MELNESS

A CROFTING COMMUNITY ON THE NORTH COAST OF SCOTLAND

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On the north coast of Scotland, and flanked by the broad inlets of Loch Eriboll to the west and the Kyle of Tongue to the east, lies the peninsula of the Moine. On the north-east part of this peninsula lies the district of Melness (Fig. 1) which is the home of a crofting community. The district illustrates the problems of modern crofting—problems which are basically those of adapting a traditionally communal way of life, evolved under subsistence conditions, to the economic individualism and cash economy of the industrial age. Here, as elsewhere in the Highlands, the old way of life underwent modifications and began to lose its separate identity through the ties forged with the Lowlands after the "Forty-five". The dependence on home-produced food, a fundamental binding force in the community, started to be undercut in the 1880's when cheap imported flour began to replace the old staples of potatoes and oat-meal; and the upheavals which accompanied and followed World War I gave the old way its death-blow.

In Melness there is a farm and a number of croft clusters: these are townships of varied size, but all share a big area of common grazing, and Melness is in effect one community. The district is part of Tongue parish, for which statistics have been used, although this includes other crofting districts on the eastern side of the Kyle and several farms as well.

The Moine has a rectangular outline, and stretches some 10 miles north to south and 6 miles east to west. Its surface for the great part is an old planation surface, ranging from 400 to 700 feet in elevation, and covered with blanket peat (the name *Moine* means "peat moss"). On it there are a few upstanding residual masses, and it falls sharply on all its seaward slopes. In the Melness area this slope is less steep but more complex in form: the landscape is varied with small ridges and valleys, and by the Strath of Melness—a bigger and deeper valley which runs north to south with the rock strike.

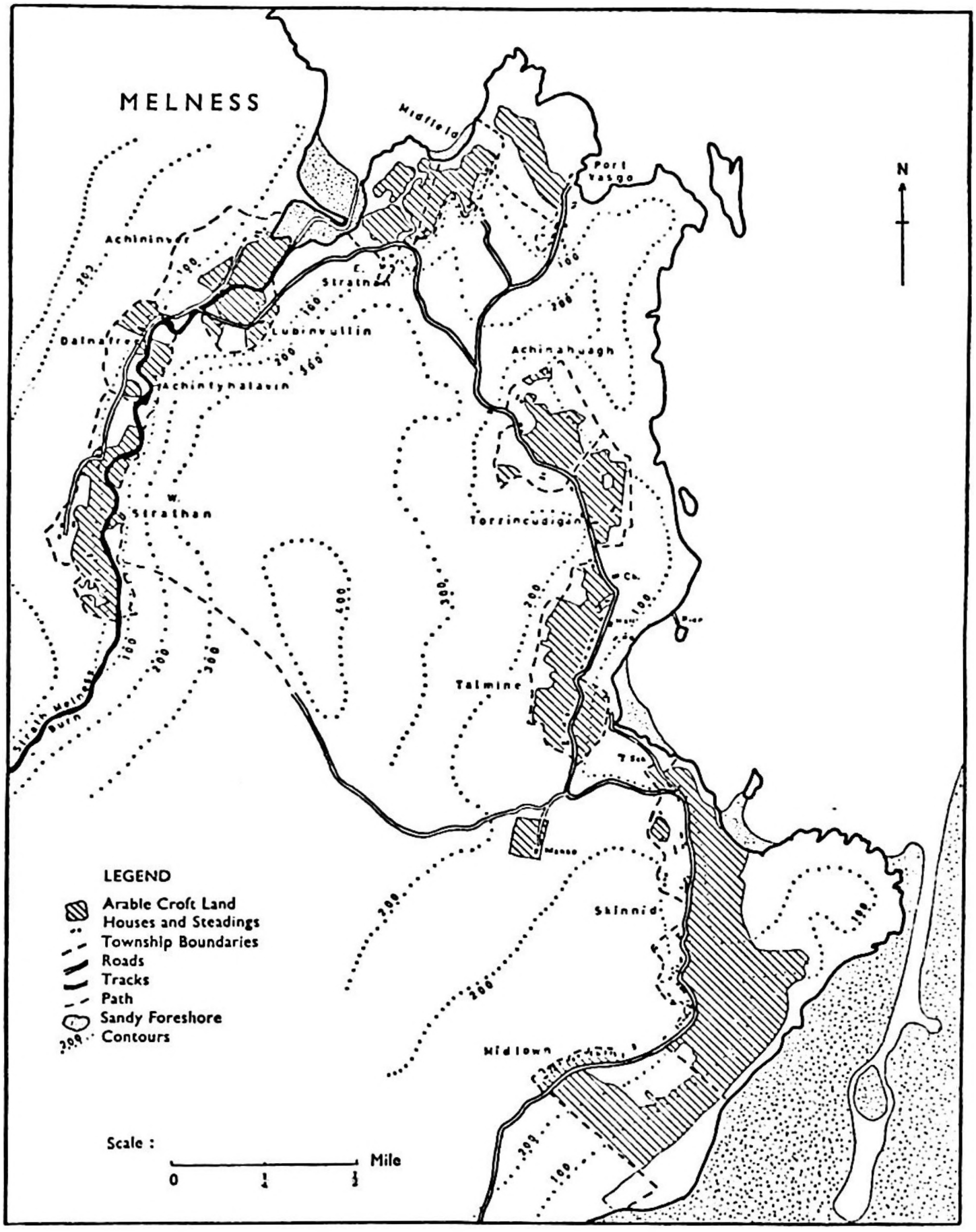
MELNESS
Middle Ia
Port Vasgo
N
Achininver
E. Strathan
Dalnafree
Lubinvullin
Achintyhalavin
Achinahuagh
W. Strathan
Torrincudigan
Talmine
Skinnid
Midtown
LEGEND
Arable Croft Land
Houses and Steadings
Township Boundaries
Roads
Tracks
Path
Sandy Foreshore
Contours
Scale :
Mile
0

FIG. 1.

