

BC	1263	Battle of Largs, King Haakon dies	1872	Education Act 1872
c.10000	1266	Treaty of Perth	1874	Bemera Riot
c6000	1275	Battle of Ronaldsway	1880s	Canadian Prairies available
	1300	Dutch already fishing herring	1880	Steamer pier Lochboisdale
	1354	John of Islay Lord of the Isles	1884	Napier Commission
3900	1350s	Borve Castle on Benbecula built	1886	Crofting Act
	1398	Henry Sinclair visits America??	1887	Paire Deer raid
3800	1468	Impignoration of Orkney	1888	Aignish Riot
3500	1492	<i>Columbus reaches America</i>	1897	Government purchases land
3200	1493	Lordship of Isles forfeit		Kyle Railway opens
3150	1506	Stornoway Castle captured		Golden Road on Harris
c.3000	c.1520	Rodel Church built	1900	Flannans lighthouse mystery
c.2900	1540	King James V visits	1901	Railway reaches Mallaig
2700	1547	Alasdair Crochach buried Rodel	1904	Loss of <i>SS Norge</i> at Rockall
2600	1550s	Cromwellian garrison	1906	Vatersay raid
c.2500	1598	Fife Adventurers		Harris Tweed Trade Mark
c.2000	1601	Battle of Carinish	1910	Adabrock bronze hoard found
	1603	Union of the Crowns	1912	Mingulay evacuated
	1607	Stornoway Burgh of Barony	1915	First Great Skuas breed
1500	1653	Cromwellian fort built	1918	Leverhulme buys Lewis
1159	1666	<i>Great Fire of London;</i>		U-boat shells Village Bay
c.800		<i>Newton realises gravity of situation</i>	1919	<i>lolaire</i> shipwreck
700	c.1700	Martin Martin visits		Coll & Gress raids
600	1707	Treaty of Union	1920	N Zealand Wild White Clover
c.325	1715	Jacobite rising		Hattersley Loom
214	1721	Kelp-making introduced to isles		Bragar Blue Whale
100	1722	Flora MacDonald born	1920s	Pentland Road built
c.55	1727	Smallpox epidemic on Hirta	1923	Stornoway Trust
AD	1741	Tigh Chearsabhagh built	1930	St Kilda evacuated
33	1745	Bonnie Prince Charlie arrives	1934	Rocket Post to Scarp
43		First emigrants leave Barra		First air services start
c.70	1746	Battle of Culloden	1936	Scheduled air services to Barra
83	1760	Sheep farming introduced	1937	End of herring boom
c.100	1764	Sir Alexander MacKenzie born	1938	Work on South Ford link starts
c.150	1770	Grass, clover and turnip seeds introduced, farming reforms	1939	World War II
c.500	1776	<i>American Declaration of Independence</i>	1941	<i>SS Politician</i> grounded
c.620		<i>Death of Muhammad</i>	1942	Monarchs evacuated
632		<i>Death of Muhammad</i>	1948	<i>Whisky Galore</i> released
700s	1786	John Knox visits	1949	filming of <i>Whisky Galore</i>
793	1789	Eilean Glas lighthouse	1953	Great Bemera Bridge
795	c.1800	Crofting system introduced	1957	Rocket Range South Uist
800s	1816	Stornoway Old Pier renovated	1959	<i>Russia launches first satellite</i>
871	1820s	Start of large scale clearances	1960	North Ford causeway built
c.872	1830	Collapse of Kelp Boom	1965	Arnol Blackhouse last inhabited
		Mermaid sighted	1967	Loganair starts inter-island service
955	1831	Lewis chessmen found at Uig	1969	<i>First landing on the Moon</i>
1000	1833	Barra Head lighthouse	1973	MV <i>Suilven</i> start of ro-ro
	1840s	Potato blight	1974	ro-ro service to Lochboisdale
1014	1841	Fudaiagh Mor cleared	1975	Islands Council formed
	1842	Harris Tweed invented	1987	St Kilda World Heritage Site
1065	1843	Disruption in the Kirk	1990	Vatersay causeway opened
1066	1844	James Mathieson buys Lewis	1993	Harris Tweed Act
		Regular steamer to Stornoway	1997	Scalpay Bridge
1079	1850s	Many evictions	1998	First unmanned aircraft to cross
1098	1851	Major clearances on Barra		Atlantic lands at Rocket Range
1156	1852	Amish Point lighthouse	1999	Bemera Causeway opened
	1853	Annie Jane shipwreck	2001	Eriskay Causeway opens
	1860	Herring fishing gets important	2002	1st edition of this guide published
1171	1862	Butt of Lewis lighthouse	2003	Land Reform (Scotland) Act
c.1200	1865	Stornoway Harbour Commission	2005	Gaelic Language Act
1231	1867	Callanish cleared of peat	2009	Sunday ferries to Stornoway
	1869	Castlebay major Herring port	2011	3rd edition of this Guide Book



Moonset over Callanish at the major lunar standstill

After the last Ice Age ended about 10,000 years ago, Mesolithic nomadic hunters arrived in Scotland. Many sites attest the presence of these people, but evidence in the Outer Hebrides remains sparse. Most probably this is because relative sea level was 5-10m lower than today. As a result much land, and archaeological evidence, has been lost to the sea, especially off the shallow west coasts.

By 4000BC, Neolithic farmers were settled in the area and for over 1,500 years their culture flourished. The houses, tombs and standing stones they built are among the most spectacular Neolithic monuments in Britain.

The Bronze Age succeeded the Neolithic and left behind burnt mounds, middens and ruins of small houses. Individual burial in stone cists or barrows became the norm, either as cremations or inhumations. This period was marked by a deterioration in climate and the appearance of

bronze tools and weapons as well as Beaker style pots.

About 700BC larger round houses started to appear and later the spectacular brochs, some with large settlements around them, were developed. Iron tools and weapons were revolutionary. The Outer Hebrides remained peripheral, but from about AD43 and later as part of the Pictish Kingdom, they started to experience more outside influence.

In the 8th century the Scandinavians began to appear. Large scale migration took place during the 9th century, followed by the *Golden Age of the Vikings*. The Norse domination lasted for nearly 500 years and this influence can still be seen in many place-names today. Orkney was of great strategic importance during Viking times, and the exploits of the Earls and their supporters are related colourfully in the *Orkneyinga Saga*.

Medieval times saw a small

influx of Lowland Scots, however the Western Isles remained remote to Scotland for long. After the Jacobite rebellions major political changes brought them much more into the mainstream. During the 19th century the notorious clearances removed thousands of native inhabitants, and created the empty lands we see today.

The region was opened up with the advent of steam power in the 19th century when sea transport became more reliable and railways were built to ports such as Oban. During the later 19th and the 20th century there have been the boom in Herring fishing, two World Wars, improvements in agriculture, North Sea Oil.

An influx of large numbers of mainly English immigrants, with the result that the population decline has slowed. Wind, wave and tidal power generation have yet to make an impact, but probably will in the near future.



Bharpa Langass on North Uist is well preserved

NEOLITHIC AGE The first settlers to the Western Isles were probably Mesolithic hunter-gatherers around 7000BC. However, the earliest substantial remaining structures are the many prominent chambered cairns, domestic sites and standing stones built by settled Neolithic farmers.

The introduction of agriculture brought with it a different lifestyle involving animal husbandry, as well as the planting and harvesting of crops. Natural resources such as fish, crustacea, molluscs, wild animals and plants were still exploited but no longer as the main source of food.

Heel shaped cairn, Barra



Everything that is known about these people has been gleaned from archaeology. Their language and beliefs are unknown, but the many artefacts, including human and animal bones, pottery, beautifully carved objects as well as stone and bone tools cast light on their way of life.

Chambered cairns are found throughout the islands, and are particularly numerous in the Uists. Most are prominently sited on hilltops or ridges above good agricultural land. They are monuments to the dead characteristic of Neolithic times which occur throughout the Atlantic coast of Europe.

