

OLD LAND DENOMINATIONS AND "OLD EXTENT" IN ISLAY

PART TWO *

W. D. Lamont

SECTION IV: THE OLD ISLAY DENOMINATIONS

1. *Irish and Islay Cowlands:* Our principal reason for investigating the ancient Irish social economy was to discover whether it throws any light on the significance of the Islay Cowland. Now there certainly were in Islay the following holdings: 1 Cowland, $\frac{1}{2}$ M land, 10/- land explicitly equated with 3 Cowlands, 1M land explicitly equated with 4 Cowlands, 20/- land explicitly equated with 6 Cowlands, and 30/- land explicitly equated with 9 Cowlands.¹ We have therefore the following direct correlations, apparently, with the Irish system:

IRELAND (24 System)	Cowlands	ISLAY
Bailebiataigh	24	?
Bruighfer's lands	9	30/- land: 9 Cowlands
Bo-Aire Febsa's lands	6	20/- land: 6 Cowlands
	4	M land: 4 Cowlands
Og-Aire's lands	3	10/- land: 3 Cowlands
Fintan's Seisreach	2	$\frac{1}{2}$ M land: 2 Cowlands
Ballyboe	1	$\frac{3}{4}$ d land: 1 Cowland

But is this correlation more than accidental? If it is really significant, we ought to be able to give a reasonably confident affirmative answer to the following questions: *Firstly*, was the Islay Cowland, like the Irish, an area reckoned as 7 soums with a rent or tax of 1 cow? *Secondly*, is there any evidence that the 6-Cowland group was the minimum ploughland in Islay as in Ireland? *Thirdly*, is there any evidence that this 6-Cowland group was the ancient Islay Quarterland? We shall deal with these three questions in the order given.

2. *Meaning of Islay Cowland:* Our first question—whether "Cowland" meant the same thing in Islay as in Ireland—cannot be answered by any direct evidence from Islay itself; but it can, I think, be answered with reasonable assurance from evidence as to general practice in Celtic Scotland.

* For Part One of this article see *Scottish Studies* 2 (June 1957).

As recently as the late eighteenth century, lands in the Isles and West Highlands were generally regarded as having so many cows' grazing or "soums". In this connection "cow" had a technical sense. It meant, not a single animal, but a cow and followers—frequently a milk-cow, calf, 1-year old, and 2-year-old; and in some cases also a 3-year-old (in all 4 or 5 animals). Further, the cow soum in this technical sense was the standard soum in terms of which the grazing of other animals was stated. How this might work out we shall see in a moment.

Pennant, touring the Isles in the early 1770s, notes the souming rules and practices. While there was no exact pattern followed in every detail in all the islands, it is remarkable that, when he refers specifically to "cows", the souming follows with great regularity the 7, 14, etc., pattern (Walker 1808, pp. 55-7; Pennant 1790, pp. 225, 315, 320-1)—the pattern of the Ballyboe in ancient Ireland.

Unfortunately he provides no confirmation that this practice obtained in Islay. But, on the other hand, he goes into detail in the case of Rum; and we can, by other means, correlate the Rum and Islay systems. In Rum, he says (Pennant 1790, p. 320) there is "an absurd custom" of allotting a certain stock to the land. The official rule (often broken in practice) is "28 soums to the Pennyland", 10 sheep being equated with 1 cow, and 2 cows with a horse (strictly, a mare).

From the rest of the information he gives, it is evident that his "28 soums to the Pennyland" should read "28 soums to the Markland". Both these old denominations were used in Rum; and there, as elsewhere, when their literal meaning ceased to have any practical importance, they were liable to be confused with each other even in formal documents.²

Now 28 soums to the Rum Markland is highly relevant to the Islay problem. In Rum the Davach was a 6M land (*Orig. Par. Scot.* 1854, pp. 335-7; and if, as we shall try to show below in sub-section 4, the old Islay Quarterland was the 6-Cowland group with an Extent of 20/-, then the old Islay Quarter and the Rum quarter-davach were both 20/- lands. The term "Cowland" is not found in Rum records. If it was ever employed, it probably disappeared as a consequence of the Norse imposition of the Pennyland system. But *if* the ancient Irish system of exacting 1 cow in every 7 had obtained in Rum, then 28 soums would be equivalent to 4 Cowlands: i.e. the Markland of Rum would be a 4-Cowland group like

the Markland of Islay. The argument may be put in the alternative form: *If* the souming rules in Islay were basically the same as those in Rum, following the 7, 14, 21, 28 pattern when stated in terms of cows' grazing, then the Markland of Islay being equivalent to that of Rum (since each was one-sixth of the Bailebiataigh or Davach) the Islay Markland must have been 28 soums; and the fact that it is called a 4-Cowland group would indicate that "Cowland" did mean the same thing in Islay as in ancient Ireland.

Admittedly, we reach this conclusion only with the assistance of some important "ifs"; but the general bearing of the evidence at our command is very strongly in favour of the view that the Islay Cowland was equivalent to the Irish Ballyboe.

3. *The Old Islay Ploughland*: At the end of the eighteenth century James Macdonald said (Lamont 1957, p. 183) that the *Leor-theas* was supposed to be synonymous with the "ploughgate"; and some of our authorities think that the term is derived from the Gaelic word *leòir* (sufficiency) (McKerral 1944, p. 44; Lamont 1957, pp. 196-8). This may, perhaps, represent the position in the eighteenth century; and it is interesting to observe that, if we are correct in our correlation of the old Irish and Islay systems by means of the Cowland unit, the Islay *Leor-theas* is approximately the same as Fintan's *Seisreach*. The exact equivalent of the *Seisreach* would be the $\frac{1}{2}$ M land in Islay. But we have seen that, in adjusting the older denominations to the "33/4d to the Quarter" system, the Markland was sometimes raised, and the Poundland lowered, to the mean of 16/8d. Consequently some old $\frac{1}{2}$ M lands, as well as old 10/- lands, would appear in the revised system as the *Leor-theas* at 8/4d.

