



The Celts and their Languages 5

Goidelic languages and History of Irish

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Goidelic languages

The Irish called themselves in the old Irish language as **Goidel**, hence the name. The most common etymological explanation says that this name was originally a brythonic borrowing and came from OW *Gwyddel* “Irish” (related to MW *gwyd* “wild”).

Old word *goídelc* referred to the “Irish language”. In the classical modern Irish had this name developed into *Gaoidhealg*, which has been simplified into *Gaeilge*. (and this is by the way where the Eng. **Gaelic** originated from.

Transl. Václav Blažek, *Keltské Jazyky*

The Goidelic languages include:

Irish

Scottish Gaelic

Manx

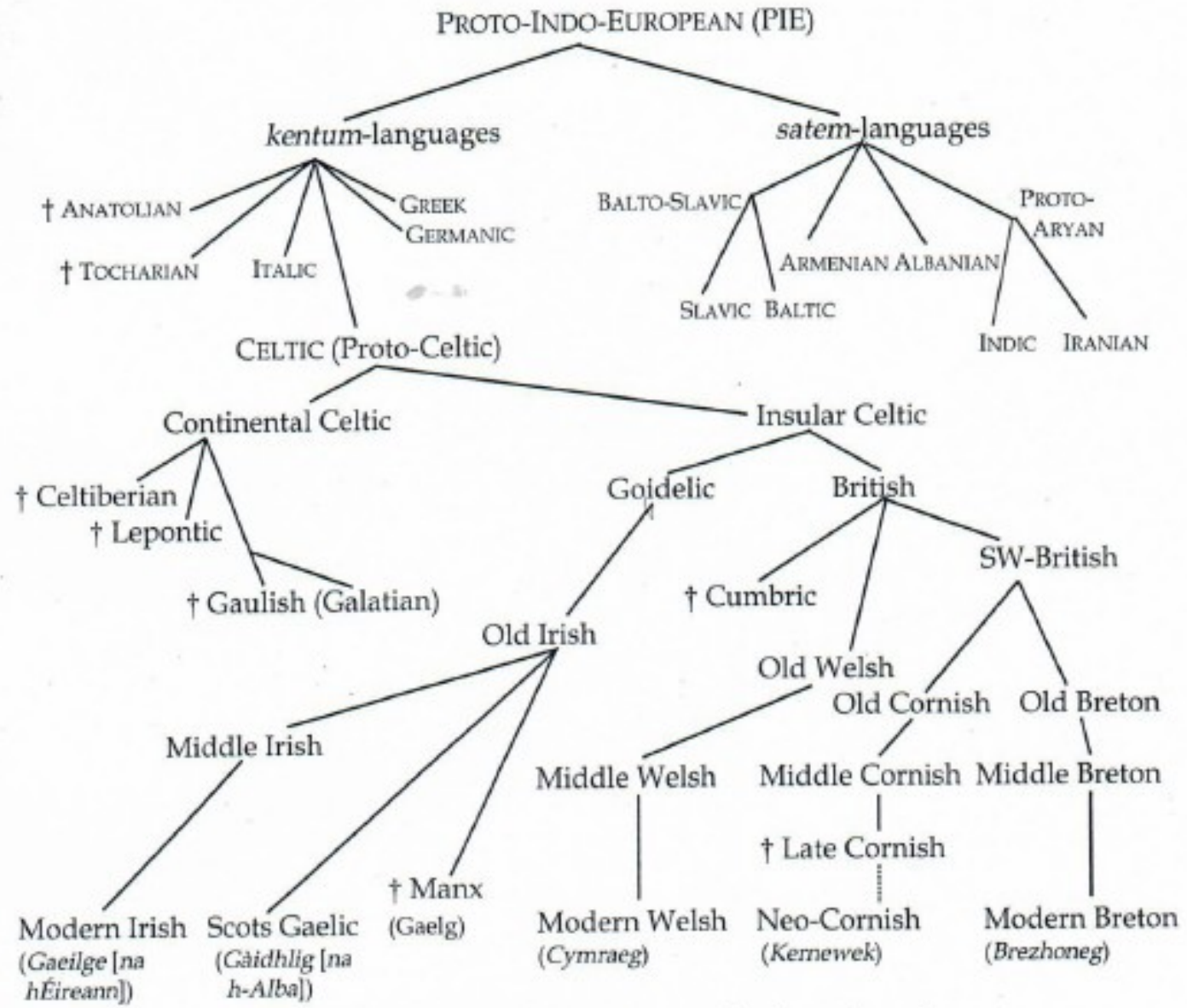
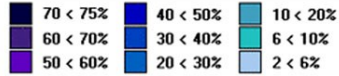


Illustration 1.1: The Celtic languages and the Indo-European family tree; † = extinct

