Gaelic in modern Scotland

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Contents

Introduction

Modern Scotland is a multi-lingual country. Gaelic, Scots and English, along with newer introductions from Europe and beyond, all influence the way Scotland's people now speak to each other and to the rest of the world.

Created with the positive encouragement of Bòrd na Gàidhlig and with support from BBC Alba, this course – available in both Gaelic and English – has been designed to provide a resource for people with a personal or professional interest in increasing their knowledge and understanding of the development and impact of Scottish Gaelic and its culture. It aims to surprise and challenge where necessary; to provide links and ideas for further research; and, for some, to kick-start a journey into learning a language which is integral to Scotland's national identity.

The course is made up of seven sections which can be studied in sequence or individually. This course is also available on our OpenLearn Works website, where you can download and customise these materials to use in your own teaching or staff development.

Contents

Lots of pictures, clips and links to people, places and events will help you learn how Gaelic language and culture continue to make a significant contribution to Scotland's literature, visual arts, music, dance and sporting life.

7.   FAQs

A list of frequently asked questions (FAQs) for people who need quick and easy access to the facts and figures concerning Gaelic

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Learning Outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- understand how Gaelic sits alongside Scots and English as one of Scotland's national languages
- understand the origins and Celtic roots of Gaelic and its close linguistic relations, including Irish and Manx, and the Gaelic Diaspora
- understand who is speaking Gaelic now, the decline in Gaelic speakers in the twentieth century and the work currently being done by government, educational institutions and independent agencies to support and grow Gaelic language acquisition the value of bi-lingualism/multi-lingualism to individuals and society, and the efforts made by countries like New Zealand to protect and celebrate the contribution of indigenous minority languages
- understand how Gaelic is spoken
- understand how Gaelic language and culture continue to make a significant contribution to Scotland's literature, visual arts, music, dance and sporting life.

1 Gaelic as a national language of Scotland

1.1 Introduction

Modern Scotland, like most nations of the world, is a multilingual entity with a complex linguistic history. In many people's eyes, Gaelic belongs predominantly to the Highlands and (west coast) Islands, but the linguistic division of Scotland along the Highland/Lowland line reflects only the latter part of the country's long history.

Indeed, of recorded Scottish languages, Gaelic defers solely to English with regard to its maximum geographical extent. The only modern administrative regions which have no significant Gaelic heritage are the Northern Isles of Orkney and Shetland, which remained outside the Scottish kingdom (and the later 'Gàidhealtachd') at the time of Gaelic pre-eminence and whose inhabitants view themselves as belonging largely to the Norse sphere of influence. In this section, we will explore the links between Gaelic and Scotland, both Highland and Lowland.

1.2 History

In the early part of the first millennium AD, the predominant languages in the British Isles were Celtic. Britain was dominated by P-Celtic or Brythonic, whose modern descendants are Welsh, Cornish and Breton, whereas the population of Ireland predominantly spoke Q-Celtic or Goidelic, from which Scottish Gaelic, Irish Gaelic and Manx Gaelic are derived. It is generally thought that immigration from Ireland brought Gaelic into parts of Wales, Cornwall, the Isle of Man and western Scotland, but the language survived in the long term only in Scotland and Man.

In the days before mechanised transport, it was the sea, rather than the land, that provided the easiest means of travel for people and goods and, given their close maritime connections, it was natural that regular communication took place between north-eastern Ireland and western Scotland.

By around 500 AD the small kingdom of Dál Riata[1] had expanded from Ulster to include a large swathe of western Scotland. This maritime region was populated by people known to Latin writers as *Scotti*, whose language was Gaelic. In Scotland their country, which eventually stretched from the Mull of Kintyre to as far north as Loch Broom, was referred to as *Airer Goídel* (the coastline of the Gaels), *Earra-Ghàidheal* in modern Gaelic, *Argyll* in its anglicised form.

Figure 1 The footprint carved in the rock on the top of Dunadd in Argyll was used in the ceremonies to inaugurate the Gaelic kings of Dál Riata. The nearby inscription in Ogham, long thought to be Pictish, is in fact Gaelic.

The Scots came across other linguistic groups as they extended their influence across Scotland. The dominant people in the north were the Picts, who are thought largely to have spoken a P-Celtic language. Across the south were the Cumbric people, also speaking a P-Celtic tongue and, in the south-east, the Anglians, speakers of a Germanic tongue, which was the ancestor of modern Scots and English. For the next 600 years or so Gaelic was to expand at the expense of other languages, except in the far north and north-west, where it came under pressure from Norse from the 9th century onwards.

The church of St Columba (521-97), whose Gaelic name *Colm Cille* (*Calum Cille* in today's vernacular) means 'dove of the church', played an important role in the Gaelic expansion.

From the monastery of Iona, established by Columba in 563, daughter monasteries were established and prosyletisation by Scottish and Pictish missionaries took Christianity across the country, founding institutions in which the vernacular tongue appears, more and more, to have been Gaelic.

For example, the marginal notes in the Book of Deer[2], written at the monastery of Deer in lowland Aberdeenshire in the 12th century, and which claim the institution was founded directly from Iona, are written in Gaelic.
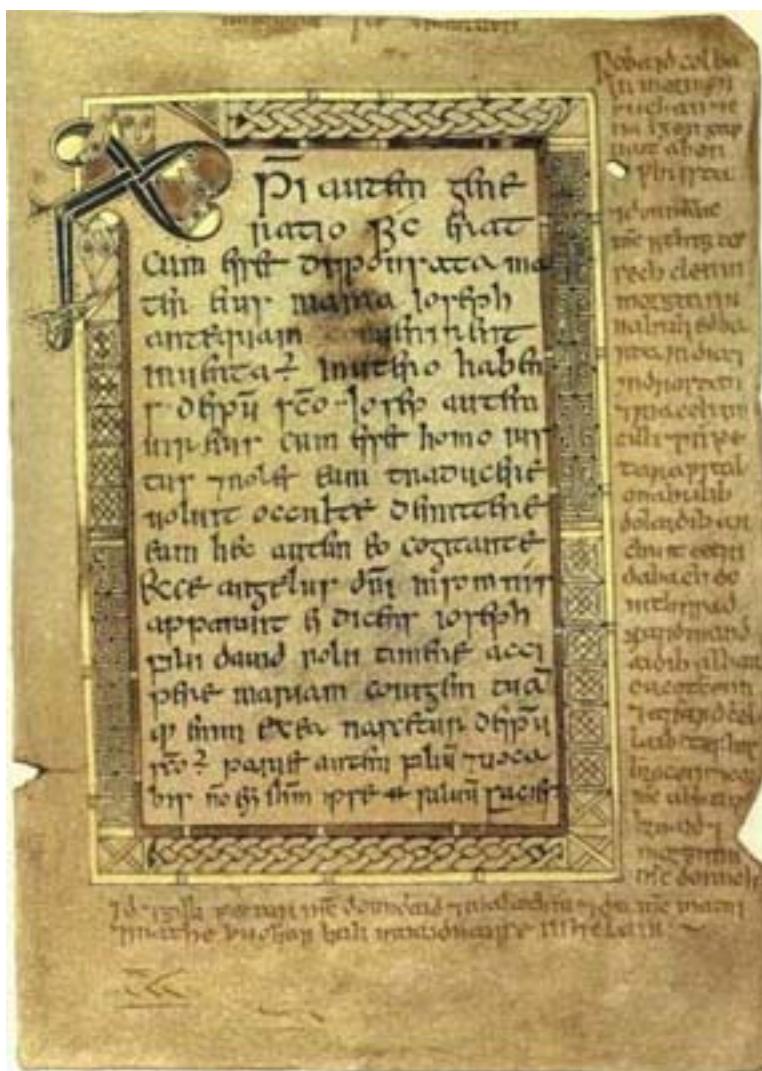
Figure 2 An example of marginal notes in the Book of Deer written in Gaelic in in the 12th century. Click here to see a map showing the location of Deer in Aberdeenshire.

Seemingly remote today, Iona was, in Columba's time, at the centre of a maritime 'highway' linking communities along the length of western Scotland and northern Ireland. It was a place of great influence and played a crucial role in the conversion of the Picts and Northumbrians to Christianity. In Gaelic the island's name is Eilean Ì (the island of Ì) or Ì Chaluim Chille (Columba's Ì), giving *Icolmkill*, by which name it was known for centuries in English. The modern English name *Iona* derives from a mistranscription of the Latin form *Ioua (Insula)*. The video clip below illustrates the important geographical position of the Western Isles.

Video content is not available in this format.
The Western Isles

Courtesy of BBC

It is thought that the world-famous Book of Kells (now in Trinity College, Dublin) was started, and perhaps even completed, in Iona during the 8th century AD, before being removed to Ireland for safekeeping during the times of the Viking raids on the Hebrides in the late 8th century. Click here for more information on the Book of Kells.

Figure 3 Decorated text from the Book of Kells

Dsmdgold/Wikipedia

There is no significant evidence for Scottish military conquest of the Picts, or that the Picts were driven out physically. Around 841 Kenneth (Cinaed) mac Alpín became King of Dál Riata and, two years later, he unified the Picts and Scots under his leadership. As the language of status and government, Gaelic became nationally dominant, absorbing Pictish. The kingdom was called Alba (and still is in Gaelic), an ancient term related to *Albion* which, in the days before the Anglo-Saxon invasions, had referred to the whole of Britain.

Records of the country being called *Scotland* by English-speakers date from the 11th century; by this stage it is thought that Gaelic was the dominant language of the country, in both status and number of speakers.

The earliest records we have of written Gaelic are on stone in a script known as Ogham. But by the 6th century AD, monks in monastical scriptoria were starting to explore the use of the alphabet of the Church language – Latin – to write their own Gaelic vernacular. English and Gaelic have thus shared a similar alphabet for a very long time but, of course, the Latin letters had to be adapted to portray sounds which were not necessarily of identical quality in each language.

Anglophone readers soon learn that the English 'rules' which relate particular letters and letter combinations to particular sounds (and which are notoriously irregular in English) do not apply in Gaelic. The Gaelic language has its own rules. For example, a 'b' in the middle of a word is more like an English 'p'. And a Gaelic peculiarity, not generally found in English, is the Svarabhakti (or 'helping') vowel (the term comes from ancient Sanskrit). This is a vowel sound which is not written but generally repeats (approximately) the preceding vowel. *Alba*, for example, is pronounced approximately 'Al-uh-puh'.

Click on the sound file to hear its correct pronunciation

Audio content is not available in this format.

Alba

Gaelic slowly replaced Cumbric in most of southern Scotland, including the old kingdom of Strathclyde, in late medieval times. It is thought that, following the Scottish victory over the Northumbrians at the Battle of Carham[3] (in the Borders) in 1018, Gaelic stemmed an Anglian advance in the south-east.

But it is unlikely that Gaelic, while being spoken by some of the ruling classes in Lothian and the south-east as far south as the border with England (and perhaps even across it), was ever numerically dominant in that part of the country. In 1091, when a Gaelic-speaking king ruled the lands north of the Tweed, except the far north and west which was under Norse control, the Anglo-Saxon chronicle records that Malcolm III (1058-93) went with his army 'ut of Scotlande into Lodene on Englaland' (out of Scotland into Lothian in England), presumably meaning that the dominant speech in Lothian was Anglian, or Inglis.

Malcolm III's rule coincided with the challenge to Gaelic's place at the pinnacle of Scottish power, and the start of its decline in southern and eastern Scotland can be dated from around the late 11th century.

Malcolm Canmore was a polyglot Gaelic king (his nickname derived from the Gaelic *Ceann Mòr*, 'big head', either in reference to a physical feature or to his kingship). He took the throne following the slaying of MacBeth at the Battle of Lumphanan in 1057. He married Margaret, a half-English princess whose brother's claim to the throne of England was thwarted by the Norman invasion of 1066. Margaret, later canonised, promoted the cause of the English language in court and church.

Figure 4 Queen Margaret, who promoted the cause of the English language in the Scottish court and church

Successive monarchs established and supported royal burghs in Gaelic Scotland, in which the ruling classes, often of Norman or Flemish ancestry, spoke English and were loyal to the crown.

Anglo-Norman magnates were granted land in various localities. While their preferred languages might originally have been Norman French and Latin, they became largely anglicised. The exceptions are some noted Highland clans of Norman origin[4] – such as the Frasers, Grants and Chisholms – which became fully Gaelicised. At this stage it was

only in the south and along the east coast that Gaelic was losing sway and, while the royal court, now firmly established in Edinburgh, might have spoken English, Norman French and Latin, the majority tongue of the ordinary people in Scotland as a whole was still Gaelic. It probably didn't lose that status until the 15th century[5].

However, the monarchs didn't entirely divorce themselves from Gaelic tradition, Alexander III, for example, being crowned at Scone in 1249 in the traditional Gaelic manner. Robert Bruce, King of the Scots from 1306 until 1329, and victor at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314, was of mixed parentage and almost certainly spoke Gaelic, among other languages; his father was of Norman extraction while his mother was from Carrick (now southern Ayrshire), then a Gaelic stronghold.

The Declaration of Arbroath, an appeal (written in Latin) to the Pope in 1320 for official recognition of Scotland's status as an independent nation, makes it clear that the country's nobles saw themselves as Scots, not Britons, Picts, Norwegians, Danes or English. The national identity had been forged, to a very large degree, by the Gaels.

Figure 5 The Declaration of Arbroath is a famous document held in the National Archives of Scotland. Written at the time of the wars of independence with the English, which started with Edward I's attempt to conquer Scotland in 1296, the declaration is a letter

from the country's earls and barons to the Pope, asking him to recognize Scotland's status as an independent nation. While their claim that the Scots had migrated from 'Greater Scythia by the Tyrrhene Sea and the Pillars of Hercules' would be questioned by modern historians, their sense of Scottish identity is manifest in their affirmation that the 'Britons they first drove out, the Picts they utterly destroyed, and, even though very often assailed by the Norwegians, the Danes and the English, they took possession of that home with many victories and untold efforts; and, as the historians of old time bear witness, they have held it free of all bondage ever since'

While Gaelic was losing ground in the south and east, the opposite process was taking place in the north and west, with many people of Norse or mixed Norse-Gaelic ancestry being assimilated into Gaelic society. Perhaps the most famous is Somerled, who first appears in 1140 as the *regulus* or king of Kintyre. When both David I of Scotland and Olaf, King of Man, died in 1153, Somerled moved to extend his control over the Hebrides, eventually achieving mastery of a sea kingdom stretching from Man to Lewis, thumbing his nose in the process at the Norwegians who had long claimed sovereignty over the isles. *Innse Gall*, 'The Isles of the Foreigners', were once more becoming Scottish, and the dynasty created by Somerled was to become *The Lords of the Isles*, a Gaelic-speaking polity that grew to challenge the power of the kings of Scotland in the west and which finally succumbed only in the late 15th century. Watch the video clip below to find out more about the Lordship of the Isles. The video stresses the strength of this Gaelic-speaking sub-kingdom.

Video content is not available in this format.
The Lordship of the Isles

Courtesy of BBC

Norway ceded sovereignty over its territories in Scotland, with the exception of Orkney and Shetland, to the Scottish crown in the Treaty of Perth (1266), strengthening the hand of Gaelic throughout the west and north, and ensuring a full regaelicisation[6] of the Hebrides. Norn, the local descendant of Norse, clung on for some time in Caithness, gradually being replaced by Scots in the north-eastern half of the area and by Gaelic in its south-western half.

By the late 14th century the anglicisation of southern and eastern Scotland had reached such an extent that the term 'Highlander' (or *Hielandman*) had become synonymous with 'Gaelic-speaker'. To the Gael, the Highlands became the *Gàidhealtachd* (the land of the Gael) and the Lowlands the *Galltachd* (land of the non-Gael), although the Gaelic folk-memory has always appreciated the historical links the language had with Lowland Scotland. Click below to listen to the pronunciation of *Gàidhealtachd* and *Galltachd.*

Audio content is not available in this format.
Gàidhealtachd

Audio content is not available in this format.
Galltachd

By this stage, many English-speakers viewed the Gaels with hostility and considered them culturally and socially inferior. But as one English-speaker writing in the 1380s, John of Fordun, makes clear, Gaelic was still viewed, even in his community, as 'the Scottish speech'.

> '[T]wo languages are spoken among them, the Scottish and the Teutonic; the latter of which is the language of those who occupy the seaboard and plains, while the race of Scottish speech inhabits the Highlands and out-lying islands. The people of the coast are of domestic and civilised habits, trusty, patient and urbane, decent in their attire, affable and peaceful, devout in Divine worship … the Highlanders and people of the islands, on the other hand, are a savage and untamed nation, rude and independent, given to rapine, ease-loving, of a docile and warm disposition, comely in person, but unsightly in dress, hostile to the English-speaking people and language … and exceedingly cruel.'

1.3 Place name evidence

The spread of Gaelic across Scotland is demonstrated by the place names left behind by Gaelic-speakers. In some cases the Gaels adapted names created earlier by Pictish, Cumbric, Norse, or even English speakers, but in many instances they created their own nomenclature anew (some of which became modified in turn by other linguistic groups).

A classic Gaelic naming element is *baile*[7], a place of permanent settlement as small as a farm but as large as a village or town, usually anglicized as *bal-, balla-* or occasionally *bella-*. The distribution of *baile* names demonstrates the historic spread of the Gaelic-speaking population across Scotland, with a large number in Aberdeenshire, Angus and Fife, and examples found, for example, in Kirkcudbrightshire (Balcary, Balmaclellan, Balmingan), Dumfriesshire (Ballaggan, Baltersan), Selkirkshire (Balnakiel) and East Lothian (Balgone, Ballencrieff).

Another naming element is *achadh*[8] (often shortened to *acha-* or *ach-*), originally a 'field' but which became applied to settlements. The only parts of Scotland where these are rare are the far south-east, possibly because the Gaels who settled there did not work the land to any great degree, and the Western Isles, owing to the influence of Norse terminology there. In the south and east of the country, the anglicised form is usually *auch-*; examples include Auchinbo and Auchintoul (Aberdeenshire), Auchendinny and Auchendoon in Midlothian, and Auchabrick and Auchenree in Wigtownshire. Examples in the Highlands include Achachork and Achnacloich (Skye), Achanalt and Achnashellach (Ross-shire) and Achavanich (Caithness).

While the oldest names can sometimes pose problems of interpretation, the later (generally Highland) names are mostly transparent. For example, Achachork is *Achadh a' Choirce* (the field of the oats), Achnacloich is *Achadh na Cloiche* (the field of the stone), Achanalt is *Achadh nan Allt* (the field of the burns) and Achnashellach is *Achadh nan Seileach* (the field of the willows).

Other Gaelic place name elements which have a wide distribution in Scotland include *kil-* (Gaelic *cill* 'church, churchyard'), *tully* or *tilly-* (Gaelic *tulach*, 'hillock, knoll') and *knock* (Gaelic *cnoc*, 'hill').

Examples of the first are Kilmarnock, Kilbirnie and Kilpatrick (Ayrshire), Kilbride (several, including Lanarkshire and Argyll), Kilallan (Renfrewshire), Kilfeddar (Wigtownshire), Kilbucho (Peeblesshire), Kilconquhar (Fife) and Kildrummy (Aberdeenshire).

Tulach examples include Tillydrine, Tillyfourie and Tillytarmont (Aberdeenshire) and Tullybelton, Tullyfergus and Tullymurdoch (Perthshire).

Knock is found in Big Knock (Peeblesshire), East and West Knock (Angus) and many places simply called Knock or The Knock.

In the Gàidhealtachd, the Ordnance Survey collected not anglicised versions of Gaelic originals as in the examples above, but thousands of pure Gaelic names, some of them going back to the earliest days of Dál Riata, but others much more modern. A great number of these are morphologically complex and pose a map-reading challenge to many Scots today, but they also provide a fantastically rich thread within the nation's cultural tapestry.

Take, for example, *Meall a' Choire Chreagaich* (the lump-shaped hill of the craggy corrie), *Cnoc Alltan Iain Duinn* (the hill of the small burn of brown-haired John), *Allt Cnoc Àirigh an t-Seilich Bhig* (the burn of the hill of the shieling of the small willow), and *Rubha Camas nam Meanbh-chuileag* (the headland of the bay of the midges).

Use the audio links below to listen to the pronunciations of these names:

Audio content is not available in this format.
Meall a' Choire Chreagaich

Audio content is not available in this format.
Cnoc Alltan Iain Duinn

Audio content is not available in this format.
Allt Cnoc Àirigh an t-Seilich Bhig

Audio content is not available in this format.
Rubha Camas nam Meanbh-chuileag

If you are interested in hearing the correct pronunciation of the names of the Munros – Scotland's mountains over 3,000 ft – click here.

