

“From the Ground Up:

Foodways as Adaptive Infrastructure in the Highlands and Islands, 1725–1840s”

By Logan Rhyanne Willford

Supervised by Dr. Peter Cook

A Graduating Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

in the Honours Program

for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

in the Department of History

University of Victoria

April 2026

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Peter Cook, whose guidance, insight, and support not only strengthened this thesis, but also challenged me to think more critically about how this history fits within the wider history of the British Isles.

I am especially grateful to Dr. Theresa Mackay, the first Scottish history teacher I ever had. Her teaching sparked my interest in Scottish folk studies and much of what I know, and how I think, about Gaelic-speaking peoples can be traced back to her classroom.

Thank you to my mom, who somehow managed to bring order to the chaos of this process. Your support made this project possible in more ways than I can count.

Lastly, thank you to my best friend for sitting on the phone with me for countless hours, keeping me company from afar. You kept me sane.

Without the four of you, this project would not exist.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	i
Table of Figures .....	iii
Maps.....	iv
Introduction.....	1
Context.....	4
Climate and Ecology .....	4
Crops and Labour .....	5
Seafood .....	8
Fuel and Architecture .....	10
Transhumance: The Shieling.....	14
Case Studies .....	17
Shetland .....	17
Mainland Highlands: Kilmalie, Inverness-shire.....	21
The Outer Hebrides: Harris and Barvas .....	22
Mounting Pressures.....	25
The Breakdown of Clanship.....	25
“Improvement,” Enclosure, Clearance, and Crofting.....	27
The Potato.....	32
Discussion .....	33
Conclusion .....	35
Bibliography .....	37

## Table of Figures

Figure 1: Map of Scotland, “Highland and Island” region bordered in red.....	4
Figure 2: Map of the western Scottish coastline.....	4
Figure 3: Communal peat-cutting in Orkney .....	11
Figure 4: A woman stacking peats to dry in Sutherland.....	12
Figure 5: A woman carrying peat in a creel on her back.....	12
Figure 6: Repairing a thatched roof in Ross .....	13
Figure 7: Drawing of the interior of a black-house.....	13
Figure 8: A sketch showing the basic interior layout of a Shieling house.....	15
Figure 9: A more realistic drawing of a Shieling house .....	15

## Maps

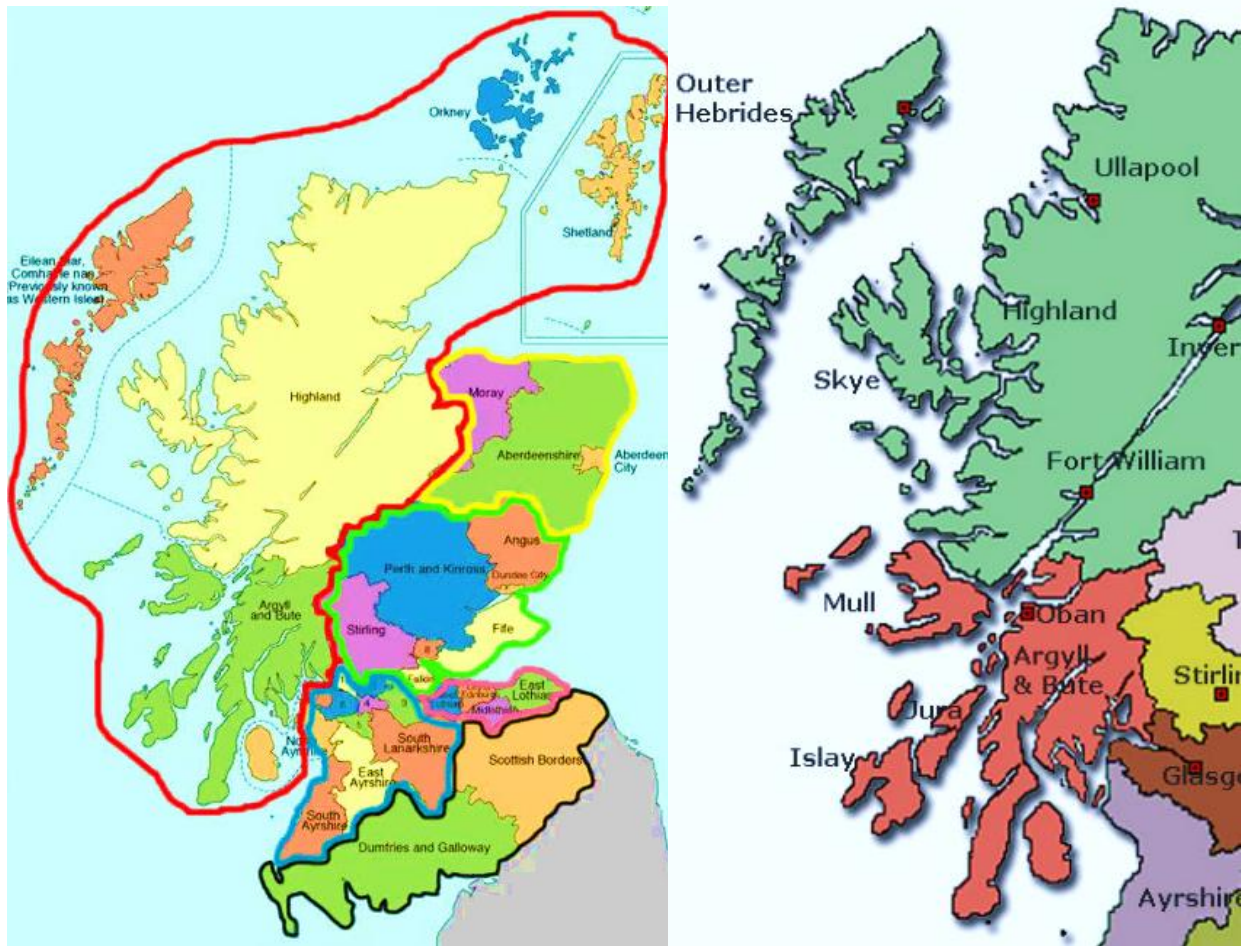


Figure 1: Map of Scotland, with the “Highland and Island” region bordered in red.<sup>1</sup>

Figure 2: Map of the western Scottish coastline, so Islands can be seen in slightly greater detail.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Local Authority Regions,” *Public Contracts Scotland*, accessed February 2026, <https://www.publiccontractsscotland.gov.uk/Maps/LocalAuthorityRegions.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> “Maps of Scotland,” *Scotland Info Guide*, June 2023, <https://www.scotlandinfo.eu/other-maps-of-scotland/>

## Introduction

In the popular imagination, the Highlands and Islands of Scotland often appear as a place seemingly out of time. They are remembered and imagined as windswept and stubborn, romantic and tragic all at once. In some tellings, they are the last holdout of an older Scotland: Gaelic-speaking, clan-bound, resistant to change. In others, they are defined almost entirely by what was done to them, by things outside of their control: evictions, famines, forced or coerced emigration, and Enclosure and Improvement. Both of these images flatten the region. One freezes it in nostalgia and idealism, the other reduces it to victimhood. Neither asks very carefully how people actually lived in this Gaelic periphery.

Much of the scholarship reflects a similar divide. Histories of land restructuring, legal suppression, and famine tend to focus on policy, economics, and the power and agency of the more wealthy. Meanwhile, foundational studies of Highland life for the non-gentry — architecture, dairying, tools and plenishings, fuels, seasonal labour — often describe material practice in impressive detail, but at a distance from the political transformations unfolding around it. The two bodies of work sit beside one another much more than they speak to one another. The result is a fragmented picture in which Highlanders and Islanders appear either as passive recipients of external pressures or as ethnographic subjects whose ways of life exist in isolation from structural change.

This thesis argues that such separation obscures more than it reveals. Between roughly 1725 and the 1840s, the Gaelic-speaking cultural community of the Highlands and Islands (the

*Gàidhealtachd*<sup>3</sup>) operated through integrated systems of subsistence that cannot be understood apart from the political economies pressing upon them. Foodways — understood not simply as diet, but as the networks associated with the cultivation, preservation, preparation, and consumption of food, encompassing things like gender roles, power dynamics, community, the balance of labour, and more — functioned as material infrastructure. They organized ecological and agricultural knowledge. They managed and mitigated risks. They structured communal and familial obligation and responsibility. They were at the absolute heart of everyday life. When Enclosure and Improvement began to transform the face of the land in the Highlands and Islands, authority shifted from reciprocal clan relationships to landlord-tenancy ties, capitalism-based market logics intensified in the higher ranks, and then finally the Potato Blight struck, all these pressures acted directly upon those foodways in complicated, intricate ways. Reintegrating foodways into the political and economic histories of the period reveals a culture neither frozen in tradition nor defined by collapse, but engaged in continual adaptation under constraints and pressures.

The period from the early eighteenth century to the 1846 Potato Famine provides a particularly revealing frame to work with. In the decades following the height of Jacobite political movement

---

<sup>3</sup> Scottish Gaelic word meaning literally “Gaelic-speaking areas” or “Gaelic-speaking people,” but more importantly functioned as a cultural and linguistic community rather than a fixed space, rooted in Gaelic identity, kin-based society, and a shared value system. In the early modern period, this identity was reshaped into a more narrowly Scottish Gaelic one rather than a larger Gaelic one that included the Irish Gaels as well, and was increasingly framed through the imposed Highland/Lowland divide. Also spelled “Gaeltachd” or, in the Irish context, “Gaeltacht.” For further reading about the *Gàidhealtachd* identity, see Jane Dawson, “The Gàidhealtachd and the Emergence of the Scottish Highlands,” in *British Consciousness and Identity: The Making of Britain, 1533–1707*, eds. Brendan Bradshaw and Peter Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Frank Bechhofer and David McCrone, “What Makes a Gael? Identity, Language and Ancestry in the Scottish Gàidhealtachd,” *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 21, no. 2 (2014).

(that is, after the rebellions of 1689, 1715, 1719, and 1745<sup>4</sup>), landholding patterns across the western mainland and island districts of Scotland shifted toward consolidation and commercial orientation for the benefit of the landed gentry, seeking to better their economic standing and relationships with Lowlanders and the English. Personal land holdings amongst the non-gentry were subdivided, relocated, and reduced in size. At the same time, populations increased dramatically in many parishes,<sup>5</sup> intensifying demands upon arable ground for agricultural cultivation. The potato, already cultivated in Scotland by this point thanks to the Columbian Exchange, became increasingly central as a high-yield staple capable of sustaining households on minimal land plots. Its near-complete adoption was entirely rational under the circumstances the Gaelic-speaking peoples faced; its vulnerability became apparent only when multiple pressures converged. The crisis of the 1840s and thereafter did not emerge from any kind of cultural backwardness, narrow-mindedness, or lack of foresight on the part of the Highlanders and Islanders. It emerged from a system operating within narrowing margins.

The sections that follow proceed in four main stages. The first provides cultural context, the second examines three regional case studies — Shetland, the western mainland Highlands (Inverness-shire, specifically), and the Outer Hebrides (Harris, specifically) — to demonstrate how foodways, fuel systems, architecture, and gendered labour formed coherent, innovative subsistence

---

<sup>4</sup> For further reading, see Murray Pittock, *The Myth of the Jacobite Clans: The Jacobite Army in 1745*, Second comprehensively revised and Expanded edition (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474471688>.