Geographic Distribution of the Gaelic Languages

Irish, Scottish Gaelic, Manx



% of Gaelic language speakers

Scotland

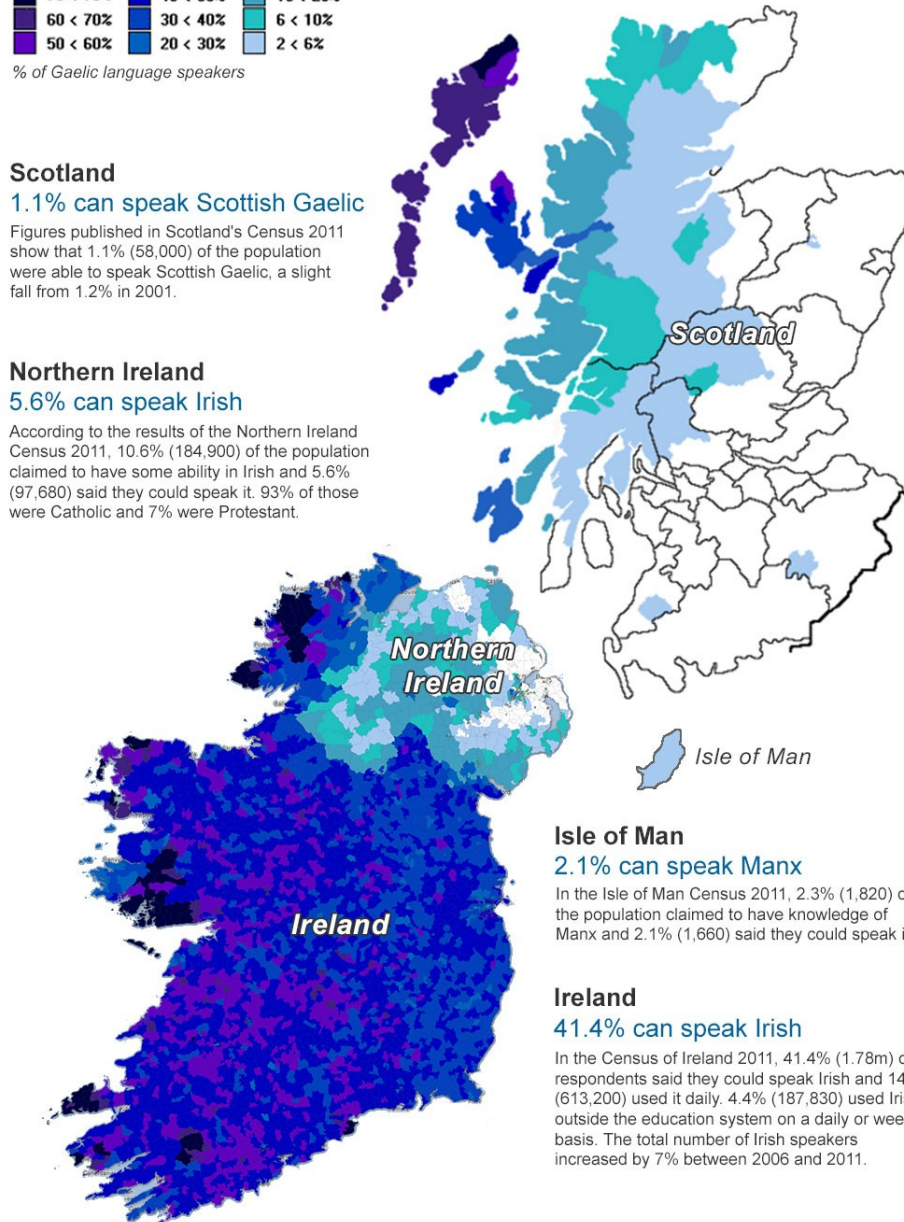
1.1% can speak Scottish Gaelic

Figures published in Scotland's Census 2011 show that 1.1% (58,000) of the population were able to speak Scottish Gaelic, a slight fall from 1.2% in 2001.

Northern Ireland

5.6% can speak Irish

According to the results of the Northern Ireland Census 2011, 10.6% (184,900) of the population claimed to have some ability in Irish and 5.6% (97,680) said they could speak it. 93% of those were Catholic and 7% were Protestant.



Isle of Man

2.1% can speak Manx

In the Isle of Man Census 2011, 2.3% (1,820) of the population claimed to have knowledge of Manx and 2.1% (1,660) said they could speak it.

Ireland

41.4% can speak Irish

In the Census of Ireland 2011, 41.4% (1.78m) of respondents said they could speak Irish and 14% (613,200) used it daily. 4.4% (187,830) used Irish outside the education system on a daily or weekly basis. The total number of Irish speakers increased by 7% between 2006 and 2011.

Ireland **ULSTER**



4
**Ancient
Provinces**



History of Irish

The proper name of Ireland is *Ériu* (W *Iwerydd*).

