

Scarborough Revisited

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Judging from *Kormáks saga*,¹ two tenth-century Icelanders made an enduring mark on the English coast by founding and naming a stronghold that later turned into the famous Yorkshire castle, spa town and seaside resort of Scarborough.² It is a colourful story, and a gift to the tourist industry, and, encouraged by an influential article by E. V. Gordon,³ several distinguished toponymists have taken it seriously. However, there are literary-historical grounds for scepticism, and there are alternative interpretations of the place-name, and both aspects have been discussed by Martin Arnold.⁴ The purpose of the present paper is to probe what I shall term the ‘Icelandic hypothesis’ further, and to suggest a new interpretation of the place-name. In the course of the discussion other English place-names, especially Flamborough, will come under review.

Starting with the sober facts of the early spellings, the forms in English documents are:

Escardeburg 1155 × 63, 1256
Scardeburc(h) -burg 1159–1505
Scarðeborc c.1200
Scartheburg(h) 1208 etc.
Scareburgh 1414
Scarbrowgh 1573.⁵

¹ *Vatnsdæla saga, Hallfreðar saga, Kormáks saga*, edited by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Íslensk fornrit, 8 (Reykjavík, 1939), p. 299.

² National Grid Reference TA 0488.

³ E. V. Gordon, ‘Scarborough and Flamborough’, *Acta Philologica Scandinavica*, 1 (1925), 320–23.

⁴ M. Arnold, ‘The legendary origins of Scarborough’, in *Medieval Scarborough: Studies in Trade and Civic Life*, edited by D. Crouch and T. Pearson (Leeds, 2001), pp. 7–14.

⁵ V. E. Watts, *Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names* (Cambridge, 2004), s.n.; hereafter *CDEPN*. All early spellings are cited from *CDEPN* unless otherwise specified.

The Icelandic form is *Skarðaborg* (*Kormáks saga*, *Flateyjarbók*; *Skarðabork* is found in *Orkneyinga saga*).⁶

Prosthetic *E-*, as in the earliest spelling, is common at this period, as witness the *Domesday Book* (1086) spellings *Escr(a)ingha* for Scrayingham and *Esneid* for Snaith (both Yorkshire), and can be ignored. This leaves forms that are reassuringly consistent, pointing to either normalised Old English (OE) *Sceardeburh* or Old Norse (ON) *Skarðaborg*. Yet uncertainty remains about the elements of the name and therefore about its genesis. The generic second element is clearly OE *burh* or ON *borg*, probably ‘fortification’, but there is some doubt as to which, while for the specific (the first or qualifying element), there are four main possibilities, two English and two Scandinavian, but all deriving from a Germanic root **sker-* and related to verbs meaning ‘to cut’: OE *sc(i)eran*, ON *skera*.

(1) An obvious possibility is the ON masculine personal name *Skarði*, whose genitive singular form *Skarða* would tidily produce the spellings we have: Middle English (ME) ones with medial *-e-* and ON ones with medial *-a-*. *Skarði* is a derivative of the neuter noun *skarð* ‘gap, cleft’.⁷ The name is recorded fairly widely in the early Nordic world, as a forename and a nickname, apparently referring to a hare-lip or a cleft in the chin.⁸ It is not recorded independently from England,⁹ and although it is possible in names such as Scarcliffe, and Scarcroft, the English generics in those names favour an English specific (see (4) below).

The identification of the anthroponym *Skarði* as the specific in the name Scarborough goes back at least to 1910,¹⁰ and is the prevailing

⁶ A. H. Smith, *The Place-Names of the North Riding of Yorkshire*, English Place-Name Society, 5 (Cambridge, 1928), p. 105; hereafter *PN YNR*; English Place-Name Society is hereafter *EPNS*.

⁷ J. de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Leiden, 1977), s.v.

⁸ E. H. Lind, *Norsk-isländska dopnamn ock fingerade namn från medeltiden* (Uppsala, 1905–15), s. n.; Finnur Jónsson, *Tilnavne i den islandske oldlitteratur* (Copenhagen, 1907), 205–6; E. H. Lind, *Norsk-isländska personbinamn från medeltiden* (Uppsala, 1921), s. n.

