

**Plantation slavery and landownership in the west
Highlands and Islands: legacies and lessons**

A Discussion Paper

Dr Iain MacKinnon & Dr Andrew Mackillop

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Land and the Common Good

A discussion paper series on land reform in Scotland

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About the Authors

Dr Iain MacKinnon belongs to a crofting community on the Isle of Skye. He studied for an MSc at the Centre for Human Ecology at Strathclyde University and took a PhD at the Academy for Irish Cultural Heritages and Ulster University. He now works as a researcher at the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience at Coventry University where he studies the Governance of Land and Natural Resources.

Dr Andrew Mackillop is from the Isle of Harris and is an historian of the Scottish Highlands and of Scotland's role in British imperialism from the later seventeenth to early nineteenth centuries. After obtaining his PhD he worked at the universities of St Andrews and Aberdeen before taking up his current post at the University of Glasgow. His book, *Human Capital: Scotland, Ireland, Wales and British Imperialism in Asia, c.1690-c.1820* is in press with Manchester University Press.

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Plantation slavery and landownership in the west Highlands and Islands: legacies and lessons

INTRODUCTION¹

Hundreds of thousands of people travel through the west Highlands of Scotland to the Hebrides each year. Many of them take the A82 northwards from Fort William, driving past Inverlochry Castle Hotel and the Commando monument at Spean Bridge. At the woods of Invergarry they turn left onto the A87 and head west, finally reaching the heights of Glenshiel, descending the hills into Kintail and then on to Lochalsh and the bridge at Kyle.

As they travel through this magnificent tract of the western Highlands it is unlikely these travellers will realise that they are passing estates that were once – and in some cases still are – owned by families who profited from Britain’s eighteenth- and nineteenth-century system of plantation and enslavement in its Caribbean colonies.

Does this obscure piece of history matter? In the context of debates over the challenges facing rural Scotland, what value is there in highlighting the links between colonial slavery and the current structure of land holding and estate economies in the Highlands? If we truly want to comprehend the problems facing rural communities and to think seriously about land and its uses in the twenty-first century, such historical realities are important. They provide a route map for understanding how patterns of large-scale land ownership came to be as they are today and how this form of property holding was, and still is, often dependent on volatile market forces and unstable forms of external capital.

As the Black Lives Matter movement demonstrates, the past has a habit of becoming relevant in new ways and of helping diverse peoples and communities understand the deeply embedded origins of current systems of power, property, and

¹ We are grateful to Community Land Scotland for the opportunity to promote this research as part of their discussion paper series and in particular to Peter Peacock and Calum MacLeod for their input and support for this project. Patrick Krause also offered support to the project. Our work has benefitted from discussions with Stephen Mullen, James Oliver, Andrew Wiseman, Norman Macdonald, Michel Pimbert and members of the History of the Gaels in Scotland reading group at Glasgow University. We also appreciate the knowledge and support of archivists at Skye and Lochalsh Archives in Portree, Highland Archives in Inverness, the Wolfson Reading Room at Aberdeen University, Liverpool Records Office, and the National Library of Scotland and National Records of Scotland in Edinburgh.

profit, as well as their resultant inequalities. This is why the overlap between British Empire slavery and Highland landownership matters. It is vitally important from the outset to acknowledge that Gaels, of all social classes and backgrounds, benefited from transatlantic slavery. Equally, however, many communities in the region also experienced negative consequences arising from the capital and propertied power created by the British system of slavery. Indeed, the experience of the Highlands and Islands provides an important historicised example of the impact of external, globalised (or imperial) forms of capital. In this case it is modes of profit acquired through the brutal exploitation of peoples and resources far removed from the Highlands. The effects of this wealth were immediate, diverse, and enduring. The legacies range from an excessively 'resource extraction' understanding of land, to the prioritising of large, monopoly forms of property holding. The scale, impact and legacies of slave wealth in the Highlands is an object lesson in how an excessive reliance on external sources of capital has helped perpetuate property owning traditions with a poor record in local economy management and in subordinating the needs of resident communities to wider market imperatives.

CONTEXT: THE 'REVOLUTION' IN HIGHLAND LANDHOLDING

Scottish historians write about a 'revolution in landownership' in the west Highlands and Islands of Scotland in the first half of the nineteenth century. It is not a matter of coincidence that this 'revolution' coincided with the period from approximately 1810 to 1860 when the Highland Clearances reached their peak and many thousands were evicted from their homes. This report discloses the extent to which the slave-based profits produced in Britain's Caribbean colonies and elsewhere provided much of the capital that fuelled this land revolution. Using new historical research undertaken by Dr Iain MacKinnon of Coventry University, and funded by the Economic History Society, it outlines the substantial scale of slavery derived wealth and its role in shaping patterns of land ownership in the west Highlands and Islands.

It provides the first systematic analysis of the location of estate purchases and the acreages involved. It focuses on the amount of money spent by slavery beneficiaries on estates in the area, and the amounts received by those estate purchasers who benefitted from the £20 million fund (more than £16 billion in today's

terms²) created by the British government under the terms of the *Slavery Abolition Act, 1833*, to compensate slaveowners for the loss of their 'property' when slavery was abolished in the British Empire.

