

Anke-Beate Stahl

Norse in the Place-names of Barra

The Barra group lies off the west coast of Scotland and forms the southernmost extremity of the Outer Hebrides. The islands between Barra Head and the Sound of Barra, hereafter referred to as the Barra group, cover an area approximately 32 km in length and 23 km in width. In addition to Barra and Vatersay, nowadays the only inhabited islands of the group, there stretches to the south a further seven islands, the largest of which are Sandray, Pabbay, Mingulay and Berneray. A number of islands of differing sizes are scattered to the north-east of Barra, and the number of skerries and rocks varies with the tidal level. Barra's physical appearance is dominated by a chain of hills which cuts through the island from north-east to south-west, with the peaks of Heaval, Hartaval and An Sgala Mór all rising above 330 m. These mountains separate the rocky and indented east coast from the machair plains of the west. The chain of hills is continued in the islands south of Barra. Due to strong winter and spring gales the shore is subject to marine erosion, resulting in a ragged coastline with narrow inlets, caves and natural arches.

Archaeological finds suggest that farming was established on Barra by 3000 BC, but as there is no linguistic evidence of a pre-Norse place names stratum the Norse immigration during the ninth century provides the earliest onomastic evidence. The Celtic cross-slab of Kilbar with its Norse ornaments and inscription is the first traceable source of any language spoken on Barra: 'Eptir þorgerðu Steinars dóttur es kross sjá reistr', '*After Þorgerð, Steinar's daughter, is this cross erected*' (Close-Brooks and Stevenson 1982:43).

As this cross is dated to the beginning of the 11th century, it can be assumed that Norse was by then well established. The absorption of Norse by Gaelic may have taken place later in the Outer Hebrides than it did in areas nearer the Scottish

mainland. By the beginning of the 13th century, however, it is likely that Norse had given way to Gaelic (Jennings 1996:72).

A look at the map gives the impression that most names in the Barra group are of Norse origin. All major satellites and the highest mountains have Norse names. It must have been this first glance which inspired Borgstrøm in 1936 to assume that 'The overwhelming majority of place names in Barra, as in the Hebrides as a whole, has no connection with the Gaelic language' (Borgstrøm 1936:287).

One way to assess the influence of the various languages involved is to examine the occurrence of their generics within geographic classes. For this purpose the Ordnance Survey classification system has been expanded and now accommodates terms related to rocks, islands, bays, shoreline, promontories, relief features, freshwater features, husbandry (including agriculture) and settlements.

Rocks and Reefs

The most popular term for submerged rocks is *bogha*, the G form of ON *boði*. In the Barra Isles alone there are more than 70 place-names in which *bogha* acts as generic. It occurs in combination with the names of ships which have struck them, as in *Bogha Chavalier*, 'reef of the Cavalier'. In other cases, sunken rocks are named after their orientation marks on land, as in *Bogh' an Taigh Ghil*, 'reef of the white house', and in *Bogha Taigh Eòin*, 'reef of Jonathan's house', and often they are just called after their colour. *An Rochd Mhór*, 'the big fold', contains the ON word *hrukka*, 'fold' or 'wrinkle', which designates a 'large, sunken, tangle-grown rock'. In Barra this term occurs only once and covers a large area west of Muldoanich. The Eng. word *shoal*, 'shallow', as in *Beatson's Shoal*, also occurs only once. On AD charts, approximately half of the names of sunken rocks have been translated into English, as in *Bull's Rock*, *Bonnet Rock* and *Old Woman's Rock*.

