

A. J. Aitken

A history of Scots (1985)¹

Edited by Caroline Macafee

Editor's Introduction

In his 'Sources of the vocabulary of Older Scots' (1954: n. 7; 2015), AJA had remarked on the distribution of Scandinavian loanwords in Scots, and deduced from this that the language had been influenced by population movements from the North of England. In his 'History of Scots' for the introduction to *The Concise Scots Dictionary*, he follows the historian Geoffrey Barrow (1980) in seeing Scots as descended primarily from the Anglo-Danish of the North of England, with only a marginal role for the Old English introduced earlier into the South-East of Scotland.

AJA concludes with some suggestions for further reading: this section has been omitted, as it is now, naturally, out of date. For a much fuller and more detailed history up to 1700, incorporating much of AJA's own work on the Older Scots period, the reader is referred to Macafee and †Aitken (2002). Two textual anthologies also offer historical treatments of the language: Görlach (2002) and, for Older Scots, Smith (2012). Corbett *et al.* eds. (2003) gives an accessible overview of the language, and a more detailed linguistic treatment can be found in Jones ed. (1997).

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[ix] I A general outline

The Concise Scots Dictionary (CSD) is concerned mainly with Scots, the language of Lowland Scotland, the area delimited by the regions listed on pp. xxxiv–xxxv [see Table 1 – Ed.] and mapped on pp. xxxi and xxxii [map not included here – Ed.]. Roughly this is the area lying to the north, east and south of the Scottish Highlands and it includes Scotland's great cities and industrial centres. To some degree it is the native language of virtually all locally-educated people in this area and it has also influenced the English speech of the Highlands and Islands, where the first language once was, and for many people, especially in the Outer Isles, still is, Gaelic. Furthermore, a variety of Scots is spoken in large enclaves of Northern Ireland, as a result of settlements there, especially from the west and south-west of Scotland in the seventeenth century and later. The first speakers of the Old English ancestor of this language arrived in what is now Southern Scotland early in the seventh century, as a

¹ Originally published as part of the Introduction to *The Concise Scots Dictionary* (ed.-in-chief Mairi Robinson, Aberdeen University Press, 1985; now published by Edinburgh University Press), ix-xvi. Reproduced by kind permission of Scottish Language Dictionaries and Edinburgh University Press.

The text has been edited for uniformity of style with other Aitken papers and some bibliographical references have been expanded or added. The original page numbers are shown in square brackets. All notes are editorial.

northern offshoot of the Anglian peoples then comprising the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Bernicia or northern Northumbria. The areas which these first Old English speakers occupied, as defined by place-names containing early Old English place-name elements, consisted of a wide swathe of what is now south-eastern and southern Scotland, with less extensive settlements along the Solway and, perhaps rather later, in Kyle in mid-Ayrshire.

Before the twelfth century the English-speaking part of Scotland was limited to these south-eastern and southern areas (except perhaps for the royal court of King Malcolm III and his queen, Margaret, a princess of the ancient royal house of Wessex, whom he married about 1070). There is also chronicle and place-name evidence that by the tenth and eleventh centuries the Gaelic language was in use throughout the whole of Scotland, including the English-speaking south-east, though no doubt the longer-established Northern English continued to be the dominant language there. In origin Gaelic was the native language of the Scots of Alba or Scotland, the kingdom centred north of the Forth and Clyde, whose kings in the tenth and eleventh centuries also gained dominion of the more southerly parts of what then became an expanded Scottish kingdom.

This expansion of English-speaking in Scotland was brought about by several important groups of immigrants to Scotland at this time: English-speaking servants and retainers of the new Anglo-Norman and Flemish landowners and of the monks from England and France who now arrived in Scotland at the invitation of the King; and English-speaking pioneer burgesses, chiefly from South-East Scotland and England, who settled in the new royal and baronial burghs of eastern and southern Scotland. Though the language of the royal court and the baronage of Scotland was now Norman French, the native tongue of many of these immigrants of lesser rank was a variety of Northern English heavily influenced in pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar by the Scandinavian language of the former Viking settlers in northern and midland England whence these immigrants came. This Scandinavianised Northern English – or Anglo-Danish – was certainly the principal, though probably not the only, language of the early Scottish burghs and its contribution to the formation of the language later known as Scots is probably even greater than that of the original Old English of south-eastern and southern Scotland.

By the fourteenth century this language had become the dominant spoken tongue of all ranks of Scots east and south of the Highland Line, except in Galloway where a form of Gaelic appears to have survived down to the seventeenth century. In some areas the country folk had by now abandoned their former Gaelic for the Northern English of the burghs, the local centres of government, law and trade. And the barons had also abandoned their minority tongue, French, for the Northern English of the majority of the Lowland population, perhaps in part influenced by an impulse towards national solidarity when the ^[x] nation was beleaguered in the War of Independence by English barons and knights who were still French-speaking. From about this time, too, the same Northern English tongue was beginning to be used in Caithness, Orkney and Shetland; so began the long process of the supplanting of the old Norse or Norn speech formerly spoken under the Norse earls of these territories.

Until the latter decades of the fourteenth century, written records of Early Scots consist of no more than a few vernacular words and phrases and some descriptive place-names and surnames which crop up sporadically in early Latin documents from the twelfth century onwards. From these fragmentary written records and by extrapolation from later evidence we do however learn something of how medieval Scots was developing internally as a language, and some account of this is given below.

