

REFERENCES

- Alexander, W. M. (1952). The Place-Names of Aberdeenshire. Aberdeen.
- Anonymous (1980 edn). Fisherman's Map of Salmon Pools on the Aberdeenshire Dee. Waverley Press, Aberdeen.
- Diack, F. C. (1944). The Inscriptions of Pictland. Aberdeen.
- Dwelly, E. (1901-11). The Illustrated Gaelic-English Dictionary. Reprinted 1971, Gairm Publications, Glasgow.
- Johnston, J. B. (1934). Place-names of Scotland. London.
- Joyce, P. W. (1869). Irish Names of Places. Dublin.
- MacBain, A. (1922). Place Names: Highlands & Islands of Scotland. Stirling.
- Macdonald, J. (1899). Place Names of West Aberdeenshire. Aberdeen.
- MacKinnon, D. (1887). 'Place names and personal names in Argyll', The Scotsman. Edinburgh.
- Milne, J. (1908). 'Kirkmichael (Banffshire) place names', Cairngorm Club Journal 5, 93-114.
- Milne, J. (1912). Celtic Place-Names in Aberdeenshire. Aberdeen.
- Nicolaisen, W. F. H. (1979). 'Field-collecting in onomastics', Names 27, 162-178.
- Parker, M. (1931). Fisherman's Map of Salmon Pools on the River Dee.
- Scott, I. (1959). Fishermans Map of Salmon Pools on the River Dee.
- Stewart, T. F. (1974). Hill Names of Perthshire. Perth.
- Watson, A. (1983a). 'Old Gaelic poems from Aberdeenshire', Scottish Gaelic Studies 14, 25-58.
- Watson, A. (1983b). 'Eighteenth century deer numbers and pine regeneration near Braemar, Scotland', Biological Conservation 25, 289-305.
- Watson, A. & Clement, R.D. (1983). 'Aberdeenshire Gaelic', Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness 52, 373-404.
- Watson, W. J. (1904). Place-Names of Ross and Cromarty. Inverness.
- Watson, W. J. (1904-5). 'The study of Highland place-names', Celtic Review 1, 22-31.
- Watson, W. J. (1916). 'Some place-names in the Cairngorm region', Cairngorm Club Journal 8, 133-136.
- Watson, W. J. (1926). The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland. Edinburgh.

CAITHNESS PLACE-NAMES*

In describing the sources and methods which I have used in my study of Caithness place-names, I shall only be referring to those six parishes which I have studied in detail, using the place-names on the 6" Ordnance Survey maps as a starting point. The six parishes are Reay, Thurso, Olig, Dunnet and Canisbay, all of which border the Pentland Firth in the north, plus Wick Parish on the east coast.

The reason for selecting these parishes in particular is that the most significant feature in the place-nomenclature of Caithness is the division between the Gaelic-influenced area to the west of the county and the Norse-influenced area to the east, and any study of Caithness place-names must obviously incorporate this linguistic orientation. The dividing line between Norse east and Gaelic west is surprisingly clearly defined, although it has been blurred to a certain extent by the gradual adoption of Scots or English as the language of all the people in Caithness.

Before examining the place-names themselves, one's first source has to be the work of the historian and the archaeologist who provide the historical backdrop against which the names can be evaluated. Precise dating of the various phases of settlement is impossible from place-name evidence alone due to the regrettable scarcity of early documentary references to place-names. The earliest date which has been suggested for the Norse settlement of Orkney, Shetland and Caithness is c. 800 AD.

The Scandinavians who came to the Northern Isles were of Norwegian origin and they possibly chose the area because of its proximity to Norway and because in many respects it was similar to their home territory. The Treaty of Perth (1266) marks the end of direct Norse control in Caithness but Norse influence in all aspects of everyday life persisted for some centuries after this date and Norn may have been spoken until the beginning of the 16th century, and some would suggest an even later date towards the end of the 16th century. It has to be remembered that Orkney and Shetland were under Scandinavian control until 1468, and there would have been contact between Orkney and Caithness during this time which would encourage retention of the Norn.

The gradual encroachment of Gaelic-speaking people from the west and south probably began in either the 12th or the 13th century once the authority of the Scottish crown had been established in the north. Professor Nicolaisen suggests this dating, commenting that: 'the boundary line between Gaelic and Norse Caithness must have been established before the end of the 9th century . . . and there seems to have been very little change in that situation before the 12th or even 13th century.' (Nicolaisen 1982, p. 80).

The movement of Gaelic-speaking people into Caithness increased in strength and spatial extent until the early 1700s, but by the later years of the 18th century Gaelic was slowly beginning to give way to English, even in the extreme west of the county, in Reay Parish, where Gaelic continued in use until the early 20th century. The Old Statistical Account (OSA) has the following to say regarding Reay Parish: 'The Gaelic or Erse language is chiefly spoken through this parish. Many indeed now speak both Gaelic and English' (OSA, vol. XVIII, Caithness, p. 158). This latter comment invariably indicates that Gaelic is in a threatened position, having been ousted as the language of communication with trading partners.

There is a small cluster of Gaelic names in Wick Parish but they have the appearance of being much later than the Gaelic names in Reay Parish. The Old

Statistical Account comments of Wick Parish: 'Little or no Gaelic is spoken in this district, unless by some persons from other parishes.' (OSA, vol. XVIII, p. 269).

