

Land, Crofting and The Assynt Crofters Trust: A Post-Colonial Geography?



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Thesis Summary Sheet

In the last decade of the 20th century '*The Land Question*' in Scotland was transformed through the actions of a number of Highland community groups. This thesis focuses on one of those community groups – The Assynt Crofters Trust. Using qualitative and quantitative methods, this research tracks the motivations and tactics of the campaigning crofting group which created the Assynt Crofters Trust. The community action is situated and critically examined through post-colonial approaches. This work follows the Assynt Crofters Trust's transformation from a campaigning organisation to becoming part of the social landownership movement. The achievements of the Assynt Crofters Trust are detailed and an assessment made of the organisation's early impacts.

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This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being currently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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Land, Crofting and The Assynt Crofters Trust: A Post-Colonial Geography?

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The big beasts eating the little beasts,
The little beasts doing as best they can."

(From the Introduction to *Carmina Gadelica*, Alexander Carmichael, 1899)

Front Page: Cartoon from *West Highland Free Press*, 1993 re: Redland Aggregates Ltd. activities aimed at creating a superquarry in Harris.

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Chapter One Orientation

Introduction

“The spoilation of the Church’s property, the fraudulent alienation of the state domains, the theft of the common lands, the usurpation of feudal and clan property and its transformation into modern private property under circumstances of ruthless terrorism, all these things were just so many idyllic methods of primitive accumulation. They conquered the field for capitalist agriculture, incorporated the soil into capital, and created for the urban industries the necessary supplies of free and rightless proletarians.”¹

Karl Marx on The Sutherland Clearances

This thesis examines the emergence of community land ownership as a significant movement and political issue in the early 1990s in Scotland, notably in the Highlands and Islands, and explores to what extent post-colonial approaches are helpful in engaging with this topic.

Since there must be justification for regarding the Highlands and Islands of Scotland as a region that experienced ‘English’ (British and Scottish) colonisation and colonial management from the 17th century into the 20th century, there must also be warrant for thinking about its current situation – and the struggles of groups such as crofters over land – as in some way ‘post-colonial’. Such a realisation opens up new intellectual and political possibilities for envisioning the movement and issue that is community land ownership. This work focuses mainly on the Assynt Crofters Trust, both during the campaign to buy the North Assynt Estate into crofting community ownership and once that aim had been achieved and the community group was managing the members own land. Other examples of community land ownership in a variety of forms are also discussed in order to illustrate some of the range of models and motivations relevant to community land ownership in the early 21st century. The role of historical representations of crofting and crofters’ positionality in Scotland is

¹ These are comments reported as Marx’s by the late **John McGrath** on p 37 **MacLean M. and Carrell C. (ed)** 1986 *As an Fhearann - From the Land Mainstream* (Edinburgh), An Lanntair (Stornnoway) and Third Eye Centre (Glasgow). See also p5 **Marx K.** 1888 *Sutherland and Slavery, or The Duchess at Home* in *The People’s Paper* 12th March 1888

examined in relation to *'The Land Question'* and to action focused on the achievement of community land ownership. The contingent and strategic aspects of the creation and *'staging'* of identities such as *'crofter'* and *'local'* are traced through a detailed and documented account of the community action taken by the Assynt Crofters Trust. In recent years community land ownership has come to be seen as a good vehicle for rural development. This example of crofters' deployment of community land ownership is critically explored through consideration of the impacts of this form of land ownership in the example of the Assynt Crofters Trust.

Theoretical approaches have been selected in response to the themes which emerged from the on-going fieldwork begun in 1992. During the early years - particularly during 1992 itself - it was impossible to guess at what the future impacts or developments might be. This made it very difficult to have a strictly time limited research design. The most practical response to this *'moving target'* was to take a qualitative approach, rooted in participant observation and in-depth interviewing, and only in the later stages did this work take a quantitative turn. Likewise, my theoretical approach became shaped by the material which emerged as a result of this mobile research process, and owes much to the framework of grounded theory. It was as a result of this approach that post-colonial ideas also became pivotal to this work.

The body of work to date described as post-colonial, can be usefully understood as an attempt to conceptualise academically – but also politically – the worlds, lives and circumstances of peoples and places which tend to *'escape'* from, or be made invisible by, the operation and momentum of thought-systems imposed by colonising groups. In reflection of the *'epistemic violence'* of Orientalism, the fluid creation of alternative *'imaginative geographies'* has an important role to play in this type of circumstance.² Post-colonial approaches have succeeded in making visible imaginations and concrete practises – complex processes and a diversity of expressions of agency – which result in or are aimed at achieving *'escape'* in

² Said E. 1978 *Orientalism* Vintage Books New York

relation to a numerous objects including environment, 'nature', culture and land. Work on this subject must inevitably emphasise that such an 'escape' is generally strategic and always ultimately impossible, given the workings of hegemonic 'western' thought-systems. These thought-systems cannot easily be unlearned. One reason for this is that previously colonised peoples, in a colonial or post-colonial state, often aspire to the concrete and symbolic status, possessions and trappings, of representatives of the colonising group. The operation of colonisation and imperialism involves the more or less willing or unwilling participation of colonised groups in colonising activities, both 'at home' and 'abroad'.

(Post) Colonial Perspectives

Engagement with the personal and political ramifications of this aspect of colonial practise is currently being felt, not just in the academe, but equally in literature. In the recent novel, *The Glass Palace*, by Amitav Ghosh, these historical and political entanglements are told through a focus on one family caught between Indian and Burmese worlds. As a young Indian boy, the central character, Rajkumar, witnesses the third British invasion of Burma in 1885. In the novel it is described thus:

“‘The English!’ someone said. And the words went quickly from mouth to mouth, growing louder and louder until they became a kind of murmured cheer. But as the vanguard passed and the next squad came into view, an amazed silence descended on the spectators: the soldiers were not English – they were Indians. The people around Rajkumar stirred, as though moved to curiosity by the sight of an Indian in their midst.”

The soldiers were the 1st Madras Pioneers. Rajkumar is rescued from the aggressive attentions of the crowd by the character Saya John, who says:

“‘I used to know soldiers like these.’
‘Saya?’
‘In Singapore, as a young man I worked for a time as a hospital orderly. The patients were mainly sepoys like these – Indians, back from fighting wars for their English masters. I still remember the smell of gangrenous bandages on amputated limbs; the night-time screams of twenty-year old boys, sitting upright in their beds. They were peasants, those men, from small countryside villages: their clothes and turbans smelled of woodsmoke and dung fires. ‘What makes you fight?’, I would ask them,

'when you should be planting your fields at home?' 'Money,' they'd say, and yet all they earned was a few annas a day, not much more than a dockyard coolie. For a few coins a day they would allow their masters to use them as they wished, to destroy every trace of resistance to the power of the English."³

The '*Second Burmese War*' occurred in 1852. It was a Scot from East Lothian, James Ramsay, 10th Earl of Dalhousie, who was Governor-General in India at the time and who ordered this second '*English*' invasion over trade disputes.

In the fictionalised account of the '*Third Burmese War*' in 1885, the character Rajkumar, asks with derision: "*A war over wood?*"⁴ It was a war over teak. The exploitation of Burmese oil resources, also mentioned later in the novel, was pioneered by a Scottish company. The original *Rangoon Oil Company* was registered in Scotland by a James Galbraith in 1871. From this company came the *Burmah Oil Company*, the parent company to the later *British Petroleum*. The *Burmah Oil Company* was incorporated in Glasgow in 1886, at the close of the Third Burmese War which resulted in Upper Burma, including Mandalay, being incorporated by the British state into '*British India*' in 1891. It was in 1856 that the Burmese Royal family were deposed by the British and transported to Madras, India.

From a recent book in the '*travel writing*' genre comes readable insights into aspects of the huge Scottish – and Highland – influence in India itself. William Dalrymple's, *City of Djinnns*, is a work of non-fiction which illustrates the strong Scots presence in Delhi, not least through his wife's family, the Frasers of Moniack, from outside Inverness.⁵ Of William Fraser, Dalrymple notes:

"Yet perhaps the most fascinating of all the British in Delhi was not Ochterlony but another Scot, William Fraser, a young Persian scholar from Inverness. In 1805, Fraser was sent up to Delhi from Calcutta where he had just won a gold medal at the Company's Fort William College. He was to be the Resident's Assistant; it was his first job. [...] Fraser remains a strange and enigmatic character – misanthropic, antisocial and difficult to fathom – part severe Highland warrior, part Brahminized philosopher,

³ pp28 – 30 Ghosh A 2001 *The Glass Palace* Harper Collins London

⁴ p15 Ghosh A 2001 *The Glass Palace* Harper Collins London

⁵ Dalrymple W 1993 *City of Djinnns: A Year in Delhi* Flamingo London

part Conradian madman. He was also, as chance would have it, a forebear and kinsman of my wife, Olivia.”⁶

These short extracts from political and personal stories of global significance, serve only to highlight some of the everyday aspects of (post)colonisation and capitalist development. In very personal ways, and in terms of academic and political practise, this post-colonial ‘*problematic*’ now exercises the imaginations of Scottish Islanders and Highlanders. Theirs too is a history of colonisation, both as a region which was colonised, and as the foot soldiers or ‘*subalterns*’ of what became the British Empire. Sometimes highlanders, like other Scots, were also embroiled as practitioners of the colonial project, suggesting lines of complicity that of course scramble a simplistic binary coloniser and colonised.

The works of post-colonial academics, such as Spivak, are helpful in negotiating ways of describing and tracing these histories, and serve to ‘*translate*’ some of the ways in which particular examples of community action by groups choosing to ‘*stage*’ themselves as ‘*crofters*’ can be seen to involve efforts to ‘*say*’ and to practise something different from the ‘*colonial*’ orthodoxies which have been previously – or more visibly - established in relation to land, environments, cultures and notions of ‘*the individual*’.⁷ As critics of Said’s *Orientalism* thesis have variously suggested, it is difficult to create something which could actually be seen as an example of ‘*de-colonised*’ knowledge. And, as Spivak famously claims, it is unclear whether the ‘*subaltern*’ can speak if this implies it would be possible to hear the voice of some ‘*pure*’ once-colonised grouping now expressing itself in terms free from the taint of colonising discourse (the thought-systems of the colonisers are taught in so many ways to the colonised). In seeking to cope with this theoretical critique of any simple recovery of subaltern histories, geographies and voices, this can appear to leave the author attempting a post-colonial approach, entangled still in ‘*metropolitan*’, ‘*master-narratives*’. Such as those of

⁶ pp98 – 99 Dalrymple W 1993 *City of Djinns: A Year in Delhi* Flamingo London

⁷ See for instance Spivak GC 1999 *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present* Harvard University Press USA

Spivak which seem to cast doubt on the approach at the very same time as promoting it.⁸

Post-colonialism has to date exhibited a number of key strands. One strand is a resistance to or questioning of 'totalising discourses', from both the political 'right' and 'left'.⁹ Another is a practice, exhibited by the subaltern studies group in India, of careful scholarship which excavates or recovers 'lost' historical or 'marginalised' voices.¹⁰ Very personally, I am uncomfortable with power-laden phrases (actions) like 'recover' and for this reason, I do find Spivak's problematisation of 'the subalterns' voice' powerful and informative. This tension goes to the heart of the crisis of representation which emerged in ethnographic work in the late 20th century. This type of critique also warns against a 'new orientalism' which makes marginalism an object of western academic enthusiasm and can have the effect of dramatising 'victimage' and overextending claims of identity with that victim.¹¹ For my work, a crucial potential in post-colonial approaches is the way in which binary oppositions such as centre/margin are destabilised, but at the same time I am also concerned not to lose sight entirely of embodied 'marginal' peoples – living on real physical and cultural margins – who while maybe not being able to say anything in quite the romanticised, different but marginal manner, suggested by some of the subaltern studies group, **do** nonetheless say things and pursue actions that have efficacy which cannot be seen as wholly contaminated by, or complicit with, the (ex-) colonial master..¹²

⁸ See **Said E** 1978 *Orientalism* Routledge and Kegan Paul London. For critiques from a Marxist point of view see **Ahmad A** *Between Orientalism and anti-historicism: anthropological knowledge of India* pp 135 – 66 in *Studies in History*, 7, 1, 1991

⁹ For a summary, see for instance **Crush J.** *Post-colonialism, De-colonisation, and Geography in* **Godlewska A. and Smith N. (ed)** 1994 *Geography and Empire* Blackwell USA

¹⁰ See for instance **Guha R (ed)** 1982 - 1988 *Subaltern Studies* Vol 1 – 6 Oxford University Press New Delhi

¹¹ p336 **Crush J.** *Post-colonialism, De-colonisation, and Geography in* **Godlewska A. and Smith N. (ed)** 1994 *Geography and Empire* Blackwell USA

¹² p615 **Johnston R, Gregory D, Pratt G and Watts M.** 2000 *The Dictionary of Human Geography* Blackwell

Map of Thesis

This Chapter serves to provide an account of the theoretical orientation of this thesis and to map out the focus and purpose of each subsequent Chapter. In Chapter Two the historical context and conditions through which the Gaidhealtachd emerged, as a cultural and political region, are laid out. An attempt is made to elucidate some of the tensions between 'Scottish' and 'Gaidhealtachd' historical interpretations, and to highlight Scottish efforts at colonisation of this region. Scottish and Highland participation in British imperialism, referred to as circuits of colony and capital, is sketched out. This leads, in Chapter Three, to consideration of the ways in which a post-colonial approach might help to 'translate' strategic Scottish, British imperial and Gaidhealtachd positions, which are at times complimentary and at times oppositional. Chapter Three also includes consideration of my own positionality as researcher and describes my research practise. In this I experience a certain personal dislocation and 'between-ness' in oscillating around roles as *researcher/academic* and *croft tenant/local resident*.

Chapter Four provides a description and analysis of the crofting system, crofting agriculture and 'The Land Question'. In the course of this Chapter definitions of crofting used in policy development and political discourse are juxtaposed with interview material describing crofting and crofters.

In the course of Chapter Five the Assynt Crofters Trust campaign, and ultimate success in buying the North Assynt Estate into crofting community ownership, is described. Particular emphasis is given to the methods by which this was achieved. Another crucial vein, running through this account, is the way in which a strategic identity as 'crofters' has been developed and staged by the leadership.

Chapter Six provides an analysis of the actions and impacts of the Assynt Crofters Trust, since taking control of the North Assynt Estate early in 1993. This analysis provides some surprising insights into the economic and social impacts

of this particular example of community land ownership. Themes which are common to many such organisations are highlighted, through reference to a range of other community land ownership organisations. The growth of this sector is discussed, as are policy reactions to this growth.

In Chapter Seven the findings of this work are further discussed and conclusions are drawn from the analysis. The extent to which a post-colonial approach has indeed helped to elucidate the dynamics at work in the growth of Gaidhealtachd community land ownership is assessed. The transforming experience of the rise of community land ownership is juxtaposed with the reworking of positions and alliances in the course of the debate regarding the Land Reform Bill. In this tense and mobile setting, the positionings of organic intellectuals are discussed.

Conclusion

Having '*set the ball rolling*' in terms of theoretical perspective and empirical focus, the themes raised in the Chapter will be expanded on in the pages which follow. A recurring, underlying, theme throughout this thesis is the current angst which occurs in relation to (impure) subalterns who do speak and act as though they '*feel*' a coherence (even purity) of subaltern identity and academic suspicions concerning claims of '*authenticity*'. A related issue is the way in which some authors have written about subaltern actors in a heroic fashion, in celebration of the '*subaltern's*' actions. This cyclical '*angst*' has serious implications for both intellectual and textual strategies.

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Chapter Two Colony and Capital

Introduction

In view of this thesis's use of post-colonial literatures, this work starts by examining the manner in which the Scottish state was created. Pertinent to this is Scotland's relations with the emergent English state and the colonising activities of both. Embedded in this narrative is an account of the changing relationship between the Highlands and Islands and Lowland Scotland - or simply Scotland - as some have viewed it, from a northern perspective. Chapter Two provides an account of this process and ends by sketching out circumstances at the beginning of the 21st century. In addition, this chapter provides a discussion of the creation and governance of crofting since all of this work was carried out in crofting communities. These histories provide a basis from which to examine community land ownership. Interpretations of history and results of historical processes will be seen to have had a strong influence on the issue of community land ownership in the Scottish Highlands and Islands.

Historical Context: Circuits of Capital and Colony

The main empirical focus of my thesis is the Assynt Crofters Trust (ACT). This Trust was created by a group of crofters in 1992 with the aim of buying the estate which was their home into community ownership. Assynt is located in the north west corner of the Scottish mainland. In order to engage with the central focus of this work, it is first necessary to situate both the place, and the people, in terms of Highlands and Islands history. By doing this it will be possible to appreciate the creation and development of the crofting system. The very act of trying to buy the local estate into community ownership, draws on the past to make sense of the present and to make decisions about the future.

With regard to the Scottish Highlands and Islands, some argue that too much emphasis has tended to be placed on the past, to the detriment of efforts to deal with the present and the future:

"If it wasn't for people like you they would still be the hillbillies that they always were"¹

It could also be argued that in the academe, far too much research has been directed towards the Highlands and Islands as an object of historical analysis. Less tends to be made of contemporary innovation or the manner in which, perhaps like capitalism, crofting seems to be able to constantly reinvent itself. To illustrate this I provide a notice which one local historian has long been tempted to pin on his gate:

"No Hawkers or PhD Students"²

There is almost some sort of cult status about studying the Highlands and Islands, which deems it to be a worthy and appropriate object of study. It is noticeable, in a Scottish context and in terms of the research carried out in Scotland by academics from all round the world that, '*The Borders*' or '*The Kingdom of Fife*' have never attracted the same degree of interest page for page or PhD for PhD.³ Some of this is due to the sentiment expressed in 1965 when the Highlands and Islands Development Board (HIDB) was created, that

"For two hundred years the Highlander has been the man on Scotland's conscience. No part of Scotland has been given a shabbier deal by history. Too often there has only been one way out of his troubles for the person in the Highlands and Islands: emigration".⁴

An account of the histories which led to this assertion are necessary to understanding it.

Academics have had cause to comment on this intense interest in the Highlands and Islands as an object of study. In '*Understanding Scotland - The Sociology of a Stateless Nation*' David McCrone notes that:

¹Fieldwork Diary 1994.

²Fieldwork Diary 1993.

³See the Highland Research Network Website for a range of research interests being pursued across the globe.

⁴The HIDB was created in 1965 and modelled on the Tennessee Valley Authority in terms of its extensive and wide ranging powers. This will be discussed further below. From a speech by Labour Scottish Secretary, Willie Ross while introducing the Bill which would create the HIDB to the House of Commons. Quoted in various including **Hunter J.** 1976 *The Making of the Crofting Community* John Donald Edinburgh.

"Perhaps more has been written by historians and social scientists on the Gaelic-speaking Highlands than the rest of Scotland put together."⁵

In MacCrone's opinion, there have been two main approaches. One is that the Clearances, though painful for some people, were an economic inevitability. The other approach, described by some as 'radical', goes more along the lines of 'people's history'. McCrone characterises this as viewing the past two hundred years as class warfare, which robbed a people of their birthright. I would tend to differentiate somewhat. Much of this approach has been aimed at explaining the outrage and bewilderment of successive generations at what occurred in the past in this region. For a long time this view was deemed to be unacademic – 'emotional'. Highland history has been characterised as a 'millstone', constantly dragging Highland people down. When you ask people whose history it is, they explain the importance of history very clearly:

"...it's not way back in the mists of time. We're still having to operate in townships which were set out after the Clearances. So we're still working in a framework which stretches back. We still have landlords - we still have the same landlords."⁶

Changes in academic methodology, ontology and epistemology have opened up the possibility of approaching the same subject in a different way and yielding a different story. For historians, when oral history becomes a respectable primary source much changes in the academic field. Social theory is to some extent dismantling 'History'.⁷ This allows some people to reinvent their subject and rework the positionality of key players. In terms of histories of the Scottish Highlands and Islands, James Hunter has done more than most to write and rewrite histories from 'below'.⁸ The revival of flourishing Gaelic

⁵ p50 **McCrone D** 1992 *Understanding Scotland - The Sociology of a Stateless Nation* Routledge London.

⁶David Bowes, Skerray, speaking on Landward, BBC1, 1992.

⁷ **Miles M and Crush J** 1993 *Personal Narratives as Interactive texts: Collecting and Interpreting Migrant Life Histories* *Professional Geographer* 45(1) pp 95 – 129. See their discussion of 'rewriting history from below' on p 85.

⁸His PhD thesis became the book, *The Making of The Crofting Community*, a scholarly work which views the relevant historical events from the point of view of those who became the crofting community. A range of other books since have created new ways of seeing Highland history, often by presenting in a scholarly way, viewpoints common amongst Islands and Highlands peoples.

scholarship, symbolically augmented by Sabhal Mor Ostaig⁹, Skye, increasingly offers alternative voices and intense academic and cultural debate.¹⁰ Gaelic television has offered a number of stimulating and well researched historical programmes which enrich this theme. Discussion and debate on Gaelic television and radio plays a crucial role in developing views and approaches.¹¹ The crofting communities' readings of the past are crucial to the actions of the Assynt Crofters Trust and indeed, in many ways, one of the major impacts of their action is to vindicate or emphasise different ways of '*doing history*'. The weight of the past is inscribed on the present in the legal systems, land ownership systems, settlement patterns, economic relationships and cultural baggage amongst which we find or lose ourselves.

⁹Gaelic Medium College in Sleat, Skye, now part of the University of the Highlands and Islands. In the late 20th century increasing links with Irish scholars has facilitated interdisciplinary gatherings. Students and academics from all over the world have been attracted to SMO.

¹⁰See in particular archived debates on the Highland research Network website which focus on language and scholarship.

¹¹A good example is a Eorpa discussion programme recorded during the 2001 Mod in Stornoway. The panel elucidated the realisation that while strong cultural revival and production has occurred the Gaelic world in Scotland now must face the idea that without action we may face a situation where a resilient and inventive culture will thrive without the language. Previously it had been assumed that cultural revival would strengthen language and culture simultaneously and pursuit of one aim would benefit the other. It turns out that this may not be the case, as evidence from Cape Breton indicates. At the time of debate, the Scottish Executive had yet to commit to a new Gaelic policy.

New kinds of histories, created from a Scottish Highlands and Islands perspective, have helped many people to overcome or alter the experience of 'self as other', which resulted from the historical interactions of Highland and Lowland Scotland. That being said, 'the' Highlands and Islands is not a unitary subject or object of study. Answers and questions vary with scale of enquiry and location, both physical and social. The role as the "the man on Scotland's conscience", offered in the late 20th century, is perhaps an onerous one, which can burden the informant terribly. In reference to the third world, Spivak comments on "the access of the colonised, along lines of class-alliance and class-formation, to the heritage and culture of imperialism" and the way in which the resultant estrangement and foreclosure is being replayed as varieties of 'fundamentalism'.¹² Bearing in mind that Spivak took Foucault and Deleuze to task for using the term "The Workers", I attempt to exercise caution.¹³ Nonetheless, her conclusions on this matter are extremely relevant to the position of 'the crofter' in late 20th century and early 21st century Scotland:

"The current mood, in the radical fringe of humanistic Northern pedagogy, of uncritical enthusiasm for the Third World [Crofting communities?], makes a demand upon the inhabitant of that Third World [Crofting community?] to speak up as an authentic ethnic fully representative of his or her tradition. This demand in principle ignores an open secret: that an ethnicity untroubled by the vicissitudes of history and neatly accessible as an object of investigation is a confection to which the disciplinary pieties of the anthropologist, the intellectual curiosity of the early colonials and the European scholars partly inspired by them, *as well as* the indigenous elite nationalists, by way of cultural imperialism, contributed their labors, and the (proper) object (of investigation) is therefore "lost".¹⁴

I attempt therefore to begin providing a brief history of the context and creation of the (vanishing?) crofter.

The Creation of Scotland

In the drive to forge something which came to be known as 'Scotland' from disparate Lordships and Kingdoms, the Scottish Crown sought to integrate

¹² p60 Spivak G. C. 1999 *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present* Harvard USA.

¹³p66 Spivak G. C. 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in Williams P and Chrisman L 1993 *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader* Harvester Wheatsheaf London.

¹⁴Brackets added - p 60 in Spivak C. G. 1999 *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* 2nd edition Harvard.

and control the Northern and Western Islands and mainland Highlands. The Scottish state and Scottish monarchy emerged or were forged from a system of local Kingdoms vying to be Kings and Over Kings to whom lesser kings paid tribute. Norway, later in the control of the Danish Crown, was a significant player for centuries.

The Lowlands-based medieval Scottish state expanded into the Highlands and Islands in order to eradicate the region's autonomy, power bases, social, cultural, legal and linguistic traditions. By the far the majority of accounts have been written from a triumphalist '*Scottish*' perspective. It might also be argued that they have often been written from a Presbyterian viewpoint. In a standard, popular '*Short History of Scotland*' such as Mackie's, we see repeatedly phrases such as "*In 1453, for no reason at all, it seemed, a horde of Isles men sailed into the Firth of Clyde and plundered the villages that lay along the coast.*"¹⁵ These lands belonged to descendants of Walter the Steward. Hence they were in the possession of the powerful Royal Stuart family. James II was on the throne and intent on subduing the Lordship of the Isles to his will. During a millennium of autonomy the Highlands and Islands did well by the standards of the day and was involved in the European scene through a variety of means or vehicles such as trade or power bases like the 7th century Iona Monastery or Orkney's 11th century earldom. Between the 16th and 18th century the last scraps of autonomy were destroyed with desperate results for both people and region.

¹⁵p94 emphasis added. The divide which emerged based on linguistic difference, as Scotland itself was created, is seen in such phrases to be written into the stories as history is recounted, almost always from a triumphalist Scottish perspective. Gaelic histories again and again take a different view. It should be noted in particular that this type of historical treatment repeatedly characterises the 'Islemen' of Highlanders as illogical. Mackie R. L. - **Donaldson G (ed)** 1978 *Mackie's Short History of Scotland* Mercat Press.

The forcible assimilation was for centuries piecemeal and was never entirely successful until “*London [...] replaced Edinburgh*” following the Union of the Crowns in 1707.¹⁶ With the enhanced resources, both financial and military, of what was then one of the world's most powerful trading states, the British state could finish what the Edinburgh monarchy and parliament had pursued over several centuries.

Normanisation

The success in 1066 of ‘*William the Conqueror*’ in taking the English throne had strong impacts in Scotland: “*There was a Norman conquest of Scotland, carried out by kings of Scottish descent.*”¹⁷ It was then that ‘*English*’ or what we later came to know as ‘*Scots*’ became the language of the Lowlands and Gaelic was gradually ousted. Likewise, ecclesiastical reorganisation in line with European structures occurred as a result. Among the English refugees who flooded across the border was a princess of the house of Alfred - Margaret. She became the wife of Malcolm Canmore - the man who slew both MacBeth and then Luach, the son of MacBeth whom the Moray people then took for their king.

It is interesting to note that the real MacBeth had a very legitimate claim to the Scottish throne and enjoyed a very successful ten-year reign. Shakespeare's MacBeth was crafted in the early 17th century to please the Stuart monarch, who in 1603 had become the king of both Scotland and England. Shakespeare therefore used as his model the portrayal of MacBeth favoured by both Canmore and the Stuarts who followed him and held the throne for some two hundred years.¹⁸

Early Colonisation

By the 11th century, the Kingdom of Moray stretched from its heartland in the coastal lowlands south of the Beaully and Moray firths to encompass Strathspey, Badenoch, Lochaber and west from the Great Glen into Lochalsh

¹⁶p13 **Hunter J.** 1999 *The Last of the Free: A Millennial History of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* Mainstream Edinburgh.

¹⁷p24 Mackie R. L. - **Donaldson G (ed)** 1978 *Mackie's Short History of Scotland* Mercat Press.

¹⁸See for instance p98 in **Hunter J.** 1999 *The Last of the Free: A Millennial History of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* Mainstream Edinburgh.

and Knoydart. Following the deposing of MacBeth in 1054, successive Scottish monarchs, descended from Malcolm Canmore, tried to defuse this power base. In the 12th century, David I sought to use feudalism as a mechanism for bringing Moray and its people to heel. Using a technique becoming common in European state building, David I granted significant lands (presumably taken from Gaelic speaking landholders) to foreign-born magnates who established themselves in Moray and created a royal burgh - Elgin. The most significant European nobleman to take up this opportunity was Freskin, who was granted substantial estates in the Elgin area. He was known as his Latinised territorial designation, *de Moravia* and hence in later years as Murray.

Other Normans who at this time gained land and rank as Scottish noblemen under David I were Walter, son of the Breton Alan Fitz-Fladd, who David I made Steward of Scotland and Robert de Brus, an English baron whose father had come over with William the Conqueror. Walter the Steward gained lands in west central Scotland and later sons of this family became the Stuart monarchs. Robert de Brus gained substantial lands in Annandale and from him the king, Robert the Bruce, was descended. In this way feudalisation advanced since these new noble families, whether lands were granted to them or acquired through marriage, had a totally different relationship to the land and the people. In the old system the '*moramaer*' was seen as judge, ruler and leader to those inhabiting the area and these people in turn paid tribute in various forms.¹⁹ The new feudal barons were landowners.

Creating the Scottish State

While this approach was often successful, the adventurers in Moray were troubled from some further hundred years by the majority of people - MacHeths and MacWilliams - living in the Moray glens, whose more ancient social order this introduced feudalism was intended to destroy. It was not until 1210 that the Edinburgh based monarchy overcame the MacHeths and not until 1230 that the MacWilliams were destroyed by dashing the head of

¹⁹p31 Mackie R. L. - **Donaldson G (ed)** 1978 *Mackie's Short History of Scotland* Mercat Press.

the last MacWilliam heir against the mercat cross in Forres. This last heir was a child, “*who had not long left her mother’s womb*”.²⁰

The mainland territories of the Earldom of Orkney were the next target. The Earldom's rulers in the late 12th century were increasingly allied with the MacWilliams and MacHeths through marriage and disposition. Clearly this made Scottish kings even keener to get the mainland territories of Caithness and Sutherland under their own control. At the same time - and for similar reasons - the Norwegian monarchy were seeking to take more control over their outlying territories, including the Earldom of Orkney. In the 1190's the Norwegian monarch deprived Earl Harald of the Shetlands in response to his defiance. On the mainland in 1196, in response to an Orcadian raid into Moray, Scottish king, William the Lion led an attack into Sutherland and Caithness and captured Thurso. In 1197 this campaign ended Orkney control of Sutherland and destabilised the Earls of Orkney's hold on Caithness. The Earls were now obliged to pay homage to the Scottish, not the Norwegian king, in their role as Caithness landholders.

The parish of Assynt was not part of this Sutherland, but was held by the MacLeods of Lewis at this time. David II granted four *davachs* of land in Assynt and the castle in Loch Assynt to Torquil MacLeod of Lewis in exchange for the service of one ship with twenty oars.²¹ In the early 15th century Assynt was given to a younger son of the MacLeods of Lewis who became the first of the MacLeods of Assynt.

Ecclesiastical Structures as a Vehicle for State Building

Using the Church as an effective political vehicle, the Scottish crown sought to consolidate these gains. Following the European model, the Church was now run by priests and bishops, rather than monks and abbots, as in the Columban structure. By 1200 the Scottish monarchy were imposing their preferred choice of bishops in the north. These men had a different culture, language and loyalty to both the Earls and the general population and much

²⁰p99 **Hunter J.** 1999 *The Last of the Free: A Millennial History of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* Mainstream Edinburgh.

²¹See pp 186 - 7 in **Omand D. (ed)** 1982 *The Sutherland Book* Northern Times Golspie.

strife ensued. In 1202 the Caithness and Sutherland bishop based in Scrabster was ritually mutilated and his successor, Bishop Adam was roasted in his own kitchen. At this point, Gilbert of Moravia, previously bishop in Moray was appointed. He moved the power base to Dornoch, an area already dominated by men of similar persuasion, intent on seeing not just Caithness and Sutherland, but the rest of the Highlands and Islands brought under Edinburgh control, as Alexander II was now determined to do. Gilbert de Moravia was later canonised. His attributed miracles include the "*restoration of incinerated accounts books and the rescue of a local salmon fisher from bankruptcy*".²² During the 13th and 14th centuries men like the Wolf of Badenoch illustrated that feudal aristocrats often '*went native*' both in the Highlands and Islands and in Ireland and hence failed to fulfil the bolstering role envisaged by the English and Scottish monarchies.

Further Reducing Norwegian Power

The Lordship of the Isles, had for a century and a half paid homage to Norway, though in effect was mostly autonomous. Since the death of Somerled it had diffused into a number of branches - or clans. Alexander II opened negotiations with King Hakon of Norway to no avail. Eventually he decided to take the lands by force but eventually died of a fever on his ship in the Sound of Kerrera. In 1263 King Hakon decided to sail on Scotland to asserts his authority over his lands. The Battle of Largs ensued and en route back to Norway, he died in Kirkwall. His successor, Magnus, agreed in The Treaty of Perth in 1266, to surrender Man and the Hebrides for a down payment and an annual payment of one hundred merks. In 1281 Eric, the young King of Norway married Princess Margaret, daughter of Alexander III. To those living under the Lord of the Isles these changes made little difference for the Lordship had never bowed to any great extent to either Scotland or Norway. However, some, like Ewen of Argyll threw in their lot with the Scottish monarchy during the fighting between Hakon and Alexander II.

²²p186 **Omand D. (ed)** 1982 *The Sutherland Book* Northern Times Golspie.

Divide and Rule: New Methods in State Building

With Alexander III a new approach emerged of which Ewen of the MacDougall Clan was an early example. The Scottish kings and their Edinburgh administrators set about making strategic alliances with established Highland and Island families: divide and rule rather than planting of colonies.²³ The Campbells are of course the most famous example. Families which so aligned themselves stood to benefit from the arrangement in terms of power, favours and land acquisition. The MacDougalls consolidated their grip on the North Argyll mainland, Jura, Lismore, Mull, Coll and Tiree. Ewen of Argyll's son married a daughter of John Comyn, one of the early thirteenth century feudal plants. This opened up land holdings in Strathspey, Badenoch and Lochaber and signified that the MacDougalls, rooted in one of the most Gaelic Highland and Island areas had acquired a status equal to these established members of the Highland nobility.

English Ambitions to be Overlord

When John Balliol, a family relation of the Comyns, was unexpectedly crowned Scottish King, the MacDougalls could hardly have moved closer to the ascendant star. However, Edward I of England, through Balliol, sought to make Scotland recognise himself as feudal superior. The Scots refused and a series of invasions and uprising ensued. In 1306 Robert Bruce proclaimed himself Scotland's rightful king and was crowned at Scone. However after a defeat by the English at Methven he was left penniless and on the run. He headed for the mountains of Argyll and the Hebrides. Robert Bruce, a Gaelic speaker from rural Ayrshire where close contact with Ireland and Kintyre was maintained, did not have the same mistrust of the Highlands and Islands as previous monarchs. In Highland tradition he is viewed as the last Gaelic speaking king. The powerful personalities in the Highlands and Islands had nothing to gain from falling under the rule of Edward I who had made his attitude towards local power bases in Wales and Ireland brutally clear. Angus Og of the MacDonalds, a descendant of Somerled came to his aid. Bruce gained the support of key players in the Highlands and Islands and in

²³This had already begun under Alexander II when the help of Fearchair mac an t-Sagairt was sought in subduing the MacHeths and MacWilliams in Moray. See p115, **Hunter J.** 1999 *The*

1314 at Bannockburn the force he successfully commanded against the English included many Highland and Island fighting men. At Bannockburn he carried the *Breccbennach Choliium Chille*, now a bonnie wee empty box in the Museum of Scotland - then believed to contain a relic of St Columba.²⁴ This was strongly symbolic and emotive, in linking the action of the day back to the Gaels who had established Dalriada and then Alba. The significance of this was not missed in the Gaelic speaking world. While Alexander III and those who went before him might have formally brought the greater part of the Highlands and Islands within Scottish boundaries, it was Robert Bruce who won hearts and minds and made these same people feel themselves to be part of this 'Scotland'. When King Robert then moved against the Comyns and the MacDougalls, Angus Og's clan gained substantially in Argyll and Lochaber.

This bringing together of the disparate parts of Scotland did not endure after the death of Robert Bruce and on-going fighting between England and Scotland left Scotland much impoverished by 1341 when two hundred years of relative peace and acceptance of Scottish independence was established. From this time came the 'Auld Alliance' with France which lasted until the Reformation.

The Highland Line

By the late 14th century, in social and cultural terms, the notion of 'The Highland Line' had become meaningful. In Lowland Scotland and across the border in England people spoke a similar language, craft people and merchants lived similar lives in similar circumstances, burghs sprang up and were organised in ways which were recognisable to both Scots and English. Feudal barons and noble landowners still presided over mini empires, but the idea of Scotland was established as a structure and these nobles often held lands in both Scotland and England. At some point during the 13th century *villeinage* disappeared so that the ordinary peasant was no longer a serf in

Last of the Free: A Millennial History of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland Mainstream Edinburgh.

²⁴See p119 **Hunter J.** 1999 *The Last of the Free: A Millennial History of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* Mainstream Edinburgh.

Scotland.²⁵ They still paid tribute but were no longer tied in a 'dishonourable' way to a particular area.

North of the Highland Line, Gaelic prevailed as the principal language in the Hebrides and Highland mainland, while Scots derivations of Norn held sway in Caithness and the Northern Isles. Towns were few and far between. Inverness was an important colonial outpost and hence as soon as it was declared a Royal Burgh in the early 12th century, a royal castle was built. The merchants who ran the royal burgh were colonial settlers and among this dominant group the Scots, not the Gaelic language, was used. In medieval Scotland these colonial burgesses of Inverness had total control of trade and commerce. It was illegal to buy and sell other than through them. People wanting to sell skins and wool were obliged to sell to the burgesses who then sold goods on. A producer who circumvented these Scots, or English speaking, burgesses and traded illegally with someone further down the line could be severely punished and fined.²⁶ These rights were created and protected by the king. The Monarch also provided tax breaks to encourage such merchants to places like Inverness - the burgesses were exempt from a variety of royal tolls.²⁷ The area controlled by the Inverness burgesses approximated most of the Highlands and Islands area. The principal trading centre was in Flanders and Inverness's main exports were furs, salmon, herring and timber. Key imports included salt, spices and wine.

Diverging Societies

To the north of the Highland line, land was held in trust, on behalf of the Clan by that Clan's Chief. Clans were becoming the most significant regional structure. Tacksmen held land worked by further sub-tenants and all those in this chain paid tribute through agricultural produce and through bearing arms as and when required. The system was mutually beneficial. Acquisition of land and cattle was central. Cultural life centred on bardic traditions and

²⁵p74 Mackie R. L. - **Donaldson G (ed)** 1978 *Mackie's Short History of Scotland* Mercat Press

²⁶pp 147-8 **Hunter J.** 1999 *The Last of the Free: A Millennial History of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* Mainstream Edinburgh. Hunter highlights the case of someone who was jailed in Inverness and fined for selling skins and wool from Strathglass and Glen Urquhart to a buyer in the Perth area.

was focused on the Chief and families with hereditary tasks such as law or music or poetry. Buildings such as the Iona Cathedral were built in the European style at the behest of the Lord of the Isles.

It was at this time that the word '*cateran*' emerged in Scots from the Gaelic root *ceatharn* or professional soldier. The Wolf of Badenoch relied on *ceatharn* rather than kinsman to fight, perhaps because his family was one of the feudal plants and did not have the kinship systems to support his activities. He descended on Elgin, burning the cathedral and also on Forres, where havoc was wreaked. The Scots word *cateran* was a wholly pejorative noun meaning lawbreakers, bandits or armed robbers. Here we see the strong emergence of difference between two peoples in Scotland, even as Scotland itself is being created and consolidated. The idea of the barbarous Highlands contrasted to the civilised Lowlands is being created and providing explanatory power to make sense of events. The differences are described through language difference.

Written evidence of this change comes from John Fordun at the close of the 14th century. He referred to Scot's as '*Teutonic*'. Scots speakers were "*home-loving, civilised, trustworthy, tolerant and polite, decently attired, affable and pacific*"; Gaelic speakers were believed to be "*a wild and untamed race, primitive and proud, given to plunder and the easy life*".²⁸

Consolidation of the Scottish State

The boundaries of what became modern Scotland were taking shape, but the Scottish monarch and the Edinburgh based government were still far from achieving the centralisation and feudalisation which they sought. Under kings still prevailed in several corners. Keen to acquire the Earldom of Ross for the Lordship of the Isles, Donald, son of Lord of the Isles, marched on Inverness and seized the government Castle, then proceeded to Harlaw on the outskirts of Aberdeen in 1411. "*The opposing army was led by the Earl of Marr, himself a leader of Highland warriors, but it included the burgesses of*

²⁷p147 **Hunter J.** 1999 *The Last of the Free: A Millennial History of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* Mainstream Edinburgh.

Aberdeen and all the available fighting men for the region between the Don and the Tay."²⁹ Huge casualties were borne and Donald withdrew. The Earl of Mar claimed victory and the Aberdonians and other Lowland Scots viewed this as a great deliverance for Lowland life, values and culture in the face of the Gaelic 'threat'.³⁰ Most histories describe this as an indisputable victory for Scotland and Earl Mar.³¹ It is possible that Donald might have been striking a claim for the Scottish throne and there were logical reasons for that action. In addition, the early 15th century saw a revival in activity in Celtic areas elsewhere in the British Isles. Owain Glyn Dwr launched a revolt against Edward I in Wales and in Ireland a number of native Lordships had so successfully reasserted their power that English influence shrunk to Dublin and its surrounds.

Despite submitting to the Duke of Albany in 1412, the Lordship, through its Council of the Isles, continued to govern as before. On his release from custody in England, James I invited the key players in the Highlands and Islands to meet in Inverness and then made them prisoners. Amongst their number was Alexander, Lord of the Isles. He escaped and burned the Royal Burgh of Inverness in revenge. Alexander was again captured but relations fought on, defeating a government army, again led by the Earl of Mar, outside modern Fort William. James I began negotiating and the Lordship was restored to Alexander. He was also confirmed as the Earl of Ross. He was now in control of the bulk of the Highlands and Islands, including Skye, from Achiltibuie in the north to the Mull of Kintyre in the south. Going east, the lands stretched to the Beaully and Cromarty Firths. The Council of the Isles met in Dingwall as often as Islay, from the 1440s onwards.

International Intrigue and the Demise of the Lordship of the Isles

In 1462 John, Lord of the Isles, made a secret treaty with Edward IV of England, the idea being that should he find himself at war with Scotland, the

²⁸p123 **Hunter J.** 1999 *The Last of the Free: A Millennial History of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* Mainstream Edinburgh.

²⁹p83 Mackie R. L. - **Donaldson G (ed)** 1978 *Mackie's Short History of Scotland* Mercat Press

³⁰See p134 **Hunter J.** 1999 *The Last of the Free: A Millennial History of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* Mainstream Edinburgh.

³¹See for instance p Mackie R. L. - **Donaldson G (ed)** 1978 *Mackie's Short History of Scotland* Mercat Press.

Lordship would come to his assistance. The Lordship was prepared to see Scotland partitioned and gain total control of everything north of the Forth-Clyde line. At the same time James I discussed the arrears on the Treaty of Perth payments with the Danish King (now in control of Norway) and it was agreed that arrears would be dropped in return for future prompt payment. In Edinburgh it was felt that Orkney and Shetland should now become part of Scotland too. Diplomatic discussions were held in Denmark. A marriage between King James III and King Christiana's daughter was agreed. The deal included a substantial dowry, which it was well known the Danish could not raise. Therefore the Scots accepted a downpayment and possession of Orkney, until full payment was made. When the balance was not forthcoming, Denmark agreed to surrender their right to annual payments for the Hebrides under the Treaty of Perth, allow Orkney to go to Scotland and even added Shetland as well. William Sinclair, Earl of Orkney, no longer useful to Edinburgh was deprived of his land a position so that Edinburgh could assert control untrammelled by local powers. In 1469 the lands which comprise modern Scotland were now all under the control of the Scottish monarch. Now James III sought to consolidate control in the last area still retaining significant autonomy within those boundaries - the Lordship of the Isles. On discovering the treaty with Edward IV, James III accused John, Lord of the Isles, of treason. In his absence, he was found guilty, and loyal nobles were invited to invade the Lordship's territories at will and kill John if possible. In 1476 John submitted to James III and lost the Earldom of Ross. His son Angus and others disagreed with this action. Rifts began and Angus mounted an attack on Inverness Castle in the 1480s, but by then the Scottish forces and resources outweighed anything he could muster. When Angus's successor, Alexander, carried out raids in the Earldom of Ross, James IV extinguished the Lordship of the Isles in 1493. By 1505, after carrying out six invasions on the Lordship, James IV felt that the *"Islemen would remain quiet"*³².

At this time the lands of Assynt were forfeited and gifted to John Reoch MacKay, along with the lands of Strath Naver, Strath Halladale, Criech,

³²p102 Mackie R. L. - **Donaldson G. (ed)** 1978 *Mackie's Short History of Scotland* Mercat Press.

Rogart, Eddrachilles, the Little Isles of Strathnaver, part of Strath Fleet and various other estates. This was reward for his part in subjugating the Lordship of the Isles. The land itself remained with the MacLeods of Assynt until 1672, but was constantly drawn into feuds involving the Earls of Sutherland and Caithness and the MacKays. It was at this time that the Earldom of Sutherland was usurped by the Gordons in the person of George Gordon, Earl of Huntly. The Gordons had a great antipathy to '*Gaelic barbarism*' as they called it and were very effective at writing history in their own interests, as the *Genealogical History* written by Sir Robert Gordon in 1630, illustrates. Sir Robert exhorted his nephew to make the inhabitants wear trousers and abandon the '*Irish*' language. He also recommended '*planting*' schools in every corner so that the young people would learn English.

Land and Trade in the 16th Century

The Highlands and Islands of the 16th century was very much a peopled landscape and an area which held a much higher percentage of the Scottish population than it does today. Outside government towns like Inverness, life was rural, as indeed it still was for the majority of the Scottish population. In the Highlands and Islands roads were non-existent and sea transport continued to be crucial to communications as it had been since people first settled these lands. The sea was the great highway, linking Scotland with the rest of Europe, Africa and with the Scandinavian countries with which trade occurred.

Agriculture in the Highlands and Islands was based on the runrig system and in each township a variety of rigs were lotted to each household in such a way as to ensure an equitable access to the best and worst land. Lotting was arranged by barony courts. Settlements were nucleated and were on average made up of about a dozen households or less. Cattle were the mainstay of the economy, but sheep, horses and goats were also kept in smaller numbers. Use of the *arigh* - summer pasture for transhumance - kept stock out of the clachans during the growing season. The climate was precarious for cereals and the household diet was based on oats and bere, beef, fish, cheese and milk, berries and nuts. Seals and whales provided another source of food in coastal locations. These communities were very largely self-sufficient in all

their needs, which made them somewhat indifferent to the efforts of the Edinburgh parliament to impose their own agendas on the region. A reliance at this time on trading links with southern Scotland would have made the region's key players less able to take against the Edinburgh administrators in a variety of ways. In the course of the 16th and 17th centuries challenges came from Orkney and Shetland, but serious family feuding amongst the Sinclair family was eventually their undoing.

Linn nan Creach - The Time of the Raids

From 1493 until the mid-15th century there were six armed rebellions. Donald Dubh entered into an alliance with Henry VIII of England at a time when tensions were running high between the Scottish and English monarchs. Nothing replaced the Lordship in terms of organisation and during the 16th century, in the absence of the Council of the Isles, affairs in the former Lordship became increasingly difficult and chaotic, in the vacuum which remained. Clan Donald fragmented and, as every where in the region, local territorialities came to dominate action and thinking. In Gaelic the 16th century is known as *linn nan creach*, or the time of the raids.³³ The traditional bards glorified these raids and massacres with reference, as was traditional to Cu Chulainn and other legendary characters. Some new, less traditional poetic voices did emerge at this time and these poets mention the pain and desperation of these experiences rather more than the traditional bards.

In Orkney, Shetland and other areas, similarly deprived of indigenous rulers, the Scottish monarchy's activities caused great disruption without delivering any perceptible benefits. Hence in the 16th century these places reverted to older and very largely tribal forms of social organisation.³⁴ Franz Fanon observes that:

"The settler keeps alive in the native an anger which he deprives of an outlet; the native is trapped in the tight links of the chains of colonialism. But we have seen that inwardly the settler can only achieve a pseudo-petrification. The native's muscular tension finds outlet in bloodthirsty explosions - in tribal warfare, in feuds between septs and in quarrels between individuals."

³³p166 **Hunter J.** 1999 *The Last of the Free: A Millennial History of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* Mainstream Edinburgh.

³⁴p169 **Hunter J.** 1999 *The Last of the Free: A Millennial History of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* Mainstream Edinburgh.

Fanon explains this thus:

" By throwing himself with all his force into the vendetta, the native tries to persuade himself that colonialism doesn't exist, that everything is going on as before, that history continues. Here on the level of communal organisation we clearly discern the well known behaviour patterns of avoidance."³⁵

Fanon notes that this extends and deepens the coloniser's assertion that the 'native' is not rational, and represents a death wish or suicidal behaviour in the face of danger. He continues:

"In the same way the native manages to by-pass the settler. A belief in fatality removes all blame from the oppressor; the cause of misfortunes and of poverty is attributed to God; He is Fate. In this way the individual accepts the disintegration ordained by God, bows down before the settler and his lot, and by a kind of interior reestablishment acquires a stony calm."³⁶

Since it is the settler who 'makes history', this turning back into and reinvention of 'native' tradition, history and feuding, elucidates elements like the *Time of the Raids* in Highland history and helps in understanding other incidents and the reporting of them, like the raid on the Firth of Clyde in 1453 "for no reason at all".³⁷ It is also interesting to note, in writings about the Highlands and Islands right into the 19th century, a preoccupation with second sight and religious ritual, attributed to pre-Christian or Celtic Christian origins.³⁸ Fanon's explanation would imply that people of the Gaidhealtachd relied on and extended elements of this as a method of survival and that Scottish observers focused on these aspects so obsessively because of the settler/native political relationship. Fanon's comments about religion seem to foreshadow the later role of evangelical Presbyterianism in the Islands and Highlands, the acceptance he refers to expressed in the '*vale of tears*.'³⁹

³⁵pp16 - 17 in **Fanon F.** 1985 edition *The Wretched of the Earth* Penguin Suffolk - a 1965 translation by Constance Farrington with a preface by Jean Paul Sartre.

³⁶pp16 - 17 in **Fanon F.** 1985 edition *The Wretched of the Earth* Penguin Suffolk - a 1965 translation by Constance Farrington with a preface by Jean Paul Sartre.

³⁷p 94 Mackie R. L. - **Donaldson G. (ed)** 1978 *Mackie's Short History of Scotland* Mercat Press

³⁸See Footnote 15 in this Chapter.

³⁹A phrase often used to describe 'the human condition' or life, by members of the Free Church. Its roots are in Presbyterian Christianity.

This reversion was seen most strongly in the 16th century in the Gaelic speaking Highlands and Islands. Questions of ancestry were hence of enormous import and Chiefs were at pains to illustrate descendancy from the legendary Irish warrior kings of old. Chiefs were expected to maintain bardic traditions in music and poetry, host lavish celebrations and feasts and protect the Clan from attack. Tacksmen or *daoine uaisle* oversaw the working of the land by lower ranking clanspeople and became the officers, when armed struggle was called for. People of the Chief and tacksmen class did not engage in agricultural labour themselves - they were the management. During the 16th century and in the course of the 17th century, tacksmen increasingly had written leases, but the relationships between Chief, tacksmen and those working the land was mutually dependant and did not involve rent money but services and tribute including agricultural produce. Likewise the Chief was dependant on the clansmen's willingness to fight for him when the need or inclination arose. These arrangements and the traditions surrounding them owed much to the methods first brought from Ireland in the 5th and 6th centuries. The term *duthchas* encapsulates these relations, whereby clanspeople were entitled to permanent use of enough land to keep their family.⁴⁰ All ranks were included in this concept which combined rights with responsibilities. The introduction of written leases, by their very nature time limited, ran counter to this system of *duthchas* but caused no disruption in this system at the time of introduction.

What was later to become Sutherland, endured desperate internecine war fare and raiding at this time also. The Earls of Sutherland and Caithness, the MacKays and the Bishop of Caithness vied with each other. European political and religious issues were reflected in this turmoil, which was complicated further by the intrigue at the time of Mary Queen of Scots. In 1601 Earl John received a fresh grant of his earldom from James VI and was made Sheriff of Sutherland. Strath Naver was included and so for the first time the boundaries were those which survived into the present day.

⁴⁰For discussion see pp156-7 in **Hunter J.** 1976 *The Making of the Crofting Community* John Donald Edinburgh.

The Reformation

During the course of the 16th century Scotland's ruling classes developed even greater suspicion and disregard for Gaelic culture and its practises. To them, unless all of Scotland was organised in the way that the Lowlands were and spoke English, Scotland itself would be prevented from a significant European role and constantly threatened by disruption or worse - fragmentation. The reformation in 1560 was very much a central belt movement and touched the Highlands and Islands but little. Only in Argyll, due the efforts of a Gaelic speaking clergyman, did the new Protestantism take hold to any degree. Elsewhere the change was in name only and the impacts mainly felt in the disappearance of monasteries and new feudal landowners who gained lands previously belonging to the church. The Campbell Chiefs - now Earls of Argyll - perfected their usefulness to Edinburgh based interests in the course of the 16th century and were as adept with the law as the sword in pursuing Edinburgh demands and adding to their own lands. From an Edinburgh perspective, this particular experiment, in supporting one Chief against others, consistently paid off very well. Argyll soon took in Islay and other locations previously at the heart of the Lordship of the Isles.

Continuation of the Colonisation Policy

Documents produced during the reign of James VI denounce the whole population of the Highlands and Islands as being godless, wild savages eternally bathing in the blood of others.⁴¹ Any awareness of the Gaelic roots of the Scottish state had disappeared. Gaelic was now seen as foreign and the Scottish parliament saw Gaelic as "*one of the chief and principal causes of the continuance of barbaritie and incivilitie amongis the inhabitantis of the Illis and Heylandis*".⁴² For that reason they sought to abolish and remove it. In Shetland and Orkney feudalisation and Anglicisation/Scoticisation had been successfully achieved through colonisation. This approach was tried in Lewis in the 1590s. Over five hundred Lowlanders - *the Fife Adventurers* - arrived in Lewis with orders from the king to proceed not through agreements but through forcible removal of the existing inhabitants. In the event, the hopeful

⁴¹See **MacLean L. (ed)** 1986 *The Seventeenth Century in The Highlands* Inverness.

colonists had to fight for their very lives and abandoned the endeavour only a few years later. In the aftermath the MacKenzies were permitted by the Edinburgh government to seize Lewis from the MacLeods. These Seaforth MacKenzies gained a right to Assynt at the same time and Assynt was subjected to MacKenzie raids. Ireland, by the end of the 16th century, was an English colony. In 1617 Donald Ban MacLeod of Assynt went on the run, described by the government as a lawless Highlander who had committed shameful and barbarous murders. His eldest son took on the estate.

Classical Inspirations: The Iona Statutes

James VI and his government gave further thought to this problem. Informed by the methods used by Agricola, Roman governor of Britain, in subverting the Celtic culture in what became England, a new approach was tried. During the winter of 1608-9 a number of Clan chiefs were held captive in the Lowlands. They were released on condition that they attended a meeting in Iona. There they were required to sign up to a number of statutes which had been modelled on those used by Agricola. The Iona Statutes required Clan Chiefs to be legally responsible for the behaviour of their clansfolk; build Protestant churches; dispense with the services of Gaelic bards and get their eldest sons educated Lowlands.⁴³ In due course these Statutes were to have a profound effect. The bardic class – the key tradition bearers - were to be horrified by the impacts of the Iona Statutes.

Civil War and English Invasion

In 1603, at the death of Elizabeth I of England, James VI became king of England. He subtly moved to reintroduce episcopacy and also move towards an absolute monarchy. His son Charles I, having left Scotland at three years old, did not have the same knowledge of Scottish sentiments nor motivations as his father, but he too sought ecclesiastical reform and tight control by himself on all things. In England, parliament took up arms against him; in Scotland the Covenanters rose against him. When the Campbells came out on the side of the Covenanters, many Island and Highland Chiefs' ironically

⁴²p5 **Durkacz V.E.** 1983 *The Decline of the Celtic Languages* Edinburgh.

⁴³For more detail see p176 **Hunter J.** 1999 *The Last of the Free: A Millennial History of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* Mainstream Edinburgh.

aligned themselves with the Stuart King, Charles I. In support of the Stuart monarch, Alasdair MacColla and James Graham, Marquis of Montrose led initially successful attacks, taking control of the Highlands and Islands and then marching on Argyll - Campbell country. Earl John Glas of Sutherland supported and fought for the Covenanters against Montrose and MacColla at Auldearn. MacKay was on the Royalist side. Of these Royalist successes, *Mackie's History* declares, "Scotland soon learned how formidable these **undisciplined, impetuous** fighters could be."⁴⁴ And again - "March saw him at the other side of Scotland, taking the walled town of Dundee by storm, then **hustling his tipsy soldiers** out by the east port."⁴⁵ Successful in their military tactics, they could never press home that advantage against their better equipped and resourced opponents. In 1645 they separated. And again in the words of Mackie, "[...] the Lowland Scot could not forgive the man who had let his **wild Highlanders and Irishmen** loose on Aberdeen to slaughter **defenceless burgesses**."⁴⁶ In 1650 Montrose returned, but without the same success. He was captured and put to death. Neil MacLeod of Assynt, as Sheriff-depute, is said to have captured Montrose and held him captive at Ardvreck Castle on Loch Assynt. It is said by some that treachery was involved on the part of Neil MacLeod, desperate to repair his family's fortunes.

Charles I was also put to death, amid growing tensions between the English parliament and the Scottish Covenanter administration. In 1651 Cromwell marched into Scotland and was soon in the Highlands and Islands. He established military garrisons in strategic locations in Inverness, Shetland, Orkney, Lewis, Lochaber and Argyll. An example had been set - it was clear that a well organised, well resourced army could impose and maintain its will in the Highlands and Islands. In exchange for military occupation and enforced English rule Scottish merchants were granted the same trading privileges as their English counterparts enjoyed.

⁴⁴Emphasis added - see p172 Mackie R. L. - **Donaldson G. (ed)** 1978 *Mackie's Short History of Scotland* Mercat Press.

⁴⁵Emphasis added - see p172 Mackie R. L. - **Donaldson G. (ed)** 1978 *Mackie's Short History of Scotland* Mercat Press.

⁴⁶Emphasis added - see pp172-3 Mackie R. L. - **Donaldson G. (ed)** 1978 *Mackie's Short History of Scotland* Mercat Press.

The Restoration

Following the death of Cromwell the Stuart monarchy was restored to the throne of both England and Scotland in 1660. Neil MacLeod of Assynt suffered greatly due to his part in the capture of Montrose and was imprisoned in Edinburgh. The Seaforth MacKenzies took advantage of the situation. During the Civil War they had raided Assynt, burning homes and taking livestock. Now they bought up debts owed by Neil MacLeod and his family and invaded Assynt in 1672, with the help of the MacKays. Ardvreck Castle surrendered, Neil fled to Edinburgh and lost his charter. A number of MacKenzies settled as tenants, when a younger son of the Earl of Seaforth acquired Assynt as a result.

Charles II dismantled the forced Scottish-Anglo union and a Scottish parliament was restored in Edinburgh. In order to cut budgets, this parliament withdrew the Cromwell garrisons from the Highlands and Islands and therefore revitalised the Clan activities. The Earl of Argyll was executed for his support of the Covenanter's cause. For a time it seemed that change was in the air but by the 1670s the new Earl of Argyll was already Edinburgh's right arm in the Highlands and Islands. The MacLeans lost Mull, Morvern and Tiree to the warring Campbells. This Campbell ascendancy dipped when they opposed James VII as king, but James was deposed and William of Orange was put on both the Scottish and English thrones. *'The Dutchman'* had impeccable Protestant credentials and a willingness to allow both parliaments adequate control over affairs of state.

Earl John Glas's son, George, received the earldom from his father in 1662. He and his brother had been educated in London and it was the custom for the inhabitants of Sutherland to contribute extra dues for special needs, including the expensive university education of the laird or chief's children. Earl George welcomed William of Orange onto the throne, having opposed James. The Sutherlands were early in moving away from Gaelic cultural roots - their last harper played for the 12th Earl and perished in the snow in 1602. The MacKays on the other hand maintained a much more traditional household and local structure, with renewed vigour after the Restoration, when John

MacKay recovered part of their lands and established the household in Durness.

The Jacobites

It was at this time that the term '*Jacobite*' emerged to denote those who believed that James Stuart was in fact the legitimate monarch of both Scotland and England. Graham of Claverhouse or Viscount Dundee, a distant relation of the Marquis of Montrose - led an army of Highlanders against Williamites at Killiecrankie in 1689. The Highland charge, as perfected by MacColla was used to devastating effect. Dundee's forces won a decisive victory but he was killed in action and this defiance petered out as a result.

The Scottish Jacobite cause suffered further set backs - at Dunkeld and at the Haughs of Cromdale. In Ireland the Battle of the Boyne, in 1690, dealt a terrible blow to Irish Jacobinism. In the Highlands and Islands the Scottish government set about re-establishing a military presence along Cromwellian lines. In February 1692 came the chilling Massacre of Glencoe. William of Orange's ministers had stipulated that by 1st January 1692 the Chiefs of pro-Jacobite clans like the MacDonalds must formally swear and register allegiance to the new king. The elderly chieftain of the Glencoe MacDonalds - Alasdair - narrowly missed this deadline. The Edinburgh men therefore resolved to make an example of the MacDonalds of Glencoe in order to make clear the hard line being taken in the Highlands and Islands. The people of the region were by this time widely regarded in the Lowlands a lesser species. Robert Campbell of Glenlyon, commander of the military detachment sent to undertake this task had instructions that, in the interests of Scotland, all the Glencoe MacDonalds of less than seventy years of age were to be killed. As Hunter points out, a similar misdemeanour in the Lowlands might have resulted in some threatening behaviour and '*roughing up*', but never in a policy of genocide.⁴⁷ Mistakes were made in carrying out this order and so some MacDonalds escaped. Nevertheless it was a truly chilling incident in an age filled with chilly moments.

⁴⁷For fuller discussion see p189 **Hunter J.** 1999 *The Last of the Free: A Millennial History of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* Mainstream Edinburgh.

Hence it can be seen that, although Jacobinism was not a Highland versus Lowland issue, for many clans the Jacobite cause was as much - or more strongly - a struggle for survival than a loyalty to the cause of Stuart restoration. Antipathy to Presbyterianism supremacy was a matter which united Jacobites across Scotland and indeed the British Isles. For both Catholics and Episcopalians this was a crucial aspect. After 1707 opposition to the Union of Parliaments became another reason to favour Jacobinism for some.

External Markets and Colonial Activities

In 1479 the first treaty regarding trading outside European waters was made between Portugal and Spain. In 1494 the Treaty of Tordesillas asserted Portuguese control east of a line running three hundred and seventy leagues west of Cape Verde and Spanish rights to the west of that line. In 1500 Portuguese mariners accidentally discovered how to get to Brazil. By 1500 European land limits were filled up, but *'The Age of Reconnaissance'* had changed the shape of European horizons and aspirations. The states with access to the Atlantic and the necessary skills and technology, found themselves in a newly central location in a newly shaped world, unlike the landlocked central European powers. Jerusalem ceased to be perceived as the centre of the world. The ascendancy of Spain and Portugal was gradually surpassed by France and Holland, all of whom were later eclipsed by England. In the 16th century the atlas was invented. By the mid-17th century Spain, Portugal, England, France and Holland all already had important overseas trading empires in the Americas, Africa and Asia. By 1700 the Spanish empire in the Central and South America was formidable. Here conquest and settlement were fundamental. In North America, significant plantations - or settlements - were established and some five hundred thousand people lived in this *'New World'* by the 1700s. At this stage, in Africa and Asia, there was no interest in subjugation of large areas. Trading posts and companies; forts and ports; government concessions, local diplomacy and protection for trade were the main concerns - and missionary work. Slaves and the slave trade was central to this colonial expansion, agriculture and the profits reaped from them. In all regions it was believed that industry should be prevented from developing in the colonies which

would compete with home manufacture. The Bank of England and the Bank of Amsterdam were international economic forces. A new trend was emerging signalled by Dutch and English diplomacy - the importance of commercial and colonial interests - or extra-European concerns. The war between France and England during the reign of Charles I had cost Scotland her only overseas colony - Nova Scotia.

The Union of Parliaments

Scottish overseas trade and the establishment of colonies or trading posts was effectively blocked by English actions and monopolies. The behaviour of William of Orange over the disastrous Darien adventure had illustrated clearly that this shared monarch would not give support to Scottish born trading companies which conflicted with the increasingly dominant English activities. Above all else it was these circumstances which led to the eventual Union of Parliaments in 1707, though the hoped for economic benefits took a good while to be felt. During the first decades the removal of customs barriers between England and Scotland merely allowed English goods to flood over the '*border*' to the detriment of smaller scale Scottish producers.

Eventually beneficial economic change occurred with imports of rum, sugar and tobacco into Glasgow, for export elsewhere in Europe. Soon Glasgow was the premier tobacco port in Great Britain. Exports from Scotland to the colonies were initially the old staples of salt fish, coarse cloth and knitted goods. Later wrought iron, leather work, pottery and crystal, rope-making, hat-making and furniture developed in west central Scotland to meet export demands, but linen dominated in the 18th century. Monies handed over at the time of the Union, as reparations for the Darien disaster, were used by the Board of Trustees for Manufactures to stimulate and support improving technologies and quality.

The Union of Parliaments in 1707 provided the opportunity of legal entry into English colonies for Scots. During the 18th century migration from the Highlands and Islands to the transatlantic colonies rose steadily. Darien, in Georgia, became one of the early significant outposts and was on the southern edge of British colonial territories in the region. It was named in honour of

the earlier Panamanian Darien and those who had perished there. Darien, Georgia was peopled and protected through arms, by families from the Scottish Highlands and Islands. The hard work and effectiveness of this band of settlers so impressed the regional governor that their success led to the ever increasing deployment of '*Highland Regiments*' in both war and colonial expansion and control all across the globe. The Darien troops were recruited in Inverness, in 1735, by James Edward Ogelthrope. Of the one hundred and seventy-seven persons, about one hundred were soldiers or potential soldiers, many in their twenties.⁴⁸ The others were family or families. The Gaelic speaking community established at Darien, came from the Inverness-shire hills - Grants, Frasers, MacIntoshes and MacPhersons - and from the MacKay country in North Sutherland.

The use at one end of an empire of regiments raised in a different troublesome corner of that same empire was not a new idea. The Romans had also made good use of this principle. While the majority at this time saw only the threat posed by '*the Highlanders*', Ogelthrope saw opportunity and acted upon this.

The '45 and After

There were small Jacobite Risings in 1715 and 1719, but the rebellion led by Prince Charles Edward Stuart, following his landing in Moidart in July 1745, was another matter altogether. From a start in Glenfinnan, the Prince and the army, which he and key Jacobite figures raised, went on in the course of 1745 to take over the whole of Scotland. This success went against apparent logic since the funds available were slim, the real military might was small and the forces ranged against them were significant. It shows therefore the force of conviction which carried this rebellion forward - what Hunter refers to in terms of Marxist or anarchist terminology as "*a revolution of will*".⁴⁹ The 20th century has provided a number of similar examples, where against inconceivable odds a small, fervent group has endured and achieved much -

⁴⁸See pp23 - 25 and the rest of Chapter 2 in **Hunter J.** 1994 *A Dance Called America: The Scottish Highlands, The United States and Canada* Mainstream Edinburgh.

⁴⁹p194 **Hunter J.** 1999 *The Last of the Free: A Millennial History of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* Mainstream Edinburgh.

and even taken power. On reaching Derby, even the city of London itself was terrified. Its people did not know from one day to the next if they would see another day. The Hanoverian state was not well liked and had troubles of its own already, but after they turned back at Derby in December 1745, the Jacobite's star seemed to wane. The expected French military support had not been forthcoming. Morale and money sunk ever lower. When the ultimate stand off came at Culloden in April 1746 the terrain did not favour the Jacobite's most successful tactics, the Prince had long since taken solace in alcohol and crucially - had failed to take the initiative in order to gain some military advantage in this clash. The Duke of Cumberland destroyed the Jacobite forces and the Prince began his famous flight back to France, from whence he never more returned.

This Jacobite rising was not exclusively a Highland rebellion and many Highland areas took no part, but in retrospect it came to be portrayed as this. The '*Highland threat*', as has been earlier illustrated, had been a concern for the Edinburgh - and now London - administration for long years. Now that threat had come closer than any had imagined, to toppling the Crown and its government. After Culloden, parliament would be satisfied with nothing less than the complete destruction of clan society and structures. That would of course include culture, language and social structures. Hunter notes that the Hanoverian army officers knew their classical history and were aware of the parallels between Cumberland's campaign and that of the Roman , Agricola back in 83AD. Taking similar marching routes, on both occasions significant imperial powers had set out to put down challenges to their imperial territories. In both cases the technological advantage and resources were with the imperial force. The leader of that long gone Caledonian army, Calgacus, was reported to have said, "*A rich enemy excites their cupidity; a poor one, their lust for power. East and west alike have failed to satisfy them. They are the only people on earth to whose covetousness both riches and poverty are equally tempting. To robbery, butchery and rapine, they give the lying name of 'government': they create a desolation and call it peace.*"⁵⁰ But while the Caledonians lost the battle at Mons Graupius, they did not loose the war.

⁵⁰See p12 and pp196-7 in **Hunter J.** 1999 *The Last of the Free: A Millennial History of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* Mainstream Edinburgh.

Now, with the resources of 'Great Britain' available, that desolation could finally be achieved. Cumberland's stated aim was to extirpate a 'race' which had severely threatened his father's kingdom. Lowland Scotland had already learned to think of the Gaelic speaking Islanders and Highlands as a lesser species or different race. Now those in England took the same view. One southern aristocrat suggested starving the whole country indiscriminately. The sort of words used to describe the Highland people included 'animals', 'vermin', 'wild beasts', 'wolves' and 'monsters'. The clans were 'arrant scum', fiends, banditti and barbarians.⁵¹ The fact that Jacobite forces had behaved in a very disciplined fashion when taking southern towns in the course of 1745 made had no impact on the measures now taken, including widespread burning of homes in Jacobite areas.

The United Kingdom's parliament passed a series of laws with the aim of punishing the Highlands and Islands people. Lands held by clans involved in the rebellion were forfeited and taken by the British state. The keeping of weapons was prohibited. Men were prohibited from wearing tartan plaids - they were to be forced to dress like those in the south. Presbyterianism was strongly promoted, at the expense of other faiths.

The road building programme begun after the '15 and '19 Rising was returned to and supplemented by garrison points throughout the area and the establishment of the Fort George army base outside Inverness. The aftermath of Culloden was profound, but the while this accelerated the disintegration of the clan system, its disintegration cannot be wholly attributed to this. The impact of the Iona Statutes was increasingly evident in the way that clan chiefs, having been educated in Edinburgh, abandoned Gaelic, developed a social and cultural life increasingly centred on Edinburgh and London and adopted the interests and leisure pursuits of non-Highland gentry and aristocracy. They hence increasingly judged their social (and financial) position in terms familiar in Edinburgh and London. After Culloden the role of the average clansman as a potential member of the chief's private army and

⁵¹see pp198-9 **Hunter J.** 1999 *The Last of the Free: A Millennial History of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* Mainstream Edinburgh.

the tacksmen as officers, ceased to be possible or relevant. The mutual dependency of the clan system was eroded quickly by this while the new lifestyles of chiefs and their immediate family caused an escalating need of money.

This social and cultural change led to several estates forfeited after Culloden being handed back to later generations, whom it was clear posed no threat to the London government and might indeed prove useful to it.

Clearance and Improvement

The growing need for increased incomes to meet the cost of the Chiefs' new lifestyles led to reorganisation of land use and tenancing arrangements. The Duke of Argyll had already, before 1745, implemented rent increases and in so doing had precipitated the emigration of tacksmen and their sub tenants. Argyllshire emigrants went via Ulster and later organised their own ships. North Carolina was the principle destination. Before 1746 it was clear that rent increases and letting of land to the highest bidder lost a Clan chief the loyalty of fighting men and their leaders. From 1746, when bearing arms was in any case illegal, and Chiefs were changing culturally, this ceased to be of the same significance. Chiefs who had resisted rent increases and reorganisation before, now began to seriously investigate this option with a view to increasing income from what they increasingly viewed as *their own land* - or '*estates*'. The principle of *duthchas* was being abandoned by the clan system's ruling class.

It was this impulse, in the late 18th and early 19th century, which led to policies of improvement and clearance and which resulted in the creation of the crofting system. A key impact of these processes was to greatly increase transatlantic migration from the Highlands and Islands. People, priced off or dispossessed of land in the Scottish Highlands and Islands, were in increasing numbers to make for North America, Australia and New Zealand, where there were apparently '*empty*' lands for the asking. In fact these migrants, whether as soldiers or settlers, were of course dispossessing other people of their ancestral lands and irrevocably disrupting relationships to land and landuses wherever they settled. Naturally that was not the only result - there were also collaborations and marriages between the incoming Highland migrants and the peoples whose lands were being encroached upon.⁵² Less

⁵²See for instance **Hunter J** *Glencoe and the Indians* Mainstream Edinburgh and for North America, **Hunter J.** 1994 *A Dance Called America: The Scottish Highlands, The United States and Canada* Mainstream Edinburgh.

savoury legacies include the use of the word '*Clan*' in the title of the Klu Klux Klan.

We now reach a stage where land ownership becomes a meaningful term in the Highlands and Islands. The feudal land ownership legal structure which is still in place today, now becomes relevant in a Highland and Island context. State aided but landlord driven, improvements included significant additions to the military road networks, including new bridges and the Crinan and Caledonian Canal. Improved infrastructure meant easier access to markets to buy and sell goods - and easier access for troops, if required. Also on the wish list of 18th century improvers were new industries, new skills, new harbours, towns and villages. Britain was in the midst of the industrial revolution and emerging as the foremost economic and naval global power. Manufacturing industries were sourcing ever increasing amounts of raw materials - wool for the textile industries, kelp for glass and soap manufacture, food like salt fish for European urban workforces.

The changes which became known as the Clearances were made in order to cash in on this demand for raw materials. Those who made the changes - land owners, estate managers and factors - did so in the name of '*improvement*'. Improvement was seen as a lofty, moral aim which should result in more efficient agricultural practises, increased estate incomes, local economic development and '*betterment*' of the local population. Some impressive achievements in terms of engineering and the creation of new planned villages did prove of lasting benefit. However in an age of extreme '*laissez-faire*' attitudes and paternalism, '*improvement*' was a fashionable and lucrative activity. Economic and social benefits were allegedly going to '*trickle down*' to all those affected. '*Improvement*' was also perhaps a very effective way of justifying decisions which resulted in unimaginable hardship, brutality, social dislocation and extreme poverty for the majority of Highlands and Islands people. Land owners, old and new, re-let ground to the highest bidder - sheep farmers from the south - or took up sheep farming themselves. Between the late 18th and the mid 19th century, all across the region, fertile, sheltered inland straths and glens were converted to '*sheep*

walks'. The year of 1792 came to be known as *bliadhna nan caoraich* - the year of the sheep.⁵³

Tacksmen and subtenants, priced off land they viewed as their own, set off across the Atlantic in search of a better life, migrated to the booming Scottish industrial centres for work or resettled in the newly created coastal crofting townships. The economy of the region was, by the late 18th century, being run according to the interests of southern industrialists, not those of the resident population. It was an area providing cheap raw materials for external industrial and manufacturing use. The financial benefits were occurring outside the region or only for the landowners themselves who largely spent outside the region.

The Emergence of Crofting System

A new spatial, social and economic order was being created at a rapid pace by the improving landlords. The crofting system was and is a modernist project. It involved large scale social engineering and economic planning on the part of a small number of individuals - the landlords and factors and their advisors. This was a time when new planned towns were a popular means of economic diversification and development. In 1788 the gentlemen directors of the British Fisheries Society began the establishment of a new fishing base - Ullapool.⁵⁴ They considered carefully as they drew up their grid plan layout, what amount of ground to allocate each dwelling. They settled on a small kailyard per house, the size of which reflected the proven ability of the Highland people to get by on very little and the fact that too large a piece of ground for household cultivation would dissuade inhabitants of the new town from pursuing with all their might the new fishing industry.

A basic step towards improvement was the surveying and mapping of estates. From this plans were developed and decisions taken about which ground should be used for which purposes. Costs and likely incomes from these new approaches could then also be assessed. New holdings were

⁵³See p244 in **Hunter J.** 1999 *The Last of the Free: A Millennial History of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* Mainstream Edinburgh.

provided for some of the tenants who did not emigrate or head south. These were crofts. A quick look at a 1:25,000 map for any crofting area will illustrate the ascendancy of the surveyors and planners. The new crofting townships were created by selecting areas of ground not suitable for sheep walks and then splitting them up into 'crofts'. These crofts are very frequently long, thin strips of ground - lots of straight lines on a map or survey - running to a shore or loch. It is important to note that this new land allocation policy resulted, in most cases, in a forced abandonment of nucleated settlement for linear settlement. Those at either end of these new townships were fairly isolated from their neighbours. The new townships were created very largely on previously uncultivated ground - and on the poorest ground - ground expendable to the landowner. This ground therefore had to be broken in and a house built by the new tenant. Great care was taken to ensure that each unit or croft was too small to feed a household. This was done in order to 'stimulate' - or force - other new economic development. In Caithness and Easter Ross the off-croft employment was often as farm labourers and the change was gradual. In the Shetlands the new industry was the fishing industry, controlled entirely by the landlords. The lease of these new crofts stipulated that the men must buy boats and gear (from the landlord), catch fish and sell that fish - to the landlord. Women and children had to help with on-shore processing. All supplies came from the landlord and the fishing required these men to live in desperate temporary accommodation all summer. The cost of fishing gear, supplies and rent was set against the value of fish sold to the landlord. The crofter-fisher families were eternally in debt to the landlord and were in effect indentured labour.⁵⁵

In the Hebrides, the Orkneys and the west coast mainland, kelp was the route to fortunes for the landlords and hence these small, poor crofts were created to facilitate the growth of this industry. In much the same way as the fishing in Shetland, the crofters were obliged to work in the kelp harvest and

⁵⁴ See p 47 **Willis D.** 1991 *The Story of Crofting in Scotland* John Donald Edinburgh or visit the Ullapool Museum for an in depth look at this particular example.

⁵⁵For further detail see pp 225 - 232 **Hunter J.** 1999 *The Last of the Free: A Millennial History of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* Mainstream Edinburgh.

burning.⁵⁶ Again the work was hard and unpleasant and kelpers often had to spend the summer months in poor, uncomfortable shacks close to the kelping grounds. Earnings were set against rent due. The kelpers themselves made little from this work since both landlords and government agreed that seaweed belonged to the owners along whose coastline it was to be found. The fortunes made at the kelp made it possible for some landlords to indulge in the sort of conspicuous consumption which they were desperately pursuing - Armadale Castle in Sleat was built during the kelp boom as were a number of fine townhouses in Kirkwall.

So lucrative were these new industries, for the landlords, that steps were taken to prevent the cheap, tied, workforce from emigrating to escape the misery of this new enforced lifestyle. The Highland Society, based in Edinburgh and dominated by landowning interests, campaigned for the Passenger Vessels Act which was passed in spring 1803, when some twenty thousand were expected to set sail for North America. The campaign was conducted on apparently humanitarian grounds, but in reality was aimed at stopping the loss of the kelpers and fishers. The Act decreed a certain minimum space requirement per person. This resulted in an immediate increase in the price of a passage across the Atlantic, hence putting it immediately beyond the means of the average 'crofter'.⁵⁷

'Redundant Population'

In the 18th century the potato had been introduced to the region. After initial scepticism, it soon became the mainstay of the household diet for the majority of people. By the 1821 the population of the north of Scotland was about eight hundred thousand, while that of Scotland as a whole was just over two million. The Highlands and Islands population now represented some 41% of the Scottish population compared to 51% in 1755 and covered 74% of the land area of Scotland.⁵⁸ In the new crofting townships, population increased and

⁵⁶For discussion of the creation of the crofting system and kelp manufacture see **Hunter J.** 1987 reprint *The Making of the Crofting Community* John Donald Edinburgh.

⁵⁷See pp255 - 6 in **Hunter J.** 1999 *The Last of the Free: A Millennial History of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* Mainstream Edinburgh.

⁵⁸See p242 **Smout T. C.** 1985 *A History of the Scottish People 1560 - 1830* Fontana Glasgow 6th edition. See also p76 in **Darling F. F. (ed)** 1955 *The West Highland Survey: An essay in human*

ground was subdivided to provide land for each household - and, as in Barra, - to increase the value of the estate⁵⁹. Crofting tenants, with no security of tenure, were often moved onto new tenancies again and again. A landless class of cottars and homeless people was created. Emigration was largely blocked by the 1803 Passenger Act. Access to good agricultural land was denied through letting of it to sheep farmers at high rents. The resident population did not have the capital to diversify into sheep in any big way. Between 1810 and 1827 the price of kelp fell drastically until, on many estates, it ceased to be a viable proposition. During the boom years some landlords had borrowed large sums of money on the strength of their kelp income. Many went to the wall and a significant number of estates changed hands.

ecology Oxford University Press for comparison of the West Highland Survey area with Scottish demographic change.

⁵⁹See p36 in **Hunter J.** 1987 3rd edition *The Making of the Crofting Community* John Donald Edinburgh. In order to raise revenue in the face of falling kelp incomes MacNeill of Barra split every croft in 2 and charged the same rent for the subdivided units as had been charged for the whole. Despite the passenger Act, 500 tenants emigrated and were replaced by tenants displaced from other areas of the Hebrides.

Croft tenants, dependant on their small kelp income to pay their rising rents, built up more debt year on year. Worse still, this resident '*workforce*' were no longer needed by the kelping landlords.

Clearance Intensifies

The landlords got the 1803 Passenger Act repealed. Emigration increased, but many were forced to take the cheapest possible tickets where appalling conditions caused thousands to die of cholera, typhoid and other such diseases before ever reaching North America. Some landlords - like MacLean of Coll in Rum and MacDonald in the Uists - had entire communities shipped to Canada. The whole population of Rum was shipped to Canada and over a number of years one thousand five hundred people were shipped from North Uist. The population of North Uist today is only in the region of a one thousand people. This Clearance continued with ever increasing numbers being evicted. Where resistance to eviction occurred, as in the Strath of Kildonan in 1820, troops were brought in.

The Sutherland Clearances and 'Improvement' of Assynt

Figure 2.1 below provides a sketch map showing an approximate boundary for the '*Highland culture region*', the administrative boundaries of the '*County*' of Sutherland and the location of the Parish of Assynt. The '*Highland Line*' boundary on this map is based on the HIE boundary. This includes Moray, which as has been already noted, has exhibited a degree of cultural difference when contrasted with the Highland '*culture region*' as a whole. In the 19th century the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland owned almost all of the County of Sutherland, except for small areas such as church grounds and school grounds. This amounted to 1,176,454 acres. Today the same family own 83,239 acres in the County. The Sutherland family acquired Assynt from the bankrupt MacKenzies in 1757. In Assynt, local tacksmen were consolidating and enlarging their holdings from 1766. By the early 19th century population in the coastal settlements was greater and growing faster than those inland. Fishing supplemented household needs amongst those on the coast. The tacksmen had already begun the introduction of sheep farming before what is

understood to be the classic Sutherland Clearance era of 1812 - 21.⁶⁰ Subletting was disallowed by the Sutherland Estate in 1775. At this time, John Home carried out a survey of Assynt, which provides an invaluable insight into circumstances at the time.

Crucially, for those whom we came to know as crofters, the changes represented a fundamental restructuring in the aim of household work, from the goal of subsisting from agricultural activity and attempting to produce a small surplus for selling, to expecting only part of the household needs would be met from agriculture and depending on getting an income from other work.⁶¹ This other work would commonly be fishing, but also kelping, dyking and odd-jobbing where and when the opportunity arose. Temporary migration to work in the herring fisheries or into service in the south was becoming increasingly common and necessary in providing households with money. The change in mode of production was enforced.

The new leases on the parcels of ground on the coast reserved for resettlement required the manufacturing of kelp and fishing.⁶² The idea was to force new industry and development by ensuring not only that each holding was too small alone to support a family but also that leases demanded these efforts. It was proposed that villages be created and that Lochinver be created to become a '*metropolis*' full of modern industry for the area in the new industrial days to come.⁶³ A fishing station was established in 1775. On occasion some basic fishing tackle and advice from fishers from the east coast was provided to speed up the process. The Estate also forbade the cutting of '*seaware*' without payment to the Estate and prior arrangement. This seaweed was crucial to the cultivation of any arable ground as fertiliser and organic matter. The new '*crofters*' were still allowed to take that which was thrown up on the shore by the tide.⁶⁴ In effect indentured labour was created. The principal of making the parcels of ground too small to live from should not really surprise

⁶⁰ See pp 3 – 12 **Bangor-Jones M** 1998 *The Assynt Clearances* The Assynt Press.

⁶¹ See **Withers C W J** 1988 *Gaelic Scotland: The Transformation of a Culture Region* Routledge London.

⁶² See Chapter 2, 3 & 4 in **Hunter J** 1987 edition *The Making of the Crofting Community* John Donald Edinburgh.

⁶³ See **Bangor-Jones M** 1996 *History of Assynt* Comunn Eachdraidh Asainte.

us, nor the practise of exacting rent arrears despite abysmal levels of poverty. The aim was to shake the indigenous population from its perceived endemic sloth and idleness. To improve estate returns, huge tracts of land were cleared of people to make way for sheep farms which would pay far higher rents.

It was not just a question of the pain of the inevitable upheaval of forcible removals from townships which this action in Sutherland started.⁶⁵ The brutality and hardship of many such evictions is well documented. The crushing poverty made worse by the years of famine when the potato failed is full of horror. The impossibility of meeting the increased rents is obvious. The difficulties of changing from a land based to a seabased economy were numerous. It was a huge break of trust and went against the long held belief in the right to get a living from the land, and having occupied a piece of land for four generations, the belief in a hereditary right of occupation.⁶⁶

But this new spatial and economic order did more than that. Those who were resettled were given ground in the poorest parts of every area while sheep farms occupied the better ground. The old settlement patterns, often in clusters, and runrig were displaced by regimented lots along the coast, the characteristic crofting landscape we have today.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ See **Bangor-Jones M** 1998 *The Assynt Clearances* The Assynt Press.

⁶⁵For contemporary comment at the time see **Marx K.** 1852 Sutherland and Slavery or The Duchess at Home *The People's Paper* 12th March. For historical analysis, see **Hunter J.** 1987 edition *The Making of the Crofting Community* John Donald Edinburgh.

⁶⁶See **Scott J. C.** 1989 *Weapons of the Weak* for other comparative examples and actions.

⁶⁷ For details of this process in Assynt see **Bangor-Jones M.** 1998 *The Assynt Clearances* The Assynt Press. For Highland wide discussion see **Willis D** 1991 *The Story of Crofting in Scotland* John Donald Edinburgh and Caird J B 1987 *The Creation of Crofts and New Settlement Patterns in the Highlands and Islands* SGM Vol 104 No 2 pp 67 – 75.

Figure 2.1: The Parish of Assynt in the County of Sutherland

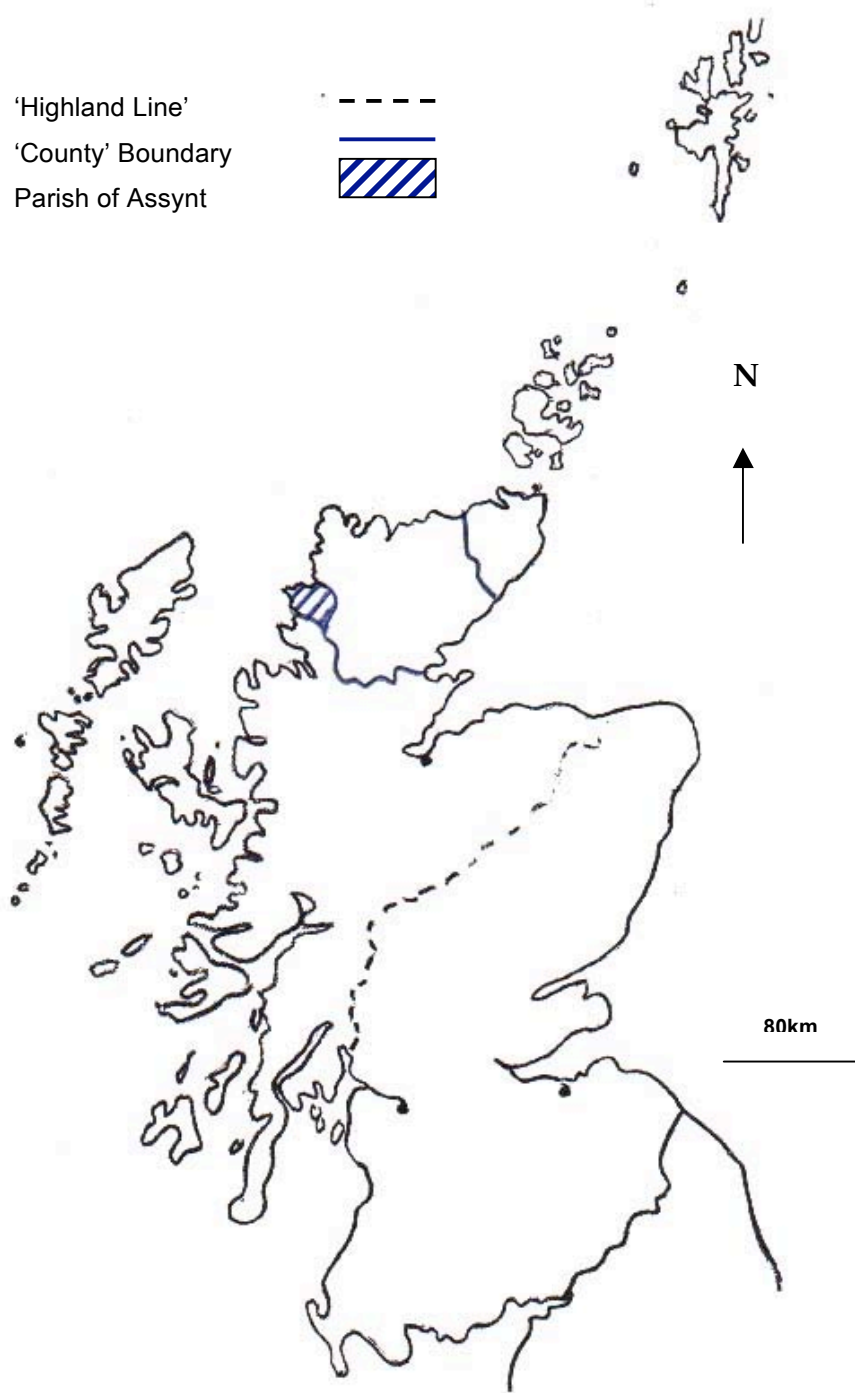




Figure 2.2: Assynt: Cleared Townships and Relocation Areas
 Source: **Bangor Jones M** 1998 *The Assynt Clearances* The Assynt Press

North Assynt Estate (Assynt Crofters Trust) 21,123 acres 
 Clearance Resettlement Areas 



The land was carefully surveyed and then split into geometric holdings. When the straight lines were drawn an effort was made to provide each holding or croft with a share of the different types of land. In Assynt one can see to this day the long thin strips of crofts in places like Elphin and Achnacarnin. In other townships like Clashmore and Balchladich the rectangular crofts fan round the loch. In the Assynt area, Raffin was the last place to be settled - it is very exposed and has poor, peaty soils which require huge amounts of work and humus or dung to cultivate on an ongoing basis. Along with each individual plot or croft was a share in township hill ground for grazing. The extent and quality of this varied greatly from place to place. In many cases the people had to break new ground where soils were poor and thin and lazybeds were the only way to grow any crops. In addition those resettled on the coast were also put in amongst others whose holdings were reduced. This increased the poverty of those who were not '*removed*' in the strictest sense but perhaps had a new sort of lease and a reduced plot of ground. The grazings in these townships could barely support such an influx of cattle as came with those being resettled, never mind each household. Land deteriorated while the newcomers broke ground, built a new dwelling house and byre, learnt to be fisherpeople and kelp makers. Many families were forced to make a '*new start*' again and again.

While for many emigration was forced and no other feasible option was available, it should be remembered that for some emigration was at that time a form of resistance and protest. A rejection of current circumstances and a search for a freer land, or in the case of religiously motivated emigrants perhaps a promised land.⁶⁸ The departure of Reverend Norman MacLeod, a native of Clachtoll, with a band of followers bound for Cape Breton in 1817 is a good example. The '*Normanites*', as they became known, developed their own brand of Presbyterianism which attracted many beset by hardship and the uncertainty of early Clearances.⁶⁹ This religious dissent was a forerunner of the Disruption of 1843. The rise of evangelical Presbyterianism in Sutherland was linked with protest at the changes brought by clearance and

⁶⁸For an example early in the Clearances, involving religious beliefs see discussion of the Reverend Norman MacLeod.

improvement. Until the late 18th century, the Established Church was very weak in Sutherland.

Some fifty townships were cleared and coastal settlements overcrowded by the relocation of cleared tenants, in the course of the 19th century. Figure 2.2 shows the parish of Assynt, the cleared townships and the areas used for relocation. This sketch map also shows the North Assynt Estate and from this information it is clear that the areas used for relocating 'removed' tenants were very largely the coastal townships, now part of the North Assynt Estate.

In 1813 there were riots at Inchnadamph as a result of Sutherland Estate clearances, in protest at the appointment of a minister, previously located in Strathnaver, and believed to be supportive of the clearance policy. After the 1812-21 'improvements' there were later attempted clearances in 1851 at Elphin and Knockan. In the face of strong resistance from the local community, this was abandoned.

The motivation for this new regime was not just economic return. A further justification was the improvement of the character of the indigenous people. The people of the region were believed to be barbarous and uncouth. In the words of Sellar, factor to Sutherland Estates, describing the humanitarian benefits of the Clearances or Improvements:

"Let him contrast it with the sloth, and the poverty, and the filth, and sleep of an unremoved tenant's turf hut in the interior. [...] and let him believe, if he can that men are injured by civilisation.."70

Another factor, James Loch, found the Gaels to be victims of:

"every species of deceit and idleness, by which they contracted habits and ideas, quite incompatible with the customs of regular society, and civilised life, adding greatly to those defects which characterise persons living in a loose and unformed state of society."71

⁶⁹ For more information see for instance **McPherson F** 1993 *Watchman Against the World* Breton Books Cape Breton.

⁷⁰ For a discussion of this quote and those which follow see the chapter titled 'What the factor Said' pp 12 – 26 in **Grimble I.** 1993 edition *The Trial of Patrick Sellar* Saltire Society Edinburgh

⁷¹ For a discussion of this quote the chapter titled "What the Factor Said" pp 12 – 26 in **Grimble I.** 1993 edition *The Trial of Patrick Sellar* Saltire Society Edinburgh.

In short, Loch found them to be '*a redundant population*' and maintained that:

"In a few years the character of the whole population will be completely changed [.....] The children of those who are removed from the hills will lose all recollection of the habits and customs of their fathers."⁷²

The Improvers were quite clear that one of the largest obstacles to modernisation was:

"that barrier which the prevalence of the Celtic tongue presents to the improvement and civilisation of the district, wherever it may prevail"⁷³

He declared Gaelic to be '*a language in which no book was ever written*', despite such obvious examples as the first Gaelic prose book published in Scotland in 1567, while at the time of making the comment three books by Duncan Ban MacIntyre were in print. A book by the Gaelic poet Rob Donn MacKay was published in 1829. Rob Donn was born in the north of Sutherland in Hope and spent most of his life (1714-1778) in Durness some twenty or thirty miles from the Factor's home and within the Estate he managed. Indeed in 1827, a very grand memorial was put up in the Durness graveyard by admirers of his work. The text on the gravestone is in Gaelic, Greek and Latin.

So it was also a moral crusade. And out in front in every colonial expedition or colonial government were Scots, often Gaelic speakers. Migrants escaping this slow process at home were assisting in the success of the same sort of project in the '*new worlds*'. Circuits of colonialism and capital? Karl Marx noticed this fact and indeed commented on it, in an article entitled "*Sutherland and Slavery or The Duchess at Home*" published in '*The People's Paper*' in 1852. Of the goings on in Sutherland and the Highlands in general, Dr K Marx closes by observing:

"The above Turkish reform by the Countess of Sutherland was justifiable, at least, from a Malthusian point of view. Other Scottish

⁷²For a discussion of this quote see the chapter titled "*What the Factor Said*" pp 12 – 26 in **Grimble I.** 1993 edition *The Trial of Patrick Sellar* Saltire Society Edinburgh.

⁷³For a discussion of this quote see the chapter titled "*What the factor Said*" pp 12 – 26 in **Grimble I.** 1993 edition *The Trial of Patrick Sellar* Saltire Society Edinburgh.

noblemen went further. Having superseded human beings by sheep, they superseded sheep by game, and the pasture grounds by forests. At the head of these was the Duke of Athol. 'After the conquest, the Norman kings aforested large portions of the soil of England, in much the same way as the landlords here are now doing with the Highlands'. (R. Sommer's letters on the Highlands, 1848)

As for the large number of the human beings expelled to make room for the game of the Duke of Athol, and the sheep of the Countess of Sutherland, where did they fly to, where did they find a home?

In the United States of North America.

The enemy of British Wages Slavery has a right to condemn Negro-Slavery; a Duchess of Sutherland, a Duke of Athol, a Manchester Cotton-lord - never!"⁷⁴

His purpose here is to undermine the enlightened and humanitarian reputation the Duchess was gaining in some circles due to her public support of the cause of anti-slavery in the USA, while Harriet Becher-Stowe (author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) spent some considerable time at the Duchesses home, Dunrobin Castle, during her visit to Europe.

If some of the most infamous and brutal Clearances were in Sutherland, the most infamous factor to implement such improvement policies must be Patrick Sellar, who was both factor to the Countess of Sutherland and tenant of some of the land to be cleared:

"He has frequently been pictured not only as a sadistic agent of a resolutely wicked landlord policy which he used for his own mercenary ends, but also as an instrument of genocide in the Highlands"⁷⁵

Sellar was much against the proposed introduction in 1817 of minimum food requirements on migrants ships since he felt that this would be an absurd obstruction to exodus from the Highlands. He asserted that the Highlander did not need as much meat as regulated because they could live on oatmeal.

A few years later he was outraged at the significant Sutherland Estate famine relief effort in the face of the potato famine. In a letter to Loch he expressed this most forcefully, as was his way:

⁷⁴ p5 Marx K. 1852 *Sutherland and Slavery or The Duchess at Home* in *The Peoples Paper* 15th March 1888.

⁷⁵ See p1 Richards E. 1971 *The Mind of Patrick Sellar* *Scottish Studies* Vol. XV 1971.

"If facilities were given for emigration, there would be a general wish to get abroad. The difference in cost of eating Indian corn in America, besides eating it at home would pay the expense of their transport. Ten millions spent in applying the remedy would be a profitable remedy, but ten millions applied, merely to pass through the bowels of the misgoverned people is worse than thrown away. It destroys their self-reliance - makes them a mistletoe on the British oak."⁷⁶

Particularly touching is the reference to the British oak, with its shades of English nationalism, and the sense that to be starving is perhaps a shade unpatriotic. He was a religious man and there is a hint in his writings that he believed that the tenets of political economy were revelations of some divine purpose. He was an extreme exponent of a commonly enough held view during the industrial revolution. The aim of '*improvement*' is what drove him, this being based on calculated rationalisation of economic activity. The fact that during his university years in Edinburgh, the thinking of Dugald Stuart was in the ascendancy may well have been a strong influence. For Sellar, Malthus, Benjamin Franklin, Luther and Coke of Holkham were models of right-thinking. His zeal and methods took him beyond the norm of improvement thinking of the time, as an extreme example of the '*laissez-faire*' intellect of the early nineteenth century.

Famine and Diaspora

In 1846 the potato harvest failed. Blight destroyed the majority of the crop. By the winter of 1846 - 47, large numbers of people were on the verge of starvation and by early 1847 typhus, scurvy and dysentery were taking hold in the starving communities. Famine relief was organised, firstly through public donation when news of the situation reached the United States, Canada, England and Lowland Scotland. Officials who had been working to alleviate the famine of the year before in Ireland, were relocated to the Scottish Highlands and Islands to deal with the crisis. The situation remained perilous but the efforts of Sir Edward Pine Coffin did much to alleviate a situation which could have become even worse. In Cromarty, Wick and Invergordon there were riots in an attempt to prevent grain export in view of the famine all around. Blight persisted throughout the 1850s and famine

⁷⁶ See p16 **Richards E.** 1971 The Mind of Patrick Sellar *Scottish Studies* XV 1971.

relief in the region seemed set to be a permanent issue. Sir Pine Coffin's team was withdrawn and replaced by voluntary agencies. Rations of oatmeal were distributed in the open air, but only in exchange for labour - hence the creation of the '*Destitution Roads*' in various Highland locations. Given the extreme laissez-faire economic thinking of the day, there were great fears among government ministers and others over interfering with the free market in Ireland and the Scottish Highlands through famine relief. Hence the complicated rules and eight hours work, six days a week for those in need of their oatmeal ration.

Landlords - a few notable exceptions aside - did very little or nothing at all to relieve the famine. They continued their evictions throughout the famine. Thousands were evicted and over sixteen thousand people were shipped overseas between 1847 and 1857. The homes of evicted families were burnt leaving them, already weakened by the famine, sheltering in caves or churches - or nowhere at all. Families were reported living on the streets in Inverness. John Gordon of Cluny hunted down escapees with dogs and bound them hand and foot in order to force them aboard a ship to Canada when he evicted and transported one thousand seven hundred people from his Hebridean estates.⁷⁷ The condition of those same forced emigrants, on arrival in Canada, caused further horror. The Doctor at the Quarantine Station on the St Lawrence River had never seen arrivals in such poor health and so lacking in clothes and bedding. The Canadian authorities met the not insignificant costs of care for these refugees from South Uist, Barra and Benbecula, but had little luck in recouping those costs from Gordon.

Balmoralisation and Highlandism

In the second half of the 19th century a new landuse rose to prominence - the Deer Forest. In this period the symbolism of a Highland Estate changed and the classic '*Highland Sporting Estate*' which we still recognise today came into existence. The Highlands, as a culture region with an identity of '*difference*', within the emergent Scotland, has been seen to have emerged in the middle

⁷⁷See pp 278 - 9 in **Hunter J.** 1999 *The Last of the Free: A Millennial History of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* Mainstream Edinburgh and Chapter 4 and 5 in **Hunter J.** 1987 3rd edition *The Making of the Crofting Community* John Donald Edinburgh.

ages.⁷⁸ The term '*Gaidhealtachd*' does not directly translate as Highlands and Islands, though it is used in this way today. Shetland, Orkney and Caithness had and have, not so much a Gaelic influenced cultural heritage but a Norse one. Neither does '*Galldachd*' translate as '*Lowlands*', since, from a Highland perspective Gaelic culture and language gradually retreated out of or was pushed out of, what has come to be known as the Lowlands. The Highlands, as culture region, can be seen, from a Scottish perspective, to have emerged through a series of waves of '*discovery*'. Following Smout, these can be characterised as the region as anthropological curiosity, following from centuries of descriptions of the region as '*wild*', '*barbaric*' and '*lawless*' – or a threat, to '*Scotland*' and '*Scottishness*'.⁷⁹ During the late 18th century and early 19th century the emphasis was on the '*sublime*' and the '*picturesque*'. The later 19th century saw the development of '*vulgar tourism*', while the 20th century brought '*mass tourism*'.

The visit of King George IV to Edinburgh in 1822 was stage managed by Sir Walter Scott, as '*Master of Ceremonies*' and memorialised in a painting by J. M. Turner – '*March of the Highlanders*'. The King wore a kilt and other '*Highland*' accoutrements, set off with pink silk stockings. In the evening a '*Highland Ball*' was held. The hardships and dislocation of the Clearances were entirely absent from this '*Highland*' region. When Queen Victoria and Prince Albert bought Balmoral in 1848, the creation of the Highlands as a space of consumption and recreation was consolidated by this further Royal intervention. This was '*Balmoralisation*'. Highland land, in the form of the Highland Sporting Estate, became a form of conspicuous consumption. The impacts of this process remain important in the 21st century and the social, environmental and economic consequences are, as will be seen in later Chapters, significant in the motivations for creating community land ownership.

⁷⁸ Withers C. W. 1992 *The Historical Creation of the Scottish Highlands* pp143 – 156 in Donnachie I. and Whatley C. 1992 *The Manufacture of Scottish History* Polygon Edinburgh.

⁷⁹ Smout T. C. 1983 *Tours in the Scottish Highlands from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries in Northern Scotland*.

Scotland & Empire

During the eighteenth century, the identification of '*the Highlander*' (as male and) as a '*natural soldier*' emerged. This transformed the '*threat*' into a useful and '*loyal*' commodity. James Wolfe fought at Falkirk and Culloden under Cumberland in 1746, as a boy of sixteen years. It is reported that when asked, in Canada, where Britain might find good, hardy recruits, General Wolfe replied: "*The Highlanders. They are a hardy and intrepid race, and no great mischief if they fall*".⁸⁰ By 1759, Wolfe was a General, leading a Highland company – the 78th or Fraser's Highlanders – onto the Plains of Abraham in Quebec. The attack was a famous success for the British Empire, though General Wolfe was mortally wounded. A monument to General Wolfe was raised in Westminster Abbey. It includes a '*sculpted Highlander*' to represent the 78th.⁸¹ By the late 19th century this association, in terms of the management and mobilisation of the British Empire, was so strong that even '*Lowland*' regiments were ordered to wear tartan and the trappings or symbols by then attributed to '*the Highlands*'.⁸²

Scots people played a vast array of roles in the creation and management of the British Empire. Glasgow became '*the second city of the Empire*' and Scottish engineering skills did much to build the transport and communications infrastructure on which '*the Empire*' relied. While in many historical sources, Scots and Highlanders are described as '*English*', since the British Empire is identified as '*English*', the role of Scotland in the Empire is so significant that someone has finally written a book titled "*The Scottish Empire*".⁸³

In 1773 the first settlement of Highlanders was established at Pictou, Cape Breton. Some fifty years later, the Normanites from Assynt would join those settlers. Right into the late 20th century, Highland emigrants made their way

⁸⁰ See p15 **MacLeod J.** 1993 *No Great Mischief If You Fall: The Highland Experience* Mainstream Edinburgh. Edinburgh – a book passed onto me by my grandfather, or a recent novel, **MacLeod A.** 2001 *No Great Mischief* Vintage London.

⁸¹ See p70 **Hunter J.** 1994 *A Dance Called America: The Scottish Highlands. The United States and Canada* Mainstream Edinburgh.

⁸² p130 **Withers C. W.** 1992 *The Historical Creation of the Scottish Highlands* in **Donnachie I. and Whatley C.** 1992 *The Manufacture of Scottish History* Polygon Edinburgh.

⁸³ **Fry M.** 2001 *The Scottish Empire* Tuckwell Press and Birlinn Edinburgh.

to the *'New Worlds'*. Gaidhealtachd enclaves were created in places like Cape Breton and North Carolina.

In 1787 a Lewisman, Alexander Mackenzie, a partner in the Hudson Bay Company, established Fort Chipewyan on Lake Athabasca. During 1788 he and a group of Quebecois, a group of Chipewyan, including one known as English Chief, and a German travelled, defined and hence *'discovered'* what became known as the Mackenzie River. In doing this they pushed *'Canada'* westwards. The North West Company was created by Highlanders in 1779. Fry's account has them as Scots, but Hunter notes that in 1798, George Landmann described himself as *'the only foreigner amongst them'*. During a social occasion⁸⁴

Scottish and Highland activity, in terms of trade, was very significant. Some of the most significant Scottish companies were created through colonial trade. *Tate & Lyle* was based on shipping and sugar. *Guthrie & Co* was set up in 1821. and by the time of the Malayan rubber *'boom'*, was at the forefront, and involved in a range of activities, including banking, insurance, railways, steamships, telegraph and docks. Thomas Lipton, Glasgow, became the single largest proprietor in 1890, in what was then Ceylon, and created *Lipton's Teas*. *James Finlay & Co* are still trading in Sri Lankan tea to this day, and in 2001 were managing twenty-two estates there.⁸⁵ *Standard Life Assurance* started business in Edinburgh in 1825 and in 1866 took over a *'colonial'* firm, gaining staff and outlets in India and Canada.

It is in trade and land – the circuits of colony and capital - that we can see most clearly the tightening interactions facilitated through state colonisation and empire building. Scots and Highlanders played military and administrative roles, throughout what became the British Empire. Scots were also active in the colonial, empire and trading activities of other European states. A particularly brutal example is the role of William MacKinnon, Kintyre, in the activities supportive of Leopold II, King of Belgium in the

⁸⁴ p159 **Hunter J.** 1994 *A Dance Called America: The Scottish Highlands. The United States and Canada* Mainstream Edinburgh.

⁸⁵ p455 **Fry M.** 2001 *The Scottish Empire* Tuckwell Press and Birlinn Edinburgh.

'Belgian Congo'. They met at conference for the geographical societies of Europe, organised by Leopold II in 1876.⁸⁶ The agenda was to discuss the best ways of '*developing*' Africa. MacKinnon worked tirelessly on schemes designed to benefit Leopold II's personal ambitions.⁸⁷

The exploits of James Matheson (the elder) are a particularly pertinent example of the personal and political global impacts of Highland involvement in trade and empire. Matheson was born in Lairg, Sutherland in 1796. He was illegitimate but his father, a '*Highland gentleman*', saw to it that he was educated at Edinburgh University. In 1819 the young James Matheson arrived in Canton and developed a lucrative partnership with William Jardine from Lochmaben. Their enterprise became the hugely successful '*Jardine Matheson*' and their business was opium smuggling. Demands by '*merchants*' active in Canton to secure legal trade with the Celestial Empire, resulted in British military action. An early attempt was led by Lord Napier, a forebear of the Napier who headed up the 1884 Napier Commission of Enquiry into conditions in what became the Crofting Counties. In 1860 the Summer Palace in Canton was burnt to the ground by James Bruce, 8th Earl of Elgin, and General Hope Grant. They were leading twelve thousand British troops, amongst whom was Henry Loch, son of James Loch, Factor of the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland's Estate. Also in the party was an escort of Sikh soldiers.

Both Jardine and Matheson became British MPs later in life, Jardine as Whig representative for a London constituency and Matheson as Whig MP for Ross and Cromarty in 1847 till 1862. Matheson bought Lewis in 1844 and built Stornoway Castle. Late in the 19th century my great grandfather, Duncan Graham, left the family croft, Gret na Griène, Drumbeg, Assynt, to take a job as a ghillie in Lewis. In the kitchens of Stornoway Castle, Duncan Graham met the woman who was to become his wife. Fry says of James Matheson:

"He earned a baronetcy in 1852 for work on relief of the Highland famine, but was also an improving landlord in the modern style who

⁸⁶ p280 Fry M. 2001 *The Scottish Empire* Tuckwell Press and Birlinn Edinburgh.

⁸⁷ See Chapter 12 in Fry M. 2001 *The Scottish Empire* Tuckwell Press and Birlinn Edinburgh.

cleared more than 500 ne'er-do-well families and packed them off to Canada."⁸⁸

Iain Grigor Fraser says of the same man:

"As a matter of fact, Sir James, part of whose fortune was requisitioned to prevent widespread starvation, disapproved strongly of what he called the lavish waste of money in the Government's famine-relief programme. He thought it better for the poor people to labour for their means of sustenance – 'that they ought rather to earn their food by toil, than eat the bread of idleness and pauperism' – and so set his tenants to work on his estate for just enough food to keep them alive and working. Perhaps his eastern experiences helped him to balance this delicate equation: for the greatest portion of his truly huge fortune had been made in the China opium addiction trade, which he had once recommended to a friend as 'the safest and most gentlemanlike speculation I am aware of'".⁸⁹

Fraser further notes:

"It was Matheson's factor, Munro, who dispensed that great power, and factor Munro's jurisdiction was severely exercised. Fines and threats of eviction followed any crofter who chose to appear before him wearing a cap or with his hands in his pockets, or in an insufficiently deferential manner; for years, such petty intimidation had been typical of the social relations on the Matheson estate. But in March 1874, the deference and quiescence of the Bernera crofters gave way to organised and determined resistance."⁹⁰

In terms of the Highlands and Islands, these entanglements and acts of violence can be traced both through personal histories and through land ownership, particularly once the Highland Sporting Estate become an essential aspect of conspicuous consumption. In Lewis again, another example of the links between capitalism, colonialism and Highland lairds is Lord Leverhulme who bought Lewis and Harris. His business empire was global and included the construction of the 'model' workers village of Port Sunlight in England.

⁸⁸ p311 Fry M. 2001 *The Scottish Empire* Tuckwell Press and Birlinn Edinburgh.

⁸⁹ p25 Grigor I. F. 1979 *Mightier than a lord: The Highland crofters' struggle for the land* Acair Stornoway.

⁹⁰ p25 Grigor I. F. 1979 *Mightier than a lord: The Highland crofters' struggle for the land* Acair Stornoway.

The Crofters Wars

It is no wonder that while resistance did occur in the course of the Clearances, sustained and organised resistance did not occur till late in the century in the course of the Crofters Wars of the 1880s.⁹¹ Such a policy over several decades all across the Highlands and Islands would set neighbour against neighbour as more and more people crowded onto the same already overcrowded poor coastal margins. How could it not? In addition, with such movements of people these redesigned townships must have resulted in households alongside each other, forced to work together but perhaps not with the same familiarity and trust as they had previously enjoyed in the township they had left. Or alongside neighbours or family members who were working parcels of ground taken from you or given to them by you to help them while you and your family struggled too. Naturally subdivision became usual as this poor marginal ground became ever more congested. Add to this emigration and migration to find paid work, and these new townships must have been tough places indeed to survive in.

Lack of land, starvation, eviction, emigration and high-handed landlordism continued to cause serious distress. Across in Ireland similar circumstances led to the formation of the Irish Land League and an act of parliament granting security of tenure and a right to fair rents. In Scotland John Murdoch founded the newspaper *The Highlander* in Inverness in 1873. Highland Societies were being formed in every industrial city in Britain. Some such societies took an interest in conditions in the Islands and Highlands. In 1874 trouble over grazings in Great Bernera escalated into a Court case for assault. The crofters were acquitted in view of the treatment they had received. A Highland Land League was formed and resistance to threats, high rents and lack of land became widespread throughout the crofting areas. Rent strikes, land raids and the burning of summons were the common means of resistance. Land League branches and meetings spread. Incidents in Braes and then Glendale fuelled this Crofters War, when five men from Glendale were given jail sentences by the Court of Session in Edinburgh. They came home the Glendale Martyrs. A particular brand of Highland

liberation theology developed also in the course of these years. The membership card for the Highland Land Law Reform Association proclaimed in Gaelic that the tenants were "*Mightier than a Laird*" but also quoted Ecclesiastes: "*The profit of the earth is for all*". Another popular verse was from the Isaiah: "*Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till their be no place, that they may be placed in the midst of the earth.*"⁹²

Gunboats carrying hundreds of marines were brought to Skye in an effort by the authorities to enforce the law. Newspapers carried increasing coverage of the agitations in every corner of the region and the cause of the crofters and cottars won much vocal sympathy in the south.

The Urban Highlanders

The great movements of people which resulted from the upheaval and lack of opportunity in the Highlands and Islands, created whole communities of 'urban' Highlanders in the cities of central Scotland. The many Highland and Islands societies, some still active to this day, vouch for the way in which people from particular areas maintained their bonds and social contact in an urban setting.

⁹¹See **MacPhail I. M. M.** 1989 *The Crofters' War* Acair Stornoway and **Grigor I. F.** 1979 *Mightier than a Lord: The Highland Crofters' Struggle for the Land* Acair Stornoway.

⁹²For discussion of the development of Highland Liberation Theology see **Meek D. E.** 1987 'The Land Question Answered from The Bible': The Land Issue and the Development of a Highland Theology of Liberation SGM Vol 103 no 2. See also **Hunter J.** 1987 edition *The Making of the Crofting Community* John Donald Edinburgh, pp 159 – 160 and Chapters 8 - 12. For details of the agitations see **MacPhail I. M. M.** 1989 *The Crofters' War* Acair Stornoway and **Grigor I. F.** 1979 *Mightier than a Lord: The Highland Crofters' Struggle for the Land* Acair Stornoway. See also Chapter 4 in this thesis.

The many societies include *The Coll Society* in Glasgow and *The Glasgow Sutherland Association*. Edinburgh too has such organisations, as has Dundee. My own grandfather was an office bearer in the *Dundee Highland Society*, when he went there as a young teacher upon finishing University in Aberdeen. Among the members were others from Lewis, of the same age group as himself. One such was our 'Auntie' Etta, who was not a blood relative but a peer of my grandfathers. These social links tend to continue across generations. During The Crofters Wars, representatives of the urban Highlanders played a very crucial role. In the 20th and 21st century this continues to be the case. The Highland Fund, a charitable organisation based in Glasgow, continues to offer low interest loans to Highland and Island households for business development. Withers has done very interesting research on this subject.⁹³

Crofting Law

The result of the Crofters Wars was the Napier Commission and the 1886 Act. Further disturbances followed the Act right into the 1930s. Gradually some of the land was taken back from deer forest and sheep farm and divided into crofts as land settlement.⁹⁴ Before the 1886 Act it was the ordinary agricultural law of Scotland which governed crofts along with farms and other agricultural holdings in Scotland.⁹⁵ Hence a crofter would be viewed as a tenant of a piece of ground owned by a landlord and occupancy was granted on a year to year basis at a mutually agreed rent. It mattered not whether the tenant had been on this piece of ground for one year or thirty-five years, the landlord could terminate the tenancy at the end of the year by giving notice of forty days in writing. The landlord had no obligation to recompense the outgoing tenant for improvement. The landlord could therefore take back the land, including any building or other improvements made by the tenant and the tenant had nothing for her/his efforts. In the

⁹³**Withers C. W.** 1998 *Urban Highlanders: Highland – Lowland Migration and Urban Gaelic Culture* East Linton.

