SCOTTISH PLACE-NAME NEWS

No. 50
Spring 2021

The Newsletter of the

SCOTTISH PLACE-NAME SOCIETY

COMANN AINMEAN-ÀITE NA H-ALBA

A typical view in Clackmannanshire, with four of the Wee County's main components: a backcloth to the north of the Ochil Hills and their steep escarpment; below them the flat land flanking the lower reaches of the River Devon; in the foreground the rolling farmland to its south; and on the left Alva, one of the series of 'Hillfoot' villages that grew into textile towns using water power from the steep hill burns. (Photo: Simon Taylor) A broader view annotated with a selection of place-names is on the back page.

The current postal address of the Scottish Place-Name Society (registered charity SC033810) is:

Membership Details: Annual membership £6 (or £15 for three years), to be sent to Peter Drummond, Apt 8 Gartsherrie Academy, Academy Place, Coatbridge ML5 3AX. (See page 6 for information on Life Membership.)

Scottish Place-Name Society web site: http://www.spns.org.uk/

Newsletter Editorial: Bill Patterson (e-mail pn.patterson3dr@btinternet.com)

COMMENT

This is the third half-yearly Newsletter since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. At that time we could only guess with foreboding at its social and economic, and for some very personal, impact and most of us had probably never heard of Zoom; by now equally few of us may have had no experience of Zoom and rival technologies. Online conferences and committee meetings are not perfect substitutes for actual gatherings and we can look forward eagerly to when those can resume, possibly later this year. But online meeting is far better than no meeting at all, and for those who would find travel difficult for reasons such as distance or poor health it enables participation that would otherwise not be practicable.

Since travel has been greatly restricted it has been another technological blessing to have so many resources, publications and discussions readily available online. If we could not lawfully go far from home, we could at least explore on our screens landscapes recreated in maps such as those made by the first Ordnance Surveyors; remarkable works even if they had occasional imperfections and sometimes relied, for the names recorded, too much on the likes of lairds and ministers and too little on such as shepherds. Not that it is difficult to find online place-names material as far-fetched and unreliable as Antivax conspiracy theories, though at least less harmful.

At the same time, as we are reminded in this issue, traditional paper publications continue to be produced and enjoyed for their satisfying physical presence. It is one of the ironies of the Zoom age that the typical Zoom setting is a study with a background of shelves full of what for many will always be the real thing.

BONHILL PARISH AT THE NORTHERN EDGE OF STRATHCLYDE: THE PLACE-NAME EVIDENCE

The parish of Bonhill lies at the north-western edge of the British Kingdom of Strathclyde. Its northern limit may have been delineated by the southern tip of Loch Lomond, given that no place-names of British origin are found to the north of this point. At some point following the demise of Strathclyde, which had occurred sometime within the early eleventh century, the area now occupied by Bonhill became part of the western reaches of the Earldom of Lennox.[1] It eventually became Gaelicised, although the rate and timing of change of language remain unknown.[2]

The south end of Loch Lomond; in background Ben Lomond ('beacon mountain') with cap of smoke-like cloud

The first attested place-name is 'Lomond', cognate with Modern Welsh *llumon*, or 'beacon', and noted by Nennius within the 9th century in his description of Loch Lomond as '*stagnum Lumonoy*'; the 'beacon' is likely to be Ben Lomond, which often appears to have a plume of cloud above it; whether a beacon was ever lit on the summit is not known. Loch Lomond drains into the river Leven. This place-name has often been claimed to derive from Gaelic *leamhan* for 'elm'; this is an unlikely explanation as elms are widespread throughout the Highlands. More likely is a British derivation either from **limo* > Welsh *llif* 'flood'; or **slimno* > Welsh *llyfn* 'smooth'. Either of these would seem appropriate given that the Leven is the second fastest river in Scotland, with the smooth quality of its water having later attracted the setting up of a textile-dyeing industry on its banks, which was one of Scotland's first industries.

[1] Clancy, T O, Ystrad Clud in *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopaedia*, ed. J Koch, Santa Barbara 2006) p 1818-1820
[2] Neville, C J, Native Lordship in Medieval Scotland, The Earldoms of Strathearn and Lennox, c1140-1365, (2005), Four Courts Press, Dublin, p 42.

Outcrops of rock at hill fort on Carman Hill, with River Clyde and Dumbarton Rock behind

The prime fishing pool of Linbrain on the Leven

Two eminent prominences visible at Bonhill are Carman and Pappert Hill. These are clearly British names. Carman derives from *cair > Welsh *caer* 'fort and *main > Welsh maen 'stone': the reason for this name became clear when, in 1953, aerial photography revealed the buried outline of an iron-age hillfort, its presence up till then having long been forgotten. Pappert Hill is covered in a difficult-to-traverse thicket. While the second part of its name derives from British *pertā > Welsh *perth* 'hedge/thicket' the first might derive from either Brythonic *panto > Welsh *pant* 'valley, or from Old Welsh *peith* > Welsh *paith* 'wilderness'. No examples are known of the word *pant* 'valley' being used as a name for a hill in the Welsh tradition, and therefore the suggestion is made here that the correct interpretation is *peithperth*, 'thicketed wasteland' – a description that would still apply today.

