

*CONTRIBUTIONS TO A HISTORY
OF DOMESTIC SETTLEMENT IN
NORTH UIST*

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As Sir Mortimer Wheeler has remarked, "the provincialisation of British history has still far to proceed"; and this remark is of course more appropriate to Scotland than to England. Both provincialisation and particularisation must indeed proceed far in Scotland before we have the necessary data for the "total" historiography which is the modern concept and goal in historical studies. What is required in fact is that all possible aids and techniques, documentary as well as fieldwork, should be applied to small definable localities and to particular themes. Only when this process has been exhaustively undertaken throughout Scotland will we have the information both positive and negative whereon generalisations can validly be made.

The present study is part of an attempt to amass information by all means short of excavation—the last resort—bearing on the history of settlement in the West Highlands prior to the crofting period. It is particularised to a study of domestic settlement evolution, and provincialised to the parish of North Uist. The background to this problem is the very limited nature of historical information relating to the West Highlands (apart from the important single source of genealogy). The questions considered are: what data emerge from a detailed field survey of a sample area; how does this amplify and relate to the documentary evidence; and how far do the combined results contribute towards bridging the gap in time between eighteenth-century Highland settlements and what are conventionally termed the "Iron Age settlements" of the area (the imprecisely dated wheel-houses, aisled-houses, etc.)?

Although this survey of North Uist is only part of a series of parish-by-parish surveys being carried out by the School of Scottish Studies, the island possesses certain characteristics both favourable and typical, which render it suitable for

separate treatment. In particular there is, for its date, a very fine survey of the island carried out in 1799 by Robert Reid for the estate of Lord Macdonald: an excellent, relatively early example of triangulation, this is accurate not only topographically but where it can be checked seems to be reliable for the settlement groups (Moisley 1961:89). This is the only accurate, detailed eighteenth-century map known for the Outer Hebrides. The present-day landscape has a fairly good representation of traditional house-types and also intact "cleared village" sites. Another favourable feature of North Uist is that it is one of the few areas of relatively intensive land use in the West Highlands (O.S. Land Utilisation Map 1944). With Benbecula and South Uist it contains a West Coast *machair* (plain) of wide extent with a light, easily cultivable, calcareous soil, perhaps as suitable as any in Scotland for early agriculture. In recent times the style *Uibhist na h-eorna* ("Uist of the barley") is significant in this connection. A region, then, of relatively high fertility and comparatively low rainfall, North Uist seems likely to have contained a substantial population throughout the historic and much of the prehistoric period. In 1755 the population was 1,909 (Webster census)—approximately a seventh of the population of the Outer Hebrides. We are considering, then, a more favourable environment than the typical West Highland settlement area, one where early settlement evidence is to be expected. Indeed, in terms of fortified sites, this is abundantly true. As an anonymous author of about 1634, quoted in the Macfarlane Geographical Collections, states: "There are sundry litle toures builded in the midst of fresh water loghes" (Mitchell 1906:2, 180). There are in fact nearly one hundred small forts still visible, mostly on islets. The theme of this study however is essentially unfortified domestic settlement, and the evidence for this is by no means so plentiful. Nevertheless, as regards preservation, there is the important insulating factor of sand blow, prevalent in *machair* areas, which has provided a degree of protection for deserted sites unknown in most other areas of the West Highlands.

Historically, North Uist was an important part of the territories of MacDonal of Sleat until the late nineteenth century—the Clan Donald North, or *Clann Uisdein*, descendants of the MacDonal, Lord of the Isles, who had acquired it from the MacRuaris of Garmoran, another branch of the same family in the fourteenth century. The island appears to have been controlled (locally at least) from Caisteal Bheagram, S. Uist,

and from Caisteal Bhuirgh, Benbecula, both medieval curtain-wall structures—no example of which is known (as yet) in North Uist. Most North Uist forts are badly ruined; many are doubtless older than the period of documentation, although some few have clear historical associations which are discussed later. Apart from these few facts our knowledge of settlement in the island can be summarised as follows: completely lacking for the Neolithic and Bronze Ages (although funerary sites exist in some numbers), some early Iron Age and presumed Iron Age sites, then an unassessed void extending from some 1,500 years until the eighteenth century.

In these circumstances one can only proceed from an assessment of conditions as far back as we know them from comprehensive documentation, followed by a critical examination of the earlier zone of partial knowledge. To penetrate beyond that requires not only the support of all available documentary evidence, and the results of a total field survey of the island, but also an attempt to relate these two sources to relevant Gaelic tradition. Documentary, and then physical, evidence for settlement sites must first be considered; then a separate review of evidence for individual house-types based on surviving or ruined structures; correlation and conclusions will be attempted at a later stage.

Settlement Sites—documentary evidence

An attempt has been made to plot the varying aspects of settlement continuity and distribution on a chronological table (Table I).

This table lists the historical *bailtean* of North Uist, including all those plotted on the Reid Survey of 1799, and a few known from other sources. Crofting townships and smaller settlements which were creations of post-1814 date are excluded from the scope of this article, e.g.:

Claddach Knockline	Ardheisker
„ Kyles	Carnach
„ Kirkibost	Locheport
„ Illeray	Langass
„ Baleshare	Loch Portain

Oral tradition has recorded a number of otherwise forgotten settlements, for example those cited or lived in by the famous bard John MacCodrum (Matheson 1938) namely Langass, Rubh Eabhadh and Aird an Runnair. Slight physical evidence

exists in some of these cases, but there is no formal documentation, and these may have been settled in the eighteenth century and evacuated in the tacksmen's emigration of the 1780s. Husabost (Moisley 1961; Beveridge 1911) seems to be known only by unsubstantiated local tradition.

The word *baile* (pl. *bailtean*) is used as the Gaelic term for the clustered houses of a joint farm, the only recorded pre-crofting form of permanent domestic settlement in the area. Fifty-four *bailtean* are listed (and numbered for convenience of reference in the text), and there are three other sites (see Table I). The numerical sequence is generally in anti-clockwise order round the coast, commencing with the extreme north-east of the machair area (see Map 1). Earliest dates shown for settlements are those of the earliest mention in documentary records, although exceptions exist especially where Blaeu's map, which is of course topographically highly inaccurate, suggests earlier settlement than land records. In the case of Blaeu *ca.* 1600 is given as the datum line, as his map of Uist, though published in 1654, was based on a lost original by Timothy Pont, whose manuscript surveys are thought to have been carried out between 1583 and 1601 (Cash 1901:401). Sources (where abbreviated) are given in the reference list below Table I. Crucial among them is the Reid survey of 1799, carried out with a view to estate improvement—namely a lotting of crofts which is indeed projected on to the map, although not commenced in fact until 1814. Early documentation is straight forward, and there are few insoluble spelling variations: names in brackets indicate major variants (where two names appear the first is the land unit, the second the *baile*). There is of course the limitation that the place-names given, applied to land-units, although it is reasonable to expect agricultural settlements on these units. Furthermore, documentation for this area is irregular and haphazard: clearly the townships of Oransay (11), Veilish (14), Griminish (21), Scolpaig (22) and Balmartin (25) extend back into the period before precise references, those of Sand (5), Sollas (13), Boreray (15), Vallay (20), Vannt (28), Hougarry (30), Balranald (31), Paible (33), Paiblesgarry (34), Balilleray (42) may do also; and all those cited in the Judicial Rental of 1718 (Appendix A) may have existed earlier despite the lack of seventeenth-century references. There are unexplained omissions from the 1718 Rental, namely Scolpaig (22) and Balmartin (25)—Scolpaig is still missing on the 1764 Rental

(Appendix B) and may have been part of Griminish (21) at this time. Nevertheless this Rental (1718) provides something approaching a total assessment of rent payers for 1718, and it evidently includes virtually all *bailtean*, with the possible exception of smaller squatter communities which may have come into being as population increased. The background population pattern to this chart has to be borne in mind and, with the reservations cited above, it can be seen that the picture from early to later references is one of expanding settlement, especially between 1666 and 1718 when population increase due to settled conditions and relatively improved health standards, was undoubtedly taking place. The subsequent increase between 1718 and 1799 is represented by the "new" *bailtean* of Goulaby (4), Ahmore (10), Grenetote (12), Kyles Paible (39), Claddach Carinish (46), Liernish (47), Stromban (48), Ardmaddy (49), Lochmaddy (50), Sponish (51) and W. Cheesebay (52), all first mentioned during this period, and this expansion is documented by the Webster Survey of 1755 and by the Balranald Rental of 1764 (see Appendix B).

