The unique heritage of place-names in North West England

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1. Introduction

This is not an academic article. I am not a scholar of the history of English. Yet this article deals mainly with developments in the remote history of the English language. So why this article with this title? When I was invited to contribute to this volume in honour of Professor Keiko Ikegami, I wanted to write something with a historical theme, as a fitting tribute. My solution was to write on a topic which has interested me for many years: the place-names of the part of English where I live, the North West of England.

My interest in place-names began early as a hobby, and I have been a member of the English Place-Name Society for many years. Curiously, the first academic 'job' I ever had was concerned with place-names. In 1959 I had just finished my final examinations for the B.A. at London University, and was waiting to learn the result. I undertook some humble unskilled work (all I can remember is writing oddly-spelt place-names on little slips of paper) for the head of my Department, Professor A.H. Smith, then probably the leading toponymist in the country. So it could be said that place-name studies began my academic career. But I have never undertaken serious research or produced publications in the field. This paper does not contain original material, but relies on the work of scholars most of whom have been well-known toponymists of English, whose work I briefly review below.

2. Background: history, geography and scholarship

For those who are not familiar with North-West England, I should explain that it is a region extending from the Mersey – etymologically, the 'boundary river' on which Liverpool stands – along the western side of England northwards to the Scottish border. No part of it is more than 50 or 60 kilometres from the Irish Sea. Today it roughly consists of four areas: the conurbations of Merseyside (including Liverpool) and Greater Manchester, and the two counties of Lancashire and Cumbria. In the south, the areas of Merseyside and Greater Manchester are highly industrialized and densely populated. In the north, the county of Cumbria is sparsely populated, and contains what is commonly considered the most beautiful part of England – the Lake District, celebrated in English literature through the work of such writers as Wordsworth, Coleridge and Ruskin, not to mention the children's stories of Beatrix Potter.

[Fig 1: Map with traditional counties]

[Fig 2: Map with present-day counties]

When the English Place-Name Society (EPNS) was founded in 1923, the map of North-West England was administratively different from today. Then, the big cities of Liverpool and Manchester were parts of Lancashire, the most populous county in England. Lancashire extended north into the Lake District, and shared the region of present-day Cumbria with the two now-abolished counties of Westmorland and Cumberland. The EPNS planned its survey of English place-names county by county, inevitably using the old county boundaries, which persisted up to 1974. The great Swedish toponymist Eilert Ekwall had already undertaken a remarkable pioneering work in 1922 – *The Place-Names of Lancashire* (Manchester: the University Press), and after more than 80 years this is still the most authoritative survey of that county. Incidentally, Lancashire is named after the historic city of Lancaster, which gives its

name to Lancaster University, where I have been a professor for many years. But Lancaster these days is a relatively unimportant city, and the county administration has moved to the larger city of Preston further south. On the origin of the name *Lancaster*, see below.

Among the other county volumes later published by the EPNS are the three volumes (vols. XX-XXII) of *The Place-Names of Cumberland*, by Armstrong et al. (1950-52) followed by the two volumes of *The Place-Names of Westmorland* (vols. XLII, XLIII) by the professor who gave me my 'job', A. H. Smith (1964-5). Nobody has yet published the EPNS-authorized successor to Ekwall's *The Place-Names of Lancashire*, but happily John Insley (of Heidelberg University) is now working on it. As the long labours of the EPNS, county by county, have continued, scholarship has deepened and county surveys have become more detailed and rigorous: whereas originally one volume was found to be sufficient for one county, nowadays it is unlikely that a county will be dealt with in less than six volumes. As a sign of the this 'inflation' of scholarship, A. H. Smith, after his two volumes for Westmorland, went on to complete eight volumes for just one part of Yorkshire – the West Riding, which in its westerly parts might be considered part of our region. It is not surprising that, over 80 years after its founding, in spite of the patient dedication of place-name scholars, the EPNS has not yet completed its plan of publishing studies of every county of England. Roughly speaking, it has published one volume of the Survey per year, and volumes LXXXII and LXXXIII are now in production. It has also produced many additional volumes of a more specialized kind.

Apart from the survey volumes of the EPNS, there are many other published sources for studying the place-names of England, varying from articles in journals (including the EPNS's own *Journal of the English Place-Name Society*) to

dictionaries, notably Ekwall's *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names* (4th edition, 1960) and Victor Watts's *Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names* (2004). One volume very useful for my present purpose has recently appeared: Diana Whaley's *A Dictionary of Lake District Place-Names* (Nottingham: English Place-Name Society, 2006).

