

NOTICE WARNING CONCERNING COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS:
The copyright law of the United States (title 17, U.S. Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Any copying of this document without permission of its author may be prohibited by law.

NOTES ON THE PAST OF
THE GAELIC DIALECT OF ST KILDA

Richard Coates

1988

Cognitive Science Research Paper

Serial No. CSRP 081

School of Cognitive Sciences

SSX
81

CONTENTS

showing the location of St Kilda.....next page

amble.....1

ion 1: PRONUNCIATION.....2

ion 2: VOCABULARY.....6

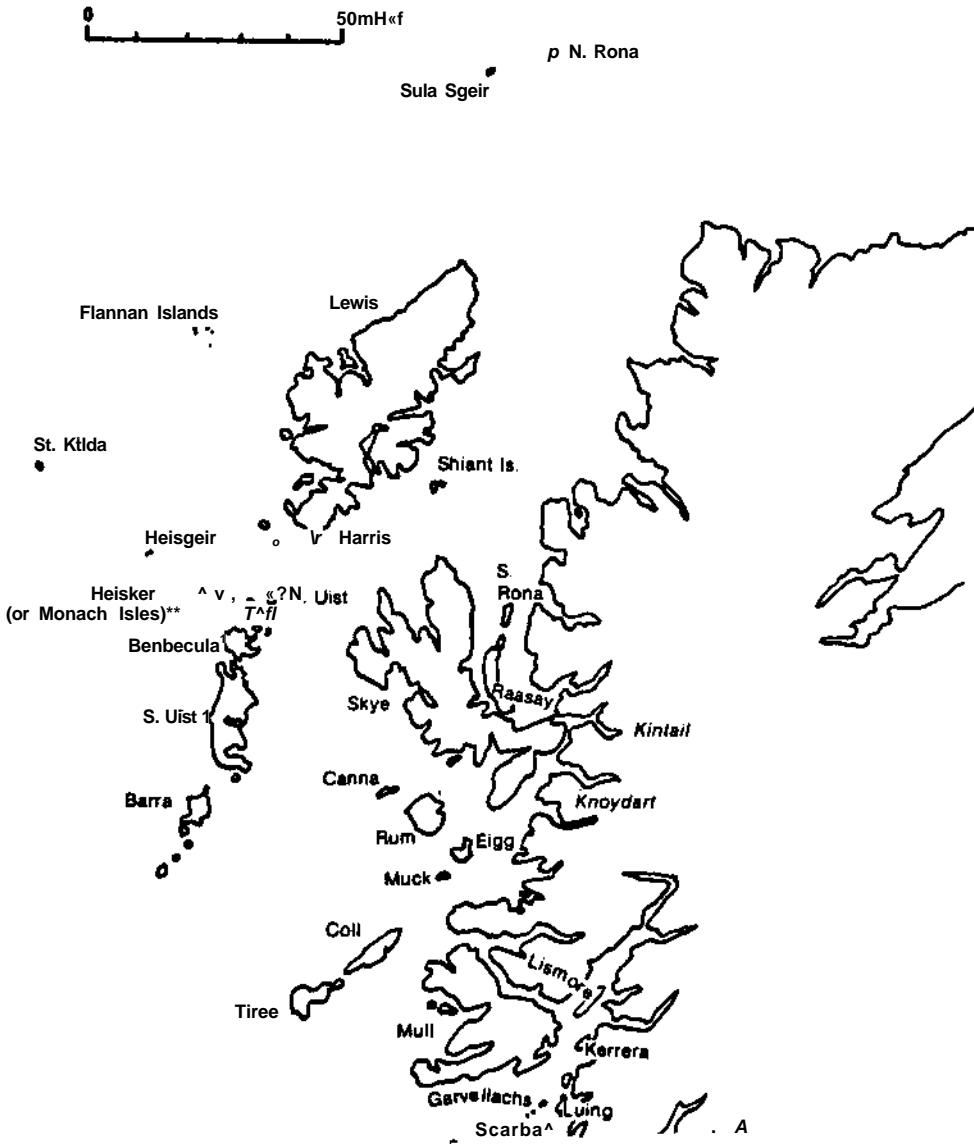
ion 3: ST KILDA GAELIC IN USE.....25

s.....28

rences.....29

SSILAG and a fulmar.....34

Map showing the location of St Kilda



PREAMBLE

This short paper is a by-blow from my book Nomina hirtensia: the place-names of St Kilda, forthcoming shortly. It is offered as a modest piece of background information pending the publication of authoritative work on the topic of the modern dialect by David Clement of the Linguistic Survey of Scotland. It consists simply of an annotated list of features of St Kildan speech recorded over three centuries, with some very limited commentary by myself. I claim no expertise of my own. Some of the authorities (especially Martin Martin (1698, 1703)) give reports of native linguistic features in English, where in fact they must be translating from the Gaelic without saying so. In these cases the report is passed on for what it is worth without any attempt to reconstruct the Gaelic that they might have heard [1]. The bird-names in particular have excited some linguistic discussion that is not entirely free from controversy, and this is noted in Section 2 on vocabulary below.

I must emphasize that the notes are about Gaelic as spoken in St Kilda. There is no presumption that the features mentioned are unique to St Kilda unless this is said explicitly. This is the first time, so far as I know, that these reports on the past of the language of St Kilda have all been brought together in one place, and I hope that to that extent the paper will be useful. I hope - and believe - that it is exhaustive of its limited subject-matter.

