

# Place-names in and around the Fleet Valley

==== S =====

## Sailor's Home

A bungalow at the site of an earlier cottage on Rainton Farm is said to have been an inn. It appears to correspond on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map to a small, un-named building where a field boundary is crossed by a track that would probably have been used by seafarers making their way up from the coast at Airds Bay and Carrick Bay towards Girthon.

## Sandgreen

On the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map, the avenue running south-west from Cally House ends at Airds Bay, where a bathing house is shown, ancestor of today's holiday village. The name Sandgreen only appears on Sandgreen Hill, though that was no doubt named from the sward between the hill-foot and the beach; there was a sand pit on that green. The name is obviously English, probably given in the early nineteenth century, when residents and guests at Cally came down here to enjoy the newly fashionable pastimes of beach picnics and sea-bathing. Nowadays, Airds Bay is more usually referred to as Sandgreen Bay.

## Scar Hill

'Scar', Scots *scaur*, Gaelic *sgeirr*, all from Old Norse *sker*, are common in topographic names throughout Scotland and northern England in a wide range of 'rocky' senses. In hill-names, it typically refers to 'a sheer rock, crag, precipice, cliff, a steep hill from which the soil has been washed away' (Scottish National Dictionary). However, Scar Hill in Anwoth parish, an eastern spur of Stey Fell, overlooking Woodhead and Upper Rusko to the north, does not seem to have any outstanding formations to match any of those descriptions, it is actually a rather featureless rounded cone, corrugated with stony ridges, but no more so than the surrounding landscape. The motive for its name is not very clear.

There are three more Scar Hills in the Stewartry – on Black Stockarton Moor in Kirkcudbright parish, in Balmaclellan and in Irongray: all are in rocky districts, but only the last (otherwise Scaur, Scarr), overlooking Glenkiln Reservoir, seems to have any marked 'scar'.

## Scrogs of Drumruck

See Drumruck above.

## Seggy Neuk

This *neuk* 'nook' is in the much-quarried hillside just south-east of the Clauchan of Girthon. Maxwell, citing Jamieson's Dictionary, gives the meaning of Scots *seg* as 'yellow flower-de-luce' (i.e. flag iris) '*Iris pseudacorus*', which flourishes in boggy locations and when not in flower can be confused with sedge (*pseudacorus* = 'false sedge'). However, the Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue gives 'sedge' for that word, and for *seggy* 'sedgy, covered in or bordered with sedge or sedges, hence, marshy', adding that it 'is found only as an initial element in place-names' (though the Scottish National Dictionary adds a transferred meaning, 'crabbed, cantankerous'). Others in the Stewartry include Seggy Gut marked north of Loch Neldricken on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map but not on current ones, and a lost *Segyfuird*; there is a Seg Hill in Balmaclellan parish.

## Shaw Hill

*Shaw*, from Old English *sceaega*, and often in the north replacing the Norse cognate *skogr*, is very common from Yorkshire and Lancashire north into Lowland Scotland as a term for a small wood, a copse or a thicket. Shaw Hill that forms the north-eastern spur of the Fell of Fleet, in the north of Girthon parish, is one of four in the Stewartry, and there are seven more elsewhere in our Region. Today it stands out as bare heathery moorland above the surrounding FCS plantations, and it is unlikely to have ever been thickly wooded, or to have sustained any substantial area of managed woodland. The name either referred to a small clump of trees standing out in the generally tree-less landscape, or carried its earlier sense of shrubby growth on marginal land.

## Shiel Rig

A *shiel* in Scots (with many different spellings, including *sheil*, which is the standard form on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map, though generally *shiel* on modern ones) was any kind of hut, bothy or more or less temporary shelter. However, in the Galloway hills, the word is used most frequently for the places where those overseeing the livestock lodged during the time of summer grazing on the uplands (often women, see Queen's Rig above); that is to say, it is synonymous with 'shieling', and, like that word, refers also to the locations of such shelters and to the portions of pastureland associated with them. The number of place-names in on maps covering Dumfries and Galloway region that involve some form of this word is well over a hundred, there are more than forty in The Stewartry incorporating 'sheil', 'shiel' or 'shield'. These include two Shiel Rigs, one in Carsphairn parish, the other in Girthon, where the name refers to a ridge (see Rig of Burnfoot etc. above) forming the northern spur of the White Top of Culreoch. It is now part of the Galloway Forest, extensively planted with conifers.

## Shiphowes

Although recorded in a transcript of the 1851 Girthon census in the D&G Library Archives online, it is not marked on the 1st edition OS map. Its census number, 866, appears to locate the dwelling between Townhead and Enrick Copper Mine. However, other sources for the 1851 census seem to indicate that it is identical to, or closely connected with, Tuphow, which see. The name is Scots, 'sheep hollows'.