In detail, however, the picture presented is a complicated one, showing the kind of difficulties met with in attempting to trace the history of such settlements, which may well explain why this has not been attempted hitherto. The pattern is one of a chronologically late interruption, a large-scale resettlement in crofting lots which has obliterated the pre-1814 settlements. The fifteenth- and sixteenth-century records refer to certain individual lands, generally larger units described as *tirunga* or *davoch*, i.e. an "ounceland"—comprising eighteen penny-lands—perhaps twenty penny-lands in North Uist (MacKerrall 1943-4), e.g. Sand (5), Oransay (11), Sollas (13), Veilish (14), Boreray (15), Vallay (20), Griminish (21), Scolpaig (22), Balmartin (25), Vannt (28), Hougarry (30), Balranald (31), Paible (33), Paiblesgarry (34), Balilleray (42). These names are still borne by some of the major arable lands of the present day and, as can be seen (Map 2), they occupy the machair area exclusively. Expansion took place by subdivision of the lands cited (our knowledge is limited, as already seen, to the increase of site references, implying changes prior to the date of the relevant documents). Baile Mhic Phàil (2), Baile Mhic Conain (3), Clachan Sand (6), Reumisgarry (7) and Vallaquay (8), for example, were all probably part of Sand (5). Subdivision of inheritances and inherited rights, and expanding population, were presumably continuing factors throughout the seventeenth

and eighteenth centuries. By 1718 (see Map 3) detailed information is available of tacksmen and minor tenants, and it seems certain that the common pattern of eighteenth-century Highland settlement applied also to North Uist—a run-rig joint farm, or *baile*, with or without tacksman, with a variable number of small farmers (MacDonald 1904:Appendix), and a supposed number of landless dependants (see Appendix A and especially B). Actual physical details are represented for the first time on the Reid survey of 1799 (expressed by Map 4) which checking on the ground has shown to be accurate in settlement terms: here we see the small house-cluster which again is characteristic of the North-West Highlands. The period from 1718 to 1814 is that zone of partial knowledge previously referred to: its characteristics were the culmination of many centuries of slow population expansion within a fairly constant economic and social framework. During this period, the Highland chiefs became land proprietors, the warrior aristocracy, tacksmen and the followers became minor farmers, or servants and dependants; arable farming began to play a dominant role, with cattle-rearing a close second, instead of the hunter-fisher pastoral economy which the environment had previously supported. More detailed knowledge of this period would be most instructive, not only as evidence for contemporary conditions but because it would reflect much of the economic organisation of earlier centuries. Unfortunately the succeeding period (from 1814 to 1850) produced the interruptions in settlement which to a great extent destroyed the physical traces of the preceding period. The growth of the kelp industry, accelerated population expansion, alienation from the absent proprietor and the latter's own dire financial straits, were all characteristic interacting features of most West Highland estates in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They produced the usual response dictated by the economic theories of the day: "improvement" as a means to greater efficiency and product. At first this took the form of lotting of crofts of roughly equal value within townships. This commenced in North Uist in 1814, and its precise pattern is superimposed on the Reid Survey. Movement of the buildings of the *baile* into the physical pattern generally characteristic of the crofting townships (one house per croft) was not immediate nor total and some traces of pre-lotting settlement are still in evidence. Some *bailtean* indeed had not moved when cleared two or three decades later, and some uncleared examples never

did. However, from 1814 a movement of primarily local convenience developed which has disrupted settlement continuity quite considerably through re-siting of houses on individual crofts. Outwith the established settlement area on the machair (see Map 1), new black soil crofting-townships were created especially on the south-west coast between Paible (33) and Carinish (44), settlements which (as stated on p. 3) have no significance for earlier periods.

The next juncture in this phase of change was that moment of economic and social disruption known as "clearance". As so often in peasant/large-proprietor relations (cf. Tudor enclosure), an increased population had reached, not necessarily the limit of the resources available for its support, but a stage short of this at which the surplus product had become inadequate to support the proprietor. This economic imbalance was conditioned not only by population increase, but also by the proprietor's inflated living standards. That the proprietor could no longer afford his tenants is one side of the argument: equally the tenants could no longer afford their proprietor—recent emotive writing has swung naturally to the latter view. In North Uist, as in most west-coast parishes, the crucial point was the repeal of the salt tax in 1823, after the Napoleonic Wars, with its implications for the import of Spanish barilla which could, and did, price kelp out of the market (Gray 1957). The production of the industrial raw material *sal alkali* had become the economic basis of West Highland society, and this support was now abruptly withdrawn. The response in North Uist to the legislation of 1823 was so critical as to be almost the classic example.

Two small clearances may have been made in 1815 at Balelone (24) and Baleloch (26) (Moisley 1961) but generally the replacement of many *bailtean* by single large farms began in 1823. The movement commenced in the north of the island, in the large tract on the northern boundary of the main machair belt. *Bailtean* nos. 1-9 were all cleared within the next decade or so. Precise dating of clearance is difficult owing to lack of relevant documents (in at least one case in North Uist they have been destroyed deliberately). Nevertheless some dates are known, and evidence before the Royal Commission in 1883 usually provides a *terminus ante quem* (R.C.C. 1884). Clearance continued spasmodically until the climax of the Sollas eviction in 1850 by which time the whole north coast from Baleloch (26) to Kyles Bernera (1) was in the hands of



FIG. 1. Probably the only instance of an eighteenth-century house with little reconstruction. At Huna (NF 716 723).



FIG. 2. At Knocknatorran (NF 734 678).



FIG. 1. Near Paiblesgarry (NF 737 692).



FIG. 2. Baleshare Machair (NF 778 619).

PLATE IV



FIG. 1. At Balloch (NF 724 731).



FIG. 2. At Paiblesgarry (NF 735 694).



FIG. 1. Aerial photograph of Hougarry—a typical township of category 4 (looking north). I wish to thank the Air Ministry and the Department of Health for Scotland for permission to publish this photograph.



FIG. 2. Nineteenth-century Hougarry (Nineteenth-century photograph—source unknown).

large farmers. The violence and publicity aroused by the Sollas eviction seems to have effectively restrained the estate factor's hand until the commission of 1884, when informants stated that no recent evictions had taken place on the island (R.C.C. 1884), and the ensuing legislation terminated all such action. The story is told in Middlequarter (16) of a N. Uist crofter who received a message from the factor about 1860 informing him that the latter would pay him a visit to discuss his pending eviction. On arrival, however, the factor encountered the man in question, a Crimean veteran, loaded musket in hand, and discussion was indefinitely deferred!

Settlement Sites—physical evidence affected by Later Events

In the nineteenth century, the Congested Districts Board, and, after the 1914-18 War, the Department of Agriculture, implemented policies of resettlement which brought crofters (few of the original stock) back to the north coasts of the island. All these movements of lotting, clearance and resettlement have destroyed the physical evidence of earlier settlement either by deliberate and immediate destruction, by gradual ploughing out or by later rebuilding and overbuilding. (As one of the results, much oral tradition has also vanished, especially for the north coast.) The discussion hitherto hardly augments existing knowledge, except that it has not perhaps been collated before in relation to this area. It is important, however, and perhaps an original contribution, to break this picture down into its smallest component parts and look for any traces of early physical evidence which may survive and which can only be discerned by a process of elimination. This is the aim of Table I, supplemented by a summary of relevant information presented in the systematic categories of Table II. These are devised according to the recent history of the *bailtean* concerned, and trace this backwards from current status to the eighteenth century.

Settlement Sites—Physical Evidence surviving from Eighteenth Century and Earlier (Table II)

Category IVa is the most numerous group and presents a picture characteristic of the whole West Highland settlement problem—repeated rebuilding on one site from time immemorial. Individual houses (considered later) are clearly on the sites of immediate predecessors, some may incorporate elements from these, or inherit the style of the earlier structures.

Hougarry (30), a typical example of traditional nucleated form, is shown in Pl. V, figs. 1 and 2. Historically significant information is clearly present, by definition, in categories

