

Written Accounts of the Perthshire Highlands : The Traveller's Contribution to Landscape History

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PREFACE

One of the objectives of the historical geographer is to reconstruct past landscapes from the evidence available to him. Written records, among the manifold sources of evidence, often provide the most detail of the social and economic state of the country, and information not necessarily evident from the study of other sources such as maps and pictures. The Statistical Accounts compiled by the parish ministers throughout Scotland in the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries are a store of valuable material from which to create pictures of the contemporary landscapes (1). Very often, however, such pictures are fragmentary, distorted by the biased perception of the authors. In this paper an attempt is made to collect other written accounts of the Highlands, mostly by visitors and travellers. These too are personal accounts, but by observers from different standpoints, and it is hoped that they can contribute to a more balanced view of the Highlands than can be obtained from the Statistical Accounts alone.

The extracts selected in illustration apply primarily to the province of Atholl, though some must be regarded as descriptive of the Highlands as a whole. The significance of many of the passages cannot be appreciated without setting them in their historical context, and this paper attempts to unite them within an explanatory framework. Brief biographical details of the authors are given where appropriate. All the passages are taken from published accounts, a list of which is given at the end of this paper. Dates in parentheses show dates of writing, where this is known. The reader is encouraged to seek out other accounts for himself.

EARLY ACCOUNTS

Until the early eighteenth century the Highlands of Scotland were virtually 'terra incognita' to the rest of Britain. The physical barrier created by the Highland Boundary Fault was fortified by fundamental cultural differences, and together these served to discourage any early travellers who succeeded in reaching the Highland margin. It was at this boundary that the advance of the Roman Empire was checked in the first century, despite Agricola's crushing defeat of the Caledonii at the battle of Mons Graupius. In Tacitus's biography of Agricola the geography of Britain is briefly explained, and we find what may be one of the earliest written references to the Highlands:

Such, indeed, is its shape south of Caledonia, and so the same shape has been attributed to the whole. But when you go farther north you find a huge and shapeless tract of country . . .

The remains of Roman encampments on the southern and eastern flanks of the Highlands, together with the supposed Roman soldier exhumed from Muirton Moss (2), bear silent testimony to this outpost of the Empire, abandoned soon after Agricola's recall to Rome in AD 84.

It is only with the advent of Cistercian monks in the twelfth century that we get the first detailed records of any kind. The monastic settlement at Coupar Abbey,

established on land granted by Malcolm IV, dates from 1164. The pioneering monks brought organised commercial agriculture to the area surrounding the abbey, and established a number of granges within one day's journey of the mother house. Much drainage, clearance and reclamation was organised, and extensive areas brought into cultivation for corn, or taken in for grazing. In the first quarter of the thirteenth century, soon after completion of the nine granges, 400 acres of grazing at Tullochcurran, in Strathardle, were rented from the Bishop of Moray. Apart from the granges, which were usually located in the lowland areas, the monastic lands included corn-mills, fulling mills and fishing, some of which were located in Strathardle and Gleniericht (3).

Extracts from the Rental Book of the Cistercian Abbey of Coupar Angus throw much light on the way of life of the Highlanders who fell within the radius of influence of the mother house. The following extract is from the Register of Tacks, and relates to the lands of Cally and Persey in Gleniericht, where the present-day name of 'Monk's Cally' bears witness to the monastic influence:

And als we, the saidis abbot and convent, has sett and for maill lat . . . to the said Walter, Alexander, his sone, Margret, his spous, and to Alexander, the son of the said Alexander and Margret, all and hale ane auchtane (eighth) part of Caille, quhilk the said Walter brukis and josis now instantlie, with the pertententes, for all the dais and termes of thairis . . . lyftymmes, as said is: Paying zerelie (yearly) therefor to ws . . . the sowm of xxvii^s iiiij^d of vsuall money . . . with commoun cariage to bring hame our cheiss (cheese), and siclyk to bring hame our rounGIS (twigs and branches used for fuel), with all vther dewiteis and dew seruice, use and wont, . . . and sal do thair dett lelelie and trewlie to our corn mill of Caille . . . reservand all wais ane akir of outfield land of the said Percie, and tuay acris of outfield land amangis all our tenentis of Caille, ilk man effering (appertaining) to his awing part, to be gevin to our forester for keping of the wod, that is to say, fra the burn of Altecref athort the west part of the bray of the pule of Lyndeganiff, vnder Johnne Drummond's hous, with the girss (grass) and pastour thereof in our hand; providing all wais that thai keip thair awin gudis out of the said wod, and to thole (suffer) nane of thair tenentis, thar seruandis, nor thame self to cut nor distroy ony of the said wod, . . . but to stop thame at thair vtir power . . . 8 July 1550.