Geologically, the main rock series of the area is the acidic Precambrian Moine, but there are three intrusions of more basic hornblende schist and the Strath of Melness has been partly eroded along one of these; however, these geological differences have little evident influence on the potential for man of the soils developed on the respective rocks. Within the strath there are some riverine terrace deposits, at least in part fluvioglacial; but for the most part glaciation has stripped the landscape, and bedrock is generally covered with at most a veneer of drift, while north of Talmine township rock outcrops are frequent. In general, slopes in the south part of Melness (from Midtown to Talmine) are smooth although rather steep for cultivation in part; while in the northern part the broken landscape makes cultivated land more fragmented. In the Strath, cultivated land is in varied situations: some is on terrace gravels, but it occurs also on the lower valley slopes, and also on the low deltaic flat behind the sand-bar at the river mouth.

Historical development

The story of Melness shows the development of a way of life whose origins are lost in history; although there is evidence that this area of Sutherland has been settled from early times, there is no definite record of continuous settlement before the fourteenth century. There is a tumulus of unknown date immediately south of Midtown, and the name Melness itself derives from the Old Norse *melr* "a sand bank" and *ness* "a cape" (Gunn and Mackay 1897:193); for centuries, indeed North Sutherland was debatable territory between the Norse and Gaels.

The first documentary mention of Melness records the gift of the lands of Melness and Hope to one Farquhar of the Strathnaver Mackays in 1379 (Mackay 1906:363). This was but one of the many changes in land ownership in Sutherland, however: with the wane in power of the Farquhars, most of Melness is recorded as having come under the main Mackay family of Strathnaver by 1511, and in 1624 the first Lord Reay bought the remainder of the Melness estate. At the latter date there are four pennylands recorded in Strathmelness, and the contemporary House of Melness seems to have been at the mouth of the Strathmelness Burn, at the modern Achininver (Mackay 1906:364).

No detail of the settlement pattern in Melness emerges

until 1678, for which year there is a Judicial Rent Roll of the Reay Estate preserved (Mackay 1906:473). This shows a variety in status of the tenantry recorded, and does suggest a healthier range of society than the present crofting community possesses. There are five big tenants (probably tacksmen, though not quoted as such), who pay 300, 150, 100, 80 and 80 merks in annual rent; the latter three rents were paid by tenants settled at Strathan, while the former two came from tenants at Melness House and Skinnid. In addition there was a smaller tenant at Achinahuagh (paying 45 merks), and the only small tenants recorded are at Midtown—one paying 12 merks, and three paying 6 merks. Doubtless this does not represent the whole population—presumably the bigger tenants had sub-tenants who paid them rents just as those of Midtown paid theirs direct to Lord Reay: the Roy Map (1747-55) also suggests this for it also shows in all eight groups of houses, including (for example) nine buildings at Skinnid, and also settlements at Port Vasgo and four settlements in Strathmelness.

From the later eighteenth century the position becomes a good deal clearer: by this time the forces which were to change the old order were already gathering momentum, and a society already in transition can be discerned.

Another rent roll of the Reay Estate for 1789 (Mackay 1906:477, 478) again shows big tenants at Strathan and Melness House, while there is still one tenant at Achinahuagh. But Skinnid—biggest of the modern townships—is recorded as having 21 tenants: Lord Reay had taken over the direct administration of the township, and this may well be an instance of the elimination of the middleman tacksman. At the same time there seems to have been severe pressure on the small tenantry: the Old Statistical Account records cases of oppression of the small tenantry, by tacksmen in Tongue Parish (*O.S.A.* 1792:529), and on the Reay Estate tenants' services had varied between 20 and 120 days per year (Adam 1921:12), but had recently been commuted to money rents. Another trend was the subdivision of holdings to accommodate a growing population—an instance of the very frequent reaction of the Highland tenantry to the problem of increasing numbers.

A great change was wrought in the early nineteenth century in the settlement patterns of the Reay Country of North Sutherland by the removal of the inland small tenantry to the

coasts, and the initiation of the crofting system by the parcelling out of the land of the small tenantry from the old run-rig pattern into permanent lots. This change was associated with the introduction of sheep-farming, infamous in Sutherland history, but also with other social and economic changes. Lord Reay had got into financial difficulties and between 1811 and 1824 cleared his tenants from Strathmore[1] (at the head of Loch Hope) and around the head of the Kyle of Tongue to make way for sheep and to increase the rental. Many settlements figure in the 1789 rent-roll which are unknown now, and in many places are to be seen the marks of former cultivation.

Melness, along with other districts on the opposite side of the Kyle of Tongue such as Skerray and Farr, was a recipient area for the people moved, and the result was the crowding of existing settlements, with the formation of some new ones. Thus by 1890 Skinnid had 31 crofts; and Midfield, East Strathan, Torrincudigan and Talmine appear by 1878,[2] apparently as creations of 1828-29. Midfield and East Strathan are notable in having their inbye croft land on a series of ledges and slopes facing north—broken, exposed terrain which was only settled because of population pressure. Although this redistribution of people certainly caused hardship and stress, coming as it did when the population was increasing, it is noteworthy that at least some authorities consider that under changed economic conditions of the nineteenth century the way of life based on fishing and small holdings at the coast was more viable than stock-rearing inland for small men (Adam 1921:10).

Changes were occurring too in the social order. By 1840 the tacksman system had passed away completely in the parish and there were three big sheep farms in the south part of it (*N.S.A.* 1845:177), while there was some movement of settlement towards the roads—tradition has it that about the mid-nineteenth century the houses of Midtown were moved up to the head of the crofts. The practice was growing too of housing the cattle in separate buildings—the old "black house" was declining, and does not come within the range of living memory in Melness. There were certainly some cottars in the district—116 are recorded in Tongue parish, which would give some 40 in Melness if they were in proportion to crofters.

When the picture finally becomes known in detail through the investigations of the first Crofters Commission in the last

decade of the nineteenth century,[3] it shows the usual prevalence of small men associated with the society of extremes of the West Highlands: in the Melness district were 90 crofts, from 1 to 6 acres in arable extent, the average being only 2 to 3 acres. In all, it was a situation of obvious land hunger. The crofts were grouped in 13 townships (Fig. 1), but most of them were in groups of 2 to 4, and only Skinnid, Talmine and Midtown had over 10 crofts. All the crofts of the district shared a common grazing of over 10,000 acres which extended some five miles westward on the Moine plateau; and in addition Midtown, Skinnid, Port Vasgo and Achininver had small township commons of their own. Skinnid also had some cultivated land on the common—the old lazy-beds which were held in run-rig are still visible. The crofts, townships and common grazings are unaltered to-day, although the way of life of the people has greatly changed.

