



## [Land-raiding in Pairc (1891)]

In April 1891 various National newspapers carried reports of a fresh outbreak of discontent and land raiding in Lewis. A Glasgow Herald correspondent reporting an interview with one of the recognised leaders of the Lewis crofters stated that the new outbreak of land raiding was a manifestation of the exasperation of the landless cottars who were forced to squat in poor housing conditions on the land of their relatives, without hope of any change in their condition of living, so long as they endured their deprivation patiently.

It was stated that there was a new plan of campaign, which involved a movement of landless cottar heads of families, and the plan was carefully drawn up and the men were thoroughly in earnest and quite prepared to face jail if necessary. At that very time, the discontent was finding expression in the land raiding of Orinsay and other former crofter townships along the coast of Park in Lewis.

The campaign was expected to spread from Lochs to other areas of the Island, such as the districts of Barvas, Galson and the Parish of Uig, which was the home of large sheep farms and deer forests, as well as the ruins of no fewer than 37 cleared townships. It was strongly maintained that there was no necessity whatsoever for the congestion of the population that existed in any of the crofting townships of Uig, because there was more than sufficient land in the parish to support all the needs of the whole population. Very much the same applied in the Parish of Lochs where the new outbreak of land raiding started.

The exasperation of the landless cottars, which manifested itself in land raiding in 1891, was the result of several bitter disappointments in the 1880s. First, there was Lady Matheson's refusal to take advantage of the favourable opportunity at the end of the lease of the Park Sheep Farm in 1883 to grant the numerous applications and petitions from the landless cottars for new landholding in the former townships of Southern Park, to enable them to earn their living in the Island of their birth, but instead of considering the deprivation of the landless cottars sympathetically, the proprietor converted the whole area of 42,000 acres of the vacant sheep farm into an unproductive deer park.

The second disappointment suffered by the landless cottars in the 1880s was when they realised that there was no provision in the Crofters Act of 1886 for new landholdings by breaking up the large sheep farms and deer parks, in order to restore to them the land from which their forefathers were unjustly evicted. As the 1886 Crofters Act gave the crofters with land of their own most of the things they wanted, but particularly, security of tenure, the level of agitation for further land law reform slowed down, and the landless cottars were left precisely where they were before the Crofters Act - landless, grossly overcrowded and usually living in squalor in poor temporary housing on their relatives' land.

The third disappointment suffered by the cottars in the 1880s was the unrealised hopes raised in the minds of the people at the time of the successful demonstration of the famous Park deer raid by what they took to be a more sympathetic attitude by the Government, when schemes were considered for the amelioration of the condition of the people, who were recognised at the time of the deer raid to be suffering from chronic poverty. Nothing practical was done except a half-hearted attempt by the government, by spending some money on a scheme of emigration and a total of only 60 families were sent away under the scheme altogether.

That lame and isolated attempt to deal with the problem of an Island with a population of 30,000 people, of which there were hundreds and hundreds of landless and homeless families, was viewed by the Islanders as farce.

Furthermore, the people had a deep-rooted feeling, that in offering them inducements to leave the country, the Government were acting, not for the benefit of the people, but in order to relieve the estates of an awkward position. That belief was caused by the fact that a very large part of the Island was in the hands of big sheep farmers and sportsmen.

The people maintained that the question of whether the Island was overpopulated was one that could not be truthfully assessed until the problem of utilising the existing land resources was grappled with, and whatever temptation the government may hold out for emigration as a policy, it would fail, unless put forward concurrently with migration to the lands at home on the Island. Furthermore, it was strongly felt that the estate would in fact benefit financially if the land in the hands of farmers and sportsmen were given out as suitable landholdings to the cottars.

It would appear that the Government wanted to withdraw from the whole matter and the people felt driven to take action by turning their backs on the Government and setting their face to the land in order to settle down and cultivate the land, yet they were determined not to do anything of a criminal nature. At no time during the land troubles did the people of the Highlands and Islands deliberately injure or kill anyone, although tacksmen, estate factors, and other estate officials cruelly treated them. The Irish were not prepared to suffer so patiently, and they secured their land law reform years before the Scottish crofters did. In fact, the question may well be asked, would the crofters of Scotland ever have achieved security of tenure, if it was not for the successful agitation of the Irish for land law reform movement.

