

Fastnet

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The Fastnet Rock, actually a fairly close-coupled pair of rocks and a half-tide reef, is some four and a half miles south-west of Cape Clear, Clear Island, County Cork. Its name has not, to my knowledge, been the subject of any previous linguistic study. I offer this brief account as a contribution to a series of works dealing with the onomastics of the edge of the world, which may indicate a craving for Tír na nÓg.¹

The name is attested in the following spellings:²

¹ R. Coates 'Uist = Ibiza' and 'Sweet Rockall', in R. Coates, *Toponymic Topics* (Brighton, 1988), pp. 21–23 and 92–98; R. Coates, *The Place-Names of St Kilda: Nomina hirtensia* (Lampeter, 1990); and R. Coates, 'Names on the edge of the world', *University of Sussex Bulletin*, 11/12/1990, p. 5.

² Convenient modern reproductions of some of the relevant maps are mentioned in the list, and the books and articles in which they may be found are given here. Other secondary sources are particularized in later footnotes. Andrews = M. C. Andrews, 'The British Isles in the nautical charts of the XIVth and XVth centuries', *Geographical Journal*, 68 (1926), 474–81 and plate 1; Crone = *Early Maps of the British Isles, A.D. 1000 – A.D. 1579*, edited by G. R. Crone (London, 1961); Haughton = *Atlas of Ireland*, edited by J. P. Haughton (Dublin, 1979); Mackenzie = Murdoch Mackenzie the elder, *Nautical Descriptions of the Coasts of Ireland* (Dublin, 1799); Mollat = M. Mollat du Jourdan and M. de la Roncière, *Sea Charts of the Early Explorers: 13th. to 17th. Century* (New York, 1984) [translation by L. le R. Dethan of *Les portulans* (Paris, date unknown)]; Nordenskiöld = N. A. E. Nordenskiöld, *Periplus; An Essay on the Early History of Charts and Sailing-Directions* (New York, date uncertain) [translation by F. A. Bather of *Periplus; utkast till sjökortens och sjöböckernas äldstra historia* (Stockholm, 1897)]; Rees = A. Rees, *The Cyclopaedia*, 39 vols (London, 1819–20); Robinson = A. H. W. Robinson, *Marine Cartography in Britain: A History of the Sea Chart to 1855* (Leicester, 1962); Wallis = Helen Wallis, *The Maps and Text of the Boke of Idrography Presented by Jean Rotz to Henry VIII, now in the British Library* (Oxford, 1981) [facsimile edition]. Fastnet may appear earliest on the Pinelli-Walkenaer chart of c.1384, but the reproduction I have seen is not clearly legible (B.L. Add.MS. 19510, ff.2v.3; reproduced Crone, map 7). See also B. S. Mac Aodha, 'Murdoch Mackenzie's charts as a source for Irish place-names', *Nomina*, 15

- fastanai* or *fastanay* Petrus Roselli chart, 1462
Reproduced Mollat, p. 208
- fastanai*(??) B.L. Egerton 73/29, anonymous Venetian map, c.1479
Reproduced Andrews, plate 1
- fastanai* anon., Columbus?, c. 1492
Reproduced Mollat, chart 21
- fos/tanai* B.L. Egerton 2803, fol. 6r., 1508
- fasta/nai* *ibid.*, fol. 6v.
- fostanai* *ibid.*, fol.8v.
- fastanai* Dijon portolan chart, c.1510
Reproduced Mollat, chart 26
- Fasney* B.L. Cotton Domitian A.xviii, f. 97r; Nowell's chart of Ireland
Reproduced Crone, map 17
- fastonay* B.L. Add.MS. 5413; Harleian world map
- ffastanay* Calapoda chart, 1522
Reproduced Nordenskiöld, XXVI
- fastanai* B.L. Add.MS. 5415A/5; Diogo Homem chart, 1558
Reproduced Crone, map 15
- Fastnei* Batista Boazio chart, 1599
Reproduced Haughton, endpapers
- Fastenay* John Speed, Kingdom of Ireland map, 1610
- fastanoy* B.L. Royal MS. 20.E.ix, f.21v; Jean Rotz, *Boke of Idrography*
Reproduced Wallis
- Fastonay* Willem Blaeu, map of Ireland, printed in the *Atlas major*
(1662), ?1635
- Fastenay* Jansson, *Hibernia regnum*, 1638
- Fastine* [perhaps *Fastnie*] Joseph Moxon, *A plat of the Channel* [etc.]
1657
Reproduced Robinson
- Fastney* Robert Norman, *The Great Rutter*, p. 141, 1671 [orig. c.1600]
- Fastne* Joh. van Keulen, *Nieuwe Pascaert, vand tuyt syde van Yrlandt*,
c. 1680
- Fastenée* anon., *Carte générale des costes d'Irlande*, 1693
- Fosteney* P. Coronelli, map of Ireland, 1696
- Fastnet* Charles Smith, map of County Cork (in a bearing), 1750