These monumental structures are stone built and were used for funerary and ritual purposes. They were constructed from around 3500BC and some were in use for a millennium. The large scale of many suggests that society was organised and successful before being able to spare the time and effort to create such structures. Most are ruinous, having been used as quarries over the years, or cleared out in the 19th century.

Chambered cairns typically have a central chamber with an entrance passage. While most in the Western Isles are round, other variations include heel-shaped and long cairns. Some

Bharpa Langass showing entrance to passage



have several cells off the main chamber and many have a fore-court which may be enclosed by horns.

Massive stones are a feature of many of these cairns. Externally they are often surrounded by akerb of massive uprights, with especially impressive megaliths at the entrance. Internally they are frequently divided by large upright stalls. The walls and corbelled roofs are usually built with very large slabs. Although most are now ruinous heaps of stones their appearance when built was probably much more impressive.

Bharpa Langass on North Uist is the best preserved chambered cairn in the Outer Hebrides, with an intact chamber and pas-



Dun Bharpa, above Craigston, Barra

sage, but there are many other impressive cairns to visit throughout the isles. Unfortunately few are signposted but finding them and admiring the view is all part of the pleasure in visiting these enigmatic monuments.



Reineval chambered cairn, South Uist

Bharpa Langass entrance passage from inside



NEOLITHIC TIMELINE

BC	
c.11000	Ice in retreat
c.7000	First hunter-gatherers arrive?
3500	Settlement at Allt Chrishal, Barra
3150	Unstan Ware Carinish hearth Shulishader axe Grooved Ware
3000	Chambered Tombs Callanish stone ring
2000	Callanish tomb Chambered tombs finally sealed up

NEOLITHIC SITES TO VISIT

Lewis	Callanish Cam a'Mharc Garrabost Aird Dell Steinicleit Clach an Truiseil
Harris	Northton
North Uist	Bharpa Langass Pobull Fhinn Carinish Clettraval Unival Loch Olabharr
South Uist	Reineval
Barra	Allt Chrishal Dun Bharpa



Neolithic house at Allt Crysail, Barra

Settlements In contrast to the large number of chambered cairns, there is very little visible evidence of domestic settlement in the islands. Several sites have been excavated, notably Eilean Domhnuill at Loch Olabhat on North Uist, which is one of many islets connected to the shore by a causeway. Machair sites at Udal on North Uist and Northton on Harris have also been studied.

These excavations yielded a large amount of material and information about life in the Neolithic and have revealed substantial footings and hearths of buildings.

Grooved Ware pottery was found which is quite similar to that from the same period in Orkney, suggesting the existence of cultural links, as well as "ritual" carved stone objects and polished stone axe blades. A com-

plete stone bladed axe with a beautifully carved Hawthorn haft was found at Shulishader on Lewis in peatworkings. The wood dates from 3150BC.

In peaty areas the generally acidic soil conditions do not allow for the preservation of bone and most organic objects, but in the alkaline machair areas preservation is much better, especially in waterlogged conditions. Since so much of the land

area is covered by blown sand or blanket peat, it seems likely that much remains to be discovered.

The Neolithic period was characterised by the gradual removal of trees and scrub, which had returned after the melting of the ice. Land clearance for agriculture, combined with grazing preventing regeneration were major factors. Wood was also consumed in the construction of buildings, the making of tools and boats as well as for fuel.

The Neolithic farmers kept cattle, sheep, goats and pigs. They also hunted deer, seals, dolphins and small whales. Shellfish, fresh water fish, deep water species such as Cod and Haddock as well as birds all featured in the diet. Six rowed Barley or Bere was grown as well as some wheat.

Although there is no artefactual evidence about their boats, it is obvious that they had sea going craft capable of fishing offshore and of carrying people, goods and animals substantial distances. Most likely their boats were constructed with hazel

frames, covered with tanned hides. Tarred woven cloth, perhaps using nettle fibres may also have been used.

Similarly, apart from the stone lower courses nothing remains to indicate what their houses looked like. Since Lewisian

Gneiss is hard to quarry, it seems probable that the upper walls were built from turves. Roofs would then have been constructed from local wood, driftwood or whalebone, and thatched with heather, reeds or straw depending on availability.



Northton machair, Harris



Replica Neolithic pots from Eilean an Taighe, North Uist

Polished stone axe



Neolithic Grooved Ware pottery



Carved stone object



Shulishader Neolithic polished stone axe and haft



Carved stone object



Shulishader Neolithic polished stone axe and haft





Callanish at midsummer dawn

STANDING STONES are prominent in the Western Isles, ranging from individual monoliths and small stone circles to the large and dramatic stone setting at Callanish overlooking Loch Roag. The dates of erection are unknown as yet, but the majority are assumed to be Neolithic monuments dating from around 3000BC or later.

Callanish has a complex of standing stones. The main setting is a central ring of large monoliths with radiating stone rows which run roughly east, south and west. A double armed avenue projects slightly east of north. Unusually, there is a small chambered cairn in the centre of the ring which postdates the largest monolith.

In addition to the main setting, here are five or more smaller stone circles near Callanish, as well as chambered cairns. Excavations here have revealed Grooved Ware similar to that found in Orkney and dating from about 3000BC, as well as sherds of Beaker pottery dating from perhaps 2000BC.

Various astronomical alignments have been suggested at Callanish. These include sunrise and sunset at the solstices and moonset at the major lunar standstill. This occurs every 18.6 years, when the Moon sets at its extreme northerly azimuth and the lunar eclipse cycle restarts.

Whether such solar and lunar events are really part of the design of Callanish or other stone settings is open to speculation. The Neolithic people would have been more aware of the seasons and the regular movements of the Sun, Moon, planets and stars than many people today.

The stone circle at Pobull Fhinn in North Uist is also very dramatic. It commands a panoram-

ic view over Loch Eport, the North and South Lees and Eaval to the east, and the flat expanse of North Uist to the south. There are obvious possible astronomical alignments. The site may be connected with Bharpa Langass chambered cairn, just to the northwest.

The majority of the other monoliths throughout the islands seem to be isolated but some, as at Gramsdale on Benbecula, are the remnants of circles, or are near to chambered cairns. Some may be seamarks or mark long forgotten events.

The original function of such large standing stones as Clach an Truisil on Lewis, the tallest in

the Outer Hebrides, or Clach Mor a'Che on North Uist is not clear but there are legends relating to them. These include mythical tales about ancient giants, celebrations of clan victories and their being grave mark-

ers of Viking chieftains. A fairy connection is often suggested. These mysteries are all part of the pleasure of visiting these ancient sites. Early morning, late evening and in moonlight are evocative times to visit.



Small stone circle at Callanish

Pobull Fhinn stone circle, Langass, North Uist



Clach Mor, a'Che, North Uist



Gramsdale, Benbecula

Standing stones above the bridge, Great Bernera



STANDING STONES TO VISIT

Lewis	Callanish below Steinicleit Clach an Truisil Achmore
Gt Bernera	above bridge
Harris	Traigh Iar
North Uist	Pobull Fhinn Sornach Coir'Fhinn Clach Mor a'Che Carinish
Benbecula	Gramsdale
South Uist	above Stoneybridge Pollochar
Barra	Borve machair



Adabrock Bronze Age hoard found at Ness, Lewis i 1910

BRONZE AGE The period between about 2000BC and 700BC is called the bronze Age. It is characterised by changes in burial practice, from communal chambered cairns to individual interments in stone lined cists. These were often covered by a barrow of earth or a stone cairn. Bodies were often cremated, but inhumation was also practised.

Beaker pottery also appears

around this time. These fine pots are often found associated with burials from this period. They are finer than Neolithic pots and usually highly decorated, often with cord marks. They may have contained food or drink to accompany the deceased on their journey.

