

(Continued from Previous Page)

Strathnaver in 1814 led to Captain Kenneth Mackay, tacksman of Torboll. However, this farm, later known as Mackay, was only cleared between 1819 and 1821.

Young and Sellar's management was not a great success. Young died in 1819 and the death and execution of his grandsons schemes while Sellar was clearly an unsuitable person to represent the estate in its dealings with the people. The replacement was largely the doing of James Loch, commissioner to the Sutherland family since 1812 and one of the foremost estate managers of his time.

Although Loch may be said to have inherited the policies of Young and Sellar from those of their predecessors, he was, nevertheless, convinced of the necessity for further clearances. The first clearance was Loch's first by mouth at the Naver, with the addition, in 1820, of some lands adjacent to Borgeibeg bought from Lord Reay.

The local background to the changes in Assynt consisted of the fact that Charles Clarke, the sheep farmer at Glendhu on the Reay estate, had in 1818 taken over the large sheep farm of Achmore from the previous tenant, James Scobie, had gone bankrupt in 1817 and also the small adjoining farm of Little Assynt and the farm of Cromalt in the heights of Assynt formerly held by the bankrupt John Mackenzie, tenant of Inverkalduh prior to 1812.

Clarke had been security for both Scobie and Mackenzie and the estate management decided, on account of his "active exertions" and possession of stock worth £10,000 to allow him to take over their farms. The same year he also entered possession of the eastern half of Unapool as a substitute to Isaac Joying who by then had ceased all attempts to quarry Assynt marble.

In 1819 Clarke took over Cullin and Camore, the two halves of Kirkton, formerly occupied by the minister and 29 subtenants and, according to the factor, yielding the "finest pasture imaginable". The following year a further 23 farms were cleared when Clarke entered into full possession of Unapool, although some were allowed to remain as tenants.

In the meantime the farm of Inchadamp had become vacant through the bankruptcy of the tenant, George Macdonald of Leckmelm, and apart from a small possession set aside for the inn, was added to Stroneuchter sheep farm.

As far east as Wester Abercross were Loch Beannach, Blackloch and Bad a Ghriann — a district described by the factor as "by

far the poorest and most miserable in the parish" but which he reckoned would make an "excellent wintering". After being cleared in 1821 Loch Boannach was taken by the factor, George Gunn, who proceeded to expand his sheep farming operations, becoming the tenant of Little Assynt in 1823 and taking over Achmore sheep farm in 1831.

Two other sheep farms were created in Strathnaver in 1819 — Skelpick on the east side of the Naver and led to John Paterson who had made a successful bid for Rhiolick in 1813, and Langdale on the opposite bank and led to Patrick Sellar. Langdale included not only the old farm at Langdale, formerly in the possession of Robert Gordon who had gone bankrupt in 1817, but also all the other townships from Gummer in the south to Apill near Auchincruive in the north. The presence of disturbances on neighbouring estates, the clearances of 1820 passed off relatively peacefully. However, in 1821 the people of Ascollemer in Strathbrock put up a considerable resistance and it required the assistance of troops before their removal was effected.

The resettlement arrangements for the 250 families cleared in 1819-1822 necessitated that Strathy Point, a farm of Armadale farm which was in the hands of William Innes of Sandiskie, be repossessed. Innes agreed to reinstate these lands in return for which the sheep farm of Armadale was considerably extended by the clearances of some 30 families from the inland townships of Dail tinnis, Achugan, Bowside, Dallargwell and Brathay.

The further reorganisation of Kildonan included the extension of the existing sheep farms and the creation of an entirely new one. In 1819 the lands between the Rivers Helmsdale and Frith were added to Reid's farm of Kilkalkmill. The same year the sheep farm of Knockin, situated between the existing farms of Luigill and Rhiolick and bounded on the south by the River Helmsdale, was established for Thomas Houston, formerly tenant of Lothbeg, and the new possessor of the arable farm of Kintredwarf as well as Ribillig sheep farm on the Reay estate.

A total of 128 families were cleared from townships in Kildonan in 1819. The following year 50 more families were cleared from the townships around Kildonan itself when those lands were added to other tenants.

There were two other sheep farms established in eastern Sutherland in 1819 — the tenant, George Macdonald of Leckmelm, and apart from a small possession set aside for the inn, was added to Stroneuchter sheep farm. As far east as Wester Abercross and 23 from Easter Abercross, was carried out in 1819 while the clearances in Clyffe extended

over three years with 42 families removed in 1819, 96 in 1820 and 34 in 1821.

Although the use of fire to destroy the house timbers was found to be a necessary step to prevent the people recouping their homes, it was an action which attracted a good deal of bad publicity for the estate management and the Sutherland family received a number of anonymous letters. One such letter referred to the Countess as a "damned old cat" who deserved "to be worried and burnt, for burning out the poor Highlanders".

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The intent look on the faces of buyers around the sales ring at Laird, when 32,600 lambs went through in one day. Sellers had plenty to smile about later, when good prices were obtained last August.



Sheep Farming on the Reay Estate

After the death in 1797 of the mentally incapable Hugh, Lord Reay, his successor, Lord Eric, made agreements with his tenants terminating the existing leases. George Brown, a well known land surveyor from Elgin, inspected the estate and in July 1799 "extensive grazings and farms" which "would maintain an immense number of sheep as well as black cattle, and merit the attention of those who wish to rear and deal extensively", were advertised to be let the following year.