(1991-92), 97-105. Professor Mac Aodha further notes in private correspondence that Fastnet is inexplicably absent from many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century maps and charts (including the Blaeus').

Fasnet Mackenzie, charts 1 and 6, 1775 (published 1799)

Fastnel Rees, XIV, s.n., 1819

Fastnet Correspondence, *The Times*, 20 November 1847, p. 7

Fastnet Lewis's *Topographical Dictionary*, under **Cape Clear Island**,
1849

What emerges from these is that the present shape of the name is of recent origin and highly misleading, and that no attempt to base an etymology on the words or elements *ness* or *net* is doomed to success.³ It shows no sign of being Irish; neither *fásach* 'wilderness' nor the personal name *Fachtna*, famous as that of the sixth-century saint and bishop of the local see, Rosscarbery, help to elucidate the known spellings. No other even semi-plausible possibilities suggest themselves. Its name in modern Irish is *An Charraig Aonair* 'Rock of Solitude', which is appropriate enough but clearly a separate invention.⁴ I regard this Irish name as of recent origin; it is necessary to believe that *Fastnet* (or, strictly, its ancestor) was once the name current among Irish-speakers, as I shall show below.

If *Fastnet* is not Irish in origin, the next most tempting hypothesis is that it is Scandinavian, since this language supplies other island names off the southern coast of Ireland. These might include possibly *Blasket* (*Blascaod*), County Kerry, if from Common Scandinavian **blá-skeldur* 'blue-shield'; and certainly the following: *Dursey* (Irish

³ Respectively, A. Room, *Brewer's Dictionary of Names* (London, 1992), p. 183; T. Jeffery and M. White, 'Fastnet Rock: sentinel under siege', *Yachting World* (August 1987), 78-81 (especially p. 79). Jeffery and White attribute to 'a Cape Clear fisherman' the view that 'the [surprisingly anglophone, R.C.] old timers christened the Rock from the fact that their cork and cotton gill nets sometimes floated down on the tide and became trapped fast'; which might just as well be a theory of the origin of the name of Cork.

⁴ I have not seen this name in any academic literature, but see e.g. Liam Ó Loideoin and others, *Cosán eolais Oileán Chléire* (Skibbereen, Co. Cork, 1989), e.g. pp. 10 and 49-50. It is confirmed for me by Professor Breandán Mac Aodha, and the rock appears as *Carraig Aonair* on the official Irish-language Ordnance Survey 1:575,000 map *Éire*. To judge by south-coastal toponyms, *carraig* (here feminine) may be of either gender. The version of the name offered by Jeffery and White is *Carrig Anoonar* [sic] (*op.cit.*, p. 79), presumably collected from the lighthouse-keepers in 1987. This suggests a different syntax, *Carraig an Aonair*, consistent with an interpretation 'Rock of the Lonesome Man'; this seems to me to be a mistake.