Use the map below to explore the Gaelic and anglicised versions of the names of some well-known cities and towns in Scotland. Click on each place name to see its origin and hear its Gaelic pronunciation.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

1.4 Retreat into the north and west

By the end of the 15th century, the Inglis speech of the south-east was being referred to by its speakers as 'Scottis', indicating that Lowland Scots, while speaking a language closely related to that of their English neighbours, were Scottish in identity. Scots and Gaelic borrowed vocabulary from each other, as did Scots and Norse, and Gaelic and Norse.

Examples of words which entered Gaelic from Scots are *bodhaig* (from bouk, a body), *dig* (ditch), *eàrlas* (arles, a pledge, token), *poca* (pock, poke, a bag) and *radan* (rattan, a rat). Scots words which derive from Gaelic include *ben* (beinn, a mountain), *claymore* (claidheamh mòr, a big sword), *corrie* (coire, a cauldron shaped bowl in the mountains), *ghillie* (gille, a servant), *kyle* (caol, a narrows), *machair* (machair, a plain) and *whisky* (uisge-beatha, water of life).

But, despite Gaelic's status as a founding language of Scotland, Lowland writers started to refer to it as *Irische* or *Ersch*. This is seen in the famous poetic 'Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedy', written in Scots in around 1505, in which Lothian-born William Dunbar pours scorn on the Gaelic-speaking Walter Kennedy for being *Heland* and an *Ersch Katherane* (ironically using a word derived from Gaelic) whereas Kennedy tells Dunbar that Gaelic is *all trew Scottismennis leid* (all true Scotsmen's language) and suggests that the latter would be happier living in England.

Kennedy, a significant and well-connected figure, was not from the Highlands at all, but from Carrick. This area and neighbouring Galloway remained Gaelic-speaking (their dialect is known as Galwegian Gaelic) long after the language had retreated from the rest of southern mainland Scotland, probably well into the 17th century. The dialect in nearby Arran, which was probably similar to Galwegian Gaelic, survived until the 20th century.

Dunbar's disdain towards Kennedy's Gaelic roots in Carrick (modern Ayrshire) is clear in the following stanza:

Sic eloquence as thay in Erschry use,	Such eloquence as they in Irishry [Gaeldom] use
In sic is sett thy thraward appetyte.	Is what defines your perverse taste.
Thow hes full littill feill of fair indyte.	You have very small aptitude for good verse-making.
I tak on me, ane pair of Lowthiane hippis	I'll wager, a pair of Lothian hips
Sall fairar Inglis mak and mair perfyte	Shall fairer English make and more polished
Than thow can blabbar with thy Carrick lippis.	Than thou can blabber with thy Carrick lips.

During the late 16th century, it is reckoned that half of Scotland's population lived north of the Tay and a very large number of them spoke only Gaelic. Their language, way of life and tendency to be less than fully loyal to the Edinburgh-based monarch were an affront to King James VI, who embarked on a programme to unify the nation by turning his subjects into a monoglot English-speaking people. He attempted to break the power of the Highland clans and to plant Lowlanders in Gaelic-speaking areas, although he was notably unsuccessful in Lewis, where a band of would-be settlers, known as the Fife Adventurers, were forcibly resisted.

Following the union of the Crowns of Scotland and England in 1603, the king (now James I of England) felt emboldened to press his case for the eradication of the Gaelic language. In the Statutes of Iona (1609) he forced clan chiefs to send their eldest child to school in the Lowlands in order to anglicise them, and an Act of the Privy Council[9] on 10 December 1616 expresses the desire that the 'vulgar Inglishe toung be universallie plantit, and the Irische language … may be abolisheit and removeit'. The Act promoted the establishment of English-language schools in every parish, regardless of linguistic heritage.

It has been estimated[10] that Gaelic was spoken by some 290,000 people, 23 per cent of Scotland's population, in 1755. The total was down slightly to 254,000 in 1891 but by then

this represented only 6.8 per cent of the national population. Gaelic was by now very much a minority language nationally although still very strong locally in much of the rural Highlands and Hebrides.

1.5 Religion

Because of the exclusion of Gaelic from government and most aspects of national public life, the Church was of great importance as one of the few national institutions where the language could be used in a high-register milieu. From the 17th century onwards, the Kirk made an effort to provide a Gaelic-speaking ministry for the Highlands, although a shortage of qualified ministers caused difficulties.

However, hostility to the language in official circles in the Lowlands ensured that the translation of the full scriptures into Gaelic was tardy, the first attempt being the reprinting in 1690 of the Irish Bible in Roman, rather than (Irish) Gaelic, script. This was unsatisfactory, as the Classical Irish Gaelic of the Bible did not adequately represent the Scottish vernacular.

The Scottish Gaelic New Testament was only completed in 1767 and the Old Testament in 1801, fully two hundred years after the publication of the Welsh Bible.

Figure 6 Memorial to the translator of the New Testament, Rev James Stuart, outside the Church of Scotland in Killin, Perthshire

1.6 Education

Any natural growth that might have taken place within the Gaelic-speaking population continued to be stymied by emigration (voluntary and forced) from Gaelic communities and an education system that discouraged the language's use. The Society in Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge[11], established in 1709, played an important role in the education of young Gaels through the 18th and 19th Centuries. Initially, their attitude to the language was outwardly hostile and the speaking of Gaelic was banned even in the playground.

In 1750, the Society demanded of pupils 'either in the School house or when playing about the doors thereof to speak Earse [Gaelic] on pain of being chastised and that the Schoolmasters appoint Censors to note down and report to the Schoolmaster such as transgress this rule', but in 1766 they permitted the introduction of Gaelic reading in order to improve English reading among Gaelic-speaking children. And in 1825, still with their eye on improving English fluency, they recommended that Gaelic-speaking children 'should instead of being taught first to read English as has been Universally practiced throughout the Highlands, be taught first to read Gaelic'.

However, when education was brought under the state's control as a result of the 1872 Education (Scotland) Act, Gaelic was deliberately excluded. The view of Mr D Sime, Inspector of Schools for Ross, Caithness and Sutherland, is typical of establishment attitudes at the time. In 1878 he wrote, 'I should regard the teaching of Gaelic in schools in any shape or form as a most serious misfortune.'

Later acts, while recognising the right of Gaelic to be taught as a subject in certain schools, failed to reinstate any sort of bilingual education. Gaelic was to be treated as entirely peripheral and, in the bulk of the Scottish education system, that remains its circumstance today.

The result has been a further lowering of the language's status, a general ignorance among the populus that Gaelic was a founding language of the nation and was once spoken over most of its landmass, and the inability of the majority of Scots to read the map of Scotland, more than half of which is covered with Gaelic place names.

Along with continued economic hardship and depopulation in the Highlands and Islands, lack of Gaelic-medium education at school resulted in a dramatic fall in speaker numbers to under a 100 000 in the latter part of the 20th century. As a linguistic and cultural minority in a country increasingly dominated by English, the world's most powerful language for communication, science and commerce, the Gaels have felt beleaguered and, at times, unappreciated by many fellow Scots. A large number of them finally fell prey to the orthodoxy that Gaelic was a hindrance to progress, and stopped speaking the language to their children.

But many within Gaeldom, and their supporters throughout Scotland and the wider world, have never abandoned their philosophical stance that Gaelic was not just a minority tongue belonging to their own community (and worthy, on that basis, of a valued place in a just society), but that it was also a national language of Scotland. Gaelic's claim upon, and contribution to, the national life, culture and identity of Scotland was recognised by the Scottish Parliament in 2005 when the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act[12] was passed with all-party support. The act declared that Gaelic had national status as 'an official language of Scotland commanding equal respect to the English language'.

While it is the devolved Scottish Parliament that has taken prime responsibility for the development of the language, recent political developments also have a UK and European context. The UK is a signatory to the European Charter for Regional or Minority

Languages, which obliges it to counter any measures which would 'endanger the maintenance or development' of Gaelic in Scotland. Gaels are increasingly appreciating that they are one of many minority language groups on a multilingual continent, in which a large percentage of the populace speak two or more languages. As the intellectual, social and cultural advantages of multilingualism become more widely understood in Scottish society, it is likely that Gaelic will become steadily more attractive to people from a wide array of cultural backgrounds.

2 Celtic roots and international reach

2.1 Introduction

Scotland is often defined as a 'Celtic'[13] nation, a characteristic it shares with other 'fringe' nations of the British Isles, most notably Ireland and Wales. It is often assumed, therefore, that 'Celtic' refers to geography and/or politics, or even 'ethnic' characteristics. In fact, 'Celtic' is a linguistic definition, referring to a group of related languages.

Scotland can be defined as a 'Celtic' nation because of its linguistic background. Pictish and Cumbric were Celtic languages, as is Gaelic, arguably the language which had the greatest influence in establishing a Scottish identity.

But not all languages spoken in Scotland are, or were, Celtic. Scots and English are Germanic, as was Old Norse. In this section, we shall explore the Celtic languages and the sense of Celtic identity that still exists in Scotland and beyond.

2.2 The rise of the Celts

The majority of Europe's languages, including Gaelic, belong to a family known as Indo-European, so labelled because it includes most of the tongues of South Asia (with the exception of southern India), as well as Europe. Until a major expansion from the 15th century onwards, including the creation of overseas empires, these languages were largely restricted to Europe and southern and western Asia. Now they have a global distribution, with almost 3 billion native speakers and include some of the world's most populous languages, such as Spanish, English, Hindi, Portuguese, Bengali, Russian, German and French.

Within the Indo-European family, there are several subgroupings identified by linguists. For example, English, Dutch and Norwegian belong to the Germanic subgroup, French, Italian and Spanish to the Italic subgroup, with Russian, Slovak and Polish being classified as Slavic tongues. One of the subgroups is Celtic, which contains the six living Celtic languages – Gaelic, Irish, Manx, Welsh, Breton and Cornish – and some that are now extinct e.g. Gaulish, Galatian, Celtiberian, Pictish and Cumbric.
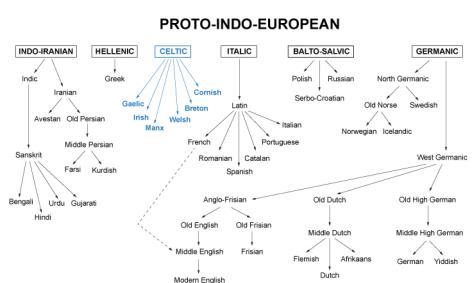

Figure 7 One model of a language tree showing the relationships between (major) languages of the Indo-European family

The earliest records of the Celts date from around 500 BC, when Greek texts referred to peoples to their north as *Keltoi*. The Latin term was *Celtae*, used of tribes and nations now

understood to have been Celtic-speaking. The term was at this stage restricted to continental peoples.

The use of *Celtic* in relation to peoples of the British Isles dates from the 17th century when the linguist Edward Lhuyd made a comparative study of Welsh, Gaelic, Irish, Cornish and Breton, and established that these were related to each other and also to the extinct language of Gaul, which was indisputably Celtic.

For example the Gaulish *mapos* ('son') has its equivalent in modern Welsh *mab* and the Gaelic *mac*; the Gaulish *tarvos* ('bull') is closely related to the Welsh *tarw* and the Gaelic *tarbh*.

The following table shows some words in Gaelic, Irish, Welsh and Cornish which would appear to share a common origin (in a common Celtic ancestral language):

Table 1 Words in Gaelic, Irish, Welsh and Cornish which share a common origin

Scottish Gaelic	Irish Gaelic	Welsh	Cornish	English
aimsir	aimsir	amser		time, weather
anail	anáil	anadl	anall	breath
cath	cath	cad	kas	battle
caol	caol	cul	cul	slender
cnò	cnó	cneuen	know	nut
creamh	creamh	craf		wild garlic
cù	cú	ci	ki	dog, hound
làn	lán	llawn	leun	full
roth	roth	rhod	ros	wheel
taigh	teach	ty	ti	house
troigh	troigh	troed	troes	foot

The continental Celts were not a politically unified people – there was no such thing as a Celtic empire – but Celtic-speaking peoples, sharing some degree of common culture, lived across a wide swathe of Europe. They left virtually no written records so our knowledge of them comes largely from the Greeks and Romans, from the archaeological record, and from the place names they left behind.

The first Celtic culture to emerge, around the 8th century BC, is associated with finds made near the Austrian village of Hallstatt and is known as the Hallstatt Culture.

Figure 8 A golden torque, an example of Hallstatt culture

Rosemania/Flickr

Excavations provided evidence of a rich material culture and trading links to the Mediterranean world. Around the 5th century BC, we see the emergence of the La Tène Culture, named for excavations made at La Tène in Switzerland.

Figure 9 An example of La Tène art

This was also Celtic and appears to have been more expansive in nature; decorated metalwork of La Tène style have been found in Britain and Ireland, for example.

Figure 10 A Romano-Celtic mirror

It is uncertain what languages were being spoken in the British Isles at the time, but it is likely that Celtic was already among them. By the 3rd century BC, the Celts had spread across a large part of continental Europe, from modern Portugal to Belgium and Germany, into northern Italy, through the Danube basin and even down into Turkey.
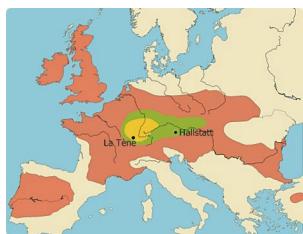
Figure 11 The spread of Celtic languages through continental Europe (Above and below)

2.3 Celtic place names

Historical records of tribe names and place names give a strong indication of the spread of Celtic languages. For example, *dunum* or *dunon*, a fort, is found in the recorded names of *Lugdunum* (now Lyons, France and Leyden, Netherlands), *Camulodunum* (now Colchester, England), *Kambodunon* (now Kempten, Germany), *Minnodunum* (now Moudon, Switzerland), *Lugidunum* (now Legnica, Poland) and *Singidunum* (now Belgrade, Serbia). There is also a 2nd century AD record of a *Tarvedu(nu)m* 'bull fort' in the far north of Scotland, thought to represent modern Dunnet Head in Caithness. While most of these names have become obsolete, many place names still contain this element, or its descendant form, in countries where Celtic languages remain extant. Scottish examples include *Dùn Dè* (Dundee), *Dùn Phàrlain* (Dunfermline) and *Dùn Gabhail* (Dungavel).

Territory names with *Gal-* in them mark the spread of the Celtic peoples, as another term used by the Greeks for the Celts was *Galatae*; the Romans referred to *Galli.* There is a *Galicia* both in north-western Spain and in the borderlands of Ukraine and Poland.

Figure 12 An example of a Celtic Stele

The adjective 'Gallic', meaning French, refers to that country's origins as the Celtic land of *Gaul* (interestingly the Gaelic word *Gall*, a 'Lowlander', originally meant a Gaul). *Galatia*, in the centre of modern Turkey, boasts an ancient Celtic heritage which sprang from a migration of Celts from the middle Danube into Macedonia and Greece in the 3rd century BC. Some thousands of these Celts, both warriors and their families, were invited to participate in a conflict in Anatolia, after which they remained in the country. The Galatians are famed as the recipients of Paul's Epistle, now a book of the Bible, and as late as the 4th century AD, St Jerome wrote that they spoke the same language as the natives of an area of the German Rhineland.

Figure 13 The Dying Gaul, a Roman statue based on a Greek bronze original actually depicts a Galatian warrior. Like other Celts the Galatians went into battle naked.

2.4 The insular Celts

In the early part of the first millennium AD, the continental Celtic languages came under pressure from other linguistic groups, most notably the Romans, and by AD 500 even the once-powerful Gaulish had been all but extinguished. In Britain and Ireland, however, Celtic languages and cultures were still vibrant. This group, from which all of today's Celtic languages (including Breton) have evolved, is called Insular Celtic.

Figure 14 A map showing the 'Celtic countries' of today – Scotland, Ireland, Man, Wales, Cornwall and Brittany – each of which boasts its own Celtic language. All of them, including Breton (which was taken to Armorica by British settlers), are classified as Insular Celtic languages

Even by this stage, Insular Celtic was far from uniform. From a theoretical Proto-Celtic common ancestor, two groups had evolved – P-Celtic (also known as Brythonic) and Q-Celtic (or Goidelic) [14]. The P- and Q- names are based on how each group treated the ancient 'Q' sound in Proto-Celtic. The Goidelic speakers simplified this to a 'c' sound, while the Brythonic Celts converted it to a 'p' sound. Each branch of Insular Celtic was represented in both Ireland and Britain, but Ireland was dominated by Goidelic speakers, while most of Britain was Brythonic.

The major division within Insular Celtic is still in evidence today. The surviving Brythonic languages – Welsh, Cornish and Breton – bear similarities to each other and permit some degree of mutual comprehension. The Goidelic languages – Scottish Gaelic, Irish Gaelic and Manx Gaelic – also have close relationships to each other; a fluent speaker of Scottish Gaelic, for example, can understand the basics of a simple conversation in Irish Gaelic. Even in Columba's day (6th century AD), however, a translator was required for the Irish-born saint to converse with a Pictish king: the churchman's language was Q-Celtic, whereas the Picts spoke a P-Celtic language.

The difference between the two groups can be seen in words still in currency in modern Celtic languages. For example the Goidelic *mac* ('son') has its equivalent in the Brythonic *map* and the Goidelic *ceann* ('head') is analogous to the Brythonic *pen*. Here are some other comparisons, using Welsh and Scottish Gaelic as examples:

Table 2 Comparisons between Goidelic and

Brythonic words still used in modern Celtic languages

Welsh (Brythonic/P-Celtic)	Gaelic (Goidelic/Q-Celtic)	English
pa	ciod	what
pair	coire	cauldron
plant	clann	children
pump	còig	five
pwy	cò	who

2.5 The Brythonic languages

The Brythonic languages have suffered considerable language death in the British Isles (Pictish and Cumbric in Scotland, for example, disappeared centuries ago), and the circumstances of the survivors are extremely varied.

Welsh is the most successful of all the Celtic languages, with around 580,000 people in Wales claiming to speak Welsh in the 2001 Census. It is classified by UNESCO as 'vulnerable', whereas all the other Celtic languages are either 'definitely endangered' or 'critically endangered'.

Encouragingly, the percentage of the Welsh population with the full range of skills (i.e. able to speak, read and write Welsh) increased from 13.6 per cent in 1991 to 16.3 per cent in 2001. Welsh has also made considerable progress in achieving improved official status in Wales.

Cornish, like Welsh, is a descendant of the Brythonic language once spoken across southern Britain. Welsh and Cornish were effectively isolated from each other after the victory of the West Saxons at the Battle of Dyrham (near Bath) in AD 577.

Cornish is thought to have been spoken by up to 38,000 people in the early 14th century but it declined dramatically under pressure from English from the mid-16th century and disappeared as a community language in the 18th century. It is now in a revival phase and boasts several hundred fluent, or semi-fluent, speakers. For more information on the history of Cornish, click here (right-click to open the link in a new window or tab).

Brittany's modern Celtic heritage derives not from a continental Gaulish ancestry, but largely as a result of immigration of Brythonic speakers from Britain following the Anglo-Saxon invasions of the 5th century AD onwards. The Breton language's closest relative is therefore Cornish.

Today Breton[15] has around 300 000 speakers, but numbers have fallen dramatically from about a million in 1945. In its traditional heartland in western Brittany, the percentage of the population speaking the language has decreased from 90 per cent in 1900 to less than 25 per cent today.

2.6 The Goidelic languages

Three descendant languages of early Goidelic are spoken today and they all face significant challenges. The strongest is Irish Gaelic (Gaeilge), an official language of the

Irish Republic (Éire), which was declared to be in daily use by 340,000 people in the 2002 Census, with some 1,571,000 claiming to be Irish-speaking to some degree (although many experts claim that the reality of numbers on the ground using Irish on a daily basis is much less than this). In Northern Ireland a further 167,000 people claimed to speak Irish in the 2001 UK Census, some 10 per cent of the province's population, with some 75,000 claiming more or less total fluency. The best areas to hear spoken Irish are in the small Gaeltacht areas, where the language has primacy; most of these are in rural parts of the west.

Scottish Gaelic (Gàidhlig), like Irish, is classified by UNESCO as 'definitely endangered' but, in reality, it is in a poorer situation than Irish, having fallen to a low of 92,400 people in Scotland who claimed some language ability in 2001. This was made up of 58,700 speakers and 33,700 who could read, write or understand it.

However, this situation is improving – between 1991 and 2001 the number of speakers fell 11 per cent, but the number of people with reading and writing ability increased 7.5 per cent and 10 per cent respectively. While it has suffered a catastrophic decline, Gaelic is still easily in the top half of the world's languages measured on numbers of speakers and, following the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act of 2005, it is now the recipient of significant state funding.

The primary Scottish Government agency working on behalf of the Gaelic Language is Bòrd na Gàidhlig, whose headquarters are in Inverness, the capital of the Highlands. Its website is here.

