Debating the Highland Clearances

DEBATES AND DOCUMENTS IN SCOTTISH HISTORY

Focusing on important themes, events, or periods throughout Scottish history, each volume in this series is split into two linked parts. Part I describes the subject, sets this in context and introduces the reader to the main issues of interpretation and debate. Part II presents a selection of relevant evidence from a range of sources, including primary source materials when appropriate.

Debating the Highland Clearances

Eric Richards

Edinburgh University Press

The author and publisher are most grateful to the following owners of copyright for permission to publish: The British Academy, for the journal of Matthew Culley; Boydell and Brewer Ltd, for Norman Scarfe's translation of La Rochefoucauld, *To the Highlands in 1786*; The Staffordshire County Record Office, for extracts from the Unett and Sutherland papers; University of Toronto Press, for the poem 'We shall go to America'; Lawrence and Wishart, London, for the works of Marx and Engels; Professor Donald Meek for poems from *Tuath is Tighearna* and *Caran an t-Saoghail*.

Edinburgh University Press Ltd
22 George Square, Edinburgh

Typeset in Minion
by Norman Tilley Graphics Ltd, Northampton,
and printed and bound in Great Britain
by Cromwell Press, Trowbridge, Wilts

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 0 7486 2182 8 (hardback)
ISBN 978 0 7486 2183 5 (paperback)

Contents

Expanded Table of Contents

Illustrations

Figures

Maps

Preface

Storm clouds regularly gather over the story of the Highland Clearances and show no sign of dispersing. After more than a century the historical dispute about the eviction of the Highlanders from the glens continues unabated and unresolved.

Debating the Highland Clearances introduces the Clearances as a classic historical problem: it focuses on the ways historians and others have approached the question and it concentrates on the methods and sources employed by the combatants. Half the book is devoted to a selection of documents which represent their main types of source material. Most of the book is about the perceptions, mentalities, politics and interpretations that dominate the noisy and continuing public debate about the Highland Clearances.

The great evictions were documented by eyewitnesses and were also recalled in many reminiscences. These descriptions, and the responses they often provoked, provide the first step in the process of historical understanding. Just as important were the contexts in which the Clearances were implemented. History is a perspective-seeking activity and without context it cannot yield historical explanation. One particular Highland context is inescapable: the controversy is entangled with political implications that influence all the issues. For more than two centuries (and now more than ever) the central question looming over the debate has been: who should possess and control the land in the Highlands?

I must thank Dr Robert Fitzsimons for every variety of assistance and advice with the preparation of the documents; and also Dr Malcolm Bangor-Jones for many references. I have received much help from the National Archives of Scotland, the National Library of Scotland and the Flinders University Library. Dr Ewen Cameron and Edinburgh University Press provided excellent editorial advice. I am grateful also to the Adelaide Club and the School of Scottish History at the University of Edinburgh who gave a lively but un-stormy hearing to my preliminary thoughts on the current state of the debate about the Clearances. The Faculty of Social Sciences at Flinders University provided a timely research grant towards the preparation of this volume.

Eric Richards
Brighton, South Australia

How to Use this Book

Why have there been such storms over the Highlands? We start off with the big picture – the scope and passion of the debate about the Clearances which has been a very long argument stretching from 1750 through to the present. Some essential definitions follow and then we look at the most prominent contributions to the debate over its long history. This establishes the central questions about the evidence on which so much passion is based. At each point in the book there are cross-references to typical evidence employed at each stage in the debate.

Next we need a benchmark by which to evaluate what happened in the Clearances. So we need to know about the situation before the Clearances. What did the Highlands look like before the sheep descended on the glens and straths? And how can we know about such a distant time? And were the Highlands entirely different from other parts of Scotland and the British Isles?

Then we need to get a measure of the timing, extent and variety of the actual Clearances – the chronology and geography of the spread of sheep and deer and the context in which this occurred. And we have plenty of description of the events in the texts.

A big question in the Clearances is about how the Highlanders reacted to this experience – whether they resisted or were compliant, whether they fled or stayed. Here we have some good descriptions and arguments in the sources. At the end we look at the big questions again and about the fate of the Highlands after the Clearances – and who was to blame? And how we might clarify the issues.

At the end we should have some idea about why there is so much heat and how we find light. The documents are not the ultimate truth but merely examples of a vastly larger body of evidence. Each document needs to be examined for bias and relevance and balance. So it is useful to move back and forth between the text and the documents, and also

refer to the key questions which are asked later on. The documents can also be read and then placed in their wider context by returning to the text. The important thing is to bring a sceptical attitude to all the claims and examine critically all the evidence adduced. In the end, all historical controversies are always about persuasion and the balance of probabilities.

Many of the people mentioned in this book, e.g. Malthus and Cockburn, have entries in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, which is a good starting point for further research.

To Stephanie, Cindy, Hilda and Ngaire

CHAPTER 1

Debating the Clearances

1. Leaving the Highlands

The Highland Clearances caused the displacement and dispersion of many thousands of common people from the glens and straths of the Highlands and Islands in the north of Scotland. Mainly these events took place in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and mostly they affected small occupiers, the peasantry of the region. The Clearances were also connected with the parallel decline of Gaelic culture and with an enduring sense of loss, grievance and desolation. This experience is widely regarded as great historical 'tragedy' and it has generated a long debate about who or what was to be blamed. These questions still matter greatly to Scots at home and abroad. This book is a critical guide to the arguments that swirl and recirculate within the debate, and it is also about the essential historical documentation upon which it all eventually depends.

The Clearances created a permanent sense of injustice against the Highland landlords and their managers. [**73**] Some of the Clearances were executed with ruthless disregard for the people and some were associated with injury and panic. The reputation of the lairds was stained and has hardly yet recovered. The exact circumstances of the Clearances continue to arouse the deepest passions in Scotland and wherever Scots are to be found. Consequently much of the historical literature is filled with indignation and rhetoric, plenty enough to fuel the continuing debate.

But people have been leaving the Highlands and Islands for centuries. Often there was some degree of expulsive pressure. A few concrete examples will conjure up the variety of paths that led out of the glens and islands. Thus, even as early as the 1730s, groups of Highlanders led by their gentry were persuaded to settle in colonial Georgia to defend the frontier against the Spanish. In 1773 a poor shopkeeper, John Harrower, left Lerwick in the Shetland Islands for the south, desperate

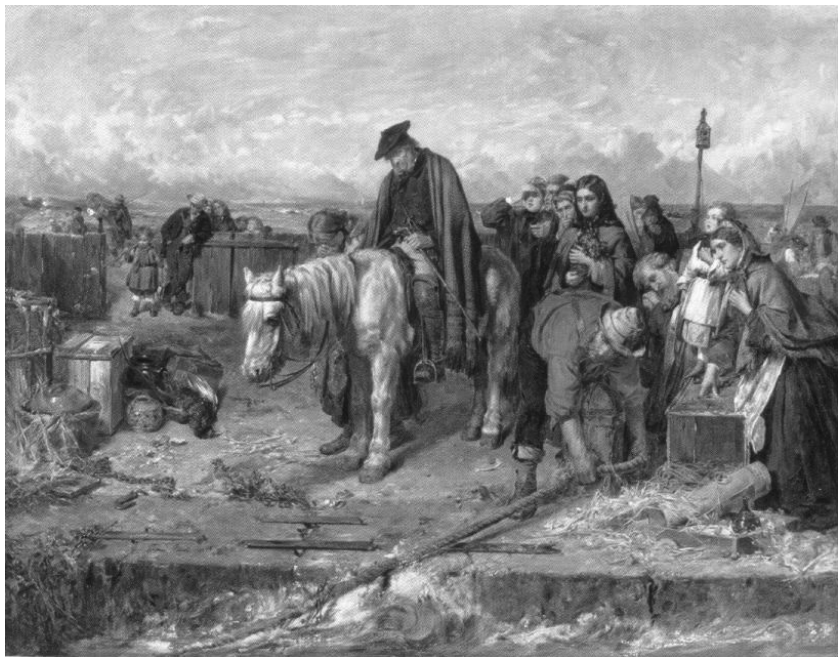


Figure 1. Thomas Faed (1826–1900), *Last of the Clan*. A romantic and tragic evocation of the nineteenth-century Highlands, the influence of which remains undiminished. The image links emigration with exile in an inescapably melancholic scene.

to support his family, but soon, 'friendless and forsaken', he indentured himself to Virginia where he became a teacher on a plantation but died suddenly before he could bring his wife and children to America. In the same decade substantial farmers from the northern Highlands rebelled against their landlords and emigrated, sometimes in large communal groupings. [**5**] They were levered out by competition from tenants prepared to pay higher rents, but also by the enticement of cheaper land available across the Atlantic. Sometimes the anger of these people was palpable, as in the case of large groups who left Glengarry between 1785 and 1802 (McLean 1991). [**24**]

The great set-piece Clearances – such as those in Strathnaver in 1814, in Gruids in 1821, Skye in 1853, Knoydart and Greenyards in 1855 – were unambiguous exercises in landlord power pitted against the wishes of the people coercively removed. Throughout, however, there were many other varieties of mobility that affected every stratum of the Highlands. Substantial tacksmen (leaseholders) sold up their holdings when times worsened and left. Thus Donald Macleod of Talisker in Skye

took his entire family and entourage to Van Diemen's Land in 1821 and became a great grazier, rough in his treatment of the convict labour force. Some lairds also got out: in 1839 the heir of Glengarry, fifty years after his kinsfolk had left for Canada, sold the remains of his ancestral lands and emigrated to New South Wales where land was cheap. He also took his capital and wide family, arriving in the colony in great style. Within five years he was a ruined man, returning home to die early in penury and humiliation. In 1853 one-third of the population of St Kilda snapped up the opportunity to emigrate to Port Phillip (Melbourne); they were accompanied as far as the Broomielaw in Glasgow by their distraught landlord who pleaded with them to stay, and wept tears on their departure.

Even among the families of the newcomers to the Highlands there was a high propensity to leave. The sons of factors – the cadre of estate managers – found their own careers mainly beyond the region. Among the sheepfarmers themselves, the men who replaced so many of the original population, even their offspring had little future in the Highlands. Patrick Sellar, the most notorious and successful of the evictors, had seven sons, only one of whom followed in his footsteps, and no Sellar dynasty survived in the Highlands. Ironically Sellar's own emigrant sons faced the ire of displaced Highlanders, in London, the United States and Australia.

Despite so much leaving of the Highlands there was an abiding paradox. Many of the displaced Highlanders resettled within the region. Moreover, the population of the Highlands continued to rise throughout the classic years of the Clearances until 1851 [**83**]. Even the few examples already cited show the different forces at work, including the effects of poverty, expulsion, lack of local opportunities and better options beyond, as well as the common wanderlust of Highland youth.

This chapter samples some of the contributions to the debate about the Highland Clearances and traces the lineage of the central arguments down to the present. The controversy possesses all the hallmarks of a classic historical argument with typical problems regarding perspective, context and the provenance and selection of documents. It is also a perfect example of a debate driven by political and ideological questions with implications for current issues relating to the future of the region. In other words, the past lies heavily on the present, and equally the present imposes itself on the past. It is an ideal subject for historians on which to cut their teeth.

2. Definitions

At the centre of the debate is the question about the necessity of the evictions and the responsibility and scope of the landlords in causing the decline and dispersion of the people of the Highlands. The debate rings the changes in three main forms.

The first entails direct contemporary documentation of the Clearances and their context: for example, first-hand descriptions, records of the events, price data, census records, accounts of conditions, migration and resistance, all laid down at the time. Typically these are journalists' reports, estate records, travellers' accounts, emigrant letters [**58, 76**], the physical evidence of the landscape as well as demographic, social and economic data collected contemporaneously.

The second broad category consists of contemporary interpretations of the events. These include commentaries on the events by, for instance, parliamentary enquiries, landlords, political economists, ministers of the church, travellers, pamphleteers and poets. Some of the story was registered within the region, especially in the oral tradition which derived from the communities directly affected by the events; but there was much more opinion generated outside the region by observers who claimed to speak on behalf of the community.

The third category in the debate is the accumulation of retrospective interpretation of the Highland Clearances by historians and others. Most of this history has been written since 1880 and in sheer scale it is probably now larger than the original documentation of the Clearances. The historiography of the Clearances, and the way it has been 'constructed', has become a subject with its own fascination, notably for historians of 'the public memory' with a post-modernist bent (see below, Section 5).

Definitions are part of the controversy. In essence, the Highland Clearances entailed the radical transformation of the economic and social foundations of the region during which a large proportion of the population was displaced, usually to make way for very large sheep farms in which they had no function or place. Eventually the total population of the Highlands began to fall and large tracts became deserted. The old Highland society – a distinctive and, to foreign eyes, a rather exotic and remarkable culture – went into decline, some of it into exile. The entire experience seems dismal and tragic, and a gloomy melancholy seemed to settle over the region. All this happened at a time when the rest of mainland Britain exulted in the most dynamic expansion ever seen in world economic history. The fate of the

Highlands was profoundly perplexing and disturbing in every sense.

The word 'clearance' was a latecomer to the story and was not much used until the mid-nineteenth century. It had greater emotional force than its earlier synonym, 'eviction', and a stronger connotation than the landlords' word, 'removal', which was the standard usage in the Highlands until the 1840s (British Parliamentary Papers 1826–7: 316). By 1840, the word 'clearance' had emerged as the general and derogatory term to denote the methods of Highland (and, equally, the Irish) landlords (Miller 1843; *The Times* 1845). Nowadays it often connotes the ejection of entire communities of large numbers of people at one fell swoop; but it has become an omnibus term to include any kind of displacement of occupiers (even of sheep) by Highland landlords: it does not discriminate between small and large evictions, voluntary and forced removals, or between outright expulsion of tenants and resettlement plans. [**20**]

The debate about the Clearances, over time, has extended far beyond the simple impact of sheep farming on the Highland economy. The 'Clearances' became a proxy for a much wider question about the fate of the Highlands in general, of the entire Gaelic culture and language which seemed to go into steep decline at the time of the evictions. [**16**] The debate indeed became focused on the clash of cultures, even civilisations in the Highland context. This sometimes entails the confrontation of 'traditional' with 'modern' society; or between the values of 'Celtic civilisation' and the Anglo-Saxon 'race' of the south; or between Highland and Lowland; or between the forces of the 'Enlightenment' and those of a pre-industrial community; or most broadly between the power of 'capitalism' and the resistance of a romanticised agrarian oral culture on the fringes of an industrialising world. The Clearances stand for much more than a sheep invasion: they become emblematic of landlords versus the people, of aristocratic power versus the rights of the community and, in extreme versions, of one civilisation against another. On the outer limits there is a suggestion of genocide and ethnic cleansing, the elimination of a 'race' at the hands of a ruthless enemy. This is, of course, a long way from the steady march of the Cheviot sheep.

3. The Original Controversy

The debate began before the sheep Clearances. The demand to change the Highlands was invested with immense urgency at the time of Culloden in 1746: the Jacobite Revolt not only symbolised the

unassimilated condition of the Highlands, but also the actual danger that it posed to the peace of the entire Hanoverian British realm. In 1750 the Highlands was regarded as the outer edge of civilisation – remote, uncouth and dangerously anarchic. Consequently the government ordered the transformation and assimilation of the region to drag the Highlands into line with the more 'civilised' south. It entailed the comprehensive pacification of the Highlands: and brutal means were employed to achieve this purpose. They were, however, also associated with positive schemes to develop the resources of the region. [**1**]

Most of the public debate in the period 1750 to 1800 related to the diagnosis of Highland poverty and the appropriate prescriptions for the future. On one side, even by the 1770s, there was considerable disquiet at the accelerated pace of change and the consequences for the people and the character of the Highlands. It was expressed most starkly in the inflation of land rents, in common with the rest of the country. On the other side, there was a rising tide of gratuitous advice (mostly from outsiders) to force further change upon the region. Already some observers were declaring their progress was too slow, that too many landlords were indolent and selfish. They were urged to eliminate the intermediary class of tacksmen and make all tenants directly responsible to the landlord [**7, 17, 41**]; they were urged also to introduce new methods and shift the people out of their old habitations; they were urged to introduce new crops and livestock. [**14**] It all seemed designed to overturn the old system and bring capitalistic values (and new industries) to the Highlands. Critics of these changes were quick to decry the apparent overthrow of clan sentiment and loyalties in the pursuit of profit. In the background there was an irresistible pressure of competition for the land, sustained for fifty years after 1760. The increase of rents clearly caused some of the tacksman class to throw in the towel and depart, some of them in large groups to North America. The contemporary debate comprised a polarisation between the improvers' mentality and the chorus of protest against the pain and rigour of the changes imposed on the Highlands. This remained the essential tension throughout the story, and was greatly sharpened with the onset of the sheep Clearances, which were mainly contained in the period 1780–1855 and caused much more dislocation than ever before.

The Commissioners of the Forfeited Estates were required to supervise eleven estates in thirty parishes over different parts of the Highlands until the 1780s. It was a careful and sustained experiment in planning. The Commissioners introduced new tenants in some parts, built schools, promoted the English language, imposed new rotations

and rearranged lands, developed the herring fisheries and improved roads and communications (Richards 1982a: 126–7). [**3**] It was a concerted effort to introduce new ways to the Highlands, especially the idea of 'villages' designed as nodes of improvement. The results were very patchy and symbolised the problems facing innovators ever thereafter.

Soon after Culloden the Highlands also attracted the attention of the curious and the political scientists of the day as well as entrepreneurs, who began to identify new commercial opportunities. In the following half century an unending succession of military and government apparatchiks, agriculturists and improvers, 'missionaries', administrators, 'improvers' and southern travellers, processions of tourists, geologists, economists and sportsmen toured the Highlands. [**5, 12, 39, 40**] Each had preconceptions and biases, and reading them requires an appreciation of their standpoints. Much of the reportage was wide-eyed and exaggerated. As Sir Walter Scott later recollected, the rest of Britain was astonished to discover that they lived next door to people who had more in common with Afghan tribes than the people of the plains of England (Richards 1982a: 74).

The most illustrious of the travellers were Johnson and Boswell in 1773. [**11**] Their brilliant accounts celebrated the exoticism of the Highlands, their 'otherness', their mystery. For the subsequent debates they were wonderfully insightful, but also decidedly ambivalent in their efforts to appraise the great changes already in train before the Clearances. The reorganisation of estates was already creating turmoil in the lives of the common people. Johnson described a society in a state of degeneration and demoralisation, 'crushed by the heavy hand of a vindictive conqueror' after Culloden. He stated that 'there was perhaps never any change of national manners so quick, so great and so general, as that which operated in the Highlands, by the last conquest, and the subsequent laws'. Johnson concluded, in a passage which recurs through many later accounts, that 'of what they [the Highlanders] had before the late conquest of their country, there remain only their language and their poverty' – and now even their language itself was under attack from the State. He believed, though not without some doubt, that poverty had worsened (Richards 1985: 8–14).

Johnson established that, even before the new sheep breeds had crossed the Highland line, the lairds had changed their stripes – many had become entirely commercial. Rents were rising rapidly and the landlords had become unpaternal and mercenary towards their dependent people. He delivered sober judgements on the erosion of Highland culture, the disloyalty of landlords and tacksmen, and the

mania for emigration (Richards 1985: 10). But his account was full of contradiction and paradox. Thus, in the same breath he denounced slovenly landlords and welcomed the signs of improvement he witnessed in several parts. He condemned the change yet welcomed the signs of improvement. Moreover, Johnson had no appreciation of the emerging population trends of the time – indeed his greatest warning was the fear of depopulation of the regions at a time when the population was actually growing faster than ever known. In this Johnson was no different from all his pre-census contemporaries.

Johnson's jaunt through the Highlands coincided with the first flush of 'Improvement' in the region. Adam Smith had little direct knowledge of the Highlands yet exerted a profound influence on thinking which penetrated into the furthest reaches of the region. [**13**] For Smith the Highlands was a perfect example of the poverty of nations tied by antiquated restrictions and organisation. It was a victim of the poor division of labour, a backwater of feudalism that had been deprived of the benefits of trade too long. It was, he said, best compared with other backward and hermetic societies seen among, for instance, the Arabs and the Tahitians (Richards 1985: 15). The laborious production of the people was consumed absurdly 'in rustic hospitality at home' and in the corruption of their leaders – instead of being traded for the benefits of the division of labour. The Highlands epitomised all the poverty, corruption and misery of a society dominated by parasitic groups. It was a society requiring liberation in order to enjoy the benefits of a proper division of labour – which, in real terms, meant 'Improvement', for which Smith provided the inspiration and the intellectual rationale.

The 'Improvers' included some native landowners, some new men with capital from industry and empire, and a cadre of advisers and ideologues imbued with ideas to galvanise the region with new methods and tenurial arrangements. They possessed astonishing optimism. In the 1780s, for example, George Dempster believed that much higher yields and rents could be reaped, and that Caithness could be 'Kentified' and eastern Sutherland converted into an industrial centre on a par with Lancashire and Lanarkshire (Richards 1985: 19–25). Such Highland enthusiasts were riding the wave of high prices for Highland commodities after 1770 (including cattle, kelp, fish, meat and wool). These propagandists encouraged the extraordinary injection of capital which the region reported in these years by men such as Knox and Anderson, Sir John Sinclair, James Watt and many of the landlords themselves. [**5**] In this time of swelling confidence, based on inflating rents and commodity prices, capital flowed into the region, some by

landlords who had made money in the Empire, for example Captain Lockhart Ross of Balnagowan. Some of the investment went into capital works (such as fishing villages, harbours and roads) and some into ostentatious consumption and extravagant house-building.

A new psychology was at work, colonising in its character: the improvers believed that radical change would be beneficial to the entire society. It was a direct attack on 'feudalism' and an attempt to replace one system by another (Richards 1982a: 129). None of the early debate assumed that the people would be required to leave the region. Improvement was designed to retain the entire population and render them more productive and self-sufficient.

4. Contemporary Reactions

Many, but not all, Highland estates had instituted reorganisation and extracted rent increases before sheep farming was introduced after about 1780. Dislocation and apprehension were mounting in intensity by 1800. Opinion in the Highlands, even among the educated ranks, remained divided between the traditionalists and the improvers. Amid the discord came attempts to enquire into the state of the Highlands on a systematic, even scientific, basis – which Enlightenment thinking itself promoted. Travellers toured the north of Scotland, and reported conditions to the nation at large. Much more ambitious were the grand efforts orchestrated by Sir John Sinclair, the eccentric but extraordinarily energetic Caithness landowner. He sponsored and organised his first great investigation at the turn of the nineteenth century – *The Statistical Account of Scotland* (Old Statistical Account) – which mobilised the efforts of church ministers in all parishes across the country and was published in twenty-one volumes in the years 1791–9. [**18**]

The OSA was a sort of Domesday Book undertaken conveniently at the moment just ahead of the onset of major clearances in most of the Highlands and Islands, and this makes it an especially valuable benchmark of local conditions. Parish ministers registered the initial spread of sheep farming and improvement. But they also recorded the anxieties and turbulence set off in many Highland parishes while also providing schematic descriptions of living standards, poverty, education, unemployment and, especially, the incidence of famine conditions in many parts. The ministers were often surprisingly candid and critical of landlords and the large farmers, despite the fact that the landlords possessed the power to remove them from their parishes. [**20**]

Sinclair became better informed than anyone about the agricultural

conditions in the Highlands in these crucial decades. He was himself a full-blooded improver, the arch enemy of the old ways and dedicated to that eradication of feudalism which he believed was the true source of poverty and squalor in the north. His favourite toast was 'May a common become an uncommon spectacle in Caithness' – an example of his plodding humour (Richards 1985: 26). Yet even Sinclair acknowledged the inescapable problem of reconciling the imperatives of economic transformation with the severe dislocation that inevitably accompanied such changes. A recurring theme among the improvers of all sorts was their contention (self-serving though it often was) that they could cushion the impact of change that, soon, would redound to the benefit of all ranks in the Highlands. The assumption, at least of the optimistic years before about 1815, was that sheep and people could coexist. Sinclair said that sheep farming could be introduced (in his own county) and would at least double the rental value of properties and, emphatically, 'without diminishing the number of the people' (Richards 1985: 27).

But there were other voices in the Highlands. Another influential landlord figure, from the south of Scotland, was the earl of Selkirk (1771–1820) who advocated and organised large-scale emigration from the Highlands to Prince Edward Island and also to the Red River Valley in the Canadas. [**26**] Selkirk was an Improvement figure on both sides of the Atlantic; but he brought a severely negative approach to the diagnosis of the Highland situation. Though he was unquestionably sympathetic towards the Highlanders, he asserted that their traditional way of life was doomed: the Highlands simply could not cope with the impact of 'Improvement' or population increase. He dismissed as optimistic nonsense the idea that the Highlanders could be retained in the region by the creation of new employment in, for example, fishing, kelp manufacture or public works. [**27**] His bleak realism asserted that the modernisation of the economy required the ejection of the people: 'Retaining population in the Highlands would reduce a noble and ancient people to patriotic servitude'. Selkirk argued that emigration was the obvious solution – the Highlander could be successfully transplanted to British North America (this would also counteract the influence of the United States and keep Canada British) (Murdoch 2003: 86). He was a practical 'emigrationist' and his opinions were attacked from all sides, including fellow landowners who would concede no need to lose their people by emigration.

Arguments between landlords were less vociferous than the rising chorus of condemnation from other quarters in the north (and

increasingly in the south). Thus, for instance, David Lawrie had already condemned in 1808 the sheep system as a crime against Highland society, which had spread across ten counties (Richards 1985: 34). Much of the condemnation was a generalised protest at the inflation of rents (common across the British Isles) which was inevitably pushing out the least competitive elements in parts of the Highlands. [**6, 10. 20**] Rack-renting was simply one dimension of sheep farming. Dr Johnson had already registered this broad sense of discord. The generalised dissatisfaction became much more focused when the sheep system was associated with sudden large-scale evictions. From 1790 onwards newspapers as varied as the *Bee* and the *Scotsman* were reporting sporadic explosive incidents in the Highlands. Between 1814 and 1820 a London-based newspaper the *Military Register* (directed at men who had served in the regiments) mounted a concerted campaign against the landlord class in the Highlands, alleging atrocities that effectively incited public opinion and drew attention to the region. Landlords feared that the press might ferment popular resistance and also attract parliamentary scrutiny and, worst of all, intervention in their affairs.

Wartime conditions (1793–1815) and the continuing opposition to emigration had already caused important political reactions. The great engineer, Thomas Telford, was called upon to survey the coasts of the Highlands and his *Report* in 1802 roundly blamed the landowners for the 'Evil of emigration'. This was important external opinion in the debate: such views did nothing to impede the landowners but they paved the way for legislative intervention to deter emigration and, also, for the construction of the great Caledonian Canal. [**25, 27**]

The landlords organised their own apologias and also sent petitions to government pleading for assistance to relieve the growing poverty among their estate populations. [**37**] Recurring famine conditions and falling prices (after 1813) created a new sense of crisis in the Highlands. On the great Sutherland estates the management contended that not only did they possess the capital but also the solutions to the problem of Highland poverty and backwardness – their Commissioner, James Loch (an Edinburgh-trained intellectual), published an elaborate manifesto of the improvement system (in 1816 and 1820). He argued that the Sutherland policies catered for all aspects of the problems associated with the changes, including the resettlement of all the people removed for the needs of sheep farming from the interior to the coasts. Ironically this defence of the Clearances eventually provided further fuel to the critics who insisted that the entire system was flawed, impractical and immoral. [**41**]

Through the subsequent decades of the Clearances (1815–55) much of the debate was confined to intellectuals, with very little published contribution from communities within the Highlands. Political economists and political commentators were, however, vocal though their knowledge was almost entirely theoretical. These armchair experts included men such as Horner, Southey and McCulloch. [**40**] Looming in the background, however, was one theorist whose influence was profound, even though he said virtually nothing directly about the Highlands. Robert Malthus was more interested in Ireland, and in the general relationship between poverty and reproduction. But his diagnosis of the emerging question of overpopulation was fully absorbed in the Highlands. Malthus argued that poverty was primarily the consequence of unrestrained reproduction; emigration had no benefit if the vacuum it created was immediately refilled. When it came to the removal of allegedly redundant populations from rural districts, Malthus believed that such evictions could only be effective if the houses of the departing were literally demolished, otherwise they would simply be reoccupied by newly reproducing paupers. The people should be cleared; their houses should be destroyed.

Foreign observers provided an important strand in the continuing debate on the Clearances. [**16, 72**] Simonde de Sismondi was an émigré Swiss-French political economist whose visits to Britain left him aghast at the social consequences of industrialisation which he witnessed at first hand in the depressed post-Napoleonic War period. Sismondi (though a Smithian at heart) was arguably the first serious critic of industrialisation and of the negative consequences of unfettered *laissez-faire*. He was also genuinely perplexed by the complexities and apparent contradictions of this new industrial world. His critique, however, extended to the rural context and he was much activated by the Sutherland case. He produced a sustained disquisition on the Highlands in which he condemned the landlords for their appropriation of traditional lands from the peasantry which thereby reduced them to penury and degradation. [**46**]

Sismondi had direct influence on two other crucial contributors to the evolving paper chase regarding the Clearances. One was the fascinating figure of Hugh Miller, the self-educated stonemason from the lowland fringe of the Highlands who became the most important voice to speak on behalf of the people of the Clearances. [**71**] Miller eventually emerged as a fiery Disruptionist and a leading Presbyterian journalist (editor of *The Witness*), which gave him the perfect platform from which to berate the landlords in general, and the countess and

Figure 2. Elizabeth, duchess-countess of Sutherland (1765–1839), the driving force behind the great Sutherland clearances.

dukes of Sutherland in particular. He regarded the Clearances as a dreadful experiment conducted on the innocent peasantry of the Highlands. He saw the growing transformation of the region as a clash of civilisations with a racial element causing the destruction of the Celts by southerners. His was a stinging attack, full of rhetoric and metaphor and rarely matched in the subsequent debate.

Karl Marx, also influenced by Sismondi, made the Clearances the

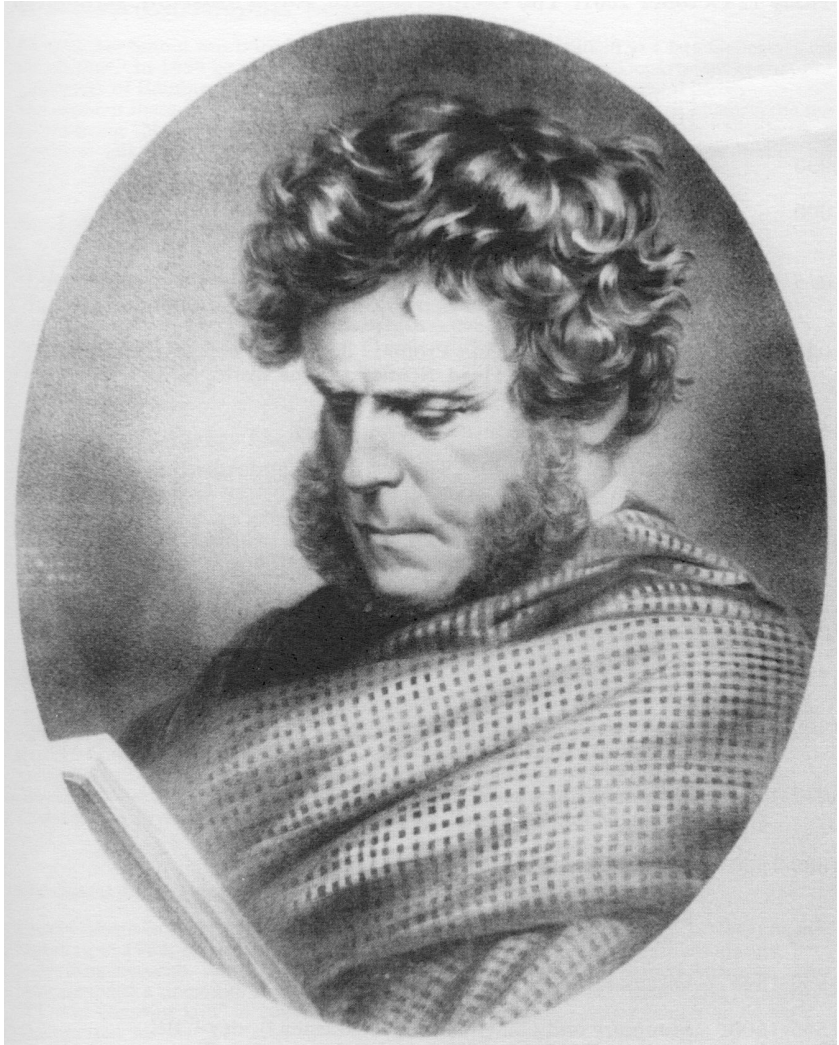


Figure 3. Hugh Miller (1802–56), the stonemason, geologist, evangelical journalist and writer who fulminated against the clearing landlords.

centrepiece in his account of the ways in which capitalist agriculture recklessly displaced feudalism in the inexorable march of history. [**59**] Marx regarded the old system in the Highlands as an anachronistic survival from the feudal world. In the nineteenth century the shift from feudalism to the capitalist mode of production was attended with the usurpation of ancient communal property rights, the embezzlement of land and the cruel eviction of the people from their houses. It was

agrarian capitalism, red in tooth and claw: 'a mass of free proletarians was hurled on the labour market by the breaking up of the bonds of feudal retainers' and was associated with 'thefts, outrages and popular misery … [when it] accompanied the forcible expropriation of the people'. Marx had never set foot in the Highlands and wrote mainly from a numbered seat in the British Museum. Indeed he himself was digesting the journalism of Robert Somers and especially Sismondi, his reliance upon whom was close to plagiarism.

More immediate than the ruminations of the distant theorists were the reports of journalists. William Cobbett was an outsider who made a brief excursion to southern Scotland in 1830 and brought the Highland situation to a wider audience, particularly asking about the radical potential of anti-landlord feeling in the north. Newspapers within Scotland carried sporadic reports on Clearances, often without much comment – the *Inverness Courier* was one, and the *Scotsman* also occasionally carried alarming reports from the north. Less well-known journals were much more critical, though usually unable to sustain their radical denunciation. Thus in 1841–2 the *Edinburgh Weekly Chronicle* printed an extraordinary series of vituperative letters from Sutherland under the name of Donald Macleod (remarkably, another stonemason), which claimed to be direct testimony by an alleged victim of vicious episodes in Sutherland over the previous thirty years (McGowan 2001). [**73**] His testimony entered the relatively small corpus of eyewitness reports which continues to be drawn upon down to the present day. By the 1840s the newspapers had become aware of the newsworthy potential of the Highland evictions and began to send their own reporters to the north. The *Scotsman* and *The Times* thus gathered first-hand reports of some of the later Clearances, creating acute embarrassment to some of the less insensitive of the clearing landlords. Donald Ross was the best-known journalist/recorder who wrote inflammatory accounts of evictions in Ross-shire in the 1850s. [**70**]

Newspaper exposures were not effective enough to cause governmental intervention in the ongoing evictions. Nevertheless Parliament instituted several vital enquiries into conditions in the Highlands. In 1825/26 a Select Committee investigated the possibility of emigration as a solution to social problems across the country; it interviewed various landowners and their representatives from the Highlands who now generally advocated emigration as the only feasible solution for rising overpopulation and poverty in the north. These accounts highlighted the benevolence of some landlords and the sheer pressure of circum-

stances of food shortages and penury. Sixteen years later there was much greater urgency and indeed desperation. This was manifest in another Inquiry, in 1841, devoted specifically to the Highlands, emphasising the danger of poverty and famine in the region. But still the government washed its hands of the problem, refusing even to assist emigration. [**45, 48, 52**]

The third Parliamentary Inquiry, under the presidency of Lord Napier, was a true milestone in Highland history: the *Crofter Commission Report* of 1883–4 was a vast compendium of opinion and data about the Highlands in the post-Clearance period. [**78, 81**] The Commission traversed the Highlands and Islands and tapped all levels of society, and was most notable for its access to the public's memories of the Clearances, many of which were marked by bitterness and anger. The Commission gave an unprecedented opportunity to ordinary people to speak into the record – in part making up for their alleged silence during the decades of the Clearances. [**74**] Much of it was a matter of settling local scores and reopening old sores, and much of it was profoundly prejudicial. But it produced a grand melange of opinion and facts at a time of heightened political awareness. The Commission was crucial historiographically because it gave considered credence to the popular side of the debate regarding the inhumanity of the evictions and the severity of the social consequences. No other part of rural Britain was given such an opportunity to comment uninhibitedly on its recent history.

This Royal Commission concluded sceptically about much of the oral evidence it had so carefully accumulated in its perambulations through the Highlands and Islands, referring to the illiteracy of many of the informants, and their reliance on early memory, hearsay or popular tradition – often 'fleeting and fallacious sources' coloured by nostalgia, resentment and ill will. Yet the Commission judged that, despite such 'loose and legendary tales', the greater account could indeed be regarded as conclusive and was confirmed by the 'solid basis of contemporary records' as well as in the 'indelible character in the surface of the soil' (Richards 1985: 86–7). The Crofter Commission was a perfect example of how the historical record was employed politically to influence governmental policy – successfully in the event (the findings of the Commission eventually inaugurated radical changes in land tenure in the region).

A paper war in the Highlands had broken out in the 1870s before the Napier Commission began its deliberations, partly through the efforts of perhaps the most effective journalist of the era, Alexander

Mackenzie, the editor of the *Celtic Magazine*. His achievement was to collect together a broad range of reports of the Clearances into a single fat volume, *The History of the Highland Clearances*. This became the most consulted and reprinted handbook of the evictions, gathering together the critics of the landlords who reinforced each other to produce a comprehensive condemnation of the entire landlord order.

In the 1880s, the tide flowed strongly against the landlords, helped along by quasi-academic authority from John Stuart Blackie, Professor of Greek at Edinburgh, who became a champion of Highland causes and excoriated the landlords while romanticising the Highland tradition. The antiquarian scholar and Highland MP, Fraser Mackintosh, added his voice and provided some selective documentary evidence from several estates. He was one of the first to delve into the documentary records of the Highland estates, but was reluctant to accept that many of the evicting lairds were Highlanders (Macdonald 1996: 10). On the landlord side, the eighth duke of Argyll made a powerful counterblast, pouring scorn on the landlord's critics for their failure to understand the simple realities of the Highland situation. He fulminated that Highland lairds had been defamed and totally misrepresented, and that their critics simply had no idea about the imperatives of Highland estate management (Richards 1985: 90–1).

5. The Modern Debate

The question of the Highland Clearances has always been entangled with Scottish politics, the future of the region and, most of all, with the actual possession of the land itself. [**24**] It is therefore a livelier debate than most in Scottish history. Its temperature has continued to rise long after the passing of anyone who had any direct experience of the events. A notable political intervention in the early twentieth century came from the Scottish socialist Tom Johnston who condemned the lairds 'who have grown rich by laying their hands upon property that belonged to other people and who have increased their estates by a ruthless exploitation of smallholders and peasant owners'. His class analysis led to a demand for the restitution of the land to the people: 'We are on the offensive, taking back from men who stole … the wealth that originally belonged to the community.' Johnston indeed chronicled the Clearances as part of the reclamation of Scottish history by the people (Johnston 1920, 1909).

The debate intensified in the early 1960s, when John Prebble produced a series of highly accessible accounts of Highland history,

Figure 4. John Prebble (1915–2001), writer of a series of books on Scottish History, including *The Highland Clearances* (1963), the perennial best-seller in the field.

including a passionate denunciation of the clearing landlords. Prebble became the most widely read of all accounts though he mainly recycled earlier reports (Prebble 1963). At that time also, Ian Grimble, employing folkloric sources beyond the reach of most historians, focused attention on the character of the old society and its Gaelic traditions. His contribution to the Clearances debate included the revival of the case against Patrick Sellar, largely drawing on Alexander Mackenzie's anthology of 1883 (Grimble 1962, 1979).

The debate on the Clearances was also coloured by richly fictionalised accounts that were designed to arouse indignation. There has been a ceaseless procession of novels (most famously those of Neil Gunn),

plays (such as *The Stag, the Cheviot and the Black Black Oil* by John McGrath), poems (such as those of Iain Crichton Smith) and films (such as *The Blood is Strong*) about the Clearances. These continue to flow not only in Scotland but from romantics abroad – a recent example being Verna MacLean, *Farewell Rhilochan* (2003). Many of these productions openly mix claims of authenticity and empathy with imaginative revelation and appeal to an emotional engagement with the victims' view of the Highland experience. Though the story ultimately depends on the documentary record, the impact of fiction and semi-fiction is usually greater than the slow progress of academic research. Historians of the academic sort occasionally expressed their irritation with the florid overstatements of popular historians. Thus Rosalind Mitchison, reflecting on the social psychology of the Highland debate, remarked that the entire historiography was 'heavy with myth', prejudice and distortion and based on selective use of evidence (Mitchison 1981: 10). Similarly R. H. Campbell declared that too much of the debate simply reduced the landowners to 'wicked ogres, the scapegoats of the Highland scene' (Gaskell 1980: x).

By the 1960s some historians of the Highlands became increasingly interested in the fundamental economic and demographic questions that underlay the Clearances – about the underdevelopment, poverty and depopulation of the region. Even earlier Fraser Darling had studied the ecological effects of the Clearances and land use in the Highlands (he described the Clearances as descending on the region with the brutality of a Norse raid a thousand years earlier) (Darling 1955: 6). Economic historians, much concerned with the origins of economic growth and 'backwardness', gave close scrutiny to the fundamental problems of the Highland economy. Malcolm Gray, for instance, began to analyse the components of Highland economic life, the intra-regional variations and the limits set by external and internal conditions (such as commodity prices, land availability and employment possibilities). Some of the debate, which carried both contemporary and historical implications, was shaped by theories about the structural relationship between regions in advanced industrial societies and the problems commonly associated with rural transformation. One consequence of this approach was to suggest that the Highlands should be studied not in isolation but in parallel with comparable cases (Holland 1976).

The work of James Hunter in the 1980s brought greater depth of archival evidence to the study of the Clearances. He argued that class conflict in the Highlands was exposed when the landlords discovered

the commercial potential of their estates: it was a saga of exploitation for which the only remedy was State intervention. Hunter declared that the Clearances had obliterated entire communities by landlords pursuing 'their desperate quest for the revenues needed to sustain the new and fashionably lavish lifestyles these landlords had universally adopted'. It was a calamity implemented 'by men who said, as the perpetrators of atrocities usually do, that they were acting in the cause of human progress' (Hunter 2004: 7). Hunter reasserted the traditional condemnation of the lairds, specifically their responsibility for the economic retardation of the Highlands.

In the modern historiography of the Clearances, little of which reaches the public debate, there has been new research in several important areas of the subject. Archaeologists have investigated Clearance sites not only to determine the evidence of violence and fire raising, but also the broad character of rural life in traditional Highland communities (Branigan 2005; Ben Lowers Project 2003–4). Historical geography (notably in the work of Robert Dodgshon (1989, 1998)) has also defined the spatial and chronological shifts in the old Highland economy, often drawing evidence from estate maps and rental records. There has been less systematic work devoted to population questions, which remains a central weakness in the study of the Clearances. The oral record has emerged in recent years as a crucial source by which to discover the mentalities of the communities represented in the folk traditions of the region (Meek 1995, 2003). [**23, 77**] Work has also been pursued on two vital questions: first, the mobility of Highlanders within and beyond the region, especially in terms of the composition and timing (Gray 1990); and second, the politics of Highland resistance in the late nineteenth century, which has received attention to match earlier work on patterns of protest during the period of the evictions (Cameron 1996). Some biographical work has given greater depth to parts of the account and there has been new research on the distribution of wealth and patterns of land holding. Famine in the Highlands has been studied, especially in the 1840s, but the longer perspective on food production has not yet been attempted. Military history, always popular, has attracted much attention. But the documentary bases of Highland history have remained undernourished: the most promising avenue, local studies, despite some notable exceptions, have not been much developed (see Guide to Further Reading).

Two newer tendencies have recently entered the argument about the Clearances. Allan Macinnes has extended the origins of the evictions back towards the seventeenth century and also discovered three ages of

clearances by which the Highlands passed through various shifts down to the 1920s (Macinnes 1988: 70–108). The second 'discovery', namely the so-called 'Lowland Clearances', refers to landlords who reorganised their estates in southern Scotland (Devine 1978; Aitchison and Cassell 2003). Implicit in these developments is the notion that agrarian transformation is not merely Highland and Lowland, but a generic phenomenon in Britain, and indeed in any society undergoing modern economic growth.

Most recently the debate about the Clearances has been subject to the impact of renewed Scottish nationalism in the revived Scottish Parliament, which provides a platform for the political forms of the controversy. In parallel has been the development of the study of the ways in which the public memory of the Clearances has been nurtured and manipulated for particular purposes (Basu 2002). The two have merged in some recent campaigns for a public recognition of the wrongs of the Clearances (analogous to the official 'apologies' for Slavery, the Irish Famine, the Holocaust, and the British Empire). Similarly there has been a recurring demand for the return of the land to 'the people' of the Highlands, and for certain symbolic gestures. The most graphic has been the campaign to destroy the massive statue of the first duke of Sutherland, denounced as 'the Murderer's Monument', which has stood provocatively above Golspie on the east coast of Sutherland for more than 150 years. (The duke was husband of the countess of Sutherland at the time of her great clearances, 1808–33.) Less essentially destructive was a project to erect a large counterpoised monument to the people of the Clearances in the form of a ziggurat. In the words of the commissioned sculptor, Gerald Laing, it would commemorate 'the story of the expulsion from the Garden of Eden'. The new monument would overlook and outface the landlord's monument in a perfectly symbolic fashion. In the ensuing debate the language of denunciation ripened – the Duke became 'Scotland's own Stalin', and 'the autocrat who had forced people from their homes to drift off to the slums of Glasgow and Edinburgh, or to take their chances as emigrants sailing to North America and Australia in ships that were worse than those that had been used for the slave trade' (Tyrrell 2003: 21–8; Gouriévidis 2000).

Some Scottish historians thought that the campaign was hysterical and absurd, reducing Scottish history to Disneyland. At the centre of the debate has been the plight of the Highlanders during the Clearances, often depicted as hapless victims of impossible fate, and denied volition in the making of the modern Highlands. There were complaints about

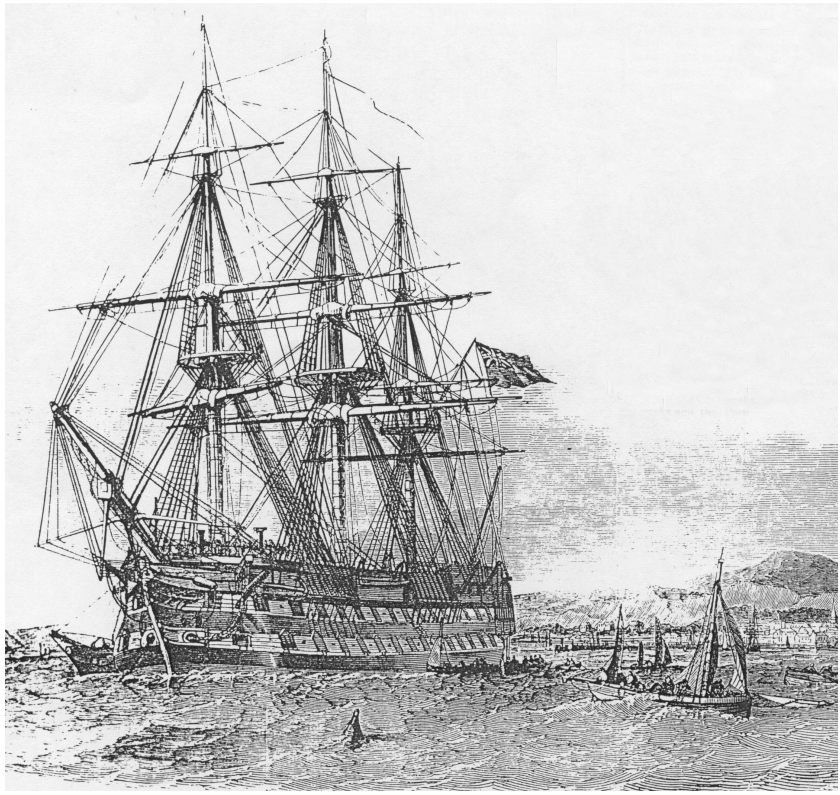


Figure 5. The *Hercules*, a vast emigration ship leaving Skye for Australia in 1852 and conveying many Highlanders who had suffered in the recent famine. Epidemics and appalling weather turned this journey into a nightmare, in contrast to most voyages to Australia.

'the tone of patronising compassion' that pervaded accounts of Scottish emigration (Houston and Knox 2001). Marjory Harper spoke of the 'persistently negative historiography of a Highland Diaspora which has often owed as much to persuasion as perception' (Macinnes et al. 2002: 20). The implication is that emigration from the Highlands was never simply a matter of eviction and expulsion. It was suggested that the Clearances story had been exploited for commercial/touristic purposes – a parallel to the Loch Ness Monster attraction in the Great Glen.

Without question the waters have been muddied yet again. The storm over the Highlands breaks forth almost annually, rarely matched by new research. Like many other national debates, the tendency is towards polarisation and polemics. This attained new intensity in 2004/5 when Michael Fry entered the fray and denounced lazy academic historians

for being in thrall of the baleful legacy of John Prebble who had turned Highland history into a fable of 'oppression and suffering'. Fry, echoing many earlier historians, contended that the denunciation of the landlords had been absurdly exaggerated: 'in the Highlands of 1800 there was not a single county, not a single island, not a single parish, not a single estate, that was cleared' (Fry 2005a: 159). The lairds were no more greedy nor less ethical than those elsewhere. Fry was notably critical of the idea that Highlanders should have special rights to the land and he regarded crofting as an improbable basis for modern living standards. Fry asked, 'Clearances? What Clearances?' and declared that the population of the Highlands had actually risen during the decades of the Clearances; that the Sutherland Clearances were more accurately an effort to reorganise and retain the population on a more productive and secure foundation; that emigration was not so much a matter of coercion as the gumption of people using their own initiatives; and that the claim that famine was rife is refuted by the actual decline in mortality rates during the so-called famine years (Fry 2005a and 2005b). Predictably Fry was immediately abused as a 'Clearance denier'. This, of course, alluded to parallels with other Holocausts, adding fuel to the flames (Craig 1997: 38, 72; Basu 2005: 131–52). Fry was rebuked in the Scottish Parliament and reminded by one writer that 'the empty hills and glens and the sad rickles of stones which litter the Highlands and Islands' were testimony to the reality of the tragedy that Fry denied (Maclean 2005).

6. Responsibility

Within the debate about the Highland Clearances certain issues hold special prominence. What or who was responsible? How much violence was employed in the events? Was this exceptional to the Highlands? How much resistance was there? What were the consequences? Who were the winners and the losers? Was it all inevitable?

CHAPTER 2

Before the Clearances

1. The Benchmark Problem

At one extreme of the debate, it used to be assumed that 'the law of progress' simply did not operate in the Scottish Highlands: this was a society which had been had been sunk in a primitive and uncivilised state for centuries; its people had always been in the thrall of their autocratic patriarchs; it was chained to 'a sort of Asiatic immutability' (Bisset 1877: 108). This was a view of the old Highlands common in Victorian times. Is it an accurate account of the condition of the Highlands before the Clearances? And is this a fair benchmark by which to measure the impact of the coming Clearances? Did the introduction of sheep constitute 'progress'?

The historical reality was not so simple. Modern historians emphasise the long-developing continuities of the changes which overtook the region. The sheep invasion moved forward sporadically and at different velocities across the different parts of the Highlands; there was no sharp and decisive break with the past. Yet this detracts from the unquestionable drama of the sudden displacement of hundreds of families at certain times; many parts of the Highlands experienced evictions which, in a few months, revolutionised the very foundations of life. Moreover, there was an identifiable acceleration of sheep farming in the 1780s.

The Highlands had certainly belonged to the pre-literate and pre-statistical world; this means that we know less about that lost world the further back we trace pre-clearance conditions. Commerce was limited and most local production was consumed within the community; barter was widespread: rents, for instance, were, at least partially, paid in kind and in labour services. [**3, 4, 10, 17**] These arrangements were poorly documented. Hence it is always difficult to measure and evaluate living standards, social welfare and the security of life in the Highlands before the evictions.

Lurking in this question is another hazard. Those who advocated radical change in the Highlands always harboured a tendency to exaggerate the failing of the old system, its inequities and its poverty. [**41**] The opposite applied with equal strength to the guardians of the status quo, the denigrators of change. [**39**] Often, therefore, we are dependent on the observations of visitors whose knowledge (even Dr Johnson's) was likely to be transient or superficial. [**11, 16**]

2. Conditions of Life

The 'average' condition of the old Highlands is not easily drawn. Highland geography varied greatly between northern Sutherland and southern Argyll, between Caithness, Easter Ross and Lewis, not to mention the most distant sites such as St Kilda. Some parts, even their dialects, were as remote from each other as from the rest of the world. Moreover, all pre-industrial societies experience great lurches in their circumstances, annually and seasonally. The pre-clearance Highlands were marked by the unpredictable alternation of 'times of feasting, times of fasting'. These were determined by the climate and weather and by the very low rates of return on manual labour. [**7, 18, 41**]

Contemporary observers were never unanimous, nor do modern historians speak with a single voice. For instance, Joseph Mitchell knew the Highlands at the start of the nineteenth century better than anyone and he cited approvingly the words of Stewart of Garth, the great defender of old Highland ways. [**39**] Stewart said that 'a more happy and contented race never existed'. Mitchell himself said that, in pre-Clearances days, the people 'led a … semi-savage life, disliking industry but enjoying the sports of fishing and shooting which are now esteemed the choice recreation of our aristocracy'. They were 'a kindly affectionate people living a half-idle life'. Stewart also claimed that the Highlanders lived in 'a half wild and uncivilised condition'. [**42**] The reputation of the old order was probably most influenced by the writings of Sir Walter Scott, who helped to invest the old Highlands with that 'roseate glow' which has not yet dispersed. The crucial question here is whether the old economy sustained the population in a secure fashion.

