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## In (and around) Scatness\*

### *Introduction*

Place-names are cultural artefacts which can be scrutinised by researchers, in much the same way that a structure emerging out of the ground at the Old Scatness archaeological dig can be examined, with the aim of extracting from the individual place-name some information about the people who first created it, the linguistic and cultural environment in which they used it and the changing historical environment in which it then survived throughout ensuing centuries. The basic task of the toponymist is 'to provide etymologies based on the collection and study of early spellings', as Margaret Gelling noted in her excellent study of *Place-Names in the Landscape* (Gelling 1984, 1-2). Archaeologists, historians and scholars in other disciplines can then use the material as a supportive, analytical tool. One Shetland historian, at least, would argue that 'Scholars of place-names should aim to do more than collect names (or celebrate the 'nation' which coined them). They should attempt to reconstruct, or at least probe into, the societies where the names came to life' (Smith 1995, 26).

Toponymists and archaeologists may approach their raw material in different ways, but it has long been recognised that the two disciplines are complementary. For the toponymist, the existence of an archaeological site can confirm the appropriateness of a place-name and, if the site has been excavated and dated, can help towards identifying a date for the creation of the place-name, which is often otherwise very difficult to establish, particularly in places like Shetland where the early written record is limited in extent. For the archaeologist, the survival of a place-name into the modern period can often point towards a promising location for investigation, although it has to be admitted, from the start, that Scatness is a place-name which does not prove this point

particularly well because there is uncertainty about the etymology of the first, or specific, element in the name, which is the part of a place-name most likely to give informative detail about the locale of the name (Waugh 2001, 52-55).

Much less uncertainty has been expressed about the origin of the name of the parish, Dunrossness, within which Scatness is located. Dunrossness is a name now used to cover a wide extent of land in the south mainland of Shetland. It is important, however, to note, as Ronald Cant does in his detailed study of *The Medieval Churches and Chapels of Shetland* that 'South of Quarff the whole remaining section of the mainland to Sumburgh Head formed a single priest's district of Dunrossness that also extended to Fair Isle, but the mainland area seems to have been divided into a 'north parish' of Cunningsburgh, a mid-parish of Sandwick, and a south parish of Dunrossness proper ...' (Cant 1975, 19). The original specific in Dunrossness, is recorded in *Orkneyinga saga* as *Dynröst*, a name for a stretch of sea off the south of Shetland, instantly recognisable to all who have sailed upon it as a place of 'strong currents and severe gales' (Anderson 1873, 164), now known to Shetlanders as Da Roost, in which 'da' is the Shetland dialect version of English 'the'. The interpretation – strong tide – suggested by Jakobsen for the specific "*dynröst*" in his hypothetical "*dynrastar-nes*" (Jakobsen 1936, reprint 1993, 126) is most likely to be accurate, although 'noisy' would be a more precise rendering of the meaning of *dyn-* than 'strong', if Jakobsen intended to suggest 'strong' as a translation of *dyn-*. The present name for the strong tide to the south of Shetland does not preserve the first element 'Dyn-', and the only place in which it is still used is as the specific in the Norse name for the area defined by Cant (after Goudie 1889, xcvi) as 'Dunrossness proper', now extended to the wider parish of Dunrossness.

### *Scatness*

The settlement which is the focus of the present archaeological dig is described as 'Old' Scatness because it is

the 'historic focus of the Scatness settlement' (Nicholson & Dockrill 1998, 61). In the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, however, there was movement of settlement out on to the Scatness peninsula – the topographic feature which gives rise to the second, or generic, element in the place-name (ON *nes* – headland). It is difficult to establish conclusively whether the compound, Old Scatness, was really in use as a place-name prior to the archaeological dig, but it certainly does exist now after six years of intense local interest in site activities. In fact, it could be argued that the name Scatness itself has been rejuvenated and has taken on new locational overtones because of the significance of the site. In years to come, place-name researchers will not hear about Scatness the peninsula with its Norse name, or Scatness the township of later centuries; instead, they will hear of Scatness the multiperiod archaeological site, in the upper layers of which some demonstrably Norse artefacts were found. Perhaps another Sir Walter Scott will visit and create a suitably resonant name to match neighbouring Jarlshof, which was coined by Scott for his novel *The Pirate* – a 'colourful piratical romance' filled with 'images of Viking antiquity' (Wawn 1996, IX). In other words, place-names are constantly being invented, re-invented, changing and adapting to fit the circumstances in which they are being used and the purposes of the speakers who are using them. It is important not to lose sight of this fact while delving back to the linguistic origin of the name. Even if that is found and clearly identified, it never tells the whole story, but it does provide a significant starting place.

