Project Reports

This is a new item in the journal, a chance for projects to set out at greater length than in the Newsletter their aims and approaches and – in the case of more mature projects – to draw attention to their published results. Submissions of reports on new, ongoing or recently completed projects (however 'project' is defined) are very welcome for future issues — Editor.

Recovering the Earliest English Language in Scotland: evidence from place-names

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to introduce the REELS project, funded by The Leverhulme Trust from January 2016 to December 2018 at the University of Glasgow. Building on the AHRC-funded 'Scottish Toponymy in Transition: progressing county surveys of the place-names of Scotland' (STIT) project (2011–14; PI Thomas Clancy), which scoped out work on the historical counties of Ayrshire, Berwickshire and Perthshire alongside producing full surveys of Clackmannanshire and Kinross-shire (Taylor *et al*. forthcoming/a and /b), REELS focuses on the place-names of Berwickshire, the heartland of Anglo-Saxon settlement in Scotland. Its aims are to inaugurate the survey of Berwickshire place-names, and to use the resulting data as source material for the study of the Northumbrian dialect of Old English and its development into Older Scots.

2. Project Team

The project team is as follows:

- Prof. Carole Hough (Principal Investigator)
- Dr Simon Taylor (Co-Investigator)
- Dr Eila Williamson (Research Associate)
- Mr Dàibhidh Grannd (PhD Student)
- Mr Brian Aitken (Systems Developer)

The wider team of Advisors comprises: Dr Christopher Bowles (Archaeology Officer, Scottish Borders Council), Prof. Dauvit Broun (Professor of Scottish History, University of Glasgow), Dr Jayne Carroll (Associate Professor in the History of English, University of Nottingham / Director, Institute for Name Studies), Prof. Thomas Owen Clancy (Professor of Celtic, University of Glasgow), Dr Alison Grant (Senior Editor, Scottish Language Dictionaries, Edinburgh / Convener, Scottish Place-Name Society), Prof. Andrew Prescott (Professor of Digital Humanities, University of Glasgow), Dr Margaret Scott (Lecturer in English Language and Literature, University of Salford), Prof. Jeremy Smith (Professor of English Philology, University of Glasgow), Prof. Diana Whaley (Emeritus Professor of Early Medieval Studies, Newcastle University / Editor, Northumberland Place-Name Survey).

3. Background

3.1 Old English

Old English, the collective term for the dialects spoken by the Anglo-Saxon settlers in Britain from the fifth to eleventh centuries, is the ancestor of both present-day English and Scots. There are three main types of sources: manuscripts, inscriptions and place-names (see, e.g., Hough 2012). These preserve an uneven spread of evidence. Manuscript production was concentrated in southern England, where the main centres of secular and ecclesiastical administration were located at the time when vernacular texts were being produced. Inscriptions are widely scattered, but the ultimate provenance of portable objects is difficult to

establish, as is the profile of their carvers (local or non-local, literate or non-literate). Although place-names are locatable and fairly evenly distributed, the place-name record has been more extensively mined for information on the southern than the northern kingdoms. The ninety volumes of the Survey of English Place-Names published to date have achieved complete or partial coverage of all historical counties in the south or midlands except Herefordshire, Kent and Somerset. In contrast, County Durham is represented by a single volume for Stockton Ward, and collection of material for Northumberland has begun but not reached publication. Current scholarship has therefore achieved a better understanding of the southern and midland dialects of Old English – broadly categorised as Kentish, West Saxon and Mercian – than of Old Northumbrian, the variety spoken in the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Bernicia that spanned the present-day border between England and Scotland.

3.2 Old Northumbrian

Grouped with Mercian as an Anglian dialect, Northumbrian is 'broadly identified with an area north of a line from the Mersey to the Humber' (Hogg 1992, 5). Two forms of Northumbrian are recognised, spoken in Bernicia (North Northumbrian) and in Deira (South Northumbrian). However, little is known of either, as most Old English texts are preserved through the medium of the West Saxon literary dialect. The main evidence for Northumbrian comprises three short poems from the eighth century (*Bede's Death Song*, *Caedmon's Hymn*, *Leiden Riddle*); runic inscriptions on the Franks Casket and Ruthwell Cross; tenth-century glosses to the *Durham Ritual*, *Lindisfarne Gospels* and *Rushworth Gospels* (second part); personal names and place-names. With the exception of place-names, all have been examined in detail, although the corpus is not only small but deeply problematic. Almost all Old English texts survive in mixed dialects, so that the identification of Northumbrian features is fraught with difficulty. Attempts to differentiate early and late Northumbrian are compromised by uncertainty regarding the dating of the earliest manuscripts (see, e.g., Kiernan 1990); attempts

to differentiate North and South Northumbrian by uncertainty regarding the location of *æt harawuda*, where the *Rushworth* glosses were written (see, e.g., Bibire and Ross 1981; Coates 1997). As Fernández Cuesta *et al.* (2008, 133) point out: 'We cannot locate with any degree of certainty where the early manuscripts were produced nor do we know the provenance of the scribes who wrote them. The same applies to the inscriptions.' The conclusions drawn from this evidence are therefore tentative and incomplete.

