

THE LAKE OF MENTEITH: WHY A LAKE AMONGST LOCHS?

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The Lake of Menteith has the distinction of being the only *lake* in Scotland. It was not always thus: on James Stobie's map of the Counties of Perth and Clackmannan, published in 1783, the lake is named *Loch of Menteith*, while in a letter dated to 1817–19, Sir Walter Scott called it *Lough of Menteith* (Grierson 1933, 302). Why, then, did this 'considerable sheet of water', as the Ordnance Survey described it in 1862–63 (OS1/25/69/43), come to be termed a *lake* when every other 'sheet of water' in the vicinity is designated *loch*?

There are a number of theories given for this unique state of affairs including a popularly held notion that it is a *lake* because in geographical terms it is different from Scotland's other stretches of inland fresh water. However, this must be rejected as there are many other examples of Lowland bodies of water that are called *lochs*, e.g. Linlithgow Loch WLO, Bishop Loch near Glasgow, and Loch Leven KNR. Another theory is that *lake* here derives from Scots *laich* 'stretch of low-lying ground' (*DOST*), meaning, in effect, the land surrounding the lake, and a cartographer mistook this Scots word for *lake*.¹ While this theory seems plausible on the face of it, it should also be rejected since there is no evidence that the flat, often boggy area around the lake has ever been called a *laich*.

Until the beginning of the 19th century the Lake of Menteith always had *loch* in its name. However, unlike the other lochs in the vicinity, it has almost always contained the preposition *of*. Another difference is that the specific is unstable. Prior to 1685, the lake was called Loch of Inchmahome or similar, except on three occasions, when it is Loch Inchmahome,² and from 1685 to 1783 it was called Loch of Menteith (see early forms below). Furthermore, during the 19th century the 'country people of the surrounding district were in the habit of speaking of it as the *Loch o' Port*, and by that name it is still known to the older among them' (Hutchison 1899, 68). The surrounding lochs are always called Loch Lomond, Loch

1 This is the explanation given on the National Park/Historic Scotland notice board next to the pier for the boat to Inchmahome.

2 Even these are interrelated, however, since they are connected to the texts and maps made by Pont, Gordon and Blaeu. (For Inchmahome, see this volume, pp. 54–59.)

Venachar, Loch Ard and so on; they are never, for example, Loch of Lomond or Loch of Venachar. This inherent instability must be part of the reason for the change from *lake* to *loch*. However, more relevant is the role of the anglicisation of the Scots language and the rise of literary tourism in the early and mid-19th century.

It has been written that the ‘use of *lake* rather than *loch* in a Scottish setting was common place in Scott’s day ... even while retaining *Loch* in proper names’ (Ransom 2004, 135). The reason *lake* replaced *loch* might have its roots in the perception that English was the language of literature in the decades after the union of 1707. At the height of the Scottish Enlightenment, David Hume and James Beattie both wrote lists of scotticisms – Scots words to be avoided when writing. It was felt that Scots must show they could write English as well as Englishmen (Murdoch and Sher 1988, 129; Daiches 1964, 20–22). Part of the reason is that English came to be seen as the language of ‘improvement’ (Crawford 2009, 39), and there was a great deal of improvement in agriculture and landscape management happening in 18th- and 19th-century Menteith with wholesale clearance of Flanders and Kincardine Mosses by landlords such as Lord Kames of Blairdrummond (Whittington 1963; Harrison 2003; Harrison and Tipping 2007; Harrison 2008). However, it was also the case that English was the written language, at least, of the university-educated class of ministers, civil servants, surveyors and others who administered the British Empire (Murdoch and Sher 1988, 129). In order that men (and they were mostly men) of different dialects of English from Scotland, Ireland, Wales and the various districts of England, might simply understand each other they spoke and wrote in what was deemed ‘proper’ English. In Scotland the replacement of *lake* for *loch* might be seen as a natural progression of this phenomenon.