⁹ See G. Fellows-Jensen, *Scandinavian Personal Names in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire* (Copenhagen, 1968), s.n. There are no entries in W. G. Searle, *Onomasticon Anglo-Saxonicum* (Cambridge, 1897); J. Insley, *Scandinavian Personal Names in Norfolk* (Uppsala, 1964); or *PASE: Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*. <<http://www.pase.ac.uk>>, accessed 8 December 2009.

¹⁰ J. G. Rutter, crediting F. W. Moorman, in ‘The place-name “Scarborough”’: a fur-

interpretation in the standard sources.¹¹ It does, however, entail either that an ON personal name forms a hybrid with OE *burh*, or that the original generic was ON *borg*, both of which situations would be possible but relatively unusual in the toponymy of England.

(2) The ON neuter noun *skarð* ‘cleft, gap, notch’ refers to gaps between hills in many early Icelandic and Norwegian place-names,¹² and it has been assumed in the Danish Skartved.¹³ It also appears in Scandinavian-influenced parts of England, e.g. Aysgarth, North Yorkshire (*Echescard* 1086) or Scarth Hill, Lancashire (*Scarth* c. 1190). It is not a good solution for Scarborough, however. Since the genitive singular is *skarðs* and no spelling of Scarborough shows inflectional *-s* one would have to assume the genitive plural *skarða*, and identify two or more gaps in the landscape to explain the name.

(3) A further possibility is that the specific of Scarborough is OE *sceard*, the cognate of ON *skarð*, with approximately the same meaning: a cleft, gap or pass between hills. Again, it is neuter, with genitive singular *sceardes*, so again the *-a-* and *-e-* spellings could be explained as reflecting the genitive plural, here *scearda* ‘of or characterised by gaps’, but a single gap is also possible if the medial vowel is epenthetic. The assumption of vocalic epenthesis is an explanatory convenience which is rarely discussed and would repay more systematic investigation, but such an assumption seems to be made by Mills and Watts for Scarcliff(e), Scarcroft and Shardlow (discussed below). As for the initial [sk], this could easily result from OE *sceard*: witness the two Yorkshire Skiptons, which are Scandinavianised Shiptons, far from the sea and unequivocally derived from OE *scē(a)p* ‘sheep’ rather than ON *skip* ‘ship’; and the Icelandic spellings for Scarborough would represent the standard

ther note’, *Transactions of the Scarborough Archaeological and Historical Society*, 7 (1964), 2–3. See Arnold, ‘Legendary origins’, p. 7 for earlier interpretations.

¹¹ E.g. *PN YNR*, p. 105; E. Ekwall, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names* (Oxford, 1960), s.n. (hereafter *DEPN*); A. D. Mills, *A Dictionary of British Place-Names* (Oxford, 2003), s.n.; *CDEPN*, s.n. Mills qualifies his entry with ‘probably’.

¹² E.g. several instances in *Landnámabók (Íslendingabók, Landnámabók, 2 vols*, edited by Jakob Benediktsson, Íslenzk fornrit, 1 (Reykjavík, 1968)); and see O. H. Rygh, *Norske gaardnavne. Forord og indledning* (Kristiania, 1898), p. 75.

¹³ B. Jørgensen, *Stednavne ordbog* (Copenhagen, 1995), s.n.

treatment of a foreign place-name by Nordic speakers: compare, for instance, the early eleventh-century form for Canterbury, *borg Kantara* in Óttarr svarti's *Hǫfuðlausn* 10/4.¹⁴

A topographical etymology for the name Scarborough is encouraged by the presence of striking landscape features. The town is overlooked by the dramatic promontory of Castle Hill which rises steeply, then levels out around 70m above the sea, and is all but cut off on the landward side by the steep escarpment of Castle Dyke(s). It is the site of prehistoric settlements, a fourth-century Roman signal station,¹⁵ a late Anglo-Saxon chapel, and a Norman castle which became the stage for a critical siege in the English Civil War. The headland is flanked by fine bays to the north and south. However, if the specific is ON *skarð* or OE *sceard* we need to look for one or more clear gaps in the landscape at Scarborough and none of these features has the two steeply rising sides that would characterise a *skarð* or *sceard*.¹⁶ A possible candidate is The Valley, formerly Ramsdale and its upper continuation Burtondale, which runs north-south on the landward side of South Bay. It is flanked to the east by Weaponness and Oliver's Mount, and to the west by a lower ridge of rising ground, so it might count as a *skarð* or cleft, especially at the point where it pierces the low hills which fringe Scarborough to the south. Margaret Gelling, followed by Field and Room,¹⁷ suggested that the name Scarborough originated in ON *skarð* 'gap', referring to this valley, and ON *berg* 'hill'. To propose *berg* when the spellings clearly point to OE *burh* or possibly ON *borg* is presumably motivated by the fact that if the promontory defences are the *burh/borg* they would be rather far from the *skarð*—around a mile, depending on the point of measurement. However, it would be rash to ignore the unanimous evidence of the spellings, and the same difficulty could be overcome by assuming that the *burh/borg* is not the spectacular

