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Much of Galloway is green and gently rolling, especially the more fertile and populous areas through which the few main roads pass. However, hill ranges dominate many Galloway skylines, and first-time visitors who explore them are often amazed at their rugged and lonely qualities, more reminiscent of less trodden parts of the west Highlands or some mountainous parts of Ireland than of the rounder hill landscapes of the Borderland farther east. This bothy at Backhill of Bush is in a vast tract of land with no public motor roads; an innovation planned for the Spring 2009 SPNS conference is an excursion on the following day which, it is hoped, will offer an opportunity to visit this remote and beautiful spot, usually only accessible on foot. In choosing another conference location well away from the central belt the Society's committee has calculated that many who are already familiar with Galloway and intrigued by its often seemingly impenetrable place-names will want to be in New Galloway in early May next year, besides others who wish to learn more about the region's varied landscapes and its complex and still disputed linguistic and ethnic history for which its place-names provide important clues.
(Photo: Michael Ansell)

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EDITORIAL

Not long ago we wished to make a photocopy of an illustration from a parish history written by an incumbent parish minister when Britain ruled the waves and the Dreadnought class of heavier, faster, bigger-gunned battleship was the latest manifestation of the arms race athwart the North Sea. The illustration had been made by the minister himself, who was apparently attracted by the 'primitive' style of the representation of the Virgin and Child burgh emblem on the burgh hearse at the time. The interest in 2008 lay in the fact that the burgh and parish in question, Lauder, marches with Wedale (Stow), where in the Middle Ages there was an important 'girth' or sanctuary around a church with a famous image of Our Lady of Wedale; and in the radical difference from the conventional Virgin and Child on the latest burgh crest. Was it conceivable that the archaic appearance on the hearse was the last manifestation of a tradition of two-dimensional representations of an ancient and renowned statue destroyed at or soon after the Reformation; or was it merely the result of poor draughtsmanship? There was no opportunity to make the copy in order to reflect on the matter; the librarian whose advice was sought about how best to fit the book into the copier ruled that copying would contravene copyright law, in the absence of certainty that the minister of a century ago had died more than 70 years ago. That what we hoped to copy was itself intended as a factual record of work, which for its function in declaring the ownership of a hearse would not have involved any creativity or originality, made no difference.

Of course those who produce original writings or create reproducible images deserve protection from pirate copying of their work and diversion of income to which they are entitled. However, the current copyright periods, particularly for non-fiction text or factual rather than artistic illustrations, are – if observed – more of a hindrance to research than a guarantee of meaningful income to authors and artists. They seem wildly anachronistic compared to the speed at which information can be disseminated once it is freely available on the internet, including much valuable material (as well as incalculable amounts of rubbish) which is only ever intended for publication there.

'SPEAK WEEL O THE HIELANDS, BUT LIVE IN THE LAICH'

"Speak weel o the Hielands, but live in the Laich" is a sensible adage to adhere to if you live in Moray, bounded to the north by the sea and on the south and west by the Highlands. Ideally, in speaking weel o the Hielands we should speak in Gaelic, the native language of the Highlander and once widely spoken throughout Scotland. Alas, mothers stopped speaking to their children in Gaelic many generations ago and so the language has all but died out. To ensure the existence of any language, all it requires is for mothers to speak it to their infants. But the non-Gaelic speaker, of which I am one, requires some education in the language of his or her ancestors. Periodically, the letter columns of *The Scotsman* erupts with vehemence and bile as some monoglot citizen complains about the slightest help given to Gaelic. Just recently, in Elgin, I was assured that Gaelic had never been spoken in Moray and besides it was obviously an inferior language because "it does not even have a word for television", to which I retorted, "true, but then neither does English."

To refute the allegation that Gaelic was never spoken in Moray I considered examining a random sample of place-names around Elgin to see if any could be very obviously Gaelic and possibly still having a meaning to a Gaelic speaker today. But how do you choose a truly random sample? Eventually I decided to let the pre-Reformation church do it for me. In the Middle Ages there were four cathedrals in Moray, not I hasten to add, simultaneously, but consecutively, and their locations were Birnie, Kinneddar, Spynie and Elgin. None of these

name looks overtly Gaelic, particularly Birnie, which has a couthy Scottish feel to it.

Birnie (NJ 207 588) lies some 4 km to the south of Elgin and the existing kirk, still in use for worship, dates to 1150 and was the seat of the first few bishops. The earliest attempt at the etymology of the name is by Shaw (1775; 308), a Gaelic speaker from Badenoch, who writes "The parish of Birnie, anciently *Brenoth*, i.e. a brae or high land." Joseph Anderson (1791; 155) indulges in popular etymology with his "This parish was named *Brenuth* about the beginning of the 13th century: a name probably derived from *Brae-nut*, i.e. 'High land abounding in nuts'". His son-in-law, Gordon (1835; 82) shows proper scholarly caution by stating "No satisfactory derivation has yet been assigned to the name."

The clerical pair, Grant and Leslie (1798; 142) follow Shaw, but give him no credit for plagiarising his work "*Brenuth* a Gaelic appellation, signifying, in its literal interpretation, the north hill side." A hundred years later, Rampini (1897; 55) uncritically quotes Shaw, while his contemporary, Maxwell (1894) conveniently omits Birnie from his word list. Matheson (1905; 47), who holds the dubious honour of writing the worst book on place-names, introduces St. Brendan, who may well have crossed the Atlantic, but there is little evidence for his presence in Moray. Mackinlay (1904; 24) and Macdonald (1900; 400) maintain that Birnie is the Church of St. Brendan, but the assertion is based on perceived similarities between the words Brendan and Brenuth or Brennach. Simpson (1935), usually ever ready to accept evidence of extra-Columban evidence at work in the North-East, mentions neither Brendon nor Birnie in his catalogue of saints and sites. Watson (1926; 189), cuts through myth and fancy with his blunt exposition "Birnie in Morayshire is 'Brennach' before 1200, which is simply G. *braonach*, a moist place; the dative-locative is *braonaigh*, which becomes Birnie in Scots by the usual metathesis." This metathesis can be followed through the centuries, so that in five hundred years, Gaelic *braonaigh*, written *brennath*, becomes Scottish Birnie:-

Brennath1210	REM
Brennath1239	"
Birneth 1421	"
Byrneth 1451	"

Birneth	1543	"
Birnet	1554	"
Birnet	1571	"
Birney	1596	Records of Elgin
Birney	1651	"
Birnie	1695	"
Birnay	1718	"
Birnie	1732	"

(REM = Registrum Episcopatus Moraviensis)

Does the Gaelic *braonaigh*, meaning '(at) moist place', describe Birnie accurately? The kirk is set up on a mound or knoll, but the area to the east and north is on a substantially lower level, while the adjacent field to the east is known as Paddock Haugh. Paddock or puddock is the Middle English and Scots word for frog. Frogs thrive in moist places so the original Gaelic appellation is entirely appropriate.