A detailed study of the conditions attached to the leases gives a fascinating insight into the advanced methods of land management adopted by the Cistercian improvers. Instructions are given as to drainage, to restoration of peat cuttings to grazing, and to afforestation of land. Thus, on appointment as master forester in Strathardle, Neyl McKeden is encouraged to:

put the sade land til al possibil polici in biggyn (building) of houses, plantacioun of treys, eschis, ozaris and sauch (willows), with thar defensuris (fences): And he sal kep the wuddis of Stroynacalady, and be master forstar of alour wuddis in Strethardyl, he takand his nedis til his byggyng, without byrnyng, garthin (enclosing) gevyn or sellyn . . . Whitsunday 1473.

While the majority of people were employed on the land, the abbey also took

"their huts are built mostly on some rising rocky Spot at the Foot of a Hill, secure from any Bourne or Springs that might descend upon them from the Mountains . . ." BURT 1754.

on skilled craftsmen, as wheel-wrights, carpenters, smiths and masons.

Complacency and greed gradually replaced the piety and charity of former times. Prestige waned. Although the abbey survived until 1596, the influence of the monks had largely evaporated, and much of the land was sold to pay increasingly heavy taxes. As the tide of commercial enterprise ebbed from the valleys of the Highland margin the people returned to their subsistence farming and to renewed obscurity. Improvement on such a scale was not to return to the Highlands until the early nineteenth century.

The re-emergence of the Highlands from this obscurity begins in the early eighteenth century. Prior to this date few accounts can be found, and those that exist are either very general in their comments, or are untrustworthy as records. Don Pedro de Alaya, ambassador from the Spain of Ferdinand and Isabella, described the Scotland of his period in not altogether flattering terms:

The Scotch are not industrious, and the people are poor. They spend all their time in wars, and when there is no war they fight with one another. . . . They have more meat in great and small animals, than they want, and plenty of wool and hides . . . There are immense flocks of sheep, especially in the savage portions of Scotland. Hides are employed for many purposes. The corn is very good, but they do not produce as much as they might, because they do not cultivate the land. (1498).

Hector Boece also wrote of his native Scotland in his much admired 'History of Scotland' (1527). Sadly, a serious lack of scrupulousness on Boece's part, combined with an almost complete lack of real information on large parts of the country, led to the construction of a glorified and fanciful account of the history and geography of Scotland. Many existing myths were fortified and elaborated, among them his celebrated account of the Barnacle Geese. Dr. Samuel Johnson was constrained to say of Boece:

His history is written with elegance and vigour, but his fabulousness and credulity are justly blamed. His fabulousness, if he was the author of the fictions, is a fault for which no apology can be made; but his credulity may be excused in an age when all men were credulous. (1773).

And so we wait for the light of the eighteenth century to pierce this gloom.

THE HIGHLANDS IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Scotland was still enveloped in a blanket of mistrust for her southern neighbour. The Union of the crowns of England and Scotland under James VI in 1603 had done nothing to bring the two countries closer together. The Stuart kings, once established in England, governed through the Privy Council by decree, but after the Revolution of 1688 even this instrument was weakened. In the years that followed the succession of William of Orange, the dichotomy between Highlands and Lowlands strengthened as the Lowlands inclined towards the House of Orange and to presbyterianism, the Highlands towards the dethroned Stuarts and their Catholic tradition. While the Lowlander began to adopt a more English life-style and English values, the Highlander remained firmly attached to his clan, and to the rigs and clachans of his subsistence existence.

The choice lay between closer union and conflict. After the Act of Union of 1707, when Edinburgh came under the power of Westminster for the first time, there was widespread resentment among the Scots. The weakness of Westminster allowed this discontent to burgeon in the Highlands, to erupt in the Jacobite Rebellions of 1715 and 1745. Only after the crushing and humiliating defeat of the Clans at Culloden in 1746, and the strong repressive measures which followed, did the Highlands cease to be a law unto themselves. Only then, with the improvement in communications, was the way open for the diffusion of innovations into the Highlands. While the politicians began their disputes, which have lasted to this day, the interest of the two nations in each other's affairs began to grow. Visitors to the Highlands recorded their impressions of the country, and the myths of the old days began to yield to the realities of contemporary writers. A survey of eighteenth century accounts of the Highlands will give the reader a vivid picture of the old way of life that was to disappear so rapidly in the face of nineteenth century developments.