¹⁴ *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, edited by Finnur Jónsson, 4 vols (Copenhagen 1912–15), BI, 270.

¹⁵ There is some debate about the function of such structures, but they were clearly involved in coastal defence (pers. comm., Dr Christopher Tolan-Smith).

¹⁶ Arnold, 'Legendary origins', p. 11, citing Pearson, favours the Castle Dyke(s) escarpment, but this would be a *scar* rather than a *sceard* or *skarð*.

¹⁷ M. Gelling, W. F. H. Nicolaisen and M. Richards, *The Names of Towns and Cities in Britain* (London, 1970), s.n.; J. Field, *Place-Names of Great Britain and Ireland* (Newton Abbot, 1980), s.n.; A. Room, *Dictionary of Place-Names in the British Isles* (Enderby, 1993), s.n.

headland site but the prehistoric fortifications on Oliver's Mount, for which there is historical evidence though not, so far, firm archaeological proof.¹⁸ A better solution still, however, is to assume that the *burh/borg* is, after all, on the headland, and that the *sceard/skarð* is not a separate feature from the *burh* but rather an attribute of it;¹⁹ that way we do not need to argue The Valley into a more convincing cleft than it really is. Evidence for the application of *sceard* to a cleft in another feature would include *þæt lytle sceard þæt is on burh hlinceas* 'the small cleft that is on the fortification banks' in a set of Worcestershire charter bounds²⁰ (assuming scribal error or late grammar, since *-um* rather than *-as* would be expected).

(4) This brings us to the related possibility, not previously mooted but in my view preferable, of the OE adjective *sceard* 'notched, cleft, hacked, damaged'. The adjective occurs in tenth-century Northamptonshire charter bounds in *to/of þam sceardan beorge* 'to/from the notched hill or mound'.²¹ A small group of comparanda may well contain *sceard* as either noun or adjective. Two of them have clearly OE generics (both masculine): OE *hlāw* 'hill, tumulus' in Shardlow, Derbyshire (*Serdelau* 1086, *Sherdelawe* 1231), and OE *croft* 'enclosure, small enclosed field' in Scarcroft, West Yorkshire (*Sc- Skardecroft(e)* 1160 × 75–1252, *Skarthecroft(e)* 1174–1348). Scarcliffe, Derbyshire (*Sc- Skardeclif(f)* and variants 1086–1413) may contain the OE neuter noun *clif* 'cliff, bank', though the ON cognate *klif* cannot be ruled out. It will be noted that the spellings of the specific in these names match those for Scarborough (*Scarde-* 1159–1505). The site at Shardlow is low and flat, and the original reference could have been to a cleft in a small mound. The topography at Scarcroft would perhaps allow of a topographical 'cleft' separate from the *croft*, but another possibility is that the *croft* was itself notched or damaged, and if so this is an instance of the adjective *sceard* applied to a man-made feature, but there is in any case a secure example of this, in the OE poem *The Ruin*, ll. 3–5: *hrofas sind gehrorene, hreorge*

¹⁸ C. Hall and T. Pearson, 'Investigations into a possible prehistoric earthwork at Oliver's Mount, Scarborough', *Transactions of the Scarborough Archaeological and Historical Society*, 31 (1995), 45–52.

¹⁹ I am grateful to Peter Kitson for encouraging this view.

²⁰ *LangScape: The Language of Landscape: Reading the Anglo-Saxon Countryside*, L1599 <<http://langscape.org.uk>>, accessed 8 December 2009.

