



SOCIETY FOR NAME STUDIES

IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND

CONFERENCE NOTICE

2024 SNSBI autumn conference

York and online
19th October 2024

The 2024 SNSBI autumn conference, on the theme of creativity and innovation in naming, will take place on Saturday October 19 at King's Manor, University of York, from 1030 to 1630, and online from 1100 to 1630.

To book a place at the conference, follow [this link](#), which you will also find on the conference page on the SNSBI website.

The invited speakers are Dr Harry Parkin (University of Chester) and Dr Tania Styles (Oxford English Dictionary), and papers will also be delivered by Alex Harvey, Jeremy Harte, Varshneyee Dutt, and Keith Briggs.

For further details, including titles of papers, see the conference page on the SNSBI website

Newsletter NS. 28 2024

Welcome to the 28th issue of the SNSBI newsletter!

The majority of this issue is made up of a report on the 2024 Spring conference by Abigail Lloyd. It's a wonderfully detailed reflection of the conference, and I thought it was only fair to present Abigail's report in its entirety. I'm very grateful to other members who sent photos of the conference and other scenes of onomastic interest, and I aim to include these in the next issue.

Thank to members who have requested hard copies of the newsletter for their patience. Production has been slowed because I've had to explore new printing options following the closure of our usual printing service.

Please continue to send in anything that you think could be included in the newsletter.

Harry Parkin (editor)

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SNSBI SOCIETY FOR NAME STUDIES IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND

Conference report

SNSBI Spring Conference

10th–13th May 2024

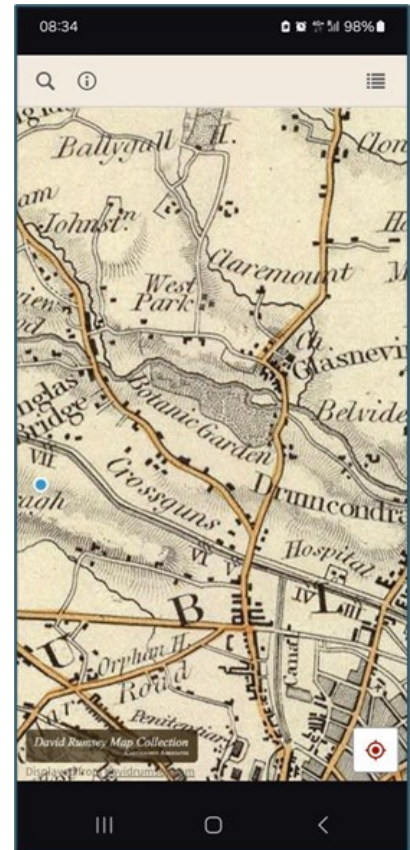
Abstracts can be found on the [2024 SNSBI Spring Conference page](#) of the SNSBI website.

Report by Abigail Lloyd

The SNSBI Spring Conference 2024, held at Dublin City University, started with a pre-conference Placenames Workshop (Ceardlann Logainmneacha) organised by the team behind logainm.ie. We met at the Botanic Gardens in the north of modern Dublin, albeit I had fun navigating by 1830s mapping to get there. At the gardens we spent time looking at native Irish trees and plants, discussing their role in place-naming. The discussion was very interactive with lots of to and fro between Irish place-names and native plant specialists. In 2014, a viking age house was erected in the gardens based on an 11th-century house excavated in the 1980s at Wood Quay, Dublin. The replica sits

surrounded by plants known to have been used by the viking age settlements in Dublin, and was very interesting to see, even if slightly incongruously situated next to 19th-century elaborate glasshouses.

