

THE HISTORY OF 'TIRERAGAN' TOWNSHIP,
ROSS OF MULL.

A Study in Local History
by Carol Riddell.

"No people are more attached to their native country and it is only want that obliges them to leave it." - Rev. Dougal Campbell, Minister of Kilfinichan and Killevecon Parish, South West Mull, 1793.

"My lands in Morvern and Mull have more sheep upon them than any district in Scotland or perhaps in England of equal extent" - 5th Duke of Argyll, 1805.

"I wish to send out those whom we would be obliged to feed if they stayed at home - to get rid of that class is the object." - 8th Duke of Argyll, 1851.

INTRODUCTION.

This is an account of the old township of 'Tireragan', near the southwest corner of the Ross of Mull, on the Isle of Mull, Inner Hebrides, Scotland.

One of the principles of 'Highland Renewal' is to consider carefully the local history of the areas where the project works (See '*Highland Renewal - an Introductory Booklet*' for the work this Scottish Charity is undertaking). Although the former inhabitants of Tireragan have long been dispossessed and only the ruins of their houses remain, to be able to work caringly with the land something of their history and background needs to be understood. They were the natural trustees of this land, they did not leave willingly and there is a legacy for us to honour. Indeed, any project in rural regeneration in the Highlands needs a careful study of the history of its area. Wellborn contemporaries of the old inhabitants tended to disparage the people as idle, primitive peasants. Nothing could be further from the truth.

'Tireragan.'

The name of the ruined clachan or hamlet that existed on the south of the Ross, between Knockvologan and Ardalanish, is given on the Ordnance Survey Map as 'Tir Fhearagain', which would mean 'Fhearagain's Land' or coast, or possibly 'Fergus' Land'. However, this spelling does not exist in any of the older written records of the area, which date back to the mid 17th century. Nor do they refer to the clachan, but to the whole area - a 'township' comprising several such clachans.

In the records, the name is spelt in various ways, 'Toirorgan, 'Tireragan', 'Tireragan', 'Tiergan', 'Tiriragan', 'Tiragan' or 'Tiraragan', etc., sometimes with the first 'r' doubled. Is the OS spelling merely a modern transliteration of spoken gaelic, or is the modern name a mistake? Mairi MacArthur has pointed out that in Charlie Maclean's unpublished collection of Mull Gaelic placenames a footnote refers the name to 'Fergna' Britt, 4th Abbot of Iona, who died in 633. On the other hand, Dugald MacCormick, a nineteenth century resident of the Ross of Mull, remembered the name as meaning 'the land of angry waves ('Tir Fheirg-thonn') and said that that was the understood local meaning. (*Personal correspondence from Prof. Neil McCormick*). Perhaps we will never know for sure. I have decided to use the most common of the old spellings, 'Tireragan' as one of the easiest to spell and say (the 't' is pronounced like the 'ch' in 'chuckle').

References to Tireragan are scarce, even in the Archives at Inveraray Castle. The inhabitants spoke Gaelic, and few were literate. It was marked on Johan Blaer's 1654 map and a document from 1662 - dating from the period when the McLeans of Duart were still the owners - gives it a rent of £120/-/-, with 'Casualis' of £30/-/-, so it has at least a 350 year history and certainly dates much further back **From George Langland's Map of the County of Argyll, 1801 (IA,B2531)**. Tireragan must have been similar to other local communities on Mull and it is reasonable to assume that much of the general information about the area as a whole is relevant to Tireragan also.

Such small communities were usually called 'townships' and were divided into 'clachans' or 'settlements', a practice dating at least from the 17th century: "Some townships divided into small hamlets or 'clachans' and tenants paid rent in groups. Common grazing lands were owned by the group as a whole." (*Shaw, p.85*)

There are remains of 5 settlements which probably made up the 'township' of Tireragan, 4 of which are on Taigh Sithe land, the other on land currently belonging to Fidden Farm (*See sketch map*). Some isolated ruins look as if they were once part of other, earlier clachans, thoroughly demolished.

The settlements comprise from 6 to 10 ruins. There are also at least ten isolated ruins and several piles of stones which look like thoroughly demolished houses. Given that people had large families, there must have been well over 100 people in the township as a whole between 1830 and 1840, when the population of the area was at its highest (*See Table 1*). A list from the first years of the 19th century gives 95 inhabitants, making the township more populated at the time than Ardalanish, Fidden or Knockvologan, neighbouring townships (*IA, Bundle 904*).

All the ruins with standing walls probably date from the 18th & 19th centuries as, prior to at least 1744, normal buildings were of 'earth and wattle' which would leave no trace (*Cregeen, AEI, p.xxi*). Indeed, even in 1800, John Leyden comments of his visit to Mull:

"The huts of the peasants in Mull are most deplorable. Some of the doors are hardly 4 ft. high and the houses themselves composed of earthen sods in many instances, are scarce 12. There is often no other outlet of smoke but at the door, the consequence of which is that the women are more squalid and dirty than the men, and their features more disagreeable." (*Leyden, J. p.34-5*) Many of the stone ruins may date from later than 1800, then, and traces of housing prior to the eighteenth century are negligible.

Table 1. Population of the Local Parish (Kilfinichen and Kilveceon) and of Mull at various dates.

(*Source, J. Ramsay, 1863 (IA, B.1548) and MacCormick, p. 204.*)

Date	1750	1755	1771	1791	1801	1811	1821	1831
Parish	1,616	1,685	1,676	3,002	3,174	3,205	3,967	3,819
Mull	5,044	5,287	5,526	8,016	8,539	9,383	10,612	10,538

Date	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921
Parish	4113	3054	2518	2448	1982	1735	1529	1403	1319
Mull	10,064	8369	7331	6441	5624	5076	4712	4173	3754

Tireragan Township - the Visible Record.

1. Cille Mhuire (Mary's Cemetary, or Cell).

This is the most northerly settlement, on Fidden land, outside the present boundary. It has 8 houses. One of the houses is well built and local informants say it was a school. A quill pen is said to have been found in it.

A small walled area at the top of the 'infield' was a cemetary, and three graves belong to 'the last inhabitants of the area'. But I have not been able to identify them with certainty among many stones signifying graves. At the spot are the remains of a small building which could have been a chapel. It is high enough for a clear view of Iona Cathedral across the moor. It is said that St. Columba did not allow nuns on Iona - perhaps the place has an older connotation and possibly the name literally refers to 'Mary's Hermitage'?

About 600m E, along a small glen, is a large cairn, the 'Wishing Cairn' with a tiny spring running from it. It contains literally thousands of stones. Legend is that to place a stone on the cairn with one's initials (or mark?) carved on it made a wish come true. There are initials on some of the stones.

2. 'Tir Fhearagain.'

This settlement - where the 'Highland Renewal project will restore some of the old ruins - is called 'Cro na Ba Glaise' ('Pen of the Grey Cow') in older editions of the Ordnance Survey map. It lies across Glac Ròineach hill to the south of Cille Mhuire and has 10 ruins, one of which is a cottage of rather better quality than the others, with a chimney. The end wall with the chimney has obviously been added to rest of the house, as a different, squared stone was used and there are remains of mortar. It was probably re-occupied in 1885 for about 11 years by John Campbell and then Donald MacDonald (*see below*). (It was MacDonalds from the neighbouring farm of Knockvologan who gave Hugh Cameron and Callum Campbell their information about Tireragan.) One of the ruins is very small and could have been an animal pen. With three larger ruins, it lies about 150m. up the hill to the NE of the main group of houses. Another, isolated, ruin lies 300m. to the west, nestling on the corner of Glas Ròinach.

