

## Norse and Gaelic Coastal Terminology in the Western Isles

It is probably true to say that the most enduring aspect of Norse place-names in the Hebrides, if we expect settlement names, has been the toponymy of the sea coast. This is perhaps not surprising, when we consider the importance of the sea and the seashore in the economy of the islands throughout history. The interplay of agriculture and fishing has contributed in no small measure to the great variety of toponymic terms which are to be found in the islands. Moreover, the broken nature of the island coasts, and the variety of scenery which they afford, have ensured the survival of a great number of coastal terms, both in Gaelic and Norse. The purpose of this paper, then, is to examine these terms with a Norse content in the hope of assessing the importance of the two languages in the various islands concerned.

The distribution of Norse names in the Hebrides has already attracted scholars like Oftedal and Nicolaisen, who have concentrated on established settlement names, such as the village names of Lewis (Oftedal 1954) and the major Norse settlement elements (Nicolaisen, S.H.R. 1969). These studies, however, have limited themselves to settlement names, although both would recognise that the less important names also merit study in an intensive way. The field-work done by the Scottish Place Name Survey, and localised studies like those done by MacAulay (TGSI, 1972) have gone some way to rectifying this omission, but the amount of material available is enormous, and it may be some years yet before it is assembled in a form which can be of use to scholarship.

W.J. Watson, writing in his 'Place Names of Ross and Cromarty' (1904) was one of the first to assemble a body of material relating to the terminology of minor features. His list of names from Lewis, and his coverage of mainland Ross-shire pointed to the great variety of terms which were used for coastal features. He stressed, moreover, the amount of contact which had taken place between Gaelic and Norse, and went some way towards establishing a system of Norse-Gaelic Phonetics from the evidence of place-names. Watson's work, however, was limited to Ross-shire and hence, Lewis, and his sound volume on

Ross-shire names tells us only the skeleton of the place-name story. He was nevertheless one of the first to attempt to define the problem of inter-relation between Gaelic and Norse.

I have chosen to examine coastal terminology for a variety of reasons. Firstly, the number of coastal names in the Hebrides gives us a sufficiently large sample to work with. Secondly, the distribution of the various coastal place-name elements has scarcely been investigated at all and finally, the six-inch Ordnance Survey map has sufficient scope to provide names of even relatively small features, which may individually be insignificant, but which in a wider context can tell us a great deal about the complexities of the Gaelic-Norse relationship, at least as far as place-names are concerned.

The Norse, as we all know, were intimately involved with the sea and the sea-coasts, wherever they settled. Their activities of fishing and fowling were passed on to their successors, and with them, the terminology which they introduced into the place-name coverage. The Lewis coastline is probably the best example of this, since Lewis place-names have been remarkably well-preserved. This is due partly to the uninterrupted nature of Lewis settlement, and partly to the pressure of population on both land and shore, thus ensuring a high density of place-names in the island. This is true also, but to a lesser extent, of Harris and the other islands of the Outer Hebrides, but the situation changes in parts of Skye, Mull, Jura and Islay, where nineteenth-century clearances have deprived us of the knowledge of much of the nomenclature of the landscape. Tiree, however, which is relatively densely populated, affords us a similar situation to Lewis in many respects, as does Colonsay, and to some extent, Gigha. We will look at this situation in more detail near the end of this paper.

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The terminology of coastlines can be divided into five sections, for the purposes of this survey.

- 1) Bays, inlets and other water features like straits, pools and channels.
- 2) Cliff and beach features.

- 3) Promontories and points.
- 4) Rocks and reefs, both tidal and submarine.
- 5) Islands.

It is difficult to define this last section accurately. What is an island? For our purpose, we may define it as any piece of land (or rock, for that matter) which remains above sea level at H.W.M.O.S.T., and is entirely surrounded by water at L.W.M.O.S.T. They may, however be exceptions to this rule, e.g. names in Oronsay, or Eilean Tioram which are normally tidal, i.e. joined to the land at low water.

