

# THE CREATION OF THE CROFTING TOWNSHIPS IN TIREE

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ERIC R. CREGEEN, ed. ANNIE TINDLEY

## Introductory note

This article was first drafted by its author, Eric R. Cregeen, in 1973; by his untimely death in 1983 it remained still untouched, as he worked on other areas of interest and helped to lay down the foundations of oral history practice in Scotland. It was, however, the research closest to his heart, part of the work for a long-planned monograph, which he was sadly unable to complete. It has come into the editor's hands via the good graces of his widow, Mrs Lily Cregeen, and its value to historical scholarship still being highly relevant and original, is presented here in a re-cast form.

Although now forty years old, the article which follows is still fundamentally original in its intention, scope and sources. Little has been published on Tiree, and the origins of crofting more generally, as discussed here, have been neglected by historians. Cregeen's object in writing this article was to 'trace the beginnings of the crofting townships in the island of Tiree and to examine the forces which led to their creation'. Although elements of the crofting experience have been extensively written on, its origins have seen less investigation, particularly the regional and chronological variations of experience.<sup>1</sup> This work is vital, therefore, in contributing to a fuller understanding of what was happening on one of the great Scottish estates in the age of improvement, and why.

Cregeen was a noted oral, as well as documentary, historian; a folklorist with a deep knowledge and love of Argyll. He worked and travelled throughout the county as an extra-mural tutor for the University of Glasgow from 1954, his memories of and reflections on which he published.<sup>2</sup> Although teaching across such a geographically challenging county, Cregeen also undertook his own

<sup>1</sup> For context please see E. Richards, *The Leviathan of Wealth: the Sutherland fortune in the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1973) and J. Hunter, *The Making of the Crofting Community* (Edinburgh, 1976).

<sup>2</sup> E. R. Cregeen, 'Extra-Mural classes in the West Highlands', *Scottish Adult Education*, 20 (1957), pp. 6–10; E. R. Cregeen, 'In Partnership: Adult education in the County of Argyll', *Scottish Adult Education*, 30 (1960), pp. 16–21.

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ground-breaking research, recording and collecting oral testimonies covering a wide range of themes. From the old droving practices of Argyll, to agricultural techniques, to Gaelic song and poetry, Cregeen broke new ground in his systematic technique of collection. He was also prolific in publishing his research findings, as well as generous in his support for the burgeoning field of oral history as a valid, and indeed vital, part of the discipline. He was a leading light in the organisation and promotion of the Scottish oral history field in the 1960s and 1970s, including supporting young researchers and historians at the beginning of their own careers.<sup>3</sup> In 1966, Cregeen took up a post in the Scottish Studies department at the University of Edinburgh and contributed a great deal to what is now Scotland's major sound archive, particularly in recordings and research relating to Tiree. Due to Cregeen's efforts, Tiree is one of the best-represented Scottish localities in the archives of the School of Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh. Additionally, copies of Cregeen's Tiree recordings have been deposited in *An Iodhlann*, the museum-archive on Tiree, making them fully accessible to residents and visitors to the island.<sup>4</sup>

As well as his expertise in the nature and opportunities of oral testimony and cultural history, Cregeen became one of the foremost researchers in the archives of the Campbell family, earls and dukes of Argyll, and their landed estates at Inveraray Castle. Although a survey of these archives was undertaken by the National Register of Archives for Scotland in the 1950s, they have never been easily accessible to scholars. Further, the estate management papers published by Cregeen are not included in the survey at all, enhancing further the importance of his published work, and this article in particular.<sup>5</sup>

His originality lies in the way he mixed documentary and oral sources to build a picture of the history and traditions of the West Highlands and Islands. His grasp of the complex social strata that made up Highland society before, during and after the age of Improvement was second to none. His command of the minutiae of estate life, captured in the ledgers, rental rolls and censuses of the Argyll estate, gave him a unique overview of a period of transformation, from the driving force of the successive dukes of Argyll to the percolation of these changes,

<sup>3</sup> See for instance, E. R. Cregeen, 'Oral sources for the social history of the Scottish Highlands and Islands', *Oral History*, 2:2 (1974), pp. 23–36; 'Flailing in Argyll', *Journal of the Society for Folk Life Studies*, 3 (1965); 'Oral History in Scotland: a report of the conference of March 1978', *Oral History*, 6:2 (1978), pp. 19–22; with D. W. Mackenzie, *Tiree Bards and their Bardachd* (Society of West Highland and Island Research, 1978); 'Oral tradition and History in a Hebridean Island', *Scottish Studies*, 32 (1998), pp. 12–37.

<sup>4</sup> M. Bennett (ed.), *Recollections of an Argyllshire drover' and other West Highland tales* (Edinburgh, 2004), pp. 8–9. This volume constitutes a major collection of Cregeen's work (published and unpublished), collected together with a detailed introduction covering aspects of Cregeen's life and work in detail not possible to give here. The emphasis in that volume is on Cregeen's oral history and folklore work.

<sup>5</sup> National Register of Archives for Scotland, NRAS1209, Campbell family, dukes of Argyll; see for instance, E. R. Cregeen (ed.), *Argyll Estate Instructions: Mull, Morvern, Tiree, 1771–1805* (Scottish History Society: Edinburgh, 1964).

mediated through the estate factors and chamberlains, down to their impact on the tenantry – a process and experience uniquely well-recorded in Tìree.

Tìree is of particular interest to the Scottish historian for two key reasons. The first is that a remarkable cache of archival records survive, documenting the minutiae of economic and social change on the island, still privately held by the Argyll family at Inveraray Castle, and to which Cregeen gained access and used to great effect in this article. Secondly, by illuminating the Tìree experience, Cregeen widens out a view of Highland historiography which has traditionally focused on a limited geographical range, principally Lewis, Sutherland and Skye.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, the themes and questions asked here by Cregeen remain central to the Highland historian: how can we explain the enormous and fast-paced changes of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century? What role did the landed classes play in these changes, and how did people respond to them?<sup>7</sup> Many of these questions are now asked through the prism of the Land War of the 1880s and more recent land reform movements. Cregeen, however, takes these questions on their own terms and applies ample and original evidence from the muniment room in Inveraray to answer them.

He gives us a detailed account of the economic and social structure of Tìree before the age of improvement, while noting that radical change was far from unknown before the 1790s. He then examines those changes and their motivations in detail, delineating the complex arrangements of administration and the tensions between the layers of command, and between that command and the people and tenancies it was re-structuring. He gives us a sense of the extent to which the ducal family were the agents of change and what levers they utilised to push through reform. And most importantly, by using one geographical case study, Cregeen helps us understand the motivations for these changes and their results in ways which side-step more recent academic conflagrations over the Highland Clearances. This article is an important piece of original scholarship, therefore, and adds much local detail to debates which have accelerated since the 1970s.

It further provides invaluable context for the wider trajectory of Tìree's nineteenth- and early twentieth-century history. This period was dominated by another strong ducal character, that of George Douglas Campbell, the 8<sup>th</sup> Duke, who like his predecessor the 5<sup>th</sup> Duke, took an active – even dogmatic – role in estate policy and management. He was in place to see the population of Tìree explode through the early decades of the nineteenth century and by the Highland Famine of the late 1840s saw Tìree as symbolic of all the social and economic problems of the western Highlands and Islands.<sup>8</sup> He imposed a programme of

<sup>6</sup> See for instance, Hunter, *Making of the Crofting Community*; Tìree's experience of the Highland Land War of the 1880s is discussed in E. A. Cameron, *Land for the People? The British Government and the Scottish Highlands, c.1880-c.1925* (East Linton, 1996), pp. 41–2, 63, 156–60 and in K. Mulhern, 'The Intellectual Duke: George Douglas Campbell, 8th Duke of Argyll, 1823–1900', Unpublished PhD thesis (University of Edinburgh, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> E. Richards, *Debating the Highland Clearances* (Edinburgh, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Mulhern, 'The Intellectual Duke', pp. 37–40.

reform for Tiree and a strict ban on sub-letting, both aimed at eradicating the ‘evils’ of the crofting system.<sup>9</sup> These reforms generated much bitterness among the Tiree crofting community, the current of which runs through their evidence to the royal commission that visited the island, as part of a tour of the Highlands and Islands generally in 1883, after agitation had taken hold in the region.<sup>10</sup> Further reform programmes were removed from the 8<sup>th</sup> Duke’s hands as the government legislated from 1886 on crofter’s rights and land resettlement programmes began on Tiree from 1911.<sup>11</sup> This article provides invaluable context for these later events.

### A note on the text

The following article has been transcribed from Dr Cregeen’s original typed text and then re-cast quite fundamentally in order to align with contemporary journal publishing practice. At the top of the first page of the original typescript was noted ‘FIRST DRAFT’ and this was confirmed by Eric’s widow, Mrs Lily Cregeen, under whose auspices this article has come to light. As such, she has given permission for the article to be re-shaped for publication, and this note will outline what has been done to the original typescript, so the reader can be confident of what they are engaging with.<sup>12</sup>

The first and most difficult task in editing this piece was the necessity of cutting the text back from 21,000 words to around 12,000 words to keep it within current academic practice. Although clearly intended to be an article, rather than (at least initially) part of his intended monograph on Tiree, Cregeen was evidently working out his ideas and arguments with a wealth of detail already to hand. As can easily be imagined, the task of cutting 45–50 per cent from the total text was not a simple one. This editing has been done in three ways: first, some of the illustrative examples and quotations used by Cregeen have been removed. Second, any extra examples used to illustrate key points and arguments have been unwoven from the text, leaving just one in place; and last, and most radically, almost all of the last section of the article was removed. This section was the most draft-like and unpolished, and instead the editor has incorporated the key points into a new conclusion, written by her, as the article had no conclusion as such. The main structural addition has been section headings throughout, merely as an aid to the reader, and these are chronologically-based. In making these changes, the editor

<sup>9</sup> Mulhern, ‘The Intellectual Duke’, pp. 36–7.

<sup>10</sup> See PP1884, XXXII–XXXVI, *Royal Commission of enquiry into the conditions of the crofters and cottars in the Highlands and Islands*. The evidence taken at Tiree runs from pp. 2128–82, with crucial evidence from the crofters as to the post-famine reorganization coming at Q33430, pp. 2129–30; Q33466, p. 2132 and Q33607, pp. 2141–4. For the factor’s retrospective defense see, pp. 2157–65.

<sup>11</sup> L. Leneman, *Fit for Heroes? Land Settlement in Scotland after World War One* (Edinburgh, 1989); Cameron, *Land for the People*, pp. 156–60.

<sup>12</sup> A full version of the original typescript is in the hands of the editor, and she can be contacted on: A.Tindley@dundee.ac.uk

has been keenly aware of the primary task: preserving the character of the prose, which is lively and mature.

The main addition has been to the references. The article was sparsely referenced, and in most cases these were merely indicative. The editor has completed these indicative references (all the original references have been put into italics so that the reader is clear what is editorial addition), and for those references to materials in Inveraray Castle, has matched these to the same sources subsequently published in Cregeen's *Argyll Estate Instructions* for greater clarity and crosschecking by readers. Where this has not been possible, the editor has attempted to standardise them and add as much detail as possible. Further, this article had no references, beyond a scant handful, to relevant historical literature. This was due to the article's first draft status as well as the different expectations of academic work in the early 1970s. No doubt Cregeen intended to add these at a later stage, and so the editor has done this, incorporating post-1973 literature also. In so doing it is not the intention of the editor to be presumptuous, but rather these references are intended to act as a guide to further literature (especially Cregeen's other publications) and to add context to the themes and claims made in the text.

