Scotsman Shorts 2016-17

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Ainmean-Àite na h-Alba

Summary

From March 2016 to December 2017 our senior researcher, Dr Jacob King, produced short weekly pieces about Gaelic place-names which were published in the Gaelic section of the Scotsman's Saturday publication. These shorts had a strict word count, so detail was concise, but interesting none the less.

The purpose of this document is to collate all of these shorts in one place as an archive, with the contents in date order of publication. All the place-names discussed here can be found in our database and are linked directly throughout the document.

Contents

Linlithgow ~ Gleann Iucha

Published: 26 March 2016

The name Linlithgow (first recorded in 1138 as Linlidcu) is of 'British' origin, that is, a language that existed in Scotland before Gaelic or Scots, and is related to modern Welsh. In all likelihood the name originally meant 'the pool of the damp or grey hollow', relating to what is now Linlithgow Loch. The modern Gaelic form of the name, Gleann Iucha, may seem utterly different from this, but is probably the result of a Gaelic reinterpretation of this name into *Gleann Fhliuch Chu meaning 'glen of the wet hollow' which was changed in natural speech to Gleann Iucha. (The fh- is silent in Gaelic). Moreover, the name was reinterpreted again by Gaelic speakers as *Linn Liath Chu, 'pool of the grey dog'. There is a memory of this version of the name locally in the burgh crest which depicts a black dog, whilst locals call themselves 'Black Bitches'!

Lochnagar ~ Loch na Gàire / Beinn nan Cìochan

Published: 2 April 2016

The name of this famous mountain is puzzling: Why does this mountain have the name of a loch? The exact reason is unknown but the name comes from a small loch on the north face of the mountain; this is Loch na Gàire, 'the loch of the outcry', thought to take its name from the howling of the wind among the rocks.

This gives rise to the question, what was the mountain called in Gaelic? The answer is Beinn nan Cìochan, 'the hill of the paps' (pap is used here in the sense of 'hill'). This was the name recorded from the last generation of native speakers of Aberdeenshire Gaelic. The paps in question are called in Scots the Meikle Pap and the Little Pap. These are translations from the Gaelic names, since the name for the Meikle Pap has been recovered as A' Chìoch Mhòr, of exactly the same meaning.

River Clyde ~ Abhainn Chluaidh

Published: 9 April 2016

The River Clyde is one of the oldest Scottish names for which we have a record; the Egyptian geographer Ptolemy in 50 AD wrote it as klōta. It is always difficult to tell the original intended meanings of large rivers in Scotland, but this name is thought to mean 'pure or cleansed one', a meaning possibly also seen in the name of the Cluden Water.

The name of the Clutha Bar on the banks of the Clyde is taken from Macpherson's Ossianic Poetry which used Clutha as the Gaelic name of the

River Clyde. Macpherson likely invented this form for his poetry however, since the name of the Clyde in Gaelic is Cluaidh.

In Arran Gaelic the River Clyde was known simply as An Rìobhar, 'The River' a loan word from Scots river. Arran Gaelic speakers would say a' dol suas an Rìobhar, 'going up the River (Clyde)'.

Culloden ~ Cùil Lodair

Published: 16 April 2016

For obvious reasons Culloden (Cullodyn in 1238) was a very well-known name in Gaelic, mentioned many times in prose and poem after the battle there on this day in 1746. The first element cùil means 'nook or corner'; this word is related to – but quite distinct from – cùl 'back part'. The second element is most likely lodan 'little pool', thus meaning 'small pool nook'. The modern Gaelic form, however, has changed by folk etymology to Cùil Lodair, which would mean 'lad nook'. Another common modern spelling – with the same pronunciation – is Cùil Fhodair which means 'fodder nook'.

The actual battle itself was fought at Drumossie ~ Druim Athaisidh. Druim means a 'ridge'. Various meanings have been given for athaisidh, including 'poor, disused meadow', but this is not certain.

Lamlash ~ Eilean MoLaise

Published: 23 April 2016

The name of Lamlash (Helantmlaysche late 14th Century) on the Isle of Arran has a complex history. The settlement sits on the coast facing Holy Island. The name of the island was of old Eilean MoLaise 'the island of MoLaise'. MoLaise seems to be the name of the saint, and on Holy Island is a place called St Molaise's Cave. According to local tradition, St Columba came to the island to visit him.

Over time, Gaelic Eilean MoLaise has turned into English Lamlash, by reduction of an unstressed 'Eilean Mo-'. The name has also transferred from the island itself to the settlement facing it. To add to this confusion, the name of the town was often referred to locally in Gaelic either as An t-Eilean 'the island' or An t-Eilean Àrd 'the high island', with the bay of Lamlash being Loch an Eilein 'the loch of the island'.

Birnam ~ Braonan

Published: 30 April 2016

Birnam (Brannan in 1345) most likely reflects braonan, 'little wet place'. The same element also appears in Loch Bhraoin in Wester Ross - Loch Broom in English.

When Shakespeare wrote his play Macbeth, he was not familiar with the name; his source for the play, Holinshed, spelt the name as Birnane. Shakespeare's first folio edition of Macbeth spells the name Byrnan and Byrnam, whilst later editions chose the less correct Byrnam or Birnam throughout. The form ending in -m became so famous it seems to have largely displaced the authentic name for the place. The form Braonan however was reinstated in the late twentieth century on the bilingual railway station sign.

The original form may have been remembered locally. One source from around 1900 mentions Birnam Hill as Branac in the saying: Tha ceò air Branac 'there is mist on Birnam Hill'.

Càrn Eighe ~ Càrn Èite

Published: 7 May 2016

Càrn Eighe (as it appears on modern maps) is a mountain in Strathglass to the west of Inverness. Its name has a confusing history. Nineteenth-century Ordnance Survey maps showed it as Càrn Eige 'notch cairn'. Nearby are Bealach na h-Eige and Creag na h-Eige 'the pass and crag of the notch', respectively. Early mountaineering books, however, referred to this as Càrn Eighe, probably in confusion with Beinn Eighe ('file mountain', from its serrated outline) in Wester Ross. The confusion is understandable since the mountain in question also has a serrated outline.

The confusion does not end there however. The form Càrn Eige is itself not the correct form. Local Gaelic speakers actually referred to it as Càrn Èite. The meaning of èite is not clear, but it occurs also in Glen Etive, Gleann Èite. Possibly, the word is related to èiteadh 'stretching, extending'.

Tyndrum ~ Taigh an Droma

Published: 14 May 2016

There are two places with this name. The better-known one is in Gaelic Taigh an Droma 'the house of the ridge', sitting as it does at the boundary between Perthshire and Argyll. The 'ridge' or druim is that of Druim Albainn 'the ridge of Scotland', the great range running through this part of Scotland, dividing the watersheds. Very close to here is Càrn an Droma 'the cairn of the ridge'.

One old text mentions 'Betwix Carne Druyme and Badenoch is the month called Drum-Allabyn' (Between Carndrum and Badenoch is the mounth (or mountain) called Drumalban).

There is another Tyndrum near Foyers, but this is a 'false friend' being in Gaelic Trian an Droma 'the third part of the ridge'. Nearby is Trinloist or An Trian Loisgte 'the burnt third part.' The identity of this last third part, so to speak, is alas unknown.

Dunnichen ~ Dùn Eachain

Published: 21 May 2016

The Irish Annals record a battle in 686 between the Picts and the Northumbrians at a place called Duin Nechtain, which in modern spelling would be Dùn Neachdain. The name as it stands means 'the fort of Nechtan'; Nechtan was a Pictish King. The location of this battle is not certain, but it is generally thought to be at Dunnichen in Angus.

Dunnichen is on record as dunectin in 1179, and the modern Gaelic form recorded about a century ago is Dùn Eachain 'the fort of Eachan' where Eachan is a personal name commonly anglicised as 'Hector'. The 1179 form could reflect either Eachan or Neachdan. It is of course possible that the meaning of the name has changed, especially since Neachdan is not a common Gaelic name. Alternatively, the similarity between the names Dunnichen and Duin Nechtain may be coincidental, with the battle having occurred somewhere else entirely.

Maggieknockater ~ Magh an Fhùcadair

Published: 28 May 2016

This odd-looking Banffshire name has given rise to a number of fanciful derivations, such as it being named from a woman called 'Maggie Knockater'. If the name were called 'Maggie Knockater's Hill' or the like, this derivation might have some credence.

The name is in fact Gaelic in origin, being most likely Magh an Fhùcadair 'the field of the cloth fuller', although the Gaelic form of this name does not seem to have been recorded when traditional Gaelic was used in this area. Parallels exist however, such as in Clacknockater in Glen Isla, Forfar, for which the Gaelic form was recorded as Glaic an Fhùcadair 'the hollow of the cloth fuller'. Moreover, Ballanucater near Port of Menteith is in Gaelic Baile an Fhùcadair 'the farm of the cloth fuller'. Although now restricted to the Outer Hebrides, the practice of waulking or fulling the cloth was once commonplace throughout Scotland.

Saint Kilda ~ Hiort

Published: 4 June 2016

The English name of this remote island sounds as if it is named after a holy person; it is however a misnomer. The Gaelic, and original, form is Hiort (Hirt in 1202). The difference between the two forms came about from a well on the island called Tobar Chiolda. Tobar means 'well' in Gaelic, and the other element derives from the Norse kelda, also meaning a 'well'. This name was mistakenly taken to be a saint's name, and then this was taken to be the name of the whole island. This newer form is first on record from around the seventeenth century, and was likely coined by seamen.

In Gaelic, Saint Kilda has a similar role to 'Timbuktoo' in English, meaning a remote place. A common saying to denote the extent of the traditional Gaelic speaking area in Scotland is bho Pheairt gu Hiort, 'from Perth to Saint Kilda'.

Penrith ~ Pìorait

Published: 11 June 2016

It is not only places in Scotland that have Gaelic names. The town of Penrith in Cumbria has its own: Pìorait. In 1745 there was a skirmish near Penrith between the English and Prince Charlie's retreating forces; this is more commonly known in English as the Battle or Skirmish of Clifton Moor. This event seems to have put Penrith into Gaelic tradition.