### 1. Bays and Inlets

Terms to describe bays and inlets, both in Norse and Gaelic, are many and varied. For the purposes of this paper, I will ignore G. loch and O.N. fjordr, since they almost always refer to large sea-lochs. It is sufficient to note that names like Seaforth, Skipport, and Harport (Skye) are invariably preceded by loch in common usage. There are occasional hybrids like Caolisport, but these are relatively rare. G. **Bagh**, bay is in widespread use throughout Gaelic Scotland, as well as being found in the O.N. area where *vagr* is the equivalent term. **Bagh Siar** (Vatersay), **Bagh nan Capull** (Colonsay) and **Bagh na Doirlinn** (Gigha) are typical. Lewis, however, has **Lemreway** (pron. Liomrabhagn) and **Stornoway**, while **Grosebay** and **Finsbay** are in Harris. These clearly have *vagr* as a final element. The term is often anglicised to **Erg. Bay** for the larger examples, e.g. **Swordale Bay** (Lewis), **Coradale Bay** (S. Uist) and **Calgary Bay** (Mull).

The O.N. **vikn**, bay, occurs as much as a settlement name as a bay-name, yet it is one of the most numerous names in this section. It usually applies to fairly large inlet features, such as **Meavaig** in Harris, **Kirivick** in Lewis and **Breivig** in Barra, and in many of these cases, if not in most of them, the settlement around the bay has taken the name of the bay itself. However, **-vikn** also appears as a term for bays and inlets of a very minor nature, such as **Asbhig** and **Norivig** in Point, Lewis, **Brebhig** in Ness, **Saltaig** in Tiree, and **Uragaig** in Colonsay. In general, **-vikn** names are usually located on inlets which are a good deal smaller

than coastal inlets bearing the name **loch**, **fjordr** or **bagh**. As far as the latter is concerned, **bagh** can apply to quite small bays, but with a more open aspect than those in **-vikn**.

The Norse **hop**, 'inlet', 'bay' has a much more limited use than either **vikn** or **bagh**, and is usually represented by the Gaelic **tob** or **ob**. **Tob** is found only in Lewis, so far as I can tell, where we have many examples, like **Tob Mhic Colla** and **Tob Kintaravay** on Loch Seaforth, **Tob Eishken** and **Tob na Gile Moire** on Loch Shell, **Tob Bhrollum** on Loch Bhrollum, and **Tob Valasay** and **Dubh-Thoib** on Great Bernera. These Lewis examples are invariably small sheltered, rocky bays situated on the shores of major Lewis sea-lochs. In Harris, the term degenerates to **ob**. We have **Ob Meavag** and **Ob Ceann a Gharaidh** in East Loch Tarbert, **Ob Leasaid** and **Ob Scalla** at the mouth of Loch Stocknush, and **Ob a Bharrail** in North-West Harris. In the Uists, **ob** is scarce as a first element, with only a few examples on the eastern sea lochs. It is much more common in its diminutive form **oban**, applied to the innumerable arms of lochs in the interior of the Uists, and in the tidal lochs which drain into the Minch. Examples are **Oban a Chlachain**, **Oban nam Fiadh** and **Oban nam Muca-Mara** in North Uist, **Oban nan Forsanan** and **Oban Maine** in Benbecula, and **Oban na Bucail-nachdrach** in S. Uist. The tidal Loch an Oib in Barra, while **Oban** occurs in Colonsay. It is difficult, of course, to establish the datings of these **ob** names. Certainly the Lewis **tob** seems to be Norse, but the remainder appear to be of Gaelic origin. In no case do we have **tob** or **ob** as a final element, however, so cannot assume that this term is in the first rank of Norse coastal terms like **vikn** or **vagr**.

The Outer Hebrides are possessed of a highly-indented coastline, much of which is steep and rocky. The Uists are pretected by sandy machair land on their west coasts, as are South Harris, Barra and Vatersay. Lewis and North Harris, and much of Skye, as well as the Uist east coast have, in contrast, rocky, steep cliffs. The gneiss and schistose rocks of the Outer Hebrides in particular is largely resistant to marine erosion, but have numerous faults whcih allow erosion along planes of shattered and less resistant rocks. This leads to cliff coastlines being interrupted by deep chasms and inlets, often unsuitable for entry by small boats, but frequently ideal for rock fishing,

and, in times past, for fowling. The Norse term **gja**, 'cleft' is usually applied to such inlets. They are often deep and dangerous, but seldom very long. The Norse word has been borrowed into Gaelic as **geodha**, often appearing on O.S. maps as **geo**.