The oldest documented words of Goidelic origin are found in **Ptolemy's Geography** (around 150 AD), where in the description of Ireland, he mentioned more than 30 place and tribal names.

Proto-Goidelic

Prehistoric ancestor of Irish, spoken in Ireland at least at the beginning of the Christian era, if not earlier.

Primitive Irish (Ogam Irish)

The earliest preserved Irish is found in about 300 stone inscriptions written in **Ogam (Ogham)** script. The origin of the Ogam script is unknown and most of the inscriptions come from southern Ireland and date back between the fourth and seventh centuries AD. They are usually short burial inscriptions.

In medieval manuscript tradition names for Ogam letters have come down to us. Often tree names are used for the names of the individual letters, but many of the identifications are dubious. Also not all original phonological values of the Ogam letters are absolutely clear.



Figure 1: Distribution map of early medieval ogham stones based on searches of online national databases in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales (McKeague and Thomas forthcoming, Sampled 18 December 2015). Data is derived from multiple sources: © *Historic Environment Scotland*; © *Crown Copyright RCAHMW*; © *Historic England*; © *NIEA*; © *Copyright Government of Ireland*

Group I		
┆	B	Beithe (Birch)
┆┆	L	Luis (Rowan-tree)
┆┆┆	F (V)	Fern (Alder)
┆┆┆┆	S	Sail (Willow)
┆┆┆┆┆	N	Nin (Ash-tree?)

Group II		
┆	H (P/J?)	hÚath (Whitethorn, Fear?)
┆┆	D	Dair (Oak)
┆┆┆	T	Tinne (Holly?)
┆┆┆┆	C	Coll (Hazel)
┆┆┆┆┆	Q	Cert (Bush?)

Illustration 2.1a: The Ogam alphabet

Group III		
┆	M	Muin (Vine)
┆┆	G	Gort (Ivy)
┆┆┆	NG (G ^v)	nGétal (Killing)
┆┆┆┆	Z (ST?)	Straif (Sulphur)
┆┆┆┆┆	R	Ruis (Elder-tree)

Group IV		
┆	A	Ailm (Pine-tree)
┆┆	O	Onn (Ash-tree)
┆┆┆	U	Úr (Heath)
┆┆┆┆	E	Edad (Aspen?)
┆┆┆┆┆	I	Idad (Yew Tree?)

Illustration 2.1b: The Ogam alphabet





In the **fifth century**, Ireland converted to Christianity and this resulted in the introduction of the **Roman alphabet**. In the following two centuries, the Irish language changed radically and started resembling the Irish we know from the most popular medieval Irish literature.

Old Irish

Approximately from the **seventh to the mid-900s**.

Religious manuscripts brought to the Continent (Milan, Turin, Würzburg) by Irish missionaries in the **eighth and ninth** centuries represent our only contemporary documentation of the Old Irish classical period (commentaries on the psalms). They survived on the Continent for nobody understood them and they were not worn out from continuous use and recopied with modernized spellings.

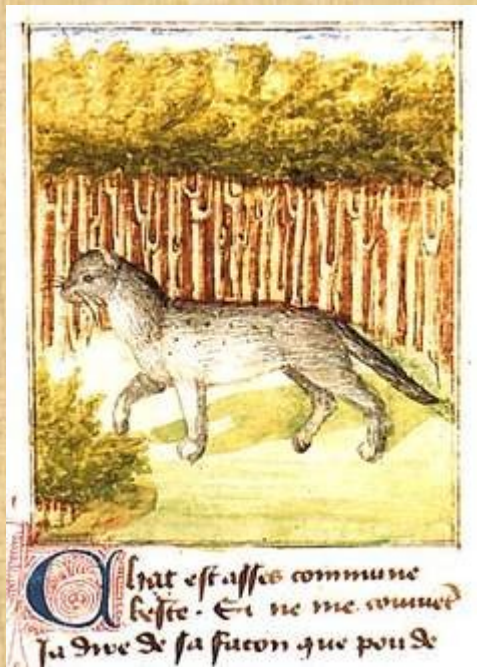
Many texts that have survived were copied into much later manuscripts.

Old Irish possesses an extremely high number of phonemes in comparison to other European languages (esp. consonants). 18 letters are thus used to express 66 sounds, which means that on average every letter has more than 3 sound meanings.

In modern Irish, the number of phonemes was reduced to 52. This is dealt with by introducing **broad** and **slender** consonants (**palatalization**).

Example: **Old Irish poem *The Scholar and his Cat***

A poem about a monk and his cat (Pangur Bán) found in a manuscript in the monastery of St. Paul in Lavanttal in Austria (written around the 9th century).



Middle Irish

10-13th century

There were a lot of far-reaching changes in the morphological system of the language - simplification of verb conjugations.