Oileán Baoi), at the northern lip of Bantry Bay, County Cork, *Whiddy* (Irish *Faoide*, but suggestively *Enys Weday* on Robert Lythe's map),⁵ in Bantry Bay itself, *Foaty* (*Fota*), in Cork Harbour, the *Saltees* (*Sailti*), off Kilmore Quay, County Wexford, and *Tuskar Rock*, off Rosslare, County Wexford. There are no certain English names of the required antiquity in the region, and there is therefore no pressing reason to interpret it as Old English (OE) *fæsten-ēg* 'fortress island', even though that would suit the recorded spellings rather well. It is very doubtful whether *ēg* persisted as a name-element into Middle English times (i.e. the times when English interest in Ireland began) except as a fully-integral part of the words *ēilond* and *ēit*.⁶ The best provisional solution appears to be that *Fastnet* is an unusual Scandinavian three-element name, consisting of *hvass* 'pointed', *tannur* (> historical *tōnn*) 'tooth' and *ey* 'island'. At first sight, such a use of *ey* is surprising, since this element usually attaches to islands big enough to have some economic or practical usefulness, and usually large enough to permit settlement all the year round rather than just, say, summer grazing or the possibility of fowling. Otherwise in Scandinavian territory *holmr* 'islet' or *sker* 'skerry' (as in *Tuskar Rock*) tend to be used, or *boði* for a rock submerged by high tides. However, Kneen notes: 'The Norse meaning of *ey* is "an island", but it is frequently applied to "a rock" around the Manx coast.'⁷ He sees it in *Ippney* and *The Thousla*, but

⁵ West Sussex Record Office MS. PHA 9581, the Petworth Map, c. 1570, archetype attributed to Robert Lythe; see J. H. Andrews, 'The maps of Robert Lythe as a source for Irish place-names', *Nomina*, 16 (1992-93), 7-21, especially p. 21.

⁶ See the entry *ēie* in F. H. Stratmann, *A Middle-English Dictionary*, new edition edited by H. Bradley (Oxford, 1891), p. 191, where the headword is bracketed; its function appears to be a convenient address for accessing the two words mentioned in my text. The *Middle English Dictionary* gives the word only in place-names and in surnames derived from place-names or locative expressions. J. Wright, *The English Dialect Dictionary*, 6 vols (Oxford, 1898-1905), II, 223-24, gives one very equivocal instance of the word *ea* possibly in a sense akin to those of OE *ēg*, in a fixed proverbial expression.

⁷ J. J. Kneen, *The Place-Names of the Isle of Man* (Douglas, 1925), p. 40. It is of some interest that *holmr* is virtually absent from Man also; it is found in the record, and then only implicitly, only in reference to St Patrick's Isle at Peel, the older name of Peel being *Holmtún* (Kneen, *op. cit.*, p. 44). This suggests that in Man at least there was room in the later Scandinavian period for a

these are the only two names of rocks containing *ey* to be registered in his index.⁸ The element *ey* is apparently absent from J. J. Joughin's list of fishing-marks off the coast of Kirk Patrick and Kirk German parishes.⁹ Nevertheless there seems no reason to doubt Kneen's considered opinion that the element could in that part of the Scandinavian-speaking area have the meaning 'rock'. In addition, a suggestive parallel is offered by *Drangey* off the north-west coast of Iceland, where *ey* has been compounded with *dranga* 'pillar of rock (genitive singular)'; there is a seabird crag there. This is where Grettir the Strong was marooned, according to his saga, and it was therefore habitable up to a point; but we will not be detained by this as the same source declares that he fought with the undead and with a troll.¹⁰