Hugh Miller was born in the pre-clearance Sutherland Highlands, and he knew the status quo ante. His was an idyllic picture: 'We are old enough to remember the country in its original state, when it was one of the happiest and one of the most exemplary districts in Scotland.' It was a country of 'snug farms', the people evenly spread over the interior and the seacoasts living 'in very comfortable circumstances' and in a

'state of trustful security' (Miller 1843: 5; 1854: 270–1). There were, he conceded, occasional food shortages in the less 'genial' localities, commonly in the two months before the crops ripened, but the people always possessed the means and the savings to tide them over such shortfalls. He asserted unequivocally that 'the country never heard of dearth in Sutherland', and 'Never were there a happier or more contented people, or a people more strongly attached to the soil … nor one who does not look back on this period of comfort and enjoyment with sad and hopeless regret' (Miller 1843: 15). [**43**] Before the Clearances the Highlands had been a region of gaiety and enjoyment of abundance (Miller 1843). Ian Grimble, versed in the Gaelic sources, also spoke of the golden age before the Clearances, which he portrayed as a time of 'joy and richness' (Grimble 1979). The classic text on pre-clearance conditions is Edmund Burt's *Letters*, originally written in the late 1720s, showing that this was not a totally isolated society; indeed it possessed many connections with the world beyond. Burt had a very good knowledge of, and sympathy with, the people and observed directly elements of loyalty and mutual deference that subsisted in the region. He made no bones about the severe poverty of the common people (Burt 1754). [**2**]

Some of the features of the pre-Clearances world of the Highlanders are now better known. The notion that the Highlanders lived in benign opulence and security is regarded as a seductive myth which bears little relationship to any direct evidence of the pre-clearance period. Similarly the notion that this was a static and immobile society has been exploded. If there was reciprocity and benevolence in the old order it was balanced by the arbitrary ruthlessness of an extremely hierarchical and bellicose society, one in which low levels of welfare and literacy were accompanied by high mortality rates.

The old Highland order was highly stratified in its social structure, based upon a patriarchal ordering of power which expressed itself in reciprocal obligations and responsibilities. [**6**] Decisions about the distribution of land and the exaction of services, civil or military, were determined arbitrarily from above (usually through the middlemen, the tacksmen). [**10,18**] Some historians stress the stability of the old order, with tribal customs subsisting for a thousand years. The idea of the collective clan ownership of the land is unclear, though there can be no doubting the sense of social solidarity that existed in certain districts, and there was a 'system of ideology and behaviour' that pervaded the general mentality. This was a special variant of the pre-industrial 'moral economy' in which customary obligations between people and their

leaders were more resilient and reciprocal than in modern societies (Thompson 1991: ch. 3). Whether these ties extended to the large and invisible group of subtenants [**3, 6, 72, 41**] is much more questionable. The social and economic system, in any case, was in the throes of change long before Culloden and was increasingly entangled with wider market forces (Dodgshon 1989: 170).

It seems most likely that life in the old Highlands was eked out within the narrowest margins of subsistence, though some historians claim that it gave security to the common people. The main determinant of the peoples' welfare was the fluctuating ratio of population to land. As numbers rose and fell, so the edge of cultivation expanded and contracted. The alternation of good times and bad, of feasting and fasting, fitted the classic model of pre-industrial life, dominated for much of the year by the fear of deprivation in the months before each new harvest. This, after all, was a resolutely peasant society subsisting on some of the least generous land in the British Isles.

3. Security and Food Supplies

The extent to which the people were secure in their attachment to the land in the old society is debatable. The sense of a reciprocation between landlord and tenantry is a strong tradition in the Highlands but not easily measured. Many of the arrangements regarding the occupation of the land were customary and not committed to paper. Research among surviving records of land occupation under the old order shows a surprisingly high turnover of tenants, year by year, as well as a remarkable degree of change of actual ownership. Moreover, the people at the bottom were at the mercy of the intermediate ranks: there were entire strata whose history is completely missing from the record, viz. the perpetual 'outsiders' in the system – the cottars, squatters and subtenants who were not only insecure but also invisible. [**50, 67**] Robert Dodgshon found that there was 'no great stability from one generation to another' and the cottars and unofficial populations of the estates were the most vulnerable and disposable of all. The tenantry were in a 'continuous state of flux' (Dodgshon 1993, 1998). Thus, well ahead of the sheep clearances, occupiers were subject to loss of tenancies much more frequently than we might imagine.

The most fundamental test of the viability of any society is its ability to feed itself. Indeed, as we will see, one of the main accusations against clearing landlords is that they fatally damaged the food-supplying capacity of the Highlands. What is the record of the pre-clearance High-

lands? Leah Leneman insisted that, in Atholl for instance, 'for the mass of the people there, as elsewhere, life was a constant struggle' (Leneman 1986: 68). The succession of southern visitors to the north at the end of the eighteenth century were appalled by the squalor they found, though they were equally surprised at the richness of the culture that thrived amid such poverty. [**5**] Isobel Grant, a writer who explored the inner life of the Highland community with the greatest sensitivity, had no reservation about the severity of life in the old Highlands. Referring to the Kingussie-Aviemore district in the 1770s, she wrote of the hardness and narrowness of the material conditions typical of 'any starveling, down-trodden peasantry' who lived in conditions 'that would now be considered incompatible with a civilised existence'. The people lived 'on the very verge of absolute starvation', yet it was a life apparently without crime, locks or thieves. It was a simpler but incomparably harsher way of life, relieved, however, by elements in Highland life that were, she insists, 'unspeakably precious' (Grant 1981: 23–4, 123).

Some writers have rebelled against allegedly excessive descriptions of destitution and squalor in the pre-clearance Highlands. Eric Cregeen was eloquent in his advocacy of literary and oral sources for a characterisation of that culture and he made an implicit distinction between 'the quality of life' and the material foundations of that life. He spoke of:

> [The] exquisite and highly elaborate music and poetry vigorously alive among ordinary crofters and cottars, and alive not only in the sense of perpetuating an earlier heritage (although it did that) but in the sense of renewing it in creative and socially relevant work.

Cregeen suggested that 'whatever the material conditions of the Highland population of the early nineteenth century, they had nothing of the "slum" mentality and were indeed infinitely more civilised than most of the dwellers of the cities of the plain' (Cregeen 1970: 157). The combination of extreme privation and a rich culture is, of course, common in peasant societies.

By 1700 most of the British Isles was able to produce a reliable supply of food for the majority of the inhabitants, but the shadow of famine still stalked some parts of the land (in 1743–4 Ireland suffered disastrous hunger that killed a very high proportion of its people) (O Grada 2005). In the Highlands there were severe shortages recorded in 1671, 1680, 1688 and 1695–1702 (which left the farmers seedless). Devastating seasons recurred in 1740–1, 1744–5, 1751, 1756, 1771–2, 1782–3, 1795–6, 1806–7 and 1816–17, to mention only the most publicised. [**37, 72, 7, 71**] These were grand scarcities between which

were the more regular/routine dearths. In the famine of 1740–1 food shortages caused desperation and dysentery, probably affecting 10 per cent of the population. Some parishes blocked entry to people from other places. This, therefore, was never a secure existence and nature was less liberal to the Highlanders than to people in the rest of mainland Britain. The harvest of 1782–3 produced a severe shortfall in the north-east Highlands that left an indelible mark on the public mind: it was remembered with fear for several generations to come, even though the death rate was relatively well contained during the crisis (Whyte 1995: 122–3; Bangor-Jones 2000: 66). [**7**]

The resources of the Highlands were scant, its geography (according to Dodgshon) a 'complex mosaic of exposed, rain-sodden and extreme environments' (Dodgshon 2004: 1). Famine was endemic and crops were likely to fail every third year on average. Regardless of the behaviour of landlords, this was always 'a risk-laden environment for traditional farming communities with low productivity', which had been true from time immemorial. Dodgshon paints a picture of a society living at all times on the edge of famine into which it was likely to descend in different degrees at almost predictable intervals, four or five years apart. As he points out acerbically, 'it was hardly the system suffused with the spirit of a "primitive communism" that some have attached to it'. The peripheral small tenantry, the 'mere Ephemerae' as Dr Johnson called them, were liable to extreme neglect. Some historians argue that these famines were essentially localised and occasional, yet it is undeniable that the Highlands were the last part of mainland Britain to remain prone to famine, and they retained this awful distinction much later than elsewhere. [**3**]

So endemic were these dangers that Highland society adjusted itself creatively to the demands, using strategies which, as far as was possible, minimised the risks contained in the essential vulnerability. These entailed special storage systems and the use of alternative foods during grain shortages (traditionally seaweeds and shellfish and some resort to edible weeds too), which were ways of buffering against scarcity. There was also adjustment towards hardier grain types, a growing reliance on potatoes after 1770 [**3, 18**], a degree of diversification, the deferral of rents, and the provision of credit by landlords who commonly accepted a quasi-paternalist role in crises. Food shortages could also be balanced by imports of meal paid by 'exports' from the region and by credit. The growth of the cattle trade in the early eighteenth century was crucial to the ability of the Highlands to maintain claims on food imports. The growth of the trade in meal, which is not well documented, suggests a

strategic and increasing dependence on imports. All the evidence about the trade of the Highlands before the Clearances is consistent with the picture of an economy closely geared to a dual necessity to export cattle and to import meal. Despite the predominantly subsistence character of economic life, the population had a critical reliance on its trading sector to a degree probably as great as anywhere else in Britain. The expansion of seasonal labour in the south before the harvest was another form of risk aversion at a critical time of the year. It was upon these slender foundations that population growth and structural change were imposed later in the eighteenth century. [**29**]

The crucial questions that emerge are, first, whether these conditions were improving or deteriorating before the Clearances and, second, whether the region had ways of paying for external supplies of food. Population was rising by 1760 and this inevitably increased the burden placed on the soil (and probably exacerbated its rising dependence on potatoes). Moreover, there is no evidence of significant increase in grain productivity at any time between 1660 and 1760. Only the switch to cash-traded products offered better claims on outside supplies (Dodgshon 2004). Consequently the invasion of sheep farming fell upon a region already traditionally more vulnerable than most, and less able to cope with the pressures of change.

4. Population before the Clearances

The least known, yet the most vital, force in Highland history was its population dimension. The Clearances were ultimately about the relationship between the land and the people, and the pressure on landed resources was heightened by the introduction of tens of thousands of sheep.

Meanwhile, however, the human population of the Highlands also rose rapidly before and during the decades of sheep farming. (The landlords, on their own heroic assumptions, believed that they could accommodate both human and sheep populations to everyone's benefit.) In 1883 Alexander Mackenzie (a critic of the landlords) had the excellent sense to incorporate in his *History* an indispensable table of the parish populations of the Highlands from 1831 to 1881.

Before the first census in 1801 there existed only estimates and fragments of demographic data (Flinn et al. 1977), but it is almost certain that the Highlands experienced the usual high birth and death rates of most pre-industrial societies. The best estimates suggest that the

population of the Highlands probably fell by more than a quarter in the famished years of 1696–9, followed by a relative stability of numbers until about 1750. Thereafter population growth became cumulative across the region. The causes are still unclear but probably entailed the decline of diseases (such as smallpox) and the short-term improvement of food supply (including potatoes) influencing both death and birth rates. The great population expansion affected every region of Britain and the consequences were startlingly obvious: these extra people had to be fed and clothed and employed. [**Table 1**]

The population numbers in the Highlands accumulated much more seriously in the west and north than in the east and south. Indeed, taken together, the population of the Highlands in the century 1750–1850 increased less than that of Scotland as a whole. But in the west and north of the Highlands numbers increased by 34 per cent from 1755 to 1800, and then by a further 53 per cent before 1841. This was the stark measure of the strain now imposed on a region which, even in the best of times, was notoriously vulnerable to harvest failure and extreme poverty. [**18**]

There was a crucial contrast. In the south and east of the Highlands, generally the better off and more productive districts, the population grew little at all before 1800 and then only by about 7 per cent before 1840. This blessed stability masked the essential difference that was related to the different rates of migration. From the south and east the Highlanders were easily drawn by the magnetic attraction of the towns and villages of central Scotland, some being specifically recruited into the new cotton mills. Highlanders migrated not because of sheep clearances as such but because of accessible alternative employment nearby. As early as 1741, 10 per cent of the population of Greenock was Highland-born; by 1791 it was nearly one-third.

In the north and west of the Highlands the problem was in a different league. In Durness in the 1760s there were 25 births per annum; by the 1790s there were 45. With the introduction of the potato, less land was required to set up a family and crofting was the result even before the advent of clearances (Bangor-Jones 2000: 72). From such districts the movement outwards was much less, despite the long tradition of Atlantic emigration which indeed continued throughout the period. The outflow was never enough to restrain effectively the upward thrust of population along the western littoral. So the population expanded generation after generation, each pressing more heavily on the employment base which eventually shrank. [**18**] Eviction and resettlement policies probably exacerbated the problem but were not the first cause.

The population of the Highlands was never greater than in the age of the Clearances.

In some locations in the west the increases were spectacular. Thus the population of Skye increased from 13,000 in 1772 to 23,000 in 1841; Harris, Lochs, North and South Uist, Applecross and Lochbroom all doubled in population between 1755 and 1841, while in Tiree, astonishingly, the population was 1,500 in 1747, 1,776 in 1802 and 4,453 in 1831. In the Western Isles as a whole the population grew by 80 per cent between 1755 and 1821, often accommodated in a proliferation of smallholdings, swelling the number of crofters in the new regime. In one Lewis parish the population increased by almost 28 per cent in the 1830s alone, and then continued to increase by 38 per cent before 1881. Some of the local rates of population growth were greater than the average for Ireland in the 1830s.

The growth of the population of the Scottish Highlands must stand at the centre of the story of the Clearances, but it is rarely accorded this status. It was the most important single fact of life in the fate of the region throughout the turmoil; it was something that landlords could exacerbate or mitigate but they could not control. The explosive growth of population in the poorest parts of the Highlands placed an unyielding clamp which restricted the possibilities of progress. In essence, the Highlands experienced the general British (indeed West European) expansion of human numbers without a sufficient expansion of the economic capacity that accompanied change in the rest of the country (apart from the unhappy parallel of southern Ireland).

Long before most of the sheep clearances, James Anderson testified to the burden of population in a description which corresponds with the technical definition of overpopulation. He said categorically that 'there is no doubt that one-tenth part of the present inhabitants would be sufficient to perform all the operations there, were their industry properly exerted' (Anderson 1785: 168–9). Some landlords blundered and encouraged subdivision and early marriage, and – before 1815 – tried to prevent emigration.

The chronology of the population increases strongly suggests that the demographic pressure predated the Clearances but coincided with the rapid inflation of rents extracted by landlords from 1780 onwards. The signs of land hunger were clear even before the sheep encroached. As Cregeen remarked, 'Unless new resources were found progressive poverty was inevitable' (Richards 2000: 47). Seasonal and permanent migration were expressions of land hunger; recruitment into the regiments was much assisted by the internal pressure of numbers;

subdivision and increasing reliance on the potato were further responses. [**3, 4**] The potato was one of the most important means by which the population growth was sustained without much further diversification of the economic structure. It was a perilous course and much criticised by contemporary ideologues of Improvement. On subdivision William Marshall reported that:

> The farms were frittered down to the atoms in which they are now farmed: and the country is burdened with a load of tenantry which had hitherto been considered a bar … to the prosecution of any rational plan of management. (Richards 2000: 48)

The meaning of these population trends was unmistakable. Even without the introduction of sheep farming the region in the north and west confronted an unprecedented crisis of numbers simply because, apart from the production of potatoes, there was no concomitant and consistent growth of food supplies or employment. [**6**] There were some false hopes that seemed to sustain the population for a few decades, notably the introduction of kelp manufacture in the 1760s (producing alkali for the glass industry and extremely labour intensive during its short season), as well as new fishing villages in the north-west. [**18**] But there was no reliable permanent growth in the economy. The regiments and the Empire absorbed some of the human surpluses: military service alone accounted for, probably, as many as 85,000 men between 1756 and 1815 (Mackillop 2000: 236). But then the resident population continued to grow while employment and subsistence crumbled, leaving the region almost as susceptible to famine as many parts of contemporary Ireland. The fear of famine hung ominously over the west Highlands and Islands and catastrophe was predicted by 1810, becoming a reality in 1837–8 and yet more decisively in 1847–51.

There is every indication that the population in the west was pressing towards its Malthusian limit. The island of Coll was a classic case in point. According to a contemporary observer, Coll carried at least one-third too many people. Its proprietor was caught in a dilemma. He could not bring himself to evict the surplus people, yet there seemed no humane alternative except further subdivision and congestion, which would only depress again the average levels of welfare. The *sine qua non* of any agricultural improvement was the introduction of large tenants with capital. [**14**] Meanwhile, the condition of the people worsened and the landlord was forced to forgo large amounts of rent because he was under 'the necessity of maintaining three or four hundred souls of a superfluous population'. The alternative – viz. 'forcibly driving them

away from the dwellings of their fathers, without capital, trade, or any other visible means of subsistence' – was utterly unthinkable at least to this proprietor. Macdonald, the agricultural reporter, contemplating these circumstances (which were general in the west), believed that the only answer was 'the paternal interposition of the legislature', that is, State intervention to create employment for the redundant population of the Highlands. 'This', he remarked, 'might surely be done without any clamour or noise, without the appearance of violence, or the odium of expatriation.' Macdonald's eloquent but unanswered pleas were particularly significant because they were written before the general decline of the Highland economy; within three years of the publication of his book the entire context of Highland development was much worsened by the effects of depression and long-term decline (Richards 2000: 48).

The old economies of the British Isles, the Highlands in particular, were incapable of accommodating the new scale of population. These societies had to change or the people would not survive. The dilemma was barely perceptible until 1801, and so the response was unplanned. The Highlands, despite changes before and after Culloden, were not well prepared for the challenge. Some contemporaries soon came to the view that the role of the Highlands was predetermined: it was intended to supply raw materials to the rest of the kingdom. The people should disperse. As we have seen, this was the considered opinion of Lord Selkirk, who believed that emigration was the only solution. [**26**] Increasing land hunger was the fundamental context into which the sheep clearances were introduced.

5. Change before the Clearances

In reality the Highlands had not been inertly awaiting the descent of a Malthusian catastrophe. The Clearances were not the first act in the transformation of the Highlands. They were part of the set of changes that predated and occurred simultaneously with the expansion of sheep farming. Tenurial reorganisation was in evidence in many districts substantially before Culloden. This inevitably complicates the accounting with regard to responsibility for the subsequent consequences. Allan Macinnes argues that, long before 1745, 'Scottish Gaeldom' was already caught in the throes of fundamental change, and this prepared the ground for the later changes associated with the sheep clearances. It was already becoming 'a mobile society moving away from its traditional roots in commercial confidence' (Macinnes 1993–4: 400). The land-

lords, the chiefs, were switching from their traditional commitment to clanship and towards decidedly more commercial uses of the lands of the clans. As early as the sixteenth century, the elite of the north were already bending to 'southern values', travelling easily between 'the tribal world of the north and the polite society of the south'.

In essence, the philosophy of heritable trusteeship – which had obliged the chiefs to maintain security of possession within their wide circles of kin – became moribund and rejected. In its place rose the notion of legalised heritable title, which substituted individual for collective possession. It was a deep institutional and psychic change in the very fabric of Gaelic society which, in practical terms, subverted the traditional forms of multiple tenancy under the wing of the tacksmen and which connected upwards in an unbroken line of reciprocation to the chief, the patriarch of the people (Cregeen 2004: ch. 13). In Macinnes's words, this was the ultimate source of the 'inexorable reorientation of estates towards the market at the expense of clanship throughout Gaeldom'. In a phrase, it was the penetration of the old society by the forces of capitalism, which the chiefs gathered enthusiastically to their individual bosoms. It meant that clanship was not a society frozen in time, awaiting the Enlightenment, but a society already shifting. Culloden was a convulsive climax in a long transformation and Macinnes regards the Jacobite reprisals as having 'the genocidal intent of ethnic cleansing' (Macinnes 1998). It was, according to Lenman, 'The transition from an armed and largely autonomous Celtic world, compounded of tribal and feudal values, to an Anglo Saxon world based on property rights and commercial intercourse in a market economy' (Lenman 1977: xiii).

These arguments are vital because they suggest a growing preparedness for change in many parts of the north even before the fateful incursions of commercial sheep farming. The thrust of Macinnes's arguments is found in the substantial rifts and conflicts by which the pre-clearance Highlands accommodated each new capitalist challenge and opportunity. Macinnes identifies these adjustments (especially in trade and estate management) and effectively reduces the notion of discontinuity and disjunction in the Highland story. Hence the Clearances emerged as part of a wider and larger evolution in the north of Scotland, moving in tune with the rest of Britain even though the adjustments were probably more traumatic and disruptive (Macinnes 1998: 163ff.).

Robert Dodgshon also traces a very long transition in Gaelic society which was in continual adjustment to conditions inside and outside

the Highlands. He portrays the old Highlands in terms of its distinct ideology of behaviour, most clearly marked by its displays of feasting and feuding, habitual ways of life which served as a primitive means of food management and protection against neighbours. It was a social system in which equity and individual autonomy appear to have been subsumed into the clan and its leaders; and welfare was measured in pre-market terms. It was a rents-in-kind system – an economy of direct consumption. It was based on an exchange or exaction of loyalty in return for collective security and a violent attitude to contiguous clans. In the chieftainly model 'the status and wellbeing of the clan [was established] through conspicuous consumption'. Dodgshon says that the Highland chiefs saw themselves, first and foremost, as trying 'to maximise the social product of land rather than its cash returns pure and simple' (Dodgshon 1998: 3–4, 55, 94). But gross inequality gave rise to recurrent hostility between smallholders at the base of the society.

This system was in the grip of long-term transformation, most of all in the mentality of the leadership which, like those of the south, became progressively commercial long before the eighteenth century. At the heart of the matter was 'the growing evaluation of estate resources in purely economic terms' rather than the status conferred in the older system. The ideology of chieftainly behaviour had been decomposing since the late fifteenth century and by the end of the eighteenth century, 'the management policies of even the most conservative estate had become dominated by the opportunities of the marketplace and the need to maximise estate income'.

The crust of customary Gaeldom was, therefore, already broken by the time of Culloden; the chiefs had already been commercialised, the system was overthrown from within by its own leaders. But the changes proceeded at different velocities in different parts of the Highlands. Rather than a society collapsing under its own weight, there was a growing engagement with commerce and enterprise within and outwith the Highlands, often in surprisingly dynamic form. The socio-economic differences between the Lowland and the Highland gentry were narrowing, and this was greatly hastened by the rapid rise of the cattle trade with England before Culloden. Old tenurial understandings were overturned, demonstrated by the 'piecemeal phasing out of the old tacksmen'.

Sir Archibald Grant of Monymusk in Aberdeenshire famously improved his estates in the years 1716–60, changes which entailed much reorganisation, new leases, shifting tenants, and new employment opportunities. These were impressive improvements which certainly

required the dislodgement of the small tenantry but caused little rancour because the people were reaccommodated in improved housing (Muir 1982: 181–2). Changes on the Argyll estates began as early as 1737 when tacksmen were displaced in Mull and Tiree. Argyll was at the forefront of modernisation and the new management was marked by direct tenancies, and increased rent and a faster turnover of tenants; sheep were introduced in the years 1747–55 as well as new enterprise involving kelp, timber, slate, bark for tanning, and new villages (Muir 1982: 167). [**17**] But in other parts of the Highlands the old tacksman system survived for many more decades (Bangor-Jones 2000: 66).

If the Highland elite was already well travelled along the capitalist road, Culloden remains the greatest convulsion in the breakdown of the old Gaeldom. The British government pursued a policy determined without compunction to modernise and straiten Highland society, to drag it into the wider world of the eighteenth century and to pacify the region. After 1746, it was unashamedly designed to destroy those elements in the Highlands that might repeat the military threat to the State. The elimination of the threat was done with brutality: it was a hammer blow to Highland society. The punishment and humiliation meted out also rendered the Highlands less resistant to further economic and social change. The Jacobite Rebellion and the subsequent exposure of conditions in the extreme north of Britain turned the Highlands into an arena for the exercise of civilising missions and, especially, economic improvement. [**1**]

There were efforts to remould the north and reinforce the unity of the land by positive policies of redevelopment to set beside the violent subjugation. The estates forfeited by Jacobite landlords were the focus of this State-enforced improvement and rationalisation and it entailed the dissolution of much of the old structure, for example the abolition of runrig, the elimination of the tacksmen, the relocation of the population and the termination of feudal exactions. The transformation shifted the social bases of Highland life – from a multiple-tenant tacksman-organised system of farming worked by the hierarchy of clansmen – towards the single-tenant farms notably for cattle and sheep. The Forfeited Estates Commissioners no doubt helped to accelerate rationalisation: chief tenants weeded out their subtenants who then either dispersed to other estates or kept on as hired servants with a loss of status and attachment. The policy of consolidation produced local resentment, but the expansion of villages, for example at Comrie, absorbed surplus population and followed a regime of low

rents (Smith 1974). [3] The Forfeited Estates pioneered the crofting-style development (the settlement of small tenants on individualised blocks of land), and as Macinnes says, these estates acted as 'corridors of improvement' (Macinnes 1996). Much of it was geared to the continuing expansion of commercial cattle production which drove up rents and caused displacement in many parts of the Highlands. There is good evidence that, even before the Clearances, little of this transformation was either understood or welcomed by the common people of the region. The squeezing of rents and services added to the turmoil and turnover and indeed to emigration (Smith 1982: 64–75).

The argument for continuity therefore makes the response of the Highlands to accelerated economic and social change by the 1780s more understandable. In that decade the British economy entered unprecedented growth and turbulence, perhaps faster than any economy had ever experienced. One of the first manifestations was the sensational growth in demand for and production of textiles. The industrialisation of cotton manufacture generated extraordinary consequences which caused great new growth, for instance in the American cotton plantations and, no less, in the Atlantic slave trade. A parallel growth in textile production in the great woollen mills of Yorkshire led to massive increases in the demand for wool across Britain, Germany and Spain. Wool prices shot up and rural entrepreneurs drove an unprecedented expansion of pastoral production. The Highlands was soon recognised as a region which could be converted to very large-scale sheep farming, reaping large returns to graziers and their landlords. The factory masters of Yorkshire (and their customers) were the men who, at a distance, drove the engines of transformation in the Highlands (Table 3). By the mid-nineteenth century even Argentina, the United States and the Antipodes were drawn into the web of industrial woollen production and this further intensified worldwide competition among wool producers and pressed down on wool prices for many decades.

6. Emigration before the Clearances

The Clearances were later much associated with accelerated, and allegedly coerced, emigration from the region, and this is certainly part of the wider indictment. What was the record of mobility before the Clearances? In the late seventeenth and throughout the eighteenth century Highlanders were moving south, at least on a seasonal basis, for harvest, employment and domestic service. Northern landlords some-

times tried to curb such movements to preserve their own claims on the labour of their people (Richards 2004: 78).

There were also larger-scale movements of people: many Highland elements from the south-west of the region participated in the appropriation of lands in Ireland in the seventeenth century. Moreover, there were continuing exercises in internal colonisation whereby attempts were made to introduce new populations into sparsely populated places such as Lewis and parts of Perthshire.

The transatlantic migrations were more suggestive of extrusive forces and more certainly part of the later story of the Clearances (see Chapter 4), but they also predated the sheep invasion of the late eighteenth century. Scottish, and especially Highland, emigration rose greatly after the Union with England in 1707. Highlanders were specifically recruited for particular colonisation ventures. An early example is the plan to settle colonial Georgia – in the late 1730s and 1740s – when Highland colonists were selected because they were regarded as farmers and soldiers and accustomed to provide service (including military service) in return for land. They were regarded as especially suitable to the needs of frontier defence and they were heavily recruited into the regiments for America (W. R. Brock described the Highlanders as 'the shock troops' of the American frontier (Brock 1982)). Many stayed on, fully engaged in the evolving slave economy (Parker 1997). [**15**]

Highland emigration to America accelerated in the 1770s. There is some famous documentation a few years before the American Revolution generated by a British government inquiry (in 1772–3) into the causes of the emigration which was alarming the landowners north and south at that time. [**10**] All emigrants were questioned before departure and their answers are the closest to direct testimony from Highlanders that exists for the period. The impression they gave was of tightening conditions in the Highlands, of rising rents and difficult circumstances at home. It was precisely the story reported by Dr Johnson who had watched 'The Dance called America' in October 1773. This pressure on rents was rising even before the advent of sheep farming and related more specifically to cattle farming and a generalised inflation in all prices. Cattle production probably strengthened the tacksmen who emerged as wadsetters and owners, undermining many of the old subtenancy arrangements (Mackillop 1999: 245). [**34**]

There was a sense of rejection (even *Schadenfreude*) among the emigrants who were repelled by rent increases. [**5, 8, 15**] There is also evidence that the threat of emigration was used as a bargaining tool against the landlords. [**9**] Emigration was an escape from the Highlands

in an age of rising land pressure. The composition of the emigrations suggests that many were relatively prosperous people with capital, and they carried with them many of their 'followers' too. Poverty was certainly a driver of emigration but so also was the work of recruiting agents who offered great enticement to people already suggestible and willing to follow their kinsfolk to America. Until about 1813 practically all proprietors (and the government) were opposed to emigration since it reduced the productive (and rent-paying) capabilities of their estates and weakened the defences of the nation. The crucial reversal of attitudes to emigration occurred only after 1815.

7. Mobility and Capital Flows

In the late eighteenth century the landlord elite in the Highlands increasingly looked outward, to the south, and to the Empire. Their involvement in military service eventually became celebrated and new enterprise emerged in many corners. As Macinnes points out, the transatlantic migrations out of the Highlands were themselves often led by ambitious tacksmen and were 'an expression of indigenous enterprise' which was demonstrated also in the growth of 'Improvement' investment in the region. Symptomatic was the employment of professional surveyors on several Highland estates in the 1760s, the harbingers of economic transformations. [4] Land changed hands more swiftly, and tenants bid against each other as rents rose – leaving some tacksmen disgruntled and footloose.

Highlanders were soon involved disproportionately in trade and Empire, and some of them made fortunes in India and America (and some later in Australia and the Far East). They were involved with commercial elements in Glasgow and Edinburgh, and Highlanders were profiteering across the Empire in the West Indies as much as in Bengal. Some of this capital subsequently flowed back to the Highlands and there is evidence of heavy investment in grand houses and various forms of conspicuous consumption by the end of the century. Not all of this imperial wealth remained in the region since much of it was wasted in rash investment. Nevertheless there were stimuli of many sorts. The vitality of Highland enterprise was best expressed in the return of imperial adventurers with their bounty of Empire to plough into their Highlands estates. Sir Alexander MacLeod, using monies from his career in the East India Company, bought the island of Harris in 1778 and plunged more of his funds in the development of the local fishing industry (as well as astonishing outlays on political bribery and

Figure 6. Angus Macmillan (1810–65), an émigré tacksman in Australia, typifying the often brutal impact of Highland colonists on indigenous societies.

influence). Sir Alexander Campbell of Inverneil, as Governor of Jamaica and Madras, and Neil Malcolm of Poltalloch, as a colonial planter in Jamaica, both reaped large returns which they ploughed back into Highland properties (Mackillop 2005: 516–17). Even the government found itself, against all its instincts, investing in Highland infrastructure (most notably in the Caledonian Canal) to stem the tide of emigration, and also to create conditions of economic improvement in the region.

It would be easy to exaggerate the extent and importance of this new indigenous enterprise in the Highlands. Rural conservatism was rife and there were ingrained attitudes which constituted a 'crust of custom'. They included oppressive labour requirements which continued to be exacted by tacksmen. [**20, 41**] The very idea of sheep farming was regarded as unacceptable by some farmers, the men whom Andrew Wight derided as 'the old drones' (Wight 1784: 183). In 1767 it was reported that:

> Just now a Farmer thinks it below his Dignity to acknowledge he has any Sheep or knows anything about them; when any Questions are asked concerning them, he Answers: 'I do not know, my wife has Sheep with Leave.' (Wills 1978)

On the eve of the sheep clearances, therefore, the Highlands were in a mixed condition: there were clear indications of growth and confidence; there were also ominous signs of a rapid population surge; and there was disturbing flux in the relations between the strata of Highland society. [**8**] Mostly a sense of optimism prevailed. A question therefore remains: if the Highlands were already embarked on progressive change before, say, 1780, how deep were its roots and how strong was its capacity to exert enough growth to sustain the region? As we will see in the next chapter, the most dynamic change was propelled by the sheepfarmers.

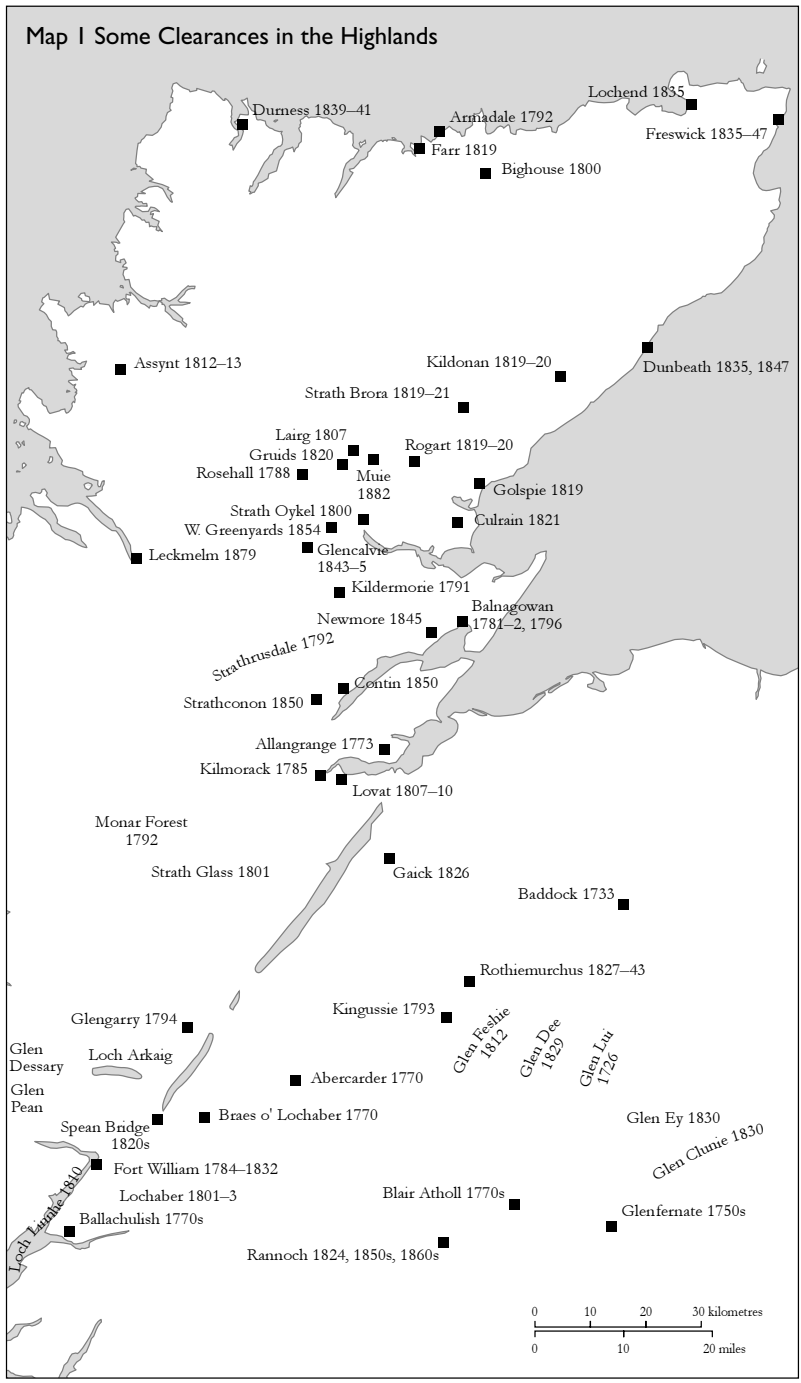
CHAPTER 3

The Age of the Clearances

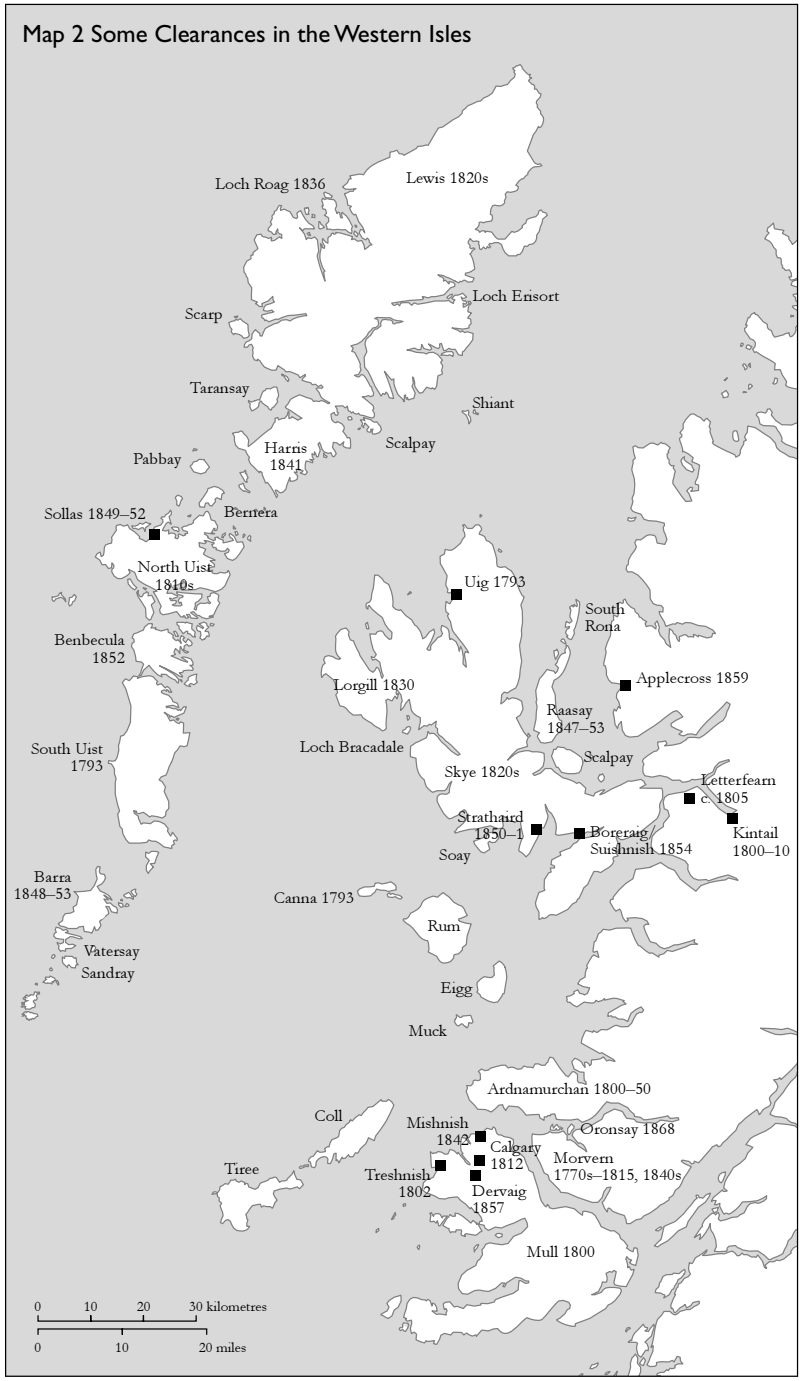
1. Harris, Arichonan and the Uses of Eviction

The first great surge of clearances began during the expansionary 1780s but then continued into the years of contraction and travail after Waterloo in 1815 when falling commodity prices squeezed all the previous optimism out of the Highland economy. The initial landlord assumption was that the people would be relocated and redeployed into new activities, usually along the coasts of the great estates. In the later phase the people were simply ousted without regard to alternative accommodation. The first step to eviction was the serving of a 'Notice of Removal' to a tenant. [**35**] The most infamous clearances entailed the wholesale displacement of traditional communities in sudden evacuations, but the exact circumstances were often complicated.

A case in point was the clearance of the island of Harris in the years about 1840, which was both dramatic and well-documented: popular resistance on Harris attracted the attention of southern newspapers and the episode was also reported in a Parliamentary Inquiry. [**48, 52**] The Harris estate of Lord Dunmore had suffered great distress in the most recent famine of 1836–7. There were 440 crofter families holding directly from the landlord and a further 2,300 people in the usually invisible substrata of Highland society. The people had been reduced to misery (the land was poor, there was no kelp, they were heavily in debt and their numbers had risen by 48 per cent since 1801). The landlord, as usual, had expensively relieved the people during the recent food crisis with little expectation of recouping even a third of his outlay. Meanwhile, his only remunerative tenant, a sheepfarmer, refused to renew his lease unless the people's lands at Borve were added to his own farm, that is, cleared of the small tenantry. Sheepfarmers in the late 1830s could dictate terms to landlords (since wool prices and rents were falling). Dunmore was caught in a vice since he could not afford to lose the sheepfarmer. [**30, 38**] He gave the Borve people three years' notice



Map 1. Some Clearances in the Highlands.



Map 2. Some Clearances in the Western Isles.

to quit (at Whitsunday 1839). He offered the old and the infirm some lands elsewhere on the island; all the others were offered free passages to Canada; additionally they were forgiven their rent arrears and offered a fair price for their stock of cattle (a generous 'redundancy package' for the times).

At first the people regarded their landlord's offer as generous and made no objection to the plan; later they changed their minds, refused to emigrate and blocked their removal. Dunmore's agents called in troops to deal with the opposition; the revolt was suppressed though the ringleaders were dealt with leniently. The people remained at Borve for a further twelve months and then removed, resettling either in other parts of Harris or beyond the island, having again resisted that offer of emigration. Some time later they petitioned Dunmore to revive his offer of passages to Canada and eventually more than 600 left, and another group departed for Australia in 1854. The Harris Clearances eventually dislodged all the people: emigration was a delayed (and perhaps fully considered) response some time after the original displacement (Richards 2000: 192–4). [**52**]

Thus, even in so dramatic an example as the Harris Clearances, the actual eviction was stretched over several years and the circumstances were typically more complicated than a simple eviction to make way for sheep. In reality the history of the Highland Clearances encompassed many varieties of removal, some of them barely identifiable in the normal historical record; some are still being discovered: neither the geography nor the chronology of the Clearances has yet been completely registered. Like long-lost archaeological sites, episodes are being rediscovered year by year in different parts of the Highlands, even substantial examples. For instance, the Arichonan evictions of 1848 have recently been re-examined: here a traditional multiple farm in Knapdale was subject to clearance but eventually required almost the entire constabulary of Argyllshire to disperse the people. Their resistance was recollected in the 1880s and has since been documented as a classic example of eviction, police intervention, the involvement of women in the resistance, followed by elaborate legal proceedings (Macinnes 1998; McFarlane 2004). [**61**]

Eviction was part of the conventional armoury of landlords throughout the British Isles. It was a fact of life in all rural communities and 'an important part of the general process of estate management' (Cragoe 1998: 181). Across the Victorian countryside British landlords employed 'the threat of eviction as a weapon with which to terrorise tenants into voting as they were instructed'. Evictions were a way of

extracting debts and facilitating the turnover of the tenantry, sometimes to enforce better rents, more compliance or better farming methods. By a similar token, of course, the threat of resignation of a lease, or simply departing, operated as a bargaining tool in the hands of a preferred tenant against his or her landlord. [**32**] Annual tenancies were favoured by landlords because they gave more immediate leverage as a 'debt collection strategy'. In effect it was part of the timeless negotiation of rural life, north and south. Thus Lord Durham's agent in England declared in 1857 that he sought to 'weed the farmers every year'. Over a period of twenty years in the Weald of Kent and Sussex only 14 per cent of farmers were able to retain their farms; there was an 80 per cent turnover in this region (Short 1975). How much the Highlands differed from these practices is central to the debate. Undoubtedly the Highlands became a byword for the large-scale sweeping of the people from the land in set-piece evictions, but in comparative terms the numbers and the degree of coercion were barely in the same league as those of contemporary Ireland.

2. The New Sheep

The new breeds of sheep came to the Highlands in a series of waves mainly from the south. There is evidence of commercial sheep farming in the northern Highlands as early as the 1730s and landlord experiments with English breeds several decades before the system took off in the 1780s (Bangor-Jones 2002). [**3**] The old native Highland sheep were of no use to capitalist sheepfarmers. When wool prices rose spectacularly from the 1770s, [**Table 3**] the stimulus was transmitted across the country and soon the Highlands became the target of expanding entrepreneurial sheepfarmers who were entranced by the prospect of high profits from cheap land. Even more, they possessed more remunerative breeds of sheep – first the Blackface and then, from the 1790s, the great surge of Cheviots. By 1820, Inverness emerged as the centre for sheep sales, the Mecca of hard-bargaining millowners from Yorkshire who faced equally determined men who made up the sheep-farming elite of the Highlands. Many, but by no means all, were new men from the south, some who had cut their teeth in the Borders – the Armstrongs, the Hunters and the Elliots among them. [**26**]

The growing flocks of Lintons and Cheviots put new pressure on the land by greatly intensified pastoral use which, of course, increased the productive and commercial capacity of the region. When the Northumbrian expert Matthew Culley (from the heartlands of improvement,

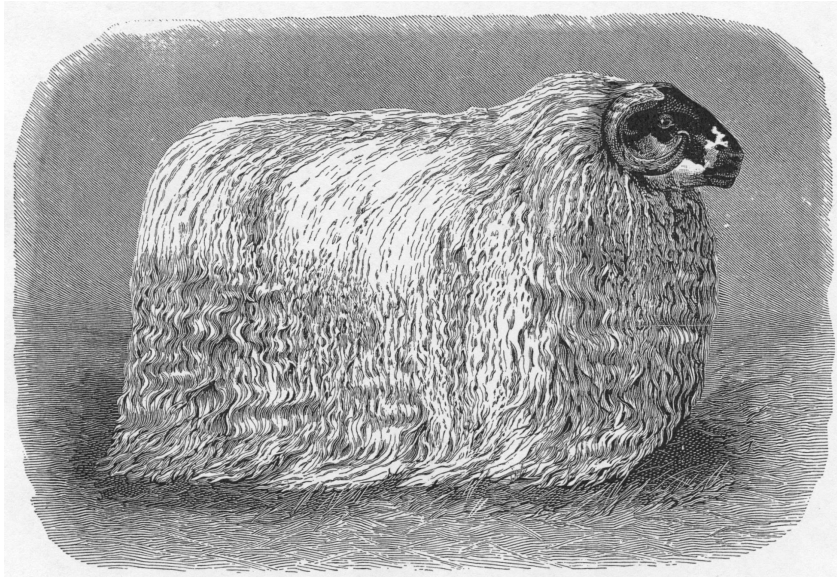


Figure 7. The black-faced ram, one of the newly introduced breeds that effectively colonised vast tracts of the Highlands after 1780.

part of the spontaneous national drive to improve agricultural productivity across the country) toured the north in the 1760s he concluded that the country could support ten times as many sheep and keep as many cattle as before, and also grow more corn. It was an almost biblical vision of improved productivity (Orde 2002). [**12**] James Anderson said that the expansion of wool production would provide the basis for the establishment of wool manufacture in the Highlands. And, as we have seen, enthusiasts such as Sinclair and Ross declared emphatically that sheep were perfectly compatible with the current population of the country (Richards 2000: 48).

In the event, black cattle and the people were eventually pushed off the grazing lands and the old sweet spots of arable land were required for wintering the great flocks of sheep. The growth in sheep numbers was staggering – from virtually none in 1760 in Argyll to 278,000 by 1800, 827,000 by 1855 and over a million in 1880. These rates were replicated across the Highlands as the sheep swept over the glens and hills in the decades after 1770. By about 1840, according to the reports of the *New Statistical Account*, large-scale sheep farms had captured 85 per cent of Sutherland, 61 per cent of Ross and Cromarty, 60 per cent of Inverness and 35 per cent of Argyll (Devine 1988; *New Statistical Account* 1845, vol. 7: 213, vol. 14: 211). [**24**]

3. The Timetable of Clearance

The movement of the sheep can be followed in more detail to demonstrate the cumulative advance and its variety (MacDonald 2005). There was nothing new about clearances in the Highlands: in 1669, long before the coming of the sheep, the duke of Argyll and his son Lord Lorne removed sixty small tenants from some of the islands 'without any provision as to where they should go' (Macdonald 1984–6: 88). Some landlords moved forward quickly – for instance, the duke of Atholl inaugurated great changes in Perthshire in the 1750s. Moray, partially a lowland county in the north-east, also saw widespread rationalisation in the same period, developing an efficient surplus-yielding agriculture on good soils. Other areas (as we shall see) made little progress and lapsed further behind as each decade passed them by. The expansion of cattle production before 1770 undoubtedly created a pervasive pressure for larger farms. This had caused social dislocation as early as the 1730s while engrossing and consolidation for larger arable operations continued in the eastern Highlands throughout the eighteenth century. The pressure building up on land occupation was manifest in the increase of rents and in the complaints of emigrants leaving in the 1770s. [**50**] Sheep were certainly invading Knoydart by the late 1780s and their appearance coincided with a rush of emigration.

Many landlords remained hesitant. Sometimes the first impetus came from tacksmen who removed the small tenantry, thereby building up the class of landless cottars well ahead of the sheep clearances. [**26**] Hugh Rose, factor on the Sutherland estate, opposed the introduction of sheep farming in 1786, pointing out that 'once the natives of these countries be extirpated or dispersed, it is believed that no set of people, whatsoever, from any quarter of the globe, would be got to inhabit it' (Bangor-Jones 2000). Seven years later the factor thought that sheep could be introduced 'and few or no families turned off the Estate'. Yet the change was once more delayed, possibly deterred by the 1792 insurrection in nearby Ross-shire. Another decade passed before the sheep were introduced into Assynt and the new leaseholders were specifically required to pledge themselves that no subtenant would be removed unless provided with 'an equivalent [place] for them in the parish'. Even where elaborate resettlement provision was made by the estate, the managers realistically expected some of the people to 'quit the Country in disgust at the idea of being forced to acquire new habits of life' (Bangor-Jones 2000: 5–7). Meanwhile the rents in some instances

increased by 400 per cent and this was the great propellant of change – it caused some of the existing tacksmen to vie for new leases at extravagant rates. Moreover, the estate made special arrangements for small tenants who responded to the regimental recruiting officer, creating the basis for much recrimination when the later removals were pursued in Sutherland.

The impact of commercial sheep farming was therefore dramatic. It was pushing into the southern Highlands as early as the 1750s, hurrying on as far as the Great Glen by 1790 and reaching even the distant north-west by the 1810s. Farmers from the Southern Uplands were moving into Dunbarton as early as 1747 and further north in the late 1750s, including Borders sheepfarmers, men of enterprise and capital, seeking cheaper lands for their hardier sheep. John Campbell of Lagwine moved into the west Highlands at Arkinlass in Argyll in this decade. [**19**] The second thrust appears to have been in the early 1760s into Inverness-shire but more generally and swiftly in the higher lands of Perthshire and in Forfar, Aberdeenshire and Moray also, followed by the Breadalbane and Atholl districts in the central Highlands. There were clear extensions of sheep into Easter Ross from the early 1770s, though they accelerated further in the 1790s. Many of these advances were first stages and some of the earliest of the new sheepfarmers made second and third incursions as the sheep spread northwards. But the movement was uneven – much of Perthshire and Inverness-shire were only infiltrated by the new sheep after 1770. Large areas remained untouched, even in the southern Highlands, into the second quarter of the nineteenth century. In 1794 less than two-fifths of Perthshire had been affected in this manner. The islands and the vast territory north and west of the Great Glen were largely untouched before 1790.

Consequently the cataclysmic aspect of economic change should not be overemphasised. [**28**] Despite the acceleration in the 1790s, the Highland Clearances required more than a century to complete, and even then many districts remained untouched by sheep. Moreover, the sheer diversity of agricultural change in the Highlands, especially east to west, tells against simple generalisation. The phrase 'the Highland Clearances' does not account for the complexity of these changes. There were, as well, many types of removal of resident communities to make way for sheep. The most dramatic and infamous version of these was the mass eviction of whole communities with little notice, often marked by rough methods (including manhandling and the destruction and burning of houses and outbuildings), which provided no alternative accommodation or employment for the people involved. Sometimes

these policies were executed by estate officials, reinforced by legal officers and a posse of police, and were the cause of great hardship among the people. In another category were many instances of large-scale removal in which the landlord (often in a hurry and at large additional expense) offered the people alternative accommodation on the same estate. This usually involved resettlement in crofts on the fringe of the estate and on marginal land which required the people to make great adjustments in both status and means of livelihood. Much crofting was created on the assumption that the people would take up fishing or kelp working, or else find other productive ways of dividing their labour. Some of these clearances were forced through by legal process and in clear defiance of the wishes of the people. Rarely, if ever, were the common people consulted about their future: they were simply given their marching orders. Only the more dramatic episodes were ever recorded. But more prevalent were smaller-scale and longer drawn-out clearances which punctuated the life of the region, especially in the years 1800 to 1840. Many of them involved relocation rather than outright eviction. [**20**]

Given this diversity it is difficult to conjure up the typical or average clearance, and the temptation to extrapolate the most sensational examples to the entire Highlands is scarcely resistible. Yet most removals were little-by-little affairs, rarely recorded and have no dramatic resonance for posterity.

The passage of the Cheviot across the Great Glen was a symbolic moment in the history of sheep farming during its acceleration of the 1790s. Sullen disgust with the changes had already occasionally broken surface in spasms of resistance in the 1780s. During the 1790s there were many reports of evictions. J. L. Buchanan in 1793 mentioned the removal of 'several hundred souls', for the sake of sheep, in South Uist and Canna. In that same year Francis Humberston Mackenzie advertised the whole parish of Uig in Lewis as a sheep farm, and in 1796 358 summonses of removal were issued by him; over the period 1780–1832 he issued 2,300 summonses of removal. Colonel Macleod of Macleod undertook reorganisation and removal on a similar scale, also in the 1790s. In 1794 Alexander Macdonnell of Glengarry, whose estate had already taken a flying start into sheep farming, had no compunction about evicting any small tenants who refused to enlist in the regiments for him: 'I have fully determined to warn them out, and turn them off my property, without loss of time.' Many of his tenants took off for Canada. [**21**]

At this time southern breeds of sheep were introduced into central

areas of Inverness-shire, notably in Kingussie and Laggan. By 1793 the sheep system was in evidence at Fodderty in Easter Ross and in Lochbroom in the extreme west of the same county. At Banff in 1794 there was already a selection of southern breeds familiar to the stock farmers. Throughout the decade many landlords were contemplating plans for removals, most notably on the great Sutherland estate: schemes were being concocted for the planned introduction of new economic structures in many places. Recruitment into the regiments, and the highly visible financial success of kelp, helped to create an atmosphere favourable to radical reorganisation. [**21**] Thomas Garnett reported that many of the people displaced by sheep in the counties of Argyll, Inverness and Caithness had migrated south to the Lowlands, and some had found their way to New Lanark, where they were welcomed into the arms of the managers of the celebrated milltown of David Dale.

