

The Decline of Fishing

Crofting agriculture is not, and never was, sufficient to sustain a family on its own. It is therefore essential that there is some other gainful employment available to the crofter and members of his family, within easy reach of their croft. Traditionally it was the fishing industry that provided the main additional employment that sustained the crofting way of life. Crofters do, of course, participate in a wide variety of jobs including business, professional and highly skilled work and that is what makes the crofting way of life so attractive. The really distinctive feature of the crofting society is the close-knit communal spirit of the crofter townships.

Fish of all kinds, herring, white fish and shellfish etc. was to be had in abundance in the sea surrounding the north of Scotland and its off-shore Islands. It was natural therefore, for the local inhabitants to fish for their domestic requirements, and later on, engage in commercial fishing. As the Gaelic proverb indicates, "dh'iarr am muir a thadhal" (the sea expects to be visited). Even Lord Leverhulme observed that, "the great wealth of the Islands was the surrounding sea".

Fishing is a big subject in its own right, and it is not our purpose here to treat the subject in depth, but only to observe the close relationship between crofting and fishing, particularly in the Islands, and the way the decline of fishing affects crofting and all aspects of life in the Islands.