The comments for the other parishes indicate that Gaelic was never spoken throughout the whole of Caithness, and any Gaelic place-names which occur in the extreme north-east of the county, in Canisbay Parish, are accidentals, perhaps introduced by the occasional Gaelic incomer or perhaps named from a seaman's point of view because they tend to be coastal topographical names. For example, on the island of Stroma which lies in the Pentland Firth, and which is part of Canisbay Parish, there is one Gaelic name Sgeir Bhan 'white skerry', pronounced locally [skɛrə 'bjan], referring to a rock which is regarded as a particular hazard to fishermen. Incidentally, this particular development, from bhan [va:n] to bhan [bja:n], tends to occur on the east side of Caithness when the initial consonant of the specific in the Gaelic name is lenited. It is probably a recent development in response to the written Gaelic form in which the < h > in the orthography, indicating lenition of the initial consonant, becomes [j] in pronunciation. An example from Wick Parish is the Gaelic name Loch Dhubh 'black loch' (loch being feminine in Caithness Gaelic and, therefore, requiring lenition of the adjective), which is anglicised in pronunciation to [d̪ə 'dju lɔx]. (The final < -bh > of the Gaelic written form dhubh is silent in both Gaelic and English.) The anglicised form [d̪ə 'dju lɔx] is elicited in response to the written Gaelic form. There is no English written form corresponding to the anglicised pronunciation.

There are, unfortunately, no Caithness Gaelic speakers still alive although my informant for Reay Parish, aged 54, showed no hesitation in pronouncing the numerous Gaelic names he knew. However, it was sometimes difficult to recognise the original Gaelic form from his pronunciation of the name, e. g. Cnoc na Gaoith 'hill of the wind' becomes [krɔk nə 'gi]; Cnoc an Fhithich 'hill of the raven' becomes [krɔk nə 'fidax]. My Reay informant could also frequently offer a translation of the name whereas informants on the east side of the county in Wick Parish shied away from attempting pronunciation of minor Gaelic names, although they always said, 'That's a Gaelic name'.

Wick Parish is, on the other hand, renowned throughout Caithness for having a particularly idiosyncratic and pronounced dialect of Scots, perhaps reflecting the fact that the Scots first moved into the east side of Caithness (c. 1400) and, thereafter, spread gradually northwards and westwards.

Having formed a general picture of the various strands of settlement we can now consider the documentary sources which contain references to place-names in Caithness, or which contain useful comparative material. Unfortunately, prior to the 15th century, such sources are extremely sparse. There are, however, some very useful references to Caithness names in Orkneyinga Saga and in Njál's Saga - in particular, in Orkneyinga Saga, to the name Caithness itself which was coined by the Norse in the form Katanes 'headland of the Cats', a tribal name probably given to the people who occupied the area prior to the Norse by their Celtic neighbours (Watson 1926, p. 30). This name is, in fact, one of the very few indicators of pre-Norse settlement which can be traced in the place-names. Another such indicator is the name given by the Norse to the stretch of water between Orkney and Caithness now known as the Pentland Firth. The Norse called it Pétlandsfjörðr or Pictland Firth - a name which shows an awareness of a population on the other side of the Firth.

It is difficult to provide a satisfactory explanation of the non-survival of place-name material from the period prior to the Norse settlement of Caithness but, if it is

assumed that the settlement pattern of the early inhabitants, as well as their language, differed from that of the Norse, it is not altogether surprising that their place-names have been lost, because the same process of attrition can be seen happening in the 20th century; but more of that in the section relating to local informants at the end of this paper.

Early maps of the area are also useful sources of information although Ptolemy's map has probably raised more questions than it has answered with its elusive *Tarvedu(nu)m: 'bull fort', which has been equated with Dunnet Head (Rivet and Smith 1979, p. 469). Blaeu's map (1654), on the other hand, is particularly helpful because its author, Timothy Pont, was actually minister of Dunnet Parish in Caithness and his local knowledge can be seen in the number and accuracy in positioning of the names recorded, although the spellings are occasionally idiosyncratic.

There are several other useful map sources, particularly General Roy's military survey map (1750), and detailed references to all early maps of Scotland can be found in D. G. Moir's Early Maps of Scotland (Edinburgh, 1973).

Undoubtedly the most prolific sources of early name forms are the Register of the Great Seal, the Register of the Privy Seal, and Retours. Almost equal in importance are the various estate papers, most of which are now housed in the Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh, although some are still held locally by Lord Thurso in his estate office on the outskirts of Thurso. These latter papers, however, proved to be mostly recent - late 18th and early 19th century - although they did contain useful references to some of the minor place-names which are otherwise not recorded.

There is a marked difference between the east and west sides of the county as regards early documentation. The east is reasonably well served by Northern Scottish standards, particularly in the Sinclair of Mey and Sinclair of Freswick estate papers, but the Gaelic speaking west is very scantily documented: this reflects the earlier adoption of English, the language of written records, on the east side of the county. Lord Reay's estate papers are available but references are mostly to places on the Sutherland side of the county boundary and are, in general, more recent. Other estate papers which have provided early name forms are Sutherland of Forse, Mackay of Bighouse, Sinclair of Murkle and Sinclair of Dunbeath.

Another useful source of early place-name references is Old Lore Miscellany of Orkney, Shetland, Caithness and Sutherland.

Last, but certainly not least, come some very important sources of external comparative material. These are Hugh Marwick's Orkney Farm Names and The Orkney Norn, J. Jakobsen's The Place-Names of Shetland and An Etymological Dictionary of the Norn Language in Shetland, and Olaf Rygh's Norske Gaardnavne. There are very few names of Norse origin in Caithness which do not have parallels in either the Northern Isles or south-west Norway.