Islands

Sea-terminology accommodates generics such as ON *ey*, 'island', which is usually modified to *-ay*, and is part of the names of all of the major islands of the Barra group. ON *holmr*, modified to the forms *-um* or *-lum*, is the term for a 'medium-sized island' which is large enough to provide grazing for a few animals, as emphasised by names like *Lamalum*, 'island of the lambs', and *Solon Beag* and *Solon Mór*, 'small sheep island' and 'large sheep island' respectively. The ON word *múli*, 'headland', is also used in Barra as a term for 'sea rocks', which vary not only in height but also in size. *Arnumul*, 'eagle rock', is the largest, even bigger than some *holmr*-islands and certainly the highest, measuring 121 m above sea-level. *Lianumul*, composed of an obscure element and *múli*, and *Greanamul*, 'green rock', are substantial lower-lying rocks. At the bottom end of the scale there is *Leigemul* just off Ledaig, and the most famous rock containing the element *múli*, *Kisumul*, 'rock of the small bay', which is just large enough to accommodate the castle. *Kisumul* has a parallel name in *A'Steinn* from ON *steinn*, 'stone', which here is used in the sense of 'prominent little island'. This element can also be found in other parts of the Western Isles and is very popular in Norway.

A place-name element which describes features of a less variable size than does *múli*, is ON *sker*, borrowed into G in the form of *sgeir*. It is used for rocks or small islands which usually do not support cattle or sheep and in many cases are void of vegetation. *Sgeir* is a flexible loan-word which occurs in combination with either G or ON specifics in either ON or G word order. Occasionally it is used in its anglicised form 'skerry'. Examples of inverted word order include *Glasssgeir*, 'grey-green skerry', and *Dubhsgeir*, 'dark skerry', a variation of the OS entry *Sgeir Dubh*. There are ON forms as in *Holisgeir*, which includes an obscure ON specific, but the most frequent creations contain G elements and the traditional G order of composition as in *Sgeir Dubh*, 'dark skerry', and *Sgeir na Cloiche*, 'skerry of the stone'. *Sgeir* is a widespread generic in Barra's nomenclature.

The most restricted term for an island is G *laogh* meaning 'calf' or 'friend'. Islands called *An Laogh* are very small in size and always located immediately beside a very large island. In Barra there are only two islands with this name, one north of Muldoanich, and the other one north of Gighay. Although the ON Hebridean equivalent *Calvay*, 'calf island', does not occur in Barra, there is one close to adjacent Eriskay.

Bays

This group includes all features related to saltwater, such as bays, inlets, channels and natural landing-places.

The most popular element is G *bàgh*, a loan from ON *vágr*, meaning 'bay'. In the Western Isles it covers middle to good-sized features as in *Bàgh a' Deas*, 'south bay', and *Bàgh Siar*, 'west bay'. The most prominent bays, *Bàgh a' Chaisteil*, 'castle bay', and *Bàgh a Tuath*, 'north bay', have parallel Eng. forms. Despite the widespread use of the G loan-word version, the ON original words *vík* and *vágr* have not disappeared from the nomenclature of the islands. ON *vík*, usually modified to *-aig* or *-vick*, covers large to medium-sized round bays as in *Brevig*, 'broad bay', and *Tresivick*, 'bay of the current', while ON *vágr* is productive in *Bàgh Huilavagh*, possibly 'hill bay', and *Bàgh Hirivagh*, 'dry bay'. In contrast to the open, round shape of *vík*-features, ON *vágr* is applied to longer and narrower inlets.

The ON element *hópr* is used for sheltered bays with narrow access. In Barra there are two features that match the geographic requirements, but only *Loch Obe*, or *Loch na h-Òb* as it is referred to by locals, contains a form of this element.

G *poll*, a loan from ON *pollr*, describes a 'little bay', almost a 'pool'.

Other elements describing some sort of bay, but occurring with very low frequency, are G *camus* as in *An Camus Gasd'*, 'the beautiful bay', and G *cearcall*, a loan from Lat. *circulum* and related to Eng. *circle*. This element is more commonly used with rock formations. *An Cearcall* at the west side of Pabbay



Kisimul, Castle Bay.

is a round, small bay in whose exact centre there is a rock. The Eng. name *The Lagoon* describes a shallow, sheltered bay between Hellisay and Gighay. Although *The Lagoon* includes various small inlets for which there are ON or G names, there is no other competing place-name for the entire bay. Another one-off name is *Na Cìreanan*, 'the cock's combs', a set of narrow inlets which, taken as a whole, resemble the shape of a cock's comb.