But, however this may be, we can pretty definitely reject the view that the *Leor-theas* was the ancient Islay ploughland. One of the older denominations superseded in the system as described by Macdonald was the *Horsegang*. While it may be ancient, we only come across it in the eighteenth century Rentals, and there it usually appears as one-sixth of the Quarter at 33/4d (Smith 1895, pp. 508, 545, 547). This might be taken to imply that this Quarter was the old ploughland worked by a 6-horse plough. But there is no tradition of such a plough in Islay; and I think that the evidence we are about to adduce indicates that the normal ploughland was the 6-Cowland group containing 4 *Horsegangs*, and that when

the new "Quarter" is equated with 6 Horsegangs, this merely shows how, in some particular cases, the new large Quarters were made up.

The best clue to the nature of the Islay Horsegang is probably found in what we are told of the system obtaining in the Argyllshire parish of Kilmartin. Normally, in that parish, there were 4 tenants on a farm, though some of the larger farms had 6 or even 8 tenants. On the 4-tenant farm there was a single plough—the old home-made implement drawn by 4 horses abreast—and each tenant's portion of the farm was called a Horsegang (Sinclair 1792, pp. 97-103). Fortunately we have a record of the souming rules for Kilmartin at the same time. With the 4-tenant farm as the lower limit, and the 8-tenant farm as the upper, the stocking rule was:

Cows (besides some young cattle)	.	from 24 to 48
Sheep	. . . . .	„ 30 to 60
Horses	. . . . .	„ 8 to 12

Now if the souming rules were in principle the same in Kilmartin as in Rum, the official souming capacity of the 4-Horsegang farm in Kilmartin, stated in terms of the "standard cow soum", was:

24 Cows	. . . . .	24	standard soums
30 Sheep	. . . . .	3	„ „
8 Horses	. . . . .	16	„ „
		—	
Total	. . . . .	43	„ „

This works out at almost exactly the souming capacity of 1½M lands (20/-) in Rum (Rum 42, Kilmartin 43), and a difference of 1 unit as between these two places in the eighteenth century is of little moment. We have already, in sub-section 2, shown the strong probability that the Rum and Islay Marklands were equivalent in this respect; and it would therefore appear that the Kilmartin 4-Horsegang farm was equivalent to the Islay 20/- land of 6 Cowlands.

We have some further data for making a rough check on this equation of the Kilmartin 4-Horsegang and Islay 20/- lands. It seems that the most common Extents in Kilmartin were of the 40/-, 20/- type (*Orig. Par. Scot.* 1854, pp. 335-7). Further, we are told (*Orig. Par. Scot.* 1854, pp. 91, 93) that the parish of Kilmartin was almost co-extensive with the old "barony of Ardskeodnish" which was a 100M land. In this parish there were about 48 farms (Sinclair 1792, pp. 97-103) and this

gives an average of 2M to a farm. But as some of these farms were of 6 or 8 Horsegangs, the 4-Horsegang would be less than 2M in Extent; and as the most common Extents are of the 40/-, 20/- order, it is reasonable to assume that 20/- was normally the Extent of the 4-Horsegang farm.

As to direct evidence from Islay itself, I have so far found only one item of special interest. The lands of Kennabols and Eolobols are shown thus (Smith 1895, pp. 535, 550, 557):

	1722	1733	1741
Kennabols	. }	1 Qr {	4 Horsegangs . . . 1 (?) Horsegang
Eolobols	. }	2 Horsegangs . . .	10/-

Most unfortunately, something has gone wrong in the entry for Kennabols in 1741, for the rent actually charged shows that the lands are the same as in the earlier years. Still, we do have the 2 Horsegangs of Eolobols explicitly equated with a 10/- land.

With regard to our *second* question, then—Was the 6-Cowland group in Islay the old minimum ploughland group, as it seems to have been in ancient Ireland?—the answer is much the same as the answer to our *first* question as to the equivalence of the Ballyboe and Cowland. While absolute proof is not possible, we can with reasonable assurance answer in the affirmative.

While it is not our business here to consider the system of Lowland Scotland, it is interesting to note that the Extent of the Islay Horsegang (5/-) would, on our theory, be equal to that of the Oygait of which there were 8 in the “Twa pund land of auld extent”.

4. *The 6-Cowland Group as the Old Islay Quarter:* Apart from the circumstantial evidence provided in the preceding pages and the inference which may naturally be drawn from it, there is nothing which could show that the 6-Cowland group was the old Quarterland other than some direct reference to it as such. And we can hardly expect such references subsequent to the establishment of the new system of Quarterlands at 33/4d.

It so happens, however, that there has been some confusion about the proper Extent of some lands on the “33/4d to the Quarter” system, a confusion which is explicable only on the assumption that it originated in confusion between an old Quarter at 20/- and the new Quarter at 33/4d. Three such cases have come to my notice.

The first of these has already been referred to in the immediately preceding sub-section—the lands of Kennabols and Eolobols. These were old Church lands; and they appear in McIan's 1507 Rental as Kennabols, 33/4d; Allabolis, 16/8d. The explanation of these Extents is found in a charter of 1587-8 (Smith 1895, p. 89) where the first is called a Quarter and the second an Eighth, without any Extents attached. McIan, in listing the Church lands in 1507, was probably responsible for adding the "appropriate" Extents of 33/4d and 16/8d, which were of little practical significance to anyone then because Church lands were not in these cases subject to Crown dues. These McIan Extents were accordingly entered for the lands when they were transferred to lay ownership in 1617 (Smith 1895, p. 354). But thereafter the assessment did become important; and presumably the tenants concerned complained about it, for we find that by 1722 the two lands are together given the reduced Extent of 1 Quarter. There is not the slightest ground for supposing any alteration in their area between 1507 and 1722; and since they appear in 1733 as 4 and 2 Horsegangs respectively, the obvious inference is that their original denominations as a Quarter and an Eighth meant a Quarter at 20/- and an Eighth at 10/- (and it is as a 10/- land that Eolobols is actually entered in the local Rental of 1741).