Goidelic has been on the Isle of Man since the 5th century AD and its descendant, Manx Gaelic (Gaelg), is still spoken today, having survived long periods of political domination by Norse and English. Man was part of the Gaelic-speaking Lordship of the Isles, which encompassed the Hebrides. Following the death of the last native (first-language) speaker in 1974, experts classified Manx as 'extinct'. This, however, ignored the fact that there remained a fluent speaker community, based around people who had learned Manx as a second tongue.

UNESCO has now upgraded Manx to the same status as Cornish – 'critically endangered'. In reality, because of language activism and support from the Isle of Man Government, Manx has come back from the brink and is in a recovery phase. There is now a limited amount of Manx-medium education, and the number of speakers has increased dramatically over the last few decades, from 165 in 1961 to 1,689 in 2001.

The differences between the three Goidelic languages have been enhanced by the loss of dialectal forms that might have acted as bridges between them. For example, the Gaelic of Rathlin Island was very close to Scottish Gaelic, while the extinct Scottish dialects of Kintyre and Galloway probably bore similarities to Irish, as well as to Manx. Even today the Gaelic of Argyll employs words and phrases which might be seen by more northerly Scottish Gaels as 'Irishisms', as shown by the examples below.

Table 3 Differences and similarities between Goidelic languages

Irish Gaelic	Argyll Gaelic	Northern Scottish Gaelic	English
ascaill	asgaill	achlais	armpit
citeal	ceatal	coire	kettle
comharsa	coimhearsnach	nàbaidh	neighbour
cosúil	cosail	coltach	like, resembling
dreoilín	dreòlan	dreathann-donn	wren

go raibh maith agat	gun robh maith agad	tapadh leat	thank you
gruaig	gruag	falt	hair of the head
olann	olann	clòimh	wool
sé	sè	sia	six
siopa	siop	bùth	shop

Similarly, most Scottish Gaelic speakers would find the Donegal (Ulster) dialect of Irish more readily comprehensible than those spoken further south in Ireland (the dialectal variance within Irish is more marked than that within Scottish Gaelic). This can be illustrated by the sentence: 'How are you?'

Table 4 How are you?

Scottish	Ciamar a tha thu? / Dè mar a tha thu?
Ulster (north west Ireland)	Cad é mar atá tú?
Connacht (central west Ireland)	Cén chaoi a bhfuil tú?
Munster (south west Ireland)	Conas atá tú?

But this is only a rule of thumb and, perhaps paradoxically, Munster forms can sometimes seem familiar to Scots; for 'How are you?', for example, some Scottish Gaelic speakers would say: 'Cionnas a tha thu?'!

Despite the obvious similarities, there are some fairly significant differences between Scottish and Irish Gaelic that allow them to be classified now as sister languages, rather than dialects of the one tongue (which would have been the case a few hundred years ago, when Gaelic was spoken continously from Cork to Caithness).

The simple present verbal tense, still a part of Irish Gaelic, has been replaced in Scottish Gaelic by the present continous, employing a verbal noun. Thus, the Irish *tuigim* ('I understand') is paralleled by the Scottish *tha mi a' tuigsinn* (literally 'I am at understanding'). And an old common negative verbal form *nichon* has been abbreviated differently in each country, giving *ní* in Ireland and *chan* in Scotland (although *chan* is also found in Ulster). Thus we get *chan eil airgead agam* ('I don't have money') in Scottish Gaelic and *níl airgead agam* in Irish.

The accents, which indicate vowel lengthening, are different in each language. In Irish they are all acute and in Scottish Gaelic, following reform of the orthography in the early 1980s, they are all grave. Thus, welcome signs in Ireland say '*Fáilte*' whereas in Scotland they proclaim '*Fàilte*'. Some words bear emphasis on the final syllable in Irish, particularly in southern dialects, whereas Scottish Gaelic almost always places the emphasis on the first syllable of a word. Thus salmon is *bradan* (Scottish) and *bradán* (Irish); bread is *aran* (Scottish) and *arán* (Irish).

Scottish Gaelic has retained the classical Gaelic usage of the plural personal pronoun *sibh* in order to show respect to an individual (as with *vous* in French). Thus, in speaking to a person a generation older, a Scot would say *'Ciamar a tha sibh?'* rather than using the singular, familiar *'Ciamar a tha thu?'* In contrast, an Irish speaker would only ever use *sibh* to speak to more than one person.

The rules for inflexion, that is the modification of a word in relation to grammatical requirements, also vary a little between Irish and Scottish Gaelic, and their vocabularies have been differentially affected by neighbouring tongues. For example, Scottish Gaelic has borrowed loanwords from Norse and Scots, which are not generally paralleled in Irish

(although Irish does have some Norse borrowings). However, they have both borrowed heavily, and similarly, from English.

The softer consonant sounds characteristic of Scottish Gaelic are the result, not only of a greater amount of lenition (a softening of consonants indicated in writing by an intrusive 'h' following the lenited consonant), but also of pre-aspiration (where an intrusive 'h' or 'ch' is pronounced, but not written, before the consonant). The latter is not present in Irish, but is found in Icelandic, Faroese and Norwegian (and intriguingly in philologically unrelated Arctic languages like Sami and Greenlandic). Pre-aspiration means that the word *mac* ('son') is pronounced 'mak' in Irish but 'machk' in Scottish Gaelic.

The orthographical systems of Scottish Gaelic and Irish Gaelic are quite similar, being modernised variants of what was employed for the writing of the classical Gaelic used by the educated elite of both countries; thus readers of Scottish Gaelic can get the gist of an Irish text and vice-versa. Manx, however, is substantially different and largely opaque to readers of the other two Gaelics. Its orthography was developed in the 17th century and it owes much to the English, and to a lesser degree Welsh, systems of representing sounds with letters. Some of the differences can be appreciated in the table below.

Table 5 Orthographical similarities between Scottish and Irish Gaelic, with differences from Manx Gaelic

Scottish Gaelic	Irish Gaelic	Manx Gaelic	English
a' bhean	an bhean	yn ven	the wife, woman
ceann	ceann	kione	a head
deoch	deoch	jough	a drink
Dimàirt	Dé Máirt	Jemayrt	Tuesday
gu leòr	go leor	di liooar	enough
iasg	iasc	eeast	a fish
loch	loch	logh	a lake
seòmar	seomra	shamyr	a room
teth	te	çheh	hot

2.7 The Celtic Diaspora

The movement of Celtic-speaking peoples to other parts of the world, which has led to millions of North Americans, Australians, and New Zealanders being able to claim Celtic ancestry, weakened the languages in their homelands. It also generally failed to establish linguistic beachheads in the recipient lands, most of which, being in the British Empire, were dominated linguistically by English. Scottish Gaelic, for example, flourished briefly in parts of Australia and New Zealand, but is now spoken in both countries only by small numbers of emigrant Scots and local enthusiasts. There are two notable exceptions to that general picture – Welsh in Patagonia and Scottish Gaelic in Nova Scotia.

There are still Welsh speakers in Argentina, descendants of a migration that began in 1865 to Chubut Province, with the express purpose of creating communities where the Welsh language and culture would not be destroyed by assimilation, as was happening with emigration to North America. They have struggled to retain their linguistic heritage in

the face of competition from Spanish but, with growing assistance from Wales, there is renewed interest in learning and promoting the Welsh language in Argentina[16].

The establishment of Scottish Gaelic in Canada began much earlier, in the 18th century, as a result of economic (and later forced) migration of Highland Scots. Gaelic-speaking communities existed in many parts of Canada, most notably Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia. In 1867, at the time of Canadian confederation, it is reckoned that Scottish Gaelic was Canada's third language after English and French, with some 200,000 speakers. At this stage many emigrant Irish Gaels also retained their native tongue, giving 19th century Canada an intensity of Gaelic heritage never experienced in any other country outside Scotland, Ireland or Man.

The standard-bearer for Scottish Gaelic in modern Canada, and indeed in North America as a whole, has been the province of Nova Scotia (*Alba Nuadh*), and most particularly Cape Breton Island. While the language has virtually died elsewhere in the country (beyond small groups of enthusiasts and learners), a population of native speakers has been maintained in Nova Scotia, although this is now down to just a few hundred people, compared to nearly 100,000, a third of the province's population, at the end of the 19th century.

Watch the video clip below to find out more about how Gaelic has been renewed in Nova Scotia.

Video content is not available in this format.

Speaking Gaelic in Nova Scotia

Courtesy of BBC

It is not only the language that has been retained in Nova Scotia; there is also a flourishing Gaelic-related culture there, with a strong heritage of music (notably fiddle playing) and dance (particularly step-dancing). It is the one place outside Scotland that has retained a tradition of singing group songs to accompany the waulking, or fulling, of tweed – a uniquely Scottish Gaelic phenomenon. Nova Scotian Gaels have made a major contribution to the global heritage of Gaelic storytelling, singing, writing and publishing, and the province is the only place outside Scotland where the Scottish Gaelic language is specifically supported by an arm of government. In 2006 the Nova Scotian Government created an Office of Gaelic Affairs, under the oversight of a Minister, to 'work with Nova Scotians in the renewal of Gaelic language and culture in the Province'. The Nova Scotian Gaelic community also created its own flag (below).

Figure 15 The flag of the Nova Scotian Gaelic community

2.8 Learners and enthusiasts worldwide

There are significant numbers of Gaelic learners outside Scotland, many of them utilising the opportunities for learning provided by internet resources, or engaging in distance learning courses like the *Cùrsa Inntrigidh* at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. Some of these are in countries which were traditional recipients of emigrant Gaels, such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United States and Argentina, as well as England, Wales and Ireland.

Video content is not available in this format.
Blogging in Gaelic from Los Angeles in the United States

But Gaelic learners, some of whom have achieved moderate or total fluency, are also to be found in countries as diverse as Brazil, China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Hungary, Poland, Austria and Switzerland. Most of these are not descendants of emigrant Gaels, but people of varied cultural backgrounds who have taken an interest in Gaelic as individuals, having been attracted to the language in a variety of ways, such as through music, storytelling, an interest in Celtic heritage or history, or falling in love with the landscape and/or people of the Gàidhealtachd.

The most numerous of this latter group are to be found in Germany. Michael Klevenhaus is a fluent Gaelic-speaking German who has written a handbook in German for students of Gaelic (*Schottisch-Gälisch: Wort für Wort*), and who teaches the language to students at the University of Bonn. A considerable number of Germans have learned Gaelic to fluency and some are now making a living within the Gaelic economy in Scotland.
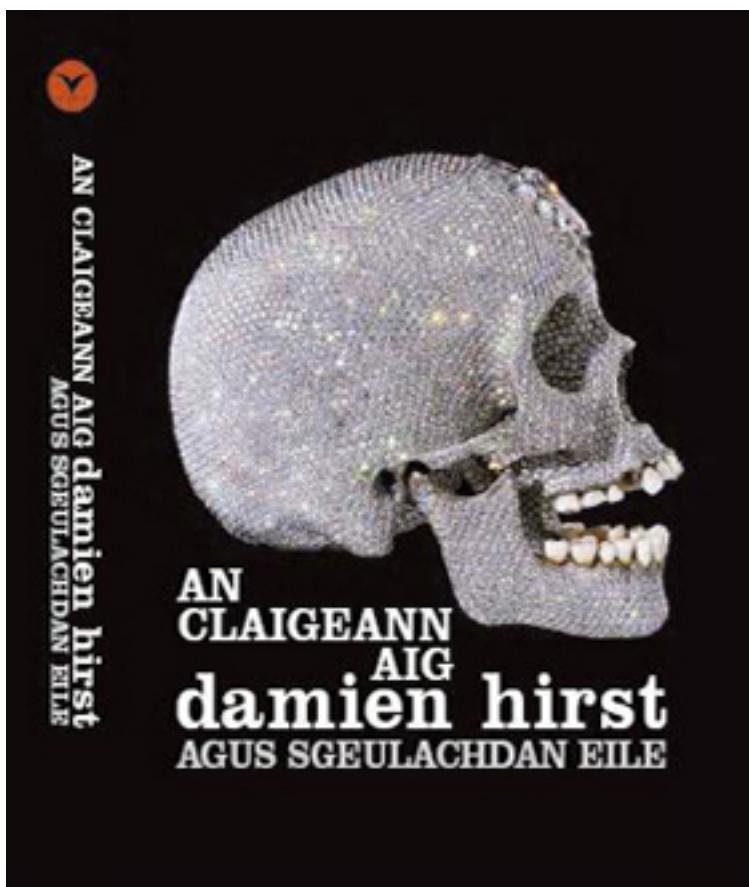
Figure 16 A collection of modern short stories written and published in Gaelic (above) then translated into German (below)

Gaelic learners are an important addition to the modern world of Gaelic, demonstrating (to native Scots among others!) that the language can not only be learned to fluency as an adult without too much difficulty, but that it possesses a powerful attractiveness to people outside its traditional community, who will bring with them new energy and vision.

3 Gaelic in the modern era

3.1 Who speaks Gaelic?

3.1.1 I do!

'*Mise*', in answer to the question 'Who speaks Gaelic?', means 'I do'. 'Mise' is pronounced 'mish-uh'.

It also means 'I am …', when someone is introducing himself or herself. Here three Gaelic speakers living in Scotland in 2011 tell you a little about themselves.

Karen

'*Mise* Karen. I'm 18 years old and I have lived in Inverness all my life. My Grampa's family were native Gaelic speakers and my parents wanted me to learn the language too. I'm very pleased I did. I went to the Gaelic Medium Unit in Inverness and have been lucky to have had so many opportunities especially on the music aspect since. This September I'm off to Glasgow University to study Gaelic and History and perhaps Politics.'

Crìsdean

'*Mise* Crìsdean. I spoke English and French at home and learned Gaelic in school and in a Gaelic college. I have had various jobs in the Gaelic world.'

Dòmhnall-Iain

'*Mise* Dòmhnall-Iain. I was brought up in a Gaelic speaking community in the Western Isles but have mostly lived and worked in cities such as Glasgow and Inverness. I use Gaelic regularly, at home, socially and when working.'

3.1.2 The big picture

There were 58,652 people in Scotland who spoke Gaelic at the time of the 2001 National Census, while a further 33,700 could understand the language.

Of the Gaelic speakers, 33,315 (57 per cent of the total) lived in the historical Gaelic heartland of the Highlands and Islands. The Western Isles (15,723 speakers) had the highest concentration at 62.3 per cent, with several parishes at or over 80 per cent. The

Isle of Skye (3,999) was 35.5 per cent Gaelic speaking in 2001, with one parish at over 70 per cent. Argyll & Bute and the Highland Council area (minus Skye) accounted for the most of the remaining 13,593, including 2,820 in the City of Inverness. Gaelic is in everyday use in many of these communities, particularly in the Western Isles and Skye.

Table 6 Summary of Gaelic-speaking areas in Scotland

Area	Gaelic
Eilean Siar (Western Isles)	15,723
Skye & Lochalsh	3,999
Rest of Highland (Mainland)	8,670
Argyll & Bute	4,168
Other main Gaelic areas	755
Total, Gaelic areas	**33,315**

There were 25,337 Gaelic speakers outwith the traditional Gaelic area in 2001. They could be found in all parts of Scotland, with significant concentrations in cities such as Glasgow (5,731), Edinburgh (3,132) and Aberdeen (1,420). Many of these speakers also use Gaelic on a regular basis, both in social and more formal contexts, in effect forming loosely-knit sub-communities within these cities.

Table 7 Summary of the number of Gaelic speakers in Scotland

Area	Gaelic
Total, Gaelic areas	33,315
Rest of Scotland	25,337
Total	**58,652**

A detailed map showing the percentage of Gaelic speakers in all parishes in Scotland is contained in the General Register Office (GRO) Report on the 2001 Census and can be accessed here.

The average age of the Gaelic speakers recorded in the 2001 Census, at 45.9 years, was 18 per cent higher than the Scottish average of 39. This age imbalance is also evident from comparison of the following age bands:

Table 8 Average age of Gaelic speakers

Age group	Gaelic speakers
0-20 years	10,158
45-64 years	16,855

This graph, compiled by research agency Sgrùd, sets out the situation in graphic form.
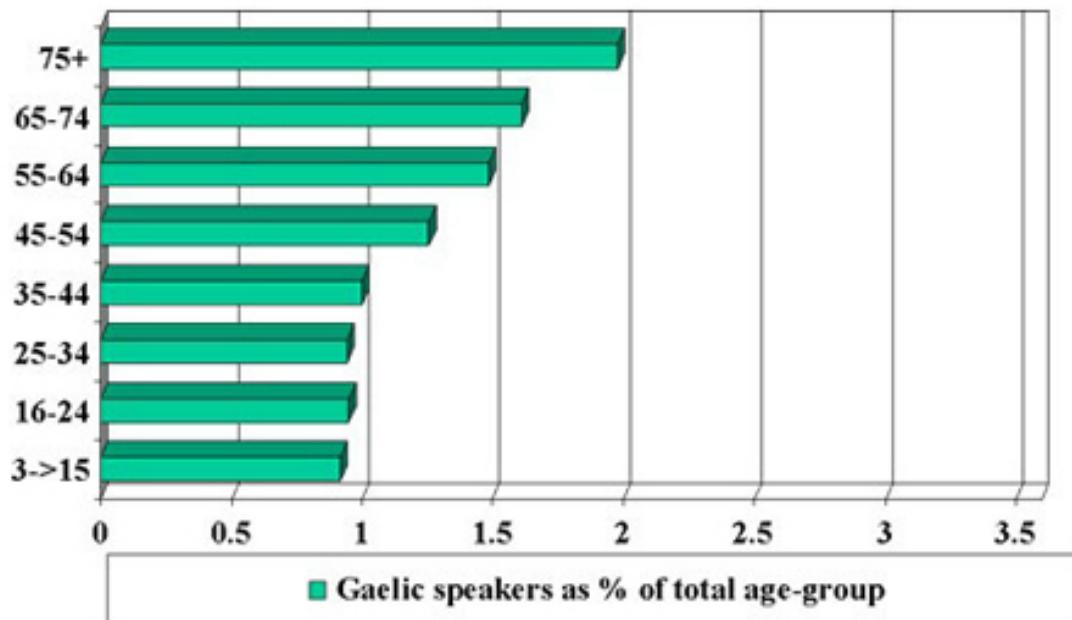
Analysis: K. MacKinnon © 2003 SGRÙD Research. Click here for additional graphs.

Most of the older Gaelic speakers are native speakers who have learned the language in the home and community, usually (although not in all cases) in the Highlands and Islands. Among the younger generation, the majority now learn the language in school, especially through Gaelic medium education: they can be found throughout Scotland. There are also a growing number of adult learners, including many non-Scots.

Box 1

Detailed information from the 2001 Census Gaelic Report can be accessed from the following sites:

- Text
- Tables
- Charts

3.2 Decline

Having been brought to Scotland from Ireland in the early part of the millennium, Gaelic had become the dominant language of the country by the end of that millennium. However, it has been in decline for most of the period since then, for a variety of reasons.

A combination of political, economic, cultural and educational factors described above had, by the beginning of the 20th century, launched a spiral of decline which resulted in the 254,415 Gaelic speakers of 1891 falling, decade by decade, to 58,652 by 2001, as shown on this graph (compiled by the research agency Sgrùd):

A bar chart showing Numbers of Gaelic speakers from 1881 to 2001. Vertical axis from 0 to 300,000. Source: GROS Gaelic Reports 1961-91; GROS 13.02.03
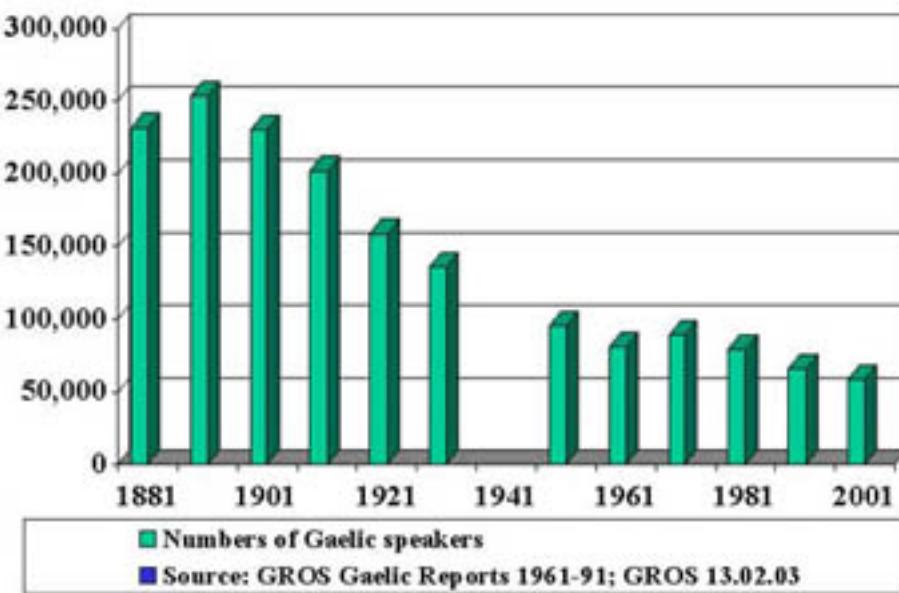
3.2.1 Politics and economics

The displacement of Gaelic by Norman French at the court of King Malcolm Canmore and Queen Margaret in the 11th century is an early milestone in this process. This was followed by the gradual establishment of Scots as the language of the new Lowland burghs from the 12th century. Over the course of the following centuries, Gaelic has been driven back inexorably towards the north and west of the country.

