

Place-names in and around the Fleet Valley

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Fal- and Fauld-

A substantial number of place-names in Galloway begin with Fal-, around 20 on current OS maps, the majority being in Wigtownshire and most of the rest in the west of the Stewartry. Maxwell was probably right in deriving this element from Gaelic *fàl*, cognate with Welsh *gwal*, Latin *vallum*, and indeed English ‘wall’. Although this word, in its slightly different forms, occurs in place-names elsewhere in Scotland and in Ireland and the Isle of Man, its frequency in the west of Galloway is exceptional.

This word is well-known to students of early place-names in Scotland, as Bede refers to *Pean-fahel* as the place at the east end of the Antonine Wall: it must have been early P-Celtic **penn-wal* ‘end of the wall’ (see Penwhaile below), but even by his time (early 8th century) the second element had come under Q-Celtic influence, changing *wal* to *fàil*, Bede’s *fahel*; subsequently the first element was replaced by early Gaelic *cenn-*, and the name developed to **Cenn-fhàil*, Kinneil.

However, in Scottish, Irish and Manx Gaelic, this word could be used of any kind of linear barrier, be it a stone dyke, a fence, a hedge or an embankment. Moreover, of particular relevance to its frequent occurrence in the Galloway hills, the meaning was modified by association with the (unrelated) Scots word *fauld*, English ‘fold’, a pen for livestock. Indeed, beside the Fal- names in Galloway there are around ten that have Fauld- as first element followed by another Gaelic word. These are disguised formations with *fàl-*, but our Fal- and Fauld- names probably did refer to folds, *fàl* was evidently an important term for sites where livestock was corralled, especially at the end-of-summer round-up, before being driven down into the valleys.

Another word *fail*, probably related to *fàl*, is found Scots dialects including those of Galloway, as a term for a block of peat used in building dykes and even houses. Although *fail-dyke* is found in documents relating to our region as an appellative (a common noun referring to a location), it doesn’t seem to occur as ‘fail’ or similar in place-names.

Falbae and Falnaw Burn

Falbae, with Falbae Burn, Bridge, Well and Plantation, lie to the west of Culcronchie near the Creetown road, in Kirkmabreck parish; there is another Falbae in Parton. It is doubtless, as Maxwell says, **fàl-beithe* ‘birch fold’.

Falnaw must have been located nearby, to the east of Falbae: Maxwell lists it as a location, though OS maps show only Falnaw Burn, flowing from Culcronchie Hill to join Culcronchie Burn, and thence Moneypool Burn. Maxwell interprets this as **fàl an àtha* ‘fold at the ford’: this is reasonably likely, though –aw for *àtha* is more typical of Ireland than most of Gaelic Scotland. It would imply that the fold was located close to where the routeway crossed the burn before Culcronchie Bridge was built.

Fauldrare Burn

An apparent example of *fàl* becoming ‘Fauld-’ is Fauldrare Burn. It is another burn named from a lost fold, still in Kirkmabreck parish, but flowing from the west side of the Cairnsmore of Fleet past

Cairnsmore house to join the Cairnsmore Burn and thence the Palnure Burn; it is otherwise spelt Falraer, Fulrare. Maxwell suggests **fàl-reamhar*, ‘broad garth’: in Scots Gaelic, *reamhar* generally means ‘fat, plump’, but Kione Roauyr in Rushen on the Isle of Man is ‘broad headland’, and in Ulster Killyrover in Co. Fermanagh is probably ‘broad’; Ulster Irish *ramhar* is phonetically closer than Scots *reamhar* to ‘rare’.

In Girthon parish, Darow, Hill, and Poind Faulds are all formed with the Scots word *fauld*.

Fell

Old Norse *fell* was a common term for a prominent hill or mountain, the related form *ffjall* more generally for a range of hills, mountainous territory. It seems to have been especially favoured by the West Norse (Norwegian) settlers on the Northern Isles, the Hebrides (where it is often seen in the Gaelicised form *-bhal*), the Isle of Man, and around the Solway Firth: Criffel is a Norse name, the first element may be *kráka* ‘raven’.

