

Tiree: A History

Part 4 - 1770-1900

*Bent grass, rushes and wild water-cress
Are in secret hollows where the thrush sings.
Often we found honey in the banks
From the restless, russet-brindled humming bee.*

(John Maclean, the Balemartine Bard)¹



Neil MacKinnon of Tiree c.1568

Billy Clelland 2001, Revised 2009

¹ TB p3

About the author

Billy Clelland was born in South Lanarkshire, Scotland in 1935. His great grandparents were MacKinnons of Balemartine, Tiree. His maternal grandmother, although not born in Tiree, always maintained Highland traditions and a Sunday afternoon during World War 2 often resembled a ceilidh in that she and her six daughters would sit around the old kitchen table singing Gaelic songs in turn solo and together. Everyone had to participate. Thus he was raised with a smattering of 'the Gaelic' and a keen interest in the island of Tiree. His father, a joiner and typical Presbyterian Lowlander, was involved in construction of the airport at The Reef, Tiree, and was a frequent guest of his MacKinnon in-laws. Lacking the tongue he was annoyed that they occasionally lapsed into Gaelic during his visits.

In 1952 the family emigrated to South Australia where Billy and his brother, Tommy, were welcomed into the Port Adelaide Caledonian Society Pipe Band as experienced although young bandsmen. Billy graduated as an actuary and followed a career in computer science principally in the mining industry. This career allowed him with his family to travel widely and their journey to Scotland enroute to Africa in 1972 was when he made his first visit to Tiree.

Subsequent visits in 1988, 1990, 1992 and 2000 were frustrated by the lack of readily-available documentary evidence of the history of the island. When he began to compile a family tree in 2001, including of course his Tiree ancestors, he found it necessary to start from scratch by building his own 'history of Tiree' as background to the family story. The work was never intended to be published, being simply notes for his Tiree ancestors' chapters to be drawn from. Nevertheless he is more than happy to allow other interested genealogists and historians free access to his research.

Part 4

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Chapter Nine: 5th Duke of Argyll - Highland Regiments - Overpopulation - Black Houses - Kelp - Old Statistical Account - Education

By 1771¹⁵⁴ the 5th Duke of Argyll, who was a dedicated 'improver', had succeeded to the Argyll estates and was endeavouring to increase the rental returns from Tiree and his other estates. John Campbell, the 5th Duke, (1723-1806) had served under General Hawley at Falkirk and under the Duke of Cumberland as a Colonel at Culloden. Dr Samuel Johnson stayed two days with the Duke at his new Inverary house in 1773 whilst on his travels around the western islands.¹⁵⁵ The Duke's interest and passion for improvement was to a great extent controlled by the need for revenue. In the Highlands there was scarcely an estate that was not encumbered by debts, a large part of this due to a more lavish style of living by the chiefs and their tacksmen. Samuel Johnson on his journey to the Western Highlands observed, "Their chiefs being now deprived of their jurisdiction, have already lost much of their influence; and as they gradually degenerate from patriarchal rulers to rapacious landlords, they will divest themselves of the little that remains."¹⁵⁶ and "The old chief had lost his prestige as the leader of his followers, and must compensate by a larger income and grandeur of living."¹⁵⁷ The 5th Duke maintained a close and intimate familiarity with his Tiree estate and its management and conducted regular correspondence with his Chamberlains or factors. In October of each year he gave renewed 'Instructions' for the forthcoming year and interrogated his Chamberlains where it was considered that they had not fulfilled his goals set at the previous year's meeting. Estate management records are littered with good intentions and failed achievements that culminate in the emigrations of the 19th century.

According to the New Statistical Report the parish register of Tiree extends back only to 1775, the earliest entry dating to 16th January. "It appears that all parish records prior to that date were sent to Edinburgh, in order to settle a legal dispute and were lost, or at least never returned. They do not seem to have been regularly kept until 1814."¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless Appendix F lists the annual number of Tiree Marriages and Baptisms recorded between 1766 and 1854. In 1773 Samuel Johnson met the Reverend Mr Hector Maclean, then Minister of the Parish of Col and Tyr-yi [sic] aged 77 years old, during his visit to the islands.¹⁵⁹ Balephetrish farm, west of Earnel, was tenanted from 1754 by the Rev Charles Campbell, a native of Barmolloch in Glassary near Loch Awe until his death in 1779. The farm comprised 504 acres in extent and 37 acres of glebe - well above the usual allowance. He had three sons and a daughter and at the time of his death, at the age of eighty, his youngest son was aged four and his wife 36 years old.¹⁶⁰ Balephetrish - *Baile Phèadrais*, was a large farm for centuries. Another origin for its name is from the Gaelic *Ayg Macphetrish*, Hugh son of Peter, a cleric there in the 15th century. At this time the Scottish Kirk was very much the mouthpiece of the lairds.¹⁶¹ The implicit control by the

¹⁵⁴ The year of the "Black Spring" - many cattle died throughout the Highlands.

¹⁵⁵ JWS p122

¹⁵⁶ JWS p69

¹⁵⁷ JWS p117

¹⁵⁸ SA1834

¹⁵⁹ JTH p314

¹⁶⁰ TE p28

¹⁶¹ SC p27

[3rd] Duke of Argyll extended even to the pulpit. In 1756, in the 'Instructions to the Chamberlain' he said, "I will fall on some proper way of showing my displeasure to such as are refractory and to encourage those who do as I direct. I'm resolved to keep no tenants but such as will be peaceable and apply to industry. You'll cause intimate this some Sabbath after sermon."¹⁶² This was in respect of the tenants of Tiree being required to grow flax and to pay part of their rents in spun yarn. In many areas of the Highlands and Islands, textiles had been demanded as part of a tenant's rent. In the case of islands like Harris, Tiree and Islay, it was called simply 'white cloth'. But over the first half of the 18th century the emphasis shifted more to yarn, especially flax yarn. It gave work to the women and children, freeing the men for farm work.¹⁶³ The yarn was exported to a linen factory in Dunoon, owned by Campbell of Dunloskin and the Chamberlain of Tiree, Donald Campbell. The Reverend Campbell was succeeded by his nephew Colin Campbell, who in turn was succeeded by an uncle of the Gaelic poet Dr John MacLachlan of Rahoy. Then came another Colin Campbell, the father of Colina, the wife of the well-respected Dr Alasdair Buchanan of Baugh.¹⁶⁴ It is interesting to find a John MacDonald listed as a 'musician' (presumably a piper) at Balephetrish in 1779. It seems likely enough that the Barmolloch family, who were then in Balephetrish, rewarded him with gifts in return for his services as a piper.¹⁶⁵ The earliest surviving example of native *bardachd* is a song addressed by Neil Lamont of Balevullin to Sir Allan Maclean of Brolas and to the deceased laird of Coll, on the occasion of Sir Allan sailing with his wife, a daughter of Coll's, to Jamaica in 1757. It is highly traditional as it recites the deeds of valour and the splendid entertainment of the heroic age of the Macleans.¹⁶⁶

Fifty seven Tiree men enlisted in the 88th Campbell's Highlanders raised by John Campbell of Dunoon for the Seven Years War 1756-1763 but only twelve returned. They were disbanded at Linlithgow in 1763 where a near-mutiny occurred when the men demanded the pay and clothing due to them and before their complaints were met "some indications of violence very opposite to their previous exemplary conduct were manifested."¹⁶⁷ As a potential military danger the clan unit was no longer formidable, even though, as late as the 1750s, clan organisation had been kept intact and in a state of preparedness on the neighbouring forfeited estates of Lochiel, Barrasdale and Kinlochmoidart. But clan sentiment remained extremely strong among the small tenants of Mull and Tiree, and found a ready focus in the few Maclean tacksmen. An official and authoritative report made for the 5th Duke in 1771 leaves the matter in no doubt: "The small tenants of Tiry [sic] are disaffected to the family of Argyll. In this disposition it's thought that long leases might render them too much independent of them, and encourage the people to that sort of insolence and outrage to which they are naturally prone, and much incited by their chieftains of the Maclean gentry." Thus, the likelihood of any small tenants obtaining longer leases was an illusion. In his census of 1776 the Chamberlain noted those tenants well-affected to the family and those disaffected.¹⁶⁸ Little wonder that the small tenants were not

¹⁶² AEI pxix

¹⁶³ LS p312

¹⁶⁴ TE p28

¹⁶⁵ TB p7

¹⁶⁶ TB p5

¹⁶⁷ M p501

¹⁶⁸ AEI pxxii

encouraged to effect improvements that might simply benefit the next 'Duke-friendly' tenant. The disaffection of most of the small tenants was an underlying current. Usually it took the form of resentment of change, a passive withholding of cooperation from the ducal plans, and suspicion of all improvements.

Tiree, less influenced by the price of cattle, appeared to be modestly thriving when Dr Walker visited in 1764, its inhabitants "*well clothed and well fed, having abundance of corn and cattle and great variety and profusion of the finest fish.*" Hay and potatoes had been added to their limited crops and, with the 3rd Duke's assistance, an export trade in barrelled salt beef had been established worth £230 a year.¹⁶⁹ As previously noted, the population by 1768 had increased to 1,676. The isolation caused by the frequent gale-force winds and the lack of a harbour or shelter for shipping contributed to self-sufficiency but exports and imports were well-nigh impossible during the winter months. Thus during the milder summer months an impractical and costly amount of labour was spent in travel to obtain peat and grind corn on the Ross of Mull water mills. The Duke's woods on the slopes of Loch Sunart furnished timber for ploughs and buildings on treeless Tiree but in 1786 the Chamberlain of Mull was complaining to the Duke that the people of Tiree were 'abusing his woods' and they had to be constrained into taking only what had been ordered via the Tiree Chamberlain. However Tiree's abundant stills were able to provide the neighbouring coasts and islands with whisky. The islanders also had a reputation for heavy drinking.

In October 1771 the 5th Duke of Argyll told his Chamberlain that Tiree was "*over-peopled and my farms oppress'd with a numerous set of indigent [impoverished] tenants & cottars. I am desirous to relieve the farms of these supernumeraries*".¹⁷⁰ However he stated that he was not inclined to subject them to distress and would encourage them to settle in a fishing village he would establish. The best fishermen should be encouraged to begin this settlement - "*they will be given room for a house, two acres of arable and a cow's grass*" when they settled. It was at Scarinish that a stone harbour was built in 1771. The west Highlander of the period appears as an unwilling partner to fishing. His unwillingness had deep roots. Back in the 16th century, fishing on the western seaboard was carried out by fleets of boats that moved into the region in spring from the east with the herring shoals rather than by locals. Part of the reason may have been the unpredictable nature of the harvest especially fish like herring. Also there was the lack of facility and organisation for marketing. Its slow growth nevertheless did give opportunity for the establishment of new settlements.¹⁷¹

The Chamberlain of Tiree from 1769 to 1800 was Major Donald Campbell, the son of Donald Campbell, tacksman of Aros and other farms in Mull. He resided at Crossapoll in Tiree and occupied the farms of Crossapol, Balemartine and Balephuill. With the Duke's Tiree estate were included the east and west ends of Coll, totalling a further 3,018 acres [1,222h]. Donald Campbell retired to Ardnacross in Mull in 1800. The Duke described in 1800 what he saw on his

¹⁶⁹ Dr Walker's 'Observations on Tiree' c1765, MS Inverary Castle. He also found only about twenty islanders who understood English.

¹⁷⁰ LS p292

¹⁷¹ LS p311

estate as "a picture of Celtic feudalism dying hard."¹⁷² Duncan Campbell of Treshnish, who was tacksman of Ruaig, was appointed as his replacement but resigned the following year. Malcolm McLaurin succeeded him as Chamberlain of Tyree in June 1801 and served both the 5th and 6th Dukes in that capacity.¹⁷³ In 1773 Dr Samuel Johnson described the factor, Donald Campbell, as "a genteel, agreeable man."¹⁷⁴ 1771 was the year that the 5th Duke began his Instructions to his Chamberlain. He also set out his ideas for 'Improvement' including a reduction in sheep numbers, introduction of hemp and flax, the 'crushing' of illegal distilleries and requesting quotes of building better mills¹⁷⁵ at Lochvassapole [Loch Bhasapol] and a wind-mill at Scarinish. The following year the Duke agreed to the construction of the mill but insisted that the building must be sound and, as the miller would have a monopoly, his rates must be fair. The next set of Instructions are dated 1785 and the Duke promotes the building of stone dykes upon all his farms and he thenceforth annually questions his Chamberlain on how many roods have been built during the previous twelve months. 200 roods [approximately 11,000 metres] were built during the year ended October 1785. He also requested that some blocks of marble quarried from Balephetrish be forwarded to Leith but despatch was delayed as the blocks were too large to transport over-land to Scarinish.

The minister of Tiree wrote in 1788: "*The people have a natural attachment to the old ways yet when they see work being carried on more profitably, expeditiously, and cheaper, they will easily comply.*" The people of Tiree unquestionably had lively minds and abilities, and were ready to adopt improvements where they promised real advantage to themselves. Past unhappy experiences and deprivations in the clan struggles had turned them sour. Twenty years earlier Dr Walker had observed, "*Yet there are none who can more assiduously pursue any branch of industry when they are persuaded ... that is advantageous.*"¹⁷⁶ The conditions for the enhancement of relations between the people of Tiree and the 5th Duke from his succession in 1770 seemed ideal as the Duke's magnanimity in dealing with his small tenants and, in contrast to the 3rd Duke, favour to his own clan appears to have played little part in the 5th Duke's administration. So what went wrong? The Duke's Instructions to his Chamberlain clearly have the tenants' best interests at heart but the tenants are regularly portrayed by the Duke's man on the ground as shiftless indigents.

The enclosures by construction of stone dykes continued apace and each year the Chamberlain of Tiree reported in roods how much enclosure had been achieved. Of the years reported between 1785 and 1805, the dykes built annually averaged between 200 and 400 roods i.e.

¹⁷² LS p277

¹⁷³ McLaurin, of a Lorn family, was the least successful of all the Duke's Chamberlains, unpopular both with the Duke and his tenants. But he was not inefficient. Writing to the Duke about the rents in March 1805, James Ferrier says '... to give the Devil his due, Mr McLaurin has already done a great deal in that matter, in as far as, from being the worst paid of your rents, Tiry now pays sooner and better than any estate belonging to you'. This was made possible by the flourishing manufacture of kelp. AEI p52

¹⁷⁴ JWS p331

¹⁷⁵ At *Acarseid an Duin, Caoles*, upon a very small burn, which rises in *Loch a'Mhuillin*, are the scanty remains of a rude corn-mill. Hugh MacDonald's ancestors had been millers in *Caoles* since 1725. It was in operation until c1885.

¹⁷⁶ AEI pxxiii

between 11,000 and 22,000 metres. This practice markedly increased the value of the farms affected and, doubtless, the rentals expected by the Duke from each farm. This would have been directly felt by the landless peasant and excluding him from the enclosed land unless only as a farm labourer. There were three extensive commons in Tiree - The Reef consisting of 1,034 acres [419h], Drimdearg 811 acres [328h] and Drimbuigh 287 acres [116h]. The latter two were now being enclosed within adjacent farms, but The Reef remained open. The report made on the island in 1771 represented these commons as "*hurtful to My Lord Duke's interest and destructive of the good government of the island*". The report laid the blame for the excess of cattle in the island, and the multiplication of "idle cottars and supernumeries", on the existence of these large commons, "*a vulgar opinion prevailing among them [the cottars] that the commonties belonged to the King, and that My Lord Duke or his tenants have no right to hinder them.*"

The Instructions regularly report on petty disagreements or certainly niggardly shortcomings in the system, in providing housing and income for the local minister and the schoolmaster - facilities required to be provided by law¹⁷⁷ to the people of Tiree. Penny-pinching when it benefits the islanders - no expense spared if it benefits the Duke? (e. g. the blocks of marble transported to Leith from Balephetrish.) In 1696 Parliament had enacted that a schoolmaster should be appointed for every Parish, a schoolhouse and salary to be supplied by heritors and tenants on a 50/50 basis but by 1758, there were still 175 Highland parishes without school or master.¹⁷⁸

The issue of taking of wood from Loch Sunart continued to fester. In October 1789 the Duke's agent, James Ferrier¹⁷⁹ (1744-1829), on behalf of the Duke issued instructions to 'stop the present method of building houses'. According to the woodranger's report some 7,000 trees had been removed by Tiree tenants. He insisted that the tenants must "*build stone and lime walls and to buy timber themselves, which will give them a better notion of the value of it than they seem to have at present.*"¹⁸⁰ He then proceeded to provide a comprehensive list of tenants, their farms and the wood they had obtained from Loch Sunart in 1788 and 1789. Without masons on Tiree it is unlikely that building could be made in stone in any case and from the list it would not appear that the bulk of the wood was directly used either in the construction or repair of dwelling houses. Dwellings on Tiree at this time were not likely to be described as sumptuous or 'well-appointed'. With the exception of a few occupied by the minister and the Campbell tacksmen such as the house built in 1747 on Loch an Eilein, 'hovels' would be a more appropriate description. Without a secure and lengthy tenure only a fool would waste time and money on a dwelling built on someone else's land particularly as 'improvements' would simply result in a higher rental. "*Make improvements and your lot will be re-valued and the rent increased.*" Peasant housing in the Highlands and Islands until well into the 20th century had low and feeble walls constructed of a few stones jumbled together with mortar to cement them. No chimneys, only holes in the turf-covered roofs for smoke from the fire in the middle of the earthen floor

¹⁷⁷ The expense of repairing kirk and manse was imposed on heritors in 1690. SL18 p286

¹⁷⁸ SL18 p420

¹⁷⁹ James Ferrier, Writer to the Signet, was the Duke's agent and receiver-general. He rose to be Principal Clerk of Session, 1802-1827.

