



# THE MAKING OF THE GAIRLOCH CROFTING LANDSCAPE

J. B. Caird

In the last two centuries kelp and fisheries, sheep farms, crofts, clearances, emigration and deer forests are the main developments which have contributed to the cultural landscape of the Highlands and Islands. The creation of crofts from Kintyre in Argyllshire to Unst in Shetland resulted in the formation of a distinctive landscape, settlement pattern and distribution of population, with the crofting population occupying small lots almost exclusively round the coast, except in the eastern parts of Inverness-shire, Ross and Cromarty and Sutherland and in Caithness and Orkney where the Old Red Sandstone provides potential arable land beyond the coastal fringe. Such crofts as there are in the straths are almost exclusively 20th century creations, the result of settlement schemes recommended by the *Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Condition of Crofters and Cottars in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* of 1884, which resulted in most of the cleared land being restored to small tenant holdings (Caird 1979. 7-25).

The pattern of settlement around Loch Broom and Little Loch Broom is typical of what emerged in the North-West Highlands during the 19th century [Fig. 7.1]. This paper, however, concerns the creation of the crofting system in Gairloch, which was distinctly unusual. The resultant landscape on the Gairloch Estate is one of squares rather than rectangles and the associated settlement pattern is scattered rather than linear.

## ESTATES IN THE PARISH OF GAIRLOCH

The Gruinard Estate, in the northern part of Gairloch, extends from Drumchork, immediately south-east of Aultbea, northwards and eastwards to the Little Gruinard River which forms the parish boundary with Lochbroom [Fig. 7.2]. It was in the possession of the Mackenzies of Gruinard before 1655 but was bought by Henry Davidson of Tulloch, near Dingwall, in 1795 (see Bangor-Jones, this volume), and the crofts were created during Davidson's ownership. In 1835, it was sold to a wealthy Englishman, Meyrick Bankes (Dixon [1886] 1974. 60), whose family held it till the first decade of the 20th century, expanding the estate by the purchase of Letterewe also in 1835. Bankes cleared Little Gruinard and Badantsluig (NG 935906) after 1835 to form a sheep farm and reduced the

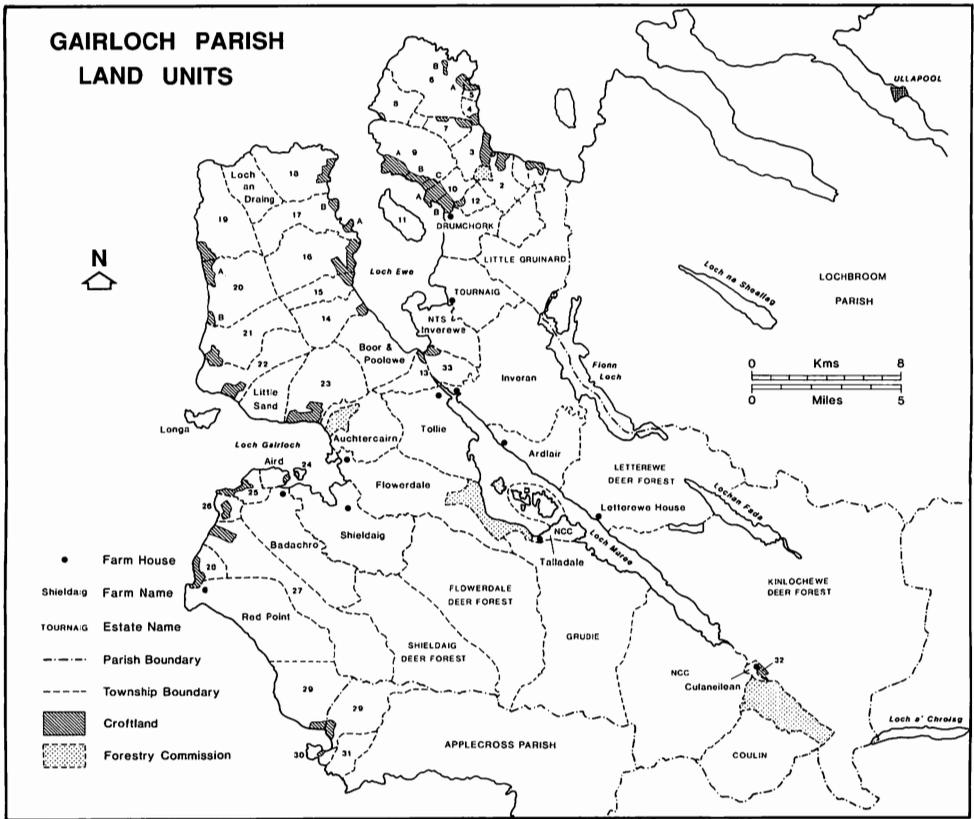


Fig. 7.2 Gairloch Parish, Land Units, 1981.

The crofting townships (with crofts shaded and common grazings given in hectares) are the dominant agricultural units numerically. Five farms are also worked, two small estates are mostly used for sporting purposes, there are Forestry Commission plantations, four deer forests and the National Trust area which includes Inverewe Gardens. (1 acre = 0.4047 hectares).

TOWNSHIP		No. OF CROFTS	COMMON GRAZING (Area in Hectares)
1	First and Second Coast	7	169
2	Sand	11	293
3	Laide	15	279
4	Udrigle	3	98
5	North Udrigle	1	51
6A	Mellon Udrigle	8	
6B	Opinan	7	1036
7	Achgarve	8	295
8	Slaggan	1	406
9A	Mellon Charles	44	
9B	Ormiscaig	15	
9C	Buainaluib, Aird	9	988
10A	Culconich, Tignafiline	9	
10B	Aultbea	9	250

11	Isle Ewe	11	?
12	Badfearn	4	109
13	Pool Crofts	10	299
14	Naust	11	575
15	Braes	8	458
16	Midtown	28	891
17A	Coast of Inverasdale	18	
17B	Mellangaun	7	868
18	Cove	15	1014
19	Melvaig	28	1295
20A	Aultgrishan	23	
20B	Allt am Phadruig	5	1189
21	North Erradale	22	944
22	Big Sand	33	741
23	Strath	47	1065
24	Eilean Horrisdale	5	?
25	Port Henderson	21	87
26	Opinan	13	129
27	South Erradale	17	2285
28	Red Point	7	195
29	Lower Diabeg	23	1214
30	Arrat	2	?
31	Upper Diabeg	?	277
32	Incheril	7	?
33	Londubh	14	118

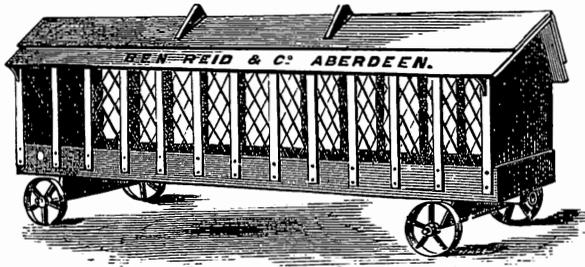
number of crofters in Sand by increasing the number of crofts in First and Second Coast but also added Beinn a' Chaisgein (NG 965822), the sheiling ground of Sand and First and Second Coast, to the sheep farm (*Royal Comm.* 1884. para. 1861). Crofters at Drumchork, where he built his lodge in 1881 were also evicted: Drumchork had a farm of 100 acres as early as 1851 sharing the land with crofters, but the crofters were cleared and their land 'added to a sheep farm' (*Census* 1861; *Royal Comm.* 1884. paras 1862, 1881). In North Gairloch in 1888, there were 91 crofts whose rents were reduced by 37 per cent, and 78 per cent of the rent arrears were cancelled during the Fair Rents exercise, not uncommon percentages (*Northern Chronicle* 13 June 1888). Bankes did, however, make the crofters drain their land and built piers to assist the fishermen (*Royal Comm.* 1884. para 1862).