The second case is also an old Church land included in the same charter of 1587-88. It is Nerrabolls, and is described in the charter as a 5M land. But in 1722 it is reduced to 1 Quarter at 33/4d. The explanation here is almost certainly that Nerrabolls was originally known as 2 Quarters with an Extent of 40/-, and was given the Extent of 5M later on through confusion between the old and the new Quarter, this Extent being still later reduced to 33/4d. This suggestion is not mere speculation. The *reddendo* (Smith 1895, p. 91) for Nerrabolls, as set out in the charter, was the ancient one of "60 ells of coloured cloth, or 8d for each ell", a *reddendo* apparently fixed when the land had belonged to the Monastery of Derry, and certainly very old since the ell of coloured cloth was 2/8d in 1329, 4/4½d in 1330, and 2/4d in 1331 (*Exch. Rolls*, i, 219, 290, 365). 60 ells at 8d each amounts to 40/-; and so Nerrabolls was apparently 2 Quarters at 20/- each.

The third case provoked some acrimonious controversy in the local Islay "Parliament" in the eighteenth century (Smith 1895, Index; Ramsay 1890, pp. 13, 25-6). A large area called

Scanlastol had been chopped up in the McIan Extent to fit his Quarterland system, parts of it being subsequently joined (for fiscal purposes only, it would seem) to different lands at different times. By 1614 (Smith 1895, p. 204) it had apparently settled down to an Extent of £2:16:8d ($4\frac{1}{4}M$). Locally, however, it seems to have been traditionally regarded as a 3 Quarters land, and was so assessed by the local Parliament for some years, at $7\frac{1}{2}M$. The tenants then apparently heard that, according to the old records, this was extortionate, and made a spirited protest. The complaint was rejected. They were told that Scanlastol was and would continue to be regarded as 3 Quarters until documentary evidence was produced to prove the contrary. It is likely that there was an important element of truth in both the claims. Scanlastol probably *was* 3 Quarters—but 3 old, not McIan, Quarters.

Here we must leave the matter to the judgment of the reader, inviting him to decide for himself whether the circumstantial evidence does or does not favour the view that the 6-Cowland group, the 4-Horsegang ploughland, and the old Islay Quarter were one and the same thing. I shall merely summarise, in concluding the discussion of the denominations, the position which seems to me most near the truth.

5. *Summary of Argument on Islay Denominations:* The ancient Islay denominations, traces of which survive in the seventeenth and eighteenth century local Rentals, most probably derived from the ancient Irish system of 24 Ballybocs to the Bailebiataigh, the 3, 6 and 9-Cowland groups corresponding to the holdings of the Og-Aire, Bo-Aire Febsa and Bruighfer, respectively. The 6-Cowland group was probably the normal or minimum ploughland, and also the old Quarterland, presupposing a larger administrative unit corresponding to the Bailebiataigh.

This was apparently the system in operation when the Old Extent was imposed in, or shortly after, 1266; but at a much later date—probably after 1493—the lands of Islay were systematically regrouped into larger Quarters with an Extent of $3\frac{3}{4}$. Initially, the new system, applied for State purposes, had little effect on local practice and nomenclature. Its influence is, however, dominant by the middle of the eighteenth century, the older denominations surviving only as scattered remnants in the Rentals. By the end of the century, when Macdonald visited the island, the new had completely replaced the old.

SECTION V: THE "OLD EXTENT" OF ISLAY

1. *The Period of this Extent*: While the foregoing Sections have been primarily concerned with the old land denominations, enough has been said about the Extent of the Cowland and ancient Quarterland to fix the period to which it belongs. The vital clue is the valuation of the cow at 3/4d. Though the cash allowances made to tenants in the Exchequer accounts of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries vary enormously, the official value for Extent purposes is much more regular. In 1329-30 the value was 8/- (*Exch. Rolls*, i, 125, 219, 289). In the Isles it appears to have been about 7/8M in 1408 (if the 42M of the Gaelic charter of that year is equated, not with "4 cows", but with "4 cows per markland"); and in 1541 it was £1:6:8d. Some old cow values are given in *Regiam Majestatem* (Cooper 1946, pp. 273-6, 279), ranging from 4/- to 6/-. But none of these values quite fits our case. On the other hand, Mr. McKerral (1944, p. 66) has noted that in 1264-66 a "Mark Extent" could be equated with any one of the following: 16 bolls oatmeal, 20 bolls malt, 26 stones cheese, 4 cows.

This, then, must be the period of our 20/- to the ancient Quarterland Extent in Islay. It is the true "Old Extent", imposed just after the cession of the Isles to Scotland.

2. *The Total "Old Extent" of Islay*: Having determined the relation of the "Old Extent" to the typical small land denominations, we shall now try to determine the total "Old Extent" of the island as a whole. This enquiry is not undertaken as a piece of merely pedantic antiquarianism; for, in trying to discover the total amount, we shall—as I hope to show—also discover interesting features of social life in Islay which profoundly influenced the Extent or assessment of the island by the officers of the Crown.

There have been two radically different estimates of the total "Old Extent", one putting it at £170:0:4d (255M and 4d), the other putting it at 360M (£240).

(i) *The 360M Estimate*. This is the Extent alleged in the *Description of the Isles of Scotland*, 1577-95, already referred to (Lamont 1957, p. 186). It is pretty clear, from some of the information given by the writer of this *Description*, that he had access to the Exchequer accounts of his own time. Further, the nice round sum he gives—360M or £240—is the kind of thing we should expect. Again, this was the estimate accepted by Sir James Macdonald of Dunyveg in 1599 (Smith 1895, p. 111).

But despite its initial plausibility, we must reject it. Sir

James Macdonald's opinion in 1599 was of little value. His family connection with the island had been very broken for a century, the old writs were destroyed, and he had spent most of his life in the Lothians. As to the writer of the *Description*, admitting his knowledge of the contemporary scene, one is forced to the view that he was mistaken. No working Rental or chamberlain's account ever accepted anything like the figure of 360M. However, as our discussion proceeds, we shall see how very nearly this writer came to the true figure, and how his mistake probably arose.

