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# Arnol Blackhouse

## 1 - History - History

The Arnol Blackhouse tells us a lot about what island life was like in the Western Isles in days gone by.

The blackhouse was a residence for both animals and humans. There was no chimney and a peat fire was lit at all times in the centre of the kitchen and living area. In the village of Arnol, Isle of Lewis, the blackhouse stands side by side with the more modern dwelling nicknamed "the white house". The blackhouses were dwellings which had straw thatched roofs and included areas where the animals or livestock were housed.

**The "white houses" came into existence when legal pressures and health regulations started to demand that the livestock should be housed in separate dwellings.**

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## Communal - family atmosphere in the blackhouse

A blackhouse is long and narrow; its main feature is a thatched roof made of twigs and heather and overlaid with straw. The building is constructed from local stones with no cement between the stones. The Blackhouse at Arnol was built as recently as 1875. There had to be a certain amount of modernisation – for example, the roof - which in times gone by would have been re-thatched every year. The present blackhouse roof has been more sturdily built to suit the tough weathers and to ensure that it lasts longer.

The smoky atmosphere and bedding and livestock arrangements really bring it home to you just how communal these family houses were.

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## Barn and Byre

A further room for animals that would have held pigs, sheep and cattle. The animals didn't live here permanently but were only brought inside when the weather was unfavourable. The family cow was housed under the same roof as the humans, usually only during the winter months. Milk was so important to the family so ensuring that the cow was warm and healthy was a necessity!

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## The Byre

The urine from the animals drained into the land and the ammonia assisted in sterilizing the house.

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## Fertiliser

Each spring the byre was cleaned and the manure was placed on the crops as fertiliser. Human waste would also

be gathered to use as fertiliser. Urine was used for treating fabrics such as tweed.

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## **Tools - farm implements**

Small hand tools such as sickles, spades, rakes, scythes, peat cutting irons, and barrels and chests to hold food for the hens and animals were housed in the barn area of the blackhouse.

## **Timeline**

### **Frise**

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## **Games**

## **Activities**

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