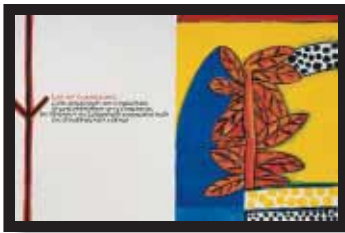


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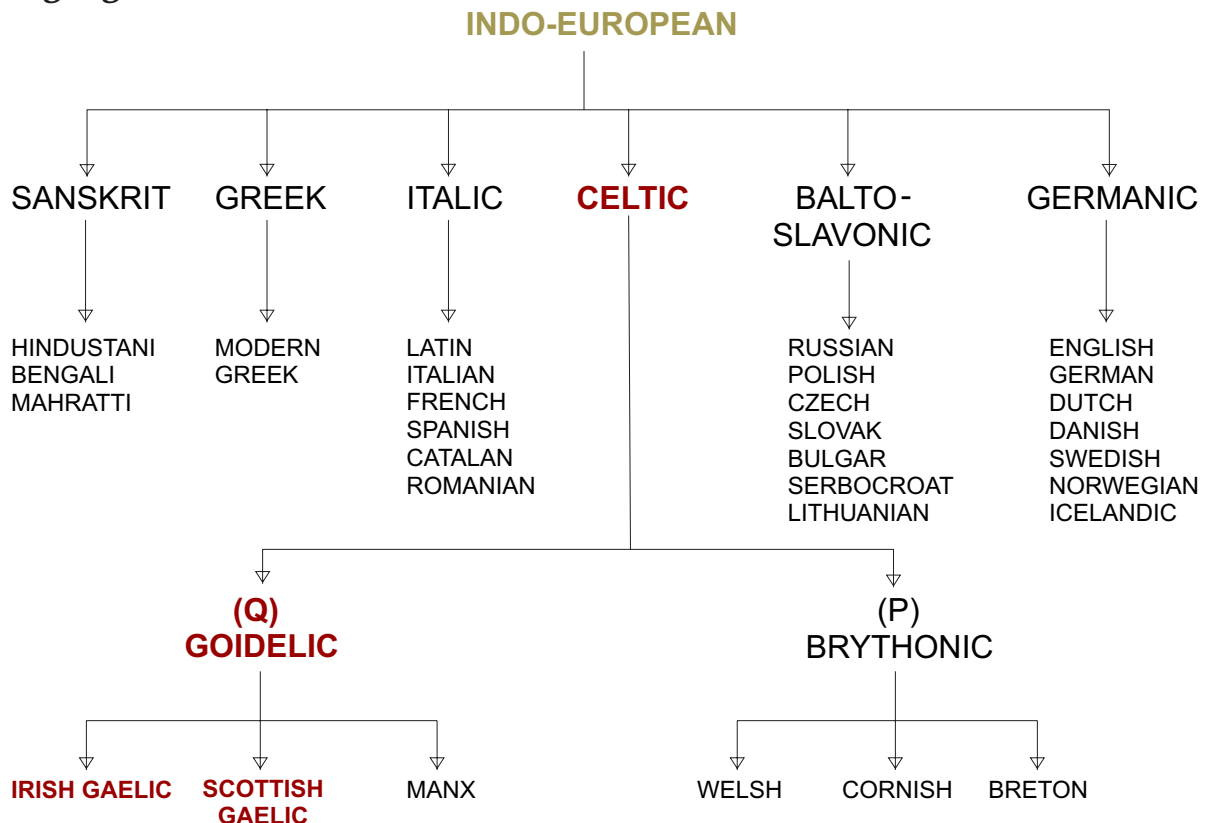
THE GREAT BOOK of GAELIC



## 2 - THE CELTIC LANGUAGES

### The Celtic languages

The Celtic languages all had a common root or ‘parent language’, which they also shared with many other languages: the root is known as Indo-European. The Indo-European family tree is as follows:

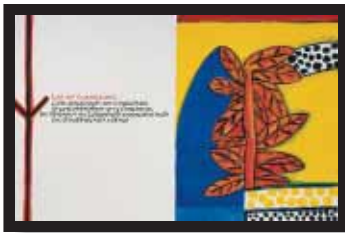


The Celtic languages are classified into two main ‘families’ or groups, known as P and Q Celtic. (That’s where the expression “mind your Ps and Qs” comes from!) The surviving, or recently-surviving, P-Celtic languages are Welsh, Breton and Cornish. The surviving, or recently-surviving, Q-Celtic languages are Irish Gaelic, Scots Gaelic and Manx. The reason for the P/Q (or C) classification can be clearly seen in the following table:

	<b>P</b>			<b>Q</b>		
(ENGLISH)	WELSH	CORNISH	BRETON	SCOTTISH GAELIC	IRISH GAELIC	MANX
(four)	pedwar	peder	peder	ceithir	ceithre	kiare
(five)	pump	pypm	pemp	còig	cùig	queig
(who?)	pwy?	pwy?	piou?	cò?	cè?	quoi?
(son)	map	mab	mab	mac	mac	mac
(head)	penn	pen	penn	ceann	ceann	kione

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## The Celtic languages



## 2 - THE CELTIC LANGUAGES

### The Celts in Britain

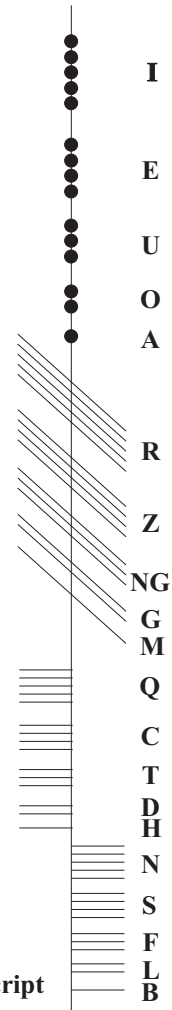
From historic times onwards the British Isles have been dominated by Celtic-speaking peoples, both **Brythonic** (P-Celts) and **Goidelic** (Q-Celts).

The earliest Irish documentation is to be found in Ogam inscriptions – fifteen consonants and five vowels based on the Latin alphabet but with Gaelic names for each letter. These names are derived from plants and trees with the same initial (B = *beith*, birch, D = *darach*, oak etc.) The script is written as diagonal strokes or notches on the corner of a stone or column, and seems to have been connected with memorial ceremony, i.e. death rites etc. The Ogam inscriptions date from both pre-Christian and post-Christian times. About 300 examples have been found, mostly in Ireland, but also in Wales and Scotland. A transcription of one is:

DUMELI MAQI GLASICONAS  
NIOTTA COBRANORIGAS

*Dubmala Mac Glasconas Nighean  
Cobranorig*

Dumelos son of Glasicu daughter of  
Cobranorix



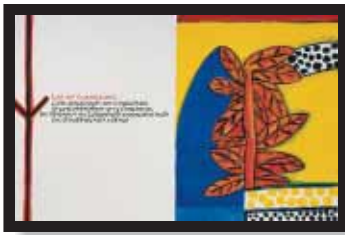
Ogam script

Conventional Latin writing forms were adopted from the 5th century AD onwards. The earliest documents in Irish date from the 7th century AD – a little later in Welsh. From the 5th century AD the Goidelic-speaking Irish tribe known as the **Scotti** began to penetrate the Brythonic-speaking north (today's Scotland) while the Anglo-Saxons were entering the Brythonic-speaking south (today's England). P-Celtic Brythonic was gradually displaced, except in Wales, Cornwall and **Strathclyde**, where it may have been spoken as late as the 11th century. Dumbarton (**Dùn Bhreatainn** - *Fort of the Britons*) was the centre of Brythonic Strathclyde.

However the Gaelic language remained dominant throughout Scotland until the 12th century. From then on its influence gradually eroded over the centuries. It remained dominant in Ireland until the end of the 16th century; in the Isle of Man until the 17th century. Meanwhile Brythonic Celts left Devon, Cornwall and parts of Wales to make a new colony on the Continent, replacing the Roman tongue with Brythonic c.500 - 600 AD (today's Brittany). They seem to have been fleeing either Scots or Saxon invasion.