Travel: One of the most immediate effects of the Jacobite Rebellions was to hasten the construction of military roads, to link the English garrisons with the south, and to fragment the clan territories. Initially in the hands of General Wade, following the 1715 rising, the road-building efforts were redoubled after the '45. Before this, roads were mere tracks.

Two extracts suffice to indicate the exhausting and hazardous nature of travel in the mountainous parts of Scotland. Taylor the Water Poet, in fulfilment of a wager, set out on a pedestrian tour of Scotland in 1618. His travels took him from Glen Esk to Deeside on one occasion, and he leaves us with a characteristically humorous account:

The next day I travelled over an exceeding high mountain, called mount Skeene (Keen), where I found the valley very warme before I went up it; but when I came to the top of it, my teeth beganne to dance in my head with cold, like virgin-als jacks; and withall, a most familiar mist embraced me round, that I could not see thrice my length any way: withall, it yeilded so friendly a deaw, that it did moysten thorow all my clothes; where the old proverb of a Scottish mist was verified, in wetting me to the skinne. Up and downe, I think this hill is six miles, the way so uneven, stony, and full of bogges, quagmires, and long heath, that a dogge with three legs will out-runne a horse with four: for doe what wee could wee were four hours before we could passe it. (1618).

Edward Burt, as agent to General Wade during the building of the military roads, leaves us in no doubt about the need for improvement:

The 2nd of October, 172-.
Set out with one servant and a Guide; the latter because no Stranger can venture among the Hills without a Conductor; for if he once go aside, the most especially if Snow should fall, in that, or any other Case, he may wander into a Bog to impassable Bourns or Rocks, and every 'ne plus ultra' oblige him to change his Course, till he wanders from all Hopes of ever again seeing the Face of a human Creature. Or if he should accidentally hit upon the Way from whence he strayed, he would not distinguish it from another, there is such a seeming Sameness in

all the rocky Places. Or again, if he should happen to meet with some Highlander, and one that was not unwilling to give him Directions, he could not declare his Wants, as being a Stranger to the Language of the Country. (c. 1726).

Such poor communications restricted the movement of people and ideas. With little opportunity to develop trade, there was little incentive for change in life-style.

Agriculture: To travellers familiar with the agricultural advances of the eighteenth century in England, and with the benefits, albeit disputed, of enclosure, agriculture in the Highlands must have seemed very primitive. That the Highlands remained so agriculturally backward must have been largely the result of their remoteness and impenetrability to innovations from without. Rotation of crops was not a common practice, and the use of fertilisers very restricted. There is no doubt that slopes and soils acted in conjunction with altitude and climate to place severe limitations on the farmers of the time. Superimposed on this was an apathy in the people, bred of centuries-old tradition. Such was the inertia of subsistence farming that any change would inevitably lead to its own destruction.

Thomas Morer, a man who must rank high among early travellers for his discerning comment, was in Scotland in the late seventeenth century as chaplain to a Scots regiment. Here he describes the agriculture of the province:

The soil of the country seems to the eye very indifferent, and tho' they have many fine valleys, which might be improved in competitorship with our English meadows, yet for want of sufficient industry and care they become almost useless, on the account of the frequent bogs and waters in such places. Whence it is, that they have little hay in that Kingdom. . . . Their arable ground is very considerable; and 'tis almost incredible how much of the mountains they plough, where the declensions, I had almost said the precipices, are such, that to our thinking, it puts 'em to greater difficulty and charge to carry on their work, than they need be at in draining the valleys.

We seldom meet with enclosures; either because being a corn country, they would be injured as little as may be by birds which harbour in the hedges; or being without those long and kind leases the tenants of England have, they are not encouraged by their lords in that and some other improvements; or that there is want of industry in this, and the like cases: So it is, that their fields are open, and without fences, unless here and there they raise out of the road some little continued heaps of stone in the nature of a wall, to secure their crops from the incursions of travellers. (1689).

The lack of enclosure, also evident in early maps such as Roy's survey of 1750, presented a real barrier to progress. In the small co-operative 'ferm-touns' the land was often divided into small strips, so that each member of the community might have a share in the different qualities of land. Such strips or 'rigs' were too small to enclose, and were often re-allocated to different tenants annually. Furthermore each tenant was forced to conform to traditional dates and methods imposed by the community, or risk losing his livelihood. There was little opportunity, let alone incentive, for the individual to improve.

