

# THE SURVEYS FOR THE SUTHERLAND CLEARANCES 1813-1820

---

Horace Fairhurst

## 1. *The Sutherland Clearances*

Very extensive stretches of the interior of the county of Sutherland form such a sparsely populated wilderness that they raise administrative problems of great magnitude for the local authorities. As every Scot knows, this wilderness is not due merely to difficulties of soil, climate and location; the land was purposefully denuded of its former inhabitants in the early years of the nineteenth century to make way for extensive sheep farming. A similar policy of clearance was followed in many parts of the Highlands but nowhere was it carried out with such thoroughness over such wide areas as in Sutherland, and particularly in Strath Naver and the Strath of Kildonan. In these two valleys alone, many hundreds of families were displaced to make way for a few sheep owners and their shepherds; from Captain John Henderson's estimates of the population at the time, it would appear that at least three hundred were moved out of Strath Naver (Henderson 1815:25).

The settlements in the two straths were depopulated in a series of planned operations between 1806 and 1820; some of the inhabitants went to the colonies, some perhaps moved to the industrial towns growing up in the south, while many were directed to small "lots" of about two acres each on the coast at Bettyhill, Strathy or Helmsdale. Here, the settlers were expected to build new homes on the lots which were purposely kept small by the management of the Sutherland Estate; they were to be forced to turn to the sea for additional income, though they knew little of sea fishing. The complement to the wilderness of the interior is the pattern of small ladder-like fields which characterise the coastlands to-day around Helmsdale and Bettyhill. Perhaps the most spectacular of these reception areas is the now abandoned site of Badbae above the cliffs near the Ord of Caithness, where the slope was so steep

adjacent clachan down to the North Sea coast of Sutherland at Helmsdale (Pl. I). A second group portrays extensive stretches of middle and lower Strath Naver, below Loch Naver and running out to Farr Point in the centre of the north coast of Scotland. These plans are of interest for two reasons: they throw light upon a subject in which hard facts have been much obscured by partisan pleading, and secondly, they show the old settlement pattern in some detail in a region where the traditional way of life had been but little affected by the "Improvements" which were making such great changes in the south.

The individual plans comprising the survey of Strath Naver and the Strath of Kildonan vary considerably in size, scale, technique and state of preservation.<sup>2</sup> All but one have been mounted on linen, and the exception is in a very poor state. Some are unsigned, several bear the initials "B.M."<sup>3</sup> with the date, and the latest is "from an accurate survey taken in 1818 by Wm. Cumming". The trials of the latter are graphically illustrated by a carefully inscribed remark in Farr Bay, "here the boat upset", and there is a minute but appropriate sketch. Cumming is mentioned as being active in the Inverness area about 1800 (Inglis 1934:105).

In each case only a linear scale is given in Scots chains, so that the representative fraction must be stated as an approximation. The Scots mile was apt to vary but contained 80 Scots chains; on his plan, Cumming gives the length of the latter as 74 feet, and this has been taken as standard. Individual plans vary from about 1 inch to 4 Scots chains (i.e. 1:c. 3452, or just over 18 inches to our mile) down to 1 inch to 12 Scots chains (1:10,656 or nearly 6 inches to the present mile). As regards size, several of the plans for lower Strath Naver measure only about 22 inches by 17 inches and the area surveyed is restricted to a strip rarely as much as a mile wide along the river. The largest covers the lower part of the Strath of Kildonan and is made up of six separate sheets which have been mounted together in a roll 14 feet long by 26 to 33 inches wide. Here again, only the improved land along the river is shown and consists of a strip about 6 inches across, i.e. about one third of a mile wide.

Generally, relief is portrayed by rough brush work in watery black: pasture is indicated by a faint light green and the arable with an equally faint yellow wash sometimes brush lined with a darker shade to suggest the plough rigs. Woodland

is shown by a green dapple, but rough grazing is normally left blank. On many of the plans, individual holdings are outlined in different colours and a key giving the areas of the various types of land involved is provided in a "table of contents". In all cases, individual buildings are shown by small rectangles picked out in a faint red; on the larger scale plans such as that for Kildonan, the appearance suggests meticulous accuracy, but with the work of "B.M." on a smaller scale, the rectangles have a suspiciously vague look.

It has rarely been possible to check the accuracy of most of the Scottish estate plans of the period which have been studied in detail<sup>4</sup> in connection with the buildings pattern for the period before the Improvements. In this case, however, some field work undertaken in a rather different connection has allowed checks to be made and throws light on the nature of the buildings portrayed.

### 3. *A Clearance Township: Rosal in Strath Naver*

The field work in Strath Naver was undertaken in 1962 at the invitation of the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments in Scotland by staff and students from the Archaeology and Geography Departments, Glasgow University.<sup>5</sup> An investigation was made of the site of a township called Rosal (1 inch O.S. 7th Series, Sheet 10, Tongue, NC 688414). It was cleared in or soon after 1814 to form part of a sheep farm for the notorious Patrick Sellar, and since that time has been kept in sheepwalk so that the ruined buildings have remained undisturbed.

Rosal now lies within the Forestry Commission plantations which will soon transform the scenery of the present wilderness of grass and heather. The country around is an irregular but relatively open plateau through which the Naver flows in a narrow and quite shallow valley. Rosal is wide open to the winds of these northern areas, but although twelve miles inland and set above the haughlands and flood danger, it is at an altitude of no more than about 250 to 350 feet.

About 70 structures were located within the dry stone dyke which surrounded the improved land at Rosal, but of these, only about 15 appeared to be dwellings.<sup>6</sup> The remainder were stackyards, barns, outhouses and kilns for corn drying, each standing more or less in isolation so that it was difficult to recognise the individual farming units involved, i.e. to associate

any particular dwelling with its yard and outhouses. It is probable that at least some of the ruined structures were obsolete and even in disrepair before the evictions took place, but it was very difficult to differentiate them and, in fact, it would appear that only a small proportion was involved. Excavation suggested that the walls were largely of turf built above a dry-stone base about 2 feet high and 2 feet wide; the thatched roof was supported on curved couples, rising from the ground on the inside of the two long walls, to meet at the central ridge. Documentary evidence from several sources confirms this as being the characteristic technique for this part of Sutherland.<sup>7</sup> In all cases, the floor was of earth and the surface was surprisingly uneven.

The dwellings were as much as 108 feet long by about 9 to 11 feet wide. In the example we excavated, about half of the long-house formed the byre (see Pl. VIII). Continuing this and without any obvious signs of a partition between came the living-end around a central hearth, with a small room beyond shut off by a flimsy wall. There was only one door normally, leading straight into the byre, and we found no traces of built chimneys nor of windows. These long-houses were much larger than the barns and outhouses which were perhaps 30 to 40 feet in length; the difference is quite sufficient to be noted on a plan on the scale of 18 inches or even 9 inches to the mile, if carefully drawn. The kilns were contained within round-ended buildings of a diminutive size, measuring about 16 feet by 7 feet.

#### 4. *Plans of the Clearance Areas: the Heights of Strath Naver*

Rosal is covered on a large plan of "The Heights of Strathnaver", on the scale of about 6 inches to the mile, by "B.M." The townlands are shown quite recognisably as an area of arable and pasture within very extensive common grazings shared with the tenants of the neighbouring settlement of Dalharrold. The survey is dated 1811, only three years before the evictions began, but the pattern of the buildings shown is scarcely recognisable in terms of the ruined structures on the ground (see Pl. III). In all, 25 small rectangles of varying sizes appear on the plan, spaced around the periphery in three loose clusters (as in fact, they occur) but individually it is impossible to identify on the ground more than about half a dozen with any degree of certainty. Even the arable land is shown as a

continuous block, whereas in fact it was much divided by peaty hollows and patches of rough ground. Anyone attempting a description of the traditional buildings pattern at Rosal, or estimating the number of families, would be grossly misled by the plan (see Pl. II.)

