



THE TÍREE CROFTERS STRUGGLE

INTRODUCTION

In compiling this small booklet outlining, in a most condensed form, the part played by the Tiree crofters and cottars in the struggle in the Highlands and Islands at that time, I trust it may bring home to us the great debt we owe to them all. We hold those Tiree men, who went to prison because they opposed their landlord, in admiration as their efforts ensured a better and more secure future for us who follow. Their agitation led, in a large measure, to landlords ceasing to oppress the people as they had done centuries before.

I have, on purpose, omitted to mention details on the clearances which I believe fuelled the fire of agitation which followed. I feel that we are commemorating the Centenary of an Act which went in no small way to helping those who worked the land and mention of something else would only detract from it. It is my earnest hope that someone more able than I will consider writing a complete book on Tiree - there is a wealth of information available for anyone who is interested - so that special events which changed the way of life on the island can be recorded for all time.

To all who helped me in any way, may I express my heartfelt thanks, and especially to the 'Oban Times' who allowed me access to past copies of their newspaper.

Alex MacArthur
July, 1986.

THE TIREE CROFTERS' STRUGGLE

"You are soon here after MacFarlane's defeat" were the words with which the Tiree men greeted the messenger at arms and the police on the 21st of July, 1886 when a band of forty officers arrived on the island. Their purpose was to serve notices of interdict on crofters and cottars who had illegally stocked the vacant farm of Greenhill on the southwest part of the island with their cattle.

The reference to MacFarlane resulted from his defeat as the crofters' Member of Parliament for Argyll in the British General Election the previous week on 15th July, 1886 when the seat and the election was won by the Tories. The complacency of the crofters in not coming out to vote for their candidate was said to be the cause of the seat being lost by MacFarlane by only 613 votes. The three preceeding years had shortlived parliamentary administrations for both the Liberals and Tories. The country had been governed by the Liberals since the previous December of 1885 when five crofters' candidates stood for the crofting counties of Argyll, Ross, and Cromarty - Invernesshire, Caithness and Sutherland. The crofters themselves had won the right to vote in the summer of 1885 under the third Reform Act - this was a major step which was to influence voting patterns greatly in the future. All the candidates but one were successful. The Marquis of Stafford took Sutherland from the crofters' candidate who was also named Sutherland by 650 votes. D.H. MacFarlane, a Roman Catholic from Caithness and former Parnellite M.P. for County Carlow in Ireland, was Argyll's M.P. representing the crofters. In February 1886 he demanded that the crofters' cause be taken up by the then third Gladstone Government which had earlier in May 1885 introduced a Crofters Bill which unfortunately fell with the Government on 8th June, 1885. There was success this time however and on 25th June, 1886 the Crofters Act became law. While it did very little for the cottars, it gave security of tenure to crofters. It also allowed them to bequeath their crofts to their families and outgoing crofters were to receive compensation for their improvements. A land court, known at that time as a Crofters' Commission, was set up. It's remit was to fix fair rents and to administer subsequent Acts. On Tiree thousands of pounds of croft rent arrears were written off which should never have been demanded in the first place.

The name Tiree is said to have originated from the Gaelic "tir-ith - land of corn" but locals now prefer it to be pronounced and spelt as Tiriodh. It appears to have been a supplier of considerable quantities of corn to Iona in Columbian times. There is to this day a special barley grown on the island which has a four rowed seed known locally as bere barley; there is a possibility it could have been introduced to Tiree by St. Columba and his followers. In 1774 each farm had a still and considerable profit was made from the export of whisky and grain. However an Act of Parliament in 1786 slowed this down when a heavy licence was placed on stills and an instruction from the Duke of Argyll said that only two were to be kept on the island. It was hard to enforce this law and illegal distilling took place to such an extent that some tenants were evicted from their land and the Duke's Chamberlain was asked in 1803 to remove all stills. Almost all the barley grown was then exported but it is known that in 1802 a large amount was shipped secretly to Ireland for distilling. At that time there was a steady shipping

trade between Ireland and the Scottish Islands. The first Christian settlers arrived on Tiree before 600 A.D. and were missionaries associated with Columba and Comgall, this is recorded by at least five sites. Comgall who was born in Co. Antrim in 517 A.D. established a church on Tiree around 550 A.D. and eight years later founded the now ancient Abbey of Bangour which was to become one of the most famous missionary schools in Western Christendom.

Mixed farming began on Tiree around 500 B.C. as was evident by the excavation of one of over twenty forts and brochs excavated in 1962. The artefacts indicated the buildings were inhabited from the 5th century B.C. to the 3rd century A.D. serving as defensive rather than domestic purposes which was to come later. Between the 3rd century and up to the 19th century conditions were difficult for the native islander and very little is known except that there was extreme poverty. They lived in houses constructed of stones, timber and turf and were situated in small settlements, the biggest being at Kenovay, Vaul, Balevullin, Hough and Heylipol. The latter had a population of 149 in 1764. Today there is scarcely more than half a dozen. The timber for the buildings was supplied from woods in Loch Sunart. Along with the working of the land, the only other major industry was kelping (the burning of the tangle weed) which began in 1774, reaching its peak during the Napoleonic Wars. In 1794, 160 tons of kelp was exported from the island realising a price of £4 a ton. This was £2 lower than it made two years earlier. In 1792 a large quantity of flax seed had been sown. It is not known how well it grew but earlier in 1745 over 100 women were believed to have been involved in the spinning of the yarn which was sent to a Dunoon linen factory. The bottom fell out of the kelp market following the abolition of the Salt Tax in 1825 together with the reduction of the import duties on alkali.

As islanders were emigrating to Canada in droves a Passenger Act was passed in 1803 to restrict their movements and to hold them at the kelping. Others said it was a genuine effort to prevent passengers in emigrant ships from having to endure the hardships their counterparts had encountered on the earlier Atlantic voyages. The Act laid down regulations governing the provision of adequate space for passengers, sufficient supplies of food, water and medicine - each ship carrying over 50 persons was to have a surgeon on board. This Act was however repealed in 1827 to again encourage emigration and this made way for the big mainland farmer and his sheep, 30 years earlier Tiree had hardly any sheep. The population of Tiree in 1831 stood at 4,453 and five years before the Act of 1886 it had dwindled to 2,730. Today it stands at 800.

The only fuel available in the late 18th century was driftwood, the island peat having been of poor quality and very scarce; islanders were later forced to go to Coll and the Ross of Mull to dig their hazardous cargoes of peat. It was during one of the return trips that one of their boats capsized resulting in the whole Tiree party being drowned, they were buried in Mull and Islay. Tiree stones used as ballast can be seen in the bays on the North side of the Ross of Mull to this day, their distinctive whiteness contrasting with the darker local Mull Stone.

The potato was introduced in about 1750 and islanders quickly adopted it as their staple diet much to their cost almost 100 years later. It was believed to have been introduced to Ireland first of all from North Carolina and was the staple diet in Ireland 200 years before it was introduced to Scotland. In 1846 the year after the



KELP BURNING, KENAVARA, TIREE. 1800's



KELP BURNING AT DUN HIADER, TIREE.

Irish famine the crop on Tiree failed, as it did the following year also, resulting in 75 per cent of the island population being without food - on Tiree this period is to this day referred to as "the year the potatoes rotted". In 1791 and 1792 conditions were almost as bad, but sufficient quantities of meal were sent to the island, relieving the situation. One million people starved to death in the famine years of 1845-46 in Ireland. It was conditions like these that eventually led to friends and relations of the islanders in London bringing to the notice of those in the corridors of power the plight of the people at home in the Highlands and Islands.

THE TIREE CROFTERS' WAR

In 1883 the crofters' allies formed the Highland Land Law Reform Association (later known as the Land League) in London. In August of that year 2,000 crofters from all parts of the Highlands and Islands, who were based at the summer herring fishing in Frazerburgh, resolved that when they returned to their various districts a branch of the H.L.L.R.A. would be set up. The Tiree branch was formed in the autumn of that year, having a membership of 700. It is not insignificant that close on 100 years later the eighty or so active crofters on Tiree decided it was time to organise a branch of the Crofters Union to project their views to the authorities concerned.

