

TINGWALL: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NAME

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Introduction: *thing and ting*¹

In present-day English the word *thing* means ‘an entity of any kind’, concrete or abstract, as in the pronouns *anything*, *something* or *nothing*. It can even be used as a term of endearment, at least to those not in a position to remonstrate, for example Alice in Wonderland, into whose arm the Duchess tucked her arm affectionately, saying ‘You can’t think how glad I am to see you again, you dear old thing!’ In the modern Scandinavian languages, too, the cognate word *ting* has the same all-embracing kind of meaning and is found in pronouns such as Danish *nogenting* ‘anything’ and *ingenting* ‘nothing’. When used of a person, however, it is generally in a derogatory sense, referring mainly to women who are old, ugly or loose-living or perhaps all three at once (ODS s.v. *ting*).

As a place-name specific or generic, it is clear that *thing* must have a concrete significance. There are a number of field-names recorded in Middle English and early Modern English sources in which it is compounded with a personal name or a term denoting a human-being and seems to have the sense ‘possession’. The earliest example I have noted is *Aynolfesthyng* 1356 in Ash in Surrey (Gover et al. 1933: 270) but the vast majority of occurrences date from the 15th to the 17th centuries.

In Old English and the other early Germanic languages, however, the word *thing* and its cognates, which were all of neuter gender, had the meaning ‘assembly, meeting’ and it is from this meaning that the modern, more general meaning has developed. In a language such as Danish in which a modified form of grammatical gender has survived to the present day, *ting* in its original sense retains its neuter gender, while *ting* in the wider sense has acquired common gender so that we have *et ting* ‘an assembly’ and *en ting* ‘a thing’. When a Danish newspaper headline today uses the term *Tinget* with the suffixed definite article, it is referring to *Folketinget*, the Danish parliament, but this term only dates back to the nineteenth century. It was the renown of the Icelandic parliament, the *Alþingi*, that inspired Norway, after secession from Denmark in 1814, to employ the term *ting* for the three chambers of the Norwegian parliament (*Lagting*, *Odelsting* and *Storting*), while Denmark, after the abolition of absolute monarchy and its replacement

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by the new constitution of 1849, followed the same inspiration and chose to call the two divisions of the Danish parliament *Landsting* and *Folketing*. In the Faroes, the *Løgting* or 'law assembly' has borne this name from at least 1400, although it was earlier known as *Alþing*.

Thing and ting in place-names

As well as of legislative assemblies, the word *ting* has also been used through the centuries in Scandinavia of judicial assemblies and it is in this sense that it normally occurs in major and minor place-names in both Scandinavia and the British Isles. The Danish parish known as *Ting Jellinge*, for example, has since 1480 been distinguished from the neighbouring village of *Sønder Jellinge* by the prefixing of *Ting*, referring to the fact that the hundred *ting* or assembly was held here (Jørgensen 1977: 100, 298).

It is comparatively rare for *thing* in the sense 'assembly' to occur as a place-name generic. The village and district name *Morthen* in the West Riding of Yorkshire has early forms such as *Mordinges* 1164-81, *Morthinges* 1202-08, *Morthyng* 13th century and can only be explained as a compound of Old English (OE) *mōr* or Scandinavian (Scand) *mór* 'moorland' with OE or Scand *þing* and A.H. Smith has argued very plausibly that it is probably a vestige of some early Viking organisation in this moorland area (Smith 1961-63: 1. 101-02, 141, 168-69; 7. 54 n.3). The name of the assembly would seem to have been transferred both to a village and to the district subject to the *thing*, which apparently embraced the area between Rotherham and the southern boundary of the Riding. A name identical in origin with *Morthen* may once have been found in Berwickshire. The place-name *Mordington* there has been tentatively explained as an original OE **morð-hring* 'murder ring' with subsequent addition of OE *tūn* 'settlement' (Williamson 1942: 30; Nicolaisen 1976: 28). This explanation of the name, which is based on an isolated form *Mortringtonam* 1095, as opposed to the other forms such as *Morðintun* c.1095, *Morthinton* 1095x1100, seems rather far-fetched and Nicolaisen has suggested in the addenda in the reprint of his book an alternative derivation of the first part of the name as OE *mōr-þing* 'moorland assembly'. Mordington House stands on the moors to the north of Berwick-on-Tweed, just on the Scottish side of the border. It may once have been the meeting-place for an assembly of the inhabitants of this moorland area.

