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Paisley / Pàislig

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Gaelic Names in Gaelic Orthography from OS Name Books in Highland/Lowland Border Counties

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What I'd like to look at in the presentation

Gaelic Names in Gaelic Orthography – What does this mean?

Gaelic Names in Gaelic Orthography – Why does this matter?

Highland/Lowland Border Counties – What are they?

Highland/Lowland Border Counties – In more detail

Points of Linguistic Interest

Conclusions

Additional Reading

Gaelic Names in Gaelic Orthography – What does this mean?

Names written in Gaelic spelling rather than transliterated or translated.
Generally understood by Gaelic speakers today.

Allt a' Mhonaidh (Knockando)	Burn of the upland
Am Maol Ruadh (Drymen)	Red-brown blunt hill
Àirigh nam Bruach Dubha (Thurso)	Shieling of the black river-banks

Most Gaelic names have been transliterated, and spelled according to the Scots/English sound systems.

Aldivalloch (Cabrach)	*Allt a' Bhealaich*	Burn of the mountain pass
Bauchbeg (Glenisla & Alyth)	*Am Bàthach Beag*	Small byre
Aldochlay (Luss)	*Allt a' Chlaidheimh*	Burn of the sword (but Diack heard *Allt a' Chlaidh*)

Some names have also been translated.

Courthill (Rosneath)	*Tom a' Mhòid*	Hillock of the assembly
Newton (Kilbride, Arran)	*Baile Nodha*	New farm
Dog's Craig (Kirkmichael)	*Creag a' Mhadaidh*	Crag of the hound

Gaelic Names in Gaelic Orthography – Why does this matter?

For names to be recorded in Gaelic spelling, they had to be named by local informants in Gaelic.

This suggests a Gaelic presence of some sort in the areas covered.

But collectors would need help or some knowledge of Gaelic to record the names accurately.

Is there an under-recording of Gaelic names? An excess of transliteration?

> On 15th February 1976, A Watson, J Duff and Betty Allan visited her [Mrs Bain's] son Robert near Crathie, as someone had told us that he would probably know some local place names. Mrs Bain repeated Robert's names in a pronunciation different from anything we had heard from numerous informants in Upper Deeside. … With growing astonishment we listened, realising that Braemar Gaelic had not died after all.
> [Watson, A & Clement, R D (1983) *Aberdeenshire Gaelic*. Inverness: TGSI Vol. LII, 387]

Highland/Lowland Border Counties – What are they?

Sutherland, Ross & Cromarty, Inverness and Argyll considered ‘Highland’ and Gaelic ‘heartlands’.

Gaelic communities far more widely spread than that.

‘Border’ counties contained Gaelic communities or residual local Gaelic speakers but considered ‘Lowland’ and Scots/English-speaking.

Gaelic names in Gaelic orthography were recorded by OS in the ‘border’ counties of:
Caithness, Nairn, Moray, Banff, Aberdeen, Angus, Stirling, Dunbarton, Bute.

Perthshire is excluded from this survey because so many Perthshire Name Books were destroyed by fire during a WWII bombing raid on OS HQ in Southampton.

Highland/Lowland Border Counties – Where are they?