Kneen's observation enables us to resolve the problem of a three-element name and make a definite proposal about its history. It is likely that *Fastnet* was originally called **Hvasstann(u)*- 'sharp tooth' to which *ey* was added in accordance with later Scandinavian usage in the Celtic seas. The works involved in building the lighthouse on the rock in 1849-53 and replacing it in 1899-1903 changed its original profile to some degree, and it is hard to judge the appropriateness of the suggested etymology. But it is not difficult to find viewpoints that are suggestive. Photographs of it in its present state show at least one original vertical face jutting up from the basal reef. Nothing obviously speaks against seeing any such isolated 100ft.-high rock as a tooth, and

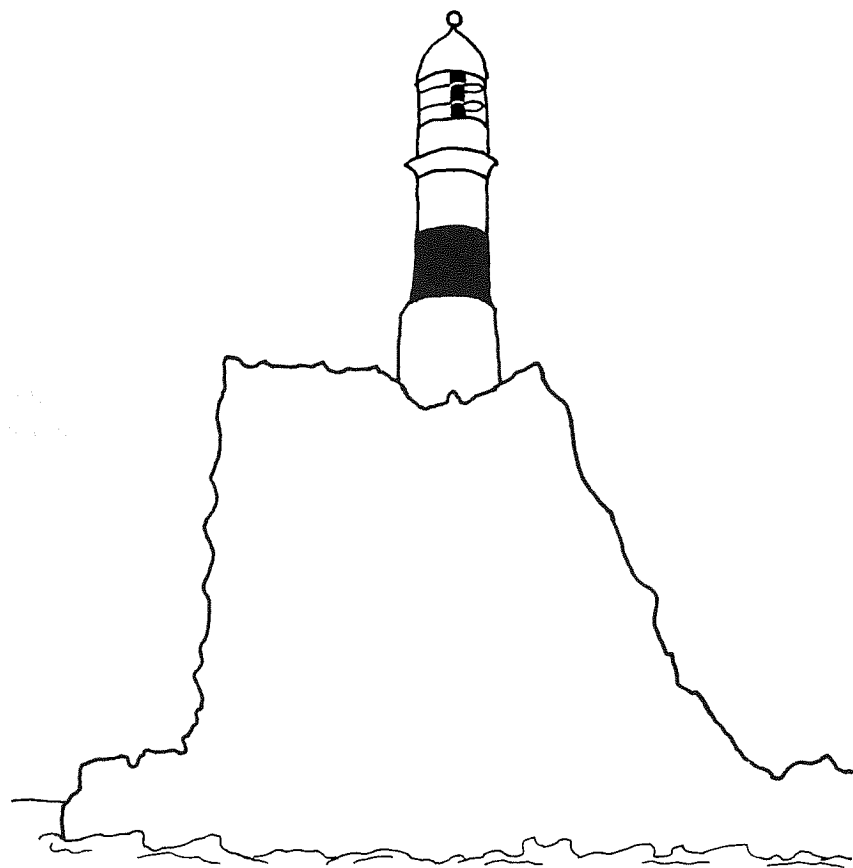
more liberal application of the term *ey* to land in water, though *sker* also occurs. I have not found a secure instance of *holmr* in southern Ireland, and it appears fairly infrequent in the Western Isles. I hazard the guess that, as the Viking communities of the west of the British Isles became Gaelicized, subtlety of their native lexicon as applied in geographical names was a casualty. S. Hug, *Scandinavian Loanwords and their Equivalents in Middle English* (Frankfurt am Main, 1987), pp. 258-59, confirms the scarcity of *holmr* as a loanword in English in the required sense in literature and place-names; it is practically restricted to the sense 'dry ground in marsh'.

⁸ Kneen, *loc. cit.* (with an allusion to one further name) and p. 56. The *Thousla* is a well-known shipping hazard equipped with a beacon, providing a nice parallel for *Fastnet*.

⁹ Quoted by Kneen, *PN Isle of Man.*, pp. 417-18.

