

Northern Ireland Place-Name Project

The Northern Ireland Place-Name Project is located at 7 University Square in room 202 and it is open from 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m.

It is staffed by Dr Kay Muhr (Senior Research Fellow) and Dr Patrick McKay (Research Fellow).

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Background

Because almost all the older place-names in Northern Ireland were coined in the Irish language, place-name research in the University was established in Irish and Celtic Studies in the School of Languages, Literatures and Arts. All local place-names, however, are covered by the research, including those in English and Scots. The Director is Dr Nollaig Ó Muraíle, Reader in Irish and Celtic, who was formerly a place-names officer with the Ordnance Survey of Ireland. The University's connection with place-names is of long standing. John O'Donovan who investigated Irish names for the Ordnance Survey of Ireland in the 1830s and 1840s, was the first professor of Celtic in Queen's. More recently the place-name scholars Seán Mac Airt and Deirdre Flanagan worked here and were founder members of the Ulster Place-Name Society which is still closely connected with Irish and Celtic at Queen's.

The Northern Ireland Place-Name Project was established with government funding in 1987 to research names of physical features and settlements on the Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 scale map. The Project was to build up a computer database of the names, giving their origin, meaning, and any historical or other relevant information. In 1990 the work was extended to include all townlands and a publication programme was begun, thus fulfilling the aims of the Ulster Place-Name Society "to undertake a survey of Ulster place-names" and to publish the results for members. Seven volumes were produced (1992-7), on parts of Counties Antrim (2), Derry (1) and Down (4). A leaflet is available listing the parishes covered in each of these. After a gap in funding (1997-9), a new grant was obtained from the Arts and Humanities Research Board to produce two further volumes in the series (Fermanagh and Tyrone) and to work towards releasing the database online. In the meantime some support was obtained from the Heritage Lottery Fund for a travelling exhibition (Celebrating Ulster's Townlands by Kay Muhr) and from the Community Relations Council and Ultach Trust for the writing of the first Dictionary of Ulster Place-Names (by Patrick McKay).

Database

Information already on the database:

All place-names and locations shown on the 1:50,000 map of Northern Ireland. Townlands, civil parishes and baronies for Counties Antrim, Armagh, Down, Derry, Fermanagh and Tyrone.

Historical spellings for these and other names, with source reference and date.

Bibliography of place-name sources (documents and maps).

Information being added to the database:

Landholders and family names connected with the places.
Local Government districts and Roman Catholic parishes.
Names shown only on large-scale maps, or from oral tradition.
Original language spellings and explanations of the meaning of each name.
Bibliography and meaning of individual place-name elements.

Enquiry Service and Talks

The project operates an enquiry service, although due to difficulties in achieving extended research funding this can only be free to those who are willing to share their own place-name knowledge with the archive (which includes sound recordings). Visits to the Project office by arrangement only. Project staff can provide talks and seminars to help groups investigating their local place-names. The Ulster Place-Name Society organises lectures in Belfast annually in November and May of each year and occasionally at other venues. It also publishes the journal *Ainm*.

Publications

[Map] Éire Thuaidh/ Ireland North (Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland, 1987)
Patrick McKay, *A Dictionary of Ulster Place-Names* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University, 1999)
Kay Muhr, *Celebrating Ulster's Townlands* (Belfast: Queen's University, 1999)

Place-Names of Northern Ireland Series

General editor Gerard Stockman (vols I-VI), Nollaig Ó Muraíle (Vol. VII-).
Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University.

Hardback £20, paperback £8.50

Vol I County Down I: Newry and South-West Down (1992) 217pp

Gregory Toner and Mícheál B. Ó Mainnín

ISBN 085389 449 3 (hb) / ISBN 085389 432 9 (pb)

Vol II County Down II: The Ards (1992) 301pp

A. J. Hughes and R. J. Hannan

ISBN 085389 450 7 (hb) / ISBN 085389 433 7 (pb)

Vol III County Down III: The Mourne (1993) 246pp

Mícheál B. Ó Mainnín

ISBN 085389 451 5 (hb) / ISBN 085389 448 5 (pb)

Vol IV County Antrim I: The Baronies of Toome (1995) 313pp

Patrick McKay

ISBN 085389 568 6 (hb) / ISBN 085389 569 4 (pb)

Vol V County Derry I: The Moyola Valley (1996) 283pp

Gregory Toner

ISBN 085389 612 7 (hb) / ISBN 085389 613 5 (pb)

Vol VI County Down IV: North-West Down / Iveagh (1996) 415pp

Kay Muhr

ISBN 085389 570 8 (hb) / ISBN 085389 571 9 (pb)

Vol VII County Antrim II: Ballycastle and North-East Antrim (1997) 408pp

Fiachra Mac Gabhann

ISBN 085389 664 X (hb) / ISBN 085389 665 8 (pb)

Vols VIII, IX, X Armagh City, Lisnaskea, Dungannon areas – forthcoming:

Mícheál B. Ó Mainnín, Patrick McKay, Kay Muhr.

Celebrating Ulster's Townlands: A Travelling Exhibition for the Millennium

The exhibition is thematic and shows place-names and their link with the landscape, plants, animals and birds, ancient monuments and historic buildings, people who have lived in the places, and poems and stories about them. A questionnaire encourages visitors to think further about the place-names they know, and through it we are delighted to have gained many local volunteers to help the ongoing research. A full-colour souvenir booklet (Kay Muhr, Celebrating Ulster's Townlands, £3) includes an index of the names and background reading. Since its inception in 1999, the exhibition has toured extensively throughout Ulster and further afield. For further information contact:

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