

A 17TH CENTURY CONTRIBUTION TO THE SCOTTISH FLORA

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About the year 1695 Martin Martin, Gent., native of Skye and sometime scholar of Leiden University, made a tour of the Inner and Outer Hebrides, visiting almost every island personally, including St. Kilda. In 1698 he published *A Late Voyage to St. Kilda, the Remotest of all the Hebrides*, and five years later in 1703 appeared the first edition of the work for which he is justly famous, *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland*. Both works have long been valued by students of Hebridean history for the acute account of life in the islands in the late 17th century, but as far as can be gathered the many plants mentioned by Martin have been overlooked.* For this reason the plants have been extracted and are listed according to the Island on which they are said to grow by Martin. In most cases he gave an English or Scots name. An attempt has been made to identify the plants more exactly and notes, giving reasons, are added. The main source of information for identification has been Britten & Holland (1886) and unless otherwise stated the notes are based on that work.

LEWIS, v.c. 110

Birch

Hazel : *Corylus avellana*

Nettle

Reed : Probably *Phragmites communis*. *Typha latifolia* is mentioned elsewhere and is called "Cat's Tail."

Golden Rod : *Solidago virgaurea*

All Heal : May be *Stachys arvensis* which is the name given by Lightfoot (2) although it is well to remember he is "a Lecturer of Uxbridge," as Thomas Pennant delightfully describes him. He received his information mostly at second-hand from Stuart, who spoke Gaelic, and who was the third member of the party which comprised Pennant's (1776) *Voyage to the Hebrides*. However, Clown's All Heal is *Stachys palustris*, and we may perhaps accept the family likeness.

HARRIS, v.c. 110

Daisy : *Bellis perennis*

Clover

Wild White Carrot : *Daucus carota*

Allium latifolium : *Allium ursinum*; no other *Allium* has been recorded in v.c. 110.

BERNERAY, v.c. 110

Slake-like plant growing on land [slake = seaweed]

HERMETRAY, v.c. 110

Milkwort

* Neither N. Douglas Simpson nor Canon C. E. Raven with whom I have corresponded on the subject is aware of references to the book in botanical literature.

NORTH UIST, v.c. 110

Braggir : *Fucus* sp. according to Ray (1724)

Flamula Jovis : *Ranunculus flammula*

Linarich : Sea plant, perhaps *Enteromorpha* sp.

Shunnish : Suinas or Shunas. *Ligusticum scoticum*

Alexander : *Smyrniolum olusatrum*. This was probably a garden escape; it is not found wild in v.c. 110 today. It was once widely used as a pot-herb and Sibbald mentions it in his list of Scottish Garden Plants.

BARRA, v.c. 110

Curran-Petris : *Daucus carota*. In Gaelic Curran = carrot

SKYE, v.c. 104

Oak

Groundsel : *Senecio vulgaris*

Corkir : Lichen. Probably Corkin which is *Lecanora tartarea*

Crostil : Another Lichen. Martin may have meant Crotal or Crotle - *Parmelia omphalodes*. Both these lichens are used for dyeing cloth.

Slake : Seaweed

Dulse : *Rhodomenia palmata*

Alga marina : Tangle - *Laminaria digitata*

SOAY (Soa Brettill - Martin), v.c. 104

Mertillo : *Vaccinium myrtillus*

Red Garden Currant : *Ribes spicatum*? This is the only *Ribes* species recorded for V.C. 104

EILEAN NAN GILLEAN - near Kyle of Lochalsh (Ilan Nan Gillin - Martin), v.c. 105

Erica baccifera : *Empetrum* (Ray, 1690)

GUILLAMON - near Scalpay (Gilliman I - Martin), v.c. 104

Erica baccifera : *Empetrum* (Ray, 1690)

RONA, v.c. 104

Erica baccifera : *Empetrum* (Ray, 1690)

Mertillus : *Vaccinium myrtillus*

AN t-IASGAIR - near Rudha Hunish, v.c. 104

Scurvy Grass : "Of an extraordinary size, and very thick." *Cochlearia officinalis*.