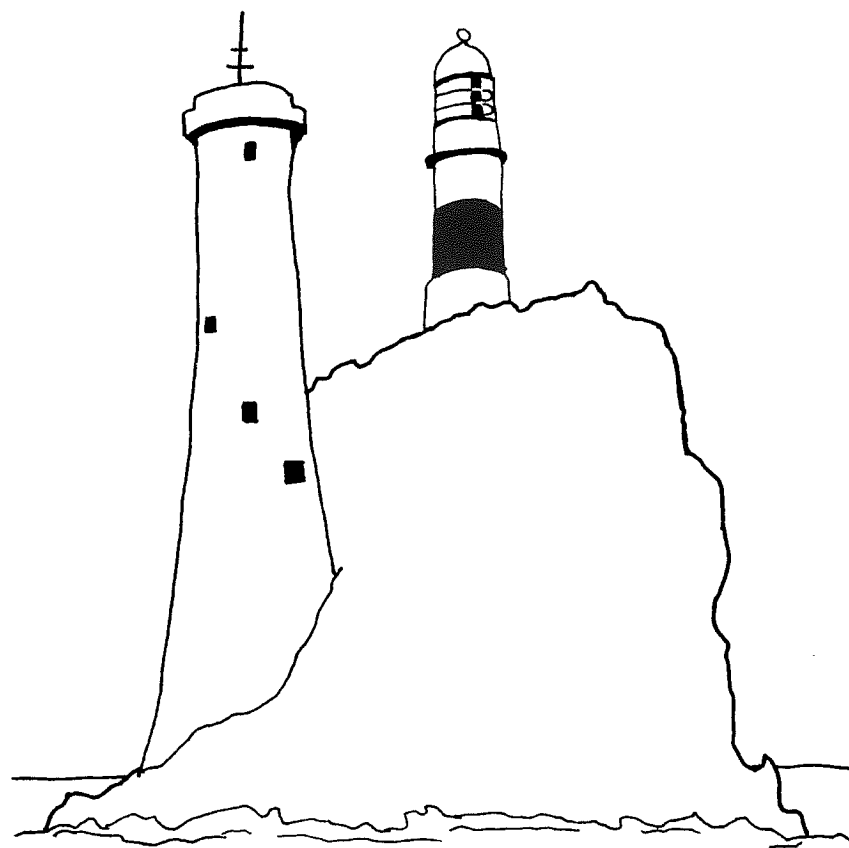
¹⁰ *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, edited by B. Sveinsson (Reykjavík, 1921), especially chapters 69-76. The parallel with *Fastnet* should not be pushed too far, however; there was pasturage for 80 sheep on *Drangey* (chapter 69) and twenty men had shares in it (chapter 70).

two profiles are shown below to enable the reader to form a personal opinion.¹¹



Profile 1:
The Fastnet from the north-east in 1897

¹¹ Charles W. Scott, *History of the Fastnet Rock Lighthouses* (Dublin, 1906). The profiles are from photographs in this book, redrawn by Miriam Coates.



Profile 2:
The Fastnet from the south-west in 1902
during the construction of the new tower

Hvass seems to have originally meant 'prickly, capable of lacerating'; compare its cognates, OE *hwæcs* (used of the Crown of Thorns), and Middle High German *was* 'cutting, sharp'. A derived noun may be seen in Gothic *hwassei* 'sharpness, severity', Old Saxon *hwessi* 'point'. If the original shape of the rock permitted it, which I cannot now judge, we might take **hvasstann(u)-* as meaning, quasi-technically, 'canine tooth'. Alternatively, we might consider giving geomorphological significance to the term. Fastnet is a pinnacle of folded and fractured Silurian slate, every exposed edge of which might be considered as a cutting edge, and **hvasstann(u)-* might be thought of as meaning, quasi-technically, 'incisor, cutting-tooth'. In either case, a compound of these two elements is a satisfactory explanation for the form of the name, and it is not necessary to demand greater anatomical detail.

