



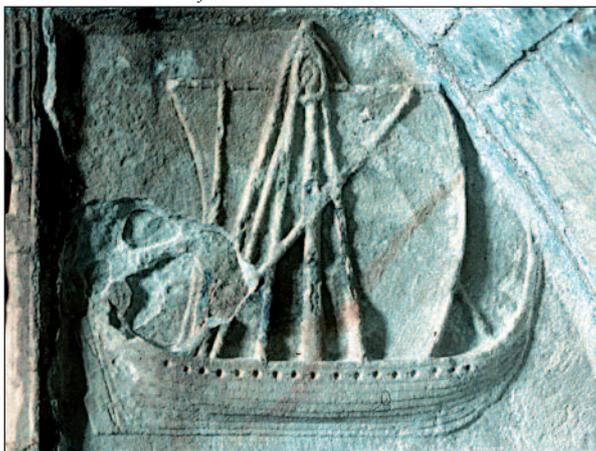
Replica Birlinn "Aileach" which sailed from Ireland to the Faeroes

**THE LORDS OF THE ISLES**  
During the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the kingdoms of Dalriada and Pictland merged under Kenneth MacAlpin. The centre of power of the new Kingdom of Scotland moved east, while Norse power was increasing on the western seaboard. The title *Lord of the Isles* originates from the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Norse rulers depended on the sea to wield power, and 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 always had divided loyalties until 1266 when the Treaty of Perth ceded the Hebrides to Scotland. The *Annual of Norway* was part of this agreement and continued to be paid by the Scots until 1468, when Orkney was impignorated to Scotland.

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



Previously 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 13<sup>th</sup> 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 excluding Skye, as well as large areas of the Mainland.

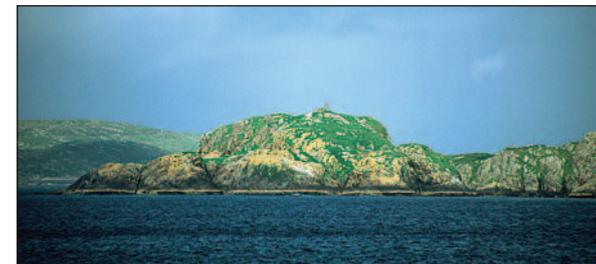
This power was centred on Islay and depended on having control of the sea. His successors strove to expand their power until eventually John of Islay plotted with Edward IV of England against the Scottish Crown. This was a step too far and his title was forfeited in 1475, and finally again in 1493.

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

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 12<sup>th</sup> 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 Isles



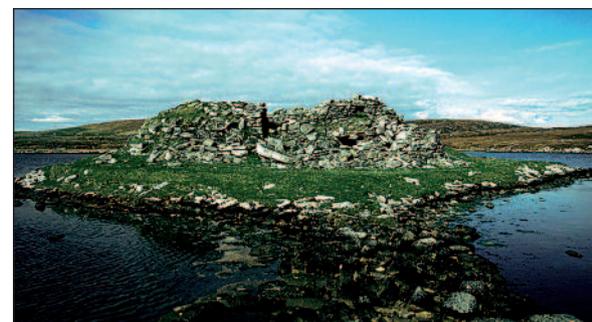
Weaver's Castle off the south of Eriskay was a pirate's lair

and their successors easy means of transport around the Hebrides for lawful and less lawful activities. Similar craft remained in use until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

By the early 17<sup>th</sup> 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 MacLeod



Ronan's Chapel, Rona may date from the 7<sup>th</sup> 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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



(*Ronaidh*) the chapel may date from the late 7<sup>th</sup> or early 8<sup>th</sup> 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 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> century and others 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup>. 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 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> 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 13<sup>th</sup> 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 12<sup>th</sup> century. It served as a school in the middle ages and is mentioned in 14<sup>th</sup> century records. Today the buildings

Chapel ruins at Howmore, South Uist



Kilbar, Barra

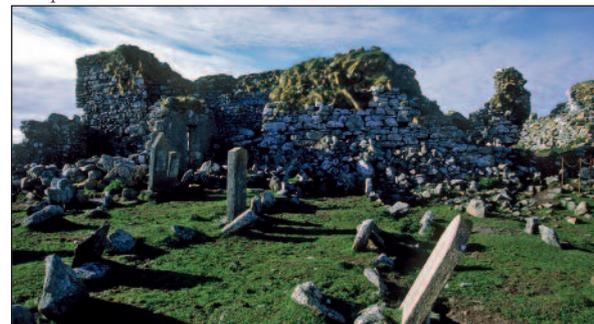
are ruinous but, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the church was said to have had carved stone decorative work and a spire.