9 counties

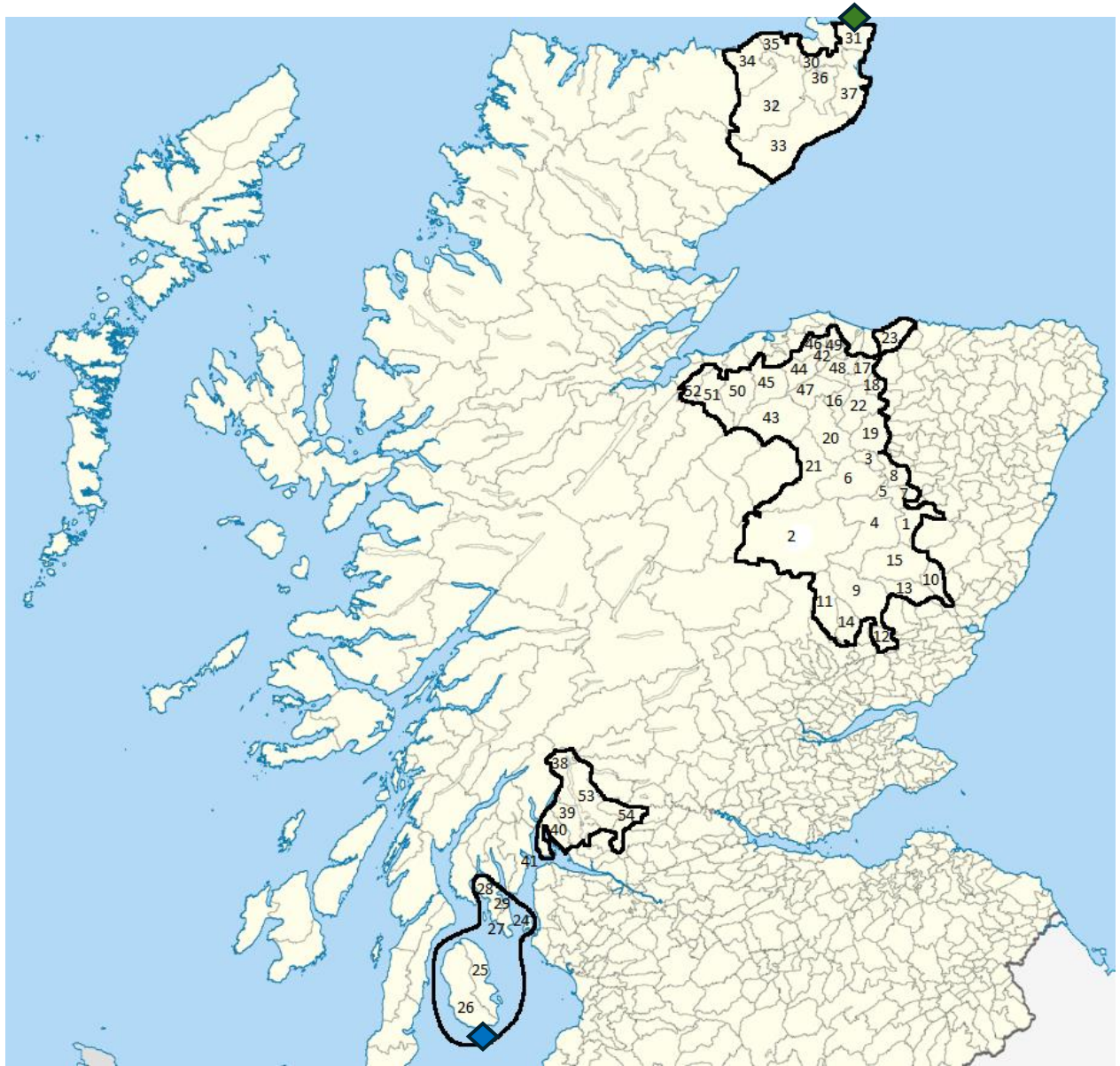
54 parishes

3720 names

From Stroma in the Pentland Firth…

..to Pladda in the Firth of Clyde.

