

Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland

Twelfth Annual Study Conference: Shetland 2003

The twelfth annual study conference of the Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland was held in conjunction with the Scottish Place-Name Society and NORNA (the Society for Name Studies in Scandinavia) in Lerwick, Shetland, from 4 to 8 April 2003. The programme was organized by Doreen Waugh in collaboration with Jennifer Scherr and Michael Lerche Nielsen, and was on the theme of 'Cultural Contacts in the North Atlantic Region'. The majority of papers were held in the conference room of the Shetland Hotel, with one lecture in the Garrison Theatre following a reception in the Town Hall. Accommodation was at the Shetland Hotel and Lerwick Youth Hostel. The programme, together with abstracts where available, is reproduced below.

Friday 4 April

10.00–11.00: Coffee/Welcome (three organizing committees)

11.00–12.00: **Eileen Brooke-Freeman**: *Shetland Place-Name Project*

Abstract: The current Shetland Place-Name Project aims to systematically record all available information on Shetland's place-names (including previously unrecorded information) in a comprehensive database, and to link this to digital maps. Information will be made available to a range of users in different ways. Volunteers of all ages are using a range of techniques—sound recordings; maps and recording sheets; walking the ground; photographing features; extracting information from documentary sources; and using maps, aerial photographs and lists of names as triggers. We are also building on work already done by Jakobsen, Stewart and others—verifying names

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and pinpointing their locations on maps.

12.00-1.00: **Brian Smith:** *Andro Smyth's database of Shetland farm-names, 1628-1643*

Abstract: Andro Smyth, born near Perth at the beginning of the seventeenth century, an Orkney laird for most of his life, had a very practical view of Shetland farm-names. He and his brother were sub-lessees of the crown rents and duties of Shetland in the 1620s to 1640s. Andro drew up a `rental' of them, and elaborated on it during his life. From this work, and because of its form, it is possible to make judgements about the likely age and status of the various farms in the islands which paid tax and rent. It is an important document for place-name scholars.

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1.00–2.00: Lunch (buffet)

2.00–2.45: **Dónall Mac Giolla Easpaig**: *Scandinavian place-names in Ireland*

2.45–3.30: **Arne Kruse**: *Worlds apart—Gaelic and Norse in the west of Scotland*

Abstract: This talk will focus on the early contact between the natives and the Norse in the Northern and Western Isles of Scotland and reflect on the possibility of establishing an early stratum of names.

3.30–4.00: Afternoon tea/coffee

4.00–5.00: **Gillian Fellows-Jensen**: *Extermination or economic exploitation?*

Abstract: One of the unsolved problems about Viking settlement in the islands to the north and west of Scotland is the lack of a satisfactory explanation for the difference between the practically blanket coverage of Scandinavian place-names in Shetland and Orkney and the varying more or less limited degrees of Scandinavian influence betrayed by the place-names of the Western Isles. In a learned but provocative article in the journal *Northern Studies* entitled 'The Picts and the Martyrs, or Did Vikings kill the native population of Orkney and Shetland?', Brian Smith has recently accused earlier scholars, archaeologists and philologists alike, of being too mealy-mouthed in refusing to expect the worst from the Viking settlers in the Northern Isles. Without expecting to be able to convert Brian Smith to my own mealy-mouthed point of view, I shall try to throw some light on the place-name situation in Shetland and Orkney by drawing comparisons with the situations in the Isle of Man on the one hand and the English Danelaw on the other.

6.00–7.30: Civic Reception (with drinks and canapés)

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7.30–8.30: **W. F. H. Nicolaisen:** *Shetland place-names in a wider context*

Abstract: A brief survey of the place-nomenclature of Shetland will be followed by an attempt to reconstruct a kind of chronological and linguistic stratification. While the need for internal field-work and research by people belonging to the area, or at least with sound local knowledge, is obvious and cannot be over-emphasised, Shetland is not isolated or unique in the nature of its toponymic evidence, and it makes sense therefore to look beyond the archipelago to Norway, Orkney and the Western Isles, and perhaps even to the Faeroes and Iceland. The knotty problem of the virtual absence of pre-Norse names will have to be addressed, even if it would be over-optimistic to expect an answer that will satisfy everybody. Naturally, the ever-growing inventory of post-Norse names will require attention. The presentation will be explorative rather than definitive.