Although the form appears several times in writing, the origin of the form appears to be a poem written in 1800 about this event, which contains the line: Am blàr a bha 'm Pìorait 'the battle that was in Penrith'. It is the more interesting since the local pronunciation of Penrith is Peerith or Peerit from which the Gaelic form seems to have been taken, rather than the more common form of Penrith. Perhaps Prince Charlie's forces coined the name from locals in Penrith?

River Ugie ~ Uige

Published: 18 June 2016

This river, which flows through Buchan and enters the sea near Peterhead, rises as two separate watercourses, now known as the North Ugie Water and the South Ugie Water, before merging into the River Ugie. Nowadays the two waters are denoted by their geographical relation to each other; in the Fifteenth Century however they were known in Scots as the Back Ugie and Fore Ugie, respectively.

Previously, the River Ugie appeared around 1150 AD in the Book of Deer - one of the earliest examples of Scottish Gaelic. There the South Ugie Water is mentioned as dubuci, which in modern Gaelic would be Dubh Uige, that is, the dubh or 'black' Ugie. The North Ugie Water is not mentioned but possibly this was the find (modern Gaelic fionn) or 'White' Ugie. The name Uige itself is likely of pre-Gaelic origin and its original meaning is not known.

Bannockburn ~ Allt a' Bhonnaich

Published: 25 June 2016

This name has a complicated history. The name of the current settlement takes its name from the watercourse that runs through it: Bannock Burn. This name first appears in a Latin text written around 1200 AD as a hill named Bannauc; from the context this most likely refers to the hills to the west of Bannockburn. It is mentioned in medieval Welsh literature as the boundary between the Britons of the Old North and the Picts. The name in British most likely meant 'abounding in summits or spurs'.

After the battle that took place here this week in 1314, the place was mentioned many times in Gaelic writing, usually referred to as Allt a' Bhonnaich 'the burn of the bannock'; a bannock being a type of flat bread. This is a translation of the modern Scots form of the name, though of course this interpretation has no historical authenticity.

Dumbarton Rock ~ Ail Chluaidh / Creag Chluaidh

Published: 2 July 2016

This rock was an important strategic site in late antiquity and it is perhaps no surprise that it was mentioned for the first time as early as 658 AD: as Alo Cluathe, and for several hundred years thereafter, with variations in spelling. In modern Gaelic this would be Ail Chluaidh 'the rock of the Clyde'. Ail is a now-extinct Gaelic word meaning a 'rock' or 'cliff'; it appears in several other place-names, such as Alloway and Alloa, both likely relating to the same feature: Ail-mhagh 'rock plain'. It also appears in the Gaelic word mac-talla or mac-alla 'echo', literally 'the son of the cliff'.

In modern Gaelic the name is not so well known, although in Perthshire a proverb was recorded: cho bodhar ri Creig Chluaidh 'as deaf as Dumbarton Rock', a variant on the better-known version: cho bodhar ri cloich 'as deaf as a stone'.

Iona ~ Eilean Ì

Published: 9 July 2016

Our earliest recorded mention of Iona comes from the Latin Vita Columbae, a book about the Life of St Columba, written round 700 AD. In that book it is referred to as Ioua Insula (Insula being Latin for 'island'). At some point however the u of Ioua was confused with n to make 'Iona'. This was not likely a scribal error, however, since the Hebrew word for 'dove' is yonah (also spelt ionah). The Gaelic man's name Colum, now Calum, is a loan-word from Latin columba meaning 'dove'. Columba's name in Gaelic was Calum Cille 'the dove of the church'. It is likely therefore that the correct spelling Ioua was changed knowingly to Iona in order to strengthen links between St Columba and Iona.

Pottie on Mull is in Gaelic Poit Ì, 'the pot of Iona', probably denoting a place from where Iona is visible.

Altimarlach ~ Allt nam Mèirleach

Published: 16 July 2016

Altimarlach Farm is a place in Caithness situated by a small watercourse now called in English the Burn of Altimarlach. Under the name Old Namerluch, the banks of this burn were the site of a battle occurring this week in 1680 between the Clan Campbell of Glenorchy and the Sinclairs of Caithness, and where the former were victorious. It is considered to be the last feudal battle in Scotland.

Although Gaelic tradition about this event has not survived in Caithness, the battle was remembered in Highland Perthshire and the correct Gaelic form of the place has been preserved: Allt nam Mèirleach 'the burn of the thieves'. The name possibly relates to the plunder taken away from Caithness by Clan Campbell, which gave rise to the phrase Òr Ghallaibh air bòrd Bhealaich 'Caithness gold on the Taymouth table'. In likelihood, though, the name was in existence before the battle took place.

Falkirk ~ An Eaglais Bhreac

Published: 20 July 2016

This name is of British origin, recorded as egglesbreth in c. 1120. It likely originally meant 'the speckled church'. In the Gaelic era, the name was translated as An Eaglais Bhreac, of the same meaning and using cognate elements. Gaelic eaglais, and its British equivalent, are loan words from Latin ecclesia 'church', whilst breac means 'speckled'.

The Gaelic form of this name is well remembered for two reasons: William Wallace's famous battle took place here this week in 1298; moreover a fair was held here until relatively recent times, when Highlanders would drove [R1.1]their cattle here to sell.

The modern name Falkirk is an early translation of the Gaelic or British form into Scots 'faw kirk' of the same meaning. The -l- has crept in due to hypercorrection, since in Scots a syllable final -l is sometimes dropped (such as Scots ba' for English ball).

Killiecrankie ~ Coille Chnagaidh or Coille Chreathnaich

Published: 30 July 2016

The Battle of Killiecrankie took place this week in 1689. The name of this place appears to have two distinct forms: Coille Chnagaidh (from which the English form of the name appears to derive) and Coille Chreathnaich. The reason for this difference is not clear, and it is possible that there were two separate places in close proximity which been confused in the English form. The initial element coille means 'a wood', although in general Kill- in place-names denotes cille 'church', from Latin cella '(monk's) cell'. Cnagadh is of uncertain meaning, possibly 'knocking'; creathnach means 'aspen'.

It is perhaps hardly surprising then that in Gaelic the battle itself is generally referred to as Raon Ruairidh 'Rory's field', denoting the location where the battle actually occurred. The name of battles between Highlanders and the English are often quite unrelated in Gaelic and English, due to separate historical traditions.

The Cairnwell ~ An Càrn Bhalg

Published: 6 August 2016

The Cairnwell (Carnavalage, mid 17th Century) is a prominent mountain in the Cairngorms, known in Gaelic as An Càrn Bhalg 'the bag or bag shaped hill'. The English form may have been influenced by a nearby well known in Gaelic as Tobar a' Chùirn 'the well of the cairn or cairn-shaped hill'. Confusingly this spring is known in English as the Cairn Well. Queen Victoria is said to have drunk here.

To add to this confusion, on the other side of the Cairnwell, a burn falls down its slope, known simply in English as the Cairnwell Burn. This is in Gaelic Allt an Tobair, meaning 'the burn of the well'. It is rather too far away to be named from the well Tobar a' Chùirn mentioned above, and it is possible the Allt an Tobair is a back-translation from the English name Cairnwell as if relating to an actual well.

Loch Katrine ~ Loch Ceiterein

Published: 13 August 2016

Loch Katrine (Loch Ketterin in c. 1591) is literally of 'obscure' origin. The name in Gaelic is Loch Ceiterein. Ceiterein is an old Gaelic word, possibly of Pictish origin, denoting 'dusky, gloomy place'. The modern English form of the name using the woman's name was coined by Walter Scott in his influential poem 'Lady of the Lake', first published in 1810. The name of the eponymous heroine however is Ellen, who gives her name in that book to Ellen's Isle, the island in Loch Katrine. The original Gaelic form of the island was An t-Eilean Molach, 'the lush isle'. Eilean in Gaelic means 'island', and seems to have been taken by Walter to somehow be the name of the heroine as 'Ellen'. Scott's poem was so popular that these names first used by Walter Scott were put onto Ordnance Survey maps in preference to their authentic Gaelic names.

Aviemore ~ An Aghaidh Mhòr

Published: 20 August 2016

Today the Gaelic form of the popular holiday destination Aviemore is An Aghaidh Mhòr 'the big face', and this can be seen on the wooden sign at the train station. One hundred years ago, however, the form of the name was Agaidh Mhòr 'big Agaidh'. The meaning of the element agaidh is not known, although it possibly relates to eag 'notch' or 'cleft'. Be that is it may, agaidh also appears nearby in the name Avielochan ~ Agaidh an Lochain 'the agaidh of the little loch'. The element also possibly appears in the names Blargie ~ Blàragaidh and Gallovie ~ Gealagaidh.

When Gaelic was in decline in the area, some said Aviemore was in Gaelic A' Ghaoth Mhòr 'the big wind'. This form is of course fanciful, as it neither makes sense as a name, nor does it match the stress pattern of the English form.

Benderloch ~ Meadarloch

Published: 27 August 2016

This name was at some point in the past Beinn Eadar Dà Loch 'the mountain between two lochs' (it was written as Beandir Loch in c.1640), relating to the mountainous region in Argyll between Loch Creran to the north and Ardmucknish Bay and Loch Etive to the South. The English form of the name is simply a shortened version of this old Gaelic form, but the modern Gaelic form is Meadarloch.

The exact reason for this change is not clear, but the initial B- in the name may have become nasalised by influence with the word an 'in', earlier Gaelic in. Thus Early Gaelic i mBeinn Eter Dhá Loch 'in Benderloch', where -mb-

was pronounced simply as -m-. The -nn- in the word beinn may have become lost by dissimilation between the new initial nasal -m- and the -nn. That is, there were too many nasal sounds in the word.

Peterhead ~ Ceann Phàdraig

Published: 3 September 2016

The settlement now known as Peterhead was earlier known as 'Inverugie of Peter' (written in a latinised form as Inuerugy Petri in 1274). Inverugie or Gaelic Inbhir Ùigidh means 'the inlet of the river Ugie'. In Braemar Gaelic until the early twentieth century Peterhead was still known as Inbhir Ùigidh. Through a separate linguistic tradition it came in Scots to be called Peterheid (later Peterhead) 'the headland of Peter'. The identity of Peter is, alas, unknown.