TABLE II
Categories for historical development of Bailtean

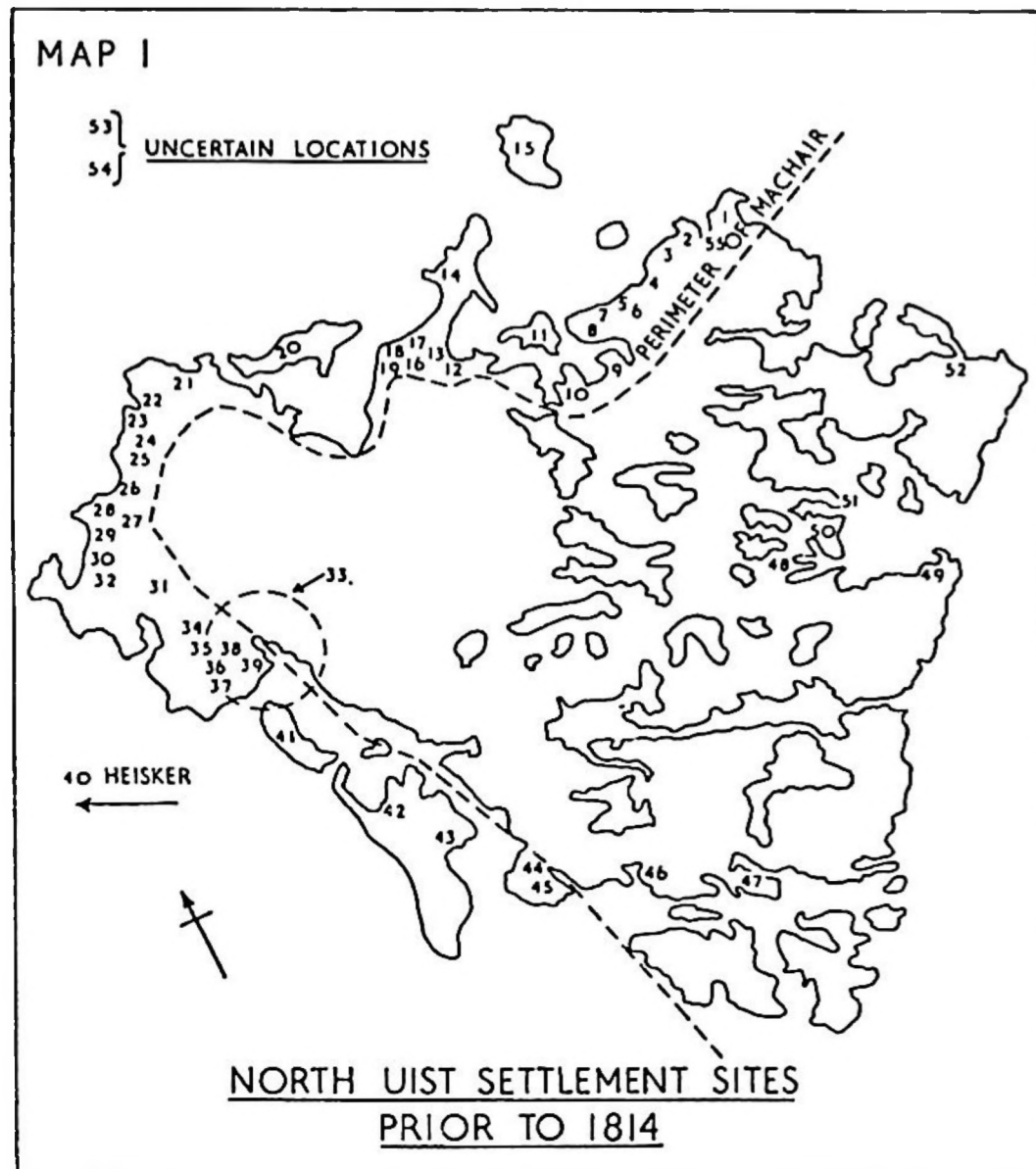
Recent status (or category reference)	19th-century status	Late 18th- century status	Existence of physical evidence for 18th settlement	Totals
I. Single farm or part thereof	Clearance	<i>Baile</i>	(a) No remaining P.E. 1, 2, 3, 22, 23, 24	6
			(b) P.E. exists 21, 32	2
II. Resettled as crofting township	Farm Clearance	<i>Baile</i>	(a) No P.E. 4, 7, 8, 9, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19	9
			(b) P.E. 6, 13, 26, 31	4
III. Crofting township	Lotted as crofts (1814)	<i>Baile</i>	(a) No P.E. 34, 43, 44	3
			(b) P.E. 29, 42	2
IV. Crofting township settlement in <i>Baile</i> form		<i>Baile</i>	(a) Continuity but no definite P.E. 25, 27, 30, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 46, 48, 52, 40	12
			(b) Nil	
V. Deserted farm		<i>Baile</i>	(a) No P.E. 11, 15, 20, 28, 41	5
			(b) Nil	
VI. Other categories	Lack of information, or unusual status		(a) No P.E. 10, 45, 47, 49, 50, 51	6
			(b) P.E. Veilish (14) and Dunamich(55) earlier than 18th century	1(+1)
<i>Also</i> —Broken into smaller units accounted for individually: 33, 5				2
Unidentified 53, 54, and Baldricym, Balchenglish				2(+2)
				<u>54(+3)</u>

Ib, *Iib*, *IIIb* and *VIb*. This means that of the fifty-four historic *bailtean* of North Uist only nine, plus one other site—Dunamich (55)—can be traced physically with any confidence. All these are visible as ruins only, with the possible

exception of a complete house at Tigharry (29). Four of the nine—Sollas (13), Baleloch (26), Tigharry (29), Balranald (31)—exist in small part only. Three—Clachan Sand (6), Griminish (21) and Balilleray (42)—exist as almost complete plans of eighteenth-century *bailtean*, the first two (Plan 1 and 2) virtually in their 1799 form, being cleared some two decades later, whilst Balilleray (42) may be a less certain example as its terminus is later (all this, of course, allowing for rebuilding). Veilish (14), Penmore (32) and Dunamich (55), are probable identifications only. These *bailtean* then (or the relevant elements of them) with the possible exception of the three last mentioned, can be traced with fair certainty to 1799, and there seems every reason to envisage continuity at least back to 1718. Baleloch (26) and Tigharry (29) are not referred to before 1718 and may have their origins in the late seventeenth century. Clachan Sand (6) Sollas (13) Griminish (21) Balranald (31) and Balilleray (42) continue backwards (documentarily at least); Griminish/Foshigarry (21) having the earliest possible dating of 1469. To what extent these *bailtean* represent physically the late medieval sites referred to in the Register of the Great Seal must remain an open question until further information is available. Such information is of course unlikely to be obtained save by excavation. Veilish (14) and Dunamich (55), despite uncertainty as regards their identification, are perhaps the most interesting of all because they represent the only two unfortified settlement-sites in the area which ceased apparently to be occupied before the eighteenth century, our period of partial knowledge. They might provide a vital link between early and more recent settlement, and they will be discussed in detail.

Veilish (14). This is almost certainly the *Waynlis*, *Walis*, *Wainlies* or *Vanilis* of early charters. It is a small headland on the west side of the long strip of low *machair* land which links the major headland of Aird a'Mhorrain to the main island at the Machair Leathainn (see Map 1). This stretch bears the name Udal (?Norse *út val*) and at the base of the Veilish headland there is an area of some twelve acres of high (c. 50 feet) sand dunes, called locally Coileagan an Udail. These dunes are being wind eroded and, some 20 feet below their summits, substantial stratification and extensive remains of settlement are apparent, and traces of considerable iron-working activity imply a dating between the Iron Age and the late seventeenth century (see Table I). These structures have been identified

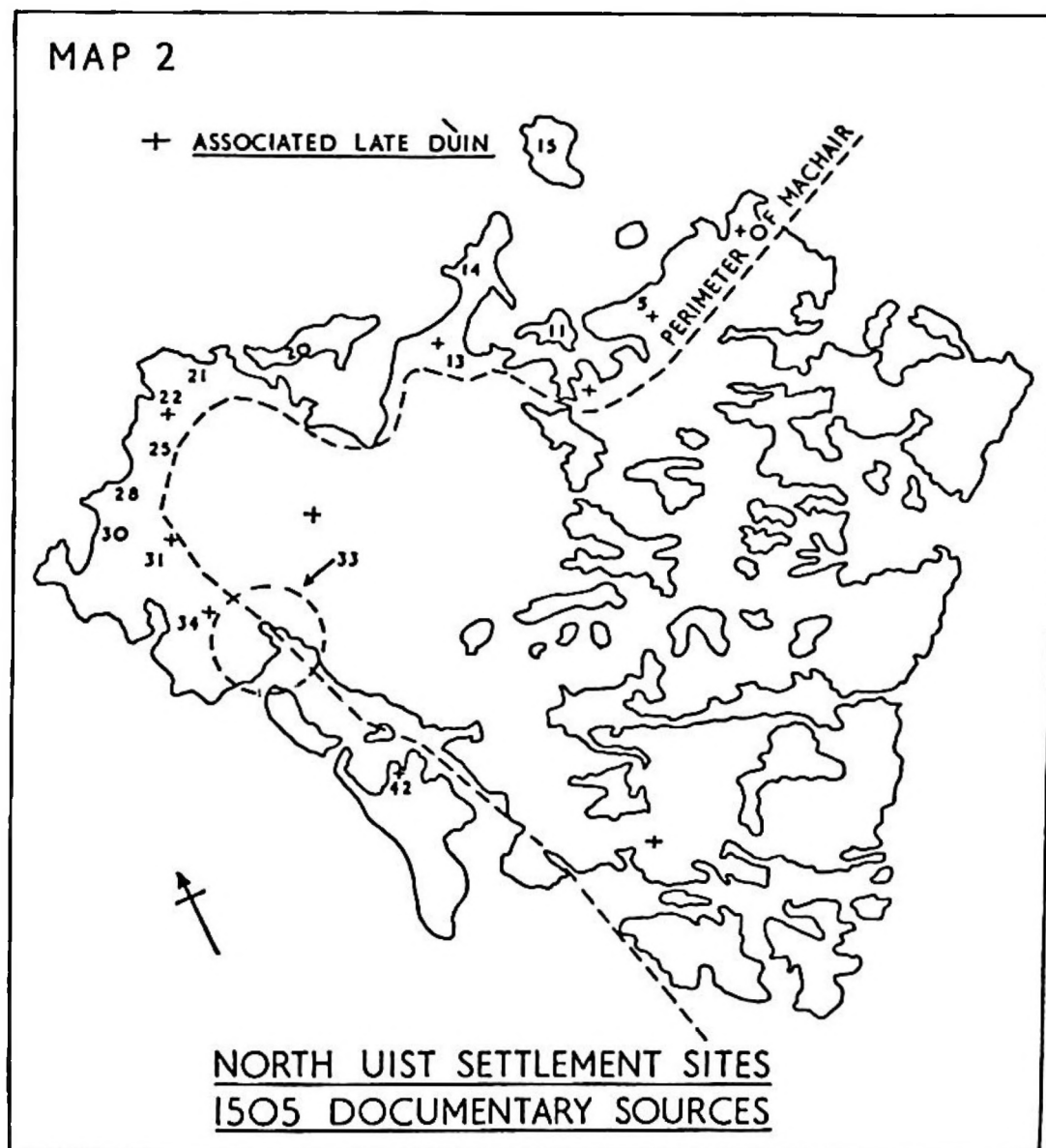
as earth houses (Beveridge 1911; RCAM No. 273), but there is no evidence to show that these are not in fact the remains of a medieval township. It is possibly significant that, when cited in early charters, Veilish, a mere half-penny land, was assessed together with lands ten times its valuation. It is conceivable that this was a prestige site, of considerable antiquity, inhabited



originally by a significant family group: its own arable land may well have been very heavily eroded by the sea—a frequent occurrence on this coast, particularly in this area. This hypothesis is supported by oral tradition still current, recorded by D. A. MacDonald in 1964 (R.L.2123 A.1) and by Carmichael nearly a century ago (E.U.L. M.S. 133a). This avers that the area was occupied by the *Siolachadh Ghoraidh*, the descendants of Godfrey, son of John, Iain Mór Ile, that King or Lord of the Isles who united northern and southern areas of the West Highlands and Islands by his dynastic marriage with the MacRuari heiress of the North c. 1337. Veilish, then, if

