

Around the Archives

Tasglann nan Eilean Siar: A'fosgladh dorsan gu ulaidhean Tasglann anns na h-Eileanan Siar

Hebridean Archive: Opening up Access to Archives in the Western Isles

David Powell

The Western Isles of Scotland can usually be found just above, or behind, the head of your UK national TV network weather presenter. Situated off the north-west coast of Scotland, the islands have a population of around 27,000 people living across the islands of Vatersay and Barra in the south, working northwards through Eriskay, South Uist, Benbecula, North Uist, Berneray, Harris and Lewis. There are several smaller island groups associated with the area, including the abandoned islands of Mingulay and the Bishop's Islands to the south of Barra, the double World Heritage Site of St Kilda out to the west of the main archipelago, Heisker (also known as the Monach Islands) and the remote outpost of Rockall. The first language of the islands remains Scots Gaelic and the Gaelic culture underpins life within its communities through its traditions, values and outlook.

Situated as they are, the islands are remote from the administrative centres of Edinburgh and London. Historically though, the islands were anything but remote. Placed strategically on the Western Seaboard of Europe, they sat on the major trade routes between Scandinavia and Europe. These trade routes saw Viking invasion and a heavy Norse influence the legacy of which is seen in place names such as Laxdale, Habost, Leurbost and Valtos.

From the twelfth century the Western Isles formed part of the dominion of the Lord of the Isles until finally falling to the crown in the fifteenth century. This period probably represents the last time the islands were unified until local government reorganisation in 1975, passing into the ownership of various clan families and landlords who had control over the people and the land. This lack of unification has resulted in each island within the chain having developed its very own unique and independent identity, traditions and customs which continue to be celebrated, preserved and owned by their communities.

Local government first came to the islands in 1845 with the establishment

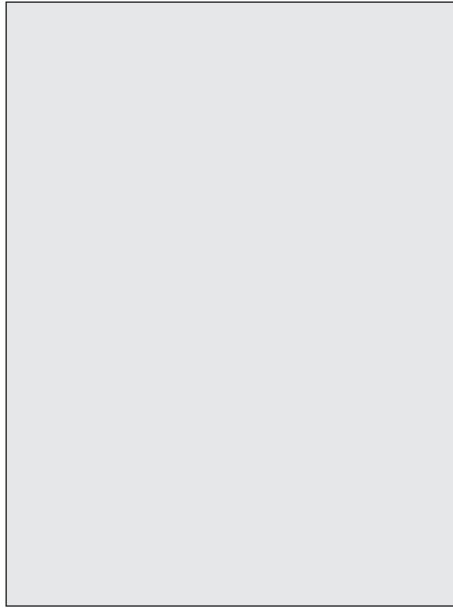


Plate 1 *Declarations de fidelī administratione officiū*, front. Front page of a volume of declarations signed by all Councillors of the Burgh of Stornoway, 1874–1974. (S/R.612)

of the parish system. Lewis had the four parishes of Barvas, Lochs, Stornoway and Uig. Four other parishes were more island-based, namely Harris (including Berneray and St Kilda), North Uist, South Uist (incorporating Benbecula) and Barra. With the establishment of Scottish County Councils and District Committees in 1890, the islands fell into two camps: Lewis came under Ross & Cromarty with its headquarters in Dingwall on the east side of mainland Scotland and was served locally by Lewis District Council. Harris through to Barra in the south came under Inverness-shire County Council headquartered in Inverness with the local District Committees of Harris, North Uist, and a joint District Committee for South Uist and Barra. When the District Committees were replaced by District Councils in 1930, the borders remained the same, with the exception of Barra who got their own District Council. Come local government reorganisation in 1975, this was all swept away and a new unitary authority, Comhairle nan Eilean (Western Isles Islands Council), was established, headquartered in the former Burgh of Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis. This had been sold to the former Inverness-shire isles as an improvement – local government was more local, in their own community rather than in Inverness! However, there is little link historically, physically or mentally between the Uists, Barra or even Harris with Lewis. The Uists

and Barra had, and continue to have, good transport links with Inverness and Glasgow by air, and Oban and the west coast of Scotland by sea, and even today have little reason to visit Stornoway.