<sup>5</sup> In the roughly 65-year period between 1755 and 1820, records show that the overall population of Scotland — despite emigration rates — grew from 1.265 million to two million. While not all of the Highland and Island regions experienced a population boom, most of the northern and western most parishes experienced population increases ranging from 25%–80%. This boom was largely attributable to more secure food supplies that reduced infant mortality rates, and the introduction of the smallpox vaccine in the 1760s. T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Clearances: A History of the Dispossessed, 1600–1900* (London: Allen Lane, 2018), 221–222.

infrastructures within distinct ecological contexts. The third examines the structural pressures acting upon the *Gàidhealtachd* over the course of the eighteenth century and after, including ecological constraint, Improvement, demographic intensification, and the convergence of crises. The final section draws these strands together to reassess prevailing narratives of inefficiency, decline, and passivity. Taken together, this study suggests that what was often dismissed as backward may instead be understood as an entirely different model of efficiency — one calibrated not for export and profit, but for resilience and survival.

## Context

### *Climate and Ecology*

Across the Highlands and Islands, cultivatable land was limited by its distribution. In areas like Argyll, Inverness-shire, and Sutherland, arable ground was concentrated in small in-bye<sup>6</sup> fields along sea lochs, river valleys, and sheltered coastal margins. Beyond these strips lay extensive tracts of peat moor, rocky upland, and rough grazing. On Lewis and Harris in the Outer Hebrides, peat deposits could reach considerable depth, while on parts of Skye and the western mainland, glacially thinned soils sat directly over rock. What could be cultivated depended heavily on drainage, slope, and exposure to Atlantic winds. Fields were rarely expansive or uniform; instead, they were fragmented, irregular, and worked intensively. The land did not lend itself to large-scale cereal farming of the kind common in eastern Scotland. Instead, agricultural effort centred on the careful management of limited plots in which productivity varied by year.

---

<sup>6</sup> In the Scottish context, “in-bye” generally means low-lying, usually arable farmland close to the farm or house.

Climate conditions compounded these constraints. The western seaboard receives significantly higher rainfall than the eastern districts, and prolonged damp conditions could flatten crops, delay harvest, and compromise storage if grain was not properly dried. Late spring frosts and sudden autumn storms posed additional risks. Under such conditions, wheat, a crop which requires deeper, more stable soils and longer growing seasons, proved exceedingly unreliable. Oats, bere barley, and pease<sup>7</sup> were more dependable, their shorter growing cycles and tolerance for poorer soils better suited to the conditions of northern and western Scotland. Crop choice was therefore ecological and practical rather than strictly cultural. What might appear from a distance as limitation was, in practice, adaptation.<sup>8</sup>

### *Crops and Labour*

Foodways in the *Gàidhealtachd* cannot be reduced to a list of staple foods or recipes. They encompassed the full set of practices through which food was produced, processed, prepared, and consumed, as well as the labour, knowledge, and relationships that made those processes possible. Cultivation, preservation, fuel use, seasonal movement, and domestic organization were all part of the same system. The act of eating was only the final stage in a much larger network of activity that began with the management of land and extended through to the structuring of daily and seasonal labour. These processes were not independent: the timing of harvest shaped patterns of work, access to fuel determined methods of cooking and preservation, and grazing availability affected both diet and exchange. Foodways, in this sense, functioned as a form of infrastructure,

---

<sup>7</sup> The older term for “peas,” still commonly used in Highland Scottish historiography.

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Mather, “Geology, Soils, Climate, and Vegetation,” in *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology*, vol. 2, *Farming and the Land*, eds. Alexander Fenton and Kenneth Veitch (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2011), 63–86.

organizing how resources moved through households and communities and how those resources were transformed into sustenance.

Labour within this foodways system was distributed across households and communities in ways that reflected both necessity and established social roles. Systems of shared labour and communal farming “dominated the region from late prehistory down to”<sup>9</sup> the late eighteenth century. Women played a central role in many aspects of food production and processing, particularly in dairying, where the making of butter and cheese formed an essential component of both subsistence and exchange, though they were also heavily involved with other aspects of agricultural work as well. Men were often associated with ploughing, heavy labour, and, in coastal regions, fishing — though these divisions were neither absolute nor universal.<sup>10</sup> Communal labour remained important, especially during periods such as harvest, when cooperation allowed work to be completed within narrow seasonal windows.<sup>11</sup> The system relied not only on what was produced, but on who produced it and how that labour was coordinated. Foodways were therefore also social systems, structuring relationships within households and across communities.

Taken together, these practices formed a system that was not inefficient or underdeveloped, but carefully calibrated to the conditions in which it operated. Its strengths lie in diversification, flexibility, and the distribution of risk across multiple forms of production. Grain, dairy, and, in many regions, fish or gathered resources each contributed to a broader subsistence base. When one

---

<sup>9</sup> Robert A. Dodgshon, “Highland Touns before the Clearances,” in *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology*, vol. 2, *Farming and the Land*, eds. Alexander Fenton and Kenneth Veitch (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2011), 127.

<sup>10</sup> Alexander Fenton, *Scottish Country Life*, (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1976), 26, 35, 38, 43, 45, 47, 52, 54, 60, 61, 80, 81, 93, 94, 116, 121, 124-132, 212, 213, 225.

<sup>11</sup> Heather Holmes, “Seasonal and Casual Agricultural Workers,” in *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology*, vol. 2, *Farming and the Land*, eds. Alexander Fenton and Kenneth Veitch (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2011), 477–502.

element was less productive, others could compensate. This capacity to absorb fluctuation was not accidental, but built into the fabric of everyday life. Gap famines were common in the Highlands and Islands,<sup>12</sup> but the diversified subsistence base was often able to mitigate those brief periods of scarcity. To understand later developments in the *Gàidhealtachd*, it is necessary to recognize that what was altered was not a collection of isolated practices, but an integrated system of resource management.

Oats and bere barley formed the foundation of grain production, as they were among the few grains that could reliably mature in thin soils, high rainfall, short growing seasons, and on small, intensively worked plots. Oats, in particular, were a consistently central staple across much of the region, used in bannocks, brose, porridge, oat cakes, sowens, and more.<sup>13</sup> Bere, an older form of barley, remained in use due to its hardiness, rapid growth cycle, and use in whisky-making,<sup>14</sup> though its importance varied regionally. Rye was also occasionally cultivated, but was largely overshadowed by oats and bere.<sup>15</sup> Wheat, though common elsewhere in Britain, was rarely viable at scale under these conditions.

Crop cultivation was closely tied to many aspects of the subsistence infrastructure, requiring carefully considered management of limited land. Within this system, the potato, introduced in the late seventeenth century<sup>16</sup> and increasingly adopted through the eighteenth century, offered a

---

<sup>12</sup> For further reading on other famines and seasonal scarcity in Scotland before the Potato Famine, see Karen J. Cullen, *Famine in Scotland: The "Ill Years" of the 1690s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780748641840>.

<sup>13</sup> F. Marian McNeill, *The Scots Kitchen: Classic Recipes and Traditions*, first published 1929, ed. and introd. Catherine Brown, illus. Iain McIntosh (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2025).

<sup>14</sup> Fenton, *Scottish Country Life*, 166–167; F. Marian McNeill, *The Scots Cellar Its Traditions and Lore* (Moffat: Lochar, 1992), 7–31.

<sup>15</sup> Fenton, *Scottish Country Life*, 164.

<sup>16</sup> Alexander Fenton, *The Food of the Scots*, vol. 5 (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2007), 205.

significant advantage. Its high caloric yield and ability to grow in poorer soils made it particularly suited to the constraints of the *Gàidhealtachd*. It did not replace grain cultivation, but began to alter the balance of subsistence by allowing greater output from smaller areas of land. Fields were often worked intensively and repeatedly, with little time for fallow, making crop reliability critical. In fact, many Scots brought in the use of pease and some beans as fallow crops, so that even the “fallowing land” was still growing food, even if it was not a particularly high-yield crop.<sup>17</sup> In addition to the in-bye plots, many houses had “kailyards”<sup>18</sup> — relatively small plots near dwellings where other assorted vegetables (cabbage, turnips, carrots, and kail most commonly) and herbs could be grown.<sup>19</sup> Kail was among the most commonly grown, as were cabbage and turnips. Some wild or kailyard-grown berry bushes were common in some areas as well.<sup>20</sup> What emerges from this pattern is not a narrow or underdeveloped agricultural system, but one structured around careful balance. Grains and root crops formed the foundation of the diet, but in many regions this balance was supplemented and strengthened by access to marine resources.

### *Seafood*

Marine resources provided an additional and often essential source of sustenance. Fish such as herring, cod, haddock, and coalfish were the most commonly found, though others, like salmon,

---

<sup>17</sup> Alexander Fenton, *The Northern Isles: Orkney and Shetland* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1978), 56; I.F. Grant’s *Social and Economic Development to 1603* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1930), 291.

<sup>18</sup> This term has many common spellings, including: kailyard, kaleyard, kail-yard, kale-yard, kail yard, and kale yard. Defined in John Jamieson, *Jamieson’s Dictionary of the Scottish Language* (1866; repr., abridged by J. Johnstone and revised and enlarged by John Longmuir, with supplement and introduction by W. M. Metcalfe [Paisley: Alexander Gardner, 1912]) as “a kitchen-garden, [...] *kaalgard*, a garden of herbs,” 302.

<sup>19</sup> Fenton, *Scottish Country Life*, 159, 178–180.

<sup>20</sup> Fenton, *Scottish Country Life*, 179–180.

were often available as well.<sup>21</sup> Fish could be caught from small vessels or from the shore, with fishermen often using hand-made fishing nets of various natural materials, such as heather. While shellfish were often available, Highlanders and Islanders alike tended to avoid them when they could, typically only collecting and consuming them when scarcity and famine made it necessary.<sup>22</sup> Fish supplemented land-based subsistence where conditions allowed, contributing to dietary diversity and helping offset fluctuations in agricultural production.<sup>23</sup>

Access to the sea, of course, was uneven. In more inland regions, fish played a very limited role, while in island communities and many coastal settlements it could be absolutely central to survival. But even in some coastal areas, steep cliffs and lack of shoreline could make effective or consistent fishing extremely difficult or dangerous. The variation across different regions was significant. However, nowhere did marine resources fully replace agricultural production, as sea life populations would have been unlikely to be able to support such a system. Like grain and dairy, fish formed only one part of a wider network of foodways.

As with other elements of foodways in the *Gàidhealtachd*, preservation was a central focus. Fish could be salted, dried, or smoked, allowing it to be stored and consumed at a far later date. This could be of great help in bridging the food shortages that commonly occurred in late winter or spring. This type of seasonal scarcity, also known as gap famines, was routine for cottars<sup>24</sup> when

---

<sup>21</sup> Alexander Fenton, “Craig Fishing” in *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology*, vol. 4, *Boats, Fishing and the Sea*, eds. James R. Coull, Alexander Fenton, and Kenneth Veitch (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2008), 85–89.

<sup>22</sup> Hugh Cheape, “Cha ghabhadh na b’ fheàrr fhaighinn (‘It couldn’t be better’): Gaelic Perspectives on Island Cultural Heritage in Scotland’s Hebrides,” in *Scotland and Islandness*, eds. Kathryn A. Burnett, Ray Burnett, and Michael Danson (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2021), 62–63.