The old church dedicated to St Columba at Aignish in Lewis may date from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. There is a gravestone to Margaret, daughter of Ruairi, who was chief of the MacLeods of Lewis and died in 1503. The 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 14<sup>th</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 new house and steading in the 18<sup>th</sup> 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 17<sup>th</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup> century the church was disused, but it was renovated in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The tower has several carved stone ornaments including a *Sheela na Gig*.

**OLD CHURCHES  
TIMELINE**

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

**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

**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

Flora MacDonald's birthplace at Milton, South Uist



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.

Prince Charles Edward Stuart landed at the Princes Strand on Eriskay on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1745. He raised his standard at Glenfinnan on 19<sup>th</sup> August and marched 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 16<sup>th</sup> April 1746.

With a reward of £30,000 for his capture, Bonnie Prince Charlie went on the run and ended up in Benbecula on 27<sup>th</sup> 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 Flora, 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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. His son, James, was to rise to fame under Napoleon. He became a Marshall in the French army and 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.

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 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.

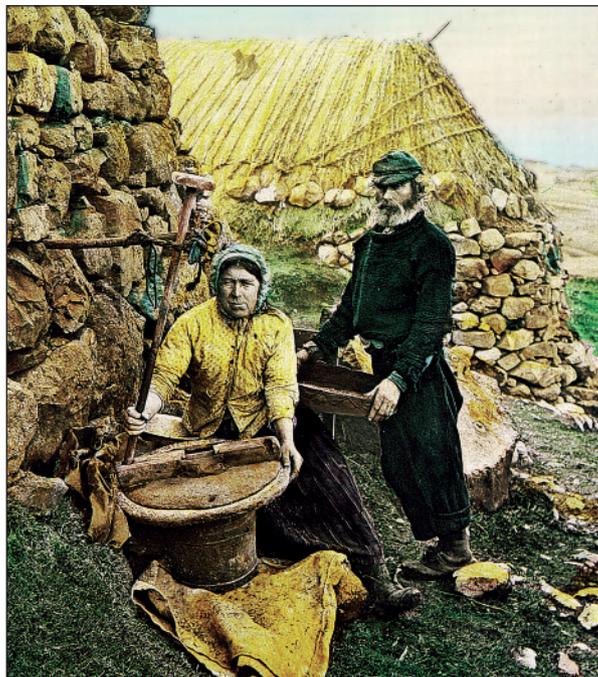
In 1750, she married Allan MacDonald of Kingsburgh on Skye, who was an army captain. They settled at Flodigarry in Skye, but in 1774, they emigrated to North Carolina. Her husband fought as a Colonel on the British side in the American War of Independence. Flora had returned to South Uist in

1779. Allan was released in 1784 and they returned to Skye in 1787. 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 on Skye accompanied by a huge crowd 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 300 years. Until the Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745 the violent aftermath, the West Highlands and Islands were

largely left to themselves by successive Scottish and then British governments. After the Battle 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

Children outside their blackhouse home at Stornoway



centuries of hardship, 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 bestowed the status of landowners on the clan chiefs. In modern language the land was nationalised at zero compensation and taken by the clan chiefs for nothing. These chiefs 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 position.

The system of land tenure was most likely little changed since prehistoric times. It 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 materials 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 abundant seaweed resources provided the ideal raw material to make kelp, a good source of potash, which is essential for glass making and munitions manufacture.

Kelp is made by burning dried seaweed in pits. The very labour intensive process depends on plenty 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. 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 -





Memorial to the Pairc Deer Raid, Lewis

**LAND WARS** During the late 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the Established Church ministers usually tended to err on the side of landowners and sheep farmers and did not often support tenants or criticize evictions. There was a growth of religious revival and evangelism which was greatly aided by the publication of the Gaelic Bible and the introduction of 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.

