

The Uses of Place-names and Scottish History – Pointers and Pitfalls

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The usefulness of place-name studies as a tool for the historian came comparatively late in the modern historiography of Scotland. It is true that George Chalmers (1742–1825), John Pinkerton (1758–1826) and William Forbes Skene (1809–92) all appreciated the relevance of philology in establishing a reliable chronology and ethnic analysis of the earliest period of the Scottish past which could realistically be called historical, that is to say the fourth to the seventh century AD. But in their time philological studies of the relevant vernacular languages had scarcely reached their infancy, while it was practically impossible to make any serious use of place-name material before there had been any systematic collection and publication of the earliest forms in which the names of places had been recorded. We can see the beginning of a new era when Cosmo Innes (1798–1874), an exceptionally able record scholar, oversaw the publication of volume I and volume II, parts I and II, of the *Origines Parochiales Scotiae* (1851–55). This mixture of topography and history (with a little archaeology thrown in) was far too ambitiously conceived ever to have been finished. Of the twelve medieval dioceses which the work was planned to cover, only Argyll, Caithness, The Isles, Ross and the greater part of Glasgow had been completed when the undertaking came to a halt. For our purposes the most interesting feature of *OPS* is that all the known forms of the names of parishes are set out in chronological order in the heading for each article, while in the text every reference to a locality or property within the parish is given in its original spelling, with dates where known. This was an immense advance on anything that had gone before, and all subsequent place-name scholars have had reason to regret that Innes and his much underrated assistant John Brichan were not able to deal with the huge residual area of Scotland covered by the dioceses of Orkney, Moray, Aberdeen, Brechin,

Dunkeld, Dunblane, Galloway and, above all, St Andrews. Moreover, informative though it was, *OPS* was not a work of toponymic science. From the 1850s until the period between the two world wars most Scottish historians paid little or no attention to place-names as an aid to historical understanding. Curiously enough, the outstanding exception was an amateur in both fields of study, Sir Herbert Maxwell of Monreith, Baronet, who was certainly aware that the place-names of Galloway and the south-west could throw light at least on the early period of Scottish history. In the mean time experts in the field of Norse language studies – mainly Scandinavians themselves, although including several scholars from the Northern Isles and elsewhere in Scotland – had pioneered the difficult historical problems raised by the Viking conquests and settlements of the islands off Scotland's north and west coasts and of sizeable areas of the mainland. The sagas had been largely (and perhaps somewhat over-enthusiastically) published in the nineteenth century. They told a story which seemed increasingly at variance with the results of place-name studies and with what could be learned from the steady advance in archaeological investigation. It is probably no exaggeration to say that this Scandinavian contribution to Scottish historiography decisively established the necessity of place-name study for all historians working in the period before about 1500.

Here, within the scope of a brief chapter, I can do no more than indicate some of the ways in which place-names can act as pointers towards building up a convincing background for important political and ethnic developments and can also confront us with pitfalls which may all too easily obstruct a true reading of the evidence.

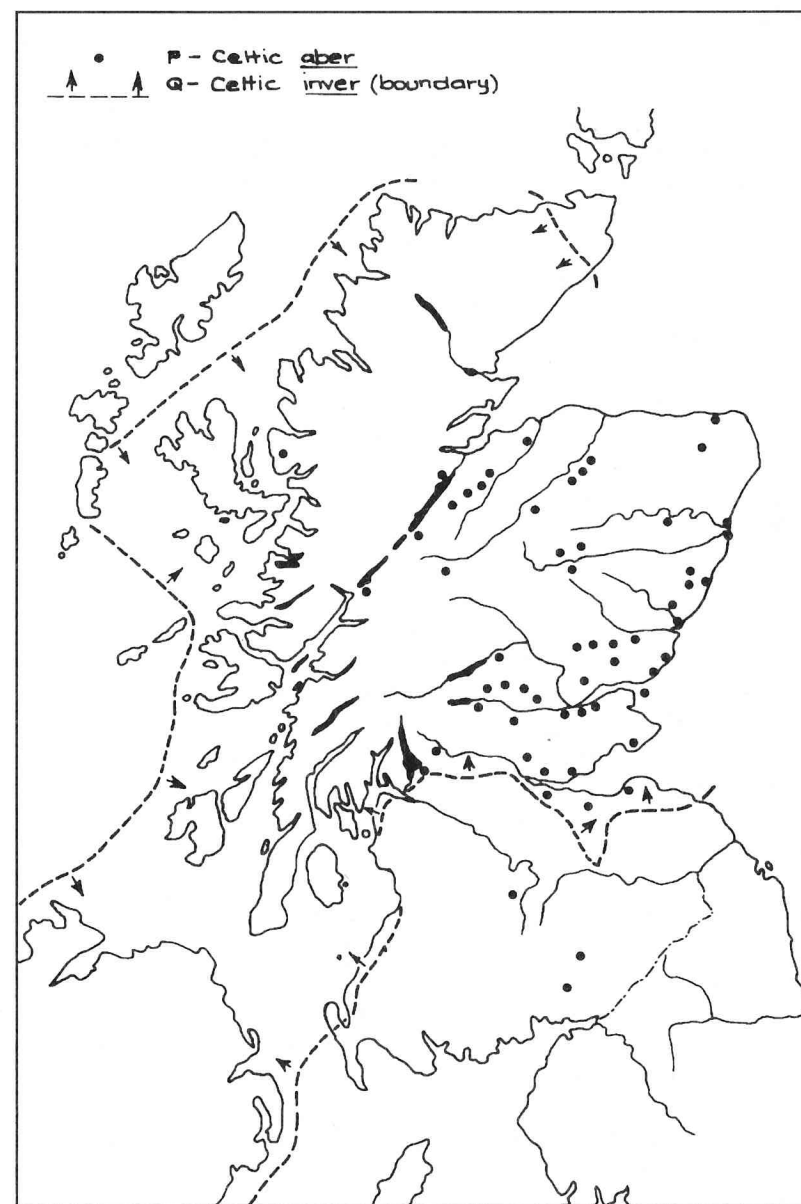
Historians still argue vigorously as to whether the Pictish period came to an abrupt and dramatic end in the ninth century or simply faded away gradually, giving place to a Scoto-Pictish amalgam (with, increasingly, a strong input from Scandinavia, especially in the far north and west). In this context the place-name element most often used to demonstrate continuity has been the diagnostically 'Pictish' term *pett* (normally reflected as *Pit-* in modern names). Kenneth Jackson's famous distribution map of *pett*-names, first published in 1955 and many times reprinted, has been for all students of the period the definitive map of the 'Pictish area' of north Britain (Jackson 1955, 147). Jackson also compiled and published in 1955 another map of certain P-Celtic place-name elements other than *Pit-* (e.g. *carden*, *lanerc*, *pert*, *pevr*, *aber*), but unfortunately his map confined these elements to the country north of the Antonine Wall, suggesting to the unwary reader that these elements, like *Pit-*, were specifically Pictish (*ibid.*, 150).

