

THE BRITISH FISHERIES SOCIETY

1786-1893

by

JEAN DUNLOP



The British Fisheries Society

Introduction.	1
I. The Fisheries in 1785.	10
II. The Foundation of the Society. 1786.	31
III. The Settlement at Lochbroom. 1787-1788.	52
IV. The Building of Ullapool. 1788-1792.	72
V. The Development of Ullapool. 1792-1798.	102
VI. The Society in the Highlands. 1786-1798.	127
VII. The Society in London. 1786-1798.	154
VIII. The Society in Parliament. 1786-1808.	179
IX. The Western Settlements. 1798-1808.	213
X. Pulteneytown. 1803-1830.	242
XI. The Decline of the Society. 1808-1848.	264
XII. The Last Years of the Society. 1848-1893.	293
Conclusion.	307
Bibliography.	319

Maps

The Western Highlands and Islands	facing p. 48
Coigach	" 57
Ullapool	" 98

INTRODUCTION

This thesis traces the history of the British Fisheries Society from its incorporation in 1786 until its death more than a century later. The Society was founded as a Joint Stock Company, whose objects were outlined in its full title, "The British Society for Extending the Fisheries and Improving the Sea Coasts of the Kingdom". Today the Society is popularly connected with the foundation of Ullapool and sometimes with the development of Tobermory, but it is not generally known that in addition to a settlement at Lochbay, near Dunvegan, the Society built Pulteneytown on the south bank of the Wick river in Caithness.

The Society's three western settlements were sold during the period 1838 to 1848 when conditions in the Highlands were approaching their worst and when for many years the fishing had been unsuccessful. For nearly fifty years the shareholders received no dividend. It should not, however, be assumed that the Society had failed utterly, for apart from the growth of Pulteneytown, its work in "extending the fisheries" took many forms which benefited the industry not only in the Highlands but all over Britain.

In introducing the Society and the circumstances which led to its foundation, it is necessary to consider certain aspects of Highland development in 1785 and to examine the state of the fishing industry. It is not intended to sketch the economic and social conditions of the Highlands at that date since each county differed from its neighbour and some estates had progressed very much further than others and

generalisations must necessarily be so vague as to have little value. More detailed study of a few regions will appear later, but there are a few points which are relevant and which should be recalled.

In considering the state of Highland development in 1785, two facts provide the key to the situation. It is one year after the passing of the Act by which the forfeited estates were returned to their previous owners and two years after the end of the American War.

Neither the work of the Commissioners for the Forfeited Estates nor of the Board of Manufactures has yet been examined in detail and it is difficult to estimate what changes were brought about by their policy and what resulted from the Rebellion and pre-Rebellion development. There is no doubt, however, that the two bodies opened the Highlands to southern influence.

In spite of the building of Wade's roads which had attracted some commerce and a few travellers, there was a very high rate of ignorance about conditions in the north, even among the people of lowland Scotland. The surveys and reports which the Commissioners ordered and which eventually reached Edinburgh showed far greater possibilities for improving the land and setting up manufactures in the Highlands than had been appreciated before.

This impression was only slightly marred by the results of the practical experiments of the Commissioners, which were not uniformly successful. Each estate or small group was in charge of a factor who was responsible for introducing new methods of cultivation and in some cases even new crops. It is unnecessary to go into details as each estate required different treatment but it is certain that the new

ideas which were becoming fashionable in the Lowlands, enclosures and other improvements, were in some cases initiated and in others encouraged by the Commissioners. In addition to agriculture, arrangements were made for building roads which were essential to Highland development. With a view to encouraging manufactures several centres for a linen industry were established where the Commissioners, aided by the Board of Manufactures, provided instruction and equipment for use in the cottages. The cost of freight both for raw materials and finished goods ruined this plan while in several cases it was proved that money was wasted on unnecessary buildings or actually embezzled. There were also attempts to set up fishing centres but, for reasons which will be considered later, the existing laws prevented much immediate progress in that industry. These last two experiments were not successful but their failure was attributed to faulty execution and the result was to suggest that some form of manufacture was possible for the Highlands, notably home produced wool, and a considerable future was forecast for agriculture and fisheries.

Thus when the estates were returned to their former owners in 1784 there had already been some improvement but more important was the change of attitude among southern people towards the Highlands and the corresponding change in the North. The landlord who returned to his estate after nearly forty years in exile was in many cases the son of the old laird who had been engaged in trade or military service. He had a wider experience than formerly and judged his estates on the standards of England where he had become accustomed to the new fashionable improvements. Several of them studied agricultural methods in

the south and some even worked small parts of their own estates under the guidance of the Commissioners' factor. During the first few years after their return many landowners may have studied memoranda like that drawn up in 1788 for Francis Humberstone Mackenzie of Seaforth on how best to develop a large estate with very slender means.¹ In this case Seaforth was advised to concentrate his improvements in Lewis rather than spread them over Easter Ross. The important point lies not so much in the decision as in the illustration of the fresh approach to the problem of running a Highland estate which was widespread in 1785.

Meanwhile changes were also going forward on those lands which had not been forfeited. The increase of trade after the Union had by now affected the anti-Jacobite Highland families and provided outside money for the improvement of their estates. An example of this can be seen in the Malcolms of Poltalloch who by the middle of the century had established a connexion with Jamaica. In 1785 there succeeded to Poltalloch, Neil Malcolm who had been a "merchant in Jamaica"² and whose fortune was devoted to reconstruction on the estate and later to encouraging the Crinan Canal. Some of the estates even changed hands like that of Appin which was bought in 1766 by Hugh Seton of Touch³ who undertook a very active programme of public work while later George Dempster bought the lands of Skibo from Gordon of Polrossie.⁴ There are several more examples of this movement but the effect is already

1. Seaforth MSS. Letters 1775-98.

2. Burke. Landed Gentry.

3. Scottish History Society. Forfeited Estate Papers p. 277.

4. Fergusson. Letters of George Dempster p. 155.

clear that new ideas, new money and even new owners were penetrating the Highlands in 1785 so that the return of the forfeited estates was regarded at the time as the opening of a new era and one full of promise.

The progress of Highland development was greatly affected by events outside Britain, especially by the end of the American War.

The Treaty of Versailles signed in 1783 acknowledged the independence of the thirteen American Colonies and their loss to Britain. This was a very considerable blow to British prestige but perhaps the most prevalent attitude at home was the feeling of resentment at the ingratitude of the Colonies upon which so much money and energy had been spent. The urge to colonise was still strong and while India received much attention it was also suggested that there was a region nearer home which could be developed without fear of its claiming independence. The Highlands were demonstrated to have excellent natural resources, the new reports and surveys were quoted and the latest experiments discussed and the prospects compared favourably with America.

There was another reason besides a geographical dependence for urging northern improvement and that was the impression made by the Highland Regiments and the Highland sailors in the recent war. Formed in 1757 these Regiments had done good service in the Seven Years War and had acquitted themselves even better between 1776 and 1783. The men were specially noted for their fighting qualities but were regarded as hardy and industrious and potentially worthy of encouragement in agriculture and industry at home. There was a general feeling of gratitude to these unknown people and as early as 1763 benevolent

schemes had been launched by the Commissioners for the Forfeited Estates to help returning soldiers and sailors to obtain land, houses and boats. In 1783 not only was the gratitude greater but to it was added a fear that the Highlanders would be tempted to settle in Canada or America as a number of them did.

The reputation of the Highland Regiments proved the loyalty of the north and reassured those who might have questioned the wisdom of development within forty years of the Rebellion. Indeed Scottish affairs were more kindly regarded in England in 1785 than at any time since the Union. Immediately before 1707 according to a speaker in 1750 England had been "jealous of everything that might tend to the enriching of Scotland".¹ The fear of Rebellion dominated the Government policy after 1715 and it was only when the panic of 1745 had died down that a new attitude could be expected. This was greatly assisted when Pitt came into power in 1783 for his friendship with Dundas assured a good hearing for northern affairs while a group of unusually active Scottish Members of Parliament were quick to take advantage of this.

So when a new field of development was sought to replace the lost American Colonies, Highlanders were being regarded with admiration and gratitude by the public at the very time when their country was newly recognised to have agricultural and industrial possibilities. We have already seen that the internal state of the Highlands favoured the development of these same possibilities.

It remained, however, to be considered what form this development should take. Much was written on the subject but the outlines

1. Cobbett. Parliamentary Register XIV p. 779

were almost universally agreed since they depended on the economic theories and conditions of the time and on the natural resources of the country.

To most writers of the late Eighteenth Century the key to the economic argument was that an increase of population led to an increase of wealth. Thus though the numbers were rising very quickly in the Highlands owing to the improvement of medicine and the cultivation of the potato, the aim of the improvers was to prevent emigration, whether to America or Canada, by providing employment at home. Such employment was to be productive, either in industry or fishing. This involved a complete change in the organisation of Highland society for the people were mainly self-supporting and each family cultivated its own land, caught its own fish, spun its own yarn and made its own clothes. On this system little time was reserved for producing articles for sale. Development was therefore based on the building of villages in which the Highlanders should live and while they should all occupy small crofts, each must have a trade, fishing, curing, making shoes or doing carpentry. For these jobs they would be paid by their fellow villagers and when they had begun to specialise in their own crafts merchants from the south would come to buy fish and other local produce. The essence of this scheme, then, was to collect the population in large villages in order to practise a division of labour.

Agriculture was one of the most important occupations in the Highlands but it was realised that the climate in the north west, which most needed this development, was unsuitable for growing grain in quantity and that the cultivation of potatoes, vegetables and oats for home

consumption with the improvement of pasture was all that could be expected. What was not fully appreciated, however, was the shallowness and poverty of the soil. The enormous improvements carried out in the South and the satisfactory beginnings made by the Commissioners for the Forfeited Estates caused many theorists to believe that the Highland soil, especially the peat, could be improved almost indefinitely to produce heavy crops. This misconception was serious for it meant that too many people were expected to live on too little land though this was not apparent for nearly thirty years by which time the population had increased according to plan. In 1785 the problem of sheep walks had not appeared for although sheep rearing was being encouraged there was thought to be enough improvable land for all.

The mention of sheep introduces the question of industry which most writers considered essential for the Highlands. The Commissioners for the Forfeited Estates had tried linen and their failure was partly attributed to lack of communications and the cost of freight. The former was a serious drawback but could soon be remedied while the latter was to be countered by concentrating on local produce, such as wool and hemp, for which there was a national market and which could be sent south either in a raw state or manufactured. A more popular industry and one to which the Highlands were evidently suited was fishing. This was considered well adapted for the new villages since there was no doubt that the fish, both herring and white fish such as cod and ling, abounded on the north western coasts and supply was well below demand in the West Indies and Europe. We shall see in the next chapter how the year 1785 was an important one in the fishing industry

since complete reorganisation was required and it was urged that steps should be taken to shape the industry to fit into the pattern of Highland development and avoid the failures of earlier efforts.

