

Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland

Twentieth Annual Study Conference

The twentieth annual study conference organized by the Society for Name Studies in Great Britain and Ireland was held at the University of Kent, Canterbury, from 15 to 18 April 2011. The programme was organized by Dr Paul Cullen. To set us in context with plenty of dark earth, the first speaker was Dr Andrew Richardson (Canterbury Archaeological Trust) on ‘The rise of the kingdom of Kent’.

Dr Oliver Padel (St Neot) began the onomastics with ‘Ecclesiastical and habitative placename elements in three Brittonic regions: a comparison’. In habitative place-names unlike the language at large Brittany differed more from both Cornwall and Wales than they did from each other. Dr Ann Cole (Oxford) asked ‘Between Peutinger and Gough: can place-names fill the gap?’ She found that the compounds *stræt-tūn* and *cumb-tūn* occur enormously oftener within a mile of the main roads shown on the Ordnance Survey map of Roman Britain than might randomly be expected or than a control sample of other **-tun** compounds or putatively relevant simplexes do. Dr George Redmonds (Huddersfield) related ‘Surnames and place-names in the Yorkshire Dales’, correcting reference works on Beecroft and Bycroft among others.

Dr John Baker (Nottingham) presented data on ‘Place-names and Anglo-Saxon assembly sites’, with some picaresque anecdotes of investigation on the ground. Mrs Sheila Young (Aboyne) considered ‘The eternal ascent: an exploratory treatise of mountain route names’, introducing us to the fraternity of “first ascensionists”, and finding Poles and Spaniards keener on indecent names than Scots. Dr Tania Styles spoke on ‘Place-name evidence in the OED’, in whose current state of revision place-names are mentioned in over 500 entries. Persons were not

forgotten, with *Syward Dogheafd* c.1195 antedating by a good four centuries *Doghead* in the original OED.

Saturday afternoon was occupied with a visit to Canterbury Cathedral, especially to an exhibition in the cathedral archives arranged by an old friend of the Society, Dr Mark Bateson. On our return Ms Terhi Nurminen (Newcastle) surveyed ‘Hill-terms in the place-names of the historical counties of Northumberland and Durham’. Dr Simon Draper (Bristol) spoke on ‘Place-names and Anglo-Saxon estates’, focusing on recurrent functional subdivisions of large and/or ‘multiple’ estates, which he saw as emerging in the seventh century. Prof. Thomas Clancy (Glasgow) introduced ‘At St Meddan's convenience: Scottish hagiotoponyms and their challenges’, a three-year project to produce a fully searchable online database. Mr Peter Kitson (Stoke Prior) spoke on ‘The chronology of river-names’, pointing out that though familiarity dulls us to it, Celtic and Germanic are unusual among the branches of Indo-European in having early replaced suffixation by compounding as the normal mode of forming geographical names including river-names. He thought aspects of changes within these two and distributions involving other branches better fitted the long chronology for Indo-European that tends to be favoured by European scholars than the short one fashionable among Americans.

On Sunday after the AGM Prof. Hywel Wyn Owen (Llandegfan) described good current progress ‘Towards a place-name society for Wales’. Mr Graham Collis (Thetford) broached the phenomenon of ‘Little England beyond Calais—the Anglo-Saxons and Angles and Saxons on the Continent’. Dr Sheila Sweetinburgh (Canterbury) told a story of seventeenth-century landowning folk, ‘Place-names and family identity in Anne Clifford's *Great Book of Record*’. Prof. John Insley (Bad Konigshofen) spoke on ‘Englishmen beyond the narrow seas’, presenting traces of English pilgrims to Rome in Continental confraternity books and runic graffiti on Monte Gargano. Dr Shaun Tyas (Donington) spoke on ‘Friar Tuck: the names, the men, the legends’, finding the bandit friar not originally native to the Robin

Hood stories nor his name to the same part of the country. Mr John Freeman (London) expatiated on 'Scandinavian name material in Herefordshire'.

The sun shone on an afternoon excursion to Richborough and Sandwich led by Dr Paul Cullen. The evening session was taken up by project reports. Mr Peter McClure (Cottingham), aided by Simon Draper and Paul Cullen, gave an update on Family Names of the UK. Dr Duncan Probert (KCL) drew a 'Profile of a Doomed Elite: the structure of English landed society in 1066', as magnificently computerized in a database more than 27,000 lines long and more than 100 columns wide. Mr Donall Mac Giolla Easpaig and Miss Mairead Nic Lochlainn (Dublin) reported on the Placenames Database of Ireland, Prof. Carole Hough (Glasgow) on 'Scots words and place-names', and Miss Ellen Bramwell (Glasgow) on 'A comparative study of personal naming' involving Pakistanis in Scotland. Finally Miss Jennifer Scherr (Bristol) was warmly thanked on taking leave of the last commitments of her twenty-three years of secretaryship of the Society and its predecessor the Council for Name Studies. (She thought this surpassed by two years the stint of her predecessor Ian Fraser.)

