

Place-names in and around the Fleet Valley

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Inks

Skyre Burn Bay where the burn flows into the Fleet is gradually being infilled by sand and mud. On the 1st edition OS map the word 'Inks' is shown on two grassy areas near Skyre Burn bridge; they are covered by water at the high spring tides, and are seasonally grazed by sheep. Mactaggart tells us in his *Scottish Gallovidian Encyclopaedia*, 'On muddy, level shores, there are pieces of land overflowed with high spring tides, and not touched by common ones, according to the laws of nature, on these grows a coarse kind of grass good for sheep threatened with the rot; the saline food sometimes cures them. When there comes a roaring spring tide before a storm, its whirling motion washes out circular holes in the sludge; these are left filled with water, which soon stagnates and becomes of an inky colour, but I do not think that it is from *ink* that the word *inks* arises, for all that; such land is called *links*, in various districts of Scotland, and I am inclined to fancy the word derives its origin from some ancient tongue.'

Maxwell, in *The Place-Names of Galloway*, declared that Scots *inks* was from Gaelic *inis*, and that it 'becomes *links* on the east coast', but Mactaggart was right to think that *inks* is unrelated to *links*. *Links* is from Old English *hlinc* 'ridge, bank', and does indeed commonly refer around the coasts of Scotland to sandy ground near the sea-shore, much favoured for playing golf on, but *inks* is from Old Norse *eng*, 'meadow, outlying pasture'. It is common in place-names in Scandinavian-influenced parts of northern and eastern England, where it was adopted as *ing*, as at Fairburn Ings, the RSBP Reserve in West Yorkshire; in William Dickinson's *Glossary of... the Cumberland Dialect*, *ing* is 'a common name for a meadow in a low or moist situation'. *Inks* was a Galloway Scots equivalent to *ings* (thanks to Michael Ansell for suggesting this): *The Scottish National Dictionary* cites Galloway sources defining *inks* as 'rich sea marsh' and 'shore pasture'; it also has an entry for *eng* as 'a meadow' in Orkney and Shetland.

The Inks of Machermore are at the head of the Cree estuary, at the mean tidal limit.

Irelandton

As *Irelandtown* on the 1st edition OS map, on the Twynholm side of the parish boundary, the farm lies by the Auchengashell Burn with Irelandton Moor to the north-west, Irelandton hill to the south-east, and just off the earliest route of the Old Military Road, which followed a way used by drovers and was probably an ancient cross-country track.

The name, which could have been a Scots or an English formation, indicates either that the place was perceived as a 'little Ireland', or that it belonged to a man surnamed Ireland (cf. Maggie Ireland's Wa's, below). In either case, it is a reminder of the strong and pretty well continuous links between Galloway and Ireland, with migration in either direction. The name could have been formed at any date from late Northumbrian to early modern, but the latter is more likely, when Irish immigrants were involved in cattle-rearing and droving, and the established Scots-speaking community would have regarded them as a distinctive community. Ingleston south of Twynholm, a Scots formation, likewise reflects a time when any *Inglis*, English, settlers were seen as a distinct group.

Isle of Pins

This tiny islet in a bend of the Little Water of Fleet between the Doon of Culreoch and the Scrogs of Drumruck might have been a source of 'pins' in the sense, both English and Scots, of wooden pegs used in many types of carpentry and joinery; they would have been made from a few coppiced bushes that could have grown here to produce the required slender stems where livestock could not graze.