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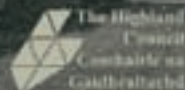


# The Cromarty Fisherfolk Dialect

*Dualchinnnt Iarsairean Chromaidh*



[www.ambaile.org.uk](http://www.ambaile.org.uk)



A Lexicon of Words and Phrases compiled by Am Baile,  
The Highland Council's History and Culture Website.

# *Acknowledgements*

## *Buidheachas*

Am Baile would like to thank current and former members of the Cromarty community, at home and abroad, for helping with this project. Special thanks to the Hogg brothers – Bobby and Gordon – Bobby's wife, Helen, and Mr. Clem Watson for providing so much material, not only on the dialect, but on the history of the town's fisher folk. Thanks also to Maggie Scott, Scottish Language Dictionaries Ltd, Edinburgh, for helping with the research.



# Images

## Ìomhaighean

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# Introduction

## Ro-ràdh

The former royal burgh of Cromarty lies on the northern tip of the Black Isle peninsula, at the mouth of the Cromarty Firth in northeast Scotland. It is home to brothers Bobby and Gordon Hogg, descendants of a long line of local fisher folk. The Hoggs can trace their ancestry back for centuries in the small coastal port; in the census of 1861 there were no fewer than 96 Hoggs living in the Cromarty district and an entry for the family name in the Old Parish Register dates back as early as 1698.



Bobby and Gordon believe they are the last two fluent speakers of the ‘Cromarty fisher dialect’, a unique Scots dialect identified by William Grant in his introduction to the *Scottish National Dictionary* (1931) as ‘North Northern A’. This dialect is mainly associated with the fishing communities of the Black Isle (Cromarty and Avoch) and other small towns and villages along the shores of the Cromarty Firth, although each locale has its own vocabulary and subtle differences in syntax. While several Cromarty residents retain aspects of the fisher vocabulary, when Bobby and Gordon get together they can converse fluently in the dialect.

It is said that at one time there were three separate Scots dialects in the Cromarty area – fisher, town, and farmer. In his article, ‘Cromarty Dialect and

Folk-lore’ (1928), Donald Mackenzie identified three distinct resident groups: the fishers of ‘fishertoon’; the ‘toon’s fowk’ of the town proper; and the ‘Gaelickers’ of the landward part of the parish, although in Mackenzie’s boyhood the term ‘Gaelickers’ was applied mainly to the residents of the adjoining parish of Resolis and other parishes beyond. Over the years the three dialects would have blended together and this current lexicon probably represents such a fusion.

The origin of the three linguistic groups is interesting. According to one local tradition, the fisher folk came from the Firth of Forth area during the reign of James IV (1473–1513) and may themselves have been descendants of Norse or Dutch fishermen. These incomers would have spoken

Scots or 'Scottis', the dominant language spoken throughout Lowland Scotland from the second half of the 14th century until the Reformation and spoken by all ranks of society. The 'toon's folk' – the local traders, craftsmen and seamen – were a mixture of Morayshire and Highland stock.

Consequently their Scots dialect had a Gaelic lilt to it.

The 'Gaelickers', of course, spoke Gaelic and had migrated over the years to the Cromarty area from neighbouring parishes, seeking employment, especially during the period of the town's development in the second half of the 18th century

by local landowner, George Ross. In 1783 Ross erected a special chapel at the top of Kirky Brae for these Gaelic residents. It is easy, therefore, to see how Cromarty could develop its own distinct dialect and, given its relatively isolated geographical location, at least on the landward side, how that dialect might be maintained.



## Some Phonetic Features

### *Feartan Cànan*

In his introduction to the *Scottish National Dictionary*, (1931) Grant described Cromarty's fisher quarter dialect as being 'of a very curious and interesting type'. A few of these linguistic curiosities are listed here on pages 4 and 5.

## Omission of Consonants

### *Connragan sam fàgail às*

In Cromarty, the aspirate 'h' was often omitted or inserted contrary to standard usage; Annie would be pronounced, 'Hannie', a hoose, an 'oos', an apple, a 'haypel'. Thus, a Cromarty fisherman might say,

'A'm fair sconfished wi hayreen; gie's fur brakwast lashins o am and heggs.' (I'm so fed up with herring, give me plenty of ham and eggs for breakfast.)

Another feature of the dialect was the omission of the 'wh' sound at the beginning of the interrogative pronouns – who, what, whose, when, and where:-

At's theer trouble? (What's your trouble?)

Ar's he fae? (Where is he from?)

Az dowg's that? (Whose dog is that?)

Similarly, with the adverb 'how' – Oo thee keepan? (How are you?).

At other times, 'w' took the place of the 'wh' sound. In this way, 'which' becomes 'wutch' and 'whiskers', 'wuskers'.

## Use of Archaic Language

### Seann Chànan sa Chleachdadh

The archaic pronouns – thou, thee, thy, etc. – were in common use in the first half of the 20th century in Cromarty and are still used occasionally to this day. Bobby and Gordon both use them in their dialect. It is their belief that this is the result of a religious upbringing and their ancestors' associations with the Bible. For example, a common expression used by their aunt was, 'Div thee put the Lord afore thee the day?' This biblical association is borne out in Donald Mackenzie's *Cromarty Dialects and Folk-Lore* (1928) in which he records that the elder fishermen of Cromarty were very religious and were able to recite or chant prayers, without preparation.



