‘Milkit Four Times in the Day’

A history of agriculture on Tiree

Tiree & Coll Gaelic Partnership, 2012

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Cover photo: Elizabeth MacMaster, Kenovay, at milking time at Cnoc Gorm in the 1940s (V18)

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Introduction

It cannot be gainsaid that Tiree is the most fertile of the Hebrides, despite the fact that the islanders have to contend with the ravages of the wind sweeping across their farmlands, uprooting vegetables, blowing the soil away from seed planted in the springtime, and not infrequently devastating the crops in the autumn. [1]

We were driving down through the Outer Hebridean island of Barrist (some island names have been changed to protect their identity) after the boat festival. Some pockets of green lit up the huge expanses of brown moorland. "You can see," came the voice of Lachie Doan from the back seat, "why the geese come to Tiree!"

Tiree has always prided itself on its rich grazing and its fertile fields which have supported a population of around a thousand people since prehistoric times. The domestication of animals – cattle, sheep, pigs, goats and poultry – began in Neolithic times 6000 years ago, as people settled year round on the island for the first time. Cattle became a valuable export from around 1700. Rarely eaten on the island, they produced milk, leather and tallow and pulled the ploughs. Sheep were kept principally for their wool, although older animals were eaten as mutton. Improvements from the 'Agricultural Revolution' came to Tiree around 1800. There was a thriving pig and egg export industry on Tiree from 1850 to 1950 as improved transport opened up the markets of Glasgow. Since the last war there has been another 'revolution' in the standard of agriculture, as the island became a producer of fine young store cattle.

Cattle around the Mary Stewart at Scarinish Harbour in 1950 (P194)

[1] *Skye and the Inner Hebrides*, Alasdair Alpin MacGregor, Robert Hale, 1953, p 74.

Cattle

1. Tiree's First Agricultural Revolution – 5000 BC to 1790

Farming – growing corn and the rearing of cattle and sheep - first started on Tiree in the Neolithic, or 'New Stone Age', 6000 years ago and continued through the Bronze Age. Later again, the Iron Age broch in Vaul, *Dùn Mòr Bhalla*, was occupied from 500 BC to 300 AD. When Dr Euan MacKie excavated the site in the 1960s he found 348 cattle bones indicating their importance at that time. [2]

The Runrig System

From the Middle Ages to around 1800 the Tiree townships were leased to tacksmen. Their tenants lived grouped together in farm towns or *clachain.* We don't know much about earlier times but it is likely to have been similar.

The whole population lived in farm towns consisting of impermanent buildings, often made of earth and wattle, clustered on the infields of the farms...[with, on Tiree] an average, in 1779, of 59 people [3].

The cultivated land was divided into thin strips ploughed into ridges and furrows, which were allocated to different households each year by lottery. This is known as the runrig system. There were few field walls and no fences and it must have been difficult to protect the crops of oats, rye and barley from grazing animals.

The tenants here differ considerably in their method of husbandry from those in the low country and the south parts of Scotland in making no distinction between their infields and outfields, or good and bad arable [4].

The Shieling System

The minister on Tiree reported in 1791.

Till the middle of June the cattle are suffered to pasture on the corn which also very much prevents a better return [5].

Transhumance, the tradition of taking cattle in the summer to graze on higher and wetter ground and away from the unfenced crops, is found all over the world. In Scotland these summer camps were called shielings or, in Gaelic, *àirigh.* Although Tiree is so small, the

[2] *Dun Mor Vaul*, Euan Mackie, University of Glasgow Press, 1974, p 187.

[3] *Argyll Estate Instructions*, ed E Cregeen, Scottish History Society, 1964, p xxi.

[4] Turnbull's survey of Tiree, 1768, AI 2000.169.1.

[5] *Old Statistical Account*, 1791, p 396.

shieling tradition was practiced on the island until the land was broken up into crofts around 1800.

Walking a cow home to be milked twice a day is time consuming and uses up the animal's energy, and so some of the township remained in the summer on the wetter hills and the moor, or *sliabh*, milking the cows there and making butter and cheese. Most men came back to the township to do other work, leaving the women and children behind to look after the animals. A third of the townships on Tiree have shieling names:

- *Àirigh a' mheannain*, Ardeas, Caolas
- *Àirigh Fhionnlaigh*, Milton
- *An Àirigh Bhòidheach*, Gott
- *Àirigh Fhearchair*, Scarinish
- *Cnoc Àirigh an Fhraoich*, Scarinish
- *Àirigh Fhearchair*, Hough
- *An Àirigh*, Mannal
- *An Àirigh Bhòidheach*, Balephuil
- *Bothag na h-Àirigh*, Moss
- *Àirigh na h-Aon Oidhche*, Cornaigmore
- *Corrairigh*, Cornaigbeg
- *Dùn Shiadair*, West Hynish. *Siadair* comes from the Norse word for shieling, *setr*, implying that the Viking settlers were also using this system on Tiree from 800 to 1200 AD.

The shieling system declined on Tiree when runrig ended and land was divided into individual enclosed crofts which were more self-sufficient for fodder [6].

Highland Cattle

The Highland breed of cattle was universal in Scotland at this time. The animals would have looked tiny to modern eyes.

One of the first thing that struck contemporary observers about livestock throughout the islands was their small size...Smallness was characteristic of the hardiest breeds, best fitted to survive the rigours of the climate...The other factor was the perpetual shortage of winter fodder...the irresistible temptation to overstock the land in the many places where summer pastures were plentiful [7].

[6] *Scottish Country Life*, Alexander Fenton, Tuckwell Press, 1999, p 138.

[7] *The Northern and Western Islands of Scotland*, Frances Shaw, John Donald, 1980, p 109.

Isabella MacLean (Bella Mhate) of Kilmoluaig with her cows in the early 1940s (X35)

The older breed of cattle, full grown, weighed around 160 kg [8]. By comparison a modern cow weighs three to four times more, 450-600 kg. It is tempting to think of these as 'primitive' animals, but in some ways smaller animals with less muscle and slower growth were better adapted to the conditions at the time with less feed available.

The cattle were predominantly black. Red or brown variants were bred in Glen Lyon around 1850 and became the dominant colour in Victorian times as the breed became sought after as 'ornaments' in the south [9].

Most islanders did not have access to better stock for breeding.

The cattle of this island are of middling size and generally ill-shaped, excepting those bred by the factor, Mr Campbell of Ardslignish [10].

The Export of Beef

The crucial importance of cattle to the farming economy was one reason why they generally received more favourable treatment than the other domestic animals in terms of food and shelter...Most of the money in circulation in the Western Isles in the 17th century was undoubtedly provided by the cattle trade. Indeed, so important were [they] that they were

[8] *The Size and Weight of Cattle and Sheep in Early Modern Scotland,* AJS Gibson, *Ag Hist Rev,* 36 II, 162-71.

[9] *The Drove Roads of Scotland,* ARB Haldane, re-published Birlinn, 1997, p 60.

[10] Turnbull's survey of Tiree, 1768, AI2000.169.1.

often used directly instead of money as a means of settling debts...this was a common practice in marriage settlements [11].

Tiree was owned by a landlord who demanded rent. In 1792 the Duke of Argyll commanded that:

Rents should be paid [in] black cattle, horses, grain and kelp...the black cattle to be delivered in October, and to be immediately sent to Aros in Mull [12].

His more generous side was on show two years later.

I allow all the oats, all the potatoes, all the lint [flax], all the sheep, all the milk, butter, cheese, poultry eggs, fish etc, 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 [13].

The trade in cattle from Argyll dates from the time of Mary Queen of Scots, around 1580[14]. But the booming south-east of England and the demands of the British navy and army meant substantial increases in the export of black cattle to England between Union of the Crowns in 1603 and the Union of Kingdoms in 1707 [15]. War was good for business.

From 1727 till 1815 the droving trade to England benefited from the almost continuous wars [with Spain, America and then Napoleon] in which Great Britain was involved...in this the demand for salted beef for the navy played a considerable part [16].

Records of the time show:

1791 – 260 cattle exported live from Tiree [17].

1792 - 350 cattle sold [18].

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[11] *The Northern and Western Islands of Scotland,* Frances Shaw, John Donald, 1980, p 114 and 158.

[12] *Instructions,* p 23.

[13] *Instructions,* p 29.

[14] *The Drove Roads of Scotland,* ARB Haldane, re-published Birlinn, 1997, p 84

[15] *Scottish Country Life*, Alexander Fenton, Tuckwell Press, 1999, p 133.

[16] *The Drove Roads of Scotland,* ARB Haldane, re-published Birlinn, 1997, p 57.

[17] *OSA*, p 411.

[18] *Instructions,* p 39.

1794 - 350 cattle were exported from the island with a total value of £632 (between £1 10s and £2 12s 6d each). This was 27% of exports from Tiree by value that year [19].

1845 - 465 cattle sold [20].

Droving

To get the island's cattle to markets in Crieff and Falkirk, beasts had to be taken by open boat to Mull, then to the mainland and subsequently walked overland.

The older breed of cattle was slower to mature than today's animals.

It is probable that until the end of the eighteenth century, in view of the slow growth of beasts to whom each winter meant starvation, few were sold before three years and most at four years or older [21].

Occasionally cattle also came from the Outer Isles to Tiree.

I've heard of a boat going from Mingulay to Tiree, rowing all the time. They started in Mingulay at sunrise and they were back in Mingulay at sunset again the same day after leaving their cattle on Tiree. The drovers used to come from Tiree [22].

There is a rock off Kilmoluaig called *Bodh' an Tairbh*, which got its name after a boat from Barra with a bull on board went aground there. The animal came ashore safely [23].

The droving journey started for the west end cattle along *An Tràigh Mhòr*, Gott, through Brock and on to the raised beach between Ruaig and Milton. Then the beasts were driven through a gateway in the wall between Ardeas and Milton called *Bealach nam Bò*, pass of the cattle, and on to the small bay at *Lònamar* in Caolas, where they were loaded on to boats [24]. There was another loading point in Scarinish beyond the lighthouse at *A' Charraig Dhomhainn*, the deep fishing rock. On this headland you can still see the remains of a fank under the grass [25].

The cattle were sold in the autumn.

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[19] *Instructions*, p 39.

[20] *NSA*, p 214.

[21] *The Drove Roads of Scotland,* ARB Haldane, re-published Birlinn, 1997, p 59.

[22] Nan MacKinnon, Barra, SA1960.123.

[23] Donald Kennedy, Balevullin.

[24] Angus MacLean, Scarinish.

[25] Donald Kennedy, Scarinish.

After the summering and that they were splendid big animals...grand big bullocks, just full of flesh and hair when they were sold at three and a half years old in October [26].

The south-east wind, unhelpfully for sailors trying to get to Mull from Tiree, would often set in for a week in October. It was called *gaoth ear-dheas nan damh*, the south-east wind of the stirks [27]. The open boat journey under sail was likely to have been very stressful for the animals. In 1804 the factor tried to persuade the Duke to buy a larger ferry boat for the Coll-Tiree passage.

The factor has frequently had occasion to observe the bad effects of the small boats kept for the purpose of the ferry betwixt Tiree and Coll, in which neither horses nor cows can be ferried without throwing them down and tying them on their passage, a practice that often produces serious effects, and at times the death of these animals [28].

For the passage to Mull larger boats were needed, although they were still powered by sail.

Cattle were carried to and from Tiree in modified [single sail dipping lug] 'Fifies', up to 30 feet long...ballasted with stones...at least half a dozen fully grown cattle could be carried, and they would be driven aboard from a pier or lamraig. The reduce the damage to the boat's timbers the ballast stones were covered with bracken to provide a fàrradh [litter]...which not only protected the timbers but provided a foothold for the cattle [29].

The cattle were landed on the nearest part of Mull with an adequate road. Tiree was exporting around 350 beasts a year and so this part of the journey could have taken 20 boats three trips each. With the wait for suitable weather there and back, the sail to Mull could have taken two to three weeks in itself.

At first cattle were taken to Croig on the north coast of Mull. The Bellachroy Inn in nearby Dervaig was established as a drovers' inn in 1608. However, the planting of woodland meant that the journey through Mull became too difficult (or possibly unpopular) and the Tiree boats were forced to make the longer journey to the Ross of Mull [30].

The landing place for Coll and Tiree is described as 'at the back of Mull,' but local tradition puts the landing point at the little bay of Kintra at the north-west corner of the Ross of Mull, and the Second Report of the Commissioners for Highland Roads and Bridges in 1805 refers

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[26] *Recollections of an Argyllshire Drover*, Eric Cregeen, ed Margaret Bennett, John Donald, 2004, p 37.

[27] Donald MacLean, Kenovay, 11/2010.

[28] *Instructions*, p 94-5.

[29] *Ferry Tales of Argyll and the Isles*, Walter Weyndling, Sutton, 1997, p 130.

[30] Angus MacLean, Scarinish, 9/2011.

to a proposed extension of the Mull road to Kintra to which Iona cattle and very frequently those from Tiree, Barra and South Uist were brought [31].

The cattle were then walked to Grass Point, Auchnacraig, where they were shipped again to Kerrera. The boats landed either at *Barr nam Boc* or at Ardmore at the south end of this island. In the old days they were then driven up through Ardintrive Farm (*Àird an t-Snaimh*, the headland of the swimming) to the northern tip of Kerrera and at slack low tide they were coaxed into the water and swum to Dunollie on the north side of Oban. The Ardintrive farmer complained in 1818 "respecting the droves of cattle that come from the adjacent islands through Kerrera...the droves lie upon the grass days without compensation." The landowner at Dunollie was also unhappy and had his "servants collected to keep the droves from the corn land, and frequently employed for hours upon this business." [32]

So in 1824 a cattle boat was provided between Port Kerrera and the mainland south of Oban. "The cattle boats had a thick covering of birch brushwood as a protection against the hooves of the nervous cattle. Rings fitted along the inside of the gunwale secured the cattle. The boat can take 4 cows or 50 sheep." [33]

A drove of 50 cattle could be handled by two men and their dogs and the hundred mile journey to Falkirk was done in seven days [34]. Ideally the drovers would reach Falkirk three days before the sale to allow the cattle to rest.

A good drover was careful not to press his cattle too hard, especially at the outset. 'They were in full bloom, and full of flesh and hair. If you sweated them, the hair dropped down and never got up again into the same [condition]. The great secret was to take them there as good looking as they were when they left home. They'd go along quite nicely when they were left alone. The man that was in front...he took maybe twelve or so of the first cattle on, and the rest followed.' [35]

From just south of Oban, the cattle were driven either to Dalmally, Tyndrum, Killin and Crieff, or across Loch Awe to Inveraray and down by Loch Lomond. [36]

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[31] *The Drove Roads of Scotland,* ARB Haldane, re-published Birlinn, 1997, p 86.

[32]*Island of Kerrera,* H MacDougall, 1979, p 97-8, AI 2004.8.7.

[33] *Island of Kerrera,* H MacDougall, 1979, AI 2004.8.7.

[34] *Recollections of an Argyllshire Drover*, Eric Cregeen, ed Margaret Bennett, John Donald, 2004, p 37.

[35] *Recollections of an Argyllshire Drover*, Eric Cregeen, ed Margaret Bennett, John Donald, 2004, p 38.

[36] *The Drove Roads of Scotland,* ARB Haldane, re-published Birlinn, 1997.

Halting places for a night's grazing existed all along the drovers' route. There were stances where custom gave the drover free, unhindered access for his beasts, though a charge was made for the use of them. When there was no stance, accommodation could be obtained on farms for a payment of about ten shillings a score [in the 1890s].[37]

Remarkably few cattle died on the drove. Only 8 of almost 2000 died on the way to market in 1740 [38].

Naturally the drovers expected to make a profit. The average price of cattle from the Hebrides was £1.50-£3 while the average price at the Falkirk Tryst was £4. [39]

The original major cattle fair for the Highlands was held in Crieff in the second week in October. The Crieff Cattle Tryst sold 30,000 cattle in 1723, but this market came to an end in the 1770s and the Falkirk Tryst took its place. The sales there were in August, September and the second Tuesday in October. [40]

For a century and a half the Falkirk Tryst occupied a unique place in the economic development and social life of Scotland. It was the annual meeting place of English buyers and Scottish drovers, a gathering almost as widely representative as the General Assembly...The export trade was worth about £250,000 in the closing decade of the 18th century. [41]

By the 1840s Tiree had bigger boats.

In Tiree there are...20 open or half-decked boats of from 6-20 tons, which are chiefly engaged in ferrying cattle. [42]

The Tiree boats also ferried cattle from other islands.

The Tiree smacks traded all, over the islands. A lot of you will remember Biddy in Scarinish. Her mother's brother, Charles MacPhail, Tearlach Beag as he was known, his father had a smack. And his father died when he was only 14, and his uncles were running the smack, and they weren't making a very good job of it. Tearlach Beag said, "I'm going to run this smack

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[37] *Recollections of an Argyllshire Drover*, Eric Cregeen, ed Margaret Bennett, John Donald, 2004, p 39.

[38] *Recollections of an Argyllshire Drover*, Eric Cregeen, ed Margaret Bennett, John Donald, 2004, p 32.

[39] *The Drove Roads of Scotland*, ARB Haldane, re-published Birlinn, 1997, p 58-9.

[40] *The Drove Roads of Scotland*, ARB Haldane, re-published Birlinn, 1997, p 136.

[41] *Recollections of an Argyllshire Drover*, Eric Cregeen, ed Margaret Bennett, John Donald, 2004, p 37.

[42] *New Statistical Account*, 1845, p 216.

myself." And the first order they had was to go to a place in Uist to load cattle to take down to Oban. And he had no chart for this loch in Uist. But his grandfather sketched out a chart of the loch on the floor of his house with his walking stick and [the lad] memorised it. Six smacks left Scarinish on the same tide bound for the same loch to load cattle. Well, Tearlach, at the age of 14 was in there, had the boat loaded and was out of the mouth of the loch before the next smack arrived from Tiree. [43]

The bigger boats meant that the island's cattle could be ferried straight to Oban. The minister of Torosay, Mull, reported in 1845:

[In 1791] the Coll and Tiree cattle were landed at the back of Mull and driven to this ferry; but now the smacks that take them first on board proceed with them direct to the mainland. [44]

Many of the drovers came to the island from the mainland, but there were at least some Tiree men who took island cattle to market themselves. As late as 1884 Ronald MacDonald, a 46 year old cottar from Heanish, was giving evidence to the Napier Commission:

How do you make your own living?
I am a cattle dealer.
Is the droving trade going on as well as before?
Yes, sometimes better, sometimes worse.
But is it interfered with or altered by the railways and other causes of that sort?
It goes on as before. [45]

There is a house in Barrapol called *Taigh Nèill an Dròbhair,* the house of Neil the drover.

The original tenant of *Lag nan Cruach* was a Lamont who walked his own cattle to Falkirk. [46]

The Lamonts that were in Lag nan Cruach, they were going to the Falkirk sale, An Eaglais Bhreac, with a lot of fallow cows and young cattle. And they were telling me, the old people, that one end of the cattle was down at the Meeting Hall at the side of the road there and the other end turning at the bridge...there must have been a lot. I remember Donald Lamont, Heanish [around the 1920s]. I mind him going to the same sale. He wouldn't go to Oban at all. They were going at the beginning of the summer up to Barra and he was buying cattle there – stirks – and he was grazing them here and there on Tiree. And at the back end of the year he would gather them together and go away to Falkirk with them. [47]

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[43] Hector MacPhail, AC 41.

[44] *New Statistical Account,* Torosay, p 292.

[45] Napier Commission Evidence, p2176, vol 3 1884 (AI1999.17.1).

[46] Willie MacPhail, Clachan, 4/2002.

[47] Hector Kennedy, Heylipol, talking to Eric Cregeen, SA1974.232.

Donald MacLean (*Dòmhnall an Tuairneir*) was the tenant of Whitehouse farm.

As well as being a farmer [he] was a cattle buyer, shipping the cattle he bought to Oban on smacks...Falkirk was a "hive of activity, a confusion of cattle-dealers, robbers, thieves, harlots and suchlike." On one of his trips to Falkirk he lost his dog in the confusion. Having searched unsuccessfully, he set off walking to Oban with his companions and eventually sailed home to Tiree without his dog. However, a week later the missing dog jumped off a smack in Scarinish and made his way home to Cornaigbeg. [48]

Donald Sinclair, West Hynish, knew a Tiree man who had been droving. This would have been around 1860.

DS: *I remember an old man in Tiree. In his younger days...this old man was the manager and shepherd and everything out of that farm in Balephetrish. And he walked to Falkirk often with this farmer's cattle. I've seen the man and I've heard him telling the stories.*

EC: *He was a drover, was he?*

DS: *No! He was not! He was in the service of MacLaurin [the factor], the chief manager, a groom or whatever you need to call him. He was MacLaurin's right hand man. They were walking the cattle. And that man often walked to Falkirk in his bare feet. Oh! He was a hardy old man! The like of him is not in the Highlands these days.* [49]

DS: *I remember Nicol MacLean [Balephetrish] (Neacal Beag mac Sheumais Thàilleir) as well as I remember myself. He was a bit of a drover. He used to be buying cattle and taking them away to the mainland and selling them. A very witty man too, very clever in answering. In his younger days he was always around Strathaven. All the farmers knew him.* [50]

However, the railways were coming (reaching Oban on 30th June 1880). The Falkirk Tryst fell away and was over by 1901. [51]

The progress of the railway meant the decline of the drovers' craft. Cattle were conveyed from the most distant parts to Larbert in a day. [52]

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[48] Hector MacPhail's Township Histories, 1998.44.2.

[49] Eric Cregeen talking to Donald Sinclair, SA1968.243.

[50] Donald Sinclair talking to Eric Cregeen, SA 1971.090.

[51] *Recollections of an Argyllshire Drover*, Eric Cregeen, ed Margaret Bennett, John Donald, 2004, p 42.

[52] *Recollections of an Argyllshire Drover*, Eric Cregeen, ed Margaret Bennett, John Donald, 2004, p 42.

By the 1890s cattle and sheep were being transported on larger ferries. This was before the Gott Bay pier was built and animals had to be taken out in groups in a small rowing boat. Lady Frances Balfour described the scene in 1891.

If the embarkation of human beings was always difficult and sometimes dangerous, the same held good of the transport of the numerous flocks and herds which year by year had to be transhipped ...On another occasion we arrived at the side of the steamer and it was so full of sheep that the regular gangways could not be opened. [53]

Large consignments of livestock have left here last week for the southern markets. In addition to the transport accommodation of the regular steamers, all of which was fully occupied, it was found necessary to charter the SS Fingal so as to enable crofters and farmers to have their stock on the markets in due time. [54]

A Fatal Illness

However, there was a fatal problem with live beef exports from Tiree in the 18th and 19th centuries – the cattle often died when they were taken to the mainland. The Tiree factor wrote to the Duke in 1794.

The cattle bred in Tiree are subject to a very dangerous disorder when brought to [the mainland], which entirely deters dealers from attempting to bring them to market, and only stots [bullocks] of one or two years old are sold to them as they are found to be less subject to the distemper than aged cattle, altho' other cattle are slaughtered by the owners or by boatmen who dispose of the beef either at the [Easdale] slate quarries or in the Clyde. The price of both cows and stots is from one third to one fourth below what such cattle bred in Coll or Mull usually sell for, which together with the difficulty of disposing of them, discourages the tenants from paying much attention to the rearing of cattle. [55]

The minister of the island backed up this account in 1791.

The black cattle of Tiree and part of Coll, which have no access to pasture in healthy ground, are subject to murrain, or in Gaelic airneach, probably from its affecting the kidneys. It seems to be communicated either from the milk or fine grass or both. However, when the sheep are banished, the coarse grass enclosed and encouraged to grow, being the best pasture for calves and young cattle, it becomes at least such a seasoning as may prevent the above distemper. Then such cattle, deducing the inconveniences of ferrying, might most probably fetch as high as any in the Highlands.[56]

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[53] *Lady Victoria Campbell*, Frances Balfour, Hodder and Stoughton, p 237 and 244.

[54] *Oban Times*, 2 September 1911

[55] *Instructions*, 1794, p 33.

[56] *OSA*, p 411-2.

The surveyor Turnbull agreed.

There were a great number of cattle bought up in this island in Harvest 1766 by people from Mull who ferried them there and lost the greater part of them by a distemper they took, which cattle on this island are always subject to, called the Muirill or Red Water...The cause of this distemper is owing to very little heath being here and the fine pile of grass on the island in comparison with the pasture they are brought to. [57]

Even as late as 1845 the minister of Tiree was reporting:

The cattle reared in Tiree are not in general reckoned of very good quality... Owing to the fineness of the grass and want of heather, they are not so hardy and do not stand driving to market so well as many other cattle, and are moreover liable to certain distempers which affect their value, so that dealers are not so fond of purchasing them except at reduced prices...The black cattle in Coll are much superior in quality and may be estimated at £2 per head higher in value. The price of cows there may be reckoned from £5-8 [whereas] in Tiree from £3-6. [58]

In fact this disease was nothing to do with feeding and was almost certainly babesiosis (*Babesia divergans*). This is a parasitic infection of cattle which causes destruction of red blood cells. Animals become anaemic, jaundiced and have blood in their urine. It is transmitted through ticks which live in long grass and heather. Cattle on Tiree are therefore not exposed to the disease and were susceptible to be infected when they walked through the rough ground on the Ross of Mull. Cattle from Mull and Coll would have developed immunity by low grade infection over the years. [59]

Salting

To get round this problem the 3rd Duke (1682-1761) introduced the practice of salting Tiree beef for export in barrels.

There are some live cattle exported but as the cattle of this island, when driven, are subjected to a fatal distemper, this obliges the inhabitants to salt the greatest part of their beef which they sell at the ports of the Clyde... Tiree exports about 150 barrels of salted beef, each barrel being 32 English gallons and contains about 200 lb. weight of beef. This may amount

[57] Turnbull's survey of Tiree, 1768, AI2000.169.1.

[58] *New Statistical Account*, p 213.

[59] Pat Boyd, personal communication, who says he saw this disease as a young vet in Northern Ireland. He remembers entering the tin cattle sheds and hearing the fast heart beat of the infected animals.

to about £230 [by comparison oats and barley exports came to £240 and kelp was valued at £143]. *The salt with which they salt their beef comes from Ireland.* [60]

Irish salt was used because that from Scotland, which was made from dried sea water, contained too much magnesium and calcium sulphate. These salts produce an unpleasant flavour and texture in the beef. [61]

In 1767 some traders took away some salted beef.

