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The Street Names of Inverness: A Diachronic Study of their Cultural, Political & Religious Connotations

Varshneyee Dutt

Onomastic evidence offers a unique opportunity for us to understand and reflect upon what we find important enough to notice and lend a name to. This paper studies the street nomenclature of Inverness, a city of key importance throughout Scottish history, to explore what can be inferred about its political, religious and historical past from its street naming patterns and priorities. At its core, this paper surveys the diachronic development of Inverness by looking at maps and town plans from different time periods and qualitatively analyzing the ways in which they represent the fundamental ethos of the city.

Introduction

In the study of toponymy, street names have come to play an essential role in facilitating an understanding of the fundamental fabric of a town because, as Kenneth Cameron puts it, ‘they often give useful information on the early history and development of the particular town, and especially on the different trades represented there and the location of them’.¹ Studying the street names of a town, therefore, enables us to narrow down our research focus and make empirical observations about what might have been collectively considered significant enough to acknowledge in the form of odonyms by a large population. This, in turn, helps us to ascertain the generally prevailing ideologies of the place. Keeping that in mind, the aim of this paper is to conduct a case study of the street names of Inverness in an attempt to shed light on its socio-historical characteristics as a town. I will adopt a qualitative research methodology and focus on a handful of street names to relate them to the broader cultural spirit of Inverness.

¹ Kenneth Cameron, *English Place-Names* (London: Methuen, [1961] 1969), 194.

Unless otherwise stated, this paper will consider the corpus of street names curated by Geographic.org (see Bibliography, Primary source 1) and group them chiefly in terms of their religious, historical and political contexts. To that end, I will also choose a handful of maps to study from the National Library of Scotland (NLS) website (see Bibliography, Primary sources 2). Additionally, some attention will be lent to exemplifying how street names can sometimes fail to wholly capture the historical background of a town by undertaking a study of the lack of occupational and Jacobitism-related toponyms in Inverness - the purpose of this is to demonstrate the limitation of solely considering street names for historical research in toponomastics.

Political Nature of Inverness

Cameron notes that ‘most street-names are descriptive, whether of situation, size or importance’² - that is to say, studying them gives us an idea of their direct link to the events or features or people that they are describing, and enables us to then examine their unique context. On that note, the first context for street nomenclature in Inverness that I will look at constitutes the commemoration of local as well as royal people. The inclusion of important royal figures in a town’s street names can often be indicative of its prevailing political allegiance and reverence for the reigning sovereign, whereas the commemoration of natives in its street names can reflect a town’s localised sense of community. Bearing that in mind, a look at how Inverness honours royals and locals in its toponymy will be a good starting point to determine its political stance and cultural and social priorities.

Albert Place, Bruce Avenue, Bruce Gardens, Charles Street, Crown Drive, Crown Road, Crown Avenue, King Duncans Road, King Duncans Gardens, Queensgate, Victoria Circus, Victoria Lane and Victoria Terrace are some of the street names listed by Geographic.org that seem to commemorate royal figures and associations. Out of the above listed street names, Bruce Gardens, Charles Street, Crown Drive, Crown Street, Crown Avenue, Victoria Circus, Victoria Terrace and Queens Gate are recorded for the first time in the Plan of the Town of Inverness (1899). Given that Queen Victoria ascended to the throne

Cameron, *English Place-Names*, 194.

of Great Britain and Ireland in 1837, it is unsurprising that street names in Inverness started being named after her possibly in order to commemorate her reign from this period onwards. Albert Place, which is recorded in the Ordnance Survey (OS) Map (1895), also perhaps commemorates Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert - the inclusion of their names in the street names of Inverness could very well have political connotations and be suggestive of its inhabitants' gradual acceptance of the reign of Queen Victoria, an English-born monarch. Crown Drive, Crown Avenue and Crown Street too have clear royal connections and possibly reflect the town's acknowledgement of the sovereign power of the monarchy.

King Duncans Road, King Duncans Gardens and Bruce Avenue are not recorded in any of the town plans of Inverness available from the NLS website that this paper chose to study (see Bibliography, Primary sources 2). They can all, however, be spotted on Google Maps (see Bibliography, Primary sources 3) - and for that reason, it is plausible to argue that they are fairly recent coinages of street names and offer evidence for the modern town planning conventions observed in Inverness. What this actually seems to indicate, however, is the centrality of royal influences on the street naming patterns practised in Inverness across different periods. In any case, they offer a unique chance to study Inverness's interactions with royal politics in a diachronic manner. Even if the last few aforementioned street names are modern coinages, the fact that they commemorate royal figures has much to reveal about Inverness's continual cultural and political values since it is undeniable that all of the above examples encapsulate the constant respect that the inhabitants of Inverness must have harboured for the monarchy to commemorate it in their street names. The inclusion of royal members in its street names also suggests Inverness's inclination towards commemorating figures of national importance, and could perhaps be interpreted as having potentially patriotic undertones.