²¹ *LangScape*, L623.

torras ... scearde scurbeorge, scorene, gedrorene ‘roofs have fallen in, towers collapsed ... storm-protections [are] notched, cut, perished’.²² Just as the poem views a site usually identified with Roman Bath through Anglo-Saxon eyes, the place-name Scarborough could describe the Roman signal station in disrepair as (*sēo*) *scearde burh* ‘(the) notched fortification’. Such a phrase containing the OE nominative feminine adjective would explain the medial *-e-* in the early forms of Scarborough and its comparanda without recourse to epenthesis as in interpretation (3) above. The fabric may well have been literally dilapidated in the post-Roman period, and the present remains of the signal station are incomplete, perching precariously above a progressively eroding cliff.

The generic element in Scarborough is clearly either OE *burh* or ON *borg*, but more likely the former. As a place-name element OE *burh*, with its ME reflex, refers most often to Roman, Anglian or post-Conquest defended sites (though seemingly not to Viking fortifications) and produces dozens of simplex and compound place-names in *b(o)rough*, *burgh*, *bury* etc. It collocates with a wide variety of specifics, but rarely with ON words or personal names,²³ though two of the possible examples are on the Yorkshire coast: Guisborough (with personal name Gígr) to the north of Scarborough and Flamborough (discussed below) to the south.

ON *borg* ‘fortification’ or ‘(terraced or domed) hill’ is quite common in the major and minor place-names of mainland Scandinavia,²⁴ and to a lesser extent in Iceland. But definite examples are very rare in England, even in areas of strong Scandinavian influence, so that a name such as Scarborough is on the whole much more likely to be an English than a Scandinavian coinage.

To summarise so far: out of the four solutions for the specific of Scarborough none can be rejected, but a good case can be made for the two English solutions involving OE *sceard* ‘cleft’ as noun or adjective, and this is further supported by the second, generic element, which is statisti-

²² *The Old English Elegies*, edited by A. Klinck (Montreal & Kingston, 1992), p. 103; translation mine.

²³ A. H. Smith, *English Place-Name Elements*, 2 vols, EPNS, 25–26 (Cambridge, 1956), s.v. *burh* (hereafter *EPNE*); D. Parsons and T. Styles, *The Vocabulary of English Place-Names (Brace—Cæster)* (Nottingham, 2000), s.v. *burh* (hereafter *VEPN 2*).

²⁴ J. Sandnes and O. Stemshaug, *Norsk Stadnamleksikon*, 3rd edn (Oslo, 1990), s.v. *borg*; Jørgensen, *Stednavne ordbog*, s.v. *borg*.

cally much more likely to be OE *burh* than ON *borg*, and if *burh*, is relatively unlikely to form a hybrid with an ON element. Essentially, therefore, the onomastic evidence does not favour a Nordic or specifically Icelandic explanation for Scarborough.

As for literary evidence, the founding of Scarborough is, as E. V. Gordon showed, narrated in two medieval narratives—a rare luxury—: the early thirteenth-century *Kormáks saga* preserved primarily in the fourteenth-century Möðruvallabók, AM 132 fol., and the ME *Chronicle* or *Story of Inglande* by Robert Mannyng, which is preserved in two late medieval manuscripts, Petyt 511 and Lambeth Palace 131, and located precisely in space (Bourne, Lincolnshire) and time (May 25th, 1338, 4 p.m). E. V. Gordon drew on these sources to argue that Scarborough was named after Þorgils, brother of Kormákr, Skarði being his nickname.²⁵ The saga does not quite state either of these things, and therefore some scrutiny of the detail is in order. Chapter 27 of *Kormáks saga* reads:

En þeir bræðr herjuðu um Írland, Bretland, England, Skotland, ok þóttu inir ágæztu menn. Þeir settu fyrst virki þat, er heitir Skarðaborg. Þeir runnu upp á Skotland ok unnu mǫrg stórvirki ok hófðu mikit lið; í þeim her var engi slíkr sem Kormákr um afl ok áræði.

‘But the brothers [Kormákr and Þorgils] raided in Ireland, Wales, England [and] Scotland, and were considered most outstanding men. They were the first to establish the fortification called *Skarðaborg*. They went ashore in Scotland and performed many great deeds and had a large force; no-one in that army was equal to Kormákr in strength and determination.’²⁶

The saga author does not explicitly state that *Skarðaborg* was named after anyone, but his audience might well have linked it with the Skarði who is addressed in three of the skaldic stanzas embedded in the prose

²⁵ The saga account is also cited without demur in Smith (*PN YNR* 105–6), Ekwall (*DEPN*) and Watts (*CDEPN*), as well as in R. M. Wilson, *The Lost Literature of Medieval England*, 2nd edn (London, 1970), pp. 39–40. Varying degrees of scepticism are expressed by Gelling, *Names of Towns and Cities*, s.n.; D. Parsons, T. Styles and C. Hough, *The Vocabulary of English Place-Names (A–Box)* (Nottingham, 1997), p. 129; and Arnold, ‘Legendary Origins’.

