The Etymologies of *Pluscarden* and *Stirling*

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It is something of a dictum within place-name studies that place-names contain a fairly limited lexicon, and that proposed etymologies suggesting obscure or lesser-used etymons are inherently suspect. While there is some merit to this as a rule of thumb, the phonology of names sometimes can only be explained by recourse to more obscure or problematic words, especially when these are the specific (modifying) elements in the name. Two names which have proved problematic to place-name scholars over the years, Pluscarden and Stirling, illustrate this point well. As will be seen below, each can be best explained by recourse to a comparatively unusual specific element, in each case the first element in the name.

I. Pluscarden

The name Pluscarden has a problematic etymology. This note proposes a new solution. Pluscarden was the name of a Valliscaullian priory founded in 1230 or 1231 by King Alexander II; later in the middle ages it became a Benedictine house (Cowan and Easson 1976, 84). Transferred into lay hands at the Reformation, it was refounded in 1948 as a revived Benedictine priory (Pluscarden/history). The priory also developed into a medieval parish, which was later incorporated into the parish of Elgin. In the earliest original charter relating to it (of 1233), it is described as being founded in *foresta de Ploschardin* (MacPhail 1881, see plate opposite p. 66 for facsimile), and it is reasonable to assume that it was originally a topographical name, as was the case with many monastic foundations in Scotland, both early and medieval. This said, the name Pluscarden only gradually assumed a status as synonymous with the religious house, which seems early to have taken the name 'Valley of St Andrew' (cf. 1233 grant '*que dicitur Vallis Sancti Andree*'), perhaps consciously echoing the name of its mother house in Val de Choux, and almost certainly a name created with the foundation of the monastery (cf. *vallis sancti Andree apud Pluscardin* 1236). So initially then, this religious house can be thought of as lying in the newly designated 'valley of St Andrew' in the forest of Pluscarden. The early forms of the name Pluscarden do not vary notably over the course of the priory's medieval lifespan.

The name has generally been invoked in discussions of the proposed Pictish element **carden*, the meaning of which has in recent years become somewhat contentious. W. J. Watson was one of the first to discuss this term (1926, 352–53),

which he took (following earlier Welsh dictionaries) to be a British element meaning 'thicket, brake'. Here he was thinking of W. *cardden*, now defined by *GPC* as 'enclosure, fort; thicket', but in William Owen-Pugh's nineteenth-century dictionary, as 'a wild place, thicket, brake' (*GPC*, s. v.); he was followed in this understanding of the word by Nicolaisen among others (Nicolaisen 2001, 204). The word is not well attested in Welsh, however, and recent scholarship has instead inclined towards the 'enclosure' aspect which had been mooted by Andrew Breeze (Breeze 1999, 39–41; James 2009, 150–51; Taylor 2011, 101–02, and see most recently James 2013, 61, n 247).[1] Alan James (2009, 150–51) probably summarises the potential meaning best: 'An impartial reading of the citations in [*GPC*] suggests that a *cardden* is somewhere difficult to get into or through. A meaning like "an enclosure surrounded by a thick hedge" would seem reasonable.' But it should probably be admitted that whatever the meaning of the poorly-attested and -understood Welsh word, we do not know the semantics of its Northern Brittonic or Pictish cognate(s), and perhaps we would be better to try to derive a meaning from a survey of the topography related to these names. It was invoked as a distinctive Pictish element by Jackson (1955, 164), and its apparent phonology is of some importance in discussions of the features of Pictish, notably the development of the internal consonant cluster *-rd-* which, unlike in Welsh, has not been spirantised (see James 2009, 150; and 2013, 61–62, for potential influence of adoption into Gaelic; and further on this in Taylor, forthcoming).

Although Pluscarden is frequently invoked in discussions of **carden*, the first element is less often discussed. On the face of it, especially given its initial consonant, it appears to be a 'P-Celtic', i.e. Brittonic, element, though what that might be is less apparent. Watson (1926, 353) noted merely that it was stressed on the first element 'now, at any rate'. Johnston (1934, 276) etymologised it by recourse to Welsh, '*plas cerddyn*, "place with the wood or brake"', though it is not clear what his '*cerddyn*' was meant to represent – I presume he was thinking of *cardden*. Welsh *plas* is a loan-word from OFr, perhaps via ME (see *GPC* s. v.; *OED*, *place*[1]), and as such is highly unlikely to be present in this name in twelfth-century Moray. Even if this were thought a possibility, the vowel in the first element – always *-o-* or *-u-* (*Ploschardyn*, *Pluscardin*)[2] – would seem to forbid this as a viable analysis. The obscure Cornish element *plos*, discussed by Padel in his *Cornish Place-Name Elements* (1985, 187), which he cites as meaning 'filthy', but with 'derivation or cognates unknown', is a possibility, but hardly inviting.

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1 Dr Simon Taylor notes to me (pers. comm.) that the meaning 'enclosure' had been mooted much earlier: see his forthcoming Groam House Lecture for details.

2 The one exception, in 1237, seems merely a variant, and not a superior reading for a form attested in other copies as *Pluscardyn*.

The name is invariably stressed on the first syllable (despite the dominant second element stress in Scottish place-names), and this stress pattern invites us to take the first element as the specific, freeing us to pursue words which are not normally found as place-name generics. My proposal is that the word here is either G *plaosg* (OG *plaesc*), or a Pictish word related to it and to the Brittonic cognates W *plisc*, Mid. Breton *plusk*. These words are somewhat troublesome in their definitions, especially in a toponymic context, but, as we shall see, there are parallels to their use in place-names, and the phonology is an excellent fit.

