



The Attachment of the Crofting Community to the Land

Undoubtedly, the Highlands and Islands Crofting Community have an unusually strong attachment to the land of their birth, and the reasons are not immediately obvious to the casual onlooker - if indeed the Highland Community themselves understand the mystery.

I personally share that feeling of attachment to the land, and to one particular spot, which is dear to my heart - my birthplace, the community in which I grew up, the family into which I was born and my mother in particular.

We come from Mother Earth just as surely as we come from our natural mothers and we return to Mother Earth in the end. As crofters we certainly have a close relationship with Mother Earth. Some of the elements we are strongly attached to are the landscape, the hills, the sea, as well as the soil, which we cultivate, and the natural environment.

Then there is the community and the way of life, sharing and caring, working as a team and working communally, on many tasks, such as, rounding up sheep, shearing sheep, dipping sheep, putting sheep out to the moor in the spring and taking them back to the croft in-bye land in the autumn, attending cattle and other animals. Peat cutting is usually done as teamwork. 'Luadh' or washing and finishing the tweed were done by a team of girls with their work songs (fulling the cloth). Freshwater fishing and sea fishing were done in groups, and boats were always crewed by a team of village friends that effectively worked as a team.

Croft work is attractive to children and adults alike because of its close contact with animals, particularly as we are growing up. There is variety in the seasonal work:

- A. A time for planting
- B. A time for growing
- C. A time for harvesting
- D. A time for relaxing in the ceilidh house and at play.

The crofting community is close to nature.

Also our history in the Highlands and Islands shows our attachment to the land, particularly when the whole Highland community was denied a few acres of God's created land from which to eke a living.

George Mackenzie, Laxay, Lochs testified in 1883 before the Napier Commission, when the people were removed from Southern Park:

We were driven away with all our belongings from our thriving and agreeable holdings, a place in which people knew nothing beyond prosperity and happiness. Park, which nature seemed to mean for man, with all its arable lands, hill pastures and bays of the sea, offering grand opportunities for comfort as a result of human industry, was quite unprecedented relieved of the inhabitant population of about 28 townships.

These land strugglers attached us to the land of our forebears. A neighbour of George Mackenzie, John Smith, Balallan, told the Napier Commission of Enquiry at question 1738, 'We were dealt with like a flock of sheep driven by dogs into a fank'.

Then there is our ancient culture of language, songs, stories and music. Therefore not only are the Highland and Island crofters attached to their land, we are also attached to our unique way of life, our language, our culture and our religion.

When the whole is taken together the Highlands of Scotland are a pleasant place to live.

Much of what is now-a-days regarded as typical of Scotland has been borrowed from the Gaels - the kilt, the tartan, the bagpipes and its music. It was the Gaels that created Scotland.

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