## Diminutive Forms

### Faclan airson

### Rudan Beaga

The use of the Scots diminutive and double diminutive were also commonly used:-

chiel (boy), chielie (small boy),  
chielack (smaller boy),  
chielachie (even smaller boy)  
rope (rope), ropie (small rope),  
ropack (smaller rope),  
ropackie (even smaller rope)

A fisherman might say, 'Come ere and hae a squint at ma wee bit boatackie' or 'Come intae oor wee bit hooseackie'.



## Sources

### Stòir

This lexicon has been compiled using predominantly late 19th and 20th century written sources, and 20th and 21st century oral sources. Every word or phrase listed has been recorded as having been used in Cromarty at one time or another during the past 140 years. Some of the words will have been used in other Scots-speaking areas, albeit with different pronunciations. Others seem to be exclusive to the Cromarty fisher folk. For example, their word for a thrashing or beating – a ‘sallikatazaar’ – appears to be quite unique and is still remembered by several members of the community.

## Written Sources

### Stòir Sgrìobhte

One of the earliest written references to the Cromarty dialect appeared in 1867, in a series of articles in *The Invergordon Times and General Advertiser*, titled ‘Six Days in Cromarty’,

‘The dialect of the town [Cromarty] is peculiar to itself...it sounds very strangely to one who looks for the nasal pronunciation of Ross-shire.’

Other written sources used for this project include: *The North Star and Farmers’ Chronicle* (1897-1898); *The Scotsman* (1909-1912); *Transactions of the Scottish Dialect Committee* (1914-1921); *Transactions of the Rymour Club* (1928); *The Scottish*

*National Dictionary* (1931-1976); and *The Linguistic Survey of Scotland* (1975 and 1977).

## Oral Sources

### Stòir Beòil

Oral sources include recordings of Hogg family members and friends (1960s and 1993) and recent recordings and conversations (2007) with Bobby Hogg, Helen Hogg, Gordon Hogg and Clem Watson. Contributions were also received by email from various Cromarty residents, ex-residents, visitors and general enthusiasts, at home and abroad.





Harbour, Cromarty.

# Dialect Words

## Faclan Dualchainnt

<b>Dialect Word</b>	<b>English Meaning</b>
a, ah	who
ablach	odd looking, awkward
aave	the boy who acts as scummer (bailer) as well as the instrument he uses
amitan	a fool
ammers	embers
ank	the place in the stern of the boat where the steersman's feet rest
ar	where
at	what
az	whose
back flan	down draught
baldie boats	type of fishing boat that Cromarty men took to the lochs
bannock-stane	a flat stone placed before a fire on which bannocks & cakes of oatmeal were baked, or a small flat stone laid among the hot ashes
battle nose	bottlenose whale
bauchles	old ill fitting shoes or slippers
bavin	bathing
beetyach	a small knife for beeting (mending) nets
belligut	a greedy person
belwar	layers of tangles
bendin	the place where two pieces of long-line are joined
beouch	dear
beygin, bingin, or binnen o the teeset or teyset	second fishing line
beygin, bingin, or binnen o the teydin	seventh fishing line
bicht	a turn taken by a boat when shooting the lines
biggar-man, beggar man	black flounder

binnen	binding
bladyach	sweet sounding
bladyach tang	sweet tongue
blairack	bee
bleds	tea
bleems	the potato plant
blether-bus	a chatterbox
bleyan	a fish that has been bitten and sucked by another
blockie	a small cod or codling
boatic or bottick	boat hook
boddach	odd, old man
bomie-wan	a boat hook or punting pole (also bomie-wand)
bonnach faaly	a small bannock made from leftover dough
boorie	a heap
borack	a bradawl
boshach	ill-shaped with turned out feet
brachtan	a young chaffinch
brakwast	breakfast
breckans	brackens (for burning in the fire)
brime	to fill a boat with salt water so as to swell and close the timbers after it has been lying ashore during the winter
brimed	said of boats when timbers are soaked with sea water
brocht (o drink)	a surfeit, excess
bronyach	poor creature
bruchtin	burping
bubba	grandfather (extended to mean the 'devil')
buckies	whelks (Latin: <i>Buccinum undatum</i> )
buidr or boord	the last net shot
bullat	a large stone
burden or burdeen	a bundle of twigs and branches carried home on the back
burgat	a soup made of black pease

burth	distance between boats in setting lines
buss	a mouth
bussack	a slap, smack or thump
byoch	a word of familiar address; also used to children
cadger	hawker
caisie	sack or basket for carrying corn on horse
callach	an old woman
carcle	to count, calculate
caulkers	boots studded with large tacks
causie stanes	cobble stones
chacher	small angler fish
channel	angle between end of staves and bottom of cask
chatters	iron staples in rudder post into which rudder is fixed
cheeks	sides
chiel	boy
chielack or chielag	small boy
chielachie	very small boy
chirls	wood shavings
clabberd	covered with mud or dirt
clieve	stick on which hook is placed when making up lines
clocker	black beetle
cockie-paidles	lumpfish or lumpsuckers
collumsaw	coalfish
coolan	youngest in a breed
coopan or coupan	a hen's stomach
cootyach or coutyach	family group, company or clan (often used contemptuously)
cosfeet, cosfit, cosset	
or cossits	starfish
cosie	a small tub
cown	weep
creenie	little finger