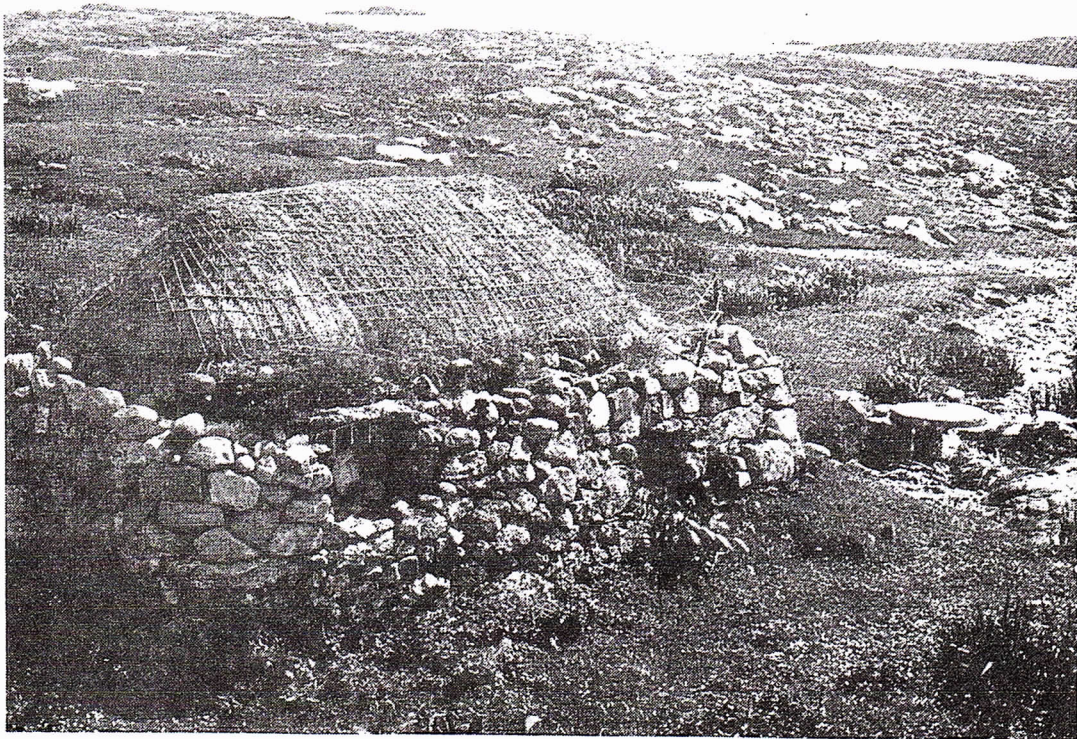
The Liberal government of 1883 formed a Royal Commission headed by a Lord Napier to investigate and to take evidence from crofters and others regarding the true position of the plight of those living in the Highlands and Islands. In August of that year the Napier Commission visited Tiree, they met in Kirkapol Church with over 800 islanders present, the Commissioners were able to establish that half the land was taken over by sheep farms and the remainder of the poorer land occupied by non-secure tenants. It was told rents had increased to such an alarming degree that crofters had no money to pay their highly inflated rent and were being evicted. Their now vacant crofts were added to farms at places like Scarinish, Baugh, Balephuill, Heylipol and Mannel. The 8th Duke of Argyll was astonished at the dissatisfaction of his tenants and their unhappy frame of mind. The events which were to follow he later named as "Linn nan Amadan - The Epop of the Fools". While agitation was happening in other islands Tiree was astonishingly slow to act. It was not until 1884 when leading Land Leaguers like John MacPherson from Skye (who urged crofters to fight for their vote) and much later an emissary from the Irish National Land League visited the island that crofters began to take action. A decade or so later it was however acknowledged by many that the chastisement of the Tiree crofters was the severest meted out by the courts to any group of crofters in the Highlands at the time.

The illegal stocking of Greenhill Farm by crofters and cottars was the start of the agitation proper on Tiree. One hundred years earlier the same farm had been subject to a slight controversy when the tenant Archibald MacNiven was short of money and the landlord withheld his lease until he had paid up. The accepted tenant of Greenhill Farm at a rent of £80 per year was a Mr. Lachlan MacNeill, a

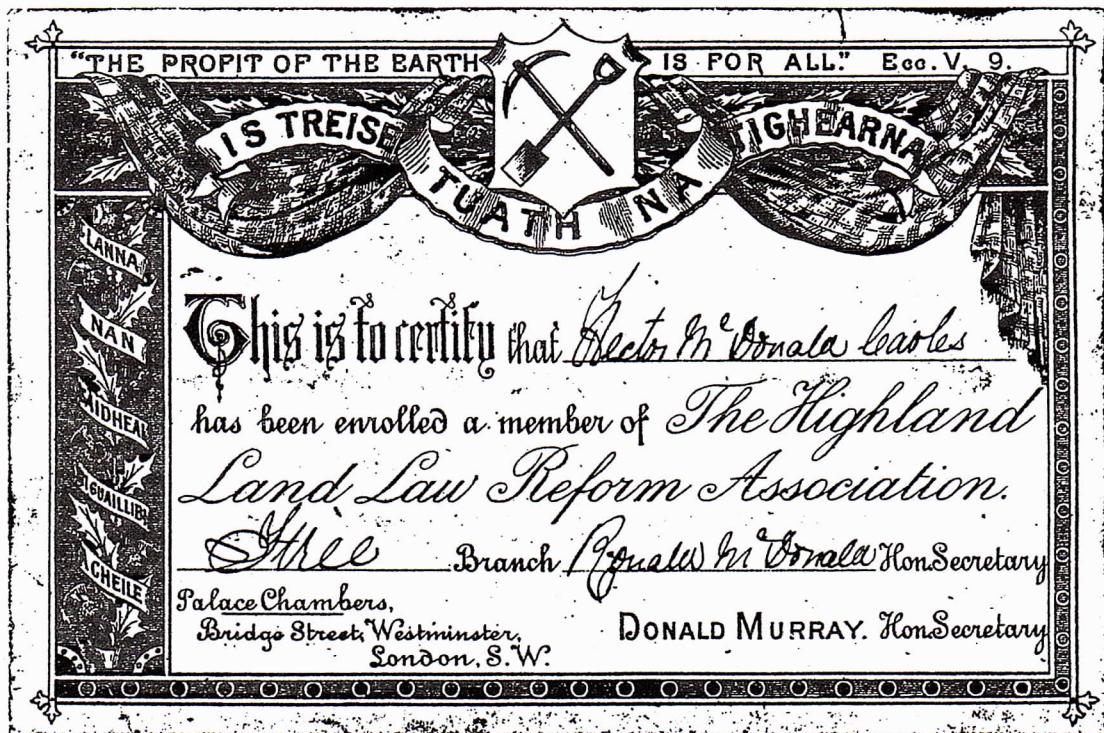
brother of the President of the Tiree branch of the Land League for three years. Lachlan MacNeill had been hindered since 27th May from taking possession of it by crofters as they accused the brothers of being involved in a conspiracy with the factor. Lachlan was told never to show his face on the farm again and his brother Neil was deposed from the Land League. Such was the anger of the crofters. In an effort to stop this situation developing further, the landlord called on the forces of the law to bring order to his Tiree estate and to remove the militant crofters from a farm they had taken without permission but were willing to pay a rent for. The show of police force on the island to serve notices on the crofters and cottars who had stocked Greenhill Farm was seen by the islanders as an extreme act of intimidation and provocation and this enraged them greatly. So much so that a large band of islanders outnumbered the police contingent, confronted them and forced the officers of the law to stop at an area between the townships of Balemartine and Baelphuill. A group then sprang through the police guard grabbing the heads of the horses which drew the traps turning them in the direction they had come. The police were forced to retreat but they then decided to proceed to Greenhill Farm. News of their arrival at Balemartine had already reached Greenhill and crofters there quickly armed themselves with stout sticks to do battle. The appearance in the distance of such an angry mob was too much for the Chief Constable of Argyll, Captain Colin Cameron and his men and there was nothing for it but to retreat (with Mr. Nicholson, the messenger at arms they were meant to be assisting to serve the writs) to Scarinish Hotel which is situated close to the bay where they had arrived the previous day. Thus the first round in the land war was won by the Tirisdich. The owner of the regular steamer "Hebridean" did not think it expedient to accept the patronage which the contingent intended to place on his vessel so that the party had been forced to charter one of the newest and best boats owned by Mr. McLaughlan, Fishcurer, Glasgow for their trip to Tiree. The first regular boat service to the island began in 1801 when a weekly boat plied between Tiree and the Ross of Mull. This decision by Mr. MacBrayne might have been taken in view of the warning given to one of his regular captains to Tiree, namely that if his ship brought any sheriff officers to the island they would take action to ensure she would not go back - they would sink her. In the "Oban Times" newspaper of 31st July, 1886 its editorial states that "If the Duke of Argyll does not now grant the farm of Greenhill to the Tiree crofters and cottars at a fair rent his name will become a term of reproach wherever British history is read". It goes on to say that the deforcement of a messenger at arms (who is only carrying out his duty) will do the crofters no good and is a dangerous experiment they will probably have to suffer for in the future. The newspaper did acknowledge however that "the farmers are very few, the crofters are many and the cottars are too many".

It was now obvious that the messenger at arms or sheriff officer, as he is called nowadays, had been deforced and the task he had been sent to do had been uncompleted. The lawlessness on Tiree had to be halted somehow and the only course left was to muster the forces of the Crown - this was done without delay and a troopship had been summoned.

Meanwhile on the evening of Tuesday the 27th day of July the chairman of the Land League, Donald Sinclair, Barrapol called a meeting in the school at Moss where he briefly outlined the purpose of the gathering. Over three hundred men



A FANNING BUILDING AT CAOLIS, TIREE.