The remainder or the parish, with an exclave north-west of Aultbea consisting of the present crofting townships of Buailnaluib, Ormiscaig and Mellon Charles and Isle Ewe, has been held by the Mackenzies of Gairloch for some five centuries, though death duties have forced sales of land since the 1950s. Their title to Gairloch goes back to a protocol of 1494 (Dixon *ibid.* 60), which granted 'the landis of Gerloch lyande betwix the watteris callyde Innerew and Torvedene within the Shireffdom of Innerness' — from the River Ewe and Loch Maree to Loch Torridon — to which was added Mellon, half of Isle Ewe and fishing rights on the left bank of the River Ewe in 1671. The Kinlochewe Estate, at the eastern end of the parish, was purchased in 1743 (*ibid.*). The Kernsary estate, mainly a sheep farm,

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was purchased from Mackenzie of Seaforth in 1844, partly to add the fishing rights on the right bank of the River Ewe. Inverewe and Tournaig were bought from Mackenzie of Coul in 1862 for Osgood Mackenzie, later the creator of Inverewe Gardens and half-brother of Sir Kenneth Mackenzie of Gairloch, from whom the part of Kernsary adjacent to Inverewe was purchased (also for Osgood Mackenzie) in 1862; Kernsary was cleared of sheep a few years later. Letterewe on the north side of Loch Maree was a wadset acquired by the Mackenzies of Gairloch in 1696 and exchanged in the same year for Wester Logie or Conon in Easter Ross with an uncle, the first Mackenzie of Letterewe: this excambion gave the Mackenzies of Gairloch a base in Easter Ross which became their principal residence (*ibid.* 62). The Gairloch Estate now consists of the area from Strath township (immediately north-west of Gairloch village), to Talladale on the south side of Loch Maree and southwards to the Torridon-Gairloch boundary north of Diabeg. The only other Highland estates which have retained substantial lands for such a long period are the estates of the Duke of Argyll and those of Lord Macdonald of Sleat and MacLeod of Dunvegan in Skye.

## **CROFTING ON THE GAIRLOCH ESTATE**

In addition to ancestral ownership, the circumstances in which the crofts were created on the Mackenzies of Gairloch Estate and the ideas on which they were established were decidedly unusual: the aim was not specifically to retain labour for kelp-making or fishing as on most other crofting estates, but to improve agriculture and housing. This was quite unlike the creation of the Argyll crofts, where the crofting system was first developed in Iona and Tiree in 1801 and 1802, under clear instructions from the Duke that crofts were to be created for the accommodation of people 'who are to derive their subsistence from sources other than the produce of the land' (Cregeen 1964. 48, 51, 136-7, 199). Furthermore, the creation of the crofts in Gairloch was carried out in 1845, later than elsewhere in most of the Highlands and Islands.

### **The Beginnings of Agricultural Change**

The *Military Survey*, or Roy's Map, provides a view of the landscape of Gairloch ca. 1750, with clustered settlements at the edge of unenclosed parcels of arable land on farms held by tacksmen or leaseholders and their sub-tenants in a sparsely settled area. The only sign of improvement is in the area immediately surrounding Flowerdale House, the present mansion of the Mackenzies of Gairloch, where building was begun in 1738 by Sir Alexander Mackenzie, the second baronet, close by the site of the earlier Tigh Dige or moated house. He also built Conon House in 1758 (Dixon *ibid.* 102; Byam Shaw 1988. 64). During Sir Hector Mackenzie, the fourth baronet's tenure, the first sheep farm in Gairloch parish was created before 1810 on

the Seaforth Letterewe Estate, and others followed around Kinlochewe (Dixon *ibid.* 137). In this period, the *Old Statistical Account* states that the oat crop only provided meal for seven to eight months of the year, but emphasised the role of the cod and herring fisheries with 30,000 to 40,000 cod annually exported (McIntosh 1792. 89-93). In 1815, portions of the lands of South Erradale and Ardrisaig were cut off from these farms and let to 22 tenants to form a fishing village at Port Henderson, which later became a crofting township. In the same year, small tenants replaced tacksmen at Mellon Charles and cottars were added: on some of the farms, tenants were bound to have subtenants, in reality cottars, to complete the crews of the cod fishing boats (Mackenzie 1885. 1-11).

The fifth baronet, Sir Francis Mackenzie, who succeeded to the estate in 1826, had previously improved Isle Ewe after the small tenants had been removed — apparently the first attempt at agricultural improvement on the estate (Byam Shaw 1988. 216, 226). The author of the *New Statistical Account* pointed out the urgent need for road construction to facilitate agricultural improvement: ‘without public roads, no regular improvement can be carried out in this part of the Highlands’ (Russell 1836. 99). But Sir Francis was also the author of *Hints for the use of Highland Tenants and Cottagers: by a Proprietor*, published in 1838 in Gaelic and English. In the introduction, he explains:

that this treatise . . . is chiefly intended for the benefit of you, my Cottar Tenants . . . it would be well were you supplied with a small book of reference to which recourse could be had in your domestic economy and agricultural occupations . . . Considering the wretched hovels which many of you inhabit, it would be absurd to hope for substituting at once the beautiful Swiss or English cottages or require from you the delightful cleanliness of a Dutch Boor. All I recommend for the present is some little improvement on the present system. In a dwellinghouse, the porch comes first under consideration; for I must protest against human beings and cattle entering together, in your present fashion at the same doorway.

He also refers to ‘smocky dens with a hole in the roof with sometimes an old creel stuck in it in imitation of a chimney’. Besides a new house with a porch, kitchen and bedroom, he recommended a garden of a quarter of an acre, with fruit trees, the reduction of the barley crop (used for distilling) and the substitution of oats, clover and turnips : draining and trenching the land with the spade, but also the use of ploughs and carts and of liquid manure (Mackenzie 1838. 29, 33, 50, 51-8, 118-20) [Fig. 7.3a/b].

Sir Francis also urged consideration before entering early into marriage, ‘bringing labourers into a world already overstocked, taking employment and food from those who already have not enough’. Here he was referring to existing congestion on the estate, for the population of Gairloch had increased from 1,437 in 1801 to 4,445 in 1831, an increase of 309 per cent.

