

NOTES AND COMMENTS

A. NOTES ON SCOTTISH PLACE-NAMES

19. *Further Minor Elements in Scottish River-Names*

In note 17 in this series (5 (1961) 199-201), we discussed the lexicographical value and geographical distribution of the words *sike* and *strand* in names of Scottish water-courses. These are probably the most significant of the minor elements of English origin in Scottish hydronymy but there are others, sometimes only occurring in isolated instances, which also deserve our consideration. We want to record their existence, discuss their etymology, and interpret their meaning in this note, and we regard it of particular importance that they should not be divorced from their usage outside names, i.e. as ordinary appellatives in historical or present-day Scottish (and English) dialects. Without a doubt, there have been words in all languages ever spoken in this country, and particularly in the earliest strata, which are only evidenced within the onomastic context, but the elements which we are going to look at in this note do not belong to this category. Some of them, however, seem to have a meaning when used in place-names which is rare in appellative usage.

The words to be discussed are *lake*, *latch*, *linn*, **rið*, *runner*, *spout*, *stank*, and *stream*, in this order. Examples will be taken almost exclusively from the one-inch Ordnance Survey maps of Scotland. Any figures given therefore only relate to these, and as all our elements normally refer to comparatively small water-courses, scrutiny of the six-inch maps would no doubt furnish further instances. However, this material is at present not available to the writer in its entirety; it could be added to from previously unrecorded local usage, but such a complete account will not be possible for many years to come and we think that there is considerable justification for the presentation of the fragmentary evidence at our disposal.

(a) *Lake*

This word goes back to Old English (OE) *lacu* "stream" and is not identical with Middle English (ME) *lake* "lake, pool", Old High German (OHG) *lahha* "pool", Middle Low

German (MLG) *lake* "puddle" all of which derive from the cognate Latin *lacus* -ūs m. "pit, lake, trough". The Germanic equivalent of the latter is OE, *lagu* "lake", the Celtic one Gaelic *loch*. According to Wright (1902:III, 508) *lake* is still used dialectically in the south-west of England as well as in Cumberland, in the meaning of "a brook, rivulet or stream; a dried-up water-course in the moors". It occurs in a number of river-names in many English counties, usually combined with significant words of English origin.

For Scotland the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* (DOST) covering the Scots language before 1700, mentions the occasional use of our word in the meaning "flowing water" (XVIII:522a), but the *Scottish National Dictionary* (SND) gives as the Scottish usage after 1700 "a small stagnant pool, esp. one formed at ebb-tide on the shore" (V:495c). This obviously only refers to the loan-word from Latin and not to the word under discussion. Toponymically, however, we have three examples supplied by the one-inch map: Altrieve Lake (Selkirkshire) which flows past Altrieve and Altrieve Rig into the River Yarrow (a tributary is the Altrieve Burn!); Earshaig Lake (Dumfriesshire) past East and West Earshaig into Kinnel Water; Poldivan Lake, in the same country into Capel Water. It is of interest to note that all three explanatory elements are of Celtic, probably Gaelic, origin.

(b) *Latch*

A word cognate with *lake*; only whereas the basis of the former is probably a Germanic **lakō-*, *latch* derives from **lakjō*, from the Indo-European (IE) root **leg-* "to drip, to ooze, to dissolve" (Pokorny 1953:657). This would give a geminated stem *læcc* in Old English, although an *i*-stem *læce* is possible (Smith 1956:II, 10). According to the latter it survives in North Country and North West Midland dialects in the form *lache* or *letch* "a stream flowing through boggy land, a muddy hole or ditch, a bog", and similar meanings are recorded for earlier and more recent Scottish usage (DOST XIX:6306; SND VI:10b). "Slow moving stream" may be the original meaning.

Scottish one-inch Ordnance Survey maps yield two examples in which *latch* appears as a generic term in the names of water-courses: Blacklatch Burn (Aberdeenshire), coming from the Correen Hills and flowing into the River Don after combining with the Suie Burn; and Long Latch (Berwickshire),

a tributary of Ale Water on Coldingham Moor. Related, although based on the meaning "dub, mire" are the place-names Effledge (Roxburghshire) and Cumledge (Berwickshire). These are listed by Williamson (1942:269) who also notes at least two "lost" names belonging here: *Harecarlecche* 1204 (near Whitton, Roxburghshire), and *Witheleche* c. 1250 (near Fans, Berwickshire). These are worth mentioning although they do not strictly belong to our semantic category.