⁹⁴See **Leneman L.** 1989 *Fit for Heroes? Land Settlement in Scotland After World War I* Aberdeen University Press. For the role of promises based on land and the role of crofts in a development dispute see MacDonal C 1943 *Highland Journey of Suil Air Ais* where the author discusses the events resulting in Leverhulme leaving Lewis and Harris. The author was agricultural advisor at the time and was obliged to participate in the discussions.

event that the landlord had provided buildings and equipment for the use of the tenant at an agreed rent for an agreed period it was a different matter.

The 1886 Act did not accord entirely with the recommendations of the Napier Commission, nor indeed the demands of the crofters and cottars, but it did provide security of tenure, the right to compensation for improvements, heritable tenancies and the right to a fair rent set by the Scottish Land Court. These were hard won rights for the crofters. It did not however offer anything to the cottars nor did it meet the single most important demand of the Highland Land League - the land for the people.⁹⁶

The Highlands and Islands in the 20th Century

As with the rest of the UK, the Highlands and Islands experienced great changes as a result of the two World Wars of the 20th century. These changes were social and economic. Out migration to the cities of the south and to Canada, USA, Australia and New Zealand continued until a reduction in the depopulation rate in the mid 1970s. A study carried out in the main crofting areas in the middle of the century continues to provide a very informative summary of the changes wrought in the region in the first half of the 20th century. That study was the *West Highland Survey*.

The West Highland Survey

The West Highland Survey was carried out between 1944 and 1950 and was published in 1955. The idea of a social and biological investigation was proposed by Frank Fraser Darling and eventually supported by Development Fund monies from the Department of Agriculture for Scotland. Frank Fraser Darling ran the Survey from Strontian, with the assistance of a team comprising a Research Assistant (Avril Morley), a Statistician (Robert. S. Barclay), and Economist (Gordon. G. Hayes), an Assistant (Euphemia Munro) and four Gaelic speaking Field Survey Officers (Murdo MacDonald, Callum R. Morrison, Colin F. MacDonald and John Cameron).

⁹⁵See for instance p 3 **Bangor-Jones M.** 1998 *The Assynt Clearances* The Assynt Press and **Hunter J.** 1987 edition *The Making of the Crofting Community* John Donald Edinburgh.

⁹⁶See and **Grigor I. F.** 1979 *Mightier than a Lord: The Highland Crofters' Struggle for the Land* Acair Stornoway.

The Survey was from a Human Ecology perspective and focused on environmental change brought about by human action and the challenges faced by the small, ageing population base in achieving adequate economic, social and environmental success. A human ecology perspective includes not only environmental influences and change, but equally psychological and social phenomena. In all one thousand and forty crofting townships in the Western Isles and West Coast mainland were surveyed, providing an as yet unparalleled profile of these places.

In summarising the Survey findings, F. F. Darling summarised the historical basis of the '*Highland Problem*' thus:

"The present problem is traced (a) to depletion of the renewable land resources (basically forests) through some hundreds of years but particularly since AD 1700; (b) to the break up of the clan system following the Risings of 1715 and 1745, linked with the fact that the attitudes of mind and forms of administration of that period and of the following century gave no effective substitute for the clan system; and (c) to the steep rise in population after 1745 accompanied by failing resources and then to the rapidly falling population with top-heaviness of the age structure (...). Furthermore, until the troubled times of the 1870's and early 1880's governments insisted that the welfare of the people was the responsibility of the lairds, an interpretation which caused severe distress to both people and lairds in such times of the famine of 1847-8.⁹⁷ Darling then notes, very importantly that, 'The Napier Commission and the subsequent Crofters' Act of 1886 was the turning-point and the Government has become more and more the guardian of the Highlands, where it is now the largest landowner.'⁹⁸

Darling notes however that security of tenure and heritability of tenure do not necessarily lead to good husbandry and that the principle basis of the Survey Report is that the future prosperity of the crofting areas relies not on '*artificially imported industries*' but on the productive potentials of land and sea.

The Survey Report notes that the main part of the Highland problem lies north and west of the Great Glen. The population of the Survey area at the time of the 1951 census was the similar to that of 1755 - some 119,071 people - but its distribution and age structure were very different. In 1755, the Survey

⁹⁷p 407 **Darling F. F. (ed)** 1955 *The West Highland Survey: An essay in human ecology* Oxford University Press.

area accounted for 9.1% of the Scottish population of 1,265,380 people. In the intervening years, introduction of the potato, reduction in internecine warfare and inoculation had allowed and increase in population. Since 1755 the population of Scotland had steadily risen, but that of the Highlands rose at a steeper rate than the Scottish average between 1800 to 1840. By 1831 the Survey area population had risen to 200,955. This represented a fall to 8.5% of the total Scottish population of 2,364,386 people. The Highlands then experienced a steep decline until 1861(5.7% of the Scottish population), followed by a slower but steady decline until the 1970s. By 1951 the Survey area accounted for a mere 2.3% (or 119,071 people) of the Scottish population of 5,095,969 people. The Outer Hebrides however showed a different trajectory, having seen population increase continue into the early 20th century. The pattern of change hence varied between areas but population decline can be seen to be caused mainly by either excess emigration over natural increase or the combined effect of emigration and natural decrease.⁹⁹

The destruction of woodland cover is postulated to have resulted in loss of scarce soil and the protective circulation of nutrients through the forest ecosystem, while from the 18th century the rapid increase in sheep grazing has had profound effects on the land. The use of burning to maintain pasture and the pressure of grazing by sheep instead of cattle or a balanced mixture of species has meant that woodland does not regenerate and heather is often reduced and replaced with other species, such as bracken on drier slopes below 1,500 feet. Climate change has also inhibited regeneration. The Survey also suggests that erosion is widespread. The Survey further notes that there is an overpopulation of red deer and suggest that a healthier balance would be in the region of 60,000. The dangers of destroying raptor and small predatory animals is highlighted and the practice deplored. The need for watershed management is highlighted and the methods for conserving precious machair ground are discussed. The conclusion is that "*the Highlands*

⁹⁸p407 emphasis added - **Darling F. F. (ed)** 1955 *The West Highland Survey: An essay in human ecology* Oxford University Press.

⁹⁹Statistics based on those in **Darling F. F. (ed)** 1955 *The West Highland Survey: An essay in human ecology* Oxford University Press.

are described as a devastated habitat which will probably take a century to rehabilitate."¹⁰⁰

The Survey Report notes that where heavy depopulation has occurred amalgamation of crofts is common, but where congestion has recently been prevalent evidence of subdivision remains. The size of crofts varied markedly across the Survey area with smaller crofts (less than 5 acres) predominating in areas of poorer terrain like the North West and North Hebrides. On the good machair of the South Hebrides by contrast croft size averages 16 - 21 acres. Between 1911 and 1947, tillage falls with population decrease so that when comparing production across time in areas of amalgamation, it is noted that production falls through amalgamation. Darling postulates therefore that in the North West households have maintained the same standard of living by working larger amounts of ground less intensively, rather than increasing croft production through access to more ground. Darling notes that at the time of writing, enlargement of croft holdings through amalgamation is uncritically accepted to be a good thing. However, amalgamation can only occur where depopulation occurs and depopulation '*in the interests of the social pattern, may not be desirable.*'¹⁰¹ Land which has reverted to '*rough*' could be reclaimed with immense effort but this ground is generally the poorest. He suggests that enlargement must come through intensive working of inbye ground. Even in the 1950s it is interesting to note that the souming system - '*this primitive conservation measure*' is gradually breaking down as overgrazing in some places illustrates.¹⁰²

At the time of the Survey less than 40% of townships had individually fenced crofts. It was noted that a lack of inbye fencing favours '*the least progressive members of the community*'.¹⁰³ Just under 27% of the total inbye ground available was in tillage with a little over 19% in hay and 53.7% had been

¹⁰⁰p411 Darling F. F. (ed) 1955 *The West Highland Survey: An essay in human ecology* Oxford University Press.

¹⁰¹p411 Darling F. F. (ed) 1955 *The West Highland Survey: An essay in human ecology* Oxford University Press.

¹⁰²p412 Darling F. F. (ed) 1955 *The West Highland Survey: An essay in human ecology* Oxford University Press.

¹⁰³p412 Darling F. F. (ed) 1955 *The West Highland Survey: An essay in human ecology* Oxford University Press.

returned to permanent pasture. Potato and barley cultivation had decreased markedly since 1911 illustrating a dramatic change in eating habits and a move away from subsistence agriculture. The level of intensive work required for that sort of cultivation was no longer possible once paid employment had become a more regular feature. The Report notes however that "*the framework on which it [subsistence husbandry] was moulded remains as an obstacle to a further evolution of society comparable with that which took place in the Lowlands*".¹⁰⁴ It was noted that the inbye ground used at grass was far from reaching its full potential and that cultivation for grass currently resulted in great loss of nutrients. As one would expect at this stage in post War agricultural change, the number of horses has halved since 1911, dairy cows and heifers are reduced by 25% as are cattle and sheep. However greater variation is observable at a local level. In the North West cattle were reduced by 40%, while sheep stock rose. Availability of new ewe subsidies were at that time affecting stocking and in the Hebrides a boom in Harris Tweed had further affect on sharply rising sheep stocking levels. The increase in sheep was most dramatic in areas of poorest ground where the potential of harm through overstocking was highest: Hebrides and North West. It was believed that lambing percentages were also falling in these areas. Some of the reduction in cattle numbers was attributed to an ageing population. It is instructive to note that Darling outlines the following as an appropriate cattle policy:

"(a) maintenance of an adequate foundation stock of a hardy pure breed such as Highland or Galloway; (b) maintenance throughout the year of an adequate milk-supply in the crofting townships; (c) an increase in the numbers and quality of store cattle for export to down country farms; (d) a sufficiency of suitable strong stores for grazing and ultimate finishing in the deer forests. Stocks of Highlanders must be maintained, their spill in cast cows or surplus heifers being crossed with the Shorthorn and a possible second Shorthorn cross would make for flexibility. These cattle would be the normally kept cow stock of the townships. The Aberdeen Angus could be crossed on these so long as the offspring were sold to the east and not kept in the west. Such stratification of the cattle-breeding husbandry would be in line with the invariable practice of sheep-farming."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴p412 Darling F. F. (ed) 1955 *The West Highland Survey: An essay in human ecology* Oxford University Press.

¹⁰⁵p414 Darling F. F. (ed) 1955 *The West Highland Survey: An essay in human ecology* Oxford University Press.

And in summarising the critical nature of the unfolding situation he states:

"It is held that the West Highland habitat cannot be restored until the cattle-sheep ration is narrowed. If we take the rough approximations of 1,400,000 sheep and 100,000 cattle in the Survey region, a halving of the sheep and a doubling of the cattle would mean the same number of grazing units as at present, but the cattle-sheep ration would be narrowed to 1:3.5. Improvement of habitat from that point onwards would probably allow of heavier stocking in later years, as distinct from the present trend towards reductions in stocking capacity and infertility of stock."¹⁰⁶

With regard to *'The Social Situation'*, the Report notes that the shape of townships affects social cohesion and that in areas of depopulation with linear settlement patterns, townships die out at their edges first.¹⁰⁷ While in some places the *'Celtic'* nucleated settlement pattern prevails and in a small number a linear pattern is forced by the terrain, in many cases the linear pattern observed was created through the introduction of the crofting land tenure system and the redistribution of land which this entailed. In the Hebrides, it is noted, settlements and individual houses are not so isolated. In contrast, the mainland *North West* has many examples of scattered or strung-out, linear settlement. A link is postulated between density of rural settlement and the emergence of social organisations. The fact that the majority of townships had no public or community buildings was seen as putting a brake on social development.

Distance from markets and general communication issues are highlighted. The Survey team question the value of good roads in and of themselves. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, cars had not yet become so commonly owned, mass tourism was in its very early stages and hence income from tourism had to take on the significance it has today in many Survey areas. The difficulty of getting goods like shellfish out to markets is noted. With regard to off-croft employment, Lewis and Harris provide *'rich possibilities'*, but the north west mainland and Skye are poor.

¹⁰⁶p414 Darling F. F. (ed) 1955 *The West Highland Survey: An essay in human ecology* Oxford University Press.

¹⁰⁷p414 Title for section VI, Darling F. F. (ed) 1955 *The West Highland Survey: An essay in human ecology* Oxford University Press.

A key issue at the time was a lack of 'joined up' government, illustrated by reference to the lack of integration in terms of 'rehabilitative' effort between the Forestry Commission and hydro-electric. Agricultural education was deemed to be in an unsatisfactory state in the crofting districts. In discussing the social situation, Darling uses the phrase 'township Gael':

"The township Gael is described as being intensely sociable, and if this sociability cannot be indulged, communities fade."¹⁰⁸

The township is described as

"a collection of homes of people of like skills bound by the necessity of mutual aid and communalism, the minimum number being originally the work-team or boats' crew of four [men?]"¹⁰⁹

Darling further states that "*The Hebridean township is a classless society.*"¹¹⁰ In discussing the 'social situation', Morley states that "*We are concerned here with the sick but surviving culture of Highland Gaeldom.*"¹¹¹ She goes on to note:

"A Malinowski studies the New Hebrides with classic skill, sympathy and comprehension, but the Hebrides are white in the skin and have the vote. Therefore it would be impudence to study Gaeldom as a different culture, and Gaeldom in general is affronted if it is approached as a different culture."¹¹²

She then explains that any such study tends to be misunderstood as ranking Gaelic culture '*as something inferior and quaint*'. She attributes this to a:

"too common and an erroneous impression that to be the subject of an anthropological investigation is derogatory to cultural dignity."¹¹³

¹⁰⁸p414 Darling F. F. (ed) 1955 *The West Highland Survey: An essay in human ecology* Oxford University Press.

¹⁰⁹p414 (men?) my addition to the quote Darling F. F. (ed) 1955 *The West Highland Survey: An essay in human ecology* Oxford University Press.

¹¹⁰p414 Darling F. F. (ed) 1955 *The West Highland Survey: An essay in human ecology* Oxford University Press.

¹¹¹ Research Assistant on the West Highland Survey and writer of the Section VI: The Social Situation and co-writer on Section V: The Agricultural Situation.

¹¹²p281 Darling F. F. (ed) 1955 *The West Highland Survey: An essay in human ecology* Oxford University Press.

¹¹³p281 Darling F. F. (ed) 1955 *The West Highland Survey: An essay in human ecology* Oxford University Press.

She argues that anthropo-ecological approaches are scientific and '*truth seeking*'. The observations included which cannot be made through statistical tables she identifies as crucial in avoiding '*a dull interpretation of the social situation*' and apologises for any potential fallibility in the teams '*qualitative*' observations, begging leave to '*be discursive*'.¹¹⁴

Lack of woodland cover is deemed to inhibit agricultural and horticultural experimentation, social life and '*courting*'. Lack of woodland cover is deemed to be socially and psychologically very damaging.¹¹⁵ It is noted that in the *North West* the idea of increasing woodland cover is met with suspicion since it is seen as a way of decreasing grazing ground, while in all areas there are differences of opinion over whether tree cover should be established for shelter or for fuel.

Post War Change

In post war Britain agricultural policy focused exclusively on increasing production and economies of scale. Crofting agriculture was seen as outmoded and irrelevant, being small scale and low intensity. Support payments and grant aid aimed at intensifying agricultural production were introduced. Mixed small scale farming was gradually reduced and pressure, through the restructuring of the agricultural economy and incentives, resulted in increased size of landholdings, fewer farming families and the squeezing out of the mixed family farm. Specialisation was encouraged. In crofting amalgamation of holdings was not so easy, due to the tenure structure. However, continued out-migration, leaving empty or unused crofts did allow some to increase the land they worked through tenancing or using several crofts. This new kind of agriculture was much more capital intensive than the old way. Crofting agriculture was moving away from subsistence and off-croft paid employment became increasingly important. The more labour intensive aspects of crofting agriculture decreased, both because of off croft employment and because with a much reduced and ageing population it became impossible to carry out all the jobs that were once done on a croft and

¹¹⁴p282 **Darling F. F. (ed)** 1955 *The West Highland Survey: An essay in human ecology* Oxford University Press.

in a township. The result was that by the 1980s, crofting agriculture had in many places, become dominated by sheep production. Indeed in some areas a monoculture of sheep had resulted.

The Emergence of the Development Industry and The 'Highland Problem'

Another aspect of post war politics was the rise of the development industry both at a global and state scale. The Highlands and Islands had already seen examples of state sponsored development initiatives in the form of a range of organisations such as the Fisheries Board, Congested Districts Board and the Crofters Commission. The Forestry Commission, with a social and economic remit was established as was the '*Hydro*' Board, which similarly had to carry out its work with a view to rural job creation and social issues. In 1965 the Highlands and Islands Development Board was created by Act of Parliament to tackle '*The Highland Problem*' - economic under-development, out migration, ageing populations, low and insecure incomes and lack of basic services and communications infrastructure. Only a minority, such as Frank Fraser Darling, added environmental degradation to the list of concerns bound up in the phrase '*the Highland Problem*', back then.

The HIDB was modelled on the Tennessee Valley Authority in the USA. This organisation had been created to tackle the similar problems experienced by the Appalachian communities there. Both organisations had an unprecedented range of powers including the ability to own property, create businesses, grant aid development, promote the region and own land. This type of organisation and aspiration was typical of the 1950s post war optimism in progress as unending (economic) improvement driven by scientific advance, regional planning, large scale Fordist industrial development and professionalism. '*Development*' was becoming a vocation or profession.

The early HIDB approach to the development business focused on the creation or fostering of growth centres in the belief that only through industrialisation could Highland regeneration be achieved. Hence economic policy for both industry and agriculture were focused on very large

¹¹⁵See p414 for a summary but pp303 - 305 for a full discussion **Darling F. F. (ed)** 1955 *The West Highland Survey: An essay in human ecology* Oxford University Press.

enterprises. The main large scale industrial development in the region at this time was aluminium smelting, at Fort William, Kinlochleven and Foyers. These had been created in order to take advantage of the cheap electricity produced by the development of hydro power. A more recent and much larger smelter was then established at Invergordon, which resulted in the transformation of Alness from a village to a significant town. In Caithness the fast breeder reactor was installed at Dounreay, in Fort William a pulp and paper mill was opened and a huge grain distillery was established at Invergordon.

The HIBD saw these as the grains of future development and favoured such large scale developments. However, by the early-1980s several of these large enterprises were in serious trouble. In 1980 the pulp and paper mill shut down and in 1981 the Invergordon smelter was shut after only ten years, creating urban scale unemployment in Alness. By the time Dounreay was decommissioned in the mid-1990s, policies had changed radically. The HIBD staff had begun to value and support small-scale business development and community initiatives. Indigenous efforts played a key role in the gradual change in regional fortunes. It became clear, not least in Shetland, that cultural revival and dignity had very positive impacts on economic change. HIBD began to pay more attention to support for reorganising or improving small businesses in more traditional sectors - fishing and agriculture - and in tourism. By the 1970s the relentless regional population decline was finally halted, though the pattern was of course uneven, with remote crofting areas continuing to lose population in many cases. By the 1980s the regional population had actually increased and has continued to do so since then.

During the Thatcherite era, the HIBD was dismantled and replaced by Highlands and Islands Enterprise and network of Local Enterprise Companies. Since this was a politically motivated move, in an era of self-conscious Conservative '*enterprise culture*', this change was greatly feared by many. Time has shown that this new structure has made it possible to reflect local priorities more easily and a change of government in 1997 has led to an increased focus on '*Strengthening Communities*' within this organisation.

Counter-urbanisation

European wide counter urbanisation, which began in the 1970s has had an impact on the region. The main effects are twofold. Firstly significant numbers of people have chosen to move to the Highlands and islands for a better and different quality of life. This has been so significant that in some cases - for instance, Knoydart and Scoraig - communities which have been totally emptied of their indigenous inhabitants have been re-peopled and revitalised. Secondly changing attitudes associated with counter urbanisation have reduce the old stigma of staying in the remote rural corners of the region. Interest in ideas of quality of life, clean environments, crime free places, culture and sense of community have caused new people to migrate into the Highlands and Islands. Modern media communications and the in-migrants themselves illustrate the down side of city life and so for those brought up in crofting communities - if work can be found or created - the idea of staying is less unattractive. The energy and pride created by cultural revitalisation is also fundamental to these changing attitudes amongst local youngsters.

Gaelic and Culture

During the 20th century a renewed cultural self-confidence was gradually within the Gaidhealtachd. Authors such as Hugh MacDairmid and Sorely MacLean, in the early part of the century did much to the raise the profile and appreciation of Gaelic language and literature. By the late 20th century there was Gaelic television, Gaelic radio and a burgeoning global Celtic arts network. By this time Gaelic had come to be seen as an essential component of regional recovery, though naturally debate continues on how best that to achieve that integrated approach. This theme will be returned to later in the Chapter.

The Land Question

Ever since the 1886 Crofters Act failed to '*return the land to the people*', the '*Land Question*' has exercise minds. The '*question*' includes - issues such as:

- is it fair that land ownership in Scotland is focused in so few hands?

- whose land is it anyway? - lairds took it from the majority when written title was introduced
- does this pattern of land ownership inhibit economic development?
- is it appropriate that Scottish land ownership is still feudal in legal terms?

More recent issues on this subject include:

- the questioning of whether this type and pattern of land ownership is appropriate in terms of environmental protection
- whether it is in the national interest to treat land as a commodity equivalent to cars or other goods and property
- an assertion that it is in the public interest to be able to identify who owns a particular parcel of land
- debate over rights of access for the general public, increasingly important as outdoor recreation has grown

During the 20th century debate on this issue tended to polarise along part political lines. The type of question outlined above were presented as radical and very *'left of centre'*. Any questioning of the present manner and pattern of land ownership was seen as an attack on private property, *'western'* democracy and capitalism. Until the publication of John McEwan's *"Who Owns Scotland"*,¹¹⁶ very little was known about who owns Scotland outside each local area or large estates long associated with particular families.

Mutton Mountains?

Post war increases and intensification of agricultural production coupled with the EU agricultural regime led to over production and the creation of beef and butter *'mountains'*. By this time much of crofting agriculture was a sheep monoculture, reliant on distant rather than local markets. The effects of intensive state and EU supported overproduction, on the environment, has been increasingly highlighted since the 1980s. Ironically this produced an opportunity to *'repackage'* crofting as a low intensity environmentally friendly type of agriculture. Across Europe part-time farming has become

¹¹⁶ McEwan J 1973 *Who Owns Scotland?* USPB

increasingly common and so the view of crofting as an agricultural anomaly has been eroded.

A large proportion of the most environmentally precious landscapes and ecosystems in the UK are in crofting areas and have been created by or protected by traditional crofting methods. In policy circles efforts today are focused on increasing the number of cattle on croft ground, decreasing the number of sheep and reintroducing cropping for environmental reasons. Understandably many crofters are a little cynical about this, having experienced the opposite pressure in the latter part of the 20th century. Despite this in many crofting areas there is increasing activity focused on local production of food for local consumption. It is well known that high quality food is produced in the region, but until recently it was very hard to eat any of it there. The idea is to reduce '*food miles*', improve the quality and range of locally available food and develop local markets in the interest of local consumers and producers. Skye and Lochalsh provide an excellent example of this. The Skye and Lochalsh Horticultural Development Association supports horticultural producers, new and established, and markets produce. The Skye Machinery Ring members now finish lambs for local consumption and direct market this. A van delivering a range of local produce was started and is now a full time concern.

Environmental Interests

The vagaries of government policy changes can be bewildering. The late 20th century has been marked by a range of policies which have increasingly clashed and contradicted. In Sunart in the early 21st century local people, public agencies and landowners, led by Forest Enterprise, are enthusiastically engaged in a project to restore the famous Sunart Oakwoods, a remnant of the Atlantic Oakwoods. As late as the 1980s, the Forestry Commission was underplanting those same oakwoods with conifers for commercial timber production. Much of the current work involves taking those conifers out and facilitating natural regeneration of oak and other native hardwoods. In the 1980s government tax breaks encouraged the planting of conifers on precious blanket bog in the Caithness and Sutherland Flow Country. At Forsinard, the RSPB with the help of *LIFE* funding is reclaiming planted ground and creating

significant economic impacts through wildlife tourism. In other corners, crofters are being paid to cultivate hay and then cut it in particular ways to encourage the return of the corncrakes. Not very long ago those same crofters were being encouraged to carry large stocks of sheep and buy in winter feed, in the interest of agricultural efficiency.

It is not surprising therefore that in crofting communities there is much suspicion about environmental interests and agencies. The charge of scientific colonialism has been levelled at environmental interests and agencies. On the other hand there is much local interest in wildlife and the environment. This conflict is about power and the ever contested, control and use of Highland and island land and resources. To the interests of land owners, shooting parties and salmon fishermen, tenants, crofters, local communities, departed cousins and diasporic communities has been added those of hill walkers, mountaineers, tourists and environmental lobbyists. Some people will be eligible for several of these '*categories*'. Competing land uses and conceptions of the land jostle, at times uncomfortably: spaces of consumption, production and protection.

Tourism and Outdoor Recreation

With the rise of the private motor car and increased leisure time, in post war Britain, mass tourism began to emerge. In the Highlands and Islands this led to the emergence of B&B, letting houses and caravans to let. The Scottish Youth Hostel movement often gave people their first taste of Highland holidays. Camping and mountaineering grew in popularity and were relatively accessible for people. New land uses emerged. Tourism began as a handy boost to household incomes and went on to become the mainstay of many local economies. In the rural Highlands and Islands it is common for several generations of the same family to come back year after year. The rise of cheap package holidays to the sun has changed the nature of Highland tourism. New niche markets are emerging and the trend is towards second holidays and activity holidays being taken in the Highlands and Islands. In 1999 UK and overseas visitor spending contributed £402 million to the economy of the Highlands and Islands. In the same year, tourism employed 11,593 people in the Highlands and Islands, accounting for 13.4% of those

employed. This contrasts with a figure of 201,538 people employed in this sector at the Scottish level, accounting for 9% of those in employment in Scotland as a whole.¹¹⁷

Assynt Area Profile

This section of the Chapter provides information on the social, economic and environmental characteristics of the key study area – the Parish of Assynt. As Figure 2.1 above shows, the parish of Assynt is located in the north west of the Scottish mainland, in the County of Sutherland.

Settlement and Services

As the sketch map in Figure 2.2 above illustrates, settlement is concentrated on the coastal areas as a result of the 19th century Clearances. The main village of Lochinver, also created in the course of the Sutherland Clearances, is a nucleated settlement and is home to the majority of the population. This village provides key services for the parish, including a Bank, newsagents, Assynt Medical Centre, two general grocers, a butcher, ironmongers, one of the two remaining local primary schools, Highland Council Office (part-time hours), CASE Business Development Manager (one day a week), sheltered housing, Assynt Centre – a day care centre for the elderly, volunteer Fire Service, volunteer Lifeboat, volunteer Coastguard and the Police Station.

Climate

The parish of Assynt demonstrates the 'classic' Highland challenges of distance from markets, poor agricultural land and a challenging climate. The influence of the North Atlantic Drift results in winter weather on the coast, much milder than that which is found inland, even at the south eastern edges of the parish. Here - at Knockan and Inchnadamph - much more and longer lying snow is experienced and hard frosts are common. The coastal area is milder, snow lies for less time and frost is not as common. However the coastal and inland climate is still very severe. The coastal climate in particular is dominated by high wind speeds and gales. The effect of wind-chill and wind speeds is strong on animals, crops and everyday human life.

¹¹⁷Source of information is HOST 2001 Research Report.

The economy is affected not just through the challenges to agricultural production, but also through days lost at sea for the fishing industry and ancillary businesses. Tourism is also affected - poor winter weather and short daylight hours inhibits, or makes dangerous, hill walking and mountaineering. On the other hand the winters are not cold enough to provide for the winter climbing or the cross-country ski market which exists in the central Highlands. Rainfall rises inland towards Inchnadamph, but is everywhere here above average for the UK, as one would expect of a maritime climate such as this. The driest part of the year is April - June. In terms of climatic classifications, the Assynt climate, shifts from '*fairly warm and moderately dry*' on the coast to '*cool and wet*' as one moves inland and altitude increases. Temperature normally decreases by approximately 0.6 °C for each 100m rise in altitude. Annual average precipitation is 1200mm p.a. The mean summer temperature range is 10 - 15 °C and the mean winter temperature range is 2- 6 °C. The June monthly average for sunshine hours is 150 hours, while the December average is 15.5 hours, reflecting the influence of latitude. Maximums are normally in May and June. In terms of windspeeds this coast is classified as '*very exposed*'. This indicates average annual wind speeds of between 6.2 and 8m/second. Wind speeds are of course altered locally by fetch, terrain and altitude.

Geology and Topography

The coastal fringe is known in terms of geology as the '*Foreland*' and consists of Torridonian sandstone and Torridonian conglomerate in Rhu Stoer itself. From Alt na Bradhan southwards and from Clashnessie bay northwards, both the coast and the interior are of the classic Lewisian gneiss '*cnockan and lochan*' landscape, typified by hundreds of small lochs, thin, poor soil and a very large proportion of bare rock. Separating this Foreland from the area where the classic Assynt and Wester Ross mountains are located is the Moine Thrust, stretching from the south right up to Durness, on the north coast. Along this famous thrust zone, named after *A' Mhoine* (Peaty Place) on the north coast, several kilometres of older rock was forced over the top of younger rocks. It was in Assynt that some understanding of this process first emerged through the work of a number of geologists, most famously Peache and Horne, during the British Geological Survey in 1884. It is interesting that

this geological survey and discovery was occurring in the same year as the Napier Commission was assembled to investigate the circumstances of the Highlands and Islandscrofting communities. To this day, Assynt is viewed world-wide as a '*geologist's Mecca*' because of this early work, well in advance of plate tectonics and other more modern concepts.

The distinctive shapes of the Assynt and Wester Ross mountains in this area, are a result of distinctive geology. Instead of ranges there are a collection of individual peaks, rising alone from a plateau of Lewisian gneiss. The mountains themselves, consisting largely of Torridonian sandstone with a topping of Cambrian quartzite on the highest peaks, are relict formations. They formed below the earth's surface and were exposed or created gradually through erosion and thrusting. It is for this reason that the bedding planes are often close to horizontal. In the distant geological past, this landmass was part of the same continent as North America. Since the Canadian shield is so similar geologically and visibly to the *cnoc and lochan* landscape, this comes as no surprise.

Geology and Habitats

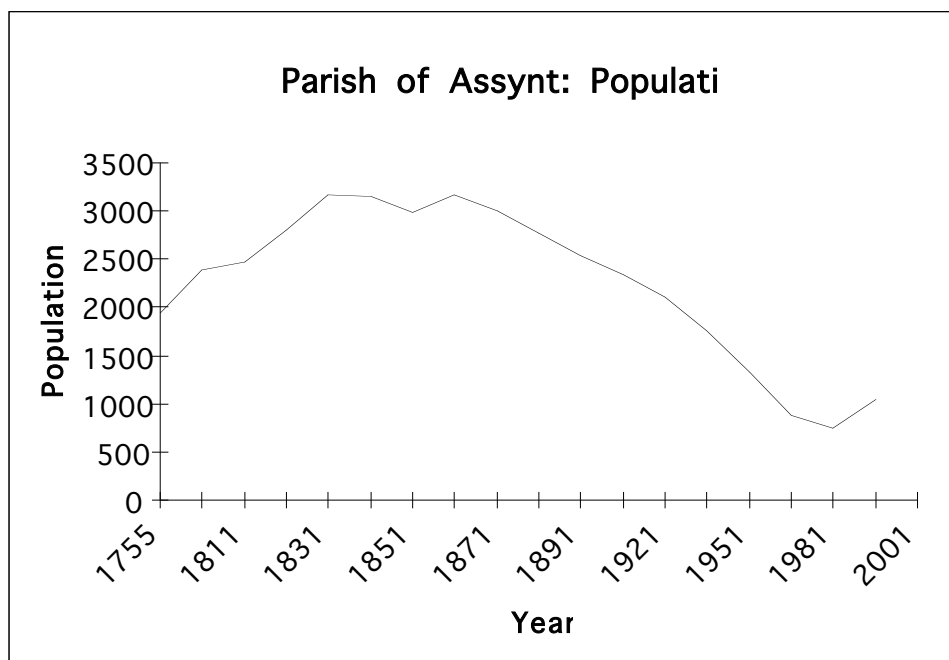
Along the line of the Moine Thrust lies a band of limestone, fairly uncommon in these latitudes. The township of Elphin and the hamlets of Ledmore and Inchnadamph benefit from the presence of this limestone. The limestone bedrock results in soils more fertile than usual for this part of the world and hence also, unusual flora and fauna. Rarities include globe flower, mountain avens, Holly Fern and whortle leaved willow.

Given this fertility, it is no surprise to find that the Inchnadamph and Kirkton areas were the centre of human settlement and activity in Assynt from the beginnings of human presence. It was only in the late 19th century that the parish church ceased to be at Inchnadamph, and moved to Lochinver, a coastal location closer to the new population centres created by the removal of people from the interior of the parish. In 1813 there was a riot at Inchnadamph in protest at the appointment of a minister who had previously served in Strathnaver and who was suspected of being supportive of the clearance policy.

Demography

Today Inchnadamph has only half a dozen households permanently resident there. This change is a result of both out-migration and the removal of people. Figure 2.2 shows the townships which were completely cleared and the areas into which families were relocated. It is very clear that the areas receiving those removed are the centre of population and crofting today and are a large part of the North Assynt Estate.

Figure 2.3: Population Change in the Parish of Assynt
Source: West Highland Survey and Highland Council Statistics



In the West Highland Survey, the parish of Assynt was described as '*the disintegrating parish of Assynt*'.¹¹⁸ As with so many rural places in the Highlands and Islands, Assynt has seen a decline in population since the mid-19th century. Figure 2.3 illustrates the population change since 1755. This

shows that at the time of publication of the West Highland Survey, Assynt had experienced persistent depopulation for some one hundred years, through a combination of natural decrease and out-migration. In common with the average for the Highlands and Islands, the parish began to experience a change in this trend in the mid-1970s, when population levels began gradually to stop falling and to rise in some localities. The impact of this regional and parish trend should be set against the fact that at other scales of enquiry, population continued to fall. For instance, in Highland Region the population increased by 6.2% in the period 1981 - 91, while that of Sutherland decreased in the same period by 0.8%. At both scales of analysis this represents two causes. In the case of Highland region, 1% of the increase is due to births and 5.2% is due to immigration. At the Sutherland level 4.4% of the decrease is due to deaths set against a 3.6% increase due to immigration, resulting in a total change of -0.8%. Likewise, at a township or sub settlement zone level some areas are still experiencing population decline or instability.

It is clear from Figure 2.3 that historically, in terms of folk memory and current experience, out migration and depopulation has dominated culturally, psychologically and economically. The total population for the parish of Assynt in 1991 had risen to 1,049 - close to the levels in the late 1950s, and just over one third of the level in 1871. In Figure 2.4, which compares age structure in 1991 for Highland Region, Sutherland and Assynt, spatial variation in age structures emerges.

The age distribution in Assynt illustrates some of the key characteristics of a fragile area more intensely than that of Highland Region. The proportion of the population over retirement age is 18.9% compared to a Highland average of 17.5%. The proportion of the population under 16 years is 20.6% compared to a Highland average of 21.5%. The Sutherland population structure is much more unbalanced. This is due to the influence of the north coast of Sutherland which continues to suffer greatly from an unbalanced population structure, out migration, high dependence on primary industries for income and employment, lack of range of local services and difficulties in accessing

¹¹⁸p162 **Darling F. F. (ed.)** 1955 *Report of the West Highland Survey: A Study in Human Ecology* Oxford

services and markets. At a township level, on the North Assynt Estate, the Drumbeg/Nedd area has had an ageing and declining population, while the townships closer to Lochinver - Achmelvich, Torbreck and Clachtoll have been growing and are better demographically balanced. The remaining townships have been ageing but are maintaining population. In 1981 24% of the North Assynt population lived in the three townships nearest Lochinver; by 1996 that had risen to 36%. In 1996, in a local survey, the population of the North Assynt Estate was calculated to be 297.¹¹⁹ In the 1981 census it was 302 and in 1991 it was 296, indicating that the total population is fairly steady. Figure 2.5 illustrates changes in demographic structure on the North Assynt Estate. The table indicates that the age structure has stayed fairly constant, although it has become slightly more aged.

It is interesting to compare the age structure in the parish of Assynt with that of the North Assynt Estate. In Figure 2.6 it is clear that the population in the ACT or North Assynt Estate area is more elderly than that of the parish as a whole. Again, within North Assynt Estate, spatial variation is important. In 1996, in the townships of Culkein Stoer, Clashnessie, Culkein Drumbeg and Nedd the proportion of the population over 65 years was calculated to be 33% compared to a Highland and national average of some 16%. The proportion of the population under 15 years is very low. It was 16% in 1981, 15% in 1991 and 14.5% in 1996. This compares very unfavourably with a Highland Region average in 1991 of 21% and a parish figure in 1991 of 20.6%. In the village of Lochinver, in 1991, the proportion of under 16 year olds was 25%. This shows very clearly that the problems of depopulation and ageing persist in the crofting townships in Assynt.

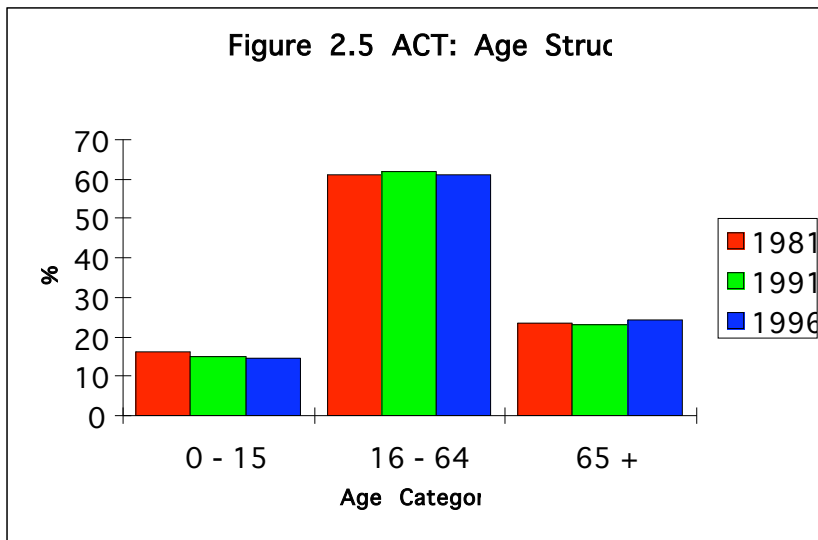
¹¹⁹**Alexander D.** 1996 *North Assynt Housing Study: A Report on a Survey of Housing Needs, Preferences and Supply Issues in the Townships of North Assynt* for ACT and Scottish Homes

Figure 2.4: Comparison of Age Structure 1991

Source: Highland Council Statistics

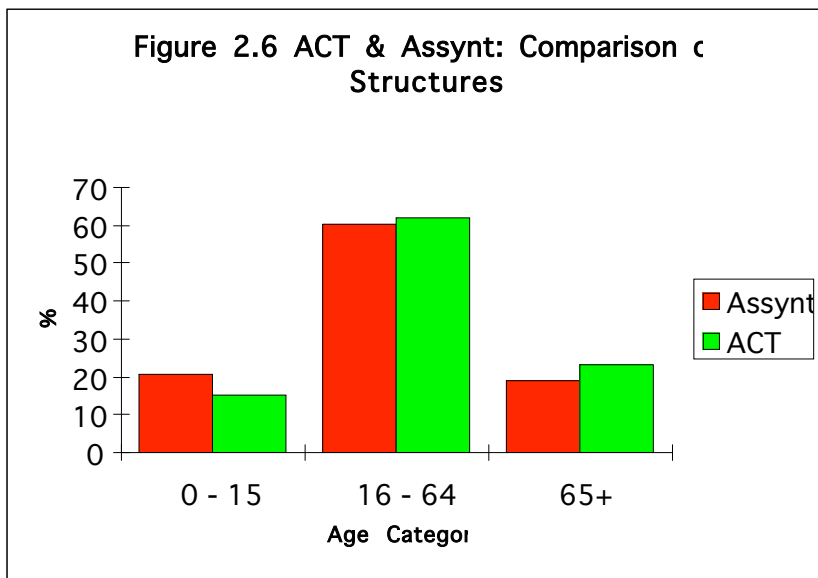


Figure 2.5: ACT: Age Structure 1981 - 96



Source: Highland Council Statistics and North Assynt Housing Needs Survey

Figure 2.6: ACT & Assynt: Comparison of Age Structure



Source: Highland Council Statistics and North Assynt Housing Needs Survey

Figure 2.7: Fragile Areas: HC Areas with 7 Rural Indicators

Source: Highland Council Planning Department

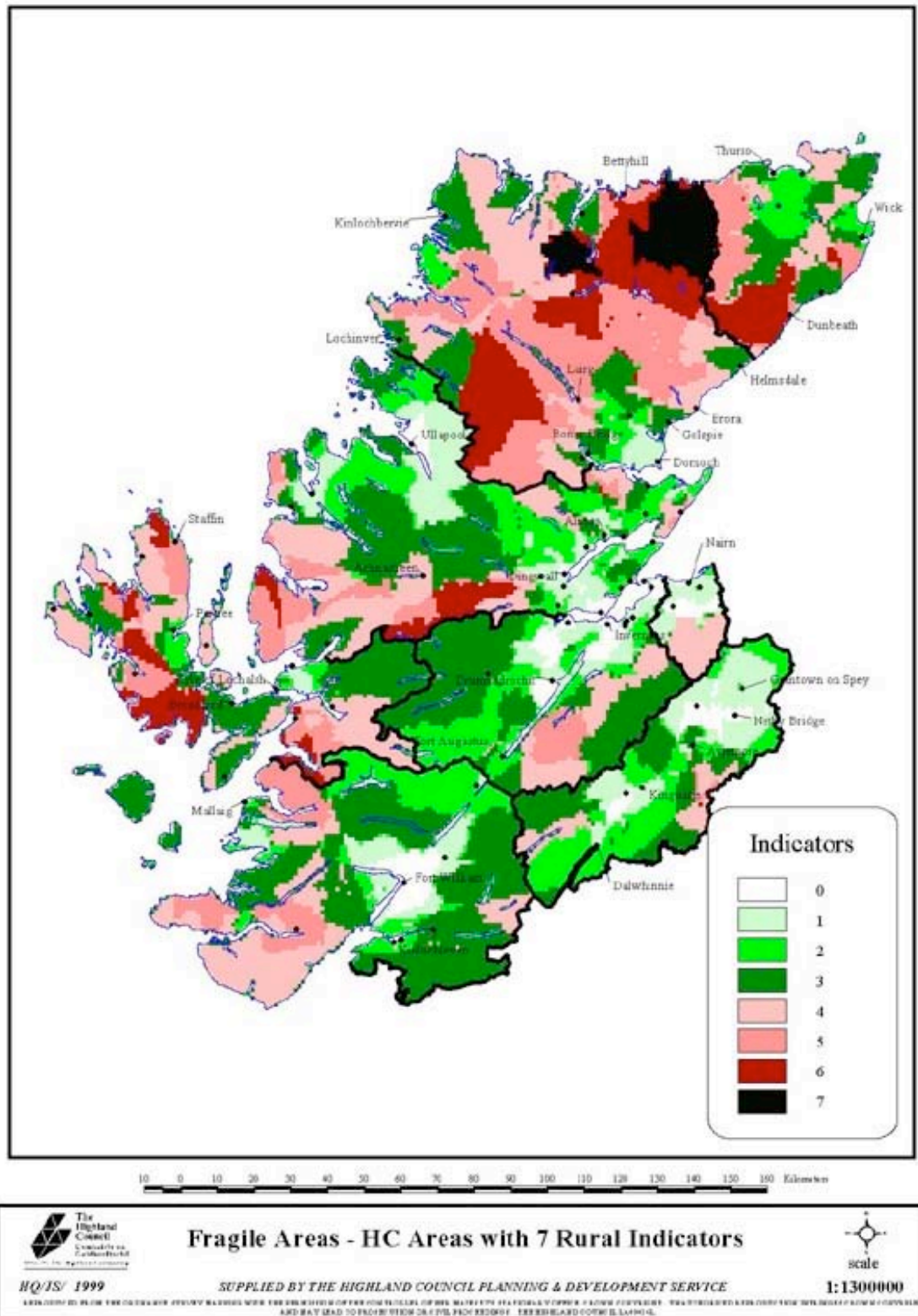
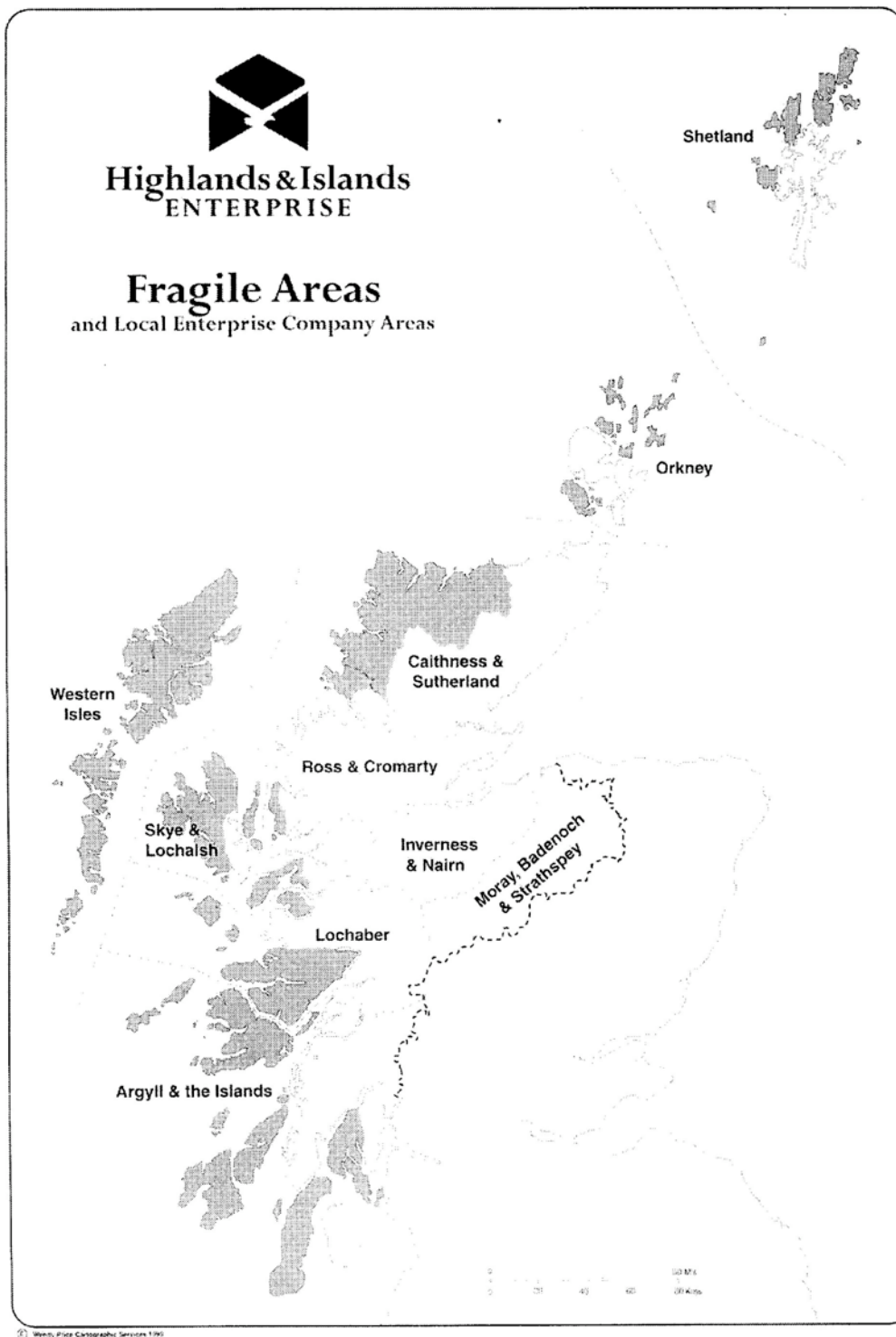


Figure 2.8: HIE Fragile Areas

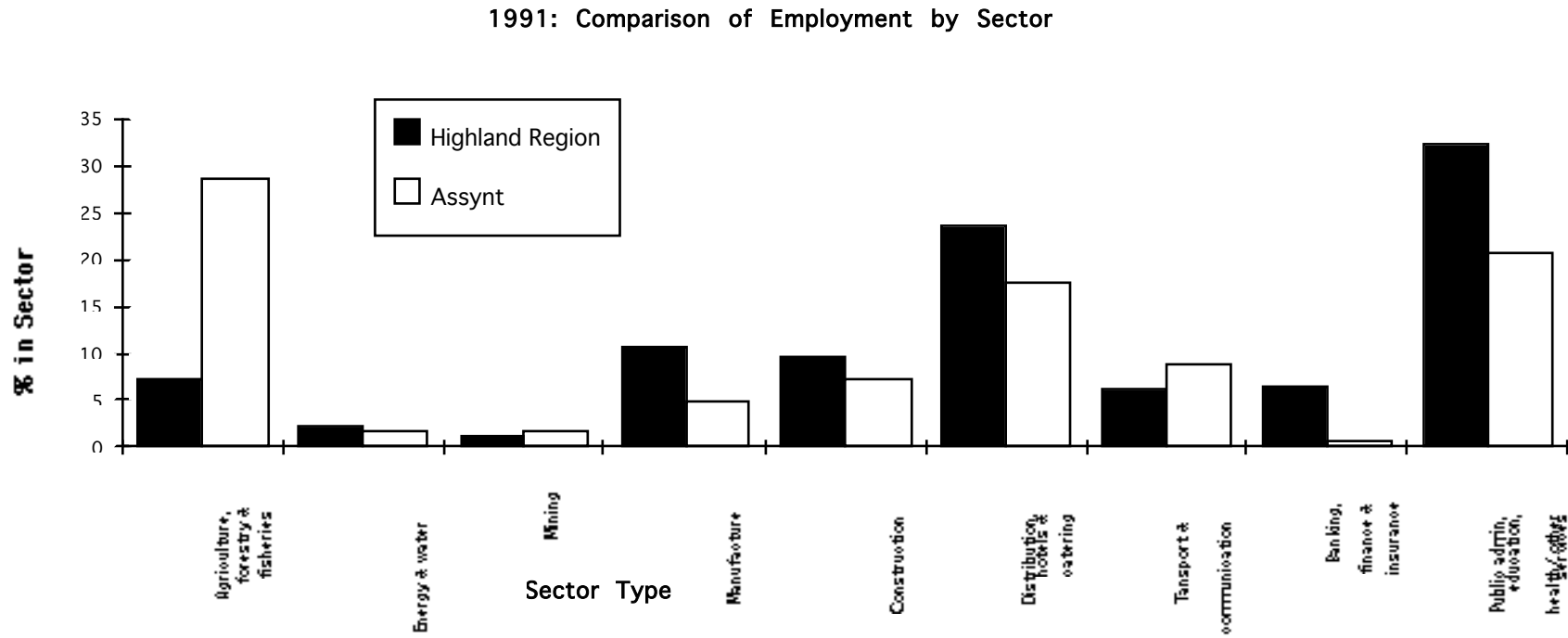
Source: HIE¹²⁰



¹²⁰HIE - Network Strategy Office

Figure 2.9: 1991 Comparison of Employment by Sector

Source: 1991 Census and Highland Council



Fragility

Across the HIE and Highland Region areas, a range of aspects characteristic of fragile rural areas are examined to establish the relative fragility of each sub area. Figure 2.7 illustrates the situation at a Highland Region level, using seven indicators of fragility.

The seven indicators used are:

- population density, by Highland Council settlement zone
- % population change between 1981 - 1991, by Highland Council settlement zone
- % change in population aged 0-15 years, between 1981 - 1991, by Highland Council settlement zone
- % people aged over 18 claiming income support, by 1996 Ward
- % of long term unemployment, by District Ward
- 10 minute drive time to 5 key services - PO; Food Shop; GP; Primary school; Petrol facility
- areas outwith 1.5 hr drive time of Inverness

The two accessibility indicators were mapped. A suitable cut-off point was chosen for the five numerical indicators. In order to be comparable with HIE fragility definitions, the worst third of areas was selected as the cut-off point. Since this exercise was aimed at measuring rural fragility, urban areas were substituted with the next rural area, if they fell into the '*worst third*' category. As the map shows, the parish of Assynt scores fairly highly using these fragility indicators, but the north coast of Sutherland continues to experience greater difficulties, scoring very highly. The ACT area exhibits the presence of four or five of the seven indicators in most of the area and three or two nearer Lochinver.

It should be born in mind that the majority of the rural Highlands and Islands continues to display characteristics of '*fragility*' - or the modern equivalent perhaps, of some aspects of the old '*Highland problem*'. Figure 2.8 illustrates the extent of this across the HIE area. HIE uses a slightly different method of ascertaining fragility, but the same core areas emerge as most fragile. HIE uses the following to define fragility:

Geographic

- Islands which lie off other islands and are not linked by a causeway
- A distance of more than 50 miles from a population centre of 5000
- Over 70% of roads are single track

Demographic

- Islands with a population of less than 2,500
- Population density less than the HIE area average (9 persons per square kilometre)
- More than 20% of the population is of pensionable age
- Population loss between last two censuses
- In-migration of economically active below the HIE average

Economic

- Economic activity rate below the HIE area average
- High average and/or seasonal unemployment
- Long term unemployment more than 25% above the HIE average
- High dependency on primary sector employment¹²¹

Again, Assynt is classified as fragile by this definition. Figure 2.8 illustrates the areas in the Highlands and Islands defined as fragile by this method.

Local Economy

In Assynt itself, the economy continues to rely very heavily on primary industries and tourism. Figure 2.9 above illustrates this sectorally when compared to the Highland region averages, through employment in each sector.

The economically active population constitutes 61.9% of the total population and compares favourably with the Highland Region rate of 62.4%. In 1996 average incomes in Assynt were often in the region of £8,000 - £12,000 p.a. and the cost of living was - and still is - higher than the national average.¹²² The result is a lower than average disposable income.¹²³ For Summer 2000, according to the Rural Scotland Price Survey, the cost of living in Assynt was just ahead of Edinburgh.¹²⁴ In 1996, the average Scottish wage was £17,420 p.a., while the Highland Region average was £16,380 p.a. The majority of

¹²¹HIE - Network Strategy Office

¹²²This is monitored on an on-going basis through the Rural Scotland Price Survey carried out quarterly by MacKay Consultants on behalf of HIE

¹²³Alexander D. 1996 *North Assynt Housing Study: A Report on a Survey of Housing Needs, Preferences and Supply Issues in the Townships of North Assynt* for ACT and Scottish Homes

households supplement incomes with other part-time work or crofting agriculture.

The local economy is dominated by three main sources of employment. These are Highland Stoneware, Ardvær Salmon and Fishing/ancillary activities. Public sector employment is also very significant. Tourism is important too, both as a full-time and a part-time income. A significant number of households rely on crofting agriculture for part of their income. In Assynt in 1991, 24.3% of the economically active population were self-employed. This compares to a Highland average of 13.3% and a Scottish average of 8.6%. It is typical of *'fragile'* areas that self-employment is higher than average.

Demography, Housing and Households

At the time of the 1991 census there were 456 permanent households. Some 6% of the population were living in what Highland Council classifies as *'non-permanent'* accommodation – caravans, in the main. In 1991 25.7% of the housing stock in Assynt comprised of *'second/holiday homes'*. The Highland Region average is 7.2%. There may be some inaccuracy in this figure since some houses will be let as a business run by local people. That type of *'holiday home'* has a different social and economic impact from that of a second home. The North West Demographic Survey in 1989 found that 31% of the housing stock was holiday homes and 2% was vacant.¹²⁵ Even allowing for some discrepancies in these figures, Assynt has a very high percentage of holiday homes. The next highest in the north west, in the 1989 survey, was Eddrachilles with 14%. However the 1991 census returns indicate high levels throughout the north west. It is important to note that at a local scale the distribution of holiday homes is uneven. In Assynt for instance they are concentrated in the crofting communities rather than Lochinver. Therefore the very local impact - economically, socially and psychologically - can be very significant. Certain townships end up having very few permanent residents and higher than average house prices. The 1996 housing needs

¹²⁴p3 This is monitored on an on-going basis through the Rural Scotland Price Survey carried out quarterly by MacKay Consultants on behalf of HIE. This is based on Ullapool, though in fact due to transport, costs in Assynt will be higher.

survey indicates that 34% of the housing stock in North Assynt Estate is 'holiday/second home' accommodation.¹²⁶ As implied earlier, in the attractive coastal townships of Balchladich, Raffin, Clashmore and Clashnessie, the proportion is much higher, at 50%. Among those who are permanently resident, the housing pattern is illustrated in Figure 2.10.

Tied housing is more important in Assynt than in Highland Region generally (4.4%). Housing association properties in 1991 were just below average. The housing situation has changed somewhat since 1991, in that by 1996 the number of housing association properties in Lochinver had more than doubled from fifteen to thirty-three. Figure 2.10 compares housing type in Highland Region, the Parish of Assynt and the North Assynt Estate.

As can be seen from Figure 2.10, owner-occupation in the ACT area is higher than the regional average and than that of the parish as a whole. The higher than average owner-occupation reflects the influence of crofting tenure and the '76 Act, which allowed tenants to buy their house and garden ground for fifteen times the annual rent. The 1996 housing needs survey indicates that on the North Assynt Estate 82% of housing is owner-occupied.

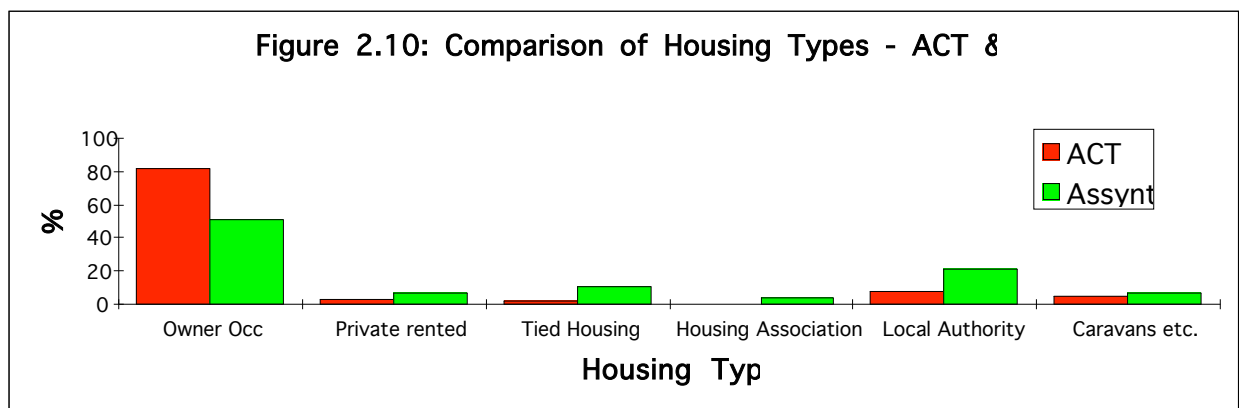
¹²⁵ **MacKay Consultants** 1989 *North West Demographic Survey*

¹²⁶ **Alexander D.** 1996 *North Assynt Housing Study: A Report on a Survey of Housing Needs, Preferences and Supply Issues in the Townships of North Assynt* for ACT and Scottish Homes.

In this category, 46% are in fact owner-occupied croft houses and 36% are ordinary owner-occupied houses. Among permanently resident households, 23% (34 houses) lived in *Below Tolerable Standard* (BTS) housing at the time of the survey. Of these, fifteen had pensioners living in them and thirteen were exclusively pensioners, while most were registered crofters. The remaining nineteen were occupied by younger households, four of whom were in private rented and fifteen of whom were owner-occupiers. In 1996, in the ACT area, there were five households resident in caravans and two in sub-standard chalets. The Highland Region average for caravan dwelling and other forms of housing, not deemed to be permanent, was 1.1% in 1991. In the parish of Assynt it was 6.2%, while in North Assynt in 1996 it was 5%.

In the North Assynt Estate in 1996 there were 149 households and 297 residents. This implies an average household size in the North Assynt Estate of 1.99 persons. This is another indicator of the unbalanced age structure and lack of children in the ACT area. The average household size in 1991 in the parish of Assynt was 2.3 persons. This average did not change greatly between 1991 and 1996 and if anything, as the 2001 census results are likely to reveal, will have improved.

Figure 2.10: Comparison of Housing Types in ACT area, Assynt and Highland Region
 Source: 1991 Census and 1996 North Assynt Housing Survey



Scarce Resources: People

One of Assynt's key assets and scarcest resources lies in the resident population, not least in view of the dramatic depopulation and consequent social and economic dislocation that the parish has suffered in the past century. In the West Highland Survey, Assynt is referred to as "the

disintegrating parish of Assynt".¹²⁷ At that time (1951) there were three hundred and fifty-two crofts and three hundred and forty-three croft tenants in the parish and the population had halved between 1931 and 1951.¹²⁸ The landlord had many vacant crofts in hand, a situation unthinkable in today's land hungry climate. In the area referred to as the 'North West' in the West Highland Survey – the parishes of Assynt, Eddrachilles, Durness, Tongue and Farr, there were estimated to be 1129 crofts and six or seven hundred crofters in 2001. Figure 2.11 illustrates their distribution. In 1991, on what became the North Assynt Estate, there were one hundred and forty tenants, of whom ninety-seven were male and forty-three were female. In 2001, on the North Assynt Estate, there were one hundred and eighty-two crofts and one hundred and thirty-seven tenants. Of these, ninety-six were male and forty-one were female. Figure 2.12 illustrates the proportion of male and female tenants and the absentee rate in 1991 and 2001. On average, in the past ten years, 30% of croft tenancies in North Assynt have been held by women. The number of female absentee tenants has fallen slightly in the last ten years, while the number of male absentee tenants has risen.

Figure 2.11: Distribution of crofts in the North West Parishes
Source: Crofters Commission

Parish	Number of Crofts	% share
Assynt	281	25.0%
Eddrachilles	163	14.5%
Durness	88	8.0%
Tongue	219	19.0%
Farr	378	33.5%
TOTAL	1129	100%

Figure 2.12: Gender of Tenants and Absentee Rates in North Assynt
Source: ACT records

	TOTAL Croft Tenants	Male	Female	Total Absentee	Male Absentee	Female Absentee	% Absentee
1991	140	97	43	42	26	16	30%
2001	137	96	41	45	32	13	33%

Gaelic and Culture in Assynt

It is a reflection of the circumstances some fifty years ago that in Assynt only 13.8% of the population today (1991) speak, reads or writes Gaelic. While this

¹²⁷p227 Darling F. F. (ed.) 1955 *Report of the West Highland Survey: A Study in Human Ecology* Oxford.

¹²⁸p200 Darling F. F. (ed.) 1955 *Report of the West Highland Survey: A Study in Human Ecology* Oxford.

compares favourably with the Highland Region average of 7.5%, it compares very unfavourably with other crofting areas. In the Trotternish peninsula in Skye for instance, 50% of the population speak, read or write Gaelic. In north Sutherland the rate is 17.9%, while particular Settlement Zones show higher rates. The Tongue Settlement Zone has a rate of 21.3%.

This low rate in Assynt does not only reflect in-migration and out-migration in the second half of the 20th century. A certain number of in-migrants were Gaelic speakers after all. This reflects strongly the psycho-cultural impacts of the deadly combination of high out-migration, extremely low and unstable household incomes, an ageing population and a strong awareness of the historical animosity towards Gaelic in 'Scotland' itself. The social pressures to abandon the Gaelic language were felt throughout the Gaidhealtachd. In the 1990s, a native speaker from the Western Isles explained it thus:

"When I was young my parents wanted us to be successful and have careers. But in those days you couldn't be successful and trendy AND be a Gaelic speaker"¹²⁹

A cousin of mine, also in the Western Isles, recalled that in her youth her aunt once spoke to her mother in the shop in Gaelic. Although the family only used Gaelic at home, they also only used English outside the home. Her mother was so angry and embarrassed by her sister using Gaelic in public that she barely spoke to her for months.¹³⁰ Many parents felt that their children needed to speak English as their first language in order to have a chance to '*get on in the world*'. It is interesting to note that the context to this is a very British obsession with a monoglot English speaking '*nation*'. This was a common theme in European 19th century state building. In the early 21st century, the pressure to have English as your first language remains and is mobilised in more diverse ways. Witness for instance the Westminster government Minister, David Blunkett, asserting in December 2001, that minority communities in the UK ought to learn to use English as their main - or *first* - language.

¹²⁹TV interview 1995

¹³⁰Fieldwork Diary 1993

In the past twenty years Gaelic has become both a vehicle for social and economic regeneration and a symptom of it. Despite this the actual numbers of Gaelic speakers has continued to decline, though the use of Gaelic has expanded into television, radio, newspapers, a range of literature for a range of age and interest groups, music, theatre and business. In the early 21st century a dilemma is involved in strategies for strengthening of the Gaelic language. In effect the impacts of strategies to date have resulted in a strong regaining of cultural confidence but it now appears that, without further changes this might result in survival of a culture without its language. In mainland crofting areas, as indicated by the percentage of Gaelic speakers, this is already the case. That situation does not however rule out future increases in Gaelic speakers and use. Assynt already has the regaining of cultural confidence and renewal combined with evolution of the culture, without a very high level language use. At a regional level insights are being sought from other Gaelic speaking communities globally. Cape Breton is arguably further along the road of cultural revival without equal language revival and Scottish activists are taking lessons from elsewhere.

Social and Cultural Change

In terms of the social and cultural composition of the North Assynt Estate, there are quite a high number of older return-migrants and in-migration by people with some sort of family connection. In-migration by people with no former connection has also played an important part. Elsewhere in Assynt, in the township of Elphin, in-migration of this sort has reversed the previous serious decline in that township and created new businesses and a younger, more balanced age structure.

Natural Environment: Species and Habitats

In common with all crofting areas, Assynt and the North Assynt Estate enjoys a very high quality of natural environment, created in the coastal areas by historic crofting agricultural practises. The range of terrain within the parish results in a broad range of habitat types, from coast and cliff to montane. Geology contributes to this variety, as already mentioned in the case of the Knockan /Inchnadamph area, which has Inchnadamph National Nature Reserve and Knockan Cliff National Nature Reserve. Machair dune systems

are present at Clachtoll/Stoer and Achmelvich. The sandstone seacliffs of Rhu Stoer support breeding colonies of fulmar, gannets, razorbills, guillemots and kittewake. In addition these cliff areas provide some excellent examples of ungrazed sub-maritime vegetation.

The cnockan and lochan landscapes inland are also important for birds. Red and Black throated divers nest and feed there. Other important birds breeding in Assynt include redwing, greenshank, merlin, peregrine, golden eagles and greylag geese. In the past few years there have been several sightings of sea eagles and osprey. In terms of species included in the Red Data Book, the area also has Water Vole, Azure Hawker dragonfly and fresh water mussels.

Important local flora includes a range of orchids, including lesser twayblade. Also present are pyramidal bugle, great fen sedge and wood bitter vetch. As mentioned earlier, a range of interesting species are found on the limestone inland at Inchnadamph. Globe flower has however been found in coastal locations too.

On the North Assynt Estate, remnant ancient woodland is found in the Achmelvich area and the Nedd/Drumbeg area. Small pockets exist elsewhere too. For many of the species present, this is their most significant northerly location. These woodlands include birch, aspen, rowan, hazel, willow, alder, wych elm, oak, holly and bird cherry.

Environmental Designations

Assynt and Coigach form a designated National Scenic Area. Figure 1.13 lists the environmental designations in the Assynt parish. Only three of the SSSIs are within - or partly within - the North Assynt Estate. These are Assynt Lochs, Loch Beannach Islands and Ardvar Woods. Surveys indicate a range of other high quality and undesignated habitats within the North Assynt Estate and the parish more generally.

Conclusion

The Highlands and Islands, as a culturally distinct region emerged in relation to and in opposition to Scotland in the late 14th century. The Highlands and Islands themselves were not and are not homogenous and are not exclusively Gaelic speaking. Orkney, Shetland and Caithness were not Gaelic speaking. Hence the Gaidhealtachd does not correspond to the Highlands and Islands and parts of what became Lowland Scotland were once Gaelic speaking.

The Lowlands increasingly described the Highlands in opposition to itself as barbaric, pagan and uncivilised. A variety of methods of colonisation were tried in the region. These included plantations of settlers, courting of local magnates, encouragement of local disputes, eradication of local language through state schooling and promotion of state approved religion, control of commercial development by government and small numbers of loyal groupings, road and garrison networks and construction of the inhabitants as less than human. During mercantilism and industrialisation, development was restricted to supply of raw materials. The feudalisation of land holdings which followed the pattern of vast clan lands, retained economic control in the hands of a few, ensured that profits did not stay in the region and prevented the majority of people from participation in economic development. Control was centred in Edinburgh, then London, and decisions were not taken in the interests of the inhabitants.

After finally achieving military control and enjoying the positive results of Anglicisation of the ruling class, things Highland were appropriated by the upper classes as fashionable. The Romantic movement played a part and the Royal seal on Highlandism – and a conspicuous silence on the subjects of evictions, poverty and famine - was provided by Queen Victoria and George IV.

During the Crofters Wars, helped by the extension of the franchise to all men, the plight of those who had become crofters attracted wide public attention and support. The urban Highlanders played a key role in this. Successful resistance, informed by the Irish example, created what we now think of as '*crofting*'. Economic hardship continued and it was not until the late 20th

century that any positive change emerged. Fundamental to the cessation of depopulation and the economic development which occurred has been a revival in local and regional identity, reworking of the status of the Gaelic language and a developing diasporic, global, Gaelic culture.

Gaelic has survived in Scotland most strongly in the crofting areas and so crofting tends to be symbolic of more than agricultural production or other income generation. By the very nature of its creation it is an ambiguous system, representing *both* past wrongs *and* successful popular struggle. The reworking of crofting as relevant and vibrant, and Gaelic, Shetland and Orkney cultures as rich and modern, has been fundamental to the momentum of economic recovery, in contrast to the grand Fordist schemes preferred in the post-war era. Dignity has stood at the centre of this seachange.

Figure 2.13: Environmental Designations

Source: SNH

Date of Creation	Name	Designation	Ha	Description
2000	Abhainn Clais an Eas Alt a Mhuilinn	SAC		fresh water mussels
1975	Ardvar Woodlands	SSSI/ part of Ardvar Loch & A'Mhuilinn Woods SAC (805.99ha) – proposed 2001	710.5	relict north western forest esp bryohpytes and ferns
1978	Assynt & Coigach	National Scenic Area	90,200	
2000	Assynt Lochs	SSSI/SPA – proposed and accepted 2001	1156.39	Group of 7 oligotrophic lochs and associated islands with relict deciduous woods. Breeding site for 4% of <i>Gavia artica</i>
1956 - parts 1987 - whole	Ben Mor Assynt	SSSI – SAC status in 2000 under name, Inchnadamph	9118.75	Calcerous plant communities on site astride the Moine Thrust. Limestone pavement, eutrophic loch and river and rich fauna.
1975 - Eilean na Gartaig current boundary 1987	Cam Loch	SSSI/SPA - part of Inverpolly & nearby Lochs - incs Loch Awe, Loch Ailsh, Urigill	360.3	Ancient ungrazed woodland on islands
1956	Inchnadamph	NNR /SAC within Ben Mor Assynt SSSI	1323	Karst landforms and associated vegetation
1971 boundary change - 1986	Inverpolly	NNR/SAC	11,946.3	Range of habitats characteristic of region – from sea to mountina, including woodland.
1963 - 1975 - boundary change 1987 - legislation & boundary change	Knockan Cliff	SSSI/part NNR	361.73	Cambrian limestones, classic Moine Thrust window
1999	Loch Awe & Loch Ailsh	SSSI/ SPA	146.03	Oligotrophic lochs, water plants. 1% of British breeding population of <i>Gavia artica</i>
1963	Loch Beannach Islands	SSSI/ SPA Assynt Lochs includes this site Specially Protected Area	32.5 ha	Birch-Rowan Woodland; ground flora like an oakwood. Schedule 1 bird nesting site
1963 1984 - boundary change	Loch Glencoul	SSSI	1094.5	Mixed deciduous woodland; maritime zonation.
1996	Loch Urigill	SSSI/ SPA	322	Herb rich field layer; woodland; birds.

Chapter Three Permission to Speak?

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Chapter Three

Permission to Speak?

Introduction

In this Chapter I discuss the theoretical approach which evolved from my fieldwork. I then outline my methodologies, both qualitative and quantitative and provide an account of the fieldwork which was undertaken as part of this thesis.

Why choose a Post-Colonial Approach?

The previous chapter illustrated, through an historical approach, the ways in which the Scottish Highlands and Islands as a region has been bound up in colonialism. The region was actively and aggressively colonised, and together with Ireland, provided a testing ground for British colonial methods. Through the rapid transformation of land use and economy created by clearance and improvement, the region became an important and lucrative source of raw materials for manufacturing industries in Lowland Scotland and England. The economic benefits did not accrue within the region and were not generally spent in the region. Large numbers of people were displaced as a result of this activity and many of them emigrated to North America and later to Australia and New Zealand. The people of the region hence became colonisers themselves and played a significant part in '*making their own*', land which was taken from the native people, frequently by force. Highland men came to be viewed as '*natural soldiers*' and in the words of Wolfe, "*no great mischief if they fall*". Both as soldiers and as settlers, Highland people were very useful to the British Empire since they were accustomed to a physically arduous life in remote rural locations. In the course of the creation of Scotland a sense of the Highlands and Islands as a cultural region - a place rather than an agglomeration of disparate settlements and peoples - emerged.

As a result of the Highland diaspora and subsequent colonisation, Gaelic communities became established across the globe, particularly in Canada, USA, Australia and New Zealand. Today if you listen to programmes like *Celtic Connections* on Radio Scotland, browse in any well stocked music or book shop, or attend a range of cultural events in Scotland, you are as likely

to find books, CDs and performances by artists from Cape Breton or North Carolina as from South Uist or Skye. Sydney University in Australia launched a research project in 2001 looking at Australian Gaelic speaking communities. A strong and ever growing diasporic culture has emerged from these migrations and privations. Faster and cheaper international travel, economic globalisation and glocalisation, new communication technologies and cultural revival in the Scottish Highlands and Islands themselves have all contributed to this diverse diasporic weave.

In this chapter I seek '*permission to narrate*', in acknowledgement of Spivak's question: '*Can the Subaltern Speak?*'¹

At the outset I experienced extreme difficulties in documenting why I felt that approaches focused on identity, new '*voices*' and '*allowing*' marginalised groups to '*speak for themselves*' did not meet the needs of this study. I produced a number of outlandish and dramatic written explanations. None of my efforts achieved what I sought nor helped me to find a more appropriate approach. Any notion of allowing marginalised groups to speak for themselves includes the granting of permission to so do and must therefore surely be an act organised and sanctioned by the binary opposite - or centre. This notional '*author*' might be an '*external*' author or indeed someone identified as an '*organic intellectual*'. Identity does not have strong explanatory power or mobility and, except when deployed strategically, carries a danger of reduction into fundamentalism. It is also inward looking and can hence tend to isolate rather than liberate - and privilege the individual, as opposed to agency. In an academic context, at play here may be essentialising processes of academic production. Finally, it was the approach taken by Spivak which clarified what was worrying me.

Spivak points out that the '*speaking*' act to which she refers involves both speaking and hearing to complete the speech act.² Speaking is a transaction

¹ A paraphrasing of Spivak's chapter title in Williams P and Chrisman L. 1993 *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory* On p79 she refers to Said's discussion of the problem under the title "Permission to Narrate" in *London Review of Books* 16th February 1984.

² See Spivak. G. C. 1993 pp 53 - 65 in Williams P. and Chrisman L. (ed) 1993 *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* Harvester Wheatsheaf England for a version of

between speaker and listener. She explains her suggestion that the subaltern cannot speak by pointing out that in a colonised country the subaltern(s) exist(s) in a space which is cut off from the lines of mobility.³ Below the foreign elite and the indigenous elite are these lines of mobility - or "*vectors of upward, downward, sideward, backward mobility*".⁴ Drawing on Subaltern Studies, Spivak suggest that:

"[...] every moment of insurgency that they have fastened onto has been a moment when subalternity has been brought to a point of crisis; the cultural constructions that are allowed to exist within subalternity, removed as it is from other lines of mobility, are changed into militancy. In other words, every moment that is noticed as a case of subalternity is undermined. We are never looking at the pure subaltern. There is then, something of a not-speakingness in the very notion of subalternity."⁵

Spivak makes clear also that there can be no question of a romantic attachment to '*pure subalternity*' nor any interest in preserving subalternity, an impulse which might flow from such a notion. Bound up with this danger is the treatment by some, of organic intellectuals who come to be spokespersons for subalternity, as token, speaking subalterns.⁶ Spivak also clarifies some dangerous confusions in terms of identity and agency. She proposes that agency does not follow necessarily from identity claims and that a shift from identity to agency does not make a distinction between good or bad agency.

the original article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" See **Spivak G.C.** "*An Unfashionable Grammatology*" for a revised version of that article. See pp 287 - 308 in **Landry D. and MacLean G.** (ed) 1996 *The Spivak Reader* Routledge London for an interview with Spivak discussing this article.

³ Use of the term 'subaltern' comes originally from Gramsci who refers to the 'subaltern classes' and compares the function of intellectuals of 'the urban type' 'to that of subaltern officers in the army'. See for instance p14 in **Hoare Q. and Nowell Smith G.** (ed) 1996 *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antoni Gramsci* Lawrence and Wishart London. Post-colonial uses of the term 'subaltern' refers to subordinate of non-elite social groups. From the work of the Subaltern Studies group the subaltern can be seen as a product of 'networks of differential, contradictory strands' rather than as an identity category 'with sovereign self-consciousness'. The Subaltern Studies group is a group of Indian historians who are writing history 'from below', from the point of view of peasant insurgency. Ranajit Guha talks of 'the prose of counterinsurgency' and the ways in which colonial archive material takes its shape not just through the will of colonial administrators but also through the will of 'the insurgent'. See pp 205 - 236 **Landry D. and MacLean G.** (ed) 1996 *The Spivak Reader* Routledge and **Guha R.** (ed) 1982 - 1988 *Subaltern Studies* Vol 1 - 6 Oxford University Press New Delhi.

⁴p289 **Landry D. and MacLean G.** (ed) 1996 *The Spivak Reader* Routledge London.

⁵See p289 **Landry D. and MacLean G.** (ed) 1996 *The Spivak Reader* Routledge London.

⁶ The concept of the 'organic intellectual' comes from Gramsci who made distinctions between the functions, impact and roles of rural and urban and traditional and organic intellectuals. See for instance pp5 - 23 in **Hoare Q. and Nowell Smith G.** (ed) 1996 *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antoni Gramsci* Lawrence and Wishart London.

She asserts that agency comes from the principle of *'accountable reason'*. Viewing agency in that way requires that "one has to assume the possibility of intention, one has to assume even the freedom of subjectivity in order to be responsible".⁷ Spivak also provides informative thoughts on two kinds of representation - that of attempting to represent (*vertreten* - speaking for - within the state or political economy) and to re-present (*darstellen* - within the theory of the Subject). By running both of these senses of representation into one, intellectuals tend to make themselves transparent.⁸ Through this awareness she draws attention to representation as a kind of *'staging'*.

Her original treatment of the question - can the subaltern speak? - makes clear that the effort to speak does not collapse into the act of talking. The *'speech act'* includes voting, shouting, eating, not-eating, washing dishes, organising and socialising. Her examination of the story of Bhuvanewari Bhaduri in the original article shows one way in which speaking is not just talking - Bhuvanewari Bhaduri's suicide is her speaking, but the act was not completed through difficulties of translation and the wilful absence of committed listeners. It should also be noted that there is no pure subaltern here - Bhuvanewari Bhaduri was middle class. The possibility of subalternity acts as a reminder which brings into focus the power laden structures and encounters through which globalised capital, new international divisions of labour and post-colonial relationships operate.

Through my own work, I take issue with the seductions of what we might usefully term *'metropolitan intellectualism'*. This *'metropolitanism'* is inherently suspicious of both the embodied figure of the angry marginalised subaltern and of any claims by such a figure to name, occupy and delimit territories for her(him)self. The emergence (or discovery) of such claims implies changes in the spaces of subalternity and an accessing of the vectors of mobility, through which the subaltern, or representatives thereof, might be speaking. Spivak's intervention has illuminated the need to avoid writing geographies which cast such actions as heroic and *'uncontaminated'* by the practises and ideas of

⁷p294 Landry D. and MacLean G. (ed) 1996 *The Spivak Reader* Routledge London.

⁸See p70 in Spivak G C. *Can the Subaltern Speak?* In Williams P. and Chrisman L. (ed) 1994 *Colonial and Post-Colonial Theory* Harvester Wheatsheaf Hertfordshire.

the coloniser. Her use of deconstruction helps to avoid juxtaposing coloniser with colonised in such a way as to imply a dubious 'purity' in the subaltern's positioning and practises. Fanon was very clear on this point, in his consideration of violence and desire in *'The Wretched of the Earth'*. In the case ofcrofting communities, the actors have historically been both colonised and coloniser.⁹

In trying to present a relevant historical background to my work, in the previous chapter, I am constantly reminded of Spivak's suggestion of the 'non-speaking' status of the subaltern and of her useful engagement with issues of translation. Many of the ideas and phrases used in Gaelic to describe or illustrate Gaidhealtachd relationships to land do not readily translate into English and, when translated, appear to acquire a quaintness they did not hitherto possess. The term '*duthchas*' was used more than once in the last chapter and is an excellent example. There is no one word translation, but the shortest translation might be '*a kindness*' (from the land). This word is not in common use today, but it has been reworked recently when used as the name of a project aimed at creating grass roots sustainability strategies in three local areas. When it comes to writing histories, the complexities multiply, and it is hard to avoid the sensation that an awful lot is '*lost in the translation*' and that the act of speaking and hearing is not being achieved. Spivak highlights this problem in three ways, all of which can be understood as relevant to the non-speakingness of the subaltern.

Words and Phrases

She notes:

"I had in 'Echo' a footnote which was just two lines of Bengali poetry. Now this footnote will be incomprehensible to non-Bengali readers. Now in order for me to explain this footnote, I would in fact reduce the power of the footnote to a zilcho. [.....]To an extent that is also my way of pointing at what the arrogance of multiculturalism quite often forgets, that there are strict limits to multiculturalist benevolence. ...And in fact it also has something about translations, that one has to perceive that every translation - necessary but impossible - is also impossible. In fact

⁹ The nature of participation in the role of 'coloniser' are varied, including military participation, trade, religious activities and 'pioneers'.

a translation is always an imperfect solution of a problem - as is the original, in another way."¹⁰

As discussed above, consideration of the word *duthchas* also illustrates this point.

Events

The Triumph of Durga is an important holiday and celebration for Indian Hindus. For some Indian tribals - or First Nations - it is a day of defeat

"Because the golden-yellow-colored goddess, winning over the principle of evil, who is in the disguise of a buffalo, might very well conceal the seeds of a historical-mythic event which for tribals betokens the defeat in the hands of the invading 'Aryan' Hindus".¹¹

Spivak points out that most caste-Hindus do not know this. This points to the way in which the same event can have different symbolic meanings, different heroes and differing casts of characters. In the previous chapter it was noted that the story of MacBeth was once such example. MacBeth had a legitimate claim to the Scottish crown and enjoyed a successful ten year reign. North of the Highland Line this was well known and later claims to the Scottish crown from Chiefs might well have reflected that event. Through the work of Shakespeare, MacBeth is known to most English speakers/readers as an evil threat and a usurper. MacBeth's legitimacy was written out of history in Scots and English and in those languages was despised rather than celebrated. Translating these kinds of mutually incomprehensible histories into one text is only ever partial and is always a struggle.

Processes

In illustrating what she means by claiming that the subaltern cannot speak, Spivak chooses the example of the complicated irrigation ditches which existed in Bengal at the time when the British arrived there in the 18th century. This system had been developed and maintained in order to manage flooding in the interests of local agriculture and settlements. Maintenance

¹⁰p304 Subaltern Talk: Interview with the Editors in Landry D. and MacLean G. (ed) 1996 *The Spivak Reader* Routledge London.

¹¹p26 Bonding in Difference, Interview with Alfred Arteaga in Landry D. and MacLean G. (ed) 1996 *The Spivak Reader* Routledge London.

was achieved through the feudal system in place at the time. Feudal chiefs required their subordinates (serfs in European languages) to carry out repair and maintenance as part of the feudal relations. The British did not know what the canals and channels were for. When the British achieved control, the feudal chiefs became tax collectors on their behalf and did not continue to ensure upkeep of the canals. Nor did anyone in the British East India Company. Through gradual collapse and lack of maintenance, the canals became choked and then stagnant and provided ideal mosquito habitats. The British then began to destroy the canals. Flooding gradually worsened and eroded the area's previous prosperity. The former serfs, throughout hundreds of years, fought persistently and unsuccessfully with the British police.

In the 1930s a British waterworks inspector correctly identified the waterways as a flood and irrigation management system of some complexity. His report - "*a text from the other side*" - recommended restoration in the interests of economic recovery and improvement.¹² In due course the World Bank funded the construction of levees in order to achieve flood management. Local landless peasants and fisherfolk are currently and persistently breaking down these levees. In the face of this, ecological workers now recommend restoration of the ancient system instead. However, the old system was built slowly with great attention to the "*the rhythms of those very young rivers*".¹³ Any such work today would be "*capital-intensive, cost-efficient and fast*". Spivak offers this story in illustration of some two hundred years of "continuous subaltern insurgency, always failing, but continuous to this day".¹⁴ She cites this as "*a spectacular example of the subaltern not being able to 'speak'*" and explains that even when one has '*uttered*':

¹² p291 Subaltern Talk: Interview with the Editors in Landry D. and MacLean G. (ed) 1996 *The Spivak Reader* Routledge London.

¹³p 291 Subaltern Talk: Interview with the Editors in Landry D. and MacLean G. (ed) 1996 *The Spivak Reader* Routledge London.

¹⁴p291 Subaltern Talk: Interview with the Editors in Landry D. and MacLean G. (ed) 1996 *The Spivak Reader* Routledge London.

"one was constructed by a certain kind of psychobiography, so that the utterance itself [...] would have to be interpreted in the way in which we historically interpret anything".¹⁵

This story and process is illuminating in terms of the Scottish Highlands and Islands, and might serve to translate the deep animosity towards environmental organisations endemic among crofting communities today. Organic intellectuals try to soften the public utterances of this animosity, in an attempt to secure social and economic benefits for their communities from biodiversity and its management. This softening is also aimed at illustrating that crofting communities do not themselves despise '*the environment*' or their environment, which is highly valued by others. These others demonstrate the high value that they attribute to habitats in the Scottish Highlands and Islands through designation - drawing lines around pieces of land and naming and labelling in the process. Through designation, use and management is changed and controlled by agencies charged by central government with that responsibility. Today it is Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). Previously it was the Nature Conservancy Council, Scotland. SNH in turn increasingly uses '*the community's*' language - or the word community - in a persistent attempt to illustrate that really '*we*' all want the same thing. But to those who inhabit the role of '*ignorant*' peasant/crofter with some flair and ingenuity:

"They are always talking about land management. SNH doesn't own the land".¹⁶

The song below illustrates that power and dignity are at stake in this entanglement. It is sung to the tune of "*The Massacre of Glencoe*" and was written in the 1980s, on the north coast of Sutherland. For some time it was sung at local ceilidhs and eventually it was published in a local newspaper - *Am Bratach*. When it was published there was a great furore in SNH and the Local Enterprise Company (LEC) because the crofter who wrote it was employed by Caithness & Sutherland Enterprise (CASE).¹⁷ SNH management

¹⁵p291 Subaltern Talk: Interview with the Editors in Landry D. and MacLean G. (ed) 1996 *The Spivak Reader* Routledge London.

¹⁶Fieldwork 1994.

¹⁷ CASE is one of the ten Highland LECs, overseen by HIE – Highlands and Islands Enterprise. This structure replaced the old HIDB – Highlands and Islands Development Board. HIE reports direct to the Scottish Executive.

felt strongly that it was inappropriate and destructive for an employee of a public agency to publish material of this sort.

Chorus:

Oh cruel are the folk
And it's no joke
We should have taken a stand
Oh cruel are the folk
Who at one stroke
Designated our Land

Verse 1

They came from the city
Looking so sleek
In their Barbour jackets
Green wellies on feet
And they told us that our land
It was unique
And they made it an SSSI

Verse 2

They gave us a list of things not to do now
Like planting a tree
Or using a plough
Or taking your motorbike across the Flow
On their precious SSSI

Verse 3

Now from this list I could go on forever
Like feeding your sheep
Or burning **their** heather
And if they could
They'd control the weather
On their precious SSSI

Verse 4

Compensation's a word
I don't think they've heard
Unless you're a Lord
Or even a Laird
But we are the crofters
Working so hard
Trying to live on their SSSI

Singing has a very important place in the culture of the Gaidhealtachd. Traditionally, a huge range of songs were used during work - waulking songs or rowing, songs for instance. The importance of songs was both everyday and bardic. It has always been usual to compose songs or verses commenting on current events, whether personal or political. A highly prized skill is the ability to alter songs while singing to make fun of someone or to reflect recent events or gossip. In this, it is also common to re-use tunes for this purpose. In addition, some people suggest that in the late 18th and early 19th century, when evangelical Presbyterianism took hold in many island and Highland communities, singing became even more important since it could not be destroyed in the same way as musical instruments could be. The song quoted above is therefore very typical of an enduring cultural mode - it re-uses an

older tune; the tune itself carries certain allusions with it; the message challenges the rightness and wisdom of prevailing government policy and highlights the power relations and class position of the agencies of government *vis-a-vis* the people/crofters living on *the land* which is being designated from 'above'.

In a Highlands and islands context, already we can see emerging from this account a variety of power laden encounters and relationships revolving around 'the land' – part of that dynamic is the concept of duthchas and state and EU interventions directed at 'environmental protection'. The same space is seen as a space of agricultural production and 'everyday' life, juxtaposed in the song with conceptualisation of the space as 'extraordinary' on environmental/scientific grounds. Fanon noted perceptively that:

"For a colonised people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity. But this dignity has nothing to do with the dignity of the human individual: for that human individual has never heard tell of it."¹⁸

With regard to the evangelical Presbyterianism which came to the Highlands and Islands in the 18th and 19th century and led to the Disruption, it may be that this religious movement provided one of the first effective 'mobility vectors' in a regional context. The region and people had for some time been characterised as barbaric and pagan. Involvement in this religious community provided - for men only - experience in debate and public speaking through biblical learning. Protestant theology provided a vehicle through which to achieve Spivak's speech act. The late 19th century development of Highland liberation theology was one result of this.

Space and Place

Spivak's work is particularly relevant in geographical work because she focuses so much on spaces.

¹⁸p34 **Fanon F.** 1985 *The Wretched of the Earth* Penguin England - Preface by Jean Paul Sartre; Translation by Constance Farrington.

Positioning Places

It is worthwhile, at this stage, to consider the place of the Highlands and Islands – and indeed crofting and crofters – in relation to the academe. This is a ‘community’ in which the Highlands and Islands, particularly the areas that are traditionally Gaelic speaking, have been discursively ‘created’. It might be argued that this creation has been in opposition to an academically imagined or enacted Lowland Scottish Same. My discussion moves between descriptions of processes at work at a regional scale and details of the same effects at the scale of the parish of Assynt. I do not wish to imply that local conditions and regional patterns can be assumed to mirror each other, and I try to highlight this disjuncture in an historical context. Discourses employed in ‘*The Improvement*’ project known as ‘*The Clearances*’ were introduced in the last chapter. I try to illustrate the colonial flavour of these ‘improving’ aims, but also to indicate the circuits of colonialism and capital at work. These circuits were peopled and serve very well to illustrate the between-ness or the strategic nature of crofting’s subaltern voices. As already noted, the majority of those who emigrated in the course of the past two hundred years went to the ‘new worlds’. These Gaels, some forcibly displaced, some resisting by leaving and others seeking a better life, were often the active and willing foot soldiers (subalterns?) of British Imperialism. In Australia immigrants from the Gaidhealtachd are implicated in the worst slaughter of native peoples experienced there. In North America these Gaels were busy taking well loved lands from other indigenous peoples and spilling blood to assert that claim. Having been pushed out of their crofts at home, the same peoples are found fighting for the ‘old country’ in the Civil War. After defeat large numbers moved over the border into Canada rather than be part of the youthful United States.¹⁹ There were of course notable exceptions to this and marriages with native Americans resulting in long standing family ties right up to the present day.²⁰ However, in outposts of empire on every continent were to be found Gaels working as clerks, cooks, soldiers, mothers, entrepreneurs, farmers, explorers, shopkeepers – you name it – they did it, in the company of all the

¹⁹A variety of these histories have been traced in ‘Na h’Eilthirich’ or ‘The Emigrants/Exiles’, a weekly series running on BBC2 throughout February and March 1999.

²⁰ For more detail see **Hunter J.** 1996 *Glencoe and the Indians* Mainstream Edinburgh; 1994 *A Dance Called America: The Scottish Highlands, the United States and Canada* Mainstream Edinburgh.

other Scots similarly involved. Placenames and street names still tell the tale: Glendale in California; Caledon Street in Area 7, Johannesburg, which was bulldozed in the apartheid era; the use of Petronella as a female first name on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua.²¹

The Highlands and Islands of Scotland are a place very much made in the minds of outsiders. To understand this I think it is helpful to situate the Highlands and Islands and crofters within an imaginary geography of Scotland. Imaginary geographies are not false or pretend pictures set against a known *'real'*. Imaginary geographies are about the manner in which people conceptualise places - and hence people and cultures. At a global scale Edward Said shows how this works with *'East'* and *'West'*. The West depends on beliefs that the East is mysterious, erotic, uncivilised and brutal to constitute its own identity as rational, civilised and decent. Images of things *'Highland'* are central to representations of Scotland both inside and outside Scotland. At the same time things Highland - culture and people - have historically been treated with anything from embarrassment to attempts at eradication on a number of grounds. The grounds have often been economic advancement of the region and (self-) improvement of the people. Edward Said suggests that the process of symbolic exclusion is achieved through a strategy of positional superiority whereby the High is maintained in a myriad of possible relationships with the Low, while always maintaining the upper hand. In a spatialised form the Low/High dualism engages with a Central/Marginal dualism in marking out the cultures of marginal places and spaces - and the cultures of the marginalised. Scotland finds itself on the wrong end of a binary opposition in distinction to England, where England is cosmopolitan and advanced in contrast to a parochial and backwards Scotland. The Gaidhealtachd finds itself in the same relationship within Scotland, cast in opposition to the Lowlands.

²¹For details and context see "The Sharp End of the Knife", produced and directed by Barbara Orton of True TV & Film Productions. In this film, community activist Cathy McCormack from Easterhouse in Glasgow visits South Africa. A museum about 'Area 7' is featured. On the walls are all the streetname plaques which one of the demolition workers saved and kept for many years. The floor is a huge street plan of the community which was once there. People are encouraged to write their names on the street plan in the location where their

If this is so, why should characterisations of the Highlands provide the central symbols in representations of Scotland? Since the 14th century this cultural region has been seen as separate and culturally inferior, while also lacking any culture in relation to perceived 'real' levels of social and economic development. This has been the basis of a discourse of improvement (development) enhanced by the imagined 'wildness' of Highland clans. The advent of the literary Highlands as romantic wilderness and the folklore movement, equated Highlanders, particularly the peasantry, with qualities of virtue and noble humility. The adoption of certain trappings of these imagined Highlands by the upper classes in Scottish and British society successfully invented a tradition. Somehow the Scotland of industrial and urban might became a tributary of a south flowing stream while Scotland's own Scotland is a multitude of noble savages just off the croft. The High maintains its superiority in myriad of different relationships to the Low. The Highlands today are hence imagined as an empty wilderness and crofting provides a remnant of the past on the doorstep of the present:

"[T]he top includes that low symbolically, as a primary eroticised constituent of its own fantasy life. [...] It is for this reason that what is socially peripheral is so frequently symbolically central. The low-Other is despised and denied at the level of political organisation and social being whilst it is instrumentally constitutive of the shared imaginary repertoires of the dominant culture." ²²

Self as Other

The poem which follows helps to elucidate one aspect of colonial experience – the effect of seeing self as Other.

Alba fo Dhìmeas

Chuala mi oileanach ag ràdh
'Luchd nan eilean, chan iogantach'
gur suarach an cultar –
dè 'n cothro a th'aca air ealain?

Is lean fear eile air,
'Mura biodh an t-Ath-Leasachadh, bhitheadh Mozart is Verdi
againn fhìn ann an Alba...

Tha mi ag ionnsachadh bhuapa

homes once stood. The Petronella is a Scottish dance. Angela from Bluefields, one of the participants in the SEAD Study Tour in 1993, has a friend called Petronella.

²²See p5 **Stallybrass P. and White A.** 1986 *Politics and Poetics of Transgression* Methuen London.

gu bheil obair an oideachais coilionta;
a-nist chan fhaic iad
an grinneas nan dualchas.

Scotland Despised

I heard a student say,
'The teuchters, it's not surprising
their culture's pathetic;
what chance have they to see the arts?'

And another continued,
'But for the Reformation
we'd have a Mozart and a Verdi
of our own in Scotland...'

I'm learning from them
the business of education is complete,
now they will not see
the fineness in their heritage.²³

At the time of writing this poem, the poet taught at Telford College, Edinburgh and the student narrators are presumably students she overheard chattering at the College. She now teaches at Sabhal Mor Ostaig. Notice that the *'teuchters'* are *'they'*, positioned in opposition to the *'we'* of central Scotland. *'They'* have no chance to see *'the'* arts, meaning high art, proper culture. From this the reader may infer that in the opinion of the speakers - the students - the teuchters are without culture or at least without any culture which registers as such in a *'civilised'* setting. The *'culture'* of the teuchters is *'pathetic'*, a thing which inspires pity and scorn. A thing from which one might turn away through embarrassment and shame. The speakers, the *'we'* equate Scotland with themselves in the phrase *'of our own in Scotland'*. But this is not a binary opposition, for the Scotland these students see and know is also pathetic in cultural terms when compared to the *'proper'* high art of Europe. *'But for the Reformation'*, their Scotland might have been part of that rather than an audience to such creativity. What marks the *'we'* of this poem and their Scotland out from the pitiful teuchters is the ability of this Scotland to recognise this difference and to *'appreciate'* high art as represented by Mozart and Verdi. The narrow-mindedness of Scotland's Reformation has robbed them of this possibility. What they do have is the habit of looking south for edification and enlightenment, in order to know themselves. Hence *'now they will not see the fineness in their heritage'* because all things proper and

²³p10 **Bateman M** 1991 in **Whyte ed** 1991 *An Aghaidh na Soirraidheachd/In the Face of Eternity* Polygon Edinburgh.

useful come from elsewhere. While the teuchters do not have the cultural capital to feel or to notice such tragedy, the people of this Scotland are cultural consumers not producers. The poem implies that it is this inferiorist discourse which is self-fulfilling.²⁴

Seen from the Outside

The quote below describes other overheard conversations amongst holidaymakers in Assynt:

“...we were coming back, and they were talking about, there was a dance that night in Lochinver, and they would just go along to the dance cos you’d get a hang of a laugh at the locals. And I don’t think it was the word local they used – it was some other word, and I can’t remember. But it was just like saying – we’re superior. I mean – we come from Drumchapel in Glasgow! But we’re superior to these people here. And I thought, well – they really make you sick these people... they do.... They seem to have this attitude – if you come from a town, you’re better than somebody who comes from the country! I don’t know why it is. Maybe it’s a lack of communication – they don’t really try to find out.”²⁵

In what way *‘the locals’* would provide such amusement is not specified, perhaps only guessed at and feared. The same speaker expands on this theme:

“There was a lady in when I was in at the Centre there. And she was talking – well, they went to the meeting and were quite interested – visitors. She was talking about secondary schooling and that, teaching and O Level courses and that. And she was talking to me as though I never knew what an O Level course was – or Highers were. And I was saying to myself – well, really – but does she think that nobody from here has ever gone to University or ...? I mean that was her attitude – that everybody sort of stopped their schooling at six and a half or something like that. That we didn’t know what anything else was. And I was thinking – that’s dreadful you know.”

And she continues:

“I know I read before that I think the Highlands send out about 25% to Further Education, which is a lot higher – whereas the towns are only about 12.5%. So there’s nearly double going to Higher/Further

²⁴ For discussion of inferiorist discourses at a Scottish level see **Beveridge G. and Turnbull R.** 1989 *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture* Polygon Edinburgh.

²⁵ Interview 1992 ACT / Female 55-60

Education per capita. So they're obviously doing far better than many in the towns."

Notice that those going on to/into Further Education are '*sent out*'. Out of the area? Out of the cultural region? Out of one society into another, in the view of the speaker? She then explains where she thinks such ideas or prejudice against Islanders and Highlanders come from:

"I think people tend to think that Highlanders are not very bright. But I think this comes from – you know – when people visit. They have this reservation – right, I'm going to see what you do before You know, it goes back to the Clearances – that they're wary, sort of, of strangers. Like you see Crofter X there, he will sort of find out who a person is – what they are, before he says anything. So they have this sort of holding back until they find out what the person is or who they are and what they're about. I think maybe this is what they think. That we're pretty dumb because of this. But it's not – it's because they're just holding back to see – right – whether this person is dangerous to us or what they want out of us. They're being canny more than anything. And I think this is where they get the idea from. It's probably just ignorance. People just have the prejudice before hand about ideas."²⁶

It is not easy for anyone to put into a few sentences in the course of an interview the sense of denial expressed more vigorously in the poem above. The speaker in these quotes expresses some sense of her suspicions on this matter, but most people struggle to formalise such thoughts in a general way. For some this is because putting these fleeting subjectivities into words undermines the position of the speaker more than those being spoken about. It is all a bit '*chip on the shoulderish*'. It is the sort of thing which is more properly dealt with '*off-stage*', perhaps through humour. Literary examples such as the classroom scene in Brian Friel's play '*Translations*' capture some of this very effectively.²⁷ Aspects of this are expressed far more clearly in relation to specific examples. This I will discuss in a moment.

For some commentators, to talk about this sort of – let us face it – emotion is, in a sense to give it too much reality. It is also to position yourself amongst

²⁶Interview 1992 ACT/Female 55-60

²⁷ For an extract where the English soldiers can't understand the schoolchildren because they think the schoolchildren are speaking Gaelic, when in fact they are speaking Latin see p105 **Friel B.** from *Translations* in **MacLeod F. (ed)** 1989 *Togail Tir – Marking Time: The Map of the Western Isles* Acair Ltd and An Lanntair Gallery Stornoway.

the irrational/emotional cohorts, which is not necessarily helpful for the speaker. This tension is also an example of subalternity where the speaker is unable to speak a 'pure' language of her/his 'own truth'. Hence some may distance themselves from giving such discussion 'airtime' in a general sense:

"Well, it's hard to separate out banter from prejudice from myth, but sure – these are very depressed, difficult areas. But you have to remember that this is a very depressed, difficult area to live in. Economically, until recently, there's been no future here. The population dived, from 3000 people in Assynt for example – in what – 1841? To 800 people in 1951. And that's the loss of nearly three quarters of your population. Now that's recovering slightly, but these were hard times. People were hungry, very hungry. And that's changed and the population's stabilised – it's picking up again – but that will bring changes with it of course."²⁸

The speaker is responding to a question about allegations of a culture of degeneracy in crofting areas, a 'subsidy junky' mentality. Here we see some sort of striving for a metanarrative based on (rational) economic logic and acceptable historical analysis. Key indicators such as demographic statistics and economic analysis are called upon. The speaker is knowingly positioning the story and himself in a particular way. Other participants in my fieldwork do the same sort of thing in a different way.

Womack, in *Improvement and Romance: Constructing the Myth of the Highlands*, tracks the changing deposition of constructions of the Highlands as a place and the people in that place.²⁹ One aspect of that is the visual, the educated gaze. He describes the way in which integration of Highland life and the Islands and Highlands as a territory occurred post 1745 and notes that within this discourse

"Highland life [...] has no autonomy – no internal order which would make it intelligible in its own terms. Rather, it is given as the opposite of order in general. Conformably with this, we find that the anglophone culture identifies the Highlander, in the first instance, with traditional stereotypes of the social reject. In particular, the Highlander is textualised as the fool, as the rogue, and as the beggar."³⁰

²⁸Interview 1992 ACT/Male 50-55

²⁹ **Womack P.** 1989 *Improvement and Romance: Constructing the Myth of the Highlands* MacMillan Press London.

³⁰ As above, p 6.

I would add that the Highlander was also textualised as male. He tracks the construction of the conversion (integration?) of the '*Uncouth Savage*' as fool, rogue and beggar or the seer. The important and most visible construction as '*warrior*,' and hence conversion to stalwart of empire, is also discussed. As already noted, constructions of '*the people*' as poetic rather than practical is also described. And one might add '*the people*' as insubstantial or partial and recognised only as Other – the Other of the masculine, white, anglophone Same.

The invention of the picturesque and particularly the sublime as a way of seeing/viewing the land is also dealt with. This entailed a change from a way of seeing alluded to by Womack through the following quote from Edward Burt describing in 1730 the mountains near Inverness in his opening lines as being:

“of a dismal gloomy Brown, drawing upon a dirty Purple; and most of all disagreeable, when the Heath is in Bloom”

This negative portrayal became replaced by a sense of the sublime or awesomeness of constant Nature to today's '*Scotland in Bloom*' postcards of the same heather. It is fascinating and endlessly absorbing. One encounter I had made me think of this and of the difficulty, discussed below of creating new places of enunciation. On arriving in someone's living room one afternoon to interview them, I commented politely on the fine view from the window. This met with a fairly aggressive response which was brought up in the course of the interview:

“Speaker: It's a bit like the scenery – your immediate reaction – what a view! And that's the reaction I've always had. In fact I once had a delegation from the House of Lords who were looking at various rural enterprises, in the context of producing a report on the impact of the EU rural policy. And a whole dose of these guys trooped in here – ohing and aching at the view from the window. But the point quite simply is – when one is seeking to make a living, the aesthetics pale into insignificance.

Me: Although presumably the aesthetics had something to do with putting the house here, part from the land being ...?

Speaker: Absolutely nothing! ... wife had all to do with putting the house here. I have another croft over the village which wasn't our family croft. It's a croft I acquired since coming here permanently. I came here permanently 15 years ago. And my intention had been to build – the chalet at the end of the road there's ours – and I intended to build a house down below there. The wife decided no – she would be semi-claustrophobic down there and she wanted to come over here. So it wasn't the aesthetics that brought me here, it was the wife that brought me here."³¹

No-one who is making part of their living from tourism (the chalet) is oblivious to what, since the 18th century, we have learnt to refer to as landscape – or the view. He protesteth too much. The very reason I was trying to draw him on this point was because he was so clearly making a particular kind of statement involving positioning himself in relation to certain constructions of the Highlands and Highlanders which have been on the go for some two hundred years. He is successfully positioning myself – and the 'dorse' from the House of Lords – amongst those who admire views. Those who admire views, it is implied, are impractical and fanciful. He is taking control of any constructions (not just the house) which are going on and putting himself in the driving seat immediately. Funnily enough, the very next line he speaks is:

"And the first thing I had to do was put a road in – borrow a JCB and get stuck in and make a road."

I am interested also in the fact that he mentions fear of '*claustrophobia*' on the part of his wife as a reason to choose this site. Another comment on, views which I recall from several years before in another parish to the south, was from one a woman with an eight year old child and husband, living on a hill farm:

"They say, but you have such wonderful scenery. Well, I've been looking at An Teallach (a very spectacular mountain) every day for fifteen years – and it hasn't changed or moved a damned inch in all that time."

³¹Interview 1992 ACT/Male 55-60

It is interesting that fear of a slight touch of mental illness is located as being more rational than admiring views. All of this ties in with the discussion below of the construction of the Highland myth.

With regard to nature, the change from a Renaissance assumption of living by the principles of nature and *in* nature to

“the absolute and dynamic polarity of Nature on the one hand and, on the other hand ‘us’.”³²

which occurs by the late 18th century is instructive. This separation is of a particular kind and can include in nature people and customs of the countryside as well as flora and fauna – rocks and burns but also ancient monuments. This separation sets up a binary opposition around core and periphery. Figure 3.1 illustrates how Womack describes this binary opposition:³³ In addition are the ‘*inferiorist*’ binary oppositions defined by Beveridge and Turnbull and the binary ‘*oppositions*’ described by Shields.³⁴ Figure 3.1b and 3.1c illustrate the types of visual sign systems or symbolic representations of Scotland, defined through things ‘*Highland*’, which have endured over the centuries.

From Figures 3.1b and 3.1c can be seen the enduring thread of brutishness, the grotesque, physicality and ‘*exotic*’ ‘*Highland*’ dress juxtaposed with ‘*civilised*’ dress (John Major’s suit), in caricatures of Scotland, based entirely on representations of things ‘*Highland*’. It is interesting that in the midst of two hundred years of emigration the Highlands are also characterised as ‘*home*’, real home, further feminising the region in addition to head and heart splitting as shown in Womack’s table. A particular kind of home – loving, caring, cosy, protective – but in the midst of ‘*Improvement*’.

³² As above, Womack p172.

³³ As above, Womack p168.

³⁴ **Beveridge C. and Turnbull R.** 1989 *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture* Polygon Edinburgh and **Shields R.** 1991 *Places on the Margins: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* Routledge London.

Figure 3.1a
 Source: Womack 1989, Craig and Beveridge 1989 and Rob Shields 1991

Womack	
<i>the core is:</i>	<i>the periphery is:</i>
rich and successful glitz materialistic individualistic competing consumers rootless head	poor and defeated decency idealistic communitarian caring real people traditional heart
Beveridge and Turnbull	
<i>England is:</i>	<i>Scotland is:</i>
enlightened advanced reasonable decent civilised tolerant cosmopolitan refined moderate mild orderly kind gentle sophisticated	dark backward fanatical violent barbaric illiberal parochial uncouth intemperate savage unruly severe harsh primitive
Shields	
<i>Centre is:</i>	<i>Margin is:</i>
rational civilised centre social order mundane	ludic nature periphery carnavalesque liminal

Figure 3.1b: Caricature Map of Scotland

Source: "Map of Scotland from 'Geographical Fun' by Aleph, 1869". Front cover of **McCrone D., Kendrick S., and Straw P. (ed)** 1989 *The Making of Scotland: Nation, Culture & Social Change* British Sociological Association Vol. 29. Also see p6 **MacLean M. and Carrell C. (ed)** 1986 *As an Fhearann From the Land* Mainstream Edinburgh, An Lanntair, Stornoway and Third Eye, Glasgow

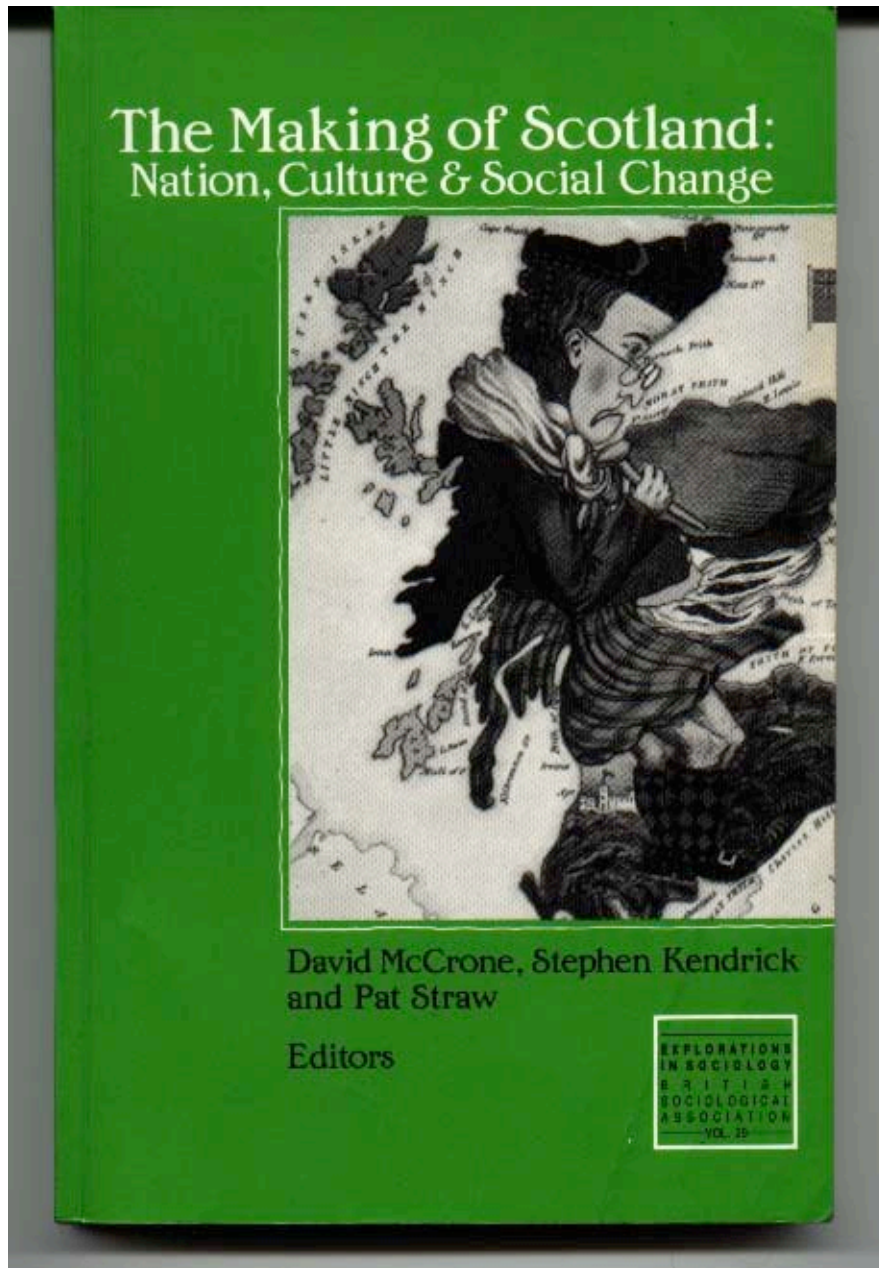


Figure 3.1c: Welcome to Scotland

Source: *The Independent* – week following 1997 General Election



Womack illustrates these constructions, with regard to nature, with two quotes which I feel the need to reproduce here because it is so helpful in regard to these changes in distinctions. Firstly, to illustrate that a certain clichéd language establishing the Gaidhealtachd as an ideal country, he quotes Lady Amelia 'one of the correspondents in a very minor epistolary novel of 1797':

"they are the happiest set of folks I ever saw, in a state most people would think themselves very miserable; fond of their native rocks. The chieftain of their name sprung from the same root: The fond attachment seems to increase with every danger; but, alas! They feel no such paternal kindness as their fathers and grandfathers used to find in their chiefs. Of old, they were like children of the same family; the same easy familiarity reigned throughout, and was a great source of happiness; now new lairds have raised their rents, without pointing out to the uninstructed peasantry the art of husbandry, improvement, or cultivation ... Much blame to those who, forgetful of their country, cramp the natural freedom of these brave Highlanders, by airs of superiority and extortion, treatment their forefathers were unacquainted with; nor can the present generation relish it: their warm, grateful hearts are always ready to own a favour, but are equally alive to affronts, and ready to revenge the injury."³⁵

Womack's comments on this piece go thus:

"Lady Amelia seems not to understand all the things she's saying: her Highlanders are first idyllically happy and later smarting under injurious treatment; the second sentence ought to be explaining that the chief and the people share a common name and ancestry, but doesn't quite manage it; the judgement that unkind landlords are unpatriotic needs to be backed up by the 'nursery of soldiers' idea if it is to make sense. The abrupt way the children of the clan turn into 'uninstructed peasants' when the immediate context shifts from romance to improvement confirms that feeling that this is writing without an independent object: it is not so much a description of the Highlands, even an ill-informed one, as a series of oblivious transitions from one *idée reçue* to the next. Contented poverty – native rocks – paternalism – danger – mercenary heritors – Improvement – natural freedom – fidelity and vindictiveness: *what everyone knows* about the Highlands in 1797 is rehearsed with the unerring confidence of a sleepwalker."³⁶

He then contrasts this with another piece of writing from two years earlier in which Friedrich Schiller talks about the objects of nature. In Womack's own

³⁵ As above - P170 Womack from **A McDonald** *Evening Amusements or What Happens in Life, A Novel 2 vols.* vol. 1 p243 Edinburgh 1797.

³⁶ As above, Womack p170.

text he uses a pleasing textual trick by wondering how Lady Amelia's thoughts might be elucidated '*if it were to be generalised deliberately and philosophically, rather than by default?*' Womack then reveals that Schiller is discussing nature, but the important point is to realise that this nature includes people and customs in the countryside, set against the European, metropolitan '*us*' or Same. Schiller's quote follows:

"What could give them a claim on our love, even? It is not these objects, it is an idea represented by them which we love in them. In them we love ... the quiet functioning from within themselves, the existence according to their own laws, the inner necessity, the eternal unity with themselves.

They *are* what we *were*; they are what we *should become* again. We were natural like them and our culture should lead us back to nature along the path of reason and freedom. They are, therefore, our lost childhood, which remains eternally most precious to us and thus they fill us with a certain sadness, (and) representations of our highest perfection in the ideal, so that they transport us to a state of elevated emotion.