The policy of Highland improvement was supported by the Government but the loss of the American War and the increased cost of administration left the country's finances too low for official grants at this time though a few years later the British Fisheries Society and the Crinan Canal Company both obtained large sums. The £2,000 received annually by the Board of Manufactures was already allocated and in any case was insufficient to undertake works on the scale of building villages. Private owners were doing such things, as for example Dempster at Dunnichen and Lord Gardenstone at Laurencekirk, but on the whole Highland landlords could not raise large enough sums alone. The solution was a familiar one for the Eighteenth Century, the formation of a Joint Stock Company, the British Fisheries Society, which raised sufficient capital by subscription to undertake large scale development but remained essentially a private enterprise.

For the reasons put forward here it appears that the year 1785 was a particularly happy one in which to launch schemes for Highland development. The process had already gone far enough to give confidence and inspire new ventures, local and general conditions were favourable while difficulties, some of which we can see already, were not yet apparent to contemporary eyes. In this history of the British Fisheries Society the fate of one of these schemes will be followed in detail.

CHAPTER I

The Fisheries in 1785

The history of fishery legislation has been divided into three phases, protective, promotive and administrative. The protective laws were directed at "the good of the people by the preservation of a valuable property and an important source of food",¹ and the fisheries of England and Scotland remained on this basis until the beginning of the seventeenth century. In England laws had been passed as early as the fourteenth century to protect fishermen and to decree fast days to increase the consumption of fish rather than meat but the industry was regarded only as a source of food and comparatively little trade was carried on abroad. The Scottish fisheries, on the other hand, were a means of wealth and in 1491 Don Pedro de Ayala reported that salmon and herring were exported in quantity to Italy, France, Flanders and England.² Strict regulations were required to maintain a high standard in curing and packing and the fishermen had to be organised to withstand the competition of foreigners attracted by the richness of the fishing grounds of Scotland. Legislation for the herring industry was in the hands of the Convention of Royal Burghs and, while the catching of fish was free to all lieges, the trade both at home and abroad was in the hands of registered merchants only.³

Just before the Union of Crowns in 1603 an attempt was made by James VI to establish a fishery in Lewis, where it had not previously

-
1. C. E. Fryer. The Relations of the State with Fisheries and Fishermen p. 8.
 2. P. Hume Brown. Early Travellers in Scotland p. 44.
 3. T. Pagan. The Convention of Royal Burghs p. 215 et seq.

been tried, and this may be regarded as opening the second or promotive period of legislation. The King's object was partly political, to gain greater control of the Western Highlands and Islands. His scheme was to bring to Lewis a company of adventurers from Fife whose skill and example was to encourage local fisheries.¹ By 1610 native opposition had defeated the attempt and when Seaforth tried to introduce Dutch fishermen there thirteen years later they were driven out in the same way.²

In 1631 and again in 1661 joint efforts were made in England and Scotland.³ In both cases charters granted to companies of gentlemen the monopoly in catching, curing and selling fish and in organising the industry. These companies raised capital by subscription and planned to rival the Dutch in foreign markets, but they faded out through inefficiency, dishonesty and lack of money. At an inquiry in 1639 it appeared that all the money raised in 1631 had been spent within two years, mostly on lavish building, though the Company was not finally wound up until the outbreak of the Civil War. According to Pepys the later scheme was just as badly organised. The English branch was sacrificed for Charles II's friendship with France but the Company in Scotland was not dissolved until 1690 when an Act of Parliament restored rights of catching fish to all lieges, and the monopoly of export to the Convention of Royal Burghs.⁴ The early efforts at promoting the

-
1. I.F.Grant. Social and Economic Development of Scotland p.540-542.
 2. J.P.Day. Public Administration in the Highlands and Islands p.235.
 3. J.R.Elder. The Royal Fishery Companies of the Seventeenth Century passim.
 4. A. P. S. IX p.224.

fisheries had thus no lasting results in organisation and there had been no marked increase in the fishing export trade.

Nor was much progress made in the first half of the eighteenth century, for the Dutch maintained their supremacy in the markets and continued to fish in what would now be British territorial waters. However a change in organisation was made in Scotland. In 1719 a monopoly Company was floated in London in the period of fashionable speculation and a year later met a fate similar to the South Sea Bubble. A rival Scheme "The Copartnery of the Freemen burgesses of the Royal Burrows of Scotland for carrying on a Fishing Trade" was launched in Scotland by the Convention of Royal Burghs.¹ After collecting a little capital and considering the needs of the fisheries, the Convention decided to demand the annual £2,000 promised by England in 1707 for the linen and wool trades and for the fisheries, which had not yet been paid. In 1726 the Convention reported that although well situated for the fishing grounds, the cost of material and high wages added 25% on to the price of British fish compared with Dutch and only constant encouragement over a long period could improve the trade.² It was therefore resolved³ that the new Board of Manufactures, set up to administer the annual grant, should take over control of the industry from the Convention of Royal Burghs, should make rules for curing and packing and should enforce these rules with Inspectors. Yearly premiums for successful fishery were introduced

1. Records of the Convention of Royal Burghs 1711-38 p.238 et seq.

2. Ibid. p.419.

3. Ibid. p.428.

in 1727 but the Board was unable to enlarge an industry suffering from continual wars, the prevalence of smuggling and the universal poverty of Scotland.

After the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748 Britain, realising to what an extent she had forfeited her sea power, began to rebuild her Navy. At a time when there was no permanent Naval establishment fishing provided an important training ground for seamen, an argument in favour of the encouragement of the fisheries which had been used by many writers since Sir Walter Raleigh. The weakness of our Dutch rivals also favoured a revival of the British fisheries after 1748 on commercial grounds. At the time this weakness was assumed to be temporary. History reveals that the Dutch, finding their trade on the decline, had already turned to finance and in 1750 officially decided that their fishing industry among others was no longer worth much encouragement,¹ but this was not realised in Britain for many years. These two points, the need for seamen and the temporary weakness of the Dutch in trade, were stressed continually in 1749 and 1750 both in Parliament and outside to start a movement for the immediate encouragement of the fishing industry in Britain.

The advantages of promoting the fisheries were quickly appreciated by Parliament and the merchants and they turned to consider the best practical means of doing it. In those days herrings were caught either from boats or busses. The boats were open, seldom more than 16 feet by 7 and manned by a crew of 4 or 5 men. The busses were

1. C.H.Wilson. Anglo-Dutch Commerce and Finance p.20.

decked vessels, varying from 20 to 80 tons, had a crew of 10 to 16 men and could remain at sea for several months at a time. Until 1750 the British favoured boats while the Dutch used busses to transport the crew, their stores and small boats to the fishing ground where they became floating headquarters.

In 1750 it was felt that since the Dutch were so successful with busses an effort should be made to build and equip a British fleet of them for trial at the Shetland fishery. These busses were expensive to build; 35 years later, after the war had increased prices somewhat, a buss of 50 tons cost £723.¹ Therefore an Act of Parliament was passed giving bounties to owners of busses. "A bounty of Thirty shillings per Ton shall be paid annually, out of such sums as shall be produced out of His Majesty's Customs, to the Owner or Owners of all Decked Vessels from 20 to 80 tons Burden, which shall be built, after the Commencement of this Act for the Use of the said Fisheries, and fitted out and employed in the said Fisheries."²

In order to safeguard the payment of these bounties certain regulations had to be made for the conduct of the busses. Before setting out the buss had to be examined by Customs officers to make sure that it contained the proper fishing equipment as listed in the Act. All busses bound for the Shetland fishery had to attend a rendezvous at Brassey Sound on or before 11th June and might not fish before 13th June, while a similar meeting at Campbeltown on 1st September introduced the Autumn fishing. The busses must then remain at the fisheries for

1. Reports X p.100.

2. 23 Geo. II cap. 24.

three months during which time they might not, on pain of forfeiting their bounty, return to port, nor might they buy fish from native boats. These regulations were aimed at keeping the busses at sea for the object of the bounty was regarded as much the training of seamen as the catching of fish.

This same Act of Parliament set up yet another fishery Company, The Society of Free British Fishery.¹ This Company was incorporated for 21 years with power to make rules for "The regulation and management of the said Trade and Commerce" and for curing, sorting and packing the herring. The Society was impowered to raise a capital of £500,000 in shares with which to build busses and storehouses and to encourage subscribers the Government agreed to pay 3% of the total capital every year for fourteen years. The headquarters of the Society was in the City of London whose Lord Mayor was an active member, but any number of persons, subscribing together £10,000 to the Society, could form themselves into local Fishing Chambers, organise their own trade under the protection of the central Committee and were entitled to the 3% grant from the Government. The great difference between the Society for Free British Fishery and the former Companies was that it did not have a monopoly of the trade and the 30/- bounty was available to all buss-owners whether members of the Society or not.

Subscriptions were received from merchants of the City of London, many of whom took more than £300 worth of shares, while local branches were founded at Edinburgh, Glasgow, Montrose, Newcastle and Whitehaven.

1. Papers of the Society for Free British Fishery. British Museum Add. MSS. 15154-65.

During the first few years the Society built and equipped many busses for the Shetland and Yarmouth fisheries and engaged at least 300 Orkney men every year as crews. The beginning of the Seven Years War in 1755 brought "warm impressing of seamen" and a plan for letting the busses to the Admiralty during the war. This does not appear to have been done but by 1759 the Society could only employ five busses and sold a few every year at very low prices for use in the coal and other coastal trades.

The final years of the Society, after 1767, are not covered by available records but war time losses were not made good and the Charter was not renewed when it expired in 1771.

The main impression left by the Society of Free British Fishery on its contemporaries was that the object was "their own immediate benefit, to enrich themselves". One witness reported in 1785 that "it is very probable that the Societys affairs suffered greatly from mismanagement"¹ while Knox wrote² that the want of markets was responsible for its bankruptcy. Whatever the true cause of the failure may have been the Society was regarded as having wasted public money in trading ventures without advantage to the fishing industry as a whole.

In 1757, when the Society was already in financial difficulties, the Government decided to increase the bounty from 30/- to 50/- per ton. This did not save the Society but it stimulated private fishermen especially in the Clyde area. In the six years following the

1. Reports X p.142.

2. Knox. Observations p.24-5.

increase of the bounty the number of busses fitted out from the South West of Scotland rose from 13 to 261.¹ But when the busses returned from the season of 1766 the fishermen were told that the bounty could not be paid. According to the Act of 1750 the bounty was to be found from the customs revenue and Scotland could not continue to meet the increased bounty though the English bounty went on being paid. A few Clyde fishermen tried the English fishery from Whitehaven but found the expenses too great and by 1770 only 19 busses remained active. The fishermen of South West Scotland therefore petitioned the government to reduce the bounty to 30/- provided it was regularly paid. This was done for Scotland while the English bounty remained at 50/- until 1780 when that also was reduced.²

The payment of the 30/- bounty produced another wave of prosperity in Scotland which lasted for six years until the outbreak of war with the American colonies in 1776. Although the effect of press gangs was felt heavily among the buss fishermen and the enormous rise in the price of material and in wages affected the fisheries, busses were still being fitted out at the end of the war in the Clyde ports of Rothesay, Greenock, Campbeltown and Port Glasgow.