At this point I should briefly explain the fascination, indeed the 'uniqueness' of the North-West place-name heritage, as announced in my title. The North West is arguably unique in its rich mixture of place-name origins. In most of England, place-names are overwhelmingly inherited from OE or from later periods of English. Admittedly, some parts of England, (especially Cornwall) have a large admixture, even a predominance, of Celtic names and name elements. In yet other parts, roughly corresponding to the historical Danelaw in the north and east of England, there is a strong heritage of names and name-elements from Old Norse. However, in the North West, unlike any other part of England, there is a remarkable mixture of three historical place-name stocks: Old English, Old Norse, and Old Welsh or more precisely Cumbric (the language spoken by the Celts in this region before the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons.)[1] As in other parts of England, there is also a small contribution of names of Latin/Romance origin: Latin elements such as *-caster* 'fort, camp' (e.g. in *Lancaster*) inherited from the Roman occupation of England, and French elements such as *Egremont* ('pointed hill') and the definite article *le* in *Bolton-le-Sands*, arising

[1] 'Unique' is a hazardous word to use, and I should qualify it here as 'unique *in England*'. The threefold mixture of Celtic, Anglian and Norse name elements is also found across the Scottish border, particularly in South-West Scotland. Indeed, during the most formative period for place-names (from the 7th to the 11th century) the boundary between England and Scotland was unfixed: most of present-day Cumbria was still in Scottish hands in the mid-twelfth century.

from the later Norman invasion. However, for my present purpose interest will be focused be on the three place-name stocks of OE, ON and Old Celtic.)[2]

There remains a large amount of mystery and uncertainty about many names in the North West. The source of this is indeed partly the mixing of the three different language stocks. But another important factor is the general poverty and backwardness of this part of England up to the time of the Industrial Revolution, when the cotton and coal industries transformed the southern part of the region. The Angles (as we should call the more northerly Anglo-Saxon settlers) were late in reaching this remote and inhospitable region: coming from the east and south around the turn of the seventh century, they settled rather sparsely. Then, three centuries after the Anglian settlement came the Vikings or Norsemen, who, in spite of their ferocious reputation, in some areas of the North West probably settled peaceably, taking over virgin land that had previously been uninhabited. After the Norman Conquest, this region partly escaped the control of the Normans, and William the Conqueror's Domesday survey, in the 1080s, did not penetrate further north than the southern reaches of the present Lake District. The earliest records of North West place-names rarely predate the Domesday book, and often even major settlement names appear considerably later. Indeed, many quite important names of the Lake District today (especially those of mountains or *fells*) have no records before the late 18th century. The remote and undeveloped nature of the North West in comparison with southern and eastern counties helps to explain the relative poverty of historical records, and consequent doubt about origins.

[2] It is also generally held that there are traces of a stratum of name elements older than the Celtic – a Common European stratum, which may be the origin of some of the river names of the North West region, such as *Esk.*

3. Celtic, Anglian and Norse name stocks and their subdivisions

The most formative period for North West English place-names, and the period we shall be mostly concerned with here, is the period from c.600 to c.900, subsuming the Anglian and Scandinavian settlements. Most of the major settlement place-names must be assumed to date from this period, although the first surviving records of these names are generally of later date – typically from the twelfth or thirteenth centuries. We should not assume, however, that naming practices stood still after that date. Places (especially minor places) continued to be given new names. It should also be remembered that in the northern dialects of English, words of Norse origin were appropriated, and have continued in use up to the present day. Examples are *beck* for a brook, *fell* for a mountain(-side), *tarn* for a small lake, *kirk* for a church and *dale* for a valley. Hence the presence of a Norse element in a modern place-name has no implication that that name is as early as the Norse settlements.

On looking more closely at this combination of three name stocks, we find that there is even more of a mixture than has so far been admitted. In fact, each of the three name stocks can be further subdivided, so that we need to be aware of *six* different sources of place-name elements:

Table 1

name stock	subdivisions of name stock	typical locations in North West England
Old English (Anglian)	Northumbrian dialect	North West England generally
	Mercian dialect	Some names in Lancashire south of the River Ribble
Old Norse	West Norse (Norwegian)	Especially in coastal and upland areas
	East Norse (Danish)	In a small area around Manchester and

		possibly elsewhere
Old Celtic	Old Welsh (Cumbric)	Scattered around the region, but especially found in north Cumbria
	Old Gaelic (from Ireland)	Especially found in north west Cumbria

The following sections explain and illustrate these sub-divisions.

