Dr Doreen Jennifer Waugh died on 23 September 2015 after a long illness. As a tribute to all she did for Scottish place-name studies, and to the fact that she was a valued member of the Editorial Advisory Board of The Journal of Scottish Name Studies, we include in this issue of the Journal an obituary by Brian Smith, Shetland Archives, which appeared in The Shetland Times, Friday 1 October 2015. It is reproduced here with his kind permission, as well as that of The Shetland Times. It is followed by a bibliography of her published work, which well shows both the focus and the breadth of her scholarship. It was compiled by William (Willie) Waugh, Doreen’s husband, Eileen Brooke-Freeman, Brian Smith and Simon Taylor.

**Doreen Waugh**  
1944–2015

Doreen Waugh, Shetland’s foremost scholar of place-names, died last week. She had been seriously ill since 2008, but fought back, continued to work, and greeted her first grandchildren during her final years. She was 70.

She was the adopted daughter of Williamina Laurenson, who was eventually head teacher at Sand primary school, and her husband George. Doreen went to school at Sand, and then in the mid-fifties to the Anderson Institute in Lerwick. There, like others, she came under the influence of John and Lollie Graham, who taught her to love literature and language, not least her Shetland tongue.

At Edinburgh University she studied English language. She met a young geographer, Willie Waugh, whom she married in 1970. After graduating she worked for the British Council for a year, in Borås in Sweden, teaching English to businessmen. Back in Scotland she taught at Bathgate Academy, travelling by car daily on the notorious A8, and later at James Gillespie’s High School in Edinburgh.

It was during 10 years at home, having children and looking after them, that she became interested in names. Willie saw that she was finding an exclusively domestic life rather tedious, and at Christmas 1976 bought her a copy of Bill Nicolaisen’s *Place-names of Scotland*, just published. She was enthralled.

For the rest of her life place-names were, as she put it, ‘an endless source of fun, inspiration, enthusiasm and intellectual excitement.’ Soon afterwards she signed up for evening classes with Ian Fraser from the Scottish Place-name Survey. In 1980 she got a Faculty of Arts scholarship at Edinburgh University to do a PhD with him, studying names in Caithness.

At the same time she joined the Scottish Society for Northern Studies, whose activities were also based in George Square. It was a lifetime association. She enjoyed the informal and interdisciplinary atmosphere of the Society and made fast friends there. From 1985–89 she was editor of its journal *Northern Studies*, from 1987–89...
its secretary, became president for three years in the early nineties, and sat on its committee until 2000.

And she was making friends further afield. In October 1980 she met Gunnel Melchers, a philologist from Sweden, when Gunnel gave an informal lecture in the university. They became lifelong friends.

A year later she was introduced to the names-scholar Gillian Fellows-Jensen at the bicentenary conference of the National Museum of Antiquities. It was another firm and long-lasting friendship. Gillian spent a week with Doreen and Willie last month and reports that she was as hospitable and kind as always, despite the medical treatment she was by then receiving.

Doreen successfully submitted her thesis at Easter 1985. (Gillian was her external examiner.) By that time she was teaching again, this time at the Mary Erskine School in Edinburgh, where she became a member of senior management. She continued to work there until she retired and was by all accounts a good administrator and efficient handler of her pupils.

But her deepest interest was always in name studies. During the 1980s she published several papers based on her Caithness material. Later she extended her interests further afield: to Strathnaver, to Dumfries and Galloway, to Orkney, and eventually to her beloved Shetland. But she continued to have a soft spot for Caithness, and on the eve of her illness she was planning a major dictionary of names there, inspired by work that Diana Whaley had done in the Lake District, and by Simon Taylor's encyclopedic studies of Fife.

Doreen never wrote at book-length. She preferred the close focus of a journal article. Readers of this or that paper may not spot it, but she was gradually working out an original approach to name studies.