Taking a cue from the above observations, it might seem plausible to conclude that King Street, which is first recorded in John Wood's Plan of the Town of Inverness from actual survey (1821), also exemplifies

a royal commemoration. In fact, given that after the Acts of Union in 1707, a succession of male monarchs from the Hanoverian dynasty reigned over Britain, it is understandable why one might feel tempted to interpret King Street in that light. However, that argument can be contested by using comparative evidence from the naming patterns of nearby streets. In John Wood's Plan of the Town of Inverness from actual survey (1821), King Street runs parallel to Nelson Street, Brown Street and Anderson Street, and also leads to Grant Street. The OS Map (1895) offers a new instance of King Street - and although it lies in close proximity to Queen Street, it is also quite close to Fairfield Lane, Telford Street and Young Street. All of these instances indicate a clustered preponderance of street names derived from family names, and considering the fact that in both of the aforementioned cases, King Street is situated near these clusters makes it possible that it is also a street name derived from a surname.

Similarly, Douglas Row recorded for the first time in John Wood's Plan of the Town of Inverness from actual survey (1821) is notable. Kenneth Street, Duff Street, Huntly Place, Beaton's Lane, Baron Taylor's Lane recorded in the OS Map (1895) should also be noted. Hanks et al. note Inverness as one of the main areas of usage for the surname 'Beaton' and acknowledge the widespread presence of the surnames 'Douglas' and 'Duff' in Scotland.³ Now, it is worth mentioning that this paper admits the ambiguous existence of 'Kenneth' and 'Huntly' as a personal name and a place-name in Aberdeenshire respectively. And although Hanks et al. do not explicitly mention the presence of the other aforementioned surnames in Inverness,⁴ considering the clustered presence of most of these street names, it is plausible to categorise all of them as surname-derived odonyms because it is only likely for a closely-situated group of street names to share related characteristics.

3 Hanks et al., *The Oxford Dictionary of Family Names in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), accessed 8th January, 2024, https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy2.lib.gla.ac.uk/display/10.1093/acref/9780199677764.001.0001/acref-978_0199677764

4 Ibid.

Now, the incorporation of surnames offers a strong ground to argue that these street names celebrate people of local importance to Inverness because, as Adrian Room notes, toponyms that carry family names tend to either refer to the aristocrats who owned properties on which the streets were built or those who were linked to the streets for various reasons ranging from administration to construction.⁵ Drawing inspiration from Rex Taylor's technique of relating his chosen street names in Dumfries to the locals that they commemorate,⁶ an attempt was made to speculatively point out the locals who might have been commemorated in the aforementioned street names, but to no avail. I looked at *The Inverness Directory* (1873) and *The Inverness Burgh Directory* (1899) available from the NLS website, but given that the actual survey date for the OS Map (1895) referred to here is from 1866-67, they did not quite serve the purpose.

Nevertheless, it is fair to assume that the people commemorated in these street names must have gained popularity among locals for various reasons and could, therefore, be easily recognised on the basis of their family names. What we can infer about the nature of Inverness from the above examples is that its street names tend to strike a good balance between local and royal commemorations. The inclusion of local figures in its street names gives us an impression of Inverness as a town that offers recognition and appreciation for its inhabitants and enables the formation of a synergetic sense of community by celebrating each other's accomplishments and social standing in a public manner, whereas its royal commemorations enable Inverness to participate in upholding the national legacy of the monarchy and the politics that surrounds it.

5 Adrian Room, *The Street Names of England* (Stamford, Lincolnshire: Paul Watkins, 1992), 144.

6 Rex Taylor, "Street Names and National Identities: An Exploratory Study between Montblanc, France, and Dumfries, Scotland," *The Journal of Scottish Name Studies*, 13 (2019): 87-88.

Colonial Legacies in Inverness' Odonyms

Complementary to the aforementioned discussion on the interrelationship between national politics and street names, a curious observation about the political involvement that Scotland might have had in British imperialism crops up while studying Inverness's street names. King Street, recorded in John Wood's Plan of the Town of Inverness from actual survey (1821) changes to Madras Street in David Stevenson and Thomas Stevenson's map titled Inverness-Harbour (1863). India Street is recorded for the first time in the Plan of the Town of Inverness (1899), whereas Jamaica Street crops up in the Plan of the Town of Inverness (1905). Madras, the former name of Chennai, was one of the key trading ports during the British rule in India, and is the possible referent of Madras Street - this speculation is based on India Street's eventual closeness to Madras Street in the Plan of the Town of Inverness (1899). Jamaica Street, on the other hand, possibly exemplifies Scotland's participation in Britain's colonisation of Jamaica. The Scottish Parliament acknowledges that Scotland flourished economically between the late seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century because of the Jamaican slave-trade economy.⁷ And, further narrowing its context in Scottish odonymy, Carol Foreman notes that Jamaica Street in Glasgow derives its name from the profits that Glaswegian traders made from Jamaican tobacco and sugarcane plantations.⁸