The central Highlands, in the early 1790s, were passing into the rigours of wholesale rural transformation. The turmoil overwhelmed the lives of thousands of small tenantry, yet most of it occurred with no public comment and little audible resistance. In 1792, and quite suddenly, the community of the peasantry in Easter Ross erupted into resistance and called for the march of the sheep to be reversed (as we will see in the next chapter). This was 'The Year of the Sheep' that sent a shiver through the landowners who were roundly branded as ruthless, avaricious men who had betrayed traditional loyalties and obligations.

But the march of the sheep soon resumed. By 1804 the Cheviots had reached the great estates of the duke of Argyll; in Easter Ross most of the Strathconan estate had been laid out in sheep walks. [**65**] Incoming sheepfarmers were driving up the price of land in a wide territory in all directions out of Fort William. Within a couple of years the Cheviots had entered Inverness-shire at Fort Augustus and even in Caithness and many parts of Ross-shire (Purves 1875). Yet there remained many parts uncolonised by the sheep – in Wester Ross near Lochbroom, in the Western Isles, and Breadalbane was still free of the ovine invaders. The Lochiel estates in Lochaber came off lease in 1801 and there was a scramble for access by high-bidding sheepfarmers (even from as far south as Moffat). Some of the small tenantry were being removed without alternative provision and, on occasion, their houses were set afire to prevent their reoccupation; there were reports of emigration as a recourse of many of these people. There was obviously a mounting sense of dispossession and anger among the people affected. The old society was being demolished in every sense.

Eviction is rarely a gentle matter and is, whenever it occurs, accompanied by coercion, the forceful shifting of reluctant and obstinate people, and the destruction of property. Where this occurs in the midst of a dense population of small tenants, the scenes become ugly and dangerous. The history of the Clearances was punctuated with such episodes, though most of the process did not create such melodrama. The Sutherland case brought into focus all the tensions of the wider story. Sutherland was relatively late in the sequence, after 1810. The estate comprised more than a million acres mainly in the hands of a single owner, the impecunious but ambitious countess of Sutherland, and her very wealthy, but undemonstrative, English husband, the marquis of Stafford, later first duke of Sutherland. The Sutherland estate decided to revolutionise the administration, occupation and land use of its great territories. It was a staggering piece of economic and social engineering previously unseen in the Highlands – the relocation of most of 15,000 people, the conversion of the old lands to sheep and the foundation of an entirely new parallel economy on the coast. The latter was an extraordinarily expensive and comprehensive scheme to accommodate the people removed from the interior, which was given over to ranch-like sheep farms in the hands of great capitalist sheep-farmers. The Sutherland management believed that this would benefit everyone – and, most of all, the people would be jolted out of their traditionally slovenly and pauperised conditions and set up in new industries and fishing communities in which they would gain the benefits of a modern division of labour. The Sutherland plan was the supreme example of 'Improvement' optimism and the dynamic energy of planners who confidently envisaged a new economic structure in which the mass of the people would be self-reliant, liberated from the chains of feudalism, and secured in better housing, employment, income and savings. The plan was fully articulated and drew on the ideology and textbooks of the Edinburgh Enlightenment. [**35, 36**]

The Sutherland case was exceptional in every way and yet, in the general debate, tends to become extrapolated as the image of the entire Clearances. It was in reality atypical in scale, drama, physical destruction, resistance and planning. The Sutherland estate was richer and bigger than all other Highland estates. Its owners made far greater efforts to retain their rural tenantry than other owners. In the outcome the consequences were not generally different from elsewhere – the population was retained for a decade or more, but then declined like elsewhere; the new economy was not as effective as planned; the sheepfarmers monopolised the grazings until they too felt the savage

consequences of competition (and the incursions of sporting tenants by the 1840s). And the Sutherland clearances never lost the capacity to raise anger in each passing generation. The old peasantry, thinned in numbers, was converted into a marginalised semi-proletariat on the coasts, though not necessarily worse off in terms of welfare.

4. Years of Pessimism

Most of the work of agrarian transformation occurred beyond the spotlight of publicity and posterity. For instance, of many cases, clearances occurred in Skye in the 1820s and were virtually unrecorded at the time. With the calamitous fall in commodity prices – kelp, grain, fish as well as wool – the circumstances of the owners radically deteriorated. Many plummeted into debt. Even the most tender-hearted landlords tightened their squeeze on their small tenants; most lairds were now convinced that the only solution to their economic woes was to cause an absolute reduction in the dependent populations on their estates, and simultaneously to convert their lands to sheep grazings. [**44**] Some lairds simply sold up and were replaced by new men.

Before 1820 it was reasonably plausible to think that the people could be relocated on the coasts (as in Sutherland) to be re-established in more secure alternative livelihoods. After 1820 this assumption became simply impractical: most estate policy now became a matter of evacuation; each new census return gave statistical probability of an impending demographic crisis; and the population pessimists, the Malthusians, supplied authoritative intellectual support to policies designed to diminish the population of the Highlands. The idea of clearance was given powerful renewed impetus.

Hence the removals continued in many different modes throughout the following decades, usually without fanfare or notice or restraint. Glenorchy was cleared and so were Glen Quoich and the Braes of Taymouth; Glen Dee was cleared for deer (a very early example, in 1829), Glen Ey saw the eviction of nine families in about 1830, and so the story continued. There were second-round clearances in Bighouse in 1831 when 126 families were removed to the coast; in 1839–41 a tenant named Anderson executed removals at Rispond expressly against the wishes of his landlord who was helpless to prevent the episode. Benbecula was cleared and much emigration followed (Campey 2004: 116f.). In 1848 the island of Handa was converted into a sheep farm by the local factor, Evander Maciver; Shegra was also cleared. Between 1846 and 1851 the islands of Ulva and Gometra were almost totally cleared;

the population of Iona fell from 520 in 1846 to 236 in 1861; clearances in Tiree halved the population by 1880. Calgary Island had been cleared in 1822; the Treshnish Islands were finally cleared in 1834; Jura was also much reduced in the 1830s (Duncan 2004: 168). Even in the extreme north of the region – in Shetland – evictions, connected with the reorganisation of agriculture were widespread by the 1840s, when new farms were being formed. Tenants were shifted about, some evicted altogether without alternative placements on the estate (Smith 1984: 127). These were variants on the Highland story. [**55**]

Clearances were executed even as far as Arran in the south-west (and the distinction between Highland and Lowland thus eroded). Arran experienced particularly comprehensive removals in 1828–9 when 1,500 people were cleared, 20 per cent of the entire population of the island. In this case the landlord, rather than introducing sheep, was essentially attempting to modernise the rural economy of his estates by eradicating traditional communal practices and reducing the population dependent on his land. This required the elimination of three-quarters of the small tenants for whom there were no alternative forms of employment; moreover, the population had increased by 26 per cent within the previous twenty years with a growing dependence on kelp production and the other elements of the traditional economy. Falling prices (of kelp and cattle in particular) brought on a crisis in the 1820s. The landlord had always opposed emigration but now faced new imperatives. The crisis was evidently demographically driven. As the landlord expressed the situation:

> As the people marry young, and little emigration has hitherto taken place from the island, the whole population may now be safely assumed to be nearly seven thousand, a population by far too great to be subsisted on the island, with little profitable employment and few means of subsistance [sic], and the fishery for the last nine years been almost a complete failure. (Little 1999: 140)

It would, he observed, be pointless to introduce manufacturing to Arran since the island could not possibly compete with the industrialised Lowlands. The only recourse was emigration, which, in conjunction with removals, became the policy of the estate. In the outcome these plans were knocked off course and many of the people remained on the island and relatively few accepted assisted passages to Canada. The Arran case was salutary because it had little to do with sheep farming and was essentially a struggle between a swelling population and a landlord motivated by Improvement ideology and his determination to maintain control of his land (Little 1999).

The great island of Lewis also experienced clearances and soon most of the Hebrides saw similar scenes – such as the events in Harris described at the start of this chapter. Across in the north-east, in the largely non-Highland county of Caithness, piecemeal changes were spread over more than fifty years – the tenantry shifted about to make way for cattle, sheep and other alternative uses of their lands. Sometimes landlords here and elsewhere in Britain removed small tenants not only because they paid poor rents, but also to prevent them becoming still greater burdens on estate finances.

Conditions worsened further in the mid-1830s in many parts when famine and near-famine conditions returned (the worst previous year had been 1817). When large plans emerged to relieve poverty and hunger there were parallel projects to diminish populations by way of assisted emigration, and these were widely extended in the 1840s. The people were recruited for emigration in many westerly places – even people in St Kilda were caught up in the exodus. From the Outer Hebrides to east Sutherland, emigration schemes were pressed upon the people, often in the guise of philanthropic relief. [**48, 49, 53, 54, 68**] At all times the motives of the landlords were regarded by critics and unsympathetic outsiders with extreme scepticism. Some landlords lost patience and seemed to coerce their tenantries into agreeing to emigrate. Their subsequent condemnation was quickly extended to all Highland lairds, regardless of several unambiguous humanitarian policies adopted during the famines.

During the 1850s some of the best reported and most vociferous episodes of physical eviction and resistance occurred in the Highlands. A succession of bitter episodes – in Greenyards, in North Uist, at Coigach, at Knoydart– generated spectacles of ruthless landlord power exerted against defenceless pauperised tenantries, and their plight was reported by some of the most vigorous journalism (and invective) of the day. The name of Highland landlordism was besmirched forever and it was barely possible to speak their case against the torrent of criticism. By the 1850s public opinion was sufficiently awakened to give great attention to some of the last major clearances, for instance at Coigach in the west (1852/53) and Greenyards in the east (in 1854). [**15, 25, 70**]

The events of the 1840s and '50s set the seal on the Highland debate, but the government was still able to avoid intervention for several more decades. By 1855 few landlords were prepared to run the gauntlet of public opprobrium – the set-piece clearance was effectively outlawed. [**64**] By then another element had entered the story, namely the

Figure 8. Rev. Thomas Robert Malthus (1766–1834), the economic theorist who warned of the perils of unchecked population growth; much admired among the clearing landlords and their advisers.

conversion of large tracts of the Highlands into sporting estates, often requiring not only the removal of people but even of the sheep that had preceded the deer. In the final decades of the century deer forests spread rapidly and in several cases required the clearing of both people and sheep from the sporting lands. [**63, 79**] This synchronised with the profitability of sheep farming (which ran into hard times and falling wool prices at various times in the century) [**Table 3**] and with the demand for sport which rose with the affluence of the upper and aspirant classes of industrial Britain in Victorian times. These were the 'Nimrods' of the late nineteenth century. [**77**]

The convergence of southern notions of sport with Highland realities was nicely captured in an advertisement for a Highland shooting estate in the 1880s. The Highland Sportsman Agency at 43 Bond Street, London offered the following property:

> INVERNESS-SHIRE: This estate comprises 20,000 acres and is capable of grazing 6,000 sheep. It would readily convert into deer forest. There are no crofters. (Mackenzie 1988: 407)

The decline of clearances after 1855 was a ragged process, partly because the sheepfarmers faced falling prices and productivity. One response was to intensify production and reduce costs (with the concomitant elimination of some sheepfarmers); another was to convert sheep farms to deer forests. In some places these changes exerted further pressure on the crofting populations (some of which continued to grow, as in Lewis). But a new balance seemed to emerge: the crofters experienced better seasons and reasonable cattle prices; their rents did not rise in general; their numbers in most locations were falling and they were coping by various stratagems including the income derived from seasonal migration. The pace of clearance decelerated and the years from 1855 to 1880 were relatively quiescent if not actually prosperous. The eruption of well-coordinated revolt among the crofters in the late 1870s remains difficult to explain and a matter of debate. Some historians stress the idea of rising but blocked aspirations among the crofters; others emphasise the delayed but accumulating expression of grievance against past oppression; both are consistent with an increasing sense of political consciousness in the wider crofter community. This debate, however, unlike its Irish counterpart, lacks detailed analysis of the texture and economics of landlord–tenant relations over the critical decades.

In the 1880s the crofters were surprisingly able to mobilise and articulate their collective grievances before the Napier Commission.

The campaign and the outcome suddenly politicised the entire Highland debate and finally applied effective brakes to the exercise of landlord power in the region. The great Clearances, conventionally defined, were over. The population of the Highlands, however, continued to decline and at an accelerating rate.

5. Landlord Power, Landlord Weakness

The removal party was not the only form of coercion in the Highlands. There were more pervasive pressures which worked to lever out the people from their old communities. Wherever the agricultural sector responded to national needs, market mechanisms were set in motion that promoted changes in land use. Eventually the pressures were transmitted to the least efficient or least commercial elements in the community, helping to dislodge them in favour of producers who promised and delivered a higher yield to the land and capital and paid better rents. In the Highlands the generalised duress took the form of the inexorable upward movement of rents from about 1760 to 1815, which effectively pushed out the least able to pay, and which was mainly fuelled by the competition of incoming sheepfarmers (see Richards 1985: Appendix, p. 504ff.). After that, falling prices worked to produce the same effect.

Sometimes the pressure came to a sharp focus – when, for instance, a tacksman's lease ended and newcomers entered the local arena and bid up the rent beyond the capability or willingness of the current occupiers to pay. [**28**] This was the most common precipitant of a large-scale eviction. More usual was the gradual attrition of the local population, of people choosing to walk off the land rather than accept the more stringent conditions of land holding. *In extremis* some of the poorest elements of the crofting population begged their landlords for assistance to emigrate. Whatever the particular propellant, these people became part of the general mobility patterns of agrarian change, moving to local villages or adjacent estates, perhaps as a prelude to a move to the coast or to the south or even abroad.

In the broad transformation of Highland land use, therefore, coercion came in several forms. Some landlords argued that removals were necessary because the people were too numerous and were propelling the entire region to the brink of famine; depopulation was imperative for their own good. This, however, was a reversal of the more common logic of the situation. The poverty of the people and their general inability to pay economic rents simply rendered alternative uses

of the land the more attractive. Moreover, there were managerial benefits from a cleared estate – it was much easier and cheaper to extract rents from a few dozen capitalist tenants than from a dense population of hundreds of lotters, often sick, or in debt, or dragging their feet. Landlords held the levers of power in the Highlands and they made decisions on behalf of the region: their legal rights were exceptionally well defined and they possessed formal authority to evict wherever they wished.

Improvement propagandists approved and encouraged landlords to increase the scale of operations and the introduction of sheep-farming tenants with good reserves of capital. The old peasant agriculture was not only palpably less competitive, it was equally a waste of the region's resources and could not even provide the people themselves with a decent secure livelihood. The ultimate causes of the Highland Clearances were located in the extraordinary increase in the nation's demands for food and raw materials which in turn generated internal pressures (over many decades) for a structural transformation of the northern economy. But it was set in a context of recurrent food shortages among a growing and increasingly congested population which experienced dangerous famine conditions, notably in 1836–7 and 1846–51, but also in the decades before and after these appalling episodes of widespread pre-industrial hunger (Richards and Clough 1989).

The landlords therefore were, in a sense, merely the intermediaries in this structural change. But they reacted to it in different ways. Some followed the trend (and their own financial interest) without much restraint: they cleared their estates. Others accepted the general dictates of the economy with great hesitation, often precipitated into radical change by some local circumstances such as an impending bankruptcy, or a change in ownership, or a subsistence crisis among the crofters on an estate. Some landlords tried to compromise, and attempted to balance the introduction of capitalist agriculture with the retention and redeployment of the old population within their estates. This compromise was the main origin of crofting in the nineteenth-century Highlands. Other landowners delayed the change as long as possible, often attempting to extract as much rent increase from the old occupiers as they could. Some of them permitted subdivision to a frightening extent. [**3, 4**] A few landlords were successfully blocked by popular resistance (or the threat of it) and were unable to restructure their estate economies. The experience of the nineteenth century contained a great variety of responses to Highland circumstances: the

sobering result was almost universally the same – namely the drain of people out of the region regardless of landlord policy. Even the institution of the Crofter Commission in the 1880s was unable to staunch the flow, though it may have reduced its rate for several decades.

6. Perceptions, Contemporary and Retrospective

The long historical sweep of the Highland Clearances is not easily captured in a handful of documents. It is obviously tempting to concentrate on a few dramatic events, shorn of their contexts, such as the 1792 'Insurrection', the Sellar affair and the so-called 'Battles' at Greenyards. The debate is largely shaped by this highly selective perception of the process. Moreover, the contemporary reportage of the Clearances was never better than haphazard in the local and Scottish newspapers. Legal records provide better evidence of the thousands of 'notices of removal' and also of the court cases against resisting tenants. [**35**] Much more detail survives in the records of the estate offices which were, in reality, the key bureaucracy in the Highlands. The latter yield the most direct documentation of the events, inevitably reflecting landlord perspectives. This does not render the source unserviceable, but their use requires elaborate allowance for its obvious *parti pris*. For instance, the Sellar episode (the most controversial in the entire history of the clearances), even when described in the Sutherland estate archives, is unquestionably a moment of dislocation on a massive scale. Estate papers created a voluminous and detailed documentation that provides much of the inside story of the events, often revealing the thinking and methods of the clearers without regard to public opinion. [**28, 30**]

On the other side of the historical account is the oral tradition and retrospective memoir, of which there is a large amount. This too carries an intrinsic set of problems, including the weakness of memory, the tendency to dramatisation, the foibles of nostalgia, and the settling of old scores. Nevertheless the oral record, now much more systematically accessible, is the best window into the world of the small tenants, into the mentalities of the people whose lives were literally dislocated by the Clearances which swept them from the land. [**23, 77**] To this source should be added the testimonies of external witnesses, including those of travellers and investigative writers who witnessed some of the events and their aftermath. As a rule the more diversified the sources the better the historical balance. [**40**]

Changing documentation and new historical approaches eventually shift the bases of historical debate. This has happened recently and the chronology and the geography of the Highland Clearances (which conventionally concentrates attention on northern Scotland in the years 1790 to 1855) have both been questioned. First has been the belated discovery of parallel rural changes in the south of Scotland which were arguably comparable with those in the north, and now labelled as 'The Lowland Clearances'. This is a valuable extension of the debate because it reduces the claim of exceptionality in the Highlands and draws attention to the wider shifts that affected rural society in other parts of Scotland – often with highly disruptive and radical consequences, and often associated with comparable degrees of depopulation. A renewed spotlight on the 'Lowland Clearances' helps lift the Highland case out of its parochial containment and widens the historical questions to which the Highland experience can productively connect (Devine 1994; Aitchison and Cassell 2003).

The second adjustment of focus relates essentially to the way in which the Clearances are periodised in the Highland narrative. Macinnes has redrawn the timetable of the Clearances in three phases, which lengthens the phenomena across as much as two centuries. The first phase includes the years from the 1730s to the 1820s, incorporating the shift from clanship arrangements to commercial landlordism, the break-up of the traditional townships and the decline of the tacksmen – in their place emerged individual tenancies, large and small, most notably in the form of great cattle and sheep farms, and the spread of crofting, which helped to retain the population. In the second phase (from the 1820s to the 1880s) these tendencies were intensified with the triumph of sheepfarming and the deer forests. The collapse of the old economy, and the narrow base of subsistence in crofting, combined with recurrent famine to force emigration and depopulation. In the final phase the government at last intervened, reducing some of the power of the landlords and providing some subsidisation of emigration; but the 'haemorrhaging' of the region continued and population fell further (Macinnes 1988: 70–89).

The combined effect of these two interpretations is to reduce the drama and the exceptional character of the Clearances: they diminish decisively the scale and suddenness of the events reported in many parts of the Highlands. Clearly many of the changes in the Highlands were gradual, almost imperceptible, and scarcely different in kind from those in other places. But the agrarian transformation in the Highlands was also distinctive in that it featured many episodes of mass eviction

Figure 9. A Highland eviction in the late nineteenth century, beyond the main period of Clearances, showing the removal of tenants from a traditional settlement, and depicting the typical house construction of the day.

during short periods of time – sudden cataclysmic, indeed explosive, change involving hundreds, even thousands, of people in one or two fell swoops. The degree of coercion involved, and the velocity and the consequences are all at issue here, but in the Highlands the events were often much more dramatic than in other places (excluding the Irish case). The power of the landlords in Scotland enabled them to implement, says Mackillop, 'the most revolutionary and rapid programme of agrarian improvement within either Britain or Ireland' (Mackillop 2003). The degree of depopulation was probably greater and swifter than elsewhere. The absence of compensation or redress was total in most cases. A high proportion of the affected population possessed no legal title to the lands. The change was more difficult than elsewhere in Scotland and England for geographical and demographic reasons. The consequences were more radical and structural – and connected too with language and cultural decline, and with further measures of immiseration – though this is still debatable on the evidence currently available. In the outcome, according to R. H. Campbell, the Highlands were left as a 'festering sore' (Campbell 1988: 101). How the Highlanders reacted to this experience is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

Protest and Resistance during the Clearances

1. The Passive Highlanders

The Highlanders were often thought of as victims of their own passivity and restraint during the Highland Clearances: broken by the impact of Culloden, they withdrew into a pathetic stoicism and met their fate without resistance or even volition. They were cowed into submission, led by their ministers who preached cooperation and compliance. The Highlanders turned inward upon themselves and made no resistance to their eviction. Typical of this vein is the comment of Richard Muir (1982: 184): 'One cannot help but think that had they turned guerillas and assassins they could never have been defeated in the glens and rocky fastnesses of the Highlands.' Is this a fair, true and agreed verdict?

When any rural community faces radical transformation imposed from above the consequences often take the form of dislocation, eviction, loss of security and stability, a reduction of status and a breakdown of the common bases of life. These sorts of changes (which occur across the world at different times) often induce reactions of disbelief that the hereditary and traditional leaders of their societies could behave in such a manner. Sometimes the reactions are more physical and political, depending on the context and geography in which rural transformation occurs (Thompson 1991).

The Scottish Highlands, as we have seen, experienced (after 1815) long-term deterioration in general conditions, as well as explosive episodes of sudden upheaval (as in the evictions). Mostly these events occurred amid a relatively dispersed population. This was not a region easily galvanised into coordinated action, let alone opposition. Nor was there any ongoing leadership or sense of solidarity among the people facing agrarian change. Even the landlords as a class found it extraordinarily difficult to coordinate any all-Highland association to

further their collective interests: they too were dispersed and disengaged from each other. There were few natural centres of opinion by which to gather the political or oppositional forces of the region. Inverness was too far from Lewis and Shetland and Arran. Stornoway was similarly distant from the south-east, and Oban became a centre only when railways and ferries connected it to the rest of the world. Most other places were too small and dispersed to exert any general influence.

The most likely nodes of popular opinion making were the new fishing villages – especially in Caithness – which enjoyed regular connections around the coasts and some possessed their own newspapers. Communities such as John O'Groats and Latheron and the Easter Ross fishing villages were natural concentrations of potentially radical sentiment, among the free spirits in the fishing communities. They indeed emerged as the most likely centres of radicalism, feared by the local establishments at several moments in the age of the removals. They were also significant because they were the usual magnets for the people extruded from the nearby glens, displaced by the Clearances. These same villages mounted some of the last episodes of food riot (a classic pre-industrial form of protest) encountered in British history (Richards 1982b).

Highlanders therefore laboured under disadvantages when compared with other societies undergoing rural transformation. In any case it was always difficult for rural communities to resist such changes. The historical record within and beyond Scotland offers a set of standards by which to judge the Highland record of protest and resistance. This evidence helps place the question in perspective and renders the Highland response less surprising than is often claimed.

2. The Common Pattern

The actual record of physical resistance shows that the scale and form of Highland resistance was greater and more interesting than it used to be understood. In the main period of evictions the most striking impression is one of sporadic but repeated eruptions of resistance to established authority, usually directed against the clearing sheepfarmers and the landlords. Across this period there were at least fifty episodes during which the forces of law and order were challenged by the will of the people. [**61**] Though the record is varied and displayed much improvisation of resistance, there was a markedly recurring pattern in the form and technique of popular protest. And, as well as the pattern of sporadic protest, there were three occasions of unusually ambitious

resistance, characterised by sustained and coordinated pressure. On these three occasions there was a perceived generalised threat to the progress of the Clearances.

Disorder on Highland estates was nothing new. There was, for instance, widespread disaffection in the mid-eighteenth century on the Argyll estates where the landlord's ambitious plans to reorganise his estates were repeatedly frustrated and restrained by a spirit of resistance among the common tenantry. Sporadic rioting was reported in other places too, but intensified with the arrival of the sheepfarmers from the south, often manifested in a low-level intimidation which was rarely recorded. In 1782 at Letterfinlay in Lochaber a visiting prospective sheepfarmer from the south was set upon by groups of local women and given a very rough reception designed to dissuade him from his enterprise. A second round of intimidation contained a mixture of abuse, threats and several gunshots (the last very unusual in the Highland context). There was no further action and the opposition fizzled out. But when Sir John Ross of Balnagowan arranged to rent out lands to a new sheepfarmer, Geddes, a local combination was mounted to steal and destroy the incoming sheep stock. At the end of the century John Ramsay predicted a physical collision from the rising tension of the times: 'The indifference and selfishness of many landlords have converted the love and veneration of the common people into hatred and alienation which will undoubtedly break out into violence in some fresh provocation' (Richards 1985: 302–3).

These were early and relatively minor symptoms of opposition to the new sheep economy. Sheepfarmers felt the rising contempt and repugnance of the local people – such as the two pioneering sheepfarmers who arrived in Inverness-shire in 1795, reporting that they were 'somewhat alarmed and apprehensive of not being relished by the present possessors and others'. In many instances this feeling was expressed in low-level intimidation of the new sheepfarmers, usually by way of sheep thefts, but also several maiming episodes and some anonymous letters directed at the sheepfarmers' families (and even their wives if they were Highland-born). Such hostility was widespread and sustained, though it was not necessarily expressed in a physical form. [**33**] A visitor to Sutherland in 1808 noted how Lady Stafford was 'very much abused for turning off last year a great number of small tenants who had held land under the family for upwards of two hundred years, and making sheep farms' (Richards 1985: 303). A decade later, sheep thefts rose to 1,500 in a single year and prompted the formation of the Sutherland Association against Felonry (Bangor-Jones 1998: 24–5).

Highlanders resisted and obstructed what they regarded as unfair impositions by their betters. The best-known form of action was the resistance to the choice of ministers of the church forced through by the landlord against their own preference. Induction riots had been common since the beginning of the previous century, and recurred throughout these years, ultimately exploding into the Disruption in the Highlands, when a comprehensive challenge to the authority of the landlords caused an almost total withdrawal of the people from the established Church.

Among the many examples of resistance to clearances, the relatively late event at Coigach in Wester Ross in 1852–3 captured most of the repeated features of such events. Coigach, on the isolated north-west coast, witnessed stout resistance to a tentative effort to resettle the people in order to accommodate a new sporting tenant. The Sheriff's officers serving legal notices were deforced by the women: 'The men formed the second line of defence in case the women should receive any ill treatment.' In February 1853 the landlord ordered a final determined attempt to impose her authority on the resistant community. The officer sent to the district to serve the summonses had no success.

> The summonses were forcibly taken from him and destroyed and himself grossly maltreated though fortunately without any serious injury to his person … The officer was entirely stripped of his clothes by these rebels, and was put into the boat in which he went to Coigach in a state of almost total nudity.

Four weeks later the entire episode was repeated when a party of six constables took on the assembled womenfolk of Coigach, but with no greater success. For the landlord there was extreme frustration. The entire affair had been conducted in a blaze of publicity that raised larger questions concerned with the maintenance of property rights and the authority of the law. The Coigach people held out for more than two years and eventually the estate managers and the landlord gave up the effort to resettle them. As an agent said, 'the people in that district have lost all respect for Constituted Authority'. Another declared that 'the people must submit for there is a prevalent feeling over all the West Coast north and south that the Government are not serious in their desire to enforce the law'. It was transparently obvious that the clearance could not be executed without military intervention, and the landlord was not prepared to stomach the odium of such an action. The Coigach people stayed put. The whole episode vividly demonstrated the weakness of local resources of law and order. Underlying the landlord's attitude was a fear of Highland radicalism and a widening (though far

from universal) sensitivity to public opinion. [**64**] But there was also a developing confidence among the crofters. Indeed the success of the Coigach people may have reinforced the resolution of other crofters to resist clearances in the following two years. Equally, it may have strengthened the determination of other landlords to crack down upon any opposition before its infection spread. In the event it was no more than a prelude to some of the most violent confrontation and resistance that had been witnessed in the Highlands at Knoydart and Greenyards in the mid 1850s (Richards and Clough 1989: ch. 17).

From the many examples of obstruction and resistance emerges an almost stylised mode of action. [**57, 69, 70, 75**] Typically the anti-eviction episode followed a pattern in these four stages:

1. The local law officer or the landlord's agent would attempt to serve the summons of removal on a village. The first time he might simply be turned away. The second time he would be subjected to petty humiliation, usually at the hands of the womenfolk of the village. They might seize his papers and burn them under his nose. Sometimes the officer was stripped naked and chased off the land – or even pushed out to sea in an open boat without oars.
2. A posse of constables led by a Sheriff and his assistants would arrive, often very early in the morning. Real resistance would follow: they would be assaulted with volleys of stones and sticks from a massed group of the common people. In the front line of the latter were, invariably, the women and boys, making most noise and taking the worst injuries. Sometimes men were reported at the front – often dressed as women. But most of the menfolk were to the rear, apparently as a second line of defence. The resistance was usually sufficiently vociferous and violent to push back the posse. Meanwhile, the common people might have made an appeal to some distant authority: the Prince Regent, the press, local worthies or even the landlord.
3. Higher legal authorities would be alerted: the Solicitor General, or the Lord Advocate, or perhaps the Home Office. Repeatedly the local landowners, in an advanced state of panic, would attribute the disturbances to agitators with suspected connections with 'Radicalism'. Sometimes there was inflated talk of a 'Northern Rebellion' which helped persuade the authorities that military intervention was required – from Inverness, Fort William, Aberdeen or Glasgow.
4. The news of impending military intervention was usually enough of itself to lead to a collapse of the resistance. Troops intervened on at

least ten occasions but were never actually engaged in physical hostilities. The termination of resistance was frequently facilitated by the mediation of the local minister who produced a face-saving formula for the people. It generally took the form of a delay of removal, but rarely did anything to prevent the eventual clearance.

Most of these incidents show the marks of desperation among the people – unpreparedness, absence of arms, lack of coordination, no clear leadership, and the final collapse in the face of military intervention.

In the majority of Highland disturbances women took a prominent, sometimes a dominant, role. Frequently the menfolk held back, apparently waiting for further developments. Highland riots were women's riots. At Culrain in 1820, and at Gruids in 1821, the women were at the forefront of the confrontations. At Durness in 1841 the women assaulted and humiliated the Sheriff's officers. At Sollas in 1849 the women confronted the officers; at Lochshiel in 1842 the eviction party was driven off by the womenfolk; at Glencalvie in 1843 it was the women who took the lead. At Greenyards in 1854 the local women bore the brunt of the armed attack by the constables, and the women sustained the worst injuries. It was a similar story at Knockan and Elphin in 1852, at Coigach and at Ullapool in 1852–3. Women were, later, a prominent element in the 'Battle of the Braes' in 1882. Still later, in December 1887, in crofter action against the landlord in Assynt (Sutherland), women, accompanied by men in women's clothes, were at the front of the resistance to the law – using strong language and throwing stones. They blackened their faces and drew their shawls across their faces. [**51, 61**]

The conspicuous place of women, and the transvestite element – of men dressing as women – were both recurrent features of Highland disturbances. Parallels with the French Revolution, and the Rebecca Riots (in Wales), spring to mind. Of the former Olwen Hufton argued forcefully that 'to appreciate the nearness of women to the Revolution one must understand their role in the family economy'. Like the womenfolk of Rebecca's Wales, Highland women shared fully in the most laborious tasks of the peasant economy. Nevertheless, it is not obvious how family roles are to be related to the propensity to violence and protest. A Sutherland agent remarked in 1821 that 'the opinion of the people here is that a woman can do anything with impunity'; it was thought (on both sides) that the constables and the troops were less likely to injure women than men. As well as this, it seems probable that

direct female activism was a characteristic of pre-industrial societies in conflict. It is well known that food rioting generally engaged high levels of female participation, probably because their conventional sex-roles exposed them most immediately to the threat of high food prices. Similarly, in a semi-communal peasant life the women directly involved in the domestic economy may have placed themselves in the front line when the fabric of social existence was under attack by way of eviction (Richards 1985: 334). [**52, 66**]

3. Three Exceptions

Beyond the common pattern of Highland resistance were three occasions when much more sustained and sophisticated strategies of opposition were mobilised. The most momentous of these events was the first, in 1792, in the so-called 'Year of the Sheep', celebrated in folklore and various evocations of the Clearances (most notably in Prebble's account).

The events in Easter Ross in the summer of 1792 were the first and virtually the last time that an effort was made to rouse the entire Highlands against the invasion of sheep and the disruption of the old way of life. The 1792 episode became a direct clash between the cattle-grazing peasantry and incoming sheepfarmers. The resistance began as a form of localised harassment of the incoming sheepfarmer and the theft of his livestock. But quickly the resistance recruited support for neighbouring farmers and some more distant assistance was garnered too. Suddenly therefore a coordinated revolt seemed to gel: widespread opposition to sheep farms was aroused and activated without much difficulty. It is unlikely that the plan could have developed at all without the considerable support of the community at large, both active and tacit. The strategy employed, however, was naïve: the incoming sheep-farmer was given rough treatment, bruised and humiliated; but the main thrust of the uprising was a direct attack on the sheep themselves – to chase them out of the northern Highlands altogether. The local gentry were rapidly brought to the point of panic, and although there were rumours of gunpowder running from Inverness, and of radical conspiracies, the entire business lacked not only violence but any suggestion of political consciousness. The whole affair evaporated with extraordinary rapidity as soon as troops appeared in the district. The 'uprising' was poorly organised, absurdly optimistic, and lacked any sustained plan or foresight. It was, in a technical sense, an un-sophisticated (though grandiloquently ambitious) piece of resistance.

Given the weaknesses in its organisation, the most remarkable feature of the episode was its duration (several weeks) and the tenacity of the resistance while it lasted. Eventually the arm of the law was strengthened by the military and the resistance was suppressed; the ringleaders were captured but cleverly absconded before their trial. The events entered the folk memory as a famous though Pyrrhic victory (Richards 1985: part 3).

The second large-scale challenge to the progress of the sheep was in the northern Highlands, in Strathnaver, the site of the greatest clearances of all, and entailed the relocation of several thousand people to the coast. The events in Sutherland in 1814 were in the second phase of the grand clearance plans undertaken by the Sutherland estate, the first having been executed in the years 1804–8. The reaction against renewed removals in Kildonan began in December 1812 in response to plans for removing at least sixty families; they were scheduled for resettlement along the coast, while their land was marked out for a new sheep farm. It is perfectly clear from the evidence in the factors' own correspondence that the people of Kildonan were smouldering with discontent at the landlord's programme of change. In January 1813 they presented a petition asking the proprietor to cancel the removal. They declared that they had been promised the occupation of the land when they 'furnished men for the 93rd Regiment'. Valuers who travelled to Kildonan to mark out the sheep farm and negotiate compensation were given short shrift by the mutinous people of the strath: they were ejected and threatened with violence should they return. The factor, William Young, described the popular opposition as 'a premeditated design to remain among the mountains in spite of every reasonable proposal to the contrary'.

Whitehall itself was apprehensive of rumours of a 'Highland Rebellion'. Alarmed estate administrators detailed the events to Sidmouth at the Home Office. The Sheriff Depute of the county, George Cranstoun, was warned that the rebellious insubordination might easily spread across the entire country, and that 'the whole people are anxiously watching the issue of the contest, for so it must now be called, some to resume farms they have formerly possessed, others to follow the same plan of resistance to other projected arrangements'. The people declared that their sons were defending the nation from Napoleon, and that they would unite to protect their lands from strangers. It was a straightforward contest for the control of the land.

The conflict stretched over many months and involved the threat of military intervention followed by a series of negotiations between the

landlord's agents and representatives of the people. The resettlement and removal programme was explained to the people. This was eventually executed in 1814 by Patrick Sellar, acting in his joint capacity as factor and incoming sheepfarmer. He was an impatient and awkward character invested with the power and responsibility of removing hundreds of people to create his own sheep farms. In the course of this work Sellar fell foul of many of the people in Sutherland – people who dragged their feet and resisted the legal instructions of the agents. Rough handling followed; people were injured, elderly folk included, and it is not unlikely that some died during this period of the evictions. Fire was employed to destroy the houses to prevent their reoccupation (a method by no means exclusive to the Highlands). Out of the confusion of eviction eventually emerged sensational accusations against Sellar and his men – that they had caused several deaths and were guilty of murder (culpable homicide). The eventual trial (in Inverness in 1816) exculpated Sellar and the Sutherland Clearances proceeded. His acquittal became a cause célèbre for opponents of the Clearances – the central example of the cynical triumph of landlord power over the wishes of the people. His descendants continued to defend his name even into the following century. [**29, 30, 31, 32, 38**]

The campaign against Sellar had been remarkably well coordinated and the leaders in the assault were almost certainly half-pay captains and tacksmen, middlemen in the old hierarchy, their economic status set at nothing by the Clearances. [**41**] The publicity generated by the affair was intensely embarrassing to the landlord's family; wisely, they did not underestimate the threat. Their anxiety was that the affair would eventually provoke the interest of parliamentary questions and inquiry. This was probably the greatest fear of the landlord class as a whole: that the noise emanating from the north would attract so much attention that Westminster would be compelled to intervene, even to the extent of clipping the wings of the landlords. It was not an entirely absurd fear, as events of the following fifty years eventually demonstrated. As for Sellar, he knew well the ferocity of the opposition and indeed the threat to his own life. As the Trial Report put the issue:

> This was not merely the trial of Mr Sellar, but in truth a conflict between the law of the land and a resistance to that law: … the question at issue involved the future fate and progress of agricultural and even moral improvements, in the county of Sutherland … [It is] in fact, a trial of strength between the abettors of anarchy and misrule, and the magistracy as well as the laws of the Country.

In other words, it was about the control of the land and the limits of landlord power (Richards 1999).

The third example of coordinated resistance to the Clearances occurred in Easter Ross in 1819 to 1820. Out of the blue emerged a sudden clamour among the people removed from the interior. A clever device was constructed to generate opposition to the impending clearances. It took the form of the Sutherland-shire Transatlantic Emigration Society, a Friendly Society for incoming evictees, led by its organiser, Thomas Dudgeon, a farmer and former tacksman. He opened a subscription to aid the emigration of the dispossessed Sutherland tenantry. This was regarded as provocative, offensive and challenging by the landlords who denied any need for emigration or for any organisation among the people. This, of course, was the perceived danger posed by the Society – for this was a time of radicalism in the south (coinciding with Peterloo and the Six Acts) and a shudder of fear passed through the local landowners. They believed that Dudgeon was a demagogue who was in league with radicals and was even likely to arm his associates against the landlords. Most of all, the association generated publicity which created great embarrassment and attracted newspaper attention, including that of the *Scotsman*. Large meetings were called with attendances estimated at over a thousand, which produced a great petition to the Regent and both Houses of Parliament pleading for grants of land and assistance to emigration. According to one extremely alarmed prospective sheepfarmer, the people 'were determined to have blood for blood in the struggle for keeping possession'. The most striking aspects of the event were threefold: the scale of the association, the severity of the anti-landlord publicity it attracted, and the influence of the remnants of the old recalcitrant class of tacksmen, half-pay officers and military pensioners who were a prevalent source of discontent in the post-war Highlands. In the event the Dudgeonite agitation did not catch fire and Dudgeon deserted the scene of the revolt.

Though the Dudgeonite episode quickly subsided, it was soon followed in the same district by a serious explosion of physical resistance. This occurred on the nearby estate of Munro of Novar at Culrain in March 1820, from which 600 people were marked out for eviction, this time with no alternative accommodation provided for the people affected. This turned into a full-scale version of the now commonplace model of Highland resistance: the obstruction of officers who attempted to deliver the notices of removal; their humiliation especially by the local womenfolk; the concentrated gathering of the entire population and recurrent melees with each attempt to serve the notices; and then the introduction of a Sheriff's party with constables

and armed militia backup. Even this was not enough to break the opposition and the landlords began to fear a widening uprising of radicalism in the eastern Highlands. The effect of the events in Culrain was the attraction of government attention and the intervention of a full military force to put down the 'Rebellion'. (Richards 1985: part 3)

4. 'A Disgruntled and Pious People'

There was therefore far more resistance, passive and active, to the Clearances than is commonly understood, but the fact remains that the resistance was, at best, only partially successful. Few clearances were actually stopped. Moreover, within this failure, the ministers of the established Church gained an unenviable reputation: they have been regarded as the 'quislings' of modern Highland history. Alexander Mackenzie wrote angrily: 'The professed ministers of religion sanctioned the iniquity [of the Clearances] and prostituted their sacred office and high calling.' W. C. Mackenzie concurred:

> The attitude of the clergy during the expatriation of the Highlanders was almost uniform in the absence of outspoken denunciation of an iniquitous injustice; … they were passive spectators of it; with hardly an exception, they showed themselves unworthy of their calling.

Certainly the influence of the clergy was considerable. As Eric Cregeen has said, 'in the nineteenth century the tacksman's role as a social leader and educator was largely taken over by the minister'. Moreover, the ministers were far from uncritical – the entries in the *New Statistical Account of Scotland* contained much explicit condemnation of the landlords and demonstrates how unsycophantic some ministers could be. This applied in Sutherland in particular, the county often represented as the most abused in this respect. But neither the ministers nor anyone else was able to see much possibility of sustained collective opposition to the widespread changes in the economy. [55]

Religion was one area of life in which the Highlanders were prepared to stand firm against the will of the landlord, and in which they were able to concert with astonishing (though not total) unanimity. The rioting against the induction of unacceptable ministers in the early nineteenth century was only a degree less violent than the anti-clearance agitation. In 1843 at the founding of the Free Church, 474 ministers walked out of the Church of Scotland in a gesture of extraordinary defiance, courage and self-sacrifice. The Disruption of the Church in the Highlands was a saga of social protest that produced

a measure of solidarity remarkable for its contrast with the weakness of organisation in the anti-clearance protests.

The relationship between landlord policy, religious dissidence and popular protest in the Highlands as elsewhere was a subtle and complex question. There were many occasions when the ministers of the established Church spoke, and wrote down, the case for the common people against the landlords. But the ministers, even those of the Free Church, did not lead the people in physical resistance. T. C. Smout has offered a general psychological proposition: that the Presbyterian revivalist movements provided a refuge into which passions were channelled away from violent opposition to landlords. In a vivid phrase he says that 'the people fled towards the compensations of an intense spiritual enthusiasm like leaves before a storm'. Thus in preaching a fatalistic acceptance of landlordism the ministers probably saved lives and avoided futile resistance: they dissuaded their people from violence in the face of the overwhelming power of the authorities. For the most part the role of the Highland ministers was not unlike that of Catholic priests in Irish rural disturbances of the early nineteenth century. They gave solace and mediation. They were leaders *of* the people, from *within* the crowd, but they cast their influence against the spontaneous resistance of the people. Nevertheless it is not the case that the ministers invariably deserted the common folk. The conventional view of the Highland clergy is close to a caricature. Their main social role was to reinforce the separation of the crofting community from the influence of established authority (in church and estate life) and to help create a parallel and introverted society better able to maintain its own values, and also to promote psychological and material self-help. (Brown 1987: 85).

The widespread desertion of people and ministers to the Free Church in the 1840s – in the face of considerable persecution – for once showed Highlanders effectively pitted against secular authority. But the role of the minister was often ambiguous and it would be a mistake to attribute all their defections to the Free Church in 1843 as connected with the Clearances: some of the ministers were themselves involved directly in agrarian improvements on the glebe which occasionally caused the displacement of their neighbours (Bangor-Jones 2000: 84). Nevertheless, the intensity of the conflict between landlords and people was severe, and the steadfast resistance of individuals and congregations often involved deprivation, self-sacrifice and eviction. There is a moving passage in *The Journal of Henry Cockburn* that bears witness to the extraordinary fortitude of the people. He wrote:

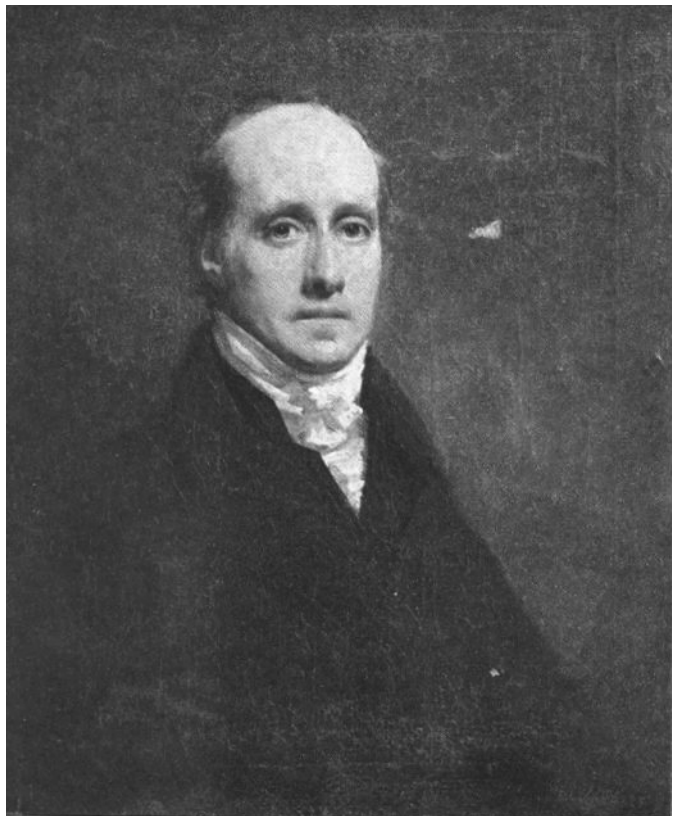


Figure 10. Lord Henry Cockburn (1779–1854), the distinguished judge who was appalled by the treatment of the small tenantry who resisted evictions in the 1840s and 1850s.

The favourite malice is for the deluded lords of the soil to refuse sites for churches or schools … The Ministers of the county of Sutherland, having suffered most, were each asked lately to say whether there was anything, and what, in his circumstances, which gave him a claim for consideration in the distribution of the Sustentation Fund. There is nothing more honourable to Scotland, and little more honourable to human nature, than the magnanimous answers by every one of these brave men. Not one of them made any claim. Each abjured it. One of them stated that though he had been turned out of a hovel he had got into last winter, and had been obliged to walk about thirty miles over snow, beside the cart which conveyed his wife and children to another district and had nothing, he was perfectly happy, and had no doubt that many of his brethren were better entitled to favour than he was. These are the men to make churches! These are the men to whom some wretched lairds think themselves superior! (Cockburn 1874: vol. 2, 79)

It was, of course, a most powerful psychological victory over the landlords, a unifying experience which helped build the communal confidence necessary for the assault that emerged in the 1870s and 1880s. [**56, 63**] It is indeed possible to identify a long but sporadic tradition of anti-landlord criticism among church ministers, even before the Disruption. Thereafter the tradition was maintained by men of the Free Church who explicitly blamed the landlords not merely for the evictions but also for the continuing poverty and squalid congestion in the west Highlands and Islands. Often this body of criticism was bitterly proclaimed from the pulpits and helped to sustain the sense of grievance and outrage in many communities. It was a line of thinking opposed to all suggestion of emigration as a solution to poverty which, they claimed, required the full restitution of the land to the people. These propositions welled up in the protests associated with the Crofters' Revolt in the 1880s (MacColl 2006: *passim*).

Amid the controversies raging over the Highland Clearances the question of emigration is among the stormiest. Highland emigration is commonly depicted as a coerced outcome of landlord policies of eviction. Yet emigration is also thought to have been an act of protest, and defiance and rejection of the new landlord order in the cleared Highlands. We have already noted that the early Atlantic and internal migrations predated the onset of the sheep economy. Moreover, the vivid evidence of the 1770s shows that emigrants leaving the Highlands cited rack-renting and imminent poverty (rather that outright eviction) as the spur to their departures. There is also good evidence of Highland tenants employing emigration as a negotiating tool to extract better terms from their landlords – thus a rent increase was countered with the threat to leave the estate entirely. Many emigrants in the years before 1815 appear to have been relatively wealthy, able to depart with large numbers of retainers and able to set up in America in considerable style. [**64, 5, 50**] Even after 1815 many Highland emigrants were people with capital seeking more rewarding avenues of investment across the Anglophone world (even to Australia). Until 1815 almost all landlords were alarmed by emigration and actively opposed the exodus wherever they could.

The argument that emigration was essentially a record of radical protest against agrarian transformation has been made most forcibly by the Canadian historian, Marianne McLean, who declares that 'rather than be exploited they left': the act of emigration enabled them to maintain the traditional self-reliance they were being denied at home; it was also an elaborate gesture of defiance and rejection against the

landlords in the Highlands. This was in a context of higher rents and growing population and at a time when landlords sought to retain their tenants. Macinnes draws attention to the fact that much of the emigration was entrepreneurial, in which process the tacksmen reaffirmed their managerial role by organising many of the early exoduses (Macinnes 1998: 232). Andrew Mackillop points out that growing competition for land in the Highlands (associated especially with the introduction of commercial cattle and sheep farming) transmitted tensions down to the lower strata of the population. This itself created 'inter-tenantry strain' and precipitated outward movements (Mackillop 1999: 243). [**9**] Each of these arguments derives ultimately from the enhanced competition for land in the Highlands that made the decision to emigrate to America an increasingly rational choice in the late eighteenth century. Nor should we underestimate the extraordinary magnetic attraction of land offered to prospective migrants. Thus in the 1760s emigrants from Islay to New York colony were offered up to 1,000 acres per adult and 500 acres per child. Similar enticements had attracted large consignments of families and servants as early as the 1730s and '40s (Ramsay 1991: 21ff.). A response to such temptation did not necessarily entail protest: substantial farmers from across the entire British Isles sought emigration under conditions in which they could acquire land on such wonderfully favourable terms, the more so after Waterloo (Macmillan 1973: 181–201). [**8**]

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the Clearances disengaged many of the people and they became more mobile. At particular times they manifested a high suggestibility to the blandishments of emigration agents as, for instance, at the time of Lord Selkirk's recruitments in Sutherland in the 1810s, despite the complications into which his plans always seemed to descend (Campey 2003: 87–90). Many Highlanders departed in sorrow and in deep poverty, accepting the most severe demands of emigration to escape worsening conditions in the north. [**50**] The acceleration of Highland emigration in the 1840s was clearly related to a severe combination of negative circumstances – including famine and eviction – combined with some philanthropic assistance schemes. Emigration was mainly an expression of the incapacity of the Highlands to accommodate the swollen population of this region. But it also contained a sense of collective rejection of the new Highlands working in tandem with the lure of attractions in the south and overseas. The psychology of emigration was always mixed, and not only in the Highlands. [**68**]

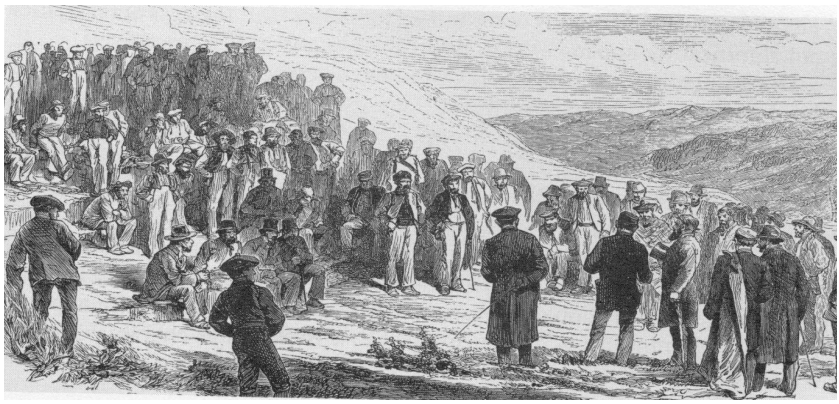


Figure 11. Crofter agitation, 1880s: concerted crofter action eventually emerged, after decades of sporadic resistance.

5. Resistance in Perspective

Apart from religion and emigration, intellectual and political leadership among the crofters emerged late in the piece and eventually erupted with remarkable success in the late 1870s as a preparation for the 'Land War'. Before that there were only isolated figures who offered even a meagre semblance of leadership – for example, Hugh Miller and, later, Alexander Mackenzie. More effective criticism of the lairds came from outside the Highlands and some possible inspiration from the land movements in contemporary Ireland (Cameron 2005: 633–66). The search for earlier origins in the Highlands tends to obscure the main historical problem – that is, the sheer unexpectedness of the crofters' revolt in the 1880s. Much of the evidence about resistance and protest, about the response of the Highlanders to the Clearances, is derived from outsiders and people who claimed to speak on their behalf. The great investigation of Highland conditions in 1883–4 (the Napier Commission) provided many volumes of nostalgia and bitterness of past times from the memories of people who had lived through parts of the Clearances. Inevitably there were faded, inaccurate and exaggerated testimonies among so much evidence (Bangor-Jones 1998: 36). [**38, 39, 74, 81**]

Direct contemporary evidence from the people is, at all times and places, sparse. One source, however, provides substantial compensation, namely the unwritten record of the Highlanders. The oral tradition of the Highlands has been gathered with great sensitivity and penetration in the past few decades. It derives from the popular poetic

memory, often in fragments of Gaelic poetry, and expresses at least part of the collective psyche, the mental world of the Highlanders during the times of displacement and dislocation. Verse, according to Donald Meek, was the main vehicle of popular expression in a society lacking, for instance, regular newspapers. Gaelic poetry provides access into 'the emotional reactions of the Highland people' and their 'priorities and values'. There is a sizeable and significant body of verse that constitutes 'the traditional Highland data-base … When such verses are taken to the bar of historical evidence, they are often found to be accurate in relation to the event described in them' (Meek 1995: 11; Leneman 1986: 64–73; Black 1986). [**23, 77**]

The content of this tradition is not easily interpreted. Sorley (Samuel) Maclean, for instance, regarded the poetry of the age of the Clearances as relatively thin, weak and lacking a clear voice. There was a perplexed response and 'an absurd tendency to blame the factor more than the landlord' [**73, 80**] – suggesting a persistent loyalty to the old traditions and to the established Church. As Maclean suggests, 'the Highlanders' resistance, physical and moral, was bound to be very weak, and the poetry of the period reflects this impotence' (Maclean 1937–41: 295–7). The poetry tended to be pathetic, depressing and hopeless in tone until the crofters were galvanised into action in the 1880s. Before that the Highlanders made little headway, poetically or intellectually, in fathoming these basic causes of their fate: they remained confused.