The land raiding in Park began in March 1891 when 18 men sailed from Crossbost with the intention of resettling Orinsay, on the shores of Loch Shell, one of the townships from which the original settlers of Crossbost and indeed some of themselves as children, were forcibly evicted about 48 years earlier when the estate officials drowned their fires on the hearths.

On arrival in Orinsay the raiders roofed three of the least ruinous of the former crofter houses, with spars, divots and sails, but they were unfortunate from the start because the weather deteriorated steadily to blizzard conditions the day after their landing, making their makeshift dwellings more or less uninhabitable. The floor of the bothys became a quagmire and the only seats were cold stones.

Following are the names of the 18 land raiders who sailed from Crossbost:

Donald Macinnes	(Alex)	5 Crossbost	aged about 48 years
Donald Macmillan	(Angus)	6 Crossbost	aged about 40 years
Donald Macaulay	(Norman)	7 Crossbost	aged about 40 years
Neil Maclean	(Lachlan)	10 Crossbost	aged about 46 years
Malcolm Macleod	(Malcolm)	13 Crossbost	aged about 42 years
Donald Macleod	(Malcolm)	13 Crossbost	aged about 50 years
John Mackenzie	(Neil)	18 Crossbost	aged about 45 years
John Mackenzie	(Murdo)	20 Crossbost	aged about 62 years
Murdo Macdonald	(?)	22 Crossbost	aged about 42 years
Donald Macdonald	(James)	23 Crossbost	aged about 31 years
Roderick Kennedy	(Murdo)	23 Crossbost	aged about 48 years
John Mackenzie	(Donald)	24 Crossbost	aged about 37 years
Malcolm Mackenzie	(Alex)	26 Crossbost	aged about 49 years
Malcolm Macdonald	(Alex)		aged about 49 years
Roderick Macleod	(John)	13 Ranish	aged about 51 years
Alexander Macleod	(John)	Ranish	aged about 45 years
John Mackenzie	(?)	27 Ranish	aged about 42 years
Murdo Morrison	(John)	22 Leurbost	aged about 28 years

Donald Macmillan, 6 Crossbost, and Malcolm Mackenzie, 26 Crossbost, were two of the raiders involved in the Park deer raid in 1887, and they were tried in Edinburgh and acquitted. John Mackenzie, 20 Crossbost, was married to a sister of Roderick Martin, Crobeg. John Mackenzie, 27 Ranish, was a brother of Malcolm Mackenzie, 26 Crossbost.

A Glasgow Herald correspondent reporting from Stornoway on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1891, stated that besides Orinsay, there is now the case of Steimreway, which is a mile, or so further up Loch Shell, and the first to arrive at Steimreway were ten men from Gravir, followed by ten men from Calbost. Bothys were prepared and portions of the land were tilled with the spades they brought.

Some of the Gravir settlers in Steimreway were in Stornoway purchasing supplies for the new colony and when they were interviewed, they stated that affairs were proceeding satisfactorily at Steimreway, and also at Orinsay, and that they were preparing to put seed in the ground.

It was stated that there were several men from Cromore in Stornoway on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 1891 and that they said that an expedition was to leave from their township by boat the following morning for Park. The expedition would consist of 11 men who had decided to settle upon a part of the Park deer forest near Eishken shooting lodge. The sheriff in a report a few days later stated that 11 men from Cromore entered the Park deer forest at a point called 'Stromas', but they did not encamp, but went ashore and dug the land and returned to their boat, and because they did not encamp there, they cannot be proceeded against under the Trespass (Scotland) Act of 1865.

The Police Superintendent at Stornoway, in a report to the Chief Constable at Dingwall on 4<sup>th</sup> April 1891, stated that eight men from Cromore entered the Park deer forest at a place called 'Scaladale' and had begun to turn the ground. It is not quite clear if there were two expeditions of land raiders from Cromore in the Park deer forest at that time, and there is no one left locally that can recall. Subsequently it is stated that the Cromore land raiders built a bothy and therefore they became liable for trespass, and eventually Lady Matheson served an interim interdict on six Cromore raiders, and in due course they came to trial.

Some attempt at tillage was made at both Steimreway and Orinsay, with the planting of potatoes, but the weather was so inhospitable and the law moved so rapidly that they were able to accomplish very little.