CERTIFICATE OF MEMBERSHIP OF THE LAND LEAGUE

This certificate was held by a Tiree crofter, Hector MacDonal ('Eachann Ban'), Caolas (the great grandfather of Donald Meek). It was probably issued in 1883, when a branch of the Highland Land Law Reform Association (later known as the Land League) was formed in the island. The President of the Tiree branch at this stage was Neil MacNeill, Vaul, whose activities later led to the unrest associated with Greenhill Farm.

heard him outline the action they were to take; groups of men were to be stationed at strategic points on the island to keep a watch out for any developments which might be expected with the impending invasion. Those gathered agreed to meet at two o'clock the following morning at Crossapol to learn of any further intelligence reports. So great was their enthusiasm that around two hundred attended. They also came to an agreement that when the Government Expedition deemed necessary by the authorities arrived they would meet them amicably and without dissension and would accept the notices of suspension and interdict. A reporter from a well known Scottish daily paper which was pro-landlord was asked to explain the reasoning behind his paper's exaggerated and false reporting. The man humbly apologised and was told if he would now promise to tell the truth he would be allowed to stay and report on what took place at the meeting - this he undertook to do. All Tiree Land League meetings were opened with praise and prayer in Gaelic. Donald Sinclair told the "Oban Times" reporter attending that the struggle he had embarked on was, he believed, a Christian one and he went no further than to demand the people's right to live on the island freely. When asked why the League had illegally taken over Greenhill Farm he replied that several crofters and cottars were in absolute need of grazing land and although they took over the land there was every intention of paying a rent for it. What annoyed Mr. Sinclair most was the late President's attitude. Neil MacNeill, he said, had urged the League to proceed in carrying out the terms of the resolution to take over the farm but all the time he doubted his sincerity. At a League meeting the previous April when MacNeill occupied the chair he moved that the crofters and cottars take it over and subdivide it; anyone, he said, with an inclination to take over the tenancy of the farm before the Land Leaguers should be hanged to the chimney of Greenhill House. He was now of the opinion that MacNeill had used the Land Leaguers as a tool merely to further his own interests.

The first naval ship ordered to Tiree was the gunboat "Assistance". Leaving her berth at Plymouth she headed for Oban to uplift a police contingent. On the night of Friday 30th July, 1886 the turret ship "Ajax", the "Assistance" and the "Nigel" which had been chartered for the police visit the previous week arrived in Scarinish Bay much to the astonishment of the islanders who thought that because of the delay the visit had been cancelled. The three ships anchored in a line a quarter of a mile from the shore and began disembarking the law officers. The newcomers were Superintendent Frazer, Lochgilphead, Inspector Cameron, Tobermory and Sergeant Fraser, Oban, along with Sheriff Irvine and Captain MacKay. Altogether there were fifty policemen - 15 of whom were from Inverness - along with the two hundred and fifty or so marines. Their purpose was to assist the Sheriff Officer in charging crofters and cottars who were the ringleaders in deforcing the officers on the earlier visit. Some islanders exclaimed that this was quite a departure from normal events when one policeman managed to control law and order on Tiree and Coll, and when he had to attend court at Tobermory there was no relief policeman sent. The crofters and cottars were to be charged with mobbing, rioting and deforcement. Mobbing, according to the law of Scotland, then consisted of a number of people combining against order and peace to the alarm of the lieges. Rioting was similar to mobbing and deforcement was the forcible prevention of officers of the law or their assistants in carrying out a legal warrant of any law.

The next day - Saturday - the Government expedition set off with a Mr. Nicholson the messenger at arms, to deliver the notice of suspension and interdict on those who had occupied Greenhill Farm. The serving of writs was carried out without difficulty and islanders offered no resistance much to the amazement of the contingent. One of those served with a writ was Donald Sinclair, who was seen walking leisurely with his hands in his pockets a little distance from Moss Church. Moss Church was replaced shortly afterwards by a new building on the same stance, it is now called Heylipol Church. When asked in Gaelic by Inspector Cameron if he thought the others were at home, Sinclair curtly replied, pointing to Barrapol, "I do not know, you ought to know that yourself". Where the police and soldiers called at homes for a drink of water they were given milk and the kindness and friendly welcome they received astonished them. Here they were, a combined military and police force, on the way to extirpate what had been described in certain quarters as a rebellion, receiving a welcome which they would hardly expect were they on a mission of peace. One, a Neil Carmichael, cottar and labourer who received the writ turned the document over several times and looking at the long procession of soldiers said that he hoped the Government would build barracks in the district and enable the poor people to find some employment. The people, instead of being overawed, began to look on the whole expedition as a huge joke; it was a new thing to see a large body of soldiers marching through the island. A number of the marines had formed part of the expedition to Skye earlier and had picked up some phrases there which they put to good use on Tiree, such as "Ciamar a tha sibh" and "Tha latha breagha ann" - "How are you" and "It's a lovely day".

Meanwhile the Land League continued to hold meetings. It had by now banned the "Scotsman" newspaper reporter from its gatherings because of the false statements being made by the anti-crofter paper. The man present denied he had sent the report and that it was someone else but those at the meeting were not prepared to accept this and he was permanently expelled. Due to the island's isolation there was a lot of rivalry between reporters from the Herald, Mail, Scotsman and Oban Times to see whose paper would be the first to print the latest news. The two "Scotsman" reporters secured the services of a pigeon to convey the latest messages to the mainland and it left for Oban laden with a full report. There was no telephone service between the island and the mainland - Tobermory being the nearest point - a telegraph cable was laid between Tiree and Coll in 1888, it was restricted to official use only. Unfortunately for the "Scotsman" fate was against it and the pigeon like the one in Noah's Ark returned not with a twig but two columns of the "Scotsman" report attached to its legs. Two policemen on the "Nigel" were able to catch the poor bird and remove the "copy" material which had twisted round its legs. The unfortunate bird had been chased by seagulls thinking the fragments of paper were food. News of this incident spread quickly throughout the island and gave rise to a good deal of merriment because this had happened to the anti-crofter paper.

In 1886 kelping was still in progress despite its precarious state in the previous three decades and 300 tons valued at £1,200 was despatched to the North British Chemical Works at Dalmuir in Glasgow. Three hundred cottars were engaged in the industry and they each received £4 in kind for their years work. As they had no land they were only too happy to receive this meagre amount. There was a

general store attached to the kelping factory and Mr. Slaven, the Manager, paid his workers from it in tea, sugar, oatmeal, flour and other groceries. Mr. Slaven was accused of taking advantage of the cottars by valuing goods in his store at highly inflated prices. He was later questioned on this at Kirkapoll by the Royal Commission headed by a Professor MacKinnon, but it is thought he used the high cost of freight as the excuse for the goods costing more on Tiree. Iodine was another of the products extracted from the tangle but it too had been in less demand further reducing the value of the kelp.

Island House was the Duke of Argyll's headquarters on Tiree and islanders saw it as the island's seat of power. In the past when it was surrounded by water it was known as the Castle on Loch an Eilean and entry to it was by a drawbridge. It had been occupied by the MacLeans but was successfully besieged by Archibald 9th Earl of Argyll in 1678. It was then allowed to fall into disrepair. Archibald Campbell 3rd Duke of Argyll built the new Island House in 1748 as a residence for his factor on Tiree. Since then it has been renovated and is now occupied as a holiday residence by the present Duke of Argyll. A document which would be regarded in the present age as being discriminatory was posted on the doors of all the island's churches having emanated from Island House. It read as follows. "Notice is hereby given that after this date no tenant paying under thirty pounds of rent is to be allowed to use whisky or any other spirits at weddings, balls, funerals or any other gatherings, and all offenders against the tenor of this notice will be dispossessed of their lands at the next term: By order (signed) Lachlan MacQuarrie, Island House, 16th November, 1885.

In such circumstances the bravery of those who agitated should be admired, the courage they displayed with the memory of the evictions of 30 and 40 years earlier under the Black Factor fresh in their minds was an example to others in Highland areas under the same suppression to stand firm. Here they were with no security whatsoever making a definite stand for what they believed under God was their due right - a piece of ground to cultivate and grow crops to stay alive.