While we may accept that *pett* was an essentially Pictish term which was

not easy for the Scots to replace when they stepped into Pictish shoes, *c.* 850, we have also to grapple with the fact that the word stuck successfully throughout eastern Scotland, although the term *baile*, perhaps the closest Scottish equivalent, was clearly able to establish itself in exactly the same region, perhaps during the second half of the period *c.* 850 to *c.* 1150. Jackson wrote of 'the intimate and growing contact between the Picts and the Gaelic Scots from the fifth to the ninth century, and of the gradual Gaelic infiltration of Pictland... in which colonisation, intermarriage (with the resulting exchange of names), and conversion to Christianity can be shown to have played a considerable part' (*ibid.*, 151). He was surely right to posit a gradual take-over of Pictland by the Scots. Only gradualness and co-existence could account for the fact that the commonest words in northern Scotland for a large, prominent or conspicuous hill are *beinn* (ben) and *càrn* (cairn), not, as in Ireland, *sliabh*. Equally, only a gradual take-over could have allowed the survival of a substantial number of P-Celtic terms which Pictland shared with the 'larger Cumbria' (Strathclyde and Cumbria as far south as Stainmore WML and YON) and parts of Lothian. Of the five listed by Jackson, we can hardly overlook *aber*, 'burn- or river-mouth', since it forms such a basic element in defining an overall pattern of settlement.

Figure 2.1 presents it in relationship to its Q-Celtic equivalent *inbhear* (inver, inner). Jackson's map failed to show Aberlady and (lost) Aberlessic ELO, Abercarf, now Wiston in upper Clydesdale, Abermelc, now Castlemilk in Annandale (NT265054), and Aberlosk, Eskdalemuir DMF (NT263037). Even so, the comparative absence of both *aber* and *inbhear* from south-western Scotland is remarkable and calls for an explanation – as, of course, does the apparently total absence of *aber* between Dumfriesshire and North Wales!

Figure 2.2 presents an element which almost by definition is likely to be P-Celtic, *neued* (Gaulish *nemeton*) 'sacred grove, sanctuary', even though the Q-Celtic cognate (Gaelic *neimhidh*) must lie behind some of our modern reflexes (e.g. Nevie, Nevay). In Scotland at least, *neued* seems never to have been applied *de novo* to a Christian site, although a majority of the known occurrences refer to places where some sort of Christian dedication or facility for Christian worship was provided at an early date. This fact, indeed, may explain why the names have survived. And whether the Christianising agent was Q-Celtic, as must surely have been the case benorth the Mounth, or P-Celtic, as is likely to have been true at many sites between the Mounth and Solway, the survival of *neued* names strongly confirms the theme of continuity. If I am correct in believing that Newtyle (*Neutil*) and (lost) Newtibble (*Neutobir*) embody the *neued* element, then we have a



2.1: Distribution of *aber*- and *inver*- place-names
(Map: J. Renny)

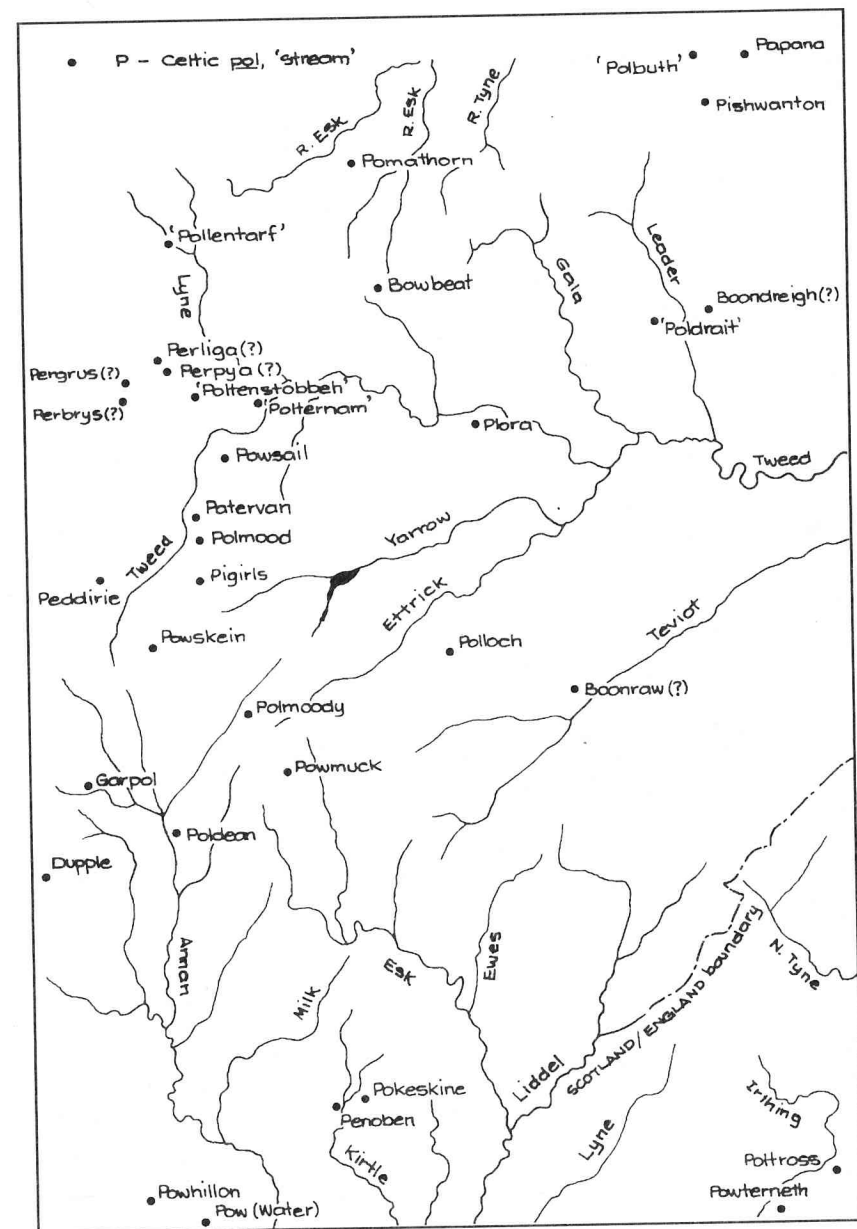


2.2: Distribution of *nemeton*-place-names, with other localities associated with pagan worship
 (Map: J. Renny)

fascinating cluster of names in and under the Sidlaw Hills on the Perthshire–Angus border – Nevay, Newtibber and Newtyle – which suggest that pre-Ninianic, pre-Columban paganism, evidently related to the paganism of Gaul, survived stubbornly enough to have left at least toponymic traces long after Q-Celtic speech had supplanted P-Celtic in this corner of the country.