The Gaelic scholar Alan Boyd has also worked on this text, and created a second run of references, giving the standard Gaelic place and family names throughout and clarifying certain points. To save confusion over referencing, I have incorporated all of these either into the main set of footnotes, or (in the case of Gaelic place names) into the main text itself. Lastly, the original text was dotted with Cregeen's notes to himself—reminders to expand or clarify a point, which were sadly never acted upon. The editor has taken these out of the main text and put them into the references, so that the reader can see the direction his argument may have taken at that particular point, even if the full exposition was never written in.

These changes have been made to make the article suitable for modern day journal publishing. Other previously unpublished pieces by Cregeen have been published elsewhere, although generally they have been left as found.<sup>13</sup> This has not been the case here, due to the very early stage this piece was at when Cregeen left it aside to tackle other projects. It is the editor's hope that readers will find the following article as stimulating and lively as she has done, and do not feel the shadow of intrusion too heavily.

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January 2014

<sup>13</sup> For example, Bennett, *Recollections of a Highland drover*.

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## Introduction

Crofters did not exist as a recognisable group or class in Tiree in the eighteenth century. Possibly there were sometimes individuals, on one or other of the extensive runrig farms, who held a piece of separate arable or croft land, without participating in the communal rights as the joint-tenants. Such individual ‘crofters’ do occur in eighteenth-century Highland rentals, but they were few and far between and were not encouraged by landlords.<sup>1</sup> It was not until the nineteenth century that the Highland scene began to be transformed by the appearance of townships of crofters.<sup>2</sup> They marked an abrupt departure from the ancient system, in that they united the scattered strips or rigs, which the joint tenants had held, into separate and compact arable holdings, and greatly restricted (though did not abolish) the interdependence which had existed among co-tenants of a farm.<sup>3</sup> They represented a partial triumph for the doctrine of individual enterprise generally accepted by the improving landlords and economists of the day.

At the beginning crofters brought improvements in revenue to the landlords and appeared as the answer to social and demographic problems that were becoming critical. Yet, in Tiree, and in other parts of the Argyll Estate, they can be seen to have been adopted with reluctance and rather as a result of almost irresistible pressures rather than as the product of successful long-term planning.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Although see M. C. Storrie, ‘Two early resettlement schemes on Barra’, *Scottish Studies*, 6 (1962) and J. B. Caird, ‘The creation of crofts and new settlement patterns in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland’, *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 103:2 (1987), pp. 67–75.

<sup>2</sup> See R. A. Gailey, ‘The role of sub-letting in the crofting community’, *Scottish Studies*, 5 (1961) and T. M. Devine, *The Great Highland Famine: hunger, emigration and the Scottish Highlands in the nineteenth century* (Edinburgh, 1980), pp. 9–12 for an overview.

<sup>3</sup> Devine, *Great Highland Famine*, pp. 1–2; J. R. Coull, ‘The island of Tiree’, *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 77 (1962).

<sup>4</sup> Macinnes identifies this as a shift from proactive to reactive landlordism: A. Macinnes, ‘Landownership, land use and elite enterprise in Scottish Gaeldom, 1688–1858’, in T. M. Devine (ed.), *Scottish Elites* (Edinburgh, 1994), p. 1; R. Gailey, ‘The evolution of Highland rural settlement with particular reference to Argyllshire’, *Scottish Studies*, 6 (1962); E. Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions: Mull, Morvern and Tiree, 1771–1805* (Scottish History Society: Edinburgh, 1964), pp. xxxv, xxii–xxiii; A. Macinnes, ‘Scottish Gaeldom: the first phase of clearance’, in T. M. Devine and R. Mitchison (eds), *People and Society in Scotland, vol. I, 1760–1830* (Edinburgh, 1988), p. 71; J. Hunter, *The Making of the Crofting Community* (Edinburgh, 1976), pp. 1, 3, 9.

What was planned was an island of large and medium-sized farms and a new village of tradesmen such as fishers and labourers.<sup>5</sup>

It is the object of this study to trace the beginnings of the crofting townships in the island of Tiree and to examine the forces which led to their creation.<sup>6</sup> The materials for such a study are, in spite of serious gaps, unusually abundant because of the improving zeal of John, 5<sup>th</sup> Duke of Argyll, who inherited the island in 1770 together with his other lands in the West Highlands, and aimed to reconstruct the whole economy of Tiree.<sup>7</sup> The detailed instructions which he yearly gave to his factor there afford a clear view of the changes that he had in mind; the reports that the successive factors and others transmitted to the Duke provide an equally clear view of the state of the islanders and of the impact that estate policy had on them.<sup>8</sup>

Some of the most valuable reports come before the 5<sup>th</sup> Duke succeeded his father, but they were, in fact, commissioned by him when acting for the 4<sup>th</sup> Duke. One, a plan executed by James Turnbull in 1768–9, is remarkable for its topographical detail and its artistry, whilst the accompanying descriptive account and schedules compass a wide range of statistical and other information.<sup>9</sup> Two reports, one dated 1769 and made by John Burrel and Major Donald Campbell, under the title ‘Observations’, along with a third endorsed ‘Remarks’, dated 1771 and unsigned, were influential in forming the Duke’s programme of action over the next thirty years and are found to embody as recommendations most of the measures that the Duke subsequently ordered his factors to carry out. A third report not commissioned by the Duke was submitted to him in the 1770s by Joseph Wight, the well-known author on agricultural improvement. The Duke later, omnivorous for information and in the process of remodelling his estates, instructed his factors to gather details of all the inhabitants, with their ages, status, families and occupations. The most comprehensive, that of 1779, has been published but there are also lists of inhabitants in Tiree in 1776 and 1792, although the latter is lacking in details of status and occupation and greatly inferior to those of 1776 and 1779.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See also E. Cregeen, ‘The Tacksmen and their successors: a study of tenurial reorganization in Mull, Morvern and Tiree in the early eighteenth century’, in E. R. Cregeen, edited by M. Bennett, *Recollections of an Argyllshire Drover and other West Highland chronicles* (Edinburgh, 2004), p. 83. This was originally published in *Scottish Studies*, 13:2 (1969), pp. 92–144.

<sup>6</sup> Macinnes, ‘Landownership’, pp. 14–15.

<sup>7</sup> Macinnes, ‘Scottish Gaeldom’, p. 83; E. Cregeen, *Inhabitants of the Argyll Estate 1779* (Scottish Record Society: Edinburgh, 1963), pp. 3–4; Macinnes, ‘Landownership’, pp. 2, 14.

<sup>8</sup> For the extant work by Cregeen on Argyll in this period, published before his death in 1983, see: E. Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions: Mull, Morvern and Tiree, 1771–1805* (Scottish History Society: Edinburgh, 1964); E. Cregeen, *Inhabitants of the Argyll Estate 1779* (Scottish Record Society: Edinburgh, 1963). The latter might be supplemented by A. I. B. Stewart, *List of Inhabitants upon the Duke of Argyll’s property in Kintyre in 1792* (Scottish Record Society: Edinburgh, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. xx.

<sup>10</sup> For further detail see Cregeen, *Inhabitants of the Argyll Estate*, pp. 3–4.

The consequence of the Duke's insatiable appetite for information is that the island of Tiree has a larger body of materials than possibly any other area of comparable size in contemporary Scotland.<sup>11</sup> Here one can do no more than indicate the sources of information that were at the Duke's disposal and which helped to form his programme of improvements. Sometimes, indeed, they even modified his own firmly held views, but it was only towards the end of his life that he made any fundamental change in his opinions and policies. Significantly, this change had, as one of its results, the creation of crofting townships.<sup>12</sup>

It is convenient to consider developments in Tiree in three periods. Firstly, 1768–c. 1790 as a period of little outward change, which saw the 5<sup>th</sup> Duke's programme of reform announced and begun, but scarcely beginning to bite. It was a period, however, in which radical trends began to show themselves in the economy and in the population. Secondly, c. 1790–c. 1799 as a period in which the economic and demographic trends became more pronounced, the island's dependence on outside markets grew, and the ducal programme, now more strongly pursued, showed itself increasingly impracticable. And thirdly, c. 1799–c. 1810 as a period of rapid change, in which a doctrinaire programme was given up in favour of a more flexible one. It is in this period that crofting townships were created, and considerable outlays made in the process.<sup>13</sup>

### Section I: Tiree to c. 1770

All the reports that the Duke received agreed in this, that this isolated and windy island, no more than twenty-four square miles in area, lying almost midway between Mull and the Long Island, was fertile and favoured by nature, and only required skilful management and the introduction of new methods and ideas to make it highly profitable.<sup>14</sup> It had excellent soil and grew considerable amounts of oats and barley. It was totally bare of trees or shelter, had little peat, and the strong winds tore great rents in the green machair land that lay behind the shores, creating tracts of sandy dunes of little use for agriculture.<sup>15</sup> But in pasture land, Tiree was unrivalled, with its three areas of common grazing: Druimdearg (An Druim Dearg) in the east, Druimbuigh (An Druim Buidhe) in the west, and in the centre the incomparable Reef or great green plain, which made all observers and agricultural writers turn lyrical and lament that it was not used to better

<sup>11</sup> *A fuller account will appear elsewhere* (this sentence refers to a major study on Tiree that Eric Cregeen was unable to publish before his death in 1983); M. A. MacKay, 'The Tiree Project', in *The Carrying Stream*, 3 (University of Edinburgh publication, 1993).

<sup>12</sup> Responses to this process were researched by Cregeen via the medium of Gaelic song and poetry, and can be read in E. Cregeen and D. W. Mackenzie, *Tiree bards and their bardachd: the poets in a Hebridean community* (Argyll, 1978), pp. 1–24.

<sup>13</sup> Macinnes, 'Landownership', p. 28.

<sup>14</sup> Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. xviii–xix.

<sup>15</sup> *Statistical Account of Scotland*, 1791–99, vol. 10, no. 29, Parish of Tiree, Rev. Archibald McColl, pp. 394, 398; M. M. MacKay (ed.), *The Rev. Dr John Walker's Report on the Hebrides of 1764 and 1771* (Edinburgh, 1980), p. 181.

