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*Alasdair C Whyte with
Katherine Forsyth and Simon Taylor*

Glasgow's Gaelic Place-Names

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PLACE-NAME ANALYSIS is notable for its value in assessing the linguistic history and development of landscapes. As such, it offers valuable insight into the relationships between language, environment and society at the time of place-name coining. Alasdair C Whyte, Katherine Forsyth and Simon Taylor provide a rigorous introduction to Gaelic naming practices in Glasgow. The book is effectively split into five parts, with an extended introduction followed by four chapters. The introduction, and the book on the whole, assume no previous knowledge of place-names and take on a suitably accessible tone to accommodate varied readership. The authors clearly define the boundaries of Glasgow as anywhere within the modern city council boundaries, and nicely discuss the relationship between Gaelic and Northern Brittonic languages and the two subgroups of the Celtic language family (p. 20).

Chapter One focuses on the source material of the corpus of place-names, discussing the varying documents and charters that preserve the early forms of place-names. This section features an excellent explanation of tracking linguistic changes over time (p. 43), and interestingly uses images of source maps alongside the discussion of individual place-names collated from them (pp. 68-69).

Chapter Two examines the language(s) and structure of place-names including a brief – but useful – summary of simplex vs complex names and generic vs specific elements (pp. 78-82). If intended for a more general audience, perhaps this discussion would prove more beneficial towards the start of the book. However, both this summary and the subsequent linguistic discussions of lenition and palatalisation, which are vital to the analysis of Gaelic place-names and their changes over time, are written in a clear and accessible manner (pp. 84-87).

Chapter Three engages with the links between place-names, society, and environment. This section offers a brief overview into the varying flora, fauna,

peoples, industries and landscape features in Gaelic place-names. The necessary broad nature of this section constrains any in-depth environmental discussions in relation to the potential re-evaluation of Glasgow's medieval environment in comparison to the modern city. However, the authors emphasise the value of landscape and topography in Gaelic place-names and clearly display fundamental material for later environmental scholarship and analysis to expand upon. The double spread visual depiction of the various landform elements (pp. 124-125) is exceptionally useful. The map of waterways is equally as impressive, but might have been improved by an image of the water at each place to clarify the different type of feature that each Gaelic topographic term is applied to (pp. 128-129).

Finally, Chapter Four presents the list of all eighty-eight Gaelic Glaswegian place-names in their modern English and modern Gaelic forms, alongside their national grid references, historical written forms, original element breakdown, and English translation. The acknowledgement of degrees of uncertainty in the breakdown of name elements and their English translations is very useful and, despite the belying clarity of information delivered across the monograph, draws attention to the difficulty in dealing with place-name evidence. Furthermore, the separate table compiled of the various Gaelic elements found across the corpus (alongside their parts of speech, gender, genitive singular form, meaning, and the names which they are found in) lays an invaluable foundation for the continued study of Gaelic place-names beyond the confines of Glasgow. If time and space permitted, a more comprehensive discussion of language interactions and contact may have been constructive, but it must be stressed that the material outlined throughout the book has exceptional potential for both general interest and further study.

Two minor notes should be mentioned: a clearer statement on the methodology and/or criteria for compiling the corpus of names could have proved beneficial for later studies building from this work; and several visual aids, figures, or images are provided without any caption, description, or explanation (eg. pp. 31, 35, 34). However, this monograph must be commended for its visual appeal and relative accessibility, and the unique addition of 'fun fact' snippets in the margins may be of particular interest for casual readership. Overall, the main value of this book is the presentation and contextualisation of the Gaelic place-names of Glasgow in a complete and approachable compendium. The authors well and truly achieve their aim of proving the definitive presence and importance of the Gaelic language throughout the history of the city.

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