The report defines 'slavery beneficiaries' as slave-owners, or the children and grand-children of slave-owners, or those who derived significant benefits from the wider slavery based economy, such as sugar, tobacco or cotton merchants. The definition also includes men who married into families with slavery derived wealth.³ In this report the term 'direct beneficiaries of slavery' is only used to describe slave-owners or slave-traders.⁴ The descendants of slave-owners or traders are described as 'indirect beneficiaries', a category which also includes individuals and their descendants involved in commercial activities reliant upon slave labour such as trading in sugar, tobacco or cotton. Some individuals span both categories. For instance, John Blackburn, the father of Glasgow University professor Hugh Blackburn who bought Roshven estate in Moidart in 1854, was both a Caribbean plantation owner and also a sugar merchant in Glasgow. John Blackburn was a major figure in the slavery economy of Jamaica and in his 32 years in the colony is reckoned to have had around 30 plantations under his management or attention. He left more than £100,000 on his death.⁵ A case like his son, Hugh Blackburn, also raises the question of what counts as a slavery derived fortune. It is a question that does not allow for a definitive answer. In some examples in this report, it is clear that slavery derived wealth has been essential for estate purchase. In other cases,

² Hall et al 2014a.

³ Almost all of the land purchases examined for this research were made by men. In the west Highlands and Islands only one slavery heiress who married into a landowning family made independent land purchases. This was Mary Hanbury, second wife of Francis Mackenzie of Gairloch. As her own son from this marriage, Osgood Hanbury Mackenzie, was not in line to inherit the Gairloch estate, Mary Hanbury bought Inverewe and Kernsary estates for him. In this way, the foundations of the National Trust gardens at Inverewe were set by someone who had inherited slavery derived wealth. In addition to those specifically mentioned in this report, other slavery heiresses who married into landed Highland families are identified in section C.2. of the Annex document to the report.

⁴ No west Highland and Island estate purchases by Caribbean sojourners [that is, migrants who left for an overseas destination with the intention of returning home] who did not own slaves have been identified. In part this may be because non-slave owning returnees are less easy to identify as they tend to be less socially prominent. It may also be because the focus of this research has been on large and expensive tracts of land – averaging around 25,000 acres. Non-slave-owning sojourners are unlikely to have been able to afford such estates. However, in a town like Fort William, which was being developed in the mid-nineteenth century by indirect slavery beneficiary Duncan Cameron of Fassifern, it is possible that smaller portions of land were acquired by such returnees. Lots in planned fishing villages on the west coast may also have been acquired by less prominent sojourners. These are potential areas for further study.

⁵ 'John Blackburn', Legacies of British Slave-ownership database, <http://www.depts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/20601>. Sheridan 1971.

particularly when the purchaser may be a grandchild of the original beneficiary, it may be the case that slavery capital, rather than being vital for a particular purchase, was instead an intergenerational benefit integral to the privileged early life and education that helped set the estate purchaser on the way to their own position of affluence and wealth.⁶ This may be the case for someone like Lt. Col. Fitzroy Maclean, 26th chief of clan Maclean, who in 1910 bought a small estate on Mull including the Maclean castle of Duart, which he subsequently restored. Slavery legacies in his family came through his grandfather, Lt. Gen. Sir Fitzroy Jeffreys Grafton Maclean, 24th chief of clan Maclean, who was awarded £3,676, in 1834 terms, for 185 enslaved men and women on his Barbados plantation, and also through his great-grandfather Sir Robert Marsham, 2nd Baron Romney, a slave-owner on St Kitts.⁷ Although it may not be possible to determine the exact influence of slavery derived wealth on their estate purchases, it is important to include indirect beneficiaries in order to give an indication of the full influence of slavery on land ownership in the west Highlands and Islands.

The west Highlands and Islands have been defined as the islands off the west coast of Scotland, from Islay in the south to Lewis in the north, and those mainland parishes of what were the counties of Inverness-shire and Ross-shire which have a boundary with the Atlantic ocean on the west coast. This definition involves four parishes in Inverness-shire, and seven parishes in Ross-shire. Limiting the project to this specific geography has kept the research manageable at this stage. However, it is clear that other parts of the wider Highland area, such as mainland Argyll, Caithness and, apparently to a lesser extent, Sutherland also saw slavery related land purchases, and that many such estate acquisitions also took place in eastern Ross and Inverness.

Any attempt to understand historical patterns of property ownership in this period benefits from the research of Professor Tom Devine on the nineteenth-century west Highlands and Islands, and his compilation of land sales between 1800 and 1860. When considering the role of slavery related capital, it is also important to

⁶ There is a useful discussion of this issue in Glasgow University's recent report on its own slavery links. (Mullen and Newman 2018).

⁷ 'Lt. Gen. Sir Fitzroy Jeffreys Grafton Maclean 8th Baronet of Morvern', Legacies of British Slave-ownership database, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2663>. Robert Marsham 2nd Baron Romney, Legacies of British Slave-ownership database, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146662549>.

acknowledge the ground-breaking *Legacies of British Slavery [LBS]* project created by University College London. This created an online, fully accessible database of British slave-owners in the Caribbean and has transformed our understanding of how and with what consequences slavery derived capital seeped back into British society. David Alston's work, including his website 'Slaves and Highlanders', is another very useful source. Much of the information on slave-owners in this report is drawn from *LBS* entries and is an attempt to elaborate on the project's findings. However, a number of the estate purchases predate the compensation records and so a wider range of sources have also been used. Drawing on the *LBS* and legal documentation in the National Records of Scotland, it is possible to connect slavery derived capital with large scale changes in land ownership in the Highlands.⁸

The financial aspects of many estate sales in the west Highlands and Islands in the early nineteenth century involved the interaction of two economic phenomena. On the one hand there is the vast influx of imperial wealth, derived from slavery and other sources, and bolstered by the massive 'one-off' compensation pay-out of 1834. On the other hand there is the accumulated and unsustainable debt burden of territorially wealthy but cash poor Highland chiefs, combined with their extravagant and sometimes reckless spending habits.⁹ The longstanding debt crisis of many landed families in the west Highlands and Islands came to a head in the years of economic difficulty following the Napoleonic Wars when their incomes, particularly but not exclusively associated with the west coast kelp industry, collapsed. Debt interest charges could no longer be paid, and estates were sold in consequence.¹⁰

The period after 1810 saw 'rapid penetration of a new breed of proprietors from outside the region', a group that Tom Devine dubbed the 'new elite'.¹¹ He argued that the market for land in the west Highlands and Islands was fuelled by the area's growing 'romantic' attraction to wealthy Victorians, including becoming a major centre for hunting, shooting and fishing, as part of what John M. Mackenzie called 'the nineteenth century hunting cult' among British imperial elites. Devine's analysis suggests that the number of estate sales in the area doubled in the 1830s, a decade

⁸ Devine 2006. Hall et al 2014b. <https://www.spanglefish.com/slavesandhighlanders/>.

