

**IDENTIFYING MIGRANTS IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND:  
THE POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITATIONS OF PLACE-NAME EVIDENCE**

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**Introduction**

Many English place-names came into existence in the early medieval period as descriptive, meaningful phrases ('the river estate', 'the clear stream', 'Edward's farm', and so on).<sup>1</sup> They evolved in the conversation of ordinary people as they referred to familiar places. Over time, these phrases underwent loss of sense in the process of 'nomination' (becoming a name). In other words, the meaning that they bore as descriptions was lost, as they came to refer (point to a place) rather than to carry sense (describe that place), thus becoming 'fossilised' as names. Other place-names may have been deliberately bestowed, as meaningful administrative labels by those in positions of power, for example, or to commemorate particular events.<sup>2</sup> They too underwent a similar process of fossilisation. Whatever the precise circumstances of evolution, place-names can yield valuable information about the periods in which they first arose, if they are handled carefully.

Immigrants to the island of Britain in the first millennium CE, as in earlier and later times, brought new languages to the island, and they used those languages to describe and categorise their environment. A record of many of these languages is therefore to be found in

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<sup>1</sup> For an introduction to English place-names, see K. Cameron, *English Place Names*, rev. edn (London, Batsford, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> For a concise discussion of these two processes of 'getting a name', see R. Coates, 'Place-Names and Linguistics', in J. Carroll and D. N. Parsons (eds), *Perceptions of Place: Twenty-First-Century Interpretations of English Place-Name Studies* (Nottingham, English Place-Name Society [EPNS], 2013), pp. 129–58 at pp. 145–7.

place-names. The purpose of this chapter is to ask what enquiries might reasonably be made of this record, to further our understanding both of movements to England in the medieval millennium, and of the process by which incoming communities negotiated the process of acculturation, retaining or giving up identity traits—including language—which marked these groups as distinctive or coherent. A response to these broad questions is attempted through a focus on the place-names of Old Norse origin which arose as a result of Scandinavian activities in England, from the late ninth to eleventh centuries.

First, a concise sketch of the challenges of place-name study is given, using examples relevant to the Scandinavian case study: a good understanding of the limits of place-name evidence is key to the useful deployment of that evidence. Second, an overview is given of what it is possible to say about the extent of Scandinavian settlement from the rich evidence of Norse linguistic impact that place-names provide. The remaining sections treat place-names that contain Scandinavian—or possibly Scandinavian—ethnonyms: group-names which refer to people by what we might term their ethnic identity. Such place-names are among the most tantalising and suggestive in attempting to unpick the identities of those involved in movements to the British Isles in the medieval millennium, but hitherto there has been no study dedicated to English place-names containing Scandinavian ethnonyms. This study presents critical corpora of three relevant group-names, and discusses their possible significances. While the precise ethnicities referred to in the names discussed can be difficult to ascertain and are shown to be dependent upon context, it is abundantly clear that awareness of ethnic identity was very strong in the late ninth and tenth centuries in what was later termed the Danelaw—those parts of northern and eastern England under Scandinavian control for some of this period.<sup>3</sup> This kind of awareness is not obviously paralleled in place-

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<sup>3</sup> K. Holman, 'Defining the Danelaw', in J. Graham-Campbell *et al.* (eds), *Vikings and the Danelaw* (Oxford, Oxbow, 2001), pp. 1–11.

names to the south and west of the Danelaw, and hints at very particular social, cultural, or economic conditions, presumably brought about by the Scandinavian settlement of the Viking Age. In other words, these place-names owe their existence to the political and social dislocation that characterised that place in that period.

### **The Methodology of Place-name Study**

Most town- and village-names in England are very old indeed, dating from the early medieval period or before. Many are first attested in Domesday Book (1086), but a significant number of surviving place-names are also found in earlier documents. With the increase in documentation characteristic of the later medieval period, many more names are recorded, and in particular an increasing number of minor places find their way into the record. These minor names—those of fields, for example, and smaller landscape features—generally lack the longevity of town- and village-names.<sup>4</sup> They feature in documents from the thirteenth century and later, and around a quarter to a third of early-attested instances survive into the records of the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Within this onomastic corpus we find evidence for the

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<sup>4</sup> Field- and minor names are now treated fully in the volumes of the English Place-Name Society's [EPNS] county-by-county Survey of English Place-Names (1924–), but only since 1950 have such names received the full scholarly attention of the EPNS county editors.

Introductory discussions can be found in J. Field, *A History of English Field Names* (London, Longman, 1993), and Cameron, *English Place Names*, chapter 20. This chapter, following EPNS Survey volumes, refers to the pre-1974 'historical' counties.

<sup>5</sup> A. H. J. Baines, 'The Longevity of Field-Names: A Case Study from Sherington', *Records of Buckinghamshire*, 38 (1996), 163–74; E. Rye, 'Dialect in the Viking-Age Scandinavian Diaspora: The Evidence of Medieval Minor Names', Ph.D. thesis (University of Nottingham, 2015), pp. 28–29, <http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/32254/> (accessed 4 April 2019).

range of languages whose speakers made lowland Britain their home over the past few millennia. We find some evidence of languages whose origins are so ancient as to resist analysis, as well as the Celtic language—British—encountered both by the Romans and the Anglo-Saxons; the occasional Latin place-name, in the very few surviving instances where the Romans coined their own names rather than making use of pre-existing British ones; Old English (OE), the variety of West Germanic brought to Britain by the Anglo-Saxons, and its later reflexes; Old Norse (ON), the language of Scandinavian settlers of the Viking Age; Old French, the language of the Normans; and medieval Latin, which found its way into English place-names as a result of its status as the language of administrative record for centuries after the Norman Conquest.

This evidence from the medieval period and later can be supplemented with names from the records of Britain's Roman administration, dating from the first to fifth centuries CE, and other Roman documents.<sup>6</sup> These contain a wealth of pre-English names, a small number of which survive, often in reduced form, to the present day.<sup>7</sup> Where the linguistic origin of these Romano-British names can be established, that origin is almost always Celtic.<sup>8</sup>

We have in our corpus of England's place-names, therefore, a resource of great potential, particularly for the study of relatively poorly documented periods. Their value for the early medieval period is widely recognised: unlike the documentary and archaeological records of

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<sup>6</sup> An overview is given in chapter 2 of M. Gelling, *Signposts to the Past: Place-Names and the History of England*, 3rd edn (Chichester, Phillimore, 1997), and full treatment in A. L. F. Rivet and C. Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain* (London, Batsford, 1979).

<sup>7</sup> Padel, 'Brittonic Place-names', pp. 16–19, 40–1.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, D. N. Parsons, 'Classifying Ptolemy's English Place-Names', in D. N. Parsons and P. Sims-Williams (eds), *Ptolemy: Towards a Linguistic Atlas of the Earliest Celtic Place-Names of Europe* (Aberystwyth: CMCS, 2000), pp. 169–78.

the period, place-names are both abundant and ubiquitous,<sup>9</sup> and offer a unique commentary on landscape, people, and practices. With many of them originating in everyday speech, they can offer access to linguistic registers not commonly encountered in the documentary record: in these names we may hear the voices of people who worked the land, as well as the voices of those who held and administered it. Any assessment of the value of place-names, though, must recognise that they are linguistic artefacts which require careful handling. Establishing a name's etymology—its linguistic origin(s), the word or words that it comprises—depends upon the availability of early spellings. Spellings preserved in early sources can take us back in time, closer to the point at which the names came into being as descriptive, meaningful labels. As these labels lost sense over time, they tended to undergo radical changes in form, usually reduction. When only late forms survive, which may have been radically reduced or altered, we are unable to suggest with any confidence what a name meant to its first users. A run of early forms is the best guide to determining what this meaning may have been. A single example demonstrates this point:

**Birkby** (North Riding of Yorkshire; NZ 331023)<sup>10</sup>

*Bretebi* 1086

*Brettebi, Bretteby* 1088

*Brytheby* 1230

*Brethy, Briteby* 1249, 1285

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<sup>9</sup> These advantages were famously pointed out by Margaret Gelling in 'Towards a Chronology for English Place-Names', in D. Hooke (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Settlements* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1988), pp. 59–76 at p. 59; see also *Signposts*, p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> A. H. Smith, *The Place-Names of the North Riding of Yorkshire* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1928) [*PNYorksNR*], p. 211.

*Brytteby* 1373

*Birtbye* 1577

*Berkby* 1316 (16th),<sup>11</sup> *Byrkbye* 1581

The etymology suggested for the name, based upon the run of early spellings given above, is ON *Breti* ‘Briton’ (in genitive plural form, *Breta* ‘of the Britons’) and ON *bý* ‘farm, village’.<sup>12</sup> It might be possible to hypothesise from the modern form of the name that the second element of the place-name derives from ON *bý*,<sup>13</sup> but *Birk-* does not suggest *Breti* (if anything, it suggests ON *birki* ‘birch-tree’<sup>14</sup>). The run of spellings demonstrates not only the likely origins of the name as *Breta-bý* (‘village of the Britons’), but also its development over time to Birkby. The following changes can be observed:

- 1 Loss of the unstressed genitive plural inflectional ending: *\*Breta-* > *Brete-* > *Bret-*
- 2 Metathesis: the transposition of /r/ and /e/ in the first syllable, represented in the spellings by the change from <Bre> to <Bir>

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<sup>11</sup> Where a copy-date differs from the purported composition date of a text, it is provided in brackets. Here the copy date is the sixteenth century.

<sup>12</sup> The head-form ON *bý*, rather than ODan *bȳ*, is used here to reflect the possibility that the element was used by Scandinavian speakers of any origin.

<sup>13</sup> It would, though, be unwise to do so: Rugby looks like a *bý*-name, but its Domesday Book form, *Rockeberie*, points to an origin in *byrig*, the dative singular of Old English *burh* ‘fortification’ (J. E. B. Gover, A. Mawer, and F. M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Warwickshire* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1936), p. 143.

<sup>14</sup> At least two other Birkby-names may derive from Old Norse *birki*, *bý*; see A. H. Smith, *The Place-Names of the West Riding of Yorkshire*, 8 vols (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1961–3) [*PNYorksWR*], Part 2, p. 297, Part 3, p. 4.

- 3 The vowel in the metathesised syllable becomes /ə/ (schwa, a central vowel sound)
- 4 The shift from /t/ to /k/, probably as a result of the association of the first element with *birk-* ‘birch’, following metathesis of /r/.