## Shuttle Island

Shuttle Island appears on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map as a little island with pointed ends, shaped vaguely like a weaver's shuttle, an artificial feature in the artificial Cally Lake. The Ordnance Survey Name Book states that it was built by unemployed cotton weavers during a trade depression, 'who were charitably employed by the late A[lexander III] Murray esq.' The 'depression' was probably the collapse of cotton spinning and weaving that followed the end of the Napoleonic Wars. The island no longer exists.

## Skyre Burn

The Skyre Burn flows from Meikle Bennan into Fleet Bay. It is renowned for rising very quickly after heavy rain and gave rise to the local saying 'A Skyreburn warning' which meant a last minute warning. It was regarded as a very dangerous burn to cross in the era before it was safely bridged.

The name has been seen as an Anglo-Scandinavian modification of Old English *scir-burna*, the first element being the noun ancestral to modern English ‘shire’. The was an important unit of territorial jurisdiction in Anglo-Saxon England, though the legal and geographical significance of the term varied over time and space. In the Kingdom of Northumbria, *sciras* were smaller than the shires that were first formed in Wessex and later created in the rest of England and ultimately Scotland too; the Northumbrian ones were units for assessment and provision of customary rents in kind, military service and hospitality to the king or other overlord, quite possibly a rationalisation of even earlier estates of local chieftains. The burn formed the boundary of Anwoth parish in mediaeval times, and might in the time of Northumbrian rule have been that of such a ‘shire’.

But the first element is ambiguous, it could be the same-sounding Old English adjective *scīr* meaning, in stream-names, ‘bright, clear’, influenced by its Norse cognate *skírr* with the same meaning. Indeed, it could just as well be a Norse name, *\*skírr-brunnr*, ‘a bright, clear spring’.

Skyre Burn Bay where the burn flows into the Fleet is gradually being infilled by sand and mud. On the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map the word ‘Inks’ is shown on two grassy areas near Skyre Burn bridge. Mactaggart tells us in his *Scottish Gallovidian Encyclopaedia*, ‘On muddy, level shores, there are pieces of land overflowed with high spring tides, and not touched by common ones, according to the laws of nature, on these grows a coarse kind of grass good for sheep threatened with the rot; the saline food sometimes cures them. When there comes a roaring spring tide before a storm, its whirling motion washes out circular holes in the sludge; these are left filled with water, which soon stagnates and becomes of an inky colour, but I do not think that it is from *ink* that the word *inks* arises, for all that; such land is called *links*, in various districts of Scotland, and I am inclined to fancy the word derives its origin from some ancient tongue.’ In fact, *links* is from Old English *hlinc* ‘ridge, bank’, and does indeed commonly refer around the coasts of Scotland to sandy ground near the sea-shore, much favoured for playing golf on. Curiously, although the words *inks* and *link* are listed, with definitions similar to Mactaggart’s, in *Chambers Scots Dictionary*, both are absent from the more substantial *Dictionaries of the Scots Language*.

## Solway

The fringes of Wigtown Bay form the westernmost coastline on the Scottish side of the Solway Firth. The earliest records are *Sulewaht* c1275, after that *Sulwath* with minor variations until the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when *Sulway*, *Solway* become usual. In all the early records it is *Aqua de*, ‘Water of’. *Firth* is Scots, from Norse *ffirðr*, a fjord, an arm of the sea.

The second syllable is certainly Old Norse *vað* ‘ford’, so the name refers to one of the low-water crossing routes between Cumberland and Dumfriesshire, at the head of the inlet. The first element is probably Norse *súl*, ‘a pillar or post’ guiding travellers across the ford. A likely identification would be the Clochmabenstone, a huge glacial erratic at Gretna which would have been a prominent landmark; its name, like that of Lochmaben, incorporates that of a Celtic deity, Mabon.

## Sprotts Pool

A fishing pool in the Fleet downstream of Standing Stone Pool, close to the highest reach of the tides. The identity of the eponymous Sprott is unknown. The surname Sprott or Sproat is found reasonably often in south-west Scotland; a connection with ‘sprout’ is sometimes suggested, but that is phonologically doubtful.

## Standing Stone(s)

Standing stones are marked on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map at Bagbie, High Auchenlarie (plural), Kirkclaugh (now lost), Newton (plural), Ardwell, and Girthon, but only the last has given rise to a place-name, that of Standing Stone Pool in the Fleet beside the stone and upstream of Sprott's Pool (above). While stones have sometimes been set upright by farmers in recent times for insect-irritated cattle to rub against, it seems reasonably likely that this impressive series of monoliths in our area dates from late Neolithic times. The proximity of the Girthon stone to the Roman camp and likely crossing-point on the Fleet suggests this was a significant location through two millennia or more B.C.

