

First Lotting

Before the crofting system of land tenure was introduced by the emerging private landowners in the 18th century, it was the old Clan system of land tenure known as 'Run-Rig' that prevailed in the Highlands and Islands. Under the Run-Rig system no part of the inbye arable land of the tack or village was held permanently by any individual small-holder. One third of the arable land within the tack or village was re-allocated by lots each year, and in that way the whole of the inbye arable land was re-allocated by lot every three years.

Towards the end of autumn, when the harvest was over, the village Constable, who was an official elected by the small holders in order to represent them (similar to a Grazing Clerk), called a meeting of the small-holders and the representatives of the tacksman or estate and, having decided on the portion of land to be allocated, it was divided into shares according to the number of tenants in the village. Thereupon they cast lots in order to decide which portion fell to which individual, hence the designation 'lot', which is still the name sometimes applied to a croft. The share of land that fell to a tenant was kept by him for three years.

The crofting system of land tenure entails that the crofter is settled on a portion of land in perpetuity, on certain conditions. To begin with a crofter's tenure was on a year to year basis, hence the Highland clearances.

The original establishment of crofting is generally referred to as the 'First Lotting'. In the Lewis Estate Sir James Matheson carried out a 'Second Lotting' about 1850 a few years after he acquired the Island in 1844.

Apparently overcrowding in the crofting townships was so bad at the end of the Seaforth landlord regime that Sir James Matheson felt that the land under crofting should be re-allocated. The Second Lotting stands to the present day. Most of the villages were enlarged. Calbost was increased from seven to fourteen crofts, without increasing the inbye land under crofting, except very little. The extra seven crofters at Calbost were already living in the village before the Second Lotting took place.

Communal Landownership

Land is the single greatest problem facing the indigenous population of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland ever since the Clan system of communal land occupier-ship was forcibly replaced by private landowners in the 18th century.

The Highland Clansmen held collective rights of possession of the land within the territory occupied by the Clan. Very often that territory was the fruit of the sword of the Clan and the Clan vested the necessary powers of administration of the Clan lands in the office (not the person) of the patriarchal Clan Chief. The Clan Chief was accountable to the Clan, not the other way round. There is no evidence to show that the patriarchal Clan Chief had any absolute rights of private ownership of the Clan lands vested in him personally by the Clan.