¹⁸⁰ AEI pp16-19

to pass through. Holes in the walls stuffed with straw or moss to keep out the draughts. Doors so low you had to creep in and are unable to stand upright.¹⁸¹ When a dwelling was old and decayed it was often not repaired but the wooden fixtures were removed (roofing trees, rafters or timbers) for use in the new building allowing the old walls to be used as an enclosure for, say, a kail yard.¹⁸² Varying somewhat in design from one locality in the isles to another, the "black house's" [*G taigh dubh*] principal architectural feature was an enormously thick outer wall made by building two dry-stone (or stones and turf) dykes, the one inside the other, and filling the space between them with earth and rubble. Seldom more than six or seven feet high [183cm-213cm], the walls were as many feet in breadth at the base but tapered slightly towards the top. On them was raised a framework of rafters [roof tree], often consisting - especially in the isles where timber was almost unobtainable - of a nondescript collection of old oars, masts and pieces of driftwood. The rafters were covered with large turfs and those, in turn, were thatched with straw from the householder's corn. The thatch was secured by heather ropes weighted with large stones, and the roof as a whole rested on the inner edges of its supporting walls, the absence of eaves ensuring that the roof could not be blown off by Atlantic gales. Long and low, the crofter's house, according to one observer, resembled nothing so much as a potato pit - a resemblance most striking in the case of the more lowly hovels which were constructed of turf [walls] rather than stone and which were propped up by the simple expedient of piling earth against their walls. Nor was the unprepossessing outward appearance of the black house compensated for by indoor comfort. The floor was of earth and, because of the absence of eaves, the walls were perpetually damp. [While tax returns of 1842-1843 gave a figure for the 'annual' (or rentable) value of the average Scottish house around 12/- per head of population, the figure for houses down the west coast ranged from a pathetic 5d in Skye and the Outer Hebrides to only 1/10d in western Argyll.]¹⁸³ In the 1870s, admittedly, the availability of a little more money led to the appearance - in Skye and on the mainland at least - of black houses equipped with windows, floorboards, more than one door, a modicum of decent furniture and, perhaps, two apartments. The older type of dwelling - still much as it had been in the 1700s - had none of these refinements however, and in the 1870s and 1880s it was still to be found all over north-west Scotland, especially in the isles where its predominance was almost completely unchallenged. Houses of this sort had no windows and no chimney, the smoke from the peat fire which burned day and night, winter and summer alike, being left to find its way through the thatch. Furnished with some planks and barrels, a few three-legged stools, and a box bed which was often roofed over to shelter its occupants from the sooty rainwater which dripped from the thatch, the archetypal black house consisted of a single apartment. The crofter and his family lived at one end; their small cattle inhabited the other; and as if that were not diversity enough, the crofter's hens roosted in the rafters above the fire. Animals and humans entered by the same door and only rarely was any attempt made to erect an internal partition between their respective halves of the dwelling - the only general concession to sanitation consisting of an effort to incline the earthen floor towards the byre, in the hope that dung and urine, if not the stench they emitted, could be confined to that end of the house. Dung was seldom so

¹⁸¹ SL18 p182

¹⁸² LS p172

¹⁸³ CSP p11

confined, partly because of droppings from the hens in the rafters, partly because the interior midden was removed only once a year - when it was spread on the fields in spring. In winter, when the weather was wettest and when cattle were confined [in the byre] for long periods, conditions were particularly appalling. Damp, dark, and dirty inside, [the exterior of] crofters' dwellings were usually surrounded by domestic refuse of all kinds, the general squalor and discomfort being added to by the frequent non-existence of paths and approach roads as well as by the crofters' enforced habit of building their homes in the least attractive and often wettest part of their holdings in order to conserve their all too precious arable land.¹⁸⁴ Even their method of repairing these houses was easy to criticize: "Using turfs instead of stones to repair and build houses strips the good land - 'the people made their houses of the grass and feed their cattle on the stones'".¹⁸⁵ These black houses have now all but disappeared from Tiree, Tiree's peat shortage leading to the abandonment of central fires, but "white houses" [*G taigh geal*] with cemented stones, thatched, tarred or felt roofs with a chimney at one or each end can still be seen on the island. Most have now been modernised - Balemartine and Mannal have many old houses. Today, dotted about the island, you will see stone-built, dormer-windowed "spotted or pudding houses" (where only the mortar is painted white); these were built around 1900 from stone quarried on Tiree.¹⁸⁶

Genealogy: Our earliest and most significant ancestral line begins with the marriage of Mary MacDonald, the daughter of Neil MacDonald and Ann MacArthur of Heylipol, to Hugh Maclean of Baugh in 1795. They both also appear living together as Tenants at Baugh in the list of 'Inhabitants in the Argyll Estate, Tiree, 1779' aged 16 years and 20 respectively. Mary bore eleven children: three of them, Christy in 1796, Mary in 1798 and Helen in 1800 were baptised as being of Heylipol. Hugh and Mary appear to have spent all or most of their married life as crofters in Heylipol.

Something of the traditional social fabric and its hierarchy of upper tenants and sub-tenants survived the 18th century but only a few of the older families of tacksman status, whether Campbell or Maclean, outlasted the cold economic climate of the early 19th century. While they did exist they evidently gave encouragement to bards and pipers on the island. It seems, too, that some Maclean tacksmen might have been attached by more than commercial ties to their landlord the Duke of Argyll. A tombstone in Kirkapoll kirkyard bears the inscription: "Neil Maclean, in memory of his father Archibald Maclean, tacksman, Greenhill, died 17th December 1887, aged 67. He faithfully served the Duke of Argyll 44 years." This, the last of the tacksman families, emigrated to New Zealand shortly afterwards, so bringing to an end the connection of the Macleans of Cornaig with their native island.¹⁸⁷ The place of the tacksmen was taken by large tenant farmers whose operations were controlled by the markets and who had no sentimental ties with the landlord, the island or the mass of the population.

The argument of the improver derived its force from the manifest failings of the old system in an age of generally rising production and growing population. The Duke's officials and other

¹⁸⁴ MCC pp164-165

¹⁸⁵ SL18 p221

¹⁸⁶ TH p17

¹⁸⁷ TB p4

observers in Tiree wrote of the restricted variety of crops and their poor yields (on the average only threefold for bere, oats and rye, and fourfold for potatoes), of time-consuming methods, of the lack of winter feeding and the consequent plight of the cattle and the innumerable small horses, of the destruction of the soil by over-grazing and general over-use (no less than one-eighth of the island's total area was ruined by sand-blow) and of the absence of auxiliary industries. The tenants might live frugally in good years, in misery when the season was bad.¹⁸⁸

A frequent criticism of traditional practice was the persistence of peasants using "*graddan-bread*", obtained by setting fire to oats and barley in the sheaves then grinding the parched grains left in stone querns. James Boswell was most disparaging: "*It appears to me that graddaning is a strong proof of the laziness of the highlanders, who will rather make fire act for them at the expense of fodder than labour themselves.*"¹⁸⁹ Around 1695 Martin Martin described the custom as follows, "The ancient way of dressing corn, which is yet used in several isles, is called *graddan*, from the Irish [Gaelic] word *grad*, which signifies quick: A woman sitting down takes a handful of corn, holding it by the stalks in her left hand, and sets fire to the ears, which are presently in a flame. She has a stick in her right hand, which she manages very dextrously, beating off the grain at the very instant when the husk is quite burnt; for if she miss of that she must use the kiln, but experience has taught them this act to perfection. The corn may be so dressed, winnowed, ground, and baked within an hour after reaping from the ground. The oat bread dressed as above is loosening, and that dressed in the kiln astringent, and of great strength for labourers: but they love the *graddan*, as being more agreeable to their taste."¹⁹⁰

What was common to all districts of the Argyll estate was the indisputable human population increase. Between 1779 and 1792 in Tiree there was an increase of 25%. The average farm population rose from 56 in 1768 (it cannot have been much more than 40 in 1750) to 59 in 1779, to 82 in 1792 and around 90 in 1800. See Appendix G for a list of Households and Population numbers from 1747 to 1891. It was against this background of rising population that the 5th Duke's plans for new industries and crofting farms were formed. Emigration was a last resort for the people of the Highlands. 'Not emigration but industry and fishing settlements' were the Duke's bold answer to the challenge of a burgeoning population.¹⁹¹ Population peaked in Argyll in 1831.¹⁹² After the middle of the 18th century, mortality in Scotland fell dramatically; the principal reasons being the introduction first of inoculation and especially of vaccination, after 1803, against smallpox, autonomous changes in the virulence of disease, a decline of deaths from famine, the advent of the potato, improved transport and more effective poor relief.¹⁹³

Until the 1840s, Scotland was freed from the threat of actual starvation, and the vaccination against smallpox produced a major reduction in deaths from a disease which had previously been

¹⁸⁸ AEI pxxvi-xxvii

¹⁸⁹ JTH p230

¹⁹⁰ WI p127

¹⁹¹ AEI pxxviii

¹⁹² PSS p46

¹⁹³ SC p3

the cause of about 15% of all deaths. But the good years did not last. A serious and lethal epidemic of measles in 1807-1808 was followed by another in 1818-1819, accompanied this time by whooping cough and typhus. Cholera struck for the first time in 1831-1832, killing perhaps 10,000 people throughout Scotland and it returned with almost equal severity in 1848-1849, 1848-1849, 1853-1854 and 1866-1867.¹⁹⁴

During the previous three quarters of a century the populations of countries across Western Europe had been growing fast, leading to growing pressure on the land. Then the revolution in agricultural practices swept through, dislocating the peasantry in country after country. Like Ireland, the Highlands were among the last places in Europe to feel the effect of these changes. Great efforts were made by, among others, the Forfeited Estates Commission and the Duke of Argyll to provide new enterprises in the region – such as linen, wool, and fishing, but only kelp proved a success until its market collapsed in the 1820s.

Kelp,¹⁹⁵ an alkaline seaweed extract then used in the manufacture of soap and glass, was first made in Scotland in the 1720s. At that time the industry was confined to the Forth estuary and to Orkney. But in the 1740s it spread to the Outer Isles and, by the mid-1760s, it was firmly established in all the Hebrides and on parts of the north-western coast of the mainland. Until the 1760s, when the average price for kelp first exceeded £2 a ton, landlords were generally unaware of the industry's growth potential and of its possible value to themselves. Most of the early profits from Hebridean kelp were consequently pocketed by a few enterprising tacksmen and by a small band of independent entrepreneurs, most of them from Ireland. The Highland landlords' state of innocence with regard to kelp's importance was of short duration, however. Increasing industrial demand for alkali had the effect of pushing kelp's price steadily upwards. By the 1790s, when imports of Spanish barilla (kelp's main rival as a source of industrial alkali) were cut off by French military action, the average price was in the region of £10 a ton, and even that figure doubled in the 19th century's opening decade. Production was accordingly stepped up. Profits rose markedly. Landlords, making up for their initial dilatoriness, accordingly stepped in and took over the industry – established legal rights to the seaweed on which it was based and taking control of all its productive and marketing sequences from the cutting of the sea wear to the unloading of finished kelp on Liverpool and Glasgow waterfronts.¹⁹⁶ The Duke of Argyll benefitted enormously from his extensive kelping interests in Tiree. In 1770 the contribution of kelp to the Duke's revenue was small. In 1770-1771 Tiree paid a rent of £852 largely from sales of barley and whisky. Nevertheless the Duke was well aware of the fluctuations in the market for kelp and he was disturbed that, despite Tiree being a fertile island, in 1794 the rent totalled only £1,000 of which approximately £677 was from kelp. He commented in the Instructions to his Chamberlain for 1794, "*In short, in place of recovering the rents from material production of the island as was done before kelp was known, you have allowed the tenants to drink their barley, and squander the other productions of the land, and taught them to trust the payment of their rents to the price of kelp, and the consequence of*

¹⁹⁴ PSS pp23-24

¹⁹⁵ See Appendix H for a contemporary description of the kelp industry for the manufacture of iodine by the North British Chemical Company in Tiree taken as evidence during the Napier Commission hearings.

¹⁹⁶ MCC pp50-51

*that whenever a market for that article fails I am to get nothing for my land.*¹⁹⁷ The Chamberlain's response blamed the situation on the 'population increasing daily' and now at 2,500 [1795]. In 1805-1806 the islanders paid a rent of £2,606, largely out of the sales of kelp. The boom in kelp prices during the Napoleonic War changed the whole economic and tenurial structure in the affected districts of the Argyll estate. The growth of output doubled in Tiree over the 1790s alone.¹⁹⁸ Thus, unplanned and unforeseen, a new industry had arisen and helped restore the small tenants to the land. Kelp earnings made possible the creation of separate, partitioned farms in the place of large runrig farms and promoted the grant of leases to small tenants. This central feature of the Duke's agrarian improvements had been unattainable, by reason of the small tenants' poverty, until the rise of kelp manufacture. The weakness of the new estate structure now rested on a precarious industry not on a broad industrial base of new sustainable industries, agricultural improvements and fishing. The Duke did not live to see the events that followed the end of the Napoleonic War - the decline of agricultural prices, the collapse of the kelp market, the eventual disappearance of nearly all of the old Highland landlords, the crop failures and famine conditions which set in motion emigration that scattered the population to distant lands. Nevertheless his administration of the estate was the best-conceived contemporary attempt to preserve the Highlands from depopulation and decay.¹⁹⁹ Kelp had entered its long catastrophic decline by 1820. Landlords throughout the islands had made excellent profits from kelp and generally trebled their rents in the years of the French Wars to 1815. Kelp was a valuable commodity in the manufacture of glass; as Joseph Mitchell remarked, it was "like a gold mine to the whole Hebrides". It brought a brief twilight of prosperity to the islands. To supply the labour demanded in harvesting and processing the kelp they had encouraged the growth of population by the sub-division of holdings and taken steps to deter emigration at the turn of the century. Hebridean proprietors used all their influence to secure the passing of the Passenger Vessels Act²⁰⁰ not with the welfare of the emigrants in mind but to secure their guarantee of a reservoir of labour to harvest the kelp. This act was supposedly to protect emigrants; designed to limit the number of passengers on any one vessel, to ensure the provision of adequate supplies of food, water and medicine. The result was that the price of an Atlantic crossing was now beyond the reach of most Highland emigrants. The landlords welcomed the act with unconcealed delight - they had created a situation where their kelpers could not escape and quit the new agrarian systems. No longer able to emigrate and desperate for land, the people had no choice but to accept crofts on their landlord's terms.²⁰¹ A labour force [in the Highlands] consisting of as many as 10,000 families whose members - men, women and children alike - cut, gathered, dried and incinerated the seaweed during the season which began in April or May and continued into August. Once cut, it was dried by sun and wind - a process calculated to occupy no more than three of the dry, warm days which commonly occur in north-west Scotland in early summer. The dried weed was carried in carts and creels to kilns -

¹⁹⁷ AEI p30

¹⁹⁸ LS p318

¹⁹⁹ AEI pxxxviii

²⁰⁰ The Passenger Vessels Act was passed in June 1803 for the purpose of preventing the serious privations that had been endured by passengers in emigrant ships. The Act laid down regulations for the provision of adequate space for passengers (one passenger to two tons of burden as a minimum), higher standards of hygiene, and sufficient supplies of food, water and medical stores. Vessels carrying more than fifty persons were to have a qualified surgeon on board.

²⁰¹ MCC p61

long low constructions of stone built handily on a nearby beach and filled, prior to each firing with peat. This peat was next set alight and the mass of seaweed which had been spread across it was reduced, as a result, to ashes – the alkaline residue from the weed accumulating, at the kiln's base, as a glowing molten mass which cooled into the brittle, bluish material that was eventually shipped to glass and soap works in England and Lowland Scotland.²⁰² Kelp harvesting and the manufacture of soda ash had a disastrous affect on people's time to plant, sow and fish. Kelpers' returns were meagre and further denied them the ability to earn from their agricultural pursuits. Even when the finished product was selling at up to £20 a ton, kelpers were receiving only £2 a ton on average. That landlords were able to reduce their kelpers' share of the proceeds to such an abysmally low level was the consequence of a well-devised and cruelly efficient system of exploitation which turned on the fact that the kelper's connection with the land was deliberately maintained by his employer who was also his landlord. Because the kelper remained an agricultural tenant who lived on the land and who continued to raise cattle and grow crops on that land, his landlord was able to draw on the kelper's labour during the kelping season while leaving him to his own – unpaid – devices for the rest of the year. As the provider of the land without which the kelper could not survive, the landlord was able to establish a degree of control over his workforce which was quite unmatched by even the most tyrannical mainland factory owner.²⁰³ The key to this level of control was to create a direct tenurial relationship between the small tenants and the landlord i.e. to remove the middlemen. The Duke of Argyll's Instructions to his Chamberlain on Tiree in 1799 read as follows: "*As you inform that small tenants can afford to pay more rent for farms in Tiry [sic] than gentlemen-farmers owing to the manufacture of kelp, this determines me to let the farms to small tenants which have been and are as present possessed by tacksmen who reside upon farms in Mull, and I desire that on your return to the island you let this be known.*"²⁰⁴ There was more money in kelp than in farming. Previous plans for agricultural improvement were abandoned and an immediate start was made on dividing the Tiree farms into crofts. The 1791 and 1792 crop failures meant that the rents were paid in kelp earnings. By 1806 four-fifths of Tiree was occupied by crofters.²⁰⁵

The Statistical Account 1791-1799 for Tiree and Coll, Parish of Tiry [sic], Presbytery of Mull, Synod and County of Argyle, was written by the Rev Archibald MacColl. A few excerpts follow, however the accuracy of his comments have to be treated with care as tradition and hearsay had much more credence in the late 18th century than today. "In the interior parts [of the island], about 1200 acres of ground were, until these three years, common to the whole inhabitants, but they are now enclosed and included in the adjacent farms." "The whole of Tiry [sic] and the two ends of Coll are the property of the [5th] Duke of Argyle, who is also patron. The middle part of Coll, above two thirds of the island, is the property of the Laird of Coll, who resides in the Parish. Tradition says that the whole property descended from MacDonald of the Isles to the Macleans. By marriage the Macleans retained it till the family of Argyle obtained right to the greatest part of Morven, Mull and Tiry [sic]. The real rent of the parish is near £2,000." "The returns [from cultivation] *communibus annis* [L on the annual average] are about

²⁰² MCC pp51-52

²⁰³ MCC pp52-53

²⁰⁴ AEI p48

²⁰⁵ MCC p55

four seeds from barley, and $2\frac{1}{2}$ from small black oats (the prevailing sorts of grain) and about 5 from potatoes, of which a great quantity is planted, mostly in lazy beds²⁰⁶ [*G feannaigan*]. Drilling potatoes is now introduced. The increase is from 8 to 20 seeds, and the incumbent has seen it at 32. They tell of far superior increase in grain, when the land was in good condition. There were then scarcely tenants sufficient to occupy the lands, though now they are so numerous, that the ground is set in too small portions to accommodate perhaps 12 or 24 of them in one farm, each paying from £1 to £4/4/- of yearly rent. The consequence is, they plough as much as they can; and their lands are impoverished, as they seldom get rest. Above two-thirds of the manure are [sic] sea-weed." [Seed Time, Harvest, Etc] "The ordinary time of sowing oats and planting potatoes is from 26th March to the 10th May; and for barley from 30th April to the 20th June. The harvest generally begins about the middle of August and is finished about 10th October. ...barley is the prevailing crop. The inhabitants serve themselves in meal, seed and spirits. Hardly any foreign spirits are now imported. A few years ago they usually sold from 200 to 300 Scotch gallons of whisky to the neighbouring islands. The parish had then upwards of 30 stills, but now it is reduced to three small licensed ones. Now the inhabitants are increased; and, in the bad seasons of 1790 and 1791, they hardly distilled 300 bolls; and bought, each succeeding year, above 2,000 bolls of meal at a very high rate, and their seed potatoes at five shillings per barrel." [Woods] "It plainly appears that wood formerly grew in this parish, when thinly inhabited and fewer cattle reared. Frequently large pieces of trees are found in mosses [bog]; though now there is not a tree in it, nor is it probable that upon any trial any would thrive in it, the situation being so far in the ocean and without shelter. [Water, Mills, Etc] "Though there be a great number of brooks, Tiry [sic] mills seldom can be wrought for want of water or sufficient falls, above five or six months yearly. This makes it necessary, either to send our grain at great expense to other countries or use querns or hand mills. [Hand-querns were still probably in use in the mid-19th century.] By the lowest calculation, the work of 50 women is yearly lost at grinding. But there is now expectation of a wind mill. [Minerals] The qualities of the Tiry [sic] marble are now well known; it is sometimes pure white; sometimes red and white, or white and green; and sometimes variegated with numberless figures. It is to be hoped a correspondence will be continued, a market procured, and a marble work carried on." [Animals] "The pigeons have chosen their habitations: Hither their enemy, at the risk of his life, descends a very unpleasant stair, carrying fire and a bundle of straw, to which he sets fire. The smoke suffocating them, they fly into the flames, attached to the light, apparently the passage to escape; thus numbers of them are caught. At the distance of six leagues westward from this hill [*Ceann a' Mhara*] lie a cluster of inhospitable rocks, called Sceir-mhor [Skerryvore], to which young adventurers, before sun rising in a calm summer day, go in quest of sport. The skins of the sea-calves, the old inhabitants of these rocks and seas, which they kill with clubs or bullets, commonly measure six to eight feet in length." [Population] "The houses of the common people are generally in dry situations and remarkably warm, built as usual in sandy islands (partly through want of stones, which are ill to quarry, but mostly out of choice,) of an inner and outer single wall, filled up in the middle with sandy earth from 4 to 6 feet thick. The people are lively, industrious and cheerful, and often engaged in active employments, in the open air; yet the

²⁰⁶ Some were no bigger than a dining table carefully built up with turf carried there in creels by the women. One of these tiny lazy beds will yield a sheaf of oats or a bucket of potatoes, a harvest no man should despise. F. F. Darling.

dampness of the place, the want of proper firing [fuel], and the poor living of many, seem to be the great causes of frequent rheumatisms, dysenteries, and nervous fevers. Draining of the lakes, and the flat grounds, may add much to the salubrity of the place. Both isles [Tiree and Coll], upon the whole, appear to be healthy from the great age to which many inhabitants attain.