MINGAY I - near Vaternish Pt. (Mingoy - Martin), v.c. 104

A red, short type of dulse

COLONSAY, v.c. 102

Erica baccifera : *Empetrum* (Ray, 1690)

Juniper

Cat's Tail : In the south of England - Devon, Hampshire, Sussex - this is the name for catkins of hazel or willow. In Aberdeenshire *Eriophorum vaginatum* and *E. angustifolium* are called Cat's Tail. Prior (1863) says it is the name for *Phleum pratense* or *Typha latifolia*. The latter is the name given by Lightfoot (1777) and is the plant most likely meant by Martin.

ST. KILDA, v.c. 110

Sorrel : *Rumex acetosa*. " It (the compost) produces much Sorrel where the compost reaches."

Lapathum vulgare : *Rumex obtusifolius*. Sibbald (1684) says " Lapathum vulgare folio obtuso J.B. Folio subrotundo B.P."

Scurvy Grass : *Cochlearia officinalis*

Mille-foil : *Achillea millefolium*

Bursa pastoris : *Capsella bursa-pastoris*

Silver weed or argentine : *Potentilla anserina*

Plantine

Sage : see under " Plants used for medicines." *Teucrium scorodonia* ?

Chicken weed : *Stellaria media*

All hail or siderites : This may be All Heal (see under Lewis). However, *Sideritis* is a genus of the Labiatae and a name given in Parkinson (1640) to various labiates.

Lindley & Moore (1876) say that *Sideritis* is *Galeopsis tetrahit*. This was present as a cornfield weed on St. Kilda as late as 1931.

Sea Pinck : *Armeria maritima*

Tormentil : *Potentilla erecta*. " Their leather is dressed with the roots of tormentil."

All but *Teucrium scorodonia* of the above have been recorded from St. Kilda this century.

NOTE ON DRYAS

In a section devoted to " The diseases known and not known in Skye and the adjacent Isles " we find the following entry :

" Caryophyllata Alpina Chamedrois fol. It grows on marble in divers parts, about Christ Church in Strath; never observed before in Britain, and but once in Ireland, by Mr. Hiaton (Heaton). Morison's Hist. Ray Synopsis, 137 (139)."

Caryophyllata Alpina Chamaedryos folio, to give the spelling in Ray (1724), is *Dryas octopetala*. This reference is to a locality for the plant on the Broadford Marble in Strath Parish, Skye. Christ Church is now a ruin and is marked 'Gill Chriosd' on the Ordnance Survey map, though it is also known as Kilchrist. It is about 3 miles S.W. of Broadford and 1,000 yards from a hill called Ben Suardal, upon which *Dryas* is reported as growing at least three times in subsequent literature. In 1776 Thomas Pennant (1776) wrote that the two other members of his party, Lightfoot and Stuart, " ascend the high limestone mountain of Beinn Shuardal, and find it in a manner covered with that rare plant the *Dryas octopeta* [sic]." On the opposite page is a charming drawing of the plant very correctly drawn and more correctly named. Lightfoot (1777) himself refers to the locality in his book published a year later : " Plentifully upon the Limestone rocks of Ben Suardal, etc. in the Parish of Christ Church, in Strath Swardle(s) in the Isle of Skye."

Dryas was still growing in the same locality 140 years later. Salmon (1916) wrote " *Dryas* extremely abundant on Limestone about Ben Suardal, near Broadford."

The question arises whether this paragraph in Martin is the first record for *Dryas* in Britain. No reference is made to *Dryas* in Sibbald (1864). In the first and second editions of Ray's *Synopsis* (1690, 1696) the only locality given for the British Isles is " in Ireland on the mountains between Gort and Galloway " where it was found by Heaton in 1650. Martin was probably referring to the edition of 1696 when he mentions Ray's *Synopsis*, although the actual page on which *Dryas* appears is 139 and not 137 as stated by Martin. Martin, then, had access to a copy of the second edition of Ray's *Synopsis*