3.1 Two Anglian influences

The largest share of place-names in the North West, as in England in general is from OE sources. Thus the Anglian names of Northern England share many linguistic elements from OE in general: endings such as *–ton* (as in *Preston*), *-ley* (as in *Burnley*), *-ham* (as in *Heysham*), *-ford* (as in *Trafford*) are common in the North West, as in the rest of the country. Of greater interest are elements that are geographically limited by their association with particular dialects. The Northumbrian kings were the power behind the earlier Anglian incursions, probably via the Lune valley, and so we find Northumbrian forms of words such as *bōþl* 'building', in contrast to the Mercian dialect from *bold* 'building', where metathesis has not take place. Interestingly, the names *Bootle* and *Bolton* (the latter from earlier *Bothlton*) occur in northern part of the region, and also in the southern part near Liverpool and Manchester, suggesting that the Northumbrian dialect penetrated the whole of the North West. On the other hand, the Mercian form *bold* also occurs in a name such as *Parbold*, south of the River Ribble, evidence of a later period of Mercian ascendancy. In fact, the Ribble, which reaches the sea at Preston in mid-Lancashire, appears to have been a dialect boundary of sorts: north of this river, the form *–caster* (as in *Lancaster*, *Casterton*) is

normal for the modern form of the Latin word *castra* ('a fortified camp'), whereas to the south of it the form underwent palatalization and diphthongization to *ceaster* as found today, for example, in *Manchester* and *Ribchester*. Thus the area north of the Ribble shows pure Northumbrian influences, whereas the area between the Ribble and the Mersey shows some mingling of Mercian and Northumbian forms.

3.2 Two Norse influences

The Old Norse language of the Viking settlers, although not so generally prevalent as the Anglian branch of OE, has left a strong mark on place-names throughout the North West region. To give one example of this: the element *–by*, of ON origin, vies with the OE *–ton* as the most general term for a farmstead or settlement. In the valley of the River Lune, where I live, alongside the OE *–ton* in *Burton, Caton, Middleton*, etc., occurs the ON *–by* as in *Hornby* and *Kirkby* (*Lonsdale*). The tell-tale ending *–by* occurs widely in the parts of England where the Scandinavian settlements occurred in the ninth and tenth centuries. The struggles between the Anglo-Saxons under King Alfred the Great and the Viking invaders reached a compromise in the Treaty of Wedmore (886), where the boundary of the Danelaw, i.e. the area of Danish settlement, was determined. The ON name elements are scattered, though with varying density, over the Northern and Eastern counties of England, yet it should be noted that the settlers in these areas were Danes, speaking a East Norse dialect (OEN). In contrast, the settlers in the North West were mainly of Norwegian stock, speaking Old West Norse (OWN). These Vikings had found their way by seaborne conquest and settlement southwards down the west coast of Scotland, most of them making their homes in Ireland and the Isle of Man before settling on the mainland of Great Britain.

In many cases the two dialects bequeathed the same name-elements (such as *by*, *kirk,* and *gate* meaning 'street'), but in other cases 'tell-tale' name elements point towards a West Norse or East Norse origin. Particular elements that appear to come from West Norse include *scale* ('hut'), *fell* ('mountain, mountainside'), *beck* ('stream, brook'), *tarn* ('small lake'), *gill* ('ravine, mountain stream'), *breck* ('slope'), *holm* ('island, or eminence amidst low-lying land'), *slack* ('valley'), *thwaite* ('clearing') and *wray* ('nook, corner'). Here are some examples of names with these endings: *Seascale* ('hut by the sea'), *Scafell* (' bald-headed mountain' the name of the highest place in England), *Tarn Hows*, *Howgill*, *Norbreck, Applethwaite, Wray*. In England, these are more or less peculiar to the North West region, and attest that the Norse settlers in this region mostly haled from West Scandinavia. However, they are predominantly names of natural features or of small settlements, which fits in with the suggestion that many of the Vikings in this area were content to occupy lands thinly settled by the Cumbrians or Angles, and did not attempt to colonize existing well-populated areas.