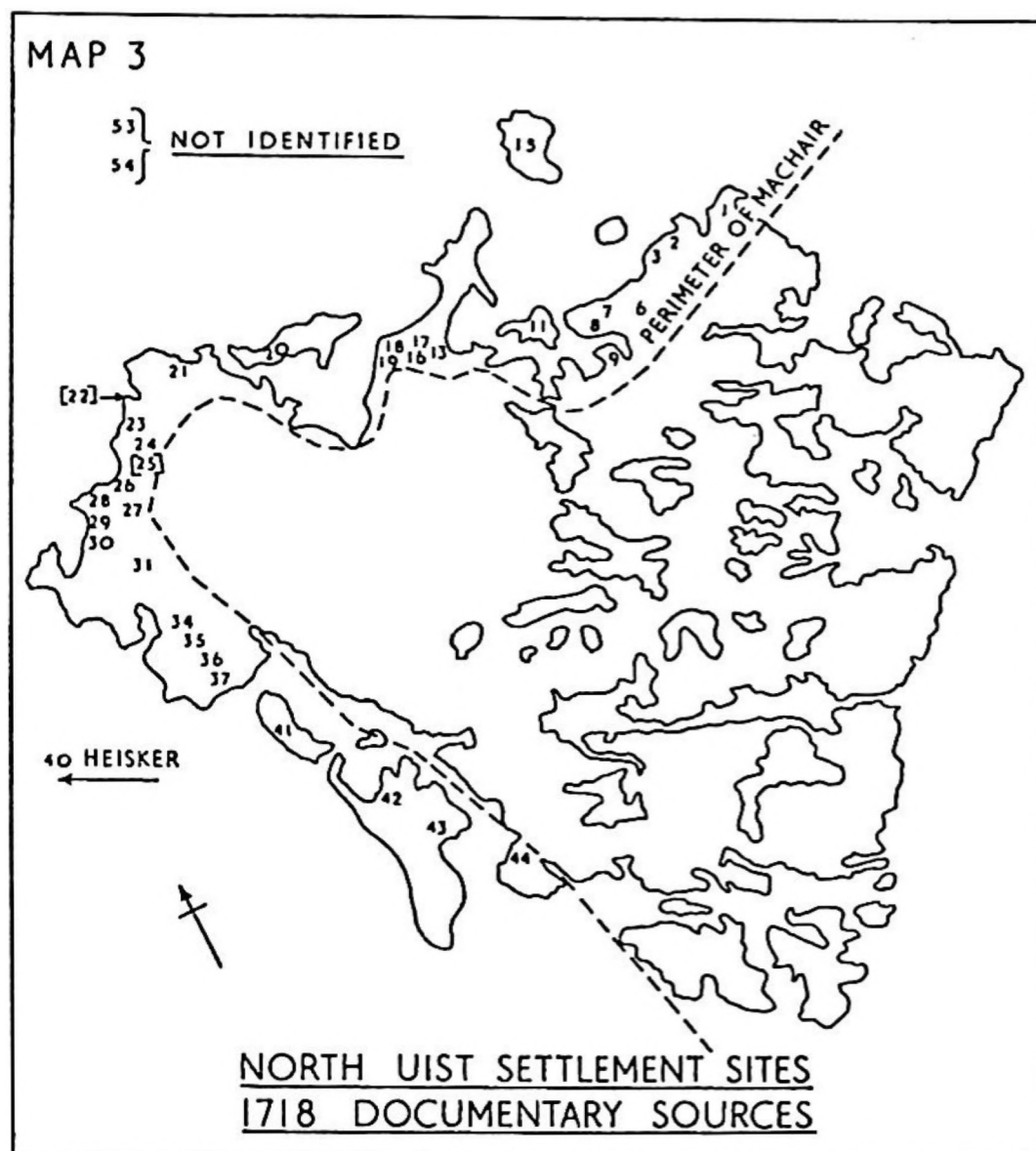
correctly identified, is a vital site for the history of the Uists. As shown in the table, its site may be indicated, though not named, on Blaeu's map.

Dunamich (55) is Blaeu's rendering of what Pont seems to have depicted as an island fort in a north-coast loch draining immediately into the sea opposite Boreray. This suits the site



of *Dùn an Sticir* (RCAM 1928:171) very satisfactorily. *Dùn an Sticir* was occupied, according to local tradition, by the Clann A'Phiocair—the MacVicars (possibly a case, as the Rev. W. Matheson suggests, of post-Reformation continued occupation by a priestly family) murdered and dispossessed by the historical *Uisdean Mac Gilleasbuig Chléirich*, of infamous renown, N. Uist bailie, in 1580 (d. c. 1590s). From this centre he may have controlled bailtean *Kyles Bernera* (1), *Baile Mhic Phàil* (2) and *Baile Mhic Conain* (3). The identification of this site and the historical characters associated with it is corroborated by the waulking song *Uisdean Mac Ghilleasbuig Chléirich* (Carmichael

1954:10-15 and footnote). He was succeeded by his son *Somhairle Mac Uisdein 'ic Ghilleasbuig Chléirich*, Tacksman of *Baile Mhic Pháil* and the name Dunamich may be an incomplete rendering of *Dùn Mhic Uisdein*. The *bailtean* just cited lay in close proximity to *Dùn an Sticir*. At an earlier phase than that discussed here, the site may well have been one of Uist's few



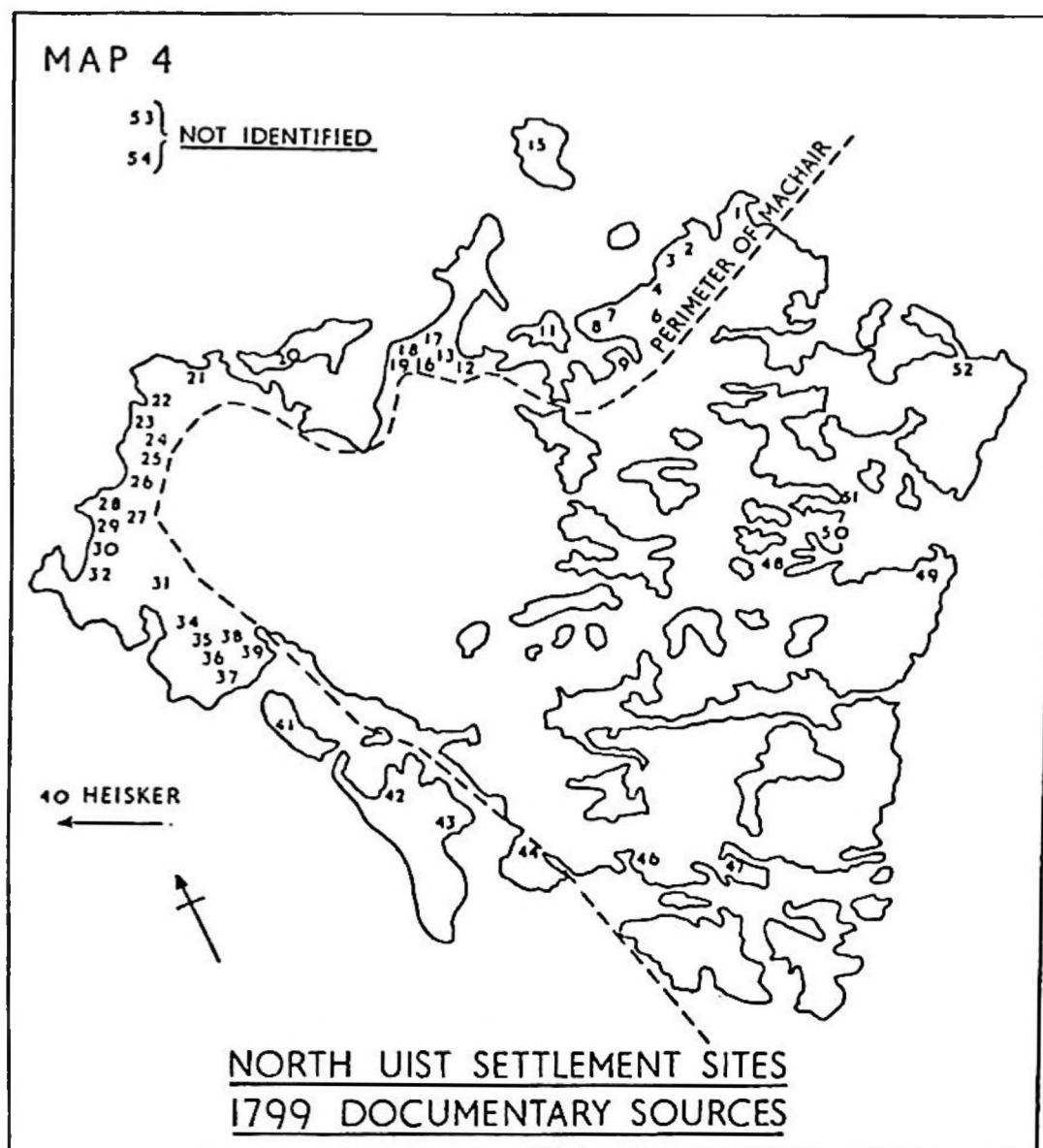
brochs, but it has a rectilinear structure within the original façade and many outhouse remains around it, whilst one of the two causeways is of cart-track proportions and this may also be later in date.