Paper 7: A history of Scots

Table 1: Dialect Districts of Scots²

Dialect District			Old Counties (pre-1975)
Insular Scots			Shetland
			Orkney
Northern Scots			Caithness
			Sutherland
			Ross-shire
			Inverness
		North-East Scots	Nairnshire
			Morayshire
			Banffshire
			Aberdeenshire
			Kincardineshire
			east Angus
Central Scots	East Central Scots	East Central Scots (a)	west Angus
			east and south-east Perthshire
			Stirlingshire
			Fife
			Kinross-shire
			Clackmannanshire
		East Central Scots (b)	West Lothian
			Midlothian
			East Lothian
			Berwickshire
	West Central Scots		Peeblesshire
			Dunbartonshire
			Argyllshire
			Bute
			Renfrewshire
			Lanarkshire
	South-West Scots		north Ayrshire
			south Ayrshire
			Wigtownshire
			Kirkcudbrightshire
			west Dumfriesshire
Southern Scots			Roxburghshire
			Selkirkshire
			east and mid Dumfriesshire
Ulster Scots			

Continuous written records of Early Scots begin in 1376 with John Barbour's great poem *Brus* – an account of the exploits of the heroes Robert Brus and James Douglas in the War of Independence. Other verse and prose writings in Scots follow, including (from 1424) the statutes of the Scottish Parliament. Gradually an ever wider range of prose and verse genres was written in Scots, so that, by the second half of the fifteenth century, Older Scots became the principal literary and record language of the Scottish nation, having successfully

² Adapted from CSD (front endpaper and §9.3).

competed in this function with Latin. Hence in the later fifteenth and sixteenth centuries there were two national languages in use in Britain, metropolitan Tudor English in the kingdom of England, and metropolitan Older Scots in the kingdom of Scotland. Though these were politically or socially separate languages, linguistically they were distinct but quite closely related dialects, much as is the case with the Scandinavian languages today. Because of this close relationship, elements originally English could be infiltrated into Scots writings and, later, speech without appearing particularly incongruous. This is indeed what now began to take place.

Traditionally, the anglicisation of Scots at this stage is attributed to influences resulting from the Reformation of 1560, in particular the adoption by the Scots Reformers of the English Geneva Bible and a mainly English Psalter instead of a Bible and a Psalter in Scots, and from the much closer political and social contacts between the two nations which followed the Reformation and, still more, after the Union of the Crowns in 1603. Unquestionably these events, and the huge prestige of Elizabethan English literature, strongly reinforced the impulse to anglicisation. But they did not initiate the process.

Literary influence of English writings on Scots writers long predated the Reformation. Readers of Sir David Lyndsay will recall his allusions to ‘Inglis buiks’ and to New Testaments in English and printed in England, which were being read by Scots of Protestant leanings before the Reformation.³ And of course English poetry and prose circulated in Scotland from the fourteenth century or earlier, and the writings of Chaucer and his successors, in particular, were admired and emulated by Scottish poets.

Indeed, what may have triggered⁴ the anglicisation process was the practice of the Scottish fifteenth- and sixteenth-century makars of including in their grandest and most pretentious poetry occasional imitations of the English spellings of Chaucer and their other English mentors, as alternatives to the corresponding native Scots forms: such as *quho* (Scots *quha*), *moste* (Scots *maist*), English words like *frome* (Scots *fra*), *tho* (Scots *than*) and *twane* (Scots *twa*), and English verbal inflexions such as the ending *-n* in *seyn* (Scots *se to see*) and the ending *-ith* (corresponding to English *-eth*, Scots *-is*). By 1540 similar spellings were appearing, though still quite rarely, in Scots prose, but after 1560 the phenomenon was much more pervasive. By now Scots writing was in a mixed dialect, in which pairs of spellings and spelling-symbols like *aith* and *oath*, *ony* and *any*, *gude* and *good*, *quh-* and *wh-*, *sch-* and *sh-*, co-existed as options, with the English-derived options gradually increasing in popularity.

³ In this connection, Murray (1873: 65) quotes two passages:

Quhat buik is that, harlot, into thy hand?
 Out! walloway! this is the New Testment,
 In Englisch toung, and printit in England!
 Herisie! herisie! fire! fire! incontinent.
 (from the *Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*, l.1144 ff.)

Quod he, “Ken ze na Heresie?”
 “I wait nocht quhat that is,” quod sche;
 Quod he, “Hard ze na *Inglis Bukis*?”
 Quod scho, “My maister on thame lukis:”
 Quod he, “The Bischop that sall knaw!”
 (from ‘Kitteis Confessioun’, l.19 ff.)

⁴ AJA seems to give a lot of weight here to the influence of poets. It might be more accurate to say that these poetic practices were an early indication of Scots falling within the sphere of influence of the London-based standard, which gradually spread in geographical and sociolinguistic range from the fifteenth century on.

Until the seventeenth century, few Scots seem to have had any strong feeling for the linguistic identity of the Scots language (though there were certainly some who did so). One indication of this is the tardiness with which the Scots adopted a separate name for their language. Not until 1494 did any Scottish writer apply the name *Scots* to his own tongue. Before that it was always called *Inglis* (i.e. English), as no doubt befitted a tongue which shared with the English of England a dialect relationship and a common Anglo-Saxon origin. And even after 1494 and indeed until the end of the Older Scots period both names continued in use, with no obvious predominance of either.