Birnie Kirk stands on a low mound surrounded by flatter ground. The establishment of Moray's first cathedral here was not the first time Birnie had high-status occupation: at dates from about 1000 BC till 200 AD there was a power centre within some 500m, where recent excavations have found evidence of pay-offs to local magnates by the Romans.



Photos of Birnie Kirk and Bronze Age/ Iron Age excavation site by Helen McKay

About as far to the north of Elgin as Birnie is to the south, lies the one time ecclesiastical site of

Kinneddar (NJ 223 693). What caused the bishops of Moray to up sticks and leave Birnie for the coast near present day Lossiemouth is not recorded. But Kinneddar, like Birnie, had been a religious site long before the Roman Church decided to establish a bishop's palace, or more realistically, a bishop's castle there. Amongst the broken remains of an earlier foundation is part of a sarcophagus, similar in design to the more famous one at St. Andrews. The bishops did not long enjoy the sea air, for with the air came pirates and the exposed headland of Kinneddar was too tempting a target and Bishop Brice de Douglas 1203-1222 (1838; 40) petitioned the Pope to have the cathedral moved from Kinneddar to Spynie. In response to Brice's petition, Pope Innocent complied with the bishop's request in a bull issued on 7th April 1207. Kinneddar is mentioned many times in *Registrum Episcopatus Moraviensis* (1838; 40, 41, 44, 82, 103, 140, 144, 151, 192 etc). The spelling varies from *Kinedor* to *Kynnedor*. Blaeu and Roy both have *King Edward*. The aberration, or maybe abomination, *King Edward* shows that the use and knowledge of Gaelic had died out by the end of the 16th century and it had been dead for at least two hundred years when Roy carried out his surveys. But despite speaking from beyond the grave, Kinneddar is wholly and unambiguously Gaelic, from *Ceann*, 'head' and *eadar*, 'between', thus a headland. When Kinneddar was named there was water on each side of the then peninsula.

Having moved from the hazards of Kinneddar to the safer shores of Loch Spynie the bishops soon established themselves and gradually extended their mercantile activities as well as expanding their domestic arrangements, so that even today Spynie Castle is a commanding ruin. However the commercial interests of the Elgin merchants were instrumental in 1224 in having the Cathedral of Moray translated from Spynie to the Holy Trinity Church, juxta Elgin, while still retaining the stronghold of the Castle of Spynie as the bishop's principal residence.

The place-name Spynie (NJ 229 655) has changed little over the centuries. Early spellings are Spinie and Spyny. Macaulay (1976; 262) quotes Watson (1926: 474) that it comes from British *spiath* and means hawthorn place. Unfortunately there are few hawthorns around Spynie, but they could well have died out in the past thousand years. However, Watson links *Spynie* with *Spey* and if this linkage is valid then

Nicolaisen's (1976;191) suggestion that *Spey*, *Spean* and *Spynie* come from a linguistic stratum, perhaps earlier than Indo-European, has some validity, so it is probably not Gaelic, but could well be a relic from the language spoken in Moray before the Gaelic speakers arrived.

On a summer day in July 1224, Gilbert, Bishop of Caithness, in the presence of Bishop Andrew of Moray, consecrated the Cathedral of Moray, just outside the Royal Burgh of Elgin. Elgin (NJ 215 627) first appears in the records in 1136 and in a charter of Malcolm IV in 1160 and a further charter in 1185, the spelling then being the same as today, although the favourite variant over the years is Elgyn.

Shaw (1827; 86), a native Gaelic speaker, writing about 1750, but not published until later, states "The meaning of the word *Elgin* is uncertain", but he tentatively suggests *hely*, 'to hunt' and *fin*, 'fair', thus a pleasant forest or hunting place. Leslie(1798: 135), the irrepressible minister of Lhanbryde, proposes Helgy, a Norse general as the eponymous founder of Elgin. This idea came from his fellow minister, Grant (1792; 1-2) and was thus gospel and has been treated as such for the next two hundred years. Gordon and Walker (1835; 1) in the best traditions of the New Statistical Account support their fellow clerics and Helgy, complete with the burgh seal, is paraded again. Comic relief from the prevailing Helgydolatriy is provided in 1866 by an anonymous writer, believed to be James Sinclair (1866; 74) who supports an earlier French proposal that Elgin is composed of two elements, *El*, meaning a town and *gin*, meaning the drink that was perfected in Geneva. Watson and Watson (1868; 127) returned the debate from the ridiculous to the absurd by their recitation of the rubric "Elgin, derived from Helgy a victorious general".

In May 1913, there erupted in the correspondence columns of *The Scotsman* a most lively exchange on the meaning of Elgin. It was started by Kuno Meyer of Berlin, whose letter, published on the 15th May, set free a hardy hare which has been running well for almost a hundred years. Meyer's words were "Elgin ... derived from *Elg*, a bardic name for Ireland, so that in now means, literally, 'Little Ireland'". On 20th May a W L Sime responded tartly, "The derivation referred to by Professor Kuno Meyer is as old as Stokes and Rys There is in Elgin a place called 'Little Ireland'". A few days later, a correspondent identified only by his initials as

D M R. intensified the attack: "Kuno Meyer and Dr W J Watson are 120 years too late with their theories". From Aberdeen, John Milne takes a wild pot shot at the hare by his allegation that Elgin means a hill of sand. The letters petered out by 2nd June, but not before some sanity was introduced by an octogenarian Highlander who stated: "In my youth ... Elgin was Elgnidh".