Fell was taken into the Middle English and Older Scots dialects in and around the Solway basin, being used likewise to refer to individual prominent hills and (reflecting *ffjall*) upland tracts. In Galloway, names with *fell* are generally – to judge by the records, forms and distribution – relatively late, Middle Scots formations, reflecting the gradual spread of the Scots language into the rural, especially upland, parts of the region. Nevertheless, it is a fairly prolific name for locally prominent, though relatively small or secondary, summits in Galloway: there are around three dozen names involving the element in the Stewartry.

Some are simply Fell, Fell Hill or The Fell (there are three Fells, three Fell Hills and two called The Fell in the Stewartry). The Fell overlooking Kirkmabreck Church is an example, on the 1st edition OS map a habitation simply called Fell stood on the southern slope, and Fell Quarries are still marked. Craig of the Fell, the rocky outcrop between Castramont Hill and Castramont Wood suggests that the former may in the past have been called The Fell. Forms like Fell of Fleet, Fell of Laghead, like the many ‘Water of’ river and burn names, are interesting as examples of the influence of Gaelic name-forming syntax on Scots names.

Stey Fell, at the head of the Skyreburn, is Scots *stey* from Old English *stæȝe* ‘steep’. Like most ‘Fell’ names in our region, it is treated on modern OS maps (which reflect the way the name would have been spoken by local informants at the time of the first survey, in the mid-nineteenth century) as a two-word phrase. It is an indication of relatively late formation is that few ‘fell’ names have become established as single-word compounds: an example is the house named Roundfell on OS maps, on the Palfern Burn at the northern edge of Girthon parish, but this takes its name from the neighbouring Round Fell, still shown on maps as two words.

Fiddle Plantation

A small area of woodland on the Cally Estate to the south-east of Laundry Farm. Although I’ve not come across a ‘fiddle’, ‘harp’ occurs quite often in minor names in England referring to the shape of a field or plantation. No boundary is shown on the 1st edition OS map, but the layout of the tree symbols is roughly ‘fiddle-shaped’, a figure 8 with the lower part somewhat wider than the upper.

Fisher's Stone, Fisher's Well

Fisher's Stone is a rock projecting above the water in Loch Grannoch; to judge from the Google satellite picture, it is part of curving reef projecting from the western shore. It presumably was, and maybe still is, a favoured stance for anglers.

Fisher's Well is on the north-east slope of Benfadyen, above Laghead Bridge. It would no doubt be a welcome source of fresh water for anglers fishing nearby in Loch Whinyeon.

Fleet

The name of our river may be Northumbrian Old English *flēot* or Old Norse *fljót*. Both words refer primarily to an estuary and tideway of a river, and both tend to be used especially of relatively narrow outlets to the sea or a larger river, which is appropriate in our case where the acute-angled mouth of the Fleet joins the much wider mouth of the Cree in Wigtown Bay.

The English word is found in a good many places in the south and east of England, London's River Fleet being the best-known, though now completely hidden underground. It seems to have been the prototype of several lesser rivers, streams and creeks on the Thames estuary, recalled in names such as Benfleet in Essex and Ebbsfleet in Kent. Other areas where the element occurs several times include the Channel coast from Portland to Selsey Bill, and around The Wash and the Humber and Tees estuaries. Further north Fleetham on the Northumberland coast seems to be an outlier.

'Fleet' occurs in field-names and other minor names in Yorkshire (West Riding), Westmorland and Cumberland): the reference is apparently to small creeks or watercourses, suggesting the word was current in such a sense local dialects, but in these areas it is at least as likely to have come from Norse as from English.

