



[Testimony of a Deer Raid Witness]

[Newspaper extract]

Stornoway - 28th November 1887

Roderick Smith, labourer, Balallan, aged 52 years, says:

About six months ago Mr Donald Macrae was appointed teacher of Balallan Public School and he has been teacher of it ever since then. Since he went there, there has been continual agitation on the land question. He is the most prominent agitator. Meetings are held in the school every week. They are called by horn. They are open to the grown up public of all opinion. I attended only one of these meetings. I was at a meeting in the Public School on Friday 11th instant, in the evening. It opened at 6.30pm. There were about 100 men and lads present. John Matheson (John's son), Gravir was in the Chair. All the speeches were in Gaelic.

At the beginning of the meeting the Chairman ordered every person who was not a member of the Land League to retire. He specifically asked members of the Primrose League to retire. I am not a member of either League and I did not retire. Matheson recommended the persons present to go and take possession of Park Deer Forest and divide it among themselves, without asking anyone's authority. He said one person had as much right to deer as another and that Mrs Platt should not be coming here, but if they broke into Park Deer Forest Mr Platt could not come back again. He was talking violently just like a Minister.

Roderick Mackenzie, merchant from Balallan, was the next speaker. He said he would give a stone of meal to every person who assisted to kill or drown all the deer on Park Forest. Roderick addressed Murdo Martin (John's son) aged 26 years from Balallan, and asked him to stand up. Mackenzie said to him, 'Are you willing to go to Park as leader'. Martin did not rise, but replied:

I am ashamed to go to Park. If you and Macrae, the teacher, will go first, I will follow after.

Mackenzie said, 'I will be the first one there'. Macrae said he would also be the first one there. He did not care whether he would go to prison or not. He would prefer to go to prison. Mackenzie then asked those who were willing to go to Park to raise their hands. About 50 raised their hands. Mackenzie then asked the remainder to stand up and give their reasons for refusing to go.

Donald Macleod (Neil's son) was put out of the meeting, as he was a member of the Primrose League. Roderick said he would never be happy until he would see Mr Platt out of Park. He said he had seen three letters, which had come to Mr Macrae the teacher - one from Dr Macdonald MP for the County, and the others from two English MPs whom he did not name, stating that the Lochs people need not complain of want of food as long as there were plenty of deer in Park and elsewhere to eat with their potatoes.

Macrae then got up and spoke in the same strain as Mackenzie. He advised the persons present to take possession of Park and that they could not be punished for doing so. He said he would earn for himself from an MP a hundred pounds if he (Macrae) succeeded in getting a slice out of Park for the people. He said there were three hundred bolls of meal coming to Lewis to pay the men who would take possession of Park and that Mackenzie was commencing to distribute the meal already. He advised them to call on Mackenzie for the meal.

I then left the meeting but it did not break up for two hours afterwards. It was proposed to go to Park on Monday 21st instant. I left about 8.20pm. My son Malcolm Smith, journeyman, tailor, residing with Captain Mackay of Bayhead, remained till the end of the meeting. He can tell what was said after I left.

The people of Balallan and Airidhbhruach were afraid that their property would have been destroyed if they refused to go to Park.

Roderick Smith

[Note by Angus Macleod:] Written, I think, by Angus Smith, Keose, in 1994 and given to me by Kenneth Mackay. Originally from an extract of newspaper recovered from the Records Office, Edinburgh.

[ends]

AN ARCHIVE RECORD FROM THE ANGUS MACLEOD ARCHIVE www.angusmacleodarchive.org.uk

Author: Extract from unspecified newspaper

Date: 1887

Original document title: Deer Raid Witness from Balallan

Location in physical archive: Series K, File 3, Section 67

NRAS reference: NRAS 4336/1/9/2