

Landownership and the Crofting System in Sutherland since 1800

By P. T. WHEELER

THE seven crofting counties of Argyll, Inverness, Ross and Cromarty, Sutherland, Caithness, Orkney, and Shetland together cover 14,051 square miles, or 47·2 per cent of the surface of Scotland. They are part of Highland Britain, an area of natural difficulty and isolation, and are united on the legal basis of the Crofting Laws. Outside the few small towns of the area, the greater part of the population of 277,716 in 1961, 177,292 of whom lived in the "landward" or rural districts, was either directly or indirectly connected with the system of small-holding known as crofting.¹ This has been the object of much attention, official and private, especially since it was realized that a great part of any solution to the problem of a declining population in this rural area must be found in an equitable and efficient form of land tenure. Yet in spite of the great amount of material published, it is surprisingly difficult to obtain precise, factual information.² Thus it is hoped that the compilation of certain facts about one of the crofting counties—Sutherland—and their presentation in chronological order will have a positive value.³

PROPRIETORS AND TENANTS

As a result of the destruction of the clan system after 1745, and the subsequent introduction of large-scale stock farming, there were widespread evictions of small tenants from their ancient areas of settlement in the Highlands. These evictions are popularly known as the 'Clearances'. The first recorded for Sutherland took place about 1760, and the last in 1872, but the period of the great 'Sutherland Clearances' should really be counted as 1806–1820.

The initial effect of these clearances in Sutherland was to depress still further the already low position of the small tenants, who, from having been largely subservient to the tacksmen, were now overshadowed by the farmers and sheep-farmers of the county. Yet in the nineteenth century, as in the eighteenth, most of the inhabitants of Sutherland must have been of small tenant class. Table I shows the state of landownership immediately before the major clearances. In the whole county there were only thirteen proprietors sufficiently substantial to be mentioned in the list, of whom only three were permanently

¹ Although ultimately derived from the ancient Highland smallholding system, the modern crofting system is defined by a relatively recent body of legislation passed since the first Crofters Act in 1886. Nowadays a croft, broadly speaking, is a tenant holding within the seven crofting counties, of less than 50 acres arable and/or £50 annual rent, that has been declared to be of crofting status. Its tenant, all things being equal, has security of tenure, an adjudicated Fair Rent, the right to compensation for improvements upon removal, and the right to nominate a successor subject to the approval of the Crofters Commission. The earlier term for 'crofter' was usually 'small tenant', and this is still worth using in a historical context, especially where a variety of types of tenure is subsumed.

² Because official reports usually need considerable processing before their data can be used, and because the unfortunate history of the modern crofting system, embittered by memories of the Clearances, of the Potato Famine, and of emigration, in a society which remembers and values the past, has tended to produce polemical works of doubtful value as sources of factual data.

³ This information was largely obtained by the writer in the course of research on the Sutherland crofting system undertaken while reading for a Ph.D. in London University. The first really full and dependable published information available for Sutherland is contained in the parish descriptions of the *First Statistical Account of Scotland* (1792–9), closely followed by the *General View of the Agriculture of Sutherland* (1812). It is therefore convenient to begin at the turn of the eighteenth century.

resident. There was an intermediate class of tacksmen and wadsetters and a very few belonging to the professional and trading classes, but these amounted to an extremely small proportion of the total population.

TABLE I
ESTATES IN SUTHERLAND IN 1808

Estate	Valuation (£ Scots)		
	£	s.	d.
1. The estate or Lordship of Sutherland	16,554	6	1
2. Lord Reay's estate	3,647	13	4
3. The estate of Skibo	1,974	11	6
4. The estate of Bighouse	900	0	0
5. The estate of Strathy	564	0	0
6. Rosehall	400	0	0
7. Part of the Pointzfield estate	466	13	4
8. Part of the Balnagown estate	431	18	0
9. Part of the Cadboll estate	354	0	0
10. The estate of Embo	346	0	8
11. Ospisdale and Ardeans*	253	6	8
12. Creich*	200	0	0
13. Achany*	100	0	0
Total†	26,192	9	7½

* Resident proprietors.

† Total as given by Henderson.

‡ Equal to £2,182 15s. 9½d. sterling, of which the estate of Sutherland accounts for 63 per cent in value. Taken from Henderson, *A General View of the Agriculture of the County of Sutherland*, London, 1812. p. 40.

In 1808, therefore, the estate of Sutherland¹ stood out as by far the most important in the county, followed after a long interval by the Reay and Skibo estates. The other estates (not counting further properties held by their owners elsewhere) were often but 'bonnet lairdships'. During the nineteenth century the predominance of one proprietor became even more overwhelming. By 1872,

when the consolidation of the estate of Sutherland was complete and before the subsequent sales had begun, the total holding of the Dukes of Sutherland had increased from 63 to 79 per cent of the recalculated valuation of the whole county and covered 90 per cent of its total area. In all, there were 433 landowners in Sutherland, 348 of whom were householders with less than an acre of ground. Only 85 proprietors held more than one acre: excluding the Sutherland Railway Company, six of these had land to a gross annual value of over £500, but only three exceeded £1,000, the Duke having much the largest share with property worth £56,936.²

Nineteenth-century estate management in Sutherland initially favoured the setting up of great sheep farms. The first big lease of lands of the estate of Sutherland, other than for agricultural or pastoral purposes, did not occur till 1866 when Earl Grosvenor (later first Duke of Westminster) took a lease of Reay Forest; this may be said to have inaugurated the deer forest phase in the county. By 1911-12, the peak year, deer forests totalled 436,323 acres in Sutherland. Very soon afterwards the fifth Duke of Sutherland decided to break up his estate, and a series of big sales were held.³ In the first instance many of these sales were to sitting tenants, some of whom had held their leases for many years. The most important among these was undoubtedly the Duke of Westminster, the lessee of Reay Forest. As a result of re-sales and government action, the Westminster estate, the Department of Agriculture for Scotland, and the Forestry Commission are now the largest landholders in the county.