An element to which only the great Swedish place-name scholar Eilert Ekwall seems to have done justice (although Sir Herbert Maxwell recognised its meaning and importance) is shown in Figures 2.3 and 2.4. This is the P-Celtic word *pol*, which must be distinguished, at any rate as a place-name element, from Q-Celtic *poll* and Old English *pōl*, both of which have the roughly similar meaning of 'pool', 'hole', 'cavity', etc. Maxwell (from his deep knowledge of Galloway and Nithsdale) and Ekwall, who kept an eye open for Scottish examples and parallels, knew that *pol* must have been a British word meaning 'stream', 'flowing water'. It has, remarkably, survived in modern Scots, in the form 'pow' (not to be confused with the word for '[top of the] head', cf. 'poll'), and now tends to have the sense of 'sluggish stream', often referring to a burn which moves slowly through peaty ground or tidal salt-marshes. Ekwall dealt with most of the extant examples in Westmorland, Cumberland and Northumberland. Figure 2.3 shows the general distribution, illustrating a northern British 'province' for this word which corresponds approximately with the *aber* 'province' of Figure 2.2 and the *minit*, *munet*, etc. 'province' of Figure 2.7. The survival of *pol* well to the north of the Tay, indeed probably as far north as the Moray Firth, reinforces the argument for continuity of settlement and habitation through the period when Q-Celtic speech succeeded P-Celtic. In south-west Scotland, between the Clyde and the Ayrshire coast and especially in upper Nithsdale, the term *pol* for a burn (by no means confined to sluggish watercourses) occurs so frequently that we are forced to conclude that in this region it was the standard word for a small or medium-sized stream, so well established that it survived the appearance of Old English, Gaelic and Older Scots (represented by square on Fig. 2.3).

It is probably unnecessary to labour the argument for continuity when the evidence is so compelling. But the widespread practice of transhumance throughout northern Britain (as, of course, in Wales) is illustrated in Scotland by comparatively abundant place-name evidence which places beyond any doubt the gradual adoption by successive layers of settlers of relevant place-nomenclature. This process has left in southern and eastern Scotland a remarkably solid P-Celtic base, upon which equivalent terms in the languages of later arrivals were planted whenever and wherever this seemed necessary. Figures 2.5–2.7 show some of the elements composing this base.



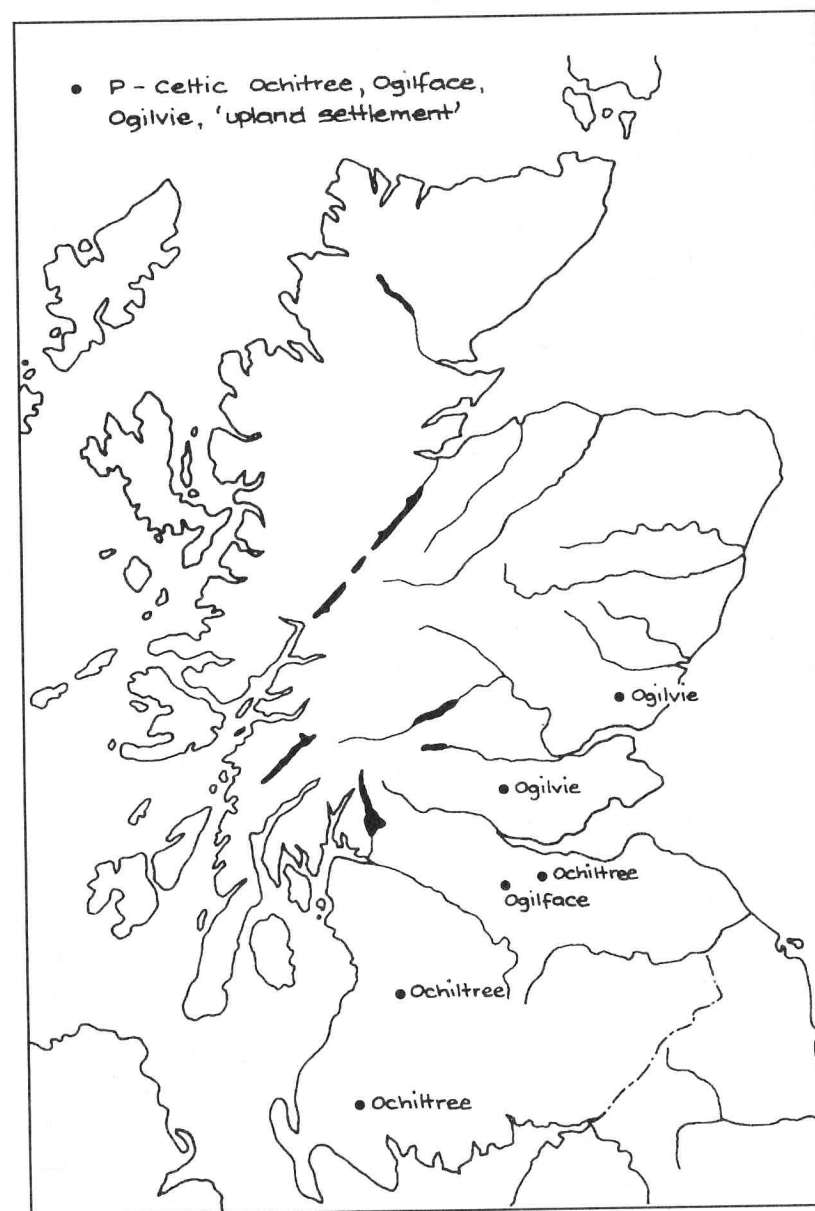
2.4: Central Scottish Borders, showing *pol*- place-names
(Map: J. Renny)

In Figure 2.5 we see the distribution of the only three Scottish survivals of what is familiar in Wales as *ucheldref*, literally 'high settlement', roughly equivalent to the even commoner *hafod* or *hafoty*, 'summer dwelling'. In Scotland the name has come through to modern times as Ochiltree, a name which does not seem to be known north of Forth. We do, however, have Ogilface (*uchel faes*, 'high field') in West Lothian and north of Forth two Ogilvies (*uchelfa*, 'high plain'), one in Blackford parish PER, the other in Glamis parish ANG. In these names the first part corresponds to the Welsh *uchel*, 'high', and there seems little doubt that they are northern equivalents of Ochiltree, albeit with the habitative element replaced by terms of physical geography. Figure 2.6 shows the distribution of the Scottish reflexes of Welsh *pebyll*, 'tent', 'temporary shelter', hence 'shieling'. Unlike Ochiltree *pebyll* or its Pictish equivalent is found north of Forth and Tay; indeed, borrowed into Gaelic it turns up as far north as Abriachan west of Loch Ness (Achpopuli).

