# SCOTTISH PLACE-NAMES RESOURCE SHEET

Some reference works and on-line resources, compiled by Simon Taylor

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**READING MATERIAL**

Note that a full bibliography, including a section on regional studies, arranged by pre-1975 county, can be found on the Scottish Place-Name Society website: *http://www.spns.org.uk/bibliography09.html*

#### MAIN WORKS

**Nicolaisen**, W. F. H., 1976, *Scottish Place-Names* (London; revised edition 1979: new revised edition, Edinburgh (John Donald) 2001). Paperback.: This is the only full scholarly study of Scottish place-names in book form. Although in need of revision in various ways, it remains the best general introduction to the subject.

**Watson**, William J., 1926, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* (Edinburgh and London): for individual names, the best book on the Celtic (British, Pictish and Gaelic) place-names. Although not easy to use in parts, it always repays the effort. Latest edition Birlinn 2004 with introduction, some addenda and corrigenda, and full Watson bibliography, by Simon Taylor; reprinted Edinburgh (Birlinn) 2011 with Taylor’s introduction, expanded addenda & corrigenda and expanded Watson bibliography. Paperback. Some chapters are available online on the SPNS web-site. It is often abbreviated simply as *CPNS*.

**Good short general introductions** are the sections on Scottish place-names in:

*Atlas of Scottish History to 1707*, ed. Peter McNeill and Hector MacQueen (1996), pp. 50-1, 58–70 [though some distribution maps need redoing]. The Atlas is now available online on:

[*http://www.scotlandsplaces.gov.uk/digital-volumes/published-gazetteers-and-atlases/atlas-scottish-history-1707*](http://www.scotlandsplaces.gov.uk/digital-volumes/published-gazetteers-and-atlases/atlas-scottish-history-1707)[with different pagination, namely pp. 72-3 and 80–92)]

Celtic Culture: An Encyclopedia, ed. John T. Koch 5 vols (Santa Barbara, USA 2006) (S. Taylor), pp. 1592–94.

*The Companion to Gaelic Scotland*, ed. D.S. Thomson (rev. ed. Glasgow 1994), pp. 226–36 (various authors, including K.H. Jackson and W.F.H. Nicolaisen).

*The Edinburgh Companion to the Gaelic Language*, ed. Moray Watson and Michelle MacLeod (Edinburgh University Press 2010), pp. 46–62 (R. A. V. Cox).

*The Edinburgh Companion to Scots*, ed. John Corbett et al. (Edinburgh University Press 2003), pp. 17–30 (M. Scott).

*Oxford Companion to Scottish History*, gen. ed. Michael Lynch (Oxford 2001), pp. 479–84 (S. Taylor).

Note also Introduction to *Uses of Place-Names* ed. S. Taylor (Edinburgh 1998): pp. 1-11.

**WEB-BASED and OTHER RESOURCES**

*The following section is arranged alphabetically by subject area. These are:*

***Field-names****,* ***Gaelic Names and Pronunciation****,* ***Hagiotoponyms*** *(Saints in Place-Names)*, ***Maps***, ***Norse Place-Names****,* ***Ordnance Survey Name Books****,* ***Parishes***, ***Place-Name Collection*, *Place-Name Elements****,* ***Place-Name Walks***, ***Place-Names in Schools***,***ScotlandsPlaces***, ***Scots***, ***Scottish Place-Name Society***

FIELD-NAMES. Every field once had a name, most of them never appearing on any published map, and these are a very important resource, preserving, for example, knowledge of lost settlements, local dialect, names of past tenants and neighbours, as well as farming practices old and new. The School of Scottish Studies (Scottish Place-Name Survey), now part of Celtic & Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh, holds collections of field-names from various parts of Scotland, and the Kinross-shire Historical Society, Loch Leven Campus, Kinross, holds an almost complete record of Kinross-shire field-names collected in the 1970s. Field-name collection sheets based on those used by the Scottish Place-Name Survey can be obtained from Simon Taylor.