There has been no demand for cattle in this island for one year excepting some that were slaughtered about Martinmas last [November 11, a feast day at the end of autumn] by traders who cure the same in barrels and hides and carry it to other parts for sale. [62]

The Value of Cattle

Although cattle were a mainstay of the island's economy, they were rarely eaten.

The available sources all suggest that the eating of fresh meat, except on festival occasions, was rare among the rural population in the 1790s. [63]

In 1764 a stone of salted beef cost 7 shillings, while the wages for a labourer were 3 old pence a day. In other words it would have taken a working man a month to earn enough to buy this amount of meat. As a source of energy beef was six times more expensive than oatmeal. [64]

When cattle *were* slaughtered, it was in the autumn.

So reduced were the animals that they would not have been worth eating if they had been killed during the winter and they were therefore killed and salted in the autumn. [65]

Unimproved early breeds had 66% lean meat, 13% edible fat, 3% tallow fat and 18% bone. [66] Little was wasted. As well as the meat, the entrails were eaten and non-edible fat (around the kidney) was made into tallow for candles, with the skin making leather.

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[60] *The Rev. Dr John Walker's Report on the Hebrides of 1764*, ed. Margaret McKay, John Donald, 1980, p 187-8.

[61] *The Drove Roads of Scotland,* ARB Haldane, re-published Birlinn, 1997, p 225.

[62] Turnbull's survey of Tiree, 1768, AI2000.169.1.

[63] *Scottish Country Life*, Alexander Fenton, Tuckwell Press, 1999, p 177.

[64] *The Size and Weight of Cattle and Sheep in Early Modern Scotland,* AJS Gibson, *Ag Hist Rev*, 36 II, p 168.

[65] *Highland Folk Ways*, IF Grant, Routledge, 1961, p 74-5.

[66] *The Size and Weight of Cattle and Sheep in Early Modern Scotland,* AJS Gibson, p 165.

In the spring, and when times were hard, cattle in the Highlands were also sometimes bled as the Masai people still do in Africa.

The people in their need turned to many forms of food in the old days. A curious one was the eating of the blood of their cattle. Blood was drawn...it was boiled, mixed with meal and eaten as a sort of cake. [67]

This happened too on Tiree.

JMcI: Have you ever heard of bleeding the cattle [on Tiree]?
DS: Yes. I never saw it, but I heard about it.
JMcI: When was that?
DS: Oh! A long time ago, a hundred years ago. They were taking blood from the cows and giving it to poor people...it was when my father was young...they were boiling it and adding it to potatoes or meal. Oh! They were poor times!
JMcI: Was it done anywhere special?
DS: In the fang. [68]

In Milton, on the right side of the road going down to the harbour, there is a rock called *Creag na Fala*, rock of the blood which may have been associated with this practice.

Cattle were also used to pull the plough. The Duke wrote to the factor on Tiree in 1801.

I wish to encourage ploughing with two horses, or oxen in place of horses. [69]

The factor replied three years later (this was before email!).

This winter the factor means to show them the example of ploughing with oxen. [70]

Superstitions about Cattle

Cattle were so vital to life on Tiree it is not surprising that a host of superstitions about their well-being grew up.

To the poor a cow is invaluable, and its ailments are naturally a source of anxiety...and his cow has the most frequently lost its milk through the machinations of witches. [71]

Hares feature strongly in stories about witchcraft on Tiree, despite being a relatively recent arrival on the island. In 1845 the minister of Tiree wrote:

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[67] *Highland Folk Ways*, IF Grant, Routledge, 1961, p 300.

[68] Donald Sinclair, West Hynish talking to Dr John MacInnes from the School of Scottish Studies in 1968, SA 1968.035.

[69] *Instructions*, p 56.

[70] *Instructions*, p 93.

[71] *The Gaelic Otherworld*, ed Ronald Black, p 175.

Hares were introduced about 18 years ago [i.e.1827]. [72]

The stories of witches assuming the shape of hares and sucking cows are numberless...When a witch assumes this shape it is dangerous to fire at her without putting silver – a sixpence or a button of that metal – in the gun. If the hare fired at was (as indeed it often was) a witch in disguise, the gun burst and the shot came back and killed the party firing. [73]

A particular farmer in Tiree had a lot of cattle and carried on a brisk trade in milk with the islanders. He took on a female servant but she proved to be as lazy as a pig and he had to let her go. His cows subsequently went dry for no obvious reason, but he had a young male employee who realised what was going on. Off he went herding but he had not been long behind the cattle when he saw a big hare running back and forward and in and out under the cows' bodies. He kept his eye on it until it went out of sight behind a rock on the shore. He climbed on top of the rock, and instead of the hare he saw his master's former employee busy tying black tangles around her waist. Our hero understood immediately what was happening, pulled out a knife, cut the tangles and the milk flowed to the ground. [74]

Milk needed to be protected against evil influences.

A ball of hair (gaoisid) called a ronag was put in the milk on Lammas day [August 1st] (or on the Thursday after) to keep its substance in the milk during the rest of the year. MacSymon (MacShìomoin, a sept of MacArthurs) a native of Balemartine was much resorted to in former times for these constitution balls. On Lammas day he gave to all who came to him a little bag of plants, sewn up, to be placed in the cream jug (crogan uachdair) for the ensuing year that the cattle and the milk might retain their virtue or substance (toradh). [75]

Some days and seasons were luckier than others. Thursday was thought to be a good day for protective magic, being sacred to St Columba. [76]

Friday was the day of the Crucifixion and was unlucky for many things…Many in Tiree remember that in their youth a sure method of putting an old woman into a rage was to begin counting her chicken s on a Friday. She seldom allowed them to get beyond three or four….People did not like to kill a cow, a sheep or other beast, or cut or mark lambs on

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[72] *New Statistical Account*, p 203.

[73] *The Gaelic Otherworld*, ed Ronald Black, p 175.

[74] *The Gaelic Otherworld*, ed Ronald Black, p 429, being a translation of a story by Niall Brownlie in *Gairm*, 77, p 22-3.

[75] *Note - he lived in Glac nan Smeur, Balephuil. The Gaelic Otherworld,* ed Ronald Black, p 177 and 431.

[76] *The Gaelic Otherworld*, ed Ronald Black, p 31.

Friday, and there would be many who would not allow their cattle to be shifted from one place to another. [77]

The time of the month was important.

At the instant the moon begins to increase (air gob na gealaiche) the horns of cows are loose on their pith (slabhagan) and may be pulled off and stuck on again. It is told [on Tiree] that a dispute having arisen on one occasion as to the correctness of an almanac about the moon's change, the old man who raised the question proved himself to be in the right by turning round and drawing the horn from one of his cows, as a sheath is taken from a knife, and sticking it on again. [78]

The evil eye was caused by someone looking at your animals enviously.

The evil eye is deadly to all animals to which the person having it takes a fancy. In the present day it is said of a man in Tiree who is accused by common report of having the gift that when he comes to buy a beast it is better to give it to him at his own price than keep it. If he does not get it the beast is taken ill and perhaps dies soon after. [79]

It is said the wife of a former tenant of Hynish would not allow her husband to look at his own fold of cattle. As sure as her did so, one of his best cows was found dead the next day. The fear of this calamity made her put a very pretty cow, to which she herself took a great fancy, in an out of the way place, near which her husband had never been allowed to go. On returning one day from a stroll on the hill, he asked who put the cow where he had seen it. The wife's worst fears were realised. The cow was dead in a few days. [80]

A Tiree crofter was selling a horse in the 1930s and a neighbour came to look at it. They haggled for a long time and could not agree on a price. At last the neighbour told her, "You'd better sell it to me, *tha droch shùil agam* [I have the evil eye]." "I don't know about your eye," she said (she was known to be witty), but "*tha droch theanga agad* [you've a bad tongue]!"

The charm for curing the evil eye must be recited on a Thursday or Sunday.

"Whoever has thee under lock of eye or malice or envy, on themselves may it fall – on their goods and on their children, on their juice and on their fatness, on their long white ground, on their choicest herd, their white backed cows, their sheep and pointed goats." [81]

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[77] *The Gaelic Otherworld*, ed Ronald Black, p 567-8.

[78] *The Gaelic Otherworld*, ed Ronald Black, p 571.

[79] *The Gaelic Otherworld*, ed Ronald Black, p 202.

[80] *The Gaelic Otherworld*, ed Ronald Black, p 203.

[81] *The Gaelic Otherworld*, ed Ronald Black, p 204.

The threat of black magic was all around. One west end crofter was herding cattle to the sales as late as the 1950s and he tied red thread round the animal's horns to protect them from *buideachd, "gus am faigh sinn seachad air an taigh."* [black magic until we get past that particular house].

It is still believed on Tiree that the year will be unlucky if the first foal or lamb seen in the spring is seen with its tail towards you.

Fairies could also be a threat to a cow.

A strong-minded headstrong woman in Heanish had a cow, the milk of which strangely failed. Suspecting that the cow was being milked by someone during the night, she sat up and watched. She saw a woman dressed in green coming noiselessly and milking the cow. She came behind and caught her. In explanation the Fairy woman said she had a child lying in the smallpox, and as a favour asked to be allowed to milk the cow for a month till the child got better. This was allowed, and when the month was out, the cow's milk became as plentiful as ever. [82]

A strong man named Dugald Campbell was one night, about the end of the last century [about 1790] watching the cattle on the farm of Balephuil. A little red cow came among the herd and was attacked by the other cows. It fled and they followed. Dugald also set off in pursuit. Sometimes the little red cow seemed near, sometimes far away. At last it entered the face of a rock, and one of the other cows followed and was never seen again. The whole herd would have followed had not Dugald intercepted them. [83]

Iron and, particularly, horseshoes were protective.

A horseshoe was of great power for the protection of cattle against witchcraft. As in England, it must be found by accident. It was put above the byre door, and a nail from it, driven into the lowest hoop (cearcall) of the milk dish (mias), kept its substance in the milk. [84]

It was also said that by putting pins in the cow's milk and boiling till the dish is dry, the witch is made to appear and confess. A woman once did this in Tiree and found her own brother was the guilty party. [85]

In Tiree a person lost several stirks by the stakes falling and strangling them in the byre. A 'wise' woman, reputed to be a witch, advised,(though her advice was not taken) that the right hand part of a fore horse-shoe with three nails in it should be put below the threshold (stairsneach) of the byre along with a silver coin, and that the hindquarters of one of the

[82] *The Gaelic Otherworld*, ed Ronald Black, p 71.

[83] *The Gaelic Otherworld*, ed Ronald Black, p 71.

[84] *The Gaelic Otherworld*, ed Ronald Black, p 178.

[85] *The Gaelic Otherworld*, ed Ronald Black, p 178.

beasts should be taken west and buried beyond the limits of the farm. This was to prevent a similar calamity in the future. [86]

Urine also offered some protection.

Maistir, or stale urine, kept for the scouring of blankets and other cloth, when sprinkled on the cattle and on the doorposts and walls of the house, kept the Fairies, and indeed every mischief, at a distance. This sprinkling was done regularly on the last evening of every quarter of the year. [87]

Before 1886 in Greenhill there was a *tairbh sligeach*, literally a shell-covered bull, which had a warty eruption on its skin. All his offspring had the same complaint and they were put down and buried at *An Iodhlann Mhòr*, the big stackyard in the township. It was said that one could still hear the lowing of the calves for their mothers from underground. The episode was put down to *sgoil dhubh*, witchcraft. [88]

Parts of the animal could also be studied to foretell the future.

Shoulder blade reading (slinneineachd) was practised...foretelling important events in the life of the owner of a slaughtered animal from the marks on the shoulder blade…it was boiled thoroughly so the flesh might be stripped clean from it, untouched by nail or knife or tooth…A shoulder blade sage in Tiree sat down to a substantial feast, to which he had been specially invited, that he might divine whether a certain friend was on his way home or not. He examined the shoulder-bone of the wedder killed on the occasion critically, unable to make up his mind. "Perhaps," he said, "he will come, perhaps he will not." A boy, who had hid himself on the top of a bed in the room that he might see the fun, could not help exclaiming, "They cannot find you untrue." The bed broke, and the diviner and his companions, thinking the voice came from the skies, fled. When the boy recovered he got the dinner all to himself. [89]

Fertility and Famine

Tiree has had a reputation as a fertile island since records began. St Columba of Iona instructed his daughter monastery on Tiree around 580 AD to send a *fat beast and six measures of grain* to a poor man on Coll. A thousand years later Dean Munro wrote in 1549 of Tiree that *Na cuntrie may be mair fertile of corn*, and around 1580 another traveller wrote that the island was:

[86] *The Gaelic Otherworld*, ed Ronald Black, p 179.

[87] *The Gaelic Otherworld*, ed Ronald Black, p 26.

[88] Alasdair Sinclair, Greenhill, 6/1995.

[89] *The Gaelic Otherworld*, ed Ronald Black, p 145.

All teillit land and na girs but ley land, quhilk is maist nurischand girs of any other, quhairthrow the ky if this Ile abundis sa of milk that thai are milkit four times in the day [all tilled land and no grass but ley (arable land put down to grass) which is the most nutritious sort, so that the cows of this island have to be milked four times a day]. [90]

This fertility is part of the self-identity of Tiree. With the huge expanses of flower-rich machair and easily worked soils, the island has always compared itself favourably to the rest of the west coast of Scotland.

However, because of this fertility, Tiree probably carried a high population, approaching 1000 people, from the Iron Age [91] to 1750. The island was almost entirely self sufficient in food, yet the cattle and sheep were less than half the size of today's animals, no winter feed or hay was grown and the potato crop was yet to arrive. Agricultural output was a fraction of what it is today, feeding a larger population with no food imports or subsidies. It is reasonable to assume that there was little surplus and one poor season would lead to considerable hardship.

By modern standards there was very little variety of food. The only food crops were oats, barley and rye, milk, butter and cheese and eggs. Little meat was eaten, there were no vegetable gardens and no potatoes. Martin Martin visited Tiree around 1695.

The natives for the most part live on barley bread, butter, milk, cheese, fish and the roots of silver weed... There are but few [islanders] that eat any flesh. [92]

And from 1700 many reports about Tiree talk of problems with the island's agriculture. The island's light soils had attracted the first farmers, but the ceaseless cropping of oats, rye and barley from the same ground led to a fall in its fertility.

[The Isle of Tiree] has always been valued for its extraordinary fruitfulness in corn, yet being tilled every year, it is become less fruitful than formerly.

There was no understanding of the need to rotate crops to different ground.

A proper and regular rotation of cropping ought to be pursued. [93]

And however rich the grassland of the island was in the summer, the main problem on Tiree was keeping cattle sheltered and fed during the long winter and spring. No hay was cut and no winter feed crops cultivated.

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[90] Quoted in *Adomnán of Iona,* ed. Jonathan Wooding, Four Courts Press, 2010, p 219.

[91] Dr Euan Mackie, personal communication.

[92] *A Description of the Western Isles,* Martin Martin, 1703, Islands Book Trust, p 211-2.

[93] *Instructions,* 1801, p 60.

During the summer the beasts fed on grass, but natural hay is poor in the Highlands and all land suitable for growing corn was devoted to producing food for human beings....the cattle outside had to subsist upon what they could pick up from the shrivelled winter herbage and on the bare stubbles, until the land was gnawed to the quick... In the spring the cattle were so weakened by hunger that the people had to combine together to lift them from the byre to the pasture...So underfed were the cows that they only calved every second year and only gave one pint of milk a day, and the period of lactation was comparatively short. [94]

Martin Martin had written in 1695 that on Tiree:

The cows are of a very low size in this isle being in the winter and spring often reduced to eat seaware [seaweed]. The cows give plenty of milk when they have enough of fresh seaware to feed on it fattens them.[95]

And in 1791 Tiree's minister reported that:

The black cattle are mostly in a starving condition...Most tenants keep two or three cows, which have not a calf for years together. One informed me of having a cow ten years old that never had but one calf. Another that he keeps three or four cows, but had not a calf for six years. [96]

Cattle were so weak in the spring that they were sometimes unable to walk by themselves out of the byre.

There used to be a saying [that] March was carrying oot time. [97]

The island's population, steady at around 1,000 for two thousand years, started to climb in the 1750s due to the growth of the kelp industry. By 1750 a census counted 1,509 on Tiree, and in 1841 there were 4,961. Farming methods that had changed little since Neolithic times were no longer adequate.

[94] *Highland Folk Ways*, IF Grant, Routledge, 1961, p 92 and 75.

[95] *A Description of the Western Isles*, Martin Martin, 1703, Islands Book Trust, p 211-2.

[96] *Old Statistical Account*, p 411-2.

[97] Robert Beck talking to Dr John Holliday, 2011.

2. Tiree's Second Agricultural Revolution: Crofts, Feed and Drainage - 1790 to 1939

By the 18th century there had been improvements in agriculture south of the border (the 'Agricultural Revolution') and a number of landlords in Scotland were becoming dissatisfied with the old fashioned methods used on their estates, hoping to wring more profit out of their lands.

John Walker was sent by the Commission for Annexed Estates on a tour of the Highlands in 1764 to find out where changes could be made. On Tiree he found:

The first and most important step, therefore, that the farmers can be put upon here is to provide winter forage, to house their cattle and preserve the dung. This is but the common routine of every improved country where agriculture has made any progress...The cattle of every kind range the fields here all year round. The farmers, having neither stables nor cow houses, collect no dung...The want of winter food for cattle which is the great calamity over all the Highlands might be more easily remedied in Tiree than anywhere else. For if turnips can be raised with success and advantage for the purpose, it is in this island...they might be preserved in Tiree throughout the whole winter and the great losses prevented, to which both the tenants and landlord are subjected, by the death of great numbers of cattle in the spring by absolute want of food. [98]

The surveyor James Turnbull was hired by the estate produce a picture of agriculture on Tiree in 1768.

They keep too much ground in tillage without manuring it properly...The objections of herding may be got over by obliging the tenants of each farm to herd their cattle carefully, which would allow them to sow their grain in good time whither the ground be enclosed or not. [99]

In 1791 the minister on Tiree wrote:

We need a change of feed, introducing of green crops, inclosing, draining and subdividing small farms...Though the people be naturally attached to their ancient modes, yet whenever they see new methods pursued to perfection in enclosed farms, and work carried on much more profitably, expeditiously and cheaply, they will readily comply.[100]

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[98] *The Rev. Dr John Walker's Report on the Hebrides of 1764 and 1771*, ed. Margaret McKay, John Donald, 1980, p 185 and 187.

[99] Turnbull's survey of Tiree, 1768, AI2000.169.1.

[100] *OSA*, p 396, 412-3 and 418.

There was general agreement that changes were needed to the island. These were:

- the enclosure of fields
- the drainage of boggy land
- the growing of winter feed such as turnips and hay
- the fertilising of the ground in a systematic way
- the adoption of new breeds.

Enclosure

John Walker had reported from Tiree in 1764 that many fields had earth boundaries, but that these did not keep the animals out.

A great part of the fields are enclosed with walls of earth...five or six feet high and covered with grass... without answering in any tolerable degree the purposes of enclosure, being built of dry, sandy earth they are perpetually crumbling to pieces. [101]

The island's minister reported in 1791 that fields where crops were grown were only then being enclosed with proper walls.

Inclosures are lately begun. [102]

Around 1800 the estate began another revolution on Tiree – the break-up of the runrig townships and the creation of new individual crofts. The Duke instructed his factor on the island in 1803.

Such as were formerly tenants to have from 6 to 10 arable acres...Besides Scarinish and Heanish already divided, the farms to be broken down are Balemartine, Balephuil, Mannal and Gott. I understand these will give above 100 crofts which I suppose will be sufficient to accommodate all who have any good pretentions. [103]

The newly chosen crofters set about changing the landscape of Tiree by building stone walls around their new allocation of land. This was encouraged by the Duke. In 1804 his factor wrote:

Upon the farms of Kenovay Malcolm and Alexander MacDonald have built a sort of a dyke, filled up the middle with earth, faced on both sides with stone. The fence looks pretty well but cannot be supposed to be very durable and has not therefore been considered deserving of your Grace's premium as an encouragement. Archibald Campbell the change-keeper [inn

[101] *The Rev. Dr John Walker's Report on the Hebrides of 1764 and 1771*, ed. Margaret McKay, John Donald, 1980, p 184.

[102] *OSA*, p 412.

[103] *Instructions*, p 73-4.

keeper] has shown great industry between the march [boundary] dyke of Gott and his own house...which has cost him upwards of £60. [104]

The big Crossapol wall, *An Gàrradh Mòr*, was built by the estate using free labour, or *morlanachd*. Broken stone is scarce on Tiree. One day the factor came to a crofter in Kenovay and told him he would have to provide two sled loads of stone for the Crossapol wall or he would be put out of his croft. He was so desperate that he pulled down the gable end of his own house to provide the stones, reckoning he would be able to build it back up later in his own time. [105]

Drainage

Low-lying Tiree, with its bedrock of impermeable gneiss, had large areas of bog and loch.

There are 27 lochs on this island...a great part of the meadow, pasture and some arable ground lies low and much under water in the winter season. It would be a great advantage to cause the tenants to drain all such ground where sour. [106]

The Duke wrote in 1771:

I expect to make a considerable acquisition of fields of moss [peat banks] by draining the lochs of Tiree...procure an estimate of the expense of draining Loch Heylipol which seems to be easy and will be a method of saving my house in the island from immediate decay. [107]

Loch Bharrapol, to the north of *Loch a' Phuill*, and *Loch Baugh* around *Dùn Ìbrig* in Baugh, were among many lochs which were drained around this time by digging large open ditches. One drainer in Ayrshire in 1763 was recorded as having dug nine miles of ditching (from one end of Tiree to the other!) in a year. [108]

Open ditches were dug by hand until the 1970s and was paid for by the chain, an official measure of 22 yards (although it was suspected that some unscrupulous employers put extra links in the chain to make the diggers work harder!). It was hard work and few teams could do more than two chains a day. Danny Gillespie came to Tiree from Ireland and he could do more. Duncan MacPhail, Balephuil, "was the only man on Tiree who could keep up with him!" The tools you needed were a *spaid drèinidh* a sharp pointed spade with a 19 inch blade (which you had to keep sharpened with a file) and a small 'step' on one side; a *grapa-chrom* or long fork with curving prongs sometimes also used for pulling down seaweed from carts;

[104] *Instructions,* p 92.

[105] Donald MacLean, Kenovay, 9/2011.

[106] Turnbull's survey of Tiree, 1768, AI2000.169.1.

[107] *Instructions,* p 3.

[108] *Scottish Country Life*, p 19.

and finally an ordinary square-bottomed spade for the bottom of the ditch. A narrow, steep ditch had faster-moving water and did not clog up so easily. [109]

Fields were also drained with covered field drains. A ditch was dug, lined with stone and covered with stones and turf. These older stone drains can last for centuries and may be laid up to 4 feet below the ground, depending on the 'run'. If you see red-brown stained water at the surface it means the drain is blocked. [110]

From the 1840s fired clay drain-tiles were being manufactured on the mainland and these were being used on Tiree by the end of the 19th century. Where the tiles joined they put a handful of threshed straw over the pipes to stop the earth falling through the cracks and blocking them. These drains lasted about 50 years.

The drainage revolution allowed the new crofters to plough new land and create level fields in place of the old ridges and furrows. This in turn made possible the introduction of heavier farm machinery like reapers. Many of these drains are now blocked.

Winter Feed

The strange thing is that so little attention was paid to laying in a stock of winter fodder. Lowland farmers showed little skill in hay-making until the mid-nineteenth century and in the Highlands hay was hardly being made at all. [111]

Amazingly, very little hay was cut on Tiree until 1752.

Twelve years ago there was no hay made in Tiree but upon two farms. The practice has since become general. [112]

The factor was the first person to make hay.

The people never were used ... to make any hay till within these 14 or 15 years. They now in general by the factor's example in making his hay, come to understand the method of managing that branch of husbandry. [113]

Hay was cut with a sickle, *corran*, or later a *speall*, or scythe, into *stathan*, or rows.

DS: My English is not good, but still and all it might do...In my time they were cutting murran [bent] with a sickle, because the cottars hadn't got a scythe but there was a sickle in every

[109] John Donald MacLean, Millhouse and Hugh Archie MacCallum, White House, 10/2005.

[110] Donald Dubh MacLean, Kenovay, 3/2008.

[111] *Scottish Country Life*, p 143.

[112] *The Rev. Dr John Walker's Report on the Hebrides of 1764 and 1771*, ed. Margaret McKay, John Donald, 1980, p 186.

[113] Turnbull's survey of Tiree, 1768, AI2000.169.1.

house. They were getting hold of the top of the bent and the sickle was as sharp as a razor. You would wonder how many sheaves they would do in an hour. They would not be long getting a load ready to come home. Well you would be helping the crofter and he would bring home your bent in his cart and that would save you carrying it. I've seen us going as far as Hough [from West Hynish], that's up where the other hill is. That was a good distance to go for bent. That was the property of the factor at the time and he never grudged us to get bent there.

EC: Did the better off people have the scythe?

DS: Oh Yes! But I remember the sickle going full swing all the same. But in my time, when I was a boy, every crofter got a scythe. They weren't dear. You would get a scythe made for two shillings. And you would get, what do you call it? The wood that it was attached to for two shillings too. Bent was better – it was more tighter on the house than straw.

EC: Did you ever hear when the first scythes came to Tiree?

DS: That was, I might say, a hundred years ago. It was all sickles they had before that. And they used to go by the score to the harvest in the Lowlands from Tiree at that time, and some of my people were going there every year too. And my great grandfather was there, say, over eighty years ago. And it was him that brought the first scythe to Tiree. I can't say how much he paid for it but the farmer he happened to be working with, he got scythes there...It was John Black, a descendant of the man from Lismore. I've seen them often cutting corn with the sickle. But when this big scythe came home to Tiree they were coming from all parts of the island to see the big scythe - corran mòr, they were calling it, the big sickle. They didn't know anything about the speall or a scythe... Some of the women were very good with the sickle and I've seen a woman trying a scythe often. Some of them were good enough with it, especially girls that were brought up on a farm. Girls would try anything. [114]

By the 1870s horse drawn reapers became popular, but only after the first row at the edge had been cut by hand. Crofters liked to cut the hay before Fair Friday, around the 14th of July, because Fair Fortnight was a busy time with relatives returning from Glasgow.

The next day the rows of hay were turned with a *ràsail fheòir*, or hay rake, and clumps of damper hay were tossed up into the air with a fork. The old folk would smell the hay as it dried in the sun to see when it was ready to put into *prapagan*, or small piles, or a *rùc achadh*, a field stack. If the weather was damp three stobs would be tied together to make a tripod and the hay built up around this. After three weeks the *rùcanan achadh* were then pulled on hay slides dragged by a horse to *an iodhlann*, the stackyard, where the hay was built up on a ring of stones into *rùcanan*, or haystacks.