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| Number of souls in Tiry [sic] in March 1792 | 2416 |
| Males | 1184 |
| Females | 1232 |
| Under 10 | 663 |
| From 10 to 20 | 573 |
| From 20 to 50 | 737 |
| From 50 to 70 | 334 |
| From 70 to 80 | 77 |
| From 80 to 90 | 22 |
| From 90 to 100 | 9 |
| Above 100 | 1 |
| Annual average of baptisms, for 6 years | 95 |
| Annual average of marriages, for 6 years | 16 |
| Families | 467 |
| Farmers | 270 |
| Workmen | 66 |
| Cottars | 131 |
| Return to [sic] Dr Webster for 1755 | 1509 |
| Increase from 1755 | 907 [+60%] |

The man above 100 [years old], was allowed to be 106, at his death in spring last. Except for the last 7 years he supported himself and his wife by herding. His liveliness appeared to the last, not only by walking but dancing. There are no registers of birth or burials, and the parish records preceding the present incumbent's time have been lost. There are not 40 natives of any other parish in the two [Tiree & Coll] isles. Tradesmen are numerous yet some good ones are much wanted. It is not easy to calculate their number, because, in general, they are not distinct from farmers. Many men and women work at the weaving business.²⁰⁷ There are very few bachelors or widowers. The men frequently marry at 19 or 20. The population has been also increased, within these 14 years, by three successful courses of inoculation. The situation of the parish is dismal without a surgeon residing in it. Poor people cannot afford sending occasionally for a surgeon, to a distant country, at great expense, with frequent disappointments; the raging elements forbid it; or perhaps before the relief arrive, the hope of the family is no more. Too often has the present incumbent seen child-bed women, in particular, fall sad sacrifices without relief. It is too much for this parish, without manufactures, and without greater improvements in agriculture, to support 3,457 inhabitants, if they should be free of other burdens. Yet the people have often and cordially united to make up a small salary according to their abilities, and bestowed it upon young surgeons, who resided now and then amongst them, considering it as a temporary appointment. There are now so many pious mortifications, so many public funds raised upon charitable foundations; if, in this respect, the

²⁰⁷ By 1899 there were less than 12 looms in Tiree, operated by old people, weaving cloth solely for local use.

situation of this parish was represented and known, is there any part in Scotland in need of relief from them? A fund of this kind, with a farm to reside on, together with what a surgeon could add to it by his practice, might be an object worth attention to some gentleman of that profession. In the times of the last American war [1775-1780], in one twelvemonth 120 youths, in this spring above 100, left this island for the service of their country. Does this not merit attention in many respects?" [Manufactures & Fishery] "This parish, in its present situation, is so over peopled, that, though the lands be still occupied by small tenants, 1200 or 1500 males and females, above eight year old, might be spared for fishing and other manufactures. For which purpose, wherever the situation admits of it, every farm, especially those from 30 to 200 inhabitants, should be subdivided and enclosed to one, or at most four tenants each division. These few would be more disposed to improve their farms than now, in common with many, whose main study is to plough all they can, though but ill-prepared for a good crop. Numerous inhabitants are agreeable and have their uses. Here they be made still more numerous; but when with a view to serve them all, lands in common are divided into very small portions, such families can never thrive. Above all, fishing should never be neglected, one of the best situations in all western isles. In summer 1787, there were several companies of natives employed, and, although of little experience, they caught at one setting of 200 or 300 hooks, from 30 to 80 cod and ling, besides a variety of skate, eels,²⁰⁸ dol-fish, etc. and those who had harpoons and lines caught at the same time sail-fish, each yielding from 5 to 8 barrels oil. Herrings frequent the bay of Gott, yet there are no nets on the island... they do not, in this district, pursue the fishing with spirit. The reasons are obvious. They are mostly farmers having a small portion of land, in common with many, which requires daily attendance. Poor people will have a sure, though perhaps a starving way of supporting their families, seldom risk their small fortunes, and of their own accord begin a new branch of business....surely the expense of boats, hands, hooks, harpoons, lines, etc. is considerable, and the storms often break their lines and buoys. If a man could spare, from his daily employment, time to catch 200 or 300 cod and ling, they turn out to little avail without a purchaser at hand. [Sheep, Black Cattle. & Horses] A few years ago there were at least 14,000 sheep in these isles [Tiree & Coll]. The inclemency of the seasons reduced them in Tiry [sic]. There are not now 1,100 in the parish [Tiree & Coll]. Though in other countries a most beneficial flock, they are most destructive, especially to Tiry [sic]. There is not a sufficient range for them. They do not thrive in summer owing to certain weeds; nor in winter on account of the wetness of the pasture. Tiry [sic] is already too fine. Yet if the sheep were banished, it would be necessary to contract for years with sheep-graziers, whereby wool may be provided to the inhabitants at a moderate rate. The black cattle of Tiry [sic] and part of Coll, which have no access to pasture in healthy ground, are subject to the murrain [cattle plague], or in Gaelic *airneach*, probably from its affecting the kidneys.

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|--------------------------------|------|
| Number of horses in Tiry [sic] | 1400 |
| Number of sheep | 600 |
| Tons of kelp manufactured | 245 |
| Ploughs | 160 |
| Black cattle | 1800 |

²⁰⁸ Eels were abhorred in many parts of Scotland because of their resemblance to snakes.

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| Black cattle yearly ferried | 260 |
| Black cattle slaughtered | 70 |

A few years ago the number of horses was much greater; orders were given to reduce them in both islands [Tiree & Coll]. A four year old native horse sells for £2 to £5. In Tiry [sic] they might be reduced to 250 good ones with some mares. What makes the ploughs so very numerous is, that commonly they only plough from the beginning of March to 20th June. At least one third of the kelp is made of wrack, cast by storms upon the shores. The black cattle and horses are mostly in a starving condition. The latter, when their pasture is very bare in winter and spring, tear up the ground with their feet to come at the roots. Many tenants keep two or three cows, which have not a calf for years together. One informed me of having a cow ten years old, that never had but one calf. Another, that he keeps three or four cows, but had not a calf for six years. [Agriculture, Etc.] Enclosures are lately begun. The above facts show the necessity of continuing them, and subdividing farms to a few tenants that may be able to keep carts. As yet there are only five [roads] in the parish. The method of ploughing by one man, two horses, and long reins, is used by only two in the parish [Tiree & Coll]; but might easily be practised by getting a stronger breed of horses. A change of method is indeed required; and fishing with manufactures to employ so many superfluous hands. Though the people be naturally attached to their ancient modes, yet whenever they see new methods pursued to perfection in enclosed farms, and work carried on much more profitably, expeditiously, and cheaply, they will readily comply. About 4 years ago, the yearly wages and gratuities of a labourer amounted only to £2/12/- and of a female servant to £1 but they are now increased near a third, owing mostly to the servants frequenting the low country [Scottish Lowlands]. Small tenants give them much more. Another cause of the increase of wages is the enlisting so many men for the army, particularly the fencible corps, with promises of possessions to their friends or to themselves at their return. In some countries they can more easily triple these wages; their possessions, their soil, their markets, and plans of labouring, can better afford it. Tradesmen have from seven pence to one shilling and two pence per day, besides victuals. [Character & Customs of the People] The common people are not very attentive to the ordinances of religion, but are now reforming, as the gentlemen show them a good example. They still retain some Roman Catholic sayings, prayers, and oaths, as expletives; such as '*Dias Muire let*' i.e. God and Mary be with you. '*Air Muire*', swearing by Mary, etc. They are free of superstition, and make a considerable progress in knowledge. There is no schism from the established church; and none of any other persuasion, except now and then a few Roman Catholic servants from Barra. It is a great advantage to their morals that there are only three licensed small stills, and four public houses at the ferries and harbours in both isles [Tiree & Coll]. For generations back there has been no robbery, murder, or suicide. In general they are subtle and not easily deceived. They are mannerly, lively, and ingenious, very hospitable to strangers, and kind to the distressed. And although it might be impossible to answer for the behaviour of all the common people, if left at liberty, the shipwrecked have always found protection and safety from all the best families. A country man, who died last year about 5 feet 10 inches [178cm] high, was employed by the Laird of Coll as post to Glasgow or Edinburgh. His ordinary burden thence to Coll was 16 stone [102kg]. Being once stopped at a toll near Dumbarton, he humorously asked if whether he should pay for a burden, and upon being answered in the negative, carried his horse in his arms past the toll.

Indeed, though of an ordinary size, the people are remarkable for agility. They frequently entertain themselves by composing and singing songs, by repeating Fingalian and other tales, by dancing assemblies at different farms by turns. In this qualification they are remarkably neat.²⁰⁹ They are very cheerful and humorous, and not above two or three of either sex corpulent in either isle [Tiree & Coll]. [Poor & Schools] They are very attentive to the poor in sickness and want. They rarely have cash, but liberally bestow grain, etc. The kirk session funds do not afford to give annually above three shillings to each of 50 poor in Tiry [sic]. There are also five shillings or six shillings allowed to help their interments. Whatever these Islanders may be behind their neighbours [in knowledge], anywhere on the mainland, is wholly owing to their great disadvantages as to education. Till lately there were only £10 of a parochial salary for a school. Nine years ago [1783], the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge (SSPCK), bestowed £10 for another school. These two schools had generally not ten scholars each. The people had not taste for education, and there were complaints against the teachers. The Society have, since Mr Kemp's visit, added to these salaries a sum that enables the teachers to teach all gratis, and bestowed a number of books upon them. The Duke of Argyle is pleased to add so much for provisions which the parish should make. I doubt not they shall henceforth be all well attended, if the schoolmasters be well chosen. There are now often from 60 to 80 scholars in each. From whatever source funds may be obtained to accommodate this parish properly, Tiry [sic] requires 4 schools and Coll two. Our congregations were untaught singers, till the beginning of this year. An itinerant church music teacher, with a small salary, employed by the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge, was sent for. He teaches at so cheap a rate, that it is believed 800 or 900 in the parish will attend him this year. The good effects may be great. Singing is already become agreeable, even to the old and illiterate. Men of 70 years of age attend. Sewing schools, and especially spinning schools, are much required, as the women in general are very backward in these respects. A few of the common people speak English. They all speak Gaelic, which has a greater similarity to the most ancient, than to modern languages. And it has little dependence upon other languages, it may not be so copious; but it has great advantage, that the lowest peasant easily comprehends the highest style. [Emigration] Thirty-six men, women, and children, emigrated from Coll to America in 1792. None hitherto has emigrated from Tiry [sic], though some talk of doing so. Their crops failed in 1790 and 1791, which, together with the low prices of kelp and cattle, has much reduced them. They must soon go somewhere for relief, unless manufactures be introduced to employ them. [Ferries] There is a stated ferry between Tiry [sic] and Coll, often very dangerous, owing to a heavy swell from the Atlantic, to rapid currents and amazing breakers, over rocks and shifting sands. There is no stated ferry between Tiry [sic] and Mull. The shortest distance from land to land is 21 miles [34km]; but above 30 [48km] between the usual landing places. The fare for a stout boat and hands here, is from 12 shillings to 15 shillings. For travelling correspondence and markets, there is great need of a packet between these isles [Tiree & Coll] and Mull, especially if Tobermory,

²⁰⁹ As the Reverend gentleman does not criticize the "lower classes" for having "modern frivolous tastes" in garments, unlike his contemporary contributors to the Statistical Account, we can assume the Tiree residents had little money for fancy clothing. PL18 218

the nearest post office town increases.²¹⁰ It is to be hoped when the Crinan canal will be finished, that there will be an increase of trade in all the western isles, and that then, instead of asking a salary, some may find it their interest to apply for leave to keep packets. The run from Tiry [sic] to Crinan, by the west side of Mull, will be straight, and hardly exceeding 90 miles. Such a packet would find her business daily increase, from coals, marble, fish, beef, potatoes, etc. [Church & Stipend] There are three places of worship in the parish [Tiree & Coll]. The stipends hitherto have not exceeded £50, together with £16/13/4d in lieu of a manse, glebe and communion elements. There is also a salary of £33/6/3d given to an assistant in Coll. The whole teinds of the parish by decreets 1726, 1729, and 1733 are 211 bolls victual, two thirds bear, and one third oat meal, together with £294/5/6d Scotch [currency]. The *ipsa corpora* stipend, or tenth part, was taken up to late as 1752. There is now a process of augmentation commenced. At Sorbie [Sorobaidh] in Tiry [sic] was the mother church of the deanery of the isles. [Advantages & Disadvantages] The only advantages we can be said to have, are, that the proprietors of these isles have always manifested an inclination that their tenants should live comfortably; that our lands, though impoverished, are very improvable; and that the fishing, if encouraged, and attended to, may be very considerable. The circumstances of not getting salt without great plague and danger, and the markets turning out badly, when the first attempts were made, have discouraged the natives; whereas, in their situation, they require not only the countenance of the law, but even aid, at first, to purchase lines, harpoons, etc. It is necessary also to improve the harbours. For this purpose, many vessels that frequent the island would cheerfully pay a small anchorage, even without the trouble of an act of Parliament. Humanity will feel for our dismal situation without a surgeon. The want of a proper mill is a heavy grievance, and the loss of several hundred pounds Sterling. We are in great need of markets, and easier communication with towns; and also of a village and manufactures within ourselves, to occupy our superfluous hands. We need much a change of feed, introducing of green crops, enclosing, draining, and subdividing small farms. How can we improve our farms without tradesmen, carts, a better breed of horses to expedite our labour, and banishing so many hundred weak horses, to rear black cattle in their place? We spend the best season of the year, which should be otherwise usefully employed, in providing fuel, in ruining the face of our farms; while there is such an unequal duty upon coals, and yet we must soon buy them at whatever price. [This was written before the repeal of coal duty.] Our loyal and vigorous youth are ready, at a call, to serve their King and country; and if any place in Scotland can claim preference, an exemption from the coal duty, it is this Atlantic Isle.²¹¹

The situation in Tiree with regard to local education was, as above, described by the Reverend MacColl in his Statistical Report. Despite the "Act for the Settling of Schools" of 1695 that ordained that every Parish in Scotland should build a schoolhouse and pay for the upkeep of a schoolteacher the situation in the Highlands was frightful. Tiree was probably no worse or no better than the general state of affairs. Like the obligations for a minister in the Parish, the landlords reluctantly and belatedly obeyed the law when official or semi-official complaints were

²¹⁰ After the Union of 1707 the post in Scotland was reformed. For several years one letter-carrier in Edinburgh was sufficient. The London mail-bag early in the century sometimes contained only one letter. Six days were spent by post-boys on the road to London. Before 1756 there was no post-office in the Hebrides. SL18 p46.