(c) *Linn*

According to Smith (1956:I, 254), OE *hlynn* f. occurs only once in non-topographical usage, glossing in that case Latin *torrens*. Its basic meaning is "the noisy one", and it is well attested in the sense of "noise, din". As a dialect word it is confined to Northern English and Southern Scots. In Scottish place-names, *linn* seems to refer mainly to waterfalls, cascades of water, cataracts, deep and narrow gorges, and pools below waterfalls (DOST XX:787a; SND VI:91a-92b; Williamson 1942:278), but in some instances it occurs in the names of streams in rocky courses. These latter cases concern us here, and in them the influence of Gaelic *linne*, Welsh *llyn* "a pool" appears to be less likely than in those in which an actual *pool* is meant. It is, however, not always easy to keep these two words apart, and in some of the examples given below the actual geographical feature described may in fact belong to or overlap one of the other categories of meaning. When does a torrent become a waterfall, and vice versa?

Our Scottish names which apparently contain this element are all to be found in two very small areas. One group is situated on the Midlothian-Lanarkshire border where Darnead Linn, Kitchen Linn and Lingore Linn all combine to form the Breich Water. Dumfriesshire supplies the second group: Ogle Linn is a tributary of Broadshaw Water; Sailfoot Linn rises on Sailford Law, flows past Sailfoot and parallel to Sailfoot Burn (!) into Moffat Water; and Tuppark Linn and Black Linn (part of Glenkill Burn) together join the Water of Ae. These seven examples could probably be augmented from the six-inch map.

(d) *rið* or **rið*

Although there is only one example of this word in Scottish river-nomenclature it nevertheless emphasises the preserving

durability of place-names of all kinds in comparison with normal appellative usage. Here we have a word of which there is no record in any of the sources available to Scottish lexicographers, and we can probably assume that it became obsolescent in the early centuries of Anglian settlement.

The one example in question is the name of Slitrig Water, a tributary of the Teviot at Hawick. According to Robson (1947:64) older forms of the name are *Slitriith* about 1200, Slitridge, Slitrige 1730; Slitterick, Slitrik 1767, but unfortunately he does not mention his sources. The one which interests us here is the earliest, *Slitriith*, for the later ones are obviously due to folk-etymological re-interpretation of the second element when it had become meaningless. The medieval form *-riith*, in comparatively unstressed position could go back to either *rið* or *rīð*, although the former seems to be the more likely. Its original meaning appears to have been "small stream" and in this sense it is still current in the dialects of Hampshire and Sussex as *rithe* or *ride* (Smith 1956:II, 85-6). The nearest English place-name is Ritton (Northumberland).

Rið is cognate with Old Saxon *rīth* m. "torrens", Middle Low German (MLG) *rīde* f. "stream, water-course", German—*riede* in place-names. These are from Germanic **rīþa-*, **rīþōn-* and related to Sanskrit *rīti*—"river, run, etc." The first part of the name is probably OE *slite* "a straight and narrow cut or incision".

(e) *Runner*

Another word which can with considerable justification be classified under the "minor" elements in Scottish river-nomenclature, for again the Scottish one-inch maps provide only one example, in this case *Carsgailoch Runner* which rises on *Carsgailoch Hill* in the parish of New Cumnock (Ayrshire) and joins the Holm Burn, a tributary of Lugar Water. A second instance, now obsolete, is mentioned by Shirley (1915:36) who cites the Catstrand, a "stream known in the 16th century as the 'Freizehole runner'," from Dumfries.

Despite its scarcity on the Scottish map, the word is well documented in the unpublished collections of our Scottish dictionaries, from 1565 to the present day, the first being from Banffshire "quhair ane stryp or runner descending northerlie down" is mentioned in a charter, the last coming from the St. Andrews district of Fife where in 1945 the word is still said to be in common use of very small burns. In between

we have, amongst others, "at the Runner-foot" (Dumfriesshire 1684); "They walked . . . down the Runner of the Cleugh East through Sletrig-water [!]" (Roxburghshire, 1768); "the side of a small burn or runner" (Kirkcudbrightshire, 1830); and "ditches or small runners" (Dumfriesshire, 1833).