If there was no hay to feed to cattle, the old men would dilute black treacle, which they got from MacFarlane Shearers, 1:2 with warm water and pour it on straw. The cattle would eat

[114] Donald Sinclair talking to Eric Cregeen, SA1968.09.26.

straw then. The women used this treacle for baking and making treacle scones – they said it was better than the shop treacle! [115]

Turnips were grown in gardens in Scotland from 1672, but they only became a field crop north of the border in 1740. Since their cultivation depended on keeping cattle off the fields, it went hand in hand with enclosing fields with walls for the first time.

New root and fodder crops enabled farmers to over winter more animals and to provide fresh meat at reasonably regular intervals, winter and summer. [116]

If turnips can anywhere be raised with success and advantage for [winter food for the cattle] it is in this island...and the great losses prevented...by the death of great numbers of cattle in the spring by absolute want of food. [117]

In 1804 the factor grew a demonstration field of feed crops for the first time.

The factor has shown them the example of sowing turnips, carrots, grass seeds and planting winter cabbages. [118]

The overwintered cattle were also given some of the cereal crop.

Do you use the whole produce of the croft in feeding your cattle?

The greater number give to the cattle the whole of the barley and oats... [119]

Most crofters by the 1930s kept 4 to 8 cows in the byre during the winter. They were milked by hand and the calves fed from a bucket. Water had to be pulled from the well and carried to the byre. If the weather was reasonable the cows were let out at midday when could have a drink. The byre was "warmer than the house in the evening." Neil MacArthur's uncle in Moss kept a few beasts outside in winter. He had to go out twice a day with feed over his shoulder for them in the 1940s. [120]

The cattle wintered in the byre were fed hay, corn, cut potatoes and quartered turnips, which they cut up with an old sickle blade held with a cloth. [121]. Some crofters grew special "blue" potatoes for the cattle which they chopped up with spades. They also fed them hay and

[115] Hugh Archie MacCallum, White House, 5/2009.

[116] *Scottish Country Life*, Alexander Fenton, Tuckwell Press, 1999, p 177.

[117] John Walker, p 187.

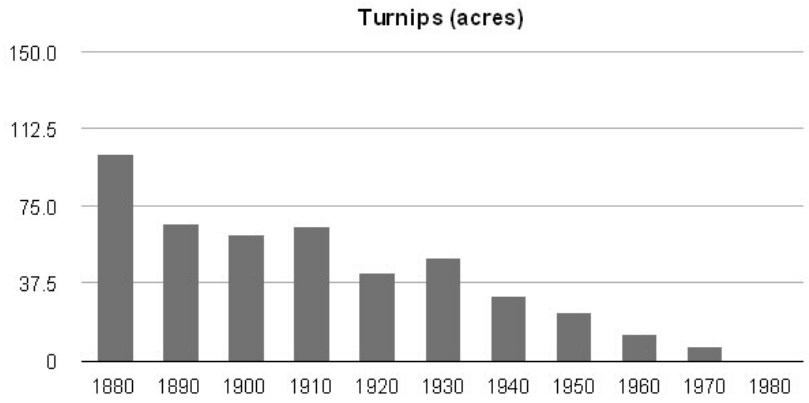
[118] *Instructions*, p 93.

[119] Napier Commission Evidence, 1884, vol 3, p 2133 (AI1999.17.1).

[120] Neil MacArthur, Moss, 5/2011.

[121] Colin MacKinnon, Kilkenneth, 5/2011.

(usually) threshed barley or oats. [122] Crofters would cut the potatoes in half when sorting them by size into seeds for next year. They usually used potatoes from Brock for feeding to the cattle because they were scabby. They used a turnip cutting machine, at first one operated by hand and then an electric one. [123]



The cows were milked and then some milk given in pails to the calves. In the spring two seagull eggs could also be mixed with the milk. [124] Tommy MacKinnon, Vaul, used to go to Gunna to collect seagull's eggs which they fed to calves in the spring. It put a gloss on their coats if they were being sold. [125]

There was also no reseeding of hay meadows.

About ten years ago [1754] Mr Lachlan MacLean, a merchant in Glasgow and a native of Tiree, caused clover and rye grass to be sown here for the first time. But though they throve exceedingly, the experiment has never been repeated. [126]

[122] Jean MacCallum, Balevullin, 5/2011.

[123] Mary Flora and Ewen MacKinnon, Hillcrest, 5/2011.

[124] Hughie MacKinnon, Torr a' Bhaile, Ruaig, unknown date.

[125] Tommy MacKinnon, Vaul, 8/2001.

[126] *The Rev. Dr John Walker's Report on the Hebrides of 1764 and 1771*, ed. Margaret McKay, John Donald, 1980, p 186.

Shelter

Cattle were increasingly wintered inside.

The people never were used to house their cattle in winter. [127]

In Lewis and the Northern Isles cattle lived in one end of the main house, but in Tiree the byre was separate from the living quarters. [128] Keeping the cattle inside allowed the dung to be collected during the winter and spread on particular fields in a more controlled way in the spring.

If the crofter had a bull, they were kept in another building, *Taigh an Tairbh* [house of the bull]. Many crofters couldn't afford their own bull. Colin MacKinnon, Kilkenneth, took his cows to be served next door to his neighbour, Angus MacDonald, in June and July. This gave a March calving. Summer calving produced more problems from bluebottles and mastitis. [129]

New Breeds

In many ways there had been great changes in the rearing of cattle on Tiree. However, the favoured breed on the island remained to a large extent the Highland, although Shorthorns were starting to come in. Hugh Macdiarmid, the factor, told the Napier Commission in 1884:

What is the cross introduced into the country now?
Highland cattle.
You adhere to the pure Highland cattle?
Yes, there are one or two dairy farms, but principally Highland cattle.
You have no shorthorn crosses?
Yes, on some of the larger farms.
Are the crofters taking to that at all?
No...
Has the proprietor taken a particular interest in the improvement of the breed of cattle?
Yes.
Is there a bull kept here?
A large number of them.
Afforded by the proprietor?
No, the people pay for the bulls themselves. [130]

In the 20th century the old Highland cattle were replaced by quicker growing breeds like Shorthorn and Aberdeen Angus. [131]

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[127] Turnbull's survey of Tiree, 1768, AI2000.169.1.

[128] *Highland Folk Ways*, IF Grant, Routledge, 1961, p 146.

[129] Colin MacKinnon, Kilkenneth, 5/2011.

[130] Napier Commission Evidence, p2161, vol 3 1884 (AI1999.17.1)

[131] Colin MacKinnon, Kilkenneth, 5/2011.

Thomas Barr

An important figure in the transformation of farming on Tiree was Tom Barr. In 1883 the 8th Duke of Argyll wrote:

The pasturage of Tyree is particularly rich in clovers and grasses of the moist nutritious kind. Consequently it is admirably and most specially adapted to dairy farming. But dairy farming was almost wholly unknown in the island until I took pains to introduce it. [132]

Milking cows and making butter and cheese had been an essential part of living on Tiree since Neolithic times. What the Duke meant was a **dairy industry**. He spent time and money to entice a mainland farmer to the island.

When the large farm of Balephetrish became vacant some twenty two years ago I instructed my factor to look out for a tenant from the low country [the Lowlands] who should be a dairy farmer. The disadvantages of residence in a remote island, the character of which was little known in the low country, made this a matter of some difficulty, and involved a very considerable outlay in buildings adapted for the purpose. But a tenant was found (ibid).

Tom Barr's farm at Balephetrish (D87)

The Barr family, from Ayrshire, the heart of Scottish dairy farming, answered the call. Robert Barr worked 100 acres with one man, at Burntongues Farm, Dalry. He signed the lease of the 800 acre Balephetrish Farm in 1864.

Robert had four sons [two sons and two stepsons- Mary's first husband had drowned in a fishing boat accident and Robert was her second husband] and he maybe thought he didn't have enough in Ayrshire [for them all]. [133]

Sadly Robert Barr died weeks later at the age of 53 at his own farm sale. But the family may have had little option, having sold up, but to carry on, His wife, Mary Crawford, and two sons, Hugh and Thomas, came to Tiree and took up the lease in his place.

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[132] *Crofts and Farms in the Hebrides,* 8th Duke of Argyll, 1883, p 31, AI 1997.49.1

[133] John Barr talk, AC 121.

It was really Robert Barr that was meant to take over the farm, but he died at the farm sale, and it was Mary Crawford, who is buried at Kirkapol, who came over with the two young ones, Tom and Hugh. [Robert] had signed the lease and took pneumonia and died at the farm sale. [134].

I heard that the estate got him to teach local people to dairy farm and to make cheese. Dairy farming was more labour intensive. It was to give employment. That was one of the reasons that the estate brought Tom Barr out...A lot of the farmers in Coll were of Ayrshire extraction, names like Galbraith and Paterson. And the farms were all of the Ayrshire pattern, built after the Clearances on Coll around 1852. There was nothing unusual about Ayrshire famers coming up to the islands. [135]

Mary Crawford, herself a farmer's daughter was 51, Hugh Barr 20 and Tom only 16 when the family arrived on the island. The story is still told that they landed at the east end and were walking to Balephetrish across the moor at Earnal. Tom looked around at the wet, heather covered ground and asked his companion if the whole island was like that.

[Tom] Barr came ashore in Caolas and travelled through the sliabh at Earnal, and that was all of Tiree he had seen so far and he remarked what on earth had got into his father's head when he saw ground like this! [136]

He must have been relieved when he turned the corner in the road and saw Balephetrish machair and the Reef stretched in front of him!

[Tom Barr] brought 8 cows [with him from Ayrshire]. That's what I heard. [137]

When he came to Tiree at first there was byre built on for 60 cows and a cheese making loft was added on when he took over the tenancy. The house [next door – Grianan] was only one story. [138]

The layout of the buildings is very similar to what you see in Ayrshire. [139]

Seven years after his arrival the 1871 Census shows Tom Barr visiting one of the big dairy farms on Coll, while his mother was in Balephetrish with her two daughters, five farm

[134] John Barr talk, AC 121

[135] Robert Beck, AC 121.

[136] Alasdair Sinclair, Brock, AC 121.

[137] Lachie MacKinnon, Balephetrish, AC 121.

[138] John Barr, AC 121.

[139] Iain MacKinnon, Hillcrest, AC 121.

servants and one domestic servant. By 1871 Hugh had left Tiree, married and moved to the 1,100 Fearnoch Farm at Tighnabruich. [140]

Unless the estate was being misled, the dairy at Balephetrish must still have been working in 1883, 19 years after the Barrs arrived. The Duke purred:

The experiment has answered perfectly The pasturage of Tiree has proved itself to be admirably and specially adapted to the production of cheese of a high quality and to the healthy condition of a fine herd of first class Ayrshire cows. [141]

The 1881 Census shows Tom Barr employing five men and also three girls, making it likely that a large number of cows were still being milked. However, some time after that Tom Barr decided to phase out dairying and become a stock farmer.

A dairy was set up...but it just wasn't on the cards on the island of Tiree and it went back to being a stock farm. [142]

This decision was not because of the costs of getting cheeses to market. The large dairy farms of Coll were successful until the 1950s. It is more likely that, by the 1880s, there was more money to be made breeding horses and buying and selling cattle (see later).

One of the reasons for the success of the Barr family on Tiree was that the extended family worked together. The 1881 Tom was living in Balephetrish with his wife, his widowed mother in law, his uncle James Crawford, also a farmer, his nephew John Barr, a shepherd, two daughters and six farm servants - 12 people living in an 8 roomed house. In the next door house (now Grianan) there were another five farm and domestic servants.

EC*: He had the two houses [at Balephetrish] together?*
DS: *The two. Yes that's right.* [143]

Tom Barr seemed to have a lot of relations coming over every summer for months for a holiday. They kept up with all their Ayrshire friends. [144]

The estate continued to invest in the farm.

1880 Roofing the piggeries at Balephetrish.

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[140] 1871 Census.

[141] *Crofts and Farms in the Hebrides,* 8th Duke of Argyll, 1883, p 31, AI 1997.49.1

[142] John Barr, AC 121.

[143] Donald Sinclair talking to Eric Cregeen, SA 1972.096.

[144] John Barr talk, AC 121.

1885 Sum allowed to Thomas Barr to build shelter dykes. [145]

The fact that there was a piggery at Balephetrish is more evidence that dairying in Balephetrish continued into the 1880s as pigs were fed the whey left over from cheese production and many dairy farms had one. [146]

At some time after 1881 Tom Barr took over the leases of Kenovay and Crossapol, giving him control of the whole of the Reef and giving him an estate of 3000 acres that stretched from the Vaul boundary to where Paterson's farm is today. 300 acres of this was ploughed. *Taigh Chailien Lachainn* (the ruin in front of Colin MacPhail's house in Crossapol) was built for his shepherd. John MacMaster was brought from Mull as a shepherd by Tom Barr and lived in Kenovay on the site of 'Sunny Brae'.

Thomas Barr farmed at Balephetrish from 1864 to 1912 (E73)

Tom Barr was a major employer and had a flagpole set up on Balephetrish Hill so that he could summon day workers when he needed them.

There's a place on top of Balephetrish Hill, and it's still there actually, and there is a wee mound there where there was a flagpole. A flag was hoisted every time he wanted labour and the day there was no wind that an old barrel that was brightly painted [was hoisted], something they could actually see. The wee hole is still there, I understand. [147]

[145] Factory Act Books, AI 1998.151.1

[146] Robert Beck, AC 121.

[147] Iain MacKinnon, Hillcrest, AC 121.

On a rock in front of Balephetrish House, still known as *Creag an Cluig*, the rock of the bell, there was a bell which was rung to bring the farm workers in for their meals. [148]

This bell had SS Beagle on it. We do know that a ship of that name was wrecked in 1890 in Balephetrish Bay. [149]

The size of his farm and workforce meant that Tom Barr could operate on a much more modern 'industrial' scale.

Neil Campbell, Kenovay, told me that Tom Barr had a man with a horse and cart taking up seaweed all year round. [150]

If the estate had wanted someone to 'modernise' Tiree agriculture, they had certainly found their man.

[Tom Barr] was instrumental in bringing a lot of new things to the island. He installed a sheep dipper in Balephetrish, the first one in the island, a big round one...He brought in [iron] slag to Tiree by puffer. There are trace elements in slag and it helps to neutralise the lime in the soil.[151]

He introduced heavy Clydesdale horses to Tiree.

It was Tom Barr that introduced the Clydesdale horse to Tiree...The Agricultural Society was set up and Tom Barr was appointed to go to the Stallion Show and select two stallions and bring them back for breeding on Tiree. [152]

Just to show you how astute he was. He was wanting to buy a stallion. He went to down to the famous Matthew Marshall at Stranraer. And he duly arrived at the station off the train, got his pony and trap and went out to Bridgebank to see two of the stallions. Matthew Marshall thought that someone from the Highlands, could maybe palm anything onto them, and so he showed him one or two stallions. After a short while he went into the house. He come out about half an hour later on. He thought Tom Barr would be studying all the finer details. He asked where Mr Barr was. He was informed that Mr Barr was gone. "If that's all he could produce he was no longer interested and he set off back to Tiree. [153]

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[148] Iain MacKinnon, Hillcrest.

[149] Alasdair Sinclair, Brock. AC 121.

[150] Robert Beck, AC 121.

[151] John Barr, AC 121.

[152] Donald MacIntyre, AC 41.

[153] John Barr, AC 121.

A Clydesdale stallion (K166)

He had 60 horses on the Reef [in the winter] – it was always the two year old geldings he kept, because the crofters always kept the female foals for breeding...But Mr Barr would buy the [geldings] from the crofters. A big load of hay was going out every day in the winter. But the crofters were unable to do the spring work with a mare and a foal, so they would go to Mr Barr and he would say "Take whatever horse you want from the Reef, look after him, feed him." And when the spring work was finished they went back to Balephetrish. Maybe there were 20 of these geldings being broken in by the crofters. Mr Barr went away with the [broken] geldings [and sold them for more]. [154]

He discovered the cure for 'pine', a mineral deficiency that affects grazing animals on Tiree (see later).

It seems he may have brought in sheep from Ayrshire, attracted by the high calcium levels in the grass growing on the island's shell sand. This produced strong bone growth.

Sheep in large numbers were sent from Ayrshire to be grazed. They conducted analyses of the grass in 1923 and 1924. They found 1.7% lime and 0.69% phosphate in the grass...from these figures there was no doubt that it paid men to ship sheep from Ayrshire to Tiree, where they found strong, rich grass. [155]

In 1878 he married Janet Barclay whose father farmed 60 acres at Lochwinnoch, Ayrshire, and they had 8 children – Mary, Jessie, Robert, Jeanie, John, Thomas, Alexander and Anna Margaret. These grew up bilingual at school in Scarinish – in fact Thomas himself is recorded as speaking Gaelic and English in the 1891 Census. The family later took a house in Oban to allow the children to go to secondary school there.

[154] Donald MacIntyre, AC 121.

[155] *The Scotsman*, 28 January 1926.

I liked the Gaelic. I came over to the mainland in 1906. My father took a farm at Buckholm, Galashiels. I stayed there seven years. The land was very steep, that was the worst of it. I was accustomed to flat, sandy land! [156]

The first recollection of John Barr, when he came over to Galashiels, was him piling the salt on. I said to him, "What's the idea?" When I was in Tiree," he said, "the puffers only came in every six months and the meat had to be salted. I just can't stick this food in Galashiels!" He lived to be 105! Everything was out wintered in Tiree. When he came to Galashiels he thought he would do the same thing. The winter of 1962/3 was the worst we had ever seen. It snowed for months...John Barr had no sheds. All he could do was bring them in around the house...It was a lesson [on the difference between the east and west side of the country]. [157]

Tragically Tom Barr's wife died of appendicitis when she was only 48.

He was a far-sighted man. The 1911 Census shows the sons Robert and Alexander Barr managing the Balephetrish farm "rented by [their] father."

After 1910 there wasn't much future for the Barr family on Tiree, so they took over the lease of the farm of Buckholm, near Galashiels, and his son John and Tom went [there]. In 1912 John took over the lease of Moneylaws. After the war he gave up Moneylaws and took over the farm of Prest and his family are still farming there today. My father and Robert were left in Tiree. My father joined the Border and Mid-Lothian Horse. In fact he took a pony from Buckholm and was out in Salonica. My father was a very good swimmer. He could swim between Coll and Tiree. Out in Salonika, the enemy, the Bulgars, were swimming behind the British lines. My father went out and intercepted this Bulgar and brought him ashore. For that he got the Meritorious Service Medal. After 1922 at the end of the lease Uncle Robert went through to Galashiels [from Tiree]. [158]

Tom Barr saw that his lease on Tiree was unlikely to be renewed because of the pressure on the estate to break up the big farms on the island to make crofts. When some of his land was given to crofters he demanded compensation and was awarded £1,243, the surveyor noting "ample evidence of excellent management" in his report. He is said to have been offered one of the new crofts carved out of his farm. He refused.

He died at Langshaw, Roxburgh, in 1918, aged 70. *[My father] was back in London on [Armistice Day] in 1918 and he got word that his father was very ill at Buckholm and he set off. He died in 1918.* [159]

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[156] John Barr, Tom Barr's son, talking on the BBC on his 100th birthday in 1987, AC 92.

[157] Brodie on AC 121.

[158] John Barr, AC 121.

[159] John Barr, AC 121.

The family finally gave up the lease in 1920. [160]

Tom Barr was a huge figure in the history of Tiree's agriculture over some 45 years. He is still remembered on the island with a mixture of affection, envy and admiration. A good businessman who was willing to help the crofters on the island; but the price was usually a day's work on his land.

In 1869 crofters in Gott signed an agreement with him to cart 26 loads of seaweed from Saltaig, on the north shore of Balephetrish, for his land in return for the seaweed on their own crofts. [161]

It seems from talking to people that the attitude [on the island] is a mixture of admiration and the very opposite. There was always a strong reaction. He did a lot of good and at the same time exploited the people. There are two sides to this....I don't think his family were in destitution afterwards [leaving Tiree]. [162]

He loaned or guaranteed money for a number of capital projects on the island.

He was good to the people of Tiree, especially those in need. If he could help them he would. Mr Barr was an elder in the church and the price of building a church at that time was £500. The Kirk Session didn't have a penny, so Mr Barr told them he would give them the money provided they repaid it when they could. They got on and built the church [at Cornaig] and in time they paid him back. [163]

He was also instrumental in getting the harbour built on Tiree. There was a bond of £12,000 that he [pledged]...He didn't actually part with the money. He was a shrewd man! Just before he died, word came through that the [Board of Agriculture] had rescinded that [bond]. [164]

Donald Sinclair, West Hynish, knew Tom Barr well.

DS: *He was a very good neighbour, Mr Barr, [he would] give a chance to everybody. He was keeping eleven horses over at Crossapol and every one of the horses was broken in to cart work or ploughing work, and if a tenant would lose a horse and was left on one horse, all he had to do was go and see Mr Barr, and Mr Barr would tell him, "There is eleven horses over at Crossapol. Just take any one of them you like and all you have to do is to send it back in the same condition you got it." That was very liberal. He was a nice man. If you were taking*

[160] AC 121.

[161] AI 1999.68.5.

[162] Robert Beck, AC 121.

[163] Donald MacIntyre, AC 121.

[164] John Barr, AC 121.

a passage on the boat with him he would give you dinner. Oh Yes! He always had a barrel of whisky in the house.

EC: *Did he keep his cattle indoors?*

DS: *Well some of them. His farm was so big, you know. He's got the Reef, he's got Crossapol, he's got Balephetrish. Oh! He's got hundreds of beasts! He left, was it £300,000 he left? He was a rich man. And he was a liberal man too, he was a nice man.*

EC: *Was it mostly dairying he was doing?*

DS: *Well, that's what he was doing at first, but he was depending on beef cattle and sheep after that. Balephetrish was a very good place for sheep and the Reef was a very good place for cattle. If you would go to Balephetrish on any business whether he knew you or not old Barr would say, "Do you want to see me? Come in and get your food first and you'll be stronger to do the business." That's true about him. ..That was his style. I knew Barr very well*. [165]

Tom Barr had been good for Tiree and Tiree had been good to him.

Dairying

Selling a beast paid a crofter's rent, but milking a cow fed the children. *Creag and Loch a' Bhleoghain*, (the rock and loch of the milking) in Baugh and *Creag a' Bhleoghain* in Milton are place names on the island that testify to this. Cattle were milked twice a day, although they dried up for a while before calving. Some people sang to the animals to calm them and get more milk.

In Baugh there is a kink in the side road at *Creag na Buarach.* The *buarach* was a piece of rope with an eye spliced in the end and was used to tie the back legs of a cow above the knees. It stopped the animal walking far and particularly stopped them kicking the milker or the pail of milk over. It was also sometimes used when putting a calf to the cow, although not every cow needed one. [166]

Crofters were more fortunate than the landless cottars who had to rent grazing from crofters and farmers, often paying them back with their labour.

We were cottars in Brock and we had one cow which went under the odd name of 'Harry', a lovely Ayrshire cow, fully horned. Now cottars do not normally have a cow - that's [for] crofters. But at that time there were four cows permitted to a croft and my mother's cousin had two crofts which allowed him eight cows. We had one cow and he reduced his down to seven [to keep within] the souming [the allowance of animals that went with each croft].

[165] Donald Sinclair talking to Eric Cregeen, SA 1972.096.

[166] Neil MacArthur, Moss, 6/2011.

George Paterson and Archie Kennedy milking cows in the cattle byre at Crossapol in the 1930s (C118)

Every morning before going to school the cow would be somewhere away down the machair, and my job, wind or rain, would be to put the long adult waterproofs on, running in my bare feet away up the banks to look to see where the cows were overnight out on the common grazing. They could go out to Soay, but they generally remained about the central part of the common grazing. All the different cows from the various crofts would be there, and there would be 'Harry'. Now Harry was a cow with a certain mind of its own. She would give a sweep of her horns if you went near and you had to be very careful. But she would accept then that it was time to move and you got behind [her]. You had a walking stick. My aunt always used to say,"Don't make the cow run now. It's full of milk. Just walk it nicely down the road." So she started to walk at its own pace, her udder full of milk. You just plodded on behind it.

She knew where to go and made for the byre. By that time my aunt had her white enamel pail. We would go in for breakfast and the cow would go into her stall in the byre and my aunt would be in there milking. You could hear the Tssh, Tssh, Tssh! The milk going hard into the pail there, building up this big froth on the top. She would come in with this pail and we would be given big glasses of the milk. I've heard people say they didn't like it blood warm from the cow, but we did. It was rather nice on a cold winter's day, getting ready from school. Boiled egg and a piece and this big glass of milk. Like a big Guinness with the froth on top. And, boys being boys, we liked to put our noses into it and blow. [167]

To preserve the surplus of the summer, butter and cheese were made. Milk was left to separate overnight in a staved wooden pail or *cuman*, or later a tin pail. Then the cream was separated off with a scallop shell skimmer perforated with holes. Butter could be made by shaking this milk fat in a leather bag or pot.

[167] Duncan Grant, Ruaig talking to Dr John Holliday 10/2011.

The old way of making butter was to put the milk in an earthenware craggan [pot] covered with a tightly tied sheep or goat's skin...Then two women seated opposite each other tipped it half up and then dashed it back down, till the milk broke in butter against the sides. It could take nine or ten hours. Straw was used to cushion the shock. [168]

The plunger churn, *lanaid*, must have seemed a great step forward.

The upright wooden plunge-churns were still an innovation in the islands quite late in the nineteenth century [around 1870]. [169]

I remember making butter [in Ruaig in the 1950s]. In the byre there was a large churn. It seemed, as boys, very heavy. But we were given the task of churning, up and down with a plunger. And your arms were tired after a short while! Every now and again she would lift the wooden bit off the top and look in and you would see a change – slightly bluer the milk and you would see bits of butter floating around. There was a disc at the bottom [of the plunger] with holes. I never did like the buttermilk – it never appealed to me. I know the crofter, Alasdair Dhòmhnaill Bhàin, he would quite welcome a glass of buttermilk. Eventually she would put us boys aside and she would start gathering the lumps of butter. She had two little wooden spades. It would be rather wet, and she would pat it and squeeze it. The fresh butter had the beads of wet on it. It took a lot of patting to get the liquid out of the butter. I really liked the fresh butter. It wasn't like the [butter] you get in the Coop with preservatives. It tasted lovely! ...Kate Lamont, the post mistress in Ruaig, had this thistle butter mould which my aunt didn't have and I remember going down to get this lovely thistle put on the top of the butter.