As almost everywhere, the standards of crofting husbandry here have never impressed favourably. The insecurity of tenants under the tacksman system still discouraged progress at the end of the eighteenth century, although by this time potatoes had become the main crop, and much seaweed was carried up from the beach to supplement manure as fertiliser; indeed seaweed was so valuable that trips were made by boat to the island of Eilean Roan and up the Kyle to collect additional supplies. However, in 1840, croft land was still in poor heart—and it was unfenced and generally undrained, and never rested from a potatoes-bere-oats rotation: the bere yielded only about four-fold and the oats two-fold (*N.S.A.* 1845:179). Again at the end of the nineteenth century, the frequency of corn marigold and charlock in the corn was remarked (Edwards-Moss 1888:80)—also the fact that most of the work was done by women.

Memories of the early years of this century record practices which have now completely disappeared. Thus hay was cut by the crofters on the township in Skinnid, and divided into heaps, and each crofter had to select his own one while his back was turned; it was also the custom of at least some of the crofters at this time to break in some of the outrun within their crofts in winter with the spade—an exceedingly laborious task with the stony compacted soils. It was frequent too for two neighbours to team up and each provide a horse for a plough pair, and bere was grown till the inter-war years.

At the end of the eighteenth century, the stock in this area

of Sutherland were all of unimproved breeds (Sinclair 1795: 147), and of prime importance were black cattle, which were kept on the mountains inland in summer, but on the inbye land in winter (Sinclair 1795:149). In 1792 there were 2,142 cattle in Tongue parish, and 2,846 of the much less valuable sheep; horses numbered 538, and the omniverous and hardy goat was more valuable then than now—there were 714 of them (*O.S.A.* 1792:523). The small tenantry participated on a humble scale in the trade in cattle, which fetched about £2.10s. per head and were doubtless the main source of cash income.

By 1840, the introduction of commercial sheep rearing had restricted the emphasis on cattle, and the crofters had got rid of their old breeds and were raising Blackface and Cheviot-Blackface crosses, while the big farmers in the area reared pure Cheviots (*N.S.A.* 1845:179). New horse breeds were coming in too, and the Highland pony was now rare. If the breeds of stock had improved, it seems that their management had not, for all types of stock were stunted of growth: already stocking had reached a level which the land could not adequately support. Even so, sheep numbers were certainly less than now—few families had more than 12 or 15 sheep[4] before 1914. In the latter nineteenth century, most crofters kept a pig for household use, and it was customary for groups of them to take it in turn to rear bulls. In 1883, the method of disposing of stock—both cattle and lambs—was by selling them to travelling dealers from Caithness.[5]

Right up until World War I it was the custom for stock to be herded on the common during the cropping season; each township provided a herd for its own animals, but the system ended in 1915 with the erection of a substantial fence to separate the hill grazing from the inbye land, helped by a grant from the Department of Agriculture. Before this these herds, who were usually young boys or old men, were paid £2 or £3 per season. According to the grazings regulations formalised in 1896,[6] the souming on the common is one cow and follower and six sheep per £1 of rent; and in practice, this gave an average of some three cows and followers, and twenty sheep per crofter. For souming purposes, one cow was equivalent to five sheep, and one horse to eight sheep. Shielings, up on the Moine, are also said to have been used until about the turn of the century.

In 1792, the threat of hunger was obviously very real. By

this time potatoes were the staple diet, supplemented by meal, butter, cheese, milk and fish, while only the better off sometimes had milk and beef (*O.S.A.* 1792:524). However, import of grain, from Caithness, was relatively easy (Sinclair 1795: 151), and its continued importance is shown in 1849 (St. John 1884:81). In bad seasons the landlord and the government had to provide relief food, and after the bad harvest of 1782 many of the poor had to subsist largely on the cockles and mussels they could gather at low tide on the mudflats in the Kyle of Tongue (*O.S.A.* 1792:522); these indeed figured regularly in the diet of the people—they were mentioned again in 1840 (*N.S.A.* 1845:172).

Fishing has always been pursued to some extent, although attempts made to put it on a commercial basis show the usual West Highland story of very sparing success. In the late eighteenth century, the emphasis was on white fishing from small boats, for which the winter was the time of peak activity (*O.S.A.* 1792:522). In the 1830's there were attempts by the Duke of Sutherland to promote commercial herring fishing to help accommodate the men cleared from the inland straths and in 1833 each boat in Tongue parish, on the average landed 118 barrels (*N.S.A.* 1845:76); a good return by the standards of the successful port of Wick in Caithness. Success was not maintained, however, and there was no investment in the bigger boats and other equipment which would have given fishermen the range they needed in pursuing their elusive quarry. More significant was the growth of the practice of the men going to the East Coast herring fishing in summer. About 1888, nearly all the able-bodied men went to the East Coast for 8 to 10 weeks and brought back £12 to £25 for the season (Edwards-Moss 1888:80-81). However, there was a herring fishing station established in the nineteenth century, and a pier built at Talmine, and French and Dutch boats as well as those from Caithness and Sutherland landed herring.[7] A post office with a telegraph was built to aid this in 1911, but it was never of great consequence. White fishing did attain some economic importance, and continued to be a source of income until after World War II when lorries came to transport the fish; but the lack of port facilities, and of capital to buy modern boats and gear, together with a population ageing and declining in numbers, led to the final demise of the fishery.

Although the problem facing the community in this corner

of the Highlands in the nineteenth century was largely that of insufficient land, it was not this alone which ultimately led to the disintegration of the old way of life; the change involved had many components, and the Melness district shows several variations from the general Highland trend.

Thus in Tongue parish, population almost doubled in the period 1755 to 1831 (Fig. 2); by the late eighteenth century, seasonal migration to work on the Lowland harvests had begun (*O.S.A.* 1792:529), and by the middle of the nineteenth century the landlord was aiding emigration to Canada (St.