Both Gaelic and Welsh words show an alternation in the first cluster between *bl-* and *pl-*. OG attests both *plaesc* and more frequently *blaesc* (DIL, s. v. *bláesc*), meaning 'integument' and also 'eggshell' or 'nutshell'. The sense that it is the soft part of the shell, rather than the outer part, predominates, and is to be found in the modern ScG *plaosg*, which retains also a meaning of the lining of the egg, and also of the skull (see Dwelly, s. v.; HDSG slips). Whilst eggshells predominate in historical usages (see now Corpas na Gàidhlig, search under *plaosg*), nutshells are also present. The same is true of the W variants *plisg* and *blisg*, both taken as collectives, with singulatives in *-yn* (*plisgyn*, *blisgyn*). GPC (s. vv.) gives as meanings for *blisg* 'shells, husks, fragments'; *plisg* has similar meanings.

Whilst this may initially seem an unlikely element to find in Pluscarden, the phonology suits it well, and the Breton form supports a potential Pictish **plusc*. We may, however, be dealing with a rendering into Latin/Scots orthography of G *plaesc*, ScG *plaosg*. More importantly, there is at least one other Gaelic name in Scotland which employs this as a specific: Creagan nam Plaosg, near Brig o' Turk (NN545063) (McNiven forthcoming.; Murray 2014, plate 1 for illustration, though given there erroneously as 'Creagan nam Plaoisg'). Murray translates this as 'The Little Rock of the Husks'. This provides a very exact, if smaller-scale parallel for the proposed usage in Pluscarden, with a more usual later Gaelic name-form in generic + def. art. + specific, instead of a preposed specific. I would take it that the association is with nuts, or nutshells, perhaps a location abounding in nutshells, because animals (including domesticated animals such as pigs) frequent the woods to eat easily-peeled nuts. For some sense of the semantic associations of *plaosg*, consider these lines from Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir's 'Coire a' Cheathaich' (MacLeod, 1978, ll. 2406–09):

> Bha cus r'a fhotainn de chnothan caoine
> 'S cha b' iad na caochagan aotrom gann,
> Ach bagailt mhaola, bu taine plaoisg,
> A' toirt brìgh a laodhan nam maothshlat fann ...'

> Plenty of ripe nuts could be obtained,
> Nor were they empty shells, light and scarce,
> But naked clusters of thinnest husks,
> Battening on the pith of tender twigs …

This identification, however, leaves the second element, now identified as the generic, uncertain. It is perfectly possible that we should still see it as P **carden*, and the earliest form from 1233, *Ploschardin*, might support this, if we take the *-ch-* to represent a lenited *c-*, but I think that an uncertain inference. Nonetheless, **plusc* or *plaesc* might readily combine with **carden* in such a way that the final of **plusc*/*plaesc* and the initial of **carden* would be elided. Strengthening the potential for this word to be the second element, Peter McNiven has noted (pers. comm.; and 2016) the presence of a place-name Carden, as well as Carden Hill nearby (NJ140627; it is Cardon on Roy's map, so is at least as old as the 1750s).

But we must also consider a potential generic in *ard(in)*, here presumably either G *àrd, àird* 'high (place), height', or a Pictish cognate of W *ardd*, with similar meaning (*PNFife* 5, 285–86). Both are found as place-name generics. The presumption here would be that we are dealing in the final syllable with the ubiquitous eastern Scottish suffix *-in*, the exact nature of which has been the subject of considerable discussion, both in and out of print (for most recent consideration, see *PNFife* 5, 407–12), but the solution to which is beyond the scope of this article. On balance, if it were from **ardin*, it might be difficult to account for the persistence of the ending *-en* in forms throughout the name's history in this scenario, but it must remain a possibility.

In these two possibilities we would then be dealing with either 'nutshell-enclosure' or 'nutshell-height', and the second of these, with its suggestion of tree-lined hills, might suit well the bank of hills now called Heldon Hill, but which was called in the mid-nineteenth century 'Eildon Hill' (with 'Eildon Wood'), which shelter Pluscarden to the north-west.[3] The description of it in the OSNB is interesting, given its reference also to Pluscarden as a 'district': 'A prominent hill forming the northern boundary of the district known as Pluscarden, and over the summit of which passes the boundary between this parish and that of Alves' (OSNB Moray 1868–71, vol. 11). Recalling that initially the location of the monastery was described as a *foresta*, it might be appropriate

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3 This name appears as Eildon Hill and Eildon wood on the OS 6″ 1st edn and in the OSNB; but by the second edition it has become Heldon Hill and Heldon Wood. It is possible Eildon was originally a transferred name, and perhaps Heldon was the underlying local form – thought there is no sign of it in the OSNB. 'Eildon' however persisted on Bartholomew maps until mid 20th century. Consult the historic maps at maps.nls.uk/geo/explore for comparisons.

that the monastery might take its name from these hills. If from **carden* on the other hand, this perhaps referred to some feature, now lost, in the vicinity of the present monastery.

It is almost certainly a coincidence, but it is worth noting that it is not the only monastic foundation in Britain to use the word 'nutshell' in its name. Of the early medieval abbey of Nursling in Hampshire, Richard Coates notes: 'It seems clear that this extraordinary name started as OE **hnutusciell* 'nutshell'. We can only guess at the reason. (Ekwall thinks it a jocular name for a tiny place.) ... The presence of nut-trees in the district is apparently corroborated by the existence of *Nutfield* in Rownhams and *Nutburn* in North Baddesley' (Coates 1989, 124–25; cf. OED, s. v. *nutshell* for further comment).

