# Scots Language in Diana Gabaldon's 'Outlander'

## By Jeremy Smith

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This column takes a historical approach — we're interested in our eighteenth-century story, after all — but most of these words are still current and used today. You can find all of them in the free, online Dictionary of the Scots Language, and if you have any questions, you can email one of the editors at Scottish Language Dictionaries: mail@scotsdictionaries.org.uk If you have any comments or questions for *The Bottle Imp*, please get in touch!

# Some Scots Words from Diana Gabaldon's *Outlander*

**Bannock**: a round, flat, thickish cake of oatmeal, barley, pease or flour, baked on a girdle. The word can be used metaphorically; it is possibly from Gaelic *bannoch*, cf. Latin *panicium* 'bread'. At the end of the eighteenth century, it is recorded that such 'thin, flaccid cakes' were 'the ordinary bread of the gentry or lairds' in Perthshire.

**Bothy**: primitive dwelling or shelter. The form is probably from the same origin as English *booth*, cf. Germanic *bu–* 'to dwell'. Such shelters were commonly occupied by country-folk on field-duty, e.g. shepherds. Thomas Pennant, touring Scotland at the end of the eighteenth century, refers to the Bothay as 'a dairy-house, where the Highland shepherds, or graziers, live during summer with their herds and flocks, and during that season make butter and cheese'. Common bothy-food at the end of the nineteenth century was **brose** (see below). The term *bothy* is often used to refer to a hillwalkers' shelter, as witnessed by the Mountain Bothies Association.

**Braw**: fine, splendid, worthy, handsome; related to brave. Robert Burns in 'The Cottar's Saturday Night' refers to how 'Their eldest hope, their Jenny, woman-grown', comes home to show off her 'braw new gown'.

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**Laird**: landed proprietor, related to English *lord* etymologically (both from Old English *hlaford*), but developing a distinct meaning equivalent to the English squire, or lesser gentry. Scott catches some of the expectations of the laird in his introduction to *The Monastery* (1820): 'The laird had his farming and improving operations to superintend; and, besides, he had to attend trustee meetings, and lieutenancy meetings, and head-courts, and meetings of justices, and what not.'

**Receipts**: recipe or prescription. John Moncreif, in *The Poor Mans' Physician* (1731), offered 'The Receits of the Famous John Moncrief of Tippermalloch; Being a choice Collection of simple and easy Remedies for most Distempers'. The Dictionary of the Scots Language records *receipt* being used to mean a food recipe in 2003: 'Ma mither-in-law had a great receipt for pancakes'.

**Sark** shirt, generally male, but the term was used also for a woman's chemise. The form derives from Old Norse *serkr*. In 1721, a curious custom is recorded: 'He was wrap'd in his Mother's Sark Tail. The Scots have a superstitious Custom of receiving a Child, when it comes to the World, in its Mother's Shift, if a Male; believing that this Usage will make him wellbeloved among Women.' And perhaps the most famous sark is the one worn by Robert Burns's beguiling witch in 'Tam O'Shanter'.

**Sassenach**: English-speaking person, formerly applied to Lowlanders but later applied to Englishmen or women. The form derives from Gaelic *sasunnach* 'Saxon'. When Jamie calls Claire a Sassenach, he is drawing attention to the fact that she is English and a foreigner. He means it as an endearment, but this is not always the case, as Maggie Scott explains in an earlier column for *The Bottle Imp*. Also see **Dinna Fash**, above.

**Sporran**: pouch, specifically of leather, and with the **dirk** (see above) a traditional item of highland dress. The form is from Gaelic *sporan*. A traveller in 1752 described the appearance of a Highlander as follows: 'This Weapon [dirk]

hangs before in a Scabbard along with a Knife and Fork, and a Purse for their Money, which they term a Sparren.'

**Stramash**: uproar, commotion, hubbub. The word has a wide currency in Scots; the famous nineteenth-century newspaper columnist W.D.Latto ('Tammas Bodkin') offers the following citation in DSL from 1864: 'There arose a stramash doon stairs fiercer than ordinary.'

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