

# Scotland's Other Heritage

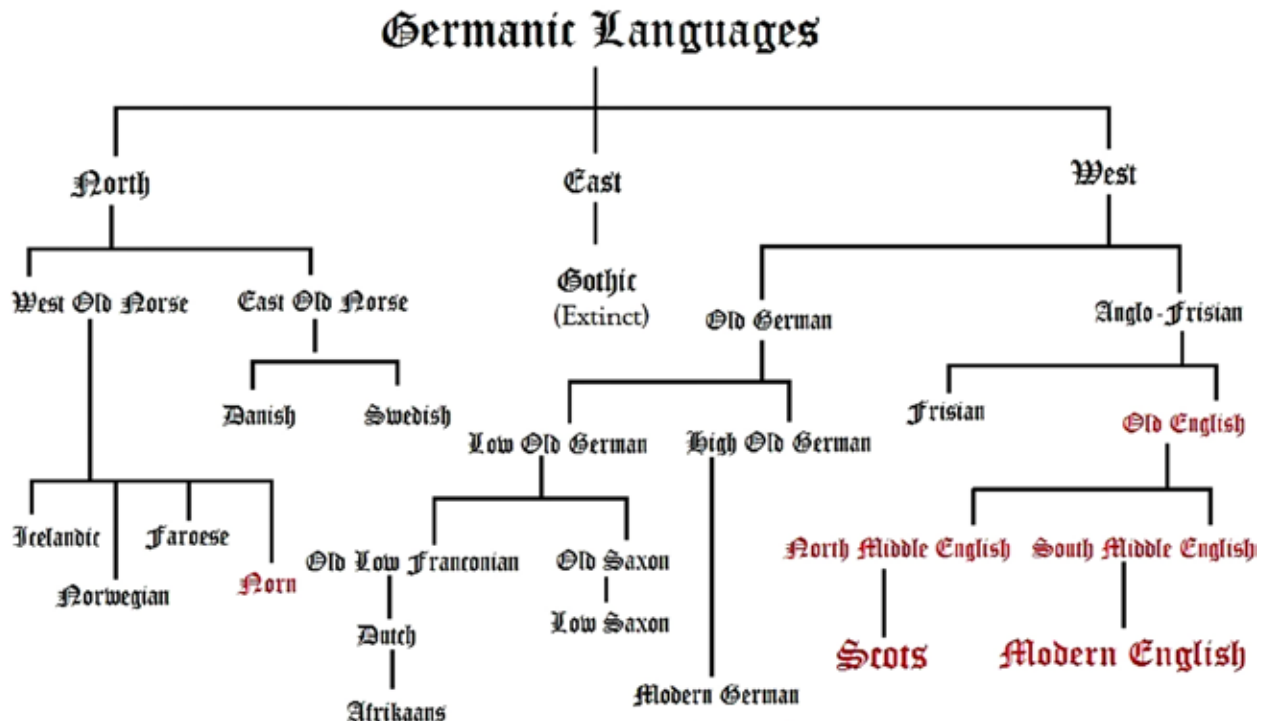
## The forgotten legacy of Germanic Scotland *by Carolyn Emerick*

So much attention is placed on Scotland's identity as a Celtic Nation, that we often overlook the other major influences that are a legitimate part of Scotland's history and culture. It would be fair to say that Scotland is roughly half Germanic, but this part of the Scottish heritage is often downplayed while the Celtic side is discussed. Scotland's ties to Scandinavia have been highlighted in the news media recently, especially as the country debates the possibility of independence from Britain. The country is re-evaluating its own identity, and considering historical ties to countries outside of the United Kingdom.

In the May issue of Celtic Guide, we explored Orkney's Viking heritage, and how both Orkney and Shetland were owned by Norway until they were handed over to Scotland in the 15th century. Both archipelagos spoke a Norse dialect called Norn from the time they were settled by

Vikings (8th century) and even after they were handed over to Scotland, when usage of the Norn language began to erode. Use of the Norn language continued on for at least two centuries in Orkney, but was eventually replaced by the Scots language. It lingered longer in Shetland than in Orkney, however. As late as the 18th century, Shetlanders were documented speaking fluent Norn, and many Norn words are still used in regular Shetland speech today. Norn was also spoken in areas of mainland Scotland, particularly in Northeastern coastal regions, such as Caithness.