GAELIC NAMES and PRONUNCIATION. There are good Gaelic sound files for place-names (as well as for common nouns) on the following site: *http://www.learngaelic.net/dictionary/*. While the sound file coverage is not yet complete, they are being added all the time (by BBC Alba).

Gaelic sound files for some Munros can be found on *http://www.cnag.org/en/mountain-names*

Gaelic sound files for some place-names, as well as reliable analysis of meaning, can be found in the Database of Ainmean-Àite na h-Alba/Gaelic Place-Names on *http://www.gaelicplacenames.org*.

See also PLACE-NAME ELEMENTS, below.

There are four good, substantial booklets on place-names produced by Scottish Natural Heritage, all free from SNH, and available online on *www.snh.org.uk*

**MacIlleathain**, Ruaraidh, 2007, *Gaelic in the Landscape: Place names in the North West Highlands/A’ Ghàidhlig air Aghaidh na Tìre: Ainmean-àite ann an Iar-thuath na Gàidhealtachd*, Scottish Natural Heritage (bilingual Gaelic and English, with a guide to the Gaelic pronunciation of each name discussed. Currently out of print, so only available online).

**MacIlleathain**, Ruaraidh, nd, *Gaelic and Norse in the Landscape:* *Place names in Caithness and Sutherland/A’ Ghàidhlig is Lochlannais air Aghaidh na Tìre: Ainmean-àite ann an Gallaibh, Cataibh is Dùthaich MhicAoidh*, Scottish Natural Heritage (bilingual Gaelic and English, with a guide to the Gaelic pronunciation of each name discussed).

**King**, Jacob, and **Cotter**, Michelle, 2011, *Gaelic in the Landscape: Place-names in* ***Islay*** *and* ***Jura****/A’ Ghàidhlig air Aghaidh na Tìre:* *Ainmean-àite ann an Ìle agus Diùra* (Scottish Natural Heritage/Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba and Ainmean-Àite na h-Alba/Gaelic Place-Names of Scotland).

**King**, Jacob, and Clyne, Heather, nd [2013], *Gaelic in the Landscape: The Rough Bounds of* ***Lochaber****/ A’ Ghàidhlig air Aghaidh na Tìre:* *Garbh-Crìochan Loch Abar* (Scottish Natural Heritage/Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba and Ainmean-Àite na h-Alba/Gaelic Place-Names of Scotland).

The best Scottish Gaelic Dictionary remains Edward Dwelly’s *The Illustrated Gaelic-English Dictionary* (1901–11; various editions and reprints), though it needs to be handled with some care. It is online (in both a Gaelic and an English version) on: *http://www.dwelly.info/*

HAGIOTOPONYMS. This is the technical term for a place-name which commemorates a saint. These can range from important towns (e.g. St Andrews) to small wells. Thanks to a Leverhulme-funded project based at the University of Glasgow, there is an excellent and comprehensive Database of Scottish Hagiotoponyms (DoSH for short!) online on *http://www.saintsplaces.gla.ac.uk/*

MAPS. The National Library of Scotland (Map Library) runs an excellent website *http://maps.nls.uk/* on which you can access detailed maps of the counties of Scotland as far back as the manuscript maps of Timothy Pont made in the 1590s, and including the all-important Ordnance Survey 1st edition 6 inch.