We may be dealing with one of "B.M."s less happy productions, for the neighbouring settlement at Truderscaig, shown on the same plan, has a good outline and here 15 rectangles are shown, most of them obviously referring to long-houses whose ruins can still be recognised. Truderscaig, however, is known to have been a larger settlement than Rosal, so that only a fraction of the total buildings pattern can have been plotted.

Perhaps the main interest of the plan of "The Heights of Strathnaver" is that it is the only one of the series which makes any attempt to show the extent of the rough grazings and to indicate outlying enclosures. The latter were of two types; in the first place there were the shielings to which the cattle were taken for some weeks during the summer, and secondly, there were a number of small enclosures, about 2 acres in extent, which appear to have been cultivated and in some cases, to have been permanently inhabited.<sup>8</sup> The second group has every appearance of being old shieling ground which had come under continuous occupation. It is interesting to note in passing that much of the evidence at the trial of Patrick Sellar revolves round a man named Chisholm who was said to have been squatting on an outlying patch of land to the east of Rosal; this place called Badinloskin can be identified on the plan. Considerable care must have been exercised in plotting these small outlying patches of arable, though no dwellings are shown.

##### *5. Plans of the Clearance Areas: Lower Strath Naver*

From Syre Bridge below Rosal down to the north coast, lower Strath Naver is covered by a series of plans bearing the initials "B.M." and on the scale of about  $9\frac{1}{4}$  inches to the Scots mile. In this area, the scenery changes and in place of the shallow open valley of the upper strath, the hills close in to give a deep glen with sides rising sharply up to about 800 feet from the narrow floor. The pattern of settlement of the pre-Clearance population also changed; upstream from Syre, the townships resembled Rosal and Truderscaig which were islands of improved land set amid extensive moorlands from



which they were separated by a dry-stone "ring" dyke. In the lower strath, the townships consisted of strips of improved land on either side of the river, though sometimes they were discontinuous. Here, the dwellings of the early nineteenth century have been badly disturbed as the land was re-settled after being in sheep walk for a time, and was divided into crofts later in the century.

The plans portray no more than the narrow and discontinuous strip along the floor of the valley. Originally, there must have been five sheets numbered consecutively from IV to VIII, but VI of the Carnachy-Dun Viden area has not been located. In general, a fair degree of accuracy has been achieved in showing the area of improved pasture and arable while "Tables of Contents", too, give valuable information about the land use; one of these is given in detail below (page 8). Of the building patterns, however, there is again good reason to believe that only a fraction was recorded, even on these relatively large scale plans. The only detailed check we were able to make was at Auchloch (NC 716585) where it was plain that "B.M." made little more than a token plot of the dwellings; his plan gives a poor impression of what was an interesting and unusual settlement, tightly knit in linear pattern along a road.

In spite of shortcomings, however, the plans throw some light on the basic settlement pattern in this part of Scotland at the beginning of last century. The houses are normally portrayed in small clusters, but isolated dwellings also occur. This latter point is of considerable interest for, as the writer has argued elsewhere, the traditional settlement pattern in Scotland generally seems to have been related to the method of farming cooperatively in run-rig, in which the joint tenants grouped their dwellings together in loose clusters, sometimes referred to as "clachans" (Fairhurst 1960). The "tables of contents" are of some help in this connection and a characteristic example is given on page 8 from the bottom edge of Plan VII showing the districts of Ravigill, Skail and Rhifail.

Unfortunately, the number of the "small tenants" is not given but additional information is available from two other sources for this particular area. Captain Henderson gives an estimate of the number of families (Henderson 1815:25) and in the evidence given at the trial of Patrick Sellar, witnesses gave information of the number of tenants present at some townships.<sup>9</sup> It becomes quite clear that the average acreage

of arable and pasture for each "small tenant" was extremely small, being  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to 4 at Rhifail with no hill grazing at all, and  $4\frac{1}{2}$  at Ravigill with some hill and wood.<sup>10</sup> At Skail, the figure was probably about 4 but with no hill grazing again.

No. VII Plan of the farms of Ravigill, Skeal and Rhifele with the small possessions of Girfe and Enishvloundi. B.M. 1810.

	Contents					Total
	Arable	Pasture	Wood	Muir	Hill Pasture	
<b>RAVIGILL</b>						
Small tenants	34 1 15	11 3 32	26 2 38	17 2 37	. . .	90 2 2
<b>GIRFE</b>						
Dond Macbeath	8 0 35	. . .	. . .	. . .	. . .	8 0 35
<b>RHIFELE</b>						
Captn Mackay	5 3 35	4 . .	. . .	42 2 20	203 2 0	255 3 25
Small tenants	14 1 12	5 3 32	. . .	. . .	. . .	20 1 4
<b>SKEAL</b>						
Mr. Mackay	10 2 26	14 2 32	. . .	. . .	. . .	33 1 13
John Mackay	6 3 37	4 3 8	. . .	16 1 36	. . .	28 1 1
Small tenants	5 2 5	2 3 28	. . .	11 1 34	. . .	19 3 27
" "	2 2 5	2 2 0	. . .	. . .	. . .	5 . 5
Brown and Macdonald	4 . 17	1 . .	. . .	1 . 29	. . .	6 . 6
<b>ENISHVLOUNDI</b>						
Angus Mackay	3 . 30	5 3 0	. . .	. . .	. . .	8 3 30
	103 2 72	53 1 12		89 1 36	203 2 0	476 3 33

NOTE.—The measurements are given in Scots acres, roods and falls. There were 40 falls to the rood and 4 roods to the acre. According to McKerral, the Scots acre was  $1\frac{1}{4}$  the size of the English acre (McKerral 1943-4). The additions in some of the above columns are inaccurate.

Returning now to the pattern of settlement on the plans of 1810, it is clear that some of the isolated dwellings belong to tenants who held as individuals. Of these, some would belong to the tacksmen class, perhaps retired military officers of the type which was said to have attempted to inflame public opinion at the time of the Clearances. With such small acreages of arable to each "small tenant", however, it may be that some isolated settlement had occurred from time immemorial in areas such as Strath Naver where the fertile ground was in narrow strips and often in discontinuous patches.

## 6. *The Clearance Areas: the Strath of Kildonan*

Before discussing the settlement pattern further, it is advisable at this stage to turn to another district covered by the plans from Dunrobin Castle, that of the Strath of Kildonan (Pl. I). This is one of the main valleys opening on to the North Sea coast of Sutherland and is drained by the Helmsdale River which enters the sea at the small modern town and fishing harbour of Helmsdale. In its upper course, the river drains an irregular but open plateau stretching over into Strath Naver—at present a desolation of moor, peat bog and shallow loch. On approaching the small present day settlement of Kildonan where the true strath begins, the hills close in on the Helmsdale River until, as with lower Strath Naver, there is only a narrow ribbon of low ground at the bottom of a steep sided glen, widening a little where a side burn enters.

The Clearance took place about the same time as in Strath Naver; the first was in 1813 and caused much uproar but no practical opposition, and the process seems to have been completed about 1820 when a number of longer leases terminated. Nowadays, a modern farm occurs from place to place along the Strath, but it is very sparsely populated and the old church seems remote and lonely; the visible memorials of the former population occur as overgrown ruins spaced at frequent intervals.

