



# scottish place-name society comann ainmean-àite na h-alba

## 2021 CONVENER'S REPORT

### Introduction

This is my first report as Convener of the Scottish Place-Name Society. I'd like to begin it by thanking my predecessor, Professor Carole Hough, for the sterling job she has done in the role. Carole's is a difficult act to follow, but I will try to do my best!

To say this last year has been challenging would be an understatement. My thoughts, like those of the Committee, go out to all of you who have suffered personally and lost loved ones during the pandemic. We can only hope that with the vaccination programme nearly complete, the tide will soon turn for good.

### Main Activities

Here in the SPNS, we resolved to keep society business going as best we could. Despite our optimism at the last AGM that things might soon return to normal, that, sadly, proved not to be the case. In fact, it is only now, a full year later, that we can finally see some clear light at the end of the tunnel.

With gatherings and travel severely restricted, there have been no traditional conferences or meetings. But we have not been inactive. In November, we moved our Autumn conference online, with almost 100 guests participating via the Zoom platform. This virtual conference was a first for the Society, but I am pleased to report that things ran smoothly, with several of the presentations subsequently published in the Society's newsletter or available via the website. Of course, there are many aspects of more traditional meetings that online activity can never replicate. But November's experience did serve to make the proceedings accessible to those whose health or distant location might have prevented them from attending. While we hope to get back to physical conference halls and meeting rooms in the future, the Committee will now actively consider ways in which new technology can help to widen access to and enhance the appeal of our events.

As winter moved into spring, it became clear that our planned visit to Sabhal Mòr Ostaig in Skye for our AGM would have to be postponed once again. Fortunately, however, the internet – and the flexibility of our speakers – has come to our rescue for a second time, and afforded us a forum for presentations and discussion, which we can all join and enjoy directly after this AGM.

### Other Conferences, Projects and Publications

Elsewhere in the world of onomastics, work has continued in a similar vein. Online conferences have been offered by a number of groups and projects including the *Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland*, and *The Place-Names of the Galloway Glens* project. Additional major research projects starting or continuing apace include *The Place-names of the Coalfield Communities*; and *Iona's Namescape: Place-Names and their Dynamics in Iona and its Environs*, with numerous smaller initiatives and investigations underway. Following on from the *Black Lives Matter* movement, there has been a particular focus on place-names linked to Scotland's role in the slave trade and other less savoury aspects of early modern colonialism.

In terms of publications, the year since our last AGM has seen the release of two further editions of *Scottish Place-Name News*, thanks to the hard work of Bill Patterson and Leonie Mhari. We have also seen the publication of the weighty *Place-Names of Clackmannanshire* by Simon Taylor with Thomas Owen Clancy, Peter McNiven and Eila Williamson. This long-awaited volume is available direct from the publisher, Shaun Tyas, with a discount for Society members. *The Place-Names of Berwickshire Volume 1* has been held up by the lockdowns, but is anticipated in the not-so-distant future.

### **Outreach Activity**

Following last year's AGM and the election of Sofia Evemalm-Graham, Alasdair Whyte onto the Committee, a new sub-committee was established to review and refresh the Society's engagement with the wider world through social media. Our Twitter account has been given a reboot, and now has more than 400 followers. More excitingly, the Society has established a presence on Instagram, which has already attracted almost 200 followers. These platforms are being used to share and promote the work of the society generally, but also to share thought-provoking observations on individual place-names.

The sub-committee has also been tasked with developing short videos for social media, to serve as both introduction and enticement to studying the place-names of Scotland. After much discussion and planning, filming for the first of these is now scheduled to begin in the coming months, with Alasdair, Sofia and Simon Taylor working on a section on the Northern Brittonic component of Scottish place-names with the University of Glasgow's Learning Enhancement & Academic Development Service. When all parts of the video are complete, they will be edited together and posted on YouTube to maximise access to the public.

### **Changes to the Constitution**

The Committee's experience of working remotely over the past year-and-a-bit have really highlighted the importance of the internet as a means of communication and web-based resources for the dissemination of knowledge. They have also made it clear to the Committee the very real debt we owe to our own Webmaster Simeon Krastev, who has already played a pivotal role in revamping our website, and managing our electronic interactions. For these reasons, I am proposing formalising the role of Webmaster, and adding it, as an additional office to the Society's Committee. The webmaster would have formal responsibility for managing the Society's website, and overseeing other aspects of our core digital business.

This proposal would mean increasing the number of office bearers from five to six, and the maximum total number of office-bearers, ordinary members and co-opted members from 14 to 15.

These changes would require a change to section six of our Constitution to come into effect.

According to section 18, this is possible at an Extraordinary General Meeting held after 21 days notice has been given to the Society's members. I propose that such a meeting be held – via Zoom – on the 24<sup>th</sup> of May at 2 pm. Unless there are strong and valid objections, which will be discussed and debated as appropriate, the meeting itself will be a formality.

### **Elections for Committee Posts**

I am sorry to report that Leonie Mhari will be stepping down from the Committee after quite a few years of very active service, latterly as assistant editor of the newsletter. I would like to take the opportunity to thank Leonie for her contribution, and welcome her to stand for election again in the future should the opportunity arise.

There will be an election to replace Leonie at the AGM.

I should also report that the Committee has co-opted Simeon Krastev under section 6 of the constitution. Should the proposed changes to the constitution outlined above be successful, I propose that Simeon be accepted onto the Committee as a full member, in the official capacity of Webmaster.

### **Future Events**

While the future of live events is still far from certain, members should rest assured that the Society will offer a conference in the autumn. At the moment, this may have to virtual, but if circumstances change in time, this will be reviewed, and members contacted via e-mail.

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Alan Macniven (SPNS Convener) 30 April 2021