The ruins of small round met-houses which date from this period are quite common in the Western Isles. Middens

and field walls may be apparent. Burnt mounds date from this time. These piles of fire blackened stones are usually situated next to a watercourse and are often accompanied by a trough. Stones were heated in a fire and used to boil water, either to cook meat, or as a sauna, or perhaps both.

Only limited evidence of metalworking has so far been discovered here. At Northton in Harris some splashes of

Gold torc and rings dredged from near the Shiants



NMS



Bronze Age pot

bronze suggest that casting may have taken place. At Dalmore some metal fragments were found in a limited excavation on an eroding shoreline. Some evidence of bronze working has been found at Cnip in Lewis.

This period was marked by a deterioration in climate and the encroachment of blanket peat bogs over large areas. Windblown sand also covered areas which in Neolithic times were agricultural land. This lack of evidence may simply reflect the fact that most sites are covered by sand or peat.

Adabrock Hoard In May 1910 whilst cutting peats at

Adabrock in Ness, Lewis, Donald Murray came across a hoard of bronze artefacts. These included parts of a large vessel with a decorated rim, socketed axes, a spearhead, a chisel, a hammer and razors as well as a gold bead and amber beads. Two whetstones complete this dramatic find.

Bronze swords have also turned up in peat banks. Those from South Dell on Lewis and Iochdar on South Uist are typical *Caledonian swords*. Along with a number of socketed axes, these have also been found on Skye. These stray finds from the late 19th century may have been deposited deliberately, and

seem to date from the late Bronze Age.

Arrowheads made from quartz or flint also turn up in the Bronze Age. These tanged and barbed objects are usually beautifully made and probably unused. They are sometimes stray finds, but are also commonly found with burials. For example, one was found in Bharpa Langass as a late deposition.

The evidence suggests that during this period the Outer Hebrides were in close touch with the outside world and new fashions in technology, but that life in general was harder than in the Neolithic.



Dalmore, Lewis, site of Bronze Age domestic remains



Tanged and barbed arrowhead

Bronze Age house, Allt Chrisal, Barra



BRONZE AGE TO VISIT

Lewis	Callanish below Steinicleit Clach an Truisel Achmore
Gt Bernera	above bridge
Harris	Traigh Iar
North Uist	Pobull Fhinn Sornach Coir'Fhinn Clach Mor a'Che Carinish
Benbecula	Gramsdale
South Uist	above Stoneybridge Pollochar
Barra	Borve machair



Replica Iron Age house at Camas Bosta, Great Berneray

IRON AGE The term northern Scotland from about 700BC to early medieval times. The shortage of timber meant that stone was used for the walls and internal divisions.



Replica Iron Age house at Camas Bosta, Great Berneray - interior

Crannog on Great Bernera, built on an islet and reached by a causeway



sions.

These houses were quite large and roomy inside. The roofs were built using large timbers which may have been imported. Driftwood or whalebone was probably also used. The roofs were lined with turves supported by straw or heather ropes (simmons) and thatched with heather, straw or reeds as available.

Roundhouses were often built on small islands on lochs and reached by a causeway. Such dwellings are referred to as *crannogs*. They were also sited on small hills or on the machair, often just above the shore. It is thus likely that many have been lost due to erosion by the sea

It now seems that roundhouses, duns and brochs are all part of an evolution in building styles. All of the duns so far excavated have intra-mural cells, galleries or stairs resembling the larger brochs. Good examples are scattered throughout the islands from Loch an Duna in Lewis to Barra Head lighthouse.

Elsewhere in Britain massive roundhouses were constructed of wood. All that remains are post holes, visible in aerial photographs or by geophysical survey. The Atlantic Roundhouses are now thought to be a local development of a widespread style of building.

Brochs and duns in the Outer

Hebrides seem to have been isolated structures, and not usually surrounded by settlements. While those situated on islets on lochs would have had easy access to water, those on rocky knolls would not, since the local Lewisian Gneiss is not porous and wells are rare in such places.

Excavation has shown that these houses were really farmhouses, often with long occupation histories, rather than strongholds, and perhaps more a product of fashion rather than defence needs. The broch towers had more than one internal wooden floor, which were accessed by the internal stairway.

The smaller duns would not have had more than one level and indeed the blackhouses which persisted into the 20th century would not have been that much different inside. With their thick walls, massive roofs and central hearths these houses would have been quite comfortable, though perhaps not to modern taste.



Excavated aisled wheelhouse at Kilphedar, South Uist

Another development was the wheelhouse, which was built on the machair. A large circular hole was dug in the sandy soil. This was then lined with a stone wall. Further stone walls were then built radially to support the exterior walls from collapsing inwards and the structure roofed over. Unfortunately the only well preserved examples are at Jarlshof in Shetland. There is an excavated but partially collapsed example at Kilphedar on South Uist.

There are a number of promontory forts in the Outer Hebrides. The best examples

are at Rubha na Beirgh near the Butt of Lewis, Caisteal Odair on the north-west point of North Uist, and near the lighthouse on Barra Head.

IRON AGE TIMELINE

700	Iron Age round houses
600	Oldest Broch deposits
100	Brochs at peak
100AD	Brochs abandoned

IRON AGE SITES TO VISIT

Lewis	Callanish Dun Carloway Riff Loch a'Dun
Gr Bernera	Dun Bharabhat Houses, Bosta
Harris	Northron
North Uist	Clettraval Dun Torchuill Dun Sticir
Benbecula	Dun Buidhe
South Uist	Loch a Bharp Dun Mor Dun Uiselan Kilphedar Aisled House Allt Chrishal wheelhouse
Barra	Dun Scurrial Dun Ban Pabbay Barra Head

Wheelhouse at Allt Chrishal, overlooking Vatersay Sound, Barra





Dun Carloway intramural stairway

Dun Carloway The most prominent and best preserved broch is Dun Carloway, not far from Callanish. It is built on a rocky hillock, in common with many other similar mon-

uments. As in all brochs, the walls are hollow. The inner and outer walls are bound together with large lintels. These form the floors of the intramural galleries, which are

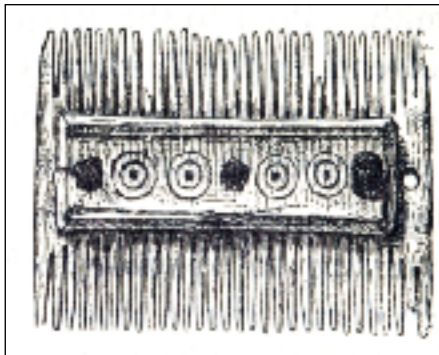
accessed by stairs. The walls are over 3m thick at the base, and the interior walls rise vertically from the scarcement at about 2m above the floor.

The exterior walls have a marked batter and slope inwards considerably. The maximum surviving portion is about 9m high, while the missing north upperside reveals the construction. No doubt many of the stones are in the ruined blackhouses below.

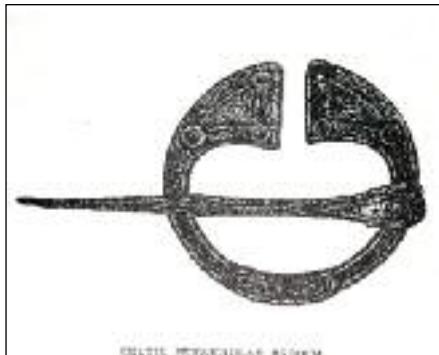
Brochs remain conspicuous in the landscape and there are many throughout the Outer Hebrides that are worth visiting. Most are now robbed out and reduced to piles of rubble. However in many cases intramural galleries and stairs can be discerned. Some remained in use for many centuries, even into medieval times.

A few of these sites have the remains of extensive outbuildings or settlements. Dun Vulcan on South Uist is perhaps the best example, but Dun Torchuill and Dun Sticir

Pictish comb



Penannular brooch



on North Uist also have outlying ruins.

