

The Place-Names of Fife, Volume One, West Fife between Leven and Forth.

By Simon Taylor and Gilbert Márkus. Pp.x, 623.

ISBN 1 900289 77 6.

Irthlingborough: Shaun Tyas. 2006. Hb. £24.00.

How many historians know their *cill* from their *coille*? Those who do, I suspect, owe a large debt of gratitude to Simon Taylor for his unfailingly polite and informative responses to requests for help in cutting through onomastic Gordian knots. Yet the very fact that we have to make such enquiries is symptomatic of a deep malaise that lies at the heart of onomastic studies in Scotland.

Volume one of *The Place-Names of Fife* is only the third regional study of place-names in Scotland to have been published in 104 years. We should be ashamed of ourselves: in less time, between 1923 and 2007, the English Place-Name Society has published eighty-two regional place-name volumes and at least twenty associated studies (and counting). Across the Irish Sea, the *Bulletin of the Ulster Place-Name Society*, now known as *Ainm*, was first established in 1952 and is still going strong. In Scotland we had to wait until 2007 for the appearance of the first volume of the *Journal of Scottish Name Studies*, though this should not forget the excellent but grossly under-funded work undertaken by the Scottish Place-Name Society since the 1990s. In short, we have largely squandered the rich legacy bequeathed to us by W.J. Watson.

Pointing accusing fingers at various institutions and funding bodies does not solve our current dilemma. Instead, we should be thinking about how the twin problems of disinterest and under-investment in the field of onomastic studies can be rectified at a university level. Whether we are political historians, environmental historians, lexicographers, or historical geographers, all of us benefit from the study of onomastics and this book demonstrates the practical benefits of investment in this discipline.

The current volume is the first of four publications on the place-names of Fife and the product of fourteen years of work by both authors. It examines the parishes of West Fife between the River Leven and the Firth of Forth and, after a short initial section on linear features and unidentified sites, the parishes of this area are then listed alphabetically (each with their own map) and their place-names discussed. Each place-name entry is provided with a set of useful identifiers so that they can be located by parish, map reference, accuracy locator, height, aspect, and type of feature. Then, the different documentary forms of each place-name are listed chronologically. This means that the book is clearly laid out and easy to use. Another bonus of this approach is that the reader is shown how each place-name developed across time. The authors are also to be congratulated for providing short discussions on all of the different languages on display, pronunciation, and a glossary of terms. The book does contain some errors but the authors will hopefully have the opportunity to correct these mistakes in a later volume. It might also be added that the series cannot really be fully assessed until the discussion of primary sources (in volume four) is digested.

A more critical issue is what will happen to onomastic studies in Scotland when the current AHRC-funded project ends in a few years time. Will any higher education institution invest time and money into developing an important discipline or will the

authors be left to resume a peripatetic existence as they once again set off in search for an institutional backer and funding council money for their next project? We can but hope that in the future onomastic studies in Scotland are given proper support so that the discipline is never again left to stagnate in a *cùil*. Or should that be ‘never again pushed to the *cùil*’?

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