P. R. K.

Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland

Twenty-first Annual Study Conference

The twenty-first annual study conference organized by the Society for Name Studies in Great Britain and Ireland was held at the Raheen Woods Hotel, Athenry, near Galway, from 30 March to 2 April 2012. The programme was organized by Dr Nollaig Ó Muraíle. We were plunged straight into the deep end of ancient Ireland by Kevin Murray (Cork), who spoke on ‘The intertwining of *Fianaigecht* and *Dinnshenchas*’, expounding three textual versions of standard place-name lore not equally mappable, and how they and popular heroic poetry might illuminate one another.

Conchubhar Ó Crualaoich (Dublin) opened the Saturday with ‘Surnames in the townland names of Sligo’. Duncan Probert (London) then presented ‘Some ambiguities and identifications among Domesday names’. His champion for obscurity was a landholder *Rotlesc*. Simon Taylor (Aberdour) took ‘The road to Meikle Seggie: some place-names to ponder in Kinross-shire, Scotland’. Prosaic sedge in several led on to more lurid possibilities in Moneyready Well and Shoggle-Boggle Well. Mightier waters burst forth to drown lands when Pat McKay (Belfast) returned to his childhood country of ‘Lough Neagh: place-names and mythology’. Isobel Ryan (Little Island, Cork) spoke on the importance of place-names in the autobiography of traditional storyteller Peig Sayers, not only framing relations of people but also expressing her feelings toward them; a workplace she did not like was ‘a placeless house’. Catherine Swift (Limerick) on ‘Surname formation; discussion, debates and DNA’ enlisted the aid of modern science. ‘What are coyly called by the geneticists non-paternity events’ caused more disruption by laughter in the house than to the main investigation.

Being so close to a mediaeval town whose shape is well preserved, it was felt we should make the most of it. The afternoon was spent in a leisurely tour of Athenry whose local leader was Jim McKeon. A pause for instruction at the Heritage Centre was enlivened by the sight of the society's president in royal robes and crown. Papers resumed with one by Keith Briggs (Martlesham) on what he proposed as 'Names of regions with the suffix *-ia* in Anglia'. His argument was that the Old English word *ge* cognate with German *gau* usually seen in a small group of names including *Elge* Ely and *Eosterge* Eastry, together with derivatives like *Eastrgena* 'of the Eastry inhabitants', never existed, but those names were formed with a Latin suffix.¹

Aengus Finnegan (Athlone) explained '*putog* as an element in Irish townland names' as a word for a small boat with Connaught Irish sound-change. There followed progress reports on current projects: by Rhian Parry (Dolgellau) for the Welsh Place-Name Society especially on recording names from abandoned upland farmsteads; Mairead Nic Lochlainn (Dublin) for <www.logainm.ie> supplementing her report at Canterbury last year; Peter McNiven (Meustrie) on Scottish toponymy, mainly of Clackmannanshire; Patrick Hanks as what he called 'a sort of ventriloquist's dummy' for colleagues on Family Names of the UK; and Eamon Lankford on the Cork City and County Place-Names Survey.

Sunday's Annual General Meeting heard that the long-standing secretary's role had been redistributed between not just two committee members but three. David Parsons (Aberystwyth) then asked 'Where

¹ In this chronicler's opinion that is unsound. The spelling *Elge* is attested in the early manuscripts of Bede, in which final *i* and *a* are still distinct from *e*, so *e* as a spelling for the phonetically more distant *a* is impossible; neither do they use *g* for *j*. Moreover the gender inferred for *ge* from inflections agrees with Low German against High German, as it should in a genuine Old English word when such a dialect division occurs on the continental side; nor is motivation apparent for recourse to a foreign morpheme that levels shades of meaning expressed by OE *-ing(as)* and plural *-e*.

are the Irish place-names in Wales?’ which might be expected from archaeological as well as purportedly historical evidence of settlements in the immediate post-Roman period. If there were ever many it seemed that cymricization of Irish cognates had obscured them, but he found a few possible single outliers in Wales of Irish place-name usages, and thought that ecclesiastical contexts would be the best hunting-grounds for any more.