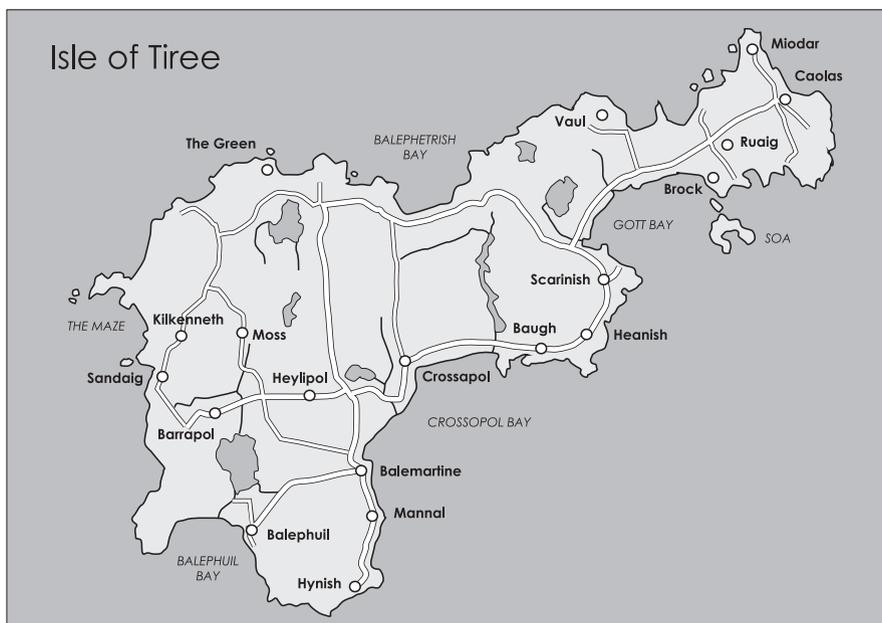


Figure 1. Map of Tiree.

account. Commenting on the Reef in the year 1764, Dr Walker (the celebrated author and divine) stated that ‘after the first of June, it is a common pasturage, to all the farmers in the island, and while it remains so, must remain in the finest unimproved spot in Scotland’.<sup>16</sup> He goes on to say that in the summer ‘there may be seen pasturing upon it [the Reef] at once, about 1,000 black cattle, 2,000 sheep, and 300 horses intermixed with immense flocks of lapwings and green plovers’.<sup>17</sup> Even in its relatively unimproved state, the island yielded a revenue of £852 to the landlord in 1770, supported a population of nearly 1,700 in reasonable style, and sold large quantities of whisky to neighbouring areas, besides salt beef in barrels worth £230.<sup>18</sup>

The Duke’s reporters drew the attention of the landlord to the unrealised potential that lay within the island’s resources, if he took steps to correct and supplement the deficiencies of nature and the caprices of the inhabitants. They pointed out that isolation and lack of communications hindered the development of this potential. Within the island, which was innocent of roads and any form of wheeled transport, small ponies laden with creels were the normal mode of transport, sufficient for the seaweed, stones and dung with which they were usually freighted, but not for heavier burdens. For sea communications, there

<sup>16</sup> MacKay, *Rev Dr John Walker*, p. 182.

<sup>17</sup> Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. xxi-xxii; MacKay, *Rev Dr John Walker*, p. 182.

<sup>18</sup> Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. xiii-xvi notes that the total estate rental for the Argyll estates in 1770 was £10,204.

was no regular packet either to the neighbouring islands or to the mainland.<sup>19</sup> For roughly half the year Tiree was cut off by gales from the outside world, since no harbour existed and the best of the natural harbours, Scarinsh (Sgairnis) and Gott Bay (Loch Glot), were lacking in shelter. Dr. Walker stated that 'there is not a creek round all the island where a vessel of any size can be safe if the weather is rough'.<sup>20</sup> The gentry had larger boats capable of going between Tiree and Mull or the mainland of Argyll, but the boats of the tenants were inadequate and had, moreover, to be light enough to be drawn up safe above the high water mark. Hence the paradox of an island community surrounded by some of the best fishing waters in Scotland (especially the banks to the east where the east coast fishermen and the Barra men caught cod and ling), but without a commercial fishing industry. The exploitation of the banks by fishermen based on new villages in Tiree was in the forefront of the advice tendered by the authors of the various reports composed for the new Duke.<sup>21</sup> Some of nature's deficiencies could not easily be corrected. The lack of peat for fuel was already becoming acute by 1770, and the absence of timber for implements and building had long been felt. Timber was imported in considerable quantities from the ducal lands in Sunart, and peat was cut in Coll and the Ross of Mull and ferried over on calm days by the Tiree people, but it was a drain on time and labour, and might sometimes be very hazardous.

In the eyes of the Duke's advisers, if the island was to realise its economic possibilities and bring benefit both to the landlord and the people, it was not nature but man who stood in most need of reform. With soil as good as Tiree had, it would be possible to increase production vastly. First of all, the amount of land available for agriculture could be greatly increased by draining many of the inland fresh water lochs and meadows subject to periodic flooding, and by reclaiming sand-blown tracts. Its fertility could be further improved by using marl, shell sand and other manures.<sup>22</sup> Yields could be much increased by introducing fresh seed, by the use of fallowing and new crop-rotations, and by bringing in sown grasses and turnips. The wasteful use of man and horse-power could be avoided if traditional methods were replaced by new techniques and implements. Several particularly described the primitive mode of ploughing and the room for improvement that it left.<sup>23</sup>

Some of these innovations had been already attempted by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Duke of Argyll, and had yielded promising, though limited, results.<sup>24</sup> It was owing to his initiative that the making of hay and crops of potatoes had appeared in the island for the first time, and that new seed and fresh bloodstock had been introduced

<sup>19</sup> Macinnes, 'Landownership', p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> MacKay, *Rev Dr John Walker*, p. 180.

<sup>21</sup> Creggen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. xxvi-xxvii; *Statistical Account*, Tiree, pp. 404-7.

<sup>22</sup> Macinnes, 'Scottish Gaeldom', p. 75.

<sup>23</sup> *Statistical Account*, Tiree, p. 396.

<sup>24</sup> For some more detail on this see Cregeen, 'Tacksmen and their successors', pp. 86-91.

to improve respectively their cereals and horses. But the failure of some of the experiments was due, at least in part, to the prevalence of the runrig system, to the open fenceless state of the island, and to the system of common grazing that was widely practised. By 1770, the Duke's advisors were pressing upon him the need to change root and branch the whole organisation on which the agriculture and wider economy of the island depended, to do away with the system of joint tenancy; to create separate medium-sized farms, and to insist on adequate fencing.<sup>25</sup> The surplus population resulting from this they envisaged being settled in newly-created villages established for the purpose of developing centres of fishing and handicraft industries. These were ideas which were much in the air at this time and which were to be applied with some success in other parts of the Duke's estate.<sup>26</sup> What could not be predicted was the relevance and applicability of these solutions to island areas like Tiree, where the outlook, habits and values of the people were rooted in a traditional culture that had little in common with those of the Lowland areas in which a new climate of thought had come gradually into existence.<sup>27</sup>

Who were these people whom the Duke wished to reform and reorganise? There were 1,676 of them in 1768, living in clustered hamlets or townships, ranging from about 158 to 12 inhabitants. The bulk of them were concerned with agriculture, either as tenants or servants. They had lived successively under the rule of the abbey of Iona, the Macleans of Duart and, since the late seventeenth century, the Campbells of Argyll.<sup>28</sup> The former dominance of the Maclean chieftains had disappeared, though a few of the Maclean gentry survived and served as a focus of discontent against the Campbell landlords. Improvement, begun under the 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke with the abolition of the tacksmen, had not turned out all that it had been represented to be, for although the 'common tenants' received leases for their land, and were relieved of services to the tacksmen, rents had steadily increased and many of the leases had been surrendered.<sup>29</sup> The native tenants overstrained their resources in competitive bidding against the Campbell candidates. There was by now a long tradition of hostility to the landlord, and of resistance against his policies. Much of this was factious but there was also a well-founded anxiety that the traditional way of life was in danger, and when ducal edicts went out remodelling the farms and their tenants, the native population tended to close their ranks and resist.<sup>30</sup>

From Turnbull's plan and survey of 1768–9, as well as from other reports, it is clear that whatever changes the previous half century had brought, much remained of the fabric of insular life in terms of economy, social relations and

<sup>25</sup> Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. xxvi–xxvii.

<sup>26</sup> Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. ix–xi; Macinnes, 'Landownership', pp. 15–16.

<sup>27</sup> Cregeen, 'Tacksmen and their successors', pp. 79–81; Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. xxxv; Macinnes, 'Scottish Gaeldom', p. 71.

<sup>28</sup> Macinnes, 'Landownership', p. 10.

<sup>29</sup> See Cregeen, 'Tacksmen and their successors' for an overview.

<sup>30</sup> Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. xxxv.

attitudes.<sup>31</sup> The whole island was divided into some thirty bailes, extensive farms not yet separated by dykes from their neighbours, each with a share of the commons inland and of the seashore. The sea and the commons dictated the lie of the farms; the sea providing invaluable sea-wrack for manure, as well as fish, and the commons providing grazing and fuel. In the broader west, the farms radiated out from the moss of Moinegeal (A'Mhointeach) and the common of Drimbuigh, in the east from the common of Druimdearg, whilst in the centre of the island was the low plain of the Reef, over a thousand acres of grazing, where the cattle of the whole island were pastured from June each year.

The farms were mostly very extensive.<sup>32</sup> Twelve exceeded 400 acres, and only eight were less than 200 acres. The average was 323 acres, inclusive of common grazing (but excluding inland lochs which equalled a twentieth of the area of the island) and areas of wind-blown sand on the coast which accounted for no less than one-eighth of the area of the island and composed nearly a half of such farms as Balmenoch (Am Baile Meadhanach), Sandaig (Sanndaig), and Kenvar (Ceann a'Bahara), on the west coast. The traditional fences in the island were made of earth, and divided the crop growing land from the grazing, but there appear to have been no physical boundaries separating the farms from one another. Dr. Walker says that the fields were mostly enclosed by banks, and that this must mean that each township had a number of enclosed fields.<sup>33</sup> Some farms were known to be better than others, but the most important distinction was that made between arable farms and grazing farms. The latter were not numerous, for the island was predominately given over to cropping, but they are found to be managed on a different system, usually in the eighteenth century being leased to a gentleman-farmer resident in Mull or on the mainland, who was permitted (even after the abolition of the tacksmen in 1737) to sub-let the farms to sub-tenants.<sup>34</sup>

The arable farms were held either by one principal tenant or by 'common tenants'. In the 1760s there were farms held by large tenants: one may call them 'tacksmen' for convenience, but the term was beginning to change its significance.<sup>35</sup> Resident tacksmen managed their farms by means of servants, either living-in or married servants (called 'workmen' in some documents; 'hynds' by Turnbull; the Gaelic term would be '*seirbheisich*') who received a proportion of the cereal crop as wages, and might also have the grazing of a cow. In 1768 there were in excess of thirty runrig farms, let to common tenants, practising yearly reallocation of the arable rigs, grazing in common and employing a township herd. They would work, to a large extent, as independent family units, employing such extra help as they could obtain from cottars in return for pieces of land and

<sup>31</sup> Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. xx.

<sup>32</sup> For more context see Cregeen, 'Tacksmen and their successors', pp. 90–1; Hunter, *Crofting Community*, pp. 12–13.

<sup>33</sup> Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. xx–xxi.

<sup>34</sup> Devine, *Great Highland Famine*, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> See Cregeen, 'Tacksmen and their successors'.

rights of grazing, but the absence of effective fences meant that all had to observe the traditional dates for beginning work and clearing the crops, and were expected to restrict their quantity of stock to their souming or allowance.

There were differences in size of holding among co-tenants of the same farm as well as among the various farms, but from Turnbull's data it appears that the average holding of a runrig tenant was fifty-one acres, of which about half was arable, nearly a third was common pasture, and the rest made up of moss, water and blown-sand (the latter around six acres). In terms of mail-lands, the average per tenant was a 3.3 mail-land, which in theory meant grazing for about ten larger animals (cows or horses) and their followers.<sup>36</sup> In actuality a tenant's holding and his stock fell short of the theoretical amount. Whether or not a tenant had a lease (and at least some of the common tenants possessed joint leases in 1770), he employed his land to support his close kinsmen and to pay for labour. A tenant with a family of grown, married children by custom divided his land among them whilst he was still alive. There were, in consequence, many more holdings than appeared in the rentals.