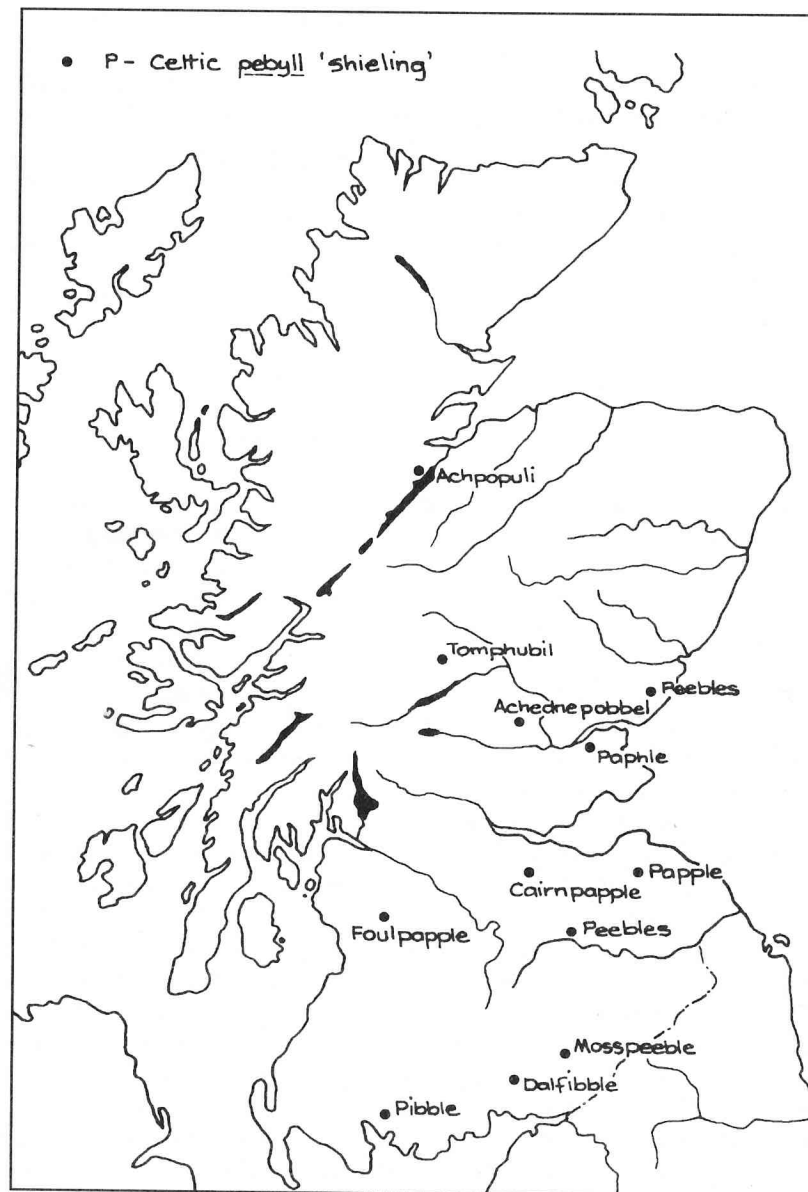
The most important of these P-Celtic elements involving the practice of transhumance, the distribution of which demonstrates conclusively that Picts shared with Cumbrians and *Votadini* the custom of exploiting upland grazing in summer, and that incoming Scots took over this custom with the geographical context absorbed rather than replaced, is the term, variously spelled in early sources, which is represented by Welsh *mynydd* (*minit*, *munet*, *moneth*, etc., derived from a supposed British **monijo*).

In Wales *mynydd* is used in two distinct but related senses. It either denotes (1) a prominent hill or extensive area of hill ground, a range of hills – examples are Mynydd Mawr (Mynyddfawr) in Caernarvonshire, at SH540547; Y Mynydd Du ('the black mountain') in Dyfed; and Mynydd Du ('Black Mountains') in Powys; or it indicates (2) a stretch of rough pasture, summer grazing which might be on a hill but might simply consist of moorland, not necessarily on an elevated site. Among the extremely numerous instances (especially in southern Wales) we may note Mynydd Llangorse (SO157261), attached to Llangorse, Mynydd Llangatwg (SO180140), attached to Llangattock, Mynydd Castlebythe (SN028297), attached to Castlebythe, and Ysgubor Mountain (SM966304), attached to Skyber Farm. Localities sited on the edge of such areas of rough grazing might be called Penmynydd (Penfynydd), of which I have collected some ten examples drawn from almost all parts of Wales. These were located simply by scanning the 1 inch and 1:50,000 O.S. maps, and no doubt more examples would come to light in a systematic search.

Precisely the same duality is found in Scotland (Fig. 2.7). Here the equivalent of *mynydd* (*minit*, *munet*, *moneth*, etc.) is used for big hills and



2.5: Distribution of Ochiltree, Ogilface and Ogilvie
(Map: J. Renny)