The end of the war in 1783 almost coincided with the need to renew the fishery laws which expired in 1785 and it was felt that before a new start could be made every aspect of the fishing trade should be examined by a Committee of the House of Commons. From the

1. Reports X p.41a.
2. Ibid. p.41b.

evidence given to this Committee a detailed picture of the fisheries, not only in every part of Britain but also in foreign countries, can be built up.

It is difficult to estimate the proportion of busses and boats at this period because, although the busses were carefully registered, the boats were not. From evidence in 1785¹ it appears that the buss bounty had reacted very unfavourably on the boat fishery since 1750 and their numbers had decreased rapidly. There are no figures for boat catches during this period but a comparison between buss catches and total exports for each year may prove helpful as the home market was then very small. Until 1764 the total export of herrings from Scotland exceeded by an average of nearly two thirds the catch by busses.² In 1765 and 1766 when the 50/- bounty was effective the difference was very much less. 1767-1771 saw a reduction of busses when the bounty failed and consequently there was again a market for the boat fishermen but from 1772 until the outbreak of war the busses again held almost a monopoly of the exports. The three years before the war raised export figures to record proportions.

The English figures show rather a different story. The highest number of bounty busses was 22 compared with 261 for Scotland with a great increase from 1769-1771 when they came from the Clyde to Whitehaven. After 1771 the buss fishery again decreased and produced a very small proportion of the total export.

This method of assessing the size of vessels engaged in the fishery cannot be taken as strictly accurate. These figures do not

1. Reports X p.49a.

2. Ibid. p.56-9.

necessarily mean that there were only 22 vessels over 20 tons, the rest being below that tonnage, for over 80 tons was rare, but that 22 is the total number of vessels which applied for the bounty. It is known that fishermen at Yarmouth had vessels above 20 tons but were not willing to conform to all the regulations and therefore sacrificed their bounties.¹ In 1760 Yarmouth fitted out 205 vessels² of which about half were probably busses in the strict sense of the term. Although Yarmouth alone is recorded in this action, it is possible that fishermen elsewhere in England and Scotland may have refrained from claiming bounty for the same reasons and their vessels would not be included among the buss figures. The proportion of the catch obtained from small boats would therefore have been slight both in England and Scotland.

To fit out a buss on the regulation scale required a very large capital. It was estimated in 1785 that a buss of average size, about 47 tons, cost £487 to build and £236 to equip and man.³ In spite of the bounty, in this case £70:10:0, a medium catch of 110 barrels of herring resulted in a loss of nearly £60, though some of this could be regained in the carrying trade during the non-fishing season. The equipment and crew of a boat under 20 tons could vary according to the means of the owner but a buss qualifying for the bounty must conform with the Act of 1750.⁴ By this law a buss of 70 tons must have a crew of 16 men (one of 47 tons had 11 men) and must carry 50 nets,

1. Knox. Observations on Northern Fisheries p.31.

2. Reports X p.19b.

3. Ibid. p.100.

4. 23 Geo. II cap.24.

each net to be at least 30 yards full on the rope and 7 fathoms deep with the necessary large number of floats.

Neither trawling nor seine netting had so far been introduced. In 1785 "the ordinary method of catching herrings is with a drift net. The drift net floats with the tide and presents a perpendicular wall of netting frequently $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles long and 10 yards deep. The herrings meeting this net mesh themselves into it and being caught either by the gill covers or by the body, are hanged and die." The size of the mesh of the nets was not, so far, regulated and fish varied very much in size. This method of fishing was used by all vessels whether busses or boats.

Once caught, the herring were cured in two different ways. Smoked or red herring which had been popular in Yarmouth had been famous also in Scotland but the trade had died out there and was only revived about 1770. To cure herring in this way, they were first packed in salt, without gutting, for two or three days.¹ After this they were washed in fresh water, put on wooden spits and hung in Fish Houses above wood fires for about four to six weeks. After that they were packed in casks for export or home consumption. The casks were of uniform size and held between 500 and 1,000 fish while those of Irish and some foreign curers were smaller. The other method of curing was to pickle the fish in salt.² The herring were landed fresh and gutted "when thought necessary" but not always. They were carefully salted in a wooden trough and then tightly packed in barrels

1. Reports X p.19a.

2. Ibid. p.340a.

with alternate layers of salt and fish. After remaining for ten days in this fashion the pickle was drained off, the barrels filled up with more herring and salt. This was done again, usually only once, before the barrel was filled to capacity by pressing down the fish, and finally closed. Some curers believed in removing all fish from the barrels at least once and washing them before repacking. The quantity of salt used varied according to the destination of the herrings,¹ the aim for the European market being to add as little salt as possible so that the fish might taste nearly fresh, while the West Indian market needed far more salt for preservation and the people liked the strong flavour of the pickle. Curers at this time were not obliged to mark their barrels and the standard of curing was very low since bad work could not be traced back to the curer, and indeed no kind of official inspection was made.

Fish curing was not very profitable at this time even when a merchant had raised enough capital to make a start. He bought his fish fresh at 5/- or 5/6 per barrel, but these were not tightly packed and would eventually go into two-thirds of a barrel.² The price of new barrels was 6/- each with heads and hoops included. For his salt the curer paid 2/2d per bushel and required $3\frac{1}{2}$ bushels per barrel for the West Indies and 2 bushels for the European market - with just over 1 bushel for red herring. The total expense for a barrel of herring cured for Europe was thus about 17/10. The price of cured herring for export, both red and white, varied according to the season and in

1. Reports X p.37a.

2. Ibid. p.100.

one year the prices would rise during the Autumn while in a very good season they would fall. All export was completed by Christmas. Between 1780 and 1785 the average for each year was between 23/8 and 19/2 per barrel with the highest price of any barrel during those years 28/- and the lowest at 17/6.¹ When freight charges are added to the expenses of fish, salt and barrels it will be seen that the lowest price would represent a loss though prices for cured herring rose very quickly at the end of the American war.

In 1780 the total export for herring from Britain was 32,819 barrels of white and 24,202 barrels of red herring.² Unfortunately it is not until 1788 that these exports are classified, but the proportions sent to the principal markets do not seem to have altered during the intervening eight years. In 1788 the totals exported were 45,338 barrels of white and 19,495 barrels of red herring.³ Of the former, 31,268 barrels reached the West Indies, 9,280 went to Ireland, 1,263 to Italy 977 to Germany and 541 to Portugal, the rest going in small quantities to other markets. Most of the red herring remained in Europe, 8,137 barrels going to Gibraltar and the Straits, 5,534 to the West Indies, 2,305 to Italy, 2,273 to Ireland, 703 to Holland and 316 to Spain and Portugal. An analysis of the ports from which the herrings were sent will be given later in this chapter.

In comparison with the export figures, the rate of home consumption was very low, 14,346 barrels of red herring and only 3,740 of white for the year 1780.⁴ The salt regulations were partly responsible

-
1. Reports X p.315.
 2. Ibid. p.56 and 59.
 3. Ibid. p.276-7.
 4. Ibid. p.55.

for this as duty free salt was not allowed to curers for the home market, which explains the far larger proportion of smoked than pickled herring eaten at home, the former method requiring less salt.

Thus the trade position in 1785 was that most of the white herring was cured for the West Indies since much of what was exported to Ireland was re-exported from Cork or used to victual the West India fleet. The European market on the whole was in the hands of the Dutch who used secret methods of curing and obtained a better flavour. In red herring the balance was kept more even because the Dutch wood was less suitable than British oak and their smoked fish was of a lower quality than the British.

The export trade was naturally affected by the progress of the herring industry in the foreign countries. Many busses from overseas attended the Shetland fishery, the total of 270 which fished there in 1784¹ being composed of 166 Dutch busses, 44 Prussian, 29 Danish, 24 from Flanders and 7 from France.

Of these only the Dutch were a serious menace because their vessels also fished along the east coast of England and because their organisation and curing was so good that they held the European white herring market. Their organisation was a carefully guarded secret as were their figures for catch and export. There is no doubt that the state gave very large sums as premiums and kept a firm hand upon the standard of curing and packing. Having held the monopoly in Europe for so many years they seemed to be in an impregnable position and although after 1750 the policy of the State was directed towards

1. Reports X p.60.

financial rather than commercial development and the fisheries obtained less encouragement than before, it was not until the war of 1792 that the British ceased to regard the Dutch as their most deadly rivals in the herring industry.

The Prussian, Danish, Flemish and French busses only caught fish for home consumption. The herring export trade was, however, threatened by two countries which had recently begun to fish, Sweden and Ireland. By one of those strange movements of herring shoals had begun to set in to Swedish shores about 1752.¹ Without any State encouragement Swedish fishermen set to work aided by the cheap wood and other necessary material available. Another very great advantage was that the fiords were so narrow that nets could sometimes be stretched from one shore to the other and fish caught without using boats at all. A witness in 1785 remarked "I fear it would require a very high bounty to enable us to dispute the market with the Swedes." By 1760 they cured 200,000 barrels of herring annually and exported them to Ireland, West Indies, Baltic ports and the Mediterranean, selling at 8/- to 10/- per barrel. The Swedish menace, as compared with the Dutch, was young in 1785 but growing alarmingly strong.

Fishing on a large scale was also new in Ireland. Knox wrote² that Scottish emigrants found shoals off Donegal in 1763 and that the Irish Parliament "encouraged and prosecuted with great vigour". A 20/- bounty was paid on the British model but without so many restrictions. The great advantage of the Irish fishers was that Cork was

1. Reports X p.129-130.

2. Knox. Observations on Northern Fisheries p.71.

the market where West India ships bought their supplies. By 1785 this fleet began to leave the Clyde before the busses returned from the north and west and bought their herring from Ireland instead.¹ This was a new development of which more will be heard later.

While dealing with the development of the industry and with the export trade after 1750, the British fisheries have been treated as a whole, with little distinction between England and Scotland. In fact the growth of the herring fishery was different for England and Scotland and indeed for each individual port. One contrast between north and south Britain was the method of curing. In 1780² England exported 7,697 barrels of white and 24,083 barrels of red herring while Scotland exported 25,122 barrels of white compared with only 119 barrels of red, a process of curing which, as we have seen, was still new to Scotland.³ Figures of this kind are not always a safe guide in the herring industry where certain ports are deserted by shoals for several years at a time while others have a sudden glut, but the balance in 1780 seems a just average. It should also be remembered that the port of export is not necessarily an indication as to where the herring was caught. For example Liverpool, the chief exporter of white and red herrings in England in 1780, sent out busses to Cornwall, Wales, the Isle of Man and further north to the Scottish coast, but no record was kept as to the catches of each fleet.⁴ London also received fish for re-export from many parts of the country.