The 'tell-tale' elements for East Norse origin are infrequent in the North West, although it is quite likely that Danes did settle in this area. The ending *–thorpe* (for a secondary settlement) is common in the Danelaw, but the Danelaw scarcely stretched to the North West, where *–thorpe* names are relatively rare (*Milnthorpe* is an example). Another sign of Danish settlement is the spelling *hulme*, corresponding to West Norse *holm*. There is a cluster of *hulme* names in the Greater Manchester area (*Cheadle Hulme*, *Levenshulme, Davyhulme*, etc.), suggesting that there may well have been a colony of Danes in this area on the south-east borders of our region. To confirm this, certain names such a *Flixton* and *Urmston* in the same area appear to

have a Danish personal name as their first element. However, overwhelmingly ON place-names in the North West point to an OWN origin.

3.3 Two Celtic Influences

I have left Celtic influences to the end of this section, after dealing with the Germanic influences of OE and ON. The reason for this apparently out-of-sequence presentation is that the Celtic influences come from two different periods in the history of North West names. The first stratum, of course, antedates the Anglian settlement, and goes back well before the arrival of the Roman legions in the first century. The indigenous Celts of this region, whom we may call 'Cumbrian Britons', must have kept their language and culture going in this region for a considerable time after the Germanic settlers had made inroads. The Britons left their mark in a scatter of names across the region, among which are some of the most important. Many of the river names (as elsewhere in England) represent this older stratum of names, either of Celtic or pre-Celtic origin. Celtic river names like *Calder, Cocker, Derwent* and *Kent* are paralleled by similar names elsewhere in England. The River *Lune*, which (subject to some puzzling sound changes) accounts for the first part of *Lancaster* and *Lonsdale*, may have a Celtic origin, and one explanation of its meaning is 'health-giving river'.

The names *Cumbria* and *Cumberland* derive from a word referring to the British Celts and their land, as in the modern Welsh word *Cymru* for Wales. Some of the cities of the region also have Celtic elements in their names: *Carlisle*, on the Scottish border, begins with the Celtic element *caer* 'fort' found in such Welsh names as *Caernarfon* and *Carmarthen*. Another element common among Welsh and Cornish names is *pen* ('end, top, hill') survives in the Cumbrian town of *Penrith*, as well as some other names like *Pendle* (referring to a prominent hill of East Lancashire) and

Pen-y-Ghent (another prominent hill, over the border in West Yorkshire). Other elements such as *cum* (modern Welsh *cwm*, 'valley'), *glen* ('valley') and *blen* (modern Welsh *blaen*, 'top') have survived in Cumbrian places such as *Cumwhitton*, *Glenridding*, *Blencathra*. It will be noticed that these elements occur at the beginning of a name, whereas the typical position of the Germanic elements previously mentioned is at the end of the name. This difference reflects a basic difference of ordering: in Celtic names the generic term is typically placed first, before the specific, whereas in Germanic names this order is reversed.

It is generally assumed that the Anglo-Saxons, who like English of today appear to have been lazy in learning foreign languages, did not bother to learn the language of the Celts. One interesting piece of evidence for this is that they created so-called tautological compounds like *Penhill*, meaning 'hill hill', not realising that the word *pen* itself meant 'hill' in OW. *Penhill*, in fact, is an earlier form of the name *Pendle* mentioned above, and to cap it all, the English eventually forgot the origin of the word *Pendle*, and added another word *Hill* after it. So the name *Pendle Hill* used today means 'hill hill hill'!

Evidence of a different sort comes from the name *Eccles* (for a town now part of Greater Manchester), derived from the OW noun **egles* (ultimately from Greek *ekklēsia*) for a church. This seems to indicate that the Anglians who settled in the North West, although probably not yet Christian themselves, were familiar with the church as a British institution. There are also three examples of the name *Eccleston* ('settlement with a British church') in the region.

The second stratum of Celtic influence came from the Goidelic Celtic (or Gaelic) of Ireland, also found in the Isle of Man and the western part of Scotland, rather than from the Brythonic Celtic of Great Britain. This influence penetrated the

North West after many Vikings had settled in Ireland in the ninth century. It is clear, from linguistic evidence, that many of the Vikings who came to North West England in the early years of the tenth century had settled for a considerable time in Ireland, and brought with them elements of the Irish language and culture.

The evidence of this Irish influence is of five kinds.

