

## THE INCOME OF TENANTS ON A SCOTCH OPEN-FIELD FARM IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

THE following figures are based on an old farming account book dated 1769-1779, and they seem to throw some interesting light upon the life and conditions of the smaller sub-tenants to whom portions of the farm were let.

The Davoch of Dunachton, which now forms the two farms of Dunachton More and Kinncraig, was situated in Badenoch, the district covering the upper reaches of the Spey. The soil is exceptionally good, and, owing to the slope on which the fields lie, the introduction of deep drainage has probably made less difference in making the better land available for cultivation than in most parts of the country.

We have the following contemporary account of Dunachton by the proprietor: "On a farm rented from me by McIntosh of Balnespick for £86 13s. 4d. str., 240 people are supported, of which 60 are able to carry arms" (*Notes Descriptive and Historical, principally relating to the Parish of Moy in Strathdearn*, by Sir Eneas Mackintosh of Mackintosh, Bart., written between 1774-1783 and privately published by the present Mackintosh of Mackintosh in 1892. See p. 37.) A davoch of land usually contained about 416 acres of arable (see Cosmo Innes, *Scotch Legal Antiquities*, pp. 271 and 241), the subdivisions being—2 oxgates of 13 acres each = 1 husbandland, 4 husbandlands = 1 ploughgate, 4 ploughgates 1 davoch. The ploughgate was said to be the commonest unit for a farm held jointly by small tenants, but in Badenoch, where farms were usually let to a principal tenant or tacksman, they seem to have generally consisted of two ploughgates each (see Gordon Rent Roll for 1600, published in Vol. IV of the new *Spalding Club Miscellany*). The oxgates were each supposed to furnish an ox for the common plough, and the ploughgate was supposed to be the extent that could be ploughed in a season. The old joint tenants were therefore successful co-operators, and the subdivision of their shares of land was more scientific than is the case with many of our present-day small-holdings with their partially employed horses and

ploughs! (see *Report on Economics of Small Farms and Small Holdings*, published by the Scottish Board of Agriculture, p. 37).

In his account book Captain William Mackintosh of Balnespick gives a list of the rentals of his sub-tenants, and as the names of most of their holdings have come down to the present day, it is possible to call up a fairly vivid picture of their general conditions if one cares to "read between the lines" of crabbed handwriting in the yellowing old book. Forty tenants are mentioned in all, and eleven more names occur through the account book as belonging to different parts of the davoch, and who were probably cottars and servants to the larger sub-tenants. The land was sub-let as follows:—

*Group 1.*—One holding of about 40 to 50 acres, let singly.

Now out of cultivation.

One holding of about 40 acres, rented jointly by two tenants. Now out of cultivation.

One holding of about 40 acres, rented jointly by three tenants. Now out of cultivation.

*Group 2.*—One holding of about 50 acres, rented jointly by two or three tenants. Now under partial cultivation.

*Group 3.*—One holding of about 65 acres, held singly. Still under cultivation.

Two holdings of about 39 acres each, held singly. Still under cultivation.

All these holdings were on less fertile soil than that now under permanent arable cultivation at Dunachton More. Group 3 probably gives at least two returns less for the amount of seed sown under modern conditions. Group 2 is less good than Group 3, and Group 1 is distinctly inferior to Group 2 both as to soil, accessibility and the lie of the land.

In addition there was one holding of 3 oxengates = 39 acres, five holdings of 1 oxengate each held singly, four holdings of 1 oxengate each held jointly, and fourteen holdings of half an oxengate each; all these holdings being on exceptionally good land. Some of them were on portions of the ground cultivated by the principal tenant himself, or by his son, others were grouped on a smaller farm now cultivated as part of Dunachton More, held jointly among themselves. (Note: the position of this farm is easily identified. It is now covered by a fifty-acre field. At present the soil is equal in quality to that of the rest of Dunachton

More, but in those days it may have been inferior, and the amount under constant arable was probably less in extent, for this part of the farm is still inclined to be damp and owes more to deep drainage than does any other. In the opinion of the present tenant farmer drainage has doubled the yield of this field, both by increasing the returns to the seed sown and the actual area under cultivation). On the whole it would therefore certainly be no over-statement to assume that the harvests and crops of the sub-tenants were very similar to those of the tacksman.

