

Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland

Twenty-Fourth Annual Study Conference

The twenty-fourth annual study conference organized by the Society for Name Studies in Great Britain and Ireland was held from 27 to 30 March 2015 in the University of East Anglia, Norwich, in conjunction with the Centre for East Anglian Studies there. The programme was organized by Keith Briggs (Martlesham). The opening address was by Tom Williamson (UEA) on 'Place-names and the East Anglian landscape: problems and possibilities'. Among the points he made were that the alignments of coaxial field systems are conditioned by river-lines, so they need not be prehistoric even if cut through by Roman roads, and that wood-banks in this region tend to be twelfth-century, representing enclosure of part of the common waste for the lord of the manor. He interpreted some clusters of names as reflecting clearance of more accessible wooded slopes on lords' behalf, leaving remoter wolds for small-scale private enterprise.

On the Saturday morning Keith Briggs propounded 'Some Suffolk place-name puzzles', of which those that provoked liveliest discussion were the pair of Thelnetham and Whelnetham. Susan Kilby (Leicester) probed 'The secret life of fields: extraordinary ordinary landscapes' as possibly thought in the late Middle Ages *loci* of early medieval history and legend. Robert Briggs (Nottingham) gave a conspectus of '-ingas and -ingaham place-names in Surrey', and was pleased to report enduring abundance of ash-trees at the Burghal Hidage site of Eshing. Carole Hough (Glasgow) spoke on 'The Scottish Maidenwells', modifying her conclusions on the English ones at the Society's Falmouth conference in 2009. Graham Collis (Thetford) went in search of 'The -ingahem names of the Lumbres canton (Pas-de-Calais)', but he too was content with simple -ingas at a pinch, citing a pair Wilbedingues and Wildebingues as being half a kilometre apart. (You will seek them in vain in Wavrans-sur-l'Aa on the Michelin map, though the rue de Wilbedingues is mapped by Google.) Our elastic insularity was stretched still further when Ídowu O.

Odébode expounded ‘Toponymy: a sociolinguistic study of selected place-names in Nigeria’.

More modest expansion was seen in what past conferences knew as FaNUK, now a *Dictionary of Family Names in Britain and Ireland*. A presentation of its current state by Patrick Hanks (UWE) was soon interrupted by loud discordant noises. The computer-wardens switched off fast only to discover slowly that the problem was no more than a lead chafing on the lectern and that they had no quick means of restoring the connection. Deprived of the electronic slave he had expected (though a generous printed handout would seem to make it hardly needful), the speaker retired like Achilles to his tent. Into the breach stepped Paul Cullen (UWE), doing for ‘Locative surnames in East Anglia’ roughly what he did for Kentish ones at Gregynog last year, and Veronica Smart (St Andrews) on ‘The moneyers’ names of the St. Edmund coinage’, an ‘extraordinary assemblage’ of continental Germanic names to the practical exclusion of Old English ones. Shaun Tyas (Donington) worried at ‘Onomastic problems connected with the study of the reign of Ecgberht of Wessex’. The session ended with surnames reëmpowered and no permanent casualties mechanical or human.

Attention then turned to seaborne connections, first with Gillian Fellows-Jensen (Copenhagen) ‘Looking even more closely at the Nordic element in East Anglian place-names’; Thrigby seemed more fully Scandinavian than Herringby, but she maintained her opposition to a personal name as qualifier. Peder Gammeltoft (Copenhagen) devoted colourful computer resources wearing soberer garb on paper to ‘East Anglia and Jutland – a comparative place-name study across the North Sea’. Enthusiasts for vikings may have found it slightly disappointing. Similarities between East Anglian and Jutland place-names were more at the level of language than name formation, more due to common Germanic inheritance than to borrowing in the viking age, when most of such loans as he displayed were from English to Danish not vice versa. An exception was initial *h* in ‘elder’ in names like Hilderbush Acre, twelve Danish names *Hyldebusk(ager)* being all in Jutland.

The evening was rounded off with short reports, by Kelly Kilpatrick (Oxford) on a project begun in January to produce a book on Suffolk place-names for the EPNS popular series, by Aengus Finnegan (Westmeath) on the Irish place-name website <logainm.ie>, by Keith Briggs on his own project of a non-judgmental index of all personal names that have ever been proposed as qualifiers in English place-names, and by Ellen Bramwell (Glasgow) on mapping metaphor with the *Historical Thesaurus of English*.

After the annual general meeting on Sunday morning, David Boulton (UEA) assessed 'The geographical context of Scandinavian place-names in East Anglia', noting that boulder clay though hard to work is more fertile than the sandy soils near the coast which the Anglo-Saxons first settled, and that erosion since Roman times means the original coastal context of Danish settlement has been lost. Grimston hybrids, often on upper slopes of river valleys, he thought were formed when the clay soils were being colonized in the ninth and tenth centuries. Johnny Grandjean Gøgsig Jakobsen (Copenhagen) spoke on 'Thorps, soils, churches and rent: an interdisciplinary approach for place-name studies of settlement structure in medieval Denmark with comparative aspects for the Danelaw region', illustrating how thorpes relate to centres of settlement in a non-colonial context. Taxation in 'barrels' struck a Hamletic note. Peder Gammeltoft added that in Falster where historical tax records are available, assessments for thorpes increased more over time than those for other parishes, so they were the ones with most growth potential. Eleanor Rye (Nottingham) examined 'The Scandinavian vocabulary of north-west England's microtoponymy', particularly lexemes whose presence in local names there is reason to believe was not a product of Scandinavian settlers directly but of Middle (and/or even Modern) English-speakers whose forebears' dialect adopted words from them. Edward Martin (UEA) related 'East Anglian landscape history and place-names', focusing on greens, commons, and tyes, much the same sort of feature but in different areas, and on what he saw as a contrast between a Greater Norfolk and Greater Essex, matching roughly the old tribal divide of Icenii and Trinovantes, with Suffolk not a distinct entity.

The afternoon excursion took us to Newton Flotman, Eye, Stowmarket, and Bungay among other places, with special attention to the ducking-pond called the Grimmer at Wickham Skeith, but just escaping Diss. In the evening Rebecca Gregory (Nottingham) looked at ‘Nottinghamshire nomenclature: dialect and development in some Trentside field-names’ with an eye to what microtoponymic or tenorial differences might constrain uneven distributions of terms such as ON *vangr* (= OE *wang*) in Danelaw counties. Kishli Laister (Cardiff) ranged ‘From deer to ducks and toponymy to archaeology in medieval Gloucestershire’, concentrating on rôles played by animals [(or not played): ‘...They were not, however, eating mole or water-vole...’]. Katie Hambrook (East Oxford community archaeology project) brought proceedings to a close with ‘East Oxford place-names and field-names’, including enigmatically a *Toothlesse headland* in 1605.

P.R.K.