The settlement has an old bridge over the burn, and a stone in the village centre which we have named the 'pulpit stone', as it was surely used as a 'speaker's platform' (see illustration). There is a walled area to the east side which may have been an animal enclosure or a 'kail yard', and another, smaller, at the west end. The atmosphere here is quite magical. A number of pottery shards have been found.

South from the settlement, an old wall runs right over the hill to the south, and continues towards the sea, sometimes as a dyke. It is probably the one referred to later, dividing the land.

3. Breac-achadh (The 'Speckled Field').

This lies on the hillside to the right of the above mentioned wall, about 500m SE of 'Tir Fhearagain'. There are 8 similar ruins here. Some pottery shards were found in a ditch below the lowest of them. The place is very overgrown with bracken in the summer, and a little forbidding in atmosphere. The houses overlook the glen running west to the sea from 'Tir Fhearagain' as well as the main glen running south to the beach at Traigh Gheal. They are exposed to winds, but a good place to spot invaders from south and west in olden times.

In the west running glen are many 'lazy beds' and the ruins of at least four other houses, including a drying kiln. It was an intensely cultivated area.

The central glen has a single ruin along its eastern edge, set in a narrow gully by a burn. It would have been a good location for a small mill. About 400m SE is another isolated ruin with a squarer shape than other houses.

4. Tor Mhic an Fhamhair. (Hill of the Giant's Son).

Here, 600m south of Breac-achadh, are 3 ruins, with 3 more about 100m. to the east. The first three, on a little knoll, have been built into a sheep fank, but their outlines are still quite clear.

South again lies Traigh Gheal, the 'white' beach, with two paths constructed down its steep slopes. The easterly one winds up the hill, while the path to the west is straighter, and probably served all the above settlements. By the beach itself are some lazy beds and a large pile of stones, perhaps providing a store for house construction. At the west side of the beach is a rough breakwater and cleared area for boats to be pulled up in stormy weather.

5. Tobhta Alic (Alex's Ruin).

This is a settlement about 700m. roughly E.S.E. of Tor Mhic an Fhamhair, high on the hill above the march of the property with Ardalanish farm to the east. Here there are eight ruins, facing south, with spectacular views over to Colonsay, Jura and Islay. Below them is a wide area of walled field which runs down towards the march glen.

Seven of the ruins are typical but the eighth, in the best position of all, is a substantial house with mortared walls and a ruined chimney end, built of squared stones of a different material from the other houses. Callum Campbell heard that this house belonged to the 'richest man on the Ross, with 200 pounds in the bank.'. Attie McKechnie has identified him as Alex McLean of Pennycross, a well respected citizen. The District Archives show that he was a member of the Parochial Board for Poor Relief in the 1840s.

The name, 'Tobhta Alic' is obviously more recent than the ruins. The settlement may once have been called 'An Tuachdain', after the glen below it, but none of the Ordnance Survey maps gives a name. One of the ruins is very small with a round end, and an entrance narrowed by two large stones - possibly a sheep pen. Another structure lies, half overgrown, about 200 yards to the south, a large rectangle, perhaps a former cattle pen. Another ruin lies half overgrown further down in the woods, and there is yet another nestling against the hillside further down the march fence. This settlement is quite isolated. Probably, the eastern path down to Traigh Gheal gave it access to the sea.

Other Ruins.

500m SE of Tir Fhearagain are the foundations of an isolated ruin, in a hollow leading down to the march glen. It may once have been connected with ruins on the land of Ardalanish farm east of Loch An Sgalain, which may or may not have formed part of old Tireragan.

There is a small lochan in the hills, about 800m. slightly SW of Breacachadh, near which there are lazy beds. Here, a man called 'Seamus, the Indian man' is said to have built a house after serving in the army in India and coming back with £20. Exactly when is not known. The lochan is known as '*Indian Loch*' and the ruined house is above the trees west of it.

There are house remains in a tiny cove at the SW tip of the property, nestling to avoid the prevailing winds. A boat could be beached there. In this isolated spot there are lazy beds. Perhaps the family from here farmed the nearby islet of Calmain (the Dove), which also has lazy beds. In 1549, Calmain was said by Sir Donald Munro to be populated and fertile. In 1772 it was part of Tireragan, but in 1792 it was rented separately by Lt.Col. Campbell, for £4/-/10p. In 1807 it was divided between 'Tiergan' and Knockvologan. It was returned to Tireragan in 1852, but now, once more, forms part of Knockvologan Croft. (*IA, B2369, 1523*)

All the larger woodland areas show evidence of hazel tree coppicing. The stems were used for the construction of roofs and for creels, among other things.

There are also numerous walls and dykes on the property, which seem to vary in age and construction. Some are made of stones similar to those of the house ruins, but others, more overgrown, have very large stones indeed and may be from an earlier period.

Who were the inhabitants of Tireragan and how did they live?

BACKGROUND AND EARLY HISTORY.

The list of remains indicates that Tireragan, now desolate, was once a populous township. A record from 1779 lists 45 people, but by 1804, there were 17 men, 30 women and 32 children under 12 - 79 in all, compared with the neighboring townships of Fidden & Pottie - 80, Ardalanish - 97 and 43 at Knockvologan. A few years later, with 26 males, 33 females and 36 children (95 in total) it was the most populous of them all (Fidden -76, Ardalanish - 90, Knockvologan - 45)(*IA,B904*). The low number of men probably reflects the impact of the Napoleonic wars - many would have been serving. The growth in population is probably due to the rise in income for landlords from kelping (*see below*). By 1861, Fidden and Knockvologan farms together only had 17 houses with 96 people in them and Tireragan itself was empty (*IA Bundle 1526*).

Records of life prior to the 18th century are very scanty. Like the rest of the Hebrides, Mull was under Norse rule from the 9th to the 13th century. From 1345, it was part of the territory of the 'Lordship of the Isles', but I have not found records specific to Tireragan (*Grimble* and *Grant* give general information about this period in Western Highland history).

In 1542, Dean Monroe described Mull as, "...ane grate rough iyle noch the les it is fertil and fruitfull..."

Black 'Kyløe' cattle were exported (Kyløe being an anglicization of an old Gaelic word that could have meant 'Kyle' or 'Highland breed') back into the early middle ages. The island was part of a military based clan system, where the right to live and cultivate land was exchanged for the obligation to serve the clan chiefs as soldiers in time of need. The Ross of Mull was the most fertile area of Mull. MacDonald in an interesting book about the agriculture of the Hebrides (1811) writes:

"granite... yields the most fertile soil on Mull, as we found on examining the district of Ross." (*p.672*)

The Ross itself was devastated in 16th century feuds between the MacDonalds and the McLeans, who owned it. Steadily, the power of the MacLean clan declined, and a deep feud with the powerful Campbell Clan developed. The military resources of the MacLean's were seriously weakened at the battle of Inverkeithing in 1651, during which 140 men from the Ross of Mull alone were killed. The Campbells used the weakness to their advantage. After holding off one attempt at subjugation, McLean's men were subdued shortly after. The official 'complaint against the occupation records:

" ...A formidable armada arrived, landing at four different quarters of the island, who commenced the work of death by hanging and maiming the passive cattle, and slaughtering defenseless and inoffensive women and children." There was a practice of 'hocking' - cutting off the hind legs of cattle and leaving them to die. (*McCormick*, p.185-6).

