

SCANDINAVIAN INFLUENCES ON CUMBRIAN DIALECT

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It could be assumed that Scandinavian influence on the English language, apart from those loan words that have come into the standard speech, might have been fairly well confined to the Danelaw. This seems so far from the case, however, with individual words, that one might feel there is little point in looking for specific evidence of preservation anywhere. Examination of maps in the *Reader's Digest Atlas of the British Isles*¹ for *rivulet* and *freckles* shows a wide distribution of Scandinavian *beck* and a very restricted one of *frackens*, though both fall well within the Danelaw. However, the distribution of Scandinavian *stack* is well outside the Danelaw, and seems to be ousting the English *rick* in the midlands and south-east. This need not, in itself, be too surprising since the distribution of other Scandinavian words can be shown to have been quite unconnected with the Scandinavian settlement. The medieval distribution of the Scandinavian pronouns *they*, *them* and *their* is not even the same for the three words, related though they may seem, whilst the total acceptance in English of some Scandinavian loans such as *sky*, *outlaw* or *mEEK*, has meant that we have a considerable number of these interlopers in our speech which today seem completely English and are universally used.

Some researchers, however, have tried to see certain linguistic boundaries as fairly fixed markers of limits of Scandinavian influence. A. J. Ellis in 1889² gave a precise limit to the northern usage of *t'* or *tee* for the definite article:

The line commences . . . 13 w. Carlisle, (on the Solway Firth) passes just s. of Kirk Bampton (7 w. Carlisle), then turns in a s. direction as far as about 2 s. of Sebergham (9 ssw. Carlisle) after which it turns ne. and passes e. of Southwaite (7 sse. Carlisle) and Coathill (5 sw. Carlisle) to just s. of Fort, where it reaches the Eden R. by Hornsby, up which it proceeds in a se. direction to Kirk Oswald, 14 se. Carlisle, and immediately turns nne., forming an acute angle with its former course, passes over Croglin Fell, when it again bends through sw. Nb., and passing s. of Alston (20 sse. Carlisle), it re-enters Cu., where, after going s. for a little way, it turns e. at Rother Fell (4 s. Alston) to the border of Nb.

Ellis describes this line, and its continuation across the middle of Durham, as the 'separation of the Danified from the non-Danified N', quoting J. A. H. Murray's *Dialects of the South of Scotland* as his authority. This boundary may seem to be supported by Figures 11. 1b, c and d but not at all by the others.