<sup>23</sup> For further reading on how fish supplemented the Highland and Island subsistence diet, see James R. Coull, Alexander Fenton, and Kenneth Veitch, *Boats, Fishing and the Sea*, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> Tacksman were clan members who leased larger areas of land (called “tacks”) from the clan chiefs or lairds, and tacksmen rented out the use of land and dwellings on those large plots to smaller tenants of

their grain and vegetable stores from the year before ran low or ran out. Smoking fish, the most common method of preservation, was often done through the use of peat fires in the home, making it one of the less labour-intensive preservation processes available to them.<sup>25</sup> Because of the relative ease of preserving and storing smoked fish, the fishing industry provided a consistent layer of security within the foodways system.

### *Fuel and Architecture*

Peat dominated both landscape and domestic life for Highlanders and Islanders. In the Outer Hebrides, northern Skye, and many parts of the Highland mainland, communal peat cutting periods formed an annual necessity, supplying the primary fuel for cooking and heating through the year. Peat banks structured seasonal labour just as surely as the harvest did. The same bogs that constrained cultivation provided energy, tying together limitations and solutions within the same environment.

The process of peat-cutting itself was labour-intensive and required careful management and planning. Peat was cut into long, narrow slices similar in size and shape to bricks using specialized tools. The peats were then laid out in small stacks to dry out in the summer sun, before being gathered for transport back to villages and dwellings via cart, horse, or creel<sup>26</sup> carried on the back. Peat-cutting was a long process, but was usually done communally to lighten the load. Peat quality and burn varied depending on composition and moisture, affecting how it was used within the household. Nevertheless, once dried, peat tended to burn slowly and steadily, producing a

---

different ranks in the clan — the lowest of them called “cottars,” who often worked the land not only for subsistence purposes, but on behalf of the landowner. Cottars were often among the poorest members of the clan, holding no lease or legal land tenure.

<sup>25</sup> Fenton, *Scottish Country Life*, 197.

<sup>26</sup> A “creel” is a kind of large, hand-woven basket common across the Highlands and Islands, often made out of combinations of hazel or willow wood, and are often associated with carrying peats, manure, or other farm-related things. They could be attached to pack animals or simply worn on the back.

consistent heat that was particularly suited to long cooking processes and smoking. It was not an incidental fuel, but one around which daily domestic practices were organized.<sup>27</sup>



*Figure 3: Communal peat-cutting in Orkney, 1880s.*<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Alexander Fenton, *Country Life in Scotland: Our Rural Past* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1987), 83–94.

<sup>28</sup> Am Baile, *Am Baile: Highland History and Culture*. Accessed February, 2026.  
<https://www.ambaile.org.uk>. Asset ID: 38454.



*Figure 4: A woman stacking peats to dry in Sutherland, 1880s or 1890s.<sup>29</sup>*

*Figure 5: A woman carrying peat in a creel on her back, 1880s or 1890s Skye.<sup>30</sup>*

Fuel scarcity in timber-poor districts shaped architecture as well: stone-built houses with thick walls, thatched roofs, and central hearths were designed to conserve heat and maximize the efficiency of peat fires. These low-standing houses, known as either black-houses or long-houses, were common across many regions of northern and western Scotland. The thick stone walls were ideal, as they were sturdy enough to withstand the strong Atlantic winds and provide some insulation from the cold.<sup>31</sup> Oftentimes, black-houses had a byre that was attached to the house so as to help keep both the animals and the people inside the black-houses warm. The emblematic thatched roofs were typically made of some combination of hay, straw, turf, heather, clay, some form of wooden structure, and some form of rope of various materials.<sup>32</sup> The roofs were designed

<sup>29</sup> Am Baile, Asset ID: 38557.

<sup>30</sup> Am Baile, Asset ID: 38416.

<sup>31</sup> Fenton, *The Northern Isles*, 189.

<sup>32</sup> Alexander Fenton and Bruce Walker, *The Rural Architecture of Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1981).

to be replaced yearly, the old roof broken down and used as nutrient-rich fertilizer for the crop fields.<sup>33</sup> The central hearth, typically unvented or only partially vented, allowed smoke to circulate through the rafters before escaping through the thatch, a feature that fostered the perfect environment for preserving meats and fish.<sup>34</sup> Meats and fish could be hung in the rafters to cure in the smoke over time, all the while the hearth also provided heat for cooking and warmth for the household.<sup>35</sup> In this way, a single fuel source supported multiple interconnected processes.

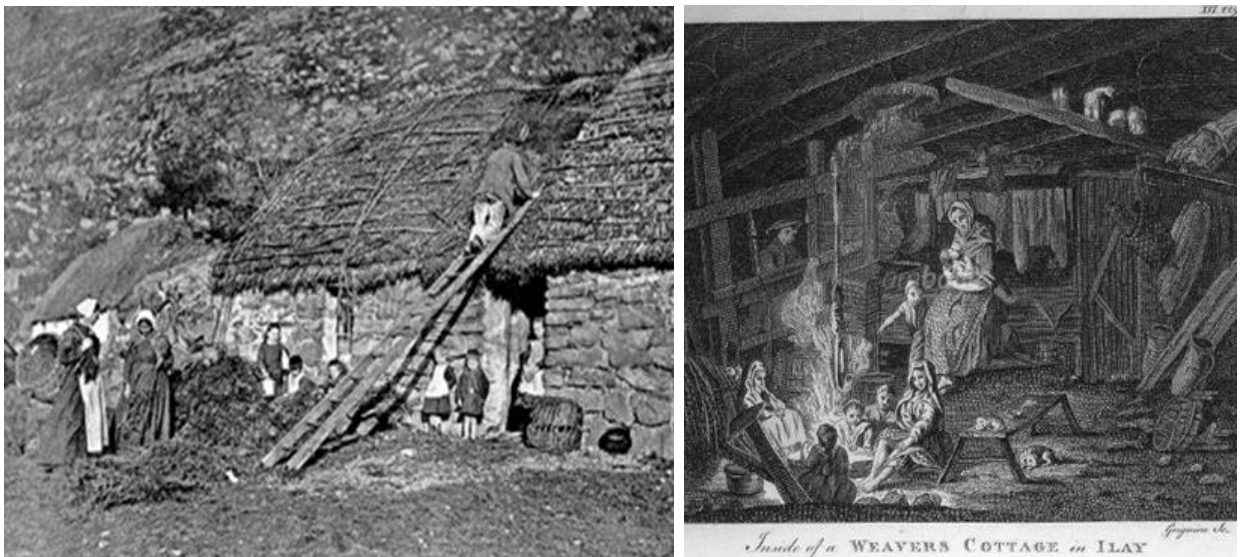


Figure 6: Repairing a thatched roof in Ross, 1890s.<sup>36</sup>

Figure 7: Drawing of the interior of a black-house in Argyll, 1760s.<sup>37</sup>

Peat use was not limited to heating or cooking in isolation, but was embedded within a wider system of foodways in several ways. It enabled methods of preservation, shaped the layout and function of domestic space, and structured seasonal and communal patterns of labour. Ecology,

<sup>33</sup> Fenton, *Scottish Country Life*, 131; Fenton and Walker, *The Rural Architecture of Scotland*, 66.

<sup>34</sup> Fenton and Walker, *Rural Architecture of Scotland*, 44-67, 72-83, 102-159.

<sup>35</sup> Fenton, *Scottish Country Life*, 175, 197.

<sup>36</sup> Am Baile, Asset ID: 38412.

<sup>37</sup> Am Baile, Asset ID: 31137.

fuel, and domestic design were not separate considerations at all but components of a cohesive system.

### *Transhumance: The Shieling*

Seasonal movement formed an essential component of subsistence practice across much of the *Gàidhealtachd*, particularly in areas where limited arable land required a careful balance between cultivation and grazing. One of the most important expressions of this system was the practice of transhumance, or the “Shieling.” Shieling villages were typically upland pastures where seasonal dwellings known as shielings or beehive houses were used.<sup>38</sup> This seasonal relocation allowed lower-lying in-bye land to be used for crop cultivation while still maintaining access to fresh grazing for livestock. The practice extended the productive capacity of the landscape by allowing different ecological zones to be used in complementary ways. Upland pasture, unsuitable for cultivation, became a vital resource during the summer months, while lower ground was reserved for crops. This division of land use reduced pressure on limited arable plots and supported the maintenance of cattle herds, which in turn sustained dairy production and contributed to dietary diversity. Seasonal mobility also provided a degree of flexibility, allowing households to adjust their use of land in response to local conditions. It was, in effect, a way of expanding available resources without expanding landholdings.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Also sometimes referred to as shieling or beehive ‘huts,’ though that term has fallen into disuse given the negative connotations that accompany it. The Gaelic word “àirigh” can refer to the Shieling practice or the Shieling house itself.

<sup>39</sup> Scottish Archaeological Research Framework (ScARF), “Case Study: Transhumance and Shielings,” in *Modern Case Studies*, Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, accessed January 2026 <https://scarf.scot/national/scarf-modern-panel-report/modern-case-studies/case-study-transhumance-and-shielings/>; Fenton, *Scottish Country Life*, 124–146; I. F. Grant, *Highland Folk Ways* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), 84–87, 147–148; Fenton, *Country Life in Scotland*, 9–10, 27–36.