-
1. Reports X p.46b.
 2. Ibid. p.56.
 3. Ibid. p.59.
 4. Ibid. p.250a.

The leading English fishing port was Yarmouth. Here the curers specialised in red herring and for the 16 years before 1787 had exported 270,985 barrels out of the total English export of 412,702 barrels. Witnesses in 1785 reported that the Yarmouth fishery was declining for in 1760 the port had fitted out 205 vessels while only 94 were fishing in 1784.¹ The expense of material was blamed for this and competition from the French and Dutch. Hull and Southwold both exported small quantities of red herring. For the white herring industry the east coast of England figured very low in the table of exports between 1771 and 1787, Aldborough and Newcastle only being mentioned at 91 and 72 barrels respectively out of a total of 171,465 barrels for all England.

By 1785, then, the English east coast fishery was on the decline while the west coast, especially Liverpool, was increasing rapidly. In red herring the export figure² for Liverpool in the years 1771-1787 comes third to Yarmouth (270,985 barrels) and London (80,733 barrels) with a total of 54,204 barrels while the next highest was Rye's 2,193 barrels. London headed the white herring exports with 91,510 barrels and Liverpool took second place with 38,072 barrels. There is no account of the Liverpool fishery until 1798 but it seems to have grown up after 1765, about the same period as the development on the Clyde. Liverpool merchants evidently bought herring from the Isle of Man for Manx fishermen complained that the bounty enabled British curers to offer better prices than local men.³ Vessels from Liverpool visited

1. Reports X p.19b.
2. Ibid. p.286-7.
3. Ibid. p.152a.

Cornwall, Wales and the Clyde. Of the other western ports Whitehaven showed a total of 27,700 barrels exported from 1771-87, Bristol 12,851 barrels and Beaumaris 1,652 barrels.

Southern England had a small trade in red herrings, Rye and Hastings being mentioned particularly by the 1785 Committee. The London market headed the white herring figures by 91,510 barrels to Liverpool's 38,072 and held second place in the red herring list though the total was under one-third that of Yarmouth. Fish exported from London was caught at very many different places round the coast and the capital city held an almost complete monopoly of the home trade.

The analysis of Scotland's export figures for the same period 1771-87¹ shows that out of a total export of 441,145 barrels of white herring, 381,067 were sent from the neighbourhood of the Clyde. Greenock headed the list with 226,458, Campbeltown followed with less than half and Port Glasgow came third with less than half again while Irvine, Rothesay and Ayr contributed also. Other western ports were Stranraer, with 7,615 barrels, Wigtown, Dumfries, Kirkcudbright, the new Customs house at Isle of Martin and Stornoway, whose export came fourth to Port Glasgow with 23,659 barrels.

Again it should be emphasised that the fish were not all caught in the Clyde, though this with Loch Fyne had been the seat of the fishing before 1750. Later the herring moved north and the highland lochs beyond Cantyre became the busses' ground so that Ayr complained of loss in 1785.² These north western lochs had always been

1. Reports X p.290-1.

2. Ibid. p.139b.

considered more suitable for the boat than the buss fishery but after 1750 the busses monopolised the water. The native population was mostly too poor to buy boats and equipment and since busses were forbidden to buy any fish, there was no market in the Highlands but Stornoway and the recent foundation at Isle Martin. It was pointed out by several witnesses in 1785 that busses and boats could combine in the north west, that encouragement must be given to the natives to buy and equip their boats and that a market should be provided for them.

Poverty and lack of an open market dominated the Shetland fishery also.¹ Although this was attended by foreign vessels, the Clyde busses preferred the shorter voyage to the west coast. In the seventeenth century Dutch and other foreign merchants had employed native boatmen but by 1785 they fished themselves and took their fish home to Holland, Prussia or elsewhere. Local landowners in Shetland had tried to organise a fishing trade by granting land in return for fish, the credit given for the fish being very low. Even so the landlords were seldom out of debt and their tenants failed either to cultivate their land or to fish with much success. Mr. Bruce of Sumburgh tried a different system by exacting a money rent and leaving his tenants free to sell their fish either to himself or any other buyer if they could find one, but witnesses in 1785 were not all in favour of this as markets were scarce. The Committee reported the great need for regular rather than part time fishermen near the rich Shetland fisheries.

1. Reports X p.25-30.

There remains to be considered only Scotland's east coast. To the south the herring fishery had been very good until about 1725 when the shoals ceased to come into the Firth of Forth and the towns of Fife declined.¹ Eyemouth also did badly but Dunbar managed to survive the difficult years and had taken over the new red herring industry and after 1771 had supplied 5,088 of the 7,300 barrels exported from Scotland. Robert Fall, a merchant and curer from Dunbar, told the Committee² in 1785 that the east coast fishing should be developed on the Dutch pattern of larger vessels and deep sea fishing but that the Dutch success depended finally upon patience and industry which were lacking in Scotland.

Further north, Aberdeen was exporting a few white herring but the Moray Firth had not yet provided fish for export. It was noted in 1785 that the fish there were small and good tasting but not fat enough for the European market,³ while the storms of the Pentland Firth made it hardly worth the voyage from the Clyde. To the north again, Thurso exported 9,754 barrels between 1771 and 1787 though it seems likely that these herring were caught near Wick rather than on the north coast.

In conclusion, the position of the fishing industry in 1785 may be summarised as the decline of the east coast and the emergence of the west brought about by the movement of the shoals of herring. It was realised that this balance was probably a temporary matter for one witness remarked on the poverty of the eastern fishing that "such a state

1. Reports X p.30a.

2. Ibid. p.108-9.

3. Ibid. p.118b.

may some time attend the present plentiful Fishery upon the West coast.¹
In the matter of foreign markets demand exceeded supply and, with a new
organisation and encouragement for full-time fishermen, great wealth
could soon be won. Thus in 1785 it seemed that success was only just
round the corner.

1. Reports X p.118b.

CHAPTER II

The foundation of the Society. 1786

From the survey in the preceding chapter it will be seen that the years immediately after the end of the American War, coinciding as they did with the expiry of the bounty laws, were bound to be critical years in the history of the fishing industry. Thus far the situation was much the same as that which brought about the early bounty system and the Society of Free British Fishery in 1750. Thirty years later fishery policy was linked with Highland development and this connexion determined the character of the new laws.

Before the end of the war Members of Parliament and the public in general were being urged to give greater encouragement to the fisheries especially in Scotland. In 1777 Dr. James Anderson, a Professor of Glasgow University, wrote his "Observations on the means of exciting a National Industry" in which he pleaded for the establishment of a woollen industry in the Highlands and also devoted several chapters to showing the importance of the fisheries. Six years later Anderson wrote "The True Interest of Great Britain considered" which carried as sub-title "A Proposal for establishing Northern Fisheries". His scheme was not worked out in detail but the pamphlet was one of the first of many on this subject. In 1778 David Loch, in his Essays on Trade, had also considered the fisheries but it was not until 1784 that the topic began to receive widespread attention. The most influential of the several books published on the subject in that year was John Knox's "View of the British Empire and Scotland". Knox had been a bookseller and after his retirement in 1764 he made sixteen

tours in Scotland to study conditions in the north. In this book he set out to contrast the large sums of money expended on the colonies in America with the poor returns realised and he suggested that the Highlands would respond more readily to development. To prove his thesis, which as we have already seen was a popular one at the time, Knox sketched the history of the fisheries in Scotland and elsewhere, demonstrating what might be done for the Highlands by building villages for fishermen.

The publicity which these books gave to the question of fisheries in 1784 caused the Treasury to send Dr. Anderson on an official tour to report on the conditions of the industry in the north. Another tour was made a few months later by a private Member of Parliament, but one who was to be closely connected with Highland Fisheries, George Dempster of Dunnichen. Whether Dempster was inspired by Knox or Anderson is not clear but he visited the Hebrides early in 1785. Before setting out he stated the problem with admirable brevity, "The seas abound with fish"¹ he wrote, "the Highlands with industrious and good people. It will be the business of the legislature to bring these two to meet." But he added "I fear it would in that country be an easier task for mountains to meet, at least they are at present much nearer one another."

Dempster returned to Westminster determined to "bring these two to meet". On 14th March 1785 he seconded a resolution by Henry Dundas "that A Committee be appointed to inquire into the state of the British Fisheries" telling the House of Commons that he was convinced

1. Fergusson. Letters of George Dempster p.138.

of the necessity for a full investigation. The resolution was adopted without further debate.¹

Very little is known of the composition of this Committee beyond the fact that Henry Beaufoy was Chairman and Dempster was almost certainly a member. Nor is it clear how long the Committee continued its deliberations, for after publishing three reports and framing the Fishery Act of July 1785, four additional reports leading to another Act of Parliament were produced by the same or a similar Committee in 1786.² The later reports are numbered separately from those of the previous year but there is no mention in the Journal of the House of Commons of setting up a new Committee, so it may be assumed that the former one was recalled in the new session.

The first of the three reports published in 1785 was dated 11th May and was concerned with the vexed question of the Salt laws. Briefly stated the problem was to give fishermen their salt free of the usual high duty without so many restrictions as to make its use impracticable or so few as to open the way to fraud and smuggling. The Committee was unable to recommend the means to do this and the question which remained open for many years will be discussed in detail in a later chapter. The second report, of 27th June, contained the main recommendations of the Committee while the third, published on 14th July, included a summary of the evidence of witnesses appearing before the Committee and forty nine Appendices of relevant letters and documents, among them a copy of Dr. Anderson's report.

-
1. Scots Magazine XLVII p.219.
 2. Reports X p.11 and 300.

In 1786 the first two reports were published in February and dealt with the duty on imported turbot and regulations of the trade in bait such as prawns and lampreys, while the third and fourth reports which appeared in May and June treated the whole question of bounties and other encouragement for the fisheries and formed the basis of the Fishery Act of 1786.

The witnesses called to the Committee included Dr. Anderson and John Knox also fish curers, merchants, fishermen and Customs officials from many parts of the country. There were a number of landowners and Ministers from Highland parishes and the Secretary of the Commissioners for the Forfeited Estates also sent in a paper of evidence. The Committee's deliberations covered the fishing industry all over Britain but they concentrated on the north west of Scotland, for as the survey in the previous chapter has shown the fishing there was considered the most profitable for development. In the same way, although many branches of the industry were discussed, it was the encouragement of the herring fishing that concerned the Committee rather than cod, ling, turbot, whale and other catch.

The achievements of the Committee were twofold. In the Act of 1785¹ many of the old restrictions were removed, while that of the next year included new bounty laws and other encouragements.