From early in the sixteenth century there are occasional hints that, even though Scots was now the national language, it was felt to be somewhat less elegant than literary English. As early as 1513 the poet Gavin Douglas thought of his own vernacular as ‘braid and plane’⁵ alongside ‘sudron’ (i.e. English). In 1603 this feeling was stated quite explicitly (see below) and from time to time thereafter.

The progressive anglicisation of writings in manuscript (records, diaries, manuscript histories, and others) proceeded through the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth, until finally virtually every trace of Scottishness had disappeared from Scottish writing. In print, ^[xi] partly or largely as a result of commercial considerations by publishers and printers, the demise of literary Older Scots is far earlier and more sudden. After 1610, except for a few legal texts and one or two comic or satiric *tours-de-force*, all Scots writings in prose, whether printed in Scotland, or, as often, in London, are in what can only be called English – with an occasional Scots locution only every dozen pages or so.

There was however one exception to the general trend towards anglicisation. The tradition of printing popular heroic and comic poems of the classical Early and Middle Scots periods continued through the seventeenth century (albeit in somewhat anglicised spelling). A few new comic and satiric pieces such as Robert Sempill’s *Habbie Simson* were also composed at this time, mostly in up-to-date popular Scots. These served as a springboard for the eighteenth-century revival of Scots writing launched by Allan Ramsay and his contemporaries in lyric, comic and descriptive verse, in balladry and, a little later, in humorous tales and ghost stories in prose, and prose dialogue and monologue. This however was in a more colloquial Scots than the formal style of most Older Scots writing. Some of the new features of spelling and grammar of this modern literary Scots are mentioned below.

While Scots writing was becoming anglicised in these ways from the sixteenth century or earlier, the indications are that, except for a very few Scotsmen of unusual personal histories like John Knox, the *speech* of all Scotsmen continued fully Scots into the seventeenth century.⁶ Following the Reformation in 1560, however, Scotsmen of all classes were coming for the first time into regular visual and aural contact with writings in Southern English: aural in that at least once a week, and in the case of devout people several times a week, they heard readings from the English Bible, and sermons in a language partly modelled on Biblical English. In the course of the seventeenth century there was also a considerable increase in meetings between Scotsmen and Englishmen. No doubt most important of all these anglicising influences was the great increase in meetings between the upper classes of the two countries. Inter-marriage between the Scottish and English aristocracies was becoming common, a trend almost unknown before 1603. After the Restoration in 1660, every

⁵ In the Prologue to the First Book of the *Eneados*.

⁶ AJA examines the evidence for the anglicisation of speech in ‘The pioneers of anglicised speech in Scotland: a second look’ (1997, 2015).

Scotsman of the nobility was likely to spend part of his time in southern England, at court or residing in the Home Counties, and nearly all other eminent Scots visited London for longer or shorter periods. And the practice of well-to-do Scots of sending their sons to school in England – pioneered by John Knox in the sixteenth century – was not entirely unknown at this time (though it does not seem to have become common until the late eighteenth century). Under these circumstances it is not surprising that the Scottish upper classes gradually gave up their native Scots speech for what had long been regarded as the more “elegant and perfect” English of the south, as it was called by one Scottish writer in 1603.⁷

It is doubtless possible to exaggerate the length things had gone by the late seventeenth century, and individuals no doubt varied, as they do today. But the overall impression must be that, in contrast with the sixteenth century, when all Scots (with very rare exceptions like John Knox) simply spoke native Older Scots, by this time the formal or, in the language of the period, ‘polite’ speech of the social élite of Scotland was now expected to approximate to the Southern English dialect. This was now the language of social pretension, of intellectual discussion and of formal speech. For some it must also have become the usual informal or fully vernacular style. From this time onwards, forms of speech which mostly favoured traditional Scots usages were identified with conservatives, eccentrics and, especially, with the common people.

This is not to deny that some upper- and middle-class Scots still used occasional Scotticisms, though uneasily aware that these were regarded as undignified, and that they spoke their English with a noticeable Scottish accent. But this was also the time when the Augustan culture of eighteenth-century England began strongly influencing the Scottish cultural scene. Augustanism was a fashion which laid great emphasis on ‘propriety’ and prohibited in ‘polite’ usage anything ‘unrefined’, ‘vulgar’ or ‘provincial’.

These prescriptions were swallowed by nearly all educated Scots of the eighteenth century, though there were some dissenting voices like those of the poets Allan Ramsay and Alexander Ross. A notable result was a greatly increased self-consciousness on the part of the Scots intellectuals and middle classes about the provincialism of their English speech. Residual Scottish features were now regarded as sullyng what might otherwise have been exemplary refined English, and it was all but universally accepted as desirable for anyone with pretensions to being ‘polite’ that he should write and speak English with ‘propriety’ – that is, according to the standards of London society. This is already in evidence in the records of the Fair Intellectual Club, founded in 1719 for educated young ladies of Edinburgh, in which the first president complimented her members on the propriety of their English ‘considering how difficult it is for our country people to acquire it’. The well-known consequences of these ^[xii] notions include the publication, from 1752 onwards, of several

⁷ The allusion is to the quotation from Sir William Alexander that AJA gives in ‘Scottish Speech: a historical view with special reference to the Standard English of Scotland’ (1979: 89):