Patrick Hanks (Bristol) and Kay Muhr (Belfast) spoke on ‘Exchanging names: population movements and the forms of family names in Ireland and Britain’, beginning with Robert de Bermingham one of the leaders of the 1170 invasion of Ireland. Guto Rhys (Glasgow) presented ‘Gleanings from Pictland’, with attention to ancient *Lox(-)* and modern Lossie, and splendid photographs justifying from local microclimate the etymology of the river Naver from Indo-European **nebh-* ‘cloud’. Nollaig Ó Muraíle (Galway) spoke on ‘Kings and queens in Irish place-names—presence and absence’. The largest category of absence was where names that seemed to contain *ri* ‘king’ derived from forms of *fraoch* ‘heather’ with initial mutation. Coit Nic Fhionnlaoich (Dublin) rounded off the papers with ‘Place-names of Gola Island, Co. Donegal’. Perhaps symbolic of an isle now largely depopulated was a name meaning ‘Rock of the shout’, originally referring to sea-made noises but reinterpreted as being where careless boaters shipwrecked would cry for rescue.

The afternoon excursion was to the ecclesiastical site at Clonmacnoise and to Clonfert Cathedral, led by Dr Christy Cunniffe. He mentioned the discovery at Clonmacnoise in the 1990s of remains of a wooden bridge across the Shannon tree-ring dated to 806, and detailed at Clonfert the travels of a holy well whose third incarnation is a tree. The day finished formally with a conference dinner, informally with traditional music by four of the participants punctuated by bursts of another kind of music by a fifth.

P. R. K

REVIEWS

Simon Taylor with Gilbert Márkus (2009), *The Place-Names of Fife, Volume Three: St Andrews and the East Neuk* (Shaun Tyas: Donington, 2009). xii + 644pp. £24 hbk. ISBN 978-1900289979

The first-named learned author begins his Preface by putting forward as his model the long-standing English Place-Name Survey county volumes and the more recent Place-Names of Northern Ireland series, to which this reviewer contributed. However the Place-Names of Northern Ireland series, although opening new ground in both local history and language, was always intended for the general interested reader rather than the specialist. Partly because of the longer historical documentation of landholding in Scotland, partly from deliberate intention, the super-size volumes of *The Place-Names of Fife* leave no questions unanswered in their effort to reveal the full historical and linguistic story of each place and its name. This is not to say that the books are for academic truth-seekers only, and the preface is generous in its scope and its acknowledgements to academics, map-makers, place-name-society members, local councils and walkers. Anyone who doubted the cross-curricular breadth of place-name studies would learn better here, and find the experience enjoyable. As the contents of volume 3 can show, place-names have something for everybody.

Volume 3 covers the names of the second part of the central horizontal section of Fife, north of the river Leven but south and east of the river Eden: the East Neuk promontory or headland (not named on the Physical Features map) which extends furthest east at Crail. The thirteen parishes covered in the volume also include 'St Andrews and St Leonards' and are listed on p.16, in the general introduction which describes the layout of the volumes.

The meaning of East Neuk was a surprise, not 'corner' or 'recess' but Older Scots 'projecting point of land'. Language is discussed in the

introduction, and this is a reminder that names in Scots, the most recent language of the three most important in the region, Pictish, Gaelic, Scots, need some explaining too. One enjoyable feature of Scots place-names is their humour: Spratty Hall and Toomtuns ‘empty casks’ for smallholdings in Kilconquhar, Foulhugger or ‘dirty stocking’ in Crail, and the back-story of Nakedfield there, which was Tornaikiterse until 1700, possibly part-translated from a name in Gaelic. Opportunities for linguistic interaction are made clear, for example in the parish of Carnbee, and the settlement-name Lingo within it, also Thirdpart in Kilrenny, which provoked an extraordinary poem in Latin and Scots.

The first section of the book covers ‘Linear Features’, and here the names of some burns and the East Neuk are explained, although the boundary rivers are dealt with in other volumes. The parishes are treated in alphabetical order in Section 2, and following the parish introduction so are the place-names within them. The importance of each place has partly to be deduced from the date and number of references to it, as the admirably economical top-line system of classification (containing abbreviations for parish(es), type, grid-reference, certainty of location, height, and orientation) cannot at the same time grab attention. Similarly, the name-explanation when it comes, although following exactly the layout described in the general introduction, sometimes fails to stand out from its position between the historical references (translated when necessary) and the fuller discussion. However, the intention has never been to provide original-language spellings for modern speakers to copy and use, unlike the Northern Ireland series.