A year after the above, Mackintosh (1914; 2), although aware of the *Scotsman* correspondence, comes out in favour of "the Norse general, Helgy". In 1926, Watson (1926; 231) continues to support Meyer that *Elginn* means 'Little Ireland', but raises a note of caution; though he does repeat the story that part of Elgin was once known as 'Little Ireland', but without producing any additional evidence to that given above for the existence of 'Little Ireland'. Nicolaisen et al (1970; 83) are Little Irelanders, but with a question mark. Years later, Nicolaisen (1993: 260) increases the size of the question mark. Macaulay (1976: 261) is another cautious supporter of Eire, while Dorward (1979; 15) and Field (1980; 15) continue support for the Irish. Macaulay(1987; 261) returns to the fight still flying the Irish flag but also advancing the possibility that the name relates to Elg, an earth goddess. The latest to join the fray on the Irish side is Clancy (2008) who produces a lot of bricks, with a suspiciously low straw content.

Diligent examination of the 19th century poor rolls and the rating documents has failed to uncover any part of Elgin known as 'Little Ireland'. It may have been a transient name given to a district where Irish farm labourers congregated, but if so it does not appear to have survived into the 20th century. This survey of the meaning of Elgin reaches no conclusion, but the last word is best left to Robert Young (1879:3) who writes, "The name is no doubt of Celtic origin, but perhaps so corrupted that it is impossible to arrive at its true derivative. It is evidently of great antiquity, and of much earlier date than the time of Helgy."

So, of the four places chosen by the Medieval church as the sites for the Cathedral of Moray; two are very ancient and, if Celtic, are pre-Gaelic, while two are Gaelic and simple straight forward at that. So if we went back a thousand years and were sensible enough to reside in Moray we would be well advised to Speak weel o the Hielands but live in the Laich – in Gaelic, of course.

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Ian Keillar (based on his talk to the Spring 2008 conference in Elgin)

ELGIN, BANFF, EARN, ATHOLL: 'NEW IRELANDS' IN THE EAST REVISITED

W. J. Watson (1926, 225-33) proposed, in the *locus classicus* on this topic, that a series of names meaning 'Ireland' were also employed in Scotland, and were part of the story of the spread of Gaels and Gaelic to the east of Scotland. Watson's argument was hardly definitive, and parts of it are quite inferential. Since then, a number of the names have been questioned – explicitly or implicitly; in print or in

the pub – as genuinely containing elements meaning ‘Ireland’, and the time is ripe for a review of the evidence. An SPNS conference in Elgin seems to me the most appropriate venue by far to reconsider this topic – though whether what I have to offer gets us much further forward remains to be seen. I hope to publish a fuller review of the topic in the near future.

At the outset, we should explain these multiple terms for Ireland. The main term used for Ireland in Gaelic in the middle ages was *Ériu* mod.I. *Éire*, ScG *Éireann*. In the Irish literary imagination, however, this was only one of a series of names by which Ireland could be called, and others were frequently employed in the praise poetry of the period, especially: *Banbha*, *Fodla*, *Elg* and *Fál*. Of these, I shan’t be considering the last, *Fál*, except in passing. But all are used to greater or lesser extent in the poetry of the classical period, at least, and some are known in the sparse records of praise poetry from an earlier period. These names exist, not so much in common speech, but in a learned register of names, whether we are talking of the context of praise poetry or of the antiquarian dictionaries. As such, these names would have a curious and high-register feel to them, if they are indeed examples of ‘new Ireland’ names.

Atholl is the least problematic of the ‘new Ireland’ names. The early forms seem to secure its composition as *ath* + *Fotla*, one of our Ireland names. The prefix *ath* has a variety of meanings – before nouns it can mean ‘re-, another’ and that is how it has been taken in this case ‘another Fotla’, ‘a second Fotla’. That said, there are reasons to hesitate. I know of no Irish parallels for the use of *ath-* in a place-name in this way. But for a variety of reasons, most particularly the stress pattern of Atholl, I do not think we can be dealing with *áth* ‘ford’ here. *Fotla* is a highly unusual word, and is etymologically opaque. Rather than proposing that it has been created independently twice in Ireland and in Scotland, it seems most sensible to run with the existing proposal, that Atholl is based on the element *ath* + the existing name of *Fotla*. For all that, the name *Athfhotla* reeks of the schoolroom. Is it an example of a learned coinage that ‘took off’?

Although the name **Ériu** and its case-derivatives, e.g., *Éirenn* (with variants) is unlikely to mean much other than Ireland, the extent to which we do find this in the place-name record has been disputed. A number of names that have been assigned to *Ériu* are river names or could be

derived from river names: the Earn with its putative derivative Strathearn (also Loch Earn); the contrastive rivers Findhorn and Deveron. In the context, without (I think) explicitly taking Watson’s argument to task, Nicolaisen (1976, 241) has argued that river names like the Earn, and the Findhorn and Deveron, contain an element that belongs to the common European lexicon of rivers. Watson argued instead that Strathearn was a district first, with various Earn names precipitating out; and also argued that there was a region named Eren or similar in the region of Nairn (no relation), from which a number of places received their names. This would include Auldearn, and also the two rivers Findhorn and Deveron. Nicolaisen probably sounds the clearest note of caution here: ‘the evidence is too scanty to make a final judgement’.

Banba appears in the list of ‘goddesses’ who give their names to Ireland. It is a problematic name. It may be that it is related to the word *banb* ‘suckling pig’, and that the –a ending is an attempt to make a ‘goddess’ name out of it. Equally, however, it may be derived from a different word. Because of its closeness to *banb* ‘pig’ it cannot be certain in any case that the place-names in Scotland we are dealing with are from Banba. *Banb*, like its Welsh cognate *banw* was used in particular for river names, and this is likely what we are dealing with in cases such as Banavie, Benvie < *banbhaidh*. But this is perhaps not the whole story. It is the case that in Banff, and elsewhere, we don’t, in fact, have river names carrying the *banb* element. Banff itself is on the Deveron. Is it credible that this name has displaced an earlier river Banb? But Banff is not Banba, and Watson himself recognised the intrinsic problems here. It seems to me that, taken on its own, there is no good reason to regard any of the Scottish examples as representing a ‘new Ireland’ name. That said, Banff itself may prove an exception based on context. The key to understanding that context, I would argue, may lie in our last example: Elgin.