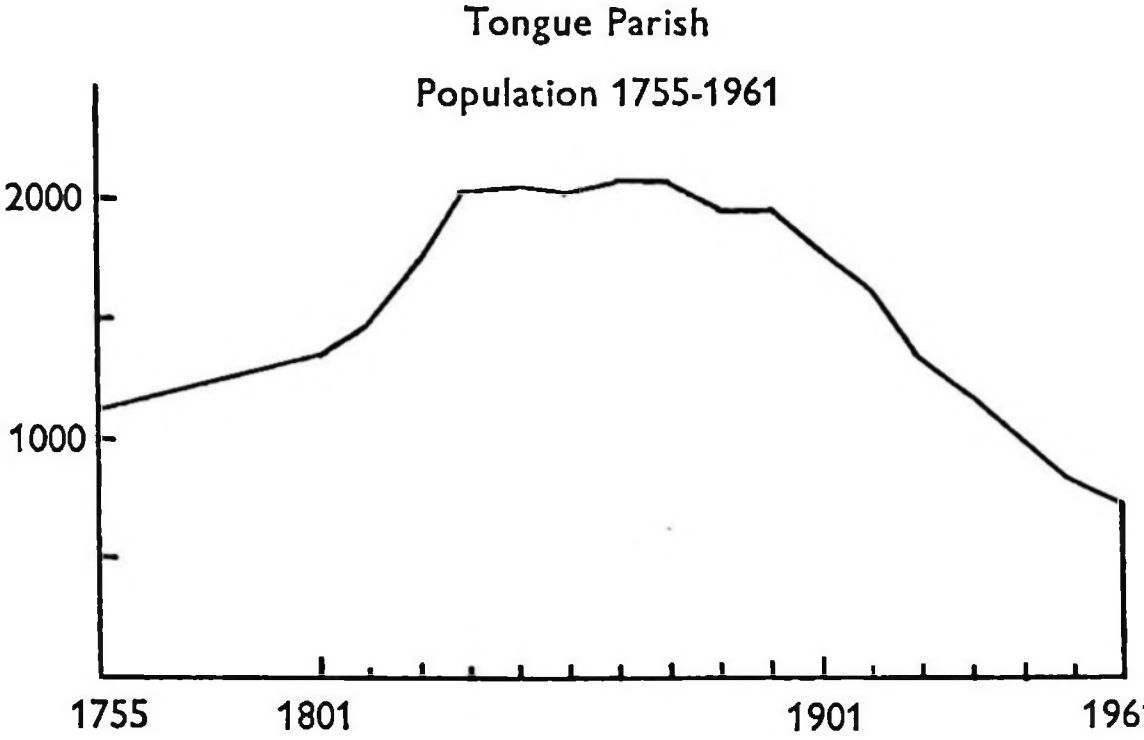

Fig. 2.

John 1884:80); and contacts with the outside world were also being increased by the summer migration to the East Coast fishing. Census figures suggest that the crash which followed the Potato Famines here was less severe than in most of the West Highlands, for the population remained steady in Tongue parish from 1831 to 1871 (Fig. 2) and only after this did the decline begin which is still unchecked to-day.

Seasonal and permanent migration were attempts to adjust to the new economic conditions of the nineteenth century, but there were also efforts to adjust internally. These consisted in part of fishing and rearing the new sheep breeds already discussed; in addition quarrying of slate and flagstone was active at Port Vasgo in 1792 (*O.S.A.* 1792:519), and also later at Midtown, but this had been virtually discontinued by 1840 (*N.S.A.* 1845:179), having proved uneconomic. Some kelp was

made in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (about 20 to 30 tons per year), but it collapsed in the 1820's and none was made after 1832 (*N.S.A.* 1845:180).

Roads were a feature of the new order, and began relatively early—they were progressing well by 1792 in Tongue parish (*O.S.A.* 1792:527); by 1840 there was a post office at Tongue (*N.S.A.* 1845:180), to which Melness was connected by a ferry across the Kyle. Mail was taken thrice weekly to Thurso, and twice to Golspie by a coach which also carried passengers. In the nineteenth century too began the coasting traffic with "shop boats" from Orkney, which speeded up commercial exchange, although in 1883 the main medium of trade were smacks from Caithness which called sporadically at Tongue, whence goods had to be carried to Melness across the ferry. The last trading smack called in 1932, for they were ousted in the inter-war years by land transport.

Local artisans still flourished in the earlier nineteenth century in the parish—there were carpenters, masons, shoemakers and smiths (*N.S.A.* 1845:177), and there seems to have been at least one of each in Melness: freer exchange in the factory age has eliminated most of these—there is only one builder and one shoemaker now. Mills at Dalnafree in the Strath and at Talmine ground the home-grown grain, but these had gone out of use by 1902.

In the decline of the old community life, formal education has played a part. Melness had its own school by 1790, and in 1840 English was generally understood by the younger people (*N.S.A.* 1845:177), and although the older members of the community still speak Gaelic as a first language, it was finally superseded as such among the school population between the wars.

Melness to-day

In Melness to-day, the decline of the crofting way of life is very apparent: the usual symptoms—neglected croft land, decreased cattle numbers, and a top-heavy population structure are all present. Apart from the crofts (with their insufficient economic basis for a livelihood now), virtually all the employment is in services. At present (1960) the total community strength is some 170: i.e. those who have a house or a croft in Melness, and who regard it as home; but about 60 of these are outside the district, and most will certainly never return apart from holidays. There are in all 65 homes in the townships

