

Old Word Meanings

Meanings of unusual words or abbreviations that might be encountered in old parish registers, early censuses, rental records, or other old documents. Additions are always welcome at [email](mailto:).

[For more detail, or meanings of words not listed here, try [Dictionary of the Scots Language](#)]

Vc, 'ic, Mhic & Mac. When written as part of a man's name or pedigree these all mean "son of". For example, a pedigree written as *Domhnall mac Pharaic 'ic Iain 'ic Niall 'ic Chaluum* translates as *Donald, son of Peter, son of John, son of Neil, son of Malcolm*. It could have been written just as well as *Domhnall mac Pharaic Vc Iain Vc Niall Vc Chaluum*, or in more archaic Gaelic as *Dhòmhnaill Mac Pharaic Mhic Iain Mhic Niall Mhic Chaluum*.. Similarly, *Ne* means "daughter of".

| Word | Meaning |
|---------------------------|---|
| ae | Only (e.g only son) |
| agnate | One related on the father's side |
| air (ayr) | Heir |
| airis (ayris) | Heirs |
| ane | One |
| anent | Concerning |
| anis | Once |
| annam | Weak |
| arle | Taken into service on payment of a sum of money |
| assadat | Let or leased |
| assedation | A tack or letting of land for a term |
| Bailie | Officer employed by a landowner to give sasine or formal possession of land |
| bairn | Child (see also wean) |
| bàn (bain, bane) | Fair (see also bhàin). |
| banns | Notice of contract of marriage read out in the church some weeks before the marriage takes place. |
| base-born | Illegitimate, born out of wedlock. |
| bear (bere, beir) | Barley |
| beet | Flax, bundle of |
| bhàin | Fair (see also bàn, bain, bane). |
| biggen | With child |
| birlinn | Large rowing boat (Western Highlands) |
| blanter | Oat-based food (e.g. porridge, bread) |
| blind | Doll. |
| boll | A volume measure of grain, meal, potatoes etc. that varied according to commodity and locality. Commonly, a boll of wheat was about 4 Imp. bushels, a boll of oats, barley or potatoes was about 6 Imp. bushels, and a boll of meal weighed about 140 lb. Smaller measures related to the boll were: firlot = ¼ boll, peck = ¼ firlot, lippie = ¼ peck. A chalder was 16 bolls. Boll was also used as a term of valuation of crop land according to the number of bolls it could produce. |
| bone (bonday) wark | Unpaid work as part of tenant service |
| bothy | A building that housed bachelor farm labourers and itinerant workers |
| braboner | Weaver |
| brod | Young child, often the youngest in the family |
| bronnach | Big-bellied |
| buggis | Lamb's wool |
| bygottin | Illegitimate |
| Candlemas | 2 nd February, a Scots quarter day (with Lammas, Matinmas and Whitsunday, the days on which farm contracts, leases, rents began and ended). |

