



SOCIETY FOR NAME STUDIES

IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND

CONFERENCE NOTICES

English Place-Name Society centenary celebration Nottingham, 9th Sept 2023

While not a SNSBI event, I thought that members might be interested to know that the English Place-Name Society will be holding a one-day conference on 9th September to celebrate its centenary. See also the EVENTS section on page 8.

2023 SNSBI Autumn online day conference

We will be joining the Scottish Place-Name Society for this day conference. Keep an eye on the SNSBI website and your emails for further information.

2024 SNSBI Spring Conference

Dublin, 10th - 13th May 2024

This conference will take place at Dublin City University. Keep an eye on the SNSBI website and your emails for further details.

Newsletter NS. 26 2023

Welcome to the 26th issue of the SNSBI newsletter!

I'm afraid that it was not possible to produce a Spring newsletter this year, for a variety of reasons. I have therefore decided to publish just one newsletter for 2023. I will return to the usual pattern of producing a Spring and Autumn newsletter in 2024.

Following the 2023 AGM, changes have been made to the Society's committee (see the list on the right of this page). We are very grateful to Carole Hough, who has held senior positions on the committee, including President, for a number of years. Carole is no longer on the committee as her term as Vice-President has come to an end. Thanks also go to Diana Whaley, who has just finished a term as President and is now Vice-President. Jennifer Scherr is now President of the Society, and Aengus Ó Fionnagáin is Vice-President. We also welcome Katie Hambrook and James Chetwood as new ordinary committee members.

Harry Parkin (editor)

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2022-23

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SNSBI SOCIETY FOR NAME STUDIES IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND

Conference reports

SNSBI Autumn day conference

29 October 2022

Abstracts can be found on the [2022 SNSBI autumn day conference page](#) of the SNSBI website.

The SNSBI autumn day conference was held at the University of Leicester on Saturday 29th October. It was the first in-person conference held by the Society for 2 years, although the hybrid format meant that many joined virtually too. It was great to see so many people in attendance online and in-person, and to see the range of presentations on the theme 'Names and local history'.

The first paper, 'Hōhs and boundaries', was delivered by Bob Trubshaw. His focus was on place-names with the element *hōh*, such as Lancing Hoe in Sussex and Morteheo in Devon, which Margaret Gelling identified with distinctively-shaped hills. Many of these names are located on boundaries; both land-sea boundaries and those between counties. His conclusion of a study of names with this element, and

their relation to boundaries down to Hundred level, was that the element originally denoted a kind of boundary shrine from the pre-Conversion period, located on topographically distinctive hills.

Keith Briggs delivered the next paper, on 'Some more Scandinavian elements in Suffolk place-names'. In Suffolk, elements of Scandinavian origin can be found in field- and minor-names, as well as major place-names. Keith spoke of how many of these could actually be described as Anglo-Scandinavian hybrids, containing anglicisations or generics which were borrowed into English. His recent work, however, found examples of names with purely Scandinavian elements, or elements which were not anglicised, and he gave a number of examples including road-names and water-names of Old Danish origin.

After a break for tea and coffee, the short paper 'Mapping place and identity in early modern and industrialising Wales' was given by Angela Muir. This paper highlighted the importance of and potential in the depositions from the Court of Great Sessions in Wales for study of Welsh place-names. These courts

operated in a similar way to English assize courts, but have left more documentary evidence. These sources contain significant and comprehensive detail about the places where crimes were taking place, and crucially they are recorded in English and Welsh. Angela spoke of how useful these are as a source for place-names, and raised the possibility of organising future work on them.

The morning's final paper, given by Alasdair Whyte, presented findings from research on 'The place-names of Muile~Mull, Ulbha~Ulva and surrounding smaller islands in the Inner Hebrides'. Focusing mainly on the methodological approach to such a study, he spoke of the importance of using a range of sources for toponymic evidence, including local knowledge, folklore, and oral recordings, as well as texts, maps, and fiction. The final part focused on findings from archive material from the Gloucestershire Heritage Hub. This research is due to be published in various places, including in volumes of the Survey of Scottish Place-Names.

Everyone gathered in the University Library cafe for Lunch, which was a lovely



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opportunity to discuss the day so far and meet new people at the conference.

After lunch, Simon Draper presented recent local historical research undertaken for the Victoria County History in Oxfordshire. This began with focused attention on the surnames *Chaundy* and *Merry* and their history in Oxfordshire, before considering the Tax records between 1279 and 1327 in Langtree Hundred. This demonstrated the importance of microtopography, settlement patterns, landownership, and economy in studying the development of medieval personal names in local contexts.