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### Gaelic in Scotland

From earliest times the Gaelic language was closely bound up with Scottish nationhood. It was the language of the very first Scots: our nation owes its very name to the ‘Scotti’ – the Gaelic-speaking tribe from Dal Riata in the North-west of Ireland who colonised what we now call Argyll in the 5th century AD. Gaelic was the medium by which Christianity was first introduced, the language spoken by Kenneth MacAlpin who unified the Picts and Scots, the language spoken by King Duncan and MacBeth and Malcolm Ceann Mòr, by the time of whose accession in 1057 it was spoken in almost every part of Scotland, having replaced the other indigenous Celtic languages (Brythonic and Pictish) and absorbed the Norse influence:-

*Those of us who live on the borders of England have forsaken our mother tongue and learned English, being driven thereto by wars and commerce. But the Highlanders remain just as they were at the time of Malcolm Canmore in whose days we began to adopt English.* **Hector Boece** (c. 1527)

Gaelic began its decline in the south in the period roughly between 1157 and 1400. But it is important to realise that this did not happen overnight, and that in many places the two languages lived on side by side for many generations. In fact it was not just a bilingual but a trilingual situation: English, French and Gaelic. This was due to the influence of the royal court, especially after it removed to the Lothians from Scone / Dunfermline. French-speaking Anglo-Norman aristocrats came to settle in Scotland and were granted lands by the Crown. When Margaret married Malcolm Canmore she was very devout, but she was also very fond of beautiful things: new fashions sprung up as a result of this and cross-border trading of ‘luxury goods’ increased. In the Lowlands many new towns and burghs were established – and these were mostly English-speaking, while the rural areas surrounding them remained Gaelic-speaking much longer. And then during the period known as the Wars of Independence (in the reign of Edward I, the so-called ‘Hammer of the Scots’) many parts of Scotland were permanently occupied by English troops.

All these things had a negative effect on Gaelic. But most of Wallace’s army would have been Gaelic-speaking, as would that of Bruce at Bannockburn. Bruce went into battle carrying the Brechbennoch of St Columba – Gaelic Scotland’s most sacred relic. King James IV spoke Gaelic and we know that he cultivated Highland music and employed harpers. As late as the mid-16th century we read that the students at Aberdeen Grammar School were allowed to converse in Latin, Greek, Hebrew or Gaelic, but not in English! Writers in the Middle Ages used the word *English* (*Inglis*) to describe the language of the Lowlands, and used the word *Scots* when they meant the Gaelic language.

But from the 16th century onwards a change appears, and writers begin to use the word *Scots* for the language of the Lowlands, and start describing Gaelic as *Irish*:-

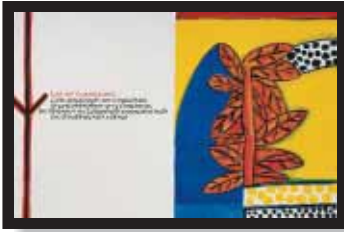
*Most of us spoke Irish a short time ago - now one half of Scotland speaks Irish.* **John Major** (1521).

It was as if the Gaelic language and its speakers had begun to be regarded as alien within their own nation.

The rift between Highland and Lowland opened up even further after the **Reformation**

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(1560). While most of the rest of Scotland adopted the Protestant religion, the Highland areas remained largely Catholic, due to both real and perceived difficulties in penetrating this large and unknown area beyond the mountains. The reformers worked hard to bring both the scriptures and literacy to the general populace – and if they had done so in the Highlands through the language of the people themselves the history of Gaelic might have been very different. Instead they insisted that the only way to educate the Highland people was to root out their language once and for all. Instead of translating the Bible into Gaelic so that Highlanders could become literate in their native language, the reformers categorised Gaelic-speaking Scots as ‘savage’ or ‘barbarian’, and Gaelic was seen as a mark of ‘Popery’ and barbarity. King James VI and I wrote thus of his Gaelic-speaking subjects:

*I shortly comprehend them (Gaelic-speakers) all in two sorts of people: the one that dwelleth in our mainland that are barbarous for the most part, and yet mixed with some show of civility; the other that dwelleth in the Isles that are utterly barbarians without any show of civility.*

