomas Bowdler, 1754-1825) from
her UK-bestselling Home Cooking.
Linda McCartney has always been
portrayed as a bit of a homebody in
the media, not at all glamorous. Did
the idea of Ms McCartney as not
quite a real celebrity in her own right
contribute to the success of her cook-
book? After all, Home Cooking hardly
reaches out and grabs you with a
fatal attraction from shelves over-
whelmed with excitingly named
books of ethnic cuisine, does it?

Perhaps it was the exact conjunc-
tion of wisely, secondary fame with the
rubber gloves-clad title Home Cook-
ing which spelt success. After all, a
well-dressed ‘tart’ image wouldn’t
fit in with the sweet domesticity con-
jured up by the title. One can’t im-
agine Elizabeth Taylor producing a
cookbook called Home Cooking, any
more than a perfume called Chastity.
But Linda McCartney, the person
who could never quite move in time
to the music, whose hair is so over-
whelmingly straight...Somehow this
makes sense.

The books themselves contain prac-
tical and easy vegetarian recipes. Oc-
casionally they are so straightfor-
ward as to be almost silly, as in the case
of Vegetarian Sausage Rolls: “Place a
sausage across the centre of each strip of pastry and
wrap the pastry around the
sausage...” There is actually an il-
ustration of the said sausage rolls in
case you didn’t understand the con-
cept. These books would be useful
for a person who is something of a
virgin in culinary terms. They are
respectable and non-threatening,
decorated by images of Ms Mc-
cartney looking suitably modest
and Linda McCartney looking suitably modest and
pleased, in a quiet sort of way. I
am reminded of television advertise-
ments where the mother or wife is
congratulated for her choice of mar-
garine, and her long-suffering face
creases into a smile. Oh well, if the
apron fits, I suppose one should at
least make the effort to wear it.

Penelope Cottier.