

SCOTTISH PLACE-NAME NEWS No.1

Summer 1996

The Newsletter of the SCOTTISH PLACE-NAME SOCIETY

Honorary Presides {1}

G.W.S. Barrow, University of Edinburgh, and W.F.H. Nicolaisen, University of Aberdeen.

Committee Members

Convenor: Ian F. Fraser, Scottish Place-Name Survey, School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh

Vice-Convenor: Doreen Waugh, Assistant Head/Director of Studies, The Mary Erskine School, Edinburgh, and Honorary Research Fellow, University of Glasgow

Secretary: Richard Cox, Department of Celtic, University of Aberdeen

Treasurer/Membership Secretary: Carole Hough, Department of English Language, University of Glasgow

Newsletter Editor: Simon Taylor, Anderson Research Fellow, St Andrews Scottish Studies Institute, University of St Andrews.

Ordinary Members

Dauvit Broun, Department of Scottish History, University of Glasgow

Graham Caie, Head of Department of English Language, University of Glasgow

Barbara Crawford, Department of Medieval History, University of St Andrews

Margaret A. Mackay, Director of the School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh

Note:

{1} The Committee decided to revive the guid Scots word *preses* (plural *presides*) for 'president'.

The postal address of the Scottish Place-Name Society is:
c/o School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh EH8 9LD.
Newsletter Editor: Simon Taylor, c/o St Andrews Scottish Studies Institute,
University of St Andrews, St Andrews KY16 9AL.

Annual membership of the society costs £5. To join simply send fee with your name, address and list of interests to the Treasurer Carole Hough, 12 University Gardens, University of Glasgow, Glasgow G12 8QQ.

CONVENOR IAN FRASER WRITES:

In this first Newsletter of the Society, I thought it appropriate that, on behalf of the Committee, I extend a warm welcome to our members. The membership is made up of a wide variety of people. Some are full-time academics, working in various aspects of history, language, archaeology and geography. But the bulk of the membership is composed of people who find place-names an enduring fascination, giving a special insight into many facets of our history and culture. Both professionals and amateurs alike are frequently constrained by the lack of easy access to place-name material. The establishing of a Database, along with the publication of a series of volumes on Scottish place-names area by area, as proposed by the Society, will go a long way in meeting those needs.

The successful International Congress of Onomastic Sciences, which met in Aberdeen (4-11 August) was a meeting of name scholars from some 40 countries. The delegates had an opportunity to exchange ideas on the study of names, and to explore new approaches to this many-faceted discipline. The Scottish participants made many new contacts, especially with Scandinavian scholars, most of whom are involved in long-standing and well-funded place-name projects.

Crucial to the development of Scottish onomastics is the whole question of funding. Over the past two years we have made several attempts to attract funds, particularly for the Database. As yet a major sponsor has not been forthcoming [see *Database News* below]. The formation of the Society will, we hope, give an added boost to our efforts to secure funding that is sorely needed to put Scottish place-name studies on a firm financial and academic footing.

Ian F. Fraser
Convenor

EDITORIAL

After the launch of the Scottish Place-Name Society in St Andrews in February of this year, its membership rose rapidly to around 140 - eloquent testimony to the lively interest in place-name studies in Scotland today. As will be seen from the list of members and their interests, which will form the bulk of SCOTTISH PLACE-NAMES NEWS No. 2, we are a broad kirk, with a wide geographical and linguistic sweep from Muckle Flugga to the Rhinns of Galloway.

Onomastics is the 'leirit or fantouche' word for the study of names of all kinds, especially personal and place-names. However, all other proper names, such as brand names, ship-names, names of political parties etc. also fall within its remit. Toponymy is the branch of onomastics which deals specifically with place-names, and those engaged in this branch, for whatever reason and with whatever level of intensity, are toponymists. So welcome, all you toponymists out there!

There are many reasons for getting involved in toponymy. You might be a local historian trying to delve beyond the often late and fragmentary written record to piece together a coherent picture of your locality before that documentary record began, and may find that place-names offer the most fruitful line of inquiry. Or you might be interested in Scotland-wide history, wrestling with the many unanswered questions relating to the formation of the Scottish kingdom over a thousand years ago, aware that our greatest and most pervasive tangible legacy from this period is our place-name stock, and that a greater understanding of it will yield a greater understanding of the cultural, political and administrative forces at work at this crucial period in Scotland's history.