Although extremely limited, the textual and epigraphic evidence throws light on some phonological and morphological aspects of Northumbrian. These include features common to the Anglian dialects, such as /o/ rather than /a/ before nasals (e.g. *mon* rather than *man*) and retraction rather than breaking of front vowels in certain phonetic environments (e.g. *ald* rather than *eald* < **æld*), alongside others unique to Northumbrian, such as the retention of unbroken /a/ before /r+C/ (e.g. *barnum* rather than *bearnum*), and loss of word-final /n/ (e.g. *foldu* rather than *foldun*). Similarly, the personal name evidence reflects some name elements from common Old English, such as *torht* 'shining, clear; beautiful, noble' and *tūn* 'hedge; garden; enclosure; homestead; village', alongside others unique to Northumbrian such as *tond*, related etymologically to Gothic *tandjan* 'set on fire' (Insley 2007, 10). Less successful is the use of word geography to identify lexical items whose distribution is restricted to texts of Northumbrian provenance. The corpus is too small to support this kind of investigation, although individual terms clearly belong to the Anglian rather than non-Anglian dialect group (Wenisch 1979).

Place-names offer by far the most extensive and closely locatable body of evidence. If we are ever to know more about the Northumbrian dialect, it can only be through this material. The complexities associated with place-name data, particularly in an area like southern Scotland where the evidence has been overlaid with other linguistic strata, has hitherto precluded such an attempt. Systematic investigation can only be tackled through place-name survey, which has not yet been undertaken for any part of the Borders. However, recent advances in the place-name

surveys both of Scotland and of neighbouring areas of England have now made it possible to embark on the research.

3.3 Place-name survey

Whereas the Survey of English Place-Names has been in progress since the 1920s, the Survey of Scottish Place-Names has only recently been established under the auspices of the Scottish Place-Name Society. Counties surveyed so far are Fife (Taylor with Márkus 2006–12), part of Buteshire (Márkus 2012), Clackmannanshire (Taylor *et al.* forthcoming/a) and Kinross-shire (Taylor *et al.* forthcoming/b). Survey of the Borders is an urgent priority for scholars in both Scotland and England. It is logical to begin with Berwickshire, a large county of thirty-two parishes, which – partly due to the survival of extensive archives from the medieval priory of Coldingham, preserved in Durham Cathedral – has some of Scotland's earliest recorded place-names. These derive from a range of Celtic and Germanic languages including Brittonic, Gaelic, Old English and Old Norse; many later names are from Scots. The only general study is the short, deeply flawed work by Johnston (1940). Modern scholarship (e.g. Nicolaisen 2001; Scott 2003; Grant 2011; Grant 2012) draws on Williamson (1942), which provides more reliable but selective coverage and belongs to an early era of research. Recent work (e.g. Hough 1999; Donnelly 2000; Dunlop and Hough 2014) is limited to small-scale analyses of individual or groups of names. Building on the momentum of the STIT project described above (1), REELS will initiate the place-name survey of Berwickshire and undertake cross-border comparison with related groups of names in England, liaising with ongoing place-name survey in Northumberland.

4. METHODOLOGY AND OUTPUTS

4.1 Preparatory work

In preparation for the project, material was collected from printed sources towards a detailed survey of six parishes from the North Sea westwards along the Anglo-Scottish border, then along the Tweed where it forms

that border. From east to west, these are Mordington, Foulden, Hutton, Ladykirk, Coldstream and Eccles. They will be brought to full survey in *The Place-Names of Berwickshire*, I, *The Tweedside Parishes*, for public- ation within the Survey of Scottish Place-Names. A preliminary corpus of place-names from the Ordnance Survey (OS) 1:50,000 Landranger map was also drawn up. These will form the basis of a freely available online web resource covering major settlement, hill and river names throughout Berwickshire. Taken together, the two sets of data will provide a solid basis for investigation of the Old Northumbrian linguistic stratum, with the results to be published as journal articles during the lifetime of the project, and subsequently consolidated into a monograph.

Outlined below are the methodologies to be applied to the three main strands of the project: the published survey, the web resource, and the reconstruction of Old Northumbrian.

