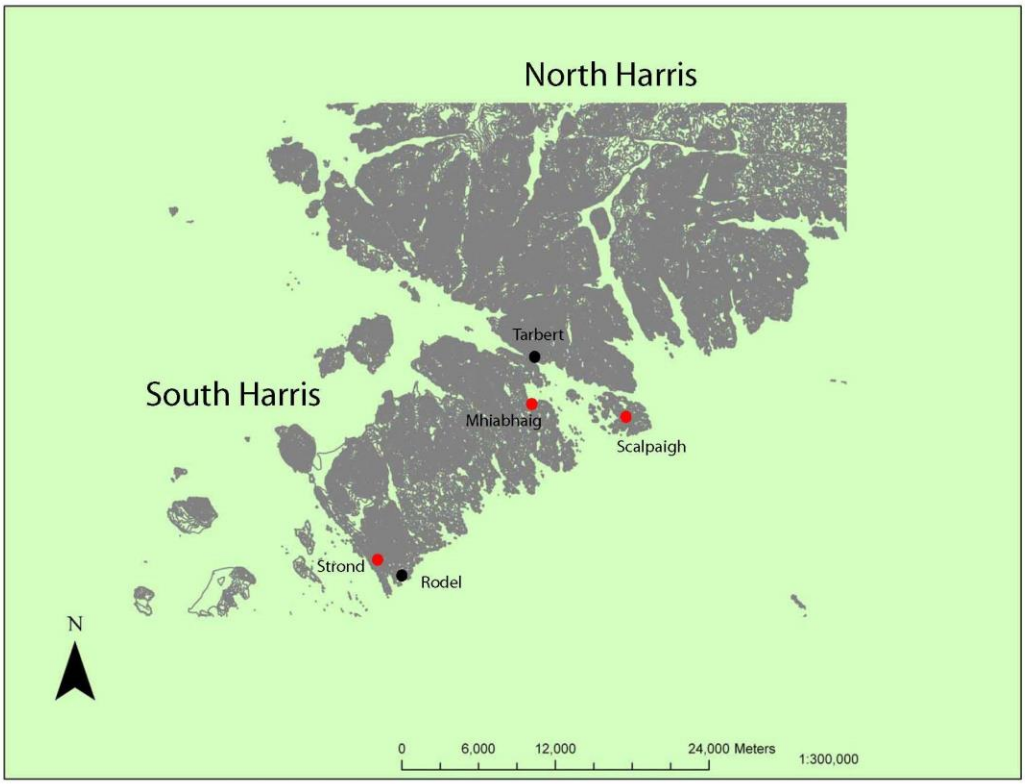
Fishing in Scalpay and the Bays of Harris



Map of Harris. The red circles represent focus of research interest

Background

The last three centuries have witnessed unprecedented change not only in the way marine resources have been exploited on Harris, but also in the effect of that exploitation on the way of life of the inhabitants - social development, fishing technology and economic forces have all progressed significantly and have left behind a way of life of which there is currently little record. Indeed the full extent of this heritage has yet to be evaluated: many of the relevant physical remains are vulnerable, either to gradual coastal erosion or development, and other parts of this resource survive only in human memory and are vulnerable to the passage of time. This study draws together the various strands of archaeological field survey (links 1, 2 & 3), placenames (link 7), local fishing history (links 4 & 8), reminiscence study (link 5) and early photography (link 6) in order to provide some record of fishing activities, particularly on Scalpay, over the recent past.

Chain line carrying bricks from the *Glas Island* for the new church in the late 1940s

Fishing on Harris

Historically, the people of Harris have relied extensively on the sea and waterways, partly for trade and transport, but equally for communication to exploit the rich stocks of local fish. Before documented times little is known of how fishing might have contributed to local diet and trade, although commonsense suggests that it was a food resource too valuable and convenient to ignore. The only early evidence available, from excavations at Northton in south Harris, suggests that fishing was a longstanding activity stretching far back into prehistory, and as such conforms to well attested records from elsewhere in coastal Scotland. Seafood has probably been a traditional element of the Harris diet ever since: it played a key part in a mixed subsistence economy which allowed islanders to exploit the land, animals, fowl and the sea in various measures according to season and need. The importance of sea fish features in one of the earliest descriptions of the island by Martin Martin in the early 18th century and is emphasised further in the *First Statistical Account* for the parish compiled in the late 18th century which also draws attention to loch fishing and stocks of salmon. The same reference also alludes to whales, and a whaling station was subsequently constructed by Norwegians at Bunavoneader in the early 20th century, later to be temporarily revitalised under Lord Lever's ill-fated ownership of the island in the 1920s.

Nonetheless, the actual nature and extent of fishing throughout the 9,000 years of human presence on Harris is less clear. Not all the coastline is amenable to harbourage or easy tidal passage, notably the sands and machair to the west where sea level change throughout prehistory has been at its most dramatic. This is where cultivable land is at its best, and where significant prehistoric monuments have survived under the coastal dunes.