A week later on 6th August the arrests began, this following a week of inactivity which was not without speculation. A combined force of three hundred men left their ships and their temporary accommodation (a rat infested store on the pier) to make their way to the west end of the island, the time of day being 7 a.m. The weather was miserable with a soaking, drizzling rain, accompanied by a very strong wind. One of the marines was heard to say to his mate "These cloaks we are wearing are warranted to keep out the rain for 24 hours but this Scotch mist goes through them in one hour", such was the density of the rain. The first arrest was made at Balemartine where Colin Henderson was apprehended. He had been lifting lobster creels and was having his breakfast when the "visitors" arrived. Hector MacDonald, who resided in the same township, was arrested next; a friend who wanted to speak to him was hindered from doing so but a marine intervened and allowed them to speak. Alexander MacLean, also of Balemartine, was not at home and on being questioned his sister declared her entire ignorance of his whereabouts. They did not believe her and proceeded to search for him but he was nowhere to be found. A small party of marines were ordered to stay behind and watch the house. After this the expedition proceeded on its way to Barrapoll. Donald Sinclair of the Land League, who was by now quite



THE PORT OF SCARINISH
as it looked in 1886 when the military arrived



ISLAND HOUSE
The Factor's Residence as it looked at the time of the agitation

ill, was taken prisoner. Because of his weak condition, the Sheriff, out of pity, gave him a seat in the machine which accompanied the party. He was offered a drink of brandy but declined, stating that he was a tee-totaller. As the three prisoners went through Moss, the people shouted to them in Gaelic as they passed their doors, "They have not the heart to kill you anyway". Another leader of the League, Donald MacKinnon, Balevullin, was taken prisoner as he was busily engaged in joinery work in a shed at the end of a row of houses. It was then on to the house of another Leaguer, Lachlan Brown. On being told he had gone on business to Kilkenneth, three officers decided to go and search for him. They met Mr. Brown on his way home and unaware of what was happening at first he hesitated, on being told the purpose of the visit he immediately submitted and accompanied them on their way back to Scarinish. Shortly afterwards, Alexander MacLean arrived at the hotel at Scarinish and surrendered himself. He told the contingent that he had not been aware they were looking for him as he was away working at his usual employment at Heynish provision store.

The six prisoners left Tiree on the "Nigel" at 1 a.m. on the morning of Saturday 7th August. The reason for the early start being that they may be conveyed to Inveraray via Dalmally by the first train from Oban to the south. Sheriff Irvine remained on board the "Assistance" anchored opposite Scarinish Harbour and the two hundred and fifty or so marines were now accommodated in forty tents situated on the machair on the west side of Scarinish Hotel. The hotel keeper, Mr. MacFadyen, was now becoming annoyed with the contingent following the previous day's arrests and said that he did not want his hostelry to become a temporary courthouse and prison. Following the arrests of the known leaders of the Land League; Sinclair, Brown and MacKinnon, the League, instead of being weakened, appeared to take on an added impetus and a more determined purpose. About one hundred and fifty men assembled on the same day at Cnoc Eabraig near to the Baptist Church at Baugh. This meeting was attended by Pipe Major MacDonald, Balemartine who had served the country for twenty-two years in Sebastapol, Crimea and India. The Oban Times reporter present remarked at the time that the Pipe Major had at least five medals displayed on his breast. The proceedings were opened with a prayer in Gaelic by Angus Munn and James MacLean, a medical student, belonging to the island and home on holiday, addressed those present. He accused the police of using too much force in the previous day's arrests and said that they had broken furniture at MacLean's house at Balemartine, when they were searching for him. With regard to Donald Sinclair, he said that he had been taken out of his sick bed and arrested - Donald's brother was present at the meeting. Donald Lamont, Ruaig, suggested that a resolution condemning the Government for sending an armed force to Tiree should be passed. This was received with much applause.

Meanwhile, matters in the country at large continued as normal - at Corson's Mart, Oban, top Cross lambs were selling for up to 30 shillings, big cattle to £9-15 shillings, calves 30 shillings and young pigs up to £1.

The Forth Rail Bridge was under construction and the borough of Clydebank had been formed following the opening of the famous Singer Sewing Machine factory two years earlier. The Irish troubles were continuing with fighting on the streets of Belfast; stringent checks were being carried out on Irish Mail Trams at Euston, London following explosions at Victoria Station and St. James Square.



**THRESHING CREW OF TIREE SETTLERS
AT BRUCE COUNTY, ONTARIO PROVINCE, CANADA.**
It is interesting to note that in 1986 Tiree Crofters were importing hay
from Ontario in Canada, following the disasterous harvest of 1985.



MALCOLM MACDONALD, CROFTER, MANNEL
who was a close friend of The Rev. Donald MacCallum

The reigning monarch, Queen Victoria, had two years earlier celebrated her 65th birthday and the new Tory government was formed under Lord Salisbury.

In 1886 a young Glasgow business man, by the name of John George Govan, set up what was to be known as the "Faith Mission", its purpose was Christian Evangelism in the country districts of Great Britain and Ireland. This organisation became very well known in Tiree and the other islands through periodical visits by its evangelists, better known as "pilgrims" who held missions in the various local churches. Many islanders responded to the gospel through the preaching of the pilgrims and went on to become the leaders of the local churches and this work continues up to the present day. Donald Sinclair, one of the arrested men, went on to compose many beautiful hymns which are still sung in Gaelic on the island, a particular favourite is "An seann, seann, sgeul".

THE CROFTERS' TRIAL

The same week as the crofters were arrested, the Glasgow Highland Reform League held their monthly meeting in the Waterloo Rooms. They were pleased to note that Mr. Angus Sutherland, the crofters' candidate for the County of Sutherland, had won the seat from the Marquis of Stafford at the previous month's election. The same week, the Greenock Branch deplored the rejection by the County of Argyll of Mr. MacFarlane as their M.P. and confirmed that it was the complacency of the crofters which was to blame.

One must come to the conclusion that were it not for the support from places distant from the Highlands and Islands, the crofters would not have had the impetus or the financial resources to continue their agitation. Meanwhile, Oban Town Council and the Police Commissioners met and there was widespread criticism of the great expense which the police went to in sending their contingent to Tiree. One, a Councillor Munro, said that as a community they would have to bear a share of the expenses in the form of taxation. He went on to say that such a display of force, which would cost in the region of £1,000, was quite uncalled for and, as a Highlander and an Argyllshire man, he protested at the island being made into such a spectacle. He was of the opinion that a handful of men could have settled the whole business. The council chairman said that he had it on good authority that the only person on the County Board who voted against sending the police contingent was Major Malcolm, the new M.P. for Argyll. The new M.P., who was a Tory, was also later instrumental in having a copy of the "Crofters Act of 1886" published in Gaelic.

The Highland Land League Reform Association of London asked members to contribute to a fund being set up to provide legal assistance to crofters who might be arrested on the alleged charge of deforcement and to provide pecuniary assistance to those who may be evicted. The funds treasurer was Dr. Roderick MacDonald, M.P. for Ross and Cromarty.

On Wednesday, 11th August, 1886, the six Tiree prisoners were allowed bail following their appearance at Inverary Sheriff Court. They were: Donald Sinclair, Barrapol; Colin Henderson, Hector MacDonald, Alexander MacLean, all of

Le beannachdan, bho
Chòirneal I. W. MAC'ILLECHALUIM,
Fear-Pàrlamaid Earraghaidheil.

ACHD NAN CROITEIREAN ALBANNACH, 1886.

A C H D

A dh' ath-leasachadh an Lagh a bhuineas do Chdir-
fearainn Chroiteirean anns a' Ghàidhealtachd agus
ann an Eileana na h-Alba, agus air son aobharan
eile a bhuineas dha sin.—[An còigeamh-la-fichead
de 'n Og-mhios, 1886.]

GLASGHO:
CLO-BHUALTE LE GILLEASBUIG MAC-NA-CEARDADH,
62 SRAID EARRAGHAIDHEIL.

THE FRONT COVER OF A COPY IN GAELIC OF THE CROFTERS ACT OF 1886
with the compliments of the new Argyll M.P., Colonel Malcolm,
who defeated Donald MacFarlane in the Election of July, 1886.

Balemartine; Lachlan Brown and Donald MacKinnon, both of Balevullin.

Mr. Lachlan MacQuarrie of Cowglen, Glasgow, who owned a general store on Tiree, paid bail of £20 for each man. An observer, who was present, remarked that he hoped the men would be tried at their own court of Tobermory, rather than Inverary where the ducal influence was so powerful.

The same evening, the Tiree men left Inverary on the steamer "Lord of the Isles", arriving at the Broomielaw in Glasgow the same night where they were met by Highland supporters. The following night they met in the Waterloo Rooms to explain the state of affairs on Tiree and to arrange for their defence. Dr. Clark, the crofters' M.P. for Caithness, spoke at this meeting and carried his audience with him when he denounced landlordism and all its trappings. The meeting was also told that several other Members of Parliament were collecting facts on the Tiree expedition with a view to putting pointed questions to government officials regarding the sending of an armed force to Tiree to assist the Duke of Argyll. At this meeting, another committee was set up named "Tiree Crofters' Defence Committee" and when sums of money were collected from different areas, a day or so later, a total of £14 was announced.

On Tiree, sympathisers waited for news of the prisoners on the arrival of the "Trojan" but they were disappointed. The only information available was that their treatment in jail was much better than that given to ordinary prisoners.

The Tiree Land League decided at a large meeting of members at Baugh to remove the cattle from Greenhill Farm which they had illegally stocked and they came to the conclusion that there was little probability of them being put back. They did, however, decide to vigorously agitate constitutionally, despite most of their leaders being in jail. It was now known that the Tiree bards were beginning to become involved in what they saw as a new avenue in which to promote their works.