I am very grateful for commentary and assistance given by Graeme Buchan of the National Trust for Scotland, by David Clement and John MacInnes of the University of Edinburgh, by Derick Thomson of the University of Glasgow, and by Alasdair Smith of the University of

Section 1

PRONUNCIATION

Martin, the earliest detailed observer of St Kilda, briefly mentions the Gaelic of the inhabitants (1698: 437), saying that "both sexes have a lisp, but more especially the women, neither of the two pronouncing the letters, d, g, or r". It is not said whether these features were unique to St Kilda. Neither is it fully clear what is meant, because Martin offers no examples. (Macaulay (1764) also uses the term lisp, see below.) In the modern dialect the distinction between /t'/ and /k'/ is neutralized. The slender lenes (here the nonlabial palatalized voiceless unaspirated stops) have become palatal consonants. It is likely that Martin alludes to this merger. I have occasionally alluded to Martin's observation on d (presumably /t'/) and g (presumably /k'/) in my place-name dictionary (Coates 1988, forthcoming), but no dogmatic arguments about St Kildan phonology have been founded upon it. I have simply used it as a device to help cast light on some of the more intractable names. (Neil Mackenzie (1911: 5; written c. 1843) also comments on the peculiarity of "d" and "g".)

Mackenzie (1911: 5) and Norman Heathcote (1900: 12; possibly resting on Mackenzie if he knew Mackenzie's MS.) record that the St Kildans pronounced the common Gaelic "r rough" (i.e. velarized nonlenited /R/, cf. Borgstrom 1940: 23-4) as "l" (i.e. /L/?): thus, he says, ruith 'run' was pronounced as if luith. Henderson (1910: 108ff.) accepted this at face value and ascribed it, with no degree of plausibility, to Norse influence. This early observation has caused

find no trace of such a feature in the modern dialect. In fact, it is "slender (palatalized) r" that merges with "slender l" in the speech of the surviving St Kildans, and the history of the process observed by earlier writers remains mysterious.

Martin uses the term mall for 'seagull' (1698: e.g. 428, 433), which Lockwood (1965; 1966) takes to descend by the same process lateralizing /r/ from Common Scandinavian mar; but it is more likely to be a hyperanglicism for Scots maw, as used by Kenneth Macaulay (1764: 159) and as recorded in the Scottish National Dictionary. Martin does not mention such a thing elsewhere; cf. the discussion of his form Down for the name of the island of DUN in Coates (1988). Borgström (1940) does not record this feature from anywhere else in the Western Isles. This pronunciation, for all its lack of currency at the present time, seems to have had repercussions in the stock of place-names; as in MULLACH SCAR, for instance, which contains a reflex of Old Norse skalli 'bald head'. Spellings for this name with l were recorded well into the twentieth century (cf. Coates, s.n.).

An instance of the later merger of /r'/ and /l'/ is seen in the report (Fergusson 1885/6: 91) that in St Kilda sgràbair is sgrabail (see SCRABER in Section 2 below). Note also that Mackenzie (1906: 6) tentatively glosses two occurrences of le in the verses as ri.

The Gaelic of St Kilda is explicitly said by Macaulay (1764: 214-6) to have been distinctive; in particular it was characterized by "uncorrigible lispings: Not one of [the St Kildans] are able to give their proper sounds to the liquid letters". This presumably alludes to the pronunciation of /R/ just mentioned. For Macaulay this feature derives from some "vicious affectation", probably copied from some

influential person like a steward (1764: 215) • The dialect is implied to have differed from that spoken in the Long Island, but Macaulay opines that it originated in Lewis (1764: 263).

Mackenzie, the island's minister from 1830-43, also noted that "the only [other] linguistic differences are in the shade of meaning which they attach to a few words". However his son J.B. Mackenzie, acting as his posthumous editor, notes (1906) that his transcriptions in the literary orthography betray a possible local characteristic, viz. the "frequent suppression of n before c, çj, t and a few uncommon combinations". The vernacular poems collected by Mackenzie include such lines as:

Gheibh fear a(n) tighe ^fn a laimh e
Dh^faithnichinn thu a(n) gàradh leat fein
Bha('n) cridhe fo mhi^h-ghleus
Is thainig i.(^hn) tubh-sa
Tha (^fn) sgeul ud air innseach

where the n^fs in parentheses are presumably supplied by the editor. No initial mutation consequent on its loss is notated, so it is not an analogical change based on phrases including mutated forms of the relevant lexical items or of other ones. It is a phonological change, therefore, even if restricted to the article and despite the unnatural class of environments cited by Mackenzie, and is likely to have consisted of the nasalization of the preceding vowel and loss of the nasal consonant's oral stricture. It is, however, not notated consistently in the verses; cf.:

Leis an tart tha air an dùthaich
A bha dian air an tòir
An Sgrìobtur na firinn

Gaelic dialect of St Kilda

There is slight evidence in the verses for a cluster-simplification affecting the set - indeed ritual - phrase seachd beannachd 'seven blessings'¹; it appears twice as seach beannachd and once as seachd beannach (the missing /k/ (orthographic d) being in each case supplied by the editor). The evidence for further examples of cluster-simplification is insufficient, though the processes are plausible enough.

Section 2

VOCABULARY

Beyond the above, and there is not much of that, it is possible to say on the basis of the evidence of past writers only a little about the history of the vocabulary, and nothing significant about that of grammar or pronunciation. The rest must be left to comparative and internal reconstruction, and/or the assumption that common Gaelic features extended also to St Kilda. In this section are listed some words which have been claimed to be in use in St Kilda Gaelic, though no opinion of my own is implied about whether they are in fact to be heard elsewhere as well.

Macaulay (1764) thought he detected "a little mixture of the Norwegian tongue", which suggests he had noticed the use of some words of high cultural importance of Scandinavian origin, such as siman (i.e. síomain 'ropes' (Mackenzie 1911: 9, 19)) and certain of the bird-names in the first list below. We have already met the observation of Neil Mackenzie, the island's minister from 1830-43, that "the only [other] linguistic differences [between St Kilda and other varieties of Gaelic] are in the shade of meaning which they attach to a few words".

In the lists that follow, the spelling of the head-word is the one which I have found earliest in the literature specifically on St Kilda. The series of bird-name studies by Lockwood (1965-1984) has proved of great use in considering the words in Section 1., though I do not agree with Lockwood on every point of detail.