Notes that the factor added to the list of inhabitants in Tiree in 1776 as to their stock and general abilities are illuminating. At this period the island had about as many small ponies as cows and they counted as the equivalent in terms of souming. The average stock of cows and ponies for 156 tenants was eight, which would be made up of four cows and four ponies to each holding. This suggests that there was a gentle gradation of economic capacity and well-being among the common tenants of the island, with no great differences in wealth. Mailers, or sub-tenants, occupied a rather lower place in the scale of prosperity. Cottars, workmen, and even unmarried servants had a small stake in the land, if only rights of grazing. With luck and drive one might rise from being a cottar to having a tenant's holding but the ceiling of ambition was low. There was little striving towards material wealth or improvement in social status, though there was a universal and deep desire for a stake in the land, no matter how small. The effects of the kinship obligations and of using land to pay for services were to distribute land and stock widely rather than to build up concentrations of wealth. Any increase in population was bound to give further impetus to this egalitarian trend. To this subject we will return, but in the period under discussion it seems that although the fragmentation of holdings had gone far, there were tenants of

<sup>36</sup> Cregeen noted here: '*see p.81 typescript and calculate percentage of meadow, peat moss, etc.*' The typescript referred to is 160 pages written by E. R. Cregeen in the 1960s, largely based on the Chamberlain's Instructions and entitled 'Argyll Estate 1701-1806'. Page 81 of this typescript reads: 'The management of the farms in Tiree was still governed by tradition in 1770. Two-thirds of the farms were occupied by small tenants in 1776 who, as the 'fellowship' of the farm, managed it, should any of them fail in their payment. Each tenant had a share of the arable, common pasture and turbarry. On the average the tenant had a 57 acre farm if all types of land are included; made up of 14½ acres of infield, nearly 13 acres of outfield, an acre of meadow, 17½ acres of common pasture, 2¼ acres of peat, 7 acres of blown sand and 3 acres of water, so that in fact his area of useful land was 47 acres. If the 12 farms held by tacksmen in 1776 are excluded from the reckoning, the farm of the small tenant amounts to slightly less—a 51 acre farm inclusive of blown sand and water, or slightly over 40 acres.'

modest substance who were described as capable of holding a four mail-land farm or more.

According to Turnbull's survey, there were 241 tenants including hynds and mailers, and 170 cottars (of whom sixty-six were women).<sup>37</sup> There were, at this period, twelve upper tenants of tacksman class (members of one family are counted as one), even if they had no actual tack (as was the case in 1767 with the minister, Rev. Charles Campbell, and the factor, Donald Campbell). These twelve upper tenants occupied, usually on a tack of nineteen years, no fewer than seventeen and a half of the island's thirty-five farms. In terms of mail-lands, they held 491 out of the total of 936 in the 1767 rental, which gives an average holding of a forty-one mail-land as compared with the tenant's average of just under a three mail-land.

Thus in Tiree there still survived a powerful and privileged class of upper tenants, holding half of the land, usually on a tack, and paying well under half of the rent; in 1767–8, £303 7s 6d compared with £428 16s from the 155 tenants of the other farms.<sup>38</sup> Even allowing that several of their farms were lower rented because they were grazing, not arable farms, there still appeared to be favour shown to the tacksman. Perhaps this was because they were representatives of an unpopular new Campbell ascendancy. Since most of them were non-resident and rarely appeared, the native tacksman enjoyed greater influence than they might have otherwise had, though they stabilised their position vis-à-vis the rulers by marriage with the Campbells. The several families of Campbells holding land in Tiree had, in most cases, a connection with these farms extending back to the first half of the eighteenth century.<sup>39</sup>

The most powerful individual in the island was undoubtedly the factor, always a Campbell, who allied considerable economic interests as a landholder with his prestige as a member of the Clan Campbell and his power and influence as the representative of the Duke of Argyll.<sup>40</sup> From 1770 until 1799 the factor was Donald Campbell, son of Duncan Campbell, the tacksman of Aros in Mull, who was allied with many of the main families in that island. Characteristically, he had married a Campbell and lived at Island House built on an island in Loch an Eilein, with his wife and children and their servants, and presided over the destinies of the Tiree people.

How, in fact, did the agriculture carried on by the tacksman differ from that of the common tenants?<sup>41</sup> Mention has been made already of the distinction between grazing and arable farms. The grazing farms were in the hands of non-resident tacksman with farms in Mull or Ardnamurchan. A sub-tenant or manager looked

<sup>37</sup> Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. xx.

<sup>38</sup> For a general discussion of the Argyll estate rents in this period see Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. xxiii–xxvi.

<sup>39</sup> Macinnes, 'Scottish Gaeldom', p. 83.

<sup>40</sup> Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. xxxvii–xxxviii.

<sup>41</sup> Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. xviii–xix; Hunter, *Crofting Community*, pp. 12–13.

after the Tiree farm and sent the cattle to the tacksman's own farm to be finished before they were marketed. The Mull tacksmen were becoming specialised in cattle-rearing, so that the cattle from the tacksmen's farms in Tiree were no doubt of a better type and fetched higher prices than those of the common tenants. On the holding of the bigger tacksmen in Tiree there may have been upwards of fifty cows and their followers.<sup>42</sup>

Tacksmen's farms were stocked with ponies for transport and ploughing, as were tenants', but the upper tenants were earlier in adopting improvements and exchanging their ponies for heavier horses. The vast numbers of ponies that roamed everywhere throughout the year were seen by outsiders as a severe handicap to improvement, but for carrying seaware in creels from the shores in spring they were indispensable. A heavier horse might be better at working, but would require feeding, whereas the hardy pony could find his own sustenance throughout the year. Neither upper tenants nor common tenants had large flocks of sheep in Tiree.<sup>43</sup> Sheep were kept largely for their wool, but their habit of digging up roots and creating holes in the machair contributed to the spread of wind-blown sand (*sioban*) and the destruction of arable land and pasture. Of goats there is no evidence, but it was customary for cottars to keep pigs, whose rooting aggravated the problem of wind-blow on the machair.<sup>44</sup>

There is little reason to think that methods and productivity in agriculture, as opposed to grazing, varied greatly between tacksmen's and tenants' farms. They relied alike on barley, oats, and peas or beans, growing them in rigs, never renewing the seed, and content to see a return of two or threefold.<sup>45</sup> On some farms a little flax was grown for spinning into linen thread. Indeed, in the 1750s a thriving domestic spinning industry had existed in the island, which exported the yarn to Dunoon. Potatoes began to be grown in the early 1760s, but had not yet come to bulk large in the economy. Barley dominated the economy, with 400 bolls being produced each year. It paid the rents being either paid in kind to the landlord, or paid in money. There were still some fifty legal stills in the island where much of the barley was turned into whisky and exported to the neighbouring coasts and islands.<sup>46</sup> Oats were the second most important crop, and served as food for animals and humans.

Servitudes, or unpaid labour (*mòrlanachd*) had been abolished in 1737. Hence the situation of sub-tenants on the farms of non-resident tacksmen would be improved, approximating more closely to that of the common tenants. But possibly on the farms of resident tacksmen, sub-tenants had given way to married servants, 'workmen', charged with the work of attending to the arable and paid

<sup>42</sup> *Statistical Account*, Tiree, p. 411.

<sup>43</sup> Devine, *Great Highland Famine*, pp. 18–21.

<sup>44</sup> *Statistical Account*, Tiree, pp. 410–12.

<sup>45</sup> *Statistical Account*, Tiree, p. 397.

<sup>46</sup> See T. M. Devine, 'The rise and fall of illicit whisky-making in northern Scotland, c. 1780–1840', *Scottish Historical Review*, 54:158 (1975), pp. 155–77; Macinnes, 'Scottish Gaeldom', p. 83.

largely in kind, but without any degree of independence from the master. There is no marked difference in the productivity of tacksmen's and tenants' farms in the island. What is clearly apparent is the extreme paucity of specialised crafts and trades in the island at this period. Turnbull lists in 1768–9 only weavers (50), lint-dressers (1), carpenters (4), blacksmiths (3), and tailors (11). There were no masons, carters, wheelwrights or any of the other craftsmen normally to be found in a community of this size.<sup>47</sup> In 1771 two corn mills existed, one at Crossapol and one at Cornaig, but the inadequate flow of water restricted their use to less than half the year and drove most tenants and cottars to use the traditional quernstones. The better-off could send their grain to the Ross of Mull, where mills were plentiful. No cooper, brewer or shoemaker is listed, although there was one of each by 1776. There were no full-time fishermen, nor any of the occupations associated with improvement such as dyke-building or quarrying. Shepherds are absent, and so too are crofters.

This narrow range of specialists was not exceptional in the Hebrides and much of the mainland of the Highlands. To a remarkable degree each household was a self-sufficient unit, as it had to be where money was a scarce commodity. The typical figure in Tiree was the small tenant who worked his land with the assistance of his family and rarely employed a farm servant unless it was a cottar in busy seasons. Like small farmers at all times and in all places, he could turn his hand to any type of work on his holding. He was a jack of all trades, capable of building his own house, cutting and carrying his fuel, providing meal for food, catching fish off the rocks, manufacturing whisky, tanning leather and making shoes, and in general supplying most of his household's needs. Spades and iron tips for wooden ploughs would be obtained from the smithy, but he would make or improvise most of his farm implements, including his plough.

The township was the social, cultural and economic milieu in which the people of Tiree passed their working life. The townships consisted, in 1768, of typically between ten and twenty families, living in close proximity in a group of thatched houses. The clustered settlements are delineated in Turnbull's plan, showing each building clearly.<sup>48</sup> They are all within about quarter of a mile from the sea. There was, of course, a distinction between tenant and cottar in economic status, but little social difference, and frequently they would be bound together by kinship. In a typical runrig *baile*, one finds about half the number of cottar households to tenants, usually smaller in size because the cottars' children have grown up and left home to work as herds, dairymaids and servants in the households of tacksmen and better-off tenants. Cottar households contained, on average, two children, compared with the tenant's three, and were characterised by more frequent departure from the nuclear family of parents and children.

<sup>47</sup> See also, *Statistical Account*, Tiree, p. 404.

<sup>48</sup> Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. xx.

The clan system tended to strengthen links between higher and lower classes, and so to prevent social conflict.<sup>49</sup> Immense respect for the gentry can be seen in contemporary songs, and is implicit in much of the story tradition.<sup>50</sup> But in this island, where the former Maclean chiefs had been displaced by the Campbells, surviving clan sentiment was anti-landlord and could potentially reinforce any growth of class-consciousness and a sense of class oppression that might develop in the future. This was not to occur until the nineteenth century, but it is important to note that clan sentiment here had a radical aspect.<sup>51</sup>

In 1770, then, Tiree was still a remarkably traditional place, despite earlier attempts to introduce change in the form of a new tenurial system and modern technology.<sup>52</sup> There had been, perhaps, a slight increase in the size of the population, but this was probably not yet noticeable. Turnbull gave the population as 1,676; Dr. Walker spoke of 1,793 in c.1765, which may be overstated.<sup>53</sup> It was, at any rate, a basic assumption of the early improvers that population could be assumed to be static. Only gradually did its rapid expansion strike them and cause them to modify some of their cherished plans.<sup>54</sup>

## Section II: Tiree, c. 1770-c. 1790

In his instructions to his Chamberlain of Tiree in October 1771, the 5<sup>th</sup> Duke announced a comprehensive and well-digested programme of reform, based on judicious and expert advice.<sup>55</sup> Most of the programme was directly taken from a report submitted in 1771 under the title 'Remarks on the Island of Tiry'.<sup>56</sup> It is unsigned but is by the author of a report on Mull made in the same year, who clearly had an intimate knowledge of that island and equally clearly had no love for the Macleans. The author of these excellent reports was Alexander Campbell, a member of a family settled in Mull of the Bragleen branch of the Campbells, and who became the Duke's Chamberlain of Kintyre.<sup>57</sup>

In this report it was argued that the island's runrig farms were overburdened by cottars and unauthorised sub-tenants, and that a new village should be established on Gott Bay, the best anchorage in the island, to accommodate these 'supererogatory' tenants with houses and two acres each. By offering generous

<sup>49</sup> Macinnes, 'Scottish Gaeldom', p. 72.