But their perfection is no merit of their own, since it is not the product of their own choice. They accord us, therefore, the quite singular pleasure of being our models without putting us to shame... The essence of their character is precisely that which is lacking to the perfection of our own; what distinguishes us from them is exactly what is lacking to the divinity of theirs. We are free and they are necessary; we change, they remain one.. In them, therefore, we eternally see what eludes us, but for which we are called upon to struggle and which we may hope to approach in a never-ending progression, although we never reach it. In ourselves we see a merit which they can either never possess, like the unreasoning, or only if they travel on the same path as us, like children. They therefore provide us with the sweetest enjoyment of our humanity as an idea, even if they must necessarily humble themselves with regard to that particular condition of our humanity."³⁷

What Schiller's Romantic discourse is doing is to romanticise and inferiorise the rural peasantry – or Highlanders – and to construct that symbolic '*peasantry*' as part of the sum total of '*nature*'. This symbolic peasantry are hence determined by nature and the '*rhythms*' of nature and are therefore rendered as timeless, without agency and without history.

³⁷ P171 in **Womack** as above from p31 in Schiller *On the Naïve and Sentimental in Literature* Trans 1981.

One of the crucial effects of the embeddedness of these discourses established in the late 18th and early 19th century is that in effect even those trying to communicate aspirations or descriptions to further the interests of the Gaidhealtachd find themselves doing so in similar terms, perhaps because little remains outside of the vocabularies positioned by this positioning. This reflects Spivak's observations on the ways in which colonised or post-colonised groups use and continue to use what are apparently discourses and vocabularies of the colonising groups. In view of recent geographical debates on mobility, it is interesting to note that in Schiller's piece '*we*' are in motion while '*they*' are not.

Womack suggests that Improvement, being a specification of the idea of progress, is somewhat limitless and has two significant consequences:

"Firstly, in so far as a programme of Improvement is successful, the society which emerges from it is '*artificial*': its focus, manners, artefacts and so on do not emerge in theoretically innocent fashion from the texture of its life, but represent the general principles and systematic knowledge of the improvers. Planned villages – those showpieces of enlightened estate management in the 18th century Highlands – are the type of this departure from the natural: their inhabitants live in someone else's idea of how they should live. Secondly, Improvement doesn't in principle establish any limits for itself; it's a comparative concept, not an absolute one; it could always be taken further. Its' implication is therefore not only that some methods and attitudes need to be changed: it is also proposing change as a way of life. As well as opposing certain customs, it is opposed to custom as such"³⁸

Obviously one needs to treat terms such as '*natural*' and '*artificial*' with some caution, but his phrase concerning inhabitants living '*in someone else's idea of how they should live*' is very evocative. The limitlessness of Improvement is important, and too the sensation that this is about constant change. Improvement creates an Other which is not self-conscious. For the people of this region this is oppressive:

"By idealising the people of the region as Edenically pre-conscious, it excludes them from participation in their own postlapsarian destiny; all possible arrangements in the real world are equally unworthy of their poetical essence, so their preferences can be ignored. And by

³⁸In Womack as above p 174.

equating the indigenous with the archaic, it ensures a metropolitan monopoly on the determination of the future.”³⁹

What Womack makes clear is the implicit colonialism of the myth structure and the perhaps more explicit colonialism through military and administrative means. It is worth noting too that while this age of Improvement and literalisation of the Highlands is very much 18th century, the application of practical projects based on this continues into the mid 19th century in the form of projects such as The Clearances. The thinking and beliefs of those such as Sellar (mentioned earlier) was based on the 18th century Improvement literature and philosophy. ‘*Balmoralisation*’ too had its impact and changed aspects both material and mythical. It is interesting and indeed productive to compare this to the post-war invention of the development industry. In the context of the 20th and 21st century, it should be noted once again that the land tenure systems, the land ownership system, the settlement patterns of crofting townships and villages like Lochinver and Ullapool and the access to agricultural land continue to be governed by those patterns and systems created in the late 18th and early 19th century. The material circumstances of everyday life continue to be those which were created as ‘*Improvements*’. The Crofters Wars were arguably the first successful speech act, in Spivak’s terms, since vectors of mobility such as the new right to vote for all men was used to elect four Crofters MPs, nominated through the Land League Conference in Portree in 1885. During the 20th century that level of very public, high profile democratic representation was not achieved again until the 1980s with the creation of the SCU. Until that late 1970s the development industry in the region was focused, as noted in the last Chapter, on large scale development projects. By implication the common acceptance of the region as dominated by ‘*The Highland Problem*’ constructed a less visible ‘*problem people*’. The binary oppositions proposed by Womack and quoted above have evolved and endured. One aspect of this can be seen in 20th and 21st century constructions of crofters as ‘*real people*’, ‘*traditional*’ and above all ‘*communitarian*’. For political purposes this can at times be enabling, as will be seen in the public reactions to the Assynt **Crofters** Trust campaign. In other particular circumstances these same

³⁹In Womack as above p175.

constructions can be stifling and create difficult barriers to action. This can be seen in the way in which community land ownership groups are under huge pressure to be *'caring'*, *'idealistic'* and *'communitarian'*. This pressure can be seen in the devastating emotional responses to in-fighting, both among participants and observers, and the adverse publicity everyday differences of opinion can attract. This theme will be returned to in later Chapters.

The historical insights provided by Womack's approach help considerably in elucidating the earlier poem and in situating comments from my fieldwork regarding outsiders' understanding of and ideas about the Highlands and Islands. It also forces us to engage in a critique of the instability of *'common-sense'* categories like incomer, white-settler, grey-settler and local (see below). We have strong discourses which might mean that there is a certain credibility to these categories. They are not absolute, but positionality with regard to these ways of seeing Highlanders and Highlands is elucidated. This lends some validity, in a strategic sense, to the incomer-local spectrum. It is not so much about origins, although it may appear to be argued in a way which evokes origins. It is about the determining effects of these ways of seeing right into the present. In everyday conversation, differences of positionality within these ways of seeing are often marked by those who use *'we'* and those who use *'they'* in talking about what is going on in the Highlands. Those who use *'we'* see themselves as included in efforts to determine or to choose a better future and tend to have come into the area or – very occasionally - are highly empowered activists. Activists however, and other *'locals'* often talk about *'they'*, speaking for instance of what *'they'* are trying to do now to the place. The speakers in this case will, in the way they use language, exclude themselves from a determining role in changes which are occurring. In instances when such speakers use *'we'*, they are often talking about their township, or their neighbours and themselves or their crofters union branch: things or social entities in which they do have a measurable role and in which such speakers' influence or agency can be clearly seen or activated should they wish. Different actors see themselves – or reveal themselves through their use of language – as being, in their own view, unequally empowered: or perhaps unequally visible or audible.

Rewriting Histories

In my own experience, it is only in the 1980s and 1990s that we hear people in Scotland begin to refer to the Clearances as '*ethnic cleansing*' and to two hundred years of migration (voluntary and involuntary) as the creation of a Highland diaspora. A whole new and more powerful vocabulary has become current. I think that there is ample evidence to justify a description of Gaidhealtachd culture as diasporic in Bhabha's terms.⁴⁰ It is interesting to note that this new vocabulary becomes current at the same time as the former Yugoslavia fragments into bloodshed. What drifts across firstly is a useful and highly emotive vocabulary with which to rework the already overworked Highland stories:

"So the Marchioness dealt out secondary justice, with perhaps a hint of ethnic cleansing."⁴¹

This quote uses this new discourse to describe the past in Sutherland. The Marchioness is the Duchess of Sutherland whose factors carried out the infamous Sutherland Clearances. This is a new assertive vocabulary with moral '*pulling power*' and there is here a closeness perhaps with the idea of racism as being a bundle of categories available to mobilise in particular situations for particular ends. It might also be viewed as what Fanon described in colonised cultures – a concentration or turning in on itself of indigenous culture under colonisation, a looking and searching back in the interests of a '*national culture*'. Resistance to colonialism, neocolonialism or some measure of recovery involves reworking these pasts and presents in order to reposition the self and others.

Gaelic Revival

When your own history of why these things '*are so*' is systematically denied, what becomes of your sense of self? In this century voluntary migration has been a common strategy to evade economic and cultural marginalisation.

⁴⁰ Bhabha describes diasporic cultures as being about becoming as well as being and notes that such cultures are fractured and changing. There is not one 'voice', though more emergent, less self-conscious diasporic cultures may coalesce around acts of imaginary reunification which assert homogeneity. See **Bhabha H. K.** 1994 *The Location of Culture* Routledge London. This theme is further explored in later Chapters.

⁴¹ Assynt News 15th Jan 1993.

There is too a public and a private life. Behind closed doors remains a fierce pride in what still remains of this culture, but for decades many have ensured that their children are fluent English speakers. Gaelic might only mark them out and hold them back. The rise of the Gaelic media shows a turning of this tide - in attitude and cultural confidence in the first instance.

Representations of these places and peoples by 'outsiders' still have strong contemporary power and are used in a number of ways. One of these is in selling places such as the North Assynt Estate. The revival of the Gaelic language, more in terms of status than in absolute numbers of speakers, can be seen as both a symptom and a cause of recovery within crofting areas. Government agencies established to deal with 'the Highland problem' provide records of various development 'solutions'. Evidence from the HIDB suggests that the sloth and indolence historically attributed to the Gaidhealtachd in its entirety is perceived to have receded to lurk on the margins of the margins - in the north and west, the remaining strongholds of crofting and Gaelic culture.⁴² Said's spatialised Low remains, if geographically shrunk in this very specific instance.

Dangers of a Post-Colonial Approach

Early in the original 'Can the Subaltern Speak' article, Spivak takes to task Foucault and Deleuze for their use of the phrases 'A Maoist' and 'the workers struggle'.⁴³ In using the term 'Maoist' 'the eccentric phenomenon of French intellectual 'Maoism' and subsequent 'new Philosophy' symptomatically renders 'Asia' transparent'⁴⁴. Spivak also proposes that their use of the phrase 'the workers' struggle' illustrates a common problem with post-structuralist theory in that it ignores the international division of labour. She elaborates as follows:

⁴² Video evidence of discussion with HIDB. Quotes from Assynt News 1991 regarding a fish processing company leaving Lochinver and relocation on the east coast because of an inability to get a stable workforce. Some of the article involves 'denials' that the west coast workforce are 'workshy'.

⁴³ See pp 66 - 67 and beyond in **Spivak G. C.** *Can the Subaltern Speak?* in **Williams P and Chrisman L. (ed)** 1994 *Colonial and Post-Colonial Theory* Harvester Wheatsheaf Hertfordshire.

⁴⁴ See p 67 and beyond in **Spivak G. C.** *Can the Subaltern Speak?* in **Williams P. and Chrisman L. (ed)** 1994 *Colonial and Post-Colonial Theory* Harvester Wheatsheaf Hertfordshire.

"The invocation of *the* workers' struggle is baleful in its very innocence; it is incapable of dealing with global capitalism: the subject-production of worker and unemployed within nation-state ideologies in its Center; the increasing subtraction of the working class in the Periphery from the realization of surplus value and thus from 'humanistic' training in consumerism; and the large-scale presence of paracapitalist labor as well as the heterogeneous structural status of agriculture in the Periphery. Ignoring the international division of labor; rendering 'Asia' (and on occasion 'Africa') transparent (unless the subject is ostensibly the 'Third World'); re-establishing the legal subject of socialized capital - these are problems as common to much of poststructuralist as to structuralist theory."⁴⁵

In this discussion Spivak asserts that for both Deleuze and Foucault the Other as Subject is inaccessible. She attributes this to their indifference to ideology and characterisations of theory as '*a box of tools*' which results in verbal slippage:

"The unrecognised contradiction within a position that valorises the concrete experience of the oppressed, while being so uncritical about the historical role of the intellectual, is maintained by verbal slippage."⁴⁶

The danger of this is in the way that it helps positivist empiricism – '*the foundation of advanced capitalist neocolonialism - to define its own arena as 'concrete experience''* and in so doing to consolidate and to extend the international division of labour.⁴⁷ Spivak suggests that:

"The failure of Deleuze and Guattari to consider the relations between desire, power and subjectivity renders them incapable of articulating a theory of interests."⁴⁸

At the core of this discussion is the realisation that much of the scholarship which comes out of '*the West*' critiques the sovereign subject (European), but in so doing reinstates '*the West*' as Subject - a Subject which pretends '*it has no geo-political determinations*'.

⁴⁵See p67 and beyond in **Spivak G. C.** *Can the Subaltern Speak?* in **Williams P. and Chrisman L. (ed)** 1994 *Colonial and Post-Colonial Theory* Harvester Wheatsheaf Hertfordshire

⁴⁶ Same as above.

⁴⁷See pp 69 and beyond in **Spivak G. C.** *Can the Subaltern Speak?* in **Williams P. and Chrisman L. (ed)** 1994 *Colonial and Post-Colonial Theory* Harvester Wheatsheaf Hertfordshire

⁴⁸ P 68 in **Spivak G. C.** *Can the Subaltern Speak?* In **Williams P. and Chrisman L. (ed)** 1994 *Colonial and Post-Colonial Theory* Harvester Wheatsheaf Hertfordshire.

Colonising Theory?

That is the most pervasive problem or danger in my own use of post-colonial theory to illuminate a thesis focused on land struggles in '*the First World*'. By engaging with colonial discourse and post-colonial theory, there is a danger of in effect colonising theory and instating the Other as a shadow of the Self - a hegemonic European self.

The Highlands and Islands were colonised by the emergent Scotland which became a key component in imperialist Britain. The people of the Gaidhealtachd experienced Self as Other under these circumstances while simultaneously becoming the foot soldiers of empire. Gaidhealtachd people who stayed in place did not sense themselves to be included in the Scottish/English/European Self; those who migrated did achieve this to a greater extent. This achievement was only partial and the diasporic culture(s) which have developed illustrate this. In North America the migrants took a very active part in '*pushing back*' the First Nations and creation of a Fourth World in a violent drive to create and to expand the First World. Exceptions are also documented - the warm relations in Nova Scotia between the Miq'Macs and the incoming Highlanders, for example. The circuits of colony and capital which developed were embodied not just in the patterns of colonisation but also in the commoditisation of land in the Scottish Highlands and Islands. The same people who made fortunes through colonial trade and the developing international division of labour bought Highland estates. Matheson, who bought Lewis in 1844, made his money in opium. Lord Leverhulme created a significant business empire, the most famous element of which is Port Sunlight and Sunlight soap. Extraction of raw materials from colonial Africa was also involved in his business. He bought Lewis and Harris in the early 20th century and sold it again shortly after World War I. The Vestey family who acquired Assynt Estates in the 1930s made their money through beef ranching in Argentina and Australia, linked to shipping for the beef and refrigeration. Their horizontal and vertical control of the beef industry in Argentina is legendary and implicated in the development of particular Argentinean political events of the Peron era.

The crofting communities are hence securely located in the powerful First World, as are the migrants who left from there, but this was not their starting point and the instability of their inclusion can be seen most clearly through the land issue. Spivak's discussion of the subaltern's struggle to speak can be used to translate the Gaidhealtachd conception of land, and to illuminate the volatile debates about environment and conservation in the Highlands and Islands. Counter-urbanisation means that today's Highlands and Islands is home to a range of cultures, but the claim of crofting and of the Gaidhealtachd cultures still dominates political relations. As the Wolf of Badenoch illustrated centuries before, incoming settlers often '*go native*'. The Gaelic language has lost many speakers so that significant numbers are *of the culture* without having language fluency. Concern over this issue is shared by other areas - for instance Cape Breton. The developing diasporic culture is not unitary or unproblematic. A well known Gaidhealtachd musician said the following after travelling to Australia as an invited musician:

"I will never go back there. The Australian ex-pat Scots are the most racist bunch of people I have ever had the misfortune to meet."⁴⁹

In a recent diasporic novel *First, Third and Fourth World* relations are alluded to through description of the way in which global capital has created particular types of wildlife and habitat conservation. These are spaces of consumption disrupted by production:

"A few years ago', she continued, 'Mike and I went on one of those African safari tours. To see the animals on the plain at the base of Mount Kilimanjaro, in the south of Kenya near the border of Tanzania. the animals take your breath away. All the different species grazing together and followed by their natural predators. Almost intermixed with the animals are the Masai following the grass cycle with their cattle herds, living off the milk and blood of their cows. We would go early in the morning from the base camp in Land Rovers and all-terrain vehicles, armed with cameras and binoculars. The tour operators apologized for the presence of the Masai. They realised that we had paid a lot of money to see wildlife, not families of people following their cows. There were borders and boundaries to the game preserves and the national parks, explained the tour operators, but the Masai refused to recognise them. They just followed the water and the grass. They had always been "troublesome" according to the tour operator, and when colonisation first came to Kenya they had attacked rather than co-operate. 'What will be done with them', asked a member of

⁴⁹Fieldwork Diary 1999

our tour group, 'to get them out of this beautiful place?' 'I don't know,' said the tour operator. 'Something. Soon, I hope.'"⁵⁰

The novel is set among people of Clan Calum Ruadh in Cape Breton - people who had fled Moidart in 1779. The speaker is a woman, now living an affluent lifestyle away from Cape Breton. This fictional example highlights the historical emergence of uneven spatialised power relations amongst different fractions of a global 'Fourth World'. In terms of subaltern positionings, strategic identities drawn from historical or present subalternity are mobile, fractional and can be in conflict. This fractured, but potentially, strategically global, Fourth World collective has in common strong symbolic links between particular cultures and land – or people and places. A way of 'seeing' this commonality is through metropolitan mobilisations of empty nature and environmental protection. As will be seen shortly, the idea that an environment and landscape is 'contaminated' by the presence of living, breathing, working people has huge resonance in Assynt and other Island and Highland communities.

Common Ground

Revival of Gaelic has proved to be integral to economic improvement. This is linked to issues of dignity. The late 20th century struggle to take land into community ownership in the Scottish Highlands and Islands took inspiration from regional history and from land struggles in decolonising states. Evidence of this is provided in Chapter Five.

The emergence of this Highland drive to take land into community ownership has gained support from Fourth World representatives. In 1995 Chief Stone Eagle of the Miq'Mac visited the Island of Eigg, where the local people were engaged in a campaign to buy their island into community ownership, and to Assynt which had achieved this in 1992. The Chief was on his way to give evidence at the superquarry enquiry in Harris. In the context of post-colonial positionings, this is an interesting alliance. On the subject of subalternity within First World space, Spivak notes that:

⁵⁰p214 in **MacLeod A.** 2001 *No Great Mischief* Vintage London.

“The identity claims of Fourth World groups are different from those of new immigrants. In the cultural conformity of Fourth World groups there are plenty of attitudes which would be extremely helpful to the problems that a developed postindustrial capitalism is confronting.”⁵¹

In discussing the need to develop a transnational vision, and be careful of identity claims which fuel racism and competition, Spivak relates during an interview, that she was once accused of racism for inviting a Kenyan woman to share with her, on the basis that they had both been brought up under British imperialism:

“I remember to my great desolation, being called a racist when I asked a Nigerian woman to share something with me because we were both British ex-colonials. I think there are signs that this sort of thing is now in the past.”⁵²

The speaker in the transcript below also runs this risk and illustrates the way in which a range of actors form strategic alliances and forms of research networks in their everyday encounters with the legacy of British Imperialism and Eurocentric attitudes. This occurs at many different scales. In this example ‘*Dan*’ and some fellow educators create a strategic alliance in the midst of a conference. This alliance and conversation is based on the fact that:

“I ended up, in the debate, aligned with, particularly, an Indian man and a Jamaican man. And we were talking about what we had in common. And this has happened many times when I’ve talked to people from all parts of the world. One of the things we had in common was that we had all been at school in the 1950s, and we’d all learnt British imperial history. The other thing we had in common was that we had all discovered our own indigenous, native forms of expression. And so, in that sense, through talking about the art, we actually began to realise that what we had in common was that we were all colonised. And we’d all been colonised by a kind of bourgeois art form, you know? And it was that recognition of similarities - the woman who was attacking me was saying, “No, no, no - you are British. And you’re part of the colonisers”. You know? And, I mean, there’s truth in that- of course there is. And I am British, and I do understand those art forms, you know? But the problem there was people saying it’s an either or situation.

We have a visit here every year from the school of Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine. ... And they come here to find out about our

⁵¹ p296 in *Subaltern Talk: Interview with the Editors* in Landry D. and MacLean G. (ed) 1996 *The Spivak Reader* Routledge London.

⁵² p297 *Subaltern Talk: Interview with the Editors* in Landry D. and MacLean G. (ed) 1996 *The Spivak Reader* Routledge London.

relationship to the local community, and how we evolve curriculum, by talking to local people. And the methods we use to do that. ... I did exactly the same exercise with those people. I said, what history did you learn at school? And that was amazing because there was about fifteen people round here in a circle. All different colours. And all but one - who was American - had learnt British imperial history. And that's people from Philippines, Yemen, Africa, Asia - all different places, you know? They'd gone to English schools basically, and had learnt English imperial history. They knew NOTHING about their own history. Nothing. Apart from that which was handed down orally because none of it was written down, you know? So! That's what you're competing against, you know.."⁵³

This 'group' in the conference were trying to instil a sense of relative value in the place of imperial assumptions of absolute beauty and absolute worth based on Eurocentric high culture. They encountered great difficulty in having their reasonings heard:

"Well, basically the story was that I was in a conference on adult education and the Arts ... and a lot of people there were saying that the role of adult education is to teach people to appreciate the Art that was made by the dominant elite of that country. And generally speaking, Western bourgeois art.

And the debate really emerged, that there was such a thing as absolute beauty; and absolute aesthetic qualities, you know? And that some of them were held in Western classical art, you know? And the counter to that, which was coming almost **entirely** from people from the colonies, was that you cannot understand beauty outside of cultural context.

So this Jamaican was talking about his language, and use of language, and I was talking about the music and language of Scotland. And the Asian was talking about the music and language of his part of the world, you know?

And all that we were saying, was that these art forms have a numerical advantage , you know? They have a power base behind them. You can't say, well, we can have a bit of indigenous stuff, and a bit of opera and a bit of ballet, because in **every** single situation in the world the opera, ballet, symphony orchestra sort of set up, got all the money. From all the governments. And the indigenous art forms got nothing.⁵⁴

This transcript highlights some alliances made in relation to dominant cultural mores in particular situations and the powerful influence of local elites on cultural expression. It also illustrates another example of the difficulty of the speech act. In addition it signals the existence of a varied

⁵³Interview 1993

⁵⁴Interview 1993

Scotland where British/English imperial history was until very recently the only kind of history to which most people had access, outside oral traditions. In common with other European states, there was in 19th century Scotland a growth of nationalism. To use Benedict Anderson's phrase, this '*imagined community*', as discussed earlier in this chapter and in the previous chapter under the title Highlandism, was constructed very largely from Highland symbols and images.

Improvement/Development

Spivak's approach is helpful in considering the development industry, which in the Scottish Highlands and islands has a long history. She focuses on the fact that social relations are fractional - fractured, relational, fraught with multiple and sometimes contradictory identifications and interests. She hence notes that one of the problems of the legacy of Orientalism is the kind of thinking that assumes '*the other side*' to be "*all unfractioned good*".⁵⁵ The result can be a crude national identity used by development agencies to justify themselves in the face of opposition and to keep '*on-side*' benevolent people '*who share this kind of Orientalist presupposition*'⁵⁶. Hence in the face of criticism the development agency will say - the Somalis asked for it; the Indians asked for it - and no-one ever asks - what Somalis; what Indians? In this way opposers of a given development can be cast as the enemies of '*progress*' and '*the people*'.

A crowd of us were travelling in a minibus across Skye, one evening in the summer of 1993, singing a song called "*Maids When You're Young, Never Wed an Old Man*". In response to the song Linda told us this story:

"An aid worker sat chatting to the women of the village in the Indian hills. It was evening. Everyone was gathered together to give the NGO people a bit of a welcome.

"What single thing would improve the quality of your lives?" asked the aid worker of the Indian women. This seemed like a good chance to get a feel for the grassroots needs of this community.

⁵⁵p 305 Landry D. and MacLean G. (ed) 1996 *The Spivak Reader* Routledge London.

⁵⁶p305 Landry D. and MacLean G. (ed) 1996 *The Spivak Reader* Routledge London.

They smiled, considered and discussed before coming back to him with a reply. "Younger husbands" was their unanimous reply."⁵⁷

The way in which this story highlights the difficulty of emancipatory projects and research alliances is interesting. Stories like this call into question any simple and mutually constituted political engagement which ignores power - and irony.

So, post-colonial approaches have some usefulness and relevance in this context, but carry dangers too, which must be attended to at every stage. In particular it will be necessary to ensure that any claims to partial subalternity on the part of crofting communities does not render transparent their collusions in the violence of colonialism and Orientalism. It is therefore important to be alert to significant silences in these Gaidhealtachd, Highlands and Islands and crofting discourses. In these pages only a small start can be made. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage critically to any great extent with colonialist and neocolonialist relations outwith the Highlands and Islands. It is to be hoped that in the future just such a task would help in peopling or embodying the circuits of colony and capital earlier alluded to. This is but a first step. This thesis focuses only on the emergence of a late 20th century movement in the Scottish Highlands and Islands to take parcels of land into community ownership. Post-colonial theory, within limits, is helpful in translating historical motivations for such action and in contextualising the aspirations of community groups. This is an endeavour fraught with difficulty, but Spivak's practical approach to theory should help to judge the efficacy of this approach:

"That's how you use theories. Ready to jettison them. You know what I mean?"⁵⁸

Methods

In this section I discuss the methodologies which I used for my research. These are mainly qualitative and ethnographic methods. The material

⁵⁷Fieldwork Diary 1993

⁵⁸p 306 Landry D. and MacLean G. (ed) 1996 *The Spivak Reader* Routledge London.

presented in Chapter Six is slightly different, and this I will describe later in this Chapter. In this section I position myself as a researcher. The next section, *'Diary of Interviews and other Fieldwork'*, in tandem with Appendix 1, charts my fieldwork in many of its forms. In Appendix 1 are supplementary notes concerning methods and aims. I follow this with a section, *'Interviewing'*, discussing some of the many issues raised by my fieldwork in the course of doing that fieldwork. These are illustrated and interrogated through reference to literature on qualitative methods and through quotes from some of my interview material. In the following section, *'Fieldwork'*, I briefly describe of the locations that I visited in the course of this fieldwork.

Qualitative methods were employed throughout this work. Between 1993 and 1995 I carried out in-depth semi-structured interviews in a variety of locations in the Highlands and Islands. Throughout this time I spent on average six months per year based in Assynt, and travelling from there to carry out other relevant fieldwork and interviews. From 1995 until the present day I have been living permanently in Assynt. I have a croft of my own through the *New Entrants Scheme* and am a member of the Assynt Crofters Trust. During 2001 I undertook new fieldwork to update the 1990s work in view of the significant changes which had occurred in the intervening years. In the same year I was elected by my township to be a Director of the Assynt Crofters Trust, having already been elected as Clerk of Grazing. Since 1992 I have therefore been engaged in on-going participant observation in the field. Appendix 1 provides details of my fieldwork.

I had been advised to use the *'snowball technique'* as a way of assessing whether I had enough representative material through interviewing.⁵⁹ In the event I found that this was not helpful. The situation was changing week by week, month by month and year by year. The snowball technique suggests that you keep on undertaking new interviews with new people until no *'new'* material turns up. In these circumstances this was totally unrealistic, since there were constant new developments emerging. I could have kept on

⁵⁹ See for instance **Glaser B. and Strauss A** 1967 *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* Chicago Aldine.

interviewing the same people every month and still produced new material at every turn.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory was first formally developed by Glaser and Strauss. Instead of viewing the research process as a series of discrete steps starting with the framing of the key research question(s), proceeding onto to data collection, via methods defined in relation to the research question, and finally data analysis and the writing of results, Glaser and Strauss made available the idea of a more reflexive method.⁶⁰ Their approach is inductive and focuses on generating theory from the data itself. The data collected is analysed or scanned in order to identify broad categories or themes and then the inter-relationships between these categories. In my case this process continued until a manageable empirical and theoretical synthesis was arrived at, which also did justice to issues of representation and ethics. Grounded theory has been criticised for underplaying the extent to which any researcher brings theory to the research task.⁶¹ This is undoubtedly the case, and I started out from a political economy perspective. However, the practise of grounded theory, for me provides a tenacity to research integrity and rigour through recorded observation and on-going analysis. This process provides for, and indeed encourages, unexpected '*findings*' and provides the opportunity to theoretically engage with unexpected and puzzling findings. In this way empirical material is respected, the work of the interviewees or research participants, in giving of their time, is honoured to the full and the findings are not shackled to a pre-conceived framework which imposes inappropriate '*silences*' on the analysis process.

While desk based research might have led me to explore the extent to which post-colonial approaches would throw light on the topic, it was in fact my fieldwork and the sort of transcripts created through that which forced me to take this direction. In the first instance it was the work of Fanon which resonated strongly with the sort of texts created in the field through in-depth

⁶⁰ See for instance **Silverman D.** 1993 *Interpreting Qualitative Data* London Sage and **Glaser B. and Strauss A** 1967 *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* Chicago.

⁶¹ p46 – 47 in **Silverman** (1993) above.

interviewing. In particular, his mentions of dignity and the physicality of the colonised subject, including longing/desire to replace the coloniser violently, but also his observation that the symbolic and physical colonial defences send a mixed message to the colonised by inciting a constant readiness for violent insurrection and a show of force.

The interviews were taped and transcribed. The transcripts were then scanned in combination with the fieldwork diaries, in order to identify a range of themes which would be representative of the material created. Once this list of themes was established, I coded the transcripts using these themes as headings.

I then carried out more desk-based research on each theme and collected relevant press cuttings, videos of television broadcasts and tapes of radio items. Over the years I also made every effort to attend any conferences or events which might be relevant or helpful. Participant observation provided an on-going and challenging engagement. From this base, I began to write the thesis.

Self as Researcher

For the purposes of research, the fact that I had local connections was very significant. I am not Assainteach⁶² born and bred, but had family connections, intensified when my parents and grandfather moved to the area permanently some fifteen years ago. I had spent every summer in Assynt since I was six months old, and every other school holiday besides that. My maternal great grandfather was from a township in Assynt and went to Lewis as a boy, with others of his age, to live and work there. My own grandfather was therefore born and brought up in Lewis but had first cousins in Assynt. My maternal grandmother was born and brought up in Dundee while my paternal grandmother was born and brought up in Argyllshire. My paternal grandfather was born and brought up in North Uist, but lived and worked on Mull where my own father was born. After his death as a fairly young man, leaving a young family, the family moved back to Argyllshire. I still have

⁶² Gaelic, meaning from or belonging to the parish of Assynt

cousins in North Uist to this day. Personally I felt that, never having permanently lived in the area, I had no *'authentic'* claim to localness and that the act of research would render me more of an outsider than an insider, on some sort of moving scale. In fact the process of research, to my great surprise, has resulted in me being referred to as *'local'* by many of the key players. The fact that I take an active interest in old stories and songs possibly affected my status as being *'of the place'* for many of the key players. My age also contributed to this, given the dangerously top heavy age structure in the crofting townships of Assynt. During the campaign it was useful to be able to produce a young, female *'crofter'* for the media instead of *'a lot of old men'*. This is true in crofting more widely. At one point the Crofters Commission asked me to feature in a video about crofting for the same reason. This video went into a schools educational pack. The aim of this educational pack was to set crofting in a contemporary context instead of always talking about the past.

Insider Positions

I wish here to consider my positionality, with respect to my research. In addition to the semi-structured interviews, I relied on participant observation, fieldnotes, attendance at appropriate conferences and a diary in the course of fieldwork. Following McDowell (1992)⁶³ not in *'doing gender'* specifically, but in *'doing'* research, how might I recognise and write into this thesis our respective positions - the research participants', my own and that of the reader?

Perhaps, for the purposes of research I am an insider. I think however that the categories of *'insider'* and *'outsider'* are unstable in some ways. At the outset, to be an outsider is a clear position: the researcher works in places or amongst people previously unknown to her (him). But if the research is in any sense ethnographic or involves spending time with people, then this stasis of outsider researching insiders moves on. The researcher becomes some people's friend, for a while at least. It is likely that axes of communication or alliance other than insider/outsider come into play: class,

⁶³ P 409 McDowell L 1992 *Doing Gender: feminism, feminists and research methods in human geography* in TIBG Vol. 17 N0 4 pp 399-416

gender, cultural capital, ethnicity and so on. Indeed, these aspects of subjectivity would have been significant at the outset. In a remote area such as Assynt, those residents who are academically inclined might welcome what they see as *'a new mind to tussle with'*. Intellectual isolation is not an unexamined experience, but is a formally acknowledged professional condition in some quarters. A debate in the local press in 1994 over whether a full-time psychiatric post could be established in Caithness and Sutherland revolved around this very issue: that even if there is an adequate workload to justify the post it is undesirable due to the problem of professional isolation.

Mr Buchanan, Chief Executive of Caithness and Sutherland NHS Trust:

"Much has been made of the professional and social isolation of locating a post in Caithness and Sutherland. The professional issues, which must be addressed, are not new to professional people within Caithness and Sutherland.

For those people who want to work and live in Caithness and Sutherland, sometimes strenuous efforts need to be made to encourage these links through study leave and other activities."⁶⁴

Hence the researcher might almost instantly be welcomed as a sort of insider, within a loose and informal community of what might perhaps be described as pre-existing *'organic'* intellectuals and professionals.

In the course of my undergraduate dissertation I had interviewed and come to know many of the key informants relevant to my current topic. These were people working in organisations such as the Crofters Commission, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the Scottish Crofters Union. Some of these contacts had since moved into other jobs in similar and relevant organisations and this earlier contact made it fairly easy for me call on their time once again, in the interests of this research. Likewise I had interviewed fifty crofters or members of crofting households in the Assynt area for this undergraduate dissertation, and so it was no surprise to these individuals that I was again calling on their time. Neither was the idea of participating in my project so difficult to explain to those who had helped me before.

One of the main comments as I embarked on fieldwork in the Crofting Counties, both during my undergraduate dissertation and my PhD, was one muttered rather than spoken:

"Well at least you've got the right accent for it."⁶⁵

The fact that I am Scottish, and have family connections with the study area is being referred to. The fact that *'my mother's people came from Drumbeg'* in Assynt is also of great significance, along with the smattering of *'42nd cousins'* here and there. The fact that my father was Secretary of the Assynt Branch of the Crofters Union and Achnacarnin representative on the Assynt Crofters Trust Steering Group is relevant. I certainly had what might be described as *'privileged access'* to the group central to my study – the Assynt Crofters Trust. It should be noted that in a small community in the midst of a political engagement, there are however limits to this type of access. For instance, the researcher may be perceived to be aligned with *'the wrong sort'*, which would close off access in some directions, in a manner which will not occur with an *'outsider'*. It is easier for an *'outsider'* to present themselves as relatively neutral.

Again I raise the matter of the instability of insider/outsider categories, but in a different form: that of *'local'* or *'incomer'*. While some interviewees regarded me as *'of the place'* and asserted that *'I had the right accent'* others positioned me as *'a Lowlander'*:

"It's very pleasing to see a Lowland girl like yourself putting in so much effort on behalf of ourselves"⁶⁶

I discuss the instability of the categories *'local'* and *'incomer'* later in this Chapter. This quote serves at this stage to flag these instabilities. It is also a quote which helps me to explain why I find it rather challenging to position myself in the text in any straightforward way. I would not choose to call myself one or the other, and would not claim to in any way, speak for or, on

⁶⁴p.1 *Northern Times*, 20/1/95

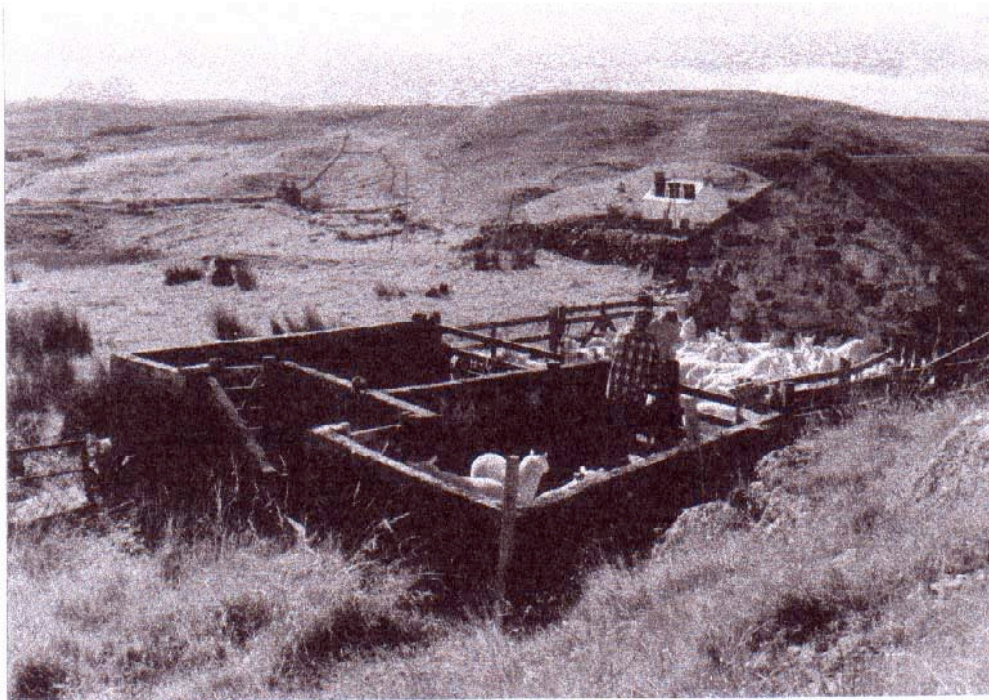
⁶⁵Fieldwork Diary 1993 - G. Campbell & others

⁶⁶ Fieldwork Diary 1993: Angus MacLeod, Marybank, Stornoway

behalf of, the people who participated in this research. I have been talking to them and am the author of the text. Aspects of my own identity and interests are in common with those to whom I spoke. Figure 3.2 is a picture of myself and my partner at the fank in Achnacarnin. We have a croft, sheep, Highland cows, working dogs, sometimes pigs and a vegetable garden. I am a '*New Entrant to Crofting*' through the Croft Entrant Scheme (discussed in Chapter Four). We are in serious housing need: for six years we have lived in a variety of rented properties and caravans. The longest period, of four years, was spent in a house with no road to it and no running water of any sort. We are about to move once again into a caravan for the foreseeable future, until we are able to build a house on the croft, using *Crofting Building Grants and Loans*. I am a member of the Assynt Crofters Trust and a Director. On occasion I have been formally asked to speak on behalf of the Assynt Crofters Trust in a variety of circumstances. In those situations I have always tried to base my contribution on the conversations which I have had with those on whose behalf I was asked to speak.

In the summer of 1992 a ceilidh was held in Stoer Hall to raise money for the Assynt Crofters Trust campaign. When attending such a ceilidh, it is important to have a song or story ready to perform. Since this was in the midst of the campaign and I was in the midst of interviewing and taping Steering Group members, I wrote a wee ditty about the campaign to perform that night. It was not and is not a great work of literature. It was done for a bit of a laugh and to honour the occasion in a light-hearted way. The words are based entirely on the sort of thoughts and phrases being used by those I was speaking to at the time.

Figure 3.2: At the Fank, Achnacarnin



The tune is very loosely based on a song made famous by the Alexander Brothers - *"For These Are My Mountains"*, although the tune used for the Assynt Crofters Trust song is actually simpler and less twirly. The Alexander Brothers were marketed as *'twa Hielan' laddies'* - and were always dressed in formal kilt outfits - but they were from Motherwell. Their song is to my mind rather maudlin, but almost everybody knows the words. My re-working of their song and reference through a similar tune was intentionally a bit ironic. It was also practical since if people are going to join in a song they have never heard before, it needs to have a familiar tune and a familiar format in terms of words and verses. In the second line of the Chorus I use the word *'ken'* and my grandfather pointed out that this is a Lowland word. I should therefore point out, as I did to him, that I deliberately used a Lowland word since many of the community which created the Assynt Crofters Trust were not born and brought up there. That is a fact that I wanted to signal or hint at in order to be inclusive. The words are reproduced below:

Assynt Crofters Trust Song

Chorus:

For these are OUR mountains
And the crofts we all ken
The land's for the people
Not 'For Sale' yet again
So the Crofters of Assynt
All met in the School
The land's for the people
Not for landlords to rule

Verse 1

Just north of Lochinver
An estate was for sale
And the news made the Crofters
Of Assynt turn pale
On offer for thousands
In lots very small
They didn't think this plan
Would suit them at all!

Verse 2

They were cleared to the coast once
Under terrible strife
Some shipped off abroad
While still more lost their lives
But the memory still lingers
With those who remain
Who fight for the future
But remember the pain

Verse 3

There's a chance now in Assynt
A place in history to gain
And everyone's striving
For we have a claim
To a say in our future
To control of our land
Working together
To buy back the land!

Verse 4

We went on the tele
We raffled a pig
There's a ceilidh in Stoer now
So we're having a jig
There's crofters from Skye too
Who're lending a hand
Cos everyone knows now
We're taking a stand!

Diary of Interviews and other Fieldwork

The map in Figure 3.3 shows the places in which I conducted interviews. As you can see, I spent a lot of time *'on the road'*. In addition to the main fieldwork there was also the Scottish Education for Action (SEAD) Study Tour in 1993, which took me to a number of other locations in the rural Highlands and Islands.⁶⁷ I was asked to attend this as a representative from the Assynt Crofters Trust. Some details regarding this tour are included in Appendix 1.

As mentioned earlier, Appendix 1 provides brief diary extracts, tracking my interviews and participant observation. This Appendix serves to illustrate the variety of interviewees, locations of interviews and participant observation and methods which I used. The notes on *'remit'* and *'methods'* give a brief outline for each interview or encounter and the aims of that encounter. The notes on location include reference to whether, for instance, a particular interview was carried out in the home of the participant – or the workplace or street. I note these details since such circumstances so often influence the type of encounter which results and the sort of transcript which emerges.

Interviewing

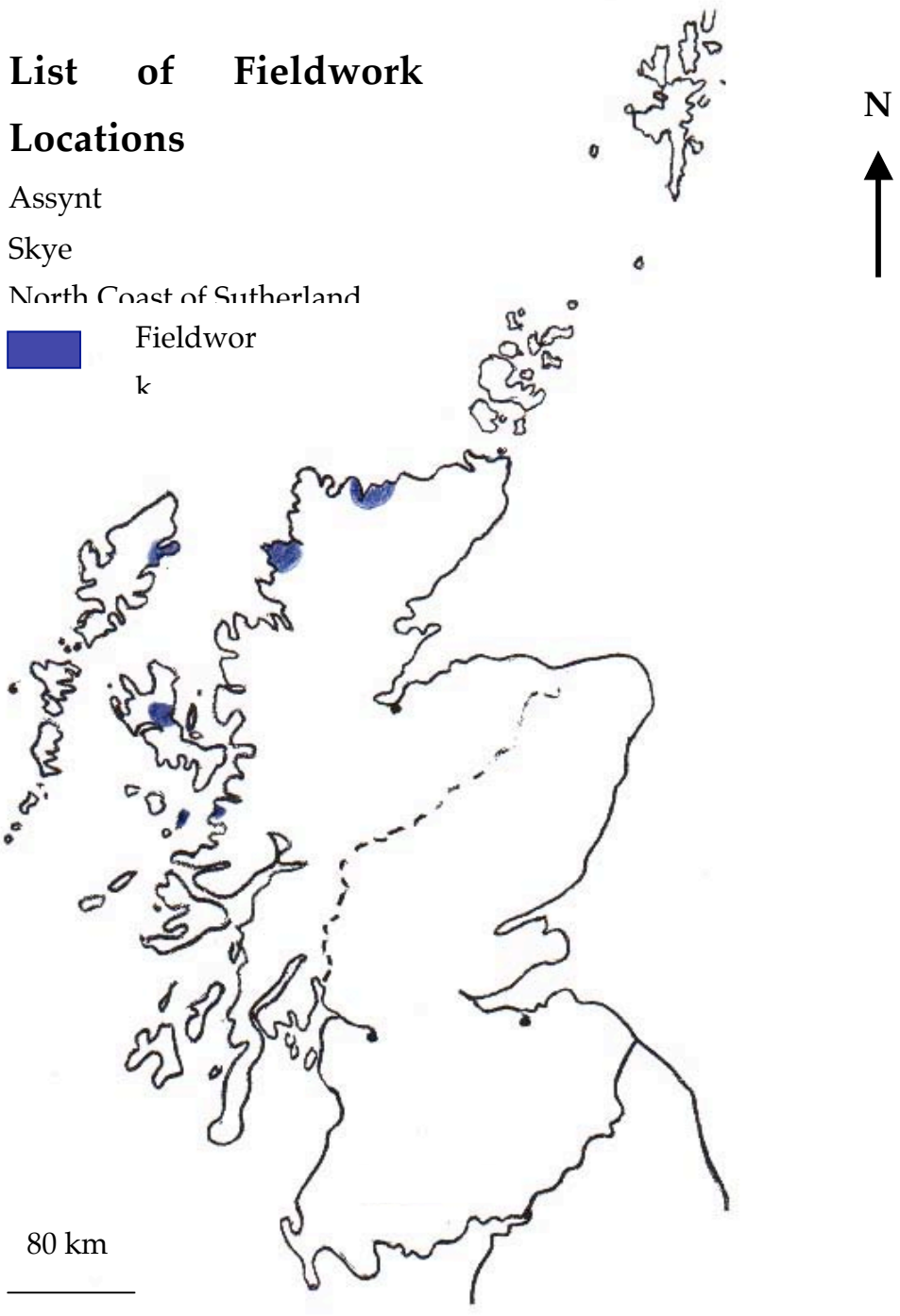
I adopted qualitative methods in this thesis, because quantitative methods would not have been capable of elucidating the topics with which I wished to engage. Such techniques, relying as they do on personal narrative, are often a good way of recovering hidden histories and geographies. In their work with Swazi women, Miles and Crush note that the advantages of using such an approach are as follows. Firstly, such methodologies are seen as *'corrective to the silences and Eurocentrism of many archival documents'*. These approaches might therefore be useful in elucidating the way in which historical constructions of crofting and the Highlands are reworked by the groups whom I interviewed. Secondly, they may assist the researcher in achieving a *'degree of depth, flexibility, richness and vitality often lacking in conventional*

⁶⁷ This involved women from all over the world who were involved in community development in their own communities. The title of the tour and conference was *'Shifting the Balance: People, Power and Participation'*. There were separate rural and urban tours and so

questionnaire based interviews'. As we will see in Chapter Four, the material gathered in this way contrasts interestingly with questionnaire survey material, in its focus. Thirdly, these approaches may help to *'uncover not only what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did'*. This was hence a useful aspect of these methodologies, in interviewing the Assynt Crofters Trust representatives after their successful campaign, and in interviewing Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD) croft tenants in Skye, in the wake of the Assynt Crofters and Borve and Annishadder Township actions. Fourthly, these approaches can *'illuminate both the logic of individual courses of action and the effects of systematic and structural constraints within which life-courses evolve'*.

two representatives from each country were invited. The countries were South Africa, Nicaragua, Philippines, Georgian Republic, Ireland and Scotland.

Figure 3.3: Fieldwork Locations



Fifthly, it is possible that these methodologies might assist in cracking the codes of the muted group, 'by documenting the personal histories and struggles of "invisible" people, thus giving a voice to the marginalised and the dispossessed'.⁶⁸ The work of Miles and Crush on life-histories amongst Swazi women is part of a project aimed at rewriting the historical geography of Swaziland 'from below'. Theirs is a useful discussion since they note most clearly that the life-histories they collect cannot be viewed as unproblematic sources 'for the reconstruction of "real" events and experiences'. Consideration of this has led them to:

"redefine the life histories as the product of a complex series of interactions between the two researchers and between the researchers and the women interviewed".⁶⁹

I hope that in my discussion of my positioning in this research I have illustrated that I take a similar view. I am also helped by the way in which Miles and Crush problematise the matter of conducting research '*from within*':

"The act of formulating a research problem, the definition of what is missing in the written history or geography of a country or people, the posing of questions not normally formulated and posed, the imposition of a narrative form on memory, the definition of a social relationship (interviewer-interviewee) not normally forged, and the presence of a recording device all force the insider, for all the advantages of such positionality, into a (temporary) outsider position. Seen this way, the advantages of insider status are relative rather than absolute. Issues of representation are as germane to the insider."⁷⁰

Miles and Crush flag the fact that in different cultural settings and when there are significant age differences between interviewer and interviewee, it is simply not polite or appropriate to ask certain kinds of questions or to probe difficult subjects unless the interviewee brings these difficult subjects up her(him)self.

⁶⁸ See discussion of 'giving voice' on p 85 of **Miles M. and Crush J.** 1993 *Personal Narratives as Interactive Texts: Collecting and Interpreting Migrant Life-Histories* Professional Geographer Vol. 45(1) pp84 -94.

⁶⁹ See discussion on p 85 of **Miles M. and Crush J.** 1993 *Personal Narratives as Interactive Texts: Collecting and Interpreting Migrant Life-Histories* Professional Geographer Vol. 45(1) pp84 -94

⁷⁰ See p 87 of **Miles M. and Crush J.** 1993 *Personal Narratives as Interactive Texts: Collecting and Interpreting Migrant Life-Histories* Professional Geographer Vol. 45(1) pp84 -94.

Quantitative methods might only have served to mask the rich variety of material at different scales. The subtle differences, not just between parishes or organisations, but right down to the scale of township and intra-household variations, would not have emerged without a qualitative approach. However, Staeheli and Lawson note that the necessity in qualitative fieldwork to focus on place can bring a danger of overlooking or failing to notice the many non-local forces at work.⁷¹ These non-local forces may not necessarily be mentioned by interviewees. It is for this reason that multiple scales are recommended in each '*field*'. In view of the debates within geography on this matter, it is interesting to note past understandings and interpretations of the meaning of '*statistical*' enquiry:

"by Statistical is meant ... an inquiry into the state of a country for the purpose of ascertaining the quantum of happiness enjoyed by its inhabitants and the means of its future improvement"⁷²

At the time of doing my fieldwork, '*ascertaining the quantum of happiness enjoyed by*' Assynt's inhabitants required, in my view, a qualitative approach, not least to discover what these inhabitants value as a grounding for any notion of '*improvement*', future or present. The use of key informants and short profiles of each study area provided a method of analysis which included '*non-local*' forces and influences.

At the time I was placing myself as different in approach from studies such as Caird and Moisley's work on crofting in the 1950s and 1960s.⁷³ Studies such as this were often done during summer excursions – '*geography holidays*' in a sense. These were made up of enthusiastic amateurs led by professional geographers such as Caird, then a lecturer at Glasgow University. Such publications involve thanks to *Mrs MacSo-and-So* for her scones and tea, and *Mrs MacThingy* for her delightful picnic lunch. Or so it seemed to me at the time. I felt, I suppose, embarrassed by such texts and saw them as

⁷¹ See p 98 in Staeheli L. A. and Lawson V. A. 1994 *A Discussion of "Women in the Field": The Politics of Feminist Fieldwork* Professional Geographer Vol. 94(1) pp 96-102.

⁷² Sir John Sinclair, Bart, 1798. Quoted in Smith J. S. (ed) 1983 *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland* Volume XIXB, Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh.

⁷³ Caird J.B. 1959 *Paicr: A Geographical Study of a Lewis Crofting District* University of Glasgow, Dept. of Geography and Moisley H. A. 1966 *Uig: Hebridean Parish* University of Glasgow, Dept. of Geography.

condescending to the subjects of the research. The whole practice of going out there to '*deepest, darkest Lewis*' with a company of zealous, committed amateurs reminded me of 19th century missionary activity, somehow. Now I tend to see things slightly differently. I am fascinated by such texts, find them useful and am ashamed of my earlier perceptions. It is banal to point out that such a text says as much about those who created it as it does on its ostensible focus. As a text it is obviously a product of its own time in exactly the same way as is the text I am in the process of creating. One difference is perhaps that such studies were apparently unselfconscious in their making of lists, counting things and noting down of all sorts of eclectic detail. Texts like this then offer, in their own positioned way, a fascinating level of detail.

What I, and those who participated in this research, have produced are a large selection of interactive texts or interview transcripts. These are the results of long, often intimate, semi-structured interviews. I had a list of basic topics that I wished to cover, but I did not raise these topics in any particular order, and often they were discussed without my asking particular questions. Once the interview was underway, I would employ the turn of phrase used by the interviewee in asking for clarification and more details. The structure of the interview flowed from my picking up on different comments and asking for more detail. As a wider range of topics emerged from this procedure, I would then add new items to my '*shopping list*' of topics. Some items were always raised by me and not by the interviewees. One particular example of this was my question about '*the role of women*', past and present, in crofting. In talking about the past, many people mentioned the role of women, but no-one brought the subject up with respect to the present, without prompting.

Fieldwork Impacts

In the regular run of events, no individual is asked for their ideas and opinions about the world and *their* world, for several hours at a time.⁷⁴ This very act has a number of effects. Having made a commitment to be part of the research process, the participant or subject has set time aside for this. This

⁷⁴ For further discussion of this see **Miles M. and Crush J.** 1993 *Personal Narratives as Interactive Texts: Collecting and Interpreting Migrant Life-Histories* Professional Geographer Vol. 45(1) pp84 -94.

is, if you like, dedicated time. For many people, this is the first time in their lives that they have set aside time which is dedicated to systematic thinking and discussion of a particular topic. The participants in the research are not burdened with the need for outcomes or active results within this time and these discussions. For academics and researchers it is easy to overlook the significance, or difference, of this, but even academics and journalists do find this different. Dr. James Hunter, Skye, who is himself an historian, writer and journalist found the experience quite to his taste:

"The press only ever want soundbites. I rarely get the chance just to talk at length honestly."⁷⁵

For others the experience of suddenly being attributed '*expert*' status is excruciating and inhibiting. They feel they must strive to say something '*significant*'. They defer to the knowledge of others in the community, or to the knowledge of the researcher herself. Many of those interviewed said they knew very little and suggested I should speak to one or two others involved. This was not just nervousness, but also an endorsement of the ability and leadership skills of certain elected representatives. Despite this, many participants panicked the first time or for the first quarter of an hour. This is tempered by the realisation that, suddenly, what the subjects of the research are saying and doing, is deemed worthy of '*academic enquiry*'. This realisation can confer status and induce a degree of self-confidence, once the interviewee settles into the idea of the research process and overcomes her(his) fear of being taped. In the first round of ACT interviews, two of the subjects were not taped because the whole idea made them far too nervous. Instead I took notes. In the second round of interviews, one of these people had become quite comfortable, if a little bashful about being taped, and had given several interviews to journalists in the intervening year.

Having overcome that problem, what follows then is a tentative journey of description and explanation that sketches the individual subject's positioned knowledge and beliefs. The parameters are drawn by the interviewee, through reference to information and knowledge held by other members of

⁷⁵ Fieldwork Interview 1993

the group, or more abstract sources beyond the community. In this dedicated time, the interviewees are often striving to express things that they may have never previously had cause to put into words. They may also find themselves making connections, or being asked to make connections between topics they have not previously considered in relation to each other or themselves.⁷⁶ This systematic, though semi-structured, process can cause the subjects to find, form and create opinions and positions never before visited. Once set in motion, there is no telling where the process will take you or the participants in your research. Further thoughts on the part of the participants may yield ever developing and changing understandings. It is also likely, to have an effect on the activities of the participants in the research. Others have commented on this research '*spin-off*', and the issues of responsibility or in some cases culpability that this raises. In the case of the Assynt Crofters Trust Steering Group, their activities involved holding meetings. The time dedicated to a meeting differs from that dedicated to the research process for, although discussion takes place, the over-riding aim is ultimately to take decisions which will be acted upon. My involvement began the day after the public launch of the Assynt Crofters Trust appeal. Hence my interviewing underpinned by participant observation, or a role as observer-participant, ran in tandem with the development of the Assynt Crofters' campaign. The extent to which my research impacted upon the campaign is impossible to gauge. However, my impression is that in the early days of the campaign, my interviews had a number of effects. The fact that I listened and took seriously what was said gave some people a little more confidence in their own opinions. At times the interviews also seemed to provide a relatively '*safe*' (less-public) trial run at explaining what the Assynt Crofters Trust was all about - or a chance to express worries and misgivings. Others perhaps used them to '*play*' with ideas running through their own minds at the time. Later in the research process, and in the life of the Assynt Crofters Trust, accounts and updates of the activities of the Trust itself became more uniform among participants. That is to say, accounts by different participants became more alike, possibly in reaction to a number of factors. The campaign achieved a very high media profile which resulted in the Assynt Crofters' representatives

⁷⁶p 90 Miles M. and Crush J. 1993 *Personal Narratives as Interactive Texts: Collecting and Interpreting Migrant Life-Histories* Professional Geographer Vol. 45(1) pp84 -94.

being frequently obliged to repeat and to re-present '*the story*' for journalists, conferences and the general public. Secondly, with the passing of time, a shared narrative of what the 'story' was, formed among the community, both for internal and external use. The passing of time aided this process by making it possible to discern more easily or to decide on a direction, purpose and trajectory for that story. To some extent, a formula story or account emerged.

This process appears to be, to some extent, circular. The formula story presented by the Assynt Crofters bore a close resemblance to the television account of events. The television account was constructed around lengthy speeches and interviews with both representatives of the Assynt Crofters and the Assynt Crofters' own press releases.

The community account tended to reflect the media emphasis. This type of edit was then re-presented and updated for the media. And so the process went on. In calling the resultant narrative '*formulistic*', that is not to imply that the story is unchanging. As time passes and events unfold, the narrative/news changes and develops. The coincidence of views amongst the subjects of the research is not due to repetition of opinions, but to the development of a story for external and internal consumption which provides an adequate account of the recent past - last week, last year, last summer. Participants in my fieldwork also had their own views on research:

"And then you don't know what they do with it afterwards. (The information gathered) I always remember that I got - I was down at the library and you know how today we're all into this breastfeeding babies? And it's all into this breastfeeding babies.. Well, anyway, this was a book I saw and it was supposed to be a discussion on whether children turned out ..- whether it was environment or genetic causes for their development. You know the sort of thing. So I was reading along and suddenly it's all about these working class women who insist upon feeding their babies with the breast when they know very well - it's been PROVEN very well - that feeding them with a bottle. ... And I'm saying to myself - now that isn't what people are saying! So I look at the back you see, and I said - when was it printed? So it was printed in the 60s, and the research had been done, I think, late 40s to 50s. And I read on with the book and it was the exact opposite of what people all think today. And I thought, well - this really just shows that everything goes by middle class mores. they say - right, breast feeding is in, so now we all breast feed and if you don't do it you're wrong. And then at one point bottle feeding was in because these ladies were all too busy doing other things to breast feed, you know? And it was these stupid - I mean, it really went like that - these working class women who weren't intelligent enough to sterilise bottles and teats and they didn't know how to do these things. They couldn't read a formula, so they had to continue breast feeding because they couldn't do the rest. And I said - I mean, it just shows you - I said that these people set out with a preconceived idea and they just put it in.

... What was it somebody said? Statistics OR state-istics? That's it. You know, you can turn statistics to whatever, in the way you phrase a question - and you can get the statistics you want."⁷⁷

I find this to be a brilliant quote considering the historical '*baggage*' of social science research and the difficulties of finding a way forward. She was also talking about the research tactics that I might need to adopt, given my own positionality, or involvement in the local campaign to get the land. With

⁷⁷Interview 1992 ACT/Female 55-60

regard to interviewing the Scottish Landowners Federation she gave the following advice:

"Maybe the best thing is to give your address away, so that they're not aware...

Me: If I use University of Wales paper you know,...

She: Oh yes - you can just say you were up here visiting and interviewing several people here and that ... you're just on your way back...

Me: If I let on I'm helping raffle pigs and whatever for the Assynt Crofters Trust, I don't think they'd be ... I don't know ... I don't think they'd talk much...

She: No. If they thought you were biased before you came they would be wary, so you've got to kid on that it's purely from an educational point that you..."⁷⁸

There are many people in the area who think that students and especially postdoctoral students acquire '*high-falutin*' qualifications off the back of other people's efforts because they talk to people doing '*real things*', write it all down, hand it in and get another degree. There are some people who feel quite strongly about this. Such thinking is probably exacerbated in the Assynt area by the fact that the Highlands and Islands of Scotland - and now particularly a place which has pursued community land ownership - seems to attract a disproportionate degree of research interest from all around the world. There seems to be a sort of curiosity effect, whereby this culture region and crofting is something of a curio for academics and students in the English-speaking world. The level of interest appears disproportionate to the significance of the place. Perhaps this prompted the next quote or question, which was posed to me quite aggressively:

"What do you think, if it's not an improper question, might be the value of this to the Assynt Crofters Trust?"⁷⁹

'*This*' refers to my PhD thesis. I waffled on but was pretty unspecific because, despite all the research alliance ideas, it seemed somewhat arrogant to make any claims for the usefulness of my own work at such an early stage. It was not yet too clear what direction the final thesis would take. In any case, my

⁷⁸ Interview 1992 ACT/Female 55-60

⁷⁹ Interview 1992 ACT/Male 55-60

own idea of what might be useful for the future may not coincide with that of the speaker.

As discussed earlier, I worked unquestioningly with the community's representatives, the Steering Group, since it seemed both polite and appropriate. Further information was gained in a day-to-day fashion, through living and working in the area. Throughout this time I kept a fieldwork diary, and also became alarmingly trigger-happy with the tape recorder, for fear of missing something which might later prove '*utterly crucial*'.

Whilst I worked very hard to find appropriate methodological approaches and put a great deal of thought into the implications of each decision in this regard, I was left feeling somewhat uncomfortable and dissatisfied with the results of these efforts. I found Gillian Rose's discussion, written '*from a sense of failure,*' very helpful in dealing with this.⁸⁰ Particularly useful in understanding my discomfort was her discussion of Fiona Smith's comments on translations – her view that translations from local knowledges to academic knowledges are deeply regulated by power relations. Rose suggests that:

"This is an argument which understands the imperative to situate less in terms of surveying positions in a landscape of power and more in terms of seeing a view of power as punctured by gaps precariously bridged."⁸¹

Hence '*situated knowledge*' might be negotiated between different knowledges.⁸² In this negotiation the knowledges of both researched and researcher are recognised, and the authority of the knowledge claims of the academy are perhaps resisted. Rose suggests that this sense of failure is due in some part to the impossibility of achieving '*transparent reflexivity*'. This point serves to acknowledge that the ideal of '*really*' knowing ourselves and

⁸⁰ See **Rose G.** 1997 *Situating knowledges: positionality, reflexivities and other tactics* Progress in Human Geography Vol. 21 (3) pp 305-320.

⁸¹ p 315 in **Rose G.** 1997 *Situating knowledges: positionality, reflexivities and other tactics* Progress in Human Geography Vol. 21 (3) pp 305-320.

⁸² The term situated knowledge was developed first by Marcus as a critique of universalising knowledges, which makes claims to 'really know', without recognising the specificity and rootedness of all knowledge claims which are contingent and partial, and rooted in particular times, places and cultural fractions.

our field encounters with others perfectly is always and inevitably impossible. Since *'we'* ourselves are not transparently knowable it is only possible to partially *'map'* the relations of power, desire, distaste, distraction – and so on – between *'us'*, the researchers and *'others'*. Rose proposes that those who suggest a more modest vision of research, as a process of constitutive negotiation, offer a workable way forward.

Fieldwork

In this section of the Chapter I briefly introduce the different places in which I carried out my research. This is done in chronological order. There are seven elements to the fieldwork.

The Assynt Crofters Trust Campaign

The Assynt Crofters launched their campaign to buy the Estate into community ownership on 28th July 1992. Throughout August I carried out lengthy semi-structured interviews with all but one of the Steering Group (who was unavailable at the time). In these interviews I aimed to find out what the Assynt Crofters were trying to do; why they wanted to do this; and how they were going about the task that they had set themselves. In addition, these interviews included discussion of how outsiders or visitors saw the area; consideration of regional and local policy and planning issues; and descriptions of what crofting is. A miscellaneous collection of other topics emerged in the course of this set of interviews which I followed up in later interviews.

My original intention had been to interview more widely than the Steering Group itself, to get some *'off-stage'* comment and a wider selection of people from the community. However, this proved impractical for a number of reasons. Firstly, I was already generating very large amounts of research material. Secondly, everyone involved in the campaign was investing a great deal of effort in it. The Steering Group members had been elected to represent their township, and so I decided to focus on these elected representatives. It seemed to me rather rude to seek more opinions in each township in the midst of a very time consuming campaign. Interviews take up a lot of the participants' precious time and I did not want anyone to feel

that I was in any way disregarding the democratic structure that the voting members of the ACT had chosen or their elected members. Any hint of that might have had an unintended destabilising effect.

Having investigated the tactics and motivation of the Assynt Crofters, I then sought the opinions of other crofters in areas outwith Assynt. This was a process of triangulation, undertaken to contextualise the views of the Assynt Crofters Trust representatives. To achieve this process of grounding, I decided to visit three other crofting areas, and to carry out interviews in each of these. In two of these three areas – the Stornoway Trust and Borge and Annishadder Township - community land ownership had also been pursued or raised as an issue. The map in Figure 3.1 shows the location of the parish of Assynt and the map in Figure 3.2 shows the North Assynt estate, which was marketed as the North Lochinver Estate in 1992. Also shown are the thirteen townships from which the Assynt Crofters Trust was created.

Skerry: Support for the Campaign

I chose to visit this community because they had undertaken fundraising in support of the Assynt Crofters Trust campaign. I wanted to find out more about why they supported the Assynt Crofters' campaign so strongly. My first introduction to this community was through watching a BBC television programme called *Landward*, which focused on the Skerry crofting community. Following this, I visited Skerry in August 1992 with a delegation of Assynt Crofters who were going there to attend a fundraising event organised by the people of Skerry, in support of the ACT campaign. Skerry is located on the north coast of Sutherland.

Skye: Divergent Views on Crofting Community Land Ownership

In July 1993 I travelled to Skye to carry out interviews there. Skye was important for two reasons. Seven estates on the island are owned by the government department now known as SEERAD (Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department), which is landlord to a total of 630 crofting tenants on these properties. SEERAD is part of the Scottish Executive, but before Devolution in 1999, it was part of the Scottish Office under the direct control of the Westminster government. In February 1990

Lord Sanderson, then Scottish Office Agricultural Minister, circulated a Consultation Paper on the '*possible disposal of the secretary of State's crofting estates to community ownership*'. In effect, the SEERAD tenants on Skye and Raasay were being offered the opportunity of community control and ownership of their land at no cost to themselves, with the bonus of free professional advice on how the tenants might manage this land in their own interests. Considerable, and at times acrimonious, debate ensued. Eventually the Skye and Raasay tenants vehemently rejected the offer. It therefore seemed to me that it would be informative to set these crofters' opinions and motives along side those of the Assynt Crofters, who had used such energy and imagination two years later, to secure what the Skye and Raasay tenants had rejected as a gift. In addition to an interest in the opinions of these crofters, I also wished to visit one group on the island which had bought their townships into community ownership, in the wake of the Assynt Crofters Appeal. The Borve and Annishadder crofters were tenants on a private estate and had consulted with the Assynt Crofters before taking this course of action. The sketch map in Figure 3.4a shows the location of Borve and Annishadder Township Ltd and the locations of the SEERAD estates on Skye. Also included are the locations of interviews carried out with SEERAD tenants. Figure 3.4b provides a map of the township grounds brought into community ownership by Borve and Annishadder Township Ltd. I return to discussion of this township buy-out and to the issue of the SEERAD Estates later in the thesis.

Lewis: The Benefit of Experience

In 1993 I also visited the island of Lewis. The purpose of this visit was twofold. Firstly I wished to interview Trustees and employees of the Stornoway Trust. The Stornoway Trust is an area of 65,000 acres including 1,500 crofts and the town of Stornoway itself, and has been run as a community Trust since 1923. It was gifted to the tenants in 1923 by Lord Leverhulme, who at that time owned all of Lewis and Harris. He offered all his tenants this opportunity, but only those in the Stornoway area accepted. This was a chance then, to learn about the workings and management of one of the only existing successful example of community landownership. The second reason for the visit was to interview the Assynt Crofters Trust lawyer,

who was instrumental in the campaign, and who lives and works in Lewis. I had heard many stories about Lewis throughout my life, since my grandfather was born and brought up there. Figure 3.5 is a sketch map of Lewis, showing the location and extent of the Stornoway Trust. Discussion of the Stornoway Trust is to be found mainly in Chapters Six.

Reactions: Key Actors, Gatekeepers and Influences

In addition to visiting Skerray, Skye and Lewis to conduct interviews, I also interviewed a number of key informants who had an influence on, or an interest in, events in Assynt. These included representatives from Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise (CASE), what was then Highland Regional Council (HRC), Scottish Crofters Union (SCU), Scottish Landowners Federation (SLF), the Crofters Commission, and the District and Regional Councillors for the Assynt area.

Return to Assynt: Owning the Land

In the sixth part of my fieldwork I returned to Assynt in June 1994, a year and a half after conducting the first set of interviews. By then the crofters had been successful in their bid for the Estate, and had been running the Estate as a crofting community trust for just over a year. These interviews provide a retrospective view on the crofters' campaign, an insight into the impact of their success and a feel for their changed circumstances as tenants and administrators of their own land.

On-Going Participant Observation : Impacts of ACT Action

From 1995 onwards I have been permanently based in Assynt. I have my own croft through the New Entrants Scheme and am a member of the Assynt Crofters Trust. I was Secretary of the Culag Community Woodland Trust and Comunn Eachdraidh Asiante when these organisations were first created in 1995. I maintained my interest in the subjects on which this thesis is based and learned much from my own personal involvement, despite suffering serious illness from 1995 until 2000. During that time I managed to do a little consultancy work, a part-time job for the ACT for a year and then full time work in tourism, once I was mobile enough to manage it. In 2001, having recovered sufficiently to drive long distances, I embarked on new research

which builds upon my original fieldwork. This new research focuses on eight groups who have achieved or aspire to achieve community land ownership. The groups are the ACT, the Culag Community Woodland Trust (Assynt), the Melness Crofters Estate, the North Sutherland Community Forest Trust, the Stornoway Trust, the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust, the Knoydart Foundation and Borve and Annishadder Township Ltd.

Figure 3.4a: Borve & Annishader Township and the Skye SEERAD Estates

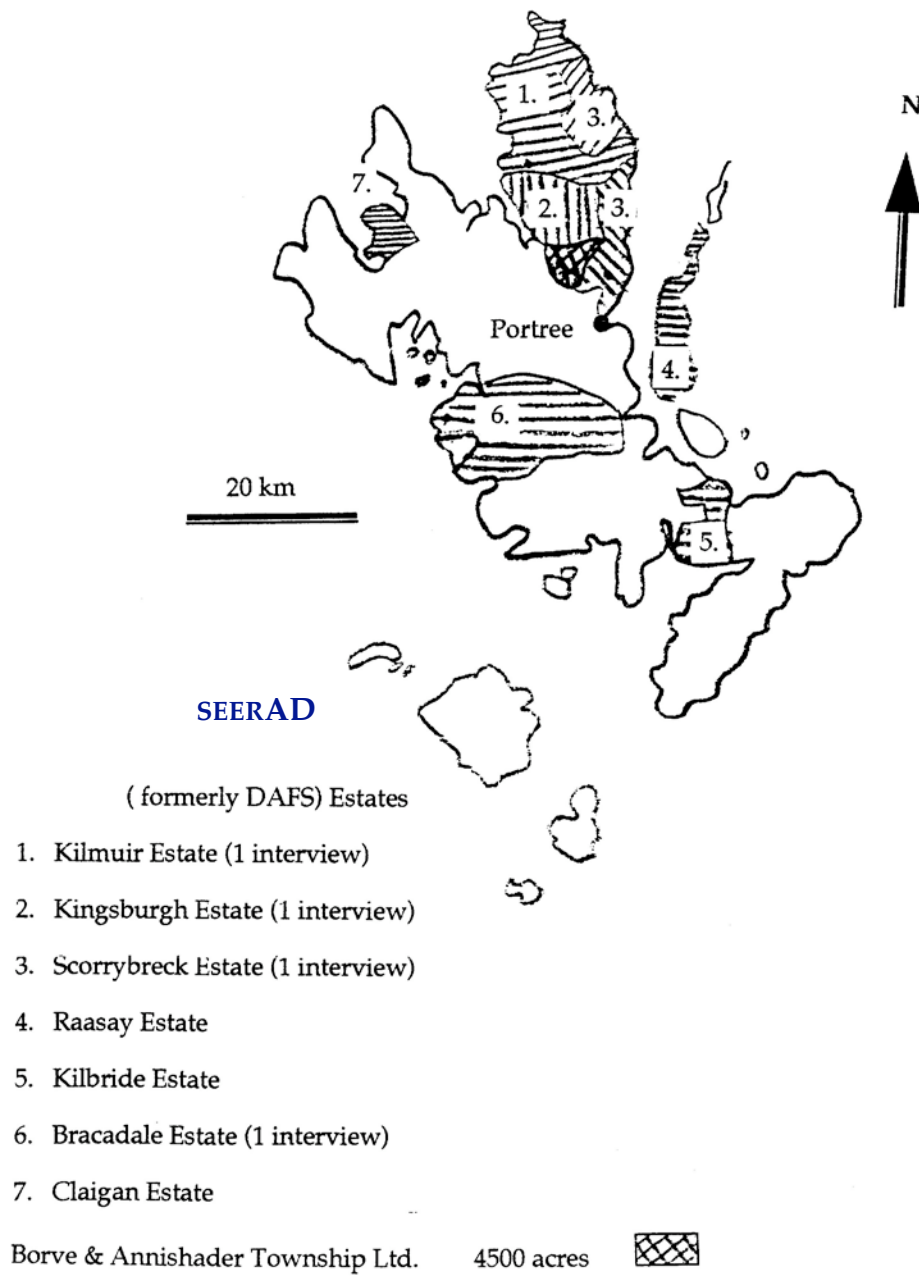


Figure 3.4b: Borve & Annishader Township Ltd.

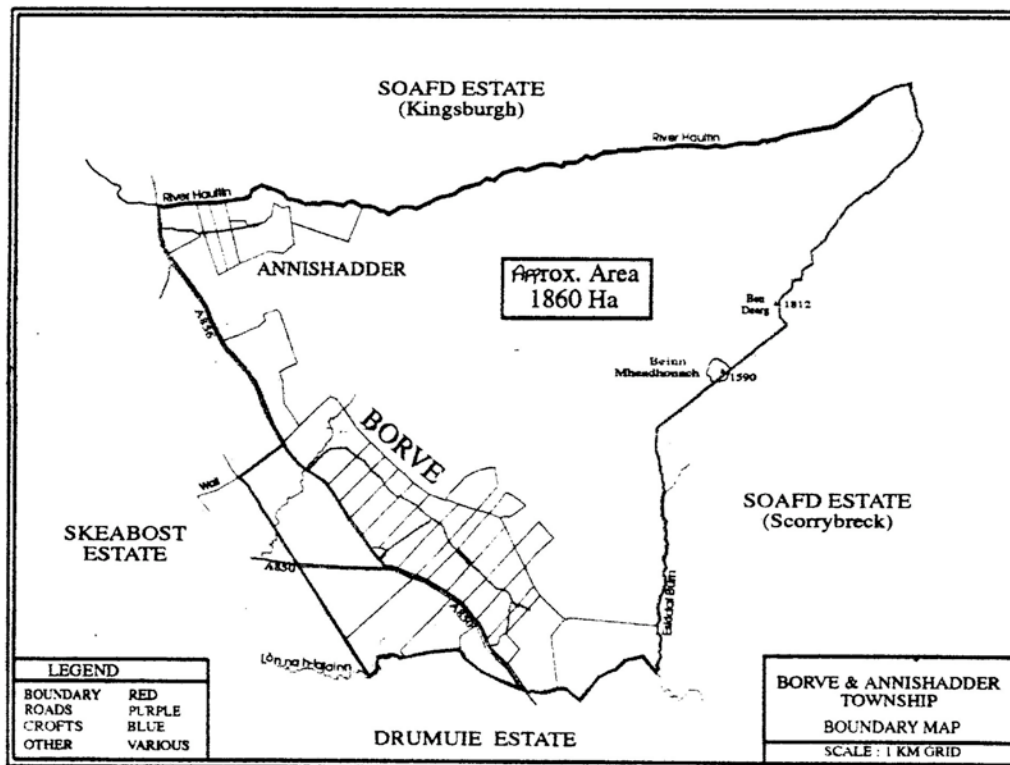
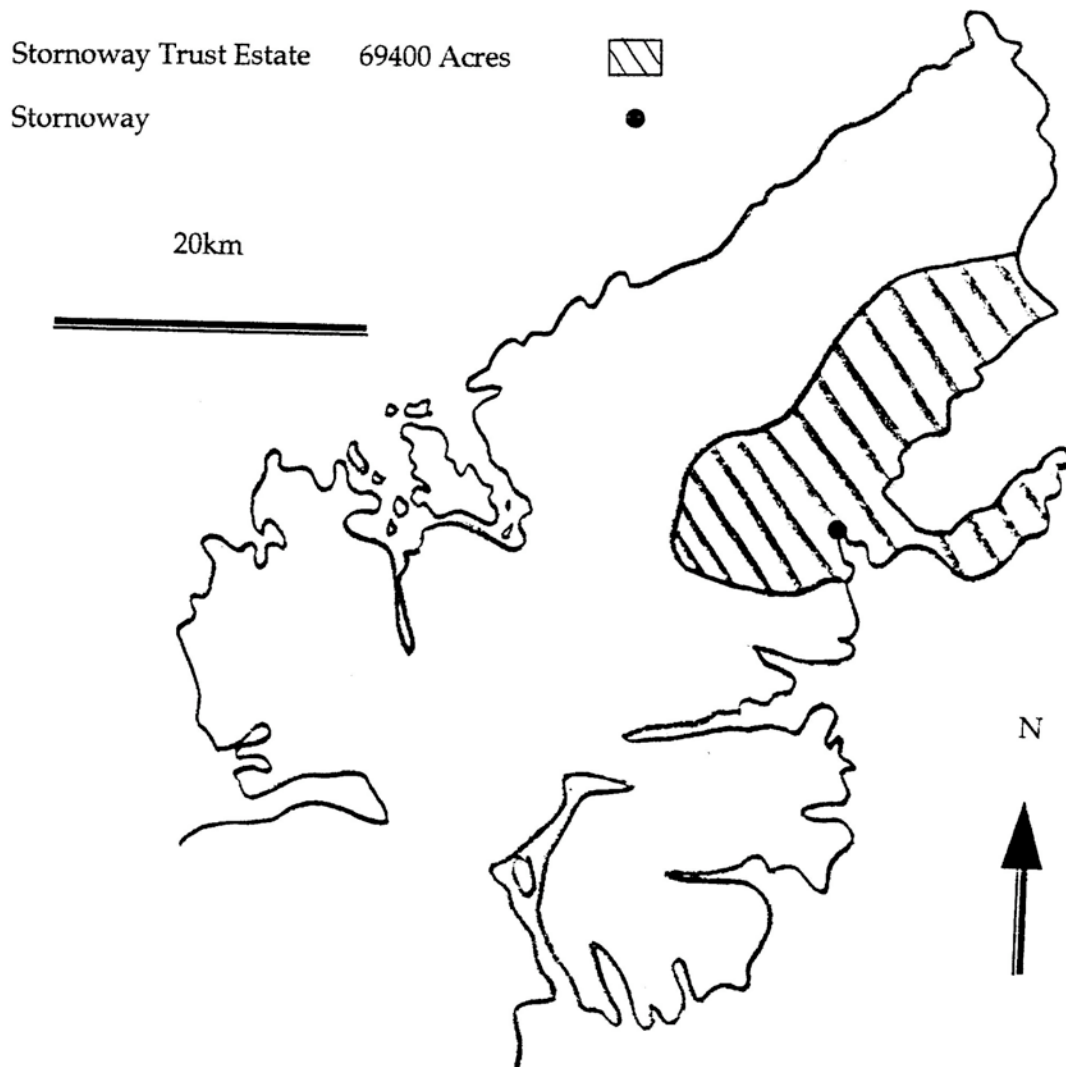


Figure 3.5: Lewis and the Stornoway Trust



In the intervening years much had changed. In 1999 Devolution had been achieved and a new government elected in Edinburgh, with a great deal of attention having been devoted to land ownership issues during the devolution debate. The subsequent Scottish Executive elections saw that debate continue, so that community and crofting community landownership has ceased to be a curiosity and are increasingly being viewed by both community groups and rural policy makers as a vehicle for sustainable rural development. The new Scottish Executive then created a new project within HIE - The Community Land Unit. A range of different kinds of community land ownership structures have emerged across the Highlands and Islands. In 2000 the Scottish Land Fund was created, providing access to some £10 million of public support for community groups managing land or seeking to acquire land. This was provided through Lottery monies – The New Opportunities Fund.

Conclusions

It has become clear that the attention paid, in the study of colonial discourse and post-colonial theory to translation, diasporic cultures and the speech act is productive in elucidating the position of the Highlands and Islands and the Gaidhealtachd within Scotland and 'Great Britain'. Through consideration of speech acts and translation, it is possible to trace the ways in which colonisation of the Gaidhealtachd culture region has informed British imperial practices. These practises include characterisations of the Gaidhealtachd in opposition to the Scottish/North British/UK 'centre', in discourses which have resonances with Said's *Orientalism*, albeit at a smaller scale. Other important colonial practices, the development of which was influenced by the experience of the British state in the Highlands and Islands, are military, administrative and cultural. Fundamental to this process has been the incorporation of Highland men as British armed forces and of Highlands and Islands peoples as settlers in colonised places. Colonised places have tended to be characterised as 'not-urban' in opposition to the metropolitan 'centre'. A key aspect of this process is the way in which the natural environment and 'natural' resources are first conceptualised, and then ordered and controlled by the colonising power. It is in contested definitions, control and use of land, nature and 'natural' resources that aspects of the roots

of these linked processes of colonisation and the development of global capitalism, can clearly be seen in the Scottish Highlands and Islands. In this respect the crofting community experiences partial subalternity, through active retention of pre-colonial conceptualisations of land, environment and resources. At times of heightened political activity focused on ‘*The Land Question,*’ or use and control of (natural) resources, the crofting community, through its representatives and representative bodies, actively excavates, re-works and stages positions, ideas and identities which refer directly to those colonial and imperial conceptualisations, which have been imposed upon the region. The most documented and large scale examples of this are the Crofters Wars, the creation of the Scottish Crofters Union in 1985, and the activity relating to community land ownership beginning in 1991. Only through post-colonial approaches which foreground subalternity, translation and Spivak’s speech act, is it possible to represent effectively these crofting ‘*speech acts*’ and moments of resistance without being epistemologically obliged to position them unfavourably in relation to – or perhaps in binary opposition to – a ‘*rational*’, metropolitan centre which asserts its own superior ability to ‘*really know*’ and to undertake ‘*rational*’ economic development. The other crucial benefit of an approach informed by post-colonial theory is that it evades the assumption that there are two ‘*sides*’, occupied by two groups of ‘*pure*’ subjects, one of which is unfractured ‘*good*’ and the other unfractured ‘*bad*’. Fanon talks at length about violence and says:

“The look the native turns on the settlers’ town is a look of lust – it expresses his dream of possession, for there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settlers’ place”⁸³

To set oneself up ‘*in the settlers’ place*’ carries a strong implication of a lust for that *same* violent power. Spivak notes that:

“When a line of communication is established between a member of a subaltern group and the circuits of citizenship or institutionality, the subaltern has been inserted into the long road to hegemony. Unless we want to be romantic purists or primitivists about “preserving subalternity” – a contradiction in terms – this is absolutely to be desired. (It goes without saying that museumized or curricularised

⁸³p30 Fanon F. 1985 *The Wretched of the Earth* Pelican London.

access to ethnic origin – another battle that must be fought – is not identical with preserving subalternity.)”⁸⁴

Spivak also highlights that the tendency to think that ‘*the other side is all unfractioned good*’ is itself a legacy of ‘*Orientalism within imperialism*’.⁸⁵ Clearly ‘*the crofters*’ are very far from being a ‘*pure*’ subaltern. The crofting community, and its diasporic Gaidhealtachd communities, are firmly located in the First World. Political action by groups staging their group identity as ‘*crofter*’ or ‘*crofting community*’ is influenced by both the memory and the concrete traces of reorganisation of land and resources through British colonial/imperial processes. That reorganisation was constitutive of the creation of those colonial/imperial processes. There are hence connections between the mobilisation of strategic subalternity by crofting groups and the processes of British colonialism. Simultaneously it is crucial that an intellectual separation be maintained between the *application of post-colonial approaches* to this topic and an account of political action wherein the *actors position or stage themselves as being subaltern*, as a result of British colonialism. This approach can hence be productive in *making visible* particular power relations at different scales – global, regional and local. However, the position of the Gaidhealtachd and crofting communities, created both by those communities and by the activities of the embodied, peopled British Empire, must be critically attended to in order to avoid reinstating the European Same in the position of Subject - or of ‘*colonising theory*’. In terms of the Scottish Highlands and Islands, both people and place are pivotally involved with imperial violence. In this thesis only one small moment in those circuits of colony and capital are attended to and every effort is made to signpost significant silences in the resultant discourses are.

⁸⁴p310 Spivak G. C. 1999 *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* Harvard University Press USA.

⁸⁵p305 in *Subaltern Talk: Interview with the Editors* in Landry D. and MacLean G (ed) 1996 *The Spivak Reader* Routledge USA.

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Chapter Four

Crofting and Crofters

Introduction

In this chapter I provide an account of the crofting system and discuss representations of crofting and crofters. Firstly I consider what landownership is and then I explore what crofting is and how crofting works. The themes which emerged through the grounded theory process, in relation to constructions of crofting as an activity and crofter as an identity, are discussed. Included in this account are aspects of crofting and crofting which cut across homogenising assumptions about crofters as a group. Later in the chapter I compare selected results from questionnaire surveys amongst crofters, on the subject of crofting, with my own interview material on the same topic.

Landownership and The Land Question

What is landownership? Until the late 20th century, the legal and landed establishment had for the most part managed to maintain the impression that landownership was a technical matter, best left for them to consider.¹ Many of us have a tendency to think of landownership as an absolute thing. In fact landownership is much more akin to a bundle of rights. The contents of that bundle can vary greatly from landowner to landowner. The bundle typically includes use of the soil, mineral rights, fishing and '*sporting*' rights, buildings, rights to change of use for land or buildings, water rights, rights to allow or prevent access on certain criteria and rights to forestry and woodland. A landowner who has title to a particular area of ground may have all of the rights mentioned. In contrast, the landowner may only have some of this '*bundle*' as part of the title to the land. The actual bundle might only include use of soil, water, forestry and buildings. Someone else may '*own*' the mineral rights. Another individual or company might own the fishing rights. Yet another individual might have a say in any change of use of buildings or open ground which the title holder considers. This person or organisation would be the feudal superior. The feudal superior might approve of a renovation to create a domestic dwelling house of average size but refuse

consent for the same building to be renovated and used as a guest-house, a craft shop or some other type of business premises.

The type of land tenure system which operates in Scotland is referred to as feudal. Scotland is the only country in the world which still has a feudal system of land tenure and the country with the most concentrated pattern of large-scale private estates.² It is still the case that less than 1500 private owners own the majority of land in Scotland:

"50% of Scotland's 19 million acres is held by 608 landowners;
40% by 283 landowners;
30% by 136 landowners;
20% by 58 landowners;
and 10% by 18 landowners."³

The feudal system was introduced in Scotland in the 11th century. Feudal tenure has many faults but one potential opportunity, in terms of reform, lies in the fact that under a feudal system, landownership is conditional due to the position of the Crown in the system. In a parliamentary democracy, it should be possible for the public interest to be asserted since the Crown ought to represent, technically, that public interest since sovereignty lies with the Scottish people. However, to date this system has developed under the control of its main beneficiaries - the landowners and legal professions. The basic elements of this system of land tenure can be most easily understood by looking at a diagram. Figure 4.1 illustrates the main elements of the system.

There is a strong vertical as well as horizontal aspect to landownership. Theoretically ownership goes from the skies to the centre of the earth. The Crown is understood to be God's representative on earth. The Crown 'owns' all the land in the United Kingdom, and the territorial seas and natural resources. Legally the Crown holds these in 'trust' for the people of Scotland, since this is a system governed by Scot's Law. Below this level are the superiors - feudal superiors - who have the effective control. Below this are

¹p vii Callander R. 1998 *How Scotland is Owned* Canongate Edinburgh.

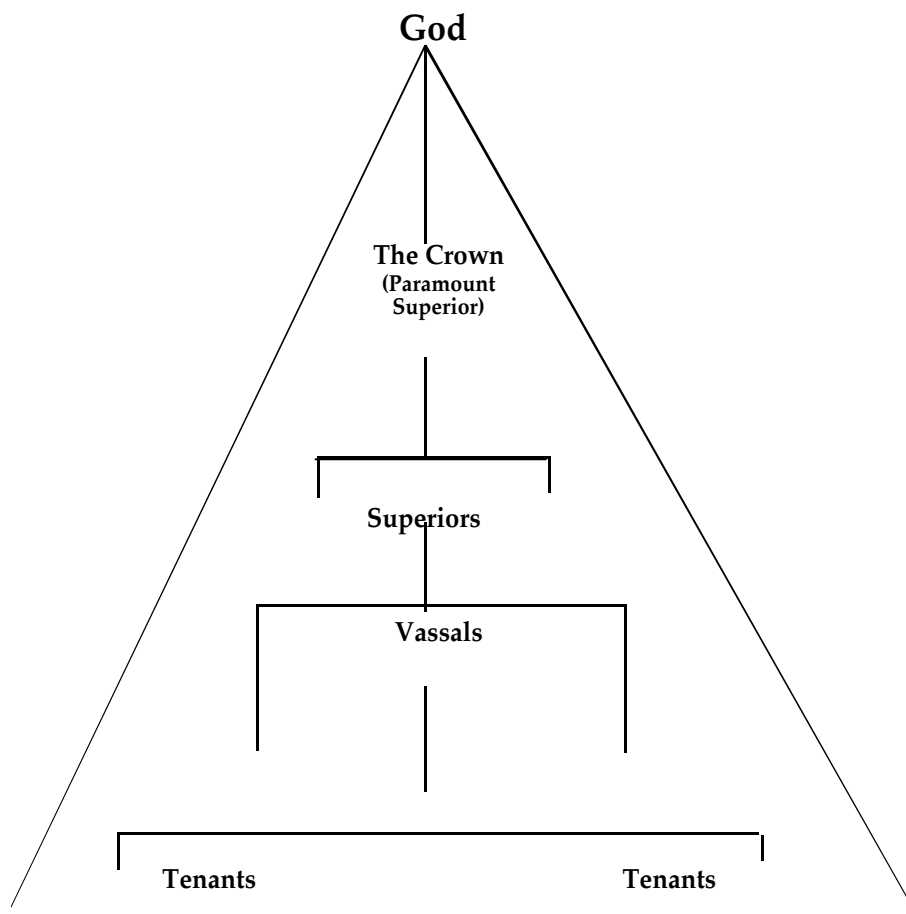
²For a more in depth treatment of this see Wightman A. 1996 *Who Owns Scotland?* Canongate Edinburgh and Callander R. 1997 *How Scotland is Owned* Canongate Edinburgh.

³p7 Callander R. 1998 *How Scotland is Owned* Canongate Edinburgh from Wightman 1996.

vassals and then tenants. Over time the pattern of rights has become complex as different landowners have retained some aspect of feudal superiority when selling land. Examples include rights like pre-emption or mineral rights. Vassals are the majority of landowners. Their rights are constrained by title deeds. The rights of tenants are derived from the vassal class, although in practice today tenancy rights are often governed by legislation such as the 1886 Crofters (Scotland) Act or the Land Tenure Reform (Scotland) Act 1974.

Landownership in Scotland has tended to be shrouded in mystery and secrecy. That has begun to change but to date the sources of information are scant. The key sources are the Register of Sasines, which is a legal source not easily accessed for reasons other than research, and the Land Register, created in 1979 through the Land Registration (Scotland) Act. The Register of Sasines is not map based and so any enquirer needs some sort of advance knowledge about the place or person about whom they are enquiring. The Land Register is for the issuing of Land Certificates which ensure accurate title. This source only covers land which comes onto the market. Significant areas of land have not come onto the market for centuries and are unlikely to do so. In addition it will take decades to cover the whole of Scotland. Until sporting estates were de-rated in 1995, the valuation role was a useful source of information. Public bodies hold a great deal of useful information but they often deem this to be confidential.

Figure 4.1: Diagram of the Scottish Land Ownership Structure
Source: Wightman 1996



The information lodged through Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS) requirements, for instance, would be an incredibly rich source if access was ever possible, but SEERAD will not even share this information with other public bodies like the Crofters Commission for whom much of it would be relevant.⁴ In 1872 the government carried out a survey across the UK in an attempt to counter the claims of land agitators in Ireland and the Scottish Highlands and Islands. The survey revealed that only seven thousand people owned 80% of the whole country. Over half of the Highlands was owned by just fifteen people. The government survey was followed up by the work of John Bateman, in 1883, when he published *The Great Landowners of Britain and Ireland*.⁵ This was the only published source and was reprinted in 1971. At this time John Millman of Aberdeen University undertook the first research in the 20th century on landownership patterns, as part of a study focused on outdoor recreation. The maps and index cards he produced were lodged in the Scottish Record Office where John McEwen accessed them, analysed them and published *Who Owns Scotland?* in 1977.⁶ Bryan MacGregor, Aberdeen University, carried out work in north west Sutherland, and in particular Assynt, for his MSc and PhD, looking at the impacts of landownership on economic development and later at owner motivation.⁷

⁴All registered agricultural produces have to fill in an IACS form annually. This provides detailed information on fields and hectares. The information is map based.

⁵**Bateman J.** 1883 *The Great Landowners of Britain and Ireland* 4th Edition Harrison London

⁶**McEwen J.** 1977 *Who Owns Scotland* Saltire Edinburgh.

⁷**MacGregor B.** 1993 *Land Tenure in Scotland* The First John McEwen Memorial Lecture; 1986 *Crofting Demography and Landuse – A Case Study of North West Sutherland* SGM Vol. 102 pp 45 – 56.

The work of Bryden, Mather and Houston was also useful in this context.⁸ Before becoming Secretary of State for Scotland during the Second World War, Tom Johnston wrote *Our Scots Noble Families*. It is necessary to provide an example of his approach:

"Show the people that our Old Nobility is not noble, that its lands are stolen lands - stolen either by force or fraud; show people that the title-deeds are rapine, murder, massacre, cheating, or Court harlotry; dissolve the halo of divinity that surrounds the hereditary title; let the people clearly understand that our present House of Lords is composed largely of descendants of successful pirates and rogues; do these things and you shatter the Romance that keeps the nation dumb and spellbound while privilege picks its pocket."⁹

One key effect - and perhaps reason - for the scarcity of sources is the manner in which debate on landownership in Scotland has tended to become politically polarised. Only in the 19th and 20th century has any land reforming legislation gone before parliament, and then, generally, only when the Liberals were in power or held the balance of power. Andy Wightman points out that in the absence of factual information, discussion of landownership in the 20th century has tended to focus on individuals rather than processes and impacts. Hence examples of bad or eccentric landlords have been aired in the media on a regular basis and the activities or opinions of more responsible landowners, largely ignored. Of course many landowners have been persistently averse to providing information in the public interest and have consistently portrayed any discussion on the issue as an attack of privacy and the sanctity of private property. Those with this sort of vested interest talk of the 'burden of responsibility' and assert, in a Highlands and Islands context, that the owners of large estates make crucial contributions to the local economy and undertake conservation and environmental management. The land owning interests have been represented since 1906 by the Scottish Landowners Federation (SLF). The SLF was originally created in order to protect landowners' interests and oppose elements of the Small Landholders

⁸**Bryden J.** *Land Tenure and Rural Development in Scotland* The Fourth John McEwen Lecture; **Bryden J, Fraser S, Houston. S, and Robertson A** 1990 *The Future of DAFS Estates in Skye and Raasay* Report for the HIDB and SCU (Arkleton Research); **Bryden J. and Fuller A. M.** 1988 *Pluriactivity as a Rural Development Option* The Arkleton Trust; **Bryden J.** 1987 *Crofting in a European Context* SGM Vol. 103 No 2. Pp 100 – 104; **Mather A. S.** 1993 *Protected Areas in the Periphery: Conservation and Controversy in Northern Scotland* Journal of Rural Studies Vol. 9 No. 4 pp371 – 384.

⁹p **Johnston T.** 1909 *Our Scots Noble Families* Forward Publishing Glasgow.

(Scotland) Bill, which proposed to extend crofting tenure to the whole of Scotland. Wightman suggests that the organisation does not, as it asserts, represent four thousand owners and '80% of Scotland's land in private ownership', but two thousand nine hundred and twenty-two owners with 'less than 42%, of private rural land in Scotland'¹⁰. He also points out that the membership pattern is concentrated in the wealthier farming counties, particularly Perthshire, Ayrshire and Aberdeenshire.

Until the late 1980s the debate over '*The Land Question*' was polarised between those advocating land nationalisation and those who insisted that the only possible system was to maintain private ownership in a free market. John McEwen advocated the complete nationalisation of all rural land in Scotland. The rise of Scottish nationalism in the 1970s diversified the debate. The Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) and the Scottish Labour Party rejected nationalisation as way forward. The new ideas which emerged focused more on pluralistic private ownership, responsible and enhanced public ownership and were moving towards concepts like community ownership. The publication at this time of work by historians, who produced new histories of Scotland and the Highlands and Islands, fed the development of new ideas.¹¹ Among many who involved themselves in the development of these debates there was an expectation that the 1979 Devolution Referendum would result in the re-establishment of a Scottish parliament with a will to tackle the Land Question. Due to the very particular requirements in terms of voting turnout and percentage of votes, a Scottish parliament was not secured. In the same year a Conservative government achieved power in Westminster.

A marked change in approach emerged among public agencies and the Scottish Office as a direct result of *Thatcherism*. The HIDB was dismantled and replaced by HIE and the LEC network. This entailed a change of emphasis from support for communities and local businesses to measuring achievements mainly through '*business births*' or start-ups. The theory was that in each LEC would be representatives of the local business community who would become involved in the '*development industry*' through serving on

¹⁰p145 **Wightman A.** 1996 *Who Owns Scotland?* Canongate Edinburgh.

¹¹Important contributions came from James Hunter, John Prebble and Ian Carter all of whom presented histories which challenged traditional conservative historical analysis.

the Board of their local LEC. In this political climate, given the polarised character of the Land Question debate, land issues and land reform were topics which practically disappeared from public debate. Self-help and '*enterprise*' were dominant. Collective political action and trade unionism were under attack - state intervention with a view to land reform was unthinkable. The SLF and landowners themselves felt very comfortable in this environment with a Scottish Office dominated by old style Conservatives. This suited them very well since the 1976 Crofting Reform Act - which is discussed later in this Chapter - had shaken this group more than most people realised, then or now. Meanwhile the fear this created among landowners is illustrated with a quote from an interview with the SLF legal advisor, Paul Blackstock in 1992 - sixteen years after the Act itself:

"Which ever way you look at it, land that historically belonged to one person has been handed to somebody else. It's sort of - well, without wishing to give you the impression of being on the extreme right, which I'm certainly not - it's quasi-Bolshevick nationalisation of land! I see distinct parallels between the '76 Act and ... sort of the 1917 revolution, where landlords' land was given to the peasants. For kulaks or peasants, read crofters. And you may or may not like landlords, but traditional Western society has always meant that if you took somebody's property - well, you pay them compensation. I mean, the '76 Act is virtually legalised theft! There's a lot of landlords don't like it and would like to see it reversed. ..."12

Types of Landownership

It was not until the 1990s - post Assynt Crofters Trust - that productive debate and research into landownership was supported and sought out by any but a few dedicated people. By this point the work of people like Robin Callander and Andy Wightman had finally come to be more widely known. Wightman's work, in mapping landownership in the 1990's, is crucial not only for the mapping work itself, but equally for his clear headed attention to process and effect. He draws attention to the fact that the pattern in Scotland is globally unique, in that the size of holdings is enormous and these holdings are concentrated in a very few hands. He highlights a number of different types of estate:

¹²Interview 1992 Paul Blackstock, SLF Legal Adviser

The Mixed Estate - typically owned by well established Scottish landed families. These holdings are extensive and in most cases continuity of ownership over centuries, size and mixture of land types has facilitated a mixed estate economy.

Forestry - While mixed estates, the Atholl Estates being a good example, include forestry, landholdings dedicated purely to forestry were a particular feature of the 1980s. This forestry embarked upon at that time was almost exclusively exotic conifer plantations. Tax incentives at that time encouraged investment in this and led to the development of a whole new sector, funded by investors who would never see the property and managed by new types of companies created through the '*windfall*' opportunities. This policy also resulted in contentious plantings - for example in the Caithness and Sutherland Flow Country - which were environmentally damaging. The tax incentives have now been replaced by the Woodland Grant Scheme and policies favouring native species of tree are a strong feature.

Farms - about 65% are owner occupied. This type of holding is a dominant feature of the Lowlands.

The Highland Sporting Estate - large in area and created without any need for or interest in establishing a viable business. This type of estate dominates the Highlands and Islands and critiques of the Highland Sporting estate have tended to dominate discussion of landownership. This type of estate has been a status symbol since Victorian times and '*Balmoralisation*' and is a form of conspicuous consumption par excellence. The prices which this type of estate command in the open market bear no relation to valuations which relate to the productivity of the land or other kinds of economic potential.

The Crofting Estate - This type of landholding is a result of the 1886 Act. Many of this type of estate are owned by SEERAD as a result of the 1911 Land Settlement Act which was used to create new crofts and to return some land to existing croft tenants after the First World War. Since the '76 Act, alluded to earlier, many private landowners view the presence of croft holdings as even less desirable than previously. One effect of this is the creation of the

North Assynt Estate - sold as the North Lochinver Estate in the 1980s by the Vestey family (Assynt Estates). This 'estate' was created in order to dispense with the area where the majority of crofts were. The Vestey family then bought more of the 'empty' hill ground to extend their Deer Forest.

Wightman also discusses the principal types of owner and the background of the owner:

Figure 4. 2 Characterisation of Scottish Landownership
Source: A. Wightman 1996 *Who Owns Scotland?* p145

Landowner Background	Land Use	Status
The Aristocracy	The Mixed Estate	Companies
Old Money	Forestry	Trusts
New Money	Farms	Individuals
Not for Profit Organisations	The Highland Sporting Estate	Partnerships
The State	The Lowland Sporting Estate	
Overseas Interests	The Crofting Estate	
The Investment Owners		
The Working Farmers		

Landownership 'Myths'

A crucial aspect of *'The Land Question'* is the effects of that system on the Highlands and Islands and the way in which serious consideration of those impacts are deterred or diverted through what Wightman refers to as a series of 'myths'.

The key effects of the system and pattern of landownership found in the Highlands and Islands (and the rest of rural Scotland) is to prevent social and economic development. To emphasise this - and the fact that the Scottish situation is so out of step with the rest of the world - Wightman quotes a piece written in 1978 by Danus Skene, then a political activist, now a farmer in Fife:

"It once befell me, while working in East Africa, to read widely concerning land tenure in Africa and its relation to problems of social and economic development. These days I often find myself stressing two items of African experience that seem to bear more than passing relevance to Scotland. First, no country with so inequitable a land distribution as Scotland would ever receive a jot or tittle of overseas aid in the rural sector. Second, any country with such a land distribution and with much of the landownership in alien hands would, anywhere but Scotland, be facing a revolutionary phase. Why should what is unacceptable in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) or imperial Ethiopia be of no consequence in Ross-shire?"¹³

¹³From Skene D. 1978 *"Am I a chauvinist paranoid?"* Crann Tara No 2 Spring 1978, quoted in Wightman A. 1996 *Who Owns Scotland?* Canongate Edinburgh, p189.

The relationship between landownership and social and economic development is frequently masked or avoided by a number of 'myths'. Wightman does a great service to the debate by tackling these.

"It's not who owns the land that's important. It's how it's managed."

How it is managed is significant but:

"the highest standards of land management can be achieved within widely varying landownership systems. Standards of management tend not to be of great significance in discussions about how such a regime should operate. What is of more concern tends to be issues of democracy, opportunity, accountability, access to capital, freedom and public interest. A benign ecological dictatorship can produce high standards of management. Of course management matters, but so does ownership."¹⁴

In due course it might be productive to redefine 'good management' in similar ways to 'ecological accounting', so that issues of opportunity, democracy and public interest are part of how good management is identified. The next quote, from my interview with the SLF legal advisor, refers to this myth and to the next myth, which Wightman attends to:

"Well, when the landlord sells the estate all that means is that somebody else collects the desultory rent, which probably costs as much to collect as it is. And someone else gets to trudge around, facing the midges and shooting the birds - or facing the midges and getting the salmon! So I mean all you've got is a different set of people in their plus-fours huntin' and fishing. I don't see that as a step forward or backwards. It's a step sideways really. The point about the sale of a sporting estate is that - well - the market determines and it's a question of supply and demand. But it's still available for crofting and you can't change that because the law has provided statutory rights for the crofters. So very little changes in principle, where you've got a change of landlord. I mean some landlords are more prepared than others to reach into their pockets and actually subsidise the estate, cos what has happened in a large number of cases is that people from outside have got cash. They've got deep pockets, whereas the traditional Highland estate owner just didn't have it. And when you have the estate and nothing else it scratched along. If you bring in outside money, whether a shiek or a stockbroker from London - he's got money and he can invest in the local community."¹⁵

"Scottish estates need wealthy owners who are prepared to subsidise them with wealth earned elsewhere."

This argument assumes that rural Scotland - and in particular the Highlands and islands, since it so often refers to sporting estates - is not economically

¹⁴p197 **Wightman A** 1996 *Who Owns Scotland?* Canongate Edinburgh.

viable, and is saved by enlightened and wealthy landowners. This approach is so well rehearsed that most people living in the region are effectively blind to the rich natural and human resources to be found there. To merely recognise these is a significant struggle, so used are we to thinking of ourselves as part of *'The Highland Problem'* and as desperately resource poor. Only when examples like rural Norway - geologically and climatically similar - are examined does this myth start to become visible. In the Norwegian fjords are communities with diverse economic bases, much higher and younger population bases and cheap accessible transport systems. Highland Sporting estates were not developed to make money or even to pay their own way. The shocking effects of this type of estate has been seen recently in Knoydart where almost all housing, land, jobs and economic activity was controlled by the estate. The estate began to change hands repeatedly. Wages were not paid and houses crumbled. People left, having nowhere to turn to and no way of supporting themselves. A well-kept estate of this sort can appear to be comfortable and safe. In reality they are personal fiefdoms where innovation and development are artificially stifled generation upon generation. The jobs that do exist are poorly paid. The housing is tied to the poorly paid jobs. A mere shift in estate management policy, away from costly maintenance of this toy world, can easily result in the few remaining residents becoming homeless and jobless. This system annihilates communities, economic opportunities, communications infrastructure and all local assets and resources.

"The access myth"

Wightman states that unlike hillwalking, access is not a landuse and *'freedom to roam'* is not *"an extreme and irresponsible demand"*¹⁶.

"There is nothing strange about so few people owning so much of Scotland. So much land is poor and mountainous that one would expect a large number of large estates simply due to the poor land"

There is a correlation between land quality and size of estate. However much of this land is not used for profitable enterprises, and the economies of scale

¹⁵Interview 1992 Paul Blackstock, SLF Legal Adviser.

which do apply are based rather more on agricultural subsidy than business management. Large scale ownership also exists on good land.

"The typical landowner is either a crusty aristocrat in tweeds or a filthy rich Arab who has paid vast sums of money for an estate and keeps people out"

Concentration on individual landowners and stereotypes of *'lairds'* tends to oust consideration of the land tenure system and landownership itself. Given the difficulty of discovering information on landownership, speculation will inevitably prevail.

"Private property rights are sacrosanct and should not be interfered with"

All of the land in Scotland legally lies with the people of Scotland since the law defines sovereignty to lie with the Scottish people. Private property rights have historically been altered on a number of occasions and it should be born in mind that a legal and land tenure system is socially and historically constructed. Wightman observes:

"Since the restriction of individual property rights usually involves the expansion of everyone else's, land reform measures will justifiably continue to redefine property rights in the wider public interest"¹⁷.

Attitudes Towards Land and Impacts of Landownership

Since legal systems are social and political constructs, the ways in which people feel about land is important. Their feelings are likely to inform their social and political choices regarding the subject of landownership. Should a significant proportion of the population doubt the legitimacy of the current pattern of landownership and landuse or the system of landownership, they might seek to alter that pattern and system. This is not to assume that criticism of a system is the same as political opposition to it. Nor can one assume, particularly with something like landownership which traditionally involves a certain power, influence and articulacy, that just because a proportion of the voting public doubts or questions the legitimacy of something that it will necessarily be investigated or altered.

¹⁶p198 **Wightman A.** 1996 *Who Owns Scotland?* Canongate Edinburgh.

¹⁷p201 **Wightman A.** 1996 *Who Owns Scotland?* Canongate Edinburgh.

"The justification for these big landowners to run the land is not clear. They are making claims which are very dubious indeed - like, well if it wasn't for us rich landlords buying it and pouring money into it, it wouldn't be in good heart. Well that's rubbish. These guys have burnt it, raped it, killed the wildlife, overgrazed it, chopped down trees... We see them doing it. Planting conifer plantations all over wonderful valleys throughout the Highlands. I mean their claim to be guardians of the landscape is absolute nonsense."¹⁸

This comment highlights a very contemporary justification for the current system and the current balance, and questions it on its own terms. In the 19th century, justification was expressed in terms of 'rational' economic development or improvement. With *Balmoralisation*, landownership and management in the Highlands and Islands came to be dominated by conspicuous consumption.¹⁹ This, and the jobs provided for the 'poor' locals, by such estates has continued into the present as a rationale for such a system. The next quotes are from fieldwork in Assynt:

"Well, as I said, the last ones, I think they thought they could develop it. I think in the past when people like Vestey and that bought it, they bought it as land. They'd made their money and they bought it as their sort of .. country estate, because it was a status symbol. It didn't have to generate money or anything. They were only interested in the status symbol."²⁰

Opposition or doubt over the legitimacy of this landownership system does not necessarily result from personal observations of abuse of status.

"No, I can't say there was a lot of trouble with either Vestey or with Zeteburgh really. I mean anything you ever asked that you wanted done ... it was done. They didn't cause any hassle or ... But I mean they were so far away - away down in Brechin. His agents were in Brechin and they were only here once a year to collect rents!"²¹

What the Vestey owners have been accused of in Assynt is too much control of economic opportunities and assets:

¹⁸Interview 1992 ACT/Male 50-55

¹⁹ See for instance **McCrone D, Morris A. and Straw P. (eds)** 1989 *The Making of Scotland: Nation, Culture and Social Change* Edinburgh University Press.

²⁰Interview 1992 ACT/Female 50-55

²¹Interview 1992 ACT/Female 55-60

"As far as I know there wasn't really. I mean I don't think they bothered that much. I mean as long as things ran smoothly no-body bothered. I mean any time you asked for a decrofting or something you usually got it. But what they did say - the only thing with Vestey - up until 1976, that if you say, wanted to open a shop, you couldn't open a shop. He had all those rights - if you wanted to sell petrol - No. So he was keeping all these things within. Things he had control over. What was sold and off-licences and everything. As far as business development maybe Vestey did hold people back."²²

Others have specific stories of obstruction by the landlord. One younger crofter was granted planning permission to build a house for himself and his family (including two toddlers), who were at the time living in a caravan, on condition that it was out of sight of the road. To locate the house out of sight of the road would have cost so much more in terms of building a road to the site and taking basic services - water and electricity to the site - as to make it too expensive to build. He eventually managed to get permission to build closer to the road, but it all took a long time, including further obstruction concerning wayleaves for the electricity supply.

Some go so far as to allege that the result of this concentration of economic activity in the hands of the estate creates a company town effect and silences both initiative and opposition. In the next quote locals not only comment on that but also position themselves in the narrative as '*black natives*', calling to mind the circuits of colony and capital at work. This speaker also alludes to some of the weapons of the weak - petty sabotage or secret non-violent direct action. The cutting of a new fence over and over again until the new owner wearies of insisting on that course of action or feels disinclined to put any more money into that idea.

"Then the Vestey's took over. They'd been used to dealing with native Argentineans and Australian Aboriginals, and they were amazed that the local people here wouldn't do what they were told. They said - sheep are vermin - take them off the hills! And they were quite surprised when they resisted that. You may know the story of Kenny-John's grandfather - the Fencer. And he was building a fence for Vestey, to fence off the Suilven area, and ... lightning was striking it every few days. It was cut in neat sections! So then he capitulated on that one. But then he mopped up quite a lot of the businesses round here - the hotel, the shops.... he had a number of people working for the Estate itself, he had the salmon fishing. From all that he had a huge sphere of influence and that silenced. For every job there would be about six mouths were silenced. And when

²²Interview 1992 ACT/Female 50-55

there were some dreadful things being done - papers got hold of it and Panorama would come up. I think, on two occasions. But no-one would speak to them! Cos they were afraid that the jobs would be lost."²³

It seems to me extremely unlikely that the Argentineans and the native Australians were as passive as the speaker implies. It was on Vestey land in the Northern Territory, Australia that the event which marked the beginning of the aboriginal land rights movement occurred in 1966. In 1914 the Vestey family had acquired the lease of 36,000 square miles in Northern Territory and East Kimberly district of Western Australia for an incredibly low rent. So low, that by 1980, their rent on the Wave Hill Station in Northern Territory - 6,158 square miles or four million acres - was £1,650 per annum. The Vestey family business developed beef ranching and chilled transport, in much the same way as they had done in Argentina. By the mid 1930s the Australian meat trade was dominated by overseas groups - the Borthwicks, the Swifts and the Vestey family. The Labour government commissioned a report and it was noted that holdings on the scale of those the Vestey family owned inhibited regional development and that greater benefits would accrue from residents on smaller leased landholdings. Nothing much changed however:

"The cattle stations relied entirely on aboriginal labour, which at the outset was unpaid. Accommodation comprised metal huts, like dog kennels and those unable to work were often starving. Education was discouraged. In 1946 another report was instigated, this time by the Vestey family, who were running short of labour and were not sure why. The Brendts from the Anthropology Department at Sydney University were charged with this task. "When they came to inspect the Vestey stations, the Brendts could hardly believe what they saw. The aborigines lived in crudely-built shacks of old bagging and iron. These were rarely waterproof and would disintegrate in a strong wind. Sanitation and rubbish disposal were virtually non-existent. There was scarcely any access to potable water. On one station night soil was dumped in an area used to catch water in the wet season. Although the white man's drinking water was filtered or came from tank rainwater, the aborigines were refused permission to use even the station garden hose to replenish their own supplies. The working day had no limits and depended on the inclination of the employer. Children were allocated various functions from an early age ..."²⁴

And Knightley continues,

²³Interview 1993 Assynt/Male 60-65

²⁴p164 **Knightley P.** 1993 *The Rise and Fall of the House of Vestey* Warner Books London.

"The Brendts found that at one Vestey station girls as young as seven had been taken into the traffic ostensibly to assist Europeans to avoid venereal disease."²⁵

The Brendts also remarked on the use of violence to '*maintain discipline*'. In 1957 a minimum wage for stockmen, amounting to a fifth of a white stockman's wage, was set by the government. Only in 1965 did the government insist on wage equalisation and conceded three years for this to be achieved. In 1966 on stations all across the Northern Territory stockmen walked off the job. One of these strikes became national news:

"On August 23rd, 1966, Vincent Lingiari led 200 members of his Gurindji tribe off the Vestey's Wave Hill cattle station. Lingiari died in 1984, but one of the stockmen, Bill Bunter Jampijinpa, recalls: 'We were fed up. We were treated just like dogs. We were lucky to get paid the fifty quid a month we were due, and we lived in tin humpies you had to crawl in and out on your knees. There was no running water. The food was bad - just flour, tea, sugar and bits of beef like the head or feet of a bullock. The Vestey mob was hard men. They didn't care about black fellas.'.... Jampijinpa remembers how the protest began: 'Old Vincent came back from hospital in Darwin and said he had decided that he would pull us out. He pulled everyone out that Tuesday and we walked with the kids and our swags to the Victoria River and set up camp there. After we'd been there a couple of days the Vestey mob came and said they would get two killers (slaughtered beasts) and raise our wages if we came back. Old Vincent said, "No, we're stopping here." So we stayed there until New Year and then we walked to our new promised land, we call it Daguragu, back to our sacred places and our country, our new homeland."²⁶

White people referred to Daguragu as Wattie Creek, within the boundaries of the Vestey's Wave Hill station. The Gurindji:

"announced that they wanted to start a co-operative venture to catch and break in wild horses and contract their services to the Vestey's for cattle mustering, fencing, branding and other station work. But under Australian law the aborigines were squatters and the Vestey's would have been within their legal rights in ordering the aborigines to leave and, if they refused, in forcing them to do so. But by now the aborigines' stand had caught the attention of the metropolitan media, and trade union, church, student and writers' organisations moved in to lend the aborigines their support. ... Peter Morris, the Vestey's superintendent who was the principal witness in the Arbitration Commission case against giving aborigines equal pay, approached Vincent Lingiari and demanded, 'What are you doing on Vestey's land?' Vincent thought for a moment and then replied, 'I dunno. This belongs to my grandfather."²⁷

²⁵p166 Knightley P. 1993 *The Rise and Fall of the House of Vestey* Warner Books London.

²⁶pp169 - 170 Knightley P. 1993 *The Rise and Fall of the House of Vestey* Warner Books London.

²⁷p170 Knightley P/ 1993 *The Rise and Fall of the House of Vestey* Warner Books London/

The way in which stories are positioned is always of interest. The next speaker positions the Clearances in the apparently inevitable unilinear history of agricultural revolution, enclosure and economic advancement. He also explains some of the reason for the vividness of feeling and opinion regarding the Clearances and the impression often given that everything is about before and after the Clearances. An impression of a sudden break. He talks about migration. Movement is the only constant in this story and tends to imply stasis before. The continued migration is at the root of the diasporic culture we see today. The use of the term '*folk memory*' maintains a slight distance from the story on the part of the speaker - a hint of the rational omniscient observer.