Martin (1698: 432); •storm petrel¹ (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) • Martin gives an accurate description and provides a quaint but recognizable picture, reproduced at the end of this paper. The word is also recorded as ashilag (Macaulay 1764: 160), aslag (mor) (Ross 1889), aisleag (Mackenzie 1911: 47). Two separate scribal traditions exist, therefore, one indicating a palatal first consonant and the other an alveolar* Mackenzie glosses it 'little ferryman^f, assuming a relationship with Gaelic aiseag 'ferry¹. He applies the term to the storm petrel because of its characteristic going back and forth; its flight is sometimes called "butterfly-like". The relationship can hardly be real, however, for aisleag could not be a diminutive of aiseag; if anything, formally, rather of aiseal 'axletree¹ or •fun¹, though neither of these yields a credible etymology.

Lockwood (1971, 1976: 271) agrees with the identification, but spells the word asaileag, i.e. relying on the •alveolar¹ tradition, deriving it from Old Norse *hafsvala, literally •sea-swallow¹. There are two problems here. Firstly the phonology, involving the sprouting of a final /k/, spelt g, in the Gaelic word (possibly a rendering of the diminutive in -ag; but if so where the medial palatal /I¹/ come from? [2]), and the emergence of palatal (ized) medial consonants, needs explaining. Secondly the description 'swallow' more

obviously applies to Leach's petrel (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*) with its forked tail than to the storm petrel, though the two are otherwise quite similar (indeed Ross (1889) glosses his aslag mor 'fork tail petrel'). The flight of neither is swallow-like. On the other hand, it is true that there is a further native Gaelic term for the petrel(s) annlag mhara, i.e. precisely 'swallow of (the) sea', which could conceivably be a translation of the supposed Norse expression. Lockwood does not explicitly offer his own etymology in his book of 1984, preferring to regard the word as of doubtful affinity.

The problems are compounded by the etymology offered by Sommerfelt (1952a: 230). He says "evidently" contains Gaelic faoileag '(black-headed gull' (*Larus ridibundus*) as its second element, and derives the whole from hafs-faoileag, apparently meant to mean 'ocean-gull'. Sommerfelt's etymology is a strange animal. The storm petrel is clearly not a gull and it is hard to see what metaphor would be involved in such a word, apart from a weak common association of the two birds with the sea. Whilst it is true that the Scandinavian haf is borrowed into some Gaelic dialects (e.g. that of Eriskay), and whilst faoileag is a Gaelic word, the structure of his etymon, with its genitive -s, is purely Norse. Jakobsen (1928: s.n.) derives it from the same source as Shetlandic asel 'storm, cold, sharp blast' (from Old Norse asa 'to storm?'); on which see

Lockwood (1971), who points out that this term is Shetlandic only and therefore unlikely to be involved in asaileag.

BICEIN-CÀIL

According to MacIennan (1925: 37), the local name for the unique St Kilda subspecies of the wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes hirtensis*). But John Ross, in an unpublished letter of 1889 to a Mr Campbell, glosses biggan cail as 'tree sparrow' (*Passer montanus*), the form resting perhaps on a mistaken association with the Gaelic big 'a chirrup'. Ross reserves for the wren the expression drùdhan don, apparently Gaelic for 'brown dram', where drùdhan is a masculine relative of the familiar drùdhag. Bicein-càil is literally 'little bit-grain', i.e. something implying near-invisibility.

BOWGER

Martin (1698: 417); 'puffin' (*Fratercula arctica*). Martin and Macaulay (1764: 53; bougir) also gloss it as 'coulter-neb', a common alternative northern dialect word (e.g. Farne Islands). Mackenzie (1911: 53) offers the spelling buigire and the etymology "'damp fellow'" (leaning unconvincingly on buige 'moistness'), from the fact that it arrives at the breeding-grounds earlier than usual when the weather is damp. [3]

Sommerfelt (1952b: 375) offers an etymology from Old Norse *bugakeri 'bent-bill cock-bird', regarding it as a euphemistic term. Lockwood (1976) declines to speculate on its origin (though he once believed it to be native Gaelic rather than Norse (1971: 277-8); see

below), and the Scottish National Dictionary calls it "obscure". The Gaelic dictionaries have invented some spellings for it like bugaire, budhaigir, budhaid, buthraigear, buigire (Lockwood 1984: 34 offers bùgair), which appear to indicate at least two pronunciation-traditions, one with /k/ and one with /k'//, as well as numerous other points of variety.

Lockwood's most recent pronouncement (1984) proffers a Gaelic -air -suffixed form (common in words for birds; cf. SCRABER below) of Common Scandinavian búkr 'belly', here used as a bird-name. This, however, will not account for the full range of spellings in existence, especially not those with palatalized medial consonants.

DRUID Ross (1889) 'starling', the usual Gaelic word.

FALK Martin (1698: 431-2); 'razorbill' (Alca torda). This is confirmed by Ross (1889): falca. >From Common Scandinavian alka (Sommerfelt 1952a: 230), the present Hebridean form being an unhistorical nominative inferred from /alk/ (as if this were a form representable orthographically as fhalg).

FAOILAG Mackenzie (1911: 41); 'herring gull' (Larus argentatus), i.e. Gaelic faoileag. Mackenzie says that its young, and that of the black-backed gull (L. marinus/fuscus), was called sklurag, i.e. sgliùrach. The word also appears in the earlier report entered under TULIAC below.

FARSPOCK

Mackenzie (1911: 41) 'black-backed gull' (*Larus marinus/fuscus*). This word appears in the St Kilda place-names CREAGAN FHARSPEIG and GEÒ CREAG AN ARPAID. (For the alternation between final /t'/ and /k'/ cf. the phonological notes in Section 1.) Lockwood (1976) derives this from Common Scandinavian svartbakk 'black back' (cf. Henderson 1910: 122; Christiansen 1938: 15 "begge navn gjelder samme fugl, så de henger muligens sammen"). If this is right, the f- is presumably for sv-, whilst the form without f- must be a new nominative inferred from the lenited form. (For tension between lenited and nonlenited forms in other words, see FALK, TULIAC, TULMER above and below.) In general Gaelic too, the word is recorded with and without initial f, thus (f)arspag in MacIennan (1925), for instance. The medial -rs- will be a reduction of -rstp-, where the -s- is epenthetic between the semi-voiceless alveolar tap /r/ and the following /t/ or /p/, as seen in the occasional rendering of Hi(o)rt, the Gaelic name of St Kilda, as Hirst (Taylor 1967/8: 119). The loss of /t/ is straightforward cluster-reduction. Since such cases of epenthesis are sporadic, this scenario also explains the forms of this word without medial s.