Norse *fljót* is not found in river-names in Norway, but does occur quite often in Iceland, where it is still current in the language, though now used to refer to a quiet stretch of a river rather than an estuary or creek. Scotland's other River Fleet, that flows from another Loch Fleet near Lairg in Sutherland, down to the Dornoch Firth, is certainly of Norse origin. But either Anglian or Scandinavian seafarers could have named our river in Galloway its apparent popularity with the West Norse speaking Vikings of the North Atlantic, perhaps favours the Nordic origin. Either way, it is the only substantial river in Galloway with a name of Germanic rather than Celtic origin.

There is one tantalising consideration: the English word 'fleet' meaning 'swift' is not recorded before the 15th century in the OED, and is not reflected in Older Scots, yet it is unlikely to have been a foreign introduction, it probably had an ancestor in Old English. The Galloway Fleet is indeed a swift river, flowing as the Big Water of Fleet from sources as high as 1640' (500m) on the Cairnsmore, and as the Little Water from Loch Fleet at about 1110' (335m), down to sea-level in little more than ten miles. It is probably coincidental, though it might have had some influence at least on the survival of the name in preference to any Brittonic predecessor or Gaelic replacement.

The river-name has been extended by association to several natural and man-made features on or near its course: The Fell of Fleet whence its headwaters flow into Loch Fleet, the Cairnsmore of Fleet massif whence several tributary burns feed the river from the west (including the Cardoon and Carrouch Burns, see above for these and Cairnsmore and Fell), down to the Isles of Fleet in Fleet Bay

at the mouth of the estuary, with Gatehouse of Fleet and Fleet Bridge on its course. A minor mystery are the Thorns of Fleet: see below.

Ptolemy's 'Geography', in the early second century AD (but based in its British section on military surveys from the previous century) lists an estuary named *iēnā*, apparently to the west of the (Kirkcudbrightshire) Dee, so possibly the Fleet, the Cree or the Bladnoch. There were Antonine period forts at crossing points on both the Fleet (near Gatehouse cemetery) and the Bladnoch (upstream of the distillery), and the route between them would have forded Cree Bay, but the name is wholly obscure, no Celtic or other Indo-European elements or analogues can be found for it. It is either very ancient or very garbled.

It should be borne in mind whenever the early history, archaeology, topography and toponymy of the valley and estuary are under consideration, that the relative sea-level along our part of the Irish Sea coast during the first millennium AD was appreciably higher than it is today, by as much as 1.5 – 2 metres. What is now low-lying land around the estuary and lower course of the river would have regularly been flooded at high tides, and the river would have been navigable upstream at least as far as the Roman fort.

Flesh Market

This name is found twice in our area, on the col between the Rig of Burnfoot and Laughenghie Hill in Girthon parish, and on a shelf at the western edge of Craignelder, on the north of the Cairnsmore of Fleet, in Minigaff parish.

This Craignelder Flesh Market shares with another location with that name at the north end of the Rinns of Kells the characteristic of having on one side a high and precipitous drop. Present-day rock-climbers have added other witty names for climbing routes here, including Vegetable Market, Mini-Market and Niche Market. The suggestion to be found on rock-climbing websites is that Flesh Market was so-named from the number of sheep that fell to their doom here (I am grateful to Mr. Bill Patterson for bringing this information to my attention). However, on the first edition OS map Flesh Market is not the name of the crags, the cliffs are named Big Gairy, with Foul Loup below, but Flesh Market itself is well away from the edge, on the shelf above.

Mr. Michael Ansell, an authority on the place-name evidence for deer-hunting in the Galloway Forest, points out that large-scale deer-hunting was probably a major land-use in areas like this. Crochan Burn to the south-west might be **cròcean* 'antlers' (it may even mean 'a venison feast'). Deer could have been corralled in the area of the Flesh Market before being driven over the cliff-edge to their death – this was the usual practice.

On the other hand, the Girthon Flesh Market is a place which may well have been used by drovers to rest and graze cattle before their long journey south. There are references during the eighteenth century to drovers' *tryst* at Gatehouse, though its location is unknown. Like the famous one at Kelton Hill, a convenient stopping-place like this might have been where local farmers brought livestock to sell on to drovers, and perhaps pedlars and tradesmen took the opportunity to offer their wares, so at times it could have served as an unofficial open-air market. Place-names with similar implications are found on drove-routes in England and Wales.