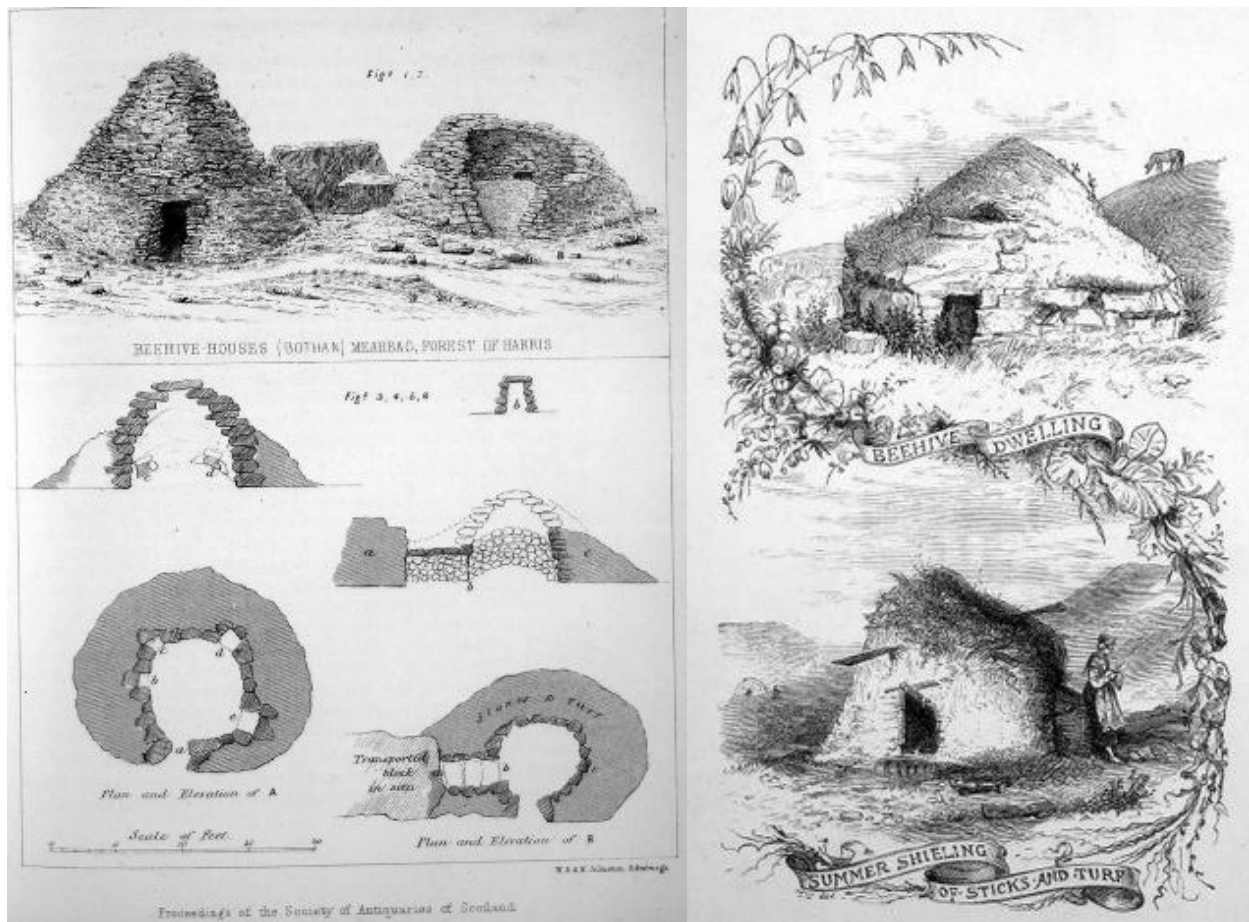


Figure 8: A sketch showing the basic interior layout of a Shieling house.<sup>40</sup>

Figure 9: A more realistic drawing of a Shieling house. Note the inclusion of a cow and a woman in these depictions.<sup>41</sup>

During those summer months, essentially all women physically able to travel would attend the Shielings, starting around their mid-teens. Only very young children and babies, the ones who could not reasonably be separated from their mothers, accompanied the women to the Shieling. Children old enough to be separated from their mothers but not old enough to work remained at home with their male family members. Before the Shieling began, the able-bodied men of the villages would often go ahead to the Shieling villages to make any necessary repairs (such as

<sup>40</sup> Am Baile, Asset ID: 31578.

<sup>41</sup> Am Baile, Asset ID: 31045.

replacing the thatched roofs), to transport heavier tools and other items, and to move the cattle.<sup>42</sup> Once that work was completed, the men returned home, and the women travelled to the Shieling villages. Women often walked to the Shielings, knitting as they walked, with “their long skirts... drawn up under a belt to let them walk freely,”<sup>43</sup> carrying with them bedding, dairy utensils, oatmeal, and tools for spinning wool while they were away. Once women arrived at the Shieling village, it became the women’s domain.

Life at the Shieling was closely tied to dairying. Milk production increased during the summer grazing period, and much of this milk was processed on-site into butter and cheeses. These products were more durable than fresh milk and could more easily be transported back to the main settlement. This processing relied on a range of tools and techniques, including hand-churns and the use of rennet to separate curds from whey. Dairy intended to be made into fresh cheeses were often set in the warmest parts of the dwelling — sometimes in small recesses in the walls in near sleeping spaces in the beehive houses — where the residual heat of bodies or a nearby hearth helped encourage the curd to form.<sup>44</sup> In these ways, even the structure of the Shieling village and dwellings and the rhythms of daily movement became part of the dairying process.

The summer was often a time of fun for the women at the Shielings, free from the typical expectations of the main household, including the constant demands of childcare and domestic maintenance. The sense of community made this vital period of “hard work a pleasure,”<sup>45</sup> “an

---

<sup>42</sup> Fenton, *Scottish Country Life*, 131.

<sup>43</sup> Fenton, *Scottish Country Life*, 131.

<sup>44</sup> Examples of these recesses in the wall can actually be seen in Figure 8.

<sup>45</sup> Fenton, *Country Life in Scotland*, 31.

occasion of delight”<sup>46</sup> for those who attended.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, it was also a period of practical education for younger women, who learned directly from elders through participation in everyday tasks. Skills related to dairying, cooking, baking, preservation, and especially textile-making were not taught abstractly, but passed down through repeated practice in a shared working environment.<sup>48</sup>

The Shieling thus functioned as a site of food production and preservation and as a space of knowledge transmission, where generational expertise could be maintained and adapted in relative autonomy. Aside from that, it was also a key part of the economy. In many places in the *Gàidhealtachd*, dairy formed part of the basis of local economies. Cottars frequently used butter and cheeses as a part of rent payments, or in exchange for goods and services in their villages.<sup>49</sup> While money was not a foreign concept by any means, dairy was a completely acceptable means of trade or payment in kind.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, the Shieling and women’s labour were essential aspects of foodways, social networks, knowledge sharing, and local economic systems.

## Case Studies

### *Shetland*

Many studies do not consider Shetland in studies of the Scottish Highlands and Islands for the sake of its many cultural and linguistic differences. One the most significant of these

---

<sup>46</sup> Fenton, *Scottish Country Life*, 131.

<sup>47</sup> Fenton, *Scottish Country Life*, 131; Fenton, *Country Life in Scotland*, 31; Grant, *Highland Folk Ways*, 85, 147-148.

<sup>48</sup> Fenton, *Country Life in Scotland*, 32.

<sup>49</sup> Cheape, “Cha ghabhadh na b’fheàrr fhaighinn,” 66.

<sup>50</sup> Robert A. Dodgshon, “Livestock Farming in the Highlands and Islands before and after the Clearances,” in *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology*, vol. 2, *Farming and the Land*, eds. Alexander Fenton and Kenneth Veitch (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2011), 554-555.

differences was its use of “Norn,” a Norse dialect present only in Shetland, rather than Gaelic.<sup>51</sup> This paper, however, includes Shetland due to its shared structural conditions with the rest of the Highlands and Islands. These include: geographical marginality, environmental constraints and the methods used to navigate them, as well as the subsistence-oriented ways of life that mark the Scottish Highlands and Islands as unique in the world. Including it as a comparative case provides some frame of reference as to which aspects of foodways were specifically Gaelic, and which emerged more broadly from life on the Atlantic periphery.

Shetland occupies a distinct position within the northern reaches of the Scottish islands, lying further removed from the mainland than any other Scottish lands, and much more fully exposed to North Atlantic conditions. Its environment differed in crucial ways from that of the western mainland and even the Hebrides. Arable land was extremely limited and often of poor quality, with very thin soils, very high winds, and ever-present dampness severely limiting what could be cultivated.<sup>52</sup> Cultivation was restricted to very small, and therefore very carefully managed, plots, while large portions of the landscape were given over to rough grazing and peat. When the potato arrived in Shetland in the 1750s, it rapidly became a central pillar of the diet, as it could reliably be grown and harvest in the limited land.<sup>53</sup> The lack of sufficient grazing lands limited the number of cattle that could effectively be kept, with the *Old Statistical Account of Scotland* (OSA) reporting that in 1792 Lerwick, for example, there was a population of 1,259 and only 200 cattle.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Mercedes Durham, “Thirty Years Later: Real-Time Change and Stability in Attitudes towards the Dialect in Shetland,” in *Sociolinguistics in Scotland*, ed. Robert Lawson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 297; Lynn Abrams, *Myth and Materiality in a Woman’s World: Shetland 1800–2000* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 3, 5, 6, 34.

<sup>52</sup> Abrams, *Myth and Materiality*, 59.

<sup>53</sup> Fenton, *The Northern Isles*, 416.

<sup>54</sup> Sir John Sinclair, ed., *The Statistical Account of Scotland*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: William Creech, 1792), 418, 420, “Lerwick,” County of Shetland, online at University of Edinburgh and University of Glasgow,

This restricted the dairying industry, and thus prevented transhumance practices like the Shielling from developing in Shetland. The sea, by contrast, was ever-present and accessible, offering a resource that was not subject to the same constraints as the land. This environmental balance — limited agriculture alongside extensive access to marine resources — shaped almost every aspect of life for the people in Shetland, in ways that set it apart from the rest of the Highlands and Islands. In Shetland, marine resources were not simply supplementary. They were central. Unlike in mainland regions, where fishing might barely supplement an otherwise land-based system, in Shetland it operated as a pillar of foodways, economy, and society.

Fish formed a substantial portion of the diet, including herring, cod, and haddock, but also coalfish, monkfish, piltock, and many others. Shellfish, especially mussels, were another staple food for those in Shetland, and did not necessarily carry the same negative connotations as it did in other parts of Scotland, where shellfish was a food mainly eaten by the destitute or in times of famine.<sup>55</sup> Trade in fish and fish-based products was the basis of the economy before Improvement in Shetland. Where rents were often paid in dairy products in places like the Hebrides, fish and fish oils could be used as rent payments in Shetland, or otherwise “sold fresh to the landholders and their tacksmen, at various prices.”<sup>56</sup> Where in other areas of northern Scotland fishing was a relatively unstructured industry operating mostly on an as-needed basis, fishing in Shetland was organized, consistent, and foundational to their ways of living.

---

*Statistical Accounts of Scotland*,

<https://stataccscot.ed.ac.uk:443/link/osa-vol3-p414-parish-shetland-lerwick>

<sup>55</sup> James R. Coull, “Shellfishing,” in *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology*, vol. 4, *Boats, Fishing and the Sea*, eds. James R. Coull, Alexander Fenton, and Kenneth Veitch (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2008), 374–388.

<sup>56</sup> OSA, *Lerwick*, 415.

The structure of labour and labour expectations further distinguished Shetland. While agricultural work remained important, a significant portion of male labour was directed towards fishing, often taking men away from the home for extended periods of time. Additionally, many men either succumbed to injury or illness at sea, or emigrated.<sup>57</sup> Women, therefore, assumed primary responsibility for the management of the household economy, cultivation and food processing, other cottage industries such as knitting (usually wool; for clothes as well as household textiles<sup>58</sup>), and the coordination of daily activities. Women in Shetland tended to have more freedom and agency than most of their contemporaries, aided by the fact that they simply and consistently outnumbered men over the course of centuries.<sup>59</sup>

Despite these regional differences, subsistence in Shetland remained structured by the same principles of integration and diversification seen elsewhere in the Highlands and Islands. Agriculture, dairying (where possible), marine resources, and fuel use were not separate systems, but interconnected components of a broader whole. Peat remained the central fuel source, shaping cooking and preservation practices, while a lack of rich or plentiful soil made crops like oats, bere, and potatoes the most reliable. The same ecological issues that shaped architecture elsewhere in Scotland were at work in Shetland, and Shetlanders consistently opted for much the same style of dwelling — the black-house — to deal with those issues. The Shetland black-house might have organized their dwellings in a slightly distinct style (such as frequently having the byre separated, “lying parallel,”<sup>60</sup> from the main house), the houses kept those central aspects that defined black-

---

<sup>57</sup> Abrams, *Myth and Materiality*, 67–69.

<sup>58</sup> OSA, *Lerwick*, 418.

<sup>59</sup> Abrams, *Myth and Materiality*, 65–79.