²⁶ Edited by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 298–9; translation mine.

(stanzas 53–55, in chapters 18–19). The name *Skarði* is consistently spelled in the manuscripts, and secured by internal rhyme and alliteration; and the stanzas, along with others in the saga, are evidently older than the saga prose and quite possibly authentic.²⁷ They are spoken by Kormákr, who contrasts his situation—valiantly battling against the cold or against overwhelming numbers in a fight—with the cosy marriage bed of his one-time fiancée Steingerðr. Skarði is clearly a close companion of the speaker, addressed as *sessi* ‘bench-mate’ in stanza 54 and incited with the words *skulum tveir banar þeira* ‘we two shall be their slayers’ in stanza 55.²⁸ Then in the prose following each stanza, Kormákr’s faithful brother Þorgils responds with a comment on Kormákr’s obsession with Steingerðr. It therefore seems that the prose author equated Skarði with Þorgils, though again he does not do so explicitly, and the nickname occurs nowhere else in the saga’s prose or verse.

Kormáks saga has little serious pretension to historicity, despite its broadly historical frameworks of Icelandic genealogy and Norwegian royal history. Its chronology, if taken seriously, would raise problems for the claim about Scarborough, since it allows very little time for the brothers to found and name a place of lasting significance. They are in Bjarmaland (Permian) with King Haraldr gráfeldr (‘Grey-cloak’) in AD 966, and Kormákr dies in 967. Hence they have hardly more than a year to complete a busy schedule of raiding all over the British Isles, found Scarborough, then return to Scotland where Kormákr falls at the hands of a giant. Moreover, if Þorgils founded Scarborough, which by c.1200 was so imposing a feature of the North Sea coast, and which is mentioned in a number of other sagas,²⁹ he gets surprisingly little recognition for it. He is not recorded in *Landnámabók*, though Kormákr and his mother Dalla are, and other brief saga appearances are suspect.³⁰

Robert Mannyng sets the founding of Scarborough in a very different context. A British (*Breto(u)n*) king named Engle comes with his champ-

²⁷ K. E. Gade, ‘The dating and attributions of verses in the skald sagas’, in *Skald-sagas*, edited by R. G. Poole (Berlin, 2001), pp. 50–74 (pp. 73–74).

²⁸ The edited text by Finnur Jónsson (*Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, BI, 78; also *Kormáks saga*, edited by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, p. 269) emphasises the bond with the phrase *holllr hjördrífr* ‘faithful sword-wielder’, but *holllr* is an emendation, and *Möðruvallabók* has ‘allz’.

²⁹ Arnold, ‘Legendary origins’, p. 13, n. 30.

³⁰ Arnold, ‘Legendary origins’, p. 9.

ion Skardying (variants *Scardying*, *Scarthe*), a giant in strength, to challenge the English, who have overrun his ancestral realm. Engle and Scardying terrify their enemies into submission and the land is named *Inglond*. Robert continues, citing a lost tale by Thomas of Kendal, with these lines:

*When Engle had þe lond þorgh,
He gaf Skardying Skarburgh
toward þe north bi þe se side,
a hauen it is, schippes in to ride.
fflayn was his broþer, so sais a tale
þat Thomas mad of Kendale;
Of Scarthe & fflayn Thomas seys,
What þey were how þey dide what weys.³¹*

This too is clearly far from proving the Icelandic hypothesis for Scarborough.³² The action would presumably take place around the fifth century, not in the tenth century, and Scarborough is allegedly named from a defending British hero not an invading Viking one, though the names *Engle* and *Skardying* hardly look Brittonic. But such quibbles are not the point: the whole account appears so garbled that it does not prove anything.

