

SCOTTISH PLACE-NAME NEWS

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The Newsletter of the
SCOTTISH PLACE-NAME SOCIETY
COMANN AINMEAN-ÀITE NA H-ALBA



In the hills north-west of Moffatdale, Dumfriesshire (photo by Pete Drummond). The small cairn is on Arthur's Seat, a ridge of Hart Fell, whose broad top is to the left of this view over the smooth south-west flank of Swatte Fell to cliffs on White Coomb and, to their right, the twin tops of the transparently named Saddle Yoke. The instances of fell are within the Dumfriesshire and Galloway territory of this element, with few outliers farther north or east, as discussed inside in an article on 'Gaelic and Scots in Southern Hill Names'. White Coomb may be named after the snow-bearing qualities of a coomb or 'hollow in a mountain-side' in its south-east face. Hart Fell and White Coomb are the same on William Crawford's Dumfriesshire map of 1804, but Saddle Yoke is Saddleback and Swatte Fell is Swaw Fell, making it more doubtful that Swatte represents swart, referring to the long stretch of very dark cliffs on the far side.

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EDITORIAL

An article on a 16th century cannon owned by the Duke of Argyll is an unlikely place to find a salutary snippet of information about the reliability of names recorded long ago by persons unfamiliar with a place or the speech of its inhabitants. The article in question, by Robert J Knecht, is in Vol. 8, No. 2 of History Scotland, and among other matters deals with the history rather than fantasy surrounding the Spanish Armada ship which famously, and with dreadful loss of life, sank off Tobermory, Mull, in late 1588 after an explosion. What is pertinent to our interest in Scottish names is that the ship came from what is now Croatia and had been commandeered with her Adriatic captain and crew by the Spanish authorities; and survivors who made their way home wrote, or informed someone who wrote, that they had anchored at an island called 'Largona' where the local lord was called 'Maelan'.

Professor Kostic who found this archive record in Croatia has identified Maelan with (in anglicised form – there are various Gaelic spellings of the surname) Lachlan Maclean of Duart, as the facts seem to demand; though Maelan would not look out of order in a list of early Gaelic personal names. 'Largona' is less penetrable as there is no island of similar name in the relevant area, but Alison McLeay has proposed that it is an attempt at what was earlier Loarn, now spelled in Gaelic Latharna (Lorne in English), the territory of an eponymous legendary founding Gael, now best known for the name of the firth between Mull and Oban.

In this instance we know approximately where those men came from who remembered the

names, and from whom the names reached written record in a far away place; the events occurred little over four centuries ago; and we could, with a little research, gain a good idea of what kind of sounds would have been represented by the names as spelled in – presumably – a 16th century south Slavic dialect of the Adriatic coast; a hasty online search gives no indication that a Croat of today would find it particularly difficult to transliterate those Gaelic names, or Muile, much more accurately than his 16th century antecedents. That these names could become so distorted and one of them could be transferred to an island from a larger territory or a firth named from it, possibly directly by those who heard them or at most through a few intermediaries before being written down, is a reminder of the problems in trying to make sense of place-names in what is now Scotland, recorded 1600 and more years ago: from languages probably unfamiliar to those who recorded the names; by way of an unknown number of intermediaries and possible changes of language or dialect; at a time when there were no accurate maps and no literacy in northern Europe; and thereafter for centuries through copying and recopying which was always liable to error. That is not to say that we should not be grateful indeed for the fragments that mediaeval intermediaries have passed on to us from ancient sources.

PROF BILL NICOLAISEN'S ARTICLE IN AUTUMN 2007 NEWSLETTER: ADDENDUM

Since his article in the last Newsletter Prof Nicolaisen has become concerned about omissions from the list of contributors to Scottish place-name studies. We are very happy to make this addendum, as he has requested:-

Set up in the early fifties by Winifred Temple as a major section of the founded School of Scottish Studies in the University of Edinburgh, the Scottish Place-Name Survey came under my custodian ship in May 1956. I was joined in 1965 by Ian Fraser for several years of complementary and productive co-operation. After my departure for the United States in 1969, he became the sole Head of the Survey until his retirement in the year 2000, after 35 years of influential service. The Survey is currently in the capable hands of Doreen Waugh.