On the whole, the small tenants were little affected by the various changes of ownership. The sheep-farmers were most closely concerned in the conversion of former sheep farms to deer forests, and since in the agri-

¹ Then held by the Marchioness of Stafford, Countess of Sutherland in her own right, whose husband was created first Duke of Sutherland in 1833.

² *Scotland: Owners of Land and Heritages, 1872-3*, Cd. 899, Edinburgh, 1874, pp. 204, 205.

³ George Granville Sutherland Leveson-Gower, fifth Duke of Sutherland, *Looking Back*, London, 1957, p. 86. The first big sale of part of the estate of Sutherland took place in 1899.—Evander Maciver, *Memoirs of a Highland Gentleman*, Edinburgh, 1905, p. 148. Subsequent sales have reduced the estate of Sutherland to a small remnant of its former extent—Dunrobin, Uppat, and part of Tongue.

TABLE II
SUTHERLAND DEER FORESTS

Year	Acres	Source
1883	144,771	H.M.S.O., <i>Deer Forests, Highland Crofting Counties . . . for the Years 1883, 1898, 1904, and 1908</i> , Glasgow, 1908, pp. 4-5.
1898	381,363	
1904	418,191	
1908	427,548	
1911-12	436,323	
1920	380,044	H.M.S.O., <i>Deer Forests and Sporting Lands (Scotland) . . . according to the Valuation Roll for the Year 1911-12</i> , London, 1913, p. 538. H.M.S.O., <i>Report of the Departmental Commission on Lands in Scotland used as Deer Forests</i> , Cd. 1636, Edinburgh, 1922, App. IX.
1950	241,036	Annual 4 June <i>Agricultural Returns</i> .
1951	291,526	
1957	348,956	

The largest acreage of deer forests in Sutherland ever given was 998,571 acres on forty-six forests in 1905, but this included lands which had not been cleared of sheep.—D. McLean, *Sutherland Deer Forests*, 1905, Sutherland Estates office, Golspie, 1905.

cultural depression of the late nineteenth century the rents of sheep farms had to be reduced by about half between 1875 and 1895, while costs of rates and labour had increased heavily, it may be surmised that in practice the sheep-farmers were not too hostile to the change. To the proprietors the deer forests, shootings, and anglings became the main, if not the only, source of profit from Highland estates. However, changes in social structure and the control of wealth since 1918 have caused the decline of the Victorian-Edwardian sporting estate. Nowadays, largely owing to the rating regulations which favour their use for agricultural as against sporting purposes, the purely sporting properties are

much reduced: in fact, the remaining deer-forest land is generally that which is of little use for any other purpose.¹

SMALL TENANTS

Since published statistics rarely distinguish between tenants of crofting and of other holdings, it is generally difficult to estimate the exact numbers and importance of the small tenants.² However, for 1853 there is a firm figure of 2,680 'crofters' occupying 10,277 acres inbye and 96,587 acres hill land.³ The next figures available are those for 1883, when 2,350 'crofters' held land on the estate of Sutherland,⁴ and (since it is known that numbers had changed little in the preceding thirty

¹ Of the 348,956 acres of deer forest returned in 1957, only 9,710 acres were given as carrying sheep.

² See note 1, p. 45. 'Cottar'—here taken as meaning an occupant of a non-crofting, non-feued house situated on the township inbye, who may or may not use land or graze animals, and who may or may not pay rent to the proprietor. 'Squatter'—the same out on the common grazings. N.B. The census definition of 'crofter' is by occupation, and therefore bears no definable relation to the number of legal crofts or other croft-type holdings.

³ 'Abstract of the Crops and Stock of 2,680 Crofts in the County of Sutherland, on the 20th June 1853', *Trans. Highland and Agricultural Society*, New Series, xiv, 1853, p. 211. These figures are claimed to "exhibit the details of every tenant of land in the county." They are not above criticism, but must be accepted in default of anything better. The upper size limit for 'crofter' at that time was £20 rent per annum.—'Agricultural Statistics 1854', *Ibid.*, p. 485.

⁴ MS. Return to the *Royal Commission of Enquiry into the Condition of the Crofters and Cottars of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (the Napier Commission) on the crofters and cottars on the estate of Sutherland as at 1 January 1883, preserved in Register House, Edinburgh. In the light of these figures, Macdonald's total figure of 2,338 holdings of less than 100 acres would seem to be an underestimate, though his assertion that there were but sixty-six holdings of over 100 acres, two-thirds of which averaged "close on 27,000 acres each," may be accepted. John Macdonald, 'On the Agriculture of the County of Sutherland', *Trans. Highland and Agric. Soc.*, Fourth Series, xii, 1880, pp. 49-50.

years¹) it may be assumed that about 330 more 'crofters' were resident upon estates belonging to other proprietors. These figures correspond remarkably closely to that of 2,687 first applications to fix Fair Rent received by the Crofters Commission between 1886 and 1912, by which time all the county had been assessed.²

