**Ulster Place-Name Society Newsletter November 2018**

UPNS Autumn Lecture: Dr Kevin Murray, of University College Cork, will talk on **Dinnshenchas as an Onomastic Resource** onThursday 29th November 2018 at 8.00 pm in Room 02/018 of the Peter Froggatt Centre, Queen’s University Belfast. The talk will be preceded by the Society’s AGM at 7pm.

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**Membership Renewal**

Members who renew their membership in the latter part of the year are reminded to do so; the fee is £10/€14 for individuals and £15/€20 for institutions. If you have received this newsletter by post, please send an e-mail address to townlands.upns@gmail.com and we will send the newsletter to you by electronic means to save costs. You will also receive more information about related events if you provide us with an e-mail address. We prefer payment by standing order and if you do not pay by this means a relevant form is enclosed. Members will soon be able to make membership payments on the website.

**New Website**

Kelsey Hanson has developed a new website for the Society at [*www.ulsterplacename.org*](http://www.ulsterplacename.org). Please visit the site and send any comments or recommendations for improvement to townlands.upns@gmail.com.

**Townlands Online**

You can discover the townland upon which your property is situated by typing your address into the link at https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/valuation-of-domestic-properties-for-rates. This website will also inform you of the rateable value of your house!

**Activities**

Pat McKay delivered the following presentations: ‘Place-Names of Crosskeys and District’ in Crosskeys Inn, Toomebridge, 10/1/18; ‘Place-Names and the Irish Language’ at the ‘Welcome to Irish’ event, Turas Project, Skainos Centre, Belfast 17/9/18; ‘The Place-names of the Parishes of Portglenone and Tamlaght O’Crilly’ to the Portglenone History and Heritage Group, 20/9/18; and ‘Place-Names of the Blackwater Valley’ to the O’Neill Country Historical Society, Benburb Priory 9/10/18. Pat is also providing advice on the derivations of the place-names of the civil parish of Dromore, Co. Tyrone for a local project sponsored by Fermanagh and Omagh Local District Council and he continues to advise Mid-Ulster District Council on Irish-language versions of road names and townlands in the Council area.

Gordon McCoy organised two events to introduce locals to aspects of Irish language culture in the Skainos Centre in east Belfast on 31/3 and 17/9. These included talks on place-names and surnames by Paul Tempan, Kay Muhr and Pat McKay. Gordon received a contract from Belfast City Council to create a *Gaelic Map of Belfast.* This will map the townlands of Belfast, other Irish place-names in the council area, and sites of interest concerning the Irish language. Pat McKay is the consultant for this project.

Kay Muhr gave talks as follows: Place-name workshop for students at St Mary’s and Stranmillis involved in ‘Education for Mutual Understanding’ (EMU), organised by Gabrielle Maguire, 28/9/18 (35 copies of *Celebrating Ulster’s Townlands* were sold and the publication is still available - it can be bought on-line at https://www.ulsterplacename.org/store/celebrating-ulsters-townlands); ‘Irish Surnames’ in the Skainos Centre, Belfast, organised by Gordon McCoy, 17/9/18; ‘John Toland and place-names in Inishowen’ in Clonmany, organised by Rosemarie Moulden for the local and visiting groups Lands of Eogain and Bernician Studies, 15/9/18; and ‘The Place Names of Carleton Country’ for the Carleton Society day conference in Fivemiletown, 7/8/18 . Kay gave two talks at conferences on Scottish islands, but which were relevant to place-names in Ulster: on Arran (SNSBI):‘Names in the legend of *Suibhne*/Sweeney (with a digression on church sites)’, 7/4/18 ; and on Skye (Ulster Cycle) ‘The concept of Ulster in the early Ulster Cycle tales’, 15/6/18. Kay Muhr and Liam Ó hAisibéil are working on the *Dictionary of Family Names of Ireland*, to be published by Oxford University Press.

The Federation of Ulster Local Studies (Aug 2018) reports its own links with name studies:

The MHS Heritage and Culture (Maghera Historical Society and the Heritage and Culture Centre) Townlands Project was launched on 30/6/18 by Cllr Sean McPeake, Chair of Mid-Ulster District Council. Grant-aided by the PEACE IV Local Authority Action plan, the project will engage with local people to record field names, stories, memories, traditions, folklore and customs, to appear in a local publication. Guest speaker, Thomas McErlean of N.U.U. talked about the history of local townlands, back to the earliest records, and John Burns, of Burns & Co. Estate Agents, encouraged everybody to take part in the work.

On 21/7/18, Joan Mullen of the Meath Field Names Project (which has recorded over 24,000 field names, associated information and folklore) addressed a Federation workshop on how to structure the work, and manage, communicate and share the data collected.

**Northern Ireland Place-Name Project**

The work of uploading and drafting explanations on townland names continued this year on County Antrim and County Armagh. Where discussion of names had not already been published, or had not been provided in draft form by Kay Muhr and Pat McKay, these were drafted by Frances Kane. Suggestions for the names in these two counties are now available online ([www.placenamesni.org](http://www.placenamesni.org)); these are provisional at this stage and require further research in some instances.

NIPNP participated in the Schools-University Partnership Initiative earlier in 2018 in collaboration with colleagues in Archaeology and Architecture. The schools in question were the 5 post-primary schools which constitute the Magherafelt Learning Partnership and involved a workshop on local place-names in which Mícheál Ó Mainnín, Frances Kane and Brian Devlin took the lead. Brian is now in the second year of his PhD on townland names in Magherafelt and neighbouring parishes.