4.2 The published survey

The research methodology for *The Place-Names of Berwickshire* will follow that pioneered in Fife and refined and developed in the subsequent surveys (see 3.3 above). The first stage is to establish and describe the evolution of the administrative framework, both secular and eccles- iastical, of the survey area. This is done primarily through the prism of the pre-1975 parish, the successor to the medieval parish. A gazetteer or corpus of head-names is extracted from the OS 6 inch first edition map series (1843–82), supplemented by names from the OS Explorer 1:25,000 series (1997 to present). To this corpus are added settlement names which appear in early documents but are not recorded by the OS. Names are arranged alphabetically within their respective parishes; each name is tagged with parish abbreviations conveying information about modern and earlier parochial affiliation. Names shared by multiple parishes (e.g. water-courses) are similarly but distinctively tagged. Thus a place can be automatically assigned to its parish in all data-storage contexts, hard- copy and digital. Also systematically collected for each name is spatial data, e.g. national grid reference. In the printed output the names are presented by parish, with an introduction to each parish, outlining aspects

of its history with a bearing on its toponymy, such as tenurial patterns and saints' cults.

4.2.1 Sources

The chief manuscripts for the Berwickshire survey are held by the National Records of Scotland, Edinburgh, with the fifteenth-century cartulary of the Cistercian nunnery of Coldstream (Harley MS 6670) held by the British Library, London. Durham Cathedral's Archive is another important source. Glasgow-based projects have already digitised all original Scottish charters pre-1300, as well as constructing the People of Medieval Scotland database (<www.poms.ac.uk>), in which all charters (broadly defined) pre-1314 have been dated. Also important are the OS Object Name Books. Images, and a growing corpus of crowd-sourced transcriptions, are available for the study area on the ScotlandsPlaces website. The REELS methodology includes the completion and checking of these transcriptions, and selective deployment of the information in discussion and analysis of head-names.

4.2.2 Pronunciation and fieldwork

Traditional, local pronunciations of place-names can provide clues to linguistic origin. Pronunciations will be collected during fieldwork and at local knowledge exchange events, including two exhibitions organised in collaboration with local societies and communities. They will be recorded and stored electronically, and presented in the published volume in IPA. Fieldwork will also help to understand names within the landscape.

4.2.3 Name analysis

For each head-name an analysis of language(s) of origins, elements and meaning will be produced, evaluating linguistic, environmental and historical considerations, often assisted by comparative toponymic evidence from linguistically and historically similar areas. The elements comprising each place-name will be identified under the relevant head-names, but because many elements recur (e.g. OE *tūn*, Scots *toun* 'farm'; OE *burna*, Scots *burn* 'stream'), wider issues of origin, usage and

distribution will be discussed in an Elements Glossary generated by the database discussed below (4.3).

4.3 The web resource

A fully searchable web resource of all Berwickshire place-names on the OS 1:50,000 Landranger map (*c*.1,192 names) will be made freely available online, and designed for both public and scholarly use. Allowing searching of place-names by parishes, elements and dates, it will feature both map-based and tabular browse and results views. Underlying this will be a relational database containing all the information collected for the head-names in the survey volume, following the precepts and methods set out in 4.1 above. The resource will also contain a database of place-name elements, linked to individual name analyses.

A web-based content management system (CMS) will be developed through which the place-name data will be created, updated, edited and finalised, and will help ensure the integrity of the data. The textual data for the project will be stored in a MySQL relational database. Aspects of the structure and some of the content such as controlled lists of place-name elements will be adapted from data sources of existing Scottish place-name surveys, such as Fife. The map interface will use the freely available Javascript-based Leaflet.js library.

4.4. The reconstruction of Old Northumbrian

Following collection and interpretation of the place-name data, the Old English and Older Scots strata will be analysed for linguistic features. The relationship between names and non-onomastic language is not straightforward, but the place-name corpus provides insights into areas of language history and development that other sources cannot (Hough 2010; Coates 2016; Grant 2016; Scott 2016). The three main foci will be lexis, phonology and morphology.

4.4.1 Lexis

The starting-point for the study of Old Northumbrian lexis will be the Elements Glossary and relational database mentioned above (4.2.3; 4.3).

All Old English and Older Scots elements will be checked against occurrences in the Old English corpus (Healey 2009) alongside major dictionaries of Old English, Older Scots and place-name elements, to differentiate between common Old English, common Anglian, and Northumbrian. Since place-names draw on a sub-set of vocabulary, the resulting picture will be partial, but significantly fuller than at present.

4.4.2 Phonology

A full list of phonetic contexts will be compiled, with a particular view to analysis of linguistic features regarded as diagnostic for Old English dialects (e.g. reflex of Germanic *$/æ:/$, back mutation, breaking, epenthesis, *i*-mutation, palatal diphthongization, retraction, smoothing) and their development through Older Scots. The results will be compared with those based on textual and epigraphic data (Campbell 1959; Hogg 1992; Toon 1992; Johnston 1997). A crucial distinction is that the linguistic significance of textual and epigraphic data depends on the relationship between orthography and phonology, and may be compromised by factors such as spelling regulation or shape/size of writing surface. Since place-names can be used without understanding of semantic content, collections of historical spellings are less subject to orthographic standardization, and offer a more reliable guide to phonology (Hough 2012). A fairly full picture of Old Northumbrian phonology should emerge, and will be analysed for features diagnostic of North or West Germanic.