⁹ Devine 2006. McKichan 2018.

¹⁰ Devine 2006.

¹¹ Devine's claim that the new elite came from 'outside the region' refers to post-1829 in particular. The current research suggests that a substantial minority of slavery related estate buyers post-1829 did have strong pre-existing connections with the region.

in which the market for land in other parts of Britain diminished. Furthermore, the precise breakdown of estate sales between 1800 and 1860 listed by Devine shows that, for those sales for which a date is given, a particularly high proportion took place in the decade following 1834. This was precisely when the slavery compensation legislation was passed and when the capital paid out to former owners entered the British economy.¹²

Taking the particular perspective of slavery derived wealth, this report develops on Devine's general analysis of the land-ownership revolution, and it compares an expanded list of estate purchasers with the *LBS* database of compensated slave-holders.¹³ The comparison enables an exploration of whether estate purchases were fuelled by the hard cash of slavery profits as well as by the attraction afforded to land in the Highlands through its new 'romantic' status.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Significant direct and indirect beneficiaries of slavery made at least 63 estate purchases in the west Highlands and Islands of Scotland in the years between 1726 and 1939. The majority of those purchases (37) took place between 1790 and 1855, the period identified by Eric Richards as the main years of the Highland Clearances.¹⁴ The peak of slavery related sales occurred in the late 1830s – in the years following the slavery compensation pay-out. These findings reinforce Devine's general conclusion on the developing land market in the early nineteenth century.

Cumulatively, it is estimated that the estates acquired by slavery beneficiaries amount to 1,144,395 acres. This figure is likely to be significantly less than the true total as it has not been possible to find acreages for several large slavery related purchases. Additionally, some estates were purchased by a slavery interest on multiple occasions – of course, the acreage of such estates have only been included once in the total acreage.

The previously mentioned geographical definition of the west Highlands and Islands allows for a reasonable estimate of the territory's total area, amounting to 3,417,074 acres. This, in turn, enables a calculation to be made of the percentage of land there that was bought by slavery derived wealth: 33.5 per cent of the west

¹² Devine 1994. Devine 2006. Mackenzie 1988.

¹³ Hall et al. 2014a.

¹⁴ Richards 2013.

Highlands and Islands – more than one-third of its total area – was sold into the hands of people directly or indirectly enriched by slavery. Moreover, as acreages have not been found for all of these estates, the true proportion will certainly be higher. The estates acquired by direct and indirect slavery beneficiaries in the west Highlands and Islands alone amount to more than five per cent of the entire land mass of Scotland.

Some of these who acquired land bought their estates after receiving money from the slave-owner's compensation fund. Using the same calculation for measuring relative monetary values over time as has been used by the *Legacies of British Slavery* project, the total of £137,600 received by these land purchasers from the compensation fund amounts to £110,080,000 in today's terms. This figure only includes direct recipients of the compensation fund, and not those who bought estates later in the century and whose parents or grandparents had earlier received awards through the 1834 fund.

Giving a contemporary value to estates bought in the nineteenth century is an imprecise science and can only give a rough estimate of the kind of financial activity occurring. However, it does indicate the scale of estate purchases by the slavery related elite¹⁵. Using the measures created by economic historians as part of the 'measuring worth' project¹⁶, it is estimated that, allowing only for price inflation, direct and indirect slavery beneficiaries spent a total of £120,260,770 on land in the west Highlands and Islands. However, on the basis that wages change at a different rate of inflation from prices, another measure calculates relative values in terms of labour value – that is, how much would someone on an average wage today need to pay to afford the total slavery related estate. This appears to be the measure used by the *LBS* project. On the basis of this measure, direct and indirect slavery beneficiaries spent £1,069,749,000 on west Highlands and Islands estates. Again, the two totals given in this paragraph will be significant underestimates as purchase prices for 22 of the 63 sales in total – more than one-third of them – have not been found.

However, the west Highlands and Islands estate purchases previously described are not the full extent of slavery derived connections to land in the area. In addition to the 'new elite' of landowners, many of whom were from outside of the

¹⁵ The recent Glasgow University report has a helpful discussion on this issue. (Mullen and Newman 2018).

¹⁶ <https://www.measuringworth.com/index.php>.

area, there is a further category of slavery enriched landowner who did not buy but rather inherited traditional family lands¹⁷. Some of these families, such as Mackenzie of Gairloch and Macleod of Macleod, had married into slavery wealth. However, at least two, Cameron of Locheil and Mackintosh of Mackintosh, appear to have been directly involved in the plantation economy in Jamaica in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹⁸ In the 1880s all of these 'old elite' families combined held at least 690,313 acres in the counties of Ross and Inverness. Although several of these families were forced to sell some land, this finding raises the question as to whether their slavery connections, to some degree, enabled them to survive the early-nineteenth-century landownership revolution identified by Tom Devine. When the land owned by these traditional families is added to the acquisitions of the new elite, it transpires that at least 1,834,708 acres of the west Highlands and Islands – more than half of the area's total landmass, and approaching ten percent of the total landmass of Scotland – has been owned by families that have benefitted significantly from slavery.