The first time the Lake of Menteith appears in print is in a book entitled *Modern Geography: A Description of the Empires, Kingdoms, States, and Colonies; with the Oceans, Seas, and Isles; in All Parts of the World*, written by the Scottish polymath John Pinkerton in 1803. In it, he states ‘The chief source of the Forth is from Ben Lomond, or rather from the two lakes, Con and Ard: the stream of Goudie soon joins it from the lake of Menteith’ (Pinkerton 1803, 80); he later adds ‘... the lake of Menteith, a beautiful small lake, about five miles in circumference, with two woody isles, one presenting the ruins of a monastery, the other those of a castle of the old Earls of Menteith’ (Pinkerton 1803, 82). The next mention of the Lake of Menteith being a *lake* is in a guide to cater for the booming tourist trade to the Trossachs and southern Perthshire by Patrick Graham, minister

of Aberfoyle, published ‘at the urging of some travelling gentlemen’ in 1806 (Watson 2006, 153). This book, *Sketches Descriptive of Picturesque Scenery, on the Southern Confines of Perthshire*, contains a chapter entitled ‘Lake of Menteith’ (Graham 1806, 68–71). *Sketches of Perthshire* appeared in three editions between 1806 and 1812. In it Graham describes Loch Lomond, Loch Venachar, Loch Katrine and the other lochs of the Trossachs as *lakes*, e.g. the lake of Loch-Lomond, lake of Loch-Venachar. He wrote of the view from Aberfoyle: ‘Looking eastward, you have the windings of the Forth, deep skirted with woods, in bird’s-eye prospect; the lake of Menteith ... the great moss, with Stirling Castle, and the Ochills, in the back ground’ (Graham 1806, 48). While Patrick Graham called Loch Lomond *the lake of Loch-Lomond*, the lake of Loch of Menteith would clearly be an absurdity. But the reason why the name-form the Lake of Menteith persisted must be due to Sir Walter Scott and his novel *Rob Roy* who copied Graham very closely: ‘while far to the eastward the eye caught a glance of the lake of Menteith, and Stirling Castle, dimly seen along with the blue and distant line of the Ochill Mountains’ (Scott 1818, 136). Scott’s book was very popular in the 19th century, as was *Lady of the Lake*, an epic poem based around Loch Katrine, and both were carried by tourists visiting the Trossachs, especially once the railway reached Aberfoyle in the 1850s (*Rob Roy*, vii; Watson 2006, 150–63). The Lake of Menteith became established as the ‘official’ name in 1866 when the 1st edition map of the Ordnance Survey was published.³

LAKE OF MENTEITH PMH W NN578005 1
 lacu de *Inchmahomok* 1485 RMS ii no. 1861
 the loch and ilis of *Inchmahomo* 1606 NAS, PA2/16, f.86v–89r
Loch Inchmahume 1630–50 Sibbald TNS 131v
L. Inch-ma-humo c.1636–52 NLS Adv.MS.70.2.10 (Gordon 51)
Loch Inche mahumo 1654 *Blaeu* Lennox
Loch of Monteith c.1685 NLS Adv.MS.70.2.11 (Adair 3)
Loch of Monteith 1724 *Geog. Coll.* i, 340
Loch of Monteith c.1750 Roy

3 Although in the OSNB for KRD, signed off by Captian Pratt in March 1863, the surveyor could still write of the Goodie Water as a ‘large burn issuing from the Loch of Monteith’ (OS1/25/39/45).

- Loch of Monteith* 1783 Stobie
Loch of Monteith 1791–99 OSA vii, 140
lake of Monteith 1804 Pinkerton (1804, 132)
lake of Monteith 1806 Graham (1806, 68–71)
lake of Monteith 1817 Scott (*Rob Roy*, 370)
Lough of Monteith 1817–19 Sir Walter Scott [‘... in the island of *Portmahom* in the *Lough of Monteith* there are the most splendid Spanish chestnuts ...’ in (Grierson 1933, 302)]
lake of Monteith 1818 Scott (1818, 136) [‘... far to the eastward the eye caught a glance of the *lake of Monteith*’]
Lake of Inchmahome 1840s NSA x, 1099
Loch of Monteith 1863 (OS1/25/39/45)
Lake of Monteith 1866 1st edn OS 6 inch map PER and CLA CXXX
Loch o’ Port 1899 Hutchison (1899, 68)
Lake of Monteith 1901 2nd edn OS 6 inch map PER and CLA CXXX.NE