ON *gjá*, modified to *-geo* or borrowed into G *geodha*, and G *sloc* cater for exactly the same kind of location, a 'gully', which is a long, narrow ravine and is a feature typical of the west coast of Barra and the southern satellites. Apart from a few place-names in Allan McDonald's document of non-Gaelic place-names in Mingulay, the ON element no longer appears as a generic without being supplemented by the tautological G *sloc*, as in *Sloc Chiasigeo*, 'gully of the small bay', and *Sloc Cuigeo*, 'gully of the enclosure'. G forms include *Sloc na Béiste*, 'gully of the beast', probably referring to a whale, *Sloc Granda*, 'dirty gully', and *Sloc an Eich*, 'gully of the horse'. For further discussion of *sloc* and *gjá* see [3]

The Barra Isles consist of a maze of channels and waterways. The straits between the largest islands appear as Eng. *sound*, related to ON *sund*, on the OS maps and the AD charts as in *Sound of Barra*, *Sound of Hellisay* and *Sound of Mingulay*. In spoken Gaelic, the names of these straits are gaelicised and the generics replaced by G *caolas*, which caters not only for large but also smaller features such as *Caolas Eilean nan Eun*, 'sound of the birds' island', and *Caolas Bogha na Lice*, 'sound of the skerry of the flagstone'.

G *sruth* is a narrow channel combining a sea-loch with the open sea, a feature which is often subject to strong tidal currents. Both *Loch Obe* and *Bàgh Beag* are connected to the sea by channels called *An Sruth*, which permit safe passage to boats at restricted times only.

Other than the Eng. loan *sound*, the only other ON term for a water-related passage in the Barra group is *rás*, as in *Snagaras*, 'sound of the headland'.

Terms for landing or anchorage places include G *seòlaid*, 'harbour' or 'pier', G *acarsaid*, a loan from ON *akkeris-sæti*,

'anchorage place', as in *Acarsaid Fhalaich*, 'secluded anchorage place', the simplex form *An Acarsaid*, and the Eng. words *harbour* and *landing place*. A frequently used generic is G *làimhrig*, a loan from ON *hlað-hamarr*, which usually describes a site with steeply sloping rocks permitting direct boat access. *Làimhrig* does occur as a simplex name, but is more popular in combination with nearby features as in *Làimhrig Fhlodaigh*, 'Flodday landing-place', or compounded with the name of its most frequent user as in *Làimhrig Ailig Bhig*, 'Small Alec's landing-place'. Its main usage is emphasised in *Làimhrig nam Mart*, 'landing-place of the cows', or in *Làimhrig na Mòna*, 'landing-place of the peat'. The most frequent element used for landing-places is G *port*, a loan from Lat. *portus* and related to Eng. *port*. This element may be compounded with the name of its main user, with a name of a boat for which it provides shelter, with the names of nearby natural features, or with an adjective describing its colour or shape.

Shoreline

Both G and ON provide a rich terminology for coastal features such as sand-banks, beaches, and rocks at the shore.

The G shore generics include *oitir* as in *Oitir Mhór*, the 'large sand-bank', and G *cladach*, usually used for a 'rocky part of the shore' as in *Cladach a' Mhaoraich*, 'shellfish coast', and *Cladach Sgiobasdail*, 'coast of Skipisdale'. *Carraig* is a very popular G term for 'fishing-rocks' and is most often combined with the name of its most regular visitor. *Carraig* is part of 52 primary names, but the number of places that were actively used as fishing-rocks and received names is probably much higher.

The general term for a beach, however, is G *tràigh* as in *An Tràigh a Deas*, 'the southern beach', *Tràigh Mhór*, 'big beach', and *Tràigh a' Bhàigh*, 'beach of the bay'. G has borrowed additional words for beaches from ON. The G *mol* from ON *mól*, 'shingly beach', is used more often than its G equivalent *morghan*. Examples in Barra include *A' Mhol*, 'the shingly

beach', *Mol Bheag Rubha Ghlas*, 'small shingly beach of the grey-green point', and *Mol nam Faochag*, 'shingly beach of the whelks'. Additionally, there is *G palla* from ON *pallr*, 'ledge', as in *A' Phalla Bhàn*, 'white cliff', and *Phalla nan Sreang*, 'ledge of the ropes'. Another term for a coastal rock is *G stalla* as in *Stalla an Eich Bhàin*, 'sea-rock of the white horse'. It is a loan-word from ON *stallr*, 'sea-rock' or 'shelf', but occurs less frequently than *palla*.