This substantial figure does not include the roughly 400,000 acres owned on Lewis by the Mackenzie of Seaforth family whose financial decline during the early decades of the nineteenth century saw them sell almost their entire estate, despite the last Lord Seaforth being both governor of the slave colony of Barbados and also a slave-owner in Berbice.

CASE STUDIES

The first significant slavery related land transaction found in the west Highlands and Islands appears to be Daniel Campbell's purchase of Islay and about half of Jura in 1726. Campbell's main profits came from the shipping and sale of tobacco and sugar (he owned a sugar house in Glasgow to store and process imported sugar), both commodities produced by enslaved people. However, there is evidence that he also traded in slaves.¹⁹ The family held Islay until 1848, when Daniel Campbell's highly-indebted great-great-grandson Walter Frederick Campbell

¹⁷ There are also further connections, not outlined in this report, related to the renting of sporting estates, to the development of herring fisheries for which Caribbean plantations were the primary market, and to slavery beneficiaries providing credit for which land in the west Highlands and Islands was used as security.

¹⁸ Macinnes 1988. Fraser Mackintosh 1890.

¹⁹ Hill and Bastin 2007.

sold it out of the family.²⁰ Following Campbell’s lead, more than 40 significant beneficiaries of the profits of slavery bought estates in the west Highlands and Islands.

Table 1 summarises the extent to which the example of Daniel Campbell and his family’s involvement in slavery and estate ownership was replicated across the region for the next two centuries.

Table 1: West Highland and Island estates purchased by families with financial connections to British Slavery, 1726-1939^{21 22}

District	Acreage Purchased	Relative value today in term of	
		(a.) price &	(b.) average wage
		a.	b.
The Argyll Islands	>212,996	> £26,826,800 / £234,608,000	
Skye and Raasay	70,093	> £10,636,000 / £86,050,000	
Western Isles	291,246	> £20,282,000 / £190,020,000	
Mainland Wester Ross	>206,481	> £11,029,970 / £90,921,000	
Mainland Wester Inverness	363,579	> £51,486,000 / £468,150,000	
TOTAL	>1,144,395	>£120,260,770 / £1,069,749,000	

The most immediately striking point about this new historical evidence is the matter of scale. Well over one million acres was secured by capital directly derived from involvement in slavery or through what can be called indirect connections. A defining

²⁰ Storrie 1981.

²¹ Acreage, date and cost details of purchases in each area are available in an accompanying document entitled ‘Report ANNEX data & references’ which is available on the Community Land Scotland website next to the link to this report. Additionally, this annex: shows how the total acreage for the west Highlands and Islands was derived; gives a list of dates of estate purchases; details estate-owners who were also slavery beneficiaries but did not use slavery derived wealth to buy their land; lists sporting tenants on west Highland estates with slavery connections; details the amounts obtained by estate purchasers from the slave-owners’ compensation fund. The annex also gives a full list of references and a bibliography.

²² Although the final sale recorded is from 1939, all bar five of the purchases took place before 1870 – well within four decades of the abolition of slavery. Of the twentieth century purchases, one is the previously discussed example of Fitzroy Maclean, another is the purchase of Applecross in 1929 by Arnold Wills of the Wills tobacco family, a family whose involvement in slavery has been brought sharply into focus this year by the Black Lives Matter movement. The other two acquisitions were by members of the Schroder merchant banking family which had extensive Atlantic slavery interests. (Drayton 2019. Bristol University 2020).

feature of the way slave wealth seeped back into British society was its transformation into different forms. Land held more than just an economic value for those with wealth that was associated with slavery or the products created through enslaved labour. It performed a very particular and helpful cultural function for this type of individual or family. The new 'romantic' status of Highland property noted by Professor Devine generated a wider public perception of the supposed 'natural', 'timeless' and 'traditional' character of land and landscape. With their connotations of 'ancient' and 'authentic', the Highlands were the antithesis of transient and unstable commercial wealth. This is why Highland acreage had a cultural attraction and value to those with imperial fortunes. Acquiring land changed both the owner and the nature of their money. The effect was to disguise the original link with slavery. This happened in a number of ways. The most obvious was the use of government compensation money to end direct ownership of human beings and to alter the nature of capital into a respectable 'public' grant. The British government 'laundered' what was now seen as immoral forms of wealth into a respectable form of capital. Another method was through involvement in commodities such as sugar, tobacco, or shipping and food supply associated with the plantation economy. This mode of wealth was 'one step' removed from trafficking in and ownership of human beings while still relying on their forced labour.

These 'indirect' forms of slavery derived wealth explain why the impact and legacies of Britain's age of slavery go far beyond those immediately involved in trading enslaved people. If these types of fortunes are not included there is the real danger of underestimating the presence and influence of slave produced capital in British and Scottish society.

The way these profits came into the Highlands can be revealed through a number of examples. From the late eighteenth century onwards, three slave-owning generations of the Davidson of Tulloch family (who seem to have had plantation interests in Florida as well as in the Caribbean) bought east and west Highland estates using their slavery derived wealth, repeatedly buying on the back of having first acted as a major creditor to the indebted previous landowner. The family became ever more involved in the slavery economy such that by the time of

compensation one member, Henry Davidson, was part or whole owner of 4,246 slaves, either directly or by mortgage to plantation owners.²³

Other pre-compensation estate purchases included two on Mull by Lachlan Macquarie, governor general of New South Wales in Australia. Although Macquarie does not seem to have been directly involved in the slavery economy, his first wife, Jane, was the daughter of Thomas Jarvis, a slave-owner and former governor of Antigua.²⁴ Jane Jarvis died young and when Macquarie bought his first estate on Mull in 1802 some £6,000, more than half the total cost, came from money she had left him. He called the estate 'Jarvisfield' in her honour.²⁵