After the gardens, we headed over to the All Hallows campus, Drumcondra (Droim Chonrach) acquired by DCU in 2016. The name refers to the ridge of Conrí, and I can certainly attest to traversing the ridge several times in all my walking. Previously, All Hallows had been a seminary, built in the grounds of the 18th-century Drumcondra House. This was our home for the rest of the time in Dublin, and



Navigating by Old Maps Online <https://www.oldmapsonline.org/> [accessed May 2024]



Viking age house based on excavations at Wood Quay



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architecturally it was a very evocative location. The morning of Ceardlann Logainmneacha was largely conducted in Irish and full immersion in the language was definitely the order of the day! I really appreciated the chance to spend the day listening and learning, chatting with other delegates, getting an insight into the world of Irish language and place-names and the ways in which they are currently being studied. It was particularly interesting to see the latest state of the digital interface for *logainm.ie*, including the possibility of creating distribution maps. The distribution map for the Irish element *muine* ‘thicket’ stood out starkly, showing the element to be one with no attestations in names within the Pale surrounding Dublin.

The SNSBI conference itself commenced in the evening, with plenty of delegates from the day workshop staying on. The opening lecture was given by Conchubhar Ó Cruaíoch from the Placenames Branch (An Brainse Logainmneacha) on ‘Placenames of Ireland: an inverted historical periscope through which we can peer into ancient time’. It included a really helpful history of Irish as the vernacular language and its loss in the 18th and



Drumcondra House on the All Hallows Campus, DCU

19th centuries, plus a description of the statutory and legal underpinning of Irish place-names study today, as well as the work of the Placenames Branch. After this important overview, the lecture looked at a few specific examples of themes emerging from place-names research, including the following highlights: Gaelicisation of Anglo-Norman names suggests that complete phonetic gaelicisation was prevalent in north-east Leinster, possibly because of greater bilingual interaction in the Pale; the paucity of Old Norse names in Irish place-names was noted as surprising given how many (estimated to be several hundred) loan words are evidenced travelling from the Norse lexicon into Irish Gaelic; and the many Irish

terms for wetlands are being examined to try better to understand their nuances in order to guide the current restoration and re-wetting of boglands. We also learnt about a very useful feature of the *logainm.ie* website – the ‘featured theme’ which highlights, via regular, short blog posts, a particular theme relating to Irish place-names. This easy-to-digest synthesis will be of interest to all place-name researchers in other countries also.

Saturday started with an early morning scurry (on my part) into central Dublin to have a closer look at the site of the Wood Quay viking age houses, plus another site lying adjacent on the northern bank of the River Liffey (to the south of St Michan’s Church, founded in the 11th century). Here,



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similar Hiberno-Norse houses were found during excavation.



Wood Quay on the south of the River Liffey

Hastily heading back to All Hallows, the second day of the conference started with a session on Irish surnames delivered by Liam Ó hAisibéil. The talk highlighted how Irish-language scribes were involved in adapting and translating Irish surnames for use in English from the 16th century onwards, and particularly in the 18th century. Liam shared with us various manuscripts at which he had recently been looking. The facsimile images were fascinating to look at. The next session focused on Ulster place-names. Justin Ó Gliasáin spoke about 'Researching the placenames of Inishowen'. The prominent role of oral evidence in exploring and investigating Irish place-names came out through this talk, as well as in many of

the other talks from the previous day. A closer look at the administrative divisions in this area and throughout Ireland was very helpful. The presence of various collocations occurring in the names of land divisions, such as 'corn' quarterlands (*ceathrú bhleathach*) was intriguing. Paul Tempan spoke next about 'The place-names on Robert Lythe's map of Carrickfergus Bay'. This map dating to 1567 depicts Belfast Lough at a time when Belfast was not much more than a muddy fording point. Unlike John Speed's map, *The province Ulster described* dating to 1610, this is a map that is pre-Plantation. It records more Irish place-names than other maps of a similar era. It also includes helpful notes such as the sentence informing the reader that quantities of oaks could be transported from a certain spot by boat or by dragging. Finally, Paul alerted us to a new website <https://www.belfaststreetnames.com/>

Coffee breaks took place in the refreshingly cool cloister. Dublin in early May was proving to be surprisingly hot and sunny. After the first of our refreshment breaks on Saturday morning, the next session commenced with