Furnishing England’s place-names with runs of historical spellings is therefore the first task of place-name scholars: it is a risky business suggesting etymologies on the basis of modern forms. Even when early forms for place-names are abundant it is, however, not always possible to suggest a precise etymology with confidence. There may be several candidate words which are formally similar, and therefore difficult or impossible to tell apart in place-names. Distinguishing the Old English word *Dene* ‘Danes’ from the Old English word *denu* ‘(main) valley’, for example, cannot be done on the basis of early forms: both are likely to produce early spellings in <dene>. It may be possible to turn to contextual information, such as topographical appropriateness (is the <dene>-name sited in the kind of valley termed *denu* by early English speakers?<sup>15</sup>) or linguistic ‘fit’ (does the other element in the name commonly compound with topographical terms like *denu* or group-names like *Dene*?<sup>16</sup>), but certainty is sometimes impossible.

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<sup>15</sup> The precision with which landscape terms were applied by Old English speakers was investigated by Margaret Gelling in her landmark publication, *Place-Names in the Landscape: The Geographical Root of Britain’s Place-Names* (London, Phoenix Press, 1984), and, with Ann Cole, in *The Landscape of Place-Names* (Stamford, Shaun Tyas, 2000). For *denu* see the latter, pp. 113–22.

<sup>16</sup> Preliminary investigation of this question and others like it can be made using A. H. Smith’s *English Place-Name Elements*, 2 vols (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1956) [*EPNE*] and D. N. Parsons and others, *The Vocabulary of English Place-Names* (Nottingham, EPNS, 1997–) [*VEPN*], an in-progress project which will in time replace *EPNE*.

The fact that closely related languages contributed to England's name-stock is another complicating factor, particularly pertinent to the question of Scandinavian migration. Old English and Old Norse are both members of the Germanic family of languages, and they inherited much of the same vocabulary from their shared ancestor languages. Sometimes, cognate forms are identical, or almost. One obvious example is OE *hūs* and ON *hús*, both 'house': there is no way of telling one from the other, at least from attested forms, when they appear in place-names. Some cognate elements, however, are formally distinguishable, such as OE *āc* and ON *eik*, both 'oak': the different vowel qualities in these two elements tend to result in different spellings. So, for example, early forms of Oak Dale (North Riding of Yorkshire), such as *Aikedale* 1208, *Hayckedale* 1234 and *Eykedal* 1339, suggest ON *eik* (/eɪk/) rather than OE *āc* (/ɑ:k).<sup>17</sup> But even when Old English and Old Norse elements are formally distinct, their similarities may give rise to substitution. So, for example, the earliest forms of Stainburn (West Riding of Yorkshire) are *Stanburn(e)* (in a charter from c. 972 preserved in an eleventh-century manuscript), suggesting its origins lie in OE *stān* 'stone' and *burna* 'stream'. However, from Domesday Book onwards, spellings such as *Stainburne* and *Steinburn* reflect a Scandinavian pronunciation of the first element as /stem/ (ON *steinn*).<sup>18</sup> It is possible that many names which appear to be Old Norse in origin are Scandinavianisations of Old English names; and indeed Old English names could be Anglicisations of Old Norse. Many names would have arisen in an environment where the language spoken was one whose phonology and lexis had been heavily influenced by the other. It is therefore not always a straightforward matter to classify place-names as either English or Scandinavian, and it is better, in many cases, to talk of Scandinavian-influenced place-names rather than Scandinavian place-names. These sorts of methodological challenges have consequences for

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<sup>17</sup> *PNYorksNR*, p. 214.

<sup>18</sup> *PNYorksWR*, Part 5, p. 48.



any venture that attempts to investigate the size or status of migrant communities through the linguistic evidence that place-names preserve. The links between, on the one hand, origin, ethnicity, and group identity, and, on the other, language are indirect.

Finally, on the many occasions when it is possible to identify with some confidence the languages and words from which a place-name derived, the circumstances of naming, that is how and why the name arose or was given (the name's 'motivation', rather than its etymology), may remain opaque. To return to the example of Birkby: we may be confident that the name comprised the Old Norse elements *Breti* and *bý*, but it is more difficult to explain in any detail why the village was so named. What, precisely, did *Bretar* 'Britons' signify in this context? What was the name's particular significance to those who first used it? Answering such questions is not straightforward, but attempts to do so can be very fruitful.

### **Linguistic Impact as an Index of Settlement**

The circumstances of the arrival in Britain of Viking-Age Scandinavian migrants have been hotly debated. Most contributions have drawn upon place-names as evidence of the presence of Scandinavian-language speakers, but to varying extent and with radically different readings of the numbers and status of those speakers. In place-name studies, the controversy has been matched only by that surrounding the earlier Germanic-speaking migrants whose language forms the basis of present-day English, and in which most of lowland Britain's place-names were given.<sup>19</sup> Each of these debates has tended to focus on numbers: how many Germanic speakers arrived in Britain from the early fifth century and how many Scandinavian speakers arrived in the ninth century and later? The questions concerning the

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<sup>19</sup> See Findell and Shaw, chapter 3 this volume, pp. XX–XX.

earlier period in particular have in recent years received fresh stimulus—but no clear answers—from work on ancient and modern DNA.<sup>20</sup>

It is perhaps unexpected, then, that the fire in the arguments surrounding Viking-Age Scandinavian settlement appears to have died down during the same period. For much of the twentieth century, debate focused upon the significance of the undeniably dense concentrations of Scandinavian and Scandinavianised place-names in northern and eastern England: were they the result of very considerable numbers of Scandinavian settlers in whose conversation the place-names evolved as descriptions, or the result of an elite takeover whose social status allowed a far-reaching linguistic imposition? Admittedly, such a characterisation rides roughshod over the subtleties of the arguments advanced by Peter Sawyer, Kenneth Cameron, Gillian Fellows-Jensen, Dawn Hadley, and others. The debate prompted groundbreaking interdisciplinary scholarship, which yoked historical, archaeological, drift-geological, and onomastic evidence to support alternative models of activity quite different in scale and chronology. Excellent recent accounts of the arguments render it unnecessary to rehearse them here,<sup>21</sup> especially as the scholarship of the early twenty-first century seems to be moving towards a consensus, at least as regards numbers. Evidence from across the historical disciplines fits better with considerable numbers of Scandinavian-speaking settlers than with a small elite. The archaeological record has been transformed by the metal detecting of the past fifteen years, whose substantial number of diagnostically ‘Scandinavian’

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<sup>20</sup> See Jobling and Millard, chapter 2 in this volume, pp. XX–XX.

<sup>21</sup> L. Abrams and D. N. Parsons, ‘Place-Names and the History of Scandinavian Settlement in England’, in J. Hines, A. Lane, and M. Redknap (eds), *Land, Sea and Home: Proceedings of a Conference in Viking-Period Settlement at Cardiff, July 2001* (Leeds, Maney, 2004), pp. 379–431; M. Townend, ‘Scandinavian Place-Names in England’, in Carroll and Parsons (eds), *Perceptions*, pp. 103–26.

everyday finds suggests large-scale settlement of both women and men.<sup>22</sup> Previously the abundant Scandinavian influence in the place-name record—and in the linguistic record more generally<sup>23</sup>—seemed at odds with archaeology, limited as this was to burial and settlement evidence in which a substantial ‘Scandinavian’ presence was undetectable. Challenges from recent genetic studies, whose results have suggested very limited Scandinavian settlement, have been met with robust counter-arguments.<sup>24</sup>

Questions remain, though, about the genesis of ‘Scandinavian’ place-names. While the heavy Old Norse influence on Danelaw place-names—and on personal names and on spoken English—points to substantial numbers of Scandinavian-speaking migrants, much of it is

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<sup>22</sup> J. F. Kershaw, *Viking Identities: Scandinavian Jewellery in England* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013); J. Kershaw and E. C. Røyrvik, ‘The People of the British Isles and Viking Settlement in England’, *Antiquity*, 90 (2016), 1670–80, at 1675–6. See further Hadley, chapter 7 in this volume, pp. XXX–XXX.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, M. Townend, *Language and History in Viking Age England*, *Studies in the Early Middle Ages*, 6 (Turnhout, Brepols, 2002) and S. M. Pons-Sanz, *The Lexical Effects of Anglo-Scandinavian Linguistic Contact on Old English*, *Studies in the Early Middle Ages*, 1 (Turnhout, Brepols, 2013). The effects of Viking-Age contact between Norse- and English speakers are in general detectable in later texts, those of the Middle English period; E. Björkman, *Scandinavian Loan-Words in Middle English* (Halle, 1900), and, more recently, R. Dance, *Words Derived from Old Norse in Early Middle English: Studies in the Vocabulary of the South-West Midland Texts*, *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 246 (Tempe, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2003).

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, S. Leslie *et al.*, ‘The Fine-Scale Genetic Structure of the British Population’, *Nature*, 519 (2015), 309–14; a critique of the conclusions therein pertaining to Scandinavian settlement is offered by Kershaw and Røyrvik, ‘The People’, 1670–80.

*indirect* evidence of those migrants. In other words, the variety of Old Norse vocabulary evidenced in place-names could not have arisen without substantial numbers of Scandinavian speakers, but not all of the names were necessarily *given* by Scandinavian speakers. It is no easy matter to decide which place-names containing Old Norse words might have been given by Scandinavian migrants. The field-names of Lincolnshire recorded in the post-Conquest period, for example, are rich in everyday Scandinavian vocabulary. The variety and register of this vocabulary leaves linguists in little doubt that the area was home to many Old Norse speakers who lived on—rather than simply held—the land; but the field-names themselves may have been the products of later generations whose language had been influenced by previous Scandinavian-speaking communities.<sup>25</sup> Many lexical items were transferred into English from Old Norse and were—are—used as ‘native’ words. The ‘English’ onomasticon absorbed common Old Norse place-name elements, which were then used by groups whose ancestry was not Scandinavian but whose dialect comprised in part these Old Norse words: *beck* (ON *bekkr*), for example, is still commonly used in northern parts of England. Occasionally, diagnostically Scandinavian inflections (grammatical endings) are preserved in place-names, and these are good evidence that such place-names were given by Old Norse speakers. They are rare, though, and Old Norse and Old English share many inflectional endings, just as they share vocabulary.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Field-name studies have generated compelling evidence for widespread Scandinavian influence at the non-elite level, but the names comprise a dataset more complex than is possible to convey here. An overview of the relevant material, with full references, can be found in Rye, ‘Dialect’, pp. 15–34. See particularly Rye’s own conclusions at pp. 347–51.

<sup>26</sup> The genitive singular ending *-ar* is specifically Scandinavian, and is preserved in names such as Helperby ‘Hjalp’s settlement’ (North Riding of Yorkshire). Genitive singular forms OE *-es* and ON *-s* are not reliably distinguishable.