creish	try to persuade one to do a thing
crockan	beetle
crockums or crockuns	refuse of fish livers after oil is extracted
crogs	fingers
cross gang	a small bundle of straw laid across the 'gob' or mouth of the scoo (flat basket) to support the bait
crottyach or crottyach	a small stout person
culla	seagull
cullumsa	coalfish
culyach	old woman
cuttye	the black guillemot
dadies	hawkers
daik	an interval in bad weather
daintyoch	nice, particular
dalleach	cow's stomach
dame or dem	a girl, woman
damackie or demackie	a small girl, woman
darra	a line for mackerel fishing
darrach	hefty knock (causing pain)
day nettle	a whitlow
dayset	the end of evening twilight
devall	to stop, cease
dichtie	clean
div	do
doochint	obstinate
dooky	a tidy
doorcans	fir cones used to smoke fish
dort	to sulk, take offence
dossan	fringe, forelock
droke	meal mixed with water
droog-droogle	be engaged in wet, heavy work

drunken	a fishing hook that has been put into the basket without being baited
druntyach	bad tempered
duffie	a chimney sweep
dunnage	clothes or 'stuff' in general
duo	a small creek (variant of geo)
durler	skelp on the ear
dutchack	a three-legged metal pot
dyuchint	obstinate
eident	a) careful b) continually busy
erthestreen	the night before last
escorn	rest on the back used by fishwives for supporting the creel
faalie	a shawl
faik	a strand in meat
falock	a shawl
farden	space between two timbers in bottom of boat
faucon	a sun dog (atmospheric phenomenon) or ring near sun indicating a change in the weather
fellots	big, clumsy hands
fitloan, fitlun, fitspar	rest for feet in rowing boat
flamach	flattering (adj.)
flattie	small plate
fleeack	bluebottle
fleuk, fluke, flock	flounder, or general word for a flat fish
follow	of a generous nature (he's a good follow)
foodge or fooge	to play truant
foosim or fousome	dirty
forgie	to shoot (a marble)
fou maw	fulmar (literally dirty gull)
fow	pigsty
fro	froth
futyuch	bustle

fyown	squeamish after drinking
gait	a gelded pig
gargi or gargie	bitter
garroch or garvie	sprat
ghea	a notion, an idea
girds	baited hoops (resembling butterfly nets) to catch buckies (whelks), baited with cured herring, fish entrails & cod heads
glesser	a glass playing marble
gob	the opening or mouth of a receptacle
gothelidge	a stupid fool
graith	bubbles, froth, soap suds
gray	a slight breath of wind on surface of water
gray alan or gray-allan	the Arctic skua
graylord or grayman	fully grown coalfish
greenga or greengaw	slimy grass left after the tide has receded
greesoch	shivery, shuddery
grey willie	young seagull
grof or groff	thick
gudlach	sweet stuff (cakes etc)
gullach or gullachan	earwig
guloot	a simple person
gunsh or gudge	a short, thick-set person
gurry	a small boil
gushel	a hurry (in a hurry)
haffleen	simpleton
hair	minute portion or quantity
hammal or hummel	said of a boat without a mast or sail, or lying with the mast and sail lowered
hayreen	herring
(h)elin (h)an	port side
hoslin	a noise made in the chest when breathing
howe	bottom of boat

howp, howpie	a mouthful of liquid
ile	smooth water, with wind all round
Jenny (or Jinny) Muck	a working woman, a female farm worker
kai or kye	brown crab
kailiers or keilers	people who stay too long in other folk's houses
keelin craft	a croft whose tenant had to pay a cod yearly to the proprietor
kemple	icicle
kessocks	herring
kiachur	a young seagull
killing or killin	a flock of sea birds hovering over the water, screaming. Their appearance indicates the presence of fish
knockle	ankle
kosfeet	starfish
krotyach	small stout person
kutyach	family group, company or clan (often used contemptuously)
kutye or kutyie	the kittiwake
kyachack, kyacher	small angler fish
lainch	a heavy sea, a surge
laroch or lyaroch	1) site of a house 2) bed to which mussels are transported from the scaup (bed where mussels are grown)
lee-gaw	sign of bad weather on opposite side from which wind is coming
leem	cup
leemies	knick-knacks, ornaments, broken bits of china used as playthings
loacher	bespatter
loug, lug	worm
lummer	a naughty girl
lupikin	a scoundrel
lyantyuch	small basket for fish
lye	the coalfish at a certain stage
lyeerin	green slime



maa or maw	seagull
mancril or mankrel	a creel or small basket for carrying fish or bait
maroochan	an unfortunate person, a poor person
mash	mesh of a fishing net
maughan	mittens
meenyach	greedy for dainty fare, fond of delicacies
meeze	a bed where one would expect to get a certain kind of fish. To take a 'meeze' is to take observations to help to locate such a bed
merlicks	baskets
metal or muttal	my dear
mistimous	before the time
moger	to roll in the gutter
moitichy or motichy	a wee bit (of cheese, etc.)
moolachie or moolie	familiar address among women
moolie or mooly	treasure, darling, term of affection
moppach	dirty or drunk
mousie's pea or pease	plant belonging to the pea family (vetch)
mowgrans	socks without feet
mumma	grandmother
muzzled	fuddled
myager	make soft with too much handling, or roll in the gutter
myow	gull
naushin	mess - what a naushin!
neffy or nevy	a chum
nev	a fist
nyarroch	very cold or sharp (weather)
oe	grandchild, grandson
olla buird	platform in the bow of a fishing boat
oo	how
ootrug	backward rush of wave
padlock or padluck	small coalfish