<sup>50</sup> See Cregeen and Mackenzie, *Tiree Bards*.

<sup>51</sup> For more on this see Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. xxii-xxiii, xviii-xix.

<sup>52</sup> Cregeen, 'Tacksmen and their successors', pp. 93-4.

<sup>53</sup> Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. xx-xxi.

<sup>54</sup> Devine, *Great Highland Famine*, pp. 21-6.

<sup>55</sup> Instructions for 1771 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. 1-3; E. Richards, *The Highland Clearances: people, landlords and rural turmoil* (Edinburgh, 2008 edn.), pp. 45-7.

<sup>56</sup> Inveraray Castle Archive, 'Remarks on the Island of Tiry' by Alexander Campbell, 1771.

<sup>57</sup> The role of chamberlain constituted the Duke's chief estate manager or overseer, who had responsibilities across the whole of the Argyll estates. One of these was to oversee the activities of the various factors (one of which was based on Tiree), who ran the day-to-day management of their section of the estates.

terms, including houses and acres free of rent for some years, and long leases of their houses, the new settlers would be induced to take up fishing.<sup>58</sup> Relieved of this human incubus, the farms should now be set to 'the most sparsible part of the small tenants', whose holdings should be not less than a four mail-land (or twelve souns).<sup>59</sup> Grazing should be allocated to each farm by dividing the commons of Drimdearg and Drimbuigh. No immediate abolition of runrig appeared to be contemplated, though a check was to be put on particular abuses in agricultural practice. A third of the farms in Tiree should be allocated to tacksmen with grazing farms in Mull. But because of the 'disaffection' of small tenants and their strong adherence to the Macleans, long leases were deprecated.

It is this programme that was announced in 1771 and that continued to govern the Duke's thinking for the greater part of his administration. The chamberlain was ordered to set such farms as would shortly be out-of-lease to small tenants, 'allowing no tenant to occupy less than four mail-lands'. He was, however, to give them nineteen-year leases in due course.<sup>60</sup> This indicates that the Duke had more confidence in the islanders than had the author of the 1771 report. But the instruction about four mail-lands was impracticable even then. To accommodate the supererogatory inhabitants, the chamberlain was to fix the site of a village at Scarinish or Gott and encourage fishermen to settle by attractive conditions. The third article of the instructions required the chamberlain to recommend a set of regulations for the reform of agriculture for the island that would be written into tacks, and drew his attention in particular to the abuses pointed out by the 1771 report – 'the abuse of runrig, the multiplicity of unnecessary servants and horses employed in labour. . . you'll consider the errors of it, and what amendment will best suit the quality of the soile and the genius of the people'.<sup>61</sup>

It was a nice combination of a systematic scheme with a flexible regard for local conditions, and promised well. It remained to be seen whether the new village would meet its author's expectations, and would provide a sufficient lure to the cottars and other poorer members of the townships. This would depend much on the prosperity of the fishing and on the development of Gott or Scarinish as a safe harbour. Success of agricultural reform would also depend on finding enough tenants with stock sufficient for a four mail-land holding, and also would require encouragement from the Duke so that outlays could be made in fencing, new implements, new seed and drainage. Such encouragement could take the form of direct subsidies or remissions in rent to enable the tenants to make their own provision. The 1772 Instructions made provision for a new corn mill to be erected

<sup>58</sup> Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. xxx-xxxii.

<sup>59</sup> M. Gray, 'The abolition of run-rig in the Highlands of Scotland', *Economic History Review*, 5 (1952).

<sup>60</sup> Instructions for 1771 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. 1-3; Cregeen, *Inhabitants*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>61</sup> Instructions for 1771 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. 1-3.

and repeated the order to settle on a site and plan for a new village.<sup>62</sup> Much then depended on what the Duke put into Tiree in sheer economic investment.<sup>63</sup>

The Instructions of 1773–84 inclusive are missing, so the Duke's measures cannot be fully known. Certain other documents exist which help to fill in the gap, notably two lists of inhabitants in 1776 and 1779, and a summary of the state of the farms in 1782, besides a general survey of the whole estate by James Ferrier in 1778.<sup>64</sup> An account of the island, with suggestions for improvement, was submitted to the Duke in 1788 by the minister, Reverend Archibald MacColl, and the *Statistical Account*, written by the same author, appeared in 1794.<sup>65</sup> These accounts together help to establish the changes which had taken place in the period of approximately twenty years since the Duke succeeded to his estate. The existence of another list of inhabitants in 1792 makes this a useful date from which to review this preceding first period, especially as the war years, with their immediate and radical consequences for the island, had not yet begun.

A village was established at Scarinish in 1773 and during the 1770s and 1780s a church and granary were built. The granary was, evidently, a very substantial building, with imported materials. Trials of the long-line and hand-line were being made on the coast of Tiree in the summer of 1773 with a Campbeltown wherry, together with a crew of four from there also. In 1776 Scarinish was composed of 103 people in twenty-four households, of which fourteen had very small crofts; one managed the change-house, five were young fishermen and their families, and four were cottar households. By 1779 (a war year) the community had declined to eighty-six and some of the fishermen had left – either to the navy, one assumes, or to their former townships.<sup>66</sup>

In 1792 Scarinish had ninety-six people, but fishing was not being prosecuted energetically; indeed, no fishermen are given as such in the minister's *Statistical Account* of the island.<sup>67</sup> Although several boats had fished cod and ling in 1787 with success, in the previous year there had been only one boat out. This the minister attributed to the expense of the boats and gear, which were liable to be lost, the restrictiveness and complexity of the Salt Laws, the lack of a good market, and the need for a quay in Scarinish harbour or Gott Bay. Yet fishing boats from Barra, Tarbert and the east coast were fishing on the Tiree banks, as the minister pointed out, and he suggested forming a company strong enough to withstand short-term losses, and capable of seeing to salt and marketing problems. 'These

<sup>62</sup> Instructions for 1772 in Cregeen, Argyll Estate Instructions, pp. 4–5

<sup>63</sup> Macinnes, 'Landownership', p. 28.

<sup>64</sup> Ferrier's survey is not included in the published Argyll Estate Instructions, so are presumably available in the Inveraray Castle Archive; see also Cregeen, *Inhabitants*.

<sup>65</sup> *Statistical Account*, Tiree.

<sup>66</sup> The editor has been unable to source any references for the information in this paragraph, and presumably it is available in the Inveraray Castle Archive.

<sup>67</sup> *Statistical Account*, Tiree, p. 404.

concurring circumstances have, at least this year, disheartened the new fishing adventurers of Tiry'.<sup>68</sup>

There were sufficient small boats—eleven or twelve of three to fourteen tons burden, and numerous yawls—but for serious fishing out at sea decked boats were needed, and for these improvements to the various harbours around the island would be necessary, providing proper quays where boats could lie at anchor safely. Certainly, the lack of a single safe harbour was a grave handicap to the development of the island at this period—it was frequently remarked on—but one cannot be sure that the building of a quay would have turned the new village into a thriving community of fishermen and tradesmen.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, human nature played a part, as James Ferrier discovered when he visited Tiree in May 1776. He found the fishermen drunk and incapable on a calm, quiet day when he wished to try the fishing and ascertained that they had not been out all year, while a Clyde fisherman had been steadily and successfully employed. Ferrier subsequently gave instructions for the experiment to be stopped.<sup>70</sup>

Undoubtedly, good and speedy communications were a pre-requisite of economic expansion and diversification, and the lack of them proved a hindrance to the success of the marble quarry at Balephetrish (Baile Pheadrais).<sup>71</sup> Marble was being quarried through the 1770s and 1780s by expert quarrymen, some at least for export to Greenock but it was not until 1790–91 that a twelve foot wide road from Balephetrish to Scarinish was made.<sup>72</sup> In 1785 the lack of proper transport meant that marble blocks destined for Leith could not be conveyed to Scarinish without them first being cut in half. In 1782, the crop accounts show the Duke subsidising a packet from Greenock to Tiree eight times in the year, but there is no entry in 1783 or 1787. Ferrier thought communications the most important single factor: 'the ordinary people must be able to travel, and visitors come.'<sup>73</sup>

If the Duke's programme for the creation of new employment and the absorption of the 'supererogatory' population of the island was making only slow and limited progress, what was happening to the planned improvement of the farms? The leases which the Duke gave normally stipulated that a sum roughly equivalent to the annual rent should be laid out in building march dykes round the farm. Some of the tenants, particularly the large ones, are found building stone march dykes round their farms during the 1780s and enclosing the commons of Drimbuigh and Drimdearg with these farms. Where the tenants could not afford

<sup>68</sup> *Statistical Account*, Tiree, pp. 407–8.

<sup>69</sup> Compare this experience to the contemporary settlement and development of Helmsdale on the Sutherland estates: E. Richards, *The Leviathan of Wealth: the Sutherland fortune in the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1973), p. 173.

<sup>70</sup> Instructions and Report for 1791 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. 20–3; Hunter, *Crofting Community*, pp. 16–17.

<sup>71</sup> Macinnes, 'Scottish Gaeldom', p. 83.

<sup>72</sup> Report for 1791 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. 21–2.

<sup>73</sup> Report for 1778 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. 11–12.

this, the Duke sometimes built dykes for them, charging them 6.5% interest on the outlay.<sup>74</sup>

But little was said or done about the provision of drains for wet land (there is, however, an instruction in 1771 about possibly draining Loch an Eilein and others), or about new blood stock or seed grain to improve native animals and crops, or about better implements and methods of work.<sup>75</sup> One reason for this neglect may have been that the chamberlain had no great interest in such matters for which he was criticised by Ferrier in his 1778 Report.<sup>76</sup> Apparently, he believed that new seed corn would not succeed. Ferrier implies in his report that the chamberlain and his relations were preventing the development of the island by resisting communications and preserving the status quo. There is an important general point here that the old-time chamberlains were out of sympathy with improvement and the development of the estate on modern lines.<sup>77</sup> The *Statistical Account* refers to the continued general survival of old agricultural methods; of runrig agriculture, of light and ineffective ploughs, of too many ponies, of pulled barley, of machair land subjected to ‘the torture of the plough’ and giving rise to the spread of wind-blown sand.<sup>78</sup> This enterprising minister had introduced improved methods on his own glebe, notably heavier horses and ploughs, and had been able to reduce his staff of servants. It might seem that the Duke was being left behind in improvements by his larger tenants, though there was virtue in concentrating on a single fundamentally important improvement – march dykes – and seeing that it was done. After all, it was by starting on improvements in crops before dykes that much of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Duke’s work went awry.