²¹¹ SA1791

made. In 1788, reputedly as the tenants of Kenovay "had not given countenance & encouragement"²¹² to the schoolmaster, he was to be accommodated at Scarinish. Unfortunately the tenants of Scarinish were not warned and the land where the schoolmaster's house was to be erected was under crop so he had remain at Kenovay until the following year. In October 1791 the Duke agreed to proposals on education on the island from Mr Kemp of the SSPCK [Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge] that had his approval with the exception of his recommendation of removing the charity school from Scarinish to Kirkapol. For part of 1792 Mr Buchanan, the schoolmaster's son, kept a separate school in the 'preaching-house of Drimbuigh' but was obliged to give it up due to the disrepair of the house. The Duke's response was prompt and affirmative, "The church of Drimbuigh must be repaired without delay and the parochial schoolmaster and his son enjoined to reside there and follow out the plan of teaching recommended by Mr Kemp. I insist that this be done as soon as you [the Chamberlain] return home and will not accept for any excuse for more delay. The schoolmaster has no right to choose a residence so unfit for the discharge of his office as that which he occupies, and therefore he must either be dismissed or go to the place where he is to be most usefull to the parish viz. that pointed out by Mr Kemp." By October 1795, Mr Buchanan had apparently outstayed his welcome as the Duke wrote, "As it appears that Buchanan is now of no use as a schoolmaster, you should get rid of him as soon as possible and correspond with Mr Kemp and Mr Ferrier about a successor for him, and let the necessary accommodations be provided in time for his successor. Buchanan may be allowed something to carry him to Perthshire, his native country."²¹³ But Buchanan wasn't quite ready to go. By October 1801, the Duke was writing, "Get Buchanan the schoolmaster and his son out of the island as soon as possible. I shall pay the old man £10 yearly during his life, provided he goes away peaceably. The son I will have nothing to do with. Another schoolmaster to be look'd for, & one of the natives to be prefer'd if qualified."²¹⁴ The saga spluttered to an end in May 1802 when the Chamberlain reported, "Buchanan the schoolmaster was removed last Whitsunday, enjoying his allowance of £10 stg for life according to your Graces' instructions. His son is dead. As there is no house, a man of any sort of merit cannot be expected to settle in the island as schoolmaster, and to remove this bar, a plan of a schoolhouse with and dwelling, and a croft upon the farm of Hilipole is submitted to your Grace as most central for the west end of the island, in which two thirds of its population are resident. The Society schoolmaster also in that island was compelled to leave it, as he had no proper accommodation of a house, garden and croft requisite for keeping a family, which in the east end of Tyree is an immense loss to the children. Both at Hilipole and Kirkapole, which seem to be most central, the first for the parochial, and the other for the Society school, as both are so essentially necessary for the interest of the island, it is hoped your Grace will order them to be accommodated, that good men may be had."²¹⁵ The Duke's reply was simply, "Look out for two good schoolmasters and make their situations comfortable and proper."²¹⁶ By 1803 a Mr McLarin was teaching at Kirkapol but the matter was far from settled and the Duke

²¹² AEI p10

²¹³ AEI p40

²¹⁴ AEI p57

²¹⁵ AEI pp62-63

²¹⁶ AEI p64

complained of the high estimated cost of building schoolhouses and maintaining the schoolmasters' salaries and accommodation until the end of 1805.²¹⁷

The SSPCK [Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge] was granted letters patent in 1709 "to erect and maintain schools in such parts of the Highlands and Islands, as should be thought to need them most; in which children of Popish as well as Protestant parents should be taught the English language, reading and writing, and especially the principles of true religion." In 1715 the Society had 25 schools; in 1795, 323 falling later to 194. In 1738 the society was granted a second patent to cover "working schools", described as providing 'useful arts of life'. In 1745 the masters had to take the Oath of Allegiance. Gaelic was not officially taught until 1766. As described above, the salaries and maintenance of the schools and schoolmasters on Tiree was niggardly at best. Elsewhere in Scotland the situation was little better: a schoolmaster's salary was £13 whereas an artisan or ploughman earned between £14 and £16.²¹⁸ No doubt it was felt by the better classes than the children of peasants had little need for education and the management of schools by the clergy was entirely superseded by the landed interest. The education of girls fared even worse: In 1764 John Walker observed, "wherever there is access to a school, the boys are carefully put to it; but the parents consider learning of any kind as little moment to the girls, on which account, great numbers of them never go to any school." Women's status as transmitters of traditional oral culture may have been thus enhanced as the men became fluent in English and Gaelic but the standard of the whole cultural form was being eroded.²¹⁹ With the Schoolmaster's Act of 1802 greater recognition of the schoolmaster's role in the community became law. Income was established at not less than 300 merks [£16/13/4d] or greater than 400 merks [£22/4/6d], provision of a house of two rooms with ground for a garden not less than one quarter of a Scots acre or two bolls of meal.²²⁰ In addition to the tale of Mr Buchanan and his son the following SSPCK schoolmasters also taught during the 18th and 19th centuries: 1725-1731: James Stewart. In 1725 he came before the SSPCK in Edinburgh having "travelled upwards of seven score miles". He taught at Bellfull [Balephuil] in 1732 opposed by a private school at Heulipole [Heylipol] set up by John MacDonald a mile from the Society school. In 1732 he was at Bona, an Inverness Parish, and noted to be deceased in November 1736. 1726: Allan Maclean, whose son Hugh was also a teacher. He was the teacher on Rum and Eigg in 1729, North Uist in 1732, Rum 1733-1737 where he died on 1st December 1737. 1732-1758: John MacDonald, Set up a private school at Heulipole [Heylipol] in 1732, Kenavay [Kenovay] 1740-1744, Kilkenneth 1746-1749, Kenavay [Kenovay] 1750-1758, Dismissed under the Society's new regulation about class number, long service, needed help. 1784-1794: Patrick Campbell, Taught at Kyle in Morven in Mull 1780-1782, salary £10, asked to bring a character certificate from Rev Stewart of Killin, lack of accommodation, Lunga in Kintyre 1783-1784, Kirkaple [Kirkapol], Tiree 1784-1794. 1824-1829: Donald Maclean was dismissed for adultery. The Rev Neil Maclean reported that he had a large infant family and his salary was thus given to the minister to help the family. 1842-1847: Dougal McInnes taught at Sandaig. On 1st May 1847 he emigrated with a large number of

²¹⁷ AEI pp90-96

²¹⁸ SL18 p423

²¹⁹ SC p135

²²⁰ SL18 p447

people from the island and given an extra £5 in addition to his salary. 1848-1867 Allan McDonald taught at Sandaig from 1848 to 1864 then at Balefuil [Balephuill] until 1867. In 1864 the Duke of Argyll withdrew his allowance as he considered the teacher inefficient. The minister blamed the "wretched state" of the accommodation which "meant great difficulty". In 1867 the school at Balefuil [Balephuill] became a *General Assembly School*. The Society did not provide him with another school but sent him £5 and recorded "a decent man but no teacher".²²¹ In 1871 the census for Balephuill was recorded by John Nicolson who described himself as a Free Church teacher. He was aged 21 and hailed from Skye. The Balevullin census was conducted by the schoolmaster James Galbraith formerly of Gigha. John McFarlane of Moss was the Parish school master. The Education Act of 1872 rationalised the existing types of schools - parochial, private, Society, Adventure and church denominational. Education became compulsory for children between the ages of 5 and 13. (The school leaving age was raised to 14 in 1883, with a provision for 'half time' after 10.) Schools henceforth had state funding and thus the SSPCK became redundant.

The 5th Duke took his responsibilities to his 'fencible men' seriously. In October 1795 he wrote to his Chamberlain "I will give no leases at this time, and you must consider and report in which manner the soldiers of Lord Lorne's regiment who have been applying for small possessions in the island of Tiry [sic] can be accommodated when the regiment is reduced."²²² The Argyll Fencibles, approved if not personally called to arms by the Duke, was raised by his brother Lord Frederick Campbell, whose qualifications for the colonelcy of the regiment were all that might be expected in a man whose active hours were spent at Court or in the House of Commons. Lord Lorne had probably realised that the offer to the government of a thousand fighting men in 1778 must further a career still short of his hopes. The discontent of the Highland soldiers at their frequent shoddy treatment and bitterness caused by arrears of pay, unpaid bounties and insulting and absurd allusions to the Highland dress uniform, would have been on the Duke's mind when he wrote these words to his Chamberlain. Uppermost in his mind would have been the mutiny of the regiment in Edinburgh in late 1779.²²³ The Chamberlain's reply simply stated, "Any particular scheme for accommodating the Fencible soldiers cannot just now be finally fixed, but as most of the island will be out of lease they may be accommodated, as found deserving, when the regiment is disbanded, in any manner that may be agreeable to His Grace. Several of them are already accommodated according to the promises made them."²²⁴ In 1801 he instructed the Chamberlain that the farms of Scarinish, Balemartine and Crossapol were to be cut down into small crofts and that the 'most deserving' of the Fencible men were to be given priority in allocation of the new crofts.²²⁵

In the Duke's Instructions to his Chamberlain on Tiree for 1799, we find "As I have set the farms of Barapole and Kenovar [later to include the farms at Scarinish, Balemartine and Crossapoll] presently possessed by Archibald Campbell, Frackadale, to sixteen small tenants, who are to enter at next Whitsunday, you must take measures for removing the one and

²²¹ SSPCK Schoolmasters 1709-1872 Scottish Record Society 1997 ISBN 0 902054 15 5.

²²² AEI p40

²²³ M pp184-193

²²⁴ AEI p41

²²⁵ AEI p55

introducing the others at that term, and as a *great many* [my italics] additional houses will be wanted for the accommodation of these new tenants, consider and inform as soon as you possibly can the plan you think best to be followed for these new buildings."²²⁶ For a view of Tiree's farm situation at 1793-1794 see Appendix E. The five farms which the Duke of Argyll had converted into crofting townships in order to cash in on the kelp boom were eventually occupied by a total of 1,080 people. Compelling people who were essentially agriculturalists to engage in non-agricultural activities was a recipe for disaster. All crops demanding attention in mid-summer were out of the question due to the demands of kelp. Seaweed traditionally used to manure the land was diverted to the kelp processing and the land suffered. Fields were denied 90% of former manure. At the time of the year when his fields had need of most attention, the crofter's energies had to be directed to the manufacture of kelp for his landlord.²²⁷

In 1793, the Major of the 4th Breadalbane Fencibles was Alexander Maclean of Coll, who brought in enough islanders of his clan and others to support his own commission, a captaincy and two lieutenantcies for his kinsmen. The mutiny of this regiment and Maclean's actions are described in detail in John Prebble's "Mutiny".²²⁸ Early in July 1794 Maclean of Coll had ordered the flogging of Private Malcolm Macfarlane. Maclean should have known the Highlanders' particular abhorrence of [the humiliation of] corporal punishment. He had been an officer of the Crown for twenty-five years but placed his duty above paternal concern for his men. He brought the Battalion to Glasgow toward the end of July and quartered it in the centre of the city. Companies exercised daily on the Low Green. Harsh discipline was imposed by Maclean and his officers. Prisoner Macfarlane escaped and Maclean ordered the prisoner's guard to be arrested and instructed his Adjutant, kinsman Hector Maclean,²²⁹ to arrange a court-martial. Maclean knew, as a lieutenant in the Argyll Fencibles in October 1779 in Edinburgh, what Highlanders could do in protest against corporal punishment and in this case the punishment inevitably waiting the guard was 'not less than three hundred lashes and not more than a thousand'. The men mutinied and the guard was released upon condition that he was returned to the court-martial the following day. Maclean was mortified. The mutiny dragged on for months. Four men volunteered to stand trial for the mutineers, one was shot, the others were despatched to the West Indies and finally the guard did not suffer his flogging. But the heartbreak of dishonest Highland enlistment, the clearing of the young men from the glens and broken promises continued.

In July 1797, the Militia Act was passed which allowed for a balloted conscription to provide men to defend the country in the event of a French invasion. The need for soldiers was urgent and this new Act provided for an element of compulsion. Parish schoolmasters were ordered to make up lists of all the men in their parishes between the ages of 18 and 35 who could be eligible for service. The people [of the Highlands and Lowlands] feared a ruse to ship their young men to the West Indies where they would inevitably die of fever.²³⁰ The people's response was passionate and violent. It was plainly seen that, while the rich and the well-to-do could hire

²²⁶ AEI p51

²²⁷ MCC p69

²²⁸ M pp261-391

²²⁹ Hector Maclean had once been a sergeant in the Scots Guards.

²³⁰ FH p34

substitutes for their sons, there was no escape for the poor. Throughout the Lowlands working-people rose upon impulse, burning the ballot lists and mobbing the schoolmasters. The Highlanders, who were expected to accept the ballot without protest, were also in revolt. They believed that the Government would not keep faith with them. They recalled the attempt to send the fencibles out of Scotland contrary to the terms of enlistment, and they feared the same would be done with the Militia. Their sons would be taken from the land at a time they were most needed, without compensation or bounty. The most serious riots in the Highlands were in Perthshire where the convicted were given lenient sentences, perhaps from compassion but more probably from the cautious realisation that harsher treatment would worsen the sullen acceptance of the Militia Act.²³¹

When the 5th Duke died in 1805, despite his apparently well-meaning attempts at "Improvements" over three decades, aligned to his need for a higher income from Tiree, very little had been achieved to improve either the livelihood of his tenants or his own fortune. One item that is plainly obvious: at no time did he or his Chamberlains ever appear to consult with their tenants on what they might consider best for all parties. Without consultation and persuasion progress was impossible and, with a burgeoning population, the situation continued to deteriorate.

The only major achievement of the "Improvements" was the sweeping away of runrig. And whatever the demerits of the runrig-based agrarian system thus destroyed, it could not be claimed that the method of landholding which replaced it was any more efficient in an agricultural sense. Mainland proprietors, anxious to put as many acres as possible under sheep and to force croft tenants to assist in developing the fishing industry, encouraged the proliferation of miniscule holdings as a means to these ends - while landlords with kelping interests eagerly followed the same course in order to maximise profits from kelp. Throughout north-west Scotland therefore, the requirements of an effective arable agriculture were strictly subordinated to landlords' overarching desire to make money by whatever method came to hand.²³² Ownership of the land upon which the peasant lived remained the monopoly of a small group of men whose pursuit of easy profits had reduced their tenants to the status of kelping labourers or unsuccessful fishermen.²³³

There could well be a model here for the forces of Western culture successfully defeating the Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan - "seduce the tribal leaders to the Western way of life with money and limited powers in the new regime and they, in turn, will ultimately force their tribes to support and adopt their more comfortable lifestyle."

²³¹ M pp395-432

²³² MCC p67

²³³ MCC p71

Chapter Ten: Evictions - Clearances - Emigration - New Statistical Account - Potato Famine - Crofters

The iniquitous evictions and clearances of the 19th century had their origins in the events of the 18th century; in the transformation and modernisation of the traditional society of the Highlands; above all, in the conversion of clan chieftains into commercial landowners. From that extraordinarily successful absorption of the Gaelic aristocracy into the capitalist order all else stemmed.²³⁴

The "Improvers" in the Highlands had failed to improve. The reasons for the failure are four. Firstly the coming of the potato as a common field crop in the decades after 1760 provided the means to support a large population on a small area, even on land torn from the edge of the waste and previously regarded as beyond the margins of cultivation. Secondly, the peasants objected to either moving or to becoming landless. To move was very difficult: in remote regions little was known of the outside world, and the common bond of a Gaelic tongue among the Highlanders also proved to be the common barrier in getting a job outside of the Highlands. To become landless was to be a staring reproach among the neighbours in a society of conservative outlook; the peasants had probably come to think of themselves as having a prescriptive right to some holding on the clan territory, though not necessarily a hereditary right to any given piece of land. The peasants therefore divided and divided again the holdings that the landowners had given them in order to get for their children a potato rig that would enable them to stay, to marry and to raise families of their own. Thirdly, the landowners, who alone had it in their power to check this sub-division, had a very ambivalent attitude towards it. They needed, on many estates, a heavy population to gather the kelp; they enjoyed (such were their own sentiments towards the recent past) the grand emotional feeling of being surrounded by a numerous tenantry. If they could not get the population to stay in any other way than as crofters cultivating potatoes in very small holdings they were not going to object, and they would not be averse to helping the process by granting them leases (at very easy terms in the first instance) to dig out rocky ground and make themselves a plot on the edge of the moor. Lastly, the limited initial success of agrarian change in the north-west seemed to provide its own justification. The tacksmen who in the old system had been intermediate rentiers between the proprietor and the peasants, now appeared to have no function in the new system and were dispossessed by the landlords. Some, anticipating what would happen, had already left and taken local peasants with them to found new clan societies in America. The joint-farms that had been the basis of the previous husbandry were broken down, usually into many smaller units than was the case in the [more fertile] Lowlands or even in the south-east Highlands: the peasants themselves subdivided them into still smaller units, until the land-holding pattern began to resemble the 19th century maze of crofts, each with its own individual patch where a family grew potatoes and oats and with its rights on the moor where they could pasture one or two cows or three or four sheep. Where possible the kelp industry was introduced, or fishing begun as an ancillary to agriculture. The price of cattle and of kelp rose, especially rapidly in the decades hinging on 1800. In material terms the peasants did not seem to be any worse off than they had been when they

²³⁴ MCC p290

lived under the subsistence economy of the old Highlands.²³⁵ The conditions necessary which could lead to a rise in the standard of living simply did not exist. The obvious physical disadvantages include the climate and a terrain unsuitable for many agricultural enterprises, remoteness which impeded both access to markets and the ease with which any surplus population could have seasonally or temporarily taken up employment elsewhere, plus complex social attitudes which inhibited change.

The Highlanders contributed to their own problems by their passion for the land they occupied, preferring a life of deepening poverty in an increasingly overcrowded environment to the risk of seeking their fortunes permanently abroad, or in the Lowlands.²³⁶ The Highlanders were rooted in attachment to the land, which led many to regard their tenancies as permanent, and to look to the landowner, not as someone with whom they had a merely legal and monetary relationship, but as someone to whom they owed a comprehensive range of social obligations as well, and from whom they expected a similarly widespread response. The tenants still looked for a paternalistic relationship when it was neglected or denied by the proprietors, a contrast in attitudes which was bound to lead to an explosive situation in any subsistence crisis by the 1830s.²³⁷ The Highlander had never seen the point in owning any land outright, providing he could be left secure in the occupancy of a croft paying a modest rent.²³⁸ Crofting therefore remained very much a subsistence occupation. On Tiree it was said that in the early decades of the 19th century half the families were squatters existing on the bounty of the other half. Maclean of Coll alone of the lairds in the region could claim there was no overpopulation on his island: "He used every means in his power to keep the population down, the means he used were, that he would not allow a young man, a son of one of the crofters, to be married without his consent; he said, if you marry without my consent, you must leave the island."²³⁹ James Loch, the Lowland lawyer who, in the early 19th century, managed the affairs of the immensely coal-rich Marquis of Stafford and his wife, the Countess of Sutherland, believed that "The indigenous inhabitants were feckless, idle impediments to progress. The fact that they had lived on the estates for generations was irrelevant; the fact that they still looked up to their lairds as their chiefs and fathers was also irrelevant. If their dispossession should leave them destitute they were a problem for society as a whole, not for their dispossessors."²⁴⁰

On the island of Barra, the collapse of the kelp prices, particularly in view of the population growth stimulated by this introduced industry, was disastrous. Economic conditions on the island were primitive. In 1827 the crops failed generally and, according to the Minister of the Parish, some 350 of the population resorted to the beaches in search of cockles without which 'there would have been hundreds dead this day on Barra'. It was reportedly a 'scene of horror', exacerbated by the influx on even more miserable people from North Uist and Tiree.²⁴¹

²³⁵ HSP pp325-326

²³⁶ CSP p13

²³⁷ PSS p50

²³⁸ CSP p76

²³⁹ Select Committee on Emigration, third report, Parliamentary Papers 1826-7, V, p291

²⁴⁰ FH p80

²⁴¹ HC p209

The glass and soap manufacturing lobby, as the chemical processes for the manufacture of alkali from salt were perfected, successfully demanded the abolition of firstly the high import duties on foreign alkali [barilla] and of the Salt Tax in 1825. The effects were immediately apparent. The average price for kelp at Liverpool, the main selling centre, fell from £9/4/11d a ton in 1823, to £6/16/10d in 1826, to £4/11/5d in 1827, and finally, to £3/13/4d in 1828. As these figures demonstrate, it was in 1827 that the situation became critical. In the ten years after 1817, the price of prime kelp had fallen by two-thirds.²⁴² By 1830, the Highlanders had become a society of small-holders living in great poverty on congested holdings either on crowded islands or next to extensive sheep farms: their existence hung above all else on the condition of the potato crop, and if this failed (as it did so tragically in the 1840s) nothing could prevent the collapse of their economy and a subsequent exodus on a scale that would eclipse by far the Sutherland clearances.²⁴³

Genealogy: Helen Maclean, the third daughter of Hugh Maclean and Mary MacDonald was born in April 1800 and married Neil MacKinnon of Balemartine in December 1832. This was Neil's second marriage. His first wife Margaret Campbell, who had borne him a son John, had died in 1827. Helen Maclean bore him five children. Marion was born in 1834, Flora in 1836, Euphemia in 1838, George in 1841 and Hugh in 1844. Neil died in 1843 but we have no record of the circumstances. Both Flora and Euphemia left Tiree as young women for farm work in the Lowlands, married and spent the rest of their lives as exiles from Tiree. Their mother Helen Maclean and grandmother Mary MacDonald both died in Tiree in 1855. Helen died in Balinoe aged 55 and Mary in Heylipol aged 78.