Another Germanic language widely spoken in Scotland is the Scots language. In my experience, there is some misunderstanding regarding this language. Some people assume "Scots language" refers to Scottish Gaelic. It does not, as these are two completely different languages. Although there is certainly a Gaelic influence in terms of



*Germanic Language Chart, Languages historically spoken in the British Isles are in red  
by Carolyn Emerick based on information from [www.Scots-Online.org](http://www.Scots-Online.org)*

loan words assimilated into Scots, the language itself falls on the Germanic branch of the Indo-European language tree, whereas Scottish Gaelic is on the Celtic branch.

Scots language descends from the same mother language that Modern English evolved from: Old English. Again, for those who haven't studied medieval English history and literature, there may be some confusion here. Some people erroneously refer to Shakespeare's English as "Old English". The English used during the Elizabethan era (late 16th century), and subsequently used in the King James Bible (early 17th century), is considered by linguists to be Modern English. Look at it this way, you can read Shakespeare and the King James Bible and make sense of it. It is still our English, albeit an earlier version. If we rewind the clock backwards to Chaucer's day (14th century) and attempt to read *The Canterbury Tales*, we find it a bit more difficult. *The Canterbury Tales* was written in Middle English. It is recognizable to a modern reader, but there are many differences and it takes a bit of background study to interpret it. Now go back further, to the age of *Beowulf*. The epic poem *Beowulf* was written in Old English, which is largely unintelligible to the modern English speaker who hasn't studied the language.

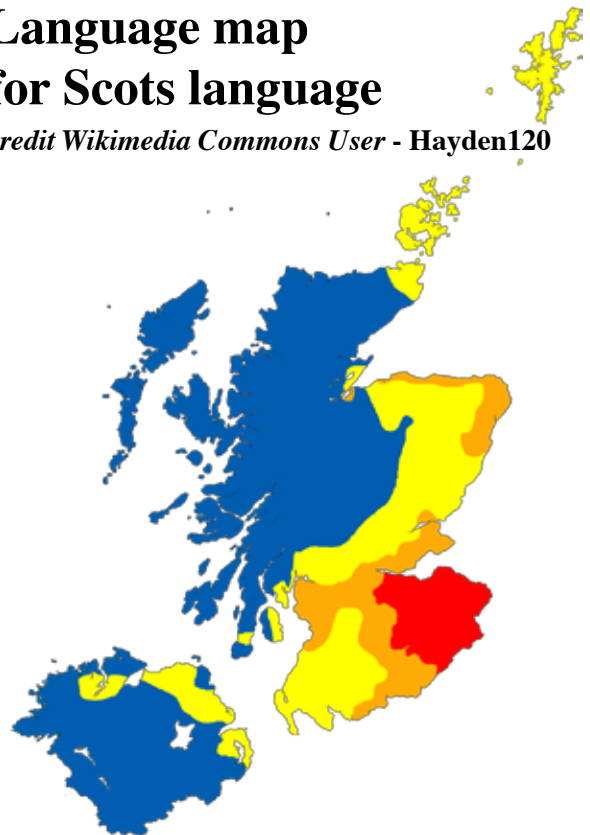
Old English was the language of the Anglo-Saxons who came from the areas of what is now Denmark and Northern Germany to settle in Britain. Their influence on England is well known. England's name is derived from Angle-Land, land of the Angles. However, what many people don't consider is that this tribe was also present in large portions of Scotland. As the Anglo-Saxons settled, and time moved on, their language began to shift between Northern and Southern dialects. The Northern version eventually evolved into Scots, while the Southern version became Modern English.

Some people argue that many Gaelic words are found in Scots, so how can it be a Germanic language? Simply put, Scots (like English) has had numerous influences. The British Islands have had settlers from many language groups,

and this is reflected in the languages spoken there. Just as English is influenced by French due to the Norman Conquest, Scots also contains an influx of words adopted from both French and Gaelic.