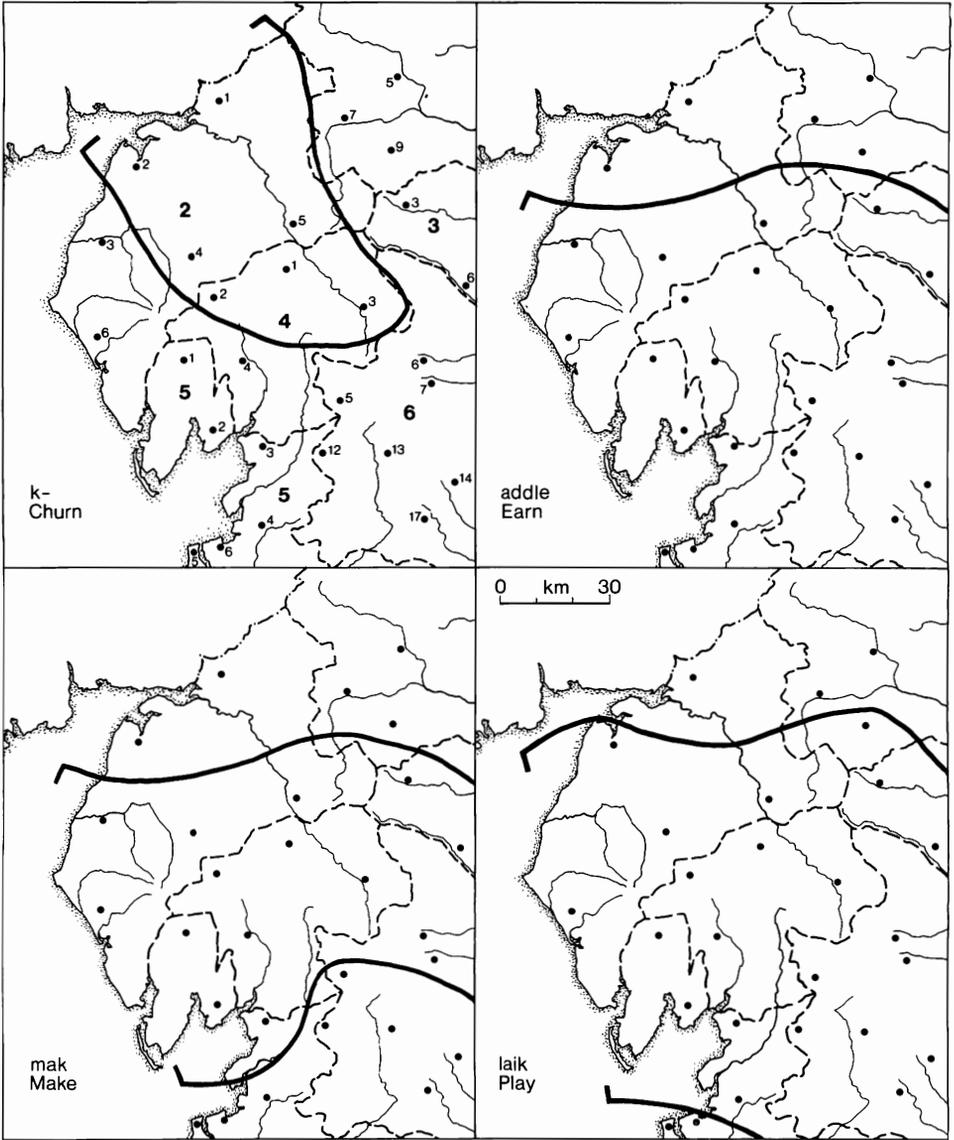


Fig. 11.1 Locational pattern of Scandinavian loan words (a) *k*: Churn; (b) *addle*: Earn; (c) *mak*: Make; (d) *laik*: Play

SURVIVING SCANDINAVIAN VOCABULARY

In looking for the traditional Scandinavian vocabulary of the local dialect it would seem proper to consider above all the long-standing traditional activities of the area — sheep and cattle husbandry, for example, dry-stone walling and such crafts perhaps as the making of shoes and baskets.

Enquiries at Gosforth in Cumberland did not produce specific Scandinavian terminology associated with shoemaking, though in Eskdale there were a couple of Scandinavian words in basket-making — the term *swill* for a 'basket', though this is widely used across the north and east of England, and the verb *rive*, to 'tear apart', used of the act of preparing the wood. In dry-stone walling the terms of Scandinavian provenance were *rid out*, to 'prepare the base', *clap*, a 'course' of walling, *gap*, *cams*, *law-* (or *lie-*) *side*, the 'exterior of the wall', and the pronunciation *warks* in a word pronounced *groondwarks*, 'groundworks'. Scandinavian words related to gates included *dragbar*, *hingins*, 'hinges', *harrtree*, *stoop* and *band*.

Elsewhere in Cumbria, a *stang* is a 'cart shaft'; a *sime* a 'heather rope'; and several terms used in ear-marking sheep have Scandinavian roots, words such as *ritted*, *shear-halved*, *stove-forked*. These are examples; the list is considerable.