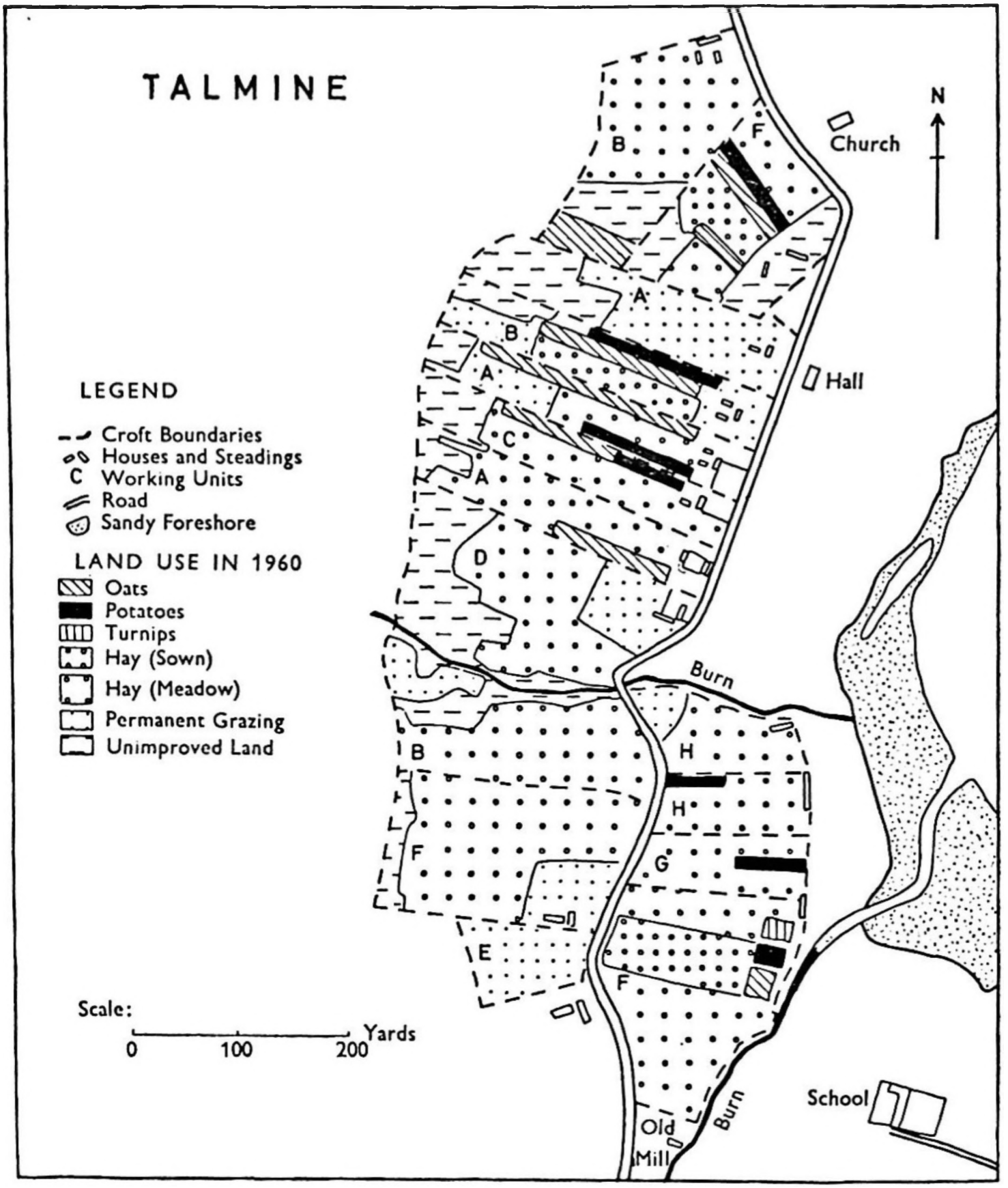

Fig. 3.

now, and 11 of these are cottars. Of the crofters, only 28 can be said to be actively working the land, and the system now is geared to the rearing of sheep for market.

The more active crofters invariably have more than one croft, although these are seldom contiguous, and they may even be in different townships: thus one Achininver crofter

has two crofts in Midfield, while one man has two at Torrincudigan and three in Talmine (Fig. 3). Significant in the south part of the district and in the Strath are the walls between the crofts—in its natural state the land was strewn with loose boulders. On the more broken terrain of Midfield and East Strathan, however, the crofts are not even fenced, and this is also found at Achininver where the land is actually still in unconsolidated strips.

The relationship of the houses of Melness to their crofts is something of a microcosm of crofting variety. Thus in Midtown and Skinnid, the nineteenth century movement of the houses upslope has actually divorced them from their crofts, for they are now sited on the opposite side of the road which runs at the head of the crofts; for the most part they have walled gardens attached which are little used. In Skinnid the houses are in aligned groups of twos and threes, not always adjacent to their crofts. Talmine is a "two-storey" township (Fig. 3)—the road runs through it at about 150 feet O.D. and there are complete crofts above and below it, all with houses at the foot of the crofts. At Midfield, East Strathan (Fig. 4) and Port Vasgo the houses are in fairly close clusters, apart from the crofts in nooks of the more rugged terrain. Port Vasgo is especially noteworthy, as nearly all its inbye land is in the bottom of a glacial meltwater channel which cuts off the small rocky peninsula of Meall Mor; it is about 500 yards long and 70 yards wide. Achininver also has its three houses in a cluster, on a terrace at about 25 feet O.D. above the low-lying delta flat on which is most of its arable land; and in the strath the houses are attached to the crofts but are fairly well dispersed.

The soils of the Melness crofts are nearly all more or less peaty and thin; the material overlying bedrock is generally a thin veneer of gravelly boulder clay, in which a shallow hard pan has formed. In the more broken terrain at the north end, part of the old arable was on more or less pure peat in hollows, and was formerly cultivated in lazybeds, but these have now been abandoned. The lowest lying part of the old delta at Achininver is very wet and has been left in lazy-beds, but the remainder gives a deep (if rather sandy) soil which is the best in the district. In the Strath, croft land is mainly on terrace gravels which are fairly well drained, if rather stony. Most of the croft land has never been artificially drained, although with the help of Crofters Commission grants, drainage has improved some of the land recently.