North Lewis, with its steep, rocky coasts has a large number of names in **geodha**, such as **Geodha an Tanga** and **Geodha nan Each** in Ness, **Geodha Gorm** in Uig, **Geodha a' Gharraidh** in Dell, **Geodha nam Ban** in Port of Ness (where women went to fish), and **Geodha Sheoruis** in the Eye Peninsula. Many of these **geodha** names refer to bird-life, like **Geodha nam Calaman** (pigeons), **Geodha nan Italtag** (bats) and **Geodha nan Sgarbh** (cormorants), and a large number seem to commemorate animals, objects, or even people who have fallen into them, like **Geodha nam Muc** (pigs), **Geodha nan Con** (dogs), **Geodha a' Mhairt** (cow), **Geodha nan Chamh** (bones) and **Geodha an Tairbh** (bull).

**Geodha** often appears as a suffix in Lewis, and it is in this form that we come across other Norse elements. Such are **Molaisgeo** (pebbly-geo), **Rosaige** (point-geo), **Gaisgadh** (goose-geo), **Skipigeo** (ship-geo) and **Sanndaiga** (sand-geo); others with indefinable initial elements are **Sioltaga**, **Fidigeagh** (perhaps meadow-geo) and **Saileagadh**.

The other islands have their share of **geodha** names but few have such variety as Lewis. We have **Geodha Fors** in Scarp, Harris (from O.N. **fors**, waterfall); **Geodha Garbh** (rough geo) in South Uist; and **Sloc Glamigeo** in Vatersay which illustrates a doublet usage, since **sloc** in the southern islands is a parallel use to **geodha**. **Geodha Phoebe** on Taransay commemorates a wrecked ship.

In Skye and the Small Isles, the use of **geodha** is, again common, **Geodha Dubh** and **Geodha an Tairbh** on Skye are typical, with the majority on the Minch coast.

**Geodha** also occurs in Mull, and Iona, but here it is found side by side with **Sloc**; this is also the case in Islay, but **Geodha** here is very common, with examples like **Geodha na Sliseig**, **G. na Maidean Mora**, **G. nam Muc** and **G. Fharnasaig** in the Rhinns. **Sloc** names in Islay are applied to similar features, and occur mostly in the Rhinns, on the cliff-bound coast of this western peninsula. Colonsay has thirteen examples of **geodha**, and

thirty occurrences of **Sloc**. Clearly, the further south we go, the greater is the proportion of **sloc** : **geodha**. Examples in Colonsay are **Geodha Eirebleg** (eyrar-brekka), and **Geodha Ifrinn**, while almost all the **Sloc** names are Gaelic. **Sloc** replaces **Geodha** completely in Tiree and Coll. It might be argued, however, that the coasts of Tiree are less steep, and we might easily expect fewer names in this group. **Sloc** names are frequent in both islands, however. This is also true of Gigha, although Jura has such names as **Geodha an t-Sil**, and **Geodha nan Each**, while **sloc** names are in the majority.

The O.N. term **gil**, ravine is fairly common in the Western Isles, and in the mainland, in Sutherland and Wester Ross. However, it is not primarily a coastal term, since inland features often have names in **-gil**. Dwelly defines **gil** as ‘a water course on a mountainside’ or ‘a rift’.

## 2. Cliff and Beach Features

The usual Gaelic term for a sandy beach is **traigh**. While generally used as a term to describe any stretch of level coast, in place-names, it is almost invariably connected with sand and gravel strands. There seems to be no Norse equivalent to **traigh** occurring in place-names, although **-vagr** occasionally appear to serve the purpose in Lewis. The principal Norse term for ‘beach’ in the Hebrides is **mol**.