However, the 3rd winter of 1799-1800, which prevented "several acquiesces" from visiting the estate, the fact that some of the local tacksmen were absent on military service, and also the refusal of the possessors of Balnakel to relinquish the farm without being ordered to do so by the Court of Session made it necessary for the new arrangements to be postponed until the next year.

In July 1800 it was advertised that many "celebrated" farms on the Reay estate as well as the Reay Forest which, it was considered, could itself pasture 20,000 "of the larger Cheviot breed of sheep", were to be set as sheep farms. As the whole estate was out of lease Lord Reay intended that the farms should be arranged "so as to

afford to each the proper proportion of upland summer pasture, and of safe lowland wintering, along the sea shore." In conclusion, it was claimed that "a more favourable opportunity for farmers of capital and spirit, either in the agricultural or grazing line, of being amply accommodated, has not occurred for some time."

Lord Reay, whose usual residence was in London, came north to spend the summer months at Tongue and receive offers. A number of agreements with tenants were made in August 1800 for entry the following year but progress was not as good as had been anticipated and in 1801 Lord Reay asked John Dunlop of Moreham, in Ayreshire, to take charge of the estate "for the purpose of

introducing a new and more improving system of management." As an inducement Dunlop was offered the choice of any farm on the estate at a moderate rent and in consequence accepted a 57-year lease of Balnakel, formerly possessed by Donald Forbes as successor to his late father-in-law, Rodrick Macleod, and the lands of Parph which had been possessed by the late Colonel Mackay of Bighouse. Dunlop's period of management, however, lasted only a year.

Most of the sheep farms were taken by former tacksmen on the estate — Auldtrivny by William Munro of Achany, Glencoil by Charles Clarke, Erriboll by Donald Mackay, Keoldale by John Clarke, Ribillig by Donald Forbes and Skerry by Captain John Mackay. Apart from Dunlop, the only other "strangers" were the Ors, tenants of Mussel, Merkan and Briggsell, and in 1803 they gave up these lands in favour of Donald Forbes and Alexander Cameron from Rens-shire.

The financial benefit to Lord Reay may be judged from the fact that the estate rental, which had already crept up from £1321 in 1797 to £1903 in 1800, increased to £2918 in 1802.

Between 1805 and 1809 the arrangements were extensively modified. A number of agreements were renegotiated to take in additional lands, either whole townships or merely hill grazings, and also to place the higher rents in the hands of arms. For instance, in 1808 Charles Clarke was given possession of Mavdy and Kylesstroma in addition to his lands of Glencoil and Glendhu. His lease was still to terminate in 1815 but the rent was increased from £140 to £380 for 1808-1811 and to £480 for the remaining years. Largely as a result of this process between 1804 and 1809 the rental of the Reay estate rose from £2978 to £4426.

Inevitably, both the establishment and extension of the Reay sheep farms were accompanied by clearances, although many families were allowed to remain in the hills, but on a small scale albeit with reduced grazing rights. Lord Reay's interest in the kelp industry demanded that most of those who were cleared be resettled in the crowded coastal townships, for instance around Scourie and on the northern shores of Loch Inchard. In the lease of some of the sheep farms excepting Balnakel and Skerry fell out in 1815 and, with the prices of meat and wool at an all-time high, it was a golden opportunity to increase sheep rents still higher. Charles Clarke retained another 19-year lease of Glendhu but at a yearly rent of £1400 for the first five years and £1800 thereafter. Elsewhere there were some changes — Donald Forbes formerly at Ribillig became tenant of Melness, John Clarke for the Scourie district, the farm mostly comprised several anciently cleared townships, such as Clashmore, Cliefseam, Trantermore and Tranterbeg, was taken by Thomas Houston, tenant of farms on the Sutherland estate. In 1820 David Gilchrist became tenant of the townships from the neighbouring mainland.

The extension of sheep farming, however, continued after the Reay Country was bought by the Sutherland family in 1829. James Anderson, the fish merchant at Rispond who held a number of farms on a lease granted in 1818, decided to turn his attention to sheep farming. Between 1839 and 1841 he cleared 32 families from various farms but when he attempted to evict a further 31 families he was met with strong resistance. The militia were called in with the result that the people were given a respite until 1842. The whole episode was highly embarrassing to the Duke of Sutherland.

The other major change centred on Scourie sheep farm which had come into the possession of Alexander MacIver, factor for the Duke of Sutherland. The farm mostly comprised several anciently cleared townships, such as Clashmore, Cliefseam, Trantermore and Tranterbeg, was taken by Thomas Houston, tenant of farms on the Sutherland estate. In 1820 David Gilchrist became tenant of the townships from the neighbouring mainland.

Conclusion

The history of the introduction of sheep farming in Sutherland is much more than the story of the Sutherland Clearances. As may be gathered, the establishment of sheep farming was both earlier and more extensive than is often assumed.

The landlords were involved from the start, either taking a direct interest by running sheep farms on their own account or by reorganising their estates and letting farms to substantial tenants. But it is also necessary to emphasise the role of the local tacksmen in introducing sheep flocks onto their existing holdings. Moreover, it is evident that tacksmen provided a significant proportion of the tenants under the new arrangements. Both landlords and tacksmen, though, were motivated by the financial possibilities of sheep farming.

There is no doubt that the introduction of sheep, whether by tacksmen or landlords, was accompanied by the clearance of the small tenantry. The manner in which these clearances were carried out has not been examined in detail here, but the evidence of resistance suggests that the people did not readily accept the changes to their way of life which were occasioned by the coming of the sheep.