For what it is worth, the relevant words are associated with each other in the Icelandic compound adjective *tannhvass* 'sharp like a tooth' or 'sharp of tooth', i.e. 'sharp-tongued' in the figurative sense (like the Danish simplex adjective *hvas*). The Scandinavian word *tönn* is also found with the appropriate phonology in Tanskey Rock, St Oswald's parish, Cheshire.¹²

The present pronunciation of *Fastnet* can be explained simply as Irish-mediated. Early Irish had no initial [w] or [hw]; Common Celtic [w] had become [f], which was therefore available to render the Scandinavian string [hw] or its later development [hv] (cf. the Irish form of *Whiddy*, cited above, whatever its etymology).¹³ The persistent *a* of the second syllable of *Fastnet* in early records is readily explained by the proposed origin in **tann(u)-* (if it is not simply one of a range of representations of a schwa-like vowel); Old Norse *ǫ* (< Scand. **a ... u*) is regularly represented by *a* in Middle English, and nothing speaks against its appearing as *a* in Irish, where not affected by adjacent consonants.¹⁴

¹² J. McN. Dodgson, *The Place-Names of Cheshire*, 5 vols in 7, English Place-Name Society, vols 44–48, 54 and 74 (Cambridge and Nottingham, 1970–97), IV, 305.

¹³ Perhaps Scandinavian *hvítr* 'white' or *hveiti* 'wheat' + *ey*. Scand. /t/ is rendered elsewhere by Irish /d/, as in the loanword *bád* 'boat'.

¹⁴ E. Björkman, *Scandinavian Loan-Words in Middle English*, I (Uppsala, 1900), 289–90, with a caveat about the Scandinavian source of ME *a*. As for

As is often the case in historical linguistics, more can be said about the transmission of a changed form than about the actuation of the change in the first place. For the present name, one can only issue a rather vague appeal to a probable misreading of *-nei* on older charts, coupled with the analogical or folk-etymological value of the word *net* in a famous fishing-ground.¹⁵ The earliest form with final *-t* is found, to the best of my knowledge, on a chart published in 1750 by Charles Smith, followed in 1775 by Murdoch Mackenzie the elder (*Fasnet*; see also footnote 2). However, a precise context for the popularization of the newer form can be provided. The need for a light at a lower altitude than the one on fogbound Cape Clear (in use c.1810–53) was brought home by the wreck of the American packet *Stephen Whitney* on 10th November 1847 in fog on the West Calf in Roaringwater Bay, County Cork. A light on Fastnet was proposed in the newspapers, and, in the wake of an official report by the inspector of lights, George Halpin, sanctioned in 1848, begun in 1849 and completed in 1853, the light being lit on 1st January 1854.¹⁶ It is in the letter of 'A Sailor'

names in Ireland, I assume, perhaps prematurely, that Crookhaven and Crosshaven (Co. Cork) contain Scand. *höfn* 'haven'; it is of course possible that these names are English or English-influenced. The Scandinavian personal name *Rögnvald* appears in Irish as *Raghnall*; see Edward MacLysaght, *Irish Surnames*, 2nd edn (Dublin, 1965), p. 175, and *Irish Families. Their Names, Arms and Origins*, 3rd edn (Dublin, 1972), p. 253.

¹⁵ An apparent parallel for the sprouting of a final *t* is afforded by the fact that the name of Blasket, County Kerry, is spelt on many medieval charts without one; for instance on one in Guillaume Brouscon's *Manuel de pilotage à l'usage des marins bretons* of 1546 (reproduced by W. A. R. Richardson, 'The Smalls, Hats and Barrels: navigational and toponymic hazards', *Nomina*, 17 (1994), 71–97, at p. 96) the name is *blasque*, and on Abraham Ortelius's map of 1572 (reproduced by Crone, *Early Maps of the British Isles*, map 16) it is *Blasquey*. However, the Irish name is authentically *Blascaod*, and the *t* clearly represents an integral part of the historical name. Was the originator of the final *-t* in *Fastnet* aware of these facts about Blasket, and did he therefore hypercorrect a form within the older tradition such as *Fastne*, which was still current on charts at the end of the seventeenth century?