Etymologically our word is obviously an agent noun from the verb "to run", and is also evidenced in North West England and Northern Ireland in the meaning "a small channel for water; a small stream" (Wright 1904:V, 189b).

(f) *Spout*

Dow Spout (Kirkcudbrightshire) provides an outlet from Dow Loch into Corran Lane and thence into the River Dee. Maxwell notes (1930:73) that in Galloway *spout* is "more generally used to denote a waterfall", and if this is so it may have been the rapid descent over the precipitous slopes of Craignaw which supplied the generic term for the name of this water-course. *Spout* appears to have a great variety of meanings, however, and Wright (1904:V, 683a) ascribes it to Scotland, the Lakeland, Westmorland and Yorkshire as meaning "a runnel of water" or "a stream of no great volume of water", whereas Jamieson (1882:371b) lists it in the sense "a boggy spring in the ground". The manuscript collections of DOST and SND contain many references to wells and springs called *spout*, but in 1598 a Glasgow source has the equation "prope rivulus lie spowtis", and our Dow Spout may in fact derive its name from the whole stream and not just from the cataract part of it. (Not appropriate, although related, in this context is, of course, the common meaning of "mouth of a water-pipe".)

(g) *Stank*

Another word, like *spout*, whose central meaning does not class it amongst the Scottish topographical terms for natural water-courses, but which, in extended usage, does enter Scotland's river-nomenclature. Like Modern French *étang* it derives from Old French *estanc*, *estanche* (<Latin *stagnum*), and "pond, pool" is therefore its primary meaning; it is in this sense that we find it in Middle English. In Middle Scots, however, it begins to denote open ditches or sluggish streams, and in subsequent sources all three meanings appear. Here are a few examples, again chosen from the unpublished collections of DOST and SND:

“Pond, fish-pond”: “. . . fischit the stankis in Strivelin . . .” (1507 Stirling); “Thar is . . . the stank of Genazureith . . .” (Asloan MS); “a pond or pool” (Scotland 1782).

“Sluggish stream or ditch”: “Stankis and louches and waleis of montayns” (c 1445 Liber Pluscardensis). “. . . ane stank that flowyt from a well . . .” (1513 Douglas Æneid); “the streme . . . Ane standard stank semyt for to be . . . (Douglas); “. . . the old march dykes, stankes and runes of water” (1709 Family of Innes); “any little stream or stank” (Aberdeen 1795); = “a ditch with stagnant water” (Berwick 1892); = “march ditch” (Aberdeen 1932).

In addition we have the common meaning in Modern Scots of “a grating, a closed drain”.

This great variety of meaning may partly account for the fact that *stank*, although in general use in Scots, does not seem to have entered the nomenclature of smaller Scottish water-courses, both natural and artificial, to any great extent. Whenever it is used in an onomastic context, it appears to be very near the border line between appellative and name, as the five examples provided by the Scottish one-inch maps show: we have *The Stank* (a) west of Corstorphine near Edinburgh, and (b) flowing past Town Yetholm (Roxburghshire) into Bowmont Water; and there are three *Black Stanks*, one a drain in the Rhinns of Galloway, one draining from Lochlundie Moss (Aberdeenshire), and one a croft near a tributary of the Burn of Aberlour (Banffshire). This can be augmented by an example from historical evidence which furnishes *Hawdanstank* as the name of a boundary ditch at Hadden in Roxburghshire at the beginning of the 15th century (Williamson 1942:279).

(h) *Stream*

This is a derivative of the widespread IE root **sreu-* “to flow”, which with a *mo-* formation **srouma-* from its *o*-grade appears as **straumo-* in Germanic, resulting ultimately in such forms as OE *stream*, Old Frisian *strām*, Old Saxon *strōm*, OHG *stroum*, German *Strom*, and ON *straum-r*. Its well evidenced use in Modern English in the meaning of “water-course, burn” makes its negligible importance in the hydronymy of the British Isles a little surprising. Smith in his *Elements* (1956: II, 163) stressing its rarity only mentions its occurrence in ME *Stremlake*, and it is almost equally infrequent in Scottish river-nomenclature. The only two modern names which we can quote here are both from Kirkcudbrightshire and show

both the additional generic term *burn*: Coldstream Burn. Coldstream is, however, evidenced as the name of human settlements, mostly farms, in at least half a dozen other cases, the most famous of them being the Berwickshire Coldstream on the River Tweed. The other five are two farms in Lanarkshire (one north of Strathaven not far from the Powmillan Burn, and one in the parish of Carluke near the Fiddler Burn), one place on a small burn in Fife north of Leven, one in the Sidlaw Hills in the vicinity of a stream descending from one of them, and one near the Dowrie Burn in the parish of Fordoun in Kincardineshire.