[168] *Scottish Country Life*, Alexander Fenton, Tuckwell Press, 1999, p 157.

[169] *Scottish Country Life*, Alexander Fenton, Tuckwell Press, 1999, p 159.

Marion MacDonald making butter with a plunger churn outside her house in Sandaig around 1942 (X36)

In the 1930s the glass butter maker with horizontal paddles came in. In summer the butter was naturally a rich yellow colour. In the winter it was paler and they sometimes used to add colouring to make it more yellow. [170]

Mary Flora MacKinnon, Hillcrest, remembers that making butter "took the whole day" with all the scalding and churning. Homemade butter often had quite a strong taste. Her family often used coarse fishing salt to preserve it and salted butter was said to keep for a year if it was kept cool, but it had often 'turned' slightly by the next summer. Some of the salted butter was put it into earthenware pots or *crogan* for the winter. By the time they reached the butter in the bottom of the pots it was very strong tasting (salty and 'mature') and she didn't like it then. [171]

Potatoes, milk and butter were a favourite meal on Tiree in the old days. Duncan Grant himself likes his potatoes with the skins just peeling off – *a' gaireachdainn* [laughing], as they used to say. [172]

The salt butter they made because in these days there were no fridges or freezers. It would only last, I suppose, fresh butter, for a certain time. There was a crystalline quality [to it]. It was powerful! But people seemed to be inured to salt in Tiree [then]. I'm not too sure what it

[170] Mairi Campbell, Corrairigh, 5/2000.

[171] Mary Flora MacKinnon, Hillcrest, 5/2011.

[172] Duncan Grant, Ruaig, 6/2005.

did for their blood pressure in these days! The salt butter was greatly used with potatoes. The great ashet [bowl] of potatoes would be put out. [We would] be taking great slices of salt butter and sliding it through the hot potato. It was very tasty! [173]

Isabella MacLean operating a cheese press made in the local smiddy (X34)

Cheese for home consumption was also made on Tiree.

Margaret MacIntyre: Calum Salum was still making cheese in the 1950s, just for family use.

Robert Beck: Dolina MacCallum, Port Bàn, was still making cheese in the 1960s. It was skimmed milk cheese. It was very nice cheese. You had to chew it but there's no harm in that.[174]

To make cheese a number of materials could be used to curdle the milk.

Probably the stomach of a calf was the most common, but that of a lamb, hare or sow would do, or even the gizzard of a fowl. [175]

The curd was then put in a cheese press, or *fiodhan*, and the top either weighted down with stones or screwed down.

Dairying was sufficiently important on Tiree before the Second World War for Tiree students to go to agricultural college.

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[173] Duncan Grant, Ruaig talking to Dr John Holliday 10/2011.

[174] AC 121.

[175] *Scottish Country Life*, Alexander Fenton, Tuckwell Press, 1999, p 159.

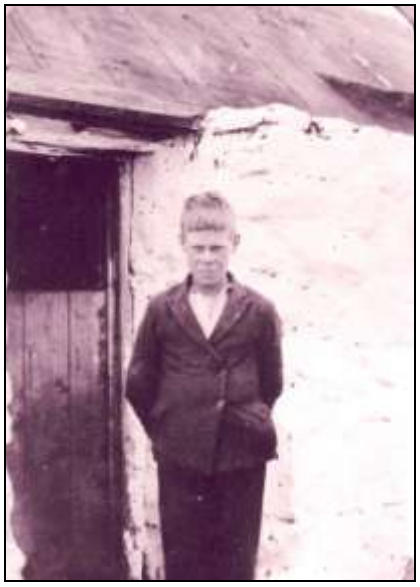
The results were announced of the 42nd annual examination for the national Diploma in Dairying which took place at the Dairy School for Scotland at Auchincruive, Ayr...Lachlan MacKinnon, Hillcrest, Mary MacKinnon, Machair, Heanish. [176]

Coll was settled with dairy farmers in the 19th century. Mary Flora MacKinnon, Hillcrest, remembers her father sailing to Coll every year for a big round cheese. [177]

Robert Beck: They were making cheese on Coll until the 1950s... Coll cheese was a high class cheese, a connoisseur's cheese. It went to the House of Commons. [178]

Cattle Herding or *Buachailleachd*

To keep cattle away from the crops in the days before fencing grants and apportionments, their grazing needed to be carefully controlled. And even after croft fields were enclosed from the 1800s and wire fences introduced in the 1870s, cattle herding, *buachailleachd,* usually by boys, continued on Tiree until the Second World War.



"The herd laddie" (E17)

Donald MacNeill, *Dòmhnall an Tàilleir,* left school at 13 and became the herdboy, or *buachaille,* for Balemartine in 1922. He left home barefoot at six in the morning to let cows out of the fang at seven and took them back at seven at night. His pay for the six month's work? £14. He left this job to go to sea when he was 25. Archie Kennedy, Crossapol, was also a *buachaille* in Balemartine before the war.

[176] *The Scotsman, 7 October 1937.*

[177] Mary Flora MacKinnon, Hillcrest, 5/2011.

[178] AC 121.

Allan MacFadyen's cousin, John MacFadyen, was the last *buachaille* in Balemartine in 1939. He was paid £10 by the crofters from 'term to term' – the 28th of May to the 28th of November. His job was to keep the cattle on the *sliabh* until about 9pm when he would take them down to be milked at the fang. If it was raining he would shelter in a hut at the top of the side road in Balemartine, *Bothag Bhaile Mhàrtainn* or *Bothag Theag* [Balemartine or Jake's bothy] but he spent the nights at home. Allan was one of three boys who re-roofed this bothy with old bed heads and turf in 1932. The herd boy was meant to keep the cattle on the Balinoe side of *Sliabh Bhaile Mhàrtainn* in the morning and take them across the road to the other side of the sliabh at 2 o' clock. John MacFadyen left Tiree in 1939 and was sadly killed in military service in 1942.

MMcK: *Did you tell me that crofters were expected to give [the buachaille] a meal as well?*

JB: *Oh Yes! They got one meal a day. They went round the houses one by one...in the middle of the day, say between 2 and 3.* [179]

Alasdair Sinclair, Balinoe, remembers Walter Brownlie, Donald Campbell and Archie Kennedy as being herdboys in Balinoe when he was young. They were also paid £10 for the season. In bad weather they would shelter in *Taigh Mhurchadh a' Ghobhainn* in lower Balinoe. Their job was to keep the cattle on the common grazing on the *sliabh* and bring them down again to the crofts to be milked in the evening. On a warm summer's afternoon Alasdair, Donald Campbell and his dog all fell asleep in the sun by the wall at MacArthur's shop in Balinoe. The cattle walked right past them all at 3pm and reached home too early. Kate Campbell was furious with them. At that time Kate MacLean from Skipnish had just graduated from Glasgow University. The next day Alasdair had gone to the MacArthur's shop with some eggs to pay for groceries. While the shopkeeper Malcolm MacArthur was through in the back, packing away the eggs, he heard him say "Alasdair and Donald were given a first class honours degree in *buachailleachd* by Kate Campbell yesterday!" As Alasdair says, "They were witty, the old people!" [180]

Islanders could not forget that they were merely tenants. Mairi Campbell remembers that Rent Day was a big occasion in her mother's time. Everyone dressed up and went to Island House, where the Chamberlain, who had come from Invereray, was staying. The crofters were ushered in one by one by the local ground officer, who called out their name. [181]

The Second Agricultural Revolution used new breeds and techniques to work Tiree's land in a smarter way. The Third Agricultural Revolution was different – Tiree started to import energy, in the form of fossil fuel to replace horses and people, and most of its food.

[179] John Brown, Balephuil, talking to Dr Margaret MacKay, SA 1973.10.21.

[180] Alasdair Sinclair, Balinoe, 12/2008.

[181] Mairi Campbell, Corrairigh, 2/2011.

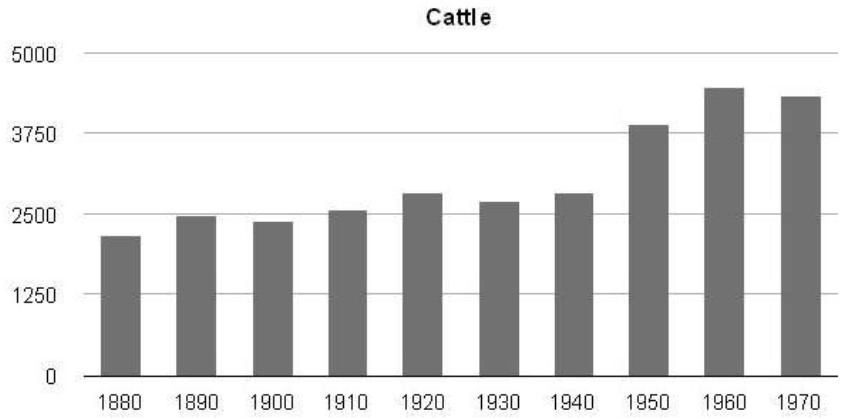
3. Tiree's Third Agricultural Revolution – 1945 to the present day

The changes to cattle husbandry on Tiree after the Second World War have been as profound as those of the two earlier 'Agricultural Revolutions.' These changes were:

- the increased numbers of cattle
- the loss of dairying and the growth of store cattle
- the use of new breeds and improved stock
- the use of silage
- the outside wintering of stock
- the advances in animal health - the elimination of the warble fly and brucellosis, the success of worming and the treatment of pine by cobalt supplements
- the increasing use of artificial fertiliser from the 1970s in place of seaweed. [182]
- the increased reseeding of hayfields
- the apportionment of common grazing
- the relative reduction of farm incomes
- the blockage of field drains and the increasing wetness of some fields
- the loss of the island's population and rural workforce and the increasing age of crofters
- the increased importance of subsidies

[182] Lachie MacKinnon, Parkhouse, 9/2011

Increased numbers of cattle



Store Cattle

As early as 1791 it was appreciated that Tiree cattle would fatten exceptionally on richer grazing on the mainland.

There are beautiful cattle reared here, especially of late, which, when sent to English pasture, grow to an amazing size. One of them, of which we lately had an account, fed by Mr Spearman of Northumberland in 1790, weighed in beef, tallow and hide 117 stone, 5 ¼ pounds. [183]

Tiree grazing is high in calcium and is ideal for the growing bones of young calves and lambs but not for fattening them. The island has therefore become a store animal producing location. [184]

Store animals are young cattle that are fattened, or 'finished', elsewhere before slaughter.

The common type of farming is the rearing of stock for the 'store' cattle market. The Tiree cattle are found to respond quickly to the fattening process prior to their sale for the market. 1,200 cattle are exported annually. Dairy farming is limited to what is sufficient for domestic and local needs; any surplus milk is utilised for the feeding of calves and pigs.[185]

[183] *OSA*, p 411-2.

[184] *Tiree Community Development Plan – Crofting, Agriculture and Environment Strategy.* TRD, 2004.

[185] *Third Statistical Account* , 1953, p 130.

Changed Breeds

Since the 1960s there has been a move towards bigger Continental bulls like Simmental and Charolais. These produce bigger calves but are more likely to need a Caesarean section to deliver them. However, Continental crosses are less good for breeding as they do not lactate so well. The calves are therefore usually sold and crofters often use Shorthorn /Aberdeen Angus crosses as cows for breeding. [186]

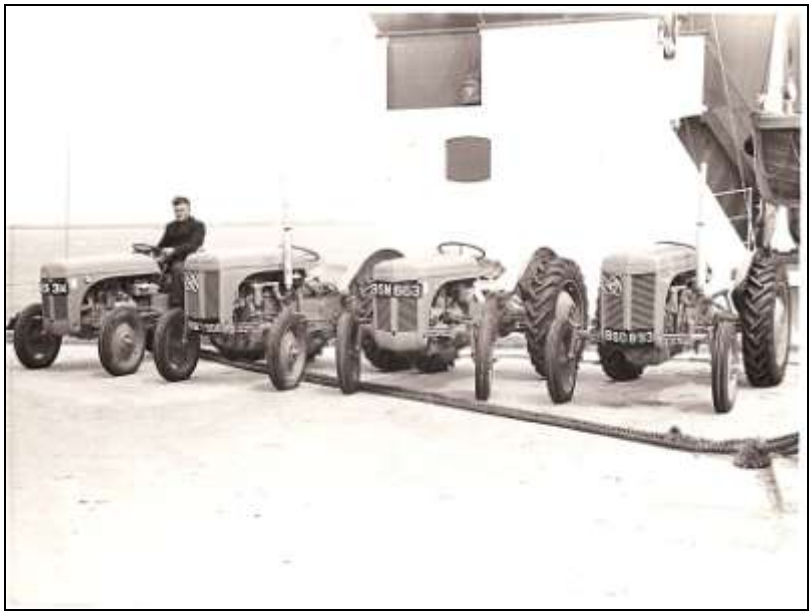
Silage

Sidney Hamilton, who lived with Ishbel MacDougall in Cornaigbeg, was the first man to make silage on Tiree. He built a pit at the end of his house in the 1950s.

One enterprising crofter has experimented with the 'silage' system of storage. [187]

One day Alan Cameron, Balevullin, was going round in the post van and asked Sidney if he was putting out dung. "Oh! No!" said Sidney, "That's silage!" [188]

The amount of cereals grown on Tiree has decreased and yet there were more cattle. The first imported hay came to Tiree in the late 1950s. [189]



Some of the first tractors on Tiree arriving on the ferry in the 1950s (N108)

[186] Tommy MacKinnon, Vaul, 6/2011.

[187] *Third Statistical Account* , 1953, p 130.

[188] Lachie Campbell, Crossapol, 2/2011.

[189] Lachie Campbell, Crossapol, 2/2011.

The Growth of Fencing

In the mid-19th century drawn iron wire became cheap enough to use for fences and in 1847 a famer in America was the first to string five strands between posts. Barbed and woven wire was invented in America in the 1870s and rapidly became indispensable to the ranchers of the American Mid West.

The first report on Tiree that wire fences were being used comes from 1887.

Wire fencers brought in from Inveraray to repair fences at Hough [farmed at the time by the factor]. [190]

Sandy MacLean fenced the area between Scarinish post office and the shore around 1910 into *Pàirc Shandaidh*, and the new crofts on the Balephetrish machair were fenced with wire in 1922. Fencing grants became common after 1955 and much common grazing has now been apportioned and fenced. This allows crofters to control the grazing and dosing of their animals, although some people say it has made the grasslands feel less 'free' for recreational walking.

The Reduced Sale Price

For long periods since the Second World War cattle prices were depressed. Ewan MacKinnon, Croish, remembers Dorothy MacKinnon from Vaul telling him that she sold one bullock in the 1960s and with the proceeds she bought a trailer. Today, he says, you'd have to sell six bullocks to buy one. [191]

Lachie MacLean, Druimfraoich said that in the 1950s he was getting £50 a cwt for cattle, or £1 a kg. In 2008 he got £1.24-1.42 per kg. Sheep used to be £40 and now are £35. [192]

In 1960 the father of Willie MacPhail bought a barrel of diesel from Archibald Brown for £4 17s 6d. In the same year that he sold lambs for £5. Now lambs go for £60 but a barrel of diesel costs you £150. [193]

The merchants used to wait for payment until after the sales. Donald 'Denny' was a crofter in Moss. Someone said to him, "You've two good stirks there." "Yes, they're two good stirks, but one belongs to Macfarlane Shearers and the other to Cook and Blair [a mail order company]!" [194]

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[190] Factory Act Books, AI 1998.151.1

[191] Ewan MacKinnon, Croish, 2/2008.

[192] Lachie MacLean, Druimfraoich, 2/2008.

[193] Willie MacPhail, Clachan, 8/2011.

[194] Willie MacPhail, Clachan, 8/2011.

An Ageing Workforce

A 2004 survey found that crofters on Tiree were getting older. There were 292 crofts tenanted by 92 crofters. 154 islanders were actively involved in crofting businesses generally – 47 of these were over 65 years old; 28 were 50-65 years old; 70 were 30-50; and only 9 were 18-30. [195]

Increased Subsidies

A number of post war subsidies have supported the Tiree agricultural economy, from the 1960s Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance, the 1980s Suckler Cow Premium Scheme and Sheep Annual Premium Scheme, to the present Single Farm Payments.

Improvements in Animal Health

See the section on Vets. Tiree has had a big problem with liver fluke which is now controlled.

All the cattle on Tiree are tuberculin tested. [196]

Wilder Cattle

Tommy MacKinnon is one of many who say that in the old days [cattle] "Were more like pets". Kept inside in the byre all winter they were talked to and handled twice a day. Now, he says, "They're as wild as hares, out all the time." Some of the new varieties of animals, bred for muscle, can be more aggressive too. [197]

[195] *Tiree Community Development Plan-Crofting, Agriculture and Environment Strategy*, TRD, 2004.

[196] *Third Statistical Account* , 1953, p 130.

[197] Tommy MacKinnon, Vaul, 6/2011.

Sheep

There have been domesticated sheep on Tiree for 6000 years. In Vaul, the Iron Age broch was found to contain 574 sheep bones were found, showing how important sheep were to farming life on the island 2000 years ago. [198] There were also a number of dog bones and it is likely that these had some role in herding the stock.

The unimproved breed of Highland native sheep was small, weighing around 25 kg, with 4-6 horns and sparse wool. They were more delicate than modern sheep. Small animals lose more heat than large animals, their thinness meant that they were less insulated and their wool was thinner. They were often kept sheltered at night and in winter.

In Skye it is known from a mid-eighteenth century description that all but the strongest wethers [castrated male sheep] were housed. [199]

They were generally housed at night and kept in relatively small numbers for their milk and the people's own requirements in wool. [200]

They were also sometimes tethered to keep them away from crops.

Sheep were also tethered, sometimes three at a time on an iron ring. The tether rope had swivels [udalain] to prevent entanglement. [201]

They were difficult to herd and tend to go their separate ways when startled, and it was believed that sheep could not be driven to market. [202]

[198] *Dun Mor Vaul,* Euan Mackie, University Glasgow Press, 1974, p 143 and 187.

[199] *The Northern and Western Islands of Scotland,* Frances Shaw, John Donald, 1980, p 112.

[200] *Highland Folk Ways,* IF Grant, p 50.

[201] *Scottish Country Life,* p 147.

[202] *Highland Folk Ways,* IF Grant, p 81.

Archie Kennedy, Crossapol, and James MacMaster , Kenovay, herding sheep along the road at Baugh on the way to the ferry after lamb sales in the 1960s (C124)

In Scotland the ownership of cattle was the accepted measure of wealth. But the country also had a considerable sheep population in the Middle Ages. Wool was the most valuable product from a sheep but they were also milked, and ewes' milk was commonly made into cheese rather than butter. [203] Sheep were also eaten as mutton at the end of their lives.

On Tiree home grown wool was spun and woven to make everybody's clothing. In 1662 there were 40 weavers in Tiree in 1662. [204]

All over the Western Isles...the plaid was the usual dress of the ordinary working tenant. The plaid was a versatile garment, consisting basically of a long piece of woollen cloth pinned together at the shoulder and fastened round the waist with a belt. When unfastened at night the plaid also did duty as a blanket. [205]

In 1378 Scotland exported 1.5 million fleeces, mainly from the Borders. [206] There were also large numbers of sheep on Tiree and there were worries that they were causing erosion to the *machair*. The minister of Tiree and Coll reported in 1791:

A few years ago there were at least 14,000 sheep in these isles [Coll and Tiree]. [207]

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[203] *Scottish Country Life*, Alexander Fenton, Tuckwell Press, 1999, p 156.

[204] *The Northern and western Islands of Scotland,* Frances Shaw, John Donald, 1980, p 133.

[205] *The Northern and western Islands of Scotland,* Frances Shaw, John Donald, 1980, p 196.

[206] *The Drove Roads of Scotland*, ARB Haldane, p 187.

[207] *Old Statistical Account,* p 410.

Packing fleeces for transport in the 1920s or 1930s (C123)

And the surveyor Turnbull reported to the Duke in 1768.

The sheep are generally very small, except a few which are of the South Country and Highland breed are a good size. None of them are sent alive from the island...Their wool is much spoiled by the sand. It is the factor's opinion that there are too great a number of sheep on the island...it is known from experience that sheep are a great means of occasioning the sand blowing (which is increasing yearly) when pasturing on that sort of soil, the surface whereof they break by scraping with their feet to reach at the roots of the grass among the sand. [208]

In fact numbers of sheep at that time were no greater than today (in 1970 there were 13,240 sheep on Tiree). Sheep graze much shorter grass and will indeed pull up the roots if they are hungry enough. The problem at that time was one of severe over-grazing generally, by cattle and particularly by the huge numbers of small horses kept by the islanders to carry seaweed. [209] With no winter feed grown, all the animals were feeding down to the bare earth. It must also have been difficult to control the breeding when there were no walls or fences.

The Duke therefore wrote to his factor in 1771.

The present system of husbandry is liable to several objections...You are to attend to...a method of reducing the number of sheep. [210]

[208] Turnbull's survey of Tiree, AI2000.169.1.

[209] Pat Boyd, personal communication.

[210] *Instructions*, p 1-2.

Action was certainly taken on Coll, and on Tiree numbers seem to have fallen precipitously too.

The Laird of Coll banished [sheep] almost out of his lands. The inclemency of the seasons reduced them in Tiree. There are now not above 1100 in the parish [Tiree and Coll]. Though in other countries a most beneficial stock, they are most destructive, especially to Tiree. There is not a sufficient range for them. They do not thrive in summer owing to certain weeds, nor in winter owing to the wetness of the pasture. Where the grass is thin and short, they tear up by their feet the very roots for food. They lodge in hollows for shelter and so break the sward, and expose the land to be driven by the winds, hence whole fields are ruined, becoming white banks. Tiree pasture is already too fine. Sheep convert the little coarse grass there is into a finer pile, to the great prejudice of black cattle...Yet if sheep were banished, it would be necessary to contract for years with sheep-graziers, whereby wool might be provided to the inhabitants at a moderate rate.[211]

Three years later the factor wrote:

The island produces scarcely any wool. ..The island is found not to answer for sheep, and very few are reared there. [212]

Many of the tenants, conscious of the bad effect of keeping sheep on sandy ground, have given them up, and have now much reason to complain of others who keep them. [213]

Ten years later the grasslands of the island had recovered.

Having now more pasture on their own farms than they had formerly, owing to the expulsion of their supernumerary horses.[214]

This feeling that grazing by sheep was too harsh for the delicate Tiree *machair* has persisted on Tiree. Duncan MacPhail, Balephuil, remembers that before World War 2 older crofters would not allow sheep onto the machair or lower fields, keeping them instead on the hill. They thought sheep pulled out the roots of the grass. [215]

After the 1760s bigger, coarse woolled black faced Linton sheep from the Borders were introduced to the Highlands. It was found they could over winter outside on the hills and that they could be more easily herded with dogs. This new method of sheep farming had spread to Argyll by the 1790s. Around 1800 the Cheviot, an even larger sheep with finer wool, was

[211] *Old Statistical Account,* 1791, p 410.

[212] *Instructions,* 1794, p 32-3.

[213] *Instructions,* 1804, p 94.

[214] *Instructions,* 1804, p 89.

[215] Duncan MacPhail, Balephuil, 9/2001.

introduced. But it took several decades for the new breeds to reach the island. The Tiree minister reported in 1845.

Some sheep stocks have been lately introduced into the island, chiefly of Cheviot and black-faced breed, but the experiment has not been tried for a sufficient length of time to enable us to form an opinion how it may succeed. [216]

The woollen mills of Yorkshire were hungry for wool and the emerging cities for mutton, and there was new money to be made by the land owners. In Glengarry estate the rent increased from £700 to £5,000 a year between 1762 and 1802 when it was let to large-scale sheep farmers instead of to local people. [217]

The same thing was also happening on Tiree by the 1850s. Giving evidence to the Napier Commission in 1884, Donald MacDougall, a 52 year old crofter from Balephuil, was questioned.

What stock do the crofters keep now on a full croft?

I keep two cows and two horses.

Young cattle?

I have no young cattle at present.

Any sheep?

No; no crofter in the island has sheep...

Who got the land when it was taken away, the whole of the hill pasture thirty years ago?

It was the tacksman of Hynish who got it from us and now Mr MacQuarrie has got it...this factor that cleared our place thirty years ago ordained ...a statute that none should have either a sheep or pig for fear of those sheep of ours would break in upon the large farms...vacant farms were consolidated into large farms. There are ten of them now upon the island, and upon eight of them there were crofters in the old times. [218]

John MacFadyen, a 42 year old crofter from Caolas, backed up this account.

Half of the island is under large sheep tacks held by strangers, and the people of the island are not allowed so much of the land as to make a living off it. ..The people having been evicted from their holdings and removed to the sea-shore, and their holdings converted into sheep tacks, six of which are held by three individuals...

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[216] *New Statistical Account*, p 213.

[217] *Highland Folk Ways,* IF Grant, p 51 -53.

[218] *Napier Commission Evidence,* p 2131-2, vol 3 1884, AI1999.17.1.

What have you, stock and acreage?

10 or 12 acres of arable ground, two horses, three cows, one quey [heifer], two stirks, two sheep.

Can you name the large tacks...that have no crofters on them?

Scarinish, Balephetrish, Cornaigmore, Hough, Greenhill, Hynish, Barrapol, Crossapol, and the Reef. [219]

Neil MacNeill, a 50 year old crofter from Vaul, complained of:

Scarcity of fuel and wool, for we have no sheep. [220]

Hugh Macdiarmid, the island's factor, was questioned at the same hearing.

You say you have changed the first farm you got from an arable farm to a grazing farm, can you tell me how many acres are [cultivated]?

Very little of that has been cultivated.

Is the second one cultivated?

No.

How many acres are there upon it?

800 acres altogether...

What is the sheep generally used on the island?

Blackfaced sheep and Leicester rams. [221]
Specialist outsiders were brought to the island to look after the new large herds. The factor in Hynish brought Lachlan MacPhail from Lochbuidhe in Mull as a shepherd. He was given Clachan as a farm, but he died after six months. Lachlan's brother, Iain, was a tailor and followed him to Clachan. [222]

But by the 1870s Scottish wool and lamb was being undercut by producers in New Zealand and Australia and these large farms became less profitable.

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[219] *Napier Commission Evidence*, p2133, vol 3 1884, AI 1999.17.1.

[220] *Napier Commission Evidence*, p 2171, vol 3, 1884, AI1999.17.1.

[221] *Napier Commission Evidence*, p 2161, vol 3 1884, AI1999.17.1.