It is, in fact, with **Elg** > Elgin that we return to some certainty. It is hard to see that those instances of Elg (Glenelg, Elgin) we have can represent anything other than ‘Ireland’. Elg appears, despite the valiant efforts of medieval antiquarians, not to have any common meaning. Its etymology – as indeed its morphology – is obscure. As a result, in Elgin, we seem fairly securely to find a place named ‘Elg’ (with a

characteristic eastern Scottish suffix in -in, or perhaps a diminutive, 'little Elg'. This can be little else than our poetic name for Ireland.

Taken individually, then, we must reject any wholesale use of the 'New Ireland' tag in eastern Scottish place-names. Whilst it is difficult to find any other good explanation for Atholl and Elgin, the same is by no means true of the other elements. However, I am unwilling to completely abandon the thesis in the context of the north-east. I am struck by the fact that at the very earliest stratum of place-name record we find the names *Eren*, *Elgin* and *Banb* appearing as already central places on the way to development as burghs (in the case of Auldearn, abortively so). Admittedly, they join in this several places that do not relate to 'Ireland', e.g. Inverness, Nairn, Forres. Nonetheless, the name Elgin, so difficult to explain as anything other than an 'Ireland' name, may embolden us to take these names as emblematic in some way of the Gaelic settlement and development of this region of Scotland. It is tempting to provide a narrative in which we have our cake and eat it too: admitting that in origin *Eren* and *Banb* may have been originally river names, they could well have been reanalysed and reused to provide 'central place' names redolent of the homeland of the Gael. It is in this region, too, that we find the most convincing example of a name in *Fál*: Dunphail near Forres.

On a final note, we should remember that, with the exception of Ériu / Éireann, these names are high register in meaning 'Ireland'. As such, if *Eren*, *Elgin*, and *Banff* are coinages of this sort, it may be thought they belong to a particular moment in the settlement history of the northeast. Given their status as central places in the 12th century, it may be that that moment was not very far distant from it.

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Professor Thomas Owen Clancy, Department of Celtic, University of Glasgow (based on his talk at the Elgin conference)

WOMEN IN SCOTTISH PLACE-NAMES

Studies of women in English place-names (Hough 2002 and 2008) have proved useful in investigating the position of women in early

society. The potential of this approach in Scotland may be even greater, given the wider range of historical language communities and the gaps in the documentary record. The challenges of the work are also greater, as less primary material has been assembled for the study of Scottish place-names. The first volume of the Scottish Place-Name Survey (Taylor 2006) contains a wealth of evidence for Scottish women; but many older surveys are compiled on less rigorous scholarly principles. Matheson (1905) explains Janetsfield in Drainie as 'the thane's field or portion of land' from an earlier *Thanetsfield*. I cannot trace either *Thanetsfield* or *Janetsfield*, although *Janefield* appears north-east of Drainie Wood on the 1st edition 6 inch OS map.

Another problem is that phonological developments may be affected by folk etymology, as with Maggieknockater. Also, some minor names containing feminine personal names may have been ephemeral. On the opposite side of Drainie Wood from *Janefield* is *Emilyfolds*. Unlike *Janefield*, this appears on the 1st edition 1 inch as well as the 1st edition 6 inch OS maps, but it has disappeared by the second editions, and I have not found it in earlier or later sources. Their potential instability makes names like these difficult to track down, but has the corresponding advantage that they may be datable close to the time of recording.

Some generics may be more likely than others to combine with references to women. Eight Fife place-names from Ann(e) include seven An(n)fields. *Janefield* in Drainie may form part of a group with these and others such as *Janefield* and *Jessfield* in Edinburgh, *Jeaniefield* in Roxburghshire and *Maryfield* in Fife. In England, feminine personal names occur in a group of place-names from OE *burh* 'fortification'. It is therefore intriguing to find them in later coinages from the Scots reflex *burgh*, including *Helensburgh* in Dunbartonshire, *Marionburgh* in Moray and Aberdeenshire, *Maryburgh* in Ross and Cromarty, *Burghnamary* north-east of Rothes, and a field-name *Maryburgh* in Kinross-shire.

Some place-names are commemorative, as with *Maryburgh* (now Fort William), named from Queen Mary II, and *Maryborough* in Ireland, named from Queen Mary I. Others denote the Virgin Mary, as with *Marykirk* and the name-type *Marywell*. More ambiguous are *Marybank*, *Maryhill*, and place-names from *lady*. Elgin Castle

stands on Lady Hill, recorded in 1574 as *the castell hill callit our Ladyhill* (Cramond 1903). There are six occurrences of the name-type Ladywell in the Scottish Field-Name Survey, and others near Edinburgh and in Glasgow (now Ladywell Street). Lady's Mill in Fife, named from the chapel of St Mary, and Ladycroft in Knockando south of Elgin, which belonged to the church, are both paralleled elsewhere. *Leuedycothe* (1238) near Nairn is ambiguous, but in my view probably religious.

Most toponymic references to women are topographical. Catherinebraes near Ladycroft in Knockando might denote St Catherine, the etymon of St Catherine's Croft south-west of Elgin. However, Catherinebraes is consistently spelled with <C>, while St Catherine's Croft also appears with <K> in early records (Cramond 1903). Moreover, *brae* is elsewhere associated with local women: Maggie Duncan's Hill in Fife is also known as Maggie Duncan's Brae (Taylor 2006).

There is another Catherinebraes in Aberlour. Place-name doublets are generally regarded as homonyms (Sandnes 2007). However, homonymy is random, whereas identical place-name formations are motivated in one of several ways. Their classification as homonyms may therefore need rethinking.