Reduction of phonemes.

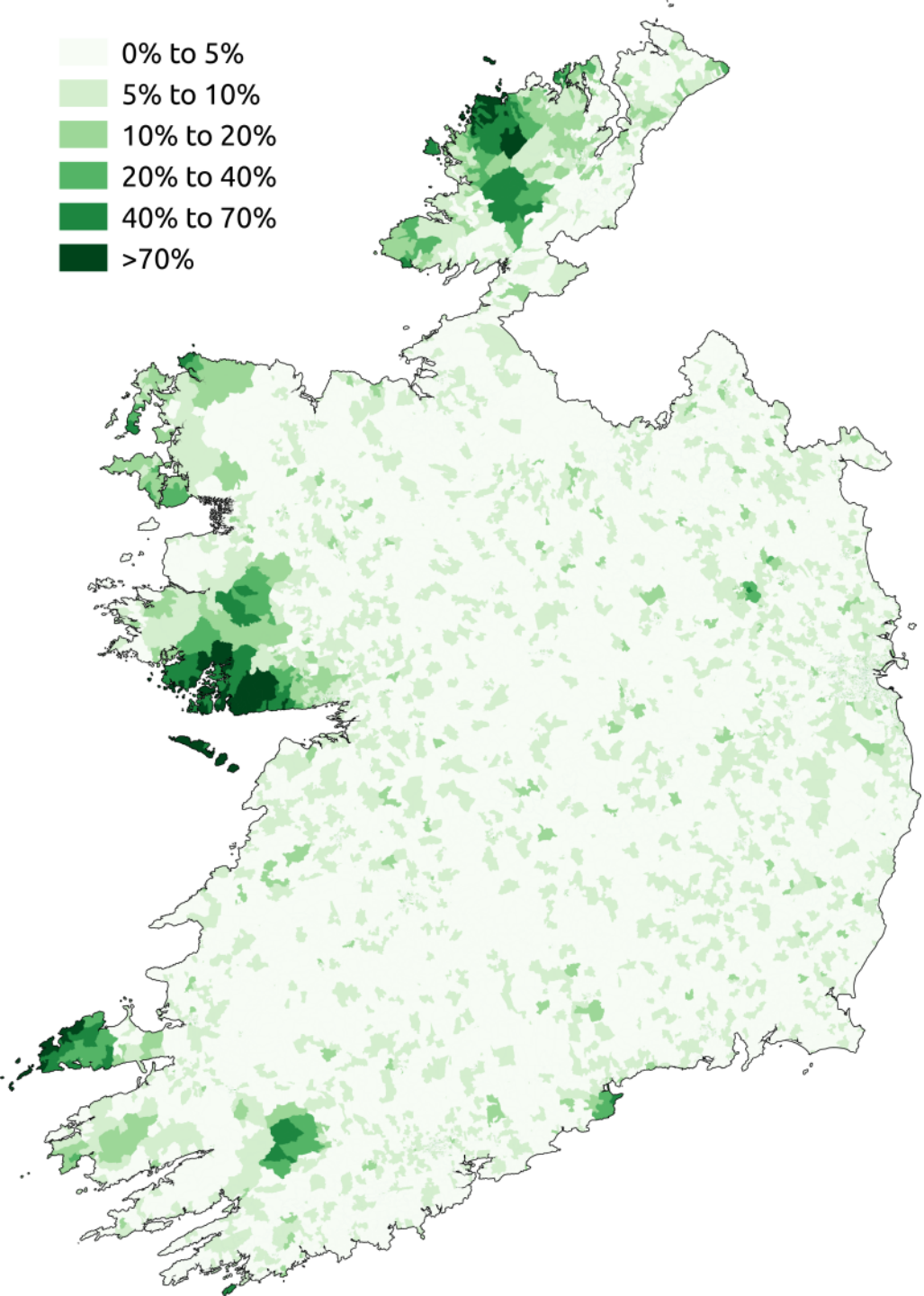
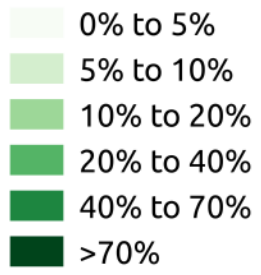
By the end of the 13th century, the language was effectively as it is today.

Modern Irish

The modern Irish period begins with the codification of a normative form of the language by bards and other literary elite in the **13th century**. In the early 1600s, however, different regional varieties appeared (Munster, Connacht and Ulster) - they exist until these days.

During the **17th century**, Ireland received an English speaking ruling class and the status of the Irish language quickly deteriorated and became a language of the rural poor. During the **potato famine** (1845-1849) much of the Irish speaking population died and about a million and a half migrated into America.

Today, more people learn Irish as L2, but the future of the Irish speaking community, *Gaeltacht*, remains uncertain.