Similarly, for names of Gaelic origin, very useful sources of comparative material are two works by W. J. Watson, The Place-Names of Ross and Cromarty and The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland, and Magne Oftedal's 'The Village Names of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides', which includes several place-names of Norse origin that have been subject to subsequent Gaelic influence, as in Reay Parish in particular.

These are the principal sources used, and evidence from them proved invaluable in conjunction with pronunciation and comments provided by local informants, whose vital role will be dealt with in detail later in this paper; for instance, early forms help one to distinguish between names containing ON setr and names containing ON bólstaðr, both of which can appear as final -ster in Caithness names; both generics denote 'farm, homestead'. It is important to distinguish between the two because they may indicate different strands of settlement in the area.

There are only three examples of names containing setr which can, with a reasonable degree of confidence, be attributed directly to the Norse settlers themselves, at least in the present six parishes. Early forms of the three names in question are as follows.

1) Thusater ['θusətər] (Thurso Parish):

Thursiter	1562-3
Thursetter	1576
Thurster	1646
Thursetter	1662
Thursatter	1680
Thurster	1750
Thuster	1796

Per Thorson suggests that this name is derived from ON Þjóðrekssetr (Thorson 1965, pp.4-5) but the earlier forms do not support this interpretation of the specific. More probable is another Norse personal name ON Þúrför (Lind 1915, col.1226).

2) Reaster ['ristər] (Dunnet Parish):

Ressister	1538
Rasister	1549
Rasseter	1604
Reister	1619
Reyster	1661
Rester	1625
Rasetter	1636
Reestre	1662
Rasiter	1798

The earliest recorded forms contain medial -i- and the most likely source of the specific is ON hreyssi n. 'a heap of stones'.

3) Seater ['sɛitər] (Canisbay Parish):

Sceter	1563
Setyr	1566
Setter	1573
Seittar	1574
Seatter	1581
Sitter	1583
Seatoure	1616
Sheater	1664
Syter	1750

This is the only example of ON setr being used as a simplex name.

There are six further possible -setr names, but lack of early references makes it impossible to be certain of the form or the provenance of the generic. These names are:

a) Helshetter (Reay Parish)

Helsettir	1782	Sinclair (Freswick)
Helshitter	1782	Sinclair (Freswick)

The palatalisation of the final element is due to Gaelic influence and it is very similar to the Hebridean reflexes of both setr and sætr 'a shieling'.

b) Fryster (Olrig Parish)

Fryster	1798	Book of Valuation
Frister	1877	6" Ordnance Survey

c) Syster (Dunnet Parish)

Sysseter	1739	Sutherland (Forse)
Sister	1831	Sinclair (Freswick)

d) Hunster (Dunnet Parish)

Hunster	1876	6" Ordnance Survey
---------	------	--------------------

e) Hasters (Dunnet Parish)

Hausters	1841	Census
----------	------	--------

The final example is Shalmstry (Thurso Parish) in which the form of the generic is very doubtful.

Shalmistrie	1643-53	Sinclair (Dunbeath)
Shalmser	1749	Sinclair (Thurso)

Even if, as seems probable, these names do contain setr rather than bólstaðr it still remains a very small group of names, scattered along the north coast (see Map 2).

Taken in conjunction with Garth in Olrig Parish (the only example of ON garðr 'an enclosure', a toponym which Marwick assigns to a period prior to the 10th century) these setr names might be interpreted as evidence for an initial phase of settlement in a comparatively narrow coastal strip directly opposite Orkney.

Of bólstaðr, on the other hand, there are 27 examples, and there is a marked concentration of these names on the western and eastern extremities of the area at present being examined, i.e. in Reay Parish on the west side, and Wick and Canisbay Parishes on the east side. These three parishes together account for 22 of the names (see Map 3). There are only two examples in Thurso Parish (Aimster and Scrabster), one example in Olrig (Sibmister) and two in Dunnet (Wester and Loch of Bushta).

In other words, the bólstaðr group of names seems to indicate a second stage of settlement in which the Norse moved westwards and southwards in search of land, although as Professor Nicolaisen pointed out it would be unwise to see these two stages as having happened in strict chronological order.

Before moving on to describe a further development in the pattern of settlement, I should like to consider some of the bólstaðr names in greater detail to illustrate the problems which can be encountered when attempting to analyse a name using source material. The first and greatest problem is one which has already been mentioned

and that is lack of early references and, in this connection, I should like to refer again to Hasters in Dunnet Parish in conjunction with Haster in Wick Parish.

Hasters in Dunnet Parish does not appear in documentary sources until the end of the 19th century, whereas Haster in Wick Parish has the following early forms:

Housbustyr	1519
Hasbister	1537
Hasbuster	1549
Haisbister	1616
Halbester	1644
Haulster	1726
Hauster	1798

The generic in this name is certainly bólstaðr, but the specific is not so obvious. Possibly ON háls 'neck, throat', used metaphorically to describe a narrow part of the Achairn Burn. This term is also Scots in the form hals or hause. ON hár 'high' is not appropriate to the situation of the Wick name, whereas it would be very appropriate to the situation of the Dunnet name. If so, then the latter is likely to contain as its generic setr, rather than bólstaðr, but it is impossible to prove until early forms of the Dunnet name are traced. (In the meantime Hasters (Dunnet Parish) is included in the setr group.)