Behind the scenes there was feverish activity going on, with telegrams going back and fore between Stornoway on the one hand and the Secretary of State for Scotland, the Admiralty, the Chief Constable in Dingwall etc, Sheriff Jamieson who, incidentally, was a Free Church Elder, reporting to the Scottish Office on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1891, thought that the opportunity should be taken to ask the Government to settle the question of whether the Admiralty should not be compelled, if future outbreaks are to take place, to undertake special service in the Isles when called on. Another telegram showed that the Admiralty was consulted as to the possibility of a gunboat and 50 marines being available to the sheriff if resistance was offered by the Steimreway and Orinsay land raiders. Yet another telegram from the sheriff to the Secretary of State for Scotland states, 'Going to try ordinary methods first, do not send gunboat, but arrange to have one at disposal, end of next week.' In another telegram the sheriff states that an examination has confirmed him in his opinion that military and police are practically useless in such emergencies. The sheriff's prejudices may be seen from the following telegram, 'Macrae, the dismissed schoolmaster at Balallan, is here, also a report of the mischievous and unvarnished paper, the North British Daily Mail, and of course doing no good.'

On 9<sup>th</sup> April 1891 twelve of the Lochs cottar raiders implicated in the land raids upon the grazing farm of Orinsay, Lewis, were tried on a criminal charge under the Trespassers (Scotland) Act 1865 at the sheriff court at Stornoway, before Sheriff Principal Jamieson. Six of the men indicted were concerned in the raid upon Orinsay and six upon Steimreway, but the libel in each individual case was given out separately, although the terms on the whole were identical, except that the offence was held to have been committed by the Steimreway men on a different date to that of those at Orinsay. Great interest was manifested in the trial, and the courthouse was crowded throughout the day.

Mr Kenneth Macdonald, Solicitor, Inverness, who was retained for the defence, failed to put in an appearance and Donald Macrae, former head teacher at Balallan and now employed in Lewis as an agent for the Land League, was prevailed upon by friends to represent the accused. Mr John Ross, Joint Procurator Fiscal, appeared on behalf of the Crown.

The names of the twelve accused were as follows:

Donald Macmillan	(Angus' son)	6 Crossbost
Donald Macdonald	(James' son)	23 Crossbost
John Mackenzie	(Donald's son)	24 Crossbost
Malcolm Mackenzie	(Alex's son)	26 Crossbost
John Mackenzie	(Alex's son)	27 Ranish
John Morrison	(John's son)	Leurbost
Donald Maclennan	(Alex's son)	Marvig
Kenneth Mackay	(Malcolm's son)	7 Calbost
Donald Mackenzie	(Donald's son)	12 Calbost
Robert Macmillan	(Murdo's son)	3 Gravir
Kenneth Macphail	(?)	Gravir
Allan Macaskill	(Donald's son)	Gravir

At the outset Mr Macrae intimated preliminary objections to the whole case. In the first place he held that the case should be prosecuted by the Fiscal, Mr William Ross, in person, and not by John Ross, who was Lady Matheson's law agent and also private agent for Roderick Martin, the tenant of the disputed land consisting of 4,000 acres at a rent of £50, leased for a period of 19 years from 1883.

The second objection was that, taking into account the whole circumstances which have occurred within the past few weeks in Lochs, it was apparent that collusion existed between the Crown officials and the estate in the matter. As was well known, interim interdicts, at the instance of Lady Matheson, had been granted against the men, and along with that, and simultaneously, there had been sprung upon them these actions for trespass, on behalf of the Fiscal. The sheriff repealed both pleas as being really groundless.

The case against Malcolm Mackenzie (Alex), Crossbost, which was similar to that of the other men, set forth that he did on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1891 and on subsequent days occupy land in the parish of Lochs, known as Orinsay, without the permission of Dame Mary Jane Matheson or Roderick Martin, farmer, Crobeg, the legal occupier of the land, contrary to the Trespass (Scotland) Act 1865, whereby accused rendered himself liable to a penalty not exceeding £1 or to imprisonment for any period, not exceeding 14 days.

Mr Mackenzie pleaded 'not guilty' and the first witness was Roderick Martin, Crobeg, who said he was tenant of Orinsay for the past eight years on lease. Suspecting that something was amiss, he went to Crossbost and found, on enquiry, that the men had gone away with the intention of cultivating Orinsay and eventually settling there. Returning to Crobeg, he despatched a message to the Superintendent of Police, asking for protection. Proceeding afterwards to Orinsay across the hills, he found eighteen men in the west bay, busy roofing some of

the old crofter houses. Next morning (Wednesday) he again visited the place, and found that three bothys had been roofed and the men were busy digging the ground. Mr Martin said one of his cows ran mad when she saw the huts. The sheriff remarked, 'she is not accustomed to seeing houses, I suppose, and no doubt she is a very sensitive animal' (laughter). 'You don't say that any of these men did any harm to a single animal belonging to you?' 'No my lord, so far as I know, they never disturbed any of my stock, nor did they do violence to anything belonging to me.'