Attempts by the Scottish Crown to bring the Highland and Islands under their control included legislation, such as the Statutes of Iona of 1609, aimed at weakening Gaelic, in particular among the clan aristocracy. The statutes stipulated, for example, that the eldest sons of clan chiefs were to be educated in English at Lowland schools.

Figure 17 Galleys, a symbol of the power of the Highland clans were also banned by the Statutes of Iona

A state of 'diglossia' developed over time in which English became the language of government and public life, with Gaelic confined for the most part to social interaction in lower-status home-neighbourhood domains.

In modern times, the main issue has been lack of positive support for Gaelic in law rather than active discrimination against it. This has been the focus of a political campaign which is described in the next section.

The Gaelic speaking heartland of the Highlands and Islands has suffered particularly badly from poverty, unemployment and emigration over the years, accentuated by events such as the Clearances and potato famine of the 19th century and the world wars of the 20th. This has impacted on Gaelic in two main ways.

Firstly, it has meant that Gaelic-speaking communities have been broken up and the Gaelic speakers, mostly young, dispersed to places like Glasgow or Canada.

More insidiously, the economic situation created a widespread perception that Gaelic was of little or no financial value, which in its turn led to schools 'educating children for exile' and to parents opting against passing the language on to their children.

3.2.3 Education and cultural influences

Although the private, mostly church-based, organisations which had run school education in the Highlands before then had provided education in Gaelic, the 1872 Education (Scotland) Act, which made school education compulsory in Scotland, completely ignored the existence of the language. As a consequence, Gaelic came to be effectively excluded from the schools, especially as language of teaching, and indeed was often positively discriminated against.

Box 2

'Archy has a vivid memory of when he was very young sitting on his grandfather's knees, gazing into his intensely blue eyes and white beard, and being told about the persecution the children were subjected to when his grandfather, Archibald, was a boy at school for speaking in Gaelic. They were severely belted and a tessera board (*maide-crochaidh*) was hung round their neck and if they had not betrayed another Gaelic speaking class-mate by 4pm they got another belting. If the child had not handed over the board by the morning attendance at school another belting was administered and so on.'

The Shielfoot Macphersons and a Journey of Discovery' by Ewen S. L. MacPherson, in *Creag Dhubh* 1994 No. 46, the magazine of the Clan MacPherson Association

Various campaigns have been waged and curricular initiatives launched over the years to remedy this situation. The 1918 Education Act which required authorities in Gaelic areas 'to make adequate provision for Gaelic', the Inverness-shire Gaelic Education Scheme, the Western Isles Bilingual Education Project and, most recently, Gaelic medium education (GME) are examples of this, which will be described in the next section.

In the period following the Second World War, and especially from the 1960s on, the Highlands and Islands became more open to outside cultural influences, mainly through television and the access it gave to the burgeoning popular culture of that period. One result of this was to make Gaelic and all that went with it seem outdated to the young, leading many to opt out of speaking Gaelic, often contrary to parental wishes and despite educational initiatives such as the Western Isles Bilingual Education Project.

3.3 Revival

Phase 1

The 19th century in the Highlands was a time of poverty and conflict but things were beginning to change for the better by its end. In Gaelic, 1891 saw the launch of the first organisation set up in support of the language. An Comunn Gàidhealach's first achievement was to create a major music festival, the Mod, which continues to this day to promote Gaelic music and to raise the profile of the language. It also set up local branches and, at national level, took part in political campaigns such as that which led to the inclusion of a clause in the 1918 Education (Scotland) Act. This act gave official recognition to Gaelic by requiring the new educational authorities 'make adequate provision for Gaelic in Gaelic-speaking areas'.

Figure 18 The founders of An Comunn Gàidhealach

Phase 2

The next phase of the Gaelic revival began just after the Second World War, running through to around 1980, and saw the voluntary sector, represented by An Comunn, being overtaken by a new cadre of activists. They initiated important developments in Gaelic publishing, broadcasting and education, either by gaining positions of influence within existing institutions (such as the BBC) or by setting up parallel systems for Gaelic (such as the Gaelic Books Council from 1968).

The main characteristic of this phase was the evolution of a professional infrastructure for Gaelic development, largely funded from the public purse.

The emphasis in education now was on developing Gaelic as a medium of teaching. The Inverness-shire Gaelic Education Scheme (in the 1960s and 1970s) and the Western Isles Bilingual Education Project (from 1975) are examples of this, both aiming to encourage Gaelic-speaking pupils to use the language 'as a natural language for the exploration and description of experience'.

Phase 3

There are three main strands to the third phase of the Gaelic revival.

Gaelic medium immersion education (GME), based on a Welsh model, was one of these. Starting in the early 1980s this has now spread throughout the country, with some 4,000 youngsters involved at all stages.

Figure 19 'Latha Mòr na Gàidhlig' (The Big Gaelic Day), held in the Highlands in 2005,

brought together 500 GME pupils from throughout Scotland.

In immersion education children are taught almost entirely in the target language, even where most of them do not speak it. The approximately 80 per cent of children in GME who come from non-Gaelic speaking homes learn to understand the language quickly and are able to communicate freely in it by the end of their schooling.

GME is regarded as the best hope for the future of Gaelic, creating new Gaelic speakers in communities where parents no longer have the language.

Foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig aig ìre bun-sgoile
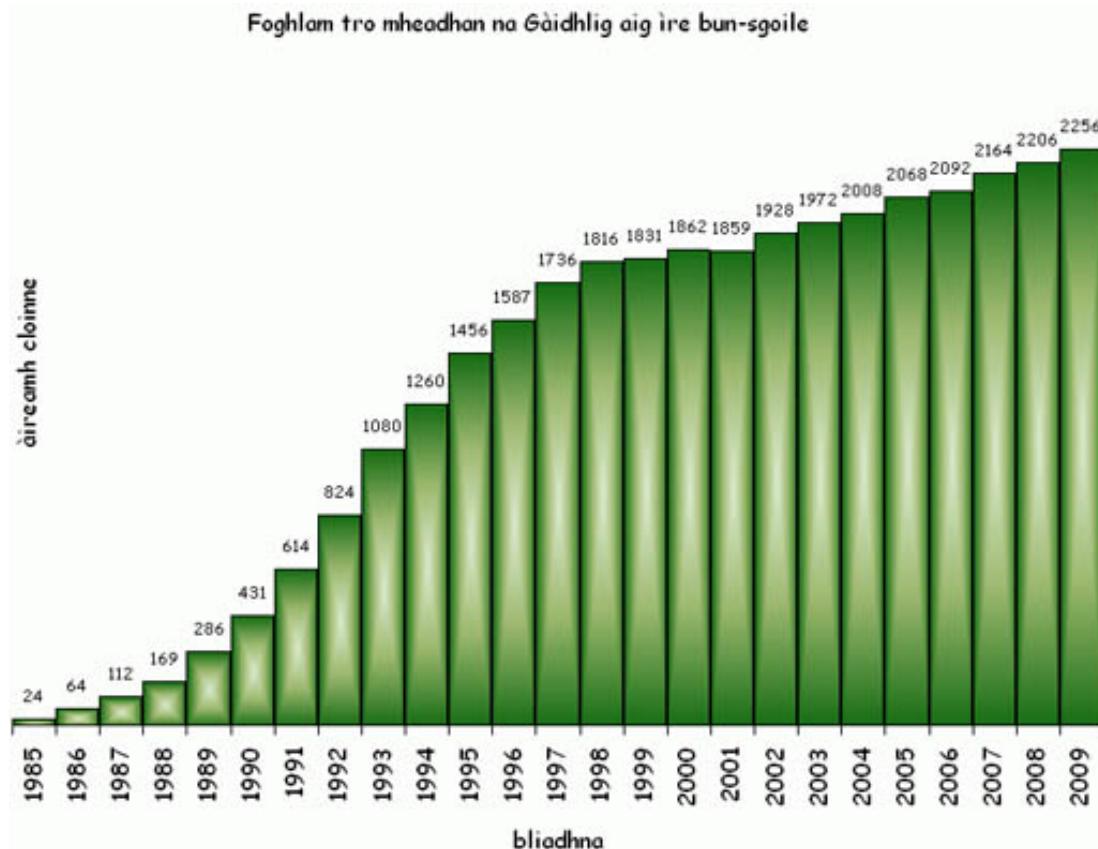
Figure 20 Gaelic Medium Primary School Education pupil numbers

There are also learners' classes in primary and secondary schools. Information on Gaelic education generally is available here.

The second strand in the revival has included a renaissance in Gaelic (and Celtic) music - which continues to gain popularity both among Gaels and in the wider Scottish public - and the development of a comprehensive broadcasting service in Gaelic, including a dedicated Gaelic television channel (described more fully in the case studies).

The third strand in the revival has been the adoption by the Scottish Parliament of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act in 2005. This created a non-governmental public body, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, which advises the government on Gaelic. The body is also required to produce a national plan for Gaelic and to assist other public bodies in producing plans. The key principle enshrined in the Act is that 'the Gaelic and English languages should be accorded equal respect'. A copy of the Act (2005) and of Bòrd na Gàidhlig's first National Plan for Gaelic (2007) can be accessed here and an overview can be seen in the box below.

Box 3 Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005

The Act – an Overview

3. The Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 establishes a body, Bòrd na Gàidhlig (the Bòrd), to promote the use and understanding of the Gaelic language and enables the Bòrd to require certain public bodies to prepare and implement plans which will set out how they will use the Gaelic language in the exercise of their functions.

4. Section 1 establishes the Bòrd with the functions of promoting the use and understanding of the Gaelic language; promoting and advising on Gaelic language, culture and education matters; and reporting to the Scottish Ministers on the implementation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in relation to the Gaelic language.

5. Section 2 requires the Bòrd to develop a national Gaelic language plan setting out how it proposes to exercise those functions.

6. Sections 3 to 8 enable the Bòrd to require relevant public authorities to prepare and implement Gaelic language plans. These plans will set out how the public authority will use the language in connection with the exercise of its functions.

7. Section 9 provides for the Bòrd to issue guidance on the provision and development of Gaelic education.

Prognosis

The Gaelic revival of the past 100 years has followed two contrasting trajectories, one showing a steady improvement in the language's status while the other shows the number of Gaelic speakers steadily falling (although the rate is slowing down). Bòrd na Gàidhlig's National Plan for Gaelic (2007) set a target of 65,000 Gaelic speakers by 2021. While some regard this as optimistic, it does seem likely that the number will stabilise in the medium term, albeit at a lower figure than this target.

3.4 Gaelic alive!

Education

Pupils start GME at an early age, usually in a Gaelic playgroup or nursery class. There are two all-Gaelic primary schools (in Inverness and Glasgow); otherwise GME is delivered as classes in two-language schools. Secondary GME provision is patchy, but all pupils in primary GME have the option of taking language classes in secondary school that lead to the 'Gàidhlig' (or fluent speaker) SQA exams.

Figure 21 The purpose-built Inverness Gaelic school, known as 'Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis' (BSGI), which opened in 2007.

For more information you can access the school website here.

Community

Gaelic is in everyday use in many communities, especially in the Western Isles and Skye but also, in a more limited way, in the Gaelic communities-within-communities of the cities. This can mean buying the groceries in the local shop or supermarket, socialising in a club or pub or taking part in a local radio programme.

Figure 22 Harris, a stronghold of the Gaelic language

Many Churches – Protestant and Catholic – use Gaelic in worship. One of the most distinctive, and impressive, forms of Gaelic culture, in fact, is the unaccompanied psalm singing which has evolved over the centuries in the Presbyterian church in the Islands. The clip below is an example from Lewis.

> View at: youtube:fMqKxpq6QAE
>
> Unaccompanied psalm singing from Lewis

Broadcasting

MG ALBA is funded by the Scottish Government in order to enable quality television programmes to be made and shown in Gaelic. In partnership with the BBC it has established BBC ALBA, a Gaelic digital TV channel (available on Freeview from 2011). For information on MG ALBA visit their website.

BBC ALBA provides a comprehensive broadcasting service in Gaelic, on radio, television and the internet, including children's programming, a news and current affairs service and light entertainment, including sport. The video below is an example of the type of programming BBC Alba provides.

> Video content is not available in this format.

An extract from BBC Alba's features programme *Eorpa*

Courtesy of BBC

Music

Celtic (including Gaelic) music has enjoyed a remarkable growth in popularity in recent years, as evidenced by the success of festivals such as Blas (in the Highlands), HebCelt (Western Isles) and Celtic Connections (Glasgow).

For more information on the festivals visit:

* www.blas-festival.com
* www.hebceltfest.com
* www.celticconnections.com

You can watch video clips from the 2010 BLAS festival here.

Fèisean are teaching festivals at which the learners, who are mostly young, can learn a wide variety of Gaelic cultural skills from professional tutors.

There are some 40 *fèisean* at present, supported by a national organisation, Fèisean nan Gàidheal. Their map, shown here, shows the location of *fèisean* taking place in 2011.

Gaelic *mods*, national and local, are competitive festivals of Gaelic music catering for both adults and children. For more information go here.

Aspects of the Gaelic heritage which are less directly related to the language have also been experiencing a revival in recent years. For example, traditional dancing, such as stepdance which has been reintroduced from Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, is becoming increasingly popular. For information visit Dannsa's website or this online Scottish dancing resource. We also cover the importance of music and dancing in Section 6.

Signage

The Gaelic Language Act's aspiration of 'equal respect' for Gaelic and English has resulted in an increase in the visual presence of the language, for example on external and internal building signage, road signs and commercial products.

Gaelic is also use sometimes for public announcements, for example on ferries to the Western Isles.

Figure 23 Gaelic signage in Scotland (above and below)

Family

Many parents with children in GME learn Gaelic in order to support their children's learning. Apart from classes there are residential events in which families can participate together. The photo below is from one such event in Skye in 2006. The following link is to CNAG's 'Cuir is Fàs' magazine, which contains a report of an event held in Lewis in 2010.

Figure 24 Parents and children at a GME residential learning event in Skye in 2006

As well as those families which enrol their children in GME, there are also families where one or more parent speaks Gaelic and the language is passed on to the next generation in the traditional way at home (and usually reinforced by GME). There is now the possibility that this can once again become the norm, given that there is once again a generation of Gaelic speakers of child-raising age.

4 Gaelic – the rationale

4.1 Bilingualism

Bilingualism is the norm in most of the world and is likely to become even more so in the future. Research has shown that speaking two (or more) languages has distinct benefits for the individual and for society at large.

4.1.1 The benefits to the individual

Up to the 1960s, most of the research on bilingualism focused on immigrant populations in the United States and usually concluded that bilingual children did less well in intelligence tests than their single-language counterparts, reinforcing the popular view of the time that speaking two languages 'confuses the minds of children'. This research is now regarded as unreliable for a number of reasons, but chiefly because it failed to take account of the socio-economic backgrounds of the young people tested.

A major research project carried out in Montreal in 1962 was the first to question the received wisdom on this matter. The linguists Elizabeth Peal and Wallace Lambert compared the performance in tests of 'balanced bilinguals' – i.e., children who were equally fluent in French and English – with monolinguals of the same age and with a similar socio-economic background. They found that the bilinguals performed better in most of the tests and they concluded that 'a bilingual child is a youngster whose experience with two language systems seems to have left him with a mental flexibility, a superiority in concept formation, a more diversified set of mental abilities.'

Although the Peal/Lambert study has, in its turn, been shown to have flaws, it set the tone for much of the research that followed, which has consistently shown the relationship between bilingualism and children's cognitive development in a positive light.

Recent research has aimed to define this relationship more precisely. Some studies have focused on the languages themselves, including the bilingual's competence in them: one expert, for example, concluded that there is a 'threshold level' at which the beneficial effects of bilingualism come into play. The relative status of the languages has also been looked at, one study suggesting that 'where the home language is that of the majority, 'additive' bilingualism is best promoted by providing initial instruction in the second language' (this is the norm in Gaelic medium education).

Some researchers have tried to identify the precise aspects of 'cognitive development' which are affected by bilingualism. Ellen Bialystok, of York University, Toronto, for example, found in several studies that bilingual children were better at prioritising and multi-tasking than monolinguals and suggested that the 'juggling of two languages' which bilingualism implies strengthens the brain's 'executive control system'. While most of Bialystok's work involves children, in February 2011 she published a paper which concluded that using two languages appeared to delay the onset of Alzheimer's Disease in older people, for similar reasons.

Figure 25 Ellen Bialystok

A fuller account of Ellen Bialystok's work can be found in her 'Cognitive effects of bilingualism: How linguistic experience leads to cognitive change' in *The International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* (2007).

In conclusion, while the relationship between bilingualism and cognitive development is a complex one, a broad consensus is beginning to emerge which is summarised as follows by Anne Brasier of Kagoshima University (Japan) in *The relationship between bilingualism and the cognitive development of bilingual children* (1999):

> 'Research has overwhelmingly concluded that bilingualism per se does not have any negative effects on cognition. In fact the opposite increasingly appears to be the case: that high levels of bilingualism have accelerating effects on children's cognitive development.'

4.1.2 Learning other languages

Individuals who have become fluent in two languages at an early age are often more successful at learning other languages than those who have not. This is also true of language communities (e.g. Holland or Switzerland). There are several reasons for this.

One is that having mastered a second language gives the learner the confidence to tackle, and to use, a third (or fourth). Since self-consciousness is one of the major factors which inhibits language learning in adults, this is an important advantage.

In addition, bilinguals develop learning techniques and coping strategies when acquiring their second language that they can transfer to new language situations, especially those involving immersion in a new language such as moving to a foreign country.

Research has shown that bilingual children's 'metalinguistic ability' is more developed than that of their single-language counterparts, i.e. that they are better at distinguishing between the 'form' of language (*how* something is said) and its 'meaning' (*what* is said). One project, for example, tested whether children used 'semantic' (or meaning) cues to group words rather than simply going by the sound or shape of the word. It found that bilingual children were able to employ this more advanced approach at an earlier age.

Research on this subject continues but again there is a growing consensus that early bilingualism makes it easier to learn other languages. For a review of the research, click here.

Crìsdean 's story

'I was born and brought up on Skye in a Gaelic-speaking community but the languages we spoke at home were English and French (my father is French). I had the

opportunity to learn Gaelic when a Gaelic medium class opened in Portree Primary School.'

Figure 26

'When I left school I attended Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, Scotland's Gaelic college, and I have been working in the Gaelic world since then. I feel quite fortunate that I am able to speak Gaelic, as well as my first two languages.'

4.1.3 The benefits to the community

Box 4 Final report and recommendations of The Nuffield Languages Inquiry, 2000

From the foreword by Sir Trevor McDonald OBE and Sir John Boyd KCMG

Our mandate from the Nuffield Foundation, to look at the UK's capability in languages and to report on what we need to do as a nation to improve it, was timely. Every day we are confronted by evidence that we live in a shrinking world. The breaking down of international barriers, a process which will move much further and faster in the course of this new century, has placed a premium on our ability to talk to our neighbours in the global village … The scale of what needs to be done has become ever more striking as our work has gone on. At the moment, by any reliable measure, we are doing badly. We talk about communication but don't always communicate. There is enthusiasm for languages but it is patchy. Educational provision is fragmented, achievement poorly measured, continuity not very evident. In the language of our time, there is a lack of joined-up thinking.

Box 5 Foreign languages in the upper secondary school: the causes of decline

Joanna McPake, Lindsay Lyall (SCRE); Richard Johnstone, Lesley Low (University of Stirling)

Introduction

In November 1996, researchers at the Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) and the Institute of Education at the University of Stirling began a study of the causes of decline in uptake of Higher courses in modern languages in Scottish secondary schools. The study was funded by The Scottish Office Education and Industry Department (SOEID)

in response to evidence from the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) that the numbers of students entered for Higher examinations in modern languages had fallen by approximately 50 per cent between 1976 and 1996, and consequent widespread concern about the effects of declining capability in modern languages on Scottish industry and trade and on Scotland's role within Europe.

