REFERENCES

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, Ollrig, 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. 600 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
consider the documentary sources which contain references to place-names in Caithness, 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 place-names in the Orkneyinga Saga and in Njal's Saga, both of which contain useful reference to the 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. 460). 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 Returns. 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 Forsie, Mackay of Bighouse, Sinclair of Markle and Sinclair of Dunbar.

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 Norm., J. Jakobsen's The Place-Names of Shetland and An Etymological Dictionary of the Norn Language in Shetland, and Olaf Rhyn’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 A 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 bólstr, both of which can appear as final -star 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) Thruseter ['Thrusestar] (Thorso Parish):
   Thrusater 1562-3
   Thrusetter 1576
   Thrusiter 1646
   Thrusetter 1662
   Thrusater 1680
   Thrusiter 1750
   Thuster 1796

Per Thorson suggests that this name is derived from ON glorekksetr (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 Firfor (Lind 1915, col.1226).

2) Roister ['Ristar] (Dunnet Parish):
   Ressister 1538
   Rassister 1549
   Rassester 1604
   Reister 1619
   Reyster 1661
   Rester 1625
   Rasseter 1636
   Reestre 1662
   Raister 1798

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

3) Seater ['Seitar] (Canisbay Parish):
   Sceter 1563
   Setyr 1566
   Setter 1573
   Settar 1574
   Seater 1581
   Sitter 1583
   Seateure 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)
   Helsetir 1782
   Helshitter 1782

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

b) Fryster (Orlig Parish)
   Fryster 1798
   Frister 1877

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

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

Shalmistry 1643-53
Shalmery 1749

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

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

Of bólstr, 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 Caithness 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 (Almister and Scrabster), one example in Orlig (Sibister) and two in Dunnet (Westre and Loch of Baish).

In other words, the bólstr 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 Nicolaelsen 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 bólstr 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Houdustry</td>
<td>1519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hasbister</td>
<td>1537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hasbister</td>
<td>1549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halabister</td>
<td>1616</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halbester</td>
<td>1644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haulster</td>
<td>1726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hauster</td>
<td>1798</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The generic in this name is certainly bölsaðr, but the specific is not so obvious. Possibly ON helis 'neck, throat', used metaphorically to describe a narrow part of the Acharn Bay. This term is also Scots in the form has or haus. ON hav '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 sett, rather than bölsaðr, 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 sett group.)

The identification of specific 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 Bilsbster (Wick Parish), which has the following early forms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bylebster</td>
<td>1527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilsbster</td>
<td>1541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilsbster</td>
<td>1549</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bilsbster</td>
<td>1644</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bilsbster</td>
<td>1662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilsbster</td>
<td>1667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilsbster</td>
<td>1750</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and Bilsbster in neighbouring Watten Parish which has a similar range of early spellings.

The specific in both names is probably the Scandinavian personal name HIL (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 [bilsbster] whereas the Watten name is [hilsbster] 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 bölsaðr 'stone farmstead') in Reay, Canishay 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):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Westbster in Dumnott</td>
<td>1632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westbster in Dun</td>
<td>1636</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It has been suggested that the specific in all the Wester-names is ON vatn 'water', with reference to a neighbouring loch (Onand 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 Westbster (1543) and, thereafter, the forms are similar to the Dunnet Parish name.

There are no references to the Lorig Parish name before the 17th century, by which time it has already become Wester. (Is it a sett name rather than a bölsaðr name? It has not been included in the distribution maps of this uncertainty.) ON vestr is a plausible specific in that bölsaðr farms were very frequently defined in relation to other farms within the community, as in Sibmister 'south farm'. Nybster 'new farm', and Thuister 'farm on the outskirts'. The size of the farm could also be indicated, as in Stroutster '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 bölsaðr group was Killimister which, at first sight, appeared to have Gaelic ciil '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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Killuminister</td>
<td>1557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Killimister</td>
<td>1557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kylmissister</td>
<td>1574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Killimister</td>
<td>1581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kylmnister</td>
<td>1662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Killimister</td>
<td>1667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Killimister</td>
<td>1726</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

Moving on from bölsaðr 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 achatd and, on the east side, Caithness òg, which is a derivative of ON òg (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 achatd in the first instance denoted a field and was then subsequently adopted as a farm name. It appears in the abbreviated form Acht in Caithness names.

ON ky 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 White Parishes, one in Thurso Parish and the more recent Lochquo in Old Parish.

In Reay Parish (Gaelic *achadh*) is very frequently attached to an earlier Norse settlement name, e.g. Achamabasg, Achforstiesgoe, Achiebraeski, and 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 Quwy 1574
- Seitter Quyes 1575
- Seitter Quyes 1581
- Seitter Quais 1582
- Seitter Quyys 1616
- Seitter Quyys 1619
- Seitter Quyys 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. Achalane (Gaelic *'a meadow, marsh*), Achnabean (Gaelic *beinn *'a hill*), Lyrequoyn (ON lur *'clay, loam*), and Dalquoy (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:

- Sounsrbough 1635
- Sounsaquoy 1653
- Sawsagay 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 *sonnie* *'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 Lochquoyn and Cairinquo 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 habitation 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 Frewskick 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 6th 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 Dunreay 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:

- Gluacan na Drachdair ['the bridge's gulping'] has become 'The Green Brig' (bridge), in which the colour *green* has been substituted for the Gaelic *glaic*, 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.
- Crach 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-ras (‘the waterfall’) becomes English ‘The Esses’ - an interesting example, because while it is obviously derived from 4a, 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.

Celtic 4Mr and 4bMr are almost invariably translated:

- Beinn nam Bad 4Mr ‘Big Ben-a-Bad’
- Beinn nam Bad 4bagg ‘Little Ben-a-Bad’
- Beinn Ratha 4Mr ‘Big Ben Ra’
- Beinn Ratha 4bagg ‘Little Ben Ra’.

The nature of the Celtic 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. Coir na h-Iarniche ‘the hill of the flying’, 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 Caithness 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 coast - 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 Wick 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'rei] by BBC announcers.

My informant initially gave me the form [dun'rei] 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 [dõn'rai] with the stress on the first syllable and the vowel in the final syllable being [a] rather than [e]. Younger people (60+) say [dun'rei] 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 dón 'a fortress' and ON ra 'a corner, nook'; or ON ra 'a pole', used metaphorically to indicate a long stretched-out elevation (cf. Norrøe Garðarvne X. p. 140).

The third form which he gave me was [dəun'a re] and I subsequently noticed the spelling 'Dounrey' on a notice-board in the local Post Office and down also, of course, occurs in some of the early forms - [dœ] and [dœ] 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 down, 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 [dœnra]' but the right way is [dəun'a re'], 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 Caithness Parish. Older people say ['daunsbi] which is closer in form to the Duncanshaw 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 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 Olgin'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 Ògacan 'lad', who distilled whisky and stored his illicit goods in the geo. The other suggests that Ògacan was a sheep-
A stealer named Sutherland who hid in the ge to avoid retribution but was, unfortunately for him, caught and deported. Incidentally the ge 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.

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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.

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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 to 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, -Hage and -tinge must date from the same period as the graves of the younger Stone Age (Hansen 1908, 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 -by.

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 -by marked areas in which the Danes had taken over hitherto unexploited land and cleared it for settlement. I never, however, denied that names in -by could be borne by settlements originally founded by the British or the English long before the Viking invasions. Ellis愛 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 Northworp, and Whitby, which must certainly have had an earlier name, but also to the numerous Kirks, Kirksby and Crosbys, which he considered were unlikely all to date from the period after the conversion of the Vikings to Christianity (Ekiwall 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 -by, 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