The language of this Poeme is (as thou seest) mixt of the English and Scottish Dialects; which perhaps may be un-pleasant and irksome to some readers of both nations. But I hope the gentle and Judicious English reader will beare with me, if I retaine some badge of mine owne countrie, by using sometimes words that are peculiar thereunto, especiallie when I finde them propre, and significant. And as for my owne countrymen, they may not justly finde fault with me, if for the more parte I vse the English phrase, as worthie to be preferred before our owne for the elegance and perfection thereof. Yea I am perswaded that both countrie-men will take in good part the mixture of their Dialects, the rather for that the bountiful providence of God doth invite them both to a straiter union and conjunction as well in language, as in other respects. (From *Darius*, ‘To the Reader’, 1603)

alphabetical lists of Scottish words and expressions, compiled expressly so that Scots people could learn to avoid them in their writing and speech, and also the descent on Edinburgh, from 1748 onwards, of a long line of English, Irish and anglicised Scottish lecturers on elocution, who spearheaded the attack on the Scots accent.

Though some continued, and no doubt continue today, to hold that the total extinction of vernacular Scots is desirable, this seems to have ceased to be the establishment position early in the nineteenth century. We may perhaps associate this change of heart with the publication of John Jamieson's *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language* in 1808, with the new wave of Scots Romantic writers, with the burgeoning of nineteenth-century antiquarianism, and with the sturdy Scots patriotism of people like Lord Cockburn (1779–1854), the celebrated Edinburgh judge and raconteur. It was now accepted that Scots was “going out as a spoken tongue every year”, as Cockburn put it in 1838 (Cockburn, 1874), but for some, such as Cockburn himself, this was a matter of nostalgic regret at the incipient demise of a rich and expressive old tongue, and no longer, as it had been, for universal congratulation.

As the nineteenth century progressed, there arose a further distinction between traditional, usually equated with rural, dialects of Scots, which were widely approved, and ‘slovenly perversions of dialect’, usually equated with urban dialects, which were not.⁸ And this threefold division into English, ‘good Scots’ and ‘bad Scots’ continues to the present day, colouring social and educational attitudes.⁹

II The position today

The language of contemporary Lowland Scotland can fairly be described as fluid. It is marked by a wide and almost infinitely variable range of speech-styles, ranging from the full Scots of some fisher-folk and farming people in the North-East, through various intermediate ‘mixtures of Scots and English’, to a variety of Standard English spoken in a Scots accent. Even the last of these retains obvious affiliations with the more fully Scottish speech-styles – in the accent with which it is pronounced, in its speakers’ frequent recourse to a repertory of ostentatious Scotticisms like *keep a calm souch* or *let that flee stick tae the wa*, in their unstudied use of some other Scotticisms like *pinkie*, *to swither*, *to miss yourself*, and in the peculiarly Scottish pronunciations of certain words such as *length* (with *n* not *ng*), of *Wednesday* (with three clear syllables), of *fifth* and *sixth* (as *fift* and *sixt*), and of *loch*, *patriarch* and *technical* (with *ch* not *k*).

The speech of an individual will vary according to region (some regions being strikingly more ‘Scottish’ than others), social class, age, sex, circumstance (for example, the well-known contrast between classroom and playground speech), and the national and local loyalties of the speaker.

This mixed and variable speech is the country’s everyday vernacular, but now no more than that. Though the terminology of law, church, education and administration is still

⁸ These attitudes are documented in AJA’s ‘Scottish Speech: a historical view with special reference to the Standard English of Scotland’ (1979). In the present edition, see ‘Scottish accents and dialects’ (1984, 2015: n. 62).

⁹ For discussion see AJA’s ‘Bad Scots: Some superstitions about Scots speech’ (1982, 2015) and ‘The Scots language and the teacher of English in Scotland’ (1976, 2015).

strongly Scottish,¹⁰ nearly all conversation beyond local and intimate settings is in Standard English. The sixteenth century situation in which the Scottish language was the universal language of Scotland has long disappeared.

It may therefore reasonably be asked if there is any sense in which Scots is entitled to the designation of a language any more than any of the regional dialects of English in England? This is not at all a new question. It has been a preoccupation of many Scots writers from the sixteenth century to the present day.

In reply one may point out that the Scots tongue possesses several attributes not shared by any regional English dialect. In its linguistic characteristics it is more strongly differentiated from Standard English than any English dialect. CSD displays a far larger number of words, meanings of words and expressions not current in Standard English than any of the English dialects could muster, and many of its pronunciations are strikingly different from their Standard English equivalents.

As yet no means has been devised of measuring how frequently individuals or whole communities actually use dialect expressions in the course of their conversation. But anyone who scans the dictionary or listens to a modern Scots play might reasonably suppose that the Scots are in general more broad-spoken and more loyal to their vernacular than many of their English cousins are. One illustration of this is the fact that a fair number of dialect words – such as *aye* (always), *pooch* (a pocket), *shune* (shoes), *een* (eyes), and *nicht* (night) – have very recently died out in Northern England but remain in vigorous use throughout Scotland right down to the Border.

It is of course true that Scots shares many words with dialects of Northern England. Words such as *hame*, *stane*, *doon*, *lass*, *bairn*, *bonny*, *loon* and *glaur*, which many Scots think of as purely Scots words, are indeed very much Northern English words as well. But it is also true that a large number of Scotticisms are now confined within the Border, and many of them perhaps always were. A number of the features of Scots described in IV below are of this class. Indeed, easily the most definite dialect-boundary in the English-speaking world is the Scottish-English Border.¹¹

[xiii] In England the only dialect which can match Scots in possessing its own separate and well-documented history is Standard English itself. And only England as a whole can compare with Lowland Scotland as a whole for dialect variety, as briefly described at IV(e) below.

