

Letter from Malcolm McLaurine, chamberlain of Tiree, to the Duke of Argyll,
29 Mar 1802

The Argyll Papers reference: PFV65/73

An Iodhlann reference: 2021.53.73

[page 1]

Mr McLaurine

29th March

1802

[page 2]

Answ^d 5th April Tyr̄ 29th March 1802

Copy Sent Mr Ferrier 10th April & of the Answer

My Lord Duke

I had the honor of writing your Grace on the 10th Ins^t., and inclosing a letter under your cover, to M^r Ferrier, and I trust both went safe.

Within these few days, all the people who were principally concerned, in the distilling last year, and those who began it this year, have been served with Removings, to leave the island at next Whitsunday. In consequence of which, am informed, many of them are going to Inveraray, with a view of petitioning your Grace, and to criminate others, who are allowed to sit, whom they think more guilty than themselves. As your Grace's instructions are that every 10th man, and those the most criminal, were to be removed; those now condescended upon, appear from the most impartial evidence to be so: And such of them as spoke to me about going to Inveraray, I have dissuaded from it, telling them, your Grace's Orders were peremptory & must be followed up, and that of course their conduct could never meet with any lenity or countenance from your Grace.

All the people also upon the farms intended

for

[page 3]

for the fishing situations, are under warning. Two young Lads, who are Millers at Cornaigmore, where the principal water miln is, as they paid no attention to the machinery, nor to their work, and the Tenants entering complaints of losing much of their grain, either from want of care or of honesty, I have included for these reasons in the removals. A Malcolm M^cDonald, who possessed some Land in the farm of Kaolis [Caoles] I have found out, has been going to Loch Sunart, to your Grace's woods, under pretence of wanting wood for repairing his house, but sold the wood in Coll to the Tenants of the Land of that island, I have warned out this island.

Reference: Argyll Papers/PFV65/73, An Iodhlann 2021.53.73

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The Executions of all these Warnings I have of this date, transmitted to M^r John Campbell your Grace's agent at Inveraray, not being able to forward them sooner, owing to the weather which has been very stormy.

That there might be no interruption to the execution of your Grace's Instructions, of the new division of the island into four mail lands¹, as Major Maxwell and Langland have not been able to come before the expiry of the legal time of warning, I have thought it advisable to take the whole Tenants bound in writing, that they would remove at next Whitsunday, from the occupation of their present

shares

[page 4]

shares of the farms when required, in order to carry the new plan into effect, which they have all agreed to, and done.

There are 85 Cotters in the island, who have 108 horses, and 76 head of black Cattle, who hardly pay a shilling of grass mail² to the Tenants, and claim the privilege of pasturing upon the Reef, with equal confidence, and right, as the Tenants themselves. As the Reef has been the occasion of their keeping such an immense number of Cattle, having summering for nothing, and of their being in winter a great source of oppression and grievance, to the Tenants, as they fasten up their wintering whether they will or not, I have intimated to them that in future they are to have no liberty of pasture upon the Reef, and that therefore they must find the best market they can for their horses and Cattle. According to your Graces' orders I have been looking out for live active Men or Herds, to maintain the proper souming³ and Keeping of the Reef; but in this island am positive none can be found, as they are to the measure by no means friendly: therefore I have sent to the main land and offered good encouragement, as the work and duty will be very troublesome.

I have the honour to be

My Lord Duke

Your Grace's

Most Ob^t Humble Serv^t

Malcolm McLaurine

¹ "An off-island Scandinavian landlord – possibly one of the Orkney jarls in the tenth century, possibly a kingship based on Man – established a taxation system based on uncelsands. Uncelsands on Tiree were divided into mail lands, an otherwise rarely-recorded unit of land tenure possibly deriving from the Old Norse word *mælir*. Farmers in many Early Medieval farm townships on Tiree appear to have developed a closed-field system, often avoiding the need for a head dyke. The survival of both uncelsands and mail lands into the seventeenth century is evidence of an enduring Norse influence on the Tiree landscape." (Dr John Holliday's 'Longships on the Sand': p287

² A sum payable for the use of pasture (https://dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/gres_maill)

³ The process of determining the total number of livestock in terms of *soums* which a common pasture can properly support in order to allocate a proportionate share among the tenants

(https://dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/soum_n_v1)

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