FENNAG

Ross (1889) "'gray crow'", i.e. Gaelic feannag, the hooded or Royston crow (*Corvus cornix*).

FIACH DU

Ross (1889) 'raven', i.e. Gaelic fitheach dùbh, superfluously 'black raven'.

GAIRFOWL

Martin (1698: 425), garefowl Macaulay (1764: 156), 'great auk' (*Alca impennis*). (Macaulay rationalizes it as rarefowl.) This is actually from the Scandinavian word (geirfugl, literally 'spear-bird') for the bird, though Lightfoot (1777: I: 37) says that it is called "there", i.e. in St Kilda, the "Gair-Fowl". Macaulay (1764: 156) offers the opinion that the word was of foreign origin, but clearly says that this is what "the men of Hirta" call it, so the word had been nativized, if we credit his report.

The last known sighting in the British Isles of this extinct flightless bird took place on St Kilda in 1821 (cf. Transactions of the Edinburgh Naturalists' Club (1887), p. 98). One tradition has it that the unfortunate bird was clubbed to death as a witch. The Gaelic name was buna-bhuachail(e), literally, it appears, 'old stump (bunadh) of a herdsman (buachail)' (Lockwood 1971: 22), from its habit of standing erect? But Lockwood argues that this was first a word for the great northern diver and only secondarily for the great auk. Later (1984: 67 and references there), he shows that the Scandinavian word was probably a humorous reapplication of one name for the gyrfalcon (*Falco rusticolus*), a magnificent flyer.

IRBUL SCOILT

Ross (1889) 'fork tailed petrel', an alternative to aslag mor (see ASSILAG). Gaelic iorball sgoilte 'cleft tail', a bookish-looking expression.

LAVY

Martin (1698: 431); 'guillemot'¹ (Uria aalge). Further recorded by Macaulay as lavie (1764: 149). Martin's spelling is confirmed by Ross (1889). Sommerfelt (1952a: 230, following Christiansen 1938: 16; cf. Lockwood 1974: 107-10) takes it to be Gaelic lamhaidh and derives it from Common Scandinavian *langvia (sc. *langvfi) denoting the same birds. This is likely, given the range of other Scots dialect reflexes, e.g. longie, longvie, lomwie (thus in the Scottish National Dictionary). It was obviously construed as the homophonous Gaelic word for 'handful' (Mackenzie 1911: 50, Quine 1983).

MALL

Martin (1698: 428) 'seagull' (of one of three species). This appears to be the Scots word maw, deriving from Common Scandinavian *máR, and mall appears to be a hypercorrect spelling of the type Kirkwall for *KirkjuvcigR. Not therefore a local Gaelic word. Lockwood's earlier theory (1965) invoking the survival of Common Scandinavian nominative -R is absent from his book of 1984, correctly. See also the phonological notes in Section 1.

REDDAG

Martin (1698: 433), better spelt ruideag by Mackenzie (1911: 41). The normal Gaelic word for 'kittiwake' (Rissa tridactyla). Appears in the genitive in the St Kilda place-name CLAIS NA HJIDEIG. Lockwood (1984: 126) regards reddag as an error for *riddag (representing Gaelic *riodag), from Common Scandinavian *ryta (Christiansen (1938: 16) says rytr) with the Gaelic diminutive suffix -ag. This is unnecessary if the

dictionary forms of the type ruideag are genuine.

SCRAEER

Martin (1698: 430) calls it in English 'puffinet
'Greenland dove'¹, i.e. the black guillemot or tyst
(*Cephus grylle*) (Scottish National Dictionary, citi
Martin); representing Gaelic sgràbair(e). Macaul
(1764: 160) writes sgrdbir, but does not say which bi
it denotes (merely one of the "more ignoble or useles
ones).

For its etymology Sommerfelt compares Faeroe
skrapur 'Manx shearwater' and related Norwegian wor
(1952a: 230). He is misled by the fact that there is
alternative tradition applying the term to the Ma
shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus* - sic; note that this
not the puffin or any relative of it). This appears
Scots scrabe (cf. Scottish National Dictionary, ^.
[4]. The similarity between the terms may have led
the application of Gaelic sgràbair to the Ma
shearwater, e.g. by Macgillivray in his British birds
1837-52; though Mackenzie (1911: 44), who also writ
scrabaire for the shearwater, in fact antedat
Maogillivray's discussion of the shearwater, in volume
(1852), because his own posthumously-published work w
actually written in 1843. They may well have drawn
the same tradition. Mackenzie says that it is so call
"from the way it pats the water" (at takeoff), perha
thinking of sgròb 'to scratch'¹. Others regard the na
as onomatopoeic (Scottish National Dictionary), or dr
attention to the fact that this shearwater scrapes out

nesting site (Swainson 1885: 212). The St Kilda word for the shearwater is reported to have been sgrabail (Fergusson 1885/6: 91; cf. the phonological notes in Section 1).

lockwood's account (1984: 135) regards the application of the word to the black guillemot as an out-and-out mistake. But the black guillemot also digs nest-holes in cliffs and might also therefore be called a "scraper". It is most likely, then, that either bird could have been called sgràbair for essentially the same reason, and there is no strong reason to regard Martin's normally acute ornithological observations as defective in this case.