E. V. Gordon ingeniously equated the two pairs of brothers *Scarthe* and *ffleyn* with Þorgils and Kormákr, and proposed Flayn as the eponymous founder of Flamborough, twenty miles south-east of Scarborough.³³ But this seems far-fetched in itself, and as with Scarborough there are more credible explanations to hand. The early spellings for this name are:

Flaneburc -burg 1086
Fleynesburg(h) -ai- -ei- 12th cent.–1251
Fleynburg(h) -ai- -ay- -ei- [1114 x 24] c.1300, 1244–1518
Flaymburgh 1461, *Flamburgh(e)* 1511, 1552

³¹ *Robert Mannyng of Brunne: The Chronicle*, edited by I. Sullens (Binghamton, 1996), p. 441, ll. 14199–204; final couplet Lambeth 131 only.

³² Gordon's case ('Scarborough', pp. 321–2) is also slightly overstated in that it gives the impression that Robert's information on Scarborough came from a 'Mayster Edmond' as well as Thomas of Kendal.

³³ National Grid Reference TA 2270.

The range of interpretative options is similar to that for Scarborough: a mix of personal names and appellatives, Scandinavian and English. All the spellings of the specific except the first are compatible with ON *fleinn*, which could be:

(1) An ON personal name *Fleinn*, quite probably a nickname, rare and of uncertain meaning but possibly ‘hook, barb, arrowhead’ or denoting someone who is grinning, ashamed or sharp-tongued.³⁴ It has been suggested for Flanchford, Surrey (*Fleynesford(e)* 1279),³⁵ and for the Normandy place-names Flainville and Fleinville.³⁶ E. V. Gordon believed that the Flayn brother of Skarthe mentioned by Robert Mannyng was actually Kormákr, for whom no nickname is recorded but whose impetuous personality and skill with words would fit the epithet ‘barb, arrow’, and he proposed a neat and romantic scenario of two Icelandic brothers founding two coastal *borgs* twenty miles apart, and an intriguing situation in which Kormákr’s nickname was remembered in England but not in Iceland. However, one can only agree with the sceptics (and there are more in this case) that it is much more likely that the legendary Fleinn/Flayn was conjured up from the place-names, just like the eponymous Grim of Grimsby in the ME *Havelok the Dane* or Port and his sons, conjured up from Portsmouth in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* annal for 501.

(2) An ON masculine appellative *fleinn*, ‘projecting hook, barb, spike’, or ‘spear, arrow’ in poetry. It can be used topographically in the sense ‘point or tongue of land’, as apparently in the Danish place-name Flenø and perhaps Flensborg,³⁷ and this was the explanation of Flamborough favoured by Lindkvist.³⁸ The word might occur in two English Plainfields, one in Cambridgeshire (*Flaynefelde* 1335) and one in Northumberland (*Fleynefeld* 1272), though the coincidence of com-

³⁴ Lind, *Personbinamn*, s. n.; Fellows-Jensen, *Scandinavian Personal Names*, s.n.

³⁵ J. E. B. Gover, A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Surrey*, EPNS, 11 (Cambridge, 1934), 305; they suggest an explanation for the unexpected incidence of a Scandinavian name in Surrey.

³⁶ A. Mawer, *The Place-Names of Northumberland and Durham* (Cambridge, 1920), s.n. Plainfield.

³⁷ G. Fellows-Jensen, *Scandinavian Settlement Names in Yorkshire* (Copenhagen, 1972), p. 145.

³⁸ H. Lindkvist, *Middle English Place-Names of Scandinavian Origin I* (Upsala, 1912), pp. 44–45.

pounding twice with OE *feld* ‘open country’ is puzzling.³⁹

(3) And once again it is worth considering an OE possibility: *flān* (masculine or feminine) ‘arrow’, cognate with ON *fleinn*, probably in a topographical sense.⁴⁰ The Domesday Book spellings of 1086 might favour that, and the shortened [flam-] in the modern form is if anything more suggestive of origins in *flān* than *fleinn* (though Smith records the pronunciation [flēm-]).⁴¹ An OE *Flān-* could have been Scandinavianised to *Flein-* just as names in OE *stān* ‘stone’ appear as *Stain-*, e.g. Stainburn, North Yorkshire (*Stanburne* [972 x 92] 11th century, *Sta(i)nburne* 1086). Further, an OE specific would sit well with the OE generic *burh* indicated by the spellings and assumed by most scholars. The element *flān* is rare at best,⁴² but there is a possible example in Flanesford, Herefordshire (*Flanesford* 1346), which lies below the arrow-shaped spur of Leys Hill.⁴³ If the specific in Flamborough is topographical *flān* there is an obvious feature for it to refer to: the dramatic chalk arrow-point of Flamborough Head. It is all but cut off by Danes’ Dyke, whose name belies its prehistoric origins, and which is doubtless the *burh* here. Thus assuming an ON personal name *Fleinn* in Flamborough is not obviously the best solution, and certain factors favour topographical, and OE, explanations. Certainly the case of Flamborough does not support the Icelandic hypothesis for Scarborough.