(a) The word *cross*, the Gaelic word for the symbol of Christianity (ultimately from Latin *crux*, was apparently borrowed by Vikings in North West England (and eventually supplanted in standard English the OE term for 'cross', *rōd*, ModE *rood*). The names *Crosby* and *Cros(s)thwaite*, clearly of Viking origin, occur a number of times in the North West.

(b) Celtic saints' names were used in dedicating Cumbrian churches, and these names then became names of the settlements that grew up around those churches. *Bridekirk* and *Kirkbride* are two villages in north Cumbria, whose names mean 'the church of St. Bride or St. Bridget'. *Mungrisdale* ('the pig valley associated with St. Mungo') is another example. *Patterdale* ('valley of Patrick') may have been named after a man whose name was Patrick, rather than from the dedication of its church to the patron saint of Ireland. But the Celtic influence is still seen in the Irish personal name. Notice that apart from imported Irish/Gaelic saint's names, these place-names are Norse.

(c) The ON element *erg* (which in modern names is often spelt in bewildering variety (e.g.*er, ergh, argh, ark*) is a loanword from Gaelic *airigh*, meaning 'shieling, hill-pasture'. This borrowing into ON is evidenced in the final element of village names such as *Mansergh, Cleator, Torver, Grimsargh*. The village of *Arkholme*, three miles

from my home, derives its name from the dative plural of *erg*, *ergum*, and therefore means 'at the shielings'. This name, incidentally, is an instructive example of how names become refashioned over the centuries through a process of re-motivation similar to folk-etymology: *Arkholme*, in spite of appearances, has no connection with the ON word *holm* ('island').

(d) The order of elements in names in the North West sometimes follows the Celtic pattern of generic + specific, rather than the Germanic pattern of specific + generic. The two words in (b) above, *Bridekirk* and *Kirkbride* represent the same name, but the order of the first is Germanic and that of the second Celtic. Yet they both have the Norse element *kirk*. Names like *Kirkbride* are termed 'inversion compounds' because they reverse the normal order in Germanic names. Other inversion compounds are:

Aspatria: 'ash + Patrick' - (the ash tree of Patrick)

Rigmaden: 'ridge + maiden' – (the ridge of the maiden)

Brigsteer: 'bridge + steer' - (the bridge of the steers/oxen)

Seatoller: 'shieling + alder' - (the shieling with alder trees [?]).

(e) Some names refer directly to the 'Irish' living in the area. *Ireleth* means 'the slope of the Irish(man)', and *Ireby* means 'the settlement of the Irish(man)'. It seems likely that the 'Irishmen' mentioned here were Vikings who had been living in Ireland. Like other names identifying Celts (*Brettargh*, meaning 'the shieling of the Briton(s)', and *Walton-le-Dale* meaning 'the settlement of the Welsh(man) in the valley'), these names suggest that the presence of Celts or Irish was somehow exceptional enough to be noteworthy, and hence indirectly imply that the Celtic/Irish population was relatively small and localized.

In general, the Irish or Gaelic influence is found in Cumbria, and even there is largely confined to the more north-westerly areas.

I end this section with an important Celtic name which is a curiosity, and does not come from either of the above sources. The name *Morecambe* is the earliest recorded name extant in the region, and yet it refers to a modern town which did not develop until the nineteenth century. Morecambe, the seaside resort which shares a municipality with Lancaster, derives its name from the work of the Egyptian-Greek geographer Ptolemy (c.100-150) who recorded *Morikāmbe* (OCelt: 'curve of the sea') as the name of a large bay on the north-west coast of Britain, now called, appropriately, *Morecambe Bay*. The name was given to the new seaside resort as an antiquarian revival.

4. Inflections

From a linguistic point of view, one of the intriguing aspects of North West place-names is the survival, often in a hidden form, of Germanic inflections. Above we noted the survival of the dative plural *ergum* of the ON noun (borrowed from Gaelic) *erg*, in the disguised form of *Arkholme*. Another comparable example is the village name *Thurnham*, which appears to end in the familiar place-name element *–ham* ('homestead'), but in fact derives from the ON dative plural *þyrnum* ('at the thorn bushes'). It was natural that place-names should occur in the dative case (interpreted locatively) in an inflectional language like OE or ON – and it happens that both languages had the same *–um* inflection for the dative plural. It is well-known to students of English toponymy that the OE word *burh* 'fortress, town' survives in two

different forms, *-borough* and *–bury*, the latter coming from the dative singular. In the historic county of Lancashire, both forms occur in the names *Burrow* (a hamlet, on the site of a Roman camp, two miles from my home) and *Bury* (a town in Greater Manchester). What is puzzling, however, is why the nominative form survived in one case, and the dative form in another.