The [New] Statistical Account 1834-1845 for Tiree and Coll, Parish of Tiree, Presbytery of Mull, Synod of Argyle, was written by the Reverend Neil Maclean, Minister of the Parish. It was first compiled in March 1840 and revised in August 1843 and provides an accurate snapshot of conditions in Tiree at that period. The following is an edited report of the text. On the subject of population he said that no accurate information could be obtained regarding the total population prior to the year 1755, at which time the population of Tiree was stated as 1,509.

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-------|
| Population of Tiree in 1831 | 4,453 |
| Population of Tiree and Coll in 1841 | 5,846 |
| Number under 15 years | 1,875 |
| Number from 15 to 30 years | 1,309 |
| Number from 30 to 50 years | 926 |
| Number from 50 to 70 years | 482 |
| Number upwards of 70 years | 95 |
| Annual average of baptisms | 143 |
| Annual average of marriages | 24½ |
| Deaths, say* | 94 |
| Unmarried men above 50 years | 65 |
| Unmarried women above 45 | 101 |
| Number of insane persons | 8 |

²⁴² MCC p73

²⁴³ HSP p335

| | |
|---|---|
| Number of blind persons | 5 |
| Number of deaf persons | 3 |
| Number of dumb persons | 1 |
| The average number of children in each family | 4 |

*"It may be proper to say that no register of deaths is kept; but comparing the number of baptisms with the rate of increase, and making allowance for a few persons who occasionally remove from the parish, a sufficiently accurate estimate of the number may be formed. There are proprietors [tacksmen] possessing lands of the yearly value of £50 and upwards, four, of whom only one resides in the parish."

On the 'Language and Customs' of the islanders he reported, "Gaelic is the language almost universally used among the lower orders. If not actually losing ground, it is certainly a good deal corrupted by a mixture of English words and phrases, in consequence of their frequent intercourse with the low country [Lowlands]. With regard to diet or manner of living, the people follow a pretty low regimen, perhaps as much from necessity as from choice. Flesh meat is seldom used among them, their ordinary food being potatoes, barley, and oatmeal, milk and fish. Until of late years, when poverty laid its iron hand upon them, in common with their other countrymen in the Highlands, it might be justly said that they were a cheerful, happy and contented people. There is one custom still prevalent, which calls loudly for a reformation - a custom now happily confined to a few remote parts of the country; drinking of ardent spirits at funerals. There are instances of poor families parting with their last horse or cow, to furnish an entertainment of this sort. What might have contributed to their upkeep for twelve months is wasted in a day. Illicit distillation was formerly carried on here to a considerable extent; but has been strictly prohibited and suppressed for the last twenty five years or thirty years. [In 1823 there were 14,000 prosecutions for illegally distilling whisky in Scotland. The following year the landowner was made liable for stills found on his land, which dealt the industry, which was one of the few generators of cash in the Highlands, a severe blow.]²⁴⁴ The people in general are intelligent and enterprising. They carry on a pretty constant trade in country produce with the low country, especially Glasgow. It must be confessed that a tendency to intemperance is still pretty apparent. The parish church is inconveniently situated and distant from great numbers [of the population]. Scantiness of clothing also deters many from attending public worship. They are extremely civil and obliging in their manners, very tractable and easily managed, kind and hospitable to strangers, and uncommonly humane and charitable to the poor."

On 'Agriculture', he said, "Although Tiree has been a good deal noted as an agricultural island, and though a considerable quantity of produce is annually raised and exported, yet the crops in general are light and of inferior quality, the bear [barley] seldom exceeding 45 pounds weight per bushel. Not much has been done in Tiree, in the way of improving the land. The present occupiers do not appear to have much skill or experience in conducting such operations and have many serious natural obstacles to contend with. Stone for enclosures is very scarce and cannot be obtained without blasting or quarrying at great expense. A great deal might be accomplished by tenants with some capital and experience, having suitable encouragement, which can never be expected while the occupier is in a state of poverty and his tenure uncertain. Tacksmen or

²⁴⁴ FH p116

holders of large possessions generally get leases of nineteen years duration but no leases have been granted to crofters or small tenantry for this last twenty years. It was probably considered expedient to retain such a check on them and to make the tenant's tenure depend on good behaviour [towards the Ducal interests]. Farm buildings, more especially enclosures, are in a backward state. The cattle reared in Tiree are not considered of very good quality. Crofters have no winter pasture. Some sheep have been introduced but the experiment has not been tried for sufficient time to form an opinion. A great number of pigs have been raised and are exported live to Glasgow and Greenock where they meet a steady demand and tolerable prices."

| Annually exported from Tiree | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| Black cattle including stirks | 485 |
| Sheep | 200 |
| Horses | 48 |
| Pigs | 500 |

Regarding the 'Rate of Wages' paid to islanders, he said, "Domestic servants are hired during the year and half-year, and the wages given to male servants are from £6 to £8; to females from £3 to £3/10/- or £4 per annum. Tradesmen and artisans are generally paid by the day and receive two shillings or two shillings and sixpence, besides their victuals, which are always provided by their employer. A great part of the young unmarried population, especially females, are in the habit of resorting every year to the low country [Lowlands] in quest of harvest employment. Hundreds of these set off about the middle of August, and are generally absent from six to eight weeks. I fear it cannot be reckoned a profitable kind of service, any wages which they earn being chiefly bestowed on superfluous finery, not suited to their means or rank in life. They also frequently bring home in their train several infectious and dangerous disorders, such as smallpox, measles, typhus fever, etc. which afterwards spread through the country, and occasion much mischief. There is no quarry at present except that for building the lighthouse at Skerryvore. Upwards of a hundred persons are employed during the summer season."

On the subject of encouragement of the islanders to create a fishing industry, "This is undoubtedly a very important branch of industry, although it does not appear to have been hitherto prosecuted with the activity and perseverance it deserves. With plenty of fish in our waters and industrious hands to take it, we need not be very apprehensive about actual starvation among our poor people unless the potato crops should unfortunately fail as in the year 1837. Though almost all are occasional fishers, yet few follow it steadily as a profession. Out of 94 fishing skiffs which the parish contains, only 10 are regularly employed. There are no fishings here which pay rent. Cod and ling are the only kind which are cured and sent to market. The cod fishing is carried on during the year; the ling fishing commences towards the end of spring and ends about mid-summer. The herring-fishing has never been practised here. Though shoals of them unquestionably frequent the coast at certain seasons, there are no bays or lochs to afford them [the vessels] shelter, and the deep-sea fishing is quite unknown. Tiree has been frequented this last 12 or 15 years by Aberdeen fishermen who prosecute ling-fishing. The superiority of the enterprising strangers and their craft is apparent. The native fishing boats are cockle-shells compared to these. Shoals of small whales sometimes frequent these bays -

people have become expert at driving them ashore with boats. If one is wounded it makes for the shore - the others follow. 15 to 20 feet long - their blubber yields about a barrel of oil each. For some years they have discontinued their visits."

| Value of Produce from Tiree | |
|------------------------------------|--------|
| Grain of all kinds | £2,582 |
| Potatoes and other plants | £4,424 |
| Hay. Meadow or cultivated | £215 |
| Pasture, horses included | £2,976 |
| Fish cured and sold | £412 |

"The only item of 'manufacture' entitled to notice is the kelp. At one time about 500 tons was made in Tiree and employed about one half of the population. Several farms paid their rent in kelp and still made a profit. Manufacturing price was £2 to £2/10/- a ton. The quantity was gradually diminishing and since 1837 there has been none."

[Local Shipping]: "In Tiree there are 4 decked vessels carrying from 20 to 40 tons burden, sometimes employed in carrying country produce to market but generally look out for employment elsewhere; 20 open or half-decked boats of from 6 to 20 tons, chiefly engaged in ferrying cattle, and conveying fuel from other islands; and 82 fishing skiffs of which only 10 are regularly employed. [Parochial Economy] There is no market town in the parish. Nearest is Oban, 56 miles [90km] distant (by sea). There is a sub-post office to Tobermory in Tiree and Coll. No packet in either island for many years. Means of communication are uncertain and irregular. Harbours are very indifferent - all boats on Tiree, great and small, are hauled up on shore from late November until the end of March. Scarinish is the harbour usually used to convey cattle. The only other is 'Accarsaid' or 'The Harbour' lying near the eastern extremity (Pier near Millton) - safer than the former but the entrance is rocky and intricate. The road leading from the harbour to the mill is impassable to carts in bad weather. Until there is a Chamberlain [of the Argyll estates] living on the island it cannot be expected that it will be attended to. The only [modern] buildings are those connected with the lighthouse proposed to be erected on Skerryvore, several of which have been already built or are in progress, such as houses for the accommodation of the tradesmen employed, working sheds, coal and boat-houses, smithies, etc. But the most important is a signal or watch-tower, upwards of thirty feet high, now nearly finished, which is intended to communicate by signal or telegraph with the lighthouse, and also to serve as a beacon to any vessels or boats coming to the pier under night. These are all built of granite and other ordinary materials."

"Black cattle markets are held in May, August and October. No charitable institutions or a jail (at times it would be desirable) on the island. There are two licensed inns on Tiree and several low illicit tippling-houses. Scarcity of fuel is one of Tiree's natural disadvantages. People are compelled to bring any fuel at high cost from Coll or Mull. The average expense to each family cannot be less than £4 per annum. Supposing that, of 768 families, 500 import their fuel in this fashion, we have an annual expense of £2,000 for fuel alone. Coll has no need and only needs the labour. The church is inconveniently placed for most people. It was built in 1776 and enlarged in 1786 and is not in a sufficient state. It can accommodate 500 but is never regularly seated. The manse was built in 1832 and repaired in 1838. It is still far from comfortable. The glebe

contains about 30 acres of inferior land. It is not worth £5 per annum. The stipend amounts to 213 bolls, 1 firlot, 1 peck, $\frac{1}{2}$ lippies bear; 70 bolls, 1 furlet, $1\frac{1}{2}$ lippies meal; and £395/17/6d Scots money, and is burdened with an annual tack duty of £22/4/5d to the Synod of Argyle and also with the salary of an assistant. There are no Government churches or ministries in the parish but there is an assistant residing in Coll. There are no Episcopalians or Catholics; but there are some Dissenters, chiefly of the Independent persuasion, and a few Baptists each sect having a preacher and meeting house of their own."

[Schools]: "There was formerly one parochial school in Tiree; another was established about 1804. The teacher's salary is £22/4/- and the amount of school fees from £4 to £5 to each. A school was appointed by the Gaelic School Society in which nothing but the reading of Gaelic Scriptures was taught with a salary of £25 and no fees. In addition there is [sic] about 5 schools supported by the people themselves with salaries of £10 to £18. From these not much benefit can be expected, the teachers being inexperienced country lads, some indifferently qualified. Parochial schools in Tiree 2, Endowed 1, Unendowed 5, Supported by Societies 1. Number in Tiree between 6 and 15 years who cannot read or write 426, upwards of [age] 15 who cannot read or write 1,255 [69%]."

"The provision in the parish for the Poor is low there being no assessment for this purpose. They are chiefly supported by the private charity of the inhabitants. The only source beside church collections is a tax on marriages and fines imposed for certain delinquencies. In urgent cases aid is given to persons not on the Poor's Roll. There appears to be no reluctance on the part of the poor to apply for parochial relief, nor do they think it at all degrading." [In reality it was the poor who maintained the poor. Collections made at the church door, dues paid for use of the mort-cloth and interest from charitable bequests, if any, combined to make up any parochial relief available for distribution. In some Highland parishes, most people were too poor to pay poor-rates, and the cost of relief fell on landlords whose own estates were often encumbered with debt. A persistent problem for the Scottish Poor Law was the high proportion of old people left behind as the young emigrated.²⁴⁵ However in the 'commune' culture of clan society it was assumed that the old and poor would be supported by friends and family thus, seeking help within their own neighborhood could never be considered 'degrading' in any shape or form.]

On the lack of medical services, he reported: "It is somewhat singular, that this parish should have been almost always destitute of a medical practitioner. This may be reckoned another of our disadvantages; and it is a melancholy consideration that many useful lives are lost, as undoubtedly they are at times, through the want of timely medical aid. Even when such aid is called from other countries [mainland districts], at an expense that few can think of incurring, the state of the weather may prevent its arriving in time to be of service. Several young medical men have, from time to time, tried the experiment of practising here, in the expectation of a certain salary; but have found the remuneration so uncertain and ill-paid, that in a short time, they have thrown up the situation in disgust. And yet, between the two islands, it might be supposed that a respectable salary could be made up for such a person without much difficulty, and without being a burden on any one, provided it could be duly proportioned among the families

²⁴⁵ PSS p277

interested, and collected by the factors along with the rents. This seems to be the only practical plan."

Finally, the miscellaneous observations by the Reverend Maclean echo the situation explained earlier - overpopulation and the imprudent dependence on kelp income, "The chief feature since the last Statistical Account is the great increase in population and, as a consequence, the greater poverty of the people. The great depression which took place in the value of produce soon after the conclusion of the last war [Napoleonic Wars], and the total failure of the kelp manufacture since that period, gave a severe blow to many parts of the Highlands and Islands. From this last source, many proprietors derived a handsome revenue, and the people found employment for themselves and their families, accompanied by a fair remuneration for their labour. This resource is now entirely cut off. It seems to be now universally admitted, that in the Highlands and Islands in general, there is a super-abundance of population, - and to no part of the country, so far as my acquaintance extends, is the observation more applicable than to this island. The present crisis in the state of the population seems to have been accelerated here by the system of crofting, or dividing the land into minute portions, - a system adopted at first with the humane intention of accommodating as many poor families as possible, but which afforded only a very temporary relief, and I fear has been the means of increasing the evil. It is no uncommon practice with such tenants to sub-divide their lots of land among their families when they grow up; and thus one croft originally designed for the maintenance of one family, and perhaps scarcely sufficient for that purpose, is frequently portioned among two or three, and the whole reduced to poverty. It would be cruel and unjust to debar a man, when disabled by age and infirmities, from employing the services and aid of his family; but some salutary and restrictive regulations might be enforced. A further cause of the increase of numbers and destitution is the great swarm of cottar's families, or persons without any regular holding. I need only mention that this island contains about 300 such families, who are a dead burden on the tenantry. Any permanent relief from such evils as these must be left chiefly to the discretion and humanity of proprietors themselves. Emigration seems to be the great resource; and the proprietors must either assist them to accomplish this measure, or apply to the Legislature to hold out encouragement and aid."²⁴⁶

The Gaelic preacher Norman MacLeod remembered how the late Duke of Argyll had shed tears over the distress during famine in Tiree in 1836-1837. The Duke had said, "These people wish to remain, they are undoubtedly attached to that island, and I cannot think of removing them; they are my fencible men, and I love them." Tiree would suffer equally again in the widespread potato famine of 1846-1847.²⁴⁷

Famine and scarcity were not novel occurrences in the Highlands and Islands. In the late 18th century, the region was estimated to suffer from food shortages in one year out of every three. But the famine which began in 1846 was of a different order of magnitude. A human tragedy on a scale unparalleled in modern Scottish history, it was unprecedented in severity and duration. It was also the culmination of thirty years of growing hardship and despair. In every year since

²⁴⁶ SA1834

²⁴⁷ HC pp191-192

1815 there had been "a gradual deterioration in the position of the people", and each decade had "shown them more impoverished and less able to meet a season of distress". The causes of the crofters' declining fortunes are clear enough: the adverse effects of the kelp industry's collapse and of the prolonged fall in cattle prices were aggravated by the loss of two other sources of income as a result of the effective suppression of illicit [spirits] distillation and the conclusion of the canal and road construction programme which had begun in 1803. The ensuing drop in crofters' earnings was temporarily offset by the seasonal migration of their sons and daughters to the Lowlands where such migrants helped bring in that area's harvests. But by the 1830s and 1840s, even this sort of employment had become precarious - harvest work having become the virtual monopoly of Irish labourers who, following the inauguration of effective steamer services, could come across to the Lowlands from Ireland more quickly and more cheaply than Highlanders could make their way south.²⁴⁸ Tiree's population, according to Jock Campbell, the Big Factor, had almost doubled between 1795 and 1846 to 5,000. More people had meant more subdivision of holdings that had been too small to begin with. The Highland famine of 1846 was a catastrophe that originated in the disappearance of the crofters' cash earnings and the growing tendency to take their land from them to give it to sheep farmers resulting on further dependence on their diminishing arable land and the universal crop, the potato.