(ii) *The £170:0:4d Estimate*. However initially unpromising, this provides a genuine clue to the true figure. It is the sum which McIan took as the total "Old Extent" and tried to distribute over the island (all church lands being, of course, excluded from this total) in accordance with his 33/4d Quarterland system in 1507; and it is on this distribution of the "Fermes" that all subsequent working estimates have been based.

Further, we know exactly how McIan got his figure. It is the apparent total of three royal charters to McIan himself, plus the remainder of the lay lands of Islay set by the Crown Commissioners in 1506:

Charter of 1494, 20M	. . . . .	£13:6:8
„ „ 1499, 170M	. . . . .	113:6:8
Lands at disposal of Crown set by Commissioners in June 1506	. . . . .	40:0:4
Charter of November 1506, 5M	. . . . .	3:6:8
		<hr/>
		<u>£170:0:4</u>

(iii) *Estimate Corrected to £160*. The material which explains McIan's figure of £170:0:4d also shows that this apparent total is incorrect.

In the *first* place, the 1494 and 1499 charters cannot be simply added, as they stand, to give their real total. The 1494 one, a Crown charter regranteeing to McIan the lands he previously held as bailie of Islay under the Lord of the Isles, is partly repeated in the comprehensive charter of 1499 which is thus artificially increased by 10M. This excess having been deducted, we get the true total for both charters as 180M.

Secondly, the 5M of the 1506 charter (Paul 1882, p. 639; Smith 1895, pp. 24-6) should not have been added, for they were already comprehended in the item "60M in Islay" in the 1499 charter. To explain:

The 1499 charter was McIan's reward for the capture and execution of Macdonald of Dunyveg and his heir. The general presumption seems to have been that this charter covered the whole lay lands excepting those assigned to certain offices and the lands belonging to Maclean of Duart in heritage. But for some reason it had not been inscribed in the *Register of the Great Seal*, and Maclean and McIan were making conflicting claims.

This was the situation confronting the Crown Commissioners when they met at Dun Add, Argyll, on 8th June 1506, to set such lands as were at the disposal of the Crown. They confined themselves to the £40:0:4d lands not in dispute. Then, two days later, they exacted from Maclean and McIan a pledge to appear before the Council in October for adjudication of their claims, and to produce their charters and writs in evidence (*Exch. Rolls*, xii, 709).

McIan (doubtless supported by Argyll) was successful. But, in addition to his two valid charters, McIan must also have produced an old one for 5M granted to his grandfather by Alexander, Lord of the Isles; for, in the following month, on 19th November, he received a re-grant of these lands by royal charter. As his grandfather's charter was tainted by the forfeiture of the Lordship, these 5M would, technically, have been at the disposal of the Crown (for disposal to McIan, of course) in June 1506 *unless* they were assumed to be covered in the 1499 charter. As this assumption seems to have operated, the 1506 charter is but a duplication of part of the 1499 one. The 5M should not be added to the true total of the 1494 and 1499 charters. The total Extent of McIan's lands was 180M (£120).

Thirdly, we can explain and discount the odd 4d in the £40:0:4d lands set in June 1506 (*Exch. Rolls*, xii, 709). Though the lands, oddly enough, are not specified, they are set to named persons,³ and one of "£5:0:4d, is set to Duncan (should it be Lachlan?) McGillehaanich". This was apparently Maclean's land the title to which was not in dispute. If so, it represents the £5 of Synnerland, Coule, Arcallich and Foreland, *plus* the 8/4d land of Mcaland whose true Extent is something of a mystery. As the 8/- has been omitted by the Commissioners and McIan, we can let the tail go with the hide and forget about the 4d.

Thus, reckoning the £40:0:4d as £40, and adding the true total of McIan's charter lands, £120, we get the corrected

figure of £160 or 240M as the total "Old Extent" of Islay. Supposing this was, indeed, the true amount, we can guess how the writer of the *Description* got the figure of 360M. At that time Extent expressed in Marks was frequently confused with Extent expressed in Pounds. If 240M were mis-stated as £240, the equivalent in Marks would be 360M.

(iv) *Distribution of Extent by Districts.* Returning for a moment to the uncorrected estimate of £170:0:4d, let us look at McIan's attempt to distribute it over the three districts:

Southward (approximately Kildalton and Oa)	£39: 6:8 (59 M)
Midward (approximately Killarow and Kilmeny)	73:16:8 (110½)
Rhinns (approximately Kilchoman and Kilchiaran)	56:11:8 (84¾)
	£169:15:0 254½M

This is a pretty creditable effort—only 5/4d short of the mark, and he has got rid of the odd 4d in the process.

Before working out the details, McIan would have in mind a round sum for each of the districts, and it is safe to assume that the round sum would be in Pounds, not Marks; for, though he was distributing on a 33/4d Quarterland system, all available evidence suggests that the "Old Extent" was conceived primarily in terms of Pounds. The old Quarterland was 20/-; and, of the lands "set" in 1506, six out of eight were £5 lands.

On this hypothesis, for McIan's primary allocation to districts the round sums nearest to his actual apportionment would be:

Southward	£40 (60M)
Midward	75 (112½)
Rhinns	55 (82½)
	£170 (255M)

(v) *Distribution of Extent and "House" Groups of Islay.* This distribution has an interesting relation to the "House" groups of Islay as described in the fourteenth century *Tract on the Scots of Dalriada* (Skene 1867, pp. 308 ff.; Thomas 1882, pp. 249 ff.). The document gives a garbled account of the sixth century colonisation from Ireland. By way of contrast, it contains a remarkably clear statement of the territories in Islay and Jura held by the "Cinel Angus" (which may mean, in this context, the clan of Angus Mor and Angus Oig, respective heads at the time of the cession of the Isles and

during the War of Independence). There seems to be general agreement as to the identity of the districts mentioned in Islay. *Caillnae* is North Kildalton, *Odeich* is South Kildalton, *Aitha Cassil* is Oa; *Freag* is approximately Killarow, *Ardbes* is approximately Kilmeny; *Loichrois* is the North Rhinns, and *Cladrois* is the South Rhinns. By *Ros deorand* the writer must mean South Jura since, about the time this *Tract* was written, North Jura was claimed by the house of Lorne. We know that South Jura was reckoned as 22½M “Old Extent” in the fifteenth century, Macdonald of Dunyveg having 12½M and Maclean of Duart 10M.