When the bounty system was introduced in 1750 it was partly aimed at increasing the number of seamen and for that purpose a number of regulations were included which kept the busses at sea for long

1. 25 Geo. III cap.65.

periods. Thirty-five years later it was agreed that these regulations were harmful to the fishing industry and ought to be abolished. The most far reaching improvement was the removal of the rendez vous. It will be remembered that vessels had to meet at Bressay in summer and Campbeltown in the autumn before they could begin to fish, even though they came several hundred miles and often from equally rich fishing grounds. This resulted not only in much inconvenience but in nearly all the busses fishing together near the rendez vous to the neglect of other waters. The Caithness coast and the lochs of the North West suffered particularly in this way. In 1779 the places for rendez vous were increased¹ but still proved unsatisfactory. Not only did the longer voyage add to the bussmasters' expenses but at the rendez vous there were many certificates which had to be issued to every vessel and paid for by her owner. Finally the rendez vous was fixed nearly a fortnight after the commencement of the Dutch season. The date had been chosen to prevent fishermen from catching herring while they were still too small but it meant that the Dutch fish were always first on the market.

The Committee of 1785 advanced the date for the opening of the fishing season by two weeks and recommended the total abolition of the rendez vous system.²

There was another reason besides the starting date for the early appearance of Dutch fish on the market although their busses were engaged much further from home than the British. The Dutch arranged

1. 19 Geo. III cap.26.

2. Reports X p.17a.

for a number of fast vessels called "Jaegers" to take the catch home while the busses remained near Shetland. The British could not do this as the bounty laws forbade the transference of fish from one vessel to another. Nor could the British return to port until they had been fishing for three months even though they had caught a full cargo during the first week. The Committee of 1785 recommended that bussmasters should be free to send their fish home and though the regulation for remaining at sea for three months remained in force the busses could now take several cargoes in one season.¹

The Committee also advocated that after remaining at sea for three months, bussmasters might buy fish from the owners of small boats. The subject of the boat fishery was one of the most important raised by Anderson and Knox. It has already been mentioned that the development of the north western fishery was being specially considered in 1785 and the many long narrow sea lochs of that district made boats more suitable than busses. As there were no markets for fresh herring in the Highlands and the state of the salt laws almost prevented boat fishermen from curing their fish, the permission to sell to busses rescued the boat fishery from oblivion.

Thus the Committee recommended the abolition of the rendezvous and the relaxation of several of the other restrictions on the buss fishery, including the rule which prohibited the catching or curing of cod and ling by a buss on the herring bounty. These recommendations were published on 27th June 1785 and a week later Beaufoy introduced

1. Reports X p.17a.

the Bill into the House of Commons.¹ He pointed out the disadvantages under which British fishermen worked as compared with the Dutch, remarking that the "restrictions amounted in effect to a bounty to the neighbouring foreign states". It is significant that in place of the old argument on the advantage of the fisheries in training seamen, he used the more fashionable one that it was owing to the lack of encouragement for fisheries that the population of Scotland was so remarkably limited. Beaufoy was well supported by Dempster and rather half-heartedly by William Pulteney. An attempt to delay the Bill until the next session was made by Pitt, Fox and Eden but Beaufoy and Dempster remained firm and the Bill was passed without a division.

The Act of 1785, however, accomplished only half the work of the Committee for the question of the payment of bounties had not been treated. It will be remembered that a bounty of 30/- per ton had been granted in 1750, increased seven years later and reduced again in Scotland in 1771. By 1780 the English bounty also returned to 30/- at which figure it stood in 1785. There were two main points at issue before the Committee. The first was that the bounty was not applicable to the boat fishery which was a favourite object for encouragement at the time; indeed the effect of a buss bounty was to dissuade adventurers from building boats. It was impossible to evolve a tonnage bounty which could operate fairly for busses of 80 tons and boats of 5 tons. The suggestion was therefore put forward by various witnesses to the Committee that the bounty should be paid in future on the catch of herring. This touched the second main point at issue,

1. Scots Magazine vol.XLVII p.484.

that the existing bounty did not stimulate effort in fishing since it was paid at the beginning of the season whether the buss caught anything or not. The bounty on catch, or barrel bounty as it was called, would meet this objection and could be applied equally to busses or boats. It was felt however that a barrel bounty had one great drawback; this lay in the uncertainty of the herring fishery which often failed entirely in a neighbourhood for one or two seasons. In a bad year the fishermen would be deprived of the barrel bounty when they needed it most to meet the cost of equipment and wages. Therefore the Committee recommended that both bounties be paid. Busses should in future receive a reduced tonnage bounty at 20/- per ton only and should also draw 4/- per barrel of herring. Boatmen landing fish from non-bounty vessels were to receive 1/- per barrel. These bounty laws were passed by Parliament in July 1786.¹

The Committee however did not leave the encouragement of the fisheries to bounties alone. From the evidence they had received it was recognised that the Highland boat fishery required "the joint labour of many individuals aided by the skill of several classes of manufacturers"² and that as a first step villages must be built to accommodate these people on the north western coasts of Scotland. They reported their conclusion that this must be done with private money and that it was "highly expedient that the subscribers should, by act of Parliament, be declared to be a Joint Stock Company". The Committee went on to discuss the details of incorporation. In most respects the new Company was to follow the usual pattern. Subscriptions were to be collected up to £150,000, divided into £50 shares of which no member might hold

1. 26 Geo.III cap.106.

2. Reports X p.196b.

more than ten. This capital was to be administered by officers elected annually by all shareholders. No member was to be liable for a larger sum than he had subscribed, and profits were to be divided in proportion to the shares held. But there was included in the recommendations, as a result of the failure of the Society of Free British Fishery of 1750, an important new limiting clause. The new Company was to be allowed only to buy land for lease to fishermen and curers, and to build houses and sheds for their use. Except for these purposes the Company "was to be restrained from engaging as a Corporation in any trade as well as from issuing notes or other species of circulating currency."¹

A few weeks before this report was published, similar proposals were considered by the Highland Society of London. Eight years earlier, that is in May 1778, 25 gentlemen of Scotland had met at the Spring Garden Coffee House, London "in order to form a Society that might prove beneficial to the Highlands." Their objects, which they set down in eight sections, were mainly literary and artistic, but among the more practical benefits they promised relief for distressed Highlanders "more especially when at a distance from their native land" and, in their eighth section, an undefined but general desire for the improvement of the northern parts of the Kingdom.² Under this section they gave practical encouragement to the Fisheries; for example between 1778 and 1786 they granted premiums for the best method of curing herring in the Dutch manner and for good catches by deep sea fishing.³ After eight years

1. Reports X p.196.

2. Sir John Sinclair. Account of the Highland Society of London p.4.

3. Ibid. p.29.

the Highland Society of London had attracted many members who between them subscribed a considerable sum of money.

Early in 1786 several extraordinary meetings were called to discuss how best this money could be employed. Suggestions were made to use it either for the recently proposed building of the Crinan Canal, or for the encouragement of Fisheries. The members of the Highland Society had already formally complimented the Committee of the House of Commons; elected "the Honourable Chairman and sundry gentlemen of the Committee" to be Honorary members of the Society, and they now decided that the present time was not suitable for building the Crinan Canal and that therefore the money should be invested in the Fisheries.¹

In March of the same year the Highland Society asked Mr. John Knox to lecture to a special Committee of the Society appointed to consider how their money could best be spent on the Fisheries. This lecture was published some months later under the title of "A Discourse on the expediency of establishing fishing stations or small towns in the Highlands of Scotland and the Hebride Isles". Knox began his lecture by repeating the argument so often used in the Seventeenth Century; that the Fisheries produced seamen and therefore deserved to be encouraged. He then turned to the details of his plan for developing the industry in the Highlands. He proposed to build about forty villages between Dornoch and Arran, each of which was to contain 30 to 40 houses, several storehouses and curing sheds, and was to cost about £2,000. The dwelling houses, some with four rooms and some with two rooms, were

1. John Knox. Tour of the Highlands of Scotland p.lxxvi.

each to have a garden in which food would be grown, and were to be built with public money and let on long term leases, or sold for payment in instalments. There was also to be an Inn, a Schoolhouse and a Church built in each settlement. These villages, by bringing together a number of fishermen, were to provide markets not only for boat builders, blacksmiths, masons and other craftsmen, and for the farmers of the district, but also for foreign and southern merchants to buy fish for export to the West Indies. Knox ended his lecture by pointing out that it appeared unlikely that Parliament would provide enough money to cover such a scheme, that the local landlords were quite unable to do so, and that therefore it must fall to gentlemen like the members of the Highland Society of London to raise the money by subscription and to furnish Directors to treat with Landlords and Contractors.

During the next few weeks matters went ahead fast. Copies of Knox's lecture were sent by the Highland Society to the King and to the Committee of the House of Commons, whose report as we have already seen was published early in May and recommended official support for the building of villages. Knox wrote that during April and May the special Committee of the Highland Society to whom he had lectured "began to assume the form of a regular establishment. A Bill of incorporation was preparing to enable them when incorporated to subscribe a joint stock and therewith to purchase land and build thereon free towns and fishing villages, and fishing stations in the Highland and Islands of that part of Great Britain called Scotland and for other purposes." Books of subscription were opened and on 23rd May, subscriptions were

first received at the Shakespeare (Coffee House, London) to the amount of £7,000 or thereabouts."¹

The Act of Incorporation was passed at the end of July 1786 and included among its terms all those recommended by the Commons' Committee.² The name of the Society was given as "The British Society for extending the Fisheries and improving the Sea Coasts of this Kingdom". This proved to be too ponderous a title even for the eighteenth century, and for many years the members contracted it according to their own tastes. Gradually the Society came to be known, though not officially until its re-incorporation under the Companies Act of 1858, as "The British Fisheries Society".³

On August 10th 1786 a meeting of the new Society was held to elect the Officers required by the Act. The Duke of Argyll, who already held similar office in the Highland Societies of London and Edinburgh, was elected Governor, and the Earl of Breadalbane was chosen as Deputy Governor. The thirteen Directors included among their number eight members of Parliament of whom at least two, Henry Beaufoy and William Wilberforce, were English. Among the rest were representatives from the Highlands in Francis Humberstone Mackenzie of Seaforth, Lord Gower and the Earl of Moray, and from the lowlands in the Marquis of Graham, Sir Adam Fergusson and Mr. George Dempster. They were united in their desire to give practical form to the encouragement of the Highland Fisheries and, in spite of many other commitments to both public and private affairs they devoted much time and thought to the affairs of the

1. Knox. Tour p.lxxviii.

2. 26 Geo.III cap.106.