The percentage of respondents who said they spoke Irish daily outside the education system in the 2011 census in the State.

Medieval Irish literature

This literature represents the most extensive and best preserved texts of all the branches of Celtic mythology.

There are four main cycles:

Mythological Cycle (the mythological beginning of Ireland, Metrical Dindshenchas, The Dream of Aengus and others).

Ulster Cycle (set in the 1st century and takes place in Ulster and Connacht- group of heroic tales of warriors, the central piece is Táin Bó Cúailnge „*The Cattle Raid of Cooley*“ .

Fenian Cycle (deeds of Irish heroes, set probably in the 3rd century).

Historical Cycle (bards used to record the history and the genealogy of the kings they served- the resulting stories became the Historical Cycle).

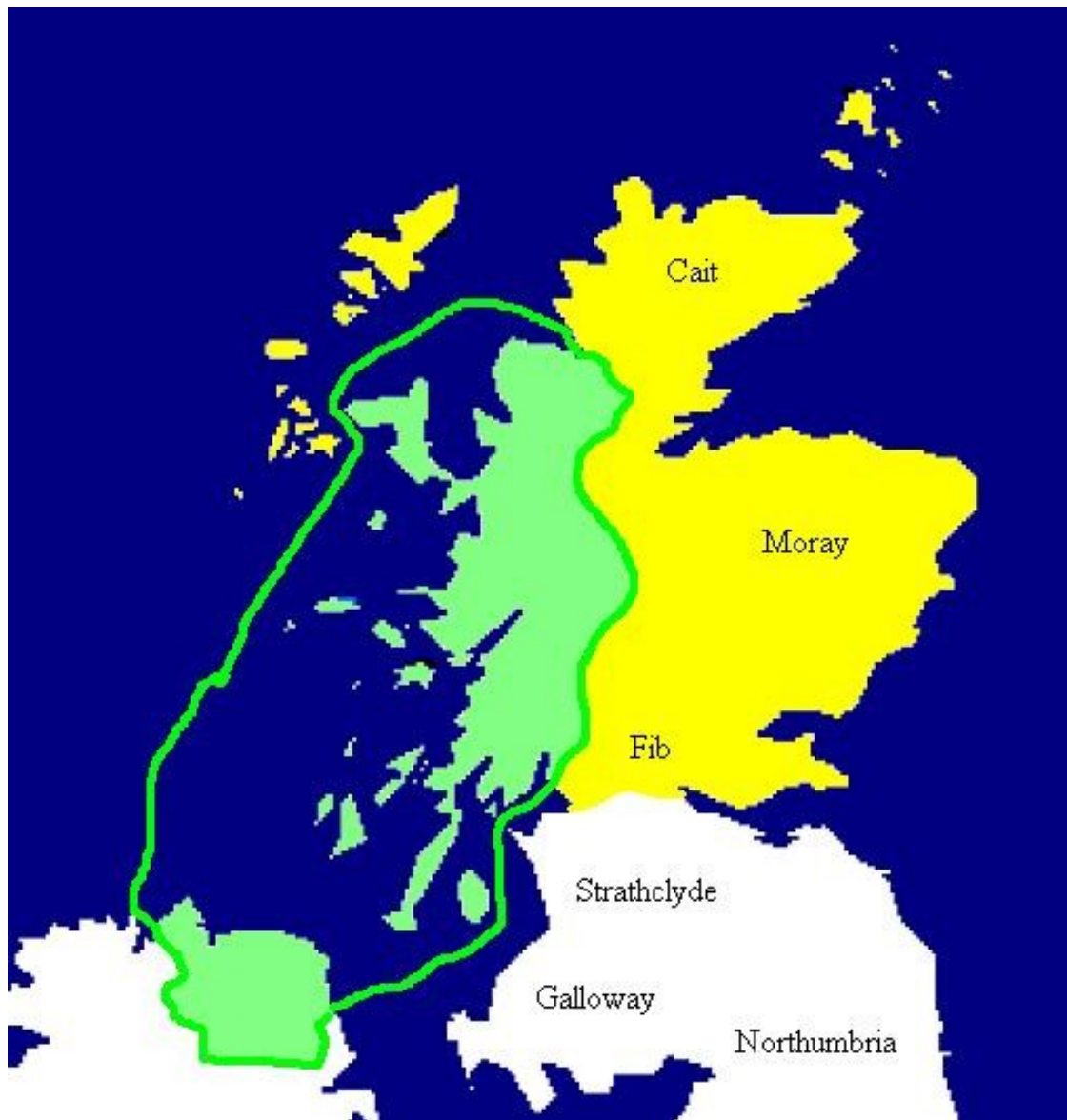
Scottish Gaelic and Manx

Scottish Gaelic

Beginning around the **late fourth century**, immigrants from Ireland colonized what is now Scotland, establishing a colony called **Dál Riata**, named after a town in northeast Ireland. The Scottish Dál Riata became the centre of a kingdom and in the 7th century, the connection was severed.