Returning to Scarborough, it remains to review, briefly, the broader contextual factors, and one of these is the wider onomastic picture in the area. Linguistically Scandinavian elements are quite plentiful in the major and minor place-names. Fellows-Jensen’s maps show a few *-by*

³⁹ P. H. Reaney, *The Place-Names of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely*, EPNS, 19 (Cambridge, 1943), p. 272, suggesting a topographical reference; Mawer, *North-umberland and Durham*, s. n. Plainfield. *EPNE*, s. v. *fleinn* favours ‘places where the use of such weapons was practised’.

⁴⁰ There is no record of an OE personal name *Flān* e. g. in Searle, *Onomasticon* or in *PASE*.

⁴¹ A. H. Smith, *The Place-Names of the East Riding of Yorkshire and York*, EPNS, 14 (Cambridge, 1937), p. 105. The possibility of an ON personal name **Flan* in the place-name Flanshaw (*Flanshowe* 1274) is mooted by A. H. Smith in *The Place-Names of the West Riding of Yorkshire*, 8 vols, EPNS, 30–37 (Cambridge, 1961–63), II, 167, though he inclines rather to an Old Irish solution.

⁴² There is no entry in *EPNE*.

⁴³ I am extremely grateful to Dr John Freeman for bringing this to my attention.

names nearby and a few hybrids of Scandinavian specific and OE *tūn* ‘farmstead, village’, though no names in *þorp* and no Scandinavian-style sculpture.⁴⁴ Similarly, the minor names show the currency of ON elements such as *kelda* ‘spring’, *holmr* ‘island of drier ground’ and *gata* ‘street’, though they are greatly outweighed by English ones.⁴⁵ Thus a Scandinavian name for Scarborough is perfectly likely; but so too is an English one, to match nearby Cloughton and Burniston, or the names of other major harbours on the same stretch of coast: Filey, Bridlington, and *Streoneshalh*, if that was the earlier name of Whitby.

Turning to the historical contexts, it will have been noted that the first known spellings for Scarborough are from the twelfth century. There is no documentary record of the place from the Anglian or Viking periods, and it does not appear in Domesday Book. This would be compatible with the view that it was not a major Anglo-Saxon settlement but was a minor fortification erected by Nordic warriors. However, Yorkshire in pre-Conquest times is poorly represented anyway, and Scarborough’s absence from Domesday Book may be due either to the repeated batterings it received in the two decades before 1086,⁴⁶ or to the fact that it belonged to the manor of nearby Falsgrave at the time.⁴⁷ As to the Icelandic hypothesis, however diverse and elusive the contexts which produced Scandinavian toponyms in England,⁴⁸ the giving of a place-name by Icelanders and by casual raiders would be an altogether extraordinary scenario,⁴⁹ and the timing would be unusual at best. The dividing up of lands in Northumbria and Mercia by the great Danish army is placed by the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in the 870s, and the period of Norwegian kingship in York (forty miles west of Scarborough) belongs to the early

⁴⁴ Fellows-Jensen, *Scandinavian Settlement Names in Yorkshire*, pp. 176, 184, 185, 178 and 221.

⁴⁵ J. Binns, ‘Gazetteer of Scarborough’s medieval place- and field-names’, in *Medieval Scarborough*, pp. 109–118.

⁴⁶ J. Binns, *The History of Scarborough from Earliest Times to the Year 2000* (Pickering 2000), p. 12.

⁴⁷ P. Dalton, ‘The foundation and development of Scarborough in the twelfth century’, in *Medieval Scarborough*, pp. 1–6 (p. 1).

⁴⁸ For a useful appraisal, see L. Abrams, and D. N. Parsons, ‘Place-names and the history of Scandinavian settlement in England’, in *Land, Sea and Home*, edited by J. Hines, A. Lane and M. Redknap (Leeds, 2004), pp. 379–431.

⁴⁹ An attempt to envisage one is made in J. Binns, *History of Scarborough*, p. 8.

tenth century, ending with the fall of Eiríkr blóðøx ('Bloodaxe') in or around 954; Yorkshire was an English earldom by the 960s.