According to Mackintosh of Balnespick's Account Book, the sub-tenants of an oxengate usually sowed 17 bolls of grain yearly, the whole of their strips of common field being under cereal crops year after year. The usual proportion of grains that they sowed were two-thirds of oats and one-third of bear or bigg, an inferior sort of barley, with some admixture of rye and pease. (Note: this is the usual proportion of Balnespick's own sowings. See also Sir John Sinclair's *View of the Agriculture in the Northern Counties*, p. 80; *Northern Rural Life in the Eighteenth Century*, by Alexander, chapter iv.; Mr. Marshall's *Report on the Agriculture of Central Scotland*, etc.) Balnespick himself gives year by year the

Year.	Amount of meal and grain used, for every boll sown by Balnespick.		Crop on an oxengate allowing a sowing of 17 bolls.			Crop on a half oxengate allowing a sowing of 8½ bolls.		
	Oats.	Bear.	Oats.	Bear.	Total.	Oats.	Bear.	Total.
1769	2-26	5-75	25-613	32-583	58-196	12-806	16-291	29-098
1770	deficit of .5 for seed	not stated	deficit of 5-666 for seed			deficit of 2-888 for seed		
1771	.12	2-68	1-359	15-184	16-544	.679	7-592	8-271
1772	.88	3-64	9-973	20-626	30-599	4-986	10-313	15-299
1773	2-16	4-17	24-679	23-629	48-103	12-339	11-814	24-054
1774	1-45	1-37	16-433	7-763	24-196	8-216	3-881	12-097
1775	2-86	3-8	32-413	21-522	53-935	16-206	10-761	26-967
1776	Total 1-53				26-01			13-005
1777	1-13	2-14	12-806	12-126	24-932	6-403	6-063	12-466
1778	1-66	.33	18-813	1-813	20-68	9-406	.934	10-34

quantity of grain he actually sowed, of the meal he used in the house, and of the grain or meal that he sold, and it is therefore possible to calculate the amount of produce actually used of every boll of seed he put into the ground. (Not the actual return in grain, weight by weight, for of course the amount of meal produced from a given measure of grain varies according

to the kind of grain and to its quality.) Allowing for resowing, the crops of the tenants would be as in the table on p. 85, according to this rough-and-ready method of calculation. (Note : the measure in common use was the boll, which is equal to 10 stone grain and 9 stone victual.)

In addition the sub-tenants kept a certain amount of livestock. As far as can be calculated, even the holder of a half oxengate must have maintained the following animals :

A share of the food of an ox to work in the common plough. (The old Scotch ox-plough was used by the sub-tenants in Badenoch as late as 1795; see *First Statistical Abstract for Alvie Parish*. Vol. XII. p. 137.)

Two garrons, hardy Highland ponies of about 12 hands, for carriage of peats, corn, etc. In Balnespick's Account Book the loads carried by these little horses are given as  $1\frac{1}{2}$  bolls, *i. e.* 15 stone.

Two cows to supply the milk on which the family lived and for raising calves. They were considered good milkers if they gave five pints a day, and they rarely produced a calf oftener than every second year.

Five stirks at least. The sale of cattle was the main way of paying rents in the Highlands (see Sir Eneas' *Notes*, p. 38), and under the miserable conditions of cattle-rearing bullocks were not ready for sale as unfattened beasts till their fourth or fifth year. In addition, it was generally calculated that at least one in every five died each winter. The rent of the half oxengates averaged £1 10s., and those of the oxengates about £3, and the sale of such bullocks brought in about 30s. a head; it would therefore be necessary for a holder of half an oxengate of land to have at least four or five cattle of different ages coming on, and for the tenant of an oxgate to keep double that number. A few sheep were also probably kept for wool to supply the family clothing, and to supplement the milk of the cow.