On the 13th of August, a large number of islanders assembled at Scarinish Harbour to await the arrival of the "Trojan" to meet their arrested brethren. Only two returned - Hector MacDonald and Alexander MacLean. The others stayed on in Oban until the following Monday as they were attending a special meeting in the town's Artillery Hall on the Saturday night. Despite the fine evening, a large number of sympathisers attended and Duncan Cameron, the editor of the Oban Times, was voted to the chair amid much cheering. Mr. Cameron, addressing the meeting, said that the present crisis was long expected and some sort of protest was bound to take place. He went on to say that if anyone cared to look at the Valuation Roll of Argyll, they would find that the rental of the island was £5,700 and less than half of this was paid by six individuals, while the remainder of the population paid the rest. This he thought was a very remarkable distribution of the land; there was a Mr. Barr who paid £1260 for 3 farms, the factor paid over £600 for two, while his brother rented one at £380. There was another instance, Mr. Cameron said, should have been borne in mind and that was the raising of rents in 1876 when the price of stock had risen somewhat. If rents were raised then, he told those assembled, why does the Duke of Argyll not lower them today when the price of stock is so low.

Donald Sinclair then addressed the meeting, stating that he accepted the Presidency of the Tiree Land League on condition that he would be allowed to open and close the meetings with praise and prayer. In the course of his remarks, he said that the ministers on Tiree did not sympathise with the crofters and cottars and did not preach the gospel of Christ so they therefore could not sit under their preaching.

He said that they, as crofters and cottars, went to the scriptures for the living truth and there they learned that the laws enforced on this earth were not the laws of God. In reading the Bible, they found that God did create the earth and that he created man to live on it - they were on their native land, where could they go?

In conclusion, a resolution was passed which was carried by the whole meeting which stated that landlords should be bought out and the land broken into small holdings. Copies of the resolution were sent to the Prime Minister, the Marquis of Salisbury, Mr. Gladstone, Lord Randolph Churchill, Secretary of State for Scotland and to M.P.'s of Highland constituencies.

The remainder of the prisoners returned to the island and on the Saturday night met at Moss School House, when the meeting was opened in the usual manner by Donald Sinclair. This time, Mr. James MacLean took the chair and introduced Mr. W. Jamieson from London who was a member of the English Land Restoration League who then addressed the meeting. He told those assembled of his desire to see Home Rule in both Ireland and Scotland and said the League he represented had exactly the same aims and aspirations as the Tiree Land League. Mr. Hector Stewart, secretary of the local branch, then read a letter from the London branch giving notice that they had instructed Angus Campbell, a solicitor, to defend the Tiree "deforcers" when the trial took place. The letter ended by saying that the Tiree people should be calm and have patience, be truly determined to be united and true to one another until victory was won. The chairman then proposed a resolution which was passed and then forwarded to Dr. G. B. Clark. It read, "This meeting of Tiree people expresses its indignation at the late government in ordering, and the present government in sending, the police and marines to enforce the unjust and oppressive laws of the Duke of Argyll and the result is that six of our fellow crofters have been sent to Inverary jail. It further resolves to entreat the county authorities and the government to dismiss the case as they are of the opinion that prejudice was the means of the apprehensions and not crime and that use was made only of this occasion for punishing agitators".

It was finally discussed how the arrival of the late M.P. Donald MacFarlane would be marked and it was decided that a deputation should go to meet him at Gott Bay.

In the 'Oban Times' of 28th August, 1886, correspondence continued between a Mr. J. G. Weir and the Duke of Argyll regarding the "Whisky Edict" which had been issued from Island House in November, 1885 by a ground officer or sub factor. The Duke had responded in the first instance by saying he had never seen or heard of the "Whisky Edict" until he had read it in the 'Glasgow Herald' the previous week.

On 23rd August, Lachlan MacNeill took possession of 'Greenhill Farm' and was now its undisputed tenant. He was accompanied by his brother John MacNeill who left his business on the mainland to share the honour his brother was receiving as "Fear Ghrianaid", which means, the owner of Greenhill. They did, however, leave their brother the deposed League President in possession of their house at Vaul with a single Ayrshire cow to support him.

Three hundred islanders gathered to meet Mr. MacFarlane when he arrived in his yacht, the "Hiawatha", in the evening at the Scarinish shore where she lay close to H.M.S. "Humber". Mr. MacFarlane, accompanied by a group of friends, came ashore and went to a raised area of ground where he spoke to those assembled. He said that the last time he had been on Tiree the island had only one policeman, today there was a large force of marines and police. Whether they had come to protect the people against the Duke of Argyll, he did not know, but judging from what had happened on the Isle of Skye, the marines were more likely to take sides with the people than with the Duke. He cautioned those present and said that the less collision they had with the law, in the form of the marines and police, the better it would be for them and everyone else. Mr. MacFarlane continued by saying that if the police had been sent to Tiree a week before the election he would now be the Member for Argyllshire. The expedition had, however, been cunningly delayed until it was too late for the people to remedy what had been done. Tiree now had a Tory M.P. but he believed Colonel Malcolm was a good fellow and he had never heard anything against him but he was a landlord and he did not expect landlords to alter the laws in the interests of the people. In parting, he said he wanted to leave some good advice with the people of Tiree - "Do not give your enemies a chance to catch you in law breaking, they are waiting for such an opportunity and would be delighted if they got it. Be wise people, keep up rightful agitation and you will win in the end". He told them he chose Argyllshire because it was the stronghold of the most mischievous form of landlordism in the country and not because there were not any safe constituencies he could have contested. Last December the people triumphed, last July the landlords triumphed and with those closing words he walked back to his yacht and left the island.

On Monday 30th August, in the House of Commons, Dr. G. B. Clark moved the adjournment of a debate to enable his motion about the Tiree Expedition to take place first thing the next day. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, replying, said that he did not think the House could agree the adjournment as the speech from the Throne was as early as 12 noon. Dr. Clark's motion, following the debate, was defeated by 197 votes to 122. The crofters' debate did resume the following afternoon when a number of Members of Parliament spoke out strongly against the treatment of crofters and cottars. The House was told that landlords were endeavouring to prevent the new Crofters Act from coming into operation. Dr. Clark said he wanted to say something on the Tiree case; contrary to what had been implied earlier, the gunboats and marines were not needed on Tiree, although islanders were glad to have them as their customers and would be richer by their visit. He described the distribution of the island land and the rent situation to the House, pointing out that over 300 cottars had no land whatsoever. The cottars had petitioned to have their crofts back along with a portion of the grazing land but they got no response from the Duke. The people were naturally

irritated at this sharp practice and resented it, the results of which are already known to this House, two of the deformed men having been miles away from the alleged incidents. He went on to quote the misrepresentations made by an Edinburgh newspaper concerning Tiree Crofters who were alleged to be firing shots over hedges when in fact there were no hedges on Tiree, this statement raised much laughter in the House.

The Autumn Circuit Court of Argyllshire met on the last day of August with Lord MacLaren presiding. His lordship was informed by the advocate-deputy that there were no cases on roll for trial. Addressing Sheriff Irvine and the other county authorities, his lordship congratulated them on the apparent absence of serious crime, mentioning that there had only been one case in the Spring Circuit. Lord MacLaren, continuing, said that he could not ignore to mention certain events in outlying areas of the county which rendered the necessity of the armed forces of the Crown.

It was regretted that law abiding Argyll people allowed themselves to be misled by agitators calling themselves "crofters' friends", the direct tendency of whose teaching is to encourage resistance. The present force of law would, he hoped, show that landlords can be protected in their just and proper rights as well as in the management of their properties, so long as they adopt no oppressive measures and deal fairly with their people.

SERVING MORE WRITS

At the end of August, 1886, with the Military Force still on the island, Sheriff Irvine together with Captain MacKay, Superintendent Fraser and George Nicholson Messenger-at-Arms with a Marine Escort set out with eighteen policemen to deliver more writs throughout the island. This time they delivered a total of 53, taking two days - some were issued to those already out on bail. Those who received them reacted to the issuing party in different ways, some were hostile while others appeared unconcerned. The list of names is too long to record here but they all lived in Kilkenneth, Moss, Sandaig, Barrapol, Middleton, Balephuill, Balevullin and Cornaigmore. On being questioned by the officers about their neighbours whereabouts, none of those receiving the interdicts would reveal their neighbours movements. As a security measure, a contingent of marines were situated on Ben Gott so that if any of the police met with resistance they could signal to them by the use of two pairs of flags, but the system proved unsuccessful when tried out. An instrument for telegraphing, called a heliograph, was also used, but, as it required the sun to convey its messages, it too proved a failure as there was a marked absence of sun.

On 28th August the Sheriff and his entourage left Tiree as it now appeared the work of issuing writs had been completed. Inspector Cameron and ten policemen remained on the island along with the marines. The marines had by now made friends with the islanders and held regular sing-songs in the open air at Scarinish school-house.