He continued by saying: ‘I confess that you, my countrymen, are in almost everything . . . behind the inhabitants of those countries which I am acquainted . . . I wish to see a change for the better’ (*ibid.* 268-70). He

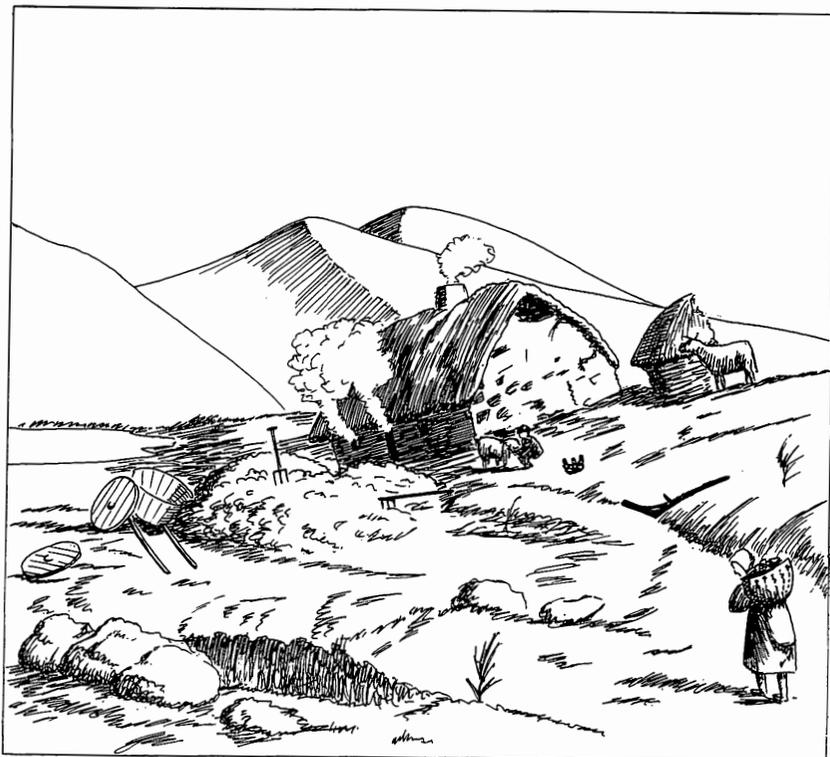
had travelled in England, Holland, Switzerland and Brittany, where his son by a second marriage, Osgood Mackenzie, later of Inverewe, was born in 1842. Sir Francis died in 1843, having in 1841 given the management of the Gairloch estate to his younger brother, Dr John Mackenzie, Doctor of Medicine, who was factor for the estates of Redcastle and Tarradale in Easter Ross and tenant of the farm of Kinellan, on the western edge of Strathpeffer and thus an experienced factor and farmer (Byam Shaw 1988. 192-3 et seq.).

It seems likely that these ideas broadly formed the basis for the subsequent plan for the conversion of the Gairloch small tenant farms into crofts, but in 1835 Dr Mackenzie had investigated a system of small-holder cultivation in Belgium. He published his findings in 1842 in a sixteen-page pamphlet entitled *The Improvement of Highland Crofts* in which 'the necessity of improving the cultivation by crofters by the adoption of Flemish husbandry' was urged: the keystone of this type of husbandry 'being feeding the cows indoors during the whole year and collecting the liquid manure in proper vessels and applying it immediately to the land wherever it is most required'. Dr Mackenzie had also visited an estate on the South Downs near Eastbourne where some 400 tenants practised the system, cultivating holdings of three to six acres solely by the spade on thin, poor soils. In this pamphlet, he also gave his views on 'the advantages offered by the spade husbandry over the present Highland cottar system' adding that Highland estate proprietors should 'think no more of clearing their properties of those unfortunate neglected, poor and ignorant, yet warm hearted creatures than if they were a drove of sheep ordered off to the Falkirk Market' (Mackenzie 1842. 3). This last advice was diametrically opposed to the conclusions of the author of the *New Statistical Account of Gairloch*, 1838, who stated that 'a government grant to convey one-third of the people to Upper Canada would be most desirable': some 150 persons had already emigrated from the parish between 1831 and 1841 (Russell 1836. 99; *Census* 1841).

Dr Mackenzie also cited a 'more rational plan' practised by Mr Blacker of Armagh in Ulster who used 'agricultural teachers' to instruct the small tenants and claimed this method was successful in increasing the yield of the land. Referring in the pamphlet to his brother's book *Hints for the Use of Highland Tenants and Cottagers*, he clearly doubted whether 'one single individual has altered his course a hairbreadth' and reckoned that 'a tenant who is to live by his land should only have as much as he can cultivate with the spade . . . and enable them not only to live well by the land, but also to pay their rents punctually and without difficulty' (Mackenzie 1842. 5-6).

### **Planning for a Crofting Economy**

He then set out his plan for the Gairloch estate: *firstly*, to create crofts of approximately four to five acres 'which a man and his family, if industrious, can properly cultivate with the spade alone without aid from a horse, but



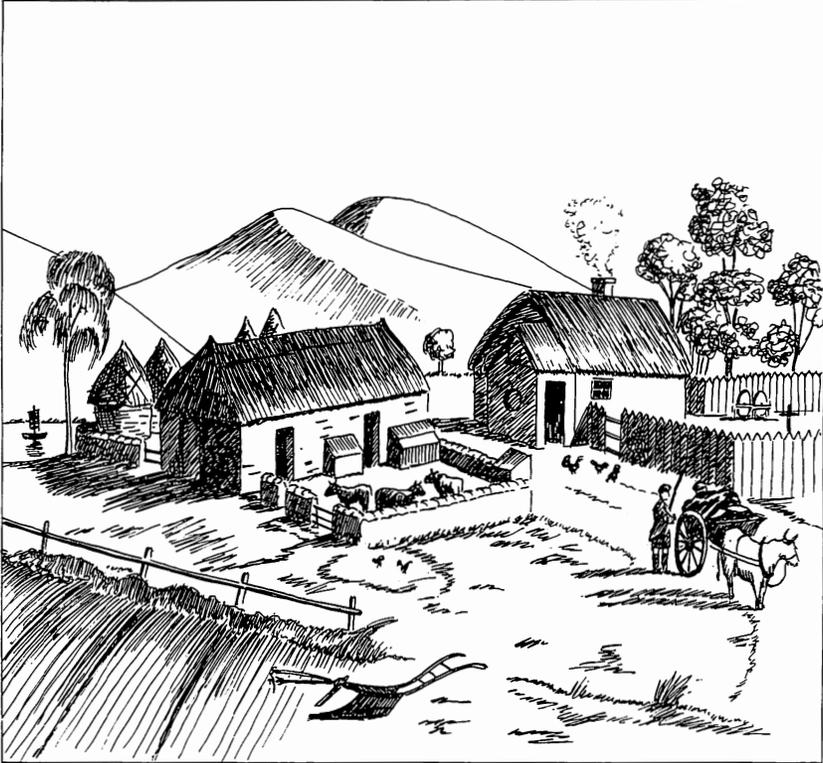
*The old Highland Dwelling House*

## OLD TIMES SEANN THIMEAN

Fig. 7.3 (a) *Seann Thimean, Old Times*. The illustrations in Sir Francis MacKenzie's *Hints . . . for Tenants . . .* reflect his view of what was no longer acceptable. Out would go the cas-chrom, the back creel, the solid-wheeled cart, unprotected stacks, open fields, outdoor milking; also the single-entrance, reeking and crumbling byre-dwelling with a midden outside the door, 1838.

with occasional aid from his cows in carting out dung and carting home crop'; *secondly* 'to appoint a well-educated agriculturalist, whose whole time will be devoted to instructing a certain number of cottars in the most approved methods of growing all kinds of produce' . . . and *thirdly*, he 'was quite aware that there are difficulties to overcome' . . . but thought that 'they were by no means so serious as they appear at a distance' (ibid. 6).

The Trustees and Tutors Nominate for the heir to the estate, Sir Kenneth Mackenzie, were his stepmother, Dame Mary Hanbury or Mackenzie and Thomas Mackenzie of Ord; and the estate was under entail. Dr John



*House and Steading of Plan I.*

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## NEW TIMES UIR THIMEAN

*Fig. 7.3 (b) Uir Thimean, New Times.* Improvement to the old Highland house would bring a separate dwelling and byre, an implement store, enclosed garden, stackyard and stockyard, (partly-) enclosed fields, trees, a new horse-drawn plough, spoke-wheeled carts, and hens industriously pecking around the steading. Figs 7.3 (a) + (b) are from Sir Francis MacKenzie's *Hints for the use of Highland Tenants and Cottagers by a Proprietor*, 1838.