Pictish Period There is very little influence so far of direct Pictish influence in the Outer Hebrides beyond two symbol stones. Both are Class I stones with well known Pictish symbols. Neither have an archaeological context.

The Benbecula stone could be related to the monastery at Balivanich. It has a disc with three small discs inside and a rectangular comb box. The Pabbay stone has a crescent and V-rod as well as a flower symbol. It also has a crude and more deeply incised cross.

Excavations at Dun Cuier, barra, Eilean Olabhat, North Uist and Loch na Berie, Lewis have revealed many Pictish-style artefacts, such as combs. Evidence of metalworking included moulds ingots, metal fragments, pins and penannular brooches. Fine quality jewellery was obviously being made in the Outer Hebrides during Pictish times.

Pictish spindle whorl



Benbecula Pictish symbol stone



Dun Carloway survives to a height of 9m

Although the evidence is sparse it is clear that cultural, and presumably trade, connections with the outside world were active in Pictish times. It is likely that more awaits.

Pabbay Pictish symbol stone





Viking gilt bronze brooches and necklace from Cnip, Lewis

VIKINGS The islands were perhaps Pictish at the time of the first Viking incursions. The existence of several islands named *Pabbay* implies that Celtic monks were present when the Norsemen arrived.

The Vikings were already settling in Orkney by the late 8th century, and first attacked Iona in 795AD. They must therefore already have been familiar with the Western Isles by that time. Norse domination of the western seaboard of Scotland was to continue for nearly 500 years.

They were variously referred to as *Lochlannaich*, Fjordmen, *Finnngaills*, White Foreigners, *Nordmanni*, Northmen, or simply *Vikiniir*. During this time the Western Isles were often referred to as the *Imse Gall*, Islands of Foreigners, by the Scots and Irish, and as the *Sudreyar*, Southern Isles, by the Vikings themselves.

Although few written records exist from this time apart from some saga mentions, there is much placename and linguistic evidence for the Norse settle-

ment. This is very apparent in Lewis where a large proportion of townships and natural features have names of Norse derivation. Western Isles Gaelic also incorporates many Norse words.

Very few distinctively Norse artefacts have been found, apart from several pagan burials at Cnip on Lewis and on Hirta. Two Norse silver hoards have been discovered in the Western Isles, at Oronsay, North Uist (c.1780) and in the Castle Grounds, Stornoway, in 1988.

The *Orkneyinga Saga* tells us that the first immigrants to Iceland included people from the Hebrides, no doubt of Norse-Pictish descent, who left to avoid paying Norwegian taxes. It now seems that the Norse settlement may have been relatively peaceful, but the takeover total, unlike the violent Viking raids.

A most interesting inscribed stone was found at Cille Bharra, on Barra. This has Christian Celtic symbols and Norse runes which read, *After Torgeth, Steiner's daughter, this cross was raised.* The stone is a replica

The island site now occupied by Kisimul Castle is said to have been the site of 11th century Viking fortifications. It seems likely that something similar may have existed at Stornoway with its excellent harbour and fertile surrounding land.

Several Norse domestic sites have been excavated, at Barvas in Lewis, at Udal in North Uist as well as at Bornish, Drimore and Kildonan in South Uist, but no

NMS

Excavation of a Norse settlement at Bornish, South Uist



Norse era building is on public view. No doubt most have been built over or reused by succeeding generations. Perhaps most were built using imported wood and local turf with stone footings.

During the early Norse period the Western Isles were used as Viking bases, and at various times came under the nominal control of the Earl of Orkney or the King of Man, themselves under the King of Norway. The Norse influence in the west stretched from Lewis to the Isle of Man and settlement towns in Ireland.



Viking grave at Traigh na Berie, Lewis



Silver hoards usually include amounts of hack silver which would have been weighted

Celtic/Norse stone at Cille Barra



Viking grave at Traigh na berie, Lewis



VIKING AGE TIME-LINE

AD	
c.500	Irish papae arriving
795	Iona first attacked
995	Sigurd the Strong baptised by force
c.1000	Sigurd makes Earl Gilli Governor
1014	Battle of Clontarf, Isles under Kingdom of Man
1066	Stamford Bridge
1098	King Magnus Barelegs' expedition
1156	Loss of Southern Hebrides
1263	Battle of Largs
1266	Treaty of Perth

SITES TO VISIT

Lewis	Uig Sands Lews Castle grounds Cnip Stornoway St Olav's Church
Harris	Northton
North Uist	Udal
South Uist	Bornish Drimore Kildonan Calvay Island
Barra	Kisimul Castle Cille Bharra
St Kilda	Village Bay



King (one of 8)

The Lewis Chessmen are said to have been found in sand dunes on the east side of Uig Bay on Lewis in spring 1831. The British Museum purchased 82 of the gaming pieces in early 1832 from an Edinburgh dealer called Forrest. The Scottish Antiquaries then acquired the remaining 11 in 1851.

Pawn (one of 19)



The pieces are carved from Walrus ivory and probably date from the second half of the 12th century. Nothing is known of their provenance but there are many colourful tales. Most likely they belonged to a prosperous person who hid the collection for safekeeping from marauders. Whether this was a merchant, cleric or wealthy Lewisman is open to imagination.

There has been much speculation about the origins of the Lewis Chessmen since their mysterious appearance in 1831. It is generally agreed that they are in the tradition of art from Trondheim. There are strong similarities with other carving and artwork made in the late 12th century



Queen (one of 8)

in this northern seat of the archbishop.

There are also suggestions that the objects may originate from Iceland. At this time skilled craftsmen and artists were employed by the church to produce fine works. Many of these were trained in Trondheim and Walrus ivory was readily available in Iceland.

Regardless of their place of origin the 93 pieces represent almost 4 complete chess sets of extraordinary craftsmanship. They are the earliest to look familiar to chess players today. The Bishops seem to be an Icelandic innovation, later taken up in Britain.



Knight (one of 15)

The so-called Warders are in fact **Beserkers**, which in Icelandic refers to fighters wearing bearskins. They are mostly depicted biting the tops of their shields as they prepare to make a frenzied attack. Their function seems to have been similar to castles today, to make fast brutal attack.

Warders or Beserkers (three of 12)



Bishop (1 of 16)

It has been suggested that some of the chessmen may have had a dual role in both chess and the Scandinavian game, hnefatafl. In this board game the king is in the centre and is defended by his warriors.

There is no evidence of colouration on any of the

pieces to differentiate the sides. This of course may have worn, or been washed off whilst deposited under the sand at Uig. Regardless of all the mysteries the Lewis Chessmen merit a trip to the British Museum or the National Scottish Museum to see their marvellous craftsmanship.

Knights (Two of 15)





Replica Birlinn "Aileach" which sailed from Ireland to the Faeroes

LORDS OF THE ISLES

During the 9th century, the kingdoms of Dalriada and Pictland merged under Kenneth MacAlpin. The centre of power of the new Kingdom of Scotland moved eastward, while Norse power was increasing on the western seaboard. The title *Lord of the Isles* originates from the 10th century when Norse rulers, who depended on the sea to wield power, were referred to in Gaelic as *Ri Imse Gall* (G King of the Isles of Foreigners).

Around 1100 the western mainland came under Scottish control, while the Isles remained under the Norwegian crown and were controlled by Scottish-Norse families. In about 1156 the Norse-Scottish Somerled, married to the granddaughter of the first *Ri Imse Gall* (Godfrey of the Isle of Man), took control of the Southern Hebrides. Chieftains in the Hebrides had always had divided loyalties until 1266 when the **Treaty of Perth** ceded the Hebrides to Scotland. The *Annual of Norway* was paid by the Scots until 1468, when Orkney was impignorated to Scotland.

Before this the Hebrides were controlled by a mix of the Norwegian Crown, the Kings of Man, the Earls of Orkney, and various Irish Kings. Norse power in the west was waning in the later 13th century while the Scots were becoming more interested in the islands. After the unsuccessful campaign of the Norse King Haakon Haakonson in 1263, power slipped to the Scottish Crown.