The main archæological task in the Outer Hebrides is the dating of settlement sites, in the face of a total absence of strictly associated dated material in this or neighbouring areas, and indeed in the West Highlands in general. A pottery sequence does not exist for the Iron Age, and general attempts at Iron Age dating for the west remain very uncertain so far. Hitherto, adequately stratified sites have not been identified within the

area or excavated destructively. Excavations now in progress at Veilish/Udal (14) may help to remedy this.

Individual House-Types: Eighteenth to Twentieth Centuries

The evolution of rural settlement especially of the domestic house-form within the settlement as evidenced by survivals,



has been studied for some time in England and Wales and with considerable success. Some examples of mainly post-Conquest minor buildings survive, fair documentation exists back to Domesday, and excavation has produced important type-sites like Wharram Percy for full-scale study of medieval rural communities. Further details have been elicited by surveys of existing house-forms, where traditional building techniques have persisted.

In Scotland the contrast is extreme. Little work has been done and this is, in part at least, due to the paucity of evidence. Few if any extant minor buildings date to the seventeenth

century, and in the Highlands the knowledge barrier is close to 1800. Between those buildings and the mélange of wheel-house, dun, circular farmstead, etc., thrust casually together into an Iron Age of uncertain dating, exists a void of over a thousand years. This is clearly one problem the solution of which must be an immediate concern of historical field-study in Scotland. As suggested earlier, the only sound procedure is first of all to assess thoroughly the known, and in the following a summary will be given of the results of a survey of existing traditional buildings in North Uist.

The traditional house of the Hebrides, where extant, is now commonly referred to as the "black house", an imprecise term of recent invention. *Tigh dubh* is not common in Gaelic, and does not appear in Dwelly, the most comprehensive Scottish-Gaelic Dictionary. As an expression in our area, it is unlikely to be older than the introduction about half a century ago of the improved indigenous house—*tigh geal* (white house). It is presumably the outsider's term for the darkness of the interior of the house; or just possibly a misinterpretation in English of *Tigh Tughaidh* (thatched house)—a term which is common Gaelic usage, and has a precise descriptive value.

All thatched houses in North Uist have been listed, and about half of them measured and photographed. The evidence presented here is concerned with exterior plan and profile. Neither interior divisions, their materials, nor furnishings, are locally made, or apparently of local tradition, or of antiquity, and are thus of little historical significance (there are two houses which are possible exceptions to this, but they cannot readily be investigated). The exterior descriptions of thatched houses of present and recent occupation have been assembled, and by associating these with the general settlement data presented in the earlier part of this paper and with the oral tradition of occupants, a chronological sequence of house-types has been drawn up (Table III). This plan of recent morphological development is based on definite dating evidence where available, and on general knowledge and oral tradition as to the character of the Hebridean house in the nineteenth century.

A Suggested Typology: General Description. The earlier houses of North Uist (Types 0 and 1) are constructed of dry-stone dyking with an outer and inner wall of large undressed stones (often there is a bottom course of orthostats), the space between being packed with rubble, and the whole some four feet thick. By phase 2, however, the walls are tending to become "single",

and in some instances dressed stones are used. Thatch is of bent grass, straw, reeds or heather (this last usually east-coast only, as elsewhere in the Outer Isles), and in the case of Types 0 and 1, and sometimes including 2, the thatch extends to the inner wall-edge only, leaving in effect an external wall-head parapet. In phases up to 2 again, there are generally no lintels on doors or windows. The movement of the hearth—as indicated by the chimneys—is probably critical, and this factor, combined with general sophistication of detail, and precise dating evidence, would seem to justify the typology illustrated (Table III). It should be noticed in considering measurements of breadth in relation to roof-span, especially for early examples (and also in relating to early sites mentioned later), that outer wall-faces are steeply battered, so that roof couples, resting on the inner edge of walls, may have a span some 10 feet less than exterior wall-dimensions indicate. Couples extend from roof-tree to wall head only. “Cruck” framing is unknown in North Uist.

Categories—(see Table III and Plates II-IV)

0 Conjectural, no examples exist to-day, but it may fairly be considered as the prototype of existing forms. The generally accepted picture of a windowless structure, with single asymmetrically sited door (though it can be central, as in illustration) and single central smoke-hole seems valid, and old photographs confirm this (see Pl. I, figs. 1 and 2, Pl. V, fig. 2). Oral tradition is firm that a “draught regulator” in the form of a board on a pole extended through the central smoke-hole. This is possibly the eighteenth-century standard type.

1A Commences divergent A tradition (see Table III).

Chimney: central, above stove or hanging lum.

Thatch: to inner edge of wall.

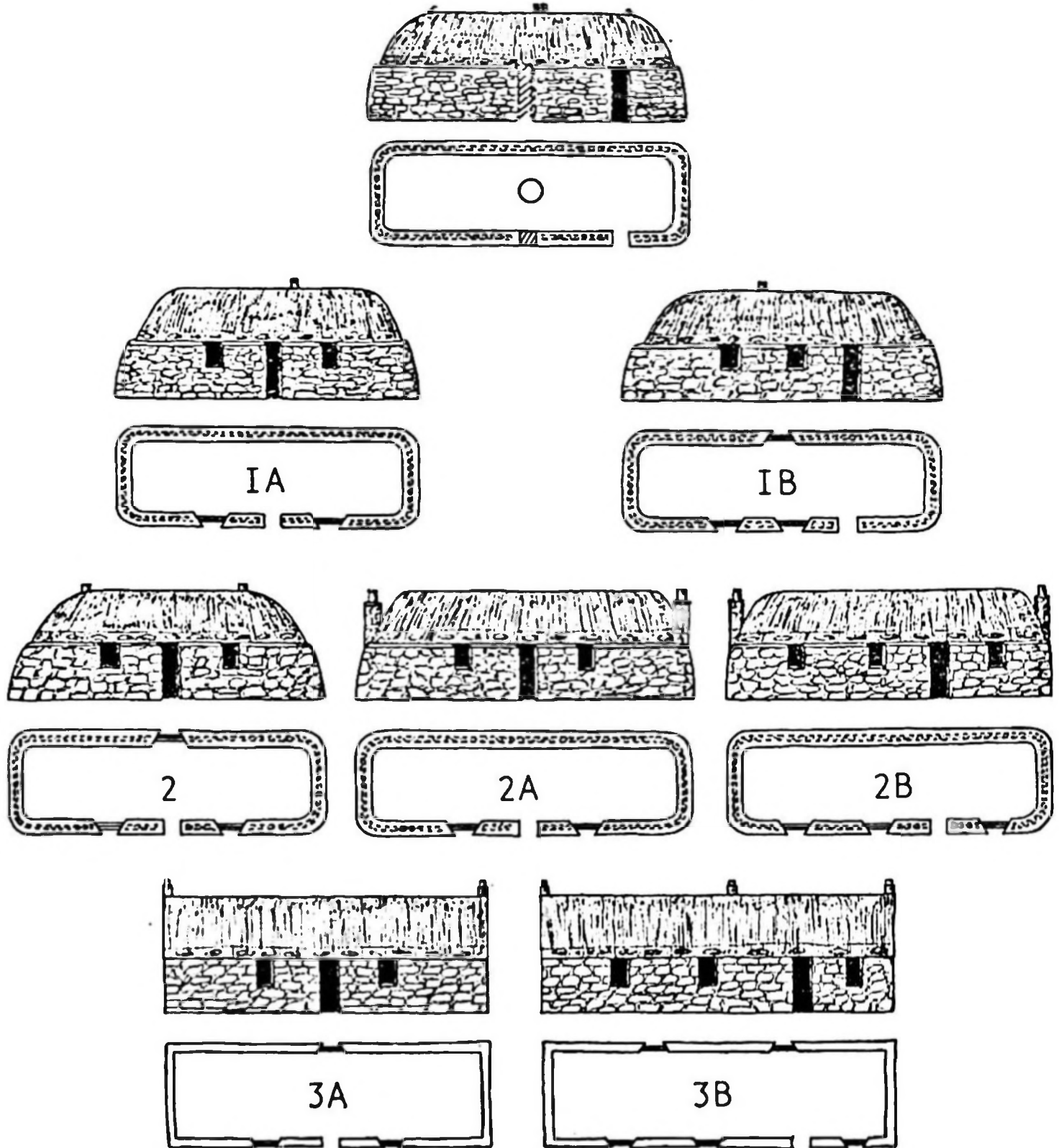
Wall: double, with parapet (3 to 4 feet thick), hip gable.