The identification of specifics is, in fact, a major difficulty because, even when the name is well-documented by northern Scottish standards, there is a cut-off point at the beginning of the 16th century before which few names are recorded, and, in some cases, earlier references would be very desirable, as in the case of Bilbster (Wick Parish), which has the following early forms:

Bylebyster	1527
Bulbistar	1541
Bulbuster	1549
Balbester	1644
Bilbuster	1662
Bylbister	1667
Bilpster	1750

and Bylbster in neighbouring Watten Parish which has a similar range of early spellings. The specific in both names is probably the Scandinavian personal name Bili (Lind 1915, col. 139), but there is a clear distinction between the two names in modern pronunciation which casts doubt on the above suggestion. The Wick name is ['bɪlpstər] whereas the Watten name is ['baɪlpstər] although it could be that the phonetic distinction is a recent spelling-based distinction, deliberately fostered in order to differentiate between the two names which are spatially so close together.

The Norse did have a tendency to use a name again and again if it fitted a particular situation, which presents another, although less serious, problem of identification. There are three examples of Stemster (ON steinn bólstaðr 'stone farmstead') in Reay, Canisbay and Wick Parishes respectively and it is extremely difficult to decide which name is being referred to in an early document. Sometimes it is possible to locate a name in a particular place because it occurs in conjunction with other names from that area and sometimes the scribe has the good sense to locate it by parish, as in the following example of Wester (Dunnet):

Westpuster in Dunnett	1632
Westbuster in Dunat	1636

It has been suggested that the specific in all the Wester- names is ON vatn 'water', with reference to a neighbouring loch (Omand 1972, p. 222). This may be the case, but it seems equally possible that it should be ON vestr 'west', particularly since the neighbouring loch in Wick Parish appears in 1662 as Westre Loch. In other words the loch was named after the farm rather than vice versa. There might, of course, have been an earlier name for the loch which has now been lost. The earliest reference to the Wick Parish name is Westbister (1545) and, thereafter, the forms are similar to the Dunnet Parish name.

There are no references to the Odrig Parish name before the 17th century, by which time it has already become Wester. (Is it a setr name rather than a bólstaðr name? It has not been included in the distribution maps because of this uncertainty.) ON vestr is a plausible specific in that bólstaðr farms were very frequently defined in relation to other farms within the community, as in Sibmister 'south farm', Nybster 'new farm', and Thrumster 'farm on the outskirts'. The size of the farm could also be indicated, as in Stroupster 'big farm', or the ownership as in Ulbster, which probably contains the Scandinavian personal name Ulfr (Lind 1915, col. 1054).

The name which most intrigued me in the bólstaðr group was Killimster which, at first sight, appeared to have Gaelic cill 'a church' as specific: this would indeed have been surprising this far north and even more surprising in conjunction with a Norse generic. The early forms are:

Killumster	1557
Kilmister	1557
Kyllamister	1574
Kilmister	1581
Kyllemster	1662
Kilimster	1667
Kilminster	1726

On mature reflection, it seems likely that the specific is ON kylna 'a kiln (for drying grain)'. The element bólstaðr often occurs in the form nasal + -ster under the influence of the final consonant in the preceding specific.

Moving on from bólstaðr names there are two place-name generics which seem worthy of consideration as indicators of a further development in the settlement history of Caithness and these are, on the west side of the county, Gaelic achadh and, on the east side, Caithness quoy, which is a derivative of ON kví (see Map 4).

Unfortunately, any attempt to prove that these two elements are chronologically compatible is foiled by the inadequacy of the early documentary sources, but they do appear to be at least spatially compatible and it seems feasible to argue that the earliest examples of these two toponyms were also chronologically compatible, representing the period of Gaelic expansion eastwards into previously Norse-held territory which occasioned a corresponding retraction eastwards by the Norse who then established secondary settlements in the Norse-controlled east of the county.

Gaelic achadh in the first instance denoted a field and was then subsequently adopted as a farm name. It appears in the abbreviated form Ach- in Caithness names.

ON kví in the first instance denoted a cattle-fold or, in a somewhat wider sense, it also referred to a place where animals were wont to assemble, for example for milking, and it also then developed to mean land enclosed for farming purposes after the initial period of settlement in the area (Marwick 1952 p. 227). It appears in

Caithness names as quoy.

There are 24 examples of achadh names - 22 of these in Reay Parish, one in the south-east of Thurso Parish, and one in the centre of Wick Parish. There are fewer examples of quoy names - 10 in total, 8 of these on the east side of Canisbay and Wick Parishes, one in Thurso Parish and the more recent Lochquoy in Olrig Parish.

In Reay Parish Gaelic achadh is very frequently attached to an earlier Norse settlement name, e.g. Achunabust

Achforsiescye

Achiebraeskiall

Achvarasdal;

and the same process of secondary settlement based on an earlier farm can be seen on the east side of the county in names such as Quoys of Seater (Canisbay Parish) and Quoys of Reiss (Wick Parish). Quoys of Seater has the following early forms:

Seitter Quysis	1573
Seitter Qwys	1574
Seitter Queyis	1575
Seitter Qwoyes	1581
Seitter Queis	1582
Seitter Quoyis	1616
Seitter Quysis	1619
Seitter Queys	1750;

and these are typical of early references to other quoy names.

Other specifics occurring with both achadh and quoy refer to some distinctive feature of the locality or the quality of the soil or the grazing, e.g. Achalone (Gaelic lón 'a meadow, marsh'), Achnabeinn (Gaelic beinn 'a hill'), Lyrequoy (ON leir 'clay, loam'), and Dallquoy (ON dalr 'a valley').