Through his preference for sloping sites, the Highlander tended to find himself on areas of thin, stony soils. The soil in permanently cultivated 'infield' areas

was often heaped into the rigs, which at once gave a deeper soil, provided drainage into intervening hollows, and left space to throw the stones turned up by the plough. The less fertile 'outfield' was cultivated intermittently. Here the poor soils were soon exhausted, and the land returned to fallow for long periods. Edward Burt is comparable to Morer in his opinions:

The Soil of the Corn-Lands is in some Places so shallow, with rocky Ground beneath it, that a Plough is no Manner of Use. This they dig up with a wooden Spade; for almost all their Implements of Husbandry are entirely made of Wood Where the Soil is deeper they plough with four of their little horses abreast.

Nothing is more common than to hear the Highlanders boast how much their Country might be improved, and that it would produce double what it does at present if better Husbandry were introduced among them. . . . I do assure you, I do not remember to have seen the least Spot that would bear Corn uncultivated, not even upon the Sides of the Hills, where it could no otherwise be broke up than with a Spade. And as for manure to supply the Salts and enrich the Ground, they have hardly any. (c. 1726).

This infertility can be blamed on two major factors. One was the general lack of lime rich rocks in the Highlands, coupled with the difficulty of processing and transporting bulky materials. The other was the lack of fertilisation by animal dung, through the virtual absence of grazing animals on the 'infield' in summer.

A prominent naturalist in his time, and a celebrated traveller, Thomas Pennant made two extensive tours of Scotland in the third quarter of the eighteenth century. In his first tour he describes a visit to a summer grazing in Glen Tilt, having traversed the glen by what he describes as the most dangerous and most horrible road he had ever travelled:

Ascend a steep hill, and find ourselves on an 'Arrie', or tract of mountain which the families of one or two hamlets retire to with their flocks for pasture in the summer. Here we refreshed ourselves with some goats' whey, at a 'Sheelin', or 'Bothay', a cottage made of turf, the dairy house, where the Highland shepherds or graziers live with their herds and flocks, and during the fine season make butter and cheese. Their whole furniture consists of a few horn-spoons, their milking utensils, a couch of sods to lie on, and a rug to cover them. Their food oatcakes, butter or cheese, and often the coagulated blood of their cattle spread on their bannocks. (1769).

Thus, much of the dung, which would have been of benefit to the crops, was lost on the hills. While this might at first sight appear wasteful of resources, the 'shieling' was an essential element in subsistence farming, for without it the valley floor would have had to provide both grazing and crop land in the summer.

One further resource essential to the survival of the Highlander was timber. Written and cartographic evidence, notably General Roy's survey of 1750, confirms that centuries of grazing had reduced the natural woodland to a fraction of its former extent. In Glen Tilt, en route for Dee-side, Pennant remarks that:

The sides of many of these mountains is covered with fine verdure, and are excellent sheepwalks: but entirely woodless.

Shortly afterwards, however, on reaching his destination he adds:

On our return passed under some high cliffs; with large woods of birch inter-mixed. This tree is used for all sorts of implements of husbandry, roofing of small houses, wheels, fuel; the Highlanders also tan their own leather with the bark; and a great deal of excellent wine is extracted from the live tree. (1769).

Little was done to conserve this vital resource. The Dukes of Atholl were afforesting their lands in the early eighteenth century, but this must be regarded as an exception to the general rule.

It should not go unrecorded that Strath Tay was often singled out by travellers for its relative fertility and prosperity. Atholl, of all parts of the Highlands, has been one of the most visited, thanks to the access afforded by the Strath. Pennant and Burt are both struck with admiration: the following passage is from Burt's letters:

I shall in Justice, say something relating to Part of the Country of Athole, which, though Highlands, claims an Exception from the preceding general and gloomy Descriptions. . . . The Mountains, though very high, have an easy Slope, and a good Way up, and are cultivated in many Places, and inhabited by Tenants who, like those below, have a different Air from other Highlanders in the Goodness of their Dress and Cheerfulness of their Countenance. (c. 1726)

Highland Society: If visitors from the south showed surprise at the backwardness of the agriculture, they were equally struck by the primitive nature of the housing. Except amongst the highest levels of the social hierarchy, the clansmen lived in cramped cottages, the size of which was strictly limited by the nature of the materials available for construction: stone, timber and peat. In a situation where subsistence was universal, there were no towns or villages. The houses were grouped in small 'clachans' or 'fermtouns', each containing several families who worked as a co-operative unit. Thomas Kirke, described by Hume Brown as a 'splenetic and perverse' observer as a result of his political leanings, dismisses the houses of the common people as:

. . . very mean, mud-wall and thatch at the best; the poorer sort live in such miserable huts as never eye beheld; men, women and children pig altogether in a poor mouse-hole of mud, heath and some such-like matter: . . . (1679)

Burt, as agent to General Wade, found himself billeted on occasion with the Highlanders whose lives he was to be instrumental in changing. He was hardly less critical of the accommodation:

Their Huts are mostly built on some rising rocky Spot at the Foot of a Hill, secure from any Bourne or Springs that might descend upon them from the Mountains; and, thus situated, they are pretty safe from Inundations from above or below, and other Ground they cannot spare from their Corn . . .

I entered the dwelling-House. There my Landlady sat, with a parcel of Children about her, some quite and others almost, naked, by a little Peat Fire in the Middle of the Hut; and over the Fire-Place was a small Hole in the Roof for a Chimney. The floor was common Earth, very uneven, and no where Dry, but near the Fire and in the Corners where no Foot had carried the muddy Dirt from without Doors. The Skeleton of the Hut was formed of small crooked Timber, but the Beam for the Roof was large out of all proportion. . . . The Walls were

about four Feet high, lined with Sticks wattled like a Hurdle, built on the Outside with Turf; and thinner Slices of the same serve for Tiling. . . . If there happened to be any Continuance of dry Weather, which is pretty rare, the Worms drop out for want of Moisture, insomuch that I have shuddered at the Apprehension of their falling into the Dish when I have been eating. (c. 1726).

Such descriptions are echoed by Pennant and others.

The economy, though largely self-contained, was not entirely closed. One or two commodities such as salt and metal would not have been obtainable within the Highlands. In return for such imports the Highlanders exported cattle. Of these they were able to produce a surplus, added to which they did not have the problem of transport. During the eighteenth century increasing numbers of them were driven to the Lowland markets, along poorly-defined tracks such as those which converged on the head of Strathardle and on the market at Kirkmichael (4). Burt explains:

About the latter End of August, or the Beginning of September, the Cattle are brought into good Order by their Summer Feed, and the Beef is extremely sweet and succulent. Now the Drovers collect their Herds and drive them to the Fairs and Markets on the Borders of the Lowlands, and sometimes to the North of England. (c. 1726).

Apart from this trade, the economy was essentially inward-looking. Land was generally divided up among tenants who paid rent to those above them in the Social hierarchy. Burt describes how:

Their Rent is chiefly paid in kind, that is to say, great Part of it in several Species arising from the Product of the Farm; such as Barley, Oatmeal, and what they call Customs, as Sheep, Lambs, Poultry, Butter &c., and the Remainder, if any, is paid in Money. (c. 1726).

Burt questions the applicability of enclosure to the Highlands, and concludes that such 'improvements' would not be compatible with the existing social and economic structure.

Despite the outward manifestations of poverty described by almost all early travellers to the Highlands, the clansmen seem genuinely to have been content with their lot, and suspicious of innovation. A short extract from Morer is instructive:

Once or twice a year, great numbers of 'em get together and make a descent into the Lowlands, where they plunder the inhabitants, and so return back and disperse themselves. And this they are apt to do in the profoundest peace, it being not only natural to 'em to delight in rapine, but they do it on a kind of principle, and in conformity to the prejudice they continually have to the Lowlanders, whom they generally take for so many enemies. (1689).

THE HIGHLANDS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Although the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 is often regarded as a turning point in the history of the Highlands, it was not until the last quarter of the eighteenth century that the life of the majority of people was materially changed. Once begun, however, the changes were rapid and profound. The improvement in communications within the Highlands was instrumental in this change, encouraging a freer movement of people and ideas between Lowland and Highland.

This, together with the suppression of the clan system, was disruptive of the long-established pattern of life in the Highlands.