As is to be expected, the incumbents have been and still are at the top of the list of published

scholars in Scottish place-name studies but, since 1950, a remarkable number of other individuals have contributed to the ever-growing inventory of publications on the subject, amongst them:

William M. Alexander (Aberdeenshire), Elizabeth Allan (Deeside), John Bannerman (Gaelic), G.W.S. Barrow (Scottish History), Albert Bil (Transhumance), Andrew Breeze (Early Celtic), Daphne Brooke (Galloway), Thomas Owen Clancy (Irish and Scottish Gaelic), Richard Coates (Scandinavian) Barbara Crawford (Scandinavian), Anthony Dilworth (Gaelic), David Dorward (Angus), Peter Drummond (Mountain Names), Gillian Fellows-Jensen (Scandinavian), John Ferguson (Berneray), Carol Foreman (Glasgow), Ian Fraser (Gaelic and General), James Graham-Campbell (Scandinavian), Eric P. Hamp (Celtic), Stuart Harris (Edinburgh), Carole Hough (Linguistics, Language History), K H Jackson (Celtic), John Kerr (Atholl), Jacob King (River Names), Gregor Lamb (Orkney), Arne Kruse (Scandinavian), Donald Macaulay (Gaelic), Aidan MacDonald (Irish and Scottish Gaelic), Lindsay Macgregor (Shetland), Neal MacGregor Strathspey), Donald McKillop (Berneray), John MacQueen (Galloway), Morgan Peadar (Gaelic), R. Oram (History), H. Pálsson (Norse), David Ross (Dictionary), S. Sigmundsson (Iceland), Brian Smith (Shetland), John Stewart (Shetland), A.B. Taylor (Scandinavian), William P.L. Thomson (Orkney), R.G. Wentworth (Gaelic), John Garth Wilkinson (West Lothian), May Williamson (street names).

In addition, most of the authors of recent doctoral theses have continued to publish beyond their narrow themes.

MORE MAP RESOURCES ONLINE

The National Library of Scotland has made additions to the old maps available online at <http://www.nls.uk/maps/>. These include John Kirk's surveys of about 1772 of farms in Golspie and Loth parishes on the east coast of Sutherland; and General William Roy's renowned mid 18th century military survey. This is available as continuous Lowlands and Highlands sheets, which can be rolled through directly with a mouse. It is worth noting that <http://www.nls.uk/maps/os6inch/> will take you direct to the First Edition 1843-1882 6 inches to 1 mile maps which may be found more user-friendly than the version available at old-maps.



An example of John Kirk's work, from his survey of farmland at Navidale (acknowledgements to NLS maps website).

To celebrate the 200th anniversary of the publication of John Jamieson's *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language* (1808), Scottish Language Dictionaries would like to offer SPNS members a special discount rate on the 2-volume photo-reduced Compact Scottish National Dictionary (hardback £67, softback £47; prices inclusive of p&p). The full text of the Scottish National Dictionary, also available online at www.dsl.ac.uk as part of the Dictionary of the Scots Language, is conveniently squeezed into these two handy volumes.

Payment can be made by credit card via the PayPal link on the Membership page of the website www.scotsdictionaries.org.uk or by cheque to Scottish Language Dictionaries, 27 George Square, Edinburgh, EH8 9LD.

GAELIC AND SCOTS IN SOUTHERN HILL-NAMES

The two main languages which mould the hill-names of southern Scotland are Gaelic and Scots. Gaelic, although widespread across the western half of the area, with some penetration to the south-east, is in hill-names largely confined to Galloway. In this south-western area, most of the highest hills have a Gaelic name (e.g. Merrick, Benyellary), and over half of all its hill-names are rooted in that language. The River Nith, flowing down the east edge of Galloway, appears however to be an almost watertight boundary penning in the Gaelic hill-names, with all those to the east of it in Scots or Cumbric only: you have to go north-east to Lanarkshire and West Lothian to find a few other Gaelic hill-names. This is in spite of the

fact that there are Gaelic settlement and water names east of the Nith. All the usual Gaelic hill-generic suspects are in Galloway, such as *beinn*, *càrn*, *cnoc* and *druim*, though a few others are posted missing, as we will see.



Massive cairn on Cairnkinna (552m) above the Scar Water, north-west Dumfries-shire.