[222] Willie MacPhail, Clachan, 4/2002.

By the 1950s Tiree was exporting 5,000 lambs annually. [223]

Sheep were less valuable than cattle and there were far fewer superstitions about them.

A native of Tiree was on his way home to the west end of the island in the evening with a new gun in his hand. When above the beach called Travay [Tràigh Bhì, the beach in Balephuil] he observed a black sheep running towards him from across the plain of Reef. Alarmed by the animal's motions, he put a silver sixpence in the gun, and on its coming near enough, took aim. The black sheep instantly became a woman (whom he recognised) with a drugget coat wrapped about her head. [224]

Shearing at the sheep fank on Heylipol Farm in 1948 (C169)

Sheep used to be smeared with a mixture of tar and butter to protect them against flies and protect the animal from cold and wet. [225] This smearing was done in the autumn when the weather was dry to protect the sheep from parasites and the cold. The mixture was Archangel tar and warmed butter or grease in a 50:50 mixture. It took a gallon of tar to do 25 sheep and it was slow and dirty work as the mixture was massaged, inch by inch, into the roots of the wool. To smear 12 sheep in a day was considered good work. What remained of this greasy mixture had to be washed out of the fleece again the next summer after shearing. This practice had practically ceased by the time dipping became compulsory in 1905. [226]

[223] *Third Statistical Account,* 1953, p 130.

[224] *The Gaelic Otherworld,* ed Ronald Black, p 186.

[225] *Highland Folk Ways,* IF Grant, p 51 -53.

[226] *Island of Kerrera,* H MacDougall, 1979, p 52 (AI 2004.8.7).

Scab became a notifiable disease in 1869 and a Scab Order made dipping infested flocks compulsory in 1905. The approved ingredients of one early treatment were tar, arsenic, lime-sulphur and tobacco.

Dipping sheep at Hough in the mid-1930s (U81)

The Hill Farming Act of 1946 gave subsidies to hill sheep farmers. Under the Act:

Hill farming land" means mountain, hill and heath land which is suitable for use for the maintenance of sheep of a hardy kind but not of sheep of other kinds, or which by improvement could be made so suitable .

At first it was ruled that Tiree did not qualify under the Act, perhaps because it has no hills. However, political pressure came to bear and:

The Department of Agriculture has reconsidered its decision to disallow claims by farmers on the Island of Tiree in respect of the hill sheep subsidy for 1948. Major Duncan MacCallum, MP for Argyll, who drew attention to the dissatisfaction in Tiree following the earlier ruling. [227]

Pigs

There were 54 pig bones in the Iron Age broch in Vaul. [228] But there is no mention of pigs in the Old Statistical Account for Tiree in 1791 and there are few place names about pigs on Tiree. *Tobar an Uircean* in Balevullin which commemorates a piglet falling in to a well, and *Àit' a' Chullaich*, place of the boar, which is the boggy stream crossed by the road from Heanish to Scarinish, are the only two.

The coming of the potato stimulated the keeping of pigs on Tiree.

In the Hebrides the prevalence of potatoes had encouraged the breeding of small pigs by the 1790s in spite of the fact that the Highlanders were said to have detested the pig and its flesh. [229]

However, as with sheep, so with pigs. In 1804 the Tiree factor reported to the Duke that free range pigs were damaging the island's over grazed grasslands.

Swine are a dreadful scourge, independent of the damage done to crops and grass. [230]

However, as transport improved, and Glasgow city began its phenomenal growth to become the second city of the British Empire, Tiree took advantage of its position to develop a healthy pig industry, this time based in enclosed sties. The minister of Tiree reported in 1845:

For some years back a great number of pigs have been reared in this parish and are found to be a very profitable kind of stock. They are generally exported alive chiefly to Glasgow and Greenock where they meet with a ready demand. Last spring upwards of 500 of them were shipped off the island, and their price at home varies from £1 10 shilling to £3. [231]

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[227] *The Scotsman*, 15 December 1948.

[228] *Dun Mor Vaul*, Euan Mackie, Univ Glasgow Press 1974, p 143.

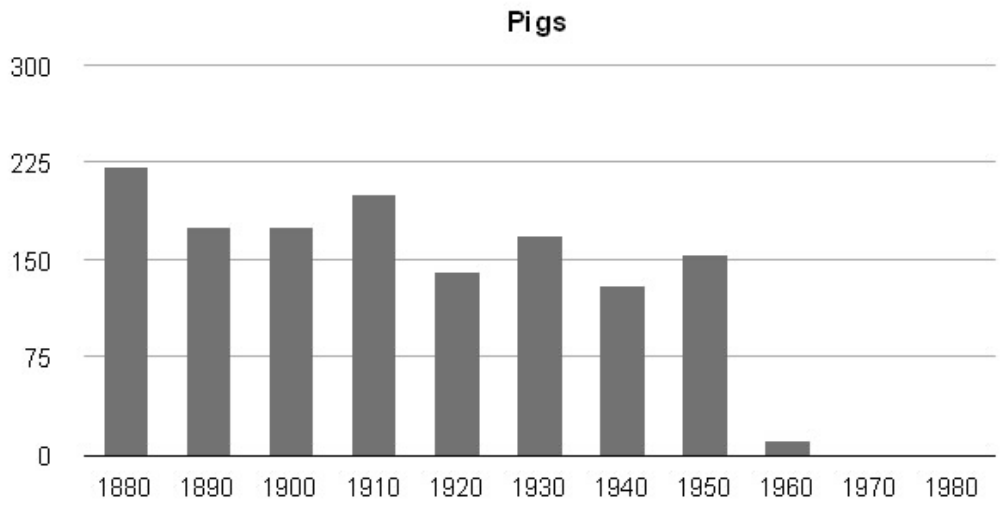
[229] *Scottish Country Life*, Alexander Fenton, Tuckwell Press, 1999, p 17.

[230] *Instructions,* p 94.

[231] *New Statistical Account*, p 213.

Where crofters had a surplus of milk and potatoes, the fattening of a pig could earn good money and, salted and smoked, was a valuable source of protein for the winter. Many kept one or two piglets. Whitehouse kept two until they sold up in 1942.

Pigs need to be kept clean and their straw bedding was changed every day. Outside they could dig up the ground and pins or rings were usually put through their noses to stop them doing this.



In 1900 there were 31 breeding sows on the island. [232] George Paterson, Crossapol, was Tiree's principal pig breeder. He sold piglets for £5 when they were six to eight weeks old and they would be carried off in a hessian bag over the shoulder. [233]

When they were taken away as a piglet [in hessian bag] they would squeal their heads off! I remember Donald the Plumber coming on his bike and going away with the piglet! [234]

Gilleasbuig Iain Bhàin in Balephuil also bred pigs which he sold in the 1920s for £2 each [235] and Alec MacNeill, Greenhill, got piglets from the turner in Cornaig for £1. [236]

[232] Agricultural Census.

[233] Mairi Campbell, Corrairigh, 1/2011.

[234] Mairi Campbell, Corrairigh, 2.2.2011.

[235] Mabel Kennedy, Sandaig, 10/1998.

[236] Alec MacNeill, Greenhill, 2/1998.

Hillcrest and Whitehouse also bred pigs.

When the sow was having her piglets, she had to be watched very carefully, as some could turn nasty and even eat their piglets. I once witnessed a sad event. A sow managed to get out of the sty and gave birth to ten piglets in a hollow down by the burn. They were found dead, but to our amazement she had covered her dead with iris leaves which she had pulled from nearby. [237]

Newly farrowed piglets are 'rough' feeders.

When they were newly born they used to break the [piglet's eye] teeth so that they didn't hurt their mother when they were sucking. That's what Hector's brother, Donald, was doing when he was attacked by the sow. He should have separated the piglets from their mother, and he [got] a very, very bad injury to his leg. There was a pair of pliers kept in the larder just for that! [238]

Paterson's, near the RAF camp, was quick to realise the opportunities offered by the catering department.

There was only one sty at first, but my father [built four more] during the war....Some of the pigs were free to range. One day the boar got out and went down to where the [Crossapol] hall is today, and had a nice feed of the swill bin there! [239]

They used to have 7 lb tins of jam, and sometimes father would come in with one of these because one of the cooks had put it in the swill barrel. They would get scones or pancakes or eggs [in return]. [240]

Pigs were fed three times a day – milk, potatoes and scraps. If a crofter was milking the cream went to make butter, and the buttermilk, *blathach*, that was left behind was poured into clay troughs for the pigs.

It was the milk that reared the pig...It was well known that raw potatoes made a firmer pig [rather than giving them cooked ones]. They soon let you know if you weren't feeding them! [241]

Fish meal gave a fishy taste to the meat. All their food had to be boiled to control diseases like tapeworms.

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[237] Mairi Campbell, Corrairigh, 2.2.2011.

[238] Mairi Campbell, Corrairigh, 2.2.2011.

[239] Mairi Campbell, Corrairigh, 2.2.2011.

[240] Mairi Campbell, Corrairigh, 2.2.2011.

[241] Hugh Archie MacCallum, Whitehouse.

During the war my father an Archie collected barrels of swill every day as food for the pigs. They went by horse and cart to collect from the RAF canteen on the croft where the Tiree garage is today. The swill had to be boiled in big boilers and Mr Rennie came unannounced from Oban Department of Agriculture to inspect if this was being done. He would even rake the ashes [to see if they were warm]. Fish meal was also used, but it was inclined to taste the pork. Another source of feedings was sweepings from a biscuit factory, which came in huge bags. On a wet day we would be up to our oxters looking for a custard cream or a chocolate! I wonder how I've survived till now! You just wiped it under your arm. We only had McGowan's toffee bars [before]. [But] milk and boiled potatoes were the main feed. Most pigs, if not kept in a sty had a wire, a piece of fencing wire, put in their nose so as not to dig up the ground. [242]

Pigs are very stubborn creatures, particularly if you wanted to walk them anywhere, for example to the pier.

Pigs go their own way. [243]

The father of Lachie MacKinnon, Parkhouse, had two carts and he would put the pig in one and then the box of the other cart upside down over it. Pigs were also driven with a rope round their leg as a collar would slip off their necks. [244]

I remember Donald MacLean, Ardbeg, walking his sow to over the Druinbhuidhe to Crossapol to mate with the boar here. I think a rope was tied round one of its hind legs. [245]

The best way to lift a pig is with two men on either side joining arms, one hand under the chest and the other behind the back legs. [246]

Pigs were a quick way to make money - you had to wait two years to sell cattle. They weren't expensive to feed. [247] Jean MacPhail, Bailephuil , remembers that they always kept two pigs. They bought piglets from Corsons for £6 and sold them for £24 when they reached 36 inches in girth. The crofters in Balephuil used to race each other to see who could fatten their pigs the fastest. [248]

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[242] Mairi Campbell, Corrairigh, 2.2.2011

[243] Hugh Archie MacCallum, Whitehouse.

[244] Tommy MacKinnon, Vaul, 6/2011.

[245] Mairi Campbell, Corrairigh, 2.2.2011.

[246] Neil MacArthur, Moss, 6/2011.

[247] Neil MacLean, Kenovay, 1/2003.

[248] Jean MacPhail, Bailephuil, 2/1998.

Some people fattened the pigs until they were a certain girth size and then sent to McGrowther's of Stirling. They were put in a sling to winch them onto [the boat]. Once a pig slipped out of that and was killed, [falling] onto the pier head. I don't think it would have been insured. [249]

Pigs were also sold to AM Wright in Glasgow. Lachie MacKinnon, Parkhouse, remembers taking the pig down to the cargo boat the *Dunara* or the *Hebrides* accompanied by a letter which showed which mark you were using on the pig's side to show it was yours. You had to careful not to over fatten the animal. If the girth was more than 37 inches the price went down, although they reckoned the pigs would lose a little bit of weight in transit to Glasgow. [250]

Pigs need to be warm and well ventilated or they would suffer from *crùban*, a disease of the feet. For this reason many crofters bought their piglets in spring and sold them in the autumn. [251]

A pig being hoisted onto a boat in the 1930s (V44)

Otherwise the pigs were slaughtered in spring when food was scarcer. Lachie MacKinnon, Parkhouse. His father slaughtered one every spring. [252]

[249] Mairi Campbell, Corrairigh, 2.2.2011.

[250] Hugh Archie MacCallum, Whitehouse, 8/2011.

[251] Hugh Archie MacCallum, Whitehouse, 8/2011.

[252] Alec MacNeill, Greenhill, 2/1998.

Most people had one pig and had it slaughtered for their own use, some of the meat being salted [for the winter] in an earthenware tub ...It was a great and busy day, slaughter day. The pig's throat would be slit and it would be allowed to run around [in the byre, which had been cleaned out] until it collapsed. Boiled water was used to scald and wash the carcass and shave the skin. The carcass was hung from an endless chain for a day and then butchered. [Her brother Iain and herself would play slapping the carcass backwards and forwards between them.] *My father did all the butchering. He was very capable. We were sent [with meat] to the neighbours and to Mannal for my aunt.* [253]

In the 1960s pig keeping in Tiree virtually ceased due to stricter hygiene regulations, increasing feed prices and the rise of industrial pig production in Holland and Denmark which cut prices.

Goats

Goats were also kept on Tiree, as the place names *Eilean nan Gobhar*, island of the goats in Heanish, and *Àirigh mheannain*, the shieling of the young goat, Caolas tell us. They were particularly valued for their milk. However, they are difficult to control and when farming developed on Tiree around 1800 their numbers fell.

In the Western Isles goats were kept in some numbers [as they] are able to reach mountain pastures inaccessible to other livestock. Goat skins were also prized. [254]

Large numbers of goats were kept in the Highlands in the old days...[but] with the introduction of planting [feed crops] and the improvements in agriculture they became unpopular. [255]

Tommy MacKinnon, Vaul, remembers that his father kept a goat and encouraged it to butt people on the backside. His grandfather eventually became exasperated and took it to Gunna where he left it. A tourist was taken out to Gunna for a day's fishing some time later. On his return he was asked how he got on. "I didn't do much fishing," he replied ruefully. "You can argue with the devil but you can't argue with that goat!" [256]

More recently goats have occasionally been kept as pets. Willie MacPhail, Clachan, remembers one being kept on the Balephetrish machair in the 1950s and the Rev George Donaldson kept on in his garden at the Gott manse in the 1980s.

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[253] Mairi Campbell, Corrairigh, 2.2.2011.

[254] *The Northern and Western Islands of Scotland,* Frances Shaw, John Donald, 1980, p 112 and 159.

[255] *Highland Folk Ways*, IF Grant p 87.

[256] Tommy MacKinnon, Vaul, 8/2011.

Butchers

Malcolm MacKinnon was the first butcher on the island and he opened a shop in Scarinish with his wife Peggy. He is noted in the 1911 Census as living in Moss, aged 35, with his father Donald, a retired shepherd. He was single and gave his job as a butcher.

Calum MacKinnon, Calum Dhòmhnaill or Calum Bùidsear, was the first butcher. He was from Moss, the house is opposite Alec MacPhail's. He started butchering and he did very well. There wasn't a butcher on the island before that. You maybe killed a sheep or a pig or whatever. And of course, no deep freezes, it was salted. I can still remember the tubs. Whatever creature was in it – a cow or whatever. That was the only means they had of keeping it fresh...The butcher's shop was in the same place as it is today. The slaughterhouse where it is today was where the greusaiche [cobbler] did his shoe repairs. I don't remember the greusaiche himself, but I remember his donkey! He was from West Hynish, and went home every weekend. But he had his shoe repair business in Scarinish. [257]

The slaughterhouse still has a chimney from these days.

Donald and Nan MacLean bought the business in 1953. His father had been slaughtering cows in an out building at Kenovay before him. Today's house was built around 1925. Water came from a hand pump and there was a big whisky barrel outside for washing the carcasses. The local Inspector was Hugh MacKinnon, 'The Contractor' from Crossapol. He came round "with his hands in his pockets". He wasn't strict, "No, No!" His mother washed the butcher's coat and apron every day by hand. Donald MacLean, Kenovay, 2/2004.

DAMcL: There were a lot of people in this township and beyond who came to buy meat from this place in Kenovay – Cornaigbeg, Cornaigmore, yes and Balevullin and Crossapol. [Then] we went to take over the shop of Malcolm MacKinnon and his wife Peggy. He came from Moss, they call his house still Taigh a' Bhuidseir. He went to Scarinish and was there for many years. I knew him well – I would be going over to work with him sometimes and he would come and visit our own house as well.

MC: I expect there are a lot changes in selling meat since you started.

DAMcL: There isn't an end to the changes! When I started in Scarinish nobody paid any attention to you. I only had to sell the meat and pay for the beasts. I didn't have to do anything else! There was no paperwork. Today there is a big, big difference. There are hygiene regulations, disability regulations. The vet has to be there on slaughtering days. A huge change!

But I liked to be out with the van[he had six in all over the years] best of all, out with people. I knew everyone so well, I didn't have to get out of the van or even knock on their doors, I knew [what they wanted]. I could get tea or a bite to eat at any house. People who lived a

[257] Annie Kennedy, Scarinish, AC 66 1998, talking to Dr John Holliday.

little out of the way, I would get them anything from the Cooperative...I miss it still, that's what I was used to, more than the shop. Nan was in charge of the shop. There were stormy days – sometimes you had to make for home. It was difficult to get close to the houses, the van was just sliding and skidding. Some of the older people couldn't leave the house. It's all over now, but they were good days.

Donald MacLean the butcher with one of his vans in 2000 (T27)

The people of Scarinish were very good to me at first – Donnchadh Teasaidh, Noan, those old people, they were so kind altogether. [258]

Donald supplied the RAF base during the war, helped by Sergeant Connel who had worked at Smithfields meat market in London before the war.

Hugh MacLean had another butcher's premises in Ruaig. For a while his family lived in the school house and the slaughterhouse was a lean-to at the back of the school, possibly the only such arrangement in the country.

Nan McClounnan, Balephuil, worked in 1945 for *Catriona Iain* who had summer lodgers in Rum View, Vaul. One day she was sent as usual to collect the meat from the butcher in Salum. This week the meat was wrapped in newspaper, which she thought was a bit odd. When she got back, Catriona opened the packet and there was a sheep's head. She told Nan she was going to make soup out of it and it would be delicious. However, Nan couldn't keep the secret and told the guests that night what had gone into their meal! [259]

Duncan Grant, Ruaig, remembers going into the butcher's shop in Salum in the war. Hugh MacLean had tied up a sheep by three of its legs and hung it upside down. He then had and

[258] Donald Archie MacLean, Kenovay, talking to Margaret Campbell in 1999, AC179.

[259] Nan McClounnan, Balephuil, 4/2011.

cut the animal's throat with a large knife, and the blood dripped into a pail. This had a great effect on him as a young boy! [260]

We had the cow for many years and then I remember my aunt saying it would have to go to the butchers in Salum. Suddenly it was no more. I expect we did [eat] part of old Harry! [261]

Poultry

Hens, ducks and geese were common the old days. In 1744 9,000 fowls were paid to MacLeod of Dunvegan as a year's rent. [262]

But by the 1880s improved communications with Glasgow meant that Tiree eggs could be traded with Glasgow, and were, in industrial quantities.

The island is admirably suited to poultry and there is annually a very large export of eggs, amounting, I have reason to believe, to not less than 50,000 dozen. This export represents a revenue to the small tenants...of at least £1,500. [263]

Eggs also became an unofficial currency on Tiree and could be used at the island's shops if you had no cash. Donald Sinclair, a cottar from Balephuil, aged 40, worked at the Glassary factory in Sandaig in the 1880s.

They [in the company shop] take eggs in return for provisions...from anyone. [264]

[260] Duncan Grant, Ruaig, 6/2011.

[261] Duncan Grant, Ruaig talking to Dr John Holliday 10/2011.

[262] *Highland Folk Ways* ,IF Grant, p 87-8.

[263] *Duke' Report to the Napier Commission,* 1883, p 33.

[264] Napier Commission Evidence, p2178, vol 3 1884 (AI1999.17.1)

A duck and ducklings at Corrairigh in Cornaigbeg (C132)

In 1910 Tiree was visited by a representative from the cooperative movement.

During the past year considerable interest has been aroused amongst the small holders in the island of Tiree on the question of cooperation in the marketing of produce and in the purchase of material necessary to the farmers, crofters and crofter fishermen in the prosecution of their calling. ..As soon as interest was sufficiently awakened, Mr Drysdale, of the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society [the SAOS still exists], was appealed to pay a visit to the island...and meetings arranged for the five crofter townships...Amongst the small holders the barter system of trading largely prevails, produce being given in return for goods.

The output of eggs from this island some years ago was computed to be 50,000 dozen per annum. By means of assistance from the Congested Districts Board a great improvement has been effected in the breeds of fowls and the output of produce has consequently largely increased....Pigs might be kept in considerably larger numbers...It is hoped that the enthusiasm which has been stirred up in Tiree will spread to the other adjacent districts. [265]

Five months later another reporter found:

In this self-help movement the small-holders of Tiree have led the way so far as Argyllshire is concerned...five trading societies have been formed in the five townships of small holders into which the island is divided. These societies began business with the collection and marketing of poultry produce...The prompt, business-like and up to date manner in which the eggs are now collected and marketed by these societies, under the guidance of the parent society in

[265] *The Scotsman, 18 March 1910.*

Edinburgh, has enabled the small holders to get their produce consigned to the best retail distributive businesses in the large centres of population at considerably enhanced prices. [266]

In 1911 an agricultural cooperative was built just to the south of Soroby graveyard. Eilidh Kennedy, Balevullin, who was born in 1902, remembered a wooden hut which bought eggs and sold cattle feed.

The Agriculture Cooperation Society are erecting new premises in Balemartine for storing the goods they put on sale to the people. The structure is of wood and is large and commodious. [267]

It was run for many years by Duncan MacKinnon, Balemartine (*Donnchadh Iain Mhòir*). The T-junction of the road going down to Balephuil is still called *Turn a' Chooperative*.

There was another agricultural cooperative in Ruaig run by Charles MacKinnon, *Tearlach Eòghainn, Torr a' Bhaile*. He used to sell sacks of flour and oatmeal and 'bogey roll', a black coil of tobacco that could be used for chewing or pipe smoking. *Anna Mhòr* lived on the Ruaig *sliabh* and was known to be very independent. One day she went down to *Tearlach Eòghainn*'s store to buy a 140 lb. sack of meal. The storekeeper offered to carry it for her but she hoisted it on her back and walked home, only stopping to put the sack on the wall as the opened the *cachaileith* gate. [268] Other cooperatives were at the house of Archie MacLean, *Eirdsidh Tuairneir*, where the vet lives today [269] and that of John MacDonald, Sandaig, where the thatched house museum was. [270]

In 1949 fowl pest spread to Tiree.

Ten flocks of poultry were destroyed at Balephuil where fowl pest was confirmed yesterday by veterinary inspectors of the Ministry of Agriculture. [271]

Hugh Lamont, *Eòghann Iain na Hongs*, was the postman and Kate, his wife, ran the post office in Ruaig. It was the custom in these days to send an unplucked cockerel or duck away at Christmas with a label round its neck and another round its foot. One day a woman came into the post office with two ducks and asked to send them away, but said "I've no labels." "Oh, I'll soon lend you a couple," said Kate. The postmistress went to fetch them and tied them on the birds herself. "They're nice ducks," she said, "And, my! They're good and fresh.

[266] *The Scotsman*, 5 August 1910.

[267] *Oban Times*, 4 February 1911.

[268] Angus MacLean, Scarinish, 9/2011.

[269] Lachie Campbell, Crossapol, 9/2011.

[270] Colin MacKinnon, Kilkenneth, 9/2011.

[271] *The Scotsman*, I October 1949.

They're still warm!" Later Hugh came in and told his wife that an otter must have been around the house. There were only four ducks. Their customer had taken them! [272]

Quite a lot of hens went by post to the city. My mother was in Glasgow at that time and a hen would be sent through the post. They accepted in these days a label around the legs with an address. I heard them saying someone in the city even got a parcel with a live lobster in. There was butter and a live lobster and the shock they got when they opened the parcel and the lobster flapping there! [273]

Catriona MacKinnon and Margaret Doig feeding hens in Vaul the 1930s (A199)

The eggs were really of a very good quality. People are so used to the pale yellow they get in the shops now. The eggs then were [almost] red, and there was a firmer consistency to them. We didn't much fry them. Boiled eggs! We ate a lot of them. We waited in the spring. There were no eggs for a certain period after the winter. I remember my aunt saying, "It won't be long now until we are getting the first eggs. When you come home from school, would you like to look in the hen house? You'll probably be seeing an egg coming soon!" This seemed to catch on to us as boys, and we'd be running down the road from school. It seemed a long time since we'd seen eggs. We'd go to the hen house, look in the boxes there. Nothing doing! My aunt would assure us, "Any time now you'll be seeing the first eggs, and from then on the spring lay." And one day you'd come in."An egg! An egg! As if it was some great treasure!" The next day you'd be looking. Nothing! The following day, maybe two eggs. And then there'd be eggs [galore].

At that time during the war people would be coming round the door looking for eggs. You couldn't give to everybody, but Poles that were in Tiree at that time. Two fine men, with their

[272] Mary Ann MacLennan, Caolas, 9/2009.

[273] Duncan Grant, Ruaig, talking to Dr John Holliday 10/2011.

broken English. My aunt opened the door when it was knocked and they clicked their heels gently and took my aunt's hand and bent over and gave it a little gentle kiss, very elegantly, and asked if she possibly had any eggs for sale. My aunt managed to get half a dozen eggs for them there and she declared that they were the finest body of men that she had ever seen! Their manners. They were courteous people. [274]

Many houses had domestic geese and a gander. Some of the latter could be quite dangerous, especially if they had some wild blood in them. The boy next door was almost killed by one. They would make quite a mess in the stackyard as they would pull out corn from the stacks. The dogs had to chase them out. [275]

A lot of [potatoes] went to the hens as well. You had used what you needed. A big black pot on the fire, and you put it out on the table, as much as you could eat. But the rest of the pot would be mixed with hen food and stirred and thrown out on the grass and the hens would come racing over, choking over it. The hens really took to that!