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- NRS OS1/25/39 Ordnance Survey Object Name Book (Kincardine in Menteith parish).
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ABERLADY AND ABERSUAINIE

Jacob King, *Ainmean-Àite na h-Alba*

I. ABERLADY

Aberlady Parish ELO NT466801

abberlefsic c.1164 BL Cott. MSS Titus A. xix. f.76–80 [*?abberlefdic*]

uicario de *aberleuedi* 1214 × 1229 *St A. Reg.*, 297

decimum denarium burgi de *Abirleuedy* 1328 *ER* i 5

Aberleuedy 1335 × 1336 *Cal. Doc.* vol. iii Edw iii [twice]

Aberleuedy 1343 *ER* i, 32

Aberleuedy 1375 *ER* ii, 79

portum de *Abreledy* 1376 *ER* ii, 82

portum de *Aberlefdy* 1379 *ER* ii, 86

(port of) *Abirledy* 1381 *ER* iii, 93

(port of) *Abyrlevedy* 1387 *ER* iii, 99

(port of) *Abirledy* 1388 *ER* iii, 102

(port of) *Habyrledy* 1389 *ER* iii, 103

(port of) *Aberledy* 1391 *ER* iii, 106

(ships at) *Abirledy* 1398 *ER* iii, 119

(boat at) *Aberledy* 1400 *ER* iii, 123

(port of) *Abbirledy* 1405 *ER* iii, 130

portum de *Abirledy* 1438 *ER* v, 178

(port of) *Abirledy* 1441 *ER* v, 182

(port of) *Aberlevedy* 1443 *ER* v, 185

terras de *Aberlady* 1454 *RMS* ii no. 680

Abirlady 1458 *RMS* ii no. 610

prebenda de *Abirlady* 1469 *RMS* ii no. 1056

portum de *Abirlady* in sinu aque de *Pepher* 1542 *RMS* iii no. 2847 ['the port/harbour of Aberlady in the bay of the water of Pepper']

lie Manis de *Abirlady* 1574 *RMS* iv 2318 ['mains of']

lie Manis de *Abirladie* 1589 *RMS* v no. 1686

cum cuniculariis lie linkis de *Abirladi* 1589 *RMS* v no. 1686 ['with the links of']

villa de *Abirlady* 1609 *RMS* vii no. 3

cemiterium de *Abirlady* 1620 *RMS* vii no. 2112

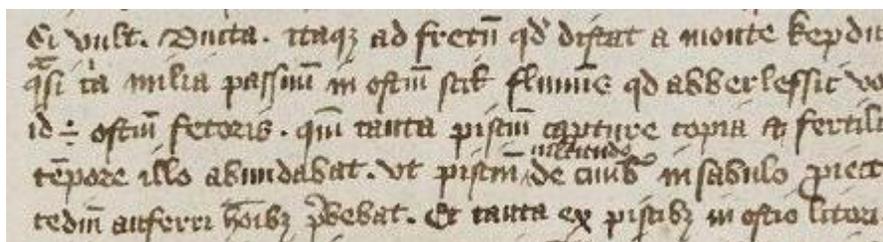


Fig. 1 © The British Library Board, BL Cott. MSS Titus A. xix. f.79. Both *passuu<m>* and *abberlefsic* are in the second line.

The oft quoted form *Aberlessic*, from the Herbertian fragment of the *Life of St Kentigern*, exists in one manuscript only in the British Library numbered Cott. MSS Titus A. xix. f. 76–80. There has been much debate¹ about the location and identity of *Aberlessic* and its relationship with modern name Aberlady. As James writes, it ‘... remains unidentified in spite of lively controversy’ (2014, 6). It hardly seems necessary to rehearse these arguments in the light of the actual form of the manuscript, which, as quoted above, is actually *abberlefsic* not *Aberlessic*.

The letter-form conventions are somewhat confusing with the letters *f*, *s* and *t*, so that, for example the ligatures *-st-* and *-ft-* are similar. The heights however of the two letters in the cluster *-fs-* in question are different, which definitely denotes *-fs-* rather than *-ss-*, by comparison with other words in the MS which have a genuine double *-ss-* ligature, such as *passuu<m>*, in which the long *ss* are the same height.