However…



Highland/Lowland Border Counties – Names

Caithness: 1054 names from 8 parishes

Aberdeenshire: 728 names from 8 parishes

Banffshire: 515 names from 8 parishes

Buteshire: 515 names from 6 parishes

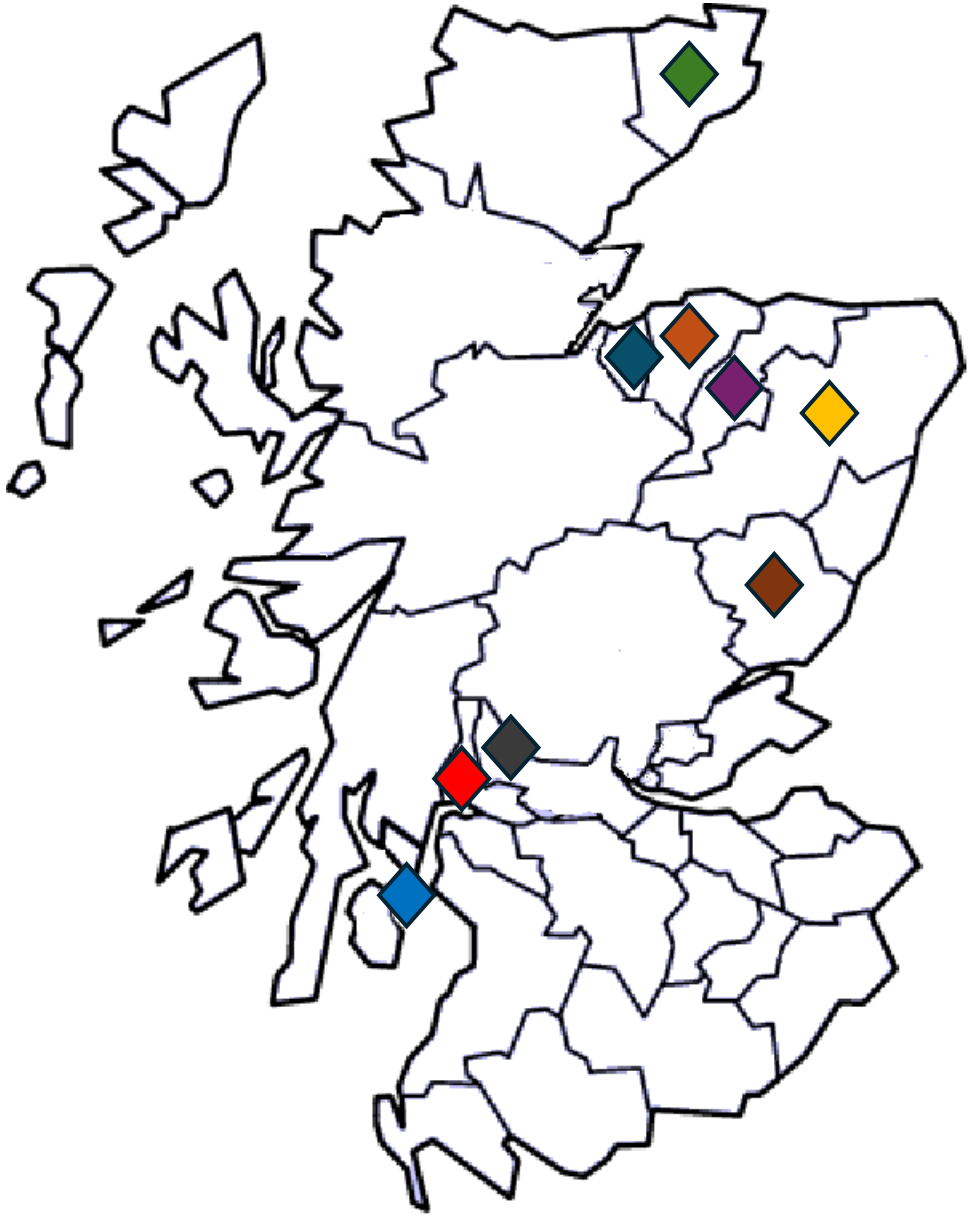
Morayshire: 292 names from 8 parishes

Stirlingshire: 227 names from 2 parishes

Dunbartonshire: 199 names from 4 parishes

Nairnshire: 137 names from 3 parishes

Angus: 53 names from 7 parishes



Highland/Lowland Border Counties – Parishes

Percentages show Gaelic names in Gaelic orthography as a proportion of the total names in each county.
Numbers refer to the maps showing the parishes covered.

Buteshire (28.0%): 24. Cumbrae; 25. Kilbride (Arran); 26. **Kilmory** (Arran); 27. Kingarth (Bute); 28. North Bute; 29. Rothesay (Bute).

Caithness (20.0%): 30. Bower; 31. Canisbay; 32. Halkirk; 33. **Latheron**; 34. Reay; 35. Thurso; 36. Watten; 37. Wick.

Nairnshire (14.7%): 50. Ardclach; 51. **Cawdor**; 52. Croy & Dalcross.

Banffshire (7.2%): 16. Aberlour; 17. Boharm; 18. Botriphnie; 19. Cabrach; 20. Inveravon; 21. **Kirkmichael**; 22. Mortlach; 23. Rathven.