Yet there was plenty of evidence in the oral tradition of robust reaction at different moments in the long record of clearances. The elimination of tacksmen in the 1770s was greeted with some poetic pleasure; the notion of the clan's moral and collective right to the lands was re-echoed; and there was a rising chorus of contempt for the incoming Lowland shepherds and farmers, though the lairds tended still to be immune from the vilifying satire. Maclean notes the continuing currents of contempt into the nineteenth century, usually aimed at tacksmen and factors, and the recurrent 'union of anger and piercing sorrow', though often mixed with 'an uncritical idealisation of the pre-clearance period'. The poetic tradition Maclean summarises as the 'wail of a harassed and dejected people', the poetry of hopelessness.

Reviewing this long tradition and its access to the communal psychology of Highland society, Meek declares that at the moral centre of the poetic tradition was 'the view that the land was the property of the people, and not of any feudal superior'. Hence evictions were an unjust violation of a natural, albeit unwritten, law. Landlords were often viewed as impostors, usurping the role of the benevolent chieftains of

an earlier time, and misusing the land. Within this tradition there was a detectable 'deep undercurrent of anger' expressed in vigorous satire and vilification repeatedly aimed at landlords, factors and shepherds, and which serves to dispel 'the view that Highlanders reacted tamely, if at all, to the evictions and territorial engineering of the period'. Here indeed was a 'deep desire for vengeance' and it employed 'strong verbal weapons (Richards 1985: 17, 290–3).

If the poetic tradition expressed the psychological response to the Clearances, in Maclean's view it reflected also a stunned, perplexed and passive reaction to events. This can be juxtaposed with the actual record summarised in the first part of this book. Significantly, much of the oral tradition related to emigration – the departure of Highlanders aroused some of the most heartfelt poetry (and some of the most famous pictorial images) of the period. [**23, 70, 77**]

In the record of resistance, as well as in the anger captured in the oral testimonies, there has been a shift in the received perspectives on Highland experience. Thus when the 'Crofters' War' captured national attention and decisive legislative intervention in the 1880s, it was regarded as an entirely new experience in the north, out of character for a people known essentially for their total forbearance and passivity over the decades of clearance. Now it is clear that virtually all the features of the crofters' agitation had their forerunners in the path of protest that had been reported so often over the previous eighty years. The main difference, of course, was the ultimate success of the later agitation. Otherwise it was a record of continuity with the tradition of sporadic protest in the Highlands. The critical differences, in the 1870s and 1880s, were related to the politicisation of the resistance, the recruitment of outside support, and the development of a unifying ideology among the crofters. By the 1880s two other differences had emerged: first, the lines of communications were much improved (even to the most remote parts of the Highlands); and second, the government and nation at large had become much more sensitive to stories of ill-usage in the Highlands – the moral climate outwith the Highlands came to converge with the moral economy of the traditional society. It was an unusual irony not much recognised at the time.

CHAPTER 5

The Blame Game

1. Reputations and Decline

Highland history has run a strange course. Even before the Victorian era, an 'invented tradition' had transmogrified the Highlander from an object of distrust and antipathy into a romantic figure. For this Dr Johnson and Sir Walter Scott take most responsibility. The Highlander became fully assimilated into the Scottish national identity, a tartanised image towards which most Lowlanders and émigrés happily cleaved. As Leah Leneman remarked, Highland chiefs in 1746 had been regarded as 'the brutal oppressors of a slavish people', but were soon metamorphosed into the 'paternal protectors of a grateful peasantry' (Leneman 1988: 114–15). [**27**] Subsequently, of course, their clearing successors were excoriated and denounced throughout the nineteenth century: the verdict on the Highland landowners became enshrined in official opinion. Thus a government Committee in 1919 declared:

> when their action is viewed in the cold light of history, it is clear that the power of wholesale eviction by private persons was one which ought never to have been permitted, and one which was rendered doubly odious … by contrast with the patriarchal relations which existed between chief and clansmen down to the rising of '45. (Report of Committee on Deer Forests 1919: 1)

This was a view that clearly incorporated golden-age assumptions regarding life in the traditional Highlands. [**16**]

Recurrent efforts have since attempted to rehabilitate the collective reputation of the lairds, sometimes depicted as misunderstood (and muddle-headed) improvers who laboured against the odds and against ignorance, to bring better standards of welfare and development to the Highlands. [**72**] Less committed contributors to the debate regard the landlords as a variegated body of owners, not much different from landowners elsewhere in Britain: they were, however, unequal to the problems everyone faced in the difficult Highland context of the nine-

teenth century: Highland landlords were neither uniquely avaricious nor unusually neglectful in comparison with landlords elsewhere. Equally fanciful is the notion that the Highlanders at large were innately and disproportionately inert or resistant to change. Landlords and the people were both locked into circumstances which meant that the solution to the 'Highland problem' was more difficult than in most other contexts.

Another critical view is that the Clearances have been absurdly exaggerated in the Highland context and that they have monopolised far too much attention, detracting thereby from all the positive farming developments in the region. Much of the latter is recorded systematically in the maps, estate plans and architecture of the great estates. One historian has recently asserted, 'It is only by looking at what happened on the ground as well as the policies described in the documents that a full assessment of estate farming can be made' (Martins 1996–7: 33).

But the central fact of decline in the Highlands is inescapable: 'depopulation' became a byword for the northern experience through to the end of the twentieth century. The Highland Clearances coincided with the general and continuous decline of the population of the Highlands and Islands. Before 1850 the depopulating impact of clearances on inland zones was temporarily masked by internal shifts of people; subsequently even the total population fell continuously. The deserted landscapes, and the melancholy remnants of old habitations are testimony to this decline, though in reality many of the ruins are post-clearance buildings and easily misread (Muir 1982: ch. 7). The Clearances also coincided with the decline of Gaelic culture, most notably in the fall in the numbers of Gaelic-speakers and the inexorable incursion of the English language. Few would argue that the Clearances did not contribute to depopulation and cultural decline. But the consequences of the Clearances were intertwined with other simultaneous events and their results. Moreover, other rural regions of the British Isles in the past 200 years have equally suffered language decline, depopulation and cultural deprivation.

Concerted efforts to halt the decay of the Gaelic language were mainly unavailing. Local histories carry the account in fine detail. For example, the east coast of Sutherland, in the age of the Clearances, had been a prime reception zone for people shifted from the interiors. During that time the Sutherland estate invested large amounts of capital to create a new coastal economy, mainly around the fishing industry, designed to absorb the people cleared. These fishing communities, notably Brora, Embo, Helmsdale and Golspie, developed distinctively,

Figure 12. Abandoned houses at Poolewe, and a common scene in many parts of the Highlands; not necessarily the consequence of eviction but profoundly symbolic of population decline and the dispersal of old settlements.

and produced as well a particular local east Sutherland Gaelic. A later student of these fisherfolk followed their survival to the end of the twentieth century: she reports that they were regarded as 'a bitterly poor occupational subgroup', the last vestiges of a flawed exercise in economic planning – their survival a triumph of the will against the odds (Dorian 1985).

In the aftermath of the Clearances the accusations against the landlords (and more particularly their factors and agents) have inflated with the passage of time. Some of the vilification has become splenetic even though many of the basic propositions remain unclear. For instance, we simply do not know how many people were directly cleared off the land in the various categories of coerced movement. Aside from the Clearances, it is likely that the general inhospitable economic conditions, much worsened by population growth, induced many more people spontaneously to take the paths out of the Highlands. And when living standards improved more rapidly in the south, after 1850, the outflow accelerated. This was not exclusive to the Highlands. The historian of Glenesk in Angus summarised the wider phenomenon of rural outflow: 'The main causes of depopulation are the same as those that have affected other isolated highland areas, mainly in the attraction

of towns, want of employment opportunities, an increase in the size of family units, mechanisation and the lack of amenities' (Michie 2000).

Living standards in the Highlands were relatively low in comparison with the rest of the country throughout the succeeding decades. Net out-migration, except in the 1930s, has been continuous until very recently. An official report in 1938 drew comfort from the reduced outflow from the Highlands during the previous decade: this, it declared, would lead to increased reproduction in the region, and then enable the Highlands to 'renew the supply of recruits to Scotland and the Empire without endangering their ability to maintain their numbers in the future'. The Highlands would remain a population reservoir for the Empire (*The Highlands and Islands of Scotland* 1938: 158).

The general indictment of the clearing landlords related first to the alleged savagery of the Clearances – the sheer ferocity of some of the episodes of eviction. In this respect there is, as we have seen, no shortage of evidence of the severe measures resorted to, and the demolition, destruction and burning of the old houses and equipment in the interior glens. There were many episodes of direct confrontation and several pitched battles in which injuries were incurred on both sides. In some of the most infamous cases, as in Sutherland in 1813–14, houses were demolished or set afire in order to prevent their reoccupation by the evicted tenantry. All this was part and parcel of the process of forced eviction and there is clear evidence of atrocious behaviour by some of the evicting officers. Occasionally the evicting parties were in cahoots with emigration agencies who had contracted the people to depart on waiting ships. When some, at the last moment, refused to leave, pressure was applied to make them fulfil their promises. Rough handling and episodic resistance was bound to occur in circumstances of sudden agricultural reorganisation and eviction. The people were obviously being moved against their wishes and coercion was unavoidable. Some landowners were patient, some not. Often the work was done by factors or incoming farmers. Patrick Sellar in Sutherland in 1814 was both; he was frustrated and angry and used methods of eviction which few then or since could justify.

Summary eviction, at the best of times, was a harsh way to deal with people whose main crime was their poverty and their inability to pay economic rents (Gaskell 1980: 25). The history of evictions is full of strong-arm tactics, great distress among the people evicted, and alarming confrontations which inevitably led to manhandling and injury. The Clearances in the Highlands contained examples of this sort

though fewer and less ferocious than in other historical parallels, for example, in Ireland. It was impossible to move tens of thousands of reluctant people off their old lands without danger to life and limb. Yet the record of injury was relatively slight – despite the melodrama of Greenyards and Coigach – and it is difficult (perhaps impossible) to find a single death directly attributable to the clearers and their henchmen. This makes any talk of literal genocide wildly inappropriate.

2. Indictments and Good Intentions

A recurrent criticism made in the aftermath of the Clearances was that the leaders and the people of the region failed to respond to the challenges of the new era. These challenges included the commercial pressures and opportunities of the time, the subsistence crises that came to a climax in the famine of 1847–51, and the population surge that marked the decades after 1770. There is an impression that the region was collectively inert, unable or incapable of taking hold of its own fate. The Highlands allowed itself to become the playground for southern plutocrats, fringed by the rural squalor of crofting.

In the optimistic years before 1815 the landlords' rent rolls had fattened famously, even when they made virtually no investment in improvement and simply absorbed their windfall gains. Thus on the Locheil estates in Lochaber rents doubled between 1755 and 1788, and in Skye rents trebled in the third quarter of the century. All across the north landlords were reaping the benefits of rising commodity prices (generated in the south) and land values shot upwards even faster. It was all of a piece with general inflation across the country in the long secular trend to 1812: most prices rose though most of them not as fast as wool prices. [**Table 3**] It was perplexing that many Highland lairds failed to make permanent gains from their extraordinary good fortune. Even during the best of the inflationary decades many landowners screwed up their own consumption and expenses to such extremes that they negated the benefits of their swelling rent rolls. One of the most remarkable aspects of the clearance years was the collapse of so many estate finances and the subsequent accelerated turnover in the ranks of the landowners. This was common even in the good years before 1812; after that climacteric, when commodity prices plunged, there was a long sequence of bankruptcy and sales among Highland lands. The Clearances, therefore, were also associated with the clearing out of many hereditary landlords (Devine 1988: 149–50). [**81**]

The expansion of sheep farming created a great new land-monopolising industry in the Highlands. Sheep farming was land- and capital-intensive and possessed weak forward and backward linkages to produce any local demand for labour or secondary production. It had little use for the local labour supply and this was the dilemma at the very centre of the rural transformation of the region. Local and incoming sheep-farming entrepreneurs transformed the Highlands into a productive source of cheap wool and meat for the producers and consumers of the newly industrialising Britain. It was remarkably successful in this role, a vigorous dynamic response to the opportunities and demands of the times. But, by the same token, this very success measured the severity of the competition for the land which confronted the indigenous peasantry of the Highlands. They simply could not (without improbable adjustments) compete with the capital-intensive, scientific, highly calculating sheepfarmers, sensitive to all the economies of scale, to movements in market prices, able to pare costs to a minimum and to call on distant credit and plan a cycle of production which stretched over half a decade. Most of all, the sheepfarmers could pay much higher rents for the land – and the sheepfarmers competed ruthlessly with each other in the contest for survival of the very few who were fittest. This was industrial agriculture with a vengeance. In the first transition, until about 1810, almost all landlords believed that the displaced population could be usefully retained in alternative enterprise, usually associated with crofting, new villages and development in fishing, kelping and some manufactures. Landlords attempted to staunch the emigration and reap secondary benefits from extra rent. But it was not only a false promise; it compounded the regional problem when prices fell after 1815.

There were two intrinsic problems. One was that the numbers of both sheep and people rose dramatically, together thereby redoubling the pressure on land resources in the region. The second was that the old and new foundations of the Highland economy soon became seriously unstable: crisis inevitably beckoned. But the region was disadvantaged in another way too: geographical isolation and relatively poor resources had sustained a resolutely peasant structure longer than in most other parts. Consequently the region was less prepared for change than, say, the West Midlands of England or Lanarkshire. When it came, agrarian change was more precipitate and more far-reaching than elsewhere. Moreover, since this economy was unable (despite many aborted efforts) to industrialise or diversify along the model emerging in the industrial south, the dislocated people had far fewer

local alternatives once diverted from their old activities. To this great dilemma the landlords, as a class, had no answer.

After 1815 many of the landlords found themselves bankrupt or unable to make their estates pay. Their younger sons found no place in this society: at the end of the French Wars, according to Elizabeth Grant of Rothiemurchas they were 'shoved off about the world to scramble through it as best they could with little but their own good blood to help them' (Mackenzie 1988: 13). Many simply sold out to men of capital from outside the region who had mixed motives and aspirations. [**44**] But the record shows that even the most vigorously entrepreneurial of lairds after 1815 could neither produce large profits nor create the conditions for modern economic growth. The failure of so many capital-intensive projects in the Highlands (from the eighteenth century through to Lord Leverhulme in the early twentieth century) suggests that there were overwhelming constraints on economic activity which no amount of goodwill, or new energy, or even external capital, or greater regional autonomy, could have overcome (Hutchinson 2003). The entire history of the modern Highlands is pockmarked with unfulfilled schemes for development, with broken dreams of economic growth, fishing, manufacturing, mining, villages and new rural enterprise invariably dashed by the problems inherent in the region's geographical disadvantages. There were very few exceptions: one may have been the Traill estate in Caithness, which used waste land to encourage the settlement of about three hundred Highlanders from Assynt and Strathnaver (who had been removed with the introduction of sheep farming) and developed pavement quarries which succeeded (Purves 1875: 7).

The best test of the possibilities in the Highlands would be a carefully designed comparison with an alternative set of possibilities or a different sample of landlords – in effect a counterfactual in juxtaposition against the actual Highland experience of the nineteenth century. This is an extremely difficult exercise and has never been attempted, even though most of the debate about the Clearances hinges on implicit claims that the Highlands could have been differently and better managed in those years. Nevertheless, it is possible to compare the actual careers of several landlords whose intentions and policies were unquestionably sympathetic to the preservation of the traditional life of the Highlands.

John Mackenzie (1803–86), physician and landowner, became heir to a vast estate in the north-west Highlands as eleventh lord of Gairloch. In the 1830s and '40s Mackenzie made several visits to Belgium to study

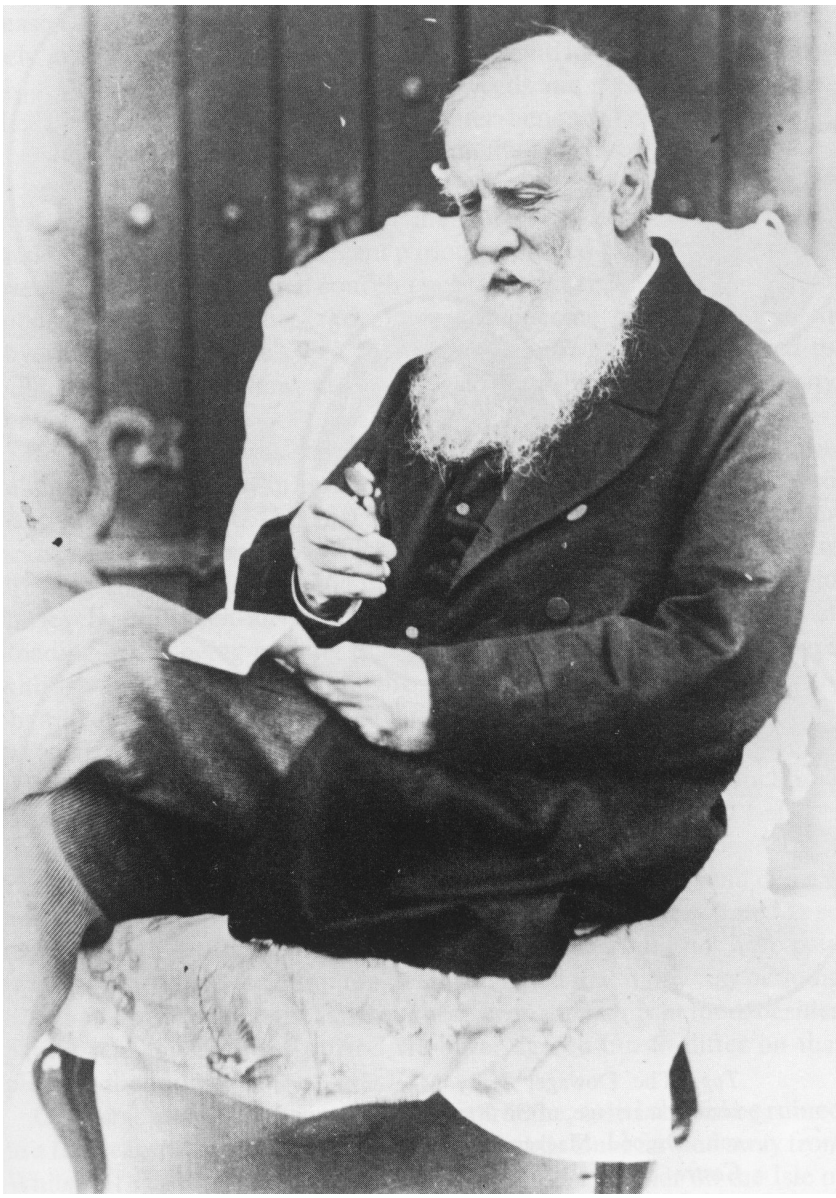


Figure 13. Dr John Mackenzie (1803–86), a landlord highly sympathetic to the Highlanders, who attempted benign improvements at Gairloch, which ended in near bankruptcy and conflict.

small farming methods, which he extolled in his pamphlet on the *Improvement of Highland Crofts* (1842). He believed in the gospel of small-scale production and advocated the adaptation of Highland crofts to the Flemish system of *petite culture*. Highland crofts suffered from 'miserably archaic methods of cultivation' and Mackenzie introduced an intensive form of cultivation for small family farms, integrating better animal husbandry to obtain several crops a year and a higher level of productivity. Mackenzie's declared philosophy was to develop crofting as an alternative to sheep farming and evictions, thus going against the grain of large-scale commercialism in the Highlands. Unhappily the entire Utopian enterprise at Gairloch was aborted and the estates eventually fell into a financial quagmire. As his biographer says, 'If the Mackenzies had elected to evict their hundreds of crofter tenants, and replace them with three or four large-scale sheep farmers, they could have at least doubled their income,' and estate administration would have been much easier too (Mackenzie 1988: 243–7, 285; Scrope 1849: 11–13). [**67, 79**]

Another case in point was that of David Stewart of Garth (1772–1829), who was the very model of the traditional patriarchal Highland laird: 'honest Garth … a highlander of the old stamp', said Walter Scott. There was 'No one kinder or more generous, the best … [and] more generally esteemed and beloved than any other man of his time.' Garth raised Highland regiments, led a distinguished and valiant military career, and possessed a good knowledge of Gaelic. When he inherited estates in Perthshire in 1821 he found them groaning under debt, typically strung up with obligations to miscellaneous family members. Moreover, the Perth estates were dependent on cross-subsidisation from the profits of slave estates owned by the family in the Caribbean. Meanwhile, Garth urged his fellow lairds in the Highlands to preserve their tenantries: in 1819 he wrote that 'the power and influence of Breadalbane is worth preserving especially if it can be done with better rents and more improvements than by depopulating the country and driving the people to banishment or begging'. Five years later he found himself urging his own tenants to emigrate; he hoped to encourage more efficient subsistence farming, yet he became an encloser and refused to grant his tenants leases while his own finances deteriorated cumulatively. He sought a rich wife without success but petitioned for a governorship in the West Indies and indeed gained a position in St Lucia but died soon after he arrived (Robertson 1998). [**42**] His estates were bankrupt. The Garth and Gairloch cases suggest that small-scale farming was an anachronism and doomed to failure. (We should note,

however, that some modern economists are becoming less dogmatic on this very issue (Mathias and Davis 1996: 1, 15).)

The majority of landlords were less tender-minded than Mackenzie and Stewart, and were increasingly faced with hordes of small tenants who, rather than sources of rental income, were unambiguous obstacles to a decent return on the capital value of the land. This economic dilemma was invested with greater piquancy by the vicarious guilt inherited from the actions of the previous generation of landlords who had encouraged the people to multiply to fill the regiments and harvest and process the kelp. The exquisite moral problem was sharpened further by the remnants of the old paternal notions of clan loyalty and reciprocation of obligations between landlord and tenant which had been re-romanticised notably by Sir Walter Scott and by David Stewart of Garth himself.

There was, indeed, always a sense of 'a moral economy' beyond the reign of legality in the Highlands. Sometimes it possessed a mystical aspect, as in the claim that Highlanders experienced an 'ever-present sense of the reality and existence of the other world of spiritual and psychic experience' (Campbell 1999: xxiii). The mentality was expressed in the notion of *dutchas* in Highland culture which made it 'A Land Apart', possessing a 'fragile heritage' with the unique 'attachments and exigencies of … Hebridean lives'. This special relationship to the land was a constant refrain over two centuries, enhanced further by the notion that west Highlanders had 'occupied the same rough patch of land for longer than any other group, indigenous or otherwise, in the United Kingdom. Their millennial unbroken tenure of the Highlands and Islands had resulted in a deep familiarity with and respect for its earth and sand. They moved from such gnosis only under duress, and they took it with them like a charm … Every fraction of those square miles was consequently dear. It was in fact beyond price' and reinforced by poverty and religion (Hutchinson 2003: 14).

Thus special claims were made on behalf of the Highlanders, including the idea that they were the last vestige of the once free peasantry, the people of Lewis being 'the only population in the United Kingdom who had avoided deracination', and had maintained their 'visceral attachment' to the land, even though 'the worst soil in Europe'. Most of all they wanted 'the egalitarian communion of their crofting townships' and to avoid the sort of proletarianisation offered by, for example, William Lever on Lewis in the 1920s (Hutchinson 2003: 151, 207). Looking beyond the Highlands, these forms of 'ruralist nostalgia' can be identified in many societies passing through such transform-

ations. Even Lord Prothero famously remarked that 'The severance of the English peasant from the soil is an economic change which most people deplore' (Collini 2004: 93–116). Land is widely invested with special symbolic force, 'as a resource, as a source of identity, and a form of power and sovereignty', and these notions were particularly strong in the Scottish Highlands (Rothery 2005: 625).

The Clearances cut through these remnants of the former system of social reciprocity by which the loyalty of the Highland tenantry had been repaid by reliable access to the land itself. The persistence and the strength of this reciprocal commitment was best revealed in times of war when the lairds expected 'their' people to enlist in their regiments. [**13, 21**] As the old system was eroded so this reciprocation dissolved; the overturning of the unwritten compact between the landlords and the people became the emotional core of the anger, frustration and protest which accompanied the Clearances. [**21**] But the traditional system of reciprocation was already in terminal decay even before Culloden: thereafter, for another fifty years, Highland lairds and the government both subscribed to the fiction that clanship was still alive, and that there was a reciprocal link between service and land holding. Recruitment to the regiments was exceptionally successful between 1756 and 1799, but it was based on a set of moribund assumptions that extended from the very top of Hanoverian government down through the lairds and even to the people themselves. That much of it is based on a fiction did not diminish the sense of betrayal when servicemen and their families were unceremoniously ousted in the Clearances.

Regimental service was of course a vital regional industry in its own right. Andrew Mackillop makes a highly suggestive comparison between the use of Highlanders in the British armies with the role of other peripheral and former frontier populations in Europe, citing the parallel example of the 'Austrian deployment of Croat populations in distinct military establishments' where 'a similar equation of military service with commercial underdevelopment was likewise applied to the regions by the governments' (Mackillop 2000: 236–7). The sharp reduction of military employment of Highlanders after Waterloo was a further depressant on the entire northern economy. [**21**]

The Highlanders sustained the reciprocal and anachronistic land argument with remarkable tenacity and success, and the historical assumptions of the Highland case were recognised by the Crofter Commission of the 1880s, which gave exceptional rights of tenure and security to the crofters. A century later the demand continued for the 'restitution' of the historical lands of the community, which is part of

the political reason why the Clearances continue to generate storms in Scotland even today. Modern legislation – in the form of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act - has radically altered the status of land holding in the Highlands. Under Section 3 of the Act, communities can force a laird to sell his land to them if public interest can be demonstrated to the Minister; the Scottish Land Fund has access to lottery money to help communities buy the land. This may be the final reversal of the powers of landlords that had been exercised most contentiously in the Clearances (*Guardian* 2004, 30 November, 5). [**80**]

3. Responsibility for Famine and Decline

There was a more complicated indictment which, in effect, blamed the Highland landlords for the ensuing poverty, overpopulation, famine, poor health and subsequent depopulation of the entire region. The Select Committee of Parliament in 1841 examined in considerable detail the question of emigration in relation to the condition of the Highlands. The Committee came to the verdict that the Highlands had 44,600 people who were 'surplus' to the capacity of the region to maintain them, and this accounted for 38 per cent of the entire population of the Highlands. Modern estimates suggest that the population had grown by more than 85,000 since the 1740s, an increase of about 74 per cent. This growth was not unique to the Highlands – it was a regional variant of the general surge of population which challenged the entire British Isles to find ways of coping with the vast number of extra mouths (Winch 2002: 7). [**35, 36, 47**]

In the Highlands there were two factors at work which conspired to exacerbate the problem of population growth. One was the prevailing policy to 1815 that a larger population was actually desirable. The landlords deliberately promoted closer settlement at the time of the expanding enterprise in kelp and fishing (Withers 1987). Moreover, the widespread expansion of demand for Highland commodities caused estate managements to dissuade prospective emigrants and to create centres of concentrated settlement, often in improvement villages and on crofter lands. This inevitably added to the density of population which later emerged as a structural problem especially in the west Highlands. This argument ceased to apply after 1815, when population continued to increase despite the clear reversal of landlord policy. The most exacerbating factor was the collapse of prices and income (and even production levels) in some of the key sectors after 1815 – kelp most catastrophically, but also cattle and fish production. [**Table 2**] This left a

congested population – much swollen by continuing demographic increases – dependent on smaller portions of land and, more and more, on potato production, which was usually a highly prolific source of basic food intake. [**60**]

The second factor was the behaviour of the small tenants themselves. Despite all the pressures (much of which derived from their own reproductive vigour in these decades) and a long tradition of emigration, the common people of the Highlands maintained a tenacious hold on the land: 'before 1846, despite dispossession, clearance, economic recession and harvest failure, the grip of the people on the land had not been broken'. In this interpretation – essentially Malthusian – there was a worsening 'imbalance between the rising population and the contraction in indigenous employment opportunities' (Devine 1988: 152–4). Despite much movement from the west coast, emigration was inadequate in preventing further population growth in many western parishes.

The ensuing famine – in 1847–51 in many parts of the western Highlands and Islands dependent on the potato crop – was 'the last great subsistence crisis on the British mainland'. In many instances the Clearances had intensified congestion and therefore also the vulnerability of the population. Only in a few cases where landlords (as in east Sutherland) made expensive efforts not only to reaccommodate the people but also to create a new economic infrastructure was there any positive benefit. Norman Macleod, the much-respected minister and publicist who raised considerable relief during the famine, claimed that the problem was not associated with 'any marked increase in population'. Instead he stressed other factors: 'The poverty was intensified by the emigration of the able bodied, and by the slow absorption of small farms into great sheep walks and deer forests, and by the cottars being thereby deprived of their small stock, out of work also, or driven into unproductive sea-side villages.' When the potato crop failed 'they had nothing to fall back upon' (Macleod 1889: xxxix). [**74, 78**]

Nevertheless, the problem of Highland poverty was beyond the capacity of most landlords to influence in any material fashion (Devine 1988: 141). They were not responsible for the catastrophic fall in prices; they were mostly not responsible for the devastating build-up of population in the region; their evictions probably reduced the aggregate population of the region. Moreover, landlords' resources were inevitably depleted – their tenantry unable to pay rents, while their relief expenses were mounting and redoubling. Many landowners, as we have seen, simply fell bankrupt. Those who held lands through the

famine years generally behaved in a responsible fashion and did their best to relieve hunger and keep their estates intact. When famine descended, in 1847, emigration at last surged swiftly, producing a spectacular response to the needs of the moment. It was reinforced on several estates by renewed evictions as well as assistance to emigrate. Relief measures were better mobilised than before and actual death rates probably fell during the great subsistence crisis. Nevertheless, there was great suffering and distress in the west coast communities and, indeed, fear and turbulence even in the east coast villages. [**47, 62**]

That a large population in mainland Britain should continue victim to recurrent harvest failure in the heyday of Victorian economic development stirred the national conscience and darkened further the reputation of the landlords. The Clearances were a critical element in the set of circumstances that caused a large growing population of peasants to live on the margin of a poorly endowed region with little chance of ancillary employment or a productive division of their labour. Indeed, more remarkable than the persistence of famine was the sheer survival of so many people in such difficult circumstances: it was a tribute to the food value (per pound, per acre, and per man-hour) of the potato, and also to the observable fortitude and communal resilience of the people themselves. In a special sense the west Highland economy was a resounding success, in that it kept alive a very large increase of its population without the benefit of diversification, industrialisation or (in the main) emigration. Some part of this may have been attributable to the population's religion. [**2, 74, 79**] Callum Brown has argued that the crofters appropriated Presbyterianism 'and turned it into a vehicle for sustaining introverted Gaelic culture during the economic transformation of the "Clearances". The result was crofting society, a system of near subsistence farming and fishing in which puritanical religion conferred cultural insularity and remarkable resilience to an oppressed peasantry divorced from the lairds and from the benefits of modern capitalism' (Brown 1997: 85). [**56**]

A more rigorous view is that the famine itself was an imperative solution. Devine puts it thus: 'in the event only a disaster on the scale of the potato famine could reduce the intractable demographic problems' that beset the Highland estates. Indeed, the population reductions of 1841–61 were dramatic – emigration effectively shunted away substantial numbers of people from many parishes – and estates in the Hebrides eventually became 'leaner and fitter'. The critical point was that the population increases had taken place in a purely agrarian setting, one in which for much of the period secondary industries in

the Highlands were dying. The region had developed a comparative advantage in sheep farming which buttressed regional income in fewer hands and employed a very small proportion of the population. The rest of the region fell into a Malthusian trap, increasingly unable to support its numbers. The population increases inevitably created congestion, squalor, fear and poverty, even or especially where no Clearances had occurred. Depopulation, in this interpretation, was the solution, not the problem.

4. The Dislocated Society

The continuing depeopling of the Highlands related most of all to the widening differential between standards of welfare prevailing in the north and the rest of the country. Out-migration seemed inevitable. But this verdict remains subject to the unspoken counterfactual that, in some way, the fate of the region could have been arranged much more positively to the benefit of the people and the old way of life. This hypothesis rests mainly on the notion of 'autonomy' – that, in the hands of local people invested with local authority, the Highlands could have been made productive and populous. James Hunter, a passionate spokesman for the Highlands, draws parallels from beyond the region and rejects the idea that depopulation was inevitable. He particularly points to the parallel case of the Faroes which, since gaining a measure of independence from Copenhagen, have experienced phenomenal economic and demographic expansion. He believes that this derives from the power that the Faroese have gained to 'manage their own affairs'. He believes that 'library-bound' historians fail to see such possibilities, nor the reason why, for example, Skye has not followed the Faroese to greater population and economic expansion (Hunter 1999: 14–15, 355–60). Indeed, the very recent unheralded upturn in Highland population in the 1990s opens up the debate in a new way – though the dynamics of recent economic change in the Highlands remain largely unexplained.

The social consequences of the Clearances were more straightforward and may be summarised. For instance, even the men who had originally implemented the Clearances conceded that the sheep-farming system had wiped out the middle ranks of Highland society and robbed it of its traditional leaders. [**74, 55**] The tacksmen and the middle-sized tenants were obliterated (this indeed had been an explicit objective since the mid-eighteenth century). [**7, 17**] The new structure was divided between the great sheep-farming elite on the one extreme,

and the mass of crofters on the other. [**74**] There was a fear that the severely polarised society would descend into open hostility. The third duke of Sutherland and his commissioners conceded that this unhealthy social outcome was directly attributable to the removal policy pursued in the 1810s. There was, in modern terms, a sense of anomie or alienation, a loss of social accord (Richards 1999).

But estate administrators did not necessarily agree among themselves about the Clearances: the most acerbic and rigorous of the factors in Sutherland was Evander Maciver, who ruled the Scourie office for many years in mid-century, and was openly critical of his predecessors, though he himself was a devoted clearer in the 1850s. Nevertheless he declared that the later crofter revolt was an infection brought in from Ireland by the local fishermen: 'they were initiated into the Irish modes of rioting and resisting landlords and their agents' (Maciver 1905: 75).

The disengagement of the rural population from the land was integral to the Highland Clearances and at the centre of the angry response. It was also part and parcel of the drastic changes identifiable in rural Lowland Scotland. As Devine puts it, 'the complex social structure of the old days was replaced by an apparently simple division of capitalist tenant farmers and landless labourers'. This was straightforward proletarianisation and usually achieved peacefully (Devine 1978). In the Highlands the reaction was evidently angrier.

In the long run the Highland economy came to be segregated into two distinct sectors – the large farms (both pastoral and arable) and the crofts. The rents of the two sectors tended to diverge. For instance, real rents in the period 1845–80 rose much faster for the large tenants and sporting leases than for the small tenantry; the crofters' contribution to total income fell throughout the century. The position of the small tenants was also weakened by the widespread refusal of Highland landlords to permit subdivision. This meant, of course, that families could not provide separately for their growing number of children as they reached adulthood. In extreme cases some landlords forbade children to remain on a croft once they married. Partly this was motivated by an effort to staunch the rapid growth of what was seen as a redundant population; undoubtedly it operated as a further expulsive force on the crofting community (Richards 1985: ch. 19).

Crofting predated the Clearances but was radically reinforced by the clearing landlords. In some respects the crofting option was a compromise which allowed the retention of the small tenantry while most of the land was turned over to commercial graziers and sportsmen. Crofting was mostly a poor basis for a large population, but it was

consolidated and then clung onto tenaciously by the small tenantry existing on the margins of the region. The Crofters Commission from the 1880s further reinforced and institutionalised the system and strengthened the tenurial rights of the small tenantry through to the present day. It was a system propped up by income from abroad and from seasonal employment in the south. The crofting compromise thus entrenched the smallholder but afforded little opportunity of development. In some ways the Highland situation bucked the tendency towards ever-increasing large-scale farming by retaining a quasi-peasant status into the twentieth century (Overton 1996: 168ff.).

In the aftermath of the Clearances, the vicissitudes of wool prices created an unstable basis even for sheep farming in the Highlands and there were long phases of decline when deer forests swallowed up much of the territory. [**59**] The instability of the grazing economy, and the unpredictable fashion for Highland estates, produced long sequences of land sales which continued the turnover of landownership the origins of which had been established in the late eighteenth century. [**56**] Thus, for instance the estate of Airds was sold in 1852 to a rich Glasgow sugar merchant, the old owner having secured a governorship in St Vincent (though he soon died of yellow fever). Another incoming laird, Malcolm of Poltalloch, had made money in Jamaica and bought up heavily in the Highlands and proceeded to clear his estates whenever he could. Similarly, Islay was sold off in two parts, first to a distiller and then to an English linen merchant. Subsequently deer forests began to monopolise a great deal of Highland territory (Campbell 2004: 71–4; Orr 1982). [**79, 80**]

All this turmoil, ultimately driven by the pressure to increase the productivity of the land, was totally pervasive in the decades about 1800: no part of Scotland was immune. It was expressed everywhere in rural displacement and rising rent-demands which were the most direct stimulant to a turnover of rural occupants and also to migration. A sitting tenant had a choice – a blunt option between paying more, producing more, being more efficient and more ruthless, or getting out. This pitch of demand was profoundly unsettling and upsetting at the best of times. It invariably led to recrimination – itself a spur to emigration. It worked in microcosm in most rural parishes of Scotland. Thus, for example, the tiny island of Little Cumbrae, off the coast of Ayr: here, in a closely contained family community, the demands of rent-increases caused severe annoyance among the tenantry and prompted angry emigration to the Mohawk Valley in 1807. The Archibald family carried their outrage with them and sustained an

undiminished sense of wrong in a remarkable series of emigrant letters across the Atlantic during the following two decades (Gerber 2005: part 3). [**15, 67**]

The most elusive figures in the drama of the Clearances are the people who were removed. In the aftermath they dispersed, sometimes locally, sometimes far away, but were generally poorly recorded. They figure much more in subsequent fiction than in the direct historical record. In the latter they make fleeting appearances in rent rolls or parish registers or censuses, where they can be tracked until their eventual disappearance (which might have been related to sudden eviction).

Some of the best nominal records of individual Highlanders are those of emigrants who reached the farthest parts of the world. One particular episode was the closely organised emigration of 5,000 Highlanders to the Australian colonies in 1851–7 under the auspices of the Highland and Island Emigration Society (a philanthropic body which pooled contributions from charities, landlords and colonial government to provide free passages to labour-hungry colonies). These emigrants, mainly from the west Highlands and Islands, are counted among the most desperate of the entire Highland population in the mid-century. Ordinarily the Australian colonies were not keen to recruit paupers, people 'shovelled out' from the homeland. But the severe labour shortages occasioned by the gold rushes in Victoria altered the criteria of selection and acceptability. Thus the call went out in the Highlands that free passages were available. [**68**]

The response was vigorously encouraged by local landowners and famine relief officials and produced a strong response. The impact of famine was seen on some of their faces – though not all, since most of them were in relatively good shape. Some, however, were literally famished and needed special feeding and preparation even before they could be readied for the travel to the southern parts for embarkation for Australia. These people were mainly from the lowest echelons of Highland society and were well recorded in the Society's papers. The descriptions are affecting and provide vivid testimony to the depths of poverty to which some of these Highlanders were reduced. [**68**] The temptation, of course, is to regard them not simply as victims of privation and crop failure, but more specifically as victims of the Clearances. In reality it is difficult to connect many of the 5,000 with actual evictions. Those from St Kilda – a conspicuous party of thirty-six islanders – were not in any way cleared and their landlord pleaded with them not to emigrate (Richards 1992: 55–75). They entered the great oceans of British emigration and their identities were later appropriated

into the invented Highland tradition of coerced exile and into the forests of émigré genealogy.

Eventually greater documentation at the local level will provide a more precise measure of the diversity of the Highland experience. The story was often seriously addled by the passage of time and the confusions of memory, as the Napier Commission exposed in the 1880s (Buxton 1995: 54ff.). [**39**] Particularly there is a need to compare the consequences over the long run of areas cleared and areas uncleared. Many estate records lie in the National Archives of Scotland unexplored and the documentation of the lowest echelons of Highland society, the cottars, the evictees and the squatters who lived on the margin of a marginal society, remains scant. The further back in time the more difficult the task becomes: who indeed really knows the conditions and frame of mind of the ordinary pre-clearance Highlanders before, say, 1780?

To understand the reasons why the Highlands were convulsed by controversy, and why the region seemed to regress in the nineteenth century, requires comparisons with other agrarian regions in the British Isles, and with other peasant societies invaded by powerful market forces in the rest of the world. Reversing the telescope makes the Highland Clearances not only more intelligible but also of great significance to historians and social scientists far beyond the Highlands. It is, for instance, well established that other rural regions in the British Isles lost their people at a faster rate than the Highlands even though these societies never faced clearances. This is a point which is rarely given adequate emphasis in the history of the Highlands.

Three key propositions remain intact. First, that the large-scale clearances such as those in Sutherland were rugged coerced removals, and were executed in the teeth of sullen withdrawal of cooperation by the people. Second, that it is difficult to believe that sheep clearances did any good for the population of the Highlands at large: they reduced employment opportunities and also diminished the resources available to the people. Finally, that while landlord efforts to create alternative accommodation were far from derisory, the record was not good except in the capital development expenditures which undoubtedly generated some substantial but short-lived employment (in a manner similar to the construction of the Caledonian Canal). [**27**]

It is extremely unlikely that the introduction of sheep and the associated displacement of the people did anything other than diminish the resources of land available to the small tenants. Their greatest challenge, therefore, was to sustain a much greater population under

conditions of diminished resources of land and employment. Beyond this there is little resolution in the debate over the Highland Clearances, no consensus, no middle way. The storm rages on because, in essence, there was, and remains, no simple solution to the question of what to do about the demands and costs of development which confront all peasant societies in the modern era.

Introduction to Documents

These documents show the diversity of evidence – often radically different in quality – about the disputes, events, personalities, processes, causes, repercussions and opinions raised in the first part of this book. This confronts us not only with the heat of the controversy but also with some of the practical historical problems that surround the business of interpretation and moral judgement. As in any warm historical debate, the provenance and verifiability of each source is crucial. So also is the matter of balance – of setting each piece of the ragged jigsaw into context and in juxtaposition with other evidence and judgements.

Historians have to be selective because the volume of evidence is overwhelming, but selection immediately introduces bias. Inevitably the extracts in this collection are removed from their context; therefore this is a sampling only. Note how easy it would be to present documentation solely to defend or attack the landlords.

Some general points in using evidence should be emphasised. First, it is best not to rely on a single source; context is crucial and the provenance of documents has to be weighed in every case; each piece of evidence was written or spoken for a purpose and, probably, with an axe to grind. Second, there is a great distinction between contemporaneous and retrospective accounts; the written sources inevitably favoured the literate and affluent elements in Highland society. The oral tradition was usually a self-reinforcing outpouring of popular feeling, often highly expressive of communal traditions and reactions. Third, estate papers and private correspondence and diaries were less likely to be engineered for public consumption; they often expose private motivations and strategies. Fourth, public investigations – such as Parliamentary Select Inquiries – were likely to be attempts to influence government and also to justify policies to a public audience. Similarly, newspaper reports often played to a popular mood or were designed to generate sales or public campaigns.

The biggest problem in representing the Highland Clearances is the temptation to concentrate on the moments of eviction, drama and conflict. In reality, of course, the Highland Clearances stretched over at least a century, were often gradual in character, and came in many different varieties. Much of the history is barely even visible, occurring slowly and imperceptibly. The moments of drama may not throw much light on the deeper currents that determined Highland life in the years of the Clearances.

Note: Part II consists of source material of various types. To facilitate cross-referencing from Part I, each source has been numbered.

1. A Hanoverian blueprint for the Highlands: Some Thoughts concerning the State of the Highlands of Scotland [in the handwriting of the Rt Hon. Duncan Forbes, Lord President of the Courts of Session in Scotland, c. 1746].

Source: *Culloden Papers* (London, 1815), pp. 298–301

Duncan Forbes (1685–1747), politician and judge, influential in government circles and an important anti-Jacobite figure, outlines the case for fundamental change in the Highlands in a famous description of the old feudalism and its remedies.

The inhabitants of the mountains, unacquainted with industry and the fruits of it, and united in some degree by the singularity of dress and language, stick close to their antient idle way of life; retain their barbarous customs and maxims; depend generally on their Chiefs, as their sovereign Lords and masters; and being accustomed to the use of Arms, and inured to hard living, are dangerous to the public peace; and must continue to be so, untill, being deprived of Arms for some years, they forget the use of them … The Grounds that are cultivated yield small quantities of mean Corn, not sufficient to feed the Inhabitants, who depend for their nourishment on milk, butter, cheese, &c. the product of their Cattle. Their constant residence during the harvest, winter, and spring, is at their small farms, in houses made of turf; the roof, which is thatched, supported by timber. In the summer season, they drive their flocks and herds many miles higher amongst the mountains, where they have large ranges of coarse pasture. The whole family follow the Cattle; the men to guard them, and to prevent their straying; the women to milk them, and to look after the butter and cheese, &c. The places in which they reside when thus employed they call shoelings, and their habitations are the most miserable huts that ever were seen …

… it seems absolutely necessary, that some force more or less be placed in the several Straths, Glens, or districts, where those lawless Highlanders reside; to keep a constant Communication with each other, to observe what passes, and give notice to the next Commanding Officer, and to execute such orders as they shall receive …

That at the several Stations, Spinning-schools be set up, to draw the idle females of those Countries into that Manufacture; and that Weavers be stationed there as soon as there is Spinning sufficient to set them to work …

… If such a Project, as it may with attention be improved, were

followed, these effects would probably ensue:
1st The Highlanders would be effectually disarmed . . .
2dly The Communication with attainted persons would be rendered difficult …
3dly In case of any Invasion, or attempt to raise an insurrection to favour it, early advice would be had;
4thly … the troops at the several Stations might draw themselves together, or dispose themselves in the best manner to defeat the design.
5thly All processes of Law would be executed securely; …
6thly … Judges … may in their Circuits hold Courts for trying Crimes in them.
7thly If any mines or improveable grounds shall be found to be amongst the mountains, men may be disposed to take leases of them, …
8thly … the numbers of Sutlers and Artificers … will, undoubtedly, produce some Gardening, and some better kind of Husbandry …
9thly When the Highlanders are deprived of their Arms, and thereby that diversion which is the greatest incentive to their idleness, i.e. hunting, is cut off, … the advantages which they must see in their neighbourhood accrueing from industry, may naturally lead them to it …
10thly As the demand at the Stations for provisions … must raise considerably the Value of all the Commodities which the Highlands produce, and thereby encourage the inhabitants; … if feeling the benefit thence flowing can induce the Highlanders to put some value on property more than they at present do, it is to be hoped … some regard for the Security of their property, the Laws, may take place of it.

It is remarkable, that in some districts bordering upon the Highlands, where within memory the inhabitants spoke the Irish Language and Highland dress gave way to a sort of English, and lowland Cloathing; the Inhabitants took to the Plough in place of Weapons; and, tho' disarmed by no Act of Parliament, are as tame as their Low Country neighbours …

2. Edmund Burt: pre-Clearance reports

Source: Edmund Burt, *Letters from a Gentleman in the North of Scotland to his Friend in London*, 2 vols (London, 1754; reprint Edinburgh, 1974)

Burt's Letters, *written in 1727–8, are a well-known source for the pre-Culloden Highlands. Burt was receiver-general and collector of rents on the unsold Forfeited Estates in Scotland, 1725–41. He possessed good knowledge of the region and was a sympathetic observer of the social mores and economic realities of the time.*

Letter IV:
… Here [Inverness] are four or five Fairs in the Year, when the Highlanders bring their Commodities to Market: but, good God! you could not conceive there was such Misery in this Island.

One has under his Arm a small Roll of Linen, another a Piece of Coarse Plaiding: these are considerable Dealers. But the Merchandise of the greatest Part of them is of a most contemptible Value, such as these, *viz*. – two or three Cheeses, of about three or four Pounds weight a-piece; a Kid sold for Six-pence or Eight-pence at the most; a small Quantity of Butter, in something that looks like a Bladder, and is sometimes set down upon the Dirt in the Street; three or four Goat-skins; a Piece of Wood for an Axletree to one of the little Carts, &c. With the Produce of what each of them sells, they generally buy something, *viz*. a Horn, or Wooden Spoon or two, a Knife, a Wooden Platter, and suchlike Necessaries for their Huts, and carry home with them little or no Money.

Letter V:
If you would conceive rightly of it, you must imagine you see two or three Hundred half-naked, half-starved Creatures of both Sexes, without so much as a Smile or any Cheerfulness among them, stalking about with Goods, such as I have described, up to their Ankles in dirt; and at Night Numbers of them lying together in Stables, or other Outhouse Hovels that are hardly any Defence against the Weather …

Letter XIX:
The Highlanders are divided into Tribes, or Clans, under Chiefs, or Chieftains, as they are called in the Laws of Scotland; and each Clan again divided into branches from the main Stock, who have Chieftains over them. These are subdivided into smaller Branches of fifty or sixty

men, who deduce their original from their particular Chieftains, and rely upon them as their more immediate Protectors and Defenders …

The ordinary Highlanders esteem it the most sublime Degree of Virtue to love their Chief, and pay him a blind Obedience, although it be in Opposition to the Government, the Laws of the kingdom, or even to the Law of God. He is their Idol; and as they profess to know no King but him (I was going further), so will they say they ought to do whatever he commends without Inquiry …

Letter XX:

… I am now to speak of the Manner in which the lower Order of Highlanders live, and shall begin with the Spring of the Year.

This is a bad Season with them, for then their Provision of Oatmeal begins to fail, and, for a Supply, they bleed their Cattle, and boil the Blood into Cakes, which, together with a little Milk and a short Allowance of Oatmeal, is their Food …

Their Cattle are much weakened by want of sufficient Food in the preceding Winter, and this immoderate Bleeding reduces them to so low a Plight that in the Morning they cannot rise from the Ground, and several of the Inhabitants join together to help up each other's Cows, &c.

In Summer the People remove to the Hills, and dwell in much worse Huts than those they leave below: these are near the Spots of Grazing and are called *Shealings*, scattered from one another as Occasion requires. Every one has his particular Space of Pasture, for which, if it be not a Part of his Farm, he pays …

Letter XXII:

… The young Children of the ordinary Highlander are miserable Objects indeed, and are mostly overrun with that Distemper which some of the old Men are hardly ever freed of from their Infancy. I have often seen them come out from the Huts early in a cold Morning stark naked and squat themselves down (if I might decently use the Comparison) like Dogs on a Dunghill, upon a certain Occasion after confinement.

3. Reports on the Annexed Estates

Source: *Reports on the Annexed Estates, 1755–1769: From the records of the Forfeited Estates preserved in the Scottish Record Office*, ed. Virginia Wills (Edinburgh, 1973)

A substantial number of Highland landowners were implicated in the Jacobite Rising of 1745–6 and lost their estates (some were also executed). The estates were administered by Commissioners and managed by their factors who were required to institute change and make regular reports which provide important evidence for Highland conditions in the eighteenth century, before the Clearances.

There was an element of self-justification by the reporters, and a temptation to stress the backwardness of the regions they managed. Nevertheless, the reports transmitted basic factual documentation and exposed the improvement mentality of the new regime.

(a) Report Made by William Monteath, factor. Strathyre in Estate of Arnprior [in the county of Perth], 1755

The English language has made very good progress in these lands …

The laws prohibiting the Highland dress have had very good effectt in that country …

The Disarming Acts are punctually observed in these lands, none of the tennants carrying arms …

There has been no thifts committed in that part of the country for some time by past.

The whole lands of Straithyre are set in tacks to tennants for the space of nineteen years … none of the ferms are sett to gentlemen that sub sett them againe …

Flax and potatoes grow pritty well in these lands, but the tennants doe not sow much of either of them …

There is little or no commerce in these lands, only a few cows they sell and some linnen yarn and a very triffle of butter and cheese … The men are for the most part idle in winter. In spring, summar and harvest they labour the ground, cutts their hay and casts, winn and leads the peats, and the women spinn and care for the cattle …

The factor is humbly of opinion that, for the incouragement of the tennants, no services should be required of them but the usuall carraige of bark when the woods are a cuting.

(b) Report & Answers by James Small, Factor on the Estate of Strowan [Struan, in the county of Perth], 1755

Ranoch lay in the center of the Highlands, with wide extended hills and scarce a single man in it but either stole or connieved at theft, it was the common randevous of all theeves and stoln cattle. For example, the cattle stoln from the south behooved to be carried through Ranoch in their way north and were brought there, both by the inhabitants and theeves, from all corners, where they lay safe till a proper oppertunity offered of driving them north. In the same way, cattle from the north were carried south, many of them even to England. The factor has now the pleasure to aquaint your Lordships that for two years past (so fare as he could hear or learn) there has not a single beast been stoln into or carried through Ranoch, and all the neighbourhood live now in quiet …

(c) Report from Captain John Forbes, Factor upon the Annexed Estates of Lovat and Cromarty, 1755

No person should get a farm who cannot speak English, unless he is already in possession …

It is very proper that leases be granted to the tennents as soon as possible, because untill that is done things can never be put on a regular footing, nor can any improvements take place. But it is to be observed that there are many farms divided among numbers of poor people & so interspersed and run-rigged as make them inconvenient for all, and it will be necessary to divide these farms in a proper manner before granting leases and each ought to have as much as can be supposed to maintain him and his family by a reasonable industry … Besides, it is impossible that ever they can live comfortably upon those small possessions, and instead of promoting industry, it encourages lazyness, because many of these little tennents are forced to beg, at least their wives and children do so. And those poor people and many of the subtennents may be employed in the manufactures and villages to be erected, or barren improvable muirs may be sett apart for them and suitable encouragement given to build houses & maintain them untill such improvments come to bear…

It is absolutely necessary to restrain or circumscribe the pernicious trade of distilling, which so much prevaills on some baronys of the above estates …

(d) Report by Mungo Campbell of the condition and Situation of the Estate of Barrasdale [Inverness-shire], 1755

The inhabitants are in winter taken up in looking after their black cattle and preparing their ground for a little grey oats, barley & potatoes, and some of them in fishing for herring, and in summer & harvest they are generally very idle, having nothing to do but to herd their cattle and keeping their hutts in repair …

(e) Report of Archibald Menzies, General Inspector, To the Honourable The Board of Annexed Estates, 1765

(Art. 13th [*lege* .16th].) By what intelligence I could learn from south country shepherds who have been sometime in the highland parts of Perthshire, there are no farms too high for sheep. There not thriving appears to be owing to mismanagement rather than to any other causes of climate or want of proper grass.