## Stelage Hill

Scots *stellage*, Middle English *stallage*, goes back to Old French *estalage*, Mediaeval Latin *stallagium*, though these words are in turn from a Germanic root and are cognate with English 'stall'. The word was originally a fiscal term, a tax or toll for permission to erect a stall at a fair or market, but it came to refer to the site on which such a stall stood, and so to the place where a market or fair was held. It was still current in Galloway in the late 18<sup>th</sup> – early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, though the citations in the Scottish National Dictionary (referring to pieces of land in Creetown and Penninghame) leave some doubt whether the sense was still specifically 'a marketplace': Scots and northern English *stell*, related to 'stall', has a wide range of meanings, including 'an enclosure for sheep',<sup>1</sup> and *stellage* might have been used to indicate a place where a 'stall' of that or some other kind was allowed.

Stelage Hill in Gatehouse is the small hill between Castramont Road (where the Parish Church was built in 1817) and the Mill Dam. It is still otherwise known as Market Hill. The town was formally permitted to hold markets once it became a burgh of barony in 1795. At its busiest, in the early nineteenth century, Gatehouse had a weekly produce market on Saturdays, livestock sales weekly on Fridays between late September and early November, and a midsummer fair. Presumably all these were held on the hill, or along the roadway between the hill and The Murray Arms. The circus must have been here early in the twentieth century when an unfortunate elephant passed away and was buried at the site now occupied by the house wittily named Ellfoot.

On the other hand, it is noticeable that the planned town never included a formal market-place (unlike wholly or partly planned towns across the Solway such as Maryport, Workington and Whitehaven); as in Castle Douglas, the market site was on the hill at the top of the town. The Murrays evidently put their faith in industrial production rather than stimulating the agricultural economy. Indeed, the name Stelage Hill might have been given earlier than 1795, to an unofficial trading-place at the road junction and river-crossing, pre-dating the foundation of the town.

## Stey Fell

This 1000' hill stands above Arkland, between the heads of the Skyre and Upper Rusko Burns. Its name is either Norse in origin or strongly Scandinavian Scots, \**stíg-fell* 'hill of steep ascent', very fitting. As mentioned above under Fell, Old Norse *fell*, rather than *fjall*, is used for a single hill, so is appropriate here. Scots *stey* occurs twice in Balmaclellan, Stey Hill overlooking the Ken Bridge, Stey

---

<sup>1</sup> Mactaggart says, 'A prop, a support: *Stell your feet*, fix your feet so as not to fall. The *stell o'the stack*, the stick which props the stack.' SND likewise refers to a support for a pit-prop, and to the notch in the ice where a curler supports his/her foot while delivering the stone. *Stell* can also be a variant of '(whisky) still', as in the case of The Stell across the Dee from Kirkcudbright, and another in St. John's Town of Dalry.

Brae to the east above Townhead - 'pit a stout heart to a stey brae' is a saying quoted by Maxwell. See also the Stey Greens discussed under Craighonald above.

## Stone Head

A feature marked on OS maps to the south of the Lane of the Loop. It is in Forestry land now, and hard to discern on satellite images, but map contours indicate a small headland here alongside the watercourse, the name is probably appropriate, and relatively modern.

## Stramoddie

Stramoddie is marked on OS maps as a location between Corseyard and Roberton in Kirkandrews; Stramoddie Strand is a wee burn (see Algowter Strand above) that flows down into Castle Haven Bay.

The second part of the name is pretty surely Gaelic *madaidh* 'of (a) dog or wolf', and the first is probably *sròn* 'nose, snout', common in place-names referring to a pointed headland or hill-spur. Gaelic *srath*, 'a broad stretch of riverside land', proposed by Maxwell, would not be relevant here, but 'mastiff's snout' suits this location at the south-western end of Doves Hill very well.

## Stranamug Burn

According to the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map, originates in the little Old Land Loch between Mill Knock and Drumuckloch Wood, and flows north, via another small loch, to Lagganmullan, then swings east to join the Skyre Burn at the stepping stones below Kirkbride Bridge. The same name is also associated on some maps with the little, tributary burn that links a series of pools (appearing only on maps from the mid-twentieth century) to the west of Lagganmullan.

This watercourse, with several associated pools, runs through a gently-sloping, rather marshy hollow between the hills that might qualify as a 'strath', Gaelic *srath*, 'a broad stretch of riverside land', albeit on a minimal scale. Alternatively *sròn* 'nose, snout' might refer to some feature in the landscape, but this is less apparent than at Stramoddie (see above); likewise Gaelic *sruthan* is possible, but this usually refers to a faster-flowing burn.

The second part of the name is pretty certainly Gaelic *na mùig* 'of the mist'. Mist drifting off Wigtown Bay does tend to hang around the upper reaches of the Skyreburn glen, and is likely to be most persistent in the north-facing valley where this burn rises.