It is thus not straightforward to detect names which can confidently be interpreted as *direct* evidence of the presence of those whose identity was—linguistically at least—Scandinavian, beyond those few that fossilise inflections. In northern and eastern parts of England, *by*-names are very likely to have arisen in Norse-speaking environments—their first element is many times more likely to be a Scandinavian personal name or Scandinavian word than an English one—and a convincing case has been made that these names came into existence before the eleventh century.<sup>27</sup> Some may belong to the early phases of settlement (i.e. the late ninth century), and may therefore have been the products of Scandinavian immigrants; others may testify to later migration, or to the survival of distinctively Scandinavian communities for generations after migration events. For these areas, a distribution map of early-attested *by*-names (Figure 4.1) is a reasonable guide to the homes of Scandinavian-speaking communities, whether migrants or their immediate descendants.

In north-west England, archaeological and textual evidence suggests Scandinavian settlement from the early tenth century.<sup>28</sup> There is considerable Scandinavian linguistic influence in the area, and many of the Scandinavian place-names there may have evolved in Norse-speaking environments, some of them demonstrably very much later than the initial period of settlement.<sup>29</sup> There is good evidence for land-taking in the first half of the tenth century, and for Norse language use in this region as late as the twelfth century.<sup>30</sup> This later

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<sup>27</sup> Abrams and Parsons, 'Place-Names', pp. 394–400.

<sup>28</sup> F. Edmonds, 'Names and History', in J. Graham-Campbell and R. Philpott (eds), *The Huxley Viking Hoard: Scandinavian Settlement in the North West* (Liverpool, National Museums Liverpool, 2009), pp. 3–12.

<sup>29</sup> J. Insley, 'Windermere', *Namn och Bygdi*, 93 (2005), 65–80.

<sup>30</sup> D. N. Parsons, 'How Long Did the Scandinavian Language Survive in England? Again', in Graham-Campbell *et al.* (eds), *Vikings and the Danelaw*, pp. 299–312, at pp. 302–5.

material may be the result of the continuous use of Norse in the area, or it may reflect its reintroduction.

A. H. Smith's 1956 map of 'The Scandinavian Settlement' famously characterised the parish-names of the north-west as the result of Norwegian incursions, and those on the other side of the Pennines as Danish.<sup>31</sup> Place-name scholars have sought to identify 'test-words' diagnostic of Old East Norse (including Danish) or of Old West Norse (including Norwegian) to comment upon the origins of the settlers.<sup>32</sup> Their identification is, however, rarely clear-cut,<sup>33</sup> and language use outside the Scandinavian homelands is unlikely to have correlated straightforwardly with language use within them.<sup>34</sup> Distinguishing between Norwegian and Danish migrants on the basis of place-name vocabulary or phonology is no easy business, but in general the historical evidence has been interpreted as supporting different geographical origins for settlers in the north-west from those in the east midlands.

The difficulty in distinguishing between groups of people (between English and Scandinavians, between Danes and Norwegians, and so on) is evidence in itself, most probably, of rapid loss of distinctive migrant identities—or at least identities that were based upon homeland origins. The widespread influence of Norse on the name-stock and on spoken English, and the new material and linguistic forms that emerged in Anglo-Scandinavian

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<sup>31</sup> *EPNE*, enclosed map, 'The Scandinavian Settlement'.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, G. Fellows-Jensen, 'To Divide the Danes from the Norwegians: On Scandinavian Settlement in the British Isles', *Nomina*, 11 (1987), 35–60.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, the discussion of *by*-names, often interpreted as diagnostically Danish but probably coined also by Norwegian speakers, in Rye, 'Dialect', pp. 175–80.

<sup>34</sup> Townend, 'Scandinavian Place-Names', pp. 120–1.

areas,<sup>35</sup> suggest levels of intercultural exchange that, in the long term, elided earlier distinctions in the construction of new local identities.

### Noting Difference

There is, however, a set of place-names which appears to record perceptions of ethnic difference, and which may comprise *direct* evidence of the presence and identity of migrants. These names identified sites through reference to what we might term the ethnic or group identity of the people who lived there, or who were associated with those places. A significant range of group-names has been identified with varying degrees of confidence.<sup>36</sup> These include those whose names appear to indicate a connection with Bede's traditional Germanic-speaking 'homelands': OE *Engle*/ON *Englar* 'Angles', OE *Seaxe*/ON *Saksar* 'Saxons', and OE *Iotas* 'Jutes'.<sup>37</sup> There are also other continental groups who do not have such strong 'homeland' associations: OE *Frīsan*/ON *Frísir* 'Frisians', OE *Swāefe* 'Swabians', and OE *Flemingas* 'Flemings'. There are references to the non-Germanic peoples of Britain and Ireland: OE *Cumbre* and OE *Walas* both perhaps best translated as 'Welsh', OE *Brettas*/ON *Bretar* 'Britons', OE *Īras*/ON *Īrar* 'Irish', and OE *Scottas*/ON *Skotar* 'Scots'. Of

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<sup>35</sup> See Hadley, chapter 7 in this volume, pp. XXX–XXX.

<sup>36</sup> These names were examined as a corpus in E. Ekwall, 'Tribal Names in English Place-Names', *Namn och Bygd*, 41 (1953), 129–77. Ekwall's paper had a very wide remit, examining the names given to the inhabitants of well-attested early English kingdoms, groups denoted through *-ingas* constructions (e.g. the *Hæstingas* of Hastings), groups attested in place-names from the late medieval period, Frenchmen, Jews, Lombards, and so on.

<sup>37</sup> For which see J. Baker and J. Carroll, 'The Afterlives of Bede's Tribal Names in English Place-names', in A. Langlands and R. Lavelle (eds), *Land of the English Kin: Studies of Wessex and Anglo-Saxon England in Honour of Barbara Yorke* (Leiden, Brill, forthcoming).

particular relevance in this context are the Scandinavian group-names, OE *Dene* and OE *Norðmenn*, and their Old Norse cognates, *Danir* and *Norðmenn*.<sup>38</sup>

Many of these people-names refer to populations that existed, or which had existed, outside early medieval England: people with foreign ties, real or perceived, current or past. Their appearance in English place-names suggests that these groups were, in particular locations, regarded as distinct, different from their surrounding populations, and in some sense strangers within the landscape, associated with a different place of origin.<sup>39</sup> Such names are usually interpreted as having arisen in the speech of neighbouring populations (rather than as self-identifying labels), and therefore as a ‘popular’ record of perceptions of difference. Those named were, however, not necessarily migrants or recent incomers. *Walas* place-names, for example, have attracted a great deal of attention as possibly indicative of the survival of British-speaking communities well into the Anglo-Saxon period,<sup>40</sup> and place-names incorporating ON *Englar* have been read as evidence of enclaves of English speakers surrounded by predominantly Scandinavian migrant populations.<sup>41</sup>

### Scandinavian ethnonyms

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<sup>38</sup> There is also one possible instance of *Færeyingr* ‘Faroe Islander’, in Ferrensby in the West Riding, but it is not secure. See *PNYorksWR*, Part 5, p. 92.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, the comments on *Dene* and *Norðmenn* names in Cameron, *English Place Names*, p. 77.

<sup>40</sup> See Findell and Shaw, chapter 3 in this volume, pp. XX–XX.

<sup>41</sup> *PNYorksNR*, p. 167; K. Cameron, *The Place-Names of Derbyshire*, 3 vols (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1959) [*PNDerbys*], p. 639; K. Cameron and J. Insley, *The Place-Names of Lincolnshire*, 7 vols to date (Nottingham, EPNS, 1985–) [*PNLincs*], Part 7, p. 93; Cameron, *English Place Names*, p. 77.



The Old English terms *Dene* and *Norðmenn* have been subject to considerable critical attention, particularly regarding their significance in narrative texts. In recent years something like a consensus view has emerged that these labels are not used with any degree of specificity therein, and that it is inaccurate to translate *Dene* as ‘Danes’ and *Norðmenn* as ‘Norwegians’.<sup>42</sup> Clare Downham, for example, argues that ‘*Norðmenn* and *Dene* were used interchangeably in English sources from the First Viking-Age’, and that *Dene* was ‘a general name for those of Scandinavian cultural identity rather than a label referring to people of one particular Scandinavian ethnicity’.<sup>43</sup> The argument that ‘Scandinavians’ is a more accurate way to translate *Dene* and *Norðmenn* in these particular contexts seems a sound one.

Some place-name scholars, on the other hand, tend to set more store by the notion that different terms for Scandinavians denoted distinct ethnic groups. Each of Gillian Fellows-Jensen’s three seminal volumes on Scandinavian settlement-names (1972, 1978, 1985) has a section on ‘The nationality of the Scandinavian settlers’, in which *Norðmenn*- and *Dene*-names are seen as indicating settlements of, respectively, Norwegians and Danes.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> The usage of the modern terms is, of course, based on well-defined nation-states, of which there are no medieval equivalents.

<sup>43</sup> C. Downham, ‘“Hiberno-Norwegians” and “Anglo-Danes”’: Anachronistic Ethnicities and Viking-Age England’, *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, 19 (2009), 139–69 at 142 and 139. See also P. Bibire, ‘North Sea Language Contacts in the Early Middle Ages: English and Norse’, in T. R. Litzka and L. E. M. Walker (eds), *The North Sea World in the Middle Ages: Studies in the Cultural History of North-Western Europe* (Dublin, Four Courts, 2001), pp. 88–107 at pp. 89–90.

<sup>44</sup> G. Fellows Jensen, *Scandinavian Settlement Names in Yorkshire*, *Navnestudier*, 11 (Copenhagen, Akademisk Forlag, 1972) [SSNY], pp. 189–94 at pp. 189–90; G. Fellows Jensen, *Scandinavian Settlement Names in the East Midlands*, *Navnestudier*, 16 (Copenhagen,

The contexts that produced place-names which contain the elements *Dene* or *Norðmenn* are likely to have been very different chronologically, culturally, and linguistically from those that produced the texts under examination by Downham. She is careful to specify that generalised usage was characteristic of the ‘First Viking Age’, from the raids of the late eighth century to the earliest phases of settlement in the later ninth and early tenth centuries; and Paul Bibire writes that ‘once the royal campaigns organized by the Danish king Sveinn Haraldsson began, in the late tenth century, Old English prose sources [...] use the term *Dene* and its cognates only in the narrow, modern sense’.<sup>45</sup> The date at which various place-names came into existence is a fraught matter: preservation in the written record gives us the *terminus ante quem* for a name, but little sense of how long it had already been in circulation. The origins of place-names referring to Scandinavians may be found in the ‘First Viking Age’ or in the eleventh century (or even later). Domesday Book (1086) is the earliest attestation for many, with one or two instances found in texts purporting to be from the tenth century but preserved in manuscripts from the late medieval period. These place-names may have arisen considerably later than the early phases of Scandinavian settlement in the ninth century.<sup>46</sup>

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Akademisk Forlag, 1978) [*SSNEM*], pp. 261–7 at pp. 261–4; G. Fellows-Jensen, *Scandinavian Settlement Names in the North-West*, *Navnestudier*, 25 (Copenhagen, Reitzels, 1985) [*SSNNW*], pp. 307–21 at pp. 307–8. See also Cameron, *English Place Names*, p. 77. Two more recent examples of such interpretations can be found in: *PNLincs*, Part 6 [2001], p. 44; and B. Cox, *The Place-Names of Leicestershire*, 7 vols (Nottingham, EPNS, 1998–2016) [*PNLeics*], Part 6, p. 197.