The bibliography of sources for the volume is extensive, and there is a new edition and translation of the ‘St Andrews Foundation Accounts’ in the Appendix. The bibliography even includes the title ditty from Whyte’s *Almanac* for Scotland, 1632: ‘Thou that this Booke dost yearely buy, Thinke on thou nearer art to dy’. Resisting such gloom, let us enjoy some more of the place-names considered, some showing the Gaelic connections with Ireland.

There is the parish name Dunino ‘fort of the assembly place’, translated with what is still the Irish meaning of *aonach*, although a local Scot criticized the *Place-Names of Northern Ireland* series for ignoring the Scottish Gaelic development to ‘height’ in the parallel name Dunineany in Co. Antrim opposite Argyll. The Denett Burn, Kilrenny, likewise has an exact equivalent in Burndennet, Co. Derry, where the Scots element Burn has been prefixed to the stream name explained as *Dionaid* ‘vehement one’. Even in translation, the names show use of words paralleled in Ireland and Man, such as Blind Well, blind meaning ‘unobtrusive, not easily seen’, and the rock seen only at low tide called Blind Capul, the second, metaphorical, element the Gaelic word for a horse.

For those interested in ancient beliefs there are the obsolete Nevethy-Endereth, mixing pre-Christian sacred wood (*nemeton*) and Christian relic-keeper, and the parish name Kilrenny, from a church dedicated to the local St Ethernan (who died in AD 669 ‘among the Picts’), but with complex connections to SS Adrian, Irenaeus, and to Ederne (Eternus) of the Llyn peninsula in north Wales.

There are other intriguing instances involving personal names. The parish name Kilconquhar probably began as the ‘church of St Duncan’ (*Dúnchad*), but *Kilconcar* / *Kilconqwhar* in 1266 provide evidence for Gaelic *Conchobhar*, now anglicized Connor, but in Ireland, as in ‘Kinnocher’ here, sometimes developing a form *Cnochúr*. The discussion of Inch Murdo comments on the general confusion between the names *Muireadhach* and *Murchadh*, but on evidence here (*Inchemurtahach*, 1240) and elsewhere, a third name *Muircheartach*, the only one to contain a dental plosive, should be added to the mix. The name Balmartin ‘Martin’s farm’ is significant for being dateable, to the mid-twelfth century, and a definitely secular owner.

There are a fair number of Bal- names, possibly indicating systematic settlement, but the original Pictish ambience of the area may come through in the number of names beginning Pit- such as Pittowie and Pittenweem (about twenty-eight in the index). As the author asserts, this

element (*pett*) had passed into Scottish Gaelic with the similar meaning ‘land-holding, farm’, and the following elements (as in ‘of the hollow, of the cave’ above) are evidently Gaelic. An archaeological example is the two Pitcorthies ‘farm of the standing stone’, in each of which the standing stone (Gaelic *coirth*) still survives, in the parishes of Carnbee and Kilrenny. A cairn also survives in Carnbee, probably simply ‘cairn of the birch tree’, but this name also has a parallel in Irish legend, in the hill of Slieve Beagh where the three counties of Fermanagh, Tyrone and Monaghan meet. That name is probably also ‘mountain of birch’, but on it is the burial cairn of Bith son of Noah, supposed to have come north to escape the Flood. Since *bith* also means ‘the world’ one could go on speculating! Many thanks to both authors for a most impressive and stimulating book.

KAY MUHR

Bruce Durie (2012), *Welsh Genealogy* (Stroud: The History Press). 284pp. £17.99 (ISBN 9780 0 7527 6599 9).

Bruce Durie’s *Scottish Genealogy* is now in its third edition, so this new Welsh counterpart to help family historians and genealogists trace their origins will be most welcome. Its style is friendly and encouraging, with seventeen chapters on all aspects of Wales, on its history, on Welsh surnames, on local records, census records, local registers, such as parish registers and the records of churches and chapels, on emigrants from Wales to the New World and the British Empire and Patagonia, on heraldry, on old weights and measures, on puzzling words and expressions which one might find in old documents, and a simple Welsh vocabulary to try to help with awkward tasks such as reading inscriptions on Welsh gravestones.