The principal families remained fiercely independent, taking sides in the Wars of Independence,

where some gained much and others lost everything. In particular Angus Og MacDonald's support for Robert the Bruce gained him much power and influence, and enabled him to greatly increase his family's interests in the Hebrides. In 1354 John of Islay, son of Angus Og, took on the title of *Dominus Insularum*, having supported David II and then Robert Stewart (later Robert II), and achieved more control of the Hebrides than anyone before him. When he died in 1387 he ruled the Hebrides from Islay to Lewis and large areas of the Mainland, but not Skye.

This power was centred on Islay and depended on having control of the sea. His successors strove to expand their power until eventually John of Islay plotted with Edward IV of England against the Scottish Crown. This was a step too far and his title was forfeited in 1475, and finally again in 1493.

Despite attempts to regain the title by various MacDonalds, the existence of such a centre of power within Scotland was too big a

Birlinn carved on the tomb of Alasdair Crotach in Rodel Church, Harris



threat to the Kingdom to be allowed to revive. Today the Prince of Wales holds the honorary title of *Lord of the Isles*.

The West Highland Galley, (ON *Byrdingr*, cargo ship), or Birlinn, which was the basis of all power in the Hebrides and West Highlands, developed from the Viking longship. In the 12th century the starboard steering oars started to be replaced with stern hung rudders. These open boats had sails and oars for propulsion and were very well suited to the waters of the area whether for military, piracy, trade or fishing uses.

Sea transport was vital to the Hebrides as elsewhere in Britain, and the small and manoeuvrable Birlinn was well suited to these waters. These fast and seaworthy vessels enabled the Lords of the



Weaver's Castle off the south of Eriskay was a pirate's lair

Isles and their successors easy means of transport around the isles for lawful and less lawful activities. Similar craft remained in use until the end of the 19th century.

By the early 17th century the government had started to take strong measures against the owners of Birlinns, particularly after the Union of the Crowns in 1603, when transport of Hebridean mercenaries to Ireland came to an end. After this, large boats were superseded by smaller versions

suit to inshore fishing and communication between islands rather than carrying large crews of fighting men and their booty.

In 1991 a replica galley called the *Aileach* sailed up the west coast of Scotland and on to the Faeroes. This boat was built in the west of Ireland in a manner very similar to Viking ships. Many small fishing boats around the Hebrides are still clinker built, but sadly wood construction has almost universally given way to fibre glass.



Dun Sticir on North Uist is an Iron Age broch which was reused

Borve Castle on Benbecula was a Clanranald stronghold



LORDS OF THE ISLES TIMELINE

AD	
1098	King Magnus Barelegs' expedition
1156	Somerled takes Southern Hebrides
1263	Battle of Largs
1266	Treaty of Perth
1354	John of Islay - Lord of the Isles
1493	Lordship of the Isles forfeit
1603	Union of the Crowns

SITES TO VISIT

Lewis	Stornoway
	Dun Eistean, Ness
Harris	Rodel Church
North Uist	Dun Sticir
	Teampall na Trionaid
Benbecula	Borve Castle
South Uist	Weaver's Castle
	Caisteal Beagram
	Calvay Castle
Barra	Kisimul Castle
	Dun MacLeòid



Ronan's Chapel, Rona may date from the 7th century

EARLY CHURCHES There are many ancient chapel sites in the Western Isles. While there is no evidence that St Columba ever visited any of the Isles, the people must have felt the influence of the Irish seaborne monks from the late 6th century onwards. Placename evidence suggests that *Papar* (ON priests) were present at the time the Vikings arrived, and there are several Pabbays (ON *Papa-oy*, Priest's Island) in the area. Incised stones with crosses have been found at several locations, and there are dedications to several Irish saints.

The two oldest extant chapels are on remote islands. On Rona

St Olav's Chapel, Gress, Lewis



(*Ronaiddh*) the chapel may date from the late 7th or early 8th century. There is a small *oratory* or cell with a corbelled roof at its east end. The chapel is surrounded by an oval enclosure with many cross-shaped grave markers, some of which may be 7th to 9th century and others 12th or 13th. The dedication may or may not be to the real St Ronan as the name Rona is Norse (ON *Hraun-oy*, rough island).

On Sula Sgeir there are several beehive cells with corbelled roofs. St Ronan's sister is said to have gone there where she was later found dead with a shag nesting in her chest cavity.

St Flann's Chapel on Eilean Mhor in the Flannan Isles is another small stonebuilt chapel of Irish type on a remote island. Its date is unknown, but it is clearly ancient.

Cille Bharra on Barra is dedicated to St Barr, or Finbar. There are three chapels on the site, which may date from Norse times or earlier. An interesting carved stone was found in 1865 with runes on one side and a Celtic cross on the other, which is from the 10th or 11th century. There are also three medieval tombstones which may have been grave markers from MacNeill chiefs of Barra.

At Howmore on South Uist there are ruins of several medieval chapels. The largest, of which only the east gable remains, is *Teampall Mor*, which may date from the 13th century, while the other three chapels are smaller and newer. The site is the burial place of the chiefs of Clan Ranald.

Teampall na Trionaid at Carinish in North Uist is said to have been founded by Beahag, daughter of Somerled in the 12th century. It was a school in the middle ages and is mentioned in 14th century records. Today the buildings are

Chapel ruins at Howmore, South Uist



Kilbar, Barra

ruinous but, in the 19th century, the church was said to have had carved stone decoration and a spire.

The old church dedicated to St Columba at Aignish in Lewis may date from the 14th century. There is a gravestone to Margaret, daughter of Ruairi, who was chief of the MacLeods of Lewis and who died in 1503. The surrounding ancient cemetery is being eroded by the sea.

Teampall Mholuaidh at Ness in Lewis is dedicated to the Irish St Moluag. It may date from the 16th century or earlier and is the site of an ancient cult where the sea-god Shony was celebrated on All Saints Day. The church was renovated in the early 20th century.

On Benbecula there is an ancient chapel at Nunton which is dedi-

Teampall na Trionaid, Carinish, North Uist



Teampall Chaluim Cille, Balivanich, Benbecula

cated to the Virgin Mary and associated with a nunnery, whose stones were used to build Clanranald's house and steading in the 18th century. The convent may also have had connections with the Monach Islands.

Teampall Chaluim Cille (G Columba's Church) is now just a ruin on a small mound near Balivanich. It gave the village its name, *Baile na Mhanaich* (G Township of the Monks) and is said to have been established by St Torranan from Ireland, who landed at Calligeo (G the Geo of the Monks). Apparently this monastery continued to function until the 17th century.

The church at Rodel in Harris is dedicated to St Clement and is the second largest medieval church in the Hebrides. It was built in the

1520s by Alasdair (*Crotach*) MacLeod of Dunvegan whose grandiose tomb occupies the south west wall of the choir. Alexander MacLeod's tomb dominates the east end of the church and there are several other interesting grave-stones in the north transept. By the 18th century the church was disused, but it was renovated in the 18th and 19th centuries. The tower has several carved stone ornaments including a *Sheela na Gig*.