The situation of all these place-names makes it just possible that every one of them once referred to a water-course. The Coldstream on the Tweed may originally have been the name of the Leet Water, and the others might possibly have been earlier or alternative names of the respective burns mentioned above in connection with them. It is, however, possible—and this seems to be the more likely explanation to me—that these names never meant the burn or the water-course as such but were only applied to one feature of it. We have two signs which point in this direction. First of all, the curious fact that our word only occurs on the Scottish map with the adjective *cold* prefixed to it; and secondly the observation that in the extensive manuscript collections of our two Scottish dictionaries *stream* is never evidence as meaning “burn” but always “current” or “tide”, and frequently in figurative usage like “stream of fire and blood”. The best example to prove that *stream*—in Scots at any rate—is not identical with *river* is to be found in Bellenden’s *Livy* where in I, 85/27 we come across the line “Thai harlit the samyn in the streme of the foresaid ryvere”. Here “the streme” is obviously the “current” of the river, and it looks more than likely that all our *Coldstreams* originally referred to precisely this, the cold currents of the burns on which they stand, and that these names are probably only applicable to one small section of the water-courses in question and not to their entire length, just as in the twelfth century the part of the River Tweed at Berwick is known as *Berewickes strem*, *Berewyckstreem*, *Berewic streme*, and the like (Williamson 1942:166). We feel, therefore that our *Coldstreams* are not really part of the Scottish river-nomenclature proper and that the explanation of the rarity of *stream* on the maps of Scotland is due to the fact that its central meaning in Scots is “current” or “tide”, and not “burn”.

The elements we have scrutinised in this note have not had any great impact on Scottish river-nomenclature. Some of them like **rið*, *runner* and *spout* occur only once each on the Scottish one-inch maps. The others are not much more numerous. Of these, **rið* is a word which has survived in an onomastic context when in appellative usage it died out many centuries ago. *Lake* has probably been prevented from spreading by the much more common English homonym meaning "a sheet of water", and in the cases of *linn*, *spout* and *stank* their more usual alternative meanings of "pool", "spring, end of a water-pipe", and "drain, ditch" respectively must have limited their application to natural water-courses. *Latch* and *runner* have, perhaps, never been very common in appellative usage anyhow, and *stream*, as we have seen, is very much a border line case. All we have tried to do in the foregoing therefore is to record their presence in Scottish hydronymy and to note some of their peculiarities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am much indebted to Mr. A. J. Aitken and Mr. David Murison, Editors of the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* and the *Scottish National Dictionary* respectively, for allowing me to make use of their unpublished manuscript collections. The selections made and their interpretation are entirely my own, however.

REFERENCES

- JAMIESON, JOHN
 1882 *An Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language*. A new edition . . . by John Longmuir and David Donaldson. Vol. IV. Paisley.
- MAXWELL, SIR HERBERT
 1930 *The Place Names of Galloway*. Glasgow.
- POKORNY, JULIUS
 1953 *Indogermanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*. Fascicle 7. Bern.
- ROBSON, W. S.
 1947 *Hawick Place Names*. Hawick.
- SHIRLEY, G. W.
 1915 *The Growth of a Scottish Burgh: a Study of the Early History of Dumfries*. Dumfries.
- SMITH, A. H.
 1956 *English Place-Name Elements*. 2 Vols. English Place-Name Society, Vols. 25 and 26. Cambridge.
- WILLIAMSON, MAY GORDON
 1942 *The Non-Celtic Place-Names of the Scottish Border Counties*. Typescript Thesis. Edinburgh.
- WRIGHT, JOSEPH
 1898-1905 *The English Dialect Dictionary*. 6 Vols. London.

W. F. H. NICOLAISEN