

Digitised copy of Letter from Malcolm McLaurine, chamberlain of Tiree, to James Ferrier, 22 Mar
1803

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James Ferrier Esq^r
one of the Principal Clerks of Session
Edin^r

Copy of this
Letter kept
J F

M^r M^cLaurin
about Tyree
affairs
22^d March
1803
Ans^d 8th April

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Tyreii 22nd March 1803

Dear Sir

In obedience to His Grace the Duke of Argyll's Instructions, M^r Langlands came here with me the latter end of Dec^r last, and has since been employed in cutting down the farms of Scarinish, Hianish & Balimartine, with a view of accommodating the supernumerary tenants that would fall to be removed from the different farms in carrying the plan of 4 Mail Land into effect next Whitsunday. He has also cut the farms of Barapoll & Kenavar & the farm of Kenovay, according to the plans given to His Grace, which were condescended upon as most suitable for beginning the Improvements necessary for the 4 Mail Land Divisions. The Tenants of Barapoll and Kenavar holding that possession in this proportion gave an inducement to cut it up, as they signified early a desire of every one having his own lot; but no sooner did they see that their wishes were to be complied with, than they set themselves violently in opposition to its being accomplished, nor were they content with limiting this spirit of resistance to that farm, but the few discontented who went to trouble His Grace & you attempted to stir up the whole Tenants of the island as far as they could, to give opposition to the Divisions of the farms or to adopt any improvements inconsistent with their old customs and habits, which they conceive to be more perfect than any thing that can be substituted in their place. And am sorry to find that this appears to have laid a deep hold of their minds, and tho' the advantages that would result to themselves from a division must be self evident each enjoying his own separately, giving an opportunity to the industrious man to reap the fruits of his labour & superior skill

and

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and even being in this manner indirectly of benefit to the more lazy, whose eyes must be opened by comparing the barren product of his indolence with the more fertile ones of his neighbour, which must strike out some spark of emulation, yet they cannot be persuaded but the mode of cultivation in the run rig way, as practiced by their fathers and Grandfathers is the best. Upon this account as they know, that in carrying the plan of 4. M. Land into effect their old hereditary customs and practices must be sacrificed in a great measure to what they deem low country innovations, which they consider any improvements to be, few of them can be prevailed upon to take 4. M. Lands, and they even who seem not averse to take them specify that it will be only under the old system of management, and rather than give this up, say, they will prefer emigrating to America. An Arch^d M^cLean who was the most active in making proselytes of opposition to His Grace's instructions finding after going to Inveraray and Edin^r that his plan proved abortive of resisting the division of Barapoll and Kenavar has, am informed, brought home from Edin^r Lord Selkirk's Scheme and Proposals for going to upper Canada where am told all the Whisky Delinquents mean to go at Whitsunday under the encouragements they hold out. As all the Tenants of the Island seemed to be interested in the success of the Application of the nine Petitioners of Gortendonel¹ I saw it would be needless to sound them on the subject of carrying His Grace's orders into effect till their return. I have since convinced the Tenants of every farm by themselves and almost invariably a combination seems to be formed to resist the Divisions or the adoptions of 4. M. Lands

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but under their old System, and a bar that appears more difficult to surmount, with few exceptions, is, their, general inability to stock them tho' they were willing. No less rooted is their aversion to Crofts and to the fishing upon account of the idleness and laziness of their habits, as they all declare if in carrying the scheme of 4. M. Lands into effect, they are obliged to leave their present possessions to dis burthen the farms of their overstock of Tenants that they will emigrate sooner than accept of them under any encouragement.

I feel these Obstacles to His Grace's Instructions peculiarly embarrassing, and lament their blindness to their own comfort & happiness which are so intimately connected with their execution. And as I have endeavoured to inculcate this upon their minds as well as I could & have upon no occasion given them any reason to think that His Grace would deviate from the plan he has laid down with this view to indulge their unreasonable opposition, I have uniformly impressed them with the necessity of their being put in effect – And strong as they have marked their resistance, I have not lost all hope but by a Hearty perseverance to his Grace's Orders many of them will be prevailed upon to comply with the 4. Mail Lands, tho' it falls to be decided by his Grace whether it is preferable to carry this in the mean time so far as to divide and cut down the farms upon the plan of Barapoll & Kenavar & Kenavay, or to allow them to possess them in the old way for some time, in expectation that a better system will gradually be adopted. In doing this many must be dispossessed, who have no alternative