There is a growing consensus in Scotland and in the UK more widely that:

- learning other languages is increasingly important for us in the modern world
- we continue to lag behind other countries in this regard.

While commentators are usually thinking of languages like German or Chinese when making such comments, this also strengthens the case for Gaelic in Scotland, in that:

- the process of learning one language, as shown above, makes it easier to learn another, whatever the languages
- Gaelic is taught and used across Scotland, making it relatively accessible as a language with which to start the language learning process
- learning a second language such as Gaelic creates 'another window on the world', contributing to the multi-cultural mindset that is so important in the modern world
- in particular, it can help broaden the linguistic horizons of a society that has, for the most part, become reconciled to speaking only one language, English, and tends to lack the confidence and motivation necessary to learn others.

In addition, those involved in planning the teaching of other languages can learn a good deal from the successful approaches developed in Gaelic - in particular the immersion method with young children and variations on it for adult learners.

4.2 Why learn Gaelic?

4.2.1 A cultural answer

One of the main reasons that people living in Scotland start learning Gaelic or enrol their children in GME is because they feel that the language is an important part of the Scottish heritage and identity, as well as a living component of the diverse society that is modern Scotland.

As discussed in Section 1.3, Gaelic's contribution to the Scottish identity extends to the country's name, 'Scoti' being the Romans' name for the Gaelic-speakers from Ireland whom they encountered here. The origin of many Scottish icons, such as tartan, is also closely associated with Gaelic, and Gaelic's rich musical tradition has influenced Scottish music generally, as well as being popular in its own right.

Place names preserve a memory of the cultures that have inhabited an area in times gone by and that have contributed to its present character. Most parts of Scotland have names that indicate a Gaelic past. Some of these terms are geographical: Troon in Ayrshire, for example, is sometimes referred to as An t-sròn - the nose, i.e. the bill-like headland which is a prominent feature of Troon harbour. Others can throw a light on an area's forgotten history. Dalneigh, for example, is the name of a housing estate in the city of Inverness but its original Gaelic name – 'Dail an Eich' or 'horse pasture' – speaks of a more agricultural

past. Ironically, a tenuous link with that past has been established recently with the setting up of an allotments scheme in Dalneigh.
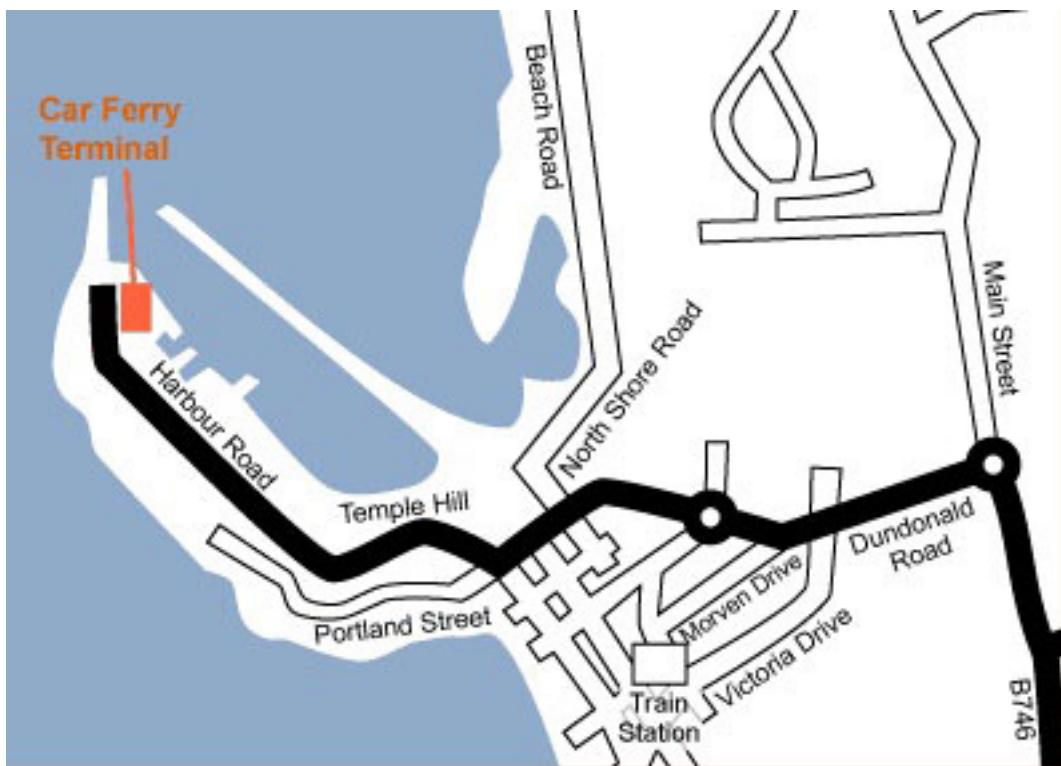
Figure 27 A map of *An t-sròn*, 'the nose'

If you are interested in Gaelic place names and would like more information, and a gazeteer of Gaelic names, visit the
Ainmean-Àite na h-Alba/Gaelic Place Names of Scotland website.

4.2.2 A practical answer

There are also more pragmatic reasons why parents and others show an interest in learning Gaelic – or having their children learn it - namely that there is a wide range of career opportunities for which Gaelic is at least an advantage and often a requirement.

Here are some examples of people who use Gaelic in their work.

Iain's story

Figure 28

'I am from South Uist and I have lived here almost all my life. I was brought up speaking Gaelic – apparently when I went to school I had very little English! I studied at Stirling University, graduating from there with a degree in English literature in 2008 I

am now working for the BBC as a journalist in Uist and Barra, travelling between the islands to report on local news. When I am not doing that I can usually be found working on the family croft.'

Sìne's story

Figure 29

'I was born and raised in Cape Breton, Canada where I and my three brothers grew up speaking Gaelic. I came to Scotland in 1998 and took a degree in the Gaelic College, Skye. I trained as a teacher and am now a Gaelic medium primary teacher in the Highlands. My husband and I live in Inverness and we have a little girl.'

4.3 The rights of linguistic minorities

4.3.1 Introduction

Another possible answer to the question, 'Why should we support a minority language like Gaelic?' is that the rights of linguistic minorities are enshrined in both international and national law, as described in the next four sections.

4.3.2 United Nations

The United Nations, at its 92nd plenary meeting on 18 December 1992, adopted a Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, Article 1 of which requires that

1. States shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity.

2. States shall adopt appropriate legislative and other measures to achieve those ends.

4.3.3 European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

Article 22 of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights states, as a broad principle, that: 'The Union respects cultural, religious and linguistic diversity.'

This is defined more clearly in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages adopted by the Council of Europe in 1992, the purpose of which is to encourage the preservation and promotion of indigenous languages throughout Europe.

The UK Government signed the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in 2000 and it was ratified by the UK Parliament in 2001. The Council of Europe's Committee of Experts visits countries that have signed up to the Charter on a regular basis in order to monitor its implementation.

4.3.4 Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act

On 21 April 2005 the Scottish Parliament passed the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act. The purpose of the act, in the language of its introductory text, is:

> 'To establish a body having functions exercisable with a view to securing the status of the Gaelic language as an official language of Scotland commanding equal respect to the English language, including the functions of preparing a national Gaelic language plan, of requiring certain public authorities to prepare and publish Gaelic language plans in connection with the exercise of their functions and to maintain and implement such plans, and of issuing guidance in relation to Gaelic education.'

Box 6 Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005

The Act – an overview

1. These Explanatory Notes have been prepared by the Scottish Executive in order to assist the reader of the Act. They do not form part of the Act and have not been endorsed by the Parliament.

2. The Notes should be read in conjunction with the Act. They are not, and are not meant to be, a comprehensive description of the Act. So where a section or schedule, or part of a section or schedule, does not seem to require any explanation or comment, none is given.

3. The Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 establishes a body, Bòrd na Gàidhlig (the Bòrd), to promote the use and understanding of the Gaelic language and enables the Bòrd to require certain public bodies to prepare and implement plans which will set out how they will use the Gaelic language in the exercise of their functions.

4. Section 1 establishes the Bòrd with the functions of promoting the use and understanding of the Gaelic language; promoting and advising on Gaelic

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language, culture and education matters; and reporting to the Scottish Ministers on the implementation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in relation to the Gaelic language.

5. Section 2 requires the Bòrd to develop a national Gaelic language plan setting out how it proposes to exercise those functions.

6. Sections 3 to 8 enable the Bòrd to require relevant public authorities to prepare and implement Gaelic language plans. These plans will set out how the public authority will use the language in connection with the exercise of its functions.

7. Section 9 provides for the Bòrd to issue guidance on the provision and development of Gaelic education.

This overview forms an introduction to the 2005 act. A copy of the act and of Bòrd na Gàidhlig's first National Plan for Gaelic (2007) may be accessed here.

Bòrd na Gàidhlig was constituted in 2005 as the body referred to in the Act. It produced a National Plan for Gaelic (including a national strategy for Gaelic education) in 2007 and has since overseen the production of Gaelic Plans by a number of public bodies.

4.4 Home and abroad: examples of bilingualism

4.4.1 Te Reo Maori

In most parts of the world, bilingualism (or multilingualism) is the norm. There are minority languages like Gaelic in most countries, often with similar problems and aspirations. Increasingly, minority language communities are becoming aware of what they have in common and what they can learn from each other.

The Maori language from New Zealand has been the big success story on the minority language scene in recent years. Basing their approach on the writings of the American sociolinguist, Joshua Fishman – and in particular his *Reversing Language Shift* of 1991 – the Maori language community, with the help of the New Zealand government, put a strategy in place which has transformed the fortunes of the language and become a model of good practice by minority language communities worldwide.

What they have achieved so far gives hope to threatened language communities, such as Gaelic, that language decline can be reversed if there is the will.

Tipene Chrisp, policy manager in the New Zealand government's Ministry of Maori Development, described their strategy in a presentation to a conference on Gaelic organised by the Highland Council in Inverness in 2005.

> 'By the late 1970s, it was predicted that the Maori language would be dead by 2010. This dire prediction sparked significant action to revitalise Maori in the early 1980s.
>
> There was some recognition of the importance of home and community in this early phase. However, this recognition was quickly overtaken by our emphasis on formal education and broadcasting as the primary means for language revitalisation. It wasn't until the Maori Language Conference of 1995 that home and community language development returned to the agenda.

The renewed emphasis on home and community language development was based on Fishman's focus on intergenerational language transmission. We absorbed this theoretical approach over time and were inspired by it. It has been adopted as the central platform of our strategy.

We realised quite early that Government cannot directly influence intergenerational language transmission. We can only take indirect measures that support the creation of an environment that is conducive to intergenerational language transmission in homes and communities. Our research indicated that there were three broad instruments for providing this indirect support:

- Incentives (mainly indirect, such as preferential access to particular schools)
- information (originally text-based for reasons of cost but now involving a range of media, including storylines in TV soaps)
- advice (delivered mainly through language planning at the community level and a system of family language mentors on the home front).'

The essence of the Maori language approach is that the family and the community are crucial to the continued survival of the language and, therefore, restoring 'intergenerational language transmission' is their principal aim. The *kohanga reo*, or 'language nests', which provide early immersion education in Maori, have played a key role in this strategy. The video clip below describes *kohanga reo*.

View at: youtube:WG2Abfglzq4

For information on the Maori language generally, visit He Korero mo Te reo Maori.

4.4.2 The bilingual poet

Aonghas MacNeacail, although he uses only the Gaelic form of his name, writes highly acclaimed poetry in both Gaelic and English. There are many journalists, actors and broadcasters who do the same, thus extending their range and marketability.

Figure 30 Aonghas MacNeacail

Aonghas's poem on Marilyn Monroe, written in both languages, is given below. Click here to visit Aonghas MacNeacail's website.

Marilyn Monroe by Aonghas Macneacail

òr 'na do ghruaig	gold in your hair

òr ann an ìnean do chas	gold in the nails on your feet
òr ann an ruisg chadalach do shùilean beò	gold in the sleepy lids of your living eyes
òr 'na do ghruaidhean, 'nam fathann athaidh	gold in your cheeks, in their rumour of a blush
òr ruadh do bhilean	red gold of your lips
òr sa ghualainn mhìn àrd a' fasgadh do smig	gold in the raised shoulder that shelters your chin
òr anns a' bhroilleach ghealltanachd	gold in your breasts, their promise
paisgte 'na bhad	enfolded in wisps
òr 'na do chneas seang, air miadan do chruachan	gold in your slender waist, on the meadows of your hip
ann an lùb nan sliasaid is	in the curve of thigh and
air glùin nan dìomhaireachd	on your knee of mysteries
rinn d' adhbrainn òrach	your golden ankle gave
dannsa caol	slim dances
do gach sùil a shealladh	that any eye could see
airgead-beò 'na do chuislean	quicksilver in your veins
airgead-beò 'na do chridhe	quicksilver in your heart
airgead-beò gu na h-iomaill	quicksilver to every corner
dhe d' anam	of your soul
agus d' osnadh, do ghàire	and your sighs, your laugh
do ghuth-seinn, do ghuth-labhairt	your singing, your speech
mar bhraoin de dh'òr	like a mist of gold
agus do gach fear a chùm	and to every man who kept you
air lios leaghteach nan dealbh thu	on the screen's dissolving field
òr, o	gold, from
bhàrr calgach do chlaiginn gu	the maned top of your skull
buinn rùisgte do chas	to the bare soles of your feet
òr, òr, òr,	gold, gold, gold,
beò no marbh	alive or dead
their cuid nach robh thu cho cùbhraidh	some say you weren't so fragrant
's iad a' deothal an t-sùigh	as they suck the substance
a sporan suilt òrach do bhèin	from the fertile purse of your skin
òr, òr, òr	gold, gold, gold

5 How the Gaelic language works

5.1 How do I say…?

Here are some common expressions in Gaelic. Listen to them by clicking on the audio link, then try saying them.

How are you?

Ciamar a tha thu?

> Audio content is not available in this format.

[I'm] fine.

Tha gu math.

> Audio content is not available in this format.

Good morning

Madainn mhath.*

> Audio content is not available in this format.

Good afternoon (or evening)

Feasgar math.*

> Audio content is not available in this format.

Come in.

Thig a-steach.

> Audio content is not available in this format.

Get out!

Mach à seo!

> Audio content is not available in this format.

Many thanks.

Mòran taing.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Cheers!

Slàinte!

Audio content is not available in this format.

What's doing?

Dè tha dol?

Audio content is not available in this format.

I'm busy.

Tha mi trang.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Can you say it again?

An can thu rithist e?

Audio content is not available in this format.

Please.

Mas e do thoil e.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Note: Nouns in Gaelic, as in many languages, can be *masculine* or *feminine*: that is why it is '*feasgar **math***' (masculine) but '*madainn **mhath***' (feminine).

5.2 Gaelic: some basics

5.2.1 Gaelic grammar – a taster

Gaelic is part of the 'Indo-European' family of languages and so is related, distantly, to languages like English and French, as is shown by the names for the numbers 1-3. Click on the audio links below to hear how these numbers are pronounced in Gaelic.

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Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Table 9 Numbers

	Gaelic	Italian	French	Danish	English
1	aon	uno	un	een	one
2	dà	due	deux	to	two
3	trì	tre	trois	tre	three

Their shared ancestry also means that Gaelic grammar has a lot in common with these languages, although there are also some differences. For example, unlike English (but like French) the adjective in Gaelic usually comes *after* the noun. An example is Gleann Mòr where '*gleann*' means 'glen' and '*mòr*' means 'big'. That is why the stress is on the last element in Highland names like Glenmore or Aviemore.

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The following is a typical Gaelic sentence, with explanatory notes:

Tha mi a' sgrìobhadh litir. (I am writing a letter.)

Audio content is not available in this format.

Table 10 Breaking down the sentence

1	2	3	4
Tha	mi	a' sgrìobhadh	litir.

1. '*Tha*' is the equivalent of 'am' in English. Although we say 'I am', 'you are', 'he is', it is always '*tha*' in Gaelic, i.e.: '*tha mi*', '*tha thu*', '*tha e*'.
2. Notice that the words are in a different order in Gaelic, '*tha*' coming before '*mi*'.
3. '*A' sgrìobhadh*' means 'writing': compare 'scribe' and 'scribble'.

4.   '*Litir*' means 'a letter': Gaelic doesn't have the equivalent of English 'a' or 'an'.

5.2.2 Sounds and letters

In this section you'll notice that words have been pronounced with different accents. These accents are from Harris, Lewis and North Uist. Can you hear the regional distinctions?

Gaelic vowels can be long or short. The long ones are shown by a *grave* accent, e.g.:

- *bata* (with a short a in the first syllable) means 'a stick'

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Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio content is not available in this format.

- *bàta* (with a long à) means 'a boat'.

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Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Consonants can also have two sounds - as in English (e.g. the 'd' in 'door' and in 'duke'). The Gaelic 'd', when it is next to the letters 'a', 'o' or 'u', is like the 'd' in 'door':

- '*doras*' (a door)

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Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio content is not available in this format.

- '*dà*' (two).

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Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio content is not available in this format.

However, it is like the 'd' in 'duke' when next to the letters 'e' or 'i':

- '*de*' (from, of)

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Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio content is not available in this format.

- '*idir*' (at all).

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Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Some consonants interact with 'h', which changes the sound of the letter. For example, when you are addressing someone called '*Màiri*' (Mary), you say '*Mhàiri*' (pronounced 'vaary').

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Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Some people use this form as a name in English.

Gaelic has more individual sounds than English but uses fewer letters. The letters therefore have to work harder but, in fact, Gaelic spelling is quite consistent. Try saying the following words and then click on the link to hear them spoken by a Gaelic speaker.

Remember, the first part of the word is usually stressed in Gaelic, look out for the grave accent and think of the effect of 'e' and 'i' on the letters beside them, including 's'!

> *aran* (bread)
>
> Audio content is not available in this format.
>
> Audio content is not available in this format.
>
> Audio content is not available in this format.
>
>

balach (boy)

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio content is not available in this format.

còta (coat)

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio content is not available in this format.

deoch (a drink)

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio content is not available in this format.

cidsin (kitchen)

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio content is not available in this format.

làr (floor)

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio content is not available in this format.

madainn mhath (good morning)

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio content is not available in this format.

rathad (road, with silent 'th')

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio content is not available in this format.

seo (here)

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio content is not available in this format.

tòrr (a lot, a hill).

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio content is not available in this format.

5.3 New words: and evolving language

5.3.1 Developing terminology: some initiatives

Gaelic was not used much in the past in contexts like education or news broadcasting and for that reason it didn't fully develop at that time the specialised vocabulary which is needed to talk about things like, for example, chemistry or the economy.

However, in the past few decades Gaelic has been used more and more in such spheres and so the appropriate terminology and registers have had to be developed quickly.

After Gaelic medium primary school education began in 1985, for example, the local authorities concerned brought together subject specialists and Gaelic academics and in 1992 issued *Faclan Ùra Gàidhlig* ('new Gaelic words'), a list of new Gaelic terms authorised for use in Gaelic medium classrooms and teaching materials.

The list has been regularly updated since then and it is now being overtaken by the work of An Seotal, an agency set up under the wing of the national Gaelic resource centre, Stòrlann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig, to produce lists of specialised terms for use in schools.

Administration

The Scottish Parliament published *Faclair na Pàrlamaid,* a list of terms for use in government business in 2001.

A similar list of terms for use in local government business is being compiled at present by The European Language Initiative (TELI).

You can access the parliamentary Gaelic dictionary [here](#).

Figure 31 The Scottish Parliament building

News and current affairs

The main originator and user of new Gaelic words is the BBC in its various news and current affairs broadcasting, on radio, television and in its developing online services. There is not as yet a complete list of these new terms but an interim checklist can be accessed on the BBC website.

The way forward

Moves are underway at present to coordinate these various initiatives and the lists of new words and expressions that they are producing. This is likely to culminate within the next few years in the creation, by Bòrd na Gàidhlig, of a Gaelic Academy.

5.3.2 Creating new Gaelic words

The following five examples show the different approaches that are used in creating new words in Gaelic to meet changing needs.

Table 1 1

English term	Gaelic term	Origin/Method
triangle	*triantan*	Gaelic '*trian*' – a third part or something made of three parts. This is an example of a well-established Gaelic word having been adapted for a new use.
geography	*cruinn-eòlas*	Based on the Gaelic '*cruinne*' (world) and '*eòlas*' (knowledge) ('-eòlas' is also used as the equivalent of '-ology'). This is an example of a concept being 'defined' in Gaelic.

television	*telebhisean*	Many Gaelic words have Greek or Latin roots, filtered though English. Often these are international terms.
rectangle	*ceart-cheàrnach*	This is made up of '*ceart*' (the Gaelic for 'right') and '*ceàrn*' (the Gaelic for 'angle'). This is a translation of the Latin-derived 'rectangle' and so is referred to as a 'loan translation'. The meaning is clearer than 'rectangle' since the word is made up of Gaelic rather than Latin elements.
credit crunch	*staing creideis*	'*Staing*' (crisis) + '*creideas*'. The Gaelic word '*creideas*' (originally 'credibility') has been 'stretched' to match English 'credit' (as in 'credit card'): this is referred to as a 'loan shift'.