Liam Mac Mathúna speaking on 'A corpus of Irish-language place-names from the Dublin area (c.1728)'. This focused on a manuscript written by a bilingual Dublin scribe Tadhg Ó Neachtain and his son Peadar. The source preserved the geographical location of many of the names it listed. Liam was able to analyse ratios of Irish names to potentially English-influenced names recorded in this source, separating them out into different regions. In terms of overall numbers, the former were double the latter. One theme that emerged strikingly was the place of dialectal variance in Irish. Liam also stressed the functional role that place-names perform, that is to communicate with others. Insistence on particular spellings would not take priority over being able to understand others and make oneself understood. Liam was followed by Aindí Mac Giolla Chomhghaill speaking on 'Irish alongside English in the placenames of the Dublin Glens'. Aindí's talk was accompanied by an impressively comprehensive and voluminous handout. Aindí looked at the Dublin 'mountains' (!) – in reality the foothills of the Wicklow Mountains to the south of Dublin. These hills are visible from most spots in Dublin, even in its modern extent,



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and so also visible from where the conference was taking place. The talk looked specifically at two glens, Glenasmole and Glencullen. This region has an unusually high proportion of Irish field names surviving (49.59% as a ratio compared with surviving English names). In two comparator areas in Wicklow and in Laois, the same ratio was strikingly lower at 7.89% and 6.9% respectively. The Irish corpus for the Dublin glens was compared with the English. A distinct cluster of *tromán* 'stream' names were seen located on one of the ridges. The close clustering needs further examination to look at the specific kind of stream involved and the geology through which it passes. The final session before lunch was delivered by Pádraig Ó Cearbhaill in a talk entitled 'Sliabh na mBan ('the mountain of the women')'. Discussion touched on the element *sliabh* 'mountain' in Scottish Gaelic as well as Irish. There was much discussion in the questions afterwards about the associations of men and women with landscape features.

After lunch, eaten sitting out in a very tranquil garden in the sun, the afternoon session looked at Placenames and Data.

Peder Gammeltoft started by considering 'Quantitative extra-linguistic methods in place-name research – worth the bother?'. Peder set out the challenge that the use of extra-linguistic evidence is perhaps more common in a Scandinavian approach to investigating names than it is in a British or Irish one, and that includes the computational and quantitative analysis of the same. For the Irish case study for his talk, Peder described how he had used soils data and mapping, clipping them to townlands throughout Ireland, to try to discern patterns in soil mapping and the names used for townlands. He was engagingly frank about the computing challenges and time taken to process so much data, as well as in ensuring it was clean enough to use, eliminating large amounts of duplication and errors caused by failures in the townland polygons. One side benefit was, apparently, a very warm office, thanks to the heat emanating out of the computer – useful over the Winter! Baile na Móna 'village, farmstead or townland of the bogland' was selected as a case study, and the results suggested that only ten percent of townlands bearing this name consisted mainly of peats, bogs and peaty topsoils. In

the discussion afterwards, various points were covered, including the differences between historical names and modern geographic classification maps and the fact that the Irish townland boundaries had historically been arbitrarily redrawn, cutting across peatlands which would previously have been shared in common between townlands. Digital methodologies have vast potential but there are inevitably various pitfalls of which to be aware. It was excellent to have so many in the room who are grappling with these issues in different countries and to be able to exchange thoughts. Having spent time looking at similar platforms, possibilities and analysis for the English Place-Name Society, I definitely valued these sorts of discussions.