Hasan Hasan remotely delivered a paper on commemorative hydronyms. The 'Osborn Drinking Fountain' in Bognor Regis was the case study for this research. It was erected by the Friendly Societies of Bognor in 1886. The history of the eponymous Dr Charles Osborn was considered in the context of the fountain. It was suggested that there may be a connection between Osborn's prominence in medicine and the role of the fountain in providing clean drinking water

to the same community in which he was a well-known figure.

To end the day, Richard Jones presented a paper on the preservation and loss of medieval watery names in Alrewas in Staffordshire. This research, as part of the Flood and Flow project, focused upon a corpus of field names in the alluvial land around Alrewas. It was found that the survival of names describing watery features was uneven, reflecting the changeable watery landscape. Riverine names and more prominent water features were more likely to survive to the 19th century than names of moorland and standing water, which were more likely to change and

disappear in the landscape. Enclosure was also found to be a likely cause for the disappearance of these names, and the possibility of new drier toponyms being coined was raised as a question.

Susan Kilby provided a short addendum on the 'Learning the Landscape Through Language' project, which created and provided resources for place-names to be taught as part of childhood education in Shropshire primary schools. Some of the resources from the project were shared with the conference, including a board game!

Report by Kathryn Hardy and Ben Marshall

Alpha Cottage (picture and note from Keith Briggs)

Alpha Cottage is the first house in Woodbridge in Suffolk upon approaching the town from Ipswich. The age of the name is uncertain, but at the other end of the town an Omega Cottage was recorded in 1881, though this has now disappeared.





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SNSBI Spring conference

14th to 17th April 2023

Abstracts, some slides, and Peter Kitson's poem on the conference can be found on the [SNSBI Twenty-ninth Spring Conference page](#) of the SNSBI website.

The 2023 SNSBI Spring conference was held in Bridgend, at the Heronston Hotel. This conference had been postponed from 2020, and it was great to finally get together for the first in-person weekend conference that the society had held for some time.

Prys Morgan kicked things off on Friday evening with his paper titled 'The Vale of Glamorgan: a muddle of names'. He showed how Norman colonization of the Vale caused a "rich second layer of names" on top of the existing Welsh ones, some of which were new Norman creations while others were Norman adaptations of native Welsh names. From the sixteenth to eighteenth century, a third layer of Welsh names arose, leading to something of an onomastic "muddle".

On the Saturday, the first talk was delivered by Dylan Foster Evans. It focused on the adoption of a large number of

suburban and street names in Cardiff when it became an international port in the nineteenth century. We saw how historic Welsh-origin names were adapted and replaced, along with how names were translated and, at times, mistranslated. The paper also looked at the aims and impact of Cardiff's new place name policy of 2019, one aim of which is to achieve "parity between Welsh and English names for Cardiff streets".

The next paper, by Sioned Davies, looked at the place-names in the medieval Welsh tales known as *the Four Branches of the Mabinogi*. While these tales are rooted in magic, mystery and enchantment, we saw how the place-names mentioned within the tales root them in the landscape. The significance of these place-names was also explored.

Next was Eurwyn William, with a fascinating look at the development of *St Fagans National Museum of History*, to prepare us for the excursion on Sunday. Eurwyn started with the history of open-air folk museums, before looking at the origins of St Fagans, and the story of its development into "today's 'vital community space' where 'everyone has a right' to 'shape the story of Wales' together".

After lunch, Rhian Parry and

Ifor Williams presented two Heritage Lottery grant-funded projects which looked at how the collecting and recording of place-names can be assisted by embedding this within local communities and engaging them with the process. We were shown some fascinating images and maps, which provided an insight into the use of minor names within slate quarries, and also saw how vital consultation with local communities can be when working with place-names and their history.

The next paper, from Jennifer Scherr, took us over the border into England with an examination of Somerset place-name evidence for hunting activity in the county. As the county contained five Royal Forests, we might expect to find place-names related to hunting. This paper showed that thirteenth-century perambulations, together with other major and minor place-name evidence, shed some light on a variety of hunting practices.

Keith Briggs then took us through some thoughts on the etymology of *beach*. The OED is uncertain on the etymology of the word, but this paper suggested that important map evidence had been overlooked. This evidence raises the possibility that the word had first been used of a specific beach in Eastbourne (Sussex), recorded as *Beche* in the thirteenth century,



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Music in the hotel bar (picture by Jeremy Harte)

surnames. The first paper of Saturday's final sessions was delivered by Conchubhar Ó Cruaíoch, who looked at 'native Irish surnames in Irish townland names'. It was shown how over half of English townland names in County Wexford are composed of an English surname with the word *town* as the generic (e.g. *Latimerstown*), but when it comes to Irish townland names, only 10% of those examined were found to contain an Irish surname. It was found that many of the Irish surnames in this sample of Irish townland names belonged to hereditary learned or professional families, and so suggested that this particular type of Irish townland name can be used as a new indicator of a family's hereditary learned or professional status.

