

Alba 1891: Gàidhlig (Scottish Gaelic) Local Profile

No. 018

Page 1 of 4

Area: *Gallaibh (Caithness): Meaghrath, Sanndasaid, Fresgoe & Sgìre Mheaghrath*

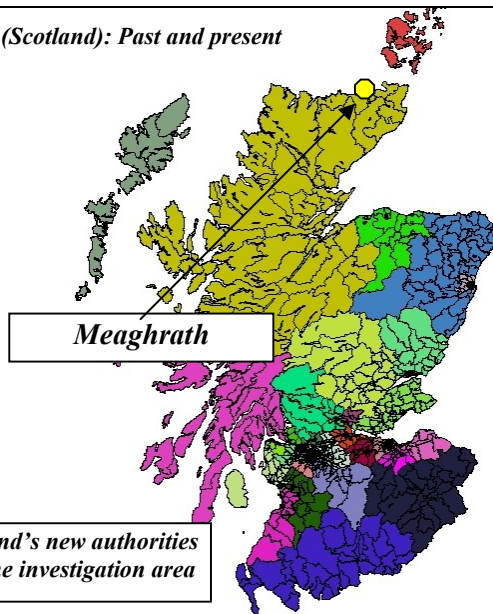
(Names of enumeration locations used on census forms: Reay, Sandside, Fresgoe, District of Reay)

Number of households: **55** Population present at census night: **237**

Share of resident population (aged three years or over) speaking *Gàidhlig*: **32.4 %**

County	Civil parish	Registration district	Enumeration district number	Census form pages
Caithness	Reay	Reay	1	6 - 15

Alba (Scotland): Past and present



State of *Gàidhlig* in 1891:

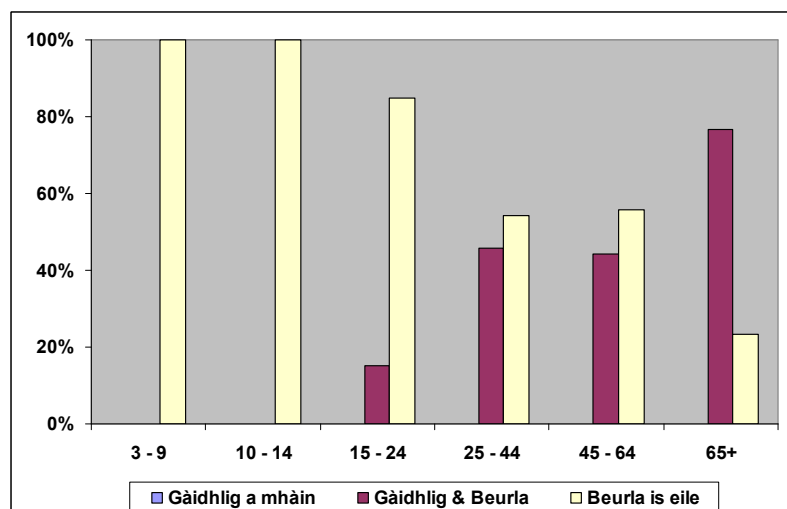
A substantial part of the resident population still spoke *Gàidhlig* in the district. All speakers were effectively bilingual. The age profile, however, was already heavily biased towards older generations. In the age group of 65+ the language was spoken by almost 80 % of all residents. Nonetheless *Gàidhlig* was still spoken by the majority within households headed by a *Gàidhlig* speaker.

Strongest *Gàidhlig* community was the village of *Meaghrath* (Reay) with 46.2 % speakers of the traditional language. On the other hand, no-one in the fishing village of *Fresgoe* nearby was returned as speaking *Gàidhlig*.

Area description:

The district investigated lies in the north-western corner of the county of *Gallaibh* (Caithness) a few miles east of the county boundary with *Cataibh* (Sutherland). Main economic activities were concerned with fisheries and agriculture. Whereas the village of *Meaghrath* (Reay) itself acted as the natural centre of the surrounding farmland *Fresgoe* was mainly occupied by fishermen and their families.

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

Alba 1891: Gàidhlig (Scottish Gaelic) Local Profile

No. 018

Page 2 of 4

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	Population enumerated				Usually resident population (3+)			
	Total	Aged 0-2	Deaf & dumb	Visitors etc. ³	Total ⁴	Gàidhlig		Gàidhlig speakers (%)
Age								
Total	237	15	0	6	216	0	70	32.4 %
3-4	10	0	0	0	10	0	0	0.0 %
5-9	22	0	0	0	22	0	0	0.0 %
10-14	20	0	0	1	19	0	0	0.0 %
15-24	47	0	0	1	46	0	7	15.2 %
25-44	48	0	0	2	46	0	21	45.7 %
45-64	44	0	0	1	43	0	19	44.2 %
65+	31	0	0	1	30	0	23	76.7 %
Gender								
Female	127	4	0	2	121	0	42	34.7 %
Male	110	11	0	4	95	0	28	29.5 %
Place of birth								
Born in parish	146	15	0	2	129	0	46	35.7 %
In neighbouring parish¹	45	0	0	1	44	0	12	27.3 %
Gaidhealtachd elsewhere²	17	0	0	3	14	0	10	71.4 %
Other places	29	0	0	0	29	0	2	6.9 %