Michal Boleslav Měchura, the IT specialist working on *logainm.ie*, followed Peder, speaking on 'A critical look at the data structure being Logainm.ie'. It was wonderful to hear someone coming from an IT background speaking with such acquired experience of place-name data structure, including some of the challenges of rendering it accurately in a (sometimes rigid or binary) database that will then be used for a public-facing web resource. Once again, the challenges seen in Ireland



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are very similar to those seen in England, and in Denmark for that matter. Questions of how to label a name with a language when that name might reflect multiple kinds of influence from various languages at various points in its history were canvassed. Carole Hough reminded us that we might even struggle to label what a language is, when it is constantly evolving and moving from one defined language (Old English for example) to another (Middle English for example). The precise 'location' of place-names (important if trying to locate names on a mapped interface) was discussed, as well as the precise relationship between historical name attestations and the different kinds of hierarchical or non-hierarchical settlement or administrative units a name might be associated with at various points in its history. After afternoon tea, back out in the cool cloister, the final afternoon session looked at the role of the Ordnance Survey in both Ireland and Scotland. Thomas Clancy started the session examining 'The Ordnance Survey and Scottish Gaelic in the nineteenth century'. Thomas offered a really important correction to the commonly received perception that the Ordnance

Survey was largely full of non-Gaelic specialists who mangled Gaelic names as a result of a lack of skill, understanding or worse. He noticed how the Scottish survey was occurring at a later point in time to the Irish survey, at a point which coincided with the high point of Scottish Gaelic literacy. The Ordnance Survey forms were, in some cases, standardised and grammatically correct as a result of the influence of highly literate Gaelic speakers working with and for the Survey. Ironically, this might have led to the masking of more local dialectal forms of Gaelic, a theme that had already been alluded to in the Irish context earlier in the conference. Zenobie Garrett from the OS 200 project followed, speaking to the title 'OS 200: Digitally Re-Mapping Ireland's Ordnance Survey Heritage'. It was exciting to see how rich and varied a corpus of materials has been digitised as part of this project marking 200 years since the Ordnance Survey of Ireland. The archive includes maps, memoirs and letters, alongside selected name books. Zenobie demonstrated to us how the web interface will look when launched in June 2024, as well as some of the kinds of analysis that will be possible

using names of places and people in this large corpus. Prior to finishing for the day, Ellie Rye and Diana Whaley gave us a really exciting glimpse of the new webpages and resources which have been developed for the SNSBI website. The Name Stories section is an excellent way of highlighting particular themes and names, and Diana is definitely on the lookout for contributors. The web resources will be launched officially later on in the year. Aengus Ó Fionnagáin gave a brief roundup of Friday's workshop for those at the SNSBI conference who had not been present on Friday. Dinner in the evening was at the Cat and Cage, one of the old postal stops on the main road from the north into Dublin, and site of the start of the 1798 uprising. Admittedly, such heritage is not immediately recognisable in what has become one of the favourite DCU evening venues, but the food, drink and all-round hospitality were great.

On Sunday morning, I curtailed any early morning scurrying since I was speaking first on the final day of the conference on 'Learning from Celtic predecessors or creation from scratch: What then is a dūn?'. It was excellent to be able to discuss during the



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session, and, indeed, throughout the day afterwards, the use of Irish *dún*, Scottish *dùn*, Welsh and Cornish *din/dyn* in place-names in those regions, as compared to the use of Old English *dūn*. One of the key values of SNSBI conferences is to be able to establish contact and share information, sparking further thoughts and ideas. Ellie Rye spoke next on 'Old English and Old Scandinavian in contact; dialect-contact and place-names'. She encouraged us not to think simplistically in terms of language contact models alone when looking at Old English and Old Scandinavian influence on historic name forms. Instead, she illustrated how scholarship looking at contact between dialects could be of assistance in thinking about names, demonstrating the point with specific examples drawn from place-name analysis. The session concluded with Keith Briggs speaking about the 'Suffolk place-name project'. A particular highlight was discussion of the use of records written in Hebrew, with Middle English names transliterated into Hebrew script. Keith pointed out how neglected these archives have been, existing in cities such as Norwich, York and Oxford, and covering many

transactions relating to land, including plenty of English place-names. The four imminent Suffolk volumes represent an enormous amount of work over many years, and we all really look forward to seeing them published.