Saturday's final paper was delivered by Harry Parkin, who talked through the difficulties he has encountered in attempts to research the likely etymological origin(s) of patronymic surnames ending *-sons*. What little previous work there is had described this form as "anomalous", but through an investigation of the names' origins, development, and chronology, the paper suggested that certain etymological origins do appear more likely than others. Even so, the point was made that there is still no certainty at this stage in the research, and the

perhaps from a derivative of Old English *bæce* 'brook, stream'. It was suggested that the place-name used for the beach in Sussex was lexicalised, underwent particular sense developments, and spread across the coast of England.

Moving north, Thomas Clancy delivered the first of two papers relating to the Scottish island of Iona. It was shown how four different maps of Iona from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries carried a tradition of microtoponyms, and how their study can provide important insight into the local perception and understanding of the landscape.

The second Iona-related

paper was delivered by Sofia Evemalm-Graham. It focused on Eilean nam Ban ('Island of the women'), an island located in the Sound of Iona. One of the more well-known accounts of how Eilean nam Ban got its name suggests that St Columba banished all women to the island, refusing to allow them on Iona. This paper examined early modern and later accounts of this etymology, and investigated the possible motivations behind such etymological narratives, at the same time demonstrating the value of early modern sources for studying the place-names of Iona.

After a break for an evening meal, we moved away from place-names and onto



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hunt for more examples of names in *-sons* continues.

In a delightfully interdisciplinary start to Sunday's proceedings, David Austin, Chair of the Strata Florida Trust, spoke about 'The landscape and names in the twelfth-century charters of Strata Florida'. Illustrated with drone photography, maps and other visual material, the paper ranged through place-names, archaeology, monastic history and landscape history to examine how this important Cistercian site in Ceredigion developed.

Peder Gammeltoft began his paper, 'How can quantitative methods contribute to place-name research?' with the surprising statement that he was an idiot. But as he described his attempts to apply quantitative methods to Norwegian farm-names, it was clear that it has been a difficult and time-consuming project, but one that is developing a useful tool for understanding the usage of generic elements across time and space and for making comparisons across regions and countries. Particularly telling were graphics showing how certain place-name elements relate to data about farm sites – their size, quantity of cultivated land and valuations as recorded in early cadastres or land registers.

Peter Kitson then spoke about

'Placing "Old European" names within Indo-European'. Due to technical problems Peter was obliged to read his paper without accompanying Powerpoint slides, but it was full of intricate detail and provided a stimulating visit to the earliest linguistic material covered in the weekend.

In a slight change to the planned ordering of the Sunday slots, Keziah Garrett-Smithson next took us back to Ceredigion with a fascinating introduction to 'Naming culture in early modern Cardiganshire', based on her doctoral research using criminal records as a source of surname data and studying the cultural influences on naming over more than a century.

The Sunday afternoon trip to Amgueddfa Cymru/St Fagans National Museum of History was a delight to all, whether seasoned visitors or new to the place. The weather was kind enough to allow thoughtful meanderings along the woodland paths, with pauses over the splendid assemblage of historic buildings and artifacts dating from all periods from prehistory to a past so recent that some of us could be heard exclaiming 'We had one of those' or even 'We've still got one of those'.

On the final evening Aengus Ó Fionnagáin gave a report on



Delegates enjoying the excursion to St Fagans (picture by Katrin McClure)

'OS200 Digitizing the Irish Ordnance Survey Name Books'. These documents, such an important source for Irish toponymy as well as for the history of mapping, have often featured in papers to SNSBI conferences, and news of this major digitisation project was very much welcomed.

Peter McClure brought the conference to a close with a lucid account of the evolution of *A Dictionary of American Family Names* (2nd edn, Oxford University Press, 2022) and a tribute to its Editor in Chief Patrick Hanks, who has now had to retire from lexicographical work due to ill health. The talk brought home the true importance of this volume and the wider project that gave birth to it, and the



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unique contribution of Patrick Hanks. Less in focus, given the modesty of the speaker, was Peter's own outstanding contribution to the volume and to surname research in general, but it was nevertheless evident and greatly appreciated.