The remaining British place-name is that of Linbrain, a fishing pool on the Leven, known as such at least since medieval times.[3] There is no obvious Gaelic cognate for the second element, 'brain'; it is more likely to derive from British *pren > Welsh *pren*, or 'tree', or *bren > Welsh *bryn*, or 'hill. Both descriptions fit the location and its setting.

The first mormaer of Lennox, Alwyn, or Ailin, ascended to his position in 1178. Given that the Kingdom of Strathclyde had come to its end by at least 1054, we remain unclear as to what sort of polity existed in the era between the two ruling entities. We do not know of Alwyn's origins, but Muireachadh Albanach Ó Dálaigh, in his panegyric to Alwyn, clearly describes him as being Irish.[4] If so, we have no clear explanation for his Welsh-sounding name as preserved locally today[5], nor do we know how he came to his Mormaership, or to his later Earldom of Lennox. If he was indeed a Gael, then perhaps his name reflected a common usage by subjects who were still Britons in terms of their culture and language.

'Alwyn' in the name of a property in Balloch

The first Gaelic place-name, Auchencarroch, is not attested until the early thirteenth century. Auchencarroch, written *Hauchenkerauch* in 1217-1249, is likely to refer to a sheep's pasture, the first element being *achadh,* a field – which came to mean 'farm', and the second comprising *caoraich,* from *caora,* a 'sheep'. Two more *achadh* names arise. Auchendennan is likely to derive from *Achadh an Dùnain,* the 'field of the small fort': this may be the only Gaelic name to refer to a structure which had pre-dated the Earldom of Lennox, whereby it is not clear to which structure it refers, unless it be to a 'round hill' marked on the OS mark as an antiquity, which remains unexcavated to this day (NS3682). Auchenheglish is not attested until 1645, and clearly refers to *Achadh na h-Eaglaise*, and to a church still visible in the eighteenth century, according to the Old Statistical Account,[6] but which had disappeared into the waters of Loch Lomond by the nineteenth century.[7] *Stukeroger,* attested in 1333-

---

[3] *Registrum Monasterii de Passelet (1163-1529)* p 211; Carta donationis terre et piscarie de Lynbren per Robertum Hertford.

[4] Gillies, William, 'A Death-bed poem ascribed to Muireadhach Albanach, *Celtica 21 (1990)*

[5] Personal knowledge

[6] *Old Statistical Account, Parish of Luss*, Volume XVII, Number XVII, (1791-1799) p 242

[7] New Statistical account, Parish of Bonhill, Volume 8,

1365, consists of *Stùc,* for 'hill' and the personal name Roger. *Stùc* is an element which often occurs in the wider area surrounding the Parish of Bonhill.

The Lennox charters name a Roger, who is signatory to a charter of Walter of Faslane in 1375, where his name is given as 'Rogerius filius Glaii.[8] Tullichewen , or *Tulach Eòghainn,* 'Ewan's Hill' refers to a Eòghann, whose identity cannot clearly be ascertained. Dalmonach, still an existing suburb in Bonhill today, or *Dail nam Manach,* 'haugh of the monks', was a lucrative yare, or fishing ground, granted to the monks of Paisley Abbey at Linbrain on the Leven (see above).[9] There are two late eighteenth-century attestations (1777) which bear witness to the continuing usage of Gaelic in the Parish of Bonhill; these are *Sruth na muillin,* or the 'Mill Stream', and *Blàr a' Mhuilt,* the 'Clearing of the Wether', from *Blàr,* a 'muir' and *Mult,* 'a wether'.

Of note is that the British and Gaelic place-names fall into two distinct categories. Apart from the name Carman, which refers to a hill fort, the British names refer to natural phenomena, whereas the Gaelic names refer exclusively to human markers on the land, in terms of possession, religion or agriculture. Where it is not possible to delineate the language shift from British to Gaelic, there is a stark difference in the nature of their respective place-names; it is unclear whether the Gaels translated British settlement names into Gaelic, while keeping the 'natural' names, or whether the British settlements simply ceased to exist.

And lastly the place-name Bonhill itself: it becomes attested in 1249 as *Buthlull.*[10] Its first element, *Buth,* could derive either from Gaelic *both* or British *bod,* both of which refer to a dwelling place, and came later, in Gaelic, to mean a 'church'. [11] As for the second element, this might refer to the saint Lolanus, but of this there is no assurance, and we cannot be certain whether Bonhill is a British or a Gaelic name.

Gwen Jones-Edwards (from her talk to the online conference in November 2020)

(1845) p 222

[8] Registrum Monasterii de Passelet p 86-87

[9] de terra illa que dicitur Dalmaunach, Reg Mon Passelet p 217

[10] Registrum Episcopatus Glasguensis vol 1 (1116-1403), entry no 178

[11] Taylor S, The Early History and Languages of West Dunbartonshire, in *Changing Identities Ancient Roots* (ed Brown I) Edinburgh University Press (2006)

SPNS SOCIAL MEDIA INITIATIVE

At SPNS's November conference last year, the society's Instagram account was officially launched. What follows here is a summary of the social media update given at the conference.