Even within the individual islands, particular areas have very distinct identities. Arguably, this is no different from towns and villages within other Scottish local authorities but in the Western Isles the communities have been relatively static. Although emigration had been significant from the notorious clearances through until the twentieth century, there has been little movement of families around the islands. People are very rooted in the land and communities around them. Cultural differences between the islands and communities manifest themselves in religion (the southern islands being predominantly Catholic and North Uist northwards being more Presbyterian), in local tradition, proverbs, poetry and in the regional variations in Gaelic that are spoken. Some traditions are common across the islands. For example, the Ceilidh house tradition of people meeting together to tell stories, dance, sing and recite Gaelic poetry was a common event across the islands. Genealogy and its associated tales formed a core part of this activity, it being recounted as a Gaelic oral tradition since well before the advent of statutory registration, and it continues as a tradition to this day. People from a very young age know their relatives, be they living or long dead, and their interrelationships with other families. The patronymic naming tradition is still common and well documented within the communities. In Gaelic, these are known as *sloinneadh* and are important for differentiating between individuals within communities where there may be multiple people who share both first and surname. Often, the *sloinneadh* include nicknames that help to further differentiate. For example, Murchadh mac Iain Duibh mhic Dhomhnaill (Murdo, son of dark-haired John, son of Donald).

The importance of genealogy and local heritage, therefore, is a key part of an individual island's traditions. With no archive service in the islands and no museum service until the mid-1980s, the communities have led on the collection, preservation and promotion of their individual heritage. This found its feet in 1977 with the establishment of Comann Eachdraidh Nis (Ness Historical Society) in Lewis.

The Comainn Eachdraidh movement began in the 1970s, motivated by the wish to preserve the Gaelic Language and culture. Comainn Eachdraidh can be considered as storehouses (with or without publicly accessible buildings) of local cultural heritage embodied in objects, archives, photographs, oral recordings and the memories of individuals. These are significant collections which, as with all museums, are only partially researched and accessible, with potential for further development and cared for by people who are eager to share these collections with as wide an audience as possible.¹

¹ Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Application for European Structural Funds [to establish Hebridean Archiving Project] (2010), 16.

Based around individual geographic areas or islands, the Comainn Eachdraidh (the Gaelic plural for Historical Societies) number around twenty (Table 1). These range from fully accredited museums through to more casual groups who meet to discuss local history. It will come as no surprise given the context I have outlined, that each Comann Eachdraidh is fiercely proud of their area's individual identity. Rightly, they see themselves as learning centres for their own geographical areas, custodians of local knowledge, the Gaelic language and culture, and as significant attractions for tourism in their localities.

<p>Isles of Lewis Angus Macleod Archives Barvas & Brue Historical Society Bernera Historical Society Carloway Historical Society East Loch Roag Historical Society Kinloch Historical Society Ness Historical Society North Lochs Historical Society North Tolsta Historical Society Park Historical Society Point Historical Society Stornoway Historical Society West Side Historical Society Uig Historical Society</p>	<p>Isles of Harris, Uists and Barra Barra and Vatersay Historical Society Benbecula Historical Society Berneray Historical Society Harris Historical Society North Uist Historical Society South Uist Historical Society</p> <p>Pan-Islands Islands Book Trust Western Isles Transport Preservation Group</p>
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Table 1 Comainn Eachdraidh (Historical Societies) active in the Western Isles in 2012. Contact details for these can be found through <http://www.tasglann.org.uk>.

Prior to 2010, formal archive advice and provision in the islands had been minimal, although the National Records of Scotland, National Register of Archives for Scotland and the Business Archives Council of Scotland had undertaken survey work. In 2009, the University of Dundee Centre for Archives & Information Studies was commissioned by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles Council) to look at archives and records management provision within the Western Isles. Its report stated:

Inadequate archival storage conditions and lack of professional oversight applies throughout the Western Isles and in many cases the deficiencies are actively and seriously affecting the long-term survival of the collections and thus the documentary heritage of the Western Isles.²

In compiling the report they looked not only at archive management within the Council, but at the archives of the Comainn Eachdraidh and several notable

² Centre for Archives & Information Studies, report on Archival Provision for Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Dundee, April 2009), 23.

businesses. The work of the voluntary-led Comainn Eachdraidh was praised but the requirement for professional guidance was noted.