Mackenzie, as Factor, and because he was the next substitute heir after his nephews, the children of his deceased brother, declined to accept appointment as a trustee. In order to grant leases of the farms, nearly all of which were due to expire in 1846, as the heir was a pupil and would not succeed until 1853, the Trustees had to petition the Court of Session on 25th June, 1844 for authority to grant new leases (*Petition: CS/235/M/64/8*). Whereas the heir in possession could grant leases of nineteen years duration in terms of the entail, the Tutors could not grant leases beyond the extent of their office. Not only did the trustees request authority to deal with farms

and cottar lots or small tenants' holdings but they stated that 'the estate contained a very large cottar population, occupying land from year to year in "runrig" and in other terms equally adverse to the interests of both landlord and tenant'.

Dr Mackenzie advised that leases of ten years were required for what he called the 'cottar lots', that is, the new crofts about to be created: it is certain that Dr Mackenzie had a fairly free hand in running the estate during the minority, as his sister-in-law was English and not fully conversant with estate conditions, and the other trustee never visited Gairloch.

In a *Report to the Tutors* presented as an Appendix to the Petition, George Campbell Smith of Banff, an experienced land surveyor who carried out surveys of estates in the Northern Highlands from 1828-1862, including a survey and sub-division of a portion of the Gairloch estate near Flowerdale in 1840, stated that:

many hundreds of acres of fine soil, now lying waste, might profitably be reclaimed and made available to the wants of the poor cottar population . . . The condition of these poor people would be very much improved were they to obtain leases of their crofts, on condition of building better houses, and draining, liming, and cultivating the whole in a proper manner.

Leases were required to encourage them to improve their lots. The previous Laird had built one or two 'good houses' in different parts of the estate: granting of leases would encourage completion of his plan. At present, the proprietor obtains 'almost nothing; and often he gives rather than receives': urgent action was required to create crofts. Regarding the larger grazings and sheep walks, Campbell Smith advocated the granting of improving leases of seven to ten years. Dr Mackenzie entirely concurred (*Report: CS/235/M/64/8* — Appendix). Campbell Smith had previously been engaged to make a full survey of the small tenant farms which he began in March 1844: the final cost was £537.4.9 (Byam Shaw 1988. 259).

### **Implementation: Joint-Tenant Farms to Individual Crofts**

Campbell Smith's manuscript plans [Fig. 7.4] bound as *The Atlas of the Townships of Gairloch, 1848*, show the existing arable land in runrig and the houses, outbuildings and stockyards of the tenants. Superimposed on the existing tenant farms, they also show the new lots or crofts within straightened township boundaries, with the acreages of 'old arable' and pasture inscribed on each numbered croft. The plans are in colour and are quite the finest plans of any crofting estate. The cottars' houses are also recognisable without stack yards or outbuildings. The surveyor appears to have laid out the crofts, but Dr Mackenzie may well have chosen the tenants for he states that 'a lot of from two to five acres [was] given to every family in the rental book, and to many others I found jammed in with their parents, unnoticed as tenants' . . . He also states that 'first choice was given sometimes to the crofters who had for years been most punctual in paying rent, and when

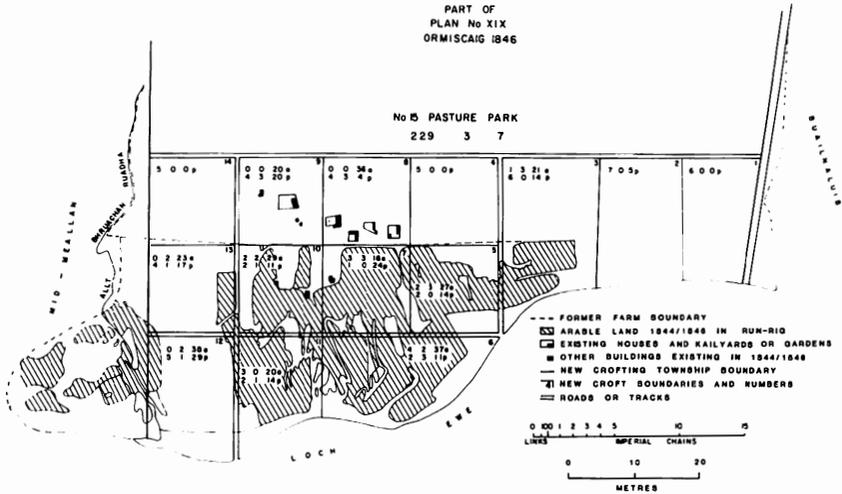


Fig. 7.4 Part of Plan No. XIX, Ormiscaig, Gairloch.

This illustration, redrawn from George Campbell-Smith's estate plan, clearly shows an example of the transition from small tenant farm to crofting township. The existing small tenant farm had irregular boundaries and the five small tenants (with houses, outbuildings and stackyards in the linear cluster) shared the arable land in scattered plots or rigs in equal proportions as each paid one-fifth of the rent of the farm.

The new crofts were superimposed on the existing layout and the plan gives both the extent of arable land (e.g. for Croft 7: 3 acres, 3 roods and 16 poles) and the extent of pasture (1 acre and 24 poles). Six crofters had no arable land on their new holding and would have to reclaim it, but sub-tenants and sons of tenants were probably thankful to be allocated a croft, even if it was on pasture land. The new crofters were bound to build a new house on these crofts [see Fig. 7.11]. From Cambell Smith, G. *Atlas of the Townships of Gairloch* 1848. Gairloch and Conon Archives.

these [few] were served, the others drew lots for their choice' (Byam Shaw 1988. 246-48). In fact, at Ormiscaig, a comparison of Fig. 7.4 and Fig. 7.5 shows that all the existing five tenants, four of them in arrears, were allocated the best five new crofts on which there was over 50 per cent of existing arable land. One of the four cottars was allocated croft number 8 in Ormiscaig, a moorland croft with no arable land on it and another obtained a croft in the adjacent township of Buailnaluib.

Fourteen crofts were created in Ormiscaig, six on improvable moorland with no existing arable land. Fig. 7.5 shows where the new tenants came from: in the rent ledger for the years 1845-1853, under the croft number, is a pencil note in Dr Mackenzie's handwriting giving the previous location and status of the new tenant. For example, in Ormiscaig, tenant number 2 in the pre-crofting rental (*Rental 1843: SRO SC 25/44/4*, Appendix 2, 54) received croft number 6 and the new tenant of croft number 2 is entered as s/t Altgrishan, sub-tenant or more properly cottar, Altgrishan (NG 743855). Fig. 7.6 shows the spatial moves made by the tenants of the three townships of Mellon Charles, Ormiscaig and Buailnaluib some of whom moved considerable distances. Of the 364 small tenants on the farms of the Gairloch

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**ORMISCAIG, GAIRLOCH:  
TENANTS 1843 AND CROFTERS 1845**

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TENANT 1843	CROFT NUMBER AND TENANT 1845 (Nov 15)	PREVIOUS LOCATIONS
	1. Mo McLennan	Isle of Ewe*
	2. Ken Urquhart	Altgrishan*
	3. Murdo McKenzie	Melvaig*
	4. [Vacant]	
John McIver (deceased before Nov 15 1845)	5. Widow McIver	Ormiscaig
John MacGregor	6. John McGregor	Ormiscaig
Hector McGregor	7. Hector McGregor	Ormiscaig
	8. Ken McDonald	Ormiscaig*
	9. Alex McPherson	Cove
Alex Cameron	10. Alex Cameron	Ormiscaig
Rodk Chisholm	11. Rodk Chisholm	Ormiscaig
	12. Dun McDonald	Cove*
	13. Hector McKenzie (1846)	Loch an Draing
	14. [Vacant]	