The programme of creating small farms of at least a four mail-land appeared to have been forgotten. In response to the Duke’s request for precise information Ferrier had carried out a careful list of the whole population in 1776 and again in 1779 when it extended over the whole estate.<sup>79</sup> In the 1776 list he had added useful information bearing on each tenant’s qualities, notably his industry, sobriety and disposition to the Argylls, amount of stock, and what stock was possessed by sub-tenants. If tenants having ten or more animals (cows and ponies) are included, there were about sixty capable of holding a four mail-land farm.

Some of the less desirable tenants were dropped, as can be seen from the 1779 List and from leases, but during this period the programme of creating four mail-land farms generally was not pursued actively. The outbreak of war, and recruiting men for the Western Fencibles, meant that some changes had to be made in the plan so as to accommodate the relations of the recruits.<sup>80</sup> The large sum of £44

<sup>74</sup> Instructions for 1786 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. 6–7.

<sup>75</sup> Inveraray Castle Archive, Crop Accounts, 1771.

<sup>76</sup> Inveraray Castle Archive, Report by Ferrier, 1778.

<sup>77</sup> Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. xxxvii–xxxviii.

<sup>78</sup> *Statistical Account*, Tiree, pp. 396–8.

<sup>79</sup> Cregeen, *Inhabitants*; Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. xxviii.

<sup>80</sup> For further context on recruiting in the region see A. Mackillop, *More Fruitful than the Soil: army, empire and the Scottish Highlands* (East Linton, 2000); Devine, *Great Highland Famine*, p. 21.

17s was expended on 'recruiting for the Western Fencibles summer and harvest 1778'.<sup>81</sup> Yet encouragement was certainly given to the common tenants as well as to large tenants to carry out the basic improvement of building march dykes.

At the Duke's accession in 1770, the great majority of farms in Tiree, runrig and other, were let on nineteen-year leases and at rents that were hardly higher than they had been ten years before. In 1761 they stood at about £700; in 1769 they were at about £730. There were steady augmentations each year from 1770, so that by 1777–8 the rents stood at about £950. The increases were less than in Mull or Kintyre, but they were difficult for small tenants to absorb in an area which had little to show in the way of improvements, and in years of bad harvest or bad cattle markets high arrears resulted.<sup>82</sup> Ferrier commented in his report of December 1778 on the high arrears of the previous two years and the general fast rise in rents since 1770 over the whole estate, both of which had, in fact, resulted in very little improvement in revenue.<sup>83</sup> He continues:

Although the augmentations have made a great swell in your rental, I do not find that they have made the same swell in the actual return of money from the estate. For example your rental 1777 is £4,000 higher than the one in 1772, but in fact the last returned within £20 as much as the former, and the same is the case of most of the others years.<sup>84</sup>

It was probably due to his influence that the 1780s saw a marked slowing down of rent increases over the estate. In Tiree, the rental of £1132 (Tiree plus part of Coll) rose only ten per cent to £1243 in 1790. In another respect, however, Ferrier's influence appears to have thrown against the small tenants. Leases for nineteen years had been made out to a number of the runrig farms and their tenants, commencing at Whit 1777. They were clearly the first and basic step in implementing the four mail-land farm programme by installing suitable tenants and giving them security of tenure, whilst binding them to carry out improvements, usually a sum equivalent to one year's rent to be spent on building march and other dykes. Ferrier, however, noted in December 1778 that most of the tenants were 'in possession during pleasure' and went on to recommend that, since improvement could not be expected from them, it would be better not to give small tenants leases, but rather 'now and then to introduce some plain, useful improvement in husbandry such as introducing a better species of grain, mending the breed of their horses, furnishing them with better implements of husbandry, etc.'<sup>85</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Inveraray Castle Archive, Crop Accounts, 1779. *In 1776 the Duke had decided the number of tenants for each farm and who they were to be but the need to reward relations of recruits caused this plan to be departed from.*

<sup>82</sup> *As in 1770–1, 1771–2, 1777–8, 1778–9 and 1782–3.*

<sup>83</sup> See Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. xiii–xvi.

<sup>84</sup> Inveraray Castle Archive, Report by Ferrier, 1778.

<sup>85</sup> Inveraray Castle Archive, Report by Ferrier, 1778.

The fact that the total rent tended to level off in the 1780s suggests that most of the farms were now again on long leases, and the rents of the farms as given in the 1782 description are precisely those given in the leases, as are those given in the report on the 1793 Instruction. Again, in 1791 the Duke asks the chamberlain to begin preparing a new sett, as one is pending. There can be no doubt that Ferrier's advice about withholding long leases from small tenants was not taken, though some farms may have been left out.<sup>86</sup> It is notable that the number of tenants in runrig farms is not appreciably different in 1782 from 1788, and is also almost exactly the same as in 1776.

### Section III: Tìree from c. 1790

By the beginning of the 1790s, the Duke was beginning to feel a need for more revenue, and his interest in his original plans revived.<sup>87</sup> The task, however, was now more formidable. Numerous observers had, in the previous twenty years, drawn attention to the way in which farms were burdened with 'supernumerary' tenants and cottars, and had urged that they should be moved to a village. Ferrier, in his report of 1778, had even proposed settling them on those farms held by non-resident tacksmen. What possibly no-one had appreciated was the steady growth of the population of the island. It took the Statistical Account of 1794 to highlight what was happening.<sup>88</sup> The population, given as 1509 in c.1755, was now 2416.<sup>89</sup> Most of the increase came after 1768 when Turnbull gives it as 1676.

It is important to note, first, that Tìree was entirely free from emigration up to 1792 and, indeed for a period after that, and second, that the island was isolated, outside general influences and very static.<sup>90</sup> There was no material change in circumstances or way of life—clothing, diet, hygiene, medicine, housing, technology—except in two respects. First, the potato was introduced c. 1758 and became by the 1790s widely cultivated.<sup>91</sup> Second, there was a course of three inoculations in the fourteen years or so before the 1790s, a form of treatment that appears to have given protection to those who actually received it. The first meant an end of the periodic acute scarcities of food which must in earlier times have cut back the population by higher mortality, by discouraging marriages or by interfering with fertility. The latter may have had some effect in reducing smallpox deaths.

For some ten years between 1792 and 1803 the 5<sup>th</sup> Duke attempted, with great pertinacity, to put into effect the reform programme announced at the beginning of his administration. Central to this programme was the division of the extensive

<sup>86</sup> Instructions for 1794 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. 28–32.

<sup>87</sup> Macinnes, 'Scottish Gaeldom', pp. 78–9.

<sup>88</sup> *Statistical Account*, Tìree, pp. 409–10.

<sup>89</sup> Richards, *The Highland Clearances*, p. 59.

<sup>90</sup> *Statistical Account*, Tìree, pp. 415–16; Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. xxix; Hunter, *Crofting Community*, pp.19–25.

<sup>91</sup> *Statistical Account*, Tìree, pp. 396–8.

farms into small, compact farms, each under a single tenant who would be capable of managing his land more efficiently and would be helped to do this in a number of material ways. The Duke's revived interest in improvement owed something to his urgent need of revenue and his awareness that the rents on his estate had fallen behind those of other Highland proprietors and were not keeping pace with the rising prices of grain and cattle. The rents of South Uist, for example, had increased by about a half in the six years previous to the publication of the *Statistical Account* in 1794.<sup>92</sup> In North Uist, Lord Macdonald's rents had not risen markedly, but he took 800 tons of kelp from his tenants annually and realised the whole profits on the sales.<sup>93</sup>

The Duke's revived interest was indicated by his Instructions to his Tیره chamberlain, Donald Campbell, in October 1791. He was:

to prepare for a new sett by informing yourself as well as possible of the true value of each farm, and considering and pointing out the best mode of disposing of it so as to improve the farm, encourage industry, and at the same time give me a reasonable rent.<sup>94</sup>

The factor was to supply details of the production of kelp on each farm and of its sale and price, and to inform the Duke about the distilling of barley as, with the prohibition of private stills, two licensed stills had been established in the island.<sup>95</sup>

With his instructions of October 1792, the Duke launched his programme of reform. The tenants must forthwith be reduced to one to every four mail-land. The dispossessed or 'supernumeraries' were to be accommodated by dividing two tacksmen's farms when the leases expired in 1796. A tambour factory was to be established in Tیره, like the one at Inveraray, to give employment to 'the great number of idle girls there', and the women were to be taught to spin. A blacksmith and a cartwright were to be settled in the island to make the necessary equipment of a reformed agriculture. And fishing was to be encouraged as stated in the 1793 Instructions. For the time being, the Duke acquiesced in a rental considerably lower than he thought right: 'it may be accepted for the present until the people are put in the way of giving me a more suitable return, which I see is only to be by my taking my rents from them in the natural productions of the island and disposing of them to the best advantage, a regular plan for which you must prepare without delay'.<sup>96</sup> The agricultural and industrial reforms were virtually the same as those announced twenty years before.<sup>97</sup> The possibility of realising them seemed less now than it had before. If the island was producing more, its

<sup>92</sup> *Statistical Account of Scotland* 1791–99, vol. 13, South Uist, Rev. George Munro, pp. 298–9.

<sup>93</sup> *Statistical Account of Scotland* 1791–99, vol. 13, North Uist, Rev. Allan MacQueen, pp. 309–11; Hunter, *Crofting Community*, pp. 19–21.

<sup>94</sup> Instructions for 1791 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. 20–1.

<sup>95</sup> Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. xxxii–xxxiii.

<sup>96</sup> Instructions for 1794 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. 28–32.

<sup>97</sup> Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. xviii–xix.

more numerous mouths were consuming more, leaving scarcely any increment for the Duke. The situation, as the factor explained it, only emphasised the urgent need for reform, and at the same time indicated that poverty could not create the means for its own abolition.<sup>98</sup>

A debate went on between Duke and factor for several years as to the fair and practicable level of rents. What appeared fair to the Duke was, according to the factor, impracticably high. 'I cannot think,' the Duke wrote in November 1794, 'that this return [namely £1,000 – of this £338 10s arose from kelp], which is less than a shilling the acre, is what in reason and in justice I ought to expect from such land'.<sup>99</sup> Could he not reasonably expect as rent two-thirds of the barley crop of 1,000 bolls, worth £1,000 (a third would be left to the tenants for seed), a proportion of the cattle (in 1792 he suggested a half of those sold or 369 cattle) and a proportion of the kelp revenue? He was willing to let the tenants keep the oats, potatoes, flax, sheep, poultry, fish and dairy produce, 'which in other countries are sold for payment of the landlord's rent. I allow all these to go for the support of the tenants because I wish them to live happily and plentifully'. He blamed the factor for allowing agriculture to be neglected at the expense of the kelp industry, and for causing rents to depend too heavily on such a risky industry:

In place of recovering the rents from the natural productions 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 is that whenever a market for that article fails I am to get nothing for my land.<sup>100</sup>

The Duke showed a sound instinct in seeing the danger of relying heavily on the kelp industry. Small quantities of kelp had earlier been produced earlier in Tiree from the seaweed that drove in on the rockier parts of the coast, but in 1792 the island was already manufacturing 230 tons of it and a great part of the island's manpower was employed in this industry during the summer months.<sup>101</sup> It was only the beginning of a wartime expansion which affected every part of the Highlands and Islands where seaweed grew, and ultimately turned the Hebridean population into semi-industrial workers.<sup>102</sup> As the prices rose during the late eighteenth century landlords reaped a rich harvest, and in the end drew more from the kelp shores than they did from the farms.<sup>103</sup>

Sound though his instinct was, the Duke nevertheless was in no position to lay all the blame on his chamberlain, who had done no more than carry out estate

<sup>98</sup> By 1838, landless cottars made up 37% of the Tiree population: Devine, *Great Highland Famine*, p. 8.