OLD CHURCHES TIMELINE

AD	
563	Columba on Iona
7 th -8 th cent	St Ronan's Chapel
7 th -13 th cent	Howmore Chapels
c.1300	Teampall na Trionaid
14 th cent	St Columba, Aignish
c.1520	Rodel Church
	Aignish Church
16 th cent	Teampall Mholuaidh

SITES TO VISIT

Lewis	Teampall Mholuaidh
	Aignish Church
	St Olav's Kirk
Harris	Rodel Church
North Uist	Teampall na Trionaid
Benbecula	Nunton Chapel
	Nunnery, Nunton
	Teampall Chaluim Cille
South Uist	Howmore chapels
	Kildonan Norse kirk
Barra	Cille Bharra
Rona	St Ronan's Chapel
Flannans	St Flann's Chapel
Monachs	Chapel/monastery
St Kilda	Village Bay

FLORA MACDONALD & BONNIE PRINCE CHARLIE



Flora MacDonald

FLORA MACDONALD was born in 1722 at Milton on South Uist. After the death of her father and the abduction of her mother to Skye she was taken into the care of MacDonald of Clanranald. She had some education in Edinburgh and was a practising Presbyterian. Several unsuccessful attempts to overthrow James II were made before

the Glorious Revolution of 1688. William of Orange and Mary, sister of James, became King and Queen of Scotland and England, James VII and II fled to France. There were abortive rebellions between 1689 and 1715 in favour of James, the Old Pretender. Finally, in 1745, Bonnie Prince Charlie or the Young Pretender had a final attempt.

Flora MacDonald's birthplace at Milton, South Uist



Prince Charles Edward Stuart landed at the Princes Strand on Eriskay on 23rd July 1745 before raising his standard at Glenfinnan on 19th August and marching south via Edinburgh to Derby before retreating north again. After a lucky victory at Falkirk the Jacobites then occupied Inverness, but were utterly routed by the Duke of Cumberland's much superior Government forces at Culloden on 16th April 1746.

With a reward of £30,000 for his capture, Bonnie Prince Charlie went on the run and ended up in Benbecula on 27th April 1746 after a wild crossing of the Minch. He and his companions were to spend the next few months as fugitives on South Uist, Lewis and Benbecula.

Despite the price on his head and local knowledge of his hiding places, he was not given up to the authorities, and finally escaped to Skye from Rossinish in Benbecula, with the help of Flora MacDonald. Lady Clanranald of Nunton House was a key player in organising this. Passes were obtained for herself, an Irish maid called Betty Burke and the boat crew to go over to Skye.

The Prince reached Portree and eventually left for France on 20th September 1746, never to return to Great Britain. Whether the Government actually really wanted to catch him, or merely ensure his departure from Britain is not clear, but there are many stories about his short time in the Western Isles as a fugitive.

The main effects of the rebellion were the hastened decline of the traditional clan system and the rapid development of commercial landlordism

"A NAME THAT WILL BE MENTIONED IN HISTORY, AND IF COURAGE AND FIDELITY BE VIRTUES, MENTIONED WITH HONOUR.", DR SAMUEL JOHNSTON.



The Battle of Culloden, the last pitched battle fought in Great Britain

which together were to lead to the clearances, emigration and the establishment of the crofting system.

One of the Prince's companions was Neil MacEachan who had fled to France with him. The son, James, was to rise to fame under Napoleon. He became a Marshall in the French army and he visited his father's birthplace at Howmore in 1826.

Surprisingly, the Prince's less than illustrious life in exile, mostly chasing ladies it seems, appears to have done nothing to reduce the myth and romance of the '45, which in reality was brutal and ill planned. It certainly had very little to do with the welfare of the people of the Highlands and.

Flora MacDonald was briefly held in the Tower of London, where Samuel Johnston, and others, visited her. She is said to have told the Duke of Cumberland, son of George II and commander-in-chief in Scotland, "that she acted from charity and would have helped him also if he had been defeated and in distress."

Her bravery and loyalty had gained her much sympathy, not least because of by her good manners and gentle



Bonnie Prince Charlie

demeanor. Dr Johnson said of her that she was "a woman of soft features, gentle manners, kind soul and elegant presence." This is quite a compliment from the famously grumpy and critical Johnston.

In 1750, she married Allan MacDoald of Kingsburgh on Skye, who was an army captain. They settled Flodigarry in Skye, but in 1774 emigrated to North Carolina, and emigrated to Carolina. Her husband fought on the British side in the American War of Independence, and

they returned to Skye in 1779. Her husband was released in 1784 and she died at Kingsburgh in 1790. Apparently her shroud was a sheet once slept in by Bonnie Prince Charlie but this is probably as fanciful as many other stories about him.

She was buried at Kilmuir cemetery accompanied by a huge crown of mourners. Dr Johnston's tribute is carved on her tomb, "a name that will be mentioned in history, and if courage and fidelity be virtues, mentioned with honour."

Flora MacDonald is buried at Kilmuir in Trotternish, Skye





A Crofting couple outside their blackhouse

CROFTING The present system of land tenure in the Western Isles is the result of local, national and international events over the last 250 years. Until the 1745-46 Jacobite rebellion and its violent aftermath, the West Highlands and Islands were

largely left to themselves by successive Scottish and then British governments. After of Culloden the ancient clan system, which had survived in the area long after such systems had died out elsewhere was brutally repressed. This resulted in centuries of hard-

ship, destitution and emigration for the people as well as depredation of the landscape.

Until 1745, most of the land in the Highlands and Islands was held under a system whereby the clan controlled ownership. The chief of the clan did not actually own the land, although under the feudal system it was nevertheless held under the overlordship of the King.

In the wake of the civil war new laws made the chiefs proprietors. In modern language the land was nationalised at zero compensation and taken by the clan chiefs for nothing. These chiefs of course proceeded to live and act in the manner of landed gentry elsewhere, but had to find a means to generate the income to keep them in their new found status.

The system of land tenure was most likely little changed since prehistoric times and was essentially a community based society of subsistence farming, augmented with a little inshore fishing. The society was based around the clan system whereby the chief could demand men to bear arms in times of emergency but otherwise the people were left to get on with life. Hebridean Galleys were a major source of power and influence in a time when inter-clan and inter-family conflict was common.

During the French Wars many products and raw mate-

rials were in short supply and either prices became elevated or alternatives were found. Small black cattle had long been a sought after product of the Highlands and Islands and their prices soared. At the same time the ready supplies of seaweed provided the ideal raw material to make **kelp**, a good source of potash for glass making and munitions, then in short supply.

Kelp is made by burning dried seaweed in pits. The very labour intensive process depends on a ready supply of cheap labour, but it could be very lucrative for the land owner. The extensive beaches on the west coast of the Outer Hebrides are especially good for seaweed harvesting.

At the same time sheep farming was becoming very attractive with high prices both for mutton and wool due to the booming industrial revolution in the south. Accordingly small tenants were cleared off the land upon which they had lived for centuries and forcibly relocated in areas suitable for kelp-making on plots of land too small to be viable on their own.

Inevitably with the cessation of hostilities the kelp boom came to an end and suddenly the proprietors had no further need for the large population of small tenants. This was aggravated by famine in the late 1840s due to potato blight and bad harvests. Despite some famine relief effort the



Kelp burners at work - it was a laborious, dirty job

government and land owners invoked a major emigration programme to Canada and Australia which was to result in the loss of tens of thou-

sands of people from the Highlands and Islands but was much to the ultimate benefit of their destination countries.



Lazy beds on fertile Jurassic rock at Airibhgean a'Beagh, Shiant Islands

The contrasting grandeur of Clanranald's mansion at Ormical, South Uist -



Children outside their blackhouse home at Stornoway





Memorial to the Pairc Deer Raid, Lewis

During the late 18th and 19th centuries the Established Church ministers usually tended to err on the side of landowners and sheep farmers and did not often support tenants or criticise evictions. There was a growth of religious revival and evangelism which was greatly aided by the publication of the Gaelic Bible and church schools.

In 1843 the Disruption and establishment of the Free Church of Scotland was seen as a victory for smallholders but as a threat by the landowners, and was one of the seeds from which grew the surge of opposition to landlordism by the crofters and their supporters.

Great Bernera Riot cairn



The history of land holding in the Western Isles is quite different to Orkney and Shetland, which remained under Norse rule until 1468, and where the land was held by Udal law. Under this system much of the land was held under owner occupation, ever since the first Norse settlement in the 9th century, while the rest was held by the earl, church or king. Udalers owned their land absolutely and could not be cleared nearly so easily. Norse dominance in the north was complete, whereas this may not have been true in the west.