<sup>45</sup> Bibire is similarly precise about earlier usage: ‘[*Dene*] certainly had a wider meaning in English before and in the tenth century’; ‘North Sea Language Contacts’, p. 89.

<sup>46</sup> See Hadley, chapter 7 in this volume, pp. XXX–XXX.

A further point, of equal or greater importance, is that these place-names may preserve the voices not only of communities of Old English speakers, but also of Scandinavian speakers, and of communities whose language(s) had developed within a mixed Anglo-Scandinavian milieu.<sup>47</sup> Many of the place-names whose specific elements refer to Scandinavians of some sort compound with generic elements of Scandinavian origin: they may have arisen in Scandinavian-language contexts. In short, the contexts which produced *Dene-/Danir-* and *Norðmenn-*names might have borne very little resemblance to those which produced the surviving Old English—and overwhelmingly West Saxon<sup>48</sup>—texts.

What *Danir* and *Norðmenn* might have meant to an Old Norse speaker is clearly also a topic for consideration, but the main available source-type—skaldic verse—presents some challenges. Skaldic verse is Old Norse court poetry of great structural complexity, with ornately poetic diction. It was largely the preserve of peripatetic Icelanders, who performed for leaders across the Viking World, but—if the surviving corpus is representative—mostly for Norwegians. It is an awkward proxy for the kinds of language from which place-names are forged. Much of the skaldic corpus is, though, considered to date from the late Viking Age and, together with the corpus of Viking-Age runic inscriptions, it provides roughly contemporary evidence for Old Norse usage, in terms of sense if not syntax.<sup>49</sup> *Danr*, *Danir* (‘Dane, Danes’) occurs commonly in pre-1100 stanzas which celebrate the exploits of

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<sup>47</sup> See above pp. XX–XX.

<sup>48</sup> See Story, chapter 1 in this volume, pp. XX–XX.

<sup>49</sup> For the ‘authenticity’ of skaldic verses purporting to be earlier than manuscripts record, see E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1976), pp. lxvi–lxxiv.

Norwegian rulers against their Danish rivals: Óláfr Tryggvason against Sveinn Forkbeard;<sup>50</sup> Haraldr harðráði against Sveinn Úlfsson;<sup>51</sup> Magnús inn góði ‘the Good’ Ólafsson against Sveinn Knútsson,<sup>52</sup> and against Sveinn Úlfsson.<sup>53</sup> There, it seems never to have had a general sense of ‘Scandinavian’. The same can be said of *Norðmaðr* and *Norðmenn*: the Norwegian kings Haraldr hárfagri, Hákon inn góði, Óláfr Tryggvason, and Óláfr Haraldsson are all described as leaders of *Norðmenn*,<sup>54</sup> and groups described as *Norðmenn* are clearly

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<sup>50</sup> Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, *Erfidrápa Óláfs Tryggvasonar* 5, ed. K. Heslop, in D. Whaley (ed.), *Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas 1*, Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages, 1 (Turnhout, Brepols, 2012), p. 408.

<sup>51</sup> See the verses by Þjóðólfr Arnórsson, Arnórr jarlaskáld Þórðarson, Bólverkr Arnórsson, Valgarðr á Velli, Þorleikr fagri, Halli stirði, Stúfr inn blindi Þórðarson kattar, and Steinn Herdísarson in K. E. Gade (ed.), *Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas 2*, Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages, 2 (Turnhout, Brepols, 2009), pp. 131–3, 157–8, 168–9, 263–4, 293, 305–6, 316, 339–41, 355, 361, 365–6 (individual editors: D. Whaley, K. E. Gade, and R. Poole).

<sup>52</sup> Arnórr jarlaskáld Þórðarson, *Magnússdrápa* 17, ed. D. Whaley, in Gade (ed.), *Poetry*, pp. 226–7. See also Þórarinn loftunga, *Glælognskviða* 1, ed. M. Townend, in Whaley (ed.), *Poetry*, p. 865, where *Danir* refers to Sveinn’s followers.

<sup>53</sup> Þjóðólfr Arnórsson, Stanzas about Magnús Ólafsson in *Danaveldi* 8, ed. D. Whaley, in Gade (ed.), *Poetry*, 96; stanza 12, pp. 99–100, refers to *Danaveldi* ‘realm of the Danes’ and *Danmørk* ‘Denmark’ is mentioned there and in stanza 9.

<sup>54</sup> See the verses by Þorbjörn hornklofi, Eyvindr skáldaspillir Finnsson, Þórðr Særeksson (Sjáreksson), Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld Óttarsson, and Sigvatr Þórðarson in Whaley (ed.), *Poetry*, pp. 98, 177, 180, 219, 237, 433, 726 (individual editors are R. D. Fulk, R. Poole, K. E. Gade, and K. Heslop).

identifiable as the troops of Norwegian kings.<sup>55</sup> The evidence suggests that, in skaldic verse of the tenth and eleventh centuries, these labels were used with a high degree of ethnic specificity. For the adjective *Danskr* ‘Danish’, there is only one context in which a generalised sense of ‘Scandinavian’ can be claimed: *Dǫnsk tunga* (‘Danish tongue’) refers consistently to varieties of Norse spoken right across Scandinavia and beyond.<sup>56</sup> Given the preponderance of instances whose sense is specific, this seems to be a special case.

The politicised context of this court poetry, however, gives pause for thought. Much of it was produced within shifting political environments in which the rulers—the subjects of the verse—had ambitions for supra-regional power. These ‘national’ labels have an obvious function within such environments. So, what evidence there is from skaldic verse suggests that Old Norse *Danir* and *Norðmenn* did not carry a general sense of ‘Scandinavians’ in the homelands, but it is difficult to be confident that this usage is representative.

The precise significance in place-names of their Old English equivalents remains open to interpretation, but that these terms refer to Scandinavians of some sort is not in doubt. There are, though, other group-names less obviously Scandinavian which have been interpreted as denoting peoples who were in some way Scandinavian or Scandinavianised, or whose activities were bound up with the activities of the Vikings. It has been suggested that, in place-names, some instances of the group-names OE *Brettas*/ON *Bretar*, OE *Īras*/ON *Īrar*, OE *Scottas*/ON *Skotar*, and OE *Frīsan*/ON *Frīsir* have strongly Scandinavian associations which are not to be found in texts. The first three pairs indicate peoples associated with Celtic-speaking areas: OE *Brettas* was used in written sources to refer to the pre-English

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<sup>55</sup> See the verses by Þjóðólfr Arnórsson and Steinn Herdísarson in Gade (ed.), *Poetry*, pp. 93, 98, 154, 363, 379 (individual editors D. Whaley and K. E. Gade).

<sup>56</sup> Bibire, ‘North Sea Language Contacts’, p. 89. The earliest recorded instance is c. 1015, in Sigvatr Þórðarson, *Vikingavísur*, ed. J. Jesch, in Whaley (ed.), *Poetry*, p. 555.

inhabitants of Britain and of Bretons, and ON *Bretar* to refer to inhabitants of areas in which British continued to be spoken;<sup>57</sup> *Íras/Írar* and *Scottas/Skotar* referred to people who lived in, or whose origins in some sense lay in, Ireland.<sup>58</sup> *Frīsan/Frīsir* refers to the Continental Germanic people of the north-western European mainland.<sup>59</sup> These terms tend, however, to be interpreted rather differently when they appear as place-name elements. The terms OE *Īras*/ON *Írar* have been selected for concise treatment as a case study in what follows, in order to demonstrate (a) some of the methodological problems involved in identifying such

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<sup>57</sup> R. E. Zachrisson, *Romans, Kelts and Saxons in Ancient Britain* (Uppsala, Almqvist & Wiksell, 1927), pp. 46–7.

<sup>58</sup> See J. Bosworth and T. N. Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1898), with *Supplement* by T. N. Toller (1921) and *Revised and Enlarged Addenda* by A. Campbell (1972) [BT]; H. Degnbol *et al.* (eds), *A Dictionary of Old Norse Prose / Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog. 1–* (Copenhagen: The Arnamagnæan Commission, 1989–); R. Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 2nd edn with supplement by W. A. Craigie (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1957). Ethnonyms are not treated in the *Dictionary of Old English: A to I*, ed. A. Cameron *et al.* (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2016), <https://www.doe.utoronto.ca/pages/index.html> (accessed 4 April 2019).

<sup>59</sup> J. Bately (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 3: Ms A* (Cambridge, Brewer, 1986), p. 52, s.a. 885; J. Bately, *The Old English Orosius*, Early English Texts Society, s.s. 6 (London, Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 12. Old Norse examples from the skaldic corpus include Einarr skálaglamm Helgason, *Vellekla* 27, ed. E. Marold, and Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld Óttarsson, *Óláfsdrápa* 3, ed. D. Whaley, in Whaley (ed.), *Poetry*, pp. 317, 394. A small number of runic inscriptions refer to groups of *Frīsir* or individuals described as *Frīss*, but are somewhat lacking in helpful context (*Samnordisk Runtextdatabas*: U 379, U 391, Vs 14, DR 224, IR 6).

names, and (b) the complexities and rewards in teasing out aspects of identity from these intriguing name-types.