Taking these facts about British colonialism and the clustered presence of Madras Street, India Street and Jamaica Street in the Plan of the Town of Inverness (1905) into account, it could perhaps be speculated that these three street names are possible references to the British colonial projects in India and Jamaica, and reflect Scotland as a whole or perhaps even specifically Inverness's interactions with these

7 The Scottish Parliament, section on 'Scotland's Economy and Slavery in Jamaica', accessed 8th January, 2024, https://archive2021.parliament.scot/gettinginvolved/petitions/PE01500-PE01599/PE01585_BackgroundInfo.aspx#:~:text=Scotland's%20economy%20and%20slavery%20in%20Jamaica&text=Edward%20Long%2C%20who%20was%20a,descendants%20from%20those%20who%20were.

8 Carol Foreman, *Glasgow Street Names* (Edinburgh: Birlinn Limited, 2007),

101.

colonies. The latter point is obviously something that requires further investigation. These street names certainly shed light on Britain's territorial expansion from the seventeenth century onwards and offer impetus to further research on what it signified for Scotland.

Religious Picture of Historical and Modern-Day Inverness

Apart from making revelations about the political nature and the local priorities of a town, street names can reveal information about a place's association with different religions or religious groups. Room notes that the commemoration of religion in street names is an ancient practice that involves commemorating both religious figures and places.⁹ Inverness is no exception to this. Church Street, Church Lane, Friars Street, Friars Lane and Friars Place recorded by Geographic.org count as street names with evident religious associations. Church Street is recorded for the first time in John Home's Plan of the river Ness to the north of the bridge of Inverness (1774), whereas Church Lane, Friars Lane and Greyfriars Street are recorded for the first time in John Wood's Plan of the Town of Inverness from actual survey (1821). The subsequent change of Greyfriars Street to Friars Street is recorded in the OS Map (1895). Evidently, Church Street, Church Lane and Chapel Street indicate the early establishments of Inverness's various places of worship, whereas the presence of Friars Lane and Friars Street seems to allude to a Catholic religious order and perhaps suggests that these streets were popular for housing predominantly members of this religious group. In The Ordnance Survey Name Book for Inverness-shire Mainland, Friars Street is described as:

*Friars Street extends from Glebe Street to the middle of Friars Lane. This street and the preceding one commemorate in their names, Friars Street & Friars Lane, the monastery belonging to the Grey Friars tradition tells us stood here previous to the Reformation.*¹⁰

9 Room, *The Street Names of England*, 73.

10 *The Ordnance Survey Name Book for Inverness-shire Mainland, 1876-1878*, Vol. 33, ScotlandsPlaces website, OS1/17/33/122, accessed 8th January, 2024 <https://scotlandspplaces.gov.uk/digital-volumes/ordnance-survey-name-books/inverness-shire-os-name-books-1876-1878/inverness-shire-mainland-volume-33/122>

Although its wording is slightly confusing, this description gives us an insight into the impact that the Protestant Reformation must have had on the presence of the Greyfriars Order in Inverness, which in turn prompted the aforementioned change in the street's nomenclature. It is not explicitly specified if the Greyfriars monastery was demolished, but the fact that it went out of use during the Reformation reveals the kind of religious turmoil that Inverness dealt with from this period onwards. This also clarifies that the aforementioned street names referring to the friary indicate the early influences of Catholicism in Inverness from the pre-Reformation era. Geographic.org also lists, for instance, St Andrew Drive, St Mungo Road, St Valery Avenue, St Ninian Drive, St Margaret's Road and St Mary's Avenue, which have clear religious associations. These street names have also not been recorded in any of this paper's chosen maps of Inverness from the NLS website (see Bibliography, Primary sources 2), but they can be spotted in clusters on Google Maps (see Bibliography, Primary sources 3).

These modern street names might not add to our understanding of the religious history of a specific period in Inverness, but given their commemoration of numerous saints, we can perhaps speculate that these saints had some kind of following in Inverness and left a sustained legacy for posterity, and have therefore been honoured in Inverness's street names. Alternatively, these saints' legacies across Scotland at large might have inspired the commemorative naming of these streets in Inverness. Either way, all the aforementioned street names reflect the continual influence of religion in Inverness and also enable us to make inferences about the manner in which Inverness responded to the rise and fall of Catholicism in Scotland.