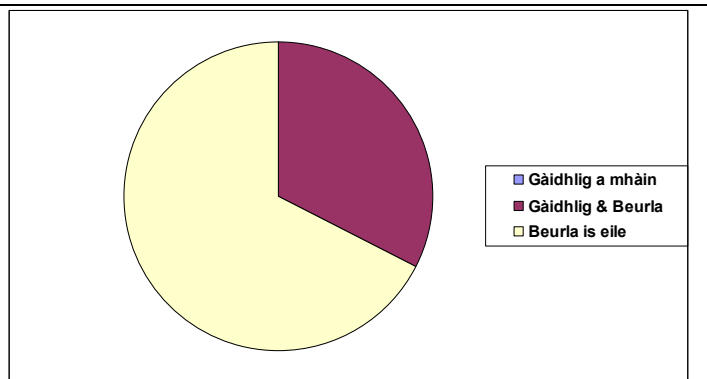
Notes:

¹ Parishes of Thurso and Halkirk (both Caithness) or Farr (Sutherland).

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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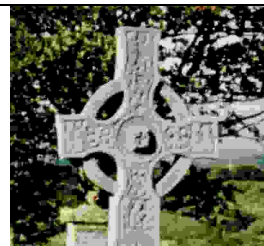
No. 018

Page 3 of 4

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	House-holds	Usually resident population (3+)			
		Total	Gàidhlig	Gàidhlig & English	Gàidhlig speakers (%)
Meaghrath	55	216	0	70	32.4 %
Individual communities					
Meaghrath (Reay)	34	104	0	48	46.2 %
Sanndasaid (Sandside)	8	43	0	12	27.9 %
Fresgoe (Fresgoe)	5	27	0	0	0.0 %
Sgìre Mheaghraith (District of Reay)	8	42	0	10	23.8 %
Language of parents					
Both parents Gàidhlig speaking	6	25	0	13	52.0 %
Single parent Gàidhlig speaking	1	6	0	4	66.7 %
One parent Gàidhlig speaking	0	0	0	0	-
No Gàidhlig speaking parent	19	114	0	12	10.5 %
Households with no children (0-14)	29	71	0	41	57.7 %
Occupation of head of household					
Crofter, farmer, fisherman, etc.	10	50	0	12	24.0 %
Shepherd, gamekeeper or similar	1	2	0	2	100 %
Clergyman, teacher, physician, etc.	6	39	0	6	15.4 %
Mason, carpenter, merchant, etc.	11	44	0	19	43.2 %
Living on private means	2	6	0	6	100 %
Manager, coachman, cook, etc.	2	10	0	0	-
Worker, farm/domestic servant, etc.	23	65	0	25	38.5 %
Remaining occupations	0	0	0	0	-

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Alba 1891: Gàidhlig (Scottish Gaelic) Local Profile

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Page 4 of 4

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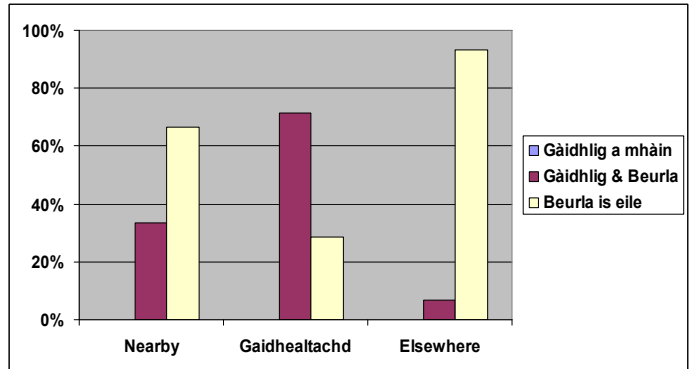
Place of birth and Gàidhlig speaking:

The language was evidently a traditional means of communication and not only “imported” by incomers. More than a third of locally born people was *Gàidhlig* speaking. People born in other parts of the *Gaidhealtachd* of course were predominantly *Gàidhlig*-speaking.

Notes:

¹ Born either in Reay or in the adjacent parishes of Thurso and Halkirk (both Caithness) or Farr (Sutherland).

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. Most of the elderly residents were *Gàidhlig*-speaking. In addition, the share of *Gàidhlig* speakers of the locally born population was still substantial. Therefore, this part of *Gallaibh* (Caithness) can be classified as part of the *Gaidhealtachd* where the language had been traditionally spoken.
2. According to the age distribution of the *Gàidhlig* community language transmission seems to have seized effectively in the 1860s.
3. In original census report terms, the district had a population of 237 persons of all ages. 76 enumerated inhabitants spoke “Gaelic and English” leading to an “official” share of *Gàidhlig* speakers of 32.1 %. This was just an under-estimation by 0.3 % compared with the more precise definition based on the usually resident population.
4. 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.