Now that you have read about the origin of these words, listen to how they are pronounced.

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triantan

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---

cruinn-eòlas

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---

telebhisean

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---

ceart-cheàrnach

Audio content is not available in this format.

---

staing creideis

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5.3.3 Gaelic loanwords in English

All languages take words from each other. Gaelic borrows from English – after all, almost all Gaelic speakers also speak English – but English has also borrowed from Gaelic over the years. Examples include a number of words for geographical features associated with Scotland such as:

- ben *(beinn)*

- brae *(bràigh)*
- corry *(coire).*
- glen *(gleann)*
- loch *(loch).*

Words of cultural origin include:

- caber (from '*cabar*' – a tree trunk).
- ceilidh
- clan (from '*clann*' – children)
- galore ('*gu leòr*' – enough)
- slogan (probably from '*sluagh-ghairm*' – a war cry)
- sporran ('*sporan*' – a purse)
- whisky (from '*uisge*', short for '*uisge-beatha*' – water of life)

More speculative suggestions of borrowings from Gaelic to English include:

- grotty (from '*grod*' – rotten)
- smashing (from ''*S math sin'* - that's good)
- shoot (from '*siuthad*' – go on)
- twig (from '*tuig*' – understand)!

5.4 How to learn Gaelic

The most common, and by far the most effective, method of acquiring a language is when it is learned by children in the home and developed in the community. This still happens in Gaelic, although not as much as in the past.

The other methods of learning languages can be divided into two broad categories, although there is a good deal of overlap between them. These are:

- *form-led* learning, where the emphasis is on teaching the basic grammar of the language, usually in a school or evening class setting
- *meaning-led* learning, where the focus is on using the language for practical purposes while learning it, as happens in immersion education (either in classes or in a less structured way in the community when one moves to a new country).

Experience world-wide has shown that the second of these approaches brings learners more quickly to the level of communicative competence – chiefly because the 'total immersion' process creates a powerful incentive to learn the language – but that this can sometimes be at the expense of grammatical correctness.

Form-led learning, often referred to as second-language teaching, can also be effective, especially with students with an aptitude for language, but the proportion achieving communicative competence is usually much lower than for immersion and it tends to take longer.

All the courses described in the sections that follow lie somewhere on this spectrum.

5.4.1 Adult learners

Below is a video of some adult learners explaining why they are learning Gaelic.

Video content is not available in this format.
Why learn Gaelic?

Courtesy of BBC

The traditional way for adults to start learning Gaelic has been to attend an evening class, usually for a two-hour session once a week during the winter leisure-class season (which usually runs for 20 weeks). The methodology in these classes varies but tends to be at the 'form-led' end of the spectrum. They may follow a book-based course or a television series such as 'Speaking our Language' or, less commonly, be tailored by the teacher to the needs of the class.

Short courses are a variation on this approach, with classes compressed into a one or two week period, often in a residential setting which gives scope for practising the language outwith class. Often learners combine short courses with the weekly variety.

There are also a number of websites which enable learners to start learning Gaelic online, which will be discussed in the next section.

Evening classes, residential sessions and online courses are a good way to start learning Gaelic, providing an introduction to the basics in a relaxed atmosphere and often with opportunities to experience Gaelic culture and to socialise with like-minded people. They are less effective at helping learners to progress beyond the initial stage, however, and so classes often have members who are at different stages.

For adult students who already have a good grasp of the basics or who would prefer to learn at a faster pace, the most interesting development in recent years has been the growth of the 'Ùlpan' style of course. This is based on methodology pioneered in Israel with Hebrew and refined in Wales with Welsh. Ùlpan is a structured, progressive course with the emphasis on communication. It comprises 200 units which may be delivered in different configurations, ranging from twice-weekly classes over 3 years to a more intensive delivery pattern, mainly residential, which could see the course completed in 9 or 10 weeks. A flexible approach which marries week-by-week delivery with occasional concentrated inputs is also possible. The aim of the Ùlpan method is to bring the learner, stage by stage, to the level of full communicative competence in Gaelic by the end of the course.

Information on all of the above courses, including advice on what is available (or could be made available) in your area, can be obtained from the Gaelic Learners Association Clì Gàidhlig.

BBC Alba offers a range of internet-based sites to support learners of Gaelic at different ages and stages.

Click here for a full list.

Figure 32 Some resources for online Gaelic learning from BBC Alba. From left: Colin and Cumberland, Air Splaoid, and Dealas.

The Highland Council website contains the following tools for learners:

- an introduction to Gaelic
- a 'toolkit' of expressions which can be used in various settings.

You will be able to find 'Basic Gaelic for Parents', a list of words and expression for use by parents with their children, here.

Sabhal Mòr Ostaig's 'Cùrsa Inntrigidh' is intended to prepare students for entry to the college's courses but is open to others as well. Click here for more information.

5.4.2 Adult learning in action: some examples

Adults are learning Gaelic throughout Scotland – and beyond. In many areas learners have set up their own support or conversation groups. Details of the websites of three of these – from Fife, Glasgow and Australia – are given below.

Cearcall Còmhraidh Fìobha is a network of adult Gaelic learners who meet regularly and hold events in parts of Fife. Their attractive website can be accessed here.

Meetup Gàidhlig Ghlaschu is a similar group in the Glasgow area. The following extract from their website - – give the views of some of the members about the group.

What are members saying?

'A bunch of lovely people who made me feel very welcome!'

Leona Buchanan

'It is a very friendly, informal group. Everyone is accepted no matter what level their Gaelic is and it helps gain confidence in speaking'

Evelyn

There is also a Facebook page for a Gaelic learners group in Australia.

5.5 Options for children

More and more people living in Scotland, whether or not they themselves are Gaelic speakers or Gaelic learners, are taking steps to ensure that their children have the opportunity to learn Gaelic. There are a number of reasons for this, but the most important are appreciation of the cultural significance of the language to Scotland and the perceived advantages to their children, academically and in terms of career prospects.

The options available to parents and young learners vary from area to area. The main ones are described here in general terms. To find out what is available (or could be made available) in your area, contact your local authority's education service or visit the Bòrd na Gàidhlig website. You will also find an FAQ on the same site.

Gaelic medium education

GME is a form of 'immersion' education, in which learners are taught through the target language (in this case Gaelic) at the same time as they are acquiring skills and knowledge across the curriculum.

Most children in GME have little or no Gaelic when they first enter the system (usually at around 0-3). They learn the language through using it, in combination with some direct

teaching which mostly takes the form of games, songs and stories. In almost all cases, pupils in GME are able to communicate freely in Gaelic by the time they leave school.

Immersion is a method favoured by many minority language communities, with Welsh a notable example, but it is also used with majority languages: French immersion education is well-established and successful in Canada, for example.

Figure 33 Glasgow Gaelic School

GME is provided by local authorities in response to parental demand. Policies vary but usually authorities require evidence of a viable level of uptake that is sustainable for the foreseeable future. There may also be cost, staffing and accommodation issues which have to be resolved at local level. For information, contact your local education service, the Gaelic parental association Comann nam Pàrant or Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

Gaelic Learners in the Primary School (GLPS)

This is a national scheme which provides training for teachers (including language tuition) and teaching materials to enable them to teach some Gaelic to pupils, usually in the upper stages of primary school. Its aim is to inform the youngsters about Gaelic language and culture as part of multi-cultural education and, where that is an option, to prepare them to continue learning Gaelic in secondary school.

Gaelic classes in secondary school

Gaelic Learners classes usually start in S1 (or before) and cater for complete beginners. They offer a pathway to SQA National Qualifications in 'Gaelic (Learners)' and currently are on offer in schools throughout Scotland.

There are also 'fluent speaker' Gaelic classes in secondary schools in most areas where GME is provided in the primary school. These have their own National Qualification (NQ) exams, which are formally entitled 'Gàidhlig' and are broadly the equivalent of the NQ exams in English.

There is some Gaelic medium subject teaching at the secondary school level but provision is patchy.

Information on GLPS and on the teaching of Gaelic as a subject can be found on the
Bòrd na Gàidhlig website.

6 Gaelic culture: a national asset

6.1 The art of the *Gàidhealtachd*

The art history of the Scottish *Gàidhealtachd* (Gaelic speaking areas) has received little attention, even though it is known to be important. That is a crucial absence, for the recognition of visual traditions – both in terms of history and current activity – is fundamental to the international perception and everyday wellbeing of any culture. Divorcing a culture from the significance of its visual art traditions can be used to imply cultural inadequacy[17].

Some works such as the Book of Durrow and the Book of Kells are, of course, well known. But as well as those Iona manuscripts of the 7th to the 9th century, the Scottish Gàidhealtachd also gave us works such as the Book of Deer, (a 10th century Latin Gospel Book from Old Deer in Aberdeenshire) and the Celtic Psalter from the 10th and 11th Centuries (which contains hand-written psalms in Latin, with illustrations.) And in the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries one finds the remarkable stone carvings of the West Highland School of Sculpture, the era of the Lordship of the Isles.

Figure 34 The Book of Deer is a 10th century Latin gospel book from Old Deer in Aberdeenshire. An image of the Book of Deer can be found here.

It is an irony that the disruptions of the Jacobite period and its aftermath led to tartan, that great visual product of the *Gàidhealtachd*, first being banned and then being commercialised without benefit to the *Gàidhealtachd*. Yet its importance persists in *Gàidhealtachd* art, whether in the 18th century work of the Clan Grant painter Richard Waitt or in the 19th century work of artists such as John Blake McDonald (1829-1901).

A work like McDonald's *Glencoe 1692* might at first sight seem to be merely historical or literary illustration. But when one notes that it was painted in 1879, during the period of land agitation that led in 1886 to the Crofters Act, (which gave crofters security of tenure for the first time) one can recognise it as a visual revisiting of a key moment of Highland history. The painting thus refers to contemporary politics every bit as much as does the

emigrant theme of John Watson Nicol's (1856-1926) *Lochaber No More*, painted four years later.

Figure 35 *Glencoe 1692* by John Blake McDonald (1829-1901)

It is instructive to note that it was a Gaelic-speaking artist from Kintyre, William McTaggart (1835-1910) who, more than any other artist, laid the foundations for modern Scottish art. The contrast between McTaggart's pioneering paintings and the stereotype of the Highlands could hardly be more marked.

In 1911 that greatest of Gaelic learners Edward Dwelly, the lexicographer who was born near Arundel in 1864, emphasised the visual aspect of the *Gàidhealtachd* in his illustrated Gaelic-English dictionary (more on this in a moment), not least through the work of the Stornoway artist Malcolm MacDonald. He helped Dwelly to illustrate the dictionary and was one of the first trained visual artists from the Western Isles. He studied at the Glasgow School of Art and the École des Beaux-Artes in Paris, and produced a number of fine oil paintings of Lewis and of sailing ships.

By that time key historical works such as the great crosses of Iona and Islay and the works of the West Highland School centuries had been recorded by 19th century artists like Andrew Gibb and James Drummond.

Gibb, in volume two of John Stuart's *Sculptured Stones of Scotland*, published in 1867, recorded works such as the Kildalton Cross in Islay and St Martin's Cross in Iona. Equally important was Drummond's *Sculptured Monuments of Iona and the West Highlands*, published in 1881, which drew attention to the West Highland School of Sculpture after a long period of neglect.

Following on from this there developed a Celtic Revival art of high quality. One of the great books of the Celtic Revival - and, indeed, of the Arts and Crafts Movement - was the collection of Gaelic hymns and incantations, *Carmina Gadelica*, edited and translated by Alexander Carmichael and published in 1900.
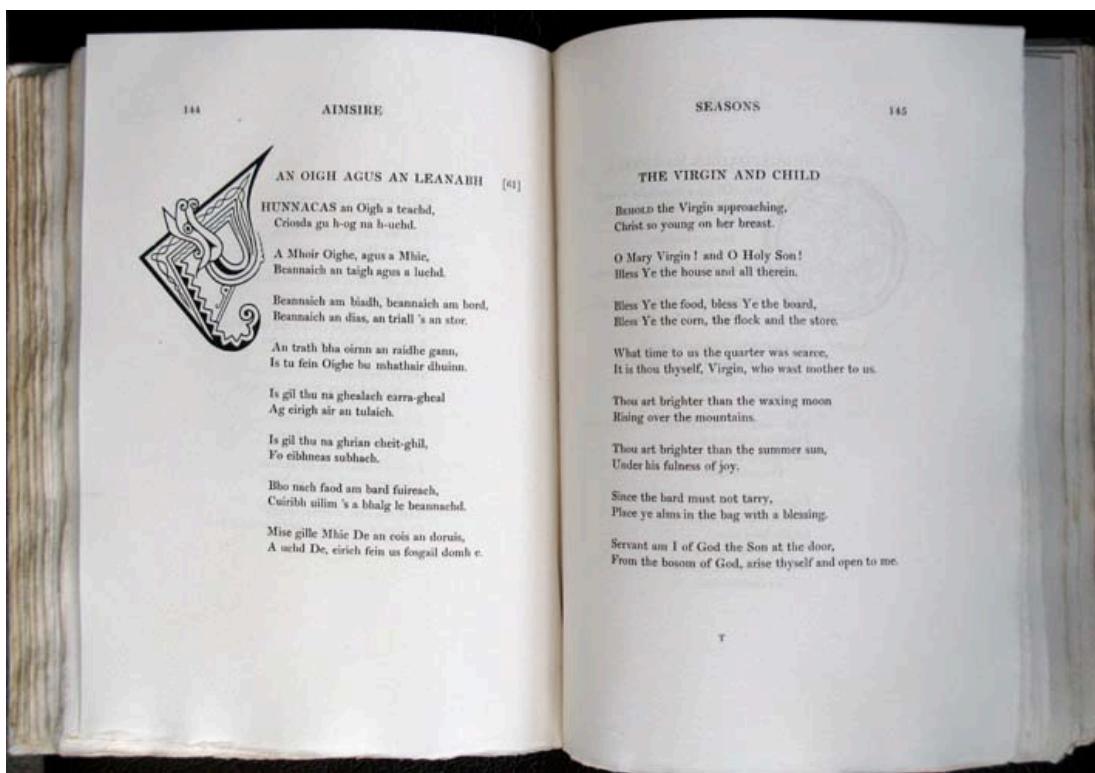
Figure 36 Pages from Volume 1 of *Carmina Gadelica,* a collection of Gaelic hymns and incantations

That first edition takes its place as part of *Gàidhealtachd* visual art. It not only reflects the aesthetic values of its time on a high level but it also revisits earlier *Gàidhealtachd* art stretching back well over a millennium, not least *The Book of Deer.* The artist was Alexander Carmichael's wife, Mary (see Macdonald, M., 2008, 'The Visual Dimension of *Carmina Gadelica*' in Stiubhart, D. U., ed., *The Life and Legacy of Alexander Carmichael*, Port of Ness: The Islands Book Trust).

Edward Dwelly took inspiration from *Carmina Gadelica* for the title page of the first edition of his dictionary, *Faclair Gàidhlig – air son nan sgoiltean. Le Dealabhan/A Gaelic Dictionary,* underlining the aesthetic as well as linguistic links between the two works. The 'F' of 'Faclair' is closely related to the 'F' of 'Failt' on page 108 of volume one of *Carmina Gadelica*.
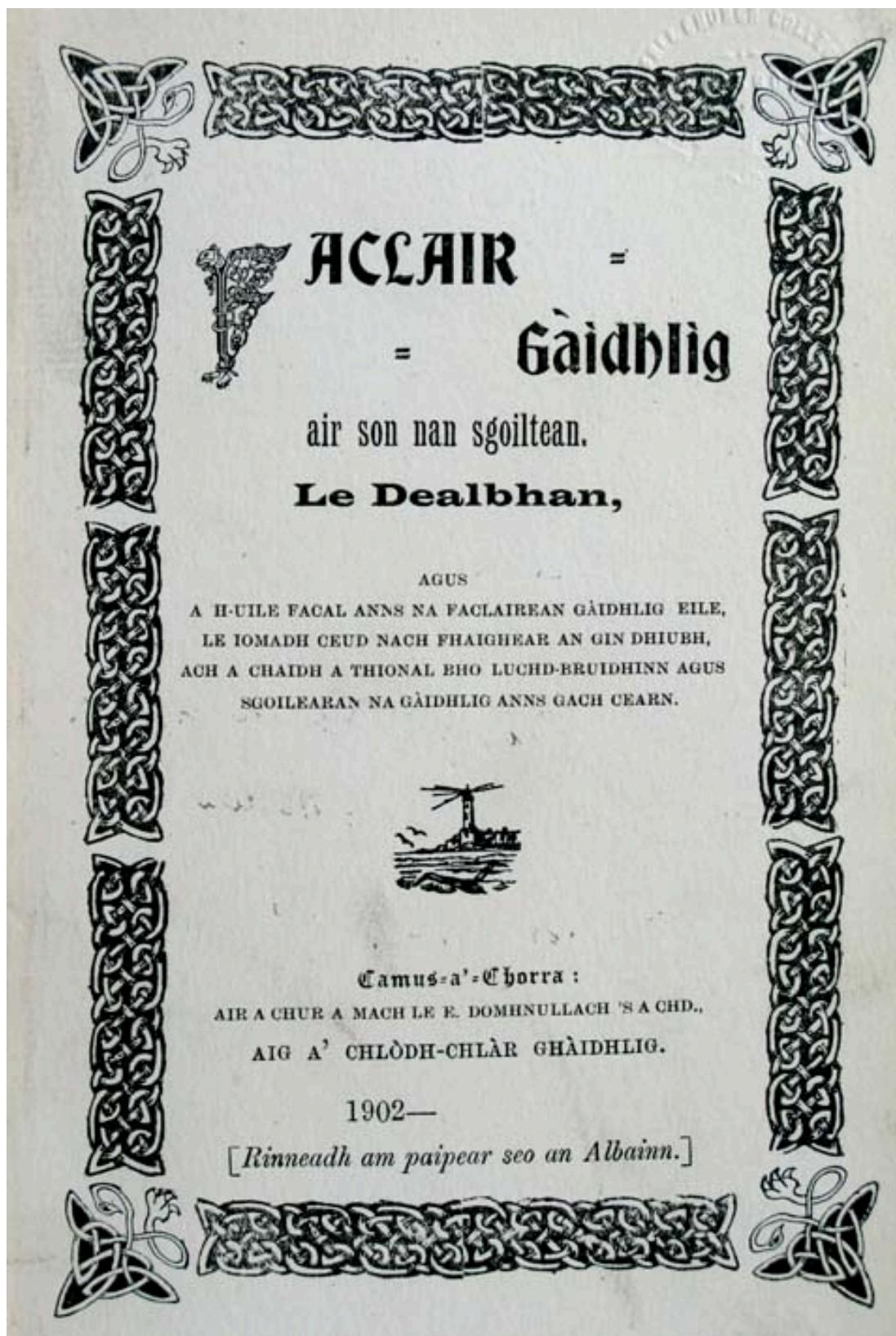
Figure 37 The title page of the first edition of Dwelly's Gaelic Dictionary

Thus by the early years of the 20th century there was great potential for articulation of visual art as an integral part of wider Gaelic culture. So why did that not happen, at least in any sustainable way?

One factor was the loss of population through emigration, so eloquently portrayed in William McTaggart's *Sailing of the Emigrant Ship*, painted in 1895.

Figure 38 William McTaggart, *The Sailing of the Emigrant Ship*, National Gallery of Scotland

During that same late 19th century period the *de facto* anti-Gaelic provisions of the Education Act of 1872 were felt in full force (for a writer's commentary on this see Campbell, A. P., 2006, *Invisible Islands*, Glasgow: Otago). The new educational message was that Gaelic was irrelevant as a language. The implication was that the visual tradition was irrelevant also.

McTaggart's painting has inspired artists of today such as Will Maclean to respond strongly issues such as land ownership. Maclean's memorial cairns at Balallan, Aignis and Gress in Lewis are good examples of this.

Figure 39 An example of Will Maclean's Memorial Cairns (Aignis)

The response by artists of today to Gaelic poetry has also been powerful. In 2002 *An Leabhar Mòr/The Great Book of Gaelic* brought together the responses to Gaelic poetry of 100 artists from Scotland and Ireland. These included, for example, Will Maclean working with Aonghas Macneacail, Mhairi Killin working with Meg Bateman, Kate Whiteford evoking the words of Murdo MacFarlane, Floraidh Mackenzie responding to the words of Derick Thomson, Elizabeth Ogilvie working with a song by 17th century poet Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh, and Calum Angus Mackay exploring the work of 18th century bard Duncan Bàn Macintyre.