Here, where the land was good, fish may arguably have been a less significant component of the local diet. By contrast, the rockier eastern coastline and the 'Bays' offer relatively poor soils, but had the advantage of being indented with natural harbours and, according to the *Account*, lay adjacent to good fishing grounds. By the end of the 18th century the coastline already contained a number of small crofts and green patches of land 'brought into culture by the laborious industry of the inhabitants'.

The sandy (machair) west coast (left) and the rockier east coast (right)

The character of fishing on Harris was also affected by well-documented economic and political factors. Fishing was not only a matter of small scale domestic activity, but also had the potential to be carried out commercially. The first recorded attempt to exploit the fish stocks of the Minch on a large scale occurred during the reign of Charles I who had formed an *Association for the Fishing* in 1632. A fishing station was subsequently established on the uninhabited isle of Hermetray which lies off North Uist in the Sound of Harris, convenient for fishing in the Minch. It was part of a government sponsored scheme to take advantage of the success of the Dutch herring fishing. The Dutch had perfected the salt 'curing' of herrings, and the whole process was carried out on board their *Busses* - a typical *Busse* had a 30 - 50 foot length of keel, was built wide in the beam and could carry up to up to 80 tons of cargo. Hundreds were built in England and Scotland under a government scheme but very little is known of the success or otherwise of this venture, although the fish that were caught were recorded as being 'the best of their kind in Europe'. Martin himself claims to have seen on Hermatray 'the foundation of a house built by the English, in King Charles I's time . . . carrying on the fishery'. Unroofed remains around the sheltered anchorage at the east of the Hermetray basin are shown on the 1881 Ordnance Survey first edition (6 inch) map, and the ruins of stone bothies and a fairly substantial storehouse can still be seen there. Only the large foundation stones of the likely original landing place remain on the shoreline below the storehouse.

In the late 18th century another attempt was made to establish a commercial fishing base, this time at Rodel at the southern tip of Harris where Captain Alexander Macleod, who

had then purchased the whole of Harris, built a harbour complete with storehouses for nets and salt as well as covered storage for boat maintenance. Smaller fishing stations were also set up at this time throughout the Bays of Harris where the inlets and natural harbours looked 'as if nature had designed them for promoting a fishing trade'. Macleod enlisted the help of experienced fishermen and associated trades people from mainland Scotland and the Orkneys, some of whom settled on the island and whose descendants are still there today. Remains of stone jetties, fish traps and house foundations around the inlets and natural harbours attest to the development of those areas since that time. For example, at the small community at Mhiabaig situated within the East Bays, over 50 fishing related sites are still visible today along the shores of Bun Challagrich and Ob Mhiabhaig (link 1). Mostly seen at low tide, these weed covered jetties, slipways and traps are inextricably linked to the ruined houses and structures located just a few meters from the shore. The small communities along these shores thrived and struggled as the fishing industry and crofting, and the relationship between the two, developed.

From 1801 – 1951 the census returns for Harris show a population fluctuating between c.3000-5500 souls (the present population is now barely 2000), although the earlier figures also disguise emigrants resulting from clearances, internal migration from the fertile west to the inhospitable east, and 'incomers' supporting the kelp industry. Kelp collection was already attested in the *Account* which describes how seaweed was carried from the shore and used to manure cultivated land (the same account gives an excellent description as to how to create 'lazy beds'). Later, kelp was being collected in order to be burned to produce alkali for glass manufacture. This did much to remove manpower away from crofting and fishing to the long-term detriment of both, although its collection was claimed to occupy only two months of the year. Kelp burning was arguably as close as Harris ever came to the industrial revolution, but the price of kelp fell dramatically in the earlier 19th century and never recovered.

Excavation of a kelp kiln on Harris

Population movement eastwards had already been considered in the 1799 *Account* which proposed that islanders who were a burden on the landholders should be 'collected into villages' built for them on those parts of the east coast next to the fishing grounds. This period saw the beginnings of a fishing community on the island of Scalpay – a place described rather unfairly by one modern author as 'an inhospitable lump' where 'the Ice Ages [had] scraped away most of the soil', where cultivation was almost impossible, but which offered two superb natural harbours (the north harbour and the south harbour) and a series of sheltered inlets. Scalpay was settled in the 1840s after folk were cleared from Pabbay, Uist and Harris by the landowner. The 1841 census for Scalpay shows a population of a mere 31 inhabitants; by 1881 the number had reached 540. These hapless settlers had nothing to turn to but the sea and, after some initial help, a Scalpay man began curing herring in 1856. By the end of the 19th century the Scalpachs had become adept fishermen, the island had nine curing stations and employment opportunities, not leastly for herring-girls, had increased considerably. A further population peak in Harris in 1911 also seems likely to reflect the growth of the herring and white fish industry, particularly around Scalpay where harbourage was 'much resorted to by foreign ships'. Even in the 1950s there were still seven general stores on Scalpay, and 42 throughout Harris overall. There is now only one general store on Scalpay, and only five on Harris in total.