Mackenzie says that the young of the shearwater is called fathach quasi the Gaelic word for 'monster'¹, and that the shearwater itself is also called cromag i.e. 'hook- or crescent-shaped'¹. As for the former remark, he surely meant fachach. Fachach is Gaelic for 'puffin' (*Fratercula arctica*) according to Dvelly's dictionary (1925: s.n.; he provides a crude but unmistakable drawing). He is wrong, though; it is a "puffin" in the older sense of 'shearwater' which has given the scientific latin name Puffinus to this latter genus of birds. (Cf. also Lockwood (1965).)

'Gannet' (*Sula bassana*). Martin (1698: 425) wrote sou'l-er, and (with due reserve) offered this local word as the etymon of the widespread alternative word solan

(goose) (contrast below). Macaulay (1764: 133-4) and Mackenzie (1911: 47) explain suileire [5] as meaning 'sharp-eyed'ⁱ, i.e. they derive it from suil ^f'eye^f. Ross (1889) writes sular, but Lockwood (1984: 143, and c.f. references there) says that the St Kildan word for this bird is s&L, and regards the -an as purely Gaelic, in contrast with earlier linguists. He does not allude to the reports of Martin and Mackenzie.

The word solan has previously been thought to descend from a (pre-)Scandinavian compound *sulanu 'gannet-duck'¹, or from the definite form of the Scandinavian simplex word for 'gannet'¹ súla, viz, súla. On the fascinating earlier history of this word, c.f. Lockwood (1984: 143-4).

Its young is called guga in general Gaelic (goug Macaulay 1764: 144), and the older fledglings are called fathach according to Mackenzie (1911: 48); on vMch c.f. SCRAEER.

TKEUCHAN

Martin (1698: 433), ^f'oystercatcher^f (*Haematopus ostralegus*); see Lockwood (1971: 28) for the word trilleachan [6], which he regards as an onomatopoeic Gaelic double diminutive, paralleled in both respects by ptarmigan.

TUIZAC

Macaulay (1764: 159) allocates this word to a bird as big as a gannet, with a white breast, blueish back and black wings; he says that it has a different name in the Western Isles. He says that it is a pest (1764: 158-9).

i.e. it harries and/or scavenges, presumably. This description appears to mix the physical appearance of the lesser black-backed gull (*Larus fuscus*) and the habits of the herring gull (*L. argentatus*) or great skua (*Stercorarius skua*). The word is plausibly derived from faoileag '(species of) gull' (see also ASSILAG above) by the process mentioned in the next entry; indeed Ross (1889) wrote fulag for the St Kildan word. The origin of this word is not clear. If it is a derivative of faoil 'lavish hospitality', then it may be some kind of propitiatory name. On the other hand, Lockwood (1984: 158) gives a plausible Celtic etymology linking it ultimately to English gull.

Thus Macaulay (1764: 145ff.), presumably for fulmer, with a nominative /t/ inferred from a genitive in initial zero, the regular lenited form of initial /f/. The fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*). Since no other term for the economically crucial fulmar is recorded, I conclude that the local Gaelic word was a borrowing from the Scandinavian fúlmar. By the late nineteenth century it was called fulamar, according to Ross (1889), with expectable epenthesis of [a]. The change of initial consonant (if this may be taken at face value) is perhaps the result of the education provided by successive ornithologically-inclined ministers and dominies.

MHARA Ross (1889) 'eider duck', Gaelic tunnag a' mhara, literally 'duck of the sea', with a masculine muir

'sea'.

Of these, the best recent authorities suggest that only tuliac may be a form unique to St Kildan, though analogical nominative t is far from unknown in other lexical items in other dialects, e.g. the common coastal toponymic words tòb, tulm from Common Scandinavian hóp, holm(R). In some other cases some phonological or morphological details may be local.

2. Household chattels, etc.

The following words have been noted in the primary sources about life in St Kilda, all of which are found elsewhere too, except for the special application of clach shoilse dependent on the local technology; it was a hollow-stone oil lamp kept alight by a peat cinder. Most of these words are taken from Mackenzie (1911), and the spellings of the head-forms are his.

BUTA	Mackenzie 20 'wooden dish'
CAIBE	Mackenzie 8 'mattock'
CLACH SHOILSE	Mackenzie 19 'oil-lamp' (Steel 1975: 73 <u>clach shoule</u>)
CRAGAN	Mackenzie 19 'clay pot'
CROTAL	Mackenzie 11 'cudbear (lichen used for brown dye)
CRUB	'bed in wall-cavity' (Steel 1975: 73; Sands 1877 <u>crupa</u>)
CRUISGEAN	Mackenzie 20 'iron lamp'
CUMAN	Mackenzie 20 'smaller wooden dish'
FALLAN	Mackenzie 19 '[intra-house] partition'
LOBAN	Mackenzie 20 'large straw tub' (cf. Christiansen

RACAN	Mackenzie 8 'rake'
SIMAN	Mackenzie 9, 19 'fowling-rope' or 'roof-rope'
SOUBACH	Mackenzie 13 'woman's cap'

Better spellings for some of these are (following Dwelly and/or MacIennan): crùb, crùisgean, lòban, ràcan [7], síoman.

3. (Quasi-)Topographical terms

Topographical terms that could pass for place-names rather than items of the ordinary lexicon are treated in Coates (1988).

CLEIT The local word for the ubiquitous drystone structures on the islands, serving as storage cells, drying chambers, etc. From the Scandinavian word klettR 'rock, cliff'. It presumably came to be specialized in the present sense via a meaning like that of Norwegian klett, which Christiansen (1938: 23) glosses 'alenestaende klippe' ('freestanding cliff/rock').

GEARRAIDH 'Home pasture', probably from Common Scandinavian gerði. Cf. Owen (1958/9: passim). Elsewhere in the Western Isles specialized in the sense of 'land available for winter pasture', between the inland (machair 'level land, beach') and the outland (monadh 'mountain'). But I have not seen it said that the full Hebridean tripartite transhumance economy involving machair/gearraidh/monadh crofting was ever practised in St Kilda. Nonetheless the location called GEARRAIDH ARD is between the head-dyke around the village and the sheilings in Gleann Mor, and is topographically comparable with the typical Hebridean

gearraidh.