before writing his book in 1703. By the time the third edition of Ray's *Synopsis* was published in 1724, *Dryas* was apparently known from a number of localities in the Scottish mountains: "Hujus plantae speciminibus me ditavit D. Lhwyd, in montibus Hibernicis juxta Sligo collectis, quae et in omnibus altissimis Scotiae occidentalis montibus abundat, ut mihi retulit idem." D. Lhwyd is almost certainly Edward Lhwyd, Ray's friend, who visited Sligo in 1700 and sent Ray a collection of plants amongst which *Dryas* is not mentioned. However it seems likely that this note in the third edition was made by Ray himself. This view is supported by the fact that it appears in brackets and not in the small type used by Dillenius to distinguish his own additions from Ray's original work. The note would have been made between 1700 and 1704 when Ray died. It is possible that Ray knew of the existence of *Dryas* in Scotland before Martin published the fact in 1703, though the latter's statement about its abundance is surprising.

The mystery of who first found the plant growing on Ben Suardal and who told Ray still remains. Martin may have written to Ray or to the Royal Society, to which he had already contributed a paper on Medicine in 1697, and to which he contributed another in 1707. His knowledge of Ray's *Synopsis* and his deep interest in natural phenomena may have led him to pass on his information, whether self-acquired or overheard. It is just possible that Ray saw Martin's book before he died and made the note about *Dryas*, but this alone cannot explain "abundat."

PLANTS USED FOR MEDICINES IN SKYE AND ADJACENT ISLES

Presumably wherever possible wild plants were used. *Conium maculatum* is not recorded from v.c. 104 and it may have been cultivated or imported from the mainland.

Violets

Chickweed : *Stellaria media*

Foxglove : *Digitalis purpurea*

Crowfoot : Any species of *Ranunculus* other than *Batrachian* according to Lightfoot (1777).

Wild Garlic : *Allium ursinum*

Carmel : Carmele, Carmeil, or Carmill. *Lathyrus montanus*

Knaphard : Knapperts or Knapparts, from knab, a knob, and urt, wort, referring to the rhizome of *Lathyrus montanus*.

Wild Sage : No *Salvia* species is recorded from the Hebrides, but Lightfoot (1777) refers to wood sage – *Teucrium scorodonia* : "An infusion of it stands recommended in the dropsy." In Martin wild sage is used to kill horse worms.

Shunnis : *Ligusticum scoticum* (see under North Uist).

Myrtillus : *Vaccinium myrtillus*

Plantain

Flamula Jovis : *Ranunculus flammula*

Hart's tongue : *Phyllitis scolopendrium*

Maidenhair : This is a name applied to many very different plants : *Narthecium ossifragum*, *Galium verum*, *Briza media*, *Cuscuta epithymum*, *Glechoma hederacea*, *Adiantum capillus-veneris*, and species of *Asplenium*. The fact that it is mentioned in the same sentence as Hart's tongue suggests a fern. Lightfoot (1777) gives the common name of *Asplenium* spp. as Maidenhair. *Adiantum capillus-veneris* is not found in V.C. 104 and it is therefore most likely that Martin was referring to a species of *Asplenium*.

Yarrow : *Achillea millefolium*

Betonica Pauli : *Veronica officinalis*

St. John's Wort : *Hypericum perforatum*†. Lightfoot (1777) says " An oil or tincture of the flowers is esteemed a good vulnerary." Martin says that St. John's Wort, Betonica Pauli and Golden Rod, are made into an ointment with Sheeps' grease and laid on a wound. Later Fuga daemonum is mentioned; this is again a reference to St. John's Wort which was used on the eve of St. John's day (21st June) for " putting the devil to flight." The plant was hung up at windows as a protection against thunder and evil spirits.

Mercury : *Chenopodium bonus-henricus*

Golden Rod : *Solidago virgaurea*

Flags : *Iris pseudacorus*

Oak

Hemlock : *Conium maculatum*; found in v.c. 110.

The author wishes to thank Mr. N. D. Simpson for his kind help in supplying a list of references which proved invaluable.

† Very rare in v.c. 104 where it is only known from Rhum. Some other species of *Hypericum* may have been used.—Ed.

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