The specific in one of the quoy names is providing food for thought at the moment, and that is Sonsiquoy, which has early forms:

Sonsaquhoy	1635
Sownsaquoy	1653
Sawsaguay	1696.

The last form was written by a scribe who was obviously similarly puzzled. Since this paper was given I have had further thoughts on this name and, as a result, I have tentatively suggested that the specific may be Scots sonsie 'of good fortune, lucky', with reference to the heavy yield which could be expected from crops in such a favourable situation.

Both achadh and quoy continued in use for several centuries which is another reason why it is so difficult to establish a relative chronology. Names such as Lochquoy and Cairnquoy are comparatively recent, loch and cairn having been borrowed into Scots from Gaelic.

Having given you a glimpse of the problems which arise and, more occasionally, which can be solved through examining early documentary references to habitative names, I should like now to turn to topographical names, which require a slightly different approach. In general, they are not recorded in any early written sources, which means that the local informant is of vital importance. In fact, it should be

stressed again that the local informant is very important even when early documentary sources are readily available because he or she can provide pronunciation of the name to either confirm or refute a theoretical interpretation. There is nothing so exciting in place-name research as seeing a name come alive in context.

I interviewed and recorded on tape seven principal informants, but there were many others who contributed information on a more casual basis. My informants varied in age, sex and occupation and in the amount of names they knew. On the whole, male informants had a more wide-ranging knowledge of names than females, independent of age. I had expected that the older the informant, the more names he or she would know, but that did not prove to be invariably the case. Knowledge of names depended more on occupation and on interests than on age. The men were, or had at some time been, crofter/fishermen and, therefore, had knowledge of both inland and coastal names, whereas the women tended to know only the names within a certain radius of their home, although the radius varied from person to person - about two to three miles generally.

The only restriction which I imposed when choosing my primary informants was that the person had to have been born and bred in the district. One lady in her mid-seventies was worried that she might not fit this category because she had moved a few miles north from Freswick to Canisbay at the age of eighteen when she married a Canisbay crofter/fisherman, but I was able to reassure her that her qualifications were ideal.

Often when dealing with local informants one has a tremendous sense of urgency and of the need to record names indicative of an earlier way of life before they are irretrievably lost. It was stated earlier in this paper with reference to the linguistic group who inhabited Caithness before the advent of the Norse that if their settlement pattern as well as their language differed from that of the Norse it is not altogether surprising that their place-names should have been lost. The same process can be seen happening on the west side of the county in the 20th century; my principal informant for Reay Parish, who has an exceptionally wide-ranging knowledge of local names, knew only 54% of the names which were first collected in 1876 for the 6" O.S. maps. He knew approximately 78% of the habitative names but only 46% of the topographical names and the average local teenager, orientated towards the employment centres of Dounreay and Thurso, would only recognise the names of those topographical features which physically dominate the landscape.

There are various reasons for this extensive loss, the most obvious being that English has taken the place of Gaelic as the language of everyday communication. There are instances of names having been part-translated from Gaelic into English in the 19th century, but this does not happen regularly, and my informants were usually unaware that the name they gave me was in any way connected with the Gaelic name on the map, which was surprising because they could often offer translations of those Gaelic names which were still in use. Examples of names for which an alternative version was offered are:

Glupain na Drochaide ('the bridge's gulping') has become The Green Brig (bridge), in which the colour green has been substituted for the Gaelic glupain, which is an onomatopoeic word related to English gulping and which describes the sound the sea makes as it rushes in beneath a natural arch.

Cnoc an t-Samraidh ('the summer hillock') has become 'The Simmeran' (summering).

It seems likely that the reference is to former shielings situated on the hill, although only scattered rocks are now visible.

An t-eas ('the waterfall') becomes English 'The Esses' - an interesting example, because while it is obviously derived from eas my informant thought that the name referred to the snaking movement of the burn at that point, although he commented that he thought it was a strange description because the burn was not particularly winding. It did, however, prove to have a waterfall.

Gaelic mòr and beag are almost invariably translated:

Beinn nam Bad Mòr	'Big Ben-a-Bad'
Beinn nam Bad Beag	'Little Ben-a-Bad'
Beinn Ràtha Mhòr	'Big Ben Ra'
Beinn Ràtha Bheag	'Little Ben Ra'.

The nature of the Gaelic topographical names themselves often contributes to their loss. They tend to be lengthy and grammatically complex descriptions of the features to which they refer and, as such, they are difficult to remember unless the feature has some continuing significance in the life of the community, e.g. Cnoc na h-Imriche 'the hill of the flitting', which refers to the annual move by the women to the shielings to tend their cows and make butter and cheese. This activity no longer takes place and the name has been forgotten.

The chief causative factor behind the substantial name loss is probably the shift in the focus of the community which has occurred due to 20th-century mechanisation and improvements in communication. The small self-sufficient crofter, so typical of the 19th century, is now an anachronism. Shieling has ceased and shore-line fishing to supplement the daily diet has diminished. People still catch the occasional fish, of course, but only as a leisure pursuit, not for basic survival.