The case of Jane Jarvis shows how women, marriage and the creation of new Anglo-British imperial families shaped patterns of landownership and, through such ownership, the control of local populations. Slavery wealth obtained through marriage may have also been a vital source of income for major landholding families in the west Highlands and Islands. Such marriage amounted to an investment tactic which helped some key families maintain some or all of their estates during the period when many of their peers were forced to sell up. This was true of some of the largest and best known (or infamous) Highland elites. William Sutherland, the 18th earl of Sutherland married Mary Maxwell, a daughter of William Maxwell of Preston who had left her £5,000 on his death in 1741 when Mary Maxwell was still an infant. William Maxwell's estate consisted 'mostly in trade and plantations in Jamaica'. It is probable that Mary Maxwell's grandfather on her mother's side was also involved in the slave-based economy through investments in tobacco in Virginia.²⁶

Both Mary Maxwell and her husband the earl of Sutherland died when their own only surviving daughter, Elizabeth, was an infant. Elizabeth's right to inherit the title Countess of Sutherland was then challenged by other senior members of the family. In the context of an embattled noble lineage, facing a long minority and an expensive legal action, the scale and legacy of Maxwell's bequest cannot be

²³ 'Henry Davidson', Legacies of British Slave-ownership database, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/40852>.

²⁴ Thomas Jarvis senior, Legacies of British Slave-ownership database, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146630389>.

²⁵ Macquarie University, 'The Lachlan & Elizabeth Macquarie Room', 'The "Jarvisfield" Estate'. Available on-line at: <https://www.mq.edu.au/about/campus-services-and-facilities/library/about-us/lachlan-and-elizabeth-macquarie-room/lachlan-macquaries-regiments/jarvisfield-estate> [accessed 09/11/2018].

²⁶ <https://www.casemine.com/judgement/uk/5a8ff80a60d03e7f57eb86e8> & <https://www.hairston.org/p3024.htm>.

underestimated. One way of grasping how much his £5,000 gift added to the solvency of the main line of the family is to note that sixty years later, in 1802, the entire estate in the Highlands rented for £4,379.²⁷ The fact that Elizabeth won the legal case leaves open the possibility that her grandfather's slavery derived wealth left her guardians in a position to pay for the legal costs that enabled her to keep her title and ultimately to marry George Granville Leveson-Gower, the first Duke of Sutherland. It was, of course, as owners of much of Sutherland and employer of James Loch and Patrick Sellar that Elizabeth and George would evict thousands from their homes there in the early nineteenth century.

No highland family was (or is) as prestigious or regionally influential as the House of Argyll. The 7th Duke of Argyll married twice into families with wealth derived from slavery. His second wife, while he was still titled 'Lord John Campbell', was Joan Glassell, the daughter of John Glassell, a Scotsman who had emigrated to Virginia and is said to have been a major figure in the tobacco economy there, both as a merchant and a plantation owner. According to the family genealogist, on her wedding in 1820 Joan Glassell's marriage portion was £50,000. Campbell's third wife was Anne Colquhoun Cunningham, a daughter of John Cunningham 14th of Craigends who before his death owned more than 170 slaves on a Jamaican plantation.²⁸ In these ways wealth linked to slavery played a role in the steadying and recovery of the social, political and economic power of the House of Argyll in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The processes that connected the property and the power of the Davidsons, Sutherlands or Argylls to slavery were convoluted and are difficult to reconstruct. These examples are part of a crucial historic phenomenon by which land in the Highlands – and Scotland more generally – has been used to alter the form and respectability of capital. Profits secured from exploitative, high-risk, high-return ventures in the international economy can be given a makeover and made culturally respectable, non-threatening, and even 'traditional' through being embedded in land ownership. What was true in the age of slavery is still true in the 21st-century global economy. That is an important lesson to be drawn from the history of property and capital in the Highlands.

²⁷ National Library of Scotland, Sutherland Papers, Dep 313/2124.

²⁸ Hayden 1891: 3-8. Anonymous 1871: 71.

It may be significant that of the 61 dateable estate purchases known to have been made by beneficiaries of slavery in the west Highlands and Islands, around 40% took place within two decades following 1833, the year when the compensation fund for slave-owners was established. The preponderance of sales in the period immediately following compensation is suggestive, when added to direct evidence that compensation money was being used to buy estates in the area. Dr John Mackenzie of Gairloch, estate factor to Colonel Hugh Baillie of the slavery connected Dochfour family, wrote in his diary that Baillie was in the market for estates 'out of a heap more money left by old Dochfour, and compensation for freeing Colonel Baillie's slaves in Jamaica'.²⁹ Col. Hugh Baillie bought Redcastle Estate on the Black Isle shortly after receiving compensation, in 1834 terms, of approximately £22,500.³⁰

This figure pales in comparison with the amount of compensation received by Col. Hugh's brother and business partner, James Evan Baillie. He is estimated to have received £53,964 in compensation individually, with a further share of £57,042 from partnerships and £25,990 in claims affected by lawsuits.³¹ Shortly after receiving these massive awards James Evan Baillie was also in the market for estates. Among those that he bought was Glenelg in 1837, and part of Glenshiel the following year at a total cost of more than £100,000. The following decade the journalist Robert Somers visited the area during the famine years. After describing the 'miserable and filthy huts' of Glenshiel's inhabitants and the labour they were obliged to give to the tacksmen, Somers concluded rhetorically but no doubt pointedly: 'It is preposterous to talk of slavery being abolished in the British dominions.'³²

Many of the post-1833 purchases were huge. John Walker of Crawfordton in Dumfries was the son of a returnee from Jamaica, and also appears to have had independent slavery interests. The father died in 1832, leaving £100,000. In 1834

²⁹ Byam Shaw (ed.) 1988.