G uidh, borrowed from ON *eið*, is the term for an 'isthmus', a flat narrow piece of land between two straits. The Scandinavians often used these places as shortcuts by dragging their boats from one strait to the other across the narrow strip of land. In Barra this would not have been necessary as circumnavigation of the land would have taken less time. The Watersay settlement *Uidh* takes its name from the nearby isthmus, and *Traihui*, an old form collected by MacLean in 1823 for what is nowadays known as *Tràigh Siar*, 'west beach', in Watersay, is certain to contain the generic *uidh* as it links the rocky northern part of Watersay with its rocky southern part by a narrow stretch of dunes. Other elements which were not borrowed but retain their ON forms are *áll*, as in *A' Mhiriceil*, 'the dark stretch', indicating a dark stripe on the rocky shore, and *hqmull* as in *Sumula*, designating a 'layer of pebbles' or 'pebbly beach'. Additionally there is ON *eyrr*, 'sand-bank' or 'gravel-bank', as in *Eorisdale*, and ON *melr*, 'sea-links', as in *Melast*.

The influence of English on coastal features is minimal. *Arch*, *bank* and *dunes* are terms which occur merely on maps and *Gob an t-Seòr*, 'point of the shore', remains the only coastal place-name to include a gaelicised element borrowed from English.

Promontories

Some of the elements in this group qualify as coastal features, too. There is *G leac*, 'ledge of rock' or more commonly 'flagstone', as in the well-known *Leac nan Leannan*, 'the

lovers' flagstone'. G *sròn* as in *Sròn an Iasgair*, 'fisherman's nose', and *Sròn an Dùin*, 'promontory of the fort', are large rock reliefs and are used in both coastal and interior context.

The most often used G element for a large to medium-sized promontory is *rubha* as in *Rubha Domhain*, 'steep promontory', and *Rubh' an t-Sith*, 'peace point'. *Rubha* is the most popular G word for headlands and occurs as generic in 115 place-names of the Barra Isles. Far less productive are G *àird*, 'headland' or 'height', as in *Àird Rubha Mór*, 'height of the large headland', and G *gob*, referring to the extremity of a promontory. Another G term for the 'top' or 'point' of a place is G *ceann*. This element is productive in *Kentangaval*, 'point of the mountain of the headland', and in *Kinloch*, 'point of the loch'. G *amhach* as part of *Amhach Rubha na h-Acarsaid*, 'neck of the point of the landing-place', and *dòirlinn*, another term for an 'isthmus', are much rarer than the above mentioned elements.

On maps and charts the Eng. generics *head* and *point* are used for all locations which are important for navigation. There is *Greian Head*, *Doirlinn Head*, the most well-known *Barra Head*, *Scurrival Point* to the very north, *Bruernish Point* at the entrance to North Bay, and *Skate Point* just off Barra Head Lighthouse.

Three ON generics have been productive in this group. There is *stòng*, 'pole', often used metaphorically in names of peninsulas, as in *Stoung Beag* and *Stoung Mór*, both of which lie near Borve. An ON element which operates on the same scale of importance and frequency as G *rubha* is ON *nes*, 'headland' or 'promontory'. Place-name examples include *Rosinish*, 'horse peninsula', *Bruernish*, 'bridge headland', and *Leehinish*, 'shelter headland'. *Nes* is the most extensively used ON element describing headlands.

Relief Features

This group includes mountains, hills, mounds, summits, ledges, slopes, rocks, valleys and hollows.