In 1674, the Ross of Mull became the property of the Campbell Dukes of Argyll, (*Cregeen, AEI, p. xiv*). But the Duke himself fell into disfavour after the Restoration, and it was not until 1691 that the Duke of Argyll obtained a 'Commission of Fire and Sword' against the MacLeans. Houses were burned and stock removed all down the Ross of Mull (*Grimble*). The Archives at Inveraray contain records of the animals removed from the south of Mull during this period. The despoliation no doubt contributed to a subsequent famine. The Rev. Dougal Campbell comments (in the Old Statistical Account of 1793) that at the time of King William, the parish was almost depopulated by famine and plague. A rent record for Tireragan from 1662 shows a rent of £120 but by 1679, this had dropped to £26 ⁶/₈(with ³/₄ of a 'Passant'), only a fifth of the sum , although it is possible that the difference may represent a change from calculation in Scottish pounds to £ sterling. (*IA B2531*)

There is an account of the population from this period. William Sacheverall, Governor of the Isle of Man, visited Mull in 1688 and travelled in the island, writing a book about his experiences in 1702 (cited in *McCormick, p.182*):-

"During my stay, I generally observed the mean to be large-bodied, stout, subtle, active, patient of cold and hunger. There appeared in all their actions a certain generous air of freedom, and contempt of ... luxury and ambition... they bound their appetites by their necessities, and their happiness consists, not in having much, but in coveting little. The women seem to have the same sentiments with the men; though their habits were mean ... in many of them there was a natural beauty and a graceful modesty... The usual outward habit of both sexes is the plaid; the women's much finer, the colours more lively, and the squares larger than the men's... This serves them for a vail and covers both head and body. The men wear theirs after another manner, especially when designed for ornament; it is loose and flowing... Their thighs are bare, with brawny muscles...What is covered is only adapted to necessity - a thin brogue on the foot, a short buskin of various colours on the leg, tied above the calf with a striped pair of garters. 'What should be concealed' is hid by a large shot-pouch, on each side of which hangs a pistol and a dagger... A round target on their backs, a blue bonnet on their heads, in one hand a broad sword, and a musket in the other. Perhaps no nation goes better armed."

After gaining ascendancy over the MacLeans, The Campbells of Argyll resettled the area with their own vassals. Cregeen says: "To reward friends, to ensure a military following, and to preserve order in the annexed lands, allies and kinsmen had been settled on them." By 1730 the Duke had given the Ross of Mull in tack to 'Donald Campbell, brother of Scammadale'. (*AEI*)

This old kind of tacksman still resembled a feudal baron. His tenants had a great deal of service to perform for him as a price for his patronage. Lord Forbes of Culloden examined the Mull estates in 1737, and declared that the tacksmen required rent in kind from the peasants as well as labour, and 'ground them down' and, after a visit to Mull a little later in the same century, Sir John Sinclair described what had to be provided:

"Tilling, dunging, sowing, harrowing, providing peats, thatching, straw ropes or heath ropes, securing his corn in the barnyard, weeding the land, mowing, lending turf (sic) from the common for manuring, making and ingathering the hay, the spontaneous produce of the meadow and marshy ground, cutting down, harvesting, threshing out, manufacturing and carrying to market or seaport, a part of the produce of the farm. They paid in kind, straw bags, ropes made of hair for drawing the plough, reeds, tethers for cattle, straw for thatching. They also paid 'vicarage' in the smaller tythes, lamb, wool, a certain number of fowls and eggs, veal, kid, butter and cheese and on the sea coast the tythe of their fish and carrying of sea weed for manure. Sometimes lint was spun for the lady of the house and some woollen yarn was exacted." In return, if the tacksman was a good one, they might receive remission of rent in bad years, some meal to tide them over, and protection from aggression. (Cited in the Duke of Argyll's Evidence to the *Napier Commission*, 1883)

The 3rd Duke of Argyll, a noted 'improver', had commuted all the services into 12 or 24 days labour a year by 1755.(c.f. Cregeen, Argyll Estate Instructions).

'Modernisation'.

However violently inclined were earlier cultures - Frances Shaw writes of many island clan feuds in the sixteenth century after the overall control of the Lords of the Isles failed - all over the Highlands, the defeat of the 1745 Jacobite rebellion was a final proof of the end of a historical era. Gaelic, the wearing of the kilt and the playing of the bagpipes were (not very effectively on the islands) prohibited for a time, and the clan chiefs were forcibly integrated into metropolitan society - their children had to be educated in Edinburgh or London. Hunter reports a trip in Europe taken by the young, Eton educated Duke of Argyll with Adam Smith as tutor. (1976)

Of course, such a courtly life was very expensive, and could hardly be supported by existing rents, often partly paid in military service or in kind. Some chiefs went bankrupt or sold out to lowlanders, but the eighteenth century Dukes of Argyll determined to transform their holdings to create greater rents. Their strategy for modernisation was as follows:-

They first abolished the feudal service arrangements and the baronial tacksmen - some of whom emigrated with their tenants, forming the first wave of American Highlanders. (Hunter, 1994)

- They were replaced with a new kind of tacksman, with a medium sized farm and a long lease - 19 years seems to have been common. At first, the new tacksmen co-existed with the township dwellers but started to farm the blackface and cheviot sheep from the south, threatening village hill pastures.
- On the land, the potato was introduced, to some initial resistance, providing what appeared to be a wonderful source of nutrition on local village land.

- Towards the end of the century the gathering and burning of kelp to produce alkaline ash became a major source of cash income - in 1801, 600 tons were made on the Mull, some of it certainly at Tireragan. It was hard, very labour intensive work and, for a short while, very profitable to landlords, who encouraged cottars, small landless tenants, to settle. (*Grant, p.53-5, Hunter, 1994*).
- The 5th Duke of Argyll proposed that the increasing population - whose death rate had been reduced by the introduction of smallpox vaccination - could also be employed in fishing, the women in weaving flax.
- Last but not least, townships were 'modernised' by turning the old 'runrig' system, in which the villagers collectively allocated land amongst themselves, into individual holdings. The old Ross township of Shiaba was a notable example of this, but Tireragan shows no evidence of having been greatly affected.

This was the economic strategy of the improvers. It was meant to provide more rents from a more wealthy population.

Unfortunately, none of the 'improvements' benefited the local people very much. Even if all had worked, metropolitan expenditures multiplied endlessly and seemed indispensable to the landlords, so that increased rents were not usually invested in the areas that produced them.

Even the 5th Duke of Argyll, who did pay great attention to his estates, put much of his rental into an enormously expensive 'model' development round Inveraray (*AEI*). Fishing schemes foundered because of the salt tax, the capital cost of proper boats and tackle and the distance from markets. All communications were very poor and the Ross of Mull had hardly a road till the nineteenth century - early maps show a south side track from Shiaba to Tireragan, with a branch to Bunessan, as the only 'road'.

Kelp manufacture collapsed as the Napoleonic wars ended and cheap alternative sources of alkali flooded in from Spain. Flax weaving had little success, for women were already fully occupied - they did ploughing and fetched seaweed for manure as well as watching the cattle, cooking and housekeeping. Potatoes turned from asset to disaster as potato blight struck disastrously in 1845.