As Stephen Dockrill points out, 'Although there is no surviving structural evidence for Early Norse buildings within the excavated areas, the evidence points to a strong Norse presence on the site' (Nicholson & Dockrill 1998, 74) and the place-name story begins with this strong Norse presence in and around Scatness, and thereafter adds the equally strong Scots presence, both groups detectable through the language of place-names, although because Norse and Scots are both Germanic languages the picture is sometimes blurred at the edges. Place-names can provide no confirmation of settlement prior to the Norse period in the Scatness area and the lack of

such pre-Norse evidence in Shetland and Orkney is a topic which has been aired many times but, in the absence of hard evidence, no satisfactory conclusions have been reached. Differing views have been expressed, reviewed and challenged by the following archaeologists, historians and philologists, among others (Bigelow 1992, 13-15; Crawford 1987, 101; Fellows-Jensen 1984, 151; Graham-Campbell & Batey 1998, 39; Jakobsen 1936, reprint 1993, 2-3; Marwick 1952, 227; Nicolaisen 1979-80, 108-110; Stewart 1987, 19-20; Wainwright 1962, 102-107).

Hard evidence in the form of dated references is only sporadically available for Shetland place-names, by accident of documentary survival. The recent publication of two meticulously edited volumes of Shetland documents is very welcome (Ballantyne & Smith 1994; 1999). In a situation where documentary evidence is sparse, local knowledge is invaluable but it is limited by the fact that passage of time dims and distorts folk memory. It is always important to bear in mind that a place-name created during the last two or three centuries may seem very convincingly Norse because many Norn words survive in the Shetland dialect of Scots and are still active in place-name creation, providing a bridge between past and present, but often tempting the researcher to cross unwisely to the Norse past when the place-name itself is actually anchored in a more recent century. Having said that, however, it is important to stress the significance of the indigenous informant to local place-name research and some later examples will prove the point.

When Scatness first makes a regular appearance in records, in the early 16<sup>th</sup>-century, it is evident that it is not a name which attaches to any single farm, but is rather the name of a township of considerable local importance within which there were separately named subdivisions:

1506: 'Item, I leife to Jhone Mude xx markis, the quhilk I bocht fra hym in Scatness...', 26

1525: 'In primis, thre mark land and ane half mark land lyand in Scatnes callit Brendsowss ...', 35

1546: '... and the vther thre mark land lyand in Scatnes in

the parichin of Sanct Gregorii ...', 55

1578: '... 4 marks land in Skattisnes ...', 238

(Ballantyne & Smith 1999)

1588-9: 'The 60 marks land in Sowndbroche, Skatnes and Ulsness in the parish of Dunrosnes...', 56

1589: '...9 1/2 marks land in Southhous in Scatnes, 12 marks land in Newhous (*rectius* Mewhous) in Scatnes, 16 marks land in Scollandis in Scatnes...', 66

1592: '...of the 20 marks land, 6 pennies the mark, of Swounburgh, together with all right and kindness to the 'eyng' of 4 marks land, 6 pennies the mark, pertaining to the 'proves' of Norroway, liand in rig and randell' with the said 20 marks land of Swounburgh, and 'siclik' the 20 marks land, 6 pennies the mark, of Skaitness, in the parish of Dunrosnes...', 85

1592: '...together also with the pasturage of "twentie wodderis within all the boundis of the lokitnes of Skatnes...', 86

(Ballantyne & Smith 1994)

1605: '...the 20 merkland (6 penneis the merkland) of Soundburgh, togidder with all rycht, titill and kyndnes .. to the samyn eyng of the 4 merkland (6 penneis the merk) pertening to the provest of Norroway lyand in rinrig and randell with the said 20 merkland, .. the 20 merkland of Scatnes (6 penneis the merk), with all and sindrie pairtis .. of the samyn from the hicht of the hill to the lawest of the ebb... lyand within ... (the) parochin of Dunrosnes', p. 607 (cf. Ballantyne & Smith 1994, 85)

