

# Alba 1891: Gàidhlig (Scottish Gaelic) Local Profile

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Area: *Gallaibh (Caithness): Swiney, Osclay, Ridhisgil (Reisgill) & Am Baile Ùr (Newtown)*

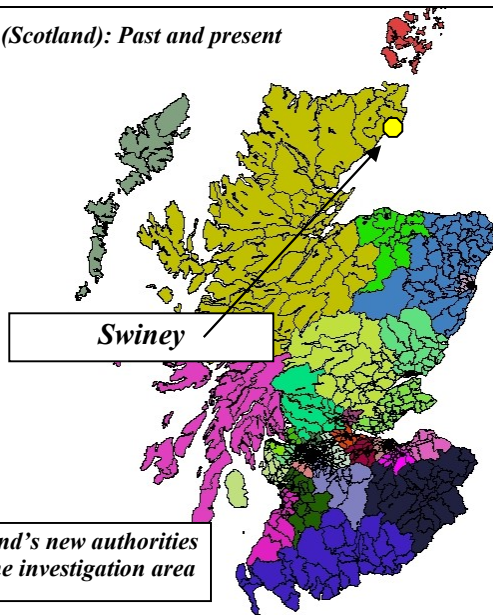
(Names of enumeration locations used on census forms: Swiney, Badharigo, Cordoo, Osclay, Swiney Ruisgill, Roadside Ruisgill, Reisgill, Newtown, Loangarron Osclay)

Number of households: 71 Population present at census night: 312

Share of resident population (aged three years or over) speaking Gàidhlig: 36.9 %

County	Civil parish	Registration district	Enumeration district number	Census form pages
Caithness	Latheron	Latheron	7	1 - 17

Alba (Scotland): Past and present



## State of Gàidhlig in 1891:

The census data clearly reveal that Gàidhlig ceased to be a relevant means of communication in this area some fifty years before. The vast majority of those older than 45 years of age still spoke Gàidhlig in these crofting communities. But the younger generations had no knowledge whatsoever (see figure below). Despite speaking the traditional language all household heads did not pass it over to the next generation(s).

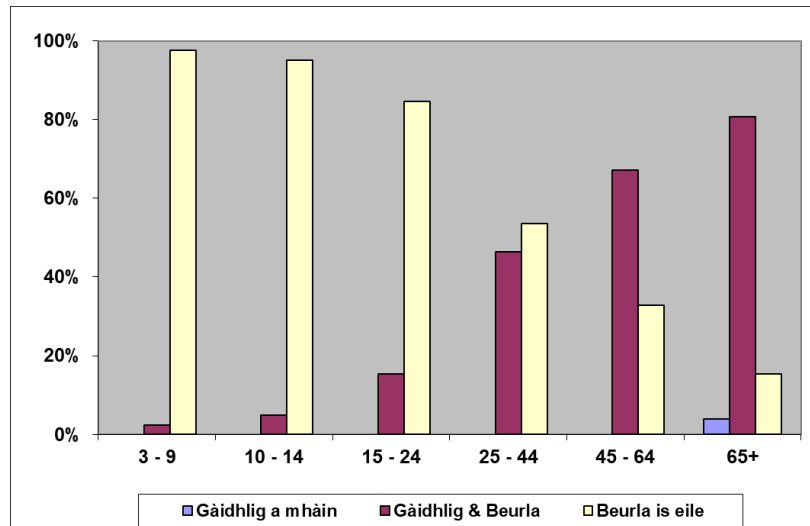
Gàidhlig was still strongest in Swiney itself, but very seldomly found in Am Baile Ùr (Newtown) next door.

## Area description:

The village of Swiney and its neighbouring crofting hamlets are object of this study. These settlements are situated in the south-eastern corner of the county of Gallaibh (Caithness) on Scotland's rocky North Sea coast between the fishing towns of Liabost (Lybster) and Latharan (Latheron).

The whole area at the time was part of one local estate. Main economic factors were some fishing, but mainly traditional crofting activities in 1891.

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. <sup>3</sup>	Total <sup>4</sup>	Gàidhlig	Gàidhlig & English	Gàidhlig speakers (%)
<b>Age</b>								
<b>Total</b>	<b>312</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>287</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>36.9 %</b>
<b>3-4</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.0 %</b>
<b>5-9</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3.2 %</b>
<b>10-14</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4.9 %</b>
<b>15-24</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>15.4 %</b>
<b>25-44</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>46.4 %</b>
<b>45-64</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>67.1 %</b>
<b>65+</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>84.6 %</b>
<b>Gender</b>								
<b>Female</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>37.9 %</b>
<b>Male</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>35.7 %</b>
<b>Place of birth</b>								
<b>Born in parish</b>	<b>273</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>38.6 %</b>
<b>In neighbouring parish<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>28</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>15.4 %</b>
<b>Gaidhealtachd elsewhere<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>100.0 %</b>
<b>Other places</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.0 %</b>

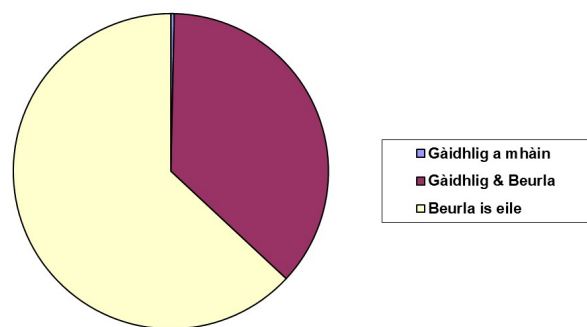
## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Parishes of Wick, Watten, Halkirk (all Caithness), Kildonan (Sutherland).