It was also noted that archives, through the route of ancestral tourism and the wide diaspora in North America and elsewhere, were a significant opportunity for economic growth through attracting visitors to the island. The value of the heritage of the islands was already evident through the testimony of the historical societies who regularly saw tourists visiting their areas to research their roots. Genealogical and academic researchers are an attractive economic proposition, often visiting for several days at a time to use the local resources and are therefore a key target audience. Visitor statistics show the value of tourism to the islands' economy, but interestingly that only twenty-four per cent of visitors are from outside the UK (Table 2) representing a large untapped market, especially amongst the wider island diaspora.

Tourism value	£49.9m
Visitors	195,766
Visitor origin	UK 76%
Visitor spend (average)	£255
Tourism jobs	1,000

Table 2 Tourism spend 2007. Source: Highlands & Islands Enterprise.³

Archives in the islands are dispersed through the Comainn Eachdraidh but the majority are still in the private hands of the businesses, organisations and individuals who created them. These have the potential to be harnessed for research tourism and community exploitation. The Comhairle formally recognises the value of heritage to the islands through its Community Planning Partnerships Single Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Government. Local Outcome 6 states:

The people of the Outer Hebrides derive maximum benefit from the natural and cultural resources of the area, whilst at the same time safeguarding those resources to benefit future generations.⁴

Arguably, most local government archive services grow out of an administrative need to manage a Council's historical records, coupled with a realisation that access to such records is part of the democratic process, an open society

³ Outer Hebrides Tourism Partnership, *Area Tourism Partnership Visitor Plan 2010–2015* (Edinburgh, 2010), 8, <http://www.visitscotland.org/pdf/Outer-Hebrides-ATP-Visitor-Plan.pdf>.

⁴ Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership, *Forward Together: Single Outcome Agreement 2009–2010* (2009), 45, <http://www.cnc-siar.gov.uk/cxdir/externalstrategy/documents/Outer%20Hebrides%20Single%20Outcome%20Agreement.pdf>.

and learning. They then go on to collect other records relating to the local area. However, for the Western Isles, the establishment of the archive team was driven by the potential for economic development where businesses can trade on their heritage and learn from their archives; the desire to increase tourism and the need to support the voluntary sector. It has not been driven by the direct administrative need of the Comhairle or a desire to centralise collections. A bid was submitted to the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to establish Tasglann nan Eilean Siar (Hebridean Archives) in 2010 as a three-year project.

A team of three people has been appointed: David Powell as Project Manager & Archivist, Katie Anne Maciver as Project Assistant and Donna Morrison as our Gaelic-speaking Archives Assistant, part-funded by Comann na Gàidhlig's graduate placement scheme. The project is tasked with laying the foundation of an archive service for the Western Isles and promoting access to archives across the archipelago. As a project, our main aim is to set the foundations for a new permanent archive service that is sensitive to the needs and uniqueness of the Western Isles, its communities and the collecting that continues to be undertaken through the Comainn Eachdraidh. Our island setting and network of community archives gives us the opportunity to do something maybe a bit different, that allows us to preserve and promote access to records as a Council service yet not necessarily through the traditional route of a central search room and archive store. Through the work and collections of the Comainn Eachdraidh and the desire to use archives as a tool for economic development through tourism, we are charged with building an archive brand for the Western Isles that represents the archive holdings of the islands as a collective, albeit dispersed, whole. To this extent we are mapping collections across the islands, promoting their regional importance and working with individuals, businesses, associations and public authorities to manage and care for their collections. The archives, regardless of where they are held, will be promoted through a Gaelic and English language website as a tool for aiding researchers in locating appropriate records and to attract the wider diaspora to visit and use collections.

The Tasglann is two years into the project and the work of mapping collections is ongoing. Already, many archive collections relating to businesses, organisations and estates have been identified, visited and documented by the team who offer advice and guidance on their care and management.

As mentioned previously, the historical societies are store houses of local knowledge and culture. They have significant collections relating to the islands, their localities and their diaspora. They are prominent bodies in their communities, not only promoting the area's culture and heritage but also providing a meeting space and community focus. Many have been successful in gaining funding to employ project staff, to purchase sophisticated equipment and to maintain permanent museum exhibitions or premises. Comainn Eachdraidh collections vary from location to location but focus heavily on individuals, families and communities covered by the individual Comann

Eachdraidh's geographical coverage. Although Gaelic is the main language in many of these communities, the majority of records are in English unless originally generated in Gaelic, as in the case of poetry, song, proverbs and exhibition text.