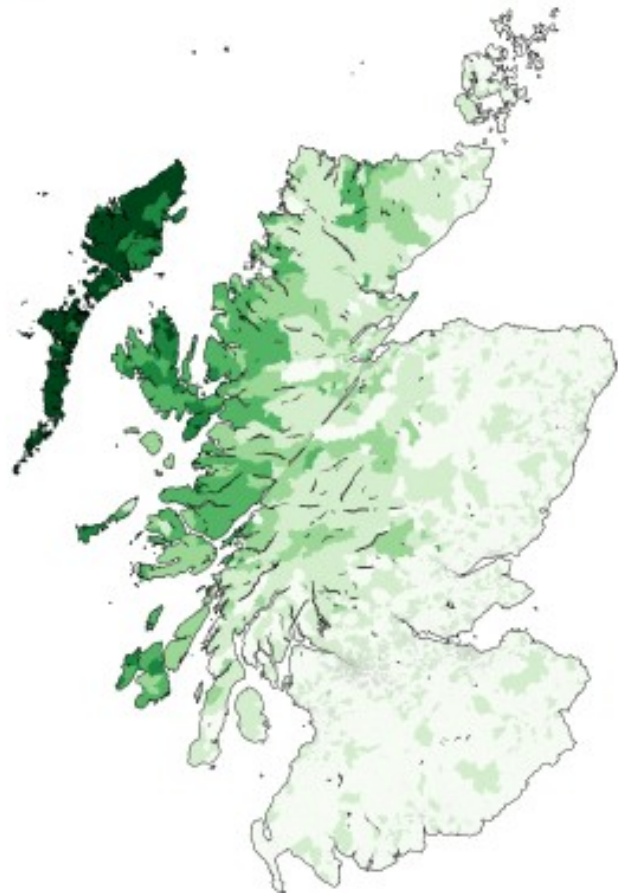
The Gaelic inhabitants expanded inland and the Scottish territory grew. However, English language gradually began to replace Scottish Gaelic, which is today confined to the Outer Hebrides, the Island of Skye, Tiree and Islay.

In the 2011 census, 57 000 people, about 1.1% of Scottish population reported as able to speak Gaelic. Scottish Gaelic is not an official language of the UK. Apart from Scotland, Scottish Gaelic is spoken by about 7000 people in Canada (especially in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island).