Pluscarden[4] NJ141575

quartam partem unius dauache in *Pluscardyn* 1226 *Moray Reg.* no. 29 [Alexander II grants 'a quarter of a davoch in Pluscarden' to the church and bishop of Moray.]

foresta de *Ploschardin* 1233 MacPhail 1881, 65 [Original document; see plate opposite p. 66 for facsimile.]

vallis sancti Andree apud *Pluscardin* 1236 *RRS* iii, no. 237[5]

monachis de *Plaskardyn'* (var. *Pluscardyn*) 1237 *RRS* iii, no. 255[6]

Symone priore de *Pluscardyn* 1239 *Moray Reg.* no. 41 [Witness.]

totum forestum nostrum de *Ploscardin* 1240 *RRS* iii [= Handlist no.378; MacPhail 1881, 199]

Pluskardin 1263 MacPhail 1881, 207-8 [Bull of Pope Urban IV]

Pluscardine 1272, MacPhail 1881, 210

Prior de *Ploshardyn* 1275 Bagimond's Roll (Dunlop edn), 44

Prior de *Pleshardyn* 1276 Bagimond's Roll (Dunlop edn), 76

Pluscartyn 1311 *RRS* v no. 15

Pluscardi 1369 *RMS* ii no. 1478

Pluscardin 1499 *RMS* ii no. 2505

le Drum de *Pluscardin* 1511 *RMS* ii no. 3552[7]

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4 My thanks to Dr Peter McNiven for supplying a list of early forms, from an unpublished report completed for Historic Environment Scotland, 2016; I have augmented this, and am also grateful to Dr Simon Taylor for further forms.

5 I am grateful to Prof. Dauvit Broun for supplying these forms from the forthcoming *RRS* iii, and to Prof. Keith Stringer for permission to use them here.

6 The 14th-century copy of the Moray Register has *Plasckerdyn*, the 13th-century copy has *Pluscardyn*.

7 The use of *le* before *drum* here suggests that it is the Sc word *drum*, derived from G *druim* rather than a place-name as such (cf. Drum[3] in the *Scottish National Dictionary*:

le Drwm de *Pluscardyn* 1528 *RMS* iii no. 544

le Drum de *Pluscardin* 1531 *RMS* iii no. 1044

priorem a *Pluscarde* dominum Robertum Hawor 1535 *Kinloss Records* ('Life of
    Abbot Thomas Crystall'), 26

terras de Drum et *Pluscardane* 1542 *RMS* iii no. 2699

petari[a] de ... *Pluscardin* 1568 *RMS* iv no. 1812

Pluskarden 1590s Pont 8 (Moray and Nairn)

Pluscarden 1596 *RMS* vi no. 410

terras et baronia de *Pluscarden* 1620 *Retours* Elgin & Forres no. 139

Pluscarden 1654 Blaeu

Pluskarden c.1750 Roy

Pluscarden Abbey 1830 Thomson

II. Stirling

The provenance of the name *Stirling* has been problematic over the years, with
a variety of languages of origin, as well as etymologies, being suggested. Previous
discussions of the name have emphasised its obscurity. W. F. H. Nicolaisen, in
a note primarily about the spelling variations of this name, as well as those of
Dunfermline, said of them: 'Both names share semantic opacity, either total or
partial, on the lexical level', speaking of 'the absence of any persuasive evidence
as to the exact morphological composition of *Stirling* and *-fermline*' (1989, 301;
for Dunfermline, see now *PNFife* 1, 308–11). Alan James describes Stirling as
'very obscure', and whilst he argues for a Brittonic element **ïstre-* or **ïstriw-* as
being the first element, notes 'the identity of the second element is a matter
of speculation' (*BLITON*, s.v. **ïster, *ïstre-, *ïstriw-*). This short note argues that
there is a clear partial solution to the name, and a probable complete solution,
and that its obscurity has been overstated.

It is worth considering a number of factors that have contributed to
uncertainty about the name. First, there has been uncertainty about the
language of origin, but a predominant sense that it ought to derive from a
Brittonic language. This is perhaps motivated by the presumed (though to
date not proven) early medieval origins of Castle Rock in Stirling, and a sense
that it ought to have an original name derived from Brittonic, like its easterly
and westerly volcanic outcrop companions with medieval castles on them,
Edinburgh and Dumbarton (formerly **Al Clud*) (for best recent review of this,

<[dsl.ac.uk](dsl.ac.uk)>), although by 1542 (terras de Drum) it seems to have firmly become a
place-name. It seems likely this refers to the ridge above Pluscarden, now known
as Heldon Hill (see below). It is worth noting that this use of *drum* 'ridge' in Scots
considerably antedates the first usage in the *SND*.

see Fraser 2008, 3–9). I will pick up on this issue at the end of the present note. An added complication here is that the original referent of the name Stirling is generally thought to be the castle or Castle Rock, whereas this cannot be certain. In our earliest documentation of the name, we already hear of a burgh, with churches, a castle and a shire called from it, and much more besides. Its bridge was one of its most prominent medieval features, to judge by the Matthew Paris map of *c.* 1250 (Paris map). Second, there has been uncertainty about the signals the early forms of the name are sending us and, in particular, about the weight we should put on the medial *-e-* in the early spellings of the name. And finally, the disparity between the modern Scottish Gaelic form of the name *Sruighlea* (AÀA s.n.), and its Scots orthographical counterparts, including in the early forms, has suggested problems particularly in relation to the final element. (A collection of early and modern forms is to be found at the end of this note.) I will leave discussion of the modern Gaelic form until later, but we should briefly consider the other matters.