3. Breadalbane MSS. Box C 30. 3. Printed Circular 1785.

Society.¹ Mr. John Mackenzie of Arcan, near Inverness, was asked to combine the position of Secretary to the new Fishery Society with the same office in the Highland Society of London which he had held since 1778. He was the son of Alexander Mackenzie of Lentrane, and after reading law for a short time in Edinburgh he went to London to finish his studies and was admitted to the Inner Temple. After 1778 his legal work was almost entirely given up and he devoted his time to Highland business. For seventeen years until his death in 1803, Mackenzie proved to be an excellent Secretary to the Fishery Society and his letters combine legal exactness and efficiency in the business of the Society with the most charming personal touches and unfailing consideration for his correspondents.

Immediately after the election of Officers, the members of the Society scattered for the summer recess. Owing to the close connection of many of them with Parliament this became a regular feature with the Directors of the Society, who met regularly in London from December to July and left the affairs of the Society in the Secretary's hands for the rest of the year. Mr. Knox had already gone to Scotland in July, taking with him an authority from the Highland Society of London to collect names of those wishing to subscribe to the new Society.² Throughout the country, members worked to enlist the support of their friends and the Secretary spent some weeks in Scotland during the Autumn where he attended meetings of the Committee of the Highland Society of Edinburgh. Full support was promised for the Fishery Society from the northern capital.³

1. Knox. Tour p.103.

2. Proceedings of the Highland Society Vol.I p.xxx.

3. Minutes of the Highland Society Vol.I Oct. & Nov. 1786.

By December, when the meetings of the Directors were resumed, the Society had attracted many members from different parts of the country. An effort was later made to obtain subscriptions among the many Scots resident in India and China. In February 1789, the Earl of Breadalbane wrote to the Governors of India, Madras and Bombay and a special branch of the Society was formed in the East by Messrs. Charles Grant and John Fergusson, which eventually produced more than £6,000 in subscriptions. In June, a similar letter was sent to the Council of Supercargoes at Canton but either this never arrived or it failed to arouse any interest as no China merchant appeared on the list of members.¹

The meetings were held several times a week in the winter of 1786-7 and the financial side of the Society's business took a prominent place. Subscription lists had been compiled with more haste than accuracy. Many members had taken shares on behalf of friends, without the formality of their permission, and in some cases, when the money was applied for, it was not forthcoming. The lists were numerous and untidy and it took several years to trace all those people whose names appeared,² but as soon as some order was produced out of the confusion, a call of 10% on subscriptions was made, so that the Society might begin to operate. The Royal Bank of Scotland, the Bank of Scotland and the Thistle Bank of Glasgow all offered 4% interest on money deposited, a special rate granted because the object of the Society was improvement of Scotland.³ It was for this reason that for nearly 30 years the Society wrestled with a complicated system of payments and accounts

1. B.F.S. Letters I p.3, 13 and 132.

2. B.F.S. Letters II p.169.

3. Argyll III p.7.

caused by their headquarters being in London and their money in Scotland. It was not until 1812 that it was decided that the resulting trouble more than outweighed the gain in income, and the capital was invested in 3% East India Stock.¹

Once the initial financial arrangements had been made, the Directors turned to the next item on the Society's agenda - the choice of sites for Fishing Stations. In February 1787 the Earl of Breadalbane wrote a circular letter to a number of Highland Proprietors introducing the Society and requesting the "favour of their opinion and advice" on five questions. They were asked to state:- which parts of the coast they thought best adapted for fishing villages; the amount of land most advantageous for each settlement; the terms on which "lands suited to the purpose of this institution" might be obtained; whether the extension of the Fisheries and the improvement of the coasts would require anything further from the Society than the building of houses and sheds; and what encouragement could be given to those already engaged in the Fisheries.² About 200 signed copies of this letter were sent to Proprietors and their Factors, to Captains of the Revenue Cutters on the North West Coasts, and to the Fishery Baillies who were employed by the Board of Trustees for Manufactures and Fisheries to keep order among the Fishermen. A large number of unsigned copies were distributed throughout the country, some finding their way into Newspapers and Magazines, the Scots Magazine among them.³

-
1. Minutes III p.59.
 2. Scots Magazine XLIX p.96-7.
 3. B.F.S. Letters I p.1.

In March and April about forty answers were received. Some proprietors showed their interest in the Society's programme by providing long and detailed accounts of conditions in the North. Captain Hamilton of the Revenue Cutter Prince Henry may have been speaking not only for himself when he wrote, "Were I not commanded I would not have troubled you with these observations as writing I am not accustomed to and would at any time rather sail fifty miles than write a sheet of paper".¹ The answers concerning sites were somewhat unsatisfactory as nearly every Proprietor was a prospective seller and found much to say in favour of his own estate. Great divergence of opinion was shown as to the amount of land which should be acquired. Of the few Landlords who went into details of the terms on which such land might be obtained some clearly had only an eye for a bargain, but nearly all appeared ready to treat with the Society. The other two questions produced some valuable opinions but writers found an easier task in stating the problems facing any industry in the Highlands than in suggesting solutions. While all agreed that villages were essential, the general opinion inclined towards the view that "a plan of improvement by building only, is improper and so ineffectual that it ought not to be attempted".² Mr. Colin Macdonald urged the Society to give "the best encouragement for catching, killing and curing fish, discovering new banks and the places where different kinds of fish most abound".³ The encouragement suggested included bounties, loans of money, boats, tackle and free salt. Perhaps the most interesting letter came from Mr.

1. Nat.Lib.Scot. MSS 2619 Extracts of answers to B.F.S. p.64.

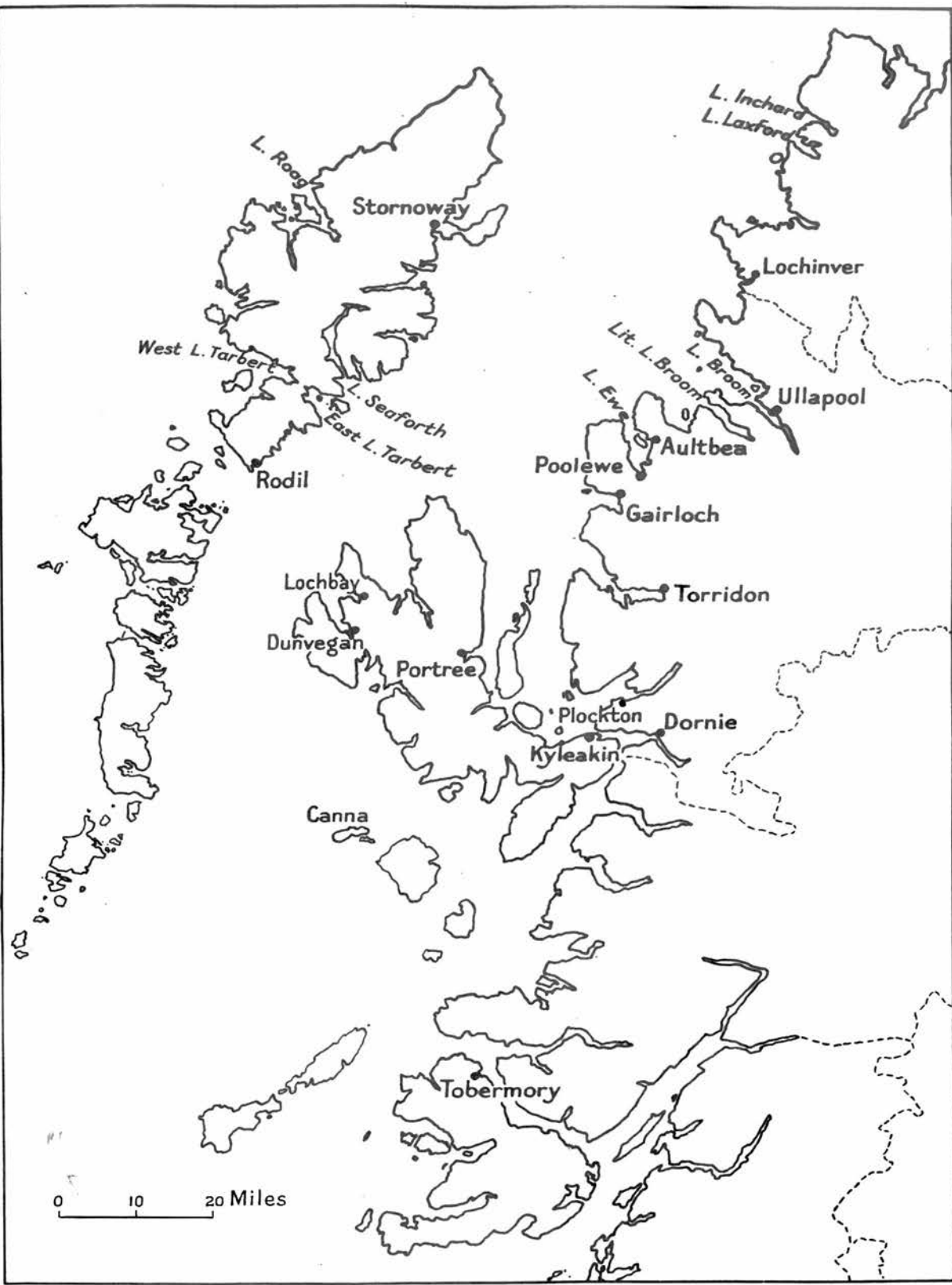
2. Ibid. p.39.

3. Ibid. p.28.

Maclean of Coll, who sets out so clearly the problem of employing Highlanders, a problem which was to be the undoing of the Society, and which has not been solved to this day. "I am one of those" he wrote, "who entertain the opinion that the erecting of wharfs, houses etc., as proposed by the Act of Incorporation, will not alone be sufficient encouragement for the extension of the Fisheries and forwarding the other views of the Society, my reasons for entertaining this opinion chiefly proceed from the difficulty I apprehend that will be found in inducing the people to inhabit the proposed towns and villages, for it is to be considered that there is not at present in this country any distinct body of men who live solely by the Fishing, that and indeed any branch of business or trade is carried on by people possessed of lands and who only make the fishing etc., a very temporary object or casualty ... If the inhabitants of those countries can procure the bare necessaries of life by their labour from the grounds they possess their ambition leads them to no further effort, nor do they in general desire to meliorate their condition by any other exertion of industry ... This is so much the case that tradesmen of all descriptions are not to be got without procuring farms for them and no sooner is this procured than they become farmers solely."¹

The answers were collected by the Secretary into a single volume of extracts, arranged according to subject. In a covering letter to the Duke of Argyll, the Secretary apologised for the size of the book saying, "the collection is very full and in the words of the

1. Nat.Lib.Scot. MSS 2619 Extracts of answers to B.F.S. p.30.



different correspondents themselves as I find an attempt to shorten it would mar the full expression of their meaning."¹