The most recent estimate of the number of crofts in Sutherland shows a considerable decrease to 2,101.³ This is due to a number of causes. Firstly, this is the number of crofts on the Register of Crofts, which may not be quite complete. Secondly, it refers to legal crofts only, and therefore does not include other croft-like properties, such as owner-occupied holdings, which do not enjoy legal crofting status (owner-occupiers do not form a large class in Sutherland, perhaps less than thirty in all). Thirdly, in spite of the formation of new townships since 1913 at Borgie, Shiness, Achnabourin, and Rhifail, and of a number of new crofts elsewhere, the effective amalgamation of holdings has proceeded apace in the last fifty years. In round figures, there are probably fewer than 2,250 crofts or holdings of croft type in Sutherland at the present day.

The number of cottars and squatters is rather obscure, for whatever definition of status be adopted, the actual numbers permitted or even noted depended to a large extent upon the policy of management of the individual proprietor or factor. However, if an adjustment is made to the returns of the estate of Sutherland in 1883 to allow for the other estates in the county, an approximate total of 73 cottars and 180 squatters may be arrived at for that year. Unfortunately there are no later, dependable estimates of the numbers of cottars and squatters in Suther-

land,⁴ but it is known that the total has continued to decline as pressure on the crofting system as a whole has declined, as the inclination of proprietors to upgrade substantial cottars and squatters to crofting status decreased after 1886, and as the more recent tendency to feu (i.e. lease in perpetuity for a fixed ground-rent) house-sites has grown. However, the total of cottars and squatters in the county is unlikely at present to exceed 50, and is probably nearer 20.

HOLDINGS OF SMALL TENANTS

The area of land occupied by small tenants has tended to increase as their numbers have decreased. The 1853 returns gave a total of 10,277 acres inbye and 96,587 acres outrun, or an average of about 4 acres inbye and 36 acres hill land per holding. In all, this was approximately 7.9 per cent of the total area of the county, and represented fairly exactly the share of land received by the small tenants in the Clearance settlement. On the other hand, this inbye represented almost half (46.7 per cent) of the contemporary arable estimated for the county.

Between the 1853 figures and those for 1883 come some interesting data for 1870.⁵ It was estimated in that year that 95 per cent of the tenants in Sutherland had less than 20 acres inbye each, while 98 per cent, with less than 100 acres each, occupied not more than 20,000 acres, leaving the remaining forty-four holdings of over 100 acres each occupying together over 1,187,000 acres. In fact, thirty tenants held an average of 36,000 acres each, covering nine-tenths of the county.

In the 1870's and 1880's a number of small additions of land were given to the crofters. Thus, in 1883, the crofters upon the estate of Sutherland were credited with 24,444 acres

¹ Macdonald, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

² Crofters Commission, *Annual Report*, 1912, Cd. 6788, Edinburgh, 1913, pp. 218, 219. It is clear from surviving rentals examined by kind permission of the fifth Duke of Sutherland that some holdings had been amalgamated or abandoned during this period.

³ Private communication from the Crofters Commission, Inverness, 9 May 1963.

⁴ The annual 4 June *Agricultural Returns* have at various times had entries which might be equated with cottars and/or squatters, but never precisely so. It is, however, quite clear after 1886 that they were not significant either for cultivation or for stock compared with crofters proper.

⁵ Macdonald, *op. cit.*, pp. 49, 50.

inbye. In 1912, with more accurate measurement and after considerable enlargement of the crofting lands, particularly outrun, the Crofters Commission gave a fairly exhaustive estimate of 23,700 acres in individual occupation, and 204,736 acres common pasture, or 17 per cent of the area of the county. The area of land under crofting tenure¹ has since been very substantially increased, so that the latest estimate available suggests that the area of inbye and regulated grazing in crofting occupation is at least 292,683 acres, or 22·5 per cent of the surface area of the county. In other words, if allowance is made for unregulated grazings, sheep club lands, etc., it may be said that the crofters now occupy about a quarter of Sutherland, which is probably the highest proportion they have ever achieved.²

STOCK NUMBERS

The Highlands were and still are primarily a stock-rearing area. Examination of surviving data shows, however, that there has been considerable variation in the amount of stock kept in Sutherland. In 1798 the total stock in

the county equalled 204,393 sheep units:³ by 1808 this had declined to 199,353 sheep units, largely due to losses of horses, cattle, and goats not wholly compensated for by an increase in the number of sheep consequent upon the introduction of sheep-farming to Sutherland.⁴ By 1853, in spite of the disappearance of goats and the marked decline in the numbers of horses and cattle, sheep-farming had forced the stock figure up to 240,890 sheep units.

The recorded stock in Sutherland was at its nineteenth-century maximum in 1876. Obvious causes of the subsequent decline seem to have been the agricultural crash of the 1870's, the conversion of much land to deer forest, and a gradual loss in the carrying power of the cleared lands.⁵ The lowest level in this century appears to have been reached just before the Second World War, after a long period of slump. Recovery during the war (partly a purely statistical feature⁶) appears to have been followed by a decline and then a recovery in the past decade, largely due to governmental encouragement of farm-

¹ By definition inclusive of the area of land occupied by the small number of surviving cottars and squatters.