paikin or paykeen	a good slapping, a thrashing, a pounding
pair	a set of related objects (but not limited to two) e.g. pair of beads
pandie or pandy	stroke of the belt or tawse
partan or parton	small crab (green)
peevick	the lapwing
pevish	mean
plashach or plashack	plaice or flounder
platuck or platyack	a straw mat or mattress for fishing lines
plookin, plooking	a beating or hiding
plucks	broken herrings
poll	to cut the hair
pooen	the first net shot
poozhant	poisoned
popper	the boy who lit the school fire and swept out the old parish school in return for payment of his fees
potie, potye, or potyie	the domestic pig
preen	pin
pucklie	a small amount
purty	pretty
pyalach	pale, sickly looking
pyock	pouch
quirky	cunning, wily
rail	one who works with fuss but little care
reenock	a fir torch
ringan	having much energy, 'a ringan deevil'
river slanch	the heron
Robert slanch	the heron
roodadoo	the heron
roosky	dirty
ropach	untidy
row or rowe	a) roll of the sea-ware on beach (tidemark) b) the beach itself

sae or say	a tub
sachie	easily bent willow for making baskets
sallikatazaar	a skelp
sappy or suppy sourock	sorrel ( <i>rumex acetosa</i> ), the leaves of which could be sucked for refreshment
scaff	potatoes – sliced and fried
scalder	a stinging jellyfish
scam	to sting, or lean over the fire heating oneself
scam or scam scone	a pancake or crumpet made of meal, water and salt
scammy nettles	stinging nettles
scanti, scanty or scantling	fishing line with hooks attached (400–3000)
scare	splice
scarf	cormorant or shag
scaup	bed where mussels are grown for line bait
scawl	bawl
sclaffert	a slap, a box on the ear
scodge	sneak about
scomfish	to disgust, sicken
scoo	woven basket for carrying the scanty (small fishing lines) or a flat scoop-shaped basket used by fishermen to hold their lines after they have been baited, or into which herring are put when being gutted
scroggan	a half-dried fish
scroogent	half-dry
scud, skuddy or skuddie	a sail or trip in a small boat for pleasure
scudyel	knife
scunfished, sconfished	sickened
shaldoo	a young sprat or herring
shatter	the pin or gudgeon on which a boat's rudder turns
shatters	iron staples to which the helm is fixed
sheemie	straw rope
sheerings or sheerins	the liquid poured off from steeped sowans (oat husks)
shimee	a rest on the back used by fishwives for supporting the creel

shortin	a familiar word of friendly address 'At's thoo sayin, shortin?'
shulbit	knife for preparing mussel bait
sile	fish fry
skilbygelk	worthless, good for nothing
skipper (h)an	starboard side
skirler	a frying pan
sklichie or sklitchie	hopscotch
skyaul or skyawl	shriek or scream loudly, esp. of high wind
sma-line or	small line (with about 600 hooks)
smeech	a) a sound b) to make a sound e.g. he niver smeeced, no a smeech fae him
smelt	a smooth spot on the sea
smoolyer	a small coalfish
smoorach	fire ash
snappy	a small cod
soom	stomach or air bladder of a herring
spardie	an attic or loft, or a wooden erection for supporting a basket for fishing lines
spatyel	grand or well-dressed (he's rael spatyel the day)
speeach	a small stick
speen	spoon
speer or spier	to ask
speet	a metal rod or skewer to hang fish up to dry
spelding	smoked haddock
spoolier or spoolyer	a young coalfish
spooner	young pollack
spotcher	bailing scoop
sprool	in hand lines for sea-fishing, a cross piece of wire or whalebone to which a twisted piece of twine with a hook is attached
steeper	a heavy drenching rain
stevi or stevie	a bar across the moon or sun
stravaig	a wander
strick-davie	a species of tern

strolyach	octopus, cuttlefish, squid
stroop or stroopie	well or tap
sulky blubber or sulky bubble	jellyfish
summyn	some
tampatherlock	anyone you like, so and so
teelup	a skelp
teeset or teyset	first fishing line
teeset or teyset buoy	buoy attached to the first fishing line
teydin	eighth fishing line
thee	you (objective singular)
thee	your (singular)
theer	your (plural)
thoo	you (nominative singular)
thy	your (singular)
truncher	big soup plate
tumblers	dolphins & harbour porpoises
vases	couch grass
veids	empty spaces between the cross bars in fish smokehouse
wanty or wantye	a stretch of fishing lines shot in the water
whipper-in or whupper-in	school attendance officer
wutchchuck	a swallow (bird)
yaa	to own
yachan	green rushes used for baskets
yagach	bleak, or bitter and raw, a 'yagach morning'
yaw	to make a sudden exclamation
yawlie, yellie, or yollie	a yawl
yaw-line	a hand line or small line flung to the pier to carry the hawser (swing-rope) for mooring
yearded	filthy with dirt
yellie	the yawl
yellow yarlack	yellowhammer
yocker or yokker	big

# Dialect Phrases

## Abairtean Dualchainnt

Dialect Phrase	English Meaning
A fancy on a flattie	A cake on a plate
A guttam o ink	A drop of ink (school usage)
A moiticky o cheese	A wee bit of cheese
Ah divna ken	I don't know
Ah ken the cutyach ye belang tae	I know where you're from (derogatory)
Ah kens at thee sayin	I know what you're saying
Ah polled thee? or Ah pollt thee?	Who cut your hair?
Ah sa me deet?	Who saw me do it?
Ah telt thee?	Who told you?
Ah wudna ken artil start	I wouldn't know where to start
Anz thee comin ere?	When are you coming here?
Ar thee gaein byoch?	Where are you going boy?
Ar thee gaein?	Where are you going?
Ars ee fae?	Where's he from?
Art thee sick en?	Are you sick, then?
At a bots that?	Whose boat is that?
At a grandeur!	What a show off!
At a plait o foosam mate!	What a plate of unpleasant food!
At a pretty at dee have on!	What a pretty hat you have on!
At a purty hat av thee!	What a pretty hat you have!
At ein wuz it?	Which one was it?
At now kucka?	A friendly greeting
At now mettle? (or muttal)	Friendly greeting
At thee motyan about?	What are you complaining about?
At thee seekin?	What do you want?