It is probably J. B. Johnston who lies at the heart of the first two problems. In his infamously problematic *Place-Names of Scotland*, he mooted a Brittonic origin for the name in '*ystre Felyn*', which he defined as 'dwelling of Velyn' (Johnston 1930, 301). His *ystre* must refer to the Welsh word found in *GPC* as *ystref, ystre*[2], a late development, according to *GPC*, from *tref, tre* 'dwelling, habitation', and therefore unlikely to be involved here. There are many improbable things about his discussion, but he has nonetheless been partially followed by other commentators, and his proposal for the first element certainly underlies the more recent discussion by James, who points more cogently in the direction of *ystre*[1] 'border, edge' as a possible first element (*BLITON*, s.v. **ïster-*) and has much more plausible suggestions in place of Johnston's *Velyn*. One reason why Johnston may have been followed in this proposal, aside from a default notion that Stirling ought to be a Brittonic name, may be Johnston's representative, but perhaps deceptive, spread of spellings. He gives '*a*[*nte*] 1124 Strevelin, *c.* 1125 Struelin, *a*[*nte*] 1182 Striuellin, *c.* 1250 Estriuelin' for his earliest spellings (1930, 300). As can be seen from the list of early forms below, Johnston's instances emphasise some more unusual spellings at the expense of the dominant forms. In so doing, they give prominence to the medial *e-*; they hint at the original vowel of the first element being *e-*, and Johnston's *c.* 1250 form also hints at a Welsh prosthetic *y-*.[8]

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8 This I presume underlies James's decision to analyse the putative word here as beginning with what in his orthography is represented by *ï-* . I am uncertain as to why a number of words in BLITON which developed a prosthetic *y-* in Welsh have been analysed under forms which imply presence of prosthetic **ï-* in NBr (**ïster-*, **ïstre-*, **ïstriw-*; **ïstüm* etc. (cf. W *ystre, ystryw, ystum*), but not **strad* (cf. W *ystrad*)). There

All of this is to ignore the dominant spellings of the name, and also its modern pronunciation. So, the form *Estriuelin* is that from the c. 1250 map of the English cartographer Matthew Paris, and the initial *E-* is more likely to be a French reflex based on the initial consonant cluster *st-* than a relic of early Brittonic (the 1326 form *Estriuelin*, from a charter in French, underlines this point), and should be discounted against the huge weight of contradictory (and much earlier and more local) evidence. Likewise, the early forms show a fairly consistent first syllable in *striu-*, with the *-u-* almost certainly representing [v], based on subsequent development of the name, and this should be given primary place in any analysis, rather than *strev-* or *stru-*. Johnston's analysis also implies a stress on the medial *-e-*. This is completely unsupported by the later development of the name, which can only have happened if the *-e-* were at most an unstressed, and perhaps epenthetic vowel, or a phonetically meaningless orthographic convention. The modern form of the name, *Stirling*, depends on there having been a first-syllable stress in the name, and subsequent reduction and syncope of the medial vowel (if in fact the grapheme represents one in the first place). The dominant second-element stress in Scottish place-names has preserved the original form of many other early names and, if the *-e-* had been stressed, this too would have likely been preserved, i.e. the name would now be *StriVELin(g); cf., for example, a name like Stracathro.[9] For these same reasons, it seems to me we should reject James's argument, which seems to follow Johnston's understanding of the name's stress and segmentation, that 'formations with *ïstre-* (in one of

is very little evidence in the Northern British material for this prosthetic *y-* which developed in Welsh (but not in Cornish, Breton etc.), unless one counts forms like *Estriuelin* and *Estrahanent* (for Annandale), in the former case certainly, and in the latter case arguably influenced by French rather than an underlying Brittonic form.

9 There is an analogous situation in the case of *Dunfermline*, with early spellings having *-fermelin* etc. See discussion in *PNFife* 1, 309–10. Of the medial *-e-*, Taylor notes: 'The earliest forms of the name consistently show *e* between *rm* and *l*; this might be radical, or it might simply be explained as an epenthetic vowel, which regularly developed in this environment in the Gaelic-speaking period', citing O'Rahilly 1932, 200. It is perhaps worth noting that there are considerable problems with the first set of propositions for the etymology of Dunfermline in *PNFife* 1 – involving the *-fer-* being from G *fear* as a gen. pl. fronting a kindred term (though the *n* that has been placed before *Fer* in the proposed '*Dún nFer mB(e)lin*, *Dún nFer Melin*' is a mistake and should be omitted). This is not the place to explore this in detail, but the proposal as it stands is in need of some attention. There are few good parallels for these kindred terms in Scotland; and the proposed underlying Pictish form is unworkable as it stands, since it is predicated on a number of features unlikely in Pictish, e.g. the word for man being *uer* – this looks likely to have been **uur*; or there being nasal mutation after a gen. pl. form – we have no indication of any sort of inflection of this sort in Pictish. It is possible that the etymology proposed was influenced by the potential name *Belin* that had been suggested as being present in Stirling.

its senses) + *-velin* ... or the personal name *Belin* ..., or **weilion* 'spikes, spears' ... all merit consideration.' All of these suggestions, which, taken on their own, are reasonably plausible, presuppose that the name was originally stressed on the medial *-e-*, but there is nothing in the name's development to suggest that this was the case, and much to predicate otherwise.

It is perhaps worth noting that the name is captured in a 14th-century Welsh Chronicle in the Red Book of Hergest, as *Ystriflin*.[10] Two later manuscripts of the same Chronicle have variants in *Ystriflig* and *Ystrilig*, perhaps suggesting an original **Ystrifling*, in turn implying an underlying form along the lines of **Strivling*. This illustrates several points being made here – that the name was stressed on *striv-* and that, by the 14th century at any rate, no *-e-* was audible. The distracting prosthetic *y-* here is not historical; like the French *e-* in Matthew Paris, it is merely a function of the Middle Welsh tendency to apply a prosthetic *y-* in loan-words and loan-names beginning with *st-* (cf. *GPC sterling, ysterling* 'a sterling (English silver penny as monetary unit)', also attested in the plural as *ysterlingot* in the 14th century).

Equally, there is no particular reason to presume that the name *Stirling* should be of Brittonic, rather than Gaelic, origin. For a start, as noted above, we do not know if the original referent of the name was the Castle Rock. Even if it were, by the time we have documentary evidence of the name Stirling (in the 12th century), neither Dumbarton nor Edinburgh, the two obvious comparanda, were going by a Brittonic name any longer – the former **Al Clud* now had a Gaelic name **Dún Bretan* (> ScG *Dùn Breatann*) 'the fort of the Britons'; and the Brittonic specific of the former *Din Eidyn* had been subsumed into the Old English name lying behind the modern form Edinburgh. So even if Castle Rock at Stirling was early medieval in date, and even if it originally had a Brittonic name, there is no good reason to presuppose that it need have continued forward to the name *Stirling*.