You might be an archaeologist, amateur or professional, trying to interpret a site, or piece together an archaeological profile of an area, finding that the only trace of an otherwise lost archaeological feature is a place-name.

You might be interested in one or more of the many languages of Scotland, past and present, and aware that the Scottish landscape is multilingual, still 'speaking' languages long gone, or much changed.

You might be interested in the flora and fauna of the past, or industrial or agricultural history, or the stories and legends that attach to place-names.

Or you might be interested in place-names as place-names, for their lyrical, evocative qualities, and for the way in which they define the identity not only of a region, but of the people who live in that region.

This wide diversity of toponymic motives, coupled with the wide diversity of language and landscape in Scotland, mean that toponymists have tended to work in isolation from each other: this can be a geographical isolation; or a disciplinary one, with archaeologists talking only to other archaeologists, historians to historians, and linguists to linguists. One of the main aims of the Scottish Place-Name Society, and the chief purpose of the Members' Directory in SCOTTISH PLACE-NAMES NEWS No.2, is to counteract this, and to act as a focus and a forum for everybody involved in any and all aspects of toponymy. Your committee thought that the most immediate and effective way of doing this was to circulate within the Society the toponymic interests and activities of all the membership, along with a full list of names, addresses and telephone numbers. And at the same time to encourage members to contact one another if they find there is any point of shared interest.

As already mentioned, we want to devote much of SCOTTISH PLACE-NAMES NEWS No.2 to this end.

IF ANYONE DOES NOT WANT THEIR NAME, ADDRESS & TELEPHONE NUMBER CIRCULATED IN THIS WAY, PLEASE INFORM THE SOCIETY BY HALLOWEEN 1996 (31.10.96).

PUBLICISING THE SOCIETY

If you would like to publicise the Society through a local or special interest group in which you are involved, leaflets are available from our Secretary, Richard Cox, c/o Celtic Department, University of Aberdeen, Old Aberdeen AB9 2UB.

CONFERENCES PAST & FUTURE

Past

Uses of Place-Names: This was the name of a day conference held at St Andrews on 17th February this year, and attended by around 130 people. Speakers from a variety of disciplines (archaeology, historical geography, history, linguistics, and literary studies) from Scotland, Wales, England and Denmark, spoke of the uses and importance of place-names in their respective fields.

The conference papers are being edited and will be out as a book called *The Uses of Place-Names* in April 1997.

The 19th International Congress of Onomastic Sciences: Over 200 delegates from around 40 countries attended this huge onomastic event held in Aberdeen from the 4th to 11th August this year. A Congress of the International Council of Onomastic Sciences is held every three years: the last one was in Trier in Germany, the next one (in 1999) will be in Santiago de Compostella in northern Spain.

This was the first time ICOS had been held in Scotland, and this was thanks to the hard work and commitment of Professor W.F.H. Nicolaisen, as well as to his influential stature in international onomastics. Professor Nicolaisen, whose book *Scottish Place-Names*, published in 1976, remains the best introduction to Scottish place-name studies, is based at Aberdeen University, and has just retired as president of ICOS. There will be a fuller report on the Congress in a future issue of *SCOTTISH PLACE-NAME NEWS*.

Future

Project Pont: A DAY SEMINAR to launch PROJECT PONT, a multi-disciplinary initiative to explore Timothy Pont's late 16th century maps of Scotland, will be held on Wednesday 2nd. October at the National Library of Scotland (Map Library), Edinburgh. These maps throw a unique light on all aspects of 16th century Scotland, its history, geography, architecture, landscape and place-names. Registration fee £12.00 (£6.00 concessions), includes tea & coffee but not lunch. **For more information contact Map Library Manager, NLS, 33 Salisbury Place, Edinburgh EH9 1SL or 'phone 0131 226 4531 x 3418.**

Scottish Place-Name Society Conference: The Society is holding a DAY CONFERENCE at the David Hume Tower, University of Edinburgh, on Saturday, 16th November, 1996. It will be an international affair, with speakers from Denmark, England, Northern Ireland, Norway and Wales.

You will find full details on the last page of this Newsletter, which includes the Registration Form.

The Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland (SNSBI) is holding its ANNUAL CONFERENCE in Glasgow, at St Andrews College, Bearsden, from 4th-7th April, 1997. Many of the papers will have a Scottish theme, and it is open to non-members. **For full details contact the Secretary, Ms J. Scherr, c/o Queen's Building Library, University of Bristol, Bristol BS8 1TR, England.** For more details of the SNSBI, see under ***OTHER PLACE-NAME SOCIETIES***.