The Norse **mol**, beach is widespread, and is borrowed as such into Gaelic, frequently occurring in its original Norse form as a suffix. **Mol** has a more specialised meaning than **traigh** in that the surface is usually one of stones or shingle rather than sand or gravel. **Clachan-mol** in Lewis Gaelic refer to the rounded stones found on storm-beaches, and **mol** invariably means a much rougher seashore than **traigh**. Like **traigh**, **camas** and **bagh/vagr**, **mol** occasionally occurs as a settlement name, e.g. **Mulhagery** in Lochs, Lewis and **Molinginish** in North Harris, but most names in **mol** refer to fairly small shore features, like **Mol Aignis** in Point, **Mol Forsgeo** in Uig, **Mol nam Muc** ‘beach of whales’ in Great Bernera and **Mol Mor Vatisker** in Stornaway (all in Lewis); **Mol an Arbhair** in North Harris; **Mol a’ Ghoill** in Scalpay; **Mol a’ Tuath** in Sout Uist, and **Mol Teiltein** in North Uist. Examples with **mol** as a suffix include **Stiomol** ‘beach of the path’ in Great Bernera, **Greonamol** ‘green beach’ in Ness, and **Rosamol** in North

Harris. **Molan Ban**, 'little white beach' occurs as diminutive form in Point, Lewis.

**Mol** also occurs, though rarely in Skye, with examples like **Mol-cloich** in Bracadale and **Moll** and **Moll River** in Portree. It is also found in Sutherland, and a few examples in Lochbroom.

The Norse **eyrar**, 'gravel-beach' appears in several place-names in the Outer Hebrides, although not often applied to the name of minor features. Lewis examples are **Eoropie** 'beach-town', **Earshader** 'beach-settlement' and **Earrabhaig** 'beach-bay'. **Ersary** in Barra may also be in this group. The term occurs also in Wester Ross.

It is difficult to establish criteria for the selection of cliff-names in our survey of coastal features, since frequently there are examples of these inland as well. This category includes terms like O.N. **klettr**, stony hill, cliff or rocky hill face. This is borrowed into Gaelic as **cleit** and is found throughout the Inner and Outer Hebrides in a variety of landscapes. A number of settlement names contain **cleit** as a final element, including **Breasclete**, Lewis, **Diraclett**, Harris, **Malaclett**, North Uist and **Liniclett**, Benbecula. Dwelly's Gaelic-English Dictionary gives **cleit** as both 'rocky eminence' and 'cliff on the sea-shore'; McDonald (1958) defines **cleit** as 'a rock projecting into the sea from the land and sometimes separated at high water by a little channel. A roost for cormorants.' Thus, in its borrowed form from Norse it varies in meaning from island to island. Certainly, in most of the Outer Hebrides it occurs as a hill-name, e.g. **Cleite na Cloich Ard** in Uig, Lewis, **Cleit Conachro** in North Harris, **Clett** in South Uist and **Ben Cleat** in Barra. However, it appears in Lewis as a coastal cliff feature, such as **Cleit a' Mhiosgain**, **Cleit Corn** and **Cleit an Iaruinn** in Ness, as well as **Clett Ruadh** in Boreray. In the Sound of Harris, which is dotted with small islands, rocks and reefs, we find **cleit** as a term used to describe small, rocky islets. In this category are **Clette a' Mhadaidh** (dog's clett), **Clette nan Luch** (mouse-clett) and **Clette an Iasgaich**, clett of the fishing.

**Cleit** occurs widely in Skye, often to describe small rocky hillrocks inland, but also as a cliff feature. It is common in Coll and Tiree, where we find **Cleit Bheag** (ashore) **Cleit Ruaig**, a

sea-rock, and simply a' **Chleit**, also a single rock some distance from the coast.

A cliff term that seems limited to the north of Lewis is **palla**, a grassy ledge on a steep cliff. This is from the O.N. **talr**, and may well have been associated with fowling operations. Examples are **Palla an Tighe**, 'the ledge of the house', and **Palla Iain 'ic Eachainn**, 'John son of Hector's ledge' in **Sula-Sgeir**; **am Palla Beag**, 'little ledge', **Palla a' Chait**, 'cat's ledge', and **Palla Iain Ionhair**, 'John Ivor's ledge' are in Ness. The term also occurs in Uig parish, Lewis, but is not so active in place-names. **Palla** exists as a common noun in North Lewis, and does not appear in mapped place-names — only in local terminology.