³⁰ This figure is based on the assumption that the three partners in Baillie, Ames and Baillie took equal shares in their firm's compensation awards, and that in their shared awards the two brothers Col. Hugh and James Evan Baillie did likewise.

³¹ Hamilton 2005: 202.

³² Somers 1977. Around the same period Donald Macleod, in his book *Gloomy Memories*, makes similar associations with 'the old slave-owner' John Gordon of Cluny's treatment of tenants on his Hebridean estates. (Macleod 1996) In testimony to the Napier Commission in 1883 tenants of Dr Nicol Martin, owner of Husabost Estate in north west Skye and a former slave-owner in British Guiana, testified that they 'had to give ten days a year of free labour to Dr Martin' and that his grievance made them 'work like slaves.' (Hutchinson 2015).

John bought Corrour estate in the county of Inverness-shire for £45,000. In the 1880s, the family had more than 70,000 acres in the county. Their estates adjoined the 39,414 acres of Inverlochy, bought in 1840 by James Scarlett, for £75,150. Scarlett, an Attorney General of England and a member of the Privy Council, was awarded compensation of £626 for a plantation with 30 slaves in Jamaica. He was married to a daughter of Peter Campbell, a major slave-owner in Jamaica, who left his daughter £3,000 in his will. Slavery wealth is therefore likely to have formed a portion of the money Scarlett paid for Inverlochy, where he went on to build Inverlochy Castle of which Queen Victoria reputedly wrote that she had never seen a lovelier or more romantic spot.

Another neighbouring member of the new Inverness-shire elite, Edward Ellice, had been an architect of the amalgamation of the North West Company and the Hudson Bay Company in Canada and was heavily involved in the colonisation of Lower Canada and Vancouver Island.³³ In addition to his high-profile activities in North America, Ellice had significant interests in the Caribbean. The 1803 accounts of the firm in which his father had been a partner, and in which he was to become a partner, showed assets of more than £480,000 in Caribbean slave colonies and liabilities of just £46,000.³⁴ As well as being a major mortgage lender in those islands he also directly owned several plantations. In 1839 Ellice bought Glenquoich for £32,000 and later added the neighbouring Glengarry estate. By the 1870s his son, Edward Ellice junior, owned 99,545 acres in Inverness-shire, to which the family received a stream of visitors to hunt and shoot with them. These included Edwin Landseer, painter of the romantic icon 'Monarch of the Glen'. Ellice was a significant patron of Landseer. The family let the fishing rights for Glengarry to the Duke of Portland, himself an indirect beneficiary of slavery wealth, and in 1873 Glenquoich was let as a sporting estate to Lord Burton. Burton's many rich and famous hunting guests included King Edward VII, twice, and Grand Duke Michael of Russia.³⁵

³³ <https://www.kellyblack.ca/blog/2019/5/20/settler-colonialism-and-the-everyday> & http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/ellice_edward_9E.html.

³⁴ Clarke 1974.

³⁵ <https://www.obantimes.co.uk/2016/04/13/morvern-lines-14-april-2016-with-highland-historian-iain-thornber/> & <https://www.obantimes.co.uk/2017/06/25/morvern-lines-with-iain-thornber-9/> <https://www.bonhams.com/auctions/23501/lot/31/> & <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2005/the-british-sale-paintings-drawings-and-watercolours-105170/lot.82.html>.

In 1897 Rev. Norman Maclean became Church of Scotland minister of Glengarry and Glenquoich. The entire parish at that time was owned by Elizabeth Ellice, widow of the younger Edward Ellice.³⁶ Having previously ministered on Skye, Rev. Maclean was struck by the lack of people in his new charge. He later wrote: 'There you had two of the most beautiful glens in Scotland, and except for the scattered village of Invergarry and a handful of cottages at Glenquoich, the whole land was empty and desolate.' Substantially cleared of population by the MacDonnells of Glengarry before the Ellice purchase, the two glens, Rev. Maclean concluded, held only a 'remnant' population and had become 'a sportsman's paradise...emptied of life to become playgrounds for aliens'. Maclean's tenure in Glengarry saw the creation of a major new transport link to these playgrounds: the Invergarry and Fort Augustus railway. A 'hopelessly unremunerative' development, according to one recent history of Highland railways, this line was the product of speculation by industrial capitalists and the self-interest of local landed elites. A member of the Ellice family was deputy-chairman of the company promoting the route. It was supported by other Great Glen landlords such as Lord Abinger and Cunninghame of Foyers – both indirect beneficiaries of slavery – but the chief lobbyist seems to have been Lord Burton. Rev. Maclean claimed that Burton, aghast at having to travel long distances by road, 'wanted...the railway that he might get quicker to his deer-forest at Glenquoich'.

The minister was present when the first sod for the new line was cut in 1897. He recollected: 'I probably shall never witness such a banquet as followed. Toast followed toast and speech vied with speech in heralding the golden age that was dawning on the Great Glen. Nobody in the fervour of oratory paused to think that one excursion train could remove the whole population in Invergarry and Fort Augustus to Glasgow or London, leaving not a wrack behind'. The line was built, and, after haemorrhaging money for a few years, was closed again, its chief backer, Lord Burton, having given up the sporting lease of Glenquoich in 1905. In such ways was slavery wealth at the heart of the 'Victorian hunting cult' and of re-creating the Highlands a playground for the rich.³⁷

³⁶ Elizabeth Ellice's deceased first husband, Alexander Spiers, was also an indirect beneficiary of slavery wealth – his grandfather was a Glasgow tobacco lord and plantation owner in Virginia.