To summarise: there exists a corpus of English place-names whose specifics comprise group-names which may refer to Scandinavian or ‘Scandinavianised’ communities. The usage of these group-names in place-names may differ from that of Old English documentary texts, and this may in part reflect a Scandinavian, or Anglo-Scandinavian, linguistic milieu not evidenced in parts of the written record. While securely identifying these group-names is no easy matter, the potential that this corpus has as evidence for ‘migrant’ identities is very considerable, and has not been comprehensibly explored. In the following section, the methodological challenges presented by the individual ethnonyms are discussed, in order to compile *relatively* secure corpora of place-names which likely contain them. These corpora are restricted to names attested before 1200 in order to maximise the chances that they reflect the multicultural and multilingual environments of early medieval England, rather than those of the post-Conquest period. These three sections are emphatically methodological, focusing upon the formal characteristics of the names and the reasons for admitting them to the corpora. Discussion of the possible significances of the names is reserved for the penultimate section.<sup>60</sup>

### **Scandinavian Ethnonyms in English Place-names**

#### **The corpus of *Dene-* and *Danir-*names**

The identification of names in OE *Dene* (‘Scandinavians, Danes’) can rarely be made on formal grounds alone. There are two possible genitive plural forms, *Dena* and *Denig(e)a*. The

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<sup>60</sup> Readers more interested in these significances than in the methodological groundwork may choose to focus on the **Discussion** (pp. XX–XX) rather than the sections identifying each of the ethnonyms.

first produces forms in <dene>, indistinguishable from *denu* ('valley'), the second is diagnostic but rare, and could also reduce to <dene> over time. Scholars have therefore used a combination of (largely unstated) criteria to identify *Dene*-names: a location within those areas of England traditionally thought of as having seen Scandinavian settlement; a co-occurrence with a particular set of generics thought to be productive during the later pre-Conquest period (i.e. at the time of Scandinavian settlement); and/or the absence of any topographical feature that could be described as *denu*. This produces the following:

Denaby, Yorkshire WR (*Denegebi* 1086)

Denby, Derbyshire (*Denebi* 1086)

Denby, Yorkshire WR (*Denebi*, *Deneby(e)* 1086)

Upper Denby, Yorkshire WR (*Denebi*, *Deneby* 1086)

Denny Abbey, Cambridgeshire (*Deneia [insula]* 1160–71).<sup>61</sup>

Old Norse *Danir*-names present fewer problems of identification, in that there are no other common place-name elements with which they are easily confused. However, *Dana*-, represented by <Dane>-spellings, could be the genitive singular form of the personal name *Dani* or the genitive singular of the group-name *Danir*.<sup>62</sup> Formally, either could be the first element of the following:<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> *PNYorksWR*, Part 1, p. 122; *PNDerbys*, p. 444; *PNYorksWR*, Part 1, 326; *PNYorksWR*, Part 2, p. 233; P. H. Reaney, *The Place-Names of Cambridgeshire* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1943), p. 185.

<sup>62</sup> The personal name is found in Domesday Book; 'Dane 1', 'Dene 2' Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England, <http://www.pase.ac.uk> (accessed 1 June 2017).

<sup>63</sup> *PNYorksNR*, pp. 131, 249, 276; A. H. Smith, *Place-Names of the East Riding of Yorkshire and York* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1937) [*PNYorksER*], p. 53.



Danby (Yorkshire NR, *Danebi*, *Daneby* 1086)

Danby on Ure (Yorkshire NR, *Danebi*, *Daneby* 1086)

Danby Wiske (Yorkshire NR, *Danebi*, *Daneby* 1086)

Danthorpe (Yorkshire ER, *Danetorp* 1086)

Two names have early forms in <Dane> but are nevertheless usually analysed as containing *Dene*:<sup>64</sup>

Denhall (Cheshire, *Danewell* 1184)

Denver (Norfolk, *Danefella*, *Danefaella* 1086, *Denever(e)* 1200, 1275).

In each case, a preference for OE *Dene* seems to rest on a reading of the generic elements as Old English: in Denhall's case, OE *wella* ('spring, stream'), and for Denver, OE *fær* ('crossing, passage'). Related Old Norse generics (*vella*, *ferja*) are possible but unlikely in both cases.

There are two further names not usually included in the corpus of *Dene*-/*Danir*-names: Denton in Lincolnshire (with OE *tūn* 'village, estate'), and Denford (with OE *ford* 'ford') in Northamptonshire. Each of these has been interpreted as containing OE *denu* ('valley'),<sup>65</sup> but given their east midland locations it is worth considering them as *Dene*-candidates. Denton

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<sup>64</sup> J. McN. Dodgson, *The Place-Names of Cheshire*, 5 parts in 7 vols (Cambridge 1970–2, Nottingham, 1981–7), Part 4, p. 220; V. Watts, *Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004) [*CDEPN*], under Denver.

<sup>65</sup> K. Cameron, *A Dictionary of Lincolnshire Place-Names* (Nottingham, EPNS, 1998), p. 37; J. E. B. Gover, A. Mawer, and F. M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Northamptonshire* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1933) [*PNNorthants*], pp. 180–1.

has ‘no forms in *Dene-* that might represent a genitive plural *Dena*’,<sup>66</sup> but a reduction of this sort before *-tūn* is very common and such a compound might be expected, given the number of *Norðmenn* + *tūn* compounds.<sup>67</sup> Denton is, though, sited in a valley which could very well be described as one of the ‘classic’ *denus*, defined by Ann Cole as ‘long narrow valleys with two moderately steep sides and a gentle gradient along most of their length’.<sup>68</sup> Its inclusion in a corpus of *Dene*-names is difficult to justify.

Denford (*Deneforde* 1086) is formally unproblematic as a *Dene*-name, and could be considered to fit into a pattern of ethnonym + routeway names. Gelling and Cole list *ford*-names with *Scottas* and *Walas*,<sup>69</sup> for example, and there is an intriguing number of other names in this category.<sup>70</sup> Denford’s site is also less topographically appropriate: it sits on the River Nene at the mouth of a small side valley: not the sort of feature that Old English

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<sup>66</sup> *SSNEM*, p. 264.

<sup>67</sup> See further below.

<sup>68</sup> A. Cole, ‘Topography, Hydrology and Place-Names in the Chalklands of Southern England: *cumb* and *denu*’, *Nomina*, 6 (1982), 73–87 at 86; see also Gelling and Cole, *Landscape*, pp. 113–14.

<sup>69</sup> Gelling and Cole, *Landscape*, p. 75.

<sup>70</sup> Examples include: Jubbergate (*Brettegata* 1145–55; *PNYorksER*, p. 291), *Brethstrette* (1220–47; A. H. Smith, *The Place-Names of Westmorland*, 2 vols (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1967), Part 1, p. 21); *Brettestret* (13th century; E. Ekwall, *The Place-Names of Lancashire* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1922), p. 224); four compounds of *Danir* (gen. *Dana*) + *gata* (*PNLincs*, Part 3, p. 29; Part 5, pp. 12, 34, 75); three of *Norðmenn* (gen. *Norðmanna*) + *gata* (*PNNorthants*, p. 233; *PNLeics*, Part 2, pp. 30, 198); and possibly *Scotgate* (*PNLincs*, Part 2, p. 103).

speakers customarily called *denu*. All things considered, it is not a bad candidate for a *Dene*-name, and is included, but identified by name, in [Figure 4.2](#).

The *Dene*-names are confined to the more southerly parts of the West Riding of Yorkshire and the east midlands, with the *Danir*-names located further north and east. Denver looks to fit more comfortably into the *Dene*-group, but such categorisation is more difficult for Denhall, isolated as it is in the north-west.

### The corpus of *Norðmenn*-names

The corpus of *Norðmenn*-names is relatively large. Names with early spellings in *-es* almost certainly contain the attested personal name deriving from the ethnonym,<sup>71</sup> and are not included here. Other names have early forms that suggest an underlying genitive plural, and some lack any form of inflectional ending:

*Norðmanna-* (genitive plural)<sup>72</sup>

Normanby (Ormesby, Yorkshire NR, *Norðmannabi* c. 1050)

Normanby (Burneston, Yorkshire NR, *Normanebi* 1086)

Normanby (Yorkshire NR, *Normanebi*, *-by* 1086)

Normanby (Lincolnshire, *Normanebi* 1086)

Normanby le Wold (Lincolnshire, *Normanebi*, *Normanesbi* 1086)<sup>73</sup>

Normanby by Spittal (Lincolnshire, *Normanebi* 1086)

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<sup>71</sup> OE *Norðmann* and ON *Norðmaðr* are both attested as personal names, although the latter is rare; O. von Feilitzen, *The Pre-Conquest Personal Names of Domesday Book* (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1937), pp. 331–2.

<sup>72</sup> *PNYorksNR*, pp. 117, 157, 226, 57–8; *PNLincs*, Part 3, p. 71, Part 6, pp. 44, 188.

<sup>73</sup> The run of early spellings suggesting gen.pl. *-a* is considerably more extensive than that suggesting gen.sg. *-es* (*SSNEM*, pp. 60–1, *PNLincs* Part 3, 71–2).

Normanby (Fylingdales, Yorkshire NR, *Normanneby* c. 1100)

*Norðmann-* (uninflected)<sup>74</sup>

Normanton (Southwell, Nottinghamshire, *Normantune* 958 (14th))

Normanton (Derbyshire, *Normantune*, *Normanestune* 1086)<sup>75</sup>

South Normanton (Derbyshire, *Normentune* 1086)

Temple Normanton (Derbyshire, *Normantune* 1086)

Normanton-on-Cliffe (Lincolnshire, *Normenton* 1086)

Normanton on Trent (Nottinghamshire, *Normantone* 1086)

Normanton on the Wolds (Nottinghamshire, *Normantone* 1086)

Normanton on Soar (Nottinghamshire, *Normanton*, *-tune* 1086)

Normanton (Elkesley, Nottinghamshire, *Normentone* 1086)

Normanton (Yorkshire WR, *Normetune*, *Normatune*, *Normantone* 1086)

Normanton (Leicestershire, *Normanton* ' 1130)

Normanton (Rutland, *Normanton(e)* 1183)

Normanton Turville (Leicestershire, *Normanton* 1191)

Normanton le Heath (Leicestershire, *Normantun* late 12th cent.).

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<sup>74</sup> J. E. B. Gover, A. Mawer, and F. M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Nottinghamshire* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1940), pp. 78, 176, 193, 238, 254; *PNDerbys*, pp. 280–2, 649; *PNLincs*, Part 6, p. 44; *PNYorksWR*, Part 2, 121, Part 7, 52, 55; *PNLeics* Part 2, pp. 41, Part 6, pp. 197, 304; B. Cox, *The Place-Names of Rutland* (Nottingham, EPNS, 1994), p. 201; *CDEPN*.

<sup>75</sup> Domesday Book has a single *-es* form, but two lacking inflection; all later spellings lack inflection (*PNDerbys*, p. 649).

There is an obvious correlation between generic and grammatical inflection: genitive plural *Norðmanna-* compounds with Old Norse *bý*, and uninflected *Norðman(n)-* compounds with Old English *tūn*. It is possible that the preservation—or otherwise—of inflections could be the result of particular phonetic environments: loss of inflection may be more likely before /t/ than before /b/. However, the remarkable regularity with which the distinction is maintained may suggest that this is not the case here. The two name-types have distinct distributions (Figure 4.3).<sup>76</sup> The *\*Norðmanna-bý*-names are confined to those areas of the country which saw direct linguistic influence, and the *Norðman(n)-tūn*-names are clustered in the east midlands, where there is in fact a marked concentration of the names.