The [hens] were inclined to go into the crofts where the corn was growing. A great scraping! They were quite destructive in corn. You were told to chase them back onto the machair. [276]

And then of course you had your hens. You killed a hen. They were better than the hens you get nowadays. The old coileach [cockerel] from the midden, taken in, its neck screwed, feathered. I've done it all! I can assure you ...the chicken you can buy today – it hasn't the flavour that I was used to! [277]

The murder of the cockerel! I don't think my aunt was all that happy at wringing a cockerel's neck. We were put into the house out of the road. We seemed to know that it was going to happen. But we could hear this squawking out in the byre. You'd got to know [the cockerel] out at the door. This wasn't a nice thing at all. Then she'd come in and it would be held up by the legs with a string round the legs and she would hang it up on this big hook next to the clock. It looked very russet coloured around the head. And every once in a while the wings would give a jerk! I used to say, "It's not dead" "Yes, it's dead! It's just the reaction!" she would tell us. I was never convinced! Then she would spend a lot of time out in the byre plucking the feathers into a wooden barrel. Later on she would take a shovel and put methylated spirits on it and light it. And she would take the naked looking fowl with all the tiny bits of feather and these would be singed off, rolling it over in the blue flame, she would burn off all these wee stubs of down that were left. Then it would be gutted and made into soup. Excellent soup! I don't remember them being roasted. It was boiled. Then we had it sliced. You had to forget what the poor cockerel had gone through by that time! There was an

[274] Duncan Grant, Ruaig, talking to Dr John Holliday 10/2011.

[275] Duncan MacPhail, Balephuil, 3/2005.

[276] Duncan Grant, Ruaig, talking to Dr John Holliday 10/2011.

[277] Annie Kennedy, Scarinish, AC 66 1998, talking to Dr John Holliday.

attachment to the creatures that you had around you then. We had this not very frequently. There was limit with the number of hens we had... There was a lovely flavour to the meat. Not at all like the insipid, plastic tasting hens all wrapped up from the shops. These were living out on the machair on the grass. [278]

Sales on Tiree

In 1802 the 3rd Duke instructed his factor to set up a cattle sale on Tiree.

A market for cattle, horses etc. to be tried twice in the year, in May and early in October. [279]

The factor replied that the first effort had not been a success. He may have had a financial interest in keeping other buyers away from the island.

There was a market held on 3rd May which brought but few purchasers. On the 3rd October the second market was held, when a good many fat cows appeared, but as there was an unforeseen coincidence of the market of Coll on the same day, few dealers appeared in the island. [280]

Forty years later there were still local sales.

Markets are held on Coll and Tiree in May, August and October, solely for the sale of black cattle. [281]

In the 1840s the dates of the Tiree cattle markets were still fixed with reference to those of Mull. [282]

The sales were erratic, however, and wealthier farmers were the only people who could afford to ship the cattle to the mainland.

In those days, the fact that no cattle sales were held in Tiree or Oban enabled people like the Duke of Argyll's factor or Tom Barr – who had economic power to buy hundreds of cattle – to have a stranglehold over crofters who perhaps would have no more than six beasts to sell. They had the island divided between them, offering very low prices and not competing or buying in one another's 'territory.' The small-holders had no option but to accept the low

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[278] Duncan Grant, Ruaig, talking to Dr John Holliday 10/2011.

[279] *Instructions*, p 65.

[280] *Instructions* 1802, p 72.

[281] *New Statistical Account,* 1845, p 218.

[282] *The Drove Roads of Scotland,* ARB Haldane, re-published Birlinn, 1997, p 86.

prices offered by these buyers who could afford to charter smacks and schooners to take the cattle to the mainland, take them to trysts at Falkirk and Stirling and sell at great profit. [283]

If you sold to Tom Barr in April, say, you had to keep the beasts at your own expense until *Là na Bealtainn*, term day in May, before he would accept them on the Reef. As well as Tom Barr and the factor, Donald MacLean, *Dòmhnall an Tuairneir*, and Archie MacLean, the miller, bought cattle that the two bigger buyers left. [284]

This situation did not improve until the beginning of the [20th] century when a cattle buyer from Stirling by the name of John Tough arrived in Tiree offering fairer prices. The first man to sell to him was Donald Maclean (Dòmhnall 'ic Eòghainn), Ardbeg. When Tom Barr arrived offering his usual pittance he was told by Donald MacLean that unless he matched the prices being paid by John Tough he would not get the cattle. Barr, with arrogant scorn, said that nobody would pay such prices. In this he was mistaken...Shortly after this, cattle sales began to be held in Oban, then in Tiree itself. [285]

The first cattle dealer that came to Tiree was a man John Touch from Stirling, came in before the First World War. You know the Hendrys [buyers] that come in here. Old Hendry's mother was a sister of John Tough's wife. [286]

Tiree Agricultural Show in 1950 (E26)

[283] Hector MacPhail's *Township Histories*, AI 1998.44.2.

[284] Donald MacLean, Kenovay, 9/2011.

[285] Hector MacPhail's *Township Histories*, AI 1998.44.2.

[286] Hector MacPhail, AC 41.

The coming of sales and an auctioneer was greeted with relief.

It was local fairs and private bargaining in my day, and then the auctioneer came, and it was the best of the lot. [287]

The first sale that was held in Oban [was] in Argyll Square. And it was a farmer that was leaving that place to clear it for houses in Oban. And the auctioneer was standing on a box turned upside down. You wouldn't believe it! There was no sale in Oban once upon a time. [288]

The first known site for cattle sales on Tiree was next to Heylipol Church. [289]

There are 17 scholars absent today. There is a cattle sale at Heylipol and as there is a holiday given at that school, the Balemartine scholars evidently thought that they were as much entitled to a holiday as the Heylipol scholars. [290]

Like today, crofters still took stock to Mull or Oban if they felt that prices would be better there. However there were familiar problems.

Almost the entire wealth of the island is in cattle and horses, and it may easily be imagined the loss of life and limb in transit of stock. Often the farmers arrive in Mull or at Oban too late for the market and have to sell their beasts at any price they will fetch. At the best of times it is of course obvious that good prices can seldom be obtained, as naturally the Tiree farmer is known to be anxious to sell when the alternative is the risk of attempting to convey his cattle once more to so inaccessible an island. The extreme necessity for a pier has of course been long obvious. [291]

[287] Donald Morrison, Mull, SA 1976.054.

[288] Hector Kennedy talking to Eric Cregeen, SA1974.232.

[289] Archie Kennedy, Crossapol, 12/1993 and Sandy MacKinnon, Crossapol, 2/1994.

[290] Balemartine School Log, April 25th 1917.

[291] *Outer Isles,* Ada Goodrich-Freer, Dutton, 1902, p 20-21.

Loading sheep onto the ferry MV Columba (L70)

But by the 1920s sales had moved to Crossapol and Scarinish. The two auctioneers were Thomas Corson and the Speedie Brothers.

Thomas Corson and Co. (1922): Tiree Lamb Sales, 31 August 1926: Annual sale of 2000 lambs and fat sheep at Crossapol and Scarinish. SS Princess Louise from Oban. [292]

Speedie Brothers Ltd: Scarinish, Wednesday - on arrival of Cygnet, 100 cattle; Crossapol, Thursday – 400 cattle. [293]

Thomas Corson conducted the annual April sales of store cattle at Crossapol and Scarinish when 800 were put forward...the quality was not up to the usual...cross Shorthorn and cross Highland cattle sold very readily. [294]

Speedie Brothers held their annual spring cattle sales...at Tiree there were close on 500 cattle forward...a good clearance was affected with buyers from Crieff, Perth, Stirling, Comrie and Oban taking the majority. [295]

In 1939 Corsons sold 700 cattle on Tiree in April, mainly two year olds. [296]

There is a funny story about one sale at Crossapol with Mr Mair, the chief auctioneer from Oban. A farmer brought into the ring a stirk which did not look very good. Mr Mair, thinking he would get a laugh, said, "What is this?" The farmer, who was quick witted, replied, "A

[292] *The Scotsman*, 30 August 1926.

[293] *The Scotsman*, 9 April 1928.

[294] *The Scotsman*, 18 April 1929.

[295] *The Scotsman*, 23 April 1929.

[296] *The Scotsman*, 3 April 1939.

native of Oban, like yourself, Mr Mair!" The stirk had come from the auctioneer's own firm as a calf!" [297]

By the 1930s the Crossapol sales were held in the pens next the road in Alasdair MacFadyen's croft. [298] Later the sales ring moved to George Paterson's croft in the same township. Tommy MacKinnon, Vaul, remembers going as a young boy 1940s to Paterson's with the auctioneers Corson. They put a roof on the ring several years later.

In the east end of the island Donald MacIntyre, Gott, remembers going to a sale at the Gott Manse barn in the 1920s. Later a sale was held at the pens opposite Scarinish Post Office. Peggy MacKinnon, Vaul, remembers taking her young children there in the 1980s. This stopped when the Crossapol mart was roofed. "They became too soft!" laughs Tommy MacKinnon, Vaul.

When tractors came to the island the number of cattle increased. Thomas Corson, the auction firm from Oban, conducted two days of sales on the island in the month of April. Up to the beginning of World war 2 two day sales were held – one day at Crossapol for the west end of the island and on the second day it was in Gott for the east end crofters. [299]

The Crossapol sale was held first, with the buyers going over to the Scarinish pens for the east end trade. Some of them would nip into the hotel for a refreshment on the way. The prices always seemed to be better after that and one crofter from Balevullin remarked that they should get a bar in Crossapol too! [300]

Some of the older crofters would put salt in their cattle's water on the morning of the sale so they would drink more and look fatter. [301]

Sales day was an important one in the social calendar. Donald MacLean, Barrapol, was at the sales one year. He knocked on the door of the nearby house and asked if he could borrow a mirror. There was one inside the back porch and he proceeded to wax his moustache before going into the ring. Angus MacKechnie, Crossapol, remembers that crofters would make a day of it – it was a great meeting place. They used to lie in groups on their sides in the dunes with a bottle, reminding him of "seals"! Nowadays crofters float their cattle to the new ring and leave after they have been through – it's not the same. [302]

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[297] Lachie MacKinnon, Parkhouse, TRD Christmas Newsletter 2011.

[298] Colin MacKinnon, Kilkenneth, 5/2011.

[299] Lachie MacKinnon, Parkhouse, TRD Christmas Newsletter 2011.

[300] Angus MacKechnie, Crossapol, 6/2011.

[301] Angus MacKechnie, Crossapol, 6/2011.

[302] Angus MacKechnie, Crossapol, 6/2011.

Every October five boat loads of cattle left Tiree for the great October sale held in Oban. This went on for a week. Those who went to Oban to sell their cattle enjoyed those sales and very much looked forward to it as it meant meeting with farmers from all over the country. This ceased when the mart in Oban was sold and Tesco bought the stance. [303]

MacDonald, Fraser and Co. amalgamated with Speedie Brothers and Thomas Corson to become United Auctions in 1962.

The Tiree Cattle show

Cattle Show in Scarinish in 1927 (B197)

The earliest record we have for a Cattle Show on Tiree is in 1877 with a donation from the Duke.

1877 Subscription from 8th Duke for Tiree Cattle Show. [304]

Seven years later the island's doctor, Dr Buchanan, was questioned at the Napier Commission inquiry in Kirkapol Church.

[303] Lachie MacKinnon, Parkhouse, TRD Christmas Newsletter 2011.

[304] Factory Act Books, AI 1998.151.

Are there any prizes offered for nice houses or gardens or agricultural shows?

Yes, there are. The Duke gives in the summer for agricultural shows some £20 a year. [305]

The island's factor, Mr McDiarmid, was questioned at the same hearing. It seems as though the Show at that stage was simpler than it is today.

What is the nature of the competition, for sheep and cattle?

Cattle and horses and butter.
Cheese?

No, just an ordinary agricultural show.

Poultry?

No. [306]

But by 1891 the Show was sufficiently developed to raise a large sum to build the Reading Room in Scarinish. This was originally a waiting room for people hoping to travel on the ferry. It also contained a library of books and is today the home of An Iodhlann.

1891 Tiree Cattle Show's contribution to building a reading room and waiting rooms at Scarinish £45 13s. [307]

We don't know where the first Shows were held, but by the beginning of the 20th century Scarinish School and playground was the venue. A newspaper report from 1911 paints a vivid picture.

Crofters' and Cottars' Show in Tiree

> *An exceedingly interesting exhibition of livestock and home industries was held at Scarinish at the end of last week [i.e.in August, later than today's Shows and outside Glasgow Fair Fortnight]. The competition was restricted crofters and cottars paying £30 of rent and under. This is the first show held in Tiree during the past 28 years and naturally it created great interest throughout the island.*
>
> *The necessary funds for carrying out the show were raised by local subscriptions which were greatly helped by a generous donation from his Grace the Duke of Argyll and by a grant from the Congested Districts Board.*

[305] *Napier Commission Evidence*, vol 3, p 2155, 1884 (AI1999.17.1).

[306] *Napier Commission Evidence*, vol 3, p 2161, 1884 (AI1999.17.1).

[307] Factory Act Books, AI 1998.151.1

The local committee, consisting of Mr Hugh Mcdiarmid, Mr Barr, Balephetrish, Mr Colin Brown and Mr Barr junior, secretary, who were leading spirits, deserve great credit. In addition to 8 classes for Clydesdale horses, there were four classes for Highland garrons [smaller horses] not exceeding 14 hands high, and also classes for Highland, Ayrshire and cross cattle, pigs, poultry and dairy produce and a section for home industries...The Highland cattle were a very fair lot, the winning three year old heifer which gained the special prize in the cattle classes being a particularly good animal, and quite fit to win in better company. As regards the cross cattle, of which there are many bred on the island, there is room for great improvement. Many of the Ayrshire and cross cows are mated to Highland bulls and the resulting cross is not an animal that feeders care to buy. The Congested Districts Board provide a number of Highland bulls for the use of the crofters, but in such a fertile island a greater benefit would be conferred on the breeders if two or more shorthorn bulls were sent over and mated with the native and Ayrshire cows. A cross-bred stirk of this kind, if fairly well reared, would undoubtedly bring £4 to £5 more money to the breeder.

A very large number of pigs of a good class are bred on the island, some very good boars having been introduced. The winners at the show were highly creditable, and of that class of pig with lengthy loins so much in demand at this present time.

In the poultry section some very fine specimens were exhibited, noticeably the pen of black MInorcas belonging to Charles MacLean, Cornaig, and the black Leghorns and white Wyandottes exhibited by Miss Macfarlane, Baugh.

In the dairy produce the butter cannot be described as more than fair, but nevertheless was quite creditable considering the primitive conditions under which it is produced. The eggs were especially good, Tiree being a great egg producing district. [308]

The Show for many was the highlight of the year. Annie Brown, Crossapol, remembered Cattle Show day being her father's annual day out. He put on his best suit, bought some tomatoes at MacArthur's shop in Scarinish (she had never seen them before and she didn't like them) and ten Capstan cigarettes (he didn't even smoke!) [309]

[308] *The Scotsman, 9 August 1911.*

[309] Annie Brown, Crossapol, 3/2001.

Tiree Cattle Show at Scarinish School in 1927 (C121)

David McClounnan, Balephuil also remembered the old times. It cost one old penny to get into the Cattle Show in Scarinish, paid at the school gate. The sheep and horses were in pens inside the school wall (David McClounnan, Balephuil, 3/2001). By the 1930s there was also a piping and milking competition (Iain Chaluim MacKinnon, Kilmoluaig, 9/2000).

The Show stopped during the Second World War and moved to the new pens at Paterson's in Crossapol in the 1950s. While the new Rural Centre was being built it was held in Whitehouse and has now settled at the Rural Centre in Crossapol.

The Tiree Agricultural Show at the Rural Centre in 2004 (E189)

Vets and animal health

Traditional cures and 'lay' vets

Tiree had no vet until the 1950s and animal health was in the hands of the crofters and farmers, some of whom developed a real expertise in some areas.

One of these was George Patterson at Crossapol, who was often assisted by Archie Kennedy. Mairi Campbell remembers her father being called out to deliver a foal from a tiring mare at MacDougall's in Cornaigbeg. The foal died and he had to cut its forelegs off to get it out.

Cattle were also prone to getting potatoes stuck in the gullet if the food wasn't cut to the right size. Mary Ann MacLennan, Caolas, remembers "getting a row" from a crofter in Ruaig because she had left half eaten turnips by the roadside on her way to school. The crofter was worried that the cattle would eat them when they hadn't been cut up properly. George Paterson had a special leather tube with a ball on the end which he used for pushing them down. [310]

The Camerons of Balevullin were also well-known as lay vets, as were John Hume, the shepherd at Heylipol, Tom Barr of Balephetrish Farm and the father of Donald MacLean, the late butcher.

Tom Barr was very good at castrating horses, and his fee was a day's work. [311]

My grandfather had a special knife. And there was a worm [an intermediate stage of a tapeworm – RB] got into the sheep's head some way and he was able to get it out. [312]

Cattle wintered inside had to be looked after carefully or the confined space would allow infectious disease to spread rapidly. Jean MacCallum remembers that they were scrupulous about cleaning out the byre by brushing the floor and then sprinkling it with boiled water in which they had dissolved a block of disinfectant obtained from Massey's and Son, Hyndland Road, Glasgow. "You could eat your dinner off the floor after that!" she recalls. [313]

There were a number of traditional cures. The seaweed *feamainn chitheag* was boiled up and the juice given to weak calves. Then the boiled seaweed was mixed with oatmeal and fed to the animals. [314]

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[310] Mairi Campbell, Corrairigh, 2/2011.

[311] Robert Beck, AC 121.

[312] John Barr, AC 121.

[313] Jean MacCallum, Balevullin, 5/2006.

[314] Jean MacCallum, Balevullin, 2/2011.

We were always warned never to leave the potato shed door open. This was truly dangerous. If the cow gets in there it will gorge itself on the potatoes and, my aunt explained, they can kill themselves. They fill up with gas and they're in agony. Sometimes, she says, it's been known the cow lying on its side, blown up. There was certain people that could come and put a probe into some part of the belly of the cow and let the gas out. And she said, seemingly there was a terrible smell when the gas came out. [315]

Drowning excess puppies was called "going to the Navy!" [316]

Braxy (*ceithreamh gorm*) was a disease that tends to affect pet or overfed lambs or the biggest calves as they went on to richer pastures in August and September. Hugh Archie MacCallum, Kenovay, remembers that the old men used to put a tape soaked in Stockholm or Archangel Tar (*tèarr dhearg*) on a needle and put it through the loose skin over the cow's chest (*brolain*) to keep the illness away. [317]

Braxy mutton from sheep that were found dead from natural causes or an illness was sometimes eaten. Alasdair Sinclair, Brock, remembered that the meat was very strong and he didn't like it. [318] Hugh Archie MacCallum wouldn't eat braxy mutton either. [319]

Pat Boyd's late father in Northern Ireland had an old Highland shepherd called Farquhar MacLeod. If he found a sheep dead in the morning from braxy, he would pick it up by the legs and shake the corpse three times. If the legs stayed on it was fit to eat! [320]

[315] Duncan Grant, Ruaig talking to Dr John Holliday 10/2011.

[316] Flora MacKinnon, Balevullin, 1/2010.

[317] Hugh Archie MacCallum, Kenovay, 2/2007 and 1/2009.

[318] Alasdair Sinclair, Brock, 1/2007.

[319] Hugh Archie MacCallum, Kenovay, 2/2007 and 1/2009.

[320] Pat Boyd, Cornaig, 1/2009.

Notice at Loch an Eilein regarding the Foot & Mouth outbreak in April 2001 (P68)

Pine, or *searg*, is a trace element deficiency of sheep grazed exclusively on the shell sand machair and it used to be common on Tiree. The animals fail to thrive and develop very white wool. [321] When the skin of the ears starts to peel the animal is close to death. Lambs that are suffering from pine and need to be moved to darker ground are known as *seòltachan*.

There was certain type of pine here in Tiree. Tom Barr put out an iron trough for the beasts to drink on the Reef [where pine] was very, very bad, being shell sand. The beasts that drank out of this trough did not suffer from pine so he [thought the pine] must be iron deficiency because by this time the trough was rusty. So he called in the scientists and they took samples of the rust. One of the impurities was cobalt. Through Tom Barr the cause of this pine was discovered. It used to be so bad that if you left beasts on shell sand machair they just withered away and died. It was bad as that. They had to keep on shifting them. [322]

The sheep in Tiree are always liable to be suffering from deficiency of trace elements, cobalt. It rubbed off on my father and when I was a young man, mixing the manure before it came in bags, there was always cobalt in the mixture. He was very particular about trace elements.[323]

Investigations carried out by the West of Scotland College of Agriculture into a condition existing among sheep and cattle in the island of Tiree known locally as 'pining' reveal that it is a deficiency disease due to probably to the want of a combination of traces of essential minerals. This conclusion is reached by John Wilson, county organiser for North Argyll, who in a report on the subject to the College states that pining has been in evidence on Tiree for upwards of one hundred years, although it has become much more acute in the last ten years or so, probably due to the more intensive farming now being carried out in small

[321] "Death white" – Hugh Archie MacCallum, Kenovay.

[322] Robert Beck, AC 121.

[323] John Barr talk in An Iodhlann, 1999. AC121.

holdings....although the attention of the College was directed to pine in sheep, it was found that young cattle were possibly more subject to this condition than lambs, and on several holdings serious losses had resulted each year. According to the information gathered the death rate on some holdings was over 50%, while the affected animals which survived were most unthrifty, even though well fed during the winter and spring. The pining began to show from about New Year onwards, and by March most of the surviving animals were merely skin and bone, and hardly able to walk. [324]

It is now known to be due to cobalt deficiency. The solution is to move the animals to 'black,' wetter and heavier ground. The reason pine may have become more common since the 1830s is probably enclosure. When there were less field boundaries sheep and cattle would naturally graze on a mixture of grounds through the year.

Tommy MacKinnon remembers his father treated pine with big pills which you broke in half for the lambs. [325] Although most of the drenches given to animals now contain trace elements, sheep can still be affected on Tiree.

Veterinary services

The Highlands and Islands Veterinary Services Scheme (HIVSS) was set up in 1915 and revised in 1995. It subsidises veterinary services to crofters in the Crofting Counties for all animals kept for agricultural purposes. There are now 13 practices from Shetland to Islay, although at first Tiree wasn't among them.

Duncan MacLean

Duncan MacLean, Balevullin, *Donnchadh Dhòmhnaill 'ic Nèill*, was the island's first vet. DO MacLean, the respected head teacher at Cornaig School, was indirectly responsible for his choice of profession. Flora MacKinnon, Balevullin, tells this story about her uncle. Duncan had left school and had gone sea at 16. The headmaster came to visit Duncan's father and persuaded him to send the young man back to school. Duncan went on to Glasgow University and qualified as a vet in 1932 when he was 31. His mother gave him a copy of *Na Bàird Thirisdeach* on the date of his graduation (she has the book still).

There was a man in Balevullin called Duncan MacLean, and he lived in a wee thatched cottage. He was a crofter's son. He went to sea, sailing before the mast, and he saved his money, left the sea and put himself through vet college, something which demands our great admiration, quite a feat. He landed up in Skye with the HIVSS. He was thought very highly of...but he lost his job there and came back home, living on the family croft. People started to

[324] *The Scotsman*, 21 July 1933.

[325] Tommy MacKinnon, Vaul, 6/2011.

Duncan MacLean, Balevullin, was Tiree's first vet (C185)

call him in as a veterinary surgeon. Now there was no [HIVSS} scheme for Tiree in these days. You get a small subsidy which theoretically makes up for the uneconomic work. The Camerons in Balevullin and one or two others got together and lobbied the authorities and got an appointment secured for Tiree. So he was the first man to be a vet here. He had a good name, people thought quite a lot of him. But he relapsed and didn't last long after that. [326]

His first practice was in Skye but he came back to Tiree in the late 1930s. He lived with his sister, Mairi, in the family's thatched house in Balevullin and worked out of the byre. There was no phone in the house. Despite these difficult conditions he developed a fine reputation, so much so that a lot of humans came to him as well as animals! Neil MacArthur, Moss, remembers that ringworm was common in those days. Dr Hunter, the island's doctor at the time, used to treat it with gentian violet, but it never seemed to heal. Duncan made up his own paste and it was gone in a few days. [327] Alasdair MacNeill, Hynish, still had a pot of Duncan's ringworm paste in his cupboard 30 years after its prescription!

Duncan was particularly good at delivering foals. Lord Margadale, Islay, kept pedigree stallions at that time and his men weren't able to deliver a difficult foal. So he got a private plane to fly from Islay to Tiree to collect Duncan. He delivered the foal successfully and was flown back. [328]

He died in 1955 at the age of 54 and is buried in Soroby.

[326] Robert Beck, Ruaig, talking to Dr John Holliday, February 2011.

[327] Neil MacArthur, Moss, 1/2011.

[328] Donald MacLean, Kenovay, 1/2011).

Willie Robertson

Willie Robertson and his wife Jean (who is retired in Tyndrum), they were both in my class at college. They were the vets here. Willie started artificial insemination [on Tiree], that was a big step. They bought Island House and lived there. [329]

William Robertson also took Gaelic lessons from *An Tidsear Mhòr* at Melness. [330]

Robert Beck

Robert Beck was born in 1926 near Kilwinning and qualified from Glasgow in 1950. He worked as an assistant in Penzance for 6 months, then in the Isle of Wight, Lockerbie, Cumbria, Kirkcudbright (for four years) and Auchinleck in Ayrshire before coming to Tiree. In this last posting he was responsible for the last set of working pit ponies. He came to Tiree in 1959 and left in 1974 to become lecturer in Animal Husbandry and Preventive Medicine at the Royal Dick Vet School in Edinburgh. He retired in 1990. He succeeded in helping to make Tiree the first place in the world to be bovine brucellosis free and also set up a warble fly eradication programme.

I came here on May 1st 1959. There was some very dire poverty here [then]. There were a number of very small subsistence crofts. It was unbelievably bad, it really was. The two commonest diseases were parasitism and malnutrition which are attributable to bad husbandry. You can't cure that with a syringe...they did not value scientific knowledge...you don't blame the people at all...the whole idea was to educate young people and get them out of here...out of agriculture and fishing. When I came here I was thunderstruck by the antediluvian methods and beliefs and practices.

There was a lack of management of the grazings, how to 'haven' them, save them and then use them, how to fertilise grass. There would be too many animals at one place and one time and it was grazed bare. This is where parasitism gets a grip. It was a common practice here to keep bullocks for three or four years. They were very badly bred – they didn't have decent bulls. The animals were very badly fed over the winter. Hay was left to get bleached with all the goodness out of it before it was lifted. They were often fed on straw. These bullocks were all legs and hardly any body. And they had to keep them for three or four winters. When they sold them they got very low prices. Now they're selling calves a few months old, and great calves, toppers! They didn't winter their cows outside – they were all kept inside in byres. The cows not eating anything outside, [it was] all winter keep. It's ridiculous. There's no justification for this at all! The breeding was wrong. If the cows had been genetically suitable for out wintering things would have been an awful lot better. They had a lot of dairy cattle mixed with them. The Department had a lot to do with that. They were encouraging the use of Ayrshire bulls which was absolute insanity! Highland or Galloway breeds, hill breeds, these are the ones!