(Walker, *On the Hebrides*, Vol. I. p. 56, published 1812, has the fullest account of the Highland animals; see also Sir John Sinclair, *View of the Northern Counties*, published 1795, p. 76, both of which contain the lists of stock required on a farm, though the latter reference is dealing with one devoted more to corn-raising. There are good summaries in *Northern Rural Life*, by Alexander, chaps. ix. and x., and Section II. of Vol. I. of *Lectures from the Mountains*, a little known, anonymous book written by the son of a farmer in Glen Avon about 1860.)

The rents of the oxengates and half oxengates seem to have

covered "promiscuous eating" on the stubbles of the common field and the out-field and pasturage in the hills in summer, but additional grazing, or a share of the hay "midow" was charged for extra. The stock also were fed on the straw of the cereal crops. The cows certainly received corn and hay, the cost of wintering them being apparently about equal to the value of two bolls of corn, and it is unthinkable that the oxen did not receive some corn, in addition to a scanty diet of straw and inferior hay (no grass seed or clover was sown) when they did the ploughing. It would therefore be safe to allow the value of two bolls of the crop on a half oxengate for the maintenance of one cow—they probably kept two and helped to maintain an ox—and to allow for at least two cows and some small share of corn for the work animals on a larger holding.

The amount of meal consumed by the family can be estimated more exactly. Sir John Sinclair, in his *Report on the Northern Counties*, p. 82, describes the dietary of a small tenant farmer as mainly consisting of preparations of meal and milk. "There is not 5lb. of meat consumed within the family throughout the year; an egg is a luxury that is seldom or ever indulged in, far less a fowl; we have seen in the summer season a haddock occasionally, as a wonderful regalement. By this mode of living, two men, two women, three children and a grown girl or lad may subsist in all upon £15 4s. per annum, but hardly in a manner adequate to give spirit or strength for labour." Sir John Sinclair calculated the amount of meal per head at six bolls for a man four bolls for a woman and a boll apiece for children. Assuming that the average size of the families of sub-tenants on Dunachton was five—father, mother, three children—and this is certainly no over-estimate, for the number of dependants to each fencible man in Sir Eneas' statement is four, and Highland families were famous for their size (see Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*), the annual consumption of meal would be thirteen bolls per family. The home consumption of meal and grain for an oxengate would therefore probably be about eighteen bolls at least, and for a half oxengate fifteen bolls. The corn from their holdings therefore sometimes showed a surplus and sometimes a deficit, and unfortunately the local price of corn was extremely variable, owing to the uncertainty of the Highland climate and the difficulties of transport from other places, and they had to sell in a low market and buy in a dear one. Balnespick does not always quote the price at which he sold or bought his corn, but I have endeavoured to supplement the information from other sources:—

		Oxengates				Half oxengate.			
1769.	Price of oatmeal per boll	10s.	Surplus 40-2.	Profit £20	2 0	Surplus 14-0.	Profit £7	0 0	
1770.	" " "	20s.	Oats showed a deficit of 5 for sowing.	Deficit £18	0 0	Deficit 15 bolls.	Loss £15	0 0	
Bear uncertain.									
Total deficit (maintenance and sowing) probably at least 18 bolls.									
1771.	" " "	19s.	Deficit 2-5.	Loss £ 1	8 6	Deficit 6-7.	Loss £6	7 3½	
1772.	" " "	18s.	Surplus 12-6.	Profit £11	6 9½	Surplus -3.	Profit £0	5 4½	
1773.	" " "	16s.	" 30-3.	" £22	10 0	" 9-2.	" £6	18 0	
1774.	" " "	16s.	" 6-2.	" £ 4	19 4½	Deficit 3-0.	Loss £2	8 0	
1775.	" " "	14s.	" 55-9.	" £25	2 2½	Surplus 11-9.	Profit £8	6 6	
1776.	" " "	18s.	" 8-0.	" £ 7	4 0	Deficit 2-0.	Loss £1	16 0	
1777.	" " "	16s.	" 6-9.	" £ 5	10 4½	" 2-5.	" £2	0 0	
1778.	" " "	18s.	" 2-7.	" £ 2	8 7½	" 4-7.	" £4	4 7	

The slight additional profit caused by the additional price of barley may well be set against cost of cartage to market, interest on money borrowed in bad years, etc.