"Well the land issue in the Highlands is a big issue. It's been simmering away for years, generations. And the folk memory within the Highlands, because of the migrations of Highlanders, is very strong outwith the Highlands and the Clearances... Though there's nothing new about the Clearances. The Clearances went on all over Europe and all over England, but at a much earlier date. They were late in coming to Scotland and in that sense they're much closer to folk memory. You know you're only a grandfather away from it in many cases and it's very strong here. And that of course has been carried out by people who're migrating. Remember we've had massive depopulation taking place here until recently and all these people are out there with that folk memory too. So a lot of it is of course just responding to that. But the land issue is a big issue in the Highlands anyway - the whole idea of whether these foreign companies, foreign landowners are in fact the right people to be in control of our assets. There are very strong arguments to suggest they're not."²⁸

In the next quote the speakers position themselves very personally in relation to this story and convey a sense of personal outrage. They clearly suspect that the land belonged to '*the people*' originally. Here the symbolism of the '*empty*' spaces in the interior of the mainland compared to the resulting coastal settlement pattern - the pattern of the people living on the edge of the land and on the edge of endurance - comes across.

"Croft 1: Oh, I don't know- away , way back before the Clearances I take it it was owned by the Duke of Sutherland. Did he always own it? Who owned it originally? Did it belong to the people? Who knows! But the way they cleared the people out of the place and set their homes on fire and all that- I mean that was really terrible! And all cleared to the coast. There must have been people here originally though. But then there was all these other people were cleared to the coast and probably they had to make a...

²⁸Interview 1992 ACT/Male 50-55

Croft 2: With all the ruins you see round about - it tells you . . ."29

This idea of *duthchas* (Gaelic - a kindness) and customary rights, wrongfully usurped by a variety of landlords has been expressed in a variety of forms.³⁰ In medieval and early modern times, the *duthchas* or kindness, was generally thought to have been established when a family had maintained effective occupation of township or joint farm for three generations. This gave the family an inalienable right to reside on the land. Crofters never accepted the idea of private ownership of game. Nor did they give up their belief that they had a hereditary right to their holding. In conjunction with religious beliefs these fundamentals from ancient Celtic law were central to the crofters of the 1880s in their agitation over land rights and landlords. In whatever form, this system of beliefs and material practices has no place in the logic of contemporary capitalism. It does not sit well with the operation of private property and land as a commodity. Before the Crofting Act of 1886 such a culture had no foundation in law. While the 1886 Act brought security of tenure, rights of succession within the family, right to compensation for improvements and a right to fair rents, it did not return lands already cleared or 'taken' - the single most important demand of the crofters movement at that time. The lands emptied of people - the empty spaces of the interior which had been stolen from the people - were not returned at that time although some land resettlement did occur until the mid 20th century. The persistence of this attitude to land and society has been seen as another indication of the backwardness and 'lack of culture' of the Highland people. It is not a 'real' worldview. Neither is the belief that land cleared of people has been wrongfully taken and should be returned to the people.

Here another local crofter refers to this and to the contested meaning picturesque empty Highland landscapes have when looked at from this point of view. The speaker was looking at a map of the Assynt area at the time:

²⁹Interview 1992 ACT/Females - 2 - 60-65 + 65-70

³⁰ Hunter J. 1987 edition *The Making of the Crofting Community* John Donald Edinburgh, particularly pp 13, 156-60, 179, 207.

"Look at that - all the inbye down on the coast-where all the people were pushed to - and into the sea, and off to Canada. Many's the one died in the process. We've a right **at least** to have the inbye, **our own inbye!**"³¹

The next speaker positions himself less personally, but is still adamant about his sense of injustice:

"These assets belong to the people and they've been cleared off the land 150 years ago. Now I think it's this sort of deliberate attempt by Vestey to sell off the land and apparently, quite consciously sold it to a property development company."³²

This speaker sees the fact that Vestey sold the land on as a betrayal of trust by a faithless landlord. It is interesting to find this notion of trust between landlord and tenants assumed to be within this '*dubious*' system. A system may be unfair but it has its own internal logic and to disrupt that is itself seen as an act of betrayal.

Another speaker, below, makes a distinction between the feelings of the '*native*' person and others, presumably '*non-native*'. Again this speaker positions himself clearly and personally in the story and senses a call for justice from the past:

"I think for the native man - maybe not everybody feels so strongly about it, but certainly when I walk out there and I see the old steadings out there, you know, out the hill there, I just feel - oh yes, dug those stones out of the ground - you can just feel the spirit of the past there you know. Yeh - you can."³³

In the quote which follows, the speaker also positions himself in the story, questions the strength of feeling that local people have for the land, but admits to having this strong feeling himself nevertheless. He wilfully positions himself with the '*irrational*' who hold strong feelings for '*worthless bits of stony ground*' because of its symbolic significance:

³¹Fieldwork Diary 1992 ACT/Male 70-75

³²Interview 1992 ACT/male 50-55

³³Interview 1992 ACT/Male 45-50

"I have no doubt whatsoever that farmers over the whole country would look on the land that their forebears farmed in days gone by in precisely the same way as we do. But it's amazing what sentimental attachment people have just to a small bit of land - rocky, stony, uninspiring land in any other sense! But for me to think that my forebears looked on the same hills and islands and what not, and made their own imprint, as I'm hoping that I'm making mine. So far as I'm concerned that means a lot."³⁴

Many commentators have accused crofters and Highlands and Islands people of holding themselves back through their '*emotional attitude*' to history and land. This has been referred to as the '*emotional millstone*' of the past. This characterisation as emotional continues that which came about in the 19th century, when romantic writings cast the Highlander as immaterial and poetic as opposed to practical. It is interesting that this emotional positionality was ascribed from outside rather than strategically chosen and that its ambiguous influence persists today.

In the next quote a crofter, David Bowes (29), living in Skerray, on the north coast of Sutherland, is asked about crofting's emotional millstone and its history. He replies:

".....it's not way back in the mists of time. We're still having to operate in crofting townships which were set out after the Clearances. So we're still working in a framework which stretches back. We still have landlords- we still have the same landlords."³⁵

In simple terms the legacy of the Clearances is all around in the material circumstances of everyday life. The very layout of settlements, agricultural landuse, communication routes, employment profiles, legal structures and '*empty wildernesses*' owes much to the Clearances and the Crofters' Wars. It is not just that reminders of the past can be seen in the landscape or that particular sites are imbued with the meaning of historical struggle, crucial though this is. It is also that the past impinges acutely on day to day life. Stressing this makes it possible to reclaim some sort of position of practicality rather than poetics. When you achieve that then you can move on to the future:

³⁴Interview 1992 ACT/Male 55-60

³⁵1992 Lights in the Glen, Landward, B.B.C.1

"For over a hundred years now we've seen the lights go out in glen after glen, community after community. I think in the next one hundred years we'll see them coming back on."³⁶

Where is Crofting?

The map in Figure 4.3 shows the spatial distribution of crofts. As can be seen from this map the main crofting areas are concentrated on the western and northern margins of the Highland mainland and in the Northern and Western Isles. Scattered crofts also exist on Orkney, Mull, the Inner Hebrides, on the Caithness coast, on the east coast of Sutherland and Ross-shire, on the west coast and south eastern border of the former County of Inverness, in the Great Glen and the Argyllshire coast. The mainland interior is noticeably empty. A small measure of the symbolic and psychological significance of crofting and crofters, to the people of Scotland and ideas of Scotland, can be gained from the fact that these were known as '*the seven Crofting Counties*' until local government reform, when Argyllshire became part of Strathclyde Region, the Island Councils were created and the remaining mainland became Highland Region. Since then they have been regularly referred to as '*the former Crofting Counties*'. Of course, there is a great deal of legal and administrative convenience in this since various Acts of Parliament use this wording. The Sasines and Land Register also continue to rely on the county system. As already noted, it was the Crofters Holdings (Scotland) Act 1886 which established crofts and crofters, as we have come to know them. Prior to the 1886 Act there was no statutory legislation with regard to the crofting situation in Scotland.³⁷ The term '*croft*' itself came very slowly into being and in Gaelic meant a small piece of arable land. The '*crofter*' was recognised as the person who held a '*croft*' of land.³⁸

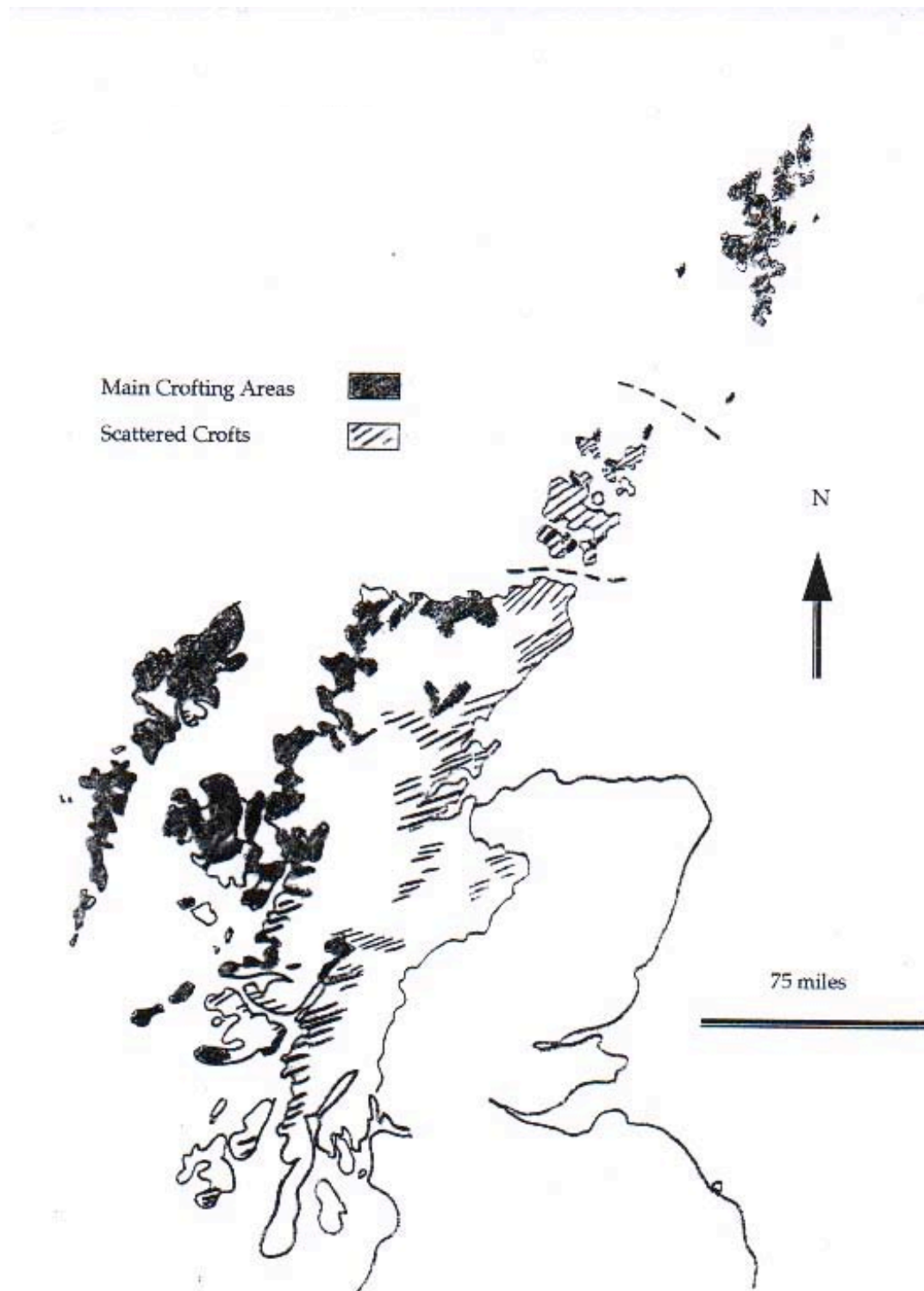
³⁶Dr James Hunter, *Lights in the Glen*, Landward BBC1, 1992.

³⁷ See **Hunter J.** 1987 edition *The Making of the Crofting Community* John Donald Edinburgh, particularly Chapters 9 and 10.

³⁸ See **Hunter J.** 1987 edition *The Making of the Crofting Community* John Donald Edinburgh, particularly Chapter 2.

Figure 4.3: Distribution of Crofting

Source: Crofters Commission



This legislation was passed following the Report of the Napier Commission in 1884 'to enquire into the condition of the crofters and cottars in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and all matters relating to the same or relating thereto'.³⁹ Cottars were the landless people, with just a house that they had built themselves and a potato patch. They had even less security and prospects than the crofters.

Defining the Croft

In view of this first legislation and subsequent amendments, including the Crofters (Scotland) Act 1955, a croft is a holding in the former Crofting Counties which:

1. is situated in a designated crofting parish (a parish in which in 1886 or the preceding 80 years there were holdings comprising arable land and pasturage held in common) and in which there were tenants in 1886 who were resident on their holdings and paying less than £30/year rent. The tenant of such a unit and his heirs and legatees were crofters and if the tenancy continues until 1955 this was a croft. (Crofters Holdings(Scotland) Act 1886);
2. (from 1911) was less than 50 acres or had rent of less than £50, whose tenant was resident within two miles of the holding and who personally or whose family cultivated the holding and was an agricultural holding within the meaning of the Agricultural Holdings Acts. The tenant of such a unit and his heirs and legatees were small landholders or statutory small tenants and if the tenancy continues until 1955 this was a croft. (Small Landholders (Scotland) Act 1911)
3. further, the Crofters (Scotland) Act 1961 defines a croft as having less than 75 acres or rent of less than £50 and the landlord and tenant apply to the Secretary of state for a direction that it is a croft and the secretary of state agrees;
4. is non-croft land let to an existing crofter and the resultant holding is less than the 75 acres or the rent is less than £50, and both the landlord and crofter agree that it should be crofting land;
5. or is non-crofting land let to a crofter and the resultant holding is more than 75 acres and the rent is more than £50 and the landlord, crofter and the Secretary of State agree that it should be crofting land.⁴⁰

This is a strictly legal definition, which gives little idea of how the crofting system actually works.

³⁹ See **Cameron A. D.** 1986 *Go Listen to the Crofters: The Napier Commission and Crofting a Century Ago* Acair Stornoway and **Napier Commission** 1884 Her Majesty's Commission of Enquiry into the Condition of crofters and Cottars of the Highlands of Scotland: *Report and Minute of Evidence*.

⁴⁰ Source is **MacCuish D. J. and Flyn D.** 1990 *Crofting Law* Butterworths Edinburgh

Crofting as a System

In this section I look at some aspects of crofting as a system. Firstly I look into what a croft is and how a township functions. Then I discuss the manner in which crofting is administered or governed and the aims of this governance.

Crofts and Townships

In most cases crofts are small units of ground, averaging five hectares, which includes some land suitable for arable cultivation. Today the majority of crofting agriculture is focused on the production of sheep and some cattle. This means that the majority of croft land today is in permanent pasture. In addition to the individual unit of ground, referred to as *'the inbye'*, each crofter has access to a considerable *'outrun'* or common grazings specific to the township. Shares in these common grazings are defined in the Township Grazings Regulations and described by a fraction - e.g. 2/26 of 443 ha with 25 others. Each share does not represent a particular piece of ground but instead translates into what is called a *'souming'*. In this example the souming is 16 sheep per share. This means that a share of 2/26 translates into the right to put 32 sheep and *'followers'* onto the township common grazing. Further regulations relating to this example state that *"one cow shall be deemed equivalent to five sheep and one horse to eight sheep. Only one horse may be grazed in respect of each holding. foals, calves and lambs of the year shall not be taken into account in making up the souming."*⁴¹ Grazings regulations typically cover a range of issues including standing orders pertaining to the committee, animal health, peat cutting, muirburn and seaweed rights. Some township regulations have not been updated since the 1920s and 1930s. In other townships regulations have been amended much more recently to reflect changes in landuse and work patterns in that township. A very common amendment currently is that pertaining to township forestry schemes where townships have chosen to plant significant areas with native species and each shareholder therefore reduces their souming as a result in accordance with the area of ground taken out of pasture and into forestry.

⁴¹ This example is from the Grazing Regulations for the Clashmore and Raffin Township.

The shareholders or crofters elect a Grazings Committee from amongst their number and a Clerk or Constable of the Grazings, who is in a sense the committee secretary.⁴² The Clerk need not be a crofter nor resident in the township though s/he often is. It is up to the shareholders to choose someone who will hopefully be impartial and good at paperwork. Crofting today involves a lot of paperwork and crofting has for a long time been legislatively complicated. A common definition of a croft is '*a small piece of ground surrounded by regulations*'. The committee have duties beyond the management of township land and the balancing of the rights of individual crofters against what seems most appropriate for the general good. The croft tenancy is a very strong type of tenancy in that:

- it guarantees a right to a fair agricultural rent
- a right to compensation for '*improvements*' on giving up the tenancy to someone else
- security of tenure as long as you are resident within 16 km of your croft and are using your croft
- your tenancy can be assigned to or inherited by a close member of your family without challenge
- or assigned to a person of your choice within your lifetime

Should a tenant choose to assign her/his tenancy to a non-family member, the person to whom the tenant wishes to assign the tenancy must be approved by the Grazings Committee, or more properly the other shareholders, and by the Crofters Commission. The final choice of new tenant must be deemed to be '*in the community interest*'. This is assessed by the Crofters Commission, which asks for the township view of the proposed tenant, consults the Area Assessor (appointed by the Crofters Commission) for her/his opinion, asks the landlord's opinion and assesses the candidate itself, to ascertain if the person is equipped with the appropriate skills and motivation to become a crofter and make a contribution to the future of the township. The definition of these criteria is very broad and dependant on individual circumstances. Someone who has little agricultural experience but a commitment to living in

⁴² Shareholders are all those who have a croft tenancy in the township.

the township and an aptitude for dealing with paperwork and grants, for others in the township, is as fitted for the job often. Such a person might add to the pool of skills available in the township and learn the agricultural aspects from other members of the township.

The decision is supposed to be taken in the best interests of the community and hence the tenancy may be denied on these grounds. Decisions can be challenged by individuals or Grazings Committees. If this happens then there is a *'hearing'*, run by the Scottish Land Court. This may or may not result in a different decision, but this hearing is public and so those involved must be prepared to speak their mind in public. Results of private consultations amongst other tenants are also made available, due to the needs of open government. This obviously affects the way such issues are dealt with and puts a heavy burden on every shareholder. A very contentious assignment may get to the stage of a *'hearing'*, but the main players may have a different view in public in comparison to private comments.

Regulation and Governance of the System

The crofting system is administered by the Crofters Commission which is answerable to the Scottish Executive. The Commission is based in Inverness but has a team of Area Assessors and a ruling committee of Commissioners, each of whom represents one crofting district. This committee of Commissioners, who are all crofters, make decisions within the remit of the Crofters Commission. This remit is:

"to reorganise, develop and regulate crofting in what were the crofting counties - Shetland, Orkney, Caithness, Sutherland, Ross & Cromarty, Inverness and Argyll. To promote the interests of crofters there and to keep under review all matters pertaining to crofting. The Commission is required to have regard for local conditions and circumstances. In making decisions the Commission and its commissioners are required to act at all times in the best interests of the community - the crofting community."⁴³

What does the Commission consider crofting to be about?

⁴³ This quote and those which follow are from **Crofters Commission** 1998 *The Way Forward - The Role of Crofting in Rural Communities* HMSO Inverness

"The Commission considers the meaning of 'crofting' to encompass the close and interlinked relationships between the land and the economy, agriculture, environment, heritage, culture and distinctive lifestyles of crofting communities."⁴⁴

In a Crofters Commission Policy document, *The Way Forward*, the Chairman's Foreword states:

"This strategy document comes in a difficult period for crofting and for rural communities and their agriculture. Perhaps this acute time calls more clearly than others for a way forward preserving the best of the old traditions and seeking out the most promising of the new."⁴⁵

- and continues:

"I believe that at this difficult time we are approaching a crossroads. If we take the correct road then crofting will continue to play a vital role in sustaining our fragile rural populations; if we fail to find the right route forward there is a risk that crofting could falter and wither, weakening all those around as it does so. Crofting remains an excellent model of sustainable development, and I am hopeful that CAP reform and Agenda 2000 can move matters forward in a way which will support and encourage crofting and rural communities"⁴⁶

There are approximately 17,700 crofts occupied by an estimated 11,000 crofting households with a total population of 33,000. It is believed that there are about 7,500 active crofters and some 3250 owner-occupiers.⁴⁷ Crofting households account for 20% of all households in one third of the parishes of the crofting counties. Obviously there are areas where the percentage is much higher and peripheral parishes - peripheral in terms of the crofting heartland - where the percentage is a great deal lower. Experience and research shows that the crofting system has succeeded in maintaining population in Scotland's, and indeed, Europe's most remote and sparsely populated regions. The population density in the HIE area is 9.5 persons per square kilometre. The entire Highlands and Islands has been classed as a Less Favoured Area under EEC Directive 75/268 and enjoys Objective 1 status. From 2001 to 2006, the area has transitional status and in 2006 this will change. This type of status brings special European grants but being officially designated as part

⁴⁴ as above.

⁴⁵ As above.

⁴⁶ As above.

⁴⁷ From Crofters Commission information

of the poorest, most underprivileged group in Europe is not necessarily a cause for celebration. As one person put it to me:

"Objective 1? That means we're poorer than Portugal. Hell - they're pissing in the streets in Portugal!"⁴⁸

Presumably they are saying the same about the Highlands and Islands in the streets of Portugal.

The pattern of landholding and settlement in crofting areas, when compared to non-crofting areas, illustrates the manner in which the whole complicated crofting system has held population. Upland Grampian, not enjoying that sort of system, saw the amalgamation of 61% of holdings in the period 1951-71. In comparison the total stock of crofts in the crofting counties diminished by only 10.4% in the period 1960- 1994. The density of population in the Western Isles, when compared to rural Aberdeenshire, reflects this too.⁴⁹ Looking further back in history, and at present day maps, it is clear that apart from the few towns in the region, significant population has only been maintained in the areas with crofts. However, despite counter-stream migration since the 1960s, the risk of depopulation in the islands and the remoter parts of the mainland remains. The cost of living in Shetland in 1998 was 11% higher than urban Scotland. A survey in the parish of Assynt in 1995 illustrated that it is still the case that the majority of households have an income below the national average and sacrifice much to keep a car since without one, employment is almost impossible.⁵⁰ In the period 1981 - 1996 the population of the Highlands and Islands increased by 7.1%. This trend is however uneven. In the same period the population fell by 1.3% in Sutherland, by 6.1% in Caithness, by 12.6% in Shetland and by 8.5% in the Western Isles.⁵¹ It would appear that in the Western Isles at least that trend is

⁴⁸Fieldwork Diary/Stornoway 1993

⁴⁹**MacMillan G.** 1996 *Land, People and Government I Northern Scotland: An Evaluation of Crofting Policy as a Tool for Maintaining the Welfare of Rural Populations in Marginal Rural Areas* Report prepared for crofters Commission.

⁵⁰**Alexander D.** 1996 *North Assynt Housing Study: A Report on a Survey of Housing Needs, Preferences and Supply issues in the Townships of North Assynt* Report prepared for the Assynt Crofters Trust and Scottish Homes.

⁵¹From Statistical updates prepared by HIE and information quoted in **Crofters Commission** 1998 *The Way Forward - The Role of Crofting in Rural Communities* HMSO Inverness.

set to continue. Again the age structure continues to be very different from the Scottish average. Since 1981 the percentage of the population under 24 years old in the Highlands and Islands has fallen, while the percentage of those over 40 has risen. For economic activity, innovative diversification and revitalisation of rural economies, this is worrying. This can also endanger certain local services and businesses and increase the 'push' factors for outmigration. Again it is an uneven process. While the Scottish average for those over pensionable age is 18.1%, the population in this category in Harris in 1997 was 28.9%.⁵²

The impact of this loss of young people is not only economic. The strongest effects are emotional and psychological and this maintains a discourse of loss and pain, for which the region is already so famed. When I was a child I often thought, at the end of the summer when all the grandchildren and parents returned south to Glasgow, how bereft the grannies and neighbours must feel, after a brief enjoyment of the sudden peace and quiet. The rise of qualitative methods is no doubt beginning to make this point clear over twenty-five years later. Issues like this serve to remind that qualitative techniques came about originally in order to enhance the 'bare bones' and 'broad brush strokes' which social science statistics can provide. It is important however to continue to gather quantitative material in the Highlands and Islands because such small variations, at the local scale, can be so crucial to a local community. Changes over short times in useful indicators can be enormously helpful in understanding very local conditions. It is interesting to note that in *'The Way Forward'* the Commission states that:

"As well as the loss of potentially active participants, the survey revealed the personal loss felt by the community and those leaving."

This situation which echoes the sense of the region as being defined by discourses of loss, leaving and movement, undermines the emotional sustainability of what is seen by so many as a model of sustainable rural development.

⁵²As above.

Another observable effect of the crofting system is rather ironic, given the way in which it came into existence. The crofting system has tended to maintain the cultures of the Islands and Highlands. The spatial distribution of Gaelic speakers, for instance, matches very largely the pattern of crofting areas. The Nordic cultures of Shetland and Orkney and the language and culture of the Gaidhealtachd, particularly in the Western Isles, have held fast in the crofting areas to a much greater degree than elsewhere.

Today crofting is viewed by many organisations and commentators as a viable model for sustainable rural development in Europe.⁵³ Crofting is valued in policy-making circles as a unique way of life, which holds people in rural communities all the year round. It is the 'social glue' which holds communities together all across the region. In hard times crofters have the land to fall back on, even if a full-time living from the croft is not an option. Having a croft often also provides a house or land to build on and access to CBGLS - *Crofters Building Grants and Loans Scheme* - with which to build a house. This scheme is a cheaper way of providing rural housing than that which the local authorities can manage.⁵⁴ The croft can hence provide a certain degree of security in difficult financial times. The pluriactivity, common in crofting areas, is also seen as a strength since it makes the local economy and local workforce fairly flexible and resilient, despite the fragile nature of remote local economies, due to having more than one source of income.

It is a sign of the seachange in attitude that these positive views should be held in policy-making circles.⁵⁵ In the days when increased agricultural production on larger and larger units was the policy aim, crofting was viewed

⁵³See **Bryden J. M.** 1987 Crofting in a European Context SGM Vol 103 no 2 pp 100 – 104; **Crofters Commission** et al *Crofting education Pack: crofting Communities – a model for sustainable rural development* HMSO Inverness; **SCU & RSPB** 1992 *Crofting and the Environment: A New Approach*.

⁵⁴**SCU** 1987 *Crofter Housing: The Way Forward* Broadford.

⁵⁵Although for remnants of the old 'agro-economy' view see **Smith I. M.** 1997 Final Phase of Clearances in *The Herald* 13/9/97 p 15. In this newspaper item, Ian Smith who is an absentee crofter in my own township and a lecturer in Economics in Newcastle, claims that the New Entrant Scheme is clearing proper people out. He portrays crofting and the whole region as economically dead and new entrants to crofting as unemployed no hopers who hang about in unsightly caravans.

as an anachronism - or failed farming. Mixed farming and old fashioned methods were frowned upon and the size of crofts was deemed unviable. Proposals were made to amalgamate crofts to provide '*viable units*'. Had this occurred, the units which at that point had been considered viable would in due course have proved too small for capital intensive farming methods. In addition, further rural depopulation would inevitably have occurred in the post-war period, when government policy became entirely focused on full-time units. Today in Europe, though more slowly in the UK, part-time farming is increasingly a very common part of the rural scene. Crofting can now be characterised as extensive, low intensity landuse and from this perspective be seen as a model landuse system. Many of the SSSIs and other designated areas which have been created in the region exist due to past crofting activities. While traditional crofting agricultural practises have fallen away there is a resurgence of interest in these practises since they do produce and maintain a rich variety of habitats.⁵⁶

Crofting Agriculture

As I noted earlier, crofting agriculture is today dominated by sheep and only a few cattle. The stock produced from the crofter's breeding stock is sold on at auctions to those who farm better ground in the south and east. These farmers '*finish*' the wedder lambs or stirks for the meat market. Stock raised in the difficult agricultural and climatic conditions of the crofting areas come on very well when taken onto a better quality of ground. The cost of feed, the poor thin acidic soils and the winter gales make finishing stock on the croft costly. Female lambs and heifers are also sold for breeding stock. Croft stock is viewed as an important source of hardy, disease free animals for the rest of the UK. The Annual Lairg Lamb Sale in August is the biggest such sale in Europe and attracts buyers from all over the UK.

In recent years there has been a slight upsurge in interest in cultivation, or perhaps more properly horticulture amongst crofters. This reflects a combination of changing attitudes, new crofters and technological advances. The advent of polytunnels has opened up choices in this field. A spin off

⁵⁶See SCU & RSPB 1992 *Crofting and the Environment: A New Approach*.

from the 'goodlifer' syndrome and changing ideas about the environment along with younger people coming into crofting, has meant a return in some places to the serious kitchen garden. Often this is for domestic use but a small demand by local residents and local hotels, increasingly demanding local produce, means a small seasonal market for the surplus. There is now a genuine upsurge in interest in use of local produce, including local meat. The fact that most households in crofting areas now own deep freezers also means that a big investment in labour in the kitchen garden is more worthwhile. It is possible to blanch and freeze produce for the winter. This, along with butchering a few sheep, a stirk and a pig - or perhaps a stag or hind, makes a serious contribution to household needs.

When population is falling and the existing crofters are getting older, no one household or township can undertake too much physical work. In addition, years of hardship and total reliance on producing as much as possible from the croft has had an effect on attitudes. To be able to buy your potatoes implies a certain prosperity and creates some leisure time. It is a form of conspicuous consumption. Choosing to grow vegetables because of an interest in making more of the ground is a quite different thing. In the same way, building a brand new kit house is like symbolically leaving the croft, in the old sense. It is also cheaper than renovating an old house.

Most crofts provide only spare or part-time employment and with agricultural prices falling real incomes are falling. Only 5% of crofters work their croft full-time.⁵⁷ Such individuals will have several crofts and a lot of stock. They will also typically be located on the better ground on the east coast mainland. The vast majority have full-time jobs doing something else, or several other jobs. Crofting communities are therefore characterised by occupational pluralism or multi-skilling. Crofting is much more similar to other European rural communities than the rest of the UK because diversification is the norm. In Assynt this diversification tends to involve tourism. The ground in Assynt is, for the most part, very poor and so such diversification into tourism happened much more quickly in Assynt than in

⁵⁷From Crofters Commission statistics.

some other crofting communities with better ground. In terms of diversification, the croft provides the opportunity to do B&B, keep a caravan site or camping, build chalets - or let the family house in the summer and live in a caravan. Until the 1990 Crofters Forestry Act, a crofter could not own a tree - it was the property of the landlord. If townships wish they can now plant trees on the common grazing, with the landlords permission. It was their landlord's refusal to grant permission which prompted the Borge and Annishader crofters to pursue community ownership. For some forestry is a new and exciting opportunity. For others, in townships with a mixture of active and inactive crofters, this may cause tensions regarding landuse choices. In view of the part or spare-time nature of crofting agriculture, statistics are often difficult to get since purely agricultural statistics generally focus on full-time holdings with crofts falling below the average 'man-hours' per year watershed. With agriculture in crisis the full-time crofter is the most disadvantaged, since the unit is too big to allow waged labour off the croft and too small to carry the burden of cashflow over a series of bad years.

In the Townships

In the townships ideas about what crofting is and what crofters do often differ from those commonly or currently used amongst activists and policy makers. During fieldwork, it is not uncommon to be told that there isn't really any crofting anymore. From this research it seems that the title of 'crofter' is something which is awarded and won, not acquired with a croft tenancy. First and foremost, 'real crofters' have stock and at least one working dog. Since a dog is necessary to work sheep, being without a dog implies that someone else is doing the work for you. This is a view which equates agricultural activity with crofting. Many, perhaps most, see 'proper' crofting as involving cultivation of the inbye ground instead of using it for pasture. For this reason many people assert that crofting is finished or that there are no longer any crofters. This is a definition of crofting and crofters based on the past. For these reasons most people do not describe themselves as a 'crofter' when asked or would shrink from that description when asked. In a very real sense there is a notion of what a 'real,' 'authentic' crofter is and is not. 'Proper' 'real' crofters are a thing of the past, the lamented and troubled past and the 'time of the grandfathers'. Those who can be unambiguously described by their

neighbours as crofters today, qualifying that definition with the idea of *'the proper crofter from the past'*, are indigenous *'born-and-bred locals'* with a lot of stock. In any other circumstances, for instance collectively, to describe oneself as a crofter is a strategic move involving the assertion of a particular kind of identity and positionality. It is a means to an end and an invocation of complex, and often contradictory, discourses conjured up by claiming the identity *'crofter'*. This claim asserts a certain kind of voice – or voices a certain kind of assertion. In such moments there is a strong call to a sense of *'natural'* justice on the part of the listener or audience. To ignore such a voice might be tread upon the downtrodden.

These ideas of *'real'* and *'authentic'* crofters contrast with the discourse created in the public arena by crofting activists and policy makers for whom crofting is the *'social glue'* which holds communities together. Activists would describe the crofting system as a way of life - and the only way for most people to access land, which provides somewhere to live, to build a house or put a caravan, and a source of food in areas where employment may be seasonal or unreliable. The croft ensures a degree of independence beyond a weekly wage packet, in a fickle economic climate. In the activist's terms it is the only system which holds people in the outlying areas all the year round. But for crofting, there would be no communities in the remote rural areas. Crofting has succeeded in reducing the rate of rural depopulation, but not in halting it. In the public policy arena crofting is what *'crofters'* do. Interpretation of *'the community interest'* is broad. Although there is great concern about underuse or dereliction of land on policy making circles, crofting is never reduced to a gendered agricultural activity but rather, it involves and retains a landbased population or community.

Gender and Crofting

Viewing crofting as sheep production is a very good way of ignoring the contribution of women to the crofting community. Women work as clerks of grazing, work at some sheep tasks, organise all manner of social events, run B&Bs, generally deal with the accounts and forms - of which there are many.

Since most people's working definition of a crofter excludes the possibility of the person identified as the crofter being anything other than male, asking about the role of women in crofting does not often produce very verbose responses. During fieldwork only one man made a persistent point of referring to his spouse as '*the crofter*':

"That's the crofter you know - that's the one you should be interviewing! She's the crofter - I'm just the one that does the work! Unpaid employee!"⁵⁸

As with many women, the woman referred to here is the tenant of the croft and hence the crofter in the eyes of the law. Many people have said to me that I would make a good crofter's wife, but no-one has ever suggested that I would make a good crofter. The views of individuals are strongly affected by age and '*cultural capital*'. Age is a more significant influence than gender or tertiary education. Personal attributes also come into play - the more confident are less inclined to a sense of disempowerment or loss. In dealing with such small numbers of people in each area where interviews were carried out, it might be argued that it is easy to overwork the information gathered, without allowing for that which we might call '*personality*'.

Local demography is also highly influential. One township I visited is dominated by single men ranging from early 50s to late 60s. Another township is dominated by women.

"Well look at this area. It's nearly all women, but I don't know how representative of other crofting communities that is."⁵⁹

Some respondents identified differences in their experiences as women in the rural, crofting community when compared to an urban setting:

"Well I have always thought, having lived in the town and that, that women on the whole are treated more equal here, than they are in towns. Even as a child too, I thought even children were treated ... they didn't talk down to children like they do in town - sort of, you keep your place. Everybody seemed to be treated more equally, as if they had an opinion and they were worth something. I don't think women were as downtrodden here. Because, I mean, even today, although they say equal opportunities and all that, I mean I've had men sort of say, right, shut up,

⁵⁸Interview 1994 ACT/Male 50-55

⁵⁹Interview Female 45-50

listen - in the town. They don't want you to feature, because you're so dumb, you know? "⁶⁰

This serves to highlight the fact that many women involved in community action on the margins find that there is a tension between community and political action which seeks to maintain the cultural integrity of the group and the rights or aspirations of women within that group. Not inevitably, but often, the cultural traditions of the group dictate narrow gender roles or are intolerant of transgression. Voices in the margins are not necessarily more inclusive than those of the notional centre. They may also be inclusive in a radical sense, in an uneven way, selecting some people from '*out of parenthesis*' but not others. This does not only affect women, their ideas of self and other, their moral codes and social interaction. It also expects certain things of men and delimits their gender roles and social behaviour. Some things have changed radically, in this regard, perhaps because of the demographic change rather than wilful reworking of gender roles. A quote from Assynt:

"I mean it's only recently that women have gone to funerals. It was always done from the house and the men would go to the graveside. It was unheard of, even twenty years ago, for a woman to go to the graveside."⁶¹

In the very recent past women did not participate in the **public** ceremony and ritual of mourning in Assynt. That was the role of the men. Gender roles in the townships result in different, overlapping social spaces. Roles have changed over time:

"So, the fact is that women in the past formed... had a ... crucial role in the crofting community. And I don't diminish that in the slightest today. The women of the community have as important a role as the men of the community, but in a different sense."⁶²

The speaker did not elaborate what this '*different sense*' might be. Most people's '*commonsense*' idea of what crofting is, relies on past crofting agricultural practices, leading many to assert that there is no longer any crofting - or even crofters. The combined result of this was that responses

⁶⁰Interview Female 60+

⁶¹Interview 1993 ACT/Female 45-50

tended to deal with the role of women in crofting **in the past**. Several people felt that the question was being asked because it is just one of those questions that a person must ask these days:

"Where do you get these questions from? It's politically correct questions.
Role of women in crofting!"⁶³

Given the circumstances of the fieldwork, namely in the midst of a bold community initiative, it seemed to me inappropriate to raise too strongly too wide a range of potentially difficult topics. I had in mind the experiences of Sarah Whatmore during the research for Farming Women when one of the participants decided to leave farm, husband and family on the strength of the rather focused thinking she had done during the course of the interviews. Likewise Doreen Massey had mentioned similar effects during interviews in the Cambridge area. In that instance at least one woman made the decision to give up being the home-based provider of clean laundry and home-made bread.⁶⁴

At no time did I imagine that I risked such a dramatic impact in my own research. Nonetheless it did seem to me that I would be forcing attention and effort on a subject which many interviewees saw as irrelevant to the job in hand.

In terms of crofting agriculture, the need for a certain physical strength is often seen as a barrier to women involvement:

".. I think probably just as much as men. I think there's a lot of women in crofting townships today. They maybe haven't got the physical ability to do a lot of things - that men have. I never thought I did have... but you need help. Who doesn't need help at some time or other? But I think that women have a strong position in crofting today. I mean, look at 'The Crofter of the Year' was a woman,.. in Shetland. Jean Sandesan. She had I don't know how many cows and ewes, all different breeds, and she had a husband and two sons, but if there was ploughing to be done or peats to be cut or calves to be born, and the men weren't there, she just got on with

⁶²Interview 1994 ACT/Male 55-60

⁶³Interview, 1993, Female/ACT

⁶⁴Lecture given by Doreen Massey, Aberystwyth 1994.

it. Off on the tractor and she just got on with it. Oh, she was a strong person. But, aye, she got 'Crofter of the Year'. "⁶⁵

The implication in this quote is that although the woman could do all this, she was strong and just got on with it **because** of the absence of the men. Notice also that, as always, crofting is understood purely as crofting agriculture. Proper crofters are those who engage actively in crofting agriculture. No mention is made of the other things which keep even crofting agriculture going - book-keeping, record keeping, being Clerk of the Grazings, making phone calls to order feed and fencing materials. These are all things which women do a disproportionate amount of, but which are somehow not what '*real*' crofting is about. The invisible producers perhaps, in a similar sense to the work involved in reproduction within a household, where meals, clean laundry and even children appear, keeping an economy running and putting workers into the jobmarket.

Some women in crofting have said to me that they were not allowed to learn to clip sheep, as youngsters, while brothers were forced to do so. Other women and men are somewhat mocking of the aspirations of women to be involved in an active way in crofting agriculture:

"... a lot of women own sheep who can't take to the hills with dogs, and a lot of old people own sheep. But they've done their bit in the past, I suppose."⁶⁶

Here '*old people*' can be excused any inability to '*go to the hill*' – meaning to go out gathering sheep – while it appears to be assumed that women cannot do this at any age. Ideas of the role of women in crofting in the past seem to be expressed more freely by the participants:

"I only think back to what it was like when I first came here, when women played almost an equal part on the crofts. There's not so many left."⁶⁷

Notice that here women are viewed as having an almost equal part. Again we have an illustration of the apparent invisibility of women's work in this

⁶⁵Interview 1992 ACT/Female - +60 years. The Crofter of the Yea Award is made through the SCU and the prize is provided by SNH.

⁶⁶Interview, 1992, male/ACT

context. Since the preferred idea of a crofter involves outdoor/public work, battling with animals and the elements, less heroic or dramatic roles are blurred out a little. This quote also serves to emphasise again the impact of demographic differences at the township level. The speaker is saying that there are not very many women left. This person first came to this area in the 1950s. All the other respondents were referring to a much more distant past.

There are other fascinating spatial variations. When I asked the Director of the SCU about the role of women in crofting, he said that as a rough guide you can assume that the further west you go, the less public participation by women you find in crofting activity and politics. This mirrors the notional imagined geography of the crofting margins whereby the further west you go the more '*authentic*' is the Gaidhealtachd culture or for the outsider, the more endemic is the '*culture of degeneracy*'. Fluency in Gaelic also follows this pattern, as does the assumed strength of crofting culture in the Western Isles, which serves as some sort of imaginary '*Mecca*' for some. Crofters and communities in the Western Isles seem to be viewed as somehow '*more real*' and more authentic than the everyday crofting life of Assynt. This pattern of women's involvement in crofting affairs described by the SCU representative also mirrors to some extent the gender bias in my interview participants.

The next quote turns to gender roles indoors as opposed to outdoors:

"XXX's mother in law, from Lewis, she's a right quiet body, and just keeps to the kitchen and does the baking and the cleaning and the cooking. And the man was the one that spoke. You know, when people would come in and she wouldn't speak. I think that would be quite a common thing perhaps in the islands .."⁶⁸

So, while Lewis may symbolically represent the authentic remnants of a disappearing culture the passing of which is deeply mourned, it also seems to harbour less attractive elements of that culture which have been apparently changed on '*the mainland*'.

⁶⁷Interview 1994 Male 65+

⁶⁸Interview 1994 ACT / Female 45-50

There follows three quotes referring to the role of women in crofting in Assynt in the past. Perhaps it is easier to talk about the past than the present because, being passed, it can seem more fixed and therefore easier to describe. Two of the men were quite vehement in stating that in the past the women basically did all the work.

"It was the women did all the work in the old days. It wasn't the men. The men had an easy time of it. It was the women that did all the work. When I was a wee boy it was my mother that ran the household. It wasn't my father that ran the household. Definitely. In not for that, the whole structure of crofting would have gone to the wall. And the whole family life would've went to the wall. And it was them that ran the household and knitted and made butter and made crowdie and ... did everything. Just everything. Never sitting back and doing bugger all. ... But I'm not willing to say that that's still the case!"⁶⁹

And another interviewee explains:

"Oh the women was quite tough. They were doing a lot of work, there's no doubt about it. The men would be away fishing and the women would have all the work of the place. There was a lot of work you see, between washing, baking, milking cows, doing the house...."⁷⁰

Many women worked away as well, in service and in the herring fishing, but this was not mentioned. Below is another quote on this subject:

"The women were the ones who did all the hard work. The women are the ones that kept the family together. They would work out in the fields, they were far more important than the men cos they did all the basic work, whereas the men would just go off to sea and come back and put their feet up.... and in the land riots, it was always the women. They were the ones who deforced the sheriff's officers. Oh no - that myth about the strong Highland man is a myth. It was a strong Highland woman. Now I don't know if she has the same role nowadays because they don't have all the croft work. So in that respect I suppose they could feel devalued when they no longer have the same reason... I never spoke about that with anyone.You need something like that to give yourself some kind of self respect. I don't know were the women ever really valued by the men here? I've never spoken to her about it - or did the men just think - they were the Lord's creation, weren't they? The ministers would have told them that. It says in the Bible, man was given dominance. I think they meant humans, but! It says man was given dominance so they just had to obey the Lord and Master. It never bothered me if I was doing the ironing or ... washing or anything like that. Just worked together. But in the past they had very clear cut roles. That's changed a lot now."⁷¹

⁶⁹interview 1994 ACT/Male 50-55

⁷⁰Interview 1994 ACT/Male 65+

⁷¹Interview 1994 ACT/Male 50-55

An impression of a matriarchal society is given by this speaker. In the past and indeed, to the present day, many men are known by their wife's family name which does indicate some elements of matriarchy. However the type of Christianity prevalent in those days would certainly mitigate against women, as the last quote indicates. Historical research has tended to favour the notion of separate roles and translating contemporary attitudes back onto the past is a bit simplistic and dangerous. With regard to social protest, the work of Iain Robertson has reinterpreted the role of women. He notes that many treatments of women's role in social protest in Britain has tended to perpetuate gender divisions, being based upon them. He points out that the introduction of capitalism in the region and the resultant development of crofting agriculture brought about reworkings of existing relations between men and women. Contrary to past treatments of this subject, it is clear that women became central to the crofting economy and vital to the maintenance of claims to land. It was from this that these women drew the strength to participate in protests. The sources of their motivation were **the same** as their male counterparts. Others had previously attributed this participation in food riots and resistance to clearance to defence of the 'moral' economy, basing explanation on domestic roles.⁷² The church view in the past, or perhaps plain expediency, is illustrated in the final quote here:

"Obviously the place of women in the past was crucial. A man for example, would find it extremely difficult to carry out certain of the crofting tasks if he was without a wife. Some of these tasks meant two pairs of hands."⁷³

It is interesting to balance this view with another comment by the same man referring to the present rather than the past:

"It seems to me, with the best will in the world, we have a resource in the female population which is not matched in the male population, and a resource that's not being utilised."⁷⁴

⁷²**Robertson I. J. M.** 1997 *The role of women in social protest in the Highlands of Scotland* *Journal of Historical Geography* Vol. 23 No 2 pp 187-200. Also his PhD thesis, Cheltenham & Gloucester College of Higher Education.

⁷³Interview 1994 ACT/Male 55-60

⁷⁴Interview 1994 ACT/Male 60-65

Only a crofter?

"What is a crofter-fisherman?
Someone who drinks like a fish
Has three sheep
And can't find any of them!"⁷⁵

This quote is typical of many '*outsiders*' ideas of crofters and crofting. It is also illustrative of the sort of discourse and binary oppositions which have resulted from the fact that the Highlands and Islands are very much a place made in the minds of outsiders. I will look at this in more detail in a later section. In the meantime this type of characterisation can perhaps be seen as the politer 20th century version of the '*brutish, savage Highlander*'. I commented earlier that current positive definitions of crofting contrast sharply with past ideas about it being a non-viable, museum piece. Significant changes have also come about in what it means to be a crofter, which do not revolve around notions of '*authenticity*' and the '*real*'. Past definitions and discourse regarding crofters in this century have tended to imply a status as victim. One would reflect on the plight of the '*poor crofters*'. In fact '*status*' is probably not the right word to use since a common phrase was once ... '*only a crofter*.'

"They saw crofting as almost something to be ashamed of - that you were '*only*' a crofter!"⁷⁶

In recent years such phrases have still been used, but extremely ironically. Crofting politics has developed a vibrancy and dynamism arguably not seen for some one hundred years. Crofting and crofters have regained a degree of self-confidence and self-respect. In the 1990s crofting, and the status of someone describing themselves as a crofter, has changed to such an extent that more than one interviewee commented:

"It's almost become trendy, which is a good thing. Down in places like Portree and in Stornoway there are doctors and lawyers and teachers - professional people, who want to be crofters. But there's a danger in that too, of course. That maybe the ordinary crofter will be priced out or not ever get the chance of a croft of his own. That it might change crofting into something else altogether..."⁷⁷

⁷⁵Fieldwork Diary 1993 - Anonymous (for their own safety)

⁷⁶Interview 1992 ACT/Male 65-70

⁷⁷Interview 1993 Skye Male 50-55

However, there are still many people in areas where crofting occurs, not to mention elsewhere, who continue to characterise crofters as '*lazy halfwits*' who enjoy outrageous levels of subsidy. But even so, I think that on balance, in the public realm, crofting is a condensation point around which and through which a whole variety of values and issues are made visible and vocalised. Crofting, and that which we know as crofting politics, is a good vehicle for addressing a wide range of rural issues. These issues do not just involve the material circumstances in the periphery. They also involve, implicitly often, issues of culture and identity or the ethics of the crofting system and the integrity of those ideals. The health of crofting is seen as a metaphor for the well-being of the whole region. Hence stagnancy and decline on in the crofting communities reflects on the whole '*nation*'. Through debate about the future of crofting assertions about modern values and rights of citizenship are being made. Having been conjured into existence, a whole jumble of values and aspirations which are barely discernible in themselves come to have names and labels and find a place in the policy arena. The Gaelic language, perhaps strangely given that it is a language, does not display this versatility. It is probably no coincidence though that it too has been gathering momentum in the policy arena, adjacent in time and space to the revitalisation of crofting as activity and identity. All of this goes some way to explaining why crofting seems so often to be talked of as a thing:

'."It's interesting even that people talk about crofters always as a - as a **thing**, in a way that they don't talk about farmers or anything - I mean, they talk about crofters almost as - inferring that they are the entire population of the Highland rural community. You don't go to Aberdeenshire and talk about farmers in the same context, although they're just as important a part of the rural framework in a place like Aberdeen."⁷⁸

The crofting areas are the only places where there is anyone left to take a stand at all, their chances enhanced by their legal rights as crofters and notions of their strategic political position as those who have held out, who '*remain*' despite '*past wrongs*' and constant pressures and difficulties. Of course this is a comment on, and aspect of, perceptions of the identity of

⁷⁸Interview 1992 Factor, Assynt Estates

crofters and crofting, **not** individuals who are crofters. They have not necessarily personally experienced the past wrongs and constant pressures. But to be active in crofting and crofting politics, and today, to get a croft at all, it is usually necessary to identify with that which crofting is seen to stand for, to **at least** partially internalise and empathise with that identity. And it appears that often crofting is the crystal or particle, around which the values of '*a culture in opposition*' condense. Perhaps because in terms of policy and political strategy crofting is **a thing** - it has a name and a concrete material existence. And perhaps that is why, at times, I find myself appearing to collapse the region - the Highlands and Islands - into crofting or vice-versa, and observe others doing the same, rarely mentioning the people who are not crofters at all.

Considering Class

Historically it has been held that a class system never really developed in the crofting areas. That is to say, there were the lairds, factors, ministers and schoolteachers - and then there was everyone else - the majority. Historically there was no middle ground and almost no middle classes, or an underdeveloped middle class, at any rate.

"A commercial middle layer was almost non-existent outside of the towns. And where such a middle class did exist it was often made up of estate factors and land agents whose position as the officer of landlord authority in running estates was often complemented by their role as local justices of the peace, sheriff's officers, overseers of poor law administration or health board inspectors." ⁷⁹

Withers notes that by the 1800's it is possible to talk of social classes in what he calls an '*absolute*' or occupational class sense and in terms of relative identity or class-consciousness. Both he and Hunter suggest that the delay or lack of development of a middle class can be attributed to:

"some sort of collective **psychological trauma** within the Highland peasantry. This trauma was occasioned more perhaps by residual deference to kin loyalties(..) than it was to the simple result of 'the shock of the new' in terms of the imposition of 'modern' agricultural methods. For most Highlanders, it was the fact that it was often chiefs, in their new role as commercial landlords, that made the changes in material

⁷⁹See p 409 **Withers C. W. J.** 1988 *Gaelic Scotland: The Transformation of a Culture Region* Routledge, London.

circumstances so hard to come to terms with and questions of loyalty and agreed behavioural patterns so difficult to depart from." ⁸⁰

In Ireland appreciation of the changed social and economic circumstances was made more possible by the complete removal of the landlord system. Hunter notes however, that:

"The undermining of the belief that 'if our landlord knew our circumstances well he would give us justice' was an immensely slow process which had its origins in the 18th century and is by no means complete even today" ⁸¹

The evidence suggests that in view of persistent residual deference:

"the notion of class consciousness to describe the simple recognition of other class groups or even a sense of opposition to the interests of other classes may not be sufficient to allow for those issues of loyalty, custom, and inherent ideology that we have seen to be set within and between classes." ⁸²

However when class-consciousness did emerge among the Highland peasantry as a basis for identity and action, it was an uneven process within the region. The geography of protest reveals much about the rearticulation of traditional behavioural relationships along class lines.

"Opposition to enclosure and Lowland factors and graziers centred before 1860 in the more fertile districts of Easter Ross and east Sutherland. Later protest at the extinction of customary rights and the appropriation of land was more common in the north and west and islands where ideas of custom and loyalty perhaps persisted longer where the claims to these traditional rights as legitimation for opposition was the result both of this persistence and the delayed but more abrupt nature of material change in those parts." ⁸³

In the north and west the crofting community was very much made or created through retention of population and continual subdivision of holdings. Material circumstances, class and custom were strongly bound into the very existence and notion of a crofter and crofting community as it was created from the runrig and clan system. In the south and east change had

⁸⁰See **Withers** 1988 as above; p 410.

⁸¹See p 91 **Hunter J.** 1987 edition *The Making of the Crofting Community* John Donald, Edinburgh.

⁸²See **Wither C. W. J.** 1988 *Gaelic Scotland: The Transformation of a Culture Region*; p 410.

⁸³See **Withers C. W. J.** 1988 as above; p410.

come earlier and in a more gradual fashion. It is possible that greater mobility and employment outside agriculture, in areas which are in any case incredibly fertile in comparison to the north, west and islands may have undermined agreed rights and customs earlier and also caused class formation and material change to be more rapid. Within the region as a whole the processes of class formation was also fuelled from derived sources, in the second half of the 19th century. This includes non-Highlanders with similar class interests, urban Highland institutions and Highlanders themselves, all involved in the wider political arena, often in relation to issues of land reform but also on broader agendas.⁸⁴

This historical geography helps to place the main study area of Assynt and the other areas visited, which are all in the north, west and the islands. All areas therefore where class formation and material change was later and more abrupt, where agricultural conditions are difficult, where protests erupted post -1860 and where today one finds the concentration of contemporary crofting. Today differences in economy, lifestyle, wages and so on still follow this geography, with the north, the west and the islands being the least developed. And though it is true that there are those who still defer to the laird, even in Assynt, the majority of the population now have an unshakeable belief in the innate '*badness*' of landlords. What habitual behaviour based on hatred of landlords might mean for the Assynt Crofters Trust, who have become their own landlord, remains to be seen.

Today, if you take employment as an indicator, something of this lack of a middle class remains. The jobs which are available in the local area are all generally unskilled and low paid. Economically therefore class could be seen as having less direct impact than in some other areas of Scotland. Class distinctions are based more on cultural capital, which since the 1960's and the subsequent emergence of counter-urbanisation, has become something of an influence.

⁸⁴See **Withers C. W. J.** 1999 *Urban Highlanders: Highland – Lowland Migration and Urban Gaelic Culture 1700 – 1900*, Tuckwell Press; also **Hunter J.** 1985 edition *The Making of the Crofting*

Cultural distinctions are most often mobilised in distinguishing those whose family can be demonstrated to have lived and worked in a particular Highland setting for many generations, as opposed to those who have 'come in' and who lack the cultural background of the Gael and the strong associations with a family croft or township.

Inside and Outside

The work done by MacLeod and Payne in the Coigach peninsula, adjacent and to the south of Assynt, is illuminating with respect to my own positionality and the influence of standard indicators of social difference and division. In this investigation of social and cultural identity in Coigach the local/incomer distinction was found to be a crucial variable independent of class, race, religion and gender. Previous work has treated the local/incomer distinction as secondary in importance to other variables, particularly social class and housing, and explicable through these favoured variables. MacLeod and Payne note firstly that:

"Today's way of life is more varied than in earlier times. In recent years a diversity of occupations unrelated to any local particularity and not providing any obvious social bond has come to prevail, making for differences rather than fostering common interest and cohesion. The dominant pattern is still one of manual work on a small scale, but the increased diversity of the economic base means that there is no collective work-orientated consciousness. The communal labour exchanges of the fank or the fishing are small scale and occasional: the small-talk of work tasks common to all in the daily round no longer applies. Instead we have a local society in which many small groups can flourish, and where in many cases individuals move between one group and another from day to day." ⁸⁵

Since differences today, in terms of clothing, speech or lifestyle, are comparatively small an outside observer would have trouble differentiating between locals and incomers. Within the community, rather than a decisive split, a sliding scale operates. MacLeod and Payne's rendering of this is provided in Figure 4.4 below.

Figure 4.4: A Scale of Insider/Outsider Categories

Community John Donald, Edinburgh, Chapters 8 & 9; **MacPhail I. M. M.** 1989 *The Crofters' War* Acair, Stornoway.

⁸⁵p 393 **MacLeod A. and Payne G.** 1994 'Locals' and Incomers': *Social and Cultural identity in Late Twentieth Century Coigach* in **Baldwin J. R.(ed)** 1994 *Peoples and Settlement in North West Ross*

Source: MacLeod A. and Payne G. 1994⁸⁶

Category	Description
Local	Coigach born and bred
Local non-resident	local living away from Coigach
Locally connected	non-local, married into local family, or with long local work record
Incomer	non-local resident
Regular Visitor	incomer for part of each year(e.g. school holidays)
White Settler	incomer, usually well-off/middle class, with few local connections; rarely used to describe people who come to live in Coigach, but is reserved for those who normally spend only a few weeks of the year in their holiday home
'Bongley' / visitor	casual non-local visitor or tourist

At a conference I attended in the 1990s, a Wester Ross woman commented that in her area, '*white settler*' referred to incomers who had '*fallen out with everyone and to whom no-one spoke*'.⁸⁷ In Assynt a white settler can be someone who has moved to the area, is '*rich*' and has no respect for local ways, and is likely to try to tell the '*natives*' how to do things '*properly*'. In all cases though, a sliding scale applies and people's status is both mobile and contingent. In Assynt I notice that '*incomers*' active in local public life tend to defer to perceived local values or opinion.

The authors, MacLeod and Payne, suggest that this situation has arisen with the impact of immigration as a result of counter-urbanisation which makes the '*locals*' feel that their identity and its locatedness is threatened. This threat and struggle is coded into a local story telling of an historical act of resistance. The historical nature of the story, with its allegorical elements, is sufficiently distanced from '*the everyday*' to allow its telling without breaching the bounds of politeness. The telling of stories of the place, is in itself, an act which asserts *localness* and which in Coigach, is often reserved for exchanges between locals for whom this repetition affirms *mutual localness*, in the absence of other noticeable markers of difference or boundaries of belonging. I feel however that this analysis lacks historicity, in that the threat is cultural, in the term's widest sense and must be seen against the backdrop of centuries of attack on Highland ways, culture and language. Combined with constant

⁸⁶p410 – note 7 - **MacLeod A. and Payne G.** 1994 '*Locals*' and '*Incomers*': *Social and Cultural Identity in late Twentieth Century Coigach* in **Baldwin J. R. (ed)** *Peoples and Settlement in North West Ross*.

⁸⁷See also book review by **MacArthur E. M.** in *Scottish Affairs* No 22 Winter 1998, pp 129 – 133 where she uses the same example (having attended the same conference as me). The review is of **Jedrej C. and Nutall M.** 1996 *White Settlers: the Impact of Rural Repopulation in Scotland* Harwood Academic Publishers, Luxembourg.

outmigration, particularly of the young, and more contemporary in-migration from other cultures, a siege mentality is experienced. The psycho-cultural dimensions of subordination are in action. 'Localness' is a form of cultural opposition which asserts value where none is generally attributed by 'non-locals' or outsiders. The dichotomy which the local/incomer division expresses is in fact the *local's* ambiguity between valuing indigenous cultural expression while rejecting it in order to 'get on' in a world, where to be a 'teuchter' is to be marked in a variety of ways.

Hence in work more thoroughly informed by cultural theory, a rather different picture emerges. Jedrej and Nutall take issue with the glib use of the terms 'local' and 'incomer' in studies of counter-stream migration:

"The presumption is that the scientific vocabulary is no more than an accurate version of the everyday vernacular"⁸⁸

They correctly note that such terms do not constitute a fixed category with definable attributes, but instead are deployed inconsistently:

"In short, the vocabulary of 'locals' and 'incomers' is a complex and deeply embedded metaphor providing the terms through which people express and give meaning to the experiences which constitute their lives. The social anthropological interest lies in the metaphorical and symbolic attributes of the vernacular concepts and the ways in which they structure experience."⁸⁹

They therefore argue that such a vocabulary in a rural setting derives from systematic relationships of inequality, in particular the inescapable asymmetries of social class. They further suggest that the only material difference in rural and urban life is an '*amplification effect*'. In their view the feeling that there is something different about rural life derives from:

"the amplification of systematic features of social structure, features which are more muted in the urban setting and, secondly, because in the construction of national identities the rural landscape and its inhabitants are resorted to as a treasury of images"⁹⁰

⁸⁸p114 **Jedrej C. and Nutall M.** 1995 *Incomers and Locals: Metaphors and Reality in Repopulation of Rural Scotland* in *Scottish Affairs* No 10 Winter 1995 pp112-126.

⁸⁹As above.

⁹⁰**Jedrej C. and Nutall M.** as above; p 117

I agree with much of their argument and welcome the fact that they have seen beyond the mirage of describing '*incomers*'. I think however there is more to this feeling of '*the difference of the rural*' than that which can be put down to amplification and '*remoteness*'. Following Ardener, they suggest that '*remoteness*' explains anything **left out** by amplification. Remoteness in this sense is more than physical geography. It is a phenomenologically complex experience. I suspect that the impossibility of anonymity and privacy in remote places is not about amplification or '*remoteness*'. It does though, written like that, seem paradoxical. 'Remoteness' in this context:

"is the paradox of both a sense of the difficulty of travelling to the area, and, at the same time a sense of the vulnerability of the area to penetration by agents and agencies from elsewhere."⁹¹

To last through the years in a remote rural area, does, I think, require a qualitatively different kind of social interaction. Class inequality is definitely cross-cut by allegiances based on religion, attitudes to environmental issues, lifestyle, political and party political beliefs and personality traits. Any sort of local/incomer divide is also strongly cross-cut by these same attributes. A certain siege mentality, derived from a long spell of cultural disintegration for Gaels and loss of young people, does not perhaps justify discursively or materially excluding '*newcomers*', but it does go a long way to explaining **why** such behaviour is so often seen as acceptable. As Jedrej and Nutall observe, the categories of local and incomer are unstable. Sometimes in terms of both categories, they are perhaps defensive gestures. On other occasions the terms may be mobilised in local power struggles which may be over crofts or status or ideological power, to name but a few possibilities.

Crofters Talking About Crofting

As part of my undergraduate dissertation in 1990, I interviewed fifty croft tenants in the Rhu Stoer area using questionnaires. The questions were open questions and had known most of the respondents since I was a child. The reasons given at that time for going into crofting are listed in Figure 4.5 below.

⁹¹Jedrej C. and Nutall M. as above; p 124.

Figure 4.5: "Why did you take up crofting?"

Source: I MacPhail, Undergraduate Dissertation 1990, Glasgow University

<i>"Why did you take up crofting?"</i>	
left to me /inherited	15
in the blood /born here	15
farming background / interest in livestock /smallholding	7
good healthy lifestyle	4
no work /house where I was	2
only thing available	2
to be own boss	2
married in area	1
living in area - wanted to be more involved	1
additional income	1
TOTAL	50

If we combine the '*only thing available*' category with the '*no work*' category and the '*inherited*' category we have nineteen of the sample giving passive or negative reasons for being in crofting. The other responses indicate an active choice. In the case of '*in the blood,*' this choice tends to be like claiming one's heritage. To continue the tradition of crofting in this case is to assert the value of that cultural package. To be proud and to be committed to the survival of the local community. Until counter-stream migration, crofting choose you, you did not choose crofting. It was part of the effort to survive and the main way that the bulk of the population could maintain some degree of stability and security. For the older generation therefore, asking why a person is in crofting often seems like a most peculiar and incomprehensible question. It is also a question which can compromise the crofter's pride and sense of self. This is because in the past many people have asserted that anyone with any get up and go had long since got up and gone. These out-migrants, it has been argued, left to make something of themselves. By implication, only those fit for nothing else remained on the croft. Some academics have traced this to the disproportionate emigration of the tacksmen in the course of the Clearances. This, they argue, left the Highlands with no indigenous '*leaders*'.⁹² In more recent times this question has caused discomfort for other reasons. In many families one person, usually a son, stayed home to run the family croft and take care of the ageing parents while his/her siblings went off into '*the big world*' beyond. This question can therefore raise difficult and delicate issues regarding intra-family politics and sibling rivalry, based on years of summer holiday visits by the departed ones. The following quote

illustrates this little talked of situation. I have quoted it in full because it illustrates so well the delicacy of this issue:

"When I was young and I grew up on a croft - born and bred in Tiree - and I just progressed. For secondary school I had to move off to Oban, to senior Secondary education, and then to Glasgow University. And the common process - it was almost plotted out for you - that if you had enough grey matter to pass the necessary exams. That was what you would do. So I did what everyone else did. But again, on the croft, the youngest of 5 sons - life was hard. And my parents' ambition was for us to get out of here! And all the family did - which was a shame because the croft is no longer - it's gone out of the family. ... The other part of that story, going back to the '30s and 40s and 50s, was that there were still some people caught in the trap. They couldn't get out and someone drew the short straw - the person who couldn't get his post-qualifying or his lowers or whatever - would end up working the croft. Because there was a very strong culture, there still is, that the croft had to be occupied and maintained. And it was the family treasure at the end of the day, and no-one could discard that. And there would have to be a very strong argument for the croft to run to no use. So it was the lot of some person - who might regard himself as the unfortunate - to be left running the croft. And the scenario would be that those who went away would come back, with their affluence and - in a way you could feel - I saw this with my parents. They were the ones that were in Tiree. The brothers and sisters - aunts and uncles of mine - they were the toffs. The ones who had a lot of money and all the rest of it. It was quite a thought."⁹³

This quote highlights the influence of education in taking the young people away. Children in crofting areas have often had to leave home at the age of twelve to go to secondary school. There were no secondary schools on the west coast mainland in Wester Ross and Sutherland until the 1980's. In the 1980's secondary schools, going right up to Sixth Year, were established in Gairloch, Ullapool and Kinlochbervie. This was the first time since the beginning of universal state education that those wishing to continue at school could commute daily. In Assynt, until the opening of a Secondary School to sixth year in Ullapool, children boarded in Golspie on the east coast and came home at the weekends. By the time they left school children were looking to college, university or jobs down south. All the people I spoke to in the course of fieldwork felt that daily access to a Secondary School was a huge improvement and that, in effect, the young people of the past left home at twelve years old and in many cases never came back, except on holiday. It was a '*culture of leaving*'. Little intrinsic value was seen in what had been left

⁹²See among others, **Caird J. B. and Moisley H. A.** 1961 Leadership and Innovation in the Crofting Communities of the Outer Hebrides *Sociological Review* Vol. 9 pp 85 -102.

⁹³Interview 1992 Chair, Crofters' Commission 60-65/male

behind except a sentimental *'pull'*. As the quote above implies, for all the songs and stories that may have been sung in praise of what we tend to refer to as the (former) Crofting Counties, and their ambiguous position in the creation of ideas of Scotland and Scottishness, there is a strong implication that those who did not *'get out'* could not get out due to poverty, family commitments or lack of ability. This is very different from those return migrants who have been able to come back to the family croft to retire, with a pension and their fond childhood memories intact.

A *'Survey of Crofters' Views'* was carried out on behalf of the Crofters Commission in 1993 and included a question about why people were involved in crofting.⁹⁴ When compared with the results of my own smaller survey, carried out five years earlier, it is noticeable that for the all areas the *'inherited'* and *'in the blood categories'* are still the most usual, though across all areas *'in the blood'* is less than in West Sutherland and Wester Ross. One of the most marked differences is the appearance of an *'Enjoy it/Interest'* category. In my own survey only one respondent referred to *'interest'*, though four referred to a *'good health lifestyle'*, which is also a positive reason. On balance it would appear that in those short five years crofting has come to be seen as a more positive choice than previously. It should be noted that economic change and development had already begun to create greater economic choices in places like Skye and Lochaber, which was definitely not the case a generation before.

⁹⁴**Independent Northern Consultants** 1993 *Survey of Crofters Views* Report prepared for the Crofters Commission.

Table 4.6: Comparison of Responses from Selected Sample Areas & Total Sample
 Source: Question 3: Survey of Crofters' View, Crofters Commission 1993 Independent Northern Consultants

<i>"We are interested in finding out why individual crofters are involved in crofting. In a nutshell could you say why you personally are involved in crofting?"</i>				
Response	% of respondents Total Sample	% of respondents WSuth&WRos	% of respondents Lewis&Harris	% of respondents Uists
Inherited/heritage	45	48	30	38
Enjoy it/interest	26	26	32	30
Way of life	7	12	9	2
Income/livelihood	5	4	7	3
"in the blood"	4	26	32	30
Get a house	3	2	3	7
Hobby	2	2	4	5
Other	3	1	5	2
No answer	4	2	4	5

There are other reasons why staying in a crofting community does not mean what it once did:

"Young people have a completely different perception of life now, from what pertained 10, 15 or 20 years ago, when there was full employment in the city or the town. The urban environment attracted young people. That perception has now completely changed and young people are very much aware of the disadvantages of living in an urban area today. Because of unemployment, because of environment and all the rest of it - their values have changed. And they are now very much attracted by living in their own parish, so to speak - and many of them want to do so if it's possible. And one of the ways which makes it possible is to come into crofting, because if they can acquire a croft or even an official sublet of a croft, there then is the possibility of their building a house and obtaining assistance to do so, rather than ending up in a council house in Castlemilk or somewhere like that."⁹⁵

Another retired person making similar comments:

"You're your own boss - can come and go as you please. It's a healthy outdoor lifestyle. And you don't have the problems... vandalism, like down in Lochinver... and Inverness, a terrible place. Don't have that in the townships yet thank goodness. Not like the cities."⁹⁶

⁹⁵Interview 1992 ACT/Male 65-70

⁹⁶Fieldwork Diary 1992 ACT/Male 65-70

Notice that the village of Lochinver, with a population of around five hundred, located sixteen miles to the south of this speaker's home, is bundled in with Inverness and '*cities in general*' as being bad news. This highlights the strong cultural difference that is believed by residents to exist between the crofting townships - or '*the remote areas*' - and villages or nucleated settlements. When Sheltered Housing for the parish was built in Lochinver, this was assumed to be a great thing because older residents would be able to stay in '*their*' communities rather than going to a nursing home on the east coast. The east coast nursing home was referred to by older people as '*The Poor House*' because it had once been this. Going there still retained some of that old stigma. However several older residents in the townships were appalled by the idea of moving to Lochinver, saying that it would be the equivalent of moving to '*Sodom and Gomorrah*'. Within a parish with a population of about one thousand people there are different communities who define themselves and defend those divisions. Many people view Lochinver as a necessary evil, because it provides local services but imply that it is in some way a '*sinful place*' full of '*idlers with no wish to work*'. It is very true that there is a different feel to these two types of places but it is difficult to describe why. The younger generations tend to move between the two worlds with greater ease. In comparison with Lochinver, it is true that the crofting areas have maintained a stronger '*traditional*' culture, in terms of day to day life. These are differences at a very local scale about which people feel very strongly.

Given the structure of crofting townships, the way a croft tenant chooses to do croft work and to behave towards other people has an immediate and direct effect on every other crofter in the township. For better or for worse, people in a township are bound together, not necessarily willingly. While crofts do hold people in the outlying areas all the year round, one less positive aspect is that, on occasion it may be because no-one can bear the thought of giving up their crofts for fear that the '*badman/public enemy number 1*' down the road, will get her/his hands on the croft tenancy. Not perhaps exactly a '*pull*' factor, but still a very strong motivation to '*stick it out*' despite everything - and a less '*heroic*' form of community commitment perhaps. This is another way in which crofts bind people to a place and to each other (*know*

your enemy') very powerfully. Perhaps this sort of situation also forces innovation in townships. If those involved manage not to get so fed up with the endless tussling that they just let things drift along, perhaps they are striving to find a better, more harmonious way of running the township?

In view of the potential influence the possession of a croft tenancy can provide it is easy to see why who gets a croft tenancy can be such an explosive issue. The balance of power at the township level will inevitably be affected by a change of tenancy in a township. Given that decisions regarding individual rights within the township and township rules, regarding use of common grazings, township fanks, animal health, repair of fences and so on, are decided by the Grazings Committee which is elected, changes of tenancy can strongly affect attitude and decisions in a township. People can come into favour or fall from favour. A committee once sympathetic can change. Individuals do not all have the same ability to exercise impartial detachment in decision making and achieve conflict management. Hence some members of a committee may set aside their own interests and opinions in reaching a decision which should be based on their interpretation of that which is '*in the community interest*', while others may believe that their own interests and those of the community coincide at all times. Especially when it involves crofters who have come into the township, a power struggle and sabotage tactics are not unusual. It should be noted that this attitude can be applied to **anyone** not born and bred in a particular township, not specifically to '*incomers*' so called. This fact highlights again the **instability** of the incomer/local categories. In this example the '*incomer*' label is being mobilised in an effort to gain control and block someone else's access to a croft. The person objecting to a proposed tenant would not mobilise such concepts against another prospective tenant from outside the township who could be guaranteed to be sympathetic to her/his opinion and to vote with her/him on issues raised in township meetings. In another instance the newcomer to the township might bring such new enthusiasm, vigour and skills that a township which has previously been more or less moribund is reinvigorated to a tremendous degree, as other tenants find they can get help and support. The existing tenants then rapidly find their own ideas and enthusiasms, which have been dormant, are reawakened. New projects and better land

management often follow from this type of change. In general tenancies don't change hands with any great regularity. The majority continue to pass to a member of the immediate family. The Croft Entrant Scheme has, in some areas, increased the number of tenancies changing hands since it offers incentive payments to out-goers who assign the tenancy to a young (under forty) newcomer to crofting. The 'new entrant' then gets some assistance over three years with putting into practise the business plan that each new crofter must produce as part of this scheme. The new entrant receives financial assistance in the form of a percentage of the cost of each item undertaken. Examples include sheds, fencing, shelter belts and polytunnels. Opponents of the scheme call the new entrants 'Young Upstarts'. Critics of the scheme are convinced that its result is to enable 'the wrong sort of person' to get a croft and become involved in crofting. This is mentioned in *The Survey of Crofters Views*, as are 'goodlifers'. Goodlifers are inevitably 'incomers'. Some crofts have been made available through taking action against long term absentee tenants of crofts. This has been very controversial. To illustrate this I quote from a newspaper article published in *The Herald* in 1997. The title of it is 'Final Phase of Clearances'.⁹⁷ The author, Iain M Smith, is described as follows:

"A lecturer in Economics at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. His family have been involved in crofting for four generations."

Having thus established his credentials, the author proceeds to provide a brief history of the Highlands, Clearances and crofting with an 'economic' slant. This done, he begins his criticism of the New Entrant Scheme:

"Despite these economic incentives, the scheme failed to stimulate much interest. On the supply side it failed to secure the release of much croft land; on the demand side, though few are prepared to admit it, it failed to produce many suitable applicants."

This shows a fundamental lack of understanding of the way in which the scheme operates. It does not match up crofting 'hopefuls' with unknown crofters wishing to give up or retire. The potential new entrant must have

⁹⁷For full details and a fascinating read see **Smith I. M.** 1997 Final Phase of Clearances *The Herald* 13/9/97.

someone who wishes to assign his/her croft to the new entrant. It is not a case of adding up points like one does to acquire a local authority house. There is not a recognised status as *'in crofting need'*. The scheme was first piloted in some areas and then adopted right across the crofting areas. Its aims are modest in terms of numbers of people but uptake has been significant. Smith then focuses on this scheme as it affects the Assynt Crofters Trust:

“The Assynt Crofters Trust, the first crofting community to acquire legal ownership of their land in the history of crofting, had as one of its early objectives, the intention of making crofts available to young people. Since members of the Trust were not however, prepared to make any of their own croft land available, the only land that could be made available was that belonging to absentees, even though many of them had contributed handsomely towards the purchase of the estate. Within a year, the Trust had compiled a list of more than 20 people, who, it claimed, wanted crofts. The list was lodged with the Crofters Commission as evidence of known and strong demand. The list was essentially a list of people who were interested in acquiring something for nothing. There were no qualifications to get on to the list: there was, as a consequence, no way of knowing the suitability of those named, either in terms of character, experience, age, capital, or any other criteria. A list, however compiled does not constitute an economic demand.”

Again he misunderstands what is happening. Long before the advent of the ACT, the Assynt Branch of the SCU noted that there was no mechanism for assessing the demand for crofts. The Branch started a Register of Demand and encouraged the North West Area to adopt a similar approach. They then encouraged the Crofters Commission to do the same. When the New Entrant Scheme was started the Crofters Commission also began a Register of Demand. This means that anyone with a serious interest in becoming a croft tenant can fill in a form, giving some basic information about themselves and their plans. These forms are kept and used to illustrate the extent to which a local demand for crofts exists. This list does **not** entitle the person who registers to anything. A person who wants a croft must find someone who wants to assign their croft to the person wishing to become a crofter. In the event of a croft vacancy the local list may serve to indicate interest but aspiring crofters must apply. There are almost never any vacant tenancies because of the way in which crofts are passed on. He goes on to describe crofting as *'ripe for deregulation and the flexibility which the free market provides'* and asserts that the *'market solution to diminishing returns to croft land is*

depopulation'. Earlier in the article he defines crofting, not as a commercial activity, but as a way of life:

"The uneconomic nature of crofting is starkly illustrated by the croft entrant scheme. A new entrant, who has to build a house and finance the purchase of machinery and livestock, would find that a croft, even with grants and subsidies, cannot generate sufficient income to cover the interest charges on borrowed capital. While the scheme emphasises the grants potentially available to new crofters, it makes no reference to the negative return on capital. Without regular wage/employment would-be entrants cannot survive, except on income support.

It is an irresponsible use of public funds to promote a settlement scheme which is sustainable only on the basis of a further outlay of public funds. It is a mistake to imagine that remote crofting communities can be revitalised by extending the culture of dependency."

Every new entrant in the parish of Assynt is in full-time employment, was brought up on a croft or has significant agricultural experience and has a higher than average level of motivation in everything they try their hand at. The scheme in Assynt is only open to those permanently resident in the area.

Perhaps at this point, I should position myself in this story. I am a New Entrant, having got my own croft through this scheme. Across the road from my croft are two other crofts. The tenants of these two crofts are absentees. They live '*down south*' and come back to the township on holiday. One of these tenants is Iain M Smith, the author of the article I have just discussed. The other tenant is his brother.

Before the scheme started, all research had for years pointed to the fears of crofters over the ageing population in many townships. This was seen to be putting communities at risk due to the difficulty of getting young people into crofting and because of the high costs, low returns and lack of tenancies combined with the fact that large numbers of crofts, in some areas, are tenanted by absentee tenants or are underused, since the older crofter is hanging onto the ground. This is an issue was raised during my fieldwork:

"You know, very often, crofters are their own worst enemies. I told them down at branch there, at one evening meeting. I said that - how terribly important it was for crofters on the ground to recognise this problem and to do everything they could to bring new people into the townships. And quite frankly, I said, in the not too distant future, when the next

generation ask, how is there nobody left in this township, it may well be crofters themselves who'll be standing in the dock."⁹⁸

To explain a little about what a '*goodlifer*' is, here is another quote:

"I have no doubt whatsoever that there are many who see the idea of settling on a West Highland croft, with a few goats usually, and a dog and a cat. ... There's something seemingly idyllic about that, which loses all sight of practicality. We have a fairly high turnover so far as people are concerned. There was a period when quite a lot of people came in here, and quite a lot of people departed. I think we've got a slowly, still slowly increasing population. But there's a fair turnover - people come and people go."⁹⁹

In the 1993 Survey of Crofters Views it was found that when asked '*What do you think are the most important threats or problems coming up for the whole crofting way of life in the future?*' 24% of respondents mentioned '*viability/costs/prices/profits*' and 19% mentioned '*changes in grants/subsidies etc.*'. The next largest response was regarding '*Incomers/white settlers*' which 11% mentioned. The categories '*Inappropriate crofters*' and '*Young people leaving/showing no interest*' were both mentioned by 6% of respondents. '*Absentees*' were only mentioned by 1% of respondents.

Once a scheme to tackle the issues of getting young people into crofting was in place, some people seemed to '*run shy of it*'. One problem is that in some areas there are many crofts which are unofficially used by other crofters because the tenants are absentee. This is by arrangement with the absentee tenant. In other instances resident crofters have an official sublet of such crofts. These extra crofts become central to the stock management of the subtenant since this situation has been going on for many years. The subtenant is therefore in a difficult position when such crofts are taken from the absentee tenant and assigned to a new entrant. The subtenant may be financially dependant on the use of that ground. The subtenant will definitely have come to assume that in an informal sense the ground is her/his own - not to '*own*' - but to use until such time as s/he no longer needs it. The subtenant will have developed a fondness for that bit of ground and habits of stock management which relate to that croft. To then see it given to some unknown '*Young Upstart*' hurts. The '*Young Upstart*' may be an

⁹⁸Interview 1992 ACT/Male 45-50

⁹⁹Interview 1992 ACT/Male 55-60

unknown quantity and it is very hard not to severely resent her/him. The Crofters Commission no longer views subletting as an acceptable long term solution for absentee tenants and so many more cases will occur. This pain will be repeated for many crofters. Fear of losing '*the croft*' through absentee action has resulted in some absentees assigning crofts to cousins who are locally resident. This implies that some of the impacts of the Crofters Commission action against absentee tenants are not quite what was intended.

Table 4.7: Threats to Crofting

Source: Crofters Commission Survey of Crofters Views 1993

<i>'What do you think are the most important threats or problems coming up for the whole crofting way of life in the future?'</i>				
Response	% of respondents mentioning Total Sample	% of respondents mentioning WSuth&WRoss	% of respondents mentioning Lewis & Harris	% of respondents mentioning Uists
Viability/costs/prices/profits	24	16	29	25
Changes in grants/subsidies etc.	19	26	17	23
Incomers/White settlers	11	20	14	5
Inappropriate crofters	6	10	7	7
Young people leaving/showing no interest	6	9	9	8
EEC	6	5	2	12
Bureaucracy/red tape/regulations	6	4	2	2
Weather	5	2	13	10
Buying/selling of croft	4	5	2	5
Environmentalists/conservationists	4	1	2	7
De-crofting	4	5	4	0
Lack of other jobs off the croft	4	2	4	3
Amalgamation of crofts	4	0	0	2
Cheque book crofting	3	4	1	0
Economic development/developers	2	2	3	0
Unused crofts	2	4	6	0
Absentees	1	5	0	2
Lack of crofts	1	0	1	2
Depopulation	1	1	3	0
Apportionments	1	0	3	0
Age structure of crofters	1	0	0	2
Other	9	0	4	7
No answer/don't know	10	7	6	12

This evasive action by absentees is, in some townships, resulting in an increased concentration of crofts in the hands of one or two already very dominant tenants. Another criticism is that these new entrants are not suited to crofting and are not from the area. The scheme, as administered by CASE, is only open to those who are resident locally. It is administered very tightly, by people who are experienced enough to be able to tell whether someone can become a crofter and to appreciate the local balance of feeling. As is normal when a tenancy changes hands, the opinion of the township is sought. It is important not to put eager young newcomers in townships where they would

be so bitterly resented that they would be unable to achieve anything. It is not an easy task. As always decisions must be made 'in the interests of the community' which can be a difficult thing to assess and depends on the varied views of those involved.

For absentee tenants it is also a difficult issue. Most crofts with absentee tenants are family crofts with a great deal of sentimental value. The croft may be the location of an annual family holiday or the absentee tenant might have hopes of one day retiring back to the family croft. Many current return migrants did just such a thing. Since early retirement is now an option for many people this can now lead to return migrants '*retiring*' with a lot of new skills and the energy and time to put into local affairs. The reasons behind the New Entrant Scheme appeal to some of the absentee tenants and they comply willingly. Others redouble their efforts to put energy into the township and spend as much time as possible on crofting without actually moving into the township. Some fight it all the way and loose the croft. Other crofts have been in the hands of people overseas who are barely aware that they have the croft and have paid rent for years by Bankers Order. There was one such croft in my own township, which is now tenanted by a new entrant who was already resident and active in the township for ten years.

Given that the focus of all of this activity is to get more young people into crofting, it seems appropriate to quote a younger person:

"Partly it's to do with wanting to stay in the area. There's not a lot of money in it but it always helps - everything helps to survive. Why would you want to move to a town, when half the folk from the towns are only wanting to move up here? After all, it's one of the most beautiful parts of the country. You've got that outside your door every morning, and yes, there's more work around these days. Most people in the place who want to work have got jobs."¹⁰⁰

This illustrates the way in which attitudes towards what it means to live in the Highlands and Islands are changing. It is no longer only somewhere to escape from for every young person, though some will of course wish to get away to see different places and lifestyles.

¹⁰⁰Fieldwork Diary 1992 ACT/Male 30-35

Changes in Crofting

Here I look at the way in which crofters view the changes which have occurred in crofting. Again I contrast the indications given by surveys with quotes from my own fieldwork. The table which follows is based on my undergraduate dissertation results.

Table 4.8: Changes in Crofting

Source: I MacPhail, Undergraduate Dissertation 1990, Glasgow University

<i>"Changes in crofting?"</i>	
no crops/ only sheep	19
young people gone/ few interested/ need young	13
crofting finished/ declined	6
land deteriorated	4
change of lifestyle - other job opportunities	4
township co-operation/ community spirit lost	2
peat banks gone/ nearly gone	2
lack of labour - no winter feed	2
new ideas/ incomers mixed blessing	1
pressure for crofters high	1
grants - better chances, would not otherwise survive	1
decline in cattle numbers	1
TOTAL	56 - More than one view expressed

In the table only one item is not negative – ‘*grants and subsidies*’ and nineteen comments relate to the increase in sheep.. A similar pattern emerges from many of the interviews:

"Well, the only thing that's here is sheep really. Now a few people are into cattle certainly and I think cattle and sheep together are good for the ground, but... I quite like cattle too, but I just feel they're too big for me. But really it's just sheep here. There's very few people even cutting hay today..

... I think it has changed - I mean when was the last real crofter here? It's a long while ago"¹⁰¹

On a separate occasion I was told:

"Spouse: You'd have to ask a real crofter, who understands these questions...

Another interviewee said:

¹⁰¹Interview 1992 ACT/ Female 60-65

Croft Tenant: I'm really looking at it very much as an outsider. I don't know the history of it at all."

And again....

"Croft tenant: It was very much a successful croft. But then he ... every ... it's understood that a crofter can't just earn a living entirely on his croft. He has to do something else. But Neighbour 1 certainly was very much a farmer-crofter. He was interested - he would love to have been a farmer rather than a crofter. And he used to buy every bit of machinery he thought could help him. He kept cattle and fed them up and sold them. And of course I think he supplemented with fencing for people and things like that.

Spouse: But he was a real crofter..

Croft tenant: He was. Yes. You see they all did something else - Neighbour 2... it was salmon fishing with him. Neighbour 3 worked on the roads. Neighbour 4 worked for the Stores for years and crewed on fishing boats after that. And in fact he was so much in full-time work that he really didn't have time to do any crofting. I mean he had sheep, but they were very few and he never really ... he worked full-time."¹⁰²

Here the interviewees are defining '*real*' crofting and crofters as something in the past. In speaking about the township the interviewee says:

"I'm quite sure it's just a typical crofting community. Not like in the islands. In the Islands everything's cultivated, everything's used and worked. I'm sure things are much stronger about crofts lying empty than here. But I don't think you're actually a crofter unless you... what is it? Grow crops, plant potatoes, all sorts of things. All sorts of old qualifications before you would actually be a crofter. So in that sense probably none of us are crofters."¹⁰³

Again '*real*' crofting and crofters are positioned in the past. The '*Islands*' are presumed to still have that '*reality*':

"When my daughter was in Stornoway she said it was amazing to see all these young people full of style and fashion and chattering away in Gaelic. She thought it was just amazing, and nice. And natural."¹⁰⁴

In addition to this '*real*' crofting, this quote illustrates that this is further enhanced by the fact that '*The Islands*' also enjoy the '*authentic*' culture in a linguistic sense. This is crucial to the positioning of '*The Islands*' and the sense

¹⁰²Interview 1992 ACT/Male&Female +65

¹⁰³Interview 1992 ACT/Female 45-50

¹⁰⁴Interview 1992 ACT/Female 45-50

of loss so often expressed about the *'not-so-authentic'* margins on the western fringes of the mainland.

Periphery and Centre

The next speaker discusses some aspects of these positionings in the following lengthy quote:

"It depends what you mean by crofting. If you mean is the subsidy coming off sheep, the answer is yes. But if that's what you equate with crofting - fair enough. It's a very narrow vision. Crofting has only been sheep for the last 40 years. Crofting isn't that. Crofting is to do with having a relationship with the land. Having access to a piece of land. Having your small holding on which you can secure your family. It's leading 2 or 3 jobs type life. It's got its own strengths and there will be a place for it. It's not to say it won't shrivel up at the edges or change, but I mean what it won't be is a lot of old men in smocks with cas chroms digging potatoes. Now there's room for them but it could actually mean somebody with a piece of native woodland on his croft, which he's managing for wildlife and perhaps using the timber as well for firewood and working from a desktop publishing computer on his croft. I don't see any anomaly there at all. I think that's crofting. I don't know why that's not identified as crofting. It doesn't make any difference to me - none what so ever.... I can't answer for other people's perceptions but the general view of crofting is still very traditional. It is still very much of ... I suppose there are 2 main views. One is that you've got a vigorous heartland of crofting, say in the Uists and some of the other island situations, where you've still got a very mixed landbased economy. You've got cattle and sheep and crop rotation and so on and there's a certain cultural wholeness about the system. And then you've got the fringe areas. When I say fringe, it's part of the heartland I suppose, really, but the coastal fringe of the west coast for example, where crofting isn't that. In fact in many cases it is very run down. There are many deserted townships. There are many very neglected lands and the cultural element has broken down because of the migration of other people into the crofting areas. So you don't get that same picture of crofting. In some ways you get a more depressed picture of crofting. But interestingly, it's in areas like that where the changes have perhaps taken place.... but it's hard - I mean I can't really say what other people's perception of crofting is. The sort of pretty picture is the Uists where it is working well on the land and the rather depressing picture is some areas of the west coast where it's deserted."¹⁰⁵

In the quote which follows is expressed a sense of the siege-like mentality experienced in the crofting places which are positioned by these speakers as marginal in relation to a centre, which is the Western Isles:

"So there you are - and I mean, something that is particularly .. in the north west here I think... Out in the likes of Lewis and Harris, and these other areas where you've a lot more people on the ground, even though there are many absentee crofters, it's not so critical. Cos you still have a

¹⁰⁵Interview 1992 ACT/male 45-50

lot of people on the ground. Up here we don't, and the crofts are so vital to anchor people in the outlying community - that's the vital thing about them. I mean we all know you can't make a living out of them, but they anchor the people out there and keep these communities alive - keep things going. Very important."¹⁰⁶

From this interview material it can be seen that the cultural '*centre*' – The Islands – is located in an area more usually portrayed as '*peripheral*', in physical and cultural terms, within the context of Scotland and the UK. In terms of conceptualisations of crofting, '*real crofting and crofters*' have been located, by the people quoted, as being found in The Islands.

'Se Aonacd Neart - The Scottish Crofters Union

The Scottish Crofters Union was founded in 1985 and launched in 1986, one hundred years after the first Crofting Act. For a long number of years there had been a Federation of Crofters Unions with branches scattered across the crofting areas. It had become largely moribund and had never enjoyed a good network of communications between branches, a high profile or funds and full-time staff. By the late 1990s the SCU had a membership in the region of four thousand which it estimated to represent about 40 - 50% of active crofting households. The SCU developed a strong and effective lobbying role in Edinburgh and Brussels, on behalf of members' interests, and liased with the Crofters Commission, HIE and the LEC network, local authorities and other organisations involved in crofting matters. Members received a Union newspaper quarterly - The Crofter - named after a Highland Land League publication. The SCU provided access to legal advice, help with grant applications, technical assistance and information, insurance through NFU Mutual and research into matters of crucial concern to crofting communities. In the first two or three years the SCU produced detailed analysis of the CBGLS, illustrating that this it is a very cost effective scheme. Two years later the SCU tackled the issue of croft household incomes. This is always difficult to assess but is important to research at a time of falling agricultural support and prices.

¹⁰⁶Interview 1992 ACT/Male 50-55

In its early days the SCU tried to encourage the view that crofting was about the crofting household and the crofting community - not just the person who works the ground. This is interesting since it is the opposite of some of the reductionist working definitions discussed above.

The importance and success of the SCU lies not just with the more obvious activities it has undertaken. The single most important thing that the SCU achieved was the creation a platform and a *'voice,'* through a structure which brought those involved in crofting together. Crofting and employment patterns mean that people do not necessarily meet others outside the local townships who are involved in similar activities. People in different corners may well be facing the same problem and never know it. Someone else twenty-five miles away may have found a way forward, but would anyone know of it? The Branch structure created a unique forum for discussion about current circumstances and future prospects. This was not just a *'talking shop'*. Since the SCU, in its lobbying capacity, could take up issues, constructive thinking and debate became worthwhile. This was an opportunity not previously available and many members, for the first time in their lives, were able to have an impact at local and national level. The experience was empowering and had strong capacity building impact, creating many with new skills in problem solving and public speaking among members. Some members became outstanding orators and organisers. A new confidence came with this experience along with a genuine excitement and pride. In small communities the multiplier effects of this were tremendously important. Through this participation many people come to have some kind of *'ownership'* over the issues affecting their lives and came to expect some kind of involvement in solutions to local and regional issues.

Another far reaching impact of SCU activities was to change the image of crofters in the eyes of the outside world and in the eyes of crofters themselves. From the outset, SCU leaders tackled the image of the crofter as a *'workshy subsidy-junky with absolutely no get-up-and-go'*. The Director of the Union described crofters as *'independent and proud of that independence of spirit'*. The leadership was prepared to talk about these issues and discuss the unspoken -

for instance the feeling that the one who stayed behind to mind the croft could never quite do so well as those who left.

In 2001 the SCU changed into the Scottish Crofters Federation (SCF), a body with charitable status which can therefore attract more funding and provide an opportunity the involvement of interested parties other than crofters tenants themselves. This was necessary since membership was falling and costs rising, amidst agricultural crisis and difficulties in the tourism industry. The old SCU could not survive financially or in terms of human resources, without making this change. It remains to be seen if the SCF will achieve a similar level of impact in the 21st century to that which the SCU achieved in the late 20th century. Many members, previously of the SCU and now of the SCF, are uncomfortable with the change and feel that the clear '*crofting*' identity of the organisation is now diluted and that this will result in '*real*' crofters leaving the new organisation.

Conclusions

The historical circumstances of the creation of the crofting system and Highland patterns of landownership continue to be important in representations of crofting and crofters – and in how crofters themselves conceptualise what they do and where they live. There is a tension between descriptions of crofting based on its social and cultural attributes, often used today in policy, planning and politics, and widely held definitions based on current agricultural activity or on agricultural practises from the past. Both in public forums and in private conceptualisations, crofters and crofting is gendered in such a way as to make women's involvement and work somewhat invisible. The historical role of women in crofting seems to have a much higher profile than in the present.

Crofting's cultural and symbolic heartland, through fieldwork, has been identified as the Western Isles – central in a Gaidhealtachd culture region while being defined as peripheral within Scotland and the UK. Within townships a range of potentially identity forming issues cross-cut the, at times unitary, identity of '*the crofter*' and '*the crofting community*'. These attributes include gender, age, cultural background, ethnicity, religion and class. In this

thesis comments have been made on class, gender and the contingent and unstable nature of categories of *'incomer'* and *'local'*. These are not *'de facto'* categories and can be more usefully understood as aspects of a process whereby any individual's identification as local or incomer is contingent on the moment in question. This issue serves to highlight the ways in which terms like *'incomer'* and *'local'* are mobilised for specific reasons, under specific circumstances and makes clear, in combination with the findings on the use of the term *'crofter,'* that when a group stages themselves in a public forum as *'crofters,'* the apparently homogenous identity which is presented must have been actively created through a shared will to produce shared benefits from an agreed common focus. In the next Chapter, the way in which the Assynt Crofters Trust staged a strategic identity as *'crofters'* in order to come together to launch a campaign aimed at the achievement of a crofting community land buy-out, will be presented.

Chapter Five

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Chapter Five The Assynt Crofters Trust Campaign

Introduction

In this Chapter, I recount the manner in which the Assynt Crofters Trust was created and consider their motivations, strategy and campaign to buy the North Lochinver Estate into crofting community ownership.

This land was put on the market in spring 1992. It was offered in seven lots, raising the possibility of not one, but several absentee or disinterested landlords. Incensed by this situation and the fear of each crofter paying rent to several disparate landlords, the crofters in North Assynt met to discuss the issue. The result of these discussions was the Assynt Crofters Trust, formed with the intention of raising the necessary funds to bid for the whole Estate themselves. In July of 1992, *'With History, Justice and the Law'*¹ on their side, they set about the task.

It would be easy in retrospect, given the subsequent rise in interest and achievement of community land ownership, in a variety of forms, to see this as inevitable. It was not. Why should these people, in the face of the sale and fragmentation of the estate on which they were resident, have taken these steps? Estates are sold and fragmented all the time. The North Lochinver Estate itself was created by sale and fragmentation in the 1980s, having formerly been part of the larger Assynt Estate held by the Vestey family. Why then should this fragment of estate inspire such a resolve as the Assynt Crofters demonstrated?

Opportunity

"Let's assume it was sold as one lot to yet another foreign absentee or broken up into small lots. The chances are that the person who bought it would not necessarily understand or be sympathetic to crofting and so on. So in a sense, we turned what was a threat into a positive opportunity."²

¹Assynt Crofters Trust Appeal document 1992 See Figure 5.3.

²Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 50 - 55

Bill Ritchie became aware, in June 1992, that the ground comprising the townships of Nedd, Drumbeg, Culkein Drumbeg, Clashnessie, Achnacarnin, Culkein Stoer, Clashmore and Raffin, Balchladich, Stoer, Clachtoll, Torbreck and the Achmelvich Common Grazings had been put on the market. These townships were being sold by the agents, John Clegg & Co. (Edinburgh), as the North Lochinver Estate. The so-called '*North Lochinver Estate*' was being sold by order of the liquidators, Raymond Hocking, of Stoy Hayward Accountants and Business Advisors. This '*property*' was being offered in seven lots. These are described in Figure 5.1 below.

Taking all seven Lots together, the area for sale was 21,132 acres. The total asking price was £473,000, while the total annual income was in the region of £2,608. When the same '*Estate*' was sold in 1989 by the Vestey family, owners of Assynt Estates, to Scandinavian Property Services Ltd (SPS Ltd), the asking price was £750,000 and the total annual income was £3,636 p.a. At that time the North Lochinver Estate was offered in three Lots - Torbreck Estate, Drumbeg Estate and Stoer Estate. SPS Ltd, a Swedish property development company, bought all three Lots for something in the region of £1 million. At that time, Torbreck House had not been renovated and the refurbished '*croft*' house, offered as Lot 3 in 1992, was not included in the sale.

Mineral rights were not initially included in either sale and rights to the foreshore were not mentioned. Lot 1 included the right to put a boat for Salmon, Sea Trout and Char on Loch Assynt. The ground adjacent to Achmelvich Bay was not included - this is the croft inbye ground - but a sporting lease on this was available. In the three years since the previous sale, the market had changed somewhat.

Figure 5.1: Assets On Offer

Source: Sales Brochure

*offers in excess of ££

Lot	Name	Acres	Description	'Estate Income'	Guide Price*
Lot 1	The Torbreck Estate	10,056	Recently renovated 4 bedroom country house; beautiful house site; complete river system with immense potential; outstanding wildlife interest; red and roe deer stalking; rough shooting; over 70 trout lochs; sheltered sea moorings; sandy beaches	£902 p.a.	£200,000
Lot 2	Stoer Peninsula	5,586	Spectacular coastline including the Old Man of Stoer; Cliffs and sandy beaches; Island; wonderful wildlife; rich variety of vegetation and topography; extensive trout fishings; rough shooting.	£1,180 p.a.	£60,000
Lot 3	208 Clashmore	0.36	refurbished 3 bedroom 'croft' house	n/a	£50,000
Lot 4	Phollain Beithe	770	Extensive trout fishings; riparian rights to Loch Poll; 50 acres of land with vacant possession; pretty unspoilt coastline.	£11	£40,000
Lot 5	Culkein Drumbeg	1,526	Culkein harbour and islands; rough shooting; fishing on Loch Poll and other hill lochs; river and estuary fishing; wonderful wildlife interest.	£183 p.a.,	£45,000
Lot 6	Drumbeg	1,713	Coastline and islets; trout fishing; rough shooting; some deer stalking; wonderful wildlife interest	£200 p.a.	£40,000
Lot 7	Nedd	1,481	Good hill lochs; red and roe deer for much of the year; superb sea anchorage; wildlife.	£132 p.a.	£38,000

In the words of John Lambeth of John Clegg and Co.:

"The sporting estates at the end of the '80s did go quite high. There were lots of people around with lots of money and after a nice sporting estate ..

They're concerned or potentially would sell if the market was better and I think there's just a bit of a misconception in the market place at the moment cos there are buyers out there. There are new people coming back from Hong Kong, people living in Hong Kong wanting estates. There's some European money; some Scandinavian money; a little bit from the States and Canada. Not a great deal. European - a bit of German money. Late '80s, there was lots of sort of European money

going on quality Scottish estates. So that's the sporting side of quality estates. You may also be looking for a piece of farm land."³

For most people, it may not be clear what a 'good' sporting estate is. John Lambeth explains:

"The ideal estate is something with a nice big house in the middle. All the sporting (grouse, pheasant, stalking, salmon, trout) and you've got to look at the commercialism of it. I mean are all the cottages full of old retired post workers of the estates or are they let on an open market rent and producing an annual income? Are you letting salmon fishing for x thousand a year? Have you got a commercial shoot that's producing income? A grouse moor. Some people are prepared to buy estates and pump money into it annually. Others need it to be paying for itself at least."⁴

The North Lochinver Estate is not really an estate in the way that is the classic Highland Sporting Estate. As one interviewee commented:

"He borrowed the money from a Swedish bank. Whether he thought he was buying a sporting estate - he must have done! It's not! There's no salmon rivers. There are deer, but not many. There's no big house or anything. So he's obviously been badly informed, and has gone into liquidation."⁵

What had been created in 1989 was more akin to the category which Wightman calls '*Crofting Estate*'.⁶ It was however marketed as though it was a '*Sporting Estate*'. The particulars included mention of "*Complete Salmon & Sea Trout Fishing System; Deer Stalking; Rough Shooting and Countless Trout Lochs*".⁷ These assets were described thus:

"The Manse Loch system used to be a noted Sea Trout and Salmon fishery embracing estuary, loch and river. The entire system is included in this Lot and provides a superb opportunity to develop an interesting and rewarding fishery in a beautiful unspoilt situation.

The seller has agreed to enter into an agreement with the purchasers to prevent any netting in the area of the estuary, in and around Loch Roe.

Recent catches have been very modest, with little fishing effort. However this must be viewed with due regard to the circumstances of the Seller who is proprietor of several other much larger and more productive salmon fisheries in the area, with their major management

³Fieldwork 1993 John Lambeth of John Clegg & Co.

⁴Fieldwork 1993 John Lambeth of John Clegg & Co.

⁵Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 65 – 70

⁶ See Chapter 4.

⁷p3 Sales Brochure, North Lochinver Estate 1989 - John Clegg & Co., Edinburgh.

concentrated accordingly. There is little doubt that with careful future management the Manse system has very great scope."⁸

This description was of Lot 1 in 1989. The stalking was also described in rather optimistic terms, and the rough shooting was even more fanciful. There was talk of grouse, wild ducks and snipe. The following was for Lot 2:

"As for Lot 1 there is considerable variety available with grouse, snipe, duck, woodcock and rabbits. In the past there was a full time gamekeeper based at Drumbeg and good bags were obtained. Some old sporting records were recently discovered and the following extracts make interesting reading:

- | | |
|------|--|
| 1894 | 8 Black Game; 95 Red Grouse; 10 partridge;
114 Snipe; 20 Wild Duck; 5 Teal; 5 Hares;
7 Rabbits; and 57 various. |
| 1925 | 102 Red Grouse; 3 Plovers; 10 Woodcock; 234 Snipe;
20 Mallard; 4 Teal; 1 Rabbit; and 16 various. |
| 1936 | 4 Black Grouse; 108 red Grouse; 13 Partridges;
27 Snipe; 3 Wild Geese; 14 Wild Ducks; 5 Teal; 2 Widgeon;
2 Pigeon; 3 Hares; and 13 Rabbits" ⁹ |

Crofting was mentioned in the particulars, but it seems that many people were not aware of the crofting system and crofting law. In the particulars for 1989, crofting had a heading of its own, but nowhere was it explained that only fifty of those 21,000 acres are excluded from crofting tenure:

"Crofting

The crofting townships and common grazings are described in general within the text of each Lot, giving details of income. The full crofting records are held in the Assynt Estate Office, Lochinver and further information can be provided on request."¹⁰

In the 1992 sales brochure no particular mention was made of crofting, though it is stated under each Lot that information and records were available. In 1989 the acreage is given as 21,116 while in 1992 it is given as 21,132. In both sales, it must therefore have been fairly easy to underplay the fact that all but fifty acres of this 21,000 acre estate remains under crofting tenure. That means that the 'owner' has rights to sport and timber but if any of the ground were to be developed it would have to taken out of crofting law and tenure, and compensation paid to the township in question under the

⁸p9 Sales Brochure, North Lochinver Estate 1989 - John Clegg & Co., Edinburgh.

⁹p13 Sales Brochure, North Lochinver Estate 1989 - John Clegg & Co., Edinburgh.

1976 Act. Such a move would only be possible on common grazing and not on any inbye ground:

"And then when they bought it they found that they hadn't understood crofting law, so they couldn't do anything about taking the land away from crofters or that, so they were stuck. And because of this they found themselves in financial difficulties and they had to go into liquidation."¹¹

It is common practise among factors, lawyers and land agents to maintain an air of mystery about crofting law, from which they profit handsomely. Many crofters know about this because of deliberate delays by factors in processing requests for actions which are legally protected and because of substantial charges made by factors and land agents for those legally enshrined rights:

"Crofter: The factors for X estate charged the family £500 for a family assignation.

Is: A family assignation???!** But all you have to do is write to the Crofters Commission to request a family assignation. Then they write to your landlord and send the new tenant official notice of the transfer of the tenancy. Even the township doesn't get to have an opinion on that. It's free. It's a legal right.

Crofter: Yes. Exactly. And here's another example. We decided to decroft the housesite and garden grounds on my wife's family croft in Skye. So I went to 'the firm that were factoring' it and made the request. They came back to me and said that would be no bother and that it would cost £6000.

Is: £6000!!

Crofter: I went back to the 'legal firm' and pointed out that under the '76 Act we had a legal right to the house and garden ground for fifteen times the annual rent. By our reckoning that would be about £200 total, including any legal fees. The factors got back to me and agreed that that was indeed the case.

So, about ten days later, I was in Skye and I was telling one of boys in the township about decrofting the housesite and garden grounds. He sad to me, if you don't mind me asking, what did you pay? So I told him all about the £6000 and how it'd had ended up being £200. Well, he says, just this week, another fella, who'd inherited the croft from his grandfather went to decroft his house site and garden grounds and the very same happened. He was told the price was £6,000. Not knowing any different, he went and paid the £6,000 that they told him it would take."¹²

¹⁰p4 Sales Brochure, North Lochinver Estate 1989 - John Clegg & Co., Edinburgh.

¹¹Fieldwork 1992 ACT female 60 - 65

¹²Fieldwork 2001 male 50 - 55

Those looking to speculate in land are as likely, or perhaps more likely, to be taken advantage of by land agents in the know. The difference is that on becoming the landowner, they might themselves benefit from this sort of mystification of crofting law. In the mid-1980s the Highland land market was very active. Land was being marketed to new sort of owners and packaged as though it were a '*Sporting Estate*' to attract speculators, those wishing to invest in land as fairly safe 'commodity' and those seeking the status of a Sporting Estate for conspicuous consumption. The view of land agents are of interest when considering the diversification of types of owner:

"New money has been created by commercially minded entrepreneurial people. If you look at the traditional money, it might be three generations old. If you look back to where that money came from - it probably came from drug smuggling or something like that. Opium from Hong Kong.

And they have a big estate and they're all very sensible, traditional people. You find the commercial money. They're a bit more entrepreneurial. A bit more risk taking and not unhappy to go into a place and sort it out. And if that means getting rid of a couple of employees, then that's fine. It's cruel. It's nasty. That's life. They've got on. They've made something out of their lives."¹³

The most financial benefit could be secured for the seller by marketing the North Lochinver Estate as a Sporting Estate. Despite the absence of the usual '*trappings*' of a Highland Sporting Estate, in this way it could be sold for over £1,000,000. By the early 1990s the crisis in the global insurance market, and in particular the difficulties facing the Lloyds '*names*' resulted in more land coming onto the market than is usual. By the early-1990s the high prices of the previous decade were no longer available. Hence the packaging of the North Lochinver Estate, to sell the same product to a different potential market. Each Lot offered the allure of that Highland Sporting Estate status, but at the price of a small house in the south east of England. Again the implications of the crofting tenure are not strongly highlighted by the sellers:

"I mean the thing is really - under the old - I mean it was taken for granted - how croft lands in the past were in one piece. It was a relatively stabilised situation and people had become resigned to it. It may not have been the ideal set up, but over time people had become conditioned to it. But now things are changing in the Highlands - a lot of estates are going on the market. A lot of foreign companies are coming in and trading with the land - trading with crofters' land -

¹³Fieldwork 1993 John Lambeth of John Clegg & Co.

people who are only in it for what they can get out of it, and I think that was the main reason that got us going. But of course then there is - even I find it hard to understand how we got such unanimous support. I feel there's more to it than that."¹⁴

It is because of these changes in the land market and in the type of buyers that spokesmen for the Assynt Crofters talked of a '*break of trust*'. The past pattern, which held firm in some areas where sales of this type did not occur, had a lot wrong with it, as was discussed in Chapter Four, but most people felt that they at least knew how it worked and what to expect. Part of those expectations, not always easy to assert, were responsibilities as well as rights, which landowners, it was felt, ought to shoulder. Maintaining landholdings in units which reflect settlement and tenants' landuse patterns was assumed to be part of those responsibilities. Even when other broader responsibilities, such as support for local economic and social developments, were outrageously flouted by landowners, there was still an assumption that this was inappropriate behaviour, selling parts of communities to different buyers would never be considered. This changed with the changing land market. The practise of Lotting was described to me by John Lambeth of John Clegg & Co. as an attempt, on behalf of 'your client', to make 2+2=6. The land agent is employed to secure the best possible deal for the seller and to advise accordingly:

"What you do - say you've got an estate with a whole lot of cottages on it. It is almost certain that those occupiers will all be there under a different set of conditions. So what you do, is specify that. That will then attract different buyers. And again that's another reason for Lotting it. You might have a couple of vacant cottages, that someone just wants - a house in the countryside. If it's an hours drive from Glasgow, then he's prepared to do that. It's their dream cottage in the countryside, so you Lot it separately and you get a lot of interest. You may have five cottages that are occupied that have got secure tenancies on them and won't be vacant for another twenty years or until the people die. It may be thirty years. And so the value of that property is reduced. Now, you might get investment - a pension scheme for example - institutional money - who are prepared to buy those cottages. They receive their rental income per annum. Some of that is set off against repairs. Management costs, insurance. They have a little bit of income, but in twenty years time they become vacant and they can flog them. It may be they take a bit of a gamble. It may be that the occupants die two years later. So there's institutional money getting involved there."¹⁵

¹⁴Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 45 - 50

¹⁵Fieldwork 1993 John Lambeth of John Clegg & Co.

John Lambeth acknowledges that there are a range of issues to consider when Lotting because while one buyer might buy all the Lots, it being possible that the Lots would end up in separate ownerships and no longer be managed as a whole:

"Management certainly comes into it. Don't get me wrong... if you've got a management team on the go. Moral issues come into it as well. You're breaking the whole thing up. They use the term asset stripping and you've got to lay off five people, then yes I can understand the morals of that. And the idea is that - you've got to make the most money for your client. If you want to be a total bastard about it and go and sack everyone, then that's up to you. If you want to - you're a buyer and you want to keep that in place, then you buy it as a whole and you may continue to lose money on it, quite possibly. But if you've got that sort of money and you like to be lord of the manor and stroll about and have a word with all the employees on the farm and the estate and lose £100K on it a year, that's OK..."¹⁶

As discussed in Chapter Four, land ownership consists of a bundle of rights - the greater the bundle, the stronger the position of the 'owner'. The man who was to become the Assynt Crofters Trust lawyer discusses why this is of relevance to communities or groups of crofters:

"Ownership of the foreshore may or may not be a significant thing. There was a case of a big quarry - don't know if it was on the mainland or Skye - where the guy that owned the quarry unfortunately didn't own the foreshore. And I don't think it was the crown there that owned the foreshore - it was somebody else. And before the quarried material could be shipped out by sea, it has to pass over the foreshore. The foreshore's the wet bit, if you like, between high and low water - or the occasionally wet bit. And he could prevent them from passing over the foreshore, obviously. And I think he extracted a very onerous settlement for allowing this. So if there were, at any time, to be exploitation of minerals, that's the difficulty. You've got removal of sand and gravel on the renewing shores as a source of revenue, I suppose. But basically, it's just one of these extra strings to the bow, if you have full - the more you've got, the more control you have. I think the beauty is that there's nobody else there to say that you can't do this, that and the next thing. Full control's a beautiful thing because - the crofters, *because they're crofters*, are members of the company who own the thing, so the same people control absolutely everything - great! It doesn't exist anywhere."¹⁷

He demonstrates here that bringing together the different elements of the 'ownership bundle' and vesting them in one organisation is not necessarily, in and of itself, a bad thing. It may be a question of structure. An ownership vehicle or organisation which is appropriately structured may be able to

¹⁶Fieldwork 1993 John Lambeth of John Clegg & Co.

deliver more equitable and democratic benefits from the existing land tenure legal structure.

Beginnings

When the North Lochinver Estate had been sold by the Vestey family in 1989, the fact that the ground was on the market was not discussed locally to the same extent as it was to be in 1992. Among those who were aware of the sale, there was some disquiet at the prospect of a new and as yet unknown landlord. An interviewee describes the way in which this earlier sale was viewed by local people and the fact that it was this new kind of land speculation which sowed the seeds from which the Assynt Crofters Trust emerged:

"Essentially the thing is started from the decision by Vestey to sell off the townships from Torbreck right through to Nedd - what is now the North Lochinver Estate - in 1989. And he sold that to a Swedish man - Mr Zeteburg - who, we understand, controls a company called Scandinavian Property Services Ltd. And we understand he paid £1,080,000 for it. Seems an awful lot of money, considering it was all croft land. But anyway, presumably it wasn't his money. It would be some bank's money. The crofters at the time were not very impressed by the sale because, already it was being offered for sale in three lots or as a whole, but the crofters decided not to act at that point and Peter Hayanyway told us that it was being sold to a single gentleman, who wanted it just for a bit of private sport and wouldn't do anything to do with the crofters.¹⁸ So it sort of went by then. This guy took over, and to be fair, I suppose he was totally negligent about the crofting situation rather than antagonistic. Except for example, in Achmelvich, he attempted to gate the peat road. So we promptly sawed that down of course, and made it perfectly clear that it was a crofters road and not his road. But otherwise, I can't say that there was any general angst.

Is: What did he want to do that for anyway?

Well he was trying to protect vehicle access to one of the fishing lochs. He was building up a road - the peat road. He started repairing our peat road, which is fine by us. We're quite happy if he wants to put money into our peat road. But then he wanted to gate it because he had put a boat on it. But that was the only direct incident that I'm aware of. Certainly at this end anyway - whatever happened elsewhere?? But anyway, he went bust at some point, presumably earlier this year, and the liquidators have been appointed and these liquidators are instructed - presumably on the instruction of a bank of course - have instructed John Clegg & Co. of Edinburgh to market the land for sale.

Now this time they've actually broken it down into even smaller lots, quite deliberately. Apparently it makes it easier to sell. It's easier to sell lots of £40,000. So what he's done essentially is isolate the big

¹⁷Fieldwork 1993 ACT lawyer male 45 - 50?

¹⁸Factor of Assynt Estates (Vestey family) until late in 1992.

swathe of common grazings in the middle of the so-called estate - and [is] selling that as a sporting estate with a lodge. And then he's broken up the other townships into five lots. The seventh lot is just a single house site, which doesn't concern us at all."¹⁹

With regard to the Scottish land market, it is interesting to consider the impact of crofting upon this. John Lambeth starts with one kind of example:

"John: There are crofting rights. I had a chap - we were selling a moor. Traditionally an old grouse moor. Totally unmanaged. And - I don't know if you know, but grouse are the only ones where it's - pheasants are often put down and they're bred in captivity and put down. Grouse aren't. They can't do it, so you've got to look after the natural population. And this is where anti blood sports is absolute nonsense because if we didn't manage them they'd disappear. The foxes would kill them out. So it's well kept. So keepers are killing vermin - foxes, crows, the rest of it, and they do burning because grouse live in the margins. The edges of grouse moors. So if you burn the layers, they've got lots more areas or edges to live in. And they pop out and eat gravel and they pop back in.

