

# Fiddling on the roof —

## Norfolk Island house names

*Island communities by their very nature are often closed to outside influences which can lead to hyper-creativity in areas of daily life. Up until the nineteenth century the rural Irish seldom travelled more than thirty miles. We can see this evidence in maps of family names: the O'Sullivans in County Kerry, the O'Donnells in County Donegal, the Joyces in County Galway. Even today, the local Irish postie must be able to distinguish between families when there is no road name available. There's an old Irish joke of a chap named Maher who came into some money and built two enormous and ornate gates leading into his property. He became known as 'Maher of the Gates'. Some years later he fell on hard times and had to sell the gates. Thereafter, he was known as 'Maher without the Gates'. Joshua Nash has been researching placenames on Norfolk Island, and has discovered the same type of hyper-creativity for placenames there in a place called Cascade Road. Here is his account. (Dymphna Lonergan)*

Cascade Road is a one-kilometre stretch between the Norfolk Island Central School and its junction with New Cascade Road. In 2007 a Cascade Road resident erected a sign on another resident's fence that read 'Orange Roof', a reference to the colour of the house's roof. This name sparked a creative outburst which focused on the word *roof*. Soon there was an 'Orange Roof', a 'Blue Roof', a 'Red Roof' and a 'Redder Roof'. The residents of Cascade Road then took a new direction: from naming the roof colour they moved to naming some other aspect of the house or house occupants: 'Hipster Roof', 'Holy Roof', 'Rented Roof', 'Jazzy Roof'. The naming soon moved on again to a movie reference, 'Hot Tin Roof', a declaration of proud ownership, 'Leslie's Green Roof', and no doubt from the doggy sound sense, 'Roof Roof'.

demonstration of the prevailing motivator of this kind of placenaming: humour, including irony.



Establishing whether the 'No Roof' house on Cascade Road now lives up to its title will no doubt require another field trip. Of special linguistic interest is the Norf'k spelling in two other roof names, 'Nuffka Roof' and 'Kaa Sii da Roof'. *Nuffka* is the Norf'k word for the Norfolk Sacred Kingfisher. *Kaa Sii da Roof* is a good

The process of naming roofs on Cascade Road involves both residents who are Pitcairn descendants (Norfolk Islanders) and those who are not. By adhering to this house-naming template, the householders affirm their loyalty to a group membership that bridges ethnic boundaries. Following the template also marks out the individual and the group as being distinct from the rest of Norfolk Island.

Some residents have even suggested that Cascade Road be changed to 'Roof Road'. If this were to happen, it would reflect a similar pattern to the unofficial naming nearby of 'House Road' and 'Store Road'. They are not official road names but illustrate how a road name can describe its surrounding environment. For the residents of Cascade Road roof-ness is what makes their place.

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