Windows: two (one on either side of door), and one possible rear window.

Door: central.

1B This is more in direct line from Type 0, and establishes the B tradition, with asymmetric door and originally, presumably as with 0, bipartite or tripartite internal division into byre at door, with communicating living-room or rooms. No examples of this division existed in North Uist in living memory, but whilst comparative published evidence is

TABLE III

Suggested evolutionary sequence of North Uist house types

Plans approximate to average dimensions of recorded types.

eschewed in this article it may be noted that this is akin to Walton's "Skye type" (Walton 1957) (see Pl. II, figs. 1 and 2).

As in 1A except—

Door: off central (occasionally three windows).

2 With 2A transitional from 1A to 3A,

Chimney: two (one at either gable) in thatch.

Thatch: to inner edge of wall.

Wall: double with parapet (3 feet thick) hip gable.

Windows: two, asymmetrically about door, lintelled in some cases with stone or wood.

Door: central, lintelled in some cases with stone or wood.

2A Distinctive Hebridean "tower" chimney type (see Pl. III, fig. 1).

As 2, but—

Chimney: two of "tower" type.

2B In tradition B style (see Pl. III, fig. 2).

As 2A, except—

Windows: three.

Door: asymmetrically sited.

3A Final stage of A before manufactured roofing (see Pl. IV, fig. 1).

Chimney: two in gables.

Thatch: to outer edge of wall.

Windows: two, symmetrically placed.

Wall: single (2 to 3 feet thick), full gables.

Door: central.

3B Final stage of B transition, many examples probably converted to hard roofs in recent times (see Pl. IV, fig. 2).

As 3A except—

Chimney: three (one central, two gable).

Windows: three.

Door: asymmetrically placed.

As regards measurements, these are not given in the case of identical examples, especially type 2A, the most numerous class. As regards dating, it must be remembered that the Reid Survey only enables definite identification of 1799 *sites*, intact survival of actual buildings shown there is unlikely. Dating given as "nineteenth century", without source, indicates that the structure is not recent according to oral tradition and O.S. 1875, nor apparently as old as the 1799 Survey.

TABLE IV

Summary of measurements and dating evidence of extant houses

Type	No.	Mea- sured	Measurements (exterior)	Dating source	Dating and notes
0	—	—	See site-plans for (6) and (21), also Plans I and II	Clearance of 1820s (E.U.L. M.S.)	Probable last exam- ples in late 19th century: see Pl. I, fig. 1
1A	1	—	—	Post 1799 (Reid Map)	Rare instance of transitional type. Occupant refused to allow photography, etc.
1B	6	4	(i) 36' × 20'	Post 1799 (Reid)	All but the first (i) and one unmeasured site, a steading, are on 1799 sites (Reid)
			(ii) 64/54' × 24'	OT = +100 years old (Reid 1799)	(ii) and (iii) are inhabited houses, (iii) being the only fairly certain exam- ple in North Uist of a relatively intact and still occu- pied 18th-century house: (iv) and the two unmeasured sites are now steadings
			(iii) 57' × 21'	Reid 1799	
			(iv) 51/48' × 27'	OT = +60 years old (Reid 1799)	
2	—	—			Examples very prob- ably existed and one still does on off- shore island of Grimsay
2A	34	13		(Reid Map) OT	Two examples on 1799 sites Ten examples dat- ing to 19th-20th century
2B	11	7	39' × 18' 48/57' × 24' (orig. 70') 54' × 24' 60' × 24'	—1799 site —19th century OT —19th century —1912 built by occupant)	One dating to 1939 Sites cover period 1799-1912
3A	6	2	60' × 24' 54' × 21' 42' × 24' 48' × 21'	—1850 OT —ca. 1860 OT —1799 site —1799 site, 19th century rebuilt	19th-20th century
3B	1	1	60' × 21'	—1880 OT	1880 (+1933) Many probable ex- amples now conver- ted to slate- or zinc- roofs
Grand Totals	59	27			

Note—OT = Oral Tradition.

1799 site = approximate site of house marked in Reid Survey. Steading not generally included.

A further source exists in old photographs: those in Table 5 were published in Beveridge (1911). Especially instructive is the example from Heisker (Pl. I, fig. 1), which contains all types. These photographs were all taken before 1905, and may thus be considered as virtually late nineteenth-century evidence. See Table V.

TABLE V

House types represented in old photographs

Type	Numbers	Dating (Based on Reid; and E. Beveridge photographs)	Remarks
0	3	pre-1905	Heisker and Eilean a Ghiorr (see Pl. I, figs. 1 and 2).
1	3	19th century, and pre-1905	Hougarry 19th century, (1799 site).
2A	3	pre-1905	Heisker.
2B	1	pre-1905 + 1799 site	Tigharry.
3B	1	pre-1905 pre-1905 (post 1799)	Boreray. Heisker.

The above summaries (Tables IV and V) show that all the types of buildings were in use in the nineteenth century. It seems likely that the gable was a late nineteenth-century adaptation following directly from the "tower" chimneys of 2A and 2B, which originated perhaps in the mid-nineteenth century. There seems to be no precise knowledge of the date of introduction of the "tower" chimneys, but, their dressed stone, cement binding, tiled orifice, and the changed position of the fireplace away from the central hearth to the end wall, all suggest a mid-nineteenth century origin. In endeavouring to trace the history of vernacular architecture farther backwards it is necessary to assess the datable content in the statistics of Table VI. As indicated, types 2, 2A and 2B, 3A and 3B are stylistically late (none probably earlier than mid-nineteenth century), and are unlikely to throw much light on previous forms: very few are even on eighteenth-century sites, still less incorporate eighteenth-century buildings (see Table VI).

TABLE VI

Number of thatched houses 1963	Types 2, 2A, B, 3A, 3B		Types 1A/1B	
	Total No.	No. on 1799 sites	Total No.	No. on 1799 site
59	54	5	7	4
			(of this total three were converted to steadings probably in the 19th century and are dubious in detail).	

The paucity of these figures and the almost total lack of continuity is dramatically illustrated by the following summary of the late eighteenth-century totals.

TABLE VII

(1) 1799 Reid Survey approx. total buildings	(2) OSA (1794?) total houses	(3) OSA Houses other than thatched
665	463	3

The discrepancy between (1) and (2) is to be accounted for primarily by outbuildings. The fact which emerges is that four hundred and sixty thatched houses existed in North Uist at the end of the eighteenth century, and of these only four (Table VI, Types 1A/1B) have probably survived more or less intact; some five (Table VI, Types 2-3B) are reconstructions.

It is fortunate that those village sites showing physical evidence datable to 1799 shown on the settlement table No. 1 survive; otherwise evidence of historical continuity would scarcely exist.

As stated on p. 9, definite and detailed evidence remains of *bailtean* Clachan Sand (6), Grinish (21) and Balilleray (42) and, to a much lesser extent, of Sollas (13), Baleloch (26), Tigharry (24) and Balranald (31). The relevance of this to our study of individual house-types is of course that the foundations of these are present and measurable. In the case of Clachan Sand (6), and Grinish (21), the precise buildings of *c.* 1825 (clearance) exist and, allowing for slight increase in numbers, presumably almost in the form of the 1799 settlements. The plans of Foshigarry (21) and Clachan Sand (6) are given, Nos. 1 and 2 (Figs. 1 and 2). Individual buildings are of the following dimensions (all exterior measurements):

TABLE VIII

Foshigarry (2) Larger buildings Numbers: 6	Clachan Shanda (22) Larger buildings 8	Balranald (9) Larger buildings 1
45' × 25'	55' × 24'	<i>c.</i> 75' × 30'
48' × 26'	48' × 27'	(badly ruined)
45' × 25'	54' × 24'	
51' × 25'	69' × 27'	
63' × 27'	48' × 24'	
57' × 25'	57' × 28'	
	54' × 24'	
	39' × 24'	

Measurements are approximate as many of the foundations are turfed over. The exceptionally long fourth house at Clachan Sand perhaps includes a small outhouse. Generally, however, the figures are fairly similar, showing a length to breadth ratio of 2:1, and averaging at Foshigarry 51×26 ft. and at Clachan Sand (excluding the fourth house on list) 51.5×25 ft. Balranald was a leading tacksman's house and, earlier, that of a cadet