So anyway we were selling this moor and it's got crofters grazing rights all over it. Unused. The crofters hadn't been on it but they had rights. OK? Which go on forever. Crofting rights! The chap who bought it - The moor was unkept, so very low numbers of grouse. This chap was a conservationist who wanted to grow trees. Ideal he said. Well fine. Chap from England. Very nice chap. Made some money. Very sensible. Wanted to grow trees. And got there. Realised that these chaps had a right over it - grazing rights. And there was no way he could plant trees. So - buyer out the window. A very good use of that land. Crofters weren't using it, but his lawyer said - oh we can't touch this. So it certainly has its nightmares. Ask Simon Laird. It's a bit of swear word I think.²⁰

So - it's an unusual concept, crofting. And I don't know anywhere else in the world where it happens. There might well be somewhere, but - the thing is, in a lot of places crofting has happened for years. I mean the landowner doesn't make any money out of it. It happens. As long as landlord and tenant/landowner and crofter - get on, it's like a landlord and tenant situation. As long as they get on it can work. There's no-one making any money out of it - possibly the crofter. He basically has some land or builds his house on land very cheaply. So it can work. There may well be the odd person - the seller of North Lochinver Estate - was an unusual fella. I mean he was - I can't say very much about my clients, but he was... perhaps he got it wrong. He was looking for the best way out. But that's the thing about selling property. It's yours to do with whatever you want. Basically the owner bought it so he can do whatever he wants. That may upset people, but that's business in the cruel world.

I'm totally open minded about it all. As an agent or a go-between then we go and we find the objective of the seller and we will advise him on the best way to do it. If he wants to go down a particular avenue, we'll advise him.

¹⁹Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 55 - 60

²⁰The person who handled the sale of the North Lochinver estate on behalf of John Clegg & Co. He had since gone to work in Poland and was not available to interview easily.

Is: Do you advise people to get rid of crofting land?

John: You'll struggle to do it. I mean it has been done but, it depends what your objectives are. If your objective is to make your asset as valuable as you can, that could well be the case.

You may well Lot out the crofting because you might get the crofters to buy the place. What you do - you Lot it. That doesn't stop anyone from buying the whole. The crofters may not want to buy it and they'll just continue on as they are.

It's a nonsense concept crofting. It really is. I really think it is. It's just extraordinary really.

Is: Is it a huge problem for estate management?

John: It can work. You've got to accept it and just carry on. It's not a problem unless you want it to be. If you want to get crofting properly, you want to get Simon because that was quite an experience."²¹

Note that this interview was carried out in 1993. It is extremely unlikely that in 1992 an estate agent like John Lambeth would have suggested a group of crofters as a potential buyer, as he does above. A year later - as is illustrated in this interview - this estate agent refers to potential crofter buy-outs as an almost routine possibility. When discussing the particular example of the sale of the North Lochinver Estate, John Lambeth returns to the issue of crofting and clarifies his view of ownership:

"John: The whole thing here was that it was an awful lot of crofters and they were concerned that someone was going to come in there and... new money with a big brush and knock it all about and change it. Management is certainly important and continual management of the countryside is important. Such points as access in the countryside are very debatable and have got different views.

My personal view is that if you're buying something, within reason and within the boundaries of Law and Acts, it is yours to do whatever you want with.

Is: That's the problem with crofting?

John: That is the problem with crofting. That is exactly right. And you get someone who's lived there in their little croft all their lives and they're scared stiff of someone coming in and giving them a hard time. Now that's a sad reality. But then again - the cruel world. But that's not to say they won't be looking after the countryside well. They've got different objectives. Someone may have tried to come in and bought this from a commercial aspect - buying it and holding on to it for five years and then reselling it. Well that's fair enough. If they wanted to come and live there and be friendly and drink with the crofters in the local pub, That's great as well. Personal view."²²

²¹Fieldwork 1993 John Lambeth of John Clegg & Co.

²²Fieldwork 1993 John Lambeth of John Clegg & Co.

Notice that he expresses a conception of ownership which clashes with the conceptions developed within the crofting community and during the Crofters' Wars. There is no sense or responsibilities other than those imposed by law or arrived at by personal interpretation of the importance of '*continual management of the countryside*'.

There was little public discussion of the 1989 sale and SPS Ltd. took possession of the North Lochinver Estate quietly. At the outset, Assynt Estate continued to factor the area on behalf of the new owner. Later crofting tenants were informed by letter that a firm of solicitors in Aberdeenshire would be their contact with the new landlord and that a representative of this firm would visit each Martinmas to collect rents. This duty was fulfilled by Ewen Berkley of the Savilles Office in Brechin.

The Sales Brochure

The description used in the Sales Brochure for both sales of the North Lochinver Estate illustrates well the way in which the Highlands and Islands is very much a place made in the minds of outsiders, as discussed in Chapter Three. The description from the sales brochure is as follows:

“One need only enter Assynt to see the great sphinx-like mass of Suilven to sense the atmosphere of unreality, almost fantasy, which permeates even the character of the people who live there. Mountains such as Quinag, Canisp, Ben More Assynt, Cul Mor, Cul Beag, Stack Polly and Conival all have the immense power to impress, and all serve to emphasise that man himself is perhaps the alien element in this landscape.”²³

It is interesting, in view of debates focused on *Orientalism*, that a hill in a place described as '*fantasy*' is referred to as sphinx-like. As in Schiller's piece, quoted by Womack, '*Nature*' here includes all human life.²⁴ But this human life is waif like and not fully present – for sale is perhaps a little Brigadoon. There is also at work a newer idea of Nature, which is Nature as separate from the human cultural world, and the notion that human presence is an inappropriate intrusion into the scenery or landscape. An aesthetic taste for

²³p 3 (1989) and p 3 (1992) in *Sales Brochure*, North Lochinver Estate, **John Clegg & Co.** Edinburgh.

²⁴ See Chapter 3.

empty places and pristine sites which are graded today for conservation measures – pristine and untouched by human effort is Grade 1. There is a strong sense that this '*place*' or bit of land which is for sale is in a parallel universe or a very different time zone – unreal, fantasy, not real – and entails the opposite of the everyday and practical. This, to a great extent, is what the potential buyer is being encouraged to buy or to gain access to. Another quote from the media refers to this sales blurb and uses the term '*ethnic cleansing*':

“ ‘Man himself is perhaps the alien element in this landscape.’ Tells you a lot about the bastards, doesn't it? But there are still a few exceptional individuals who work the odd fertile corner of this barren waste despite all attempts at ethnic cleansing and now the crofters of Assynt are bidding to buy the estate.”²⁵

John Lambeth of John Clegg & Co. explains the use of this quote as follows:

John: It was a quote and I don't know where it comes from. It was a quote and that's why it's in speech marks. We're governed very strongly by the Misdemeanors Act. OK? Our brochures are and that's fine. Basically we can't put in detail that misinforms people. What we've done there is taken a quote from someone that your - when you first pick up these particulars, hopefully you're quite impressed by the photograph. You've got 21,000 acres. You've got some fantastic scenery. You could go straight into - Situation and General Description. What that was trying to do was just give you a bit of a feel for the place cos quite possibly you received this - you're sitting in your office block in London and hopefully. It's part of presentation almost in that you're trying to get a feel for the place. Now if you start off with the solicitors giving a - it's almost a piece of art, do you know what I mean? All the information's there and you could print that out on 3 sides of A4 - type it all out. But it's part of it... this is what we are selling and that was a quote from somewhere. I don't know where it's come from.

Is: The alien element - does that give a fair impression. Is there a danger that this sort of description give the impression that what is for sale is a backyard to play in rather than something to be managed?

John: No I don't think it does. Look at that. It's a fantastic place isn't it? But whoever said that ... this "immense power to impress and all serve to emphasise that man himself is perhaps the alien element in this landscape". Well if you look at that. I mean whoever said it, I think was possibly making a point, because if you suddenly put a house in there, it would almost look out of place wouldn't it? I mean that quote didn't come out from anyone out of this office. But whoever said it - and perhaps it should have - the line should have been here - who said it and the date and what it's out of. So - no. I think that's just a rather nice quote from somebody at some point in a previous time.

²⁵TV Review - *Scotland on Sunday* 6th Sept. 1992.

Another example - we're just about, in the spring - to put a farm on the market. It's got a lovely garden and a lovely herd of pedigree cows and in the particulars somewhere, we're going to give him a page and he's going to write a little bit about his garden because he knows it better than - we could get all that information but it would probably take us two years to find out all the species of flowers in his garden and it's a personal touch.

And that's all we're doing here - is just trying to give a nice touch to the particulars."²⁶

It is clear that he likes the 'quote' and can see no reason to be upset by it. Particularly interesting is his explanation using the example of the intrusion of a house in an 'empty' landscape: "*if you suddenly put a house in there, it would look almost out of place, wouldn't it?*" In comparison to the reactions of residents, this illustrates a clear failure of Spivak's speech act. There follows four different reactions to the same description from Assynt interviewees:

"I don't like that - 'unreality and almost fantasy which permeates the character of the people'. I mean really! Maybe that's why they thought that they could do what they like with everything here. You know - if the people just crawled out of a bog or something. 'Man himself is the alien element'! Oh well!"²⁷

"Sense the atmosphere of unreality? Almost fantasy?! And all serve to emphasise that man himself is perhaps the alien element in this landscape. That we shouldn't even be here??!! I think that's terrible. They would like it to be, just the last wilderness, you know? And have it as a wilderness - having it for themselves only."²⁸

"It's just the blurb that a selling agent is prone to introduce from the point of view of attracting the kind of individual that I think they will seek to attract. There is another item which makes reference to the wildlife and there's almost a suggestion that the inhabitants fit into the same category, if you like."²⁹

"They would like to make a wildlife park - and we're the wildlife"³⁰

The people quoted above were reading the sales brochure as they were being interviewed. In the Sales Brochure quote can be seen the endurance of the positioning people as 'not fully present' in order to render the landscape 'empty'. Through the selection of quotes above the local residents' keen

²⁶Fieldwork 1993 John Lambeth of John Clegg & Co.

²⁷Fieldwork 1992 ACT female 60 - 65

²⁸Fieldwork 1992 ACT female 55 - 65 group

²⁹Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 55 - 60

³⁰Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 50 - 55

awareness of this way of conceptualising nature and the position (absence) into which local people are written is obvious, but confronting that process is still a shock. Again the place – the Highlands or Assynt – is being made in the minds of outsiders and the local communities are being written into nature in the position of ‘*noble savage*’. The sales brochure quote also inspired headlines such as “*Assynt ‘Aliens’ Not For Sale*”³¹, used by *Am Bratach* to report on the discussions being held by crofters in the area regarding the sale.

Making a Start: From Mutterings to Strategy

By early summer in 1992 local people in the parish of Assynt were aware that the North Lochinver Estate was on the market again after only three years. Why on this occasion did local residents come to the conclusion that it was any of their business?

"They didn't think it would come to this - no! It's themselves that put us on the spot because of the fragmentation of the land. ... I think what really made the crofters sit up about the North Lochinver Estate was the fragmentation of it. When it went on the market in seven parts and it was realised by the crofters that you could possibly have four or five landlords. And that was enough to gee them on and decide that they would have to do something about it. So that's when it really all started to happen - when the early meetings happened. When the crofters were told, they were all unanimous that they would support a bid to buy the land and then, I suppose the likes of Allan and Bill realised how much support they had. That's when they put the whole thing into action."³²

There were also extra-local influences - and the benefit of the experience of local action on other recent issues of concern:

"I think people are probably coming into - they were led to believe at one time, they had no control. And I think now they believe that they do and that they can achieve something on their own and that they don't always have to have someone above telling them - right, you've got to do it my way. They're beginning to feel - right, now it's time that we did it our way - improve things."³³

Key individuals had gained a good deal of experience of issues at both a regional and a local level, and had gained experience of working together to

³¹p1 *Am Bratach* No. 9 July 1992.

³²Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 50 - 55

³³Fieldwork 1992 ACT female 55 - 60

formulate collective views and action plans on local and regional issues. In the late spring of 1992 some of these individuals came to the fore:

"Basically the stimulus for the Assynt Trust was Bill Ritchie. Bill became aware of the estate being put on the market as a result of the liquidation of SPS Ltd., and called a meeting, essentially of the Crofters Union, but an open meeting so that the entire community would be made aware of the situation. We discussed the implications of this in so far as the various townships were concerned. It's notable that Achmelvich - the inbye land is - I think it's the inbye land - that's for sale and the grazings are still retained by the Vestey empire. And that gives an indication of the catastrophe that this could well create, because of the administrative nightmare that it would generate. I would suggest that the fact that it was being split into seven separate Lots was really the aspect that caused the greatest degree of upset. Had it been offered as a single lot, I think it's unlikely that the degree of outrage and the resultant resolve would have been manifested. But the end result was that all concerned thought it a worthwhile exercise to attempt to mount a buy-out."³⁴

The speaker quoted is John MacKenzie. Bill Ritchie and Allan MacRae brought a range of skills and experience to the discussion of the break up of the croft lands - or the Lotting and sale - then underway through John Clegg & Co. They were both active at Branch and Regional level with the SCU. They were both in the habit of attending Highland Forum events. They held differing viewpoints which often resulted in a more effective position or action than either of the two view points alone would have offered. They had already learned to work together in this way. That is why, when asked many people at the time explained events thus:

"Well, just that the estate came on the market, as you know yourself, for the second time in what - two or three years? And Vestey sold it and this Zeteburg took over and now he went bankrupt and he's putting it on the market. And the crofters, through, I think, the Crofters Union, started it off - Bill Ritchie and Allan MacRae - to see if the crofters could buy it. And then following on from that there was the decision from the law judges in Edinburgh, that if you sold a piece of land you didn't have to pay half of it to the proprietor. So that was all about the start of it and they thought this would be a good thing, if the crofters could own their own land - **again!** - as they should've done from the beginning!"³⁵

Again, this speaker stresses that '*the land*' is rightfully the crofters' own land. Also highlighted is the announcement on 5th June 1992 of the results of the deliberations of the Court of Session on the MacDonald v Whitbread case (see

³⁴Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 55 - 60

³⁵Fieldwork 1992 ACT female 60 - 65

below for discussion). At this stage of course, the news was just spreading throughout the parish and north west Sutherland. No particular course of action had been decided upon and not everyone was 'up to speed' on what was going on:

"I would just like to say to you that when this thing started, there had been two public meetings in the school. The first one, I think, was in the library. There'd been a big response, so the next meeting was in the school. And they had an even bigger response. And I hadn't gone to either. The second one, I thought of going to, but I was tired and I didn't go. So I had missed the first two, sort of, vital meetings - so I feel honestly, I'm not qualified to be answering your questions."³⁶

At this time, the Secretary of the Assynt Branch of the Crofters Union was my father, Pat MacPhail, the Chair was Allan MacRae and the Vice Chair was Bill Ritchie. The Assynt Branch of the Crofters Union called a meeting for 6th June. This meeting was attended not only by members and other local people, but also by the then SCU Director George Campbell.

George Campbell, then in his late-twenties, is a native of Rhu in Wester Ross, located just to the south of the parish of Assynt. On finishing College George Campbell's first job had been as Project Officer for the North West Development Plan. This was a project aimed at assisting crofting households to diversify and improve agricultural facilities. George Campbell was based in the north west and went from house to house helping each household to make the most of this opportunity. Uptake was high, assisted by his background in crofting, his College training in agricultural economics and his personable demeanour. He was therefore a well 'kent' face in the area.

The DAFS Estates

Early in his career with the SCU, George Campbell was entangled in the uproar which ensued in Skye and Raasay, when in 1990 the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland (DAFS) proposed to transfer all of its estates in Skye and Raasay to the croft tenants as a community ownership package.³⁷ The impetus for this proposal was a keenness among the

³⁶Fieldwork 1992 ACT female 40 - 45

³⁷Since Devolution the Scottish Office is now the Scotland Office. This Department at the Scottish Office was later the Scotland Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries

Conservative administration in the Scottish Office to dispose of assets as a principle aimed at reducing '*state intervention*'. Michael Forsyth was the only Conservative Minister to see the potential of community trusts as an appropriate way of delivering this end. Unlike many of the '*old school*' Scottish Conservatives, Forsyth did not have the same unimaginative loyalty to the land owning interests, who are so suspicious of crofting. The precedents referred to in investigating this option were The Stornoway Trust, created in 1923 when Lord Leverhulme gifted the Parish of Stornoway to a Trust comprising local land using representatives and local authority representatives, and also the suggestions made by the Crofters Commission in the 1960s for trust ownership as a vehicle for management of some grazings. The SCU had numerous discussions with Scottish Office Ministers and were enthusiastic about exploring the possibilities.

DAFS/SEERAD own and manage the estates of Kilmuir, Kinsburgh, Scorrybreck, Claigan, Bracadale and Kilbride on Skye and the Raasay estate, which covers most of the island of Raasay.³⁸ There are 630 crofts in total on these estates, accounting for 40% of the crofts factored by SEERAD and 59,833 hectares of land. Originally these properties included fishing rights, shooting rights, buildings, lodges and farms, but over time the Secretary of State for Scotland had already disposed of these. By 1990 what remained was croft lands, some mineral rights and some of the salmon fishing. At that time income from rents amounted to £32,000 p.a. and other income - from sporting rights - amounted to £9,000 p.a.

A Consultation Paper was issued in February 1990, requesting views by the end of June on what the implications of such an action would be and how it might appropriately be achieved. To embark on the transfer of these estates to some form of trust might require legislation to enable the transfer. The Arkleton Trust (Research) Ltd was asked by the HIDB and the SCU to undertake a study of this subject. The team assembled to carry out the research comprised John Bryden (Arkleton), George Houston (Economics

Department (SOAEFD), controlled from Westminster. The equivalent after Devolution under the Scottish Parliament is the Scottish Executive Rural Affairs Department (SERAD) and now the Scottish Executive Environmental and Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD). These estates are administered by SEERAD.

Dept, University of Glasgow), Andrew Robertson (Glasgow based lawyer with community experience) and Simon Fraser, a Leòdhasach lawyer, Clerk of Grazing, crofter and factor.³⁹

This research work helped to identify:

- current economic situation *vis-a-vis* the estates
- a suitable structure
- a method of transfer which would not incapacitate a future trust or trusts
- basic management costs for such a trust or trusts
- the possibility of a staged approach instead of immediate outright transfer of title

The total income of the estates was calculated as in the region of £41,000 p.a., not including 'windfall' incomes from sale of house sites. The factoring could have been achieved by contracting it out to a professional business at between 35 % and 40% of rental income. On that basis, it was suggested that factoring costs would be likely to rise faster than rental income. The Report noted that the potential for generating other income was limited and would appear to rely on sport, tourism, fish-farming and quarrying.

The Team recommended a company limited by guarantee, set up under the Companies Act, to be the most practical structure and recommended that the composition of Directors should represent the crofting and farming interests. With this in mind it was recommended that the trust should have fifteen Directors in total - five of these to be elected by each of the five smaller estates, two elected by each of the two larger estates and an optional three more co-opted to reflect wider community interests. It was recommended that the Directors should serve on a three year cycle.

With regard to the possible transfer of assets, the Report insisted that anything other than a no cost transfer, with legal costs met by the Scottish

³⁸ See Figure 3.4 in Chapter 3 for a map of these properties.

³⁹Lewisman.

Office, would create an impossible burden of debt for the potential new organisation(s). It was further noted that in order for the idea to be viable all assets - sporting rights, mineral rights, foreshore rights and so on - should be transferred to any potential trust. The Report suggested that it might be helpful to consider a staged approach, whereby management but not title was transferred to a trust in the first instance, with a view to a complete transfer at a later date.

In the second half of the year, the croft tenants on these DAFS estates were consulted about the proposal. Heated debate and much unrest ensued, despite the enthusiasm of crofters leaders and activists and the SCU leadership for the idea. In some quarters it was suggested that the SCU, a membership organisation, was trying to force the membership into agreement to this radical new idea, being presented by the Conservative Scottish Office.

By early December 1990 meetings had been held in every DAFS estate in Skye and Raasay to discuss the matter. Further information had been sought and the croft tenants were asked to vote on the suggestion that all of these seven estates be transferred to a single trust, with themselves as members. The majority of croft tenants voted 'NO'. Years later, George Campbell, SCU Director was often heard to say that he *'still bore the scars'* from that time. Following the 'NO' vote there was much fear that the government might move directly to private sales of the estates, since it was enthusiastically pursuing a policy of selling off state assets in every other area.

At the time, for imaginative strategists and crofting leaders the 'NO' vote was a bitter blow. Once the dust settled, it became easier to ascertain some of the reasons. Firstly there was the scale of the proposed trust. The creation of a single trust for all seven estates was very problematic because across those seven estates were a huge variety of communities which had no or very little contact with each other. Neither did the majority of the croft tenants have any great knowledge of the land, assets and problems on the other estates. The crofters were therefore being asked to join together and work with a range of individuals and communities largely unknown to them, and to take responsibility for a range of unknown difficulties, both in terms of other

people's townships and in terms of this new and untried structure. The scale was too large, although the potential economies of scale were attractive. This is strongly illustrated by the fact that although the result of voting was 'NO', if the votes of all crofters are counted '*at large*', on an area basis, the voting result in some communities and estates, such as Portnalong, was actually 'YES'. Perhaps, had the option of a series of smaller trusts been offered, the results might have been rather different, with some estates taking up the offer, while others refused.

Another complication was that the debate was carried out in the terms of the traditional '*Land Question*' debate. Many Labour supporters on the island were defending the principal of enlightened state ownership in opposition to private ownership. This apparent '*third way*', offered by a '*Tory*' Scottish Office, was assumed by many to be some sort of trap or Trojan Horse, aimed at destroying crofting from the inside out. The idea that community ownership might provide a more human scale and democratic option had yet to take hold across Scotland. Suspicion of Scottish Office enthusiasms for '*enterprise*' was at that time rife. Those who were advocating community ownership pointed out, in that context, that it offered a lot more of a say than state ownership, given that no amount of complaining changed the way that the government of the day disposed of British Telecom or British Rail.

The situation was further confused by the discovery that a significant proportion of the DAFS tenants believed that they only received grant aid for fences or housing, through CCAGS and CBGLS, and support payments **because** they were DAFS tenants.⁴⁰ A significant proportion of tenants therefore believed that a 'YES' vote would end their access to this generally available state assistance to agriculture and crofting. Some also thought that they might lose their rights as tenants and still more feared that the trust might develop the complications that they had heard about in Glendale.⁴¹

Of particular importance was the fact that DAFS is a very good landlord. Not having experienced any of the difficulties that bad types of private

⁴⁰Crofting Counties Agricultural Grant Scheme and Crofting Building Grants and Loan.

landlordism can bring, since the onset of state ownership, there was little reason for these tenants to take on extra voluntary work, stress and risk in order to test out what many saw as someone else's bright idea. All of these factors combined to discourage the majority of tenants from taking the idea any further.

Isle of Eigg Trust

Come 1991, there was further excitement on *'The Land Question'* front. In November 1991 the *West Highland Free Press* (WHFP) reported the meeting between the then Isle of Eigg Trust - created by a group of concerned individuals who did not live on Eigg - and the residents of Eigg, with the headline "*Alternative model of land ownership put before the people of Eigg*".⁴² It was reported that the people of the island of Eigg gave the idea a cautious welcome.

This Trust was the creation of Alastair MacIntosh, Edinburgh, Director for the Centre for Human Ecology; Elisabeth Lyon, lawyer and artist; Robert Harris, Lochwinnoch, a farmer and writer; and Tom Forsyth, formerly of the Iona Community and Scoraig.⁴³ Their aim was to *'remove the island forever, from the vagaries of private ownership.'*⁴⁴ The trust had four trustees, charitable status and used the Company limited by guarantee with no share capital legal structure.

The meeting in Eigg, reported by the *WHFP*, was attended by about two thirds of the island's adult population. The speech made on behalf of the trust at this meeting stated that:

"Should the trust acquire ownership of Eigg the main thing we will offer is security of tenure for those who lack it. ... We further undertake that decisions about such matters would be made within the terms of the Trust deed by the trustees and a management committee representative of the community.

⁴¹Discussed further in Chapter 6 - basically involving loss of legal crofting status and land and assets being passed out of group and crofting control due to legal structure used.

⁴²1st November 1991 *West Highland Free Press*.

⁴³Brought up in Lewis and with Lewis background.

⁴⁴1st November 1991 *WHFP* and Fieldwork 1993.

The Trust offers the prospect that when a future visitor asks your children who owns Eigg, they will reply not a German factory magnate, English popstar, Dutch syndicate, aristocratic heir or any other sort of laird, but simply us. It will be held in trust for people and nature."

In this speech another theme, not often returned to since, was raised:

"The names on doors of those living in the high rise flats and 'priority treatment' estates in the poorer quarters of our cities are Highland. Folk for whom the tragedy of being uprooted, by direct clearance or restriction of access to nature's sustenance, has given rise to the spectre of poverty across generations."⁴⁵

Since the 1960s the island of Eigg had suffered increasingly rapid changes of ownership. In 1971 a bid was explored by a group with island connections, who sought financial support from the HIDB, but to no avail. The Anglyn Trust bought the island.⁴⁶ Repairs and maintenance on estate property gradually ceased to be carried out. The former '*perks*' of estate jobs - free coal and milk - were stopped, leaving employees to rely on the wage of £14 per week. One young family left for Canna; another, expecting their first child shortly, were evicted from the estate house they lived in with two weeks notice. Investigative journalists discovered that the owner, '*Commander*' Farnham-Smith, had never been in the Navy: the only thing he had ever commanded was a fire brigade. In 1974 the island went on the market once more. At this point the HIDB considered purchase, but was beaten to it by former bobsleigh champion and '*businessman*', Keith Schellenberg, who offered £70,000 more than the HIDB. Local residents had not been enthusiastic about the HIDB buy-out and were initially pleased that someone with suitable means sought to invest in and develop the island. The main focus, supported by the HIDB, was farming and tourism.

After initial successes and optimism, things started to fall apart. Schellenberg had legal disputes with employees. His leisure pursuits involved a certain degree of modern '*Balmoralisation*' with raucous jaunts with visiting friends and inter-island Highland Games. In 1980 Schellenberg and the Honourable Margaret de Hauteville Udney-Hamilton divorced, leaving her still part owner of the island. Funding of tourism and agricultural projects faltered and the

⁴⁵1st November 1991 WHFP.

⁴⁶p153 Dressler C. 1998 *Eigg: The Story of an Island* Polygon Edinburgh For a full discussion of this story, see this book.

ground surrounding SSSI, Blar Dubh Bog, was drained and planted with exotic conifers. Several tenants and employees, evicted or fired by Schellenberg, moved into the crofting area in Eigg - Cleadale - rather than leave the island altogether.⁴⁷ Schellenberg complained in the press of:

‘the anti-enterprise environment which pervades the North-West Highlands’.⁴⁸

The fact that Schellenberg chose to use the word ‘*enterprise*’, in undermining the residents of Eigg, illustrates the extent to which, at that time, a powerful enterprise discourse had been created through Thatcherism. The way in which Schellenberg mobilises this enterprise discourse links to older discourses which had defined the Highlands and Islands as backwards, dependant on state subsidies and the interventions of rich landlords and **lacking** in motivation. Sellar’s ‘*sloth*’ and James Loch’s ‘*idleness*’ haunt this assertion of a resistance to enterprise.⁴⁹

In 1983 the Isle of Eigg Residents Association (IERA) was created and gained charitable status three years later. This provided a vehicle for action and a forum for discussion. Until this point it had been the island factor only who had discussed piers, ferries and other issues of importance with government bodies. The creation of the Small Isles Community Council in the 1970s had also been an important step away from this tradition.

When Liz Lyon, a friend of Schellenberg's third wife, visited Eigg in the late 1980s, she was not impressed with the conditions and decline she witnessed.⁵⁰ She explained the circumstances to Tom Forsyth. In July 1991, Liz, Tom, Robert Harris and Alastair MacIntosh formed the Isle of Eigg Trust and launched an appeal for £3 million in order to buy the island and remove it from the merry-go-round of destructive private ownerships that it had so far experienced. Hence the meeting with the island residents in November of that year. On the island, in informal discussions throughout 1991, the idea

⁴⁷Eigg residents and crofters refer to the Cleadale area as 'The Reservation' because the crofting townships have been confined to the far side of the island, well out of view of the 'Big House'.

⁴⁸**Schellenberg K.** 11th September 1984 Letter to the Editor - *Glasgow Herald*.

⁴⁹See Chapter 3 regarding Loch and Sellar’s views.

⁵⁰As noted above, Liz Lyon later became a founding member of the first Isle of Eigg Trust. She also later moved to Eigg permanently and now lives in Cleadale.

met with a mixed response. For most people, back in 1991, it was a novel, untested and dramatically ambitious idea. The people of Eigg were not alone in being hesitant and at times perplexed by the very idea –of some form of not-for-profit ownership, driven by the community. By later in 1991, the IERA voted to support the Trust, as long as it as it was amended to include two IERA representatives as trustees and grant the IERA right of veto. Local Councillor, Michael Foxley, favoured public ownership. The Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) suggested buying part of the island from Margaret Schellenberg and entering into a management agreement with Schellenberg. They saw their work to date on environmental protection and enhancement threatened by both the instability and Schellenberg's activities.

In May 1992 the island went on the market with a price tag of £2 million. The Isle of Eigg Trust managed to create a great deal of moral support, but not a great deal of money to build on their opening donation of £100 from the Iona Community. The National Heritage Memorial Fund refused financial support, despite having been created post W.W.II, to restore land to returning soldiers and landless communities. Highland Regional Council were coming round to the idea of support for a partnership in order to pursue this idea, but failed in their request to extend the sale deadline. In July 1992, Keith Schellenberg bought this island once more, as a result of a sale forced by his former wife, previously part owner. The Isle of Eigg Trust decided to become a trust in waiting.

While the principles debated through media attention to the Eigg Trust were of relevance to Assynt, the form of trust - created at this stage by individuals outside the community - was not one which inspired the majority of those in the North Assynt Estate.

Pre-existing Local Organisations

Meanwhile in Assynt, the Assynt Branch of the SCU felt that the sale of the North Lochinver Estate was a matter necessitating urgent discussion. The Office Bearers organised a public meeting for everyone in the area to discuss the sale on 6th June 1992. Union member or not, all were welcome.

There are two important points to note here. It is likely that without the SCU there would be no Assynt Crofters Trust. Without previous experience of action and campaign, the Assynt Crofters Trust would never have been the success it so clearly became. Through the SCU there was access to information, support and experience from all across the Highlands and Islands. This network was to prove invaluable as events progressed. One key impact of the SCU had been in capacity building among crofters and their elected representatives. To clarify, the SCU did not in any way create the Assynt Crofters Trust. What it did do was to create the circumstances which made such a bold move thinkable and then possible:

"Before we'd a very stabilised land system and people had become conditioned to it. Individuals didn't see any way that they could change things. An odd individual might be saying - oh well!! But I think the Union must take considerable credit. I think the Union has forged quite a bit of unity among crofters. I think the fact that crofters get together at meetings to discuss things, discuss different issues. This issue has just been an extension of that. I think the Union has been very important. If the Union had not been on the ground, that initial initiative might not have been taken. Now, I think that's the truth. In fact I'm pretty certain it's true."⁵¹

"I think the Union got started when it did because crofters began to feel threatened."⁵²

"On this particular issue - if not for the Union we couldn't have fought the National Parks issue. It's the Union that forged the unity to do it. Oh aye, the Union's been very important. ... As I've said before, people had in a way become conditioned to the system. Of course it was a relatively stabilised system, and people had become conditioned to it and didn't feel they could do anything about it. I think, without doubt, the Union has made people realise that possibly they can do something about these things. I mean, as the National Parks showed, we can do things. We can make our voice heard. I think that's important."⁵³

The SCU was established in 1985 and replaced a number of local groups linked through the Federation of Crofters Unions. Among other things, the SCU became the vehicle through which definitions of crofting and crofters were again reworked. Important aspects of the new staging of crofting was to contextualise it no longer as *'failed farming'*, but an extensive, low-intensity landuse. As noted in the last Chapter, the importance of the crofting system came to be summarised as the social glue which ensures the survival of

⁵¹Fieldwork 1991 ACT male 45 - 50

⁵²Fieldwork 1991 ACT male 45 - 50

remote communities and a way of life with social, cultural and environmental value. The SCU was taken seriously. In Assynt, the union branch provided a respected and appropriate local organisation which could provide a forum for everyone to discuss the sale of the estate. Union activists were tried and tested and had an awareness that they could make a difference, and that they were not alone.

SCU staff, through their experience of the debates which ensued after the Scottish Office offer of community ownership for their estates in Skye, had learned much about both the aspirations and fears of local crofting communities, considering the issue of crofting community ownership of land. As noted above, the research carried out on this subject in the wake of the 1990 DAFS offer had made some very useful points which were soon to be of great relevance for people in Assynt.

Getting Organised

In this section the main themes which were of importance to the ACT's community based action are discussed. Events unfolded with great rapidity in Assynt. The participants, croft tenants, SCU members, local residents and interested parties throughout Scotland who wished to help were forced to think quickly, act quickly and create a way of proceeding and organising very much '*on the hoof*'. It is for that reason that those with past experience in crofting law, suitable structures for community organisations, potential fears and hesitancy among local people, good contacts in local authorities and public agencies and a previous grounding in voluntary work and activism all became so pivotal. There was little time to debate the finer points of a range of legal structures or the implications of different kinds of stated aims.

Meetings

As already discussed, the Assynt SCU Branch called the first meeting to discuss the sale of the estate. From this point it was quickly established that a significant and growing number of local croft tenants and other residents were interested in the idea of halting the sale. As discussions developed, the idea of a community buy-out emerged from this. A series of public meetings

⁵³Fieldwork 1991 ACT male 45 - 50

and consultations with others in the Highlands and Islands with relevant experience or thoughts were arranged.

The "Kinlochewe" Ruling

On 5th June 1992 the verdict in *MacDonald v Whitbread*, which became known as '*The Kinlochewe Ruling*' was announced and widely reported in the press. This ruling was of great interest in Assynt:

"Kinlochewe - that's where it all came about! When it was discovered that the landlord had no right to demand 50% of any land that was sold by crofters, for house sites etc. And he was done out in the Court of Session and that's how that came about. When that was discovered, I think that's when Bill Ritchie kind of sat up and took note that things were maybe gonna!"⁵⁴

The implication of this ruling was that, in view of the fact that all but fifty of the 21,000 acres comprising the North Lochinver Estate were in crofting tenure, if the croft tenants chose individually to buy-out their inbye ground and apportioned hill ground, they could nominate a third party to become owner. That third party could be a trust created by the croft tenants themselves. On that basis, their buy-out would cost in the region of £40,000. Any buyer who paid for the North Lochinver Estate would, if this idea was carried out, lose all but fifty acres of what had been paid for. At an asking price of £473,000, the croft tenants felt sure they would be able to point out that this would not be sensible financial move for any buyer.

The ruling itself received a great deal of press coverage. It was a surprise to landowners and croft tenants. Before this ruling, if such a transfer had been considered, the landowner would have claimed 50% of the sale cost, described until this point as the '*development value*'. What the Kinlochewe Ruling did was determine that in the event of croft land being purchased under the 1976 Act and transferred direct to a third party, the landowner had no right to clawback 50% of the sale value:

"And the fact that the publicity relating to the recent Court of Session ruling, in relation to the Land Court judgement - *MacDonald v*

⁵⁴Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 50 - 55

Whitbread - that I think really was the final agent - catalytic agent - that caused us to decide to take specific action."⁵⁵

The ruling had come about through a Court battle between a croft tenant - Donald MacDonald - and the estate owner - Whitbread estate. On losing his job, Archie MacLellan and his family found themselves without a home, having previously lived in an estate house. They found temporary accommodation in the area, with Donald MacDonald. Donald MacDonald offered the family a plot to build a house on and began the necessary arrangements for selling this plot to Archie MacLellan's son. Whitbread Estate, under the clawback provisions of the '76 Act, demanded 50% of the sale price. The clawback rules involve a landowner's right to claim 50% of the development value of any land bought through the '76 Act if it was sold on within a five year period of the transfer. Whitbread Estate asserted that this particular transaction involved two parts - in effect that the land was being sold on - and that therefore the clawback rules applied. The site was valued at £25,000 and the estate was claiming £12,500. This right was disputed by Donald MacDonald and the case was heard in November 1991 by the Land Court. Arguing that the Land Court **approval** to acquire the site did not constitute transfer, MacDonald argued that the only transaction was to Archie MacLellan, since the Land Court only gave authority for the transaction, direct to third party, to proceed. The Land Court found in MacDonald's favour. The Court of Session agreed, as was announced on 5th June 1992. Lord Murray, delivering the Court's finding, said that:

"The Land Court's decision had driven a coach and four through that consensus. [the previous assumption of right to clawback] Be that as it may, we have come to the conclusion that such a general understanding is not well-founded in law."⁵⁶

This ruling alarmed landowners, and in a television documentary later the same year, the Highland spokesperson of the Scottish Landowners Federation (SLF) expressed concern that '*the law did not say what people thought it had said,*' and on that basis claimed it would not be surprising if SLF tried to have it changed. To date this has not occurred.

⁵⁵Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 55 - 60

The timing of this announcement could not have been more fortuitous for those back in Assynt, deep in thought and discussion over the sale of the North Assynt Estate.

First Steps

In the first days of June, much thinking and planning had already been accomplished by the people who were to become the prime movers and leaders in what became the Assynt Crofters Trust. Bill Ritchie had read the Arkleton Report on the Skye DAFS estates and had been in contact with Simon Fraser, the Lewis lawyer, crofter and factor who had been one of the team of four to research and write that Report.⁵⁷ At the meeting on Saturday 6th June, the meeting resolved that legal advice should be sought '*on the possibility of setting up a crofters trust to buy the land and to seek the support of the agencies and the local authorities*'.⁵⁸ The core of a Steering Group was elected at this meeting, with Allan MacRae as Chair, Bill Ritchie as Secretary and John MacKenzie as Vice Chair. A start was made on nominating a representative from each of the thirteen townships in the North Lochinver Estate. It would take a few more weeks before what became the Steering Group was in place.

"But as I say, I had missed the first two meetings, so I had all my thoughts. They were my own thoughts because I hadn't been subjected to a meeting about other people's thoughts. And during that time of the first two meetings, it was very widely known - people were talking about it. And I thought - now, I feel a wee bit ambiguous towards this! But I'm going to ask questions so that I can actually make a judgement about it. So I spoke to Ishbel; I spoke to Allan MacRae - and different people 'at work'. And every single person that spoke to me had a very strong opinion on it. And the opinion that they had, I felt, was totally emotional. And that made me... kind of even more pulling back. And I thought - this whole thing is an emotional issue. And the time of the third meeting came up. I thought - right, I've got to go to this meeting cos I want to know what it's about. But I had this feeling in me - this is pure emotion. It was Vestey before, and it never touched us. Then it was a Swedish guy; it didn't touch us! He went into liquidation and it didn't affect any single crofter. They don't have the power to affect crofters. And I felt that if you had a croft and you're a crofter - it doesn't matter who owns the land - it can't affect you. But I thought - all this emotion going about it! So I thought - well, I'm going to go to this third meeting, just to see what's what."⁵⁹

⁵⁶Whitbread v MacDonald 1992 SC p485.

⁵⁷**Bryden J., Fraser S., Houston G. and Robertson A.** 1990 *The Future of DAFS Estates in Skye and Raasay* Report for the Highlands and Islands Development Board Arkleton Trust (Research) Ltd.

⁵⁸From the notice for the meeting of 20th June 1992.

⁵⁹Fieldwork 1992 ACT female 40 - 45

This person soon became a member of the Steering Group, encouraged to become so specifically because of the hesitancy expressed.

After the meeting of Saturday 6th June 1992, the SCU Assynt Branch circulated a press release on 9th June, describing the action being taken locally to *'fight the break up of croft lands'*. It read as follows:

"SCOTTISH CROFTERS UNION - ASSYNT BRANCH, NORTH WEST SUTHERLAND

PRESS RELEASE

USE: IMMEDIATE

NORTH CROFTERS TO FIGHT BREAK UP OF CROFT LANDS

CROFTERS IN ASSYNT NORTH WEST SUTHERLAND EXPRESSED THEIR ANGER AND DETERMINATION TO RESIST THE ATTEMPTED SALE IN SMALL LOTS OF PART OF THE FORMER ASSYNT ESTATE. THE ESTATE WAS SOLD BY THE VESTEYS THREE YEARS AGO TO A FOREIGN OWNED COMPANY SET UP TO TRADE IN SCOTTISH LAND. THAT COMPANY, SPS LTD, IS NOW IN THE HANDS OF THE RECEIVER AND THE CROFT LAND IS TO BE SOLD BY SELLING AGENTS JOHN CLEGG AND CO OF EDINBURGH IN SMALL LOTS.

THE CROFTERS WERE TOLD THAT THIS WOULD CAUSE ADMINISTRATIVE CHAOS WITH MULTIPLE LAND OWNERSHIP. IN SOME CASES CROFTERS WOULD BE PAYING RENT ON THEIR INBYE TO ONE LANDLORD, RENT FOR PART OF THEIR GRAZINGS TO ANOTHER AND RENT FOR THE REMAINDER TO YET ANOTHER. SOME CROFTERS DESCRIBED AS "OUTRAGEOUS" THE FACT THAT IF A CROFTER WANTED TO ASSIGN HIS CROFT TO HIS SON HE WOULD NEED THE WRITTEN PERMISSION OF THE NEW LANDOWNER EVEN IF HE WAS A SURREY BANK CLERK.

THE CROFTERS ARE DETERMINED TO PUT A HALT TO THE INCREASE IN FRAGMENTATION OF THE CROFT LANDS AT THE HANDS OF LAND SPECULATORS.

AMONG THE OPTIONS DISCUSSED WAS A PROGRAMME OF PLANNED APPORTIONMENTS FOLLOWED BY APPLICATION TO PURCHASE THE LAND UNDER THE TERMS OF THE CROFTING ACTS WHICH ENABLES CROFTERS TO BUY THE LAND AT A FIXED PRICE. THE CROFTERS WERE TOLD THAT THIS WOULD RESULT IN THE NEW LANDLORD HAVING TO SELL THE LAND AT WELL BELOW THE PURCHASE PRICE RESULTING IN SUBSTANTIAL FINANCIAL LOSSES TO THE SPECULATORS. SOME OF THE CROFTERS CLAIM THAT THE SELLING

AGENTS ARE BEING LESS THAN HONEST BY NOT DESCRIBING THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE FACT THAT THE LAND OFFERED FOR SALE IS ALMOST WHOLLY CROFT LAND SUBJECT TO THE CROFTING ACTS.

THE CROFTERS ALSO EXPRESSED THEIR DISAPPOINTMENT THAT THOUGH THERE WAS MUCH TALK AMONG THE GOVT. AGENCIES AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE AND VALUE OF THE CROFTING SYSTEM, AND SOME HAVE THE POWER TO INTERVENE, THEY SEEM UNWILLING TO DO SO WHEN THE NEED AND OPPORTUNITY ARISES.

THE CROFTERS AGREED TO PURSUE THE POSSIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING A TRUST TO PURCHASE THE LAND AND ARE CONTACTING A NUMBER OF INTERESTED GROUPS. THEY ARE ALSO TO SEEK AN URGENT MEETING WITH THE SELLING AGENT AND THE RECEIVER TO MAKE CLEAR THE IMPLICATION OF THE SALE SO THAT PROSPECTIVE BUYERS ARE FULLY AWARE OF THESE."⁶⁰

Following the Branch meeting on Saturday 6th June in the Stoer Hall, the SCU North West Sutherland Area held their next meeting in Stoer Hall on 23rd June. First on the agenda was the sale of North Lochinver Estate. In the weeks between the Branch meeting and the Area meeting, much work had been done.

By 20th June a public meeting had been arranged in Stoer Hall and every croft tenant was urged to attend. Again, Stoer Hall was used. It was important that there was a suitable centrally located venue which was easy to book and cheap to rent. Already the banner on the poster read: '*Assynt Crofters*'.⁶¹ At this meeting the leaders - Bill Ritchie, Allan MacRae and John MacKenzie - reported back on what they had learned to date, having been mandated on 6th June '*to take legal advice on the possibility of setting up a crofters trust to buy the land and to seek the support of the agencies and local authorities*'"⁶²

In the intervening fortnight Simon Fraser had offered his services to the group and had discussed options for legal structures with Bill Ritchie. Informal discussions by Bill Ritchie with Caithness & Sutherland Enterprise (CASE), the SCU Director, the Natural Resources Division in Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and the Convenor of the Highland Regional Council (HRC)

⁶⁰SCU Assynt Branch Press Release 9th June 1992.

⁶¹Poster advertising meeting on 20th June 1992.

⁶²From the notice for the meeting of 20th June 1992.

had yielded a range of useful advice, including sources of finance and the tone of potential press releases. CASE and SCU had already committed a small amount of money to pay for legal advice, should the group resolve to take the matter further. Among the key agencies, the matter had been informally raised, allowing time for internal discussion and consideration of what sort of support each agency might be in a position to offer. CASE, SCU and Highland Regional Council were first in taking up that challenge enthusiastically.

Armed with these tentative offers of support *'in principle'*, the leaders decided that the next crucial step - if that support was to be shaped and formally secured - was for the croft tenants to demonstrate the extent, or otherwise, of their resolve. The chosen mechanism for achieving this was to set up a *'Trust'* at the next meeting, and by the very decision to create such a body, and the number of members, ascertain and illustrate local commitment to the idea. If the croft tenants resolved, after hearing feedback to date, to create such a body, this would not only send a strong signal to those in the agencies who tentatively offered some form of support. It would also create a formally constituted organisation, capable of then instructing its elected representatives - the Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary - to enter into formal discussions and make potentially crucial agreements and arrangements on behalf of the membership. No further progress could be made via other existing local organisations. The time had come when only a new, *'purpose built'* organisation could further develop this idea and potential course of action.

It was at the meeting of Saturday 20th June 1992 that the croft tenants present unanimously voted *'in principle'* to set up a company *"to buy our croft lands either with the agreement of the seller or through the Courts as is our right under the Crofting Acts."*⁶³ It is interesting to note that at each stage, the *'collective'* resolved to pursue a particular course of action, *'in principle'*. This tentative approach was taken because new information was being received and sought every day. Both the leaders of the group and the growing membership were waiting to assess the legal, financial and business viability of the idea, before

making any irrevocable commitments. The huge amount achieved already in such a short space of time illustrates one of the great strengths of this group. Although this was a new idea, never tested in practice, the elected leaders were sufficiently well informed and '*networked*' to quickly gather a huge amount of relevant technical information. Even before the new organisation which was required had been created, the leadership had hit the ground running. In a remote rural location, knowing where to turn in order to find a suitable structure and strategy is normally very difficult. It can take years for a group, in their own voluntary time, to figure out and agree how best to organise themselves. Allan MacRae and Bill Ritchie had not only been involved in the SCU for some years, but had also attended a number of *Highlands and Islands Forum* Workshops where practical ways of working as a community had often been debated. Workshops were led by individuals who had been involved in relevant practical projects as a member of a community. This capacity building experience was to serve them well. John and Bill had worked together in a voluntary capacity in the Assynt Development Group, which sought to facilitate local economic benefits. From this too they had learned to work together and had gathered experience on how to proceed in the interests of the wider community. Most recently the SCU Branch, led by Allan and Bill, had opposed the proposal to consider the area as a potential National Park. In that campaign, an approach had been successfully used which was already showing its worth in this new and totally unknown chain of events.

Methods and Skills

Individuals, community groups and organisations often come upon new policies, plans or events apparently beyond their control. It is not unusual for such groups or individuals to protest at what they see as wrong, unjust or inappropriate in the new situation which presents itself. This is done in a wide variety of ways: letters to newspapers, MPs and MSPs; petitions; marches; appeals to local authorities or public agencies; creation of new lobbying or action orientated organisations; raising the issue through existing local organisations. The list is not exhaustive. What is less common is for such a group - whether constituted or brought together in reaction to events -

⁶³From the notice for the meeting of 27th June 1992.

to propose a practical, workable alternative approach in lieu of simply obstructing or objecting to that which has been proposed or implemented *'over their heads'*. This approach, usefully summed up as *'Say No; Say Why; Suggest a Workable Alternative'*, is much more powerful and much more likely to create further opportunities for involvement and dialogue than the more common reactive processes already mentioned. Too often only the first stage is ever tackled in this loose three stage approach - *'Say No'*.⁶⁴ I developed this summary - *'Say No; Say Why; Suggest a Workable Alternative'* - after researching and analysing a range of community actions, in order to identify what the differences in methods and approach were between successful or high impact examples and examples which did not achieve their aims, or failed to even *'get going'* at all. In developing this summary I looked at a broad range of examples, but the key ones were the Assynt Crofters Trust and the Assynt SCU Branch action against the National Park proposals. The very striking differences, which created successful impacts, were taking the second two *'steps'*. A very significant number of groups or proto-groups never get beyond Step One, and in some instances only ever reach the outer fringes of Step One. That means that the potential collective never move from *'mutterings'* to action, which at Step One might be making a collectively agreed statement. In reality this model is perhaps better understood as a sliding scale, summarised through Steps One Two Three. I presented this model or, as it has been referred to elsewhere, formula, in a number of community workshops during the 1990s, as part of an account of what characterises successful community action. Appendix 2 provides summary sheets from two participatory community development events where I presented this type of analysis in workshops.⁶⁵

Of course, before even reaching the *'Say No'* stage, there is another crucial element which is required in moving from mutterings to strategy and action. That is *'ownership of the issues'*. Clearly in 1989, when the North Lochinver Estate was first put on the market by Edmund Vestey, few local residents felt

⁶⁵See for instance Appendix 2: *Highlands and Islands Community Conference 1994: The People and the Land – Information file and report; The Assynt Crofters Trust*. See also SEAD *Shifting the Balance Conference Report 1993 – Workshop Report Sheet B11: The Assynt Crofters Trust*. At both events I foregrounded the concept of *'ownership of the issue'*, development of *'non-threatening agendas'* and *'using their language without endorsing their ideology'*.

any *'sense of ownership of the issue'*, judging from the lack of any action or comment other than local mutterings. John MacKenzie wrote to Assynt Estates, protesting at the sale and expressing concern over potential changes. Others were aware, but no collective response or action emerged. Community land ownership was not a well known concept. Likewise, in 1991 on the island of Eigg, although the externally created Trust met with an increasingly favourable response, local people were hesitant and were not putting themselves *'in the driving seat'*. In a few years time the Eigg residents themselves were creating a new trust, running a spectacularly successful public campaign and appeal and achieving a buy-out of the island in 1996 in partnership with Highland Council and the Scottish Wildlife Trust. In 1991 Gigha was on the market. A tenant dairy farmer, Kenny Robison, suggested to friends and neighbours that they should all consider a community buy-out. He was laughed at. In Gigha - as in so many places - this was viewed as a *'communist'* or *'leftie'* idea. It would be some time before that general perception changed throughout Scotland. By 2001, this island was once again on the market, and Kenny Robison was a member of the Steering Group which successfully achieved a community buy-out of Gigha.

'Ownership of the issue' involves learning of an event or a proposal and *'making it your business'*. In the arena of landownership, this had not occurred in the Highlands and Islands to any great extent since the late 19th century. In Assynt in 1989 this attitude in terms of landownership had yet to occur widely. The SCU Branch was younger and *'greener'*. The individuals who rose to prominence as leaders in 1992 did not have the same local profile, experience or habit of working together. In remote rural locations it often takes a particular vehicle to bring together people in different townships or social circles. By 1992 the situation was different. *'Ownership of the issue'* was taken for granted by a core of activists and this assumption - of it being *'our business'* - was gradually internalised by the vast majority of local residents. As illustrated in the SCU Branch press release above, by 9th June the SCU Branch was clearly *'Saying No'* and *'Saying Why'*. They were also making early suggestions about *'A Workable Alternative'*. The group were saying *'No'* because the proposed land fragmentation via sale would create administrative chaos and inhibit local development. In addition they were

protesting strongly against financial organisations speculating in croft land. They were making it clear that they intended to halt this process. They then suggested two ways of achieving this: one was through the '76 Act; the other through creating a crofter run organisation to buy that land themselves. In the course of this *'utterance'* a challenge is made to government agencies to support crofting through support of this action by crofters.

Following the meeting of Saturday 20th June, another meeting was held a week later on Saturday 27th June. In the intervening week Simon Fraser had been engaged as the Assynt Crofters' lawyer. Draft Articles of Memorandum and Association had been prepared. The name was Assynt Crofters Trust Ltd. Membership was open to croft tenants, including croft tenants of grazing shares on the North Lochinver Estate on receipt of an application form and membership fee of £1. Liability was limited to £1. Directors or *'trustees'* were to be elected by members and the Board could co-opt further Board members as they saw fit up to a maximum number.⁶⁶ The structure and details were very largely based on the system suggested in the Arkleton Report.⁶⁷ Simon Fraser was also asked to consider how investment capital would be held, especially *'investments'* by shareholders and non-shareholders. This was important if funds were to be raised from a range of sources. It was particularly important to clarify this in relation to voting rights.

Legal advice had been obtained from three different lawyers on the practicality and legal status of using the '76 Act, in view of the Kinlochewe Ruling, to obtain title to the majority of the land through the Courts. All but Paul Blackstock of the Scottish Landowners Federation had agreed that this was legally possible.

In advertising the next meeting, the Steering Group made very clear that, if the crofters chose to take this path, the tenancy rights and crofting rights of every individual tenant would remain secure and unchanged. It had been clear in Skye in 1991 that this was a major concern of croft tenants. Serious

⁶⁶Not trustees in the legal sense.

⁶⁷**Bryden J., Fraser S., Houston G. and Robertson A.** 1990 *The Future of DAFS Estates in Skye and Raasay* Report for the Highlands and Islands Development Board Arkleton Trust (Research) Ltd.

concerns had also arisen over this because the Glendale shareholders had used a structure which resulted in them ceasing to be legally croft tenants in the usual way. Each share in Glendale was not protected and could not be kept in crofting. In addition, when Lord Leverhulme offered Lewis and Harris to the residents in 1923, a number of individual croft tenants had taken up the offer. These are commonly referred to as '*free gifters*'. They too had, in legal terms, become their own landlord, which led to certain disadvantages in terms of access to CCAGS and CBGLS. In some cases this had been overcome by putting a husband, brother or wife in as the tenant. In law, no one individual can be both parts of a legal relationship. In such a case the weaker part '*flies off*'. In this case that is the position of tenant. For any crofting trust to be created and supported, this problem had to be overcome, in order both to maintain the integrity of the aims and democratic structure and to maintain the status as tenant of every shareholder. The structure had also to ensure that all of the assets remained in democratic and crofting control.

Simon Laird of John Clegg & Co. was informed by the Secretary, Bill Ritchie, about the resolve of the crofters to seek to buy the land or acquire it through the Courts. Bill asked that Simon Laird inform his client, Stoy Hayward Accountants - the receivers, and requested a meeting between crofting representatives, their legal advisors and John Clegg & Co.

At the crofters' meeting of 27th June, the results of the investigations to date were announced to the assembled croft tenants and other interested parties. Simon Fraser was in attendance and explained the proposed legal structure. The meeting decided to proceed to create Assynt Crofters Trust Ltd. (ACT) on the basis suggested by Simon Fraser, and in the following week applications for membership were received from many who had been unable to attend the meeting itself. By early July 80% of the resident croft tenants were members.

Meanwhile, Simon Fraser began arrangements to finalise the Articles of Memorandum and Association, and have the new company registered in due course. It should be born in mind that this action brought together individuals from a range of townships in common cause. Other than through the SCU branch and in support of the Stoer Hall, this had rarely occurred. In

terms of crofting, there were many details to check, since a representative from one end of the 'Estate' would not necessarily know a great deal about circumstances at the other. For instance, in order to produce appropriate Articles of Memorandum and Association, the leaders had to clarify exactly how many townships were in the North Lochinver Estate. In one case - Clashmore and Raffin - two townships have one Grazings Committee. It was not clear whether it would be most appropriate for Clashmore and Raffin to have an elected representative each or to share one.

The Steering Group

By mid July the leaders and township representatives had become the Assynt Crofters Trust Steering Group. Each of the thirteen townships on the North Lochinver Estate had a representative. Several were retired and only one member was under forty years old. It is important to note that, as in other rural Highlands and Islands communities, older and retired people often play a very important role in the community. They have acquired a range of skills which they often use voluntarily in community organisations, and this voluntary effort can be crucial to the success of local organisations. The older and retired age groups can be seen to be performing a role which younger people in full employment are unable to take on. The older generations are also tradition bearers. In view of the usual interpretation of demographically unbalanced age structures, this is an important point to note. Another place where this is significant has been North Uist. It is interesting to note that this action takes place in a period when community representatives across the region had begun to re-conceptualise local resources away from the more traditional negative accounts which stress *distance* from services and markets, *high cost* of living and *ageing* or *unbalanced* demographic structures. Highlighting the fact that the older members of a community are a very versatile and '*high impact*' '*resource*' is another positive re-conceptualisation.

The ACT Steering Group consisted of:

Nedd

John Blunt

In his fifties, John moved to Nedd some thirty years ago to work a croft with his wife. He was attracted by an academic interest in ecology. Until the late

1990s they kept excellent sheep on the croft and always gained very good prices at the Lairg Sales.

Drumbeg Hughie Matheson

In his sixties, his family was originally from Culkein Stoer. Hughie married into the township and became Clerk. Hughie ran the Salmon Fishing Station at Culkein Drumbeg, provided transport for prawns and raised a family in the township. Sadly, Hughie died in 1995.

Culkein Drumbeg John MacKenzie (Vice Chair)

In his fifties, John spent his childhood and most of his working life in Bishop Briggs. His mother was from Culkein Drumbeg and he and his family moved back to Culkein Drumbeg some twenty years ago. John is an electrical engineer but also had a salmon farm in the 1980s. He was Clerk for some years, played a strong role in the Assynt Development Group and was pivotal in creating the Drumbeg Development Group. John was very active in the Free Church and later became a member of the Free Church (Continuing).

Clashnessie Donald King

A headmaster who retired to Clashnessie from England, Donald took on a croft and became Clerk for a time. His clerical and paper work skills were a great asset to neighbours in the township. His family had holidayed in the area for a long time previous to becoming permanently resident.

Achnacarnin Pat MacPhail⁶⁸

A retired headmaster, Pat and his wife left teaching and moved to the area permanently some fifteen years ago. They ran a B&B, chalets and a croft. His wife's father's family was from Drumbeg. His own father was from North Uist and his mother from Argyllshire. Pat was Clerk of Grazing for some years and Secretary of the SCU Assynt Branch for a time.

⁶⁸MacAskill has Pat MacPhail down as the Clashmore representative and then Board member and Aileen Kinnaird as the same for Achnacarnin. This is not correct, but the mistake is no fault of MacAskill's. This was a constant confusion within ACT, since both individuals lived in Clashmore but had Achnacarnin connections. Perhaps this serves to illustrate that individuals know relatively little about each others townships, and so the creation of an overarching organisation such as ACT is much more challenging than outside observers might assume, when they think of a small local population. That population is scattered and does not inevitably see common cause.

Culkein Stoer Donald MacKenzie

From a long established Culkein family, Donald worked for the County Roads Department and ran a croft. He retired in the mid 1990s, but kept the croft going in his retirement. Donald and his late brother, Alastair had a great interest in local history and the changes in crofting agriculture.

Raffin Michael Lord

His family came to the area in the 1950s, from a shepherding background in North Yorkshire. Michael married a local girl. They kept a croft, a very good vegetable garden and he worked as the 'Postie' for a long number of years, but was forced to retire due to ill health.

Clashmore Aileen Kinnaird

Aileen's mother was from Clashmore and Aileen was born and brought up in Glasgow. She moved to Clashmore with her family in 1979. At the time she was in her forties and working in a shop in Lochinver. Aileen served on the Hall Committee. She later returned to teaching, becoming the Special Needs Teacher at Lochinver Primary School.

Balchladich Alastair MacIntyre

Alastair was in his late forties at the time. His family was from Rhu Stoer and he and his sister kept a croft in Culkein and Balchladich. Alastair was always happy to help neighbours at the fank and was a great asset at clipping time. Sadly, Alastair died in 2001.

Stoer Ishbel MacAulay

Ishbel's mother was from Stoer, and during the Second World War, she and her sister stayed with their grandparents in Stoer and went to school there. They were born and brought up in Glasgow, and on retiral from the Glasgow Police Force, Ishbel retired to Stoer. There she keeps sheep on the croft and became Clerk of Grazing. Ishbel is also very active in the Stoer Hall Committee and was fundamental in having the Hall built in the 1980s. She and her sister, Chrissie, are very active in Comunn Eachdraidh Asiante, which was set up in 1995.

Clachtoll Felicity Basu

In the early 1950s, Felicity's widowed mother married a man from Clachtoll. He had been wounded in action and shipped to Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, to recover. Felicity was born and brought up in what was then Rhodesia and came to Scotland as a child. After a brief stay in Clachtoll, Felicity's family settled in Glasgow. In later life she nursed her uncle, John, in Clachtoll. She then settled in Clachtoll and kept on the croft. She was the Clerk for the township. Sadly, Felicity died in 1998.

Torbreck Derrick MacLeod

Derrick's mother was brought up in Clashmore, his father in Recharn. Derrick was in his thirties at the time and worked at Ardvar Fish Farm. His wife and young family had built a house and worked a sublet croft in Torbreck.

Achmelvich Iain MacLeod

Iain's mother was from Achnacarnin, but married in Raffin where Iain was brought up. Marriage took him to Achmelvich where he worked a croft and created a caravan site on the croft with his family. Iain also worked unloading fish at the Pier and is a joiner by trade. At the time he was in his early fifties. Ian is very active in the Assynt Games Committee and performs each year in the local Panto.

Chair Allan MacRae

Allan's mother came to Assynt from London '*in service*'. His father was from the local area and was keeper at Little Assynt where the family were brought up. Allan was in his late forties at the time, keeping sheep and pigs on the croft and working as a stone mason and unloading fish at the Pier.

Secretary Bill Ritchie

Bill came to Assynt in the mid 1970s. The young family settled at Achmelvich, building a house, creating a very productive vegetable garden and keeping sheep and Icelandic ponies on the croft. At the time Bill was a young grandfather, in his early fifties, serving as a Commissioner at the Crofters Commission.

John Blunt, Nedd resigned early on. He was fully supportive of the creation of a trust and a crofting community buy-out. He was however never in the habit of participating in meetings and public events and did not feel able to take on such a role. This raises an important issue for community action of this type. The majority of local people are uncomfortable in meetings, dealing with Minutes and legal formalities, but this remains one of the most usual ways of proceeding with any type of community action. Lack of participation cannot be lightly assumed to mean lack of support. For some people, it is personally impossible or hugely difficult to play an active or public part of this sort. The fact that action like this soon involves legal issues and a significant amount of written material such as accounts, Minutes and Articles of Memorandum and Association will stand in the way of the involvement of some. Not everyone is able to speak in public or to attend large gatherings of people. Some individuals may have dyslexia or severe literacy problems, of which other participants may not be aware or overlook. For others their role as carers, lack of transport or work commitments can often stand in the way of participation.

It is noticeable that one of the great strengths of the Assynt Crofters Trust, as it emerged, was that despite the traditional meetings format, all important information was reported verbally. The growing excitement due to the significance and enormity of the issue being tackled contributed greatly to avoiding stilted and formal meetings. Also important, however, was the skill of the office bearers in presenting information and choices to members.

In particular, Bill Ritchie, was careful to present information at each stage in such a way that members were never forced into making irrevocable decisions without the option to review the situation in the light of new information. The process was carefully structured to make it easy for people to take positive rather than negative decisions at every meeting. If a group are repeatedly presented with a set of circumstances or choices which they constantly have to reject, confidence and enthusiasm does not flourish and the aim of '*Suggesting a Workable Alternative*' is rarely achieved. However, if the process is structured in such a way that affirmative decisions and action can

be taken, it is possible quickly to build momentum and confidence. The experience for the individual is more positive and less stressful. Often it is only a matter of how the process is structured and how information is presented. It does nonetheless take great skill to achieve a positive process with any rapidity in an unknown situation. Bill Ritchie was adept at this and Allan MacRae was particularly effective at summarising options verbally in a way that always referred back to the principal aspirations and concerns of the group. This made it easy for the maximum possible number of people to feel themselves to be fully informed and involved.

With the Steering Group in place, what had been an ad hoc collection of people began to take on a more formal structure, keep Minutes and share responsibilities. The bulk of the thinking, researching and negotiating was still done by the new office bearers. All of this was being done in voluntary time during the height of summer when everyone locally was under pressure from tourism work and the need to get sheep clipped.

Feasibility Study and Business Plan

At this stage the idea of a crofter buy-out - or taking the bulk of the land through the Courts - was still a big '*if*'. Final commitment to this plan of action was contingent on assessing the financial implications and responsibilities of this course of action. To assess this a feasibility study and business plan would be required. CASE and SCU both provided £1500 to pay for the commissioning of this work. Initially the leadership had some difficulty in finding suitable consultants willing to take on this job. It was a job viewed by many consultants at the time as too politically sensitive to risk.

Finally, however, consultants were appointed. They were an Economist, Steve Westbrook, based in Nairn, and an Accountant, Graeme Scott, from Angus MacKenzie & Co., Inverness. This team set to work. The final results of their study would not become available until August, but early drafts were under discussion throughout July. With a closing date for the sale of the Estate in late August, other action had to press ahead in the meantime.

Structure

"I wasn't at the first meeting. We were away. It was only when the second meeting came up that I went to it. And that's when they were going to form a Company. And they had papers all ready and they were going to sell ordinary shares to the crofters at £1 each, and they had voting rights, and they were going to sell preference shares, without voting rights, to non-crofters who were interested in paying in money. And the crofters themselves could also buy preference shares. This was to raise the money. But then of course they found that - I think the solicitors advised them that they couldn't do this without producing a prospectus and declaring dividends. Well, you see, they really want to plough all the money into the land, and they said nobody could expect to get anything out of it! Not financially. The preference shares would just be people interested in preserving the land, but they wouldn't get... it would probably run at a loss anyway, and they would never get their money back! You probably couldn't sell the shares. But the whole thing was to administer it for the good of the crofting community."⁶⁹

This quote illustrates that in the beginning, the sort of legal structure which would be suitable for a crofting trust as potential landowner was not clear. After some investigations it became clear that raising money through preference shares would not meet the needs of the group. It might also create unanticipated tensions between members and those with preference shares - those who had put their own money into the Company - in terms of decision making and priorities. A structure like that would not achieve the key aim of crofter control over what were very largely crofters' lands. It might also not be the best structure to achieve charitable status, which at this stage the leaders hoped to achieve. It was believed that charitable status would be particularly beneficial for fund raising, having the effect of adding a third to all monies raised through public donation:

"You're probably aware that what we had intended originally in the formation of Assynt Crofters Ltd. - a company limited by guarantee - but because we recognised right from the outset that it was unlikely that we ourselves would be able to generate sufficient funds to make a reasonable bid for the estate, it was obvious that we were going to have to go out to the wider community, seeking financial support, and the result of that was that we had to look at a different format - hence - Assynt Crofters Trust."⁷⁰

⁶⁹Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 65 - 70

⁷⁰Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 55 - 60

Assynt Crofters Limited was therefore replaced by the Assynt Crofters Trust, a Company Limited By Guarantee and not having any share capital. The Assynt Crofters Trust had the following aims:

"3. The Company's objects are:

(i)

(a) To raise funds by way of donation and grant to purchase the land and other resources comprised in the North Lochinver Estate.

(b) To improve the social, educational and cultural environment of the crofting community and of the natural environment of Assynt in Sutherland.

(c) To help fund viable capital investment and to secure property development and its management and to secure land renewal and environmental and improvement projects for the crofting community of Assynt in Sutherland."⁷¹

The Company was incorporated on 11th September 1992. Liability for members was limited to £1 and the Company was a '*not-for-profit*' company. Membership eligibility were to be defined through adoption of '*Rules of By-Laws*'.⁷² As noted earlier, the legal structure of the Company formed to buy the land was a crucial element in the strength of the campaign and a future investment in maintaining the integrity of the aims. Simon Fraser, ACT lawyer, discusses the choices made:

"I mean, this is the first time that anything's ever happened anyway. I could see a difficulty - the kind of structure - the kind of company structure - was going to be influenced by the question of whether or not they had to go for commercial borrowing, with a company with shares and all the rest of it, as opposed to simply being able to raise the money themselves, in addition to getting grants and loans. I was a lot happier with being able to recommend the present structure, because that was far more answerable to the community ownership requirement, if you like, and it was far more able to be controlled by the people. And most importantly, control could never go outwith. If you like, there are several possible structures that you could have: you could have a bare legal Trust, but that's horrendous - difficulties with that. You could have a commercial company, but the Board's always answerable to the shareholders and creditors and so on - and control could pass out. They wouldn't have control over their shareholders - it could be very difficult to keep control in the community there. And the other structure is the one we went for - a company limited by guarantee. Membership - no-one with more than one membership; no shareholding, and it's quite easy to define who can become a member - a crofter if you like. They elect their own Board. The Board then works out ... So I was an awful lot happier with being able to go to that and go ahead with that structure."⁷³

⁷¹Memorandum of Association of Assynt crofters Trust Limited.

⁷²p9 Item 21 i - v, Articles of Association of Assynt Crofters Trust Limited.

⁷³Fieldwork 1991 Simon Fraser ACT lawyer.

The legal structure adopted ensured that the crofters remained tenants and elected a Steering Group and subsequently Board of Directors from amongst their number. Any crofting tenant or subtenant was eligible for membership. Out of a total population of about 300 people living on the North Assynt Estate, 104 were croft tenants or subtenants and 36 other croft tenants were absentee. By mid summer the ACT had a membership of 111. In 1991 30% of the tenants were absentees and in 1992 approximately 50% of those absentees were members. Of the 20% of tenants who did not join, a significant number of absentees would not have known about the creation of the ACT and a much smaller number of resident tenants did not want to join. Several of these joined in later years. From both absentee and resident tenants, the total number of people who were eligible to join but did not in 1992 was 29. I discuss some of the reasons later in the Chapter. By 2001 the ACT had 115 members, of which 21 or 18% were absentee croft tenants. The proportion in 1992 is likely to have been very similar, although in the period 1993 to 2001 the level of absenteeism rose by 3%.

Motivations

In considering the sale of the North Lochinver Estate, it was felt that an attempt should be made to prevent the break up of the estate. The earlier sale which had created the North Assynt Estate was now viewed as a break in trust by the landlord:

"I think the crofters just decided to react to this because this just seemed to be a pattern, a trend that was about to begin. The trust between the traditional landlord and the tenant had been broken by Vestey selling it off to a development company. Quite clearly, SPS Ltd. the company, as far as we can understand, was set up to trade in assets. It wasn't really intended to be a private estate. It was presumably borrowed money and he just bought at the wrong time in the market. So we were pretty angry about that, and it was decided to try and take some action about it."⁷⁴

The ease with which companies, institutions and individuals with sufficient credit or capital could buy and sell whole areas and hence have such strong effects on people's work, businesses, crofting, future prospects and present peace of mind shocked the majority of Assynt residents. The opportunity to

intervene, in order not only to make a moral point about the rectitude of this system, but also perhaps with a view to avoiding similar upheaval in the future, was a new and attractive idea:

"Well, as far as we're concerned, we want to keep it in crofting - much the same as it is. The landlord will be the crofters and most of the land will still stay in crofting tenancy. But it will also make it easier from that point of view, for the landlord - maybe local people who want a bit of land - to get them a bit of land, at a reasonable price and hopefully, they'll be able to stay, and build, and keep families, cos you really want families with young children coming in. And that's the main point, is to keep them here."⁷⁵

The feeling here is that what was being created was a vehicle fit to fight for the principle of crofting as an expression of regional identities linked to the assertion that the crofting system, if released from the vagaries of the land market, would offer a method of securing appropriate development into the future. Another source of motivation and inspiration was the sensation that whether or not the crofting community could prevent the break up of croft lands and, in addition, secure title for themselves by whatever means, useful lessons would be learned in the process that would be of benefit to other crofting communities who might find themselves facing similar threats and circumstances:

"Well, success is not guaranteed, but if we were successful, I can see a big challenge ahead of us. It's going to be important that crofters ensure that crofting heads in the right direction - that we can safeguard the identity of crofting. We are fighting for our identity up here - in a way we are - from these outside pressures. And some of us would simply say that crofting is the only system in areas like this that can hope to anchor people in the outlying areas all the year round. It's all very well talking about conservation, holiday making... but these people are sometimes gone in the winter. After all, 31% of the houses are empty in winter - contribute nothing, nothing to the community - not a thing, not really. I think crofting has proved itself as a system that can anchor people and I think that's a very important thing, in areas like this. It's a tried and proven system and it's got to get the right support and incentives to enable it to do that in the future."⁷⁶

The principal fear among the majority was the possibility of several landlords, none of whom were familiar with or interested in the crofting system or the local communities on the Estate. This was what caused the most anger and

⁷⁴Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 50 - 55

⁷⁵Fieldwork 1992 ACT female 60 - 65

⁷⁶Fieldwork 1991 ACT male 45 - 50

created the fear that such landlords, through ignorance of the crofting system, would obstruct local development.

History

"Of course part of it is, you know, to the native person, it is partly, you know - it's a deep rooted thing - the idea of taking the land off the proprietor. Oh yes! You don't need any other reasons you know. Think, by God - aye! You know! But then we had support from a lot of people who came into the place - eh? Yes!"⁷⁷

Here the influence of *'traditional'* relationships to the land is expressed. It is emphasised through use of the term *'native person'*. The participation of, by implication, *'non-native'* persons is also mentioned – *'people who came into the place'*. This sort of juxtaposition tends to imply a past stasis in population which old census records do not support. In the past two hundred years however, the dominant influence has been out-migration and internal local relocation - or Clearance. In this context, any in-migration takes on greater symbolic importance than it might otherwise do. It should be noted that despite the extreme difficulties created by persistent out-migration, in-migration is often not welcomed. It can result in croft tenancies passing to new people, who perhaps in terms of *'duthchas'* have not earned that *'right'* through three generations of inhabitation. During out-migration, those who remain often manage to obtain several croft tenancies instead of one or two. In-migrants are a threat to this amalgamation and the potential economic spin-offs. In Assynt in the 1950s and 60s some in-migrants easily obtained tenancies from the estate since the tenancies were lying empty.

The negative symbolism of in-migration is also in terms of cultural impacts - increased pressures to abandon Gaelic and local cultural practices. The ACT Steering Group in fact included a mixture of people who had been in-migrants at some stage and those whose families had lived locally for at least several generations. This mixture of cultural practice and experience was one of the group's strengths. The speaker's own mother was an in-migrant several decades before. Clearly the subaltern here is indeed *'impure'* and hybrid. The identity as *'crofters'* staged by this group does not rely on origins but on

common cause. The leadership of the group reflected that hybridity very clearly and in some senses symbolically brought together and publicly presented different kinds of 'crofters': a 'native' person, who is deeply suspicious of environmental agencies and whose mother is English; a second generation return-migrant, active in the Free Church; and a long established in-migrant, who worked as a Countryside Ranger and was a very active SCU member. This hybridity in no way implies a lack commitment or passion for the cause.

A very strong motivating force in this community action was a desire to reach a stage where the extreme poverty of the area in the recent past could not be repeated:

"Oh - because it goes back for generations! That's why. Because people - I can remember the hard times up here and the hard times were caused by the landowners - the old landowners. People were suppressed! People have been suppressed for the last one hundred and fifty years. That's why! The poverty.

And I think the idea of owning your own land instead of having to answer to a blinking landowner from - an absentee landowner, which is worse. I think that's why the passion is there, without a doubt.

You couldn't do anything up here without the permission of the landowner and nine times out of ten, when you did seek the permission of the landowner, he refused. Because you were always in opposition to him no matter what you were doing. So as long as you were in opposition to him he wouldn't allow anything to happen. And that's why it's been generated. He put the people down here, bringing the sheep in, or whatever - The Great Sheep.

There was some that drove them down to the coast. They headed across the Atlantic and that's really why people are just wanting shot of landlords! Because they've really done nothing. If you look at Lochinver today - the dilapidated buildings in Lochinver today belong to the landowner now. He doesn't employ people anymore... That is why - just want - just want them out.

Why should they? Why should people own the ground? The ground, most of it which is absolutely worthless. It's absolutely worthless for growing crops on - 90% of it. And all the stones. You see all the cairns? That was all stones that was taken out of the ground, trying to improve the ground! And even after taking the blinking stones out, it still wasn't worth growing crops on! Twenty - twenty-five - thirty years ago, there was extreme poverty down in this part of the world. Extreme poverty. So that's why people are passionate about getting rid of the Vestey's ... and such like."⁷⁸

⁷⁷Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 45 - 50

⁷⁸Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 50 - 55

In this quote we see the enduring influence of the commoditisation of Highland land, through Clearance, during the height of British colonial expansion in the 19th century. The oppression of the colonial style relations to land and 'ownership' which were established is referred to in anger, as is the relocation of '*the people*' – '*he put the people down here*' – onto the worst land, in an area where the ground is '*absolutely worthless*' in any case. In spite of the ground's '*uselessness*', it is well-loved ground. In order to grow food the new coastal plots, or crofts, had to be broken-in. This involved lifting many tons of stones out of the ground to get enough soil for plant growth, hence the emotive mention of the '*cairns*'. The enormous control which landowners of large Highland Estates wield is also highlighted in this quote. It is very hard to quantify that effect, but the results are often seen in places which in the late 1990s, chose to try community landownership. Eigg and Knoydart are other very good examples.

The history of land ownership in Assynt was alluded to earlier in Chapter Two and Chapter Four. Basically the land passed from the MacLeods of Assynt to the Seaforth MacKenzies. It was then sequestrated in the 18th century and was sold by judicial roup in 1757 to Lady Strathnaver. In this way it became part of the Sutherland Estates. In 1913 it was sold by the then Duke of Sutherland, as a lot of 600,000 acres, including Eddrachilles, to Major General William Stewart. He had been born and brought up in Nedd, left for Canada where he made a fortune as a railroad engineer, and returned to buy this estate. In 1935 this estate was again sold, this time to the Duke of Westminster, who sought it as wedding gift for his son-in-law William Filmer-Sankey. At this time the Vestey family had put in a bid, but failed to secure the estate. Shortly after this William Filmer-Sankey re-sold most of the estate to the Vestey family, but kept a small area on the shores of Loch Assynt.

Through changes of ownership, the Sutherland Clearances had impacted upon the parish of Assynt, in ways already mentioned above. In the 20th century economic activity had become concentrated in the hands of Assynt Estates and Assynt Trading - or the Vestey family. Economic opportunities were thwarted by opposition of the landowner, and public works were also

prevented. At a time when white fish was a mainstay of local economic activity, Assynt Estates continually blocked Highland Regional Council efforts to develop the Lochinver Pier and Harbour. It was only in the late-1980s that the Highland Regional Council finally succeeded in having its plans accepted. In order to achieve this the Council was forced to buy Culag Hotel from the Vestey family and grant a planning application to the Vestey family to build a new hotel above Lochinver. The Council resold the Hotel the same day to a consortium created by a local family. Sadly, with these delays, it was only on the cusp of an accelerated decline in the white fishing industry that the harbour development was achieved. By the mid-1990s much of the white fish trade had already moved north to the port of Kinlochbervie. Another pertinent example is the continued difficulty of acquiring sites for social housing in the Lochinver area. Assynt Estate has strong views on where housing should be allowed and will not release land around the village itself. New housing has therefore become concentrated in Baddidarrach at the opposite side of the bay from Lochinver. Assynt Estate has been known to insist that new social housing should not be **seen** from any of the Vestey properties. As the only landowner, if Assynt Estates choose not to release land for housing, then there will be no housing.

Wider cultural and regional debates about the rectitude of Highland land ownership, as the quotes above illustrate, also played a strong part in the attitudes of local individuals to the idea of crofting community landownership. Aspects of 19th century debates on land ownership and crofting rights were taken up or revisited in a late 20th century context. The public debate was progressively broadened. History and matters other than beneficial economic change were very central:

"Really, it seems to me that you cannot quantify the blight that the present system has been on our rural communities in the Highlands, unless you compare it to similar places in other countries. It's only when you do that, do you realise - Norway - see how they've developed - realise what a blight our present system has been. We're still - we have a lot to learn from these countries. It's not something you can put into words. It's quite wrong for people to see events in Assynt here purely in terms of economics. That's only one dimension of the wider natural development of our communities, both in terms of land and people. And it's going to take time."⁷⁹

In the rest of this Chapter, as events unfold, the central importance of history and local readings of historical events will be seen to have remained crucial. However, in a **public** setting the emphasis was on economic and environmental developments, even if in **private**, the historical motivations were paramount. In the main public transcript or utterances, this was a matter of principal therefore, not *'emotion'*.

Local Support and Credibility

"The Assynt Branch of the Crofters Union have been constantly advocating that crofters up here, if we are going to fight off the pressure that's coming on the land up here, that crofters have to take a much more positive stance on the land. We've always advocated that, and I think that has been reflected in the very positive stances we've taken on the National Parks issue. We got tremendous support for that issue. And I think it has also been reflected in Assynt and the North West here, we have adopted one of the main recommendations of the Arkleton Trust Report, which was to set up a registered demand for new entrants into crofting, because we recognise that this is one of the keys to the future of crofting here. One of the very key issues that has to be addressed. I think when you add it up all together, I think up here now we're beginning to realise that we have to take the initiative more. Not sit back and let our future be dictated for us. That the only hope for a more certain future up here is - take the initiative. Otherwise areas like this will simply succumb to these outside pressures. WE must take the initiative. And I think that's what we have done on this issue, simply. And once we set it off the sheer momentum has carried it on."⁸⁰

As discussed above, local credibility was established fairly quickly because of the skills of those in leadership positions and because *'tried and tested'* people brought about early discussion of the issue through a tried and tested structure - the SCU. That structure already had legitimacy, particularly in discussing matters pertaining to crofting. In a short space of time that credible structure gave way to a more focused and new structure, designed specifically for the job that this group had set itself. All of this was achieved within four to six weeks. Nevertheless, it was a very big idea for people to grasp, and *'off-stage'* the idea required much soul searching from each individual deciding whether it seemed to themselves to be an appropriate route to take. Financial issues were of course of great concern:

⁷⁹Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 50 - 55

⁸⁰Fieldwork 1991 ACT male 45 - 50

"Is: You were saying that there were some folk who expected money back out on it or something?

Crofter: Oh aye. A man said to me, he was looking for something back! They're not interested. They're only interested in what they're going to get out of it.

Is: Do you think most people though are behind it?

Crofter: I think so. I mean that person I spoke to, it's the only person who's spoke in that vein. I think most people would rather put in to it and know that the ground - the land - was their own!"⁸¹

It should be remembered that this debate was going on in the early-1990s, after another Conservative General Election victory in the January of that year, and in the wake of the strong Thatcherite influences of the 1980s. Altruistic action did not at that time have a strong profile; nor did enlightened state intervention. Private enterprise, entrepreneurial behaviour, '*getting on your bike*', supporting England at cricket and '*standing on your own two feet*' were more common catch phrases.⁸² It was to come as something of a surprise to the ACT to find, as their campaign gathered momentum, that hundreds and thousands of people were more than happy to get the opportunity to donate money to this cause and expect nothing in the way of personal financial gain. The croft tenants, becoming ACT members, did not themselves expect or seek personal financial gain either:

"I've heard people say to me too, you know - the same sort of thing. You know - why put your money in it? What are you getting out of it? You've already got the land anyway, except etc. etc. But you either believe in a cause or you don't."⁸³

Membership crept up, as the organisation itself was created and structured:

"There are a few - quite a number I think. They added how many people had paid the £1, for the ordinary share. I think it was seventy odds, and they thought there were over one hundred. But they thought a large number - thirty or so - were absentee."⁸⁴

There was no residency requirement for membership, so a significant number of absentee tenants joined and made large donations to the appeal. Locally interest and participation continued to grow, particularly as practical

⁸¹Fieldwork 1992 ACT female group 55 - 65

⁸²Refers to Norman Tebbit's 'cricket test' with regard to 'assimilation'.

⁸³Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 50 - 55

⁸⁴Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 65 - 70

concerns over the rights of members, the rights of croft tenants, financial burdens and legal commitments were addressed and explained:

"Seems to be a genuine excitement about it - the whole thing. There's certainly a great deal of backing - the meetings were very full and supportive. Nobody has publicly spoken against it. There are a few sceptics - there's no question about it. There are people who want to know why we're having to buy the land and think we can't do it. But the majority seem to be rooting behind us."⁸⁵

Faced with such a '*big idea*' and huge potential responsibilities to be met largely in hard pressed voluntary time, not to mention the fact that this was uncharted territory, lots of people took some time to decide what to think - and to overcome their quite natural fears:

"I think a lot of people at first were wary about doing this because they felt that it was more an emotional thing. That, here, they're going to charge in and try to buy this and they've no idea whether they can handle the situation or whether they can administer it and all that. And I think it made even quite a few of the crofters think - well - is this the right thing to do? Maybe people are just doing it because this is the land they've lived on generations and all that, and they want to keep it, and therefore you've got to try and say - right. You've got to get a business sense into this. Will it work if we do it or will we be in liquidation a year later? This is really what the main point is now. Not if you can, but if you can make it work. That you don't end up going the same road!"⁸⁶

Inevitably, within any group there are a variety of attitudes. Some were uncomfortable with references to past wrongs from the time of the Clearances, feeling that such talk was old fashioned and made themselves look ridiculous:

"I don't like this feeling of an old fashioned feeling. And saying it's - I don't like this harping about the Clearances and things that are not relevant, you know?"⁸⁷

Others were unashamed in viewing any move towards community landownership as '*taking back*' what was taken from us.

"We seek quite simply to redress the balance of generations gone by... It's us seeking to achieve what we consider to be our historical right."⁸⁸

⁸⁵Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 50 - 55

⁸⁶Fieldwork 1991 ACT female 60 - 65

⁸⁷Fieldwork 1992 ACT female 40 - 45

⁸⁸Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 55 - 60

More than one person discussed their fears that perhaps one day the crofting system would be dismantled and that this possibility might have a bearing on whether or not a crofting community buy-out was a good idea:

"It is a danger in it - that you could sort of light a hornet's nest. Cos if they're going to say - if crofters can buy this, why do they need all these - you know - Acts protecting them. Or, now it's served it's purpose and it's out of date. It was originally to prevent people being thrown off the land and that. But if people are up and buying their crofts? Why do they need it anymore? Why not make it - and especially if it's Tories that are in power - well, they're all for this, you know, 'stand on your own two feet'?"⁸⁹

Many had to confront within themselves and in other people, the popular conviction that '*crofters can never agree*':

"I think everybody's on an equal footing. I think so. I think this is a good idea, everybody on an equal footing. Aye. It'll be quite interesting. I mean crofters over the years, over the generations, have never agreed. I just wonder will they start to agree all of a sudden, which I doubt very much that they will! But - och - if everybody stands to benefit from all the things that this new project might bring to the place - I think that everybody's going to get the benefit on an equal footing - I think possibly that crofters would start agreeing. Who knows?! Something we'll just have to find out. It's been very, very difficult for townships to get together over the generations. It was never a common thing. Especially at weddings - always pally on the way out and always fighting on the way home! Once they'd taken a few drams - shouting about fences that were a foot into somebody else's property - who knows? Need to come back in a year's time and ask that question!"⁹⁰

The quote above reminds us that the '*subaltern*' is always fractured as well as '*impure*'. Amongst the women in particular, due to their involvement in other community activities, there was an early awareness that both the campaign and later, if it came to that, management of the Estate would involve a lot of time and work. There were too a fair number of people were not interested at all in the idea of a community buy-out. For them, the question of who owns the land was irrelevant:

"As long as I've got the inbye and that bit of hill ground, and no one interferes with it, I don't give a damn about who owns it."⁹¹

⁸⁹Fieldwork 1992 ACT female 55 - 60

⁹⁰Fieldwork 1991 ACT male 50 - 55

⁹¹Fieldwork Diary 1992

Some croft tenants were not interested either way because they felt, at their age, that they '*had had their day*'. Fears concerning the difficulties of sustaining an estate, if a buy-out was achieved preyed on some potential participants' minds too:

"I mean, X is not for it at all... he's 85 and thinks it should be left the way it was. There's always been landlords and things. He doesn't see much point. Y is a wee bit ... not sure of it. I think she'll go along with the majority, but she's not enthusiastic. ... I think it's that they're not sure that the people can handle it. Also, she wasn't sure about - you know when they said about this share sort of thing. The crofter buys a share and instead of saying it was a hereditary share, they're now saying that the share dies with the crofter. ... It think it was a better idea just to leave it and say - well the person who is the crofter is automatically the shareholder."⁹²

The early part of this quote illustrates the way in which people have become accustomed to the existing landownership system. It is naturalised and hence its impacts and power are made much less visible. The latter part of this quote illustrates the difficulty of finding, explaining and understanding the potential legal structures. In the event, the Assynt Crofters Ltd model, involving preference shares, was abandoned in favour of the Assynt Crofters Trust Ltd - a company limited by guarantee with no share capital. In this second structure, the membership must be applied for and dies with the member.

As will be seen later, support for the idea and confidence grew as each practical step was taken. The whole idea became less of an abstract and dramatic stand and more of a practical '*do-able*' process. This quote from later in the summer of 1992 illustrates that:

"I think there's more confidence now than there was at the beginning. I think a lot of people were maybe 50/50. Wary of it at the beginning, but now I think, since they've done the feasibility study and some other things, they're beginning to think - well. It's a possibility. Or even getting the money together. At first people thought - well, this is ridiculous! Even attempting such a thing!"⁹³

Another common aspiration in support of the idea was the notion that perhaps, if a crofting community buy-out could be achieved in Assynt, it

⁹²Fieldwork 1991 ACT female 55 - 60

⁹³Fieldwork 1991 ACT female 55 - 60

would offer a practical way forward for other communities faced with similar issues:

"If this comes off, a lot of others might follow suit."⁹⁴

A further similar idea was that, even if a buy-out was not achieved in Assynt, another group somewhere else would achieve it in the not too distant future, and meantime in Assynt a whole lot could be learned about how to and how not to do it.

Aspirations

It is clear that the motivations for even considering a community buy-out were varied. For some local residents and crofters the idea, and the principles, were immediately electrifying. Others were cautious and initially somewhat overawed by the audacity of the idea, and of course fearful that at heart it was an heroic stand based on anger at historical wrongs which would not survive economically. Some residents and crofters were totally disinterested in the idea at the outset, but did not wish to hold back the growing numbers who were both enthusiastic and increasingly committed to giving it a try. A minority were not at all interested in the idea and remained disinterested, but were not actively opposed to the idea.

In discussing the idea, debate inevitably had to move onto practical matters fairly quickly. If the idea was to be taken seriously locally and by those outside the area, the growing group involved in discussions would have to explain their motivations in ways that would be easily understood and avoid being caricatured as fanciful, heroic and impractical. For this reason, although private motivations were almost always influenced by Highland and crofting history, public debate began quickly to focus on other reasons for giving this a go. One way of doing this was to consider what actions a potential Trust as landowner could take to tackle current local problems.

"Oh you can't hope to compete for houses that are up on the market. I think that townships now will be trying to identify land on the common grazings that could be made available for housing. That would be a big step forward."⁹⁵

⁹⁴Fieldwork 1991 ACT female 60 - 65

⁹⁵Fieldwork 1991 ACT male 45 - 50

Affordable local housing for rent came high on many people's wish list. Environmental projects, including native woodlands, were also mentioned. In the early weeks specific ideas of what might be achieved in the event of a successful buy-out were not well developed because meeting the challenge of trying to create a buy-out for such a small group of people in the height of the summer was a big job in itself. There was a general appreciation that success would open up a range of possibilities, yet to be imagined, some of which would take a long time to develop:

"It seems to me that the Crofters Trust, with the collateral of the land behind them, should be helping townships maybe put cattle on the common grazings or community grazings. Help the land, you know? Through doing something positive. I think we should be thinking along those lines you know? I think, were we to win the land, we have a big responsibility to show people haven't supported us for nothing."⁹⁶

Team Work in Action

The first significant step, as already hinted, was when members of the community took the view that these circumstances were their business. The *ownership of the issue* was with the local people. Local expertise was used to develop the campaign and additional expert advice brought in as required. At all stages the aim was to enable the community to take positive decisions. The experience of taking negative decisions - or continually rejecting the options presented - does not build momentum or resolve. It does not produce in the imagination a notion of a future worth striving for. It was particularly important to not be in any way manipulative by presenting non-contentious options and decisions which were easy to take. Material and decisions needed to be structured to avoid threat and to reduce to a minimum the potential for individuals to start falling out with each other. To maintain, this the leaders sought a mandate from the membership at each and every stage and had a good '*feel*' for what members concerns, hopes and fears were.

The ability, clarity and conviction of Allan MacRae and Bill Ritchie gave others confidence and inspiration. The practical implications of any course of action were quickly and professionally addressed. It was a process of creative

⁹⁶Fieldwork 1991 ACT male 45 - 50

thinking based strictly on the facts. Simply celebrating a position of powerless moral superiority would not have been transforming. The experience of many of those involved in past efforts to build a community hall, run the Assynt Highland Games or any other such project provided a good grounding in getting organised and getting the job done. The will to prevent the break up of the estate translated into the decision to try to buy the land into community ownership. This proposal enjoyed the **unanimous support** of the public meeting to which it was presented.

Many of the early decisions taken, by the community as represented at public meetings or the steering group, involved seeking additional information on current circumstances and options for action.

Early progress on securing public agency and local authority support had been achieved because Bill Ritchie, described at the first formal meeting of the Steering Group on 24th July 1992 by Allan MacRae, as "*the architect of the Assynt Crofters Trust*", had good contacts in these agencies already.⁹⁷ In order for a small community group to achieve that type of support in principle, even before becoming formally constituted, the group needs to understand the remit of each agency and the right person to approach. Put another way, a key skill is knowing who not to approach. No public agency or local authority is a monolith. Internal politics are at work. An early approach to the wrong person - one disinterested or obstructive to the community group's aims - can set back the group's momentum hugely and mislead that group into assuming no help or support can be achieved. If the group or its representatives understand the agency's remit, they can present a more professional case for help, by relating their own ambitions with the key activities of the particular agency. This will help agency staff to present their case within their own organisation. If at all possible, the community group needs to identify individuals likely to take an active interest and then '*cultivate*' those individuals. The community group can gain most from having a friend or '*insider*' in each relevant agency, who lobbies internally on their behalf and advises informally on the most effective presentation of aims, routes to help and the likelihood of success. Bill Ritchie was well networked

with regard to CASE, HIE and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). Highland Regional Council was unknown territory for him. He therefore took the next best route - cast around for someone else who did know who to go to. For a community group to be successful at this, they or their representatives need to learn to work the system and present themselves as the epitome of what that particular agency seeks to achieve through its own remit. At best the community group can then be seen as a way of delivering part of that remit and improving agency performance. Identifying appropriate contacts in each agency is crucial since that individual can use their own skills and knowledge on behalf of the group, very effectively widening the range of skills at the group's disposal without disrupting the group's key aims, structure and motivations. On the point of identifying and '*befriending*' the right kind of contact in strategically important agencies, this is what any successful business does in cultivating productive working friendships.

Campaign

By mid-July a significant body of information had been gathered and discussed. Some publicity had been raised through one press release in early June. A plan had been created to tackle the task which the Assynt crofters set themselves. With this strategy agreed, it was time to '*go public*'. This section examines the tactics created by the ACT in order to mount and run their campaign. Since the tactics which were developed are strongly related to the themes, discussed in the previous section, which influenced this example of community action, some repetition emerges in this section. The purpose of this is to provide as full an account as possible of the tactics, since this is of relevance to other examples of community action.

⁹⁷From Minute of Meeting.

Strategy

The ACT themselves summarised the key objectives of their strategy in 1992 thus:

1. Prevent the Sale
 - it is 99% croft land
 - occupied by angry crofters
 - controlled by crofting regulations
 - including the 'right to buy'
 - press campaign
2. Purchase the Estate
 - each crofting family to aim for £1000
 - launch public appeal
 - seek grant aid
3. Succeed⁹⁸

What key actions were taken in order to achieve these objectives? By mid-July 1992, a good start had been made on achieving all of the points under Objective 1: Prevent the Sale. This had been achieved locally through discussions, meetings and the decision to form a company to raise money to buy the land into community ownership. More publicly, this had been achieved through the early press release quoted above. Both the decision of the crofting group to take this action and the implications of the legal status of the croft land in terms of estate sale and purchase price had been communicated by the Assynt crofters to the selling agent. CASE had put out a press release in support of the Assynt Crofters Trust aspirations. CASE had also, in addition to funding the feasibility study and business plan, offered significant funding for a Project Officer once the land was in community ownership. SNH and the Crofters Commission had sent letters of support to the Steering Group. The John Muir Trust had begun discussion with representative of the Steering Group to establish whether a partnership buy-out was a suitable vehicle and an acceptable option to the Assynt Crofters Trust members. Individuals in HIE had suggested that an organisation such as the ACT might be viewed as a '*community enterprise business*' and might, on that basis, be eligible for support. Charitable status was being applied for.

⁹⁸This information is an ACT checklist or prompt for giving talks to visitors and other community groups.

The Press campaign was just beginning and work on Objective 2: Purchase Estate was in motion.

Going Public

It was agreed that the press should be invited to the public launch of the ACT Appeal. An Appeal document, summarising the ACT objectives and explaining how members of the public could help was drawn up. A great deal of thought and rewriting went into producing the final version, as Simon Fraser explains:

"The appeal document that went out.... You know we thought about it before, and I wrote it on the boat on the way over... I was trying to scribble it out. Took it from the Irish Declaration of Independence, Easter Sunday 1916! We, the people of Assynt, have resolved together to buy the land, not for reasons motivated by political or romantic sentiment, but because we believe that ... Bill Ritchie shortened it a wee bit."⁹⁹

A form for making donations and pledges to the ACT was also produced. These are reproduced here in Figure 5.3 and Figure 5.4. It was decided that anyone who donated £500 or more would be made an Honorary Member and perhaps receive a regular Newsletter in the future. A book listing the names of all those who made a donation was also planned for local public display.

⁹⁹Fieldwork 1993 Simon Fraser

Figure 5.3: Assynt Crofters Trust Appeal Document

ASSYNT CROFTERS TRUST FUND APPEAL

The North Lochinver Estate was sold by the millionaire Vestey family to a foreign property company - SPS Ltd. That company is now bankrupt and our croft land is being broken up and offered for sale again in small lots. The land is virtually all croft land.

We the crofters have resolved to band together to buy the estate, not for reason motivated by political or romantic sentiment but because we believe that to give our crofting communities the best chance of surviving and prospering in the future, control of our resources - especially the land - will be our best chance.

The crofters are forming a Company Limited by Guarantee - to be known as The Assynt Crofters Trust - and we hope to achieve charitable status. Membership and control of the Trust will be restricted to the crofting tenants of the North Lochinver Estate.

The stated objects of the Trust will be

to raise funds by way of donation by the crofters and friends, and grant to purchase our land and other resources in the North Lochinver Estate

to improve the social, educational and cultural environment of the crofting communities and of the natural environment of Assynt Sutherland.

to help fund viable investment and to secure property development and its management and to secure land renewal and environmental and improvement projects for the crofting communities.

If we are successful 100% of the development value will be retained locally for re-investment instead of 50% being extracted by absentee landlords.

We can create affordable house sites for our local young people.

We can embark on woodland and other management projects creating some part-time employment.

We will create an atmosphere of optimism and opportunity and may be able to help our young people stay in their own communities and develop economic opportunities.

Whilst we expect some support from the public agencies it is vital that we the crofters raise most of the funds ourselves with help from our many friends.

What's in it for me?

Frankly, a place in history if we succeed. Every person who donates to our trust fund will receive a certificate and will have their name in a roll of honour which will be bound and placed in Stoer Post Office. Everyone who donates £500 or more will be entitled to become an Honorary Member of Assynt Crofters Trust without voting rights and receive regular updates on our activities.

How can I help?

If you would like to help the crofters secure their land and their future, complete the attached form carefully, sign it and send with your donation or pledge to Assynt Crofters Trust, Lochinver. If our offer - which will be based on the funds donated and promised by our pledges - is successful we will call on you to honour your pledge.

If we are unsuccessful in having our offer accepted the crofters of Assynt are resolved to acquire the title to our croft lands through the Scottish Land Court.

WE HAVE HISTORY, JUSTICE AND THE LAW ON OUR SIDE.
WITH HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS WE WILL SUCCEED.

Figure 5. 4: Assynt Crofters Trust Pledge Document

ASSYNT CROFTERS TRUST FUND APPEAL

Please complete section one or two only sign below and return before 24th August if possible.

SECTION ONE

If you would like to **donate less than £400** please complete this section, sign this document at the bottom and **forward your donation /cheque made out to Assynt Crofters Trust Fund** to the address below.

INAME
OFADDRESS
.....
.....
.....POST CODETELEPHONE

I hereby donate to Assynt Crofters Trust Fund the sum of £.....
for the purpose of buying and administering all or part of the North Lochinver Estate on the understanding that if the Crofters fail to buy all or part of the estate my donation will be returned to me.

SECTION TWO

Help the tax man help us! If you are a **UK taxpayer at the basic or higher rate** and would like to **donate £400 or more** please complete this section which will enable us to claim back the tax paid on your donation if you make it as a Gift Aid and we are successful in achieving charitable status. We will send you the necessary form when we call on you to honour your pledge. **Do not send your donation.**

INAME
OFADDRESS
.....
.....
.....POST CODETELEPHONE

I hereby pledge to donate to Assynt Crofters Trust Fund the sum of £.....
for the purpose of buying and administering all or part of the North Lochinver Estate. In the event that the Crofters offer to buy all or part of the estate is successful I will honour this pledge immediately when called upon to do so.

When you have completed section one or two please sign below and send this form to

**ASSYNT CROFTERS TRUST FUND
LOCHINVER
SUTHERLAND
IV27 4JB**

SIGNED.....DATE.....

The Launch

The Launch of the ACT Public Appeal was organised for Tuesday 28th July 1992. The venue this time was Stoer School. Local interest and support had grown to such an extent that Stoer Hall – or The Library, as it is locally known - was no longer big enough to accommodate everyone at a public meeting. All those eligible for membership of the proposed Company - the Assynt Crofters Trust - were asked to bring £1 and a pen. The meetings thus far had been packed - standing room only, with groups perched on every windowsill. This meeting was no exception, and about one hundred and twenty people were in attendance. A press release had been sent out and the media were there in force. At the front of the room sat the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Secretary of the Steering Group (Allan MacRae, John MacKenzie and Bill Ritchie) along with the lawyer, Simon Fraser. The meeting opened, and the story to date was presented for the benefit of all present.

Allan MacRae opened the meeting, thanking everyone for turning out and extending particular thanks to Robert MacLennan MP for attending. Bill Ritchie thanked everyone who had to date offered their support in a range of forms. He explained that the purpose of the intended action was to safeguard the land and the future, by offering a fair price for the estate. He emphasised that the group had a '*just claim*' and would make a '*just offer*'. If that failed, he explained, the ACT would resort to the Land Court, and through those means, demand title to the land. The big challenge was to raise funds in time for the sellers' deadline.

He outlined three possible approaches:

- offer a bid for everything, taking a partner if necessary
- offer a bid for everything except non-croft land
- acquire title by using the '*Fall-back position*,' i.e. the Land Court

However things might turn out, the ACT was optimistic about the future. Robert MacLennan gave an emotional speech in support of the ACT action and pledged £50 for every year he had been in Parliament - a total of twenty

six years and £1300. He explained that since his people had been cleared from the Ullapool area, he could personally identify strongly with this cause.¹⁰⁰

The team at the top table handed round the Appeal document to all present. As illustrated above, this A4 leaflet laid out the aims and objectives of the proposed Company. The motion, "*that you agree in principle that we should form a company to buy the land*", was presented to the meeting and passed unanimously. One by one the crofters came forward to sign with their pen and pay their £1 membership to form the Assynt Crofters Trust Ltd. By the end of the evening, the Assynt Crofters Trust had 111 members.

Live at Six: Demonstrating a Strong Mandate

The next day this moment was broadcast to '*the nation*' on the Six O'Clock News. All the major Scottish and some UK newspapers carried the story. In the summer of 1992, many in the Scottish media were hungry for a '*feel-good*' story. During the General Election campaigns earlier that year, the suggestions that the Conservative Government might lose had come to nothing. Again they were returned with almost no Scottish mandate, despite press speculation to the contrary. In Scotland there was an increasing disillusion with the so-called democratic process and party politics and so the Assynt Crofters Trust action had the potential to change the mood of a nation.

From the ACT point of view, what did the Public Launch achieve? It established beyond all reasonable doubt that the Assynt Crofters Trust was much more than one or two '*over-excited activists*'. It demonstrated that the Assynt Crofters Trust had an extremely high level of support within the community and was formally and legally constituted on a democratic basis. The press coverage illustrated very forcibly the strong mandate possessed by the ACT leaders, and also the wide support, both within the community and outwith, which the ACT had already achieved.

The appeal document established the professionalism and seriousness of their intent. (See Figure 5.3) It was a professionally typed document and was well presented. It began, '*We, the people of Assynt,*' a phrase with a powerful effect

¹⁰⁰ Robert MacLennan was referring to the fact that his forebears were among those removed

on public and community alike. In the first paragraph it took on the common caricature of crofting politics and land debate in the Highlands and Islands. The document states :

"We the crofters have resolved to band together to buy the estate, not for reason motivated by political or romantic sentiment but because we believe that to give our crofting communities the best chance of surviving and prospering in the future, control of our resources - especially the land - will be our best chance." ¹⁰¹

Again, in the public domain, the emotional issue of '*righting past wrongs*' is downplayed by the ACT themselves. It is however foregrounded by ACT supporters, as illustrated in the emotional, indeed tearful, speech made by Robert MacLennan. The appeal document goes on to outline the aims and objectives of the Assynt Crofters Trust which included:

"i) to raise funds to buy the land
ii) to improve the social, educational, cultural and natural environment of the crofting communities in Assynt, Sutherland
ii) to help fund viable investment and secure property development for the crofting communities."¹⁰²

Speaking 'Their' Language

The appeal document talked of '*viable investment*' and the creation of '*an atmosphere of optimism and opportunity*'. The discourse created, had strong resonance with the language and ideology of both the Local Enterprise Company network and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE). The Assynt Crofters Trust Ltd. presented itself as the very epitome of '*community enterprise*'. In so doing the Assynt Crofters Trust moved the arena of debate from the deadlock of past land debate and passed '*the credibility burden*' from themselves to the public agencies, most particularly HIE. This involved an active engagement with enterprise discourse. The campaign was a strategy based on the use of enterprise discourse, while clearly standing in opposition to the Thatcherite ideologies on which such a discourse is based. The ACT subverted this voluntarist, Thatcherite enterprise discourse in its own interests and through this creative subversion, redrew the boundaries of the debate arena. In this way, the ACT secured material gains in the form of

from land in the Ullapool area during the Clearances.

¹⁰¹Quote from BBC TV News coverage.

grant support. It was not about the end of society, but rather the strength of community and culture. By using this *'enterprise'* discourse as the main campaigning aim or identity, the ACT passed the credibility burden to HIE and avoided the political stalemate or failure, in the public domain, which would have resulted from a staging of ACT aims in terms of *'The Land Question'* debate.

Building a Public Identity

What has happened here? One of the key risks in basing the whole appeal on the moral justice of the *'crofters'* claim to this land is that the group will be perceived as *'never having got over the Clearances'*. Other possible negative views would have been that *'they will just end up fighting each other,'* or, from *'business minded people'*, that they will struggle to collect the rents and be forever limping along financially.

The public launch required the Assynt Crofters Trust to represent themselves in the public arena. In doing this the Assynt crofters were aware of the sort of stereotypes they would encounter and reinvented themselves. Any successful group stage manages their entrance into the public domain. This is not about cynicism and marketing; it is about identity and representation in a transforming moment created by action. They did not deny the effect of the past on contemporary material circumstances. Indeed, they boldly declared that they had *'History, Justice and the Law'* on their side. This appealed to the general public who donated generously to the fund. But they simultaneously perfected the art of living in their own times - the whole plan was played out by the field rules of the dominant culture. They sought to buy the land on the open market, set up a Limited Company and encourage appropriate inward investment. They were presenting themselves as crofters of the 1990's, businesslike and professional in terms of the civilised and rational values of British jurisprudence. They did not ask for anything for nothing other than support for their plan. James. C. Scott refers to this as *'talking up'*; a subordinate group's challenge to the dominant ideologies or demands on democracy tends to be hidden. In seeking to achieve the aim, social interaction involves power laden encounters and forms of discourse are

¹⁰²ACT Appeal Document - see Figure 4.3.

tailored accordingly and strategically. The Assynt Crofters want '*to take back the land*' because they represent the epitome of enterprise! But such apparent consensus in the public arena does not automatically negate dissent. The tactics of the less powerful should not be mistaken for the whole story - or the '*hidden transcript*'. Scott's work focuses on examples from the developing world. The usefulness of his approach is that it privileges issues of dignity and autonomy which are often seen as secondary to material exploitation. The evidence in Assynt is that it is this very issue of dignity and the legitimation in a public arena of certain values and historical readings which is at stake.

Talking Up

The public transcript involves '*talking up*', employing certain sanctioned discourses to gain access to the public arena, to gain an audience and legitimacy. In parts of the world where dissent finds public expression rarely, the public declaration of the hidden transcript - or the '*raw declaration*' in his terms - is an euphoric moment. In less extreme instances of subordination he talks of '*cooked*' rather than raw declarations:

"Cooked declarations are more likely to be nuanced and elaborate because they arise under circumstances in which there is a good deal of offstage freedom among subordinate groups, allowing them to share a rich and deep hidden transcript. In a sense the hidden transcript of such subordinate groups is already a product of mutual communication that already has a quasi-public existence."¹⁰³

In applying for HIE funding as a community enterprise business and in aiming to raise a significant part of the sum required from among themselves, the ACT models itself as '*enterprising*', '*risk taking*' and more than eager to '*stand on their own two feet*'. The group's fluency in communicating through this discourse was hugely effective. Quickly the principle of community land ownership was freed from a '*leftist*' and/or nationalist positions within party political thinking, and was seen by all four political parties as a vehicle for delivering some of their own principles and illustrating the rightness of each party's political thinking. This is a strong position to be in.

¹⁰³p261 Scott J. C. 1991 *Weapons of the Weak*

The extent to which this occurred in media comment after the public launch is well illustrated by comments made by James Hunter in a *Scotsman* article that summer:

"For all that community ownership of land is perfectly commonplace in many western European countries, including some whose political credentials are impeccably right-wing, such is the history of these matters in the Highlands and Islands as to make it highly likely that the notion of the Assynt Crofters Trust taking over the North Lochinver Estate will be greeted in some quarters as the first step on a road likely to lead inexorably to the red flag being hoisted over Dunrobin Castle.

If developments in Assynt do indeed evoke this type of tired and prejudiced response in the places where it matters politically - and especially if Scottish Office ministers should adopt a neutral or even hostile position with regard to the possibility of community ownership - the Conservative party will have missed an important opportunity to apply their own social and economic thinking more imaginatively than usual."¹⁰⁴

Figure 5.5 provides a collage of a selection of press cuttings from 1992. It is noticeable that the headlines frequently refer to the *'emotional'*, historical aspects of the campaign and are not generally as strategically sensitive as the Hunter article quoted above. Later that month a letter of support from a government minister was received. It took supportive *'noises'* from the Scottish Office to nudge the Chief Executive at HIE into approving financial support. While key HIE staff had been supportive from the outset, the official response from HIE had not been enthusiastic. CASE had gone against HIE in its early support.

Deconstructing the Scottish Landownership Pattern

A crucial aspect of the ACT tactics was the way in which the spokespeople critically engaged with Scottish land tenure and land ownership structures and patterns. In doing this, the ACT was effective in shifting the debate into new territory and created for themselves a well informed and well argued *'moral'* position. This was a moral position which did not rely on the Clearances and the positionality of *'victim'*. It was a self-consciously modern and articulate stance.

There were four strands to this *'deconstruction'*. These were:

¹⁰⁴James Hunter 7th August 1992 *Putting faith in the Trust* The Scotsman.

- proposing the concept of a '*fair price*' with regard to the functioning of land as a commodity
- illustrating and explaining the implications of crofting tenure on land as a commodity
- using the potential legal rights of the '*crofter*' to explain why any other buyer would be ill advised to buy the North Lochinver Estate
- using those same legal rights to create a second strategy - or '*Fall-back position*' - to strengthen the position of the ACT

Figure 5.5: Collage of Topical Press Cuttings



'A Fair Price'

Instead of taking the *'asking price'* in the seller's brochure as a guide price, the ACT examined what was for sale and calculated its monetary value by using a different value system:

"We're not in a bidding position. We're not in a silly position of raising silly money to compete with silly people. We'll be making what we believe to be a morally justified stance and offering a **fair price** to get our land back."¹⁰⁵

The sellers asking price was £473,000. In view of the individual croft tenant's right to buy under the auspices of the '76 Act, the ACT first calculated the agricultural *'price tag'* using the formula prescribed in that Act. The formula is that the price for an individual tenant to buy will be set at fifteen times the annual rent. By this reckoning, since the total rents for the North Lochinver Estate were quoted as £2,608, the ACT asserted that a fair price for the title would be in the region of £40,000. The ACT then assessed what other assets were offered in the Sale and priced these too.

In terms of *'sporting assets'*, the eight to ten stags per year were calculated at £80,000. Torbreck House was valued at £90,000. This came to a total value of £210,000. In private the ACT assumed that a little more might be added, if a *'friendly'* buy-out was achieved, and a little more after that if it was proved that, despite their best efforts, there was competition from other buyers:

"We've made it perfectly clear all along - we don't hide the fact at all - that if we fail to buy it, at what we call a non-offensive price - that is, we've had it valued, and our offer will be based on that evaluation, and the money we've raised. ... If that's refused and they go ahead and break it up into small lots then the crofters seem pretty determined to use the Act to take the land."¹⁰⁶

The ACT's *'non-offensive'* price, in the region of £220,000 - £250,000, fell some £250,000 short of the asking price for all the Lots. By invoking the concept of a *'fair price'*, the ACT presented themselves as having *'justice'* on their side and did not come across in public utterances as a group out to get *'something for nothing'*. A stance like this in the early-1990s, following the 1980s *'me'*

¹⁰⁵Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 50 - 55

¹⁰⁶Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 50 - 55

decade, which had seen public and state altruism dwindle, money and personal gain acquiring new dimensions and the worth of a concept such as 'society' brought into question, this 'moral' aspect to the tactics might arguably have sounded rather refreshing to some people.

Devaluing the Estate

An important part of the ACT press campaign focused on explaining that, despite the descriptions offered by the selling agent, the North Lochinver Estate *is not* a sporting estate as is normally understood. The presence of sporting game does not mean that it is a sporting estate. The press campaign explained that only 1% of the land was not in crofting tenure although the 99% of the land in crofting tenure is still available to the land owner for sporting purposes. However, the type and quality of that ground meant that it is not a quality sporting property. In fact, its sporting value was minimal, from a landlord's point of view.

When the implications of crofting tenure are taken into account, the use value of the estate was much reduced: minimal shooting, brown trout fishing, no development land, as Lotted only one cottage and one house. The land in crofting tenure could not be taken by the landowner unless the croft tenants agreed and were compensated. This might, from time to time, be possible on common grazings, but would be impossible on inbye ground, arguably the most potentially commercial ground. The sale of house sites, often used by sporting estates to boost estate incomes, would not be a possibility. The income generating potential of the estate in any hands, other than the ACT, would be minimal or almost non-existent. By pointing this out, the ACT in effect devalued the estate in terms of the market.

The Fall-Back Position

".. this guy had put money up for Eigg and he withdrew and he was phoning Bill Ritchie and he told Bill Ritchie that anybody - he told him about the situation on Eigg. He also expressed an interest in the Torbreck House, and he also said that any landowner in their right mind wouldn't bid on the North Lochinver estate. That was totally out of the question, with all the media support and everything else that the crofters have had - and the fact that it doesn't matter if Plan One doesn't succeed. Plan Two is bound to succeed - where you can buy-out at 15 times your annual rent. Then you're only left with 50 acres!

[which could not be bought in this way] That is the only part that's not involved in crofting. So - as the man said, it's only a madman that would put a bid in for the North Lochinver estate."¹⁰⁷

If the Assynt Crofters Trust raised the necessary capital and managed to put in a bid for the land, in the event of their bid being refused, the Assynt Crofters Trust had a powerful 'fall-back position' - or Plan 2. The Assynt Crofters Trust pointed out that should anyone outbid them and take ownership of their Estate, the crofters would begin to buy all of their ground at fifteen times the annual rent as decreed in the 1976 Crofting Reform Act ('76 Act) and transfer this ground directly to a third party - the Assynt Crofters Trust. It would then only be a matter of time, they argued, before title for all but the non-croft fifty acres was held by the ACT. The '*Kinlochewe Ruling*', discussed above, made this legally possible and further legal advice confirmed that it was possible. This tactic illustrates that community groups can make powerful strategic use of legal and statutory circumstances and that successful groups include this type of tactic in their '*weapons of the weak*', in order to gain strategic advantages.

In practice this approach would have been costly, prolonged and difficult. To maintain group momentum over the time this would take to achieve would have been very taxing. The first step would have been for each township to apportion and fence their common grazings. To use the provisions of the '76 Act, each apportionment would have to be contiguous to the croft involved. Given that some grazings are in blocks of land completely separate from the inbye ground - the Achnacarnin extension being a good example - the mapping of this alone would have required considerable imagination. Then each apportionment would have to be fenced. At a notional cost of about £4 per metre for several thousands of metres - in reality, miles of fence - implementation of the Fall-back Position would have been a real headache. There would also have been legal fees for the transfer of each title to be paid for.

Despite the practical and financial challenges of implementing this threat, it was still a very effective tactic in the campaign. It meant that the campaign

¹⁰⁷Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 50 - 55

had the option of more than way ahead, which made members more secure in their efforts.

The Crofters 'Right to Buy': Scaring Off the Competition

If the publicity their campaign had created didn't scare off the opposition, then the Fall-back Position surely would. It would make the Estate worthless to any potential owner other than themselves. The crofters prepared the legal groundwork for this Fall-back Position and were in a position to proceed if necessary. Their seriousness in this strengthened their position despite the fact that in reality such a move would be legally complex and time-consuming. It was nevertheless a powerful and well-researched option which posed a real threat to any other potential buyer not dissuaded from purchase through support of the local cause or fear of unfriendly '*natives*'.