1605: '...toggidder also with the pasturage of 20 wedderis within all the boundis of the Lokitnes of Scatnes...', p. 608 (cf. Ballantyne & Smith 1994, 85)

(*Register of the Great Seal (RMS)*, Vol. VI 1593-1608)

1617: '... for their removal from 3 merk land 6d. the merk in Brintshous in Scatnes...', 61

1628: '... 3 barrels of salt, each barrel worth £10, lying in a

skeo in Scatnes in the parish of Dunrosnes ...', 141  
*Court Book of Shetland 1615-29*

Jakob Jakobsen, in his study of the place-names of Shetland does not comment on Scatness, although he does include a reference to "de Gerts o' Scatness" (Jakobsen 1936, reprint 1993, 43). The fact that he makes no comment on Scatness itself, probably points to his perception of it as a relatively minor topographical name, if he gave it any consideration whatsoever. Nothing could highlight the changing fortunes of the place more clearly than the fact that Jakobsen only thought its name worthy of tangential mention when he was illustrating the Old Norse term *garðr* – enclosure, which, by definition, refers to later, secondary settlement. Contrast this 19<sup>th</sup>-century perception with the 16<sup>th</sup>-century township of considerable size and economic importance in the parish of Dunrossness.

John Stewart suggests derivation of the specific in Scatness from '*skata*, f., 'a skate, which it resembles' (Stewart 1987, 219). References in place-names to fish, however, usually relate to fish caught and consumed in the neighbouring sea, rather than to a perceived resemblance to the shape of the fish on land, and there is no evidence from the middens excavated thus far at Old Scatness to suggest the eating of a preponderance of skate, whether in the Norse period or earlier.

Another possibility could be ON *skattr* – tribute or tax, but one would not expect tax to have been levied on a 'ness' or headland, although, from a linguistic point of view, early forms of Scatness do not contradict this suggested etymology, and the name, at least in the 16<sup>th</sup>-century, clearly applied to a place of some territorial significance. It is, therefore, worth pausing to consider whether or not *skattr* might be the specific because 'scat' could have been collected from the arable portion of the ness inside the dyke which walled off the outer grazing land stretching out to the Ness of Burgi, which is the name of the outermost point of the peninsula of Scatness. It is just possible that the present distinction made by some locals between Scatness, the inner part of the ness inside the dyke,

and the Ness of Burgi, the outer part beyond the dyke, delimits the area – the Lokitnes of Scatnes (Ballantyne & Smith 1994, 85) – inside which scat was levied in earlier centuries. An 1873 Lerwick Sheriff Court document entitled ‘Decree Arbitral by the Arbiter in Division of Scatness’ would tend to confirm that the perception of division between the ‘ness’ of Scatness and the ‘ness’ of Burgi was current among the men engaged in the 1777 division of Scatness (D8/385/3/2), which was eventually finalised in the 1873 document, in which the following summative statement is made:

‘Further I find that the total extent of the land forming the subject of division as finally settled in the course of the proceedings before me and including the whole arable and grass lands of the town of Scatness, the Ness of Scatness, the ness of Burgie or Bergie, and the separate property amounts to 383 acres, three roods 11 poles’ (SC12 53/13).

There is also now a smallholding known as Da Grind (ON *grind* – a gate, surviving in the present-day Shetland dialect in the same form) which marks the gate through the dyke which closed off the outer part of the ness. No doubt the gate has been known as ‘da grind’ since the dyke was built (i.e. at least since the late 16<sup>th</sup>-century) but the smallholding which now bears the name is more recent.

None of this evidence about locked and open ‘nesses’, amounts to proof that the specific in the name Scatness derives from ON *skattr* and the real weakness of the argument is that it is based on 16<sup>th</sup>-century evidence which is far removed, chronologically, from the probable early Norse origin of the topographical place-name. The strongest contender for the role of specific in a topographical name has to be a term which is descriptive of the topography and for the specific in Scatness, therefore, the most likely Norse word is ON *skati* — something long, thin and protruding, which describes the Scatness promontory very well. There is a difficulty in that the only surviving written evidence for the existence of *skati* is in poetic language (Cleasby, Vigfusson, Craigie 1982 reprint, 540), but it is reasonable to assume that a similar word existed

in the everyday language with a more general meaning, such as that suggested here (personal comments: Judith Jesch, University of Nottingham; Tom Schmidt, University of Oslo). Various place-names in *Norske Gaardnavne* have been suggested by the editors to contain the common noun *skati* in the sense of 'protruding part': eg Skattum IV, 70, 144; Skaten XI, 46; Skatland XI, 101 (Rygh 1897-1936). The personal byname, *Skati*, is based on the same likeness to something long, or tall, and thin, but it is very unlikely that a personal name would be combined with a topographical element such as *nes*.