Nicolaisen, in the study mentioned above, handily summarised the likely development of the name on the basis of 'thousands of early spellings' – he was referring to forms of other names as well here, but in the case of *Stirling*, this is unlikely to be an exaggeration. Since this publication is not in a mainstream location,[11] it is worth quoting his summary in full before we move on:

> Broadly speaking, the picture which emerges is this: almost from the very beginning of the recorded history of *Stirling* in the first half of the twelfth century, *-lin (-lyn, -line, -lyne)* and *-ling (-lyng)* spellings occur side by side although until the fifteenth century the former are much more common

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10 For the source, see fn 19, below.

11 I am very grateful to Dr Simon Taylor for pointing me in the direction of this article.

than the latter. From the fifteenth century onwards, *-ling* spellings are predominant and take over completely from the second half of the sixteenth century on. As far as the first component is concerned, the vowel *-e-* occurs sporadically throughout the record but metathesized forms in *Ster-* and *Stir-* (*Styr-*) are not found very frequently until the seventeenth century, usually later than the development of *Streve-* or *Strive-* via *Sterv-*/*Stirv-* to *Ster-*/*Stir-*, and, because of their lateness, normally associated with *-ling*. Leaving the parallel spellings with *-e-* [e.g. *Streve-*] aside, an oversimplified generalization would yield the following sequence: *Strivelin* > *Striveling* > *Strivling* (or *Stirveling*) > *Stirvling* > *Stirling*, though in reality the picture is, of course, more complex, insofar as *-ling* forms are found while *-lin* is predominant, and *-lin* continues to be used well after *-ling* has become the regular spelling. (Nicolaisen 1989, 303)

If we concentrate on the early forms and discount the importance of the unstressed medial *-e-* as likely to be an epenthetic vowel, there is a clear candidate for the first element of the name. As can be seen, by far the dominant early forms of the name's first, and stressed, syllable are *striu-* and *striv-*, both probably representing [striv]. OG *sreb, srib* 'stream, river' (> G **sribh*: for clarity, the final *-b* of *sreb, srib* was pronounced [v]) seems a clear candidate for this element. It is not a common place-name element in either Ireland or Scotland, but is a very well-attested word, in both spellings, in OG (see *DIL*, s. v. *sreb, srib*). This word seems to have been preserved in ScG only as *sreabh*/*sramh* 'jet of milk coming from a cow's udder' (a meaning attested in the earlier language, cf. *DIL sreb* (c) 'Of milk in the cow's teat'), and this may account for the uncertain later development of the name in its Scottish Gaelic form (on which see below).

Analysis of the first element as OG *srib* 'stream, river' prompts the obvious proposal that the second element is OG *linn* 'pool, lake' (see *DIL*, s. v. 1 *linn*), ScG *linne* (see *PNF* 5, 425–26). An etymology as OG *srib-linn* 'river-pool' would account for almost all of the obvious features of the name in its early forms and its modern development in Scots orthography: the first-element stress (*srib*, as the specific, would be stressed), the variations in *-lin* and *-ling* (but see below) and the occasional appearance of *-e-* in the first syllable, in forms in *Strev-*. G *sr-* is invariably rendered as *str-* in the anglicised Latin orthography of medieval Scottish records. As noted above, the medial *-e-* in this analysis would be either an epenthetic vowel or an orthographical convention without phonetic weight. This term *srib-linn* would be a variant on the attested term *sruth-linn* 'eddying pool, pool in a stream, river-pool' (see *DIL*, s. v. *sruth*, compounds with nouns; and see below on a possible use of this term for Stirling), employing a different but virtually synonymous first noun for the compound. The original referent

of the name would be Stirling's most significant topographical feature in the middle ages – it is the point at which the river Forth widens and becomes navigable to ships (see Graham 1968–69, 278), and it is the point at which the river becomes tidal. The original *srib-linn*, then, would refer to this point on the river (perhaps then meaning 'highest navigable point on an estuary', or referring to a river-pool allowing harbourage), rather than any land feature such as the castle rock which overlooks it.

There are, however, a number of issues which need to be attended to. First, the early forms all show a preference for *-in*/*-yn* over *-ing* in the final syllable. Nicolaisen has discussed in detail the problems of deciding on the meaningfulness or otherwise of this sort of variation, adducing a variety of comparable names, of very diverse etymological origins. The ultimate outcome of his discussion must be that the orthography on its own is not capable of demonstrating the underlying element in these *-in*/*-ing* endings. As he puts it (1989, 314): 'The most likely explanation therefore seems to be that in these names *-n* and *-ng* are, like *-i-* and *-y-*, allographs over varying periods of time with one of them assuming the role of allographic norm either temporarily or permanently.' It is the *-ing* ending in particular which encourages us to think of G *linn*; if we were to emphasise the *-in* endings, we might think perhaps of the very frequent eastern Scottish ending in *-in* (*PNF* 5, 407–11). We could in this case make reference to OG *sriball* 'stream' (*DIL*, s. v.) with an *-in* ending, e.g. **sriballin*. In general, however, this *-in* suffix tends to reduce to *-ie* or the like in its development in Scots. There is no sign at all of this in any of the Latin/ Scots forms. As a result, and given the situation of Stirling on the Forth, we can probably be confident of OG *linn* as the final element here.