4.4.3 Morphology

A full list of morphological contexts will be compiled to identify Northumbrian features and trace their development into Older Scots. Although the picture will be incomplete, we can expect nominal and adjectival paradigms to be well represented.

4.4.4 Personal names

A list of personal names within place-names will be compiled, extending knowledge of Northumbrian and Older Scots anthroponymy.

5. Significance

The main significance of the REELS project lies in the recovery of evidence for the early history of both English and Scots. In addition, it will enhance understanding of the toponymic continuum between northern England and southern Scotland, probe the potential of place-name evidence for language reconstruction, and advance the recently-inaugurated Survey of Scottish Place-Names.

5.1 Old Northumbrian

Our knowledge of Old English is largely mediated through the West Saxon literary dialect, a variety associated with a small but politically dominant kingdom, which does not reflect the language actually spoken in different parts of Anglo-Saxon Britain. Interrogation of the place-name evidence will be the biggest single step forward in the understanding of the northernmost variety known as Old Northumbrian.

5.2 Older Scots

The runs of historical spellings compiled as an essential component of the survey work will allow the project team to track the early development of Scots and contrast it with early forms of Middle English. Although Scots derives mainly from Old English, it also came into contact with the other Celtic and Germanic languages spoken in different parts of Scotland, and it is particularly difficult to establish the extent of influence from Old Norse (see, e.g., Corbett *et al.* 2003, 4–8). The problem is exacerbated by similarities between northern varieties of Old English and North Germanic (see, e.g., Smith 2009, 122), and by what Lutz (2012, 34) describes as the 'progressiveness of the Northumbrian dialect'. With no evidence of major Norse settlement in the Borders, there is greater continuity of language from Old English to Scots here than in other parts of Scotland, so this is the best opportunity to establish which features of Scots derive from Old Northumbrian rather than from Old Norse. The endeavour is particularly timely in view of recent controversial claims that English is a Scandinavian language (Emonds and Faarlund 2014).

5.3 Cross-border comparison

The project will also advance understanding of the relationship between place-names in southern Scotland and northern England. The border consolidated in 1237 obscures much about the common pasts of the two countries, not least the links between Anglo-Saxon settlement in both areas, and the inheritance of the English language dialects which evolved into Northern English and Older and Modern Scots. Clancy (2013) outlines the challenges and opportunities of cross-border comparison, including how analysis of elements like *bý* and *tūn* in Scotland can inform understanding of their usage in England, and the importance of historical contextualisation in assessing place-name evidence for language contact. These issues will be pursued within the project. Some structures are characteristic of northern England and southern Scotland, as with 'bird-hall' names (Hough 2003) and verbal names (Taylor 2008). Cross-border comparison has also thrown light on interpretation of field-names (Hough 2001), place-name elements (Hough 2002) and place-names (Hough 2005). REELS is expected to lead to significant re-interpretations of place-names related to those in the study area and beyond, disseminated as conference papers and articles.

5.4 The potential of place-name evidence

Finally, REELS will test the capacity of place-name evidence to support the recovery of a language variety for which hardly any other evidence survives. Names shed important light on other poorly attested varieties of Old English such as Kentish, Mercian and East Anglian, but in most cases they have either been used alongside other types of data, as with a recent re-assessment of the earliest evidence for Kentish (Hough 2015), or have been targeted selectively to uncover individual aspects of lexis, morphology or phonology. Respective examples include Kentish *munddenn* 'secured swinepasture' or 'morning-gift' (Coates 1986) and Mercian *corþer* 'dairy' (Hough 1996; 2010, 14); the present participle in *-ande* reflecting Scandinavian influence on the East Anglian dialect area (Sandred 2001: 51–2); and the /æ:/ ~ /e:/ isogloss between Northern East Anglian and Southern East Anglian (Kristensson 2001). In attempting to

reconstruct as comprehensive as possible a picture of Old Northumbrian from place-name material, the project team have set themselves an ambitious goal, but only by making the attempt will the full potential as well as the limitations of the evidence be revealed.

Some areas of language will inevitably be better represented than others. The range of phonetic contexts is much fuller than the range of morphological or syntactic contexts, while lexical material is skewed towards nouns and adjectives relating to the physical world. However, the REELS team believe that the findings of this project will reveal an exciting picture of the language spoken in the Borders during the early Middle Ages, illustrating the value and significance of the Survey of Scottish Place-Names.

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