<sup>60</sup> Fenton, *The Northern Isles*, 115.

houses: the stone walls, the thatched roofs made of recyclable material, and the central hearth.<sup>61</sup>

Overall, the differences in Shetland do not represent a complete departure from Highland and Island subsistence systems, but a rebalancing of them in response to local conditions.<sup>62</sup>

### *Mainland Highlands: Kilmalie, Inverness-shire*

Mainland Highland regions such as Inverness-shire, Argyll, and Ross occupied a markedly different environmental position from Shetland, despite sharing many of the same broader constraints. While soils remained thin in many areas and rainfall was still considerably high, these areas offered greater variation in terrain, including: glens, river valleys, forest, mountain, and more substantial in-bye land.<sup>63</sup> This allowed for a more balanced use of arable and grazing land, even if both remained somewhat limited in absolute terms. Access to upland pasture was particularly significant, enabling the Shieling practice to flourish.<sup>64</sup> The result of the mixed terrain was not abundance, but flexibility. Compared to Shetland, where subsistence leaned more heavily toward marine resources, mainland Highland communities operated within a system that allowed for a more even distribution between cultivation, grazing and dairying, and other forms of production.

---

<sup>61</sup> Fenton, *The Northern Isles*, 113–115, 160–190.

<sup>62</sup> For further reading on Shetland, see Fenton, *The Northern Isles*; Abrams, *Myth and Materiality*; and Coull, Fenton, and Veitch, eds., *Boats, Fishing and the Sea*.

<sup>63</sup> Sir John Sinclair, ed., *The Statistical Account of Scotland*, vol. 8 (Edinburgh: William Creech, 1793), 408, “Kilmalie,” County of Inverness, online at University of Edinburgh and University of Glasgow, *Statistical Accounts of Scotland*, <https://stataccscot.ed.ac.uk/link/osa-vol8-p407-parish-inverness-kilmalie>; Sir John Sinclair, ed., *The Statistical Account of Scotland*, vol. 14 (Edinburgh: William Creech, 1795), 139–159, “Kilninian and Kilmore,” County of Argyll, online at University of Edinburgh and University of Glasgow, *Statistical Accounts of Scotland*, [https://stataccscot.ed.ac.uk/link/osa-vol14-p140-parish-argyle-kilninian\\_and\\_kilmore](https://stataccscot.ed.ac.uk/link/osa-vol14-p140-parish-argyle-kilninian_and_kilmore); Sir John Sinclair, ed., *The Statistical Account of Scotland*, vol. 10 (Edinburgh: William Creech, 1794), 315–325, “Kilniver and Kilmelfort,” County of Argyll, online at University of Edinburgh and University of Glasgow, *Statistical Accounts of Scotland*, [https://stataccscot.ed.ac.uk/link/osa-vol10-p316-parish-argyle-kilniver\\_and\\_kilmelfort](https://stataccscot.ed.ac.uk/link/osa-vol10-p316-parish-argyle-kilniver_and_kilmelfort).

<sup>64</sup> ScARF, “Case Study: Transhumance and Shielings,” <https://scarf.scot>.

In these regions, grain cultivation and dairying formed the foundation of subsistence. Oats and bere remained the principal crops. However, unlike in Shetland, access to adequate grazing land supported the maintenance of cattle herds at a more substantial level. Where Lerwick had 0.16 cattle per person in 1792,<sup>65</sup> parish Kilmalie<sup>66</sup> in County Inverness in 1793 boasted 6,000 cattle for 4,225 people,<sup>67</sup> or about 1.42 cattle per person (roughly nine times the cattle per person than Lerwick had). This, in turn, enabled a far more developed dairying system, with milk processed into butter and cheese for both consumption and exchange in often ample quantities. The relationship between crops and livestock was closely managed with each supporting the other: cattle moved with the Shielling to allow the crops to grow over the summer, but also provided manure for the fields. The potato, increasingly adopted in the area, further strengthened the security of this system.

### *The Outer Hebrides: Harris and Lewis*

The Outer Hebrides, also sometimes referred to as the Western Isles, occupied a unique position within the subsistence systems of the *Gàidhealtachd*, combining features of mainland *Gàidhealtachd* systems as well as some of those seen in Shetland. The black-house was the dwelling type used in the Outer Hebrides, like most places in the Highlands and Islands.<sup>68</sup> Like Shetland, these islands were deeply shaped by their exposure to the Atlantic and their access to marine resources, but unlike Shetland, subsistence did not centre primarily on the sea. At the same time, while they shared with the mainland a reliance on grain cultivation and dairying, the

---

<sup>65</sup> OSA, *Lerwick*, 418, 420.

<sup>66</sup> “Kilmalie” has a couple spellings. This paper uses the spelling listed in the OSA.

<sup>67</sup> OSA, *Kilmalie*, 423, 248.

<sup>68</sup> In fact, there is a known black-house that was lived in by a Hebridean family until at least 1964. Alexander Fenton, *The Island Blackhouse: and a Guide to “The Blackhouse” No. 42, Arnol* (Edinburgh: H.M.S.O., 1989), 4.

environmental limitations of the islands imposed far tighter restrictions on how those practices could be carried out. In Harris, arable land was extremely scarce and often of poor quality, confined to fragmented patches that required intensive cultivation. Under these conditions, subsistence depended not on any single mode of production, but on the balanced integration of multiple resources: small-scale grain cultivation, a comparatively strong dairying system supported by available pasture, and the consistent use of marine resources to supplement and balance the diet. Evidence from neighbouring districts such as Barvas (in Lewis) suggests a similar pattern, though with somewhat greater emphasis on fishing in certain localities. Taken together, the Outer Hebrides had a distinct configuration between land- and sea- based systems wherein both were essential, and in which survival depended on the continual balancing of limited agricultural capacity with the opportunities offered by the surrounding sea.

The constraints imposed by the physical landscape were central to shaping the foodways systems in the Western Isles. In Harris, cultivatable land was not only scarce but unevenly distributed, often limited to narrow coastal strips and small inland pockets where soil conditions permitted any form of tillage. Much of the island consisted of rocky ground, peat moor, or exposed upland, leaving only a very small proportion of land that could be considered properly arable. Even within these areas, soils were frequently sandy, shallow, or composed largely of shell fragments, requiring continual effort to maintain their productivity.<sup>69</sup> Cultivation therefore depended on intensive management rather than expansion, with fields carefully and repeatedly used, often with the use of seaweed manure gathered from the shores. According to the OSA report, the “only crops

---

<sup>69</sup> Sir John Sinclair, ed., *The Statistical Account of Scotland*, vol. 19 (Edinburgh: William Creech, 1797), 263–273, “Barvas,” County of Ross and Cromarty, online at University of Edinburgh and University of Glasgow, *Statistical Accounts of Scotland*, [https://stataccscot.ed.ac.uk/link/osa-vol19-p263-parish-ross\\_and\\_cromarty-barvas](https://stataccscot.ed.ac.uk/link/osa-vol19-p263-parish-ross_and_cromarty-barvas)

reared”<sup>70</sup> were oats, bere, and potatoes, though one could likely assume that kailyards with some small amounts of other foodstuffs might be found, and that these were overlooked in the report. The result of this agricultural planning was a system in which even marginal land was made to produce through sustained labour and local knowledge, while its limitations ensured that cultivation alone could never fully sustain the population.

The surrounding sea, meanwhile, provided an additional and necessary subsistence resource – though its role differed from that in Shetland. In the Outer Hebrides, fishing formed a regular component of household economies, but did not tip the balance of land- versus sea- based food. Coastal settlements made free use of the available herring, cod, coalfish, and other white fish, given that rock and “inshore” fishing was commonplace practice.<sup>71</sup> In districts like Barvas, fishing could take on greater local importance, with organized activity and the production of fish oils contributing to both subsistence and exchange. Yet even here, the dangers of the Atlantic and the limitations of landing sites constrained how far fishing could develop as a dominant industry. Rather than the primary basis of life, marine resources operated alongside agriculture and other practices, helping offset fluctuations in land-based yields.

If marine resources supplemented the limitations of cultivation, it was dairying and seasonal pastoralism that most fully extended the productive capacity of the land. Across the Outer Hebrides, and in Harris and Lewis in particular, cattle formed a central component of subsistence, supported by access to upland pasture that could not otherwise be cultivated effectively. This made transhumance not simply advantageous but essential. The movement of livestock to summer grazing grounds allowed limited in-bye land to be reserved for crops in the growing season, while

---

<sup>70</sup> OSA, *Barvas*, 266.

<sup>71</sup> Fenton, “Craig Fishing,” 86; Cheape, “Cha ghabhadh na b’ fheàrr fhaighinn,” 61.

still maintaining milk production at a meaningful scale, anchoring a dairying system that contributed both to household consumption and local exchange. Unlike elsewhere in the *Gàidhealtachd*, the Shieling remained a lived and functional practice in some places in the Outer Hebrides (Lewis in particular) until after the Second World War.<sup>72</sup> This longevity was not a result of a cultural conservatism alone, but of the enduring sustainability and suitability of the system to the landscape in which it operated.

Rather than representing a compromise between land- and sea- based subsistence, the Outer Hebrides demonstrate how these systems could be deliberately integrated under conditions of extreme constraint. In Harris and Lewis, survival depended not on the dominance of any single resource, but on the continual balancing of limited arable land, accessible marine resources, and a dairying system sustained through seasonal pastoralism. The persistence of cultural markers such as Shieling and the black-house reflect not cultural or intellectual inertia but the enduring effectiveness of these strategies within their environmental context. As in Shetland and the mainland Highlands, foodways in the Outer Hebrides operated as a form of adaptive infrastructure foundational to life in the *Gàidhealtachd*: flexible, knowledge-intensive, and closely attuned to both ecological limits and opportunity.

## Mounting Pressures

### *The Breakdown of Clanship*

Prior to the period at hand, clanship in the *Gàidhealtachd* functioned less as a rigid hierarchy of command than as a system of reciprocal obligation rooted in kinship, territory, and shared

---

<sup>72</sup> In fact, many Shieling houses still survive in Lewis today. Fenton, *Country Life in Scotland*, 27–36; Cheape, “Cha ghabhadh na b’ fheàrr fhaighinn,” 66.

subsistence. The clan system was a social, economic, and legal system that developed through the course of centuries, becoming recognizable and consolidated in the late medieval period through interaction with English and Lowland feudal landholding structures. By the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, this system was the guiding one of the *Gàidhealtachd*. Within it, chiefs, chieftains, and lairds<sup>73</sup> held authority, but that authority was not exercised solely through rent extraction or formal contracts. Instead, it operated through a network of mutual responsibility in which land was understood as collectively sustained rather than exclusively owned in the modern sense. Cottars and other lower-ranking clan members occupied and worked land with an expectation of continued access so long as obligations — labour, military service, or other forms of support — were met.<sup>74</sup> Communal practices such as shared grazing, community labour during harvest, and seasonal movement to Shielings were embedded within this structure. These were not informal or incidental arrangements; they were integral to how the *Gàidhealtachd* functioned. Access to pasture, the ability to move cattle, and the pooling of labour all depended on relationships in which social and economic obligations were inseparable. Clanship, in this sense, provided not only a framework of identity and loyalty based on kinship, but a practical means of organizing access to resources and managing environmental risk.<sup>75</sup>

Over the course of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, this arrangement was gradually transformed. Lairds increasingly redefined themselves as landlords, aligning their

---

<sup>73</sup> “Chiefs” were the leaders of clans, generally the highest authority in practical terms, and the traditional owner of the clan lands. “Chieftains” were leaders of a branch of a clan. “Lairds” were estate landowners. A man could be a chief/chieftain and a laird. For further reading, see Grant, *Social and Economic Development*.

