

The Passing of the Highland Clan System

There were rumblings of discontent in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland from time to time and the Jacobite rising of 1745 was one such occurrence, the initial success of which alarmed the British Government. When, however, the Scottish clansmen suffered a setback at Culloden the following year, the Government unleashed a savage repressive policy against the Highland people, aimed at the complete disarming of the clansmen, as well as the destruction of the old clan system in the Highlands and Islands, including the Gaelic language, culture, music and even the highland dress etc. At the same time the patriarchal clan chiefs betrayed the people, and with Government encouragement assumed full control of the clan lands and became private landowners.

Under that severe pressure the clansmen were bitterly disillusioned and demoralised and very soon the ancient communal, social order of the clan system in the Highlands disintegrated and was gone forever. In its place private landlordism was imposed on the people. Life for the common people under the old clan system left much to be desired, but very soon the people realised that life under the new system of private landlordism was a much worse form of tyranny.

By the end of the 18th century widespread crofter clearances had taken place under the new system of private landownership throughout the Highland mainland of Scotland, and the evicted crofters were being replaced by large commercial sheep farmers from the south country with their big cheviot sheep (na caoraich mhora) which were all over the Highlands and poised ready to move into the offshore Islands.

At that time the whole of Park Peninsula in the Parish of Lochs, on the Island of Lewis, was inhabited from end to end by smallholder / crofters and the Seaforth Mackenzie Lewis Estate decided, in 1802, to establish the first commercial sheep farm on the Island at the extreme southern end of the Peninsula in the area of Loch Brollum and Loch Claidh. A new purpose built farm house was built at Valtos on the southern shores of the Peninsula, the ruins of which may still be seen there. In order to establish the Park Sheep Farm the Seaforth Lewis Estate cleared about ten or twelve crofter townships in the area of Valtos at the southern end of the peninsula.