GEO

O'Dell and Walton (1962: 323, fn.) gloss this as 'cave'. In mainland Gaelic it means 'chasm, rift in cliffs into which the sea breaks', as its Scandinavian etymon gjá does. Many of the relevant rifts in St Kilda have caves at the end and it would not be worthwhile to search for a sense-distinction along these lines if we had not found the word uamh 'cave' in use in St Kilda place-names.

OUTSIDE HOUSE

Scots term (? translating a Gaelic one) for 'byre' (Steel 1975: 75). Some of the pre-1860's houses were reused for this purpose once Pastor Mackenzie's second village was properly established. Steel claims that no other primary term for 'byre' existed in St Kilda Gaelic.

4. Other vocabulary

ALIORAM

See IORRAM NA TRUAIGHE.

AMIR, LAVE KEILE, MAILE

Martin (1698: 448); words for units of measurement, partially anglicized in form. The weight/volume-unit called amir ("or rather half-amir as they call it" (Martin: loc. cit.)) was of about two pecks. Martin offers the view that it represents the Hebrew omer (see e.g. Exodus 16:16; cf. Martin 1703: 313). Curiously the Scottish National Dictionary does not mention Martin's observation, but for omer has a

single record dated 1845 from rural Inverness-shire. Here too it was about two pecks. The editors believe it to be an extended usage of the Hebrew term. Martin's early record tends to show on the contrary that it is an indigenous term. It probably continues the ancestor of the Old English dry-measure term amber, meaning four bushels, obsolete in England by the end of the High Middle Ages in all its senses, according to the OED. This word seems to have been West Germanic only, but may have got into Scandinavian (cf. Danish ember) via Old/Middle Low German. The original initial vowel appears to have been a, and a form *amber could well have been Gaelicized as *aimbir, whence the term recorded by Martin.

The larger maile was of ten pecks. This is to be compared with the Orkney meil. The term is presumably of Scandinavian origin. It is not known in mainland Gaelic, but English and Scots dialects show descendants of either Scandinavian mæilir or Old English mele in spellings like mele for much of the Middle Ages at least.

The two Scandinavian-derived words are discussed at greater length in Coates (MS., forthcoming).

The lave keile is a Gaelic term for a unit of length; it means 'hand of wood' (làmh choill) and is a traditional cubit, though used only in measuring timber lengths for boats.

BROCHAN

'Gruel', used with GIBEN in a cake of fat and oatmeal used as a remedy for the cough (Martin 1698: 439).

CLACH AOTAIG

Mackenzie (1911: 6) describes a semi-transparent stone, an object of veneration, which he says is elsewhere called the clach buaidhean (i.e. clach bhuaidh 'amulet').

GHOADICH

'Racket, noise', according to George Murray, who reports the term in his diary (1886/7). The general Gaelic word gogaideachd, which it appears to represent, means 'lightheadedness (perceived as a female attribute)'; hence, here, Murray's interlocutor probably meant something like 'silly goings-on' rather than 'noise'. The context was sheep-shearing, an activity previously unknown to the St Kildans who plucked (roo'd) their sheep. In Murray's own words, quoted by Steel (1975: 85), "the owner of the beast said it would not stay on that side of the island after hearing such a ghogadich (noise) about its ears, meaning the sounding of the shears".

GIBEN

Martin (1698: 439); gibain (Macaulay 1764: 145), 'guga-fat', i.e. gibeau. Cf. BROCHAN above; see also SOU'LER above.

GINGACH

Macaulay (1764: 188). A title given to the first man to land on the sea-stacks in the bird-collecting season; a man of significance, the steward's deputy. A derivative in -ach (a zero-derivative deadjectival noun) of the stem seen in díonganta 'impetuous'. I have not seen this

word recorded elsewhere.

GKOAGACH

A female (supposed) deity frowned upon by the pious Macaulay (1764: 86-7), whose name is said by him to mean 'one with fine hair or long tresses'^f. As a nominalization it may be applied to any woman whose hair is done up for ceremonial purposes, e.g. the maid of honour at a wedding. The word in the sense noted by Macaulay is presumably euphemistic.

IORAM NA TRUAIGHE

Mackenzie (1911: 24-5) lament¹, literally 'oar-song (iorram) of woe'¹. The precise significance of the bracketed initial letters al- in the first mention by Mackenzie is not known.

IACHDAN

Mackenzie (1911: 11) 'light dun'¹, natural wool colour, general Gaelic ladhdunn.

IAVE-KEIIE

See (HALF-)AMIR.

MAILE

See (HALF-)AMIR.

MEIJRE

Martin (1698: 450), "an officer". Represents Gaelic maoi 'ground-officer'¹.

SAOIEHIR

MacLennan (1925: 279) glosses this word 'St Kilda skate'¹. Not known whether in use in St Kilda.

SHIORD 1HU

Steel (1975: 91) reports that this phrase, literally 'over to you', was used to denote the process of fulling tweed. It was the refrain of various work-songs sung whilst doing this.

Gaelic dialect of St Kilda

srnTNG-PIACES Macaulay (1764: 255) says that this term was used to mean the places on two rocks from which sea-angling was conducted.

STOLEN Martin (1698: 456); English rendering of the Gaelic term used locally for the 'taking¹ of gannet.

Other general Gaelic terms used in relation to St Kildan institutions are given e.g. by Steel (1975: 41, 81, 89, 153), often in a barbarous spelling. Thus: bean-ghluine 'midwife¹, cardadh mor '(the) great carding¹, c^schrom 'foot-plough¹, cuddiche 'chieftain's feudal right to hospitality'.