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Dr Carole Hough (from her talk to the Elgin conference)

A FOLK ETYMOLOGY CLASSIC

John G Wilkinson reports:-

My friend Kenny (whom I used to teach) was at a wedding in Limekilns (in west Fife) the other week. At the reception the local sage, a man in his 70s, was expatiating on the history and

geography of the area to his spellbound listeners. He got to the Dunfermline linen industry. 'In fact,' quoth he in all seriousness, 'that's how Dunfermline got its name: I'm gaun *down fer ma linen*.'

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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.

SACRÉ BLEU! QU' EST-CE QUE C'EST QUE ÇA?



Scots are famously a nation of emigrants. And like many such, they have taken place-names with them, especially to the English-speaking former colonies. Stuart Conroy's *The Name's the Same* is a gazetteer and exploration of many of these names, mainly settlements. There are also

some mountain names, with Ben Lomond having the most descendants – there's one each in New Zealand, New Brunswick, New South Wales, Tasmania and Utah. The latter is part of the range that used to be featured in the opening credits of Paramount pictures. By comparison, mighty Ben Nevis has but one colonial echo, in the far south of New Zealand.

But what is this on a road sign near Grenoble in the Alps? Did the Auld Alliance have an onomastic thread to it? Did fleeing Jacobites take a name with them? Sadly, it is not a hill but a mountain hamlet, at the foot of the mighty cliffs of the Vercors plateau. And while the local literature on place-names is silent on it, other villages with *ben* elements tend to be etymologised as *béni* (blessed) or *bien* (well, good) - quite unlike our own Ben Nevis, usually interpreted as venomous mountain.

Pete Drummond

LIES, DAMN LIES, STATISTICS AND THE TRUE SIGNIFICANCE OF ISLAY'S NORSE PLACE- NAMES

With little other evidence to go by, place-name statistics are central to our understanding of the Norse impact on Western Maritime Scotland. The purpose of my talk was to highlight the importance of context when using these statistics.

Etymological surveys by Marwick (1952), Oftedal (1954) and Thomas (1876, 1881-2) suggested relative proportions of Norse and Gaelic farm-names for Orkney (almost 100% Norse), Lewis (80% Norse: 20% Gaelic) and Islay (33% Norse: 66% Gaelic). Comparison of these figures has fed the received dichotomy of native 'extirpation' in the North but survival in the South. We can call this the 'Ratio Approach' to Norse settlement studies. Without background detail, however, the validity of this approach is open to question. The need for critical re-appraisal can be illustrated by a contextualised re-examination of the evidence for Islay.

The island of Islay lies at the SW extremity of the Inner Hebridean archipelago. To the modern, urbanite mindset, it is peripheral, barren, and not the most obvious target for Norse settlement. To primitive medieval

farmers, however, its favourable bedrock, soils and climate combined to make it one of the most fertile lands in the West. Its location, at the entrance to the North Channel, was also highly significant. Whoever controlled Islay was also well placed to control transit between the Hebrides and the Irish Sea.

An abundance of dry-stone fortifications suggests that these qualities were exploited in prehistoric times. It is also clear from a series of early documentary references that a thriving prestige economy survived on the island into the 6th and 7th centuries AD. Its subsequent disappearance from the historical record corresponds to the advent and aftermath of the so-called 'Viking Age'. Significantly, however, when it reappears in the late 12th century, it is at the heart of the vigorously 'Gaelic' MacSorley sea-kingdom.

As Islay was Gaelic-speaking before and after the Viking Age, it is assumed to have remained so throughout. We can nevertheless infer a Norse presence from what we are told was happening in the neighbouring areas. Norse Vikings sailed past Islay *en route* to Ireland. We know that they caused havoc nearby (e.g. AU 794.7, 802.9, 806.8) and eventually gained control of 'all the islands around Ireland' (ASB 847). While it is hard to imagine that this Norse dominion did not include the fertile and well-placed island of Islay, it is often assumed that the lack of evidence for stereotypical Norse long-houses precludes all but marginal settlement. The truth is that no Viking Age structures of any kind have yet been found in Islay. When it comes to culturally diagnostic artefacts, on the other hand, those which can be traced to this period have been overwhelmingly Norse.

Then, of course, there is the matter of such palpably Norse place-names as Conisby (ON **Konungsbyr*, 'the King's farm'), and Stremnish (ON **Strömnæs* 'headland of the current'). Surprisingly, almost bizarrely, in fact, there has been very little debate on the social context of Norse settlement – of how the implantation of Norse names and their survival *in situ* was possible in a landscape that was already fully owned and occupied by speakers of Gaelic. This is where the ratio approach really starts to unravel.

Firstly, it gives no indication of the physical distribution of place-names. If we take the



Stephen MacDougall's Map of Islay 1749-51 (BI: 552-3)

simple step of plotting Gaelic and Norse farm-names on a map it is clear that farms with Norse names are distributed fairly evenly across almost every habitable part of the island. When we examine their basic economic connotations, it is clear that many lay on highly productive land – land which must previously have been owned, farmed and named by speakers of Gaelic.

It has been argued that the low ratio of Norse to Gaelic farm-names in Islay reflects the temporary take-over of a Gaelic-speaking society by an elite veneer of Norse warlords. Given what is known of social structure in early medieval Norway and Scotland, however, this seems unlikely. Unlike Norman England, for example, where francophone lords had the social and

military infrastructure to remain isolated from their English-speaking peasants, the local 'headmen' in early medieval Islay would have lived and worked alongside their people. If these were Gaelic-speaking, we might expect the incomers to have been relatively quickly assimilated. The survival of so many Norse farm-names into modern times points instead to large scale immigration following a break in both language and population.

By classifying names as simply Gaelic or Norse, the ratio approach obscures several contextualising features of Islay place-names which could help verify this. As the linguistic background of Islay's name-giving community appears to have changed from Gaelic to Norse, and then back to Gaelic again, care must be taken to distinguish between independent names, which are intrinsically new coinages; and dependent names, which include pre-existing name material. Where a dependent name comprises word-material from more than one language, the relationship between its new and dependent components can hint at the relative periods of productivity of the different source languages. In the case of Dùn Bhoraraic in Kilmeny parish, for example, speakers of Gaelic coined a dependent *dùn* name by adaptation of a pre-existing *Boraraic (ON **Borga(r)vík* 'Bay of the fort'). Critically, however, the presence of this element points to the previous existence of an independent Norse name and thus of a Norse-speaking name-giving community which has later come to speak Gaelic. When dependent units are figured into a standard ratio, the relationship of originally Norse to Gaelic names rises above 1:1 – substantially higher than Thomas' figure of 1:2.