A more searching problem is the Gaelic forms of the name. On the whole, there is no sign of the final *-n* in Gaelic forms of the name. It is worth noting one extraordinary outlier in this, an emigration pamphlet by Nahum Ward, from 1822, printed in Stirling itself, entitled *Eisdibh! Eisdibh! Eisdibh! Rabhadh dhoibh-san d'am miann a dhol a dh'Ohio ann America* (Ward 1822, 'Listen! Listen! A warning to those of you who wish to go to Ohio in America'). The pamphlet, entirely in Gaelic, says it has been printed in *Sribhlinn*, and notes Mr Ward as residing for a time in '*Sribhlinn*', glossing this as 'Stirling' (neither '*Duneidin*' nor '*Glasgho*' are similarly glossed, and this may suggest that the author was aware of this as an innovative or distinctive form). Despite this being precisely what I am proposing as the etymology of the name, given that this is such an isolated form, we are perhaps best to approach it instead as a learned or antiquarian confection, however difficult to explain.

The current standard form in Gaelic, *Sruighlea*, however, seems to be a compromise rendition, based on a great variety of uncertain forms attested

throughout the early modern and modern period. Taking a range of Gaelic forms into consideration, we can see that the end of the first syllable is represented by a variety of voiced consonants *-bh-*, *-th-*, *-gh-*, all of which would have been reduced in pronunciation when followed by *-l-*. A non-scientific scan of forms in Corpas na Gàidhlig (I have given below only a small sample) attests c. 23 forms in *Sruibh-* (with a further 3 in *Struibh-*), c. 40 in *Sruidh-* (with a few instances of *Struidh-*), some 15 in *Sruigh-* (with a few in *Struigh-*), and some 14 in *Sruith-* (and one in *Struith-*). One conclusion from all this is that the Gaelic name could readily be derived from an original in **sruibh-* (presumably from < **sribh* < OG *srib*) with all other forms in *-dh, -gh, -th* variants on this. Particularly relevant to this, perhaps, is the development of ScG *sruthladh* 'cleansing, scouring', for which Dwelly lists *srubhladh* as a variant (cf. *DIL sriblad* and *sreblaid* for potential OG origins). I am not suggesting any of these as the actual etymon of the name, but rather that ScG had a number of terms in *srubh-, sruth-* etc. with which the name was tacitly aligned.

These forms also show a great variety of final endings, including the vowel ending of the modern form (*-le, -la, -lea*), but also a number of consonantal endings: *-leadh, -ladh, -leach, -lach, -lath*). Watson (2002 [1906], 61–62), suggests for '*Sruighla ...* perhaps a reduced form of *-lach* or *-lann*', but the forms do not seem to me to support this proposal. It is surprising that, with the exception noted above (and perhaps one in the Book of the Dean, see below), we never see *-linn* or *-ling*. One suggestion here is that many of these forms are based on an original **Sruibhleadh*, a Gaelic reinterpretation of the name, with the final syllable representing a verbal noun ending corresponding to Sc *-ing*. The proposition is that, despite the name having originated in Gaelic, it was reabsorbed into Gaelic speech, not from local Gaelic speech-communities, but via Scots, where it was treated as a Gaelic version of a Scots-based name perceived as ending in *-ing*.[12] It is worth underlining the chronological gap that pertains before we get our first proper Gaelic orthographical forms in the eighteenth or nineteenth century.

There remain a number of references in outlying sources which are worth considering briefly here. First is a text which lies in between Scots and Gaelic, the Book of the Dean of Lismore. Chronologically, this also lies between the bulk of our early forms for Stirling, and the first in certainly Gaelic orthography. One text from this constitutes the earliest certain Gaelic text, albeit in Scots orthography, in which we find our name, there as *Strwlee*, in a genealogical text added to the manuscript, by its own witness, in 1542. The name also appears twice in a chronicle with probable Latin origins, as *Striweleich*, and *Streulyne*. These latter

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12 It is worth noting that Johnston, whom I have criticised above, makes this point about the Gaelic forms.

forms, particularly the second one, may be suspected of having been influenced by the underlying forms in their source, but it is nonetheless intriguing to see this variety of renditions in the one manuscript, and both *Strwlee* and *Striweleich* seem to reflect forms attested later in Gaelic orthography.[13]

One final source may be of relevance. The Middle Gaelic poem 'The Prophecy of Berchan' contains one verse which may perhaps allude to Stirling. This verse – according to Benjamin Hudson, referring to Causantín mac Cuilén †997 – says 'his cattle-pound of battle will be his, at the stream called the Tay': *a chomann catha bidh háe / de struthlinn fris n-abar Tóe* (Hudson 1996, 51, 89 §176). It should be noted that A. O. Anderson took this line to read *Sruthlinn* and *Abar Tóe*, 'from Stirling to Abertay' (1922 i, 519), and this reading is not without merit, though on balance we should probably prefer Hudson's.[14] Even if, as seems likely, the line does not constitute our earliest reference to Stirling, it does testify to the idea that the tidal, lower reach of a river might be called a *sruth-linn*, an attested word in OG, and nearly synonymous, as mentioned above, with the proposed *srib-linn* underlying Stirling.

The proposal, then, is that *Stirling* is in origin a Gaelic name referring to the place at which the river Forth became tidal, or perhaps better, the uppermost reach of the Forth estuary being navigable, its *srib-linn* 'stream-pool' or the like, perhaps reflecting an early harbour at the site. The early forms of the name support such an origin well, as does its subsequent development where the medial *-e-* in the spelling – prominent in previous etymologies – disappears, undoubtedly because it was either unstressed (and) epenthetic, or a phonetically meaningless orthographic convention. The later Scottish Gaelic forms of the name, it is proposed, represent a reabsorption and reanalysis of the Scots form of this name back into Gaelic, initially calquing the *-ing* ending of Stirling with a verbal noun ending *-adh* (as *Sruibhleadh*, an attested form, or similar), which was subsequently reduced and transformed in a variety of ways, as was the first syllable. Its development into a variety of forms was aided by the virtual absence of the Old Gaelic word *sreb, srib* from ScG except in restricted contexts.