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 9<sup>th</sup> 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 the case in the west.

The lack of 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 lazybeds 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 with great effort, by 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, as well as 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, which included the issues of land ownership and availability.

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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 limit 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 *Storas 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

Great Bernera Riot cairn





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. Crofters have 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 kept on the Uists and Barra,

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



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 jobs. 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 improving, but low prices in the recent past and changes in subsidies have encouraged a reduction in numbers. Cattle prices are

Highland cow on Harris



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

The crofting community has always believed that the land was theirs. Hopefully the 21<sup>st</sup> 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 early 18<sup>th</sup> 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. Conversely,

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 and were lined with wood. Many ruins of these dwellings 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 might be just one room, but in later houses, as at 42 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.



Heather and choir ropes and homemade baskets



The byre at No 42 Arnol

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 stormy weather, 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 mid 20<sup>th</sup> century house, 39 Arnol, 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.

20<sup>th</sup> century kitchen with cast iron stove at 39 Arnol



Thatched croft house at Howbeg with lazybeds

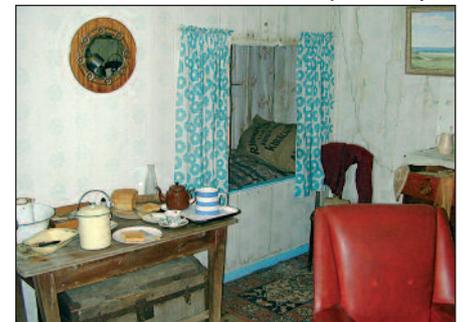


Restored kiln and Norse type watermill at Shawbost, Lewis



Exterior of No 42 Arnol from the west

Box bed and mid 20<sup>th</sup> century kitchen artefacts





Spinning wool by hand, Procropool, Harris

**HARRIS TWEED** The craft of weaving has been practised in the Hebrides for a long time. 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 wash 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.

**Countess of Dunmore** 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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.

**Hattersley Loom** 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.

**Harris Tweed Act** 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".



Weaver at work on his Hattersley loom, Lewis



Samples of Harris Tweed



Orb symbol Trade Mark

Weaving on a traditional wooden loom, Procropool, Harris



Tweed awaiting despatch



Harris Tweed Authority

Rolls of finished Harris Tweed



Harris Tweed Authority



Hattersley loom

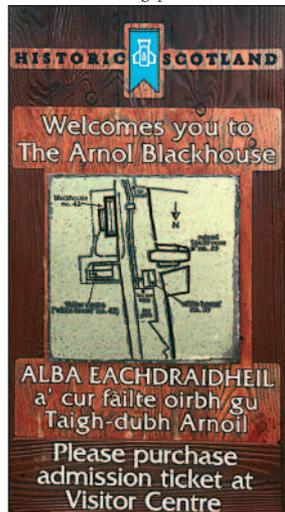


Post Office sign on Barra

**GAELIC** No visitor to the Outer Hebrides can fail to notice that the everyday language is Gaelic and not English for many of the inhabitants. Despite several centuries of strenuous efforts by the Church and State to extirpate it, the language remains strong here and on nearby Skye.

Today most of the population of the Western Isles understands Gaelic. It is the language of everyday life for between 40% and 80% of the population, depending on the area and demographics. There about 60,000 native speakers, mostly in the Outer Hebrides.

Arnol blackhouse signpost



Various attempts were made in the past to eradicate it, including the Education Act of 1872, which forbade the use of Gaelic in schools. Although a lot of harm was done, all such measures failed to eliminate the language.

The political desire to destroy the clan system after 1745, plus increasing need to travel to find work, ensured that many Hebrideans had to learn English, just as did the many immigrants. It was to be the late 18<sup>th</sup> 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.

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 educa-

tion. 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.

**“Celtic”** Up until the late Iron Age “Celtic” was spoken across much of Europe. The term was invented by Edward Lhuyd, Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum, in 1707, as a result of his researches into the languages of Great Britain, Ireland and Brittany. He was one of the first to describe the similarities of Brythonic (Brittonic or P-Celtic) and Goidelic (Gaelic or Q-Celtic).

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.