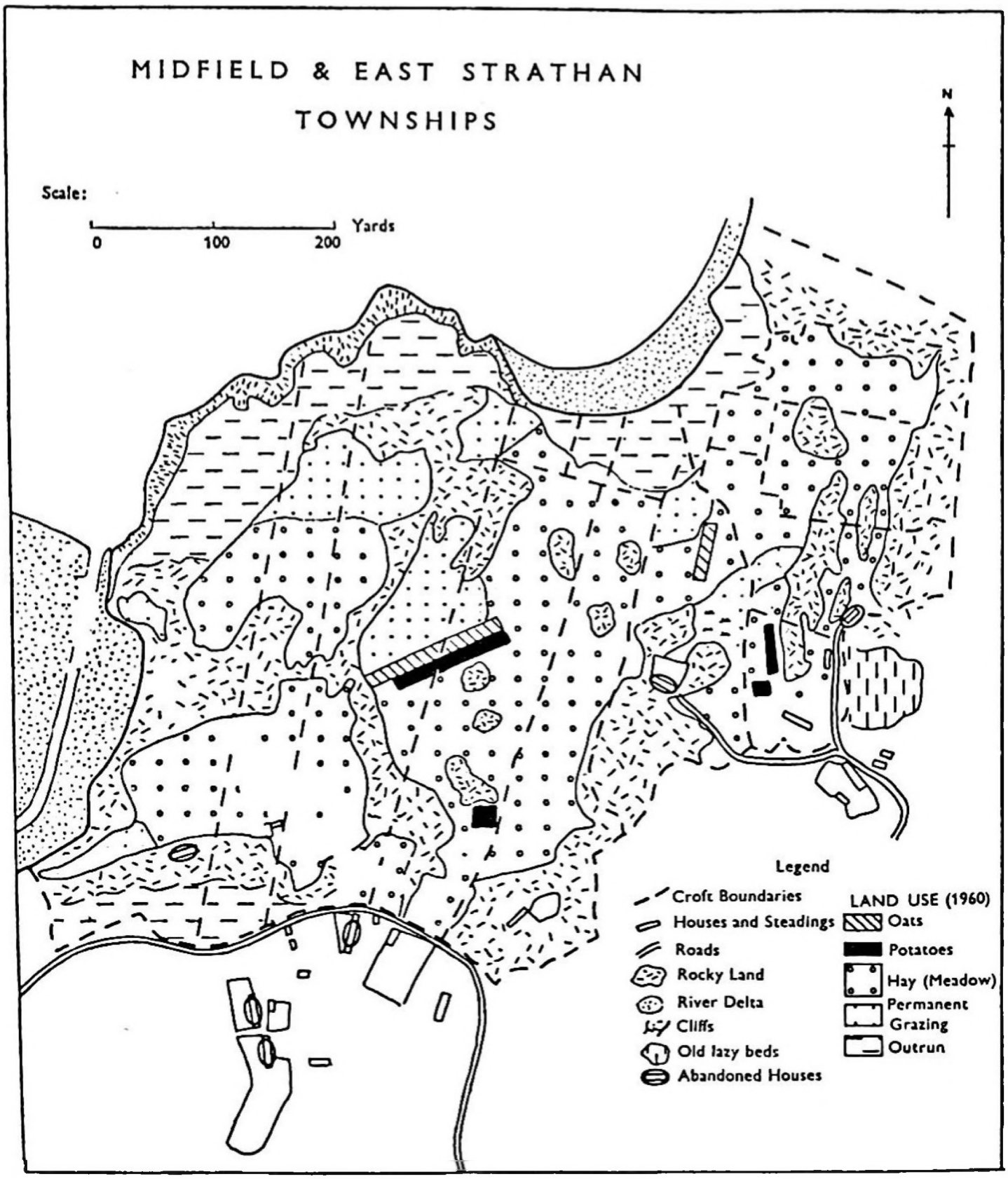

FIG. 4.

Where the land is still actively worked, it is now coming more or less into a six-course rotation, although there are often more than three consecutive years of grass between the crop of oats, potatoes and oats. Much of the hay now cut was seeded down several years ago, or may indeed come from natural grass. It is cut in late August and September for hay, and half a dozen crofters are now overcoming the uncertain autumn

weather by putting it up on tripods and fences. Oats are the only other crop of significance for the animals: potato oats as well as sandy oats now figure in the system, and with the new varieties they can still mature when sown in mid-May as opposed to the old practice in mid-April. A few turnips also are grown for stock feed, but only five crofters had patches of them in 1960. Every croft still has its own potato patch, but

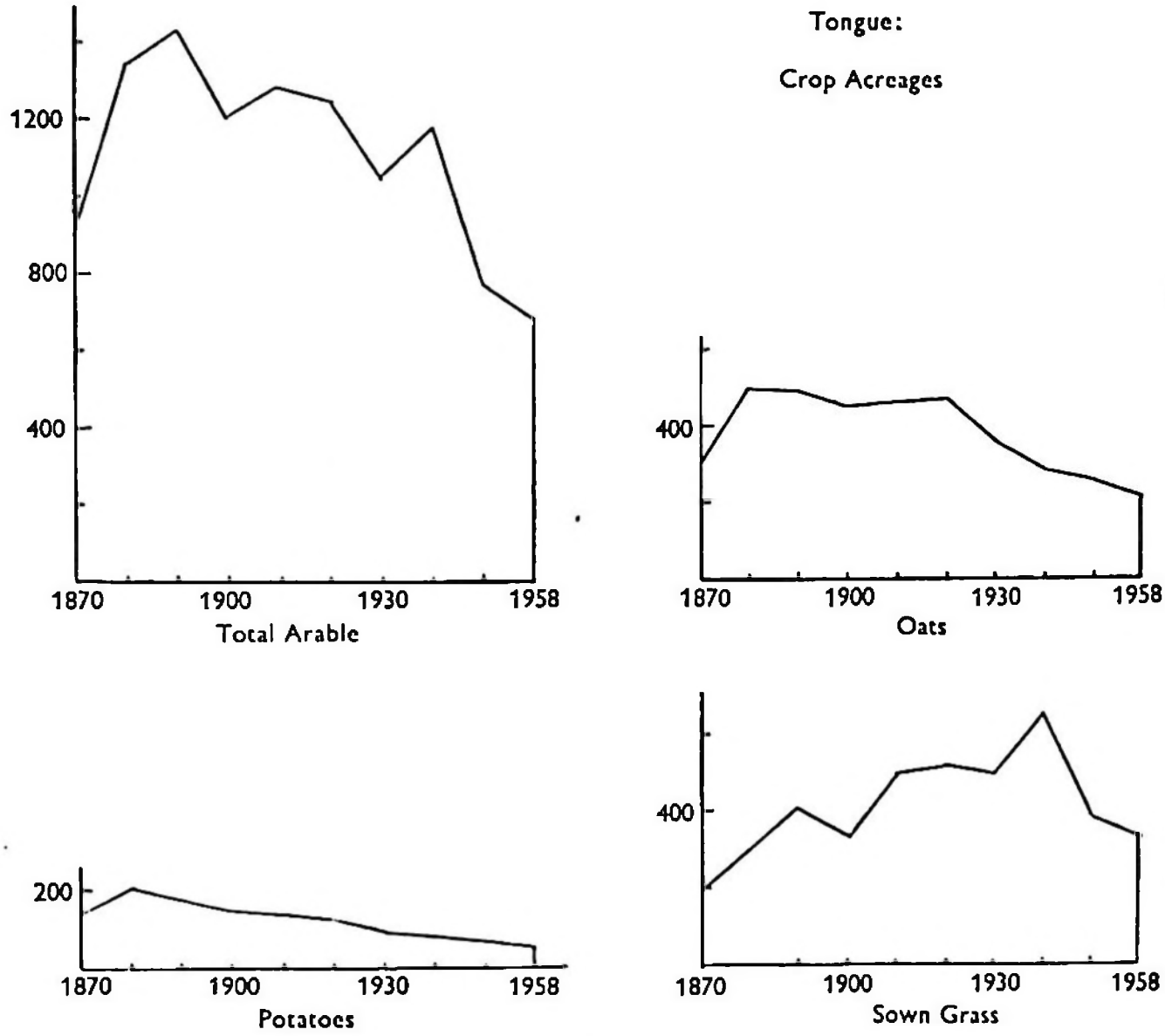

FIG. 5.