The Strath is covered from the neighbourhood of the old church down to the sea, a distance of about nine miles, by the composite roll of six sheets mounted together which was mentioned earlier. The name of the surveyor is not stated but the style is not unlike that of Cumming who was responsible for the Bettyhill plan of 1818, though the lettering is different in detail. The scale is relatively large, 1 inch to 4 Scots chains (about 18 inches to the present mile), and there is reason to believe that the buildings pattern is portrayed with a considerable degree of accuracy.

In this respect, a check on what is in effect a random sample from amongst the settlements was made during the summer of 1962. Under the auspices of the Sutherland Education Committee and with Mr. Gordon Petrie as instructor, a summer school in field survey for amateur archæologists made plans of various ancient monuments, including one of the Clearance site at Kilphedir; this is located near a burn on the north side of the Strath of Kildonan about three miles above the sea at



Helmsdale. A fair copy is shown (Pl. V) together with a reproduction of the relevant part of the old plan from Dunrobin (Pl. IV). It is to be borne in mind, as with Rosal, that some of the buildings were in all probability ruinous before the evictions took place; unfortunately, too, Kilphedir is near the modern road and has suffered some disturbance during the last 150 years. Still, the plan of 1962 does indicate the degree of accuracy obtained on the early survey.

There is another check on the accuracy of these plans of a very different type. At the time of the Clearances, the minister at the Church of Kildonan was Aeneas Sage; his son Donald, born in 1789, wrote an autobiography and family history in a large collection of papers rather late in life and they were published after his death by his son in 1883 in the well known "Memorabilia Domestica; or Parish Life in the North of Scotland" (Sage 1889). Donald Sage has little to say about the earlier evictions of 1813-14, but in 1819 he was a missionary for the outlying parts of his father's parish and that of Farr, living at Achness in Strath Naver, not far from Rosal. He describes in some detail the events of the period and accuses the agents of the Duchess of Sutherland of atrocities in the evictions. He must have known the individuals involved personally, and in fact, Sage's statements provide some of the most damning evidence produced against the former factor, Patrick Sellar.

Many writers have taken Sage's description at face value, as does Ian Grimble in "The Trial of Patrick Sellar", where there is a chapter entitled "What was in the diary 1889". It should be remarked, however, that strictly speaking, Sage was not actually an eye witness, as he left his flock after conducting what must have been a highly emotional gathering at Langdale on the previous Sunday. It is also very difficult to see why Sage, if he had such damning evidence, remained silent all his life during a long controversy which sadly lacked precisely the type of corroboration he alone could have given.

However, "Memorabilia Domestica" will be read as long as the Clearances are discussed. One of the most interesting, and indeed moving chapters describes the Strath of Kildonan and especially the district around the manse, as it was about the year 1800 when Sage was a boy and must have known it intimately. On the plans of 1811 it is portrayed just as he saw it (Pl. VI). There is his father's manse, with the two wings running out on either side, where the roof leaked so badly.

Behind is the kiln house, and then the houses of the eight tenants on his father's farm stretching for about a mile downstream from the glebe and still, as he says on p. 72, "in run rigs". Rarely is it possible to read a description of one of the traditional co-operative farms of that period and to see a detailed plan of the features discussed. And yet, so typical of the man, Sage is tantalisingly vague about the minor details which the modern student would have valued so highly.

### *7. Settlements in the Strath of Kildonan*

The plans of Kildonan should not be overrated in comparison with that of the Heights of Strath Naver; although they give the buildings pattern in far more detail, they show little more than the extent of the arable along the bottom of the strath and there is no indication of the nature of the hill grazings nor of the position of the shielings.

What is at once striking on the plans of the early nineteenth century is the large number of buildings along the edge of the strip of arable and pasture near the river. This is only in places more than quarter of a mile wide, but every quarter to half mile along the valley, there appears a small cluster of dwellings with the associated barns, outhouses and kilns suggestive of a group farm. Here again, it is noticeable that isolated dwellings also occur, which do not seem to differ in size and plan from those of the normal tenants. Generally speaking, the buildings are placed at the foot of the slope up to the hills on either side, above flood level, and especially where the valley opens out slightly with the junction of a side valley; sometimes, as at Caën, the settlement extends into a side valley. Kilphedir itself was placed near a burn on a terrace above the cultivable land. Incidentally, it is noticeable that the settlements are more numerous on the north eastern side facing the sun.

In both the Strath of Kildonan and in Strath Naver, on different scales and with different degrees of accuracy, the plans indicate a relatively large population which was crowded on to a small area of arable land. Doubtless the wide extent of the hill grazings, the shielings and perhaps outlying patches of arable mitigated the problem to some extent, but whether consideration is given to the total number of dwellings shown on the maps, or to the calculations of the amount of arable per family, or to the housing conditions as established for Rosal, there can be little doubt that the material standard of living

was very low. Population within the Highlands generally was rising at the time and, although the potato had proved an important addition to the crops, famines were common, as the Reverend Aeneas Sage describes for the Strath of Kildonan in the early years of the century.<sup>11</sup>

The recurrent famines, the need for fresh sources of income and the inevitability of emigration are exactly the points emphasised by the apologists for the Sutherland Clearances such as James Loch and Patrick Sellar. Their scheme to abolish the problem is illustrated equally clearly on some of the other plans from Dunrobin, for the areas of Farr and Helmsdale.

#### 8. *The Reception Areas: Farr*

Two plans of different dates are available for the district at the mouth of the Naver around what is now Bettyhill. To the west of the narrow estuary, there is a most spectacular stretch of sand blown up a rocky hill side which all tourists to the area will well remember. To the east, however, running out towards Farr Point, there is a succession of rocky headlands backed by irregular ground, usually with very thin soil but sometimes with blown sand; it is this area with which the plans are concerned, around the old church of Farr and what is now the modern hotel at Bettyhill.

The first plan is obviously by "B.M.", though all but the tip of the M in his signature has been torn away; the scale is about 13 inches to the Scots mile (i.e. 1:5460 or 11½ inches to the present mile) and the date is 1810. Comparatively few buildings are shown except for three groups around the inn, the manse and a house at Clerkhill. On the shore a "boiling house" is indicated, perhaps for salmon. Although the buildings pattern may be incomplete, the plan seems clearly to indicate a sparsely populated area.

The second plan shows a marked change; it is entitled "The Land loted out in the Parish of Farr" and is signed by Wm. Cumming in 1818, that is, the year before the second and greater Clearance of Strath Naver (Pl. VII). It is on a larger scale than the earlier plan, in this case 7½ inches to 30 Scots chains (i.e. 1:3580, or 17¾ inches to the present mile). At a later time, the site of the Free Church and the School at Bettyhill have been indicated roughly in blue pencil, as well as the modern course of the road.

In the first place, the number of buildings shows a very

marked increase as compared with the earlier map; the shortcomings of "B.M." have been discussed before, but in this case a new township has appeared on the site of the modern settlement at Farr, and another group of houses is to be seen up at Newlands behind the inn. It would be reasonable to suggest that these represent an influx of settlers after the first Strath Naver evictions of 1814.

Secondly, the plan indicates a new division of the land into small or very small parcels as compared with the earlier holdings. On the better land, these "lots" consist of long narrow strips measuring perhaps 300 by 40 yards, and each containing about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  Scots acres of arable and about  $\frac{1}{2}$  an acre of pasture, the amounts being carefully inscribed on the plan in acres, roods and falls. On the rougher ground as at Newlands, the parcels are larger and less geometrical. The demarcation of these lots brought into being the field boundaries which can be seen in the area to-day (Pl. VII).