## Language map for Scots language

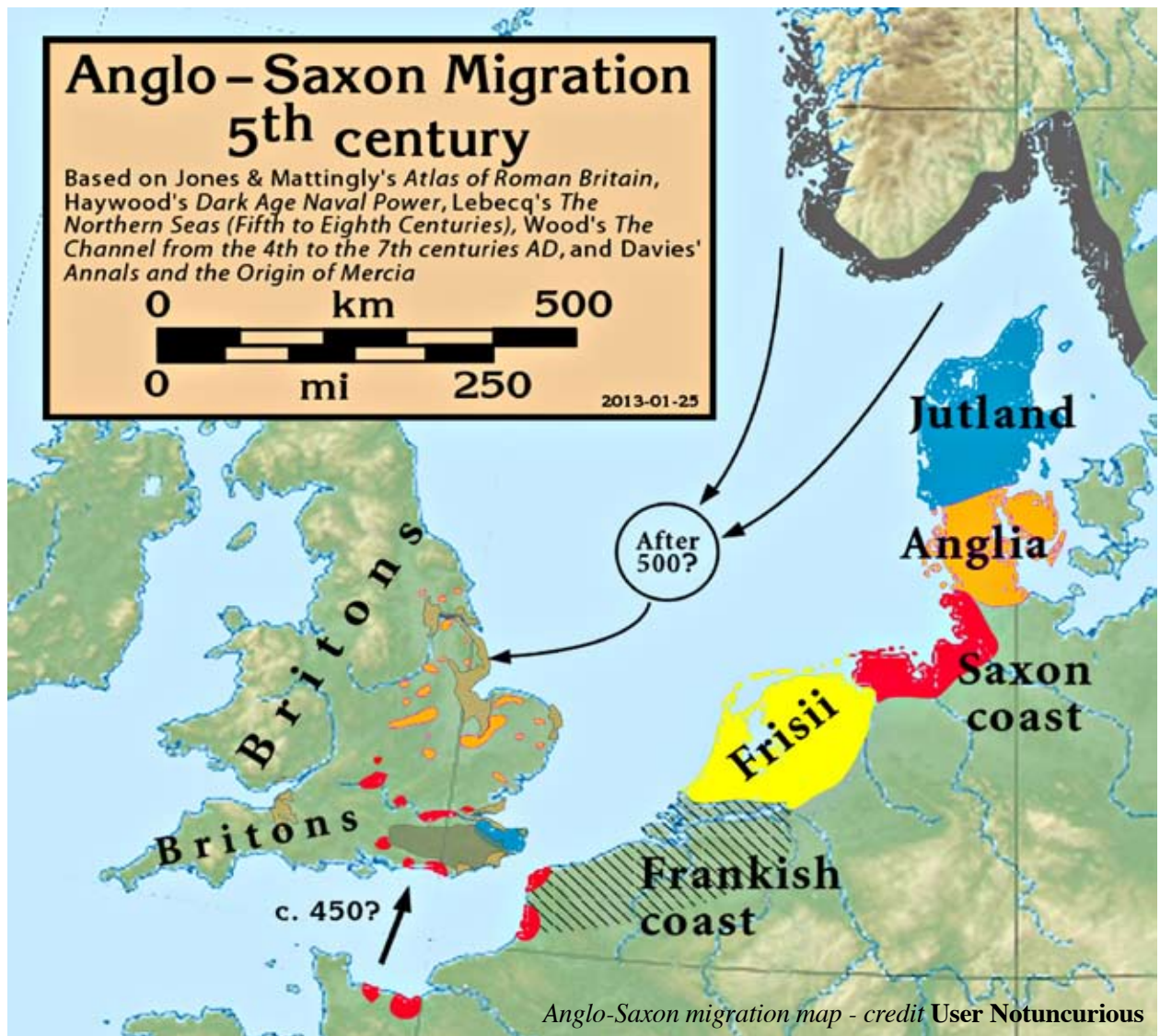
*credit Wikimedia Commons User - Hayden120*