(1) PRAGMATICS and SOCIOUNGUISTICS

The people were until late in the islands¹ history monolingual; they "express[ed] themselves slowly but pertinently; and ha[d] the same language with those of Harries and other isles, who retain[ed] the Irish in its purity" (Martin 1698: 454-5). Neil Mackenzie (1911: 8ff.) described the menfolk as "everlasting talkers", and attributed some of the islands¹ wretchedness to this fact. Others have attributed their misery to the ardour-dampening activities of successive Calvinist ministers, not entirely exonerating Neil Mackenzie (e.g. Heathcote 1900: 43? Maogregor 1960: 42; Steel 1975: chapter 6). Mackenzie found their slipshod attitude to life encapsulated in "their favourite phrase": "It will do" (1911: 10).

Some set phrases are mentioned and discussed by Martin (1698: 442, 446, 461_r, 463), which it is not of great interest to detail here. Some snatches of ordinary Gaelic are quoted by Steel (1975: 64, 65, 171 (this last from John Ross¹ diary-notes (1887-8)) •

The Society in Scotland for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge appointed a catechist on St Kilda in 1710 (Scottish Record Office [SRO] document GD 95 2, 8/6/1711; cf. Durkacz 1983: 47). The man appointed had been ^f*nrLnister" since 1705 and was therefore already handy. He had a thankless task for he was not permitted to minister to his flock in Gaelic, or to teach any reading in Gaelic at all (Durkacz OJD. cit.: 59-60; *SBD* document GD 95 2/3, 7/5/1724); not surprisingly, the implied

attempt at anglicization did not work. Macaulay (1764: ii) gives the low-key opinion that the aim was "to give the younger sort some tolerable notion of the English tongue". But from 1811 for most of the rest of the century, a more realistic linguistic policy was pursued; rather than trying to spread a superfluous language, the Gaelic School Society attended to the St Kildans' spiritual and educational needs in the mother tongue. From the 1880's onwards renewed attempts were made to bring the doubtful benefits of anglophone civilization to the St Kildans, with indifferent results (Steel 1975: chapter 7). At about this time, a visitor (Sands 1878) recorded the St Kildans' impression that English sounded like "the cackling of the fulmar" - decidedly not a compliment.

St Kilda was still profoundly Gaelic-speaking when it was evacuated at the request of the inhabitants in 1930; certainly at least one old man neither spoke nor wrote a word of English (Steel 1975: 213). A very few of the former residents still survive, living on the Scottish mainland. Their language is the subject of scrutiny by David Clement, in work to be published.

Only one further special feature of language use appears in the literature of visitors. Martin reports on a case of euphemism in relation to name of St Kilda (1703: 98f.) as follows: "It is absolutely unlawful to call the island ... by its proper Irish name Hirt, but only the high country." Later in the same work (1703: 313), he relates that the inhabitants use the term the country for St Kilda. One may be forgiven for wondering whether he got confused here, because he had earlier written that this was a euphemistic expression for the name of the Flannan Islands, for use when actually there (1703: 98); this was part of a more extensive system of lexical euphemism, which he calls,

Gaelic dialect of St Kilda

along with certain other acts, a "superstition" (1703: 99). Such systems in relation to Norse or Norse-derived cultures of the other Atlantic islands are discussed at length by Iockwood (1966). This feature may have been what Macaulay alluded to when he wrote (1764: 215): "They have many words and cant phrases, quite unintelligible to their neighbours."¹¹ For in other respects the vocabulary of St Kilda is not reported to be radically different from general Hebridean.

(2) THE LITERATURE OF THE ST KILDANS

All that survives, so far as I know, is a lullaby/boat-song collected by Francis Collinson (1966: 89-90) and an elegy recorded in translation by a visitor in 1799, reprinted by Quine (1983: 116-7); and some twenty-odd laments and poems collected by Neil Mackenzie, of which those which were not lost when Mackenzie left St Kilda in 1843 were printed by his son in the Celtic Review in 1906, and reprinted as an appendix to Mackenzie (1911). The oral history of the last seanchaidh Rìphemia Mac^{^^}immon (Eibhrig nic Cruimein), is known only in the words of others (Kennedy 1862 (1874)).

- 1] In my book on the place-names, reconstructions are attempted.
- 2] This is a problem unless the Scandinavian dialect of the Western Isles was the ancestor one of those West Norwegian ones which do not have so-called "thick l" adjacent to non-front non-high vowels in word-medial and word-final positions. A Gaelic palatal(ized) l could plausibly represent only Common Scandinavian clear l, not "thick l", in a borrowing, and in most Scandinavian dialects except those mentioned such a sound would not have existed in the word svala (cf. Haugen 1976: 274-8, esp. Map 18). If and only if the Gaelic-speakers had heard [svala] with clear [l], they might have substituted their own "slender (palatalized) l" ([l']) for it.
- 3] Ross' MS. notes contain the spelling Bonur (judging by other scribal peculiarities *Bonir may be intended), which I am at a loss to explain.
- 4] Joseph Wright's English dialect dictionary also partitions the senses in this way: scrabe for the shearwater, scraber for the black guillemot.
- 5] Macaulay actually writes sociler - surely an error (for sooiler?).
- 6] He also draws attention to another form without the palatalized medial liquid: triollachan. For this, cf. Ross' spelling (1889) Triolachan; though the fourth letter may be s in the MS.
- 7] But for a short vowel in racan, cf. Christiansen (1938: 19).

REFERENCES

- Borgström, C.Hj. (1940) A linguistic survey of the Gaelic dialects of Scotland I: The dialects of the Outer Hebrides. Supplement to Norsk Tidsskrift for Sprogvidenskap 1.
- Christiansen, R. (1938) Sudrøy-norn. Maal og minne (Norske studier) 16, pp. 1-27.
- Clement, R.D. (forthcoming) Work on the Gaelic of St Kilda. [No title available yet.] Forthcoming in Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness.
- Coates, R. (1988, forthcoming) Nomina hirtensia: the place-names of St Kilda. Brighton: Younsmere Press.
- Coates, R. (forthcoming) Two measure-terms in Gaelic and early modern Scots. [MS., University of Sussex.]
- Collinson, F. (1966) The traditional and national music of Scotland. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Durkacz, E. (1983) The decline of the Celtic languages. Edinburgh: John Donald.
- Dwelly, E. (1949) The illustrated Gaelic-English dictionary [fifth edition]. Glasgow: Maclaren. [First edition 1901-11.]
- Fergusson, C. (1885/6) The Gaelic names of birds, part II. Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness 12, pp. 28ff.
- Grant, W. (ed.), later also Murison, D. (1929-76) The Scottish national dictionary. Edinburgh: Scottish National Dictionary Association.