In the new pattern imposed by the Government, the Clan Chiefs were obliged to play a new role as land-owners, or to suffer. Many chose the former path, and the ties of loyalty which had held the fabric of Highland life together for so long began to weaken and break. Those who maintained their independence of spirit included Robertson of Struan. Alexander Robertson, intractable Jacobite, records his stand against the usurping monarchy in a poetic 'Epitaph' on himself:

*Tenacious of his Faith, to aid the Cause
Of Heav'n's Anointed, and his Country's Laws,
Thrice he engag'd, and thrice, with STUART'S Race
He fail'd; but ne'er comply'd with foul Disgrace.
Tho' some, despising Heav'n's most sacred Tyes,
Perjur'd for Int'rest, acquiesc'd to Lies,
CLAN-DONNOCH'S Chief maintain'd his Reputation,
And scorn'd to flourish in an Usurpation. (1751).*

Thomas Pennant records his fate when talking of Rannoch:

This country was once the property of Robertson of Struan, who had been in the rebellion of 1715; had his estate restored, but in 1745 rebelling a second time, the country was burnt, and the estate annexed to the crown. He returned a few years after, and died as he lived, a most abandoned sot; notwithstanding which, he had a genius for poetry, and left behind him a volume of elegies, and other pieces, in some of which he elegantly laments the ravages of war among his vassals, and the loss of his favourite scenes, and in particular his fountain Argentine. (1769).

The greater proportion of land-owners, many of them newly-educated clan chiefs or heads of families, became aware of the benefits offered by a commercial economy. They also realised that adapting their lands to such an economy would involve the disruption or removal of subsistence farming. The inability of the old system to accommodate innovations was soon to lead to its destruction.

The remaining section of this paper is concerned less with the outward and visible signs of the early nineteenth century and Victorian period, which are still everywhere to be seen, and more with the contrasting attitudes of travellers to the changes that were taking place.

Travel: The spate of road-building, both military and private, which followed the Jacobite risings did much to open up the Highlands. As the time taken to travel from Perth to Inverness shrank from days to hours, and as the risks of travel were progressively reduced, more and more people ventured into the Highlands. Even in Thomas Pennant's time the improvements were substantial:

I must not omit that on the North side of this lake (Loch Tay) is a most excellent road, which runs the whole length of it. . . . The whole road was made at the sole expence of the present Lord Breadalbane; who, to facilitate the travelling, also erected thirty-two stone bridges over the torrents that rush from the mountains into the lake. (Travellers) will find the whole country excell in roads, partly military, partly done by statute labor, and much by the munificence of the great men. (1769).

The growth of the Landscape Movement in Art and Literature brought with it, in the more leisured classes, a desire for travel. To the 'tourist' the dreary wastes and threatening hills became noble and sublime. Poets and artists came to seek inspiration in the newly discovered landscapes of the Highlands. Such picturesque appreciation of the landscape is best illustrated by a passage from the Reverend William Gilpin's *Observations on Picturesque Beauty in the Highlands of Scotland*. Here this father of Landscape Appreciation describes a scene on the banks of the Tummel, as he travels northwards to Blair Atholl:

When we leave the Tay, we meet the Tummel, which, tho' less wild in it's accompaniments, performs its evolutions with as much beauty. One scene upon it's bank called aloud for the pencil. We had many, in which were greater beauties; but they were mixed, as is often the case, with something awkward. But this view was almost purely picturesque. A broad sand-bank stretched before the eye, as a second distance, round which the river formed an indented curve: its banks were well decorated, and the view was closed, in the fashion of the Scotch landscape, with beautiful mountains. (1776).

There are many such passages in the numerous tourist guides that were published in the early nineteenth century, but they are sadly of little value in the reconstruction of the living landscape, concerning themselves as they do with the niceties of colour and composition. Of poets who visited the Highlands, including Keats, Wordsworth and Southey, the last has left an account of some interest to us.

Agriculture: The rapid progress of agriculture in the Highlands is well illustrated in the papers of the agricultural societies of the time, as well as in Fenton's recent book on *Scottish Country Life* (1976). To be effective, many of the new techniques and especially the use of machinery required much larger units of land. Farm rationalisation often began with the parcelling of scattered plots and strips into more manageable units. In his *General View of the Agriculture in the County of Perth*, of 1799, Robertson explains:

The proportion of pasture and arable land varies always according to local circumstances: but in the most forbidding situations, at the very heads of the glens, there is some arable ground, where the possessor has his house and garden and a little grain. The farms, however, in these mountainous parts of the country are more frequently reckoned by miles than by acres: and the stocks are in proportion to their extent. . . . At present sheep stock prevails. . . . At the head of Strathardle, Glenshee, Rannoch, Glenlyon and other places the distances from the nearest farms or grazings of the nearest adjacent countries are (great) . . . These remote grazings used to be occupied in different lots during the summer months by the tenants of the particular estates to which they belonged. In which case they removed all their cattle to the several lots that fell to their share, where they lived in temporary huts with their families, until the grass was eaten up . . . Some farms had two or more lots in different places, to which the possessors moved in succession, before their return to the homestead or wintertown. But by the present sheep system, the more distant grazings are disjoined from the farms to which they formerly belonged, and are let as distinct possessions. (1799).