Assembly names in -thing

In Iceland a number of district assemblies with names such as *Sunnudalsþing* and *Skaftafellssþing* were established in the course of the tenth century (Thorsteinsson 1985: 26-27). There is a small group of names in Shetland ending in *ting*. Five of these are now parish names: *Delting*, *Lunnasting*, *Nesting*, *Aithsting* and *Sandsting* (Jakobsen 1936: 126; Stewart 1987: 300). The word *ting* has been compounded with the name for, or a description of,

the locality at which the local assembly met: Dale, Lunna, the ness called Neep, Aith and Sand. These parish-names are not recorded in written sources until 1490 or later and they may well be comparatively late formations. The two remaining names in *-ting* in Shetland are recorded in a document from 1321 as *Rauðarþing* and *Thveitaping* but it is not known for certain to which localities they refer. It has been suggested by John Stewart that *Rauðarþing* was an early assembly held in the area now referred to as North Roe and that this latter name, which is not recorded until 1660, may originally have been **rauð-eið* 'red isthmus' (Stewart 1987: 79), while P.A. Munch considered that *Rauðarþing* was identical with the parish of North Mavine, in which there are several places with names containing the element *rauðr* 'red' (Andersen 1984: 30). *Thveitaping* has been identified by John Stewart with *Twatt* in Aithsting and by Jakob Jakobsen as an area embracing all the places with names containing the element *þveit*. Of the five names in *-þveit* recorded by Stewart, four are borne by localities in the parish of Walls, situated at no great distance from each other, and none is recorded in a document earlier than 1507 so it is possible that the area was earlier known as *Thveitaping* and that the generic in their names refers to this area rather than to a localised clearing.

***T(h)ing* as a place-name specific**

In southern England there are a number of place-names which contain as specific OE *þing* in the sense 'assembly'. *Fingest* in Buckinghamshire (*Tingeherst* 1163; Mawer & Stenton 1925: 176) and *Thinghill* in Herefordshire (*Tingehede* 1086; Ekwall 1960: 466) would both seem to mean 'assembly hill', while *Finedon* in Northamptonshire (*Tingdene* 1086; Gover et al. 1933: 181) means 'assembly valley'. All three localities presumably received their names because they were the sites for local meeting-places.

Ping-haugr

Place-names containing *þing* are of quite common occurrence in northern and eastern England and the coining of most of these names has been ascribed to settlers of Scandinavian origin, who would have been familiar with the word *þing* in the sense 'assembly' from their homelands. In Denmark, the commonly occurring name *Tinghøj* 'assembly mound' denotes the meeting-place of a 'hundred assembly', although it normally survives as the name of a farm (Hald 1969: 37). The name *Tinghøj* is not of course to be analysed as a compound place-name with the generic *-høj* but as a simplex appellative name, that is an appellative which has assumed the function of a place-name.

The cognate Scandinavian appellative **þing-haugr* functions quite frequently as a place-name in England. Of particular significance are names such as *Thingoe* in Suffolk, which is borne by an administrative hundred, and

Pinghou in Lincolnshire and *Thinghou* in Norfolk, which apparently denote hundred meeting-places (Anderson 1934: 60, 68, 95). *Fingay Hill* in the North Riding of Yorkshire, recorded as *Thynghou* c.1250, seems likely to have been the meeting-place of the judicial assembly for the whole riding (Smith 1925: 213). In theory, these various English names could be reflexes of an English compound of *þing* and *hōh* but the fact that the names occur in areas of marked Danish settlement, combined with the fact that the Danish compound occurs frequently as a place-name in Denmark, while there are no certain examples of **þing-hōh* in southern England, make it reasonable to assume a Danish origin for *Thingoe*, *Fingay* etc.

The Scandinavian compound *þing-haugr* is not, of course, specifically Danish but it is in Denmark that it would seem to have achieved greatest popularity. *Pinghaugr*-names do occur in Norway, for example *Tinghaugen* in the parish of Hedrum in Vestfold (*Thinghouffuen* 1664; NG 6. 342), as well as in areas of Norwegian settlement in the British Isles, for example the mound known as *Dingishowe* which stands on the isthmus joining the parish of Deerness to the Orkney Mainland (Marwick 1952: 79).