I noted at the outset that this has consequences of a sort for a separate set of debates. These relate to the question of whether Bede's *urbs Giudi* (and the

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13 Again, despite my criticism of Johnston above, it is he who calls attention to these forms in the Book of the Dean.

14 I am unconvinced by Hudson's 'cattle-pound of battle'. The text supports a reading of *a chommann catha* 'his alliance/company of battle', i.e. his army. Hudson further suggests (note to §176d on p. 68) that we should read *fris-n-abairt*, but I don't see this as necessary, cf. *Druim C. risa n-apar Áni Clíach*, cited in *DIL* from *Mesca Ulad* (s. v. *as-beir*). One point in favour of Anderson's interpretation is *de*, which cannot easily bear the translation 'at' that Hudson gives it.

forms in other texts related to it, such as *Iudeu*, *Iuddew*) was Castle Rock at Stirling (see most fully Fraser 2008). Whilst the present note does not directly address that question, it does clear away one problematic sub-argument, which is the suggestion that that location could not be *Giudi* because it already had a different, Brittonic name, the name lying behind Stirling. This note demonstrates that, whatever the location of *urbs Giudi*, the name Stirling was Gaelic, referred to the river Forth, and was not originally the name of Castle Rock.[15]

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Non-Gaelic orthographical forms

in burgo meo in *st<ri>uelin* 1124 × 1127 *Dunf. Reg.* no. 26 [= *David I Chrs* no. 19, which prints *Strivelin*]

in *St<ri>uelin* 1127 × 1131, prob. 1128 *Dunf. Reg.* no. 1 [= *David I Chrs* no. 33, which prints *Strivelin*[16]]

Apud *striueliñ* 1128 × 1136 *Dunf. Reg.* no. 29 [= *David I Chrs* no. 44, which prints *Strivelin*]

st<ri>uelin 1128 × 1153 *Dunf. Reg.* no. 8 [in rubric = *David I Chrs* no 49, which prints *Striuelin*]

st<ri>uelin 1128 × 1153 *Dunf. Reg.* no. 8 [= *David I Chrs* no. 49, which prints *Strivelin*]

Gilberto de *striueli<n>* 1136 × 1141, prob. 1136 *Glasg. Reg.* i no. 3 [witness; = *David I Chrs* no. 56, which prints *Strivelin*]

Gilleberto vicecomite de *st<ri>uelin* 1136 × 1143, prob. 1139 *Dunf. Reg.* no. 9 ['to Gilbert sheriff of Stirling'; = *David I Chrs* no. 67, which prints *Strivelin*]

capella castelli de *st<ri>uelin* 1139 × 1151 *Dunf. Reg.* no. 4 [= *SEA* no. 140, which prints *Strivelin*]

Waltero de *St<ri>uelyñ* prob. 1140 *Kelso Liber* ii no. 382 [witness; = *David I Chrs*

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15 This note has been immensely improved by the suggestions of the editor, Simon Taylor, and the Journal's anonymous reviewer: that I have not incorporated all that person's wise suggestions is not meant as a reflection on their wisdom. I am grateful, as I have been too many times in my career, for a number of colleagues who have badgered this note into print, since it has been something I have discussed informally in a variety of contexts, but needed to be robustly argued in print to stand a chance of being convincing. These include Stephen Digney, James Fraser, Peter McNiven, Guto Rhys and Simon Taylor. The final trigger was a very extended Facebook exchange on the name, and I am grateful to the surprisingly large number of people who participated in that, and put up with me saying 'I think I know what the etymology is, but I want to publish it somewhere other than Facebook'. Here it is.

16 Correcting Lawrie's reading 'Struelin' in *ESC* no. 74; note Stirling appears twice in this charter, the first time as in burgo de *St<ri>uel'*, which Barrow has printed as Strivel*in*, using italics to indicate expansion of final syllable.

no. 91, which prints *Striuelyn*]

prepositis de *Striuelinis Scyra* 1140 × 1147 *Dunf. Reg.* no. 7 ['to the grieves of Stirling's shire'; = *David I Chrs* no. 99, which prints *Strivelinis Scyra*]

St<ri>uelinschire 1128 × 1147 *Holyrood Liber* no. 5 [original document; = *David I Chrs* no. 115, which prints *Striuelinschire*]

apud *St<ri>uelin* 1128 × 1147 *Holyrood Liber* no. 5 [original document; = *David I Chrs* no. 115, which prints *Striuelin*]

de *striueline* 1141 × 1147 *Holyrood Liber* no. 1, p. 5 [original document, with facsimile (actual size) at the end of *Holyrood Liber* Preface; printed (as *Striueline*) *David I Chrs* no. 147]

forestariis de *striuelin sire* 1141 × 1147 *Holyrood Liber* no. 1, p. 5 [original document, with facsimile (actual size) at the end of *Holyrood Liber* Preface; printed (as *Striuelin sire*) *David I Chrs* no. 147. David I commands all his ministers and 'foresters of Stirlingshire and Clackmannan'(omnibus ministris meis et forestariis de *striuelin sire* et de *clacmanant*) to allow Holyrood Abbey to take timber for building]

Striueling 1147 *Cambus. Reg.* no. 23[17] [16th-c. copy]

Ecclesie Sancte Marie de *Striveling* 1147 *David I Chrs,* no. 159 [16th-c. copy; = *Cambus.Reg.* no. 51, which prints *Striueling*]

[ecclesiam] de *struulin* 1152 × 1159 *SEA* i, no. 120 [original document; a register copy (13th c.) printed *Dunf. Reg.* no. 92, which has *St<ri>uel'*]

Walteri de *Streuelyn* 1153 × 1159 *RRS* i no. 129 [16th-c. copy; = *Dryburgh Liber* no. 159, which prints Valteri de *Strevelyn*]

abbate de *striueli<n>* 1159 × 1164 *St A. Lib.,* 197 [= *RRS* i no. 228, which prints *Striuelin*; witness]