³⁷ Maclean 1949. McGregor 1998. Although several landowners along the route were slavery beneficiaries, Lord Burton himself does not seem to have had connections to slavery. However, his only child married into the Baillie of Dochfour family which had amassed huge wealth from slavery.

Within five years of the establishment of the slavery compensation fund, at least eight former slave-owners enriched by the fund had bought estates. However, money from the fund may also have been used for later purchases with compensation being initially channelled into investments elsewhere in the domestic or imperial economy until a suitable estate became available. It is hard to conceive how someone like George Rainy – from a relatively modest background (the son of a minister in Sutherland) but who had received more than £50,000 from the compensation fund – could otherwise have bought the island of Raasay for £27,000 in 1846. Similarly, although Alexander McBarnet had married into a family with slavery connections, he does not seem to have come from a particularly affluent background. However, after a period as a sojourner in St Vincent he was able to afford to buy not one but two large west Highland estates. Compensation of more than £8,000 received in 1836 is highly likely to have contributed to his purchase of Attadale in 1837 and Torridon in 1838.

SLAVERY AND THE CLEARANCES

McBarnet and Rainy are two of a number of slavery landlords criticised for their treatment of tenants in testimonies to the Napier Commission. Therefore, the research also has implications for our understanding of the clearances. Pre-clearance society was constituted of indigenous bailtean communities which had intricate land management systems. Clearance was part of a wider process of land commodification in which these bailtean villages were ‘virtually eliminated’ by landlords ‘intent on exploiting the marketable commodities of their estates’, and were generally replaced by single-occupier sheep farms or crofting townships. The first appearance of slavery related land buyers to the west Highlands and Islands, in the shape of Daniel Campbell on Islay and Jura in 1726, appears to have occurred contemporaneous with the beginning of what Allan Macinnes has called ‘the first phase of clearance’, and over the next one hundred years, as clearance intensified, so did the ownership of land by slavery derived wealth.³⁸

In the nineteenth century, some of the worst examples of clearance can be found on the estates of members of the new slavery elite. John Gordon of Cluny

³⁸ Macinnes 1988.

removed more than 2,900 people – ‘forced in some cases with circumstances of shocking inhumanity’ – in the years following his purchase of Uist and Barra.³⁹

Other smaller, but no more humane, clearances were enacted by Rainy on Raasay, and by slavery beneficiaries James Forsyth on Mull and Lord Cranstoun at Arisaig. There also appears to have been ‘assisted emigration’ from other slavery linked properties in the Highlands on which estate policy appears first to have placed the land’s inhabitants into circumstances of abject destitution from which they then ‘voluntarily’ removed.⁴⁰ The total number cleared by the new slavery elite using these different methods is highly unlikely to be less than 5,000. After the actions of traditional clan families implicated in slavery are taken into account this figure will be very much higher, almost certainly into the tens of thousands – for instance, Eric Richards estimates that in the years 1819 and 1820 alone the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland were responsible for clearing some 5,600 people (Richards 2013).

There is also a strong connection between slave-ownership and the land risings on Skye that led to the passing of the Crofters Act of 1886. Two of the main landlords whose oppressive actions led to resistance were beneficiaries of slavery. Nicol Martin of Husabost, central to the risings in Glendale, had been directly compensated for the loss of his slaves in 1834. William Fraser owned Kilmuir estate, and his rack-renting and large-scale evictions there led to some of the earliest protests on Skye. Fraser had inherited the estate of Guisachan in east Inverness-shire directly from his grandfather, William Fraser of Culbokie who had been a major slave-owner in British Guiana and also had plantation interests in St Vincent. William Fraser the younger sold Guisachan to Dudley Coutts Marjoribanks, whose father had been a partner in Coutts Bank and claimed unsuccessfully to be compensated for slaves on a plantation in Trinidad.⁴¹ Moreover, half the membership of the Napier Commission, whose report on social conditions in the Highlands and Islands preceded the crofting legislation of 1886, were descended from indirect or direct beneficiaries of slavery. These were Kenneth Mackenzie of Gairloch, Donald Cameron of Lochiel and Sheriff Alexander Nicolson.

³⁹ Devine 1988.

⁴⁰ Hutchinson 2006. Currie 2000. Devine 1998. Rixson 2011. MacDonald 1997b.

⁴¹ MacPhail 1989.

CONCLUSIONS

At first glance, it may appear that the legacy of slavery on the ownership and management of land and natural resources in the Scottish Gàidhealtachd is not an important or lasting one. After all, few among those families who bought land after benefitting from slavery are major landlords in the area today. Moreover, and as the Sutherland Clearances best exemplify, it was not the case that all landlords who ruthlessly cleared their estates were connected with slavery, at least directly. Nor did all slavery related landlords clear their estates. Duncan Darroch, for instance, a scion of slavery derived wealth, was considered a good landlord on the Torridon estate he purchased in the 1870s.⁴²

However, at a deeper level the legacies of slavery in the transformation of the Gàidhealtachd have been profound and enduring. The fact that more than a million acres in the area were bought by beneficiaries of slavery (and many more hundreds of thousands of acres may have been maintained in traditional ownership through the influx of money derived from the slavery economy or from marriage into families which had benefitted from that economy) suggests that 'slave wealth' played a vital role in the 'revolution in landownership' outlined by Devine.

Beyond the actions of particular landowners, what is clear is that this period witnessed a transformative change in social relations between the propertied class and populations under their control. Profits from slavery enabled and sustained in new ways propertied power over people and communities the length and breadth of the west Highlands and Islands. This form of capital brought with it attitudes to land and the people on it which reflected its origins. As a form of colonial wealth, slavery related capital was derived from highly exploitative, often brutally coercive forms of labour. Its creation was predicated on emphasising resource and labour extraction as well as profit maximisation.

