

Alba 1891: Gàidhlig (Scottish Gaelic) Local Profile

No. 015

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Area: *Gallaibh (Caithness): An Spideal, Achalone, Achanarras, An Dail & Mybster*

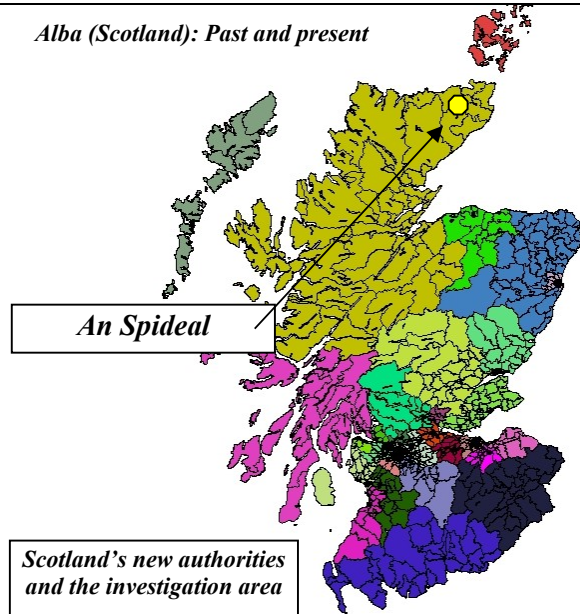
(Names of enumeration locations used on census forms: Spittal, Achalone, Bardsnurkie, Achanarras, Dale & Mybster)

Number of households: 82 Population present at census night: 372

Share of resident population (aged three years +) speaking *Gàidhlig*: 29.1 %

County	Civil parish	Registration district	Enumeration district number	Census form pages
Caithness	Halkirk	Halkirk	5 6	1 - 11 1 - 5

Alba (Scotland): Past and present



State of *Gàidhlig* in 1891:

The language was still widespread among the older people but no-one below the age of 15 was reported as *Gàidhlig*-speaking in 1891. Intergenerational language transmission seems to have seized effectively in the 1870s in this area. Nonetheless almost 30 % of the usually resident population was returned as speaking *Gàidhlig* as well as English.

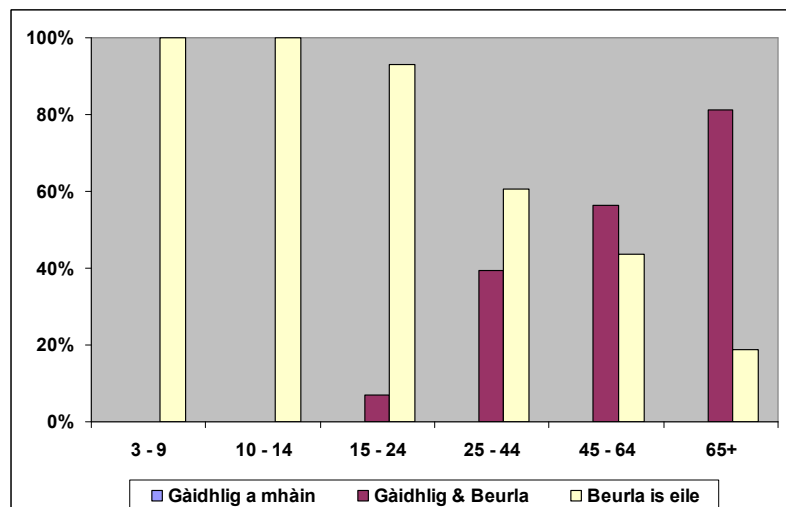
The language was strongest in the community of Mybster with a respectable 53.6 % of *Gàidhlig*-speakers within its population. *Gàidhlig* was predominant also among the elderly who were born in the parish. This points to the fact that the language was not an “import” by migrants from the Highlands further west.

Area description:

This area comprises relatively fertile farmland south of the town of *Baile Theòrsa* (Thurso) in the county of *Gallaibh* (Caithness). All settlements as far south as Mybster were part of the parish of *Hacraig* (Halkirk).