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¹ Goirtean Dòmhnail https://www.tireeplacenames.org/barrapol/goirtean_domhnail/
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but to accept of the Crofts or to emigrate, which seems to them preferrable, if they can be believed, but I apprehend is principally with a view of carrying their own plans, so infatuated are they under their prejudices against them. But upon the supposition that this should be the case, the labour and expense incurred in dividing these farms for their accommodation will be lost, and the whole scheme of the fishing rendered abortive. His Grace will be pleased to direct, what in such an event is to be made of these farms of Scarinish, Balimartin and Hianish, even the old Possessors of Scarinish refuse to accept of the Crofts there, excepting four of five of them, yet I think, when they see they'll get nothing else, they shall be glad to have them I have given notice at Church that the farm of Barapoll and Kenavar are to be let in Lots according to His Grace's instruction and Mr Langland's division, & that such as wished to be served would give in their offers for the Lot they would wish for, but as yet none have signified any wish but Alex^r Campbell who was formerly suggested to His Grace as a fit man for 8 Merk Land of that Possession, and a brother of his a Donald Campbell presently occupying 4. M. Land there, & a Donald McPhail who gave up 4. M. L. of it at last Whitsunday & is at present one of the Tenants of Balinoe and lately a Serg^t of the Volunteer Company here, who has a good Subject & is willing to carry [^] on the necessary improvements, and is desirous to have 8. M. Lands if His Grace would be pleased to indulge him, & I would beg to recommend him as deserving of encouragement, & wishes for the very lot of that farm; which the late Peti

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:tioners enduced as an argument against Mr Langlands' Division, which they said would not grow Oats. They have not yet given in their offers, tho' they seemed to think that they would prefer making out his Grace's rent by offers for each Lot to taking them at the schemed rent according to the plan of division, by which means each would please himself better – The other 13 Tenants of that farm, as they have been disappointed of having it in the old way, are preparing am told to go to America, & that they might be no bar to its being set to others, who may be willing to carry on the proposed Improvements, I have regularly got them warned for removing at Whitsunday – some of them who were clamorous about their houses, have built them of His Grace's Woods & those who bought some wood have built them in the old fashion of the hovels of the country, which can be of no use to the Tenants who shall occupy the new divisions, as none of them are upon the new stances, but one or two at most, however, [^] the wood they bought can be valued, and given to the new Tenants for their houses.

There are at present 24 Tenants in Kenovay each possessing 2 M. Land, and 13 of whom can only be accommodated besides giving a Croft to one of the herds taking care of the Soumning² of the Reef, according to the plan of that farm, of course 11 fall to be removed, but none of them are willing to take Crofts or begin the fishing, tho' to a few they would rather attempt a let of the new Divisions under the new improvements rather than this;

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² The number of livestock which can be supported by a certain amount of pasturage

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

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but what they would wish, is, that two of them would join about each Lot and carry on the new improvements, but in this I told them they could not be indulged consistently with the Duke's Plan and orders – indeed could this deviation from the 4. M. Land plan be thought of, as more attainable to the ability and wish of the Tenants in general it might suggest a division of other farms in this way upon the same system of improvement, where the Tenants are not fit for 4. M. Land, tho' certainly this would be shackling the Land with its old over burthen of population, yet probably the improvements upon half the scale by double the number of hands, would more easily upon this account be put in execution – Many of the Tenants have told me that they could by their own labour manage the 2 M. Lands, but that they did not consider they would be gainers, with the four and to engage servants. And no doubt those fittest for them are such as have Children grown up who are able to assist them. This smaller division surely could not be thought of, could the larger be found practicable, and it may only occur as a question, whether it can be considered as any remedy for the Defects of the present system of management in the occupation of 2 mail lands.

If His Grace will deem it advisable to carry the 4. M. Land into effect with regard to the farms of Keolis³, Ruaig, Salum, Kirkapoll, Baugh, Kenovay, Cornaigmore, Balivulin, & Hilipoll in which it seems in any way practicable, 57 Tenants fall to be removed, who would all be accommodated in the Crofts of Scarinish Hianish & Balimartine amounting to 85 in number besides accommodating the present 15 Crofters of Scarinish, there would be 13 more for Fencible men or tradesmen should they wish for them – But as the Tenants that would fall to

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be removed have signified their aversion to the Crofts so strongly it remains with His Grace to determine what is best to be done. After the encouragement, that he has already been pleased to offer to those willing to begin the fishing & to build their houses & inclosures, which they are much against, it might be unreasonable they should expect any further sacrifice of His Graces's interest or extension of his bounty, which setting rent free for 2 or 3 years, till they got their Inclosures finished, would be considered & amount to a sum of about £350 St^r in 3 years. But if they were at all to consider, they must feel the advantages already held out full of His Grace's benevolence and goodness toward them, and as they are so ungrateful for, and insensible of them, they would only have themselves to blame if they choose emigration in preference to them; and as remedies must be applied to strike at the many & growing evils of an over stock of people, it may be fortunate they would dis burthen the islands of their trouble by having their liberty to indulge their humour.