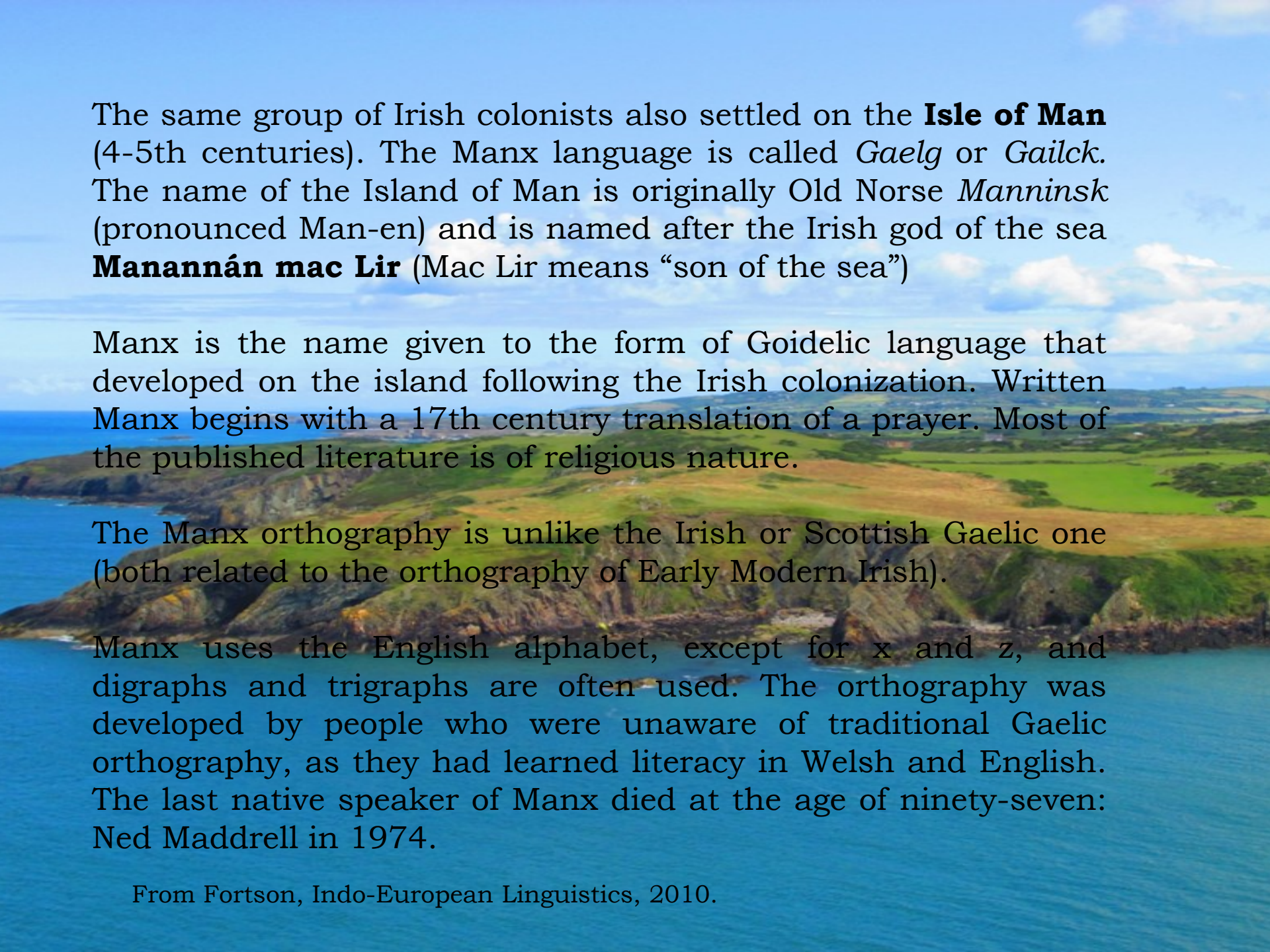


Map of Dál Riata at its height, c. 580–600. Pictish regions are marked in yellow.





Geographic distribution of Gaelic speakers in Scotland in 2011.



The same group of Irish colonists also settled on the **Isle of Man** (4-5th centuries). The Manx language is called *Gaelg* or *Gailck*. The name of the Island of Man is originally Old Norse *Manninsk* (pronounced Man-en) and is named after the Irish god of the sea **Manannán mac Lir** (Mac Lir means “son of the sea”)

Manx is the name given to the form of Goidelic language that developed on the island following the Irish colonization. Written Manx begins with a 17th century translation of a prayer. Most of the published literature is of religious nature.

The Manx orthography is unlike the Irish or Scottish Gaelic one (both related to the orthography of Early Modern Irish).

Manx uses the English alphabet, except for x and z, and digraphs and trigraphs are often used. The orthography was developed by people who were unaware of traditional Gaelic orthography, as they had learned literacy in Welsh and English. The last native speaker of Manx died at the age of ninety-seven: Ned Maddrell in 1974.

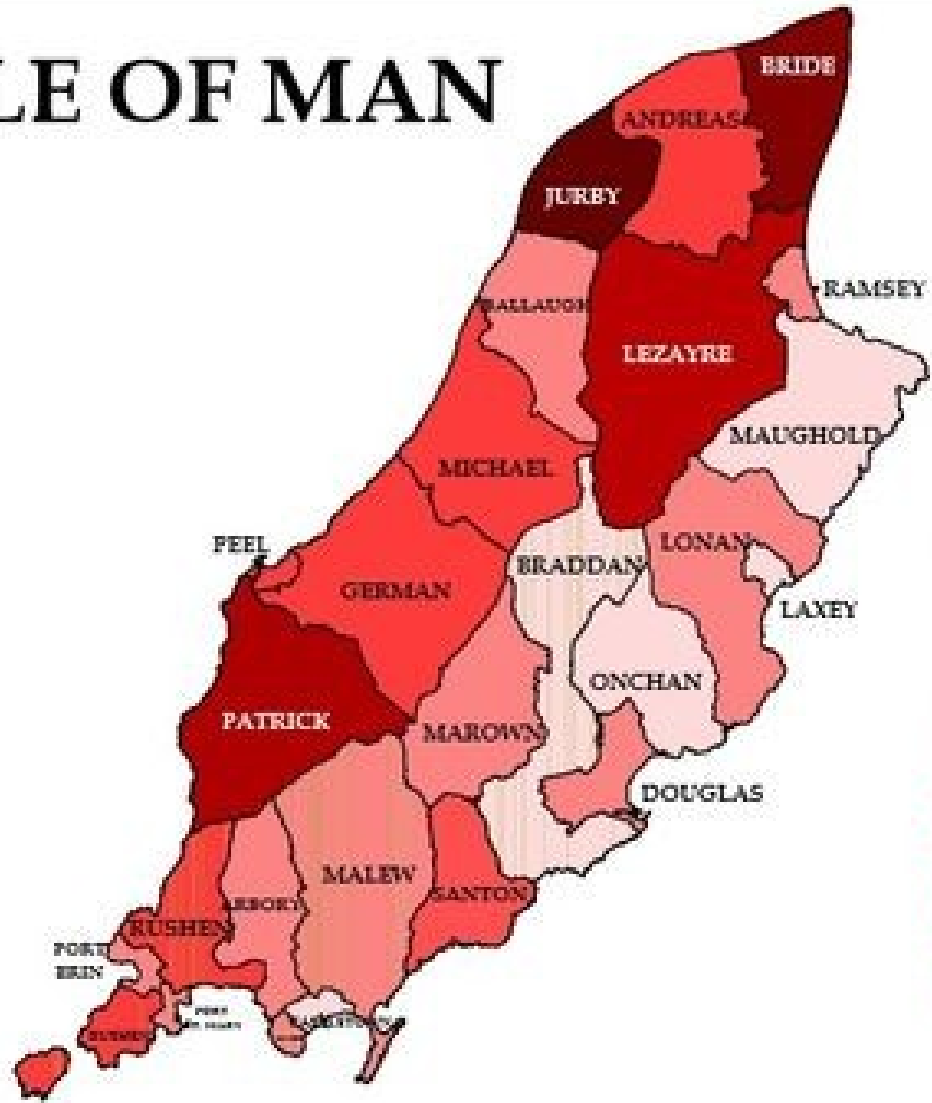
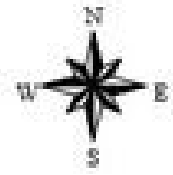