Ordnance Survey: the first complete mapping of Scotland was conducted by the British army Ordnance Survey in the mid-nineteenth century, and laid the foundations for the maps and the forms of names that we are so familiar with today. It was at a scale of 6 inches to the mile (in some places also 25 inches to the mile), and contains over a quarter of a million names. Scotland is very fortunate in still having an almost complete record of this enterprise in the form of the Ordnance Survey Object Name Books, usually known as the **Ordnance Survey Name Books**: these are hand-written notes made by the surveyors, and include descriptions and other information about every single place-name that appears on this map series, sometimes including how the place got its name, local stories and often, in the case of names recorded in Gaelic orthography, a translation into English. They also include details of institutions such as schools, hospitals, churches and poors houses, as well as of archaeological features such as cairns and hill-forts. In addition they list the names of the people who gave or confirmed the form of every place-name: usually three people for each name, but if the informants are at variance, the number increases, and the reasons are given for the Ordnance Survey’s final decision. These Name Books are a very valuable resource, not just for studying place-names, but for local studies in general, giving a snap shot of a community in the mid-nineteenth century. Digital images of the Name Books for all Scottish counties, now fully indexed, are available on ScotlandsPlaces website (see SCOTLANDSPLACES, below). There is also the possibility of involvement in the ScotlandsPlaces crowd-sourcing transcription project. Active involvement in this project gives free online access to all digitised resources; otherwise there is a fee (£5 per month).

NOTE ALSO: *http://maplandbritain.co.uk/* for giant jigsaw OS maps of Scotland.

NORSE PLACE-NAMES aka SCANDINAVIAN PLACE-NAMES

See PLACE-NAME ELEMENTS, below.

ORDNANCE SURVEY NAME BOOKS

See MAPS, above.

PARISHES

While there is no map that will depict the precise medieval parishes, the National Library of Scotland now has online the index maps from the Ordnance Survey 19th-century 6-inch maps, and these have the pre-1891 parish boundaries on county-wide maps.

*http://maps.nls.uk/os/county\_series\_list.html*

For parishes between 1891 and 1975, go to:

*http://www.scotlandsplaces.gov.uk/*, then click on the relevant county on the interactive map or the accompanying list. For more on this website, see SCOTLANDSPLACES, below.

For parishes and parish boundaries, medieval and modern, see also the new website of the Mapping of the Historical Parishes of Scotland group:

*http://www.stir.ac.uk/cehp/mapping-parishes-medieval-scotland/*

PLACE-NAME COLLECTION

A methodology for the collection and analysis of Scottish place-names has been developed over the past ten years, and has been adopted by the recently established Survey of Scottish Place-Names, under the auspices of the Scottish Place-Name Society. It has been deployed in the 5-volume series *The Place-Names of Fife* by S. Taylor with G. Márkus (Donington 2006-12), as well as in *The Place-Names of Bute* by G. Márkus(Donington 2012), and is most fully described in the Introductions to these volumes.

PLACE-NAME ELEMENTS:

There are OS web-booklets for three of the languages which have made an important contribution to the place-names of Scotland: **Gaelic**, **Scandinavian** (Norse) and **Scots**. Each consists of an *Introduction*, which includes some basic grammar as it relates to place-name formation, and a *Glossary* of common place-name elements.

For **Gaelic** Place-Names (Introduction by Simon Taylor):

The pdf of the 41-page booklet, with Introduction, can be downloaded on:

*http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/oswebsite/docs/ebooks/guide-to-gaelic-origins-of-place-names.pdf*  
For **Scandinavian** (**Norse**) Place-Names (Introduction by Anke-Beate Stahl):

The pdf of the 12-page booklet, with Introduction, can be downloaded on:

*http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/oswebsite/docs/ebooks/guide-to-scandinavian-origins-of-place-names.pdf*  
For **Scots** Place-Names (Introduction by Simon Taylor):

The pdf of the 22-page booklet, with Introduction, can be downloaded on:

*http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/oswebsite/docs/ebooks/guide-to-scots-origins-of-place-names.pdf*

There is a fourth such site concerning **Welsh** Place-Names; see:

*http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/oswebsite/support/knowledgebase/place-name-origins/welsh/index.html*

Very helpful to use with Watson’s *History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* (see READING MATERIAL, above) is the **Elements** **Index**(compiled by Eric Basden and Alan James, with contributions by Angus Watson) to be found on the SPNS web-site: *http://www.spns.org.uk/WatsIndex2.html*

For a full discussion of all words found in Fife place-names (Pictish, Gaelic, Scots, Norse, French), see the Elements Glossary in***The Place-Names of Fife* 5** (Discussion, Glossaries and Edited Texts, with Addenda and Corrigenda of Volumes 1–4), Simon Taylor with Gilbert Márkus (Shaun Tyas: Donington 2012), pp. 275-535.This is a useful resource for many other parts of Scotland which share with Fife a similar linguistic history.