Over the past year, the society's sub-committee (Alasdair Whyte, Simon Taylor, Sofia Evemalm-Graham) has been meeting regularly to discuss various outreach activities on behalf of the society. One of the aims of the sub-committee is to find new ways of engaging with existing members and to attract new members to the society. Amongst other things, this includes a renewed social media presence. The society's Twitter account is active and monitored for any queries, but we are currently focusing on posting new content on Instagram.

Instagram is an especially well-suited social media platform for several reasons; firstly, it is useful in reaching a broad audience, including both an academic and non-academic audience. Secondly, the visual dimension means that it is an excellent platform for showcasing interesting research in an accessible format and place-name research tends to lend itself well to this type of content. Finally, Instagram's word limit is not as restricted as that of Twitter, making it easier to provide meaningful discussions of different place-names.

We plan to post a variety of content relating to all things with a Scottish place-name dimension. A typical entry may consist of an image of a landscape feature or view, a map or manuscript image, with a short description. Where relevant, a discussion of the etymology of the place-name given to that feature or area, or any other interesting aspect of that name will be included. We are currently aiming to post content on a monthly basis and all contributions are individually credited.

An Sàilean/Salen on the east coast of the Inner Hebridean island of Muile/Mull' (Photo by Dr Alasdair C. Whyte)

In our recent posts you can read about a variety of landscape features, including The Murrel in Fife (photo and text by Simon Taylor), An Sàilean/Salen on the Isle of Mull (photo and text by Alasdair Whyte), and An Greasaiche Crom/The Cobbler, Arrochar (photo and text by Bill Patterson, based on a conference talk by Peter Drummond). If society members are keen to see any particular content, including specific place-names, do not hesitate to get in touch (email address below). You can find our Instagram page here: @scotplacenames, and our Twitter here: @Scotplacenames.

Sofia Evemalm-Graham
sofia.evemalmgraham@glasgow.ac.uk

CLACKMANNANSHIRE BOOK LAUNCH

The Place-Names of Clackmannanshire: Simon Taylor with Thomas Owen Clancy, Peter McNiven and Eila Williamson (Shaun Tyas: Donington 2020). 562 + xiii pages.
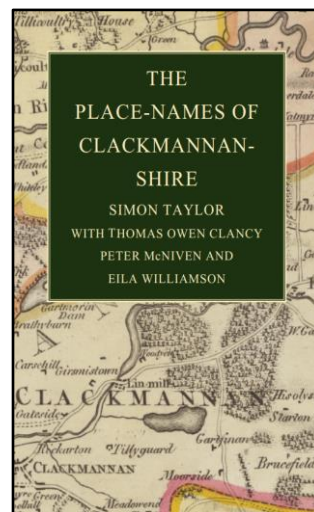
At the virtual SPNS autumn conference on 11 November 2020 there was a virtual book launch: the long-awaited (at least by the authors) *Place-Names of Clackmannanshire* (hereafter *PNCLA*). In fact, even the book was virtual, as it had not actually arrived from the printers. It is, however, out now. Along with its sibling volume *The Place-Names of Kinross-shire* (Simon Taylor with Peter McNiven and Eila Williamson) (hereafter *PNKNR*), which appeared in 2017, *PNCLA* constitutes the two county-survey volumes undertaken as part of the Arts and Humanities Council-funded 'Scottish Toponymy in Transition' project based at the University of Glasgow from 2011 to 2014.[12]

PNCLA is volume VIII in the Survey of Scottish Place-Names. While this was officially established under the auspices of the Scottish Place-Name Society in 2014, in practice it was inaugurated by the publication of *The Place-Names of Fife* Vol. 1 in 2006. This provided a new template for the comprehensive collection and analysis of the place-names of a pre-1975 Scottish county. It is this template, with minor adjustments and refinements, which has been adopted by the Survey of Scottish Place-Names, and it is for this reason that the Survey justifies its retrospective claim to this and the five volumes which followed *Fife* Vol. 1 up until 2012, to the extent that any

reprints of these volumes will carry the SSPN logo.

THE SURVEY OF SCOTTISH PLACE-NAMES
SURVEANCE O THE PLACE-NAMES O SCOTLAND
SUIRBHIDH AINMEAN-ÀITE NA H-ALBA
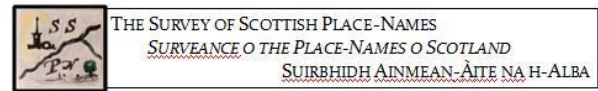
Clackmannanshire is known as the Wee County, it being the smallest in Scotland by area (though not by population). The pre-1975 county consisted of five parishes: **Alloa**, **Alva**, **Clackmannan**, **Dollar** and **Tillicoultry**. These form five chapters, containing individual place-names, fully analysed, arranged alphabetically within each. Each of these parish-chapters is provided with an extensive introduction up to 15 pages long, dealing with the history of the parish as it effects and interacts with its toponymy. It therefore includes details of the medieval church and saints' cults, local legends, land ownership and industry, as well as editions and translations from Latin of some of the more important relevant documents. Several of these introductions also have sections on street- and house-names. Preceding each parish are two maps: (1) a drawn map showing the more important settlements, water-courses and hills; and (2) the parish as it appears on James Stobie's magnificent map of the counties of Perth and Clackmannan, 1783 (in monochrome). This map, in full colour, also provides the design for the dust-wrapper.