There remains one further quibble. Why would it be necessary to add the word *nes* 'a headland' to the word *skati* 'a protruding part of something', because the words have the same meaning? Arne Kruse, in a personal comment, has given added support to the suggestion that *skati* is, in fact, totally appropriate in this context by providing parallel names from Norway. He points out that in Hardanger the names Skatetangen and Skatanes also occur, the latter probably from a masculine form *\*skat* used in coastal names about headlands ending in a narrow point. A further parallel can be found in common place-names such as Skagnes, in which ON *skagi* = a projecting point of land. (The element *skagi* is also found in Skaw in Unst.) For these *Skagnes* names, it has been suggested that the original name was *\*Skag(i)* and that *nes* was added at a later date. The same might be proposed with regard to Scatness; it might be preferable to consider the *-ness* in Scatness as a secondary addition and to suggest that the original place-name might well have been *\*Skat(i)* (personal comment: Tom Schmidt). Other place-name scholars, however, believe that names of the *Skagnes*-type were first created in that form and did not go through the developmental stage described here.

### *'In Scatness'*

Whatever the etymology of Scatness may be, it appears to be the sole example of its type in Shetland. There is no helpful



local grouping of names to point us towards the existence of a larger unit with Scatness at its centre, as often happens in an area where there has been proliferation of settlement in and around a focal point with a simplex topographical name, such as the various Strom- names which Brian Smith has proposed as evidence of an old Strom estate (Smith 1995, 34-5). Other farms are noted as being 'in Scatness' as already quoted above (Ballantyne & Smith 1994, 66) but place-names are not helpful in establishing the historical links which clearly existed, at least in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The farms which are mentioned as being 'in Scatness' have already been listed above: Brendsowss (1525); Southhous in Scatnes, 12 marks land in Newhous (*rectius* Mewhous) in Scatnes, 16 marks land in Scollandis in Scatnes...(1589).

Many of these place-names are still in existence today, with the exception of the 'half mark land lyand in Scatnes callit Brendsowss ...' (1525) (Ballantyne & Smith 1999, 35) which appears again in 1617 as Brintshous (Court Book of Shetland 1615-29, 61) and as Brintishous (*ibid*, 74) but is now lost. The specific in the name may be the ON personal name *Brandr*, and the place-name may have fallen into disuse when the owner and his descendants died or departed elsewhere. Hugh Marwick records a similar name – Brunthouse – from Flotta in Orkney and compares it with Bruntbigging (Burray) and Brinnigar (Stromness) and suggests that burning may have occurred in these places, although, as he notes, early forms of Brinnigar make that unlikely (Marwick 1952, 187). In the Shetland name, however, there is a persistent medial –s– (Brendsowss, Brintshous, Brintshous) which is difficult to explain away if ON *brennt* – burnt is to be considered as the source.

The generic in Brendsowss and, more obviously, in Southhous and Mewhous is ON *hús* – house, and there is an excellent article by William P. L. Thomson on the subject of Shetland 'houses' (Thomson 1998, 107-127). In his discussion of run-rig agriculture in Shetland, Thomson states the following:

'Run-rig agriculture in Shetland involved three levels of organisation, the township, the 'house' and the tenant-

holding. A township can be envisaged as a confederation of 'houses', bound together by an encircling hill-dyke and united by shared interests in unevenly distributed resources such as arable land, grass and meadow-hay. These constituent 'houses', sometimes known as 'farms', might each be occupied by a single tenant, but they were often divided into two, three or more quite distinct tenant holdings' (Thomson 1998, 107).

As Thomson goes on to point out, 'It can be seen that there are problems with terminology ...' and that is certainly true in terms of place-name etymology as well. Interpretation of the place-name cannot reveal single or multiple tenancy, but the historian, Brian Smith, is convinced that multiple tenancy applied in Scatness 'houses' (personal comment). If the interpretation of the specific in Brendsowss as a personal name is accepted, single tenancy of that particular 'house' might be probable but, even then, there could have been several tenants, all members of the same family.