The renowned Gaelic poet Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir, or Duncan Ban MacIntyre, served in a regiment that was posted for a time in Peterhead and mentions the settlement in his poetry as Ceann Phàdraig. This was a name almost certainly of his own creation and taken from the Scots name Peterhead. Ceann means 'head' in Gaelic, but is not used in the sense of 'headland' as it is here.

Weem ~ Uaimh / Baile a' Chlachain

Published: 10 September 2016

The name of the Parish of Weem (Doilweme in the fourteenth century 'Dull of Weem') is now in Gaelic Uaimh, simply meaning 'cave'. The settlement of Weem itself was known in Scots as Kirktown of Weem and in Gaelic as Baile a' Chlachain 'the town of the graveyard'.

Overlooking Weem is Weem Rock or Creag Uaimhe. There is a local tradition of a cave in which the devil - in the form of a red-cloaked man - dwelt. The cave itself was known as Toll nan Trì Nigheanan 'the cave of the three girls', relating to a story in which three girls entered the cave, two of whom were never seen again. The cave was said to be connected to another cave several miles to the north-east. Elsewhere on Weem Rock is Creag an t-Seipeil 'the rock of the chapel' an overhanging rock where Saint Cuthbert was said to have lived.

Partick ~ Partaig/Pearraig

Published: 17 September 2016

The name of this well-known suburb, Partick (perteyk in 1136), is of British, that is pre-Gaelic, origin. It likely meant 'little copse', coming from the same

root as Perth (in Gaelic Peairt) deriving from British pert 'copse', with a diminutive suffix. In antiquity Gaelic lost the sound [p] so when it occurs in the language, it is nearly always as part of a loan word from another language.

Although the modern Gaelic for Partick is Partaig, as seen on the bilingual sign at the railway station and used locally, this is a modern form derived from the English name. In the nineteenth century, Gaels who lived in Glasgow referred it as Pearthaig or Pearraig. Indeed, this Gaelic form was so well-known it gave rise to a saying: when a young boy was restless it was said of him, cho lùthmhor ri Muileann Phearraig 'as agile as Partick Mill'.

Croftangry ~ Croit an Rìgh

Published: 24 September 2016

In Edinburgh, there is a small area adjacent to Holyrood Palace referred to on street signs as Croft-an-Righ. On the face of it, this would seem to simply be a slightly anglicised version of Gaelic Croit an Rìgh 'the King's croft'. This would seem appropriate given the royal location, indeed, it is referred to as such in a nineteenth-century Gaelic book.

The name as it appears now however is misleading; in 1781 it is on record as Croft Angry. Several other places with such a name exist in Scotland, including two in Fife. These are Scots names containing croft with an element angry; this is of uncertain meaning as it seems only to have survived in place-names; it is related to German anger '(small) meadow'. Possibly it means a 'fenced grazing in the croft or arable infield' or perhaps more simply 'grassland'.

Largs ~ An Leargaidh Ghallta

Published: 1 October 2016

On this day tomorrow in 1263 the Battle of Largs ~ Blàr na Leargaidh took place in North Ayrshire between the forces of Norway and Scotland. Due to its proximity to the Inner Hebrides, the Gaelic name for Largs (Larghes in 1165) has been preserved as An Leargaidh Ghallta. The Gaelic element leargaidh (which appears in the anglicised form) means a 'sloping place'. The second term gallta can mean 'foreign' or 'strange' but here has the sense of the '(Scottish) Lowlands' thus meaning 'the Lowland Largs'. This element was most likely used to differentiate it from Largie in Kintyre which in Gaelic uses the same element but was referred to as An Leargaidh Chinntireach meaning 'the Kintyre Largie'.

The -s ending in the English form of the name is no doubt a Scots plural ending, perhaps because the settlement was divided into two at some point.

River Forth ~ Abhainn Foirthe

Published: 8 October 2016

This river has had a number of names over the years. It was recorded in antiquity as Bodotria or Boderia, of unknown meaning. A twelfth-century text gives it another three names, Froch, Werid and Scottewattre. Froch (for Froth) is Gaelic, which is reflected in the modern English form first appearing as Forthin in the tenth century; Werid is the British form of the same name. These forms likely derive from a British name meaning 'slow-running one'. Scottewattre means 'water of the Scots' separating Scotia proper to the north from Lothian to the south.

A Norse thirteenth-century text refers to the Firth of Forth as Myrkvafjörðr 'foggy firth'. In modern times the Forth is known variously in Gaelic as Abhainn Foirthe or Abhainn For, though these are possibly derived from the modern English form. Its upper stretches in Stirlingshire are known however as An Abhainn Dubh 'the black river', running through An Gleann Dubh 'the black glen'.

Dingwall ~ Inbhir Pheofharain

Published: 15 October 2016

In certain cases, the Gaelic and English names for a particular place are completely different. In the case of Dingwall, there were originally two separate places which have merged into one with population expansion. Dingwall is a name of Norse origin: Þingvellir meaning 'assembly field'. The location of this place is thought to be what is now Cromartie Memorial car park. This Norse term is also the origin of the name of Tynwald, the parliament of the Isle of Man.

The Gaelic form is Inbhir Pheofharain (Inverferan in 1256) which means 'the confluence of the River Peffery'. The river-name Peffer or Peffery occurs a number of times in Scotland and is of British origin, meaning 'bright' or 'shining'. The upper reaches of the River Peffery which flow through Strathpeffer was known to the last generation of Gaelic speakers as Peofharag 'the little Peffery'.

Ballachulish ~ Baile a' Chaolais

Published: 22 October 2016

The original settlement in Lochaber known simply as Ballachulish or Baile a' Chaolais (Balecheules in c. 1591) is what is now marked on maps as South Ballachulish. The name means 'the farm of the strait' pertaining to the narrows across Loch Leven where a ferry was. The strait in question was

known as Caolas Mhic Phàdraig ‘the son of Patrick’s strait’. It sits at the foot of Gleann a’ Chaolais ‘the glen of the strait’.

In more recent times the settlement of North Ballachulish has been established on the other side of the strait, with Ballachulish proper being now known as South Ballachulish. To the east of South Balluchulish was an area called Slate in English and An Sglèata (also found written as An Sgliata) in Gaelic, literally ‘the slate’, referring to the famous slate quarries that are at this location. Confusingly, this is referred to on maps as Ballachulish.

Strontian ~ Sròn an t-Sìthein

Published: 29 October 2016

The place-name Strontian (Stroninshen in 1685) is famous for having a lead mine in which the element strontium was first identified in 1790 by two scientists, Adair Crawford and William Cruikshank. The element strontium was of course coined from the place-name Strontian. Sròn an t-Sìthein means ‘the nose-shaped hill of the fairy mound’. Sròn is literally ‘nose’ in Gaelic but has also come to mean a ‘nose-shaped hill’ or ‘headland’ when used in place-names. Sìthean is related to the word sìth a ‘mound or hill in which fairies were thought to live’ and which is found in Gaelic na daoine-sìthe ‘the fairies’, bean-sìthe ‘female fairy’ (so English banshee) and sìthiche ‘fairy’.

Through the discovery of strontium at this site, this name has been borrowed into all the languages of the world in which the periodic table is used. In Japanese, for example, strontium is sutoronchiumu.

Paisley ~ Pàislig

Published: 5 November 2016

It is not clear if the name Paisley (Passalek in 1296) is British (i.e. P-Celtic) or Gaelic in origin, but, in either scenario, it is a loan-word from Latin basilica, itself from Greek basilikón. In these languages, this word generally denoted a ‘public hall for secular use’, but with the christianisation of those cultures, these buildings were reused as churches at an early date, and, in the Latin of early Christian Britain and Ireland, basilica was used of any impressive church building. It is this sense which has been loaned into British and Gaelic (baislec ‘church’ in Old Irish). That said, despite the existence of the abbey, there is no other evidence for an early church in the area; moreover, apart from one other example in Wales, the word is not known in place-names in the United Kingdom. The Gaelic form Pàislig has been preserved due to long-standing contact between Glasgow and the Highlands.

Tay ~ Tatha

Published: 12 November 2016

The word 'ancient' is often used inappropriately in relation to the Gaelic language, but the name of the River Tay is undeniably ancient; the earliest source for the name is contained in Ptolemy's Geography, compiled some time between 140 and 150 AD, where it is recorded as Taoua. Several derivations for this name have been offered, but none have been universally accepted.

In modern Gaelic, it is called Uisge Tatha or Abhainn Tatha 'the water of Tay' or 'the river of Tay'. Likewise, Loch Tay is Loch Tatha whilst someone living in Strathtay is known as a Tathach a 'Tay man'. There is a Gaelic saying: Tatha mhòr nan tonn, bheir i sgrìob lom air Peairt 'Great Tay of the waves, she will sweep Perth bare.' In this saying, Tatha is in the feminine gender, just as it was in Ptolemy's form.

John o' Groats ~ Taigh Iain Ghròta

Published: 19 November 2016

Although much tradition has built up concerning the origin of this name, it is a fact that a charter exists dated 1496 mentioning a John Grot in relation to the lands of Duncansby where this place is situated. Although this John Grot is often considered to be Dutch, it is more likely that he was a native Scot.

John o' Groats is of course known as the northernmost place of mainland Britain and is often referred to in sayings such as 'between Land's End and John o' Groats' to describe the length of Britain. It is also used in Gaelic in a similar way. For example, a poem from around 1801 mentions eadar a' chrìoch Shasannach gu ruige Taigh Iain Ghròta 'between the English border as far as John o' Groats'. Another poem has eadar Taigh Iain Ghròt agus baile Lunnainn 'between John o' Groats and London town'.

Kirkcudbright ~ Cille Chuithbeirt

Published: 26 November 2016

Kirkcudbright (Kyrkecuthbert 1200-06) is a name of Gaelic origin, although the first part Kirk- appears to be borrowing into Gaelic from either Scots kirk or Norse kirkja both meaning 'church'. The second part, written confusingly as -cudbright, reflects (Saint) Cuthbert, a Northumbrian saint. The form Kirk- is thought to be Gaelic because of the word order; in Gaelic the generic element normally comes first. If this name were Scots in origin it might be something like *Cuthbertskirk. (In fact this name is first on record as Cuthbrictis Khirche in 1164.)