A final consideration: stories of these Flesh Markets being used by rieviers to hide stolen cattle may be coloured by fantasy, but such were the ways in the hill-country from prehistoric times until at least the mid-eighteenth century, legal possession of the beasts pastured in these places may not always have been beyond dispute. The slope leading up to the Craignelder Flesh Market is named Little Road, but, like the Flesh Market, it is above the cliffs, at some 1200 feet: if it was used as a track for livestock, it could only have been by herders with good local knowledge, and perhaps with a motive for driving them up to such an out-of-the-way spot.

Fleuchlarg

The house near the Old Bridge of Barlay now named Fleuchlarg appears as *Flularg* on Blaeu's map, *Flarurg* on General Roy's map of 1747/55, *Fililarg* in a tack of 1777, and is *Low Flilarg* on the Castramont Road, with *High Flilarg* (no longer extant) to the east on the Laurieston Road, on the 1st edition OS map; other records showing it as *Flerrack* or *Flerrick* reflect the actual pronunciation even today. There are other Fleuchlargs in our region, one is now Fleuch Larg Plantation in Penninghame parish, Wigtownshire, another, spelt Fleughlarg on OS maps, but with Fleuchlarg Hill, is in Glencairn parish, Dumfriesshire.

Maxwell interprets this name as **fliuch-learg*, giving the meaning as 'wet hill-side', Watson (who muddled the Gatehouse and Penninghame places together) gives **fliuch-làirg*, 'wet pass'. This is not entirely unproblematic. *Fliuch* 'wet, damp, oozy' is not a very common element in Scottish or Irish place-names (where, after all, most places tend to be frequently so!), and where it is found it is normally in second position; however, it forms several Gaelic compound words in first position, and Watson does see **fhliuch-chua* 'damp hollow' in *Lin Liucha*, Linlithgow, though only as a Gaelic reinterpretation of an earlier Brittonic name.

Làirg (modern Gaelic *làirig*) and *learg* have complex and overlapping ranges of meaning. If it is a wet slope, that would presumably be the north-west side of Disdow Hill, but either word can also refer to a path or track, so it may be a 'wet track'; Watson's 'pass' doesn't seem appropriate here, though it may be more so in the other two examples (MacQueen gives *flicuh- làirig* 'wet moor' or 'wet pass' for Fleuch Larg Plantation, Maxwell-Ferguson allows *làirig* 'a pass' or *learg* 'a slope' for the place in Glencairn). As is pointed out under Auchenlarie above, *learg* is reasonably well-evidenced in our region, the status of *làir(i)g* is more doubtful. Whatever the exact form and meaning, it seems that in the Gaelic of south-west Scotland, a compound term, either **fliuch-learg* or **fliuch-làirg*, was used in naming either hillsides or trackways that were exceptionally damp.

Forester's House

The only evidence for this house-name is an entry in the 1851 Anwoth Census, between Damhead (which see) and Lagganmullan. The forester was probably employed in Lagganmullan Wood.

Fuffock

The curious name Fuffock is attached to a dwelling in Twynholm parish, already 'in ruins' on the 1st edition OS map. It survives in the names of Fuffock Hill and Fuffock Burn now in the southern part of Glengap Forest. Fuffock also appears as the name of a house in Crossmichael parish, now named Kilmichael, just north of Castle Douglas golf course, and there is the Kiln o the Fuffock in Kirkmaiden on the Rhinns.

Fuff is a guid Scots word for a 'puff', used pretty widely from the spitting of a cat to a sharp blast of wind. The Kiln o the Fuffock is a gully in the cliffside that tunnels such gusts, and although the word

is not recorded in the dictionaries, it's clear that *fuffock* was a Galloway term for a place likely to experience such *fuffs*.