The parallel strips run back from the shore along the Naver through the modern Achine, Dalcharn and Bettyhill but very few dwellings are indicated on the plan over and above those already shown on the plan of 1810. Presumably these are the lots marked out in preparation for the influx of settlers expected after the evictions contemplated for 1819-20. At Clerkhill and at Farr, however, similar parallel strips occur which show very little relation to the existing houses. It looks very much as though lots for both the old and the new settlers were in process of demarcation, as though the older inhabitants were being huddled together to make room for the additional tenants. In all, 113 parcels can be counted, and a number of names have been faintly pencilled over some of the divisions.

At first sight, these 2 acre lots do not seem to differ very markedly in size from the area of arable per tenant calculated for the inland farms. Two points can be made: there was no hill grazing as at Rosal, and secondly, if the inland tenants were existing near subsistence level, even a slight reduction would be catastrophic. The idea, as James Loch so clearly states (1820:70, 105), was to force the population to turn to fishing; with the wild sea off shore and the lack of safe harbours, the prospect was bleak for a people from inland areas.

#### 9. *The Reception Areas: Helmsdale*

On the east coast, the position was less hopeless and in fact, several fishing harbours developed rapidly after the evictions,

notably Helmsdale itself. Herring were plentiful at the time and there was a thriving trade in salt herring with the Baltic. Later in the century, the shoals largely disappeared and in any case, the fishing became concentrated on the port at Wick after about 1840. Now the old curing yards and warehouses at Helmsdale stand disused and incomprehensible to the passing tourist, while at Lybster, on the Caithness coast, the wharves, gutting platforms and even the quays are grass grown in a once flourishing harbour.

For the Helmsdale area, two separate plans are available for the period of the Clearances, as with Bettyhill. On the last of the roll of six sheets which cover the Strath of Kildonan, the mouth of the river is shown and the area northwards towards, but not including, Navidale. Easter Helmsdale appears as no more than a typical cluster of dwellings housing a small farming community, one of the many extending up the Strath; it was located northwestwards of the modern town in what is now known as Old Helmsdale. Wester Helmsdale across the river, was even smaller. Of the little modern town itself, there was not a sign, but the road bridge was shown; this suggests that the survey was carried out just before the Clearances of 1813 and the lots have been indicated later in pencil. These resemble the parallel strips at Bettyhill and once more, the ladder-like fields of to-day can be traced back to this period. It is noticeable that no dwellings had as yet been constructed on the lots though a few names had been written in pencil over some of the divisions.

The second plan is on a large sheet of folded paper in very poor condition, badly cracked and barely holding together; it is entitled "Plan of the Ground Alloted for Fishermen at and near Helmsdale" and is dated May, 1817. The surveyor was W. Forbes. The scale is wrongly given in links whereas it is 1 inch to 4 chains, i.e. the same as for the survey of Kildonan. Forbes used a muddy blue wash for the sea and indicated relief very crudely with a large brush, but he took pains over a most attractive water colour sketch in the top right of the plan. This shows the new bridge over the river, with the ruined castle to the right, looking very much as it does to-day, and on the left a cluster of buildings which are named "Corf House" on the plan; the latter was in fact a curing factory.<sup>12</sup>

Rather strangely, the lots are still shown in pencil, but they now extend into Wester Helmsdale and Gartymore. The individual strips vary quite considerably in shape but are for



the most part long rectangles; an average specimen may be taken as being about 350 yards long and 20 yards wide, that is, about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  Scots acres. Still there is no sign of the beginning of modern Helmsdale except for the fish curing yards which, James Loch says, were built in 1814.<sup>13</sup> It is very noticeable, too that the surveyor has not indicated any new dwellings on the lots; surely by 1817, a new buildings pattern was coming into being as the people evicted from the Strath in 1813 constructed houses for themselves. Perhaps the evictions and resettlement were far from complete; there is a noticeable discrepancy in the accounts here. Sage, whom many writers have trusted implicitly, states apparently for the year 1813, "The whole north and south sides of the Strath, from Kildonan to Caën on the left bank of the river, and from Dalcharn to Marrel on the right bank were, at one fell sweep, cleared of their inhabitants" (Sage 1889:185). James Loch, however, speaks of the Kirkton of Kildonan, alongside the manse where Sage was brought up, as being cleared in 1820 (Loch 1820:89). On the whole, it looks from the plan as though the lotting was not complete in 1817. It is a minor point in one sense, but not if the veracity of major sources is at issue.

This curious plan of 1817 by Forbes has another intriguing aspect; on the back there is a complete rent roll for the lots in the Helmsdale area—this, of course, explains why the plan has not been mounted on linen. The list gives the names of the tenants, the acreage of the lot held and the rent, the last two averaging about two acres and £4. The contents of the roll have been certified by the famous Patrick Sellar himself with a clear, bold flourish of a signature which could tell something of the inner man of whom so little is known and so much has been said.

## 10. *Conclusion*

Perhaps two comments may be made in conclusion. The relatively small scale plans of Strath Naver portrayed the buildings pattern only in very general terms, and this casual treatment, while it may be ineptitude, seems to call for further explanation. The dwellings were, we know, both unsubstantial and liable to be replaced at short intervals: possibly "B.M." knew perfectly well that his plans were intended for use in the Clearances. Yet the larger scale plans of Kildonan seem to be accurate enough. Until more detailed studies have been made



of Scottish Estate plans, it would be as well to remember that the surveyors may not have paid too much attention to accuracy in portraying a buildings pattern which they knew was about to be superseded.

Secondly, the buildings everywhere occur in open clusters of very irregular form and size, situated at close intervals and with what appear to be occasional examples of quite isolated dwellings. Traditionally, the buildings pattern was almost certainly related to the agricultural practice of working the land in group farms, whose tenants lived companionably together in loosely clustered settlements. In speaking of a pattern, however, it may be that we impose in our minds far more regularity in arrangement than actually obtained, particularly, it would appear in this northerly region. The occurrence, too, of completely isolated dwellings which might well strike the student of rural settlement as especially significant, is barely noticeable in the straggling clusters of Strath Naver and the Strath of Kildonan.

The traditional settlement pattern elsewhere in the Highlands, and even in the Lowlands at an early period, may have been much more loose than our settlement classifications would persuade us to think.

#### APPENDIX

##### *Catalogue of Plans from Dunrobin Castle.*

NOTE: the "Table of Contents", if present, usually occurs in the lower margin and lists the tenants with the area each occupies, classified by type (arable, pasture, wood, moor, etc.) in acres, roods and falls.

1. "Heights of Strathnaver including Rosshill, Dalharrold and the small possessions of Achaphreish, Auchenrach, Dalmallard, Breckathunahowen and Badilea-oid . . . and hill grazings attached in Colonel Clune's Wadset the Farm of Truderscaig and part of the hill bounds belonging to Rheloisk B.M. 1811."

Scale  $6\frac{3}{4}$  inches to 1 Scots mile.  $49\frac{1}{4}$  by 33 inches. Table of Contents. Mounted on linen but in poor condition with cracks and stains. It is a composite sheet of 4 unequal parts mounted together.