The Fall-back Position, combined with the other arguments discussed above, was aimed at dissuading other potential bidders from trying to buy the estate. The aim was to make clear that should an individual buy this estate, by outbidding the ACT, the new owner would have over one hundred even angrier tenants to factor. Moreover, those tenants would immediately and systematically set about depriving this notional purchaser of the land so recently bought from under the crofters. One would have thought that this would have been enough to scare off any potential buyer. In fact, a few maintained an interest until quite far into the campaign. Some of them however, proved invaluable to the ACT in ways which will be discussed later.

Press Campaign

From early in the campaign, even before the ACT had been created, press releases and press interviews were provided by group representatives. The leadership were able to ascertain which journalists were sympathetic to the crofters' cause and honourable in their reporting and working practises. Figure 5.5 above provides an insight into the sort of headlines which were being generated and in the next Chapter, consideration is given to the content of press coverage. The leadership cultivated good working relationships with those journalists. As the situation developed, this made it possible to be confident in dealing with the press and to ensure effective, disciplined press

coverage. For the purposes of raising awareness of the Public Appeal for funds and in scaring off other potential buyers, the high press profile which the ACT achieved was critical. Again, the relationship with the press which the ACT developed was a crucial aspect of the *'weapons of the weak'*.

Professionalism

The message put forward by the ACT was very largely a consistent, measured and disciplined one. All of the tactics - or arguments - were well thought through and those presenting them, the ACT office bearers, were very effective in their delivery of that *'message'*. Likewise all letters and other documents were professionally presented and finished to a high standard. The group, as portrayed in media coverage, moved in an orderly and organised fashion from discussion to creating a legally and democratically constituted organisation. From there the group launched a Public Appeal, with all the appropriate legal and financial arrangements in place.

This impression of careful organisation and democratic, planned tactics made a strong impression on the general public and on agencies. This seemed to be a highly motivated and organised group, speaking with one voice. The overall effect inspired confidence and implied effectiveness and professionalism. The strong working relationship with a range of journalists helped to avoid undermining, divisive coverage. Only on one occasion in 1992 was this discipline broken, when a potential funding agency released details of a potential funding offer, and importantly, the funders conditions, to the press before an agreement had been reached with the full Steering Group. The Steering Group Chair responded critically through the press. The effect of this undermined the otherwise professional discipline of the group for a few days, but was overcome through goodwill on both sides.

Using Cultural Vocabularies

The approaches made to the public agencies for funding were done, as mentioned earlier, by *'speaking their language'*. The ACT was presented as the epitome of *'community enterprise'*. The economic and environmental potential of this type of democratisation of land ownership were stressed. Simultaneously, however, this enterprise discourse was woven into another

type of discourse which resonated across the Highlands and Islands, Scotland and beyond. This discourse employed more cultural vocabularies and in juxtaposition with the opening phrase of the Appeal document - '*not for political or romantic sentiment*' - operated as a kind of open joke.

This discourse referred unashamedly to crofting representations of history. It is for this reason that the Appeal document finishes with the phrase '*With History, Justice and the Law on Our Side*'. '*The Law*' here is crofting law and the recent Kinlochewe Ruling. '*Justice*' refers both to the righting of past wrongs and to the peculiar legacy of the feudal land ownership system from which Scotland continues to suffer. '*History*' refers squarely to the injustice of the land '*taken from the people*' in the 18th and 19th century. It offers the tantalising possibility of rewriting history. In explaining what people making donations and pledges in support of the campaign might get out of it, the Appeal document states: "*Frankly, a place in history if we succeed*".¹⁰⁸ The '*place in history*' on offer is implied to stretch well beyond the confines of Assynt based communities.

In press interviews and television appearances, Allan MacRae and John MacKenzie, in particular, referred to the past – to the suffering and injustice of the past. In the BBC Landward documentary that summer, John MacKenzie clarified that this action is not revenge:

"but us simply seeking to exercise our historical right in taking back what was taken from us in the first place. We seek, quite simply, to redress the balance of generations gone by".¹⁰⁹

For the Highland Diaspora, this was a strong message which drew strong and often very emotional support:

"We're simply asking people to help us prove that it can be done differently because the price is beyond the crofters. Now that clearly is a problem. The fact that we're relying on - when I say relying on - the bulk of the money is going to come from the crofters, but you know, we have asked for the public to support us and we've had a huge range of support. We've had pensioners writing in with £5 or £6 cheques, but you know, touching letters. Old people and some saying things like, you know, in memory of my grandfather who was cleared from Rossal

¹⁰⁸ACT Appeal Document. See Figure 4.3.

¹⁰⁹John MacKenzie Landward BBC 1992.

and in memory of my grandfather who was a Land Leaguer. And they're very touching. Morally, it's a great moral boost and it is a financial boost. When you add it up, it's surprising what it comes to. And that's one extreme. We've had individual donations of £1000, and more, from non-crofters. They've not been many, but it's significant and it's helping."¹¹⁰

The reason that this type of strong support was generated, through the operation of this open joke, was not only because the idea of '*taking back the land*' was so powerful, but also because by that very act, by the discipline and professionalism that the ACT displayed, they were actively and knowingly undermining and dismantling the historic constructions of crofters and Highlanders as comic, incompetent, helpless '*children*'. (See Chapter Three) Simultaneously, the Public Appeal for support added another strand to the emergent international Gaidhealtachd. The ACT sent letters to a contact in South Australia, an absentee croft tenant in Sao Paulo, Brazil, The Clan MacLeod Society of Australia, and to '*The Scottish Banner*', a New York based publication. These are but examples. Individuals in Assynt and with Assynt connections sent information and appeals for help right across the globe. In my own family alone, Appeal documents and Pledge documents were sent to family in France, Canada, Australia, USA and England. A Canadian newspaper published a significant article on the ACT '*struggle*'. The Glasgow Sutherland Association was also approached by ACT for support and in order to publicise the need for support more widely. Since a very significant number of Assinteach out-migrants went to Glasgow over the generations, The Glasgow Sutherland Association has always been a very significant organisation. In my childhood, when we lived in Glasgow, we and about a dozen children, all '*from*' Clashmore, were sent annually to the Glasgow Sutherland Children's Christmas Parties. Each autumn, to this day, '*The Sutherland*' occurs. This is a robust weekend of ceilidhs, dinners and drams in Glasgow, to which, in my childhood, a huge range of age groups from Assynt and Glasgow-Assynt attended without fail. Today, a community bus taking the older generations to this event is run each year, but it is no longer the ultimate annual social event it once was.

¹¹⁰Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 50 - 55

This international aspect to the Appeal illustrates an aspect of diasporic cultures which Homi Bhabha explores: imaginary reunification. Notwithstanding Spivak's comments on '*identity*' discussed in Chapter Three, he explains that cultural identity is about '*becoming*' as well as '*being*'. It is about the future as well as the past. This becoming and being involves rupture and difference: it is not about a unitary or homogenous political object, nor about recovering voices from the past or the margins. Diasporic identities are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference. The ACT is a moment in this structure of iteration. The transformative impact of the ACT, in the Highlands and Islands, was to disrupt the experience of self as other. In emergent forms of representation, the idea of cultural identity as '*one-ness*' can be a powerful and creative force amongst hitherto marginalised peoples. The moment can require an act of imaginary reunification and strategic essentialism since despite the actors fragmentation in their time-space trajectory, the assertion is that '*we*' are all '*crofters*', with a shared vision and common goals. By contacting groups and individuals in the key receiving locations of Gaidhealtachd out-migration, ACT challenges this wide range of people and implies '*community*' and common cause. Given that the dominant story of crofting is one of forced movement, emigration, pain and poverty, resulting in people all over the world actively asserting their '*Highlandness*', the production of identity in the Highlands and Islands can usefully be viewed as diasporic. The process of gathering back in these disparate peoples/groups can be usefully viewed as imaginary reunification.

When engaging with the uses of history, tradition and Highland or crofting identities in the ACT story, Bhabha's explanation of difference and performative identities is illuminating:

"Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively. The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge at moments of historical transformation. The 'right' to signify from the periphery of authorized power and privilege does not depend on the persistence of tradition; it is resourced by the power of tradition to be reinscribed through the conditions of contingency and contradictoriness that attend upon the lives of those in the 'minority'. The recognition that tradition bestows

is a partial form of identification. In restaging the past it introduces other, incommensurable cultural temporalities into the invention of tradition. This process estranges any immediate access to an originary identity or a 'received' tradition. The borderline engagements of cultural difference may as often be consensual as conflictual; they may confound our definitions of tradition and modernity; realign the customary boundaries between private and public; high and low; and challenge normative expectations of development and progress."¹¹¹

Bhabha's approach goes some way to elucidating both the inclusive nature of the ACT Steering Group and the Scotland-wide support the ACT began to enjoy. By transforming the category '*crofter*,' and by implication '*Highlander*', Scottish identities too become transformed since, symbols of '*Scottishness*' have since the 19th century tended to be '*Highland*'. The reinvention of the '*crofter*' as a modern, business-like, enterprising tradition bearer who is starting to assert him/her self, and '*call the shots*', therefore impacts upon senses of Scottishness and in itself creates a degree of imaginary reunification at a Scottish scale too. Consensual borderline encounters with sectors in English society emerge too, particularly with an English press keen to kick against another term of Conservative government. To a certain extent, the '*real*' world had been changed. The ACT campaign and its logic removed potentially negative representations of crofters, crofting and Highlanders as part of their process in order to strengthen their own cause and position.

This new staged identity arose in stark contrast to that usually implied of those who did not emigrate, but who stayed '*at home*' and stands in contrast to definitions of Clearance as economic necessity and emigration as a personal choice. For some, especially early on, it was. However, right up to the present day, recent representations of history have not completely ousted the categorisation of Clearance and Improvement as philanthropic and '*benevolent*':

"All these could be classed as more or less voluntary colonists. [18th century emigrants] Certain groups had of course come against their will, the worst case being the Catholics driven from South Uist by the persecution of a Protestant landlord. But most emigrant Highlanders were not victims, neither dispossessed nor forced by destitution. Rather, they wanted to leave to avoid modernisation, and its threat to their cultural identity. which all sensible Scots thought vital if the Highlands were ever to prosper. That needed the benevolent economic planning and social engineering of which a later age might

¹¹¹p2 Bhabha H. K. 1994 *The Location of Culture* Routledge London.

have approved had they been carried out by the state rather than the only agency available at the time, the landed magnates. The idea among them, fully in accord with the best expert advice, was to develop a Highland economy in which natives would want to remain. Against this philanthropic vision of their future the emigrants in effect mounted a reactionary and intransigent resistance: if they could not hold what they had by staying, then they went."¹¹²

This description comes from a history book published in 2001. Imaginary reunification of Gaidhealtachd peoples occurs in other realms too: for instance, in discussion of the status of and use of the Gaelic language or through musical performance and '*tradition*'. It is worth noting that in other circumstances this imaginary reunification is not consensual in nature. For instance, on occasion populations resident in the Highlands and Islands resent or reject what they see as the '*unreal*' and '*out of touch*' ideas about the place/region presented by diasporic communities in Central Scotland or North America and beyond.

Another significant aspect of the campaign is the way in which the ACT are positioning themselves partially in the Fourth World. The Fourth World is a term used to distinguish '*pre-national*' from the First World and Third World. For instance, Spivak describes the First World in the USA as '*the Fourth World pushed back*'. Communities which can be said to be part of the Fourth World may be located in First World or Third World states. Spivak notes in particular the role of geography in the power-laden activity of mapping and of the maps/boundary creation says:

"They are investment boundaries that change constantly because the dynamics of international capital are fast-moving. One of the not inconsiderable motive forces in the drawing up of these maps is the appropriation of the Fourth World's ecosystems in the name of Development. ... The pre-national is now globalized, after uneven insertion into the nation form of appearance."¹¹³

In a television interview Allan MacRae stated that:

"You can go to many corners of the world and find indigenous people like ourselves seeking to maintain control of their land or seeking to take back lands that were lost to them in the past. There's nothing

¹¹²p99 Fry M. 2001 *The Scottish Empire* Tuckwell Press and Birlinn Edinburgh and East Lothian.

¹¹³p380 in Spivak G. C. 1999 *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* Harvard University Press USA.

unique about us. It's something very basic - a human instinct. People up here are thin on the ground and mostly silent, but they feel strongly about the land. This issue has shown that very clearly, in the unanimous support that we have got. You just can't ignore that."¹¹⁴

In fieldwork interviews this theme also emerged, when people were asked about international parallels and inspirations:

"There's one notable parallel on a much bigger scale in Canada at the moment and the Canadian Indians have been highly successful in motivating their own national government in a fashion that we haven't. ... There are many communities, indigenous communities throughout the world, who are beginning to have significant impact upon national governments. And as I say, there was one particular group in Canada, of Indians. A guy who succeeded in dramatically motivating his brothers, if you like, in raising a campaign for the return of significant areas of land, together with financial aid in order to enable them to develop in commercial terms the areas that they had stated in the enquiry."¹¹⁵

Another interviewee interestingly brought up another part of that Canadian 'story' - the out-migrants as colonisers:

"Well, up here people have gone away from here - the Highlands - people have gone away from the Highlands to all parts of the world. And after all - our colonising forebears - I think their background in areas like this has made them second to none in terms of colonising areas. I think that's important. Well, I mean, you think how hard the rights we have up here on the land - when you realise the tremendous price our forebears paid to win those rights for us - one can never forget that. I think that's important too - for crofters to hang onto their land. Oh aye, very important for a crofter to retain control of their land - very important. Cos if they loose control of their land in places like this, that is the finish of crofting. Areas like this would be just like any other area - we would've lost identity. I think that's the important thing! The important thing is - the crofting system is unique - there's nowhere else in Britain, Ishbel, where ordinary people can have access to land. We have a unique system in the Highlands here. But that's been hard won - hard won - and we have got to ensure that we will hold onto it."¹¹⁶

A number of people did not see into international parallels and did not see anything in the international scene to inspire them:

"No. I don't know of any parallels overseas. No."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴Allan MacRae *Landward* BBC 1992.

¹¹⁵Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 55 - 60

¹¹⁶Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 45 - 50

¹¹⁷Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 60 - 65

"Not really, no. Except in the break up of the Soviet Union. People tend to be trying to take control of their lives more, instead of being under one vast state. It's as if people are finally saying - to hell with it! We're not being pushed around anymore. But apart from that, no. The rise of the little people."¹¹⁸

At least a third of those interviewed did, however, have strong ideas on this topic:

"Well I suppose all the blacks and the people like that who have been held down, just like the crofters were, for years and years and years. And are now, in the likes of South Africa, are coming into their own again. Indigenous people of the place, you know?"¹¹⁹

These comments were made in 1993, when the apartheid system in South Africa was on the brink of being dismantled. Another person made explicit links with circumstances in Africa:

"Well the African people were the same. They were cleared off their land and they're trying to get their land back. And this is happening, I think maybe in every country in the world where people have been dispersed for other people's advantage. I'm sure you tend to think it only happened here because you know about that, but if you read more and learn about these things you suddenly realise. Well that's a similar situation.

I think I see it because I was born in Rhodesia, so I kind of think like that. I can remember as a child, an African being injured on the road and nobody would touch him because he was an African. And he had lost so much blood... And not only would they not touch him, but they told the others to move him round the back of the house so that no-one would see him. And I can remember that as a child, standing watching this and feeling funny. That there was something just not right here! And I mean, people will say - oh 'we' built it, but they built it for their own profit. It was for their own profit, you know. Plus the fact, with low wages and that, they couldn't do it - exploitation of the people, that you're underpaying them and they'd [The Vestey family] set up a Trust fund and that, so that the money doesn't come into this country. It said [book on Vestey empire] if it wasn't for them, maybe the Argentine war wouldn't have been on, because they sort of set up this business that allowed people to get in and - monopolise things."¹²⁰

It was because of the quotes above that I began asking other people about international parallels and comparisons. Allan MacRae, as noted above had already been thinking along these lines. During an early interview with me, he said much what he later said in the *Landward* television programme:

¹¹⁸Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 50 - 55

¹¹⁹Fieldwork 1993 ACT female 60 - 65

"There's nothing unique about that you know. Because you'll find people in places like - the Australian Aborigines, American Indians, you know - fighting to hold onto their land. Fighting to repossess lands they've lost in the past. And I think that's very important that. It's a feeling - much more than just, oh this is valuable stuff, we need that. It's a deep-rooted thing. That's something that these conservationists wouldn't understand. But as I say, if all the natives die out, areas like this - there'll be no real identity left. I'm not saying there won't still be people on the land here and crofts, but the old - oh aye - as far as - it'll have gone you know."¹²¹

Notice the reference to '*conservationists*'. Again in *Landward*, James Hunter tackles the perceived threat to a 'precious wilderness' by crofters taking over the land and by aspirations to repopulate the Highlands and islands:

"The typical empty Highland glen, with its treeless hillsides and bare moorlands is no more natural than a motorway embankment. It's something that's been created by what's been done to it by mankind over the last two - three - four hundred years. And in some ways it's a monument to man's inhumanity to man. It's been made the way it is by people maltreating the land and removing human communities. So let's have no more talk of wilderness. Let's talk about how do we put back this landscape into the shape it ought to be in.

For over one hundred years, we've seen the lights go out in glen after glen, community after community. I think in the next hundred years, we'll see them coming back."¹²²

Here is an example of an effort to overcome the failure of Spivak's speech act with regard to '*environmental issues*', by dealing with ecological capital as part of a reinvigorated, repopulated Highlands where the monopoly on environmental opinions is partially dismantled and reiterated from an '*insider*' position.

Another ACT representative made specific reference to environmental issues in talking about international comparisons. In this case, it was to comment on the way in which local people manage environmental assets on Grade 1 sites in Costa Rica. This was used to illustrate the potential of such an approach for Assynt, although in Assynt the environmental heritage value is frequently a result of human activity, unlike the situation on a Grade 1 site:

"I mean Assynt's landscape and flora and fauna, the natural heritage value in it, is very much tied up with man's activities. So there were

¹²⁰Fieldwork 1992 ACT female 55 - 60

¹²¹Fieldwork 1992 ACT Allan MacRae.

¹²²James Hunter *Landward* 1992.

differences in that respect. But there were principles being applied that would seem to me to be very, very important. And as crofting moves away from being predominantly agricultural, towards resource management, then of course we have to look at our resource in a different way. We have to look at it producing other things. And one of the things it will produce is landscapes. The things it will produce is enhanced natural heritage. In other words, we'll be looking at habitat creation. Now it seems to me that the crofters should be part of that process - that we should not be looking to outsiders coming in to do this, or students coming in to do this, or volunteers coming in to do it. We should actually, as a matter of policy, nationally that is, be involving the people who are occupying the land, in this process. And getting paid for it. So instead of being paid, you know, £1000 per year as subsidy for your sheep, you may well be being paid £1000 a year for a wider management plan for the land you occupy, including environmental enhancement, maintenance of landscape features and so on. [...]

And those who want to move away from the very - in a sense - unstable agricultural environment - we're in just now - because crofting is very much on the periphery of agricultural activity, and at the moment heavily subsidised - the agricultural activity, which to be fair, is mostly sheep management is highly subsidised. It's now reached the stage where the majority, in fact nearly 100%, of the profit from agricultural activity in crofting is in fact related directly to subsidy. Now that puts crofters in a very vulnerable position in my opinion, and subject to political whim. So, if for example, under pressure from taxpayers, it's agreed that - why are we subsidising sheep, when we don't want sheep? Or why are we subsidising sheep when they're damaging the environment? It seems to me very important that crofters get themselves in a position to be subsidised to do what the nation does want, in this landscape. And that role, of management, is not given to others outside crofting."¹²³

From this quote can be glimpsed some of the different opinions held by the ACT Steering Group members and differences in how they position themselves in relation to environmental debate and definitions of what environmental assets are. In this quote we see, not a static object which should be protected, but a strong awareness of a dynamic system influenced by political decisions at different scales of governance. Instead of a confrontational understanding of personal engagement in that political arena, we see an empowered conceptualisation and an ambition that crofters in general should have a strong and participative presence in that arena.

A final international comparison which was made by several people was that with Norway. In the following year, Bill Ritchie was one of the delegates on the Norwegian Reforesting Scotland Study Tour. He did a presentation in the

¹²³Fieldwork 1993 ACT male 50 - 55

Stoer Hall about it on his return. Here one of the interviewee's talks about that:

"That was an interesting night - howing the lifestyle of the people of Norway in the country areas. Houses, and some of them built in most inaccessible places. Yes - terrific steep, very steep both sides. They had their own wood round about it - their own forest. They were cutting their own wood, firewood ... Every house - you could see them with their stack of cut wood beside the house. This was put in motion after the War. Now of course the trees are all ready for cropping. It's a long term thing of course too. Planting trees. That's one of the things that we would hope to get going in this area. To plant trees and regenerate some of the trees that we have, in places where there have been trees growing, to sort of plant them and protect them to grow properly."¹²⁴

In this case the international comparison leads to a very practical management option.

Raising the Capital

Having developed the concept of a '*fair price*' and put a figure to that '*fair price*', the ACT was in a position to calculate just how much money they had to raise from the range of sources available. In July 1992, it was expected that the closing date for offers would be sometime in late August, which left very little time to achieve this goal. In fact, the closing date ended up being 16th September, which in the end provided a little more breathing space, but in July there was no way of knowing that. The pressure was most definitely on.

In order to be in a position to calculate necessary funds, the ACT also needed to know what sort of running costs they might need to meet, should their bid be successful, and what sort of income it would be reasonable to anticipate. By late-July the draft feasibility study and business plan was helpful in thinking this through.

Results of the Feasibility Study and Business Plan

The contents of the Study and Business Plan were kept absolutely confidential. There was a great fear amongst the ACT leadership that if the detailed contents became known, the ACT tactics would become known and

¹²⁴Fieldwork 1993 ACT male 60 - 65

the strong position they had to date achieved might be undermined by well informed hostile bids or negotiations.

The Study stated that the economic principle for purchasing the land is:

"to ensure that the income and wealth which it is capable of generating stays within the local community. Many potential benefits will only be realised in the long term, however, and the crofters are as much interested in providing the next generation with a sounder base as in improving their current economic welfare."¹²⁵

The Study identified the economic and social benefits of such a purchase by ACT as:

- the psychological benefits (in terms of self confidence etc.) to the crofters and their families from being in control of their own destiny rather than being constrained by the policies, attitudes and whims of external landlords
- population retention or growth (with associated stimulus to local services)
- more control over community development, especially through the types of housing developed, the leasing policy over any housing for rent and through exerting influence on the Crofters Commission to deal with the problems of absentee crofters
- the generation of new employment opportunities, which would generally be of a part-time nature and thus compatible with other crofting activities
- improved estate management in terms of
 - farming practices
 - natural woodland regeneration
 - deer population control/enhancement
 - sporting value
 - attraction of tourists and other visitors
 - wildlife and botanical conservation and enhancement
- opportunities to generate a surplus for re-investment in the Estate
- improved potential for co-operation between resident crofters in undertaking development programmes, agreeing conservation measures, providing social and recreational facilities in townships, etc.
- removal of constraints which landlords have imposed on the development by local people of shops or other small scale service businesses¹²⁶

¹²⁵p2 Westbrook S and MacKenzie & Co. August 1992 North Assynt Crofters: Feasibility and Business Plan

¹²⁶p2 Westbrook S. and MacKenzie & Co. August 1992 *North Assynt Crofters: Feasibility and Business Plan.*

The Study suggested that, when looking at the potential in forestry, house building/maintenance, estate management/administration and small scale tourism it would be possible in the short term to create a range of part-time jobs amounting to 10 FTEs (Full Time Equivalents). The Study further notes that other indirect employment benefits might result through tourism, by improving local occupancy rates.

The Business Plan assumes that there would be two part-time employees - one engaged to carry out administration, and one in a Project Officer role. In addition, the Plan assumes that a stalker would be paid for. Since CASE had offered to help fund a Project Officer Post, a grant of £3,000 was included in the projected cash flow. It was assumed that Torbreck House would be bought, as part of estate, using a Highland Prospect loan, and then sold in the first year.

In terms of estate income, the Business Plan included croft rental of £2600 p.a., stalking rentals for eight stags p.a. and sale of venison - 8 stags and 16 hinds p.a. Expenses are projected as including stalkers fees - £600 p.a.; vehicle hire - £600 p.a.; rates and insurance. Administrative costs, over and above staff were estimated at in the region of £4,000 p.a. Assuming that the company would start trading on 1st October 1992, the projected Net Profit for 1993 was £3,750 and £3,250 for 1994. The Study and Business Plan therefore indicated that a modest profit was possible, if the assumptions were correct. In the event of a Project Officer post not being assisted through grant aid, the authors suggest cutting administration to the bone, bringing them to some £4,000 p.a. - including staffing costs.

The conclusion was that, were the ACT in a position to put in a bid in the region of £250,000, they would need to do so unencumbered with debt, other than against Torbreck House which could be sold on. The ACT should exclude the cottage - Lot 3: 208 Clashmore, valued at £50,000 - from their bid. In order to afford Torbreck House, a favourable loan with Highland Prospect would be the only way. It would be necessary to buy Torbreck House in

order to have any hope of securing the whole estate. The valuation of the assets excluding buildings was £160,000.

The authors strongly make the points that based on their analysis:

- estimates of creation of 10 FTE justified a CASE/HIE input of a grant of £50,000 - £100,000
- public funding would have to be in the form of equity or grants - other than against Torbreck House, loans were out of the question other than for bridging purposes
- public agencies would have to provide bridging finance
- the suggested employment potential - 10 FTEs - would only be achieved if a Project Officer was in post
- if efficiently managed, croft rents could pay for 60% - 70% of costs

The Study concluded that:

"The crofters would be justified in making a bid of £250,000 for the North Lochinver Estate, excluding 208 Clashmore (which is valued at £50,000) on the assumption that adequate funding as outlined in the Business Plan can be obtained".¹²⁷

Fundraising Plan

The plan for raising the necessary finance was then developed. The ACT decided that to have any hope of attracting the necessary financial support in the time available, the crofters themselves would have to raise a substantial sum from amongst themselves. If they could achieve this, it was felt they would be justified in seeking 'match funding' from a range of public agencies. As the Chairman said at the Public Appeal Launch in July:

"Once we get some money together, the support will come to us. We must show that we mean business. It's not going to happen - we have to make it happen."¹²⁸

The ACT members resolved therefore to try to raise £80,000 from amongst their own families and friends. This represented half of the estimated value of the assets, when buildings were excluded. The principle adopted was that

¹²⁷p19 **Westbrook S. and MacKenzie & Co.** August 1992 *North Assynt Crofters: Feasibility and Business Plan.*

each crofting household would try to pledge £1000 each. It was acknowledged, however, that many households would never be able to donate £1000. Several people told me that households who could afford to donate or pledge more than £1000 would try to do so, in order to compensate for those who would be unable to make a financial contribution. In view of the average income levels in Assynt, referred to in the Assynt Area Profile (Chapter Two), it is easy to see that this would be a major financial challenge for a very significant proportion of people.

Pledges and donations were kept confidential and were a totally separate issue to membership. All croft tenants and official sub-tenants could be members. It was a *'one member one vote'* system, irrespective of how many crofts a person had or whether that person was able or chose to make any sort of financial contribution. This was a very important point. It was to achieve this equity that decisions regarding the final legal structure had been so carefully debated and scrutinised:

" Somebody was saying that people - we know them - the crofters - won't have £1000. Every house should try and get £1000, between yourself and your family and friends - if they could make it up to £1000. But we know there are crofters who can't do that! Old people on fixed incomes. There's no way they can do that. And they said - right, for the likes of these people, they would understand. Let's keep it entirely confidential. But people who could afford would have to put in more to try and compensate for the people who couldn't afford - especially people who are working. There's certainly folk, they'll put something in - even the ones on really basic incomes"¹²⁹

The importance of everyone having an equal vote, irrespective of any financial contribution, was explained further for me by the Chair:

"I think that true democracy is irrespective of your means. And in a set-up such as this, everyone must have equal voting rights. I think you would be going back to the days when only people who had money had the right to vote, which of course would be clearly wrong."¹³⁰

Non-crofters could not be members but this did not damp anyone's enthusiasm, nor did it exclude anyone from the discussion or the meetings.

¹²⁸Allan MacRae, ACT Chair, 28th July 1992 - Public Launch, Stoer School.

¹²⁹Fieldwork 1992 ACT female 60 - 65

¹³⁰Fieldwork 1992 ACT Chair

The membership structure had unanimous support, and at the time it did not occur to anyone caught up in these events to consider any other format. All but fifty acres of the land is in crofting tenure and the chosen structure had a strong logic and identity with which all involved felt comfortable. This very straightforward identity - as *'the crofters'* - also proved invaluable in the course of the press campaign. The identity of *'the crofters'* was easy for the general public to understand and empathise with, and sent out a whole host of useful messages, some of which were discussed above. Much of the organisation's strength, discipline, unity and direction came from that crofter-based structure. It provided a way of focusing on a manageable and comprehensible range of concerns and aspirations. In addition - and very importantly - the crofter based structure made a huge contribution to the fast development of a workable legal structure and constitution. From the very start, each township was asked to put forward a representative. That meant that in effect the whole ACT structure was created out of an existing, long standing and very well understood structure - that of the township, its Grazings Committee and its Clerk of Grazing. The majority of those put onto the Steering Group were Clerks of Grazing for their township. This automatically provided a communications network and structure reaching back into each township. This provided a logical, fair and familiar structure as part of a radical, new and totally unknown one - the ACT. At the heart of the ACT was that older township structure. In some senses the ACT was like a Grazings Committee at a greater geographical scale which made it possible to bring together a range of communities (townships) with differing ideas around a common issue, to work together and to speak with one voice, as far as was possible. There can be no doubt that this often overlooked reliance on such a well established local network or structure was a huge strength, an effective discussion and communications network, well understood and easily accessible at the township level. This contributed hugely to engagement by potential members and fast growth in membership. This structure provided a crucial stability in the midst of the complete unknown - community land ownership and bidding hundreds of thousands of pounds for large chunks of land.

In addition to the monies which the ACT sought to raise amongst themselves, the leaders, solicitor and accountant identified potential sources and amounts to seek from a range of other public sources. To achieve this, the crofters required two things: as much support as possible from the general public, and the ability to convince quangos and other grant giving bodies that this was a serious matter which merited their financial backing. The early discussions, in June, had already helped to clarify suitable routes and contacts. In early-August this plan was fine tuned and acted upon. Requests for the following financial assistance in the form of grant aid were sent out:

Highland Regional Council	£10,000
CASE & HIE	£50,000
Scottish Natural Heritage	£20,000
World Wildlife Fund	£10,000
RSPB	£10,000
Total	£100,00

By mid August £53,500 had been raised through crofter and non-crofter pledges and donations and public donations. By early September the Appeal was close to target.

Appeal Methods

In order to raise the necessary funds through public appeal, a number of methods had to be devised and administrative systems put in place. This section provides a brief account of the specific methods which were employed.

Pledges and Car Stickers

The use of Pledges was fundamental to the success of fundraising through public appeal. Since the target sum was so large, straightforward public donations would have been legally and morally difficult to handle if a financial package large enough to allow bidding had not been achieved. In addition, if the ACT bid had been unsuccessful, although the money raised would have been useful and crucial in implementing the Fall-back Position, the supporters and donors might not have seen this use of the funds, as in quite the same spirit, as that of putting in a bid for the land.

Through the use of pledges some of these problems were avoided. Supporters could fill in a Pledge Form for the amount they wished to donate. Pledge Forms were sent direct to the lawyers office and added to the records there. This ensured the sort of anonymity which the Steering Group were so keen to achieve. By using pledges it was not necessary to bank hundreds of thousands of pounds, which in the event of failure might have to be returned to the donors - an exercise which could have been very complicated. In addition, if charitable status had been achieved - which it was not - the value of the pledges would have significantly increased.

The drawback to using pledges, which would only become apparent at the point of bidding, was that the pledges made up a very significant part of the total sum available to bid with. This therefore introduced a big risk. What if a significant proportion of the pledges were not honoured? That would mean that the ACT would not have the sum that they had relied on, by counting the total worth of the pledges. If, as was likely, the bid itself took all available resources, and the value of the pledges fell short of what was expected, the ACT would run the risk of starting out in serious debt - exactly the circumstances which the Feasibility Study had warned against at all costs. Another drawback was the fact that a fairly hefty bridging loan might prove necessary until the pledges had been called in. In the event of the pledges being called in there was no way of knowing quite how long it might take to actually receive real money.

In putting together the bids, the lawyer and accountant calculated in a margin of error, to allow for a small short fall in monies from pledges. This was aimed at reducing the risk. Despite that, in taking responsibility for placing the bid, the lawyer Simon Fraser, took a massive professional risk on behalf of the ACT. Had the monies not been sufficient in the end, it would have been his professional reputation and career which would have been risked too. Bridging finance was arranged, again in an attempt to minimise risk, but also in the hope that it would not be needed. Of the risks Simon Fraser took and the dedication so far beyond the call of duty, Simon makes light:

"I'll be eternally grateful for the rest of my days to the Assynt people for getting me involved in this. I enjoyed it enormously! People tried

to put me in the papers and things like that about it. I'm not interested in that. I got so much enjoyment and satisfaction out of being able to help them all and helping to pull it off. Never quite get anything like this again."¹³¹

Car Stickers saying "*I Support The Assynt Crofters Trust*" were produced and sent to all those who would become Honorary Members - all those pledging or donating £500 or more.

Donations

Following the Public Launch donations began to appear. The trickle strengthened to a flood in a very short time. Some donations were from individuals and some from groups of people or organisations which had raised money by a variety of means: a ceilidh in Skerray, a 'do' in a Stirling Folk Club; a donation from the Isle of Eigg Trust; a primary school class collection. Runrig pledged £1000 and apologised for being unable to stage a fund raising concert. The West Highland Free Press also pledged £1000. The list was enormous. Donations too were directed to the lawyer's office in Stornoway:

"I ceased to be surprised at the amount, because I could see the thing - how much it grew. I got caught up in it myself, and then I was very enthusiastic in what I was doing, for the - I didn't look on it purely as a professional job at all! Though I used my professionalism as much as I could to achieve the end. But I was very keen to support myself, and I could see that many others were. The more support that came in - I didn't find it surprising. I found it pleasing, I suppose, because all the pledges were directed to this Office. We collected the money. The donations were sent here, the pledge forms were sent here - huge number... And it was a big very job to get them in, but they all paid up. we worked out what money was going to be available at the end of the day. We had to make notional discounts and certain people gave guarantees to back it. In the event not only did the guarantees not have to be called in, but the pledges over paid. Some people had pledged £500 and gave £600. Somebody pledged £300 and gave £1000, if I remember rightly! So it was very substantial support, not only moral support, but real money support. I'm not going to tell you the figures. They're confidential of course. But there was many, many hundreds of people. We've got a computer list of people. Six figures anyway came from people, which is a lot of money."¹³²

That sum included all types of donation – crofters' pledges and donations, other local residents' pledges and donations, friends, family, visitors, supporters all across Scotland and beyond. There is no doubt that much of

¹³¹Fieldwork 1993 ACT lawyer

the support from individual members of the public was prompted by an awareness of the wrongs of the past, a wish to support the small (wo)man against the giants of international capital and the place of the crofter in the Scottish consciousness. Others were influenced by an interest in environmental issues and many were holiday-makers familiar with the place and the people. The contributions made by people who knew Assynt through holidaying in the area were very, very significant. By mid September the total fund was running at £95,000 - more than the ACT had initially set out to raise.

Events

There were some local fund raising events that summer. The ceilidh at Stoer Hall, at which the Assynt Crofters' Ditty was first sung, as I mentioned in Chapter Three. On the last Friday in August there was a stall at the Assynt Games. At the stall people could make donations, buy packs of sandwiches and home baking, collect Appeal Leaflets and Pledge Forms and '*Guess the Weight of the Pig*'. Earlier in the month, The Chair, Allan MacRae, had donated one of his piglets to the cause. At the Games a '*Guess the Weight*' Competition was run, with each competitor paying a small sum to be included. At the end of the day the piglet was weighed and the person who had guessed the nearest weight was the proud owner of a wee patchy black and pink piglet. There were so many different kinds of fundraising efforts, it is difficult to highlight only one or two. The only other one I will therefore mention in any detail is one where I was present myself. This was a ceilidh in Skerray, organised by communities on the north coast of Sutherland.

To get to Skerray Hall for the fundraising ceilidh, we travelled by car east to Lairg and then north on the A836. This route took us past Crask Inn to Altnaharra, and then north via Strathnaver. In the car were Ishbel MacAulay, Clerk for Stoer Township and the Stoer representative on the ACT Steering Group and Allan MacRae, Torbreck - Chair of the Assynt Crofters Trust. My mother was driving. The drive through Strathnaver is a moment I shall never forget. We four from Assynt were travelling to the North coast to represent the ACT at a fundraising benefit for the ACT campaign. By this time the ACT cause had received a good deal of media attention and Allan MacRae was

¹³²Fieldwork 1993 ACT lawyer

already a *'well kent'* face on Scottish television. Our fickle Highland climate had provided us with a splendid day of intense sunlight, offset by cumulus shadow which intensified the colours and contours of the landscape to great effect. With the purpose of our journey foremost in our minds, each member of the group fell silent as we proceeded through Strathnaver. For mile after mile there was no human habitation. For mile after mile Allan or Ishbel would point out ruined houses or the places where bracken had taken hold on a well-drained sunny slope, replacing previous cultivation. The juxtaposition of this small group's aspirations with the material evidence of the Strathnaver Clearances was humbling. The effect was at once painful and invigorating since it focused everyone's mind so clearly on the reasons why community ownership was an aim worth pursuing.

Workload

During these months the activity was frenetic. The Steering Group Office bearers put in an unbelievable amount of voluntary time and on some occasions barely slept. Other members of the Steering Group also set aside their own lives to contribute to the campaign. On a number of occasions a selection of Steering Group representatives met with the liquidators or representatives of potential fundraising bodies. Mail poured in from supporters and the task of sorting through the mail, taking note of any donations that had been sent to Assynt instead of the Stornoway Office, composing and sending thank you letters and filing all correspondence fell very largely to the women involved. The women also organised and ran the fund-raising ceilidh and the Games Day Stall. At the outset the female Steering Group members were not keen to give press interviews, but as time went on their reluctance reduced and, Ishbel MacAulay, in particular, gave both Gaelic and English interviews with increasing regularity. It was at her home that much of the work of dealing with supporters' mail was carried out. The messages of support from such a range of people provided great delight and an important moral boost throughout these months.

Among male Gaelic speaking Steering Group members there was some reluctance to give press interviews in Gaelic. One person I discussed this with explained that for him, since Gaelic had always been the language of the

home, the township and the croft, he felt very daunted about trying to speak in a formal tone on subjects he was unaccustomed to discussing in Gaelic, with strangers - journalists - and by implication, in front of thousands of viewers and listeners. Again this nervousness reduced as time went on, confidence built up and experience grew. The general nervousness in giving press interviews, in either language, also reduced as the months passed and it became clear that so many of the journalists were sympathetic, good listeners who were not trying to catch anyone out.

Grants and Loans

In July it had been decided that the ACT could not take further the John Muir Trust's (JMT) offer of a significant contribution towards the sale price and a partnership bid. This was a difficult decision taken at a time when the realistic potential of raising the necessary funds was unknown and appeared near impossible. Why did the ACT refuse such welcome financial assistance? The answer lay in the implications of partnership when juxtaposed with the sort of mandate that the Steering Group had. JMT sought joint management and in view of the fact that they were an environmentally orientated group, they would be sure to want to implement particular environmental management arrangements. The continued suspicion among many crofting groups of SNH and other environmental organisations meant that this idea immediately caused tensions and awakened fears for some members. This in turn raised the challenge and pivotal importance of maintaining unity as a Group.

The Group were therefore faced with a very difficult decision. After discussion it was resolved by revisiting the basic principles on which the ACT had been so recently founded. The mandate which the Steering Group had from the members was to prevent the sale and try to buy the estate into community ownership. From that, it was clear that the Steering Group did not have a mandate to enter into partnerships. Besides that, the motor of their momentum lay in trying, as a crofting group, to *'take the land back'*. Much of their public support was on account of this. On this basis it seemed clear that it would be inappropriate and arguably counter-productive for the Steering Group to pursue a partnership. They had to stick to their original inspiration

and do their very best to achieve that. It is also important to understand, in this context, that in view of the predominance of crofting tenure over 99% of the land, an ACT Board could only have limited influence on actual land management practices. In effect, land management lies with each township, and in the event of choosing to pursue an environmental management plan, the ACT could only take a facilitating role.

The RSPB was unable to gift funds to the ACT, but could only offer funds as part of management agreement. For reasons similar to those discussed with regard to the JMT situation, this was impossible or inappropriate at the time. The WWF likewise did not contribute. Highland Prospect had approved a secured loan of £ 90,000, at a low starting interest rate in late August. In late September the announcement in the press of Highland Regional Council approval of a grant of £10,000 to ACT caused quite a stir. Sutherland District Council also made a donation of £1,000, a significant sum for an organisation with such a small turnover. CASE sought to make a grant of £50,000, but for any award over £30,000, CASE was obliged to get HIE approval. At first this did not look hopeful, but as support grew and included a letter of support from the Conservative Scottish Office Minister Lord Sanderson, the mood of the HIE Chief Executive changed. In the face of such extensive Scottish and UK press coverage and public support, it became perhaps inevitable. It is interesting to note though, as John MacAskill does in his book on the ACT campaign, that a representative of John Clegg & Co. described HIE's decision as 'odd'.¹³³ In advance of that comment, *The Independent* reported that lawyers acting for potential bidders were investigating the possibility of legal action against HIE, if their clients were to be outbid on account of the HIE grant.

SNH approved a grant of £20,000. Despite the upset created by the early announcement of certain conditions, the differences of opinion and difficulties were overcome. Again this highlights the delicacy for many crofters of any involvement with SNH and other environmental organisations. These tensions, as discussed earlier, relate to issues of power and dignity and not necessarily to the actual apparent issue of environmental protection and enhancement. The debate about how conservation is done and

what it actually means is ill-developed and not particularly 'open'. This has resulted in accusations of scientific colonialism on the part of environmental organisations and pressure groups. Mather engages with Castro's (1972) term, 'scientific colonialism', in discussing the controversy during the 1980s in north Sutherland over Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) designations. After and during the 'ecological imperialism' of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries in the 'periphery', now came attempts to establish conservation reserves. The needs of indigenous peoples and their landuses are frequently little considered during this process. Mather notes similarities in conservation conflicts between colonial India and Africa and northern Scotland in the 1980s. Mather notes the work of a number of authors which explores the idea that creation of conservation reservations:

"serves to perpetuate under-development and dependency, and that local people remain alienated from control of the land and its resources."¹³⁴

Mather suggests that empirically, under development has not resulted from the 1980s SSSI designations, but that the 'scientific colonialism' model does have explanatory power for this example. This, I would suggest, again points to issues of power, dignity and failed speech acts - and highlights the strong role of agency based on experiences of partial subalternity in this example.¹³⁵ In considering this example, post-colonial theory facilitates an avoidance of positioning the dissenting voices in this type of conservation dispute as 'irrational'.

In Assynt, as in many crofting communities, feelings run high on these matters and a significant proportion of people feel that on principle they should do their own kind of conservation work free of the hierarchical and bureaucratic kind which SNH is **seen to** deliver, often without achieving the intended impacts. Designations in particular come in for criticism since they can be viewed as labels created by a system which does not deliver a great deal on the ground. It should be stressed, however, that due in very large

¹³³MacAskill J. 1999 *We Have Won The Land* Acair Stornoway

¹³⁴p374 Mather A. S. 1993 *Protected Areas in the Periphery: Conservation and Controversy in Northern Scotland* in **Journal of Rural Studies** Vol. 9 No 1 pp 371 – 384.

¹³⁵Toogood M. 1995 *Representing ecology and Highland tradition* in **Area** 27.2; pp102-109 is also useful in this context, as is the work of Fraser MacDonald, Arkleton Trust.

part to a growing band of Area Officers who understand these tensions and were often brought up in communities where these tensions were common, in some places these antagonisms have been broken down in recent years. In the case of the SNH grant to ACT, it was again an issue of power and presumption. Allan MacRae, among others, were happy to be advised by SNH, but on principle could not compromise the ACT's control of its own assets through open-ended management agreements. For some, any such arrangement sounded like SNH buying a share in the ACT rather than supporting the ACT to achieve what was its central goal and *raison d'être* in 1992 - a crofter community buy-out.

By late August the financial package available can be summarised thus:

Highland Council	£10,000
Sutherland District Council	£1,000
Highland Prospect	£90,000
SNH	£20,000
CASE/HIE	£50,000
Total	£171,000

The balance would have to be made up of the funds raised through public and crofters donations and pledges. By 8th September the fundraising total was at £95,000. The Highland Fund, having provided £3,000 to cover legal fees and running expenses during the campaign, agreed at a later date to underwrite any shortfall in funds in view of the risks of the value of the pledges not being as calculated on collection. This was of course a very significant reduction in the risk involved as the bidding situation developed into a very tense and trying experience.

Bidding for the Land

The public warmed to the cause and the public agencies approached for funding would have looked as though they are failing to fulfil the logic of their own remit if they failed to support the Assynt Crofters Trust campaign. Without the ground swell of public support, due in large part to favourable media coverage, the Assynt Crofters Trust would not have got far. The idea and the people themselves inspired people all across Scotland and beyond.

Given the media time - their professionalism and conviction was powerful - they literally '*spoke for themselves*'. Donations poured in to support the courage and determination of these people. By the autumn of 1992 the Assynt Crofters Trust were in a position to make a bid for their land. Their confidence and determination had increased in those summer months as had their unity of purpose.

Bidding Begins

"And now we're at the point of almost realising our target by being able to put in a sensible bid and almost certain that we'll be able to buy the ground and that they have no option but to sell it to us because there were no other bids in."¹³⁶

During August and early September more details of the assets on offer were acquired from the selling agents. Despite the statement in the sale particulars that mineral rights were not included, it transpired that they were indeed included in the title. The right to a boat on Loch Assynt was clarified as including the right to two boats for salmon, sea trout and char fishing, and the right to moorings, access and building of a boat house if desired. In addition it was discovered that the salmon netting rights were limited to a small section of the coast - stations at Clachtoll and Culkein Stoer. The rest of the coastal salmon right had been transferred back to the control of Vestey family via the Assynt Trading Company after the sale to SPS Ltd. Furthermore, the remaining netting rights had been leased back to Assynt Trading for a fifty year period. It would appear that Assynt Estates had done this to limit netting in the area, in an attempt to benefit their rod fishing on the Inver and Kirkaig rivers. It was established that on the coast, foreshore rights were included in the title as well, as was lease of spating rights at Achmelvich. There had been some confusion also over the status of the house and garden grounds at Torbreck House. It had been agreed that the ACT would not be bidding for the house, 208 Clashmore. The situation with the Torbreck House garden grounds took a little longer to clarify. Meanwhile the closing date for bids was fast approaching.

¹³⁶Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 50 - 55

The First Bid

After much discussion over what, in reality, that '*fair price*' ought to be, on 9th September 1992 a bid of £235,000 was submitted by the lawyer, Simon Fraser, on behalf of the ACT. Clearly a momentous event had been reached in a matter of some ten weeks. Just over a month before, the idea of even raising half of the necessary finance had been hard to imagine.

On 16th September, John Clegg & Co. stated that they were pleased with the choice of offers they had received. They further stated that a **range of offers** had been received, including ones for the whole estate, single Lots and combinations of Lots. They indicated that all offers were being carefully considered and that the liquidator was seeking clarification on particular details. Once this had been done an announcement would be made on Friday 18th September at 4 pm.

In view of the ACT tactics of scaring off other potential buyers, this statement and press reports of some eleven offers was difficult to absorb. Such a huge amount of voluntary effort, in communities and households across Scotland and beyond - and not least in Assynt - had made this bid possible. In the past weeks, in North Assynt, the majority of people had become '*fired up*' with the excitement, the challenge, the satisfaction of overcoming huge difficulties as a group and the strong pride that this campaign was both fuelled by and fed. To be faced with the threat of other buyers, and by an unnerving wait for news of the outcome was very hard to bear. This period was an anti-climax of enforced inactivity - a waiting game. The determination to succeed remained, but the situation denied everyone the opportunity of action.

Disappointment

On 22nd September John Clegg & Co. announced that all the bids had been rejected. Clearly this was a huge blow which had to be faced with significant courage and determination. The statement did, however, contain some comfort. If no other bid had been acceptable, it might be that these other offers were not as yet too huge a threat.

At least this brought an end to the unbearable waiting. Difficult circumstances are somehow easier to bear when it become possible to take some action to ameliorate those circumstances. Among the ACT leaders and members, there grew a strong suspicion that *'they'* don't want us to have the land. This suspicion was deepened by John Clegg & Co.'s suggestion that the liquidator might even decide to keep the estate for some time - even perhaps five years - and run it until *'the market'* improved. This suggestion was vigorously disputed by John MacKenzie, the ACT Vice Chair, since it contravened the defined role of a liquidator. Keeping and running the estate was, as John pointed out, a role for a receiver not a liquidator. The invitation extended by John Clegg & Co. to bidders, to enter into private negotiations with the selling agents, was particularly worrying. It might imply that *'they'* did indeed want to avoid the ACT getting the land, and were keen to negotiate a deal with more or less anyone else. The very next day the ACT submitted a revised offer and sent out a press release:

"Press Release

Use: Embargo until 17.00 23/9/92

Following the decision of the liquidator to reject the offer of the Assynt crofters for the North Lochinver Estate the crofters' representatives have submitted a revised offer with a closing date for acceptance by the liquidator of 12 noon on Tuesday 29th September.

The crofters have reiterated their determination to press ahead with plans to exercise their right to seek orders from the Land Court in terms of the Crofting legislation to acquire title to every inch of their croft lands under the terms of the Crofting Acts and to nominate Assynt Crofters Trust to hold these titles if no agreement on a fair offer can be reached.

The crofters stressed that their offer, a substantial one measured in hundreds of thousands of pounds, was made in good faith after constant communications with the selling agent and based on two independent valuations. The crofters are to seek an assurance from the liquidator that the main creditor, believed to be a foreign bank, is fully aware that what is for sale is not a sporting estate or a wild life paradise but 99% croft land occupied by crofters and regulated by the Crofting Acts.

The crofters are to question the statement made by Angus Crowe of Clegg and Co. the selling agent to the press that the liquidator would continue to run the Estate for months - even "Five years" - rather than accept the crofters' offer based on these independent valuations. The crofters' offer is widely believed to be the best received.

Crofters at a meeting also questioned the ethics of the selling agent and liquidator of inviting The Assynt Crofters to make a sealed offer and then literally minutes after rejecting the offer, publicly inviting anyone to negotiate privately with the liquidator in the knowledge of the crofters' offer. The crofters are to seek legal advice on this matter.

The crofters are to hold a public meeting in Stoer School next Wednesday the 30th September at 8.00 to decide on further action.

END"¹³⁷

The revised offer was for £245,000. It was accompanied by a letter from Simon Fraser reminding the selling agents of the crofting status of 99% of the ground and pointing out that, if the ACT began to implement their Fall-back position, the selling agent's clients could expect not much over £40,000 for the majority of the land. Simon also made Clegg & Co. aware that the resolve of the crofters had hardened in view of the announcements of the previous week by the selling agent. This second offer was open for acceptance until 29th September.

More Disappointment

On 29th September, the ACT office bearers learned that their second offer had been rejected, *'in its present form'*. Bill Ritchie had learned that the liquidators were to instruct the selling agents to open negotiations with the ACT, with a view to a revised offer. The ACT representatives were invited to meet with Cleggs. They refused invitations at this stage, on the grounds that it might imply a willingness to negotiate. Simon would meet Clegg & Co., but not to negotiate. Many members felt that now was the time to embark upon the Fall-back position.

¹³⁷ACT Press Release of 23/9/92.

The Steering Group met in Stoer Hall that evening. In the midst of this disappointment and strain, Bill Ritchie turned to Iain Grigor Fraser's book, *Mightier Than a Lord: The Highland Crofters' Struggle for the Land*, for inspiration and courage. From this book he read, for the assembled Steering Group, passages referring to the Land League meetings in Assynt during the Crofters Wars. With quotations from this book he reminded the Steering Committee of the old Land League motto: *Is Treasa Tuath na Tighearna - The People are Mightier than a Lord*. The last paragraph in that book states:

"That the people who live and work on this land still do not own the land and still do not control the land is not, however, a matter for which the men and women of the land agitation of the 1880s bear responsibility."¹³⁸

Bill Ritchie stressed the strong letters of support which the ACT was continuing to receive and the high press profile, which likewise continued. The maintenance of that high press profile would, he reminded the meeting, help to deter prospective buyers. He noted that *The Herald* was believed to be developing an article on the Swedish bank from which SPS Ltd had taken their loan and that the BBC had a Scandinavian correspondent. Bill suggested that the ACT should themselves write to the Swedish bank, making clear the circumstances and reasons for the ACT action and the potential implications of failing to buy the estate by offering a fair price - the Fall-back position, of course. There was also discussion about the idea of creating a '*fighting fund*' in view of the situation. Allan suggested, and the meeting agreed, that the Steering Group's next step would be to hold a meeting with the members or '*the crofters*', to inform everyone of developments to date and to answer any questions that might arise from that. The meeting should be conducted without press presence, it was agreed.

Intelligence

Earlier in the campaign Bill Ritchie had commented to me that, among the range of skills and resources a community group might need to attempt this sort of thing, '*Intelligence*' was a crucial component. By this he meant links with networks of people who were well placed to pass back to the community group and information relevant to their cause. In some cases this might be

individuals in potential grant giving organisations who could explain the application process and requirements. Equally. However, it could be other types of information. The strong relationships that had been built up with a range of journalists in the previous weeks provided one such source of intelligence. These journalists not only received information from the ACT, but frequently passed useful titbits or '*intelligence*' back to the ACT. Other individuals with access to the Scottish Landowners Federation kept a weather eye on developments there, since the SLF was publicly threatening to have the Kinlochewe Ruling reversed. Achieving or trying that would of course impact upon the ACT's Fall-back position.

Astonishingly, a number of individuals who had been keen contenders as buyers of certain Lots also approached the ACT, having become aware of its activities. These individuals withdrew their bids and passed on to the ACT leadership useful insights into the bidding and negotiations which Clegg & Co. were conducting. This sort of '*intelligence*' was of enormous importance in boosting morals and helping to clarify tactics.

At this point two journalists were trying to find out all that they could about the circumstances and attitude of the Ostgota Bank in Sweden. One newspaper actually offered to fly Allan MacRae to Sweden to meet with Bank representatives but the Ostgota bank declined the offer of a meeting. Simultaneously the *Comunn Ceilteach Oilthigh Obar Dheadhain* - Celtic Society of Aberdeen University - wrote to a number of Swedish Trade Unions asking them to put pressure on the Ostgota Bank to respect the ACT cause and to take action to facilitate its achievement. The ACT sent a letter to the Ostgota Bank in Sweden:

"Ostgota Enskilda Bank
Smalandsgatan 2 S-103 92
Stockholm
Sweden

7th October 1992

Dear Sirs,

ASSYNT CROFTERS / NORTH LOCHINVER ESTATE

¹³⁸p167 Grigor Fraser I. 1979 *Mightier Than a Lord* Acair Stornoway.

The crofter tenants of the townships on the North Lochinver Estate, together with most of the population of Scotland, are surprised and disappointed that you do not wish the liquidator to accept our offer of £245,000. Our offer is based on a fair valuation of the assets as made known to us and in principle has the support of all the Government Agencies in the Highlands including the Minster responsible for crofting. We urge you to recognise the justice of our case in wishing to buy our land to protect it from speculators.

We ask you not to seek any revenge from the crofter tenants for the way you may have been treated in the dealings in which you were involved with SPS Securities at Assynt and their advisors. If you believe that you were at all misled as to the true value of our croft lands and led to believe that it was a sporting estate, we want to assure you that we protested to the selling agents and to others that this is not the case. The North Lochinver Estate consists almost entirely of croft land regulated by the Crofting Acts of Scotland.

The selling agents were fully aware of this when they sold it to your clients. They in turn should have made you aware of this.

We had no wish to exercise our legal rights as tenants to buy title to our lands against innocent parties. But our patience and the patience of the whole Scottish people, including the 12,000 crofters, is at an end. We can no longer stand by and watch our land being traded as paper assets and people like yourselves, who may be innocent of the legal status of these lands, perhaps being misled with possible serious consequences. Not only for the purchaser but also for the crofter tenants.

We are willing to explain the status of our land and the nature of our rights under the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 1976.

We invite you to contact the Crofters Commission, Castle Wynd, Inverness, Scotland, telephone 0463 237231, which is the Government Agency which regulates the croft lands, to confirm that the land comprising the North Lochinver Estate is virtually all croft land and subject to crofting tenure and Regulations.

The 1976 Act gives us, the crofting tenants, the right to seek from the Scottish Land Court an owners title to our croft lands, including the apportioned hill land, for 15 times the rent. We estimate this to be valued at around £40,000. We also have the right to nominate a third

party, in our case the Assynt Crofters Trust, to hold that title. This has recently been confirmed by the Scottish Court of Session in Edinburgh in a special case stated by the Scottish Land Court in causa Whitbread, landlord, against MacDonald, crofter, 5th June 1992. The Court found in favour of the crofter.

The Act also make sit clear that the cost to the landlord of the conveyances of the titles must be borne by the landlord.

We have an indisputable right to occupy all of the croft lands.

Again we would invite you to refer to the Crofters Commission for confirmation that whole grazings lands have been apportioned in planned schemes in recent times, and confirmation of our right to occupy the land.

All persons buying and selling croft land and seeking a security on that land should have been made aware of these and the many other burdens at the time of sale, purchase or granting of a security. Failure to do so would appear to us to amount to professional negligence at the very least.

With the support of virtually the whole of the Scottish nation (you will be aware of the intense interest in the Press, Radio and Television in this case) the Government Agencies and all political parties including Government ministers, the Assynt Crofters want to purchase the whole estate to demonstrate that we can protect our economic, cultural and natural heritage and our future for our families. And protect it against speculators and dealers who use our lands as assets for other ventures.

We would stress that we do not believe that you are deliberately standing in the way of our just ambition to save our land but rather that you are not fully aware of the implications of this case that you have been caught up in, and indeed may not be aware of the outrage of the Scottish people at the way we have been treated over this attempt to break up and sell our croft land.

We believe that when you are made fully aware of the implications you will recognise the justice of our case.

Our representatives are willing to meet you in private here in Assynt, away from the glare of publicity which is surrounding this case here and in Sweden, in an attempt to resolve this matter.

We extend to you a sincere invitation to meet with us in private at a time convenient to ourselves.

Yours faithfully

Bill Ritchie
Acting Secretary
Assynt Crofters Trust"¹³⁹

Notice the choice of language in this letter. The words '*land*' and '*lands*' were used with great frequency. The phrases '*our lands*'/ '*our croft land(s)*' were used eight times. In paragraph six the term '*hill land*' was used where normally, in talking about crofting, the terms '*common grazings*', '*hill ground*' or '*outrun*' would be used. In paragraph eight the term '*grazings lands*' was used when it would be more usual again to use simply '*grazings*', '*common grazings*', or '*hill ground/outrun*'. In the North Lochinver Estate Sales brochure the phrase '*common grazings*' was used.¹⁴⁰

Verbs such as '*protect*' and '*save*' were used to contextualise the ACT action. In terms of legal rights it was stated that there exists a right to '*occupy the land*'. In legal terms it would be more usual to note that crofting rights provide the right to graze, cut peat and produce crops - use of the soil - and a right of access in pursuance of these activities. The discourse of this letter did not employ the usual terminology for property sales. It persistently undermined the treatment of '*land*' as an object on a par with other types of property. Estate agents, companies and individuals buying and selling land use a range of different words such as '*the property*', '*the Estate*', '*the assets*' and '*the particulars*'. While the term '*assets*' was used, these assets were clearly a subset of '*our land*'. The repeated use of the word '*land*' hence achieved a shift in how these '*assets*' were to be understood and reminded the reader repeatedly of '*The Land Question*'. The '*assets*' were personalised through frequent use of '*our*'.

While the words '*crofter*' and '*crofters*' did appear, these words were not used in the same way as they are in the public campaign in Scotland because they would completely fail to achieve the same sort of resonance and staging of

¹³⁹Letter from ACT to Ostgota Bank, 7th October 1992.

identity. In this case the actors or agency came not from the *'small person'* taking on the *'big person,'* but from repeated reference to a determination at a totally different geographic scale – *'the whole Scottish people'; 'most of the population of Scotland'*. The bank was being informed that here was a matter of *'national'* importance. The fact that all political parties - but in particular, the Government and its Ministers and Agencies - supported both the principle of this action and the legal points made, particularly in reference to the Fall-back position, was made several times. Independent sources of legal information were provided - the Crofters Commission.

Importantly the construction of the letter provided potential honourable or *'face-saving'* positions for the Bank representatives to take up should they choose to engage themselves in this discourse and/or take up the ACT invitation of a private meeting: *"We believe that when you are made fully aware of the implications you will recognise the justice of our case."* The Bank was given the option to be a victim in this whole situation through being ill advised - paragraph nine. At the end, the very news-worthy nature of the ACT action was emphasised in this invitation by the offer of a *'private'* meeting.

The Bank did not reply at all. Later that month ACT sent a fax asking that the Bank confirm that they had received the letter. The Bank replied by fax. The fax was one sentence long and stated that the letter of 7th October had been received.

Strategic Dilemmas

At this stage the ACT was under pressure. There appeared to be a stalemate since the selling agents were determined to get more money from the sale of the Lots in one way or another. Simon Fraser met with the selling agents in late October. He stated that he was not empowered to negotiate but that it would be appropriate for the selling agent to present new proposals for progressing the matter in writing. John Clegg & Co. proposed that the last bid of £245,000 would be acceptable if the following were excluded from the sale:

¹⁴⁰p6 1992 Sales Brochure, John Clegg & Co.

- Torbreck House and grounds
- The Manse Loch
- Right to Two Boats on Loch Assynt
- The Right to Three Stags per Year
- The non-croft ground at Loch Poll

The Steering Group discussed this with Simon on 28th October. The selling agent's new proposal was in no way acceptable to the ACT. To accept it would be to allow asset stripping, and to force the ACT to take on the responsibilities of running the estate without the small range of assets which might help to create an income stream in the medium to long term. In addition it was felt that it would be morally inappropriate to act in this way, the principle being that of preventing any break up of the North Lochinver Estate. Accepting this proposal would completely fail to achieve that, and some tenants would have different landlords for inbye and outrun. These assets were in every sense at the heart of the estate and ACT principles.

The ACT Steering Group were now in the position of having to decide on how to make their last offer and at what level that offer should be. At the same time, the Steering Group decided to meet with the Torbreck and Achmelvich croft tenants to discuss implementation of the Fall-back position on a staged basis.

The suggestion by the selling agents to exclude The Manse Loch underlined a fact that had been known to the Steering Group for some time. The Manse Loch system was the most valuable asset. If combined with Torbreck House, this would create a Lot with great attraction for a keen fisherman. It offered good accommodation and excellent brown trout, sea trout and the possibility of salmon. The Selling agents had clearly been hoping to relot these assets along with access to Loch Assynt (more excellent fishing), Loch Poll and a little bit of shooting.

As had already been appreciated, the reality of implementing the Fall-back position was complicated. The only possible route was on a township by township basis. Since The Manse Loch was the most valuable asset, it was agreed that, as the Manse Loch system was the boundary between Torbreck and Achmelvich townships, a good strategic move would be to begin

implementation in Torbreck and Achmelvich. The fact that four active members of the Steering Group had crofts in these townships would obviously help in making a start, since at least a core of the tenants were very familiar with why this needed to be done and what would be involved. Those Steering Group members were Iain MacLeod (Soimeach) Achmelvich; Derrick MacLeod, Torbreck; Allan MacRae, Torbreck; and Bill Ritchie, Achmelvich. The matter was discussed in both townships and it was noted that making a start on the planning of this manoeuvre added a number of new strategic advantages to the ACT bargaining position. Fencing of the common grazings would render that ground 'enclosed,' which would make it legal to shoot any red deer, since they would technically be marauding just as on inbye ground. Clearly this would be of significance to a potential buyer. The ACT, as the third party receiving the transfer of title, would gain rights to brown trout fishing and would therefore be in a position to charge for permits and to demand indemnity from the liquidator for any loss or damage due to the 'landlord' exercising access rights for fishing. Both of these items would in effect devalue the North Lochinver Estate further.

Press Leak

In order to press home these tactical issues, 'someone in Assynt' issued a "press leak":

"Excitement is growing in Assynt amid rumour and speculation that the Assynt Crofters Trust is about to make its first move to acquire the title to the croft lands following the rejection by selling agent Clegg and Co. of the crofters' second bid for the North Lochinver Estate.

It now seems likely that rather than engage in the long process of preparing an application for every croft in the Estate the Trust will target key areas in the first instance - areas where they will achieve maximum impact and success.

If the Crofters were to be selective, an obvious target would be the land around Torbreck House and the Manse Loch river system which has been identified by Cleggs as the jewel in the crown of the estate and is at the heart of Lot 1 which was described as having immense potential as sporting estate.

Though the leaders of the Crofters are refusing to comment, meetings have been held by the crofters in the Achmelvich/Torbreck Township which includes the Torbreck/Manse Loch System. And four of the Steering Committee are crofters in that township, including the Chairman and the Secretary.

Many of the crofts are adjacent to the river system including the estuary at Loch Roe, whilst others are actually adjacent to the Loch System. If the trust were to take these lands first it could have a severe impact on the value of the remaining land. Even though the crofters would not gain legal access to the system for salmon they would have access to fish legally for non migratory species. They would of course put back any salmon caught. They could also permit others, for example local anglers or even angling clubs, to have access to the rivers and lochs.

A further option would be to apply for a planned apportionment of the grazings around the wider area of the Manse Loch System and out onto the deer ground. Whilst continuing to make no comment, it is now known that the crofters have recently flown in by helicopter over six tones of fencing materials and have nearly completed 3 kilometres of fencing around the best grazing in this area. If the crofters were to improve the grass on this grazing it may be that under current law any deer on the ground could be considered as marauding and therefore could be culled by the crofters.

There can be little doubt that such a strategy of targeting the key areas would make the estate less attractive to any outsider seeking to buy the estate for speculative or sporting purposes.

At the moment this is only a rumour and speculation but it seems more than likely that if the crofters are determined to press ahead with their Fall-back position of acquiring the land under the terms of the 1976 Crofting Acts, then such a strategy, if adopted, would certainly be most effective.

If successful it is likely that the crofters would then proceed to target the other areas until most of the croft lands are brought under control of the Trust. They presumably would then offer to buy the remainder - for much less than they are currently offering."¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹Press Leak regarding ACT activity - leaked in the last days of October 1992. Actual source unknown.

While the source is unknown, the information was accurate in terms of strategy being discussed at the time. Again, this press leak shows a very sophisticated engagement with a range of discourses and a few hints of humour as well. In particular, the idea with regard to shared fishing rights, that "*They would of course put back any salmon caught*", is interesting and laughable.¹⁴² Note that the idea of '*the fair price*' appears in the last sentence, but in this case it would be for what remained **after** implementing the Fall-back position.

During the same period another ACT story hit the press. This one focused on the position of cottars in Assynt and suggested that Savilles - the firm which had factored the North Lochinver Estate for SPS Ltd - and the Vestey factor, had been less than honourable in dealing with cottars. Cottars have the right to buy their home under the Crofting Acts. One case was brought to the attention of the press to illustrate the problems, which have occurred, generally with elderly cottars. If the cottar signs a lease they lose the right to bequeath the house, by buying it. In effect, the estate or landlord, ends up acquiring the house for nothing. John MacKenzie led this debate and related that he knew of a number of other similar cases, all involving elderly people.

Negotiations

By mid-November, the Steering Group had decided to ask Simon to find out what figure John Clegg & Co. would accept, on the understanding that it would be for all the assets. It was agreed that these discussions should be carried on without press coverage. By this point John Clegg & Co. were very keen to meet the ACT lawyer to discuss a way ahead. Simon also met with representatives of the Ostgota Bank, Sweden. The following week Simon reported back from his discussions. It was beginning to look as though the selling agents might be preparing to strike a deal with the ACT. It was noted that, in the absence of negotiating powers, Simon could only state the ACT case and report back on the selling agent's position. The Steering Group formally approved negotiating powers for Simon.

In order to keep supporters informed and 'on board' a letter was sent to all donors and an "I Support The Assynt Crofters Trust" car sticker included with each. Earlier in the campaign these had been sent out in more limited numbers. Two months later, on arriving at the 1993 Institute of British Geographers Conference, I was amazed to see a car parked outside the host University displaying one of those car stickers. As MacAskill notes, there were reports from much further afield.¹⁴³ A Mr MacMillan wrote to the ACT from New Zealand to say that on his last shopping trip, he had found that when he got out of the car that the car next to him was also displaying an ACT car sticker.

Principled Decision

In approving negotiating powers, the Steering Group also had to agree what the value of the final bid could realistically be. Money and letters of support continued to come in. At 25th November donations totalled £56,000 and pledges £74,000. It was at this point that the Highland Fund crucially agreed to underwrite any potential shortfall in the calculated sum - to a maximum of £25,000 - when the pledges were called in. It was important to think through the implications of using every last available penny for this last bid. If it was successful, there would be no reserve cash for getting up and running. Again, as the Steering Group had done before, they revisited the basic principles of their case in order to come to a practical decision. Since the donations were pouring in to help buy 'the land' and the ACT, on principle, sought to acquire **all assets**, all available funds **had to** be used. If this was not done people might legitimately wonder in the future why the opportunity had been lost, through not offering all the monies donated for that purpose. On that basis it was clear that while it might be sensible, traditional, financial sense to hold a little back, the ACT could not and would not do this. It would, given the context and principles at stake, potentially be a false economy. In this way, following further discussions between Simon and the selling agent, a third bid of £265,000 was made on 27th November. This was rejected and on 4th December a final bid of £300,000 was submitted. The ACT could offer

¹⁴²Press Leak 1992.

¹⁴³MacAskill J. 1999 *We Have Won The Land: The story of the purchase of the North Lochinver Estate* Acair Stornoway.

nothing more and if this one failed to be accepted, the Fall-back position would be the only available avenue. The momentum that had buoyed everyone along through, by now, months of intense voluntary work, evening meetings, negotiations and sleepless nights could well be lost over the months, years and complexities of actually making the Fall-back position reality. This round of bidding was undertaken in total secrecy, without any press statements - or leaks.

Winning the Land

On the afternoon of 8th December 1992 the news came through that the fourth Assynt Crofters Trust bid to buy their land had been successful. The news spread rapidly around the north west. A meeting was quickly arranged for that evening in Stoer School. In the dark of a December evening people drove from miles away to hear the announcement. At the front of the hall sat Allan MacRae, Bill Ritchie, John MacKenzie and Simon Fraser, flown in from Stornoway for the announcement. The reporters, now familiar faces, had also trekked through that dark, windy night especially to be there.

And what was said in that school hall? Did the campaign leaders stand up and celebrate a future of enterprise and viable investment? Did they throw off the burden of crofting's '*emotional millstone*' and dance into a new history-free zone? After thanking everyone present and all those across Scotland and beyond who had '*stood firm*', Vice-Convenor of the Regional Council, Peter Peacock, Andrew Thin from CASE and John Lister-Kay and Peter Tilbrook from SNH, this is what Allan MacRae said:

"Well ladies and gentlemen - it seems that we have won the land and I think that's certainly a moment to savour. No doubt about that. And certainly, my immediate thoughts are to wish that some of our forebears could be here to share this moment with us. I must say, I don't think there's any doubt that in winning the land, the Assynt Crofters have struck an historic blow for people on the land right throughout the Highlands and Islands."¹⁴⁴

Bill Ritchie followed this with these words:

¹⁴⁴Allan MacRae - Chairman, Assynt Crofters Trust 1992-96 - continues as a Director.

"I'd like, if I may, to quote from a book, quite frankly Simon Fraser gave me early on. And I think this book too gave us a great deal of inspiration. It's called *Mightier than a Lord* - by Ian Fraser Grigor. It's an account of the Land League struggle of the people after they were cleared off the land to get their land back. I could go on and on with quotes of what was happening - I think I once quoted to some of you events that were recorded in Stoer itself. There were meetings held here in Stoer, there were meetings held in Lochinver and the people then demanded the land for the people. But I'd like to read you just a wee short few sentences from the back of that. This is him writing after he's detailed the history:

He says - 'the 1886 Crofters Act represented a remarkable victory for the Highland crofters. It was not the end however, but a beginning. The greatest single demand of the crofters' movement - the land to the people - was not met. Nor has it yet been met.'

Well - they can start rewriting the history books because we have our land!"¹⁴⁵

Cheers, clapping and a standing ovation followed. Locally the sense of astonishment and elation continued for some time:

"Oh sheer elation! I think everybody felt sheer elation. Everybody just wanted to get drunk. Weren't very keen to sober up! Sheer elation. Absolutely marvellous."¹⁴⁶

The Culag Hotel donated a case of whisky and had it sent up to Stoer School. Agnes Dickson, who had that year won the '*Gallon of Whisky*' in the Assynt Games Raffle, brought that gallon of whisky to the Stoer School. Kenny John Matheson, a talented local accordionist and member of the Lochinver Ceilidh Band was on call. Instead of '*piping in*' the team who had co-ordinated and masterminded the campaign - Bill, Alan, John and Simon - Kenny-John '*accordianed*' them in. SCU members from North West Area drove all the way from the North coast to be there.

A spontaneous ceilidh emerged after the formal announcements and thanks were done with, and once the team at the top table had '*popped*' a bottle of pink champagne. Kenny John played and the Stoer Ladies passed round glasses of whisky to everyone present:

"That was a great night. We had a great night and a lot of surprises, with the - we didn't expect such a good night. Well, we expected good

¹⁴⁵Bill Ritchie, Secretary/Vice-Chair, Assynt Crofters Trust 1992-96 - continues as a Director.

¹⁴⁶Fieldwork 1993 ACT male 50 - 55

news, but we enjoyed ourselves very much. You would have seen the evidence of that on the television!"¹⁴⁷

Drink flowed, songs were sung and the evening had an indescribable buzz to it. Late on I remember the Stoer Ladies sharing out as many empty whisky bottles as possible among ourselves. The theory was that we could each take away a good number in our cars and handbags. The reason for this was to avoid leaving such incriminating evidence in the Primary School - or indeed in the Primary School bin - for innocent children and officials of Highland Region to find in the cold, clear light of the following morning. That particular plan was not entirely successful.

The following morning on every channel, the TV news had pictures of the announcement and celebration. It would not have taken a terribly alert Council official to realise that alcohol had been consumed and cigarettes smoked in the Primary School premises. The event was covered widely in the press and made the front page of "*The Herald*", with the headline:

"Crofters drink to land victory".¹⁴⁸

The lead story in *The Herald* declared in its title that "*EU future on a 'razor edge'*".¹⁴⁹ That weekend, in *The Observer*, Ian Bell wrote:

"More than one commentator suggested last week that the victory of the Assynt crofters, who have at last managed to buy their own land, was more important for Scotland than anything the European Council might decide at its Edinburgh summit.

At first sight the claim looks like parochialism. What are 21,000 acres of Sutherland, after all, compared to the fate of 350 million people? But it is correct.

The struggle of the crofters was deeply symbolic. The North Lochinver estate was once owned by the Vestey family, then by something called Scandinavian Property Services Ltd. At their third attempt, and after three months of often despairing negotiations, the crofters last week managed to wrest it from the liquidators."¹⁵⁰

Ian Bell continued and explained his reasoning:

¹⁴⁷Fieldwork 1993 ACT male 60 - 65

¹⁴⁸P1 *The Herald* 9th December 1992

¹⁴⁹P1 *The Herald* 9th December 1992

"Seventy-five percent of us voted in January for parties that would give Scotland a parliament. Instead, we have John Major arriving in our capital to talk about subsidiarity while denying Scots even a limited say in their own affairs.

In that sense, we are all Assynt crofters, each denied control over our land and our future"¹⁵¹

From these comments can be seen evidence of the impact of the ACT victory on concepts of Scotland, Scottishness and the Scottish state. This may also hint at possible Scottish level influences on the creation of the ACT itself. It could be argued that, at a Scottish level, the public was more open than might previously have been the case to an action of this type.

Heather Behind Their Ears

It was a euphoric moment. What had been won was not just '*the land*'. What the ACT had achieved was to bring the crofting community's understanding of what land is, and what their history meant, into the centre of late 20th century Scottish politics - and to legitimate those feelings, those views, that culture and that identity. The ACT had brought the values and history of the periphery back to the centre and re-negotiated that relationship. What they had also '*won*' was dignity. As one crofter from north Sutherland put it:

"Because of the Assynt Crofters Trust, crofters no longer have heather behind their ears."¹⁵²

The ACT had in a variety of ways restaged the identity(ies) of crofters and inevitably touched the identity(ies) of Scotland itself in so doing. The social and cultural values of the Gaidhealtachd acquired a '*real*' contemporary status through this act. The ambiguity of representations of Scotland which revolve around notions of things Highland lost some stigma. The inter-relationships between High(land) and Low(land) had been re-negotiated and shifted.

¹⁵⁰**Bell I** 13th December 1992 "*Rocking the House of cards*" The Observer. It was in fact the fourth bid, but that was not public knowledge.

¹⁵¹**Bell I** 13th December 1992 "*Rocking the House of cards*" The Observer

¹⁵²Fieldwork Diary 1992

Calling in the Pledges

Once the celebrating had abated a little, there followed the daunting task of calling in all the pledges and the sitting out the fear that the sum would not be what had been expected. The Ostgota Bank, Sweden had required proof that the available funds were in place. This could not be done and Simon had therefore staked his professional reputation on it in order to secure a successful bid. In fact the final sum was in excess of what had been expected. Donations continued to arrive and many people sent more than they had originally pledged, aware that the campaign had gone on longer than originally hoped for back in the summer and that therefore there would be costs to be met.

Preparing for Community Ownership

On 30th December the Steering Group met to agree how to put in place a suitable structure for the responsibilities to come. The Group and the members were moving towards a new set of circumstances and new challenges. The ACT By-laws had to be drawn up and agreed by members. This would include detail of membership eligibility, both for members and elected Directors. A Board of Directors had to be formally elected in time for the '*Hand Over*', which was scheduled for February 1st 1993. The first step was to agree a mechanism for achieving this. The By-laws proposed and adopted were as follows:

- a member would be a tenant or official sub-tenant of inbye and croft land who had paid £1 and was therefore eligible to vote
- all elected Board members must be locally resident and members
- each township would nominate a member to be a Director
- when the township nominates a Director, that Director would be deemed to have been recommended for appointment
- a retiring Director, if not renominated, would be selected by a vote of township
- the number of Directors would be a maximum of seventeen and a minimum of two

- thirteen Directors would be elected by townships¹⁵³ and four co-opted by the Board

It was agreed that a township could nominate any eligible person as their Director - the nominated person did not need to reside in that township. In the event of a tied vote the matter would be returned to the township to be resolved.

With regard to membership, there was some discussion over whether, in the event of a croft having the tenant and the official subtenant as ACT members, the vote should be exercised by the tenant or the sub-tenant. Many favoured the sub-tenant, but it was agreed finally that both would be eligible to vote. After the Directors were appointed they would co-opt a further four Directors with particular talents or expertise that would be useful in fulfilling the responsibilities of the Board and the ACT more broadly. Simon volunteered to be Company Secretary and suggested that the new Board consider seeking out a volunteer manager to undertake basic factoring duties on behalf of the Board.

The issue of absentees being members was discussed during this period. This was a delicate issue. Many, many absentee tenants had supported the ACT campaign passionately and had made handsome pledges and donations. It seemed inappropriate to deny such committed participants and supporters the right to membership. In addition, a number of resident members and Directors had once been absentee themselves, but had returned to the area. Some people felt that absentee tenants should be obliged to sublet their crofts or assign them. However, in view of the strong support from current absentees and the past pattern of people returning to the area, bringing skills that they had learned and used elsewhere into the area, when they inherited a croft or were able to retire early to their croft, it was agreed that this would be not only unfair but potentially counter-productive in revitalising the townships.

¹⁵³Raffin elected a Director although Raffin and Clashmore share a Grazings Committee.

A postal ballot system was agreed upon as the most appropriate way of electing the new Directors. Ellen MacKenzie (Dùnain), Stoer, agreed to act as Returning Officer. The Steering Group recommended that, except where a current Steering Group member did not want to continue, it might be sensible, in the interests of continuity, for townships to start by electing their current Steering Group representative as their first ACT Director. It was noted that this would be a '*primary Board*', and only a start. It was arranged that a third of Directors would stand down every three years and their posts put up for election. In this way, it was felt, continuity could be maintained and new people could be involved along with 'old hands' as the Trust progressed.

The Steering Group organised a Public Meeting for 9th January 1993 to present the proposed by-laws and procedures to the full membership and to seek agreement for the procedures for the first ACT elections. After discussion, the by-laws and procedures described above were agreed upon. With regard to the election, the closing date for votes was set as 20th January. Another public meeting was scheduled for 23rd January 1993. With the agreement of members present to waive the twenty-one days notice requirement, this meeting would run as an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM). At this meeting the voting results would be announced and the new Directors would be formally recommended. This was a formal procedure in line with the Memorandum and Articles of Association. It is for this reason that one of the by-laws states that once a township has voted for a Director, in a first-past-the post election, the winner of that township level election will be deemed to have been recommended by the Board. At the first meeting following any election, the Board - or a quorum of the Board - still needs to formally recommend the appointment of that person as a Director.

During these weeks in late December 1992 and into January 1993, the Steering Group received a number of requests for leasing fishing and sporting rights and the opportunity to buy some boats from Assynt Estates for use on the lochs. The Steering Group decided to leave consideration of all such matters to the soon to be elected first ACT Board of Directors.

Despite their joy at the successful buy-out, the Steering Group and many members were well aware that there were plenty of observers waiting to 'sneer' if things did not go so well. At the Public Meeting of 9th January this was discussed and those present resolved that they would just need to prove such cynics wrong, as indeed had already been achieved through the buy-out itself. More than one Director privately hoped that people would remember that none of them "*had done this sort of thing before*"¹⁵⁴ and be tolerant and patient since mistakes were bound to be made, particularly in the early days.

A celebration ceilidh was organised for Friday 5th February 1993 by the Steering Group members - now Directors - Aileen Kinnaird and Ishbel MacAulay. The venue was the Culag Hotel, since the Stoer Hall was too small for such a crowd. A wide range of people who had helped out during the campaign were invited. Aileen and Ishbel worked hard to sort through all the correspondence, arrange thank you letters and send out invites to the list of guests. Michael Lord, Director for Raffin, created a computer database of supporters to help relieve the workload, by printing out address labels. He had learned many of his computer skills through a home based, on-line course - an RSA in Business Administration - the year before. This had been supported by CASE. A Church Service of thanksgiving was organised by Steering Group member and now Director, John MacKenzie, for Wednesday 3rd February 1993 in Stoer Free Church.

At the meeting of 23rd January 1993, those present endorsed the proposed by-laws and waived the twenty-one day notice period. The meeting was now constituted as an EGM. The following were recommended and accepted as Directors:

Achmelvich	Iain MacLeod
Torbreck	Derrick MacLeod
Clachtoll	Felicity Basu
Stoer	Ishbel MacAulay
Balchladich	Jimmy Kerr
Clashmore	Aileen Kinnaird
Raffin	Michael Lord
Culkein Stoer	Donald MacKenzie, Dùnain

¹⁵⁴Fieldwork Diary 1992/Jan 93

Clashnessie
Culkein Drumbeg
Drumbeg
Nedd

Donald King
John MacKenzie
Hughie Matheson
John Blunt

The vote in Achnacarnin was tied and the matter was returned to the township members for consideration. In the following month, Pat MacPhail was returned as Director for Achnacarnin.

Meanwhile, at the EGM, the new Board now in place, all members, including absent members, were formally accepted into the Trust on the basis of the new by-laws. There was then general discussion on subjects ranging from vermin control, letting of the non-croft fifty acres at Oldany, potential new social housing, salmon fishing and stalking. It was noted that any crofter who had bought her/his croft could sell it back to the ACT and become a tenant again if s/he wished to do so. The need to create income in order to run the Estate was discussed. Thanks were extended to Aileen and Ishbel for all their hard work in organising the forthcoming ceilidh, to Aileen, Ishbel and Michael for their hard work in dealings with the thank you letters and filing incoming mail, and to Bill, John and Allan for all their hard work in running the buy-out.

Tributes and Congratulations

Letters of congratulations continued to arrive. Two pieces of music had been written in honour of the ACT success. On New Year's Day 1993, Radio Scotland ran a round up of significant events in 1992 hosted by Eddi Stark. The ACT campaign and buy-out was one of the items featured. I was asked by the ACT to be interviewed on behalf of the Trust and to choose a piece of music. After seeking suggestions from a whole lot of different people locally, on what piece of music to choose, I selected '*Airigh a Chulchinn*'.

This song was written by '*The Professor*' who lived in Culkein Stoer. The Professor - Iain MacLeod - had been born and brought up there and had left as a young man to pursue an academic career. MacLeod attended Tain Academy, then Edinburgh and finally Glasgow University, in the study of theology under Dr Caird. On graduation he attained a senior mastership in

the Grammar School of Arminster, England. A congested left lung forced MacLeod to give up the post. It is very interesting to note that on his recovery he worked as a tutor for a number of 'noblemen', including "Sir Charles Tennant of the Glen, Sir Frederick Graham of Netherby Hall and Lord Lawrence, late Governor-general of India".¹⁵⁵ MacLeod then gained a place in London as Lecturer in English Literature, Philology and Constitutional History, "in two of the best known institutions for preparing men for Sandhurst and for the Civil Service of India".¹⁵⁶ Again, we see the very personal way in which colonialism and empire are entwined into the life of the Highlands and Islands. In this particular example, MacLeod's intellectual life took him to the heart of the 'establishment' and hence this subaltern and 'native' voice can be seen to totally hybrid. Again he fell ill, this time much more seriously:

"And here again, and within prospect of the promised goal, I was knocked on the head by a terrible fever, which shattered my physical health, and even impaired my verbal memory. And this is the reason I am here, living in the solitude and social isolation of Assynt.

I have not however been idle since I came here; for although I am nearly as poor as St Peter himself for lack of silver and gold, yet I have had opportunities of helping my crofter neighbours in many business ways, and the sick among them with comfort and medical treatment."¹⁵⁷

When ill health forced him into a very early retirement, he moved back home. He was active in the community and managed to secure funding from the Congested Districts Board to build a decent pier at Culkein Stoer. In addition:

"from the Government of the late Lord Salisbury I got a daily local postman for the different townships of the district."¹⁵⁸

Much of his time had been spent writing poems and songs, mainly in Gaelic. Although he left behind a fairly large collection, 'Airigh a Chulchinn is the one which persists at local ceilidhs. It tells of the joys of the arigh of his

¹⁵⁵p8 MacLeod I. 1907 *Dain Agus Orain* Northern Counties Newspaper and Printing and Publishing Company Limited, Inverness.

¹⁵⁶p8 MacLeod I. 1907 *Dain Agus Orain* Northern Counties Newspaper and Printing and Publishing Company Limited, Inverness.

¹⁵⁷p8 MacLeod I. 1907 *Dain Agus Orain* Northern Counties Newspaper and Printing and Publishing Company Limited, Inverness.

¹⁵⁸p9 MacLeod I. 1907 *Dain Agus Orain* Northern Counties Newspaper and Printing and Publishing Company Limited, Inverness.

boyhood.¹⁵⁹ There is much laughter and sunshine - and a remarkable lack of rain and midges. Yet there is more to this song than a lot of nostalgic frolics. In the last verse the singer beseeches all those who are so knowledgeable about the Parliament of the Land to make an effort to return the land to the people. The singer promises that if this were to be achieved, 'man' will dance and sing 'Long Live the King' as long as he (man) lives.

This song is popular because it has a pretty tune, refers to local places and 'days of youth' **and** because it also makes strong reference to 'The Land Question'. It is also very important that it is written in Gaelic by a local person. For all of these reasons - and because it symbolically joins past with present, Land League with the ACT, in the medium of Gaelic - it proved an appropriate and popular choice. Given that the programme was broadcast on New Year's Day, many people did not hear it. Donald MacKenzie, Dùnain - Director for Culkein, did. He and his brother were born and brought up in sight of the arigh and Donald lives there still. His brother Alastair sang that very song beautifully on many occasions. Donald and Alastair phoned to say how pleased they were to hear the song. The arigh referred to is located up hill from their house, at the back of Dùnain.

Airigh a' Chulchinn

'N àm éirigh na gréine, cur failt' air a bheinn
Bu bhòidheach an àirigh am bràigh Chulchinn
Na h-uiseagan 's na smeoraich ch ceolmhor a' seinn
'S na flùirean a b'aluinn le'm faile 'ga inns'

Chorus

Oh mar a bha, mar bha sinn òg
Rì mireag air an àrigh le maran is cèol!

Verse 2

Bha solus air an àirigh nach ann do na ghrian
Bha ceol ann 'o 'n uair sin nach cuala mi riamh
Bha solus anns' a gradh agus dàn anns' gach fiamh
'S bha ùr-bhlath na h'oige cur fonn air an t-sliabh

Verse 3

Na faice' tu na caistealan, 's ann asda dheaninn uail
'S e bothanan na àirigh làn bainne blàth na'm buoil'
Na miosaran, na cumanan, na copanan, 's na iuaich
'S na caileagan a g' itealaich mar dhealan-dè main cuart!

¹⁵⁹ The arigh is the hill pasture and stone bothy used in the summer months, when in the past the young girls took the cattle to hill pasture for the summer. It was central to past practise of transhumance and was a great ceilidh place for the younger generations.

Verse 4

Tha gaire na àirigh is mais na sùilean tlàth
 Cho ùr 's nar a b'abhaist bhi g'ol a bhainne bhlat
 'O laimh na tè a bhi aithne dhomh, 's a nis thu cho beò
 'S cho soilleir na ma shùilean 's na bha i ann 's a chrò!

Verse 5

Sibhse tha cho fiosarach am Palamiad na Tir
 Thoiribh dhuinn nan àirighean, na mullaichean 'na frith
 'S théid mi fhéin an urras dhubh, mar dhuine 's fhaide chi
 Dannaidsinn sinn, is seinnidh sinn, 'G am fada beò an Rìgh!

Last Chorus

Dìreach mar a bha, etc.

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There are a number of different spellings of *airigh* used in versions written down at different times. The available translations into English vary hugely. The 1932 print by MacLaren has the following translation for the first verse:

“The sheiling blinked bonnily up Culkein way
 As the sun kissed the grey bens at dawning of the day
 When larks far aloft poured their bright hymnal lay
 And flowerets rich spangled decked woodland and brae.”

The translation given to me by a neighbour for the same verse is:

“At the rising of the sun, welcoming the mountain
 How beautiful is the shieling on the brae of Culkein
 The larks and the thrushes signing tunefully
 And the most beautiful flowers, lovely scented, telling all.”

The first example of a translation is obviously done with a view to matching the tune. There is no mention of woodlands in this verse. The second translation tries to echo the meaning of the words more and does not try to rhyme. The second translation continues thus:

Chorus:

Oh, as it was when we were young
 Playing at the shieling with music and song

Verse 2

There was a light at the shieling but not from the sun
 There was music there then which I had never heard before
 There was light in the love and happiness on each face
 And the early dew of youth lighting up the hillside

¹⁶⁰Airigh a' Chulchinn - From MacLaren's Hebrides Collection of Gaelic Songs No 15 1932
 Glasgow Gaelic words by Professor John MacLeod, Culkein English translation by Somerled
 MacMillan Pianoforte accompaniment by Ethel M Baptie Sung by Mr Roderick MacLeod,
 Mod medalist; Sung by Mr James C MacPhee, Mod Medalist.

Verse 3

Didn't you see the castles which I extol
The bothies of the shieling, full of warm milk
The basins and the cups, the buckets and the pails
And the girls flitting around like butterflies

Verse 5

You people who are so knowledgeable about the parliament of the Land
Give us the shielings, the heights and the woods
And I'll guarantee that man, as long as he lives
Will dance and sing, "Long Live the King!"

Chorus

Just as it was etc.

The significant differences in the two translations offered above serve yet again to emphasise the impurity and hybridity of subaltern voices and 'local' voices, and illustrates one of the ways in which meanings and translations are layered and interwoven. It is through this type of interweaving that hidden transcripts are encoded and a range of messages staged in the public domain. In their round up of 1992 on 27th December 1992, *The Scotland on Sunday* included the ACT victory alongside commentary on that year's General Election, the Devolution debate and the legacy of the Maxwell debacle faced by Robert Maxwell's son, Kevin.

The Hand Over

The legal handover occurred at twelve noon on Monday 1st February 1993. A set of keys and legal documents were symbolically handed to the ACT representatives. As many Directors as were able to attend gathered for the occasion. Press representatives were also present. For the ACT Board of Directors it was both an exciting and a daunting moment. As many of them said:

"This is when the real work begins."¹⁶¹

Another Director explained more fully:

"Oh sheer elation. ... You see, that was always going to be the best part of it. And when it was all over and people had to start running the estate, that's when you got down to the nitty-gritty. And then you find it's not such an easy job then. And who's got the time to do it? That's all really - what it all came back to. I think there was a lot of people didn't realise, that after the bid was accepted, that then everybody had

¹⁶¹Fieldwork Diary 1992

to muck in. I certainly, for one, didn't expect to have to ... start doing all sorts of things to keep the place running and ... that didn't occur to me. I thought it was all going to be the same ones that were going to take it over and that they were going to run it. The ones that had got it. But obviously it couldn't be done that way. Everybody had to muck in and be Directors and ... So, I think a lot of things came home to roost after it was all over, after everybody sobered up."¹⁶²

But before anyone '*sobered up entirely*,' there was still the Ceilidh to come. The Church Thanksgiving on the Wednesday was well attended. The week finished with the Celebratory Ceilidh on the Friday night. A huge crowd attended. Many supporters travelled a long way to be there. Votes of thanks were offered to a wide range of people. The press covered the event and the first year of owning and running the land began.

Conclusion

In summing up the action and impacts of the ACT achievements in 1992, it is useful to consider a summary of the Hopes and Fears expressed locally during that time. Figure 5.6 summarises these. In their campaign phase, the ACT achieved, in some part, all of what they had hoped to and in many ways - the level of financial support and donation; the range of types of support - exceeded their original aspirations. In terms of fears, through the energy and skills brought to bear, and, crucially, the advice of friends or key supporters, many of the '*fears*' were avoided.

Although a much higher bid than originally anticipated was required to secure the land, the resources were in place to do that. In the end, including grant, loan, pledges and donations, by January 1993 there was in fact a total of £313,000 available in the ACT coffers. The level of pledges when they were called in was higher due to extra donations being sent with pledges. The need to truly implement the Fall-back position did not arise, so thankfully for those involved, that was not a test which in the end had to be faced.

¹⁶²Fieldwork 1993 ACT male 50 - 55

Figure 5.6: ACT Hopes & Fears
Source: Fieldwork

Hopes	Fears
<i>ACT Creation & Campaign</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preventing the sale • Preventing the break-up of the land • Scaring Off potential buyers • Create an organisation to mount a community buy-out • Find a suitable legal structure • Winning the land' • Achieve wide local support • Support from other crofting communities and 'ex-pats' • Proving to public agencies that this move epitomised 'enterprise' and should therefore be supported financially • Raising the necessary capital • Creating an atmosphere of confidence and possibility • Learning lessons which would benefit other crofting communities • Questioning legitimacy of land speculation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not raising enough money to make a suitable bid • Using all funds raised to buy the land leaving nothing for starting management • Failing to gain public agency support and grant aid • Insufficient local enthusiasm, unity and drive • Failing to establish local and public credibility • Pledges not being honoured • Being forced to implement the Fall-back Position • Maintaining campaign momentum and unity over a long time period if that became necessary • Being pressurised into compromising on key aims in order to raise funding • Being outbid by other people for key assets or part of Estate
Achievement of Buy-out & Hand Over	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive economic development • Increase local confidence • Achieve positive environmental impacts • Develop an enabling role for ACT • Develop sources of income to help develop ACT role • ACT to avoid economic activities which can be taken up by local entrepreneurs • Get to grips with administrative responsibilities • Maintain unity and momentum • Be allowed to make mistakes and learn as they go 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not breaking even • Not making a profit • In-fighting • Low population base leading to problems in replacing Directors • Lack of voluntary time will hold back ACT • Burnout of key figures • Traditional animosity to environmental agencies will make it impossible to secure agreement and funding for environmental projects

The basic principles established at the outset provided strong guidance when the Steering Group faced difficult decisions. Therefore, despite several bewildering periods, the group were not compromised in their aims nor did they end up with less than the full set of assets on sale. From this summary it is clear that the hopes, fears and aspirations changed when the ACT moved into a new phase. New concerns emerged, not least because the group were entering such uncharted territory.

In examining the ACT campaign and strategy, it becomes clear that a number of influences and circumstances coincided to make this act thinkable and then possible. At a Scottish and regional scale, debate over the '*Land Question*' and

strategies to engage with that Question had been changing. In 1990 there was the Scottish Office proposal for the DAFS estates in Skye. In 1991 the Isle of Eigg Trust was created and made public its rationale, aspirations and reasons for action. Gaidhealtachd culture was growing more self confident and more diverse. It was also becoming self aware, regarding its diasporic aspects. A 'new age' was tentatively emerging.

At the Assynt level there were a group of people with a growing experience of community based action on a range of 'fronts'. There was a pre-existing local organisation with a high local and regional profile. A core of people with a dynamic mix of skills and leadership abilities were active in the parish, and members networked regionally through the SCU, through the Free Church and via key public agencies. The combination of these circumstances, largely brought about by past 'agency', with the principled action of local leaders turned the sale of the North Lochinver Estate from a threat into an opportunity. Through building alliances and credibility locally, regionally and at state level, the ACT grew from an idea into a functioning, flexible and dynamic organisation.¹⁶³ Existing local skills were added to through advice and by engaging committed professionals with key skills - Simon Fraser, lawyer and Graeme Scott, Accountant. The skills pool was enriched throughout the campaign process, resulting in rapid capacity building.

A fundamental skill or aspect of the campaign was use of different kinds of cultural vocabularies and languages, at times simultaneously. This resulted in a clearly principled organisation and set of actions or steps - and in an organisation which fulfilled and reworked dominant 'development' concepts of appropriate action and attitudes. The momentum of this way of staging the ACT identities increased over time and significantly altered or made permeable past political boundaries and groupings. The effect, for the duration of the campaign, was increasingly unifying locally, regionally and at the Scottish level. For this reason, at a local level, attitudes and discourses, as expressed in interviews and in daily life, became increasingly alike. Those who started out unsure or resistant to the idea of the ACT and a community

¹⁶³Scottish level - could also be described as sub-state.

buy-out, became fewer as the months passed. Individuals who remained ambiguous did not choose to oppose the action.

By the end of 1992, with the buy-out achieved, from the perspective of crofters, the political landscape had changed irrevocably irrespective of whether a particular crofting group had an interest in community land ownership or not. Once the buy-out was achieved, the ACT thus had to begin to learn another whole raft of new skills and adjust to operating at a different pace. New stresses and challenges emerged at this point, not least through a strong awareness that these first steps in community ownership had to be taken very much in public view. The high press profile, created during the campaign, was maintained, and in this new phase put a great deal of pressure on the newly elected Board of Directors.

In spite of the new pressures and challenges, the achievement of the buy-out itself was a transformative moment, which left few local people and many other people more than a little changed. A certain dignity and self-confidence sprang up locally and led in turn to routine questioning of regional policies and circumstances by many groups and individuals. This illustrates an alteration in the experience of self as other, and a dismantling of the partial subalternity discussed earlier. Importantly, though, the experiences of 1992 also made clear the politically and strategically useful possibilities of deploying partial or strategic subalternity.

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Chapter Six A Decade of Community Land Ownership

Introduction

In 1993 the ACT Directors, the members and the wider community embarked on a new and unknown path. As was discussed in the previous Chapter, the group had a range of hopes and fears in mind as they made a start on owning and managing the land in the interests of their members and in line with their stated aims. This Chapter provides an account and analysis of the ACT's activities as *'landowner'* and hence, an account of the concrete impacts of ACT action. In terms of the post-colonial problematic this Chapter illustrates some of the social, economic and environmental changes wrought by the ACT but also highlights the fact that, having put the ACT in the position of *'landowner'*, the ACT becomes in some senses, the *'establishment'*. The ACT Board therefore has to negotiate its changed positioning and strategically engage with the implications of this oppositional group's *'insertion'* into a position of *'power,'* laden with the historically naturalised, pre-existing power relations against which the group has defined itself.

Owning the Land

Amongst the Directors, there was a strong determination to *'stick it out'* and an appreciation that everyone was now on a very steep learning curve. One of the challenges faced in the early days and years, was conceptualising community ownership. Having eradicated the category of *'land owner'* or laird, through community action, it was often difficult to define the new relationships. Nobody felt that the ACT or its members were *'landowners'* in the sense that the term has traditionally been understood. The group lacked a new vocabulary that would describe roles adequately. This confusion over categories extended to ACT actions. There was much debate over whether the ACT should join the Scottish Landowners Federation, as it was now entitled to do.

A clear thread running through this entanglement was the belief that ownership of the land was in fact of no interest to anybody. That may seem like a very strange concept, in view of the enormous effort it took the ACT to secure ownership. It was ACT Directors themselves - and members - who expressed these beliefs to me. They

were of the view that owning the land is only a means to an end. Ownership is not an end in itself and, in and of itself, is of no particular interest. In fact, in principle, it should not even be necessary for community groups like the ACT to engage in a struggle to attain ownership at all. This again calls into question the whole concept of ownership, as defined through laws and precedents based on Western European jurisprudence and, significantly, developed in tandem with the development of capitalism from mercantilism. Some local crofters who were not particularly keen on the ACT, felt very ambiguous about the idea precisely because they believed that croft tenants are '*only passing through*'. That is to say, that each crofter has guardianship of a bit of ground for the duration of his/her lifetime or for as long as that bit of ground is needed. It then passes on to someone else. For many people the concept of ownership in relation to land continued to seem ludicrous and morally wrong. It is for this reason that ACT Directors and members would and still assert, apparently illogically, that ownership doesn't matter and is of no interest to them.

This entanglement, once the ACT had achieved '*ownership*', is what led to difficult issues of translation, in embarking on managing the land as a community. Again, the phrase '*managing the land*' misrepresents the relationships between members, the organisation (ACT) and the land. Even the term '*land*', used in this context, is completely inaccurate, since it reduces '*all of life therein*' to a thing labelled like a pound of lard - '*land*'.

In terms of the ways in which individuals might conceptualise themselves in relation to the ACT, there was a need to work at creating new conceptualisations. Crofters have always defined themselves in opposition to the '*laird*'. As many people said in 1992 and 1993:

"In the past, you could always blame Vestey."¹

This emotional safety valve no longer existed and it would prove an enduring challenge to find ways of operating which were inclusive and which would encourage everybody in the North Assynt Estate to appreciate their own actual or potential role and responsibilities. To some extent, the old enduring identities had

¹Fieldwork 1992 -3 ACT various

been set adrift by the ACT success and it would take some time to recreate new ones through action.

Gradually new vocabularies emerged, including phrases such as '*managing our land*', which were used contingently and hesitantly due to their inadequacies. One of the very big weaknesses of this phrase, if used by the ACT, is the way in which it fails to flag up the strict limits to ACT powers in relation to land as an environmental and agricultural '*object*'. These powers of management, in reality, and particularly in a structure like the ACT, created through representation of each township, lie with each township, its tenants and its Grazings Committee.

The result of this failure of language was that the Board of Directors spent the early years striving to find words and create concepts that would meet their needs. Immediately after the handover, the name of the estate was changed from the North Lochinver Estate to the North Assynt Estate. Lochinver is one village outside the '*estate*' boundaries, whereas Assynt is a parish in which the '*estate*' is located. The new name is therefore more logical, accurate and inclusive.

In creating a new administrative structure, the ACT created the voluntary post of Croft Administrator. This phrase was consciously chosen to distance the responsibilities of this post from the sort of role and position normally occupied by a '*Factor*'. The Board of Directors were trying, in actions of this sort, to symbolically position the ACT as a very different kind of '*landlord*'. Likewise, in 1995, when a paid part-time post was created, the Board of Directors went to some trouble to find an appropriate job title for a job which combined administrative responsibilities and project development, and which was, in its early days, fairly loosely defined in any case. The Board settled on the phrase '*cuidiche do mhuinntir Asainte*' - '*helper to the people of Assynt*'. The word '*helper*' is not an ideal translation but the important point is that the word '*cuidiche*' carries a sense of facilitation, and is answerable to '*do mhuinntir*' - the people of Assynt, not the Board of Directors or the Executive.

Through use, and practice, by the later years of the first decade of existence, the ACT Board and members had made certain approaches and phrases their own and were able, with much less difficulty, to talk about '*managing our assets*', management responsibilities and the role of the ACT as '*landlord*'. The idea of ownership of land

itself remains alien and abhorrent to many of those involved. The journey to this point was often tense and fraught with difficulties. From the point of view of the general public, many of the challenges were invisible and unglamorous but very pressing for those at the sharp end, shouldering the task of creating from a campaigning group a functioning community organisation, with significant aspirations and responsibilities, but little in the way of money or income.

After the buy-out, there was £6,600 left in the account and £2,805 extra from donations to help with expenses. This was in fact a better start than had been anticipated, due to public generosity in sending amounts over above the original pledges and continued donations right into the early days of 1993. Only two pledges had not been received by February 1993.

Managing Community Ownership

In this section I provide an account of the ACT activities during the period 1993 to 2001. As will be seen there were many developments and lessons to learn during that period.

Organisational Structure

One of the first tasks undertaken by the Board was to create a suitable administrative structure. It was agreed that an Executive Committee of three Directors would be appointed by the Board to deal with day to day issues and implementation of Board of Directors' policies. At the outset this Executive consisted of a Chair - Allan MacRae, a Vice-Chair - John MacKenzie and an Acting Secretary - Bill Ritchie. The Company Secretary, charged with fulfilling the administrative and legal obligations laid down by Companies' Law, was the lawyer, Simon Fraser. In the following year, the Croft Administrator was added to the Executive, making a team of four. In 1993, Pat MacPhail was elected by the Board as Croft Administrator.

A major challenge was to achieve a structure and working practices which would, as far as was possible, make crofting business confidential and not subject to Board debate. By crofting business was meant croft assignments, selling of house-sites by individual crofters and fulfilment of the ACT role as landowner in terms of croft assignments. In the event of a non-family assignment three separate opinions are sought by the Crofters Commission on the suitability of the new proposed tenant and the extent to which transfer of the croft to the proposed new tenant would be deemed to be *'in the interests of the community'*. The three opinions sought are:

- the views of the township involved, as expressed by the Grazings Committee
- the view of the Area Assessor - an individual living in the area, appointed by the Crofters Commission on the basis of adverts and recommendations
- the view of the landlord, which in this case is the Assynt Crofters Trust

Since the ACT was made up of township representatives, in the position of Directors, the matter of a landlord's opinion and a township opinion could be delicate. It was therefore agreed that all mail pertaining to assignments, conveyancing, planning applications and the like would be sent direct to the Croft Administrator. Matters arising from this set of responsibilities would then be dealt with by the Executive and only referred to the Board in

exceptional circumstances. In principle, in the early years, the Executive would tend to respond by endorsing the township view on a particular assignation, unless there were compelling reasons not to. Those reasons might include a principled decision in support of facilitating New Entrants to become croft tenants, particularly if a township was not unanimous in its view.

There is no more dangerous and delicate subject matter in crofting than croft assignations - who gets what croft. It is rare for an assignation to be approved without significant uproar and disputes in the township involved, and in the wider community. This was therefore an area of responsibility fraught with difficulties and requiring significant courage and strong mindedness to tackle it at all. It would inevitably be an area where suitable procedures were developed over time, refined as another pit-fall or mini-skirmish was endured or resolved.

Dealing with the wider ACT aspirations was immediately a more positive experience. The Board created three sub-committees, and identified priorities for each sub-committee, in January 1993:

- Land and Natural Resources Deer Control and game management
- Commercial and Industrial Torbreck House
- Tourism and Recreation Fishing permits

Allan, Bill and Derrick were appointed to the Land and Natural Resources sub-group. John, Hughie and Donald King were appointed to the Commercial and Industrial sub-group. Iain, Ishbel, Felicity and Aileen were appointed to the Tourism and Recreation sub-group. The ACT now had a structure of responsibilities which is described diagrammatically in Figure 6.1 and a sectoral division of labour as described in Figure 6.2.

Figure 6.1: ACT Administrative Structure
Source: ACT documentation 1994/5

Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • membership open to all croft tenants • 111 in 13 townships • appoint Directors on a township basis • members guide Trust policies through general meetings
Board of Directors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13 appointed and 2 co-opted • legally responsible and determine policy
Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair; Vice Chair; Secretary;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administrator management decisions within policy
Working Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop initiatives

Figure 6.2: ACT Working Groups
Source: ACT documentation 1994/5

Croft Administration	Economic Development	Tourism	Natural Resources
<i>One Director Solicitor</i>	<i>Two Directors</i>	<i>Three Directors Three Co-opted</i>	<i>Three Directors</i>
Croft Legal Duties Assignment of crofts Conveyancing of house sites Conveyancing of development sites Decrofting Resumption Apportionment Collect croft rents Keep Records	Housing Power Generation Leasing Property	Fishing	Management Plans Woodlands Fishing Access Minerals

The details in Figure 6.2 are from 1994 - 1995 and show how the basic sub-group or Working Group concept evolved, as did the Croft Administration. Within a year three people were co-opted onto the Tourism Working Group, to help develop the fishing. These were David Grant, Highland Stoneware, Lochinver; Trevor Coul, Assynt Angling Club, Lochinver; and Frank Ross, Nedd - an older member of the community with long and varied experience in land and natural resource management. Through these co-options the ACT was gaining the energy and commitment of non-crofters and widening the skills base. Frank Ross had a family croft, but David Grant and Trevor Coul were not part of the crofting community and were based in Lochinver. By this time the Directors on this Working Group had changed to comprise Ishbel MacAulay, Aileen Kinnaird and Pat MacPhail.

Early in 1993 the ACT acquired office premises. These were the old Shop/ Post Office in Stoer, which had been empty since the 1970s. This provided a place to store the ever increasing paperwork and documentation which the ACT was accumulating in the homes of a number of Directors. It was also centrally located from the point of view of Directors from either end of the North Assynt Estate attending evening meetings. Members and Directors donated old chairs and tables to furnish the building. Donnie (Pal) MacLeod, Drumbeg, organised a team of men to paint the new office. In the beginning, the building had no

electricity and meetings were held by candle light and gas lamp. There was no computer till 1995 and no phone line till 1996.

From Figure 6.2 it can be seen that the Croft Administration role had been further defined and was being undertaken now by a Working Group of two - Simon Fraser, the lawyer and Pat MacPhail, Croft Administrator. By this time, the Croft Administrator was part of the Executive. The Commercial and Industrial sub-group was called the Economic Development Working Group. Bill Ritchie and John MacKenzie were now the Directors taking this aspect forward. Land and Natural Resources - shortened to Natural Resources - was being taken forward by Bill Ritchie, Allan MacRae and John Mackenzie.

In terms of housing, in the early days the Economic Development Working Group concentrated on researching what options might be available to the ACT in tackling this issue. Contact was made with housing associations to ascertain whether the ACT should set up a housing association or work with an existing organisation. Efforts were made to identify suitable land for potential social housing and self-build and it was discovered at an early stage that the non-croft land at Oldany was considered unsuitable by the relevant public agencies because it was so isolated from existing settlement and public services. At this stage the discussions about housing were exploratory and aimed at identifying a suitable way ahead and developing consensus on housing issues.

This Working Group also began investigating the possibility of developing renewable energy resources with a view to creating an income source for the ACT in the future. The ACT had quickly taken the view that it was not appropriate for the ACT to develop economic opportunities which local individuals could develop. That, it was stated, had been one of the classic problems of the traditional Highland estate - concentrating all economic activities in estate hands. The ACT was determined to avoid taking that route, even though it would make income generation for running and developing the Trust even more challenging. The ACT was, and still is, conceived of as a facilitating body, but it does need to develop some sort of income-stream in order to survive and prosper. Renewable energy, it was felt, might be an

appropriate avenue, since it was beyond the means of individual businesses in the area.

The Economic Development Group's responsibilities concerning Property focused on Torbreck House. There was much heart searching over this issue, as the building had to either pay for itself or be sold quickly, since no-one wished to prolong the Highland Prospect loan which had been taken to secure Torbreck House as part of the North Assynt Estate assets.

A surprising solution literally turned up. Pat MacPhail, returning from a local funeral, met a van on the road. The driver seemed lost and Pat MacPhail approached him to see if he needed help or directions. The driver explained that they were looking around the area to see if there was a property to let. The driver was Rob Cannal who, with his partner, ran a company called *Implex*. This company created emergency planning computer packages for local authorities and undertook environmental monitoring across Europe. Much of their environmental information came in daily 'on-line'. They were looking for premises to rent. On being shown Torbreck House, *Implex* rented it for an initial eighteen month period. Once installed they recruited two local people - one as an administrator and one as a fieldworker. Any final decision on what to do with Torbreck House could be delayed since this rental would cover loan repayments.

The Natural Resources Group had to decide how to meet the ACT obligations concerning an annual deer cull. Through the West Sutherland Deer Management Group, the Red Deer Commission provides guidelines as to how many stags and hinds each area should cull annually and how many deer should be on each area of ground. The ACT obligations were small, but again someone had to take responsibility for this task.

Rights to some of the shooting was leased to Calum Miller, Drumbeg who provided ghilleing, fishing tuition and stalking for paying guests. Calum also leased rights to brown trout fishing and a boat on certain lochs. Another small local business - Clashmore Holiday Cottages - leased trout fishing and permission on Loch na Claise for the use of visitors in the family's holiday lets.

In the first month of operation the ACT had to consider requests from two different fish farms to site cages, a request for use of the non-croft land at Oldany and a proposal to investigate the sustainable harvesting of water lily-rhizomes. The Board discussed a name and logo for the estate. As noted earlier, the name was changed to North Assynt Estate. A competition was launched for a logo. This was won by Uwe, the SWT Warden on Handa Island and later the Highland Council Ranger in Durness. He came up with the '*Split Rock*' logo, which was adopted and used for headed notepaper.

Membership and Participation

Once the ACT was running the land, and the first Board of Directors were in place, attendance at public meetings, EGMs and AGMs dropped to an average of about thirty people each time. During 1992 every public meeting had been packed. For the Board of Directors, this was disappointing, as this comment in 1994 makes clear:

"We had only twenty-eight members of the Trust present at the AGM. In other words, there was a great feeling of involvement and participation in the campaign, but for whatever reason, people have now slipped back into a feeling that they would just like to get on with their own lives. That disappoints me because I would like people to feel that they are involved. How we achieve that I'm not quite sure."²

This fact made the Board of Directors feel a little isolated, compared to the '*carnival*' atmosphere of 1992 and the early part of 1993. In retrospect, it seems clear that the very concept of '*carnival*' helps to explain this change. If the idea of carnival is to turn the world and its usual ordering, '*on its head*', then the events of 1992 and the official hand-over of '*the land*' certainly did this. The ACT was setting the agenda for debate and action. The ACT were aiming to be '*their own landlord*'. Press headlines of the time further emphasise this turning upside down which was occurring:

²Fieldwork 1994 ACT male 50 - 55

"Crofters gather to plan clearance of landlords"³

This was the title to an article in *The Telegraph* in July 1992. The comment under this read:

"Highlanders are challenging the traditional land ownership pattern writes Jenny Shields"⁴

Later in July, *The Guardian* used the title:

"Highlanders fight to halt laird's clearance sale"⁵

From this type of reporting and from the atmosphere in Assynt, which was one of euphoria, new dignity and elation, the sense that the previous order of things was being turned upside down is strong.⁶

With the change from a campaigning organisation, dominated in the early years by day to day responsibilities, huge demands on voluntary time and the unrelenting need to learn new skills and invent new ways of proceeding, this sense of carnival ebbed away, except on special occasions. The annual celebration in February of the '*Hand-Over*' was one such special occasion. By thinking through this change in terms of carnival, which is always temporary, it becomes clear that an ebbing away of attendance at meetings was perhaps inevitable. In addition, the majority of people in the North Assynt Estate do not enjoy meetings. As is common in the rural Islands and Highlands, there are a great range of demands on local voluntary time from activities which include Grazings Committees, Hall Committees, Local Development Groups, Assynt Games Committee, Friends of Assynt Care, Comunn Eachdraidh Asiante, Church activities, Playgroup, Wildlife Watch Club, Assynt Field Club, activities in support of the Primary Schools, activities to raise funds for charities like Highland Hospice, Save the Children, miscellaneous charities, annual Panto... the list is close to endless. In a parish of about one thousand people, it becomes

³Title from an article in *The Telegraph* p7, 1st July 1992.

⁴p7 *The Telegraph* 1st July 1992.

⁵*The Guardian* 31st July 1992.

clearer why maintaining high attendance at standard meetings is very difficult. The standard meeting, ruled by Minutes and formalities is for some, a subtle form of torture.

Some people were daunted by the technicalities and basic administrative and legal responsibilities and hence participated less than they had done originally. This quote helps to illustrate the effort which had to go into creating appropriate ways of proceeding:

"It's all been a lot more complicated than I had thought. I thought that it would be more informal. But even with regard to Minutes and circulation of Minutes; circulation of agendas. At the beginning I thought, my goodness, what a lot of money they're wasting on stamps. But when I said that to Bill, he said - Oh no! Before we were just a group trying to get something - a Steering Group. But now we're a properly, legally formed Company and there are rules and regulations. But I must admit, at the beginning, to me anyway, it felt very formal. Different from before. But I recognise, I suppose, that it's got to be like that. But it all seems to be going well. Slowly, which is a good thing. Not too many abrupt changes for any of the locals to have to get [used to]."⁷

It fell, in great part, to the original leadership to forge a way ahead. Another important factor was, as mentioned in the previous Chapter, the need to change pace and approach, from a campaigning role to a management and development role.