Petro de *striuelin* 1159 × 1164 *St A. Lib.,* 197 [= *RRS* i no. 228, which prints *Striuelin*; witness]

apud *striuel'* 1159 × 1164 *St A. Lib.,* 197 [= *RRS* i no. 228, which prints *Striuelin*]

Striuelin 1159 × 1164 *RRS* i, no. 228

[ecclesiam] de *Strivelin* 1160 × 1162 *SEA* i no. 145 [= *Dunf. Reg.* no. 93, which prints *St<ri>uelin*]

ecclesie Sancte Marie de *Striueling* 1163 × 1164 *Cambus. Reg.* no. 50 [16th-c. copy; = *RRS* i, no. 241]

Striueling 1163 × 1164 *Cambus. Reg.* no. 50 [16th-c. copy; = *RRS* i no. 241]

Sterling 1163 × 1164 *Cambus. Reg.* no. 50 [16th-c copy; = *RRS* i no. 241]

ecclesiam de *St<ri>uelin* 1165 × 1169 *Dunf. Reg.* no. 596 [original document; printed in *SEA* i no. 163, as *Striuelin*]

Ace de *Sterueling* 1178 *Cambus. Reg.* no. 36 [16th-c. copy; witness]

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17 The Cambuskenneth Register, a 16th century copy, seems extremely consistent in using *Striueling*, with very minor variants, throughout, even into the 15th century.

ecclesie sancte Marie de *Striuelyne* 1180 *Cambus. Reg.* no. 16 [16th-c. copy]

apud *Striuelyn* 1180 *Cambus. Reg.* no. 16 [16th-c. copy]

Edwardo filio Patricii de *Steruelin* 1195 × 1214 *Cambus. Reg.* no. 37 [16th-c. copy; witness]

in *Kars* apud *st<ri>uelyn* 1213 *Arb. Lib.* i no. 1 [= *RRS* ii no. 513, which prints *Striuelyn*]

Estriuelyn pons c. 1250 *Matthew Paris Map*

domini Johannis de *Striueling* 1282 *Camb. Reg.* no. 49, p. 70

Willelmi de *Striveling* 1282 *Cambus. Reg.* no. 49, p. 70

communitatis de *Striueling* 1282 *Camb. Reg.* no. 49, p. 70

Patricius de *Striueling* 1323 *RRS* v no. 219

Patricium de *Striuelyn* 1325 *RRS* v no. 278 [original document]

a *Estriuelin* 1326 *RRS* v no. 299 [original document; in French]

Apud *Striuilling* 1327 *RRS* v no. 320 [17th-c. copy]

Ystriflin[18] yn y gogledd late 14th c. Red Book of Hergest[19], p. 125r/col. 518, ll. 9–10

v^cconquhy a *Strwlee* 1512 *Book of the Dean of Lismore* p. 144 [in Gaelic]

Striweleich 1542 *Book of the Dean of Lismore* p. 186 [in Gaelic]

Streulyne 1542 *Book of the Dean of Lismore* p. 186 [in Gaelic]

Gaelic orthographical forms

go *Sruighle* c. 1658 *Niall mac Mhuirich*, NLS Adv. MS 72.1.50, fo. 4v[20]

*an t-Sruibhleach*21 ante 1868 Iain Lom, l. 16 [original poem early 17th c.]

Sruidhleadh ante 1813 attr. Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir, l. 5853

Sribhlinn 1822 Ward, 1822

ann an *Sruithlath* 1851 Caimbeul 1851, p. 64

Sruileadh 1890s *Tales from Highland Perthshire*, no. 100

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18 Two other, later manuscripts of this chronicle have *ystrilig* and *ystriflig*; see next footnote for source and discussion.

19 This is from a note of the battle of Bannockburn ('a slaughter of the English') in 1314, in a Chronicle (up to 1321) in the 14th-century Welsh manuscript, the Red Book of Hergest, a full transcript of the prose of which is available on the Medieval Welsh Prose web-resource (rhyddiaithganoloesol.caerdydd.ac.uk). A few short extracts from this Chronicle were published, including this one, in Historical Manuscripts Commission 1902, p. 3, though with the incorrect date of 1414. There are variant copies of it also in two 15th-century manuscripts. This Chronicle has now been edited from its three manuscripts by Rebecca Try in a forthcoming article: 'A Forgotten Welsh Chronology in Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS 5267B, Peniarth 50, and the Red Book of Hergest'. I am grateful to Myra Booth-Cockcroft for calling the Chronicle to my attention, to Dr Ben Guy for alerting me to the edition and to Ms Try for graciously supplying me with a pre-publication copy.

20 I am most grateful to Prof. William Gillies for supplying me with this form.

21 This appears to refer to a type of sword made in Stirling.

do *Shruila* 1890s *Tales from Highland Perthshire* no. 101
na ropairean *'Shruileadh* 1890s *Tales from Highland Perthshire*, no. 101[22]
Sruibhla 1896 *Mac-Talla* vol. 5
faisg air *Sruighleidh* 1896 *Mac-Talla* vol. 8
Sruibhle 1905–07 Whyte, *Naigheachdan Firinneach*
Sruibhleadh 1910 MacDougall, *Folk Tales and Fairy Lore*, p. 168
Carraig *Shruibhleadh* 1910 MacDougall, *Folk Tales and Fairy Lore*, p. 168
an *Sruibhlea* 1938 *Bonn-steidh*, p. 10
Sruighlea 1965 Laing 1965, 44

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22 The storyteller, Peter MacGregor, had been resident for a time in Stirling, see Dilworth, *Tales*, 569–70.

53, and of his son henry, Earl of Northumberland, 1139–52, ed. G. W. S. Barrow (Woodbridge 1999).

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