Those who secured such wealth tended in turn to see any land they owned, regardless of geography, in similarly extractive terms. Landed estates were simply an extension of their capital and had to be productive. These owners now brought such attitudes to bear upon people and communities inhabiting at least 1 million acres of the Highlands – tens of thousands of the area's population. This elite possessed backgrounds and outlooks which stressed productivity rather than social

⁴² MacDonald 1997b.

or ecological sustainability. Local economies across the region were reshaped by this ethos of maximised production. Land was treated as only one asset, and often a subsidiary one at that, within a portfolio of commercial interests connected to wider British and imperial markets. With the emphasis on economies of scale and the benefits of market-driven specialisation – be that kelp or tobacco, sugar or sheep, cotton or deer – local diversity and social resilience came a poor second.

Working alongside this economic calculus was the cultural imperative to treat land in the Highlands as a badge of success. Estates and their populations became trophy purchases, the culmination for the new elite of their successful social climbing. Slavery beneficiaries were also integral to the new image of the Highlands as a sporting playground, turning hundreds of thousands of acres into deer forest, thus condemning these areas to be ecologically impoverished artificial wildernesses into which elites inserted themselves each summer in order to kill for sport. This increasingly one-dimensional use of the land stands in stark contrast to the mixed arable and pastoral economies of the bailtean which, in turn, sustained socially complex communities. These township populations nurtured knowledge production systems that enabled mixed land management strategies. This was underpinned by communal, rule-based approaches to foreshores, grazing, and fuel assets which were taken to be common pool resources. Local resources could then be exploited through a consciously integrated and diverse set of micro-economies.⁴³

In contrast, the cultural productions of the new elite's influential artistic and creative guests helped to redefine the area, and its inhabitants, in simplistic romantic terms and helped pave the way for highly-contested conceptions that the area is a 'wilderness' or 'wild land' today. Devine has described hunting as a 'psychological drive or need' among the new elite and, more widely, argued that 'buying a Highland estate and 'improving' it gratified the same passion for possession as the collection of fine art or the acquisition of expensive and elaborate furniture'.⁴⁴ Drawing on the work of the psychologist Erich Fromm and his own experiences working as a ghillie on a Lewis sporting estate, the human ecologist Alastair McIntosh argued that people driven by such psychological needs confuse 'having' with 'being' and live 'as

⁴³ Two classic texts on this topic are Nobel Economic Prize-winner Elinor Ostrom's study *Governing the Commons*, and the pioneering volume on social-ecological resilience, *Navigating Social-Ecological Systems: Building Resilience for Complexity and Change*. (Ostrom 1990. Berkes, Colding & Folke 2002).

⁴⁴ Devine 1994.

if a person's possessions are their being'. In McIntosh's view, this 'passion for possession' depends on the creation of unaccountable power that 'bolsters an artificial sense of being somebody' but at the expense of the person's surroundings, the people around them, and their own personality.⁴⁵

In acquiring a Highland estate, slavery beneficiaries sought to present themselves and the public face of their wealth in a particular light. But in doing so they also contributed to changing the character of the area they had bought, and its communities. Although Hugh Trevor Roper's tendentious but influential writing has argued otherwise, most of the cultural practices and beliefs of Gaelic Scotland in the early nineteenth century were derived from ancient roots. Indeed, for some members of the new elite an awareness of this cultural distinctiveness – albeit occluded by cloying romanticism – was a significant part of the area's attraction as an investment. However, the very process of them 'buying into' the cultural distinctiveness that goes with the territory – in some cases to adopt the lifestyle of a pseudo-clan chief – has been an important part of cultural deracination in the Gàidhealtachd.

Control of land, of wildlife, and even of resident populations helped to generate the impression not of a 'new' imperial elite but of respectable owners and families who did not threaten the political, economic and cultural mores of the British and Scottish establishments. In this way 'new' wealth could, and did, appear as 'old' wealth. The fact that the scale of the link between land in the Highlands and Islands and Britain's enslavement economies is only now becoming clear reveals how successful this 'disguising' strategy has been.

The legacy of British slavery is an important part of modern Highland history. It is also important to reiterate that highlighting these links in no way detracts from the fact that Gaels benefited from colonial slavery. The region's aristocracy and gentry did so, as did those Gaels with sufficient education and social status to become overseers of enslaved people, bookkeepers, plantation managers and agents. Ordinary Gaels wore cotton and consumed sugar and tobacco while aware of the brutal conditions under which it was produced. Culpability and complicity in the benefits of enslaving other human beings spread throughout the region and down its social order.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ McIntosh 2004.

⁴⁶ Alston 2004. Kidd 2013. Kehoe 2016. Mullen 2018. Worthington 2020.

However, the legacies of slavery and the wealth it generated also impacted upon the region in ways that worked against many of its already vulnerable communities. It should be stressed that colonial profits did not create the new commercial forms of landlordism that transformed the people and communities of the Highlands between c.1750 and c.1900. But slavery lay at the heart of a new and significant turnover in ownership and acreage at a crucial point in the social history of the region. Capital derived from the enslavement of human beings sustained large scale, monopoly forms of landownership across the west Highlands and Islands. Not only does this historical reality raise important moral questions around the nature of ownership, and of the need for reparative acknowledgement, it points to enduring practical legacies. Overseas, slavery based capital further embedded in the Highlands short term, extraction-based estate economies that were volatile, one dimensional and susceptible to wider external market forces. It is a pattern that is still instantly recognisable today.

This is a point worth remembering when considering the moral and economic case for community- and people-centred solutions to the problems which continue to beset rural populations across the Highlands, the Islands, and Scotland more generally.

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