THE PLACE-NAMES OF CLACKMANNAN-SHIRE
SIMON TAYLOR
WITH THOMAS OWEN CLANCY
PETER McNIVEN AND
EILA WILLIAMSON

These core five chapters are preceded by three introductory chapters covering such subjects as geology, geography, routeways, industry, early history and language.

The five parish-chapters are followed by several glossaries, the most important of which is the Elements Glossary. Forty pages long, it contains every element identified in a Clackmannanshire place-name from the three languages which have contributed to the county's toponymy: Northern Brittonic, Gaelic and Scots, with its later development, Scottish Standard English.

The county is bounded by the River Forth on the south and the Ochils on the north, the dramatic range of hills which rise up steeply from the low plain below (see cover photo of this issue). The hills and the plain together are encapsulated in the name of what is now the county's largest town,

---

[12] For more information on the project see https://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/humanities/research/celticgaelicresearch/researchprojects/stit.

Alloa, earlier *Alloway*, *Allway* etc. This is made up of two Gaelic elements, *all* 'a cliff' and *magh* 'a plain', the first element referring to the steep escarpment of the Ochils, the second to the low, fertile ground below. The same elements are probably also to be found in the parish-name, Alva, although other theories are available (see *PNCLA* s.n. for full, gory details).

As would be expected in this part of Scotland, the names of the parishes and of the most important settlements are either Northern Brittonic coinings (e.g. Dollar, Menstrie, Aberdona) or Gaelic ones (Tillicoultry, Auchenbaird, Gartinkeir, Balquharn). There were, however, three major divisions of the lands of Tillicoultry with Scots names: Harviestoun, Elistoun and the now obsolete Collintown. Each one has a personal name as the specific, the eponymous Colin of Collintown probably Sir Colin Campbell who held lands in Tillicoultry in the early 14th century – it is likely that the Campbell clan originated in the area. Scots *toun* is of course the standard element meaning 'farm', but what is remarkable about these three names is that they are first recorded in the 15th century with the Scots generic *davoch* instead of *toun* (e.g. *Hervyisdawac*), an extremely rare place-name element in southern Scotland.

The book contains 660 fully analysed place-names, with scores of others discussed in the parish introductions. However, as with the other volumes in this series, PNCLA has attempted not only to see place-names as linguistic items, but also to integrate them into the wider fabric of local history, society and landscape. After all, place-names do not exist in a vacuum.

A pdf of the slides which accompanied the 40 minute presentation of the book can be found on:

Presentations from SPNS Autumn Conference 2020 – Scottish Place-Name Society

Simon Taylor

Life Membership of SPNS

SPNS has a membership category, Life Membership of the Society, for £80. If you would like to become a Life Member, please contact the Treasurer Peter Drummond, addresses below. If you have already paid for a 3-year membership, any outstanding credit balance can count against the £80 fee. peter.drummond@btinternet.com; 8 Academy Place, Coatbridge ML5 3AX

---

*Retail price for **Clackmannanshire volume** £35. Special offer to members of the Scottish Place-Name Society and / or the Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland: £28 and free delivery within the UK. Contact the publisher for a price if it needs to be posted overseas.*

To order, please contact: Shaun Tyas shaun@shauntyas.myzen.co.uk Tel. 01775 821542. Postal address for cheques: 'Shaun Tyas', 1 High Street, Donington, Lincolnshire PE11 4TA.

It can also be ordered on Amazon.

N.B. Some Fife volumes and the Kinross-shire volume are also still available from Shaun Tyas.

AWARDS FOR STUDENTS!
Details of grants available to students from the Thomas Marcus Huser Fieldwork Fund and the Cultural Contacts Fund, as well as of the Nicolaisen Essay Prize, are available on the SPNS website, <http://spns.org.uk/>.

DR CHRISTOPHER H. CAMERON 1940-2020

It was with great sadness that I learnt of the death of Dr Chris Cameron on 27th September last year. He had been an active and enthusiastic member of the SPNS for over 20 years and gave a paper to the Society's spring conference in 2005 titled 'Birds in Place-Names of the Borders'.[13] This drew on an M.Sc. thesis he had completed at Edinburgh University in 1999 titled 'Colloquial names for birds in South-East Scotland'.

Chris had been a much respected and well liked G.P. in Kelso until he took early retirement in the 1990s. This gave him the opportunity to pursue his many other interests, and the thesis brought together two of these: ornithology and language (shortly before starting the M.Sc. he had taken a degree in Russian).

I first met Chris in the early 2000s. When at Edinburgh University he had got to know the historian Dr Alex Woolf, who was teaching there before he went to St Andrews. Chris offered to show Alex some of the Borders hill-forts and other archaeological and early historical sites. This became a regular occurrence, and I was lucky enough to be invited along. For over ten years, once or twice a year Alex and I would drive down

---

[13] It appeared as an article in *SPNNews* 19 (Autumn 2005), pp. 2-4.

to Kelso and pick up Chris, who would then guide us to different sites in the eastern Borders, making the odd foray into Northumberland. I will always treasure the memories of these tours. Chris knew exactly what Alex and myself would want to visit. This was because we had so many interests in common – landscape, archaeology, history, place-names, language.