W J Watson opined that Galloway's Gaelic names were more closely linked to Scottish (Highland) Gaelic than to Irish Gaelic, which might seem odd given how close Ireland is to the Mull of Galloway. His view was based on the fact that land measures in Galloway are as those of west Scotland, that *bàrr* is a common name for low hills in Galloway and Argyll, and there are other words like *eileirg*, deer trap, rare in Ireland but common in Scotland and Galloway. However he says that while *sliabh* is common in Ireland for mountain it is very rare in Galloway: subsequent research has shown that the element is in fact found here, although certainly not for a mountain of any size. Meanwhile the absence of the common Highland hill element *cruch* might be explained by the fact it is common in the west of Ireland and the north (i.e. opposite Kintyre) but not County Down (opposite Galloway). And *càrn*, used in Ireland for burial markers (unlike in the Highland hill-names), may be reflected in the chambered cairns found on hills like Cairnscarrow, Wigtownshire, and perhaps Cairnkinna, Dumfriesshire. So the jury must remain out on Watson's opinion on the linkage.

Two other hill-name generics common in the Highlands but not in Galloway are *sgùrr* and *meall*: the former is a word of Scandinavian origin and hence confined to the north-west, and not found here; the latter is there, but in disguise in the form of hill-names beginning Mill-, Mull- or Meaul, of which there are 67 altogether. They have the lumpy shape of *meall* hills, and some of the old forms like Mealdanach for Mulldonoch indicate their origin, as do lost names mapped by Pont like Meal Tuachtan. Gaelic died out earlier in Galloway than the Highlands (by the 16th

century), and hence 19th century OS mapmakers heard a local Scots pronunciation of *meall* far removed from the original. Another consequence of the early death of Gaelic here was that as the Gaelic elements in a name became obscure to Scots speakers, they became either corrupted or even dropped from part of the name: the Bin Maerack hill on one Blaeu map (Carrick) became simply Maerack on another (Galloway) because the latter's local informant, not understanding that the element 'Bin' (i.e. *beinn*) meant a hill, just omitted it.

Thus the hill now known as Merrick or The Merrick is translatable only as 'branched', i.e. as an adjective orphaned without a generic noun. Similarly, the hill called Bow above Loch Doon was probably once in name part of Meall Buidhe, but now remains translatable therefore as 'yellow': perhaps the top a mile away called Meaul is the absent generic *meall* of the orphaned *buidhe* specific, and the whole massif may once have been Meall Buidhe?



Galloway hills and lochs in Blaeu's map published in the mid 17th century, based on pioneer work by Timothy Pont at the end of the 16th century. The inaccuracy and probable duplication ('L. Craigmatrix' and 'L. Mackatrix?'), compared to modern maps, doubtless reflect the physical difficulty of survey work in this scenic but rocky and boggy landscape dissected by deep streams. Acknowledgements to NLS for use of the online map.

Outside Galloway, Scots hill-names are largely built on Scots generics, of which there is a wide variety including *fell*, *law*, *rig*, *dod*, *mount* and *muir*. But although Scots is and has been the dominant language of all the southern hill areas bar Galloway for several hundred years, there is considerable variation in the frequency with which different generics are used in different areas, as Table 1 shows for a few examples. The two big players among these Scots generics are

fell and *law*, the former of Scandinavian etymology (*fjall*), becoming a Cumbrian loan word before crossing to Scotland: the latter was an Anglian word, which came to signify a hill in Northumberland's northern English, but which really came into its own in Scotland.



Skelfhill Pen, dominant in this twilight silhouette, is one of many hills with distinctive shapes in the hill country of south Roxburghshire; it is also one of the handful of hill names where Cumbric pen has become a Scots generic.

The relationship between *fell* and *law*, and the spread of these elements, are intriguing. *Fell* is found almost exclusively in the south-west, in Dumfries and Galloway, whilst *law* is found in the northern and eastern areas of Lanarkshire, the Lothians, and the counties of the Tweed Basin, as well as further north into the Ochils and Sidlaws. The watershed between the zones of *law* and *fell* is almost as watertight as the Nith is to Gaelic Galloway: hardly any *fells* lie north of the watershed, and only a few minor *law* hills lie to its south. The only significant hill to have crossed into 'enemy territory' is Culter Fell, whose story I told in Newsletter 21, as a probable landowner's transplant from Cumbria. On both sides of the watershed, the respective hill generic seems to have been applied to hills almost regardless of height or topography: there are high broad-topped hills with cliffs on one side (Broad Law and Hart Fell – though hers are larger), conical hills (Dirrington Law and Capel Fell), rounded hills (Deuchar Law and Loch Fell), and low hills (Mochrum Fell, 197m. and Down Law, 190m.). Even within each generic's own domain, there are variations: *fell* applies to the highest hills in Dumfriesshire (Hart Fell, Swatte Fell and others over 500m.) but to generally lower hills in Galloway (often below 200m.) round the fringes of the Gaelic high ground. *Law* applies not only to high but also to medium size hills and indeed to mere swellings in the Merse (respectively Dollar Law, Scald Law and Lempitlaw), and further to striking isolated hills like North Berwick Law.