(f) Report, Archibald Menzies, General Inspector, to the Honourable The Board of Annexed Estates [1766, Perth, Lovat and Cromarty (E. 729/8)]

… The farms are generally small and the possessors are daily endeavouring to make them less by dividing them, either as a settlement during their life or as a provision after their death amongst their children, any other occupation than that of a farmer being looked upon as beneath a person who claims his descent from what he looks upon as the first family in the kingdom.

Numbers of people of late have settled on the frontiers of the annexed estates near the mosses. They just now acknowledge no master. When challenged by the factor, they pretend they belong to the neighbouring heretors, and when challenged by the neighbouring heretor, they answer they belong to the King's estate. The tenants complain of them as a nuisance, as they keep cattle on their grass, which they maintain in winter by straw thigged from them & the neighbouring tenants, and maintain themselves by begging.

As a number of inhabitants, when industrious, are the greatest riches of a country, on the contrary, when idle, they are greatest nuisance. The greatest part of the inhabitants of those estates may be included in the last class …

I should humbly propose to erect villages … that each tradesman willing to settle there should have in few a certain quantity of ground,

that each apprentice bred by the Board should pay no entry or perhaps be exempted from paying any rent for a few years or be furnished with a proper sett of utensils for the carrying on of his trade …

(g) Report, Archibald Menzies, General Inspector, to the Honourable the Board of Annexed Estates [1767–8, Lovat and Cromarty (E. 787/24)]

… many bad consequences … attended the practice of the tenants' dividing their farms amongst their children and not breeding them to any employment, by which means, in a few years, they were reduced to beggary …

Sheep would thrive extremely well in these countries, especially where they are near the west coast, a great part of which ground is too craggie for cattle. Their sheep, in spite of their present very bad management, thrive wonderfully well.

I am humbly of opinion that the utmost attention should be given to encourage the rearing of sheep in these countrys, as wool ought to be their staple manufacture …

4. Observations of Peter May

Source: I. H. Adams (ed.), *Papers of Peter May Land Surveyor, 1749–1793* (Edinburgh, 1979)

Peter May, the surveyor for the Annexed Estates, reported conditions in Coigach in 1756, capturing the communal confusion of the old system, its discomforts and the moment of contact with the forces of change flowing from the south in the post-Culloden decades.

Peter May to Commissioners of Annexed Estates (NAS. E.746/78/2)

I am now surveying at Coigach, part of the Cromarty estate, and have orders to measure the subtenants' possessions separately from the principal tacksmen, to do which distinctly is almost impossible as they are so interwoven with one another and run-ridged on sundry farms with the tenants themselves, and these ridges are only patches that they dig up with a crooked spade, and so very small that there will be above 100 ridges in an acre scattered up and down like easie [lazy] beds of potatoes …

The estate of Coigach is a very large country … which with the great

distance there is between houses makes me obliged to sleep in the open fields for several nights together, which is dangerous in a climate where so much rain falls. I wish the Commissioners would condescend to allow me a tent or otherwise I'll have great difficulty to go through. There is no such thing as sleeping in their houses in the summer time, they are so full of vermin. Everything is scarce and dear, my living costs me more here than it does in Aberdeen although I can scarcely get bear bannocks. I pay my people eight pence a day and with difficulty I can get them at any rate.

5. Thomas Pennant, 1769 and 1772

Thomas Pennant's Tours *were among the influences that prompted Samuel Johnson to conduct his better-known excursion to the Highlands. Pennant observed the cattle trade, the reliance on meal imports, the rise of rents and the trails of emigrants. He was vivid in his descriptions of poverty, hunger and emigration from the west Highlands, suggesting increasing congestion and privation before the entry of the new sheep breeds into the west and the islands.*

Source: Thomas Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland MDCCLXIX*, 3rd edition (Warrington, 1774), pp. 117, 208–9

The houses of the common people in these parts [near Braemar] are shocking to humanity, formed of loose stones, and covered with clods, which they call *devots*, or with heath, broom, or branches of fir: they look, at a distance, like so many black mole-hills. The inhabitants live very poorly, on oatmeal, barley-cakes, and potatoes; their drink whisky, sweetened with honey. The men are thin, but strong; idle and lazy, except employed in the chace, or any thing that looks like amusement; are content with their hard fare, and will not exert themselves farther than to get what they deem necessaries. The women are more industrious, spin their own husbands' cloaths, and get money by knitting stockings, the great trade of the country …

The great produce of *Lochaber* is cattle … Scarce any arable land, for the excessive wet which reigns here almost totally prevents the growth of corn, and what little there is fit for tillage sets at ten shillings an acre. The inhabitants of this district are therefore obliged, for their support, to import six thousand bolls of oatmeal annually, which cost about 4000 l.; the rents are about 3000 l. *per annum*; the return for the cattle is

about 7500 l.; the horses may produce some trifle; so that the tenants must content themselves with a very scanty subsistence, without the prospect of saving the lest against unforeseen accidents. The rage of raising rents has reached this distant country: in *England* there may be reason for it, (in a certain degree) where the value of lands is increased by accession of commerce, and by the rise of provisions; but here (contrary to all policy) the great men begin at the wrong end, with squeezing the bag, before they have helped the poor tenant to fill it, by the introduction of manufactures. In many of the isles this already shows its unhappy effect, and begins to depopulate the country; for numbers of families have been obliged to give up the strong attachment the *Scots* in general have for their country, and to exchange it for the wilds of *America*.

The houses of the peasants in *Lochaber* are the most wretched that can be imagined …

Source: Thomas Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides MDCCLXXII* (Chester, 1774), pp. 307–8

By an unnatural force some of the rents [of Skye] are now doubled and trebled …

The high advance of the price of cattle is a plea for the high advance of rents …

Resentment drove many to seek a retreat beyond the *Atlantic*: they sold their stock, and in numbers made their first essay. They found, or thought they found, while their passions were warm, an happy change of situation: they wrote in terms favouring of romance, an account of their situation: their friends caught the contagion; and numbers followed; and others were preparing to follow their example. The tacksmen from a motive of independency: the poor from attachment; and from excess of misery.

6. The Hebrides, 1772: the property of Norman Macleod

Source: National Library of Scotland, Lee MS 3431: Anonymous observations on emigration from Skye, 1772

A document registering the turmoil of commercial change (from kelp especially) forcing dislocation and rent increases in the late 1760s in Harris. Note the appeal to clan solidarity as a motive for paying vastly

increased rents, and also the financial embarrassment of the laird, and the general optimism of the time.

… Black cattle … were the staple commodity of the Islands in general till within these few years that this usefull manufactory of kelp was discovered which of late has turned out a more certain and beneficial article than even that of black cattle … Kelp is the most certain and less precarious of anything hitherto discovered in these islands … Macleod the present Proprietor from the involved situation of his family affairs and a natural anxiety of preparing his Estate entire so peculiar to a Highland Chieftain [,] in the year 1769 proposed to his clan to lease out his estate for twenty three years from Whitsunday 1769 and from personal attachment the inhabitants of these countries belonging to McLeod were wrought upon to Engage for such a high rent without the aid of any new improvements whatever …

7. Emigration, famine and social structures – Assynt in the 1770s

Source: *John Home's Survey of Assynt*, ed. R. J. Adam (Edinburgh, 1960), pp. xxiv, xxxi–xxxii

A survey of the remote north-west of Sutherland – Assynt – by John Home occurred at a time of food shortage and emigration. It shows that, well before the Clearances, the coastal land was already heavily populated with small tenants who relied on the arable land for subsistence and on small stocks of black cattle for the payment of rent. The inland tracts of land were devoted to large cattle operations to supply southern markets.

(a) Captain Sutherland to Alexander Mackenzie, WS, Dunrobin, 20 December 1771

… there is nothing that I am more certain of than that the Assent People have a Scheme to plead poverty, in hopes as their Tacks are near run out, to deminish the present rent, or at least to prevent an augmentation, and to favour this plan they have told Ardloch that they have some thoughts to follow the example [i.e. emigration] of the Isle of Sky People.

(b) Captain Sutherland to Alexander Mackenzie, WS, Dunrobin, 17 February 1772

… I guess that their great argument in support of the migration will be the Want of Victual and the opression they meet with from their Masters the Tacksmen, this is rather a disagreeable expedition for to do justice to the poor people I shall certainly have the resentment of the Tacksmen, my shoulders are broad enough if I can but releve the oprest.

(c) Resolution of the Tutors, 20 July 1769

The eight Tutors, who had charge of the Sutherland estates during the countess's minority, concluded that tacksmen in Assynt abused their tacks and oppressed their subtenants. The estate blamed the tacksmen for the rash of emigration.

The Tutors having on this occasion taken under consideration the former practice of giving Leases of Extensive farms and Grasings to One Tenant with a Power of Subsetting the same whereby The principal Tacksman commonly Exacts an additional Rent from his Subtenants imposing heavy Services and Other Conditions Oppressive to the Subtenants and detrimental to the Improvement of the Country. The Tutors, in order to remedy these Evils, Have unanimously Resolved That All tacks granted by them for the future shall contain an Express Seclusion of the Tenants Assignies or Subtenants without Consent of the Tutors or the Proprietor in writing …

8. Emigration, 1772: Letter from Alexander Campbell of Balole to Lachlan Mackinnon of Corrychatachan

Source: Barbara DeWolfe, *Discoveries of America* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 184–6

A letter circulated in the inner Hebridean isles, including Skye, offering reliable, well-informed and highly favourable advice about the prospects for Highlanders in North Carolina. Emigrants evidently carried away substantial quantities of money; some also 'flitted' the country without paying their rents and debts.

Last Year I brot. some passengers to that Country, I went first ashoar in S. Carolina it is the richest place I ever saw … the produce [of North

Carolina] … is Tarr Turpentine Beef & pork & some Indigo Rice and Tobacco all Sort of timber, with various other Commodities; N.C: is but a new Settlemt … I have seen the first Child was born to the English there & I do not believe he is above 45 years old An Uncle of mine Niell MacNiel of Ardulay brot. over the first Highlanders that went there 30 years ago, he then settled under many dissadvantages 40 Miles in the midst of Woods distant from any other Settlemt … 100 Miles above this town lies Croscreeks on the same River, a very thriving place, the Highlanders are mostly settled about this last, each has a plantation of his own on the river Side & live as happy as princes, they have liberty & property & no Excise, no dread of their being turned out of their lands by Tyrants, each has as good a Charter as a D. of Argyle, or a Sir A Macdonald, and only pay half a Crown a year for 100 Acres they possess, in Short I never saw a people seemed to me to be so really happy as our Countrymen there, As to health they have no more Complaints than those in the highlands; … if a person take £500 Str with him and employ it in any rationall manner he may live equall to any Laird of £500 p Annum in any part of great Brittain, & so in proportion with any Sum one carries wt. him free there As for getting lands no person needs have the least doubt about that for I was well informed if all the people in Scotland & Ireland were to go there theyd have plenty of land in that province … for there is nothing they want so much as people … I must own I have a strong Attachmt. to be and settle with my own Countrymen in the County of Cumberland where I have some lands Relations & friends; In this County I could buy a settled plantation with a good house Out houses 80 Acres of opened lands & 500 Acres of wood lands, & which woud return more than any farm in Ilay or Sky, I say I coud purchase such a place for £150 or £160 Str. & some of them are Sold for £60, all on the river Side where you send produce to town & getts of Goods & money … Upon the whole if that Country was as well known as the little knowledge I have of it there would be few tents [i.e. tenants] or farmers in Scotland or Ireland in 5 years.

9. Letter: Allan MacDonald, of Kingsburgh (Skye), to John McKenzie Esq. of Delvine, WS Edinburgh

Source: National Library of Scotland, Delvine Papers MS 1306/f67

Regarding emigration from the Western Isles in 1773, pointing to the impact of rising rents which created tensions down through the entire community, layer by layer.

2 March 1773.
The only news in this Island is Emigration. I believe the whole will go to America. In 1771 there shipped and carried safe to North Carolina 500 souls. In 1772 there shipped and carried safe to the same place 450 souls. This year they have carried already signed and preparing to go 800 souls, and all these from Sky and North Uist. It is melancholy to see the state of this miserable place; the superior summoning the tennants to remove for not paying the great rents; the tennants the superior for oppression, for breaking the conditions of his tacks, and for violent profits. The factor tennants at law, for iniquitous and wrong acct, are to [remove?] out of their lands in the months of May and June [without?] previous warning – no respect of persons, as the best are mostly gone, stealing of sheep, and constantly, and picking and thieving of Corn, garden stuffs, and potatoes, perpetually lying, backbyting, and slandering – honesty entirely fled, villainy and Deceit suported by downright poverty in no place – most miserable is the State of this once great and good family – when this next emigration is gone only old Aird, and other three old men, will be all that will be in Slate and Troternish of the name of MacDonald …

10. Pre-Clearance emigration, 1774

Source: A. R. Newsome, 'Records of Emigrants from England and Scotland to North Carolina, 1774–1775', *The North Carolina Historical Review* 11 (1934), pp. 130–2

This is a crucial source relating to Highland emigration before the sheep arrived in the north, at a time when the government and the lairds were intensely anxious about the loss of Highland tenantries. Emigrants were interrogated about their reasons for departing.

… William McKay, aged Thirty, by Trade a Farmer, married, hath three children from Eight to two years Old, besides one dead since he left his own country, resided … in the Parish of Farr in the County of Strathnaver upon the Estate of the Countess of Sutherland. Intends to go to Wilmington in North Carolina, because his stock being small, Crops failing, and bread excessively dear, and the price of Cattle low, he found he could not have bread for his Family at home, and was encouraged to emigrate by the Accounts received from his Countrymen who had gone to America before him, assuring him that he might procure a Comfortable Subsistence in that country. That the land he possessed

was a Wadset of the Family of Sutherland to Mr Charles Gordon of Skelpick, lying in the height of the country of Strathnaver, the Rents were not raised.

Wm. Sutherland, aged Forty, a Farmer, married, hath five children from 19 to 9 years old, lived last at Strathalidale in the Parish of Rea … Intends to go to North Carolina; left his own country because the Rents were raised, as Soldiers returning upon the peace with a little money had offered higher Rents; and longer Fines or Grassums, besides the Services were oppressive in the highest degree. That from his Farm which paid 60 Merks Scots, he was obliged to find two Horses and two Servants from the middle of July to the end of Harvest solely at his own Expence, besides plowing, Cutting Turf, making middings, mixing Dung and leading it out in Seed time, and besides cutting, winning, leading and stacking 10 Fathoms of Peats yearly, all done without so much as a bit of bread or a drink to his Servants …

Eliz: McDonald, Aged 29, unmarried, servant to James Duncan in Mointle in the Parish of Farr in the County of Sutherland, Intends to go to Wilmington in North Carolina; left her own country because several of her Friends having gone to Carolina before her, had assured her that she would get much better service and greater Encouragement in Carolina than in her own Country.

11. Johnson and Boswell in the Highlands and Islands

Source: *Johnson's Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland and Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, LL.D.*, ed. R. W. Chapman (London, 1924), pp. 33, 85–6, 295–6, 345–6

The tour of the Western Islands by Johnson and Boswell in 1773 is often regarded as the starting-point of documentation of the Highlands. The timing was crucial: rents were already rising sharply, migrants were on the move, and new currents were at play across the region, all brilliantly described by Johnson and Boswell. Their account is neither a wholehearted celebration of the old Highlands nor a total denunciation of new ways being introduced to the region.

From Samuel Johnson, *Journey to the Western Islands*

From him [Johnson's host at Anoch, Glenmollison] we first heard of the general dissatisfaction, which is now driving the Highlanders into the

other hemisphere; and when I asked him whether they would stay at home, if they were well treated, he answered with indignation, that no man willingly left his native country. Of the farm, which he himself occupied, the rent had, in twenty-five years, been advanced from five to twenty pounds, which he found himself so little able to pay, that he would be glad to try his fortune in some other place. Yet he owned the reasonableness of raising the Highland rents in a certain degree, and declared himself willing to pay ten pounds for the ground which he had formerly had for five …

The Chiefs, divested of their prerogatives, necessarily turned their thoughts to the improvement of their revenues, and expect more rent, as they have less homage. The tenant, who is far from perceiving that his condition is made better in the same proportion, as that of his landlord is made worse, does not immediately see why his industry is to be taxed more heavily than before. He refuses to pay the demand, and is ejected; the ground is then let to a stranger, who perhaps brings a larger stock, but who, taking the land at its full price, treats with the Laird upon equal terms, and considers him not as a Chief, but as a trafficker in land. Thus the estate perhaps is improved, but the clan is broken.

It seems to be the general opinion, that the rents have been raised with too much eagerness. Some regard must be paid to prejudice. Those who have hitherto paid but little, will not suddenly be persuaded to pay much, though they can afford it … The proprietors of the Highlands might perhaps often increase their income, by subdividing the farms, and allotting to every occupier only so many acres as he can profitably employ, but that they want people.

There seems now, whatever be the cause, to be through a great part of the Highlands a general discontent. That adherence, which was lately professed by every man to the chief of his name, has now little prevalence; and he that cannot live as he desires at home, listens to the tale of fortunate islands, and happy regions, where every man may have land of his own, and eat the product of his labour without a superior.

From James Boswell, *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*

The topic of emigration being again introduced, Dr. Johnson said, that 'a rapacious Chief would make a wilderness of his estate.' Mr. Donald McQueen told us, that the oppresssion, which then made so much noise, was owing to landlords listening to bad advice in the letting of their lands; that interested and designing people flattered them with golden dreams of much higher rents than could reasonably be paid; and

that some of the gentlemen *tacksmen*, or upper tenants, were themselves in part the occasion of the mischief, by over-rating the farms of others. That many of the *tacksmen*, rather than comply with exorbitant demands, had gone off to America, and impoverished the country, by draining it of its wealth; and that their places were filled by a number of poor people, who had lived under them, properly speaking, as servants, paid by a certain proportion of the produce of the lands, though called sub-tenants.

… In the evening the company danced as usual. We performed, with much activity, a dance which, I suppose, the emigration from Sky has occasioned. They call it *America*. Each of the couples, after the common *involutions* and *evolutions*, successively whirls round in a circle, till all are in motion; and the dance seems intended to shew how emigration catches, till a whole neighbourhood is set afloat. – Mrs. McKinnon told me, that last year when a ship sailed from Portree for America, the people on shore were almost distracted when they saw their relations go off; they lay down on the ground, tumbled, and tore the grass with their teeth. – This year there was not a tear shed. The people on shore seemed to think that they would soon follow. This indifference is a mortal sign for the country …

12. Matthew Culley's Journal, 1775

Source: *Matthew and George Culley: Travel Journals and Letters, 1765–1798*, ed. Anne Orde (Oxford, 2002), pp. 117–18, 123, 126–7

The Culleys were Northumberland stockbreeders and sheepfarmers who brought their professional expertise to the possibilities of the Highlands. These were journeys of reconnaissance, full of close observation and by no means unsympathetic to the people. Their observations in 1775 were, in effect, a formula for the rapid expansion of sheep farming and the general development of the Highlands, all of which would be accomplished without disadvantage to the people.

We now found too good evidence that the chief reason why the poor people migrated to America, who had lately left this country, was entirely owing to the tyranny under which they groaned from Donald McDonald of the Isles, and other chieftains who oppressed these poor vassals so much by raising their rents as to force them, by a voluntary banishment to seek their bread which their native country denied them, in the inhospitable provinces of Canada, in North America, an

oppression that was rendered the more insupportable to these people, as their landlords at the same time as they raised their rents, shewed them not, either by their precept or example, the method of improving their lands … when the baronet had raised these people's rents after making a short trial how it might turn out [they] went to him [Sir Alexander McDonald] and told him that unless he lowered them again, they would be obliged to leave their native country, and upon his refusing to comply with their request, or even allowing them anything for their houses, which, however mean and unliked, they had reared with some trouble and cost, they immediately set the whole on fire, and to the amount of 300 souls left the country in quest of new settlements on a distant continent …

He [Gustavus Monro] told us that two years before this the whole inhabitants of the strath or valley entered into an association that they would emigrate to America, not because the farms they occupied were rented at too high a value, but because they were by some means given to understand that America was a much better country to live in, which by the way, is a very different account of the matter from what we have heretofore been told …

I have no doubt but that in a little time this country and indeed the whole of Scotland will keep ten sheep for one they now have. These are certainly the very kind of stock that is best fitted and adapted for the country; and both necessity and their own experience will concurr in teaching them this important truth in time … Were the people of this country to pursue a proper mode of management they might breed as many black cattle as they do at present, grow more corn, and at the same time keep ten sheep for one they now do. All spinning here is performed by the rock and spindle, and they spin as they walk along.

13. Adam Smith

Source: Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (London, 1776)

Adam Smith was the most influential political economist of the age of Clearances. Though not directly familiar with the Highlands, he used the region as the classic example of poverty and irrational organisation. Feudal bonds tied up enterprise and prevented the best use of the land; the division of labour was constricted in the extreme; poverty stared out of the faces of the people. The Highlands needed freedom and the benefits of the market.

As it is the power of exchanging that gives occasion to the division of labour, so the extent of this division must always be limited by the extent of that power, or, in other words, by the extent of the market … In the lone houses and very small villages which are scattered about in so desert a country as the Highlands of Scotland, every farmer must be butcher, baker and brewer for his own family. (I.iii)

But poverty, though it does not prevent the generation, is extremely unfavourable to the rearing of children. The tender plant is produced, but in so cold and so severe a climate, soon withers and dies. It is not uncommon, I have been frequently told, in the Highlands of Scotland for a mother who has borne twenty children not to have two alive. (I. viii)

… It is not thirty years ago since Mr Cameron of Lochiel, a gentleman of Lochabar in Scotland, without any legal warrant whatever … used, notwithstanding, to exercise the highest criminal jurisdiction over his own people … That gentleman, whose rent never exceeded five hundred pounds a year, carried, in 1745, eight hundred of his own people into the rebellion with him. (III. iv)

14. Henry Home, Lord Kames

Source: Henry Home, Lord Kames, *The Gentleman Farmer* (Edinburgh, 1776), Appendix, pp. 359–66

Lord Kames was the apostle of rural improvement in mid-eighteenth-century Scotland. His indictment of the old system was sweeping and his prescriptions for progress no less radical. Such thinking soon reached the north of Scotland.

Imperfection of Scotch Husbandry

… My present purpose, is to delineate the imperfect state of Scotch husbandry, not only as formerly practised every where, but as practised at present in most places.

Our crops in general are very indifferent …

Did landlords attend to their interest, they would be diligent to improve the breed. Why do they not reflect, that the same farm-servants with better horses, would double the ordinary work? …

The division of a farm into infield and outfield, is execrable husbandry. Formerly, war employed the bulk of our people: the remainder

were far from sufficiently numerous for cultivating even that small proportion of our land which is capable of the plough. Hence extensive farms, a small part of which next the dwelling, termed *infield*, was cultivated for corn: the remainder, termed *outfield*, was abandoned to the cattle, in appearance for pasture, but in reality for starving. The same mode continues to this day, without many exceptions, though necessity cannot be pleaded for it …

A potato is a most useful plant, and, when properly cultivated, affords a plentiful crop. It is a great resource to the labouring poor, being a nourishing food that requires very little cooking. We have been afflicted of late years with very bad seasons, which, but for that resource, must have driven many of our people from their native country. Yet potatoes to this day continue to be propagated in lazy beds …

15. William Gilpin: emigration in 1776

Source: William Gilpin, *Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Made in the Year 1776, on Several Parts of Great Britain; Particularly the High-Lands of Scotland* (London, 1789), pp. 169–71

The evidence regarding Highland emigration was often contradictory and ambiguous. Here William Gilpin observes an emigration episode in which the people departing seem to be relatively affluent and in no sense coerced by their circumstances.

At Killin we heard the little history of a Highland migration. Several expeditions of this kind to America, … began to make a noise in the country; and a discontented spirit got abroad, even in those parts, where no oppression could be complained of; particularly in the domains of the earl of Breadalbin; the happiness of whose tenants seems to have been among the principal sources of the happiness of their lord … Here convened about thirty families, making in all above three hundred people … the whole company was called together by the sound of bag-pipes, and the order of their march was settled … They were all dressed in their best attire; and the men were armed in the Highland fashion … Then taking a long adieu of their friends, and relations, who gathered round them, the music began to play, and in the midst of a thousand good wishes mutually distributed, the whole train moved on.

… Many of them were possessed of two or three hundred pounds,

and few of less than thirty or forty, which at least shewed, they had not starved upon their farms. They were a jocund crew, and set out, not like people flying from the face of poverty, but like men, who were about to carry their health, their strength, and little property, to a better market.

16. Alexandre de La Rochefoucauld: a French perspective

Source: Alexandre de La Rochefoucauld, *To the Highlands in 1786: The Inquisitive Journey of a Young French Aristocrat*, ed. Norman Scarfe (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2001), pp. 173–5, 223

Foreign observers were rare in the Highlands. This French tourist in 1786 absorbed the classic romantic view of the Highlands and captured the resentment general across the north against alien influences. The fact that he was an outsider may invest the account with some unusual neutrality.

… Although Scotland has a quite separate régime, these Highlands are a country entirely different from the rest. The great landowners, or seigneurs, are here known as *Lairds*. They own great estates (of varying size). These Lairds lease their lands to a sort of tenant-in-chief, called a *tacksman*, usually rich, who sub-lets the lands to the farmers. The tacksman is the man 'on the ground', between laird and peasant, who was being over-charged …

These simple inhabitants maintain steadfastly the same fidelity and warmth for their ancient chiefs. They speak of the present king of England only with contempt, and will never call him king, referring to him merely as *George*, or even *The Governor*… They can't speak of Culloden without getting heated, and the thought that they are subjected to the English is one that grieves and torments them in such a terrible way that I'm sure that all these clansmen loyal to the flag of the Pretender would even now be ready to risk trying conclusions yet again.

Everything has been done to make them give up their attachment to their *patrie*, so that their highland dress, entirely peculiar to them, was forbidden. They weren't allowed to go into towns unless they wore trousers. So the markets became meagre and ill-attended. They preferred not to live well and to remain a people utterly apart; not to abandon the smallest of their ways, so much respected in the country, and distinguishing them from all other people.

… I've been told something that has also troubled me: that since English was introduced, they have begun to lose their ancient customs

– their music for instance, and what they talk much more about, having been made to wear breeches …

The highlanders are a people apart, and act as though they are entirely different from the rest of the Scots. They have a little plot of land, from which they have just managed to scrape a living. They live on little. The idea of liberty makes them live, and that idea is so common and so strong that you'll find very few of these people working as servants or labourers. If they are obliged to earn their livings, they try to do a job of their own choosing. They are inseparable from their Highlands, and would never willingly leave them, even for the most beautiful place in the world.

17. Letters from General Mackay, of the Reay estate, to a Tacksman

Source: Reay papers, in Angus Mackay, *The Book of Mackay* (Edinburgh, 1906), pp. 219–20

The curbing of the tacksmen: note that General Mackay blames tacksmen for oppressive services. Subtenants are recognised as having rights, preferably as direct tenants. Their subsequent removal by this landlord (thirty years later) was the ironic corollary of these earlier changes.

[20 March 1788]
I am certain that no people can thrive till they are perfectly free and masters of their own time. But there is still one material point which I want to put on a clear footing, which is that tacksmen shall not have the power of treating their sub-tenants in a worse manner than the rest of the tenants on the estate are … I wish particularly that every subtenant should have the same liberty, as every man ought to have, of selling his cattle to whom he pleases, and likewise that they should not be obliged to winter cattle for the taxman any more than tenants are for the proprietor, and they should not be subject to carry burdens or to go from home on the taxman's business, but with their own free will and paid for their trouble, as these customs are all oppressive.

[7 May 1788]
… Where services must be paid they ought to be stipulated to guard against imposition, and accordingly I fix for the parish of Kintail half peats, that is to say, half what was usually paid. Every other thing what-

ever, harvest and spring work, carrying burdens, and going with letters, I totally abolish … But it is a difficult matter to alter the customs of a country which has been so long upon a barbarous and cruel footing … With regard to David Nicol, I have no objection to grant him a Tack of what he possesses himself, but I will never put it in his power, or any such men, to turn out or put in sub-tenants at his pleasure.

18. Assynt, Sutherland, in the late eighteenth century

Source: *The Statistical Account of Scotland 1791–1799*, ed. Sir John Sinclair (Edinburgh, 1794; reprint Wakefield, 1981), vol. 18: Sutherland and Caithness

At the far extremity of north-west Sutherland, the parish of Assynt in the 1790s had experienced little change apart from swift population growth. The traditional economy was intact. The description by the local minister (Rev. William MacKenzie) captures the strengths and weaknesses of the old regime in the northern Highlands, as well as the new pressure of numbers. There is no reference to the introduction of commercial sheep farming in Assynt at this time. This was the old black cattle economy.

… in the 1765 … there were no potatoes … At first the natives were indifferent; however, being persuaded to persevere, and finding their great advantage, they have ever since improved in the skill of planting their plots and fields of potatoes …

… Harvest 1771 was favourable, the crop was good, and safely got in. A very great fall of snow took place in the beginning of January 1772, … notwithstanding almost the whole crop, and all the provender had been given to the cattle, yet more than one third of the live stock of this parish died. Harvest 1782 was very bad; very little of the crop was secured. It was mostly lost, being covered with snow. Spring 1783 was more favourable than that of 1772, consequently less loss of cattle. At this very time, *viz.* September 24. 1793, the barley is not cut down, therefore a very late harvest is dreaded …

… the natives are a third more numerous than when he [MacKenzie] first came in 1766 …

Character of the People, &c. – They are in general civil sober, and hospitable to a high degree; … They are patient of hunger, cold, and fatigue, by sea and land, as emergencies may require. In general, they are serious and devout, and do not approve, but highly dislike the contrary

character whenever seen; yet, when imprudently provoked or insulted, they will shew themselves not devoid of resentment.

By what means the Situation of the Inhabitants and Parish might be meliorated … villages might be built in or near the harbours, which in course of time would not fail to produce … valuable purposes to the Honourable proprietors and the people at large.

19. Some observations on Argyll

Source: *The Statistical Account of Scotland*, ed. Sir John Sinclair (Edinburgh, 1791; reprint Wakefield, 1983); vol. 8: Argyll: Parishes of Lochgoil-head and Kilmorich

Southern Argyll was one of the first districts to experience the intrusion of commercial sheep farming.

… This country … is … ill adapted for tillage; there is very little land capable of being ploughed, little sun-shine to ripen, or dry weather to preserve the crops … Potatoes are much cultivated, and they produce plentifully; there are about 150 bolls planted annually … when this country was chiefly stocked with black cattle, there was not a season in which a great number of them did not perish for want; and in bad seasons, it was very common for a tenant to lose a third, and sometimes the half of his flock … John Campbell of Lagwine, from Ayrshire, was the first person who stocked a farm with sheep in this parish, 35 years ago. Some of his countrymen settled soon after, in the neighbouring parishes. The country people regarded the few strangers who came to settle among them with an evil eye; and this rendered them more averse to follow their example. But a short time reconciled them to their system, and convinced them of the superior advantage of sheep to black cattle. From that time, therefore, the number of sheep has been encreasing, and that of black cattle decreasing. It is believed, that there are at present about 26,500 sheep in this parish. The few strangers who came to settle here, brought with them the breed of sheep which they had in their own country, and the sheep which have been introduced since, from time to time, were chiefly brought from the Linton market …

… The great decrease in the population of the country is owing to the introduction of sheep. Since the farms have been chiefly stocked with sheep, one man often rents as much land as 10, 12, or 14 tenants formerly possessed …

The strength of a nation cannot surely consist in the number of idle people which it maintains; that the inhabitants of this part of the country were formerly sunk in indolence, and contributed very little to the wealth, or to the support of the state cannot be denied. The produce of this parish, since sheep have become the principal commodity, is at least double the intrinsic value of what it was formerly; so that half the number of hands produce more than double the quantity of provisions, for the support of our large towns, and the supply of our tradesmen and manufacturers; and the system by which land returns the most valuable produce, and in great abundance, seems to be the most beneficial for the country at large.

20. Perthshire in the 1790s

Source: *The Statistical Account of Scotland, 1791–1799*, ed. Sir John Sinclair (Edinburgh, 1794–5; reprint Wakefield, 1977), vol. 12: North and West Perthshire, pp. 101, 273, 697–9

This is a contemporary perception of the changes after the '45 in the southern Highlands. Note the ambiguous course of population change in Blair Atholl and the impact of the Forfeited Estates administration at Comrie, balanced in this case by the creation of village alternatives. At Lethendy there was a clearance of sheep to create advances in arable production.

Parishes of Blair-Atholl and Strowan

… When the jurisdiction act took place, and men of landed property could not make their tenants fight their battles, they became less careful of having clever fellows about them, and so began to consider, how they might make the most of that class of men in another way. Then the rents began to be raised, the farms to be enlarged, much land to be taken into the landlord's domain, and the shepherd and his dog to be the inhabitants of farms, that formerly maintained many families; though this last particular is not, as yet, so much the case here, as it is in many other places. In consequence of these changes, some of the tenants are become cottagers; some have removed to towns, to gain a livelihood by labour; and a few have emigrated to America, though that spirit is not become very common here as yet.

Parish of Comrie

About a third part of this parish once belonged to the family of PERTH;

and when their estate was forfeited, and put under the management of commissioners, several farms, formerly possessed by many tenants, were given to one person. This lessened the number of inhabitants considerably. The village indeed has increased very much of late; but, by comparing what the large farms have lost of tenants and cottagers, with what the village has gained, the population does not appear to be on the increase …

Parish of Lethendy

Thirty years ago, the best lands in the parish were under sheep pasture, and from a bad breed, and probably unskilful management, yielded but a poor pittance to the proprietor, and but a very scanty subsistence to the tenant. Since that period, sheep have been banished entirely; the use of marl has been adopted; the waste lands have been cultivated; the rental of the parish trebled; the condition of the tenants meliorated; and the face of the country entirely changed …

21. Colonel Alexander Macdonell of Glengarry writes to his agent, 1794

Source: C. Fraser-Mackintosh (ed.), *Letters of Two Centuries* (Inverness, 1890), pp. 328–9

Macdonell of Glengarry here expresses the traditional expectation of military service of his tenants (including their cottars) – reinforced by the explicit threat of eviction if the tenant refused. By the 1790s the bargain was strained. Removals in Knoydart continued. Forty years later Macdonell's successor was bankrupt and emigrated to Australia.

Scamadale, 29th Nov., 1794

Sir, – Enclosed you have a list of small tenants belonging to my Knoydart property – their leases being expired by Whitsunday first – and having refused to serve me, I have fully determined to warn them out, and turn them off my property, without loss of time; and as this is the first order of the kind I have given you since I came of age, I have only to add that your punctuality and expedition on the present occasion will be marked by me, and I am sir, your humble servant.

(Signed) A. MACDONELL,
Glengarry, Colonel

Figure 14. Alexander Ranaldson Macdonell of Glengarry (1773–1828), the epitome of the traditional Highland chief. His family was responsible for early evictions; the heir finally sold out and left for Australia in 1840, only to return in humiliation.

22. Knoydart, 1795: James Fraser of Gorthlick writes to the Procurator-Fiscal of Inverness-shire

Source: C. Fraser-Mackintosh (ed.), *Letters of Two Centuries* (Inverness, 1890), pp. 330–1

This document registers the first entry of Lowland sheepfarmers into the Scothouse estate, which later was absorbed into Knoydart, the scene of many removals over several decades. Note the trepidation of the initial movements.

Two gentlemen from the Border have just now left me, who set out tomorrow morning for Ft.-Augustus, to examine the Culachy farm, and from thence they propose to proceed to Scothouse; but, as they are entire strangers, and, I observe, somewhat alarmed and apprehensive of not being relished by the present possessors or others, I told them that I would write to you, and that you would probably direct them to a proper guide from Ft.-Augustus, which, indeed, would seem to be of no small consequence in order to guard agt. all prejudices or prepossessions from any interested third parties …

23. Oral testimonies

Source: Margaret MacDonnell, *The Emigrant Experience: Songs of Highland Emigrants in North America* (Toronto, 1982), pp. 62–3

Oral testimonies are regarded 'as near as you can get to the history of everyman and to everyone's history' (E. Cregeen, Recollections, *p. 3). The Gaelic poetry of the age of the Clearances has been recovered by modern scholars who have been able to classify much of the provenance of the work. Some of it has a reputation of weak sentimentality, but there is much that is venomous, vigorous and satiric, as this example and those in No. 77 illustrate. The popular targets were commonly the sheep, the factors, the sheepfarmers; often the emigrants are celebrated and mourned in the same breath. None of this source is objective reportage but its survival speaks volumes for the continuing resentment felt at the changes that overcame the Highlands, and all the nostalgia for a better imagined past.*

This song was composed by an unknown bard who apparently had witnessed early evictions in Strath Glass. A consolation to emigrants departing for North America, it was sung before the Gaelic society of Inverness in March 1883 but possibly dates from the early nineteenth century.

'Théid sinn a dh' America', Fear a' Mhuinntir Mheinne

Théid sinn a dh' America
'S gur h-e ar deireadh falbh ann;
Ni sinn fearainn de'n choille
Far nach teirig airgiod.

Gheibh sinn càirdean romhainn ann,
Oifigich ro-ainmeil;
Tha cuid aig a 'bheil stòras dhiubh
'S cha b'fhiach iad gròt 'n uair dh'fhalbh iad.

Meòirean chraobh air lùbadh ann
Le ùbhlan glas 's dearga;
Gheibh sinn beòir gun chunntas ann
A chuireadh sùrd 's an anfhann.

Marbhphaisg air na tighearnan,
An ruith th' ac' air an airgiod;
'S fheàrr leò baidein chaorach
No 'n cuid dhaoine 's iad fo àrmachd.

'We Shall Go to America', by A native of Main or a Menzies

We shall go to America
it is our destiny to go there;
we shall convert the forest to holdings
where money will not run out.

We'll find friends there before us
now renowned professional men;
some of them are wealthy though
they hadn't a groat when they emigrated.

There the branches are laden
with green and red apples;
we shall have plenty of ale there
to enliven the dispirited.

A plague on the landlords,
with their greed for money;
they prefer flocks of sheep
to their own armed hosts.

24. Progress of sheep farming

Source: James Hogg, *A Tour in the Highlands in 1803: A Series of Letters by James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, Addressed to Sir Walter Scott* (Paisley, 1888), p. 52

As late as 1803, sheep farming was still unknown in many parts of the Highlands. Hogg's Tour *declared that the potential for expansion was manifest – as he explained to Walter Scott.*

… It is believed by most people that I am too partial to the Highlands, and that they will not produce such stocks as I affirm that they will. Let them only take an impartial view of Glengarry and accuse me if they can. The superiority of its grazings to those of a great many other Highland countries, is in no wise discernable to the beholder, yet the stocks of sheep upon it are equal in quality to those of any county in the south of Scotland. Gillespie hath one farm completely stocked with the finest Cheviot breed, which thrive remarkably well. These he bought on the Border … All the stocks of sheep on Glengarry are good … The ground lets very high. Alexander Macdonald, Esquire, of Glengarry, is the proprietor …

25. Thomas Telford, 1802

Source: Thomas Telford, 'A Survey and Report of the Coasts and Central Highlands of Scotland … in the Autumn of 1802', in 'Reports of the Select Committee on the Survey of the Central Highlands of Scotland'. Great Britain: House of Commons: *Parliamentary Papers* 1802–3, vol. IV.1, pp. 25–7

Telford, the opinionated and brilliant civil engineer, examined the context for the construction of the Caledonian Canal, which eventually generated considerable employment during its construction. His primary purposes were, however, to staunch the outflow of Highland emigration, to create positive conditions for economic development, and to bolster northern defences. Telford gave a forthright diagnosis of Highland emigration, in which he did not much spare the landlords. The irony, eventually, was that this great canal probably accelerated emigration and failed to generate much new permanent development.

Emigrations have already taken place from various Parts of the High-

lands, … about Three Thousand Persons went away in the Course of last Year, and if I am rightly informed, Three Times that Number are preparing to leave the Country in the present Year.

… converting large Districts of the Country into extensive Sheep-walks … requires much fewer People to manage the same Track of Country …

The Difference of Rents to the Landlords between Sheep and Black Cattle is, I understand, at least Three to One, and yet on Account of the extraordinary Rise in the Prices of Sheep and Wool, the Sheep Farmers have of late Years been acquiring Wealth …

The very high Price of Black Cattle has also facilitated the Means of Emigration, as it has furnished the old Farmers with a Portion of Capital which enables them to transport their Families beyond the Atlantic.

In some few Cases a greater Population than the Land can support in any Shape, has been the Cause of Emigrations; such was the Island of Tiree.

Some have, no doubt, been deluded by Accounts sent back from others gone before them; and many deceived by artful Persons, who hesitate not to sacrifice these poor ignorant People to selfish Ends.

A very principal Reason must also be, that the People, when turned out of their Black Cattle Farms to make way for the Sheep Farmers, see no Mode of Employment whereby they can earn a Subsistence in their own Country, and sooner than seek in the Low Lands of Scotland, or in England, they will believe what is told them may be done in the Farming Line in America. …

To point out the Means of preventing Emigrations in future, is a Part of my Duty … As the Evil at present seems to arise chiefly from the Conduct of Landowners, in changing the Oeconomy of their Estates, it may be questioned whether Government can with Justice interfere, or whether any essential Benefits are likely to arise from this Interference.

In one point of View … it is the Interest of the Empire that this District be made to produce as much human Food as it is capable of doing at the least possible Expence; that this may be done by stocking it chiefly with Sheep; …

In another point of View … it is a great Hardship, if not a great Injustice, that the Inhabitants of an extensive District should all at once be driven from their native Country, to make way for Sheep Farming, which is likely to be carried to an imprudent Extent; that, in a few Years, this Excess will be evident; that before it is discovered, the Country will be depopulated, and that Race of People which has of late Years

maintained so honourable a Share in the Operations of our Armies and Navies will then be no more …

The Caledonian Canal … will not only furnish present Employment, but promise to accomplish all the leading Objects which can reasonably be looked forward to for the Improvement and future Welfare of the Country, whether we regard its Agriculture, Fisheries, or Manufactures.

26. Selkirk on emigration

Source: The earl of Selkirk, *Observations on the Present State of the Highlands of Scotland, With a View of the Causes and Probable Consequences of Emigration* (London, 1805), pp. 1–3, 30–4

Thomas Douglas, earl of Selkirk (1771–1820), was a landed proprietor (with estates in Kirkcudbright and Galloway) who became a proponent of emigration to North America. He gained some familiarity with the Highlands (and toured at the time of the anti-clearance riots in 1792). He became involved in several schemes to promote emigration in Louisiana, Prince Edward Island, Upper Canada and the Red River Valley. These particularly addressed the crisis in the Highlands and created opportunities for people ousted by the 'improvements' in the Highlands. The schemes had very mixed results and though several thousand people were conveyed to Canada, Selkirk died a failure, at least in financial terms. He believed emigration was not only inevitable but desirable, and he exposed the contradiction between the idea of improvement and continuing opposition to emigration. His case was sympathetic to the Highlanders and open-eyed about the consequences of radical changes in productivity and population growth.

Without any immediate or local connexion with the Highlands, I was led, very early in life, to take a warm interest in the fate of my countrymen in that part of the kingdom … in the year 1792, I was prompted to take an extensive tour through their wild region, … I ascertained … that Emigration was an unavoidable result of the general state of the country, arising from causes above all control, and in itself of essential consequence to the tranquillity and permanent welfare of the kingdom.

… I thought, however, that a portion of the antient spirit might be preserved among the Highlanders of the New World – that the

emigrants might be brought together in some part of our own colonies, where they would be of national utility, and where no motives of general policy would militate (as they certainly may at home) against the preservation of all those peculiarities of customs and language, which they are themselves so reluctant to give up, and which are perhaps intimately connected with many of their most striking and characteristic virtues.

… Ever since the introduction of sheep-farming into the Highlands, there has been a very unequal struggle between the former possessors of the lands, and the graziers. It would be difficult, perhaps, to quote an instance where the old tenantry have been able to offer a rent equal to that which their competitors would have given. In many instances, indeed, the fear of such competition has induced them to stretch their utmost nerve, and to make offers, which left from the produce of the land a bare subsistence for themselves …

The first sheep-farmers … reaped great profits … Many of the tacksmen have also discarded their superfluous cotters and subtenants, and imitate the active industry of the strangers …

Hence the competition with which the old occupiers have to contend, has risen to a pitch which they cannot possibly resist; and the conclusion is inevitable, that, as fast as the current leases expire, the whole or nearly the whole of this body of men will be dispossessed.

The cotters are scarcely more likely to hold their place; because, though a few may be requisite, yet the number usually employed on any farm under the old system, was incomparably greater than a grazier has occasion for. The rents that are now to be paid, will not allow the occupier to submit to any unnecessary expense: the families to be maintained on the ground must, for his own interest, be reduced to the small number who are sufficient for the tending of his flocks.

To the dispossessed tenantry, as well as to the cotters, who by the same progress of things are deprived of their situations and livelihood, two different resources present themselves. They know that in the Low Country of Scotland, and particularly in the manufacturing towns, labour will procure them good wages: they know likewise that in America the wages of labour are still higher, and that from the moderate price of land they may expect to obtain not only the possession of a farm, but an absolute property.

… Emigration is by far the most likely to suit the inclination and habits of the Highlanders. It requires a great momentary effort; but holds out a speedy prospect of a situation and mode of life similar to that in which they have been educated.

27. Rev. James Hall

Source: Rev. James Hall, *Travel in Scotland by an Unusual Route* (London, 1807), vol. 2, pp. 507, 443, 473

Sympathetic to displaced Highlanders, Hall gave short shrift to the landlords; he observes the powerful current of emigration in the north. Hall, of Walthamstow, was chaplain to the earl of Caithness.

It is a certain fact, the chieftains in the Highlands are now, for the most part, instead of being almost adored, in general despised. And why? merely because their lands are let out in large sheep walks, to tenants who are nearly as independent as themselves, and the tenants turned out of their small possessions have no more favours in expectation …

The sheepwalks in the Highlands, particularly of late, that sheep have brought so high a price, have become an excellent concern. A gentleman in Badenoch, who has merely a part of one, I have the best information, netts at least six hundred pounds a year by it. Some of these sheepwalks are from twelve to twenty miles long, and nearly as broad, and this vast extent of sheep walk, swallowing up in one a number of families, is the reason why the population of the Highlands is decreasing, emigration every day takes place, and the wealth of the country concentrating in a few monopolizing overgrown individuals.

… the people of the Highlands, driven from their farms by the avarice of their landholders, will rather seek a scanty subsistence on a foreign shore than remain at home, to see their possessions, which they and their fathers occupied, in the hands of strangers, and turned into extensive sheep walks. The high wages given for digging the Caledonian Canal may detain some of these for a while; but till they cease to hear of the success of some of their acquaintance that have gone before them, or find themselves invited to improve the seats of their forefathers and the scenes of their younger years, they will never cease to wish to be gone, where hope induces them to think they will be happier.

… What then is to be done with the Highlanders after the canal is finished? … The towns and villages of Scotland are, perhaps, too full already, and the abodes of their youth are now turned into extensive sheep walks, and in the hands of a few overgrown monopolizers. What can they do but go to our settlements abroad, or some other settlements? This is Lord Selkirk's reasoning; and it is irrefragable … There are not manufactures in the north to employ a twentieth part of the hands that are idle, even if the genius and habits of the Highlanders induced them to manufactures …

28. A common clearance, 1810

Source: Staffordshire County Record Office,
Papers of Unett and Related Families, D3610

This document relates to a family which had colonial and military interests and property in England and a Highland estate, namely at Ballindown and Kinneiries. The owner, James G. Fraser, was a half-pay officer; in 1793 he complained, 'my farm in Ballindoinn is the only property in Scotland, and I may add in Britain, that has not yielded a Shilling to the lawful owners since … 1776, a period of nearly 20 years.' Note the determination to consolidate farms and increase rents, and equally the hope that the ousted tenantry might cope well enough on the margins of the estate.

Notices to quit should be immediately given to all these tenants, except the Cottagers; and a few months previous to their quitting, the Farms should be advertised to be let altogether by Tender. The new Tenant should be bound to lay out all the arable land down in an husbandlike manner, and occupy it afterwards as a Sheep Farm, and he should permit the Cottage Tenants to turn the usual quantity of black cattle and sheep on the hills during the proper season of the year, and get Peat etc. These farms may likewise be let on lease for 11 years.

With respect to the present Tenants, Mr Grant must accommodate matters with them as well as he can. Perhaps if they had each of them a small plot of Land on the boundaries of the Estate to cultivate and improve, at a mere nominal Rent, with provisions to turn a certain quantity of black cattle and sheep on the hills, at the proper times of the year, they might all of them do just as well as they have done. It is presumed that these Farms will lett together for £150 a year, at least or from that to £200 a year …

29. The Oppression of Numbers – Sutherland, 1817: Patrick Sellar writes to James Loch, 17 April 1817

Source: Staffordshire County Record Office,
Sutherland Papers D593/K/1/3/5

Patrick Sellar, sheepfarmer and factor, declares the imperative of clearance in Sutherland – at a time of destitution and resistance.

… I perceive it is her Ladyship's wish … that all Woodstealers &

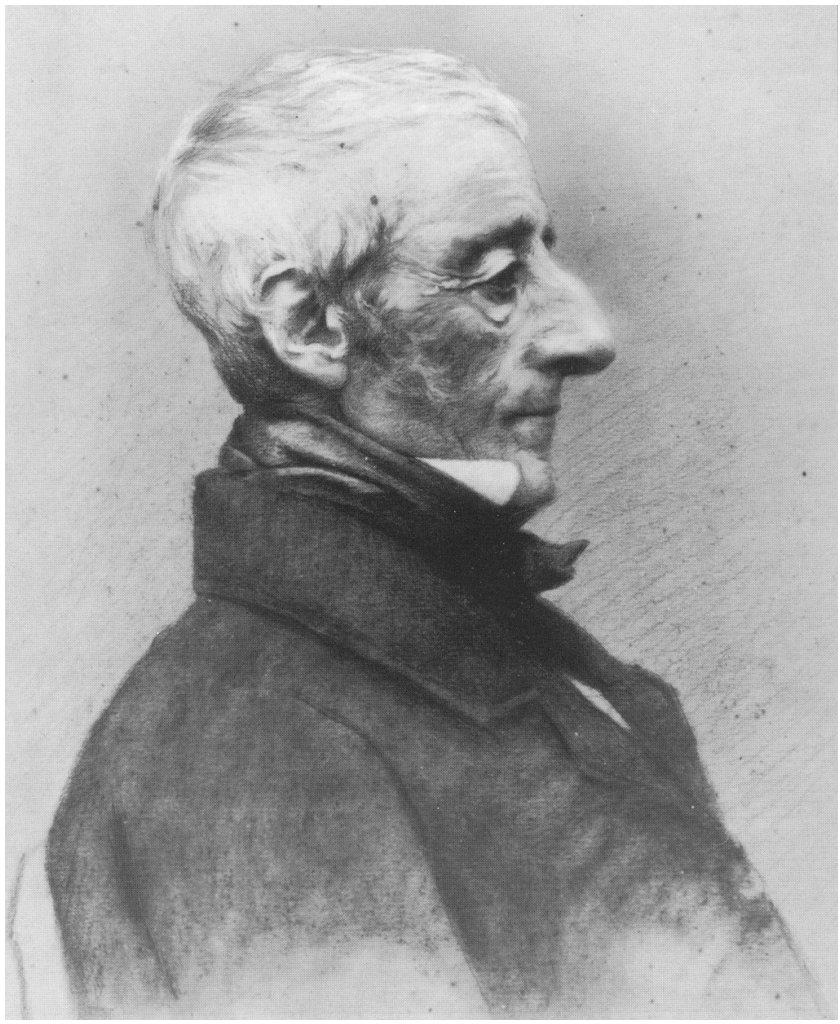


Figure 15. Patrick Sellar (1780–1851), the most successful sheepfarmer and the most despised name among the evictors.

poachers & thieves be sent out of the country – This with the view 1st of maintaining policy, and 2nd of so far diminishing the burthen of population. – I shall see that the order be obeyed. – The first effect it Shall have – The second I have more doubts about; unless the Ground from which the person be ejected, be left unoccupied; for if another family Step in to work the land & undertake the rent. – a young pair marry or a friend is brought from the South & in a word the population is presently filled up.

I am therefore most humbly of opinion that the population of the Interior cannot be diminished; but, by closing a certain district annually & laying it under Stock; unless, the Family were to Say, whoever is picked out & ejected, his possession shall lay unoccupied … Their land does not grow corn or cloth; that they require these; that they require to provide rent; & that They create nothing to export to other countries in exchange for the supply of these wants; Their only product, cattle, not being of so much value as to pay for the food the population requires.

… I think it plain, that either emigration must soon take place from hence, – or a prodigeous & continued arrear and loss, will be added to the loss of wood & turff damage now sustained. I humbly beg you will coolly reflect, on what, taking interest and humanity together, into the noble Family's consideration, it is for them to do? … God knows it would be humane to say "Here is a district in Great misery by being erroneously possessed. If you will continue this miserable life do So. But if you prefer going to your friends in Pictou, the Family will make you a present of next Martinmas rent and pay the freight of a vessel for you – nay they have taken a Grant of such and such a tract of land at Pictou and they offer each family of you 100 acres of it rent free for 50 years to come." … the poor people, leaving the Country with grateful hearts, and planted in competency, and in that State of Society for which, above all other people they are fitted, are essentially bettered in every respect – I doubt not but a few years will diminish the population by Grief poverty & distress. – But it is heart-breaking to reflect on the causes which must produce such effect. – Malthus shews it clearly – shews what kind of thing it is & how much it is to be avoided. –

I would yearly send a cargo of this Sort to this 'New Sutherland'. – untill all the mildewed land be cleared of people by this, & by Settlements on the Coast.