The book is an excellent starting-point for people seeking their family origins, each chapter ending with a short booklist, and very extensive references to recent websites and databases, and all kinds of computer programmes for looking up the frequency or location of surnames or ancestors who might have been clerics or soldiers, for example. There are rather a lot of references to Scotland, for example it is hard to see how some of the words in the glossary, such as ‘dominie’, ‘gaberlunzie’, ‘Senator of the College of Justice’, ‘Writer to the Signet’ and so on, will be of much help to a Welsh genealogist. The chapter on heraldry is clear and well-illustrated, but it would also have been a help to discuss the arms of the many Welsh families claiming descent from the so-called ‘Welsh Patriarchs’ such as the ‘Royal Tribes of Wales’ or, in Glamorgan, the chieftains Iestyn ap Gwrgan and Einion ap Collwyn, and to show that many families with differing surnames could share the same arms. It is true that reference is made here to the remarkable work of Dr Michael Powell Siddons on Welsh heraldry, and of Peter Bartrum on early Welsh genealogies, but the beginner is not likely to find it easy to use them in the early stages of family research.

The readers of *Nomina* are most likely to wish to know what the book has to say about Welsh names and surnames, and I feel that this review must concentrate on this one aspect of the book. The list of the commonest Welsh surnames on pp. 23–24 will strike some readers as rather odd, since it gives many surnames such as Prowse, Coughlin, Phoenix, and many others which were so rare in past centuries, that the researcher would not find it difficult to trace each bearer of such names. But it underlines the fact that there have been immigrant families for many centuries in Wales, and indeed some purely native families took surnames such as Dyer and Baker in medieval boroughs. I find it strange that surnames that are traditional in my home district of Swansea, for example, such as Daniels, Walters, Francis, Nicholas, Charles, George, let alone Leyshon and Lougher, do not appear in the list. Some of the ‘meanings’ of surnames given here are dubious, in my opinion: it is not true to say on page 29 that the surname Blayney is from the town of

Blaenau, for it clearly arises from the geographical term *blaenau* meaning ‘the headwaters of a river’.

The real minefield for researchers, as is well known, is that most of the population of Wales took surnames of a patronymic type, and that from a very small pool of first names. This of course arose from two factors: one was the Welsh legal system, under which much land was held in common by kin-groups, hence the importance of showing descent from forefathers, and hence the high status of names and thence patronymics. The other was that the surnaming system came in at the very period when baptismal names were chosen from a very brief catalogue of famous Biblical or royal names, flavoured only rarely by a few native names such as Griffith or Morgan, hence the legions of Davies and Jones, Richards and Edwards. The chapter gives an excellent case-study of the distribution throughout the world of the surname Griffiths, and a case-study of an actual search for one particular Griffiths family across many areas and about two centuries. Griffith is an important surname in Ireland, and Welsh immigration into Ireland over many centuries should have been mentioned in the chapter on emigration of surnames. It would have been helpful here to refer more precisely to the work of John and Sheila Rowlands on *The Surnames of Wales*, (mentioned in the bibliography), and which plots throughout Wales the distribution of common surnames, and even the less common, and shows that it is possible to pinpoint in a fairly small area the origins of one’s family if one can combine the surnames of two married ancestors. For example, although Roberts is bafflingly omnipresent, if one knew that a Roberts married a Bryan, one could well search in Flintshire, or if the Roberts married a Pughe one might search in Montgomeryshire. More could have been said here about the erratic and confusing varieties of spelling of surnames in Wales, and thus people who were closely akin might adopt different spellings, Howell, Powell, Howells, for example, or Rhydderch, Protheroe or Roderick. Llewelyn might turn into Lewis, Howell into Hugh, and Perkin into Peregrine. The pressure of the patronymic system was so great that many families of Anglo-Norman

settlers preferred to adopt a conventional native patronymic, thus the Boleyns of Breconshire became Williams. My own family in Llangyfelach, Swansea, were intermarried with members of the Awbrey family, but they grew tired of the exotic surname and became Morgan (from one Morgan Awbrey).

Although this work gives the impression that the English type of fixed surname was common in Wales from the sixteenth century onwards, the work of family historians is often stymied because in fact the Welsh commonly used 'unfixed' surnames in many areas until the mid-nineteenth century. The Methodist leader John Elias (died 1841) was the son of an Elias Jones, John Jones 'Myrddin Fardd' (died as recently as 1921) was the son of a John Owen. Even the fixed surnames were also confusing in that brothers might decide to take a fixed surname from either a grandfather or a father: in my own family in the mid-eighteenth century one son of Matthew Morgan ap Matthew gave rise to a Morgan family, another to a Matthews. These are the accidents of the minefield of Welsh family research one has to face, and I think, be warned about.

It was inevitable that I should concentrate on the chapter on surnames in a review for *Nomina*, and it was this which I found the most frustrating in what was otherwise an engaging book, well designed to foster family history research, especially helpful to those from outside Wales, and most encouraging in its many references to research on-line.

PRYS MORGAN

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(b) *Philology*

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III: ONOMASTICS

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