The lighthouse at Eilean Glas, Scalpay (left) and the concrete vessel *Cretetree*

During a survey of the coastline undertaken in 2007 over 150 maritime or fishing related sites were identified on Scalpay alone; these are listed, illustrated and described briefly here (link 2). Some of these were manifestly obvious, notably at the eastern tip of the island where the lighthouse at Eilean Glas (now in the care of Historic Scotland) represents a monumental complex of construction and engineering, as well as a permanent reminder of the treacherous coastline of the island, or the *Cretetree*, a collier built of concrete, registered shortly after the First World War and now abandoned in a quiet part of the north harbour. However, the majority of sites are less obtrusive, many only being identifiable at low tide and comprising mostly of jetties, slipways, quays and nausts. Some of these have long been abandoned and are now almost unrecognisable as

weed covered rocks. Others, particularly those in current populated areas have been revamped or rebuilt and maintained with their construction sometimes showing several phases of change. Least obvious are the slipways and nausts. Slipways were often formed in natural bays or inlets by clearing an area of stones and boulders and using them to create informal edges or jettying sometimes as much as 5m apart. Now weed-covered and often hard to distinguish, they represent a utilization of the natural shoreline to a degree considerably greater than at present. Nausts, of which several were found, represent a convenient method of securing boats from wind, and high seas. These were normally constructed by utilizing or adapting a natural depression at the head of an inlet where a boat could be safely drawn up out of harm's way. Sometimes they were edged with stone to provide greater safety for the vessel. A few are still being used, but the majority now stand empty other than as a storage place for creels and ropes, or as natural collection point for wind-blown debris and rubbish brought in by the tides.

Two of the jetties and slipways recorded during the low tide survey

Elsewhere much effort has been expended in creating traps for fish (corals), usually by building low walls at the end of inlets, or in deliberately deepened small bays, where fish introduced on an incoming tide became trapped and easily picked out by hand as the tide ebbed. In other places lobster ponds were constructed using stone walls, perhaps representing an early form of fish farming, where lobsters caught in creels could be released into an area of defined captivity and easily extracted later, having been fed on young saithe to maintain their vigour. These were sometimes on small offshore islands where the topography and depth were suitable; sometimes they needed to be accessed during higher tides and necessitated the construction of short narrow causeways or walkways between one landmass and the next.

Fish trap adjacent to croft at Strond

The grandest fishing scheme of all was in the 1920's when Lord Leverhulme of Lever Brothers, the Port Sunlight soap manufacturers, began to develop the village of An t-Ob in south Harris; the operation is succinctly described in the *Third Statistical Account* written in 1953. The Port of Leverburgh, as An t-Ob was subsequently named, had only a short lifespan; it employed around three hundred people on-shore who were supplied with herrings by a fleet of up to fifty large steam powered drifters from various ports around the UK. The Leverburgh initiative was part of a much larger enterprise which included the island of Lewis (also at that time in Leverhulme's ownership), as well a rejuvenation of the whaling station at Bunavoneadar in North Harris for the processing of whale meat. The whole grand scheme came to an abrupt end following the death of its founder in 1925. The parent company took the decision to close down the business, and the processing facilities at Leverburgh were demolished. Remarkably, however, the marketing offshoot that Leverhulme had set up for retailing the catches – the chain of shops known as *MacFisheries* with outlets in most major towns in the UK - survived until 2000 when it was absorbed by Youngs Seafoods.

Intensive commercialisation returned only with the construction of fish farms in the inshore waters around Harris in the later 20th century, the most recent development being the establishment of a fish processing factory on Scalpay in 2000. This operated for a few years preparing farmed salmon for processing on the Scottish mainland, but the final plans to set up an end-product processing line in the Scalpay factory itself never came to fruition. The closure of this factory probably highlights the main problems in maintaining long-term industry in the islands – uneconomic transport costs, difficulty of labour recruitment and inadequate infrastructure in relation to competition with the mainland.

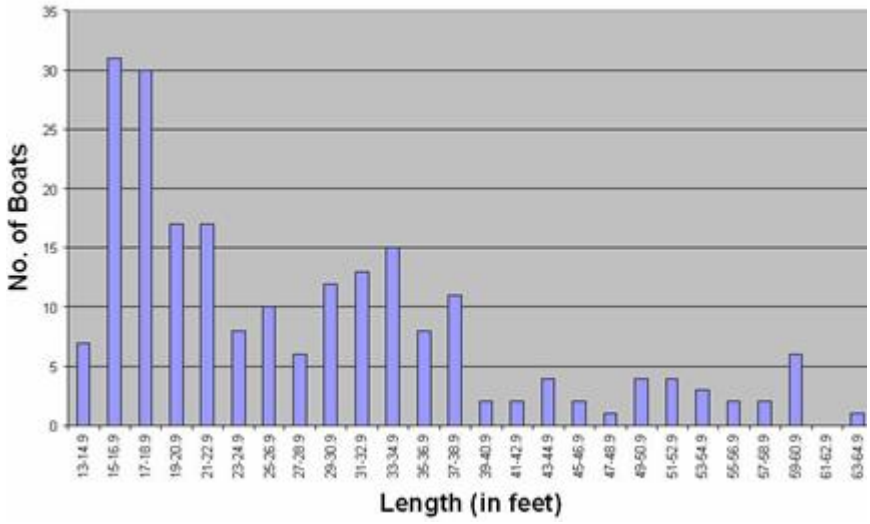
Remains of the former whaling station at Bunavoneadar

To some extent these were large and well-publicised failures, but they did little to affect local inshore fishing based on traditional methods with individually or family operated boats. Fishing at this level continued irrespective; it provided a relatively stable source of subsistence to balance small scale farming on the land . Local fishing, particularly for lobsters, already recognised in the mid-19th century, became taken up to meet southern demands and markets.