This name loss can also be seen occurring on the east side of the county, particularly among the numerous shore-line names. In Canisbay Parish there is a large number of coastal names on the 6" Ordnance Survey map (1876) partly because there is a particularly long stretch of coastline - it being on the corner - but it seems to be true in general of the previously Norse-dominated area that there are fewer topographical names referring to inland features, although this could, of course, indicate that these names had already been lost by the end of the 19th century rather than that their absence suggests a basic difference in the life-style of the two ethnic groups, with the Norse being coast-and-sea-orientated and the Gaels being hill-and-moor-orientated. A large number of these coastal names have now, regrettably, been forgotten.

It would be wrong to leave you with a totally negative picture of names being gradually whittled away without replacement, although it is true that the balance is towards loss rather than gain, certainly in Reay Parish which is more sparsely populated than the other five parishes. Nevertheless, even in Reay Parish there are signs of continuing naming activity and, in the environs of both Thurso and Wick, 20th century prosperity has encouraged new building and the creation of appropriate names to describe either single houses or small groups of houses.

To return, however, to the subject of informants; there are some potential pitfalls which have to be borne in mind. For example, one has to be particularly careful because an informant might be inclined to alter the pronunciation of a name to conform with his or her conception of how it should be pronounced in a formal

situation. This comment applies especially to habitative names which have an 'outside image' as it were. Take, for instance, a name with which you will be familiar from having heard it on the radio or television and this is Dounreay, usually pronounced [dun're] by BBC announcers.

My informant initially gave me the form [dun're] as used by the BBC and then, fortunately, he said 'I wouldn't say that here though', and he proceeded to give me a fascinating glimpse of social history in a further three possible pronunciations which depended partly on the age of the speaker and partly on the context in which the name was being used.

Older people (60+) in Reay Parish use the form ['dunra] with the stress on the first syllable and the vowel in the final syllable being [a] rather than [e]. Younger people (60-) say [dun'ra] using the stress pattern of the BBC announcer but retaining the local vowel [a] in the final syllable. These two forms, used in conjunction with early written forms, are the most helpful when it comes to interpreting the name. I have suggested that this is a hybrid name containing Gaelic dùn 'a fortress' and ON rǎ 'a corner, nook'; or ON rǎ 'a pole', used metaphorically to indicate a long stretched-out elevation (cf. Norske Gaardnavne X, p. 140).

The third form which he gave me was ['daunre] and I subsequently noticed the spelling <Downreay> on a notice-board in the local Post Office and down also, of course, occurs in some of the early forms - <u> and <w> often being interchangeable in the orthography - so this particular pronunciation is based on a recent mistaken interpretation of the written form. It has obviously been assumed that Down/Down represent Scots doun, a variant of English down, and English down has been substituted as being more 'correct'. This form is used in conversation with outsiders who live locally, for example the Americans who live at the base between Reay and Thurso. When I cross-checked this information with a second informant (aged 60+) he said 'Well I would say ['dunra] but the right way is ['daunra]', adding yet another variant pronunciation.

Another example of a name which varies according to the age of the speaker and the context in which it is used is Duncansby in Canisbay Parish. Older people say ['daunʃbi] which is closer in form to the Dungalsbær which occurs in Orkneyinga Saga than the form Duncansby which is favoured by younger local people and outsiders. Duncansby is likewise a form which appears to have arisen out of a mistaken interpretation of an early written form.

My own Shetland dialect proved an invaluable asset in counteracting this tendency to alter the local pronunciation to suit the outsider. It was possible to exchange dialect items which occur in place-names and, having established this common ground, it became much easier to extract the information which we did not have in common, and it even helped to reassure informants about the tape-recorder because I too was willing to 'make a fool of myself' as they saw it, in front of the microphone.

Having persuaded an informant to talk freely, one sometimes has to be on guard against plausible-sounding explanations of the meaning of a name. There were often two or more local stories to account for a particular name, each delivered with the utmost sincerity and appearing to bear the stamp of authenticity in the amount of detail contained in the story. There is a name Oigin's Geo in Reay Parish (a geo being a steep-sided inlet of the sea) and I was given two stories relating to this geo. One tells of a man named Henderson nicknamed in Gaelic ðigean 'lad', who distilled whisky and stored his illicit goods in the geo. The other suggests that Óigean was a sheep-

stealer named Sutherland who hid in the geo to avoid retribution but was, unfortunately for him, caught and deported. Incidentally the geo appears to be devoid of shelter for either sheep-stealer or illicit whisky. Folk etymology would, in fact, make a fascinating separate study.

Finally, having extracted as much information as possible from an informant, the next step before returning to the typewriter is a step taken in a completely literal sense. In doing a survey such as this it is very important to familiarise oneself with the terrain by covering it on foot, ideally in the company of the informant, but sometimes that did not prove possible. Often the rationale behind a name is clearly visible on the spot and one can acquire a clearer understanding of the naming process, as prompted by the landscape and, most importantly, one can absorb the atmosphere of the place - something of which I hope I have communicated to you.

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

NOTE

* This is a revised version of the paper given on March 31st 1984 at the XVth Annual Conference of the Council for Name Studies held at the University of Aberdeen.

REFERENCES

Manuscript sources

Lord Reay: estate papers in Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh, catalogue reference GD84.

Mackay of Bighouse: estate papers in Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh, catalogue reference GD87.

Sinclair of Dunbeath: estate papers in Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh, catalogue reference GD280.

Sinclair of Freswick: estate papers in Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh, catalogue reference GD136.

Sinclair of Mey: estate papers in Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh, catalogue reference GD96.

Sinclair of Murkle: estate papers in Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh, catalogue reference GD247.

Sinclair of Thurso: estate papers in Lord Thurso's estate office, Thurso, Caithness.