A poem in Manx Gaelic from the sixteenth century refers to this places as Keel Choobragh; this is Manx spelling for Cille Chubragh. In this form of the name, the obscure Gaelic term represented as Kirk- has been replaced by the more common cill(e) 'church' seen often in Scottish names, for instance in Kilmartin or Cille Mhàrtainn.

Gleneagles ~ Gleann Eagais

Published: 3 December 2016

The name Gleneagles (Glennegas in 1482) has been subject to several interpretations - in both Gaelic and Scots - which have influenced the form of the name over time. The first element gleann 'glen' is not in doubt; the second or specific element however may have originally been from eagas 'notch-place' a derivative of eag 'notch'. This was apparently not readily understandable in Gaelic however and it seems to have been interpreted later as èagas 'bard or learned man'.

It is not until the seventeenth century that forms with -l- appear, for example Gleneglis in 1664. The name appears to have been reanalysed yet again as Gleann na h-Eaglais 'the glen of the church', possibly by non-local Gaelic speakers who used this glen for droving cattle. Finally, within a Scots context, the form eaglais was reinterpreted as if it were the English word eagles, leaving us with the modern form.

Troon ~ An Truthail

Published: 10 December 2016

The name Troon (le Trone in 1371 and le Trune in 1464) is likely British (i.e. Pictish) in origin, from a word cognate with Welsh trwyn 'nose, cape', which represents the topography very well. It is possible that the earliest Gaelic form of this name was An t-Sròn 'the nose' (where the s is silent); 'nose' is used here in the sense of 'headland'. Since the words sròn and trwyn are cognate, it could have been easily adapted from one language to the other.

The modern form An Truthail derives from Arran Gaelic which was used within living memory, and only a few miles from Troon. This is probably based on a form An t-Sruthail 'the current', which may be a folk etymology from an earlier version of the name. Alternatively, it may have denoted the sea current between Arran and Troon, rather than the headland itself.

Fort William ~ An Gearasdan

Published: 17 December 2016

This is a relatively modern place-name, coined in English after Prince William, a man unpopular in the Gaelic world for his part in putting down the Jacobite rebellion of 1745. In modern Gaelic, the name is An Gearasdan 'the garrison', also a reminder of the time when a military presence was here in the wake of the Battle of Culloden. The spelling should in modern Gaelic be An Gearastan; the version with -d- reflects the old spelling, but this was so popular locally even new road signs contain the old version.

Various attempts have been made to rename the town; in the pages of this newspaper in 1935 is an article about an organisation known as the 'Fort William Celtic Vigilance Society' applying to have the name changed to Abernevis, as if it were a name of Pictish origin meaning 'the confluence of the Nevis'. Also considered were Invernevis, Balnevis, Inverlochy, Balalba and Nevis!

Applecross ~ A' Chomraich

Published: 24 December 2016

This name, whilst seemingly of English origin, is a reinterpretation of an earlier Aporcrossan. This is a Pictish name, meaning 'confluence of the Crosan river'. Applecross River is in Gaelic Abhainn Crosan. The Gaelic form of the name today is A' Chomraich 'the sanctuary' after the church land of Maol Rubha who founded a church here.

There are other names with the element Aber- in Scotland, e.g. Aberdeen, most of which are in the South-East. It is possible that there were once many more Aber- names in the West, this one remained perhaps precisely because of its remoteness: it was for many years more easily approached by sea than by land. The fact it was considered more as an island than mainland is reinforced by the fact that Gaelic speakers refer to being in Applecross as air a' Chomraich 'on Applecross' a preposition often used for islands.

Conon Bridge ~ Drochaid Sguideil

Published: 31 December 2016

Conon Bridge relates of course to the bridge, built between 1807 and 1809, over the River Conon here. Prior to this there was a ferry called Scuttol or Scuddale ferry. The Gaelic form Drochaid Sguideil 'the bridge of Scuddale', refers to the original name. Sguideal or Scuddale perhaps comes from a Norse name scat-dalr meaning 'tax-dale', possibly relating to tax paid on common grazing. Further up Strathconan is Scatwell or Sgatail Mòr and Little Scatwell

or Sgatail Beag. These names contain the same Norse element pertaining to ‘scat’ or ‘tax’. Another Gaelic form of Conon Bridge was Ceann na Drochaid, a common place-name simply meaning ‘the bridge end’.

The bay here also had a Norse name; a Latin charter dated 1587 refers to the River Conon as aqua de Stavack, meaning ‘the water of Stavack’, which most likely derives from Norse staf-vík ‘staff-bay’.

Dunfermline ~ Dùn Phàrlain

Published: 7 January 2017

The name of this town (Dunfermelin in 1128) is of obscure origin. Whilst the first element is clearly Gaelic dùn ‘fort’, the meaning of the rest of the name is a matter of debate, as is the exact location of the fort. As with several places in Fife, the Gaelic form was known by Gaelic speakers outside the area long after Gaelic was no longer productive in Fife. The name is recorded in Gaelic in 1699 as Dynfarmlyn written in Welsh orthography.

The modern Gaelic form Dùn Phàrlain appears to date from the nineteenth century and is a reinterpretation of the name as if it meant ‘Pàrlan’s fort’. Pàrlan is a Gaelic personal name from Old Gaelic Partholon; it is often anglicised as Bartholomew, although the two names are unrelated. The personal name also appears in the surname MacFarlane from Gaelic MacPhàrlain ‘the son of Pàrlan’.

Island I Vow ~ Eilean a’ Bhùtha

Published: 14 January 2017

Island I Vow (Elanvow in the fourteenth century) is situated at the northern end of Loch Lomond. A survey of Loch Lomond in 1701 refers to it as Ilan a Bou or the Booth Isle. This would suggest the Gaelic form as Eilean a’ Bhùtha ‘the island of the shop or booth’.

There are however a number of submerged rocks very close to this island well-known for being dangerous to sailors on the loch. It is therefore possible the original form of the island was Eilean a’ Bhogha ‘the island of the submerged rock’.

The odd modern form of the name is based on folk-etymology: a fanciful story claims that the name is derived from the Chief of Clan MacFarlane building a castle here and making a solemn ‘vow’ that he would allow no more clansmen hostile to him to pass down the loch.

Arbroath ~ Obar Bhrothaig

Published: 21 January 2017

Made famous by the Declaration of Arbroath in 1320, the older form of this name was the longer Aberbrothock (Aberbrudoc in c. 1194), shortened in recent times to its current form. The name is Pictish in origin, meaning 'the confluence of the river Brothock'. The watercourse name itself likely meant 'boiling or eruptive one'.

The name in modern Gaelic is established as Obair Bhrothaig; this form however is in evidence only from twentieth century academic writing. Earlier and alternative forms suggest Àird Bhrothainn or Àird Bhroth 'the height of Brothainn' or 'Broth' as a Gaelic form. This second element possibly still relates to the water course. It is possible there were originally two separate places, one with the name beginning with Obair and another with Àird, which merged into the single modern settlement over time; alternatively, the forms with Àird came by analogy from the modern English form.

Balloch ~ Am Bealach / Baile an Loch

Published: 28 January 2017

There are two places in Scotland called Balloch, one in Dunbartonshire and one near Culloden in Inverness-shire. The first one is in Gaelic Am Bealach 'the pass (through mountains)'. The Inverness-shire name, however, represents Baile an Loch 'the farm of the loch'; in the nineteenth century it was spelt Ballinloch. Recently, it has been suggested this latter name also derives from bealach, denoting the pass through which the soldiers went to the Battle of Culloden, but this is of course fanciful; the name predates that event.

Given the difference in the Gaelic forms of the name, it is perhaps not surprising that the names are pronounced in English, with different stress patterns. The Dunbartonshire name is stressed on the first syllable BAL-loch, just as it is in Gaelic. The Inverness-shire name stresses the second syllable, Bal-LOCH, as expected. This is an excellent example of the adage: 'Place-names are not always what they seem'.

The Lomonds ~ Laomainn/Cuspairean Bhallais

Published: 4 February 2017

The name of these two distinctive hills in Fife - individually East Lomond and West Lomond (Lomondys in 1315) - are possibly in origin from Pictish *lumon 'beacon hill'. Alternatively, the name could derive from Gaelic lom monadh 'bare hill'. Possibly the name was reinterpreted from the Pictish form by Gaelic

speakers. Another scenario is that Pictish cognates of the Gaelic elements were gaelicised as lom monadh. This *lumon form is likely the origin of Ben Lomond in Stirlingshire which is now in Gaelic Beinn Laomainn, after which Loch Lomond, Gaelic Loch Laomainn, is named.

In the Gaelic tradition of Perthshire and Angus, the hills were referred to as Cuspairean Bhallais or Wallace's Goals. The name was so-called because William Wallace was either supposed to be able to jump from one summit to the other, or throw a stone from one to the other.

Dalmarnock ~ Dail Meàrnag

Published: 11 February 2017

Dalmarnock (Dalmornoc in 1186) in Glasgow is from Gaelic Dail Meàrnag 'the haugh land of (Saint) Ernóc'. The form Meàrnag is likely a hypocoristic form (or pet name), mo + Ernóc. Mo or 'my' is a common way of denoting saints. Ernóc is the diminutive form of another saints' name, Ernán, although little is known about him.

There are two other places in Perthshire with the same name, in Little Dunkeld and Kinclaven, but the early forms for the one in Kinclaven (e.g. Dunmernoch in 1236) suggest that the original element was dùn 'fort' rather than dail. The Gaelic form for the Dunkeld name has been recorded as Tom Earnag. The saint also appears in several other names, such as Kilmarnock in Ayrshire which is Cille Meàrnag 'the church of saint Ernóc, and Baldernock (Buthernok in c. 1200) possibly for Both Ernóc 'the hut or church of Ernóc'.