For the defence, Donald Macmillan, Crossbost, who was himself one of the parties to the indictment, was first put forward, and his evidence went to show that the people of Crossbost and neighbouring townships were in a very destitute condition, owing in a great measure to congestion and overcrowding. Knowing the special facilities afforded for fishing in Loch Shell and the nature of the soil in Orinsay where their forefathers had been settled, they made up their minds to go forward and occupy it. Their object was not alone to prosecute the fishing, but also to cultivate the land for the support of themselves and their families. He was a married man with seven children and he squatted on his father's croft. His parents were born at Eishkin within sight of Orinsay, where they had lived before eviction. Some of the men who went to Orinsay were very poor, said Mr Macmillan, so poor that they had neither food nor blankets to take along with them when they left.

Donald Mackenzie, Crossbost, an old man of 76 years, said he was born in Orinsay and was in his 20s when his father's family had been removed. The crofters then were not so numerous and consequently they were much more comfortable. The multiplying of squatters on their crofts was the bane of crofting life, and it was what brought them to their present pass Two of his own family were squatting and one of them was involved in the present charge.

That closed the evidence and the other eleven men were brought forward singly and the charge read over to each of them, when they all pled not guilty, and proof was led formally, after which the agents addressed the court.

The sheriff, addressing the accused at length, concluded by saying he found them all guilty, and the next point to be considered was as to the sentence, and in connection with it, he was obliged to conclude that theirs was an aggravated case. He had endeavoured to discover some circumstances in their favour but could find none.

It had been alleged that they had a perfect right to these lands because their ancestors lived there fifty years ago, but even in common law that was absurd, even if it might be true that some of their ancestors were settled there, and had been removed. They were squatters without being able to plead that they were heirs to the Orinsay and Steimreway men at all. Last of all, they said they were very poor, there was no work for them and no land. His Lordship thought this was a very foolish and mischievous way of speaking.

It was a very serious offence, for it was nothing better than robbery, because Mr Martin paid rent for the land and they tried to take it by force. They could not plead ignorance, the superintendent asked them to leave but they refused. His Lordship felt it was his duty to impose the full penalty allowed by the Act, namely 14 days imprisonment without the option of a fine. There was not enough room for them in Stornoway prison, so they served their sentences in Inverness.

The trial of the second batch of fifteen land raiders took place at Stornoway Sheriff Court on 15<sup>th</sup> April 1891, before Sheriff Jamieson. Mr John Ross, Procurator Fiscal Depute, prosecuted and Mr Donald Macrae, former head teacher at Balallan, appeared for the accused. John Macleod, Calbost (John's son) was charged with having on 31<sup>st</sup> March and following days, occupied or encamped on lands at Steimreway without permission, contrary to the Trespass (Scotland) Act 1865. The sheriff asked the accused to plead and the court interpreter, having translated the charge and the sheriff's question into Gaelic, the accused replied in that language, that he wished Mr Macrae to speak for him.

Mr Macrae said that after the painful and tedious trial of last Thursday, and His Lordship's interpretation of the Act of Parliament, under which the accused on that occasion were indicted, the whole of the men who were to appear before His Lordship had resolved to plead guilty, and therefore, at this stage, he thought it would facilitate the public business if the whole of the cases were taken together. The sheriff agreed and Mr Macrae's intention was to lay before the sheriff and the public a statement of the men's grievances and a plea for mitigation. He rose and said he would crave His Lordship's permission to make a short statement in mitigation of sentence, as shortly and tersely as he could.

The sheriff interposed saying that he wished in the first place to ask a question or two before that. The accused were again interrogated when he pleaded guilty, and the following others were afterwards brought forward in the order named, and each pled guilty to a similar charge, some of them encamping upon Orinsay and others upon Steimreway.