The growth and distribution of Scots in Scotland and Ulster:

- **Old English** by the beginning of the 9th century in the northern portion of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Northumbria, now part of Scotland
- **Early Scots** by the beginning of the 15th century
- **Modern Scots** in the mid 20th century

Looking at language maps, it is very interesting to see that Scotland is linguistically divided almost right down the middle. Scottish Gaelic has been traditionally prevalent in the Highlands, islands and coastal regions to the West (the coast that faces Ireland), whereas Scots was (and still is) spoken in the Lowlands, and



the coasts and islands to the East (the side that faces Scandinavia). So we can see that the side of Scotland that would have had more contact with Celtic Ireland retained their Gaelic language, and vice versa for the side that had interaction with Scandinavia.

But, not so fast! Scots language was also spoken in Ireland! The Northeast coastal regions of Ireland and Northern Ireland are home to a version of Scots known as Ulster Scots. Like the Scottish version, Ulster Scots has also been influenced by the local Gaelic languages, so Irish Gaelic words are present in its vocabulary.

As with other European local dialects, there are movements to preserve Scots and keep it from fading to a distant memory like its cousin, Norn.



***English, Irish Gaelic, and Ulster Scots***  
*Trilingual sign in Enniskillen, Northern Ireland*  
by Dean Molyneaux





### ***Ballyhalbert, Northern Ireland***

*Dual Scots Language Sign*

*(Parts of Ards Peninsula were settled by Scots in the 17th century)*

*by Aubrey Dale*

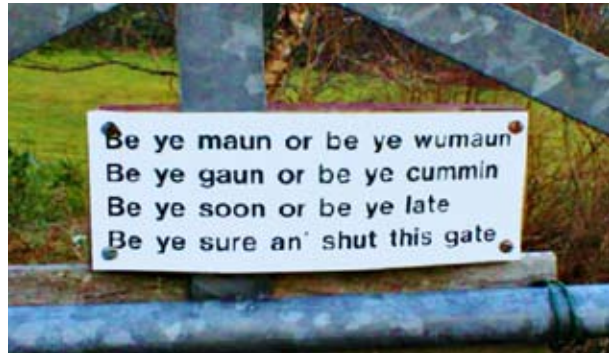


### ***Newtownards, Northern Ireland***

*Scots Language Sign by Albert Bridge*



In areas where Scots is spoken, it is common to see tri-lingual signage using English, Scots, and Gaelic. It is also celebrated as the preferred language of famed Scottish poet, Robert Burns.



### ***Gate at Badachro, Scotland***

*Doric Scots sign in a Gaelic Community*

*by Paddy Heron*

So, why is this part of Scotland's heritage minimized in favor of the Celtic side?

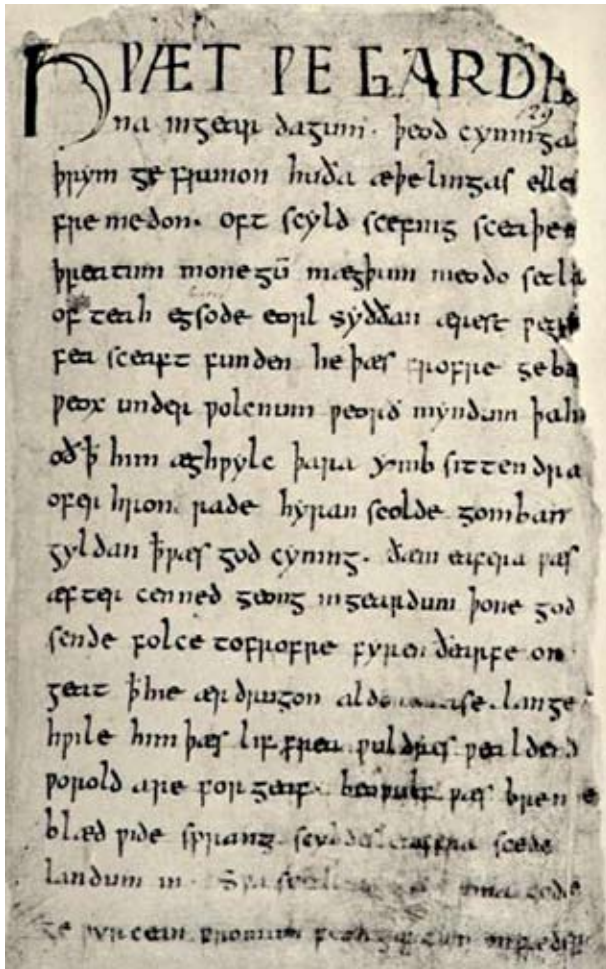
My own theory is that due to strained relations with England over many hundreds of years, there was a need for Scottish people to assert their own independent identity separate from the English. Since the English are so strongly affiliated with the Anglo-Saxons, Scotland proudly waved the banner of the Celts in defiance.