Finally, rents, though increased, were often in arrears as individual tenants struggled with poor harvests. *Of all the 'improvements', only sheep farming was successful in increasing rentable value over a long period.* Sheep farming required very few people.

Getting Rid of the People.

During the kelping era, Highland landlords wanted increased population, and fought against a wave of emigration by their tenants. They persuaded the landlord dominated parliament to enact a law which made it prohibitively expensive for ordinary people to emigrate.

But, by the 1820s, kelp production was no longer profitable and tenants were a burden again. The legislation was repealed and the major era of the 'Clearances' began. On the Ross of Mull, it was the mid 1840s before the 7th and 8th Dukes of Argyll decided that the time to remove their uneconomic small tenants and cottars had come.

The one thing the Dukes - and all the other landlords - never did, was to provide *security of tenure*, perhaps the only option that could have helped both them and their tenants. There was little incentive for innovation and extra effort once the traditional tie with the clan chief was lost and tenants were never sure whether they might not be expelled the next Whitsunday - when tenancies were renewed. So much of the people's creativity went into song and story. Their legacy is a cultural heritage so powerful that it still captivates non-gaelic speakers far and wide.

Unfortunately, landlords and their agents rarely saw more than indolence and lack of initiative in their impoverished tenants, choosing to ignore their extensive and well organized trade in illicit whisky, their resourcefulness after emigration and their much valued skill as soldiery (*Devine, Hunter, 1994*).

The insecurity of the tenants was chronic. A list of 'Warnings for Evictions' (1850) in the Inveraray Archives gives some indication why. 'Arrears of Rent' is the most common ground, followed by 'Poaching Salmon', 'Being Destitute', 'Not being a native of the Ross', 'Retailing Whiskey', 'Stealing Turnips', 'Keeping a cow and paying no rent', and 'Fighting and disorderly conduct' (*IA, B1804*).

A document written in the 1860s by the same Chamberlain - John Campbell, 'Factor Mor', a much feared and hated man, lists his 'Special Rules and Regulations as to the Removing of Crofters':

1. Indolent crofters who cultivate their lands in a careless, slovenly manner and do not adhere to the given rules as to cultivation.
2. Widows and Families of deceased crofters with a few exceptions when there is a young family with grown up sons of industrious habit.
3. Crofters who are quarrelsome and troublesome to their neighbours and of reputed bad character.
4. Crofters taking married sons and daughters into possession when the rent is under 20 pounds.
5. Crofters who keep idle grown up families about them and of no benefit to the property.
6. Crofters keeping dogs or infringing any of the regulations laid down for the management of the estates.

7. All crofters who do not pay up their rents at the stated periods of collection and not having sufficient stock on their land. (IA,B1527)

It was as late as 1876 that the Duke of Argyll's next factor, James Wyllie - installed in 1872 after the death of 'Factor Mor' - published the first Tenancy Agreement for the few remaining crofters of the Ross of Mull, now almost all on the north side. It surely indicates the attitudes of the Dukes' factors at earlier dates. It is printed, signed by the 8th Duke, and witnessed. The following is a summary:

1. No sub-tenants or assignees allowed. Cottars living on land prior to this agreement not to be removed without the factor's permission. Cottars are not allowed dogs.
2. All woods, mines, minerals, seaweed, limestone and moss belong to the proprietor.
3. Peats can be dug only in places where the Factor allows.
4. The Duke's agents have right of access to all land for any works.
5. All rights for hunting and fishing are the Duke's.
6. The Factor can order the cutting of drains and the tenant must provide stone or tiles. If he cannot, he must pay the Duke to have it done, with interest on any sums owed.
7. Rent is half yearly, Martinmas and Whitsunday.
8. Tenant must pay thirlage services to the local mill or any other designated mill. He must give 6 days work to drainage per year.
9. Tenants must live on the property.
10. Arable lands must be tilled with a fourfold division - 1/4 green crop or fallow, 1/4 barley or oats, 1/4 grass, 1/4 oats (it may be there is an error here. C.R.) Potatoes may not be grown two years in succession. The factor has discretion to change this.
11. All roads must have a 'headridge' between them and ploughed land.
12. Straw & manure must be used for dunging.
13. Incoming tenants must buy or take the crops of the outgoing, if the latter wish it.
14. Stock must be kept up, according to the souming, but with no excess.
15. Woods must not be harmed and no goats to be kept.
16. Houses & Fences must be kept in good order.
17. If there is no agreement, all improvements are at the cost of the tenant.
18. There is no claim for 'unexhausted manures' on leaving a tenancy. 19. The landlord can take out such insurance as he wishes and the tenant must pay the premiums.
19. Tenants shall obey the 'Baron Baillie', if there is one. (IA,B1651.)

There is no mention of any *tenants' rights* in the 'agreement'.

Together, these documents indicate the enormous and relatively arbitrary power of the Duke's factor on the Ross. Clearly, a sensible tenant 'kept his head down' and did only what he was told. Landlord and factor took this as an indication of his inability to take initiative, as the 8th Duke complained bitterly to the Napier Commission. Nevertheless, that Commission's report in 1883 led, at last, to a degree of security of tenure for crofter tenants. Cottars - those without significant land - had by then almost been eliminated. They were regarded, after the kelp boom was over, as totally redundant. In 1847, the 7th Duke's newly installed factor, John Campbell, wrote, of penniless cottars wishing to emigrate:

"The Cottar tribe, who are the Locusts of the land ...must remain, a dead weight upon His Grace's estate... With few exceptions they comprise the indolent, uncivilized and pauperism of the Estate and in my humble opinion, His Grace of Argyll never speculated money to such advantage as to get ridd of them by all possible speed." (IA,B1522)

It is slight wonder that many wished to emigrate, and an indication of the tenacity of local people that so many had to be forced to!

Evidence from *Tireragan*.

As to Tireragan itself, it was rumoured to have been fertile land, and to have produced whisky , 'around the time of Waterloo.' (oral evidence from *Johnny Campbell*). There is an extant lease from 1772, which should have run from 1772 - 1791 dividing Tireragan between:

"Mr. John McIlevrain, Pennyghael (1/2 pennyland), Hector Beaton (1/4), Donald MacDonald (in suo) (1/4 including Calmain), with a tack duty of 30 pounds. The property is to pay 6 days service of one man and one house yearly. 20 pounds is to be laid out on the building of march dykes, the half within the first 5 years and the remainder before the end of the 9th year, otherwise to pay 10% p.a. for what is not laid out. To plant 100 trees and to raise Sallies for hooping. To plant 2 bolls potatoes and sow 2 pecks of linseed yearly in mossy ground. To keep no goats. No distillery. To be allowed timber like Anne Campbell." (IA, B.756)

The 5th Duke held a 'census' in 1779, which lists the tenants as:- Donald McArthur, Donald McGilvra, Charles McEachern, Charles McArthur, John Beaton, and Finlay McMillan, plus a servant - Donald MacDonald and a workman - Archibald McArthur, with their families - 44 inhabitants in all.

Perhaps the lease did not run its course, for it seems as if a tacksman held possession in Oct. 1788. He had not been long there, for in the Argyll Estate Instructions the 5th Duke asks his factor:

"Payback to Colin Campbell at Achnacross the 33 pounds, fourteen shillings and threepence paid by him for the fourth of Tireragan and give the possession to Fencible soldiers, charging them with a proper additional rent for my reimbursement of that advance." (p.152) The factor records that this instruction was carried out. Fencible soldiers were recruited for service within Britain, often with the promise of a small piece of land on their return from service. Another reference, in a list of recruits to the army between 1778 and 1783 shows one Donald Cameron of Tireragan serving under Lt. John Campbell Clachan. (IA,B324).