On 1st September an unexpected development took place when the Procurator Fiscal, the Sheriff's substitute and the Sheriff's clerk arrived that evening from Tobermory on the "Trojan". The following morning at 9 a.m., accompanied by the ten resident policemen and sixty marines, they left for the west end of the island to carry out more arrests. Having walked through the soft sand on Traigh Bhaigh, the contingent stopped for a drink at a well at the west end of the beach to which they had become quite accustomed to using. Their first arrest was at Balinoe where George Campbell was apprehended; he was charged with mobbing, rioting and obstructing an officer in discharging his duty on 25th July last. In a field near George Campbell's house, a large number of men and women were busy cutting barley for the factor and it was to this group the police went to before arresting George Campbell. Their next stop was at Balure where they met Donald MacKinnon, Shoemaker. He met them at the door wearing a leather apron and when they told him what their mission was he went indoors immediately. He reappeared fifteen minutes later and left with them. As he was led away, a woman in the village shouted after him, "May God help you Donald - you are taken away very innocent". A halt was called as they reached the house of John Sinclair, Balemartine. When told that he was not at home, the officers waited for a time and then proceeded to an area near the shore at Balemartine. They waited there for Gilbert MacDonald as his wife had told them he was away at the beach gathering limpets for bait. When he returned they allowed him time to get dressed and take his dinner while his three young children looked on; he was then taken prisoner. On the return journey the troops rested again at Crossapol Well. Their next stop was at Heanish at the home of John MacDonald. Here they arrested his servant, John MacFayden, a native of Balemartine, who was married with a large family. When the four prisoners reached the hotel at Scarinish, following hard on their heels was John Sinclair, accompanied by Alexander MacLean, one of the former prisoners and the Rev. John MacRury, Heylipol. An interrogation then took place at the hotel with the five prisoners linked to a policeman. Mr. MacRury, who was not a Land Leaguer, had, because of the earlier arrests, become sympathetic to the crofters cause and his presence at the hotel was greatly welcomed by those arrested. He demanded to know from Inspector Cameron what his motives were for the arrests. When told the reason, he agreed to pay bail of £20 for each man to have them liberated. It now appeared that the military occupation of Tiree was now almost over, as the marines were observed taking down their tents at Scarinish where they had stayed during those past weeks.

THE FINAL TRIAL

The trial of eight Tiree crofters began on the 18th of October at the High Court of Edinburgh with Lord Mure presiding. Those who were served with indictments were Alexander MacLean, Colin Henderson, Hector MacDonald, John Sinclair, John MacFadyen, Gilbert MacDonald, all of Balemartine; George William Campbell, Balinoe and Donald MacKinnon of Balephuil. Their alleged crime was that of mobbing, rioting and the deforcement of a messenger-at-arms; their actions hindering the serving of notices of suspension and interdict on residents of Tiree. It now appeared that not all those who had been earlier charged were to

be tried in court, neither did those summoned have their wish for the court to be held in Tobermory granted.

The case for the Crown was conducted by Mr. J.H.A. MacDonald, Q.C., M.P. Lord Advocate and Mr. MacKechnie, Advocate-Deputy. The counsel for the accused were Mr. Rhind, Mr. Orr and Mr. A.S.D. Thomson under the instructions of Mr. Angus Campbell, Glasgow and Mr. Officer, Edinburgh. Out of over 100 jurors, no fewer than 32 were challenged and the final 15 chosen comprised of coal and egg merchants, stationers, builders and surveyors.

The first witness called was the Chief Constable of Argyll, Colin MacKay. He told the Court he had served on the police for 32 years, 24 of them as Chief Constable. Chief Constable MacKay went on to describe the scene which confronted them at the Balemartine/Balephuil boundary when a group of over 200 crofters asked them what their mission was to Tiree with so many policemen. When told, the crowd became very angry. "The messenger managed to serve five writs when a group ran and held on to the machine wheels with someone else catching the horse by the head and turning him. When we eventually got the machines free, we turned back for Scarinish as hard as we could, the crowd raising a loud cheer. The messenger, though, wanted to deliver some more writs at Greenhill so we returned and went in that direction. We could hear a group shouting in the distance that no papers would be allowed to be served at Greenhill. The man we had as a guide to point out the houses to us was a ground officer by the name of MacKinnon. He was on horseback. When he saw the threatening crowd he became alarmed and set off in a gallop with part of the crowd in pursuit." The Chief Constable said it was now useless to proceed further as a deforcement had taken place. He had seen many crowds in his long service but this one was most excited. When cross-examined by Mr. Rhind regarding the force of 30 men not being able to control a crowd of 200, MacKay said that they might have but it looked twice that number. This was the first time the messenger-at-arms had experienced writs being refused.

Superintendent Fraser, Argyllshire police, told the Court that the group said to him "we took possession of Greenhill Farm and we are determined to keep it - you'll never serve a paper at Greenhill except at the point of a bayonet." Superintendent Fraser continued, saying, he heard a man shouting at MacFadyen the machine driver "Will you swear that you will go home and that you won't return with these men for this or any other purpose?" to which the frightened driver replied "Yes, Yes, Yes." Alan Cameron, Police Inspector from Tobermory with almost 40 years service, said that while there was much excitement he did not need to take the baton out of his pocket and neither did any of the other policemen. The cross examining continued until the court adjourned with Mr. Campbell standing security for the prisoners until the following day.

The next day, Tuesday, saw a large attendance of the public present again when Mr. MacKechnie called on the constable on Tiree, Murdoch MacLeod, to give his version of the events. He said many of the crofters present that day brandished sticks, spoke loudly in Gaelic and said they were going to take the machine and throw it over a rocky cliff. When asked by a jurer if he considered the crowd was there out of curiosity or for obstructing the officers, he said it was to cause obstruction. He was then asked if it was the usual thing for an officer to be

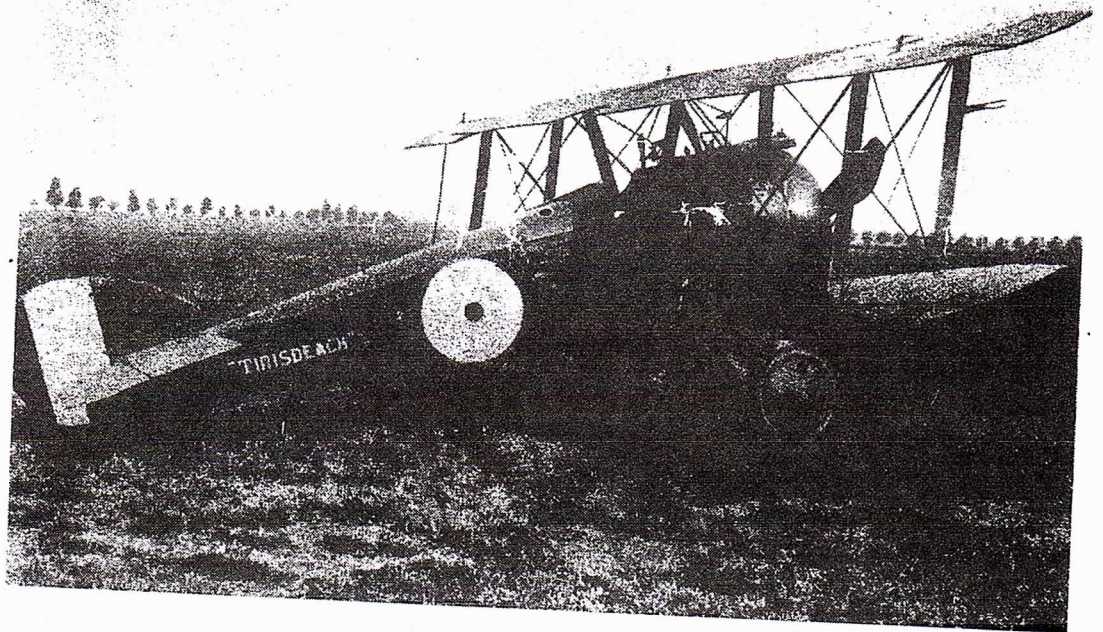
obstructed on Tiree to which he was confidently able to reply that writs had been served before without disturbance. Hugh Cameron, a constable residing at Oban, gave a fairer report to the court of the events and being a Gaelic speaker began to question what the interpreter had said in connection with the planned disposal of the machine. Constable Cameron said that the words used by one of the prisoners were "we should now go and throw the man with the machine over the precipice" whereas the interpreter had said "we should now go away and throw the man with the white horse into a hole or a pit". The judge was by now becoming very annoyed at the prominence given to the finer points of the Gaelic language and told the court that they did not have the time to be arguing about translations. James Christie, a constable from Lochgilphead, said he saw a man blowing a horn between Balemartine and Balephuill and when the writs were being served at the latter there was much shouting and jeering. He had also heard the Chief Constable being asked on whose authority he had been sent with such a large number of men. Constable Christie went on to say that there was English spoken as well as Gaelic, although he had no Gaelic he was of the opinion that it would have been dangerous to have persevered in serving writs that day.