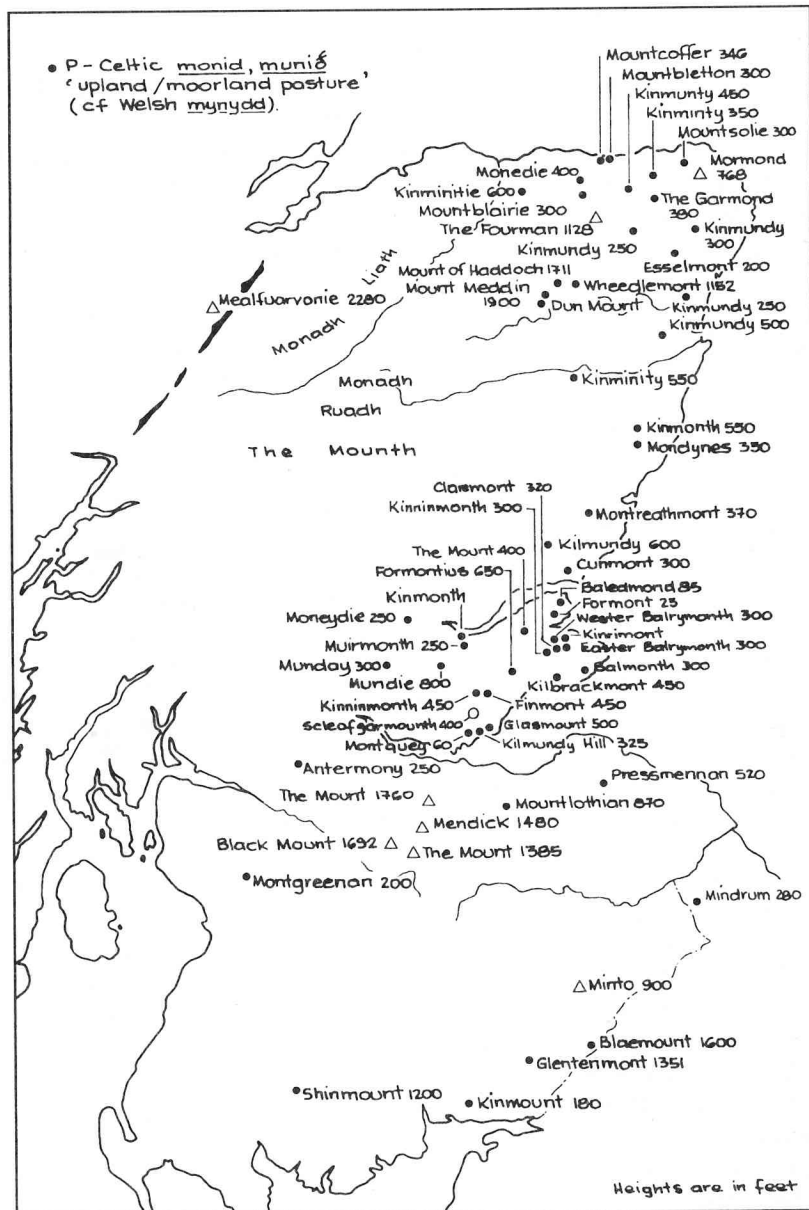
2.6: Distribution of *pebyll*-place-names

(Map: J. Renny)

mountain ranges, as Monadh Liath ('grey hill range'), Monadh Ruadh ('red hill range') and most famously the Mounth itself, the big lump of mountainous territory which stretches from west to east across the middle of Scotland, from Fort William to Stonehaven. The biggish hill known as Monadh Mòr (NN938942) might be seen as a Scottish counterpart of the Snowdonian Mynyddfawr already noted. But the term also (and much more commonly, as in Wales) enters into the formation of names for stretches of rough grazing, as in Mindrum (north Northumberland), Mountlothian (Midlothian), Mendick Hill (Peeblesshire), all south of Forth, and (lost) 'Scleofgarmonth' (Fife, near Loch Gelly, Auchterderran),¹ The Mount (also Fife), Mundie (Perthshire) and north of Tay very numerous examples. Just as in Wales we find Penmynydd (Penfynydd) names situated at the edge of rough grazing so in Scotland we find (with first element 'gaelicised') Kinmount (Dumfriesshire), Kinmonth (Perthshire) and further north a host of names with such forms as Kinmundy, Kilmundie, Kinminity, etc. etc.

Place-nomenclature shows us the linguistic and to some extent the geographical context of transhumance, with continuity indicated at least through the period in which P-Celtic speech gave way to Q-Celtic in south-west Scotland and in the east from the Firth of Forth to the Moray Firth. It is of equal interest that the continuity of transhumance – whether in the fullest sense when it involved small-scale human migrations twice a year from low ground to upland sites and then the reverse, or in the partial sense of shifting beasts from low-lying pasture to upland grazing for the summer months – is strongly reflected in place-names which bring the story forward to the seventeenth or even eighteenth centuries.

It is my contention that the word 'hill' (OE *hyll*) in Scottish usage was very widely used (as, indeed, it still is used even today) to signify 'hill grazing', 'rough grazing' or some such, and not to indicate what Dr Johnson once famously called 'a considerable protuberance'. When today a farmer in upland parts of Scotland says that he is putting his beasts to the hill (or on the hill) he does not mean that they are being forced to bag a few Munros or Corbets. Thus the name Doon Hill (NT685757) does not mean 'a hill called Doon' or (as it might be phrased in modern English) 'Mount Doon', but 'the hill grazing attached to the settlement called Doon', which (nowadays at least) is at NT678760. Just south east of Doon Hill is Pinkerton Hill (Pinkerton), while working westward along the Lammermuir Edge from Doon Hill we have Brunt Hill (The Brunt), Newlands Hill (Newlands), Penshiel Hill (Penshiel), Blegbie Hill (Blegbie), Soutra Hill (Soutra), etc. etc. I would argue that this is a different type of hill name from that found in, e.g. Spott Dod, Deuchrie Dod or Lammer Law in the same locality. Moving



2.7: Place-names containing *monadh*, *munid* (Map: J. Renny)

north to the Sidlaws in Angus and Perthshire, we may note (working from NE to SW) Dunnichen Hill, NO509497 (Dunnichen), Lownie Hill (Lownie), Hill of Lour (Lour), Hayston Hill (Hayston), Ingliston Hill (Ingliston), Kinpurney Hill (Kinpurney), Henderston Hill (Henderston), Auchterhouse Hill, NO355398 (Auchterhouse), Hatton Hill (Hatton), Newtyle Hill (Newtyle), Hill of Keillor and Keillor Hill (Keillor and High Keillor) and so on and so on. The contrast here would be with such names as Craigowl, NO378400, King's Seat, NO231330 or Dunsinnan Hill, NO214317, where the first two are actual 'hill names' while the third is called after the big concentric vitrified fort which crowns the summit. Across Strathmore from the Sidlaw Hills, in an area where some use of the Gaelic language may be presumed as late as the end of the eighteenth century or even in the early nineteenth, we find the same phenomenon but usually with the word-order showing Gaelic influence. Thus we have Kinclune Hill, NO315568 (Kinclune), Hill of Loyal, NO255503 (Loyal), Hill of Alyth (Alyth), Hill of St Fink (St Fink), Hill of Drimmie, NO185503 (Drimmie), Newtyle Hill, NO050422 (Newtyle, NO049409).

The same exercise could be carried out in many other regions of Scotland in which Older Scots came into use while rural place-names were still in process of formation. The concept of low-lying or sheltered permanent settlement supplemented by high-lying shielings occupied from May to September was firmly established across highland-zone Britain from some very early date until the late-medieval or (in some regions) the early modern period. A comparatively rich stratification of place-names in Scotland provides useful pointers to the concept and practice of transhumance, and to their continuity over at least a millennium.

A relatively unexplored development of Scottish history, for which place-names can certainly serve as pointers even although they are in some respects enigmatic pointers, is the penetration of parts of southern Scotland by the earliest Old English speakers. The received wisdom is that groups or bands of Angles (some coming directly from Lindsey) began to settle the Northumberland littoral about 550 AD and were in a position to expand westward in strength after the battle of Degsaſtān in 603. Edinburgh, presumably with its hinterland, was in their hands by c.640. An English-controlled Dunbar played a part in the early life of St Wilfrid (born 634), while the English-speaking Cuthbert, presumably an Angle himself, was born about 635 in or on the edge of Lammermuir and within the catchment area of the Scottish monastery at Old Melrose.