The lack of leases and security of tenure for crofters meant that there was no incentive to improve houses, buildings or agricultural practices and an indifference to stock breeding, resulting in poor quality animals and low cattle prices. During the 1880s wool prices crashed and many sheep farms were turned over to deer forests. At the same time the crofters finally started become proactive and from 1881 until the 1920s there were a series of rent strikes, land

seizures, and refusals to obey courts and officials.

Throughout the Western Isles lazy-beds or *feannagan* may be seen, often on the most inhospitable of places. These ridges were raised by people evicted from their homes and forced to glean a living elsewhere. They were created from anything but laziness, and involved carting seaweed, animal manure and domestic midden to the area to augment the meagre turf which was present to grow potatoes and grain.

The Land Wars are commemorated by a series of cairns on Great Bernera, at Gress, Aignish and Pairc on Lewis. The actions of these crofters in the 1880s were to be the catalyst for change in the control of crofting lands, but the outcome did not immediately solve all of their problems.

Public opinion in the country was changing in favour of the crofters, due to very successful political campaigning. The Napier Commission on crofting was set

up in 1883 and reported in 1884. The Crofters Act of 1886 finally gave crofters security of tenure and compensation for buildings and improvements as well as power to fix rents. The Act did not solve the other central problems for crofters and cottars, namely the severe lack of land and the issue of land ownership.

In 1897 the Government finally started to purchase more land for crofters but it was after the First World War before the Board of Agriculture finally addressed the issue by eventually purchasing over 200,000 acres of land for crofts.

During the 20th century there have been many attempts to solve the so called Highland Problem; howev-

er the central issue of land ownership remains. Apart from ensuring the continued fossilization of traditional crofting (itself a creation of the early 19th century), most people remain tenants who do not own or control the land. In addition the system of government grants to crofters combined with a bureaucratic Crofters Commission are probably the factors which most limits economic development in the islands.

Most young people do not return home to work after their education, and depopulation is a serious threat for many of the remoter areas. Only a fundamental reform of land tenure where local communities have much more influence on land usage can begin to allow

the potential for social and economic progression and thus viable local populations.

The Stornoway Trust was for long unique. It was the only area to accept Lord Leverhulme's offer of ownership in 1923 and administers it on behalf of the people. The Land Reform Act (Scotland) 2003 has allowed several communities to buy up estates, which are now run for the benefit of the local economy. These include parts of Lewis, Harris and South Uist. The largest to date was the £4.5 buyout of South Uist, Eriskay and Benbecula by Stòras Uibhist (G The Wealth of Uist). Covering 92,000 acres the estate covers nearly 25% of the Outer Hebrides.



Gress Land Raid cairn, Lewis

Aignish cairn, Lewis



"LAND WARS" TIMELINE

c.1760	Sheep farming
c.1800	Crofting system introduced
1843	The Disruption in the Kirk
1850s	Many evictions
1874	Bernera Riot
1884	Napier Commission
1886	Crofters Act
1888	Aignish Riot
1919	Coll and Gress raids
1923	Stornoway Trust

SITES TO VISIT

Lewis	Stornoway Arnol blackhouse Gress Aignish Great Bernera Pairc Uig
Harris	Leverburgh "Golden Road"
North Uist	Lochmaddy Sollas
Benbecula	Nunton
South Uist	Eriskay
Barra	Vatersay Castlebay



Girl herding sheep, Ness, Lewis

Crofting remains an important part of the social and economic life of the Western Isles. There are over 6,000 crofts, but few are large enough to provide a living. Although crofters have had the right to buy their land for the price of a few years' rent few have opted for this due to the way in which agricultural support grants apply to crofting.

Most crofters have other jobs, or are retired. There are also a few small farms, especially on the Uists. The main production is Blackface lambs for fattening on the Scottish Mainland. Cattle are also

There are lots of old grey Fergies, but this one is red!



kept on the Uists and Barra, where grazing is better, and holdings bigger. Hay, silage and some oats are grown for winter fodder as well as potatoes for home use.

By its nature crofting is a low intensity method of agriculture and as such is environmentally friendly. Most crofters have one or more additional occupations. Traditionally these might have been weaving or fishing, but many are now just as likely to be in a Stornoway office or on an oil rig. At the same time, the land has helped to retain the scattered rural population structure.

Young people have always left the Western Isles for further education and work. In the past many men joined the Royal or Merchant Navy, or worked on fishing boats, while their wives and children looked after the croft. This is still the case today, as many emigrate to the mainland or abroad to find work, with the result that in several parts of the islands the population is in severe decline.

At present sheep and wool prices are low, and only the subsidies paid by the Government make rearing sheep viable at all. Cattle prices are more buoyant, but

Highland cow on Harris



the market today is for larger, faster growing breeds, which are inherently unsuited to the small scale environment of crofting. Some crofters keep Highland Cattle, or Highland crosses, which are hardy enough to outwinter and meet a speciality beef market.

The crofting community has always believed that the land was theirs. It is to be hoped that the 21st century will see the process of reform continued to the ultimate benefit of the local communities. However the process has taken nearly 300 years since the upheavals of the 18th century.

Agricultural developments that have taken place in other island communities have to a large extent bypassed the Outer Hebrides. Active crofting is essential in maintaining the diversity of wildlife in the islands. In particular grazing and cropping of meadows is needed to stop the growth of rank vegetation.

Crofter with sheep, South Uist



Peat bank on North Uist



Sheep gathered in for shearing on South Uist



Potatoes grow very well on the light machair soil

Cultivating the machair, South Uist





Living room at No 42 Arnol, Lewis

BLACKHOUSES The preserved and reconstructed blackhouse at 42, Arnol in Lewis was inhabited until 1965, having been built in 1885. It is one of the last remaining examples of a long tradition of house building which goes back to Viking times or earlier where people and domestic animals shared the same subrectangular buildings. Blackhouses are so named because they had no chimneys, the smoke escaping through the thatched roof.

The name also had a derogatory connotation which implied that the inhabitants were not very civilised, an assumption which was based on no evidence. This despite

the fact that many eminent master mariners, doctors, engineers and other educated people grew up in such places throughout the Highlands and Islands.

Such houses were usually built from stone and turf on a stone foundation with a wooden lining. Many ruins of these houses may be seen all over the Western Isles. The walls were double skinned with a filling of clay and small stones between the inner and outer faces and up to 2m thick, while the roofs were formed from driftwood or whalebone couples which rested on the inner wall.

The roof was then covered with

slatted planks supported by purlins. A layer of heather turf was put in place and finally the roof was thatched with oat or bere straw, or Marram Grass, and tied down with heather ropes weighted with stones.

Drains were incorporated to remove rainwater and effluent from the byre end which was at the lower end of the house. Often a small barn was attached to one side. The ben end was often just one room, but in later houses, as at Arnol, there was a living room/kitchen and a sleeping room with box beds. A cooking pot or kettle was suspended over an open peat fire in the middle of the floor. Many blackhouses were later modified to have chimneys and hearths and became whitehouses of which there are many examples in the Uists.

The peat reek (smoke) acted as a disinfectant and deodorant, and the sooty thatch made good manure. The proximity of people and cattle perhaps reduced tuberculosis to some extent as ammonia from the cattle urine can kill the bacillus. Exposure to cowpox also gave resistance to smallpox, which dairy maids rarely contracted.

The byre at No 42 Arnol



Heather and choir ropes and homemade baskets

Blackhouses may appear primitive and unhygienic by contemporary standards, but they were well-adapted to the climate and resources available to their inhabitants. The traditional breed of black cattle was small and easily handled and would have provided milk, cheese and butter. Some sheep, a pig and hens would have been kept while fish would have added to the staple diet of potatoes.