Main hamlet was the scattered township of *An Spideal* (Spittal) where – as anywhere in this fertile area – the major occupation was farming.

Please see the remark regarding the use of placenames in Caithness on page 4 of this factsheet!



Age profile: Share of population speaking (1) *Gàidhlig*, (2) *Gàidhlig* & English, or (3) no *Gàidhlig* at all

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	Population enumerated				Usually resident population (3+)			
	Total	Aged 0-2	Deaf & dumb	Visitors etc. ³	Total ⁴	Gàidhlig	Gàidhlig & English	Gàidhlig speakers (%)
Age								
Total	372	29	0	17	326	0	95	29.1 %
3-4	16		0	1	15	0	0	0.0 %
5-9	40		0	2	38	0	0	0.0 %
10-14	47		0	0	47	0	0	0.0 %
15-24	64		0	6	58	0	4	6.9 %
25-44	81		0	5	76	0	30	39.5 %
45-64	56		0	1	55	0	31	56.4 %
65+	39		0	2	37	0	30	81.1 %
Gender								
Female	189	15	0	4	170	0	50	29.4 %
Male	183	14	0	13	156	0	45	28.8 %
Place of birth								
Born in parish	230	29	0	2	199	0	43	21.6 %
In neighbouring parish¹	116	0	0	9	107	0	43	40.2 %
Gaidhealtachd elsewhere²	18	0	0	5	13	0	6	46.2 %
Other places	8	0	0	1	7	0	3	42.9 %

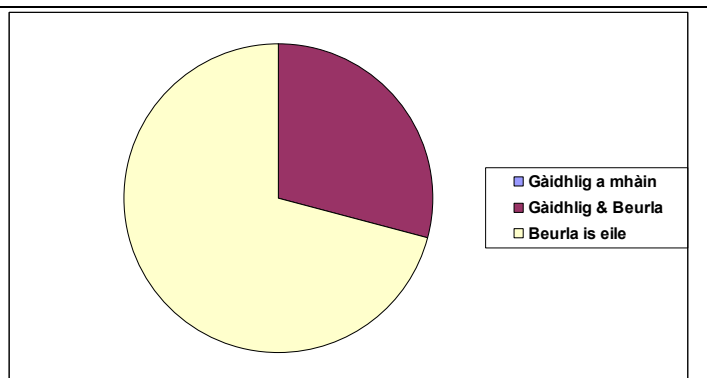
Notes:

¹ Parishes of Farr and Kildonan (Sutherland), Latheron, Bower, Reay, Watten and Thurso (all Caithness).

² Other parishes in Scotland with more than 50 % Gàidhlig speakers in the 1891 census.

³ People described as visitors, boarders, lodgers or other similar terms.

⁴ Number of enumerated persons who were (1) older than 2 years of age, who were (2) not deaf & dumb and who (3) did not live only temporarily in the area.



Share of population speaking (1) Gàidhlig, (2) Gàidhlig & English, or (3) no Gàidhlig at all

Background of Gàidhlig (Scottish Gaelic) Local Profiles:

The 1891 census was the first such enumeration exercise with an unequivocal language question. After more than 100 years the original census forms are publicly available for detailed analysis. During research concerned with the “Gàidhlig (Scottish Gaelic) Local Studies” a vast number of such local statistics have been gathered about the Gàidhlig speaking population of Scotland in that year. As many of these results could not be included in the reports these concise fact-sheets are a welcome way to publish some of the “local gems”. More information is provided at http://www.linguae-celticae.de/GLP_english.htm.