James planned to plant colonies of ‘answerable inland subjects’ to ‘reform and civilise’ the Gaels whilst ‘rooting out and transporting the barbarous and stubborn sort.’ (1598)

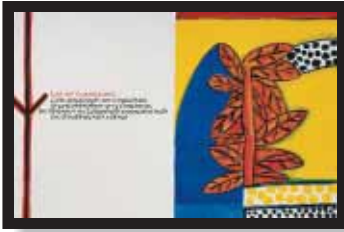
Thus Gaelic – the language of Columba and the Celtic Christian evangelists – was categorised as worse than worthless. In 1603 the Union of the Crowns removed the Scottish Court to London, and from then on the government of Scotland was increasingly carried out from a distance. Anglicisation of the Highlands (‘civilisation’ as it was called) became the official policy of James’ Scottish Parliament. In 1609 twelve clan chiefs from the Highlands and Islands were tricked into boarding a ship in the expectation of hearing a sermon. They were then transported to the Lowlands where they were thrown into prison. Here they were kept until they agreed to sign their names to the Statutes of Iona, which required chiefs to send their sons to Lowland schools where they would learn English so that

*the Irish language, which is one of the principal causes of barbarity among the inhabitants of the Isles and Highlands may be abolished and removed.*

The language, shrinking northwards, was badly affected by the General Assembly’s continued failure to provide Scottish Gaelic speakers with a Bible in their own language and by the demise of the traditional clan system. During the centuries that followed the Reformation, schools were set up in more and more parishes in the Lowlands. This was more difficult in the Highlands where the populace was much more scattered. Where parish schools were set up the children were taught in English, which meant nothing to them and made most of their learning experience meaningless. Gaelic was not perceived as a “proper” language in its own right, Gaelic literacy was not perceived as “real” literacy. The traditional culture of the Gaels was not perceived as “proper” knowledge, and their homeland was not perceived as a place that any sane person would want to remain in. It was inevitable that over the centuries some of the antagonism rubbed off on the Gaelic-speaking population, till they began believing some of the negative perceptions themselves.

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In the 18th century the inhabitants of the Highland area were further isolated by the Jacobite Risings and the determination of subsequent British Governments that the Highlands should not ever again be used as a back-door to invasion from the Continent. After the 1745 Rising, instead of schemes to regenerate the North, the people were forced to leave their homes and seek a living in the cities or abroad. As one visitor to the Highlands (Dr Johnson) said

*of what they had before the conquest of their land there remains only their language and their poverty.*

There was a widespread and tenacious underlying assumption that English was the passport to advancement or even survival, and Gaelic acquired more and more negative associations. These were reinforced by punishments given to children heard using Gaelic on school premises. The infamous “culaidh-mhagaidh” (*object of mockery*) was a sign which was hung round the neck of any school pupil heard speaking Gaelic. It was passed from neck to neck as the day went on, and whoever was wearing it when the bell went was beaten. Alexander Carmichael writing in the late 19th century tells about a teenaged mainland girl – a non-Gaelic speaker – who had come to live in Islay. She loved the sound of Gaelic singing and one day after school on their way out of the playground she asked her new friends to sing her a song. The headteacher heard the singing, called all the girls back into the school and belted them, drawing blood. There are still living Gaelic-speakers who recall being punished for speaking Gaelic on school premises.

And finally Gaelic was dealt a near-fatal blow by the infamous Highland Clearances and the potato famines which literally emptied the glens and scattered Gaelic-speakers all over the world. The 1872 Education Act did not mention Gaelic at all, even though many members of the teaching profession recognised that Gaelic must be used especially among monolingual Gaelic-speaking infants if their education was to mean anything at all to them. Small wonder that the Gaelic-speaking population continued to decline radically.