### 3. Promontories and Points

Coastal features in this category are numerous and vary in size enormously. By far the most common Gaelic term for 'promontory' is **rubha**. This is sometimes Anglicised to **ru** or even **rhu**. A term to describe a larger, more extensive headland is **aird**. This is approximately equivalent to the O.N. **nes** which appears in place-names as **-nish** or **nes**, and occasionally **-nais** throughout the Western Isles. Unlike **rubha**, and to a lesser extent, **and**, **nes** appears to have become an active element in settlement names. **Arnish**, 'eagle ness', **Callanish**, 'keel-ness', **Steinish**, 'stone-ness' and **Ranish**, 'roe-ness' are in Lewis; **Reibinish**, 'reef-ness', and **Manish**, 'narrow-ness' in Harris; **Griminish**, Grim's-ness in North Uist, and **Rosinish**, 'horse-ness' in Pabbay. However, a large number of minor promontory features contain **-nes** in one form or another, and they are well distributed throughout the entire chain of islands. In Lewis, we have **Uamis**, 'point of the hollow' and **Tanganais**, 'promontory of the sharp point' in Great Bernera, **Steinis**, 'stone point' and **Langanais**, 'long point' in Ness (itself derived from this word); **Quidinish**, 'cattle-fold point' in Harris; **Liernish**, 'mud-point' in North Uist; **Gashernish**, possibly 'goose-point' in Benbecula; and **Heinish**, 'high-ness' in Eriskay.

Skye, of course is an Island which is broken up by a large number of big sea-lochs. Here we have the term **nes** being applied to the land masses which separate these sea-lochs. **Trotternish**, **Waternish**, **Treasnish** and **Mearnish** are typical.



Canna has such examples as **Carrinis**, **Asganais** and **Langannish**; **Sgibinish** 'ship-ness' is in Tiree; Jura has the doublet form **Ardmenish**; Colonsay also has **Sgibinish** and **Alanais**; and **Trudernish** is in Islay. **Nes** is therefore a very widespread term and its distribution on the mainland shows examples from Sutherland to Argyll.

Another O.N. promontory term is **hofdhi**, 'promontory', which is Gaelicised **tobha**. This is found in North and West Lewis, but is largely absent elsewhere. It applies to a much smaller feature than **nes** and to some extent replaces **rubha** in W. Lewis. An **Tobha** is in Great Bernera; **Tobha Ghabhsuinn**, and **Tobha Tholstadh** refer to promontories on the village lands concerned. **Tobhaigeo** 'promontory geo' is in Ness, and **Rubha an Tothain** 'point of the little promontory' may be an example in North Harris.

#### 4. Rocks and Reefs

The Gaelic for 'rock' is **creag**, and this appears throughout the Highlands and Islands, describing a variety of rocky features, ranging in size from a sizeable hill to single boulders, and in locations which vary from the interior to the coast. The diminutive **creagan** is a common coastal term, especially in Wester Ross and Sutherland. Old Norse elements in this category, however, tend to be much more specialised than **creag**, although there are Gaelic terms which are also of a specialised nature. The O.N. **sker**, **skerry** or **rock** is one such term.

This is borrowed into Gaelic as **sgeir** and occurs widely throughout the Hebrides and West Highlands, either in its Gaelic form (e.g. **Sgeir nan Caorach**, 'sheep-skerry' in Harris) or in a Norse context (**Gasker** 'goose-skerry' in Harris.) Between these two forms comes a Gaelic type in a Norse combination, like **Mas Sgeir** 'buttock-skerry' in Uig, or **Glas Sgeir** 'green skerry' in Harris. **Sgeir** can refer to either a rock which is attached to a coastline, or to a detached rock, usually visible at high tide. In some cases, it may be large enough to support grazing animals, such as **Haskeir** to the west of North Uist, or **Heiskeir** (alternatively the Monach Islands) which supported a population within living memory. As a rule, however, features which contain **sker** are small, and most islets sufficiently large to support

sheep or cattle for grazing purposes in summer are in the category of **eilean**, —**holmr** or **ey** (q.v.). Examples of this element are numerous, but include **Sgeir na leuma**, 'skerry of the leap' — presumably where one had to make a long jump to reach it from the shore — in Ness; **Sgeir a' Gharraidh**, 'dyke-skerry' in Point; **Sgeir na h-Aon Chaorach** 'skerry of the one sheep'; and **Dubh Sgeir**, 'black skerry' in Uig, Lewis; **Sgeir a' Chaise**, 'cheese-skerry' and **Sgeir an Fheidh**, 'deer-skerry' and **Trollaskeir**, 'troll-skerry' in South Uist.