If the Scatness 'houses' fit into the confederate pattern described by Thomson, which seems very probable, it would be reasonable to suggest that because there is ON *suðr* – south in Southhous, and ON *miðr* – middle in Mewhous, the lost Brendsowss might have been to the north in relation to these two farms, although distribution patterns are not always governed by linguistic logic. There is, of course, a Northhouse still in existence to the north of Toab but it is unlikely to be a replacement of Brendsowss because it is not 'in Scatness' but more probably in Lee (personal comment: Brian Smith). It, or another example of the same place-name, is mentioned in 1589 as follows:

'... and 1 mark 2 ures land in Northhous in the parish of Dunrosnes, together with Mathew's sasine of the said lands ...' (Ballantyne & Smith 1994, 71).

The 1589 reference to the '16 marks land in Scollandis in Scatnes' (Ballantyne & Smith 1994, 66) will present no problems of recognition to those familiar with the present

place-name, Skolland, given here in the form recorded on the 1882, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, 6" Ordnance Survey map. Jakobsen cites 'Skollan (Du)' and posits '\*í skálanum or í skálum' from ON *skáli* – a shed, hut (Jakobsen 1936, reprint 1993, 96). He does not give the source of his form ending '-lan', but the -landis of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century reference should also be considered. Jakobsen's definition of the place-name may recreate the name as it was first coined by Norse settlers, but it is also possible that the original was Skolland, rather than Skollan. *Norske Gaardnavne* includes an example of Skaaland, recorded as 'Skolandt, Skaaland' in 1563 (Rygh 1897-1936, X, 31) and proposes either ON *skáli* or *skál* – a bowl or hollow, as the specific, along with the generic ON *land* – land. Both of these specifics would be acceptable for the Scatness name as well.

Evidence for the division of Skolland into two parts by the late 16<sup>th</sup>-/early 17<sup>th</sup>-century, can be found in the references to Nether Scoland (ON *neðurr* – lower, further down) and Over Scoland (ON *yfir* – over, above) (Ballantyne & Smith 1994, 197), both of which terms were borrowed into the local dialect of Scots at an early stage and are commonly used in the Northern Isles. In the case of 'Scollandis in Scatnes', no matter what Norse generic is preferred for the name Skolland, there must have been influence from Scots, to give rise to the 16<sup>th</sup>-century form '-landis'. Scots *land* (pl.) – the fields (of a farm), would have been a very appropriate reference to a place which had '16 marks land'. As has already been inferred, there is a tendency for people using place-names to alter them marginally so as to render them applicable in the language of the speaker, if the sound of the original place-name fits the desired new meaning. Present-day local pronunciation of Skolland sometimes incorporates the final [d], but it is difficult to be certain that the dental stop is invariably present after nasal [n].

### 'In (and around) Scatness'

If we add the place-names which are next listed in the usefully detailed 1589 document, after the names described as

being 'in Scatnes', we have many of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century landholdings from 'Dunrossness proper' and many of the place-names which probably originated in the early period of Norse settlement, although documentary proof is lacking:

1589: '...2 marks land in Got, 21 marks land 'in the four Tollopes' (*sic*), 20 marks 2 ures land in Lie, 8 1/2 marks land in Oknastay, 4 1/2 marks land in Daill, 11 marks land 'in the four Exingabous' (*sic*), 8 1/2 marks land in Garth ...' (Ballantyne & Smith 1994, 66)

There are several examples of Got/Gott etc. in Shetland place-names and it often occurs without a specific, as it does here. Other early references to Got (Dunrossness) are to Gait (c.1507x1513) (Ballantyne & Smith 1999, 263); Gote (1597); Goit (1603), Gott (1606) (Ballantyne & Smith 1994, 117, 161, 197). The Old Norse word from which it stems is *gata* – a road, path, which was also borrowed into the Shetland dialect and is still commonly used in the later form *gaet* (Graham 1979, 28). Oddly, the word does not occur in Orkney place-names and it is not recorded as a noun in Marwick's dictionary of the Norn language in Orkney (Marwick 1929), although there are examples of its use in place-names in Norway, Faroe and Iceland. In addition, it is a common element in other parts of Scotland and England where there has been strong Scandinavian influence in the past and its absence from Orkney place-names and from Marwick's dictionary is, therefore, doubly strange.