According to Martin Martin, potatoes were part of the 'common diet' on Skye from the 17th century.²⁴⁹ But from other sources it would appear that widespread acceptance was not achieved until the mid-18th century. The potato was tolerant of lime deficiency and responded well to seaweed manure. By 1811, potatoes were reckoned to provide the typical Hebridean crofter with four-fifths of his food.²⁵⁰ The first attack of potato blight in Europe occurred in 1845 and, although the fungus was fairly widespread in southern Scotland that year, most of the Highlands and Islands escaped its devastations until the following year. No less than 15,410 barrels of potatoes were sent south from Tobermory, and on the Mull estates belonging to the Duke of Argyll and Campbell of Kilpatrick at least £3,158 was received from sales of grain and potatoes to southern dealers - a sum which exceeded those estates' rental by more than £550.²⁵¹ In July 1846, after a good season, rain fell and with the rain came the blight. It appeared in Skye in the middle of the month and by the end of August the potato crop was devastated. No area of the Highlands escaped the blight. 1846 then had an early winter with frequent storms and gales. Typhus and cholera broke out in several places. The shellfish scavenged from the beaches caused diarrhoea. With the absence of potatoes, the populace became deficient in essential vitamins and scurvy appeared in several districts where it had been unknown for more than a century. As the scale of the disaster became apparent, the Marquis of Lorne, son of the Duke of Argyll, wrote to the government to ask if they would "extend to Scotland the advantage they have given to Ireland under the same affliction". Before the end of the year [1846] a Treasury official was despatched to conduct an enquiry into the Highland situation and, if necessary, take charge of famine relief operations. His findings confirmed the worst reports. The crofting population was in need of immediate and massive

²⁴⁸ MCC pp91-92

²⁴⁹ WI p94

²⁵⁰ MCC p93

²⁵¹ MCC p95

assistance. Little help was forthcoming from the Highland landlords. True or false, he wrote, "they serve to show that the moral obligation supposed to attach to the landowners cannot be relied on to secure the people from destitution".²⁵² The government drew their attention to the Drainage Act - a recently passed measure intended to help solve the Irish crisis by providing official funds for estate improvement and employment of the destitute crofters. To the detriment of the crofters, when the drains were dug, those proprietors who borrowed government money to finance estate improvements simply passed the financial burden on to their tenants. Even forty years after the famine, crofters in Tiree, Skye and other areas were still paying the resulting 'drainage money' over and above their rents. And, on the majority of Highland estates, crofters and their families were left to their own devices with the landowners "evident indisposition to take steps to alleviate their tenants' sufferings." The following year, 1847, proved to be equally disastrous. The entire population of Wester Ross was in serious difficulty and 'not a few families were on the verge of starvation'. In Tiree, Arisaig, Barra, the Uists and Harris, the situation was 'so deplorable as to cause serious apprehension'; the situation was, if anything, worse than it had been the year before. The Central Relief Board,²⁵³ despite "much more destitution" between 1847 and 1848 and an increase in the number of relief recipients, reduced the amount of meal supplied by about 75%. Relief Board rules forced crofters to sell their cattle and convert their few savings into food - leaving the population bereft of almost all capital resources. Petty work-house rules negated what could have been relief from starvation of the Highland population. Nevertheless, members of the Relief Board were not unaware of the root crisis of Highland land ownership and tenancy and perceived the landowners' attitude as 'an entire want of faith in the possibility of improving the position of the people, or any desire to aid in the attempt'. Even the catastrophe of the famine could not force any change in the outlook of the Highland landowner to his tenant.

By 1850 the landowners could see that the solution to their economic woes, now that kelping and the 'bold' agrarian improvements had failed to substantially increase rents, was to return to the way out offered by emigration and the replacement of crofting tenants with sheep. In other words clear their land of the people. Highland landlords' propaganda skills were brought into play to persuade the British government that emigration of surplus population to the colonies was in the interest of everyone. The Highland clearances had started some 50 years before but had been interrupted by the Napoleonic Wars and then by the Passenger Vessels Act, conveniently introduced when kelp prices were high and the landlords were keen to have as many tenants as possible processing the kelp on their estates. But by the mid-19th century, a speedy decrease in the region's inhabitants was widely seen as the only way of permanently improving the potential of the Highlands.

Many thousands of the crofting population made their way south to the Lowlands and many would have emigrated overseas if they had had the necessary funds. This was borne out by a crofter from Creich in Mull telling Sir John MacNeill, in 1851, that 'not one in three would

²⁵² MCC P100

²⁵³ The "Central Board of Management of the Fund for the Relief of the Destitute Inhabitants of the Highlands" held its first meeting in February 1847 and took overall responsibility for fund-raising and food distribution during the famine crisis until late 1850.

remain if they could find the means of emigrating'. And Sir John himself calculated that more than half the population of some crofting parishes would emigrate 'if they could find the means'.²⁵⁴ But in some places removal of people from the townships was not carried out in order to effect an improvement in the condition of the crofters. The land they vacated was added to adjoining sheep farms. In 1849 the Duke of Argyll shipped almost 600 people from Tiree to Canada. Cholera broke out on the transports that carried the Tiree people across the Atlantic and, on their arrival in Quebec they could not afford to move on into the interior to look for work or land. With the city's immigrant sheds already crammed with the human debris of the Irish famine, the Tiree folk could obtain no shelter from the weather and, huddled together on the wharfs, many of them died of exposure and disease. These and subsequent emigrations from the island were accompanied by scores of evictions, the duke himself admitting to 40. Half of Tiree was thus taken out of crofters' hands by John Campbell, the Big Factor²⁵⁵ - a development paralleled on the Duke of Argyll's property in the Ross of Mull and, indeed, on practically every other estate in the latter island. Most of Coll was cleared at about the same time. In Mull, it was reported in 1849, the 'poverty and misery' caused by the famine were 'daily being added to by the evictions taking place'. Dozens of ejected families settled themselves in 'wretched hovels' which sprang up in the neighbourhood of Tobermory, and there they supported themselves on shellfish scavenged from nearby beaches.²⁵⁶

The Highland Clearances continues to be one of the most painful episodes in modern Scottish history. During the decades of the clearances, from around 1790 to about 1855, a large proportion of the small tenantry of the Highlands was shifted off their land. The evictions or removals, as they were known at that time, affected every part of the Highlands and Islands. People were removed from their land to make way for sheep or removed simply to reduce the costs of running the vast Highland estates. Whether it was the removal of tenants for sheep or due to the potato famine between 1847 and 1854, the result was the same. The land was unable to support the population and the owners of the land were unable or unwilling to help. Some proprietors, especially before 1820 [and the collapse of the kelp market], created employment, raised new enterprises and villages, invested in local infrastructure and subsidised migration. Mostly they failed, demonstrating the intractability of 'the Highland problem' and the long record of failure of capital investment in virtually all enterprises except sheep and deer forests.²⁵⁷

On a lighter note, Tiree's Alan Maclean won the Pibroch Society's medal in 1810, as his father Neil had done in 1783. Alan played before Maclean of Hynish and among the tunes he played were "Blue Ribbon" and "Bratach Bhan".²⁵⁸ In the first decade of the 19th century, as communities of crofters and cottars emerged on the island, their material conditions declined in the years of agricultural depression and the soaring population which followed. Yet they embodied many of the traditional values and attitudes of older Gaelic society, giving pride of place to poetry, song and story in their everyday life. When chiefs and tacksmen disappeared, it

²⁵⁴ MCC pp123-126

²⁵⁵ The next chapter provides details of some of the evictions carried out by the Big Factor.

²⁵⁶ MCC p131

²⁵⁷ HC p314

²⁵⁸ TB p7

was the crofting townships which fostered and developed the traditional culture and contributed to the renaissance of *bardachd*. The bards of the 19th century transformed into popular poets with apparent ease. In the absence of any early surviving examples one cannot be positive but it is highly probable that a popular song tradition always existed alongside the more formal tradition and was sustained by local bards in informal *ceilidhing* and work processes such as rowing and cloth-waulking. It is remarkable that, although the latter survived until the end of the 19th century and was accompanied by songs on the island, this genre is practically unknown in the native songs of Tìree.²⁵⁹ John Maclean, or *Iain mac Ailein* as he is commonly known (1787-1848) was born in Caoles, a shoemaker and son of a small tenant on the east end of the island, derived in direct line from the Macleans of Hynish, a cadet branch of the Treshnish family who were themselves sprung from the Macleans of Ardgour. His title *Bàrd Thighearna Cholla*, the laird of Coll's bard, was largely honorific but he was a widely-admired poet and composer. His early verse was mainly traditional eulogy commemorating events in the laird's life. In 1818 a collection of his songs was published in Edinburgh but economic circumstances compelled him to emigrate to Nova Scotia in 1819. His genius blossomed in the congenial company of neighbouring families in the 'gloomy forest' and he continued to write and compose until his demise in 1848.²⁶⁰

John Gregorson Campbell,²⁶¹ Minister of Tìree [Kirkapol Manse] from 1861 to 1891 and a collector of folktales and historical traditions, wrote "Superstitions of the Scottish Highlands" (published posthumously in 1900). His work was based on information meticulously gathered from his Gaelic informants in the 1850s and 1860s. He died in Tìree in November 1891.

The gift for composition was remarkably widespread in Tìree. Every township had a least one practising bard in the 18th century (and probably indeed, in previous ages). For something more than a century after the creation of the crofts in 1805 the astonishing ferment went on. Every other house seemed to have its poet. Macleans, MacDougalls, MacDonalds, Sinclairs, MacPhails, Browns, MacArthurs and Blacks all contributed to the cultural activity in Balephuill (NL9540) as poets, story-tellers and *seanchaidhs*. Duncan MacDougall, the Baptist missionary's hymns were published in 1841. Neighbouring poets from other townships were attracted and would come to *ceilidh* with the Balephuill bards. *Bardachd* in Balephuill shows the same development as the rest of the island as the clan tradition evolves into the 'popular'. The bard had a secure and respected place in the community, at any rate until the end of the century. In the earlier 'clan period', the bard together with the chief's *seanchaidh* and piper, was charged with the important function of magnifying the clan and its chief and diffusing a sense of solidarity among all those attached to the chief. His position in the 19th century community in Tìree, even without the *éclat* of being the official bard, remained influential. Some of the Tìree bards were masters of satire. Duncan MacKinnon of Vaul (NM0449) attacked James Shaw, the Lochnell bard, for criticising the 3rd Argyll Regiment.

Good as your master is, it is a disgrace to
Recount of him that he keeps on his dung-hill

²⁵⁹ TB p4

²⁶⁰ TB p7

²⁶¹ Born Kingairloch in 1836. Also author of "Witchcraft & Second Sight in the Highlands" (1902). See Birlinn ISBN 1-84158-207-7.

Such a malignant cur as you, nibbling at bones
And snapping at heels - that was your habit
Wherever you happened to be.

Chapter Eleven: Over-population and clearance - Highland Land Wars - Napier Commission - Crofters' Holdings (Scotland) Act - Tiree Bards

It is possible that the Highlanders' love of their land, trust in their chiefs and ignorance of the outside world due to their geographical and linguistic isolation exposed them to exploitation more than most people living in rural areas so that by 1843, they were the poorest and worst fed of all Scots.²⁶²

One reason given for the extent of sub-division of crofts on the Duke's Tiree estate in the 1820s was that "four fencible regiments of men" had been raised during the Napoleonic Wars and holdings were carved out of existing tenancies to accommodate those who had seen service.²⁶³ By 1846 the total population of Tiree had risen to about 5,000. This was when Colonel Jock Campbell (*am Bàillidh Mor*, the Big Factor) came on the scene. There is no doubt that Campbell had the full authority of the 8th Duke of Argyll to reduce the population of Tiree, but it was the terrible deeds he perpetrated during his reign as factor that awoke the deep hatred of the peasantry for himself and his master. Before he passed away in Mull some twenty years later, he had reduced the population to around 2,000. His legacy was well-remembered by crofter witnesses to the Napier Commission in 1883.

One story from the time of *am Bàillidh Mor* relevant to his period of occupation of Island House: The road leading up to the house had a gravel surface, and on a cold and frosty November day, in her bare feet, a woman from Balephuill came to pay the rent. As she found it very painful to walk on the hard gravel, she took to the grass, but when she arrived at the office, the Colonel turned her away, ordering her to walk on the gravel or the rent would not be accepted and she would be evicted.²⁶⁴

The population which had been 4,450 in 1830 had dropped to 2,700 fifty years later due to evictions and the potato famines. By 1846, it was reported that the 'population at just under 5,000 is so enormously redundant that they have exhausted every particle of fuel on the island and depend on a distant property for the supply of peat - where upwards of 1,400 people are in such a condition that they cannot pay a farthing to the proprietor nor to any tenant and are without doubting liable to destitution from [even] partial failure of any one crop'. Yet there is a Gaelic saying, which is still an adage on the island, which can be translated as "If it were not for fear of the double rent, Tiree could yield two crops per annum". Oral sources say that there is a field on the slope of Beinn Ghott [NM0346] that did exactly that many years ago.²⁶⁵

In July 1856 seven fishing boats, with a complement of forty souls, were overwhelmed and nine men drowned. Although there was only a slight breeze blowing at the time of sailing, they were warned not to sail by an experienced fisherman, Archibald Campbell of Barrapol, as he was positive that a storm was brewing.²⁶⁶ Eric Linklater observed that "an island community may live

²⁶² SC p84

²⁶³ SC p161

²⁶⁴ TE p106

²⁶⁵ TE p20

²⁶⁶ TE p84

without a doctor or minister but cannot exist without a good boatman".²⁶⁷ By the 1880s Tiree supported a vigorous fishing community, most of which were Tiree-born, with over 170 men and boys describing themselves as 'fisherman'.²⁶⁸ But returns to crofters were limited by the impossibility, in the absence of adequate rail links, of transporting fresh fish to southern markets - as well as by the control exercised over the industry by curers. The latter operated a credit system of payment which, by ensuring that fishermen were almost as perpetually and deeply in debt as kelpers had once been, made it easy for curers to keep down prices and otherwise manipulate the market to their own advantage. Despite the difficulties under which they laboured, however, it was possible for Hebridean crofters to derive a reasonable income from the cod and ling fishings. In Lewis in the 1870s, for example, the six or eight men who made up a boat's crew could clear £15 to £20 apiece in a good winter - besides providing themselves and their families with fish for consumption. Such returns were seldom equalled outside the Outer Isles, the industry's main centre, but in most of the north-west, especially in Tiree, Skye, Wester Ross and Sutherland, crofters were assured of at least some income from the winter fishings. However it was to the summer herring fishings that they looked for real financial rewards. The native crofters were not as directly involved in the deep-water herring fishing but each summer almost all the drifters from the east coast took on one or two local men as crew members. In fact it was not uncommon for crofters to travel to Castlebay [*G Bagh a Chaisteil*] on Barra [*G Barraigh*] and Stornoway [*G Steornabhagh*] on the Isle of Lewis [*G Eilean Leodhais*] in order to obtain employment.

The steady rise in income from such sources meant that the typical crofter of the 1870s was much better off than his father had been. Once the blight had died down in the 1850s, potatoes again became the most important foodstuff. But dependence upon them was everywhere less complete than before the famine, the staple diet of boiled potatoes being supplemented by fairly large quantities of fresh and salted fish. And although meat was still a rarity, because sheep and cattle were too valuable to be slaughtered for food, a chicken or two might be put on the table on a special occasion, while milk and eggs were usually quite plentiful. Grain crops were generally used as winter fodder for cattle. But when crofters' potatoes ran out in spring and early summer there was usually enough money available to buy meal - imports of which rose steadily between the 1850s and 1880s.²⁶⁹ The wives and daughters of the crofters had their own specific tasks, principally dairy work and textile work, in addition to their housework. On the crofts, where the men often had to work away from home, the women would take over the responsibility for cultivation, but the men performed the heavier work of digging, and cutting and floating the seaweed before they left, to return in time to do the peat cutting.²⁷⁰

In comparison to the 18th century and the early decades of the 19th century, the period which extended from the 1860s to the 1880s was relatively prosperous. But the average crofter had little reason to feel satisfied with the conditions under which they lived. Their houses were little more than hovels and they had no security of tenure. On being cleared from their land

²⁶⁷ OS p198

²⁶⁸ 1881 Census for Tiree

²⁶⁹ MCC pp161-163

²⁷⁰ PSS pp211-212

they received no compensation for any improvements made. Most of their income was derived from what the family earned away from home as their portion of arable land was insufficient to earn a decent living. In the decade prior to the 'Land War' which began in north-west Scotland in 1882, the region's agrarian structure was dominated, as it had been since the 18th century, by a few wealthy landlords controlling vast expanses of territory. The island of Tiree was a relatively small component of the Duke of Argyll's 168,315 acre [68,170ha] domain. Since landlords could not effectively manage their estates from London or the south of France, absenteeism had the effect of enhancing the role of estate factors - men who, as one Tiree crofter remarked bitterly, '*had all the power in their own hands*'.²⁷¹ There are instances where a factor increased crofters' rents by sixpence for each time they failed to doff their caps to him.

Nevertheless overpopulation among the peasantry was not a phenomenon confined to the Highlands. A 'Letter to the Editor' in a London newspaper of 1873 regarding a failed emigration scheme to Paraguay read as follows: "*Why should English labouring men seek a home and employment in foreign lands when our colonies hold out such splendid inducements to them? Canada and Australia alone would absorb the whole of the surplus of the English labour market. They offer abundance of employment both for mechanics and for agricultural hands.*"

Predictably the problem of landlessness was most acute in areas where the crofting population was at its most dense. In Tiree and the Outer Isles, it was not uncommon, as the Napier Commission²⁷² noted, to find 'crowds of squatters who construct hovels, appropriate land, and possess and pasture stock, but pay no rent, obey no control, and scarcely recognise any allegiance or authority'. In Tiree, for instance, the Duke of Argyll's policy of consolidating crofts at every opportunity - while benefitting those lucky enough to become tenants of the holdings thus enlarged - led to frequent dispossession of the families of deceased crofters. Having nowhere else to go, they joined the landless population originally created by the Tiree clearances of the 1850s. By 1904, as a result, Tiree contained over 200 cottars and squatters.²⁷³

The creation of sheep farms, often comprising large tracts of empty, uncultivated and often fertile land, which hemmed in the congested townships on their boundaries, created social tensions which unavoidably led to revolt among the disadvantaged. The farms established on Tiree in the 1840s and 1850s, having been forcibly cleared of their original occupants (who were probably relatives of the present landless cottars and squatters existing on poor land, held in small quantities, on the boundaries) were but a few of the farms designated by crofters as suitable for resettlement by themselves.

The 1880s in the Highlands grew to become a decade of severe, occasionally chronic, agricultural depression. As wool prices collapsed, sheep farmers' profits and landlords' rentals fell back sharply from the heights they had reached in the balmy years of the 1860s and early 1870s. The poor harvests of 1881-1882 plunged the crofting population to a level reminiscent of

²⁷¹ MCC p175

²⁷² The Napier Commission was charged in 1883 with the task of conducting the first official enquiry into crofting conditions.

²⁷³ MCC pp179-180

the potato famine. Then on 1st October 1882 after prolonged rain in August and September came a severe southerly gale which destroyed the unharvested grain. In addition, the storm damaged or destroyed some 1,200 fishing boats, their nets and fishing gear.²⁷⁴

Contemporary Irish unrest and the activities of the Irish Land League did not go unnoticed in the Highlands (as early as 1866 there were rumours of Irish Fenians stirring unrest in Campbeltown where they had a significant presence) and crofters on Skye intimated their intention to cease paying rent to their landlord. This crisis was allayed by a 25% reduction in rents. But the 'Battle of the Braes' incident, also on Skye in 1882, gave wide publicity to the crofters' plight swinging public opinion in the crofting community's favour. By late 1882, there were indications that these events might at last launch Highland land reforms. Three crofters petitioned the Duke of Argyll for a reduction in their rents, and the tenants of Balephuill township demanded the restoration of common pastures on Ben Hynish which the Duke's managers, years before, had added to a neighbouring farm. Given the extent of threats throughout the region, the British government intervened actively in crofting affairs for the first time since the famine of the 1840s. On 8th May 1883, the Napier Commission began taking evidence on Skye at a locality called The Braes, south of Portree, where the spate of public disobedience had first erupted.