(\*Subtenant)

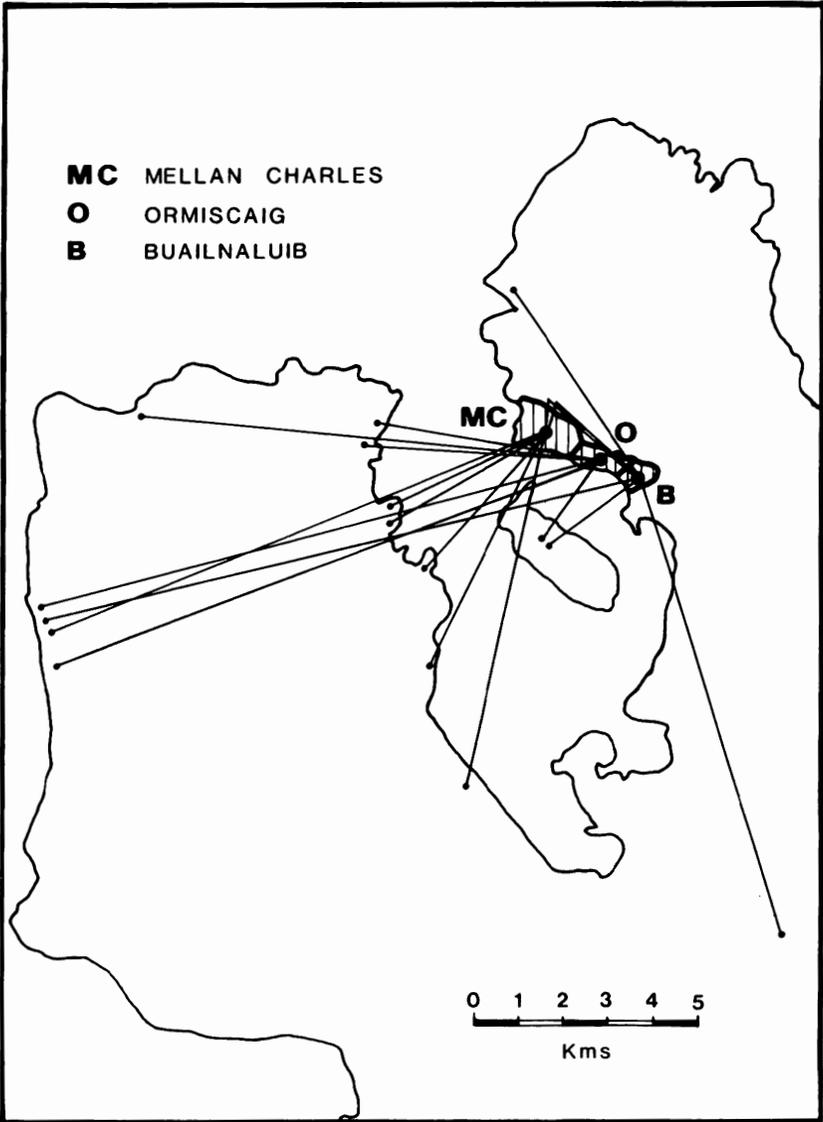
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*Fig. 7.5 From Rental of the Estate of Gairloch and Conon, for Crop and year Eighteen Hundred and forty three, Testament Dative and Inventory Sir Alexander MacKenzie, registered 20 March 1844, Dingwall Sheriff Court Commissary Record, SRO SC 25/44/4. Appendix II. 54; Ledger: Rental of Gairloch, 15 November 1845 to 24 May 1853. Gairloch and Conon Archives.*

Estate in 1843, 74% were allocated crofts on the farm where they had previously resided and 94 (or 26%) moved to crofts on other farms. An additional 98 tenants were added to the rental, 34 of whom were sons of small tenants, 30 were cottars who remained on the same farm and 34 were cottars who obtained crofts in other townships. Thus, of 462 new crofters, 72% were allocated crofts on the farm where they had previously resided, and 28% had to move to new locations on other farms (Caird 1987. 73).

The reason why some tenants of the new crofts had to move is not documented, but all the new crofting townships had a larger number of crofting tenants than the number of small tenants on the pre-existing farms, some of which were very overcrowded, so some movement was inevitable. But this scheme of creating crofts meant that Campbell Smith's 'many hundreds of acres of *fine* soil, now lying waste' (the non-arable parts of the new crofts), could be reclaimed. Cottars and sons of tenants in the overcrowded small tenant farms would have been glad to obtain a croft anywhere, even if it was on unimproved land.

The new crofting townships were mostly created out of former small tenant farms, but three additional townships were also laid out [Fig. 7.2]: Altanphadruig (NG 742832) and Upper Diabeg (NG 812601), both



*Fig. 7.6* Movement of Tenants to Mellan Charles, Ormiscaig and Buailnaluib, Gairloch. In Gairloch there was considerable movement of tenants and their families to new crofting townships where crofts were created to absorb sub-tenants or cottars and sons of tenants. This diagram shows the pattern of movement to three crofting townships. From *Rental of the Estate of Gairloch and Conon, for Crop and year Eighteen Hundred and forty three* SRO SC 25/44/4: Ledger, Rental of Gairloch, 15 November 1845 to 24 May 1853. Gairloch and Conon Archives.

moorland settlements on former grazing land, and Opinan (NG 745725) on part of the former arable land of South Erradale. In this process of reorganising the estate, Port Lair (NG 801577) was made into a small farm and the Tollie crofts with seven families (NG 865786) were cleared, as were six crofters from Kernsary (NG 893794) in 1848 when their crofts were added to Inveran Farm (NG 873787), which was subsequently merged with the farm of Kernsary in 1852 (*Rental* 1845-52).

## Improving the Land

After the crofts were allocated, according to Alexander Mackenzie, author of *The Highland Clearances* and a native of Gairloch, the crofters were obliged to trench and drain their new holdings and Dr Mackenzie insisted that they followed 'specified rotations of crops and sown grasses, clover and rye grass, turnips, cabbages and carrots, Jerusalem artichokes and numerous other vegetables of which they had never heard before so as to enable them to feed their cattle indoors and to have plenty of green vegetables for their own consumption' (*Royal Comm. Report* 1893. 153). They were also obliged to build houses on their new crofts. But the agricultural instructor was not appointed, probably because the trustees felt that the estate could not afford to make the appointment: the late Sir Francis had died heavily in debt (Byam Shaw 1988. 229, 248-9, 262-4).