Þing-staðr

Another compound appellative which functions as a place-name in Denmark is **þing-staðr* ‘assembly place’. This word is current in the form *tingsted* in modern Danish as the term for the place where a judicial court sits. The appellative *tingsted* occurs as a parish name *Tingsted* on the island of Falster, while a conglomeration of farms and houses in the parish of Vester Marie in Bornholm also bears the name *Tingsted* (Kousgård Sørensen 1958: 122). This appellative is of much more common occurrence as a place-name in Sweden, where it is found as the name of several parishes and hamlets (Linde 1951: 62-64). It does not seem to have been carried as a place-name to the British Isles but the English appellative *thingstead* is used of some presumed assembly-sites.

***Þing-vellir* in Scandinavia**

Whereas the *Tinghøj*- and *Tingsted*-names occur most frequently in eastern Scandinavia and in areas where Danish vikings settled, another group of names, those in **þing-vellir* ‘assembly plains’, for example the Shetland *Tingwall*, have a markedly western distribution. It is *Þingvellir* in Árnessýsla in Iceland that is the most well-known of them. The role played by this locality and the *Alþingi* held there as the scene for dramatic events in the Icelandic family sagas has meant that its fame has spread worldwide. There is an account of its early history in *Íslendingabók* (Benediktsson 1986: 8-9). The *Alþingi* was established about the year 930. It met for two weeks at midsummer each year. It was on a hill known as *Lögberg* or ‘law-rock’, standing on the northern bank of a lake later known as *Þingvallavatn*, that the laws were pronounced. The *lögrétta* or legislative assembly, which consisted

of the *goðar* or priest-chiefs from the various districts, met on the other side of the river Öxará and the *holmgangur* or institutionalised duels were fought on the *Holmur* in the river until this practice was abolished by law in about 1010. The delegates to the *Alþingi* put up their booths and grazed their horses on the surrounding plain, which had become public property as a result of confiscation after a murder. This plain became known as *Þingvellir*. Land on which to pitch tents and graze horses would of course have been a prerequisite for the holding of any assembly to which delegates had to travel from far afield. Even the more local things whose authority extended over small districts needed to be held at sites where open land was available and which lay on convenient routes of communication. *Þingvöllr* in Helgafellssveit in Snæfellsnessýsla is named in a document from about 1274 (*þing vallar holmur*; DI II. 116) and the farm of this name is recorded as *Þingvollur* in a document from 1377-78 (DI III. 326). Later the place became known as *Þingvellir*, presumably as a result of the loss of -r- in the genitive singular form *þingvallar-* and the subsequent misinterpretation of the name as a plural form, perhaps by association with the name of the site of the *Alþingi*. It is claimed that Þorsteinn Þorskabítr's farm on the coastal promontory near Helgafell, which is described in *Eyrbyggja saga* chap. 11, is to be identified with *Þingvellir* (Sveinsson & Þórðarson 1935: 18 n.3). There are other *Þingvellir*-type names in Iceland but they are not recorded in early sources.²

The Norwegian vikings who settled in Iceland must have taken the concept of the *þing* or legal assembly with them. The question is whether they also brought the name **Þingvöllr* or **Þingvellir* ready coined for the land surrounding the assembly-place or whether the name *Þingvellir* arose naturally as a fitting description of the locality around the Icelandic meeting-place. There are a few *Þingvellir*-names in continental Scandinavia that are recorded in early sources. The earliest record of such a name is *de Thingwaldum* 1290, which refers to a parish that is now the central part of the town which was granted its charter under the name Karlstad in 1584, situated on Lake Vänern in Värmlands län, Sweden (SOV I. 41; VII. 17). Other records of this name are as *par. Thingwalli* 1291, *de Thynguallum* 1305. The site can be easily reached by land and water from far around and it is at no great distance from the frontier with Norway. The cathedral now stands on the mound which was earlier known as *Lagberget* (*a lagberghe* 1411). The village called *Tingvall* in Naverstad parish, Bullarens härad, Bohuslän, Sweden, is first recorded as *j Þinguollum* in a charter dated 1334 (OGB XVIII. 129). This *Tingvall* was originally the site of the assembly-place of the härad. Like *Tingvalla* (Karlstad), it is situated fairly close to the frontier with Norway. A farm called *Tingvalla* in Dals-Eds parish, Vedsbo härad,

2. For a discussion of *þingvellir*-names recorded in younger sources in Scandinavia see Gillian Fellows-Jensen, 'Tingwall, Dingwall and Thingwall', *NOWELE* 21/22 (1993), 53-67. The present paper incorporates much of this earlier work.