The highest mountains in Barra, *Heaval*, 'high mountain',

and *Hartaval*, 'horse mountain', contain the ON generic *fjall*, which also forms part of *Ben Tangaval*, 'mountain of the headland', where it is supplemented by its G equivalent *beinn*. G *beinn* also occurs, of course, in purely G context as in the names A' *Bheinn Mhór*, 'the large mountain'. In contrast to the ON element *fjall*, in the Western Isles often modified to *-val*, which only covers high mountains, G *beinn* caters for a wider range of sizes. G *An t-Aonach Pabach*, 'the Pabbay plateau', has the alias name *The Hoe*, a derivation of from ON *haugr*, 'hill'. The mountain name *Na Sgurragan* derives from G *sgùrr*, a loan from ON *skor*, 'the sharp-pointed hills'. The G element *tom*, 'round knoll', is represented in names like *Tom a' Reithean*, 'the young ram's knoll', and *Tom na Beinne*, 'round knoll of the mountain', both of which are high elevations.

G is the dominant language for names of medium-sized hills with common terms being *meall*, 'knoll' or 'mound', and *cnoc*, 'eminence' or 'hill'. G *tòrr* is related to Lat. *turris* and has the meaning of 'hillock' as in *Tor Gormlaig*, 'hillock of the blue flagstone'. 'Fairy knoll' is the translation of G *An Sithean*, of which there are at least two in Barra.

Small elevations include terms like ON *hóll*, 'mound', as in *Grèdàl*, 'gravel mound', and G *cnap* / *gnob*, a loan from ON *knappr*, as in *Cnap a' Choilich*, 'mound of the grouse'. G *bot* means bank as in *Am Bota Ruadh*, 'the red peat bank'.

Mountain or hill tops are referred to with three G generics. *Sgùmban* is part of *An Sgùmban a Tuath*, 'the northern summit'. *Uachdar* in a place-names context means 'summit' or 'top', and in the Barra name *An t-Uachdar* designates the upper part of the township of Cleat. *Mullach* also has the meaning of 'top', 'hill' or 'summit' and occurs in the Bruernish place-name *Mullach an Rathaid*, 'top of the road'. In this group G *mullach* is the most frequently used term. General terms for rocks G are *clach*, 'stone', G *creag*, 'rock', 'cliff' or 'hill', and G *cleit*, a loan from ON *klettr*, meaning 'rock', 'cliff' or 'sea-rock'. Standing stones carry G names like *Am Bodach*, 'the old man', and A' *Chailleach*, 'the old woman'. G *carragh* is the term for a pillar-shaped stone and G *càrn* describes a stone mound.

Slopes are designated by terms such as ON *lein*, 'mountain

side', as in *Na Latha-Lìn*, 'the layered mountain side'. ON *brekka*, 'slope', occurs in *Ùlabrac*, 'slope of the wolf', and ON *urð* forms part of *Clach Urth*, 'stone of the rocky slope'. G generics for slopes include *leathad*, 'slope', and *bruach*, which can also mean 'bank'. *Bac* is the gaelicised form of ON *bakki*, 'bank'. G *gualann* describes the 'shoulder of a mountain' as in *A' Ghuala' Mhór*, 'the big shoulder'. The most common G generic for a ridge is *druim* and forms part of *Druim an t-Sruth*, 'ridge of the current', and *Druim na Crìche*, 'ridge of the boundary'.

With the exception of ON *dalr*, all terms for 'valley' are of G origin. *Dalr* is productive in the ON name *Skipisdale*, 'ship valley'. This element is used for large valleys and slopes and is a popular settlement generic. Its G equivalent is *gleann*, which in Barra, too, has become a settlement name. *Bealach* as in *Bealach Dhuggain*, 'Fr. Duggan's pass', describes a passage between two mountains and occurs frequently in Barra's nomenclature. G *caigeann* is a 'rough mountain pass', whereas the popular G element *cadha* is more like a 'wind channel'. *Glaic* describes a 'hollow or shallow cut in a rock' as in *Glaic an Daimh*, 'hollow of the bullock', and G *lag*, *coire*, *nead* and *sùil* all designate kinds of concavities with *uamh*, 'cave', being the deepest.

Freshwater Features

Although elements from Eng., G and ON have been productive in naming freshwater features, it is G that has the most versatile vocabulary and dominates in this group.