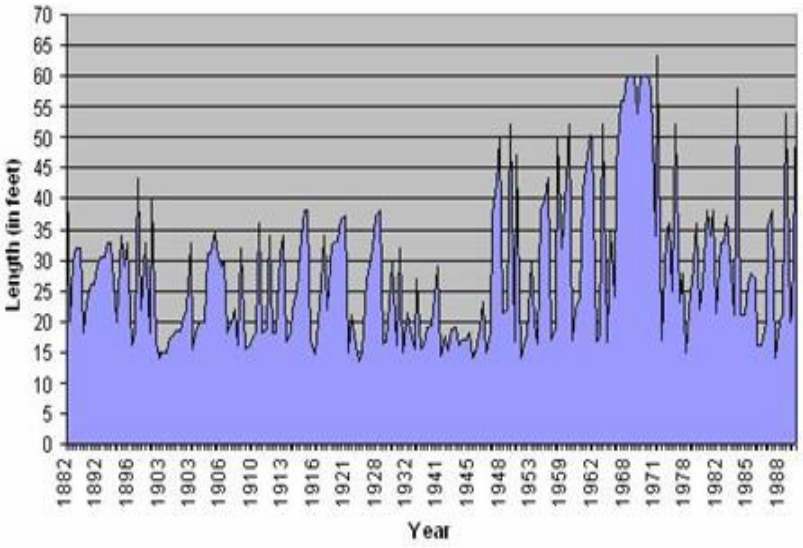
Local vessels

The boats used throughout varied in design and were developed over the centuries according to the fishing methods employed. The formal archives are incomplete, but records pertaining to over 200 boats registered in Scalpay alone still survive. These have been tabulated here (link 4) showing each vessel's name, the registration number (prefixed 'SY'), the year of registration, the length of the vessel, and the name of the owner. The earliest recorded vessel, *New Sea Flower*, was registered in 1882 and was a 44 foot vessel belonging to John MacLeod. Towards the end of that century there appears to have been a spate of registrations but with slightly smaller boats around 30 feet in length including *Annie*, *Fisher Boy*, *Lervia*, *Morning Star*, *Traveller*, and *Turtle Dove*. The *New Sea Flower*'s replacement of the same name in 1892 was also around 30 feet long perhaps indicating an optimum size for the nature and techniques of fishing used at the time. This may also be evident from a graph (below) which provides an indication of the number of boats of specific lengths. The length distribution of boats tends to show four fairly clear peaks, one at about 15 - 19 feet, another at about 20 – 23 feet, one at around 30 – 35 feet, and the final peak at about 60 feet. Length of vessels presumably

varied according to purpose. The smallest registered were around 15 feet, the largest over 60 feet, among the latter the *Britannia* (1969), the *Jasper* (1968) the *Marcalina* (1968) the *Village Maid* (1969), the *Ribhinn Donn* (1971) and the *Vigilant* (1969). It can be no co-incidence that these larger boats are contemporary and possibly reflect of the use of ringnets at that time. The graph also emphasises the preponderance of small craft (numerically approximately half of all those recorded) which might be interpreted as reflecting domestic use in contrast to the larger vessels which are more likely to represent those used for commercial fishing. The length of the individual boats is shown in a further chart (below) chronologically from 1882 to 1988 but only partly supports these observations. The registration of small boats is fairly persistent, but only up until the end of the Second World War when larger boats were introduced. The war period itself was clearly a time when small craft came into their own. It was also a time of significant change in the size of boats registered, presumably for commercial purpose: the pre-war fleet tended to be around 33 – 38 feet and best suited to driftnet fishing, and the post-war fleet some 15 feet longer, with the largest (ringnet?) boats appearing in the later 1960s.



Distribution of registered Scalpay boats in relation to length.



Distribution of registered Scalpay boat length in relation to date.

The names of the boats recorded vary considerably, although there was a preponderance of girl's names among them. Curiously, only two were Gaelic, the *Maighdean Hearachany* and the *Ribhinn Donn.* Many names reflected subsequent generations of the same vessel, for example the four generations of *Annie* (1892, 1903, 1928 and 1952), or the three generations of *Mary* (1907, 1935 and 1945) and Lily (1936, 1948 and 1953). The smaller clinker built boats of up to around 20 feet in length were built locally throughout the islands, although there is no memory of boat building on Scalpay itself. Many were 'imported' from the east coast of Scotland and from Orkney, and at least in the 19th and early 20th century they could be categorised as '*fifies*,' '*scaffies*,' '*zulus*,' and '*Orkney'* boats. All of them were designed as sailing boats, but later converted to power. The new breed of herring boats, the *ring-netter* (below), was built on the Clyde in the 1950s and 1960s as well as the east coast boatyards, with the names of boat builders like Walter Reekie, Smith & Hutton, William Fife, Millers and Nobles dominating the scene for many years. Other boats were built for dual purpose and able to adapt quickly to bottom trawling for prawns and white fish which required a different type of net towed along the seabed. This period succeeded in temporarily halting out-migration of young men from the islands. Many even returned from mainland jobs and from the merchant navy to share in the economic boom.