Most Comainn Eachdraidh maintain detailed croft histories for their areas including family genealogies, patronymics and nicknames, photographs of individuals and buildings, with the research dating back into the nineteenth century and beyond. Non-crofting families are also recorded. The great value of the Comainn Eachdraidh are the personal connections and knowledge their members can provide to researchers, the unwritten history and connections that come from living and working within a close-knit community.

As well as genealogical information, photographic collections are a particular strength. Alongside images of individuals, thematic folders relating to crofting, fishing, religion, wartime, military, music and a host of other local subjects are compiled from images contributed by the communities. These photographs are complemented by research papers undertaken by Comainn Eachdraidh members. Folders of local bàrdachd (poetry), stories and proverbs help to preserve and record the local Gaelic culture. Their archive collections can also include school records, records of local shops and businesses, family papers, harbours and even, in the case of North Uist Historical Society, the archive of the Scottish folk-rock band Runrig.

Many of the societies also maintain museums and collect artefacts relating to the local area. Several undertake programmes of Gaelic and English oral history interviews with local individuals along with an active programme of events and exhibitions that help to promote and disseminate their research. The annotation of Ordnance Survey maps with Gaelic place names and landmarks is another common feature, with local knowledge often correcting the misrecorded names noted by the nineteenth-century map surveyors who couldn't understand the Gaelic names told to them at the time.

The Comainn Eachdraidh of Bernera, Park, Uig and Kinloch came together to create Hebridean Connections in 2006. This innovative Lottery-funded project brought together their collected genealogical data into a single, searchable website and added value to this through linking people's records to other life events or stories such as their crofts, boats, stories or objects in the Comainn Eachdraidh collections. It is a fascinating and engrossing site that has proved massively popular with genealogists and locals alike. Although the project has now finished, funding is being sought to expand the site and open it up to other Comainn Eachdraidh so that it can become a more comprehensive resource for the islands. The site is available at <http://www.hebrideanconnections.com/> and is a testament to the power and strength of community archives.

One of the roles of the Tasglann project is to provide ongoing advice and support to the Comainn Eachdraidh who have benefited from curatorial advice from the Museum nan Eilean but have had little aid in identifying and managing their archive collections. The Tasglann offer a programme of

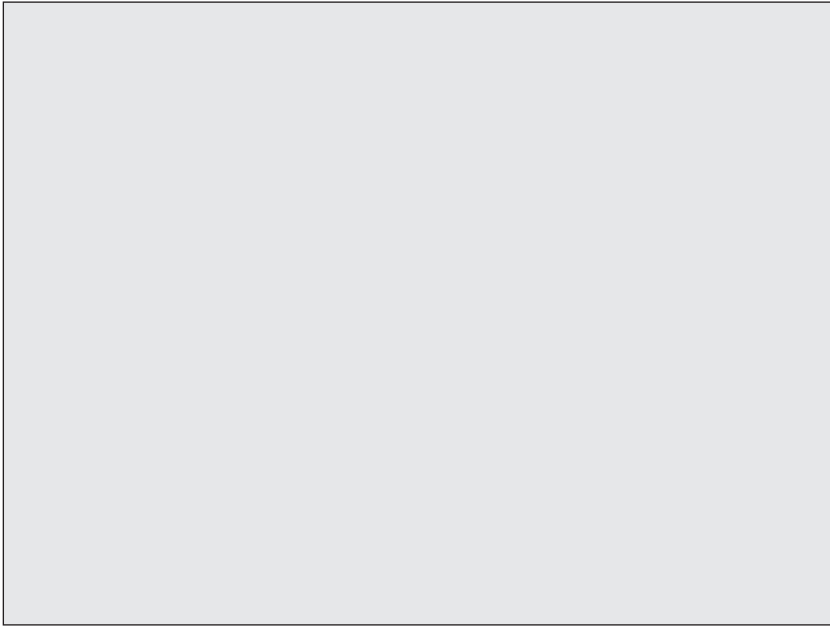


Plate 2 Preservation training with Comainn Eachdraidh members.

training based around their individual needs, ranging from catalogue training through to appraisal of collections, storage, handling and digitisation. Each session is tailored to the need of the individual Comann Eachdraidh and has been warmly received.