The material collected proved valuable to the Directors, and it was decided that a Committee should make a tour of the North Western coasts of Scotland during the Recess. Those chosen were the Duke of Argyll, the Earl of Breadalbane, Sir Adam Fergusson, Mr. Dempster, Mr. Isaac Hawkins Browne and Mr. Humberstone Mackenzie.² The Committee was accompanied by Lachlan Mactavish as a representative of the Board of Trustees for Manufactures and Fisheries.³ They set out from Inveraray on 27th June and went first to Tobermory in Mull. Sir Adam Fergusson, who kept notes of each place visited during the journey, remarked on the fine harbour at Tobermory though he thought that it lay too far from the nearest fishing ground.⁴ But the Duke of Argyll and Mr. Campbell of Knock, both of whom owned land near the bay, offered such excellent terms to the Society that preliminary arrangements were begun on the spot, and concluded later in Edinburgh, for the purchase of several hundred acres. From Tobermory the Duke of Argyll returned home, but the rest of the Committee proceeded to Canna, part of which had been offered to the Society by Clanranald, and then to Dunvegan. After seeing a number of places on the Western side of Skye (including Lochbay which made a favourable impression and was later purchased by the Society) they continued their journey in the Revenue Cutter Prince of Wales, going first to Rodal in Harris and then Northward past

1. B.F.S. Letters I p.17.

2. Argyll III 18.

3. Argyll I 96.

4. Kilkerran MSS. Memorandum of Sir Adam Fergusson.

Tarbert to Stornoway which they reached on 23rd July. After staying only two days the party returned to the Mainland at Loch Broom, spent a day visiting Lochinver and Assynt and then turned south to Gruinard. Dempster and Hawkins Browne left on 5th August, but the remainder of the Committee sailed up Loch Torridon, where they were "detained on the water by calms till one in the morning", and returned to Skye, this time to Portree on the East side of the Island. From there they finally turned south, reaching Oban at four o'clock in the afternoon of August 10th and on the 20th of that month Sir Adam Fergusson recorded that he arrived home at Kilkerran. Although the party was inconvenienced more by "calms" than by the stormy weather of the Minch, during the two months of their journey they had covered most of the possible ground and Sir Adam's notes show that they seldom stayed two days in the same place. He summed up the general opinion of the Committee by saying, "there does not appear to be one place on the north west of Scotland fitted in all respects for a town; tho' some may admit of stations for fishing".

Meanwhile another Director was also travelling on the north western coast of Scotland. Henry Beaufoy had also been elected a member of the travelling Committee but had been detained in London by public engagements. Toward the end of June he hastened overland direct to Loch Broom where he arrived before the main party.¹ At Tain he had been joined by David Aitken, a Surveyor recently employed by the Commissioners of the Forfeited Estates at Coigach.² Together they

1. H. Beaufoy. Speech to Proprietors p.34.

2. Forfeited Estate Papers, Coigach (4).

considered the various possible sites on Lochbroom and to them it appeared that the situation of the farm of Ullapool was suitable in every way for a fishing station, a view which was strongly supported by local opinion. On continuing their journey northwards they left behind them letters addressed to the other Directors recommending Ullapool to their attention.¹ After visiting Lochinver, Beaufoy went south to Gairloch and then to Tobermory before his engagements forced him to return to London.

The majority of Directors agreed with Beaufoy as to the advantages of Ullapool and the decision to offer for the farm land must have been taken without delay. Although meetings of the Directors were not resumed in London until February 1788, it was at least as early as December that the Society first approached Lord Macleod, owner of the Cromarty Estate. On 21st December the Secretary wrote to Aitken requesting him to accompany Lord Macleod's Factor to Ullapool to make a joint survey of the farm and to report all particulars to the Directors.² This report was received early in February and on the 28th of that month a formal agreement was signed between Lord Macleod and the "British Society for extending the Fisheries" concluding the purchase by the Society of 1,300 English Acres of farm land at Ullapool and about 300 Acres on the nearby island of Ristol, at a feu duty of £46 per annum.³

At the Annual General Meeting of shareholders of the Society held on 25th March 1788, Mr. Beaufoy, on behalf of the Directors, reviewed the proceedings of the Society since its foundation in 1786. Besides raising a large sum of money in subscriptions, of which the

1. Argyll I p.111.
2. B.F.S. Letters I p.30.
3. Ibid. p.188.

first call had provided £1,743, and collecting a store of information, the Society had purchased land at Tobermory and Ullapool on the north west coasts of Scotland and was at that moment ready to begin its true programme of building fishing villages.

This account of the foundation of the Society shows how it originated in simultaneous movements in the Highland Society of London and in the Parliamentary Committee on the Fisheries. This dual beginning gives the key to the Society's work for the Directors were concerned not only with the question of Highland development but also with the problem of encouraging the fishing industry everywhere.

CHAPTER III

The Settlement at Lochbroom. 1788

In order to understand the work of the Society in the Highlands it is necessary to make a detailed study of the development of at least one settlement.

Tobermory, chosen in 1787, was sold to the Society by the Duke of Argyll,¹ who retained a strong influence over the village. The Duke was the original Governor of the Society but resigned after several years and took no further part in its affairs outside Mull. The Society's Agent in Tobermory was also the Duke's Factor in Mull, his instructions from the Society being generally vetted by the Duke and his reports invariably forwarded to London through Inveraray. There was also another respect in which Tobermory grew away from the Society's original plan. The fine harbour and the Customs House soon attracted merchants and ships rather than fishermen and later the opening of the Caledonian Canal brought ships from the east coast to Mull. The success of Tobermory, then, rested upon commerce rather than fishing and therefore cannot be taken as a fair test of the work of the British Fisheries Society.

Lochbay, the third western settlement, was not acquired for several months after Ullapool and Tobermory and was not developed until 1795. The delay led to a loss of faith by the local population in the intentions of the Society and resulted, in spite of the Directors' efforts to prevent it, in large scale emigration from Skye. Also by the time Lochbay was ready to be built and settled many of the worst

1. Argyll III p.11.

problems had been solved at the other two villages. Thus a study of Lochbay alone would omit some of the most interesting experiments made by the Society in its early years.

No such extraneous influences appeared at Ullapool and the Directors, free to develop the village as they wished, can be followed as they dealt with each problem in turn. The development of Ullapool therefore provides the best means of judging both the aims of the British Fisheries Society and the way in which those aims were implemented.

What made the Society choose Ullapool for one of their first settlements? The answer to this question is important because the failure of the Society to establish a successful fishing station on the west coast was later attributed to the unsuitability of their sites. The Directors' reasons for their choice of Ullapool must therefore be studied in detail.

The Prospectus of the Society, issued in 1786,¹ stated that "It has often been observed with wonder and regret that a very considerable part of the Coast of Great Britain continues destitute of the blessings of Art, Industry and Independence though inhabited by a numerous tribe of British subjects not less capable, nor less inclined than their fellow citizens to become useful members of the Community." Before going on to describe the means by which the Society hoped to remedy this state of affairs, it was explained that "The coast here alluded to extends from the Firth of Clyde round by Cape Wrath to Dungsby (sic) Head in Caithness and including the numerous islands, it

1. Copy in Argyll I p.296.

comprises a coast of nearly one thousand miles." The Society had chosen to concentrate on the western Highlands and Islands.

After receiving many offers of land the Directors decided to begin with only two settlements,¹ "one of which will be established in the Southern and the other in the Northern division of the Highlands." The southern division was the first to be considered and it proved fairly easy to choose a site. Tobermory, which had an excellent harbour and good prospects for the fishing, was offered to the Society by the Duke of Argyll. When the Directors met on 18th May 1787 to give instructions to their travelling Committee,² the first resolution affirmed that Tobermory appeared "a proper place for establishing a village", a statement endorsed by the Committee when they arrived in Mull.

The southern establishment was thus selected and the Directors turned to consider the northern division of the Highlands from the Isle of Skye to the Pentland Firth. The Society was criticised both at the time and later, for not choosing a site on the Long Island, where Loch Roag, Loch Seaforth and Loch Tarbet had all been offered to the Society and were most suitable for the fishery.³ There seem to have been two reasons for the rejection of these sites. The first lay in the fact that the expense of building and maintaining a settlement would be greatly increased by the distance and the sea passage. The second was that all the sites were within easy reach of Stornoway which, as Knox⁴ and others had stressed, was the only village and Customs House in all

1. Argyll III p.23.

2. Ibid. p.17.

3. J.L.Buchanan. Travels p.212-215.

4. John Knox. Discourse p.11.

the thousand miles of the western coastline. The Directors agreed that their station must be somewhere further from these facilities and therefore refused to consider a first settlement in the Outer Hebrides.

The Directors seem to have been impressed with the need for development in Skye, and with several sites offered, but the situation was not central enough to serve the lochs of the northern Highlands and Skye was therefore reserved for the time when a third settlement could be contemplated.

The choice was thus narrowed down to one of the lochs to the north of Skye, the chief being Loch Torridon, Ewe, Broom, Inver, Laxford and Inchard. Kenneth Mackenzie of Torridon was already engaged in a scheme for encouraging the fisheries at Torridon.¹ Lochinver was rejected on local information as having too little flat land to accommodate a large village,² and further north Lochs Laxford and Inchard were not very often visited by the busses. By process of elimination, then, the Directors reached their second resolution of 18th May 1787 which read³ "So far as appears from the information hitherto received by the Directors, there is reason to believe that with a view to the extension of the Fisheries, a village and port may be established with advantage on the banks of either Loch Broom or Loch Ewe."