At wid be scekan tiln ken?	What do you want to know?
At's neem?	What's his name?
At's mine's mine; at's thine's thine	What's mine is mine; what's yours is yours
At's theer trouble?	What's your trouble?
Aw revelt	All mixed up
Az is zat bot?	Whose boat is that?
Az is zat?	Whose is that?
Az oe is zat?	Whose grandson is that?
Bairns, bairns, will ye no devall?	Children, will you please stop!
Blessing o sheds	A large amount of sheds
Blussing o tattas	A large amount of potatoes
Boors n boors	Lots and lots
Bowg awa at	Work without making much progress, a lazy bug
Burrest o here	Further east of here
Craw wuddie!	What Cromarty boys cried out when raiding Rosemarkie with divots (turfs)
Div thee ken?	Did you know?
Doal-sooch comin doon the lum	An expression used when someone is falling asleep at the fire
E got a right darrach	He got a right knock (hurt himself)
E rose from his mate lik a potye	He got up from his meal like a pig
Ee's a boshach-skeyter	Contemptuous expression for a miserable, mishapen creature
E's as prood as Bubba	He's as proud as the devil
E's rael spatyel the day	He's very well dressed today
E's the caws o mornin	He's the cause of mourning (black sheep?)
Fause lippenin	False trust
Foamin for want	Gasping for a cup of tea
Fooge the skeel	Play truant
Gaen clean tae the tootrach	Away with the fairies, or having become disreputable through drink
Glennings at the arras	The final picking of potatoes from a field
Got thee ony sclafards?	Did you get any hard slaps?
Haud muttal	Wait a minute, dear

Hide the leemie	Game involving searching for small knick-knacks e.g. in the cracks of a wall
Hiv thoo a roosky sazpence i thi pooch?	Are you able to lend me some money? (literally, have you got a dirty sixpence in your pocket?)
Holl toll	Very drunk
It's gae urny weather	It's a frosty morning
Ma thrapple's hewt (or hewun)	I'm gasping for a cup of tea (literally, my throat's cut)
Moufu o bleds	Cup of tea
Na faigs	No, not at all
Oo thee doin, muttal?	Friendly greeting
Oo thee keepan?	How are you?
Oo thee the day?	How are you today?
Peer ondachs	Poor souls, hapless people
Pit the bucket oer the batrray til me	Hand the bucket to me over the sea wall
Pyock o pushin	A bad tempered or crabbit person (literally a bag of poison)
Sorra kens	Goodness knows
Sun's breakin doon the dykes the day	Sun's splitting the skies today
Tak it now kukka	Take that, my friend (a greeting)
Tak up theer baggage and be scuddan	Collect your bags and be off
That's a yocker that!	That's a big one
The clever yawlie	First motor fishing boat to appear in Cromarty (clever here meaning 'fast')
The fugie blow	One boy challenging another to a fair fight by hitting him lightly on the shoulder.
Theer nae tae big fi a sclaffert yet!	You're not too big for a slap!
Theer no talkin licht	You're spot on
Went oot o his trottums	Got very angry
Whelp o darkness	An individual who was prone to anti-social behaviour
Whit a kinna cutyach he's come outa?	Where's he from? (derogatory) Literally, what family does he belong to?
Yer awfu spatyell the day	You're looking very well dressed today





# Bynames

## Farainmean

### Personal Names

It is common for members of a close-knit community to have nicknames based on physical appearance or profession. Fishing communities like Cromarty, however, were often made up from a limited number of families and it was likely that there would have been more than one person at any one time with exactly the same name. Bynames were therefore used to differentiate between one person and another. A byname could be linked to physical appearance or occupation, but it could also come down through the generations. The Hogg bynames of 'Bolt' and 'Koka' were passed down in this way. The following is a list of bynames and nicknames used in Cromarty at one time or another.

Alecky Doo, Allicky Dhu	Black Gilbert
Angie the Bobby	Blind Janet
Annaig Sponge	Bloss
Annie Cracker	Bob the Engineer
Batty	Bobbie Eapie
Beagle	Bobbie Stichie
Beely	Bobuck Son (or Puss-in-Boots)
Bella Dhu	Bobby Bolt
Betty Pi	Bobby Eepie
Big Robert	Bolt

Bonzie Skay	Jimmy 'Mallaig' Hossack
Bothers	Jock Dile
Bouf	Jock Lala
Bunks	Jock Speed
Cunner	Jock the Trapper
Danny Mapp	Johnnie Balls
Darkie	Johnny Bothers
Derry	Johnny Dile
Dettan	Johnny Stickies
Doash	Jonder
Doger	Joubert
Donald Dile	Kate Todd
Donny Doo	Koka
Eppie Jigger	Kye Zee
Foosh	Ledgie
Gaffer	Meem
Georda Don't	Naushin
Gibbie Maa	Nellie Bolt
Ginga	Pa Makkum
Glesga Jean	Peelans
Gyte	Pinda, Pinder
Hip	Pongo
Hugh Watson	Popanie
Inky	Popeye
J. Riah	Potts
Jean the Burn	Puffer
Jessie Bobbins	Red Jeanack
Jessie Poose	Red Jock
Jigger	Red Murdo
Jiggs	Red Sandy
Jimma Steeks	Rita Tartie