Fig. 1. Sites of Tingwall-names in the British Isles.

Älvsborgs län (SOÄ XIX. 26) is first recorded in the 16th century but it is uniquely well situated from the point of view of communications on a direct route into Norway (Rosell 1983: 18).

Almost exactly contemporary with the first record of Tingvall in Bohuslän is that of *Tingvoll* parish and herred in Møre and Romsdal, Norway, a *Pingwelli* 1333, a *Thingwallom* c.1430 (NG 13. 370). The parish church here stands on level ground near the shore of the Tingvoll fiord.

There is no way of knowing whether or not *Tingvalla* in Värmland, *Tingvalla* in Bohuslän and *Tingvoll* in Norway antedate the naming of the famous *Pingvellir* in Iceland. It is striking that at Tingvalla (Karlstad) there is also a *Lagberget*, corresponding to the *Lögberg* in Iceland, but it was, of course, to be expected that there would be a name for the locality at which the laws were actually promulgated as well as a name for the surrounding land.

***Ping-vellir* in the British Isles**

The Norwegians who settled in Shetland, Orkney, the Hebrides, Man and mainland Scotland brought with them both the concept of the thing and the idea that a thing needed to be held at a site with good communication-routes by land or sea and where there was suitable accommodation on level ground for the tents and horses of those attending the thing. They sometimes called this level ground *þingvöllr* or *þingvellir*. There are no fewer than eleven names in the British Isles which may be reflexes of these Scandinavian terms and the localities denoted by eight of these can still be identified. I shall discuss these names briefly here in topographical order from north to south.

1. Tingwall, a parish about 6 km to the north-west of Lerwick, Mainland, Shetland (HU 4143). a *Pinga velle* 19/5 1307 (DN I. 98), *Tyngvale* 1389 (DN II. 396), *Tyngvell* 1467x1507, *Tyngwall* 1525, *Tingwale* 1576 (Stewart 1987: 298). Initial /p/ is replaced by /t/ in the Shetland dialect. The annual chief assize in Shetland is said to have been held here. Late in the 13th century this assembly was referred to as the *logþing* (DN I. 89). At the beginning of the 18th century, John Brand described the site and the way in which the court was conducted as follows:

It was in this Parish in a small Holm [HU 4143], within a Lake nigh to this Church, where the Principal Feud or Judge of the Country used to sit and give Judgment, hence the Holm to this day is called the *Law-Ting* (from which probably the Parish of *Tingwal* had its name) we go into this Holm by stepping stones, where three or four great Stones are to be seen, upon which the Judge, Clerk and other Officers of the Court did sit: All the Country concerned to be there stood at some distance from the Holm on the side of the Loch, and when any of their Causes was to be Judged or Determined, or the judge found it necessary that any Person should compear before him, he was called upon by the Officer, and went in by these stepping stones, who when heard, returned the same way he came: And tho now this place be not the Seat of Judgement, there is yet

something among them to this day, which keepeth up the Memory of their old Practice, for at every end of the Loch there is a House, upon whose Grass the Country Men coming to the Court did leave their Horses, and by reason the Masters of these Houses did suffer a loss this way, they were declared to be Scat-free (Brand 1701: 121-22).

According to Thomas Gifford's description of the site, the causeway leading to the holm was known as the *Lawtainy* (Gifford 1786: 9-10). Brian Smith has suggested to me that the lawthing holm at Tingwall might originally have been a duelling-holm rather than the site of the *thing* itself. No artificial features have been found on the holm and it must be admitted that the procedure described by John Brand would have slowed down the business of the *thing* immensely. It is, however, unlikely to be possible to determine with certainty whether the holm was ever used for duels or whether the judge had his seat there from the very beginning.

