

Place-names in and around the Fleet Valley

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Oak Clints

See under Clints of Dromore above.

Old Land

This cottage stands on the south slope of Ben John, overlooking Cardoness Wood from the west, with Old Land Loch, presumably associated though it is nearly a mile away to the north-east. The name probably has the dialectal sense of 'land formerly cultivated but returned to pasture'. Given the fairly marginal location, this seems more likely than 'land that has long been under cultivation' as suggested by Maxwell. But, again considering the location, it is not impossible that a Brittonic name is in the background: **alt-lann* would have been *alt*, 'a steep height', with a *lann*, 'an enclosed clearing from former scrubby woodland'. *Llan* in Welsh, and *lan* in Cornish, came to be used for a Christian cemetery, a church, and eventually a parish, but there is no evidence for it being so used in the Cumbric lands around the Solway, and it is unlikely to be relevant here.

Orchard

The site of this dwelling below Cardoness Wood and overlooking the Lane Burn and the main road, is in a more or less rectangular plot that cuts into the boundary of the wood, doubtless a trace of the layout of the eponymous orchard. The 1st edition OS map shows around a dozen trees, most of them in a row, near to the house, but no-one was living there by the time of the 1881 Census.

Orchars

This ruined dwelling in recently cleared FCS plantations at the northern end of Girthon parish, occupied in the nineteenth century by a shepherd and his family, attracted the interest of the great Celtic scholar William J. Watson. In his 'History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland' (1926) he wrote: 'Orchars on the Black Water of Dee is the English plural of M(iddle) Ir(ish) *orchar*, Sc(ottish) G(aelic) *urchair*, a cast, a shot, with reference, perhaps, to some feat, actual or legendary, of casting.' Undoubtedly the location enjoys a wide prospect across the Dee which might have encouraged shot-putting or javelin-hurling. However, Watson added a footnote, 'O(ld) Ir(ish) *airchur*, *arathir*, 'projecting part of a plough' (lit. 'front-cast of plough' [Modern Scottish Gaelic *urchair*]) glosses *temo*, a plough-beam... In place-names therefore it may refer to a projecting spur of land.' Indeed, **ar-chur* is basically a verbal noun meaning 'a putting forward, a projection', which does suit very well the location of the steading on the tip of the northern spur of the Fell of Fleet (Gormal Hill) that extends to the west of the Nick of Orchars, and seems the likeliest explanation for the name.

Watson saw this same element in a few other place-names in Scotland, though more recent research into early records suggests other origins for most. However, Pitnaurchara in Dunfermline parish, Fife, may well be **pett-an-* (portion of land of the) *-urchaire*.

On the 1st edition OS map, Nether Orchar is shown about a quarter of a mile to the east as a ruin. The plural Orchars would have referred to both tenements. Back Hill of Orchars is to the south-west, on the far side of the spur from the Nick, and overlooking Loch Grannoch. Maxwell listed Orchars in Minnigaff, but incorrectly.

Ornockenoch

This house among the hills to the west of Rusko appears on Blaeu's map as *Ardkrockanock*. On the 1st edition OS map, *Ornockenough* is a substantial farm with a thrashing mill and a mill-dam to the north. That mill and dam no longer exist, but a more substantial artificial loch was created to the south of the settlement in 1931 for a fish-pond, and as part of a private hydro-power scheme, for Rusko House. It is fed by the Ornockenoch Burn which flows on down to join the Pulcree Burn and thence the Fleet.

The name is surely **àrd-* (modern Gaelic *àird*) 'high place' plus *cnocanach* 'abounding in hillocks' (see *Knockbogle* above), an accurate description of the glacially-shaped landscape here. Maxwell rightly points out that Pont's spelling preserved on the Blaeu map reflects the pronunciation *croc-*, common in modern Scottish Gaelic, Ulster Gaelic and Manx; it is rather rarely reflected in the 'official' spellings of places in Galloway, though Crockencally in Kirkbean, **crocán nan cailleach*, 'hillock of the nuns', is an interesting example.