The origin of the misreading derives from the first edition of the *Life of St Kentigern*. It was edited by Cosmo Innes in the *Registrum Episcopatus Glasguensis* (1843) (hereafter *Glas. Reg.*), lxxviii–lxxxvi, and this form has been taken at face value by later scholars. However, Innes himself as good as admits that he himself emended sections of the manuscript:

The original is a very careless and ignorant transcript, in a hand of the beginning of the fifteenth century, with red initial letters. The unintelligible shape in which the scribe has left his work, must excuse the attempt I have made to restore it nearer to the character which the original must have borne, and which I did not venture without the most careful collation of the MS.²

1 See, for example, Beveridge 1923, 15, Watson 1926, 460–01, Jackson 1958, 291–93, and MacQuarrie 1997, 120, 124.

2 *Glas. Reg.* i, lx

Were emendation necessary, Innes would have been better off emending the form from *Abberlefsic* to **Abberlefdic* or **Abberleftic*. A form such as this was probably intended and is clearly meant to denote Aberlady. This is much closer to the next earliest form, *aberleuedi*.

This correct reading makes sense of the comment in the text: *in ostium scilicet fluminis quod abberlefsic vocatur, id est ostium fetori* ‘the mouth of a river which is called *Abberlefsic*, that is the mouth of stench’. *Ostium fetoris*, meaning ‘the mouth of stench’ is perhaps a Latin gloss for Brittonic **aber loβedīg*, where **aber* ‘confluence’ is a gloss for *ostium* and *loβ-* ‘weak or diseased’ for *fetoris* ‘stench’ (James 2014, 244). Whether this is the true derivation or an early folk etymology is not known, since, as James points out, a form of **leīβedīg* or **leīpedīg* from an element possibly meaning ‘smooth or level’ may be preferable (ibid. 229). This specific fell together with late Northumbrian Old English/proto-Scots *levedi* < *blafdiġe* ‘loaf-distributor’, whence modern English ‘lady’ (ibid. 229–30).

Previous scholars have struggled to reconcile the seeming difference between Aberlady and **Aberlessic*, either positing that they represent two separate sites or tackling the issue of the phonology in a seeming change from **lessic* > **levedig*. This re-reading of the form *Abberlefsic* has largely reconciled the phonological differences and makes it clear that *Abberlefsic* (or indeed an emended form *Abberlefdic*) was indeed what we now call Aberlady.

2. ABERSUAINIE

Blair Atholl Parish PER NN842657

the Ford of *Abersuane* 1710 Commissariat of Dunkeld

Aper Suanie or *Innervack Miln* 1718 Records of Blair Atholl and Struan Kirk Session [NRS CH2/430/1/7]

Abarsuainie 1760 Chronicles of the Atholl and Tullibardine Families vol. iii, p. 480 [Croy³ built in the Garry at *Abarsuainie*]

Aberwainie 1834–45 NSA (Blair-Atholl) vol. 10, p. 564

Abersuainie is no longer extant but seems to be Milton of Invervack near Woodend on the River Garry. The name is often mentioned alongside a story explaining the name, giving it a (folk) etymology of **Àth Bàrd Suainidh*, as if from Gaelic *àth* ‘ford’ + *bàrd* (gen. sing. *bàird*) ‘bard’ + *Suaine(art)* ‘Sunart’ ‘the ford of the Sunart bard’. The story has become

3 *Croy* is a variant of *cruive*, a sort of fish trap. Cf. *DOST* <http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/cro_n_1>.

confounded with two separate locations. The first set of stories relate to NN881685 which is Cumhann-leum Bridge on the Tilt, a few miles from the actual location on the Garry. The stories are:

... a number of cairns ... being the cairns of the Suaineart men, who came to plunder Atholl, about 200 years ago, and were killed above Bohespig, to a man, after having had their bard shot across the river, a mile above Blair, from whom the ford is called Ath-baird-suainidh, to this day.⁴

ATH BAIRD SUAWRAIDH a ford over the Tilt near Blair Athol in Perthshire near which are a number of tumuli covering the graves of a body of men from Sunart who came into Athole on a plundering party in the latter end of the 16th century and were all killed.⁵

These following stories contain this folk etymology but relate the name to the location by Invervack.