ON *garðr* – an enclosure or a yard, is even more common in Shetland place-names and it is always difficult to pinpoint a particular 'Garth', without recourse to information other than the purely onomastic. The Garth mentioned in the 1589 document cited here is derived from the same Norse element as the *garðr* which Jakobsen identifies in 'de Gerts o' Scatness' (Jakobsen 1936, reprint 1993, 43), but it is not, in fact, the Scatness name. Brian Smith identifies it as Garth in Quendale, because of the reference to '8 1/2 marks land in Garth'. Garth, Quendale, comprised 96 marks of land, 8 1/2 of which belonged to the king. Unfortunately, the Norse settlers

in Shetland made no attempt to distinguish between *garðr*-names for the sake of succeeding generations of researchers who might be engaged in the task of identifying and defining the names as distinct entities.

ON *hlíð* – a slope and *dalr* – a valley, are also very common place-name elements in the Northern Isles and can be seen in Lie (*hlíð*) and Daill (*dalr*) (1589) respectively (Ballantyne & Smith 1994, 66). Stewart records 'Lee, Tolob, Dunrossness' as having been 'destroyed by sand' and cites various early forms from the early 16<sup>th</sup>-century onwards (Stewart 1987, 135), starting with the form Le which is recorded in the 'Skat of Yetland'. Daill is also recorded in the early 16<sup>th</sup>-century 'Skat of Yetland' as Dealle, Daile (Ballantyne & Smith 1999, 256).

The curious 1589 reference to '... the four Tollopes' and '... the four Exingabous' is not repeated in later documents and the editorial insertion of (*sic*) points to a degree of scepticism on their part about the accuracy of the apparent quadripartite division (Ballantyne & Smith 1994, 66). By removing the English plural -s, we can identify Tollope with modern Toab and Exingabou with Exnaboe and discuss the two place-names in that order.

Toab does occur as a place-name in Orkney and Marwick's description of it is worth quoting in full because of some similarities to the Shetland name and its location:

'Tollop 1439, 1584, 1590; Toop 1509; Toep and Thoep 1519; Thoip 1537; Tohope 1579; Tolop 1589 (all in R.E.O.); Tollope 1492 R.; Tohop 1500 and 1595 R.

A tunship rather than a farm-name, and from the 15<sup>th</sup> century at least, it consisted of two parts – "T- above the yard," and "T- beneath the yard." Though the exact skattable valuation is difficult to ascertain from the Rentals, it would seem that the two parts amounted to 2 urislands'.

The 'yard' referred to certainly indicated a dyke of some kind (ON *garðr*), and a parallel may be found in Papa Westray where the island was divided into two parts – North Yard and South Yard – the dividing 'yard'

being one of the old gairsty dykes. North Ronaldsay was similarly divided into three parts by two such gairsties, one called The Muckle Gairsty; and a part of the parish of Sandwich is still known as North Dyke since it apparently had such a gairsty as its southern boundary. These gairsties or treb-dykes are quite prehistoric...' (Marwick 1952, 86).

In Toab, Orkney, we find not four but two divisions and, looking at the situation from the negative stance of absence of proof to the contrary, it is worth pausing to consider the possibility of a divided township for the similarly named Toab in Shetland. 'The Skat of Yetland' (c. 1507x1513), however, provides no proof of division into four parts; at least not from a place-name point of view:

Skat Dunrossness:

Item, Tullope, iiij s viij d. veafirtht (Ballantyne & Smith 1999, 256; for an explanation of 'veafirtht', 254).

Landmaill Dunrossness

Item, Guttrun in Scholland, v mark in Schatnes, and ij mark in Tullope, fat guid iiij l. buter, tenetur iiij d.

Item, ij mark in Tullope pait.

Item, Henry in Burrohous, viij mark in Tullop, viij d. fat guid (Ballantyne & Smith 1999, 265).