This major project by Pròiseact Nan Ealan led to an international touring exhibition which toured internationally for a decade after its creation. The establishment of an artists' residency programme at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig in 2007 should also be noted, not least with respect to the work of Gill Russell and Eoghan Mac Colla.

Work by artists involved in An Leabhar Mòr, including Helen Macalister, Donald Smith, Donald Urquhart, Norman Shaw and Frances Walker, was at the heart of an important reassessment of Scottish Gàihealtachd art held at the City Art Centre in Edinburgh from November 2010 to March 2011.

Figure 40 City Art Centre, Edinburgh

Precursors of this exhibition include As an Fhearann/From the Land: Clearance, Conflict and Crofting (1986), Togail Tìr/Marking Time: The Map of the Western Isles (1989), and the Calanais exhibition in 1995, an international response by contemporary artists to a key Highland archaeological site.

Notable also from recent years in the sculpture, Crannghal, designed by Will Maclean and Arthur Watson and installed at Sabhal Mor Ostaig in 2006. It refers in its boat-like form to the transmission of knowledge throughout the Gàidhealtachd, and in its 'unfinished' quality to the fact that this task is not yet complete. Land and language issues are intertwined in such art. These are recognised key cultural issues throughout the world, not least from an ecological perspective. For that reason among many others, the visual art of the Scottish Gàidhealtachd is resonant on local, national and international levels.

Figure 41 Crannghal, a sculpture designed by Will Maclean and Arthur Watson and installed at Sabhal Mor Ostaig in 2006

Murdo MacDonald

6.2 Gaelic music and song

From rock to pop and rap, from waulking songs (*òrain luaidh*) to mouth music (*puirt-a-beul*), from harps (the *clàrsach*), to bagpipes (*pìoban*), psalm singing (*sailm*) and opera, the generic term 'Gaelic music' knows very few boundaries.

Generally speaking, Gaelic music and song is divided into categories such as 'traditional' and 'popular', with distinctive categories such as psalm singing and waulking songs giving the language a wide range of interpretation and styles. Its strong oral tradition means that highly personalised and dynamic versions of sometimes ancient lyrics have been the norm and the transcription of melodies is a relatively modern feature.

Waulking songs, for example, are characterised by refrains, composed of meaningless vocables or a mixture of vocables and words, or of words alone. These work songs were used to lighten the work-load as women were *waulking* or handling tweed.

Figure 42 A waulking song group in South Uist.

Click here to hear a waulking song.

Leading the singing

Gaelic psalm singing, by way of contrast, presents a unique style of singing Scottish Psalter tunes in unison. The style is characterised by the precentor, or lead singer, giving out the psalm line by line, being followed by the congregation.

Modern interpretations of this genre have seen internationally acclaimed performances of Gaelic Psalms world-wide and a series of CDs has been issued capturing live, unrehearsed examples of what has been described as 'the only church music in the British Isles with any soul'.

Listen to the audio clip below for an example of psalm singing, recorded in the Free Church Seminary, Stornoway.

Audio content is not available in this format.
Psalm singing

Instrumental music

There are three musical instruments directly associated with Gaelic musical tradition: the *clàrsach* (harp) the fiddle and the bagpipes. All three have undergone something of a modern revival with a new, dynamic generation of tradition bearers challenging the more conservative delivery of the past, whilst at the same time maintaining the integrity of the tradition.

The *clàrsach* is now synonymous with a particular stream of Celtic musicianship whilst fiddling has become one of Scotland's most vibrant musical scenes.

Listen to some solo harp playing by Wendy Stewart from her CD 'About Time' by clicking here.

The links between Gaelic singing and piping are inextricable. Generally speaking there are two types of pipe music: *ceòl mòr* – 'great music' –

referring to the classical music known as '*pibroch*'; and *ceòl beag* – 'small music' – the marches, airs and dance tunes such as strathspeys, reels jigs and hornpipes.

Scotland now has its own National Piping Centre, the national centre of excellence for the instrument and its music, based in Glasgow, near the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. The Piping Centre incorporates rehearsal rooms, an auditorium, an interpretation centre, reference library and a hotel and conference facility. Its patron is Prince Charles. You can listen to pipe music on The National Piping Centre website.

The *cèilidh* – home of Gaelic music and song

Wherever there is a gathering of Gaelic speakers, there is usually a *cèilidh*, or 'gathering' with song or music at the centre of the activity. A *cèilidh* can be either formal or informal – a meeting of friends where stories and tales would be told and songs are sung. In more recent times, the *cèilidh* has become a mixture of dance and formal entertainment and part of a wider public entertainment scene, although it still remains and important part of community life as a means of visiting friends and keeping up to date with local affairs.

'*Ceilidhs*' have effectively become 'concerts' and are often the centre-pieces and highlights of major festivals and events such as Celtic Connections in Glasgow each

January, the Hebridean Celtic Festival in the Hebrides and Celtic Colours International Festival in Cape Breton.

Go to the following sites for further information:

- www.celticconnections.com
- www.celtic-colours.com
- www.hebceltfest.com

Royal National Mod

The Royal National Mod ('Am Mòd Nàiseanta Rìoghail' in Gaelic) is the annual national Gaelic festival of song, arts and culture and the equivalent of the Welsh Eisteddfod. Organised by An Comunn Gàidhealach (The Gaelic Association), it includes a competitive element as well as a very lively 'Fringe'. It was first held in Oban in 1892 and continues to be the highest profile annual event showcasing Gaelic culture.

Fèisean nan Gàidheal

The Gaelic word for a festival or feast is '*Fèis*'. This word is now synonymous with the *Fèis* movement which is a grouping of Gaelic arts festivals the primary function of which is tuition. Each *Fèis* provides an opportunity for individuals (mostly young people) to acquire and/or develop their skills in aspects of the Gaelic arts from song to dance, drama and traditional music on a wide range of instruments.

The first *Fèis* was held on the island of Barra in 1981. The National Association of Gaelic Arts Youth Festivals was established in 1991 and now hosts nearly 50 events with around 5,000 participants throughout Scotland annually. The movement is now one of the most successful arts initiatives in Scotland and accredited with giving major impetus to the revival and increasing popularity of Gaelic and Scottish music and song amongst young people. For more information visit the following website.

Bliadhna nan Òran/The Year of Song

The year 2010 was the Year of Song on BBC Radio nan Gàidheal and BBC ALBA and throughout the year an unparalleled line-up of music-related programmes were broadcast, with a different song chosen for each day of the year.

Its website allows users to access content quickly and simply by means of four key sections: songs, writers, themes and singers. The site currently offers the opportunity to listen to over 800 songs with supporting lyrics, 360 excerpts from radio programmes, and over 550 video clips. Biographical information is also available for over 500 singers and writers.

All 365 Song for the Day programmes are also available, including audio and accompanying verbatim transcripts for each.

Collections

Tobar an Dualchais/Kist o Riches is a collaborative project which has been set up to preserve, digitise, catalogue and make available online several thousand hours of Gaelic and Scots recordings. This website contains a wealth of material such as folklore, songs, music, history, poetry, traditions, stories and other information. The material has been collected from all over Scotland and beyond from the 1930s onwards.

The recordings come from the School of Scottish Studies (University of Edinburgh), BBC Scotland and the National Trust for Scotland's Canna Collection. The material includes stories recorded by John Lorne Campbell on wax cylinders in 1937, folklore collected all over Scotland by Calum Maclean in the 1950s; Scots songs recorded by Hamish Henderson from travelling people in the 1960s and archival material broadcast by BBC Radio nan Gàidheal. You can access the website here.

Stellar quality

A number of individual performers of Gaelic music and song have gone on to become award-winning, internationally-acclaimed artistes. Singer and musician Julie Fowlis and rock band Runrig are two of the most notable.

Gaelic singer Julie Fowlis has attracted UK-wide attention and a significant following built on success in music awards and at festivals throughout Britain and Ireland.

Ignoring much advice to pursue a career in more mainstream music, Julie has remained true to her roots and the Gaelic language. She performs all her material in Gaelic, finding her inspiration and creativity from the music, history and culture of her homeland.

Since being presented with her award as BBC Radio 2 Folk Singer of the Year 2008 (the first ever Scottish Gaelic singer to win this prestigious award), the *Daily Telegraph* predicted that 'Fowlis could be the first Scottish Gaelic crossover star in the making'

The singer has compiled a remarkable CV in a very short time. She is no stranger to awards and distinctions, winning Gaelic Singer Of The Year and Album Of The Year at the Scots Trad Music Awards 2007. She won Album of the Year a second time in 2010. She has also been repeatedly nominated for the BBC Radio 2 Folk Singer of the Year. Her single 'Blackbird' was also playlisted on BBC Radio 2, the first Scottish Gaelic artist to achieve this distinction. She was also the first Scottish Gaelic artist to appear on the legendary show 'Later…with Jools Holland' in 2007.

She is perhaps most proud of her award as Scotland's Gaelic Ambassador - 'Tosgaire na Gàidhlig', bestowed by the Scottish Parliament in 2008/2009, the first person to ever receive this honour.

The Scottish rock group Runrig, formed in Skye in 1973, have been, along with Capercaillie, the highest profile exponents of Gaelic music on the popular stage. Runrig have released more than 15 albums, with a significant amount of their material in Gaelic. The group released a written collection of 115 of their songs with illustrations in 2000.

Runrig's material draws heavily on locations, history, politics and people unique to the bands roots in the western isles of Scotland. Their fan base is world-wide ranging from the United Kingdom, to substantial audiences in Denmark, and Germany, and more traditionally 'Scottish' areas such as Nova Scotia. In 2006 Runrig played their first concert in the United States, at a benefit for the charity 'Glasgow the Caring City' in New York City.

Runrig's iconic re-recording of the song Loch Lomond (Hampden Remix) to raise funds for the BBC's annual Children In Need appeal included the 'Tartan Army' (Scotland's

Hampden Football Supporters), and pop star Rod Stewart on backing vocals. It reached number 9 in the UK Singles Chart. In the summer of 1995, Runrig made history by putting a Scottish Gaelic song, *An Ubhal As Airde*, into the UK Top 20. It entered the chart 10 at number 18. The band has been inducted into the Scottish Traditional Music Hall of Fame, through the Scottish Traditional Music Awards.

The start of 2011 saw a new Gaelic band Mànran attempt to recreate Runrig's success with a Gaelic song *Làtha math* ('A Good day'). The song met with limited success, reaching number 61 in the UK charts, selling nearly 5,500 copies, but it was number 1 in the UK singer/songwriter chart and the band had 55,000 hits on its website on the day after the song's release.

The opera *Hiort* : St Kilda

Gaelic music and song was launched onto the international stage by Pròiseact nan Ealan, the Gaelic National Arts Agency. The specially commissioned opera Hiort: St Kilda, with music by Jean-Paul Dessy and David Graham, and libretto by Iain Finlay MacLeòid, told the story of the people of the St Kilda islands and how they dealt with day-to-day life before the islands were evacuated in 1930. Hiort is St Kilda in Scottish Gaelic.

The power, emotion and appeal of this story connected Gaelic with European culture at many levels and set Gaelic language and culture, as well as Gaelic broadcasting, on a unique international stage.

Figure 43 A scene from the opera Hiort: St Kilda

Courtesy of Proisect nan Ealan, the Gaelic National Arts Agency

The Belgian production of the opera, St Kilda: L'île des Hommes-Oiseaux, was performed at the Edinburgh Festival Theatre as a highlight of the Edinburgh International

Festival 2009. It was one of five productions performed simultaneously in Scotland, France, Germany, and Austria, as well as Belgium. An element of the production was also broadcast live from St Kilda to all 5 locations. The Belgian production was restaged and toured to France in late 2008.

The Belgian production presented a unique interpretation of the St Kildan story. It was shown live to the world in a special broadcasting project which brought six European countries together.

Gaelic in the charts

Perhaps the most famous success for a Gaelic singer in the popular music charts was the 1981 song Japanese Boy, sung by Aneka (real name Mary Sandeman), which reached number 1. She was well known for the Oriental image she adopted for the song. After her brief foray into pop she established herself as an accomplished singer of Scottish traditional music under her real name.

Figure 44 The cover from Aneka's popular 1981 song Japanese Boy

Studying Gaelic music

The department of Scottish Music at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland offers the only honours degree in Scottish traditional music in the world. The course offers a broad based training to talented traditional musicians, enabling them to pursue a variety of careers, or further study. A degree in piping is run in collaboration with the National Piping Centre, which is internationally recognised as a centre of excellence in Highland bagpipe teaching.

Mary Ann Kennedy is one former student of RSAMD who has gone on to become a major figure on the Scottish music and broadcasting scene. She now lives in Lochaber where she and her husband run Watercolour Music Studios. A traditional music background and a classical training coupled with 15 years' experience working with the BBC has established her as a major figure in the Scottish music scene, equally respected as a performer and as an authoritative commentator on world, classical, traditional and folk music.

Mary Ann's musical career covers several roles as performer, producer, writer and teacher. She has won several major awards, including the Concours Internationale de l'Harpe Celtique and both National Mod Gold Medals. Her band, Cliar, won the all-time

Best Album accolade at the inaugural Scots Trad Music Awards, and earned her a Saltire Award.

Her broadcast credits include radio work for BBC Radio Scotland, BBC Radio 3, RTE and BBC Radio nan Gàidheal, and presentation and performance on BBC Scotland, BBC2, TG4 and BBC4, fronting major series and specials on world and traditional Scottish and Irish music.

James Graham from Lochinver has similarly excelled as a young traditional musician since undertaking the RSAMD BA Scottish Music course. James belongs to Assynt in Lochinver, Sutherland and started competing at local Mod competitions as a 9 year-old.

Now an accomplished piper and singer, he studied Gaelic song under the tutelage of Kenna Campbell, one of a number of key figures passing on their skills and traditions. In 2004, James won the BBC Scotland Young Traditional Musician of the Year award. He was the first male performer and first Gaelic singer to take the prize. In 2007 he won the Gold Medal at the Royal national Mod and has gone on to release a number of acclaimed CDs.

James has also completed a further two years of study at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, where he took an HND in Gaelic language and culture.

He has continued to develop his work as a live performer and has worked on a number of award-winning television and radio programmes, including Transatlantic Sessions 4.

Community events

Ceòlas is a music and dance summer school featuring expert tuition in piping, fiddling, singing, Scotch reels and quadrilles, step dancing and the Gaelic language. It is set within the Gaelic-speaking community of South Uist in the Outer Hebrides. Ceòlas explores the vital connections between Scottish traditional music, Gaelic song and dance while allowing ample opportunity for participants to enjoy all these art forms in cèilidhs and in homes, the places which fostered them.

Where Gaelic music is 'cool'?

In 1999, recognising the wealth of traditional music activity generated by the *Fèis* movement and others, Highland Council led a plan to establish a residential Centre of Excellence specialising in traditional music. The bid was successful, and the National Centre of Excellence in Traditional Music - Sgoil Chiùil na Gàidhealtachd - was established at Plockton High School in Wester Ross in May 2000 with funding of £500,000 over three years from the Scottish Executive's Excellence Fund, with additional input from The Highland Council.

The choice of location was significant. Plockton, on the west coast of Ross-shire just opposite the Isle of Skye, is at the heart of a wide community which has long been known for its support of traditional music and Gaelic culture. Both the school and the wider community have good track records of achievement, particularly in piping and in Gaelic medium education.

The Plockton project is unique amongst the centres of excellence set up at the time in that it concentrates specifically on one genre of music - traditional music. That that genre is has been regarded by many people as testament to the huge growth in popularity and intrinsic importance and value of Scotland's native musical culture. It was also decided early in the life of the project that it would not be strictly vocational.

Many graduates of the school, which survived a funding crisis in 2011 due to a public campaign of support, have gone on to pursue highly successful careers as the professional musicians.

6.3 Dance

Historical background

Of all the Gaelic art forms, dance has had, perhaps surprisingly, the least impact and it is in its modern manifestations and representations through Highland Games that it is best known. Many current forms of dance activity have displaced older versions, or are modifications of ritual celebrations and some have, over time, become more associated with children's play activities and entertainment. There are also interesting sub-sets of mainstream activity, with military institutions developing their own interests and styles, the most notable being the introduction of Highland dancing to the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo.

Throughout the world, however, Highland dancing is recognised as one of the iconic activities of Scotland and its presence on the global stage is, in no small measure, due to the presence of Highland émigrés from the 19th century in particular. Highland dancing was, simply, one of the cultural anchors which enabled a displaced people to entertain themselves and retain some semblance of their life back in the home country in, for example, Geelong, Australia.
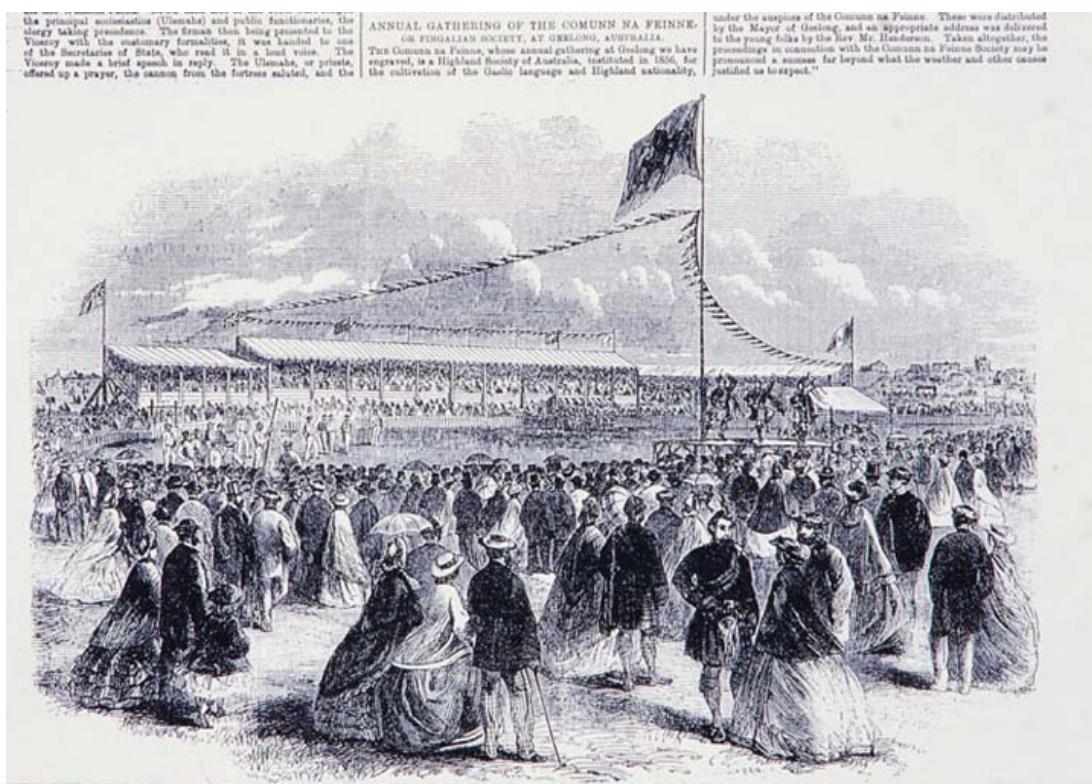

Figure 45 An extract from the Illustrated London News in 1857, which reported on the Highland Games in Geelong, Australia, organised by the Highland Society Comunn na Feinne. Dancing was a central activity at the games, both for display and competition.

Step dance in Canada

Although step dancing is unique to Canada, there are three distinct styles within the country: Cape Breton Style, French Canadian Style and Ottawa Valley Style. All three draw heavily on the traditions of dance in Scotland and Ireland and were brought to Canada by emigrants from the Highlands of Scotland and Ireland.

Step dancing is a fast paced, rugged and energetic style of dance usually performed to traditional fiddle music. It generally requires limited surface movement and is concentrated on foot work involving limited hand and arm motion. Step dancing is usually performed on a board with a hard, smooth surface, wearing character shoes with special clickers attached to the toe and heel. Similar to Highland country dancing and Irish dancing, it has a competitive element beyond its social context of community dances.

Step dancing follows the popular pattern of an eight-bar step. Although the traditional method of right then left foot is most common among dancers, many times dancers creatively dance on only one foot before moving on to the next step. This is usually done when creating steps defined for a specific piece of music.

There are many different types of step dances. All have different tempos, timing and accents. The different dances include: reels, jigs, clogs, strathspeys, hornpipes, waltz-clogs, polkas, and two-steps.