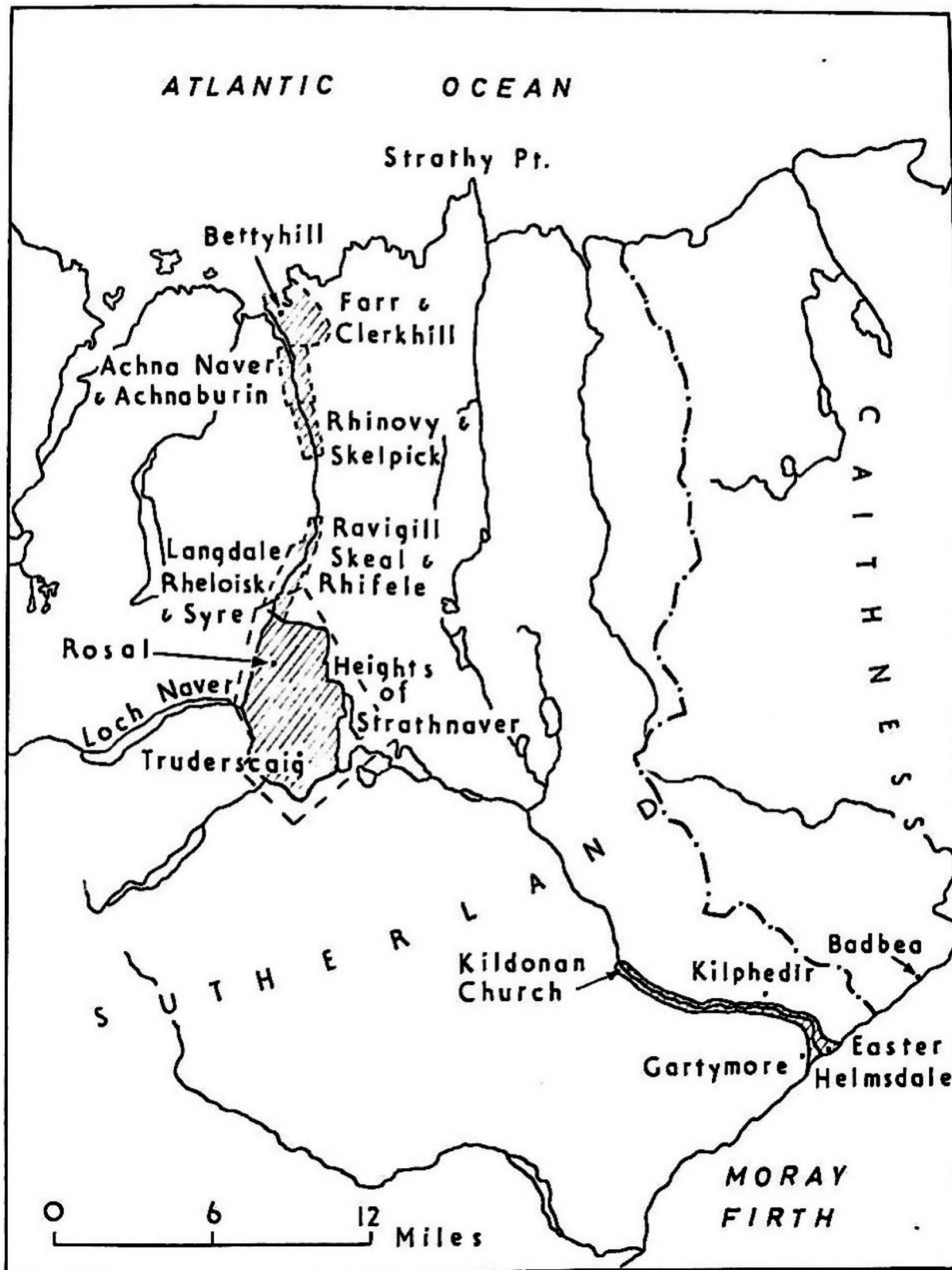
2. "No. IV. Plan of Achna Naver Ackilnaburgie Achloch and Achna-burin. B.M. 1810."

Scale  $10\frac{1}{2}$  inches to 1 Scots mile.  $21\frac{1}{2}$  by  $17\frac{1}{4}$  inches. Table of Contents. Good condition on linen back.

3. "No. V. Plan of the Farms of Rhinovy, Skelpick, Aphil, Dalhoraskil, Dalvigas and Achyalagree. B.M. 1810."

Scale  $10\frac{1}{2}$  inches to 1 Scots mile.  $22\frac{1}{2}$  by 18 inches. Table of Contents. Good condition on linen back.

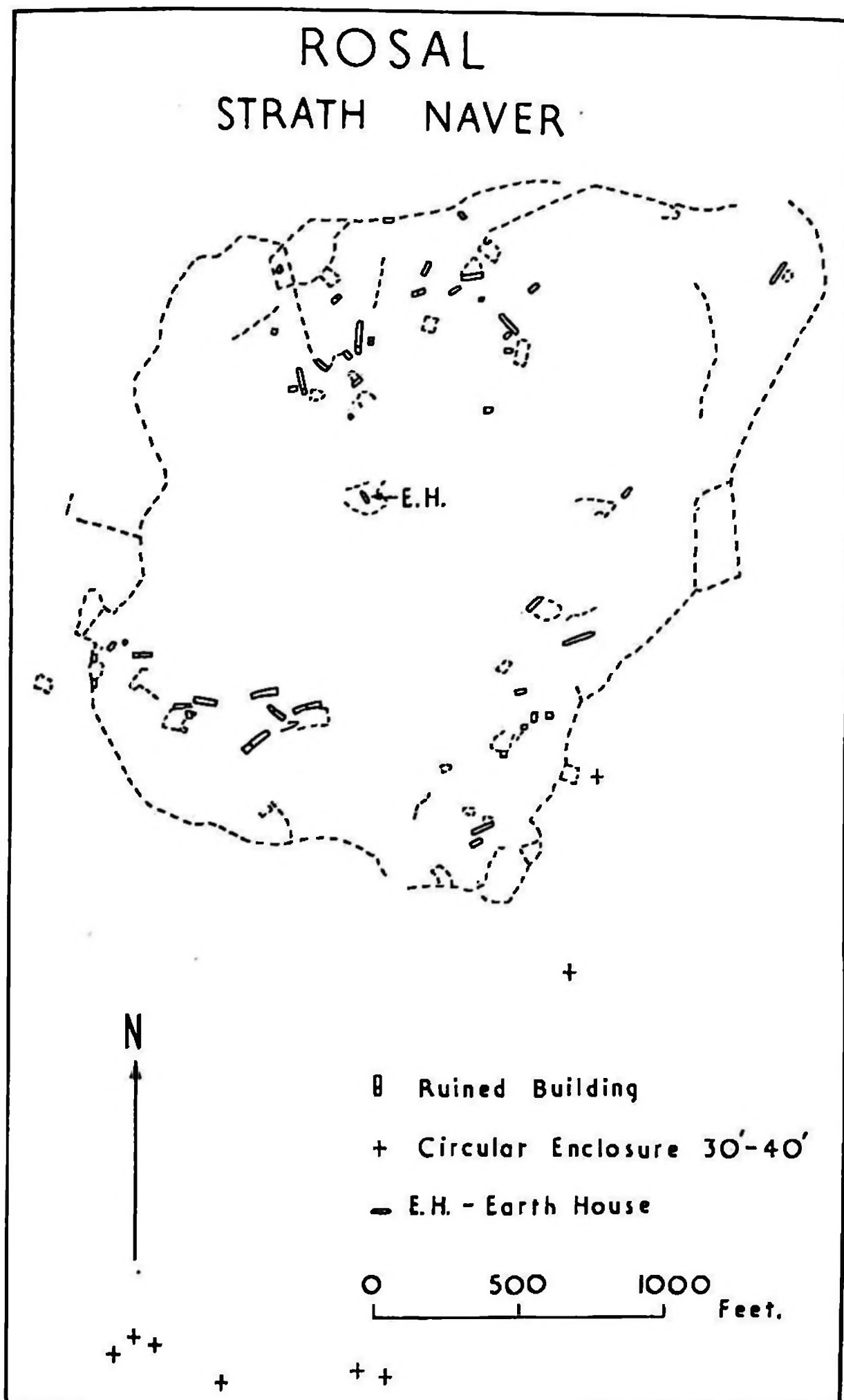
4. "No. VII. Plan of the farms of Ravigill, Skeal and Richifele with the small possessions of Girfe and Enishvloundi. B.M. 1810."