Many enlargements were granted to individual crofts and to separate common grazings under post-1886 legislation, and numbers of new crofts have been set up. The new townships established have been Strath Naver (Syre; 1901), Sheigra (1912), Borgie (1916), Shiness with West Shiness and Achnairn (1920), South Achnabourin or Achagary (1923), Rhifail (1927), and Scibberscross (1931). Except for Sheigra, all these were "Part II Schemes"—that is, the original subjects were acquired by the Congested Districts Board or the Board (later the Department) of Agriculture for Scotland for the establishment of crofts, and the land is still owned by the state and administered by the Department. Sheigra remained in private ownership and is therefore a "Part I Scheme."

² This estimate agrees closely with one of 24·5 per cent arrived at by adding the area of inbye of all holdings of less than 50 acres crops and grass (15,899 acres) and of 'Common Grazings' (228,418 acres: figures for 1959 and 1960 kindly supplied by courtesy of the Department of Agriculture for Scotland), to an estimated area for the sheep-stock clubs in the county, not all of which make returns (88,856 acres), giving a total crofting area of 333,173 acres. This in its turn compares closely with the total land area held by 'part-time' and 'other' farms in 1956 (332,635 acres; unpublished data kindly given by the Department of Agriculture for Scotland).

³ John Henderson, *A General View of the Agriculture of the County of Sutherland*, London, 1812, p. 180. For the purpose of arriving at a total stocking figure for the whole county, all types of animal have been reduced to sheep units. Pigs are traditionally unsoumed, and have not been included.

⁴ The decline was at least partly due to the bad year 1807-8. It should be remembered that the old unimproved stock was by no means the equal in value or feed-consumption of the later animals. To this extent it is misleading to construct figures such as Fig. II without introducing a compensating factor. This, however, is a counsel of perfection.

⁵ First evident on the older farms about 1850, but amounting to about 25 per cent of the stock carried over the next thirty years.—C. G. Roberts, 'Sutherland Reclamations', *Jour. R. Agric. Soc.*, Second Series, xv, 1879, p. 446. See also A. J. S. Watson, 'The Rise and Development of the Sheep Industry in the Highlands and North of Scotland', *Trans. Highland and Agric. Soc.*, Fifth Series, XLIV, 1932, p. 15.

⁶ Caused by the necessity to make stock returns in order to get feed rations.

ing, of hill-sheep farming, and of crofting.

So far as the individual types of animal are concerned, it will be observed that sheep numbers in particular have fluctuated. To some extent this reflects the bad seasons such as the winter of 1940-1. Cattle numbers showed a characteristic and steady decline from 1876 to 1939, but thereafter appear to have recovered somewhat. The numbers of horses decline steadily.

It may be taken that formerly the greater part of the stock in the county belonged to small tenants, but the Clearances altered this completely. Most of the old Kerry sheep and goats of Sutherland were killed off by the bad winter of 1807-8 and by an epidemic of scab and rot, so that a large proportion of the 94,570 sheep recorded in 1808 must have been Blackface (with some Cheviots) owned by sheep farmers. By 1853 it was possible to be more specific, for the crofters were said to hold 26.7 per cent of the stock of Sutherland—most of the horses and (except in the east) cattle, though their holdings of sheep were small, especially in the east of the county. There were no pigs in the west, but elsewhere the crofters held a substantial proportion of the total.¹

The 1883 *Return* gave the crofters only 49,200 sheep units, or 16.8 per cent of the stock; the balance of stock kept shows that sheep still occupied a lesser place in the economy with 46 per cent of the stock held.²

¹ This corresponds on the one hand to the demands of subsistence agriculture, with cattle for milk and sale, sheep for wool and occasional slaughter, and pigs for meat, and on the other to the predominance of small crofts with large areas of hill in the north and west, and the presence of larger crofts but with overrun much limited by farms in the east.

² It is rather surprising, in view of the political pressure at that time to improve the lot of the crofters and to extend their lands, to find that they held but 55.9 per cent of their permitted soum or stint. The horse and cattle soums were usually completely taken up, in contrast to the sheep soum of which just over a third was taken up, making 46 per cent of the stock actually held (cf. *Return* in note 4 on p. 47). This assumes that the factors who made the return held an accurate knowledge of the tenants' stock, and that soums were related to actual carrying power of hill pastures.

³ See note 2, p. 49. If the 'part-time' and 'other' farms are reckoned to be the equivalent of the crofts in 1956, one can, however, suggest that the crofters held 97,543 sheep units (of which 83.4 per cent were sheep), out of 271,539 sheep units in the county (of which 84.5 per cent were sheep), or 35.9 per cent of the total stock. The drop in the crofters' share in the total stock is to be accounted for by the fact that whereas in 1883 the other farmers held a stock probably not so very different from the present and certainly composed mainly of sheep, the crofters have much reduced their cattle without (in the circumstances of the decline of the crofting economy) increasing their sheep sufficiently to compensate. Both crofters and farmers have greatly reduced their stock of horses.

⁴ John Henderson, *op. cit.*, 2nd edition, 1814, p. 190.