<sup>99</sup> Instructions for 1794 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. 29.

<sup>100</sup> Instructions for 1794 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. 30–1.

<sup>101</sup> Hunter, *Crofting Community*, pp. 16–19.

<sup>102</sup> Macinnes, 'Scottish Gaeldom', p. 85.

<sup>103</sup> Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. xxxii–xxxiii.

policy—a policy, as he was quick to point out, that had favoured the growth of population and the sub-division of farms.<sup>104</sup> By the late 1790s there were scarcely ‘forty [tenants] among them who could stock and manage four mail-land possessions’. The population now numbered 2,500, of whom 229 were tenants. The factor set out the production of each farm in the island, together with the monetary value of it and the rent. In all, kelp produced £691 17s 6d, barley produced £674 1s and cattle £632, whilst income from horses, potatoes, linen and grazing yielded £352; in all £2345 18 6d. Of this, rent absorbed £1022 4s 2d.<sup>105</sup> Without the income from kelp, the island could not maintain so large a population. Clearly, too, it would be dangerous to push the rent up much higher, when it already amounted to 51% of the island’s monetary income. Indeed, it was not until the end of the decade and the opening years of the nineteenth century that the rental of Tiree grew at all considerably. This was due to kelp, which the Duke succumbed to.<sup>106</sup>

By the late 1790s there was no question in the Duke’s mind about the wisdom of relying heavily on kelp: it had become indispensable, and increasingly influenced estate policy.<sup>107</sup> In 1799 he was instructing the factor:

‘As you inform that small tenants can afford to pay more rent for farms in Tiree than gentlemen farmers owing to the manufacture of kelp, this determines me to let the farms to small tenants which have been and are at present possessed by tacksmen who reside upon farms in Mull.’<sup>108</sup>

An immediate and important result of this was that Barrapol and Kenavara were not re-let to Archibald Campbell of Fracadale but to sixteen small tenants from Whit 1800.

Collecting barley and kelp in kind had a beneficial effect on the island’s communications, for the Duke, in partnership with others, purchased a sloop to run several times a year to Tiree. Some work was also done on the harbour at Scarinish, and encouragement was given to the new weekly packet between the island and the north of Mull for the transport of passengers and mail.<sup>109</sup> The profits of this important industry provided a new and expanding revenue to both Duke and islanders. In contrast with other estates in the Hebrides, the tenants on the Argyll estate retained the kelp and marketed it through the Duke, whose own share in it arose as a result of the tenants’ larger income. This difference in management was a result of the strong arguments put forward by the Mull

<sup>104</sup> Report for 1794 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. 32–4.

<sup>105</sup> Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. 32–3.

<sup>106</sup> Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. 39; Macinnes, ‘Scottish Gaeldom’, p. 85.

<sup>107</sup> Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. xxxii–xxxiii, 71. For more on kelp in the Highland economy more widely see M. Gray, *The Highland Economy 1750–1850* (Edinburgh, 1957).

<sup>108</sup> Instructions for 1799 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. 48–9.

<sup>109</sup> Report for 1802 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. 66–73.

factor, James Maxwell, several years before, in favour of the tenants retaining the management of the kelp in consideration of paying higher rents.<sup>110</sup>

The collection of barley in lieu of money rent had less happy results. Not only was it less profitable financially, but it involved the Duke in the most direct confrontation with the tenants that he had ever had.<sup>111</sup> In 1801 he had ordered that the island's barley crop should be collected in kind, and to ensure that it was not diverted to illicit stills, required that 'the pernicious practice of distilling and smuggling whisky' be prevented.<sup>112</sup> Already a majority of all the island's tenants (157) had been convicted before the justice of the peace (also the factor) of this offence and punished severely. They were to pay immediately all arrears of rent, and as a further deterrent, every tenth man was dispossessed of his farm and required to leave the island.<sup>113</sup>

Beginning with the setting of Gortandomhnuil to sixteen small tenants as from Whit 1801, with the idea of their occupying their holdings separately, the Duke announced in his Instructions of 1801 that all the farms in the island should be divided into four mail-land holdings and the supernumerary tenants and fenciblemen should be found accommodation in three townships – Scarinish, Balemartin and Crossapol – which were 'to be cut down into small crofts, agreeable to the plan of Scarinish Anno 1769'.<sup>114</sup> Crofters willing to undertake fishing were to receive positive help in house-building and in enclosing their crofts, as well as nineteen-year leases.<sup>115</sup> The fishermen were to be given £10 sterling or hooks and lines to this value. A whole series of reforms was introduced to launch the new agrarian system. The mill at Cornaig was repaired, the island's vast numbers of horses were reduced, seed was given gratis to any who had prepared the ground, and premiums were offered for ploughing with oxen.<sup>116</sup> Trees were sent from Inveraray and Kintyre to plant in the island as an experiment.<sup>117</sup> A market was established, to be held in May and October and new schools and churches planned.<sup>118</sup>

Had the Duke's ambitious plan been realised, the history of the island would have been radically different. As it was, the harsh facts of poverty and overpopulation had to be accepted, though not without a struggle. The new factor, Malcolm McLaurine, nervously pointed to the difficulties in 1802.<sup>119</sup> 170

<sup>110</sup> Cregeen notes here: 'Give details from accounts of how it was managed, and profits shared with tenants.'

<sup>111</sup> Report for 1802 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. 66–73.

<sup>112</sup> Report for 1802 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. 69; Instructions for 1803 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. 73–8.

<sup>113</sup> Report for 1801 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. 57–8.

<sup>114</sup> Instructions for 1801 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. 55.

<sup>115</sup> Report for 1803 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. 78–84.

<sup>116</sup> Instructions for 1801 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. 56; Report for 1803 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. 82.

<sup>117</sup> Instructions for 1802 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. 65; Report for 1802 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. 72.

<sup>118</sup> Instructions for 1802 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. 65.

<sup>119</sup> Report for 1802 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. 66–7.

tenants would be required to stock the 682 mail-lands that were to be made into compact holdings. There were 286 tenants at present, and of these only thirty to forty had the necessary stock. Undaunted, the Duke insisted that the scheme should be carried out. 'On a fair trial you will find plenty of candidates with a sufficient stock for a four mail-land.'<sup>120</sup> In April 1803 he was still insistent, though he agreed to allow two tenants to hold a four mail-land temporarily if they had not enough stock.

The situation in 1803 offers the most striking contrast. On the one hand, a landlord pressing on with cheerful confidence with a doctrinaire programme: on the other, an island on the verge of revolt.<sup>121</sup> The tenants on the farms designated for four mail-land holdings would not accept the abolition of runrig and resisted these and similar proposals as Lowland innovations.<sup>122</sup> Malcolm McLaurine stated that 'they [the tenants] cannot be persuaded but the mode of cultivation in the runrig way, as practised by their fathers and grandfathers, is the best'.<sup>123</sup> The tenants designated to be removed would not accept crofts and declared that they preferred to emigrate.<sup>124</sup> McLaurine blamed a number of the Gortandomhnul tenants as the ringleaders and submitted a schedule along with his letter showing the problems he was up against.

In the event, the factor was authorised to put the plan into partial effect by departing from some of its central provisions, notably allowing two tenants to a four mail-land holding where necessary.<sup>125</sup> Not all the crofts were successfully let at Scarinish, Balemartin and Hianish, but by taking cottars, some progress was made.<sup>126</sup> The factor proposed that the bounty of £10 should be given at Mannal 'as none would accept in other farms for fishing', though he pointed out that those who were to settle at Mannal 'have already been adventurers, and have their fishing lines, boats and apparatus, which may save your Grace's bounty, particularly as the crofts intended to be cut there are better than any formerly made for the purpose'.<sup>127</sup>

Such then was the unsatisfactory state of the reform plan in 1803. Other aspects of the Duke's programme were also over-clouded by opposition or ill-luck. There was no sale for barley, so it was left with the tenants.<sup>128</sup> None of the islanders was willing to go to Inveraray to learn quarrying and dyking. The windmill was not built, as the mason had not returned from Mull. Plans for the two schools were delayed, so new school masters had not been appointed. The October

<sup>120</sup> Instructions for 1802 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. 63.

<sup>121</sup> Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p.xxxv.

<sup>122</sup> Macinnes, 'Scottish Gaeldom,' p. 80.

<sup>123</sup> Inveraray Castle Archive, Factor's correspondence, McLaurie to Duke, 22 Mar. 1803.

<sup>124</sup> Inveraray Castle Archive, Factor's correspondence, McLaurie to Duke, 22 Mar. 1803.

<sup>125</sup> Report for 1802 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. 68; Gailey, 'The evolution of Highland rural settlement'.

<sup>126</sup> Report for 1802 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. 67.

<sup>127</sup> Report for 1802 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. 67.

<sup>128</sup> Report for 1802 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. 69.

market had been a fiasco, owing to a clash with the Coll market.<sup>129</sup> It may be that the factor's own limitations contributed to the poor progress of reform. The tenants of Gortandomhnuil and Kenovay presented a petition complaining of his conduct.<sup>130</sup> It may also be that the islanders' feelings had been inflamed by the penalties exacted on the whisky delinquents, and that they were in no mood to co-operate. In August, Ferrier came to the island and made a report, now lost. But the outcome was a great change in the Duke's plans.

#### **Section IV: Tiree, c. 1800–10**

The 5<sup>th</sup> Duke's Instructions of October 1803 are prefaced thus: 'The difficulty of emigration since the late Act of Parliament makes it necessary to relax or even to change my plans of settling the people of Tyree'.<sup>131</sup> He went on to order that 'such of the distillers as have not left the island may be suffered to remain with their friends till they can take themselves away, but they must not expect possessions'. The really important modification in his thirty-year old programme was announced in the second article, which ran:

The scheme of bringing the farms to four mail-lands each must be given up in so far as not already executed effectually, and different farms must be broke down into small crofts to accommodate the people who are in want of possessions. Such as were formerly tenants to have from six to ten arable acres, and those who were only cottars and tradesmen to have four arable acres, and both to have what accommodation can be given in the article of summer grass. As these people will have much to do in the article of building houses and division fences at the beginning, I agree to allow the first year free of rent to such as shall deserve it by building houses, and other exertions in that period. I must also be at some expense in quarrying stones for these buildings—perhaps my furnishing tools and powder for blasting may be sufficient—but do not let the work stand for want of further exertion on my part if it should be necessary.<sup>132</sup>

The 1803 Instructions were a volte-face in what had been the Duke's policy and convictions, held consistently over thirty years. Hitherto he had held obstinately to the view that only with small farms could any improvement take place in the island's economy and agriculture.<sup>133</sup> He had always rejected the arguments of the

<sup>129</sup> Report for 1802 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. 72.

<sup>130</sup> The editor could find no direct reference to this petition and presumably it is available in the Inveraray Castle Archive.

<sup>131</sup> Instructions for 1803 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. 73; for an overview of emigration in this period and the impact of the 1803 Act see E. Richards, *Highland Clearances*, pp. 80–6.

<sup>132</sup> Instructions for 1803 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p.73.