### The corpus of *Írar-/Īras*-names

OE *Īras* ‘Irish (people)’ replaced an earlier term, *Scottas*, whose referents shifted from inhabitants of Ireland to Scottish Gaels.<sup>77</sup> *Īras* is not well attested in the early medieval period, but may appear in some English place-names. ON *Írar* ‘Irish (people)’ is, on the other hand, well attested. Each of the names listed and mapped in Figure 4.4 is interpreted as containing the genitive plural form of one of these terms. However, formally, each could contain genitive singular ON *Íra* ‘of an Irishman, of a man called *Íri*’. The existence of an Old English personal name *Īra* is possible, and that some of these names could contain a reduced form of its genitive singular *Īran* cannot be ruled out.

<sup>76</sup> See **Discussion** below, pp. XX–XX.

<sup>77</sup> ‘Scot, n.1 (and adj.)’, *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2017, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/173097?rskey=ujUOLE&result=1#eid> (accessed 4 April 2019). OE *Scottas* probably appears in place-names, but it is fiendishly difficult to track down as it shares some of its possible outcomes with several other common elements; *EPNE*, under **Scot(t)**, and Ekwall, ‘Tribal Names’, pp. 168–71.

*Írar/Īras + bý:*

- Irby Manor (Yorkshire NR, *Irebi* 1086)
- Irby upon Humber (Lincolnshire, *Iribi* 1086)
- Ireby (Cumberland, *Irebi* c. 1160)
- Ireby (Lancashire, *Irebi* 1086)
- Ireby (Cheshire, *Erberia* 1096–1101 (copied 1280))
- Ireby in the Marsh (Lincolnshire, *Irebi* 1086)

*Írar/Īras + tūn:*

- Irton (Yorkshire NR, *Iretone* 1086)
- Ireton Farm (Derbyshire, *Iretune* 1086)
- Kirk Ireton (Derbyshire, *Hiretune* 1086)
- Irton (Yorkshire NR, *Iretun(e)* 1086)

## Other (possible) compounds:

- Ireleth (Lancashire, *Irlid* 1190), with OE *hlið* or ON *hlið* ('hill slope')
- Orford (Lincolnshire, *Erforde* 1086, *Ireforde*, *Iraforda* c. 1115), with OE *ford* ('river-crossing').

Of these, Orford is not a straightforward example. Ekwall suggested OE *Īras* for its first element, but also the Old English personal names *Īra* or \**Yra*, seemingly evidenced in Irchester (*Yranceaster* 973 (c. 1250)).<sup>78</sup> It is theoretically possible that the eleventh-century York moneyer(s) named on coins as <IRE>, <IRRA> bore the otherwise unattested Old

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<sup>78</sup> Ekwall, 'Tribal Names', p. 167; E. Ekwall, *Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 4th edn (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1960); see also *PNNorthants*, p. 192.

English name *Īra*, but the attested Scandinavian equivalent, *Íri*, is far likelier.<sup>79</sup> Cameron and Insley prefer an Old English personal name \**Ȫra*. They reject *Īras* on the grounds that (a) it is a late development in Old English, and (b) ‘such a name compounded with **ford** has no parallel’.<sup>80</sup> A Scandinavian-English ‘hybrid’, *Īra-ford* (ON *Írar*), is deemed improbable, presumably because major names in OE *ford* are thought to have been coined pre-Viking Age. However, a Viking-Age *ford*-name with *Írar* or late OE *Īras* cannot be inconceivable, and *ford* does in fact compound with a number of group-names.<sup>81</sup> Further circumstantial support may be offered by Denford (discussed above), and also from the considerable number of later place-names which team ethnonyms with routeway elements.<sup>82</sup>

## Discussion

Not all of the names in the above corpora are certain instances of the ethnonyms under discussion. A few, for example, may contain personal names rather than group-names. However, with the exception of *Norðmann*, the relevant personal names are not commonly attested in other textual sources: we would not, therefore, expect to find them repeatedly in place-names. Additionally, many of the place-names in the corpora are recurrent *bý*- and *tūn*-compounds. This is strong combined evidence that these names do indeed belong to a particular class of place-names, and that in almost all cases the first element is indeed a group-name. For example, although *bý* is commonly compounded with a personal name, the

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<sup>79</sup> Smart, *Sylloge, Index 1–20*, p. 48, *Sylloge, Index 21–40*, p. 78.

<sup>80</sup> *PNLincs*, Part 3, pp. 125–6.

<sup>81</sup> Gelling and Cole list *ford*-names with *Hwicce*, *Scottas*, *Walas*, and accept that Orford has ‘Irish’ as its first element without specifying whether this is ON *Írar* or OE *Īras*; *Landscape*, p. 75.

<sup>82</sup> See footnote 70.

chances of all six *Irbys* being named after different individuals called *Íri* are slim indeed. The common distribution and compounding patterns of the names may also suggest that they may have emerged from similar cultural contexts. Did they arise in similar circumstances and in similar linguistic communities?

The interplay of the two ‘source’ languages is of particular interest when considering the significance of these names, and who was responsible for their emergence. Only in the case of the *Danir-/Dene*-names do we have group-names sufficiently distinct to identify on formal grounds their source-languages with any confidence. There is a clear difference in distribution between ON *Danir*- and OE *Dene*-forms (Figure 4.2), with the former found further north and east, in areas with a heavy concentration of early attested *by*-names (Figure 4.1). Their second elements can comfortably be analysed as Old Norse, and they are all good candidates for having arisen in Scandinavian-speaking environments. The *Dene*-names, on the other hand, are found outside the areas of clear early linguistic influence or, in the case of the *Denby*-names, on their margins. The *Denby*-names are best explained as compounds formed in the mouths of English speakers in close proximity to Scandinavian speakers and who had adopted *-by* into their toponymicon;<sup>83</sup> it is less likely that they are Anglicisations of *Danby*-names by English speakers. Denver fits well with the overall distribution of *Dene*-names: although the earliest attestation is in <Dane> (*Danefella* 1086), this looks anomalous. Denhall is perhaps less clear-cut. It is formally possible that its generic is ON *vella*, the cognate of OE *wella*. The Scandinavian word is not especially common in Danish and Norwegian place-names, but it is found with the same sense as OE *wella* (‘spring, stream’).<sup>84</sup> This name, though, is a good example of the difficulty of classifying some place-names as either English or Scandinavian. The Old English and Old Norse forms of the generic element

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<sup>83</sup> Abrams and Parsons, ‘Place-Names’, pp. 388–9.

<sup>84</sup> See the discussion, with references, in Rye, ‘Dialect’, pp. 139–40, 161.



are equally well represented by <welle>, and though the very earliest attestations have <Dane>, <Dene>-forms appear within 60 years, and the two alternate until the mid-fourteenth century, when <Dene> wins out. The name's history bears all the hallmarks of a mixed Anglo-Scandinavian linguistic milieu. So, even in the *Danir-/Dene*-corpus we may have a variety of contexts in which the names arose; their genesis was probably in more than one type of linguistic community.

There is also a split in the distribution of *Norðmenn*-names: the *Normanbys* are found further north and east than the *Normantons*, again in the areas subject to heavy Scandinavian linguistic influence, and they can plausibly be attributed to Scandinavian-speaking communities. There is good evidence, it seems, both in form and distribution, that *Danby*- and *Normanby*-names were given by Scandinavians. What might it have meant for groups of Scandinavian speakers to call their neighbours *Danir* or *Norðmenn*? Recognisable and specific ethnic identities—Danes and Norwegians—seem to be at work here, although these should not be confused with modern, national identities. However, to accept the prevailing minority-group interpretations,<sup>85</sup> we would have to reckon with *Danir* surrounded by *Norðmenn*, and *Norðmenn* surrounded by *Danir*. This is relatively unproblematic for the *Normanbys*. As Gillian Fellows-Jensen observes, ‘Most of the *Normanbys* are found in eastern England, where the Scandinavian settlers were predominantly Danish’.<sup>86</sup> The *Danbys* are, though, also located in eastern areas of the country, rather than in the north-westerly areas associated with Norwegian settlement; the isolated minority-group explanation does not

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<sup>85</sup> See above pp. XX–XX.

<sup>86</sup> G. Fellows-Jensen, ‘Scandinavian Settlement in the British Isles and Normandy: What the Place-names Reveal’, in J. Adams and K. Holman (eds), *Scandinavia and Europe: 800–1350: Contact, Conflict, and Coexistence*, Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe, 4 (Turnhout, Brepols, 2004), pp. 137–47, at p. 143.

work well for them. Given this, it is worth exploring other possible naming contexts for all of the Scandinavian-language names. Self-identification is a distinct possibility: that these names were given not by surrounding populations, but by the new Scandinavian inhabitants, perhaps as deliberate expressions of ownership and power—and of course of precise identity and origin. This alternative explanation was put forward by Carole Hough, who suggested that the referents may have been ‘the first groups of such settlers to arrive in the area, naming the settlement after themselves in order to stake their claim’.<sup>87</sup>

The English-language names are in some ways less problematic: English speakers naming their Scandinavian neighbours either *Dene* or *Norðmenn*, effectively labelling them as ‘different’, makes better sense. However, the *Normanton* cluster in the east midlands deserves close examination, as its regularity and density is striking (Figure 4.3). In this area of the country *Normantons* are thick on the ground, but there is a notable scarcity of *Dene*-names. The seemingly obvious reason for this is that there may be ‘hidden’ *Dena-tūn*-names which have been wrongly interpreted as *denu-tūns* (‘valley settlements’). There is, however, only one possible east midlands candidate for either etymology: the Denton in Lincolnshire discussed above, and identified as a reasonably secure *denu-tūn*. The east midlands *Normanton* cluster, coupled with the absence of *Dentons*, may suggest that, in this area, *Norðmenn* was used as a catch-all term, by English-speaking communities, for Scandinavians of any origin. In other words, the ‘ethnic-label’ usage in this area may have been very general: English speakers giving these names in this part of the world did not distinguish between—perhaps did not recognise—different types of Scandinavian, and used *Norðmenn* as a general term for all.