It is extremely unfortunate that after 1883 there are no figures of stock from which it is possible to extract the small tenants' holdings: only field work can give this information now. Certain broad trends are generally acknowledged: the number of horses kept by crofters has fallen, though rather more slowly than in the farming community; the number of cattle has fallen with the change from subsistence agriculture on the crofts, though it has been affected in recent years by the hill cattle subsidies; the number of sheep has increased out of all proportion and is responsible for both the over-grazing and the ill-balanced grazing of many common pastures. However, some estimates for the post-war period will be made on the basis of various official statistics.³

CULTIVATED LAND

The cultivated area in Sutherland in 1808 was 18,125 acres, including 479 acres of rotation grass, plus a further 1,250 acres of natural meadow.⁴ Since this was virtually pre-Clearance it is certain that a large part of the cultivation must have been in the hands of small tenants, though probably all the rotation grass was on the east-coast farms. The Clearances undoubtedly changed this. In 1853 there were 22,022 acres arable (4,978 acres under "alternate grasses") in the county, while 1,799 acres comprised improved enclosures under permanent grass. Allowing for

inaccuracies in statistics, it therefore appears that between 1808 and 1853 there was an increase of 23 per cent in the total area of arable and hayed or enclosed permanent pasture, or 21 per cent in the area of arable alone, resulting mainly from a very considerable increase in the area of rotation grass. The last must have been almost entirely on the farms, especially those on the east coast. Presumably the reclamations of the small tenants after Clearance and of some of the larger tenants were sufficient to maintain the level of annual cultivation.

The course of events after 1853 is not wholly clear. The 1870 returns were thought to be an under-estimate, and this may well account for the puzzling decline in the area of arable between 1853 and 1870. On the other hand, the increase in arable and in enclosed permanent grass during the next decade was almost wholly due to the great Sutherland reclamations, which added 2,643 acres of arable and a considerable amount of enclosed outrun to the agricultural lands of the county.¹

After 1881 the area of cultivation fell, as much of the reclaimed land was allowed to revert to permanent grass. There seems to have been a slight recovery about 1901, when the most acute phase of the post-1870 agricultural depression was passing. Thereafter the crops and fallow area fell continuously, and especially steeply between 1921 and 1931. The area of rotation grass also fell until 1951, but showed a slight increase in the late 1950's, possibly due in part to the administration of the cropping grants in the crofting areas. The total inbye area ('Crops and Grass'), on the other hand, remained more stable. It is possible that if the present extension of fencing is continued and if the Sutherland crofters and farmers really adopt a programme of improvement of rough grazings such as has been undertaken in Lewis, the effective area of inbye may be increased somewhat, though the main improvement will probably come in the upgrading of already enclosed pastures.

The 1853 material allows an exact calculation

¹ C. G. Roberts, *op. cit.*, pp. 397 ff.

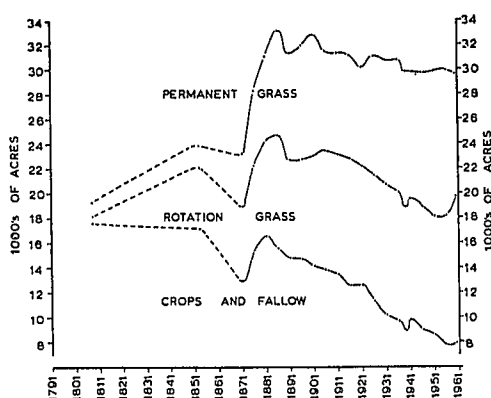


FIG. I. CROPS AND GRASS.

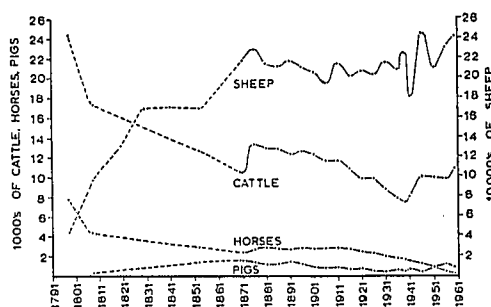


FIG. II. LIVESTOCK.

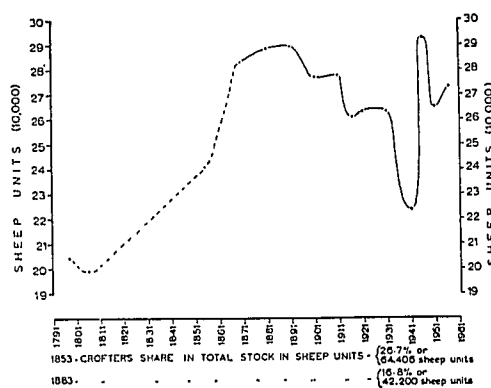


FIG. III. TOTAL LIVESTOCK IN SHEEP UNITS.

Pecked lines represent discontinuous data; continuous lines 4 June *Agricultural Returns*.

tion to be made of the share of the small tenants in the cultivation of the period.¹ They had 11,527 acres inbye, or 40.5 per cent of the total area of inbye, 46.7 per cent of the arable land of the county, with 23 per cent of the rotation grass and 53.6 per cent of the land under crop and fallow. On the other hand, they had but 14.9 per cent of the improved pasture. This is what would be expected, allowing for the emphasis in the mid-nineteenth-century croft economy on cultivation of every feasible portion of inbye. In 1883 most of the newly reclaimed land was still in cultivation and therefore the crofters' share in the county totals was proportionately reduced to about 27,870 acres inbye, or 69.2 per cent of the total arable and grass.² The last official estimate of the crofters' inbye was that of the Crofters Commission for 1911, when it was given as 23,700 acres, or 75.8 per cent of the total area of crops, grass, and fallow.³

Even if it is impossible to state accurately the share of the crofters in the cultivation of the county, it is still possible to state generally accepted trends. It is certain that during this century much croft inbye land has gone back to permanent grass and to rough grazing. The cultivation is much less intensive than it used to be in the days of subsistence farming, and crops for human consumption are now almost entirely limited to potatoes and vegetables. In recent years there has been a slight increase in cultivation in connection with the administration of cropping grants and subsidies (and perhaps with the temporary elimination of rabbits), but it has not yet made any significant difference.

