

Gaelic Place-Names: 'Gall'

By Alison Grant

The Gaelic place-name *gall* means stranger, foreigner, and occurs in Scottish place-names inclu

the Danes as the *dubh gall* dark strangers . *Fionn gall* is the original of the Gaelic personal name Fingal, and similarly *dubh gall* has evolved into the modern personal name and surname Dougal. Another surname derived from *gall* is Galbraith, which is Gaelic *gall Breathnach* foreign Briton .

In addition to the *dubh gall* and the *fionn gall*, Gaelic-speakers recognised a distinct ethnic group they referred to as the *Gall-Gaidheal* or foreigner Gaels . There has been much debate about the precise ethnicity of the *Gall-Gaidheal*, with various theories including that they were Gaelic-speakers from Ireland, English overlords in a Gaelic-speaking region of Scotland, Norman immigrants, Irish Protestants or Strathclyde Britons. However, the predominant view is that the name referred to a group of a mixed Gaelic-Viking group, who originated either in Ireland or the Western Seaboard of Scotland, and who eventually settled in the Galloway area. Indeed the modern Gaelic name for Galloway is *Gall-Ghaidhealaibh* among the foreign Gaels .The Gaelic place-name *gall* means stranger, foreigner , and occurs in Scottish place-names including *Achingall* field of the strangers (East Lothian), *Rubha nan Gall* point of the strangers (Mull), *Cnoc nan Gall* hill of the strangers (Colonsay), *Allt nan Gall* stream of the strangers (Sutherland), *Inchgall* isle of the strangers (Fife), *Barr nan Gall* summit of the strangers (Argyllshire) and *Camusnagaul* bay of the strangers (Wester Ross).

In some cases, it can be difficult to establish whether names in *gall* refer to strangers or to a specific stone, although in examples such as *Leac nan Gall* in Argyll (containing *leac* slab, flat stone) and *Craigengall* in West Lothian (containing *creag* rock), the interpretation of stranger or non-Gael is to be preferred, as they would otherwise be stone-of-the-stone tautological formations.

The Viking *gall* are well-documented in historical sources including the *Annals of Ulster* and the *Annals of the Four Masters*, where they are often subdivided into two groups, with the Norwegians designated as the *fionn gall* fair strangers and the Danes as the *dubh gall* dark strangers . *Fionn gall* is the original of the Gaelic personal name Fingal, and similarly *dubh gall* has evolved into the modern