DISTRIBUTION AND DENSITY

I have no evidence of the actual distribution of these words, however, and for the overall patterning of Scandinavian words in Cumbrian dialect I have extracted material from the *Survey of English Dialects*³ that I collected as Professor Orton's fieldworker in 1953–54. A small number of words will suffice. The list of localities investigated in Cumbria and adjacent areas is shown below, along with the identification numbers for the pre-1974 local government counties [see Fig. 11.1A]. The locations of the villages investigated in each county are shown on all the other distribution maps:

The Survey of English Dialects

NORTHERN LOCALITIES

1 <i>Northumberland</i>	3 <i>Durham</i>	2 Cartmel
5 Wark	3 Wearhead	3 Yealand
7 Haltwhistle	6 Eggleston	4 Dolphinholme
9 Allendale		
2 <i>Cumberland</i>	4 <i>Westmorland</i>	6 <i>Yorkshire</i>
1 Longtown	1 Great Strickland	5 Dent
2 Abbeytown	2 Patterdale	6 Muker
3 Brigham	3 Soulby	7 Askrigg
4 Threlkeld	4 Staveley-in-Kendal	12 Burton-in-Lonsdale
5 Hunsonby		13 Horton-in-Ribblesdale
6 Gosforth	5 <i>Lancashire</i>	14 Grassington
	1 Coniston	17 Gargrave