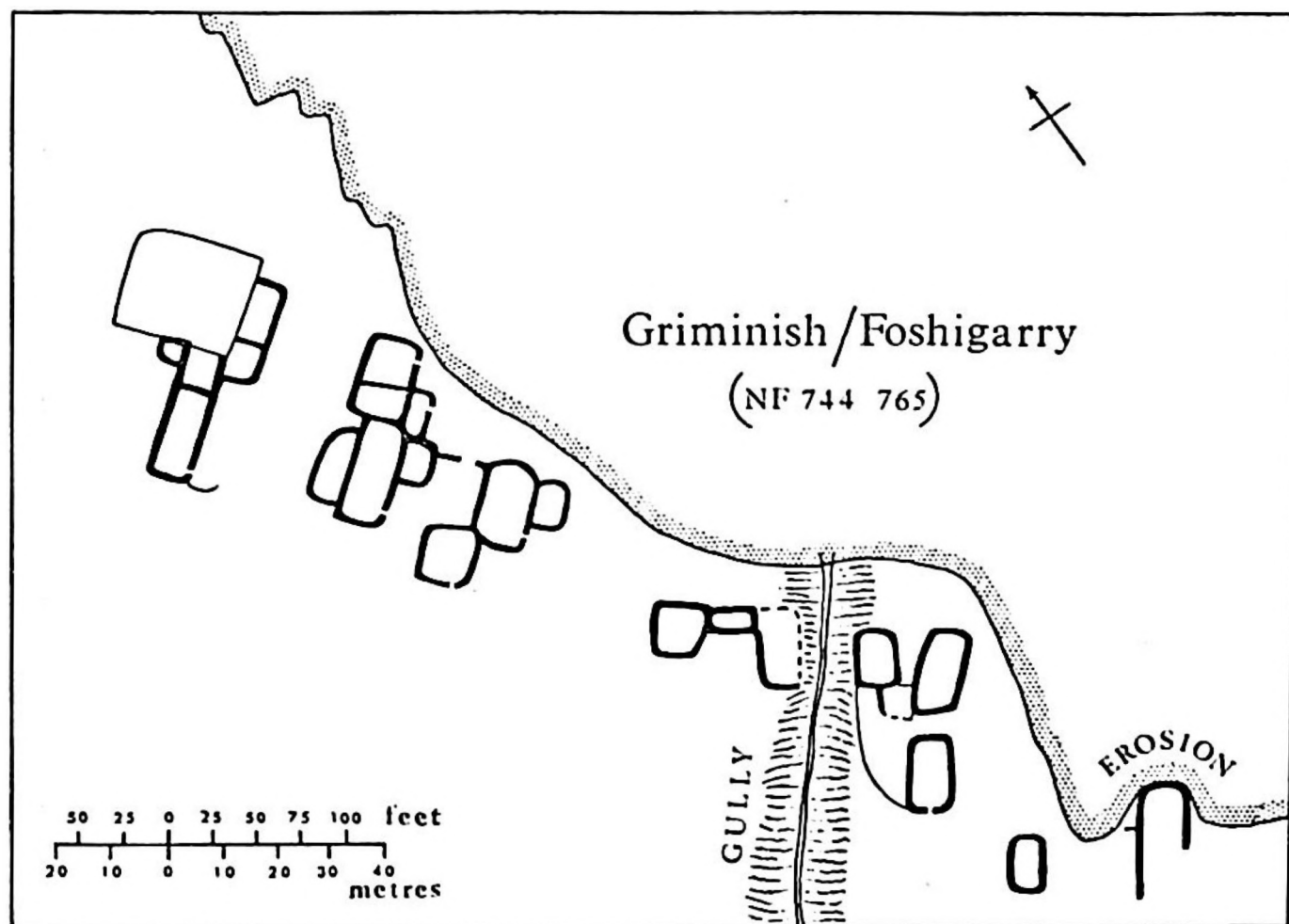


FIG. 1.

family of the Sleat hierarchy; it is of more massive proportions than the usual *baile* buildings. Buildings at Clachan Sand especially are considerable structures with bottom courses of large orthostats often six feet in diameter. Walling is clearly double and about four feet thick, and the door where discernible is usually asymmetrically placed. Further details would only be obtainable by excavation (unpublished excavations at Veilish (14) have revealed buildings of similar character but of still more massive construction even than Balranald).

The four probable surviving eighteenth-century buildings cited earlier (see Table VI) do not correspond in measurement very precisely to the figures for Foshigarry and Clachan Sand, but buildings of this sort tend to be idiosyncratic and raised by the individual. In fact, the four buildings referred to have

average proportions of 50×23 ft. Excluded from this consideration are two eighteenth-century houses (one on Vallay, one at Spanish), of typical small laird type, which are not traditional or of indigenous design—nor were they thatched.

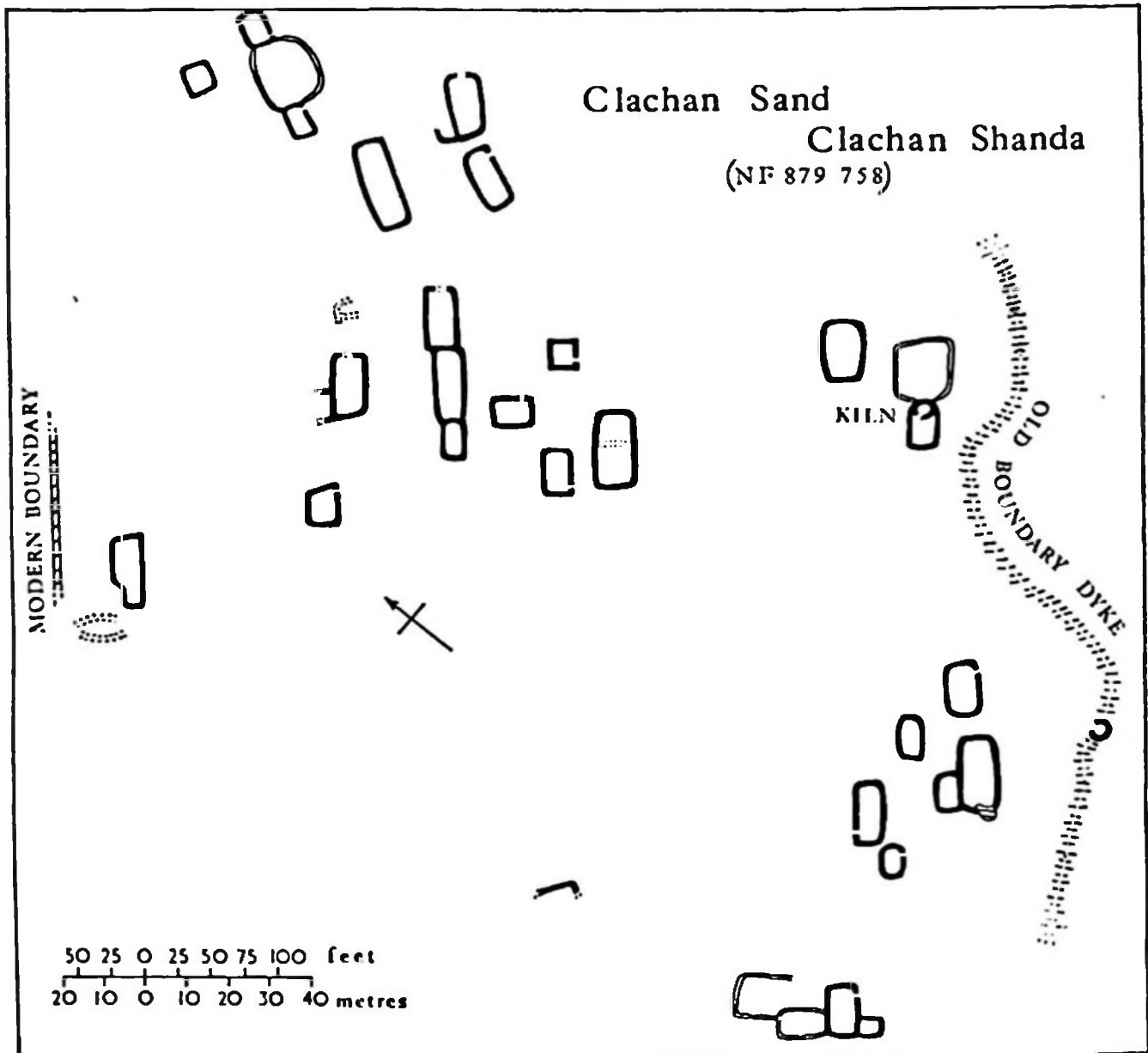


FIG. 2.

The figures for Balilleray (42) have not been given as the terminus of this township is most imprecise, and much conversion and rebuilding might have taken place in the nineteenth century: severe coastal erosion occurred in that century and caused a change of site (R.C.C. 1884). *Bailtean* at Sollas (13), Baleloch (26) and Tigharry (apart from the possible intact house) (29), contain fragments of one or two houses only, the remainder having been robbed or ploughed out. The proportions where they can be recorded, however, are similar to those of Table VIII. There is, then, no evidence here for the "Norse long house" often regarded as the prototype of recent Hebridean housing.