John Macleod	(John's son)	Calbost
Angus Morrison	(John's son)	Calbost
Malcolm Macdonald	(Roderick's son)	Gravir
John Matheson	(John's son)	Gravir
John Mackenzie	(Neil's son)	Crossbost

Neil Maclean	(Lachlan's son)	Crossbost
Angus Macphail	(Donald's son)	Gravir
Kenneth Macaskill	(Donald's son)	Gravir
John Campbell	(Donald's son)	Gravir
Donald Macinnes	(Alexander's son)	Crossbost
Malcolm Macleod	(Malcolm's son)	Crossbost
Donald Macaulay	(Norman's son)	Crossbost
Roderick Kennedy	(Murdo's son)	Crossbost
Alexander Macleod	(John's son)	Ranish
Andrew Matheson	(Murdo's son)	Gravir

Then the deputy fiscal formally moved for sentence on each of the men and the sheriff, addressing the men, said that as they pled guilty of the offence, he was prepared to let them off altogether for this time, but on condition that they would give him their word or honour that they would not go back to the lands of Orinsay and Steimreway except to take away their spades and other belongings. Each man was then questioned, and six of them declined to make the stipulated promises. The sheriff then dismissed the other nine men with an admonition.

Mr Macrae then addressed the court on behalf of the men. He said it was a very sad and affecting sight to see large numbers of men brought to a court on a charge of this kind. He thought it carried a very serious lesson with it and raised questions of the utmost importance. He would like to correct statements, which appeared in the press, and which were calculated to prejudice the best interests of the accused and all others similarly situated.

It was said that these people were egged on to commit acts of lawlessness by unscrupulous agitators and that this movement on the island was brought about by political intriguing and wire pulling. He wished to deny absolutely these charges and to point out that the harmless so-called breaches of the law were caused by the desperate conditions of poverty in which these people were steeped, and he blamed the estate management for the congestion of the population. They connived at it and encouraged it as a fruitful source of revenue to the estate coffers.

Mr Macrae called in question the statement made in the witness box last Thursday by Mr MacLennan, the Chamberlain, that the alleged destitution of three years ago, revealed by the enquiry by Sheriff Fraser and Mr Malcolm MacNeill, did not really exist, and furthermore that there was not a square inch of cultivable land in the Park deer forest. On the contrary, it was a well-known fact that 23 crofting townships were cleared out of the forest.

Mr Macrae maintained that it was a mistake to have instituted criminal proceedings against these men. It was quite clear at the first stage that the civil action adopted was quite sufficient. He firmly maintained that it was not by taking a starving people by dozens before a criminal court and sending them to prison shackled and manacled like criminals of the blackest dye, without paying the slightest attention to their home circumstances that the soil was to be cured. He maintained that the Lewis estate was infinitely more culpable than the men who appeared before His Lordship in the dock. Mr Macrae went on to say that the interests of justice might be served much better by a lighter sentence than the extremist limit the law allowed. He felt His Lordship would be fully justified in giving the men a complete acquittal.

In addressing the men, the sheriff said he was sorry they did not follow the course adopted by the other men, their companions, who had left the bar. However, as they refused to abstain from such offences in future, he must therefore treat them in the same way as the twelve men on Thursday last.

He had to consider what had been said by Mr Macrae on their behalf, and he was very sorry to think there was such great poverty as Mr Macrae said there was in Lewis, but he must also remark that it seemed to him that the poverty had arisen from men like the accused squatting on the crofts belonging to their relations, instead of going and seeking work for themselves elsewhere. (In modern parlance, get on your bikes.)

On the whole matter, he saw no reason for making any difference between the accused and the men who were sentenced last Thursday. It was quite true, as Mr Macrae had said, that 14 days was the longest period allowed by the Act, but His Lordship considered it a very short sentence for the offence they had all been guilty of. The sentence of the court was that the men be imprisoned for 14 days.

It is clear that not all the men involved in the land raiding of Southern Park in 1891 came to trial and we have not therefore got a full list of the names of all those who took part. We know that at least 38 men took part in the land raids on Steimreway and Orinsay, whereas only 27 came to trial. Of these there were only four men from Calbost, whereas we are told there were ten men from that village involved.

In that connection we are reminded of the story often related to us in the ceilidh house at Calbost by our host Angus Morrison. He told us how the Smith brothers of 5 Calbost, 'Balaich Rhuairidh Gobhainn', went on a reconnaissance mission to the Park deer forest to see if the place was suitable for settling there and their mother told them to bring back to her a sample of the soil. They liked the place very much but lo and behold it was when they were back within sight of their home that they remembered about their mother's request for a sample of the

soil of Pairc, and one of them said to the other, 'Let's take some of the soil of our own "leoba ruadh" (red field), she won't know the difference'. After giving an account of the Promised Land, they produced the sample of soil and the old lady tasted it and declared it was the same kind of soil as their own 'leoba ruadh'. Probably, that happened in 1891.