30. The clearing tenant in a hurry: Patrick Sellar to James Loch, 6 September 1817

Source: Staffordshire County Record Office, Sutherland Papers D593/K/1/3/5

The great Sutherland sheepfarmer, Sellar, demanded the lands adjacent to his own be cleared – partly to secure his own flocks, partly to fulfil the essential rationale of improvement in Sutherland. Sellar had been exculpated from the charge of culpable homicide in court proceedings in

Inverness in April 1816 – the events having related to earlier clearances which he executed in Strathnaver in 1814. After the trial Sellar was himself stripped of his role as estate factor but continued as a sheepfarmer – his very efficiency enabling him to exert continuing influence and demands in the Sutherland estate management. The letter captures Sellar's mentality to perfection.

… 1st … if the bottom of the parish of Farr were put into Lotts in place of laying in runrig there is room enough to accommodate the tenants of Syre & Grubmore. – In truth, altho' there be many hundred acres of improvable moor, … 2nd That the tenants of Syre & Grubmore by being removed from the mildew to the herring, & Captain McKay by living on the coast, will be, each at their proper business, and the land of Syre and Grubmore, by being freed of them, as well as the Low muirs by being tilled by them will be each in progress of improvement in place of that of deterioration, the proprietor in the act of receiving rent, instead of buying meal & the Tenant of selling sheep in room of feeding idle people with them. –

The plan … was this:– that the people, … as arranged in 1813, … receive immediate notice that they must quitt entirely at Whity 1819 – crop 1818 being their last crop – That moor allotments, such as the Dornoch ones be presently laid out for them, at the bottom of the Naver and along the Armadale coast – That each tenant be told at Whity 1818 what is his particular allotment. That he be allowed 12 months to move his trash there, or to go where he Chuses, … but understanding distinctly that on their own industry, not on meal to be imported by Lord Stafford, or sheep bred by the Stockfarmers are they to live. – If you give them these lots for 1/- each or for nothing for a time you will save yourselves much trouble and much good paper & ink used in writing such arrear lists. –

This is what did humbly occur to us. – If you do not march me on this Side with Stock you force me to give up, I assure you, or to Suffer ruin. – By the terms of the Sett 1818 it was held out that this district was to be put under Stock. – That these terms were not, in this particular implimented, has occasioned a loss to me much exceeding £1,000. – You are too Just I am sure to propose to me to continue so to Suffer, and if you cannot enable me to farm in peace in that district you will set me free from it. – I should rather you did not set me free from it; for I have done, as well as suffered much for the improvement of Rhiloisk farm …

31. The end of MacKid: Robert MacKid to Sellar, 22 September 1817

Source: Staffordshire County Record Office, Sutherland Papers D593/K/1/3/5

Robert MacKid, sheriff substitute of Sutherland, led the campaign to bring Patrick Sellar to trial in Inverness in April 1816 for 'culpable homicide' against people in the Strathnaver removals of 1814. Sellar was exculpated and then pursued MacKid for substantial redress. MacKid was broken by these events and agreed to sign these humiliating apologies which Sellar and his descendants were able to use against any subsequent accusers.

Sir,

Being impressed with the perfect conviction & belief that the statements to your prejudice contained in the precognition which I took in Strathnaver in May 1815, were to such an extent exaggerations as to amount to absolute falsehood. I am free to admit that led away by the clamour excited against you on account of the discharge of the duties of your office as Factor for the Marchioness of Stafford, in introducing a new system of Management on the Sutherland Estate, I gave a degree of Credit to those mis-statements of which I am now thoroughly ashamed, and which I most sincerely and deeply regret.

From the aspersions therein on your character I trust you need not doubt that you are already fully acquitted in the eyes of the world. That you would be entitled to exemplary damages from me for my participation in the injury done you, I am most sensible, and I shall therefore not only acknowledge it as a most important obligation conferred on me and on my innocent family, if you will have the goodness to drop your law suit against me, but I shall also pay the expences of that suit, and place at your disposal towards the reimbursement of the previous expences which this most unfortunate business has occasioned to you, any sum you may exact when made acquainted with the state of my affairs: trusting to your generosity to have consideration to the heavy expence my defence has cost me, and that my connection with the unfortunate affair has induced me to resign the office of Sheriff-Substitute of Sutherland. I beg further to add that in case of your compliance with my wish here expressed, you are to be at liberty to make any use you please of this letter except publishing it in the Newspapers which I doubt not you will see the propriety of my objecting to. –

I am …
(signed) Rob. MacKid

32. Sellar's triumph, 1817: Sellar to George MacPherson Grant of Ballindalloch, 23 September 1817

Source: Staffordshire County Record Office,
Sutherland Papers D593/K/1/3/5

Sellar announces his triumph over MacKid.

Dear Sir

From the nature of the advice which you were so Good as give me, last year, respecting McKid & the interest you have always been so kind as take in, what concerned me I venture to intrude on you with the annexed copy of the correspondence by which I have settled my suit against him. – I found the miserable man involved in such difficulties on all hands; and his family of I believe 9 or 10 young Children so constantly about to be beggared by my bringing him to Trial that I was well pleased to wash my hands of him.

33. An internal estate communication: draft letter, most likely by James Loch, commissioner of Sutherland estates, 3 October 1817

Source: Staffordshire County Record Office,
Sutherland Collection DS93/Additional/1

This refers to low-level harassment of sheepfarmers in Sutherland at the time of rising agitation against clearances. It also demonstrates the arbitrary power of the estate to evict or remove small tenantry. It shows the internal operations of management and the realities of otherwise invisible resistance.

… I have a long letter from Marshall [one of the new sheepfarmers] complaining of the depredations of people of the name of MacPherson of Achmore, as he has however no direct proof of their guilt he cannot make the regular complaint. Lord and Lady Stafford desire that whichever of these people which you may on investigation think bad characters you may dismiss them from the estate and give them no lot on any part of the property …

Marshall also complained that the people near Lairg stole his hay so much he was obliged to sell the remainder of it, that his shepherds watched all night and could not discover the depredators. Intrust your

new officers to look sharp after all these matters and let them also look a little after the shepherds themselves who I cannot help suspecting to use a phrase of Sellar's like good mutton as well as the highlanders.

34. Clearances and emigration: letter from James Loch to W. Allan of Leith, 22 November 1817

Source: Staffordshire County Record Office, Sutherland Papers D593/K/1/5/6

This document dates from the period of equivocal clearance, when population retention was still given considerable priority. Within a few years (even months) the tide turned and landlords began to see the benefit of reduced populations on their estates. This document indicates a degree of landlordly ambivalence at a time of large-scale removals in Sutherland. The author is James Loch, Commissioner of the Sutherland Estates, planning great new clearances in the coming twenty-four months.

It is not Lord Stafford's wish to promote any emigration from the Estate of Sutherland, as he provides lots for all he moves from the hills upon the sea coast but he at the same time does not wish to stand in the way of such a disposition upon the part of any who wish to go to the Colonies rather than settle on the coast side of Sutherland and in this view it is his Lordships wish that they may be comfortably provided for in their way out, what assistance his Lordship could pretend to give, if it is deemed adviseable that he should give any must of course depend upon the amount of the expence.

Will you therefore have the goodness to let me know what part of the American Continent you land them, what you would charge a head including their women & children, upon what food you support them and at what season of the year they should sail.

As the very asking of this question may lead to erroneous conclusions I beg leave again to repeat they are put merely for the purpose of information and that they are put without his Lordships knowledge.

35. Clearance 1817–19: Francis Suther to Loch, 6 December 1817

Source: Staffordshire County Record Office, Sutherland Papers D593/K/1/3/5

Sutherland clearance documents: arrangements to accommodate removees. Suther was the estate manager.

Rhives

Dear Sir,

… I propose to draw a line from the Kirk of Farr to the Shore of Portskerry Bay … and plant the people between that line and the sea if removals render so much necessary there you place them in a situation to ensure for certain daily food even in the worst seasons and when there if they will starve for want of exertion they deserve to suffer. This plan will require a slice of both the Innes' farms that off Armadale will be the most considerable and to make Sandside amends I would propose to give him as winter land the upper part of the Water of Strathy which is under Inhabitants (miserable beings who cannot pay their rent) and down both sides of that water to Strathy Mains march …

In the meantime I have intimated in the several parishes to all those that are to be removed – the determination of doing so of course they will not be taken by surprise and from all I can learn they are aware the resolution will be put into force … May it be tried …

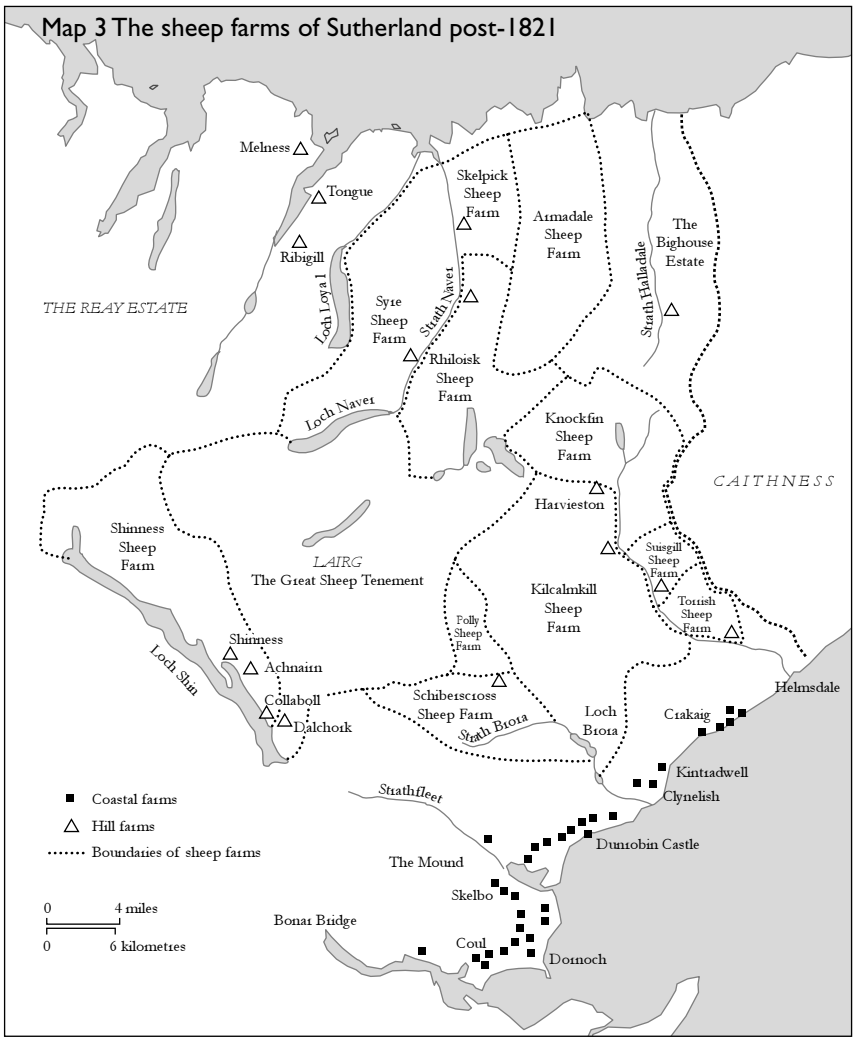
COPY OF REMOVAL NOTICE

Copy "Intimation to Tenants that are to be removed 1818

Parish of _____

The Marquis and Marchioness of Stafford having determined to lay the following places under stock viz – _____

Intimation to the Tenants therein is hereby made that allotments on the Coast will be prepared for them by the end of January next when each Person will be informed of the Allotment marked off for him in order that he may prepare to enter upon it at the Term of Whitsunday first if he so inclines. Intimation is also made that each of the Tenants who behaves himself to the satisfaction of the Proprietors and their Factors shall have permission to occupy their present holdings as pasturage rent free from Whitsunday 1818 to Whitsunday 1819 and they shall also possess their New Allotments rent free for that year in order that the Tenantry who conduct themselves as aforesaid may have



Map 3. The sheep farms of Sutherland post-1821.

full time to remove their property from the Grounds and erect Houses on their new allotments and also in order that they may have every advantage in removing."

36. James Loch to Lady Stafford, 3 November 1817

Source: Staffordshire County Record Office,
Sutherland Papers D593/K/1/5/6

Here, in a renewed and closely planned phase of removals, James Loch insists that every care should be taken with new settlements to ensure the essential humanity in the exercise planned for 1819.

… Your Ladyships letter of instructions on the subject of the Strathnaver removals shall be most strictly attended to, it contains every thing that a wise and prudent consideration, for the benefit of the Estate, coupled with a due regard for the feelings and interest of the People can dictate. The proposed period of their removal was Whity [Whitsunday] 1819. They were to enjoy their present and new lots for the year from Whity 1818 to Whity 1819 for nothing as they could not in the hurry & bustle of change do much to the cultivation of either their old or new lots. I wrote to Suther a week ago to have the lots of Strathnaver immediately surveyed …
Your Ladyship may rest assured that nothing shall be done hurriedly or without full consideration …

37. A petition

Source: Staffordshire County Record Office,
Sutherland Papers, D593/K/1/3/5

A petition on behalf of distressed people (before their removal), by some of the old tacksman class.

25th February 1817
Some of the most respectable Inhabitants of the Parish of Kildonan, having met here, they took into serious consideration the present alarming distress which evidently exists in the said Parish among Families and Individuals of the lower class …

That … a very considerable number of Persons are absolutely on the very eve of starvation for want of Provisions, and consequently that their condition loudly calls for immediate relief.

That this relief cannot possibly be afforded by those who are even best circumstanced, owing to the pressure of the times, the general scarcity and the want either of money or of credit to procure it where it can at all be found.

The Meeting therefore from a lively feeling for the distressed state of the indigent poor of their Parish … earnestly and respectfully solicit Lord and Lady Stafford's attention to this very important subject, and that they would be pleased to make such a Provision as will be sufficient to meet the distress in which the Poor of the Parish are at present involved …

Adam Gordon	Gremachany
Alexr Grant	Ensign, Half Pay, Royal Scot
William Gunn	Lieut H.P. 72d Regt
Charles Gordon	Ensign H.P. 93rd
Mrs Gordon	Breakachy
David Ross	Claggan
	… hereby homologated … by Alexander Sage, Minister.

38. Patrick Sellar to Lord Reay, 1 May 1819

Source: Angus Mackay, *The Book of Mackay* (Edinburgh, 1906), pp. 466–7

This is a typical outburst by Sellar against the subtenantry – and a demand for their removal.

… your Lordship's brother wrote me that Mr Forbes had not removed one of his subtenants, whom as dependents or servants he keeps doing mischief and ploughing in the winter land of Ben Hope – I was assured by him they should all quit along with himself at Whitsunday 1820 and leave the ground unploughed. But to my great surprise I received a letter from him … in quite a different strain, maintaining that he would plough and keep undertenants as he pleased … I gave your Lordship timely notice of all this to intimate that if the *banditti* presently kept on Ben Hope farm are to have possession until Whitsunday 1821 … and if there be of consequence no access for flocks to the safe and peaceable use of the wintering, then I cannot enter into possession at Whit. 1820, as was intended by the missives entered into betwixt your Lordship and me, on such stormy ground without the wintering, for with flocks mixed among sheep-stealers and their dogs no stockman could calculate on possessing the farm. If I can get access I will in 1820 follow up my plan, and if I cannot I will put Strathnaver under cheviot stock under a different arrangement, &c.

39. Clearance at Aberscross, Sutherland, 1819

Source: *Inverness Courier*, quoted in Joseph Mitchell, *Reminiscences of My Life in the Highlands*, vol. 2 (London, 1883–4), p. 91

Much of the documentation of the Clearances derives from the oral testimony taken in the Napier Commission inquiry in 1883, about three-quarters of a century after the events. Some claimed to be eyewitnesses. This example challenges the factor's account and highlights the cruelty of the events and the use of fire. The last issue was denied by some critics, but has confirmation in the contemporary written sources.

We have received a letter from Mr. J. Campbell, The Moss, Lairg, who calls in question certain statements made by Mr. Purves at the Commission, and says that he (the writer) was himself witness of a cruel scene at a place called Aberscross, in Strathfleet. Three crofters, he says, resided near the present Mound Wood. The wife of one of them, named Macdonald, was about to give birth to a child. The factor, along with half a dozen servants, went to burn down the houses.

'They burned the rest of them; and this crofter's was the last. He pleaded hard to be left in the house till his wife was well. The factor did not heed him, but ordered the house to be burned over him. The crofter was in the house, determined not to quit until the fire compelled him. The factor told us the plan we were to take – namely, to cut the rafters and then set fire to the thatch. This we did, but shall never forget the sight. The man, seeing it was now no use to persist, wrapt his wife in the blankets and brought her out. For two nights did that woman sleep in a sheep cot, and on the third night she gave birth to a son. That son, I believe, still lives, and is in America. That is only one instance. I could give many more did space permit.'

40. Robert Southey on landlords, 1819

Source: Robert Southey, *Journal of a Tour in Scotland in 1819* (London, 1929), pp. 40–1, 136–9

Robert Southey, the English poet, toured the north in 1819 and was full of opinions. He was prepared to denounce the great changes in Sutherland but was also critical of the traditional Highland lairds. He opposed emigration and believed that the Highlands could be densely populated to everyone's advantage.

… The country is very well cultivated. When Lord Breadalbane turned his mountains into sheep-farms, he removed the Highlanders to this valley. The evil of the migration, if it were so mismanaged as to produce any, is at an end, and a wonderful improvement it has been, both for the country and for them. There are marks of well-directed industry everywhere. Flax, potatoes, clover, oats and barley, all carefully cultivated and flourishing; the houses not in villages, but scattered about: and the people much more decent in their appearance, than those whom we saw between Killin and Callander …

There is at this time a considerable ferment in the country concerning the management of the M. of Stafford's estates: they comprize nearly 2/5ths of the county of Sutherland, and the process of converting them into extensive sheep-farms is being carried on … Here you have a quiet, thoughtful, contented, religious people, susceptible of improvement, and willing to be improved. To transplant these people from their native mountain glens to the sea coast, and require them to become some cultivators, others fishermen, occupations to which they have never been accustomed – to expect a sudden and total change of habits in the existing generation, instead of gradually producing it in their children; to expel them by process of law from their black-houses, and if they demur in obeying the ejectment, to oust them by setting fire to these combustible tenements – this surely is as little defensible on the score of policy as of morals. And however legal this course of proceeding may be according to the notions of modern legality, certain it is that no such power can be legitimately deduced from the feudal system, for that system made it as much the duty of the Lord to protect his vassals, as of the vassals to serve their Lord …

Except in forcing on this violent change, great good arises where a large estate in Scotland is transferred by marriage to an English owner, English capital and ingenuity being employed to improve it; whereas a native Laird would too probably, like an Irish gentleman, have racked his tenants to support a profuse and wasteful expenditure. Thus in the instance of the Marchioness of Stafford's possessions. They are of enormous extent, tho' they produce not more than between 5 and 600£ a year; and not only is the whole of the receipts expended in improving them, but about an equal sum from the Marquis's English property is annually appropriated to the same purpose, the Marchioness, much to her honour, having this object at heart. Large tracts are planted, and much land brought into good cultivation.

41. James Loch,1820: Improvement in Sutherland

Source: James Loch, *An Account of the Improvements on the Estates of the Marquess of Stafford* (London, 1820), pp. 60–86, 149–50

Loch was an Edinburgh-trained lawyer who took over the management of the vast Sutherland estates at the time of the Sellar affair. He became responsible for the subsequent removals in Sutherland. One of his most important tasks was to provide a reasoned public defence of the policies, of which the 1820 edition was the most elaborate and detailed. It forms the classic apologia *for the clearances, expounding in the clearest terms the essential assumptions of the 'Improvement' case. In this brief selection Loch touches upon pre-clearance conditions, the opposition of vested interests, the creation of alternative employment for the removees, the terms of resettlement and removal, and the productive benefits of the changes.*

The circumstances which have been detailed, must show that no country of Europe in any period of its history, ever presented more formidable obstacles to the improvement of a people arising out of the prejudices and feelings of the people themselves. To the tacksman, it is clear … such a change could not be agreeable. Its effect being to alter his condition, and remove him from a state of idle independence, in habits almost of equality with his chief, to a situation, although fully, if not more respectable, yet one in which his livelihood was to be obtained by his exertions and industry, and in many instances by an application to pursuits, which were by him considered as beneath the occupation of a gentleman, although leading to real independence and wealth, to a degree he never could arrive at in his original condition. Nor could it be agreeable to him to lose that command and influence, which he had hitherto exercised without controul, over his sub-tenants and dependents; while it was at variance with every feeling and prejudice in which he had been brought up and educated … From a certain set of this class, therefore, a real and determined opposition to any change was to be looked for … the bulk of the most active improvers of SUTHERLAND are natives, who, both as sheep farmers, and as skilful and enterprising agriculturalists, are equal to any to be met with in the kingdom … Out of the TWENTY-NINE principal tacksmen on the estate, SEVENTEEN are natives of SUTHERLAND, FOUR are NORTHUMBRIANS, TWO are from the county of MORAY, TWO from ROXBURGHSHIRE, TWO from CAITHNESS, ONE from MIDLOTHIAN, and ONE from the MERSE …

As … the mountainous parts of the estate, and indeed, of the county of SUTHERLAND, were as much calculated for the maintenance of stock as they were unfit for the habitation of man, there could be no doubt as to the propriety of converting them into sheep walks, *provided* the people could be at the same time, settled in situations, where, by the exercise of their honest industry, they could obtain a decent livelihood, and add to the general mass of national wealth, and where they should not be exposed to the recurrence of those privations, which so frequently and so terribly afflicted them, when situated among the mountains …

It had long been known that the coast of SUTHERLAND abounded with many different kinds of fish, not only sufficient for the consumption of the country, but affording also, a supply *to any extent*, for more distant markets or for exportation, when cured and salted … the coast of SUTHERLAND is annually visited by one of those vast shoals of herrings, which frequent the coast of Scotland. It seemed as if it had been pointed out by Nature, that the system for this remote district, in order that it might bear its suitable importance in contributing its share to the general stock of the country, was, to convert the mountainous districts into sheep-walks, and to remove the inhabitants to the coast, or to the valleys near the sea …

… Bad years, and the failure of crops continuing to produce the same miserable effects … to that portion of the population, which still continued to reside among the mountains. This calamity fell with great severity upon them in the seasons of 1812–13, and 1816–17.

During the latter period, they suffered the extremes of want and of human misery, notwithstanding every aid that could be given to them, through the bounty of their landlords. Their wretchedness was so great, that after pawning every thing they were possessed of, to the fishermen on the coast, such as had no cattle were reduced to come down from the hills in hundreds, for the purpose of gathering cockles on the shore. Those who lived in the more remote situations of the country, were obliged to subsist upon broth made of nettles, thickened with a little oat-meal. Those who had cattle had recourse to the still more wretched expedient of bleeding them, and mixing the blood with oat-meal, which they afterwards cut into slices and fried …

In order to alleviate this misery, every exertion was made by Lord Stafford. To those who had cattle he advanced money to the amount of above THREE THOUSAND POUNDS.

To supply those who had no cattle, he sent meal into the country to the amount of nearly NINE THOUSAND POUNDS … While such was

the distress of those who still remained among the hills, *it was hardly felt by those who had been settled upon the coast* …

Even after every arrangement had been made for the relief of the tenants and sub-tenants upon the estate, a third set most unexpectedly appeared. Upon examining accurately the names of those claiming relief, with the rentals and other lists, it appeared that a very numerous body had fixed themselves in the more remote districts of the estate, and on the outskirts of the more distant towns, who held neither of landlord nor of any of the tacksmen; and who, in short, enjoyed the benefit of residing upon the property without paying *any rent whatever*. Their numbers amounted to no less than FOUR HUNDRED AND EIGHT FAMILIES, consisting of nearly TWO THOUSAND individuals. Common humanity, as well as a compliance with Lord Stafford's directions, made it necessary to extend his relief to such of these people as stood in need of it. But this fact having been once discovered, it certainly would have been most unreasonable to expect that steps should not have been taken to remedy this evil, by removing the whole of these people to the coast, and by adopting such rules as would prevent, in future, the settlement of a similar class upon the property …

… The necessity of completing it [the plan for removals] as speedily as possible was called for also, in consequence of the serious and extensive losses experienced by the stock-farmers: amounting in each year to many hundred sheep …

It was determined, therefore, that the whole of the removals should be completed in the month of May, of the years 1819 and 1820, respectively, and notice to that effect was given, so far back as in the autumn of 1817. In order to give the people who were to be removed, every advantage, and for the purpose of securing to each of them such a sum of money, as might enable them to purchase a boat, or a share in one, and to proceed, without difficulty, in the erection of their new houses, and in the cultivation of their new lots, it was directed that the whole of the arrears due by them, whether on account of meal, or on account of rents, should be abandoned, and that *they should hold their farms, during the last year of their occupation, rent free,* on condition of their settling in their new lots, with alacrity and without delay …

From these details it will be seen, that, in consequence of the mountains being converted into sheep-walks, those districts which were heretofore perfectly unproductive in a national point of view, have begun to contribute very materially to the support of the woollen manufactures of England, and to the artizans of Yorkshire, who are employed in working up the raw material. This also, at the same

moment that the original inhabitants of the hills are employed on the coast, in increasing their own comforts, and adding to the surplus supply of food for some of the greater towns in the south, for the support of the population of our West-Indian colonies, or for exportation …

42. Observations of General David Stewart of Garth

Source: David Stewart, *Sketches of the Character, Manners, and Present State of the Highlanders of Scotland*, 2nd edition (London, 1822; reprint Edinburgh, 1977), vol. 1, pp. 87–8, 161–2

Stewart's Sketches, *written by a Perthshire landowner after a distinguished military career, is the classic account of the old Highlands and their destruction by the forces of capitalism and the collapse of the old order. Stewart was himself an unsuccessful Highland proprietor who was subjected to legal challenge by his enemy Sellar. The latter caused him to apologise and retract substantial sections of his treatment of the Sutherland clearances (notably regarding Sellar's trial and its outcome).*

The little glens, as well as the larger straths, were … peopled with a race accustomed to bear privations with patience and fortitude. Cheered by the enjoyment of a sort of wild freedom, cordial attachments bound their little societies together. A great check to population was, however, found in those institutions and habits, which, except in not preventing revengeful retaliation and spoliations of cattle, served all the purposes for which laws are commonly enforced.

While the country was portioned out amongst numerous tenants, none of their sons was allowed to marry till he had obtained a house, [or] a farm … These customs are now changed. The system of converting whole tracts of country into one farm, and the practice of letting lands to the highest bidder, without regard to the former occupiers, occasions gloomy prospects, and the most fearful and discouraging uncertainty of tenure. Yet, as if in despite of the theory of Malthus, these discouragements, instead of checking population, have removed the restraint which the prudent foresight of a sagacious peasantry had formerly imposed on early marriages … Whatever their misfortunes might be, they believed, that, while their offspring could work, they would not be left destitute.

… The consequences which have resulted, and the contrast between the present and past condition of the people, and between their present

and past disposition and feelings toward their superiors, show, in the most striking light, the impolicy of attempting, with such unnatural rapidity, innovations, which it would require an age, instead of a few years, to accomplish in a salutary manner; and the impossibility of effecting them without inflicting great misery, endangering good morals, undermining loyalty to the king, and respect for constituted authority … Strangers were, therefore, called in, and the whole glens cleared of their inhabitants, who, in some instances, resisted these mandates, (although legally executed,) in the hope of preserving to their families their ancient homes, to which all were enthusiastically attached. These people, blameless in every respect, save their poverty and ignorance of modern agriculture, could not believe that such harsh measures proceeded from their honoured superiors, who had hitherto been kind, and to whom they themselves had ever been attached and faithful. The whole was attributed to their acting agents, and to them, therefore, their indignation was principally directed; and, in some instances, their resistance was so obstinate, that it became necessary to enforce the orders "*vi et armis*," and to have recourse to a mode of ejectment, happily long obsolete, by setting their houses on fire. This last species of *legal* proceeding was so peculiarly conclusive and forcible, that even the stubborn Highlanders, with all their attachment to the homes of their fathers, were compelled to yield.

43. Hugh Miller's account of the Island of Rum, 1826

Source: Leading article in the *Witness*, quoted in A. Mackenzie, *The History of the Highland Clearances*, 2nd edition, revised (Glasgow, 1946)

Hugh Miller (1802–56) was one of the most eloquent and damaging of critics of the clearing landlords. He was most famous for his attack on the Sutherland evictions. His evocation of the cleared lands of Rum was quieter and no less effective.

The evening was clear, calm, golden-tinted; even wild heaths and rude rocks had assumed a flush of transient beauty; and the emerald-green patches on the hill-sides, barred by the plough lengthwise, diagonally, and transverse, had borrowed an aspect of soft and velvety richness, from the mellowed light and the broadening shadows. All was solitary. We could see among the deserted fields the grass-grown foundations of cottages razed to the ground; but the valley, more desolate than that which we had left, had not even its single inhabited dwelling; it seemed

as if man had done with it for ever. The island, eighteen years before, had been divested of its inhabitants, amounting at the time to rather more than four hundred souls, to make way for one sheep farmer and eight thousand sheep.

44. Duncan Shaw to Alexander Hunter, 25 February 1827 (from Benbecula)

Source: National Archives of Scotland, Clanranald Papers GD201/4/97

Shaw was factor to the Clanranald estates and grappled with the extreme financial problems which overwhelmed the owner; clearance and emigration were high on the post-French Wars estate agenda and the landlord sought government assistance to send the entire population of Benbecula to America.

… If the Proprietors are not allowed to exercise very considerable influence in selecting the Emigrants, assistance will be given where it is not required, the most wealthy and industrious of our Population will Emigrate, and we will be left with the [dregs?].

With regard to Clan'd's Glebe my object is to clear two particular Districts particularly well calculated to pasture, where the poorest of the People and most of the subtenants reside, and where the greater part of our inferior kelp is manufactured. The price obtained for the kelp has not for some years defrayed expenses and therefore the manufacture must be abandoned in these Districts …

I find the number of families to be 894, calculating 6 to a family, gives a population of 5364 …

… You will not fail to observe the great number of subtenants on this Estate [400 families]. This is a miserable system and it is particularly desirable that it should be got rid of. With a few exceptions, the Tacksmen are miserably poor and bad farmers, following this old system of farming with very little improvement. They are very bad payers of rent of course their tenants cannot be in good circumstances. This is a great object for Clanranald to introduce Strangers in place of the Tacksmen, but this he can never do without getting rid of the Population [?] the subtenants. I have … succeeded in letting [Askernish?] to a Stranger, a good Tenant, and I think there would be little difficulty in letting the other farm in the same way if we were to quit of the old set …

… I am not a good judge of the expense of sending Emigrants to America. The expense of transporting the Irish Emigrants is ridiculous. The people from this country will all go to Cape Breton, and no where else if they can help it. They are accustomed to live at home almost exclusively on meal, milk and potatoes. The expense of sending them across the Atlantic will be much less than that of transporting the same number from England. I am of opinion that from 30/- to £2 would feed a full grown Highlander for the ordinary journey to Cape Breton and I would imagine a vessel might be [freighted?] for about 40/- each Passenger. If you substitute molasses for the milk they are accustomed to at home, and lay in a sufficient quantity of good meal and salt for the voyage I do not think much more will be necessary …

45. From the *Perth Courier*, 1831

Source: *Perth Courier*, May 1831. From C. B. Shaw (ed.), *Pigeon Holes of Memory: The life and times of Dr John Mackenzie* (London, 1988), pp. 184–5

A report registering the tightening conditions in the Highlands by the early 1830s and the role of emigration in diminishing pressure, especially in the west.

By accounts from the Western Isles, we are informed that many of the inhabitants there are making arrangements for emigrating to North America this season. It is but justice to say, that some of the proprietors are assisting their tenantry to take themselves and their families across the Atlantic.

From the reduction of duty on Barilla, and other causes, kelp manufacture, which enabled the small tenants in those districts to pay their rents and support their families, must now in great measure be discontinued, and the only way to get rid of the redundant population, is by the 'safety valve' of emigration. The difficulty and trouble with which these poor people effect their own 'transportation', may not be unworthy of noticing. The circulation of money is very limited among them, and their whole property may be said to consist of a few black cattle and small horses, all of which are made over to the emigrant's agent at his own price, and which he sends to the south markets at his own risk, the roof of their huts, their boats, in short every thing they may have must be converted into money by him, before the necessary sum for defraying the freight can be realized.

Figure 16. Simonde de Sismondi (1773–1842), the Swiss-Italian political economist who identified the Highlands as a prime example of the damage inflicted on vulnerable society by the advance of the new industrial economy.

46. Sismondi

Source: J. C. L. Simonde de Sismondi. Extracts from the *Revue mensuelle d' économie politique* (1834), translated in *Political Economy, and the Philosophy of Government* (London, 1847), pp. 182–5

Sismondi, the prolific Swiss economist, was one of the earliest critics of industrialisation. He never visited the Highlands but he had read Loch (q.v.) and used the Sutherland case as a prime example of the mindless destruction of the old society under the demands made by industry and profit. Sismondi's ideas influenced not only Malthus and Marx but also, within the Highland debate, Hugh Miller (q.v.).

Between the years 1811 and 1820, the 15,000 inhabitants, forming about 3,000 families, were driven, or according to the softened expression of Mr Loch, *removed* from the interior of the country. All their villages

were demolished or burnt, and all their fields turned into pasturage … Mr Loch … assures us that the Marchioness of Stafford showed much more humanity than any of her neighbours; she occupied herself with the fate of those she had removed, she offered them a retreat on her own estates; retaking from them 794,000 acres of land, of which they had been in possession from time immemorial, she generously left them 6,000 or about two acres to each family.

The 794,000 acres of which the Marchioness of Stafford thus retook possession, have been divided … into twenty-nine great farms, very unequal in extent. Some are larger than the department of the Seine. These farms, destined solely to the pasturage of sheep, are each inhabited by only one family, and as the industry which they introduced into the country is new, they scarcely employ any Scotch, but only farm-servants from England. 131,000 sheep have already taken the place of the brave men who formerly shed their blood in the defence of Mhoir Fhear Chattaibh. No human voice resounds in the narrow passes of these mountains, formerly distinguished by the combats of an ancient race; no one recalls glorious recollections; the valleys have no hamlets; no accent of joy or grief disturbs these vast solitudes.

This expulsion of the Gaelic people from their ancient homes is legal, but shall we dare to say that it is just?

47. Distress in the Highlands, 1837

Source: First Report from Select Committee on Emigration, Scotland (1841). Irish University Press series of *British Parliamentary Papers*: Emigration, vol. 3 (1841), Appendix 1, pp. 212–18.

This is extracted from a Report of conditions in the west Highlands during the crisis which overwhelmed the region. Robert Graham, who had been sent by the government to investigate the distress, writes to Fox Maule, MP for Perthshire and an under-secretary of state in the Home Office.

Robert Graham to Fox Maule. 6 May 1837

The parts of the country to which I have chiefly applied my attention, were the western coasts of Argyllshire, Inverness-shire and Ross-shire, on the mainland, the Islands of Mull, Tyree, Coll, the small isles, Skye and the … Lewis … As I have already reported, most of these parts of the country are in a state of unexampled destitution.

He reports that no one can remember a worse crisis and that for many

years proprietors have supplied potatoes and meal to the people. Only twice before, in 1782 and 1817, has the government been appealed to. The weather since 1835 has been very cold and wet. There are 105,000 people at risk in the destitute districts. Poverty is endemic; charities have been activated.

The grand cause of this evil, and in which a variety of minor causes have concentrated their results, is that the population … has been allowed to increase in a much greater ratio than the means of subsistence which it affords; that the districts in question are totally incapable of maintaining in comfortable circumstances anything like the present population, must be evident.

He points also to the decline of military and naval employment for the people; the reckless tendency to early marriages; the expansion of kelp production which led landlords to encourage population numbers; and the future of the fishing industry.

The over-population has increased chiefly under the operation of the crofting system, or the minute subdivision of possessions …

He advocates emigration as the best solution:

To give effectual relief, it must be done generally, and on a great scale.

48. Famine and emigration, 1837

Source: Report from the Agent-General for Emigration, on the Applicability of Emigration to relieve Distress in the Highlands, dated 29 July 1837. Irish University Press series of *British Parliamentary Papers*: Emigration, vol. 20 (1839–41), pp. 415–16

The recurrence of famine over much of the west Highlands in 1836–8 was exacerbated by the combined failure of income sources from kelp, fishing and black cattle sales. Emigration was now widely regarded as the only solution and here a Colonial Office (T. F. Elliot) official suggests emigration to the Australian colonies.

… Seventy thousand people are reported to be brought to a condition in which, long before the commencement of next crop, they will be

without a supply of food at home; and unprovided as they are with the means of paying for importations, will yet have to look to foreign sources to avoid starvation …

Certainly no resource could suggest itself more naturally … than a removal of the people, bodily, from a land which is no longer adequate to support them …

… in order to be effectual, the removal of the people must be in a body. Whether or not a partial and selected emigration, such as I shall presently have occasion to describe as in progress to Australia, may be serviceable as a palliative, it cannot be denied, that, as several of the proprietors have already urged in reference to that undertaking, it can afford no radical cure to make a deep impression on the case, not merely the active and the enterprising, but the weak, the aged and the sickly, must accompany the general migration. And in throwing a body of people so composed upon the shores of the colonies, it would be indispensable to guard against the unfair burthen which it might otherwise produce there, in its transit to the place fixed upon for its ultimate settlement.

49. A letter: D. MacPherson to Sir Edward MacArthur, 11 May 1838, from Kingussie [Inverness-shire], North Britain

Source: Mitchell Library, Sydney, New South Wales. ML 2918 Papers of Sir Edward MacArthur: Emigration Correspondence, 1836–47, p. 73

The bounty scheme employed land sales revenues in the Australian colonies to promote free or nearly free passages to labouring people. Even with these favourable terms it was not always easy to recruit in some parts of Britain. This letter registers the reach of the system into the Highlands close to a time of near famine (i.e. the destitution of 1837) and the sharp interest aroused by the scheme. Despite various hitches in the delivery of emigrants to the quaysides, hundreds of Highlanders were conveyed to New South Wales in 1838–40. It helped create a continuing connection between the Highlands and Australia, though it was not directly linked to specific acts of clearance.

… The tide of emigration to New South Wales has set in to this country with a force and rapidity which I think will be of greatest advantage to the Population who remain, as well as to those who leave us … and to

this Colony to which they are destined … I will be most disappointed and mortified if they are not found to be the best description of emigrants that ever landed on the shores of Australia … Dr Boyter has got the names of about 240 men, women and children, in and around this Village, to embark in June and could have got as many more if there had been room for them, and I have no doubt they will be ready also. Thinking you might wish to have some Highlanders on your Estate, I wrote to your brother the Major who requested to send him the names …

50. From the file of the *Inverness Courier*, 1841

Source: James Barron, *The Northern Highlands in the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 2 (Inverness, 1907), pp. 293–4

Coverage in the northern newspapers of removals was at best sporadic. Attention was attracted most often by episodes of resistance and emigration. The Inverness Courier *was no match for the radical newspapers which issued out of the fishing ports by mid-century. Note that this melancholy description makes no explicit reference to eviction, but accords with the famous pictures by Faed and Nicol.*

January 27, 1841. – [In an article, "Scenes on the Coasts of Sutherland and Ross"] The writer gives an account of the departure of a party of emigrants from Helmsdale at the close of a successful fishing season … The party embarking in the emigrant ship were from the upland parts of the strath. Men, women, and children evinced signs of grief, the sorrow of the women being loud and open. As the vessel moved away, the pipes played, "We return no more." An old man, a catechist, accompanied the party on board the vessel, and before returning to shore he poured forth a long and pathetic Gaelic prayer. The writer joined the vessel, going with it as far as Tarbat Ness. The night closed in dark and stormy, and the ship had to lie off Tarbat Point until day broke. Most of the passengers had hardly ever seen the sea before, and the gale terrified them. Suddenly, as if by common consent, they raised a Gaelic psalm tune, which mingled, with wild and plaintive effect, with the roar of surf and wind.

51. From the *Inverness Courier*

Source: James Barron, *The Northern Highlands in the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 2 (Inverness, 1907), pp. 312–14

Durness in 1841 was especially interesting since the rioting was provoked by evictions ordered by a tenant named Anderson. His landlord, the second duke of Sutherland, attempted to prevent the clearance but was powerless because Anderson was free to act under his lease.

September 29, 1841 – An account is given of riots which occurred at Durness, in Sutherland, in connection with the issue of warrants for eviction. In August the sheriff who carried the summonses was met by a large crowd of men and women who took his papers from him and burned them in his presence. On the 18th of September the sheriff-substitute, procurator-fiscal, and a party of sheriff officers and special constables went to Durness to take further proceedings, but met with stout resistance. The people at night attacked Durine Inn, where they had put up, and compelled them to leave. The sheriff and fiscal "were compelled to retrace their steps to the nearest inn, about twenty miles distant, which they reached at 5 in the morning with half of their party. The remainder of the party concealed themselves in the standing corn and among the rocks, and made their escape when daylight broke." The summonses of removal had been issued at the instance of the local tacksman, who held under an old lease from Lord Reay, and had sublet part of the ground.

October 27. – It is stated that the excitement in Durness had subsided, and that the tacksman had allowed his sub-tenants to remain in their houses till the following May term. The hope was expressed that something would be done in the interval for the people.

52. Clearance in Harris, 1838–41: evidence of Duncan Shaw

Source: First Report of the Select Committee on Emigration, Scotland. Irish University Press series of *British Parliamentary Papers*: Emigration, vol. 3 (1841), pp. 198–201

The witness was an estate factor on Harris, and he reports removals, emigration and resistance. Coming from the management side of the estate, it is little likely to have overstated the clamour occasioned by the clearance or the burdens under which the landlord and the community at large laboured.

2640. *Chairman, Henry James Baillie.*] Is there great distress in Harris this year? – Very much indeed …

2641. What steps are you going to take in consequence? – Lord Dunmore must, as usual, supply meal for their support … A part of it, I think, will be repaid … Perhaps one-third.

2646. Had you not some difficulty with some tenants in Harris some years ago about their removal? – Yes, we had … The small farm of Borne, in the Island of Harris, lately possessed by crofters, lies in the middle of one of the largest and best grazing farms in the West Highlands. Borne is ill-suited for crofters, having no sea-weed for manure; no fishing … constant disputes occurred between the tenant of the surrounding grazings and the crofters. They were miserably poor; payment of rent, except by labour, was out of the question, and labour was unproductive: they were much in arrear, even for the price of meal annually imported … an eminent land valuator … strongly recommended the removal of the tenants. The tenant of the large farm refused to renew his lease if Borne were not included in it. The proprietor, the Earl of Dunmore, could not afford to lose so good a tenant for a farm paying 600 *l.* a year in so remote a corner as Harris; it was determined to remove the crofters, providing for them elsewhere. Three years were allowed them to prepare. At Martinmas 1838, they were told they must remove at Whitsuntide 1839. Such of them as from age or other infirmities were unfit subjects for emigration, were offered better lands elsewhere in Harris; those able to emigrate were informed their whole arrears would be passed from, that they and their families would be landed free of expense, with the proceeds of their crop and stock of cattle in their pockets, either at Cape Breton, where their friends and countrymen were already settled, or in Canada, at their choice; these offers were then considered generous, and no objection was made to them. In the meantime, however, occurrences of an unpleasant nature had taken place in the neighbouring island of Skye. Some people on the estate of Macleod fearing a removal, wrote threatening letters to Macleod, of Macleod, and his factor. Inflammatory proclamations of the same description were posted on the church doors, and some sheep belonging to a sheep grazier were houghed and killed. Those guilty of these outrages eluded detection. Exaggerated accounts of these occurrences soon reached Harris, and joined with bad advices from those who ought to have known better, wrought an immediate change on the tempers of the people; assured that no military would be sent to so remote a corner, they were advised to refuse the offers which had been made to them, and to resist the execution of the law. Every argument

was used to bring them to reason, but without effect; they defied and severely maltreated the officers of the law. It was now ascertained that a conspiracy for resisting the law existed in all this quarter of the West Highlands, which, if not at once checked, would lead to consequences no lover of order would care to think of. An investigation took place before the sheriff, to which it was, however, impossible to bring any of the rioters; application was made to Government for military aid, which, under proper precautions, was granted; a lieutenant and a party of 30 men under the charge of the sheriff-depute of the county were sent to Harris. The people expecting nothing of the kind were taken by surprise. Five of the ringleaders were taken into custody without opposition. The stay of the military in the island did not exceed a few hours. The only object Lord Dunmore and his agents had in view in applying for military aid, was the vindication of the authority of the law. This having been done by the seizure of the leaders in the riot, the tenants were at once forgiven; they were allowed to continue in possession for another year, on the same terms as formerly. His Lordship solicited the liberation of the five prisoners, and sent money to defray the expense of their journey home. Thus terminated an outbreak which, but for the prompt measures of Government in sending the military, would have thrown the whole West Highlands into confusion for many years.

2648. Mr. *Ellice*.] You speak of their resisting the law; did they oppose the mere removal, or the taking them to America? – The mere removal …

2650. *Chairman*.] What became of those tenants after the year given them to remain? – They were removed, and part of them were provided for by the tenant who took possession of the farm, others got land from Lord Dunmore, and others of them joined their relations who held land on the estate; not one of them went to America; they would not accept the terms which were offered.

2651. Are those people still squatters upon the estate? – Such of them as have not been provided for in the way I have mentioned, still are.

2673. Mr *Ellice*.] In your estimate of the removal of those people from the Long Island, how many do you think ought to be removed from Lord Dunmore's estate? – Two thousand five hundred.

2674. You think that ought to be done by public grant? – That is my opinion.

53. Testimony of Mr John Bowie, estate manager, 26 February 1841

Source: First Report from the Select Committee on Emigration, Scotland (26 March 1841). Irish University Press series of *British Parliamentary Papers*: Emigration, vol. 3 (1841), pp. 8–9

This parliamentary inquiry, prompted by the poverty and distress exposed in the west Highlands in the years 1836–8, reflected the growing opinion that emigration was the best available solution. The evidence collected inevitably favoured the landowning classes and their agents, but reveals the scale of poverty and the entanglement of the question with population growth and emigration. Famine or near-famine reinforced arguments for clearance and emigration, all of which darkened the reputation of the landlords. The Select Committee recommended emigration to the colonies and warned that a recurrence of destitution conditions was widely predicted as inevitable.

100. Lord *Teignmouth*.] Are the proprietors on the west coast generally disposed to a change in the system with regard to tenure? – The greatest majority of them are most decidedly anxious for this change; their only difficulty is, how are they to get rid of an enormous mass of population …

I am connected with and know intimately one estate in the Hebrides where certain farms rented, those farms being all crofted. The rental paid for the farms I allude to amounts to 5,200 *l.* a year, and that rental is paid by 1,108 crofters; the rental on the average being 4 *l.* 14 *s.* 5 *d.* each. But it is a matter of notoriety that, in the Highlands of Scotland, crofts are not occupied by one family or party alone; almost every other has two, three, and even sometimes four families on it; therefore if, in the case I allude to, I take one half of the crofts as each possessing two families, and take five to a family, I find a population of 8,310 living upon a landed rental of 5,232 *l.*, which gives a rental of 12 *s.* 7 *d.* per individual.

105. Mr. *Cumming Bruce*.] Is the population in that parish a poor population? – It is wretchedly poor.

54. Tiree, 1841

Source: Second Report from the Select Committee on Emigration, Scotland (24 May 1841). Irish University Press series of *British Parliamentary Papers*: Emigration, vol. 3 (1841), pp. 31–3

In evidence presented to the Select Committee on Emigration (Scotland), the voice of the landowner is provided by the seventh duke of Argyll. He comments on the crofting system, its origins, the population problem and the motives of landlords regarding the removal of population.

3386. Mr. *E. Ellice.*] You have said that the superabundant population on the Island of Tyri has been occasioned by the system of crofting; do you not suppose that the system of crofting was adopted because it produced a better rent to the proprietor of the estate? – Not at all; it was entirely an indulgence to the people, and an endeavour to give them support, which it certainly did; but at the same time it tended to give a temporary rent.

3387. Was that system of crofting introduced in consequence of the distress that came upon the people after the failure of the kelp trade? – No, I believe long before that time; but it was certainly one of the greatest of all evils for the island.

3389. You have said you would try to put a stop to that system of crofting? – Certainly, I shall do so eventually; but I must do it very gradually unless emigration takes place.

3390. What steps would you take to put a stop to the system of crofting without emigration? – I have not considered the best means of doing it; no doubt my object is to get the farms divided into large proportions, and have proper tenants on them, and the rest of the tenants to be provided for by emigration, or induced to go to the low country.

3391. You would not think of dispossessing the poor people by the rights of the Scotch law, in order to make a larger profit yourself by having large farms? – Certainly not.

3393. You have said you supposed that other landed proprietors would in general promote emigration to the utmost of their power, what reason have you to suppose that they would do so? – I have the greatest reason, that they would benefit themselves by doing so …

3411. Mr. *O'Brien.*] Can you state to the Committee what is the population of Tyri? – Between 4,000 and 5,000 souls; nearly 5,000.

3412. Of that number what proportion do you think ought to be removed? – Two thousand, I think, should emigrate, if a comfortable situation can be assured to them.

55. From the *New Statistical Account of Scotland*, 1845

These reports date mainly from the 1830s and are, therefore, situated in the middle of the Clearances. Many contributions refer to the continuing population increase and the impact of sheep farming. This usually caused a redistribution of people within parishes and was also recurrently associated with emigration.

Source: *The New Statistical Account of Scotland*, vol. 14 (Edinburgh, 1845), pp. 152–3, 156, 171, 225, 278, 314–16, 427

(a) Inverness-shire

Parish of The Small Isles

In 1831, the population of the parish was found to be 1015 souls. Some years previous it was much greater. In 1826, all the inhabitants of the Island of Rum, amounting at least to 400 souls, found it necessary to leave their native country, and to seek for new abodes in the distant wilds of our colonies in America. Of all the old residenters, only one family remained upon the island. The old and the young, the feeble and the strong, were all united in this general emigration, – the former to find tombs in a foreign land, – the latter to encounter toils, privations, and dangers, to become familiar with customs, and to acquire habits, – to which they had formerly been entire strangers. A similar emigration took place in 1828, from the Island of Muck, so that the parish has now been much depopulated. The population of Rum was thus reduced from 400 to 100 or 130.

Parish of Harris

In the year 1755, the population amounted to 1969 souls; in 1792, to 2536; and at the present period, it is upwards of 4000. By the last census, there were, males, 1863; females, 2037; families, 777; houses inhabited, 759.

Parish of North Uist

The population in 1801 was 3010

1811	3863
1821	4971
1831	4603

The diminution has been caused by upwards of 600 souls having emigrated in the year 1828 to British America; and, though a few have since followed their friends across the Atlantic, the population is still excessive. It is now considerably greater than it was in 1831.

Parish of Portree, Skye
In the year 1811 the amount of population was 2729
1821 3174
1831 3441
By an enumeration since taken, 4000

This number is diminished by from 500 to 600 souls, who emigrated to North America in the course of this and last summer. The immense increase that has taken place in the number of the people, may be ascribed to the introduction of vaccine inoculation – the subdivision of lands among the crofter-tenants, by which two or three families occupy one lot, and sometimes one house.

Parish of Kilmuir, Skye
… The proprietor, with humane intentions, divided the various hamlets into lots and crofts of small extent, for the purpose of supplying each family with less or more possessions. But this is not all; the people themselves having once seen the system introduced, went on for years dividing and subdividing their small allotments, that they might share them in trifling patches with their sons and daughters, who, by these means, branched out into separate families, built separate dwellings, and thus multiplied with amazing rapidity. Farms, in this manner cut up and mutilated, cannot possibly yield what will pay the rents and support their occupiers. To effect both these ends, there is an annual efflux of men and women to the south country in quest of employment, which is but a toilsome resource, attended with no real benefit.

Parish of Strath, Skye
… The crops, however, in the most favourable seasons, are inadequate to the support of the superabundant population. The consequence is, that they annually suffer privations in a greater or less degree …

Within these last three years, about 200 souls have emigrated to Australia from this parish. It is earnestly hoped that favourable accounts of those who have settled there, will induce many of the people to avail themselves of the great boon which is now offered to them, viz. a free passage, with every necessary and desirable comfort during the voyage.

Parish of Laggan
At the date of the former Statistical Account, the number of people in this parish was 1512. At the census of 1831, it had decreased to 1196. This decrease may be accounted for by the introduction of sheep, and throwing several small farms into sheep-walks. Many of the inhabitants

have emigrated into America; and many more are preparing to go to Australia. In some parts of the parish, where, about eighty years ago, there was a dense population, there are to be found now only a few scattered shepherds' huts …

Source: *The New Statistical Account of Scotland*, vol. 15 (Edinburgh, 1845), pp. 57, 95, 97, 103

(b) Sutherland, and Caithness

Parish of Rogart (Rev. John Mackenzie, September 1834)
The greatest change has taken place in the habits of the people since the last Account. They are now very industrious in general, and surpassed by none around them as willing, skilful, and active labourers in all those kinds of work which the extensive and varied improvements carried on in the country have supplied to its population.

The traveller interested in the comfort of the working-classes must regard the cottages in this parish as pleasing objects; and their number, seen, as they often are, in picturesque situations, must strike every observer, as giving life and interest to the scene presented to his view. In no part of the North Highlands, are there so many well built neat-looking cottages as in the county of Sutherland. Whoever sees them, must form a favourable idea of the industry of the inhabitants, and of the encouragement afforded them by the proprietor of the soil.

Parish of Durness (Rev. William Findlater, September 1834)
The whole of this parish, (with the exception of about one-twentieth part,) has been converted into four extensive sheep-walks, yielding on an average L. 500 each of rent …

Though in some respects this may have augmented the revenue of the proprietor, and added to the commercial wealth of the nation, yet it is very questionable, if it has added, in the meantime, to the intellectual, moral, or religious superiority of the inhabitants.