Nedd Maddrell-
last native
speaker of Manx



English (Baarle)	Manx (Gaelg)
Good morning	Moghrey mie
Good afternoon/evening	Fastyr mie
Good night	Oie vie
How are you?	Kys t'ou?
Very well	Feer vie
Thank you	Gura mie ayd ("tu" form) Gura mie eu ("vous" form)
And yourself?	As oo hene?
Goodbye	Slane lhiat Slane lhiu
Yessir	Whooiney
Isle of Man	Ellan Vannin

ISLE OF MAN



PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENT POPULATION WITH KNOWLEDGE OF MANX GAELIC

- less than 1.9%
- 2.0% - 2.4%
- 2.5% - 2.9%
- 3.0% - 3.4%
- 3.5% +

0 6 12 18 Kilometers

Isle of Man Census 2001

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Scottish Gaelic	Irish	Manx Gaelic	English
<i>sinn</i> [ʃi:n]	<i>sinn</i> [ʃɪn]	<i>shin</i> [ʃin]	we
<i>aon</i> [w:ɔn]	<i>aon</i> [e:n], [i:n], [w:ɔn]	<i>nane</i> [ne:n]	one
<i>mòr</i> [mo:r]	<i>mór</i> [mʲo:r]/[mʲuər]	<i>mooar</i> [mu:r]	big
<i>iasg</i> [iəsk]	<i>iasc</i> [iəsk]	<i>eeast</i> [jɪ:s]	fish
<i>cù</i> [kʰu:] (<i>madadh</i> [maɾəɣ])	<i>madra</i> [mʲadɾə] <i>gadhar</i> [gʲəiɾ] (<i>cú</i> [kʰu:] <i>hound</i>)	<i>moddey</i> [mo:də] (<i>coo</i> [kʰu:] <i>hound</i>)	dog
<i>grian</i> [kriːən]	<i>grian</i> [griːən]	<i>grian</i> [griːn]	sun
<i>craobh</i> [kʰrɔ:v] (<i>crann</i> [kʰraupʲ] <i>mast</i>)	<i>crann</i> [kʰra(u)ɾʲ] (<i>craobh</i> [kʰre:v], [kʰri:v], [kʰrɔ:v] <i>branch</i>)	<i>billey</i> [biːlə]	tree
<i>cadal</i> [kʰaɾəɣ]	<i>codail</i> [kʰodəlɪ]	<i>cadley</i> [kiadlə]	sleep (verbal noun)
<i>ceann</i> [kiaupʲ],	<i>ceann</i> [kiaunʲ]/[kia:nʲ]	<i>kione</i> [kió:ɾʲ]	head
<i>cha do dh'òl thu</i> [xa t̪ə ɣɔ:ɫʲ u]	<i>níor ól tú</i> [ni:ər o:ɫʲ t̪u:]	<i>cha diu oo</i> [xa deu u]	you did not drink
<i>bha mi a' faicinn</i> [va mi fəçkiɲ]	<i>bhí mé ag feiceáil</i> [vi: mie: əg fʲeçca:lɪ] (<i>bhíos ag feiscint</i> [vi:sɪ əg fʲeçciɲtʲ])	<i>va mee fakin</i> [və mə fa:ɣin]	I was seeing
<i>sláinte</i> [sl̪va:ɲtʲə]	<i>sláinte</i> /sl̪va:ɲtʲə/	<i>slaynt</i>	health (cheers! (toast))