Scottish Gaelic is closely related to Irish and to a large extent replaced Pictish over much of the Highlands and Islands. The succeeding influences of the Romans, Saxons, Angles, Norse, Danes, Normans and French each left their linguistic marks.

Irish settlers to Argyll and the Inner Hebrides probably introduced Gaelic to Scotland around the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Modern Scottish Gaelic developed during the 12<sup>th</sup> century and later, as Norse power declined in the west of Scotland. Throughout this period, as the Kingdom of Scotland developed, Middle English was becoming the common language of the state.

Gaelic has an ancient and rich oral heritage, which was formerly preserved by the bards and passed from generation to generation. Although an Irish version of the Bible was published in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it was not until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century that a Scottish Gaelic version was published and widely available. It is only during the last 300 years that extensive recording of this oral tradition has been made.

**Old Norse** 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 place-names and language. A large proportion of the place-names in the Outer Hebrides are directly Old Norse (ON), while many more are Gaelic (G) translations from Old Norse.

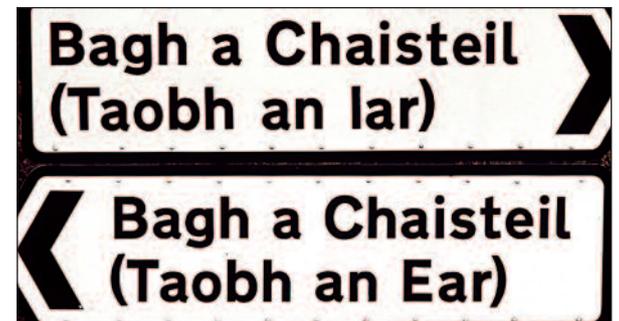
**Hebridean Gaelic** has numerous loanwords from Old Norse, but what is perhaps surprising is the lack of influence over grammar despite Norse control lasting for so long. Latin, through the early church, and English



19<sup>th</sup> century church, Hirta



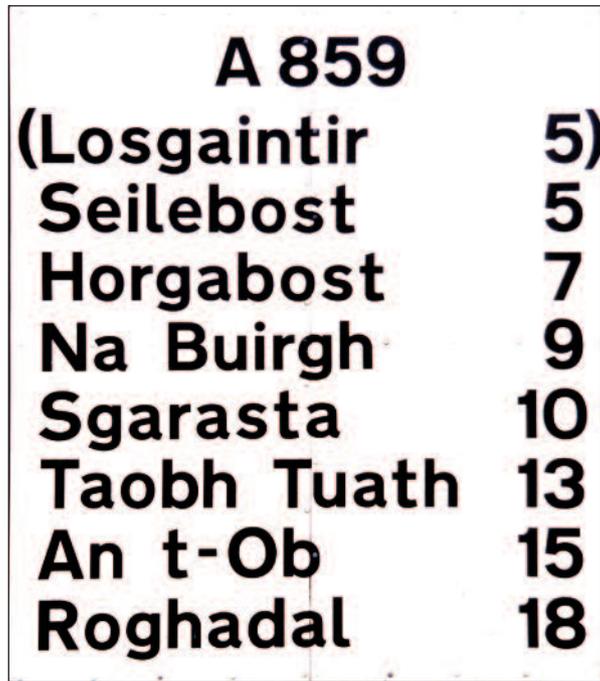
19<sup>th</sup> century schoolroom, Hirta



Barra road sign

Road sign near Stornoway





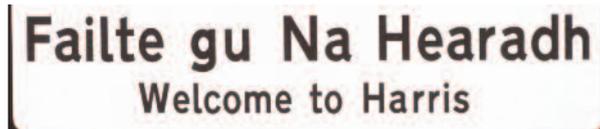
Harris road sign

through administration and trade have also had a major influence. Modern English also has many Gaelic words. In Lewis especially, the people speak with a distinct Norse tone in English.

For centuries, and especially after the failed Jacobite uprisings of the 18<sup>th</sup> early century, there have been official attempts to stamp out

Gaelic. All have failed, despite the efforts of State and Church. In the last century there were concerted efforts to reverse this trend. It is only in the Outer Hebrides, Skye, Tiree and Islay that the language remains strong. In much of the Outer Hebrides it is the language of the majority of the inhabitants.