[329] Robert Beck, Ruaig, talking to Dr John Holliday, February 2011.

[330] Donald MacLean, Kenovay, 1/2011.

They milked these calves twice a day. They took the calves off them then had to teach the calves to drink milk from a bucket. And they bought calves from all over the shop, some from South Wales, the south of England. And they arrived at the pier suffering from haemorrhagic septicaemia, dying! The mortality rate among calves was tremendous. The bulk of my work when I came here was trying to keep calves alive. The [Tiree crofters] were told by dealers there was no point in buying from Tiree, their bellies are full of sand, which was one great big lie! It was fluke and worms! The [crofters on this island] were people who could build their own house, plumb it, wire it, take your car to bits, put it back together, discuss politics and poetry with you. A lot of them had been to sea. They weren't stupid people – anything but! But the way they handled the land! There were couple of farmers up from Appleby, in the north of England. "What do you think of Tiree?" they were asked. "Oh! They waste their ground!" they replied.

I most certainly do not blame the crofting system. Crofting is the one thing that has kept the people in the Highlands. The people who held the land have been held by the land. A croft is small but you share two common grazings, a summer and a winter one. It depends on a spirit of cooperation and they get on well if they are prosperous and there is a future .It is breaking down now [though].

There were too many crofts for the standard of living, abject poverty and low morale. Officialdom and education system looked down on crofters. Subsidies had started at this time and the mentality was "What are they going to do for us?" The state of the animals was very poor. I can only tell you my point of view.

Just after I came here I met a man called Dr Alasdair Fraser. He was a biologist. He was on the staff of the extra-mural Department of Glasgow University. He gave lectures here and we struck up a friendship. I was suffering from tremendous frustration and he came along. He could see the potential. The land was so fertile and so were the people. He became a Commissioner for the Argyll Islands with the Crofters Commission...Both of us were disciples of Fraser Darling [Sir Frank Fraser Darling, 1903-1979, was an influential biologist and writer on the Highlands].

[Alasdair Fraser] wanted to use Tiree as an example. Many a time we would sit in the house there [and asked ourselves the question] what we could do? The mail boat would leave at six in the morning and we would sit by the fireside [in the old Gott manse] until half past five in the morning! We had day dreams, we knew they were day dreams. Do you know what's happened? They've nearly all come true. I see it when I look out of my window!

He got all these bodies together, all the departments and the Crofters Commission. He formed what was called the Tiree Committee...At that time the government formed Councils of Social Services at various places. Dr Fraser thought if we could get a committee on Tiree we could get crofters, the forward thinking ones, to form a committee. I was the chairman and it did an awful lot of good. And we had this agricultural sub-committee...We mounted a tremendous campaign, how crofters could improve the ground and all the rest of it. You can never improve common grazings. They'll always be one who will not mend his fences or

drains, or help to pay for fertiliser. So Alasdair promoted apportionment, and an awful lot of common grazings were split up at that time. In hindsight it was maybe not such a good thing in the long term. In the short term it was great. Crofters got acreage and they fenced it and they got grants to fence it and they fertilised it and the grass grew like billy-oh! At the same time the West of Scotland College [Bill Dunlop] was coming in [giving advice]. All these things were happening at the same time.

Brucella abortis infects cattle. It makes cattle abort which means no calves and no milk. It is spread by the placenta and amniotic fluid, which is a mass of these bugs. If you went into the byre you could breathe it in. Nearly every vet and dairymen had brucellosis. I had it myself. It starts off with a fever which came back, and usually it settles in the nervous system and the joints, causing depression and anxiety [in humans]. The government decided they were going to do something about this and introduced an Accredited Herd Scheme.

Vet Robert Beck in 1965 (K147)

This was voluntary at first. The trouble was you got your cattle tested and any that failed the test you were allowed to sell on the open market. The government had done the same thing twenty years before with the Tuberculous Herd Scheme. You were allowed to sell the reactors [infected cattle] on the open market. The folk on Tiree knew nothing about this and were buying [these] cheap [infected] cattle. There had never been tuberculosis in this island [before]. They bought these cattle, brought them back and in these days the byres were built of stone with lime mortar and the cows were breathing into this. The [disease] spread to an awful lot of cattle that way.

I thought to myself the same thing is going to happen here. There was no brucellosis on the island. [but crofters] were going to buy cheap cattle on the mainland and it'll go right from one end of the island to the other, because there were all these common grazings [with crofters having crofts in different townships]...There is only one way to treat this place when it comes to infectious disease – treat it like one big farm. I said to the authorities, "What going to happen to the islands?" "Oh! They'll be left to the end," [said the Department].

The word in Chinese for crisis is the same as the word for opportunity. I thought, this is just what we need to go to town! So I told everybody about it and we went to work on the people. Dr Calvert [the island's doctor at that time] was very enthusiastic. We produced propaganda sheets explaining what brucellosis was and what we were going to do about it. If you don't do anything you are going to get this horrible disease which you've never had before and all the economic benefits if we get in first. The Agricultural sub-Committee had four elected members, but I had a right to co-opt so I got all the forward-thinking crofters on the island – Johnny MacKinnnon, Farmhouse, Balemartine; Hector Campbell, Cornaigbeg; John Lachie MacInnes, Salum; Neil MacLean, Carnan. We had this enormous campaign, built up this awareness. I never told the Divisional Officer of the Department in Oban!

The sub-committee went round every house on the island getting signatures. There were about 5% who were against it but the township clerk simply went to them and told them to take their cattle off the common grazing. They soon signed up! When you get to 95% you can put the pressure on the remaining ones. [The application to the Department said] "We the undersigned cattle owners of Tiree wish to join the Brucellosis Accredited Scheme." There was not a thing the Divisional Officer could do about it!

An awful lot of people had a house cow [then]. You couldn't buy milk in the shops then. There were an awful lot of small crofts and there were an awful lot of signatures. This created an awful lot of publicity in the press. A wee island! The very first place in the world to join this scheme! A big thing was made of this. [I said to the people] "Hold your head up now! That was the biggest thing. It was just the thing we were looking for. Something to pull them out of this slough of despond, this sense of inferiority. It was a wonderful thing.

The island's doctor was also involved once in a story that is still remembered on the island.

When Dr Calvert came, we were hoping to God we'd get a decent doctor. I made friends with him. He came from Manchester. He'd never lived in the country before. He said he was watching telly and he saw a cow being calved and he thought this was great. [He asked me] "If you get a dystochia [obstructed labour] in a cow just let me know.". The first case I got after that was down at Hector Meek's [in Caolas]. It was what was called schistoma reflexa. It's a monstrosity! Everything is outside in, an awful business. There's only one realistic way to deliver that, and that's by Caesarean. So I put it to Hector Meek and he said "Aye! On you go!!" So I said, "I'll get some help," and I got people I could depend on. And I told Dr Calvert, so he came out with me and he was quite intrigued to see this being done on a dirty

byre floor. "What else could you do?" I did it under general with chloral hydrate, a very, very old-fashioned drug, but I found it great for cattle. [331]

Cattle crushes came in while Mr Beck had the Tiree practice. Before that cattle were treated in the byre and they could give the vet a good kick! [332]

You [had to take] blood samples from all the animals [for brucellosis testing]. There were no crushes [then]. The way we used to test the cattle for tuberculosis [in the old days was that there were a lot more young men then [and] we had to lasso the [cattle] and hang on like billy-oh. You were limping home every night! But we had to get crushes to get blood samples. The Almighty was behind us! There was a boat with a huge deck cargo of first class timber, all greased, that went ashore near Islay and this stuff came ashore on the beaches! Nearly every crush on the island was made out of it! Some of them are still there.

When it was all over we had a committee meeting and I'll never forget it. They all asked the same question. "What are we going to do now?" And I knew that my job was done! They didn't need me any more. So Eachann Lachainn [Hector Campbell, Cornaigbeg] said, "We could get rid of warble fly."

Warble fly is an insect like a blue bottle. They buzz about the animal with a high-pitched whine. You or I don't hear it, but cattle hear it. It sends them mad and they run off with their tails in the air. They can jump off cliffs like those at Kenavara! They'll go into lochs and the sea with the water up above their knees. They don't get peace to graze, to fatten. The fly lays its eggs just above the pastern [on the lower leg] and the grubs hatch out, burrow up below the skin and come out at the back which become infected with warble fly lumps. The hide is ruined with all these holes. We were experienced by then in communal things. Everybody would have to do it! Up to then if you had wanted to buy a drug to prevent warble fly you had to buy certain minimum quantities. But we calculated that if we bought enough for the whole island you could [give everyone] a wee jug for their own cow. What you did was pour the stuff along the back and it was absorbed into the animal's system and that killed the warble fly maggots. That's all you did! We let it be known that we were interested and there was one pharmaceutical firm called Walter Gregory. They sent a man out to do a free demonstration on a crofter's cattle. Of course, he got the order! Every member of the committee had a barrel of the stuff and you could go and get enough for one cow or three cows, whatever you had. It was successful. It shows what you can do with cooperation, but for cooperation you need morale, self confidence.

The day we left Tiree, there was sale the next day in Oban. It was 1974 and I knew Tiree cattle were going to be there. All I had to do was go in and say, "That's Tiree. That's Tiree!" I picked the best ones. They're quite remarkable, the cattle here. Some of the best in the West Highlands. I looked at prices in places like Tain and Dingwall, the Black Isle. They weren't

[331] Robert Beck, Ruaig, talking to Dr John Holliday, February 2011.

[332] Donald MacLean, Kenovay, 1/2011.

getting better prices. [The modern cattle on Tiree] – By Gosh! They're good! They're toppers! You want to cross the Reef just now. It does my heart good, with not a bite to eat from their owners, looking great. With calves at foot! [333]

Jimmy Wilson

Jimmy Wilson was the next vet. He later moved to Mull.

Pat Boyd

Pat is the current vet for Tiree and Coll He has become a Deputy Lord Lieutenant for Argyll and Bute, succeeding Major Nicholas MacLean-Bristol.

Potatoes

The potato is a native of the Andes in South America and is well suited to the cool, wet climate of west Britain. The Spanish invaders brought the plant back to Europe, the tubers reaching the Canaries by 1567 and Britain by the 1580s. According to Irish tradition potatoes were brought ashore from the wreck of the Spanish Armada in 1588. Amazingly, it was to take almost 200 years for the new crop to reach Tiree.

MacDonald of Clanranald brought back potatoes from Antrim to his estates in South Uist and Benbecula in 1743. His tenants famously refused to eat them at first.

It is still told that, on his arrival, he offered many of his tenants some potatoes for seed, and insisted on their planting them. The people were unwilling to comply. He threatened and was reluctantly obeyed. In October they brought the crop to his door, and told him that he could indeed compel them to be planted and raised, but not eaten, and he was welcome to use them as he thought fit. [334]

In fact there was resistance to the new crop in many parts of Europe, including riots in France and Russia, although the economist Adam Smith reported in 1776 that potatoes supported three times as many people per acre than grain crops. The main disadvantage of potatoes is that, having a high water content, they cannot be stored for more than eight months.

Potatoes are first mentioned on Tiree in 1764.

Bear [a sort of barley], oats, potatoes and a little rye are the only crops raised in Tiree. [335]

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[333] Robert Beck, Ruaig, talking to Dr John Holliday, February 2011.

[334] *General View of the Agriculture of the Hebrides,* J MacDonald, 1811.

[335] *Report on the Hebrides*, Dr John Walker, p 185.

Donald MacKinnon, Sandaig, was told that potatoes were first planted on Tiree in lazy beds on the south-east shoulder of *Beinn Ceann a' Bharra.*

But by 1791 the crop was well established on Tiree.

Potatoes of which a great quantity is planted, mostly [in rough ground] in lazy beds. Drilling potatoes [in fields] is now introduced. [336]

The crofters obviously did not, at first, trust the new crop enough to plant it in the fields next to the barley and oats. But, despite this, that year £4,424 worth of potatoes was grown on the island, almost twice the value of the cereal crop. [337]

The first record of the potato we have in estate papers is in 1792, some thirty years after its introduction, when the Duke instructed his factor on the island:

You are to give the schoolmaster ground sufficient for potatoes and greens. [338]

It seems therefore likely that the new crop was not introduced on Tiree by the estate but by one of its tenants.

However, two years later the factor in Inveraray replied that the island was exporting the new crop.

The last two seasons were very favourable for raising potatoes and the factor [on Tiree] states the value of about £60 yearly, as having been sent out of Tiree, but before these years they sold none. [339] [for comparison, the value of kelp sent from the island that year was £691 and barley £674].

Potatoes were planted in lazy beds or *feannagan*. These were created on thin, rocky soil, which was covered in seaweed. The turf was turned over on itself in strips, doubling the thickness of the soil on the one hand and providing a drainage channel on the other. Potatoes were then planted using a stick which was pushed into the ground and worked round in a circle to make a conical hole. [340] Even after potatoes were accepted as a field crop, many landless cottars were forced to use marginal land on shore or hill, continuing the use of lazy beds. The contours of old lazy beds can still be seen in many parts of Tiree, especially around the shore and on the *sliabh*.

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[336] *Old Statistical Account*, p 396.

[337] *Old Statistical Account*, p 216.

[338] *Instructions*, p 25.

[339] *Instructions*, 1794, p 33.

[340] David McClounnan, Balephuil, 10/2005.

Nancy and Alexander MacInnes lifting potatoes at Ruaig around 1925 (A33)

The last lazy beds on Tiree were worked on the *sliabh* in Balephuil by Alasdair MacArthur, *Sandaidh Mòr*. Eilidh Kennedy, Balevullin, remembered helping him there in 1910 when she was eight and John Fletcher, Balemartine, remembers working on *Feannagan Shandaidh Mhòir* in 1947. Sandy, with Charles Brown, *Tearlach Chaluim,* went twice to the big cave on Kenavara for guano which they brought out in sacks. They put the guano on Sandy's lazy beds and the potatoes that year were huge, although some people criticised them for being too floury. [341]

By the 1790s potatoes on Tiree were being planted in ploughed fields, beside the oats, barley and rye, and by 1803 the crop was an established part of the rotation on the island.

Four year rotation – barley, clover, oats, potatoes and turnips. [342]

Late potato blight is caused by a fungus infection that strikes the crop when it is fully grown. The disease began infecting crops during the 1840s in North America, and spread to Holland, England and then Ireland. 40% of the Irish crop was lost in 1845, and in 1846 a wet cold summer meant 90% of the Irish crop was affected. Part of the problem was that the crop was particularly vulnerable as all potatoes then grown in Europe had derived from only one or two varieties introduced by the Spanish.

The disease struck Tiree in 1846, literally overnight.

EC: Did you hear much about the failure of the potatoes?

DS: Yes, I heard about that too...my mother remembered the blight. She was living at Heylipol then because her father was a groom to the factor over there. And she remembered a big field of potatoes and they were praising the field in the evening, some people that were passing, and tomorrow night it was finished, ruined. The blight came and Tiree was without potatoes that year and the year after...a lot of people went to America...it's only called here

[341] David McClounnan, Balephuil, 3/2005.

[342] *Instructions*, p 78.

as far as I know in Gaelic [as] Bliadhna a dh' Fhalbh am Buntata, the year the potato went away. [343]

The sudden failure of the potato crop on Tiree caused a famine on the island at least as bad as anywhere in Scotland. Potatoes made up 80% of the diet of the Highlands. [344] But, in a sense, Tiree at that time was a famine waiting to happen. The population had increased three fold from 1,509 in 1750 to 4,961 in 1841, driven by the kelp boom. This was far more than the island could naturally support. Crofts were sub-divided into smaller and smaller plots and over-grazing caused widespread sand blow. Half the population was living in "deep poverty"[345] After the crop failed a huge relief effort was mounted and the Duke financially encouraged 1,778 islanders to emigrate from Tiree and the Ross of Mull. [346]

It is said that West Hynish was the only part of Tiree to escape the blight.

Neil MacNeill in Vaul. His father [Malcolm] was [living] in the back of Hynish that year. I heard Neil telling me, telling it to other people and I was listening although I was only a boy, and I would be up there with the old man every chance I could get – there was so many in the family... you know what he did. He took the eyes out of the potato and kept them. And he sold that in spring time and the potatoes grew. They were boiling the potatoes and he was keeping the skin. [347]

Landless cottars could be given an *iomaire*, a strip of land on a neighbour's croft, to grow their family's potatoes.

There was a lot of squatters on Tiree at that time and they had no land. And if they knew the crofters well a crofter would give them a plot of their own. And sometimes you would see in a crofter's field seven or eight plots belonging to the cottars. And they were paying that back with work in the harvest time...in my time too...well you were depending on the crofter neighbours then...they were very pally. [348]

Even from the earliest days there was an awareness that the same seed, planted year after year, gave a diminishing return. The Duke offered to help in 1800.

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[343] Eric Cregeen talking to Donald Sinclair, West Hynish in 1970. SA 1970.095.

[344] *Scottish Country Life,* Fenton, p 124.

[345] *The Great Highland Famine,* T Devine, p 230.

[346] *ibid*, p 234.

[347] Eric Cregeen talking to Hector Kennedy, Heylipol in 1973. SA 1973.097.

[348] Donald Sinclair talking to Eric Cregeen, SA 1971.091.

Think of introducing new seed oats, barley and potatoes and let me know which way I can assist this measure. [349]

1883-4 Paid Matthew Howie of Greenock for seed potatoes for crofters £63 4s 10d. [350]

The crofters used to exchange sacks of seed potatoes themselves every two or three years. Seed would be swapped from one end of the island to the other or from crofts with heavy soil to those with light soil. [351] Neil MacArthur, Moss, remembers his father exchanging seed potatoes every three years, either with the Humes in Hynish or the MacMasters in Kenovay, or they might buy a sack of seed from John Lachie MacInnes in Salum. [352]

Older varieties were the earlies Garton, Midlothian Early, Epicure, Gladstone and Sharpe's Express (introduced in 1900 by Charles Sharpe of Lincolnshire). Kerr's Pink, Record and Golden Delicious were grown as the main crop.

Light ground for potatoes needs plenty of feeding, and a mixture of seaweed and dung was preferred. Willie MacLean, Balinoe, said that guano (*salachair a' chalmain*) will burn the eyes of the potato if you are not careful and *feamainn dhearg* (red seaweed) will do the same thing. *Feamainn dhubh* (black seaweed) is fine for potatoes as is *inneir*, the droppings of sheep and cows.

Others had their own preferences.

Barr dearg was the seaweed the old folks preferred to put on their potato ground, along with plenty of dung. [353]

The dung can go in the same drill as the potatoes, but:

You must put out dung fresh in the morning you plant the potatoes. It has to be wet. I've seen me out at 5 in the morning putting it out. [354]

Potatoes were planted by hand after the ground had been fertilised and ploughed. Willie MacLean, Balinoe, used a dibber, a T-shaped tool, for planting the early crop, [355] but it was more usual to plant into the ploughed drill. If seaweed was still lying on the ground, one row

[349] *Instructions,* p 51.

[350] Estate Factory Act Books, AI 1998.151.

[351] Hugh Archie MacCallum, Cornaig.

[352] Neil MacArthur, Moss, 11/2010.

[353] Neil MacArthur, Moss, 11/2010.

[354] Archie Brown, Kilkenneth, 9/2011.

[355] Willie MacLean, Balinoe, 6/2010.

was ploughed, the seaweed pushed in to it and covered, another row ploughed and the potatoes planted into that one. The seaweed "burned" the potatoes if it was in direct contact.[356]

Potatoes were planted by the end of April, anyway. The ground wasn't so wet in those days.[357]

The crop had to be weeded.

We were cottars, but there were cousins of my mother that had the croft – Alasdair Dhòmhnaill Bhàin. They were MacLeods, from what is now known as the Point. Weeding the potato shaws I remember. It must have been in May, going down with the uncle, down on his hands and knees in these days, cleaning them very thoroughly. I remember one time, I was behind him in the drill, and he said, "Ho Ho! Look at this!" There was a little lark's nest with the brown eggs right in beside the shaw of the potatoes. [358]

Potatoes were harvested with a *gràip*, or fork. Hugh Archie MacCallum, Whitehouse, advises waiting at least three weeks after the potato has flowered before lifting them.

If you lift potatoes too early, they don't keep so well. You need to wait until October, and when you lift them the potatoes should fall off the shaw. [359]

The schools had a week or two in the autumn to allow the children to help with the potato harvest. A letter to the Ruaig teacher in 1919 ordered,

Dear Miss Lamont, Provided you can have requisite number of openings assured, give week commencing 27th October as Potato-holiday. School to re-open Monday Nov 3rd. [360]

However, the exact date of the harvest could vary with the weather.

The Board fixed the holiday for potato lifting from 15th October to 29th Oct but this date is a week too early for this district so I postponed the holidays until next week at least. [361]

Duncan Grant, Ruaig, remembers potato lifting in the 1940s.

A huge patch of potatoes in these days, everybody had. We had what we called the potato holidays in October. There was huge work in getting the potatoes in. Early in the morning the

[356] Willie MacPhail, Clachan, 8/2011.

[357] Neil MacArthur, Moss, 6/2011.

[358] Duncan Grant talking to Dr John Holliday, 1.2.2011

[359] Neil MacArthur, Moss, 11/2010.

[360] Ruaig School log, November 1919.

[361] Balemartine School Log, 1917.

horses would be taken out. We could see from Brock they were taking the horses out and opening the first drill. We went down and we could see the crofter out with his grapa, as they called it, a fork with spoon-like ends, used for flicking the potatoes out and into the steep edged part of the drill the plough had turned over. By the time we were getting ourselves on the go, gathering pails, gathering hessian sacks ... we would all move up to different parts [of the field]. You'd start filling your pail, and being boys you'd maybe half fill it, and then to the sack and put it over the top of the pail and tip it over. Back to the drill. After we'd emptied the drill we'd move back clear and then the crofter would come round with the two horses and the plough and make the first cutting. That would be 'empty' as they said, a slim cut between the actual ridges. Then as he came round the second time he would [plough] below the potatoes themselves and turn them right over, in a rounded effect and you could see the potatoes peeping through. Back to the grapas again. My aunt was there, the crofter was working steadily, wee Tommy Wilson was there. Maybe four people [working together].

It was October and the weather could be very changeable. You'd be looking into the wind and, "Here's a shower coming!" The potato bags would be beginning to fill up and empty hessian bags lying beside them, you'd empty your pails into the sack, back against the full sacks and put the empty sacks over your head. You'd be peering out. The October rains could be quite something [but] the shower would just pass quickly. Everything was soaking. The pails were wet, the bags were wet, it was wet potatoes, and your hands. I've heard of the neighbour's children even crying with the cold! But the work had to be done. It took quite a while, day after day. [362]

Not everyone had fond memories of potato lifting.

I remember speaking with the late Hugh MacLean of Salum. He said he hated the potato picking! [363]

Potatoes were kept cool and dry over the winter and spring in an underground pit called a *pollag*, ideally in sand. The crop was covered with straw and a surrounding ditch was dug to drain the pit on wetter ground. There is a *Cnoc a' Phollaig*, hillock of the potato clamp, in Kirkapol, just west of the Lodge Hotel and a *Baca nam Pollag*, dune of the potato clamp, in Scarinish behind Mary T MacPhee's house.

Neil MacArthur, Moss, remembers that his father in Heylipol built a 30 foot long ditch, 3 foot wide and 2 feet deep, lined with stone. He laid the potatoes in this and covered them with straw and then turf. The store took 6 cart loads altogether. You opened it at one end and worked your way along, covering them up again with turf when you had taken the day's share. [364]

[362] Duncan Grant talking to Dr John Holliday, 2/2011.

[363] Duncan Grant talking to Dr John Holliday, 2/2011.

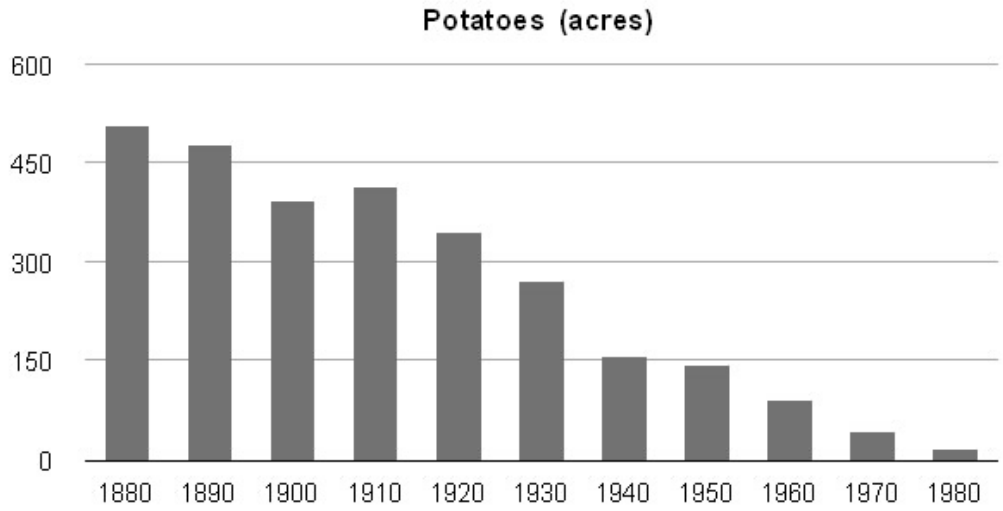
[364] Neil MacArthur, Moss, 11/2010.

Later, crofters built thatched stone potato stores, as at Hough Farm.

At the end of the day [there were] all these filled sacks along the side of the potato patch, the horses would be taken out of the plough and one would be put onto the cart, and these hundredweight bags were all laid onto the cart. The crofter being a genial type of person would lift us boys right onto the sacks while we trundled up to the potato shed. At the end of the day he had the task – it was quite something – to lift [the sacks] in, and empty [them, slowly so they wouldn't bruise, into the cement potato shed [with a] tarred roof next to the byre. Each day we would look in and see the potatoes piling up. It was fulfilling in that sense. Even as children this gave us pleasure to see that this was done, a sense of achievement. [365]

Whitehouse farm sold a potato 'spinner' to lift the croft when they had their farm sale in 1942, but it tended to fire the potatoes in all directions, especially if the horse was "fiery." It was almost harder on the back than lifting them with a fork. [366]

We had a type of potato called Goirtean. When they boiled the skin burst and rolled back, and it was called a' gaireachdainn, laughing potatoes! They were very floury. There were other people came and didn't like the dryness of these potatoes. But I know that one of our neighbouring crofters, Eòghann Iain, the postman at that time, would get a pail of the potatoes from the Point at Ruaig because they seemed to consider them the best for eating, perhaps from the drier land that we were on. This was the quality they liked – this dryness.[367]



[365] Duncan Grant talking to Dr John Holliday, 1.2.2011

[366] Willie MacPhail, Clachan, 8/2011.