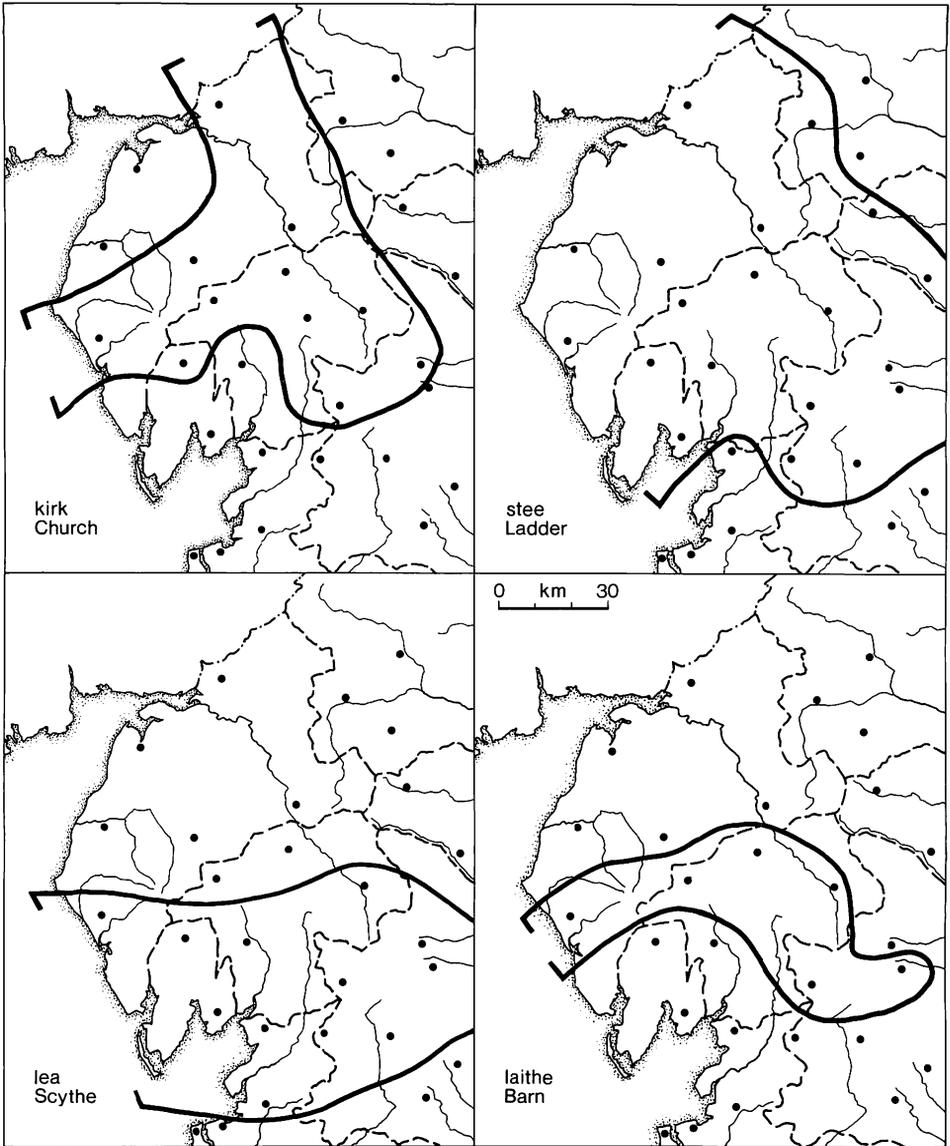


Fig. 11.2 Locational pattern of Scandinavian loan words (a) *kirk*: Church; (b) *stee*: Ladder; (c) *lea*: Scythe; (d) *laithe*: Barn

The boundary line drawn on Fig. 11.1a, with its inturning ends to show the area concerned, indicates the extent of a *k*-pronunciation in 'churn'. This is by no means the same area as that where we find *k*- for 'ch-ch' at the beginning and end of the word 'church' (Fig. 11.2a); and by contrast, initially in the word 'chaff' the *k*-pronunciation was found throughout the whole area on the maps. In the local words for 'a sheep being turned on its back' we have two Scandinavian forms — *kessen* over most of the area, but within it a smaller area where *rigged* is the normal term [Fig. 11.3c]. The other maps of lexical distribution show what tremendous variety occurs in the patterns, ranging from the widespread *stee*, 'ladder' [Fig. 11.2b] or *laik*, 'play' [Fig. 11.1d] to the restricted area where we found *laithe*, 'barn' [Fig. 11.2d].

Other words so completely covering the area that maps are not required are *clip*, of sheep, *sneck* 'door-fastening', *sile*, to 'sieve', and *gilt*, 'young sow'. All these have distributions that in a national rather than Cumbrian context vary from a fairly restricted area, the limits of which are just outside that of the accompanying diagrams, to a very wide one that includes much of East Anglia. Indeed, in the recently published *Language Variation and Diversity*, prepared by David Graddoll for the Open University⁴, there are further maps showing *Survey of English Dialects* distribution of Scandinavian words across the whole of England. Graddoll's Map 9, for instance, shows words for 'stream', including *beck*; Map 11 words for 'paddock', including *garth*; and Map 13 shows 'children', including *bairns*.

In his Map 10 David Graddoll shows the number of different Scandinavian loan words recovered by the Survey in response to specific enquiries. This shows the localities of Great Strickland and Soulby in Westmorland, and Gosforth in Cumberland, as having more than 35 Scandinavian words. Brigham, Threlkeld and Hunsonby in Cumberland, Patterdale in Westmorland, Coniston in Lancashire, and Muker and Askrigg in Yorkshire, are shown as producing between 30 and 35 words from the same questions. Abbeystown in Cumberland, Allendale in Northumberland, Wearhead in Durham, Staveley-in-Kendal in Westmorland, Cartmel in Lancashire, and (Egton), Dent, Burton-in-Lonsdale, Horton-in-Ribblesdale, Grassington and Gargrave in Yorkshire produced more than 25 but less than 30 words of Scandinavian origin in the response to the same questions. I have tried to represent this information in Fig. 11.3d, but David Graddoll's use of colour makes the pattern much more effective.

It would seem, therefore, that in spite of earlier remarks about the lack of correlation between lexical items and settlement, if we take a large sample of information there is a much stronger suggestion of a richly endowed central area of Scandinavian vocabulary in Cumbria. Whether in fact this gives us any modern support for an area of strongest settlement, as opposed to strongest survival, is a question I cannot answer. Certainly Dr Brunskill's pride in finding his ancestral home within the Westmorland area of highest occurrence of Scandinavian vocabulary suggests that he would be willing to believe it!