Saturday 5 April

9.00–10.00: **Barbara Crawford:** *'Papar' names. Multi-disciplinary pitfalls and international potential*

Abstract: This lecture will present a progress report on a project which attempts to acquire a better understanding of the geographical, environmental and cultural factors which lie behind the Norse naming of islands and locations in the North Atlantic after Celtic priests. It will look at the historical and toponymic evidence for the 'papar' and some of the sculptural and archaeological evidence in Shetland and Orkney, the Hebrides and Iceland. The nature of the locations named after the 'papar' will also be compared. What light can these names throw on the relationship between the Norse raiders and settlers and the Christian establishment in the islands? Can they really indicate a contemporary situation or do they reflect a later, retrospective nostalgia for Christian antecedents? Our comprehension of who the 'papar' were has to be based on a sound appreciation of

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all the places named after them, and an increased awareness of the common environmental factors may have significance for our better understanding of their role in the Celtic ecclesiastical world which the Norse raiders and settlers impinged upon.

10.00–10.30: **Peder Gammeltoft:** *Islands great and small: a study of the islands and skerries of Shetland, and their significance*

Abstract: Names of islands constitute an interesting and important group of place-names. A significant share of island-names in Shetland seemingly ranges among the oldest place-name material of Scandinavian origin, thus being an invaluable source for Viking-Age life in the archipelago. However, an almost equally significant number of island-names—particularly the ones denoting smaller islands—are relatively modern names, either as the result of name change or simply because they have not been named earlier. This group of names provides a fine insight into motives guiding name-change (resulting from e.g. changes in ownership or changes in utilisation) and into naming motives in the local Shetland or Insular Scots dialect. Comparisons will be made with island-names in Scandinavia and Orkney and general rules for island-name formation in the Northern Isles will be set up.

10.30–11.00: **David Sellar:** *Scandinavian personal names in Gaelic Scotland and the Isle of Man*

Abstract: The paper describes the reception of Scandinavian personal names into Gaelic, and eventually into English, after the initial period of settlement. The focus is not on etymology but on the transfer of names across languages and traditions, and also on the significance of names. This is an area which has seen comparatively little study in Scotland.

11.00–11.30: Coffee

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11.30–12.00: **Tom Schmidt:** *Onomastic evidence of Faeroese and Shetlanders in Norway?*

Abstract: A number of Norwegian place-names seem to bear evidence of contact across the North Sea from the Faeroes and from Shetland, and possibly also of immigration from the islands to the mainland. Among such names are Færøya, Færevik, Færingsholmane—Hjelten Hjelthavna, Hjeltnes. In the standard work on Norwegian names, *Norske Gaardnavne*, these names—when included—are without exception interpreted differently and in most cases probably rightly so. I have in another context—and in my own opinion not entirely successfully—struggled with the settlement name Hjälteby, which may possibly contain a byname *Hjalti* 'person from Hjaltland'. In my paper I will discuss possible interpretations of these and similar names and the extent to which it is possible to ascertain whether they do indeed refer to Shetlanders and Faroese in Scandinavia.

12.00–12.30: **Alison Grant:** *The Ayrshire '-by' names*

Abstract: The six Ayrshire *-by* names present something of an onomastic mystery, as they seem to represent Scandinavian settlement in an area for which there is little other evidence of Scandinavian presence. The lack of ancillary toponymics in Northern Ayrshire might suggest that these names were transplanted from the Danelaw in the twelfth century, when supporters of David I were granted lands in Scotland. Alternatively, as at least some of the Ayrshire *-by* names have parallels on the Western Seaboard of Scotland and in Galloway, it is possible that the names are connected to the Gaelic-Scandinavian toponymic continuum stretching from the Hebrides down to the North-West of England.