By 1793, Tireragan was listed as: "1 and 1/2 pennylands occupied by small tenants with no long leases at a rent of £29/2/8p." (IA,B756)

At the turn of the century (1802), Colin Campbell reappears. The tack is in the hands of Alex and Colin Campbell as trustees for Annabella and Mary Campbell, or at least: "That part of Tireragan which lies to the westward of a new line of march dyke passing through the same and lately executed at the sight of the Duke's chamberlain in Mull." The same two women were themselves granted a 21 year tack in Dec. 1813 (IA, books of Mull leases).

After that there is no information till a note of 1840, which lists the following Tireragan residents as being in arrears of rent:- Neil McArthur - £8, Hector MacDonald and Ailga Black - £6/5/-, Gilbert McArthur - 12/-, John McArthur - £4/5/-.

By 1841, the population of the parish including Tireragan existed more and more on the margins of successful tacksman sheepfarmers, who eyed township fields as fertile overwintering areas for their sheep. Famine was as close as it had ever been, even with potatoes as the new staple largely replacing bear (a primitive barley) and oats, the grains of earlier times.

Frankly, from the landlords' point of view, the inhabitants were redundant. Four years before the Potato blight struck, the 7th Duke of Argyll made a critical decision.

THE BREAK UP OF THE ROSS OF MULL COMMUNITY, 1840 - 1885.

The 7th Duke of Argyll had become convinced that 'improvement' with the population at existing levels was not possible. In 1841 the Census recorded a population for the parish, of 4113 (compared with 1676 in 1760), of whom 2988 were on the Ross and Iona (*Table 1 & Devine*). The control of smallpox, the advent of potatoes and the profitability of kelp with the subdivision of holdings which the Dukes had encouraged were probably the main factors responsible for the more than doubling of the population in 80 years. But profits from kelp had gone, and rents were tiny, often in arrears. The Duke told the Select Committee on Emigration:

"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" (*MacArthur, p. 73*). Devine remarks: "Over the space of less than two to three generations, estate policy in the Hebrides swung from one extreme to the other." (*p. 182*)

The Potato Famine.

It was the potato blight of 1846, continuing well into the 1850s, and its resultant famine that brought these words to action. The potato harvest failed disastrously all over the west Highlands. On the Ross, at almost the same time, in September, 1846, the new and soon much hated factor, John Campbell set up home at Ardfenaig. In 1847 the Marquis of Lorne became 8th Duke, and decided to continue more forcefully the policy adopted by his predecessor. There were two ways of tackling the looming famine resulting from the potato blight. One was poor relief; the other was emigration. Both were employed. But rent policy also changed. Instead of accepting rent arrears, the Factor was instructed to evict or to forcibly remove cattle in payment, this at a time when, from 1847 on, prices for highland cattle dropped disastrously (*Devine, app. 3*). The effects of the policy were dramatic. Campbell wrote to the Duke on April 14th, 1850: "The small crofters are generally in debt, otherwise than rents, to a larger amount than the value of their effects, even could they get a market for them." (*IA,B1804*). Firm, some might say brutal, rent collection in cash or kind mitigated the effects of the famine on the Dukes' income from the estate. The Rent Balance Sheet Abstract, 1843 - 1849 shows a deficit for only 2 years, both accounted for by expenditure on emigration, as Table 2 shows:

Table 2 (From IA, B1522) "Balance of Incomings against Outgoings." (Ross of Mull).

Year □	1843	1844	1845	1846	1847	1848	1849
In favour of proprietor	£1421	£1598	£1785	£1347		£245	
Against proprietor					£1464		£380
Net Expenditure on Emigration					£1264	£288	£1083

Poor Relief.

The 7th Duke's factor was not at first very willing to contribute to relieve the effects of the famine on their tenants. A resolution of the Parochial Board for Relief of the Parish, 1st Sept., 1846, reads:

"The Board, having called before them Mr. Alex MacDonald, Ground officer to His Grace the Duke, and having represented to him the famishing condition of a large body of the small tenants upon His Grace's lands of Ross and having proposed to him the absolute necessity of procuring immediately 5 or 6 bolls of Meal to be distributed in small portions among these famishing people,... he declined doing anything in the matter, although this Board undertook to guarantee the repayment thereof..." (The Board told their inspector to register the poor themselves and to requisition grain as required.) *(IA,B1522)*

It was universally agreed among the better off classes of the time, that relief without work would merely encourage a 'natural' tendency to indolence and dependence, and no one received any poor relief unless they worked. The Relief Board was largely made up of local tacksmen, and shared this view. However, at first it was impossible to enforce, and there was criticism of the Ross of Mull committee from Glasgow where administration of relief for the area was centred. It is the reports of the various Boards which provide much of the contemporary evidence of what went on.

Conditions on the Ross of Mull during the famine years (1846 - 56, most especially in the early years) were dreadful. The 8th Duke himself wrote, in evidence to the Napier Commission *(1883)*:

"In 1846 and the following years the aspect of the population and the numerous wretched hovels erected by squatting cottars along the roadsides, was most painful. It resembled nothing so much as the descriptions given of the poorest part of the West of Ireland. The condition of most of the crofters was almost indigent. No less than 102 of them had subdivisions rented below 5 pounds and of these a large number were under 3 and 2." *(IA,B898)*. He does not mention that, both in 1846 and 1850, rents were raised.

Alex McLean of Pennycross, mentioned in the first section, was on the local board. Through the records, there are occasional references to people from Tireragan, for example:

"Dec.20th, 1847. Widow Campbell, Tirrergain. Inspector to enquire and report to next meeting."

"Feb. 1848. The claim of Hugh McArthur, Tirergain asking support for Niel McPhiel, an orphan child 7 years of age was next considered and admitted to the role of paupers as he has no relatives bound to support him."

"Widow Kate McLean asks support for herself and for her son Hector, both in fair health and destitute. Interim relief ordered to the extent of 5 lbs.(meal) per week."

"June 1853 (No.38), Widow McLean, Tirergain, has a cow and family, some of them strong."

"Aug. 12th, 1853. Hector McLean, Tirergain reduced 3 1/2 lbs. weekly."

The last reference to Tireragan is in 1856:

"June 14th, 1856, "Janet Macfadyan, Tirergan, to be struck off." (*District Archives*)

Incidentally, Nicol MacIntyre, tacksman of Tireragan from about 1853 on, joined this local board in 1848. In 1847, the Inspector from the Glasgow section of the Central Relief Board for the Highlands met the new 8th Duke of Argyll: "The latter talked of the absolute necessity of removing a considerable number of them to some other locality or abroad. It would be attempted next spring."