Historical business records across the islands are still largely held by the businesses and individuals who created them. Many of the islands' businesses are independent, family-owned firms that have survived for several generations. Collections of business records surveyed by the Tasglann project staff include quarries, hotels, tweed mills, general merchants, chemists, community cooperatives and transport firms. Trade associations, including the Harris Tweed Authority, have also been surveyed along with non-business bodies such as Stornoway Port Authority and the Masonic Lodge. These organisations have been happy to talk about their histories and allow us to see their records. Their records are of importance not only to the organisation but also to the wider island communities. They demonstrate the economic development of the islands, the resourcefulness and ability of the companies to diversify and seize opportunities and the employment available. Records between individual companies vary. Some family companies keep few records beyond photographs, publicity materials and statutory accounts. Other companies are laden with minutes and corporate records or have never thrown a document away.

Business surveys record some of the history of the business elicited through discussions with the owners, and then project staff undertake a broad listing of the records *in situ* to get a flavour of what is held. If time allows and the business is willing, more detailed listing is also undertaken. Advice is provided to the owners in terms of helping them to identify the records worth keeping as permanent archives and those of low information value that can safely be destroyed, subject to current administrative or legislative need. The purpose of surveying is not to collect records but to ensure that records of historical importance are preserved. These could potentially be collected in the future either by the Comhairle as the local authority or, if suitable, by a local Comann Eachdraidh. This is the start of what is hoped to be an ongoing relationship between the developing archive service of the islands and the companies where continuing advice and support can be provided to record holders.

Estate records across, and relating to, the islands have also been mapped. Probably the largest estate collection is that of the Isle of Lewis during its ownership by the Mackenzies of Seaforth. The Mackenzies were the proprietors of Lewis from 1609 until 1844 and their records are preserved in the National Records of Scotland.⁵ These are a rich source of information on all aspects of Lewis life although their residence in the National Archive in Edinburgh doesn't make them the most easily accessible for the islanders of Lewis. Most Comainn Eachdraidh have copies of rentals from these papers within their own collections and a selection of records has been copied and is available in Stornoway library. In 1844, the island was purchased by Sir James Matheson who had made his fortune in the Far East spice and opium trade. The island was again sold in 1917 to the soap magnate Lord Leverhulme who planned to industrialise the islands. Although Lord Leverhulme invested heavily in the islands, he had little time for the people's desire for crofting land in the more rural areas of Lewis. This led to various run-ins with crofters returning from the Great War who had been promised land rather than factories and industry and in 1925 Lord Leverhulme quit the island, gifting it to its inhabitants. Stornoway and the villages around Broad Bay to the north of the town was gifted to its people under the auspices of the Stornoway Trust, but other areas of the island declined the offer and the estate of Lewis was carved up into smaller estates and sold off. Few records survive of the Matheson and Leverhulme period but records are held by the Stornoway Trust which have yet to be fully surveyed.

Tasglann nan Eilean Siar have managed to survey the records of several of the smaller Lewis estates which are rich in records relating to their involvement in tourism, hunting and fishing and the commercialisation of the land through fish farming and other activities. Several of the estates, both in Lewis and other areas of the islands, are now in community ownership following land buyouts.

One of the richest estate collections are the records of Stòras Uibhist,

⁵ National Records of Scotland, collection reference GD46: Mackenzies of Seaforth. For full catalogue see <http://www.nas.gov.uk/onlineCatalogue/>.

previously the South Uist Estate. These records date back to its purchase by Major Gordon of Cluny in 1838 and its subsequent management by his son, James, and his wife, Lady Cathcart, through to its present-day status following a community buyout in 2005. The archive was partially catalogued following the HLF-funded PRODIGIA project and a summary catalogue is available at <http://prodigia.wordpress.com/>.

Our mapping work also includes the records of public authorities across the islands. The Tasglann has taken over the day-to-day management of the historical records of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and its predecessor local government bodies including the School Boards, Parochial Boards and Parish Councils, District Committees, District Councils and records of the Burgh of Stornoway. The records are all held in Stornoway having been centralised there in the late 1970s after local government reorganisation. Whilst the Museum nan Eilean was able to provide limited access to these records, their exploitation potential has never been fully realised due to the lack of an archivist and supervised searchroom. The Tasglann now operate a searchroom based at Stornoway library which is open by appointment.