After the final cloister coffee break of the conference, the last session started with Carole Hough speaking on 'The Old English contribution to Scottish toponymy'. The talk focused on two case studies: First, Rutherford, Roxburghshire and Rutherglen, Lanarkshire, for which Carole set out the case for the first element being Old English *hryþer* 'cattle', combined, in the case of the second name, not with a Gaelic element but with Scots borrowing of Gaelic *gleann*, in the form of the element *glen* 'valley'. Second, with reference to the location of the conference, Dublin, Carole looked at names with the Scots element *linn* 'waterfall' or 'pool'. She suggested that it was borrowed from Gaelic *linne* 'waterfall' or 'pool' without influence from Old English. The discussion afterwards involved diverse views on the extent of Brittonic influence in the southern Scottish borders spreading into Northumberland, as well as the problems of

disentangling Brittonic names from later Gaelicisation. The final talk by Chris Lewis looked at 'Helensburgh house-names of the later Victorian period'. The corpus of 600 names, dating predominantly to the second half of the 19th century, revealed much about the social history of the professional and business classes from Glasgow who were building and naming houses for themselves in Helensburgh. The industrial and wide-ranging travel connections displayed in the names were clear to see. A particular favourite of mine was Saryune, the home of tea merchants who appear to have prospered by adding in poorer quality tea (the eponymous saryune) to bulk out higher quality supplies!

After lunch, we drove through dramatic thunderstorms, past the Hill of Tara and Kells (Ceanannas), to Fore (Baile Fhobhair 'townland of the spring'), the site of Saint Feichín's 7th-century monastic foundation. The landscape setting of the valley (*srath*) is striking with marsh and eponymous springs flanked by the Rock of Fore to the south and the Ben of Fore to the north. There, we explored the 10th-century stone church, which replaced the wooden original foundation, complete with



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monumental lintel over the west door, font and unusually shy Sheela na gig. Immediately, to the east lies one of possibly as many as eighteen high crosses which were in the Fore area.



possible Sheela na gig at the 10th-century stone church in Fore



c. 1930s Fore sign

to make it possible. In particular, thanks to Aengus Ó Fionnagáin and Úna Bhreathnach for all their work hosting us in Dublin so well.

Our guide, Rory Masterson, had the keys to let us into the later medieval anchorite cell, before looking at the Benedictine monastery on the other side of the valley, passing one of the wells in the landscape and plenty of earthworks. It was easy to see why Fore has featured so highly in medieval annals and in later folklore.

Suffice to say, I thoroughly enjoyed every aspect of the SNSBI 2024 Spring conference. Thanks must go to everyone who did so much

Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland Essay Prize

1. A prize of £100 will be awarded annually for the best essay on any topic relating to the place-names and/or personal names of England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Man or the Channel Islands.

2. Submissions are invited from students and other researchers. The prize will normally be awarded to those who have not hitherto had work in onomastics published.

3. Essays should be about 5,000 words in length.

4. Essays should in some way make an original contribution to the subject.

5. Essays should be double-spaced, with pages numbered in a single sequence of arabic numerals, and should include a bibliography of source-material used and of books and authors cited.

6. Submissions should include an abstract of up to 250 words.

7. An anonymised electronic text of the essay and abstract should be submitted by October 31 each year to secretary@snsbi.org.uk.

8. Entries will be blind-refereed and the final decision made by a panel normally consisting of the President, the two Vice-Presidents and the Editor(s) of *Nomina*, who may consider it for publication.

9. Provided an essay of sufficient merit is forthcoming, the winner will be announced at the next AGM, held in the spring of the following year.

Forthcoming SNSBI events

SNSBI Autumn Day Conference, York and Online, 19th Oct 2024. See page 1 of this newsletter for details

The 2025 SNSBI Spring conference will be at the University of Stirling from 11th–14th April 2025. Keep an eye on the website for more details.

8 [NOTE: In the conference report, etymological and distributional information on *Drumcondra*, *muine*, *Kells*, and *Fore* is taken from logainm.ie]