Fishing methods

Ringnet fishing required two vessels positioned a distance apart with a net cast between them. The method is well remembered (link 5) and there are extant photographs of several of the boats (link 6). The two boats would tow for a time, and one would then circle across to the other to bring the ends of the net together. The base of the net was brought up first with the hope that the herring would remain within it. It was heavy work pulling the net in; the base was usually brought up by winch, but the rest needed

straightforward manpower. Typically each boat would have a crew of six, and as the two vessels drew together to trap the herring in the net, four men from the incoming boat would jump aboard the other boat to help haul it in. It was dangerous, but a method generally considered less onerous and more efficient than using driftnets which were hung in the water over night. In the winter the drift nets would be cast on anchors in the lochs, usually at dusk and then pulled in at dawn, but in the summer when the herring were in deeper waters around the banks the nets would be stretched out behind a vessel and left to hang there all night, drifting to suit the current.

The *Harris Maiden* and the *Scalpay Isle* being used for social functions

Ringnet fishing started on Scalpay in the late 1940s or early 1950s initially using two new boats, the *Scalpay Isle* and the *Maighdeann Hearach* (the Harris Maiden) which was built in Banff in 1948 and originally worked as a coaster, and there were often a dozen boats involved at a time. They often worked in consistent pairs, such as the *Jasper* with the *Scalpay Isle*, or the *Majestic* with the *Ribhinn Donn*. The nets were larger than driftnets and, together with ropes and creels, were all made of natural fibres before man-made materials became available in the 1960s. They required careful maintenance to ensure the maximum working life. Mending was an everyday routine, and most of the nets were handmade by the fishermen. Very often this was the work of retired fishermen or by young boys waiting for a place in a boat. Manilla and sisal fibres were used for general purpose ropes and twines, coconut fibre (coir) or grass-rope was used for the sole ropes of drift-nets and for trawl mouths. Great-lines were made from hard laid cotton and the hooks were attached to horse-hair snoods. Inflatable buoys were made from sheepskin and from canvas, and cork floats were very common. Glass floats could withstand the pressures of deep water and were used on trawl headropes until subsequently replaced with aluminium floats. Preservatives for ropes and tackle of all kinds were various concoctions of pine-tar, turpentine and linseed oil. Cotton herring nets were regularly treated with boiling tannin extracted from oak bark, and latterly 'cutch' which was manufactured from Acacia trees. Sails, rigging ropes and even working clothes were 'barked' as the process was commonly known. The cotton nets

were often mended on the boats after the catch had been taken and were sometimes taken to Stornoway to be barked in large tanks to help preserve the fabric. On Scalpay itself cutch could be put on the nets to make them last longer. The cutch was melted in large tanks the location of which survives in placenames such as *An Coire Cartach* (the Cutch Kettle).

Ringnet fishing was not a method much in favour elsewhere in the Hebrides outside Scalpay, or even elsewhere on Harris for that matter. It was effective at a local level, but it was not a method that could easily compete with the large *purse-seiners* and 'pair-trawlers' from the east coast ports in the early 1970s. Purse nets worked in a similar way to the ringnets, but were considerably larger, apocryphally the size of a football pitch, and they almost certainly resulted in the decline of the herring industry after its peak in the 1950s and 1960s through over-fishing. A purse net could catch hundreds of crans of herring (one cran = four peat-sized baskets), compared to the ringnet catch of about 200-300 crans. Over-exploitation entailed a short-lived prosperity to an industry already vulnerable to a lack of diversity in both catches and shore based operations. There is also some argument to suggest that electronic noise generated by modern fish-finding equipment (echo-sounders and sonar) had the effect of disrupting the shoaling habits and the migratory routes of many species with resultant decline in catches on the traditional fishing grounds. According to the *Third Statistical Account* 10 boats were engaged in the herring industry in the early 1950s, but it was the lobster fishing that then began to dominate. There was also a healthy market in prawns, and later in scallops, and boats were diverted during the summer months if the herring was less plentiful. A good living could be made from either when the catches were good, prawns being caught using either dredge nets or creels. Scallop fishing made its mark in the late 1970s after herring quotas were introduced and the scallops were caught using dredge nets. The best grounds were said to be out towards the Shiant Isles and towards Waternish on Skye.

Herring fishing took place seasonally according to known, and largely predictable shoal movement. In the New Year fishing stretched towards mainland Scotland, sometimes best between Store and Loch Inver and down to Loch Ewe. There was also some herring down to Barra Head, and sometimes to Skye or down to Coll. In the autumn and early winter the herring would lie to the south by Lochmaddy on North Uist. They moved up past the Bays in a predictable manner, sometimes being visible as a dark black mass in the water. On the west side, shoals might be found out from West Loch Tarbert, between Taransay and Soay.