In 1848, the ministers of Iona and the Ross wrote to the Rev. Dr. M'Leod in Glasgow, who was collecting evidence:

"The poor here are in a state of great destitution, not only of food but also clothing... Most of the cottars have sold and consumed their only cow; many of the small tenants are at present living from their stock of cattle, which they are consuming for food. A short time will reduce many of this class to the level of the poorest cottars." (*p. 42*)

In 1849, the Glasgow Relief Board Report states that since the famine, the smallest number of recipients of assistance was 853 and the largest 1401:

"243 persons, 125 adults and 118 children, have just emigrated, which helped locally, but many got cholera on the way. Not a few have fallen victim to it and the survivors had suffered great privation." (*p.19.*)

Although, "During this year the Duke of Argyll, through his factor, Mr. Campbell of Ardfenaig, employed a considerable number of men at trenching, draining etc., and a good many women and young persons in planting, weeding and other light work... We fear that the Committee must resume operations in this district." One of the Napier Commission informants said that most of these improvements had taken place around the farm of Ardfenaig (where the factor lived). Devine's table of applications made under the drainage act shows that the Duke of Argyll, one of the largest landlords, applied for improvement for only 540 acres, whereas some other landlords claimed for over 100,000 acres. Of course, the Duke may have undertaken drainage from his own pocket without applying for assistance.

Incidentally, the Relief board reporters state: "We were...informed that a good deal of work had been done at Tিরerregan, but did not visit."

Interest payments for money put forward for drainage work was still being paid by local tenants 30 years later, one of their great grievances, but, "There was no use complaining - we were threatened everywhere." (*see below*).

Local women were employed at knitting to pay for their relief. A list for 1850-51 names 108 women from the Ross (excluding Iona). The writing is difficult to read, but the names from 'Tiergan' seem to have been: Margaret MacDonald, Catherine MacArthur, Mary McNeil, Betsy McLean and Maeve MacFarlane. Margaret MacDonald knitted 3 dozen and 10 pairs hose, receiving 10/11d, and 4 dozen and 3 pairs socks for 7/11d (*IA,B1805*).

John Campbell's reports to the Duke continue to speak of 'heavy distress' among small tenants during 1850 and 1851 and 94 destitute (males?) were employed on the Ross in 1851.

There were wholesale clearances, of Shiaba in 1847, for instance, but the usual policy was individual eviction for rent arrears or squatting. John Campbell wrote:

"I ordered John Stort to be removed because he had a piece of land for which he paid no rent and because he married a woman in the south last year and brought her back to Creich. I make a point in all such cases of having such ejected rather than that they should become burdens on the property . I have no doubt the rest of the cottars will give in their names for emigration." (April 26th, 1851)(*IA,B1805*). On Whitsunday 1852, he writes: "All the cottars on the farm of Tireragan to be removed as soon as possible."

Emigration.

Emigration became a favoured way of getting rid of 'surplus' tenants. Given the conditions, many of the population were willing to go. But at first the Duke was interested in those who could pay something towards their cost. There is a petition from 1847 with 963 names of those from the Ross of Mull estate wishing to go to Canada. The details about those from Tireragan are revealing.

**Table 3. Tireragan Residents' Names on Petition to Emigrate, 1847.
(IA,B1522)**

Name	Occupation	No.Adults	Children	Children	Total	State
			7+	7 -		
Malcolm McArthur + wife	Crofter	2	2	1	5	Can Pay
Alec. Beaton + wife	Crofter	2	2	3	7	Destitute
Donald Mac Donald + wife	Cottar	5	1	2	8	Can Pay Part
James McArthur + wife	Crofter	2	3	2	7	Destitute
Alec. Beaton + wife	Cottar	7	0	0	7	Destitute
Widow Peggy McArthur + son	Cottar	2	0	0	2	Can Pay Part

Total from Tireragan = 36.

John Campbell, the new factor, suggests that the Duke sends those who can pay, together with those who can pay a little (at 1/2 price) and to ignore the others. On this basis 224 of the 963 could go. However, he also urged the Duke to support cottars to emigrate (*letter cited earlier*). A list from March 19th, 1847 lists '848 souls' from the Ross and Iona who would emigrate. Many of this second wave of enforced emigrants went to Canada and eventually arrived, after appalling hardship and many deaths, in Glenelg County, Ontario, where a town called Bunessan exists to this day.

Devine states that 1778 people from Tiree and the Ross of Mull emigrated during the potato famine. From the Ross of Mull, in 1847, 761 people were put on emigrant ships, in 1849, 263, in 1850, 74, and in 1851, 48. Between 1846 and 1852, 196 families were evicted from the Ross. The population of Mull as a whole dropped 28% in the twenty years from 1841 to 1861, though the population of Tobermory went up. In September 1852, *Campbell* wrote that "not much more emigration" was needed from the Ross (IA,B1806).

Assisted emigration seems to have ended finally on the Ross in the 1860s. A report of John Campbell's from June 1863 refers to: "3 crofter families on the south side to whom I offered assistance to pay their passages - to each family ten pounds... Any families that go to the new country, their houses will be pulled down, or others removed to them and the vacant ones pulled down." (IA,B1763)

Evidence to the Napier Commission.

The only evidence as to what Ross people themselves felt about all this comes 30 years later, in statements to the Napier Commission from its sitting at Bunessan (*evidence p. 2183 - 2234*). A. McInnes, from Creich said that in the 1850s there was a 100% increase in rent where pasture was improved (as it had to be, since tenants who remained were forced to develop areas like Creich on the north side of the Ross - the more fertile south side was evacuated). No compensation was given for houses vacated, and when permission was given for new houses to be built, only "a kailyard' of land was given. It was ruled that if a man died, and his widow had a son less than 21 years old, she must vacate, a rule "sometimes enforced, sometimes not."

"In the year 1850, the old townships were reduced to large farms," said J. McCormick from Catchean croft, and continued, "The harsh and cruel law of evictions formerly used has now given way to the more modern and refined mode of grinding away our subject by diminishing our means, which will eventually serve the purpose of bringing us into abject poverty."

Duncan M'Lean came from Shiaba (on the SE end of the Ross, cleared in 1847) in 1838, and went to Ardalanish, where he lived for 16 years: "The crofters left Shiaba and it was put into the hands of a tacksman, turned to sheep. There were 12 families on Ardalanish. They were put off the land, which was made into a sheep farm."

Duncan Campbell, from Oban, reported that in 1846, he, his father and grandfather were at Knocknafannaig. They were put out in 1854 with five other families, although they had no rent arrears.

Under questioning from the Commissioners, the Duke's current factor, James Wyllie, affirmed that children of crofters who married did not settle on the land: "No, they go out of the country." MacArthur's study of Iona gives further evidence of the feelings involved.

Tireragan from the 1850s Onward.

As for Tireragan, if John Campbell was right, the cottars were gone in 1852. Probably in 1853, Nicol MacIntyre took over the tenancy, merging the holding with Ardalanish and Knockvologan. There are fewer and fewer references to anyone living there. Alexander Campbell was in arrears for his road tax in 1852 (everyone was liable to pay a 'road tax', even if there were no roads!), and in 1858, Norman McLeod, a blacksmith, *late of Tireragan*, gave evidence to the police about a brawl after the Aros cattle fair. (*County Archives*). It is the last reference I have discovered. No one is listed as living there on Valuation rolls, and all references to small tenants cease.

By 1883, there were five large farms in the Ross of Mull (*Devine, p279*). Those who had not emigrated had moved from the south to the north side of the Ross, where, on the whole, the land was much poorer. Ardtun and Creich were populated with small crofters. Alexander M'Intyre commented to the Napier Commission that the remaining crofters: "suffer under high rent. Conditions are as bad as they ever were."