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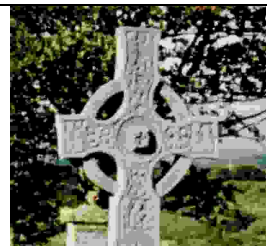
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	Households	Usually resident population (3+)			
		Total	Gàidhlig	Gàidhlig & English	Gàidhlig speakers (%)
An Spideal & Mybster	82	326	0	95	29.1 %
Individual communities					
<i>An Spideal</i> (Spittal)	36	160	0	37	23.1 %
<i>Achalone</i> (Achalone)	7	36	0	9	25.0 %
<i>Achanarras</i> (Achanarras)	8	30	0	11	36.7 %
<i>An Dail</i> (Dale)	12	52	0	11	21.2 %
<i>Mybster</i> (Mybster)	19	48	0	27	56.3 %
Language of parents					
Both parents Gàidhlig speaking	7	45	0	17	37.8 %
Single parent Gàidhlig speaking	5	19	0	9	47.4 %
One parent Gàidhlig speaking	5	30	0	5	16.7 %
No Gàidhlig speaking parent	25	126	0	8	6.3 %
Households with no children (0-14)	40	106	0	56	52.8 %
Occupation of head of household					
Crofter, farmer, fisherman, etc.	30	119	0	50	42.0 %
Shepherd, gamekeeper or similar	5	18	0	7	38.9 %
Clergyman, teacher, physician, etc.	2	9	0	1	11.1 %
Mason, carpenter, merchant, etc.	10	34	0	8	23.5 %
Living on private means	0	0	0	0	-
Manager, coachman, cook, etc.	2	11	0	0	0.0 %
Worker, farm/domestic servant, etc.	33	135	0	29	21.5 %
Remaining occupations	0	0	0	0	-

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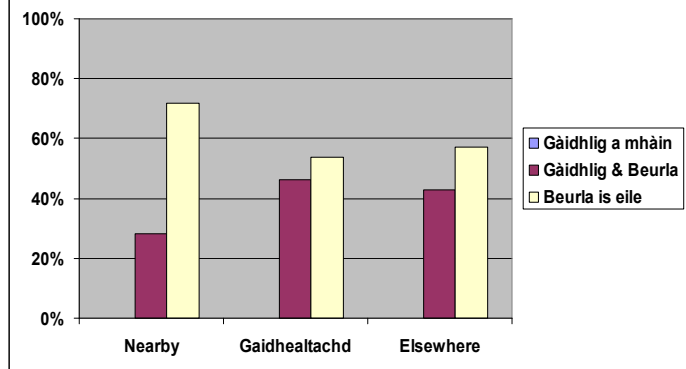
Place of birth and Gàidhlig speaking:

Over 20 % of all residents born in the parish spoke Gàidhlig. Among the remaining inhabitants this percentage was even higher.

Notes:

¹ Born either in Halkirk or in the parishes of Farr, Kildonan (Sutherland), Reay, Bower, Latheron, Watten and Thurso (all Caithness).

² Born in other parishes of Scotland with more than 50 % Gàidhlig speakers in the 1891 census.



Speakers according to place of birth (1) nearby¹
(2) in remaining *Gaidhealtachd*², or (3) elsewhere

Remarks:

1. In the original census forms one return was enumerated as “Gaelic only” in the hamlet of *An Dail* (Dale). However, this 72-year-old farm labourer was described as lodging in a crofting household. Therefore, his return was not considered in these statistics based on the “usually resident population”.
2. In original census report terms, the district had a population of 372 persons of all ages. 99 enumerated inhabitants spoke “Gaelic and English” and a lodger from *Na Hearadh* (Harris) was registered as “Gaelic only”. These figures led to an “official” share of Gàidhlig speakers of 26.9 %. This percentage was an under-estimate of 2.2% compared with the more realistic figures considering only the usually resident population.
3. There are many names of settlements in Caithness – even in the west of the county – where no distinct Gàidhlig placenames have been ascertained or documented. This does not mean that there were no Gàidhlig descriptions by the local inhabitants. Often some parts of names suggest at least a partially Gàidhlig topographic description like “ach-“, “dun-“, “brae-“, “knock-“, or “bal-“. However, the names used on Ordnance Survey maps are used in these factsheets.