There are other generics in Scots too, such as *kip* (pointed or projecting, e.g. West Kip), *pike* (a cairn, as in Pikethaw Hill), and the several listed in Table 1. Some others have entered Scots as loan words from Cumbric, a language which left its mark in hill-names down the central spine of the hills most remote from the sea. May Williamson suggested that that was where, when Anglian and other settlers pushed in, the Cumbric peoples retreated too, far from the fertile plains. Elements like *caer* (fort, as in Caerketton and, probably, Caresman Hill), *pen* (head, as in Penvalla and Penveny, and in loan word form in Skelfhill Pen), *din* (fort, as in Tinnis Hill), and *mynydd* or *monið*, a hill (as probably in Mendick, and perhaps Minch Muir), are all found. Close by Mendick the several hills with the apparently English *mount* in their name may well derive from this last Cumbric element: Black Mount was mapped by Pont as Black Munth (the Cumbric *dd* is pronounced approximately 'th'), The Mount, Faw Mount, and Mount Maw (conceivably *mynydd mawr*, big hill).

Pete Drummond (including photos; see also table on back page)

The Journal of Scottish Name Studies

Subscriptions to *The Journal of Scottish Name Studies* can be made either on line at www.clanntuirc.co.uk or by post to Clann Tuirc, Tigh a' Mhaide, Ceann Drochaid, Siorrachd Pheairt FK17 8HT Alba/Scotland.

SPNS member, delivery address within UK: £12
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JSNS was established in order to publish annually articles and reviews on place and personal names relating to Scotland, its history and languages. The inaugural volume, edited by Dr Simon Taylor, was published in September 2007. Contributions to future issues should be forwarded in paper and electronic (WORD or .rtf) formats to the publisher, Clann Tuirc, at fios@clanntuirc.co.uk or at the above address; see Notes for Contributors at:-

www.clanntuirc.co.uk/JSNS/notes_for_contributors.html, also available from the publisher.

PLACES TO WIPE YOUR SHOES ON?

The Guardian reported on 4/2/2008 that IKEA product names follow a system: because the company's founder, Ingvar Kamprad, is dyslexic, he found that naming products with proper names and words made them easier to identify.

Sofas, coffee tables, bookshelves, media storage and doorknobs are named after places in Sweden (Klippan, Malmö); beds, wardrobes and hall furniture after places in Norway; floor coverings after places in Denmark; and dining tables and chairs after places in Finland. Bookcases are mainly occupations (Bonde, peasant farmer; Styrman, helmsman) and bathroom stuff is named after lakes and rivers. (Pete Drummond)

More recently there was publicity (The Scotsman, 7/3/2008) for the suggestion from two Danish academics* that the Swedish firm may have deliberately encouraged its customers to wipe their footwear on cheap objects like doormats, named after Danish places. Relations between the Scandinavian rivals are a good deal more peaceable than they were in the brutal territorial wars of the 17th century, but more subtle digs are not unknown, such as the assertion from a Swedish sister-in-law that Danish is not a language, it's a disease of the throat. However, the Danes may have the last laugh when it comes to place-names: the first article in the recent Festschrift for Gillian Fellows-Jensen (Thorsten Andersson's '*Daner and Svear – tribal rivalry in prehistoric Scandinavia*' – yes it goes back a long way) points out that the Swedes' name for their country, Sverige, is linguistically Danish, and it should probably have been Sverke but for the prestige of Danish forms centuries ago. (Ed.)

* Not at the Institute for Place-Name Research in Copenhagen!