these are much less grown with the decline of the crop as a food staple. In all, however, less than a twentieth part of the inbye land is now ploughed up annually—even with the more active crofters the fraction is seldom more than one quarter (see Fig. 5). Artificial fertilisers now supplement manure on the land, and no seaweed is now applied. By far the greater part of the croft land is now under permanent grass: the better parts of this are cut for hay, the amount varying with the weather of the season, but most of it is grazed only.

Three crofters have Ferguson tractors, and one of these

now does most of the ploughing for the district on a contract arrangement. Even so, part of the land is still turned by spade for potatoes—in 1959 for example, one Skinnid crofter turned as much as half an acre. The contractor also does a good deal of mowing of the hay, but most of it is still cut by scythe, as is most of the oats. There are several small tractors and three horses still which help in the work on the land—such as taking

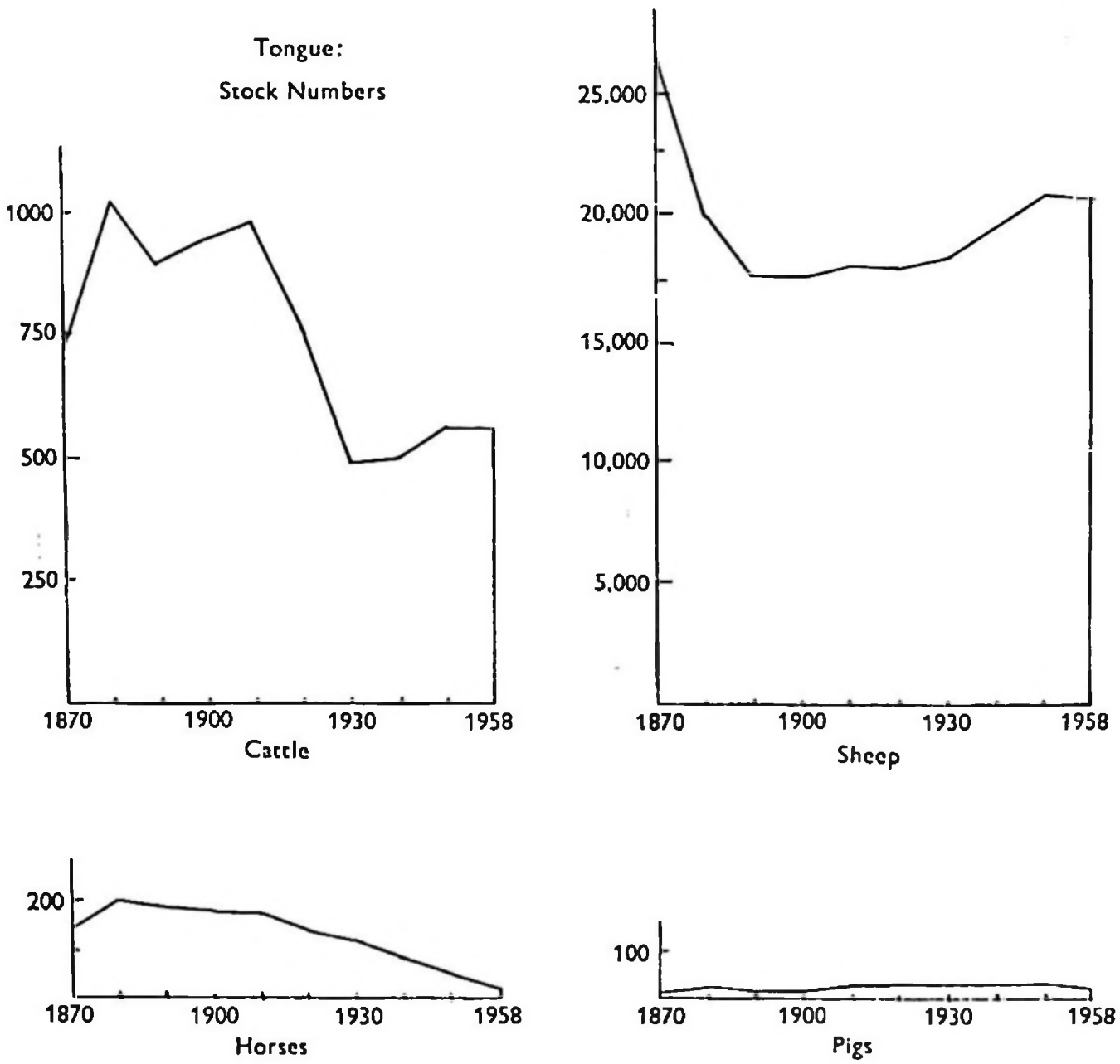

FIG. 6.

out manure or taking in hay and oats; but part of the latter is still carried on the backs of men and women.

The stock shows the modern crofting characteristic of an emphasis on sheep (see Fig. 6). A dozen crofters have as many as 60 to 100 sheep, but only half a dozen have as many as 3 cows, and there are only about 40 cows in Melness now compared with some 2,000 ewes.

The sheep are almost all Cheviots—the usual breed in the north-west mainland, and although not the best suited to this

rather bleak environment, under the present economic conditions they pay as well as any. Every crofter now looks after his own sheep, apart from the occasions of gathering (for dipping, shearing, separating the lambs from the ewes, and bringing inside the ring fence for winter), when crofters generally work with their fellows in the township.