Fish and meat would have been smoked in the rafters, or salted down for winter. The houses would have been cosy in winter gales, and could be built out of local materials by the community at almost no cost in terms of money. Their longevity is clear from the many roofless examples scattered throughout the isles.

Across the road from 42 Arnol, a 20th century house has been preserved as an example of the type of dwelling which replaced blackhouses. It is a two up two down house built using concrete blocks. The dwelling is typical of many in rural Scotland and is furnished in the manner of the 1950s, with many interesting artefacts from the time.

20th century kitchen with cast iron stove



Box bed and domestic artefacts



Restored iln and Norse type watermill at Shawbost, Lewis



Exterior of No 42 Arnol from the west



Spinning wool by hand, Procropool, Harris

HARRIS TWEED People have made woven woollen cloth for a very long time, and the traditional Hebridean Sheep was bred for weaving rather than for knitting as in Shetland. The wool is strong and makes a tough thread ideal for the loom, and results in hard-wearing cloth. By tradition it was the women who did the spinning, weaving and waulking and there are many customs and songs relating to the various processes.

Originally everything was done by hand which limited output and thus the quantity

available for sale or barter. In the past the wool was dyed using various plants such as *Crotal* (lichen), browns, Lady's Bedstraw, reds, Alder, black, Heather, green and Birch, yellow. The wool was boiled up outside in a large iron pot until the required colour was developed. Urine was used both to was the wool and as a mordant to fix the dyes.

Obtaining fast and beautiful colours from local plants was a major part of the skill involved in producing tweed. Once woven the cloth had to be laboriously waulked by hand.

After soaking in urine the tweed was laid out on a table and thumped back and fore by a group of women, who sang special waulking songs during the process which shrank the cloth and gave it more body and strength, a process akin to felting.

In 1842, the dowager Countess of Dunmore, who owned much of Harris, became interested and soon Harris Tweed was popular with sportsmen all over the country. By the late 19th century demand was greater than supply and gradually dyeing, carding, spinning and finishing became mechanised. All weaving is still done by hand at home. In 1909 a trade mark of the Harris Tweed Association was registered by the Harris Tweed Association (now Authority) which controls quality and production methods.

The introduction of the **Hattersley** loom in the 1920s, though still human powered, allowed much more efficient

production and a greater range of designs and cloth weights. Although the industry declined for a time, in recent years there has been a revival in demand. The clicking of looms in small sheds is a frequent sound in the Western Isles and it remains a substantial part of the local economy. The traditional width of the cloth is 30 inches, but many weavers are now using new double width looms.

The 1993 Harris Tweed Act states that the tweed "*must be hand-woven by islanders at their homes in the Outer Hebrides and made from pure virgin wool dyed and spun in the Outer Hebrides*". Marketing of the cloth is done by the HTA and by the main mills.

Harris Tweed is sold all around the world, but the vagaries of fashion and ups and downs of economies, mean that demand fluctuates. The orb trade mark symbol is the customer's guarantee of genuine quality in a product "*created for individuals by individuals*".

Weaving on a traditional wooden loom, Procropool, Harris



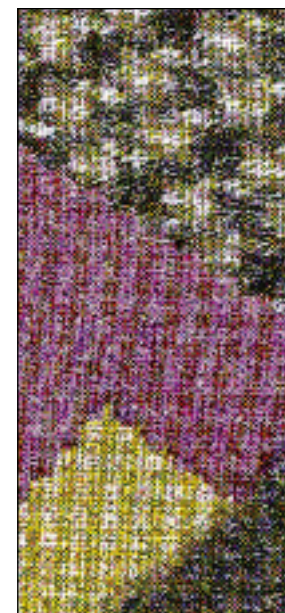
Tweed awaiting despatch



Harris Tweed Authority



Weaver at work on his Hattersley loom, Lewis



Samples of Harris Tweed



Orb symbol Trade Mark

Rolls of finished Harris Tweed



Hattersley loom

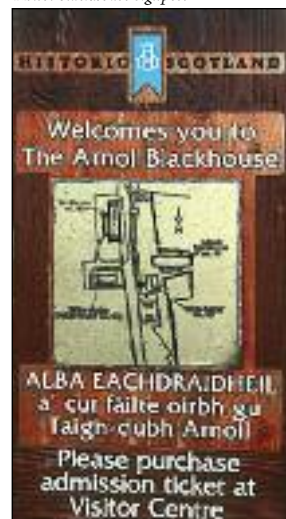


Post Office sign on Barra

GAELIC Today the majority of the population of the Western Isles understand Gaelic. It is the language of everyday life for between 40% and 80% of the population, depending on the area. Various attempts were made in the past to eradicate the language. The Education Act of 1872 forbade the use of Gaelic in schools. Although it did a lot of harm, it failed to eliminate the language.

The political need to destroy the clan system after 1745, plus increasing need to travel to find work, ensured that

Arnol blackhouse signpost



many Hebrideans had to learn English, just as did the many emigrants. It was to be the 19th century before the combination of the Church and the Gaelic Bible taught many people to read and write their language. The introduction of school education for all was at first in English, although this was subsequently relaxed.

It is not clear what language the inhabitants spoke before the arrival of the Vikings. Presumably it was similar to that current in other parts of the north and west of Scotland. It may well have been a form of Brittonic, related to that spoken by the Picts.

Only a few Norse burials, silver hoards, domestic sites and chapels are so far known, despite nearly 500 years of dominance. In contrast they left a very strong impression in the form of placenames and language. A large proportion of the placenames in the Outer Hebrides are directly Old Norse (ON), while many more are Gaelic (G) translations from Old Norse.

Incomers often translate existing placenames into their own language, so the present usage

may often represent layers of ancient Brittonic, Norse, old Gaelic, English and modern Gaelic. Names of rivers, streams, estuaries and seaways seem to be especially persistent. In many cases they have been shown to date back well over 2,000 years, thus predating any of these languages.

Hebridean Gaelic has numerous loanwords from Old Norse, but what is perhaps surprising is the lack of influence over grammar despite Norse control lasting for so long. Latin, through the early church, and English through administration and trade have also had a big influence. But of course modern English also has many Gaelic words.

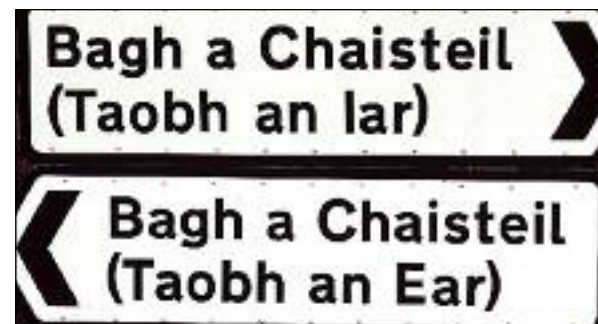
Today official attitudes to Gaelic are much more positive than in the past. The Gaelic Language Act of 2005 was passed by the Scottish Parliament to support the language, in direct contrast to the act of 133 years earlier. Gaelic culture in all its forms now receives a large amount of public support for radio, TV and publications, as well as music, other arts and education. There are worries that young people do not use the

language, but this is perhaps understandable when so many have to leave to find education and work.

There are many Gaelic cultural events which take place during the year, including, the Hebridean Celtic Festival in Lewis, Ceolas Music Summer School in South Uist, Harris Arts Festival and Barra Live. Several *Mòds*, with traditional singing, piping, dancing, music, poetry, story telling and drama are also held.

As if to confuse the visitor modern Gaelic orthography has been applied to many names perceived to be English, which are actually Norse. Signposts may have one or more versions of a name, while maps can have either, both or something different again. The visitor is strongly recommended to refer to the many sites on the Internet on Gaelic and the Outer Hebrides. Some explain spelling, meaning and pronunciation.

Shrine on Eriskay

19th century church, Hirta19th century schoolroom, Hirta

Barra roadsign



Road sign near Stornoway