Sinclair of Ulbster: estate papers in Lord Thurso's estate office, Thurso, Caithness.

Sutherland of Forse: estate papers in Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh, catalogue reference GD139.

Printed works

Jakobsen, J., An Etymological Dictionary of the Norn Language in Shetland, 2 vols, London and Copenhagen, 1928-32.

Jakobsen, J., The Place-Names of Shetland, London, 1936.

Lind, E. H., Norsk-Isländska Dopnamn ock Fingerade Namn Från Medeltiden, Uppsala, 1905-15.

Macgill, W., Old Ross-shire and Scotland as seen in the Tain and Balnagown Documents, Inverness, 1909.

Magnusson, M., and H. Pálsson, trans., Njal's Saga, Aylesbury, 1960.

Marwick, H., The Orkney Norn, Oxford, 1926.

Marwick, H., Orkney Farm Names, Kirkwall, 1952.

Nicolaisen, W. F. H., 'Scandinavians and Celts in Caithness: The Place-Name Evidence', in Caithness. A Cultural Crossroads, ed. J. R. Baldwin, Edinburgh, 1982.

Norske Gaardnavne, ed. Olaf Rygh, 19 vols, Kristiania, 1897-1936.

Oftedal, Magne, 'The Village Names of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides', Norsk Tidsskrift for Sprogvidenskap 17 (1954), 363-408.

Old Lore Miscellany of Orkney, Shetland, Caithness and Sutherland, vols 1-8, Viking Society, London, 1907-15.

Old Statistical Account of Scotland, ed. J. Sinclair, 21 vols, Edinburgh, 1791-99.

Omand, Donald, ed., The Caithness Book, Inverness, 1982.

Origines Parochiales Scotiae. The Antiquities Ecclesiastical and Territorial of the Parishes of Scotland, The Bannatyne Club, 2 vols, Edinburgh, 1855.

Pálsson, H., and P. Edwards, trans., Orkneyinga Saga, London, 1978.

Registrum Magni Sigilli Regum Scotorum, ed. J. M. Thomson et al., Edinburgh, 1882-1914.

Registrum Secreti Sigilli Regum Scotorum, ed. M. Livingstone et al., Edinburgh, 1908-.

Retours. Inquisitionum ad Capellam Domini Regis Retornatarum, quae in publicis archivis Scotiae adhuc servantur, Abbreuiatio, ed. T. Thomson, N.P., 1811-16.

Rivet, A. L. F., and Colin Smith, The Place-Names of Roman Britain, London, 1979.

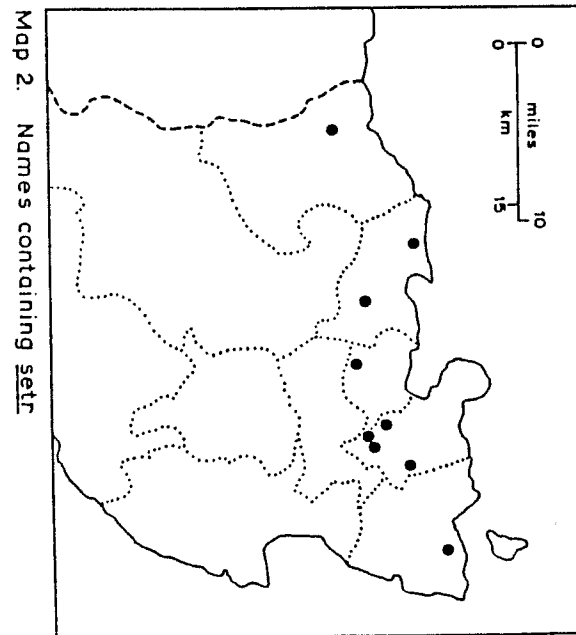
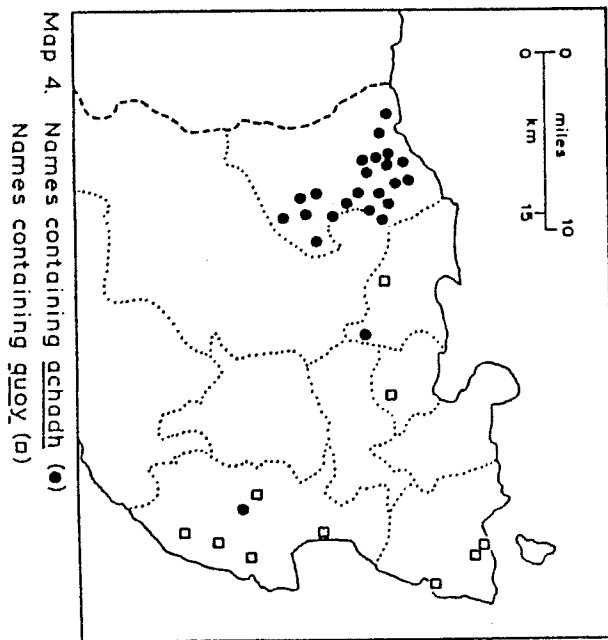
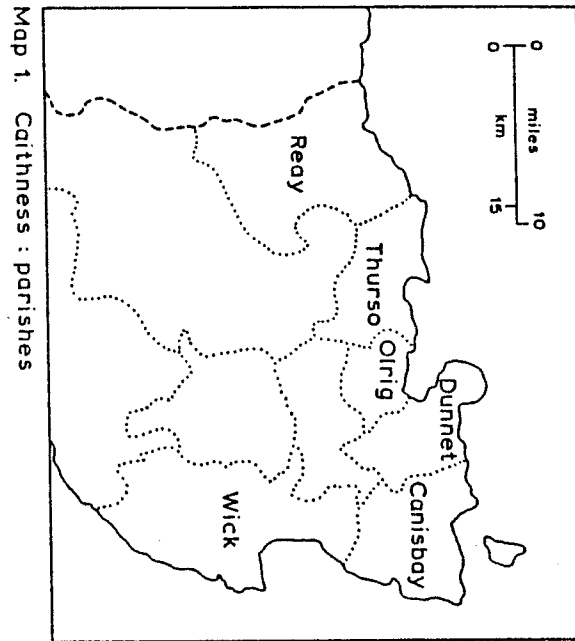
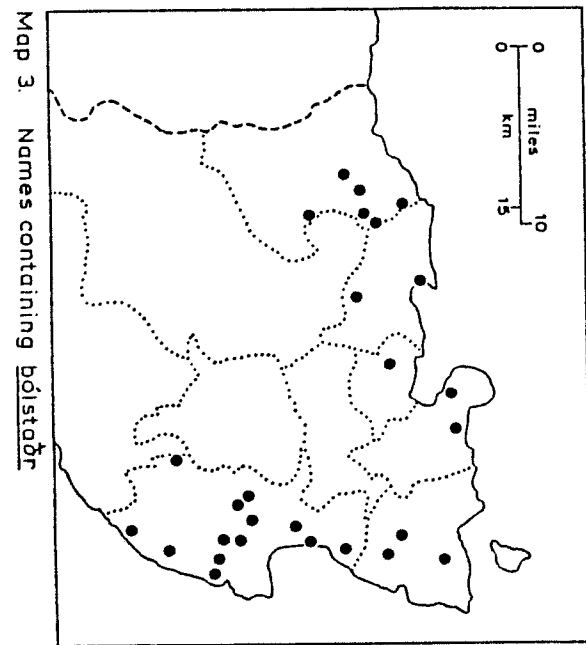
Rygh, O., Gamle Personnavne i Norske Stedsnavne, Kristiania, 1901.

