

Syne" from Sellar while Young haranged everyone on the benefits of water meadows and merino tups. In later years these high rents were to prove to be a disastrous liability for the tacksmen. Kenneth Mackenzie of Ledbeg, for instance, had in 1811 rented holdings at £90 but under the new arrangements he took on a sheep farm rented at £550.

As most of the townships to be cleared in Assynt were occupied by subtenants, the removals were largely carried out by the tacksmen after Young had made a personal visit in the Spring of 1812. The tacksmen were bound to allow the "poor

bull," shepherd in Suisgill, had been warned and by the time the crowd arrived had already set off on their horses towards Strath Halladale. Thirty men, however, chased them as far as Achintoul eight miles away.

The crowd turned their attention upon the four shepherds left in the house at Suisgill. Turnbull, his family and James Armstrong, a shepherd from Caithness, were eventually allowed to go free. But when John and George Cleugh, shepherds in Strathbrora, were persuaded out of the house they were taken across Suisgill burn and set down on the grass where blood-thirsty threats were made

and Caithness had been largely unsuccessful as had the plan of driving the sheep out of the county; a move reminiscent of 1792. However, the crowd proceeded to prevent the arrest of several of the men from Kildonan and then refused to disperse after Mackid had attempted to get them to leave.

It was obvious that the people of Kildonan enjoyed considerable support among the population of Sutherland as a whole. Consequently, George Cranston, the sheriff depute of Sutherland, came north and, after failing to placate the people, sent for troops. When a detachment of

place in two stages. In 1814 20 families were removed from the lower townships, the remaining 42 families, including 16 in Rosal, being allowed to stay on as subtenants. It was Sellar's role in this first clearance which led to his trial on 23rd April 1816 at which Donald Macleod, the famous author of *Gloomy Memories*, was named as a witness for Sellar's defence. However, prior to the trial Sellar had already begun the necessary legal steps to clear the subtenants from the farm.

The lands of Tubeg of Mudale and Dinachoire in upper

(Continued over)

# THE WIDENING SPHERE

Elsewhere in Sutherland the introduction of sheep farming continued. The Mains farm on the Strathy estate of George Honeyman, Lord Armadale, was advertised in 1788 for letting as a "sheep and grazing farm" and although it does not appear to have been occupied solely as a sheep farm the neighbouring farm of Armadale soon was. First advertised in 1790, Armadale was let in 1794 on a 19-year lease to Andrew Kerr who stocked the farm with Cheviots, possibly the first in Sutherland. In 1797 the farm was taken over by the Reids from Northumberland. Gabriel Reid later married a daughter of Mackay of Bighouse and became one of the leading sheep farmers of the north. A number of families cleared from the interior of the sheep farm were resettled on the coast at Armadale and Portskerra.

A small sheep farm was established by George Dempster in 1796 on the Pulrossie estate. **Prontenach**, a grazing or sheeling formerly attached to the farm of Pulrossie, was identified as being the most suitable situation for a sheep farm by Andrew Thomson from Berwickshire, then acting as farm manager for the Dempsters.

The sheep farm remained in Dempster's hands until 1804 when Duncan MacGregor at Tutimtarvach, tenant of Glen-cassley, took a 19-year lease of Pulrossie, and the "Sheep walk or grazing of Prontenach" with its stock of 300 Cheviots "in thriving condition". On MacGregor's entry the tenants of the neighbouring farms objected on the grounds that part of the sheep farm was located on their common. This stemmed from the fact that much of the hill ground above Bonar was a common over which the estates of Skibo, Airdens and Creich had rights of pasturage and which was only divided out in 1835.

MacGregor gave up Prontenach after a few years and the sheep farm was taken over by Walter Ross, tenant of Over-skibo. When Ross went bankrupt Prontenach reverted to being a summer grazing for cattle and horses but it was later let, presumably as a sheepwalk, to Dugald Gilchrist of Ospisdale.