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| carriage | A form of servitude in which a tenant was bound to carry for the proprietor a stated quantity of coals, grain etc., or to supply him with men and horses for a stated number of days in the year. |
| cedent | An individual who assigns property to another. |
| cessioner | An individual who receives property ceded by another. |
| chalder | A measure of 16 bolls. |
| choppin | Quart measure. |
| coir | Strange. |
| compear | To appear, as before a court or kirk session. |
| consanguinean | A brother or sister who has the same father but not the same mother. |
| cose (cosse) | An exchange, usually of lands. |
| cottar | Person occupying a farm cottage in return for labouring on the farm. |
| crofter | Tenant of a small acreage of arable land, usually with a cottage. |
| depone | Give evidence, make oath. |
| dispone | Dispose of or convey land. |
| dissenter | Non-conformist, i.e. does not conform to the established church (e.g. Baptist) |
| dou (dow, dubh, duy) | Black or dark. |
| dsp | <i>Decessit sine prole</i> , died without issue. |
| dubh (dou, dow, duy) | Black or dark. |
| eild | Children of, issue |
| ell | A measure of length, varying between regions and countries, but traditionally the distance from elbow to finger tips or shoulder to wrist. |
| eschet | Forfeiture, of goods or estate |
| executry | Moveable property of a deceased person. |
| Factor | Person empowered by a proprietor to manage estate affairs. |
| father-in-law | May mean either step-father or wife's father. |
| firlot | A volume measure of grain, meal, potatoes etc. equivalent to ¼ of a boll . A common standard for 1 firlot was: wheat = 1 Imp. bushel; barley, oats & potatoes = 1½ Imp. bushels; meal = 35 lb. |
| gimmer | Female sheep 1-2 years old, maiden ewe. |
| glun | Knee. |
| grieve | Overseer of a farm or estate. |
| herd (hird, hyrd) | Farm hand looking after cattle, shepherd. |
| hog | One-year-old sheep (hogget). |
| 'ic | Son of, as in <i>Donald McAllen 'ic Conell 'ic Neill</i> (see also Mhic, Vc) |
| kirk | The Church, in particular the Church of Scotland. |
| kirk session | Church court made up of the minister and elders of the parish. |
| Lammas | 1 st August, one of the quarter days (see Candlemas, Matinmas & Whitsunday) |
| ley (lea) | Unploughed land, pasture land. |
| lippie (forpet) | A volume measure of grain, meal, potatoes etc. equivalent to ¼ of a Scots peck . Where still used it usually means 1¾ lb by weight. |
| lùbanach | Wily |
| maill | Rent. Maills and Duties were yearly rents due in money or grain. |
| maill-land | A land measure, recorded only in Tìree, amounting to one forty-eighth of a tìrung . A tìrung was 6 merkland , and was divided into 48 malies or 20 pennylands . |
| Matinmas | 11 th November, one of the quarter days (see Candlemas, Lammas & Whitsunday) |
| merkland | An ancient unit of valuation of land related to its productive capacity (a merk was a silver coin worth two-thirds of a pound Scots). |
| Mhic | Son of, as in <i>Donald McAllen Mhic Conell Mhic Neill</i> (see also 'ic, Vc) |
| milne | Mill |

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|--------------------------|---|
| mòr (mhor, mhòir) | Great. |
| natural | Illegitimate, born out of wedlock. |
| neuo | Nephew |
| ocht | Eight |
| odhar | Swarthy |
| oig | Young |
| peck | A Scots peck was a volume measure of grain, meal, potatoes etc.equivalent to ¼ of a firlot . A peck of meal was about 9 lbs in weight. |
| pendicle | A small piece of land that is a subsidiary part of a large estate; an appurtenance or minor property |
| pennyland | An ancient unit of valuation of land, used particularly in the Ross of Mull, equivalent to about half a merkland , the ancient unit used in Tìree and elsewhere. |
| poffeft be | Possessed (i.e occupied) by, in relation to land. |
| presbytery | Ecclesiastical court of ministers and elders of a district of several parishes. |
| quha | Who. |
| quhilk | Which. |
| relict | Widow or widower, the surviving member of a married couple |
| roup | An auction, conducted under conditions called "Articles of Roup" |
| roy (ruadh) | Red-haired |
| runrig | Narrow strips of farm land allocated to tenants. |
| sasine (seisin) | Act giving legal possession of property (land, house); deed recording the act. |
| sett | A lease. |
| sprangach | Bold |
| stipend | A regular payment made in money, grain, or both, to a parish minister. |
| stirk | Yearling heifer or bullock. |
| stot | Bullock. |
| tack | A lease. |
| tacksman | A person, often a relative of the proprietor, who had a lease of a substantial area of land and sub-let parts of it. A person of considerable power in small Highland and Island communities. |
| teinds | Scots equivalent of English tithes, a tenth part of the annual produce or income payable to the church. |
| threttein | Thirteen |
| tìrung | A land measure used in Tìree. It was equivalent to 6 merkland , and was divided into 48 maill-land (mailies) or 20 pennyland . |
| umquhile | Deceased, the late. |
| uterine | Children of the same mother but not the same father. |
| Vc | Son of, as in <i>Donald McAllen Vc Conell Vc Neill</i> (see also ' ic , Mhic) |
| victual | Grain of any kind. |
| wadset | A mortgage. The conveyance of land in pledge for a debt. |
| wafte | Waste (i.e unproductive) land. |
| wean | Child, bairn |
| wedder | Castrated male sheep (i.e. wether) |
| Whitsunday | 15 th May, one of the quarter days (see Candlemas, Lammas & Matinmas) |
| yeiris | Years |

Acknowledgments: [ScotlandsPeople](#), [Dictionary of the Scots Language](#), [The Wedderburn Pages](#), [Scottish Archive Network](#), Gene Lamont, Ian Phillips, Flo Straker, Nanette Mitchell.