The surviving records are a rich resource. Although there are noticeable gaps within the local government collections, they are particularly strong in school records and parish records documenting the administration of the Poor Law. In the short time that we have operated a searchroom, researchers have been covering areas such as genealogy, crofting, land raids, fishing, Gaelic policy, shipwrecks and nursing provision.

We realise that the geographical spread of the islands makes it difficult and expensive for islanders from the Uists and Barra to travel to Stornoway to undertake prolonged periods of research. We are looking into the potential of digitising some of the more popular records relating to this area to help aid access but, in the meantime and subject to preservation conditions of the documents, we will transport records to local branch libraries across the islands where they can be consulted under the supervision of library staff.

The Tasglann manage deposited records held by the Comhairle (Table 3). These include the records of the Gatliff Trust (ref. GD1) who operate a series of hostels across the Western Isles. The visitors' books from the hostels are particularly attractive and include interesting comments on the weather, local people and even have individuals leaving musical compositions and poems inspired by their surroundings within their pages.

The Lewis Society of Detroit (ref. GD2) was founded in the early twentieth century by families from Lewis who moved to Detroit, USA, to make a better life for themselves and their families. It was a particularly active society and offered a place where the Gaelic community could meet, socialise and talk in their native tongue although their record-keeping was all undertaken in English. The group met regularly and organised picnics and entertainments for its members. Membership was exclusive to Lewis folk, with applications from Harris families being rejected. Ultimately, the Society disbanded in 1972 and the records were returned to Lewis where they show a fascinating glimpse

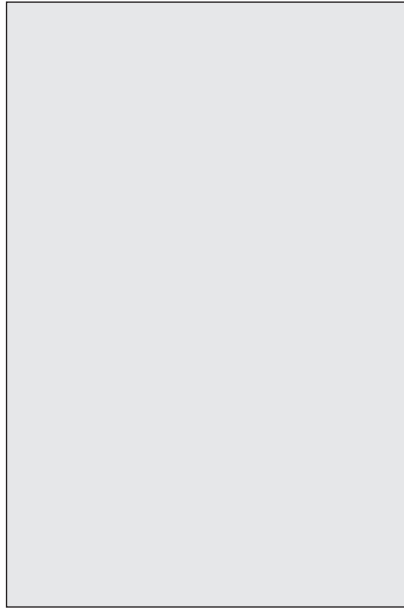


Plate 3 Constitution and By-Laws of the Lewis Society (GD2/1).

into the links between Lewis and North America. These links were celebrated at a public event in Stornoway in May 2011 where local people with links to Detroit helped to bring these records to life.

The Gaelic language is not as prevalent amongst the deposited collections as we would like. English tended to be the main record-keeping language until more recent times when the Gaelic Act saw greater promotion of the language. However, poetry and stories recorded in Gaelic do feature in the collections. Notable examples are the papers of D. R. Morrison (ref. GD3), a poet and writer from the island of Scalpay in Harris. His papers include original Gaelic and English poetry and copies of articles he contributed to the *Oban Times* and other newspapers. The notebooks of Donald MacDonald (ref. GD10) record numerous Gaelic stories recorded during research for his books, written out in beautiful longhand.

As well as records owned and managed by the Comhairle, the project is working with NHS Western Isles to locate and survey their historical records. We are also in discussion with the Highland Constabulary and Highland & Islands Fire & Rescue Service to uncover records held relating to the islands and the potential for these to be returned to the islands in the future so they can be studied by the people to whom they relate.

All this mapping work is helping to open up access to the archival resources of the islands. Once surveyed and their existence known about, the Tasglann

