

## STREET NAMES TALK

**This is the full transcript the talk that Bruce Jamieson gave to Linlithgow Civic Trust members in Cross House on 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2006.**

I was stopped three times this week by lorry drivers looking for directions. Well, I knew where Broomyhill Terrace and Braewell Gardens were... why? - because I supplied the names for them! But as for Meadowbank, Linlithgow - I was stuck. Where is that?

My interest in street names began not long after I moved to Linlithgow – a place name which itself has an interesting etymology and is found in over 20 variations: Linlithcu, Linlythku, Linliskeu, Linliscoth, Linlychku, and Lithcow – to name a few. The origin of our burgh's name is probably Gaelic – ‘the town in the valley beside water’.

I arrived in town when housebuilders Messrs Wimpey were in full swing in Springfield. New streets were appearing like mushrooms and no-one was very interested in naming them. The town council was nearing the end of its days and West Lothian Council had not yet been established.

Consequently, it had been proposed to name the new roads - those leading off Springfield – after Scottish lochs (on the grounds, I suppose, that there was a loch here – and that new streets could be titled after others:

Lomond Drive; Striven Street; Morar Mews, Tay Terrace?

I objected - using the principal argument that place names were an excellent way of preserving local history; that in a town which had lost so much – the Headquarters of the Knights of St John; the White House in Blackness Road; the Poor House; the Cunzie Neuk; the Golden Cross; the mansion of the Drummonds of Hawthornden; the Spanish Ambassador's House; that in a burgh which had suffered so badly at the hands of 60's town planners and misguided councils; that we should preserve something of what had gone. I also pointed out that retaining old names made the job of local historians so much easier. Research is facilitated if a place is still called what it has been known as for centuries.

The new West Lothian Council were sympathetic - but queried whether there would be enough names to go around. The Springfield estate alone would produce at least eight new streets - and ‘goodness knows how many more would come along in the next 30 years’, they said - how right they were!

Could I find enough place names? I accepted the challenge and began to consult as many sources of inspiration as I could.

Existing histories, including David Waldie's, were of some use; Angus Macdonald's 1937 PHD thesis – 'Place Names of West Lothian' was useful; old maps were invaluable - and it was just at that time that Bill Cadell came across the 1808 Dalhousie Estate map in an abandoned attic in his house - called 'Grange' and not 'The Grange', of course - place names must be correct!

I also consulted other records I had come across – such as the diary of Admiral Robert Johnston Stewart.

I duly compiled a list of some 40 place names associated with the Springfield area and the Council agreed to use them. Sadly, I was not consulted over any further detail – for example, the actual selection of a name for a particular street. That was in the domain of the Environmental Health Department. On asking why, I was informed that, as they were responsible for producing and cleaning the actual street signs, they got to choose the wording on them!

This resulted in my names being used - but not always in the right places. Bonnytoun Avenue and Terrace are not that near the original Bonnytoun – which really referred to a small farmstead (Bondi's toun), the remains of which can still be made out at the entrance to Bonnytoun House. Bondi were husbandmen who owned their own land: thus the ferm toun belonging to a group of farmers, or perhaps one farmer whose surname had become Bondi. However, it was nice to live in an Avenue which I had named - and in a three bedroom Wimpey House we bought for just over £4,000!

(There are many other Linlithgow place names ending in 'toun' – or 'ton', eg: – Riccarton (Richard's toun) Kettil's toun and Preston – the farmstead of the priests).

Other names from my list followed - not always on the correct site - but near enough. The names do make people ask the origin - and thus they perhaps become interested in the local history behind the name.

Pilgrim's Hill, for example, was actually a crest to the south east of the town, above St Magdalene's Hospice, where pilgrims would stay – and leave a suitable donation, before continuing their journey towards the shrine of St Andrew;

Dovecote Park is actually marked on the Dalhousie Plan where West Lothian cricket ground is today and is named after the pigeon loft belonging to the Magdalene's Monastic establishment.

Carse Knowe is of Viking etymology – kaerr knowe – meaning ‘a hill beside fertile land’ – and really to be found further to the north of the Blackness Road - to the east of Bonnietoun Farm.

Bailie lands actually lay to the south of the town and referred to land gifted to the bailies of Linlithgow by the Learmonth Family (of Learmonth Gardens fame.)

There was, to be honest, some opposition to the name ‘Bailielands’ - as it apparently reminded some of our formerly west coast residents of places such as Bailieston. But Bailielands is an old local name - first found in Thomas Johnston's protocol book of 1578.

Kingsfield, as everyone now knows – due to the Golf Range – is to the east of the burgh - and refers to a legendary spot where King Edward, the Hammer of the Scots, encamped one evening in 1502 - and was duly kicked in the head by his obliging horse.