2. Tingwall, a farm in Rendall parish, Mainland, Orkney (HY 4022). *Á Þingavoll* [anno 1154] c.1700 (*Orkneyinga saga*, chap. 95), *Tyngwell* 1492 (Marwick 1952: 121). Initial /þ/ is replaced by /t/ in the Orkney dialect. There is a broch near the site and a green mound at the farm which may have marked the place of assembly. There are no records of meetings here, however, and it may merely have been the site of a local or district thing, although its location is fairly central for the island group as a whole.

3. *Tiongal*, whose name survives in Cnoc an Tiongalairidh < **Cnocan Tiongalairidh*, the name of a hillock in the township of Tolsta Chaolais, Isle of Lewis (NB 1937). The specific of the name *Tiongalairidh* is probably either **þingvøllr* in stem-form or **þingvellir* in its genitive form *þingvalla*. The generic is Gaelic *áirge* 'milking-place', perhaps as the Gaelic loanword in Scandinavian *ærgi* (Cox 1990: 96; 1991: 484-86). Initial /þ/ was replaced by /t/ in Gaelic. The presence of an assembly-place here in the heartland of Norse settlement in Lewis is not surprising but the site may only have had local significance. The lower-lying land on the coast of East Loch Roag would have been well suited for grazing the horses of delegates attending an assembly.

4. *Tinwhil*, a place that cannot be localised but whose site was probably at approximately NG 415583, where Glen Hinnisdal, the valley of the river Hinnisdal, broadens out somewhat, Isle of Skye. *Glen Tinwhill* 1733, *Glen Tinesdale* 1804, *Amhainn Hinisdil* 1824 (Gordon 1963: 88-91). The generic in the name *Hinnisdal* is Scandinavian *dalr* 'valley'. The first element of the Gaelic name which is its specific is probably Scandinavian *þings-*. To judge from the form *Tinwhill* recorded in 1733, *þings-* would seem to be an elliptical form of this, which in turn would be a reflex of a Scandinavian place-name or appellative **þingvøllr* or *-vellir*. Initial /þ/ was replaced by /t/ in Gaelic. In the modern name the initial has been aspirated after Gaelic *Gleann*. There is no record of an assembly's being held here but, as noted by

Bridget Gordon, the Glen would have been easily accessible by land or by sea from the whole of the western side of Trotternish.

5. Dingwall, a town and parish on the north-western shore of the Cromarty Firth, where this is joined by the river Peffer, Ross-shire, Scotland (NH 5458). Its Gaelic name is now *Inbhir Pheofharan* (*Inver-Peffrey*). *Dingwell in Ross* 1227, *Dignewall* 1263, *Dingenale* c.1275, *Dingwal* 1308, *Dingwall* 1382 (Watson 1904: 93). The Scandinavian name was originally adopted by Gaelic speakers, who replaced initial /p/ by /t/. The initial *D-* in all the recorded forms of Dingwall probably reflects the fact that the Gaelic starting-point for the subsequent adoption of the name into English was the dative case, probably dependent on the preposition *in* (later *ann*, *an⁽ⁿ⁾*) ‘in’. The *n* of the preposition would have had the effect of voicing the initial /t/ of the Gaelic form of the name to /d/. William Gillies informs me that nasal mutation is also reflected, for example, in the Scots-English form *Dam-* of a few Gaelic place-names in *Tom-* ‘hillock’. Dingwall lies at some distance from the main concentration of Scandinavian place-names in north-eastern Scotland but the town would seem to have been the meeting-place for the Norse settlers and their Gaelic neighbours in Easter Ross (Crawford 1986: 43). Its survival as the name of an administrative centre in the upper part of the Cromarty Firth suggests that it must have persisted as an assembly-place long after these Norse settlers had been absorbed into the local Gaelic population and the Orkney earls had lost control of the province. In 1503 there was still a moot-hill (*montem*) of Dingwall close to the town and this may well have marked the meeting-place of the thing.