On the assumption that these districts are all correctly identified, we can compare the number of “Houses” in each, according to the *Tract*, with its “Old Extent”.

Tract	“Houses”	ISLAY	“O.E.” Distribution
Caillnae,	30	} = 80 . .	. . £40 for Southward
Odeich,	20		
Aitha Cassil,	30		
Freag,	100 or* 120	} = 130 or 150 . .	. . £75 for Midward
Ardbes,	30		
Loichrois,	30	} = 90 . .	. . £55 for Rhinns
Cladrois,	60		
		—————	—————
		300 or 320 . .	. . £170
JURA			
Ros deorand,	30	. . . .	. . £15 for S. Jura

In the cases of the Southward of Islay and South Jura, the number of “Houses” is just double the number of Pounds “Old Extent”. And although the fact is not indicated in this table, the equation also holds for the Oa which has 30 Houses and (excluding the ancient churchland of Kilnaughton—so listed by McIan) £15 of “Old Extent”. It also holds for the Midward of Islay if we take the 120 Houses of Freag as a correction, not a copyist’s error.

The only exceptional case is that of the Rhinns where, according to the rule, the “Old Extent” ought to be £45, not £55. But even this may be only an apparent exception. The total of 320 Houses for Islay corresponds exactly to what we have seen to be the true sum of the “Old Extent”, £160, when

* In the case of Freag, one MS. (the earliest, according to Skene) gives 100 Houses. The other two give 120 Houses. The 120 may be a copyist’s error, or it may be a deliberate correction.

McIan's charter lands are correctly totalled. It may well be, therefore, that McIan has simply placed the whole burden of the miscalculation on to the Rhinns—where his own interests were least affected.

Whatever be the explanation of this anomalous case of the Rhinns, it cannot seriously detract from the force of the other evidence. The "Old Extent" of Islay as a whole, and of its principal sub-divisions, is clearly related to the number of "Houses" they were supposed to contain, the Extent of a single House working out at 10/-.

3. *Mode of Assessing "Old Extent":*

(i) *"House" as Ultimate Unit of Taxation.* What is a "House"? In trying to answer this question, I thought the Oa the most promising field of study. From the evidence of the local Rentals I concluded that (excluding Kilnaughton) the Oa must have contained not less than $78\frac{1}{2}$ nor more than 92 old Cowlands. The House having, apparently, an Extent of 10/-, there should be 3 Cowlands (at $\frac{3}{4}d$ each) to a House, giving not less than 26 nor more than $30\frac{2}{3}$ Houses in Oa. As the *Tract* says 30 Houses, all the evidence indicates that a "House" was the equivalent of a 3-Cowland holding.

The "House" therefore corresponds to "House" in the ancient Irish system according to which the Bailebiataigh of 24 Ballyboes was reckoned as containing eight Houses, these being the minimum holdings qualifying for full political status, the status of Og-Aire.

To this conclusion there are two corollaries. *Firstly*, it is clear that the ancient social economy brought from Ireland in the early sixth century was not wholly superseded during the period of Norse influence. How far the Bailebiataigh structure was modified in Islay we do not know; but the House was certainly an effective unit until the fourteenth century at least, and it seems to have been taken as the ultimate unit of taxation when, on the cession of the Isles, the Scottish government made up the "Old Extent". *Secondly*, the Scottish government simply accepted the ancient Irish valuation of the lands of Islay. There was no re-valuation in 1266. The rental value of the House was 3 cows; and all the "Old Extent" did was to translate this into its 1266 money equivalent—10/-.

(ii) *The 20-House Group as the Primary Unit of Assessment.* But while the House was the ultimate unit of taxation, it was not the primary unit of assessment in the sense that a count was made of the actual number of Houses in order to get the

total valuation of Islay. The number of Houses would be "read off" from the theory of the social system. Thus, in ancient Ireland, the theory would be "x Houses to a Bailebiataigh, y Bailebiataighs to a Tuath, z Tuaths to a Country" or something of the sort. Even in areas amenable to artificial division, strict adherence to the theory of the system might often be impracticable. Where there were emphatic natural divisions it would sometimes be impossible. But because public administration was greatly influenced by the theory of the social structure, the normal assumption would be that a large unit of a certain kind contained the theoretical complement of Houses. As to what this large unit of primary assessment was in Islay, the initially plausible answer is "the Bailebiataigh". Almost certainly it was so in Tiree (Campbell 1912, p. 344) where the ancient "Davach" became the "Tirunga" of the Norse occupation and the "6 Markland" of the "Old Extent". As the old Islay Quarterland was 20/-, this gives £4 (6M) to the Bailebiataigh.

But this argument is not conclusive. From the time of St Columba, Tiree was valued as a "granary". The large unit of the ordinary social economy was therefore the obvious one to take as the primary unit of assessment. Islay was in a different case. Up to 1493 the whole island (excluding church land) was held on ward service; and so the appropriate primary unit of assessment would be something analogous to the "Knight's Fee". That the Bailebiataigh had the same Extent as the Tiree Tirunga is probably a consequence, not of taking this as the primary unit in both cases, but of taking the House as the ultimate unit of taxation in both cases.

What, in Islay, would be analogous to the Knight's fee? Clearly, service would be conceived primarily in terms of the naval array, not of an army in the field. And in this connection the fourteenth century *Tract* is illuminating. Apart from stating the number of Houses in each district, the main point stressed is that every 20 Houses provides for "the sea muster" a crew of 14 benches (28 oars).

That this "standard ship" of 14 benches determined the primary unit of assessment is the inference from what we know of the Oa, where there seem to have been 4 old Bailebiataighs (two of them with less than the full complement of 8 Houses).⁴ Had the primary unit of assessment been the Bailebiataigh, the district would have been reckoned as containing 32 Houses and given an Extent of £16. It was in

fact reckoned as having 30 Houses ($1\frac{1}{2}$ crews) and given an Extent of £15.