In 1796 the estate of Gruids in the parish of Lairg, which

belonged to the Munros of Poyntzfield, was advertised for letting as cattle and/or sheep farms. The estate was then being administered by the two trustees of George Gunn Munro who had gone bankrupt when trading as a merchant in London prior to his inheritance in 1785. Innes Munro, who succeeded in 1806, was forced, on account of the continuing financial difficulties of the family, to appoint an Inverness lawyer as his trustee. The various trustees were no doubt keen to let the estate to the best advantage although they were hampered by only being able to grant relatively short leases.

The estate was relet in 1803 and in 1810 the "extensive and well-known sheep farms" of Creanich, Arsaig and Sallachy on Loch Shin were advertised for letting again the following year. Arsaig was later let to John MacGregor at Pulrossie, brother (?) to Duncan MacGregor at Pulrossie and Glencassley.

In 1818 Pitaxie, Claonel and the sheep farms on Loch Shin were let to Captain John Sutherland. Some of these holdings had already been cleared and more removals followed in 1818. However, when, in 1820, further clearances were attempted without any alternative accommodation being offered the sheriff officers were deforced and driven off without their clothes. The removals were only effected the following year

when troops were brought in after the sheriff officers had again been deforced. Ironically Sutherland went bankrupt in 1822 and the farm was broken up into small tenant townships and individual grazings along Loch Shin. Later, however, all the grazings were held by Gilchrist of Ospisdale.

The first introduction of sheep on the Bighouse estate appears to have taken place in 1811 when a sheep farm was established in upper Strath Halladale. Eighteen families were cleared: they had been paying £185 rent while the sheep farm was let for £400.

The Sutherland estate management, however, were not enthusiastic. Hugh Rose, the Sutherland factor who in 1786 had written of a "kind of rage for sheep farming" sweeping the northern Highlands, was clearly not in favour, although a small sheep farm was created the following year at Killin on Loch Brora. Despite attempts to let it, the farm remained in the landlord's hands until sublet to Hugh Macpherson in Brora in 1804. In 1792 offers were made for sheep farms in the parishes of Lairg and Assynt but the estate management were not tempted and it was left to the local tacksman farmers to lead the way.

The tacksmen were already greatly involved in the rearing of cattle for the droving trade but as the prices of wool and mutton rose many began to turn their attention to sheep farming. In Assynt sheep flocks were placed on the farms of Achmore, Eddrachalda and Tumore by local tacksmen in the late 1790's. As a result subtenants were cleared even though the Sutherland estate management attempted to curb the power of the tacksmen by laying down that any subtenant who was cleared had to be provided with a possession of "equal rent and value" elsewhere in the parish. When tacksmen tried to avoid their obligations conflict was inevitable.

One such case concerned the

township of Dubh Clash, near Lochinver, which was established as a sheep farm in 1800 by Murdoch Mackenzie in Stronechrubie in partnership with Kenneth Mackenzie in Ledbeg. One of the five subtenants charged to be removed, a Roderick Macleod, refused the holding he had been offered in Kirktown at the head of Loch Assynt on the grounds that it was inland and he was "always a man for the fishing". However, he still did not remove when offered an alternative possession in Culag and chose to move to Brackloch. But the tenant in possession of Brackloch was none other than Roderick's brother, John, who proceeded to drive him off; an action which brought the whole affair to the attention of the estate management. Eventually in 1808 Roderick was forced to accept a holding in Stronechrubie, judged by a panel of three tacksmen to be "full fair and just accommodation".

Similar events were taking place on the Reay estate. There, the tacksmen, who had already cleared many of their subtenants to make way for cattle, began to turn their attention to sheep in the same way as their Assynt counterparts. One of the earliest was William Munro of Achany who had taken a lease of Auldinriny in 1787. Sheep were introduced in combination with cattle on the farm of Glendhu, held by Colin Macdiarmid, as subtenant to Mackay of Bighouse, but in 1794 taken over by Alexander Campbell of Barchaldine.

The overall effect of this process may be judged from the fact that, in Assynt between 1774 and 1811, a period of rapid population growth, the proportion of the population living on tacksman farms dropped from 26% to 14%. Had the estate managements of the Reay and Sutherland estates not instituted regulations curbing the power of the tacksmen, it is probable that by the time of the first "official" clearances there would have been hardly any subtenants living on the tacksman farms.

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