AGRICULTURE SINCE 1945

Broadly speaking, the improved inbye oc-

cupied by the small tenants was in full cultivation until 1914, which in many districts is said to have been the decisive date in the breakdown of crofting practice. The Second World War also struck hard at crofting agriculture: land which had been used again after 1918 was sometimes abandoned and sometimes worked at lower intensity thereafter. Lack of labour prevented an intensification of farming such as took place in the more important arable areas, while the peculiarities of the Highland environment and system made it not worth the government's while to enforce such intensification. Thus, while the level of activity on the arable farms of the county rose during the war, that on the crofts tended to decline.

Until recently the collection of purely crofting data has been much hampered by uncertainty about legal crofting status:⁴ statistics—e.g. those for 1946–7⁵—have tended to be arranged according to other criteria such as the amount of labour demanded by the holding. Thus, in the late forties, the main types of full-time⁶ holdings in Sutherland were 'hill sheep farms', 'stock rearing with crop sales unimportant', and 'stock rearing with crop sales relatively unimportant'. This reveals the very heavy dependence upon stock in one form or another, but the fact that these are 'full-time holdings' means that the number of crofts included is limited, a fact confirmed by local knowledge. It is tempting, therefore, though probably misleading in detail, to equate the two remaining classes of holding—'part-time' and 'spare-time' holdings—with holdings of a croft type. However, one may point out that though these two classes amounted to 71 per cent of the total operating farm units in the Highlands, they covered only 23 per cent of the total agricul-

¹ 'Abstract of the Returns of the Crops and Stock in the Counties of Roxburgh, Haddington, and Sutherland, on 20th May, 1853', *Trans. Highland and Agric. Soc.*, New Series, xiv, 1853, p. 209.

² Returns for the estate of Sutherland, weighted for the whole county.

³ Crofters Commission, *Annual Report*, 1912, *op. cit.*, pp. 218, 219.

⁴ Presently being resolved by the compilation of a register of crofts by the Crofters Commission.

⁵ Department of Agriculture for Scotland, *Types of Farming in Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1952. The following unpublished data have been extracted by courtesy of the Department.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9: 'full-time holding'—demanding over 1,800 hours' work per annum. See also maps 6, 9, 10, pp. 26, 34, 35.

tural area. It is thus clear that though numerically predominant and politically influential they were likely to be less so in regard to agricultural output than the full-time units. This is confirmed by field investigation. One may add, however, that hill sheep, largely on the common grazings, are evidently the main interest of the Highland croft,¹ and that other stock, though possibly demanding more labour, are in total less significant.² The relatively small labour requirement for sheep, together with their relatively high financial return, is, of course, one of the main reasons for their spread and preponderance in the present crofting system, where a change from a subsistence farming economy has been accompanied by an ageing of the population and a diminution of labour supply. Also, sheep fit in well with the institution of the crofting township with its common grazing. Since the 1940's these characteristics have been emphasized in Sutherland, at least, by the decline in the number of cows kept for domestic milk supply and the spread of consumer milk sales networks.

Unpublished data for 1956 were processed in a somewhat different fashion, and here it does seem likely that the classifications of 'part-time' and 'other' holdings may give approximately the number and cropping and stocking of those farm units occupied by crofters on which something like continued farming is practised, though the number of these, for obvious reasons, is not likely to be the same as the number of separate crofts or of persons describing themselves as crofters.³ On this basis 8.8 per cent of Sutherland farms were full-time, non-crofting subjects, 63.9 per cent were part-time, and 27.3 per cent were other holdings—roughly 91.2 per cent (1,882) of holdings, therefore, may have been

of crofting type. The complementary distribution of farms and crofts is sufficiently indicated in Fig. VI—the predominance of crofts in the west and north, the mixture of crofts and farms in the east and south-east, and the predominance of farms elsewhere. This also by implication brings out the contrast between farms with much arable in the east and with very little arable in other parts of the county, though frequently an east-coast farm is run in conjunction with hill grazings. In 1956 the full-time farms predominated in respect of tillage and rotation grass—the only single crop in which croft-type holdings predominated being potatoes, which are largely grown for human consumption. Similarly, the full-time holdings predominate in the total stock carried. This confirms the earlier remarks on the relative economic subordination of croft-type holdings.

The 'part-time' and 'other' holdings have the majority of working horses of the county: mechanization on the smaller crofting units is less complete than on the bigger farms. On the other hand, they had fewer cattle, sheep, or pigs. The full-time holdings included proper hill-sheep farms and stock-rearing farms, which hold much larger numbers of stock than the average croft. Similarly, pig-keeping is almost entirely restricted to the eastern farms: it is only with poultry that the 'part-time' and 'other' holdings are more important than full-time farms. The average stock carried on the latter is 100.1 livestock units compared with 8.2 units on the former.⁴ Sheep and cattle are far the most important stock. The cattle held by farms tend to fall fairly clearly into either dairy cattle (it is the east-coast farms which are the most important source of milk for the county) or hill cattle, but on the crofts there is a tendency to have

¹ In 1958-9 the stock in sheep units kept by 364 crofting units in Sutherland averaged 80.6 per cent sheep.