Furthermore, the marked recurrence of these names within a particular area, coupled with their consistent use of an uninflected first element, suggests that they were functional

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<sup>87</sup> C. Hough, ‘Commonplace Place-Names’, *Nomina*, 30 (2007), 101–20, at 113.

appellatives. Such names did not arise in natural speech (which is usually evidenced in the written record by the fossilisation of grammatical inflections) but were pre-existing lexical compounds applied to particular places with shared—usually functional or administrative—characteristics. For example, the recurrent west midland place-name, *Acton* (OE *āc-tūn* [‘oak settlement’]), is thought to have been applied to places with ‘special functions in the processing or distribution of oak timber’.<sup>88</sup> *Normantons* may, like *Actons*, have comprised a class of name referring to places labelled to reflect their status or identity within an administrative framework. Precisely what this status or identity might have been is beyond the remit of the present study, but the use of English functional appellatives of this type in this area is suggestive. The east midlands were within the area of Scandinavian control in the late ninth century, but came under West Saxon control in the course of the tenth. These *Normantons* may have referred to administrative centres so-named by politically dominant English speakers within areas with significant numbers of Scandinavian dwellers. A similar socio-onomastic context has been suggested for Shropshire, where comparable name-types are thought to reflect the firm administrative grip of a minority Mercian elite over areas whose British population had not been displaced by incoming English speakers.<sup>89</sup> So, the genesis of the *Normantons* probably belongs to a more formal, administrative naming context than other English-language names such as *Denby*, which perhaps arose in speech as descriptions of Scandinavian-inhabited places.

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<sup>88</sup> M. Gelling, *The Place-Names of Shropshire*, 6 vols– (Nottingham, EPNS, 1990–) [*PNShrops*], Part 1, pp. 2–4. See also R. Coates, ‘“Agricultural” Compound Terms and Names in *tūn* like *Acton* and *Barton*’, in R. Jones and S. Semple (eds), *Sense of Place in Anglo-Saxon England* (Donington, Shaun Tyas, 2012), pp. 211–37, especially pp. 213–14.

<sup>89</sup> *PNShrops*, Part 1, p. xiv.

With the *Īras-/Īrar*-names, the relevant question here is this: are interpretations which identify the referents as Scandinavian or ‘Scandinavianised’ justified, or is an Irish origin the primary—or sole—identity at play? It is clear that these names share, to a certain extent, an onomastic ‘profile’ with the Scandinavian ethnonyms discussed above: most are compounds with *bý* (six of the twelve instances) and *tūn* (four). The distributions are slightly different though: more of the *Īras-/Īrar*-names occur in the north-west, and the *tūn*-compounds are found not only in the east midlands but also in the heavily Scandinavianised North Riding of Yorkshire. In what follows, evidence for (1) the Irish element and (2) the Scandinavian element of *Īras-/Īrar*-identity will be assessed.

The marked north-westerly distribution—or greater proximity to the Irish Sea—of some of the names is hardly surprising, and for these it is relatively easy to evidence a Goidelic-language element of *Īrar*-identity. Goidelic refers to the group of Celtic languages which includes Irish, Scottish Gaelic, and Manx. There are, for example, two—possibly three—Goidelic-language names datable to the tenth century not far from Irby in Wirral (Cheshire).<sup>90</sup> Three further north-west names, Ireby, Ireleth (Lancashire), and Ireby (Cumberland), sit at the northern and southern margins of a concentration of inversion-compound place-names. In these inversion compounds, the generics precede the qualifying elements, a structure characteristic of the medieval Celtic languages (including Goidelic), although the generics themselves are Old Norse. Setmurthy (Cumberland) is one example; its (initial) generic is Old Norse *sætr* ‘seasonal pasture’, and its (final) specific is the Goidelic personal name *Muiredach*.<sup>91</sup> These names have been interpreted convincingly as products of native Goidelic speakers who had learned Norse, the language of the socially dominant group, as a second

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<sup>90</sup> R. Coates, ‘Liscard and Irish Names in Northern Wirral’, *Journal of the English Place-Name Society*, 30 (1997–8), 23–6.

<sup>91</sup> D. Whaley, *A Dictionary of Lake District Place-Names* (Nottingham, EPNS, 2006), p. 305.

language.<sup>92</sup> They need not have been specifically Irish though: origins in Man and the Hebrides have also been suggested for the *Írar*.<sup>93</sup>

Goidelic personal names—either Irish or Scottish Gaelic<sup>94</sup>—recorded in Domesday Book may also provide circumstantial (and possibly later) evidence for Goidelic speech communities. In Domesday Book, landholdings of men bearing Goidelic personal names are found in the north-west, and also further east, right across to Lincolnshire.<sup>95</sup> This distribution correlates closely with that of the *Írar*-/*Íras*-names in the north-west and in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire. The eleventh-century evidence provided by the personal names suggests recent sustained contact between these areas and the Goidelic-speaking regions, but it may have a heritage that stretches back much earlier.

To summarise, the combination of the group-name itself and the contextual evidence outlined above suggests that the *Íras*/*Írar* in these northerly and north-westerly areas were Goidelic speakers. While the contextual evidence is lacking for the Derbyshire *Iretons*, it is no stretch to imagine the same applies there.

The nature of the putative Scandinavian element of *Írar*/*Íras* identity is harder to pin down. Goidelic speech-communities were unlikely to have been groups of Scandinavians

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<sup>92</sup> A. Grant, ‘A New Approach to the Inversion Compounds of North-West England’, *Nomina*, 25 (2002), 65–90.

<sup>93</sup> G. Fellows-Jensen, ‘Scandinavians in Cheshire: A Reassessment of the Onomastic Evidence’, in A. R. Rumble and A. D. Mills (eds), *Names, Places and People: An Onomastic Miscellany for John McNeal Dodgson* (Stamford, Paul Watkins, 1997), pp. 77–92, at p. 85; Grant, ‘A New Approach’; Edmonds, ‘History and Names’, p. 10.

<sup>94</sup> See the references in Edmonds, ‘Names and History’, p. 11.

<sup>95</sup> Edmonds, ‘Names and History’, pp. 11–12, Figure 1.3.

who had spent some time in Ireland.<sup>96</sup> The argument that they were Irish groups who accompanied Scandinavians to England is stronger.<sup>97</sup> The presence of Scandinavians in Ireland and their subsequent movements across the Irish Sea are documented in the historical record,<sup>98</sup> and the tenth-century Viking kingdoms of Dublin and York were closely associated.<sup>99</sup> More specifically, Irby in Wirral, Cheshire (together with other Norse place-names there) has been linked with the expulsion from Dublin in 902 of Norwegians led by Ingimundr, and it has been suggested that the place-name's *Írar* were his Irish followers.<sup>100</sup> The two *Irebys* in Lancashire and Cumberland are sited on relatively poor land, surrounded by places with Scandinavian names: it has been argued that this also reflects a political

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<sup>96</sup> As was suggested in *PNYorksNR*, pp. 102, xxvii, *PNDerbys*, p. 381, and CDEPN under *Ir(e)by*-names.

<sup>97</sup> Ekwall, 'Tribal Names', p. 167; *PNDerbys*, p. 381; *PNLincs*, Part 5, p. 124. See also Edmonds, 'Names and History', p. 10.

<sup>98</sup> The account in the *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland* is supported by entries in the *Annals of Ulster* and *Annales Cambriae*; F. T. Wainwright, 'Ingimund's Invasion', *English Historical Review*, 73 (1948), 147–69; Rye, 'Dialect', pp. 145–6.

<sup>99</sup> C. Downham, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland: The Dynasty of Ívarr to AD 1014* (Edinburgh, Dunedin Academic Press, 2007).

<sup>100</sup> J. McN. Dodgson, 'The Background of Brunanburh', *Saga-Book*, 14 (1956–7), 303–16; M. C. Higham, 'Scandinavian Settlement in North-West England, with a Special Study of *Ireby* Names', in B. E. Crawford (ed.), *Scandinavian Settlement in Northern Britain: Thirteen Studies of Place-Names in their Historical Context* (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1995), pp. 195–205, at pp. 199–200. For an alternative view, see M. Gelling, *The West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages* (London, Leicester University Press, 1992), pp. 132–4.

context of Scandinavian overlordship and Irish followers.<sup>101</sup> Two further suggestions, that the Wirral *Írar* were Manx (several adjacent Scandinavian place-names are more reminiscent of Man than of Ireland),<sup>102</sup> and that the Lancashire and Cumberland *Írar* were Hebridean Goidelic speakers,<sup>103</sup> also envisage a wider context of Scandinavian movement for the migration of *Írar*.

The contextual support offered by the linguistic and onomastic contexts is less straightforward. The *Íra-by*-names almost certainly arose in Scandinavian-language environments: they sit in areas of heavy Scandinavian linguistic influence, as represented by clusters of other early-attested *by*-names. It should be remembered, though, that Old Norse could have been the language of neighbouring communities in whose speech these names arose, rather than the language of the *Írar* themselves. The Derbyshire *Iretons*, like other midland *tūn*-compounds are usually—and satisfactorily—explained as English-language in origin. They match the structure and distribution of other group-name + OE *tūn* compounds, which are also found further south, usually in the midlands.<sup>104</sup> The North Riding *Irtens*, on the other hand, sit in a heavily Scandinavianised area surrounded by *by*-names, including ethnonym + *by*-names. They are curious: if they belonged to the same (Scandinavian)

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<sup>101</sup> Higham, ‘Scandinavian Settlement’, pp. 203–4.

<sup>102</sup> G. Fellows-Jensen, ‘Scandinavians in Cheshire: A Reassessment of the Onomastic Evidence’, in A. R. Rumble and A. D. Mills (eds), *Names, Places and People: An Onomastic Miscellany for John McNeal Dodgson* (Stamford, Paul Watkins, 1997), pp. 77–92, at p. 85.

<sup>103</sup> Grant, ‘A New Approach’; Edmonds, ‘History and Names’, p. 10.

<sup>104</sup> *Tūn* compounds not only with *Norðmenn*, but also with *Brettas/Bretar*, *Engle/Englar*, possibly *Flemingas*, *Frīsan/Frīsir*, possibly *Scottas/Skotar*, and possibly *Seaxe/Saksar*. None occurs as far north as the North Riding *Irtens*.

sociolinguistic context which produced the proximate *Danbys* and the *Normanbys*, why do they not share the same structure?

It could be argued that these northern *Irtons* are Norse-language names rather than English ones: OE *tūn* may have been borrowed by Old Norse speakers, or the cognate form, ON *tún*, may have been used to form these names.<sup>105</sup> This still does not account for the use of *tūn* rather than *bý*. A later, English-language context may therefore be preferable. *Īras* is evidenced in late Old English, and in the North Riding of Yorkshire—and indeed in Derbyshire—it may well have entered the dialect of English speakers via Old Norse.<sup>106</sup> Perhaps the *Īrar/Īras* of these names were closer, chronologically and culturally, to those who bore Goidelic names in Domesday Book, and whose presence was noted at a time when the language of the area was English rather than Old Norse, albeit a variety of English that had been heavily influenced by Scandinavian migrants.