The boats were likely to be away all week, leaving Scalpay on the Monday and returning on the Friday or Saturday. Departure time depended very much on where the herring shoals were at the time. If they were at a distance, then the boats would leave immediately after the Sabbath. Catches were taken to market as soon as possible, either to Ullapool, Gairloch, Mallaig, or in later times to Uig on Skye, depending on where the best price could be gained. Life on the boats was far from easy; the crew slept on board during the working week, and there is little evidence of bothies around the islands where fishermen might have spent the night while out working. Indeed, most of the work took place during the night and obviated any need for shore-based accommodation. Food was

cooked on board and, according to accounts, was of the same standard as food prepared at home on land. Bible readings took place and when vessels were anchored together the combined crews would climb aboard one boat in order to read together. This emphasis on traditional religious practice, combined with a livelihood facing the natural environment also generated levels of superstition. There are accounts of boats being fire-branded (ie carrying a fire-flame around the boat to drive out evil spirits) and the avoidance by the crew on their way to the boat of certain 'marked' elderly ladies who were deemed to have second sight and to bring a boat bad luck. Green was thought by some to be an unlucky colour, even green socks, or anything coloured by the natural crotal dye, and certain animals such as deer and rabbits were thought to have the same effect. Swans were also thought to be unlucky and there are tales of crewmen throwing overboard a box of Swan Vesta matches for that very reason. Packs of cards often received similar treatment and were considered works of the devil.

The *Agate* and the *Jasper* in the north Harbour (left) with the curing station (right) in the background

Traditional fishing from Scalpay and the Bays of Harris was seasonal and dovetailed with other crofting activities such as crop planting, harvesting, peat cutting, tweed weaving and other community based activities. Together they constituted a sustainable lifestyle and working cycle, although not one sufficiently attractive to retain many young people in the community. In the early spring after the winter storms great-line or long-line fishing took place, herring was netted in the bays for bait, and hundreds of hooks were set to fish overnight for cod, ling, tusk, skate and conger eel. The catch, however big, was seldom sold, but rather distributed throughout the community, with much of it being salt cured and dried for the lean months of late spring and early summer. The month of May always marked the arrival of more herring in the bays and there was a ready market for those locally. Good landings by the bigger boats would go to Stornoway market.

The lobster season started at the end of June when the sea temperature had risen slightly to over ten degrees. Many of the Scalpay boats would fish around the rocky shores of the Shiant Islands as well as around the Fladda Chuain islands off the north end of Skye. Creels were set overnight and lifted daily, weather permitting, and the catch stored in wooden floats until there was sufficient to consign to market. Until the advent of modern materials lobster creels were made with a wooden base, frequently from recycled herring barrel staves or from wooden fish boxes. Hazel rods were imported from Skye or the west

coast mainland to form the bows, and a suitably sized and shaped stone weight was secured to the base. Before the Mallaig railway was built, lobsters were transported direct to Billingsgate Market in London by sailing smack, or schooner, a journey which took at least four days even in the best conditions. The lobsters were packed and layered with fresh wet seaweed into wooden barrels in the hold with an occasional bucket of sea-water splashed over the top to keep them cool and alive. Once the railway had been built, the lobsters were taken by steamer to Mallaig, usually packed in re-used plywood tea-chests, and again layered with wet seaweed. Many times the only returns were the dreaded pale green 'Mermaid' postcard proclaiming that all the lobsters were dead on arrival. Conditions in a dry railway wagon for several days could not compare with the cool moist cargo-hold of a smack. On the whole, over the season, returns were reasonable, and the fishermen who took the greatest care of their catch generally came off best. The season normally lasted until the end of the year if the weather was favourable, and prices would reach their peak for the Christmas market. A number of lobster 'ponds' were built on Scalpay as a place to keep alive lobsters caught earlier in the year in order to capitalize on Christmas prices. These were large stone-built chambers located in the sheltered inlets where lobsters could feed naturally yet still be retained, and where the gaps in the walling were sufficient to allow the tides to flow but too small for the lobsters to escape. One the lobster season was over, the creels were brought ashore, and the boats laid up for winter ready for the whole cycle to start again towards the end of February.