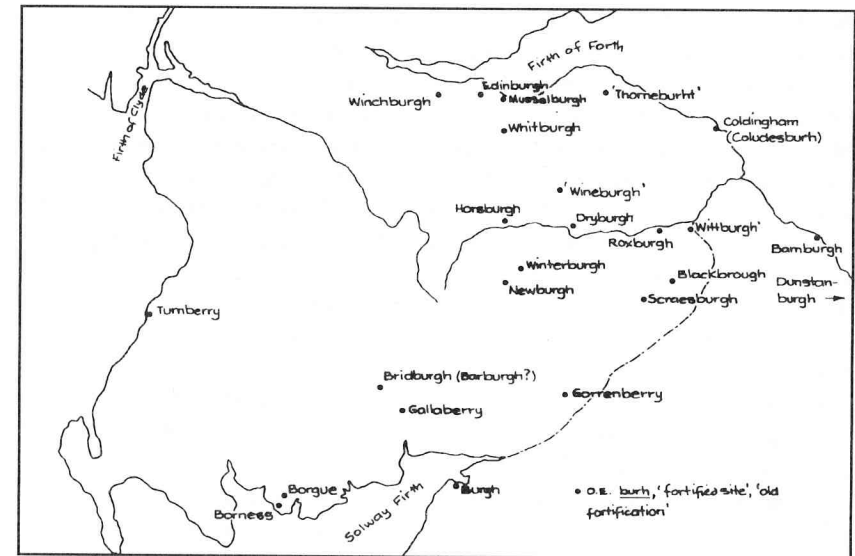
If the terms *burg* or *burh* (Fig. 2.8) and *boþl* or *botl* (Fig. 2.9) are rightly to be seen as early elements in Anglian place-name formation their

distribution across southern Scotland inevitably raises questions. Both elements turn up further west than we should expect merely from the narrative sources of early Scottish history. In particular, Turnberry in Carrick (*þorne byrig*, 'at the old fortification with thorn bushes'?) and Maybole (*maege boþl*, 'lord's hall of the maidens'?) and 'Neubottle' in Cunningham (*niwe boþl*, 'new lord's hall') are perhaps to be grouped with Prestwick (*preost* or *preosta wic*, 'priest's (priests') farm') and Eaglesham (egles-ham, 'homestead at pre-Anglian Christian church') as indicators of an upper-class Anglian occupation of Ayrshire and East Renfrewshire which leap-frogged across Clydesdale and upper Nithsdale and ought perhaps to be related to the mid-eighth-century acquisition of the 'plain of Kyle' by Edbert, king of Northumbria.

On the east side of the country the spread of both elements seems quite extensive. We note that *boþl* just managed to cross the Forth, in the hybrid name *Ballebotlia*, now Babbet in Kingsbarns parish, East Fife. Perhaps this may be linked with the occurrence of such an early-seeming Anglian name as Pusk (*Pureswic*) in Leuchars parish. And linguistic and cultural inter-communication between Gaelic-speaking Scots and English-speaking Angles in eastern Scotland seems to be illustrated by twelfth-century evidence. For example, an East Fife priest of c.1165–83 had the name Gillequdberit, i.e. *gille-Chutbert*, 'servant of (St) Cuthbert', and at some period now unascertainable (but probably fairly early) the Old English *scir*, 'division', 'cut off portion', was adopted benorth Forth.

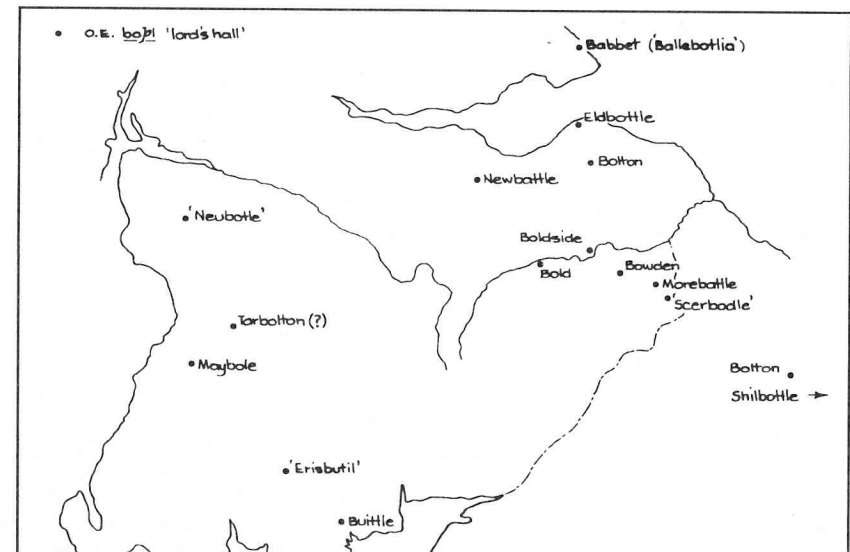
Finally, a distribution map (Fig. 2.10) of the element derived from Old English *þræapian*, 'to dispute', 'to argue over' (Scots *threep*) provides a pointer to an active process of boundary definition at a period (twelfth to thirteenth century?) when the use of Older Scots was becoming fairly general throughout lowland Scotland. The implication of the ubiquity and versatility of this word is surely that this period saw the creation of numerous estates presumably carved out of older circumscriptions which now went out of use. This ties in with many surviving charters which attempt (sometimes very ineffectually) to define estate boundaries, and with the record of early perambulations.

If properly used place-names can provide pointers to many historical processes, especially in the period before c.1200. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that for the history of Scotland before c.1100 place-names constitute the most important single document. Place-names, however, may provide pitfalls for the unwary. I am not thinking here of the absurd or facetious derivations which used to abound in popular (especially local) histories, of the kind which explained the name Barnweill in Craigie,



2.8: Place-names containing O.E. *burh/burg* in southern Scotland and northern England

(Map: J. Renny)