Six of the eleven land raiders from Cromore, already referred to, were tried before Sheriff Davidson at Stornoway on 13<sup>th</sup> May 1891, as follows:

Alexander Macleod	(son of John)	'Alastair an Og'	24 Cromore
Donald Macleod	(son of John)	'Domhnuill an Og'	24 Cromore
John Macleod	(son of John)	'Shonnie an Og'	24 Cromore
Angus Macleod	(son of John)	'Aonghais an Og'	24 Cromore
Kenneth Mackenzie	(son of Donald)	'Coinneach Dhomhnuill'	5 Cromore
John Montgomery	(son of Murdo)		8 Cromore

They were charged with the contravention of the Trespass (Scotland) Act 1865 by encamping on Park deer forest. One of the men cited had gone away to the fishing at Barra and a warrant was issued for his apprehension. They were sentenced to seven days' imprisonment rather than the maximum of 14 days because of the great poverty of their families.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1891 the 12 Lochs land raiders who were tried at Stornoway on the 9<sup>th</sup> April and incarcerated in the Inverness prison for 14 days for taking possession of their ancient homes, and tilling the land from which their forefathers were evicted at Orinsay, were liberated and were met by a large crowd at the Inverness prison gate and congratulated on their release.

Each of the men was, in the first instance, supplied with a pipe and a quantity of tobacco and thereafter they took their seats in a waiting carriage, which was drawn by a spanking pair of horses, and was led by a piper, and a banner unfurled bearing the legend, 'The land for the people'. As the carriage drove off the waiting crowd raised a loud and hearty cheer.

The raiders were then driven round the town as far as Clachnaharry and returned via Bridge Street and Academy Street to the Royal Hotel. At different points, the raiders were lustily cheered, the ladies predominating in their enthusiasm.

They were entertained to a substantial public breakfast by the 'Highland News' at the Royal Hotel at 9.15 am, but before commencing, three verses of Psalm 122 from Verse 6 was sung in Gaelic to the tune 'St Pauls', led by Councillor James MacBain in the orthodox style of presenting each line:

Sior-ghidhibh do Jerusalem Sith-shaimh is sonas mor

Pray that Jerusalem may have peace and felicity etc

Then the chairman, Rev Mr MacEachean, who was one of the original promoters of the Land Law Reform Association and who claimed to be the first clergyman in Scotland to give public voice to the grievances under which Highland crofters suffered, said grace, or more properly speaking, engaged in prayer, which embraced a variety of petitions, including the restoration of the land to the descendants of the ancient people. Breakfast over; which was said to have been served in the very best style, the chairman made what was referred to as a bottom principle speech.

Parliament, he said, has sent a commission to the Highlands, and you and other crofters have to be thanked for what never would have been granted, but for your efforts in the cause of truth and justice. Every concession has been a silent testimony to the righteousness of your cause, but much, very much, remains to be done.

Then followed a series of speakers, Councillor James MacBean, Councillor Gunn and Mr Mackenzie Greig Street (a native of Lewis), who occupied the vice-chair, he thanked those present and those who organised the breakfast, for their kindness to his countrymen.

Then Malcolm Mackenzie, one of the liberated men, spoke, saying they could not thank the gentlemen too much for the honour they had done them that day. A coach drive and a most excellent repast in that big house. They did not consider that they had been to prison - they were simply at college. They were endeavouring to improve and not break the laws; they wanted the laws their fathers lived under. Rev Mr MacEachean, having pronounced the benediction, the company adjourned to the railway station where, amidst loud cheers from a big crowd, the Lochs men steamed out for Stornoway.

Long before the hour of arrival of the steamer 'Clydesdale', which conveyed the land raiders from Strome ferry to Stornoway, a large procession, including contingents from the various crofter townships of the surrounding districts, headed by a piper, paraded the streets of the town, and when the steamer came alongside the pier,

there was a crowd of several thousand people who raised a tremendous volley of cheers at the sight of the raiders.