In 1847, after the crofts were created, the potato blight struck Gairloch. The estate borrowed £10,000 under the Drainage Act, part of which was used 'to guarantee that no one on the estate would be allowed to starve' (Mackenzie [1921] 1950. 37), but most of it was used to pay the new crofters to drain and reclaim their own holdings. Alexander Mackenzie stated that he was obliged to work on his father's croft at North Erradale digging drains and removing stones: he was probably nine or ten years old at the time (*Royal Comm. Report* 1893. 152). At Ormiskaig £222.14.5½ was paid out to the crofter tenants for drainage and probably also for reclamation work, sums ranging from £3.2.1 to the tenant of croft 3, to £32.2.14 to the tenant of 14 who had been allocated a bare moor croft. Over the whole estate, the maximum sum paid to a crofter was £33.17.0 in one of the new moorland crofts at Altgrishan and the minimum sum of 8s 2d to a crofter in Strath. In all, £5,590.6.6 was expended, and the total expenditure on the combined estate of Gairloch and Conon was £8,693 (*Drainage Act* 1850). The tenants who had received payments were charged 6.5% interest on the sum which was added to their rent and was still being charged in 1885. In 1850, work was made available for the completion of the Loch Maree road, partly funded by the Government, and earnings from employment on the road helped the new crofters to recover from the famine. The impact of reclamation was reflected in the rents: when the crofts at Ormiskaig were let in 1845, the total rental increased from £32 to £35.11.0, was slightly reduced to £35.7.10 in 1864, and increased again to £44.18.0 by 1883. On the other hand, the Fair Rents Commissioners reduced the total rent to

£32.19.0 in 1888 to less than the rents charged in 1845 when the crofts were created; and they cancelled 71% of the accumulated arrears of £125.1.1, or almost three years' rents, including those of two more crofts which were added to Ormiscaig before 1875 (*Northern Chronicle*, 13 June 1888).

### Expansion, Regression and Amalgamation

What then was the effect of the plan for the creation of crofts in order to improve the small-holders conditions in Gairloch? On 30th October 1844, the *Inverness Courier* reported that 'Dr. Mackenzie is about to confer on the tenants of Gairloch the benefits of the allotment system with crofts of from 2 to 4 acres', and that he had visited the Eastbourne estate where the system had been adopted. The reporter doubted that 'our inferior soils and climate will suit as well as the rich lands of Sussex', but thought the experiment was 'at least worth a trial' (*Inverness Courier Index*, 30 October 1844). On 19 September 1850, a representative of the same newspaper who visited Gairloch, thought it 'little less than an entire failure, but the housing had improved' and neither 'profitable to the estate — nor the crofters' (*ibid.* 19 September 1850; Byam Shaw 1988. 267-70). Evander MacIver, the Scourie Division factor of the Sutherland estate agreed, and added that there was much dissatisfaction among the crofters. 'They don't go along with Dr McKenzie in his views . . . The published accounts by Dr Mackenzie's partisans have been grossly exaggerated' (*Sutherland Papers: NLS Dep.* 313/1392).

Yet a comparison of Figs. 7.7-7.10 shows that the arable land increased from the 20.8 acres recorded on Campbell Smith's plan of Ormiscaig in 1844, to 50 acres in 1875 (*Ordnance Survey Book of Reference: Cameron* 1876); and it was further increased by 1902. From the map of land use in 1981 [Fig. 7.11], it is evident that some areas which were moorland in 1844 [Fig. 7.7], and reclaimed after the crofts were laid out, are still cultivated — although much less overall of the crofting township lands are now cultivated than was the case in 1844. On the other hand, Figs. 7.11 and 7.12 also show that only three of the 16 tenants of Ormiscaig worked their crofts in 1981, although one of them, a part-time crofter, had a unit comprising four crofts. Indeed, most of the land in Ormiscaig is used by tenants of neighbouring townships. Clearly, a township of 16 crofts with 15 tenants and only three effective units worked within the township does not accord with the *Report and Recommendations of the Commissioners of Enquiry into the Condition of Crofters and Cottars in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* of 1884. Nor, within the wider context of all the crofting townships of North Gairloch in 1981, do 197 crofts with 148 tenants and only 53 effective units (35 with cereal or hay crops, 23 with cattle and sheep, 25 with sheep only) — where in addition, there are but 60 active crofters, only 7 of them full-time and 27 over 65 years of age, out of a total male population over 14 years of age of 137 (total population, 298) [Fig. 7.12].