In short, by the 1880s the larger part of the Ross had been turned over to sheep farming. For 25 years, Tireragan was part of the large farm of Nicol M'Intyre. In 1879, he died, leaving his land to his sons Alex and Donald. Alex had Ardalanish and Donald, Knockvologan, so Tireragan was probably divided between them. In 1886, Alex himself died, with many debts and rent owing. The Duke tried to make Donald responsible for them, and a long legal battle ensued, during which the tenancy was disputed. Donald left in 1888, the stock being sold to pay off the debts. (*IA,B2735*)

Knockvologan and Tireragan lay without a main tenant for 10 years, and the Duke even wrote to his factor suggesting the possibility of dividing the area into 6 medium tenancies but there is no indication whether this proposal was made public and, in any event, it did not happen. The valuation rolls for the area show that in 1885, a cottar, John Campbell (not the factor of the same name, by then long dead) moved to 'Tiergan' and stayed there till 1902, when Donald M'Donald, ploughman, is recorded as an occupant. In 1906, he moved to Knockvologan - Tireragan was empty again.

In 1919, the Agricultural board bought the South West corner of the Ross of Mull from the Duke of Argyll and divided it into 3 crofts, one of which includes most of Tireragan. At some point it was de-crofted. The Duke of Argyll still retains the deer hunting and mineral rights. In 1992, the area was bought for 'Highland Renewal'.

Over a period of some 20 years (1845 - 1865), the population of the southern part of the Ross of Mull had been displaced by emigration, either to Canada or Australia, to other parts of Great Britain, or to northern corners of the Ross where the land was poorer. A community, including the township of Tireragan, was completely removed.

Many historians have argued as to whether this was a 'good' thing or not. But by what criteria can such judgements be made? The Dukes of Argyll were patriarchal grandees. Though they made some moves to alleviate immediate hardship, the expense of their lifestyle demanded they obtain the highest possible rental income from the communities they owned and, after the potato famine, measures which effected clearance were harshly enforced. The 8th Duke justified them strongly in his book, while regretting the hardships they caused.

The people who were themselves removed had very little say in the matter. They had merely annual tenancy agreements, with no written conditions. At times when they seemed to be needed, multiplication and sub-division of tenancies was encouraged; when they were not, the people were squeezed and evicted.

Although there were no 'land wars' on Mull - Prebble comments that the clearances here had been too effective for that - the Napier Commission evidence from Bunessan makes it clear that the villagers did not 'accept their lot', except under harsh duress, and further evidence from the 1893 Royal Commission on the Highlands and Islands (*p.52 et seq.*) shows that crofters were requesting land back on the south side of the Ross to replace sheep farms with crofts once more, (for instance, references to Ardalanish land at 'Iochdar' - now called 'Sean Bhaile' on the Ordnance Survey map). As shown above, in the event the Duke preferred to leave land untenanted rather than divide it once more at rents the crofters could afford.

Such a depopulation of small tenants happened all across the Highlands and has left a legacy of bitterness, perhaps more deeply felt because sheep were valued higher than people. Now, 100 years later, once the facts have been absorbed, the task is to see what positive alternatives for the emptied Highlands can be developed. That is the purpose of the 'Highland Renewal' project.

LIFESTYLE

The Agricultural System.

The people who lived on Tireragan were what would nowadays be called poor peasants. According to the 1779 list, they were tenant farmers, but there was also a family whose head was a 'workman' and another, a 'servant'. The land at Tireragan shows little evidence of the individualisation to be found at, say, Shiaba, further along to the east. In 4 of the 5 settlements one can see the remains of 'infields' - small walled areas of better land, well manured and seaweeded, which were divided by lot each year among the small tenants. This form of temporary land division was called 'runrig'.

The system served to give each tenant a chance of some reasonable land, and encouraged collective, rather than individual initiatives in land use. 'Outfield' land was further away and less well fertilized. All the arable land used the 'lazy bed' system - strips of soil running down slopes, with ditches between them. The nutrient rich soil washed off into the ditches, and was easily shovelled back up again, maximizing drainage and minimising leeching. Old lazy beds can be seen all over the Tireragan landscape, and experimental re-use in the project house's garden shows that they are an extremely effective method of cultivation for such a damp climate.

The 5th Duke discouraged the runrig system, but it must still have survived at Tireragan till the small tenants were finally removed, for the only evidence of the individual walled strips that replaced them is where isolated houses have been built outwith the clachans. Even the 18th century Estate Instructions indicate that Tireragan was not individualised, and walled infields are to be seen on 4 of the 5 settlements. The land was said to have been 'very fertile'.

As previously mentioned, Tireragan was said to be noted for its whisky 'at about the time of Waterloo'. The Rev. Dougal Campbell says in the OSA (*circa 1793*), that there were 6 houses for the retailing of spirits in his parish. It is most likely that the settlement had its economic 'heyday' for the few years after this time, during the Napoleonic wars, for by then kelp production was getting good money (600 tons was manufactured in Mull in 1801), and cattle prices were reasonable (*see also population statistics in section 1*). Rev. Dougal Campbell gives some description of life in the parish in general during this period. Every farm had access to the shore: "They are accustomed to the sea from infancy". "There is plenty of fish for all."

Donald MacDonald, witness to the Napier Commission, said that one of the grounds for eviction before 1846, was 'smuggling'. Tireragan might have been an ideal place for it, being so isolated, and with sea access on two sides. With the Torran Rocks offshore, even wrecking might have happened in the middle ages. But boats were little. In 1793 there was only one boat in the whole parish large enough to carry animals. By 1843 there were a dozen boats trading to Glasgow, but: "Mostly small, open and insufficient," said the Rev. Donald Campbell, (NSA).

Animal Farming.

On the hills the local sheep had already been displaced by the 'Low Country sheep', but the Rev. Dougal (*OSA*) is not keen about it: "Their flesh is not so well tasted."

J.MacDonald, in his 'General View of Agriculture in the Hebrides' (1811), writes that there were still more original breed sheep on Mull at the turn of the century than Blackface or Cheviot together and it is possible that the latter had not then taken over all the land of the Ross of Mull, relatively densely populated and without high hills. But the stock in trade of all small tenant and cottars alike, was their black Highland cattle.

Back into the remote past they had been the main source of income: and a cause of clan feuds as young men proved their vitality by rustling from the neighbours. The milk cows lived with the people in winter, sharing one end of their houses, while young women and children led them to graze the higher hills in summer. It was then that, living in rough stone shelters, the 'shielings', butter and cheese were made, an important food source for the winter (*Shaw, Grant*). It was this vital summer grazing that was lost as landlords and their tacksmen introduced the new sheep. In 1800, according to MacDonald, there were 8000 Highland cattle on Mull, and another source indicates an even greater number for "as many as 5000 beasts were exported annually from Mull." (*Le May*, p.17) In MacDonald's view, the Mull breed: "is one of the hardiest breeds in Great Britain... It is small, clean boned and well clad." Some specimens had manes on their necks. He adds: "Hebridean butter scarcely admits of improvements, being perhaps the very best in the British dominions." (p.443) Martin Martin, writing 200 years earlier, was of the same opinion: "The horses are but of a low size yet very sprightly; their black cattle are likewise low in size, but their flesh is very delicious and fine." (*Martin*)

It is not clear whether the cattle from Tireragan went far away into the easterly hills of Brolas or even further, or stayed on the lower, local hills, but, with the advent of the sheep-farming tacksmen, they were displaced. I.F. Grant, in her book, 'Highland Folkways', which brings together an enormous amount of information about life in the Highlands and Islands in the past, writes: "In the west, the loss of the hill-pastures brought severe suffering to the people, and the stocks of the all important cattle had to be drastically reduced." In evidence to the Napier Commission, it was said that the average tenant from the mid-nineteenth century in the Ross of Mull had only: "3 cows , a stirk, 3 sheep and a horse."

