



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

2022-3 CONVENER'S REPORT

Introduction

This is my third report as Convener of the Scottish Place-Name Society. It may be short, but it is also positive! Finally, despite the tribulations of the past few years, I think it's fair to say that our societal ship is now back on an even keel. We are sailing, not back to normal, but onwards and optimistically into a bright new future.

Main Activities

Our two conferences this year have maintained the high-standards familiar from previous events. We began our societal year in May, with our first in-person event of the decade! The venue was Sabhal Mòr Ostaig on the Isle of Skye. In the context of the times, the gathering was understandably cautious, with numbers subdued from traditional highs, but respectable in the circumstances. As those of you attending our forthcoming event in Berwick-upon-Tweed will see, however, the traditional format of our Spring Conference continues to appeal. As I write this report, bookings are already approaching the capacity of the venue. If you still need a ticket, now is the time to visit our website and register: <https://spns.org.uk/spring-conference-2023>

In November, we ran our Autumn Conference online, with great success – the fourth time we have done so. In previous years, this was an absolute necessity. While that is thankfully no longer the case, the benefits of this format to members who cannot attend in person for reasons of distance or mobility are clear. To balance out our in-person events in the spring, the Committee has decided to make this a permanent fixture in our calendar for the foreseeable future.

As usual, the papers presented at our conferences have been harvested for publication in the Society's Newsletter, with two issues, Nos. 53 & 54, appearing as planned and on time. The Newsletter Team has now expanded to comprise Bill Patterson (Overall Editor), Eilidh Scammell (Assistant Editor), and Jake King (Assistant Editor). Thanks are due to them for all their hard-work, and in particular, for the new layout introduced in No. 54, which allows us to make better use of modern illustrative materials.

Special acknowledgement, and thanks, are also due to our new Secretary, Jane Drummond (no relation to Pete!), and also to our Web-Coordinator, Simeon Krastev for his continued development of our web presence and booking systems.

This year also saw the award of our Nicolaisen Essay prize to Abbie Heasman, for her submission on 'Inverness-shire Field-Names', for which congratulations are due. We are hopeful that Abbie will be able to present a version of her essay at one of our future conferences.

Other Conferences, Projects and Publications

The Committee has continued to promote the work of the Society, and foster links with other organisations. In October, Simon Taylor, Leslie Fraser and I provided a short article to *Family Tree* magazine, to showcase our activities for aspiring genealogists. We have also been in communication with The Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland, with a view to hosting a joint conference online, possibly this coming autumn.

The Society's Outreach Sub-Committee, Sofia Evemalm-Graham, Alasdair Whyte and Simon Taylor, have worked with colleagues at the University of Glasgow to produce a short video on Scotland's Northern Brittonic Place-Names, which can be viewed here: <https://spns.org.uk/scottish-place-names-northern-brittonic>

New Committee-member Iain MacIlleChiar is currently investigating the training needs of members interested in conducting their own place-name research. His survey will continue at our conference in Berwick-upon-Tweed on the 13th of May. The ultimate goal of Iain's project is to develop resources to guide and inform the membership in their work.

Publications of note include the online Gazetteer for the Roy Military Survey of Scotland, 1747-55, available via the National Library of Scotland's webpages (<https://maps.nls.uk/roy/gazetteer/>). The transcription project behind it took place between February and July 2022, involving more than 180 people, and captured 33,523 place-names in total: 16,425 for the Highlands and 17,097 for the Lowlands. The dataset can be searched online, or downloaded for more sophisticated interrogation.

Cognoscenti of the water of life may also be interested in Jake King's new book, *The A to Z of Whisky Place-Names: Landscape, Language & Invention* published by Whittles Publishing.

Elections for Committee Posts

After many years in the role, our Treasurer, Pete Drummond is now ready to pass on the baton. This is an opportunity for someone to take on the position as is, or for us to restructure how its various components work. The main part of the role is looking after the Society's finances, which are largely conducted electronically through our TSB account. Brief financial reports need to be prepared for committee meetings, annually for the May AGM, and - after auditing by an outsider - to OSCR (the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator). In addition to this, Pete has been the de facto 'Membership Secretary', keeping track of who's in and who's (not) up-to-date with payments. And then there is the bi-annual mailing out of the Newsletter and any incidental flyers.

The good news is that Pete isn't going anywhere, and can help get the new Treasurer settled. We can also look at ways to minimise, and certainly streamline the Membership Secretary dimension to this - by tweaking the way the Society's website is configured. Finally, the way the mail-outs work is not set in stone. Pete is happy to continue with this for the time being, but we could look to alternatives in the future. Needless to say, there's no need to be based in the central belt to take care of the various responsibilities, however they are configured.

If this is of interest, or if you have further questions, please use the appropriate box on the AGM form to let us know.

Alan Macniven (SPNS Convener) 5 May 2023