12.30–1.00: Packed lunch

1.00–5.00: Afternoon excursion to Tingwall, Scalloway and Papil

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6.00–7.30: Dinner

8.00–8.30: **Berit Sandnes**: *What is Norse, what is Scots?*

A re-evaluation of Orkney place-names

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that although Norse influence is very visible in Orkney place-names, it may not be as massive as suggested by Marwick. Some of the place-name elements regarded by Marwick as Norse, are actually borrowed into the Scots dialect of the islands, and may be used in Scots coinages. Marwick tends to assume Norse origin for morphological endings, even when a Scots origin is more plausible, e.g. -ie/-y-endings. As Norse names have only survived in a Scots context, adaption to Scots is to be expected. On the other hand, patterns assumed to reflect outside influence may be of Norse origin. Reversed word order has been explained as Celtic influence. But this word order was common in older Old Norse, and seems to have survived in Orkney.

Sunday 6 April

9.00–10.30: Society AGMs and other meetings

10.30–11.00: Coffee

11.00–11.30: **Richard Coates**: *The grammar of place-names in Scandinavian England: a preliminary commentary*

Abstract: An examination of structural types of names where the first element is a personal name and the second a habitative element, based on published materials from selected areas of the Danelaw counties. The key points at issue are the (non-)expression of case in such constructions, and, where the genitive is expressed, what form it takes. I reflect on similarities and differences between patterns involving English and Scandinavian elements, and inch my way towards some conclusions.

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11.30–12.00: **Diana Whaley**: *The semantics of stng, stang*

Abstract: Old Norse *stng* and its reflexes occur widely in place-names throughout the Scandinavian-speaking lands, and although its basic meaning is clearly 'pole, stave', there is a great deal of uncertainty as to what this might refer to in particular place-names. Starting from some medieval and post-medieval examples from the English Lake District but casting the net more widely, this paper will consider the possible range of meanings in the light of collocational and topographical evidence.

12.00–12.30: **Inge Særheim**: *Norse settlement names in '-land' in Shetland and Orkney*

Abstract: A substantial number of Norse settlement names ending in *-land* are found in Shetland and Orkney. These names have much in common with the *land*-names in Southwest Norway, which is the key area of settlement names of this type in Scandinavia. The *land*-names of Norse origin in Shetland and Orkney reflect cultural contact in the North Sea area in the Viking Age. These names are valuable sources when studying the Scandinavian settlement names of this type, e.g. concerning the semantics of this name element and the dating of the names.

12.30–1.00: Packed lunch

1.00–6.00: Afternoon excursion (south mainland)

6.30–8.00: Dinner

8.30–9.00: **John Baldwin**: *Anatomy of a watercourse: Norse and later names along the Ham Burn, Foula*

Abstract: Many of the tiniest watercourses on Foula retain a name that may be essentially Norse, Scots or English in origin. Together they reflect social, economic and cultural change over many centuries. Over the past 130 or so

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years, various collectors have visited Foula, to the extent that Foula place-names appear in several printed and manuscript collections, and these have been augmented by further fieldwork carried out over the past 35 years. All collections are in some way 'incomplete', and most have sought mainly to collect and preserve names that were considered 'old' rather than necessarily in current usage. All can contribute to an understanding of Foula's natural environment and man's inter-relationship with that environment. This paper explores names relating specifically to streams, lochs, bogs and valleys. It is not always easy to uncover earlier forms, buried under centuries of Scots and more recently English influence, but an attempt is made to unravel cultural and linguistic origins and to help chart the impact of population and cultural change.