Dunbartonshire (7.2%): 38. **Arrochar**; 39. Luss; 40. Rhu; 41. Rosneath.

Morayshire (6.9%): 42. Birnie; 43. **Cromdale Inverallan & Advie**; 44. Dallas; 45. Edinkillie; 46. Elgin; 47. Knockando; 48. Rothes; 49. St Andrews-Lhanbryde.

Stirlingshire (5.1%): 53. **Buchanan**; 54. Drymen.

Aberdeenshire (3.6%): 1. Aboyne Glentanar & Glenmuick; 2. **Crathie & Braemar**; 3. Glenbuchat; 4. Glenmuick Tullich & Glengairn; 5. Logie Coldstone; 6. Strathdon; 7. Tarland, 8. Towie.

Angus (0.6%): 9. Cortachy & Clova; 10. Edzell; 11. **Glenisla & Alyth**; 12. Kirriemuir; 13. Lethnot & Navar; 14. Lintrathen; 15. Lochlee.

Highland/Lowland Border Counties – 10 parishes with most recorded names

Crathie & Braemar (ABD) 429 names

Latheron (CAI) 398 names

Kirkmichael (BNF) 378 names

Halkirk (CAI) 333 names

Kilmory (BUT) 300 names

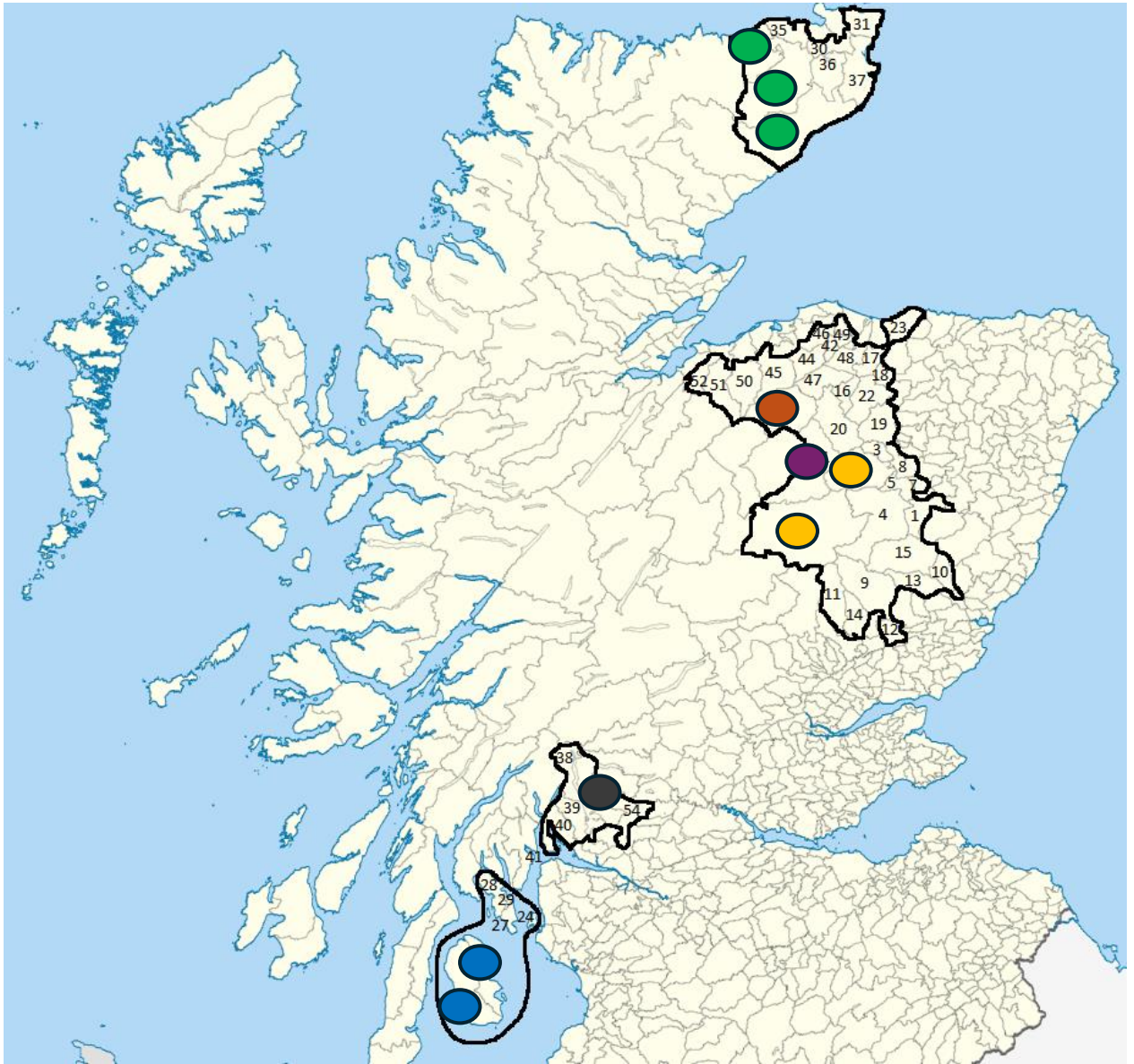
Buchanan (STI) 219 names

Cromdale Inverallan & Advie (MOR) 197 names

Reay (CAI) 196 names

Kilbride (BUT) 171 names

Strathdon (ABD) 171 names



Highland/Lowland Border Counties – parishes with 1 or 2 recorded names only

Birnie (MOR) 1 name

Botriphnie (BNF) 1 name

Bower (CAI) 1 name

Cumbrae (BUT) 1 name

Edzell (ANG) 1 name

Elgin (MOR) 1 name

Kirriemuir (ANG) 1 name

Lintrathen (ANG) 2 names

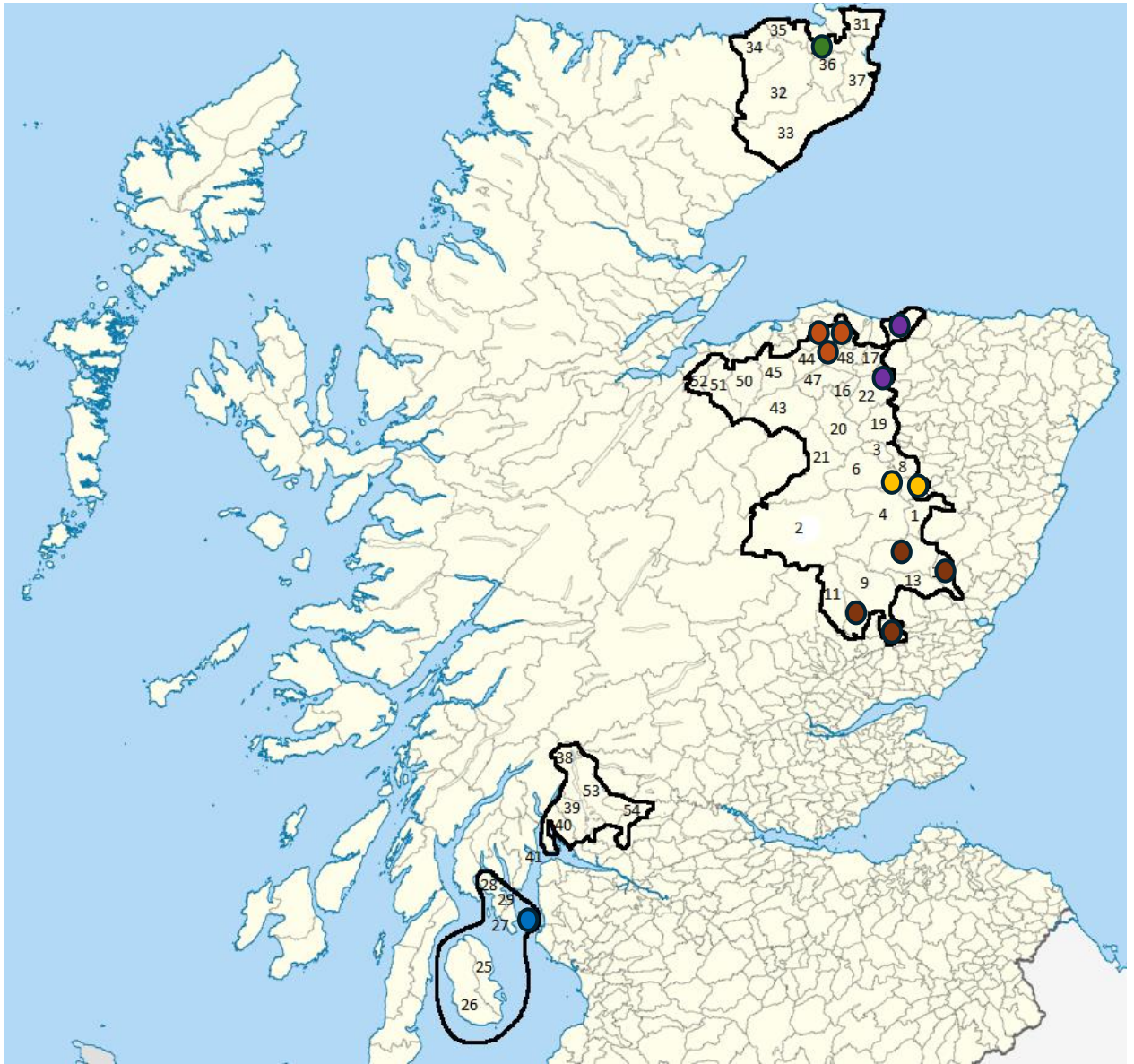
Lochlee (ANG) 1 name

Logie Coldstone (ABD) 2 names

Rathven (BNF) 1 name

St Andrews-Lhanbryde (MOR) 1 name

Tarland (ABD) 1 name



Highland/Lowland Border Counties – all parishes with under 10 recorded names

In addition to the 13 parishes with 1 or 2 names:

Aberlour (BNF) 8 names

Boharm (BNF) 5 names

Canisbay (CAI) 4 names

Cortachy & Clova (ANG) 5 names

Drymen (STI) 8 names

Lethnot & Navar (ANG) 4 names

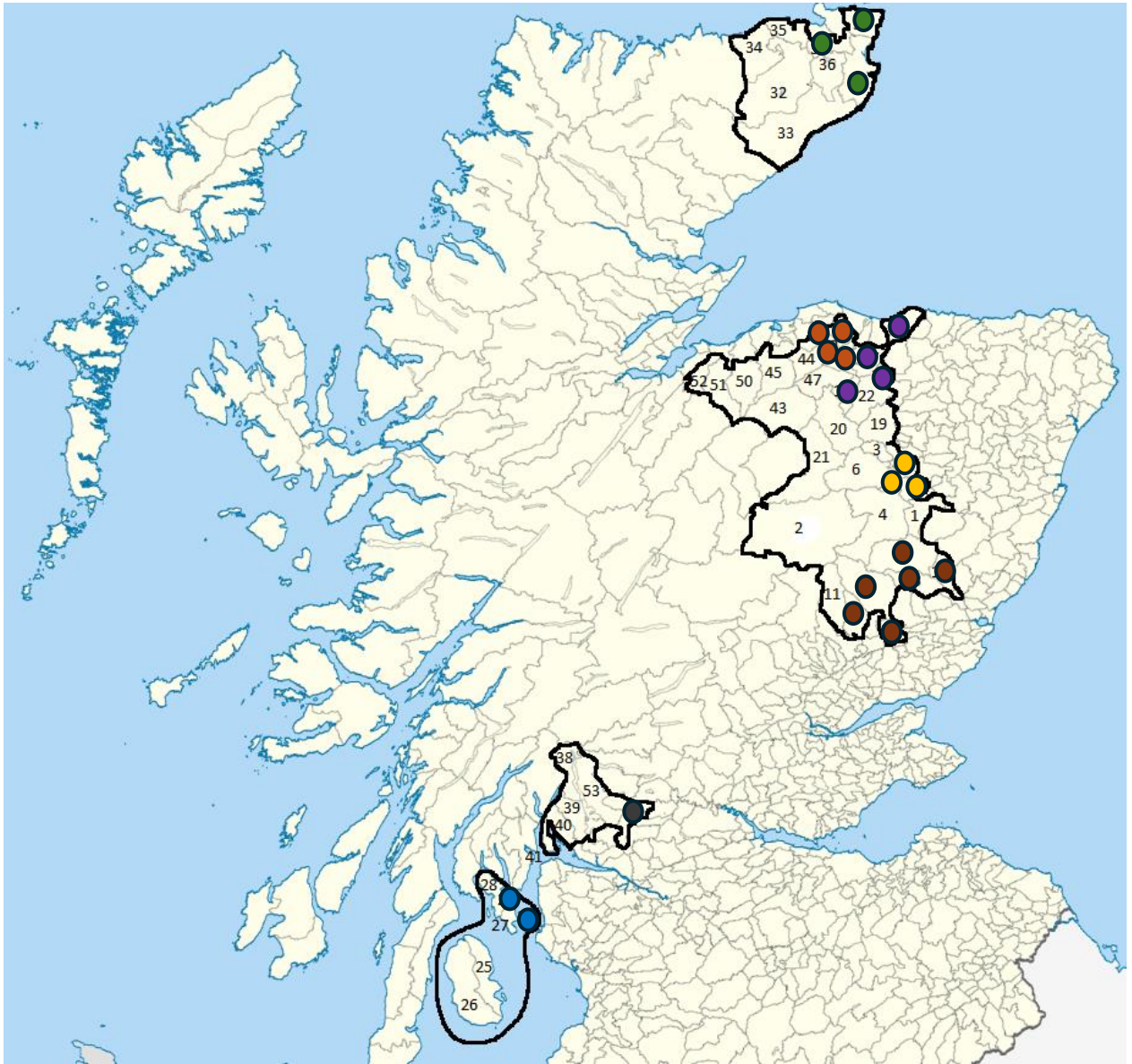
Rothes (MOR) 3 names

Rothesay (BUT) 5 names

Towie (ABD) 3 names

Wick (CAI) 3 names

Only 63 names recorded in these 23 parishes.