The division of the parish into such extensive farms has also suppressed almost entirety the *middle classes* of society, who paid rents of from L. 10 to L. 50, and has thereby tended to extinguish, in a great degree, the intelligence and laudable emulation of the lower classes.

Parish of Latheron (Rev. George Davidson, October 1840)
… during the three past years … the crops were almost a total failure all over the Highlands. The patient resignation and deep submission with which this heavy calamity was borne, could not fail to excite the

admiration of every attentive observer. Instead of riot, robbery, and bloodshed, which in many other quarters follow in the train of less formidable privations, here the public peace was never disturbed; but, on the contrary, life, and even property in general, were alike secure as in more favourable circumstances. To behold 7000 people suffering under the most distressing destitution for three successive years, many families without a handful of meal in their houses for weeks together, others satisfied with a little water-gruel once a day, and still nothing but quietness and submission prevailing, what a triumph for that sound Scriptural education to which they are early habituated, and consequent religious principle of which it seldom fails to be productive!

56. Lord Henry Cockburn

Source: Lord Cockburn, *Circuit Journeys* (Edinburgh, 1888), pp. 109–10, 134, 281, 309

Cockburn's private papers (published posthumously) show his sympathetic attitude to people evicted and his sardonic response to changes in the social mores of the time.

[1st September 1841] The great Highland estate of Glengarry, consisting of a magnificent country, was sold last year to Lord Ward … to pay his father's debts; and this son, the existing Glengarry, a respectable young man, I am told, is trying what he can do in Australia. His father was famous in his day, and by flattery and the affectation of Highland usages, had the good fortune to get Sir Walter Scott to immortalise him in several of his works, as a fine specimen of the chieftain. But none knew better than Scott that he was a paltry and odious fellow, with all the vices of a bad chieftain and none of the virtues of the good one; with the selfishness, cruelty, fraud, arrogant pretension and base meanness of the one, without the fidelity to superiors, and the generosity to vassals, the hospitality, or the courage of the other …

A rainy day brings out the full measure of the wretchedness of ill-housed poverty. We saw mud hovels to-day, and beings with the outward form of humanity within them, which I suspect the Esquimaux would shudder at. And this, as usual, close beside the great man's gate. We shall see what the English purses, and the English comfort, of the southern supplanters of our banished, beggarly, but proud, lairds will do.

* * *

We saw to-day one single house on the north side [of Loch Garve], inhabited by *an Englishman*, which I observe that the Highlanders always think description enough for the whole of these foreigners …

* * *

[Fasnacloich, Argyllshire, 10th September 1845] … The place is in the usual condition of most Highland places – great once, when retainers made greatness, but now, when rent is the thing, fallen down far below the station for which the laird appeared to be born, and, if not protected by a quibble-proof entail, certain soon to fall into the hands of some base but wealthy Saxon.

* * *

[Kindrogan, 19 September 1846] … This autumnal influx of sporting strangers is a very recent occurrence in Scotch economy. Almost every moor has its English tenant. They are not to be counted by ones, or pairs, or coveys, but by droves or flocks. On the whole, these birds of passage are useful. They are kind to the people, they increase rents, they spend money, and they diffuse a knowledge of, and a taste for, this country. The only misfortune is, that though some of them try to imitate Celticism, on the whole, the general tendency is to accelerate the obliteration of everything peculiarly Highland.

57. Enclosure: A landlord's remarks. Colonel Gordon of Cluny to Sir John McNeill, 1846.

Source: *British Parliamentary Papers*, vol. LIII (1847), pp. 191–2

Gordon of Cluny was one of the new owners in the Highlands. He was responsible for some of the most aggravated clearances in the 1840s in South Uist and Barra. He remained indignant at the criticism to which he was widely subjected, not only regarding his removals but also his failure to relieve his tenantry during the famine in the west.

… you seem to have been but partially informed of what I have been doing, in the hope of introducing industrious habits among the cottiers, and other occupiers of land in the populous district with which I am connected in Inverness-shire, long before the potato disease made its appearance. My fishermen persuaded me to supply them with tackle, that they might prosecute their calling, and be thereby enabled to pay their rents; but they no sooner got their supplies, than they laid their

heads together, and seized every opportunity of sending off their fish clandestinely to Glasgow, from whence no money was brought back, but boat-loads of raw-grained whiskey, to be retailed in the Islands, contrary to the strictest orders I could issue … Besides my wish to encourage fishing as a branch of industry, I have for the benefit of those who are not fishermen, been doing a great deal, every year, in the way of draining and road-making, though I have been compelled latterly to restrict my outlays for road-making, on account of the gross injustice I suffer from being obliged to send all my road money to Inverness, without being allowed to lay out a shilling either in making new, or repairing old roads, of my own …

The foregoing is an outline of the tyranny I exercise over my tenantry, and the little concern I take in their welfare. I was not aware till you gave me the intelligence, that Government had provided depôts of provisions at Tobermory and Portree, for supplying the wants of the poor, though previous to the receipt of your packet, I had secured a thousand bolls of oatmeal for South Uist and Barra, and the supply would before now have been on its passage out, but for the difficulty of finding a vessel to carry it.

58. An emigrant letter

Source: National Library of Scotland 313/2737,
relating to emigrants from Scourie District, Sutherland

Emigrant letters are a tricky source material because they were occasionally publicised to either encourage or deter migration, and to attack or defend landlords. The following relates to the emigrants subsidised by the second duke of Sutherland, in 1847–8.

Hugh Mackay, late of Badnabay, to John Mackay. Written from Zorra, Canada, 12 August 1847

Dear Brother,
I take the liberty of writing you these few lines in order to let you know that I am quite well, and was so since I left. The whole family the same, and all which came along with us thank God we had neither Births or deaths or sickness upon our whole passage, believe me I did not miss one diet by sea-sickness upon our whole journey. I would not believe from any persons that was to tell me so before I left that I would not get

my health better upon sea than upon the Rea Country Mountains – but believe me John the Rea Country is nothing at all to this place[.] It is a fine country and I never saw any place to call a nice place until I came here. A man lives here when he gets no land paid much better than any Gentleman in the old country. Believe me I don't suppose but I will do very well providing I get my health.

59. Marx and the Highlands

Karl Marx regarded the Clearances as a classic example of aristocratic/capitalist expropriation of the peasantry and he returned to the question on many occasions. (He used the case to exemplify his larger thesis about the nature of industrial capitalism.)

Source: Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847), in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 6 (London, 1976), p. 173

… in Scotland landed property acquired a new value through the development of English industry. This industry opened up new outlets for wool. In order to produce wool on a large scale, arable land had to be transformed into pastures. To effect this transformation, the estates had to be concentrated. To concentrate the estates, small holdings had first to be abolished, thousands of tenants had to be driven from their native soil and a few shepherds in charge of millions of sheep to be installed in their place. Thus, by successive transformations, landed property in Scotland has resulted in men being driven out by sheep.

Source: Karl Marx, Letter, *New-York Daily Tribune*, No. 4095, 2 June 1854, in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 13 (London, 1980), pp. 196–7

… Your readers will remember my description of the process of clearing estates in Ireland and Scotland, which within the first half of this century swept away so many thousands of human beings from the soil of their fathers. The process still continues, and with a vigor quite worthy of that virtuous, refined, religious, philanthropic aristocracy of this model country. Houses are either fired or knocked to pieces over the heads of the helpless inmates. At Neagaat in Knoydart, the house of Donald Macdonald, a respectable, honest, hard-working man, was attacked last autumn by the landlord's order. His wife was confined

to bed unfit to be removed, yet the factor and his ruffians turned out Macdonald's family of six children, all under 15 years of age, and demolished the house with the exception of one small bit of the roof over his wife's bed.

The man was so affected that his brain gave way. He has been declared insane by medical men, and he is now wandering about looking for his children among the ruins of the burnt and broken cottages. His starving children are crying around him, but he knows them not, and he is left roaming at large unaided and uncared for, because his insanity is harmless.

Two married females in an advanced stage of pregnancy had their houses pulled down about their ears. They had to sleep in the open air for many nights, and the consequence was that, amid excruciating sufferings, they had premature births, their reason became affected, and they are wandering about with families, helpless and hopeless imbeciles, dreadful witnesses against that class of persons called the British aristocracy.

Even children are driven mad by terror and persecution. At Done, in Knoydart, the cottagers were evicted and took refuge in an old storehouse. The agents of the landlord surrounded that storehouse in the dead of night and set fire to it as the poor outcasts were cowering beneath its shelter. Frantic, they rushed from the flames, and some were driven mad by terror …

Source: Karl Marx, 'Expropriation of Agricultural Population', from *Capital*, vol. 1, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 35 (London, 1996), pp. 718–21

The last process of wholesale expropriation of the agricultural population from the soil is, finally, the so-called clearing of estates, *i.e.*, the sweeping men off them … But what 'clearing of estates' really and properly signifies, we learn only in the promised land of modern romance, the Highlands of Scotland. There the process is distinguished by its systematic character, by the magnitude of the scale on which it is carried out at one blow (in Ireland landlords have gone to the length of sweeping away several villages at once; in Scotland areas as large as German principalities are dealt with), finally by the peculiar form of property, under which the embezzled lands were held …

Marx quotes Robert Somers:
'Now deer are supplanting sheep; and these are once more dispossessing

the small tenants, who will necessarily be driven down upon still coarsed land and to more grinding penury … Let the forests be increased in number and extent during the next quarter of a century, as they have been in the last, and the Gaels will perish from their native soil … Sufferings have been inflicted in the Highlands scarcely less severe than those occasioned by the policy of the Norman kings … And the oppressors are daily on the increase … The clearance and dispersion of the people is pursued by the proprietors as a settled principle, as an agricultural necessity, just as trees and brushwood are cleared from the wastes of America or Australia …'

60. A Canadian newspaper report on 'Emigrants from the Duke of Sutherland's Estates'

Source: National Library of Scotland, Sutherland Collection, DEP 313/2740: *Galt Reporter*, 14 July 1848

Reports from the colonies and other emigrant documentation often described in detail the condition of Highlanders as they arrived. The effects of their journeys and their prior poverty were obviously relevant; it is rarely entirely clear that they were victims of evictions. Many writers simply jump to that conclusion.

About 400 Emigrants from the Duke of Sutherland's Estates in Scotland arrived in Hamilton this week, and the greater part immediately took their departure for the Township of Zorra, where they intend to settle. A number were too poor to hire conveyances, and have gone off on their feet. The suffering and destitution of these poor people, particularly the children, as they passed through Brantford, is represented as very distressing. Among these Highland Emigrants were two lunatics – stark mad but not a single relative among their fellow passengers, and were utterly dependent upon the Bounty of those who use their superiors in but one respect. These men were represented by those who knew them to have been insane for a number of years, and their shipment under such circumstances was heartless in the extreme …

61. Clearance at Arichonan, North Knapdale, Argyll, 1848

Source: *Arichonan: A Highland Clearance Recorded*, NAS AD14/48/319, Box 714, compiled and transcribed by Heather McFarlane (Bloomington, IN, 2004), pp. 5, 9–10, 23

This clearance was conducted on behalf of the landlord, Malcolm of Poltalloch, a family which had bought up land with funds derived from activities in the West Indies in the eighteenth century. Typically this was a clearance recorded because it generated resistance and court proceedings; resistance conformed to the characteristic mode described in Chapter 4 (above).

Execution of Deforcement of John Gillies, Sheriff Officer and Party In Ejecting Tenants in Arichonan on Decree of Removing, Poltalloch, 13th June, 1848.

… I, John Gilllies, Sheriff Officer, … having commenced to Execute an Ejectment by Attempting to Clear the said Farm and House to make the same redd [*sic*] and Void for the Incoming Tenant, by Attempting driving away their Cattle of the Farm, and removing their furniture and other Effects from off the said Farm, and putting out their Fires … I was debarred from doing the same, being deforced by the above named Tenants, Wives, Families of their Encouraging, from doing so, having been Assaulted by Sticks, Stones and other weapons to the imminent risk of our lives, and all the way receiving the most abusive, threatening language, and to such a height was this unlawful conduct carried on by the said Tenants, and others there assembled, that I found it impossible to carry the same Warrant into Execution …

Copy of Letter from J. McLaurin, Esq. to Robert Bruce, Esq., Sheriff of Argylshire, Edinburgh, 1848

Saturday, Inveraray, July 8th, 1848

Dear Sir,

I have just had a call from MR. MARTIN (Poltalloch's Factor) and MR. MCKAY, the Superintendent of Police, who communicate some very serious proceedings that took place on Poltalloch's lands in the parish of North Knapdale yesterday. – A Sheriff-Officer named GILLIES and some concurrents, having gone to the farm of Arichonan last week to eject four small Tenants of Poltalloch's by virtue of a warrant of this Court, were met by the tenants and their families and threatened with violence if they attempted to enter a single house …

Captain McKay accordingly accompanied by 9 officers, and Mr. Martin, with all Poltalloch's servants, Ground officers and from 25 to 30 in number, making in all a force of nearly 40 men, went yesterday to Arichonan to eject the four tenants, when they were met by threats and abuse.

The Tenants dispatched messages immediately to the neighbouring farms and hamlets for assistance, and in a few minutes, about 100 grown men and women assembled, all armed with sticks and stones, who stoned the Police and their party, many of whom were very much hurt. Mr. Martin [*sic*] received a severe wound near the temple with a large stone [*sic*, really John Stewart], and he was immediately afterwards knocked down, struck and dragged by the hair, and it was only by the exertions of his own party and the Police that he was rescued, as there seemed a determination to direct the greatest part of their violence against him.

The Police succeeded in making five of the ringleaders prisoners, and with great difficulty and danger, brought the Prisoners to Ballenach Inn, two miles from Arichonan. Here, the crowd followed them, and had increased to 200. Mr. Martin saw they could not possibly be brought farther without their being rescued, and he arranged to take a Bail-bond from two persons for their appearance for a small penalty. In passing along from Bellanach, there are narrow wooded defiles through which the road to Lochgilphead passes. In these defiles, great crowds were assembled at suitable points with heaps of stones collected to hurl upon the Police, had they brought the prisoners along … the worst possible spirit prevails in Lochgilphead, Ardrishaig and throughout that district, and on coming to Lochgilphead, they found a large crowd assembled for the purpose of rescuing the prisoners had they brought them on …

In the hope that the Military force can be sent forward by the Steamer which leaves Glasgow on the morning of Thursday first, the 13th current – Captain McKay is to have his whole force, except those in the Islands, collected at Ardrishaig, on the arrival of the Steamer from Glasgow on that forenoon, to join the military force and proceed with it to Arichonan. He can have 17 men there …

15 July 1848 Colonel Eden: Riots in Argyleshire

My dear Sir (Mr. Brodie Esq)
I am very glad to find, by a letter I have just received from Colonel Johnston, the Officer … at Glasgow, that Mr. Bruce has intimated to

him that Military Aid will not be required by the Civil Authorities in bringing …

62. Observations of a touring English parliamentarian

Source: G. Poulett Scrope, *Some Notes of a Tour in England, Scotland and Ireland* (London, 1849), pp. 8, 12–13

The potato blight of 1846–52 caused great anxiety in the Highlands and was associated with destitution relief schemes, renewed eviction and accelerated emigration. Some of these currents were captured by the English MP, George Poulett Scrope, in 1849 – an outside observer able to see light and shade in the fraught context of near-famine.

It is well known that the distress occasioned by the potato failure of the last three years has been, in proportion to population, nearly as severe in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland as in the west and south of Ireland … the same dependence of a numerous littoral population upon the potato plot and the fishing coble; the same irresponsibility and consequent carelessness of the landed proprietor for the welfare or even the existence of the human beings who, on these precarious means of support, pullulated upon his estate – except as a kind of stock for the production of *Rent*. If destitution has not carried its ravages to so frightful an extent there as in the parallel districts of Ireland, it would seem to be owing to the more judicious character of the measures taken for its alleviation, rather than to any difference in the disease itself, or the constitution of the patient.

After referring to the 'desolating clearances in Glengarry and Sutherland' in the previous century, he spoke of current policies:

Since that time the annihilation of the kelp trade operated, through the maritime Highlands … to make population be considered a drug, instead of, as before, a source of income. The potato failure added intensely to the feeling; and hence ejectments and house levelling are almost as frequent and extensive, at this moment, in parts of the Highlands as in Clare and Galway. While I was in the vicinity I heard of between six and seven hundred notices of ejectments served at once by Lord Macdonald, on his tenants in North Uist, involving a clearance of some 3000 souls. And the Scottish newspapers, like the Irish, are full of statements of similar acts, many of them already completed.

But while the general current of feeling among the Highland proprietors takes this lamentable and unjustifiable direction, for their relief from what they look upon as a surplus population, there are some who, led no less by humanity than, as I believe, an enlightened consideration of their true interests and duties, are endeavouring, by an improved distribution of their small tenantry (or crofters) to retain and enable them not merely to support themselves, but to improve greatly their own position and the value of the estate at the same time … [but] almost every other Highland proprietor wishes to remove, and … many are actually at work in removing, all their cotters and crofters, to supply their place with sheep or grouse, as giving less trouble.

63. Lord Cockburn on the North Uist clearances, 1849

Source: *Journal of Henry Cockburn, Being a Continuation of the Memorials of His Time 1831–1854*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh, 1874), pp. 246–8

Henry Cockburn presided over the trial of rioters at the Sollas eviction. His private feelings were clearly at odds with the legal requirements of the proceedings. His sentiments express the odium to which the landowners were being subjected by mid-century. This account captures the sympathy aroused by the plight of the evictees and the equivocal situation of many courts. The public revulsion did not prevent a rash of clearances in the early 1850s, but some landowners were undoubtedly restrained by the fear of arousing further newspaper scrutiny and popular denunciation.

27th September 1849. At the North Circuit, this autumn … a case of rioting and deforcement, etc., at Inverness, against four poor respectable men who had been active in resisting a Highland clearing in North Uist. The popular feeling is so strong against these (as I think necessary, but) odious operations, that I was afraid of an acquittal, which would have been unjust and mischievous. On the other hand, even the law has no sympathy with the exercise of legal rights in a cruel way. The jury solved the difficulty by first convicting by a majority, and then adding this written, and therefore well considered, recommendation – 'the jury unanimously recommend the pannels to the utmost leniency and mercy of the Court, in consideration of the cruel, though it may be legal, proceedings adopted in ejecting the whole people of Solas from their houses and crops without the prospect of shelter, or a footing in their fatherland, or even the means of

expatriating them to a foreign one.' That statement will ring all over the country. We shall not soon cease to hear of this calm and judicial censure of incredible but proved facts. For it was established, 1st, that warrants of ejectment had been issued against about sixty tenants, being nearly the whole tenantry in the district of Solas, and comprehending probably three hundred persons – warrants which the agents of the owner had certainly a right to demand, and the Sheriff was bound to grant; 2nd, that the people had sown, and were entitled to reap their crops; 3rd, that there were no houses provided for them to take shelter in – no poor-house, no ship. They had nothing but the bare ground, or rather the hard, wet beach to lie down upon. It was said, or rather insinuated, that 'arrangements' had been made for them; and, in particular, that a ship *was to have been* soon on the coast. But, in the meantime, the hereditary roofs were to be pulled down, and the mother and her children had only the shore to sleep on – fireless, foodless, hopeless. Resistance was surely not unnatural; and it was very slight.

I am sorry for the owner [Lord Macdonald], whose name, he being the landlord, was used; but who personally was quite innocent. He was in the hands of his creditors, and they of their factor [Mr Cooper]. But the landlord will get all the abuse. The slightness of the punishment – four months' imprisonment – will probably abate the public fury.

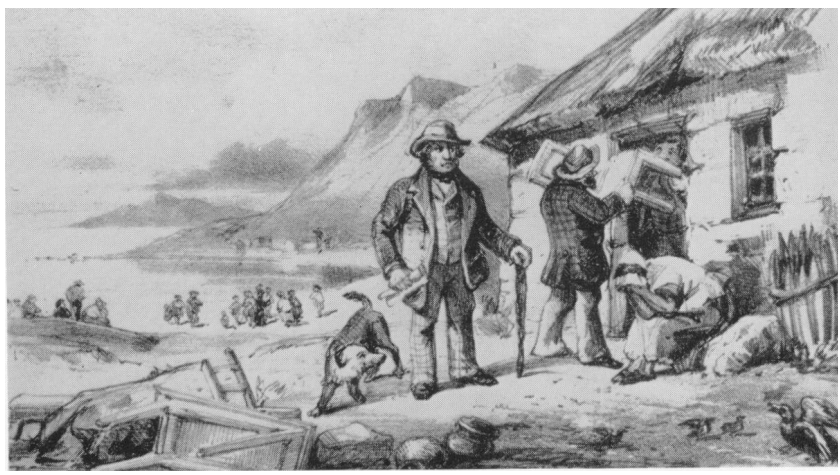


Figure 17. From Donald Ross's *Real Scottish Grievances*: a nineteenth-century depiction of a Highland eviction, a frequently reproduced image to illustrate clearances, of which there were very few direct representations or photographs.

64. Evander MacIver to James Loch. Written from Scourie, 8 March 1850

Source: National Library of Scotland, Sutherland Collection 313/877

This relates to a planned removal to the coast of Assynt of the small tenantry of inland Elphin to convert into consolidated farms. The people, though poor and famished in the recent crisis, were adamantly resistant. To the extreme irritation of the local factor, MacIver, the landlord (the second duke of Sutherland) aborted the clearance to avoid the public odium associated with their resistance. This is an example of internal estate correspondence which often exposes the conflicts among the managers of removals. Here the factor accepts that slow erosion of the tenants is the necessary but second-best alternative to a once-and-for-all clearance.

I believe taking all circumstances into consideration the Duke's decision not to make a general Removal this year is the most prudent course, damaging as it undoubtedly is to the future management of those Townships … I had a deputation of the Tenants here today – and I have sent them back to have a consultation with the rest of the Tenants – and agreed to meet them next Tuesday at Inchnadamph. One or two families may emigrate – but I don't expect any will come to the shores. I shall however do the best I can – a general Removal need not again be attempted – and a gradual relocating process is the only way of effecting a change …

65. Clearance at Strathconan, Whitsunday 1850: an eyewitness account of the episode

Source: *Inverness Courier*, 15 August 1850

The Balfour estate in Strathconan, Easter Ross, was in the midst of re-organisation; the people affected were offered long notice and relatively humane conditions. But the actual removals were repeatedly delayed until officers were brought in to execute the warrants. The Inverness Courier, *aware of 'lurid reports' already circulating, sent its own reporter who reproduced this account, clearly sympathetic to all parties, including the landlord. Even so, the raw reality of an eviction is unmistakeable, and a less uncritical observer would have been more strident. In this instance we have an account least likely to exaggerate.*

Mr Smith [the factor] and I rode to Blarnabee early in the forenoon, and found the officer and his two assistants and two of the servants from Dalbreck waiting at the foot of the small hill on which the little town stood. The officer first proceeded to the house of Mrs Campbell … A daughter came to the door on the officer's summons and promised, if let alone, to remove the lighter furniture herself. On this promise he proceeded to the hovel … of Donald Cameron, who had taken a house at Beauly. He said he had not removed because the house wanted new thatch, and he had no cart to take his furniture. Mr Smith then offered to leave him undisturbed if he could get security that he would remove in eight days, and at the same time offered to convey his furniture to his new house at the end of the time specified. This was agreed to. 'The elder' was then sent for, and, on the promise being repeated to him, the grey haired and very venerable-looking old man gave his hand to Mr Smith as Cameron's security, and the officer passed on. In a byre, formed of branches of trees, … was found a woman who had been ejected in June, and whose house had then been pulled down … She had the choice of her brother's house [at Kirkhill] or of going on the poor's roll, the inspector having provided a place for her at Dingwall, but she would do neither. She was again ejected, and sat silently mending her stocking, whilst the men removed her furniture – following, without a word, when all was out, and sitting down in the sunshine to continue her labour silent as before. The door was locked, and the officer again proceeded to the house of Mrs Campbell. No promise could be got from the woman to remove at any time. I saw the sad glance the poor daughter cast to the green hill before her as she said the words – it revealed the deep sorrow of her heart to leave the scene for ever; but I felt, whilst sympathising with her, that the Allwise Creator had permitted few of his rational creatures to indulge feelings of this nature in profitless idleness. No promise to remove could be obtained, and, assisted by the women, the furniture was removed. Whilst this labour was proceeding, one of the sons appeared from a neighbouring house and lent a hand. When the furniture was removed, he pulled out the window frames, threw down the roof, and pushed in the walls. So little animosity did he seem to feel, that he was most anxious to 'treat' the officers to 'a dram'. This they refused; but all three – mother, son and daughter – joined the officers in the refreshments, drinking 'good health' to all round.

66. Clearance: Barra, 1850

Source: *Scotsman*, 21 December 1851 and 25 December 1850

These clearances, in the aftermath of the famine of 1847–9, were among the most severe episodes of eviction. The plight of the people evicted from Barra can be traced through several sources. The landlord in question, Gordon of Cluny, responded abrasively to all criticism and goes down as one of the worst of the clearing landlords.

The unfortunate people received notice to remove from their houses in March, but they were allowed to remain in them till May, when they were ejected from them. The only resource in the circumstances was to erect tents by means of blankets raised upon sticks, while some of them took refuge in caves and in their boats. From these places also they were subsequently warned to remove, and shortly afterwards, under the warrant of the Sheriff Substitute, their tents were demolished and the boats broken up.

The 132 families reached Tobermory and, of these, thirty-seven families travelled on to Glasgow, and some others to Edinburgh, 'and more were on their way, with the idea of seeing Colonel Gordon, who resided there'. The Edinburgh authorities feared that if they gave the Barra people much encouragement, the city would find itself inundated with Highland refugees. Gordon of Cluny found himself under a deluge of public censure. He responded in the following epistle:

Of the appearance in Glasgow of a number of my tenants and cottars from the parish of Barra I had no intention previous to my receipt of your communication; and in answer to your enquiry – 'What I propose doing with them?' – I say – Nothing.

Gordon simply denied that the Barra people had been 'mercilessly turned out of their dwellings by me … at this inclement season of the year'. He had no knowledge of anyone leaving the island, and if they had, they must have left of their own accord.

… and I am not sorry they did so … It should be borne in mind that the majority of the present inhabitants were not originally natives of Barra, but brought there by the late proprietor, without regard to the characters they brought with them, the disadvantages of which I have dearly experienced – for they have uniformly thwarted all my efforts to

put them in the way of maintaining themselves and their families by their own industry, and have rendered the property of no value, but rather a heavy incumbrance.

67. Emigrant letters

Source: National Archives of Scotland: GD1/1196/1/3/1–2

The first is an example of a letter from home (in Gairloch) to an emigrant kinsman (in Victoria, Australia). It demonstrates attitudes to further emigration and, more importantly, responses to landlords and agents – here in a relatively unbuttoned style. There is also some interestingly ambivalent reference to clearances by Sir Kenneth Mackenzie, and also to recent famine conditions. Related letters speak jubilantly about the sudden death of a local estate factor.

Charlestown
20th April 1851

My dear Hector,

… It is really most melancholy to state how destitute are the most of the small tenants on the estate of Gairloch, there are a great many of them after taking from them all the cattle they had, that Dr MacKenzie has taken their little crop out of their barns, so that there is nothing left with them to keep soul & body together, but are thrown on the world, this was taken from them for arrears of rent, their usage is most cruel, so that you ought to be thankfull to kind providence, the day upon which you have left Gairloch, for there is nothing now in Gairloch but Starvation or poverty. Enough on this subject … I shall be glad to hear what kind of a house you have got, for we are told that you have only miserable huts; at any rate I hope you feel no want of food such as they do in this Country, which is now come to a great extent among the poor tenants since the failure of the Potato crop … Tell Murdo McKenzie that all his friends are well, but they are very poor, for the Caithness fishing failed them last year & no price for cattle, besides they had no cattle for sale, for Dr McKenzie brought them from them …

Your most loving Father
Murdo Mcdonald

Charlestown Gairloch
24th October 1853

Dear Cousin,
… we had a pretty good season here this year good prices for Cattle & Sheep & a good Herring fishing and the Potatoes has stood very well this year unless they go in the Pits, they are very plentifull indeed, but after all I do believe that some people would do better in Australia if they would muster the courage to go … at this very time about 10 families are turned out of their houses on the open fields which is hard enough but in justice to him [Sir Kenneth] I must say that it is lazy people who will not do anything for paying the rent, as every Country has less or more of these useless people, however things promises to be very hard under Sir Kenneth, however it is to be hoped that people will be dealt with more fairly.

68. From the records of the Highland and Island Emigration Society

Source: Mitchell Library, Sydney. A3077. Highland and Island Emigration Society: List of Emigrants 1852–7 (copies)

Destitution associated with the famine of 1846–51 produced an acceleration of emigration. The most elaborate scheme was the Highland and Island Emigration Society's recruitment and subsidisation of 5,000 people to Australia in 1852–7; it also yielded some close description of the people involved, including many pathetic cases of malnutrition and suffering. These are a few examples from the lists. Most families were not *in this state of destitution and were strongly recommended for emigration. The dispossessed appeared to be crofters being weeded out to reduce population and dependence.*

'A first rate family for Australia.'
'Parents appear to have suffered for want of proper food. Healthy eligible children.'
'Family appears very destitute and to have suffered greatly from want of food.'

Dougald McLeod, aged 36 from Aird on the Skeabost Estate, with wife 33, and four children, aged 11, 9, 7 and 1:

'Man appears to have suffered much from want of food. Lived in a gravel pit covered with heather for 18 months.'
'Strongly recommended for honesty and industry. Appearance of great destitution.'

These descriptions are of passengers, some 300 from Skye, aboard the Georgiana *bound for Port Phillip out of Glasgow in July 1852:*

'Appearance of great destitution. Good feeding on the voyage will much improve the family.'
'One of the best families for emigration I saw. It would be difficult to find a family *more* eligible for Australia …'

Many of the emigrants had served in widespread parts of Scotland – as domestics, fishermen, dairy maids, farm labourers.

Duncan Campbell of Uig (Lord Macdonald's estate) age 38, wife 37; children 16, 14, 12, 8, 4, 2:

'A very poor family. Was employed on the roads during the destitution. Left his home at an hour's notice to emigrate.'

Families with illegitimate children were vetoed.

Norman Cunningham (Dunmore Estate, Harris):

'Lately dispossessed of his croft. Very destitute family.'

Six orphans in their twenties:

'Very eligible young people. Promise not to go to the gold fields.'

McKeegan family:

'Has neither land, cattle or employment. Very poor and destitute family' [father dies, 23 February 1853].

'Accustomed to work in the south, left his employment 6 months ago to emigrate. Family has no appearance of want.'

'Dispossessed of croft in May. Employed at the fishing for a few months. Poor family.'

Dugald McFarlane of Tobermory, Avos Estate, age 40, wife 35, children 14, 12, 10, 8, 6, 4, 8 months:

'Has been a Crofter. Was dispossessed of his land about 10 months ago by Mr Clarke of Ulva. Has supported his family by catching lobsters and other shellfish. Price of lobster 2/- per dozen. Has not earned 20/- for the last month. Inhabits one room ... for which he pays 7d per week. Very destitute family. The Rev Mr Ross states that he found McFarlane and two of his children last winter lying in a bed in a state of exhaustion for want of food.'

69. Boreraig and Suishnish, Skye, 1853

Source: Alexander Mackenzie, *The History of the Highland Clearances* (1883; 2nd edition, altered and revised, Glasgow, 1946), pp. 202–9

This was a late-term clearance which attracted press coverage – an eviction at the behest of the administrators of Lord Macdonald's estates. The circumstances were aggravated by the insolvency of the landlord, the severity of the weather, the involvement of emigration schemes, and the mildest resistance of the people (in classic mode). A court case against three of the obstructing people generated further documentation. In this case the variety of sources available provides plenty of common ground to leave little doubt about the course of events. The actual eviction, as was often the case, was the culmination of a sequence of events and legal processes that stretched back at least to 1849. The people cleared in 1853 were the remnants of an earlier larger population and they had been moved on previous occasions before this, their final ejectment. The report was made by Donald Ross, a militant journalist who campaigned against the clearing landlords.

… The only plea made at the time for evicting them [at Boreraig and Suishnish] was that of over-population. Ten families received the usual summonses, and passages were secured for them in the *Hercules*, an unfortunate ship which sailed with a cargo of passengers under the auspices of a body calling itself 'The Highland and Island Emigration Society'. A deadly fever broke out among the passengers, the ship was detained at Cork in consequence, and a large number of the passengers died of the epidemic. After the sad fate of so many of those previously cleared out, in the ill-fated ship, it was generally thought that some

compassion would be shown for those who had been still permitted to remain. Not so, however. On the 4th of April, 1853, they were all warned out of their holdings. They petitioned and pleaded with his lordship to no purpose. They were ordered to remove their cattle from the pasture, and themselves from their houses and lands. They again petitioned his lordship for his merciful consideration. For a time no reply was forthcoming. Subsequently, however, they were informed that they would get land on another part of the estate – portions of a barren moor, quite unfit for cultivation.

In the middle of September following, Lord Macdonald's ground officer, with a body of constables, arrived, and at once proceeded to eject in the most heartless manner the whole population, numbering thirty-two families, and that at a period when the able-bodied male members of the families were away from home trying to earn something by which to pay their rents, and help to carry their families through the coming winter …

Excerpts from Donald Ross, *Real Scottish Grievances* (1854)

… When the evicting officers and factor arrived, the poor old woman [Flora Robertson, a widow, aged ninety-six] was sitting on a couch outside the house … they threw out before the door every article that was inside the house, and then they placed large bars and padlocks on the door! … the old woman was unable to travel to where lodgings for the night could be got … a sheep cot being near, [her grandchildren] prepared to move the old woman to it … a most wretched habitation, quite unfit for human beings, yet here the widow was compelled to remain until the month of December following.

Excerpts from solicitor Rennie's address to jury, Court of Judiciary, Inverness, quoted from *Inverness Advertiser*

It was one of a fearful series of ejectments now being carried through in the Highlands … Here were thirty-two families, averaging four members each … driven out from their houses and happy homes, and for what? For a tenant who, he believed, was not yet found … It was the will of Lord Macdonald and of Messrs Brown and Ballingal … that they should be ejected; and the civil law having failed them, the criminal law with all its terrors, is called in to overwhelm these unhappy people …

70. Greenyards, Easter Ross, 1853–4

Source: Donald Ross, Letter to the Lord Advocate, reprinted in *Northern Ensign*, 4 May 1854

Greenyards saw one of the most notorious clearances, relatively late in the larger story, and documented from several sources. One was Donald Ross's impassioned letter to the Lord Advocate. This has become the document most often quoted against landlords as a class. It demonstrates the growing power of journalism by mid-century. Ross's version was treated with incredulity but, in retrospect, conforms well with many other fracas during the Highland Clearances. The vehemence of Ross's language probably distracted attention from the wealth of corroboration of the main facts of the evictions – demonstrating again the benefit of multiple sources in the Highland account.

The evictor was Major Robertson of Kindeace, who had achieved notoriety in 1845 for the Glencalvie evictions. The opposition to the eviction in 1854 was greater than had been anticipated. Sheriff Taylor and his party of about thirty-five men travelled in the night from Tain and had arrived at Greenyards at dawn. They had been expected: a crowd of about 300 (two-thirds of them women) had assembled from the surrounding district, 'all apparently prepared to resist the execution of the law'.

– I beg most respectfully to direct your Lordship's attention to the condition of a number of women who were beat, bruised, and assaulted in a savage manner, in the parish of Kincardine, Ross-shire, by a police force convened there to assist a sheriff officer in serving summonses of removal to the tennants of Greenyard, Strathcarron, on the 31st of March last.

The police force was headed by Mr Taylor, Sheriff substitute, Tain, and proceeded under cloud of night to the district where the warnings or summonses of removal were to be served. On arriving there they found 60 or 70 females assembled. The most of them were young persons, and they stood in a row in the pass where the road led to Greenyard. There were about a dozen of men at a considerable distance, and a lot of boys and girls were standing behind the females, as spectators.

The Sheriff arrived with his force of about 30 policemen, and on coming up to the women … ordered them to retire, or clear the way for his force; and, this order not being instantly obeyed, he … ordered the police to move on and knock them down. The police instantly obeyed, and with the full force of their batons on the skulls of the women,

knocked them to the ground, and a scene ensued which baffles description. The police struck with all their strength, not only when knocking them down, but after the females were on the ground. They beat and kicked them while lying weltering in their blood. Such was the brutality with which this tragedy was carried through, that more than 20 females were carried off the field on blankets and litters; and the appearance they presented, with their heads cut and bruised, their limbs mangled, and their clothes clotted with blood, was such as would horrify any savage. There are still in Strathcarron 13 females in a very dangerous state, confined to bed, owing to the injuries they received. Four or five of those are, according to the opinion of medical men, not likely to recover; and two, at least, of these females are past recovery. I saw all these females on Thursday and on Friday last, and I declare I never on the face of this earth saw a more humiliating, a more painful, or a more heartrending sight.

… No Riot Act was read – no attempt was made to read it – and nothing was done to induce the people to retire quietly to their homes.

When the Sheriff and his party arrived at Greenyard the women had no weapons, no stones nor sticks, and they made no noise. They wanted to represent to the Sheriff, that Alexander Munro, the principal Tacksman, in whose name the summonses of removal were issued, positively denied all knowledge of them, and of the application for a police force; and denied out and out that he ever authorized the summonses to be issued in his name. This led to their meeting, but the Sheriff would not listen to any statement or representation from them, and hence followed the brutal onslaught which it is impossible here to describe …

My Lord, I have every reason to believe that the statement as to the pools of blood, and that the dogs were licking it up is perfectly correct; for, there was shown to me in Strathcarron two table-cloths filled with clothing which the unfortunate victims had on them at the time, and these were completely dyed red with their blood. There were caps with holes on them where the batons tore and carried the thin cotton with them into the skulls of the women; and there were pieces of the cotton of the caps afterwards abstracted by the doctor out of the heads of these unhappy sufferers. There were several strong ash batons left on the field, broken with the blows which the police gave with them. There are also pieces, or patches of the skin, which the police with their batons stript off the heads and shoulders of the women when they were beating them.

The police had it all their own way, for not one of them was hurt, not even had a scar or scratch. And yet such was the brutality of the scene,

that a woman declares, that after she was prostrated to the ground, and her blood gushing out, two policemen again attacked her, one with his baton and the other with his coarse boots with tacks, and had almost killed her on the spot! The marks of the tacks are still visible in her breast and shoulders.

Four females were apprehended, or rather lifted off the ground, and were carried to jail. They were hand-cuffed, two and two, their heads and shoulders dreadfully cut, and their clothes completely wet with blood. Notwithstanding of this, the police went in to the Tacksman's house at Greenyard, and drank several bottles of whisky: the females all the time lying on the grass, weltering in their blood. The spot where they were laid still bears the mark of the blood where the poor females were lying on the ground.

71. Hugh Miller in Eigg, 1845

Source: Hugh Miller, *The Cruise of the Betsey* (Edinburgh, 1857), pp. 216–18

Hugh Miller was not only a fiery critic of the Clearances. His descriptive writing evoked a powerful image of the old culture and the impact of change and poverty. Here he describes the plight of famine-damaged people who would find no charity in a country without decent poor relief arrangements.

… we passed through a straggling group of cottages on the hill-side, one of which, the most dilapidated and smallest of the number, the minister entered, to visit a poor old woman, who had been bed-ridden for ten years. Scarce ever before had I seen so miserable a hovel … The little hole in the wall had formed the poor creature's only communication with the face of the external world for ten weary years. She lay under a dingy coverlet, which, whatever its original hue, had come to differ nothing in colour from the graveyard earth, which must so soon better supply its place. What perhaps first struck the eye was the strange flatness of the bed-clothes, considering that a human body lay below: there seemed scarce bulk enough under them for a human skeleton. The light of the opening fell on the corpse-like features of the woman, – sallow, sharp, bearing at once the stamp of disease and of famine; and yet it was evident, notwithstanding, that they had once been agreeable, – not unlike those of her daughter, a good-looking girl of eighteen, who, when we entered, was sitting beside the fire. Neither mother nor

daughter had any English; but it was not difficult to determine, from the welcome with which the minister was greeted from the sick-bed, feeble as the tones were, that he was no unfrequent visitor. He prayed beside the poor creature, and, on coming away, slipped something into her hand. I learned that not during the ten years in which she had been bed-ridden had she received a single farthing from the proprietor, nor, indeed, had any of the poor on the island, and that the parish had no session-funds. I saw her husband a few days after, – an old worn-out man, with famine written legibly in his hollow cheek and eye, and on the shrivelled frame, that seemed lost in his tattered dress; and he reiterated the same sad story. They had no means of living, he said, save through the charity of their poor neighbours, who had so little to spare; for the parish or the proprietor had never given them anything …

72. An American view

Source: Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands* (London, 1854), Letter XVII

Harriet Beecher Stowe, the renowned American novelist and anti-slavery advocate, visited England in 1853 (the year following the publication of Uncle Tom's Cabin*), and delighted in aristocratic company including that of the duke and duchess of Sutherland. She retailed her hosts' defence at length and was reviled by anti-clearance writers as soon as the* Sunny Memories *was published. The main counterblast came from Donald Macleod (see below).*

As to those ridiculous stories about the Duchess of Sutherland, which have found their way into many of the prints in America, one has only to be here, moving in society, to see how excessively absurd they are … the Howard family, to which the duchess belongs, is one which has always been on the side of popular rights and popular reform. Everywhere that I have moved through Scotland and England I have heard her kindness of heart, her affability of manner, and her attention to the feelings of others spoken of as marked characteristics.

Imagine, then, what people must think when they find in respectable American prints the absurd story of her turning her tenants out into the snow, and ordering the cottages to be set on fire over their heads because they would not go out.

The general agent of the Sutherland estate is Mr Loch … [who states]:

'as from fact that, from 1811 to 1833, not one sixpence of rent has been received from that county, but, on the contrary, there has been sent there, for the benefit and improvement of the people, a sum exceeding sixty thousand pounds …'

'Previous to that change to which I have referred, they exported very few cattle, and hardly anything else. They were also, every now and then, exposed to all the difficulties of extreme famine. In the years 1812–13, and 1816–17, so great was the misery that it was necessary to send down oatmeal for their supply to the amount of nine thousand pounds, and that was given to the people. But, since industrious habits were introduced, and they were settled within reach of fishing, no such calamity has overtaken them. Their condition was then so low that they were obliged to bleed their cattle, during the winter, and mix the blood with the remnant of meal they had, in order to save them from starvation.'

… In 1817, when there was much suffering on account of bad seasons … it was found that there were located on the estate a number of people who had settled there without leave. They amounted to four hundred and eight families, or two thousand persons; and though they had no legal title to remain where they were, no hesitation was shown in supplying them with food in the same manner with those who were tenants, on the sole condition that on the first opportunity they should take cottages on the sea-shore, and become industrious people. It was the constant object of the Duke to keep the rents of his poorer tenants at a nominal amount.

As to whether the arrangement *is* a bad one, the facts which have been stated speak for themselves. To my view it is an almost sublime instance of the benevolent employment of superior wealth and power in shortening the struggles of advancing civilization, and elevating in a few years a whole community to a point of education and material prosperity, which unassisted, they might never have obtained.

73. Donald Macleod's reply

Source: Donald Macleod, *Gloomy Memories in the Highlands of Scotland versus Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe's Sunny Memories in (England) a Foreign Land* (Toronto, 1857; reprint Glasgow, 1892), pp. 91–4

Donald Macleod, the most damaging critic of the Sutherland clearances, was a stonemason who claimed to have been an eyewitness to Sellar's

evictions in 1814. He emigrated to Canada and in 1857 republished his History of the Destitution in Sutherlandshire *with a full-scale rebuttal of Stowe's defence of the Sutherland family. It raised the level of invective to new heights. Macleod died in obscurity at Woodstock, Ontario, in 1860.*

… From the year 1812 to 1820, the whole interior of the county of Sutherland was converted to a solitary wilderness, where the voice of man praising God is not to be heard, nor the image of God upon man not to be seen; where you can set a compass with twenty miles of a radius upon it, and go round with it full stretched, and not find one acre of land within the circumference that has come under the plough for the last thirty years – except a few in the parishes of Lairg and Tongue – all under mute brute animals.

This is the advancement of civilization, is it not, Madam? …

Return with me to the beginning of your elaborate *eulogy* on the Duchess of Sutherland, and if you are open to conviction, I think you should be convinced that I never published or circulated in the American, English, or Scotch public prints any ridiculous, absurd stories about her grace of Sutherland …

I can prove them to be so even in this country (Canada), by a cloud of living witnesses …

I agree with you that the Duchess of Sutherland is a beautiful accomplished lady, who would shudder at the idea of taking a faggot or a burning torch in her hand, to set fire to the cottages of her tenants … Yet it was done in their name, under their authority, to their knowledge, and with their sanction …

I think, Madam, had you the opportunity of seeing the scenes which I, and hundreds more, have seen … the ferocious appearance of the infamous *gang* who constituted the burning party, covered over face and hands with soot and ashes of the burning houses, cemented by torch grease and their own sweat, kept continually drunk or half drunk while at work; and to observe the hellish amusements some of them would get up for themselves and for an additional pleasure to their leaders … when this fiendish party found any quantity of meal, they would carry it between them to the brink, and dispatch it down the precipice amidst shrieks and yells; this was considered grand sport to see the box breaking to atoms and the meal mixed with the air. When they would set fire to a house, they would watch any of the domestic animals making their escape from the flames, such as dogs, cats, hens, or any poultry, these were caught and thrown back to the flames; grand sport for demons in human form.

74. Reminiscences of Morvern

Source: Norman Macleod, *Reminiscences of a Highland Parish* (1867; edited by Iain Thornber, 2002), pp. 61–2, 84–6

Reminiscences of a Highland Parish *was an immensely popular account of old Highland life seen from the 1860s. Norman Macleod, Church of Scotland minister and journalist, had spent part of his childhood in Morvern and was able to look back over the great changes that overcame a west Highland parish. It is a long lament for the passing of the old order, notably the tacksman class.*

Some Characteristics of the Highland Peasantry

… The dislike to make their wants known, or to complain of poverty, was also characteristic of them before the poor law was introduced, or famine compelled them to become beggars upon the general public. But even when the civilised world poured its treasures, twenty years ago, into the Fund for the Relief of Highland Destitution, the old people suffered deeply ere they accepted any help. I have known families that closed their windows to keep out the light, that their children might sleep on as if it were night, and not rise to find a home without food. I remember being present at the first distribution of meal in a distant part of the Highlands. A few old women had come some miles, from an inland glen, to receive a portion of the bounty. Their clothes were rags, but every rag was washed, and patched together as might be. They sat apart for a time, but at last approached the circle assembled round the meal depot. I watched the circumstances of the group as they conversed apparently on some momentous question. This I afterwards ascertained to be which of them should go forward to speak for the others. One woman was at last selected; while the rest stepped back and hung their heads, concealing their eyes with the tattered tartar [*sic*] plaids. The deputy slowly walked towards the rather large official committee, whose attention, when at last directed to her, made her pause. She then stripped her right arm bare, and holding up the miserable skeleton, burst into tears, and sobbed like a child! Yet, during all these sad destitution times, there was not a policeman or soldier in those districts. No food riot ever took place, no robbery was attempted, no sheep was ever stolen from the hills, and all this though hundreds had only shellfish, or 'dulse', gathered from the seashore to depend upon.

Tacksmen and Tenants

… The poor of the parish, strictly so called, were, with few exceptions, wholly provided for by the Tacksmen. Each farm, according to its size, had its old men, widows, and orphans depending on it for support. The widow had her free house, which the farmers and the 'cottiers' around him kept in repair. They drove home from 'the Moss' her peats for fuel; her cow had pasturage on the green hills. She had land sufficient to raise potatoes, and a small garden for vegetables. She had hens and ducks too, with the natural results of eggs, chickens and ducklings. She had sheaves of corn supplied her, and these, along with her own gleanings, were threshed at the mill with the Tacksman's crop. In short, she was tolerably comfortable, and very thankful, enjoying the feeling of being the object of true charity, which was returned by such labour as she could give, and by her hearty gratitude.

But all this was changed when those Tacksmen were swept away to make room for the large sheep farms, and when the remnants of the people flocked from their empty glens to occupy houses in wretched villages near the seashore, by way of becoming fishers – often where no fish could be caught …

The effect of the poor law, I fear, has been to destroy in a great measure the old feelings of self-respect which felt it to be a degradation to receive any support from public charity when living, or to be buried by it when dead …

The temptation to create large sheep farms has no doubt been great. Rents are increased, and more easily collected. Outlays are fewer and less expensive than upon houses, etc. But should more rent be the highest, the noblest object of a proprietor? Are human beings to be treated like so many things used in manufactures? Are no sacrifices to be demanded for their good and happiness? Granting even, for the sake of argument, that profit, in the sense of obtaining more money, will be found in the long run to measure what is best for the people as well as for the landlord, yet may not the converse of this be equally true – that the good and happiness of the people will in the long run be found the most profitable? Proprietors, we are glad to hear, are beginning to think that if a middle-class tenantry, with small arable farms of a rental of from £20 to £100 per annum, were again introduced into the Highlands, the result would be increased rents. Better still, the huge glens, along whose rich straths no sound is now heard for twenty or thirty miles but the bleat of sheep or the bark of dogs, would be tenanted, as of yore, with a comfortable and happy peasantry.

75. The Leckmelm evictions, 1879

Source: Alexander Mackenzie, *History of the Highland Clearances*, 2nd edition, altered and revised (Glasgow, 1946), pp. 149–50

This was a very late example of an eviction in Wester Ross – late enough to be reported contemporaneously by Alexander Mackenzie, the first anthologist of documents regarding the history of the Highland Clearances.

This small property, in the Parish of Lochbroom, changed hands in 1879, Mr A. C. Pirie, paper manufacturer, Aberdeen, having purchased it for £19,000 from Colonel Davidson, now of Tulloch. No sooner did it come into Mr Pirie's possession than a notice, dated 2nd November, 1879, in the following terms, was issued to all the tenants:-

'I am instructed by Mr Pirie, proprietor of Leckmelm, to give you notice that the present arrangements by which you hold the cottage, byre, and other buildings, together with lands on that estate, will cease from and after the term of Martinmas, 1880; and further, I am instructed to intimate to you that at the said term of Martinmas, 1880, Mr Pirie purposes taking the whole arable and pasture lands, but that he is desirous of making arrangements whereby you may continue tenant of the cottage upon terms and conditions yet to be settled upon. I have further to inform you that unless you and the other tenants at once prevent your sheep and other stock from grazing or trespassing upon the enclosures and hill, and other lands now in the occupation or possession of the said Mr Pirie, he will not, upon any conditions, permit you to remain in the cottage you now occupy, after the said term of Martinmas, 1880, but will clear all off the estate, and take down the cottages.'

This notice affected twenty-three families, numbering above one hundred souls …

76. A Canadian Highlander on evictions

Source: *The Celtic Magazine* VI (1881), pp. 346–7

A Canadian emigrant reflects on conditions in Skye, noting emigration from uncleared districts which he attributes to indirect landlord oppression.

… From my earliest recollections, dating back to about 1830, until I left my native land more than a quarter of a century ago, I experienced

and saw so much of the privations and sufferings and other evil consequences to thousands of my fellow-countrymen, resulting from wholesale clearances, that my hatred of the system and sense of its injustice is deep-rooted in my heart, and can never be eradicated while life remains.

The desolation effected throughout the Highlands, the abject poverty of the few who are huddled together here and there along the sea-shore, the ruin and wretched condition of thousands of moral and virtuous men and women from evil associations and other causes in the cities of Great Britain, and the deplorable and wretched state in which many of them arrive on this continent, all which may be traced directly to this accursed system, I am familiar with from personal observation, and deeply deplore. That such a state of affairs should, in this enlightened age, exist in Great Britain is an inexplicable problem to many, especially on this continent … I visited the Highlands three years ago, and during ten days spent in my native Isle of Skye, I was almost continually haunted with a sense of melancholy oppression owing to the desolation effected by this system within my own recollection. Mr Macleod, the parish schoolmaster and Register of Bracadale, my native parish, informed me that he made a calculation, based on the decrease of the inhabitants during the next ten years, and he found that if it continued at the same ratio during the next ten years there would not be a living soul in the parish, and this, in a district where no physical force was used, nor cottages burnt and razed for the purpose of dispossessing the occupants, but where other forces, equally as effective and not less cruel, were at work.

I saw some notice in a newspaper lately of a pamphlet, by one Cooper, justifying the evictions in North Uist on the ground that many of the evicted are now comfortable in this country. No doubt they are, and would be so in their own country if governed by liberal land laws such as ours in Canada. We have reason to be thankful that this continent affords such an asylum from tyrannical land laws and landlords, and that honest industry and perseverance generally meet with deserving success. Again thanking you for your manly efforts on behalf of the oppressed and poor against their powerful oppressors. – I am, &c.,

J. Macpherson

77. Oral testimonies

Source: *Tuath is Tighearna: Tenants and Landlords*, edited by Donald S. Meek (Edinburgh, 1995), pp. 54–5, 190–1

Satire on Patrick Sellar

This poem relates to the allegations regarding Sellar's evictions in 1814 and subsequent trial in 1816. The poem did not survive in Scotland but was preserved, presumably among Sutherland emigrants and their descendants, in Prince Edward Island.

Dòmhnall Bàillidh, Aoir air Pàdraig Sellar

Sèisd:
Hò 'n ceàrd dubh, hè 'n ceàrd dubh;
Hò 'n ceàrd dubh dhaor am fearann.

Chunnaic mise bruadar,
'S cha b' fhuathach leam fhaicinn fhathast,
'S nam faicinn e 'nam dhùsgadh,
Bu shùgradh dhomh e rim latha.

Teine mòr an òrdagh
Is Roy 'na theis-mheadhoin,
Young bhith ann am priòsan,
'S an t-iarann mu chnàmhan Shellair.

Tha Sellar an Cùl-Mhàillaidh,
Air fhàgail mar mhadadh-allaidh,
A' glacadh is a' sàradh
Gach aon nì thig 'na charaibh.

Tha shròn mar choltar iarainn
No fiacail na muice bioraich;
Tha ceann liath mar ròn air
Is bòdhan mar asal fhireann.