On Tiree on Tuesday, 7th August 1883, the Napier Royal Commission, comprising Lord Napier & Ettrick as Chairman, Sir Kenneth MacKenzie, Donald Cameron MP, C. Fraser-Mackintosh MP, Sheriff Nicolson and Professor MacKinnon convened to take evidence from the islanders. Lamentably it was not seen fit to take evidence under oath. This serious flaw in proceedings gave all parties the opportunity to exaggerate or to minimise conditions according to their point of view in the dispute and there is obvious 'pay-back' couched in the attitude and words of the witnesses. Specifically named, Colonel Jock Campbell, the Big or Black Factor, was held responsible for the worst of the clearance excesses on Tiree. But the Big Factor had died on Mull almost twenty years previously and was unable to face his accusers. Most of the witnesses also appeared as delegates for the communities where they resided - elected or self-appointed.

The first witness to appear was Donald MacDougall, a crofter aged 52 years of Balephuill. He began by requesting an assurance that his evidence would not prejudice his tenancy but the Duke's resident factor (who was present) was unable to give him this assurance. However, subsequently during the proceedings, the Duke's Chamberlain declared that '*the crofters are at liberty to make any statement they have to make without any fear of after consequences*'. Donald's evidence encompassed the subsequently all-too-familiar tales of excessive rents despite removal from rights of common grazing without compensation, and carrying threats of eviction as follows '*this factor that cleared our place thirty years ago [c1850] got the management of the property, but ordained a statute, like that of the Medes and Persians, that no one should have either a sheep or a pig, for fear that these sheep of ours, would break in upon the large farms. He went round also among us, holding a paper in the one hand and a notice to quit in the other, and he told us that unless we signed this paper, the effect of which was that we would require to be obedient to anything and everything which either he or the Duke of*

²⁷⁴ MCC pp187-188

Argyle would order us to do, we would have to quit the place. We signed the paper, otherwise we would have to quit. The cleared land was now part of the holding of a tacksman who concurrently held two other large tacks in Tiree. The next witness was John MacFadyen, unmarried, of Caolis who lived with his brother Alexander and represented the communities of Caolis, Ruaig and Salum in the north-east corner of Tiree. His petition was for *'more land, fair rent, fixity of tenure, and compensation for improvements'* – a common thread that ran through most of the demands considered vital by the crofters. Asked to name the large tacks with no crofters on them, he replied *'Scaranish, Ballepheatrish, Cornaigmore, Hough, Grianal, Hynish, Cruaidhghoirtean, Crosspool, Reef. There are several others where the place was only, partially cleared and a large tack formed of the portion that was cleared, and a few of the crofters still remain on the outskirts of the place.'* Next was Angus Munn, carer for his bed-ridden parents, who had been forced to take up fishing to support his family on only a three acre croft in Heanish because *'we have been forcibly deprived of our holdings of two crofts, during our father and mother's lifetime, to make room for another party who got into the factor's favour, and on going to his Grace the Duke of Argyle to Mull, he advised us to come home and that he himself would look after it. On the factor becoming aware of this he reported that we had no stock to stock the ground with, and on being challenged by the factor as to the stock, we had to call witnesses to let them see what number of stock we had; and on the factor's becoming aware of this, he, in a rage, asked us about the stock. Having replied in the affirmative, he said, "Did I not tell you that you were not to have a hoof on the grass after a certain day?" On being questioned as to what was to be done with them, "Drown them," said he.'* Alexander Maclean aged 74 of Balameanach was the next witness: he had been deprived of two crofts and not compensated despite improvements made and currently he managed to survive only on the money sent to him by his children working in the Lowlands. He was also the first witness to raise the subject of payment by goods or cash from the North British Chemical Company's store, described further in the testimony of James Sleven, the Resident Manager, and that of his superior Edward C Stanford.²⁷⁵

Part of the testimony of Donald Macdonald, who represented all of the crofters of Balemartine, relating to the accusations of clearances by the Big Factor is believed worthy of documenting in full, as follows: *"I wish also to read a paper containing general cases of evictions of special importance: — 1st, Neil M'Donald, crofter at Mannal, was about thirty-four years ago, for no well-grounded reasons, evicted from his home and farm by the factor, John Campbell, Esq. He had no other home to go to, and was forbidden by the factor to build a house in any part of the island. The factor also threatened with instant eviction any crofter or cottar who might out of pity afford him even one night's shelter from the cold, so his only place of shelter was a small boat turned upside down, with a hole in the centre for a chimney, and some straw laid round the openings to prevent the snow drift from perishing himself and little ones. One neighbour, who out of pity was moved to take and give his children shelter in his house, was instantly summoned before the factor, and severely reprimanded for being so humane. 2nd, Hector M'Donald, Balamartin (crofter), was some time afterwards evicted in the same manner. Forced to leave his house and home, having no house to go to, every individual crofter and cottar in Tyree were, on*

²⁷⁵ The full testimony of Stanford given at the Glasgow hearings appears in Appendix H.

the threat of eviction, forbidden to give him even one night's shelter. His wife being nigh her confinement, he for her sought shelter in his sister's house; but the farmer on whose croft the sister's house stood (John Sinclair, Barrapoll) was instructed by the factor to turn the evicted family out. In the said John Sinclair's cart the wife and family were removed, and the woman, while being driven in the cart, by the way was delivered of a child, as no one would be allowed to shelter her during the time of her delivery. 3^d, Hugh M'Lean, crofter, Mannal. This man, who was blind, was about nineteen years ago disgracefully evicted as the above. Having no house to go to, he was still in his own home. The factor then sent men to strip the roof off that home by means of instruments of iron. He then removed to the barn, in which lay a quantity of grain. The same men were then sent back with orders to strip the barn too; and the poor blind man, with his crippled wife, and no sons to help him, as of the sons he had two were drowned some time before, and his only other son was insane in the asylum, was cruelly turned out and left at the roadside. 4th, Alexander M'Donald, a blind man, was evicted while John Campbell, Esq., was factor of the island, by whose orders men were sent to have this man's house stripped while the poor man was in bed and unable to leave it. He was then removed by some friends to the barn, but the factor ordered the roof to be taken off the barn too; and thus the sightless man was rendered houseless. And the only reason for evicting this man was simply to give his holding to one of the factor's favourites. The man then became a burden to the parish, and from that time till now his maintenance cost the parish about £600. 5th, Gilchrist M'Donald. Since I can remember, my father was a crofter in Balamartin. About nineteen years ago [c1864], although being only one year's rent in arrears, he, and a neighbour who was only 50 shillings in arrears, were evicted. The latter from his own croft. This was done in order to give both the crofts to the factor's servant man, which servant was not a native of the island. Some weeks before the time to leave the house I paid the rent, but on the appointed day (as we were still in the house, not having another to go to) some men — others refused to do it — by order of the factor were sent to the house, and these men by means of an iron bar broke open the door, turned us and all our things there and then out of the house. My father was about sixty years of age, and without the croft was unable to do anything for himself. My mother, who was about the same age, was imbecile, and in that state was carried by them out of bed and laid at the road side. As the factor would not grant me leave to build a small house to shelter them, I had to remove them to Glasgow, which city not agreeing with them, I was obliged to return with them to Tyree again, but the only house I could get was an old kiln belonging to the crofters of Balamartin. The little I got for the stock on the farm was all spent in maintaining us before getting leave from the factor to build a house and had it ready for dwelling in." The next witness, Donald MacFarlane, also of Balemartine, told a similar tale of clearance at Heylipol: "Some thirty-two years ago [c1850] I had a croft at Hillipool, before it was cleared for a sheep farm for the factor's nephew. The last year I had the croft, the factor tilled the third part of it for his own use, without even telling me that it was to be done. I paid the rent in full from Whitsunday till Martinmas, and the factor's crop growing in it. If I would say anything against the factor's doings I was in danger of losing all I had. I then lost the whole croft and got another holding in Balamartin, for which I was charged twice as much rent as the tenant that had it before me. Shortly after I gave it up, as it would not pay at such high rent. My house is still on the holding, but the present tenant is against its being there, and is determined to have it out of his way.

We, the undersigned, beg to state that our grievances are very similar to the above, and that we have been wrongfully evicted for no other reason but to make room for the factor's nephew. Afterwards it fell into the factor's own hands, who had it until his death. John Cameron, Scaranish. Other fifteen families were evicted from Hillipool at the same time, and for the same reason as the above. Donald M'Millan, Mannal."

The next witness to come before the Commission was Alexander Buchanan of Baugh, the parish surgeon, who hailed from Callander in Perthshire and had been a resident of Tiree since a young man [c1860]. In addition to his medical duties he leased a farm of 160 acres [65ha] employing some six servants including a governess for his six children. His wife, Colina, the daughter of Colin Campbell, came from Mull. His wife was also the proprietor of Cornaig, Coll. Buchanan confirmed the preceding stories of the clearances as being true. He also gave evidence that he had been abroad and had met former crofters from Tiree; he said, " *Their condition is that they would not return, although they would get their land back again for nothing. Question: You are quite convinced that those who went are better off than those who remained? I am. Question: Those who remained were not much improved in their condition by their neighbours going away? No; in fact, there was no improvement. Question: It was rather the other way they say? Yes."*

Next came the Duke's Ground Officer (resident sub-factor), Hugh MacDiarmid, who leased two farms - one of which was 500 acres [200ha] - he was also from Perthshire and resident on the island from 1876. He occupied Island House. He declared that leases were not granted on land with an annual rental of less than £100 per annum thus excluding all the crofters. When asked about the preceding evidence given by the witnesses; " *Have you any observation to make upon the evidence which you have heard given - did you take any notes? Yes, but I wish to go to Bunessan [Ross of Mull], where Mr Wylie [Chamberlain to the Duke of Argyll] will be; I have been taking notes for him."* He was followed by Lachlan MacPhail, Donald Campbell and Donald Maclean, representing Kilmoluag and Balevuilin, who raised issues concerning rent increases and sea ware harvesting. The persistent criticism of the late Jock Campbell's methods of land management in Tiree under threat of eviction continued. The consistency of the complaints made by the representatives for the crofters is vexing. But without evidence being taken under oath one must be wary of collusion and exaggeration nevertheless the numerous accounts clearly indicate that the people at the bottom of the Tiree hierarchy felt that under the present system they were being and had been long treated unfairly without redress. *Question: How many people are now living in Ballvuilin? Seventeen [crofters] have land; thirty or thirty-two are without land. Question: At Kilmoluag how many have you? Nineteen [crofters]. Question: And how many cottars? About thirty. Question: Are the cottars a great burden upon you? Yes. Question: Do you pay poor rates? Yes. Question: Are these cottars in whole or in part people who have been sent into these two towns from other places? Yes; there were some of them sent consequent upon the clearing of Hylipool; some also were sent from another town which was partially cleared, Baugh, but the great majority of them belong to the place. Question: (To Donald Maclean). You state that there are sixty cottars between Ballivuilin and Kilmoluag; where could you point out any land that could be given to you? Wherever they would wish to send us.* This final answer speaks volumes. The cottars feel that they are willing to go anywhere to seek a subsistence living on their own land: a major improvement on their current situation.

Neil McNeil of Vault presented the following statement from himself and his neighbours: *'The township of Vault consists of twelve crofters and fourteen cottars. I represent the township. Our grievances are: (1) That a former factor made us sign a document that we would be obedient to his laws. The result was that he nearly doubled our rents within the last thirty-eight years, partly for drainage and twice for reasons unknown to us. (2) That owing to the inferiority of the soil through incessant tillage, we have to buy all our meal from Glasgow. Our sons and daughters gather our rent through the world. (3) Scarcity of fuel and wool, for we have no sheep. (4) That the cottars are a great burden to us.'* The next witness 'for his sins' carried the same name as the target of the crofters' ire - John Campbell. But this John Campbell was a crofter of Balinoe and his statement, among other issues, presented more evidence of land being given to favourites and servants of the Big Factor. Duncan MacKinnon, a cottar at Scarinish, had occupied a recognised holding *'from time immemorial and paid the rent'* only to be *'evicted to make room for sheep. My father was seventy-five years of age when we were evicted.'* Men like Duncan were - not surprisingly - later prominent in raids on, and seizures of, land from which their fathers and grandfathers had been cleared. The statements of Donald Sinclair and Archibald Campbell of Balephuill repeated a familiar tale of hardship that the Commission must have wearied of hearing: *"The most of us, and our fathers before us, had crofts, and without any reason being assigned they were taken from us. Our crofts were then added to the neighbouring sheep farm."* The final witness to be heard on Tiree was James Slevin, Resident Manager of the North British Chemical Company. At the time of the 1881 and 1891 Census, Slevin, an Irishman, lived with his wife and family at Middleton Cottage [NL4394]. In countering some of the evidence of operating a barter or 'trucking system' and preferring to supply his workers with goods instead of cash for their earnings, he explained that, for example, on numerous occasions the clerk carrying the cash box [by sea] from Glasgow was unable to land because of the weather and the lack of suitable quay facilities on the island. With no bank in Tiree, this forced him to pay in goods from the Company shop to prevent the seaweed gatherers from getting nothing in the short term, for their labour.

Appendix I is a record of the names of all the witnesses who presented evidence that was relevant to conditions on Tiree. For the convenience of researchers this list provides the evidence serial number at which the witness begins his testimony. A copy of this entire report is available in the public domain for research purposes.

When the Napier Commission re-convened the following day at Bunessan, James Wylie, Chamberlain for the Duke of Argyll, was a significant witness as Tiree also came under his authority. When asked *inter alia*, *"In your opinion, then, the people practically have no grievance? I do not say that; it is hardly a fair question to put to me. Question: What I should like to know is what you, having the great authority you have under the Duke of Argyll, propose doing; and you cannot suppose all those people come to us with idle grievances, do you? I am afraid some of them are not well founded. Question: But surely you would admit there is a residuum—a grain of truth at the bottom of their grievances? I am not prepared to admit that."*

The Napier Commission report which was in addition, a detailed portrayal of the enormous problems in the Highland economy, was published in April 1884 but no action was taken. The

victims of the worst inequalities of land shortage, the cottars, were simply ignored and by the autumn of 1884 it was apparent that a solution to the crofters' problems was far from imminent.

Conversely some of the more interesting observations of the Commission's report include: *"Of the terms under which the smaller tenants held their possessions no definite account is presented, but it is assumed that they were entitled to security of tenure, subject to rent and services, as the descendants or successors of those subordinate members or dependants of the family, who in former ages won the land for the clan and maintained the fortunes of the chief by their swords. This claim to security of tenure is held to have been in some sort transmitted to existing occupiers. If the picture thus submitted is a faithful likeness of any phase of popular life that ever existed in the northern parts of Scotland, it could only be in fortunate localities and in favourable seasons. That it contains some of the lineaments of truth must be admitted, but it is a view drawn without a shadow, and offers in many respects a striking deviation from the dark realities portrayed in the narratives of contemporary observers, in the statistical accounts compiled by the clergy in the last decade of the eighteenth century, and in the notices of estate management preserved in the families of hereditary proprietors."* and *"It is difficult to deny that a Macdonald, a Macleod, a Mackenzie, a Mackay, or a Cameron, who gave a son to his landlord eighty years ago to fill up the ranks of a Highland regiment, did morally acquire a tenure in his holding more sacred than the stipulations of a written covenant. Few will affirm that the descendant in possession of such a man should even now be regarded by the hereditary landlord in the same light as a labourer living in a lowland village."*

But the most thorough analysis that emerged from the wise men that formed the Commission and who predicted the problems to surface many years in the future came from Sir Kenneth MacKenzie when he said *"I felt that it would be a misfortune if any of the measures recommended should have the effect of permanently differentiating the Highlands from the rest of Britain, and I doubted whether all of them would be suitable and likely to be made applicable to the whole country. It is improbable that, if once introduced, the period of their operation in the Highlands could be limited. If exceptional privileges were to be conferred, if it were only as the subjects of special favour that it was possible to contemplate Highlanders as thriving, the grant of such privileges, while it might patch up existing evils for the moment, could hardly fail also to protract artificially the existence of the causes which had produced them, and to ensure their recurrence. In my opinion, the faulty tenure under which they have arisen should rather be brought to an end as speedily as proper consideration for the crofters will permit, and encouragement should be given to the gradual replacement of the crofting system by one of small farms, to which the land law reforms desirable for the rest of the country would be applicable. I have come to believe that those recommendations of the Report to which I have not taken exception need not at least discourage such a consummation."*

In commenting thus, the Commissioner predicted the 'hobby farm' and 'hippie in-comer' scenario that has carried through into the 21st century in the guise of a 'green' or 'alternative' modern crofting setting and rules out the possibility of the Highlands ever experiencing authentic self-sustaining economic development and condemning the crofter, old and new, to an insecure and privation-guaranteed existence. Nevertheless in many cases, the Highlander's love of the land

together with a tenacity for the traditional lifestyle of his forefathers which predestined him to subsistence living without respite, were a voluntary preference to a higher standard of living in the Lowlands or overseas and it must be recognized as a preference chosen willingly and freely by rational beings.

The Reverend Donald MacKinnon, Master of Arts, Professor of Celtic Languages, History, Literature, and Antiquities at the University of Edinburgh, himself a Highlander and as indisputably Gaelic as any of the crofter witnesses likewise spoke against the apparent and ill-advised wishes of the crofters and their counselors. *"But while I thus thought it my duty to denounce the ejection of these people. I believed then, and do still, that a certain amount of judiciously conducted emigration would be for the benefit not only of those who would thus escape from poverty, but also for the benefit of those who would remain behind. In the face of the fact that almost without exception the crofters who have emigrated have been successful, and that a good many of them have become very wealthy men, I cannot see what claim these people [Political agitators and opportunists] have to be considered friends of the crofters, who, while they maintain that their condition is so low, yet advise them to continue in that position, from which there seems so little hope of escape, thus doing all they can to suppress the natural aspirations of men to better their position in life. Why, because a man has been born a crofter, whose lot in life is at best a poor one, induce him, by bad advice, to remain hopelessly with all his offspring crofters to the end? It appears to me that both the public and the crofters themselves have formed an erroneous idea about their true position. Crofters, even with the best holdings they possess in this country, were not intended or expected to be self-supporting farmers but working men with allotments; and when, as in their case, what was merely intended to be subsidiary to the main purpose of living by labour, has come to engross their whole time and attention, to the exclusion of that labour to which it was intended chiefly to be supplementary, it is no cause of wonder that poverty has come in the wake of so unwise a transposition. The result is seen in the deplorable fact, that a very large majority of our male adult population spend from eight to nine months of the year in absolute idleness, and consequently in poverty, for the relief of which appeals have had from time to time to be made to public charity. There is here, therefore, manifestly a state of matters requiring rectification, and the only apparent remedy is a certain amount of emigration, combined with crofts of such extent as give employment to such families as wish to follow farming exclusively, and another class of crofts for those who wish to be fishermen, of such extent as will enable each family to keep a cow, with as much land as will not interfere with their vocation as fishermen. Without either migration to some place where land is more abundant, or emigration, this last remedy is not practicable; for there is not in this country anything like the quantity of land that would be necessary to make crofts of a proper size, and to give besides crofts of proper extent to those who now hold only fractions of crofts, and to those who have no crofts at all. A good many could be accommodated by reducing the size of the excessively large farms, and laying the lands thus taken out in crofts of proper size, if the money could be found to stock the lands—of which, I believe, there is little probability. Of the finding of money for this purpose by Government, as has been suggested—and as the crofters, I think, unfortunately, expect — I do not entertain any hope, for I do not see what claim crofters can set up to Government aid any more than men who are in poor circumstances in any other locality, and*

following any other vocation. I certainly would not advise the increase of crofts of such limited extent as even the best of the existing ones. Much of the poverty of which they complain is undoubtedly of their own making, for they too commonly spend in entire idleness time during which they might earn money enough to improve their circumstances very materially; and as illustrative of this, it is right that I should state that many strong able-bodied men are now returning home to live in entire idleness until next summer, from the fishing in Banff and Aberdeenshires, who from the failure of the fishing there hardly earned as much money as would pay their way home, while there is abundance of railway work where they could have got employment, going on in the district which they have left; and when one or two, perhaps three men, come home in such circumstances to one family, the result may easily be seen; and even when men return after a short time of absence, who have been fairly fortunate, their earnings as a rule simply go to pay debts due from the previous year, so that they are for about nine months running into debt for the expenses of the current year.