He was the perfect guide, deeply knowledgeable about all these aspects of his beloved Borders, and full of wonderful stories about the people who lived there. Both Alex and I see it as a huge privilege – and delight - to have had Chris share with us his knowledge and love of this beautiful corner of Scotland. For me the Borders will always now be Cameron country.

A full obituary of this remarkable man can be found in *The Scotsman* 13 October, written by Dr Ken Nesbitt.

Obituary: Dr Chris Cameron, Scottish general practitioner and musician | The Scotsman

Simon Taylor

'The Gaelic Hunting Tradition in Galloway'

An item that regrettably escaped attention in Newsletter 49 was an article by Michael Ansell in the South-West's literary magazine Southlight, issue 27; available online at https://www.wigtownbookfestival.com/uploads/2020-events-content/southlight/Southlight-27-spring-summer-2020.pdf. In not much over two pages this explains the differences between Gaelic hunting on a landscape scale and the Anglo-Norman version in fenced deer parks; and it deals with several place-names and name-forming elements characteristic of hunting and its complex quasi-military organisation in the wild hill country of the South-West.

CHAPMEN AND PACKMEN IN PLACE-NAMES

Most people who passed through the Scottish education system will have come across Rabbie Burns's poem *Tam o' Shanter*. It opens with the lines: 'When chapman billies leave the street/ and drouthy neebors neebors meet'. A *chapman* is, or more precisely was, 'an itinerant merchant or dealer, a pedlar' (Concise Scots Dictionary): the word was found in Middle English from the 13th century, deriving from Germanic languages and the equivalent of German *Kauffmann*, 'merchant trader'. It was first attested in Scotland in the early

15th century, whilst the term *packman* was first attested in the late 16th century, in a Crail Burgh document setting out tolls, 'Ilk chaipman pakman, 1d'. The Concise Scots Dictionary defines *packman* as 'pedlar, travelling merchant'; they carried their merchandise from place to place in a pack on their backs, hence the term.

Chapmen, packmen and pedlars were the travelling salesmen of the day in the 17th and 18th centuries. In the rural areas, in the era before mass transport, they would bring in goods like haberdashery or printed pamphlets to villages and small towns far from the cities. As such, they were the classic outsiders whose arrival in a community may have provoked some suspicion, especially in time of plague or pestilence. They were vulnerable as a result of these suspicions and fears, and also from the temptations (to others) of the wealth they carried on their backs and in their money belts, as they crossed lonely moors and passes between villages. Liz Curtis, in an online article for the Whiteadder Archaeology Project, noted: '"Packman's Grave" was a popular name for single stones or groups of stones, with the legend attached that a travelling packman or pedlar had been murdered there'. This prompted me to search for names which related to chapmen or packmen, especially as preserved by the records collected by the Ordnance Survey Name Books (OSNB) of the mid-19th century (available at the Scotlandsplaces.gov.uk website). Even as late as the 1950s, recordings[14] made of older people in the Highlands by the School of Scottish Studies included tales of packmen as victims of murder, or as possessing second sight or magical powers: there is even a tale of an old woman taking pity on a packman who is about to enter Heaven, but who has no Gaelic.

I have collected nearly four dozen place-names which directly or indirectly recalling their profession, and it is striking how many have tales (especially recorded by the OSNB) involving a violent end to their wandering. Over half of the names in my list recall a chapman, packman or pedlar meeting death in their travels: thirteen were murdered, another six were (allegedly) murdered by other pedlars following a fight – in three cases, remarkably, both men died – three were drowned, three died accidentally, two suicided, two were buried without explanation, one's pack was found but not the man, and one was hanged. Of course some of the associated tales, in most cases recounted in the OSNB, may be folk tales to

---

[14] Tobar na Duilchais, e.g. tracks number 127, 270, 373, 5312, 7828 *et alia*.

explain otherwise mysterious cairns or rocks, but some may have a basis in fact.

Most of these names lie in the Borders and Galloway or in the north-east Buchan lowlands. Although the terms chapman and packman are interchangeable, the former is the commoner in the place-names of the south-west (Galloway and Ayr) and in the north-east, the latter predominant in the eastern Borders especially Berwickshire.

A few examples of these names:

Packman's Grave ELO NT6464: 'a packman said to have been murdered by an innkeeper at Danskine and traditionally said to have been buried here' (Canmore: ID 57532)

Chapman's Howe KCB NX7353: 'It is reported that two chapmen or travelling merchants fought here, both being killed were buried here' (OSNB: 1/20/152/7)

Packman's Hole BWK NT9155: 'A pool of water ... during wet weather often impassable. A packman in crossing it was drowned – hence its name' (OSNB: 1/5/21/4)

Chapman's Craig AYR NX1189: 'It receives its name from a suicide who was found suspended from a jutting point of the rock' (OSNB: 1/3/16/27)

Chapmen's Graves ABD NJ5728: 'Tradition says that a long time ago … two packmen or chapmen, met and quarrelled, words ran high and at length one drew a pistol and shot the other wounding him mortally, the other previous to his exit from the world also drew a pistol and shot his antagonist, and both dying were buried on the spot where they fell' (OSNB: 1/1/46/47)

Brown's Grave AYR NX2780: 'A moss-covered stone ... placed over the ashes of a pedlar named Brown who about 90 years ago was found dead near this spot' (OSNB: OS1/3/14/111)'

The Chapmen's Graves by a hill pass north of Kilsyth

And the Chapmen's Graves STL (at NS7181) featured in the photograph: 'Two small cairns of stones erected over the graves of two pedlars, one of whom, while travelling over the moors, was murdered by the other. The murderer having been brought to justice was executed, and buried on the spot where the murder was committed, and by the side of his victim. This occurred upwards of a century ago' (OSNB: 1/32/16/26)

Peter Drummond (text and photo)

GREENOCK AND GREENWICH: ETYMOLOGICAL COUSINS?