SOUNDS OF OLDER SCOTS

Caroline Macafee has kindly provided this note on her talk to the November 2007 conference:-

About twenty years ago, at the second International Conference on the Languages of Scotland, Bill Nicolaisen expressed his disappointment that there wasn't more work on the detail and the chronology of sound-change in Older Scots. Happily, we now have a definitive treatment of the subject in Jack Aitken's posthumous *The Vowels of Older Scots*, edited by

Caroline Macafee, and published by the Scottish Text Society in 2002. The book provides the essential framework for understanding the vowel systems of Older Scots: where they came from in Old English, Old Norse and Old French; how they changed, how they rhymed and how they were spelled in the course of the Older Scots period; and how they developed into the dialects of Modern Scots. The conference heard how Aitken's system of referring to the vowels by numbers operates and its advantages over other systems; and how to use the machinery of finding aids added by the editor, comprising three indices, which allow the user to approach the information either through the sources (e.g. a given vowel in Old English), through the Older Scots vowels, or through individual Older Scots words.

GLASGOW UNIVERSITY LIBRARY [Map Collection] (Level 7) is having a sale.

* Scottish OS 1st & 2nd Ed. 6 inch. Available to purchase as complete sets, by county. Prices available on request.

* Various overseas maps - 30p per map or 4 for £1.

The University Library Map Collection is offering a one-off opportunity to purchase original historical Ordnance Survey maps. Duplicate first and second edition sheets covering many Scottish counties at six-inches to one mile are for sale.

The majority of these maps were published more than a hundred and forty years ago and they are therefore of considerable historic interest. Maps such as these very rarely come up for sale and many sheets are in good condition.

In the first instance we will be selling sheets by the county as complete sets (or as near complete as we have).

No doubt they will contain many place names of interest.

Prices range from:

Nairn (9 sheets) = £60

Aberdeenshire (106 sheets) = £700

(Prices have been set depending on condition of maps and number of sheets in set, and also according to their location. For some counties, e.g. Argyllshire, prices for certain districts may be negotiable).

Interested parties should contact staff at the Maps, Official Publications & Statistics Unit on Level 7 (maps@lib.gla.ac.uk) or John Moore (j.n.moore@lib.gla.ac.uk), the Map Librarian.

THE BRITTONIC LANGUAGE IN THE OLD NORTH

The Scottish Place-name Society's BLITON Project

Since 2001, Alan James has been researching the history of Brittonic in southern Scotland and northern England between the fifth and twelfth centuries. In the course of this study, he has assembled a comprehensive series of notes on P-Celtic elements (in their neo-Brittonic forms) that occur – or, in the views of place-name scholars, may occur – in place-names in the regions between the Forth and Loch Lomond in the north and the Humber and Mersey in the south. These notes include etymological information, references to authoritative writings on philological questions, discussion of semantic issues, details of place-names found in Classical and Early Mediaeval sources and in early Welsh literature referring to the 'Old North', and full lists of current and obsolete place-names in which these elements (may) occur, with references to published records of early forms and scholarly discussions of these names.

In 2007, the Scottish Place Name Society has undertaken to fund a project to digitise the database and make it available online. This work is being undertaken by Jacob King and Chris Yocum. The project's aims are twofold. Firstly it wishes to create a searchable online database from the dictionary. This will allow users to search either by a particular root, affix or element, as well as by place-name. At some point in the future it is envisaged that users will be able to integrate the data with Google Maps. Secondly, a traditional flat PDF document will be produced.

It is hoped that the letter A, as showcased at the conference, will go online over the next few months, for the purposes of testing and feedback. Anyone who did not give their email to us at the conference and is interested in taking part in the beta version is free to email blitoldnorth@gmail.com.

Jacob King (summarising a presentation to the November 2008 conference)

COLDRAIN

Geoffrey Barrow (1981) posits the existence of local, open-air courts serving a roughly parish-sized unit, or in some cases a collection of parishes, having a similar function to the English

hundred court. At these open-air courts local disputes would have been settled through the application of legal expertise, probably in the form of a *judex* (Latin) or *dempster* (Scots) or *britheamh* (or *breathamh*, giving Scots *breive*). Barrow argues that the name for these courts, which are practically invisible in the historical record, is *couthal*, a loan-word into Scots from the Gaelic *còmhdhail* 'meeting, assembly'. *Couthal* does in fact occur as a Scots word in an agreement made in 1329 between the abbot of Arbroath and a local Angus laird, Fergus son of Duncan, which states 'the said Fergus and his heir shall have the court which is called *couthal* for the men residing in the land of Tulloes and Craichie, to deal with the countless acts arising amongst themselves only, and they shall have the fines arising therefrom' (*Arb. Lib.* ii no. 2).