More interesting still is the case of the ON genitive *-ar*, which survives as *–er*(-) in a considerable number of place-names in the Lake District of Cumbria. Examples (with the most likely ON origins on the right) are:

Windermere 'the lake of Wīnand' *Winandar-mere*

Elterwater 'the lake of the swans' ON *Elptar-vatn,* from *elptr* 'swan'.

Borrowdale 'the valley of the fortress river' ON *Borgar-á-dalr*

Harter Fell 'the mountain of the hart' ON *Hjartar-fell*

Witherslack 'the valley of the wood' ON *Viðar-slakki*

These names are survivals from a time when ON was a living language, and from them we can infer that ON remained in use for some time after the Vikings settled in Cumbria. These names come from the mountainous Lake District, where we can surmise that the Vikings previously unfarmed land, and did not have to accommodate their language to the Celtic or Anglian communities living around them. OE did not have a genitive in *–ar*, and therefore comparable forms in OE would have an *–s* genitive, as in *Kingston* ('the king's village').

5. Mysterious, misleading, and mixed-up names

In this section, I will consider some of the puzzling aspects of place-name research on North West England.

First, there are names that have no known origin. Among these, notably, are mountain names in the Lake District, like *Helvellyn, Glaramara, Wetherlam*. Such names are well known to the thousands of visitors who seek recreational walking or climbing on the Cumbrian fells every weekend, but as there are few or no early records, the etymology remains obscure.

In *Arkholme* and *Thurnham*, I have already given examples of the way in which the modern form of names can mislead as to their origin. This phenomenon is a hazard of English place-names in general, but is perhaps more of a problem in the case of North Western names than elsewhere. Consider the name *Burneside*. A modern amateur toponymist would guess that it refers to a place at the 'side' of a 'burn' or river, and would find confirmation in the fact that Burneside is a village on the bank of the fast-flowing River Kent. But tracing the name back to its earliest recorded form *Brunolvesheved* (c.1180-1292) we reach the conclusion that the original name referred to 'Brūnwulf's headland', that is, a hill belonging to a man called Brūnwulf. Such etymological traps for the unwary are an everyday experience for place-name students.

The occurrence of 'mixed names' – that is, hybrid names containing elements from more than one language – is unsurprising in a region where three different languages have existed side by side. Examples are *Kendal,* combining the Celtic name of the river Kent with the ON *dalr* or OE *dæl* for 'valley': the whole meaning is 'valley of the river Kent'. An example of a name mixing OE and ON is *Portinscale,* meaning 'prostitute's hut(s)', from OE *portcwēne* (literally 'lady of the town') and

ON *skali*. Another kind of 'mixing' of name stocks occurs on the phonological, rather than the lexical level. The Cumbrian town of *Keswick* means 'cheese farm', and therefore has the same origin as *Chiswick* on the Thames near London. But the word for 'cheese' (OE *cēse*) has been 'Scandinavianized', /tʃ/ having been replaced by /k/. The exact mechanism for this is unclear, but it is common for OE and ON words to differ through the correspondence of the stop /k/ in ON for the affricate /tʃ/ in OE – as in *kirk* for *church,* or *birk* for *birch* (a variety of tree). This alternation was somehow tranferred to words for which they was no ON cognate form, like *cēse* .

The compound *Barrow-in-Furness*, naming a shipbuilding town in south Cumbria, illustrates as an extreme case how these various types of mystery and mixture come together in one name. *Barrow* is generally assumed to come from a Celtic word **barr* 'hill' and an ON element *ey* 'island'. The word *Furness* refers to the district in which *Barrow* is situated, and the leading theory is that it means 'the headland named after the island of *Futh* (ON), 'cleft or cunt' – a reference to its shape. The element for 'headland' could be OE *ness* or the closely comparable *nes* in ON. So there is doubt about the meaning of the name, and also doubt about the languages from which it comes. But it is quite possible that this one name contains Celtic, ON and OE elements.

6. Conclusion

It is clear from examples like this that there is plenty of scope for further work to explain the place-names of North West England. The unique combination of

different name stocks is one reason why this region affords interest and fascination for the amateur, as well as the professional toponymist.

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