But what most distinguishes Scots is its literature. Nowhere in the English-speaking world is there a dialect literature which remotely compares with Scottish literature for antiquity, for extent and variety, and for distinction. This embraces writings in mainstream or standard literary Scots (in a language based on Central Scots dialect speech), in which we may include the great medieval makars and the writers of Older Scots literary prose as well as distinguished modern performers such as Burns, Scott, Hogg, Hugh MacDiarmid, Lewis Grassie Gibbon, and innumerable others. In addition to this, several regional dialects have developed substantial and distinguished literatures in their own regional standards – notably North-Eastern Scots since the early eighteenth century, Shetland since the nineteenth century, Glasgow from early in the present century. Beyond this art-literature in Scots, and the large

¹⁰ Less so in recent years with the many legislative changes that have taken place. See editor's notes to AJA's 'The Extinction of Scotland in Popular Dictionaries of English' (1987, 2015).

¹¹ AJA discusses the linguistic significance of the Border in more detail in 'Scottish accents and dialects' (1984: 111–112; 2015).

body of Scots folksong, the truly popular literature of newspaper comic strips and cartoons in diluted mainstream Scots and of the Scots pantomime comic reaches a very wide audience.

Though Scottish literature has had only limited official recognition from government bodies, and Scottish language until very recently almost none at all,¹² both have for centuries been subjects of academic study. Important recent contributions to this have been made by the two great dictionaries on which CSD is based¹³ and the three-volume *Linguistic Atlas of Scotland*.

All of the phenomena just described have reinforced and in turn been reinforced by the ancient loyalty of some, and in more recent times, of many, Scots to their own language. Though this has from time to time encountered opposition, it has never been wholly extinguished between the sixteenth century and the present day.

From at least the first half of the eighteenth century, Scots has always been thought to be ‘dying out’ as a spoken language. From time to time suggestions have been made for ‘restoring’ or ‘reviving’ it – from the solid base of literary Scots, where its permanence has been less often in doubt. As a first step it has sometimes been suggested that Scots needs a body of writing in prose beyond the spheres of dialogue and monologue to which, since the Older Scots period, it has been all but confined. The 1970s and 1980s especially have produced some important contributions to this end, not least the superb translation of the *New Testament* into Scots by W. L. Lorimer (1983).

The unique characteristics of Scots which we have just surveyed – its linguistic distinctiveness, its occupation of its own ‘dialect island’ bounded by the Border, its individual history, its own dialect variations, its varied use in a remarkable literature, the ancient loyalty of the Scottish people to the notion of the Scots language, as well as the fact that since the sixteenth century Scots has adopted the nation’s name – all of these are attributes of a language rather than a dialect. Manifestly Scots is to be seen as much more than simply another dialect of English. CSD is intended not only as a record of the copiousness and variety of the resources of the Scots language, but also as a contribution to the self-assurance of the Scottish people about that language, which enshrines their past and lives in their daily speech.

¹² For an account of more recent developments, see Young (2014). There is also a brief account in the editor’s introduction to AJA’s ‘The Scots Language and the Teacher of English in Scotland’ (1976, 2015) in the present edition.

¹³ I.e. *A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* and *The Scottish National Dictionary*.

III The principal chronological periods in the history of Scots and English

The main periods in the history of Scots

Old English:	to 1100
Older Scots:	to 1700
Pre-literary Scots:	to 1375
Early Scots:	to 1450
Middle Scots:	1450 to 1700
Early Middle Scots:	1450 to 1550
Late Middle Scots:	1550 to 1700
Modern Scots:	1700 onwards

A corresponding list of the periods for English

Old English:	to 1100
Middle English:	1100 to 1475
Early Middle English:	1100 to 1250
Late Middle English:	1400 to 1475
Early Modern English:	1475 to 1650
Modern English:	1650 onwards

IV Internal history: some important changes in the language itself

IV(a) Sound changes: vowels and diphthongs

In the Early and Middle Scots periods, some important sound-changes resulted in differences in the pronunciation of vowels and diphthongs between Scots and Standard English (including Scottish Standard English). These include the following contrasts:

- (1) Scots *stane, gae* – (Sc)StEng *stone, go*

This results from the twelfth century rounding of Early Middle English \bar{a} (e.g. in *stān* and *gān*) in Midland and Southern England to a sound of *o*-like quality, whereas no such rounding occurred in the north. The different sounds which resulted had different subsequent developments,^[xiv] leading ultimately to the modern contrast.

- (2) Scots *buit, muin, puir* – (Sc)StEng *boot, moon, poor*
(with front vowel) (with back vowel)

This results from a fronting of an original long \bar{o} -sound in these words in the thirteenth century in Northern Middle English and, especially, Early Scots, yielding a sound of *ü*-like quality in the ancestor of Scots, but leaving \bar{o} (which later became the modern *oo*) in the ancestor of Scottish Standard English. Further developments brought about dialect variations within Scots (*ee* in Northern, *ai* or *i* in Central, *ü* remaining in Shetland, Orkney, Angus, Perthshire and Southern).