There is G *féith*, 'vein', describing an underground stream as in *Féith na Cailliche*, 'old woman's vein', a place where sheep are easily lost. More common features are G *sruthan*, 'rivulet', *allt*, 'stream', and *abhainn*, which translates as 'river'. These features, however, are much smaller than mainland Scotland features which have the same generics.

All names for wells contain the G generic *tobar* which is usually compounded with the name of the person on whose croft it is located. Other wells are described in terms of colour,

quality of water or general location.

Loch is the common G generic for 'lake' as in *Loch an Dùin*, 'lake of the fort', and in the Western Isles is also used for sea-lochs. G caters for a wide range of smaller freshwater features such as *glumag*, 'deep pool' or 'muddy, wet area', *lub*, 'marshy ground', and *slugaid* which describes a site of quicksand or a miry place as in *Slugaide*. When referring to freshwater features G *poll* means 'deep, stagnant water' or 'wet, miry meadow'. G *léig*, a 'marshy pool', is related to Lat. *linquo* and Eng. *loan*. The G term *lón*, 'meadow', 'pond', 'water', deserves special attention as it has a parallel form in ON *lón*, which has a slightly different meaning, designating a 'deep, slow running stream'. (For further information see Nicolaisen 1958:196-8.) In this group, generics from other languages are rare. The Sco. generic *burn* occurs only once, in *Duarry Burn*, and the Eng. word *well* appears only in *Usborne's Well*. ON *hlaupr*, 'run of water', is possibly part of *Analepp an Ear*.

Husbandry and Agricultural Areas

Although G dominates in agricultural terminology, it has borrowed a few frequently used words from other languages. The generic in *Goirtean Eòrna*, 'barley field', and *Goirtean Iain*, 'John's field', is based on Lat. *hortus* and related to Eng. *garden*, and in G has a number of different meanings including 'little cornfield', 'enclosure', 'park', and 'small patch of arable land'. Other loanwords from Eng. are G *croit*, 'croft', as in *Croit Iseabail*, G *lot*, 'share' or 'part', from Eng. *allotment*, and G *pàirc*, 'enclosed field', an obvious borrowing from Eng. *park*. The Eng. term *pendicle* describes a 'part of land that belongs to, but is detached from, a township'. Eng. *shieling* is a term for a 'temporary summer accommodation used by shepherds' and has been introduced by map-makers. Locals use the G equivalent *àirigh* as in *Earsary*, 'Eirik's shieling', and *Skallary*, 'Skolli's shieling'. A 'milking-place' or 'enclosure' is called *buaille* in G as in *Buaile na h-Airde*, 'enclosure of the promontory', and *A' Bhuaile Bhuidhe*, 'the yellow enclosure'. The ON term for a 'milking-place' is *stqðull*, which in

Norway is frequently used as settlement generic. In Barra it may occur in *Sgeir Bhioraghasdail*, possibly translated as 'skerry of Björn's milking-place'. There may be more examples in Barra, but the modified form of this generic, *-still*, can easily be mistaken for a combination of 's'-genitive and ON *dalr*, 'valley', which happens to follow a similar sound pattern. Place-names in which *stqðull* may have been productive were almost all located in valleys or at slopes, so that derivation from either *stqðull* or *dalr* would have been possible.

A variety of terms are available for enclosures. There are Eng. *sheep wash*, *sheep pen* and *fold*, all mapped translations of older G names. G words include *iodhlann*, 'corn-yard', 'enclosure' or 'circle', and *cotan* as in *Cotan an Laoigh*, 'fold of the calf'. Other G terms for enclosures are loanwords like *fang* from Sco. *fank*, *cuidh* from ON *kvi*, *gearraidh* from ON *gerði*, and *gàradh* from ON *garðr* which describes a 'dyke'. *Cuidh* and *gearraidh* are particularly popular elements of this group. G *cachaileith* as in *A' Chachaileith Ùr*, 'the new gate', is paralleled in G *geata*, a loan from Eng. *gate*, as in *An Geata Iarainn*, 'the iron gate'.