In Skye, we have **Stromageir**, 'tidal-race rock', **Garbhsgeir** in Kilmuir and **Sgeir ran Eathair Bara** in Trotternish. Mull has **Sgeir Crennig** (coastal), **Sgeir ran Ron** (tidal) and **Sgeir na Comhstu** in Loch a' Chumhainn. Islay has **Crois-sgeir**, **Te-sgeir** and **Sgeir nam Faochag**, while Colonsay has 25 examples in all, including **Sgeir nam Locharnach** 'Norwegian's skerry, and **Sgeir Eachain** 'Hector's skerry'. Similarly **sker** is common in Tiree, with examples like **Sgeir Leacaig**, **An Corr-sgeir** and **Lionar-sgeire**.

The O.N. **rif**, reef, is much less common than **sker** and usually refers to expanses of rock along a coast. Surprisingly, **rif** occurs on at least three occasions as a settlement name — in W. Ross, Uig, Lewis and Tiree. In North Uist we have **Riffag Mhor**, and a number of geo-names like **Rifeageo** 'reef-geo' in Ness. **Ceann Riobha** is off Oronsay (S. of Colonsay.)

Submerged rocks, which are hazardous to shipping, and which lurk just under low water mark are termed **brgha** in Gaelic. This is probably a borrowing from O.N. **bodi**. they are only occasionally marked on the 6" O.S. map, but are nevertheless to be found in all the Western Isles. **Bogha an Tairbh**, 'bull's rock' and **Bogha Dhomhruill Bhaia**, 'Fair Donald's Rock' are in Ness; **Bogha na Gile** 'ravine rock' in Point, and **Rubha Bogha-sgeir** 'point of the rock-skerry' is in North Harris. **Bogha Caol** 'thin rock' is in Barra; **Boghaichean Baite** 'drown skerries' in Jura; **Bogha nam Suidhean** 'coalfish rock' in Coll; **Bogha an Roin**, **Bogha Sgiobagair** and **Bogha Ghuthalum** in Tiree and **Bogha Biorach** in Colonsay are examples in the Inner Hebrides. Colonsay has 19 names in **bodha**, including two which commemorate ships wrecked on them. These are **Bogha 'Dale'** and **Bogha Chubaig** which marks the destruction of the ship 'Quebec', probably about 1820.

In Lewis, a term rock [Rohk] 'submerged rock' is to be found. This does not often appear in local place-names, far less on the O.S. map, but is nevertheless relevant to this survey. **Rocasdain** is a submerged rock off Ness, and a fabled land to the west of the Hebrides was known of old as **Rocabarra**. This was a mysterious island which was surrounded by impenetrable mist and fog. **Rocabarra**, however is the form used by many Gaelic speakers in Lewis and the Uists for Rockall. One traditional belief is that when Rocabarra is exposed (the present rock merely represents its highest point) the world will finally be destroyed.

'Nuair thig Ricabara ris,  
'S ann a theid an t-saoghal sgrios!'

## 5. Island Names

In a coastal zone which has literally thousands of islands ranging in size from lumps of sea-girt granite to islands capable of supporting human habitation, this section could be the basis for a major study. I shall largely ignore the O.N. *øy* island, for which we have innumerable examples, although it is true to say that they, too, range in size from very small islets to sizeable areas of land.

The most common of the other O.N. terms in this category is O.N. *holmr*, islet. The Gaelic *eilean*, too has similar applications to *øy* and *holmr*. Examples of *holmr* are **Seildem** 'herring-isle' and **Linngeam** 'heather-isle' in Uig, Lewis, both very common, **Ostern**, 'west-isle' in Scarp, Harris, **Greanem** 'green-island' in the Sound of Harris and **Bolum** 'submerged rock islet' in S. Uist, **Lamalum** 'lam's holm' is in Colonsay, **Gigalum** in Gigha, and there are many Tíree examples such as **Conslum**, **Greatharum**, **Boghasum**, **Mithealum** and **Miarum**. These *holmr* names are very commonly applied to islets which can support one or two grazing animals, hence the **Lamalum** names; those frequented by wild geese at certain times of the year are **Gasain** or **Gashem**; **Hestam** would graze a horse in summer, and there is therefore much of the descriptive in this group.