## Strife Ground, Strife Hill

Strife Ground is marked on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map to the south-west of the bridge where the Old Military Road crossed the Trostrie Burn at the head of Spout Glen. Strife Hill is the western summit of Cairnholy Hill. Both names probably recall some disputes over holdings or rights. Names with such implications are quite common, and while the word 'strife' does not occur very frequently in England, it is quite frequent in Galloway: Strife Land and Strife Rig are in Minnigaff, another Strife Rig in Kirkpatrick Durham, Strife Moat in Carsphairn; another Strife Hill is north-west of Wigtown, a further Strife Rig is in the moorland in the north of Wigtownshire, and yet another Strife Hill just over the county border near Smyrton in Carrick.

## Stroans

The name of a farmhouse east of Carsluith is evidently from Gaelic *sròn* ‘nose, snout’ (see Stramoddie above), referring presumably to the south-western spur of Kirkdale Hill that overlooks the farm. The summit of that spur is named Doon of Stroans, though it is a natural formation, not a fort as is the Doon of Carsluith to the south-west across the Cleugh of Doon (see Doon above). The –s might imply that there was at some time more than one holding here, or that the name was reinterpreted as a surname (Stroan occurs in Ulster as an anglicised form of Ó Srutháin, see Stroquhain’s Pool below).

Stroan occurs quite frequently in place-names in Galloway, especially around the Glenkens. The word was used by James Hogg, ‘over strone and steep’, ‘strath and stron’, and might have been passed from Gaelic into Galloway Scots. Loch Stroan is well-known as a picnic spot on the Raiders’ Road, taking its name from the former farm on the south side, but that in turn was surely named from the ‘nose’ of Stroan Hill that overlooks it – along with Stroan Burn, Stroan Bridge and Stroan Viaduct.

## Stroquhain’s Pool

Stroquhain’s Pool (on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map, Stroquhan’s) is in a bend in the Fleet at the confluence with the Tanniefad Burn just downstream of Rusko. The possessive ‘s implies that this is a form of a surname corresponding to the Irish Ó Srutháin, or else the Scottish Strachan, Northumberland Straughan. However these names in turn probably derive from place-names, such as Strachan in Kincardineshire. Stroquhan occurs as a place-name elsewhere in our region as a location on the Buchan Burn north of Glentool, and as a country house in Dunscore parish in Dumfriesshire. Early records for the latter include *Straquhan* 1582 and *Stronwhonn* 1660: that latter form suggests \**sròn chòinn* ‘dog’s snout’ (cf. Stramoddie above), but our pool on the Fleet – and maybe the location on the Buchan Burn in Minnigaff parish – might have been \**sruthan*, either ‘little rapids’ or ‘little stream’ (perhaps referring to the Tanniefad Burn), reinterpreted as a surname.

## Syllodioch

This farm and associated woodland between the Clauchan of Girthon and the Fleet estuary has one of the most perplexing names in our area. In a document of 1610 it appears as *Solodzeoche* and on Blaeu’s map as *Saladyow*; subsequent spellings include *Sollideach*, *Sylodioch*, *Syllodiogh*; the present-day pronunciation is ‘Sillódgie’. It was evidently an important holding by the seventeenth century, though settlements bearing the name appear to have been at least three different locations in the vicinity. It became part of the Cally Estate, and in the early nineteenth century the Factor’s house stood on a site now in Syllodioch Wood.

Gaelic *sealladh deagh* ‘good sight’, i.e. ‘good view or outlook’, is an attractive possibility, it suits this sunny south-east facing location. However, there are reasons for caution: *sealladh* does not seem to be recorded elsewhere as a generic in Gaelic place-names, though it is found as a specific, e.g. Meall an t-Seallaidh near Balquhiddel; *deagh* (unlike most adjectives) normally precedes the noun in Scottish Gaelic, and the stress on the middle syllable in present-day pronunciation would be anomalous. Alternatively Gaelic *sealach* or *seileach* ‘willow’ might be involved, though this (and almost any other two-syllable word in Gaelic) hits the same problem.

*Sliabh* might in theory emerge as ‘s’law-, s’low-’, and so ‘Salá-, Sylló-’, but in Galloway it is nearly always ‘slew’, as at Drumslew in Kells, Slewcairn in Colvend, and 36 places in Wigtownshire, and

never with an intruded vowel between s-l. In any case, it is a word for moorland pasture on ground not fit for cultivation, which does not suit this farm.

As to the second element, if it is not *deagh*, *dabhach* might conceivably be in the background, but here it would have to refer to a *davoch* as a unit of land-value, the distinctive Galloway sense of *doach* 'a fish-trap' would not be relevant (see the discussion of *dabhach* under Cullendoch above).