<sup>133</sup> Devine, *Great Highland Famine*, pp. 9–12.

factors that it was an impracticable goal.<sup>134</sup> Even so recently as early 1803 he had rejected the idea that his programme should be greatly modified, still less dropped. One may well ask if the impediments to emigration imposed by the Act of 1803 were the sole cause of this astonishing change.<sup>135</sup>

In the absence of any evidence, particularly of any report by James Ferrier in summer 1803, one can only conjecture. It is clear, at any rate, that the policy was running into great difficulties, that there were, in fact, too few tenants capable of stocking and working a farm of four mail-lands; that even on farms where there was some possibility of creating larger holdings, the tenants were strongly against giving up their traditional methods, notably runrig; that most of the tenants dispossessed from these farms would neither take up fishing nor occupy small crofts in Scarinish, Hianish or Balemartin, consequently jeopardising this side of the Duke's programme too; and that both they and other tenants were in a state of excitement and uproar and were actively preparing to emigrate.<sup>136</sup>

To persevere with the programme would have invited disaster, for a great deal depended on the co-operation of the islanders. It does also seem that in 1803 the Duke had decided on some emigration.<sup>137</sup> He evidently came to this conclusion after Ferrier, his trusted adviser, had visited Tiree in August 1803 and formed his own conclusions, independently of the factor. The Passenger Vessels Act (1803) certainly made it more difficult for would-be emigrants to sail to Canada, but it is likely that the Duke was convinced by Ferrier that the four mail-land policy was hopelessly impracticable and would have to be given up, and that the island's problems of increasing population and poverty could only be solved by a redistribution of land coinciding more closely with the people's economic condition and needs.<sup>138</sup> The new deal was surely Ferrier's work as much as the Duke's.

The new programme was perhaps not divorced altogether from financial considerations, since heavy emigration could no doubt damage the Duke's rents.<sup>139</sup> Crofting townships, too, promised as good a return as farms, whilst kelp production continued to be profitable. The new measures were, however, extremely generous both to tenants and crofters. They contained many practical and benevolent provisions to enable them to derive advantage from their new holdings, and involved the Duke directly or indirectly in considerable outlays. The rents of the farms were fixed at moderate levels, with reductions for tenants who carried out improvements.<sup>140</sup> Advice was to be given to crofters on the

<sup>134</sup> Instructions for 1802 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. 63.

<sup>135</sup> Macinnes, 'Scottish Gaeldom', p. 86; Hunter, *Crofting Community*, pp. 21–6.

<sup>136</sup> Hunter, *Crofting Community*, p. 31.

<sup>137</sup> Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. xxix; Macinnes, 'Scottish Gaeldom', p. 86; *Statistical Account*, Tiree, p. 416.

<sup>138</sup> Hunter, *Crofting Community*, pp. 21–6.

<sup>139</sup> Richards, *The Highland Clearances*, pp. 80–6.

<sup>140</sup> Cregeen noted here: 'Compare with rents just before. This would cast light on whether the whole plan was dictated by desire to increase revenue from kelp.'

management of their land, and a scheme of rotation suitable for a four-acre croft was worked out.<sup>141</sup> Whilst tenants of farms were left to manage them according to their own judgement, they were encouraged by premiums to adopt ploughing with oxen and to sow fresh barley and oat-seed (which was offered gratis), clover, rye-grass, turnips and cabbage.<sup>142</sup> New implements of better construction were placed at their disposal by sending a trained plough-wright to the island.<sup>143</sup>

Crofters were no longer required to fish but nineteen-year leases were given only to those who would. Very high prizes were offered to fishermen. 'To the fisher who shall cure and send to market the greatest quantity of fish not under 500 - £10 str. and to him who shall have the next greatest quantity, not under 300, £5 str.'<sup>144</sup> The prizes for agricultural improvements were presumably open to crofters as well as small tenants of under £20 rent. The size of crofts (up to ten acres) was very generous, and as much as farms in many parts of the Highlands.

The benevolence of the Duke's intentions towards the small tenants and crofters during the whole period from c. 1799, but especially from 1803, is thrown into relief by the conflict that was the normal condition of his relations with the chamberlain. Indeed, there is nothing of the 5<sup>th</sup> Duke's administration more striking than this. With the former chamberlain, Donald Campbell, relations had become full of friction, but the chamberlain was always on the side of the tenants, striving to protect them from what appeared to him to be wrong. The essential radicalism of the Duke's programme, involving as it did the destruction of the privileges of the Mull gentry and the transfer of their farms to small tenants, could not but cause disagreement with Donald Campbell. The Duke had no intention of allowing Malcolm McLaurie, the new factor, to assume the position of the old factor.<sup>145</sup> The farm of Balephuill was originally designated for him, though he was to live at Crossapol until the house and buildings were ready at Balephuill. McLaurie aroused suspicion that he was aiming to take over the farms of Crossapol, Balephuill and Balemartin, and a bitter correspondence took place in 1803 and 1804, in which Ferrier trounced him for his covetousness.<sup>146</sup> He was deprived of the prospect of gaining Balephuill, which was allotted to crofters, and as the crofting programme developed any hopes that he had of becoming a local grandee like his predecessors receded.<sup>147</sup> Writing to Ferrier in early 1804, he compared his position unfavourably with that of former chamberlains, who had three farms in Tiree and lands in Mull from the Duke. He had purchased his predecessor's whole cattle stock on the understanding that Balephuill was to be his, and now would stand to lose heavily.<sup>148</sup>

<sup>141</sup> Instructions for 1803 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. 73–4.

<sup>142</sup> Instructions for 1804 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. 88.

<sup>143</sup> Instructions for 1804 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. 86.

<sup>144</sup> Instructions for 1804 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. 87.

<sup>145</sup> Macinnes, 'Landownership', p. 20.

<sup>146</sup> Inveraray Castle Archive, Memorandum by Ferrier to the Duke, 1804.

<sup>147</sup> Instructions for 1803 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. 73–4.

<sup>148</sup> Report for 1803 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. 79–80.

The Duke made it clear in October 1804 that McLaurine must give up hopes of retaining Balephuil and enclosing part of the Reef, and the next year told him bluntly:

There is a necessity for your contracting your views as to farming, as I have resolved not to give you such a farm as you point at, when there is such a difficulty to accommodate the people with possessions of the smallest sort. I sent you to Tyree to be my factor, to look after and promote interest, and the good of the people, not to be a great farmer seeking suddenly to enrich and aggrandize yourself.<sup>149</sup>

Entrusting a programme of reform to a factor so out of sympathy with the islanders, and with personal interests that sometimes conflicted with the Duke's aims, was unsatisfactory.<sup>150</sup> His relations with tenants of neighbouring farms were invariably bad, often because he had designs on their land that had been frustrated, and he revenged himself by constantly complaining of their infringements of estate regulations.<sup>151</sup> As a result, one is unable to accept his evidence as unbiased with regard to the state of progress in the islanders' agriculture or their real attitude towards improvements, as he made a point of representing them as hostile and averse to changing their bad methods. It had the advantage, however, that the islanders came to realise that the Duke was on their side, and gained support and co-operation that might otherwise have been withheld. It is time now to see what progress was actually achieved in the Duke's last years in putting his programme into effect.

### Conclusion

The Duke's change of policy, combined with his manifest benevolence, had a marked effect on the islanders' attitude to improvement. Now that the creation of tenants' holdings was not going to result in involuntary removals and was going to attract new benefits, the farmers co-operated with a will, and applied for divisions to be made.

### Conclusion by editor

This article has delineated in wide-ranging detail the ebb and flow of both the gradual and rapid processes of radical change taking place on one of Scotland's great estates. Although using Tiree as a case study, as Cregeen points out more than once the same dogmatic policies of transformation were being rolled out

<sup>149</sup> Instructions for 1803 in Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, p. 74.

<sup>150</sup> For comparative studies of the travails and tensions of estate management see E. Richards, *Patrick Sellar and the Highland Clearances: homicide, eviction and the price of progress* (Edinburgh, 1999).

<sup>151</sup> Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions*, pp. xxxvii-xxxviii.

across the Argyll estates, with the 5<sup>th</sup> Duke acting as the driver of change and being faced with widely variable results and responses from across his domain. This article adds to a school of thought that placed key improving individuals at the heart of the Improvement project, in the person of the 5<sup>th</sup> Duke, but also exposes the network of individuals and expertise which helped to formulate his plans, direct his investment, and eventually persuade him to change tack by the early nineteenth century.<sup>152</sup> The very nature of the rich cache of documents used by Cregeen as the core of his evidence – the instructions and reports batted back and forth between Duke, advisors and the Tìree factors – highlights the prized philosophies of rationality and optimism which were applied, with varying degrees of success, to Tìree.

This article shows that, despite the huge efforts expended on planning for a rational future, the origins of crofting – on Tìree at least – demonstrate the haphazard vagaries and pressures of the west Highland reality in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Duke and his advisors concentrated much of their focus on social engineering via the reconstruction of tenancies on Tìree, but they exercised no control over the kelp markets, the demands of the state for fighting men and above all the revolutionary increase in population all over the country.<sup>153</sup> Most fundamental though was the question of investment. As Cregeen points out, the 5<sup>th</sup> Duke's great plans for Tìree, with its tantalisingly favourable natural resources, depended to a large extent on his ability to hold his nerve in the face of wide-ranging and expensive investment requirements. Cregeen lays these out for the reader in a litany of eye-watering expense: harbours, fishing gear, mills, roads, houses, materials for dykes, prize money and other incentives, subsidisation of transport, bloodstock – the list goes on.

What did it achieve – that is, how successful can we judge the Duke's plans to have been? Much depends on our definition of success. By the Duke's own terms and by the plans he held dear from the 1770s until the early years of the nineteenth century, he was not successful. His vision was of large, improved farms; enclosed fields and fat rents through substantial tenancies, for Tìree to be firmly plugged into a new, diversified economy.<sup>154</sup> He adhered to his vision for thirty years, but a combination of an unexpected and overwhelming increase in the Tìree population, the lure of kelp profits and the low level but stubborn resistance of the people to his radical plans led to a volte face by 1803. The pressures the Duke felt for an ever-increasing cash income and his disappointment and bafflement at

<sup>152</sup> I. H. Adams, 'Economic Process and The Scottish Land Surveyor', *Imago Mundi*, 27 (1975), pp. 13–18; I. H. Adams, 'The Agents of Agricultural Change', in M. L. Parry and T. R. Slater (eds), *The Making of the Scottish Countryside* (London, 1980), pp. 159–60, 167–9; T. M. Devine, 'The Transformation of Agriculture: cultivation and clearance', in T. M. Devine, C. H. Lee and G. C. Peden (eds), *The Transformation of Scotland: the economy since 1700* (Edinburgh, 2005), pp. 79, 87.

<sup>153</sup> Richards, *Highland Clearances*, pp. 80–7.

<sup>154</sup> Compare to the Sutherland estates management at this time: Richards, *Leviathan of Wealth*, pp. 248–55.

its non-appearance must also be factored into his change of heart.<sup>155</sup> As Cregeen states in the beginning of this conclusion, once the Duke had abandoned his plans, the islanders largely cast off their opposition and began to cooperate, a vital point which demonstrates the agency of the people being 'improved' all over the Highlands and Islands in this period. This article shows how a combination of long-standing clan based dissatisfaction, a poor choice of factor and radical reforms would rouse up resistance and this, combined with unfavourable circumstances and a pressing need for results in the form of increased income, scuppered the Duke's plans and led to the beginning of crofting, soon to become the dominant tenurial model in the region.

<sup>155</sup> Macinnes, 'Scottish Gaeldom', p. 71.

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