Scottish Place-Name Society AGM & Day Conference will be held over the weekend of 26th-27th April 1997. Details in next Newsletter.

PLACE-NAMES AT THE MOD

Comann an Luchd-Ionnsachaidh (Society for Gaelic Learners and Supporters) are organising a series of talks in English on Gaelic-related topics at the Mòd in Blairgowrie this October. Two have a definite interest for toponymists:

Tuesday 15th October: Hamish Robertson on the Gaelic Heritage of Strathardle, Glenshee and Glenisla [an important aspect of which is toponymy]

Thursday 17th October: Simon Taylor on Place-Names and Gaelic in the Eastern Lowlands.

All talks are at 11 a.m. and take place in Blairgowrie High School.

For more details, and the full programme, please contact Peadar Morgan, 3 High St., Dingwall, Ross-shire IV15 9HL or 'phone 01349 862820.

RESIDENTIAL SUMMER SCHOOL IN ST ANDREWS

14 people from Scotland, England and America attended a week-long summer-school entitled 'Exploring Scottish Place-Names', led by Simon Taylor, as part of the St Andrews University Holidays programme. It was the first time such a course had been held at St Andrews, and will be repeated next summer (with some new material). For more information contact Isobel Stuart, St Andrews University Holidays, 66 North St., St Andrews, Fife KY16 9AH.

FORTHCOMING TALKS

Various talks on place-name related subjects are being given this autumn and winter. The following list cannot claim to be comprehensive, although, in future Newsletters, with the help of the membership, it is hoped to give fuller coverage of such events throughout the whole of Scotland.

Blairgowrie October: see *PLACE-NAMES AT THE MOD* above p.4.

Dundee December 12, 7.30 p.m.: Abertay Historical Society (open to the public): Simon Taylor - 'The Uses of Place-Names'.

Venue - Room T9, Tower Block, University of Dundee.

St Andrews January 21, 1997, 7.30 p.m.: Friends of the St Andrews Museum (open to the public): Simon Taylor - 'Place-Names: A Key to the Past'.

Venue - St Andrews Museum, Kinburn House, Double Dykes Road, St Andrews.

Edinburgh March 17 1997, 2.15 p.m.: Over-60s Club Blackhall (but under 60s welcome!): Ian Fraser - 'Place-Names of Edinburgh'

Venue - St. Columba's Church, Blackhall, Edinburgh.

Oban April 23, 1997: Lorn Archaeological & Historical Society: Ian Fraser - 'Early Christian Place-Names'. For more information contact Mrs Susan. Fletcher on 01631 562222 (working hours).

COURSES

Aberdeen University Centre for Continuing Education: Doreen Waugh is running a 4 month course on Place-Names in Caithness and Sutherland, a local studies course which carries credits towards the award of Continuing Education Certificate in Caithness Studies, and in Sutherland Studies. The course is offered to part-time adult students who can attend centres in Caithness and Sutherland. Doreen will be running a similar course on Place-Names in Shetland from February to May 1997.

For more information contact the Centre for Continuing Education, Regent Building, Regent Walk, Aberdeen AB9 1FX.; Tel. 01224 272448.

St Andrews University Continuing Education: Simon Taylor is running an 8-week course on Scottish Place-Names, with special reference to Fife and Angus, from early February to late March 1997. For more information contact the Open Association, University of St Andrews, 66 North St., St Andrews, Fife KY16 9AH; Tel. 01334 462206.

Please contact the newsletter editor with information about talks, conferences, projects, radio or television programmes anywhere in Scotland which you think would be of interest to our members. Thank you.

DATABASE NEWS

Simon Taylor writes:

Developmental work on the structure of a Scottish Place-Name Database started almost three years ago, at a symposium on place-names and computers held by the Northern Ireland Place-Name Project in Belfast. Toponymists from Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England and Denmark exchanged information and experience regarding the computerisation of place-name material. A particularly useful contact was made with Terry James, an archaeologist and information officer of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, who was developing place-name data-bases for various Welsh county place-name surveys. Working closely with Terry, a draft structure suited to the needs of Scottish toponymists was worked out. I was a part-time PhD student at the School of Scottish Studies at the time, and was able to devote only very limited energies to this project. Fortunately, when I was appointed Anderson Research Fellow at the St Andrews Scottish Studies Institute in August 1995, part of my remit was to continue this developmental work. It is now nearing completion. Terry James' input has continued to be invaluable, as has that of the Arts Computing Adviser at the University of St Andrews, Julian Crowe.