Other early references to Toab in Shetland, as recorded by John Stewart (Stewart 1987, 147-8) are similar in pattern to those recorded by Marwick for the Orkney name. Forms such as that in the 1606 reference to '1 1/2 marks udal land of Tolhoip' (Ballantyne & Smith 1994, 197) confirm that there is no reason to quibble with the derivation suggested tentatively by Marwick that 'early forms point to an ON *\*toll-hóp*, 'toll-bay or -hope,' i.e. a harbour where foreign ships paid toll on arrival or departure (Marwick 1952, 86). He goes on to draw a parallel between the Orkney name and 'Tolob ... above the present Pool of Virkie in Dunrossness', which is now a much

less significant bay than it would have been in earlier centuries, due to 20<sup>th</sup>-century modifications in the outline of the bay – particularly a narrowing of access to the sea – while building the airstrip and, more recently, the marina.

Before leaving Toab, another curious coincidence which seems to link the Orkney and Shetland examples, should be noted. Marwick suggests that the two parts of Toab in Orkney were divided by a 'yard' or 'gairsty dyke' and Derek Black, sadly now deceased farmer in Toab, informed me that the path running down in front of Toab and Exnaboe to the Pool of Virkie is known as Da Gersti, recorded here as he wrote it on the 6" map (Fig. 1). The term is recorded by Jakobsen as *gordsta/gordste/gordsti* and is defined as '1) a ridge of earth remaining from an old fence (in the outfield). 2) boundary (ridge of earth) between two pieces of arable land' (Jakobsen 1928, reprint 1985, 255). As Jakobsen also notes, 'in Dunrossness, *gerste* (was) used as a common noun' (Jakobsen 1936, reprint 1993, 45) and it is, therefore, not surprising to find a path with that name in present use. While it would be wrong to make too much of this naming coincidence, one can note that one of the land features associated with these two toll bays is a 'gairsty dyke' (Orkney) or a *gerste* (Shetland). The dry, raised surface of a *gerste* would certainly have provided easy access from the landward side, which must have been a prerequisite of a bay where taxable goods were being landed.

The value of a knowledgeable local informant cannot be overstated and Derek Black's knowledge of his home territory was encyclopaedic. Its breadth can be further illustrated through the place-name Ocknastay which is recorded in the 1589 document (*Ballantyne & Smith* 1994, 66), in 'The Skat of Yetland' (c.1507x1513) as Oxinnasta, Oxinasta, Oxnasta (*Ballantyne & Smith* 1994, 256, 263, 265) and as Ocktnistae in 1735 (Bailie Court Book of Dunrossness, RH.11/29/1). It does not appear on the 6" OS map of the area published in 1882 but it could still be identified by Derek Black, in a form which he represented as *Occinster* and which he located on the map to the north-west of Exnaboe (Fig.1).

Reference has already been made to '... the four Exingabous (*sic*)' (*Ballantyne & Smith* 1994, 66). Exnaboe almost certainly





shares specific with Ocknastay/Oxinnasta /Occinster: the area must have provided good grazing for cattle – ON *yxna* (gen. pl.). It is Exnaboe which has survived as a place-name to the present day, although it is possible that Oxnasta, with ON *staðir* – a farm, as its generic, might have been the name of the primary settlement, whereas ON *bær* – a farm, tended to be used of minor, secondary settlement in Shetland and, in this pair of place-names, may have been a description of the good grazing land for the cattle reared on the farm of Oxinnasta. Alternatively, Derek Black's version – Occinster – may preserve oral record of an original ON *setr/sætr* – hill farm, shieling, in which case the *bær*-name would have been more likely to survive. Could the pasture land associated with the farm of Exingabou have been divided into four distinct named parts (one of them being Oxnasta/-ster), giving rise to the description quoted above: '11 marks land 'in the four Exingabous'?

Exnaboe is a name which appears quite frequently in records from the start of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century onwards, in forms such as Oxinabo, Oxnabo, Oxnabuye 'Skat of Yetland' (c.1507x1513); Exmabuif (1578-9) (Ballantyne & Smith 1999, 256, 265, 241) and as Oxingabu (1590-1), Axnabow (1602) (Ballantyne & Smith 1994, 78, 156) but, unfortunately, there is no earlier reference to the name. Locals, at the present day, refer to Boe [bø], rather than Exnaboe, and that simplex name is also recorded from the 16<sup>th</sup>-century, as in 'Erling of Bw, lawrychtman of Dunrosnes' (1567) (Ballantyne & Smith 1999, 125) and again as 'Bw in the town of Exinabu, in the cross parish of Dunrosnes' (1607) (Ballantyne & Smith 1994, 208). The latter reference certainly suggests that Exinabu is the primary settlement, with Bw incorporated as part of the lands of Exinabu, at least at this period in history.