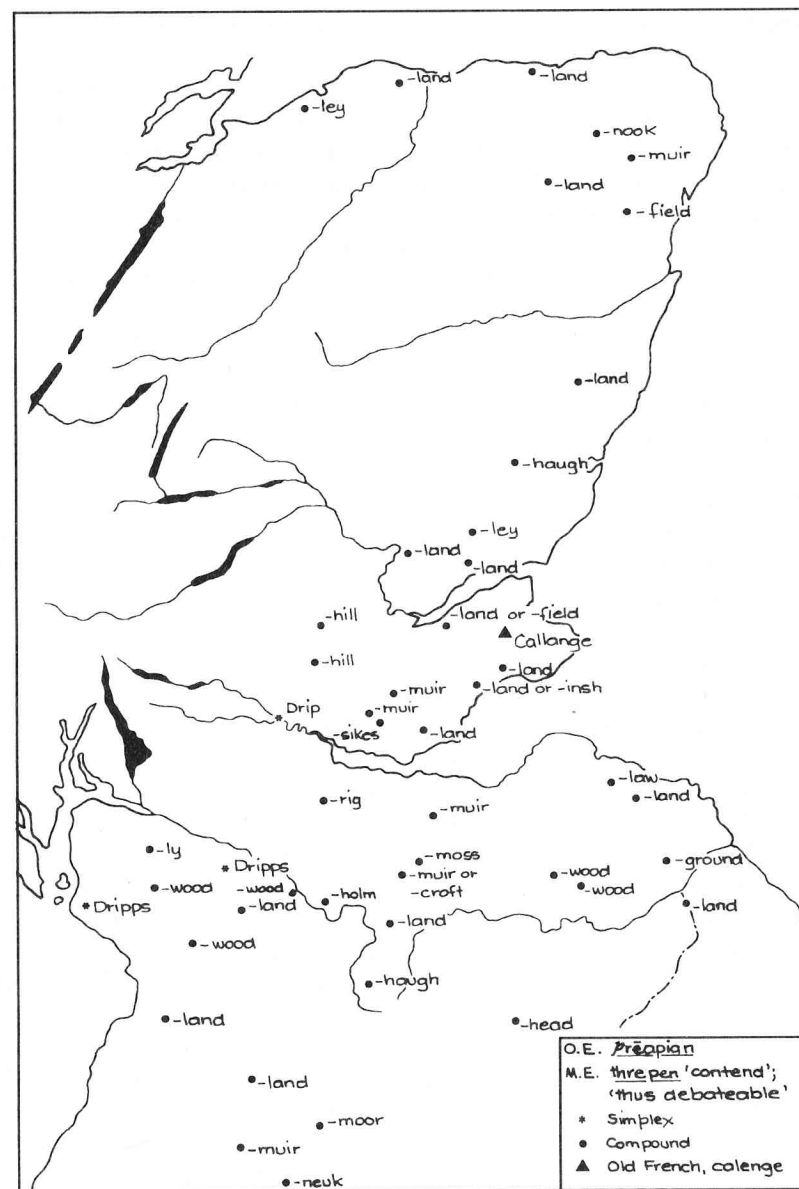


2.9: Place-names containing O.E. *boþl* in southern Scotland and northern England

(Map: J. Renny)

Ayrshire, from William Wallace's setting fire to the barns of Ayr and remarking as his enemies perished in the conflagration 'they burn weel'. Occasionally a puzzling-looking name may in truth be a puzzle. For example, the Fereneze Hills by Barrhead in Renfrewshire owe their odd name to a misunderstanding of the Old French word *fermeson*, 'close season', in charters of the early Stewarts for their abbey of Paisley, which allowed the monks to take hinds but not stags in the Stewarts' forest of Raiss *in fermeson* (when hind hunting was permitted). The odd-looking farm name Clarabad (in Hutton BWK) is derived from Clarembald of Castle Ashby NTP, a twelfth- or thirteenth-century follower of the Olifards, and either he or an ancestor of the same name provides the explanation for Clermiston west of Edinburgh (*Clarembaldestun* > *Clerribaldstoun* > Clermiston).

The pitfalls I have in mind are not connected with popular etymology or occasional oddities. They may lie in wait for us even when the philological analysis and identification are perfectly sound. Problems arise only when we try to use the material to make deductions which have a general validity. A century ago the great English historian F.W. Maitland, discussing the implications which the Danish settlement of eastern England in the ninth and tenth centuries could have had for English freedom in the later middle ages, said 'in truth we must be careful how we use our Dane' (Maitland 1897, 176). We would do well to heed Maitland's appeal for caution when examining the place-name evidence which points to an elusive, almost fugitive, Scandinavian presence in eastern and south-central Scotland at an unknown period between 800 AD and c.1050. Where we are dealing with a cluster of place-names of wholly Scandinavian character as is the case with Blegbie, Pogbie, Humbie and *Laysynbi*, the name which lies behind Leaston (all ELO), and probably Begbie less than five miles NE of Leaston, it is surely difficult to interpret this in any other way than by positing a genuinely Scandinavian settlement beneath the Lammermuir edge, lasting long enough for the names bestowed upon physical settlements to endure into a period when a Scandinavian language (or languages) had ceased to be in common use in the locality. But then what are we to make of Smeaton MLO, only eight miles NW of Humbie? Seemingly a simple Old English name, *smeotha tun*, 'smiths' town', it is in fact recorded early (1154–59) as *Smithebi* (RRS i, 183), though found as *Smithetun* in 1150 (*Dunfermline Reg.*, p. 5) and *Smihet[un]* in 1170 (*SHR*, xxx (1951), 45, 49). If this makes it Scandinavian, are we to add Smeaton to our Scandinavian cluster beneath Lammermuir, or do we infer a much more widespread Scandinavian presence in Lothian? Similarly, when we note Corsbie in Legerwood BWK (NT607442) or Newbie in Manor PEB (approx. NT20/33; see Buchan and Paton 1927, 580)



2.10: Place-names containing Older Scots *threep-* 'debateable', showing the different generic elements with which it is combined

(Map: J. Renny)

do we suspect a Scandinavian influx of which there is otherwise no record? Surely not.

We have to make allowance for a considerable borrowing of Scandinavian terms and forms into an Old English place-nomenclature, just as, presumably contemporaneously, we allow for a substantial borrowing into both English-speaking and Gaelic-speaking societies of eastern and southern Scotland of a good many Scandinavian personal names, e.g. Gamal, Liotr, Thor, Thorfinn, Orm, Ulf and Ulfill, etc. etc.

Among place-name terms which were obviously borrowed in this way I would draw attention to '-bie, -by' (*bý, býr*), 'fell' (*fell, fiall*), 'gill' (*gil*), 'grain' (*grein*) and 'wrae' (*vrá*). Apart from clusters, such as that in Lothian already mentioned and also in south Annandale (Fellows-Jensen 1985) and possibly west Cunningham and north-west Kyle, Ayrshire (e.g. Sorbie, NS245445, Busbie, NS239457, Crosbie, NS216500, Crosbie, NS344302), *bie*-names appear rather fugitively in areas not otherwise known to have been Scandinavianised, e.g. Fife (e.g. Weddersbie, NO261131, Corbie, now Birkhill, NO336234),² and Angus (e.g. Ravensby, NO535353). *Fell* occurs in the Southern Uplands over a wider area than the south Dumfriesshire 'cluster' would indicate, and of course there are the maverick Campsie Fells. *Gill* is commonly used for a hill burn or ravine in upper Clydesdale, especially Crawford parish. *Grain* (Scand. *grein*, 'branch') is commonly found in north Dumfriesshire and across into west Roxburghshire, used for small upper tributaries of larger burns or rivers. *Wrae* ('neuk', 'secluded spot') has a much wider distribution, occurring sporadically up the eastern side of Scotland from *Wrae* in upper Tweeddale (NT117333) at least as far north as Wreaton west of Aboyne (NJ502993).