An example of the eastern Scottish place-name 'Cuttle' (now Cuthill) by Prestonpans, East Lothian, from William Forrest's lavishly drawn Map of Haddingtonshire, 1802 (acknowledgements to NLS).

As a Scots word it is behind the many Cuttle-names in eastern Scotland (such as Cuttlehill and Cuttleden; see Barrow 1981 for more details). Much rarer are names which derive directly from the Gaelic form of this word. One such is Coldrain, Fossoway and Tullibole parish KNR (NO08 00). Some early forms are:

(land of) *Cu<t>hyldrayne* 1366 *RMS* i no. 221 [printed *Cuchylldrayne*]

terram de *Cothilduran* 1363 x 1369 *RMS* i no. 825

(lands of) *Coludrane* 1452 *RMS* ii no. 574

(third part of the lands of) *Kuldrane* 1466 *RMS* ii no. 877 [*Kuldrane* and *Maw* vic. FIF]

Coudran 1515 *Fife Ct. Bk.* 1 [*Coudran* and *The Maw*]

Given also Ordnance Survey maps with names in real as opposed to anglicised Gaelic and a better orthographic stab at names of Norse origin in the Northern Isles, there is a case for including more hill (and cliff) names from, say, the smaller Hebrides as well as individual entries for such as Westray and Rousay (Orkney) and Unst, Yell, Fetlar and Burra (Shetland). Fuller consideration of the wider Norse contribution might then extend coverage for Hoy and Foula – which latter also has *Eig, Hamar, Hornalie* and the enigmatic *Crugar*, whilst *Tounafield* likely originates in Old Norse *tún + fjall* (the mountain above the tún/farm) and *Soberlie* is Old Norse *sauðr + berg + (h)lið*, an excellent sheep grazing on steep slopes ending in a rocky sea-cliff. Indeed it may be helpful to re-group Scotland's vast array of islands under 'Shetland', 'Orkney', 'Outer Hebrides' and 'Inner Hebrides' – which would avoid Orkney lying between Mull and Raasay, with Hoy between Harris and Iona!

But enough of this! These are matters primarily for the publisher and detract but little from a book that provides so many answers to so many questions that haunt those who enjoy the hills and prefer to call them by their 'real' names. Why use a part-translated 'Fiddler' when you can now better pronounce as well as understand *Sgurr an Fhìdhleir* (Coigach), or tautological Knockan Crag for *Cnocan* (Elphin)?

In addition to a useful guide to Gaelic pronunciation and well-chosen line-drawings, this new edition includes a number of colour plates, most especially of 16th-17th century maps now accessible on the National Library of Scotland's invaluable website. The extent of Peter Drummond's investigations is shown, for instance, in his discussion of *Montes Marmorei* and *Montes Alabastri* (Ortelius 1573, facing p. 65, p.144). It may well be that the latter point to Torridon's quartzite hills and the former to those of Assynt, but perhaps we should not discount the possibility of an earlier recognition of the architectural qualities of those metamorphised limestones currently quarried at Ledmore (greenish-white marbles that produce spectacular banding, veining and blotching)? Pennant, for example, in his *Tour of Scotland* (1772) passed 'under some great precipices of limestone, mixed with marble' between Strathkanaird and Camloch; and quartered at Ledbeg he added that: 'This country is environed with mountains; and [as well as limestone burnt to improve the land] all the strata near their base, and in the

bottoms, are composed of white marble, fine as the Parian: houses are built with it, and walls raised ...'. (1998, p.38)

Boxed entries – a welcome new feature – focus on such specific issues, not least nuances between Gaelic words for colours; and the final chapters remind us of the importance to those who named the hills of the natural environment, their rural lifestyle, mythical beasts, lookout hills and the exploits of individuals whose names would otherwise have been lost – a veritable gamut of social and cultural history!