Ruda  
 Robert Mallaig  
 Sandy Beard  
 Scami, Scammi, Scammy  
 Shodder  
 Skay  
 Spot Jessie  
 Spotyins  
 Spouth' Watson  
 Stichee  
 Storum  
 Stylee  
 Teenie Ballies  
 The Yank  
 Ticketty Tam  
 Tirley  
 Toot  
 Totter  
 Tuffers  
 Tunach  
 White Bogg  
 Willie 'Skip' Mackay  
 Wiser  
 Wolsey  
 Yachtie  
 Yankee  
 Yellow Sandy

## Community Nicknames

### *Far-ainmean na Sgìre*

Avoch Dollies or Doallies	Inhabitants of Avoch
Ballachalls	Inhabitants of Dingwall
Cromarty Divots	What Rosemarkie folk called Cromarty folk
Cromarty Gutties	What Rosemarkie folk called Cromarty fisherfolk
Croompachs	Inhabitants of Cromarty
Gaelickers	Inhabitants of Resolis and parishes beyond
Gutter Sparrows	Inhabitants of Beauly
Peculies, Pikyoolies, or Pitoolies	Inhabitants of Nigg
Rosemarkie Crows or Cyaws	Inhabitants of Rosemarkie



## Weather Lore

### *Sgeulachdan mun t-Sìde*

The Cromarty fisher folk used to refer to the spring equinox windy weather as ‘Gentle Annie’ weather. During this period, which could last up to six weeks, the wind prevented the fishermen from going to sea, causing great deprivation. ‘Pit a saxpence in thee pooch for Gentle Hannie’ was a common local phrase meaning, ‘Put something by for the time when Gentle Annie blows’. Waves flecked with white foam were known locally as the feather in Gentle Annie’s hat, leading to the expression,

‘An Gentle Hannie is skyawlan roon the eel o Ness wi a wite futher in er at, they’ll be arryin the crook.’ (When Gentle Annie is screaming round the Heel of Ness with a white feather in her hat they [the fairies] will be harrying [robbing] the crook.)

This refers to the hook over the fire, from which the cooking pot used to hang. The shortened phrase, ‘hairin the crook’ was also used meaning simply, a time of scarcity. It has also been recorded that the expression ‘Gentle Annie’ was used to mean a snowflake.

The origins of the name ‘Gentle Annie’ are obscure but Donald Mackenzie, writing in *The Celtic Review* in 1912, suggested she was the hag of the south-west wind, in the same way that the ‘Iarnvid’, in Norse mythology, is the hag of the easterly gales. Today, Gentle Annie is still remembered in the local expression ‘When Gentle Annie comes o’er the lee’.

Another common saying linked to the weather was, ‘A sooth-east wun an dreepins, a nor-wast wun an steepins’, meaning, ‘A southeast wind brings showers, a northwest wind brings torrential rain.’

It was recorded in 1935 that the Cromarty fisherfolk refused to eat haddock in the spring until they got three 'houps' (gulps, mouthfuls) of May water, i.e. three tides. The cold snap in May was known as the 'May gobs'. It was also considered unlucky for Cromarty fishermen to refer to the minister as anyone other than the 'cowld-iron gentlemen'. Similarly, a pig had to be referred to as 'the cowld-iron beastie'.

## *Spotyins an Bunks*

### *Spotyins agus Bunks*

Two old brothers who lived in the fishertown, down the Old Vennel (nicknamed 'The Dardanelles') went by the names of Spotyins and Bunks. They did not get on with each other and, according to local legend their common fire was one of the sources of conflict. One would say to the other, 'Pit oot thee fire till Ah get mine lichtet!'

Another local story possibly linked to these brothers tells of 'two old Crows passing the Royal Hotel. One fell down in a faint and got a sip of brandy from the proprietor of the hotel, which led the other to ask, 'At about a wee suppie for me?' 'Gaw thee and faint for theesel!' was the reply.

The local saying, 'Git thy foosum (dirty) loaf oota ma clean gravy' may also be connected to these two brothers.



## Biblical Expressions

### Às a' Bhioball

It has been suggested that the preservation of the archaic 'thee' and 'thou' forms in Cromarty is linked to the community's religious background. Some of the expressions used were:

Div thee put the Lord afore thee the day?

Good Lord upon ma tongue!

Noo byoch, oo mony commandments iz thoo?

No man (nobody)

Oh Blessed One of Israel!

Oh Great Redeemer!

Oh Jacob!

Oh Michty One!

Oh the Lord be about wi me the day!

## A Cromarty Sailor Tells of His Experiences at Sea

### Seòladair à Cromba ag innse mun Mhuir

(from: *Cromarty Dialects and Folklore*, 1928)

'Ah wis workan in a Buckie boat - a druffer. Ah was cook. God Halmichty but they're gey particular fowk the Buckie fowk. They're always wanting thee to be scourin theer ans. Noo, tak brakwast time. First, thoo'll clean the errin. Then 'scour theer ands', says the skupper. 'Whan it's cooked thoo must scour theer ands afore brakwast is served in the keybin.' Ah'm tellin thee, they're got braw keybins in Buckie boats. Hoors wiz a druffer, wi vulvit cushions a roon an curtains wi dossans

on the portoles, wax-cloth on the floor, a wite cloth on the table, an pictures o the skupper's femly and Jesus Christ wi a lantern aw roon about the keybin. Ah'm tellin ye it's jist like a perfect palace. And whan thoo merches doon wi brakwast on a siller tray wi a napkin ont there's ther skupper readin his bible to the mate. Oh, they're howly fowk the Buckie fowk! The first thing he'll say to thee is 'Hae ye scoured yer ands?'

