

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).

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

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
tirung	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.