A mine of well-researched information that will make any map-browser's or hill-goer's expeditions infinitely more rewarding, *Scottish Hill Names* should also be required reading for those responsible for interpretation and publications of all kinds. For it is surely time that we tried harder to conserve and disseminate Scotland's remarkably diverse place-name heritage more accurately and effectively than hitherto. This book is an admirable step in the right direction.

Postscript:

Post-publication, the author mentioned that Blaeu has two forms for the Pentland Hills (p.169) – plural *Pent-land Hills* (Tweeddale map) and singular *Penth-landt hill* (Lothian map). Both are placed above Carlops/Ninemileburn. On the Lothian map, Blaeu [see extract on back page – with acknowledgements to NLS] also has a *Pentland hill* above the farms of *Lyips* and *Penth land*, and gives *Roslyin more* for Woodhouselee (linked with *Woodhousesley* beside Roslin) – in which case this *Pentland hill* may equate with Pentlandmuir (attached to 'Old' Pentland and from which Holyrood Abbey was granted the teinds c.1230; compare also 15th/16th-century *Kirkton de Pentland[-mure]* within Glencorse). This suggests a certain volatility in the 16th century, and tends to support the view that 'northern' *Pentland hill* could still refer to the hill-grazings of the settlement of *Penth land*, even if increasingly, maybe generally, the term was now used for the range as a whole.

John Baldwin

Looking into Creich, published by Bonar Bridge History Society (1 Foundry Bank, IV24 3EG). £7.99 (or £9.99 including a CD-ROM of the place-names spoken)

This is a survey of local place-names in the parish of Creich around Bonar Bridge in south-

east Sutherland. It is well illustrated with 30 colour photos, but the text disappoints. There is an Introduction, with a very fragmented history, followed by a four-page table entitled "Random Gaelic Words often Found in Place-names". Why random? Wouldn't an alphabetical list have been more useful? Not only is it alphabetically random, but equally random are whether the word is capitalised or not, and whether it has the definite article or not (e.g. *leac*, but *Am bealach*): even the choice of words seems random, for while many are common place-name topographic features or colours, how often do *ruathair* (skirmish) or *tosgair* (messenger) feature in place-names? Further, *eich* is not 'horse' and *mhadaidh* is not 'wolf' (or, more likely, dog or fox) but their genitive form, to indicate but two such inaccuracies.

This raises fears that the core of the book, a list of the area's place-names, might be less than satisfactory. The first thing that strikes you is, with the exception of the name Creich itself, the almost complete absence of historical forms of the place-names, fundamental in place-name study. Anyone can now access the old maps of Scotland through the NLS website (e.g. Blaeu's Southerlandia map, 1654, which covered the area) while books such as W J Watson's, which includes investigation of some of the local names, are widely available. Watson [CPNS, p.210, and in Sutherland chapters of Place-Name Papers, republished 2002] for instance discussed the River Oykel, main watercourse along the parish edge, and says it is "not Gaelic nor is it Norse, but it may go back ultimately [like many major river names] to Early Celtic *uxellos*", high. Yet this book baldly states on page 16 that "the rivers Cassley and Oykel (both Norse names) ...". I spent a brief hour looking through the RMS (Register of the Great Seal) for the main names of this parish, and found references from 1581, 1583 and 1620 to nine of the settlement names of the area. This book has none of them.

The bulk of the 325 place-names listed are topographical features with straightforward Gaelic names, transparent to a modern speaker (or Gaelic dictionary user). There is a CD available, in which a local speaker pronounces all these names, and this is definitely a useful feature. However a quick glance at a modern map of the parish would raise the eyebrows of most Scots interested in place-names, for there appears to be a group of Scandinavian names, including Ospisdale, Migdale, Spinningdale, and

Swordale; but there is no discussion of how these names came to be here. Migdale – a popular tourist destination because of its Wood – is not even listed as a name. Watson derived it from Pictish **mign* (bog) and Norse *dalr* (dale): the Norse occupied the area before the Gaels, sometimes taking over parts of the pre-existing Pictish names. Ospisdale, the book says, is from a Norse personal name *Ospis*: however its 1620 recording *Tospistell* might suggest hospital (in the sense of hospice or hostel) as nearer the mark. Swordale (*Sordell* in 1591, *Swordell* and *Sordail* in 1606) is one of several spots of this name in Scotland, literally the 'dale of the (green) sword', and the book at least gets this right. Spinningdale the book says it is from *spenja-dalr*, attractive dale, although *spenja* is a Norse verb, not an adjective, and it does not mention Blaeu's *Spainidail*: Watson thought it might be *spann*, pail, from the bay's shape. The book then throws its own Norse etymology into confusion by stating later (page 70) that Spinningdale had a mill built in the mid-19th century by the owner of Skibo estate "introducing spinning and weaving of cotton to the Highlands." Roy's map of 1755 marks only one settlement here, Inverochin at the mouth of the river, which indicates that it may have locally been known by this Gaelic name as an alternative to the Norse (as Norse name Dingwall, was Gaelic *Inbhir Pheofhearain*): an 1820 map returns to the old name Spinningdale. No mention of this in the book.