¹⁶ The wreck is first reported in the *Liverpool Albion*, 12/11/1847; *Cork Southern Reporter*, 13/11/1847; carried by *The Times*, 15–20/11/1847. The suggestion of a light on Fastnet is by 'A Sailor', letter to *The Times*, 20/11/1847, p. 7a. I have not been able to track down a copy of the Halpin report, and there appears to be no direct mention of Fastnet in the British

(clearly an authority on navigation in Irish waters) to *The Times*, written from London dated 16th and printed 20th November 1847, that the first mention of the place outside the cartographical tradition occurs. Its name appears in the modern spelling. It is no misprint, as it crops up three times in the letter in all. The new spelling is found in Lewis's *Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*, which must have been in preparation when the sinking took place.¹⁷ At the time of this infamous wreck, which cost 91 or 92 lives, the pelagic speck of Fastnet must have become known beyond its original area of salience and its name used by people who had no acquaintance with its traditional form. It is clear from the misprinted spelling *Fastnel* in Rees's *Cyclopaedia* that the form of the name was uncertain in the world at large in 1819.¹⁸ Whether *Fastnet*, *Fastnei* or some other spelling was intended is unclear, but the mistake evidently did not strike the proofreader.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to W. A. R. Richardson of Flinders University for his kindness and promptness in providing eleven of the spellings listed in the evidence for the name of Fastnet, only one of which duplicated one already known to me; to Professor Breandán S. Mac Aodha of University College, Galway, for help with identifying, locating and transcribing Irish map sources; to Dr Oliver Padel of the University of Cambridge for further commentary; and to Miriam L. Coates for the profiles of the Rock.

parliamentary papers, including digests of the public accounts, of 1847-53. None of all this is recorded in the official history of the lighthouses mentioned in footnote 11, which is exclusively about construction and engineering matters.

¹⁷ Samuel Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*, 2 vols (London, 1849).

¹⁸ Rees, *Cyclopaedia*, XIV, s.n.

Modern Scottish Gaelic Reflexes of Two Pictish Words: *pett and *lannerc

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*Pett

By way of background and in order to set the scene, it will be useful to look at two maps reproduced from Nicolaisen's *Scottish Place-Names*.¹ The first is a distribution map of so-called *Pit*-names and shows English or Scots name-forms containing an element with the modern form *Pit*-which ultimately derives from Pictish *pett, for example Pittenweem, Pitcarmick, Pitlochry, etc. (Map 1, p. 48). There are one or two outliers, but generally these names fall to the east of Scotland. It is this distribution and the distribution of Pictish symbol stones that are largely responsible for the definition of the term 'Pictland', an area lying roughly in eastern Scotland between the Dornoch Firth and the Firth of Forth, though extending for some purposes up to the Northern Isles.

The first Gaelic settlements of Scotland north of the Clyde-Forth line appeared in the south-west, in Argyll, Cowal and Lorne, and spread out northwards and eastwards. A distribution map of the element *achadh* (Map 2, p. 49) which means 'meadow, field' in modern Gaelic, but which in the onomasticon also meant 'farm, steading', shows virtually the fullest extent of Gaelic settlement in Scotland. This is of course a generalisation: in Caithness, the line created by virtue of the absence of *achadh*-names in the north-east represents a meeting of Norse and Gael, although there may be a case for arguing that there was at least some Gaelic settlement of the Orkneys; and the strongest Gaelic-speaking areas of Scotland today are found in the Western Isles, with over 80% of the population in some places being Gaelic speakers but, paradoxically, almost no *achadh*-names.

¹ W. F. H. Nicolaisen, *Scottish Place-Names* (London, 1972), pp. 153 and 140. This is a version of a paper given at the Tenth International Congress of Celtic Studies, Edinburgh, 1995. I am very grateful to the editor, Oliver Padel, and to Professor Colm Ó Baoill for their helpful suggestions and references regarding this paper.