The loss of their shielings was a crippling blow to the crofters. In combination with the need to enlarge holdings to make them commercially viable, it proved

fatal to many. The hardy Cheviot and Blackface sheep which replaced the old Highland breeds were grazed almost all the year on the hills, leaving little for other creatures. The valley land was often taken over for fodder and hay crops. Duncan Campbell of Glenlyon recalls this period in his reminiscences of life in the 1840's:

The Glen people were accustomed to take the blows of evil fortune standing, and to seek at once for self-help as a means of recovery and an outlet of escape. For forty years they had been unwillingly feeling that the old industrial system was slipping off its ancient foundations—cattle and calanas—and migrants and emigrants were going out from among them to seek their fortunes in Lowland towns and in the Colonies. When the huge shealings of the Braes and of Lochs had been turned into sheep runs, a fatal blow was given to the old system from which it could never recover again, although the . . . flourishing state of the flax spinning industry threw a veil over the approaching fatality. In 1845 it was obvious that the Highlands sheep-farming now paid best, and that the domestic industries were being made unprofitable and killed by mill machinery and steam power. (1910).

Although there are some records of evictions in Atholl and Breadalbane, there is evidence to suggest that the movement of people away from the land was a more gradual and more natural process than in other parts of the country—described in such documents as William Mackenzie's History of the Highland Clearances. In the more intensively cultivated areas there was little hardship, if Sluethy's views are to be believed: here he describes Strath Tay.

The country is very well cultivated. When Lord Breadalbane turned his mountains into sheep farms, he removed the Highlanders to this valley. The evil of migration, if it were so mismanaged as to produce any, is at an end, and a wonderful improvement it has been, both for the country and for them. There are marks of well-directed industry everywhere. Flax, potatoes, clover, oats and barley, all carefully cultivated and flourishing: the houses not in villages, but scattered about: and the people decent in their appearance . . . Stone enclosures run high up the hills on both sides of the lake. (1819).

It was on the higher land that the changes were most keenly felt, here we see to this day the tumbled walls and overgrown rigs. As Robertson observes in his Agriculture of Perthshire, however, much of this land was extremely marginal in agricultural terms. The danger of crop failure was great:

Ground has formerly been cultivated, which is so high, the climate in that latitude so forbidding and the region of the air so piercingly cold, that no grain we have could at this day survive at any degree of maturity. (1899).

For the crofter, therefore, the opportunities offered by emigration and the attractions of a new life in the industrial lowlands often outweighed his attachment to the land, especially after the failure of potato crops in the 1840's. Even the growing squalor of the towns could not bring the new generation to re-form its links with the land. Duncan Campbell laments this:

. . . "back to the land" is the cry of the people who would not know how to work the land if they got it for nothing, and would undoubtedly prefer the fate of Poplar and West Ham paupers to the hardy life of well-to-do Highland farmers of the first half of the last century. (1910).

Highland Society: For the Highlanders who remained, the quality of housing was greatly improved by replacement of the old crofts with modern cottages, using materials such as slate, glass and cast iron. Robertson's agricultural survey records the change:

The style of the farmhouses and offices is greatly improved within these few years: and it is daily improving. In the place of the mean hovels, in which their fathers lived, without light and without air, in the midst of soot and smoke, many of the farmers now live in houses substantially built with stone and lime, having two floors and a covering of blue slate—very few want glass windows (1899).

The estate owners who were usually responsible for the rebuilding of houses on their estates adopted their own characteristic life-style, reflected in the numerous estate mansions of that period. Again, Robertson observes:

The noblemen have large estates; which enable them to support their dignity with splendour and to perpetuate the hospitality of their ancestors. Many of the gentlemen have independent fortunes, gratifying a taste for elegance suited to their improved ideas and their rank of life. (1899).