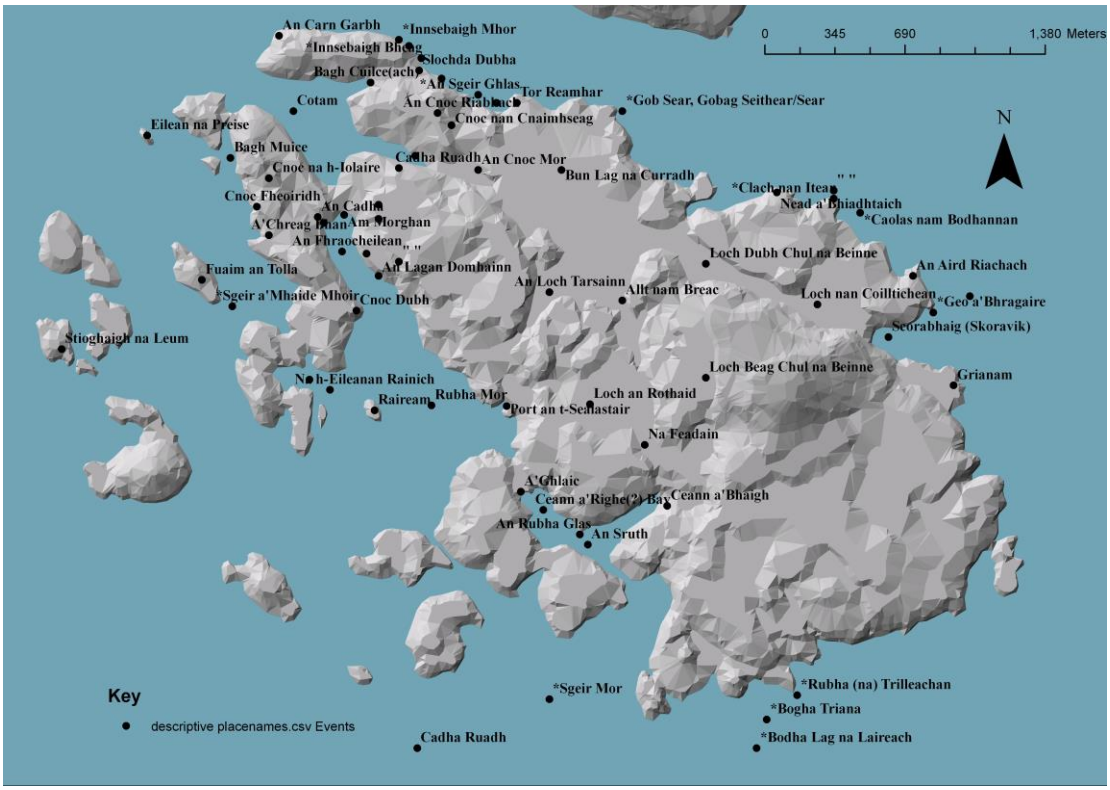
Lobster ponds on Scalpay

Currently, the main fishing effort is geared to catching *Nephrops* (Norway Lobsters) in fine meshed metal creels working in deep water and baited with herring. This provides a fairly steady income all the year round, with seasonal price fluctuations, and is seen as a full-time occupation. Lobster catches in the Minch have declined due to years of over fishing, but stocks are gradually recovering on the Atlantic coast of the islands. Smaller boats, much smaller than ringnet boats, and generally single-handed, fish for *Velvet crabs* in amongst the shallow kelp-covered reefs close inshore. Once both *Nephrops* and *Velvets* were viewed as vermin and quickly shoveled overboard, but they are now carefully transported live and individually packed in modern 'vivier' trucks mainly to Spain, but also to other European destinations. Scallop dredging which has been carried out occasionally by some of the larger, more powerful boats, is destructive and very demanding on boats and machinery and is now rarely undertaken. By contrast, rock fishing, with rods, lines, and hoop-nets, remains popular, and has been the mainstay of

many families through hard times. There are numerous bait holes – holes gouged into conveniently located rocks for storing bait while fishing – which can still be seen on the coastal edge. Picking winkles from the shore has also supplemented the returns of crofters and fishermen over the years. Once seen as an activity of the poorer members of society, it can now be a very lucrative sideline.

Placenames

The 'cutch' placename (above) represents one of the many locations referred to in conversation which never became recorded on maps (link 7). Equally there are a number of placenames which were recorded on the 1857 Admiralty chart which no longer appear on the current chart. The reminiscence and fishing history studies undertaken by the 2007 survey identified around 150 such 'lost' names, many with either a direct or indirect relationship with fishing. These included: inland lochs, headlands, cliffs, bays and natural harbours; places where boats could be moored, catches landed or nets mended, and rocks, reefs and channels. Some names were only used whilst at sea, and to use them from the shore was sometimes considered bad luck. The names recorded in the survey may represent only a proportion of those in living memory and usage, and many are likely to pass from recollection in the next decade.



Map of many of the 'lost' placenames on Scalpay

A relatively large proportion of names bear a personal element. Some of the people to whom the names relate are still remembered even although the individuals themselves have long since gone, eg *Croit Eachain Hiorteach* (Hector from St Kilda's croft) or *Port*

Domhnaill 'ic Alastair (Donald son of Alistair's port). Others are names of people who have since passed out of memory, or the events for which they might be remembered have also been forgotten, eg *Mol Anna* (Anna'a shingle beach) or *An Rubha Mor Mor Nighean Uilleim* (The Big Point of William's Daughter Morag). Some names belong to features in the sea, usually rocks or reefs such as *Bodha MhicEachainn* (Reef of MacEachan), *Bodha Catriona* (Catriona's Reef) or *Sgeir Mairi* (Mary's rock). These three names were used from the sea rather than from the land, although it is unclear whether they relate to the names of individuals, names of vessels which may have perished there, particular individuals in those vessels, or simply to the sailors' penchant for providing features with (usually) female names for recognition purposes. Inevitably some of the lost names have become entwined in events, real, partly-real or imagined, and become part of folklore, one such example being *Camas Aonghaisein* (Little/young Angus' bay - tradition has it that a man called Angus was murdered on the mainland opposite. His corpse was wrapped in cow's hide washed up on the shore at Scalpay).