**Annual Seán Mac Airt Lecture**

The UPNS Spring Lecture, ‘The Dawning of the Red Branch Nights and Where Cú Chulainn said Farewell to Bláthnaid’ was given by Dr Breandán Ó Cíobháin on Thursday 24th May 2018 in Queen’s University Belfast. Dr Ó Cíobháin listed place-names which attest to the relationship between Kerry and north-east Ireland.

Kilmalkeader/*Cill Maoilchéadar* is called after the son of an Ulster chieftain. It has been suggested that Céadar is an Irish version of ‘cedar’, but no-one is sure why it became the name of a saint. Breandán suggests the name owes its source to a hymn from the *Liber Hymnorum*, which has connections to this area, and lists all the woods used to make the cross, including ‘cedar’.

The Battle of Ventry Harbour/*Cath Fhinntrágha* is a significant Fenian tale with Ulster connections. The one surviving text dates from the 15th century, although there are many versions in local folklore. The greatest hero of the Fianna was Caol, the 13-year old son of the king of Ulster, who, unknown to his father, comes to fight the invaders with his 12 companions. The greatest invader Dáire Donn comes ashore every day, and easily kills 150 men each time. Caol survives much longer in battle against Dáire Donn but his body is eventually washed ashore.

Sliabh Mis is a mountain name only found in Antrim (Slemish) and Kerry (Slieve Mish). While the source of the Antrim name is relatively unknown, Mis is revealed in the *dinnsenchas* to be the daughter of Maireadha and sister of Eochu mac Mireadha, who gives his name to Lough Neagh, although there is no reference to the Antrim mountain.

On Sliabh Mis in Kerry stands the massive fortress *Cathair Con Roí* /Catherconree, the walls of which are still partly standing. To the west of this is a mountain range with a series of monuments. Near Annascaul there are two Bronze Age cairns, one called *Carn Chú Chulainn* (‘the cairn of Cú Chulainn’) or *Tigh Chú Chulainn* (‘the house of Cú Chulainn’) or *Leaba Chú Chulainn* (‘the bed/ grave of Cú Chulainn’). Another cairn called *Tigh Chú Chulainn* is situated three quarters of a mile east. Breandán believes their names are explained by the ‘Ulster’ sagas which include west Munster as a location. At *Cathair Con Rí* Cú Chulainn comes to take Bláthnaid from Cú Roí. The place-name *Rinn Chinn Bheara* figures in the tale, which Breandán has identified as Kerry Head. Loop Head at the Clare side of the estuary was called *Léim Chon Culainn* in 11th-century documents. Micheál Ó Braonáin of Roscommon wrote a poem in 1769 which relates how Cú Chulainn leaps from Loop Head to Clare Head to escape from the pursuit of Cú Roí.

Luccreth moccu Chiara wrote an early poem, *Conailla Medb míchuru*, which predates the Táin Bó Cuailnge, but which introduces Medb, Fergus, Fiacc, Ailill and Conchubhar. There is no mention of Cú Chúlaínn, Ferdia, or Cú Roí, which Breandán attributes to the fact that these are later names; the previous ones are older in that the qualifying term is the first element in the name. Cú Chulainn and the names of the others have ‘loose’ non-Indo-European names with the qualifier as the second element, which date from 600 AD.

Breandán noted that sagas are added to and altered over time, but has detected an element of continuity which stretches back to a period in Irish prehistory; a history of war, of defensive fortresses and advanced metallurgy with a focus on weaponry, and the appearance of large cauldrons. Ó Cíobháin identifies this period as between the 10th and 9th centuries BC, before the Iron Age, and notes that archaeological work in the last 30 years in Kerry has confirmed the crucial period of the heroic age to be around 1000 BC.

For Ó Cíobháin, one key to history is to look at traditions and place-names which are retained in local folklore, but whose origin are little understood. These are better guides than the Irish Annals, which were adapted to suit various dynasties. ‘Precise statements are what you have to distrust, ’ he quipped. This hidden dimension of north-east and south-west Ireland show an acute awareness of relationships in the heroic age.

Lough Anscaul / *Loch an Scáil* could mean ‘lough of the hero or heroine’. If we take it not to be the grave of Cú Chulainn, we have a female candidate. A story by Pádraig Ó Cinnéide in *Lochrann* (1909) relates a battle between Cú Chulainn and a giant, Fathach na Cleithe Caoile, for possession of a woman called Máire Ní Mhurnáin. After 5 days Cú Chulainn is hit by a stone hurled by Cú Roí and Máire jumps into the lake and drowns, thinking him dead. Ó Ciobháin has traced the antiquity of the tale, and is certain that it was not influenced by literary sources.

Breandán finished by paying tribute to Deirdre Flanagan and gave an example of her scholarship. She suggested that that the Red Branch might owe its name to the inauguration tree of the early Ulaid (Ulstermen). She mentioned a 17th-century reference to a stone called *Crewroe* (*Craobh Rua =* red branch) on Legar Hill in Armagh, which marks the site of the tree. Deirdre dated this to the Iron Age, but Breandán pushes this date back to the age of standing stones, the Bronze Age.

**Gordon McCoy, Mícheál Ó Mainnín, Greg Toner, Kay Muhr, Pat McKay, UPNS c/o Irish and Celtic Studies, School of Modern Languages, QUB BT7 1NN**

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See also: [www.placenamesni.org](http://www.placenamesni.org) [www.logainm.ie](http://www.logainm.ie)

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