## A Cromarty Fire

### *Teine ann an Cromba*

According to *The Statistical Account of Scotland, 1834-45*, a 'Cromarty fire' was a contemporary name throughout Scotland for a fire which had just gone out. A humorist of the period relates the story of a Cromarty farmer who gave his daughter the key of the peat chest, asking her to take out a whole peat and a half so that she might 'put on a good fire.'


## The Creeling Custom

### *Cleachdadh Clèibh*

The 'creeling' wedding custom, referred to in Dalyell's *The Darker Superstitions of Scotland* (1835) was known amongst the Cromarty fisher folk. On the morning after the ceremony, a group of youths of both sexes would assemble with the newlyweds. A basket or creel was passed around them and gradually filled up with stones. The creel was then hung around the bridegroom's neck whereupon his bride cut the cord and relieved him of his 'burden'. This burden could be referred to in the lead up to marriage, when a proposal was being made:-

'Leezie, wumman, I'm comin' to lay ma burden on thee.'

'Weel, Jock, may the Lord enable me to bear it.'



'But tho'or Established and I'm Free Kirk. Will thoo follow me?'  
'Och aye, I'd follow thee to Lunnon.'  
'That's done it.'

The marriage ceremony among the fisher folk was an elaborate affair. The relations marched in couples to the church, spinsters bareheaded. The marriage feast was preceded by the betrothal feast and followed by visiting feasts; the whole celebration could last up to two days. A typical marriage song from the time began:-

'Hi'll gie to thee ha penny's worth ho' preens,  
To tack up thy flounces hor hony hother things,  
Hif thoo'll walk, hif thoo'll walk, hif thoo'll walk with me honywhere.

But hi'll no tak yer penny's worth o' preens,  
To tack up my flounces hor hony hother things,  
Hi'll not walk wi' thee honywhere.

Hi'll gie thee a braw new dress  
To sit hupon the kerpet, or to walk hupon the gress,  
Hif thoo'll walk, etc.'

## *A Fisher Waddin*

### *Waddin Iasgair*

(by D. A. Mackenzie, from: *The North Star And Farmers' Chronicle*, 28<sup>th</sup> Oct 1897)

'A fisher 'waddin' is a local event, and means an extra half-hour to school children. A piper has been taken from across the water from among the 'Gaelicers', and he heads the procession of couples



who march to the church. The young women march bareheaded with flowers in their hair and the lads look stiff and uncomfortable in their Sunday 'rig.' They march under a fitful shower of rice and handfuls of 'ball money' are scattered broadcast. In the first procession comes the bridegroom, in the second the bride. After the marriage the two processions join and return to the festivities. Then when darkness falls there is a fisher dance. But can words describe the intricacies of that one long reel which used to last for several hours. But then that was the old days, for now they are growing more conventional.'

## *Some Cromarty Dialect*

### *Dualchainnt Chrombaidh*

(by Clem Watson)

'A Sunday visit to my grandmother was often preceded with a chat with Bella Dhu, one of Cromarty's characters.

'Com awa in Clemens. Oos theesel the day? Are thee keepan fine thanks? Cluver ere now, sit doon an Ah'll gie thee a haypel. Div thee lik green haypels? Ad on a til Ah gie the nifie a dichtie afore Ah haaf it til thee. Ad on, Ah'll gie it hanother dichtie wi ma peenie. An thee feenish thee haple, tak a stravaig til e cockat an tak back a buckatie o water til meh. Wid thee lik a pucklie fresh dulse or flukes for thee faither?'

Another piece of dialect from Clem, being a woman's comments on her neighbour's possessions.

'Oo, at a grandeur! Ah gied along an lookit in e winda. At did Ah see? – lilac taypots, coffay taybles an cocanut karpats. Ar did she get a that money thegither? She's ardly fit'll carcle!' (carcle – to count or calculate)



## Some Old Boat Names

### Ainmean Bhàtaichean

(as remembered by Mr. James Hogg, 1960s)

Annie Jane

Brilliance

Helen Slater

Jessie Anne Reid

Reeds

Bonnie Bunch o Roses

Coxifir

Honey Craib

Joseph

Scarf

Bonnie Lass o Wick

Hargot

Industry

Pilgrim

Threepenny

## The Stroopie Well

### Tobar Stroopie

(from: Mackenzie's *The Stroopie Well, A Cromarty Restoration*, 1933)

'There is a movement on foot among natives and other lovers of Cromarty to restore the 'Stroopie Well' – the ancient charm-well and cure-well below the Kirky Brae, which is approached by way of the 'Stroopie Roadie'. ...There are many who still remember the quaint old world customs associated with this ancient artesian well. As youngsters they were sent to the 'Stroopie' when some sick person asked for a drink of the cool water, believing that it would not only refresh but cure. Stories were told of sick persons reputed to have 'got the turn' after drinking 'Stroopie water.' No doubt many 'faith cures' were effected in this way. But the commonest use of the water was to charm a baking against all evil influences, such as evil eye bewitchment, spells, and fairy theft of 'the substance' of the bread.

Similar wells are found in many localities in the Highlands. The water must be brought from them by young children who are willing to run an errand, and they receive as a reward a little bannock with a hole in the middle. In Gaelic this bannock is called 'Bonnach Fallaid' ('Remnant Bannock'), and 'Siantachan a chlàir' ('Charmer of the board' – the baking board). It is considered unlucky by the bakers of oatmeal bannocks to replace any meal in the 'meal kist' or to throw away the remnants of dough. The housewife 'dusts the board' with a bunch of feathers after completing her baking, and with the remnants she makes the 'Bonnach Fallaid' (pronounced 'bonnach faaly'). She does not knead it like an ordinary bannock but forms it between her uplifted hands, turning it round as she does so. Then she makes a hole in the middle with the forefinger of the right hand. This little charm-bannock is not placed on the brander or girdle, but on the 'bannock stone' in front of the fire.