However, purely topographical names predominate and identify both inland and coastal locations. Some of these are of obvious inshore fishing interest such as *Geo an Sgadain* (Inlet of the herring), *Rubh(a) na Cudaigean* (Cuddy Point) and *Rubha nan Rionnach* (Mackerel Point). Some names are very specific, notably *Creag Lexy* (Lexy's crag – a rock known for fishing) and *Gob Sear* or *Gobag Seithear* (a little point, possibly a rock seat for fishing). Others relate to ostensibly obvious maritime features such as *Geo an Aiseig* (Inlet of the ferry), *Aird an Aiseig* (Headland of the ferry) albeit for an extinct ferry service, but other names clearly pertain to a lost era of fishing and navigation. These include *Rubh(a) nam bataichean* (Point of the boats), *Leabag an Eithir* (Small bed of the rowing boat/noust which is the location of an old curing station and small pier as well as being recorded as a place for net maintence), and *An Acarsaid Fhalaich* (Hidden anchorage). It may well be that *Aird na h-athadh* (Headland of the Kiln) relates to the process of cutching or barking nets. There are also a number of topographical names given from the sea such as *Rubha (na) Trilleachan* (Oyster-catcher headland), or *Clach nan Itean* (Rock of the feathers/birds) which doubtless embody navigational as well as descriptive elements. Several others relate specifically to hazards, usually in a purely descriptive way, for example, *Bogh(a) an t-siucar* (Sugar breaker/sunken rock), *Bogha Triana* (Sunken rock with three points on surface?) or *An Sgeir Ghlas* (The Green Skerry). There are others which would appear to have had a more colourful origin the nature of which has been lost, including *Sgeir an Airgid* (Rock of the silver/money), *Bogh(a) Bell* (Bell's Breaker / Bell Breaker which may once have had a warning bell) or *Sgeir a'Ghobhann / Sgeir Ghobhainn* (Rock of the Blacksmith). One significant hazard lying to the south of Scalpay, *Cadha Ruadh* (Red cleft rock?), probably relates to the sea rocks now recorded on charts as *Sgeir Gradich*, a hazard which claimed a number of ships and lives during the last century (below).

Wrecks

In view of the intensity of shipping activity around Scalpay it is hardly surprising that the frequency of wrecks has been commensurately high (link 8). The sources for wrecks which include the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) CANMORE (Maritime) inventory and Whittaker's list (see 'further

reading' below) identify over 40 recorded examples off the island up to 1995. The majority of these belong to the 19th century and their precise location is only generally defined, although a few can be more accurately located. Nevertheless, the records illustrate not only the breadth of the maritime arena within which Scalpay operated, but also range of vessel types and cargos which passed her shores.

Two of the wrecks on Scalpay

The earliest recorded wreck is that of the *Sarah* on route from Whitehaven with a cargo of tar although her point of destination and the nature of her fate remain unknown. Later records are more explicit in their descriptions of vessels striking rocks in and around the island, notably the rocks known as the *Sgeir Graidich* which were responsible for the loss of the *Methven Castle* (1840) on route from Stettin to Liverpool, an unknown Brigantine (1843), the *Minerva* (1884) with a cargo of salt from Runcorn to Lerwick, the steamship *Tolsa* (1935), and the trawler *Thomas Altoft* from Fleetwood (1947). Other notorious rocks and reefs included the *Sgeir Inoe* (struck by the steamship *Etna* in 1954), the *Sgeir Stilamair* (struck by the steam trawler *Boston Heron* in 1952) and the *Lag na Laire* (struck by the steamship *Labuan* in 1864). An unusual craft is the *Cretetree*, a vessel constructed entirely of concrete which is still visible in the north harbour on Scalpay where it continues to be used for storage purposes. This vessel, built in 1919 as a collier, is believed to have seen active service in the Second World War, although the history relating to how it reached its present position is unclear. Other, if more unusual demises relate to the *Courier* which was driven from its anchor (1862), the *Columba* which was dismasted in Scalpay harbour (1866), and the *Heather Bell* which was stranded off the new pier at Scalpay in 1910. The *Frederick Aae*, a schooner from Montreal was lost off Scalpay with its wreckage and drowned crew being washed ashore along the west coast of the island. More sinister, perhaps, was the demise of an unknown vessel found stranded and crewless off Scalpay in 1850 with burnt out stern and cabin.

The records of these wrecks also attest to the shipping routes and cargos passing Scalpay. A selection of 19th century victims includes: the *Aid* (1819) from Riga to Londonderry carrying flax; the *Pacific* from Limerick to London (1823); the *Harmony*, a schooner on route from Wick to Ireland (1839), the *Pauline* from Danzig to Belfast (1840), the *Labuan* (1864) and the *Concordia* (1878) both from Liverpool to Cronstadt carrying coal and cotton respectively, the *Abstainer* from Larg to Newcastle carrying limestone (1884),

and the *Minerva* carrying salt from Runcorn to Lerwick (1884). The records of many of these casualties refer only to the demise of a 'craft', whereas others are more specific in defining 'schooner', 'brigantine', 'steamship', 'sloop' or 'smack'.

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