Greenock /ˈgriːnək/ and Greenwich /ˈgrɛnɪtʃ/ are both on estuaries and both have histories as trading ports. The Clydeside town's belongs only to recent centuries whilst the usual explanation of the name Greenwich implies that it was a *wīc* 'trading port, emporium' in centuries following Germanic settlement in south-east Britain, benefiting from the Thames and the legacy of Roman roads for its transport links. Downstream of the former Roman provincial centre of Londinium, it lay towards the north-west corner of the kingdom of Kent.

It is beyond dispute that the second syllables of both names must have entirely different etymological origins. The generally accepted etymologies of their first elements are equally disparate. In *The Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* (1926; p201) W J Watson noted that 'Greenock is well known in Gaelic as *Grianáig*, dative of *grianág*, a sunny knoll, parallel to the masculine *grianán* of the same meaning'; there were other Greenocks in Perthshire and Ayrshire. This seems to remain the prevailing view, and if Gaelic-speaking sailors understood the name as based on *grían* 'sun' it can scarcely be said to have been entirely wrong; we know too that Watson had great respect for Gaelic oral sources. The earliest spelling for this former fishing hamlet is *Grenock* (1296), and later variations such as *Grinok, Greenhok, Grinock, Greenhoke, Greinnock, Grenok* and *Greinok* are insignificant. Apart possibly from a different first vowel in the first element in the earliest form *Gronewic* (918), the spellings for Greenwich have also remained quite consistent, including *Grenewic* (964, in 13th century copy), *Greenwic* (early 11th

century) and *Grenewych* (1291). The usual explanation is that the first element is simply the colour green.[15]

With the greatest respect to a place that must have wonderful midsummer sunsets over the Firth of Clyde and the hills of Argyll, the 'sunny knowe' explanation of Greenock's name has always seemed problematical in terms of topography; and the name existed long before the 18th century fashion for ironic place-names. Apart from the immediate shore area, the land on which the older parts of the town are built is relentlessly north-facing, with even steeper north-facing slopes to the south, limiting winter sunshine. Probably no-one takes too seriously the notion that Greenock was named, in Queen's English, for a 'green oak' tree. As to Greenwich, a trading harbour on a prime Thames-side site with access to the main roads of the era, there is something awkward in the idea of describing such a *wīc* as green, presumably because grass-covered.

However, for both places there may be an alternative explanation, one that takes an unexpected and fascinating turn deep into the prehistory of western Indo-European languages. Elsewhere in his magisterial tome[16] Watson remarks that the lost *Balgrenagh* (1336) in western East Lothian was "for *Baile Greanach*, 'gravelly stead'; compare Greanagh, 'gravelly stream', near Adare in Limerick; also *Greanaich*, Grennich, 'gravelly place', in Strath Tummel." A usual word for gravel in modern Scottish Gaelic is *grinneal*, but early Irish had *grian*.[17] The Wikipedia entry for Greenock is more informative than many of its counterparts for other places. It tells us that in his 1921 history of the town R M Smith suggested an alternative derivation from 'Common Brittonic' '*Graenag*, a gravelly or sandy place', as accurately describing the original foreshore; and that in his *Place-Names of Scotland* (1934) J B Johnston (generally more useful for the early forms he gives than for his etymologies) remarked that some Gaels called the seaport Ghónait, and suggested an origin in *greannach* meaning 'rough, gravelly'. Where Johnston may have got G(h)ónait from is a mystery.[18] On the other hand Smith's *graenag* is close to a word which is indeed found in *Geiriadur*

Prifysgol Cymru (the major Welsh-English dictionary): *graeanog / graenog* 'gravelly, full of gravel (grit &c), abounding in or consisting of gravel, strewn or covered with gravel …'. Smith's description of the foreshore is confirmed by early 19th century paintings[19] of the Bay of Quick, an intriguing name for the bay at Greenock that failed to make it through to modern maps. The mid 20th century 1:25,000 OS map shows the symbol for sand and gravel exposed at low tide, at Garvel Point on the outer side of Greenock's docks. The Wikipedia article mentions Gravel Point as an alternative name; but Garvel was the name of a house and an estate, so a derivative of Gaelic *garbh* 'rough' may be more likely. Whatever the etymology of that name, it is clear that for Greenock a gravelly place, either named in Gaelic or adopted into successor languages from northern Brittonic, is a much more rational explanation than a sunny one.