There are a plenty of generics for describing rather neutral pieces of ground, such as *cùil*, 'neuk', *réidh*, 'plain', 'meadow' or 'level piece of ground', and G *sliabh* for 'extended heath' or 'moorish ground'. Further generics for level areas are *bogach*, 'swamp', *mòinteach*, 'moorland', *criathrach*, which is used for 'wilderness, swampy areas', and *machair* which describes an 'extensive, low-lying plain'. In addition to these G entries there is one ON generic. ON *land* forms part of *Vaslain*, 'wet land', a boggy area south of Suidheachan. In Norway, this generic is used as a settlement generic, and *Vaslain* too, according to the Craigston Register, used to be inhabited.

Man-made Constructions

A G settlement generic is *baile*, which means 'village', as in *Baile na Creige*, 'settlement of the rock', also known as Craigston. *Taigh* is the general G term for a 'house' and is most

often compounded with the personal name of its latest owner. *Tobhta*, a 'ruin' in G, is possibly related to ON *toft*, a 'clearing' or 'walls without roof', whereas *bùth*, 'bothy' has its roots in ON *buð*. *Caisteal* has been borrowed from Lat. *castellum*, 'fort'. In Barra the general term for fortified places is G *dùn* as in *Dùn Briste*, 'broken fort', and in *Dùnan Ruadh*, 'little red fort'. Another G term for a fortified place is *crannag*, which describes a partially natural and partially man-made island.

Man-made constructions include G *dám*, a loan from Eng. *dam*, G *ceidh* from Eng. *quay* and G *tucaid*, a borrowing from Sco. *douket*, a 'dovecot'. During the last century map-makers placed a number of Eng. names on the map, including words such as *factory*, *hospital*, *house*, *inn*, *mill*, *monument*, *pillar*, *post-office*, *school* and *station*. Death, worship and church property are reflected in the Eng. terms *chapel*, *church*, *glebe*, *graveyard*, *manse* and *presbytery*. G generics in this field are *cill*, 'cell', a loan from Lat. *cella*, as in *Kilbar*, and G *uaigh* as in *Uaigh na Cailliche*, 'old woman's grave'.

Settlements

A number of settlement names have been inspired by nearby natural features and so do not contain any of the traditional settlement generics. G names include *Ardmhor*, 'large headland', *Kinloch*, 'top of the lake', *Glen* from G *gleann*, 'valley', and the Vatersay settlement name *Caolas* meaning 'sound'. The previously discussed ON element *eið*, 'isthmus', is reflected in the Vatersay settlement name *Uidh*. This element can also be found in the names of two settlements on Skye, in an old farm-name in Shetland, and in numerous sites in Norway. *Bac*, from ON *bakki*, 'slope', a formerly inhabited area of Barra, serves also as a village name in Lewis. There is also a *Back* in Shetland, and several occurrences in Norway. ON *hōgrgr*, 'pile of stones', usually designates an important site of pagan worship (Rygh 1898:58) and is reflected in the well-known *Horough* in the Castlebay area and the lesser known *Na Horgh*, a nowadays unoccupied site in the hills at the road

junction to Ardveinish.

There are names which contain both G and ON elements. Examples are *Ardveinish*, 'headland/point of the central headland', *Earsary*, a combination of the ON male personal name *Eirikr* and the G *airigh*, 'shieling', and *Kentangaval*, from G *ceann*, 'head', ON *tangi*, 'promontory', and ON *ffall*, 'mountain'.

Further ON settlement names are *Scurrival*, which includes the generic *ffall*, 'mountain', *Cleat*, from G *cleit* which is a loan from ON *klettr*, 'rock', *Bruernish*, 'bridge headland', *Brevig*, 'broad bay', and *Nask*, with a generic derived from ON *skarð* and with a name that could have an origin in **Náskarð*, 'the nearest cliff', or in **Nǫrrskarð*, 'the narrow cleft'.

Gaelic and English forms are used side by side in three settlement names: *Bàgh a Tuath* has the English equivalent Northbay, *Bàgh a' Chaisteil* is paralleled in Castlebay, and *Baile na Creige* is also known as Craigston.