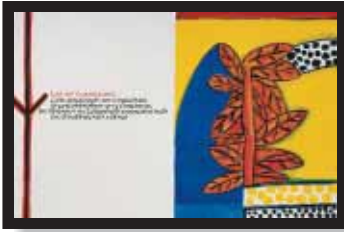
### GAELIC-SPEAKING POPULATION of SCOTLAND

Year	Number of Gaelic speakers	% of total population
1881	231,594	6.2%
1891	254,415	5.2%
1901	230,806	4.5%
1911	202,398	3.9%
1921	158,779	3.3%
1931	136,135	2.8%
1951	95,447	1.8%
1961	80,978	1.5%
1971	88,992	1.7%
1981	82,620	1.6%
1991	65,978	1.4%

(source: Census Scotland)

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And yet still the language survived – and, miraculously, survives to this day. After the reorganisation of Local Government in the 1970s Comhairle nan Eilean (the Western Isles Islands Council) was created and adopted a Bilingual Policy in its schools. For the last twenty years or so Gaelic has enjoyed more official support than ever before in its history. In 1985 the first Gaelic-medium Primary Units were established in schools on the mainland (in Glasgow and Inverness) in response to parental lobbying. At last Gaelic was recognised as a viable language for the education of children.

Gaelic-medium classes have now been established all over Scotland, including Glasgow, East Kilbride, Inverness, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Perth, Forfar, Greenock and Kilmarnock, in addition to Skye, the Western Isles and the mainland Highland area. There is no compulsion at all – and no selection procedure. Every child is welcomed no matter what their cultural or linguistic background, and a great deal of effort has been undertaken to ensure that those living in disadvantaged areas in our cities are given information as to the availability of Gaelic Units, and access by free transport. Many of those parents who choose Gaelic-medium education for their children are not themselves Gaelic speakers, but are interested in the language, or in bilingualism, or in Scottish culture, or realise that their children will gain added advantages in the job-market through becoming bilingual.

Twenty-five years ago Scottish Gaelic was being pronounced by external commentators as all but dead. But now we are beginning to feel a very cautious optimism. It is vital that Gaelic is supported by all Scottish people, Gaelic-speaking or not, as it belongs to all of us and nobody else is going to look after it if we don't. As the Welsh say:-

Cenedl heb iaith, cenedl heb galon.  
(A nation without a language is a nation without a heart.)

In Irish this is

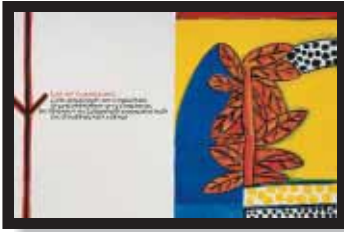
Tír gan teanga, tír gan anam

and in Scottish Gaelic

Tìr gun teanga, tìr gun anam.

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### SOME GAELIC WORDS THAT EVERYBODY KNOWS

Scots dialect retains many words and phrases of Gaelic origin, such as *ben* (*beann*) *glen* (*gleann*), *loch*, *ceilidh*, *braw* (*breagha*), *brae* (*bràigh*), *kist* (*ciste*), *smashin'* (*'s maith sin* - that's good), *slug* (*sluig* - swallow), *sporrán* (*sporan* - purse), *sgian-dubh* (black knife), *brogue* (*bròg* - shoe), *camanachd* (shinty), *pibroch* (*piobaireachd* - piping), *bard* (poet).

Perhaps one of the most interesting Gaelic loan-words is *Tory*: *tòraidh* - pursuer / highway robber / bandit. The political party derived its name from the Irish Jacobite Royalists who were miscalled as "Papist thugs" by the Reforming establishment!

In fact you'd be surprised to find out how much Gaelic you know already! Everyone can say "slàinte mhath" (good health), and everyone knows the drink *Glavva* (*glè mhath* = very good). Now you could try out different ways of greeting people at different times of day:

madainn mhath (matin va)	good morning
latha math (la ma)	good day
feasgar math (feskir ma)	good evening
oidhche mhath (aye-che va)	good night

You use Gaelic too when you use many of our personal names

Mairi	Mary
Seumas	James
Iain	John
Catriona	Catherine
Morag	Marion
Niall	Neil / Nigel
Alasdair	Alistair / Alexander etc

When you speak to someone in Gaelic you usually use a different form

a Mhàiri  
a Sheumais  
a Chatriona  
a Mhòrag

That's why some people mistakenly call their children Mhairi or Hamish (= a Sheumais).