Tha rugaid mar chòrr-riabhaich
Is ìomhaigh air nach eil tairis,
Is casan fada liadhach
Mar shiaman de shlataibh mara.

’S truagh nach robh thu ’m prìosan
Rè bhliadhnan air uisig’ is aran,
Is cearcall cruaidh de dh’ iarann
Mud shliasaid gu làidir daingeann.

Nam faighinn-s’ air an raon thu
Is daoine bhith gad cheangal,
Bheirinn le mo dhòrnaibh
Trì òirlich a-mach dhed sgamhan.

Chaidh thu fhèin ’s do phàirtidh
An àirde gu bràighe Rosail,
Is chuir thu taigh do bhràthar
’Na smàlaibh a-suas ’na lasair.

Nuair a thig am bàs ort,
Cha chàirear thu anns an talamh,
Ach bidh do charcais thodharail
Mar òtrach air aodann achaidh.

Bha Sellar agus Roy
Air an treòrachadh leis an Deamhan
Nuair dh’òrdaich iad an compaist
’S an t-slabhraidh chur air an fhearann.

Bha ‘n Simpsonach ’na chù
Mar bu dùthchasach don mharaich’,
Seacaid ghorm à bùth air,
’S triùbhsair de dh’ aodach tana.

’S i pacaid dhubh an ùillidh
A ghiùlain iad chum an fhearainn-s’,
Ach chìthear fhathast bàitht’ iad
Air tràilleach an cladach Bhanaibh.

Donald Baillie, Satire on Patrick Sellar

Refrain:
Hò the black rogue, hè the black rogue;
Hò the black rogue, who raised the land-rent.

I saw a dream,
and I would not mind seeing it again;
if I were to see it while awake,
it would make me merry all day.

A big fire was ready
and Roy was right in its middle,
Young was incarcerated,
and there was iron about Sellar's bones.

Sellar is in Culmailly,
left there like a wolf,
catching and oppressing
everything that comes within his range.

His nose is like an iron plough-share
or tooth of the long-beaked porpoise;
he has a grey head like a seal
and his lower abdomen resembles that of a male ass.

His long neck is like that of the crane,
and his face has no appearance of gentleness;
his long, sharp-shinned legs
resemble ropes of large sea-tangle.

What a pity that you were not in prison
for years, existing on bread and water,
with a hard shackle of iron,
strong and immovable, about your thigh.

If I could get at you on an open field,
with people tying you down,
I would pull with my fists
three inches [of flesh] out of your lungs.

You yourself and your party
went up to the braes of Rosal,
and you set fire to your brother's house,
so that it burned to ashes.

When death comes upon you,
you will not be placed in the ground,
but your dung-like carcase will be spread
like manure on a field's surface.

Sellar and Roy
were guided by the very Devil,
when they commanded that the compass
and the chain be set to [measure] the land.

The Simpson man behaved like a dog
as befitted the nature of a seaman,
wearing a blue jacket from a shop
and trousers of thin cloth.

It was the black packet of the oil
that brought them to this land,
but they will yet be seen drowned
[and thrown up] on seaweed on the Banff shore.

Donald Campbell, 'Farewell to the fellows'

Source: *Caran an t-Saoghail: The Wiles of the World*, edited by Donald S. Meek (Edinburgh, 2003), pp. 86–9

Composed when a large party of emigrants departed Badenoch for Australia in 1838, emphasising the anticipated benefits of this new land over the old.

Dòmhnall Caimbeul, 'Guma slàn do na fearaibh'

Guma slàn do na fearaibh
Thèid thairis a' chuan,
Gu talamh a' gheallaidh
Far nach fairich iad fuachd.

Guma slàn do na mnathan
Nach cluinnear an gearan;
'S ann thèid iad gu smearail
Gar leantainn thar chuan.

Is na nìonagan bòidheach
A dh' fhalbhas leinn còmhla,
Gheibh daoine rim pòsadh
A chuireas òr nan dà chluais.

Gheibh sinn aran is ìm ann,
Gheibh sinn siùcair is *tea* ann,
'S cha bhi gainne oirnn fhìn
San tìr sa bheil buaidh.

Nuair dh' fhàgas sinn 'n t-àit' seo,
Cha chuir iad mòr-mhàl oirnn,
'S cha bhi an Fhèill Màrtainn
Cur nàire nar gruaidh.

Gum fàg sinn an tìr seo,
Cha chinnich aon nì ann;
Tha 'm buntàt' air dol dhìth ann,
'S cha chinn iad le fuachd.

Gheibh sinn crodh agus caoraich,
Gheibh sinn cruithneachd air raointean,
'S cha bhi e cho daor dhuinn
Ri fraoch an Taoibh Tuath.

Nuair thèid mi don mhunadh,
A-mach le mo ghunna,
Cha bhi geamair no duine
Gam chur air an ruaig.

Gheibh sinn sìod' agus sròl ann,
Gheibh sinn pailteas den chlòimh ann,
'S nì na mnathan dhuinn clò dheth
Air seòl an Taoibh Tuath.

Cha bhi iad gar dùsgadh
Le clag Chinn a' Ghiùthsaich;
Cha bhi e gu diùbhras
Ged nach dùisg sinn cho luath.

Donald Campbell, 'Farewell to the fellows'

Farewell to the fellows
who'll go over the ocean
to that land of promise,
where they will not feel the cold.

Farewell to the ladies
whom we'll not hear complaining,
but who will follow us bravely
on our way over the sea.

And the lovely young lassies
who will go with us likewise,
they will find men to marry,
who will add gold to their ears.

We will get butter and bread there,
we will get sugar and tea there,
and we will lack nothing
in that prosperous land.

When we leave this district
no high rents will afflict us,
and the Feast-day of Martin
will not embarrass our cheek.

We will leave this country,
for nothing will thrive here;
the potatoes have perished,
and will not grow with the cold.

We'll get sheep there and cattle;
we'll find wheat on the flat-lands,
nor will it cost us as dearly
as the heath of the North.

When I go to the upland,
and take out my gun there,
no keeper or person
will chase me away.

We'll get satin and silk there,
we'll get plenty of wool there,
and the women will weave it
like the tweed of the North.

They will not arouse us
with the bell of Kingussie;
and it will not much matter
if we can't waken so soon.

'Malcolm is a wicked man'

Source: *Tuath is Tighearna: Tenants and Landlords*,
edited by Donald S. Meek (Edinburgh, 1995), pp. 61, 195

This is a poem directed against the clearing landlord Malcolm of Poltalloch, composed soon after the evictions at Arichonan in the summer of 1848. It came to attention in late 1884 in a speech by the Revd Donald MacCallum to a conference of crofter delegates in London, reported in the Oban Times *(3 January 1885).*

Gur Olc an Duine Malcolm

Sèisd:
Gur olc an duine Malcolm
'S gu bràth tha mi ràdh dheth.

Nuair a thig na Frangaich
A-nall ga chur ruagadh,
Cò sheasas Malcolm
'S a' ghràisg tha mun cuairt dha?

Bidh gach aon dhiubh fiadhaich
Ag iarraidh a bhualadh,
'S bidh mise mi fhèin ann
'S mi sèideadh na tuasaid.

Mo chùlaibh, mo chùlaibh,
Mo chùlaibh ris a' bhaile seo,
Mo chùlaibh ris an àite –
'S ann far an d' àraich fada mi.

Chan fhaicear sprèidh air buaile,
'S cha chluinnear duan aig banaraich;
Far an robh na daoine,
'S ann tha na caoraich bhuidhe ann.

'*Malcolm is a wicked man*'

Refrain:
Malcolm is a wicked man,
and for ever will I say it of him.

When the Frenchmen come over
to put him to flight,
who will stand up for Malcolm
and the rabble that surrounds him?

Every one of them will be fierce
in their desire to strike him,
and I myself will be there,
blowing the flames of the conflict.

Behind me, behind me,
behind me is this township;
behind me is the place
where I long spent my growing years.

Cattle can no longer be seen in a fold,
nor can the milkman's song be heard;
where there once were people,
there are now yellow-coloured sheep.

78. John MacDonald's testimony

Source: Philip Gaskell, *Morvern Transformed: A Highland Parish in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 213–15

The testimonies taken by the Napier Commission in 1883 provide a rich source of oral documentation, all reminiscent in form. It was a time of political agitation and polarised opinion about the past, present and future of the Highlands and the conditions of the crofters. The passions of the time and the dubious reliability of memory have caused some historians to

discount the testimony. John MacDonald was a Morvern man whose family had once worked a holding on the Drimnin estate but left for Glasgow where MacDonald became a clothier's shop assistant. He was heavily involved in the opposition to the landlords, presented antagonistic letters and testified to the Napier Commission in Morvern. The critical historian, Philip Gaskell, subjected it to close scrutiny based on local documentation including estate papers, parochial registers, county records, census enumerations, diaries and memoirs (his footnotes are omitted). He declared that MacDonald's evidence was inflammatory, tendentious, inaccurate, self-contradictory, 'radical stuff'. Nevertheless Gaskell conceded that 'the general purport of his tale was never denied and must be accorded some weight'. He also pointed out that MacDonald gave his evidence in front of people 'who knew what had really happened'. The inflammatory detail was always contested in such testimony; the wider story (of clearances) remained generally unchallenged. Gaskell thinks it 'likely that the removal of a few families' to Oronsay 'took place in about 1843, before the death of Sir Charles Gordon'.

John MacDonald: Extract from a letter headed 'The truth about Skye' published in the *North British Daily Mail* on 2 May 1882 and in the *Oban Times* on 6 May 1882

On the estate of Drimnin, in the parish of Morven, then owned by the widow of the late Sir Charles Gordon, some crofters were removed from their holdings to make room for a large sheep farm, the sheep mania being then at its height. This farm the factor … took into his own hands, and, as a matter of course, his first proceeding was to get the crofters out of his way, consequently the people were warned out. Some of them removed to the small town of Tobermory, some came to Glasgow, but three or four of them, rather than leave the place altogether, accepted an offer given them by the factor to remove to an island of some extent on the Loch Sunart side of the estate. This island consisted of little else than rocks and heather, with stretches of unreclaimed moss. Here the poor people took up their abode, and with years of hard and unremitting toil made this barren spot a fairly productive farm. The consequence of this was that the rent was raised on them twice in twenty years. At last when the families grew up, and they came to be fairly prosperous by their industry in fishing and by every other available means, they bethought them of building better houses. This they did at a cost of from £50 to £60, never for a moment imagining that they would be required to remove, as they always paid their rents punctually. But they little knew

what was in store for them. The neighbouring sheep farmer wanted their land, the fruit of years of hard toil, to add to his already extensive run. He knew well it would not be a very easy task to get it, as the people were paying a pretty high rent and were in no arrears. He also knew they were in favour with the proprietrix as being her oldest tenants, and unless some very plausible excuse could be trumped up he could not gain what he set his heart on. This he set about in a way which, for its diabolic malignity and cruelty, could not be surpassed. He pretended to be missing large numbers of his sheep, and insinuated that as his neighbours were prosperous of late years they must have something to do with it. (The people's prosperity, it being well known, was from a different cause, their own industry.) … The result was that the proprietrix's mind was poisoned by these insinuations conveyed in an indirect manner, and probably also by the fear of losing a tenant who held the best farm on her estate. As the tenant's lease was out, the only condition on which he would retake his farm was that the small farmers were to be removed from … the place which, by their industry, they reclaimed from being a barren wilderness to a comparatively fertile farm, without compensation being given for improving the land, or for the houses they built about two years previously. All the compensation they got was an attempt to destroy their character as honest men, so that no other proprietor would give them shelter.

79. Gairloch in the 1880s

Source: John H. Dixon, *Gairloch* (Edinburgh, 1886), pp. 132, 137, 142

John Dixon reports on conditions in the 1880s, in relatively positive mode, with particular attention to health, women and employment.

The commencement of sheepfarming in Gairloch does not seem to have been accompanied by any noticeable friction. If one or two small townships were abolished to make way for the sheepfarmer, the inhabitants had other more desireable quarters promoted for them. The population of Gairloch steadily increased from the date when sheep farming began … Recently several sheep farms have been forested for deer, i.e. the sheep have been removed, and today the only large sheep farm is that of Bruachaig above Kinlochewe, but there is a considerable extent of ground of pasturage of which is held by the crofters and by

some small farmers all of whom, both crofters and farmers, possess a number of sheep.

The potato disease was unknown in Gairloch until 1846. Now it frequently appears, and causes great loss; but in some seasons there is little of it, and years have been known when potatoes were pretty largely exported.

The chief articles of diet of the crofter population are fish, either fresh or cured, oatmeal, potatoes and milk, with a little butcher meat occasionally. Eggs are not much eaten, but are exported to Glasgow in considerable quantities …

… The women of Gairloch, like all other Highland women, are noticeable for their industry. It is they who carry home heavy creels of peats to the household fire – peats in the treatment of which they have taken an active stance the previous summer; they herd the cow, and manage the house. But, more than all, it is the women who are mainly instrumental in producing the only manufactures of the parish … They card and dye and spin the wool, they knit the Gairloch hose, and they prepare the various coloured worsteds which their weaver converts into tweeds of different patterns …

80. Late-term clearances, 1887

Source: *Scotsman*, 26 January 1887

There were many ironies and twists in the long story of the Clearances. These included the ousting of sheepfarmers to make way for deer forests and the sporting Nimrods, and the ensuing tension between the various tenantries of the Highlands. The tension can be identified from as early as the 1820s but became more pronounced in the 1850s and after.

Another large sheep farm in Ross-shire has been cleared of sheep and put under deer, arrangements having been concluded with Walter Shoolbred of Wyvis for afforesting Garbat on the estate of Cromartie. Garbat, which is high up on the north-west face of Ben Wyvis, is so much exposed that during the severe weather of the last two months the sheep had almost entirely to be removed. As a forest, Garbat will make a valuable addition to the shootings of Wyvis.

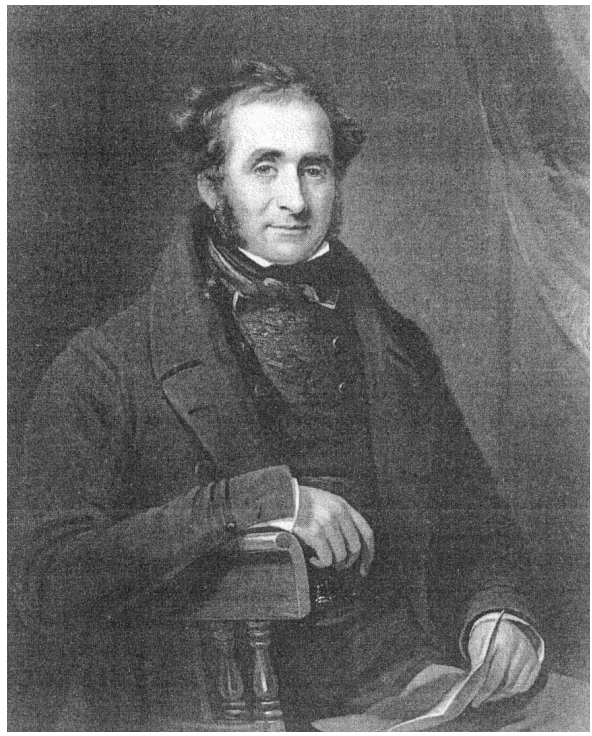


Figure 18. Sir James Matheson (1796–1878) brought into the Highlands great wealth amassed in the opium trade; he attempted to revive estates in Lewis, generally without success

Source: *Invergordon Times*, 2 February 1887

Letter from 'A constant reader'

… Garbat is as suitable a locality for a Highland Township as any place I know in Ross-shire, and I should prefer to witness it again be occupied. But, as recently stated by your correspondent, it would be infinitely better for the country and district to have it occupied by Mr Robertson who is a public-spirited and liberal minded Highlander, than as a deer forest by those London Haberdashers, to gratify what seems to be an inordinate desire for sport.

81. Some reflections of Lord Napier

Source: National Archives of Scotland RH 1/2/827.
Copy of letter from Lord Napier to Mr John Mackay, Hereford,
2 November 1889

Napier chaired the Crofter Commission (1883–6) which led to substantial changes in the governance of the Highlands. The Commission largely accepted the historical arguments of the crofters' representatives. Here Napier, several years after the Crofter Act, responds to a critic of the landlords with some of his own candid reactions.

November 2nd, /89

Dear Mr. Mackay,
… It always gratifies me to hear that the *manner*, at least in which I discharged my duties as Chairman of the Crofters Commission gave satisfaction to the spectators of the scene and the poor people more deeply concerned … I never had any doubt either of the burning of the cottages or the violation of the promises, I only desired to have direct contemporary testimony of incidents which are liable to be disfigured by popular tradition. The burning of the dwellings was the natural, almost inevitable result of the cruel policy of eviction. The violation of promises to the families of recruits was to be expected in the Reay family, who had no conscience, and as it turned out no means of fulfilling their engagements. In the Sutherland family the faithlessness was the more inexcusable, but their conscience seems to have been perverted by bad counsel and false theories of social management.

I have never yet quite understood or realised the real motives of the Duchess-Countess and her husband. I have always hoped that they were misled by prevalent, tho' erroneous views of economical and national policy, that they really believed that they were doing permanent good by causing transitory suffering, that they were not actually heartless or moved by rapacity! However this may be I have always thought that there would not be a true expiation of the guilt of the great eviction till some representative of the family led back a band of crofters to repeople in part, at least, the wilderness of Kildonan and Strathnaver.

82. The turnover of estates

Source: W. C. Mackenzie, *History of the Outer Hebrides* (Paisley, 1903), pp. 485–94

As in other parts of the British Isles, land in the Highlands was subject to great turnover in ownership, which probably quickened in the early nineteenth century. This added to the sense of turmoil and the insecurity of tenure and seemed to assail the communal loyalties of the people.

… In 1779, Harris and St Kilda [were sold] to Alexander Macleod, late captain of the East Indiaman *Mansfield*, for the sum of £15,000.

… In 1804, Captain Macleod's son sold St. Kilda and the adjoining islands to Colonel Donald Macleod of Achnagoyle for the sum of £1,350, whose son re-sold it, in 1871, to the present Macleod of Macleod for the sum of £3,000. But Harris, which had been in the possession of the chiefs of the Siol Tormod for 500 years, passed permanently out of their hands, and soon afterwards, its connexion with the Macleods was finally severed.

… On 2nd March, 1825, the island of Lewis, with the exception of the parish of Stornoway, was exposed for judicial sale in Edinburgh, to pay the entailer's debts … The upset price was £137,384 12s. 4d., being the valuation of the property, but the sale realised £160,000, the purchaser being Mr. Stewart-Mackenzie. Nineteen years later, the property finally passed out of the hands of the illustrious family [Seaforth], whose connexion with Lewis had lasted for a period of two hundred and thirty-four years … In 1844 Lewis was sold to Mr. (afterwards Sir) James Sutherland Matheson, of the family of Achany and Shiness in Sutherlandshire, for the sum of £190,000.

Source: James Barron, *The Northern Highlands in the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 2 (Inverness, 1907), pp. 329–30

SALES OF GREAT PROPERTIES

During the period several great Highland properties changed hands. The Reay or Mackay country, in the county of Sutherland, was sold in 1829 to the Marquis of Stafford, first Duke of Sutherland, for the sum of £300,000 … The great estates of the Duke of Gordon in Badenoch and Lochaber were sold during the thirties, passing into various hands. After the death of the last famous chief of Glengarry, in 1828, it was

found that his estates were heavily burdened, and they were sold by his trustees and his son. In 1840 Glenquoich was purchased by Mr Edward Ellice for £32,000, and Glengarry by Lord Ward for £91,000. Twenty years later Mr Ellice added Glengarry to his Glenquoich estate, paying for it £120,000, and thus acquiring a splendid stretch of country from Loch-Oich westward … Macdonald of Clanranald was another great chief who lost his possessions during the nineteenth century. The History of Clan Donald, by the ministers of Killearnan and Kiltarlity, gives the following list of sales by the last proprietor, Ranald George Macdonald: …

Total £214,211-11-7

The failure of the kelp industry affected Clanranald more, perhaps, than any other western proprietor … In 1840 Colonel Gordon of Cluny purchased for £38,050 the island of Barra from the trustees of Colonel Macneil. In the same year the estate of Inverlochy was purchased by Lord Abinger for £75,150.

Chronology

1739	Evictions on Skye (MacDonald of Sleat)
1746	Battle of Culloden (16 April)
1747	Heritable Jurisdictions Act
1762	Clearances in Perthshire
1762	Lockhart-Ross brings sheep to Balnagowan
1772	Emigrations from South Uist
1785	Glengarry: major clearance
1792	The Year of the Sheep – Ross-shire 'insurrection'
1800–6	Clearances in west Highlands and Islands
1801	Removals in Inverness-shire of 3,000 (Telford)
1801–71	Removal of 1027 families in Morvern, Argyll
1801–3	Removals in Strathglass, Aird, and Glen Urquhart (5,390)
1802	Glengarry emigrations
1807	Clearances at Farr and Lairg, Sutherland
1807–20	Sutherlandshire clearances
1811	Sleat, Isle of Skye: clearances
1811	Kilbride
1813	Lord and Lady Stafford appoint James Loch to administer all estates
1816	Trial of Patrick Sellar
1821–71	Mull: clearances
1826	Islands of Rum and Muck
1828	North Uist
1828	Ardnamurchan
1830–80	Evictions by MacLeod in Skye
1831–81	Rural population of Perthshire decreased by 21,348
1831–45	Reay country
1840–8	Strathconan
1843	Glencalvie, Ross-shire
1843	Disruption of the Church
1849	Tiree
1849	Glenelg
1849	Sollas: clearance and resistance

1851	South Uist and Barra
1851–3	Coigach
1853	Knoydart
1853	Boreraig and Suishinish, Isle of Skye
1853–4	Greenyards: clearance and resistance
1879	Leckmelm
1883–4	Napier Commission
1886	Crofter Act

Famine years: 1782–3, 1806–7, 1811, 1816–17, 1836–8, 1847–53.

Guide to Further Reading

It is usually best to start reading for the broad national context and then to narrow the focus to specifics. General introductions which set the evolving Highland story in the wider background include the two volumes by T. C. Smout, *A History of the Scottish People 1560–1830* (1965, Collins, London) and *A Century of the Scottish People 1830–1950* (1986, Collins, London), complemented by the more recent survey by T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation* (1999, Allen Lane, London). Several reference books providing general guidance, include Derick S. Thomson, *The Companion Guide to Gaelic Scotland*, and Michael Lynch (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Scottish History*.

To keep up-to-date with recent research and debate in Highland history, the following journals are indispensable: *Scottish Historical Review*, *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, *Northern Scotland*, *Scottish Studies* and *The Review of Scottish Culture*. But much of the fierier discussion is carried on in the local and national newspapers and magazines – from the *Scotsman* and the Glasgow *Herald* to the *West Highland Free Press* and *Am Bratach*, and even more so, the websites accessible through Google and the like.

Bibliographies of Highland history can now be found in the web-based course guides issued by History Departments of several universities, and supplemented by the website of the Institute of Historical Research and the facilities of the National Library of Scotland. There is now a proliferation of specific Highland Clearance websites easily accessible by the internet. See also the extended bibliographies in Eric Richards, *A History of the Highland Clearances*, 2 vols (1982 and 1985, Croom Helm, London).

Of the older accounts of the Clearances the substantial anthology by Alexander Mackenzie, *The History of the Highland Clearances,* has been republished many times and remains a good source of nineteenth-century opinion, creating a powerful case against the clearing landlords. His selections include most of the nineteenth-century critics, which can be supplemented by Douglas MacGowan's recent edition of Donald Macleod's vituperations under the title *The Stonemason* (2001, Praeger, Westport, CT). The wider contemporary and more recent literature is surveyed by Richards (vol. 2) in particular. Many selections of Highland documents are found in the publications of the Scottish

History Society; and also in A. J. Youngson, *Beyond the Highland Line* (1974, Collins, London), in R. H. Campbell and J. B. A. Dow, *Source Book of Scottish Economic and Social History* (1968, Oxford University Press, Oxford), and A. I. Macinnes et al. (eds), *Scotland and the Americas, c. 1650–c. 1939* (2002, Lothian for the Scottish History Society, Edinburgh). In denunciatory mode, and widely read among the general public, was John Prebble's *The Highland Clearances* (1969, Penguin, Harmondsworth), and also the work of Ian Grimble, notably *The World of Rob Donn* (1999 edition, Saltire Society, Edinburgh) and *The Trial of Patrick Sellar* (1993 edition, Saltire Society, Edinburgh). Much more fundamental research (and far less widely read) was published by J. P. Day, *Public Administration in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (1918, London), by F. Fraser Darling, *West Highland Survey* (1955, Oxford University Press, Oxford), and, most of all, by Malcolm Gray, *The Highland Economy 1750–1850* (1957, Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh), which remains the crucial contribution to any analysis of the Highland dilemma.

The modern debate, post-Prebble, was enhanced by the work of James Hunter, based on new archival research, notably in his *The Making of the Crofting Community* (2000 edition, John Donald, Edinburgh). Hunter widened his readership in later works, including *The Last of the Free* (1999, Mainstream, Edinburgh). Efforts to represent the inner (and darker) social history of the crofters and the victims of the Clearances have issued from David Craig, *On the Crofters' Trail* (1997, Pimlico, London) and his pictorial celebration with David Paterson entitled *The Glens of Silence* (2004, Birlinn, Edinburgh). For a broad survey of current knowledge, and an effort to widen the terms of reference of the subject, see Eric Richards, *The Highland Clearances* (2000, Birlinn, Edinburgh). Meanwhile, the entanglement of Highland history and present-day politics of the region is captured in, for example, John MacAskill, *We Have Won the Land* (1999, Acair, Stornoway), and in the lively and provocative intervention by Michael Fry, *The Wild Scots* (2005, John Murray, London), and the associated storm in the Scottish media.

A longer perspective, with full scholarly apparatus, is to be found in the work of Allan Macinnes, especially *Clanship, Commerce and the House of Stuart* (1996, Tuckwell, East Linton), and Robert Dodgshon, *From Chiefs to Landlords* (1998, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh). A number of aspects of the story are dealt with in T. M. Devine's *Clanship to Crofter War* (1994, Manchester University Press, Manchester), which complements his larger study *The Great Highland Famine* (1995 edition, John Donald, Edinburgh). An important reconsideration of military service in the Highlands is provided by Andrew Mackillop's *More Fruitful than the Soil: Army, Empire, and the Scottish Highlands, 1715–1815* (2000, Tuckwell, East Linton); sheep farming is chronicled in new detail in Ian S. MacDonald's *Glencoe and Beyond: The Sheep-farming Years, 1780–1830* (2005, John Donald, Edinburgh) and Willie Orr's *Deer Forests, Landlords and Crofters* (1982, John Donald, Edinburgh). Emigration is the subject of several important studies, notably Anthony W.

Parker, *Scottish Highlanders in Colonial Georgia* (1997, University of Georgia Press, Athens, GA), W. R. Brock, *Scotus Americanus* (1982, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh), Marianne MacLean, *The People of Glengarry: Highlanders in Transition, 1745–1820* (1991, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal and Kingston), J. M. Bumsted's *The People's Clearance* (1982, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh) and J. I. Little, *Crofters and Habitants: Settler Society, Economy and Culture in a Quebec Township, 1848–1881* (1991, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal and Kingston). On the nineteenth-century story see Marjory Harper's *Adventurers and Exiles* (2004, Profile, London), while the grim Australian variant is told by Don Watson in *Caledonia Australis* (1984, Collins, Sydney). For internal patterns of migration see Charles Withers, *Urban Highlanders* (1998, Tuckwell, East Linton) and Malcolm Gray's *Scots on the move: Scots migrants, 1750–1914* (1990, Economic and Social History Society of Scotland, Edinburgh).

Most of the fine detail of the Clearances and their precise contexts is bound to be located in the study of particular estates, for example, Eric Cregeen's *Argyll Estate Instructions*, Eric Richards' *Leviathan of Wealth* (1973, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London), R. J. Adam's two-volume *Papers on Sutherland Estate Management 1802–1816* (1972, Constable for SHS, Edinburgh), Leah Leneman's *Living in Atholl, 1685–1785* (1986, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh), Eric Richards and Monica Clough, *Cromartie* (1989, Aberdeen University Press, Aberdeen) and Philip Gaskell's *Morvern Transformed: A Highland Parish in the Nineteenth Century* (1980, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge). Local histories are also gathering the essential story, notably in Malcolm Bangor-Jones, *The Assynt Clearances* (1998, Assynt Press, Dundee), Denis Rixson's *Knoydart: A History* (1999, Birlinn, Edinburgh), T. C. Smout and R. A. Lambert (eds), *Rothiemurchus* (1999, Scottish Cultural Press, Dalkeith) and the series of local collections edited by John R. Baldwin, especially *The Province of Strathnaver* (2000, Scottish Society for Northern Studies, Edinburgh).

Biography in the Highlands has been underdeveloped but there are many relevant entries in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography;* connected to the Clearances are several recent studies: James Robertson, *The First Highlander: Major-General David Stewart of Garth* (1998, Tuckwell, East Linton), Eric Richards, *Patrick Sellar and the Highland Clearances* (1999, Polygon, Edinburgh), Ewen A. Cameron, *The Life and Times of Fraser Mackintosh, Crofter MP* (2000, Centre for Scottish Studies, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen), and, for a later figure, Roger Hutchinson, *The Soap Man: Lewis, Harris, and Lord Leverhulme* (2003, Birlinn, Edinburgh).

The study of the ways in which Highland history has been 'constructed' has produced interesting work by Paul Basu in 'Roots tourism as return movement: semantics and the Scottish diaspora', in Marjory Harper (ed.), *Emigrant Homecomings* (2005, Manchester University Press, Manchester) and elsewhere; see also the work of Laurence Gouriévidis, in *History and Memory* (2000,

no. 3). The great traditions of Gaelic learning and poetics are gathered together in the writing of Donald Meek, *Tuath is tighearna: Tenants and Landlords* (1995, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh) and *Caran an t-saoghail* (2003, Birlinn, Edinburgh). The role of the churchmen after the Disruption in formulating and urging the rise of land reform is developed in detail by Allan W. MacColl in *Land, Faith and the Crofting Community* (2006, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh).

Original source materials are widely flung. Some are collected in the Scottish History Society series, though few have yet been devoted to the nineteenth century. Estate papers are the most systematic source for clearance policy and implementation and are mainly located in the NLS and NAS, but also in other repositories in Scotland, and many still are in private hands. Newspapers carry much of the account, notably in the back issues of the *Inverness Courier*, the *Military Register*, the *Scotsman*, the *John O'Groat Journal*, the *Ross-shire Journal*, the *Northern Times*. The oral sources are accessible by way of Meek's work. Government publications used in this text are invaluable but infrequent – the greatest single repository of testimony about the Clearances is the Napier Commission, which was, of course, entirely retrospective and has never been fully evaluated. Finally, much of the Clearances story was transported overseas with the emigrants, and their letters are invaluable though often located far away from the Highlands. [**58, 60, 67**]

Essay Questions and Projects

Questions

Chapter One: Debating the Highland Clearances
Why has the debate on the Highland Clearances generated so much passion and why has it continued into the twenty-first century? Consider some of the standpoints and ideology and motivations of the participants. Notice the extent to which much of the debate has originated outwith the Highlands. Consider also the various categories of evidence that are employed in the debate.

Chapter Two: Before the Clearances
Why is it necessary to consider the relatively poorly documented period that preceded the age of the Clearances? Why is our picture of the old Highlands so hazy and how does this affect our interpretations? What signs of strain were evident in the old Highland society? How did Highlanders cope with recurrent scarcity?

Chapter Three: The Age of the Clearances
Why would a straightforward detailed list of clearance events – a chronology – be an inadequate history of the Highlands in the period before the Napier Commission? What aspects of the general context are relevant to a rounded understanding of the events? Consider the varieties of duress that operated upon traditional Highland communities after 1815, and how did these communities respond to the challenges?

Chapter Four: Protest and Resistance during the Highland Clearances
Why do the Highlanders appear unprotesting about the Clearances? How should we judge the level of resistance and what are the sources of evidence on which to base this judgement? How much resistance should historians expect of societies such as the Highlands during radical agrarian changes?

Chapter Five: The Blame Game

Who or what was responsible for the plight of the Highlands in the age of the Clearances? Should we regard the case of the Highlands as a unique historical experience and part of its special cultural identity? Why is there so much disagreement about the consequences of the Highland Clearances?

Projects

Examine the way in which the Highland Clearances are depicted in museums, public art, novels and films. How do these depictions relate to contemporary documentation? How do they differ from 'history' and why do historical interpretations change over time?

Construct an itinerary of clearance sites and find a way of distinguishing pre- and post-clearance ruins.

Outline a hypothetical set of conditions in the nineteenth-century Highlands which, had they existed, could have sustained a much larger population and also reversed the outflow of emigrants. This exercise will require the construction of an imaginary 'counterfactual Highlands' and might entail, for example, a different regime of land holding, ownership and production. It might also require a radical change in government policy. How realistic is this imaginary reconstruction of the Highlands?

Works Cited in Text

Aitchison, P. and Cassell, T. (2003), *The Lowland Clearances: Scotland's Silent Revolution 1760–1830*, East Linton: Tuckwell.

Anderson, James (1785), *An Account of the Present State of the Hebrides*, Edinburgh.

Bangor-Jones, M. (1998), *The Assynt Clearances*, Dundee: Assynt Press.

— (2000), 'From clanship to crofting: landownership, economy and the church in the province of Strathnaver', in J. Baldwin (ed.), *Province of Strathnaver*, Scottish Society for Northern Studies.

— (2002), 'Sheep farming in Sutherland in the eighteenth century', *Rural History*, vol. 50, part 2, pp. 181–202.

Basu, Paul (2002), 'Homecomings: genealogy, heritage-tourism and identity in the Scottish Highland diaspora', PhD thesis, London University.

— (2005), 'Roots tourism as return movement: semantics and the Scottish diaspora', in M. Harper, *Emigrant Homecomings*, pp. 131–50.

Ben Lawers Historical Landscapes Project, 2003–2004, Annual report.

Bisset, Andrew (1877), *The History of the Struggle for Parliamentary Government in England*, 2 vols, London: King.

Black, Ronald I. M. (1986), *Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair: the Ardnamurchan years*, Society of West Highland and Island Historical Research, Isle of Coll.

Branigan, Keith (2005), *From Clan to Clearances: History and Archaeology of the Isle of Barra,* c. *850–1850*, Oxford: Oxbow Books.

Brock, W. R. (1982), *Scotus Americanus*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Brown, Callum C. (1997), *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Burt, E. (1754), *Letters from a Gentleman in the North of Scotland*, London.

Buxton, B. (1995), *Mingulay: An Island and its People*, Edinburgh: Birlinn.

Cameron, E. A. (1996), *Land for the People: The British Government and the Scottish Highlands, 1880–1925*, East Linton: Tuckwell.

— (2005), 'Communication or separation? Reactions to Irish land agitation and legislation in the Highlands of Scotland, c. 1870–1910', *English Historical Review*, vol. 120, no. 487, pp. 633–66.

Campbell, Alistair (2004), *History of Clan Campbell*, vol. 3, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
Campbell, J. L. (1999), quoted in R. M. I. Black, *An tuil: Anthology of Twentieth-century Scottish Gaelic Poetry*, Edinburgh: Polygon, p. xxiii.
Campbell, R. H. (1988), 'The landed classes', in Devine and Mitchison (eds), *People and Society in Scotland*, pp. 91–108.
Campey, Lucille H. (2003), *The Silver Chief: Lord Selkirk and the Scottish Pioneers of Belfast, Baldoon and Red River*, Toronto: Natural Heritage.
— (2004), *After the Hector*, Natural Heritage Books, Toronto.
Cockburn, Henry (1874), *The Journal of Henry Cockburn*, 2 vols, Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas.
Collini, S. (2004), 'The literary critic and the village labourer: "culture" in twentieth-century Britain', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, vol. 14, pp. 93–116.
Cragoe, M. (1998), 'An anatomy of all eviction campaign: the general election of 1868 in Wales and its aftermath', *Rural History*, vol. 8.
Craig, David (1997), *On the Crofter's Trail: In Search of the Clearance Highlanders*, London: Pimlico.
— (2004), *The Glens of Silence*, Edinburgh: Birlinn.
Cregeen, E. R. (1964), *Argyll Estate Instructions*, Edinburgh: Scottish History Society.
— (1970), review of *History of the Scottish People* by T. C. Smout, *Scottish Studies*, vol. 14, p. 157.
— (2004), *Recollections of an Argyllshire Drover*, Edinburgh: John Donald.
Darling, F. Fraser (1955), *West Highland Survey*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Devine, T. M. (ed.) (1978), *Lairds and Improvement in the Scotland of the Enlightenment*, Glasgow: Scottish Historical Conference Trust.
— (1988), 'Highland landowners and the Highland potato famine', in Leneman (ed.), *Perspectives in Scottish Social History*.
— (1994), *The Transformation of Rural Scotland*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
Devine, T. M. and Mitchison, Rosalind (eds) (1988), *People and Society in Scotland*, vol. 1, Edinburgh: John Donald.
Devine, T. M. and Young, J. R. (eds) (1999), *Eighteenth-century Scotland*, East Linton: Tuckwell.
Dodgshon, Robert A. (1989), '"Pretence of blude" and "place of their dwelling"', in R. A. Houston and I. D. Whyte (eds), *Scottish Society, 1500–1800*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
— (1993), 'West Highland and Hebridean settlement prior to crofting and the clearances: a study in stability and change?', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquarians of Scotland*, vol. 123, pp. 419–38.
— (1998), *From Chiefs to Landlords*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

— (2004), 'Coping with risk: subsistence crises in the Scottish Highlands and Islands, 1600–1800', *Rural History* 15:1, pp. 1–25.
Dorian, Nancy C. (1985), *The Tyranny of Tide: An Oral History of the East Sutherland Fisherfolk*, Ann Arbor, MI: Karoma.
Duncan, P. J. (2004), 'The industries of Argyll: tradition and improvement', in D. Omond (ed.), *The Argyll Book*, Edinburgh: Birlinn, pp. 151–69.
Flinn, M. W. et al. (1977), *Scottish Population History from the Seventeenth Century to the 1930s*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Fry, Michael (2005a), *Wild Scots*, London: John Murray.
— (2005b), 'Time to right a false picture', *The Herald*, 20 June.
Gaskell, P. (1980), *Morvern Transformed: A Highland Parish in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Gerber, D. (2005), *Authors of their Lives*, New York: New York University Press.
Gouriévidis, Laurence (2000), 'The Strathnaver clearances in modern Scottish fiction: history, literary perception and memory', in Baldwin (ed.) *The Province of Strathnaver*, Edinburgh: Scottish Society for Northern Studies.
— (2000), 'Representing the disputed past of northern Scotland', *History and Memory: Studies in Representations of the Past*, vol. 3.
Grant, I. F. (1981), *Everyday Life on an Old Highland Farm, 1769–1782*, London: Shepheard-Walwyn.
Gray, Malcolm (1957), *The Highland Economy*, Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd.
— (1990), *Scots on the Move: Scots Migrants, 1750–1914*, Edinburgh: Economic and Social History Society of Scotland.
Great Britain: Royal Commission on the Crofters and Cottars in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland (1884), *Report of Her Majesty's Commissioners of Inquiry into the Condition of the Crofters and Cottars in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland*, Edinburgh.
Grimble, Ian (1962), *The Trial of Patrick Sellar*, London: Routledge.
— (1979), *The World of Rob Donn*, Edinburgh: Edina.
Harper, Marjory (ed.) (2005), *Emigrant Homecomings: The Return Movement of Emigrants, 1600–2000*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Holland, Stuart (1976), *Capital versus the Regions*, London: Macmillan.
Houston, R. A. and Knox, W. J. (eds) (2001), *The New Penguin History of Scotland*, London: Penguin.
Hunter James (1999), *Last of the Free*, Edinburgh: Mainstream.
— (2004), Foreword to Craig, *Glens of Silence*, Edinburgh: Birlinn.
Hutchinson, Roger (2003), *The Soap Man: Lewis, Harris and Lord Leverhulme*, Edinburgh: Birlinn.
Johnston, Thomas (1909), *Our Scots Noble Families*, Glasgow: Forward Publishing.
— (c. 1920), *History of the Working Classes in Scotland*, Glasgow: Forward Publishing.
Leneman, Leah (1986), *Living in Atholl: A Social History of the Estates, 1685–1785*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

— (ed.) (1988), *Perspectives in Scottish Social History: Essays in Honour of R. M. Mitchison*, Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press.
Lenman, B. (1977), Introduction to *The Statistical Account of Scotland*, vol. 12 (North and West Perthshire), East Ardsley, Wakefield: EP Publishing.
Little, J. I. (1999), 'Agricultural Improvement and Highland Clearance: The Isle of Arran 1766–1829', *Scottish Economic and Social History*, vol. 19.
MacColl, Allan W. (2006), *Land, Faith and the Crofting community: Christianity and Social Criticism in the Highlands of Scotland 1843–1893*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
MacDonald, Iain S. (1996), 'Alexander Macdonald, esq. of Glencoe: insights into early Highland sheep-farming', *Review of Scottish Culture*, vol. 10.
— (2005), *Glencoe and Beyond: The Sheep-farming Years, 1780–1830*, Edinburgh: John Donald.
Macdonald, R. H. (1984–6), 'Estates of Chisholm', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, LIV.
McFarlane, Heather (2004), *Arichonan: A Highland Clearance Recorded*, Bloomington, IN: Author House.
MacGowan, Douglas (2001), *The Stonemason: Donald Macleod's Chronicle of Scotland's Highland Clearances*, Westport, CT: Praeger.
Macinnes, Allan I. (1988), 'Scottish Gaeldom: the first phase of clearance', in T. M. Devine and R. Mitchison (eds), *People and Society in Scotland*, vol. 1, Edinburgh: John Donald.
Macinnes, A. I. (1993–4), 'Social mobility in medieval and early modern Scottish Gaeldom: the controvertible evidence', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, vol. 58.
— (1996), *Clanship, Commerce and the House of Stuart*, East Linton: Tuckwell.
— (1998), 'Scottish Gaeldom from clanship to commercial landlordism', in S. Foster et al. (eds), *Scottish Power Centres: From the Early Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century*, Glasgow: Cruithne Press.
Macinnes, A. I., Harper, Marjory and Fryer, Linda (eds) (2002), *Scotland and the Americas, c. 1650–c. 1939*, Scottish History Society, 5th series, vol. 13.
Maciver, Evander (1905), *Memoirs of a Highland Gentleman, Being the Reminiscences of Evander Maciver of Scourie*, ed. G. Henderson, Edinburgh.
Mackenzie, John (1988), *Pigeon Holes of Memory: The Life and Times of Dr John Mackenzie (1803–1886)*, ed. Christina Byam Shaw, Palo Alto, CA: Society for the Promotion of Science and Scholarship.
Mackillop, Andrew (1999), 'Highland estate change and tenant emigration', in T. M. Devine and J. R. Young (eds), *Eighteenth-century Scotland*, East Linton: Tuckwell.
— (2000), '*More fruitful than the soil': army, empire and the Scottish Highlands, 1715–1815*, East Linton: Tuckwell.
— (2003), 'Fashioning a "British" empire: Sir Archibald Campbell of Inverneil and Madras, 1785–9', in A. Mackillop and S. Murdoch, *Military Governors and Imperial Frontiers*, Leiden: Brill.

— (2005), 'The Highlands and the returning nabob: Sir Hector Munro of Novar, 1760–1807', in Marjory Harper (ed.), *Emigrant Homecomings*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Maclean, J. R. (2005), *Northern Times*, 25 March.
Maclean, Samuel (1937–41), 'The poetry of the Clearances', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, vol. 38.
Macleod, N. (1889), *Caraid na Gaidheal: The Friend of the Gael*, Edinburgh.
Macmillan, D. S. (1973), 'Commercial and industrial society in Great Britain and Ireland, 1814–1824: a study of Australian immigration applications', *Histoire sociale/Social History*, vol. 6, pp. 181–201.
McLean, Marianne (1991), *The People of Glengarry: Highlanders in Transition, 1745–1820*, Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.
Martins, Susanna Wade (1996–7), 'A century of farms and farming on the Sutherland estate, 1790–1890', *Review of Scottish Culture*, vol. 10.
Mathias, P. and Davis, A. (eds) (1996), *The nature of Industrialization: Agriculture and Industrialization from the Eighteenth Century to the Present Day*, Oxford: Blackwell.
Meek, Donald E. (ed.) (1995), *Tuath is tighearna: Tenants and Landlords*, Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press.
— (ed.) (2003), *Caran an t-Saoghail: The Wiles of the World*, Edinburgh: Birlinn.
Michie, Margaret Fairweather (2000), in A. Fenton and J. Beach (eds), *Glenesk: The History and Culture of an Angus Community*, East Linton, Tuckwell.
Miller, Hugh (1843), *Sutherland as It Was and Is, or How a Country may be Ruined*, Edinburgh.
— (1854), *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, Edinburgh.
Mitchison, Rosalind (1981), 'The highland clearances', *Scottish Economic and Social History*, vol. 1, pp. 1–24.
Muir, Richard (1982), *The Lost Villages of Britain*, London: Michael Joseph.
Murdoch, Alex (2003), *British Emigration*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.
New Statistical Account of Scotland (1835–45), Edinburgh, 15 vols.
O Grada, C. (2005), 'Markets and famines in pre-industrial Europe', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 36, pp. 143–66.
Omand, D. (ed.) (2004), *The Argyll Book*, Edinburgh: Birlinn.
Orde, Anne (ed.) (2002), *Matthew and George Culley: Travel Journals and Letters, 1765–1798*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, for The British Academy.
Orr, W. (1982), *Deer Forests, Landlords and Crofters: The Western Highlands in Victorian and Edwardian times*, Edinburgh: John Donald.
Overton, M. (1996), *Agricultural Revolution in England*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Parker, A. W. (1997), *Scottish Highlanders in Colonial Georgia*, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.
Prebble, John (1963), *The Highland Clearances*, London: Secker and Warburg.

Purves, James (1875), 'The agriculture of Caithness', copy in National Archives of Scotland, GD 268/982, Loch papers, Miscellaneous 1872–1897, Papers of James Purves.

Ramsay, Freda (ed.) (1991), *The Day book of Daniel Campbell of Shawfield 1767: With Relevant Papers concerning the Estate of Islay*, Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press.

Richards, Eric (1982a), *History of the Highland Clearances*, vol. 1, London: Croom Helm.

— (1982b), *The Last Scottish Food Riots*, supplement no. 6 of *Past and Present*.

— (1985), *History of the Highland Clearances*, vol. 2, London: Croom Helm.

— (1992), 'The decline of St Kilda: demography, economy and emigration', *Scottish Economic and Social History*, vol. 14, pp. 55–75.

— (1999), *Patrick Sellar and the Highland Clearances*, Edinburgh: Polygon.

— (2000), *The Highland Clearances*, Edinburgh: Birlinn.

— (2004), *Britannia's Children: Emigration from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland since 1600*, London: Hambledon and London.

Richards, Eric and Clough, Monica (1989), *Cromartie: Highland Life 1650–1914*, Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press.

Robertson, J. I. (1998), *The First Highlander: Major General David Stewart of Garth*, East Linton: Tuckwell.

Rothery, M. (2005), review of *Land Rights, Ethno nationality and Sovereignty in History* edited by Engerman and Meltzer, *Economic History Review*, August.

Scottish Economic Committee. Committee on the Highlands and Islands (1938), *The Highlands and Islands of Scotland: A Review of the Economic Conditions with Recommendations for Improvement*, Glasgow: The Committee.

Scrape, G. Poulett (1849), *Some Notes of a Tour in England, Scotland and Ireland*, London.

Secretary for Scotland (1922), *Report of the Departmental Committee, appointed in November, 1919: to enquire and report with regard to lands used as deer forests*, London: HMSO.

Short, Brian (1975), 'The turnover of tenants on the Ashburnham estate, 1830–1850', *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 13, cited in Matthew Cragoe, 'An anatomy of an eviction campaign: the general election of 1868 in Wales and its aftermath', *Rural History* 9 (1968), pp. 177–93.

Sinclair, John (ed.) (1983), *The Statistical Account of Scotland, 1791–1799*, reprinted with scholarly introductions, East Ardsley, Wakefield: EP Publishing.

Smith, Annette (1974), 'The administration of the forfeited annexed estates, 1752–1784', in G. W. S. Barrow (ed.), *The Scottish Tradition*, Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press.

— (1982), *Jacobite Estates of the Forty-five*, Edinburgh: John Donald.

Smith, Hance D. (1984), *Shetland Life and Trade, 1550–1914*, Edinburgh: John Donald.

Thompson, E. P. (1991), *Customs in Common*, London: Merlin.
Tyrrell, Alex (2003), 'What shall we do with the duke? Public memory and culture wars in the Scottish style', *Humanities Research*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 21–8.
Whyte, I. D. (1995), *Scotland before the Industrial Revolution*, London: Longman.
Wight, A. (1784), *Present State of Husbandry in Scotland: Extracted from Reports Made to the Commissioners of the Annexed Estates*, vol. 4, part 1, Edinburgh: William Creech.
Wills, Virginia (1978), 'The gentleman farmer and the annexed estates', in T. M. Devine (ed.), *Lairds and Improvement*.
Winch, D. (2002), *The Political Economy of the British Historical Experience, 1688–1914*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, for the British Academy.
Withers, C. W. J. (1987), 'Highland-lowland migration and the making of the crofting community, 1755–1891', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, vol. 103, no. 2.

Glossary

acre the Scotch acre contains 5,760 square yards of 36 inches each; hence 4 Scotch acres is nearly equivalent to 5 English acres.

Annexed estates The Annexing Act (March 1752) annexed 'unalienably' to the Crown fourteen estates belonging to Jacobites attainted for treason in the uprising of 1745. The estates were administered by a commission; the last estates were restored to their owners in 1784.

bear four-rowed barley.

boll a measure of volume used in Scotland and Northern England. Old boll (Scots) = 6 bushells.

coble a short flat-bottomed boat used on rivers and estuaries; a deckless fishing boat without keel.

cottar the inhabitant of a cot house or cottage.

counterfactual speculation on 'what might have happened' in history, by study of possible alternative courses of historical process.

crofter the tenant of a smallholding or croft.

Crofters Commission established by the Crofters Holdings (Scotland) Act (1886) to determine fair rents and to regulate grazing.

deforcement prevention by force of the execution of official duty.

Disruption the secession in 1843 of a large part of the established Church of Scotland, to form the Free Church of Scotland; the major issue was the demand of the presbyteries for a voice in matters of patronage.

dùthchas hereditary right of tenure. A Gaelic term rich in its connotations, it might be translated as 'heritable trusteeship'; it obliged Highland chiefs and leaders to 'ensure security of possession throughout the territorial bounds settled by their kinsmen and local associates' (Macinnes).

factor an estate agent in Scotland, manager of estates on behalf of landowner.

feu land held in perpetuity, or for ninety-nine years, generally, in payment of a yearly rent.

forfeited estates estates forfeited to the Crown by Jacobite rebels attainted for treason in the uprisings of 1715 and 1745.

grassum a fee paid to a feudal superior on entering upon the holding.

heritable jurisdiction various judicial powers possessed heritably by Highland

landlords until they were ended following the 1745 uprising.

heritor a landed proprietor in a parish, liable to pay public burdens.

hovel open shed, outhouse used for cattle, etc.; also, a wretched human dwelling.

kelp any large brown seaweed, the calcined ashes of seaweed, a source of soda, iodine, etc. Importantly, it was used in glass manufacture.

laird a landed proprietor, the owner of an estate of land of any size from the largest to a small farm, frequently followed by the name of the estate.

lot a piece of land allotted to a particular tenant.

Malthusian referring to Robert Malthus (1766–1834), or to his teaching that the increase of population tends to outstrip that of the means of living and that moral and social restraint should therefore be exercised to limit reproduction.

merk a silver coin.

midding manure heap.

oighreach hereditary right of possession.

quisling a traitor collaborating with an occupying enemy force.

rack-rent a rent stretched to the utmost annual value of the property rented; an exorbitant rent.

run-rig/run-ridge land where the alternate ridges of a field belong to different owners, or are worked by different tenants.

tacksman a middleman who leases directly from the proprietor of the estate a large piece of land which he sublets in small farms.

wadset a deed from a debtor to a creditor assigning the rents of land until the debt is paid.

Statistical Tables

Table 1 Comparative Population Growth Estimates, 1755–1850. Annual Percentage Increase by Region

	1755–1800	*1801–10*	*1811–20*	*1821–30*	*1831–40*	*1841–50*
England and Wales	0.80	1.34	1.67	1.48	1.36	1.20
Ireland	1.05	1.34	1.34	1.34	0.51	–2.19
Scotland	0.52	1.16	1.48	1.23	1.03	0.98
Scotland, excluding eight Highland Counties	0.62	1.38	1.63	1.43	1.30	1.22
Eight Highland Counties	0.29	0.44	1.01	0.60	0.05	0.01

Source: Richards 1982, pp. 96–9.

Table 2 Kelp prices per ton, 1740–1840

	£ s d		
1740–60	1. 5.0		
1771–80	5. 0.0		
1781–90	6. 0.0		
1791–1800	9. 0.0	to	10.0.0
1804	7. 0.0	to	9.0.0
1806–10	16. 0.0	to	18/20.0.0
1815	10. 0.0	to	11.0.0
1816	8. 0.0	to	10.0.0
1820	8. 0.0	to	11.0.0
1825	7. 0.0		
1830	4.16.8		
1835	3. 0.0		
1840	2.10.0	to	4.0.0

Source: Richards 1985, p. 514.

Table 3 Scottish Wool Prices, Quinquennial Averages, 1750–1887

	Laid Cheviot (pence per lb)
1750–2	3.2
1753–7	3.0
1758–62	3.5
1763–7	3.4
1768–72	3.6
1773–7	4.1
1778–82	3.1
1783–7	4.9
1788–92	7.0
1793–6	8.7
1796–1818	Unavailable
1818–22	11.6
1823–7	6.6
1828–32	6.3
1833–7	9.8
1838–42	8.7
1843–7	7.0
1848–52	6.9
1853–7	9.3
1858–62	12.2
1863–7	13.6
1868–72	11.9
1873–7	11.4
1878–82	9.5
1883–7	7.9

Source: Richards 1985, pp. 515–16.

Index