'Ath Bhaird Suainidh' (The Ford of the Sunart Bard). During the sixteenth century a body of men, mostly from Sunart in Argyllshire, made a raid into Atholl, but were defeated above Bohespig after having had their Bard shot dead with an arrow across the Garry at the ford near Wood End. From this circumstance the ford was called by the above name.⁶

Note the similarity with the *OSA* version. Here the men were killed seemingly on the Tilt 'above Bohespig' but the bard was shot in a separate event on the Garry.

During the sixteenth century a body of men, mostly from Sunart in Argyllshire, made a raid into Atholl, but were defeated above Bohespig after having had their Bard shot dead with an arrow across the Garry at the ford near Wood End. From the circumstance the ford was called by the above name.⁷

4 *OSA* vol 2 p. 476 (Blair Atholl) 1791–99.

5 Thomas Brown, *Union Gazetteer for Great Britain and Ireland*, 1807, 59.

6 *Chronicles of the Atholl and Tullibardine families* Vol. i, App. p. vi. A footnote states this incident was 'taken from a MS. By John Crerar, head-forester to John 4th Duke.' Crerar worked for the duke between c.1776–1830.

7 *Chronicles of the Atholl and Tullibardine families* Vol. iii, 480.

The name of the ford [a ferry and ford on the north side of the river Garry] must not be omitted; it arose from a large body of men chief from Sunart, in Argyleshire (at some very remote period), having invaded the country of the Atholl Highlanders, who met them close to Invervack, and every one of them were slain. Their bard took to flight, going towards the Garry river, in the hope of saving his life; he was pursued and shot dead with an arrow when ascending the opposite bank. From a hasty and careless pronunciation of the two first words of the name of this ford, some strangers, and those not acquainted with the history and traditions of Atholl, fancy it is an 'Aber,' but there is no confluence. The correct name of the place is 'Ath-bhaird-an-Siona,' meaning, 'the ford of the Sunart bard'.⁸

The river Garry winds its course in a very picturesque way through the great vale of Atholl, till it gets close to the base of Benvrackie; the ferry and the ford which is in the foreground, is named 'Ath-bhaird-an-Suinard,' which means, '*the ford of the Sunnart bard*' and it shows the historical value of local names, as this one makes us acquainted with the site of a battle, in which the Atholl Highlanders were engaged at a very ancient period, with a large body of men who belonged to the district of Sunnart, in Argyleshire, and invaded the country of Atholl to plunder it; this conflict took place on the level ground which is represented on the right of the illustration, and close to Invervack. ... the result of this battle was, that every one of the Sunnart intruders were slain except the bard, who, when he saw what had happened, took to flight in hope of saving his life. He ran straight towards the river Garry but was pursued, and though he managed to ford it, and at a place which had not previously been used for that purpose, he was shot dead with an arrow while ascending the bank, and the name of '*the ford of the Sunnart bard*' continued for it to the present day. (Robertson 1866, 476–77)

In recent times the identification between Abersuanie and *Àth Bàrd Suainidh was again adopted uncritically:

Boat of Abersuanay was a half merk pendicle of land beside the river and outside the Barony of Struan, forming part of the Easter

⁸ Robertson 1869, vii–viii. A somewhat shorter version of this also appears (*ibid.*, 384).

Invervack land of the Atholl Estate. It means Ford of the Sunart Bard from Gaelic Ath Bhaird Suainidh and it was during the 16th century that the bard of a party of Sunart men was shot dead while retreating across the river, following a raid in Atholl.⁹

The following mention is made of Abersuainie on the Garry, but with a different story behind it:

Certain mounds over in Athole on the right bank of the Garry below Stewartston [Balnansteuartach], are traditionally regarded as Danish graves, where a chief or noble of this race is said to have been interred – hence known as the burial place of ‘Athel’. The surrounding plain along both sides of the Garry is the Blair (Gaelic *Blar*) of Athole, or as it may be fairly rendered, the Battlefield of Athel ... But the particular name of the spot where these reputed Danish graves occur is Abersweyne (Gaelic *Abersuane*), evidently from Sweyn, the Danish King, who with his marauding hosts overran (A.D. 1003–1016) a great part of England, Scotland and Ireland. This Abersweyne is a promontory on the south side of the Garry, formed by a bend in the river, as indicated also by the prefix *Aber*. In ancient times it formed the key to the most available route to the southern and western districts.¹⁰

The fuller reference in the *NSA* mentioned above does not give any hint as to its location, but implies the name was well known in 1838: ‘At *Aberwainie* and upon the glebe about 500 feet above the level of the sea there was an extensive clump of the largest oaks and where many standard trees of great dimensions may still be seen.’