<sup>74</sup> Grant, *Social and Economic Development*, 516-524.

<sup>75</sup> For further reading on kinship, clanship, and the relationships between clan gentry and non-gentry, see Grant, *Social and Economic Development*.

authority with legal concepts of property and rent rather than kinship and reciprocal obligation. Land came to be treated as an asset to be managed for income, and cottars and small tenants as rent-paying occupants rather than members of a mutually dependent structure. This shift did not occur overnight, nor was it uniform across all areas, but its effects accumulated over time.<sup>76</sup> As land was consolidated and reorganized under Improvement, the social framework that had supported shared access and cooperative subsistence practices weakened. Obligations that had once been negotiated through kinship ties became formalized through tenancy agreements, often with far less flexibility in times of hardship. Communal grazing arrangements were reduced or eliminated, and seasonal practices such as transhumance were increasingly restricted.<sup>77</sup> In practical terms, this redefined how land could be used and who could use it. The transition from chief to landlord was not simply a change in title, but a reconfiguration of authority, access, and obligation across the *Gàidhealtachd*.<sup>78</sup>

### *“Improvement,” Enclosure, Clearance, and Crofting*

From the late eighteenth century onwards, landholding across much of the *Gàidhealtachd* was reshaped under the logic of “Improvement” that came along with the Industrial Revolution elsewhere in Europe. As England industrialized in the eighteenth century, Lowland and high-ranking clan members in the Highlands began to try to find ways to generate capital.<sup>79</sup> Estate owners in regions such as Ross-shire, Argyll, Inverness-shire, and, most infamously, Sutherland

---

<sup>76</sup> Robert A. Dodgshon, *From Chiefs to Landlords: Social and Economic Change in the Western Highlands and Islands, c.1493–1820*, (Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 1-4.

<sup>77</sup> Dodgshon, *From Chiefs to Landlords*, 178-117; Fenton, *Country Life in Scotland*, 32-35.

<sup>78</sup> For further reading on the breakdown of Clanship and kinship, see Dodgshon, *From Chiefs to Landlords*; I. F. Grant and Hugh Cheape, *Periods in Highland History* (London: Shephard-Walwyn, 1987), 203-269; and Allan I. Macinnes, “Scottish Gaeldom: The First Phase of Clearance,” in *People and Society in Scotland*, vol. 1, 1760–1830, ed. T. M. Devine and Rosalind Mitchison (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1988), 70–90.

<sup>79</sup> Grant and Cheape, *Periods in Highland History*, 224–269.

reorganized land to prioritize commercial output and financial gain for the landlords through large-scale sheep farming. This process involved the consolidation of both the smaller holdings used by tenant families as well as the open, communal-use lands that had sustained communal and transhumance practices. Grazing grounds for cattle, seasonal pasture routes, and access to woodland or peat banks were increasingly absorbed into estate-controlled property.<sup>80</sup> This restructuring, often described within the broader framework of Enclosure,<sup>81</sup> formed a central component of what would later be termed the Highland Clearances.<sup>82</sup>

In order to create large, continuous tracts of land suitable for sheep farming, landlords forced the relocation of tenants from long-occupied townships. In many cases, this involved the physical clearing of settlements: houses and other buildings were destroyed, and families were given limited time to remove their belongings and livestock.<sup>83</sup> Those displaced were typically resettled either on narrow inland strips of inferior land or, more commonly, on coastal plots known as “crofts.” While relocation did not usually remove people from the land entirely, it fundamentally altered both the scale and security of their access to it. The crofts were deliberately too small and insufficient “in order to ensure [crofters] could not provide a full living for their families and pay rents”<sup>84</sup> through

---

<sup>80</sup> Devine, *The Scottish Clearances*, 221–252.

<sup>81</sup> Although the term “enclosure” can be used broadly, its Scottish Highland context differed from the better-known English one. In England, enclosure is chiefly associated with the closing off of open fields and commons; in the Highlands, analogous change took the form of improvement, consolidation, and the reorganization of estates, often accompanied by the displacement of tenants and the breakdown of older communal patterns of life. Malcolm Chase, “Enclosure,” in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, eds. Iain McCalman, Jon Mee, Gillian Russell, Clara Tuite, Kate Fullagar, and Patsy Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199245437.001.0001/acref-9780199245437-e-218>.

<sup>82</sup> For further reading on the Clearances and the processes that preceded them, see James Hunter’s *The Making of the Crofting Community* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1976); Devine, *The Scottish Clearances*; and James Hunter, *Set Adrift Upon the World: The Sutherland Clearances* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2015).

<sup>83</sup> Hunter, *Set Adrift Upon the World*, 367.

<sup>84</sup> Devine, *The Scottish Clearances*, 120.

farming their new plots of land. Instead, in order to pay their ever-increasing rents, crofters were obliged to participate in supplementary activities like fishing, paid seasonal labour, or kelping.<sup>85</sup>

“Kelping” or kelp manufacturing was a complicated process. The seaweed that was found along the western coastlines was “rich in alkali,”<sup>86</sup> which was used in bleaching linen, as well as the production of soap and glass.<sup>87</sup> In the time of the Napoleonic Wars of the early nineteenth century, the price of kelp “became spectacularly profitable” for those able to produce it in Britain due to the supply issues caused by the wars, rising from £1 per ton up to £20.<sup>88</sup> Kelp manufacturing in Scotland peaked in 1810 with an output of 7,000 tons.<sup>89</sup> At low tide in the summer months, seaweed was typically cut and collected by men, but it was women who often carried the seaweed<sup>90</sup> either to the trenches dug for the express purpose of layering the seaweed with burning peat<sup>91</sup> or, in slightly more industrialized areas, specially-built kilns.<sup>92</sup> The seaweed would be calcinated (burned) right there on the shoreline for the sake of easier transport. Though profitable for a time, the wars that sent the prices soaring did not last forever. Once alternative options for buying kelp in Britain reopened, the prices dropped back down and the kelping industry all but ceased in most places along the Scottish shores.<sup>93</sup>

One of the most well documented examples of large-scale restructuring in the *Gàidhealtachd*, and one that makes visible in concrete terms the pressures and processes outlined

---

<sup>85</sup> Maccines, “Scottish Gaeldom,” 85.

<sup>86</sup> Grant, *Highland Folk Ways*, 61.

<sup>87</sup> Grant, *Highland Folk Ways*, 61; Grant and Cheape, *Periods in Highland History*, 228.

<sup>88</sup> Grant, *Highland Folk Ways*, 61.

<sup>89</sup> T. M. Devine, *Clanship to Crofters' War: The Social Transformation of the Scottish Highlands*. (St. Martin's Press, 1994), 43.

<sup>90</sup> Grant, *Highland Folk Ways*, 227.

<sup>91</sup> Grant, *Highland Folk Ways*, 61.

<sup>92</sup> Fenton, *Scottish Country Life*, 116.

<sup>93</sup> Grant, *Highland Folk Ways*, 62–63.

above, can be found in the Sutherland Clearances of the early nineteenth century. Beginning in 1807 and continuing for over a decade,<sup>94</sup> inland townships across the Sutherland estate were systematically cleared to make way for extensive sheep farms in some of the most destructive rounds of Clearance in the period. Tenants who had occupied these lands for generations were removed from their homes and resettled. This was far from a simple, easy, or peaceful process. Evictions were carried out by estate factors and so-called “eviction parties,” who moved systematically through inland districts, compelling tenants to leave and enforcing removal when they resisted. Houses, mills, and cultivated land were frequently destroyed in the process, both to prevent the people from returning and to clear the ground for incoming sheep farms. The destruction in 1819 was so widespread in Sutherland that the year garnered the name “*bliadhna na losgaidh*,” which translates literally to “the year of the burnings.”<sup>95</sup> Contemporary accounts describe agents cutting “a swathe”<sup>96</sup> through long-established communities, with entire townships dismantled or burned in their wake. Tens of thousands of small tenants were displaced in this way, their former settlements effectively erased from the landscape. Amongst the chaos this process brought, accusations of homicide and manslaughter were made by several of the tenants against some of those responsible for the evictions (most famously, Patrick Sellar, who would become known as “the most hated man in the Victorian Highlands”).<sup>97</sup> What was presented as

---

<sup>94</sup> Devine, *The Scottish Clearances*, 226.

<sup>95</sup> Hunter, *Set Adrift Upon the World*, 287.

<sup>96</sup> Eric Richards, *Patrick Sellar and the Highland Clearances: Homicide, Eviction and the Price of Progress*, (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2013), 1.

<sup>97</sup> Devine, *The Scottish Clearances*, 227. For a detailed study of a key figure in the Sutherland Clearances, see Richards, *Patrick Sellar and the Highland Clearances*.

“improvement” was experienced on the ground as forced removal, material destruction, and the abrupt disruption and dismantling of centuries-long ways of life.<sup>98</sup>

The effects on subsistence foodways followed directly from these changes in land access. Households that had previously relied on a combination of arable plots, shared grazing, and seasonal movement — the Shielings — now found those options restricted or unavailable. The loss of communal grazing reduced the number of cattle that could be kept, limiting dairying output and the production of butter and cheese. Fixed croft boundaries curtailed the ability to shift cultivation in response to local conditions, while reduced access to varied land types made it more difficult to balance grain production with pasture. Seasonal mobility, once a key strategy for managing limited resources, became increasingly constrained.<sup>99</sup> Subsistence did not collapse, but it operated under tighter limits, with fewer options for adjustment when conditions changed or hardship struck.

Under these conditions, the logic of production shifted. This was not because existing practices had failed, but because the material and social conditions that had supported them had been altered. What had once relied on movement, shared access, and a range of complementary activities was increasingly forced into forms that depended on fixed output from restricted land. It is within this context that the growing reliance on high-yield crops must be understood. As access to land became more restricted and less flexible, households were required to extract more sustenance from smaller and more fixed holdings. Following Clearance, many of the subsistence balancing mechanisms were reduced or lost almost entirely. The central problem became one of intensity rather than distribution: how to produce enough food from inadequate space. In this

---

<sup>98</sup> Hunter, *Set Adrift Upon the World*, 6-10; Devine, *The Scottish Clearances*, 226–228, 247.

<sup>99</sup> Grant and Cheape, *Periods in Highland History*, 227, 229.

context, increasing reliance on high-yield crops — most notably the potato — emerged as a practical necessity rather than a freely made cultural choice.

### *The Potato*

By the time the Clearances began in the 1750s, the potato had already become an established and increasingly important foodstuff for Highlanders and Islanders. Its adoption did not replace existing practices outright, but it altered their proportions. The potato was relatively easy to cultivate, harvest, and prepare (as, unlike grains, once harvested, they needed no “additional labour to make them edible”<sup>100</sup>), and was highly versatile in cooking. Potatoes could be boiled, mashed, roasted, fried on a girdle,<sup>101</sup> or baked as scones in the embers of a peat fire;<sup>102</sup> they could be paired with other staple foods and eaten at any meal of the day.<sup>103</sup> The feature that became most significant, however, was its caloric yield. Potatoes produced substantially more calories per acre than oats, bere, or other commonly grown crops, and they could do so on the damp, poor soils available to crofters.<sup>104</sup> Under conditions of reduced land access, this mattered. The potato made it possible to sustain a household on far less ground.