Mid 20th century OS 1:25,000 map of Greenock (thanks to NLS online maps). Steep north-facing slopes; remnant patches of low-tide gravel beside the docks.
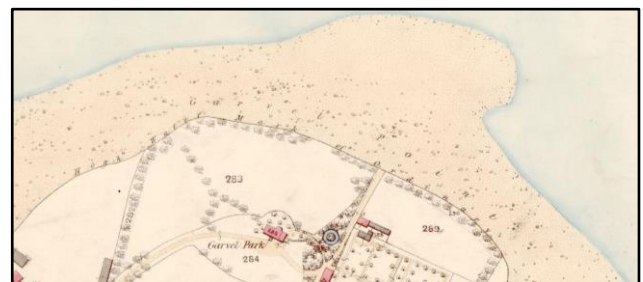
First OS 25 inches to 1 mile map of Garvel Point before major enlargement of docks, showing extensive sand and gravel at low tide (thanks to NLS online maps).

Returning southward, Eilert Ekwall in the early 20th century accepted the greenness of Greenwich and of Greenhithe, another landing place on the Kent shore of the Thames; but for eastern Kent's

---

[15] E.g. in The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names, ed. Victor Watts, 2004; and A D Mills, The Popular Dictionary of English Place-Names, 1991.

[16] Pages 140-141.

[17] http://www.dil.ie/26629 (*grian* is distinct from *grían* 'sun' with long vowel).

[18] In his 1892 version of his work with the same title Johnston favoured a 'sunny' explanation.

[19] Probably the clearest example in Inverclyde Council's art collections can be seen at https://mcleanmuseum.pastperfectonline.com/webobject/ A37DA7BB-6991-4719-8AF7-841013754490.

Isle of Grain (*Grean* c1100) he proposed **grēon*, not found lexically in Old English but with cognates known in other West Germanic dialects. This explanation is accepted by Mills and by Watts who offer, respectively, 'gravelly, sandy ground' and 'sandy ground'. At Greenwich not only the foreshore but much of the wider area is characterised by free-draining gravel, providing much more favourable conditions in wet weather for busy gatherings and the movements and loadings and unloadings of goods, than would be the case with clay or chalky ground. As with Greenock a straightforward reference to an essential physical attribute of the place is more contextually credible than the customary explanation. Knowledge that a place to do business was a **grēone* w*īc* and not a mudbath, and was a place where ballast material for freight ships might be easily found, would have been useful to skippers with a choice of North Sea emporia to visit.

Prof John Koch has recently published a proposal that, probably in the later Bronze Age, and before they separated into Proto-Celtic and Proto-Germanic blocs, a set of still mutually intelligible Indo-European dialects went through a phase of shared semantic and phonetic developments, notably within the fields of group relations, military technology and long-distance water transport.[20] Given the suggestion above that both Greenock and Greenwich are named for coarse-textured foreshores, with elements that are very similar but respectively Celtic and Germanic, it is interesting to note that the Corpus section in John Koch's paper includes 'Sand and/or gravel by or beneath a body of water'. He proposes a specialised aquatic development from the Proto-Indo-European root **ghrendh-* 'grind' to **ghreuno-*, giving Proto-Germanic **greuna-*; Proto-Celtic **griyano-* 'sea gravel, sand'; Middle Irish *grian* 'gravel, sand, sea or river bottom'; Middle Welsh *graean* 'gravel, sand, shingle, grit'; and Middle Low German *grēn* 'sea sand', Middle High German *grien* 'gravel, sandy riverside', Middle Dutch *griend* 'strip of sandy ground'. Another proposed development from the PIE root is to **ghreuwā-* at the stage of mutually intelligible dialects, and then to Proto-Celtic **grāwā-*, resulting in various Celtic words for coarse-textured deposits by or under water, and for sandy or shingle strands. Lexicologists have speculated that a member of such a group may underlie the French word borrowed into English as 'gravel'.

Bill Patterson (with thanks to Greenwich resident Anthony Durham for information on local history, geology and place-names)

CONFERENCES

As everyone will be well aware Covid-19 has put a lengthy pause on conventional conferences. We know that there can be none this spring and uncertainty remains about the autumn conference season, so details cannot be provided in this issue.

Meanwhile the SPNS Committee has arranged an online conference for 8th May: details on flier with this newsletter. Presentations from last November's autumn online meeting are available at https://spns.org.uk/presentations-from-the-spns-autumn-conference-2020.

SNSBI (Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland), http://www.snsbi.org.uk/, has arranged an online spring 2021 conference for 10-11 April.


PRESTON, EAST LOTHIAN

The story of the name Preston as found near Tranent in East Lothian provides a nice illustration of how names can reflect the history of an area. In England, Preston is a common name meaning 'farm of the priest or priests', derived from Old English *prēost* and *tūn* 'substantial farm'. There are a few instances in southern Scotland, some of which may come from post-1100 Scots *priest* and *toun*. Like the less common name Clerkington, from OE *clerca* 'of the clerics' and *tūn*, Preston 'may denote places set aside for the endowment of priests or monks.'[21]

There were two villages called Preston in East Lothian, one near Tranent and the other adjoining East Linton. First recorded in 1170 x 1171, *Prestun* near Tranent is probably Old English. If so, it is likely to have belonged to priests when the kingdom of Northumbria ruled Lothian and the monastery at Lindisfarne oversaw the churches in the area. *Prestun* then passed into Anglo-Norman hands, and in 1170 Robert de Quincy granted 'all the land he has in Preston'

---

[20] Koch J T, 2020, *Celto-Germanic: Later Prehistory and Post-Proto-Indo-European vocabulary in the North and West* (Aberystwyth: University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies) (available online through Academia.edu)

[21] A.H. Smith, *English Place-Name Elements*, (Cambridge 1956), ii, 73.