The additional outgoings would include 1s. yearly towards the payment of the fox-killer (Note: this item appears in all the old rentals I have seen. Before game was preserved the havoc wrought by vermin on the farmer's live-stock was considerable); 1s. 6d. at least towards the stipend of the minister, and payment to the schoolmaster. These three items were collected by Balnespick. Multures to the mill in payment for grinding; a surprisingly large amount for whisky (it is evident from the Account Book that several of the tenants spent many shillings on this commodity); shoes or hide to make them of; flax; the weaving of homespun yarn; probably some cloth that was not home-made; tailoring of the men's clothes (General Stuart's *Manners and Customs of the Highlands* makes it clear that this was not done at home). Salt for the cattle, which seems to have come to 1s. 6d. a year; the replacement of implements (being mostly of wood, they were cheap, but must have required constant renewal: see Sir John Sinclair, *View of the Northern Counties*, p. 75, and *Northern Rural Life*, chap. vi. for the fullest accounts of them. Sir John Sinclair estimates their total value at £3 3s., and the cost of renewing them annually at £2). The replacement of live-stock; payment for and maintenance of steadings.

Three items of present-day expenditure that do not appear are fuel and lighting, which were provided by peat and fir-wood; artificial manures, which were not used; and the provision of seeds. Turnip and hay-seed were not sown, oats and bear were taken from the old crop or bought locally.

Additional sources of income were the sale of eggs and fowls—which then sold in Inverness market at 2d. a dozen and 4d. to 6d. each, respectively (Sir Eneas Mackintosh's *Notes*, p. 43). Work as day labourers at 6d. a day; and spinning or the sale of woollen yarn, which cannot have been lucrative, as the finished

cloth only sold at 10d. an ell (*First Statistical Account for Alvie*, Vol. XIII. p. 379).

Even a small croft of 13 to 17 acres would tend to give a fairly full employment. Under present conditions the cultivation of a ten-acre croft would only amount to 80-100 full days' work (see *Report on Economics of Small Holdings*, p. 35), under the open-field system, with wooden ploughs; herding; tathing, *i. e.* manuring the land by confining the animals in a fold of sods that was moved every eight or ten days, which was regularly practised by Balnespick (for a description of the process see Robertson's *Report on the Agriculture of Inverness-shire*); threshing by means of the flail; elaborate systems of weeding to clean the dirty ground (see *Northern Rural Life*, chap. v.), etc., the amount of work needed must have been very much greater. Thus Sir John Sinclair's typical farmer of 37 acres (*View of the Northern Counties*, p. 79) employs three servants, and in Balnespick's Account Book the larger sub-tenants certainly had labourers or cottars on their land.

In addition to work on their own holdings, the sub-tenants had to perform a considerable amount of labour for the tacksman. From the Account Book it is evident that they helped with the harvest, ploughing, harrowing and tathing, they also "did the long carriage," *i. e.* went an errand with a horse and cart at their landlord's pleasure—in 1771 the long carriage consisted of taking loads of bark to Forres, about forty miles off. And it is almost certain that they also cut and carted the peats, for this was a universal service and one of the last to be abolished.

In trying to visualise the hard struggle these people endured it is difficult to realise that their circumstances were unusually favourable, for Dunachton More is an exceptionally productive farm, and the years 1769 to 1779 were not remarkable for special scarcity. Only four years ahead, the terrible shortage of the "Year of the White Peas," lay before them—one of the long series of famines that the Highlands endured, when the people were obliged to rely for food-stuffs on their own uncertain climate and not very productive soil. (See C. Fraser Mackintosh's *Letters of Two Centuries*, p. 303, for local effects. A more general account is given in *Northern Rural Life*, chaps. vii. and viii., and the first volume of Transactions by the Highland Society, published about 1799. I have seen personal letters describing the later shortages of 1802 and 1817-9, but so far as I know they have never been described in any published work.)

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