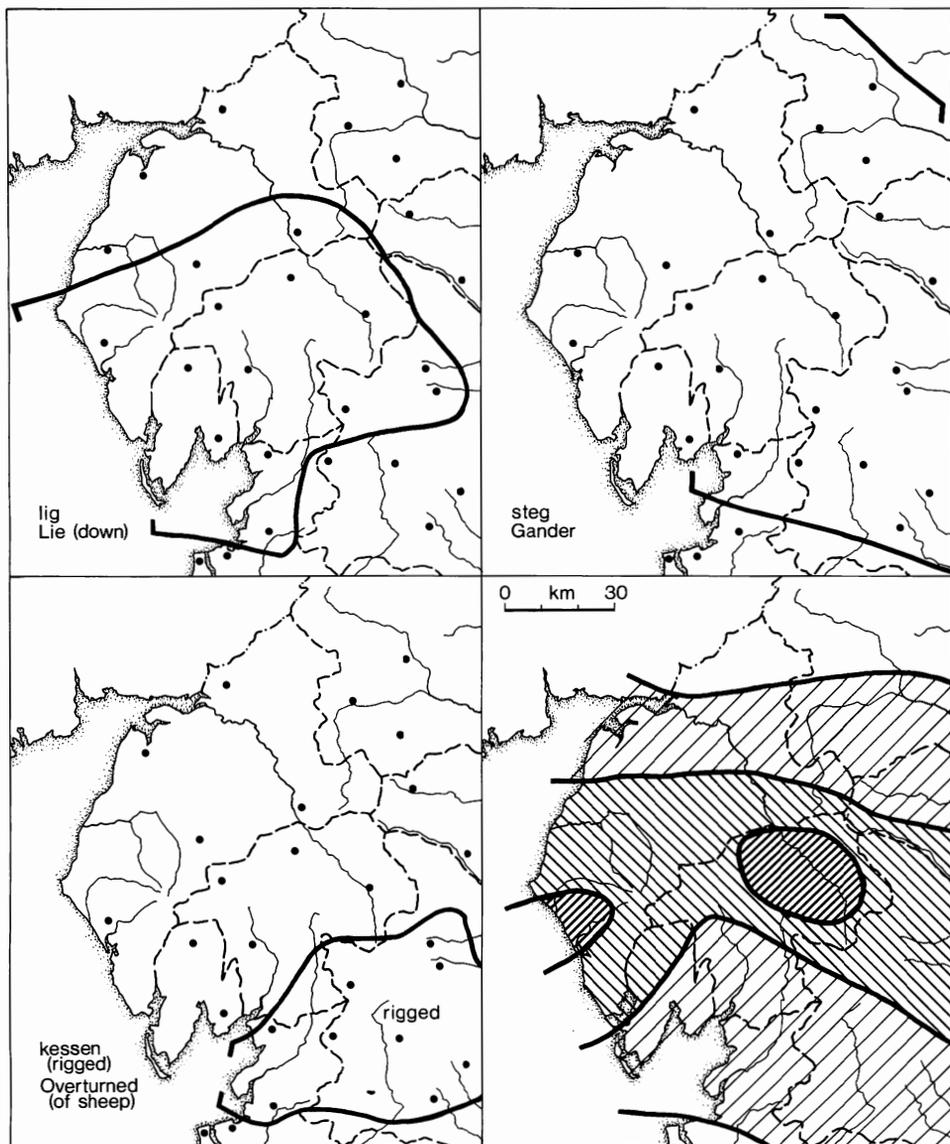


Fig. 11.3 Locational pattern of Scandinavian loan words (a) *lig*: Lie (down); (b) *steg*: Gander; (c) *kessen/rigged*: Overturned (of a sheep); (d) Density of Scandinavian loan words surviving

Notes

- ¹ *Complete Atlas of the British Isles* (Readers Digest Association 1965) 122–23.
- ² A. J. Ellis, *On Early English Pronunciation, Part V* (Philological Society 1889) 20.
- ³ H. Orton and W. J. Halliday, eds. *Survey of English Dialects (B) The Basic Material*, Vol. 1. Parts I, II and III (1962–63).
- ⁴ D. Graddoll, *Language Variation and Diversity*, Open University E263, Block 1 (1981).