

Ulster Place-Name Society Newsletter 8 May 2018

UPNS Spring Lecture: ‘**The Dawning of the Red Branch Nights and Where Cú Chulainn said Farewell to Bláthnaid**’ will be given by Dr Breandán Ó Cíobháin on Thursday 24th May at 8.00pm in Room 02/026 of the Peter Froggatt Centre, Queen’s University Belfast.

Membership Renewal

Members who renew their membership in spring are reminded to do so; the fee is £10/€14 and £15/€20 for institutions.

New Website

Gordon McCoy has been working with Kelsey Hanson to develop a new website since Webfettler informed us that they can no longer maintain our old one. We have moved to a site with a slightly different domain name *www.ulsterplacename.org*, which is much less expensive than the former one. The site allows for online payments and will be more dynamic.

Activities

The Northern Ireland Place-Name Project has secured major funding for three years from the Department of Finance and Planning; this will last until September 2020. Frances Kane has been appointed as research assistant working under the direction of Mícheál Ó Mainnín and the intention is to provide a brief discussion of the possible origin of townland names in all counties other than Down (which has already been completed). The work is currently focussed on County Antrim which had been close to completion by Kay Muhr and Pat McKay when the previous funding was terminated in 2010. The most difficult and intractable names will require further work (and more support) at a future date but this round of funding will endeavour to make preliminary suggestions for the greater number of townland names.

Kay Muhr and Liam Ó hAisibéil are working on a publication on the family names of Ireland. Pat McKay and Kay attended the Society for Name Studies weekend conference on Scottish Arran in early April: Kay gave a talk on names and history in the medieval Irish text *Buile Suibne* 'The Madness of Sweeney'. Kay will give a talk on Carleton's place-names at this year's Carleton gathering around Clogher (24th Aug at the Valley Hotel, Fivemiletown) and in the autumn both Pat and Kay will be leading seminars on minor place-names near Lough Neagh.

Pat is working on a jointly-authored book with Niall Comer of Ulster University on the townland names of the Barony of Coleraine. He is also working on his commission by Mid-Ulster District Council to supply Irish-language versions of the road names and townland names of the area. Pat gave a lecture entitled ‘Place-Names of Crosskeys and District’ in the Crosskeys Inn in Co. Antrim on January 10th. On October 9th he is to give a talk entitled ‘Place-Names of the Blackwater Valley’ to the O’Neill Country Historical Society in Benburb Friary, Co. Tyrone.

Gordon McCoy’s Gaelic map of East Belfast is now available for sale online at <https://www.cairdeturas.com/new-products/map-of-gaelic-east-belfast>

He has been given a contract by Belfast City Council to produce a Gaelic map of the whole city. Townland names are central to both works. Gordon has developed a Gaelic bus tour, which gives information to local groups. Again, local place-names are central to the tour.

Gordon is examining the implications of the General Data Protection Regulation for the Society.

Fiachra MacGabhann

Members of the Society (and the wider community) have been shocked and deeply saddened by the untimely death of Fiachra Mac Gabhann, a long-term member and an eminent place-name scholar who has lectured to us on a number of occasions. Fiachra was author of *Place-Names of Northern Ireland 7: Ballycastle and North-East Antrim* and had recently completed his great 10-volume work *Logainmneacha Mhaigh Eo* ('The Place-names of Mayo'), the largest work ever published in the Irish language. An obituary and a review of volume one will appear in the forthcoming edition of *Ainm*. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam uasal.

Annual Seán MacAirt Lecture

'The Importance of Place-names in the Storytelling Traditions of the Blue Stack Mountains' was given by Dr Eithne Ní Ghallchobhair of the Royal Irish Academy on 23th November 2017. Eithne began her presentation by relating the first ever Fenian lay she ever heard, *An Fearghamhain Donn* or *Scéal Loch Finne*. This contained many Blue Stack place-names for which explanations were given in the story. For example, Loch Finne is called after Fingheal, a young woman who was drowned while trying to save her brother Fearghamhain from a similar fate as he returned from a seven-year sojourn with the Fianna. Versions of this iconic tale were recorded in all local schools by the Irish Folklore Commission. Many place-names are keys to local history or mythology. Some have been created in living memory; *Ard an Ghunna* commemorates a spot where two men were shot in 1922. There are many records of place-names lore in the region (Séamus Ó Cathain recorded over 100 place-names in one work alone). Furthermore, they are now more available to the public than ever before, as the Folklore Commission's findings have been digitised on www.duchas.ie.

However, two problems remain. Few of the minor place-names have been mapped and, as the storytelling tradition dwindles, their location and the lore attached to them are lost. Minor place-names no longer serve any function for young people. For example, in the past farmers searching for sheep on foot would have found such names invaluable; Eithne recorded 46 place-names on one mountain alone. Young farmers now have quads and have no need for minor place-names. Eithne, a keen walker, has interviewed many of the remaining storytellers, and has mapped the location of many of the minor place-names of the Blue Stacks.

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See also: www.placenamesni.org www.logainm.ie

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