One other Norse term applied to islets in the Outer Hebrides seems to be *mul*, ridge. This appears frequently in Lewis and Harris and indeed, in the Uists, as a hill-name. **Causamul** is off Haugary in N. Uist; **Greenamul** is off the east coast of Benbecula,

and **Hartamul** is off Eriskay. These are almost all isolated islands, quite small, but high and rocky. In this brief survey of coastal terms, I have not attempted to cover the ground completely. Such a task would far exceed the time limits for this paper. However, we can attempt to assess the evidence and make a few comparisons between Gaelic and Norse coverage.

For every Gaelic descriptive term, there is usually a Norse parallel form

Norse	Gaelic
Geodha	Sloc
Vikn	Camas
Fjordr	Loch
Vagr	Loch
Mol	Cladach
Sgeir	Creag
Bogha	(none)
Eyrar	(none)
Cleit	(none)
Nes	Rubha
Nes	Aird
Hofdhi	Rhubha
Rif	(none)
Øy	Eilean
Holmr	Eilean/Sgeir
Stakki	(none)
Muli	(non, at least coastal)

It would seem, then that the Norse coastal vocabulary caters very fully for the variety of features to be found in the landscape. Gaelic has seen fit to borrow many Norse terms to make up for its own inadequacies, especially in an area where the landscape demands a wide range of topographical terms.

Clearly the Norse influence is at its strongest in the Long Island, where both isolation and the more enduring aspect of minor place-names in general have helped to prolong the use of Norse terms. As we go south, we can see, for example, geodha being replaced by sloc, or being supplemented by it; the use of bodha as a term for a submarine rock continues to be found as far south as Gigha, since no Gaelic equivalent existed. The minor feature terms like

**gil**, **cleit** and **rif**, have a very uneven distribution. **Cleit** is certainly a term which varies in meaning from island to island. In Skye it is found in several different locations; elsewhere, especially to the south, it is usually only applied to isolated sea-rocks. The inlet features, such as **-vikn**, are most complex. Clearly the fact that many of the **vikn** names have come to be associated with settlement names is a factor in their survival. The other terms associated with settlements are **-nes**, **-cleit**, **-vagr**, **-gil**, and in a couple of instances, **rif**. These are almost all in Sections (1) and (2). At no time does **geodha**, **bodha** or **sgeir** attach itself to a settlement name, although these are most common terms. **Holmr**, however is responsible for the formation of **Holm** in **Lewis** (pronounced **Tolm**), but it is significant that there is no qualifying element, nor does this apply to **rif** in the two cases in question.

In some situations, where the role of the sea-coast is at its most important economically, relative to the interior, the spread of Norse terms is at its greatest. This is certainly true of **Lewis**, and to a lesser extent, **Tiree**. The former is clearly an island situation in which the intermingling of Norse and native Gael forms a highly intimate and complex relationship. The Norse role here is an intensely personal one, relying on the cliffs, coast and offshore waters as an abundant natural resource. Terms like **palla** in **Lewis** serve to reinforce the evidence of fowling being carried on as an important occupation in the Norse period.

**Rocabarra**, however, remains a mystery. I have had several requests for derivations for **Rockall** recently, from bodies as widely separate as the Danish Government and the Outer Isles Council. There is no doubt in my mind that the oil-rich sea-bed surrounding this lump of rock off the Western Isles should remain undisturbed, for **Rocabarra**, once it rises, will undoubtedly signal the destruction that was foretold in the old Gaelic couplet from **North Uist**.

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### BROUGH OF DEERNESS, ORKNEY. (NGR 596087).

#### Interim Report on Excavations and Survey 1976–77.

Excavations and survey under the direction of C.D. Morris of Durham University took place on this site on behalf of the Department of the Environment (Scotland) in September 1976 for a period of four weeks and in July 1977 for one week. Staff and volunteers were recruited through Durham University, and the Assistant Supervisor for the excavation was Sonia Thingstad (now Jeffrey) of Gothenburg University.

#### A. Excavation

Within the Chapel excavation was completed down to natural clay. Excavation of a clay layer in the body of the church suggested that it was a layer of build-up, for it occurred only in the eastern part and overlay a more extensive sandy gravel layer. In this layer a sherd of steatite was found. A small pebble feature in the sandy gravel layer seemed to be remnants of flooring, and clearly pre-dated the bench along the south wall, and some flagging