Selling demands a long haul to market—generally to Lairg but occasionally to Forsinard, both 50 miles away on the railway in East Sutherland. Some of the crofters go to the expense of wintering their hoggs on the East Coast, although this costs about £2 per head (including freight); others keep them within the district ring fence in the winter season from 25th October to 25th May, although this means that they are in poorer condition at the end of it. According to the grazings regulations, the whole district is open to all stock in winter, but some crofters with fenced crofts exclude others than their own. Those with most sheep all give hand feed in winter—a practice which began between the wars, and is now done even in the best winters; in bad years it may necessitate the costly expedient of buying in fodder. In summer, the sheep graze on the Moine common, although there are some lost in the bogs and over the cliffs.

The few crofters who keep 3 or 4 cows have up to 10 cattle beasts with heifers and calves. Most of the cash income from cattle is now realised by selling of calves, which avoids the problem of feeding them in winter. Cattle are now mostly black polls, of the Aberdeen-Angus breed, the old Highland beasts having disappeared completely, and the objective is now beef cattle for market, little thought being given to home milk production; milk is regularly brought from Lairg—for part of the year even for those who still have cows. No bulls are now kept in the district, though formerly there were several. All crofters now depend on the bull kept at Melness House farm.

The Melness district has a big common grazing (over 10,000 acres) in relation to its size, but the part inside the hill fence, which the sheep graze in winter along with the croft land, is heavily punished now. Even in summer this part has not much vegetation—the grass is in tufts, separated by bare patches. There are some patches of bracken on the common, but drainage is so poor that it is not a serious pest.

Skinnid has a township common of 81 acres on the wing-shaped promontory which gives the township its name; it is irregular rocky terrain which provides good shelter for sheep

in winter, and has also been dusted with wind-borne sand which supports a much better sward than the general common. Two cattle per croft are allowed on this common in summer, in contrast with the other townships where cattle are either put to the hill or tethered on the crofts during the cropping season. The other township commons are of little significance now: the Midtown one (18 acres) is on coastal sand dunes and is almost all covered by marram, while at Achininver the township common (25 acres) lies on the hill between the township and the ring fence, but is also rather barren; at Port Vasgo, the cliff-top common on the Meall Mor promontory is rather better, but is only 17 acres in extent.

Ancilliaries and Services to Crofting

Productive occupations are limited to work on the land, apart from lobster fishing, in which there are only two small boats engaged, one at Talmine and the other at Port Vasgo; both have two-man crews. Before World War I, almost every family had its own boat for the inshore line fishing, but this subsequently declined. The great gale of January 1953 damaged most of the boats remaining on the beaches so badly that it almost ended the inshore fishing, although a limited amount still continues. Two of the crofters work full-time on the farm at Melness House, apart from the busy croft seasons of sowing and harvesting.

Nearly all other work is in service occupations. There are four roadmen who maintain the Melness road, and also a part of the main road along the north coast, from Kinloch to Hope; occasionally two or three other crofters get employment on the roads, too. The only other full-time worker is the shop-keeper, and part-time there are two postmen and one mail-driver; and for the school there is one janitor, one cleaner, one cook and one driver. Also, there are three teachers, the minister and a nurse, none of whom are natives of the district.

Although there are forestry plantations in North Sutherland, there is none near enough to be within daily travelling distance, and none of the Melness crofters are employed in it. The district is also unfavourably placed for the tourist trade, being off the main road; to date only two crofters cater for summer visitors, although some caravans are brought to Talmine.

More significant for the district than these home wage-earners are those who have gone away to find work. There are

about 30 of them, mostly single people, but also some with families. There are only 5 now in the Merchant Marine, the rest being scattered throughout Britain and engaged in a variety of work.

The houses of Melness are all crofter-built; most have only a single storey although some have two. A very few have roofs of the heavy Caithness slate, but most now have materials brought from further afield—asbestos slate and tarred felt. A water scheme now serves the whole district and all now have electricity. There is also a shop, a church and a little used community hall.

Fuel still consists largely of peat; all those who are physically able cut their annual supply in banks on the Moine, and it is brought to the houses by lorries hired from Tongue. Formerly, there were peats within the Melness district, and although still worked at the north end, they are virtually exhausted. Coal now supplements peat, especially with the older people, despite the freight costs.

Numbers on the school roll show that community decline has not reached a hopeless stage—there are still 30 children at the three-teacher school, although they have to go to Dornoch or Golspie in the south-east of Sutherland for secondary education after reaching the age of twelve.

The story of Melness over the last two centuries shows a common crofting theme: a struggle to adjust to a new order which has had very sparing success, as is shown by the repeated mention of debt, poverty and destitution.[8] At no time in this period has Melness ever attained any real prosperity and it still lacks prosperity—and social equilibrium—to-day.

NOTES

[1] C. C. Evidence, 1884, Vol. II, p. 1597.
[2] See 6″ O.S. map, 1st edition (1878).
[3] C.C. Report, 1891, pp. 2-6.
[4] Information from Mr. A. G. Mackay, Skinnid.
[5] C.C. Evidence, 1884, Vol. II, p. 1604.
[6] C.C. Report, 1896, p. 109.
[7] C.C. Evidence, 1884, Vol. II, p. 1601.
[8] e.g. *O.S.A.* 1792:526-7; *N.S.A.* 1845:186-7; C.C. Evidence, Vol. II, p. 1596.

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NOTES AND COMMENTS

A. NOTES ON SCOTTISH PLACE-NAMES

21. *Kilwinning*

During a field-trip to the island of Arran in the Firth of Clyde in December 1963, I was able to record what appears to be the Arran Gaelic version of the Ayrshire place-name Kilwinning. I had previously recorded from the same person, Mr. John Robertson (92) of Blackwaterfoot, other Gaelic names of some of the more important places on the Scottish mainland, particularly in Renfrewshire and Ayrshire, where Gaelic has been dead for a few hundred years—a fact which makes the recording of the Arran Gaelic pronunciation of these names all the more valuable. However, only Kilwinning shall concern us in this context, and the name as given to me by Mr. Robertson is *Cill Dingeain*. As my informant had proved most trustworthy on other occasion and as both his mother and he himself had lived and worked in Kilwinning at different times, this Arran Gaelic version of our name deserves a little closer attention.

For this purpose we first of all turn to the written story of the name. Its early phases are easily followed in Cochran-Patrick 1884, where the relevant documents are very conveniently gathered together. From these the following picture emerges:

kilwinin 1202-7 Glasgow Registrum;[1] *Kilwynnyn*, *Kilwenyne*, *Kilwynnyne*, *Kylwynnyn*, *Kilwynnyn* 1222 Dryburgh Liber;