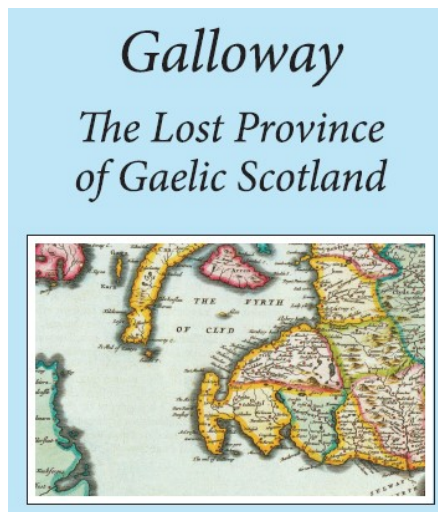
The conference overall was characterised by excellent organisation, and the atmosphere reflected everyone's pleasure at being able, at last, to gather in Wales at SNSBI's first in-person weekend conference since Covid. Some SNSBI traditions were revived, such as fascinating mealtime conversations and Saturday-night tunes and songs in the bar from flute, violin, bodhran, recorders and voice. A pre-conference event for early-career colleagues took the form of an excellent behind-the-scenes visit to Glamorgan Archives on the Friday afternoon, led by Senior Archivist Rhian Diggin. On Monday morning those who were able walked over to Ewenny Priory with its magnificent church and drank in birdsong and spring air before journeying home. The AGM of the SNSBI, traditionally held on the Sunday morning of the spring conference, was this year held online on May 9th.

*Report by Harry Parkin
and Diana Whaley*

Recent Publications

Galloway: The lost province of Gaelic Scotland

Ansell, M., Black, R., & Cowan, E. J. (eds).
John Dewar.



Members may be interested in this publication, which includes a number of chapters with an onomastic focus, including:

'Place-Names and Gaelic in Galloway: Names containing *cill* and *kirk*' by Thomas Owen Clancy

'Re-evaluating the Gaelic Mountain Toponymy of the Galloway Highlands' by Michael Ansell

'Galloway Gaelic and Place-Names: Linguistic Characteristics and Dialect Affinities' by Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh

The book is available for £19.99 from the publisher's website:

john dewar publishers.com

Please note that the regular "recent publications" section is simply a listing of items of potential interest to members. Listing here does not imply any opinion regarding quality, academic rigour, etc. Where appropriate, reviews will appear in **Nomina** in due course.

Nomina Bibliography

The **Nomina** bibliography team encourages members to send details of publications dealing with names in Britain and Ireland to biblio@snsbi.org.uk for inclusion in the annual bibliography.

The team would particularly welcome information about books and book chapters, and articles in journals that don't regularly publish onomastic content.

If it's not obvious why a publication will be of interest to SNSBI members from its title, a sentence or two outlining the onomastic content would be an enormous help!



SNSBI SOCIETY FOR NAME STUDIES IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND

Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland Essay Prize

1. A prize of £100 will be awarded annually for the best essay on any topic relating to the place-names and/or personal names of England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Man or the Channel Islands.
2. Submissions are invited from students and other researchers. The prize will normally be awarded to those who have not hitherto had work in onomastics published.
3. Essays should be about 5,000 words in length.
4. Essays should in some way make an original contribution to the subject.
5. Essays should be double-spaced, with pages numbered in a single sequence of arabic numerals, and should include a bibliography of source-material used and of books and authors cited.
6. Submissions should include an abstract of up to 250 words.
7. An anonymised electronic text of the essay and abstract should be submitted by October 31 each year to secretary@snsbi.org.uk.
8. Entries will be blind-refereed and the final decision made by a panel normally consisting of the President, the two Vice-Presidents and the Editor(s) of Nomina, who may consider it for publication.
9. Provided an essay of sufficient merit is forthcoming, the winner will be announced at the next AGM, held in the spring of the following year.

Events

English Place-Name Society (EPNS)

Centenary Meeting Nottingham 9th September 2023

The EPNS are holding a one-day conference in Nottingham at the Jubilee Conference Centre to celebrate their Society's centenary. Confirmed speakers include the Society's President, Professor Richard Coates, the Survey Director, Dr David N. Parsons, Professor Richard Dance (Cambridge), Dr Eleanor Rye (York), Dr Tania Styles (OED), and Professor Tom Williamson (UEA).

In the evening, Professor David Crystal will deliver a public lecture, 'O brave new world, that has such toponyms in it'.

For more details, see: nottingham.ac.uk/research/groups/epns/celebrating-the-epns.aspx

Welsh Place-Name Society (WPNS)

Annual Conference Aberystwyth 7th October 2023

The WPNS are holding their annual conference in

Aberystwyth at Drwm in the National Library of Wales. For more details, see: cymdeithasenwaulleoedd.cymru/our-events/

International Council of Onomastic Sciences

28th International Congress of Onomastic Sciences Helsinki, Finland 19th-23th August 2024

This congress will be hosted by the University of Helsinki. The theme is 'sustainability of names, naming and onomastics'.

For more details, see the University of Helsinki's ICOS conference webpages.

Forthcoming SNSBI events

SNSBI Autumn Day Conference, jointly with SPNS Also see the "conferences notices" on page 1, and keep an eye on the SNSBI website

SNSBI Spring Conference, Dublin, 10-13 May 2024

SNSBI Newsletter
Contact details
email: newsletter@snsbi.org.uk
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