With regard to membership and participation, it is worth bearing in mind that ACT membership is still currently restricted to those who are the tenant or official sub-tenant of a croft. This means that while absentee tenants can be members, a lot of local residents cannot. At the time of its creation this was not a problem for anyone in the community. The principal seemed to everyone sensible, in view of the predominantly crofting nature of the land for sale, and the unanimously chosen structure, based so strongly on township representation, proved resilient and easy to understand. By 1997 the issue of

⁶See particularly Chapters 1 and 5 in **Stallybrass P. and White A.** 1986 *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* Methuen London.

⁷Fieldwork 1994 ACT female 40 - 45

representation of non-crofters was being regularly raised by a range of members and non-members. The Board of Directors pledged to look into the matter and try to find suitable solutions to this issue. In 2001, the Board returned to the issue and began to put together a proposal, based on having one non-crofting representative, elected by local residents in the North Assynt Estate. At the time of writing, these proposals have been briefly outlined at the December 2001 EGM, but have not been finalised or put before the Board of Directors. By the mid to late 1990s a whole range of new community land ownership organisations had been created, with a range of different management and membership structures. Public agency grant aid, specifically for community land ownership organisations, had been developed but tied to an open and broad membership. The membership structure of the ACT was not deemed to be democratic enough by the Scottish Land Fund⁸ and by the Community Land Unit⁹. The ACT and the Melness Crofters Estate, which shares the same structure, are not eligible for grant assistance from these sources. This theme will be returned to later in this Chapter.

Communications

During the first years of ACT activity, the fact that attendance had fallen away greatly worried many Directors. They were concerned that they themselves were not doing enough to maintain a sense of involvement:

"It may be that people feel, although I'm not conscious of it, that there is insufficient feedback from the Board. And that probably is something we need to address. We are quite definitely putting a lot of energy and effort into what we are doing. And time to set up channels for people to get feedback hasn't really been available. But it is probably something we ought to address."¹⁰

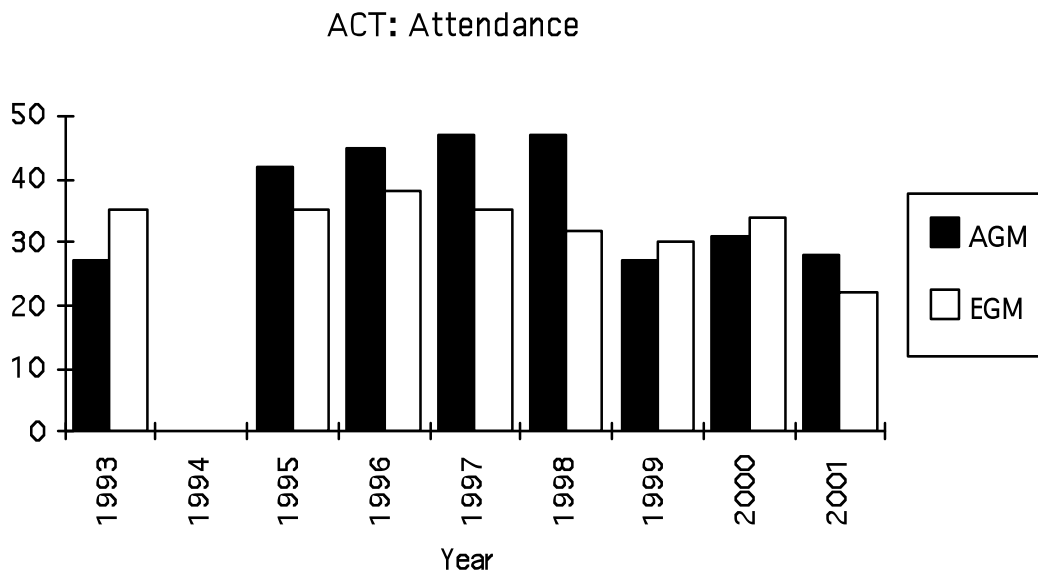
In fact, as Figure 6.3 illustrates, attendance at EGMs and AGMs rose in the first few years and reached an apparently steady rate. It was from 1999 until 2001 that attendance fell away markedly.

⁸ See below for details.

⁹ See below for details.

¹⁰Fieldwork 1994 ACT male 50 - 55

Figure 6.3: ACT Attendance
 Source: AGM and EGM Minutes
 Note: Figures for 1994 unavailable



The quote above raises one of the most difficult issues in community action: maintaining momentum and achievements through voluntary effort. Office bearers and others can be very aware of what, in an ideal situation, ought to be done but be completely unable to take on the extra tasks. During periods when there is a lot to do, as there was in the early years of the ACT, when procedures had to be put in place and the range of basic obligations understood and dealt with, it is impossible to do things in the way that a fully resourced organisation would. In 1994 the ACT decided to create a part-time administrative post and in 1995 this post became the Cuidiche post mentioned earlier. This is an all year part-time post requiring an average of sixteen hours per week. The Cuidiche has to record and type the Minutes and support the work of the Board and Executive. As time has gone on, the post has developed. In 2001 the third Cuidiche, since the creation of the post, was in place. At this time the Cuidiche began to take on basic financial responsibilities concerning banking and cashflow.

One of the early tasks of this post was to write, produce and circulate an ACT Newsletter to members and Honorary Members. This was one way in which the Board tried to tackle the communications issues they faced. Over the years

the Newsletter has been rather intermittent since, even with a part-time member of staff, other pressing matters can leave little time for jobs like the Newsletter.

Another way of tackling communications issues was to have an annual EGM late in the year, in addition to the AGM each spring. In this way, there are always two public meeting each year. At each AGM and EGM a speaker was invited to talk about a topic of local interest. This idea was implemented in the hope that it would help to encourage a higher attendance than usual at these public meetings. In late 2001 it was decided to drop speakers from the usual EGM programme because it was failing to have the desired effect.

As increasing numbers of community land ownership organisation were created in the subsequent decade, all of them found that communications was a difficult issue to deal with, even with full-time paid staff. In Eigg the Isle of Eigg Residents Association (IERA) began posting notices of meeting and potential agenda items earlier in order to encourage all residents to put items on the agenda. In Knoydart in 2001, once a full time Development Manager was in place and the organisation had an Office in the Centre of Inverie, it became possible to regularly post informal, hand-written updates and photos, in the Office window. This, combined with the daily presence of two staff members in the Office and around the village, was beneficial in creating a very public face and open access to the Foundation. During 2001 the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust (IEHT) focused in converting attic space in their Pier complex, which already houses the Cafe, Shop/P.O and Craft Shop, to provide IEHT office space and a presence in the hub of the community. Both of these organisations have more than one member of staff and are therefore more able than smaller groups to make the decision to have staff located in an accessible position. This can create a very good atmosphere, but also involves a lot of staff time. The other major component of staff time is administration. The first IEHT Project Officer calculated that 70% of her time was taken up by administration. From this it is clear that the challenges facing this type of organisation, in trying to balance PR, a facilitating role, administration and implementation of new projects, are formidable. For smaller groups, unable to create even one full-time post, the challenges are even more intense and can be

distressing for committed volunteers whose greatest wish is to achieve concrete change and development.

In 2001 the Melness Crofters Estate (MCE) also established an office, with support from Highland Region and CASE. The MCE is a much smaller organisation, with a part-time Secretary, but again this group want to achieve easy public access and a regular local presence, by having a staff member in the office at certain times. The ACT too benefited from this in the early days of the Cuidiche post. It is clear that this sort of presence creates and builds goodwill, but trying to balance this with other duties in order to support and relieve the huge voluntary effort is not easy. Not all of these aims can be achieved at the same time, with limited resources. Another step taken by the ACT to signal and achieve open communications was to announce that all Board meetings were open to the public. Some members of the public and ACT members did and still do attend, but again, for most people a meeting format is not an attractive option for the evening's entertainment.

Another aspect of communications in community land ownership organisations, which again all of the groups created to date have discovered '*the hard way*'. is that no matter how much effort and innovation is put into maintaining open communications, the local '*rumour mill*' will still trundle on.

On example of this in the North Assynt Estate, was a rumour which went round that local people were no longer allowed to fish for brown trout in the lochs. This was during 1993 - 1996, when the ACT was becoming increasingly active in developing the brown trout fishing, access to it and research into the fresh water fishing resource. In view of the strong symbolic status of rights to shoot deer and catch fresh water fish, this will always be a tense topic. On the subject of deer, the ACT Board took the view from the outset that members had every right to take '*a beast for the pot*' or the freeze and that the ACT, as landlord would not take legal action against anyone who did so. In fact, in view of the perceived overpopulation of deer in Assynt, it was thought that the more people who did this, the better.

The symbolic status of game and fishing rights can be seen clearly during the Crofters Wars, in a range of literature and stories and in the comments highlighted in the previous Chapter, from the press leak:

"They would of course put back any salmon caught."¹¹

During the Crofters Wars the landlords' rights over fish and game was a very usual illustration of the inequity of '*the system*'. This commonly quoted proverb sums up the basic position:

Breac a Linne, slat a coille
Is fiadh a fireach
Meirle anns nach do ghabh
Gaidheal riamh nàire.¹²

Or - *The Highlander has a right to take a stag from the hill, a tree from the wood and a salmon from the pool.* This assertion, based on ancient ideas, was augmented by arguments from the Bible. Old Testament passages focused on the tribal and family basis of apportioning land were quoted in Highland Land Law Reform Association pamphlets.¹³ A text very commonly used was from *Isaiah*:

"Is an-aoibhinn dhuibh-se a tha 'cur tìghe ri tigh, agus a' cur achaidh ri achadh, gus na bi àit ann, agus gu-n gabh sibh comhuidh air leth ann meadhon na tìre!

Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth!"¹⁴

The continued practise of poaching is a strong and persistent form of symbolic resistance and culturally justified law breaking. The practical outcome of food for the table or for the deep freeze, to eat over the winter, continues to make an important contribution to many household economies. However, there is much

¹¹Press Leak 1992.

¹²p7 **Grant I. F.** 1975 *Highland Folk Ways* Routledge and Kegan Paul London.

¹³See for instance p159 in **Hunter J.** 1976 *The Making of the Crofting Community* John Donald Edinburgh and pp84 - 89 **Meek D. E.** 1987 '*The Land Question Answered from the Bible*'; *The Land Issue and the Development of a Highland Theology of Liberation* **SGM** Vol. 103 No. 2.

more to the thrill of poaching than the practical outcome. A significant aspect of that thrill is in its symbolic resistance - and once again in the fact that this law breaking, which in the 20th century began to attract ever heavier Court Sentences, through fines and imprisonment, is like an open-joke. It is, in crofting communities, a good and right thing to be doing, especially for the younger men. Some women, like myself, have done it, but in general, to my knowledge, it is very much the preserve of the younger men.

With this cultural backdrop, it is easier to see why organising commercial benefits from fresh water fishing could be fraught with difficulties. The issuing of permits, raised fears about the ACT ending up being like a 'real' landlord. The idea of a children's and household annual permit to try to encourage local children to make the most of **their** brown trout fishing, by learning to fly fish did not have that effect for everyone. Rumours started to circulate that everyone would have to pay for fishing, which for the majority of people, as the background information above illustrates, would be morally wrong.

This type of persistent misunderstandings and rumours, in all community land ownership organisations, puts the volunteer Directors under a great deal of pressure. The fact that new ways of working are being developed, once an organisation has the title to an area of land, inevitably means change and uncertainty. In the highly charged atmosphere of township politics, this produces fears about unexpected consequences and the integrity and motivations of those elected to positions of power in the new organisation. It would be impossible for mistakes not to be made, as ways of working and dealing with the new pressures and responsibilities are developed. Hence, particularly in the early years, there is a very high possibility of misunderstandings, gossip, rumour and unintended negative impacts, which no-one involved could foresee. Likewise, in the early years it has yet to become clear what procedures will work best and which skills each emerging role will require. As the organisation matures this becomes clearer, a range of new skills and insights are gained and it becomes easier to match the skills or potential of

¹⁴Quoted in various, including pv **Hunter J.** 1976 *The Making of the Crofting Community* John Donald.

individual volunteers, through election, co-option or voluntary work, to the needs of the evolving community organisation.

During the 1990s media interest in an individual organisation has tended to decrease, as new organisations have '*hit the headlines*'. This too, greatly helps the early Boards of Directors, who will find themselves facing not just local, but national and regional responsibilities through media interviews and discussions with other existing, potential or emergent community land ownership organisations. As can be seen from the example of the Stornoway Trust, after decades, the organisation settles in and becomes just a part of the local scene, instead of dominating it. This too is healthy and facilitates less pressured management for the Board. The Stornoway Trust suffers from a very low turnout at elections, which worries some members, but this low turnout, except at times when a particular issue has stirred people up, can also be read as a sign that the majority of people are adequately comfortable with the range of Directors and policies the Stornoway Trust is pursuing. '*Word of mouth*' has positive as well as negative impacts for this category of organisation. Much news travels very quickly by '*word of mouth*' in rural communities, and so it is likely that at any point, many more people are fairly well informed of '*goings-on*' than might be assumed from turnouts at elections and meetings

Networking

At the time of the 1992 ACT campaign, faxes, letters and phone calls were the main means of communication used. Within two or three years, e-mail had begun to play an important role for some people. Bill Ritchie was using e-mail to maintain contacts with public agencies and other community activists. When the Knoydart Foundation and the IEHT were created, websites were a crucial element in their campaigning and later communications strategy.

For all of these groups, PCs have made effective community action much more attainable. It is still the case that only a minority of people in the crofting community have access to a PC, and have learned to use one. The same applies to e-mail and the Internet. However some people have the skills, the hardware and the software and have been able therefore to use these new technologies in

the interests of their local community. This transforms local possibilities. At a local level it became possible to produce notices of meetings, Minutes, Appeal documents, databases of members and supporters and websites fairly easily. While all of this is still labour intensive, it takes much less time than it would with an old-fashioned typewriter or hand written documents. In the absence of a photocopier, it is possible to mass-produce documents, and with e-mail to send them cheaply and quickly, to a huge number of people.

For networking between communities and activists this has also been crucial. In particular, e-mail and e-based discussion forums have the potential to save in voluntary time. Examples of this will be returned to later in the Chapter.

In terms of networking, face-to-face encounters remain important. Through a rising interest in community land ownership, new and ever increasing networks emerged. For the ACT Office Bearers, in their first and second terms of office, this became a very heavy demand on their voluntary time, but one which they were determined to meet. In 1993 Borge and Annishadder Township in Skye achieved a community buy-out, through friendly negotiations with the landowner. The spark for this move had been the fact that the landowner had refused the Grazings Committee permission to undertake a crofter forestry scheme on the hill ground. The landowner did however suggest that, if the township was determined to go ahead with their forestry idea, he would consider a community buy-out.

Representatives of the township, such as Alastair Nicholson and John Angus MacKenzie, felt that they would not have proceeded to a community buy-out without the example of the ACT to follow. John MacKenzie and Bill Ritchie met with Borge and Annishadder representatives, and visited the township, to pass on what they had learned in the course of their ACT activities. Allan MacRae was also a popular and inspiring visiting speaker for communities like Eigg and Knoydart when, a few years later, they were looking into how they too might proceed towards community ownership. Borge and Annishadder chose a structure which offered membership to all resident adults in the township. This amounted to about twenty-one members or shareholders. This township buy-out was helped too by the return of Alastair Nicholson and his

young family, to the township, after many years spent working in South Africa. Alaistar brought enthusiasm, energy and very significant computer skills into the heart of the township. This made a huge contribution to the township buy-out and development.

In recognition of the huge voluntary burden being undertaken by those with some experience of community buy-outs - in the early years Bill, Allan and John - the Crofters Commission, with financial support from HIE, created the Crofting Trust Advisory Service (CTAS). The CTAS aimed to provide advice to community groups, finance to pay for feasibility studies and legal fees and access to contacts who could carry out the necessary legal and accountancy tasks. The CTAS set out to achieve this by using advisors who had personal experience of achieving community land ownership. The advisors used were John MacKenzie, ACT and Alastair Nicholson, Borge and Annishadder. At last these activists could be paid for the time and cost involved in travelling all across the Highlands and Islands to spend time passing on experience and tactics to other communities. At this time there was interest in Eigg, Knoydart, Sconser, Melness, Nevis estates, Morar and Poolewe. In several cases it was landlords who were coming forward offering to negotiate a community buy-out. While this was the situation in Melness, in Eigg and Knoydart the communities were suffering ever worsening impacts of the Highland Sporting estate model spinning out of control in the hands of landowners who were at turns eccentric, volatile and criminal. The CTAS was provided by the Crofters Commission and paid for by the Commission and HIE.

Succession

One of the main fears expressed in North Assynt, in the first few years of community ownership was that no-one but the original leadership would be able to take forward the Trust and that over time, there would be a shortage of Directors:

"The biggest problem I see in the future is who's going to run it when the present management gives up, because the people are getting older."¹⁵

¹⁵Fieldwork 1994 ACT male 60 - 65

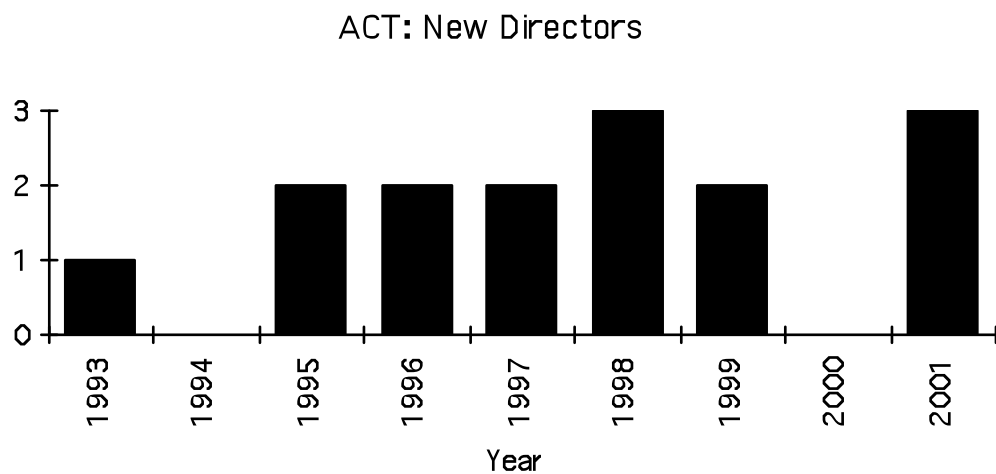
By 2001, with annual Board elections behind them, the ACT seemed to have avoided this difficulty. Each year, one third of Directors stand down. In this way continuity is maintained and everyone serves for three years at a time. Past Directors can be re-elected if they are willing and there is no restriction on the number of terms of office a Director serves. In the nine years, including 1992, sixteen new Directors had been elected onto the Board, as previous members resigned. Co-opted members automatically stand down at each AGM and can be co-opted once more, if they are willing to serve, once the new Board is in place.

As Figure 6.4 illustrates, in the first nine years of operation, new people did come forward to serve as Directors, both through election and co-option. A number of Directors who were first co-opted onto the Board, were later elected. The places taken by the new Directors were vacated by outgoing Directors who did not want to serve again, often because of their age, to gain more time for personal reasons, but also to give other people a chance to take their turn and. To date, no-one who has been a Director has been ousted through competitive elections.

Figure 6.4 ACT: New 'Blood'

Source: ACT Minutes

Note: 'New Directors' includes those co-opted and elected; Directors elected after having served as co-opted Directors are not counted as 'new blood'.



The new Directors who became involved are listed in Figure 6.5. The fact that new volunteers were and are being found to serve as Board members must go

some way to allaying the early fears of many people, that *'new blood'* would be hard to find. In addition the new Board members gain new skills as they become accustomed to their responsibilities and become more involved in areas of particular interest. This has made possible changes in Office Bearers too. Past Office Bearers have for the most part remained on the Board for a year at least, after resigning from their post and so have continued to contribute to the running of the ACT. In this way, the skills base has been progressively widened over the past ten years. In addition to the original leadership team of Allan, John and Bill, the following Directors have also served or are currently serving as office bearers:

- Aileen Kinnaird Secretary
- Ann MacCrimmon Secretary
- Andrew MacDonald Croft Administrator
- Derrick MacLeod Vice Chair
- Donnie MacLeod Vice Chair
- Janice MacLeod Croft Administrator
- Kenny MacKenzie Chair

Figure 5.5: ACT: New Elected and Co-opted Directors
Source: ACT Minutes

Year	Name	Status
1993	Jimmy Kerr, Balchladich	elected
1994	none	
1995	Dolly Kerr, Balchladich John Morrison, Culkein Stoer	co-opted co-opted
1996	Dolly Kerr, Balchladich Donald MacLeod, Drumbeg Andrew MacDonald, Culkein Drumbeg	elected elected co-opted
1997	Anne MacCrimmon, Nedd Cathel MacLeod	elected co-opted
1998	Iain Mackenzie, Achnacarnin Ian Matheson, Stoer Margaret Ann Newlands, Torbreck	elected elected elected
1999	Catriona MacDonald, Stoer John Morrison, Culkein Stoer Janice MacLeod, Culkein Drumbeg Claire Belshaw	elected elected (previously co-opted) co-opted elected
2000	none	
2001	Janice MacLeod, Culkein Drumbeg Durrant MacLeod, Stoer Isobel MacPhail, Clashmore Ian MacKenzie, Balchladich	all elected

ACT: Core Activities

In nine years of operation the ACT, as has been briefly alluded to above, developed a range of projects and interests. In addition, the range of basic administrative matters became more familiar. In this section I summarise the ACT's core activities, achievements, impacts and challenges in each year of operation.

The Organisation as a Community Business

Figure 6.6 illustrates the changes in the ACT's turnover and profit over the first eight years of operation.

Figure 5.6: ACT Profit and Turnover 1993 – 2000
Source: ACT Accounts

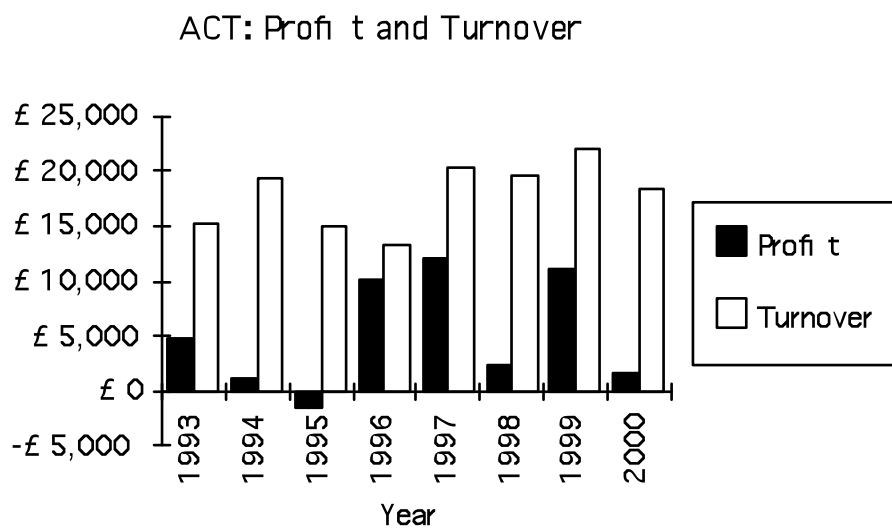


Figure 6.7 summarises information on the principal income sources created by the ACT and Figure 6.8 summarises overheads for the period 1993 to 2000. From this information it is clear that at 25% of income over that period, revenue from sporting lets, fishing permits, sale of venison, elvers, salmon netting and hire of the Argocat, have become the mainstay of ACT income. The elvers only produced significant income in one year and salmon netting only provides an annual income of £200. It is the sporting and fishing permits and the letting of sporting rights which produces a significant contribution to ACT funds.

Wayleave payments have also proved to be a significant and not previously considered, source of income at 12% over the period. Croft rents and small lets of other land provide a significant income too at 9% of the total for the period. Small land sales have provided an average of 5% of annual income over the period. This is the sale of house sites and other types of small sites, essential for local uses.

According to these figures, Torbreck House provided a significant contribution at 7%. In fact this is misleading since that rental was set against loan payments, until its sale in 1995. Since it was sizeable sum, during 1993 - 1995, in relation to total ACT incomes it shows itself in these figures. In view of the loan payments, this was not a source of profit, but very importantly this income covered loan payments. The inclusion of income from Torbreck House skews these figures.

It is particularly interesting to note that donations over the period provided only 1% of income and Capital Grants provided less than 1% of income. Research and Development Grants (R&D) account for 11% of income in this period. The projects which make up this R&D section will be discussed shortly, but it should be noted that all R&D Grants are already allocated or are '*Restricted Income*'. This type of income is already spent in effect, as Figure 6.8 shows, and so again this skews the real income generation picture. The same is true of the income from the STEM and Elder Projects (discussed below), unless expenditure is also taken into account. The majority of '*Unrestricted Income*' has been created through ACT efforts at developing resources and administering those resources.

Figure 6.7: Summary of Act Income Sources 1993 – 2000

Data Source: ACT Accounts

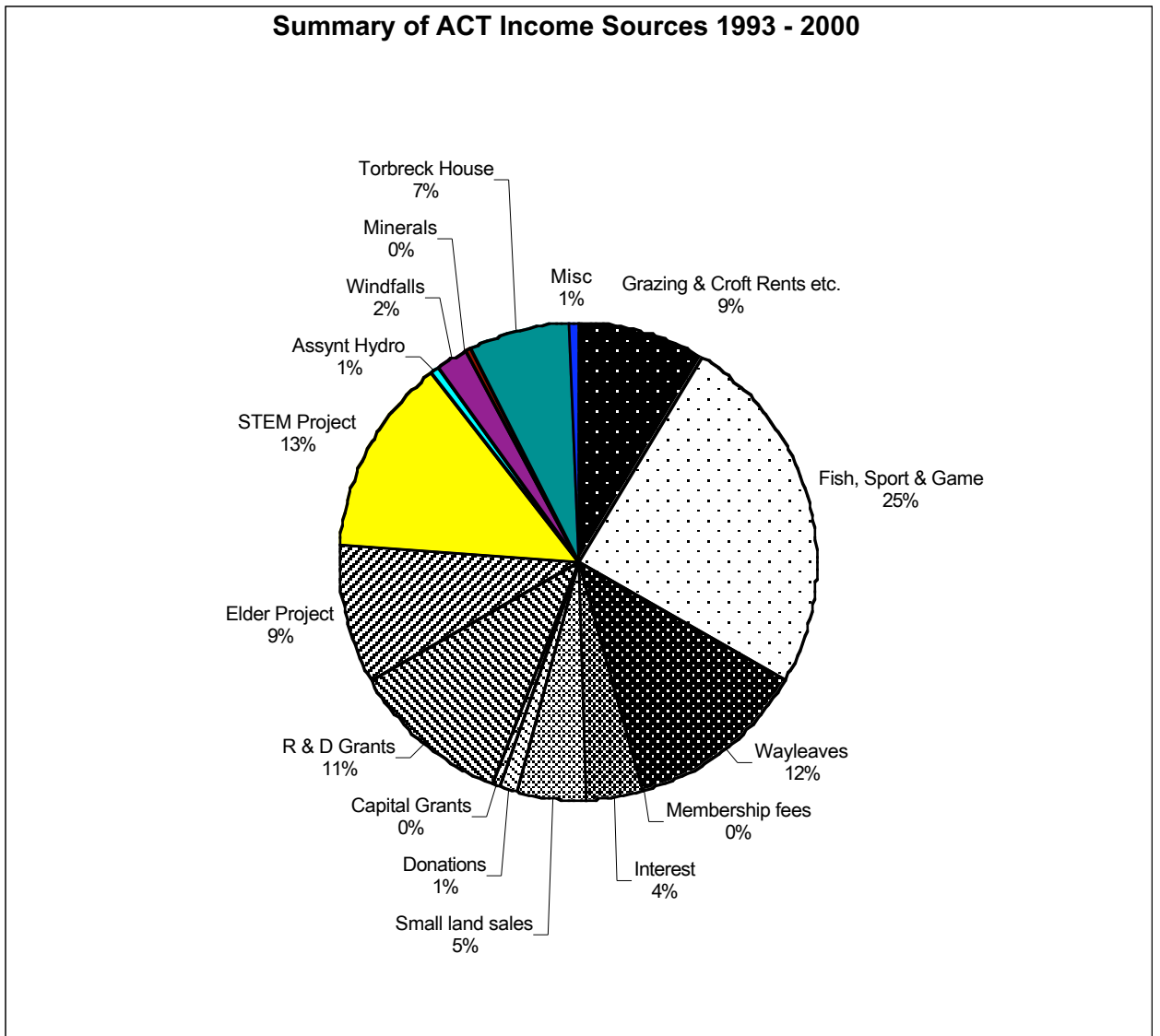


Figure 6.8: Summary of ACT Overheads Summary 1993 – 2000

Source: ACT Accounts

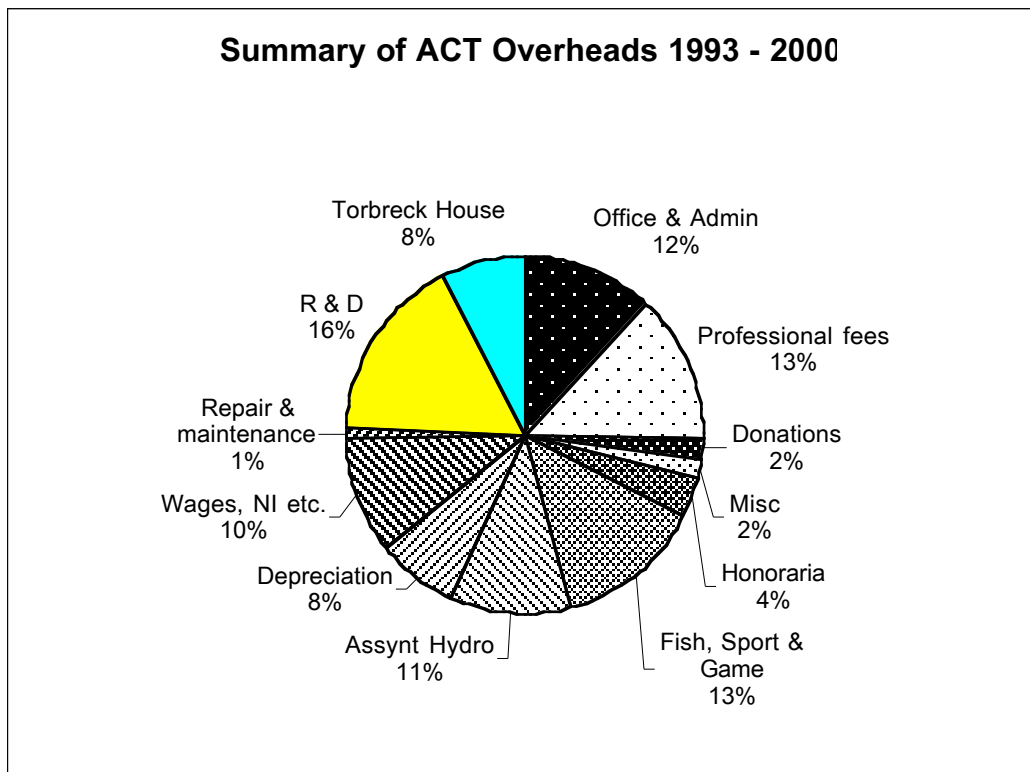


Figure 6.9.a: Summary of ACT Restricted Income Sources 1993 – 2000
Source: ACT Accounts

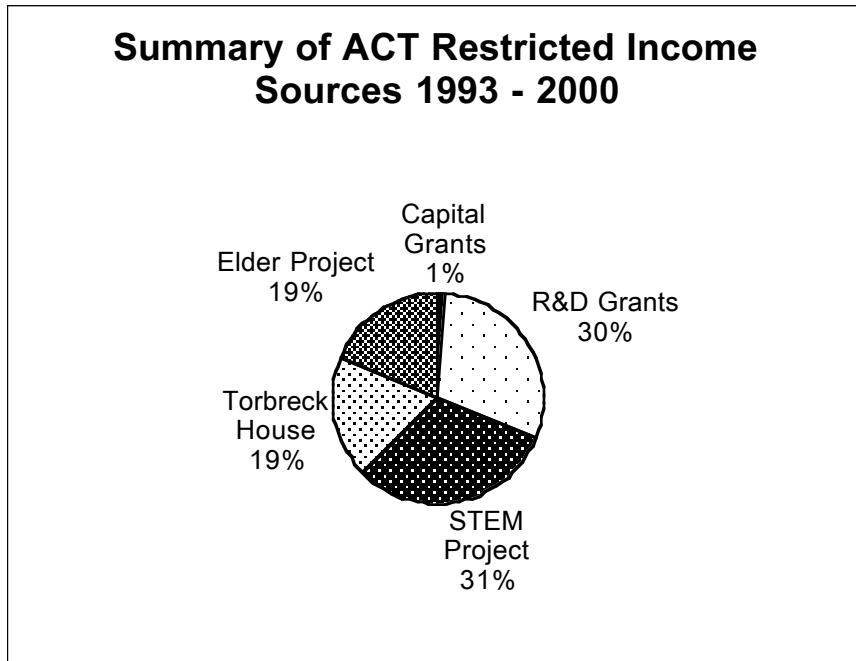


Figure 6.9.b: Summary of ACT Unrestricted Income Sources 1993 – 2000

Source: ACT Accounts

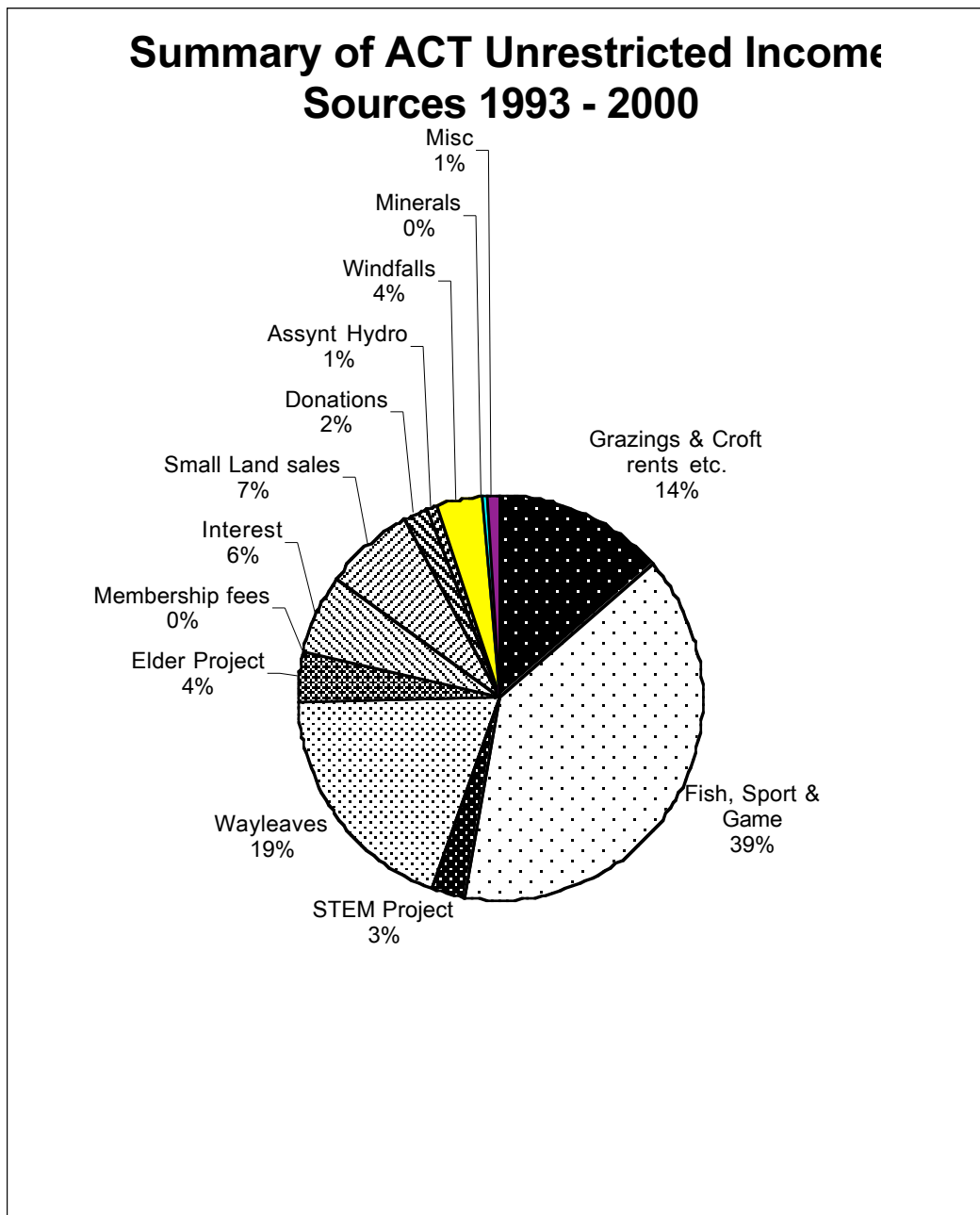


Figure 6.10.a: Summary of ACT Restricted Overheads 1993 – 2000
Source: ACT Accounts

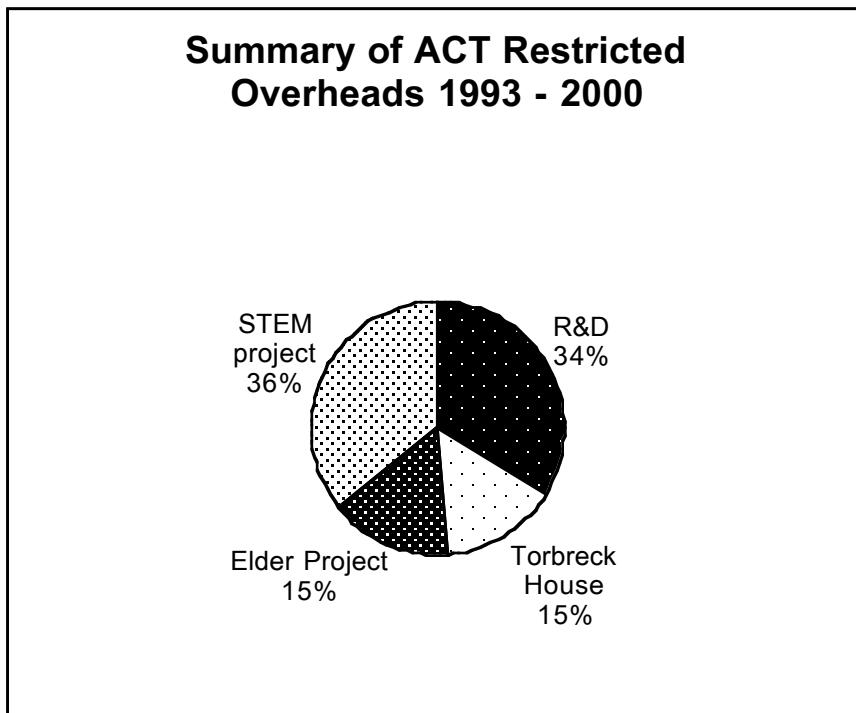
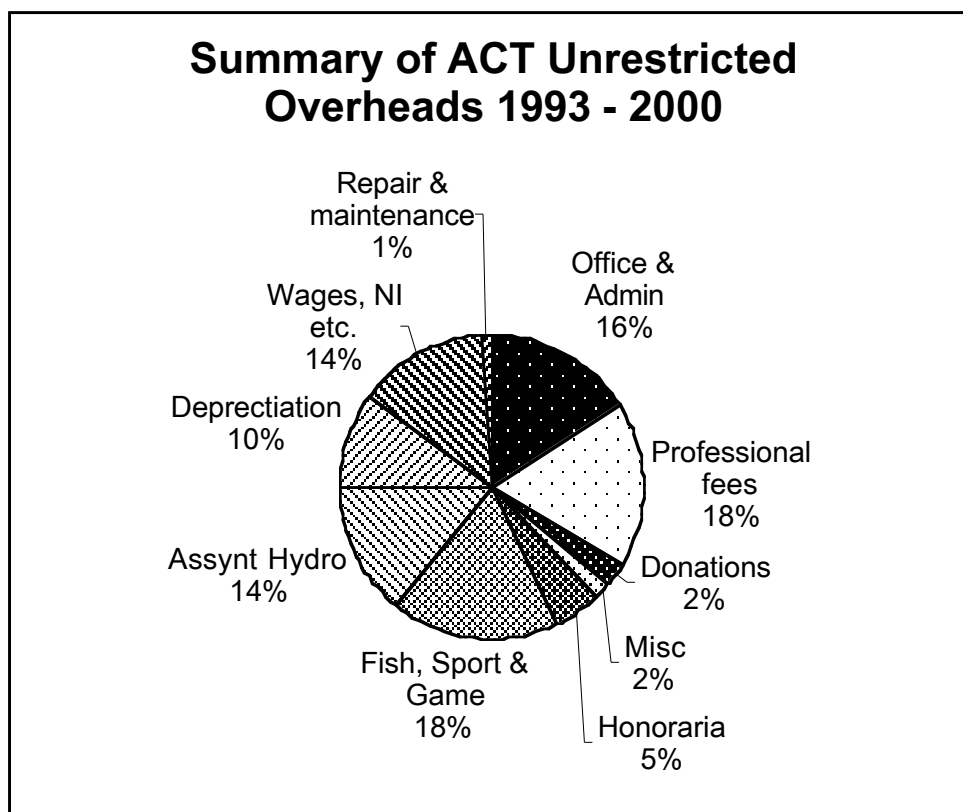


Figure 6.10.b: Summary of ACT Unrestricted Overheads 1993 – 2000

Source: ACT Accounts



For an Estate with such limited assets, this is very impressive. This also gives an inkling of the enormous voluntary effort which was invested in order to achieve this. Of particular note is the fact that the ACT have managed to 'factor' the North Assynt Estate for next to nothing. One of the greatest fears of communities considering land ownership was, in the 1990s, the potential cost of 'factoring' in relation to income generation. The ACT achievement, in factoring the Estate for next to nothing served to greatly demystify estate management and factoring. This was of enormous significance to all observers, as the ACT accountant, Graeme Scott, often remarks. Since the ACT campaign he has gone on to work as an accountant with a number of later community land ownership organisations and has therefore been able to pass on to others how to achieve this if necessary. Again, the huge voluntary effort this represents is hard to explain. In terms of the Croft Administrator post, it is significant that the three people who have taken on this voluntary post to date have all been retired people in receipt of a pension. Again this highlights the crucial community resource to be found in the older age groups in this type of rural community. It would be impossible for a person in full-time work to take on the Croft Administrator post. Ironically, the availability of retired people with skills and commitment has been fundamental to the development and survival of the ACT. There are clearly some benefits to that classic '*Highland problem*' demographic profile.

As Figure 6.8 shows, in the same period the greatest single cost has been R&D at 16% of total overheads. The next highest overhead is '*Professional fees*' at 13%. These are accounting and legal fees. Office and administrative costs are the next most significant item at 12% for the period, while wages only account for 10% of expenditure. The expenditure on Assynt Hydro (11%) and Fish, Sport and Game (13%) is investment necessary to develop these resources. The true spend on Assynt Hydro is masked because from 2000 this project has been taken forward by Assynt Hydro Ltd., a Company Limited by Guarantee with preference shares. ACT owns a majority share. The principal commercial partner, *Highland Light and Power* gives up its interests after a fifteen year period, at which point full control reverts to the ACT through its controlling shares in Assynt Hydro Ltd.

It is interesting to note that even in the first year of operation, the income generated from *'Fish, Sport and Game'* was close to £2000 more than the Feasibility Study and Business Plan had projected. By the close of 1994, the income from this sector was over twice as much as had been projected in the Feasibility Study and Business Plan. In 1993 overheads for this sector were nil and in 1994, were £158. This is in stark contrast to the projections of some £1,900 in expenses for the same sector. Small land sales were often much less than had been projected, but this was easily offset by income generated from other sources.

The administrative costs were kept below the £4,000 mark, as had been recommended in the plan, if a project officer was not appointed. The ACT Directors had decided to take projects forward themselves, according to individuals' knowledge and skills and to consider a paid post later. When the paid post of Cuidiche was created in 1995, it was without any grant aid from public sources, in contrast to the recommendations of the plan, in terms of grant aid for this. The accountant, Graeme Scott, feels that the achievement of factoring for so little outlay is hugely significant, but equally, keeping all administration and office costs to in the region of £4,000 before the later addition of staff costs, is equally admirable.

Again through voluntary effort, repair and maintenance costs have also been kept exceptionally low. Unexpected sources of income - or windfalls - have also helped. The fees for use as a film location is a good example, as are the royalties from John MacAskill's book, which are split between ACT and Comunn Eachdraidh Asiante.

To get a more accurate picture of income generation and the real impact of overheads, it is necessary to analyse the figures under the headings of restricted and unrestricted income and overheads. Restricted income is income already dedicated for one purpose and spent, more or less in its entirety, on the dedicated project. This type of income and the expenditure associated with it includes grant aid attracted for R&D activities, for capital investment – in boats for angling in the ACT case, and intended to meet specific costs, such as the loan repayments on Torbreck House, before it was sold. Figure 6.9.a

summarises the sources and proportions of restricted Income for the period 1993 to 2000. With these two types of income separated out, Figure 6.9.b gives a much truer impression of the sources and proportional importance of the range of income opportunities developed by the ACT in the same period. In Figure 6.9.b the crucial contribution of *'Fish, Sport and Game'* is very clear at 39% of unrestricted income. The STEM Project and the Elder Project both make a contribution, or profit, accounting for 3% and 4% of income respectively. Figures 6.10.a and 6.10.b serve only to illustrate the spending pattern of restricted and unrestricted overheads. The key sources of restricted overheads are of course the R&D Projects (34%) – North Assynt Woodlands Research and Tourism Research; Torbreck House overheads before sale (15%); the STEM Project (36%) and the Elder Project (15%). Through the unrestricted overheads can be seen the investment in resources – renewable energy (14%) and angling and shooting (18%). The remaining overheads are standard administrative categories.

ACT: Annual Achievements, Challenges and Impacts

The core activities of the early months have already been discussed above. Here a brief summary of the key activities in each year is provided.

1993 Achievements

Structure and Administration

The structure of the Board and the Executive were developed and agreed. A sectoral, working group structure was put in place to take forward particular areas of interest or potential. See Figures 6.1 and 6.2 above for details. After the logo was agreed through a public competition, headed notepaper and compliment slips were printed so that any ACT business was clearly distinguished through use of ACT headed paper.

Members and Participation

Suitable standing orders were, as discussed in the previous Chapter, adopted to provide membership criteria. The first elections were held to put in place the first Board of Directors. Apart from one township, all the members of the

Steering Group were elected onto the Board. Local people with key skills to offer were gradually identified and co-opted onto the Board to help out.

In February 1993 a '*Crofters' Ceilidh*' was held in the Culag Hotel, Lochinver to celebrate the achievement of the buy-out. A large number of local people attended and a guest list of people outside the area who had helped with the campaign was drawn up. Ishbel MacAskill was amongst the performers.

In addition to the AGM each spring, a public meeting in the autumn or early winter was agreed upon to provide members and the wider local community with feedback from the Board and the chance to discuss progress and projects.

Croft Administration

The post of Croft Administrator was created and a suitable person elected to this position. The early work of agreeing and putting in place systems for rent collection and other basic duties was commenced.

Economic Development

Torbreck House was let to Implex Environmental Systems. The letting income covered the Highland Opportunity loan repayments. Other ideas for economic development were discussed. These included renewable energy development.

Tourism

A start was made on organising the letting of ACT boats on selected trout lochs and the selling of permits for bank fishing on the trout lochs. These activities were. At this point, these activities were in the planning stages. If permits were to be sold, outlets would need to be found. Brochures would need to be produced for advertising and information. Membership of Sutherland Tourist Board was also arranged as a form of advertising.

Natural Resources

A number of leases of shooting rights, rights to put boats on lochs and fishing rights were agreed and let to local residents who sought these rights to benefit their own businesses. Crofter Forestry schemes were identified as a good opportunity for townships and a role in facilitating this on a township basis was envisaged for the ACT.

Networking and Support

The tenants in the township of Borve and Annishadder were investigating a township buy-out on friendly terms with the landlord, Major MacDonald. He had refused landlord permission for a township forestry plan and the idea of a township buy-out was the only route which would make this sort of plan possible. John MacKenzie and Bill Ritchie visited Borve and Annishadder to discuss how to proceed and share the knowledge they had gained the year before with the Borve and Annishadder tenants.

Income

At 26% of total income from **all sources** in 1993, significant income from 'Fish, Sport and Game' was generated even in the first year 'trading'. The significance of this and other early achievements in income generation, with regard to the Feasibility and Business Plan, was discussed above.

Overheads

In the first year of operation, '*Professional fees*' were, as would be expected after a major campaign and land sale, a very significant item of expenditure at 37%. Costs associated with '*Office and Admin*' were also significant, at 29%, and were in many ways the main focus of activity in the first year. Costs associated with Torbreck House (24%) were offset against income from this source.

Challenges

The greatest challenge was getting set up and organised and identifying the range and scope of the responsibilities of the ACT. The next challenge was beginning discussion of possible development projects that would either benefit the locality or create income for the ACT – and if possible, both. For many people, understanding the new legal requirements as a result of company status was demanding and the new formality, in view of the legal requirements, was a challenge to get used to.

Ensuring that the ACT generated sufficient income to meet its responsibilities in the first instance and then to engage in appropriate projects was a clear challenge, particularly since the Trust wished to avoid involvement in economic activities which local entrepreneurs could themselves develop.

The constant demands on voluntary times, particularly in this first year, were a challenge and at times, a strain, particularly for Executive members. In this year there were more Board and Executive meetings than would later be necessary and meetings on Friday and Saturday nights, to fit in with a range of work commitments was still a feature of ACT activity and a heavy commitment for Directors.

1994 Achievements

Structure and Administration

The ACT Board were very conscious of managing an asset worth some £500,000 and of their moral obligation to the general public and public agencies on account of their support. In view of this, early discussions concerning the production of a suitable management plan began.

Membership and Participation

A small number of new members were admitted to the ACT. These were people had recently become croft tenants, including one 'New Entrant'. Membership certificates were produced and sent out to all those who were eligible.

The ACT established its office in the old Post Office in Stoer. A group of men, led by Donnie MacLeod, Drumbeg, painted the office. A number of people donated furniture. This new office was rented but was centrally located and useful for meetings. In the same year the ACT bought the old Stoer Telephone Exchange with a view to developing this as an office in the future. The attraction was its centrality in the North Assynt Estate – and it was not a costly building.

Croft Administration

Further clarification of the best way to proceed were discussed and implemented in order to maximise confidentiality but still maintain the Board's ability to make decision on matters pertaining to the wider community and members' interests.

The *Crofters New Entrant Scheme* was launched by CASE and was welcomed by the ACT Board in view of the fact that many townships were losing population. As part of the scheme the Crofters Commission set about liaising with township clerks about the scheme.

Economic Development

A great deal of work was done in developing the idea of renewable energy production. It was found that due to the structure of the National Grid, it

would be very expensive to produce electricity from windpower and sell this via the National Grid from Assynt, due to the need for a three-phase converter to carry power onto the Grid. By the later 1990s and early 21st century, this issue was to become of major economic and political importance as increasing numbers of communities sought to make the most of their natural resources, through production of renewable energy. In 2001 the Minister for Energy, Brian Wilson, announced that government would spend £4 million laying a sub-sea cable to facilitate wind power production in the Western Isles, which had declared itself a Renewable Energy Enterprise Zone the year before.

In Assynt, the ACT decided to pursue hydro power. Two possible sites were suggested by John MacKenzie, the Board member who was driving this initiative forward. Among a significant number of members there was concern about the visual and environmental impacts of a hydro scheme. After community consultation, the proposal to include The Falls at Clashnessie was dropped in favour of a small scheme on the Loch Poll system. It was noted that the EU Habitats Directives might affect plans, but at this stage there was no information about what form these Directives might take. For planning permission, an Environmental Audit would be required and there were concerns that this would be very costly.

Implex Environmental Systems requested permission to lease Torbreck House for a further year and to consider buying then. The Board agreed to this in view of the fact that the commercial lease which was in place ensured that the ACT finances would not be detrimentally affected by this arrangement.

ACT began discussions with Highland Regional Council regarding the possible sale of the Culkein Drumbeg jetty to the ACT. The jetty is heavily used by local creel boats. However a feasibility study indicated that the potential repair costs were very significant and that the jetty might therefore be a risk and a liability. Discussion on the matter was set to run on for some years.

Tourism

The Working Group dealing with fishing made a great deal of progress in 1994 and income from brown trout fishing rose to £3,800 in that year. In preparation

for the season the group had produced a brochure with information on lochs, permits and boat hire. Brochures and permits were available from Drumbeg and Stoer Post Offices and from the Tourist Information Centre in Lochinver. The ACT joined Sutherland Tourist Board (STB) and so were mentioned in the fishing section of STB brochures. The new boat on Loch Crocach had provided a 10% return in its first year, while the loan of boats to the ACT by Frank Ross, Nedd, also boosted income. The active help provided by Highland Stoneware in writing and producing the brochure and in offering a prize for the fishing returns had been a major benefit.

In their second year of operation the ACT got involved in early discussions regarding and potential transnational green tourism project under Leader II, which was about to come on stream. As part of this development two Directors, Aileen Kinnaird and Bill Ritchie, went to Sorrento, Italy to meet other prospective partners. The project idea was being taken forward by the *European Federation d'Agriculteur* (EFA), a European wide trade union for agricultural workers. Through the trip to Italy the ACT representatives were able to talk to Michel Laing, (DG6) regarding the proposals. He was supportive but in the UK all Leader II funds had to be accessed through the local LEC and the funding available depended on the LEC's own success in applying. This was a disappointment since Leader II was described as focused on grass roots rural development in Objective 1 areas and on '*high risk*' projects – those which would take a long time to yield returns or produce indirect returns.

Natural Resources

Preparations for the first ever Crofter Forestry Scheme were taken forward in 1994. The ACT took the lead on behalf of Achmelvich township, in negotiating a management agreement with Tilhill Economic Forestry and in preparing permissions and paperwork. The work was scheduled to involve some £250,000 over a fifteen year period.

The ACT cull was carried out by Calum Miller and Allan MacRae and amounted to nine stags. Concern was expressed over the apparent steady rise in deer numbers which, it was observed, was leading to their encroachment onto new ground in the townships. Contact was made with the Fisheries Research facility at Pitlochry with a view to researching the fresh water fisheries resource to help manage future use, protection and development. The potential of elver harvesting was discussed and it was agreed that this could be investigated in the following year.

A potential new project, named STEM, was investigated by Bill Ritchie. The aim was to use new technologies to develop computer based natural resources management. This was a European Project involving Implex, ACT and Edinburgh University in Scotland and partners in Spain, Germany and the Netherlands. It was hoped that if suitable EU funding was secured a job in Assynt might be created for the duration of the project.

Networking and Support

New contacts continued to be made and older ones built upon. Other communities were quietly looking at community land ownership as an option and in Borve and Annishadder, progress towards that goal was being made. The new European contacts, made through the EFA, had proved interesting but did not, at this stage, yield a funded project.

Income

Income from croft and grazings rents increased to 13% and when other small land rents were included, had more than doubled in real value. The increase indicated improvements in collection and payment of rents as administrative systems were developed. Income from *'Fish, Sport and Game'* increased significantly, but provided a similar proportion of income. Torbreck House brought in a substantial sum but also cost more, since the first year of *'low interest'* grace had passed. Some donations were still arriving in the post and so these gave the 1994 incomes a bit of a boost.

Overheads

A small investment was made in the fishing, through buying a boat and the necessary safety equipment with the help of a *Community Action Grant* from CASE. Professional fees were a much smaller proportion of ACT overheads in 1994 since much of the early legal work to get up and running was in place and paid for by the end of 1993. Hence these fell to just 8% of expenditure. In 1994 49% of expenditure was for consultancy fees for development of the Loch Poll Hydro Project.

Challenges

Managing matters pertaining to the crofts themselves, in a sensitive and confidential way, continued to be a challenge since assignments and other related matters are very contentious and there was some confusion as to the role of the township in relation to the ACT, as landlord. The Executive continued to put in long, hard hours.

Development of hydro-power had caused some unease. In Clashnessie there had been concern over the impact on the landscape and on the *'feel'* of the place, if the waterfall was to be used. The waterfall was not included in the hydro project development, in view of township concerns, and in view of the large seasonal variation in flow rates, it would have been unlikely to be suitable. Developing a hydro project was already proving to be a complicated and very costly business but it was felt that if eventually, a successful project emerged, it could provide a crucial, regular income-stream for the ACT in the future.

Press interest in ACT activities remained high, which gave many Directors the feeling that they had to perform and **be seen** to be performing. While the public support was still welcome, the public interest could at times be demanding for the leadership.

1995 Achievements

Structure and Administration

After advertising and interviews, the first *Cuidiche do Mhuinntir Asiante* was in post by early April. This provided the opportunity to relieve volunteers – Directors – of some mundane tasks like Minute taking. It also provided the opportunity to reallocate some of the project development work to the paid post. The Board decided that for all purposes other than the Hydro Project and Croft Administration, the Cuidiche would be the first point of contact. The first task was to get an ACT phone line installed and buy a fax/ansaphone. Later that year the ACT also bought a PC and printer and by late 1995 the small, tin shack which served as the ACT Office began to resemble an office, with a desk and filing cabinets in addition to the new purchases and '*communications suite*'. The Cuidiche and the Chair took over responsibility for Housing. The Cuidiche was able to type out the backlog of hand-written Minutes stretching back to 1992.

Continued use of the old Post Office, Stoer, for the ACT Office had been offered by Rosie MacKenzie's family and repeatedly, the rent paid by the ACT, was reimbursed by the family. This was a generous form of on-going support and donation.

Membership and Participation

A biannual ACT Newsletter was started, to provide members and Honorary Members with updates on ACT activities. Honorary membership certificates, for those who had made donations or pledges over £500, were arranged by the Board and sent to all Honorary Members. A start was made in producing *The Book of Support* which would contain the names of all Honorary Members and be put on public display. The availability of a member of staff - the Cuidiche - in the ACT Office, at some point each week provided a central contact point.

Croft Administration

The Crofters Commission took absentee action against a number of ACT tenants. In view of this the Board were obliged to develop policy and procedures to be used in the event of a vacant tenancy becoming available. It was agreed that in the event of this the tenancy would be advertised and the township consulted. Potential candidates must be resident in the parish and new entrants to crofting would be preferred. Those on the *Register of Demand* would also be informed. The Clerk for each township was informed of this new procedure in case the need arose. One crofter who had previously bought his croft began negotiations to return to tenant status through the ACT.

Economic Development

Grant aid was secured from Scottish Homes to carry out a housing needs survey. Di Alexander, a rural housing consultant was engaged to carry out the work in the following year.

Torbreck House was sold to Implex with access agreements for the fank, the inscribed stones in the grounds and personal fishing rights. The sum received paid off the Highland Prospect Loan leaving the ACT debt free in its third year of operation.

Work on the Hydro project continued and Dennis MacLeod got in touch offering to be a commercial partner. In the end this was not how the project was structured, but this unexpected interest gave a boost to the project and it's main protagonist, John MacKenzie.

Energy Unlimited and *WWF (Scotland)* secured funding to carry out an energy audit in the North Assynt Estate. While the concept of an energy audit was very strange to the majority of people, this was a great boost to the Hydro project because its aims were so complimentary. Participatory approaches were used. This work began in the following year and took a number of years to complete, running until 2000. This project was called *Altener*.

Tourism

Links with *Elderhostel USA*, through the *Aigas Centre*, resulted in the development of a new tourism project. *Elderhostel USA* is a charitable organisation which organises educational and 'doing' holidays for the elderly. Several groups come each year to stay at the *Aigas Centre* near *Beauly*. Since the *Aigas Centre* focuses on wildlife and environment and is a grand old baronial hall, the holiday package was named '*The Crofter and the Laird*', in view of the mini-break spent in what were largely crofting B&Bs.

The ACT took a facilitating role in order to develop a pilot project for the following year. This link would bring some twenty or thirty people to stay in B&B on the North Assynt Estate for three nights DB&B. Since the bookings were made six months in advance it would be possible to forward plan. Income would be attracted for B&B operators and the ACT would run an organised activity programme for which the ACT itself would be paid.

Returns from brown trout fishing continued to increase and the Board decided to buy another boat to put on *Loch Cul Froaich*, with the help of a *CASE Community Action Grant*.

Natural Resources

The Board met with Alec Scott, SNH to discuss what sort of support SNH could offer through a potential management agreement. It was discovered that if a Whole Estate Plan was developed, SNH could provide help and some funds and that any potential agreement was voluntary, on the ACT's part.

In view of the demise of the Fox Destruction Club, previous to the creation of the ACT, and the growing local concern over increases in the fox and hoodie crow population, the ACT took a facilitating role in investigating whether each township wanted to re-form an organisation of this sort.

In the autumn the fencing work started on the Achmelvich Crofter Forestry project at Craig Darach. On behalf of the ACT the Cuidiche negotiated with Tilhill Economic Forestry to ensure that work with the team which would undertake screefing and planting would be available to local people. Due to the sympathetic approach taken by Lewis MacAskill, then of Tilhill, the ACT was able to advertise the vacancies locally. A core local team of about half a dozen men came forward to work full-time on the screefing and planting and in addition another half dozen people came along to work part-time when they were able. These included the Chair, Allan MacRae and Roz Summers who had arrived that summer to work as the seasonal Highland Council Ranger. Roz later bought a house in Clachtoll and acquired the tenancy of a croft. Her husband, who had remained in central Scotland for work, was appointed to the first full-time Ranger post in Assynt in the following year. In this way a whole new, young family came to the North Assynt Estate. Several years later Roz and Andy had two children and Roz found herself employed as the third Cuidiche to work for the ACT.

A start was made in organising Crofter Forestry in the townships of Stoer and Clachtoll. This work was greatly helped by the new native Woodlands Officer at work in the north west.

Information about potential new opportunities began to reach the Board through research being done on the demand in the cosmetics industry for sustainably harvested or grown natural products such as bog myrtle, birch

leaves and rowans. To date no specific developments have derived from this but the available information increases each year and the idea of making more of these natural products appeals to many croft households.

STEM means Sustainable Telematics for Environmental Management. Funding for the STEM project was confirmed as a one-year pilot project. The ACT was able to advertise a one-year part-time post locally through this project. Dairmaid MacAulay was the successful candidate. During the project he acquired a number of new skills which were to be of benefit to him in later work. By the end of the year a start had been made on collecting *IK – Indigenous Knowledge* - to form a basis for the development of data and a planning package.

Networking and Support

The demands put upon Allan MacRae, Bill Ritchie and John Mackenzie, to visit other communities considering community ownership, had become very significant. In view of this growing demand for advice and information, and in part due to the ACT Executive making this fact known, the Crofting Trust Advisory Service (CTAS) was established late in 1995.

It was during 1995 that reorganisation of local government ushered in the Highland Council and saw the demise of Sutherland District Council and the old Highland Regional Council. The new shadow Highland Council's Land Working Party held its first meeting in Stoer Hall in acknowledgement of the ACT impact and achievements in the region.

Income

The income from '*Fish, Sport and Game*' maintained its high levels and contributed 37% of the ACT income in this year. This was the last year in which income and overheads from Torbreck House appeared since it was sold in this year. Income from grants totalled only 1% in 1995. Overall the pattern of income sources remained similar to 1994.

Overheads

Hydro project costs accounted for 22% of expenditure. Repair and maintenance, at less than 1% of annual expenditure appears for the first time. The cost of 'Office and Admin' items and 'Professional fees' increased slightly on the previous year, but appear more significant at 14% and 15% because of the lower expenditure in other categories. The most significant new item is 'Wages, NI etc.' due to the creation of a part-time post for the first time. This new expenditure accounts for 18% of annual spend in 1995.

Challenges

During 1995 there was some concern among Executive members that the ACT was losing momentum. Looking back and reading through an account of the achievements in that year this is hard to understand. However it was a transitional phase in the sense that the basic responsibilities were becoming better organised all the time and so the attention of the Board was becoming more focused on project development. This sort of work is inevitably detailed and slow moving since partnerships need to be formed, funds sourced and detailed project plans produced in order to make progress. It also is likely that the punishing pace which the leadership had maintained for some four years was beginning to take its toll.

Many members were unsettled by the absentee action taken by the Crofters Commission in the North Assynt Estate during this year. The action continued on into 1996 and continued to cause disquiet. As noted in the last Chapter, the ACT has a number of absentee members who contributed financially to the buy-out. A number of residents returned to a family croft to retire, to change career or later in their working life for a range of reasons. These people are assets to their townships. For these reasons absentee action is met with ambiguous and fearful reactions. It may reduce the likelihood of certain people returning to the area at some point in their lives. Many absentees and their families 'back home' feel strongly that they have been forced into absenteeism through lack of economic opportunities at home. Action against absentee tenants can offend and alienate people who are strong ACT supporters or members. Since the ACT was supportive of the New Entrant Scheme many people were confused about the source of this action and mistakenly thought it was instigated by the ACT. To add to this tension and misunderstanding, in

the event of a croft becoming vacant it is the landlord – the ACT – who appoints a new tenant. This meant that the ACT had to take very difficult and contentious decisions in appointing new tenants. It was a very tense time and the tension continued into the following years.

1996 Achievements

Structure and Administration

In June the Cuidiche resigned due to severe ill health. It was agreed that the post should remain and that a replacement be recruited. A new project based approach to the work load was agreed. The details of this are in the next section.

Membership and Participation

At the AGM in this year the future management and voting structure was discussed. It was noted that a voting system based on representation of each township mitigated against the involvement of younger people as Directors. This left those not in crofting households without a vote. It was proposed that in the future a smaller Board, elected ‘*at large*’ from the total membership might prove more effective. It was agreed that steps needed to be taken to return responsibilities to the Board and membership since in the first three years the Executive had ended up taking the majority of the work and projects upon themselves. To this end it was suggested that there should be more regular Board meetings and that working groups, including non-members should be created or re-established around specific projects. Board meetings were introduced every second month. The new project based structure was as follows:

Figure 6.11: ACT Workgroup Restructuring and Membership
Source: ACT Minutes

Project	Team
Newsletter	Ishbel MacAulay, Aileen Kinnaird, Bob Cook, Ann Cook
Housing	Kenny MacKenzie, Allan MacRae, Issie MacPhail, Katherine Matheson
Leader II	Bill Ritchie, Aileen Kinnaird
ELDER	Bill Ritchie, Ishbel MacAulay, co-opt Madeline MacPhail
Loch Poll	John MacKenzie, Kenneth MacKenzie, Donald MacLeod, Iain MacLeod
Anglings	Pat MacPhail, Donald MacKenzie, co-opt Campbell Matheson
Altener	John MacKenzie, John Morrison
STEM	Bill Ritchie, Kenneth MacKenzie

Culkein and Nedd Jetties	John MacKenzie, Donald MacLeod
Forest projects	Principally in the hands of townships, but Allan MacRae as liaison and support

This new structure created the opportunity of drawing on the skills of non-members in the community and resulted in five new people becoming actively involved in the work of the Trust. In the interest of improving communications the idea of mailing Minutes to all members was costed but found to be prohibitively expensive. Nine new members joined the ACT in this year.

Croft Administration

A number of new entrants acquired tenancies and began their crofting activities. The impact in the townships of Balchladich and Clachtoll were particularly beneficial.

Pat MacPhail resigned as Croft Administrator but remained as a Board member. Andrew MacDonald, Culkein Drumbeg agreed to take over the responsibilities and was co-opted to the Board in this capacity.

Economic Development

Highlands and Islands Partnership (HIP) awarded a European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) grant of £294,000 to the ACT for development of Assynt Hydro. This sum was later reduced by £50,000 due to new interpretations of EU regulations. *Energy Unlimited* embarked upon an the energy audit. SNH raised objections to the Hydro proposals due to the presence of a pair of nesting Schedule 1 birds – black throated divers. This, combined with the drop in funding secured, raised the danger of significantly higher costs for the ACT and jeopardised the whole project.

The *Scottish Homes* grant of £2,500 was matched by £500 of ACT monies, enabling Di Alexander to carry out a housing needs survey and produce a report. The results of that report were drawn upon in writing the '*Assynt Area Profile*' to be found in Chapter Two above.

Discussions continued on the subject of repair or replacement of the jetties at Culkein Drumbeg and Nedd to meet the needs of working boats in the area. The needs of leisure craft were also considered and discussions were co-ordinated with Community Council activities on the subject.

Tourism

Income from the brown trout fishing again increased significantly in this year, and another boat was bought for Loch Braigh, Nedd. The ACT continued to pursue a tourism project through CASE and Leader II. This effort was led by Bill Ritchie who, as part of his responsibilities, attended a further international gathering in Calabria, Italy, in this year. Robin Noble, a local resident with extensive relevant, experience was appointed to take this project forward by preparing funding applications and liaising with CASE.

The Elder Project Pilot was arranged for October. There were twenty-five guests. A number of those who were to provide B&B visited Aigas to clarify their role and meet the organisers. During the autumn pilot each B&B provided meals, tea and scones on arrival and spent time talking to the guests about the area. A big reception and dinner was arranged on one night. Local produce such as salmon and venison was served and a ceilidh followed.

During the day Robin Noble and Bill Ritchie led walks and trips to places on interest. Ian Matheson, a young crofter from Stoer, provided a presentation about the crofting agricultural year for the American visitors. All those who led activities were paid for their time. The visit was a great success and provided the ACT with a small profit after all expenses were paid. Equally importantly, it brought new income direct to crofting households through B&B and provision of activities.

Natural Resources

The STEM project drew to a close in August of this year and provided the ACT with a small profit. The ACT's involvement had been at no cost to themselves and had provided two part-time local jobs for a year. Through demonstrations at meetings, the Board and other members had been introduced to new technologies which might prove useful for communities of the future. The STEM team planned to try to create a STEM II project in order to take the work further.

A Vermin Control sub-group was created with Derrick MacLeod as convenor. The group planned to take action on foxes and hoodies and investigate suitable training opportunities.

Planning for the Stoer Crofter Forestry project - an area of 193 hectares - was finalised. It was envisaged that work on the ground would begin in 1997. The Clachtoll township plans for a 103 hectare scheme were approved in this year. As work progressed and the process became more familiar locally, there was less and less need for the ACT to facilitate the development of Crofter Forestry projects. Achmelvich township appointed someone to take care of on-going maintenance on their Craig Darach Scheme.

The North Assynt Woodlands project, created and led by Robin Noble, secured fifty percent of its funding from Millennium Forests Scotland. This was a research project tracing woodland management through the ages and comparing the current woodland resource to that mapped in 1774 by John Holme during his survey of Assynt.

Networking and Support

The Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust achieved a community buy out in 1996. Allan MacRae and Bill Ritchie had visited, to pass on their own experiences. This was welcomed by the people of Eigg, who were inspired by Allan MacRae's vision and passion and by Bill Ritchie's excellent strategic thinking.

Income

Income from 'Fish, Sport and Game' increased significantly again in 1996. The Elder project brought in 10% of ACT income in this year and the STEM project brought in 47% which must be set against expenditure at the same level to pay for the two part-time posts.

Expenditure

Expenditure on Assynt Hydro in this year was only 1% of the total. In this year a new category of expenditure emerges – 'Honoraria'. This is reimbursement of expenses incurred by Directors through their work for the ACT. In 1996 this accounted for 1% of the total spend. In reality all of the Directors continued to meet a great deal of day to day costs themselves and only received remuneration for specific project related items on presentation of receipts.

Challenges

The Board lacked a Cuidiche for most of this year and the increased pressure on voluntary time was felt very badly by the Executive. A range of obstacles to the Hydro project emerged which raised concerns about increased costs. It became clear that if this project was to happen at all it would take several more years before 'a spade was even put in the ground'. John MacKenzie instructed consultants, Dougal Baillie Associates, to alter the plans in view of the environmental concerns raised. In the end a better scheme was to be developed, but during 1996 progress was slow and the obstacles daunting. Any project of this sort involves costs and expenditure much higher than most people are accustomed to encounter. This makes the whole process and project even more daunting.

The Executive took on the challenge of creating wider active involvement in project work and succeeded in this. As is clear from the summary above, the

ACT was involved in a much wider range of activities. That made it difficult, due to time pressures, to fully inform everyone all of the time. If meetings run on too long, they become cumbersome and too demanding of voluntary time. The expansion of activities therefore put extra pressure on meetings and the task of open communications. A new team was charged with the responsibility of producing and circulating an ACT Newsletter in an effort to overcome this.

1997 Achievements

Structure and Administration

Early in the year the pressure of the voluntary work routinely undertaken began to tell very seriously when both the Chair and the Secretary expressed a wish to resign. This led to a concerted effort to recruit a new Cuidiche. The job remit was redefined as a more administrative role than had previously been the case and the part-time post was advertised locally. A new Cuidiche, Alison Allighan, Stoer, was appointed.

With support from the Crofters Commission and the ACT, Stoer township repaired the foot bridge outside the Old Telephone Exchange in Stoer, a building owned by the ACT. The work was carried out by Allan MacRae.

Membership and Participation

The issue of Associate membership, to provide membership for those resident on the North Assynt Estate who did not have a croft tenancy, was again raised. The ACT agreed to work on this matter and bring forward suggestions for how this might be achieved. Again there were new ACT members in this year, offset by the loss of some of the older members of the community.

The Drumbeg School was closed. This was a serious blow to the communities at the north end of the North Assynt Estate. During 1997 the ACT resisted Highland Council plans to sell the building, insisting that it remained in use as a community facility. The Board did this by resisting the *Minute of Waiver*, which would have allowed the Highland Council to change use and sell the building. Since the ACT was landlord the ACT Board could take this step.

Croft Administration

The new tenants/owners of Kerracher, located in Ardvar, approached the ACT, asking that their croft become part of the Nedd township. The Kerracher croft can only be approached by foot or by boat and there are no other crofts there. Nedd is the nearest township and by the autumn the Kerracher croft was included in Nedd township, but with no grazings share in that township. The new people at Kerracher planned to create a commercial garden, open to the public and selling plants.

Economic Development

At the start of the year John MacKenzie was seriously discouraged by all the problems which had emerged in the previous year, regarding the Hydro project. He was however resolved to persevere, in view of the potential long-term economic security income from this source might provide for the ACT.

By the autumn of 1997 the future for the Hydro project was looking a lot brighter. A new, modified project had been developed in partnership with Highland based company, *Highland Light and Power*.

Interest in making more of native plants was growing as Agros Associates developed their plans. A couple in Clachtoll and the Drumbeg Grazings Committee were liaising with Agros to see what sort of joint project or pilot

might be developed. In 1997 Agros created a company specifically to develop these opportunities.

The change over to the new Highland Council had substantially delayed progress on the development of the Culkein Drumbeg and Nedd jetties. Pressure on available time also hindered the ACT's efforts in taking this forward.

All the township Grazing Committees were contacted and asked if their township could identify any ground suitable for social housing development. The Housing Needs Survey had provided a good background from which to proceed. Sites for single houses or small groups of houses were required, particularly in the Stoer and Clachtoll area, where population was growing, while at the Drumbeg end population was declining. During the year talks were held with *Albyn Housing* to explore the possibility of an established housing association like themselves building new social housing in the North Assynt Estate. Both Stoer and Clachtoll townships suggested sites on their Common Grazings, as did Drumbeg.

As part of the Altener project photomontages of wind turbines at Raffin and a hydro generation shed at Loch Poll were prepared, along with a wealth of other material and presented at a public meeting.

Tourism

Angling income continued to be significant and growing. The ACT bought two more new boats, with the help of *CASE Community Action Grants*. These were for Lexie's Loch and Loch Crocach. Allan MacRae offered to undertake repairs to the Loch Crocach road and was provided with fifteen tons of hardcore by the ACT. He put in a huge amount of unpaid work in order to repair the road for the benefit of both his township and the ACT. These repairs also benefited the Crofter Forestry and the angling. Cathel MacLeod was co-opted to the Board specifically to help with angling and game development. He was soon putting in a huge amount of work himself, on behalf of the ACT and continues to do so to date. The possibility of restocking the Manse and Loch Poll systems with salmon smolts was raised by Kenny MacKenzie, based on information about

how this had been achieved in Ireland. The Irish company Salmco came along to look at what might be possible in these systems.

By late 1997 the ACT owned ten boats, plus oars and lifejackets. Pat MacPhail, who until this point had co-ordinated the anglings, felt that at seventy years old, the considerable work load was getting a bit much. The ACT agreed a contract with a young local person, Campbell Matheson, to take care of the boats and equipment. It was agreed that payment would depend on the fishing returns and would be 10% of the annual income. Allan MacRae and Iain MacLeod, Achmelvich offered to help transport equipment, which would be stored in the Old Telephone Exchange over the winter.

Another ELDER pilot was arranged for June and October 1997. The team leading this project felt that two visits a year was probably as much as they could manage, given the demands on time. The two pilots were again very successful and another was arranged for September 1998.

Funding was secured for the Leader II project from CASE. The ACT contribution was an *'in-kind'* contribution of time and effort. Adverts were placed in local papers for a Project Co-ordinator. Robin Noble, a local resident, was appointed to the post. The project was named *'The Crofter Tourism Project'*. The first task was to carry out an audit of existing local resources. The timing of this was good since a new *Highland Interpretative Strategy* was being developed at the same time.

The ACT joined the Assynt Community Council in pushing for increased funding for paths work in the area. At the time the total budget for Scotland was thought to be far from adequate.

Natural Resources

In 1997 there were changes proposed for the *Woodland Grant Scheme*, which is fundamental to Crofter Forestry projects. All townships which had not yet registered were urged to do so, in case they would lose out. Drumbeg, Nedd and Culkein Drumbeg registered an interest with the help of Allan MacRae. The Crofter Forestry developments continued to owe much to the dedication of

Lewis MacAskill, whose father was from Inverkirkaig, Assynt. Some members were keen to see a commercial element included in the Crofter Forestry projects, since the usual project and the aim of the grant support was for non-commercial planting of native species. Local awareness, both in Assynt and the north west, had grown with regard to the potential economic and social spin-offs of commercial uses of native and non-native species. A small native woodland project of thirty hectares was approved for some of the inbye ground in Raffin. Clashnessie township embarked on the planning stage of their project. The proposed Stoer Township Scheme proved problematic because the revised grant guidelines meant that certain areas of the grazings were deemed to be unsuitable. Allan MacRae helped the township get further information from Tilhill on how this problem could be overcome. The township had discovered that a grant from the *Township Development Scheme* would cover the extra fencing involved if the planted area had to be split into three blocks as now seemed likely.

The steady rise in forestry schemes and the related fencing meant that deer were increasingly marauding onto inbye ground. At the autumn General Meeting that year, members were reminded that they had the right to take deer for the pot and that the deer needed to be controlled. It was suggested that if anyone taking deer for the pot could pass on the numbers taken to the Board, this would help assess the extent of the deer problem and potential population changes.

Red Deer Commission representatives visited the ACT and encouraged participation by the ACT with the West Sutherland Deer Management Group. The ACT had originally decided not to get involved with this group, previously dominated by more traditional landowners, but paid dues each year.

Asher Bowyer was taken on by the ACT to deal with vermin control. Asher, from Knoydart, was working for Assynt Estates as a ghille. This work was seasonal and so he needed other sources of income. A local young person, Calum Miller sought a long term fishing lease and shooting rights in order to build up a business, providing ghilling, shooting and fly fishing tuition. Under the previous landownership this would never have occurred. In the autumn a

meeting was facilitated by the ACT to set up new Fox Clubs and explain the sort of funding and support that was available. The ACT provided a grant of £500 to help the new Fox Club get on its feet.

It proved to be impossible to continue the STEM project into STEM II so the Board used the remaining funds to gather together the information created during the initial project so that it would be available for ACT use. It was agreed that in the meantime the STEM website should continue since it was getting an average of six hits per day and cost very little to run.

The North Assynt Woodlands Project had succeeded in securing all the necessary funding, so during 1997 Robin Noble was able to make good progress in researching the regeneration of trees on Culkein Drumbeg Grazings. Robin's early findings were very interesting. He found that natural regeneration had been occurring on the coastal crofts for some thirty or forty years. A couple of surprise finds were a three hundred and fifty year old oak tree and a willow in Drumbeg which was five hundred years old. Previously it had been assumed that all the remnant woodland was fairly young. Robin expressed the hope, discussed some years earlier by a few members, that a tree nursery using local seed might be established in North Assynt and that the old, and clearly successful woodland management practices would be relearned as the new Crofter Forestry schemes began maturing.

Networking and Support

In spring 1997 representatives from the *Assembly of the First Nations Peoples of Canada* paid a visit to North Assynt and held discussions with ACT representatives. A formal meeting between the First Nations' representatives and the ACT was held at the *Norman MacLeod Memorial* in Clachtoll. This was followed by a ceilidh in Stoer Hall. On the second day of the visit a seminar on land issues was arranged and was attended by a number of Scottish activists. Earlier the same week a group of Russians and a group of Scandinavians had visited the ACT.

In the autumn *The Assembly of First Nations* got in touch to seek ACT help in finding a work-experience placement in the crofting system for a young person.

The ACT sought the help of the SCU in searching for a suitable opportunity. Another group of first nations peoples from the USA visited Assynt that autumn. There were forty young people in this group and they were received by the Community Council. A number of local organisations donated funds to pay for local accommodation. The ACT donated £50 and the Community Council arranged accommodation and a ceilidh at Assynt Field Centre, Inchnadamph.

It was in this year that the *Not for Profit Landowners Group* was created. The new group intended to visit Assynt in the following year and funds were available from HIE for this trip. The ACT agreed to find accommodation and to meet with the group at that time. Meantime the ACT sought more information about their intended activities with a view to joining.

Income

In 1997 the Elder project brought in 20% of the total income and the STEM project 8%. The STEM income was for project administration. The Elder project income had also to pay for all of the accommodation and services booked for the Elder groups in Assynt. Again *'Fish, Sport and Game'* was the principal source at 22%. The income being generated by the ACT was by this time far outstripping that projected in the original Business Plan.

Expenditure

'Office and Admin', 'Professional fees' and *'Wages NI, etc'* were the main items of expenditure. The Woodlands, Tourism and Elder projects were significant but, as discussed earlier, were covered by *'Restricted Income'*.

Challenges

Absentee action by the Crofters Commission continued to cause local disquiet and confusion as to who was responsible for what. The ACT tried to clarify the roles of the Grazings Committee, the Crofters Commission and the ACT, since the ACT had no role in absentee action unless a croft became vacant as a result of it, in which case the landlord had to re-let the tenancy.

There was concern about the extent to which each township Director could actually represent the township. In company law each Director has a legal responsibility to the Company – the ACT - and is not, in a legal sense, a representative of the township but of the Company's interests. Clearly this is a delicate point since the spirit of the ACT structure is that of township representation.

When the ACT was created in 1992 through a unanimous vote, some people were voting *'Yes'* because they did not like the prospect of change and through their *'Yes'* vote, were trying to achieve stasis. Other *'Yes'* voters saw the creation of the ACT as a chance to instigate and shape appropriate change. Over time the different motivations behind the unanimous *'Yes'* vote began to emerge. This meant that for a time there was increasing divergence of opinions, which for the leadership and Board, was difficult to manage in a productive way. Amicable disagreement is, for most people, a learned skill

which overrides the sense of defensiveness and sometimes fear, which disagreement can often create.

By this stage it was also becoming apparent that, in terms of crofting administration, a community land ownership structure may put neighbours in potential positions of power over other people in the area. This can be an uncomfortable experience, particularly in the early years, when administrative systems and policies are still very much in a developmental phase. This new set of circumstances was further exacerbated by the Crofters Commission action against absentee tenants. What was for many people, already an unclear set of roles which lie with the Grazings Committee, the landlord and the Crofters Commission, became further obfuscated by the tension and fear that the combination of circumstances created for some local people. Among the absentee tenants against whom action was taken by the Crofters Commission were cousins and friends of locally resident croft tenants, and contributors to the ACT campaign fund. This tangle of loyalties and responsibilities placed many people, both Board members and ordinary members, in stressful circumstances. The experience of the translation into active policy of a popular principle – reduction of absenteeism and facilitation of new entrants into crofting – was and continued to be, somewhat traumatic, leaving many people facing tough decisions. Among many families for whom crofting has been part of life for generations, the right to the family croft, is inalienable, whether or not the member of the family who is the current tenant is resident locally. This deeply held belief, drawing of course from a sense of *duthchas*, clashed in this instance with the aspiration to bring unused croft land back into active use, restore depopulated townships through reduction of absenteeism and reduce the high average age of croft tenants in fragile areas.

1998 Achievements

Structure and Administration

The Board returned to the idea of an estate management plan, which had been an original condition of some of the purchase grants. This was still not in place, although much progress and many exciting developments had been achieved over the first five years.

It was decided that the Cuidiche should take on the role of Treasurer, under the supervision of the Board, and would be able to deposit monies into the ACT bank account. The Secretary would handle all correspondence except that pertaining to crofting matters and project work.

Membership and Participation

The Book of Support, compiled by Ann Cook and John Mackenzie, was completed and put on display. Ann and Bob Cook also compiled an archive of photographs and press cuttings pertaining to the ACT buy-out and subsequent activities. They had done this in conjunction with *Comunn Eachdraidh Asiante*.

The Cuidiche began to compile a database of all non-crofting residents in the North Assynt Estate, with a view to making progress on the matter of Associate membership or representation for those without a croft tenancy. This database included holiday-home owners.

The annual Crofters Ceilidh in February, to celebrate the buy-out continued and was organised as ever by the 'Stoer Ladies'. By 1998 the venue had changed to Stoer Hall since the huge numbers of the early years had dropped away and Stoer Hall provided an intimate venue for ceilidhs run along traditional lines.

The ACT website, which had been in existence for some years at this point, disappeared when Rob Cannall of Implex removed it from their website. This was a blow as many of the new community landownership organisations had good websites and it was useful to maintain a presence and provide background information for the general public. A further blow was the relocation of Implex to elsewhere in Europe and the sale by Implex of Torbreck House as a holiday home.

Croft Administration

There was great controversy over the ACT letting of a croft which had become vacant through the Crofters Commission absentee action. The agreed procedures had been followed, but being such a sensitive issue, it was difficult for some local residents to come to terms with. This put great strain on the

Croft Administrator and the Executive. The ACT had to consider rent reviews since this was a landlord responsibility and had been stipulated in some of the grant conditions for the buy-out. No rent changes occurred.

The ACT responded to a Scottish Office consultation document on the proposed merger of the *Countryside Premium Scheme*, the *Environmentally Sensitive Areas* and the *Organic Aid Scheme*. ACT also supported a submission by Skerray Grazings Committee asking that SOAFD grant aid be paid at a higher level for township led activities.

Economic Development

The revised Hydro plans were studied by the local SNH officer. SNH's main concerns were for the fresh water mussels in Oldany Burn and the divers. Changes in sediment could detrimentally affect the mussels. Discussions with *Highland Light and Power* progressed well and at last there seemed to be a way ahead. *Highland Light and Power* proposed that if ACT gave up a significant percentage of income from the project for the first fifteen years of operation, *Highland Light and Power* would pay for everything, including Planning Permission, the Environmental Impact Assessment and all outstanding costs. At the end of the fifteen year period the debt-free capital project would revert to the ACT with a projected lifespan of a further thirty-five years. For the Board this was a very attractive option since the development of this project had proved costly and was, as yet still speculative. It is very difficult for such a small organisation on a very low budget to keep on finding this level of development money. The ACT could not raise the sort of substantial bank loan required for this project because the bank had demanded the North Assynt Estate as security and that was a step the Board **would never take**. *Highland Light and Power* could however raise the necessary loan. In addition the new partner could professionally manage the project if it progressed. Funding the whole package remained something of a challenge since the ACT would need to convince the ERDF that this proposed partnership did not breach their funding rules. In fact, HIP which ran the ERDF programme, were very sympathetic to the ACT and granted £250,000. The Community Land Unit

(CLU) provided a further grant of £30,000.¹⁶ The project would be managed by a subsidiary company in which ACT had controlling shares. *Highland Light and Power* (HLP) contributed £50,000 and the ACT had to find a further £25,000. The cost of the Environmental Impact Assessment was still a worry since a full one costs in the region of £20,000. Much depended on the planning application, but a visit by Lord Sewell, Scottish Office Minister, seemed to boost moral and the attitudes of those who were sceptical. Another step forward occurred when previous objections from other riparian owners were overcome.

The ACT was asked to consider becoming a HISHA – *Highlands and Islands Sheep Health Association* - designated area. For those crofters producing sheep, this would mean an annual saving on health costs, which would be very welcome. It would also reduce labour needs since the sheep would only be blood tested every second year, if this idea met with general approval.

The Altener project continued and one of the partners, WWF visited to make a short film about the North Assynt Estate. The ACT made their first money from mineral extraction in 1998, when Urquharts Construction, Ullapool bought 400 tonnes of hardcore from the Culkein Stoer quarry. The township received 25% of the value of sale, which provided an unexpected boost to township funds. Albyn Housing was formally approached with a view to developing social housing on a site provided by Stoer township.

Tourism

The proposal to restock and study migratory fish in the Oldany and Manse Loch system made good progress in 1998. Cathel MacLeod and Kenny Mackenzie did much background work in creating a project with broad support. The Faskally Fisheries Research Station was supportive as were the Salmon Fisheries Board, Highland Council's Development and Fisheries Officers and HIE. The plan was to carry out a detailed survey of the Manse Loch system to ascertain existing sea trout populations, food and water levels.

The Trust by now had eleven boats for hire with the angling and brown trout fishing continued to be the ACT's biggest earner. The old brochure was

¹⁶ CLU – based in HIE. See below for details.

updated and new tickets printed. In June 1998 50,000 sea trout smolts were released into the Manse Loch system. The cost of this restocking was £3,000 p.a. The ACT bought an Argocat to help with the development of the angling and deer management. The outlay was to be off-set by hires and sales of venison. Once the Argocat had been secured, Cathel took over the deer management. The sporting and fishing lease held by young Calum Miller was improved and extended at the same time, to meet his needs.

In 1998 the Crofter Tourism Study was completed and circulated. The main recommendations were:

- A guiding service
- Development of 'Elderhostel' scheme with other outdoor groups
- Development of peat roads into walking routes
- Interpretation of archaeological features
- Wildlife project: divers on Drumbeg loch
- Development of sporting holidays

The Elder project visit was again planned for the autumn, but none were planned for 1999, although the intention was originally to reinstate the programme in 2000. However, after further discussions with Aigas the programme was discontinued due the scattered and limited accommodation available in the area.

Natural Resources

While all of the funding for the research aspects of the North Assynt Woodlands project had been secured and the early results were exciting, there was concern that funding for the practical implementation would be rather more difficult to secure at a later date.

Networking and Support

John MacKenzie joined the *Not-for-Profit Landowners Group*. The group held a 'get together' at Inchnadamph in March, during which time they visited Culag Wood and the North Assynt Estate. The Secretary of the Scottish Office Land

Reform Policy Group attended and invited comments on his discussion document.

Assynt Camanachd approached the ACT to request that the Trust fund the trophy for their proposed annual competition among Highlands and Islands primary schools. ACT was happy to sponsor the trophy and in July school teams from Back, Kiltarlity, Kirkhill, Helmsdale and Assynt assembled on the Lochinver pitch. An exhilarating day followed during which Kiltarlity took *The Cup*, presented by the ACT Chair.

The ACT agreed to co-operate fully with John MacAskill in his efforts to compile what started out as a 'booklet' about the ACT, on behalf of the Comunn Eachdraidh Asiante. The Board asked to 'vet' the book in advance of publication. By this time the 'booklet' had grown into a significant and useful book.

Income

In 1998 the income from '*Fish, Sport and Game*' rose again, to provide 30% of total ACT income. By this stage the income from this source was three times that which had been projected in the original business plan. The Elder project brought in 21% of annual income. Payments for wayleaves brought in 10% of the income in that year. Small land sales accounted for 6% of income, gravel sales for 1%, capital grants 1% and R&D grants for 3%.

Expenditure

In 1998 '*Fish, Sport and Game*' expenditure rose to 18% of the total spend. This represents the investment in a second hand Argocat. To offset this expense, the ACT sought to increase their income from shooting and venison through Cathel MacLeod's efforts. It was calculated that a certain minimum sum each year would need to be generated from this source in order to justify the money sent on the Argocat. Depreciation accounted for 15% of overheads, Assynt Hydro for 5% and '*Professional fees*' for 8%.

Challenges

In order to develop income from natural assets further the ACT Board had to take calculated risks. Buying the Argocat was one such calculated risk. There was concern among some about spending the necessary funds and taking on another financial responsibility. Cathel produced a projected cashflow and was confident of generating the necessary minimum level of income, but many Board members remained nervous because they did not have experience of this economic sector and some had not previously had this sort of 'business' experience. In addition, taking a calculated risk – or investing in assets in the short term, in order to increase income in the medium to long term - in your **own** business, is very different from doing this in the knowledge that, if the projected financial benefits are not achieved, you have taken that risk on behalf of the whole community. That is a very different and more pressured decision-making environment.

This challenge was multiplied in the case of Assynt Hydro, where the potential and actual spend was high relative to ACT resources, but the potential medium to long term benefits in creating a better financial situation for the ACT, were considerable and, some might argue, vital. Throughout the 1990s very little was known about community based renewable energy development in Scotland and the UK. In 2001, by which time the Western Isles Council had already declared the Western Isles a *Renewable Energy Development Zone* and the Stornoway Trust had unveiled plans for a wind farm development with the potential to bring in over £1million p.a. to the Stornoway Trust, much more knowledge existed. There had by this time been research by HIE and the Scottish Executive, a number of community and public sector seminars, and conferences and direct personal contact through study tours.

Despite a gradual increase in awareness and all that had been learned by the community groups pioneering renewable energy developments in the Highlands and Islands, the very high capital costs involved continued to intimidate community groups and their representatives. It should also be born in mind that hydro-schemes have a very particular cultural and political 'baggage'. In Assynt, when a hydro project was first tentatively proposed, one local resident commented:

“And once we have the hydro scheme we can look forward to fields of sugar cane, as far the eye can see.”¹⁷

This is a reference to the ambiguous symbolic position of hydro schemes in the Third and Fourth Worlds. In the Scottish First World one controversial aspect of renewable energy development is the potential visual and environmental impact, which makes some people uneasy. It was largely due to concerns about the potential visual impact that the proposed Clashnessie Waterfall project was abandoned at a very early stage. In the case of the Loch Poll scheme the potential environmental impacts were one of the main reasons for redesigning the scheme and the potential cost of a full Environmental Impact Assessment, as opposed to an Environmental Impact Statement, came close to blocking the project completely. Inevitably, particularly since SNH is the body through which environmental concerns are mobilised, this one issue acquired the backdrop of the on-going debate in the Highlands and Islands over what ‘*conservation*’ is, in whose name it is done and what the positionality of Highland and Island communities – the region’s people – might be within this debate or power struggle. The region has the lowest population density in Europe which makes it easy for the urban majority, at state level, to dictate terms, influenced by a relationship with the region based on contact through leisure time and an envisioning of the whole region as an ‘*empty*’ space of consumption. These multiple spaces of consumption include leisure activities like walking, views, car touring and wildlife watching but equally the right to ‘*enjoy*’ symbolic, imaginary and physical access to ‘*Scotland’s heritage*’. Wrapped up in that heritage are landscapes, flora and fauna. By implication then that right of access extends beyond a ‘*right to roam*’, to include the right to determine and decide what is good for this ‘*national heritage*’. It is for this reason that debates about access are rather more charged than the right to go for a walk implies.

1999 Achievements

Structure and Administration

¹⁷ Fieldwork Diary 1994 ACT male 20 – 25 years

Early in 1999 it was established that the ACT's attempt to use their landlord status to prevent Highland Council from allowing Drumbeg School to be sold out of community-use was not going to be successful. Legally it was not possible to retain the site, but this stance had succeeded in making a strong point on behalf of the community. The former teacher and her family wished to purchase the part which was a house and in which they had lived for almost twenty years while the school part of the building could be used for community purposes. The *Drumbeg Development Association*, a small local group dedicated to facilitating local development, held talks with Highland Council over the use of the old School buildings.

Again on the subject of exercising the rights of the landlord in the interests of the community, it was finally established that, apart from at the Kerracher croft, which had joined the township of Nedd in the previous year, the foreshore was owned by the ACT.

The Trust debated finding other office accommodation, since their let on the Old Post Office, Stoer was drawing to a close. Work would need to be done on the Old Telephone Exchange if it was to be used. The Board discussed whether a Portacabin might meet their needs. In 1998 smoking had been banned at all public ACT meetings, by a vote and in 1999 smoking at Board and Executive meetings was banned too.

Over the previous few years issues regarding siting of and access to phone masts and responsibility for repair of these access roads had become a frequent item for discussion as had wayleaves. Access is via township peat roads, but damage to the roads was being caused by vehicle access to service these phone and radio masts. By the end of the year it was agreed that an annual levy should be charged to all the regular users of the Loch Crocach road to set against the on-going maintenance. The users were Highland Council, Highland Constabulary and Cell Net.

The Board reorganised their working practices and structure to try to keep up with the increasing range of projects and concerns. In order to cover all the items, it was agreed that reports on projects would be taken in turn over a

number of Board meetings. It was hoped that result in more concise meetings.
The new project team structure was as follows:

Figure 6.12: ACT Workgroup Restructuring and Membership 1999
Source: ACT Minutes

Project	Team
Native Woodland Plantings	Allan MacRae plus one
Environmental Audit	Claire Belshaw to liase with Alec Scott, SNH since this was part of the original plan but has not been progressed.
Crofting Holidays	On hold, but to be dealt with as part of the Tourism Study
Altener	Completed, but a presentation is awaited
Loch Poll Hydro Scheme	On-going and in the hands of Assynt Hydro. A representative to report back to the Board regularly
Housing	Kenny MacKenzie, Allan MacRae plus one
Fishing	Cathel MacLeod, Kenny MacKenzie, Iain MacLeod
North Assynt Woodlands	John MacKenzie and Project officer, Robin Noble
Tourism Project	Iain Matheson, Iain MacLeod, project Officer, Robin Noble
Culkein and Nedd Jetties	John MacKenzie, Donald MacLeod

At the end of the year the Cuidiche resigned because she was moving away from the area. The ACT set about advertising for a new Cuidiche.

Membership and Participation

Despite the smaller size of the Annual Crofters' Ceilidh, the Board decided to return to the Culag Hotel, Lochinver, for the 1999 Ceilidh, since Stoer Hall was just a little too small. Planning for this event started late and in the end it was cancelled due to lack of time, with a view to preparing further in advance next year.

After much to-ing and fro-ing to establish quite who owned the disused Salmon Bothy at Clachtoll, it was agreed that Comunn Eachdraidh Asiante could use the building for a small interpretative display on the history of salmon netting. The ACT made a small grant in support of this project.

The issue of representation and some form of membership for non-croft local residents continued to be raised at general meetings, and had still not been resolved. The Board agreed that they would, as had been previously promised, do some thinking on this issue and bring forward suggestions for discussion. Peter Kohn, Kerracher, gave a short talk about the Kohn's development of the croft there. The garden would soon be ready for public opening and a wooden jetty was being built to provide public access. In the following year the

Kerracher Garden opened to the public, as *'the remotest garden in the UK'*. It met with much success, was featured on TV, and Willie Watson, who runs very successful wildlife watching boat trips from Kylesku, added an extra daily boat-trip to take visitors to and from the Kerracher Garden.

Croft Administration

A new croft Administrator, Janice MacLeod, Achloist, was appointed and co-opted to the Board in that capacity. A database of all relevant information pertaining to each croft and tenant was suggested as a useful management tool. The Executive and Croft Administrator decided that a new system was needed to record rent payments and issue rental reminders. The ACT was missing out on some revenue because the system was a bit haphazard. Once the new system was in place an increase in income from croft rents followed, when rents were due as usual at Martinmas - 25th November.

Discussion again arose over the role of the Board or Executive in giving a recommendation in the event of a non-family assignation. Some people favoured keeping this role with the Executive, in order to provide maximum possible confidentiality, others felt that the Executive or the Board should follow the Township Grazings Committee recommendation while another group felt that the Board should decide what the ACT recommendation would be, so that the final recommendation was informed by the full range of views from each township. The last option would mean a serious loss of confidentiality but would be more democratic. The second option follows the logic of the crofting system itself, but discards the *'balance'* of views instituted through the process by which the Crofters Commission seeks the view of the township, the landlord and the Assessor. It is very clear that there is no ideal solution to these choices. All have benefits and disbenefits.

In the autumn new style rental notices were sent to every tenant offering the option of paying rent by Direct Debit in the future and encouraging any non-members to join the ACT. Rental for that year did increase as a result of this overhaul of proceedings. A new set of guidelines on issues including decrofting, assignation and croft purchase was drawn up and filed as a reference source for Clerks.

Economic Development

In the previous year the ACT had registered an interest in developing a wind power project. During 1999 John MacKenzie was so busy with the Hydro project, that the wind generation project had to be put on the back-burner meantime.

Planning permission for the Hydro project had been applied for late in 1998. By early 1999 it began to look as though planning permission would be granted. Of the forty-one letters received by Highland Council Planning Office regarding the proposed development, thirty-two were in support and nine were objections to the proposal. Agreement had been reached with SNH over the project on condition that a research project focused on migratory fish, divers, fresh water mussels and water voles was carried out alongside the construction and running of the hydro power facility.

On 27th January 1999 Planning Consent for the Assynt Hydro project was granted by Highland Council. In May 1999 Assynt Hydro Ltd. was created as a subsidiary of the ACT. The new Company comprised three Directors from the ACT and one from HLP. The ACT Directors were John MacKenzie, John Morrison and Donald MacLeod.

Construction and installation of the hydro scheme started in this year. Some local work was created during the construction and installation. The revised scheme had a less efficient turbine, which meant that projected income over fifteen years was £140,000 instead of £200,000. In the first fifteen years the ACT income would be from renting the ground used to Assynt Hydro and from a 50/50 split with HLP of income from sale of electricity to the National Grid.

One of the potential housing sites identified by Stoer township, beside the township peat road and close to Stoer Hall, had been agreed by the relevant agencies to be suitable for development of social housing. In partnership with Albyn Housing Association, planning began for a development of four houses. In the spring this project hit difficulties when NOSWA and SEPA identified drainage problems with the site. Rules of discharge from septic tanks or similar

had been becoming ever stricter and had already reached a point where most sites in the area failed the obligatory percolation tests. In such cases very expensive individual or group sewage treatment facilities were then a condition of planning. It was decided by NOSAW and SEPA that no development could take place until a sewage treatment system which would serve the adjacent existing four council houses and the four proposed new houses was in place. The site was not eligible for Rural Home Ownership Grant Scheme monies and so social housing provided by an established housing association seemed the sensible approach.

Tourism

During 1999 the plans for development of migratory fisheries developed further. In order to study the existing pattern and the impact of the smolt release programme, fish traps were installed to enable trapping and tagging during the spring – and sea lice treatment if required. Cathel bought new equipment – oxygen, nets and polythene bags – to make it possible to transfer fish between lochs. It was decided that another 50,000 sea trout fry should be released into the Manse Loch system in 1999. Allan MacRae and Iain MacLeod, Achmelvich, provided access to the burn through their crofts and Iain soon became instrumental in carrying out the work alongside Cathel. Electro-fishing showed that native brown stock was already present in the system. By the end of the year Cathel and Iain had tagged and weighed two hundred salmon and four hundred sea trout in the Manse Loch system. In the process of developing this new approach to the fisheries the ACT had begun to work with the West Sutherland Fisheries Trust and had research back-up from Shona Marshall of Faskally Fisheries Research Station.

It was in this year that the issue of Brown Trout Protection Orders was raised in the Assynt area. The implication of signing up to this protection order, being adopted by the Assynt Angling Club was that it would be legally necessary to buy a fishing permit whereas under the current conditions it was a goodwill gesture. Signing-up to the Protection Order would not affect local people's right to fish but the principal of the idea did not appeal to many ACT members of Board members. During the same period, the neighbouring estate (Vestey family) decided to hand over all of their trout lochs to the Assynt Angling Club

(AAC). The AAC is a local membership organisation which provides boats, sells fishing permits to visitors, tries to encourage children to take up angling and holds competitions for members and with other Clubs. There was some concern that if the AAC had access to such a large number of lochs the ACT's biggest income source might be detrimentally affected.

A special meeting was held to discuss the matter of the Brown Trout Protection Order. Joining forces with Assynt Angling Club in this would result in shared marketing and might result in increased returns from fishing. It would also however, involve working with local private landlords, which made many people uncomfortable. In the end the ACT Board voted against joining since the public might misunderstand the rationale and feel let down by the ACT, where fishing is very much '*for the people*'. The Board did agree however to watch developments and keep a fairly open mind about possible future participation.

Natural Resources

The Red Deer Commission planned to carry out a deer count by helicopter but were frustrated by bad weather. A count on the ground was not undertaken since the results would be much less accurate than a helicopter count. When the count was done the results were one hundred and five stags, one hundred and fifty hinds and sixty-three calves. In the previous season Cathel had culled sixteen stags, twenty-three hinds and three calves, mainly in poor condition.

The North Assynt Woodland Study got back into action after the difficulties of trying to secure funding for the proposed practical implementation had stopped work for some time. The study was now purely academic and funding for that part of the original proposal was restored once the difficulties were ironed out. This was a great relief to Robin Noble who had made such a good start on the work back in 1997. The Clashnessie Crofter Forestry scheme started in the winter of 1999. There had been hold-ups with SEPA over bracken spraying and the pH levels in some lochs.

Networking and Support

Just after New Year, tragedy struck in Clashnessie when Donald Kerr's house burned to the ground. Donald was by then elderly and had no insurance. More than possessions, he and others mourned the loss of the memories which the house held, including those of his late wife, Minnie, and a large collection of old photographs. A Support Fund was organised and the ACT donated to this. Donald was found accommodation in the sheltered housing in Lochinver.

The ACT was invited to make responses to consultation documents on land use, land ownership and crofting. It was felt that all Board members should be involved in arriving at a collective view on this, but given the limits to voluntary time this was increasingly hard to achieve. A response also necessitated familiarity with other lengthy documents. Most people did not have time for so much reading and not everyone found these '*green papers*' and '*brown papers*' easy to follow and understand. The solution was to ask a small group to formulate basic responses and these could then be considered by the full Board.

John MacAskill's book, named '*We Have Won the Land*' was launched in Assynt.¹⁸ A reception, to which all members and Honorary members were invited, was held in the Culag Hotel, Lochinver. Out in the '*world*', public interest in the ACT continued- in this year *The New York Times* sent a donation to the ACT.

Income

In this year there was a downturn in tourism, which had a knock-on effect on sales of fishing permits: income from the angling fell for the first time, but income from venison compensated for this. For this reason the '*Fish, Sport and Game*' category provided 25% of ACT income in 1999. In Drumbeg, Non MacLeod had given up the Post Office, where she had so successfully sold ACT fishing permits and kept the rowlocks for the boats at the Drumbeg end. Non has a very thorough knowledge of the lochs and was always able to help and advise visitors. The Drumbeg Shop took on the Post Office, but Non continued to sell ACT permits.

¹⁸MacAskill J 1999 *We Have Won The Land: The Story of the Assynt Crofters Trust Campaign* Acair, Stornoway.

A new and unexpected source of income came from film location fees paid by a company that made a film at Stoer Point. This provided 4% of ACT income in 1999. The impact of *'Wayleaves'* was higher in 1999 at 25%.

Expenditure

In 1999 *'Honoraria'* was down at 1% of overheads. *'Fish, Sport and Game'* accounted for 16% due to ongoing investment and development. Assynt Hydro was responsible for only 2% of overheads, but this figure is affected by the transfer of this project to a new Company, Assynt Hydro Ltd. The largest item of expenditure is the Woodlands Project, which was paid for out of *'Restricted Income'*.

Challenges

Again the definition and agreement of the respective roles of Grazings Committees and the ACT Board proved challenging. Through negotiation and compromise an agreed process was approved by the Board, which took into account the township view.

The drop in angling incomes illustrated how reliant the ACT is on tourism and on the availability of outlets and the proactive marketing of the permits and boats by those outlets. Much of this work had been done through the personal commitment of the Post Mistresses in Stoer and Drumbeg.

The Housing project was progressing well, but because it would eventually be in the hands of a Housing Association and not the ACT, there were local concerns about what sort of say the ACT might have in the selection of suitable tenants. Another worry was the fear that if '*right-to-buy*' legislation was extended to housing association properties all the ACT's voluntary effort and Stoer township's effort and generosity, would be potentially squandered.

With the end of compulsory dipping, sheep scab arrived in the Assynt area. Sheep scab is carried by mites, is highly contagious and can be passed from animal to animal through contact with scraps of wool on fences and dykes and through handlers' clothing. In terrain like the north west, scab is very difficult to get rid of. Although sheep do not die if scab itself, the loss of condition, particularly in the winter eventually leads to death if untreated. On hill ground, with fewer people able to '*gather*' than was once the case, it is very difficult to eradicate because you can never get a 100% '*gather*'. Treatment is by injection or dipping but the treatment only kills the mites for a limited period and then stock can easily become re-infected, unless all stock in the area are treated within the same week. Treatment is costly and labour intensive and in the absence of a co-ordinated approach the scab took a hold throughout the parish.

2000 Achievements

Structure and Administration

The idea of creating a Whole Estate Plan was raised in 2000 and was being promoted by the NFP Group. The Board were keen to make progress on this. As a landowner, the ACT was consulted on the proposed *Special Area of Conservation* designation of Ardvar Woods.

A new Cuidiche, Roz Summers, was in post, as the Trust prepared to move from their old office into the Old Telephone Exchange. Highland Council transferred title of the *Drying Green* at Culkein Drumbeg to the ACT, the only cost being legal fees.

Membership and Participation

The year 2000 was very much dominated by the demands of project work, which left little time for anything else. Attendance at public meetings dropped in the following year.

Croft Administration

The ACT took on the job of arranging a co-ordinated approach to scab treatment. Through the ACT activity and the SCU Assynt Branch being reconstituted by Allan MacRae, the vet was invited to discuss the best approach. After consultation with the townships, it was agreed that all sheep in North Assynt would be gathered and dipped or injected in the week of 10th – 16th April. This action proved very successful. A guidance note on decrofting was produced and distributed. Rent arrears were tackled to try to help people avoid getting into '*bad debt*'.

Economic Development

The problems being experienced in the Drumbeg area because of the way the Hotel was being managed were highlighted when the fact that the Hotel was on the market was discussed by the Board. The Hotel owner had barred most of the local residents and frequently refused to serve passing visitors. This was giving the whole area a very bad reputation. It was also hugely embarrassing for local people who like to give visitors a good welcome. The running down of this business was also impacting on the local economy at the Drumbeg end. If people chose to do B&B, they would have to also provide evening meals because of the situation and for some people that was just not practical, hence

they were personally suffering. In view of the lack of hotel trading accounts genuine prospective buyers could not get a mortgage on the business.

The three year environmental research which is part of the Loch Poll Hydro Project continued. It was being carried out by *Young Associates* and is funded by a partnership of RSPB, West Sutherland Fisheries Trust and SNH. Construction of the Hydro scheme progressed. This good news was marred by a serious accident when close to completion, which was not the ACT's responsibility. Despite this set back the turbine was installed and the scheme commissioned. The Assynt Hydro Scheme began to produce electricity. By the autumn it was producing 210kW per day.

Tourism

In the early part of the year there was a need to invest in new boats, preferably the low maintenance *Pioneers*, which had already proved successful. The amount of work on fishing and deer management was growing so much that the administrative side was transferred to the new Cuidiche. A further 50,000 smolts were released into the Manse Loch system. The fish trapping and tagging continued. A new, updated fishing brochure, showing the increased number of boats, was produced in 2000. In Stoer, the Post Office closed altogether because Ann Dunlop, the Post Mistress was seriously ill.

The year before Robin Noble, on behalf of the ACT, approached Historic Scotland for advice on how to make safe and provide access to Clachtoll broch. Historic Scotland took up the task and found the funding to do this.

Natural Resources

SNH proposed the creation of the *Assynt Lochs Special Protection Area* (SPA). SPA is a European designation. The proposed SPA comprised the lochs and loch margins of a number of hill lochs, including Loch Beanneach, which was already a SSSI. Also included were the margins of Loch Assynt itself. This caused more than a little uproar among some local residents. The ACT and the Assynt Branch of the SCU objected. The written objection submitted by John MacKenzie was treated as a '*scientific objection*'. Only a scientific objection can cause a hearing into a proposed SPA. In the end the SPA was allowed to go ahead. On behalf of the Board, Director Claire Belshaw continued discussions with SNH on the subject of a North Assynt Natural Heritage Audit. It was believed that information accumulated through this sort of audit would be useful for future ACT management decisions.

The idea of an ACT Deer Larder was put forward since lack of one seriously affected Cathel's work. It became apparent that if the ACT drew up a Deer Management Plan – in fact wrote down what they were doing already and why – they could perhaps get financial help for building a Deer Larder. A focused discussion on development of a plan followed and it was identified that, ideally the ACT needed a 4x4 vehicle, a 270 bore rifle and a deer larder with all the necessary facilities. A Deer Management Group was formed to develop a Deer Management Plan. It was felt that the deer could become more of an economic and environmental asset with good management. During the cull it was noted that the carcass weights were up.

The North Assynt Woodlands Research was completed and copies of the report were circulated. Deer control was highlighted as one the major problems needing urgent attention. In Clashnessie the township Crofter Forestry scheme was completed. Clashmore township were looking into a scheme for the future.

Networking and Support

The ACT made donations for the children's Christmas party and for those at Stoer School and Drumbeg Toddlers. The new Scottish Executive had created the Community Land Unit, based in HIE. This will be discussed further below. The CLU awarded a grant of £30,000 to ACT for development of the Hydro project and a further £5,000 for the accompanying environmental research at Loch Poll.

The Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust hosted a '*get together*' for community landownership organisations from all over the Highlands and Islands. No-one from the ACT was able to attend, which is a shame since all the reports were very positive. As well as a good ceilidh those who did attend created a new group called CLAG – *Community Land Action Group*.

Challenges

The final phase of the Hydro scheme proved to be very challenging and, at times, nerve racking. When the system was up and running it transpired that the turbine was running slightly below capacity. In time it became clear that this would be its maximum capacity.

The impact of scab on crofting agriculture was severe, both in terms of animal health and the increased cost of inputs. The ACT's intervention was effective and timely. Agricultural prices continued to be depressed, as they had been since the 1998 Lamb Sales.

The strong pound and the ever increasing price of petrol took a toll on tourism in the north west. This difficult situation was lifted slightly by Highland Council's decision to relocate its whole Harbour Department to Lochinver. Decentralisation of public sector employment was being actively pursued by a number of large employers like Highland Council and HIE.

The creation of the CLU was proving a boost and in 2000 the CLU began to manage the new Scottish Land Fund – a fund of some £10 million dedicated to helping community buy-outs and developments after the buy-out. Unfortunately the ACT was not eligible for funds. This was frustrating since

many of the later community buy-outs, due to their structure and their charitable status, were winning substantial grants to put towards development of the local area.

Income

In the year 2000 the income from *'Fish, Sport and Game'* increased again, and accounted for 45% of ACT income. Wayleaves accounted for 17% and small land sales for 8%. Assynt Hydro accounted for 4% of income. This was for rental of the Loch Poll scheme grounds to Assynt Hydro Ltd. Windfall income came in the form of book royalties, accounting for 2% of income.

Expenditure

'Fish, Sport and Game' was the biggest overhead, due to continued investment in the migratory fisheries and repairs to the Argo. *'Honoraria'* were high due to backpayments associated with work of the Hydro scheme. General *'Repair and maintenance'* accounted for 2% of overheads and the Tourism project for 3%. The Woodland project was by this time winding down and close to completion.

2001 Achievements

Structure and Administration

The Board resolved to create a Whole Estate Plan and had the great luck to be asked to join a CLU initiative on the subject. An ACT representative was asked to attend a training day in Inverness. The training was very useful but so too was the chance to meet representatives from a whole range of other community land ownership groups including the Bhaltois Trust, the Abriachan Trust and the Stornoway Trust. In the following year consultant, Steve Westbrook, would be paid by the CLU to co-ordinate and draw up the final plan plan.

This opportunity was greeted with great enthusiasm since there was a general feeling that, in approaching the tenth anniversary, the ACT needed to reassess its position and objectives and involve the communities of North Assynt in that process. In this way perhaps a fresh vision for the next ten years could be developed.

Membership and Participation

At the EGM in December the Chair brought up the subject of representation for non-croft residents. He assured those present that although the proposals had yet to be discussed at Board level, it was being suggested that non-croft residents have a dedicated Director, elected by them.

Croft Administration

Systems and policies continued to be reviewed and clarified. Once more a huge amount of voluntary time was put in by the Croft Administrator, in order to keep things going.

Economic Development

Late in the year NOSWA secured funds for a reed bed sewage treatment system to serve the existing Local Authority Houses and the four proposed new houses in Stoer. This was great news and very quickly work began on drawing up plans for the houses themselves.

In 2001 the Hydro scheme brought in £7000 in income and was projected to produce for sale 49 000kW per annum. The final cost of the total project was put at £565,000. John MacKenzie was asked to talk about community led renewable energy development at a community conference on the subject organised by Highland Council in the early winter of 2001.

Tourism

Fishing income was detrimentally affected by the FMD outbreak. The ACT took a facilitating role in opening up the area once more. Many local businesses lost a lot of trade, especially in the early months of the crisis.

Natural Resources

The Deer Management sub-group brought a draft Management plan to the Board for discussion and sought the views of all the key public agencies. The Draft Plan was conceived of as a part of what would become the Whole Estate Plan.

Networking and Support

Lorna Campbell of the newly created CLU came to visit and made a presentation to the Board, explaining the range of support and financial help on offer. The ACT was asked to submit a response to the Draft Land Reform Bill which was being considered by the Scottish Executive. The group formed in Eigg – CLAG – changed into CLAN – *Community Land Action Network* – and Camille Dressler, Eigg worked hard to keep updates on the Land Reform debate posted on the CLAN website. The support of CAN – *Community Action Network* – was secured by CLAN for provision of and training in and e-conferencing system to allow the growing membership to communicate across the miles.