Although these terms could not be found quite widely and/or densely distributed throughout several areas of Scotland unless there had been some significant contact with Scandinavian speakers, their use and presence need not, and in many cases clearly does not, imply actual settlement by Scandinavians. They became part of the common vocabulary of inhabitants whose mother-tongues were Old English or Gaelic or possibly even (in a few cases) Cumbric. To adapt Maitland's dictum, we must be careful how we use our Scandinavian place-name terminology.

Place-names arouse the interest of a wide variety of people: philologists, folklorists, geographers, archaeologists, genealogists, people who simply have a love for topography and the human landscape. For the historian place-names contribute one of the tools of the trade. They are seldom of use in providing precise answers to specific questions, but they can be vitally important in establishing that a particular phenomenon or event was a *sine*

qua non behind some other phenomenon or event.

In chronology, it is rare for place-names to provide precise dates but they can be decisive in establishing relative chronologies. As far as Scotland is concerned, place-names are important in setting the scene and establishing general background to events in all periods before c.1600. For the historian of settlement in particular, the analysis and evaluation of place-names are absolutely essential. Place-names can tell us a great deal about agrarian patterns, landholding practices, animal and crop husbandry, systems of measurement and assessment of agricultural and fiscal capacity, ecclesiastical specialisms and much else besides. We must, however, follow the rules and be guided by common sense. In general the earlier the recorded form the closer we are to the origin of the name, but this may not always be true. Carstairs LAN first occurs (1170) as *Casteltares*, a form preserved for two and a half centuries or more. Yet the present-day spelling may be a more accurate rendering of the original name, with Cumbric *caer*, 'fort' as the first element, rather than Norman-French *c(h)astel*, 'castle'. But on the other hand the older name for Temple MLO, *Balantrudach*, may illustrate the general rule rather than prove an exception to it. Because *baile nan trudach* means 'stead of the warriors', Watson (1926, 136–7) believed that the name was coined in Gaelic after David I had granted the estate to the Knights of the Temple c.1140. But the oldest recorded form of the name, dating 1175x1199, is *Plent[r]idoc*, a P-Celtic, Brittonic name of which the first element was surely the Cumbric equivalent of Welsh *blaen*, 'upland' (*Glas. Reg.*, i, p. 37). If the study of place-names has a lesson for the historian it is surely that probabilities are easier to come by than absolute certainties.

Abbreviations

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| <i>Dunfermline Reg.</i> | <i>Registrum de Dunfermelyn</i> , Bannatyne Club, Edinburgh, 1842. |
| Fraser, <i>Wemyss</i> | W. Fraser, <i>Memorials of the Family of Wemyss of Wemyss</i> , Edinburgh, 1888. |
| <i>Glas. Reg.</i> | <i>Registrum Episcopatus Glasguensis</i> , Bannatyne and Maitland Clubs, Edinburgh, 1843. |
| RRS i | <i>Regesta Regum Scottorum</i> , vol. i, (<i>Acts of Malcolm IV</i>) ed. G.W.S. Barrow, Edinburgh, 1960. |
| SHR | <i>Scottish Historical Review</i> , 1903–28, 1947–. |

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Notes

1. I regard this as a good illustration of the tautology which arises through a gradual shift from one language to another, rather than from the abrupt replacement of one language by another. A modern example would be Mount Cairn Gorm, and even Mount Ben Nevis, which is sometimes found in London papers. As I understand it, what has happened is that Q-Celtic settlers have found a name *Garmunt (corresponding to Welsh *garw mynydd*) meaning 'rough moor' or 'rough (hill) pasture'; not *entirely* convinced they have understood **mun(i)t* aright, they have prefixed the name with Gaelic *sliabh* 'moor'; the writer of the thirteenth century charter in which this name occurs (Fraser, *Wemyss*, ii, no.4), in a similar quandary, has then added Latin *mora* (from Older Scots *mor*), so that we have, in three languages, 'moor of the moor of rough moor'!
2. For more examples, see S. Taylor, 'The Scandinavians in Fife and Kinross: the onomastic evidence' in *Scandinavian Settlement in Northern Britain*, ed. B.E. Crawford (1995). See also S. Taylor 'Scandinavians in Central Scotland – *bý*- place-names and their context' in *Sagas, Saints and Sacrifice* (provisional title), eds. P.A. Bibire and G. Williams (British Museum Press, 1998 forthcoming).

3

Place-names and Landscape

Margaret Gelling, with illustrations by Ann Cole

When the Council for Name Studies in Great Britain and Ireland held its Easter conference at Aberdeen in March 1984, a highlight of the proceedings was the presentation of the newly published study, *The Place-Names of Upper Deeside*, by Adam Watson and Elizabeth Allen. We were privileged to have lectures from the authors of this beautiful book, and in the discussion which followed several speakers compared the highly informative Gaelic names to the Scots and Scots-English ones in Upper Deeside, to the detriment of the latter. It was felt that Gaelic names with meanings like 'little hillock of the speckled field', 'corrie of the divided pool', 'burn of the sunny stream-branch' were more communicative than Scots and Scots-English names like Dikeheid Cottage or the ubiquitous Milltoun. I said that this was not a fair comparison, because truly comparable non-Gaelic names were not the recently-coined ones in Gaelic-speaking areas, but rather the early Anglo-Saxon names of English-speaking regions. The feeling of the meeting was against me, however, and the failure to make my point still rankles a little. So I am glad to have this opportunity to present to a Scottish audience some evidence of precision and subtlety in English topographical names of the post-Roman period.

The Anglo-Saxons seldom used phrase-constructions in place-name formation. Their commonest place-name types consist of a combination of two nouns or of a noun and a personal name, or of a noun qualified by an adjective. This produces, to modern perceptions, a spurious impression of simplicity and shallowness of meaning, and this apparent simplicity misled some great scholars, most notably Sir Frank Stenton, into dismissing names which translate into modern English as 'fern hill', 'long valley' and so on as having little to offer to students of the Anglo-Saxon period. The key to Anglo-Saxon topographical naming lies, however, in the precise use of words which get blanket translations like 'hill' and 'valley' in the