

## Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland

### Seventeenth Annual Study Conference: Edinburgh 2008

The seventeenth annual study conference of the Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland was held at Pollock Halls, University of Edinburgh, from 4 to 7 April 2007. The programme was organized jointly by Mr Ian Fraser, Dr Carole Hough, and Dr Doreen Waugh. The opening lecture, 'On names in literature', was, unusually, read on behalf of an absent speaker, Prof. Bill Nicolaisen (Aberdeen), who was ill, Carole Hough deputizing. Another new departure was the formal presentation of a festschrift, *A Commodity of Good Names*, to one of the founder members of the Society and longstanding member of the previous Council for Name Studies, Dr Margaret Gelling.

More normal activity was resumed on Saturday morning with a paper by Dr Pat McKay (Belfast) on 'Scots minor names in Ulster'. Dr Veronica Smart (St Andrews) applied a modern political category to 'Economic migrants? Continental names in tenth-century England', denoting substantial numbers of Flemings and others who came over to work as moneyers, primarily in the Danelaw. Politics as such concerned Mr Guy Puzey (Edinburgh), 'Minority place-names and linguistic identity in Scotland and Norway', with recurrent questions of how far people in modern states who do not identify themselves as heirs of linguistic minorities (here Gaels and Sami) will or should accommodate in such matters as bilingual road-signs those who do.

Mr Ian Fraser (Edinburgh) spoke from a crofting background on 'Place-names in oral tradition', with the intriguing subtitle 'Lies my uncle told me'. Local informants might know the real origins of names but might be quite free in reinventing them; and one bard on trial for slander was acquitted in return for composing a poem entirely of untruths. Mr Peter Drummond (Coatbridge) spoke on 'Place-name losses and changes' mainly of hill-names as shown in early modern maps in what might be called John Buchan or David Steel country. Dr Richard Cox (Teangue, Isle of Skye) expounded

‘Issues in developing a chronology for Norse and Gaelic place-names in the Hebrides’, mainly to do with whether relevant sound-changes in either language had or had not occurred, but not neglecting possibilities of different regional varieties of Norse.

Dr Gwyneth Nair (Elderslie) and Miss Jennifer Scherr (Bristol) spoke on “‘Especial vertues’”: abstract qualities and women’s names in England, 1540-1840’, drawing in the literary genre of conduct-books, most of which, they said, were written by men to regulate the conduct of women. Mr David Sellar, Lord Lyon King of Arms (Edinburgh), set forth how ‘Rachael, Gormelia, Florence and Forwhit: some female forenames’, i.e. Scottish ones of Gaelic or Norse origin, were given in writing conventional equivalents of biblical or classical form which might or might not be close phonetically. Ms Ellen Bramwell (Glasgow) explored ‘Naming-patterns in a Glasgow Pakistani/Muslim community’. Mr Liam Ó hAisibéil (Galway) displayed ‘Aspects of research on townland names in County Roscommon, Ireland’, drawing on mediaeval annals as well as Elizabethan and later legal sources.

Mr Gavin Smith (London) presented a new theory of ‘-ingas place-names in Surrey’, by which they should denote the sites of hundredal minster churches set up in a process of West Saxon royal consolidation which he posited for the middle and latter part of the seventh century. This did not satisfy English place-name specialists present, for reasons chronological and otherwise, not least unclarity as to what the -ing(-) suffix would mean. Contrast one parish-name in -ing undoubtedly named after a monastery, Nursling in the neighbouring county of Hampshire, spelt in the twelfth-century Winchester cartulary with dative *hnutscillingæ* and the like, after St. Boniface’s monastery called in his eighth-century Life *nhutscelle* (it would seem a small establishment with a kernel of good in it). There -ing (singular) has its classic derivative function (albeit obscured in reference-books which fail to note that the *Vita Bonifatii* applies the name *Nhutscelle* to the monastery as such not to the parish).

The Saturday evening session comprised seven reports on projects in progress: by Mr Dónall Mac Giolla Easpaig (Dublin) on a database

of Irish place-names; Mr Patrick Hanks (Berlin) on an improved version of Reaney's dictionary of English surnames; Dr Alison Grant (Glasgow) on a database of Scottish field-names; Prof. Thomas Clancy and Dr Simon Taylor (Glasgow) on names as evidence for the spread of Gaelic in mediaeval Scotland; Dr Doreen Waugh (Penicuik) on her joint project with Prof. Gunnel Melchers (Stockholm) on parts of the body in place-names; Dr Kay Muhr (Belfast) with 'something like a twenty-first year review' of the Northern Ireland Place-Name Project; and Dr Alan James (Ashbourne, Derbyshire) on the BLITON project surveying Brittonic names in Scotland.

The Sunday morning began as usual with the Annual General Meeting, at which the new treasurer was inducted. Mr Shaun Tyas (Donington, Lincolnshire) then gave a paper on 'The use of medievalism in business names in Britain and Ireland' illustrated with both PowerPoint projections and solid properties such as an Alfredian biscuit-tin. Mr Peter McNiven (Menstrie, Clackmannanshire) spoke on 'Place-names and the medieval church in Menteith, Perthshire', examining different ways in which places could be used toward church service. Prof. Hywel Wyn Owen (Llandegfan, Anglesey) explained the scope and layout of his recently published 'Dictionary of the place-names of Wales', and recounted for non-initiates some of the esoteric infighting it generated among the Welsh cultural élite. Mr Ian Fraser reappeared to speak on 'Linlithgow place-names' as an introduction to the afternoon's coach excursion to that town. Activity there centred on the castle-cum-palace. A re-enactment society gave us an idea of how it came to take its present architectural form; biting winds from the loch gave some idea what it would have been like to live in at this time of year. Back in Edinburgh, the evening discussion took up points from last night's progress reports, notably effects of the politics of the extremes in Ulster on appreciation of the heritage of place-names there.

P.R.K.