Further evidence is provided by the 1617 charter of the lands of Lossit.⁵ The "Old Extent" was £10; and in this charter the ancient *reddendo* of the whole is preserved by being attached formally to the principal mansion—a boat of 14 oars, or, in lieu, £10. A 1615 estimate of the number of galleys, birlings, etc., in the Isles suggests that "a boat of 14 oars" then meant a boat of 14 benches (14 oars a-side).⁶

Thus, using the ancient Irish valuation of the House, 3 cows (1266 equivalent, 10/-), to give the rental value, and the standard ship of 14 benches as the primary unit of assessment, we get:

	Ships	Houses	Extent
Southward	4	80	£40
Midward	$7\frac{1}{2}$	150	75
Rhinns	$4\frac{1}{2}$	90	45
	—	—	—
	16	320	£160

4. *General Conclusions on the "Old Extent" of Islay:* Whatever modifications Norse influence may have introduced into the ancient economic and social order brought to Islay by the sixth century colonists, the House remained as a vital element in the social structure. In 1266 it was accepted as the ultimate unit of taxation, and the ancient valuation was taken over and translated into current monetary value for purposes of the Extent.

But the Extent was not based on a direct count of Houses. It took as the primary unit of assessment the 20-House group charged with the provision of a "standard ship" of 14 benches. As there is no reference to such groups in the ancient Irish system, it is highly improbable that they were known to the original colonists. They cut right across the Bailebiataigh system with which, we gather, the Irish military organisation was integrated. These groups must have grown up some time after the settlement in Islay, and were probably created by the Gael-Gall when Islay formed part of the Kingdom of Sodor and Man. As would be reasonable for our western waters, the standard ship of the naval array, 14 benches, is rather smaller than the average in the Norse fleet where the minimum permitted was one of 13 benches, the larger ones ranging to 25 benches and over (Marwick 1949, p. 3).

Both the House system, for ordinary purposes of the social economy, and the 20-House group system, for military purposes,

were operative when the Isles passed to the Scottish Crown; and the "Old Extent" of Islay adopted the latter as the primary unit of assessment and the former's ancient valuation as the ultimate unit of valuation.

If this view is correct, then the "Old Extent" of Islay (which McIan would have got exactly right had it not been for the muddle over the total value of his charterlands) carries into the sixteenth century, not only a record of one of the first administrative acts of the new overlord after 1266, and not only a survival of the naval organisation of the Kingdom of Sodor and Man, but also a reminder of Old Dalriada in Erin and of the institutions brought thence to the New Dalriada in Alba.

SECTION VI: THE SMALLER ISLAY DENOMINATIONS

It may be useful to add some notes on all the smaller land denominations found in Islay from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth century. We shall take, first, the denominations found in the local Rentals of 1686, 1722, 1733 and 1741 (Smith 1895, pp. 490-559).

(1) *Quarter*. This is James Macdonald's "Cearabh", and it invariably means the McIan Quarter at 33/4d.

(2) *Eighth* or *Auchtenpart*. Macdonald's "Ochtobh", and invariably the McIan 16/8d land.

(3) *Lewirheis* (the oldest spelling). In the Rentals, invariably half of the Eighth at 8/4d. It is Macdonald's "Leor-theas" which he supposes to be synonymous with "ploughgate". McKerral (1944, pp. 44, 52) accepting this view, accepts also the suggestion that the name derives from *leòir*, "sufficiency"—a farm large enough for the tenant to provide his own complete plough. But this derivation, based on the supposed equation with a ploughgate, will not square with the facts. The term is at least as old as 1686. The 4-horse plough was in use for long after that, and was apparently used by joint tenants. The old minimum ploughland, we have argued, was the 20/- land. The Lewirheis, at 8/4d, may have been an old 6/8d or an old 10/- land, according as the Eighth, of which it was half, had been raised from 13/4d or lowered from 20/-.

In my view "Lewirheis" is a greatly corrupted form of *Leath-sheisreach*, meaning "half-ploughland", and is of Irish origin. Joyce says (Joyce 1910, p. 223), "When a *seisreach* was divided into two equal parts, each was called *leath-sheisreach* (lahesheragh)". The term *seisreach* was used in Islay, at the

beginning of the present century, for a pair of plough-horses (MacNeill 1900, p. 49). The reference is clearly to the team for the modern iron plough. The equivalent in the eighteenth century would be 4 horses; and so *leath-sheisreach* would then be two horses—or the 2-Horsegang holding of 10/-. If this was the derivation of Lewirheis, the 8/4d land on the McIan system would naturally have this name whether it had been an old 10/- or 6/8d land.

(4) *Kerrowrane*. Not mentioned by Macdonald, but frequently occurs in the Rentals. It is half a Lewirheis, and presumably means “a little quarter” (quarter of the old 20/- Quarter). In the eighteenth century the name would be applied to either an old 5/- or an old 3/4d land.

(5) *Cowland*. Fully explained in the preceding sections.

(6) *Horsegang*. Explained in section IV, 3.

(7) *Shilling-land*. “Shilling-lands” are set out in the Rentals on three different patterns.

(a) When *exact* Extent is given on the McIan system, the meaning is perfectly clear. 33/4d means a Quarter, and so on.

(b) But when the McIan Quarter is reckoned in shillings by summing the individual holdings, it is called a 32/- land because the odd pence in the individual items have been left out of account. This is what McKerral aptly calls the *false* Extent. In it, the symbol for “shilling” is usually the “index comma”. Thus the *false* Extent 4/- (exact McIan, 4/2d) is written 4’; and so we find 2’, 4’, 8’, 16’, and 32’ lands.

(c) But in some cases the *true* “Old Extent” is shown by this same symbol. Thus we get 30’, 20’ and 10’ lands.

So far we have been dealing with denominations found in the local Rentals; but at the end of the eighteenth century Macdonald found that those below the Lewirheis had been replaced by the *Cota ban* or *Groatland* and the *Da-sgillin*.

(8) The *Cota ban* (“white coat”) was apparently the name applied to the silver groat or fourpenny-piece. It was the equivalent of the 4/- land (*false* Extent) of the Rentals; but the shillings were Scots, and had now come to be described at their Sterling value, 4d.