Then all names beginning with 'Mac' are Gaelic in origin, as 'mac' = 'son of':

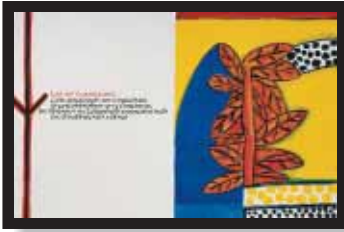
MacDonald	Mac Dhòmhnaill	son of Donald
MacGregor	Mac Ghriogair	son of Gregor
MacAllister	Mac Alasdair	son of Alister
MacIntyre	Mac an t-Saoir	son of the carpenter
MacTaggart	Mac an t-Sagairt	son of the priest

And some names come from old nick-names:

Cameron	cam-shròn	crooked nose
Campbell	cam-beul	crooked mouth

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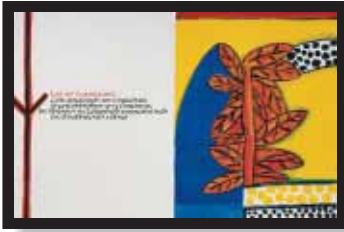
But the best place to discover Gaelic all around you is in our Scottish place-names. Not only are they interesting (explaining why we pronounce **Milngavie** the way we do), enlightening (explaining that there used to be fields of rye in **Auchenshuggle**), and amusing (telling us that **Stranraer** is Gaelic for “fat nose” – look at the map to see why!) They also illustrate how widespread Gaelic was throughout Scotland (from **Balerno** to **Ellon**, **Bellahouston** to **Drumnadrochit**) and what a huge loss it is in terms of understanding the history of our own towns and cities that we can’t understand them.

### Some Gaelic place-names to locate on the map

Aberfoyle	aber phuill	confluence of the streams
Aboyne	abh bò fhionn	river of the white cow
Airdrie	àird àirigh	high pastures
Alloway	àl a' mhaigh	rock of the plain
Arbroath	abar brothach	muddy river-mouth
Ardentinny	àird an teine	the height of the fire
Auchenshuggle	achadh an seagail	the field of rye
Auchtermuchty	uachdar muctair	the height of the swine-herd
Balerno	baile eòrna	village of barley
Ballantrae	baile an tràigh	village of the shore
Ballochmyle	bealach maol	bare pass
Balornock	baile àirneag	village of sloe-bushes
Balshagray	baile seaca graidhe	farm of the withered flock
Banchory	beannachar	pinnacled place
Bangour	beinn gobhair	goat hill
Barlinnie	bàrr linne	hill of the pond
Bellahouston	baile h-Uisdein	Hugh's village
Breadalbane	bràghaid Albainn	the slopes of Alba
Cambuslang	camus nan long	river-bend of the ships
Campsie	cam sith	crooked hill
Cardonald	cathair Domhnaill	Donald's fort
Carlisle	càrr na luig	rock of the hollow
Carmyle	cathair maoil	the fort of the bare hill
Carntyne	crann teine	tree of the fire
Cart	caraid	a pair (two streams – White and Black Cart)
Cathcart	cathair Cairt	fort of the River Cart
Clackmannan	clach Manann	the stone of the hero-god Manann
Clynder	clach dearg	red slope
Colintraive	caol an t-snàimh	the swimming strait (where cows swam across)
Comrie	comar	meeting (of waters)
Condorrat	comh-dobhar-ait	joint river place
Coupar	comh-pàirt	common land
Craiglockhart	creag lùchairt	rock of the palace
Crieff	craobh	tree
Croy	cruaidh	hard
Culden	cùl lodain	back of the little pool
Culross	cuileann ros	holy wood
Cumbernauld	comar nan allt	meeting of the streams
Dalbeattie	dàil beithe	field of the birch trees
Dalgety	dàil gaoithe	field of the wind
Dalry	dàil rìgh	field of the king
Drumchapel	druim a' chapuill	ridge of the horse

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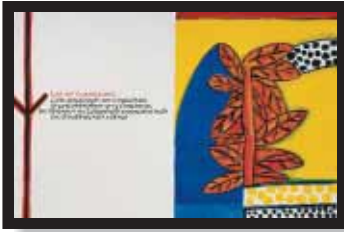