Two further names deserve mention in this initial survey, although many others could lay claim to inclusion. The two place-names which seem to stand out as omissions from the present text are Virkie and Sumburgh. Virkie is interesting because it seems to imply the need for fortification or protection of some kind, being derived from ON *virki* – a building (in the same sense as Scots *wark*), wall, stronghold or

castle. Alternatively, it could simply be that the building was imposing and this example of ON *virki* was certainly located in an area of considerable economic importance, which, in turn, would give rise to the need for protection of assets. Incidentally, the only other place where Jakobsen records *Virki* in Shetland is at Lund, in Westing, Unst (Jakobsen 1936, reprint 1993, 119). It is notable that there are many parallels between place-names at the northern and southern extremities of Shetland, but further investigation of that perception will have to wait.

Sumburgh has occupied a place in written records since at least the 15<sup>th</sup>-century when it is recorded as 'Swinburgh' in 1498 (Ballantyne & Smith 1999, 24) and in the 16<sup>th</sup>-century as the 'harbour called 'upt Ness' in Swineborchovet' in 1567 (Ballantyne & Smith 1999, 121). This latter is further clarified in an ensuing document, also dated 1567, which talks of 'the harbour of Drosteness [*inn der Havenn up Drosteness*]' (presumably Dunrossness) where the 'citizen of Bremen ... rightly paid the toll he owed...' (Ballantyne & Smith 1999, 123). These references serve as a graphic illustration of how difficult it is to etymologise with any degree of certainty. In his essay on Shetland place-names, Jakobsen offers the suggestion that '*Sumburg* (Du) means "south-broch" (*sunnborg*)' (Jakobsen 1897, 71), and that is certainly a possibility. A parallel can be drawn with Sumba, the most southerly name on the modern map of Suðuroy in Jakobsen's native Faroe, the modern specific in which strongly resembles that in Sumburgh. Jakobsen suggests that the specific in Sumba refers to its southerly position:

'Sunnbø er den sydligste bygd på Sønderø, deraf navnet' (Jakobsen 1909, reprint 1957, 95).

On the other hand, the 'Swin-' of the 1498 reference to Swinburgh does strongly suggest the possibility of ON *svín* – a pig, or possibly *marsvín* – a dolphin, as the specific in the place-name. Gillian Fellows-Jensen has drawn my attention to a comparable Danish place-name, Svendborg, for which the animal term *svín* has also been proposed, meaning either 'pig

(domestic or wild)' or 'dolphin' (Sørensen 1958, 6-7) and Sørensen lists other examples of the place-name type 'animal name + *borg*' to show that this is not an isolated instance. Whales are still a tourist attraction off Sumburgh Head and one can easily imagine dolphins playing near the shore during the early period of Norse settlement, giving the broch its name by their frequent appearance in the neighbouring sea.

No matter how convincing the visual image of playful dolphins may be, however, there can be no absolute certainty about the etymology of the specific in Sumburgh, although one can be certain that the Norse created the name which has survived throughout the ensuing centuries relatively intact, although enigmatic.

### *Conclusion*

Enigmatic survival has to be the concluding note in any survey of Shetland's place-names. People are the key to place-names which are preserved by word of mouth and it is appropriate to return to the local people for a place-name which will provide us with our concluding question in this brief survey of some of the settlement names in the area to the south of the Ward Hill (ON *varða* – beacon) or 'Dunrossness proper'. This area is now known locally by the Scots description *Da Laich Ness* – the lower part of the Ness (i.e. the lower part of Dunrossness parish). When 'laich' is used in this way, however, it generally implies an opposition between two parts, whereas Cant identifies three divisions of the parish into Cunningsburgh, Sandwick and 'Dunrossness proper' (Cant 1975, 19). Where, then, is \*Da Heich Ness? Does the usage *Da Laich Ness* imply that Sandwick and Cunningsburgh are seen as \*Da Heich/Upper Ness, versus Dunrossness proper, or is there another possible interpretation? Answers will be most welcome, but this paper on place-names 'in (and around) Scatness' has aimed to show that there is likely to be more than one possible solution and that it is wise to offer a balance of probabilities.

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O.S. 6" First Edition map (1882, reprint 1895).

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