

Place-names in and around the Fleet Valley

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Newton

Newton is one of the commonest settlement-names in England and lowland Scotland. As both *nēowe* and *tūn* were being used to name places in Anglo-Saxon times, some Newtons are actually quite old: Newton or *Newtoun* above Dalavan Bay is reported to have been a property of the Templars, so must have existed by the end of the thirteenth century, presumably a landholding carved out of what became the Cardoness estate.

There are 14 Newtons on OS maps of our region, including two in the Stewartry (High and Low and Back Newton in Twynholm parish, and Newton, High Newton and Newton Lodge formerly in Lincluden, Terregles parish) besides the Newton in Anwoth.

Nick of the Dead Man's Banes

'Nick' as the name of a narrow gap or pass between hills is one of the most distinctive and characteristic features of the toponymy of the uplands of Galloway: there are some thirty 'Nick of' names on OS maps in the Stewartry, a dozen more in adjacent areas. The term occurs occasionally further east in Dumfriesshire and Roxburghshire, and is recorded in this sense in Scots and northern English dialects, but it does seem to have been found especially appropriate for naming such gaps in the hills of our area.

The origin of 'nick' in the sense of a 'notch' is obscure: there are several possibly related words in Scots and English dialects, and in Germanic and Romance languages, but none corresponds directly in either phonetics or meaning. It is first recorded in English in 1483 (OED), and in Scots in 1603 (DOST). Place-names with 'nick' in the toponymic sense are found from the late seventeenth century, but most were only first recorded by the Ordnance Survey. They are likely to have been given by hill-farmers and shepherds, or maybe more likely by drovers herding livestock, and pedlars, tinkers and other travellers using arduous but toll-free routes through these high passes.

In the hills around the Fleet, the Nicks of Branyea, Knock, Orchars and Trestran are named from places discussed elsewhere in these notes. The Nick of the Dead Man's Banes lies between Benmeal and Craigwhinnie to the south of Loch Fleet, now planted with forestry. 'Human remain, period unassigned' are duly recorded as an antiquity on the Canmore website, but the identity of their unfortunate owner is, and probably always was, unknown.