Sutherland showing the areas covered by the plans under discussion (see pp. 2-3 and 9).

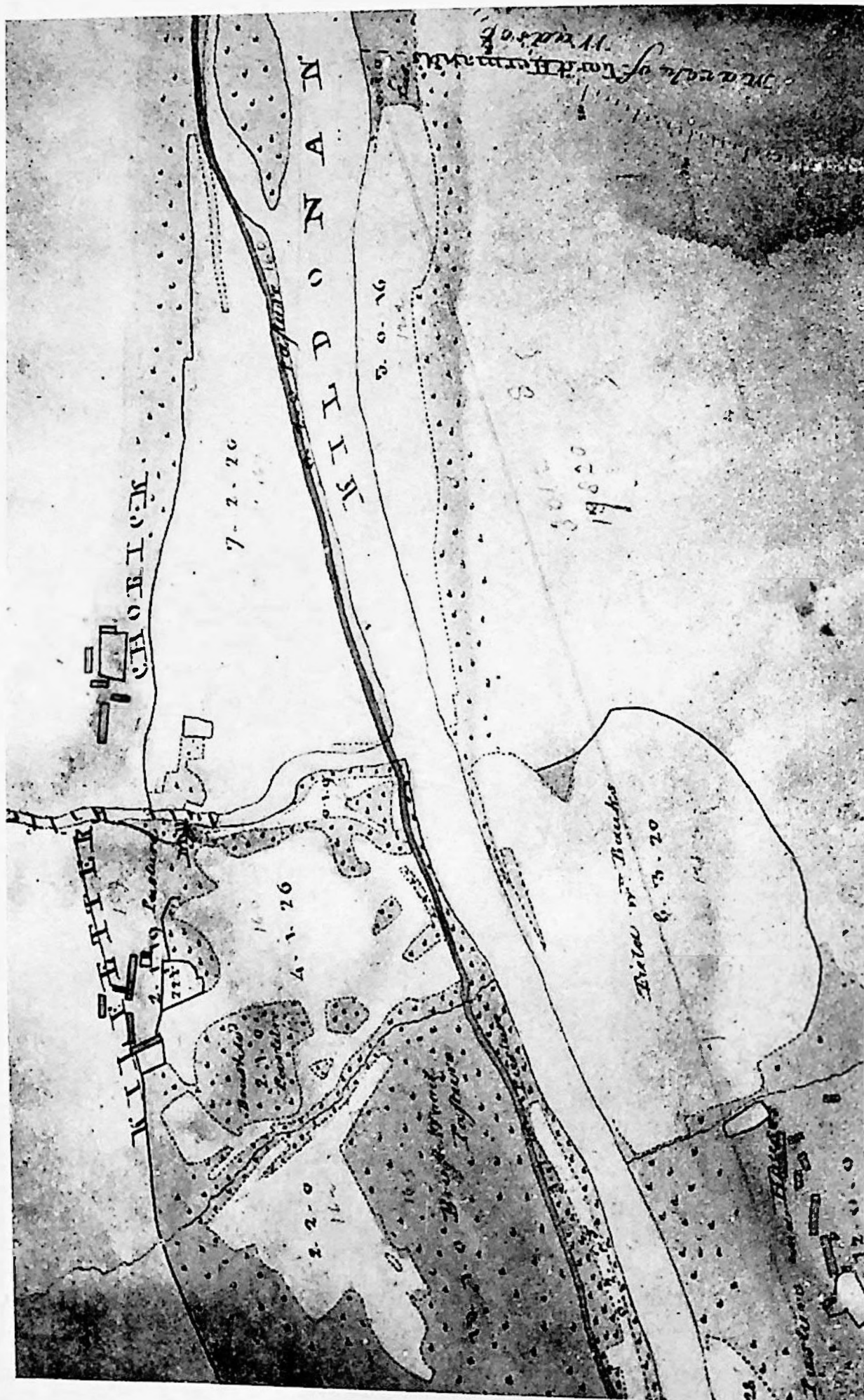


Photograph of the Rosal area as shown on the plan of 1811 and in comparison with the survey of ruined buildings seen in 1962 (Pl. III opposite).