The urge to separate themselves as a culture and define themselves as distinct from England meant that their own Anglo-Saxon heritage was downplayed and largely forgotten, while the Celtic side was emphasized.

There is also a tendency to view the Anglo-Saxons as the enemy of the Celts, who pushed them out of England into Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Cornwall, etc.

While this is true, we must also remember that the Celts themselves were not indigenous to the Isles. The Celts came to Britain from Central Europe, and may have killed off (or assimilated into) the indigenous Britons who lived there before them.

Not only that, but the Anglo-Saxon people were taken over by the Normans in 1066. The vast majority of English nobility and landowners from that point on were Norman, while the peasantry remained Anglo-Saxon.



*Old English - First page of Beowulf*

Therefore, the people responsible for the aggression against the Scottish were the English Normans, who still make up the majority of the English aristocracy today.

In truth, both Celtic and Germanic heritages have ancient and fascinating histories. One is not more legitimate, more important, or more Scottish than the other. Scotland's roots run deep and they stem from more than one tree.

It is important to celebrate all of these influences, and try our best not to allow any of them to fade into a distant memory.

Some works consulted and web articles for further reading:

"The Anglo-Saxon Invasion: England is More German Than It Thinks" by Matthias Schulz, Der Spiegel - <http://www.spiegel.de/international/>

[europe/the-anglo-saxon-invasion-britain-is-more-germanic-than-it-thinks-a-768706.html](http://europe/the-anglo-saxon-invasion-britain-is-more-germanic-than-it-thinks-a-768706.html)

"English Is A Scandinavian Language" by Trine Nickelsen, Science Nordic - <http://sciencenordic.com/english-scandinavian-language>

"Look North Scotland: A future for Scotland as a populous and accessible part of the Nordic region could be transformational" by Leslie Riddoch, The Guardian - <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/dec/05/north-scotland-nordic>

"Scotland Could Join Scandinavia, Warns Official Report" by Fran Abrams, The Independent - <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/scotland-could-join-scandinavia-warns-official-report-711073.html>

"How Scandinavian is Scotland?" by Jon Kelly, BBC - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-16050269>

"Myths of British Ancestry" by Stephen Oppenheimer, Prospect Magazine - <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/mythsofbritishancestry/#.UZIfTbXVCHg>

"Peoples of Britain" by Dr. Simon James, BBC - [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/british\\_prehistory/peoples\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/british_prehistory/peoples_01.shtml)

"The Norn Language" by Sigurd Towrie, Orkneyjar - <http://www.orkneyjar.com/orkney/norn.htm>

"Norn (Norroena)" by Simon Ager, Omniglot - <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/norn.htm>

"Norn but not forgotten on Shetland" by Mark Rickards, BBC - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-north-east-orkney-shetland-11111965>

"Scots (Scoats leid/Lallans)" by Simon Ager, Omniglot - <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/scots.htm>

"In yer ain wirds - What might we lose if we all began to speak like each other?" By Gillian Sharpe, BBC - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-19869396>

Scots Language Center - <http://www.scotslanguage.com/>

"What Is Scots?" by Andy Eagle, Scots Online - <http://www.scots-online.org/grammar/whits.htm>