² *Types of Farming in Scotland*, *op. cit.*, p. 71. For Sutherland it was calculated that out of an average total labour requirement of 1,150 hours per annum per holding, 23 per cent was for crops and grass, 40 per cent for cattle, 25 per cent for sheep, 8 per cent for poultry, and 4 per cent for horses.

³ Made available by courtesy of the Department of Agriculture for Scotland. The category 'other holdings' was not further broken down, and is somewhat distorted by the inclusion of very large areas of hill belonging to the relatively few deer forests.

⁴ Livestock units calculated on the basis indicated in *Types of Farming in Scotland*, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

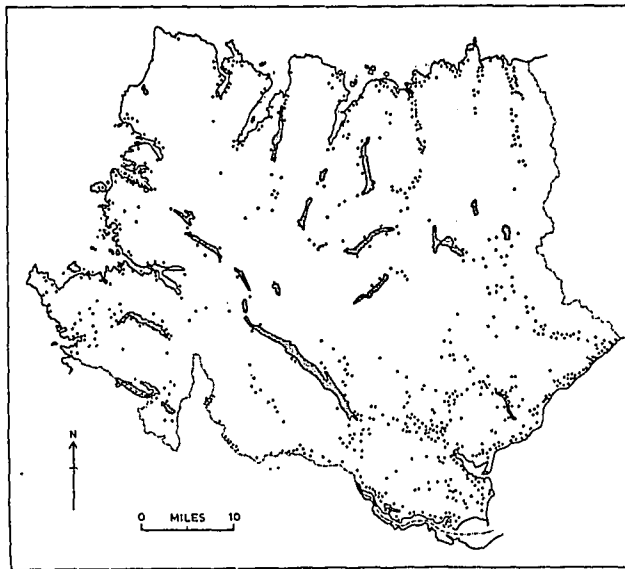


FIG. IV

PRE-CLEARANCE SETTLEMENTS
IN SUTHERLAND.

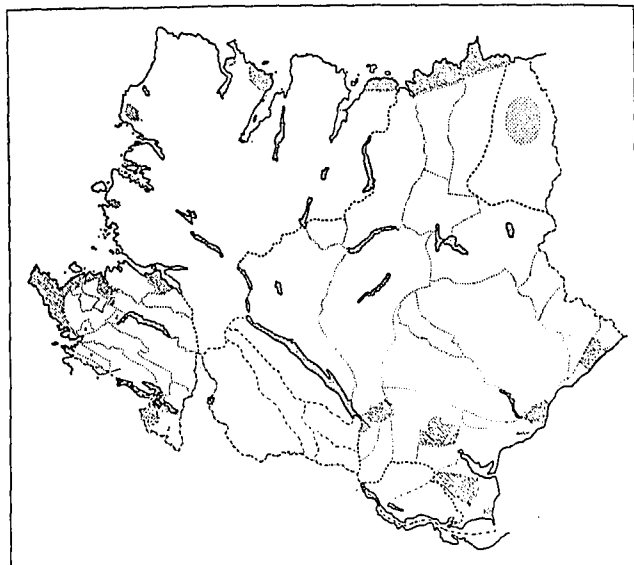
Based on Roy's map of the Highlands 1747-55 (British Museum Catalogue: MS. maps and charts XLVIII 25); other maps (British Museum Catalogue 7330: 45, 50, 54, 57, 59); First Edition Ordnance Survey maps; MS. maps in the archives of the late Duke of Sutherland; various literary sources.

- identified settlement.

FIG. V

THE CLEARANCE SETTLEMENT
OF SUTHERLAND.

Estate boundaries from the 'Sketch of the late Arrangements adopted in the County of Sutherland', in James Loch, *An Account of the Improvements on the Estates of the Marquis of Stafford*, London, 1820. Boundaries of sheep farms in the main body of the estate of Sutherland from Loch, *op. cit.*, but for Assynt see W. Young, 'Report on Assynt, etc.', MS. dated 13 August 1811 in the archives of the late Duke of Sutherland.



-  areas reserved for small tenants according to Loch (obviously an underestimate for the shores of Loch Inchard and for Scourie, probably due to the deficiencies of contemporary maps).
-  areas reserved for small tenants according to Young.
-  area known to have been reserved for small tenants on the Bighouse estate.

- boundaries of the estate of Sutherland 1820.
- boundaries of sheep farms within the estate of Sutherland.
- boundaries of other lesser estates 1820.