---

<sup>100</sup> Which is not to say they were eaten raw, only that they required no threshing, drying, or milling prior to consumption. Devine, *The Scottish Clearances*, 240.

<sup>101</sup> Similar to a “griddle” today. It was a “flat iron girdle, round or square, with legs of its own or a handle for hanging it” directly over the hearth. Fenton, *Scottish Country Life*, 164, 165, 199; Fenton, *Food of the Scots*, 6, 80, 81, 201, 214, 258, 324, 325, 333, 350, 351, 403; Grant, *Highland Folk Ways*, 219.

<sup>102</sup> Fenton, *Food of the Scots*, 321–341.

<sup>103</sup> Margaret Stewart, *Recipe Book*, 1799–1839, manuscript, National Library of Scotland, <https://digital.nls.uk/102697146>; Anonymous, *Household Recipe Book, Containing Culinary and Medical Recipes*, 1660–1699, National Library of Scotland, <https://digital.nls.uk/102666168>; Margaret Malcolm, *Recipe Book*, 1782, manuscript, National Library of Scotland, <https://digital.nls.uk/102826546>; Anonymous, *Recipe Book of the Fletcher of Saltoun Family*, 1709, National Library of Scotland, <https://digital.nls.uk/102693252>; James Hunter, *Insurrection: Scotland's Famine Winter* (Edinburgh: Birlinn Ltd, 2019), 71; McNeill, *The Scots Kitchen*.

<sup>104</sup> Devine, *The Scottish Clearances*, 239–240.

This shift did not immediately produce crisis. For a time, it reinforced existing patterns of subsistence. Higher yields supported growing households, even growing populations,<sup>105</sup> and allowed families to remain on reduced holdings that would otherwise have been insufficient under grain-based production alone. In this sense, the potato acted as a stabilizing force. However, this stability nevertheless carried consequences and dangers. As potato cultivation expanded, it altered how labour, land, and resources were allocated within the household.<sup>106</sup> Grain cultivation did not disappear, nor did dairying or fishing, but their relative importance shifted as a greater share of caloric intake came from a single crop. The result was not a complete monoculture or monocrop, but an undeniable redistribution of reliance. Fewer elements carried more weight.<sup>107</sup> This mattered because earlier resilience had depended on variety — on the ability to shift between food sources, to compensate for localized failure, and to distribute risk across multiple forms of production. As that range narrowed, so too did the capacity to absorb disruption.

## Discussion

When the Blight struck the potato crop in 1846 in Scotland, it acted upon a subsistence structure already shaped by land consolidation, reduced access to grazing, demographic pressure, and the increasing importance of a high-yield staple. The failure of the potato therefore removed not just one element from the diet, but a disproportionate share of its caloric base. In fact, by the time the Blight struck in 1846, it was estimated at the time that potatoes “constituted 75-88% of

---

<sup>105</sup> Devine, *The Scottish Clearances*, 221–222.

<sup>106</sup> Fenton, *Country Life in Scotland*, 146; Fenton, *Scottish Country Life*, 116; Devine, *The Scottish Clearances*, 205.

<sup>107</sup> Fenton, *Scottish Country Life*, 116.

the diet of Highland families.”<sup>108</sup> Highlanders and Islanders were not unaware of the threat; news of the crisis in Ireland circulated widely,<sup>109</sup> and the possibility of crop failure was well understood within a society long accustomed to dearth. What had changed was not their awareness, but their ability to respond. Alternative food sources — grain, dairy, fish — remained present, but their capacity to compensate had been constrained by reduced land access, diminished herd sizes, and the reweighting of subsistence practices. The famine that followed did not result from a single failed crop, nor from a failure to anticipate risk. It emerged from the convergence of multiple pressures that had, over time, limited the system’s capacity to adapt. A structure that was built to absorb intermittent, localized shortages encountered simultaneous constraint across land, labour, and food supply. Under such conditions, even a resilient arrangement could not hold. The resulting famine was not a simple “gap” famine, but a “great” one, marked by widespread, intense hunger and hardship.<sup>110</sup>

These pressures did not act in isolation. Over the course of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, land consolidation, the transformation of clan authority and dissolution of clan fealty, demographic strain, and the intensification of production increasingly acted together. By the 1840s, what had once allowed for flexibility and adjustment was operating within narrowing bounds. The failure of the potato did not create crisis on its own; it exposed the limits of what that reconfigured system could sustain.

---

<sup>108</sup> Fenton, *Scottish Country Life*, 117.

<sup>109</sup> Hunter, *Insurrection*, 7-17, 21-22, 29-30.

<sup>110</sup> For further reading on the Scottish potato famine, see Hunter, *Insurrection*; for further reading on the differences between levels of famine crises, see Eoin Flaherty, “Common-pool Resource Governance and Uneven Food Security: Regional Resilience during the Great Irish Famine, 1845–1852,” *Journal of Agrarian Change* 21, no. 2 (2021): 285–312, <https://doi.org/10.1111/joac.12396>

## Conclusion

This thesis argues that foodways in the *Gàidhealtachd* functioned not simply as patterns of diet, but as material infrastructures through which land, labour, and resources were organized. Cultivation, grazing, fuel use, seasonal movement, and preservation were not discrete activities, but interconnected practices that shaped everyday life for the non-gentry and enabled communities to sustain themselves within demanding environmental conditions. When examined in this way, foodways emerge not as peripheral details, but as central mechanisms through which subsistence was maintained and risk was managed.

Across the regions examined, variation in practice did not reflect disorder or inconsistency, but different configurations of the same underlying principles. In Shetland, where arable land was limited, marine resources formed a central pillar of subsistence, while in mainland Highland areas a more balanced integration of cultivation, grazing, and dairying was possible. These differences were not signs of uneven development, but of adaptation to local ecological conditions. In each case, subsistence operated through a combination of diversification, mobility, and shared access to resources, allowing households to respond flexibly to environmental and seasonal fluctuations.

The pressures of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries did not introduce crisis into an otherwise stable or static system, but one by one reshaped the conditions under which that system operated. The transformation of clanship into landlordism, the consolidation of land under Improvement, and the restructuring of settlement patterns through clearance altered access to land, reduced mobility, and narrowed the range of available subsistence strategies. These changes did not eliminate existing practices outright, but constrained how they could be combined and adapted. The increasing reliance on high-yield crops such as the potato must therefore be understood not as

a failure of foresight from the Highland and Island people, but as a reasonable, rational response to increasingly limited conditions.

What has often been characterized as inefficiency, backwardness, or resistance to progress emerges instead as a different model of subsistence, one calibrated not for surplus production or market integration, but for resilience and continuity. Earlier systems depended on diversity, redundancy, and the ability to shift between resources in response to local conditions. As these capacities were reduced, so too was the system's ability to absorb disruption. The famine of the 1840s did not result from ignorance or inertia, but from the convergence of pressures that had, over time, limited the flexibility of an otherwise adaptive system.

Re-centring foodways within the history of the *Gàidhealtachd* therefore offers more than a descriptive account of everyday life. It provides a means of bridging the gap between political economy and material practice, revealing how large-scale structural changes were experienced and negotiated at the level of the household and community. In doing so, it challenges narratives that frame Highlanders and Islanders as either passive victims or relics of a static past, and instead positions them as active participants in systems of adaptation shaped by both constraint and ingenuity.

## Bibliography

### Language References

Jamieson, John. *Jamieson's Dictionary of the Scottish Language*. 1866. Reprint, abridged by J. Johnstone and revised and enlarged by John Longmuir, with a supplement and introduction by W. M. Metcalfe. Paisley: Alexander Gardner, 1912.

Lawson, Robert, ed. *Sociolinguistics in Scotland*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137034717>.

MacLeod, Norman, and Daniel Dewar. *A Dictionary of the Gaelic Language*. Edinburgh: John Grant, 1909.

### Maps

“Local Authority Regions.” *Public Contracts Scotland*. Accessed February 2026. <https://www.publiccontractsscotland.gov.uk/Maps/LocalAuthorityRegions.aspx>.

“Maps of Scotland.” Scotland Info Guide, June 2023. Accessed February 2026. <https://www.scotlandinfo.eu/other-maps-of-scotland/>.

### Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology

Beech, John, ed. *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology. Vol. 9: The Individual and Community Life*. Edinburgh: John Donald in association with the European Ethnological Research Centre and the National Museums of Scotland, 2005.

Coull, James R., Alexander Fenton, and Kenneth Veitch, eds. *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology. Vol. 4: Boats, Fishing and the Sea*. Edinburgh: John Donald, 2008.

Fenton, Alexander, and Kenneth Veitch, eds. *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology. Vol. 2: Farming and the Land*. Edinburgh: John Donald in association with the European Ethnological Research Centre, 2011.

Fenton, Alexander, and Margaret A. Mackay, eds. *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology. Vol. 1: An Introduction to Scottish Ethnology*. Edinburgh: John Donald in association with the European Ethnological Research Centre, 2013.

Fenton, Alexander. *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology. Vol. 5: The Food of the Scots*. Edinburgh: John Donald in association with the European Ethnological Research Centre, 2007.

- Mulhern, Mark A., John Beech, and Elaine Thompson, eds. *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology. Vol. 7: The Working Life of the Scots*. Edinburgh: John Donald, 2008.
- Storrier, Susan, and Alexander Fenton, eds. *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology. Vol. 6: Scotland's Domestic Life*. Edinburgh: John Donald in association with the European Ethnological Research Centre and the National Museums of Scotland, 2006.
- Coull, James R. "Shellfishing." In *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology*, vol. 4, *Boats, Fishing and the Sea*. Edited by James R. Coull, Alexander Fenton, and Kenneth Veitch, 374–388. Edinburgh: John Donald, 2008.
- Dodgshon, Robert A. "Highland Touns before the Clearances." In *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology. Vol. 2: Farming and the Land*. Edited by Alexander Fenton and Kenneth Veitch, 111–132. Edinburgh: John Donald, 2011.
- Holmes, Heather. "Seasonal and Casual Agricultural Workers." In *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology. Vol. 2: Farming and the Land*. Edited by Alexander Fenton and Kenneth Veitch, 477–502. Edinburgh: John Donald, 2011.
- Mather, Alexander. "Geology, Soils, Climate, and Vegetation." In *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology. Vol. 2: Farming and the Land*. Edited by Alexander Fenton and Kenneth Veitch, 63–86. Edinburgh: John Donald, 2011.
- Fenton, Alexander. "Craig Fishing." In *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology. Vol. 4: Boats, Fishing and the Sea*. Edited by James R. Coull, Alexander Fenton, and Kenneth Veitch, 85–89. Edinburgh: John Donald, 2008.
- Dodgshon, Robert A. "Livestock Farming in the Highlands and Islands before and after the Clearances." In *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology. Vol. 2: Farming and the Land*. Edited by Alexander Fenton and Kenneth Veitch, 545–565. Edinburgh: John Donald, 2011.