Highland/Lowland Border Counties – parishes with 10 or more recorded names

Still 9 counties

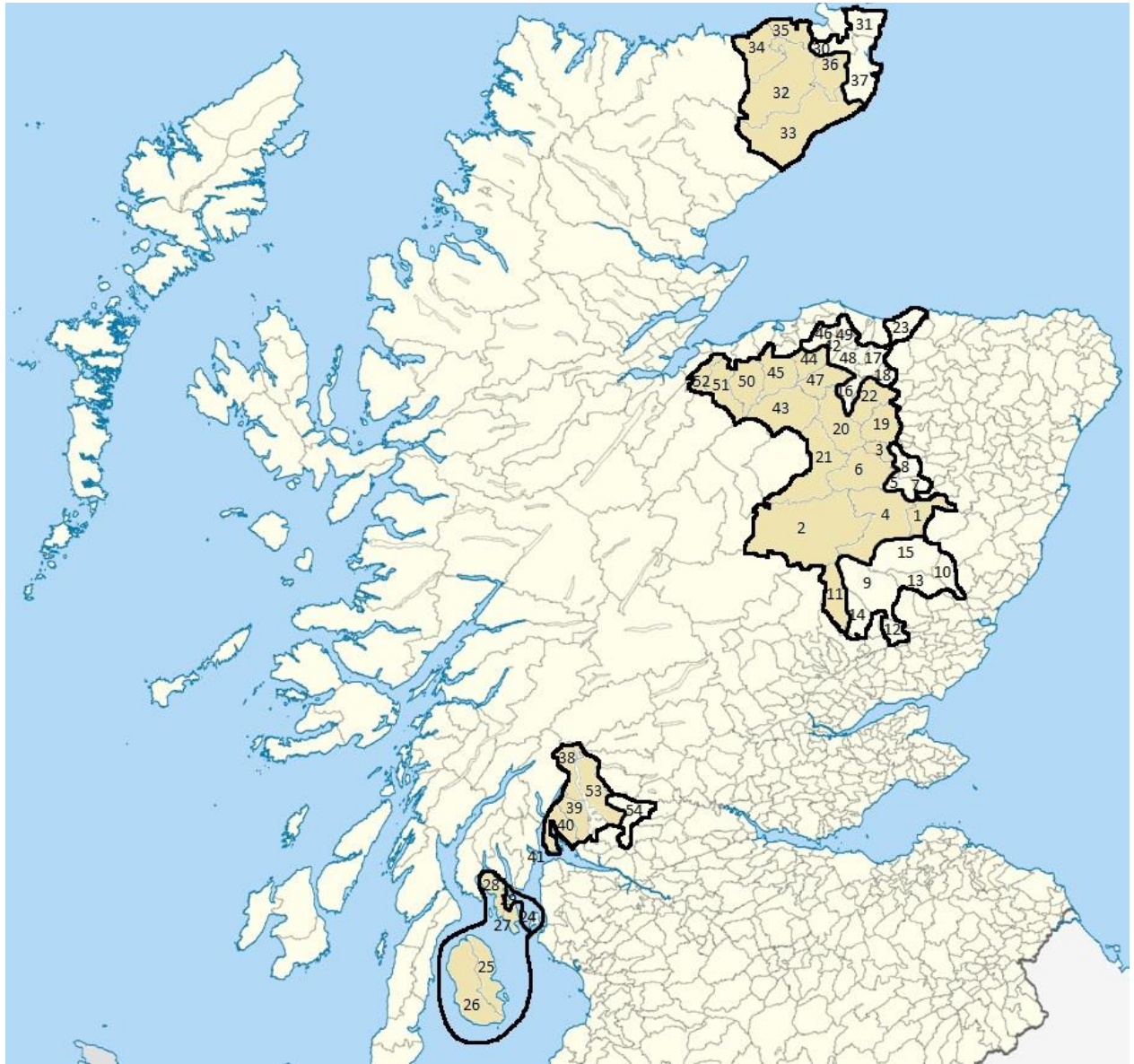
Now 31 parishes

Still 3657 names

A more accurate representation of the Highland/Lowland Border Counties?

Most of the shaded parishes are mentioned in the New Statistical Account 1831-1845.

The OS Name Books throw additional light on the presence of Gaelic in other parishes.



Points of Linguistic Interest

Distinctive Local Vocabulary

Most names conform to ‘mainstream’ Gaelic. Distinctive vocabulary and usage in Aberdeen, Banff, Bute and Caithness especially.

Absence of Article

Tòrr Rìgh Beag and *Tòrr Rìgh Mòr* in Kilmory	*Tòrr **an** Rìgh Beag* and *Tòrr **an** Rìgh Mòr*
Cnoc Breac in Kilbride (1)	cf ***An** Cnoc Breac* in Duirnish, Skye

Absence of Genitive Case in nouns

Tom na Bothain in Kirkmichael (2)	*Tom nam Bothan*

Absence of both

Allt Ruigh Mhath in Kirkmichael (3)	*Allt na Ruighe Maithe?* or even *Allt na Ruigh Mhaith?*

(1) Maybe the Name Collectors simply didn’t bother to record the Article, cf Cabrach/The Cabrach.

(2) This is the norm in informal spoken Gaelic nowadays. Were the border areas pioneers?

(3) Cf *Eilean Druim Briste* (Bottle Island in Wester Ross).

Conclusions

Gaelic names in Gaelic orthography in 14 of Scotland's 33 counties.

Name Books often the only evidence of dialect differences and of residual presence of Gaelic.

Is there an under-reporting of names in Gaelic orthography due to collectors' lack of the language?

Are divergences from traditional grammar a sign of innovation or of decay? (Dorian, 1973)

Grammatical divergences are a valuable source of information on linguistic change.

The loss of the Perthshire Name Books leaves a major gap in data sources.

Collation needed of the names in Sutherland, Ross and Cromarty, Inverness, and Argyll.

Despite their shortcomings the Name Books are a priceless resource.

Additional Reading

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Diack, F C (1944) *The Inscriptions of Pictland*. Aberdeen: Third Spalding Club
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Ordnance Survey Name Books.
https://scotlandsplaces.gov.uk/digital-volumes/ordnance-survey-name-books [accessed 19:02:25]

Tapadh leibh

Thank you