It is possible that small settlements of brief duration such as those mentioned in connection with MacCodrum the bard (Matheson 1938: *passim*) have been omitted from these considerations, but otherwise all available information dating back to 1799 has been presented. The further implications of this survey are that it seems fair to suggest that the settlements

TABLE IX

Evidence for 18th to 20th century continuity of settlement and house type

Settlements	Evidence 18th and 19th century			Evidence 20th century
	1718	1799	Lotting/ Clearance period	
Clachan Sand (6)	o	<i>Baile</i>	× Cleared probably late 1820s	Ruins as cleared
Foshigarry (21)	o	<i>Baile</i>	× Cleared probably late 1820s	Ruins as cleared
Balranald (31)	o	<i>Baile</i> (with Tacksman)	<i>Baile</i> as larger Tacksman's farm	Ruins of Tacksman's house. Remainder of <i>Baile</i> over built.
Sollas (13)	o	<i>Baile</i>	× Cleared 1850	Ruins as cleared—part only
Baleloch (26)	o	<i>Baile</i>	× Cleared 1815	Ruins as cleared—part only
Tigharry (29)	o	<i>Baile</i>	Lotted post 1815 Part of <i>Baile</i> continuous as Crofting Township	Site known as Huna: (a) Ruins pre-lotting site (part only) (b) 1 extant house Type 1B
Hasten (37)	o	<i>Baile?</i>	Lotted post 1814 <i>Baile</i> continuous as Crofting Township	1 extant steading (ex house) Type 1B. Remainder out-built
Knockatorran (35)	o	<i>Baile</i>	Lotted post 1814 <i>Baile</i> continuous as Crofting Township	1 extant steading (ex house) Type 1B. Remainder over-built

o = Documentary reference.

Baile = Existence of *baile*-type settlement.

of 1799 that have been recorded probably represent, in the absence of any known disruptive factors, the situation in 1718 fairly accurately, allowing for some expansion. Furthermore, a certain tenuous thread of continuity can also be postulated on these grounds for three existing individual houses. This continuity can be summarised as above, Table IX. This body of information is unlikely to be appreciably amplified, unless by excavation. Table IX, then, summarises the total evidence remaining of eighteenth-century settlements and of extant individual houses.

This study has been very much a consideration of minor structural details within a small area but it does present the total information available back to the frontier of precise (or semi-precise) knowledge in 1718.

Settlement prior to 1718. Before 1718 definite information is confined to place-names appearing in documents originally written at the remote centres of Stirling or Edinburgh in what was, prior to 1609, virtually another political unit. The absence of land records from the kingdom or lordship of the Isles is a serious handicap, and documentation available is liable to be partial and ill-informed, and, where it exists, it goes back only to 1469. Structural evidence with possible documentation is confined to sites at Veilish (5) and Dunamich (55), described earlier. Oral tradition and occasion incidental references seem to indicate what might be termed a “*baile and dùn*” phase persisting into the sixteenth century. Certain island *Dùin* (pl. of *Dùn*) (virtually stone crannogs) have sophisticated features, boat harbours, rectilinear buildings within the enceinte, and in one case mortared stonework. Some are definitely associated with historical characters, not necessarily the first occupants, although this in itself would of course be significant in settlement considerations. Balranald and *Dùn Mhic Raghnaill* constitute a particularly convincing example. Furthermore a few *Dùin* appear on Blaeu 1662. The information is tabled below:

TABLE X

Site	RCAM 1928 No.	Dating features	Associations	Notes
Dùn Mhic Raghnaill	205	—	Baile Raghnaill nearby, Baile of leading cadet family of Clan Donald	On Blaeu as Ylan Dunikrannal
Dùn an Sticir	171	Contains rectilinear buildings (possibly secondary)	Clann A' Phiocair Clann Mhic Chlérich	Possibly on Blaeu as Dunamich
Dùn Aonghuis	213	Contains rectilinear building boat port	Aonghus Fionn— MacDhomhnaill Hearaich Fl. ca. 1516	—
Dùn Scolpaig	322	None	Domhnall Hearach ca. 1506	Destroyed and replaced by “folly” in 19th century
Dùn Bán, Loch Caravat	215	Contains rectilinear and windowed buildings, boat port, lime-mortar construction	None	Certainly medieval
Dùn Steingarry	316	No structure remaining	Domhnall Hearach c. ca. 1506	—
	Also Nos. 204, 206, 207, 208, 210, 211, 212, 214	Boat-ports and rectilinear buildings	None	All possible medieval structures

It does in fact seem perfectly reasonable to assume for North Uist an overall pattern of Iron Age, and derived Iron Age, fortified settlement (excluding the wheelhouses, which are clearly not fortified) persisting into the late medieval period. The relatively fertile and prosperous conditions could well have supported numerous cadet families distributed among the *Dùn* and controlled titularly at least from Caisteal Bhuirbh in Benbecula (prior to the mid-fifteenth century). The development of more stable and settled conditions following the turbulence of the last years of the Island hierarchies (c. 1490-1550), with some resultant population increase, probably enabled much of the population to live in *baile* townships, whilst the local sub-chief or "tacksman" at first continued to live in his *dùn*, but later used it only in case of emergency, and finally settled in his *baile* itself. The last transition is probably indicated in the relative proximity of the *Dùn Mhic Raghnaill* and Balranald Seanaval, to take one example. This is at present, of course, hypothetical but it seems consistent with the possibilities and data available.

Only an outline of the history of West Highland settlement as it affects North Uist has been attempted. Much detailed information is still needed, but this can only be acquired when many particular problems have been dealt with. For further progress in this research, it is first of all necessary that regional surveys should be carried out for every island and parish in the West Highlands. These should define the particular problems of the individual areas, which can then be tackled (if necessary) by excavation of carefully selected sites to answer otherwise insoluble problems. For West Highland studies in general, such are necessary if only to produce the vital archaeological indices, pottery, metal types, house types, etc., needed to construct a reliable chronological scale for the area, the total absence of which is perhaps unique in Britain. A few well-stratified type-sites covering a substantial period might well provide (with much else) the detailed links needed to relate the recent historical settlement of the North-West to its prehistoric and medieval origins.

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APPENDIX A

Details from Judicial Rental of Sir Donald MacDonald's estate of North Uist, 1718

(MacDonald, A., and MacDonald, A., 1896-1914)

Places	(Baile Nos. as Table I)	Nos. of Tenants
Ballivicphaill	(2)	15
Balliviconen	(3)	4
Clachan	(6)	10
Rimskarray.	(7)	4
Vallakuy	(8)	4
Oransay	(11)	1
Hausten	(37)	7
Caranish	(44)	9
		(+ one unoccupied portion)
Griminish	(21)	1
Kilpheder	(23)	1
Ballekinloch	(26)	1
Pableskarry.	(34)	1
Kirkibost	(41)	1
Arisaig	(53)	2
Ulleray	(42)	13
		(+ one unoccupied portion)
Kerameanach	(16)	11
Malaclett	(19)	5
Balloan	(24)	5
Howgarie	(30)	14
Balmore	(36)	8
Ashdail	(54)	6
Tromskarry	(9)	1
Vannt	(28)	1
Hosta.	(27)	1
Knocknatorran	(35)	1
Ballshare	(43)	1
Heisker	(40)	1
Kyles, etc.	(39)?	1
Gerrinacurran	(18)	1
Tigheary	(29)	1
Balleranald	(31)	vacant
Doun	(17)	1
Sollas	(13)	1
Boreray	(15)	1
Vallay	(20)	1
Gr. Off. Land (Ground Officers Land)		1
Total of (Direct) rent payers		137

Of these, 20 are of tacksman status (the single units); 117 are tenants of joint farms.

The remainder of the population were dependent on the above units with the exception (presumably) of a few craftsmen.

(Spelling of Place-Names as on original Documents)

APPENDIX B

Details from Rental of North Uist—1764

(Balranald Papers MS.)

	(Baile No. as Table I)	Nos. of Tenants
Kyles Bernera	(1)	1
Baile MhicPhàil	(2)	15
Garryvurchie)	(3)	6
Balviconan)		
Peinvanich)	(4)	4
Goulbay		
The Two Clachans	(6)	14
Rammisgarry	(7)	13
Valaquie	(8)	4
Trumisgarry	(9)	1
Oransay	(11)	1
Sollas	(13)	1
Havisgarry	(with 13)	1
Dunskellar	(17)	1
Middlequarter	(16)	13
Vallay	(20)	1
Malaclett	(19)	
Griminish	(21)	1
Kilpheder	(23)	1
Balelone	(24)	
Balmartine	(25)	5
Balkenloch (Baleloch)	(26)	1
Hosta	(27)	2
Tigharry	(29)	1
Hougharry	(30)	29
Heisker	(40)	1
Paiblesgarry	(34)	1
Knockintorran	(35)	16
Balmore	(36)	14
Knockline	(38)	14
Kirkibost.	(41)	1
Balranald	(31)	
Kyles	(39)	1
Baleshare	(43)	
Gerrinancurran	(18)	1
Illeray, viz. Linclet and North Quarter	(42)	12
Carinish	(44)	12
The Tack of Borera.	(18)	(1)
Ardmaddie	(49)	1
The Change of Kerseva)	(50)	1
The Lands of Kerseva)		
(Cearsabach) (now Lochmaddy)		
The Change of Sand		1
The Change of Paible		1
The Change of Carinish		1
Total of (Direct) Rent-payers		194

Of these, 16 were of tacksman status; 4 were innkeepers; 1 (Ardmaddie) was the game-keeper; and thus 173 were tenants of joint farms.
(Spelling of Place-Names as on original Document)

STATUS OF POPULATION

	Tacksmen	Sm. Tenants	Others	Total Population
1718 . . .	20	117	?	?
1764 . . .	16	173	188 approx.*	1,909 (1755)

* This figure is arrived at by taking total tenants—194; allowing 5 family dependants each = 970 persons and subtracting this from the population total of 1,909 for 1755 and dividing again by 5 to produce family units.

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