Kilwinning ~ Cill D'Fhinnein

Published: 18 February 2017

Kilwinning (Kilwinin in 1202) in North Ayrshire is a Gaelic name meaning 'the church of Saint Finnan' (Gaelic Finnean). Cill is an old Gaelic word, no longer in use, which derives from Latin cella 'a monk's cell' which also gives us English cell. It appears many times in Scotland in names beginning with Kil-. The name Finnean is a diminutive form, relating to Findbarr of Moyville who died in 579 AD. Within Kilwinning itself is St Winning's Well. The form with -w- shows British or pre-Gaelic influence.

The Gaelic form of the name was recorded on the nearby island of Arran when the language was still spoken there (up until the 1960s). The form literally means 'the church of your Finnan', where the D' represents 'your', a way to denote saints in some Gaelic place-names. When the bilingual ScotRail sign was first constructed, some people took the name to mean "Kill the Fenian!"

Dunkeld ~ Dùn Chailleann

Published: 25 February 2017

Dunkeld or Dùn Chailleann (Dúin Chaillden in 873 in an Irish text) means 'the fort of the Caledonians'. These Caledonians or 'Cailleann' were a people who appear in two other names in the vicinity of Dunkeld. Firstly, the element is seen in the prominent hill Schiehallion or Sìth Chailleann 'the fairy hill of the Caledonians'; the term sìth or 'fairy hill' has given its name to fairies in general, anglicised as shee. Secondly, a short distance south of Dunkeld is a hill called Rohallion or Ràth Chailleann 'the fortress of the Caledonians'.

Although the original meaning of Cailleann is unclear, it is a modern Gaelic survival of a pre-Gaelic tribe name mentioned several times by Classical writers, best-known as Caledonia; the name of the people Dicalydones contains the same element. The Caledonians likely inhabited the area roughly of the same extent as modern Perthshire, where Dunkeld, Schiehallion and Rohallion are.

Balnain ~ Baile an Àthain / Beul an Àthain /Baile an Fhàin

Published: 4 March 2017

Balnain is an instructive lesson in how names can be deceptive. There are at least five places in Scotland with this name - spelt variably as Balnain or Balnaan - and they reflect a number of different Gaelic forms. Three examples of this name in Duthil, Deeside and Feshie Moor (no longer inhabited) are in Gaelic Beul an Àthain 'the mouth or opening of the little ford'. In Glen Urquhart Balnain is Baile an Àthain 'the town of the little ford'. Balnain near Conon Bridge however is Baile an Fhàin 'the town of the slope'. It is perhaps not a coincidence that Millnain is nearby, which may be Muileann an Fhàin 'the mill of the slope'.

Two examples of Ballindean in Fife and Perthshire also reflect Baile an Fhàin, but they come from an older Gaelic form Baile ind Fháin, whence the -d- in the modern form.

Rockall ~ Rocabarra(igh) / Rocal

Published: 11 March 2017

All sea-faring nations have legends of sunken islands which emerge from time to time, and the Gaels were no different. Stories of a rock called Rocabarra or Rocabarraigh were once popular. There was a common saying: Nuair a thig Rocabarraigh ris, is dual gun tèid an saoghal a sgrios 'when Rocabarra(idh)

appears, the world is doomed to destruction'. It was placed just off Skye or deep in the Atlantic eadar Uibhist is Barraigh agus Tìr nan Òg 'between Uist and Barra and the Island of the Young'. It was also known as Iola nam Muca-mara 'the fishing bank of the whales'.

This legendary place is conflated with an actual solitary rock west of St Kilda called Rockall in English and Rocal in Gaelic. A late piece of folklore say that Rockall is from Rock Hall, coined from a Captain Hall who first put the rock on the navigation charts.

Shettleston ~ Baile Nighean Sheadna

Published: 25 March 2017

This district of Glasgow is on record in 1170 as villa filie Sadin and in 1173 as villa inineschadin. These both mean 'the town of the daughter of Seadan' and likely reflects an original Gaelic *Baile Nighean (or Inghean) Sheadna. Villa is Latin for 'town or farm' and is probably a translation of Gaelic baile, of the same meaning. Filie or filia is Latin for daughter and the second form with inine represents Gaelic inghean, an old form of modern nighean 'daughter'.

By 1186 the name was already on record as Schedinstun; this still contains the -n- appearing at the end of Seadan which later changed to the -l- we have in the name today. This modern form contains a translation of Gaelic baile (or Latin villa) into Scots toun 'town', showing Scots word order. Place-names from the medieval era referring to females are quite rare.

Runnycook ~ Ruith na Cuthaige

Published: 1 April 2017

This place-name is oft-mentioned in Gaelic literature and poetry because of the famous battle that took place here on this day in 1417 between the Picts and the Jacobites. It is in Gaelic Ruith na Cuthaige 'the flow of the cuckoo', coined from the nearby stream where the famous battle was said to have occurred. The event itself is called Là Ruith na Cuthaige 'the day of Runnycook'. A well-known proverb concerning this terrible battle is in usage to this day: Tha an t-Albannach ri fealla-dhà air Là Ruith na Cuthaige 'the Scot (i.e. the Jacobite) is jesting on the day of the battle of Runnycook'. This is said of someone who does not recognise a joke when one is presented.

The original bilingual sign at the visitor centre here read 'An Còcaire Ruitheach' literally meaning 'the runny cook', but this is of course nonsense.

*Note the date this was published.

Ben Alder ~ Beinn Eallair

Published: 8 April 2017

Ben Alder (Bin-Aillayr in c.1591) sounds as though it might mean 'the mountain of the alder trees' but of course alder is an English word and as such would not appear in a Gaelic name. The Gaelic form of the name is Beinn Eallair, where the initial E is pronounced as a y. This makes the second element sound as though it were aller, the Scots word for alder. In the mid-nineteenth century, the supposedly Scots word aller was then 'corrected' into English alder.

In fact Beinn Eallair takes its name from the name of the burn which flows down it; this was earlier Alldobhar 'rock water', now Alder Burn. All or ail is an obsolete Gaelic word for 'rock' (as seen in one of the Gaelic names for Dumbarton Rock: Ail Chluaidh). Dobhar is an obsolete Gaelic term for 'water' (and related to the Gaelic word for 'otter', dòbhran).

Dundee ~ Dùn Dè / Dùn Deagh

Published: 15 April 2017

This name originally denoted 'the fort of the Tay', although the second element has changed a great deal over time – the modern Gaelic form for the river is Tatha. The 'fort' in question is likely to be the hill known as Dundee Law. Various Latin forms of the name exist, such as Taodunum, but it is not clear whether or not they reflect bona fide early forms.

In recent times this city is often referred to as Dùn Dè in Gaelic, as though it meant 'the fort of God', although of course this is fanciful; traditionally the form Dùn Deagh was more popular and is still used by many today. There was once another Gaelic name for the city – used in Angus – either Athaileag or Aileag. Although the etymology of this name form is obscure, it is clearly reflected in the latinised form Alectum, used by Boece in his sixteenth-century work on the history of Scotland.

Caithness ~ Gallaibh

Published: 22 April 2017

The English form Caithness is a name of Norse origin, on record in around 1200 AD in the Orkneyinga Saga as Katanes, meaning 'the headland of the cats'. Confusingly, cats also appear in the Gaelic name for Sutherland: Cataibh 'among the cats'. The cats referred to are probably the totemic name of the pre-Gaelic and pre-Norse Pictish people here, although the Norse name for the Pentland Firth – Pettlandsfjǫrðr 'the firth of Pictland' – strongly suggests that Picts were also once present in the area.

Gallaibh means ‘among the strangers’. Gall ‘stranger’ in this case denotes non-Gaelic speakers. The ending -aibh (also seen in Cataibh) represents an old dative plural meaning ‘among’. This name did not originally denote the borders of modern Caithness, however; the term was originally used to denote any area where non-Gaelic speakers were settled, including those along the east coast of Scotland.

Dunabban ~ Dail an Àbain

Published: 29 April 2017

Dunabban Road and Abban Street in Inverness both contain a fascinating but rare Gaelic element. Dunabban Road is situated at a place once called in Gaelic Dail an Àbain ‘the haugh of the backwater’; àban ‘backwater’ denotes a silted-up area in a loch or river. Abban Street is coined directly from the backwater itself and was once An t-Àban. This street was written as Abbey Street on the first Ordnance Survey maps, but this error was later corrected.

In Petty Bay to the east there is a stone called Clach (Dhubh) an Àbain ‘the (black) stone of the backwater’ which has over time been moved by the tide further out to sea. To the south of Inverness is Abban Water, which is a silted-up section of water at the foot of Loch Ness; likewise, this is in Gaelic An t-Àban. These are the only known occurrences of this element in place-names.

Tullybelton ~ Tulaich Bhealltainn

Published: 6 May 2017

This Perthshire place-name (Tulibeltane in 1369) is in Gaelic, Tulaich Bhealltainn ‘the hill of Beltane’. Although nowadays largely associated with Calton Hill in Edinburgh, Beltane is the Gaelic name of the May Day festival which was observed throughout Europe. Place-names containing the element Bealltainn occur several times in Ireland, including a Tullybaltiny in County Tyrone, which contains the same elements as our Scottish Tullybelton.

Elsewhere in Scotland, in Nithsdale`, just west of Dumfries, is a place called Beltonhill which most likely also means ‘the hill of Beltane’. On the Black Isle is Bellton Wood which possibly contains the element Bealltainn, though the name may be English.

Near Tullybelton itself there was once a holy well and a set of standing stones; there is a record of a tradition that every year on May Day people would take a drink from the well and walk round the standing stones nine times.

Anstruther ~ Eanstair

Published: 13 May 2017

The etymology of this Fife place-name (Ainestroder in 1178-1188) is not certain. The first element may be an obsolete Gaelic word án 'driving' or aon 'one'. The second element -struther likely denotes an obsolete word sruthair 'stream', related to the current word sruth 'stream. The water-course in question is possibly the Dreel Burn which flows through Anstruther. Locally it is pronounced 'Ainster'.