(9) *Da-sgillin* (literally “two shillings”) was half of the *Cota ban*, and often called a “Twopenny-land”, expressing the Scots value in Sterling. The “Pennylands” of Islay, it need scarcely be added, have no connection with those which derive from the Norse occupation. They have not, so far as I know, influenced the place-names; and the name was not

used, apparently, before the mid-eighteenth century. Certainly "shilling" was the term employed in the 1686 Rental.

NOTES

¹ The reference is to "Machrie". It appears in 1507 (among Church lands) as "Due Innerloskin 33/4d"; in 1617 charter of Church lands as "Lagrivug 16/8d and Innerloskan 16/8d"; in the 1686 local Rental as "Lagrevog and Inverloskane—9 Cowland,"; in the 1722 local Rental as "Macharies (a reversion to the name of the Gaelic charter of 1408) 33/4d, a Quarterland"; and in the 1733 and 1741 local Rentals as "Machrie 30/-".

² There is no doubt that Pennant found the "Pennyland" effectively in use in Rum. He found the rent of the largest farms averaged £5:12/-, and he tells us the total rent was 2000M Scots; and since Rum was a 6M land "Old Extent" (i.e. 20 Pennylands), the Pennyland rent would be 100M Scots, or 8½M Sterling, or just over £5:11/- Sterling. Pennant's "largest farm" is therefore the Pennyland.

But it is difficult to understand the statement that it is the Pennyland which has 28 soums. He tells us that, in the division into Pennylands and in much of their rural economy, Rum and Canna agree. That this similarity covers rent charges is clear from the fact that the Pennyland rent in Canna was £4:14:6. But he states the souming capacity of the Canna Pennyland to be 7 cows and 2 horses (on the Rum rule this would be 11 standard soums). If we suppose that his Rum 28 soums are for the Markland, this will give about 8½ for the Rum Pennyland—much nearer the Canna figure.

This confusion between "Pennyland" and "Markland" is not confined to travellers such as Pennant. We find it in relation to charters of lands in Craignish, Argyll. A group of lands detailed as Pennylands in 1412 is detailed in 1548 as Marklands (*Orig. Par. Scot.*, 1854, pp. 97-8). Again, in Kintyre, a charter of 1329 equates 1M with 2 Pennylands (McKerral 1944, p. 63); but in the 1505 Crown Rental of Kintyre (*Exch. Rolls*, xii, 698 ff.) we seem to get something like an equation of the Mark- and Penny-land. In items 34 and 38, S. Kintyre, we get: "Leypeynbeg (presumably 'Little half-pennyland') 8/4" and "Lepeyn Cawseray 6/8".

³ Lands "set" in 1506 (*Exch. Rolls*, xii, 709). The Commissioners were apparently ignorant of the lands they were setting, but knew the names of the persons concerned and how much each should have. Odoni McKy (£5) is clearly MacKay of the Rhinns. Archibald McKosce (£5) is clearly MacFie, maor of the Midward. Nigel McCane (£5) is clearly a relative of McIan, replacing MacKay of the Southward who would be in exile with the Macdonalds of Dunyveg. Moricio McSuyna (£5) was probably hereditary harper, of the same sept as Murdaco McOsennag and Moriauch McSchinnocht, harpers in S. Kintyre in 1505 and 1528 respectively. Lachlan McSuyna (£5) was probably the bard, though the bards in S. Kintyre were the McVurichs. The £5:0:4d land, as suggested in the text, was almost certainly that of Maclean. Gilchrist McVaig (5M) would be McBeth of Ballenaby, hereditary surgeon. "Angus son of Angus" (10M) I cannot place;

and it is surprising to find the name "McBryon" left out. The explanation may be in an instruction delivered to McIan on 10th June. He was given detailed directions as to the institution of baillie courts, the instruction ending "You are to hold your courts in proper form with all officers and ministers of court such as baillie and judge, clerk, sergeand, sutour, demster, and a lawful assize and inquest as is above written, after the order of our sovereign lord's laws". (*Exch. Rolls*, xii, 703-4). James IV was very anxious to introduce the Lowland legal system to the Isles; and "Angus son of Angus" may have been (only nominally, I suspect!) intruded into the McBryon lands to this end.

⁴ None of the terms "Bailebiataigh", "Davach" or "Tirunga" is found in the Islay records or preserved amongst the place-names, though some of the numerous "Ballys" may have derived from "Bailebiataigh" rather than from the "Baile" as a "township". Nevertheless, it is to be presumed that this unit was characteristic of the ancient economy. There is a theory (McKerral 1953, pp. 61-62; Seebohm 1884, 222 n. 5) that it was an ecclesiastical as well as a civil district, having its own "parish church". If this theory is sound, there must have been 4 Bailebiataighs in the Oa, for there are 4 ancient chapels, strategically placed in the four quarters of the peninsula. But not all of these Bailebiataighs would have the full complement of 24 Cowlands, and two of them might have more. On my estimate there would be: *NE*—(chapel of Kilnaughton) 24-26 Cowlands; *SE*—(chapel at Stremnish) 21-27½ Cowlands; *SW*—(chapel of Killeyan) 17½-22½ Cowlands; *NW*—(chapel at Tokamol) 19 Cowlands. Part of what I include in the *SE* might more appropriately be put in the *SW*. For the rest, nature has pretty well settled what the areas would be.

⁵ In 1617 the Bishop of the Isles gave Campbell of Calder a charter for all remaining church lands in Islay under the general name of the "Tenandry of Lossit". These lands are scattered all over the island (Smith 1895, pp. 353 ff.); and it would appear that the "lands of Lossit" in the proper sense were the compact group heading the McIan 1507 list of church lands. These are given in detail with "McIan Extents" attached; and all have typical sixteenth to seventeenth century "fermes", with the exception of the "33/4d of Lossit" itself. To it is attached the ancient *reddendo* of the *whole* of these £10 lands—"unam cymbam cum quatuordecem lie ores, vel pro dicta cymba decem libras monete". This *reddendo* shows that the mortification of these lands to the monastery of Iona must have been subsequent to 1266, since the Extent is connected with ward service.