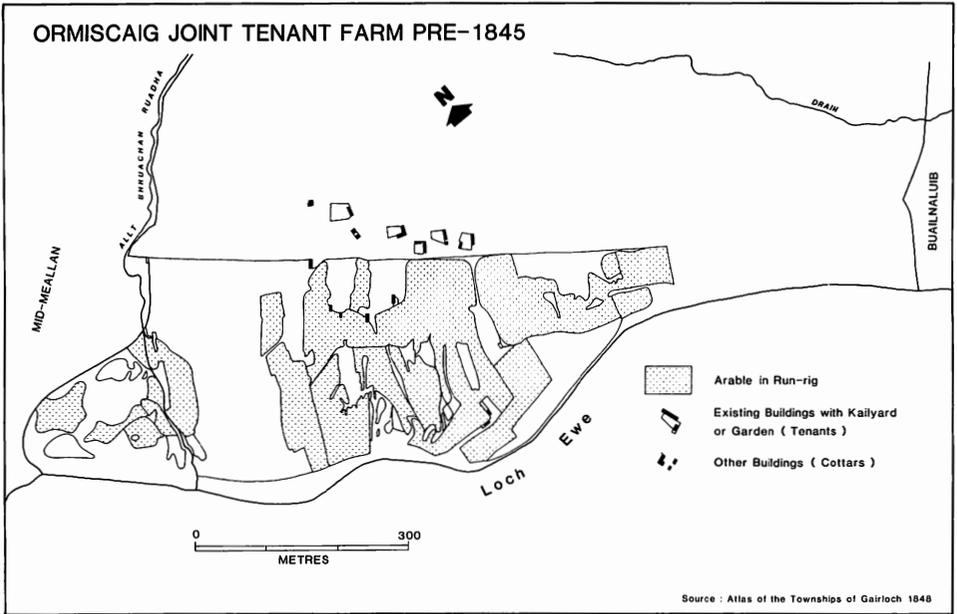


Fig. 7.7

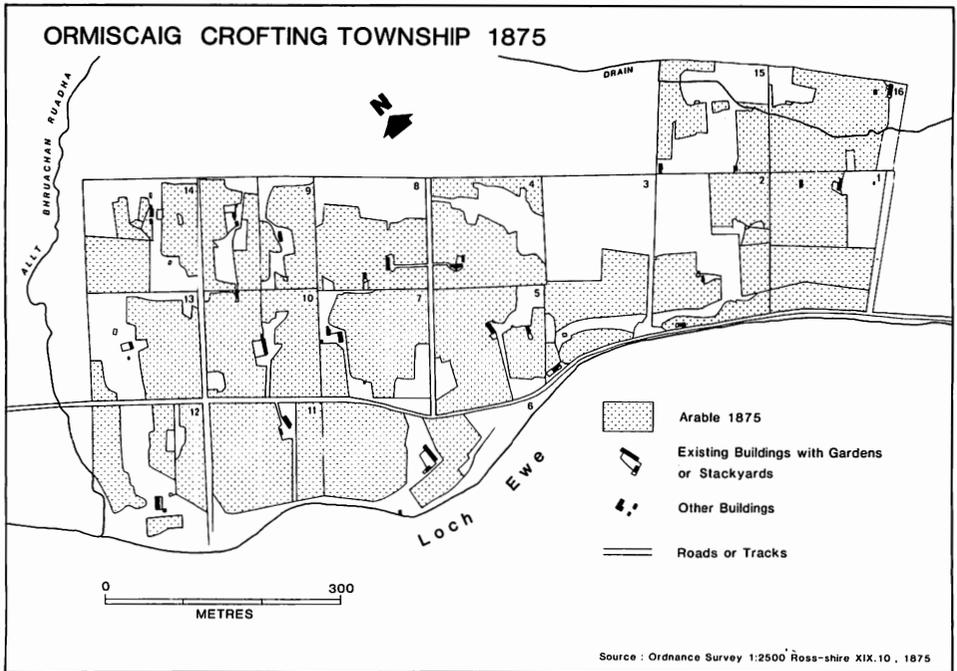


Fig. 7.9

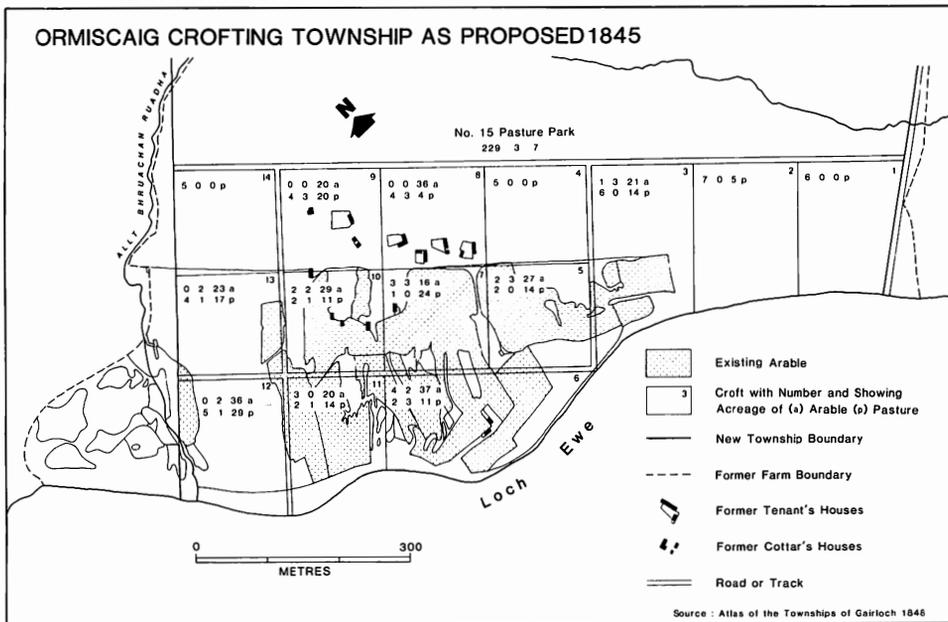


Fig. 7.8

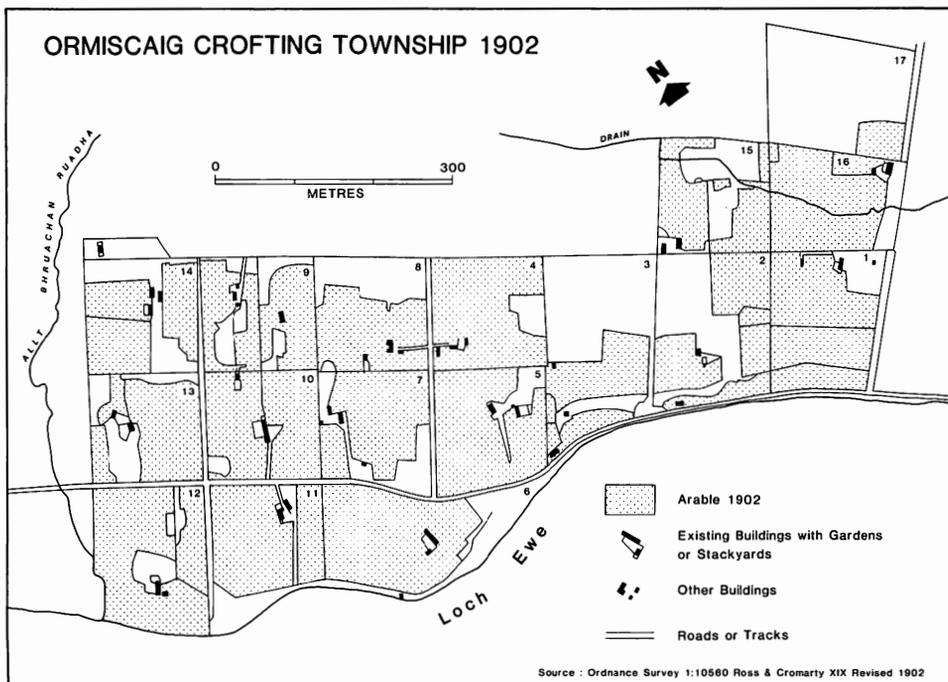


Fig. 7.10

*Figs. 7.7-7.10* The evolution of Ormiscaig.

Two elements of the evolution of Ormiscaig are illustrated in these diagrams. Before 1845 [Fig. 7.7] the farms have five joint tenants sharing the arable land in periodic runrig, that is reallocating the rigs either annually, biennially or triennially. In 1845 [Fig. 7.8] this is transformed by the division of the farm into 14 square or rectangular crofts, giving each crofting tenant a discrete and permanent plot of land on which he had to build a new house.

The extent of the arable land before 1845 is identical in Figs. 7.7 and 7.8, but in Fig. 7.9 (Ormiscaig in 1875), much land has been reclaimed and two crofts, numbers 15 and 16, have been added to the township from the moorland common grazing. By 1902 [Fig. 7.10], further land has been reclaimed.

Comparison of Figs. 7.7 and 7.10 with Fig. 7.11 demonstrates that the cultivated land in 1981 is less than the land cultivated immediately before the creation of the crofts in 1845 and the arable area in 1902.

Figs. 7.7, 7.8 from the *Atlas of the Townships of Gairloch*, 1847; Fig. 7.9 from *O.S. 1:2500 Ross-shire XIX. 10*, 1875; Fig. 7.10 from *O.S. 1:10560 Ross & Cromarty XIX Revised*, 1902.

In a note of dissent to the 1893 Report, however, one of the commissioners, Sir Kenneth S. Mackenzie of Gairloch, had advanced the view that ‘as speedily as proper considerations for the crofters will permit, encouragement should be given to the gradual replacement of the crofting system by one of small farms . . . and, with these, a few labourers’ crofts of just sufficient size to provide the occupants with milk and potatoes’ (Mackenzie [1892] 1893. Appendix 115-6).

Although certainly not exactly what Sir Kenneth desired to encourage, a type of small farm has, in fact, evolved in Gairloch (as in most other crofting communities), made up of effective units comprising scattered collections of crofts, tenanted and sublet from other tenants as depicted at Ormiscaig for 1981 [Fig. 7.11].

## CONCLUSION

In retrospect, on an ancestral estate where relationships between the landowner and his people were different from those on most of the crofting estates with new Lowland or English proprietors, Sir Francis Mackenzie’s recommendations for the improvement of the conditions of life of his small tenants and cottars seem so improbable as to be beyond achievement in the mid-19th century — even if most croft houses nowadays far exceed his recommendations. Dr. John Mackenzie’s small allotments, replacing a very traditional pre-improvement agriculture by a system of spade cultivation and stall-fed cattle, also seem quite improbable. In 1856, Dr. Mackenzie resigned his Factorship and the crofters returned to their traditional agricultural ways, but much land had been and was to be reclaimed, the arable area increased and the standard of housing improved with rebuilding on the new crofts.