A type of lobster-fishing boat called 'the Anstruther' was popular in the Hebrides and was called in Gaelic An Eanstrach 'the one from Anstruther'. On the coast of Coigach in Ross-shire is a place called Port na h-Eanstraich 'the port of the Anstruther boat'. The sail was so big it was often used as a point of comparison: Cha robh uinneag ann nach robh cho mòr 's cho leathann ri seòl-toisich Eanstraich 'there wasn't a single window that wasn't as big or as wide as an Anstruther foresail'.

The Stormont ~ An Stòrmonn

Published: 20 May 2017

Although this name is little used today, the Stormont (Starmonde in 1376) is the name of a traditional region in Perthshire between the Rivers Tay, Isla and Ericht. The name comprises a compound of stòir 'stepping-stones over a bog or river' and mon(adh) 'moor', thus 'stepping-stones moor'. The original moor denoted is now unknown. It is possible that the modern Gaelic form was adopted from the English form, however, the original Gaelic form having become obsolete.

Around 1830, the name Stormont was transferred to an estate in Dundonald in Northern Ireland which was originally called Mount Pleasant. In 1859, this was demolished and Stormont Castle was built in its place. In 1924, Parliament Buildings, now the seat of the Northern Ireland Assembly, were built nearby. Due to its proximity to the castle, Stormont became an informal name for both buildings and institution, and it is of course now far better known in this context.

Ardnamurchan ~ Àird nam Murchan

Published: 27 May 2017

This, the most westerly point of mainland Britain, is in Gaelic, Àird nam Murchan 'the promontory of the seals'. Although it now denotes the whole peninsula, it originally denoted only the westernmost point where the

lighthouse is now. The word murchan is from muir 'sea' and cù 'dog' i.e. 'sea-dog'. This is an epithet for either a seal or an otter.

This name is however mentioned three times in the Vita Columbae 'the Life of St Columba', a book written round 700 AD, but pertaining to events in the sixth century. There the promontory is referred to as Artda Muirchol (with variants). At this time, the name appears to have had a different final element, written here -chol. The meaning of this element is not clear, but might be col 'sin, wickedness', perhaps referring to acts of piracy or wrecking. Thus, the name may have originally meant 'the promontory of the (ship)wrecking'.

Balquhidder ~ Both Chuidir/Both Phuidir

Published: 3 June 2017

Balquhidder (Bouquidder in 1540) has two Gaelic forms: Both Chuidir and Both Phuidir. The first element is both 'bothy'. The modern English form looks as if it may be from Gaelic baile 'farm' but the name was never spelt or pronounced with an l until recent times, being pronounced Bo- locally. The second element likely denotes the name of the area, but its meaning is obscure. The variation can be accounted for by the fact that in some dialects p and c are interchangeable. A Balquhidder man was known as a Puidreach.

A short distance to the east of Balquhidder is a place called Broomfield or in Gaelic Tom na Croiche 'the hill of the gallows'. There is a stone here known in English as the Puidrac Stone, or in Gaelic Puidreag. It is unclear if this stone is also named after the area, or if Balquhidder was named after the stone.

Inverness ~ Inbhir Nis

Published: 10 June 2017

Inverness (Inuernis in 1187) is of course established in Gaelic as Inbhir Nis 'the confluence of the river Ness' but its fame in the Gaelic-speaking world has meant that the pronunciation of the name has been subject to several dialectal peculiarities. In Lewis and Sutherland it was pronounced Eara Nis; on Skye and in parts of Perthshire it was pronounced Eanar Nis, whilst on Uist and Harris it is Eilear Nis; in parts of Easter Ross, round Inverness itself and elsewhere it was Eornais.

Inverness in Nova Scotia – which until recently had a thriving Gaelic speaking population – was transferred as a name from the Scottish Inverness, but was always called simply 'Inverness' in both Gaelic and English.

Inverness is sometimes affectionately referred to as Inversnecky, this is from the name of a dance hall-era song by Harry Gordon; how it came to be attached to Inverness is not known.

Holborn Head ~ Ceann Hopran

Published: 17 June 2017

Holborn Head near Thurso (Hoborne Head in 1573) is a Norse name in origin, from hábrún 'high brow' possibly relating to the prominence now called Holborn Hill. Locally, it is referred to as Hobrun in Scots or English and as Ceann Hopran in Gaelic. The current written form is quite modern and undoubtedly influenced by the name of the borough in London.

One Gaelic poem refers to Holborn Head as An Ceann Beag 'the small head' in relation to nearby Dunnet Head which is much larger: Chì mi Ceann Dhunnad gu mòr ann, Ceann Thoithidh is an Ceann Beag ann 'I see mostly Dunnet Head there, Hoy Head and Holborn Head (literally 'the small head') there'. As with Peterhead or Ceann Phàdraig. It is quite rare for ceann 'head' to denote a promontory like this, and it is likely these Gaelic names have derived from the English forms.

Balmoral ~ Both Mhorail

Published: 24 June 2017

Balmoral (Bouchmorale in 1451) was originally in Gaelic Both Mhorail 'the hut or church of Moral' although the latest generation of Gaelic speakers called it Baile Mhorail. As with Balquhidder or Both Chuidir, both and baile 'town, farm' have become muddled. To add to the confusion, Easter Balmoral is Baile a' Mhorair Shìos 'upper town of the lord', whilst the land above Balmoral is known as Bràigh Mhorail 'the upland of Moral'.

The element moral is from Pictish, relating to Gaelic mòr 'big' and meaning a 'great, clear space', possibly denoting a large clearing in a forest. It also appears in other names such as Polmorral or Poll Mhorail 'the pool of Moral' on the River Dee near Banchory. Drummoral near Whithorn is possibly Druim Morail 'the ridge of Moral'. There is also a Cnoc Morail in Caithness 'the hill of Morail' whilst Morilemore near Tomatin is Morail Mòr 'great Moral'.

Flanders Moss ~ A' Mhòine Fhlanrasach

Published: 1 July 2017

Although the meaning of the English and Gaelic form is the same, it is not clear which was the original. Likewise, the reason for the name is unclear; it is possible the low-lying area was named after the topographically similar area in Flanders itself, or perhaps men from Flanders were employed to clear the moss here. Alternatively, the word could be a borrowing from the Flemish word vlaanderen 'low-lying or flooded land'. There is however no historical record of Flemish settlement here, as there is in other parts of Scotland.

A Gaelic story on the origin of Flanders Moss relates that a magician called Michael Scott attended Sgoil-dubh Shàtain or Satan's Black School. By magic he made a 'brazen man' whom he compelled to carry Flanders Moss from the European mainland on bearers or poles. The bearers broke north of Stirling where Flanders Moss still lies.

Brig o' Turk ~ Drochaid (an) Tuirce / Ceann Drochaid

Published: 8 July 2017

This place in Stirlingshire has had a variety of names. It is on record in 1451 as Estirbrigend and Westirbrigend (i.e. Easter Bridgend and Wester Bridgend). It was later recorded as Kenndrochart c. 1636-52; this represents Gaelic Ceann Drochaid which also means 'bridge end'. It was known both as Ceann Drochaid and Bridgend up to the early twentieth century.

The place is also referred to in Gaelic as Drochaid Tuirc 'boar bridge' or Drochaid an Tuirce 'the bridge of the boar'. Tuirc is from torc 'boar', and relates to the watercourse here called Abhainn Tuirc 'boar river'. There is a narrow gorge, and the river may have been coined after a boar as the perceived 'burrowing' nature of the river as it flows through the gorge. Alternatively, it may relate to the traditional Celtic neck ornament also called a torc, which narrows, but does not meet, at the front.

Calton Hill ~ Creag nan Gall

Published: 15 July 2017

Calton Hill in Edinburgh would seem on the face of it to be a Scots name, cauld toun 'cold farm'. It is in fact spelt as Caldtoun in 1773. That it once had a Gaelic name however is not in doubt, as a Latin charter of 1456 refers to it as rupem vulgariter nuncupatam cragingalt 'the rock commonly called Cragingalt'. Although the first element is certainly creag 'crag' the other elements are obscure. It has been proposed that Calton is from calltainn 'hazel' which also appears in Cragingalt if interpreted as Creag a' Chaltainn or as an earlier Creag nan Call.

There are, however, hills in Scotland such as Craigengall in West Lothian and Craiggall in Ayrshire which are all in Gaelic Creag nan Gall 'the crag of the strangers (in this case meaning Scots)'. These may have been stock names for lookout points upon which Scots speakers kept watch.

Gizzen Briggs ~ Drochaid an Fhaoibh

Published: 22 July 2017

The Gizzen Briggs (Droit neuf in c. 1591) is a sandy bank stretching across the Dornoch Firth, a notoriously dangerous area for navigation. Although the name sounds Scots, it seems to derive from Old Norse gisnar bryggjur 'leaky bridge'. The Scots word gizzened can be applied to barrels that have become leaky from drying in the sun.

The Gaelic form of the name is not well understood. The first part is certainly drochaid 'bridge' (pronounced locally as droit). The final element has been ascribed a number of meanings and spellings; most likely, the name was originally aobh (a variant of faobh) meaning a sort of kelpie or mermaid, later reanalysed to as (an t-) agh '(the) heifer'. This is the form used in a poem: Is thèid sinn ruaig do Dhòrnach, is chì sinn Droit an Agh 'and we will go on a hunt to Dornoch, and we will see the Gizzen Briggs'.

St Andrews ~ Cill Rìmhinn

Published: 29 July 2017

Although currently named after the patron saint of Scotland, whose bones it claims to possess, St Andrews (Cinrigh Monai in 747) has an older Gaelic name: the first element is Gaelic ceann 'head', followed by a Pictish place-name *Rymont, later gaelicised as *Rìghmhonadh, thus 'the end or head of the area called *Rymont'. Pictish *Rymont and its Gaelic equivalent both mean 'king's muir'; the muir in question is likely the area between St Andrews and Crail, part of which is still known as Kingsmuir.

By the twelfth century, ceann had been reinterpreted as Gaelic cill 'church', probably due to the ecclesiastical associations, and the modern Gaelic name for St Andrews preserves the original name as Cill Rìmhinn 'the church of Rìmhinn'. Further away from Fife, however, this name has sometimes been lost and forms such as Cill Anndrais are used, translated directly from the present English form.