George Nicholson, Messenger-at Arms, Edinburgh, examined by the Lord Advocate, said that in the course of his duties he was handed a certified copy of interlocutor against certain persons on Tiree. There was an escort detailed for their protection. He was a stranger to the island and not a Gaelic scholar. He heard a horn being blown and people coming in every direction in a very excited state. He had been unable to serve the writs personally. They were taken quietly from him at the houses by the women, two he fixed to doors. The police were surrounded by people all the time, later the crowd surged towards him and he had to get police protection. No harm came to him in any way, but if he continued there would be nothing but bloodshed and the sticks they had were so long the policemen could not match them. When questioned by Mr. Rhind, with regard to comments he made about people coming roaring over the hills, on an island that was almost flat, the Lord Advocate intervened saying this was not relative.

Mr. Nicholson's son, who accompanied his father on the expedition, said he could confirm everything his father had said. He acted with his father in the serving of writs when necessary. John MacDougall, a constable from Salen on Mull, told the court he had been stationed on Tiree for 11 years. He too could confirm what earlier witnesses had said and also the threat from the crowd that if the police were going to Greenhill they would be there before them. Duncan Cameron, a constable at Lochaline, had been earlier stationed on Tiree for 10 years. He spoke of his fear that someone would be killed that day and when he advised the crowd to go home they replied that if the police did not go home it would be them who would be killed. When asked if he would be prepared to use his baton if necessary, he replied in the affirmative.

After the declarations of several prisoners were read by the clerk of the court, the proceedings were adjourned until 10 a.m. the following day.

During this time, contributions were being sent to London in aid of the Tiree Crofters Defence Fund. Its treasurer, Dr. Roderick MacDonald, had received a sympathetic letter from a gentleman in London which included several



**AN AEROPLANE PURCHASED BY THE NATIVES OF TIREE
FOR THE WAR SAVINGS CAMPAIGN
IT WAS NAMED "TIRISDEACH"**

donations from English sympathisers. The need for more money to defray the expenses of defending the Tiree crofters had now become urgent as the fund had almost been exhausted.

The next day, Constable MacLevin, Salen and Constable Russell, Dunoon, gave evidence similar to that of the earlier witnesses. They said that the horses had been kicked and the drivers threatened. Constable Malcolm MacArthur, Tigh na Bruaich, said someone insighted the crowd to stone the police.

The assistant ground officer on Tiree, residing at Balevullin, was next to give evidence. Taking the oath in Gaelic, he told those present that he saw a crowd coming in the direction of the messenger and himself. He told the messenger his horse could carry two but he declined to go with him. By this time, the crowd were getting nearer but he rode as fast as his horse's feet could take him, eventually managing to lose them at Barrapol. They did not follow him to the factor's house and he could not identify any of the prisoners. Cross examined by Mr. Orr, Mr. MacKinnon told the court he had been a member of the Tiree Land League but had resigned his connection with it two years earlier. He said he did not give the crowd an opportunity to attack him and his reason for departing so quickly was the fear that his horse might be frightened and he would be thrown to the ground and be injured.

Charles MacFadyen, Scarinish Farm (son of the hotel owner Allan MacFadyen) and Malcolm MacPhee (labourer) Scarinish, the machine drivers, then gave evidence in Gaelic. Mr. MacFadyen said the crowd told him to go home and because he was frightened he obeyed them. When others had spoken, Mr. Rhind indicated to Lord Mure that he accepted they had obtained sufficient information from the prosecution to serve their purpose and did not propose to call any evidence.

The Lord Advocate then addressed the jury for the prosecution, saying the case was in one aspect very important indeed. He explained that law in the country had been secured for the liberty of everyone and for preventing that liberty from being interfered with. He asked the jury to imagine what could have happened if such an event had taken place within the city of Edinburgh. He believed the islanders had been insighted to violence by persons outside Tiree.

Mr. Rhind rose to address the jury, saying that it was with an enormous sense of responsibility he was speaking on the crofters behalf. They were honest hard working men who had never spent a day in prison or committed any offence.

The people of Tiree had been provoked by the action of the Duke of Argyll and his advisers, in obtaining the interdict within a month after the judicial commission had been appointed to decide the rights and wrongs of crofters. There were several ways in which the Duke could have served his application. The most obvious way was to have taken advantage of an Act of Parliament passed in 1882 which permitted the writs being sent through the post by registered letter and no one would have been offended. The first folly the Duke of Argyll committed was that of not taking advantage of this Act - the next was the provocation of islanders by sending an armed force of police and commissioners. There had never been a disturbance on Tiree before, nor the

serving of a writ opposed, so the sending of a regiment was an intimidation and an insult. It was under these circumstances that the occurrence for which the crowd asked the jury to consign these men to jail took place. The islanders had no notice of what was to happen as the news was kept from them until the invasion landed at Scarinish and proceeded to march throughout their island. Was it not the unutterable folly of the Duke of Argyll which led to the provocation? The islanders had been peaceful until the men reached Balephuill, when it was discovered that two of their own kith and kin were taking part in the police expedition. Mr. Rhind reminded the jury that Mr. MacFadyen, the driver, saw no stick being brandished in his face and had the policemen not been so chicken-hearted, but resolute in their conduct, he believed every writ would have been delivered that day without a blow being struck. It was further said that the horse had been hit with a stick. This was not true because MacFadyen, the driver, said that the horse had not been harmed. The messenger-at-arms had not been forced in any way - he arrived back in Edinburgh as well as when he had left it. Surely then, he pleaded, the verdict would not be to consign these man to a long term confinement, but be such as would send them back to their island homes of honest life and toil. Mr. Rhind was warmly applauded from the public gallery for his defence of the prisoners.

Lord Mure then addressed the jury for almost an hour, his remarks being somewhat discriminatory towards the prisoners.

THE VERDICT

The jury withdrew to consider their verdict, returning half an hour later, having found the prisoners guilty, but recommending them to the leniency of the court. The decision of the jury was believed to be ten for and five against conviction, while others said it was a majority of one. The announcement created much surprise and disappointment as those present were of the opinion that the prisoners would be acquitted. The 20th of October, 1886, proved to be a sad day for the many crofters and cottars on Tiree who had travelled to Edinburgh to accompany their fellow islanders.

The feeling of despondency was in stark contrast to that of the previous Saturday evening when they were entertained in Glasgow by their many friends. The chairman at the ceilidh was a Mr. John Kennedy, a native of the island. The proceedings were opened with bagpipe selections given by Michael MacNeill. Neil MacLean sang and also recited some verses he had composed about the Tiree expedition, not forgetting to mention the pigeon reporter in his composition. John MacLean, the Tiree bard, was asked to sing. He promised that if his friends got off successfully in Edinburgh, he would return and sing to them, to their hearts content. Archie MacLean sang one of the Tiree bard's songs concerning Calum Beag's supposed visits to Glasgow. Donald Sinclair was there too, reciting verses of poetry in support of those going to Edinburgh.

The next morning, 21st October, the crofters were brought before Lord Mure for sentence. Mr. Rhind, speaking on their behalf, said that there was no firm

evidence against any of them. Lord Mure, in pronouncing sentence, said the evidence on which the verdict proceeded was favourable to them, in as much as it did not appear that any actual violence was used against the officers. It was distinctly proved, however, that they had prevented the messenger from carrying out his duty. The Lord President, the judge said, had given warning some years ago that if a case such as this occurred it would be necessary to impose a severe sentence. He said the men were under some strange apprehension and had been ill-advised. He sentenced Alexander MacLean, Colin Henderson, Hector MacDonald, John Sinclair and George Campbell to six months imprisonment each; and John MacFadyen, Gilbert MacDonald and Donald MacKinnon who were in the category of observing a disturbance, to four months each. The prisoners received their sentences quietly. An Edinburgh evening paper, commenting on the sentences, said that it now appeared there was a law for the poor and another for the rich.

The following week the "Oban Times" opened a fund for those who wished to contribute to the maintenance of the families of the imprisoned Tiree crofters. The paper also said that an immediate appeal ought to be made to the Home Secretary for the release of the men.

A week later, it was announced by the Crofting Commissioners that Tiree was to be included in the list determined as crofting parishes under the new Crofter Act. The Irish Land League issued a statement following the sentences which said, "We, the members of the Glasgow branch of the Irish Land League, view with indignation the action of landlordism in tyrannising the crofters of Tiree and we sympathise in the distress of those who are suffering through the action of laws that require reform".

The prisoners were being treated as ordinary criminals in Calton Jail and, according to prison rules, were not allowed visitors for three months. A special plea was made to allow friends to visit the prisoners to convey instructions from them to their families with regard to their domestic affairs. A request was also made that a Gaelic speaking minister should be allowed to visit them on such days as the prison authorities deemed suitable. This was granted. The prisoners were found in good spirits. They told of how they had to sleep on hard boards in separate cells, but found the place to be not as bad as they had originally thought. Their only complaint was the verdict of the jury and the sentence of the judge. Their main concern was for their families who were left with very little food, as the only source of food (fishing) was very poor that year. On 5th November, a public meeting was held in Glasgow to consider the sentence passed on the crofters, to petition for mitigation of that sentence and also to take steps to make provision for the families of the prisoners.