Grean may derive from OIr. *grian*, 'sun' or 'sunny spot', or from the ON adjective *groenn*, 'green' or 'green spot'. The generics of the west coast settlements *Tangusdale* and *Allasdale* cannot be conclusively determined. Although both sites have the geographical prerequisites of a valley, ON *dalr*, the generics of their names may alternatively derive from ON *stǫðull*, 'milking-place'.

Balnabodach comes from the G *buaile nam bodach*, 'milking-place of the old men'.

Further settlement names of ON origin include *Borve*, from ON *borg*, 'fortified site', and *Cuier*, from ON *kví*, 'enclosure', both of which have equivalents in other Hebridean islands, Orkney, Shetland and Scandinavia. Each of the large ON settlement generics identified by Nicolaisen (1976:88-95) has also been productive in Barra. The examples of *Suinsibost*, whose precise location on Mingualy could not be identified, *An Garrabost*, and *Husabost*, as part of *Abhainn Husabost*, originate from ON *bólstaðr*, 'farmstead', a well established ON settlement generic which, in the form *-bost*, has also been productive on Lewis and Skye. *Melast*, 'sea-links stead', possibly contains the ON generic *staðir*, which indicates an

early stage of settlement. The Sandray place-name *Sheader* is based on ON *setr*, 'shieling', which has parallels in other Hebridean place-names and leads back to the coastal district between Fjordane, Møre and Trøndelag in south-west Norway (Nicolaisen 1979-80:108), which accommodates a high ratio of names containing this element.

Summary

The examination shows that the strong influence of ON as observed in place-names on large scale maps is not paralleled at a detailed level. The overwhelming majority of microtoponymics are of G origin. In this respect, Borgstrøm's assumption that a detailed analysis of Barra's place-names would reveal a large number of further ON place-names (Borgstrøm 1936:295) cannot be confirmed. ON dominates in the names of the highest mountains and in names for reefs and islands. It is as influential as G in terms for bay-shaped features, but serves merely as a donor language for loanwords to supplement the existing G terminology for shore features such as beach rocks and landing-places. G dominates in names of all freshwater features and also has a strong presence in terms for medium sized hills and for hollows. The frequency of ON and G in names for promontories is evenly balanced, with anglicised parallel names for the most prominent locations. A number of G loanwords for crofting are based on Eng., and a few frequently used ones on ON. In settlement names ON is slightly more dominant than G.

Assessing the level of 'Norseness' in Hebridean place-names is a risky undertaking, as it is up to the individual researcher to decide how to evaluate the status of G loanwords from ON and ON ex-nomine units, i.e. names of ON origin which are combined with G generics and consequently act as specifics in G place-names. Their inclusion or exclusion can cause considerable variation in the results.

Although the Western Isles were surveyed at a comparatively late stage, Barra's place-names are relatively well preserved. This is partly due to the fact that Gaelic with

its wide range of phonemes is capable of preserving ON names. Secondly, Barra Gaelic, which is considered conservative, has not changed rapidly but has retained its phonemic shape of words and names through the centuries. (See Oftedal 1955:110). Nevertheless, sound reductions have taken place and a number of sounds in originally ON place-names have been rendered unrecognisable. This due to lenition, a form of aspiration required in certain cases of G grammar which changes the initial sounds of words and may render them mute.

The craze for anglicisation of G place-names in the 1870s by the Admiralty has, in some cases, been reversed and the older G names revived. The latest edition of the OS Landranger series, published in 1997, however, gives gaelicised versions of every place-name on the Barra Isles, even those which are unmistakably of ON origin, and which from the earliest historical records onwards have been fairly constant in spelling.

It is understandable that the overwhelming pressure of English in Gaelic territory forces Hebrideans to protect their language and culture. This, however, should not be carried out in a desperate attempt at artificial gaelicisation, which not only wipes out English names but renders some Norse names beyond recognition. Norse influence in the Western Isles lasted 500 years and place-names coined during that period, and the fact that they survived, also form part of Hebridean heritage.

Abbreviations

G	Gaelic
ON	Old Norse
Eng.	English
Sco.	Scottish
OIr.	Old Irish
Lat.	Latin

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