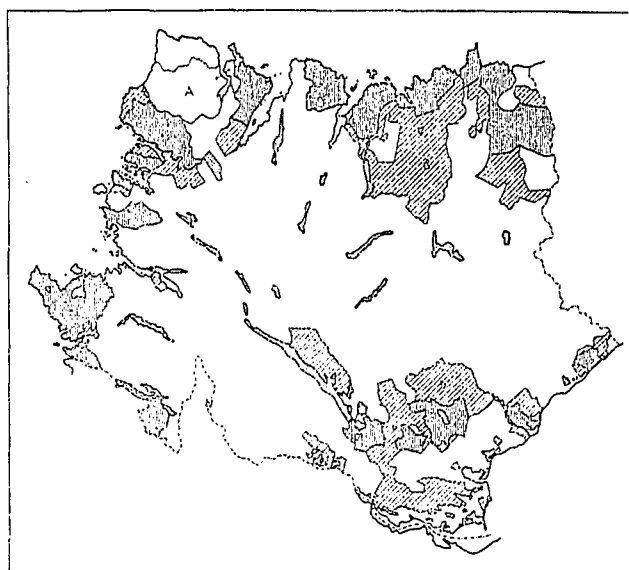


FIG. VI

LAND OCCUPIED BY SUTHERLAND
CROFTERS 1892-1960

Crofting lands for 1892 taken from *Report of the Royal Commission (Highlands and Islands 1892)*, Cd. 7681, Edinburgh 1895, Part II, maps CI-CIX, CXIII-CXV (data deficient for Creich, Dornoch, and Golspie). Additional lands occupied by crofters in 1960, including Club Stock lands, compiled from data kindly supplied by the Crofters Commission, the Department of Agriculture for Scotland, the Scottish Land Court, and from field work.

||||| existing crofting lands in 1892 (data deficient for Creich, Dornoch, and Golspie).

||||| other lands occupied by crofters in 1960.

A Keoldale Club Farm.

a cross-bred cow capable of producing milk, and to raise calves from a beef-breed bull (generally Aberdeen Angus), which will qualify for the hill-cattle grant. Formerly, the cows were the only source of domestic milk supply, but there is an increasing tendency to buy milk and to allow the cows to suckle their calves till they are sold off at any age between six and eighteen months. In any case, cattle, unless of a pure hill breed such as Highland or Galloway (neither of which are common in the county), need a good deal of winter feeding, and therefore demand the growth of fodder crops.

Sheep, by contrast, can usually get by with very little hand feeding. This leads to a sharp division of practice between farmers and crofters. Sheep farmers in Sutherland generally look after their flocks with considerable

care, and in spite of the rising difficulty in getting shepherds, manage to move the flocks from the more exposed lands in severe weather and to distribute feed whenever necessary. In fact, many of the lower farms have sheep runs attached or are run in conjunction with a sheep farm. The crofters—though many individuals take very considerable trouble over their sheep—tend to be much less professional in their standards (often almost necessarily so, considering the difficulties of stock-holding on common grazings where the communal system is not properly developed), and almost universally condemn the practice of hand feeding except in the most severe conditions. It would be interesting were it possible to compare farm and croft lambing percentages: they would almost certainly be lower in the latter.¹

¹ In this connection it is worth examining briefly some data collected by the writer in 1958-9. These show that for 364 crofting units analysed there was an average official soum or stint of 50.2 sheep units (a crofting unit is the total unit, inclusive of any amalgamation, sub-letting, etc., which is worked as one croft-type holding: it is clearly not necessarily the same as a single croft). 116 crofting units had less than half their total soum of stock, and could hardly be counted as efficient pastoral units, though 166 had more than their official soums—in most cases because of overstocking with sheep. The average proportion of the soum in sheep units actually taken up was 99.7 per cent of which 80.6 per cent consisted of sheep. Similarly, 575 crofting units with an average inbye area of 18.5 acres, 54 per cent of which was assessed

SUTHERLAND SINCE 1800: EPILOGUE

It has been possible to trace the rise of the great consolidated estate of Sutherland during the nineteenth century, as it absorbed almost all the other estates in the county. Great measures of reorganization early in the century involved clearance of the interior and the establishment of belts of dense coastal settlements of crofter-fishermen, the construction of roads and harbours, and the re-allocation of the cleared lands to alternative uses—the first, most important, and longest lasting of which was sheep farming. In this century economic and social changes have led to the break-up of the estate of Sutherland and to the diminution of the sporting interest. Sheep farming still continues after various vicissitudes, but on an area of land significantly reduced by the demands of forestry and crofting—though the latter itself has come to depend largely on sheep.

The small tenants, indeed, have greatly increased their share of the total land surface; their influence was probably at a minimum immediately after the Clearances, but in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the reduction of congestion, and especially with the passing of the 1886 Crofters Act and the electoral reform of 1884, their influence and security increased, as did their share of the land of the county. Unfortunately, improvement of the crofters' position has been accompanied by the decay of the crofting sys-

tem: the loss of population, which in the mid-nineteenth century was of assistance in relieving congestion, has gone so far and continues so rapidly that now doubts may be entertained about the continued viability of the county as a unit of local government.

The modern crofting system is the result partly of historical influences and partly of a relatively modern body of legislation. In many respects it is an anachronistic type of system in this country, but it is very heavily protected and change is largely inhibited. In spite of this, the continued loss of population proves that the system is unsatisfactory demographically, while deficiencies such as those indicated above prove that it is unsatisfactory even as an agricultural system. A very great deal will have to be done if it is decided to resuscitate the Highland areas: changes as radical as those of the early nineteenth century might well be involved, and investment on a comparable scale—though without the social injustice. Certainly, a consistent and forceful policy would have to be undertaken and applied firmly. Those with a real interest in the progress of the Highlands, not only as an individual region but also as an example of the contact of a region of geographical difficulty and economic backwardness with a more advanced and richer economy, may hope that such a policy will be formulated quickly, before its opportunities of success have been lost.

as arable, cultivated a mean of half their assessed arable area, 342 of them cultivating less than half their assessed arable. On this basis it is easy to see that a significant proportion of crofts is inefficient by the arbitrary standards of cultivation (50 per cent) or of animal husbandry (31 per cent). It is thus fair to say that the crofting system in Sutherland at least is working at much less than capacity in spite of its protected position.