It is hard, moreover, to imagine that there was no significant settlement at Scarborough during Anglo-Saxon times. It had one of the two safest anchorages in the long cliff-fringed sweep of coast between the rivers Tees and Humber,⁵⁰ and as already noted the high promontory between the two bays is an outstanding defensive site. The archaeological evidence from the headland for both Anglian and Viking periods is disappointingly scant but finds include an eighth or ninth century jet cross and ninth-century strap end, which could support an early Anglo-Saxon dating for the chapel, even a monastic site as early as the seventh century, a parallel to Whitby and Hartlepool.⁵¹ This introduces the intriguing subsidiary possibility that the word *burh* refers here not solely or even mainly to a defensive site but to a monastic one.⁵²

To conclude, *Kormáks saga* does not explicitly say that Skarðaborg was named from Skarði or that Skarði is Þorgils, the brother of Kormákr, but it is reasonable to think that the author intended these links to be made, and he definitely says that the brothers were the first to build defences at Scarborough—erroneously, and indeed practically all the evidence is against the Icelandic hypothesis. Þorgils was not famous in Iceland outside the saga, and even if the saga author did not invent him, he seemingly put together the Skarði addressed in Kormákr's stanzas with the English place he knew as Skarðaborg and on that basis gave the brothers a quick and productive trip to Yorkshire. Similarly and independently, the tale reported by Robert Mannyng is an etymological fiction extrapolated from the place-names Scarborough and Flamborough. There is clear Scandinavian influence on the medieval spellings of both places and on the pronunciation of Scarborough, and it is still possible that men called *Skarði* and *Fleinn* gave their names to Scarborough and Flamborough. If so, however, they were not the ones presented in medieval

⁵⁰ W. R. Childs, 'Mercantile Scarborough', in *Medieval Scarborough*, pp. 15–31 (p. 15).

⁵¹ T. W. Bell, 'A Roman signal station at Whitby', *Archaeological Journal* 155 (1998), 303–22 (pp. 310–11); T. Pearson, *The Archaeology of Medieval Scarborough: Excavation and Research 1987–2004* (Scarborough, 2005), p. 5.

⁵² See *VEPN* 2, 77–78 and S. Draper, 'The significance of OE *burh* in Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 15 (2008), 240–53 (pp. 242–3) for further possible examples.

saga and romance, and that being so the two place-names should be uncoupled. But in each case there are other solutions for the place-name, including English ones which are attractive not least because known cases of ON *-borg* are extremely rare even in Scandinavianised parts of England, while a combination of OE *burh* and with an OE specific is entirely likely. Flamborough is probably ‘the fortification by the arrow-like headland’, and if the specific is OE *flān* it helps to establish a rare topographical use of this word. There must have been an Anglian settlement of some sort at Scarborough, on the headland, in the harbour area or both, and it may have been named *scearde-burh* ‘the fortification (or conceivably monastic site) by or with the gap’ (if *scearde* is the noun with epenthetic vowel), or *sēo scearde burh* ‘the notched fortification’ (if *scearde* is a weak adjective, perhaps the safer assumption). Since the main candidate for a topographical cleft, the modest valley of Ramsdale/Burtendale, is unconvincing and quite far from the main defensive site, I would suggest that it is the fortification itself that is characterised by a cleft, as the signal station may well have been in post-Roman times. Thus setting aside the colourful but unlikely scenario offered by *Kormáks saga* opens up interesting onomastic and historical possibilities, in which the Viking citadel is seen as far from secure, and Anglian naming, perhaps in contemplation of a Roman ruin, emerges as a strong possibility.⁵³

⁵³ Papers on this subject were presented (as ‘Scarborough Revisited’) to the Annual Conference of the Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland, Falmouth, March 2009, and (as ‘Kormáks saga and the naming of Scarborough—a likely story?’) to the Fourteenth International Saga Conference, Uppsala, August 2009. The present article is a revised version of the latter paper as printed in *Á Austrvega: Saga and East Scandinavia. Preprint papers of The Fourteenth International Saga Conference, Uppsala, Sweden, 9th–15th August, 2009*, edited by A. Ney, H. Williams and F. C. Ljungqvist (Gävle, 2009), pp. 1024–31. I am most grateful to the members of both conferences for their interest and suggestions.