[367] Duncan Grant, Ruaig talking to Dr John Holliday 10/2011.

Bulbs and Horticulture

Attempts to start a bulb growing industry on Tiree and other west coast islands began in 1954 with experiments led by Dr Nisbet of the West of Scotland Agricultural College.

The mild climate and high sunshine in early summer earmarked the island as good bulb growing country. The one drawback was the wind. The first trial was in the lighthouse keepers' gardens in Hynish with the bulbs planted by hand.

The initial trials were carried out on a selected croft which has a network of high dry-stone dykes which carry the wind above the level of the crops. [368]

The trial was judged a success and in 1956 fourteen crofters and a farmer took part in wider trials on Tiree. The Hebridean Bulb Growers Ltd was formed in 1957 with their headquarters in Blythswood Square in Glasgow.

Mr RBC Nisbet, a young man who graduated from Reading University and later joined the West of Scotland Agricultural College, is the executive officer...The College initiated the scheme. [369]

The scheme grew and within five years there were forty growers on 5.7 hectares, mainly in Tiree but also on Coll, Mull, Barra, South Uist, Harris, Lewis, Skye, Lismore, Iona, Luing, Islay and on the mainland. [370]

Some of the bulb growing crofts on Tiree were Walter Hume's croft in Hynish; Parkhouse, Balphetrish; *Torr a' Bhaile* and Angus Grant's croft in Ruaig; Neil MacArthur's father in Middleton; Hugh Mackinnon, *Cnoc Gorm*, Kenovay; Malcolm MacLean, *Calum Saluim*, Salum; Archie 'Bel's croft in Balinoe; and Duncan Grant's aunt grew tulips in *Croit Alasdair Dhòmhnaill Bhàin* at Point in Ruaig, and you could see the striking field of red tulips as you came past on the ferry.

Mr Nisbet wrote:

There is great potential in the soils of the area and the present growers are pioneers in the development of assets that have previously been ignored. Their courage demands my respect. [371]

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[368] *Bulb Growing in the Western Isles*, R Nisbet, J Royal Horticultural Society, 87, 10, 1962.

[369] *The Times*, 15 April 1963.

[370] *Bulb Growing in the Western Isles*, R Nisbet, J Royal Horticultural Society, 87, 10, 1962.

[371] *Bulb Growing in the Western Isles*, R Nisbet, J Royal Horticultural Society, 87, 10, 1962, p 17.

Bulbs need richer, darker and more acid soil rather than plain *machair* ground. Keeping the crop weed free is important and bulbs did well following a crop of potatoes. Bulbs grow best on an eight year rotation. The tulip and daffodil bulbs were planted after ploughing, one bulb width apart and then ploughed in. Daffodils were planted from July onwards, tulips from September.

Bulb farming on a croft at Hynish (C10)

Weed control was a problem. Many crofters on Tiree weeded by hand but some used a weed killer spray in January. The crop also needed fortnightly spraying with Zineb, a fungicide from the time the shoots were a few inches high. [372] The flowers were removed from February to May to keep the goodness in the bulbs, leaving the stem to act as an extra leaf. The flowers were scattered on the shore. [373]

Last year the Dutch growers presented a cup for the best tulip at the Lanarkshire bulb show. Yes, you've guessed it. It was won with Tiree bulbs...It is hoped they will be on the open market very soon. One of the growers in this new industry is Malcolm Maclean, Salum. "I started two years ago," he told us, "and so far I have been doing very well. At the moment, however, we are trying to build up stocks." [374]

The bulbs were "polished" by hand as they were lifted.[375] Then they were taken to the bulb store in the old radar station on Ben Balephetrish. There they were loaded into wire baskets and placed into a tank of hot water containing a fungicide for four hours. Alec MacLean,

[372] *Bulb Growing in the Western Isles*, R Nisbet, J Royal Horticultural Society, 87, 10, 1962.

[373] Tina MacArthur, Caolas, 9/2011.

[374] *The People's Journal,* 1 March 1958.

[375] Tina MacArthur, Caolas, 9/2011.

Cornaigbeg, who worked at the store, remembers the "lovely smell" from the bulbs when they came out of the tank. To keep the building disease free formalin was used to wash down the bulb stores. [376] The bulb supplies came from Spalding, Lincolnshire. [377] Varieties of daffodils included Golden Harvest, King Alfred, Corinthian, and Carlton.

Mr Nisbet said they favoured tough, popular varieties...Depending on the sale price it was possible to gross £250 an acre a year for bulbs...[Hebridean growers] also claim a greater proliferation from their bulbs. A firm of commercial growers in the Clyde valley raised 12,000 [flowers] from half a ton of Hebridean bulbs, compared with 17,000 from a ton of Holland. An old man of Tiree, who returned after a working life spent in industry on Clydeside, said that he had never known his small pocket of land there to yield so high a financial return. [378]

DO MacLean, who had been the headmaster of Cornaig School until 1927, was among the first customers for Tiree bulbs.

Among the first to receive a consignment of bulbs since Hebridean growers have commercialised the new industry is Mr Donald Og MacLean, Provost of Crieff. Two hundred bulbs arrived at his home yesterday. [379]

Tulip bulbs were also grown, but were less successful.

The progress that has been made with tulip growing is rather slower than is the case with daffodils. Tulips are very susceptible to damage from high winds and this has caused several poor tulip harvests. [380]

The College experimented with different shelter plants and an experimental plot was planted around 1960 next to the manse barn on the glebe in Gott. It is still there.

The West of Scotland College is to carry out some field trials [in collaboration with Rosewarne Experimental Station] with different types of wind break materials...Escallonia 'Crimson Spire', Cupressocyparis leylandii and *Pittosprum crassifolium...A small observation plot of these materials is now successfully established.* [381] Roger Percy was the Horticultural Advisor for the West of Scotland Agricultural College, which was based in

[376] *Bulb Growing in the Western Isles*, R Nisbet, J Royal Horticultural Society, 87, 10, 1962.

[377] Alec MacLean, Cornaigbeg, 7/2008.

[378] *The Times*, 15 April 1963.

[379] *The Glasgow Herald*, 9 October 1958.

[380] *Bulb Growing in the Western Isles*, R Nisbet, J Royal Horticultural Society, 87, 10, 1962, p 15.

[381] *Bulb Growing in the Western Isles*, R Nisbet, J Royal Horticultural Society, 87, 10, 1962.p 15.

Ayrshire. In 1960 or '61 he advised Mr Beck, then the vet on the island and living in the old manse in Gott, to send for some *Olearia traversii*, a tough New Zealand tree. Mr Beck ordered six plants from a nursery in Redruth, Corwall. They have been very successful and are now grown in gardens all over the island.

The College also tried growing hawthorn on Walter Hume's croft in Hynish, and Alasdair Sinclair, Greenhill, allowed the College to grow lodgepole pine on *Croit Donnchadh Eachainn*, his wife's croft in Moss. Sadly, a storm blew them all out of the ground. They also tried to grow trees on Neil MacArthur's father's croft in Middleton. [382]

However, despite its promising beginnings, the project was not a commercial or agricultural success. Tiree was competing with the giant Dutch bulb industry, which had started as far back as 1600, and currently produces 9 billion bulbs a year - 60% of the world's bulbs.

The crofters also fell out of love with the bulb industry. The new crop needed work at the busiest time of year. The bulbs had to be weeded at the same time as the hay cutting, and you had to de-head the flowers to get bigger bulbs. [383] Others complained it was heavy work lifting a plot of bulbs by hand. Hugh Campbell, Balemartine said that bulbs were "a lot of work and not enough return." [384]

Hebridean Bulb Growers Ltd was wound up after some ten years, around 1965.

Although bulb growing was technically successful, serious problems of timely labour inputs, and particularly of marketing, developed, and by the early 1960s the co-operative was in some difficulties. [385]

Your correspondent may be interested to know that we believe it was account of the health and vigour of Hebridean bulbs that they received consistently top prices at auctions in London and were extensively planted in the public parks of Glasgow, Ayr and Aberdeen, to name but a few of the Scottish cities. Highland crofters and farmers marketed their bulbs through Hebridean Bulb Growers Ltd over the period of the last 10 years. 20 acres were under cultivation at one time, but with the enforced winding up of Hebridean Bulb Growers Ltd many of the comparatively experienced bulb growers have stopped growing bulbs. A few are continuing and will be striving to continue to produce bulbs of the highest quality. [386]

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[382] Robert Beck, Ruaig, 2/2007.

[383] Duncan Grant and Alasdair Sinclair, Ruaig, 6/2004.

[384] Hugh Campbell, Cnoc Gorm, Balemartine, 6/2004.

[385] Ritchie, W. and Mather. A.S. (1977). *The beaches of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.* Commissioned by the Countryside Commission for Scotland 1977. Reprinted 2005 by Scottish Natural Heritage as Commissioned Report No. 048.

[386] *RBC Nisbet, AP Nisbet, Hebridean Bulb Farms, Ardentallen, Oban. Glasgow Herald,* 11 January 1968.

The Highlands and Islands Development Board restarted experiments with bulb growing in North Uist in the 1960s, but a £1.4 million proposal to expand this, creating 350 jobs, was turned down in 1969.

Small scale bulb-growing on the former co-operative basis had almost completely died out, and virtually all that now remains of the bulb industry are a few incongruous patches of daffodils on the machairs of Coll and Tiree. [387]

One of the fields where daffodils still grow is in front of *Torr a' Bhaile*, Ruaig.

Roger Percy retired from the College in 1977.

TIREE SHOW'S FAREWELL TO 'BODACH NA BULBS'

The Tiree Agricultural Society committee met at Scarinish Hotel on October 20 to present Mr Roger Percy of the College of Agriculture in Oban with a gift on his retiral and to acknowledge his loyal service to the Tiree Show over the past 26 years when he has judged produce in the home industries section. Mr Iain MacKinnon, Ruaig, show chairman, asked Mrs Flora Maclean, Drumfraoich, to present Mr Percy with a small gift.

Replying Mr Percy said how much he enjoyed coming to Tiree over the years and being known on the island as 'Bodach na Bulbs' due to his involvement a number of years ago in the bulb growing industry on Tiree. [388]

[387] Ritchie, W. and Mather. A.S. (1977). *The beaches of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.* Commissioned by the Countryside Commission for Scotland 1977. Reprinted 2005 by Scottish Natural Heritage as Commissioned Report No. 048.

[388] *Oban Times,* 10 November 1977.

Seaweed

Seaweed is the only manure their grounds ever received, though immemorially cropped. This treatment of the soil never could be productive of a crop, was it not for its natural fertility, which even assuredly will decay under this management but never can be advanced. [389]

Tiree has been farmed for 6000 years. The light, well-drained soils of the island were easier to cultivate than most other parts of the Scottish west coast. But the downside of the sand-rich ground is that it quickly becomes exhausted and needs a lot of 'feeding'. Fortunately, Tiree also has a huge resource of the ideal plant 'food' – seaweed.

It is estimated that there are 307,000 tonnes of kelp alone around the shores of Tiree. This is the fourth highest total in Scotland, after the Orkneys, Shetland, and the Outer Hebrides.

We don't know when the earliest farmers discovered that putting seaweed on the land produced heavier crops, but it must have been in prehistoric times. From the evidence of the number of Iron Age forts Tiree's population then is estimated by Dr Euan MacKie as around a thousand. It is hard to believe that these sorts of numbers could have been sustained without what earlier writers called 'seaware'.

Tiree has always been remarkable, among the western islands, for its fertility and the goodness of its crops. The soil in general is very deep, sandy and full of sea shells, especially upon the shores, but in the interior parts there are many fine fields which partake largely of clay. There is a great deal of land that is kept perpetually in tillage long past the memory of anyone alive, bearing every year a crop of oats or bere [an early form of barley] without any intermission and without any assistance, except a few seaweeds put upon it once in two years. [390]

Even today, seaweed is valued as the best fertiliser.

Seaweed is the proper fertiliser. It produces more natural growth than modern chemicals.[391]

Seaware is coming ashore at intervals, and top dressing of land is being taken in hand. This valuable asset from the sea is more appreciated now [November] than later on in the year when the ground becomes sodden with rain, and carting is heavy among the ploughed land.[392]

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[389] *The Rev. Dr John Walker's Report on the Hebrides of 1764 and 1771*, ed. Margaret McKay, John Donald, 1980, p 185.

[390] *The Rev. Dr John Walker's Report on the Hebrides of 1764 and 1771*, ed. Margaret McKay, John Donald, 1980, p 181.

[391] Donald MacIntyre, Gott, 9/2008.

[392] *Skye and the Inner Hebrides*, Alasdair Alpin MacGregor, Robert Hale, 1953, p 67.

On Tiree today mixed seaweed is lifted, carted and spread mechanically, principally on land being prepared for potatoes. But a hundred years ago crofters were extremely sophisticated in what seaweed to use when and where. Different ground needs different feeding.

The old men could read their croft [ground] like a book. They knew where to put more and where to put less. You can put on too much seaweed. Donald MacIntyre, Gott.

Gathering seaweed from the beach around 1955 (V43)

Tommy MacKinnon recalls that they would put dung but not seaweed on the darker ground behind his house. But they put it on "by the ton" on *Croit MhicNèill*, a field where the third fairway of the current golf course runs, in which all the township had a share. And they would not put manure here because it dried the ground too much and made the potatoes rough. [393]

There were three main types of seaweed used as fertiliser– 'red seaweed', *feamainn d(h)earg*, which included tangles or *stamhainn*; 'black seaweed', *feamainn d(h)ubh*; and *barr dearg* which was mainly used on the fields being used for barley. The stem (*stamhainn*) of the tangle contains more 'goodness' than the fronds (*lion mhòr*)**.** However, the stems need to be cut into 9-12" lengths with a spade to help them break down and to stop them getting wrapped around the point of the plough. [394]

Willie MacPhail says it was the crofters from the *sliabh* in upper Kilmoluaig that used black seaweed, *feamainn dubh*, for their potatoes. They themselves did not use it at Clachan. There is a sandy part of the croft they would not use manure either in case it made the potatoes *carach*, or rough. For most of Clachan they used manure and red seaweed together. [395]

[393] Tommy MacKinnon, Vaul, 8/2011.

[394] Archie MacKinnon, Seaside, 8/2011.

[395] Willie MacPhail, Clachan, 8/2011.

A sharp eye was kept on the shore and the weather. Most seaweed comes in against the wind. On *Cladach a' Chrogain*, Balephetrish, for example, it comes in with an offshore, south-west wind, but in Ruaig you need a north wind. The exception is *barr dearg* which comes in 'with the wind', for example on a north wind in Kenovay. [396]

Barr dearg comes up early in the summer, often too late for crops. One year Archie Brown, Kilkenneth, put *barr dearg* on his hay field in May. Hugh MacKinnon, Kenovay, teased him, saying it was too late and that he was as well pushing against the north wind. It was a dreadful summer and it seemed to rain every day. Archie cut the field anyway, although the crop was so poor he could hardly see the rows. Eventually he got it dried and he used the hay to thatch the corn stacks. Later he saw the cows licking the ground where the hay had been lying – the seaweed had made the ground so sweet! [397] (see pine above).

Some parts of Tiree's coastline are better than others. Seaweed grows attached to rocks and the ideal shore is a rocky one with small bays where the cast seaweed can be collected. Hugh MacKinnon says that Ruaig and Gott is a "quiet coast" and there is better seaweed in Salum, Vaul and Soay. [398]

The crofters in Gott were also allowed to collect seaweed from Balephetrish near the Ringing Stone because so little comes in on *An Tràigh Mhòr*. They used the road across the island called *Rathad na Feamainn*, the road of the seaweed. [399]

Seaweed was a valuable resource and demand outstripped supply. The island factor had some of the best farms for his own use and therefore controlled important parts of the shore. Hector Kennedy remembers a stand-off between the crofters of Balevullin and the factor, probably in the 1880s.

McDiarmid down here, he had Hough and he had this place together. And that's nearer to us. I knew that man better than anybody round here. Every crofter in Balevullin had to leave so many carts of seaweed in Hough for the factor, for going across the machair to the shore. That's what he was telling them. And it's there yet, the old road they used to come, the Balevullin crofters. On this side of the hill. It's a good road now. It was done up by the air force in the time of the war. And there's a gate there. And this man Lachie Brown [the grandfather of Lachie Brown, Balevullin].... Lachie was a great Land Leaguer. And he went for seaweed, and he had two carts. And he was telling the crofters in Balevullin, he was a carpenter as well to trade, "You shouldn't do that all". And they were saying, "We have to do it!" "You've nothing of the kind." And they went together to the shore for seaweed. And the factor down here sent the ground officer, he was staying down in that cottage [in

[396] Donald MacLean, Kenovay, 9/2008.

[397] Archie Brown, Kilkenneth, 9/2011.

[398] Hugh MacKinnon, *Torr a' Bhaile*, 9/2008.

[399] Willie MacPhail, Clachan, 8/2011.

Heylipol], John MacKinnon. And he belonged to Balevullin too. And he was a great Land Leaguer [too] until he got the job of the Ground Officer from the old factor. And if they got a hold of him, the Land Leaguers he was killed, that he was a traitor. And he was sent up to this gate to put a padlock to keep the carts of Balevullin from going through the gate. And they were coming off the shore a good many carts... Lachie Brown, he was the leader. And he came to the gate. And the ground officer said to him, "You'll no go through the gate." "How?" "Well, the factor is against you going through the gate without leaving so much seaweed as you used to do on Hough."Here's one that will no do it!" Lachie Brown says, "And I'm leaving my father's horses and it's you that's to look after them, and if anything would happen to them, the factor or the estate of Argyll has to pay for them." "Oh I'm not going to take charge of them," said the ground officer. "You'll have to do it. I'm going off! There are plenty of witnesses here." "You d better come," he says. "I'll open the gate and let you through." That put an end of the seaweed. I heard my father and these people talking [about it]. There was 10 carts, 12 carts before they could put a grapeful [forkful] on their own croft. They were taking up all the seaweed that the factor was needing in Hough. Yes! Not very long ago. [400]

Tom Barr in Balephetrish also had issue with the crofters in Gott who had reached an agreement to fetch seaweed from the north shore of Balephetrish Farm. This agreement bound them to:

Put up for the tenant of Balephetrish twenty six good cart loads of seaweed to and from anywhere he may point out, at any time he may please to send us notice to do so, for each cart that we have carting seaware from the north shore. [401]

However he complained in 1902 that the crofters were not keeping to this agreement.

The Gott tenants before we came here in 1864 always did so many days shearing at harvest time to the tenant of Balephetrish for seaweed and trespass, but after we came here they refused to do as formerly so we had to serve an interdict on them. [402]

As a scarce resource, seaweed sometimes led to conflict between the crofters themselves. On an open shore the oldest man present would go along the pile marking in the sand with his foot where everybody's share started and finished. [403] Crofters would stand guard with their *graba steel* to defend their share. [404]

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[400] Hector Kennedy talking to Eric Cregeen in 1970, SA1970.096.

[401] AI 1999.68.5.

[402] Letter from Tomas Barr to Mr McDiarmid, the factor in 1902, AI 1999.68.4

[403] Donald MacIntyre, 9/2008.

[404] Hugh MacKinnon, *Torr a' Bhaile*, 9/2008.

John MacPhail, Balephuil, remembered that the competition for seaweed on *Tràigh Bhì*, Balephuil beach, was so fierce in his father's time that the grazing committee had to make a rule that no seaweed could be lifted before 9 am! [405]

In Caolas one crofter appealed for help to the Scottish Land Court in 1913.

Three crofters [named] situated at the south end of the township [Ardeas] are getting their seaweed on the shore adjoining their crofts as far as Port Ruadh...The other six [also named] take their seaweed from the Point...right along the shore to the Salum boundary. They reserve a bay which is situated right under my croft for their own use and will not allow me and the other two crofters to take any seaweed from same. [406]

In West Hynish the inlets all had 'owners'. *Port Ceit* beyond *Dùn Shiadair* was worked for tangles by *Ceit Chailein* from the *Bail' Ùr*, *Am Port Mòr* by Bella MacKinnon and her brother Lachie, *Garbh-port Beag* by Hector Sinclair, and *Garbh-port Mòr* by David McClounnan. [407]

The seaweed on Vaul beach belonged to the Vaul crofters and the seaweed on the west part of Salum beach belonged to the crofters of Gott, Kirkapol and Ruaig. Tommy MacKinnon, heard the story of one "old boy" from Ruaig who was made to tip his cart full of seaweed out [presumably he had taken it from the wrong part of the beach] but on his way home he filled his empty cart from someone else's pile. "I don't think they ever fell out about it," Tommy says. [408]

Tommy MacKinnon, Vaul, remembers there used to be more seaweed coming in the 1950s. It used to be banked seven feet high below Seaside and there would be 12-15 carts on the beach at Vaul after a winter storm. Possibly there are fewer winter storms today. [409]

The beach has changed, the weather's changed. Everything's changed. [410]

By and large you can put seaweed on the land any time from October to May, whenever it comes in. The fields earmarked for growing hay were given a seaweed top dressing just as much as the land that was to be ploughed for crops.

[405] John MacPhail, Balephuil, 11/2004.

[406] AI 1998.1.9

[407] Nan McClounnan, Balephuil, 4/2011.

[408] Tommy MacKinnon, Vaul, 8/2011.

[409] Tommy MacKinnon, Vaul, 9/2008.

[410] Archie Brown, Kilkenneth, 9/2011.

We always cart as much seaweed from the north [near the Ringing Stone] for top dressing the hay land at the back end of the year and often have it all done by the New Year or nearly so. As a rule the crofters cart very little seaweed till after the New Year. [411]

Hugh MacLean, Barrapol, recommended that fresh seaweed can be spread November to January but the best time for spreading rotten seaweed is at *Bealltainn* [May]. [412] Willie MacPhail says that he puts red seaweed on the ground in November and then ploughs in straight away, both to prevent it blowing away and to help it to rot. [413] Tommy MacKinnon remembers one year when the seaweed was hauled up early before the *adagan*, sheaves or barley, had been removed in the autumn and it had to be laid in strips between them. [414]

If there was a hurry to collect seaweed because of the wind and tide, a crofter would put it in a pile above the shore called a *flagais.* They used to help each other load their carts and Archie MacKinnon would often see them coming up off the shore together in a long line. [415]

In the days before firm roads were built, seaweed was brought from the shore in panniers carried by horses or people. By the middle of the 19th century as horses became bigger and proper roads were laid, carts, which carried much more, came to be used. The carts had to be well-balanced – if the load was too far forward the horse took too much weight, too far back and the load slipped off. The fork was stuck in at the back to keep the load on. The seaweed was put in piles on the fields and then spread out evenly.

Black seaweed, or *feamainn dubh*, is mainly bladder wrack and has little bubbles, or *builgean*, in its fronds. It grows tightly on inshore rocks and is rarely cast up on the beach. It was cut off the rocks with sickles or sheep shears in the spring low tides, and would float ashore on the incoming tide. Sometimes they also used a long rope called a *ràthair* [or *an ràth* [416]] to stop the weed floating off if the wind changed The wrack could be tied around this and the rope pulled in.

Later in the year *feamainn dubh* comes off the rocks naturally, or as it known *a' froiseadh*. It was then washed ashore but it was not so good a fertiliser then. [417]

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[411] Letter from Thomas Barr to Mr McDiarmid, factor in 1902 (AI 1999.68.4).

[412] Hugh MacLean, Barrapol, 5/1998.

[413] Willie MacPhail, Clachan, 8/2011.

[414] Tommy MacKinnon, Vaul, 9/2008.

[415] Archie MacKinnon, Seaside, 8/2011.

[416] Hector MacPhail, 12/1996

[417] Hugh MacKinnon, *Torr a' Bhaile*, 9/2008.

Tommy MacKinnon remembers hearing about his father's brothers who went out to *An Ceann Mòr* at the tip of Mithealum to collect seaweed by boat. They must have overloaded it and it filled with waterwhich they could not bale fast enough. The boat sank and at low tide they had to go down with a horse and cart to empty the boat and rescue it. [418]

It was believed *feamainn dubh* kept moisture in the ground better than tangles [419] but it was not suitable for every ground. It is less good for putting on hay meadows because it dries up becoming hard, and so is difficult to rake off before the grass is cut. [420] It is likely that darker, wetter soil was needed to 'digest' the stronger fronds of the black seaweed.

No one cuts black seaweed on Tiree today. Neil Kennedy, Balevullin (the husband of *Eilidh bheag*) was the last man to cut *feamainn dubh* at the west end of the island, [421] probably around the 1950s. Donald MacIntyre never cut *feamainn dubh* himself, but his uncle and his father did. [422]

The farm animals also ate seaweed directly. In Lewis a creel of seaweed was taken to the shielings to give to the cattle so they would stand still for milking. John Walker describes the situation in Coll in 1764.

The sea weeds serve as a principle article of the sustenance of the cattle in winter, which they devour greedily, and though a great distance from the sea, know exactly when to repair to the shore at the time of ebb [low tide]. [423]

[418] Tommy MacKinnon, Vaul, 8/201.

[419] Tommy MacKinnon, Vaul, 8/2011.

[420] Donald MacLean, Kenovay, 9/2008.

[421] Hugh Archie MacCallum, Cornaig, 9/2008.

[422] Donald MacIntyre, 9/2008.

[423] *The Rev. Dr John Walker's Report on the Hebrides of 1764 and 1771*, ed. Margaret McKay, John Donald, 1980, p 173.

Gaelic words for livestock

Bull *tarbh*

Cow *mart, bò.*

Milking cow *bò bhainne*

Dry cow *bò sheasg*

Heifer *agh*

Stirk, bullock , *damh*

Calf *laogh*

Ewe (female sheep over a year) *caora*

Ram or tup *reithe*

Lamb (under a year) *uan*

Ewe lamb *uan boireann*

Ram lamb *uan fireann*

Wether or wedder (castrated male sheep)

Yearling (between one and two years) *bliadhnach*

Gimmer or hogg (a yearling ewe) *othaisg*

Ewe lamb becomes a hogg in her first August. At 18 months after shearing she will be put to a tup as a gimmer (Ewan Malcolm, personal communication).