6. Tinwald, a parish situated on gently rising ground in Nithsdale north of Dumfries, Dumfriesshire, Scotland (NY 0081). *Tynwald* 1335-36, *Tynualde* 1477, *Tynwald* 1522 (Williamson 1942: 20). Initial /p/ was replaced by /t/ in Gaelic. The spelling of the second element of the name shows confusion with Old English (Anglian) *wald* m. ‘high land covered with wood’. Tinwald lies close to the river Nith, which marks the western boundary of the part of Dumfriesshire where Scandinavian names are of fairly common occurrence. To the west of the river, place-names are predominantly Gaelic. The Mote of Tinwald is known to have been a site at which sasine of lands was ceremoniously granted.

7. Dingbell Hill in Whitfield parish, Northumberland, England (NY 7758). *Vingvell hill* 1386, *Dingbell Hill* 1613 (Mawer 1920: 63). If the form *Vingvell* really does represent an older **þingvellir*, the initial consonant must be erratic, just possibly resulting from a confusion of the letters *þorn* and *wen* in an Old English record. The later *Dingbell*-spellings would seem to represent confusion of *-vell* with the common noun *bell*, which is used in the local dialect of a hill, and subsequent reinterpretation of *Thing-* as *Ding-*, an onomatopoeic word imitating the sound of a bell. There is no phonological explanation for a development of Scandinavian initial /p/ to /d/ in the

Northumberland dialect. Sir Allen Mawer doubted whether a Scandinavian assembly would ever have been held in Whitfield and thought Dingbell Hill might have been so called because it reminded some Scandinavian settler of 'the hill in some far-distant place of assembly in his own homeland'. There is certainly little evidence for Scandinavian settlement to be derived from the place-names in the neighbourhood of Dingbell, although it is not far from Ouston (**Ulfstūn*) and lies on the main route from Alston (originally **Halfdanar-bý*) to Corbridge and Newcastle. It is just conceivable that Dingbell may have marked the easternmost limit of Scandinavian penetration from Cumberland but the inexplicable initial *D-* rather suggests that the name has nothing whatsoever to do with the Scandinavians and their thing-sites.

8. *Thingwala*, a place that cannot be localised more closely than to the parish of Whitby, Yorkshire North Riding, England (c.NZ 8910). *Thingwala* [c.1077] late 12th century, *Tingwal* [1145x1148] c.1240 (Atkinson 1879: xxii, 3, 118; Smith 1925: 128). Initial /þ/ survives in English. The exact site of *Thingwala* cannot be located but it seems likely that it was the meeting-place for Norse settlers in Eskdale or perhaps in the whole of Cleveland. The area is rich in Scandinavian place-names. It is of particular interest that Normanby (**Norðmanna-bý*) (NZ 9206) and Airy Hill (**ærgjum* 'at the shielings') (NZ 8909) are not far from Whitby and both their names point to settlers who had come to the Danelaw from the west, where Norwegians and Gaelic-speakers had been brought into contact with each other.

9. Tynwald Hill, in the treen of Balladoyne, in the parish of Kirk German, sheading of Glenfaba, Isle of Man (SV 2781). *Tyngwalla* [anno 1237] c.1376 (Broderick 1979: f. 44r), *Tynwald* 1515 (Kneen 1927: 416). Initial /þ/ is replaced by /t/ in Manx Gaelic. In a central position and easily accessible from all points of the compass, Tynwald Hill would have been a convenient meeting-place. It stands on the site of a Bronze Age burial-mound and would thus seem to have been established as a place of assembly long before the arrival of the Vikings on Man. The Manx name of the hill, *Cronk Keeill Eoin* 'the hill of the church of St John', shows that the site has also had a religious significance.

The Manx parliament is still known as *Tynwald*. It now meets in the Tynwald Chamber in Douglas. The old tradition of an annual open-air assembly at Tynwald Hill survives to the present day, however. It is held on old midsummer day, July 5th, for the purpose of promulgating the Acts passed during the last session of Tynwald and for transacting other business.

10. Thingwall, a township in Childwall parish, West Derby hundred, Lancashire, England (SJ 4190). *Tingwella* 1177, *Thingwalle* 1212, *Thingwell* 1226 (Ekwall 1922: 112). Initial /þ/ survives in English. Thingwall Hill stands on a round, gently sloping hill between Roby (**rá-bý* or 'boundary village') and West Derby (**djúra-bý* 'deer village' or perhaps 'deer-park', the centre of West Derby hundred). There is a concentration of place-names of

Scandinavian origin in this hundred.