Rev. Donald MacCallum

Donald MacCallum was born in Barravulin in the Craignish district of Argyll in 1849. He went to Glasgow University, completing his ministerial studies in 1880. His brother Malcolm also became a minister. He went to Skye in 1884 where his



THE REV. DONALD MACCALLUM (sitting) AND A TIREE CROFTER
beside The Cairn erected at Kilkenneth in 1889 by Tiree Crofters
as a tribute to the work he had undertaken for them.

arrival was viewed with dismay by his colleagues in the Church of Scotland, since his high level of commitment to the crofters' cause would highlight their own pro-landlord interests. In 1886 he was censured by the Presbytery of Skye for creating unrest. He had, since his arrival, been chairman of the Waternish Land League. In November 1886, he was arrested for his activities in support of the crofters and spent the weekend in a Portree jail - he was released on bail the next day and no further charges were issued against him. In 1887 the parish of Heylipol on Tiree sent a call to him, this call being resinded on the instructions of the Duke of Argyll who felt it would be injurious to the moral interests of the people to have Mr. MacCallum as their pastor. The parish, realising it need not listen to its feudal superior, since patronage had ceased in 1874, sent a call to MacCallum the second time which he accepted. He was inducted to the Parish Church on 22nd December, 1887. He immediately set to work, helping crofters and cottars. Shortly afterwards, he became Chairman of the Tiree Land League and his involvement brought a new sense of purpose to the League. In 1888 the League had secured a verbal promise from the Duke of Argyll that the land under lease to the farmers on the island would be given to cottars when the lease expired.

Donald MacCallum stayed only one and a half years on Tiree. It was said that this was due to the extreme poverty in which he found himself. As his church had gone against its feudal superior, he was denied the necessary financial help expected from the Duke, if he approved the appointment. Despite the short stay on the island, crofters and cottars showed their appreciation of his work by presenting him with a diamond ring. They also built a cairn on a raised area of ground overlooking the townships of Moss and Kilkenneth which was within his parish. On his departure he was presented with a scroll, part of which translated from Gaelic reads: "From the slavish fear of landlords jurisdiction and from the scourging rod of officers and ministers, you released many". On leaving Tiree, Mr. MacCallum went to Lochs in Lewis where he remained until he retired 30 years later. Despite his short sojourn on Tiree, he returned to the island each year in the early summer to visit his friends. Addressing a crofters meeting at Moss, Tiree in May 1911, he said to those gathered: "You must believe that it is God who created the earth and not the landlord and that you are to worship God and not the landlord or the township in which you live. You must admit that there are other men in the world as well as yourselves; that they too have rights on the earth and that it is your duty to help them in their struggles to obtain them, or the township in which you live, instead of being a garden of contentment, will be an enclosure of misery". He also wrote simple verse in Gaelic and English, his greatest work being "Domhnullan" which is probably one of the most notable simple contributions of Gaelic literature. Another of his poems was in honour of his friend John Sinclair, Balemartine who had earlier served a prison sentence in the cause of the crofting struggle on Tiree. Donald MacCallum died in Glendale, Skye in 1929 to where he had retired a number of years earlier.

FOOD PRODUCERS SENT TO PRISON

Crofting matters on Tiree after MacCallum's departure remained fairly

uneventful. A "Small Landowners' Act" was passed in 1911 when the previous crofters' acts were extended to the smallholders.

Agitation started on Tiree again in 1918 when eight crofters who had been promised land at Balephetrish four years earlier took it illegally and planted potatoes on the ground. The ground was withheld from them following a hitch which developed between the tenant farmer Mr. Barr, who owned the ground, and the Board of Agriculture, who refused to pay Mr. Barr the £1200 compensation he claimed he needed, as his lease had not expired. The eight had each been promised seven acres, together with the common grazing under the "Small Landowners Act" of 1911. Mr. Barr was tenant of the farm which extended to over 3,000 acres.

On 1st April 1918, Sergeant Gilchrist of Argyll police landed on Tiree and with the local constable called on the eight landraiders, informing them they were to be arrested for their breach of the interdict and their contempt of court in disregarding the summons served upon them. The eight men, Hugh MacPhail, Archie Kennedy, John MacLean, William MacPhail, Hugh MacLean, John MacInnes, Hector MacDougall and Hector MacLean appeared before Sheriff Wallace in Oban Court at 11 a.m. on the following Saturday, 6th April.

They insisted in stating their pleas in Gaelic and the services of an interpreter had to be got. It was apparent that this was an unexpected and disagreeable disadvantage to the prosecuting agent Mr. David Stewart, Oban. The solicitor for the accused, Mr. Donald Shaw, Edinburgh asked that the case be adjourned for a week. Mr. Stewart objected strongly, stating that his clients would be greatly inconvenienced by such a plan and suggested that the Court resume in the afternoon when they secured the services of an interpreter. The Sheriff saw no reason to refuse the men adjournment and arranged for the case to be heard the following Saturday. A representative of the Oban and Lorn branch of the Land League immediately volunteered to pay the £5 bail for each of the crofters.

The eight men again appeared before Sheriff Wallace on 13th April. The Duke of Argyll and Mr. Barr were represented by Mr. Stewart, the crofters by Mr. Shaw. The men had been met at Oban pier the previous evening by members of the Oban branch of the Land League whose chairman was Rev. Malcolm MacCallum, Muckairn. His brother, the Rev. Donald MacCallum, had been on Tiree a number of years earlier.

Mr. Shaw told the Court that he objected to Mr. Stewart accusing the Tiree branch of the Land League of having caused the present unrest. He said the League only intervened after the men took possession. Mr. Shaw then proceeded to read a letter sent to the Duke of Argyll from the Highland Land League Central Council, part of which said: "It will be within your knowledge that this land was about to be placed at these people's disposal for small holdings when a hitch arose over the matter of compensation. In this crisis in the nation's affairs, when our rulers are appealing to everyone to till every possible acre of land and produce as much food as we can to help the nation through the crisis, we feel that you will not willingly lend yourself to any repressive steps, even though zeal would seem to you sometimes to encroach on individual rights. We have, therefore, to suggest that you will take up this Tiree matter personally."

The above letter, Mr. Shaw said, was submitted to His Grace but no notice had been taken of it. Mr. Shaw then went on to give a history of the Tiree case and of how the Board of Agriculture went to the expense of having the ground surveyed and divided into lots. These eight men, he went on to say, represent 33 other dependants and they have sons in the army and navy. It seems that while the huns are preventing food coming from abroad, the Duke of Argyll and Mr. Barr, with the apparent connivance of the Board of Agriculture, are trying to prevent the production of food from the homelands. Mr. Stewart, agent for the prosecution, thought it sufficient that the men in the dock had either uncles or brothers to support them. They should be able, he said, to give them ground for potatoes, while the farmer with 3,000 acres of the best land would find it difficult. Mr. Shaw described this suggestion as unspeakable.

The Sheriff said his personal sympathies were with the men but he had to uphold the law. He would let them off with a nominal fine for their breach of interdict - he had nothing to do with the question between them and their landlord - if they would give an undertaking to refrain from any further proceedings in connection with Mr. Barr's farm. The men, Mr. Shaw advised the Sheriff, would not give such a promise as they had planted crops on the ground and they would need to be protected. The Sheriff said the position left him with no option but to pass judgement accordingly. He would sentence them to ten days imprisonment without the option of a fine, with the recommendation that they be treated as political prisoners. The Sheriff adjourned the proceedings to enable the accused to reconsider their position. This was done and the eight men were freed again. At 2 p.m. Mr. Shaw announced the accused were still adamant that they would give no such undertaking for the future. Sentence was then formally recorded and the "Eight" were guests of His Majesty in Oban.

On Monday, 22nd April, 24 hours before the expiry of their sentences, the Tiree cottars were released to catch the 5 a.m. boat home. They were well treated in prison and their main task, while there, was breaking sticks. An appeal was again sent out from the London branch of the Land League for financial support. It stated that those who sacrificed themselves in this manner should not be allowed to bear the necessary heavy expenses as well.

Further Acts were then passed which helped the crofters and cottars in their struggles. In 1919 a Land Settlement Act was passed. This was to satisfy the cottar population and also the soldiers coming back from the war. The majority of the crofts created under this Act were for tenants under the Board of Agriculture. The Acts of 1955 and 1961 made provision for generous cropping and improvement grants.

The Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 1976 has one disadvantage. It abolished the creating of new crofts. The only real benefit it had for the crofter was that they were now entitled to purchase the site of their dwelling house for the agricultural value of the ground it is situated on.

Who knows where the crofter would be today, were it not for the Agitation of the 1880's.



**A GROUP OF TÍRE COTTARS AT OBAN
WHO WERE IMPRISONED IN APRIL 1918 FOR ALLEGED LAND RAIDING.**