

The Barr Family

By the 1860's the Duke was keen to modernise (and presumably make more profitable) Tiree's agriculture. Writing in his evidence to the 1886 Napier Commission he observed ...

'Dairy farming was wholly unknown in the Island until I took pains to introduce it... But 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 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. The experiment has answered perfectly. The pasturage of Tyree 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. I have had the pleasure lately of renewing the Lease to the son of the tenant who began the enterprise, Mr Barr of Balephetrish, and who, I have every reason to believe, found it profitable.'

In 1864 the Duke signed a Lease with Robert Barr, a farmer from Dalry in Ayrshire. So keen was he for his new tenant to be successful the he undertook in his Lease to "repair the dwelling house and erect a byre to contain eighty cows, a Milk House, Boiler House and Cheese-room and a stable for six horses and Piggeries and Cart shed for six carts." He also amalgamated the Tacks of Vaul, Balephetrish, the Reef, Kenovay and Crossapol (previously let separately) to make a sizeable farm of ??? acres.

Robert Barr, having signed the original 19 year Lease for £400 a year, in fact sent his son Thomas to the island to establish the farm. Disembarking at Milton with a few beasts he walked to Balephetrish with a guide. As he crossed the moor at Eirneal he cursed his father for sending him to such a barren place, but his companion reassured him he would soon be impressed by the rest of the farm.

The Duke's plan to set up a flourishing dairy industry did not succeed for long. Some cheese was made, but Tom Barr soon found that beef cattle and horses were more lucrative. At a meeting of crofters he was asked to go to the mainland for breeding stallions and he came back with Tiree's first Clydesdale. He also introduced the first mechanised hay rake to the island and there is no doubt that his up-to-date farming practices had a modernising effect on the island's crofting.

He employed several full time farm workers, including Lachy Kennedy (grandfather of Neil Kennedy, the Reef) and John MacNeill (father of the late Alec MacNeill of Balevullin). When he needed day-labourers he would raise a flag on Beinn Bhaile Pheadrais which could be seen all over the island and they would come "like ants." A bell mounted in front of his house on Cnoc na Cluig would tell the men when to start and stop work.

Tom Barr himself is remembered as a kindly man, someone who would lend poor people money or a horse in times of need. But he was also a shrewd businessman who would buy stirks cheaply from crofters unable to take their cattle to mainland markets and then sell them at a handsome profit. Interestingly his rent in fact fell from £400 in 1868 to £378 in 1903 and £315 in 1905.

RAID???

Tom Barr farmed on Tiree from 1864 until 1912 when he left to join one of his sons at a farm near Galashiels. Two other sons, Robert and Alexander took over, but the writing was on the wall. Pressure to make land available for servicemen returning from the Great War led to the Board of Agriculture for Scotland taking over his Lease. As well as £1,243, 9s. and 7d in compensation, he was offered one of the new crofts, but the old farmer, now in his seventies, refused and instead bought his children a number of farms in the Borders and Ayrshire where they are today.

Robert Barr m : **Mary Crawford** (buried in Kirkapoll)

from Dalry, Ayrshire
came to Tiree in 1864

Dr. Alexander MacGregor (1841 - 1902) m. (1876)
(Practised on Coll & Tiree in 1880's) (1849 - 1883)

Mary Barr (1849 - 1883)
Thomas Barr (1844 - 1918)
left Tiree 1912 died at
Buckholm Farm, Galashiels

m. **Janet Barclay** from Lochwinnoch
(1850 - 1898)

Mary (1878 - 1897) Unmarried ; died
Oban ; influenza

Jessie (1881 - ?) Unmarried
Kept father's house after mother died.

Robert (1883 - 1966) Unmarried
Farmed Balephetrish until 1921. Moved to Galashiels

Jeanie (1885 - 1959) Unmarried
Kept house for Robert

John (1887 - 1992) m. **Margaret Porteous**
Succeeded to father at Buckholm Farm

John Succeeded to Pressen Farm
Thomas Succeeded to Grinden Farm
Dorothy Married : James Mauchline
Stois Farm, Kelso

Farmed Buckholm Farm, Galashiels until 1912 when his father arrived from Tiree.
Went to Honeylawn Farm, Coldstream, then to Pressen Farm, Coldstream, then to Grinden Farm, Berwick upon Tweed

John Succeeded to Pressen Farm
2 Sons
2 Daughters

Thomas Succeeded to Grinden Farm
1 Son
2 Daughters

Thomas (1889 - 1975) Succeeded father at Buckholm Farm

Jean m. **Alexander** (1891 - 1973)
Farmed Balephetrish until 1921 then moved to Auchneel Farm, Stranraer

Anna Margaret (1893 - 1972) Married
James Crawford
Manor House Farm, Linton

Janet m. **Anna**
Peter **Louise**
Christopher **Simon** **Fiona**

Margaret (1923 -) **Thomas** (1925 -) **Sheena** (1927 -) **John** (1931 -) **Alexander** (1930 -)