Sheriff's Park refers to the appointment by the monarch of a local representative to govern his affairs and administer his park lands. In return, he was allocated some land of his own – again to the east of the town adjoining the Burgh Moor: the town grazing common – where witches were burned and felons hanged at the gibbet.

Certain themes do run through local street names. One of the most predominant is those with religious connotations: Carmellaws; Friars Brae; Maidlands; Manse Road; Priory; St Michael; St Ninian; Kirkgate; The Glebe.

Others are connected to powerful families: Douglas; Lennox; Hamilton; Moray; Stewart.

Or famous local men: Waldie; Merker; Philip; Whitten; Clarke; McGinley,

(but note: none have been named after famous women: there is no Dame Margaret Kidd Close; no Mary Stuart Street; no Julia Wade Way ; or Barbara Braithwaite Boardwalk – YET!)

Local industries feature a little: Barkhill (where the spent tanning bark was dumped); Tanners Wynd; Dogwell Wynd (a dogwell was a blacksmith); Capstan Walk – not “Captain's Walk”: it is named after the large winch belonging to the Rope Works. And names like this do change.

Until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, 'Baronshill' is spelt 'Barnshill' and probably refers to a medieval tithe barn on the hilly site. The name probably changed due to a mishearing of the local pronunciation of Bar(o)n's Hill.

So what's in a name? Does it matter the name of the street in which you actually live? Well, house builders certainly think it matters. They try very hard to devise a name with a cachet – although they do sometimes get lumbered with rather uninspiring ones, it must be admitted: Town View; Loch View; Grange View! GOLF COURSE ROAD!

But certain names will be ruled out. We do not have an 'Old Gas Works Vennel' on the site of the demolished goal gas retort. Instead we have Guyancourt Vennel – which is admittedly appropriate, as Vennel does come from the French word 'Venelle' meaning a vein: a long, narrow passage. At the new development off Braehead Road I bet we will not have, a 'Burgh Midden View' a 'Coup Close' an 'Old Slaughter House View'. Perhaps we could inaugurate a competition to suggest a name for this new site?

Recently, I had Alec Salmond bending my ear about the inappropriateness of some local names. He had spotted the name 'Town View' heralded above the new development at the West Port: Obviously, it had been chosen by the housebuilders and the two of us objected before it became officially accepted. Very quickly, it was altered to 'Old School Court' – and the former Linlithgow Public School is now remembered - for ever.

While having sympathy for the developer's predicament in trying to devise a name that will help sell their houses; they must not be allowed to dictate place names. Although, I stress that I do have some sympathy. How many houses would have sold in Clarendon – had it still been called by its original name of Bareshanks Park?

How many would have moved into Shitey Close, just off the High Street?

Other local names which I have uncovered in my researches and no doubt will also be rejected include: The Lands of Flasske; The Shogbog; Doomsdale; Gallows Knowe; Puddockstone; The Bottom (Pardovan 1771 estate map) Jinkabout, and my favourite: Crinkle Cock: a field on the Dalhousie Estate Plan.

Can you imagine your address as 'number two Crinkle Cock Lane'?

What is my favourite place name? I have a soft spot for Laverock Park – the field of the larks, but I think my favourite must be AVALON GARDENS.

**Avalon** comes from the Celtic word *abal*: an apple and refers to a legendary island somewhere in the British Isles, famous for its beautiful apples, an "Isle of the Blessed", a Tír na nÓg, a Hesperides.

Avalon is sometimes referred to as the legendary location where Jesus visited the British Isles with Joseph of Arimathea, usually associated with present day Glastonbury.

It is also said to be the place where the body of King Arthur is buried. He was supposedly brought there on board a boat by his half sister, Morgan le Fay. According to some legends, Arthur merely sleeps there, to awaken at some future time when the nation needs him.

And where, locally, do we find this Blessed Plot, this demi-Eden, this semi-Paradise? In Linlithgow Bridge, of course, - where the name actually derives from a brand of luxury paper produced by the Lochmill Paper Works!

But I still like it and, as I hope I've shown, it and all street names are important.

So what could the Civic Trust do to endorse and reinforce that sentiment? My little booklet - last published in the 1980s - needs updating - with many new names, including the recent 'Dawson Close' - named after local Provost and whisky magnate, Adam Dawson.

I'm really not sure who now picks street names for Linlithgow - although I hear that it is the local Lighting Department! Can this be correct? Although I am a regular supporter of Civic Trust activities, I no longer serve on the Committee. Perhaps the Trust should be actively involved in selecting the next street names in the town. If you are consulted, may I suggest: Kidd Close; Braithwaite Brae; Lavery Lane; Reed Band Road and Jamieson Avenue!

### **Postscript**

Linlithgow Civic Trust is obliged to Bruce Jamieson for giving this interesting and thought provoking talk and for granting permission to publish its text.

The Executive Committee will consider updating and re-publishing the "Place names of Linlithgow" booklet, originally authored by Bruce, and will endeavor to influence the selection of future place names.