Monday 7 April

9.00–9.30: **Gunnel Melchers:** *The structure of 'mead' names*

Abstract: The word *mead* ('meid', 'meith', 'mid') refers to a fishing-ground as well as a landmark, taken in sight when finding a fishing-ground, when two or more marks, mostly prominent pieces of land, are brought in a certain relation to each other. This paper focusses on the latter meaning of the word. *Mead* names are currently being collected on a large scale within the framework of the Shetland Place-Name Project. This paper is based on a limited set of data, partly collected by myself and partly supplied by the Shetland Archives. Comparisons are made with Swedish and Norwegian *mead* names as documented in studies by Falck-Kjällquist and Hovda. The main purpose of the paper is to discuss the formation and classification of *mead* names, which do not seem to fit nicely into a traditional onomastic typology.

9.30–10.00: **Doreen Waugh:** *Some Westside place-names from Twatt*

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Abstract: Twatt is a small village situated in the part of Shetland known as the Westside. This paper will discuss place-names from Twatt—both habitative and topographical—using local knowledge as well as documentary sources to build up a picture of the names. There is an intermingling of Norse and Scots in the place-nomenclature which is very typical of Shetland as a whole. The name Twatt itself appears regularly in documents from the sixteenth century at least. It derives from Old Norse *þveit* 'a parcel of land, etc.' which occurs in the form *twatt* in a few Shetland farm-names, all in 'Westside'. Twatt (Aithsting), Brunatwatt ..., Foratwatt, Germatwatt..., Stennestwatt... (Walls). Other names in the village are not so well documented but there are many fascinating tales about their origin and about local usage. The main purpose of this paper is to give a snapshot of these names and, where possible, of their history and when they came into being.

10.00-10.30: Coffee

10.30-11.00: **Svavar Sigmundsson**: *Place-names in Iceland and Shetland. A comparison*

Abstract: The place-names in these two countries are in many cases similar, as more or less the same words, of Norse origin, have been the basis for the name-giving. It has been maintained that about 90% of the place-names in Shetland and the Orkneys are of Scandinavian origin.

The similarity between the two countries can be illustrated by giving examples of parallel names in both areas. Firstly generics expressing natural features:

-*dalur* (Foggradaal Shetl. — Fagridalur Icel.)

-*fjörður* (Burrafirth Shetl. — Borgarfjörður Icel.)

-*nes* (Brimness Shetl. — Brimnes Icel.)

-*vík* (Culswick Shetl. — Kollsvík Icel.)

Secondly generics expressing habitation, like:

-*bær* (Melby Shetl. — Melbær Icel.)

-*staðir* (Tresta Shetl. — Tréstaðir Icel.)

On the other hand several elements in the place-names in Shetland have not been productive in Iceland, like the following:

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bjálki, glenna, hytta, pund, stilli, vist.

These similarities and differences will be discussed in the paper.

11.00–11.30: **Gunnstein Akselberg:** *Names composed in -staðir in Shetland and Western Norway. Continuity or discontinuity?*

12.00–12.30: Packed lunch

12.30–5.30: Afternoon excursion (west mainland)

6.00–7.30: Dinner

8.00–8.30: **Katherine Campbell:** *'Trowie' names*

Abstract: There are a number of stories in oral tradition concerning the trows or fairy people in connection with the fiddle in Shetland. Many of these name the locations where the music of the trows was said to have been heard. In summer 2002 I visited the Shetland Isles to take photographs of these locations, which were primarily on the mainland but also on the islands of Fetlar, Yell and Unst. This paper will present some of these images along with their accompanying stories and fiddle tunes. It will also map the locations allowing us to see the distribution of them. The paper will conclude by discussing the types of locations where trowie music was most likely to have been found.

(Followed by singing and entertainment.)

Tuesday 8 April

9.00–11.00: Visit to Clickhimin Broch/Shetland Museum
Those who stayed on for one more day departed for a full-day tour to the north mainland and the Northern Isles of Yell and Unst on Tuesday and visited Clickhimin Broch/Shetland Museum on Wednesday 9 April.