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

<sup>3</sup> People described as visitors, boarders, lodgers, or other similar terms.

<sup>4</sup> 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 & Beurla, 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 factsheets are a welcome way to publish some of the “local gems”. More information is provided at [http://www.linguae-celticae.de/GLP\\_english.htm](http://www.linguae-celticae.de/GLP_english.htm).

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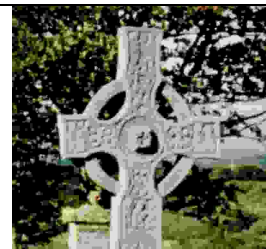
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Area: *Gallaibh (Caithness): Swiney, Osclay, Rìdhisgil (Reisgill) & Am Baile Ùr (Newtown)*

	House-holds	Usually resident population (3+)			
		Total	Gàidhlig	Gàidhlig & English	Gàidhlig speakers (%)
<b>Swiney &amp; Rìdhisgil (Reisgill)</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>287</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>36.9 %</b>
<b>Individual communities</b>					
<i>Swiney</i> (Swiney)	27	111	1	54	49.5 %
<i>Osclay</i> (Osclay)	17	67	0	24	35.8 %
<i>Rìdhisgil</i> (Reisgill)	17	63	0	21	33.3 %
<i>Am Baile Ùr</i> (Newtown)	10	46	0	6	13.0 %
<b>Language of parents</b>					
<b>Both parents Gàidhlig speaking</b>	17	92	0	46	50.0 %
<b>Single parent Gàidhlig speaking</b>	8	35	0	16	45.7 %
<b>One parent Gàidhlig speaking</b>	8	40	0	10	25.0 %
<b>No Gàidhlig speaking parent</b>	11	57	0	4	7.0 %
<b>Households with no children (0-14)</b>	27	63	1	29	47.6 %
<b>Occupation of head of household</b>					
<b>Crofter, farmer, fisherman, etc.</b>	53	237	1	87	37.1 %
<b>Shepherd, gamekeeper or similar</b>	1	7	0	0	0.0 %
<b>Clergyman, teacher, physician, etc.</b>	0	0	0	0	-
<b>Mason, carpenter, merchant, etc.</b>	4	10	0	3	30.0 %
<b>Living on private means</b>	12	26	0	13	50.0 %
<b>Manager, coachman, cook, etc.</b>	0	0	0	0	-
<b>Worker, farm/domestic servant, etc.</b>	1	7	0	2	28.6 %
<b>Remaining occupations</b>	0	0	0	0	-

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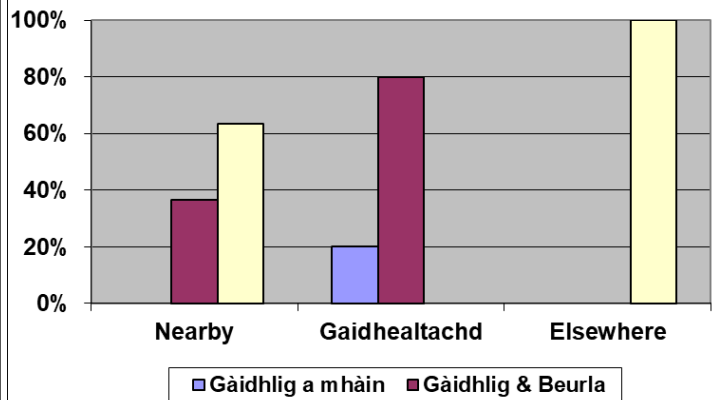
## Place of birth and Gàidhlig speaking:

The language was still spoken by around a third of the locally born inhabitants. Incomers from *Gaidhealtachd* areas all spoke Gàidhlig, all people from elsewhere not at all.

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Born either in Latheron or in the adjacent parishes of Wick, Watten, Halkirk (all Caithness), Kildonan (Sutherland).

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



Speakers according to place of birth (1) nearby<sup>1</sup> (2) in remaining *Gaidhealtachd*<sup>2</sup>, or (3) elsewhere

## Remarks:

1. Official census figures reported 107 bilingual inhabitants and one monolingual Gàidhlig-speaker out of a total population of 312 persons (34.6%). The usually resident population of 287 persons, however, consisted of 105 Gàidhlig-speakers (36.9%) including one inhabitant “with no English”.
2. A 84-year-old crofter’s widow in Swiney was the only census return as monolingual Gàidhlig-speaker. She originally came from the northwest coast of *Cataibh* (Sutherland).
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.