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| (3) Scots <i>aw, au</i> [a]
<i>ow</i> [ʌu], <i>ou, u</i> [u]
in <i>baw, saut, sowder,</i>
<i>row, mouter, fou</i> | – | (Sc)StEng <i>al(l),</i>
<i>ol(l), ul(l),</i>
in <i>ball, salt, solder,</i>
<i>roll, multure, full</i> |
|--|---|--|

This results from an early fifteenth century Scots replacement of *l* by *u* in this position – the so-called vocalisation of *l*.

- | | | |
|---|---|--------------------------------------|
| (4) Scots (and Northern English)
<i>coo, house, doon</i> | – | (Sc)StEng
<i>cow, house, down</i> |
|---|---|--------------------------------------|

This results from an important difference in the direction taken by the fifteenth century Great Vowel Shift in the north from that taken in the midlands and south of England. Scots and Northern English retain the original Old and Middle English and Early Scots monophthong, which became a diphthong in the fifteenth century only in the more southerly dialects of English. The main effects of the Great Vowel Shift on Scots itself can be seen by following through the later developments of the Early Scots vowels /i:, e:, ε:, a:/ and the diphthong /ai/ in Table 1.

Note: The Scottish system of vowel-length first arose at this time, partly as a result of the Great Vowel Shift.

IV(b) Spellings

The spelling system of Older Scots was exceptionally variable. Some features which distinguished it from the spelling of Midland and Southern English of the time are:

(1) among the spellings of consonants, Scots *quh-*, *qwh-* corresponding to *wh-*, e.g. in Scots *quhat*, *quhite*; Scots *sch-* corresponding to *sh-*; Scots *-ch* corresponding to *-gh*, e.g. in *lauch*, *nicht*, *dochter*; Scots *ʒ* corresponding to *y*, e.g. in *ʒere* (year), *ʒing* (young). Common variations within Scots in spellings of consonants included: for *-ch* as in *lauch* or *laich* (low), also *-cht*; for *-th* as in *baith* (both) or *mouth*, also *-tht*; and for either of these, superscript ^t; *v* and *w* interchanged, and *-v-* interchanged with *-u-*, *-w-* or *-f(f)-*;

(2) among the vowels, the device of adding *-i* or *-y* to distinguish certain Early Scots long vowels from similarly spelled short vowels, e.g. *hait* (hot) from *hat* (hat); *meit* (meet or meat) from *met*, *coit* (coat) from *cot*, *buit* (boot) from *but*; and some writers even use *yi* as in *byit* (bite) to distinguish this vowel from that in *bit* in the same way.

As a consequence of the sound-change mentioned at IV(a)(3) above, the following sets of spellings became interchangeable:

al, aul with *au, aw* e.g. in *halk, haulk, hawk* (hawk), or *walter, wawter, water* (water);

ol, oul, owl, with *ou, ow* e.g. in *nolt, noult, nowlt, nowt, nout* (cattle);

ul, oul, owl with *ou, ow* e.g. in *pulder, poulder, powlder, pouder, powder*.

As well as introducing new alternative English word-forms such as *oath* beside *aith*, *most* beside *maist*, *quhich* beside *quhilk*, *church* beside *kirk*, *any* beside *ony*, *if* beside *gif*, the anglicisation process (see I above) also resulted in massive changes in ways of spelling Scots

words themselves. By the eighteenth century many characteristic Older Scots spellings had been discarded: *quh-*, *sch-*, the letter *ȝ* (though this did survive as *z* – see CSD s.v. **ȝ**),¹⁴ the alternative spelling of *o-e* as *oi*, *oy* e.g. in *cote*, *coit* (coat), and such spellings as *walter* (water), *nolt* (cattle) and *pulder* (powder); and many others of the alternative spelling options just illustrated. New symbols of mainly Southern English origin were introduced: *wh*, *sh*, *gh*, *ee*, *oo*, *ea* and *oa*, and word-final *-ae* and *-oe*. Where a Scots word differed from a corresponding English one in the apparent omission of a letter, this was acknowledged with an intruded apostrophe, as *ha'e* beside *have*, *fu'* beside *full*.

Some Older Scots spellings did, however, survive, notably *ch* as in *lauch*, *nicht*, and *ai*, *ei* and *ui*.

Though still much more variable than Standard English, this new hybrid spelling system of Modern Scots was much less variable than that of Older Scots. It continues in use in Scottish literature to this day (alongside some recent, highly innovative systems to represent localised varieties of spoken Scots). Attempts to make it more consistent and less subservient to the Standard English system, notably the 'Scots Style Sheet' of the Makars' Club in 1947, have had at best only limited success.¹⁵

IV(c) Grammar

Modern Scots inherits from Early Scots a number of characteristic Northern English grammatical features, of which the following is a small sample:

- (1) irregular plurals: *een* (eyes), *shune* (shoes), *kye* (cows), *hors* (horses), *caur* (calves), and *thir* (pl. of *this*), *thae* (pl. of *that*);

¹⁴ For the reader's convenience, the CSD entry for this letter (known as 'yogh') is quoted below (with abbreviations expanded):

ȝ *letter* This letter-form was the one most commonly used in Middle Scots MSS and prints to represent the sound [j]. In Early Scots it varied with *y*, *ȝh* and (then the most common form) *yh*. In Middle Scots it predominated over its chief alternative *y*. It was indistinguishable in form for the much less commonly used) letter form *z*, used to represent the sound [z]. In MSS and black-letter prints (predominant in [the early sixteenth century], a 'tailed' form of *ȝ/z* was used but this gave way to the 'modern' more or less tail-less *z* in [late sixteenth century] prints in roman and italic types. In [the seventeenth century] the regular use of *ȝ/z* for the sound [j] was given up in favour of the alternative practice of using *y*, which of course agreed with English usage, except for fossilized occurrences in a limited number of words such as *CAPERCAILZIE*, *GABERLUNZIE*, *tailzie* (*TAILYIE*) and the names *Menzies*, *Mackenzie* and ... *ZETLAND*. In many cases the latter spellings gave rise to new spelling-pronunciations with [z] ... some of these, such as that of *Mackenzie*, being now the only surviving pronunciations.