In the previous year, Culag Community Wood had mounted a successful buy-out of the Little Assynt Estate. The Culag Wood itself is on a fifty-year lease and at the time of group formation, some members were very unhappy that community ownership had not been achieved. It was ironic therefore to see this group successfully bid for 3,000 acres, 2,000 of which are planted with native trees.

Challenges

The Foot and Mouth outbreak across the UK put great pressure on those involved in croft agriculture. Normally simple tasks like moving livestock onto 'clean ground' became fraught with complications. The Annual Lairg Lamb Sale, the biggest in Europe, was cancelled because of movement restrictions. Producers did not know from one week to the next what sort of new rules and arrangements would be put in place. For a time, tourism too was badly affected, as all agricultural ground was closed. The ACT took an active part in disseminating information about what was called 'The Come Back Code'. This was a set of guidelines to help re-open walks and other attractions. Decisions on access were made by each township, but the ACT kept Clerks informed. The Assynt Tourism Group provided footbaths where required in order to help open walks back up.

Analysis of ACT Achievements and Impacts 1993 - 2001

As can be seen from the summary of each year provided above, the ACT activities steadily broadened. If the growth of community land ownership, in a variety of forms, is to be assessed from a post-colonial perspective it is important to begin to assess the extent to which the new conceptualisations, alliances and positionings which have emerged as part of this movement have resulted in concrete social, economic and environmental change within the communities involved. While the recovery and 'celebration' of marginal voices can be important and informative, for the communities involved the effort of this action has to result in at least a partial destruction of their previous 'subalternity' – and perhaps an insertion of the outsider inside. This Chapter has provided a descriptive account of ACT activities and I now embark upon consideration of the impacts of these activities.

One of the principle ACT achievements remains the fact of bringing together in one organisation thirteen townships to 'speak with one voice' and work together. In view of the ACT's stated aim of avoiding becoming involved in economic activities which local individuals and 'entrepreneurs' could develop, it is unlikely that many jobs will be created by the ACT. This is an important point to note in assessing impacts and achievements, since many commentators crudely assume that the principal measure of the success of a community land

owning organisation is direct job creation. Nevertheless, the ACT has created the equivalent of following *Full Time Jobs* (FTJs) in the period 1993 – 2001:

- 1993 – present 1.2 FTJs
- 1996 – 0.7FTJs
- 1997 – 0.25FTJs
- 1998 – 2000 – 0.5FTJs
- 2000 onwards 0.25FTJs

Of the 1.2 permanent FTJs, 0.5 is the Cuidiche's job and the remaining 0.7FTJ is as a result of letting sporting and fishing rights in the North Assynt Estate to a local young person. Calum Miller created the business Assynt Sporting Co. with the help of the Princes Youth Business Trust. The other 30% of his work, in this capacity, comes by working for a Perthshire Sporting Agent and an estate in Lewis, both as a ghillie and a piper.

In view of the facilitating role which the ACT has set itself, the value of work created for the local and regional economies is also important. In terms of the information presented here, '*Local*' is the Parish of Assynt, '*Highland*' is the HIE area, '*Scottish*' is the rest of Scotland and '*UK*' is the rest of the UK. During the study period the value of that economic impact is as follows:

- Value of Work let to Local Contractors – circa £20,000
- Value of Work let to Highland Contractors – circa £600,000
- Value of Work let to Scottish Contractors – circa £16,000

The local contracts are principally consultancy work. The Highland contracts include consultancy work and construction and management work associated with Assynt Hydro. The Scottish contracts are specifically R&D work for Assynt Hydro.

'Retaining Our Young People'

The ACT policy in favour of New Entrants to Crofting has resulted in:

- 13 New Entrants or new croft businesses in 7 townships

In view of the urgent need to reverse the difficult demographic circumstances which have dominated north west parishes for more than half a century, this is a very significant achievement with wide ranging impacts. It would not have been possible without the existence of the New Entrants' Scheme run by CASE. The role of the landlord is however significant in helping to create such a high number of new entrants. In a number of cases, vacant tenancies were being re-let and the ACT, as landlord, strongly favoured new entrants. In considering the remainder of new entrants, the ACT, in its role as landlord, also favoured new entrants. Figure 6.13 below shows that the township of Clachtoll has enjoyed the largest number of new entrants. In addition, during the same period a number of young families previously resident in Lochinver moved into this township. The result is a much younger and more diverse demographic profile than was previously the case. This is due in part also to the attitude of the township Grazings Committee and shareholders in actively encouraging younger residents into the township. The impact of this attitude is striking in that there are now (2001) four families with school age children whereas before there were none.

Figure 6.13: New Entrants in North Assynt Estate 1993 - 2001
 Source: CASE Crofting Development Officer

Township	Number of New Entrants
Clachtoll	5
Clashmore and Raffin	2
Balchladich	2
Stoer	1
Culkein Stoer	1
Nedd	1
Torbreck	1

Another township which has been transformed by the New Entrant Scheme is Balchladich. Since the arrival of active new Entrants the township has, as noted above, successfully completed its own Crofter Forestry Scheme. As a result the township is socially more cohesive and much more active. In combination with shareholders from Clashmore and Raffin township, a number of crofters, two of whom are New Entrants, are currently creating a Machinery and Marketing Group in order to provide essential agricultural equipment and to develop direct marketing of local croft produce and other tourism products and services. In Balchladich and Clashmore and Raffin townships, the New Entrants have reintroduced Highland Cattle into the townships. These Highland Cattle, not only provide high quality meat for local households, but have also had a very positive environmental impact. There are now two Balchladich tenants who have reintroduced Highland cattle and are growing their own hay for winter-feed. No winter feed has been produced in the township for some twenty-five years.

Clashmore and Raffin township is currently planning to improve some popular local paths, which are in township ground, and to provide an otter and bird watching hide on the shore of Loch na Claise and a Cetacean watching spot at Stoer Point, which is the best place for watching whales, dolphin and porpoise in the north west. In addition, the Grazings Committee is investigating how to attract funds to repair the township dry stane dykes, which are very impressive examples of their type, and are historic, having been built from the stones of the cleared settlement of Bhaile Ruadh, when the Clashmore Farm was created, in the 1870s.

Figure 6.14: The Clashmore Riot Act

S. 206³
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NOTICE.



WHEREAS riotous and disorderly persons have recently assembled in and upon the Township and Farm of Clashmore, in Assynt, for the purpose of interfering with and obstructing Officers of the Law in the execution of their duty, and whereby the said Officers and their Assistants have been obstructed and alarmed, NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that such assemblages are illegal and criminal, and that all persons taking part in them, even although they individually commit no act of violence, are guilty of the crime of mobbing and rioting, and liable to be punished therefor. AND NOTICE IS FURTHER GIVEN, that such assemblages are hereby forbidden; that on the assembly of any such riotous and disorderly persons in future, a Proclamation in terms of the Riot Act, and to the following effect, will be made:—"Our Sovereign Lady, the Queen, chargeth and commandeth all persons "being assembled, immediately to disperse themselves, and "peaceably to depart to their habitations or to their lawful "business, upon the pains contained in the Act made in the "first year of King George, for preventing tumults and riotous "assemblies. God save the Queen;" and that if such assemblages shall not disperse within one hour after such Proclamation, each person comprising it will be guilty of the said crime, and will be liable to penal servitude for life, or for not less than fifteen years, or to imprisonment for not less than three years.

BY ORDER OF THE SHERIFF.

Lochinver, 26th December, 1887.

(as) *Aranda Taylor*
Sheriff (with of
Sutherland

In a sense the dykes are therefore also an ambiguous memorial to the struggles of Rhu Stoer crofters, who land raided the farm in 1887 and finally managed to get the ground back into crofting, as a result of the Crofters Commission intervention over the troubles. Before reaching that stage several of the tenants had served jail sentences and the Riot Act had been read, threatening '*penal servitude*' on all agitators. To read the Riot Act, see Figure 6.14.

An Atmosphere of Opportunity?

Again, in view of the facilitating role taken by the ACT towards social and economic development, an important measure of success will be the development of new local business opportunities, as a result of increased local self-confidence and the gradual creation of an atmosphere of opportunity. In North Assynt between 1993 and 2001, in terms of new business start-ups, there were:

- Total Start-ups – 21 new businesses = 20.75FTJs
- Total Closures due to retirement, bereavement, relocation, career change - 11 Businesses = 9.25FTJs
- Start-ups in crofting households – 12 businesses = 13FTJs
- Start-ups remaining in 2001 – 12.25FTJs¹⁹

Of the businesses which closed, only 0.75FTJs were due to career changes. The remainder were due to retirement, bereavement and two cases of relocation (2.75FTJs). One very surprising finding from this research is the high survival rate of businesses created by members of crofting households during the study period. While it would be imprudent to assume too much from such a small sample, these results imply that the community buy-out has increased individual's commitment to the area among crofting households. At least two of these households, accounting for 7.25FTEs, had no intention, during the 1980s, of staying permanently in this area. In addition the results imply that businesses started by members of crofting households *may* have a better survival rate than average, because these businesses will, on average, be less '*footloose*' than a businesses which can relocate to improve their prospects. This

is very interesting since it tends to support the notion that a croft '*anchors*' people in an area and that businesses set up by members of crofting households will strive very hard for survival and business success, since relocation is almost unthinkable.

On this topic it should be noted that only a proportion of businesses ever contact their LEC or Local Authority for business start-up and other types of grant support. This means that in any year the LEC and HIE count of new businesses will not represent the true picture on the ground. Only detailed local research can do this. In the case of community land ownership organisations, this makes it more difficult to assess the impacts of their activities aimed at creating '*an atmosphere of confidence and opportunity*',²⁰ without specific research and the funds to carry it out.

Sectoral Activities

Under this heading I provide more detail on the ACT's sectoral achievements during the period 1993 – 2001.

Administration and Management

The demanding responsibilities of administration and management are often overlooked, particularly in media coverage of community land ownership, since they are not, on the face of it, quite as '*heroic*' as some other tasks. In fact a huge amount of unseen heroism goes into this aspect of a community landownership organisation. To illustrate just how demanding this aspect of the work is, particularly in the early years when systems are only being developed, it is interesting to bear in mind that the first *Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust* Project Officer calculated that 70% of her time was taken up by administration. The principal achievements to date in this sector are:

- Exceeding the feasibility study financial projections by 25% within the first year of operation

¹⁹Source: Fieldwork, Local Knowledge and Phone Survey.

²⁰ A phrase used by an ACT Director in a TV programme, 1993.

- 'Factoring' the estate for next to nothing
- Development and regular review of systems and structures
- Development and regular overhaul of Group Working approach
- Regular involvement of new people, with particular skills and new Directors
- Establishment of Office with phone/fax
- Creation and retention of Cuidiche post *without grant assistance* – permanent 0.5FTJs
- Attention to confidentiality in Crofting Administration
- Improvements in level of rent payments
- Democratic development of policies for Croft Administration
- Establishment of ACT Archive
- Keeping going

Membership and Communications

This sector of activity has tended to suffer neglect whenever there is a heavy workload. Despite this the following are the key achievements:

- ACT Newsletter - intermittently
- Two Public Meeting per year
- Circulation of AGM Minutes to all members
- Board meetings open to all local residents
- Website – currently out of action, but likely to be reinstated
- Membership Certificates for all members and the twenty-nine new members since 1993
- Honorary Membership certificates
- Book of Honour
- Capacity Building - New skills gained through ACT voluntary work

Tourism

The ACT campaign and the subsequent public interest in ACT activities have undoubtedly had an impact on the area's profile in terms of tourism. It is impossible to quantify that impact, but it has most definitely had a positive marketing impact. Anecdotal evidence from those engaged in B&B indicates

that visitors ask a great deal of questions about the ACT and crofting. The following are the key achievements in this sector:

- Positive marketing impact of ACT media profile
- Improvement and development of fishing resource
- Delivery of affordable angling, open to all
- Securing grant aid for project work
- Tourism resources audit – created 25% FTJ 1997 – 1998 inclusive
- Elder Project – 75 new bednights over 2 years
- A total of 1000+ new bed nights that are known

The following are examples of new groups attracted to the Parish of Assynt as a direct result of ACT activities:

- John Muir Trust – 40 bednights plus food and drink
- Glasgow University – 240 bednights plus food and drink
- UEA – 150 bednights plus food and drink
- Winchester – 150 bednights plus food and drink
- Not for Profit Landowners – 60 bednights plus food and drink
- Reforesting Scotland – 120 bednights plus food and drink
- Crofters Ceilidh – 60 bednights plus food and drink
- Native Woodlands Discussion Group - 150 bednights plus food and drink

The key tourism outputs to date are:

- awareness of and creation of new tourism products
- action points from research
- development of fishing resource
- positive marketing impacts – attracted new types of business including academic
- restoration of Clachtoll broch

Housing

Lack of housing has, from the outset, been an issue that the ACT wished to address. For a range of reasons, discussed earlier, this has taken much longer than might have been hoped. The following are the key achievements to date in terms of housing:

- Research – let to Highland based contractor – 1996
- Donation of House site by Stoer Township
- Negotiations with NOSWA and SEPA over drainage issues
- NOSWA resolves to install reed bed system for four existing and four new houses
- Agreement that four new houses will be built and let by Albyn Housing

The key housing outputs are:

- Research into housing need
- Through negotiations with NOSWA, reduction in negative environmental impacts of sewerage disposal through reed bed system for current and proposed houses at Stoer site
- four social housing units scheduled for 2003/4

Energy

Development of the renewable energy resource has been by far the most demanding, most capital intensive and most contentious project which the ACT has embarked upon. The scheme was finally commissioned in 2000 and in the same year the project became run by Assynt Hydro Ltd in which the ACT has controlling shares. The key achievements to date are:

- Recognition of the resource potential
- Project R&D – let to Scottish consultants – 1994 – 1998
- Securing of ERDF and other grant aid
- Energy Audit and Environmental Review – Scottish consultants 1996 – 2000
- Partnership with Highland Company with necessary expertise – Highland Light and Power
- Post-commissioning environmental research – 2000 – 2005

The key outputs to date are:

- ACT income
- new local skills
- contribution to development of new regional economic sector
- local construction work
- local part-time job
- contracts for Highland companies
- medium to long term income for ACT

As I am writing, debate is raging in the press over the environmental impacts of this scheme.²¹ It is alleged that salmon and sea trout smolts cannot negotiate the weir system that has been installed in order to provide access to the upper loch systems. Since fishing and sport are the main income sources for the ACT, this is potentially a very worrying impact. This alleged negative environmental impact is being used by landowning interests to claim that all community land ownership is a bad thing and that communities are not capable of taking responsibility for assets such as salmon fisheries. Again this illustrates the very charged political atmosphere in which community land ownership must survive and the mobilisation of environmental arguments combined with a positioning of the Assynt crofters as *'less than able'* to discredit the principle of community landownership.

Angling and Game

When *'Restricted Income'* is set aside the angling and sporting provides an average of 39% p.a. of total income. The key achievements in this sector are:

- Provision of tourism products – angling, boats, information and orientation
- Purchase on new boats and equipment each year to build up resource
- R&D – sea trout smolt stocking, tagging and tracking
- Liaison with Assynt Angling Club
- Representation at West Sutherland Fisheries Trust

²¹ See for instance *Northern Times* and *WHFP* 25th January 2002.

- Representation on North and West Salmon Fisheries District Board
- Representation on West Sutherland Deer Management Group
- Group work on new Deer Management options
- Involvement of new volunteers
- New Skills acquired by volunteers
- Increase in deer cull and active management due to predation as a result of reduction in grazings

The key outputs are:

- Locally let fishing and sporting rights have created 0.7FTJ 1993 – present
- 8 boats to hire
- Brochures and information at permit point of sale
- Niche marketing of angling
- On average 39% of ACT income per year
- Investment in resource to date of circa £15,000
- Draft Deer Management Plan

Information Technologies

To date only a few Directors have access to e-mail and most do not have and have never used a computer. In the future it is likely that PCs and other new technologies will ease some of the pressures on voluntary time to some extent. In 1996 the ACT was involved in a very '*high tech*' project focused on the applications of new technologies. This was the STEM project, mentioned above, which created two posts or 0.7FTE during the whole of 1996 and brought income for administration to the ACT. The key achievements were therefore:

- Recognition of future management potential of new technologies
- Participation in STEM project planning
- 2 jobs – 0.7FTJ in 1996
- Administrative fees to ACT

The key outputs were :

- feasibility study
- new local skills

Woodlands and Forestry

Activity focused on woodlands and forestry is important both in terms of environmental impacts and economic opportunities. The ACT took a very active role in the development of Crofter Forestry and created local work as a result. In terms of environmental impacts, native woodlands have a very positive effect on fresh water ecosystems, including brown trout, salmon and sea trout. In view of the economic importance of this resource for the ACT it will be interesting to see what the impacts will be in the medium to long term. The key activities to date have been:

- Facilitation and management of early schemes
- Support and permissions for townships
- Positive environmental and recreational impacts
- New skills have been acquired in the process
- Feasibility study on potential for ACT tree nursery using native seed

The following is a break down on the impact on the local and Highland economies through letting contract work:

Value of work let to local contractors – circa £193,000

Value of work let to Highland/Moray Contractors – circa £191,000

Value of work let to Scottish contractors – circa £50,800

Value of work let to UK contractors – circa £16,834

These figures do not include monies from Farm Woodland Premium Scheme payments and Livestock Exclusion Scheme payments direct to crofting households, so the true value to the local economy is actually higher. The key outputs have been:

- Local work plus other Contract work let in Highland Region and Moray

- New local skills – administrative and woodland
- Positive medium to long term environmental impacts, inc. fresh water fishing resource
- 794.2 ha native woodland planted through crofter forestry schemes
- 3 FTJs p.a. 1996 – 2000/1 plus 2 other FTJs 1999/2000 created through crofter forestry schemes

Natural Heritage

The importance of woodlands has already been noted. The main progress to date in this sector has been in terms of research and discussion. It is said that in the future Highlands and Islands communities will reap the socio-economic benefits of biodiversity. Achieving that, demonstrating its potential and overcoming traditional suspicions of anything labelled '*environmental*' or '*natural heritage*' will take a great deal of time and effort. This traditional tension continues to stand in the way of creating a Management agreement with SNH, which could bring much needed income and has to date prevented the Environmental Audit which SNH has offered to financially assist since the outset. Despite this, excellent new research has been carried out on the North Assynt Woodlands which shows that past croft management has been responsible for the survival of remnant native woodlands and that re-instigating active management, including coppicing and pollarding would be beneficial. The key achievements to date are:

- Encouraging and facilitating access
- Research into North Assynt Woodlands
- Securing funding for research
- Participation in Millennium Forest for Scotland activities
- Passing on findings through presentations and guide walks

The key outputs are:

- Reassessment based on research of local native woodland resource

- Discovery that woodlands which have survived are beside townships because of active management until very recently, when drastic population decline and economic change occurred
- Discovery of some very old trees – a willow five hundred years old
- Vermin Control

Research Summary

A number of research projects have been undertaken. These are:

- Housing Needs Survey – Di Alexander
- Energy Needs Audit – Altener
- Environmental Review – Altener
- Crofter Tourism Project – Robin Noble
- North Assynt Woodlands – Robin Noble
- North Assynt Tree Nursery Feasibility Study – North Highland Forest Trust

Participation

Over the years the ACT has been involved in a range of local and regional groups, events and activities. The list below is by no means exhaustive, but serves to illustrate the range of participation and to demonstrate the huge call on voluntary time that this aspect of Directors' responsibilities represents. The benefits are in terms of capacity building, networking and action in partnership with others.

Assynt Tourism Group

Assynt Footpaths

Not for Profit Landowners Group

Community Land Action Group

West Sutherland Fisheries Trust

Red Deer Commission

Duthchas Renewable Energy Seminar

Highland Council Renewable Energy Seminar

Argyll and Isles LEC 'Developing our Resources Seminar'

North West Council for Social Services

Highland Community Care Forum – Social Audit

Europene Federation d'Agriculteurs (EFA)

Skerray Township response to SOAFD Consultation on Countryside Premium Scheme

Crofting Trust Advisory Service

Culag Community Wood

Comunn Eachdraidh Asiante

SEAD Study Tour and Conference – Shifting the Balance

Reforestation Scotland Annual Gathering

Highland Small Communities Housing Trust AGM

MLURI Research

Glasgow University Research

Arkleton Research

Visits to:

- Borve and Annishadder
- Eigg
- Knoydart
- Melness

Consultation Responses

Another significant call on Directors' time is the need to respond to consultations by public agencies. Since the concept of '*community*' has become so fashionable the frequency of consultations has escalated hugely. Even people in paid positions in public agencies struggle to keep up with this duty. For volunteers the responsibility can be time consuming but the group is very motivated to make its voice heard and to participate. Here are some examples of consultation to which the ACT has responded:

- Land Reform Brown Paper
- Land Reform Green Paper
- Land Reform White Paper
- Draft Land Reform Bill
- SOAFD Countryside Premium Scheme, Organic Aid Scheme etc.

Future Plans

In 2003 the ACT will have been managing their own land for a full decade. In the run up to the tenth anniversary there is a general feeling that it is time to take stock and to reassess objectives. An important aspect is the Board's efforts to involve everyone in the North Assynt Estate in giving ideas for the future. It is hoped that this will rebuild some of the momentum and spirit which has ebbed away in the last few years. With that in mind the Board have committed to creating a Whole Estate Plan. Potential future plans include:

- Whole Estate Plan
- Community Arts Project to celebrate Ten Years and honour the Clashmore Land Raids with a sculpture of monument
- Natural Resources Audit
- Deer Management Plan
- Implementation of Woodlands Study recommendations
- Implementation of Tourism study recommendations

The impact of the ACT activity has been much wider than the local area. Since 1992 the whole issue of land ownership and community land ownership has become central to Scottish politics. This will be discussed in the final section of this Chapter. In 1995 the Culag Community Woodland Trust was created in Assynt. Again this was a new form of land tenure for the area. The motivation for the creation of this local group, which was originally an off-shoot of the Assynt Community Council, was the local Lochinver community interest in the recreational and environmental importance of the Culag Wood. It is owned by Assynt Estates – the Vestey family. As noted above, this group moved on to achieve a community buy-out of a different area of ground – Little Assynt Estate - in 2000

Challenges

What is missing from this summary is consideration of the changed context of community development in Assynt. As is illustrated above, the land-based natural resources underpin every item. It should not be forgotten that a mere

ten years ago this would have been unthinkable. Gradually the ability even to consider such ambitious and wide-ranging projects has become almost taken for granted. Even disputes about the best way forward betray a new way of seeing and relating to local natural and cultural resources. In a theoretical sense, disputes over direction and principal are a healthy sign, in that these are often disputes about representation and in that, they signal ever increasing '*ownership of the issues*'. However, for those excluded from participation due to the lack of a croft tenancy, the experience in the later years may be of an accelerating loss of participation and some loss of '*ownership of the issues*'. The frequency with which this issue is raised indicates a growing frustration with this exclusion, although in the beginning the membership structure was agreed to be everyone. As the ACT has matured, a need has arisen to revise the structure in order to maintain local inclusiveness. Some croft tenants fear that the participation of '*non-crofters*' might lead to the creation of a landowning organisation more difficult to deal with than the traditional type. In places like Bhalto and Borve and Annishadder, where all residents have been members from the start, that has not been the experience.

In Assynt, those who have these fears imagine someone possessing no contact with the crofting system and no understanding of the way it works. In view of the confusions over the distinctions between the Grazings Committee's and the ACT's roles, inclusion of non-crofters as members could exacerbate this tension. However, in reality the majority of residents in North Assynt live in crofting households. The number of households with absolutely no contact with crofting is very, very small. The fact that this is not noticed by those who fear non-crofter involvement owes a great deal to the historical circumstances which have shaped crofting and the crofting community, in particular the persistent generational experience of '*loss*' – loss of people through outmigration; loss of land; loss of language and culture; loss of crofts to new, culturally different residents; loss of opportunity through economic disadvantage. The perception of '*threat*' as a result of this has been overcome for those who have become personally involved in imagining and/or shaping a different kind of present and future – crofting's organic intellectuals. Since the *Crofters Wars* these organic intellectuals have utilised and inhabited the vectors of mobility referred to by Spivak and shaped them to their own ends. In doing this they have

succeeded in partially dismantling the barrier of Spivak's subaltern '*speech act*' and achieved strategic gains for the '*region*' or community. As a group though this transformation is partial, and while it has gradually transformed the material circumstances of everyday life in crofting townships – through security of tenure' the creation of community landownership, and so on – not everyone's experience of '*Self as Other*' has been transformed. Hence the persistence of the assumption of constant threat, as illustrated through resistance to environmental organisations and '*incomers*'. In the case of '*incomers*', though, the threat can be more personal. It is less strategic, since it will often focus on access to croft tenancies, who controls township Grazings Committees or local organisations. It will frequently be fought through strategic means like the mobilisation of concepts of cultural identity and belongingness. In a particular set of circumstances the range of identities produced and the interactions between these strategic identities will be partial and contingent. Someone categorised as a '*local*' or a '*crofter*' under one set of circumstances will be categorised as an '*incomer*' and/or '*non-crofter*' in another set of circumstances. The majority of players in any particular '*moment*' will only partially fulfil the notional and contingent category description.

Organic intellectuals are less uncomfortable with this persistent between-ness and partiality, because they are more self-confident. This is seen in the positioning by the speaker of self as subject not object – '*what shall we do?*', not '*what are they doing (to us) this time?*' In Bhabha's terms, that self-confidence can be seen as an indication of culture/identity as diversity and becoming as well as being.²² The less self-confident or empowered players try constantly to shore up culture/identity as one-ness and originary, and are persistently frustrated and disappointed by the Sisyphian nature of such a task. There are interconnections **and** differences between these two ways of proceeding, and this interaction will in turn generate other partial divisions or differences. These processes are part of the ACT trajectory.

In terms of the public domain the ACT is expected to have a unitary identity. This was very effectively achieved during 1992 but is much more difficult and stifling to maintain over long time periods when the organisation itself takes

on, in some part, the status of *'the everyday'*. If two Committees – such as a Playgroup and a Hall Committee - were racked with difficulties because of differences of opinion, would that lead an observer – a member of the community or an academic – to conclude that the *'community'* was incapable of running a Playgroup or a Village Hall? Would the observer further conclude that grant aid from LECs and local authorities designed to support this type of voluntary or charitable work should be stopped as a matter of policy? I suspect that the answer is *'No'*. Most observers would conclude that all groups that share a clear common purpose will also display differences of opinion amongst their members. At times this will be of no consequence because there is basic agreement in describing the common goal and the manner in which it should be delivered. At other times it is to be expected that deeply held differences of opinion will emerge as to the appropriate methods of delivery and implementation. For example, Village Halls are *'a good thing'* but certain uses – betting or Saturday night and Sunday events – are offensive to some sections of the community. In particular circumstances, tensions can emerge but in due course these differences will be resolved and overcome and a better atmosphere restored.

The importance of this example is in the fact that community land ownership groups do not have this everyday luxury because of the politically charged context of their creation and existence. Differences of opinion, personality clashes, and competing conceptualisations of what is the proper role of an organisation is, are all very much part of any community group and community action. Community landownership organisations like the ACT are under severe pressure to deliver what in *'development speak'* are called *'outputs and impacts'* and to maintain a unitary, unchanging public identity. In the public domain there is no room for internal differences in these groups despite the fact that this is both normal and healthy, while the unitary public identity can be stifling and restrictive. There is a type of rural idyll at work here, exacerbated by the vested interests which have a need to demonstrate that *'communities'* cannot take care of *'the environment'* or salmon fishing or anything much really. The pressures which this situation creates can and do interfere with the achievement of local aims and aspirations because the group

²² Bhabha H. K. 1994 *The Location of Culture* Routledge London.

representatives need to be constantly thinking about how any action or decision will be interpreted in the public domain. Being the first very public example of the 1990s, the ACT has suffered, and continues to suffer, from this pressure to respond strategically to issues which are often peripheral to delivery of very local aims. Every action is treated as symbolic, and hence the furore over the Knoydart Foundation selling *'The Big House'* while the sale of Torbreck House was portrayed as more positive, although it was exactly the same thing, because Torbreck House was sold to Implex. Implex created two local jobs and was a high tech company – all symbolically good stuff. The economic rationale for both sales were the same. The community organisation could not invest enough in time or money to make the *'Big Houses'* pay for themselves and then turn a profit fast enough. Any option other than sale would have been irresponsible in terms of cashflow and reduction of borrowing, but that is not how it is presented in the public domain. That is why the debate over what to do about *'The Big House'* on Eigg still rages. That is also why community landownership organisations do not as yet enjoy often the option of easy and open debate and communications.

Figure 6.15 summarises some the main challenges facing the ACT. All of them have been alluded to in the earlier account of ACT activities. Not included in this list is an issue with which community land owning organisations other than ACT have found difficulty. That is the need to clarify new roles and responsibilities in relation to the new resources owned. In the beginning there is a sense among members and the wider local community that, since everything is owned by the community, anyone can use any facility as he or she wishes. In Knoydart, for example, the Estate owns a garage. When the buy-out succeeded, anyone needing to change a wheel or do work on a vehicle would go into the garage, use the facility and then get on their way. Inevitably electricity was used, tools and the building suffered wear and tear, but there was no income from use to set against repair, maintenance and running costs. In North Assynt, when the ACT bought an Argocat, a similar situation arose. It was assumed that anyone could take it and use it, and at the end of a year the repair bills were frightening. This type of use creates no balancing income. Most importantly, a small number of users are getting the benefit, but the organisation, and by implication the other 80% of people who are not using the

facility, are paying for it. This creates a very delicate situation. It is not easy to begin to define rules of access, in the wider interest, because the Directors who do this are then seen by some as behaving like a 'landlord' or trying to impose their views on other people. In Knoydart the garage problem was overcome by locking the garage and issuing a key from the Knoydart Foundation Office to users who would then be billed for a small sum each time. In this way those who use most heavily pay more than those who use it never or rarely. In North Assynt the Argocat is not loaned to anybody at all but can be hired with an operator.

Figure 6.15: Summary of ACT Challenges
Source: ACT Minutes, Fieldwork etc.

Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generating enough income to maintain ACT viability • Generating ACT income without engaging in activities suitable for local entrepreneurs • Facilitating local economic diversification
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overcoming the traditional 'crofting' distrust of SNH • Achieving and demonstrating economic and social benefits of and from enhanced biodiversity • Mitigating any negative impacts of Hydro scheme
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoiding burnout of most active people • Striving for unity despite divisions • Maintaining a 'fun' element of ACT activities • Keeping young people in the townships
Organisational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating and maintaining open communications • Reducing the demands on voluntary time • Becoming accustomed to a division of labour between Grazings Committees and the ACT as landlord

A Decade of Community Land Ownership Activity

In the past ten years we have witnessed enormous changes in the way the majority of people in Scotland think about land ownership. During the 1980s most people thought that *'The Land Question'* had ceased to exist. In the course of the following decade, it became one of the key issues in Scottish politics and played a part in the devolution debate. It was the achievement of the ACT buy-out which launched a decade of intense activity and a staggering rise in community land ownership. Before the creation of the ACT, the issue and the idea of community ownership was emerging in a number of places.

In November 1991 the West Highland Free Press reported the meeting between the then Isle of Eigg Trust - created by a group of concerned individuals who did not live on Eigg - and the residents of Eigg, with the headline "*Alternative*

model of land ownership put before the people of Eigg".²³ It was reported that the people of the island of Eigg gave the idea a cautious welcome. As noted earlier, about a year before, the then Scottish Office offer of the transfer of the DAFS (now SEERAD) estates in Skye and Raasay to a crofter community owned organisation or trust was rejected by the majority of croft tenants on those seven estates.

Some ten years on it is sometimes hard to recall the atmosphere and circumstances in which these events and debates unfolded. At the time, many people were familiar with the sector now often referred to as '*Not-for-Profit*' land ownership, but in most people's experience this was dominated by '*communities of interest*', such as the *National Trust for Scotland*, *The Church of Scotland*, *The John Muir Trust* and the *RSPB*. These organisations had large memberships, ranging from one or two million in the case of the *RSPB* and the *NTS*, to several thousand in the case of smaller organisations. These organisations can be usefully described as '*communities of interest*'. The membership is scattered across the UK. Specific land holdings are bought or acquired and managed in accordance with the aims and aspirations of these communities of interest, but these organisations do not focus on one particular geographical area, unless it is to acquire that location because it can be managed in ways which meet the organisational aims.

The Rise of Community Land Ownership

In 1991 the majority of people had never heard of the idea of '*community ownership*', despite the existence for some time of significant examples of this form of land ownership. This sector of the '*Not-for-Profit*' landowners and managers is dominated by '*communities of place*' rather than communities of interest. Organisations in this category focus their efforts very specifically on a particular geographical location and aim to manage that location or land holding for the benefit of locally resident communities. As will be seen later, there is great variety in the aims and motivations of these '*communities of place*' or community land ownership organisations. Some are motivated more by environmental concerns than economic and *vice versa*, but all share a common

²³*West Highland Free Press* 1st November 1991.

focus on the enhancement and enrichment of local social circumstances. It might be said that they stand firmly in the Scottish social economy. This type of land ownership has come to be referred to by many people as '*social land ownership*'.

Drawing on the way in which Andy Wightman²⁴ usefully presents land ownership information, in 1991 the community land owning or managing organisations which existed are listed in Figure 6.16.

Pioneering Examples

Seven of these organisations owned land, while the eighth organisation had been formed in 1991, and aspired to own land. The first to be created - Glendale, Skye - relies on unincorporated club property for its legal structure. It was created in 1908, when the Congested Districts Board created four crofting estates and offered the tenants of each the opportunity of a full transfer of property through a fifty-year purchase agreement.²⁵ The other three estates - Syre, north Sutherland (1899), Staffin, Skye (1904) and Eoligarry, Skye (1900) turned down this offer. By 1956 the one hundred and forty-seven Glendale '*tenants*' had paid off their purchase agreement.²⁶ In the *West Highland Survey* it is noted that the tenants of the other three estates decided that becoming owners would put them at risk of struggling to pay owners' rates.²⁷ During the payment period the payments were a heavy burden on the shareholders. The fact that the Glendale crofters also had to be a '*double rate*' of owner and occupier was a heavy burden.

²⁴Wightman A. and Boyd G. 2001 *Not-for-Profit landowning Organisations in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland: Organisational Profiles and Sector Review* Report prepared for Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Natural Heritage by Caledonia Centre for Social Development.

²⁵Wightman and Boyd (2001) state 1908, as does MacPherson G. W. (2001) but Darling (1955), puts it at 1905.

²⁶Wightman and Boyd (2001) state 1958, MacPherson G. W (2001) states 1956 and Darling (1955) states 1955.

²⁷p12 Darling F. F. (ed) 1955 *The West Highland Survey: An Essay in Human Ecology* Oxford University Press.

Figure 6.16: Community Land Ownership in 1991
 Source: Wightman and Boyd 2001²⁸

1991	Date	Acres owned	Acres leased	Acres managed	Acres aspired	Members	Membership	Legal Status	Charitable Status
Glendale Estate	1908	23000				n/a	shareholders	Unincorporated club property	No
Stornoway Trust	1923	69400				13000	Residents of Stornoway Parish who are on electoral roll	Trust	Yes
Hoy Trust	1973	12500				10	By invitation	Trust	Yes
Geary Common Grazings	1980	970				21	registered crofters with share in common grazings	Trust	No
Dalnavert Community Woodland Trust Ltd.	1982	125				7	residents of Dalnavert and invitation	company limited by shares	No
Isle of Eigg Trust	1991	0	0	0	7400			'Trust in waiting': Company limited by guarantee with no share capital	Yes
Trustees for Grazings Committee for Lochbay Township	?	1575				?	those with grazings shares?	Trust	n/a
Trustees for Common Grazings Committee for Townships of Upper and Lower Halistra and Hallin Park	?	770				?			
		Total= 95,840			Total= 7400	circ a 15000			

²⁸Wightman A. and Boyd G. 2001 *Not-for-Profit landowning Organisations in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland: Organisational Profiles and Sector Review Report* prepared for Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Natural Heritage by Caledonia Centre for Social Development.

Darling is very critical of the decline of the estate assets.²⁹ He asserts that this is because management would normally be carried out by a professional factor or estate manager and the Glendale holders, he says, know nothing of estate management:

"The failure of the project so far lies in the lack of knowledge of land management and in the lack in civic sense in 147 holders of equal status. A more stratified society might have arrived at a better *modus operandi* and *modus vivendi*. In the form it has taken in Glendale, peasant ownership cannot be looked on as a desirable substitute for the more traditional form of tenure."³⁰

In fact, as George W MacPherson explains the Estate was burdened with inadvisable rental agreements at fixed low rates over very long periods, through the advice of the Department of Agriculture, during the period before the final hand over.³¹ At the moment the Glendale example is being revisited by many people, since it has much to teach others involved in the development of social ownership and it is still a courageous example of a very early form of that type of ownership.

Darling's comments on the structure of ownership in Glendale strike a discordant note in today's context, and perhaps serve to highlight the great psychological, economic and social barriers which faced early pioneers such as the Glendale shareholders and The Stornoway Trust. Darling contrasts the hunger in Ireland for land ownership with the apparent historical preference in the Highlands and Islands for security of tenure and heritability of tenure. He makes no comment on the efficacy of the Stornoway Trust, though it is mentioned. He notes that companies are not a good type of landowner and that several companies became landowners in Lewis in 1923, when the

²⁹pp 309 - 311 **Darling F. F.** (ed) 1955 *The West Highland Survey: An Essay in Human Ecology* Oxford University Press.

³⁰p311 **Darling F. F.** (ed) 1955 *The West Highland Survey: An Essay in Human Ecology* Oxford University Press See also discussion by **Hunter** (1996?) in *The Claim of Crofting Mainstream*. previous negative assessments of the Glendale situation are currently being re-evaluated in the light of changing attitudes to land ownership and the rise of community land ownership.

³¹**MacPherson G. W.** 2001 *Glendale Estate: A unique Early Experiment in Crofting Ownership* in **Boyd G. and Reid D. (ed)** 2001 *Social Landownership: Vol. 3 The Not-for-Profit Landowners Project* Inverness.

Stornoway Trust was created. Among those who bought land cheaply at that time were also '*small speculators*' among the inhabitants of Lewis itself.³²

It is interesting to note that after Glendale, the next three examples all chose the legal trust as their legal structure. The Hoy Trust, it should be noted, does not have a democratic structure, since members have no role in the election of the Board. Dalnavert, created in 1982, uses the company limited by shares legal structure. This land and the herd of Aberdeen Angus, are managed by members on a co-operative basis, like a Club farm. In 1975 the Stornoway Trust changed its legal structure from that of a conventional legal trust to that of a body corporate incorporated by Act of Parliament. This allowed it to broaden the electorate to all those living in the Parish of Stornoway and on the electoral roll. Before that the right to vote had been restricted to property owners in the same geographical area. From 1975 Trustees were elected by the new wider electorate of what is today some 13,000 people.³³ The aims of the Trust emphasise the trustees' responsibilities in managing the Stornoway Estate.

The Development of New Legal Structures

It is only in 1991 that we see the first example of the legal structure that has become so common during the past ten years - the Company Limited by Guarantee with no share capital. This was the form used by the early Eigg Trust, although ultimately this particular organisation gave way to the community created and run Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust in 1996.

The publication in 1990 of a report focused on identifying a suitable vehicle for the potential transfer of the then DAFs estates in Skye and Raasay to a community trust has proved, in retrospect, to have been of enormous influence on subsequent activity in community land ownership.³⁴ It was in this report that the Company Limited by Guarantee with no share capital was identified as the most suitable legal structure for '*communities of place*' seeking to own

³²p309 **Darling F. F.** (ed) 1955 *The West Highland Survey: An Essay in Human Ecology* Oxford University Press.

³³It should be noted however that in general only about 18% of the potential electorate vote.

and/or manage land. This report explains clearly and simply how to set up an organisation with this type of legal structure, describes the main elements of a suitable constitution, the main elements of a suitable management structure and the duties of Office Bearers. It also explains that if charitable status is needed, a trading subsidiary can be created. The distinctive provisions of such a company are that members have a maximum financial liability of £1 and in taking out a share, gain membership rather than a financial stake in the company. The principal benefits are not only the £1 limit on members' liabilities, but also the fact that The Companies Acts imposes procedures and disciplines in the management of a potential company or community land ownership organisation and that the Constitution - or Memorandum of Association and Articles of Association - can be amended by a suitable majority of members, rather than through a Court.³⁵ Given the context of the report, it suggests that membership be open to all croft tenants on the DAFS estates.

It was this model that informed the early discussions of the Assynt crofters, as they moved towards creating the Assynt Crofters Trust in 1992. Since then a wide variety of forms, mainly using the legal structure of a Company Limited by Guarantee with no share capital have been created in order to pursue or achieve community land ownership.

Increased Public Awareness and Participation

Government policy has altered radically with regard to the social economy since 1991, and community land ownership is now seen as an appropriate vehicle for rural development and on that basis, has begun to enjoy a range of support. The general public are much better informed, both about what the land ownership system in Scotland can mean for local people, economies and environments and about the very idea of community ownership. Devolution has resulted in wide consultation on Land Reform.

³⁴**Bryden J., Fraser S., Houston G. and Robertson A.** 1990 *The Future of DAFS Estates in Skye and Raasay* Report for the Highlands and Islands Development Board Arkleton Trust (Research) Ltd.

This has been clearly shown, not only through the strong public support by donation, which a series of community groups have enjoyed in the past ten years in their bids for community ownership, but equally in the rise of these organisations, their achievements and their influence on public debate and the process of land reform currently underway. In the consultation on this subject community land ownership organisations have been vocal and have also displayed a diversification of interests, while still maintaining shared concerns and aspirations. Figure 6.17 below illustrates the rise in community land ownership in the Highlands and islands in the past ten years.

There has been a threefold increase in land under community ownership and/or management. There are almost five times as many such organisations as there were in 1991. There are almost twice as many people involved in this type of land ownership as there were ten years ago. Since The Stornoway Trust has such a large electorate, when compared to the average for most organisations, it exerts a disproportionate effect on these figures. Leaving aside, for a moment, The Stornoway Trust, the number of people directly involved has risen from in the region of 2,000 to in the region of 13,000³⁶. This figure does not take account of other groups who, in the past ten years, have investigated some form of community ownership, but have not achieved or pursued it for a variety of reasons.³⁷

³⁵pp21 - 28 **Bryden J., Fraser S., Houston G. and Robertson A.** 1990 *The Future of DAFS Estates in Skye and Raasay* Report for the Highlands and Islands Development Board Arkleton Trust (Research) Ltd.

³⁶These figures have to be checked and amended in view of Kinlochleven and Gigha.

³⁷Further information on this will be sought in the future.

Figure 6.17: Change in Community Land ownership in the Highlands and Islands
 Source: Wightman and Boyd (2001) and own research

1991	2001
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 organisations, inc. the early 'Eigg Trust' • 15,000 members • owning, leasing and managing 108,340 acres • 1.08% of land in the Highlands and Islands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 39 organisations • 26,000 members • owning, leasing of managing 300,000 acres • 3% of land in the Highlands and Islands

Changes in the Policy Environment

Following the creation of the Assynt Crofters Trust and their successful campaign to buy what is now called the North Assynt Estate into crofting community ownership, the interest of the public and of policy makers in social land ownership was aroused.

It was noted that the concept of this type of ownership had created unprecedented unity and motivation among the Assynt communities and beyond. It became clear that this type of ownership might prove to be a useful vehicle for implementing positive socio-economic and environmental changes at grass roots level. In communities which had historically been very badly affected by the negative impacts of private land ownership, and which were experiencing increasing instability in private ownership, as titles changed hands with more regularity, this type of ownership offered hope of change. For the majority of people in the early 1990s, this was however a new and fairly unknown approach. Both for the communities in the North Assynt Estate, and for other communities searching for ways of reversing socio-economic decline, this was relatively uncharted territory. Everyone involved - or interested - found themselves on a very steep learning curve.

Early Public Agency Support: Crofting Trust Advisory Service

In order that other crofting communities considering this route could access easily the experience that those involved were gaining, the Crofting Trust Advisory Service was created in 1995 by the Crofters Commission and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. In the period of operation, 1996 to 2001, a total of twenty-six community groups approached the CTAS for advice on

community ownership.³⁸ Thirteen of these went on to receive financial assistance towards the cost of feasibility studies, legal fees or a combination of these. To date four communities have gone on to purchase their estates as crofting trusts. It is likely that others are still considering their options and some are likely to be waiting for the Land Reform Bill to become law. For some on SEERAD Estates, an EU ruling to the effect that transfer of the land title to a crofting community trust for a minimal or no cost contravenes European competition laws has slowed down progress. The approaches to the CTAS have been from the following areas:

Figure 6.18 CTAS Enquiries by Area
Source: CTAS

Area	Number of Enquiries
North Uist	3
Skye	8
Sutherland	5
Barra	1
South Inverness	1
East Ross-shire	1
West Ross-shire	3
Lochalsh	1
Shetland	1
Small Isles	1
Argyll	1

Demand for CTAS services has changed over time, particularly since the creation of the Community Land Unit (CLU) which in 2002 takes over all such functions. Meetings between community groups and CTAS advisors, by year were as follows:

Figure 6.19: CTAS Enquiries by Year
Source: CTAS

Year	Number
1996	10
1997	5
1998	1
1999	2
2000	1
2001	1

Some transfers from benevolent private landlords, as in the case of the Melness Crofters Estate in north Sutherland, occurred. Most importantly, the CTAS paid for the time and costs involved for individuals who had already gained

³⁸ All CTAS information - Personal communication from Crofters Commission, January 2002.

experience of crofting community land ownership to pass on their experiences and advice to aspirant groups, in the capacity of CTAS Advisors. The advisors used were John MacKenzie, ACT and Alastair Nicholson, Borge and Annishadder.

In the wake of the debate over the 1990 proposed transfer of crofting estates in Skye and Raasay, Michael Forsyth, the then Secretary of State for Scotland, put forward the Transfer of Crofting Estates (Scotland) Act in 1997. For reasons similar to those raised by DAFS/SEERAD tenants in 1990, no transfers have yet occurred. In addition, as already noted, the EU decision that transfers "*at no consideration*" contravene EU competition rules has been an unexpected obstacle.³⁹

A Change in Government and Approach: Community Land Unit

A change of government from Conservative to Labour later in 1997, brought a new approach. Brian Wilson, MP, became Minister of State. Since this was someone with long experience of Highland and Island issues, he soon directed HIE to create the Community Land Unit, under the auspices of Strengthening Communities, one of HIE's three strategic priorities which are mirrored in the company structure. The announcement was made at the ceremony and celebration on the Isle of Eigg to mark the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust's successful community buy out.

The strong public support offered throughout the 1990s to a variety of community run public appeals, including Assynt, Eigg and Knoydart, illustrated an intense public interest in this sort of community action and in the issues which prompted it. In 1992, when the Assynt Crofters Trust had sought funding from the public purse, CASE had enthusiastically stepped in but the support of HIE was only achieved through a great deal of persuasion and back room lobbying. In the five years which followed this had changed dramatically. The creation of the Community Land Unit (CLU) provided specialist, focused support, advice and grant aid. By 1998/9 the Community Land Purchase Fund, administered by CLU had a budget of £0.25 million and a

further £1million for the following three years. In the period 1997 – 2001 the CLU provided technical assistance in 155 cases and acquisition resulted from 58 cases. In the same period the CLU dealt with a total of 699 enquiries. The enquiry rate rose dramatically in the winter of 2000 – 2001.

During this period, as already noted, the number of community land purchases rose steadily. All of them adopted the Company Limited by Guarantee with no share capital legal structure, but within this a diversity of structures and membership criteria emerged to meet a variety of needs. Activity in the social land ownership sector diversified in other ways, no longer being dominated by croft tenant groups. Some later structures, such as those used by Borve and Annishadder Township and Bhaltos, provide membership for all residents. Some organisations, such as Culag Community Wood, had started out with a lease and moved on later to buy land. This type of group's interest is focused on the social, educational and environmental benefits which the local community can gain through care of and creation of native woodlands. In other examples such as Laggan Forest Trust, the focus is again woodland, but the initial motivation was economic - a concern to create local employment through woodland and forestry management.

Diversification in the Community Land Ownership Sector

In 1992, when the ACT took action it was described as action aimed at achieving '*community land ownership*'. It did not occur to anyone at that time to differentiate between different forms of community land ownership. These had yet to emerge. In the course of the following years a huge range did emerge and today a new range of terms are commonly used. The term '*Not-for-Profit landowning organisations*' is used by many, including Wightman and Boyd (2001), to refer to organisations created both by '*communities of interest*' and '*communities of place*'. Examples of communities of interest include the John Muir Trust's properties at Sandwood Bay, north west Sutherland and in Skye and the various National Trust, Scotland, properties. Membership of the landowning organisation is very large and is open to a wide range of people across the UK and beyond. Membership is hence not linked to residency or

³⁹ Arkleton report on potential transfer of DAFs estates.

contact with any particular place. The motivations for ownership are mainly environmental, recreational and cultural. In assessing the growth of 'Not-for-Profit' landownership (NFP), Wightman and Boyd include this type of ownership and the growth in ownership by '*communities of place*' in their calculations. Hence they present a much greater growth in this sector than I have done earlier, because I am focusing on '*communities of place*'. Hence in 2001 Wightman and Boyd identify the following summary of the NFP sector:

- 45 organisations
- comprising some 1.38 million members and supporters UK-wide
- generating some £99 million of annual turnover UK-wide
- owning, leasing or managing 658,308 acres of land or 6.58% of the Highlands and Islands⁴⁰

Between 1996 and 2001 the number of organisations increased from twenty-three to forty-five. The membership increased from 1.25 million in the UK to 1.38 million. The turnover increased from £85 million to £99 million. The land owned, leased or managed increased from 544,388 acres to 658,308 acres. This represents an increase from 5.44% to 6.58% of the Highlands and Islands in this type of ownership.⁴¹ Again these figures emphasise the growth in public interest in the issues of appropriate management and use of Highland land and the growing political strength of this sector. In the period 1996 to 2001 the majority of the seventeen new organisations were community based.

'*Crofting community ownership*' now refers to a democratically structured group where membership is restricted to croft tenants. The ACT and the Melness Crofters Estate are examples. So too are Grazings Committees such as Kinsburgh Common Grazings and the Glendale Estate. Twelve of the organisations known of in 2001 could be described as '*crofting community ownership*' though some allow non-croft membership too.

⁴⁰ Wightman. A and Boyd G 2001 NFP Landowning Organisations in the Highlands and islands of Scotland: Organisational Profiles and Sector Review for HIE and SNH.

⁴¹ as above.

Two further organisations are fundamentally crofting community ownership, but define their membership to include all residents. These are Borve and Annishadder Township Ltd and Bhalto Community Trust Ltd.

A much broader range of community landownership structures now exist. One type, used in Knoydart and Eigg, is a partnership between a democratically structured local organisation, a relevant charitable UK based membership organisation and the local authority. In both cases the local vehicle is the Residents' Association. In Eigg the other partners are the Scottish Wildlife Trust and the Highland Council. In Knoydart the other partners are the John Muir Trust and the Highland Council. In order to assemble a good range of skills, HIE, Kilchoan Estate and the Chris Brasher Trust also have Directors on the Board.

I consider these as community landowning organisations because the motivating force was local community action, but some people would see these as having an in-between status in view of the participation of UK-based charitable organisations. One of the advantages of this type of structure is that it is possible to have a neutral Chair, which can be advantageous, particularly at times of high stress. A second very significant benefit is the access to paid staff within the partner organisations who can develop project plans, bring special expertise to bear and help to secure project funding. This helps to relieve the common burden on local voluntary time to acceptable levels.

Many of the new community land ownership organisations have rules to ensure that only full-time local residents can play an active part in proceedings. In the case of the ACT, all Directors have to be resident, but absentee croft tenants are not debarred. The support offered by this group has been important to the ACT's creation, but some observers find it very strange that non-residents should be allowed such an active part and full membership rights.

Some of the range of new community landowning organisations are less focused on economic and social regeneration than the examples already mentioned, although social and economic spin-offs are desired. Organisations

like the Culag Community Wood and the Abriachan Forest Trust are motivated primarily by environmental and recreational issues and by the principal of local resource management for local benefit. In view of this increasing diversity, it is likely that the sectors aspirations and needs will diversify further. It is already noticeable that some individuals involved in organisations primarily motivated by economic issues differentiate themselves from those which are engaged more in recreational and environmental activities. In doing this, a difference of motivation is being pointed to, whereby places which have suffered severely from economic degeneration are engaging in environmentally motivated activities, but are acutely aware of the need to facilitate local economic development which is environmentally sustainable, whereas groups like Culag Wood and Abriachan Forest Trust focus on native woodlands, but see the possibility of economic spin-offs in the form of job creation. In reality the needs of these diverse groups and the actions they take may be more similar than this differentiation implies, but it is important to note that it is a difference commented on by some of those involved in the groups themselves and it may lead to increasingly different approaches in the medium to long term.

Further Support Developments: The Scottish Land Fund

In 2000 the CLU made a bid to the New Opportunities Fund to administer the new £10 million Scottish Land Fund. The total new Opportunities Fund is some £120 million, so this represents only about 8% of the total funds. This is interesting since in media debate there are currently accusations that untold sums are being made available for community land ownership. The CLU was successful in their bid and recruited five new staff to run this fund. Four of these jobs are based in a rural location – Achteryre, Lochalsh - while two posts are filled by people working from Edinburgh and Oban. The Scottish Land Fund is open to the whole of Scotland, which signals a recognition that '*land issues*' and community land ownership is not just a '*Highlands and Islands thing*'. Wooplaw Community Wood, purchased by a community group in the Borders in 1987, and the Borders Forest Trust have led the way in community *woodland* developments in many ways.

The new Scottish Office team established after the General Election of 1997 also initiated the Scottish Office Land Reform Policy Group which ran a consultation process on land reform during 1998 and 1999. With the achievement of devolution and the recreation of a parliament in Edinburgh, the land reform process became the responsibility of the new Scottish Executive. In spring 2001 the Draft Land Reform Bill was published by the Scottish Executive and further consultation has ensued. The *Land Reform (Scotland) Bill* was made public in late November 2001 and is scheduled to be put before the Scottish Parliament late in 2002. At present evidence is being taken by the Justice Two Committee and the Rural Development Committee on the subject of the Draft Bill.

'Self Help' in the Not-for-Profit Sector

Over the past ten years a great deal has been learned by the increasing numbers of people involved in community land ownership/tenure in whatever form. The communities which have chosen this route, and those with an interest in it, have used a variety of means to share experiences and to respond to the Land Reform consultation process.

The 'Not-for-Profit' Sector

The *Not-for-Profit Landowners Project Group* (NFP) was created through the government's Local Rural Partnership scheme. It ran a number of conferences which brought interested parties together and produced three volumes of useful studies written by people involved in social landownership in their own communities.⁴² At its annual get together in 2001 it disbanded and transferred its responsibilities to the *Community Land Action Group* (CLAG) and the emergent *Community Land Action Network* (CLAN).

Community Land Action Group

CLAG was created in 2000 in the course of a land reform seminar organised by the Eigg Residents Association. The idea was that CLAG would be able to carry out research, facilitate communications and sharing of experiences between community land groups and '*speak with one voice*' on behalf of those groups. An informative website was created and responses submitted to the Draft Land Reform Bill.⁴³ In partnership with Highland Council, a leaflet explaining the land reform proposals to date was also produced and circulated. Some of the organisations invited to join felt that CLAG itself was perhaps a bit too political and hence the idea of CLAN came about as a self help group.

Community Land Action Network

At the time of writing CLAN is in the process of being created and constituted. It has succeeded in attracting support from the *Community Action Network*

⁴² NFP 1999 - 2001 *Social Land Ownership: Case Studies* Volumes 1 – 3.

⁴³ www.clag.org.uk

(CAN) for the first year of operation.⁴⁴ CAN will provide a free e-mail discussion facility, webspace and training for a representative of each community land group which joins. Travel and accommodation costs for the training are being met by CAN. This organisation is not yet constituted and operates entirely in voluntary time. Its potential membership is scattered across the most sparsely populated area in Western Europe and all of these factors combined with the time and cost of travel make it very difficult to move quickly, or at times, at all.

Support for Capacity Building

The financial and advisory support of the CLU has been fundamental in making these *'self-help'* opportunities available to an increasing range of individuals and organisations. The cost and time involved in travelling to attend events and workshops in the Highlands and Islands can be prohibitive for many of the volunteers who are the motor of the community land ownership movement. In addition, events themselves must be paid for. The CLU has therefore made significant contributions to capacity building, self-help and supporting organisation through its funding and participation in these events.

Conclusion

Without the unanticipated growth in the NFP and community landownership, there would never have been a Draft Land Reform Bill. However, this sector is fairly new and under-researched. As debate over the Draft Land Reform Bill rages in the press, it is clear that reliable information on the impacts and achievements in this sector is not freely available. This fact is having a detrimental impact upon the debate. Given the already heavy voluntary-time burden carried by the community sector of the NFP movement, it is not surprising that the groups themselves find it quite difficult to create that type of information resource. In addition, in terms of impacts, it is still early days for most groups. In view of the local economic, social and environmental situation in which each group formed, many are starting in less than favourable

⁴⁴ Contact CAN on CAN-online.org.uk.

circumstances. Among these groups, it is well understood that the benefits of work today will only be seen in the medium to long term, and arguably only by future rather than present generations. While this is true, my account of ACT activities and impacts to date illustrates rather greater economic impacts and achievements than I would have anticipated under these circumstances.

The problems, tensions and challenges which the local communities, members and Directors have encountered hence do not in any way detract from the quite remarkable progress to date. In my work with other community landowning groups, I have noted a worrying tendency to concentrate on problems and disappointments while undervaluing the annual achievements. In some ways this is to be expected since, as each part of the work progresses, people's minds move onto the next thing, and the next thing, and so on. The difficulty with this is that locally, and in terms of current media presentation of this type of subject, the impacts and achievements are being seriously underestimated. It has to be noted that many of the tasks, such as administration and accounting, do not make *'good television'* and so become overlooked. I think that the range of ACT actions and concerns discussed above should be seen as illustrating the broad range of achievements forthcoming from this type of group, but it is also obvious that such achievements are rarely dramatic and *'newsworthy'* (in the conventional sense).

Ironically, since it is action by a crofting community that succeeded in putting *'The Land Question'* back on the Scottish political agenda, crofting community ownership is somewhat out of favour at present. The reason for this lies in the way in which the current structure of the land reform debate has been interpreted. The structure of debate in the early 21st century, as developed in the course of the 1990s, is very different from former debates which focused on state versus private ownership. Today action aimed at land reform derives from the notion of *'democratisation'* of land tenure and ownership in Scotland. This means diversifying the Scottish land ownership and land tenure pattern from one historically concentrated in a few hands into a pattern showing a greater diversity of types of owners and an extension of the population now involved in landownership. The rationale is that past patterns have inhibited economic development, damaged communities and cultures, and failed to

deliver adequate '*public goods*', particularly in terms of access and environmental impacts.

Democratisation at present has three key aspects. One aspect is enhanced rights of access for individuals, dealt with in the Draft Land Reform Bill under access. Another is the development of new kinds of landownership which provide a wider range of groups and individuals with a '*stake*' in landownership. This is dealt with in two parts of the Bill – The Community Right to Buy and the Crofting Community Right to Buy. The logic of all of this comes from the notion that in Scotland, in accordance with the model of feudal landownership discussed earlier, the land is technically and morally held in trust for the people of Scotland and their representative is the Scottish Parliament. This assumption leads to the need to secure the rights of the people of Scotland, when dismantling the feudal system as it currently operates. Eradicating feudal rights without replacing them with a structure which enshrines the notional rights of '*the people*', represented by the Crown and by default the Scottish parliament under feudalism, would result in a type of absolute rather than contingent ownership. This would not be democratisation. This aspect is not dealt with in the Draft Land Reform Bill, but in the Abolition of Feudal Tenure etc. (Scotland) Bill. This Bill has been passed but not yet implemented, although this is scheduled to happen in 2002. By abolishing vassals and superiors, the Bill abolishes feudal tenure totally, hence creating a form of absolute ownership not known before in Scotland. For this reason organisations like Land reform Scotland, represented by Peter Gibb have protested at this '*theft*' from the Scottish people. The Bill does make provision for retaining the public interest through retention of feudal burdens on certain properties in the interests of conserving architecture and sites or buildings of historical or environmental importance. Granting of this retention of feudal burdens will be at the discretion of government Ministers.

With regard to the Draft Land reform Bill, much debate has ensued about how a competent community group should be legally defined. The definitions in the Draft Bill use polling districts, which for many communities, like Eigg would serve no useful purpose since Eigg falls under the Small Isles polling district. The minimum size of community group has now been reduced from

thirty people to twenty people, but in some instances this might still be too high. Activists from existing groups are recommending a reduction to ten people as the minimum. Community groups will need to register an interest in a formal procedure in order to have rights, should that land come on the market. Debate has also ensued over the proposed Crofting Community Right-to-Buy. This can be exercised at any time, while the Community Right to Buy can only be exercised in the event of land coming onto the market. The most contentious item seems to be the inclusion of salmon fishing rights in the Crofting Community Right to Buy legislation. This alone has led to the creation of a very small but active group – the *Crofting Counties Fishing Rights Group* – specifically to fight the proposal to include salmon fishing rights in the Crofting Community Right to Buy. The Clerk of this organisation, David Cotton, in a letter to *The Northern Times* made the following remarks, aimed at John MacKenzie of ACT and Dr James Hunter, HIE:

“We all know the agendas of your two good selves. It is to take from people their property, using other people’s money, and cloak the theft in windy utterances about past injustices. Covetousness, after all, is not uncommon, nor is providing a moral smokescreen for it. You delude few.

Just one more question. One which many are starting to ask. For all the millions of pounds given to community trusts in recent years how many free-standing jobs have been created? That means not research and other jobs also funded by the generous donor, but genuine market linked jobs like those of the members of the CCFRG.”⁴⁵

As I mentioned above, since groups like the ACT refrain from economic development suitable for local entrepreneurs, assessing the impacts by only counting ‘*market led jobs*’ is like counting turnips in order to find out the success of your potato harvest. Under the Crofting Community Right to Buy, many crofters are concerned that they are being forced to adopt a structure which includes non-crofters and that in some instances this will not be the most effective approach and might indeed be a hindrance.

This particular point highlights the partial application of the concept of democratisation. It could be argued that a range of different ‘*vehicles*’ should be facilitated to deliver this democratisation. These vehicles might include crofter-

⁴⁵ p7 Letters to the Editor Northern Times 25th January 2002

only organisations, single-issue groups focused on woodlands, tenant farmers provided with a new right-to-buy, and groups with a broad agenda and an entirely open membership. It has perhaps been a mistake to translate democratisation as meaning only groups with a defined type of structure and membership, since in principle, with safeguards against abuse, the objectives can be served equally by a more diverse mixture of *'vehicles'*. Basically this democratisation does not necessarily mean that every group ought to have a totally open membership, but that is how the Bill has tried to define it. In order to deliver the objective of democratisation successfully, it may in fact be preferable to concentrate on ensuring that groups created are capable of being effective and staying in existence. The evidence of this thesis suggests that crofter-only organisations, based on a township structure **do** have a robustness which can successfully stand up to the responsibilities involved in community land ownership. In addition, very few of the examples to date have been created out of nothing, the majority arising from a base in a strong, well-known and effective pre-existing local organisation. In the case of Assynt this was the action of the SCU Assynt branch and the structure of crofter representation through the townships. In the case of the Stornoway Trust this was the Stornoway Town Council, which is why the offer was not taken up in the rest of the island. Knoydart and Eigg co-ordinated their action through the local Residents' Association which, in both cases, became a partner in the ownership body created. Borve and Annishadder used the township as the area and Culag Wood started out as a sub-committee of the Assynt Community Council. In the absence of an already tested track record of group working, community ownership is much harder to achieve – and crucially – to maintain.

Based on what I have learned to date, I would be inclined to provide for a range of membership structures so long as they can be justified by the group and supported by those for whom membership is not available. In Assynt many ACT members fully support the activities of the Culag Community Woodland Trust, but do not necessarily choose to be members. At the outset it was more a Lochinver village project in any case. Likewise, not everyone in North Assynt who is a Culag Community Wood member wants to be an ACT member. It is difficult and demanding to find a set of procedures and laws that are open enough to be effective without inviting abuse.

Only time and further heated debate will tell what the final outcomes will be. Meanwhile, it is instructive to note that the interpretation of methods for democratising landownership and tenure expressed through the Draft Land Reform Bill has been very largely shaped by Scottish metropolitan thinking. The effects of the Bill's proposals on the crofting communities have to date been divisive. The vehicle of community ownership was created, achieved and first implemented in the crofting areas of the Highlands and Islands. For a decade it has been a unifying theme, even for those who do not personally wish to pursue it. Since this concept or *'vehicle'* has been *'inserted'* into the formal state democratic process, it has become fragmented or alienated from the source of its creation – the rural Highlands and Islands. From this, the key question one must ask is if this is because the debate has *'exposed'* and deepened existing fractures in the subaltern grouping? Or is it because the *'ownership of the issue'* has been usurped, albeit for honourable reasons, by a *'centre'* which had never managed to make any change in either the discourses or the practices of landownership until the intervention of the crofting subaltern?

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Chapter Seven ‘The Rise of the Little People?’

Introduction

The title for this concluding Chapter comes from an interview quoted in Chapter Five:

“It’s as if people are saying – to hell with it! We’re not being pushed around anymore. ... The rise of the little people.”¹

These words were offered at the end of a fieldwork interview as a way of summing up the speaker’s thoughts on a range of issues including late 20th century suspicion of government, politicians, uninterrupted economic growth and a range of modernist or Fordist development ‘*solutions*’ and political ‘*surprises*’ like the ‘*velvet revolutions*’ in Eastern Europe. The use of the phrase ‘*little people*’ seems somehow apt in view of the pivotal role small rural communities – or ‘little people’ – have played in Scotland in the past decade in changing the focus of the Land Question, from state versus private ownership to a broadening range of community ownerships, in what is now called social landownership. Bearing in mind the characterisation of local communities as ‘*unreal*’ and almost ‘*fantasy*’ characters, as in the Sales Brochure for the North Lochinver Estate quoted in Chapter Five, the speaker’s unintended reference to the ‘*little people*’, or fairies, is rather apt.

Talking Back

Through tracing the history of the establishment of the Gaidhealtachd as a distinctive cultural region, with an ambiguous relationship to ‘*Scotland*,’ it has been possible to illustrate the ways in which Gaidhealtachd peoples have been intellectually, textually and politically positioned from the ‘*outside*’. The outsiders’ cultural creation of the Gaels as natural, poetic, uncivilised and *less-than-adult* has historically positioned these peoples as *less-than-fully-present* **on** the land, or **in** the landscapes, of the region. In this set of circumstances it is then easy both symbolically and concretely to ‘*empty*’ those same lands or landscapes. Examples of symbolic emptying include Lanseer’s ‘*Monarch of the Glen*’ and Turner’s ‘*March of the Highlanders*’. The example *par excellence* of

¹ Fieldwork 1992 ACT male 45 – 50

concrete 'emptying' is of course 'The Clearances'. The Sales Brochure quote illustrates the surprising endurance of these powerful discourses and the fact that they continue to be reinvented, but also mobilised, in (post) modern circumstances.

Late 20th century debates over 'the environment' and conservation have tended to be staged and explained in terms of high value landscapes, valued aesthetically in terms of scenery and beautiful composition, more than through concerns for habitat diversity, species diversity and potential socio-economic benefits of biodiversity. Expressions of 'Scottish' environmental priorities in the Highlands and Islands have been largely through top-down implementation. This foregrounding of landscape and 'views' cannot but create strong emotional resonance with the persistent 'emptying' discourses. For Gaidhealtachd people this resonance can be seen to operate as an enduring provocation, similar in its trajectory to Fanon's observation that:

"The symbols of social order ... are at one and the same time inhibitory and stimulating: for they do not convey the message 'Don't dare budge'; rather, they cry out 'Get ready to attack'. ... That impulse to take the settler's place implies a tonicity of muscles the whole time; and in fact we know that in certain emotional conditions the presence of an obstacle accentuates the tendency towards motion."²

In other words the fact that current discourses of environmental protection in the Highlands and Islands are so bound into cultural landscape values, and are staged through that type of visual, learned (high culture) discourse, necessarily provokes – indeed demands - a persistent emotional and tactical response fromcrofting communities. Through attention to the roots of these types of discourses about the Gaidhealtachd, we can see that they were created during colonisation and empire building. Simultaneously, raw materials or ecological resources became conceptualised as 'natural' resources which **could only be** ordered, managed and 'developed' to their full rational potential (exhaustion?) via the application of the 'civilised' settler's 'scientific' skills.

Chevenix-Trench and Philip follow Cramb in asserting that:

² P 41 in **Fanon F.** 1985 *The Wretched of the Earth* Pelican London.

“The increase in public interest in [land ownership in] the 1980s and 1990s was largely as a result of developing environmental awareness.”³

The evidence of this thesis shows that this is not an adequate explanation in the Scottish context. There has been a rise in interest in environmental issues, and for some groups in society this has led to a questioning of the land tenure pattern and system in Scotland. Wightman is a good example of this since, due to his concerns, he became an activist and researcher focused on land tenure and landownership.⁴ This concern has also resulted in environmental charities taking new approaches to their remit through buying land that is in some instances then managed in partnership with the local community. An example of such an approach is the *John Muir Trust* property at Sandwood Bay, Sutherland; another is through partnerships with local communities who **themselves** aspire to landownership, like the *Scottish Wildlife Trust's* role in the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust. However, in terms of the motivations amongst community groups working to achieve community landownership, through whatever structure is locally chosen as the appropriate vehicle, there is little evidence to suggest that either the community groups or the general public who have donated so generously to public appeals are motivated *solely* by environmental concerns. Indeed it would be more productive to appreciate that the conceptual separation of environment, economy and society has historically occurred through western Enlightenment thought-systems which privilege ‘scientific’ and ‘rational’ approaches, and that this separation has been imposed or apparently naturalised through colonialism and neocolonialism. In the case of the Assynt Crofters Trust pre-colonial conceptualisations of land and people have been re-invented in a post-colonial (neocolonial?) situation in order to achieve legal and moral claims over land. This type of action has hence focused on an amalgam of social, economic *and* environmental ‘improvement’, but always set in the local concrete practices of everyday life where the aforementioned intellectual separation is difficult or inappropriate to maintain.

³ p140 in **Chenevix-Trench H. and Philip L. J.** 2001 *Community and Conservation Land Ownership in Highland Scotland: A Common Focus in a Changing Context* SGM 117 (2) pp 139 – 156 and **Cramb A.** 1996 *Who Owns Scotland Now?* Edinburgh Mainstream.

⁴ See www.caldeonia.org.uk and for instance **Wightman A.** 1996 *Who Owns Scotland?* Polygon Edinburgh.

Likewise, it is noticeable that when, of late, development workers have tried to 'explain' the principles of sustainable development to crofting communities, they have been met with more than a little ridicule because:

"Sustainability is a modern 'jargon' word for a concept that was historically well understood by local people in Trotternish, whose livelihood has always been dependent upon the careful husbandry of natural resources. However, in recent times global changes in lifestyle have made these traditional systems less sound. The challenge for us in the 21st century is to apply old principles of sustainability to the complex modern world."⁵

Clearly this quote carries the danger of slipping into complacent assumptions about the ecological 'natural-ness' of 'traditional' agricultural practices. Alternatively it could be viewed as a form of translation which hints at strategic shared ground. Gaelic literature about the natural world exhibits differences to English literature and here the environment is not treated as an **object** nor is it romanticised. As Hunter explains, environmental sensibilities were central to Gaidhealtachd culture a thousand years ago. A good example of these cultural differences is the way in which in Gaelic literature woodlands and forests are **symbols of cultural life** itself, while in European literatures, transported also to 'the New Worlds,' woodland and forests have historically symbolised threat and barbarism.⁶ As this thesis illustrates, the motivations for community ownership, and what is now referred to as crofting community ownership are tied to the historical experience of forced insertion into globalising colonial capitalism. Supporters who make donations towards this type of community action, as the example of the ACT appeal has shown, are also responding to the unequal histories through which the crofting system was created. 'The Land' and crofting provide a concrete focus for unease at these histories, and also signal an opportunity for resistance to the political relations which perpetuate epistemic colonial violence through neocolonial relations. The Highland Diaspora has extended this resonance in space and has created an emergent 'kinship in exploitation'. Spivak comments that:

⁵ p5 *Our Land, Our People and Our Place in the Future: Trotternish Peninsula Area Strategy 2001* Duthchas Project.

⁶ Each of the eighteen letters of the Gaelic alphabet is represented by a tree, starting with *ailm* – the elm tree – and ending with *ur* – yew tree. For discussion of the environment in Gaidhealtachd culture see **Hunter J.** 1995 *On the Other Side of Sorrow: Nature and People in the Scottish Highlands* Mainstream Edinburgh.

“A kinship of exploitation may be mobilised through the land-grabbing and reforestation practiced against the First Nations of the Americas, the destruction of the reindeer forests of the Suomis of Scandinavia, Finland and Russia, the tree-felling and large-scale eucalyptus planting against the original nations in India, and the so-called Flood Action Plan against the fisher folk and landless peasants of Bangladesh, honorary Fourth Worlders. Indeed such a kinship exists potentially between all the early civilisations that have been pushed back and away to make way for more traditional geographical elements of the map and the world today.”⁷

Another impact of this positioning of Gaidhealtachd communities as childlike, poetic and emotional, in opposition to the rational centre, is the persistent need to escape this emotional, childlike positioning in order to achieve or to begin any kind of ‘*speech act*’. This positioning relates to a head/heart split between centre and periphery. The ACT campaign strongly illustrates the strategies used by this group in order to distance their public utterances from emotional (heart) attitudes. The key phrase from the Appeal document is:

“... not for reason motivated by political or romantic sentiment...”⁸

In Chapter Four a wealth of interview material further illustrated the ways in which emotional utterances were kept off-stage until the 8th December 1992 when the ACT ‘*won the land*’. The ACT’s use of ‘*enterprise discourse*’ strengthens this strategy and can be seen as one of the ways in which the subaltern’s voice is **creatively** ‘*contaminated*’ by that of the ‘*master*’. The resultant ACT discourse proved to be a very effective way of ‘*writing back*’, but what also emerges from this need to maintain a ‘*rational*’ voice in the official public announcements is a split between ‘*transcripts*’ in the public and private realms. The public transcript has been engineered to be ‘*rational*’ or ‘*objective*’ and revolving around economic, environmental and demographic issues. The private transcript has been woven from oral and written historical sources, cultural practices and strong emotions. On many occasions the private transcript did spill over into the public domain. Supporters like Robert MacLennan could clearly read the private transcript and publicly – on television - reacted to the campaign aims in that vein. On the night of 8th December 1992 meanwhile, the objective public transcript was entirely ousted by the emotional, historically informed transcript. In this context it is interesting to note that Chenevix-

⁷ P380 Spivak G. C. 1999 *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present* Harvard University Press USA.

⁸ ACT Appeal document 1992.

Trench and Philip, in talking about the increasing public interest in landownership, create this objective/subjective opposition textually. The way in which they do this strongly implies an attempt, through '*academic objectivity*,' to destabilise moves towards land reform:

"The perceived economic constraints of the current land ownership system combine with **emotions of social injustice** to create a powerful movement for reform."⁹

One of the most productive aspects of the use of post-colonial theory in this thesis is the fact that it avoids contextualising or positioning as '*irrational*' crofting groups or individual crofters who strongly (and emotionally) resist mainstream conservation organisations and attitudes, or who in the same vein, criticise and obstruct apparently '*practical*' and '*rational*' regional and local development plans. A post-colonial approach, by problematising the powerful (neo)colonial activities of naming, mapping, describing, categorising and controlling resources, peoples, places and activities, balances and historicises competing claims on the same places and spaces, it further dismantles violent binary opposites which previously served to destabilise one truth claim against another.

The pervasive operation of this objective/subjective opposition, and the manner in which we are all socialised into neocolonial power relations, can be seen in a small way within my own research and textual practice. In my penultimate Chapter, I use statistics, percentages and pie-charts, rather than semi-structured interviews and discourse analysis, to illustrate and to make claims about ACT impacts and achievements. This approach was influenced by the debate emerging over the Draft Land Reform Bill, but also by my own educational background, the legacy of which is an internal voice muttering that unless there are '*objective*' statistics no-one will believe it! Another example of the way in which I am socialised into neocolonial ways of seeing the world is the absence of any interview with Edmund Hoyle Vestey in the course of my research. I interviewed the Selling Agent and I interviewed the *Scottish Landowners Federation* Legal Advisor, so why this significant absence? In my

⁹ p140 **Chenevix-Trench H. and Philip L. J.** 2001 *Community and Conservation Land Ownership in Highland Scotland: A Common Focus in a Changing Context* SGM 117 (2) pp 139 – 156. Emphasis added.

defence I have to say that I did ask the Factor to ask Mr Vestey for an interview, in a rather small and hesitant voice. He said that Mr Vestey was very busy at the time and was only in the area for a few days. Had I been in pursuit of any other interviewee, a small matter like that would not have held me back. Since Mr Vestey gave an interview to the BBC later that year, he can hardly be presumed to have a policy against giving interviews. No. It was me. That voice in my head kept saying that it was a bit forward to be bothering Mr Vestey with a small thing like this. He might feel I was wasting his time or being rude. And so the small voice meandered on. The facts will have to be faced. It could only have been deference that created all manner of insubstantial excuses for not interviewing the 'gentleman' at 'The Big House'. Will I ever live this down? Will post-colonial theory help me to be braver in future? I don't know.

Angst and Authenticity

Subalternity is to some extent contingent on the scale of analysis. At a global or North/South scale, Gaidhealtachd crofting communities and the world-wide diasporic communities created through out-migration benefit from secure First World status and are complicit in and benefit from First World neocolonialist processes. Since the late 19th century, Highland crofting communities have been engaged in a progressive escape from regional subalternity, which, as noted earlier, Spivak identifies as an embarkation on the road to hegemony.

Crofters' recent attempt to claim the right to legislatively secured crofting community ownership, through the Draft Land Reform Bill, might be construed as a claim to a type of local and regional hegemony. Certainly for the local homeless and landless, securing a house or residential caravan site is hugely difficult in comparison to someone who has a croft tenancy. As has been illustrated earlier, concepts of rights of access to land which derive from *duthchas* can be mobilised in order to **prevent** other local people from gaining access to land in the form of a croft tenancy. Many, many people in 21st century crofting communities have migrated there and at times cultural capital – whether Gaidhealtachd or otherwise – is mobilised in local disputes and power struggles. That does not imply a lack of shared aspirations and cultural

repertoires when the need arises, nor should it mask the development of new shared repertoires and aspirations, since this is a dynamic process. The principle of land reform enjoys a high level of support. The Draft Land Reform Bill has nonetheless proved divisive within the crofting community because some crofters are very happy to become involved in organisations with non-crofters while others are terrified by the idea of being dominated by non-crofters in the position of landlord (through their gaining a role in a community landownership organisation). In my experience these fears derive directly from the perception that the majority of non-crofters who move into crofting areas are attracted by the famous spaces of consumption and hence hold '*metropolitan*' understandings of the environment – ones which they would seek to impose on crofters. In North Assynt this assumption overlooks the fact that the majority of people classed as non-crofters actually live in households in which at least one household member has a croft tenancy. It may be that these fears are being generated through misunderstandings and entrenched through active definitions of what a '*proper*' crofter is – in this case someone with a croft tenancy. At a more regional scale it seems likely that the divisiveness which has ensued is created both by a sudden and dramatic loss of '*ownership of the issue*' **and** through exacerbating delicate fractures within each local community. There has been criticism of both the Draft Land Reform Bill and the Feudal Reform Bill. Peter Gibb of *Land Reform Scotland* argues that in the first Clearances the people were taken from the land but in the second Clearance, created by The Abolition of Feudal Tenure etc (Scotland) Bill and The Draft Land Reform Bill, the land is being taken from the people.¹⁰ Other groups have been upset by the Land Reform Bill's focus on communities of place without reference to the needs or rights of communities of interest.¹¹

Crofters, as a group, are fractured and '*impure*' and do not have the sort of cultural homogeneity *popularly*, if doubtless misleadingly, ascribed to Fourth World groups. Indeed, when in 1995 the issue of Highland land reform and community forestry was raised by Bill Ritchie at the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, the idea of an '*indigenous land claim*' by crofters through UN channels was ridiculed and criticised from within Scotland. This

¹⁰ Gibb P. 2000 *The Second Clearances* www.caledonia.org.uk

¹¹ www.caledonia.org.uk

was because crofters, as a group, were seen as insufficiently *'authentic'*. In view of post-colonial problematisation of the dangers of authenticity claims, this is both interesting and ironic. In an academic setting theorisations aimed at disrupting presentations of subaltern voices as *'heroic'* and *'authentic'*, in claims to speak for and represent a subaltern group, have precipitated circumstances which threaten to silence subaltern speech acts while claiming to respect *différence*. As discussed earlier, and in following Spivak, appreciation of the speech act should not be reduced to *'talking'*. Subaltern speech acts may involve talking, but will also involve filing paperwork, minute taking, dishwashing, fixing roofs, painting doors, campaigning for community landownership, raising children – a diverse range of activities which might be summarised as including action, agency, singing and silences. It is important that academic study aimed at documenting these concrete acts and impacts is not neglected just because of theoretical difficulties with *'authenticity'*. There is still great value in presenting *not-quite-authentic* marginal voices alongside more theoretical engagements. To turn away from this task is actively to silence strategic, partial and adequately *'authentic'* subaltern perspectives through the laudable intention of not substituting western Same for subaltern Other.

The angst created by strong critiques of post-colonial theory and subaltern studies should not serve to debilitate – or cancel - this type of work. Through this thesis it is clear that, notwithstanding an appreciation of these tensions, work which carefully documents and narrates action by contingently positioned subaltern groups *can* still make available important insights with the potential to disrupt metropolitan assumptions. Through research alliances and deconstruction of key discourses throughout the research process, the subaltern group at the centre of this type of research can gain new axes for action, useful *'academically objective'* information on group impacts (Chapter Six!) and a broadening network of *'kinship in exploitation'*. Even Spivak promotes this type of considered engagement. The evidence of this research shows that community land ownership does result in significant local development, and the idea that this type of action can be supported through public funds, on the basis of its *'development role,'* is justified. The significant impacts include capacity building, the effects of which will only be known in the medium to long term. It must be noted that the communities and

individuals involved need to be adequately comfortable with the structure used in order to maintain the huge voluntary commitment required. Pre-determining appropriate structures 'from above' is unlikely to help unless there is plenty of opportunity to fit the vehicle or structure to the local circumstances and the most robust structure and local alliances possible must therefore be used since the task is onerous, particularly in the early years. Community leaders have to deal with local pressures and the demands of an interested general public:

"Decolonisation never takes place un-noticed. It transforms spectators crushed with their own inessentiality into privileged actors – with the grandiose glare of history's floodlights upon them."¹²

Conclusion

In 1993 the Director of the Scottish Crofters Union was reported in the press as saying:

"The Highlands and Islands are the last frontier of British colonialism: Mr Campbell likened Highland difficulties to those experienced in outposts of the British Empire in the past. He said the indigenous population had neither been making the investment nor receiving the returns. Their part in the process was often confined to short-term employment."¹³

The front page of this thesis carries a cartoon published by the *West Highland Free Press* in the same year. At the time Redland Aggregate Ltd. sought to create a superquarry in south Harris to extract 10 million tonnes of anorthosite and suggested that local jobs would be forthcoming. It was noted ruefully by many Harris people that, had they accepted Lord Leverhulme's offer, as Stornoway did in 1923 when the Stornoway Trust was created, they would have been in the position to decide on the suitability of Redland's proposals themselves. No firm local consensus emerged on the matter.¹⁴ The caption from the cartoon reads:

"Don't you think you're taking the colonial angle a bit too far, Sir?"

¹² p28 **Fanon F.** 1985 *The Wretched of the Earth* Pelican London.

¹³ *WHFP* 5th March 1993 Report on Labour Party Conference.

¹⁴ **Mackenzie A. F.** 1998 'The Cheviot, The Stag ... and The White, White Rock?' *Community, identity, and environmental threat on the Isle of Harris* **Environment and Planning D: Society and Space** Vol. 16 pp509 – 532.

This thesis has perhaps not gone far enough in exploring the '*colonial angle*'. I have focused on one theme – the action taken by the Assynt crofters – but the topic would bear broader research, both historical and contemporary. From a brief consideration of who holds title to Highland land, where out-migrants have gone, where in-migrants have been, how relationships to ecological and cultural resources are structured and challenged, and how the region is represented, outside and in, it is clear that the circuits of capitalism and colonisation which have shaped the region and its peoples – and been shaped by them – are peopled, personal, embodied, opportunistic and constraining. These transnational inter-relationships could be usefully explored further. From this small contribution to the task, I conclude that '*the little people*' did indeed rise and that, despite academic angst over positioning the subaltern as '*heroic*', these partially subaltern and extremely '*impure*' little people were creative and courageous in imagining and achieving crofting community landownership in Assynt – and elsewhere – in the late 20th century.

Crofting communities in the 21st century are not culturally homogenous and are frequently not Gaelic speaking, although the proportion of Gaelic speakers varies greatly from place to place. It is still – and perhaps increasingly – the case that crofting politics and hence claims regarding land are most frequently articulated through Gaidhealtachd (or pre-colonial) conceptions of land and community. Recent in-migrants or new entrants tend to align themselves with this type of representation, and in this circumstance – and in the wide public support for the ACT campaign – can be seen the continuation, creation and extension of a kind of '*kinship in resistance*'. Out-migrants or the diasporic communities have also played a significant role, both historically, via urban diasporic groups and intellectuals, and currently in support for community land ownership and land reform. This chimes with Spivak's discussions of Third World migrants in the First World. Spivak discusses this matter at length, noting that such out-migrants will not inevitably serve the interests of the subaltern community '*back home*' and will be increasingly positioned by First World divisions of labour and socialised into the New Empire.¹⁵ In spite

¹⁵ P 310 in Spivak G. C. 1999 *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present* Harvard University Press USA.

of this, she envisions the possibility of a productive role for every individual and stresses the necessity of striving to achieve this - it should perhaps be the dream that *'one cannot not want'*:

“[I]t is my conviction that the internationality of ecological justice in that impossible, undivided world of which one must dream, in view of the impossibility of which one must work, obsessively, cannot be reached by invoking any of the so-called great religions of the world because the history of their greatness is too deeply imbricated in the narrative of the ebb and flow of power. ... I have no doubt that we must learn to learn from the original practical ecological philosophies of the world. Again I am not romanticizing; liberation theology does not romanticize every Christian. We are talking about using the strongest mobilizing discourse in the world in a certain way, for the globe, not merely for Fourth World uplift. I say this again because it is so easy to dismiss this as quixotic moralism. This learning can only be attempted through the supplementation of collective effort by love. What deserves the name of love is an effort – over which one has no control yet at which one must not strain – which is slow, attentive on both sides – how does one win the attention of the subaltern without coercion or crisis? – mindchanging on both sides, at the possibility of an unascertainable ethical singularity that is not ever a sustainable condition. The necessary collective efforts are to change laws, relations of production, systems of education, and health care. But without mind-changing one-on-one responsible contact, nothing will stick.”¹⁶

Is Treasa Tuath na Tighearna

¹⁶ p383 Spivak G. C. 1999 *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present* Harvard University Press USA

Appendix 1: Fieldwork Diary Details

Date	Name	Location	Remit	Methods & Notes
Fieldwork 1992				
29/7/92 – 5/9/92	Trail Period of Fieldwork	Assynt & Edinburgh	Get good feel for what is happening in the campaign and gauge level of support; seek out key informants and draw up fieldwork plan; keep a record of handling of story by media, particularly Scottish media	Participant observation; tape semi-structured interviews; keep fieldwork diary; press cuttings; video tapes of news items and documentaries on the campaign or related issues; audio tapes of relevant radio programmes
During clipping	Alastair MacIntyre	Culkein Assynt – at the fank, Achnacarnin	Township Representative (Balchladich) – Assynt Crofters Trust Steering Group	informal chat/ not available for interview
Unwell at the time	Michael Lord	Raffin, Assynt	Township Representative- Assynt Crofters Trust Steering Group	Go through all topics in second round of interviews
5/8/92	Donald King	At home - Clashnessie Assynt	Township Representative – Assynt Crofters Steering Group/ Acting Treasurer	Taped, Semi-structured
5/8/92	Mr Hay	Assynt Estates Office, Lochinver, Assynt	Outgoing Factor	Taped, semi-structured
5/8/92	Mr Voy	Assynt Estates Office, Lochinver, Assynt	Incoming Factor	Taped, semi-structured
6/8/92	Culkein Donald (Dhunan)MacKenzie	At home - Culkein, Assynt	Township Representative – Assynt Crofters Trust Steering Group	Notes taken – nervous of tape recorder. Semi-structured
7/8/92	Hughie Matheson	At home – Drumbeg, Assynt	Township Representative – Assynt Crofters Trust	Notes taken – tape recorder malfunctioned. Semi-structured
8/8/92	John Blunt	At home - Nedd Assynt	Elected Township Representative for ACT Steering group – fully supportive of aims but does not wish to be on a committee	Notes taken – not comfortable with tape recording
9/8/92	Ishbel MacAuley	At home -Stoer, Assynt	Township Representative – Assynt Crofters Trust Steering Group	Taped Semi-structured – 2 other people present: Georgie MacLeod & Ailsa Kinnaird
11/8/92	Allan MacRae, Torbreck	at home - Torbreck, Assynt	Chair, Assynt Crofters Trust Steering Group	Taped, Semi-Structured

11/8/92	Bill Ritchie	at home - Achmelvich, Assynt	Secretary, Assynt Crofters Trust Steering Group	Taped, Semi-Structured
13/8/92	John MacKenzie	At home - Culkein Drumbeg Assynt	Vice Chair, Assynt Crofters Steering Group	Taped, Semi-Structured
13/8/92	Felicity Basu	At home - Clachtoll, Assynt	Township representative – Assynt Crofters Trust Steering Group	Taped, Semi-Structured
25/8/92	Iain (Soimeach) MacLeod	At home - Achmelvich, Assynt	Township Representative – Assynt Crofters Trust Steering Group	Taped Semi-Structured
26/8/92	Derrick MacLeod	At home - Torbreck Assynt	Township Representative – Assynt Crofters Trust Steering Group	Taped, Semi-structured
28/8/92	Pat MacPhail	At home – Clashmore, Assynt	Township Representative (Achnacarnin) – Assynt Crofters Trust Steering Group	Taped – semi-structured
29/8/92	Aileen Kinnaird	At home - Clashmore, Assynt	Township representative – Assynt Crofters Trust Steering Group	Taped, semi-structured
2/9/92	Paul Blackstock	SLF Offices, Edinburgh	Legal Advisor, Scottish Landowners Federation	Taped, semi-structured
16/11/92 – 30/12/92	Second Period of Fieldwork	Assynt, north coast of Sutherland & Edinburgh	Waiting for news of whether the bid is accepted; observing reactions to this; gauging level of hope or optimism & strategies for moving situation along and maintaining momentum; investigating support for ACT in other crofting communities; key informants from govt agencies which have supported campaign	Participant Observation; keeping research diary; some interviews; more video tapes of TV coverage
7/12/92	Francis Keith	Durness Sutherland	Regional Councillor	
8/12/92	Anna MacConnell	At home – Armadale, North Coast, Sutherland	Crofting household, involved in organising charity event in Skerray to raise money in support of ACT campaign	Taped, semi-structured – interrupted by news that the buy-out was successful
8/12/92	Betty MacKenzie	Skerray, north coast, Sutherland	Clerk of township, involved in fundraising event in support of ACT campaign	Taped, semi-structured
8/12/92	'Winning the Land'	Stoer School	Speeches announcing the success of the	Taped

			campaign: Allan MacRae, Bill Ritchie, John MacKenzie, Simon Fraser – and a large crowd	
10/12/92	Joyce Buchananan	At home, Lochinver, Assynt	District Councillor	Taped; semi-structured
11/12/92	Allan MacRae	At home	– update	Taped
11/12/92	Bill Ritchie	At parents home	– update	taped
12/12/92	Linda & Iain MacLeod (Strathan)	At home - Lochinver, Assynt	Seeking opinions of others in the area who are not involved personally/ crofting household – used for tourism	Taped, semi-structured – 2 people present
12/12/92	Ray & Paul Phipps	At home - Lochinver Assynt	Seeking opinions of uninvolved non-croft household	Taped, semi-structured, 2 people present
16/12/92	Sandy Braidie	HIE Offices, Inverness	HIE – Economic Development	Taped, semi-structured
16/12/92	Sandy Cumming	HIE Offices, Inverness	HIE – Natural Resources	Taped, semi-structured
17/12/92	Andrew Thin	HIE Offices, Inverness	CASE Chief Executive	Taped, semi-structured
17/12/92	Hugh MacLean	Crofters Commission Offices	Chair, Crofters Commission	Taped, semi-structured

Fieldwork 1993				
20/3/93 – 2/1/94		Assynt, Lewis, Skye, Inverness, Edinburgh	Attend SCU Conference; research Stornoway Trust; research Brove & Annishader Trust; more key informants; tenants on DAFs estates on Skye – pro & anti-community ownership; SEAD study tour & conference	Research diary, semi-structured interviews; participant observation; mingling in whatever events are going on
23/3/93	Simon Fraser	Lawyers Offices, Stornoway, Lewis	ACT Lawyer; co-author of report on feasibility of community ownership of DAFs estates in Skye	Taped, semi-structured
27/3/93	Scottish Crofters Union Annual Conference	Stornoway Town Hall, Isle of Lewis	First Conference since Assynt community buy-out. Prince Charles and Allan MacRae giving speeches	Taped and did a lot of mingling.
14/4/93	Peter Peacock	Restaurant, Eden Court Theatre, Inverness	Vice-Convenor, Highland Regional Council– consulted early in ACT campaign and key negotiator for HRC support of campaign	Taped, semi-structured
4/8/93	George Campbell	Scottish Crofters Union Offices, Broadford, Skye	Director, SCU – formerly NWDP Project office based just north of Assynt	Taped, semi-structured
4/8/93	Dr James Hunter	At home - Borve Skye	Former Director of SCU; historian; written vast library on crofting; article in Scotsman at time of ACT campaign; living in a township which has followed suit	Taped, semi-structured
4/8/93	Alastair Nicolson	At home - Borve, Skye	Chair of Township buy-out committee	Taped, semi-structured
4/8/93	John Angus MacKenzie	At home - Borve	Vice Chair of Township buy-out committee	Taped, semi-structured
6/8/93	Annie MacDonald	At home - Borve	Usually has Grazings Meetings in her house – held meeting to propose buy out plan to all shareholders in her house	Taped, semi-structured
6/8/93	Peter Martin	At home - Glenhinisdale, Skye	Union activist, pro-community take over	Taped, semi-structured
6/8/93	Adam Gilmour	At home - Skye	Union activist, Clerk, anti-community take- over in Skye	Taped, semi-structured
6/8/93	Norman Gordon	At home - Skye	Clerk, union member, anti-community take	Taped; semi-structured

			over in Skye	
7/8/93	Danny MacLeod	At home - Portnalong, Skye	Clerk; Assessor, Union activist; pro-community take over of DAFs estates	Taped, semi-structured
9/8/93	Angus MacLeod	At home - Marybank Lewis	Honorary President SCU, crofting household; local historian; motivating force in establishing SCU	Taped, semi-structured – 2 separate sessions
10/8/93	John Crichton	Stornoway Trust Office	Elected Trustee	Taped, semi-structured
10/8/93	Jamie	In street in Stornoway – after guided tour	Trust Ranger, return migrant, keen local historian	Taped, semi-structured
11/8/93	Dr Frank Rennie	At home - Galson Lewis	First President of SCU; expert in rural development; lecturer in same; crofting household	Taped; semi-structured
12/8/93	Iain MacIvor	Stornoway Trust Offices, Lewis	incoming Factor, Union activist	Taped, semi-structured
12/8/93	Annette MacLaughlin	Stornoway Trust Offices	Administrator	Taped, semi-structured
13/8/93	George MacDonald	Stornoway Trust Offices	Administrator	Taped, semi-structured
13/8/93	Kenneth Nicolson	Stornoway Trust Offices	Elected Trustee	Taped; semi-structured
SEAD Study Tour				
22/8/93 (One Month)		Tour of the Highlands & Islands meeting community groups, finishing with a 2 day conference in Edinburgh	ACT was asked to send someone and I was sent. Presented workshops at 2 day conference on the ACT campaign.	Participant observation, participation in the event and informal chats everyday with other participants. Meeting circa 4 different community groups per day and hearing their story.
9/9/93	SEAD Study “Shifting the Balance: People, Power & Participation” Tour participants - rural	Aros Centre – Portree	Director of SEAD and women activists from rural communities in South Africa, Ireland, Phillipines, Nicaragua, Scotland	Group Discussion; taped
14/9/93	SEAD Study Tour participants - all	Edinburgh - Pollock Halls	Women activist from urban and rural communities in South Africa, Ireland,	Group Discussion; taped

			Georgian Republic, Phillipines and Scotland	
17/9/93 – 19/9/93	SEAD Conference: Shifting the Balance: People, Power & Participation	Edinburgh, Pollock Halls	Present workshops on Sat & Sun on behalf of and focused on Assynt Crofters Trust	Research diary; participant observation; performance
Fieldwork - Autumn/ Winter 93				
	Miscellaneous			
20/9/93	Open Meeting	Drumbeg School	ACT Update	Taped and attended
24/9/93	The First John McEwen Memorial Lecture	Perth	Focused on 'the land issue'. Given by Bryan MacGregor, Land Economy, Aberdeen, who did his MSc and PhD on Assynt.	Taped and mingled.
Nov 93	A MacRae & J MacKenzie	At home	ACT update	Taped
Nov 93	Conference for Tenant Farmers & Crofters – run by Argyle & Isles Enterprise	Islay	Presenting a speech on 'Developing Our Assets' as representative Of ACT	Focused on people as most crucial and most scarce asset in Assynt
2/12/93	John Lambert	John Clegg & Co. Offices, Edinburgh	Estate Agent for John Clegg & Co. – the firm which handled the Assynt sale. Agent who handled it has gone to work in Poland	Taped, semi-structured
3/12/93	Jean Bareham	SEAD Offices, Edinburgh	Project officer with SEAD; expert on participatory methods in community campaigns and education	Taped, semi-structured
4/12/93	Stan Reeves	ALP Offices, Edinburgh	Educator with Adult Learning Project, Edinburgh. Expert on participatory methods, life-long learning and post-colonial education in Scotland	Taped, semi-structured
9/12/93	Cathy McCormack	At home – Easterhouse, Glasgow	Community Activist for health and housing standards – experiences of inventing/ creating public presence suitable for campaign needs. Also focuses on the privatisation of health – eat more brown bread & jog – which justifies reduced public accountability	Taped, semi-structured
31/12/93	Norman MacAskill	At home, Lochinver Assynt	Local Historian	Taped, semi-structured

Fieldwork 1994				
25/1/94 – 23/10/94		Assynt	2 nd round of ACT interviews; dislocate shoulder very badly & can't get back to Wales for months; also can't drive to do interviews/ fieldwork – can't type either	Fieldwork diary, semi-structured interviews – taped; hanging about; physiotherapy
1/6/94	Ishbel MacAuley	At home - Stoer, Assynt	Director elected by township, ACT	Taped, semi-structured
1/6/94	Donald (Dhunan)MacKenzie	At home - Culkein, Assynt	Director elected by township, ACT	Taped this time – more confident; semi-structured; brother Alastair also present
2/6/94	Iain (Soimeach) MacLeod	At home - Achmelvich Assynt	Director elected by township, ACT	Taped. Semi-structured
2/6/94	Donald King	At home - Clashnessie, Assynt	Director elected by township, ACT	Taped; semi-structure – wife, Helen also present
3/6/94	John Mackenzie	At home -Culkein Drumbeg, Assynt	Secretary – Board of Directors, ACT	Taped; semi-structured
3/6/94	Hughie Matheson	At home - Drumbeg, Assynt	Director elected by township, ACT	Taped, semi-structured
3/6/94	Frank Ross	At home - Nedd, Assynt	Nominated to speak on behalf of township – no Director at present	Taped; semi-structured
5/6/94	Jimmy Kerr	At home - Balchladdich Assynt	Director elected by township, ACT	Too busy for interview – not available
7/6/94	Felicity Basu	At home - Clachtoll Assynt	Director elected by township, ACT	Taped; semi-structured
8/6/94	Alec Scott	Parents home	SNH, North West Area	Taped; semi-structured
8/6/94	Allan MacRae	At home - Torbreck Assynt	Chair – Board of Directors, ACT	Taped; semi-structured
8/6/94	Derrick MacLeod	At home - Torbreck Assynt	Director elected by township, ACT	Taped; semi-structured
8/6/94	Michael Lord	At home - Raffin, Assynt	Director elected by township, ACT	Taped; semi-structured; did 1 st & 2 nd round topics in one go; Audrey present for some of the time
9/6/94	Anna	Implex, Torbreck House, Assynt	Director of Implex – new hi-tech company which has moved to the ACT estate and bought the Lodge house from ACT	Taped, semi-structured
13/6/94	Bill Ritchie	At home -	Vice-Chair – Board of Directors, ACT	Taped, semi-structured

		Achmelvich Assynt		
13/6/94	Pat MacPhail	At home - Achnacarnin, Assynt	Director elected by township, ACT	Taped; semi-structured
13/6/94	Aileen Kinnaird	At home - Clashmore, Assynt	Director elected by township, ACT	Taped, semi-structured
Nov 94	Highlands & Islands Forum Conference: The People and the Land	Inverness	I presented 2 workshops on behalf of ACT and was facilitator for the north-west group for duration of conference	Participant and discussant. 2 days of workshops by community activists about what they have done and how they achieved it.
Fieldwork 1995				
28/2/95				
28/2/95	John Shepherd Baron	At home, Black Isle – invited to come over an discuss his ideas	Chair of RACE; produced a plan for land resettlement as motor of Highland economic development	Taped; semi-structured
Fieldwork 2001 - ongoing				
Organisations:				
ACT, Culag Community Woodland Trust, North Sutherland Community Forest Trust, Melness Crofters Estate, Stornoway Trust, Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust, Knoydart Foundation & Borve & Annishader Township Ltd.				
				All interviews taped.
25/7/01		NSCFT Board meeting		Robin Callander gave talk on Birse
Knoydart Foundation				
17/9/01	Angela Williams	Knoydart Foundation	Project Officer	Background info & documents In Office
18/9/01	Andy Tibbet	Knoydart Foundation	Alternate Director for Ian Robertson	Pier House
18/9/01	Grant Holroyd	Knoydart Foundation	Alternate Director for Gwen Barrell & Knoydart Forestry Trust PO	At home Foundation & Forestry
18/9/01	Jim Brown	Knoydart Stalker	Stalker	At Garage
19/9/01	Iain Wilson	Knoydart Hill farmer	Alternate Director for Roger Trussel	At garage & in Landrover

19/9/01	Ian Robertson	Knoydart Old Forge Pub	Director & Chair of Trading Co.	at home
19/9/01	Bernie Evely	Knoydart	Chair of Hydro	at PO
19/9/01	Rhona Miller	Knoydart	ex Office Manager	chat - not taped
19/9/01	Gwen Barrell	Knoydart	Director & sits on hydro board unofficially	Pier House
19/9/01	Louise Beveridge	Knoydart	Office Manager	outside Old Forge
20/9/01	Roger Trussel	Knoydart	Director & of Forest Trust - sits on Trading board unofficially	village hall & at home
20/9/01	Dave Marriot	Knoydart	Director & VC of Hydro retired from Pier House	at home
20/9/01	Toby Robinson	Knoydart	ex Director and head of temp housing volunteers & build	on site at temp housing construction
20/9/01	Lorna	Knoydart	very active during appeal and buy out	in Old Forge
20/9/01	Catriona Fairbairn	Knoydart but from Kilchoan	work in pub	outside Old Forge
20/9/01	Aaran Bowyer	Knoydart	work in pub	outside Old Forge potential young returner
Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust				
24/9/01	Camille Dressler	Eigg	Director	at home - about to get ferry
24/9/01	Maggie Fyffe	Eigg	ex Director - now Administrator & Finance Manager	at home
25/9/01	John	Eigg	SWT employee	at home before getting ferry
25/9/01	Andrew Binnie	Eigg	Project Officer - finished week after	at home, sitting in the sun
26/9/01	Duncan Ferguson	Eigg	farm tenant - returned cos of buy out with family resigned as Director	at farm buildings, sitting in sun
26/9/01	Colin & Maree Carr	Eigg	ex Director farm tenant ex estate employee	at home over dinner - with Simon Helliwell
26/9/01	Simon Helliwell	Eigg	Wife is a Director - he manages the Construction Co work	at the Carr's after dinner

27/9/01	Sue Kirk	Eigg	Alternate Director Construction Co Director & Tearoom Director run shop leased from Trading Co.	at home
27/9/01	Davie Robertson	Eigg	Director; crofter; taxi/bus runs	at Maggie's Bothy
27/9/01	Brig & Tach Lancaster	Eigg	Tash - young returner Brig - came from Knoydart to marry Joiner & Builder - works for cConstruction Co.	at Maggie's house over dinner with Maggie, Wes, Donald Kennedy (SWT Rahoy Hills - dyking course trainer)
27/9/01	Archie Kenny Robison plus two	The Ghigha Team	on fact finding visit to decide about buy out	informal chat
28/9/01	Sue Holland	Eigg	phone her & do by phone Trading Co & volunteer programme	meant to do interview on boat but no time due to killer whale spectacle
1/11/01	Wilma Robertson	Melness	background and documents	at estate office
1/10/01 – 28/2/02	Chasing up documentary sources	all organisations	Minutes, Accounts, newsletters, contact details for accountants and key Directors to discuss written drafts and sectoral issues with	Filling gaps in documentary evidence to date. Contacting commercial partners or sub-contractors to clarify spending patterns etc.
3/12/01 on wards	Agreeing next phase of fieldwork to fit in with remaining groups needs	Melness, NSCFT, ACT, Culag, Stornoway, Borve & Annishadder	Finish and updates. Write draft reports.	Finish off work with ACT, Culag, NSCFT and Melness. Update interviews with Stornoway and Borve & Annishadder.
5/12/01	John Watt	Knoydart	Director of Knoydart Foundation and Team leader of CLU	HIE Offices, Inverness
6/12/01	Duncan Bryden	Eigg	SWT is a partner in the IEHT. Duncan Bryden is Regional Director, North	SWT Offices, Inverness

B11

Workshop Report

Shifting the
Balance
Seed
Conference
Report

The Assynt Crofters Trust: Ishbel Macphail, Assynt, Scotland

Summary

*** The Assynt Crofters' Trust has found in trust status a form of land ownership which 'fits their agenda'**

*** They have recognised that the local community already has a great deal of skills and experience relevant to buying and managing their land, and have successfully married this to outside expertise which they can trust**

In 1992, after a highly publicised campaign, the crofters of Assynt in Sutherland made history by gaining community control of their land. In her workshop, Ishbel Macphail, who belongs to one of Assynt's crofting families gave a detailed background to the campaign to buy the land, stressing the importance to their cause of credibility, not only to the world at large, but within themselves as they realised that their expertise mattered.

Setting Their Own Agenda

The Assynt estate consists of twelve townships supporting about 120 families. In June 1992 crofters at Assynt heard that the estate was on the market. Because crofters are protected tenants, the Swedish development company which had bought the land three years previously were not able to change its use and went into liquidation. To make the sale easier, the land was offered as seven small lots, a move which was seen as a break of

trust between landlord and crofter. "The estate was split up with no regard to present use" said Ishbel. "Some of us would have several landlords each. We were very angry and worried, but we didn't have a plan of taking the land over."

"The Crofters Union publicised the sale of the estate so the information got out quickly (as opposed to the sale three years before which was completed before we heard about it). The Crofters' Union set up the public meeting to discuss the sale of the estate, and was crucial in giving us a structure to move from muttering to thinking positively.

"At first we thought we could never buy the land - it's a good idea but of course it's pie in the sky. Then we brought in a lawyer to explain what structure we could use." They were fortunate in identifying - through the Crofters' Union - a lawyer whom they could trust and who had both commitment and expertise. Ishbel believes that his help in finding a recognisable status to fit their new venture was crucial. Soon after the beginning of the campaign, they formed **The Assynt Crofters' Trust**, a legal status which was democratic, could be quickly understood by all parties, and allowed them to bring in funding through external agencies.

Trust status and community ownership fits the crofters' own agenda as far as is possible in Scotland's system of land ownership: "At first we knew what we didn't want, but not what we wanted. One of the problems is that the agenda is not set by you, and the debate doesn't necessarily encompass your needs. The political debate had been only about private or state ownership. Energies get shunted off opposing the market economy. No-one had ever asked does state ownership give more grassroots control - in fact you would have about as much control as over BT before it was sold off!

Government structures don't really give you more say over the land than a private landlord. No-one had managed to say there could be a different way. Then we brought up community ownership, and looked across party lines. The older people were among first to back the idea of buying the land, perhaps because they remembered dire poverty, which is only a generation away."

A Unanimous Mandate

At the packed public meeting called to discuss the proposals to buy the land, people were asked to turn up "with a pound and a pen". The pen allowed them to sign their name and the pound allowed each crofting family to join the Trust as a voting member. "The public meeting where it was agreed unanimously to buy the land was broadcast live on television. It was a public mandate to our elected representatives."

Twelve people - three of them women - were voted on to the committee and, said Ishbel, "within that there's an 'inner circle' of about six who can meet quickly and make fast decisions if necessary. We set out to raise £80,000 from crofters - in practice many couldn't afford that, and others put in more to compensate. We surpassed the sum because of contributions from around Scotland and overseas. We were trying to raise money for an estate we could never afford without assistance, but it was important to our credibility to aim for a sizeable but realisable sum. The next stage was working out a strategy for the agencies." The estate was finally bought as a whole when they secured a low-interest loan from Highland Region and grants from Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Highland Fund and other agencies.

Reasons for Success

Ishbel stressed the importance of what she called '**non-threatening agendas**' - such as the straightforward, well-researched proposal to buy the land. The facts were presented simply with a relevance to their own area. "Everyone in the community had to get over the mystique of oak-lined boardrooms attached to 'buying the land', and see instead that it would involve various **practical steps**." This realisation raised their confidence. They could see what skills were needed - legal knowledge, planning, writing, negotiating, fundraising. They found many of these skills through their own life experience, and in the conviction that they knew most about their area.

"There are different types of 'credibility' The mandate broadcast on TV was important for ourselves. The public and unanimous support to buy the land countered the stereotype that crofters can't agree about anything. No-one could say 'there's only a couple of people orchestrating this.' You have to have a belief in yourself. There's a stereotype about the Highlands that all the folk with gumption have got out, and only the dregs have stayed - in fact it's taken gumption to survive the adverse conditions."

"We needed leaders with a collection of skills. Crofters are very sensitive about people coming in and running everything because they have no confidence themselves. In Assynt it is genuinely local people who are acting. We had a great deal of experience of working together because that's the way that crofting communities work - even when we disagree fundamentally we still do things together! This experience counts. Assynt was already well known as being an active community - running ceilidhs, running meals on wheels, etc - and lots of this experience is relevant. We don't have those oak-lined boardrooms - what we've got is the local post office! If you're running something with the people on the ground, you can cut out all the bureaucracy, because people can quickly find out what's happening."

Throughout the workshop, Ishbel stressed the importance of the Crofters' Union, which was created in its present form in 1986. "The legal position was very complex. Importing expertise, referred to us by the Crofters' Union whom we could trust, was very important. The Crofters Union has been crucial to our success: it has given a platform to people who have never had one."

They learnt to marry local expertise with the language favoured by funding agencies. "We used 'their' language - we said, 'We are a community enterprise.' I was naive in thinking we shouldn't touch the local enterprise company because I thought it was undemocratic. I was wrong. You have to be able to use their power for your benefit at the same time as challenging its undemocratic nature."

Ishbel's workshop was one of the most hopeful of the conference. As she said, "There has been a general regaining of confidence in the Highlands - very important when you talk of land. We are taking back what is ours - we have to do it through the existing structures which is not necessarily a good thing, but we are doing it."

HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS FORUM CONFERENCE 1994

HIGHLAND & ISLANDS FORUM COMMUNITY CONFERENCE 1994

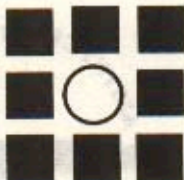
"THE PEOPLE AND THE LAND"

ASSYNT CROFTERS TRUST - Community Initiative



"If you don't like what's happening, SAY NO, SAY WHY at length, SUGGEST A WORKABLE ALTERNATIVE"

the motion was - "that you agree in principle that we should form a company to buy the land"



BACKGROUND

The 21,000 acre North Lochinver Estate, all of it under crofting tenure except for approximately 100 acres, had been sold by the previous owners, the millionaire Vestey family, to a foreign property company - SPS Ltd. That company went bankrupt and the estate was going to be broken up and offered for sale again in 7 small lots.

THE FORMULA

"If you don't like what's happening, SAY NO, SAY WHY at length, SUGGEST A WORKABLE ALTERNATIVE." Saying no and saying why are straightforward.

You've done the shouting; you've got angry (that's important); but if you stop there you're not setting an alternative agenda on your own terms, and in a sense shirking the responsibility. Finding a workable alternative is the difficult bit.

THE OPPORTUNITY

The estate came on the market when SPS Ltd. went into liquidation. The Assynt crofters wanted to remain tenants but also to secure the future of the estate in its existing form. Buying the land seemed to be a way to do that - *"The Land for the People."*

THE BEGINNING

The Assynt branch of the Crofters Union, an organised recognised body, called an open meeting. This lent the gathering immediate legitimacy, and was familiar to the people of the area. (It is always best at the outset to use existing structures.) A non-threatening agenda was set - the motion was *"that you agree in principle that we should form a company to buy the land."* The history of Assynt was evident in the strength of feeling the community had for the land, and the result was a unanimous mandate to form a Trust and go for buying the land.

THE ACTION

The Assynt Crofters Trust (A.C.T.) was set up as a company, limited by guarantee, to:

- raise funds to buy the land*
- to improve the social, educational, cultural, and natural environment of the crofting communities in Assynt, Sutherland*
- to help fund viable investment and secure property development for the crofting communities.*

To do this A.C.T. utilised valuable skills and experience from within the community, but needed to import special skills and expertise not available locally. LEGAL ADVICE came from Simon Fraser, who was appointed through the Crofters Union because of his excellent track record. FINANCIAL and BUSINESS ADVICE came from Graeme Scott and Steve Westbrook who showed great commitment to the project.

A.C.T. attempted to break down the task facing them into manageable bits so that everyone could understand what the options were, and a canny pace of decision-making was established.

- ◆ *first action was to sign up with a pound and a pen to form the Assynt Crofters Trust.*
- ◆ *"what does owning the land involve?" - A.C.T. removed the mystique of estate management. Crofting experience of township co-operation was a good base to build on.*
- ◆ *A.C.T. tried always to take the decisions - to think and act positively*
- ◆ *A.C.T. took steps to knock out the negative images - eg "crofters can never agree"; "it's just a romantic or political dream"; "unreal fantasy people" of the Estate Sales brochure, etc.*

THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE A.C.T. faced at the outset was CREDIBILITY - with agencies, and with the general

HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS FORUM CONFERENCE 1994

ASSYNT CROFTERS TRUST - Community Initiative

"A.C.T. attempted to break down the task facing them into manageable bits..."

"The biggest challenge A.C.T. faced at the outset was CREDIBILITY..."

"...A.C.T. took steps to knock out the negative images..."

Further information from:-
A.C.T.,
Stoer,
Lochinver,
Assynt,
Sutherland.

public. To help counteract this, the meeting which gave the unanimous mandate from the community to go for the land was televised live on the 6 o'clock News.

Where agencies were concerned, A.C.T. had to work hard to cancel the negative image that "all the crofters can think about is *The Clearances*". A.C.T. approached its affairs with professionalism, and established a status which could be recognised by the community, the general public, and agencies alike.

This led to productive partnerships and wider support for the cause. A.C.T. saw that:-

- ◆ you can use the system even though it may appear politically unsympathetic
- ◆ you can use their language without endorsing their ideology
- ◆ you can make the agencies fulfil their own rhetoric
- ◆ they (A.C.T.) WERE community enterprise

THE FUNDRAISING

The Assynt Crofters Trust Fund Appeal was launched using many types of publicity. An A4 leaflet was distributed widely setting out the objects of the Trust, and the aims of the crofters should they succeed in buying the estate. This document was also used to knock out many of the negative images levelled at the Trust and crofters in general, and had wide appeal in Scotland, in the U.K., and among ex-patriots abroad.

Donations of five pounds, ten pounds, fifty pounds and more, poured in from other crofters, from ex-Highlanders, from people simply fired up by the idea of the land reverting to the people, from walkers, climbers, artists. There was support also from the Scottish Crofters

Union, the Highland Fund, Highland Regional Council, Scottish Natural Heritage, and Caithness & Sutherland Enterprise. The amount raised allowed A.C.T. to bid for and eventually buy the estate on 1st February, 1993.

But this is only the beginning for A.C.T. The eyes of the world will be upon them - they have secured the land for the people. Will they secure a better and more optimistic future for the crofters of Assynt?

FACTORS which contributed to the successful bid, and ideas for wider application:-

- ◆ identify common purpose, have clear aims and objectives
- ◆ develop non-threatening agenda
- ◆ knock out negative images
- ◆ gain credibility
- ◆ identify strengths, use local skills
- ◆ import required expertise
- ◆ use existing familiar structure to start with, develop new one if required
- ◆ think positively
- ◆ develop leadership skills
- ◆ ensure good public relations
- ◆ wide dissemination of information
- ◆ have a community appraisal in place to be ready for opportunities
- ◆ do a landholding audit in your area
- ◆ get yourself up on your community's rights



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