

THE LANGUAGES of ULSTER



**Exploring the links
between Gaelic and
Scots in Ulster -
the people, places
and languages**

Irish, Scottish Gaelic and Ulster Scots have been in a close relationship for centuries and have influenced one another. Here are some words which they have in common.

GAEIC WORDS IN ULSTER SCOTS

IRISH	ULSTER SCOTS	SCOTTISH GAELIC
brochán → porridge	brochan porridge	← brochan gruel, porridge
céili → social visit	kaley, céiliadh social visit	← céiliadh social visit
clábar → mud	clabber mud	← clábar mud
gob → beak	gub mouth	← gob beak
griosaich → hot embers	greeshoch hot embers	← griosach hot embers
prácas → mess	prácas mess	
scidín → small potato	skedyin small potato	← sgrath green sward, sod
scrath → green sward, sod	scraw, scraas sod	← spág clumsy foot
spág → broad/flat foot	spag, sprag big awkward foot	← spág clumsy foot

ULSTER SCOTS WORDS IN IRISH

ULSTER SCOTS	NORTH DONEGAL IRISH
bumblebee →	bumbog bumblebee
glar → mud	glár river mud
gulder → to shout, a roar	goldar loud cry, a roar
gunk → disappointment	gonc disappointment
skink → light porridge, soup	scinc disgusting fluid
scutcher → tool for scutching flax	scutsseoir woman who undercuts people
stoor → disturbed or windblown dust	stür dust
targe, targer → scolding woman	táirdeir scolding woman
thran → obstinate	trán obstinate

NORMANS INVADE ULSTER

1177AD



9TH-13TH CENTURIES

VIKINGS SETTLE IN WESTERN SCOTLAND

9TH-11TH CENTURIES

VIKINGS SETTLE IN IRELAND



Scottish culture is full of words which have a Gaelic origin. Here are some:

SCOTTISH GAELIC WORDS IN SCOTS

caber	→	caber
rafter, caber		trimmed tree trunk thrown in competition at Highland games
claidheamh mòr	→	claymore
great sword		large two-edged Highland sword
sgian dubh	→	skean-dhu
black knife		ceremonial knife with a black hilt
sporan	→	sporran
purse		leather pouch

500AD

GAEIC HAS SPREAD FROM IRELAND TO ARGYLL



13TH-16TH CENTURIES

GAEIC-SPEAKING MERCENARIES FIGHT AND SETTLE IN IRELAND

CLAN DONALD EXTENDS CONTROL INTO NORTH ANTRIM

15TH-17TH CENTURIES



LATE 18TH CENTURY - PRESENT

IRISH MIGRANTS SETTLE PERMANENTLY IN WESTERN SCOTLAND



MASS MIGRATION OF ENGLISH AND SCOTTISH SETTLERS TO ULSSTER

1606-1700AD



Scottish Gaelic has borrowed words from Scots which are not in Irish:

SCOTS WORDS IN SCOTTISH GAELIC

burn	→	burn
stream		water
gardy	→	gairdean
arm		arm
neep	→	snéap
turnip		turnip
thrang	→	trang
busy		busy

FIRST NAMES FROM SCOTTISH GAELIC

- Alistair (from Alasdair, the Gaelic form of Alexander)
- Angus (from aon 'singular' and gus 'bravery')
- Calum (Scottish form of Colm, 'dove' - popular because of St Calum/Cille/Colmcille, a principal saint revered by the Scots)
- Donald (domhnall 'world-mighty')
- Dougal (dubhghaill 'black-haired foreigner')
- Duncan (dùnnchadh 'brown warrior')
- Finlay (fionnlaoch 'fair-haired warrior')
- Fiona (fionn 'fair')
- Iain (Gaelic form of 'John')
- Kenneth (cinnead 'offspring of fire' and coimreach 'handsome')
- Kyle (caoi 'narrows, channel, strait')



ROBERT BURNS ADD GAEIC

Although Gaelic had died out in Ayrshire by Robert Burns' time, his work contained many words of Gaelic origin: bardie (minor poet) < bárd; caird (tinker) < ceard; clachan (hamlet) < clachan; cranreuch (hoar frost) < crann-reothadh; glaive (sword) < claidheamh; kane (payment in kind) < cám; keber (rafter) < cabar; messin (small dog, cat) < measan; philibeg (kilt) < filleadh beag; pibroch (classical pipe music) < piobaireachd; spleuchan (tobacco-pouch) < spliuchan; usquebae (whisky) < uisge beatha; and whist (silence) < éisid.