¹⁵ The 'Scots Style Sheet' was published in *Lines Review* in 1955 and reprinted in various places, including *Lallans* in 1974. One of its recommendations, which *Lallans* writers did often attempt to follow, was to distinguish between the *-an(d)* and *-in(g)* endings (see below, IV(c)(2)). This was dropped from the 'Spelling recommendations' published in *Lallans* in 1985. Until the 1998 'Report o the Scots Spellin Comatee', the Scots Language Society agreed with the more radical spelling reformers in avoiding <oo>, regarding it as an anglicised innovation in Scots. It was only in 1998 that a rapprochement was arrived at between the traditional spellings up till then advocated by Scottish Language Dictionaries (formerly the Scottish National Dictionary Association) on their website, and the spellings recommended by the Scots Language Society and promulgated in *Lallans* (see 'Walit frae Report o the Scots Spellin Comatee' (2000) and 'How to Spell Scots' (n.d)). For further references, see editor's notes, especially note 10, to *AJA's 'New Scots: the problems'* (1980, 2015) in the present edition.

[xv] (2) distinction between present participle in *-an* (*He's aye gutteran aboot*) and verbal noun in *-in* (*He's fond o gutterin aboot*). This distinction is still found in extreme Northern and Southern dialects;

(3) past tense and past participle forms: *greet* (weep), pt *grat*, ptp *grutten*; *lauch* (laugh), pt *leuch*, ptp *lauchen*; *gae* (go), pt *gaed* (Older Scots *zeid*), ptp *gane*; *hing* (hang), pt *hang*, ptp *hungin*;

(4) distinction in present-tense verb forms according to whether a personal pronoun is or is not immediately adjacent to the verb (e.g. *they say he's owre auld* but *them that says he's owre auld* or *thir laddies says he's owre auld*).

Modern Scots also has a number of features which have arisen since the Early Middle Scots period:

(1) reduced forms of the negative adverb: Older Scots *nocht*, Modern Scots *no* or *nae* and *-na* or *-ny*;

(2) new rules for negative and interrogative constructions: Older Scots *he gais nocht*, *Gais he nocht*, Modern Scots *He's no gaun*, *Is he no gaun?*;

(3) new usages of auxiliary verbs such as *may* (common in Older Scots, little used in Modern Scots, where *can* and constructions with *maybe* take its place); similarly *sall* (and its reduced form *'se*) is almost obsolete.

IV(d) Vocabulary

Early Scots shared much of its word-stock with contemporary Northern Middle English. This included virtually all its word-borrowings from Scandinavian, since these had originally reached Scotland as part of the Northern English speech of the Anglo-Danish immigrants mentioned above. Among the hundreds of characteristic expressions of this source in Modern Scots are such well-known items as *bairn*, *brae*, *gate* (road), *graith* (equipment), *nieve* (fist), *kirk*, *lass*, *big* (build), *flit* (remove), *hing* (hang), *dreich* (dry¹⁶), *lowse* (loose), and several of the grammatical features mentioned in the preceding section.¹⁷ (But the history of the still more numerous Scandinavian borrowings into the dialects of Shetland, Orkney and Caithness is quite different. These derive directly from the former Norn or Norwegian language of the inhabitants of these regions, following their colonisation by Norwegian Vikings after c.800 A.D.)

All the other sources of Early Scots vocabulary contributed many words and expressions exclusive to Scots as well as others shared with the English of England. From French, both the Norman French of the original twelfth century Norman settlers and the Central French which later superseded this, came many words originally shared with English but which have survived only in Scots, such as *leal*, *ashet*, *aumry*, *coup*, *douce*, *houlat* and *tassie*, and others, perhaps resulting from direct Scots-French contact in the Franco-Scottish Alliance (1296–

¹⁶ 'Dry' is not the most usual sense, but it would apply, for instance, to a boring talk. The sense 'dreary' is probably better known.

¹⁷ In particular the *-and* inflection of the present participle, and *thir* (pl. of *this*).

1560), such as *deval* (stop), *disjune* (breakfast), *fash* (bother), *spairge* (spatter), *vennel*, *vivers* (rations), and *gardyloo* and *Hogmanay*.

Other borrowings originally special to Scots include many from Gaelic, beginning at least as early as the twelfth century, such as *cairn*, *cranreuch*, *glen*, *loch*, *strath* and *capercaillzie*, *ingle*, *messan*, *oe*, *quaich*, *sonse*, *tocher*, *car* (left(-hand)) and *crine* (shrink), along with more recent borrowings such as *claymore*, *gillie*, *pibroch*, *spleuchan*, *sporrán*, *whisky*, and, still more recently, *ceilidh*.