In the context of a rising population in Gairloch (a three and a half fold increase between 1801 and 1851), of heavy pressure on land which never produced the food supply required and an unwillingness on the part of the proprietors to promote emigration, what alternatives were available? The

EFFECTIVE CROFTING UNITS AND LAND USE

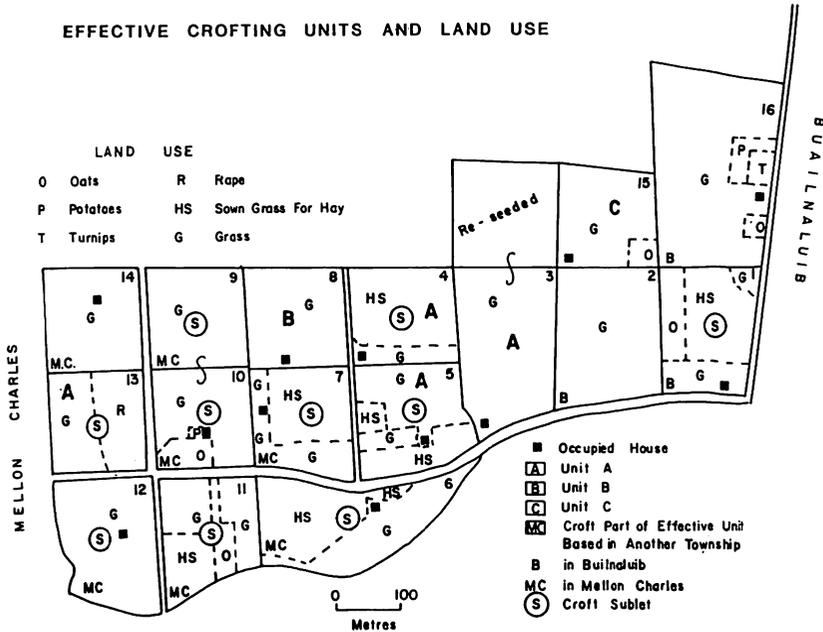


Fig. 7.11 Ormiskaig, Gairloch Parish, 1981: Effective Units and Land Use.

This illustration shows both land units and land use in 1981. The 16 crofts were held by 15 tenants but only 6 crofts were worked by residents in the township of Ormiskaig — in one unit of four crofts and two units of one croft. The remainder of the crofts were tenanted by, or sublet to, residents of the neighbouring townships of Mellon Charles and Buailnaluib.

The land use could not be said to be intensive with 6 of the 16 crofts used only for grazing. There were four small patches of oats and six plots of hay, two potato plots and one patch of turnips on the other crofts, with the balance in grazing. Only one crofter had reclaimed and reseeded an area approximately the same size as the average croft in Ormiskaig. This was taken from the moorland common grazing adjacent to his croft, and in so doing enlarged his croft and his agricultural unit. (Data collected by J. B. Caird and Second Year Geography Students, 1981).

few sheep farms might have been converted to crofting townships, but estate income would have declined for the farms were more highly rented than the crofts: and after 1870, when sheep became much less profitable, clearance of crofters to expand the deer forests in order to increase estate income from shooting lets would have been unthinkable on an ancestral estate. The smallness of the crofts reflected Dr. Mackenzie's beliefs, and in any case there was insufficient reclaimable land on the estate to create more substantial units for the very large population in the 1840s. Even had there been resources available to employ at least three agricultural instructors, it is doubtful whether they would have succeeded in making the crofters

operate the agricultural system prescribed by Dr. John Mackenzie, the Factor.

In the 1990s, most of the Gairloch coastal croftland might seem an early candidate for withdrawal from agriculture in an era of agricultural over-production in Western Europe, and the coast is not the most economic place for afforestation. Homes for indigenous residents, incomers and second home owners are already possible and established on crofts and on other estate land. But the trend seems established for multiple, if not consolidated agricultural units to form small scale, part-time units or larger full-time units, a few of small farm size, and for much croft land to remain as sheep grazing.

Sir Kenneth Mackenzie's vision of small farms and small part-time crofts with another salaried or wage earning occupation, rather than the intensive spade-cultivated units envisaged by his father and uncle, is, in the last analysis, the more likely future not only in Gairloch but throughout the crofting area in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.

## LAND USE IN NORTH GAIRLOCH, 1981

	AGRICULTURE														
	Registered crofts		Tenancies	Effective Units	Average No. of Breeding cows per effective unit	Av. No. of sheep per effective unit	Effective units with cultivation	Units with cattle and sheep	Units with sheep only	Units not sublet with no activity	Full-time crofter	Crofter with regular employment	Crofter with occasional employment	Non-crofting	Crofter over 65
<b>SECOND COAST</b>	11	5	3	0	179	2	0	3	1	0	1	0	2	3	
<b>FIRST COAST</b>	8	1	1	3	15	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	
<b>SAND</b>	16	11	9	1.6	33	6	4	2	1	0	2	0	3	6	
<b>LAIDE</b>	20	16	7	2.4	34	7	3	2	2	1	4	0	1	2	
<b>UDRIGIL</b>	3	3	2	4.0	30	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<b>ACHGARVE</b>	8	6	4	1.5	38	1	2	2	1	1	2	0	0	1	
<b>NORTH UDRIGLE</b>	2	1	1	1.0	60	1	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	
<b>MELLON UDRIGLE</b>	10	7	1	2.0	50	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	
<b>OPINAN</b>	2	1	1	0	25	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	
<b>SLAGGAN</b>	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<b>BADFEARN</b>	5	4	2	0	33	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	
<b>AULTBEA</b>	10	9	4	0.5	31	2	1	3	3	1	1	0	1	1	
<b>TIGHNAFILINE</b>	11	11	2	3	25	2	2	0	8	1	0	0	3	1	
<b>CULCONICH</b>	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	
<b>BUAILNALUIB</b>	13	10	4	1.4	23	4	1	3	0	0	1	1	0	3	
<b>ORMISCAIG</b>	16	15	3	2.5	77	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	0	0	
<b>MELLON CHARLES</b>	55	44	9	1.5	36	2	3	6	36	0	9	0	28	7	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>27</b>	

	POPULATION												
	0-4		5-14		15-44		45-64		65+		Total		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
<b>SECOND COAST</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	1	3	2	5
<b>FIRST COAST</b>	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	0	0	3	1	4
<b>SAND</b>	1	0	0	0	1	3	4	4	8	6	14	13	27
<b>LAIDE</b>	0	0	3	2	4	7	2	5	3	2	12	16	28
<b>UDRIGIL</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>ACHGARVE</b>	1	2	1	0	2	3	2	3	2	1	8	9	17
<b>NORTH UDRIGLE</b>	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	0	0	1	3	4
<b>MELLON UDRIGLE</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	3	5
<b>OPINAN</b>	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	2	5	4	9
<b>SLAGGAN</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>BADFEARN</b>	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	1	3	1	4
<b>AULTBEA</b>	0	0	1	1	1	1	3	3	2	1	7	6	13
<b>TIGHNAFILINE</b>	0	0	4	3	7	8	4	6	2	4	17	21	38
<b>CULCONICH</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>BUAILNALUIB</b>	1	0	0	0	1	2	0	2	3	1	5	5	10
<b>ORMISCAIG</b>	0	2	3	0	2	2	5	3	4	3	14	10	24
<b>MELLON CHARLES</b>	3	3	7	10	18	25	13	11	9	11	50	60	110
<b>TOTAL</b>	7	7	20	16	41	54	37	42	39	35	144	154	298

Fig. 7.12 Land Use statistics for North Gairloch. (Data collected by J. B. Caird and Second Year Geography Students, 1981).

*Registered Crofts:* Crofts are smallholdings entered in the Crofters Commission Register.

*Tenancies:* A tenant may have more than one croft.

*Effective Units:* May comprise one or several crofts tenanted by the same crofter, plus one or more crofts tenanted by the tenant's wife and one or more sublet crofts leased or informally granted by another tenant, which are worked together as one unit which has hay, potato or cereal crops and/or livestock. Units not sublet, but with no agricultural activity, are not effective units. All except one of the remaining crofts at Ormiscaig which are not parts of effective units based in Ormiscaig, are tenanted by or sublet to tenants in neighbouring crofting townships.

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