11. Thingwall, a township in the ancient parish of Woodchurch, Wirral hundred, Cheshire, England (SJ 2784). *Tuiguelle sic* for *Tinguelle* 1086 (Domesday Book), *Tingewella* 1249x1265, *Thingwelle* 1278 (Dodgson 1972: 273). *Thingwall* is on high ground which commands an extensive view but the actual site of the assembly cannot be located. To judge from the many place-names of Scandinavian origin there, the northern part of the Wirral peninsula must have been densely settled by Scandinavians. It has been suggested that the southern boundary of the territory of the Norse community was marked by Raby (**rábý* 'boundary village') and that Thingwall was its centre of administration.

The dating of the *Pingvellir*-names

It will be noted that the *Pingvellir*-names in the British Isles are not recorded in very early sources. The oldest original record is of the Cheshire *Thingwall* in Domesday Book of 1086, while the lost Yorkshire *Thingwala* is named in a late twelfth-century transcript of a document from about 1077. It is clear, however, that many of the names must have been coined much earlier than their first written records. The Scandinavian territories in Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cheshire, for example, had passed under the control of the English king well before the middle of the tenth century. The thing-sites in Shetland, Orkney, the Hebrides and Man must have been taken into use in the course of the ninth century. When settlers from Man or from south-west Scotland later landed in Wirral and south-west Lancashire, they established their local assemblies at localities they called *Thingwall*, even though the characteristic feature of these English sites was a hill and not a plain. It is not possible to date the arrival of these settlers in Cheshire and Lancashire with any certainty but it seems most likely to have taken place early in the tenth century. In the second decade of this century the English were busy fortifying Cheshire townships, apparently in an effort to contain the Vikings in Wirral, while Amounderness in Lancashire, which may still have been under Scandinavian rule at this time, was back in the hands of the English king Athelstan by 934. It seems unlikely that new Scandinavian settlement can have continued to take place in Lancashire and Cheshire much later than about 920. Conditions in the north-west of England were certainly still very unsettled throughout the first half of the tenth century, however, and enclaves of autonomous Vikings may have continued to live there and govern themselves. All in all, however, it seems most likely that Thingwall in Wirral and Thingwall in Lancashire were brought into use and named before the establishment of the Icelandic *Alþingi* on *Pingvellir* in 930. The immediate inspiration for these two names was probably Tynwald on Man. Tynwald in its turn, like most of the *þingvellir*-names in the Kingdom of the Isles, may have received its inspiration from *Tingwall* in Shetland but there would seem

to be no way in which this can be determined.

Tingwall in Shetland, *Tinwald* in Dumfriesshire and *Tynwald* in Man are borne by localities where legal assemblies continued to be held for centuries, even after the Scandinavian language had dropped out of use. *Tingwall* in Orkney is in an area of dense and lasting Norse settlement and the name probably only dropped out of use because the seat of judgment was moved eastwards to Kirkwall, and *Tiongal* in Lewis is in the heartland of Norse settlement here. Several of the other seven *þingvellir*-localities, however, are found on the outskirts of, or at some distance from, the major areas of Norse settlement. This fact was already noted by Sir Walter Scott, who wrote after visiting the Shetland *Tingwall* in 1814, 'It seems odd that in Dumfriesshire and even in the Isle of Man, where the race and laws were surely Celtic, we have this Gothic word Ting and Tingwald applied in the same way' (Ash 1984: 203). *Dingwall* and *Dingbell* in particular lie well away from areas rich in Scandinavian place-names. *Tinwhil* in Skye is geographically isolated from the marked cluster of Scandinavian names in the Outer Hebrides. *Thingwala* in Yorkshire was in an area of mainly Danish settlement, while the two English *Thingwalls* are found in Scandinavian enclaves that are well away from the major areas of Scandinavian settlement in England in the Danelaw and Cumbria. It would seem that in order to survive it was not necessary for a *þingvellir*-name to be borne by a place of assembly which continued in use as such for centuries. In areas removed from the main concentrations of Norse settlement the name might survive the abandonment of the assembly-place with a new function as the name of a farm or hamlet.

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