Between the twelfth and the eighteenth centuries contacts between Scotland and the Low Countries were constant and close, with, for example, Flemish craftsmen settling in the Scottish burghs and Scottish traders settling at the Scottish staple ports in the Netherlands. One result was the many Scots words of Dutch or Flemish origin, such as *bucht*, *callan*, *croon*, *cuit*, *mutch*, *pinkie*, *golf* and *scone*, the past tense *coft* (bought), and the names of measures such as *mutchkin* and coins such as *doit* and *plack*.

Other important elements of the distinctive vocabulary of Scots come from Anglo-Saxon itself, whence, for example, *bannock*, *but* and *ben*, *eldritch*, *gloamin*, *haffet*, *haugh*, *heuch*, *lanimer*, *wee*, *weird*, and from the continuing processes of word-formation and word-coinage, which produced *bogle*, *bonny*, *canny* and *uncanny*, *glower*, *gomerel*, *gove* (to stare), *gully*, *limmer*, *pawk*, *scunner*.

Borrowing from Latin was in Older Scots carried out virtually independently of English. Many words of Latin origin were borrowed into the two languages at widely different dates and often in strikingly different meanings: *liquid*, *liquidate*, *local*, *locality*, *narrative* is only a small sample of these. Besides this, Scots law has a large and distinctive vocabulary of Latin origin, such as *executor-dative*, *homologate*, *hypothec*, *nimious*, *sederunt*. Scots often prefers a different form of the same word (often a verb) from that preferred by English: *dispone* (beside *dispose*), *promove* (beside *promote*), and others; and Scots often prefers ending-less (and thus more 'etymological') forms of Latin past participles, like (*weel*) *educate*, *depute* and *habit* and *repute*. School Latin, partly borrowed in the modern period, has yielded such characteristic Scotticisms as *dominie*, *dux*, *fugie*, *pandie*, *vaig*, *vaik* and *vacance*.

From the foregoing it is evident that by, say, the sixteenth century, Scots differed strikingly in vocabulary as well as in all other ways from all its contemporary dialects of English, not excluding Northern English. Since the seventeenth century^[xvi] the process of direct borrowing of vocabulary from foreign sources has largely, though not entirely, ceased, but the processes of coinage and word-formation appear to continue apace, and indeed down to the present day; recent expressions of the latter origin include *scheme* (local authority housing estate), *high-heid-yin*, *henner*, *fantoosh*, *to miss oneself*, *to put* (someone's) *gas at a peep*, *to be up to high doh*, and many others. Even so, the many apparently new words which first appear in Modern Scots are by no means all of recent origin: many, such as *boorach*, *golach*, *gumption*, *gyte*, *slaister*, *theevil* are doubtless older words which have emerged into record only in the modern period, as a result of the rather different pre-occupations of most writers of Older Scots, primarily an official and record language, and of Modern Scots, primarily a folk-tongue. Many words which (approximately) coincide in form with Standard English words have very different meanings in Scots: this is true of some of the words of Latin origin mentioned above; others of diverse sources include *divider*, *find*, *flit*, *hold*, *hurl*, *mind*, *outcast*, *outcome*, *policy*, *sober*, *sort*, *travel*, *want*, *weave*, *word* and the definite article *the*.

IV(e) The spoken dialects

As a broad generalisation the traditional division of Scots into four major dialects, Insular (i.e. of Shetland and Orkney), Northern, Central and Southern, as delineated by Map 1 [not included here – Ed.], is acceptable, though of course the detail is not as straightforward or clear-cut as that might suggest. The best and fullest description of the major dialects and their subdivisions is still Grant (1931). A few characteristic features of certain dialects are mentioned incidentally at IV(a) above. Some others are:

a well-known Northern feature is *f*- where other dialects have *wh*- as in *fa* (who), *fite* (white);

a well-known characteristic of Southern Scots is the occurrence at the ends of words of *-ow* where other dialects have *-oo* and *-ey* where other dialects have *-ee* making this the so-called ‘yow and mey dialect’, e.g. *Yow and mey’ll gang oot and pow a pey* (you and me will go out and pull a pea).

Grammatical variations include the distinction between singular *thou*, *thee* and plural *ye* in Shetland, Orkney and eastern Ross-shire (cf. *tu* and *vous* in French), and that between the present participle and the verbal noun (see IV(c) above). As a result of their special histories certain localities favour words of a particular etymological source: words of Scandinavian origin in Shetland, Orkney and Caithness; a special group of words of Dutch origin in Shetland; Gaelic in the Northern dialect and in Kintyre; Romany in parts of the South-East and South; and some words special to particular occupations (notably fishing and coal-mining) are localised to particular places and regions. Beyond this it is as yet not possible to offer further generalisations on the regional distributions of different classes of words within Scotland, except to point to the very numerous variations between dialects in their terms for common notions: for ‘little finger’ *peerie finger* and variants in Shetland, Orkney and Caithness, North-Eastern *crannie*, Fife and neighbouring counties *curnie*, and *pinkie* everywhere; for ‘to rinse’ the mainly East Central *synd* and West Central *syne*, the North-Eastern *sweel* and the scattered *reenge* and variants; for ‘mud’ *dubs*, *gutter*, *glabber*, *clabber* and *glaur* are scattered around the country, with *dubs* favoured in the North-East, *gutters* in northern East Central, *glabber* and *clabber* in West Central, *glaur* in Central and Southern. One could multiply these examples many times. CSD provides copious information on the present regional distributions both of words and of individual meanings of words.

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