According to ancient belief, the little holed bannock charms the whole baking, but not until a child has fetched water from the charm-well and is given the 'Bonnach Fallaid' as a reward. The housewife sprinkles the water around the fireside to complete the charm. When this is done, the fairies cannot rob 'the substance' from the baking, no evil eye can operate, and no witchcraft can have any evil effect. Sometimes the bannock was used to protect a baby in the cradle, preventing the fairies from carrying it away and leaving a changeling in its place.

A child who was sent for the water of the charm-well was not supposed to know why the water was required. The housewife, either the mother or the grandmother, first tempted the child by suggesting he or she should get a little bannock, and then asked for the well water. The charm might not operate if the young person understood why the water was required.'



## Grannie's Baking

### Fuine na Seannhar

(by Donald Mackenzie)

When Grannie bakes her oaten cakes  
I jist drap in to news a whiley –  
If she should want a messagie,  
She'll ken that then I'd rin a miley.

My grannies' cakes are groff and sweet –  
She'll aye mak' ane for her 'wee mannie';  
Oh, a' roon' Cromarty there's non'  
Wha bakes sic cakes as my auld grannie.

'Weel, what's yer news the day?' she'll speer,  
As I sit on my ain wee stoolie;  
'And div ye like my bonnie cakes?  
And wad ye hae a bittie, mooly?'  
'Och! Grannie, aye,' I'll mak' reply.  
She'll smile – 'Wheest! Hear yon moosie rakin'  
Ahint the press though pussie's here –  
The little rougie smells my bakin'.

She'll bake ilk cake as big's the moon,  
Wi' soople thoomb and nex so knacky,  
Then whip it up and clap it doon  
Upon her girdle in a crackie;  
She'll cut a crossie wi' her knife

And leave fower farlies saft as jelly –  
At length she'll sigh – 'I'm done, but I  
Maun bake a cakie for yersel'ie'

She'll say – 'So tak' the paile doon  
And get a Stroopie drink for grannie;  
Ye'll mind and row' yer hankie roon'  
The han'lie or 't 'ill hurt yer han'ie –  
In comes the weaver's wife to crack,  
Wi' – 'Bless yer hert an' hoo's yer body?'  
I ken my cakie's toastin' fine,  
As I go up the Stroopie roadie.

Alang the hedgie linties chirp;  
I peep for nesties ha'din' eggies;  
I'm aye so eident as I go,  
For fear the nettles scam my leggies.  
The wudden Stroopie's at the dreep;  
I leave my pailie hingin' cannie,  
Then buttercups and daisies pick  
Far up the Kirky Brae for grannie.

Ah! me the day – as she wad say –  
A' this is auld-warld crack, I'm thinkin';  
The Stroopie water's no' thocht noo  
So coul and clear and sweet for drinkin' –  
No grannies bake wee oaten cakes  
For bairns wha deem they are so quirky;  
And mine so dear, this mony a year  
Is sleepin' near the Gaelic Kirky.

## Songs

### Orain

(by James Hogg, elder brother of Bobby and Gordon Hogg)

#### **There's nothing left for me**

'There's nothing left for me  
Of the coal that came by sea  
And Nicol's charity gaes past ma door  
And even Mr Moore  
Although he kens Ah'm poor  
Gaes past my door like stoor without my  
sovereen'

#### **The Bay is Very Beautiful**

The Bay is very beautiful an full o biggar-men  
I'll tak ma scoo an scanty an try the fleuks again  
Ah'm almost in starvation, Bunks in Queer  
Street now  
So I must mak an effort to find a chow

Frost or snow won't stop me, an gales Ah  
divnae fear

For if the tide be soutin, Ah'll leave luck til ma  
gear  
Maybe Ah'll get a quarter, maybe a troutie as  
weel  
An then Ah'll see the barman in Balblair Hotel

Wi silver in ma pocket an oatmeal in ma scoo  
Ah'll tramp gladly homeward like cadgers  
always do  
An when Ah reach the bothie so sair an tired I  
am  
Ah'll keep the home fires burnin an fry the ham

An then to bed as usual, three, four pints o beer  
It's best to tak things easy, we'll no be always  
here  
Oh wha would slave like Storum or stare like  
Jessie Poose  
There's little sense in savin pence for Chenrey  
Hoose.'

[Chanonry House was the Black Isle  
Combination Poorhouse, Fortrose]

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## Postscript

### Fo-yrriobhadh

During the first week in December 2007 Am Baile played host to visitors all the way from the University of North Texas. Linguistics student Kelly McGill had read about Am Baile's Cromarty Fisher Dialect project and was interested in researching this unique dialect as part of her Masters degree. Kelly and her husband, John, travelled four and a half thousand miles to meet the Am Baile team and interview the last two fisher dialect speakers - brothers Bobby and Gordon Hogg. As recent newlyweds, Kelly and John were able to combine research with a slightly delayed honeymoon.



The photograph shows (left to right) Janine Donald (Am Baile researcher), Bobby Hogg, and Kelly McGill.







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CAMPBELL.

RED MACLEAN.

GRAHAM of MONTROSE.

Cromarty.



FORBES.

DRESS FRASER.

MACDONALD.

HUNTING MENZIES.

MALCOLM.

MACGREGOR.

MURRAY of ATHOLE.

MACDUFF.