<i>Ross & Cromarty County Council area</i>		
RC1	Highways	
RC1/1	Landward Committee of the Parish of Stornoway	1895–1930
RC1/2	Stornoway District of Roads	1866–1901
RC2	Lewis District Committee	1890–1930
RC3	Valuation Rolls	1899–1973
RC4	Education	
RC4/1	Lewis Education District Sub-Committee	1868–1974
RC4/2	Achmore School Board	1875–1919
RC4/3	Barvas School Board	1873–1919
RC4/4	Lochs School Board	1873–1919
RC4/5	Stornoway School Board	1873–1919
RC4/6	Uig School Board	1873–1919
RC4/7	Trustees of Nicholson Institute	1870–1888
RC4/8	Stornoway Library records	1905–1949
RC4/9–	Individual School Records	1973–2011
RC5	Public Assistance & Parishes	
RC5/1	Barvas Parish Council	1884–1930
RC5/2	Lochs Parish Council	1890–1930
RC5/3	Stornoway Parish Council	1845–1943
RC5/4	Uig Parish Council	1885–1930
RC5/5	Lewis Public Assistance Joint Committee	1930–1975
RC5/6	Lewis Combination Poorhouse/Coulregrein House	1893–1970
RC5/7	Dun Berisay	1961–1970
RC6	Lewis District Council	1930–1975
S	Stornoway Town Council (Burgh of Stornoway)	1864–1975
<i>Inverness-shire County Council area</i>		
IN1	Highways	
IN1/1	Barra Road Trustees	1879–1888
IN2	District Committees	
IN2/1	Harris District Committee	1890–1934
IN2/2	North Uist District Committee	1890–1930
IN2/3	South Uist & Barra District Committee	1890–1930
IN3	Valuation Rolls	
	No records held	
IN4	Education	
IN4/1	Barra School Board/District Education Sub-Committee	1872–1966
IN4/2	Harris School Board/District Education Sub-Committee	1918–1975
IN4/3	North Uist School Board/District Education Sub-Committee	1893–1947
IN4/4	South Uist School Board/District Education Sub-Committee	[Not held]
IN4/5–	Individual school records	1873–1991

Table 3 Summary of archives in the care of Tasglann nan Eilean Siar. Details of collections held in private hands and by the Comainn Eachdraidh (Historical Societies) are not included here but are detailed on our website at <http://www.tasglann.org.uk>.

IN5	Public Assistance, Parishes & Poorhouses	
IN5/1	Barra Parish Council	1872–1943
IN5/2	Harris Parish Council	1863–1932
IN5/3	North Uist Parish Council	1870–1948
IN5/4	South Uist Parish Council	1891–1963
IN5/5	Barra Public Assistance Sub-Committee	1937–1948
IN5/6	Harris Public Assistance Sub-Committee	1932–1965
IN5/7	North Uist Public Assistance Sub-Committee	1930–1961
IN5/8	South Uist Public Assistance Sub-Committee	[Not held]
IN5/9	Long Island Combination Poorhouse	1875–1942
IN6	District Councils	
IN6/1	Barra District Council	1930–1956
IN6/2	Harris District Council	1934–1975
IN6/3	North Uist District Council	1930–1951
IN6/4	South Uist District Council	1930–1974
IN7	Nursing and Ambulance Associations	
IN7/1	Harris District Nursing Association	1928–1948
IN7/2	Harris (Tarbert) Ambulance Committee	1946–1963
IN7/3	South Uist & Barra District Nursing Service	1927–1934
IN7/4	South Uist (Daliburgh District) Nursing Association	1914–1936
<i>Deposited records</i>		
GD1	Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust	1962–2006
GD2	Lewis Society of Detroit	1919–1972
GD3	Papers of D. R. Morrison, bard of Scalpay	1963–2005
GD4	Papers of Michael Robson, author	1990
GD5	Papers of James Shaw Grant of Stornoway	
GD6	Western Isles Community Education project (Van Leer)	1980–1997
GD7	Election and Referenda ephemera	2011
GD8	Records of Iolaire Disaster Fund	1919–1922
GD9	MacAulay Rhodesia Trust	1952–1961
GD10	Notebooks of Donald MacDonald of Tolsta	1934
<i>Notable accessions</i>		
2010/1	Lewis Library service records	1850–1960
2010/10	Records of MacAulay family and general merchants, Stornoway	c.1910–2000
2011/02	Letter from Hutchison to Lady Matheson	1862
2011/013	Barra Sea Cadets	1944–1963
2011/013	Stornoway Literary & Debating Society	1901–1919
2011/013	Stornoway Water Company	1848–1872
2011/013	Lewis Coffee House Company	1878–1902
2011/013	Stornoway Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association	1871–1878
2011/15	Douglas Davidson photographs of Lews Castle	c.1890–1910
2012/1	Records of the Harris Tweed Authority	c.1930–2000s

can act as a broker between researcher and the owner of the records to facilitate access. Details of collections surveyed will be available on our website at <http://www.tasglann.org.uk> in a searchable format and copies of surveys will also be sent to the National Register of Archives for Scotland.⁶

Two important collaborations that have come about due to the existence of the Tasglann project should be mentioned. First, through a partnership with the National Records of Scotland, the school logbooks for the abandoned islands of Mingulay (1875–1910) and St Kilda (1901–30) have been digitised and are now available online.⁷ These have generated considerable press interest since they were launched in Summer 2011, giving a valuable insight into these remote communities. As well as giving an overview of life in the school, they show the harsh realities of living on the islands. Importantly, both document the final days of the schools prior to evacuation. In 2012, the centenary of the evacuation of Mingulay will be celebrated and the digitised logbook, and the original volume, will form a major part of the commemorative events planned.