The increasing use of the uplands for sporting purposes occurred as the profitability of sheep farming declined in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Estates now catered for the increasing number of visitors, and entries in the 'Highland Sportsman and Tourist' published by Robert Hall show the large number of estates on which the shooting was rented. In the vicinity of Kindrogan these included Balnakilly (formerly the monastic grazings of Tullochcurran), Dalreoch, Inverchroskie, Glenferstate, Straloch and Tarvie. Lord Cockburn, a circuit judge in the mid-nineteenth century, and frequent guest of Patrick Small Keir of Kindrogan, records this trend in his diaries, with particular reference to Glenshee:

This autumnal influx of sporting strangers is a very recent occurrence in Scotch economy. Almost every moor has its English tenant. They are not to be counted by ones, or pairs, or coveys, but by droves or flocks. On the whole these birds of passage are useful. They are kind to the people, they increase the rents, they spend money, and they diffuse a knowledge of, and a taste for, this country. (1846).

Queen Victoria and the Prince Regent made their own contribution to the life of the Highlands, and helped to popularise the sporting and touring aspects of the area. The Queen has left us with her own observations on the Highlands of her time, albeit from a very special view-point, in her diaries. She too was an occasional guest of the Lairds of Kindrogan and Dirnanean as she rode from Glenshee to Dunkeld. Here she records the occasion on which she paused by the River Ardle for tea:

We went the same way as before, but the ground was very wet from the great amount of rain. We stopped a moment in passing, at Dirnanean, to speak to Miss Small, Mr Small's sister, a tall, stout young lady, and then went on to Kindrogan, Mr Keir's. All about here the people speak Gaelic, and there are a few who do not speak a word of English. Soon after entering Mr Keir's grounds we got off our ponies, and went along a few yards by the side of the river Ardle to where Mr Keir had got a fire kindled, a kettle boiling, plaids spread and tea prepared. Mrs Keir and her two daughters were there . . . The Tea over, we walked up

to the house, which is a nice comfortable one. We waited there a little while, and I saw at the door Major Balfour of Fernie, the intended bridegroom of Mr Keir's youngest daughter. (1 October 1866).

There were undoubtedly aspects of the trend towards sheep farming and deer-forest which excited criticism. One source of contention was the restriction of access to hill land, formerly open. While admiring the landscape that this type of management produced, Lord Cockburn records his resentment at being excluded from the hills, together with others. Speaking of the landowner he says:

The public says he has no such right; but as there is no town at hand with its contemptuous citizens, of course the steady perseverance and the long purse of the single nobleman will soon get the better of the poor Celtic slave, the irritated tourist, the sulky drover, and even the London newspapers, who, in this slack season, have taken up the case. (20 September 1846).

Uninformed opinion was an element in this sometimes vociferous opposition, and efforts were made to bring some of the realities of the situation to public notice. The following extract is taken from a report prepared by an independent committee of enquiry into the Deer Forest of Atholl, published in 1909:

As the evidence given by the delegates upon their return from their inspection of the forest was in effect unanimous, it only remains for me . . . to summarize the whole evidence briefly as follows:

- 1) *That the area comprised in the Deer Forest of Atholl consists wholly of high barren and mountainous land, the surface of which is composed chiefly of peat, bog and stone;*
- 2) *That the land in the said Forest has never been used as agricultural land in the past;*
- 3) *That the said land is in every way unsuitable for 'small-holdings', or any such like agricultural purpose;*
- 4) *That it would be impractical to use the said area for sheep farming or timber planting;*
- 5) *And that on the other hand the utilisation of the said area as a deer forest appears to be the best use to which this area can be put, from the point of view of the industrial community, as well as that of the owners, inasmuch as it provides a larger volume of direct and indirect employment than any alternative use which has been suggested. (1909).*

This final extract brings us to the very threshold of the twentieth century. While the most recent changes hardly fall within the scope of this paper, the dramatic trend towards re-forestation since the First World War should not be ignored. For it is this, together with the sheep farm, grouse moor and deer forest which gives us the patterns of settlement and land use which we see in the Highlands today. Underlying this, and partly obscured by this new pattern, we have the landscape of the old order. It is with the help of written accounts such as those mentioned here that we can bring such landscapes alive.

NOTES

- 1 For an assessment of the Statistical Accounts for the parishes of Kirkmichael and Moulin, see CAIRD, J. B. in Bibliography below.
- 2 The position is marked on the Six Inch to One Mile Ordnance Survey Sheet LII NW 1901.
- 3 'A History of Scottish Farming', T. B. FRANKLIN (1952), gives a detailed summary of monastic influences, with special reference to Coupar Abbey.
- 4 For details of drove roads, see 'The Drove Roads of Scotland', A. R. B. HALDANE (1952).

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