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Drumnadrochit	druim na drochaid	ridge of the bridge
Drumoyne	druim uaine	green ridge
Drymen	druim fhionn	white ridge
Dumbarton	dùn Bhreatainn	hill-fort of the Britons
Dumbreck	dùn breac	speckled hill
Dumbuck	dùn buic	hill of the he-goat
Dunbar	dùn bàrr	fort on the height
Dundee	dùn dè	hill of the god
Dysart	dìseart	desert-place, hermitage
Ecclefechan	eaglais Fiachain	the church of St Fiachan (Little Raven)
Eigg	eag	a nick / hack
Ellon	eilean	island
Freuchie	fraochach	heathery
Fyvie	fiamh	track
Gareloch	geàrr loch	short loch
Gargunnoch	gart guineach	pointed enclosure
Garnagad	gartan gad	enclosure of the withies
Garscadden	gart sgadain	enclosure for herring
Garscube	gart sguuib	enclosure for corn-sheaves
Gartcosh	gart còise	enclosure of the cave
Gartmore	gart mòr	big enclosure
Gartnavel	gart nan abhal	enclosure of the apples
Gartocharn	gart a' chàirn	enclosure of the cairn
Garturk	gart nan tuirc	enclosure of the boars
Glasgow	glas caomh	dear green (place)
Gleneagles	gleann eaglais	glen of the church
Glenshee	glean sith	glen of the fairy-hill
Greenock	grianag	little sunny place
Ibrox	ath bruic	ford of the badgers
Inchinnan	innis nan uan	isle of the lambs (or ?Finnan's isle)
Inverkip	inbhir cip	confluence of the tree
Invermorison	inbhir mòr easain	confluence of the big waterfall
Kenmore	ceann mòr	big head
Kilbarchan	cill Barchain	the Church of St Barchan
Kilbowie	cùl buidhe	yellow back (of the hill)
(East) Kilbride	cill Brighde	Church of St Bridget
Killearn	coille fheàrna	wood (or ?cill = church) of the alders
Killiecrankie	coille creathannaich	wood of the aspens (or cath Raon Ruairidh – Rory's battle-field)
Kilpatrick	cill Pàdraig	Patrick's church
Kinlochleven	ceann Loch Liobhainn	head of Loch Leven
Kintyre	ceann tìre	head of the land
Kirkcaldy	cathair calldainn	fort of Calatin (druid) or hazel wood
Kirkintilloch	cathair cinn tulaich	fort of the head of the green hill
Kyles of Bute	na Caoil Bhodach	strait of the old men
Ladybank	leathad bog	moist slope
Laggan	lagan	little hollow
Leuchars	luachair-ais	reedy place
Linlithgow	linne liath chù	pool of the grey dog (or British - llyn lled cu – dear broad lake)
Lochgelly	Loch gile	whitest loch
Lochinvar	Loch an bharra	loch on the height
Maggielknockater	màgh an fhucadair	plain of the (cloth) waulker

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Maybole	màgh baoghail	plain of danger
Meldrum	maol druim	bare back
Milngavie	muileann Dhaibhidh	David's Mill
Moffat	magh fada	long plain
Monifeith	mòine fòide	peat moss
Montrose	mòine rois	moss on the promontory
Muck	(eilean nam) muc	(island of the) pigs
Mugdock	magh an dabhaich	the plain of the ploughed land
Nairn	(baile) an fheàrna	(village of the) alder
Oban	An t-Òban	the little bay
Polmadie	poll magh Dè	pool of the meadow of God
Polmaise	poll maise	pool of beauty
Pollock	Pollag	little pool
Portree	port-rìgh	king's port
Rannoch	raineach	bracken
Riddrie	ruadh àirigh	red shieling
Rouken Glen	ruicean gleann	glen of the pimple (= wee hill!)
Rutherglen	ruadh gleann	red glen
Slamannan	sliabh Manannan	Manannan's moor
Stranraer	sròn reamhar	thick nose
Strathaven	srath abhainn	valley of the streams
Strathblane	srath blàthain	valley of the little flowers
Strathbungo	srath Mhunga	Mungo's valley
Tarbert	tairbeart	isthmus