Without having warned the whole Tenants of the Island, which would have put them all under great alarm, I have taken all of them bound to remove from the occupation of their present share of each farm, if it is found necessary, in order to carry His Grace's Instructions for the better accommodation of his Tenants and the improvement of the island into effect at next Whitsunday, under a penalty of £10 St^r, which they have all readily agreed to.

The Crofters at Scarinish, the Cotters at Balimartine, the tenants of Hianish, the 13 Tenants of Barapoll & Kenavar, and all the Whisky Delinquents have all been regularly warned.

³ Caoles <https://www.tireeplacenames.org/caolas/caolas-2/>
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Owing to the long continued north westerly winds the sand

blowing

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blowing aided by other causes, has committed more than its usual ravages upon the west side of the island; the farms of Hough and Muirdale⁴ have principally suffered, and in consequence the tenants of the latter have intimated to me that they'll sit no longer than Whitsunday; they did the same last year, but now they seem to have more cause, & if none appears willing to take it at the present rent, I suppose some small deduction must be given --- I must here beg leave to remark that Sheep and Swine are very hurtful to the islands in general; and as there are no inclosures the sheep are constantly trespassing upon the Crofts during their season, and the man who has none, is often cut up by those of his neighbours, besides they pick so very bare that they scrape with their feet to the very roots of the grass & are very injurious by producing the sand blowing – And as they never ring their swine, they do much hurt in this way; upon account of their being so hurtful to themselves & the soil I took them bound last year to be quit of them, and to my amazement the tenants of the West Side after agreeing to this and being convinced of their hurt took sheep and swine from the rest of the Tenants, who wished to be quit of them & grazed them all last summer and harvest along the great Sand Tracts along that side of the island, and the consequences are the ravages are more than usual. As they will make no inclosures for them, nothing will do, but an Act of His Grace's against them, & tho' it may be considered at first a harsh measure, yet the Soums of Cattle they may keep in place of them will certainly profit them more. It is an abuse that arose from the unrestrained liberty of pasturage upon the Reef, where Tenants and Cottars had whatever number

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they thought proper, and now as the Reef is put upon a proper Soumning, they think that they'll keep them upon the different farms whatever hurt they do; Cottars do so as well as Tenants and pay nothing for them. It may be expedient that His Grace would be pleased to take this under consideration

Notwithstanding of the great encouragement held out for Dykers and Quarriers not one of the Natives could be prevailed upon to go to Inveraray to be instructed – As the intended Improvements cannot go on without men of this description, there will be a necessity of bringing them from a distance. If His Grace were pleased to order 2 or 3 of each to be sent from Inveraray and to have Crofts here, possibly it might be the best mode of furnishing Stone for building the new houses and inclosures. And if the stone could be furnished to the Crofters and Tenants, where they could not be had but by blasting one of the grounds of resistance would be removed. Where stone can be quarried, if Tools for this purpose were furnished it would also have a beneficial tendency, such as 4 or 5 sets of large hammers wedges and Crow irons.

⁴ Also known as Muradal <https://www.tireeplacenames.org/hough/muradal/>
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I have inclosed a sketch for advertising our proposed market in May & October, and beg you'll put in the shape you think proper, & give it to the different Printers.

With regard to the Bear⁵ I believe we shall be far short of last year's quantity; there has been no word from Mr Campbell Colessan⁶ about it, and as the Tenants have all got orders to keep it for his Grace, they wish to know how it is to be disposed of as they'll soon have it ready. As they all talk in very moderate terms of the quantity am quite at a loss to form any idea how much that may be,

but

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but if it can be sold without making any specification of the quantity, it would leave room for less or more as it would turn out. I got last year a Return to ascertain the quantum which was not one third of what they had, so that no dependence can be had till it comes actually to be delivered.