As a student, nervously giving a paper to a conference of the then Council for Name Studies in Great Britain and Ireland, a remark by Margaret Gelling made her realise that she hadn’t been using insights provided by her oral informants in a subtle enough way.

She reminisced later that she had been using those insights ‘rather mechanically’, and that she was ‘squirrelling away [the] information … without stopping to think more deeply about the nature of [the informants’] contribution to place-name studies …’ She began to realise, at that early date, that the informants often knew more about the landscape and its nomenclature than the scholars.

Onomasticians sometimes concentrate on settlement-names, because they are ‘hierarchical’, and because some of them exhibit higher ‘status’ than others. Doreen wrote about settlements, as we shall see in a moment, but she had a more complex view of them. As she remarked at a conference in 2011, ‘All place-names are “important”!’

She was very interested in topographical names. In the first decade of the new
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century she began to write about places called ‘ness’ and ‘aith’. She didn’t see them as mere geographical features, as ‘solely topographical’. She thought that the ‘aiths’—isthmuses—had ‘much to tell us about patterns of movement of goods and people’—what she called the ‘economic landscape’.

She worked through these ideas in papers about Shetland, some of her best. In 1993, the final year of her presidency of the Society for Northern Studies, she convened a conference in Lerwick. It celebrated the Society’s 25th anniversary and the centenary of Jakob Jakobsen’s arrival in Shetland to study the defunct Norn language.

Her own lecture there was about Sand, the place where she had spent her childhood. Using material collected from local people and documents, she created a nuanced and humane account. ‘I think what I … find so fascinating about many of the place-names,’ she told her audience, ‘… is the fact that they are so obviously living entities and should not merely be revered as icons of the dead Norn language.’

Ten years later, at another Lerwick conference, she spoke about Twatt in Aithsting, her mother’s birthplace. She painted a striking ‘toponymic picture’ of the district, using material and anecdotes provided by my old schoolmate Jim Johnston, and others.


Her energy was boundless. She became an active member of the Scottish Place-name Society, from its inception in 1996 until March 2012. At various times she was its vice-convener, secretary and convener.

And [in 1998] it was she who came forward with the idea of a Shetland Place Names Project [which started] in 2001. She convinced Shetland Amenity Trust that it was a feasible project, assisted with the project plan, helped Eileen Brooke-Freeman, the project officer, from the outset, and made the Scottish Place-Name Database, a powerful tool, available to it.

She attended and spoke at more conferences, from Flottemanville-Hague to Kárásjohka. After her retirement, in 2004, she planned to be even more active. She took on the treasurership of the Society for Northern Studies. Along with her old teacher Ian Fraser she organised the 17th annual Study Conference of Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland. She and Willie had moved from Edinburgh to Howgate, near Penicuik, and built a house at Sand.

Then, as I have said, illness struck. But amidst her treatment, sometimes punishing, she refused to give up her activities and interests. She and some colleagues organised the publication of a fat book of essays by her old mentor Bill Nicolaisen,
In the Beginning was the Name (2011). She received an honorary research fellowship at the University of the Highlands and Islands’s Centre for Nordic Studies. With Val Turner and Olwyn Owen she became editor of the 2013 Viking Congress proceedings (due out next year).

She joined the committee of Shetland ForWirds, and one of her last projects was to lead the group that created the popular little book Mirds o Wirds: a Shetland Dialect Word Book, which came out last June. I and others have pleasant memories of the speech she made, in her strong Shetland voice, at the launch of it. ‘What a privilege and strength it is to be bi-dialectal,’ Doreen once said, ‘which is what we dialect speakers in Shetland are.’

She was a scholar – not a desiccated one. I have been looking through old emails and relishing once again our discussions about books. Doreen was quite capable of introducing T. S. Eliot or Philip Larkin into a lecture about Shetland names. I remember, too, her irrepressible laugh and her hospitality. Doreen Waugh was a fine teacher. Many friends, far and wide, will mourn her passing.

Brian Smith