(totam terram quam habet in *Prestuna*) to Newbattle Abbey.[22]

In a later charter, the same lands were referred to as *Grangia de Prestone* 'the grange of Preston'.[23] A grange - from Old French *grange* 'granary' - was a farm belonging to an abbey. By the 16th century it was known as *Prestoun-grange*.[24] After the Reformation it passed out of the abbey's hands. Today *Prestongrange* encompasses *Prestongrange Museum*, on the site of the former *Prestongrange Colliery*, and the Royal Musselburgh Golf Club. The latter's clubhouse occupies *Prestongrange House*, which dates from the 16th century and was greatly extended in the 19th.
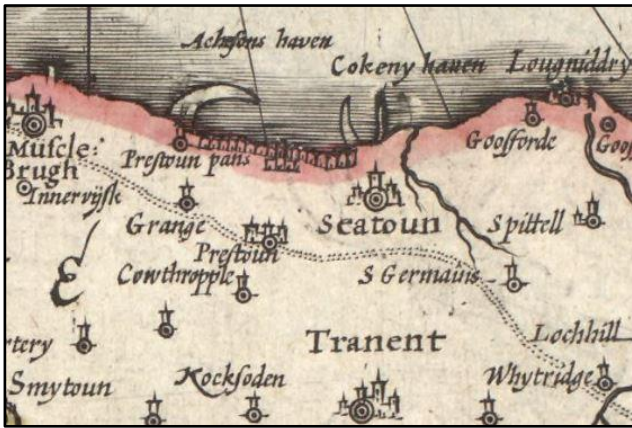
Extract from Hondius map (1630) based on survey by Timothy Pont (1590s). Thanks to NLS online maps.

By the early 13th century, the monks of Newbattle were running salt-works on the coast close to Preston.[25] Salt was an essential preservative for foodstuffs. On the Firth of Forth it was produced by boiling brine extracted from inter-tidal silts in metal pans, and later by direct boiling of sea-water.[26] Nearby coal-mines, also under the abbey's control, supplied fuel. Over succeeding centuries, a major salt-producing centre developed: Timothy Pont's map of the 1590s shows the buildings of *Prestoun pans* stretching along the coast, with the settlement of *Prestoun* inland by the main road, and *Grange* to the west.[27] The inland settlement was also known as *Salt-Prestoun*, a name which

went out of use in the 18th century.[28] The stretch of road through Wallyford linking Prestonpans with Newbattle Abbey is still known as *Salters Road*.

On a rise to the southeast of Prestongrange near the main Edinburgh road, *Preston* or *Salt-Preston* was centred on a medieval tower house, *Preston Tower*, and a fine mercat cross, *Preston Cross*. This 'was probably erected by the Hamiltons of Preston after they obtained the right to hold a fair in 1617.'[29] Today Preston forms the eastern part of Prestonpans, while the area near the cross is shown on OS Explorer map no. 351 as *Preston Market*.

One mystery remains. The *New Statistical Account* for the parish of Prestonpans written in 1839 notes that 'the most ancient name' for Preston 'appears to have been Aldhammer or Alhammer' (*NSA* ii 304). Peter McNeill, in *Prestonpans and Vicinity* (1902, 3), gives the Newbattle chartulary as his source for stating that the monks began manufacturing salt in Althamer (sic) in 1189, but this reference is not in the chartulary. Althammer is today embedded in local tradition as a Viking warrior, founder of the village which became Prestonpans.

Liz Curtis (text and photo of Preston Cross)

If any SPNS member who receives printed Newsletters would also like an electronic copy, please e-mail pn.patterson3dr@btinternet.com to arrange this.

---

[22] G.W.S. Barrow, 'A Twelfth-Century Newbattle Document', *Scottish Historical Review*, 30 (1951), 43-45.

[23] Newbattle *Registrum* no. 64, date from *POMS* 1179 x 1189.

[24] *RMS* iii no. 351, date 1526.

[25] Newbattle *Registrum*, no.127, p.95, 8 lines from bottom, *decimis salinarum de preston* 'the teinds of salt pans of Preston', date 1223. Also see Holyrood *Liber,* no. 61.

[26] For salt-making methods, see R. Oram, 'The Sea-salt Industry in Medieval Scotland', in eds. Roger Dahood and Peter E. Medine, *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, New York (2012), 209-32.

[27] 'A new description of the shyres Lothian and Linlitquo', published by Hondius in 1630.

[28] *RMS* iii no. 2362, date 1541; RMS iv no. 720, date 1552; OSA Parish of Preston-Pans, 1793; 1975 edn. p. 565.

[29] *Canmore* http://canmore.org.uk/site/53728, accessed 8.03.21.

After a year predominantly of lockdown John Garth Wilkinson reflects on the possibility of urgent place-name research as justification for escape attempts.

View to the Ochil Hillfoots from south-east of Dollar, annotated with a selection of place-names. (Photo: Eila Williamson)