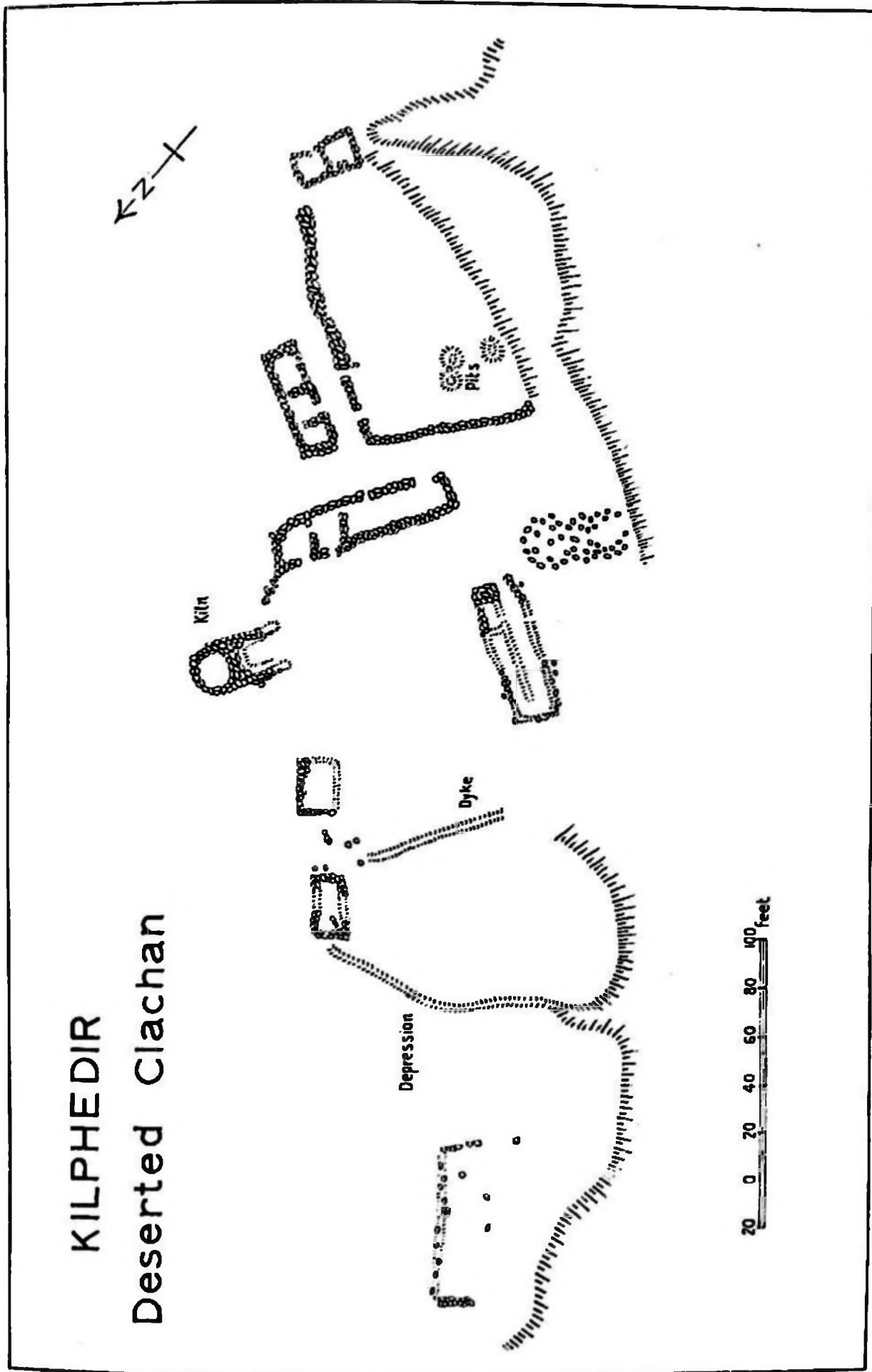


Survey of ruined buildings as seen in 1962 (see p. 5).



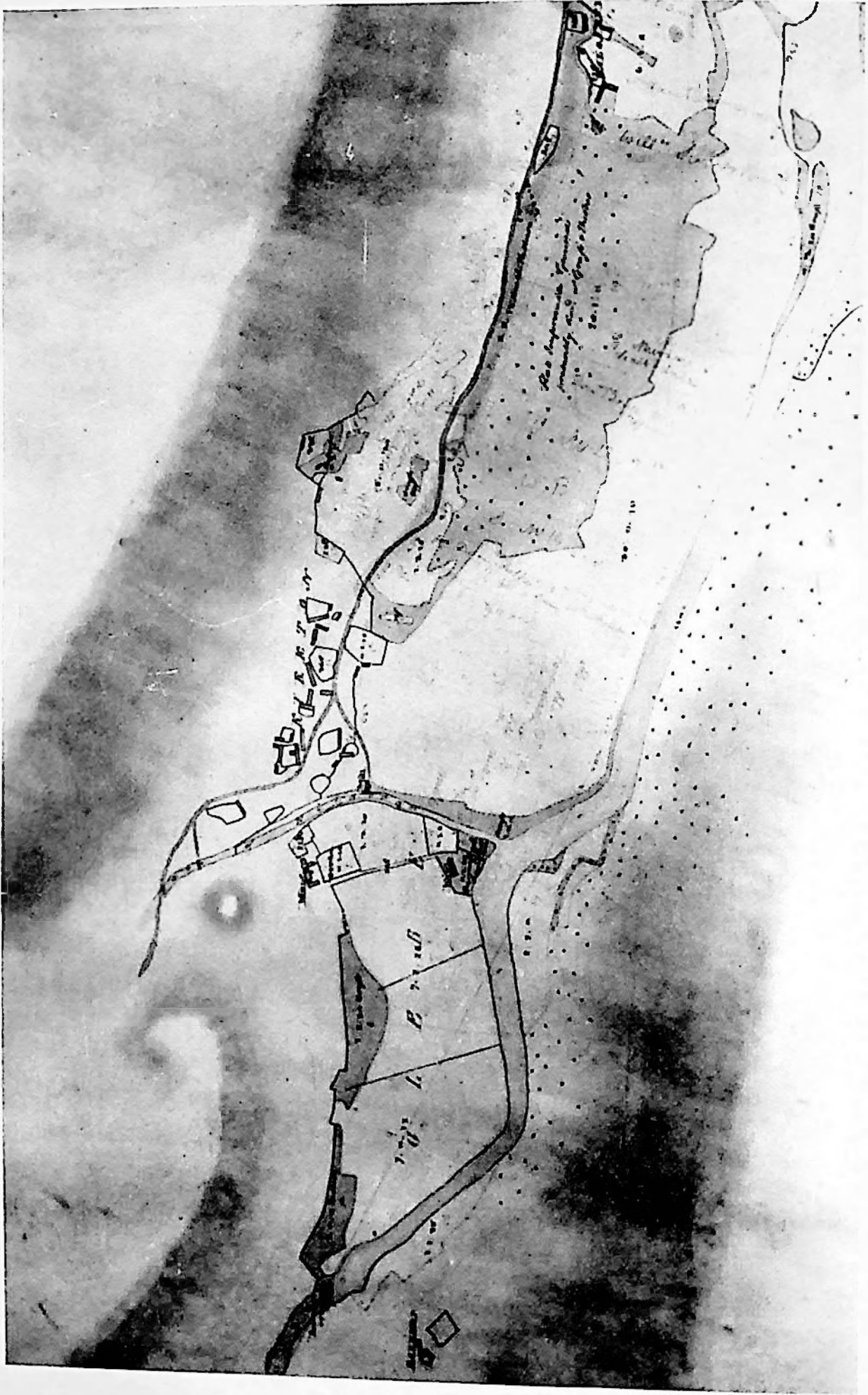


Photograph of Kilphedir as shown on the early 19th century Dunrobin roll of plans of the Strath of Kildonan, compared with the plan drawn at the Golspie Summer School in Archaeological Survey, 1962 (Pl. V opposite).



Plan of Kilphedir drawn at the Golspie Summer School in Archaeological Survey, 1962 (see pp. 9-10).