There is one difficulty in trying to equate the £10 lands of Lossit with 20 Houses. The apparent meaning of the *Tract* is that each 20 Houses (£10 Extent) provides a "standard ship" of 14 benches (28 oars), while the Lossit *reddendo* seems to be a ship of 14 oars (7 benches). On this point see note 6.

⁶ With regard to the difficulty indicated in note 5, two possibilities occurred to me. Firstly, that Skene wrongly translates "Da seacht seis" and "vij. vij. sese" as "twice seven benches". But Professor Angus Matheson of Glasgow University has given me an opinion on this point: "I would read *dá seacht-seis*, where *seacht-seis* (perhaps better *seacht-sess*) is a compound noun, meaning a boat with seven

thwarts; and so the naval contribution per 20 Houses consists of two vessels of (each) seven thwarts or 14 oars, i.e. a total of 28 oars, which gives the same total as Skene, although I do not agree with his translation 'twice seven benches.'" Professor Matheson then gives various examples of this usage in Gaelic and Norse. We may take it, therefore, that 28 oars per 20 Houses is correct.

The second possibility is that the "14 oars" of the Lossit charter means 14 benches. In 1615 (two years before the date of this charter) the Privy Council recorded the number and type of vessels which, according to its information, existed in the Isles. MacLeod of Harris was stated to possess "1 galley and some boats of 8 oars", and the Council minuted definitions of "galley" and "birlin": "Galley = a vessel of 18 oars and above to 24 oars"; "Birlin = a vessel of 12 oars and above to 18 oars". (Masson 1891, pp. 346-8). Now if "oar" in the definitions means literally "oar", the implications are odd. For his lands in Harris and Skye, MacLeod was bound to provide "unius navis viginti sex remorum, et duarum navium sexdecem remorum". We can assume that here "remus" means literally "oar". But if we also assume that "oar" in the definitions has the literal sense, the conclusion must be that in 1615 MacLeod could not possibly meet his feudal obligations as stated in 1548 (*Exch. Rolls*, xviii, 421). The *maximum* size of galley according to the definition is 1 bench smaller than the boat of 26 oars; and apart from his one galley MacLeod has nothing more than "some boats of 8 oars" exactly half the size of the two smaller craft he is bound to supply. It is hardly conceivable that, by 1615, the size of vessels had been so drastically reduced. But if "oar" in the definition means "oar a-side" ("bench") the difficulty vanishes.

In the 1617 Lossit charter the terms of the *reddendo* are: "unam cymbam cum quatuordecem *lie ores*, vel pro dicta cymba de em libras monete". The "*lie ores*" (italicised in the charter) is clearly a vernacular substitute for something in the original formula; and if in 1615-17 "so many oars" did in fact mean "so many oars a-side", the Lossit *reddendo* would be the same as the requirement for 20 Houses.

This argument is not advanced as proof, but simply as the most likely solution. See, however, MacPhail (1916, pp. 235 ff.), a reference for which I am indebted to Professor Matheson.

REFERENCES

- CAMPBELL, NIALL D.
 1912 An old Tisce Rental of the year 1662. *Scottish Historical Review* ix, pp. 343-344.
- COOPER, THE RT. HON. LORD (ed.)
 1946 The Register of Brieves as contained in the Ayr MS., the Bute MS., and Quoniam Attachiamenta. The Stair Society Vol. x. Edinburgh.
- EXCH. ROLLS
 The Exchequer Rolls of Scotland. H.M. General Register House. Edinburgh. Vol. i (1878), xii (1889), xviii (1898).
- JOYCE, P. W.
 1910 The Origin and History of Irish Names of Places, Vol. i. Dublin.

- LAMONT, W. D.
 1957 Old land denominations and "old extent" in Islay, Part I. *Scottish Studies* i, pp. 183-203.
- MCKERRAL, A.
 1944 Ancient denominations of agricultural land in Scotland. *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* lxxviii (1943-44), pp. 39-80.
 1953 The lesser land and administrative divisions in Celtic Scotland. *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* lxxxv (1950-51), pp. 52-64.
- MACNEILL, J. G.
 1900 *New Guide to Islay*. Glasgow.
- MACPHAIL, J. R. N. (ed.)
 1916 *Highland Papers* Vol. ii. Publications of the Scottish History Society, Second Series, Vol. xii. Edinburgh.
- MARWICK, H.
 1949 Naval defence in Norse Scotland. *Scottish Historical Review* xxviii, pp. 1-11.
- MASSON, D. (ed.)
 1891 *The Register of the Privy Council of Scotland*, Vol. x (1613-1616). Edinburgh.
- ORIG. PAR. SCOT.
 1854 *Origines Parochiales Scotiae*, Vol. ii, Part I. The Bannatyne Club. Edinburgh.
- PAUL, J. B. (ed.)
 1882 *Registrum Magni Sigilli Regum Scotorum 1424-1513*. Edinburgh.
- PENNANT, T.
 1790 *A tour in Scotland, 1769; and a Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides 1772*. 5th ed., Vol. iii. London.
- [RAMSAY, MRS L.]
 1890 *Stent book and acts of the Balliary of Islay, 1718-1843*. [Edinburgh].
- SEEBOHM, F.
 1884 *The English Village Community*. 3rd ed. London.
- SINCLAIR, SIR JOHN (ed.)
 1792 *The statistical account of Scotland* Vol. iii. Edinburgh.
- SKENE, W. F. (ed.)
 1867 *Tract on the Scots of Dalriada. Chronicles of the Picts, chronicles of the Scots and other early memorials of Scottish History*. Edinburgh.
- [SMITH, G. G.]
 1895 *Book of Islay: documents illustrating the history of the Island*. [Edinburgh.]
- THOMAS, F. W. L.
 1882 *Islay place-names*. *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* xvi (1881-2), pp. 241-76.
- WALKER, J.
 1808 *An economic history of the Hebrides and Highlands of Scotland*. Edinburgh.