Loch Lochy ~ Loch Lòchaidh

Published: 5 August 2017

This loch is mentioned around the eighth century as stagnum Loogdae and Stagnum Lochdae. Stagnum is a Latin word which is probably a translation of 'loch'. The second source mentioned explains the name as qui Latine dici potest Nigra Dea 'which in Latin can be called the Black Goddess'. Whilst the 'goddess' part is likely folk-etymology, lòch was an early Gaelic word meaning a particular shade of 'black', possibly 'reflective black', fitting with the modern

Gaelic form Loch Lòchaidh. The suffix added to lòch is common in river-names, and it is likely that the River Lochy or Abhainn Lòchaidh (which is fed by Loch Lochy) was the original name.

This river-name occurs several times in Scotland, generally anglicised as Lochy or Lochty. The element lòch also appears in other names such as Lochiel, probably Lòchail 'black place', or Inverlochlarig ~ Inbhir Lòch Làirig 'the confluence of the black pass'.

London ~ Lunnainn

Published: 12 August 2017

Whilst London is known in standard Gaelic as Lunnainn, it was pronounced as Lumainn in the Perthshire and Sutherland dialects, and may have been pronounced as this elsewhere. In Gaelic poetry, the city is sometimes referred to as Lunnainn nan Cleòc 'London of the cloaks', presumably in relation to the distinct traditional attire in nineteenth century London compared to that of the Highlands. The Tower of London is mentioned in Gaelic literature as Tùr Lunnainn or An Tùr Lunnainneach.

A clever example of wordplay appears in a Gaelic form for Billingsgate - a district of London - as recorded in Sutherland. Billingsgate (which of course is an English name) is famous for its fish market and as such it was known to Sutherland fishermen who referred to it as Baile nan Sgat 'the town of the skate-fish'. This sounds similar to the name Billingsgate but is also an apt description.

River Dee ~ Uisge Dè

Published: 19 August 2017

This name is first on record as Deoua as far back as AD 150, by the twentieth century it was known in Gaelic as Dè, as seen in the phrase: Tha Dè mòr an-diugh 'the Dee is full today'.

The upper part of the Dee around Braemar is called Bràigh Dhè, 'the upland of the Dee' whilst the lower part flowing through Aberdeen is Inbhir Dhè 'the confluence of the Dee', also seen in the name of Inverdee House. The Linn of Dee however is Eas Dè, 'the waterfall of Dee'.

There was a riddle about the Dee: A' chraobh a leag mi an-diugh, thuit i an-dè 'the tree I felled today, fell yesterday'. This was a pun on the word an-dè 'yesterday' which would mean 'in the Dee' if spelt an Dè. Thus, the sentence could also mean 'the tree I felled today fell into the Dee'.

Queensferry ~ Port na Banrighinn

Published: 26 August 2017

Queensferry Crossing, which opens this week, is named after (South) Queensferry. The name relates to the ferry established by Queen Margaret here between Lothian and Fife. Because it was an important route, the Gaels used the Gaelic form Port na Banrighinn, with the same meaning. The name is also recorded in a poem as Aiseag Banrigh Chaluim 'the ferry of Malcolm's Queen', relating to Margaret's husband, King Malcolm. In the seventeenth century North Queensferry is on record as Caschilis, which is likely Gaelic (An) Cas-Chaolas 'the rapid strait'.

The name is also recorded in a Gaelic proverb: Chan eil port an-asgaidh ann, tha Port na Banrighinn fhèin tastan 'there is no such thing as a free tune, Queensferry itself costs a shilling.' This is a pun on the Gaelic word port, which can mean both a 'tune' and 'ferry', the latter extended from the original meaning 'landing-place'.

Munlochy ~ Poll Lòchaidh

Published: 2 September 2017

The original Gaelic form of this name was Bun Lòchaidh 'the foot of the Lochy'; this was pronounced as Mun Lòchaidh, using the same sound change as seen between (English) Benderloch and (Gaelic) Meadarloch. The modern Gaelic form is Poll Lòchaidh 'the pool of the Lochy', relating to the bay here, although the bay was latterly called Òb Poll Lòchaidh after the name attached itself to the settlement.

The well-known clootie well near Munlochy is on Hurdyhill or Hill O' Hurdie. These names are from Gaelic Cnoc Gille Chùrdaidh, possibly meaning 'the hill of the servant of (Saint) Curitan'. The well itself was called either Tobar Cnoc Gille Chùrdaidh 'the well of Hurdy Hill' or Fuaran Fèill a' Phlaid 'the spring of the festival of the cloth'. This is a reference to the local practice of tying small pieces of cloth onto nearby trees, which persists to this day.

Cambuskenneth ~ Camas Choinnich

Published: 9 September 2017

The first element in the name of this place near Stirling is clearly Gaelic camas; this can denote either a round bay or a bend in a river. Here it is clearly the latter, as the River Forth winds here.

Concerning the second element, in modern Gaelic this name is Camas Choinnich 'Kenneth's river-bend'. This form was likely adopted from the

modern English form, however, because in the twelfth century the names was written Cambuskinel. This suggests the second element was not originally a personal name; instead it perhaps originally contained the same element as seen in Kinneil which is likely Ceannail, from ceann fhàil 'wall end', thus *Camas Ceannail.

A nineteenth-century text about the Battle of Stirling Bridge says of William Wallace's forces: Choinnich iad aig Camas Choinnich 'they gathered at Cambuskenneth'. This is a pun, as the word for 'Kenneth' and the word for 'gathered' are identical in this sentence.

Campbeltown ~ Ceann Loch Chille Chiarain

Published: 16 September 2017

There are two places in Scotland with this name. The better-known one in Kintyre is locally called Ceann Locha 'loch end' or more fully as Ceann Loch Chille Chiarain 'the loch-end of Kilkerran'. Kilkerran means 'the church of Ciaran' and is now a part of modern Campbeltown. The English name was coined in 1667 by Archibald Campbell, Earl of Argyll.

Campbeltown was also an alternative name for Ardersier near Inverness. This had three Gaelic names: Baile Chaimbeulach which is a translation of the English form; Am Baile Ùr 'the new town' and finally Àird nan Saor 'the height of the smiths'. This last is the Gaelic form for Ardersier although this was spelt Ardrosser in 1227 which most likely represents Àird Rois Ear 'east height of the promontory'. Presumably the west height is what is now called Fortrose Point on the opposite side of the Moray Firth.

Blacklunans ~ Both Chluainean / Bealach (G)lùnaig

Published: 23 September 2017

The name of this place in Glen Shee has a confusing history. It is first on record as Bawclownane in 1460, possibly representing *Both Chluainean 'meadows hut'. In 1506 however it is written as Balclunas, which possibly represents Baile Chluain 'meadow farm' with the Gaelic plural -ean changed to Scots -s. It is only from the 16th century that it was known as Blacklunans. It lies on a river called the Black Water in English so it is possible the name was changed by analogy with this river-name.

In the early twentieth century however it was recorded as having a variety of different Gaelic forms containing bealach 'pass' with an obscure second element: Bealach Glùinneig, Bealach Lùnaig and Bealach Glùnaig; it was even recorded as Bealach nan Con 'the pass of the dogs'. None of these forms however could have been the original form of the name.

Dunollie ~ Dùn Olla

Published: 30 September 2017

During the time of the Argyllshire-based Gaelic kingdom of Dál Riata, Dunollie near Oban was the chief stronghold of the kindred called Cenél Loairn. The Annals of Ulster mention this fort several times between 686 and 734 AD, referring to it variously as Dún Ollaig, Dún Ollaigh and Dún Onlaigh. These forms perhaps reflect 'the fort of Ollaigh'. Although the meaning of Ollaigh is not certain, it appears to have been reinterpreted as a Norse personal name now known as Olaf in English; for instance, in 1654 it was spelled Dunoldiff and in Gaelic it was written Dùn Ollaimh. In Modern Gaelic however it is known as Dùn Olla.

The name appears in a proverb: Mar Dhubhaird is Dhùn Olla mu choinneimh a chèile 'like Duart and Dunollie opposite each other' (Duart on Mull being visible from Dunollie). This is said of two people who are acquainted but not friendly.

Strathyre ~ Srath Eadhair / An t-Iomaire Riabhach

Published: 7 October 2017

Strathyre in Perthshire is possibly first on record as early as 653 AD in the Annals of Ulster as Sratho Ethairt. The modern Gaelic form for Strathyre is Srath Eadhair; some take the second element to be from ith-thìr 'corn land' though this is probably folk-etymology. Whilst this is the name for the whole glen, Strathyre village itself was called in Gaelic An t-Iomaire Riabhach 'the speckled ridge', sometimes written in English as Immirrioch.

Drovers between Falkirk and Skye used to pass through this village and they gave it the nickname of Nineveh. The story goes that the village had three inns: once a man got drunk and slept in each inn on successive nights, taking three days to get through it. On the third day, upon leaving Strathyre village, he remembered the biblical quote, "Nineveh was an exceedingly great city of three days' journey." Hence the name.

Roxburgh ~ Rosbrog

Published: 14 October 2017

Roxburgh (Rokesburc in 1127) is Old English in origin, from Hroc, a personal name meaning 'rook', and burh 'fortified place'. In the Book of Clanranald, an early eighteenth-century Gaelic work, in part relating events of the fifteenth century, Roxburgh Castle appears as c(h)aislen Rosbrog.

The author of this work was Niall MacMhuirich, a bard who resided in South Uist near Dalabrog (in English, now Daliburgh). Perhaps MacMhuirich was influenced by the name Dalabrog in his choice of a Gaelic form for Roxburgh. In truth, final -brog derives from Old Norse brokka 'slope', whilst the first element may be dalr 'valley' hence 'valley slope'.

The same text mentions Philliphaugh near Roxburgh as Filipfach. This is simply the Scots name Phillip and haugh 'river meadow', and the Gaelic form seems to be a phonological adoption, perhaps under influence from the Gaelic word faiche 'field', of approximately the same meaning as haugh.