*Academic Articles and Websites*

- "The Women of Scotland." Historic Environment Scotland | History. Accessed January 2026. <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/archives-and-research/online-exhibitions/the-women-of-scotland/>.
- "Recipes from Scotland: 1680s to 1940s." National Library of Scotland. Accessed January 2026. <https://digital.nls.uk/recipes/themes/>.

- Bechhofer, Frank, and David McCrone. "What Makes a Gael? Identity, Language and Ancestry in the Scottish Gàidhealtachd." *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 21, no. 2 (2014): 113-133.
- Elias, Megan. "Summoning the Food Ghosts: Food History as Public History." *The Public Historian* 34, no. 2 (2012): 13–29. <https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2012.34.2.13>.
- Flaherty, Eoin. "Common-pool Resource Governance and Uneven Food Security: Regional Resilience during the Great Irish Famine, 1845–1852." *Journal of Agrarian Change* (HOBOKEN) 21, no. 2 (2021): 285–312. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joac.12396>.
- Little, J. I. "Agricultural Improvement and Highland Clearance: The Isle of Arran, 1766–1829." *Scottish Economic & Social History* 19, no. 2 (November 1999): 132–154. <https://doi.org/10.3366/sesh.1999.19.2.132>.
- Mitchell, Janet. "Cookbooks as a Social and Historical Document. A Scottish Case Study." *Food Service Technology* 1, no. 1 (2001): 13–23. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1471-5740.2001.00002.x>.
- Scottish Archeological Research Framework (ScARF). "Case Study: Transhumance and Shielings." In *Modern Case Studies*. Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. Accessed January 2026. <https://scarf.scot/national/scarf-modern-panel-report/modern-case-studies/case-study-transhumance-and-shielings/>.

#### Primary Sources and Historic Photos

- Am Baile. *Am Baile: Highland History and Culture*. Accessed February 2026. <https://www.ambaile.org.uk>.
- Anonymous. *Household Recipe Book, Containing Culinary and Medical Recipes*. 1660–1699. Manuscript. National Library of Scotland. <https://digital.nls.uk/102666168>.
- Anonymous. *Recipe Book of the Fletcher of Saltoun Family*. 1709. Manuscript. National Library of Scotland. <https://digital.nls.uk/102693252>.
- Malcolm, Margaret. *Recipe Book*. 1782. Manuscript. National Library of Scotland. <https://digital.nls.uk/102826546>.
- Sinclair, Catherine. *Scotland and the Scotch; or, The Western Circuit*. New York: D. Appleton, 1840.
- Sinclair, Sir John. *The Statistical Account of Scotland*. Kilmalie, Inverness, vol. 8 (1793): 407–447. Edinburgh: William Creech. Online at University of Edinburgh, University of

Glasgow (1999): <https://stataccscot.ed.ac.uk:443/link/osa-vol8-p407-parish-inverness-kilmalie>.

Sinclair, Sir John. *The Statistical Account of Scotland*. Barvas, Ross and Cromarty, vol. 19 (1793): 263–273. Edinburgh: William Creech Online at University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow (1999): <https://stataccscot.ed.ac.uk:443/link/osa-vol19-p263-parish-ross-and-cromarty-barvas>.

Sinclair, Sir John. *The Statistical Account of Scotland*. Harris, Inverness, vol. 10 (1793): 342–392. Edinburgh: William Creech. Online at University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow (1999): <https://stataccscot.ed.ac.uk:443/link/osa-vol10-p353-parish-inverness-harris>.

Sinclair, Sir John. *The Statistical Account of Scotland*. Kilninian and Kilmore, Argyle, vol. 14 (1793): 139–159. Edinburgh: William Creech. Online at University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow (1999): <https://stataccscot.ed.ac.uk:443/link/osa-vol14-p140-parish-argyle-kilninian-and-kilmore>.

Sinclair, Sir John. *The Statistical Account of Scotland*. Kilninver and Kilmelfort, Argyle, vol. 10 (1793): 315–325. Edinburgh: William Creech. Online at University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow (1999): <https://stataccscot.ed.ac.uk:443/link/osa-vol10-p316-parish-argyle-kilninver-and-kilmelfort>.

Sinclair, Sir John. *The Statistical Account of Scotland*. Lerwick, Shetland, vol. 3 (1793): 414–420. Edinburgh: William Creech. Online at University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow (1999): <https://stataccscot.ed.ac.uk:443/link/osa-vol3-p420-parish-shetland-lerwick>.

Stewart, Margaret. *Recipe Book*. 1799–1839. Manuscript. National Library of Scotland. <https://digital.nls.uk/102697146>.

### Books

Abrams, Lynn, and Callum G. Brown. *A History of Everyday Life in Twentieth-Century Scotland*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010.

Abrams, Lynn. *Myth and Materiality in a Woman's World: Shetland 1800–2000*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2005.

Bennett, Margaret. *Scottish Customs: From the Cradle to the Grave*. Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2004.

Brown, Catherine. *Broths to Bannocks: Cooking in Scotland 1690 to the Present Day*. Glasgow: Waverley Books, 2010. Accessed March 11, 2025. [https://archive.org/details/brothstobannocks0000brow\\_u5e4](https://archive.org/details/brothstobannocks0000brow_u5e4).

- Burnett, Kathryn A., Ray Burnett, and Michael Danson, eds. *Scotland and Islandness: Explorations in Community, Economy, and Culture*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2021.
- Campbell, John Lorne. *A Very Civil People: Hebridean Folk, History and Tradition*. Edited by Hugh Cheape. Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2000.
- Chase, Malcolm. "Enclosure." In *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*. Edited by Iain McCalman, Jon Mee, Gillian Russell, Clara Tuite, Kate Fullagar, and Patsy Hardy. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. <https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/view/10.1093/acref/9780199245437.001.0001/acref-9780199245437-e-218>.
- Cheape, Hugh, ed. *Tools and Traditions: Studies in European Ethnology Presented to Alexander Fenton*. Edinburgh: National Museums of Scotland, 1993.
- Cheape, Hugh. "Cha ghabhadh na b' fheàrr fhaighinn ('It couldn't be better'): Gaelic Perspectives on Island Cultural Heritage in Scotland's Hebrides." In *Scotland and Islandness: Explorations in Community, Economy, and Culture*. Edited by Kathryn A. Burnett, Ray Burnett, and Michael Danson, 53-74. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2021.
- Cheape, Jane. *Hand to Mouth: The Traditional Food of the Scottish Islands*. Acair Ltd, 2002.
- Cullen, Karen J. *Famine in Scotland: The "Ill Years" of the 1690s*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780748641840>.
- Dawson, Jane. "The Gaidhealtachd and the Emergence of the Scottish Highlands." In *British Consciousness and Identity*. Edited by Brendan Bradshaw and Peter Roberts. Cambridge University Press, 1998. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511660191.011>.
- Devine, T. M. *Clanship to Crofters' War: The Social Transformation of the Scottish Highlands*. Distributed exclusively in the USA and Canada by St. Martin's Press, 1994.
- Devine, T. M. *The Scottish Clearances: A History of the Dispossessed, 1600–1900*. London: Allen Lane, 2018.
- Devine, T. M., and Rosalind Mitchison, eds. *People and Society in Scotland. vol. 1, 1760–1830*. Edinburgh: John Donald, 1988.
- Dodgshon, Robert A. *From Chiefs to Landlords: Social and Economic Change in the Western Highlands and Islands, c. 1493–1820*. Edinburgh University Press, 1998.
- Durham, Mercedes. "Thirty Years Later: Real-Time Change and Stability in Attitudes towards the Dialect in Shetland." In *Sociolinguistics in Scotland*, edited by Robert Lawson, 296–317. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

- Fenton, Alexander, and Bruce Walker. *The Rural Architecture of Scotland*. Edinburgh: John Donald, 1981.
- Fenton, Alexander, and Desmond A. Gillmor, eds. *Rural Land Use on the Atlantic Periphery of Europe: Scotland & Ireland*. Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1994.
- Fenton, Alexander, and Eszte Kisban, eds. *Food in Change: Eating Habits from the Middle Ages to the Present Day*. Edinburgh: John Donald in association with the National Museums of Scotland, 1986.
- Fenton, Alexander. *Country Life in Scotland: Our Rural Past*. Edinburgh: John Donald, 1987.
- Fenton, Alexander. *Scottish Country Life*. Edinburgh: John Donald, 1976.
- Fenton, Alexander. *The Northern Isles: Orkney and Shetland*. Edinburgh: John Donald, 1978.
- Fenton, Alexander. *The Island Blackhouse: And a Guide to "The Blackhouse" No. 42, Arnol*. Edinburgh: H.M.S.O., 1989.
- Foyster, Elizabeth A. and Christopher A. Whatley. *A History of Everyday Life in Scotland, 1600 to 1800*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010.  
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9780748629060>.
- Geddes, Olive M. *The Laird's Kitchen: Three Hundred Years of Food in Scotland*. Edinburgh: H.M.S.O., 1994.
- Grant, I. F. *Everyday Life in Old Scotland: Part II, 1603–1707*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1931.
- Grant, I. F. *Highland Folk Ways*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961.
- Grant, I. F. *The Economic History of Scotland*. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1934.
- Grant, I. F. *The Social and Economic Development of Scotland Before 1603*. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1930.
- Grant, I. F., Alexander Fenton, the European Ethnological Research Centre, and the National Museums of Scotland. *The Making of Am Fasgadh: An Account of the Origins of the Highland Folk Museum*. Edinburgh: National Museums of Scotland, 2007.
- Grant, I. F., and Hugh Cheape. *Periods in Highland History*. London: Shephard-Walwyn, 1987.
- Grant, I. F., and William Mackintosh. *Every-day Life on an Old Highland Farm, 1769–1782*. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1924.

- Hunter, James. *Culloden and the Last Clansman*. Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2001.
- Hunter, James. *Insurrection: Scotland's Famine Winter*. Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2019.
- Hunter, James. *On the Other Side of Sorrow: Nature and People in the Scottish Highlands*. Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2014.
- Hunter, James. *Scottish Highlanders: A People and Their Place*. Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishers, 1992.
- Hunter, James. *Set Adrift Upon the World: The Sutherland Clearances*. Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2015.
- Hunter, James. *The Making of the Crofting Community*. Edinburgh: John Donald, 1976.
- Macinnes, Allan I. "Scottish Gaeldom: The First Phase of Clearance." In *People and Society in Scotland*, vol. 1, 1760–1830, edited by T. M. Devine and Rosalind Mitchison, 70–90. Edinburgh: John Donald, 1988.
- McNeill, F. Marian. *The Scots Cellar: Its Traditions and Lore*. Moffat: Lochar, 1992.
- McNeill, F. Marian. *The Scots Kitchen: Classic Recipes and Traditions*. First published 1929. Edited and introduced by Catherine Brown. Illustrated by Iain McIntosh. Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2025.
- Pittock, Murray. *The Myth of the Jacobite Clans: The Jacobite Army in 1745*. Second comprehensively revised and expanded edition. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474471688>.
- Prescott, Cynthia C. and Maureen S. Thompson, eds. *Backstories: The Kitchen Table Talk Cookbook*. The Digital Press at the University of North Dakota, 2021.
- Richards, Eric. *Patrick Sellar and the Highland Clearances: Homicide, Eviction, and the Price of Progress*. Edinburgh: Polygon, 2013. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474472005>.