Closer inspection of the dependent material challenges the established model yet further. While MacDougall's map of 1749-51 shows more than 20 dependent Gaelic farm-names containing Norse material, there is not one Norse name containing Gaelic material. There is no sign of a **Portmór+vík* or a **Ballimartin+staðir*. The easiest explanation for this discrepancy would be to see Norse settlement following a period of ethnic cleansing. By killing or capturing the natives and sending them off to the battlefields of Ireland or the slave markets of the Abbasid Caliphate, the Norse would also have displaced otherwise resilient local place-names. The eventual absorption of Norse speaking Islay into the *Gaidhealtachd* on the other

hand seems to have involved the introduction of Gaelic to an established population capable of passing on Norse name material.

But why, then, if the Norse impact on Islay really was so dramatic, is the total number of Norse names far less than their Gaelic counterparts? Settlement study is a retrospective business. Unqualified place-name ratios, however, tell us nothing about the effect of post-Norse socio-economic and political developments on naming traditions and nomenclature. Islay is known to have received several waves of Gaelic-speaking immigrants since the end of the Viking Age, each with the potential to replace Norse name material with Gaelic neologisms. Take, for example, the arrival of Somerled mac Gilla-brigte and his supporters from mainland Argyll in the mid 12th century. As a powerful new socio-political force on the island, these men will undoubtedly have left their mark on the local nomenclature. Indeed, examination of the 1541 rental of the Lordship of the Isles, the first to list the tenants of Islay's farm-districts, reveals a broad correlation between clusters of Gaelic farm-names and those parts of the island under the direct control of the Lordship's traditional office bearers.

A MacSorley influence can also be found in the generic elements of Islay's Gaelic farm-names. Of these, *baile-* and *cill-* stand out immediately, occurring in around one third of the total. As common Gaelic generics, we might expect them to seem over-represented. But if we consider their distribution alongside the historical context of their coinage, a rather different explanation comes to mind.

While the word *baile-* is attested early in the Medieval period, it is not particularly common in place-names until the 12th century. This, by no mere coincidence, is the period when written standards of land-ownership first rose to the fore. In the Latin administrative documents of the day, landholdings were styled *ville*. It may have been as a colloquial counterpart to this term that Gaelic *baile-* blossomed as a place-name element. If so, the clear clustering of Islay's *baile-* names might point to the wholesale division of newly acquired estates.

We can envisage a similar scenario for names in *cill-* ('cell' or 'chapel'). Unlike *baile-* names, farm-names in *cill-* are remarkably evenly distributed – not, it has to be stressed, in terms of distance – but in terms of land assessment. On average, we

find one such farm containing an ancient chapel for every 6 Quarterlands Old Extent. Given that the advent of clan Somerled was coincident with the establishment of the parish network, this layer of *cill*- names could represent another set of administrative neologisms. What, if anything, these names replaced is difficult to say. It is worth noting, however, that even the most conspicuous of Islay's *baile*- clusters is punctuated by (fossilised) Norse nature names.

A final problem with the ratio approach is the way it treats all place-names as equal for statistical purposes. Thus the linguistic heritage of a small stream might be equated to that of a prominent mountain when assessing the relative 'Norseness' of an area. This is inconsistent with place-name theory. According to Magnus Olsen (1934), most place-names can be designated 'names of the farm' or 'names of the district', with the community creating, and/or maintaining them, being known as their 'user group'. Thus, while the names of minor topographical features on a given farm, at a given point in time might only be known to individuals living on that farm; those of more conspicuous features might be known to everyone in the district.

As we might expect for an island previously dominated by speakers of Norse, Norse name material is still extremely over represented when it comes to the more conspicuous topographic features. Down the NW coast of the Oa peninsula, for example, the names of all the major indentations in the landscape have a Norse heritage: Port Alsaig (ON **Állsvík*); Frachdale (ON **Frakkadalr*); Grasdale (ON **Grasdallr*); Glen Astle (ON **Ássdalr*); and Giol (ON **Gil*).

The same cannot be said at the level of 'names of the farm', the majority of which are Gaelic. But with much smaller user-groups, these names have been far more susceptible to change. When the Cawdor Campbells imported Gaelic-speaking farm-workers from Nairnshire in the 17th century, for example, their displacement of established local user-groups is likely to have seen many localised nature names, which could well have included Norse material, being replaced with Gaelic neologisms. Further dilution of Islay's Norse nomenclature will have followed the agricultural reforms of the 18th century, and clearances of the 19th. While both Gaelic and Norse material might have been lost in these phases, any new names coined will have

drawn on Gaelic or English and not Norse material, thus divorcing the relevance of modern place-name ratios yet further from the realities of the Viking Age.

In summary, I would ask the reader to be wary of bald statistics. They may be convenient, but they can also be misleading. On critical reappraisal of the place-name evidence for Islay, it seems that Norse settlement was far from marginal, with the Norse language completely supplanting Gaelic for a time during the early Middle Ages. And if this could happen in an island as important as Islay, it is unlikely that surrounding parts of the Maritime zone escaped the same fate.

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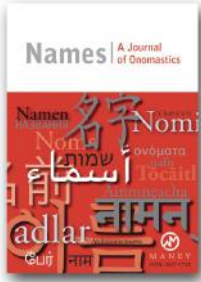
Dr Alan Macniven (based on a talk at the Spring 2007 conference)

TROUBLE DOWN SOUTH

A recent letter in the *Independent* reminded readers of the local newspaper that carried the headline about residents of neighbouring parishes in Essex and Hertfordshire: 'Nasty man marries Ugley woman'.

This letter was prompted by a news item about controversy in a Dorset village between those who defiantly adhered to its traditional name of Shitterton and those who favoured the removal of the offending <h>, in matters such as street signage and addresses.