Last year's trial of our weekly packet turned out so ill that the business was at a stand and none could be found to carry it on, which prevented my answering Mr Ronaldson's Letter. The five pounds allowed for keeping the Post office would have been an object for that & the packet, could a fit man be had for managing both; and as this could not be done the Inn Keeper at Scarinish Arch^d Campbell a very fit and judicious man has engaged to keep the post office without the Salary, which and other £5 we have made up is given to the packet man; and besides this before I could bring it to here I was under the necessity of promising one of the crofts at Scarinish, which it is hoped His Grace will be pleased to allow Rent free for his encouragement, which will not exceed £3 a year, and the Packet is bound to deliver the Bag at Tobermory after landing at Croig or Polloch in Mull, & bring our bag always from thence – I have taken him bound, if his grace is pleased to agree to the Croft for the packet, besides one for himself for payment as he was one of the old possessors & is obliged to keep a couple of hands, to go any day the Post office regulations may require duly & regularly. I was very averse that more than one Croft should be given, but none could be found upon better terms; but if His Grace requires it he is bound

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to pay for the packet Croft as well as the other.

According to His Grace's instructions I got Plans of the two School houses built in Cantyre⁷ some years ago from Captain Stewart, and now send Copies of Morrison's Estimates and beg to know if they are to go on accordingly, that he may soon be preparing – I have also inclosed a copy of his letter about them and the Mills mentioning the deductions he is to make for the carriages, and that the matter may be the better understood, have also sent Copies of the Estimates of the Mills. If Mr Umpherstone saw any necessity for making any alteration upon the Mason work or dimensions it would be requisite he should do it instantly, that notice may be given to Morrison – I wrote Mr Umpherstone a long time ago but have had no answer.

⁵ A type of Barley https://dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/bear_n1

⁶ Coilessan, Argyll and Bute

⁷ Kintyre, Argyll and Bute

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As the Rotation of Crops could not be fixed in any of the farms cut down by Mr Langlands owing to the difficulty of appointing the Tenants & Crofters he is now to divide the Moss and lay down a plan for working it. And it is much to be regretted that the rotations could not be laid down before he leaves the island, as if these arrangements can be put in effect, it will render his return necessary when they can be made – Could be a few industrious strangers well acquainted with farming improvements be got for Barapoll & Kenavar in place of those who have quit that possession, it might have a very good effect.

I have seen no horse this season affected with the glanders & all the horses are remarked to be in a better condition than ever they were. When the distempered horses were mustered last summer, the tip of the ear was taken off to discriminate them in order they might be readily distinguished for sending off the beginning of August, for any other mark they would readily destroy so as to avoid that banishment. Mr Maxwell and I in our report in May last considered this would be the best mode to find out the distempered horses in case there would be any chance of their drying up as sometimes happens when they are in the best order, but after wards breaks out, so as to send them off in Aug^t there after, which was the Cruelty so much complained of by the petitioners.

I find there is much difficulty in collecting all the Planks as they were scattered among so many hands, but I shall do every thing to get them together, and Mr Langlands & I will measure them – I was obliged to use some of them for Byre and Stable use, which I shall pay for. I have heard of nothing that came ashore this winter but a small Cask of butter, and another lump of it without any Cask or Vessel about it, which are fit for nothing but smearing

I have inclosed a sketch of the present Set of the island under which each farm is at present possessed in equal shares & have remarked when the scheme of 4 M Land can at all be conceived practicable, and where if His Grace is pleased to order it to be effected, it will be necessary to know, whether he shall order them to be divided & his own share given to each in Lots, or to allow promiscuous possession; The one surely more their own benefit & that of the Soil, but the other more agreeable

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to their wishes and practices as Hydra of many heads.

I intimated to Barmolloch that he must relinquish the whole ground taken from the Reef & he says that he is ready to do any thing in compliance with His Grace's orders, but as the first part that was added to his farm marked in Mr Langlands Plan of the Encroachment A. was with the approbation of the old Bailie containing 22 Acres, & says that he enjoyed it during the whole of the last Tack that he hopes His Grace will be pleased to allow him to continue in possession of it. He has been warned out of the whole and His Grace will be pleased to order as to this.

I am Dear Sir very respectfully

Your most faithful & Ob^t Serv^t

Malcolm McLaurine

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As I only received the sale of the last cargo of kelp a few days ago I had not in my power to settle with the Tenants, which I shall immediately do, and as the bills become due the money will be paid to you & credit given in the Rent

M McLaurine

James Ferrier Esq

Should His Grace approve of the Post Office I have wrote Mr Ronaldson

MMcL