It should be remarked that both the works by J. A. Robertson are extremely unreliable,¹¹ attempting to prove that the Gaels are the aboriginal race of Scotland. As such he would have been keen to show an *aber*-name as being Gaelic in origin. That said the story seems to contain some elements lacking from previous versions and may have been gathered locally. Although there are conflicting accounts here that clearly cannot be rationalised, it is likely that the original location for the story was at Cumhann-leum Bridge and that Robertson transposed the story to the site of Abersuainie on the Garry in order to concoct evidence that Abersuainie was a Gaelic name in origin.

9 Kerr 1991, 398–99.

10 ‘D.C.’ 1883.

11 For details, see Taylor 2011.

It is true that Robertson was not the first person to set the events on the Garry, and it is possible the similarity between the name *Abersuainie* and the folklore name of **Àth Bàrd Suainidh* resulted in the two places being conflated. It is also possible the tradition of two separate events – that of the raid into Atholl and that the killing of the bard – took place (or was originally perceived to have taken place) separately in the two locations.

The name Cumhann-leum Bridge is perhaps noteworthy. F. C. Diack recorded a pronunciation of this name as *Droxatsh Xo:ilem*, i.e. Drochaid (a') Choileum 'leap bridge' (Diack MS2276). Whilst there is no leap in the story, it is similar to a common motif of a soldier being chased and jumping a river or chasm after which his pursuers cannot follow (Nicolaisen 2011 [1968], 47–51).

So, folklore aside, is Abersuainie a bona fide *aber*-name? Once the fanciful derivation is disregarded, the forms might suggest so, although the forms are by no means old. The early forms are remarkably consistent, except for the form *Aberwainie*, which suggests a lenited form of *Suaine*. In Gaelic, *obar*-names as a rule lenite the following hydronymic element (e.g. Aberdeen - Obar Dheathain, Aberfoyle - Obar Phuill) so this form is suggestive. Moreover the 1718 form *Aper Suanie* containing two separate words suggests the name and stress pattern as one would expect for a gaelicised *aber*-name, with stress on the second element, and not that, for instance, the stress was on the second syllable.¹²

Taking Abersuainie at face value then, one would expect a place with an *aber*-name to sit at a confluence of a water-course, and that the water-course would be called the **Suaine*. The site is by a burn now called Allt Bhaic, after which Invervack or *Inbhir Bhaic* is named, suggesting that the Gaelic name replaced the earlier Pictish one. This process is unknown elsewhere in Scotland, but such a model is not impossible.

As to the identification of Pictish hydronymic element **Suaine*, there does not unfortunately seem to be any element within the Pictish onomasticon (which is where we should presumably be looking) that fits. Given the paucity of our knowledge of the Pictish language, however, this fact does not necessarily undermine the whole argument. It is just possible that this element exists in nearby Baluain (NN836660). On the face of it

¹² Beveridge 1923, 20, accepts the derivation of 'Ath Bhaird Suainidh' at face value, and dismisses it as a bona fide *aber*-name.

the specific element would be either *uaine* ‘green’ or possibly *uan* ‘lamb’.¹³ The Gaelic form seems to be simply *Baile Uain*, without an article;¹⁴ could this in fact represent **Baile Shuaine* ‘the town of **suaine*’, with this element being the same element as seen in Abersuainie?

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13 Stobie’s map of 1783 gives *Lambton* for Baluaine, which suggests the name was understood as *baile* ‘farm’ + *uan* ‘lamb’

14 Genitive in ‘cait Bhail-uain’ (Watson 1915, 75) and ‘bàl ú’an’ *Baile Uaine* (Ó Murchú 1989, 287). The final schwa in a word such as *uaine* would usually be dropped in Perthshire Gaelic.

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