This, of course, from a county whose River Piddle has already adopted a more genteel form in the settlement names Tolpuddle, Affpuddle and Puddletown. (Thanks to Simon Taylor for keeping an eye on the *Independent*)



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M A N E Y

BOOK REVIEW

Scottish Place Names, Maggie Scott, Scottish Language Dictionaries. £4.99. ISBN 9781845021931.

This is a delightful book, full of fascinating detail both for the tourist and the casual reader - at whom the series is probably aimed - and for those with a serious interest in the study of place-names. I have however one criticism - the title! It, and the front cover's illustration of a signpost pointing to Auchenshoogle (and two other places), imply a book covering all of Scotland and its languages, Gaelic included. In fact, it is a glossary of Scots language place-name elements - and there is indeed some small print on the cover, "Say it in Scots". The author perhaps had no control over the title, since it is one of a series of four, including *Scotland's Weather* and *Wha's Like Us*.

The book is arranged to group the elements that she selects under six chapter headings: Hills and Mountains, Rivers and Lochs, Forests and Glens, Sea and Coast, Buildings and Settlements, and Streets and Bridges, together with an introduction and epilogue. Quotes from Old Scots written sources, and others such as the Old Statistical Account, are frequently used to add colour to the outlines of the explanation.

Maggie Scott has a doctorate, essentially on Scots in place-names, and the depth of her knowledge shows in almost every entry, particularly on the etymology of Scots words, such as *kipp* meaning pointed - usually of hills - deriving probably from Middle Dutch or Low German *kippe*. But her style is neither too dry nor too deep (to mix metaphors), as academic prose can be, but carries the reader along easily with its light touch, and sometimes a wry humour.

As an example of these points, here is a (shortened) version of the entry on *wick*.

"Place-names incorporating the term *wick* usually derive from one of two sources. Some reflect use of the Old English word *wīc* '(dependent) farm' as in Hedderwick 'heather farm' in Angus ... while others such as Lerwick in Shetland ... derive from Old Norse *vík* 'bay'. In *A Vertebrate Fauna of the Shetland Isles* (1899), Evans and Buckley remark that the various inlets of the sea are variously styled Wick, Voe, or Geo, according to their breadth and the

nature of their surroundings. ... The similarity of terms derived from Old Norse and Old English can often be confusing, and many an inquirer has ended up with their wicks in a twist. ..."

This reviewer thought his knowledge of Scots toponyms was pretty extensive, but this book contained quite a bit new to him. Of course there are some interpretations I might disagree with: in the Hills chapter, she says that the term *pike* connects up with its widespread use in the Scandinavian names in the Lake District. In fact most of the (few) hills in south Scotland with this element appear to refer to the cairn on top, which is indeed one meaning of the element given by the SND. And while it is correct that *pap* denotes a conical hill, surely it is connected with its Scots meaning as a breast.

These are minor points. This book would make a fine winter gift for many an expatriate Scot, but even more so for you, dear reader, as a place-name student and enthusiast.

Pete Drummond

CULTURAL CONTACTS FUND

All applications welcome!

We wish to remind you that following successful fundraising for the Shetland conference volume *Cultural Contacts in the North Atlantic Region: The Evidence of Names* (P. Gammeltoft, C. Hough and D. Waugh eds.) we have surplus funds which we are using for the benefit of name research in the following ways:

- ▶ **Grants to enable students of onomastics to attend conferences**
- ▶ **Travel grants to enable students of onomastics to pursue their research in the field**
- ▶ **Grants towards publication of onomastic material relating to the North Atlantic region, defined broadly as in the publication**

A small steering committee, representing the three societies, has been appointed to make decisions on the fair allocation of funds. Further information is available from the coordinator of the steering committee, Dr Doreen Waugh:
<doreen.waugh@ed.ac.uk>

Application forms can be downloaded from the Scottish Place-Name Society website:
<<http://www.spns.org.uk>>

A LOOK AHEAD TO THE SPNS SPRING CONFERENCE, NEW GALLOWAY, SATURDAY 9 MAY 2009

Howe Hill o' Haggamalag, Hairy Horroch, Fell o' Eschonchan ...: where else but Galloway could such weird place-names occur? Well, the SPNS Spring Conference has been arranged to take place right in the centre of Galloway, at the new Cat Strand, New Galloway, Glenkens. Galloway has a complex and rich place-name heritage with earlier Brittonic and Anglian layers substantially submerged beneath an intense Gaelicisation prior to Scots and English forms coming in. Add a dash of Norse here and there with close proximity to Man and Ireland and this fascinating picture is almost complete. But not quite; we still had a gentrification process to go through. S.R. Crockett, a local author of the 19th century, didn't approve, commenting 'A certain name-changing fiend brought into our Erse and Keltic Galloway a number of mongrel names, probably some Laird Laurie with a bad education and a plentiful lack of taste, who, among other iniquities, called the ancient Clachan of Pluck after himself....' (i.e. Lauriston).

Such a place-name heritage is cloaked over a quiet, beautiful and varied landscape rising from the Solway Firth and the Irish Sea to the highest mountain in Southern Scotland, The Merrick. The interior of this mountainous area, known as The Dungeon o' Buchan is as desolate and dramatic as the rougher bounds of the Highlands.

The conference will have a Galloway theme and it is hoped to organise an excursion to an area of toponymic interest for the Sunday (10th May). More details will follow but book the dates in your diary!

Cat Strand website: www.catstrand.com

Overnight accommodation available in the area includes three hotels in or near New Galloway:-

Cross Keys, www.thecrosskeys-newgalloway.co.uk;
Kenmure Arms, www.kenmurearmshotel.co.uk;
and the Ken Bridge Hotel (approx 1 mile away), www.kenbridgehotel.co.uk.

Further hotels are available in Dalry, 4 miles away (Lochinvar Hotel) and in Castle Douglas, 14 miles away. For those with more Spartan or nostalgic tastes, Kendoon youth hostel is north of Dalry and has superb views to the Rinns of Kells range of hills.