Glasgow ~ Glaschu

Published: 21 October 2017

The name Glasgow or Glaschu is British in origin, meaning 'green hollow or valley'. Glasgow of course has many place-names of Gaelic origin dating from the medieval era, but new Gaelic names continued to be coined by later Gaelic-speaking immigrants from the Highlands. Parallel with King Street there once stood a small street called Back Wynd. This was referred to in Donnchadh Bàn's poem Òran Alasdair as Sràid a' Chùil, meaning the same thing. Although coined after Sir John Hope, the fourth Earl of Hopetoun, Hope Street is known in Gaelic as Sràid an Dòchais as though meaning 'the street of (the) hope'.

Glasgow was also referred to in poetry and proverbs by various epithets relating to the impression Gaels must have had upon arrival: Glaschu nan Stìopall 'Glasgow of the steeples', Glaschu nan Sràidean 'Glasgow of the streets' and Glaschu Mòr na Beurla 'great Glasgow of the English (or Scots) language.'

Pitlochry ~ Baile Chloichridh

Published: 28 October 2017

Like many names beginning with Pit- in Scotland, the English form derives from an older form than the Gaelic. The original Gaelic form was *Peit Chloichridh 'the stead of the stoney place'; this is the form from which the English version derives. In recent times however, Gaelic dropped the word peit in place-names and in general speech in favour of baile 'farm'. Peit was originally borrowed from Pictish, but for some reason many loan words from that language are no longer present in Gaelic. That said, there is a Pitlochrie in Glen Isla which is on record as Peit Chloichridh in Gaelic.

Cloichridh is derived from Gaelic clach 'stone'. A letter to this paper in 1934 says that there was a big stone below Pitlochry called Clach a' Chruidh 'the

stone of the cattle' where in the old days Highland drovers rested their cattle on their way to the Falkirk Tryst.

Ben Lawers ~ Beinn Labhair

Published: 4 November 2017

This name originates in the river called Uisge Labhair (called Lawers Burn in English) which flows down this mountain into Loch Tay. Labha(i)r is a Gaelic word for 'talkative' and the river-name means something like 'loud burn', presumably referring to the sound it makes as it flows. The mountain was named after this burn as Beinn Labhair.

A number of small settlements at the foot of Ben Lawers were named after the mountain: Claonlawers or Claon Labhair 'the slope of Lawers'; Milton of Lawers or Baile Mhuilinn Labhair; Lawernacroy or Labhair na Craoibh 'Lawers of the tree'; Labhair Meadhanach 'Mid Lawers' and Labhair Mòr 'Great Lawers'. These settlements no longer exist; the village of Lawers encompasses most of them and thus is in the plural, meaning 'the town encompassing the places called Lawer'. The modern English name of the mountain is named after this settlement, hence the -s.

Stonehaven

Published: 11 November 2017

Stonehaven or Steenhyve is a name of Scots origin meaning 'stone harbour'. The stone in question once obstructed the entrance to the harbour, though it was later destroyed. This stone was called Craigmacaire and whilst clearly of Gaelic origin containing the element creag 'crag', the identity of the remaining elements is unclear.

Gaelic scholars a century ago noted their inability to find a Gaelic form for Stonehaven. Part of it was known as Kilwhang. This most likely reflects cill 'church' with the name of a saint, although it has been proposed that the second element represents cumhann 'narrow', because the Church at Fetteresso was unusually long.

In modern times, the name Stonehaven has been translated as Caladh nan Clach 'harbour of the stones'. It has even been transliterated as Sròn na h-Aibhne 'the promontory of the river' as though the name Stonehaven were an adaption from Gaelic. Neither of these names have any historical authenticity.

Arthur's Seat ~ Suidhe Artair

Published: 18 November 2017

This well-known hill (Arthurissete in 1508) is naturally called Suidhe Artair in Gaelic, which has the same meaning as the English. One unreliable book gives the ungrammatical Àrd-thìr Suidhe, as if 'high ground seat', but this is nonsense. Salisbury Crags next to Arthur's Seat are mentioned in a charter of 1128 as Craginmarf which is surely Gaelic Creag nam Marbh 'the crag of the dead', possibly relating to the dangerous cliff edge there which still claims lives to this day.

There are several other hills also called Arthur's Seat in Scotland. The Cobbler or Ben Arthur at the end of Loch Long was also called Suidhe Artair (Suy arthire in 1591), although its map form suggests Beinn Artair 'Arthur's mountain'. Likewise, Suidhe in Glen Livet was Suiarthour in 1638. These names seem to relate to King Arthur, though in many cases the tradition behind the names has been lost.

Broughty Ferry ~ Port Bhruachaidh

Published: 25 November 2017

This is 'the ferry of the place Broughty' (Bruchty in 1456). The name Broughty is often said to be from Bruach Tatha as if 'the bank of the (river) Tay'; although this form is in evidence at an early date, it is folk-etymology. The name is actually from Gaelic Bruachaidh '(water) bank place'. Gaelic ch- sometimes comes out as -cht- or -ght- in Scots.

Within Broughty Ferry was a place once called Port na Creige meaning 'the harbour of the rock' (terra de Portincrag' in 1199). This gave its name to the ferry across the River Tay in North Fife, called Ferry-Port-on-Craig. This means 'the ferry of (the place) Portincraig' even though Port-on-Craig is not in Fife. In this name, the Gaelic article na meaning 'of the' has been reanalysed as Scots on. This place has had several names, including Tayport and South Ferryton, amongst others.

River Almond ~ Uisge Amain

Published: 2 December 2017

There are two rivers with this name, one in Perthshire and one in Edinburgh. These are in Gaelic Uisge Amain, deriving from a pre-Gaelic root. The Perthshire Almond runs through Sma' Glen, which is Caol-Ghleann Amain in Gaelic: 'the narrow glen of the (River) Almond'. Logiealmond is Lagan Amain, 'the hollow of the Almond' in contrast to Lagan Ràit, Logierait in English. Almond is possibly mentioned in the Annals of Ulster in 686 as Tula Aman

which might represent a *Tulach Amain ‘the hill of the Almond’, though the exact site is unknown. A Pictish king called Domnal mac Ailpín died in Rathinueramon in 862; this is in modern Gaelic Ràth Inbhir Amain ‘the fort of Inveralmond’, a site just north of Perth.

The Roman site at Cramond, which sits at the mouth of the Edinburgh Almond is what would be written in Gaelic Cair Amain ‘the fort of the (River) Almond’.

Helmsdale ~ Bun Ilidh

Published: 9 December 2017

The name Helmsdale is Norse in origin, from Hjalmundsdalr ‘Helmund’s valley’ where Helmund is a personal name. The Gaelic form Bun Ilidh means ‘the foot of the (River) Ilidh’, although the river is now known in English as the Helmsdale River. The Gaelic name is however preserved on the map in the name of the glen, Strath Ullie or Srath Ilidh in Gaelic. The meaning of Ilidh is not known, but it probably has the same origin as the river in Glen Isla or Gleann Ìle in Angus, despite the difference in vowel length.

West Helmsdale was once known as Auchvadlie; this is in Gaelic Achadh Adlaidh, where achadh ‘field’ is pronounced locally achu. The meaning of adlaidh is unclear.

Speakers of Sutherland Gaelic often said anns in the place of ann an/am for ‘in’, so ‘in Helmsdale’ was locally ‘anns Bun Ilidh’ and not the standard ‘ann am Bun Ilidh’.

Lake of Menteith ~ Loch Innis MoCholmaig

Published: 16 December 2017

This place is often referred to as ‘the only lake in Scotland’; although this is not accurate by any stretch, the usage of lake instead of loch is nonetheless odd. The most likely reason for this is that the name was confused with the name of the area roundabouts: the Laich of Menteith, from Scots laich or laigh ‘low-lying land’. The usage of the name in a Walter Scott novel may have also influenced usage.

The Gaelic form is Loch Innis Mo Cholmaig ‘the loch of the island of Saint Colm’, named after the island which sits on it, called in English Inchmahome. The Gaelic name for Menteith is Mon Teadhaich, which denotes the upland known today as the Menteith Hills.

Teadhaich, which is of unknown origin, is the Gaelic name for the River Teith. The area through which it flows between Callander and Dunblane is called Srath Theadhaich 'the strath of the Teith'.

Ayr ~ Inbhir Àir

Published: 23 December 2017

The settlement Ayr (inber-air in 1490) was originally called Inbhir Àir 'the confluence of the River Ayr'; The meaning of this river-name is unknown, although it is probably pre-Gaelic. The name of the settlement is one of a number which have inbhir in Gaelic (spelt in on maps as Inver-) but have since been lost. For example, nearby Girvan was written as Innirgarvan in 1253, representing Inbhir Gharbhain 'the confluence of the River Girvan'.

The Heads of Ayr is rocky section of coast to the south of Ayr; these are mentioned in a poem: Na sùghaichean lùn-corrach, sìnteach a' gleannadh gu Cinn Inbhir Àir 'the billows and their troughs rolling towards the Heads of Ayr'.

Prestwick to the north of Ayr is of Old English origin, but it must have been also used in Gaelic because in 1173 Pulprestwic is mentioned. This is Gaelic poll plus Prestwick 'the pool of Prestwick'.

Leith ~ Lìte

Published: 30 December 2017

This district of Edinburgh is coined from the Water of Leith (aqua de Lyeth in 1328) which runs through it. The river itself is of pre-Gaelic British origin, meaning 'damp' or 'moist'. Leith was known in Gaelic poetry by the epithet Lìte nan Long 'Leith of the ships' denoting its position as a once important port.

The river gives its name to other parts of Edinburgh: Inverleith or Inbhir Lìte 'the confluence of the Water of Leith'; Craigleith is on record as Crag de Inverleith in 1489 which would be in Gaelic Creag Inbhir Lìte 'the Crag of Inverleith'. Leith Links is mentioned in Dwelly's Gaelic Dictionary as Fighdean Lìte, whilst someone from Leith is known as Lìteach.

Kinleith in Currie on the Water of Leith however was Kyldelethe in 1373 and is of English origin, not *Ceann Lìte 'Leith head', despite the appropriateness of such a name.