Note also short, well-informed articles by Alison Grant on individual place-name elements both Gaelic and Scots in each issue of the free e-zine (electronic magazine!) *The Bottle Imp* on: *http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/ScotLit/ASLS/SWE/TBI/index.html*

PLACE-NAME WALKS: These have been developed by the University of Glasgow, in conjunction with Fife Council, Ochils Landscape Partnership and local history societies. For full details, as well as pdfs of the accompanying booklets and hand-outs, see under Resources on:

*http://onomastics.co.uk/*

This a website set up and managed by post-graduates at the University of Glasgow, and contains other features immediately relevant to the study of both place- and personal names (‘onomastics’ = ‘the study of names’).

PLACE-NAMES IN SCHOOLS: In 2013 Education Scotland in partnership with the University of Glasgow developed a series of learning and teaching ideas based around Scottish place-names for Levels Early to 4 (Primary 1 to Secondary 4). These can be found on:

*http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/studyingscotland/resourcesforlearning/learning/Contextsforstudy/placenames/index.asp*

SAINTS IN PLACE-NAMES: see HAGIOTOPONYMS, above.

SCOTLANDSPLACES: *http://www.scotlandsplaces.gov.uk/*

This describes itself as: ‘a website that lets users search across different national databases using geographic location. The user is able to enter a place name or a coordinate to search across these collections or they can use the maps to both refine and define their search. The results pages provide the data relevant to the search conducted, from each of the project partners.’ These partners currently include: The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS); The National Records of Scotland (NRS) [formerly The National Archives of Scotland (NAS)] and The National Library of Scotland (NLS).

It also contains details of all the county- and parish-boundary changes made in 1891.

It also has a subscription site which allows access to the digital images of all the **Ordnance Survey Name Books**, with their descriptions and other notes on all 250,000 or so place-names which appear on the OS 6 inch 1st edition maps. See under MAPS, Ordnance Survey, above, for full details.

SCOTS

See the website of **‘Scots Words and Place-names’** (SWAP)

*www.gla.ac.uk/swap*

This contains a ‘Glossary of Scots Place-name Elements’, as well as the facility for pupils and teachers to send in examples of place-names which contain these words. (Co-ordinated by Dr Alison Grant, Scottish Language Dictionaries and Scottish Place-Name Society).

An excellent Scots resource is the online Dictionary of the Scots Language/Dictionar o the Scots Leid, an electronic edition amalgamating two earlier works, the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* (Scots up to c.1700) and the *Scottish National Dictionary* (Scots from c.1700): *http://www.dsl.ac.uk*

For Scots in Scottish place-names, see also PLACE-NAME ELEMENTS, above.

SCOTTISH PLACE-NAME SOCIETY: *http://www.spns.org.uk*

This has a wide range of information on all aspects of Scottish place-names, alongside details of conferences and other events. This is an important resource, with digital versions of several PhDs on place-names, as well as extracts from the regularly up-dated bibliography of Scottish place-name studies, including regional studies.

**Warning**: Most popular guides and dictionaries are written on the basis of unsound methodology and information, and are best avoided. This includes almost any small, one volume work covering the whole of Scotland. Two exceptions to this are: Alison Grant’s *The Pocket Guide to Scottish Place-Names* (2010); and Maggie Scott’s *Scottish Place Names* (2008). A problematic example is J. B. Johnston, *Place-Names of Scotland* (1934). It is often seriously off the mark when dealing with etymologies, but it does contain early forms of names (though often not sourced). Furthermore there are books and pamphlets about the place-names of most areas of Scotland. While some are excellent, others are untrustworthy and misleading, especially the older ones.

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