The Early Maps of Scotland, ed. D. G. Moir, 3rd edn, Edinburgh, 1973.

Thorson, P., 'Ancient Thurso, a Religious and Judicial Centre', in B. Niclasen, ed., The Fifth Viking Congress: Torshavn 1965 (1968), 71-77.

Watson, W. J., Place-Names of Ross and Cromarty, Inverness, 1904.

Watson, W. J., The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland, Edinburgh, 1926.



PLACE-NAMES AND SETTLEMENTS: SOME PROBLEMS OF DATING
AS EXEMPLIFIED BY PLACE-NAMES IN *-bý**

Within the last few thousand years southern Scandinavia has escaped lasting occupation by people speaking a foreign tongue. This means that there has been an uninterrupted development of settlement by people speaking the same language as far back as linguistic science can penetrate (Kousgård Sørensen 1979, 3). It is therefore impossible in this region to date place-names by referring them to various chronologically stratified immigrations by foreign peoples and in the first half of this century several more or less fantastic estimates of the age of southern Scandinavian place-names were proposed, all based on the assumption that correlation between the distribution of types of place-name and that of datable archaeological finds is an indication of contemporaneity. An early and extreme example is the Norwegian Andreas M. Hansen's conclusion that settlements in Denmark with names in *-lev*, *-løse* and *-inge* must date from the same period as the graves of the younger Stone Age (Hansen 1904, 102, 105). More recently the methodological flaws in Hansen's arguments have been pointed out by both archaeologists and philologists and Scandinavian place-name scholars are now very concerned to distinguish between evidence, such as datable archaeological finds, that can help to date settlements and evidence that can contribute to the dating of the formation of the names of the settlements (Kousgård Sørensen 1979, 16-17).

For the English toponymist the dating of place-names does not offer the same temptation to a gross exaggeration of their antiquity, since the arrivals of the Celts, the Romans, the English, the Vikings and the Normans provide reliable *termini post quem* for the formation of the various strata of names. Nevertheless there are innumerable pitfalls for the unwary, some of which I should like to demonstrate by reference to place-names in *-bý*.

I must begin by confessing that, under the influence of earlier research, I have myself been guilty of assuming that place-names are contemporary with the settlements bearing the names and hence that concentrations of names in *-bý* marked areas in which the Danes had taken over hitherto unexploited land and cleared it for settlement. I never, however, denied that names in *-bý* could be borne by settlements originally founded by the British or the English long before the Viking invasions. Eilert Ekwall, the pioneer of scientifically based place-name research in England, had already emphasised in his two early surveys of the Scandinavian element in English place-names that the Scandinavian names must often have replaced English names for established settlements. He pointed not only to the examples of Derby, which is known to have replaced the English name *Norðworþig*, and Whitby, which must certainly have had an earlier name, but also to the numerous Kirbys, Kirkbys and Crosbys, which he considered were unlikely all to date from the period after the conversion of the Vikings to Christianity (Ekwall 1924, 75; 1936, 162).

In a study published in 1935 of Scandinavian place-names in the light of local topography and surface geology in South-West Kesteven, however, L. W. H. Payling interpreted the very striking distribution pattern of the various types of place-name as an indication of the planting by the Danes of new settlements, often with names in *-bý*, on heavily wooded land that had had to be cleared before it could be exploited (Payling 1935).

In his discussion of Scandinavian place-names in England Sir Frank Stenton did