- Haugen, E. (1976) The Scandinavian languages. London: Faber and Faber
(The Great Languages).
- Heathcote, N. (1900) St Kilda. London: Longmans.
- Henderson, G. (1910) The Norse influence on Celtic Scotland. Glasgow:
Maclehose.
- Jakobsen, J. (1928) An etymological dictionary of the Norn language in
Shetland [edited and translated from Danish by A. Horsböl].
London: Nutt/Copenhagen: Prior.
- Kennedy, A. (1862) [See Thomas (1874).] Letter from Miss Anne Kennedy,
1862. Proceedings - Society of Antiquaries of Scotland 10, pp.
702-11.
- Lightfoot, J. (1777) Flora scotica. London: B. White.
- Lockwood, W.B. (1965) Etymological varia. Scottish Gaelic Studies 10,
pp. 53-61.
- Lockwood, W.B. (1966) Noa terms of the Gaelic fishermen. Scottish
Gaelic Studies 11, pp. 85-99.
- Lockwood, W.B. (1969) Etymological miscellany. Zeitschrift für
Anglistik und Amerikanistik 17, pp. 252-64, esp. 258-62.
- Lockwood, W.B. (1971) Some Gaelic etymologies. Scottish Gaelic Studies
12, pp. 22-9.
- Lockwood, W.B. (1973) More English etymologies. Zeitschrift für
Anglistik und Amerikanistik 21, pp. 414-23.
- Lockwood, W.B. (1974) Faeroese bird-name origins (IV). Fróðskaparrit

22, pp. 107-17.

Lockwood, W.B. (1975) Faeroese bird-name origins (V). Fækkaparrit 23, pp. 22-31.

Lockwood, W.B. (1976) Ptarmigan and other Gaelic names. Scottish Gaelic Studies 12, pp. 271-8.

Lockwood, W.B. (1978) The philology of auk and related matters. Neuphilologische Mitteilungen 79, pp. 391-7.

Lockwood, W.B. (1984) The Oxford book of British bird-names. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Macaulay, K. (1764) The history of St Kilda. London: Baskin and de Hondt. [Reprinted 1974, Edinburgh: James Thin.]

Maclellan, W. (1837-52) A history of British birds, indigenous and migratory. London.

Macgregor, D.R. (1960) The island of St Kilda: a survey of its character and occupation. Scottish Studies 3, pp. 1-48.

Mackenzie, J.B. (1906) Bardachd Irteach. St. Kilda verses. Celtic Review 2, pp. 327-42. [Transcriptions by or collected by Neil Mackenzie.]

Mackenzie, J.B. (ed.) (1911) Episode in the life of the Rev. Neil Mackenzie at St. Kilda from 1829 to 1843. Privately printed. [Includes a reprint of Mackenzie 1906.]

Maclellan, M. (1925) A pronouncing and etymological dictionary of the Gaelic language. Aberdeen: Acair/Aberdeen University Press. [Reprint dated 1979.]

- Martin, M. (1698) A late voyage to St Kilda. London: for D. Brown and T. Goodwin. [Republished by D.J. Macleod (ed.) (1934). Stirling: Eneas Mackay.]
- Martin, M. (1703) A description of the Western Islands of Scotland circa 1695. London: for Andrew Bell. [Republished by D.J. Macleod (ed.) (1934). Stirling: Eneas Mackay.]
- O'Dell, A.C. and Walton, K. (1962) The Highlands and Islands of Scotland. London/Edinburgh: Nelson [esp. pp. 317-25].
- Owen, T.M. (1958/9) The role of the township in a Hebridean crofting economy. Gwerin 2, pp. 147-61.
- Quine, D. (1983) St Kilda revisited. Frome: Dowland. [First edition 1982.]
- Ross, J. (1887-8) Diary-notes. [MS. in the possession of the National Trust for Scotland.]
- Ross, J. (1889) Letter to Mr Campbell, dated November 1889. [MS. in the possession of the National Trust for Scotland.]
- Sands, J. (1878) Out of the world; or, life in St Kilda [second edition]. Edinburgh: MacLachlan and Stewart. [First edition 1877.]
- Scottish National Dictionary. See Grant (1929ff.).
- Sommerfelt, A. (1952a) Norse-Gaelic contacts. Norsk Tidsskrift for Sprogvidenskap 16, pp. 226-36.
- Sommerfelt, A. (1952b) Further notes on Norse-Gaelic contacts. Norsk Tidsskrift for Sprogvidenskap 16, pp. 375-6.

Gaelic dialect of St Kilda

Steel, T. (1965) The life and death of St Kilda. Edinburgh: National Trust for Scotland. [A new book vastly expanding the original was published under the same title by Fontana (1975) • References in the present work are to the 1975 book.]

Swainson, C. (1885) Provincial names and folk lore of British birds. London: Trübner (English Dialect Society).

Taylor, A.B. (1967/8) The Norsemen in St Kilda. Saga-Book of the Viking Society 17 (2/3), pp. 116-44.

Thomas, F.W.L. (1874) Letter from St Kilda. By Miss Anne Kennedy. Proceedings - Society of Antiquaries of Scotland 10, pp. 702-13 [with notes by Thomas].

Werner, O. (1968) Die Erforschung des Inselnordischen. Zeitschrift für Mundartforschung, Supplement, new series 6 (2), pp. 459-51S [esp. section 5].

Wright, J. (1898-1905) English dialect dictionary. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gaelic dialect of St Kilda

Engraving of an ASSILAG and a FULMAR from Martin (1698) (cf. pp. 5-7)