... for now it is becoming evident that landlords are willing to break down their large farms into moderately sized holdings. How much can be done in this way to raise the status of the crofters, has been clearly illustrated by His Grace the Duke of Argyll, in Tyree, where we see not only that a good many of the crofters have by the good management of their landlords, and by their own thrift and industry, been raised to the position of farmers, but that a "steady improvement is visible among the smaller tenants, so that they are decidedly superior to others of their class in the West Highlands," and "that while general progress is visible in everything, their houses are unique in comfort among the other cottages of the Highlands," than which there can be no better test of a rise in the social scale. All this has been accomplished since 1853, and be it observed, that during the transition period, there has not been a single clearance or eviction in the island."

But to return to the time of the post-Commission dialogue; in keeping with trouble brewing throughout the region, the tenants of several Tiree townships began a rent strike and threatened to occupy the grazings on Ben Hynish and Ben Hough. Between 1883 and 1884, grazing rights became an issue and the people protested by imposing rent strikes.

In conjunction with the Liberal government's impending Third Reform Act, the measure which gave crofting tenants votes for the first time, the HLLRA's²⁷⁶ declarations amounted to a knell of doom for landlordism's long dominance of Highland politics. At the HLLRA's meetings on Tiree it was demanded that 'the land be justly divided' and, both in Tiree and South Uist, wire fences around sheep farms were clandestinely destroyed. Throughout the Hebrides there were seizures of land, crofting rents withheld and farm fences destroyed. The people who had been cleared from their land two generations previously became united in action to have some sort of permanent stake in the land. By the end of 1884, the crofting population throughout north-west Scotland, so long quiescent in the face of oppression and exploitation, were actively engaged in a campaign of subversion.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁶ Highland Land Law Reform Association founded in February 1883 to represent the crofting community in the Highlands, modelled on the Irish Land League.

²⁷⁷ MCC pp192-209

On 6 July 1885, the SS *Cairnsmuir*, bound for China via Glasgow, struck the shallow reef Bogha Mor off the west coast of Tiree. Reversing the engines failed to pull her clear and the engine room flooded. The crew took to the boats but stood by until the conditions deteriorated then made for the shore. Word spread that the cargo included wine, beer and spirits. When the local Customs Officer began collecting crates that had been washed ashore, he found most of them empty.²⁷⁸ No doubt this rumour took the cottars' minds off their agricultural difficulties for a hangover or two and stiffened their resolve!

The General Election, held towards the end of 1885, was a triumph for the HLLRA with four of the five crofting constituencies falling to its candidates rather than to the traditional Liberal or Tory lairds. The Crofters' Bill which followed was largely fashioned by the stance of the HLLRA MPs in the balance of power at Westminster. At an HLLRA meeting in Baugh it was resolved in April 1886 'that as the Government has rejected all or any amendments proposed on behalf of cottars, some of the lands unjustly taken from themselves and their fathers and now lying waste be taken possession of and planted with potatoes.' The land raid agreed took place within weeks. Other seizures followed. The farm of Greenhill had been untenanted at the time of the Baugh resolution but, unexpectedly, in early May the Duke of Argyll let Greenhill to an unusually-prosperous crofter, Lachlan MacNeill, formerly of Jura. MacNeill, at the time of the 1881 census, had been unmarried and living with his brother Neil at Vaul (who had been a witness at the Napier Commission hearings). The duke - who was land reform's bitterest opponent in the world of politics - may, by this action, have been seeking to cause trouble for the HLLRA. If so, he succeeded. By taking over Greenhill, the farm's new tenant was widely considered to have betrayed his fellow crofters. [It is claimed that he was bought over by the Duke's man, MacDiarmid, and promised that in return for information about the plans of the HLLRA, his brother would be given the lease of Greenhill for £80 per annum.] The ensuing ill-feeling - aggravated by the offending crofter being both an HLLRA member and a brother of the chairman of the association's Tiree branch - played no small part in precipitating the confrontation which followed. On 22nd May, Greenhill's tenant and his brother Neil were expelled from the HLLRA. Days later, Greenhill was occupied by over 300 men who at once proceeded to divide the farm among crofters and cottars from nearby townships. Because the government refused to sanction military intervention in the Hebrides, the forty policemen who landed on the island, on 21st July 1886, to serve writs which the Duke of Argyll²⁷⁹ had taken out against Greenhill's illegal occupants were unescorted by troops. They were thus no match for the island's crofters. Confronted at Greenhill by a force of men and youths armed with sticks and clubs, the police - outnumbered by about six to one - were obliged to withdraw to the relative security of the inn at Scarinish, their mission unaccomplished. The problem of what to do next was solved for them by Tiree's crofting population. On the morning of 22nd July, Scarinish Inn was surrounded by the men responsible for the seizure of Greenhill. The police contingent, it was demanded, should immediately withdraw from Tiree. They left that afternoon.

²⁷⁸ "History of Scotland", Dr MacPhail.

²⁷⁹ The Duke of Argyll, who served in Gladstone's Cabinet, felt himself so victimized by the pro-crofter land legislation that he resigned and joined Joseph Chamberlain's anti-Irish-home-rule Liberal Unionists. CSP p75

With the police in full retreat and the Duke of Argyll complaining that Tiree was 'under the rule of savagery'; military involvement became inevitable. On 31st July 1886, a detachment of fifty police escorted by five times that number of marines was landed on the island from the vessels *Ajax* and *Assistance*. Eight crofters, including Donald Sinclair, the new chairman of Tiree's HLLRA branch, were promptly arrested and conveyed to the mainland where they were subsequently found guilty of mobbing and rioting as well as of deforcement²⁸⁰ - five being sentenced to six month's imprisonment, the others to four months. Since crofters found guilty of similar offences in the past had been fined a few shillings or jailed for two or three weeks, the Scottish Secretary became the recipient of a spate of protests and representations about the severity of the sentences. By way of demonstrating how he meant henceforth to conduct policy in the Highlands, the protestations were ignored.

The flawed Crofters' Holdings (Scotland) Act of 1886 applied to holdings tenanted on a year-to-year basis, rented under £30 annually and consisting of arable land held in conjunction with rights of common pasturage. This therefore affected almost every crofter in north-west Scotland and gave most of what the HLLRA had been demanding. However, in containing little provision for making more land available to them, it fell far short of meeting crofters' wishes. And most importantly it made no provision for cottars and squatting populations, resulting in another wave of land seizures. The Act, by which the state curbed the power of the landowners in the interests of the tenants, was a radical change in land tenure. Clearances became impossible as crofters were given security of tenure and a fair rent. This Act did not provide the additional land needed to support the population; that was the main objective of the Congested Districts (Scotland) Act of 1897. How effective these measures and their implementation were [and] are matters of dispute. Their achievement was to introduce a land system more acceptable to the people in districts where social tension had been most acute in the previous century. But it is also possible to suggest that they were more concerned with resolving the problems of the past instead of looking to those of the future.

No legislation could remove the fundamental economic difficulties which remained to plague the Highlands. The legislation which was passed may have made matters worse in the long-run by freezing the availability of land and consequently the structure of Highland society and its economy.²⁸¹ The Highland Land War was far from settled and confrontations between the crofters and authorities on Lewis escalated and continued until military withdrawal in early autumn 1888 which marked the end of the land seizures, rent-strikes and other conflicts with authority.²⁸²

Over the next twenty years or so the improvement of returns from fishing and cattle gave the crofters a higher income. A significant benefit was the shift of focus of the government's Highlands & Islands policy towards sponsored development of the Highland economy in general. The question of the cottars' rights to land remained unresolved. The Duke of Argyll's response to landless families' appeals for a measure of land redistribution elicited only an offer of

²⁸⁰ The withholding of property (especially, land) by force or violence, as from the rightful owner.

²⁸¹ PSS p51

²⁸² MCC pp229-244

assisted passages to the colonies. Land raids were threatened in the early months of 1902 and again in the spring of 1903. This situation festered into World War One when men of the islands were serving their country overseas and getting killed and maimed as their reward. In January 1918 a number of cottars from Cornaigbeg took possession of a 13-acre field on Balephetrish farm and at once proceeded to prepare it for a spring planting of potatoes. Their actions, they said, were dictated by the wartime government's injunctions to increase agricultural production as well as by their own poverty. The Prime Minister, the Balephetrish raiders pointed out, 'had asked the people to get food and that was what they were doing.' And they were doing it, moreover, on land which would have been settled by the Board of Agriculture before the war, had not the amount of compensation demanded by its landlord and tenant been so high. The Balephetrish raiders were all old men - two at least being in their seventies - and all had sons on active service. But none of that prevented them from being sentenced to ten days' imprisonment as a result of legal proceedings initiated by the Duke of Argyll. It was against the background of unrest and virtual guerrilla warfare over the north-west between the cottars and the authorities that the Land Settlement (Scotland) Act was passed in December 1919. Balephetrish, the tenancy of the farm occupied from 1754 by the Campbell family fell to Tom Barr, a close friend of the estate factor, and matters remained like this - and not to the crofters' advantage - until after the First World War, when it was broken up into crofts and given to the young men who had 'fought for King and Country'. This happened in 1921, but only after a bitter struggle with the establishment. Barr and his friend the factor had a very cosy arrangement regarding all the livestock reared on the island. If Tom Barr came first and made an offer which was refused by the crofter, it was a foregone conclusion that the factor would not make another offer. It is of little wonder that they made a fortune.²⁸³

By 1924 however the post-war crisis was clearly over. In Tiree, the majority of farms, brutally established during the first sixty years of the 19th century, were once more occupied by crofting tenants - many of them former cottars whose ancestors had been evicted from the localities to which their descendants now returned. More than a third of Tiree residents gained holdings as a result.²⁸⁴

This intense emotional attachment to territory - an attachment stemming ultimately from the position of 'land' in the ancient kin-based society of the Highlands - continues to be prevalent among crofters. Such feelings keep many crofters on their holdings in defiance of financial self-interest. Unaccompanied by the increase in living conditions experienced by their southern countrymen, crofting life is difficult to sustain. Had not the crofting community struggled for its existence, Tiree would now be as empty as Mull. The Highlands & Islands Development Board has commented, 'Crofting helps maintain communities and their essential services in remote areas which would otherwise be deserted.'²⁸⁵ But even hindsight can offer no remedy to the problem of the Highlander of that time and it remains so today. The Crofters' Holdings (Scotland) Act of 1886 was not the remedy. It interposed government regulation between landlord and tenant which gave the remaining Highlanders security of tenure but it discouraged

²⁸³ TE p28

²⁸⁴ MCC pp258-277

²⁸⁵ MCC p281

investment and froze the crofters on the marginal land to which they had been driven; the slow decline of the economy would not be halted.²⁸⁶ Rural depopulation in the Highlands was not more generally pronounced in the Highlands than in equally rural parts of the Lowlands. There are eleven Scottish counties that reached the historic peak of their populations between 1831 and 1861; seven of these are in the Highlands & Islands and four are in the Lowlands. In the forty years between 1851 and 1891, during which the law - at least until 1886 - afforded no protection against summary eviction, the drop in population of the Highland & Islands counties was 9%; the drop in the Lowland counties was the same. In the forty years between 1891 and 1931, on the other hand, in a period in which it was virtually impossible under Scottish law to evict a Highland crofter from his holding but singularly easy to evict a Lowland farm labourer from his cottage, the population of the Highlands & Islands counties fell by 26%, that of the Lowland group by only 16%. The law seems to have done nothing to stop the drain of men from the land.²⁸⁷ (Appendix J illustrates the population movement within Tiree from the first 'semi-official' census of 1779 through the Official Census records until 1891 giving the number of dwellings and population in each township.) The impact of the Education Act of 1872 on the population of the Highlands cannot be discounted either. The acquisition, for example, of fluent English was looked upon as a way of increasing their earning capacity in the seasonal migrant economy however the cultural influence of life in the cities, communication with young people of the same generation but with a different set of values tended to portray island life as dull and uninteresting and blunting their natural desires and ambitions to succeed as members of the wider Scottish community.

Ultimately this perception has led to the islands being populated either by a few of the old traditional crofting families or by incomers seeking an escape from the pressures of a modern society but with the money to enjoy all of its advantages. Where this will lead is a question that few commentators are prepared to predict for the long term since even on the mainland ample employment opportunities steadily shrink under the onslaught of cheap imported products. Only when land is owned by the people who inhabit it, as opposed to leasing or renting, can a community master its own destiny by secure investment in its future.

²⁸⁶ FH p132

²⁸⁷ CSP pp59-60



Flora MacKinnon, seated in the centre holding her great-granddaughter Barbara McCartney Scanlon. On her right her granddaughter, Rachael Thomson Harrison, and on her left her daughter Barbara Lammie McCartney, 1906.

Genealogy: By the beginning of the 20th century, Flora and Euphemia MacKinnon were mothers and grandmothers and the links to Tiree were tenuous at best. Nevertheless family relations prevailed and when my father worked in Tiree during the building of the RAF airfield in the early years of World War II, before he was conscripted into the Royal Engineers, he was made welcome by his distant MacKinnon in-laws. Unfortunately no links exist today and visits to the island are often flawed by encounters with incomers with southern accents seeking the tourist dollar.

A large RAF airfield²⁸⁸ was built on Tiree during World War II; this became the civil airport after the war. Squadrons 218 and 518 flying Warwicks and Halifax bombers operated from this airfield from around 1942. The cemetery at Sorobaigh has grave stones commemorating the young airmen who lost their lives flying out of Tiree. There was also an RAF Chain Home radar station at Kilkenneth and an RAF Chain Home Low radar station at Beinn Hough. These were preceded by a temporary RAF Advanced Chain Home radar station at Port Mor and an RAF Chain Home Beam radar station at Barrapol. Post war there was RAF Scarinish ROTOR radar station at Beinn Ghott. Of note during that war was Captain Neil MacKinnon of Heanish winning the DSC at Dunkirk in 1940 and the destroyer HMS *Sturdy* being wrecked on the coast of Tiree on the night of 30th October 1940. The well-known weather station on Tiree, which contributes to the UK weather and shipping forecasts, was started by the headmaster of Corraig School who began keeping records in 1926.²⁸⁹

No Tiree bard of the latter half of the 19th century appears to have enjoyed greater regard in the community of wider fame outside in the Gaelic-speaking world than the Balemartine bard

²⁸⁸ Reminiscences of this period appear in —The Hebrides at War— by Mike Hughes.

²⁸⁹ SI p95

(*Bàrd Bhaile Mhàrtainn*). It was not surprising to find the bard, John Maclean (1827-1895), espousing the HLLRA cause in the 1880's. His was the voice of those who stood least to gain from the ducal estate policy, which aimed at consistently creating larger, more viable croft-units, which were out of the reach of the cottars and small crofters.

Before a Duke came or any of his people
Or a kingly George from Hanover's realm,
The low-lying isle, with its many shielings,
Belonged as a dwelling to the Children of the Gael.²⁹⁰

The Balemartine bard was a constant visitor in the house of the fisherman-tailor Malcolm Sinclair, who was not a poet but a fine story-teller and acted, in his son's words, as 'patron' to the bard.²⁹¹ John Maclean was a versatile witty composer of popular love songs and humorous satires. He lived on a croft on the boundary of Balemartine and Balephuill, and with the bards' distaste of steady industry, he spent much of his time ceilidhing with the bards and neighbours of Balephuill, where he played a crucial role in the flowering of bardachd.²⁹² Evidently he would make written versions of songs which he had composed, and Hector Kennedy recalled the tradition that "the Balemartine bard would write the songs down on the door [of the house] and his sisters would read it for the boys when they would come along. He was out ceilidhing. Aye, and the old ones was learning the young ones". His song 'Manitoba', composed on the occasion of his friends John and Charles Maclean emigrating from Balephuill in 1878, conveys his personal sense of loss and then widens beyond the island's horizons to lament the changed Highland scene, with its empty glens and scattered people, unvalued by landlords who preferred money to brave soldiers.

The proud, handsome youths today are evicted,
To north and to south, cold and empty the homes;
I see not the maid of an evening go milking;
I hear not her lilting when herding the droves.

The folk of the kilt and the hose and cocked bonnets
Were ever renowned as foremost in fray.
They are sent overseas to climates unwholesome
With no end in view but to lay the land bare.²⁹³

Balephuill is known as the 'Village of Poets' [*G Baile nam Bàrd*] as there were over thirty villagers who practiced the art of versifying in the 19th century. Oral transmission of the bardachd has ceased to operate with any vigour on Tiree. Public ceilidhs are held, where native songs may be heard, but the informal ceilidh which sustained the tradition disappeared early in the 20th century. Largely through the effects of a system of compulsory education which was conceived in English terms and which was established in 1872, respect for the older tradition and values

²⁹⁰ TB p20

²⁹¹ TB p16

²⁹² TB p19

²⁹³ TB p20

has disappeared. The new generation has adopted many of the values of the English-speaking Lowlands of Scotland. The bard has no patron and no easily available audience.²⁹⁴

On the beach below the Scarinish Hotel, licensed from about 1953, lie the remains of the *Mary Stewart*, a sailing smack that belonged to the late Donald Maclean. This forlorn sight is frequently the last impression of Tiree that remains with modern tourists and this must be poor reward for the years of struggle that have endured and toughened the spirit of the Tiree people and those exiles who were forced from the island.

Celtic culture dominated Europe before the advancement of the Roman Empire and initially confined them to the north-western fringes of the continent. But in the 18th and 19th centuries, by choice or otherwise, the tide turned and Celts were once more on the march and proliferated to begin their ascendancy in the western world and beyond, providing modern humanity with leaders in politics, finance and the arts.

Cuimhnichibh na Doine o'thainig sibh
(Remember the people from whom you have come)

²⁹⁴ TB p24

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