Even with the parish name Creich, although old forms are given, and the (probably correct) etymology in Gaelic *crioch*, boundary [that between Sutherland and Ross?], the waters are then muddied when it states that researchers found that the name came from "a rock known in Caledonian-Pictish time as *Din-Crùg*, a word meaning a place of striking visual impact".

The SPNS is happy to help local groups in place-name research; it's a pity this didn't happen here.

Peter Drummond

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

The SPNS **Spring 2008 Conference** will be at the Eight Acres Hotel, Elgin on Saturday 10 May. Details and application form are in the accompanying flier. It is hoped that many members will take the opportunity to combine the conference with exploration of a beautiful and fascinating part of the country that is somewhat off the usual tourist tracks.

The **Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland** (SNSBI) is to hold its 2008 residential spring conference in Edinburgh, at the Pollock Halls close to Arthur's Seat, from the evening of Friday 4 April till breakfast on Monday 7 April. Attendance will be open to non-residents and at a slightly higher registration fee to non-members. Details are available through the SNSBI website <http://www.snsbi.org.uk/Future.html>. Expected speakers include Ellen Bramwell, Peter Drummond, Ian Fraser, Gavin Smith, Pat McKay, Gwyneth Nair with Jennifer Scherr, Bill Nicolaisen, Liam Ó hAisibéil, Hywel Wyn Owen, Guy Puzey, David Sellar, Veronica Smart, Gavin Smith, Peter McNiven and Shaun Tyas. There will thus be no lack of Scottish interest but none of the countries will be neglected. Day delegates for Saturday and/or Sunday can 'pay at the door' but Jennifer Scherr would appreciate prior notice (J.Scherr@bristol.ac.uk).

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'WHERE DO THEY GET THEM FROM?' CORNER

There are some wonderful place-name etymologies out there, especially on websites, but this one is something of a treasure:-

Votandini [sic] > Gododdin > Lothian

The kingdom of Gododdin does survive today in the regional name Lothian. Linguists seem to accept the continuous development of the Roman era name *Votandini* [sic] to *Gododdin* and eventually to Lothian. Given that 'dd' in Welsh is the 'th' sound its [sic] really only shortened with the V-> G-> L transition.

Elementary, my dear Watson. Please send us your favourites and best finds of this kind! (Ed.)

Frequencies of hill name generics in hill areas of southern Scotland

(see article 'Gaelic and Scots in Southern Hill Names')

Element	dod	fell	hill	knowe	law	rig
Hill area						
Lammermuir/ Moorfoot	3%	-	31%	11%	23%	14%
Pentlands	-	-	30%	11%	14%	9%
Cheviot	-	2%	37%	7%	30%	3%
Upper Tweed	9%	1%	36%	1%	7%	11%
Galloway	-	5%	38%	3%	-	5%
'Dumfriesshire, NE'	-	11%	41%	15%	3%	8%

The Pentland Hills in the mid 17th century Atlas of Scotland published by the Blaeu family firm in Amsterdam (see book review by John Baldwin). The settlement of 'Penthland' (now Old Pentland), 'Pentland Hill' and 'Penth-landt Hill' all appear.



Kilbucho, a south-eastern outlier of cill ('church') names, is not in this telephoto picture, looking west from the Broughton Heights in Peeblesshire to Tinto Hill, beyond the unseen River Clyde. This winter flooding of the flat Biggar Water valley, through which the pre-glacial Clyde flowed to the Tweed, may help to explain why Gaelic-speaking clerics, passing along the Clyde and Tweed between the west and Lindisfarne, preferred to found a church on a hillier and less direct but better drained linking route through the Kilbucho Burn valley next to the south.