CRAIC OR CRACK?

'Crack': the well-known Irish term for 'gossip' and 'entertainment', has its origins in both Scotland and northern England. In 'Holy Fair' (1785) Robert Burns wrote, 'They're a' famous tune, For crack that day.' Quotations from the *Dictionary of the Scots Language* include 'Sit ye down and gie your crack' (1833). South of the border there are examples of 'crack' as 'gossip' in the *English Dialect Dictionary* from Yorkshire, Cumberland and Cheshire. Crack as 'gossip' and 'entertainment' appears in Ulster Scots poetry published by Samuel Thomson in 1793. The word entered the Irish language as *craic* in the second half of the 20th century.

1177AD

THE IRISH AND SCOTS LANGUAGES HAVE BEEN INFLUENCED BY OLD NORSE AND DIALECTS OF FRENCH.

IRISH	OLD NORSE	ENGLISH
bear	bjorr	beer
fuinneog	vindauga	window
magadh	markaðr	market
stílir	styri	rudder

Most Norse words were borrowed by Scots through northern dialects of Middle English:

ULSTER SCOTS	OLD NORSE	ENGLISH
kirk	kirkja	church
kist	kista	chest
muckle	mikill	much, large amount
scarf	skarfr	cormorant

These terms were borrowed from the French dialects spoken by the Normans and their followers:

IRISH	ANGLO-FRENCH	ENGLISH
contae	cuntee	county
gasúr, garsún	garsun	boy
páiste	page	child
seomra	chaum(b)re	room, chamber

These terms stem from Norman influence and the Auld Alliance between Scotland and France (1295-1560):

ULSTER SCOTS	ANGLO-FRENCH, FRENCH	ENGLISH
fash	fascher	annoy, bother
gulpin	prob. galopin	raw youth, a fool
scutch	escoucher	to dress flax
stoor	estour	dust

By the 11th century Gaelic was spoken in most of Scotland, and the Gaelic Scots saw Ireland as their ancestral homeland. Some academics believe that they used poetic forms of 'Ireland' in their place-names, such as the names of three sovereignty goddesses - Ériu, Banba and Fódla.

GAELIC PLACE-NAMES – AND IRISH-SCOTTISH LINKS

SCOTTISH PLACE-NAME	MEANING	ENGLISH VERSION
Athfhòdhla	new Ireland	Atholl
Allt Éireann	stream of Ireland	Auldearn
Banbh	(new) Ireland	Banff
Eilginn	(new) Ireland	Elgin
Fionn-Éireann	white Ireland	Findhorn
Srath Éireann	valley of Ireland	Strathearn

Gaelic-speaking Scots came to Ireland as galloglasses (*gallóglach* 'foreign mercenary') and as followers of the Clan Donald which controlled north Antrim. A minority of the settlers who arrived during the 17th century also spoke Gaelic. Scottish Gaelic words in Antrim place-names include *allt* (stream), *monadh* (hill, mountain) and *scarbh* (cormorant). Stormont and Rowallane are named after places in Scotland.

ULSTER PLACE-NAME	MEANING	ENGLISH VERSION
Allt na Criche	stream of the boundary	Altacree Burn
Baile na nGallóglach	town of the galloglasses	Milford
Carn Albanach	cairn of the Scotsmen	Carnalbanagh
Carn Monaídh	cairn of the hill	Carnmoney
Creag na Scarbh	rock of the cormorants	Craignascarf
Rubha Àlainn	beautiful headland	Rowallane
Stairmhonadh	crossing place of the mountain	Stormont

WORDS IN STANDARD ENGLISH FROM THE IRISH LANGUAGE

ENGLISH	IRISH	MEANING OF IRISH WORD
banshee	bean sí	fairy woman
barmbrack	bairín breac	speckled loaf
phoney (prob. fawney = fake gold ring)	fáinne	ring
poteen	poitín	little pot
shamrock	seamróg	shamrock
Tory	tóraí	outlaw

WORDS IN STANDARD ENGLISH FROM IRISH AND/OR SCOTTISH GAELIC

ENGLISH	IRISH	SCOTTISH GAELIC	MEANING OF GAELIC WORD
bog	bog	bog	soft
clan	clann	clann	family
dulse	duileasc	duileasg	dulse
galore	go leor	gu leòr	enough
glen	gleann	gleann	valley
whisky (Sc.) whiskey (Ire.)	uisce beatha	uisge beatha	water of life