Lack of Occupational Street Names in Inverness

While the aforementioned street names have revealed quite a bit about the general characteristics of Inverness - ranging from religion to politics - interestingly enough, the studied maps (see Bibliography, Primary sources 2) include very few street names in Inverness that reflect the popular occupational pursuits of its people. Factory Street

and Tanners Lane are recorded for the first time in the OS Map (1895), whereas Market Street is recorded for the first time in the Plan of the Town of Inverness (1905). They seem to be the only streets that refer to occupations. It is possible that Factory Street derives its name from the industries that might have been built on the street, though what kind of industries they were cannot be determined because of the street name's lack of specificity. Market Street is quite self-explanatory and probably refers to a street on which market stalls were set up. Prior to its attestation in the Plan of the Town of Inverness (1905), Market Street was originally referred to as 'Markets' and is recorded in this form for the first time in the Plan of the Town of Inverness (1899). 'Markets' reaffirms the argument that this street was known for housing numerous shops and the like.

Lastly, the case of Tanners Lane is an intriguing one. Given that in the OS Map (1895), Tanners Lane is clustered with Kenneth Street, Young Street, Fairfield Lane - all of which are surname-derived odonyms - one may assume that Tanners Lane is also a surname-based local commemoration. Hanks et al., however, list 'Tanner' instead of 'Tanners' as a surname and do not list Scotland as a place of its occurrence.¹¹ Had Tanners Lane been in its genitive possessive form - as is the case with Beaton's Lane and Baron Taylor's Lane recorded in the OS Map (1895) - it would have still been fair to speculate about whether it is indeed a surname-based odonym. But in this case, it seems that Tanners Lane probably just refers to a street inhabited by numerous people involved in the tanning industry. The presence of only three occupational street names indicates that Inverness's odonymy perhaps does not do justice to its business and trading history.

Lack of Jacobite Commemoration in the Street Names of Inverness

Similarly, considering that Inverness witnessed many Jacobite uprisings and most importantly, the Battle of Culloden - that stamped out the Jacobite cause - one would expect to find quite a few street names remembering these rebellions. But that is not the case with

this paper's examined maps (see Bibliography, Primary sources 2). Fraser Street is recorded for the first time in John Wood's Plan of the Town of Inverness from actual survey (1821) and MacDonald Street is recorded for the first time in the OS Map (1895), whereas Lovat Road is recorded for the first time in the Plan of the Town of Inverness (1899). A new occurrence of Fraser Street also crops up in the OS Map (1895). Fraser Street, MacDonald Street and Lovat Street possibly refer to the Fraser, the MacDonald and the Fraser of Lovat clans respectively, although given that they are not clustered together, it is difficult to claim that for certain - they could alternatively be local commemorations of people with the same surnames. Evidently, the limited presence of occupational and Jacobite street names in Inverness serves as a strong example of the fact that the street names of a town cannot always fully document its past and can sometimes limit our understanding of history. Despite Inverness's connections with Jacobitism and its proximity to the River Ness - which surely facilitated trade and business - its street names do not substantially reflect these realities and leave gaps in our knowledge about certain key factors that contributed to the historical evolution of the town.

Conclusion

Quite a few conclusions emerge from the above discussions. To a large extent, studying odonymy can aid our understanding of a town's historical past - as evidenced by Inverness's inclusion of royals, locals, religion and colonial legacies in its street names, which helps us trace the town's cultural development and make deductions about its nature and communal ideologies. This paper has made use of various maps ranging across different time periods to illustrate the geographical link between street names and what socio-cultural and religious undertones might lie therein. Studying the odonymy of a town can often produce interdisciplinary research findings, ranging from, for instance, the religious affiliations of a town to its trade and economy - my research has attempted to position Inverness's odonymy as a good starting point to determine and conduct interdisciplinary studies on the town's nature.

As is the case with most qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, the research approach adopted in this paper has its own shortcomings. I did not have a hard-and-fast strategy for the sampling of street names - I have either included all of the street names pertaining to a specific category in the paper or given a few examples to illustrate my argument, and this is certainly something that can be improved for future studies. This paper demonstrates the potential research limitation of basing one's academic focus entirely on toponymy in order to gather information on a town's history by setting the paucity of occupations and Jacobitism in Inverness's street names as examples. One of the main reasons why I chose to study the toponymy of Inverness is because of my interest in Jacobite history and Inverness's role in it - the relative absence of this period of Scottish history in Inverness's street names pointed out the possibility that street names can indeed sometimes fail to capture the quintessence of a town in its entirety. Nevertheless, the end result of my research has been to exemplify the contribution that examining street nomenclature can make to the conduct of historical research on towns and their diachronic growth, and this paper's preliminary findings about the remnants of colonial legacies in Inverness's street names pave the way for further investigation on the nature of Inverness's relationship with the Empire.

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