The main thinking behind the Database has been to anticipate the needs of as many different potential users as possible: in other words everything you might ever want to know about a place-name, no matter what background or discipline you are coming from! In addition to linguistic, historical and geographical information, it will pull together all the very dispersed and fragmented references to place-names and place-name elements in both published and unpublished sources. The Foxpro relational database programme will also enable the user to question the data in a wide variety of ways, and to print out distribution maps of any element or combination of elements.

So the structure is almost ready; but the greatest work is still to come: the inputting of data. This will be an enormous task, and, as our Convenor Ian Fraser writes in his introductory piece above, this task will need major, long-term funding. It will also require the co-operation of individuals and groups working throughout Scotland on a voluntary basis.

More information on the Database will be available at the Society's November 16th Conference in Edinburgh, at which Terry James is speaking on place-names and computerisation.

UNST PROJECT

Doreen Waugh writes:

At present I am involved in a research project, funded jointly by the Shetland Amenity Trust and the University of Copenhagen, which is in its early stages, but which promises to produce exciting results. The aim of the project is to conduct an intensive multidisciplinary survey of the island of Unst in Shetland throughout its history, and, for example, to bring the work of the archaeologist and the onomastician together in a mutually enlightening way. This summer I conducted an initial survey of the island and

I have identified several local informants with an extensive oral knowledge of place-names. Research material is also available in local archives in Lerwick, and I shall be spending time there next year. The project will extend over the next five years and I look forward to working with scholars from other disciplines and other countries.

OTHER PLACE-NAME SOCIETIES

The Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland (SNSBI) has a British Isles-wide membership with an interest in both place-names and personal names. It produces an excellent annual journal called *Nomina*, and holds a lively and varied Annual Conference over a weekend in Spring. This year it was in Nottingham, next year it will be in Glasgow (see under **CONFERENCES: Future** p.4 above).

Annual Membership of SNSBI costs £15 (£5 for students and unwaged), which includes a copy of *Nomina*. For more details, contact Dr Mary Higham, 22 Peel Park Avenue, Clitheroe, Lancashire BB7 1ET, England.

There are place-name societies in Northern Ireland, Wales and England. Details of these will appear in the next issue of *SCOTTISH PLACE-NAME NEWS*.

SOME RECENT BOOKS AND ARTICLES

SPECIAL OFFER to SPNSociety Members :

In 1995 Perth & Kinross District (now Council) Libraries published Angus Watson's *The Ochils: Placenames, History, Tradition*. (159 pages) This is a handsomely produced, well illustrated and well-researched book on place-names in the Ochils (above c.80 metres) from Stirlingshire to Fife.

The book retails at £10.95. Perth & Kinross Council Libraries are offering the book to SPNSociety Members at the special price of £10 per copy INCLUDING postage and packaging. To order your copy at reduced price, please write to:

Mr. M. Moir, Head of Libraries & Archives, The A.K. Bell Library, York Place, Perth PH2 8EP, saying that you are a member of the Scottish Place-Name Society, and enclosing the necessary amount. Please make out cheques to 'Perth & Kinross Council Libraries'.

If you live in or near Perth, you can buy your copy direct from the Library shop at 10% discount (for £9.85). Again, the code word is 'Scottish Place-Name Society'. Please note that you can order (or buy direct) more than one copy at these special prices.

OTHER BOOKS

Reprint of W.J. Watson's *Place-Names of Ross & Cromarty*.

In March 1996 Highland Heritage Educational Trust issued a reprint of W.J. Watson's invaluable study of the place-names of Ross and Cromarty, first published in 1904, and reprinted for the first time in 1976. Since that reprint, demand has far outstripped supply, hence this new reprint

It retails at £10.99, and can be ordered through any bookshop (ISBN 0 9509882 6 X).

Highland Heritage Educational Trust have also brought out a **map and gazetteer** of Gaelic Place-Names of Easter Ross, Mid Ross and the Black Isle. For more details contact the Highland Heritage Educational Trust

c/o Rob Gibson, Tir nan Oran, 8 Culcairn Rd., Evanton Ross-shire IV16 9YT or telephone 01349 830388.