View at: youtube:9bnbhlP7L-g

Highland dancing

The modern term Highland dance or Highland dancing is used today to refer to a style of athletic solo dancing which developed in the Gaelic Highlands of Scotland. It now has a hugely competitive element at Highland Games, attracting world-wide interest and participation, which contrasts significantly with the concept of *ceilidh* or community dancing.

Highland dance evolved into its current form during the 19th and 20th Centuries largely in the context of competitions at Highland games), where it is often performed to the accompaniment of Highland bagpipe music and comes with an elaborate structure of judging and performance ritual.

View at: youtube:BbdqS51bHwE

Highland dancing is not the same as Scottish country dancing, which is both a social dance like ballroom dancing (that is, a dance which is danced with a partner or partners) and a formation dance similar to square dancing (a dance in which an important element is the pattern of group movement about the dance floor).

Some Highland dances do derive from traditional social dances, however. An example is the Highland Reel, also known as the Foursome Reel, in which groups of four dancers alternate between solo steps facing one another and a figure-of-eight style with intertwining progressive movement. Most Highland dances are performed solo. Highland Dance is recognised as a sport by Sportscotland.

Dancing with swords and kilts

It seems that forms of sword dancing have been performed by warriors in many parts of Europe over a long period of time. Ritualistic and combative dances portraying epic deeds and martial skills were a familiar feature in Scottish tradition and folklore.

The British Government's policy of suppression against Highland culture culminated in 1747 with the Act of Proscription, banning the wearing of kilts by civilian males. The Act was repealed in 1782 and in the early 19th century, there was something of a romanticisation of Highland culture.

Figure 46 The Book of the Club of True Highlanders, published in 1881, had dancing as its centerpiece when assembling the key elements of 'Highland culture'

The process of romanticisation received the royal seal of approval with the public wearing of the kilt by George IV in 1822; henceforth tartan's popularity was assured. Queen Victoria's subsequent enthusiasm for aspects of Highland culture included piping and dancing and it was during this period that dancing became popular at Highland Games public events.

Highland dancing was an integral part of the games from the very start of their modern revival, but the dances performed at games were mostly for the convenience of judges. Many older, traditional dances were lost at this time as they were not required for competition.

Organisation

Many Highland gatherings worldwide, and almost all in the United States, recognise the Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing (SOBHD), formed in 1950, as the world governing body of Highland dancing. A World Highland Dance Championship has been held annually at the Cowal Highland Gathering since 1934.

Highland dances

The Sword Dance

Highlanders are said to have developed the sword dance 'as a necessary preparation for the management of the broad-sword… used in certain dances to exhibit their dexterity' (Logan, James. The Scottish Gael p. 440).

This included dancing over two naked swords which are laid across each other on the floor, some while a dancer moves nimbly around them. Dexterously placing the feet by a peculiar step in the intervals between crossed blades, as in the 'Gillie Chaluim', has long been linked with dances before a decisive battle or as a victory dance.

Legend has it that on the eve of battle Highland chiefs would call out the clan's best dancers, who would dance the sword dance. If the dancers successfully avoided touching

either blade, then it was considered an omen that the next day's battle would be in the clan's favour.

A more practical explanation behind the meaning of this dance can be found in the training halls of older styles of fencing, where students of the sword developed their footwork by following geometric patterns of crosses, squares and triangles marked out on the floor. Click here to see an example.

The Highland Fling

One of the best known Highland Dances is the Highland Fling, said to be a dance of triumph at the end of a battle. Another (no less romantic) theory is that it was performed before battles (like the sword dance), on top of the dancer's shield. The shield would have a spike in the middle, around which the dancer would do the dance that involves flicking of the feet, jumping and careful stepping supposedly to drive evil spirits away. The dancer is confined to one spot.

View at: youtube:emCIxAJCe2g

The Reel of Tulloch

Ruidhle Thulaichean (anglicised as 'The Reel of Tulloch') is said (perhaps dubiously) to have originated when a congregation had to wait at a church for a minister on a cold wedding day. During the delay they allegedly whistled a Highland tune while someone improvised a dance. A more gruesome version of the story is that the dance derives from a rough game of football that some workmen building a castle played when they unearthed a human skull. A variation is that inhabitants of of Tulloch played with the severed head of an enemy.

The genesis of the song is discussed in an article entitled 'The reel of Tulloch in fact and fiction', about the folklore attached to it and the so-called Tulloch Tragedy, published in *The Transactions of Gaelic Society of Inverness* (volume LIX, pages 118-128).

The song itself is published in Archibald Sinclair's 1879 collection *An t-Òranaiche*.

 Their britheamhan na tìre
 Ma labhras iad an fhìrinn:
 'De na thig de cheòl à fidhlean
 S e rìgh dhiubh Na Tulaichean.'
 The judges of this land
 Will say if you believe them:
 'When music comes from any fiddle
 the Reel of Tulloch's the King.'

<div align="right">Archibald Sinclair, An t-Òranaiche, Glasgow 1879 pages 117-120</div>

You can see a photo of soldiers dancing the Reel of Tulloch here.

Seann Triubhas

The *Seann Triubhas* (pronounced 'shawn trewas' and meaning 'old or unwanted trousers' in Gaelic) is romantically associated with the proscription of Highland garb after the 1745 rebellion. The steps involve much shaking of the legs, symbolic of shedding the dreaded

'trewes'; the final, faster step(s) show the joy of returning to the kilt. However, the dance is considerably younger, with most of the steps performed today dating from the late 19th century.

View at: youtube:XVR6Z-4-2Vg

Like other dance traditions, what is called 'Highland dancing' is a hybrid form that has been constantly changing according to contemporary aesthetics and interpretations of the past. While some elements may be centuries old, other elements are much more modern. The vast majority of dances now performed were composed in the last century.

Figure 47 Highland dancing has seen a constant evolution in style and interpretation

Country dancing

Scottish country dances are categorised as reels (including hornpipes), jigs, and strathspeys, according to the type of music to which they are danced. The first two types (also called quick-time dances) feature fast tempos, quick movements and a lively feel. The third type (strathspey) has a much slower tempo and a more formal, stately feel. There are also 9/8 jigs, minuets and waltz-time dances, although they make up a very small part of the repertoire.

Dancers and sets

Scottish country dancing is generally done in organised formations referred to as 'sets'. Sets usually consist of three or four couples, but some dances call for larger sets of five, six or even more couples. Couples are usually mixed, but women will dance with women or men with men depending on the make-up of the assembly.

Scottish country dancing is a hugely social and inclusive activity which is enjoyed by many, of all ages. Many SCD groups enjoy putting on 'demonstrations' showing near-to-perfect dancing involving all aspects of technique.

Modern country dancing and the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society

During the early 20th century, Scottish country dance still had a part in social entertainment especially in rural Scotland, even though the number of dances within the active repertoire had diminished. Country dancing was in danger of dying out when in 1923 the Scottish Country Dance Society (SCDS) was founded in Glasgow, with the goal of preserving 'country dances *as danced in Scotland*' (this was only recently changed to read 'Scottish country dances').

The SCDS began to collect and publish the remaining dances as well as reconstruct (or reinterpret) from old sources dances that were no longer being danced. In the process, the dances and technique, which might differ considerably depending on where in Scotland a dance would be collected, were strictly standardised.

The society achieved Royal patronage in 1947 and became known as the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society (RSCDS).

Fairly soon after the inception of the SCDS people started inventing new dances in the spirit of the older ones, but also introducing new figures not part of the 'traditional' canon. Today there are over 11,000 dances catalogued, of which fewer than 1,000 can be considered 'traditional'.

Hebridean dance

The term 'Hebridean dancing' is a fairly modern one and probably first came into use at the English Folk Dance and Song Society's festival at the Royal Albert Hall, London in 1934, when Fearchar Macneil from Barra was asked to perform some dances known in South Uist and Barra. It is believed that these dances acquired this label to differentiate them from the more widely known Highland dances and to pinpoint their place of origin.

The solo dances now embraced by the term Hebridean dances, and of which several versions are known, are *Tulloch Gorm*, Highland Laddie, Over the Water to Charlie, (Scotch) Blue Bonnets, Flowers of Edinburgh, First of August, Scotch Measure and Aberdonian Lassie.

Only fragments of the dances Jacky Jar, The Lads wi' the Kilt, Over the Water and Over the Hill, *Carraig Fhearghais*, Over the Hills and Far Away, and Petronella survive to this day.

It is not known with any certainty where these dances originated but we do know that dances bearing these names were all taught by dancing master Eòghann Mac Lachlainn (Ewen MacLachlan), c. 1799-1879, who taught dancing primarily in South Benbecula, South Uist, Eriskay and in Barra in the mid-1800s.

The dances, as we know them today, are performed in a more relaxed and rather spontaneous manner than Highland dancing, and they often involve a great deal of percussive footwork.

In the mid-1980s there was a move amongst the local people in Barra and South Uist to preserve these dances which could have been lost forever. There were still several people on the islands who knew these dances from their youth and had been taught them by pupils of pupils of Ewen MacLachlan.

The dances were subsequently introduced to *Fèis Bharraigh* (Barra Festival) and in both South Uist and Barra the dances were introduced to children by local tradition bearers.

The television documentary Tiugainn a' Dhannsa ('Let's Dance') examined the role of village halls in Scottish communities throughout the 20th century. These former centres of music and dance have been torn down in many areas to be replaced by buildings catering to the needs of a very different generation. The programme used nostalgic anecdotes to recall the heyday of the village dance. The book *Hebridean Dances: Dannsa nan Eileanach* (published by Acair Ltd and illustrated by Jon Paul) has 12 detailed descriptions and diagrams of dances from Barra.

Modern dance

Creative Scotland helps to develop dance in Scotland through support of dance-based organisations, buildings, and choreographers, along with developing audiences. Scottish Dance Theatre is Scotland's national contemporary dance company.

6.4 Gaelic literature

Gaelic literature has had a long and varied history and in the past half century has firmly established itself as an important part of the wider Scottish literary scene.

6.4.1 Poetry

The Gaelic poetry of the 17th century is interesting more for the light it throws on the clan-based society of the time than for its literary merit. Comprising mostly praise of chiefs, it is an example of verse used for propaganda purposes and of poets as the spin-doctors of their day.

The 18th century saw the Highlands opening out to the outside world, as education spread and the travel became easier (especially after the failure of the Jacobite Rising of 1745/6). A recognisably modern form of society was beginning to emerge and this is reflected in the poetry of the time, which is marked by new styles of writing and a wider range of subjects, including the nature poetry of Donnchadh Bàn (Duncan Macintyre), the love songs of Uilleam Ros (William Ross), and the satire of Sutherland poet Rob Donn (Robert Mackay).

Rannan às an eadar-theangachadh Bheurla aig Iain Mac a' Ghobhainn air 'Moladh Beinn Dòbhrainn' le Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir.	**This image of the deer as the nobility of the glens is from Iain Crichton Smith's free translation of Donnchadh Bàn's tour-de-force, 'Praise of Ben Dòrain'.**
Greadhainn bu gheal cèir,	Herds with white rumps race -
Faghaid air an dèidh –	hunters in the chase.
'S laghach leam an sreud	O I love the grace
A bha sròineiseach.	of these noble ones.
…..	…..
'S aigeannach fear eutrom	Spirited and delicate
Gun mhòrchuis	and shy,
Thèid fasanta na èideadh	in fashionable coat
Neo-spòrsail.	he goes by
Tha mhantal uime fhèin,	in mantle well arrayed,
Caithtiche nach trèig –	suit that will not fade,
Bratach dhearg mar chèir	dress of waxen-red
Bhiodh mar chòmhdach air.	that he's wearing now.

The 19th century and the first half of the 20th century – an era of much poverty and social upheaval in the Highlands – produced little of merit in Gaelic poetry, although some of the subjects and styles of the great 18th century poets has survived, through this period and up to the present day, in the work of the local poets known as 'village bards' (some of whom are much more than that).

Then, out of the blue, a slim volume was published in 1943 which brought Gaelic poetry at one fell swoop into line with the best writing of its time in English and other languages. Sorley MacLean managed to bring together in *Dàin do Eimhir* the best of the Gaelic tradition and of world literature and he did so with an infectious enthusiasm that has inspired generations of Gaelic writers up to the present day.

MacLean the poet was torn between the demands of love and family on the one hand, and his sense of duty and political ideals on the other, of which socialism and the Spanish Civil War are the keynotes. He interweaved this inner conflict with other themes to produce, in *Dàin do Eimhir*, a multi-textured sequence of poems which is highly-wrought both artistically and emotionally.

Figure 48 Sorley MacLean

Click on the audio clips below to hear a interview with Sorley MacLean.

Audio content is not available in this format.
Interview with Sorley MacLean – Part 1

Audio content is not available in this format.
Interview with Sorley MacLean – Part 2

Audio content is not available in this format.
Interview with Sorley MacLean – Part 3

Audio content is not available in this format.
Interview with Sorley MacLean – Part 4

Among the other notable Gaelic poets of the late 20th and early 21st centuries are Derick Thomson, Iain Crichton Smith, Aonghas Macneacail, Catriona Montgomery, Meg Bateman, and Myles Campbell.

Thomson, in particular, has written and published poetry over six decades, changing his style and preoccupations over time but retaining the qualities that make him an outstanding poet, namely:

- a subtle intellect, emotional depth and the ability to seamlessly blend the two
- free verse which has the musicality of the traditional song metres – but more flexibility
- robust, yet precise, use of language
- a wry wit and a sharp sense of irony.

The following poem is a typical example of that sense of irony:

Alba v. Argentina, 2/6/79	**Scotland v. Argentina, 2/6/79**
mìos às dèidh Taghadh na Pàrlamaid, 3/5/79	*a month after the General Election, 3/5/79*
Glaschu a' cur thairis	Glasgow erupting
le gràdh dùthcha,	with patriotism,
leòmhainn bheucach	growling lions
air Sràid an Dòchais,	on Hope Street,
an Central	the Central
mùchte le breacan,	choked with Tartan,
cop air Tartan bho mhoch gu dubh,	foaming from dawn to dusk,
is mùn nam fineachan air a' bhlàr;	and clansmen's piss on the battlefield;
iolach-catha a' bàthadh bùrail nam busaichean –	the battle-cry drowning the buses' drone –
Sco-o-t-land, Sco-o-t-land –	Sco-o-t-land, Sco-o-t-land –
Alba chadalach,	sleepy Scotland,
mìos ro fhadalach.	a month late.

An example of the work of the younger poets, Aonghas Macneacail's 'Marilyn Monroe', can be seen in Section 4. Written in Gaelic and English, it has a more modern feel than Thomson's work but is equally skillful and insightful.

6.4.2 Drama and Fiction

The short story, novel and play first appeared in Gaelic in the early 20th century but it was only in the 1960s and 1970s that these genres achieved the same standing as poetry in Gaelic. Indeed, many would argue that the short story is now the quintessential Gaelic literary form.

The two most successful and prolific Gaelic short story writers of this period have been Iain Crichton Smith and John Murray. Smith's stories cover a wide range of themes and settings and are characterised by intellectual rigour, poetic imagery and precision in their use of language.

Murray is a short story writer of a more conventional stamp, creating an array of interesting story lines and characters and deploying a wide variety of styles with consummate ease. The skillful use of language and humour are key features of Murray's style

The main writers of Gaelic plays include the innovative Finlay MacLeod and the more traditional Paul MacInnes. MacLeod is best known for impressionistic pieces such as *Ceann Cropic* (the first Gaelic play on television in 1976), although the children's radio adventure series *Na Balaich air Rònaidh* (1968) employs a more conventional narrative approach.

Despite these two success stories, however, Gaelic playwrights have been hamstrung by a lack of opportunities to show their work, on stage or through the media, and, similarly, short story writing has been affected by the closure of the literary magazine, *Gairm*, in 2002.

It is only in the past two decades that the Gaelic novel has reached maturity, due largely to *Ùr-sgeul* ('New story'), a promotional scheme run by the Gaelic Books Council.

Angus Peter Campbell's *An Oidhche mus do Sheòl* is one of the novels fostered by Ùr-sgeul. A family chronicle, it follows an array of interesting characters through various social and historical situations, in the Islands, Glasgow and Civil War-era Spain. This novel contains some strong writing, interesting insights and accurate descriptions of historical settings: in scope it is reminiscent of the 'Great American Novel', and has both the strengths and weaknesses of that genre.

Catriona Lexy Campbell is a younger writer, with a lighter touch, but she also shows great skill in creating characters and plots and is an undoubted future talent. Other novelists published in the *Ùr-sgeul* series include Martin Macintyre, Norman Campbell and Norman MacLean.

6.4.3 Songs and tales

Among the great treasures of Gaelic literature are the songs which have come down in the oral tradition, some of them very old. A popular example is 'Griogal Cridhe', a song of great sensitivity and beauty, which can be dated as it refers to an historical event, the persecution of the Clan Macgregor in the late 16th century. It features on the BBC's *Bliadhna nan Òran* [website](): though the text is in Gaelic, various versions of the song can be enjoyed by clicking on the icons on the right of the page.

Recently, individuals and groups such as Runrig have composed Gaelic songs with a more modern flavour. Many of Runrig's songs have been covered by other singers or groups. 'Cearcall a' Chuain', for example, was recorded by a Gaelic choir and can be heard on the BBC [website]().

Gaelic also has a rich heritage of traditional Gaelic folk tales, of which John F Campbell's 19th century *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* is a well known collection. Attempts have been made in recent years to revive the storytelling tradition: although this has not been uniformly successful, the tales themselves survive alongside the songs as a treasure trove of Gaelic lore, complementing the growing corpus of contemporary poetry and fiction in the language.

6.5 Sports and pastimes

Scotland, including the Gaelic-speaking areas, has a very rich tradition of games and pastimes which were a crucial part of life, both in urban and rural environments. They were important elements of young people's lives and preceded the introduction of more formalised and regulated sports in the late 19th century.

These games and pastimes were often linked to the seasons or to specific times such as New Year, Christmas and other special occasions. They were games of chance and skill, of contest and forfeit; they involved ghosts and witches, courtship and marriage divination and well worship; gambling, feats of skill and strength, ball games and dance games.

Many of them involved singing, chanting or clapping, and their musical content very likely forms a basis for many traditional songs and tunes.

A number of significant collections and publications exist, detailing the wide range of games and pastimes and a number of organisations such as the Folklore Society and The School of Scottish studies at Edinburgh University have done important work in preserving the rich store of activities, including variations of the same games as interpreted and passed on throughout the country.

The Statistical Accounts of Scotland are an invaluable source of information on games and pastimes in the 19th century.

Box 7 Some games and pastimes

Cluich an taighe ('The Home Game')

Played with three circles 60 yards apart; participants gather in one of them; and one other person outside with a ball. The person with the ball tries to hit the others while passing between the circles making them 'prisoner'.

Stracair

A bat game played by opposing teams with the aim to get a ball (*ball-speil*) into a hole in the ground.

Iomairt air a' bhall

Played with a ball thrown against a wall, players assuming names; when name is called, designated player has to try and catch it before it hits the ground; if player fails to catch it he/she then has to avoid being hit by the player who threw it at the wall.

Iomairt air a' gheata

Played with a bat or thick stick two against two. The game involves striking a small stick trying to get it into a '*cailleach*' or hole; the other two players protect the 'gate'; sometimes called Cat and Dog or Cat and Bat.

Iomairt air an Stainchear

A version of rounders or 'bases' with the name possibly derived from the English *stanchel* (stanchion/a station/upright/support). The bat is shaped like a cricket bat, the ball made of yarn, wound round a cork centre.

Shinty

Among the sports which came of age and began to be regulated in the 19th century, shinty was undoubtedly the most important to the Gaels.

Shinty - *iomain* or *camanachd* in Gaelic - was probably introduced to Scotland along with Christianity and the Gaelic language nearly two thousand years ago by Irish missionaries. The game, or some similar version of stick and ball activity, has been played through time virtually UK-wide, from the more hospitable and gentler plains of the Scottish Borders; from the Yorkshire moors to Blackheath in London, to wind-swept St Kilda as the intrepid traveller Martin Martin described on his epic voyage round the Hebrides around 1695:

> 'They use for their diversions short clubs and balls of wood; the sand is a fair field for this sport and excercise in which they take great pleasure and are very nimble at it; they play for some eggs, fowls, hooks and tobacco; and so eager are they for victory that they strip themselves to their shirts to obtain it.'

Shinty world-wide

Shinty is a game of great antiquity and is strictly amateur. It is linked (not always with complete accuracy) to golf and ice hockey, and is also to be found in a much wider space from the plains of Montevideo in the mid-nineteenth century, to Toronto and Canada's Maritime Provinces; from the blistering heat of New Year's Day in Australia over 150 years ago, to Cape Town and also the war-ravaged wastes of Europe through two World Wars. There is now a burgeoning group of players and clubs in the United States of America.

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