

# Preface

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This book is aimed at the student, teacher, academic and general reader with an interest in the Gaelic language. It brings together in one volume original chapters on the history and development of the language, both social and linguistic, in Scotland and in North America. Its publication is particularly timely in the context of the heightened public and governmental interest in Gaelic in Scotland, reflected in the Gaelic (Scotland) Act 2005. The chapters point towards the burgeoning of Gaelic Studies as a distinct branch of Celtic Studies, a development which mirrors the way the other modern Celtic languages have developed in universities in their home countries. The volume thus also seeks to reaffirm the links between the more traditional Celtic Studies approach to the Gaelic language and the recent innovations in the use of social scientific, political scientific and stylistic/discourse analyses of the language.

The chapters are set out in an order that tries to group areas of interest, for the reader's convenience. The first two chapters place the language within a historical and social context. The next two, on place-names and literature, focus on two areas where the language may most easily be found and studied. There follows a chapter on the position of Gaelic in Canada, which is itself followed by a chapter which gives a sample study of some representative dialects. The next three chapters may broadly be categorised as sociolinguistic, although each takes rather different approaches. The final five chapters turn again to areas traditionally studied by linguists: vocabulary, writing systems, phonology, morphology and syntax.

The discrete nature of the chapters means that the reader might easily dip in and read topics in any order, although there is a small element of progression. For instance, we would recommend that most readers begin with Colm Ó Baoill's introduction to the history of the language, which provides an invaluable background for understanding most of the other chapters. David Adger's two chapters might best be read in the order in which they appear in the book, since this makes best sense of the ways in which they refer to each other. In most other cases, however, the reader may navigate through the topics in whatever way the current of interest flows.

We are very grateful to all of the expert contributors who have so kindly given their hard-won knowledge to this book, believing, as we editors also do, that it goes some way towards filling a gap that has hindered the study of Gaelic. There were other chapters we would

like to have seen, but which proved impossible to arrange, and other authors we would have liked to have write chapters. The exigencies of real life have unfortunately curtailed our ambitions, but we believe the book is of great value nevertheless. Any shortcomings in terms of scope or vision are, of course, the responsibility of the editors and not the individual authors.

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Aberdeen 2010