IMMINENT EVENTS

The SPNS **Autumn 2008 Conference** will be at Abertay University, Bell Street, Dundee, on Saturday 8 November. Details and application form are in the accompanying flier. The programme has an intriguing mix of the very local and the farther-flung, including a contribution from Latvia which should stimulate much thought on the lines of 'contrast and compare' with Scottish contexts.

The **Scottish Society for Northern Studies** meets two weeks later, at 10.15 on 22nd November, at the David Hume Tower, George Square, Edinburgh, for its 40th annual conference. Subjects include 'Scotland in its Northern Context' and 'Forty Years of Northern Archaeology'. Details from: <alancalder@btinternet.com>

DR MAY WILLIAMSON

Many with an interest in place-names in Scotland will have been saddened to learn of the death earlier this year of Dr May Williamson. She was well known and highly regarded in particular for her 1943 University of Edinburgh PhD thesis on the Non-Celtic Place-Names of the Scottish Border Counties; however, this has remained relatively inaccessible in original hard copy, and SPNS has supported a project to have it reproduced in a form that will shortly be available to everyone on the internet. More on this is expected to be announced at the forthcoming conference in Dundee.

At the Society's inaugural conference in St Andrews in May 1997 May Williamson gave a short report on recent work on street-names, for which in her later years she found research more practicable than in wilder landscapes. At that time the availability of three recent volumes was described thus:-

The Origin of Burntisland and Kinghorn Street Names, Kirkcaldy District Council, 1992. Unfortunately this is no longer obtainable. However, there is a copy for consultation at Kirkcaldy Public Library, as well as at the Leven Tourist Information Office (Tel. 01333 429464).

The Origin of Street Names of South Queensferry and Dalmeny, privately printed 1993, obtainable from the National Library of Scotland shop, George IV

Bridge, Edinburgh and the Bridge Bookshop, South Queensferry, price £1.50

The Origins of Street Names of Dalkeith, Midlothian Council Library Services, 1996, obtainable from Dalkeith and other branches of Midlothian Libraries, as well as from the NLS shop, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh, price £6.99.

Availability is likely to be even more restricted now, and how to make this work more accessible may be an appropriate matter for SPNS to consider.

It is intended to include an appreciation of May Williamson's life and work in the next issue of Scottish Place-Name News.

'RECORDS OF THE PARLIAMENTS OF SCOTLAND TILL 1707'

This resource, with an abundance of early forms of place-names and historic contexts for them, is now online at <www.rps.ac.uk>. The identification of place-names needs some refinement, and Dr Gillian Mackintosh, who is working on the project, would be grateful to be notified of any errors found. (Gillian Mackintosh's e-mail: <ghm2@st-andrews.ac.uk>)

NEW PUBLICATION

John MacQueen's *Place-Names of the Wigtownshire Moors and Machars* has recently been published by Stranraer and District Local History Trust <<http://www.stranraerhistory.org.uk/>>. ISBN 978 0 9542966 9 8. 191 pages including photos and index: a companion for the previous volume *Place-Names of the Rhinns of Galloway and Luce Valley* (2002). The publication came too late for a review in this issue of Scottish Place-Name News, but expect one in the Spring 2009 issue. It should be available to buy from the bookstall at the conference in New Galloway.

BLITON

At the time of going to press letter A of 'Brittonic Language In The Old North' (see article on page 7 in Spring 2008 issue of Scottish Place-Name News) was expected to be available imminently for online reference. Further sections will follow at a faster rate than the initial work. More details should be forthcoming at the conference in Dundee on 8 November.



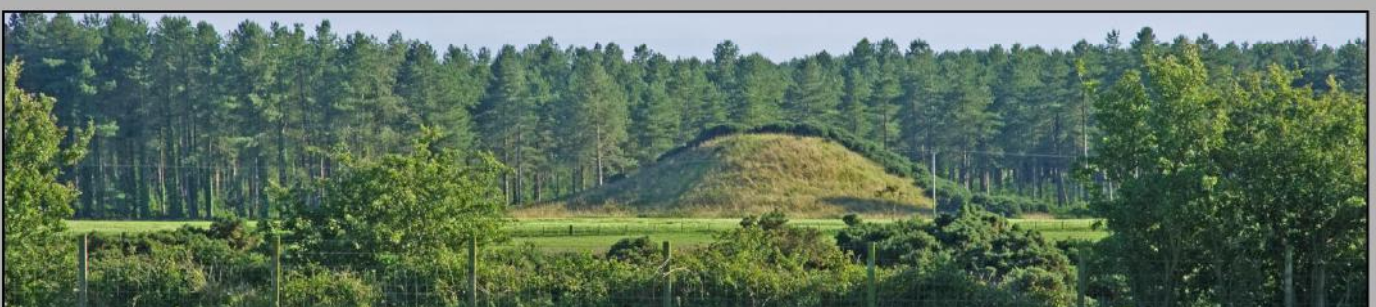
A familiar view of Ben Lomond, across Loch Lomond from the western shore north of Luss. Among the topics for the conference at Dundee is 'Saints' Names & Saints' Territories in north Fife and on Loch Lomondside (Brigit, Kessog and Mo Cha)'. Kessog is especially associated with Luss and Mo Cha appears in the name of Balmaha village on the opposite shore.



Loch Enoch with its Silver Strand is in the midst of some of Galloway's wildest country - notoriously hard going on foot - and surrounded by hills including Mullwharchar (above) to the north and the Merrick (below) to the west; at 843 metres the Merrick is the region's highest. The loch is Scotland's highest for its size and is fed only by seepage over the granite bedrock of the basin among hills formed of harder metamorphic rocks. (Photos: Michael Ansell)



Droughduil Motte at Dunragit, east of Stranraer (photo below), looks like a typical 12th century castle mound and was assumed until recently to be no more than that. However, excavations at the beginning of this century found that its origins were as part - possibly a viewing platform - of a massive ceremonial complex, otherwise not now traceable on the flat landscape, of the late Neolithic (mid 3rd millennium BC). The location on an obvious strategic route, still used by the railway and the A75 trunk road, may not be accidental. The significance of the name Dunragit is controversial!



St Brendan may never have visited Birnie in Moray, but the association in local belief between the two names presented an opportunity for a striking stained glass window in the parish church (Photo: Helen McKay)