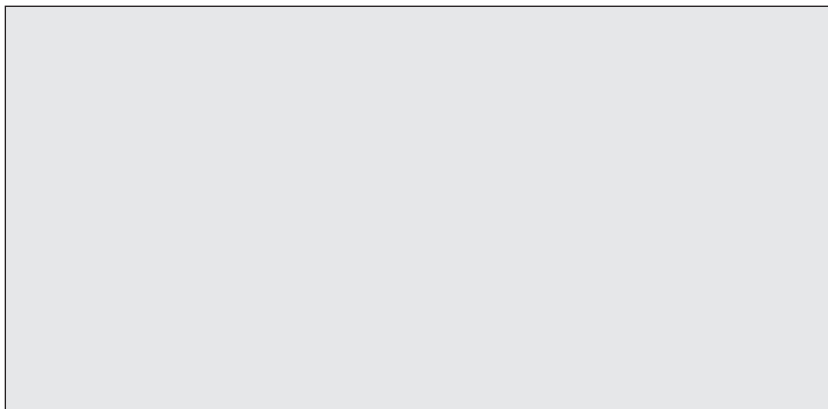


Plate 4 Final entry from the St Kilda school logbook, 29 June 1930 noting that ‘Today very probably ends the school in St Kilda as all the inhabitants intend leaving the islands this summer.’ (IN4/49)

Secondly, the Tasglann project was successful in securing £20,000 from Bòrd na Gàidhlig’s Gaelic Language Act Implementation Fund to support the recording of the histories of a number of closing schools in the islands. The money is funding communities to work in partnership with the closing schools and the local parents’ associations, community councils and Comainn Eachdraidh to celebrate and document their history. Events are being held

⁶ National Register of Archives for Scotland, <http://www.nas.gov.uk/onlineRegister/>.

⁷ The log books for Mingulay and St Kilda can be accessed at <http://www.cne-siar.gov.uk/archives/collections.asp>.

throughout 2012 to collect oral histories, photographs, memories and records relating to each school. The outputs will include Gaelic-language-led exhibitions and publications to disseminate and celebrate these histories. Importantly, the research and collecting activity undertaken by the communities will be added to the collections already held by the Comann Eachdraidh with official school records, such as logbooks and admission registers, being retained by the Comhairle. As 2012 also marks the 140th anniversary of the Education (Scotland) Act 1872, a bilingual conference is being planned for the autumn looking at the history of education in the islands from the charity schools of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries through to the modern day. A key focus of the conference will be the impact of education on the Gaelic language.

The Tasglann project is due to conclude in March 2013 but there is a desire to see the project develop into a full archive service. This is being realised through a major project to relocate the Museum nan Eilean to Lews Castle in Stornoway, built by Sir James Matheson during his ownership of the islands. This would not only see a new museum being created, but also the addition of an archive searchroom and storage. The proposed Museum and Archive would be a new-build development sitting on the footprint of the old glasshouses of the castle, with the main castle structure being opened as a hotel complex. The project has secured £4.6 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund and further contributions from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Historic Scotland, Highlands & Islands Enterprise and others are bringing together this £14 million package. It is hoped that many of the collections surveyed by the Tasglann team may find a home in this new facility and that it will help to facilitate ongoing support and training to the voluntary-led heritage societies. Importantly, it would see island-related records held by the National Records of Scotland in Edinburgh returned to the islands including those relating to customs and excise, fishing and the church, as well as records held in Inverness and elsewhere on the Scottish mainland.

The first two years of the Tasglann project have been busy and exciting and our labours are starting to bear fruit. We have a much better understanding of the archives held across the islands and as our reputation and visibility grows, more archive collections will be identified and access to them opened through our website. Further details on our activities can be found at our website <http://www.tasglann.org.uk> and we can be followed on twitter @tasglann.