On their landing, the vast crowd marched to Percival Square where County Councillor Mr J.G. Macdonald presided, and congratulated the men on the action they took. Malcolm Mackenzie, Crossbost, who figured in the High Court of Justifier for the Park deer raid in 1887, next addressed the meeting, followed by Donald Macmillan, Crossbost, one of the Crossbost raiders, who delivered a stirring and eloquent address.

About a week later the second batch of Lewis land raiders were also entertained to a breakfast given in their honour at the Royal Hotel, Inverness, after which speeches were delivered, among them an able speech from Councillor Gunn. Malcolm Mackenzie, one of the men, replied in Gaelic, remarking that he was in America for 14 years and he knew well the miseries of emigration and that it was not a remedy to cure the land question as their political enemies recommended. It was said that those who witnessed the release of the men would not readily forget what they saw on that occasion when they were heralded with demonstrations of friendship and looked upon as martyrs.

Curiously enough, Sheriff Jamieson was to attend the ensuing Free Church Assembly as a representative elder from the Presbytery within whose bounds the men he sentenced had their habitation. Although the sheriff would appear to be highly prejudiced against the raiders, both before and during their trials, he seems to have modified his views later. Perhaps the stout defence put up by Mr Donald Macrae on behalf of the raiders and his insistence that the Lewis estate was much guiltier than the men in the dock, might have caused the sheriff to reflect.

In any event we find Sheriff Jamieson in a report dated 28<sup>th</sup> April 1891 stating that he visited Leurbost and found 125 houses, each containing a family, on 60 crofts. A similar state of affairs existed in the township of Crossbost from which most of the so-called raiders came. He deplored the squatting in the villages and blamed the management of the estate, and goes on to say that if squatting is to be prevented in future, it would certainly be worthwhile to attempt to find crofts for at least a very large proportion of the present squatters, by cutting up some of the large farms which adjoin crofter townships.

It is quite remarkable to find the sheriff with his war paint removed and in full agreement with the aspiration of the deprived landless cottars of Lochs in less than two weeks after he put them down for the maximum sentence within his power, as well as using tactics of divide and conquer by extracting promises from nine of the fifteen men on trial, that they would not go back to the lands of Orinsay and Steimreway again, if he let them off free on that occasion. That unexpected procedure probably confused the men and introduced a divisive element among the men and their leadership in Lewis at that time, which had the effect of discouraging the movement, and the cottars settled down into their former condition of defeatism and utter hopelessness.

With the benefit of hindsight, radicals might be inclined to lament the lack of a crofter's organisation that would have enabled the landless cottars of the 1890's to exchange views and co-ordinate their actions, and go forward in unity under a purposeful leadership, because unknown to them the tide was turning in their favour, and perhaps they had a historic opportunity to change the future course of history in Lewis. It was not of course known to them that even Sheriff Jamieson was converted to their viewpoint and that he was advocating their case in high places.

Neither were they aware that the growing pressure of parliament and public opinion at that very time was forcing the government to give consideration to the vexed problem of the landless cottars and the sub-division of crofts in the Scottish Highlands, while side by side with these conditions of extreme deprivation, by large areas of underused land, formerly occupied by the cottars' forefathers, but at that time occupied by red deer and grazing farms.

In the 1890's the Lewis estate estimated that about one quarter of the whole crofter population of Lewis were cottars without land of their own and, as they say, 'necessity knows no law', hence the reason that the landless families were forced to cultivate and build temporary homes on sub-divisions of their relatives' crofts. An examination of the families and crofts of Park at that time would indicate that for Park at least, the figure of 25% of landless cottars was far too low. In some townships the landless cottar families accounted for some 50% of all families. Certainly 25% was not an overestimate for the whole Island.

There was no lack of information regarding the desperate land and social problem in Lewis. There existed a large volume of evidence on the subject, gathered a few years earlier by the Napier Commission and the 1886 Act failed to face up to the problem of the landless cottars. It was well known that because of that, there was bitter disappointment and discontent among the landless population, as well as strong feelings on the part of the crofters whose land the cottars were forced to live on. The Lewis Estate was also well aware of the situation, because there were numerous applications for land from landless cottars on file in the estate office.

The government was coming under mounting pressure to take action to make land available to the landless families in the Scottish Highlands, yet the influence of the powerful land lobby was such that they were successful in achieving the usual device to avoid or at least delay taking any positive action, by setting up yet another Royal Commission to investigate the problem.

[ends]

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See also Hebridean Connections, for more information about the men and places involved:

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