So, we have *Īrar* featuring in Scandinavian-language place-names, and *Īras* featuring in English-language place-names. We have good circumstantial evidence that these groups spoke Goidelic. Must we necessarily link these Goidelic-speakers with Scandinavian communities? Not always. There is evidence to suggest that some Goidelic speakers moved into England independently of Scandinavian migration. Recent work has mooted that the communities who forged the inversion compounds moved from south-west mainland Scotland to north-west England, and only there encountered Scandinavian speech.<sup>107</sup> This movement might offer an alternative—and later—context for the north-west *Irby*s and for Ireleth, and one in which the identities implied by *Īrar* are distinctly less Scandinavian. The

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<sup>105</sup> For ON *tún*, see Townend, ‘Scandinavian Place-Names’, pp. 117–20.

<sup>106</sup> *EPNE* lists ON *Īri* ‘an Irishman’ but not its Old English cognate.

<sup>107</sup> D. N. Parsons, ‘On the Origin of “Hiberno-Norse Inversion-Compounds”’, *Journal of Scottish Name Studies*, 5 (2011), 115–52.



evidence for ‘Scandinavianised’ *Írar* is perhaps more compelling for Wirral than for elsewhere in the north-west. However, the possibility that some Goidelic speakers moved independently of Scandinavians warns against assuming that *Írar*-/*Íras* groups should always be identified with groups of Scandinavians. The structure of the names and their occurrence in the Danelaw need not, *de facto*, imply Scandinavian association. There are, for example, *Englebys* in Lincolnshire, Derbyshire, and the North Riding of Yorkshire. These comprise ON *Englar* ‘English, Angles’ + *bý*, and therefore share both structure and distribution with the *Íra-býs* and Scandinavian ethnonym + *bý*-names, but they can hardly refer to groups with Scandinavian(ised) identities.<sup>108</sup> They are usually interpreted as ‘denoting an isolated survival of English inhabitants amongst a prevailing Scandinavian population’.<sup>109</sup>

In fact, it seems that ‘ethnic’ group-name place-names were a particular phenomenon of Anglo-Scandinavian England, more likely to be coined there than further west or south. Saxons, Swabians, and Frisians also feature more prominently in Danelaw place-names than those further south and west.<sup>110</sup> These names seem to indicate a preoccupation with establishing precise group-identity in areas which had seen a significant influx of newcomers from Scandinavia, and clusters of many different group-names are found in the very heaviest

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<sup>108</sup> Ingelby, Lincolnshire (*PNLincs*, Part 7, p. 93); Ingleby, Derbyshire (*PNDerbys*, p. 639); Ingleby (Greenhow), Ingleby (Barwick), Ingleby (Arncliffe), North Riding (*PNYorksNR*, pp. 167, 170, 178).

<sup>109</sup> *PNDerbys*, p. 639; see also *PNYorksNR*, p. 167.

<sup>110</sup> For *Seaxe* place-names, see Baker and Carroll, ‘The Afterlives’; for *Swāġfe*, see the entries for Swaffham (Cambridgeshire and Norfolk) in *CDEPN*. Place-names probably containing *Frīsan*/*Frīsir* can be found in *PNLeics*, Part 3, p. 80, Part 4, p. 58, Part 6, pp. 63, 141; *PNLincs*, Part 2, p. 276, Part 6, p. 154, Part 7, p. 59; *PNYorksWR* Part 1, p. 127, Part 2, p. 66, Part 4, p. 41 (and elsewhere).

areas of Scandinavian linguistic influence. It does not necessarily follow that there was less ethnic variety further south, outside the Danelaw; it may have been that such identities were simply more important within a social landscape that had seen extensive changes as a result of Scandinavian settlement. Combined linguistic, textual, and material evidence points to a relatively rapid assimilation of Scandinavian communities in certain places, and certainly to the forging of new, shared identities. The group-name phenomenon identified here may belong to relatively early stages in these processes of acculturation, when distinct identities—both of Scandinavians and of other ethnic groups—were discernible and important. These processes may have taken very different courses in different parts of England: ‘early’ in one area may be much later than in another.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to outline different place-name approaches to questions of migrant identity. While place-names present methodological challenges and require specialist analysis, it is possible to draw valuable conclusions about movements of people and perceived group identity based on the evidence they provide. The extent and nature of Scandinavian(ised) place-names suggest beyond reasonable doubt significant numbers of Norse-speaking migrants. These place-names allow us to hear the voices of those not represented in the written record, including but not limited to Norse speakers, and allow us to add to and refine what we learn from the written and material records. The corpus of group-name place-names as a whole suggests a keen awareness of, and considerable importance attributed to, ethnic difference in the Danelaw. Within this corpus, however, we find variety: place-names given as expressions of Scandinavian self-identity and power; place-names which arose as descriptive labels in the speech of surrounding populations; functional place-names bestowed by English administrators; place-names given in Old English, or Old Norse, or in thoroughly

mixed linguistic environments. While initially they give the appearance of unity, in reality they reflect a range of linguistic, cultural, and chronological contexts, and a mixed and mobile Danelaw population whose very variety and mobility led to the use of ethnonyms within place-names. Detailed contextual analysis of the names offers a nuanced perspective on constructions of identity not readily offered by other forms of evidence. While ultimately the linguistic and archaeo-historical records suggest assimilation and acculturation in the Danelaw, the group-name corpus offers us snapshots of dynamic diversity during an extended period of migration and movement to England in the first half of the medieval millennium.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Research for the paper undertaken as part of the Leverhulme Trust-funded programme, *The Impact of Diasporas in the Making of Britain*. Earlier versions were presented in London (June 2015), Leicester (September 2015), and Reykjavik (January 2016), and I thank the audiences for useful feedback. I would also like to thank Lesley Abrams, Robert Adlington, John Baker, Judith Jesch, Richard Jones, Peter McClure, and David Parsons for comments on aspects of this chapter.

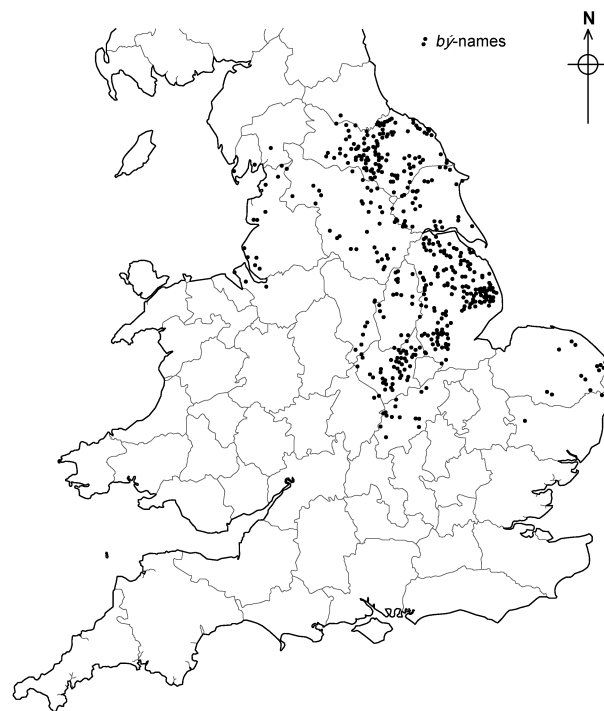


Fig. 4.1. The distribution of *by*-names, recorded by 1086 (after Abrams and Parsons, 'Place-names and the History of Scandinavian Settlement', p. 396).

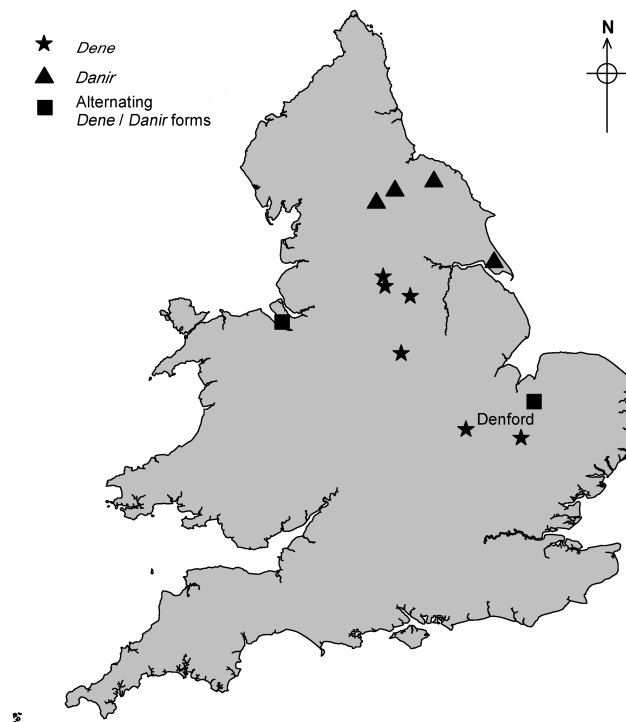


Fig. 4.2. Dene- and Danir-names attested before 1200

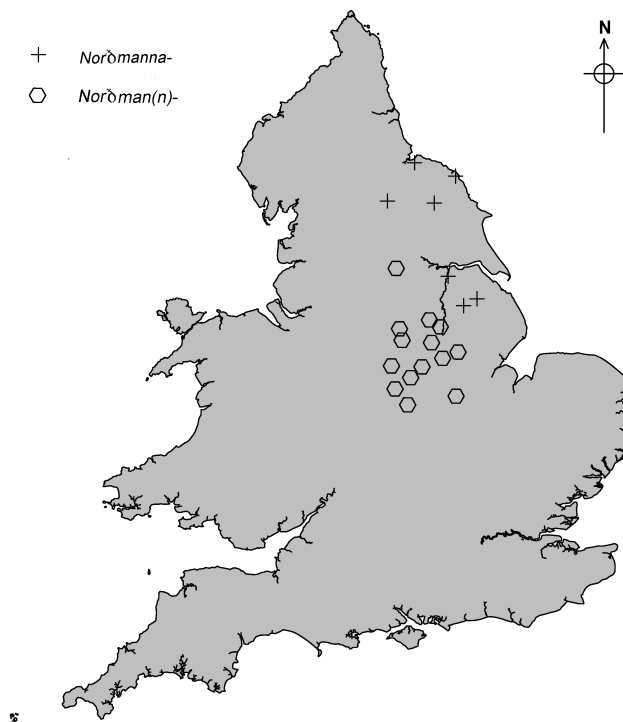


Fig. 4.3 *Norðmenn*-names attested before 1200



Fig. 4.4 *Íras / Írar*-names attested 1200