Classical Gaelic was used in literature in Scotland and Ireland until



the 18th century. The 1767 translation of the New Testament was the first major work to appear in Scottish Gaelic. It was to set a baseline for the modern written language due to its wide distribution and use.

Modern Scottish Gaelic uses only 18 letters, a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, l, m, n, o, p, r, s, t and u. The letter 'h' is mostly used after consonants such as 'b' and 'g' for lenition. The grave accent is often used to indicate a long vowel. As a result modern Gaelic orthography is initially very confusing for native English speakers.

Placenames throughout the Outer Hebrides are heavily influenced by Old Norse. Many words have been incorporated into the language, especially regarding the sea, coastal features, boats, fishing and agriculture. Modern Gaelic also incorporates many loanwords from English and other languages.

Newcomers 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.

Road signs throughout much of the Highlands and Islands are now bilingual. In some instances the old signs have been replaced by

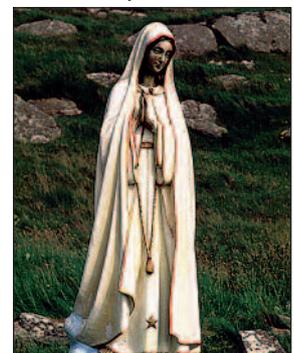
new ones in modern Gaelic only. As if to confuse the visitor modern Gaelic orthography has been applied to many names perceived to be English, which are actually Norse.

Signposts may have one or more versions of a name, while maps can have either, both or something different again. Ordnance Survey coordinates are included for most sites of interest mentioned in the text for this reason.

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.

**Cultural Events** 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 *Mods*, with traditional singing, piping, dancing, music, poetry, story telling and drama are also held.

Shrine on Eriskay



SOME GAELIC PLACENAME ELEMENTS

Scottish Gaelic	English		
abhainn	stream, river	dun	broch, mound
ach	field	eagach	notched
aird	headland	eilean	small island (ON)
allt	burn or stream	garbh	rough
bodach	old man	geal	white
-an	diminutive (lochan)	geodha	geo, inlet (ON)
aonach	ridge	glas grey	darker
bagh	vagr, bay (ON)	gleann	glen
baile	township or village	gorm	blue, green of grass
ban	blonde, pale	greian	bright
beg	small	iar	east
beinn	mountain (ben)	inbhir	river mouth
bharpa	heap of stones	Innis	meadow
-bhat	vatn, water, loch (ON)	-ist, -ista	bister, farm
bidean	tip, point	kille	church
borve	borg, broch (ON)	làirig	pass.
bost	bolstadair, farm (ON)	liath	grey lighter
braigh	slope	linnhe	pool
buchaille	shepherd	loch	lake
buidhe	yellow	mor	big
caillich	old woman.	nis	ness, headland (ON)
camus	bay	ruadh	dark red (ON)
ceann	head	rubha	headland
chaolais	narrows.	siar	west
cille	church, chapel	skeir	skerry (ON)
caisteal	castle	sron	headland
clach	stone	-sta	bolstadair, farm (ON)
coire	cauldron, kettle	stac	stack (ON)
corran	pointed	teampall	church
dail	dale, valley (ON)	tigh	house
dearg	bright red	traigh	beach
deas	south	tuath	north
donn	brown	uaine	bright green
drum	ridge	uig	vik, Bay (ON)
dubh	black	-val	fjall, fell, hill (ON)
		way	vagr, bay (ON)

SOME POLITE PHRASES

Scottish Gaelic	English
Fàilte	Welcome
Halò	Hello
Latha math	Good day
Ciamar a tha thu?	How are you?
Ciamar a tha sibh?	How are you? (plural)
Madaoinn mhath	Good morning
Feasgar math	Good afternoon
Oidhche mhath	Good night
Tapadh leat	Thank you (informal)
Tapadh leibh	Thank you (formal)
Dè an t-ainm a tha ort?	What is your name?
Dè an t-ainm a tha oirbh?	What is your name? (formal)
Is mise..., Mise...	I am...
Slàn	Goodbye (singular, informal)
Slàn leibh	Goodbye (plural, formal)
Dè a tha seo?	What is this?
Slàinte	Cheers, Good Health