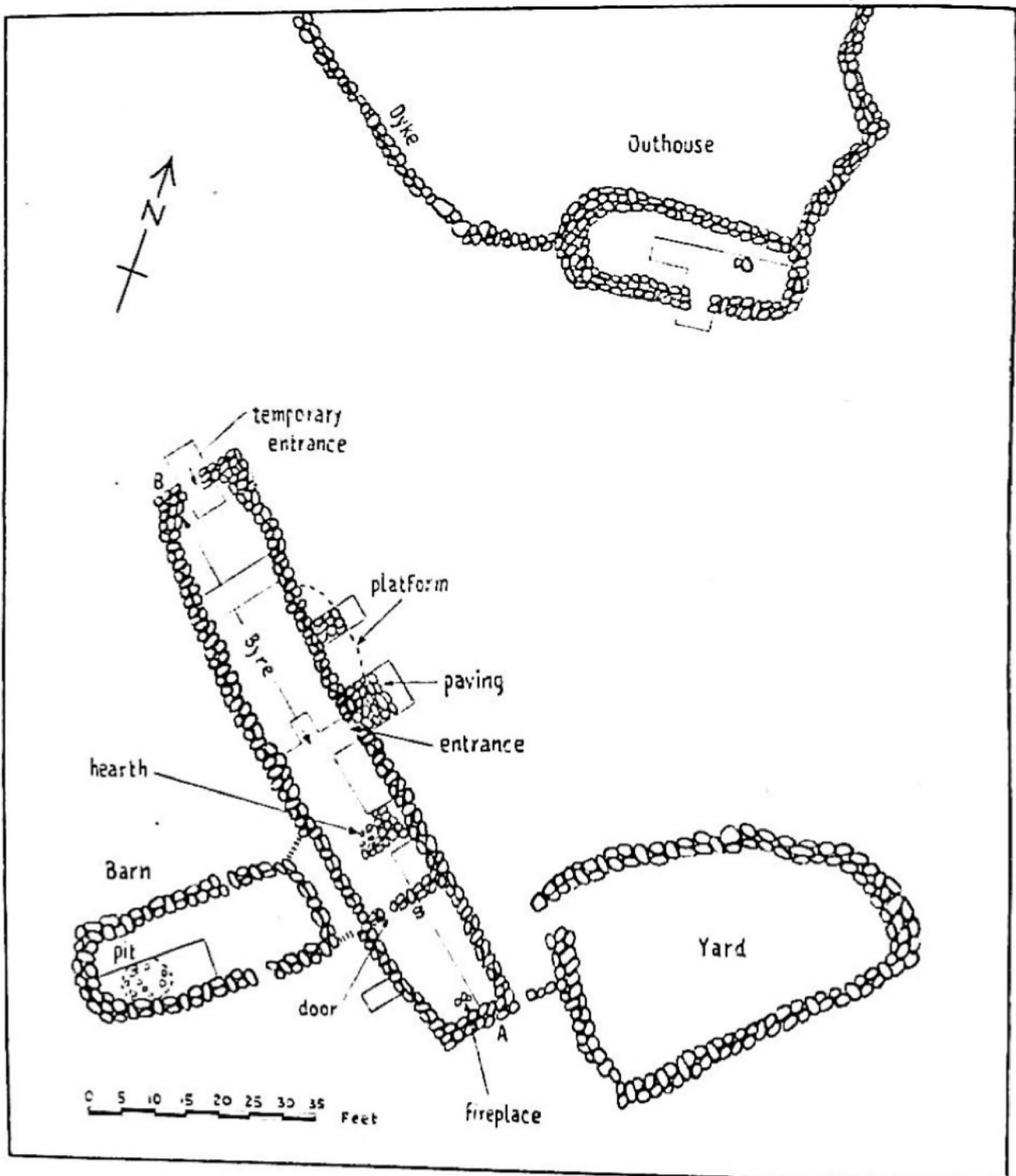


Plan of the environs of Kildonan from the early 19th century Dunrobin roll plan (see pp. 10-11).



Photograph of part of Cumming's plan of the Bettyhill area, Strath Naver, in 1818 showing the new lots (see p. 12).

# FARM BUILDINGS—ROSAL



Plan of the complex excavated at Rosal in 1962 (see p. 5).



Scale  $10\frac{1}{2}$  inches to 1 Scots mile.  $22\frac{3}{4}$  by  $18\frac{1}{4}$  inches. Table of Contents. Good condition on linen back.

5. "No. VIII. Plan of the Farms of Langdale Rheloisk and Syre. B.M. 1810."

Scale  $10\frac{1}{2}$  inches to 1 Scots mile. 23 by  $18\frac{1}{4}$  inches. Table of Contents. Good condition on linen back but ink stained along bottom edge.

6. "No. II. Plan of the Farms of Farr & Clerkhill with the small possessions of Crameron Millers Croft and Ministers Glebe, 1810." The signature is almost completely torn off but the work was that of "B.M."

Scale 13 inches to 1 Scots mile.  $22\frac{1}{4}$  by 18 inches. (No table of contents). Condition good on linen back. Vague pencillings occur, e.g. "Lots", "arable".

7. "Plan of the lands loted out in the Parish of Farr from an accurate Survey taken 1818 by Wm. Cumming."

Scale  $20\frac{1}{2}$  inches to 1 Scots mile; the plan states that "Scots Chains 74 feet each".  $49\frac{1}{4}$  by  $28\frac{3}{4}$  inches. (No table of contents.) Rather poor condition but on a linen back. The lots are shown as narrow strips with the acreage of (presumably) arable and pasture. Subsequently the site of the Free Church and adjacent School has been sketched in with blue pencil.

8. The Strath of Kildonan from the Kirkton down to the mouth of the Helmsdale River is shown on 6 plans carefully mounted edge to edge to form a roll,  $140\frac{1}{2}$  inches long varying between  $26\frac{1}{4}$  and  $32\frac{3}{4}$  inches wide. There is no title, date nor signature but the detail is drawn with meticulous care in a style like that of Cumming in Number 7 preceding, though the lettering is different. Scale 20 inches to the Scots mile. (No table of contents.) Condition good on linen back. The lots of the Helmsdale area have been pencilled in so the plan predates the Clearances and may go back to early in the second decade of the nineteenth century.

9. "Plan of the Ground Alloted for Fishermen at and near Helmsdale. May 1817 by W. Forbes."

Scale 20 inches to 1 Scots mile. 50 by  $33\frac{3}{4}$  inches. (No table of contents.) In the top right is a neat water colour sketch of the bridge, ruined castle and "Corf House" (fish curing house), and the mouth of the Helmsdale River with boats. On the back is a long rent roll signed by Patrick Sellar. The plan, not being mounted, is badly broken and in a very fragile condition. The lots have been indicated in pencil.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This volume also contains a report of the trial of his father, Patrick Sellar, and a statement by the latter in his own defence.

<sup>2</sup> A catalogue appears in the appendix.

<sup>3</sup> Mr. R. J. Adam suggests that this may be Benjamin Meredith.

<sup>4</sup> See B. M. W. Third, "The Significance of Scottish Estate Plans and Associated Documents". *Scottish Studies* 1 (1957) 39-64.

<sup>5</sup> It is a pleasure to acknowledge in particular the help of Mr. Gordon Petrie in organising the survey work, and of Dr. John Corcoran in superintending the excavation of an earth house.

<sup>6</sup> The more prominent buildings are clearly indicated on the sheet of the new 6-inch map (O.S. 6-inch sheet NC 74), which pays far more attention to the deserted townships than the old 6-inch map.

- <sup>7</sup> See Sage 1889:11, 56-7; *Report of the Trial of Patrick Sellar Esq.*, Edinburgh 1816. (This contains several interesting references); Loch 1820:52-3, 87; Henderson 1815:45.
- <sup>8</sup> Similar small enclosures occur frequently in John Home's Survey of Assynt, as noted by R. J. Adam.
- <sup>9</sup> See *Report of the Trial of Patrick Sellar, Esq.*, Edinburgh 1816.
- <sup>10</sup> A study of the accounts of Patrick Sellar for the period when he was factor on the Sutherland Estates would provide much detailed information on this and many other disputed topics.
- <sup>11</sup> Henderson 1815:174 quotes the statement by Aeneas Sage.
- <sup>12</sup> Information from Mr. Basil Megaw, School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh.
- <sup>13</sup> Loch 1820 describes the planning of Helmsdale as a fish curing harbour; plates are included.

#### REFERENCES

- ADAM, R. J.  
1960 *John Home's Survey of Assynt*. Scottish History Society, Third Series, Vol. 52. Edinburgh.
- FAIRHURST, H.  
1960 "Scottish Clachans." *Scottish Geographical Magazine*. 79:67-76. Edinburgh.
- GRIMBLE, IAN  
1962 *The Trial of Patrick Sellar*. London.
- HENDERSON, Captain JOHN  
1815 *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Sutherland*. London.
- INGLIS, H. R. G. (and others)  
1934 *The Early Maps of Scotland*. Royal Scottish Geographical Society. Edinburgh.
- LOCH, JAMES  
1820 *An Account of the Improvements on the Estates of the Marquess of Stafford*. London.
- MACKENZIE, A.  
1883 *The History of the Highland Clearances*. Inverness.
- MCKERRAL, A.  
1943-4 "Ancient Denominations of Agricultural land in Scotland". *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 78:39-80. Edinburgh.
- SAGE, DONALD  
1889 *Memorabilia Domestica*. Wick.
- SELLAR, THOMAS  
1883 *The Sutherland Evictions of 1814*. London.