Even at earlier times, conditions for the cattle in winter were very severe. There was hardly any hay for winter feedstuff. The dairy cows in the houses were so weak in the spring that they sometimes had to be carried out to the pasture!

There were "a few sheep, but no goats" on the Ross (*OSA*), although some feral goats survive along the Brolas coast. Small Highland horses were treasured and were highly praised: "They were sure-footed, full of mettle, hardly bigger than Shetland ponies" (*OSA op. cit.*). "Uncouth" ploughs (home made), "are drawn by 4 horses abreast." "The Isle of Mull breed of horses is extremely valuable on account of its hardiness and durability." (*MacDonald, op.cit.*) Such horses made light of rough country with no roads.

The sale of animals made possible the purchase of extra meal, for even at the best of times the Ross probably never produced enough barley, oats and bear to feed the population. Shaw cites evidence to show that even at the end of the sixteenth century Mull had very poor grain production (*p. 106*). Potatoes quickly became very important, especially for the winter diet. As available grazing land was reduced by the new sheep farms, there was no reserve of surplus cattle for bad years, so the potato blight created a disaster perhaps even worse than in the past, when cattle might be sold for cash, or even bled to tide families over a failed harvest.

Working the Land.

The people worked the land largely with hand made instruments - "Everyone makes his own plough," (*OSA*) - using the minimum of metal, which was in short supply (*Grant*). If horses were not available, or the land was not appropriate for their use (how 4 horses abreast, even small ones, ploughed a lazy bed is unclear), a foot plough, the *cas chrom* was used. It was said that this gave better harvests than the drawn plough. The infield was regularly dunged and covered with seaweed, but 'outfields' tended to be used till the crop dropped and then abandoned for a while. The large scale production of kelp was very labour intensive and must have put some pressure on the use of seaweed as manure, both in terms of quantity and time involved'.

Housing.

A criticism of the kind of houses the people lived in has already been cited (*Leyden*). A drawing of a 'typical Mull house' is appended. *Grant* defends them as making effective use of local raw materials, but concedes:

"All these types of primitive houses were open to serious criticism. Among their faults was the dampness of their earthen floors, their darkness and that the roof was not entirely watertight. As the rafters and divots lining the roof were thickly coated with peat soot, in the event of heavy rain, drips of inky black water were liable to fall on the inhabitants. There was a special word - *snighe* - for rain coming through the roof of a house." (*p. 151*)

So also must the people of Tireragan have lived. The tacksman had better houses, with slate roofs from the 18th century on. At Tireragan, the nearest thing to a tacksman's house is that in the settlement of "Tobht Alic" on the SE march, home of Alec MacLean of Pennycross. But there are no remnants of slates around it.

Song and Story.

The people were poor in material things, and lived very hard indeed in winter and spring, but in better years there may have been stocks of cheese and salted fish smoked in the rafters, in which the hens also lived. It was a basic, tough life, subordinate to tacksman and factor and material wealth did not have a high value in their culture. More important were clan loyalty and connection and it was song, dance and story that were rich. Grant comments: "The small, simply built houses and the unproductive land was the background to a mental life, proud, vigorous and beautiful." She cites an early traveller in the Highlands, Mrs. Grant: "In every cottage there is a musician and in every hamlet, a poet." (p.129-31).

Unfortunately, we do not know the particular stories that were told in Tireragan, the songs that were sung, the legends recounted. No one ever wrote it down and there is no-one left who remembers. But it is said that there were many stories on the Ross of the fairy folk, and the wishing cairn remains...¹

Between them Grant and McArthur give much information on a Highland cultural life that must have been common to Tireragan as well. The latter mentions the large amount of interaction between Iona and the Ross - 33% of Iona folk between 1855 and 1905 married people from the Ross of Mull; they also had to come over to cut peats - perhaps sometimes from the great peat beds above Traigh Gheal beach, though Iona peats normally came from the north side of the Ross.

After reading those accounts, it is good to go beyond history, to visit the land of Tireragan itself and to allow the magic still alive in the place to link us to the folk who lived there, grew up, worked, loved, sorrowed, and finally departed across the globe with their dispossessed fellows, in a *diaspora*, a memorial to 'economic necessity'. Connect with them in their strongest years, two hundred years ago, cutting peats, tending cattle, digging the ditches of the lazy beds, sowing, reaping, harvesting, and bringing in the seaweed. Follow their songs down the paths to the boats drawn up on the west side of Traigh Gheal beach. Hear them on the wind among the ruins of Tireragan; listen on smoke-filled nights as the fabled stories of the 'Fionn' unfold.

The eagles still soar over the hills, fairies can still be re-discovered in the circles made by hidden oak trees among the birch woods. As we learn a little of their history, the least we can do is to honour land and people - by creating from their heritage so their ghosts may rest easy and the land live again.

1 ¹J.F.Campbell collected much Highland Folklore from the period, recently republished in 4 volumes.

APPENDIX - A TIRERAGAN PETITION.

A letter to the 8th Duke of Argyll from James McFarlane, Tireragan, dated 24th February, 1848:

"That one of the name of Aleck Campbell, Farmer, came from Islay last year, to the above mentioned place, that he is threatening to eject me out of my house and to send me away and I do not know where to go as I am a poor man and in destitute circumstances, having a wife and 6 children and unable to work.

I was working at a quay in Carsaig and got myself hurt. I was under the necessity of going to Inveraray to be under the medical attendance of Dr. King there and your noble father, the late Duke of Argyll ordered me a house and a small piece of ground and a stone of meal a week, and I went to your factor and the answer I got that he was dead and that he did not know how matters would be.

I got a yard of mast on the shore sometime ago and the said Aleck Campbell took it from me and I received nothing for it and it was my intention if it was lawful for me to sell it. I get food for my wife and children, your Petitioner hopes your Grace will be so good and so kind as to take my distressed case to your serious considerations and be so good as to allow me to remain in my present house as it is convenient to the fishing which will be a great help for me in rearing and supporting my wife and tender family.

I travelled all the way, penniless to throw myself on the mercy and clemency of your Grace, from Mull, and I sincerely hope you will grant my request. It would be a great help for me if I had nets but these I have not and if your Grace wants to be so kind as to give me them I would promise to pay them by degrees as I could and I do not know how to go home.

Hoping your Grace will grant the above request. (Written for him and marked by him.)

On 20th March, 1848, John Campbell, the factor, made the following comment about James McFarlane's Petition:

"The petitioner, James McFarlane, Cottar, Tararigan is habit and repute a thief, has a wife who is confined to bed for the last 6 weeks from a thrashing he gave her, five of a family, 2 daughters about 20 years of age, a son about 16, all with at home. The Neighbours say they live upon thieving, principally sheep, and keep a dog for the purpose of catching them.

I gave him a boat last year under promise that he should fish & support, or help to support himself, but as far as I could learn made no use of her."

There is no indication as to what the Duke did with this petition. (IA,B1522)

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HIGHLAND RENEWAL -

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