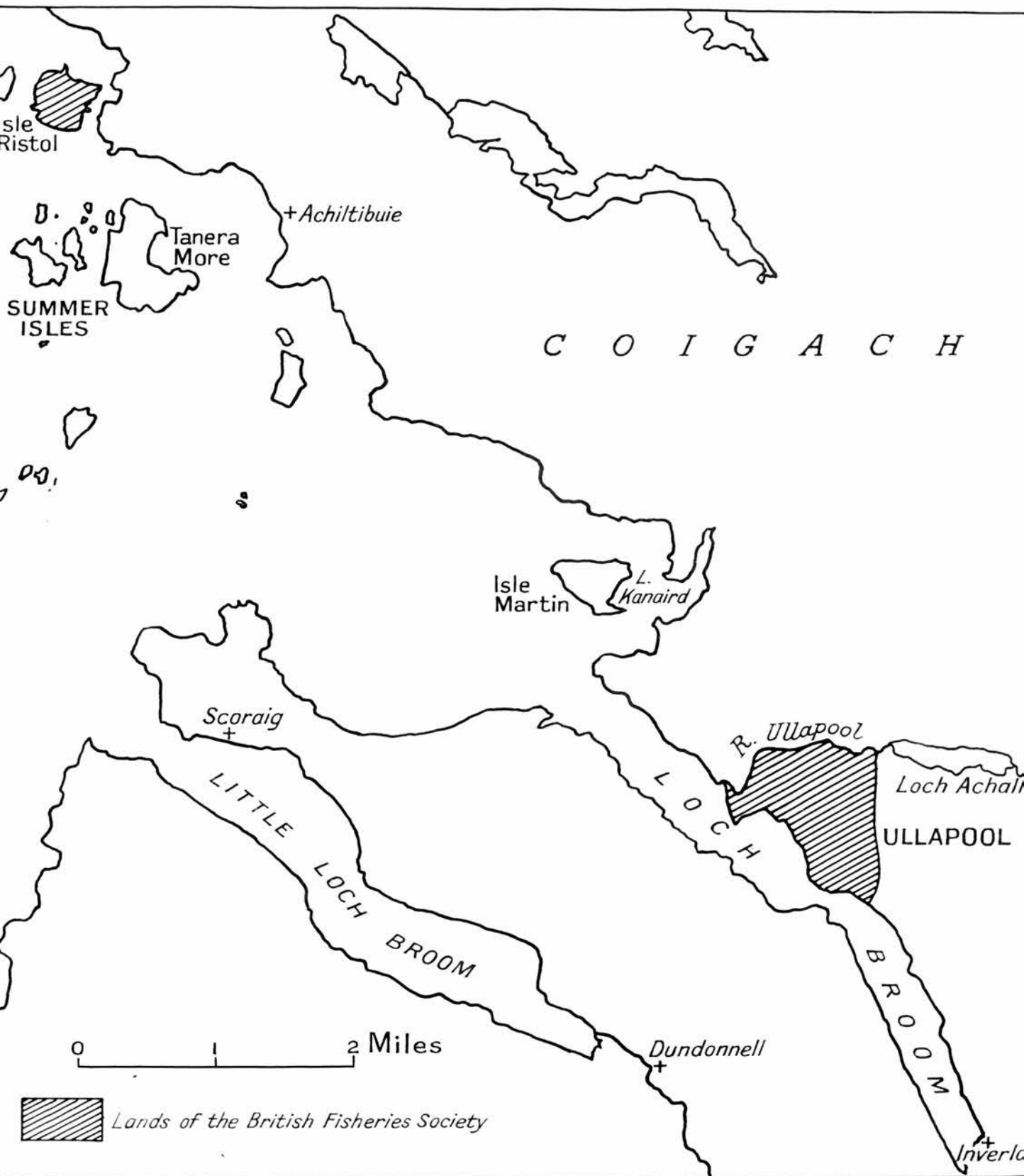
In order to guide the touring Committee in their inspection the third, fourth and fifth resolutions of the same date outlined the essentials for a site. By the third, the owner must "engage to sell or feu a sufficient quantity of land for the proposed Establishment." This

-
1. Argyll III p.142.
 2. Beaufoy. Speech p.42.
 3. Argyll III p.17.

"sufficient quantity" was not defined but the Directors had agreed that the villages must be capable of extension to accommodate many settlers with houses and gardens. The fourth resolution stated that previous to a final determination an exact survey ought to be taken of the coast, the ground and the harbour. Finally it was "Resolved that Stone fit for building, Lime Stone, Turf, Coal or Wood for Firing, and above all wholesome fresh water are essential Requisites to be found on the Spot." These appear to be elementary requirements but they determined the rejection of one or two of the sites offered. It was also understood that a sheltered harbour was essential and that the land should be capable of improvement by the settlers.

Bearing in mind these instructions the Directors visited Loch Ewe and Lochbroom. It may have influenced them that they all saw Lochbroom first and fell under its spell. Loch Ewe had two great advantages,¹ a better road to the east coast which had been made for the mails by the local gentry in 1768 while Lochbroom had only a track. Secondly the Stornoway packet left from Loch Ewe which brought some travellers to the neighbourhood. The Directors were confident that they could change the packet's route to Lochbroom and they expected a road to be built soon which would be shorter than the one to Loch Ewe, so neither of these advantages weighed heavily. On the other hand the herring appeared less regularly than in Lochbroom which seems to have had a unique reputation in this way. The three harbours noticed by Beaufoy in Loch Ewe, one at Aultbea and two at the head of the Loch, were not available to the Society as the owners would not part with them.

1. Beaufoy. Speech p.45.



Seaforth urged a station at Poolewe¹ but his colleagues thought the land bad and the site too far from the open sea. Hawkins Browne remarked that there was little room on the north side except at Aultbea and that the south shore of the loch was very exposed and both were a very long way from Dingwall or Tain.²

Had Aultbea been available in 1787 the Directors might have hesitated but they were agreed in recommending a site on Lochbroom a description of which will explain their choice.

Lochbroom was part of the Coigach Estate owned by the Earl of Cromarty. Though pardoned for his part in the Rebellion of 1745 he was deprived of his lands and required to live in England while his son, Lord Macleod, went to serve in the Swedish Army. Thus his estates, including Coigach, were administered from 1746 to 1784 by the Commissioners for the Forfeited Estates.

In a survey made³ for the Commissioners Coigach was described as "Lying upon the West Coast within the parish of Lochbroom, measuring about 14 miles in length and 7 or 8 in breadth, the nearest point being about 30 miles from Dingwall the county town." "The principal product of the Barony is black cattle, horses, sheep and goats; the pasture is extremely good and very extensive." The same could not be said of the soil which was thin and barren while the crops could not be depended on "because of the frequent rains to which the West Coast is exposed." "No flax seed sown here" the surveyor continued, "nor grass seed nor any hay made, nor are there any enclosures; of late they plant a good deal

1. The Bee IX p.122.

2. Argyll I p.347.

3. Forfeited Estate Papers. Coigach (2).

of potatoes." The melancholy account went even further. "There was a great deal of wood in the Barony, both Fir and Birch but greatly destroyed after the Rebellion." The surveyor remarked the absence of Manufactures but the presence of Whisky "retailed in ten or twelve huts." Finally "The roads to and from this country may be reckoned the worst in the Highlands being mountainous, rocky, full of stones and no bridges upon the Rivers, so that nothing but necessity brings strangers here."¹

A second surveyor of Coigach who visited Lochbroom in 1756 was much more cheerful, dwelling upon the pasturage and small patches of wood which made it "convenient for grassing and brooding cattle (sic)." He even went so far as to say "I have never seen a country where the poor people might live more comfortably than here. Fish of most kinds is plenty, Butter and Cheese the same, with Moss and Firing upon every farm in abundance which is of no small consequence to them."

Although there seems to have been a difference of opinion on the agriculture, optimists and pessimists alike took a cheerful view of the fishery in Coigach. As early as 1566 the fame of Lochbroom was widespread for in that year "strangers" applied to the Privy Council of Scotland for a licence to fish there, for "it has plesit God to oppin ane greit commoditie to the common weil of the realm." The herring continued to haunt Lochbroom with greater regularity than any other loch, but owing to the regulations of the later Eighteenth Century, especially the Salt laws, it was not the local population but the fishermen from the Clyde who reaped the benefit.

1. Forfeited Estate Papers. Coigach (1).

This was how the Barony of Coigach appeared to the Commissioners for the Forfeited Estates, the main points being a poor agriculture, a population supported by cattle rearing and an excellent fishery.

In Coigach, as in all their estates, the Commissioners launched a programme of improvement. It was decided that agriculture was unsuitable but that the population should be encouraged to take up manufactures. The first industrial scheme in Wester Ross was organised by the Board of Manufactures in conjunction with the Commissioners for the Forfeited Estates. In 1753 Parliament granted £3,000 annually for nine years to be spent on encouraging the manufacture of linen in such places in the Highlands where the industry had not previously been introduced.¹ Three sites were chosen, Loch Carron, Glenmoriston and Inverlael near the head of Lochbroom.

At Inverlael the Board purchased twelve acres of land and arranged for the building of two stone warehouses with slate roofs, a house for the Principal Undertaker in charge of the station and several smaller houses for the workers.² The Principal Undertaker was to employ a Master Heckler, a Weaver and a Wheelwright each of whom was to have two country boys as apprentices and a Spinning Mistress was to teach forty or fifty local girls to spin and knit stockings.

The history of the Lochbroom station was one of failure. There was a bad beginning, for the Principal Undertaker chosen by the Board in the Autumn of 1754 was denounced as a Jacobite, probably by someone who wanted the position for himself. The appointment was delayed while

1. 26 Geo. II cap. 20.

2. Board of Manufactures. Minutes vol. 13 p. 132-3.

the charge was investigated¹ and it was not until June 1755 that the Undertaker was able to go to Lochbroom. The building of the settlement caused further anxiety to the Board since this proved very much more expensive than had been anticipated. The cost of carriage for raw materials and the lack of a market near Lochbroom increased the difficulties which were being experienced at Loch Carron and Glenmoriston further south. Salaries were reduced in 1759² and although it appears that pupils were to be found at all three stations, they continued to be run at a loss to the Board.

At Christmas 1762 the annual grant of £3,000 expired. The Board sent a Memorandum to the Treasury pointing out that the manufacture of linen was a civilising influence which would cease when the stations closed and that the Board was quite unable to maintain them out of its ordinary funds.³ This appeal to the Treasury failed as did a similar one to the Commissioners for the Forfeited Estates and in 1765 the stations were returned to their original owners to be kept up by them during the pleasure of the Board.⁴ They were finally resold in 1791.⁵

The practical influence of this scheme had disappeared long before the Directors of the British Fisheries Society visited Lochbroom in 1787 though the ruins served as a reminder of its failure and the reasons given for its failure were important. Lachlan Mactavish, who accompanied the Directors on their tour, was detailed by the Board of

-
1. Board of Manufactures. Letters Vol.6 p.8.
 2. Board of Manufactures. Minutes Vol.14 p.193.
 3. Board of Manufactures. Minutes Vol.17 p.75.
 4. Board of Manufactures. Minutes Vol.18 p.136.
 5. Board of Manufactures. Minutes Vol.27 p.403.

Manufactures to inspect the remains of the Board's linen stations. He found Inverlael in "a most wretched state of cultivation, and the buildings which cost the Board £1100 sterling (although I am persuaded the real expence could never have exceeded £400) a perfect ruin: nor could I learn that any branch of manufacture was ever carried on there; so that upon the whole a more flagrant instance of the abuse of public money, which appears to have been all jobbed away, can hardly be produced."¹ After further investigation in 1789 the Board concluded that the buildings were never completed although the full sum of money had been expended. A Minute of the Board in November 1789 stated, "It is to be regretted that such an investigation as the present did not take place thirty years ago, when notwithstanding the loose manner in which the money was paid they might have been compelled to account in a satisfactory way."²

There can be no doubt that the Directors, who had travelled to Scotland to learn all that they could about founding settlements, were impressed by this example of failure. The Society of Free British Fishery had suffered in the same way from lack of supervision and proper accounting for money and the Directors of the new Society became convinced of the need for care in issuing their money.

Coigach was chosen to figure in another development scheme under the Commissioners for the Forfeited Estates. This was organised in 1763 for the soldiers and sailors returning from the Seven Years War in an attempt to provide a living for them in the Highlands. The

1. Argyll I p.112.

2. Board of Manufactures. Minutes Vol.27 p.114.

sailors were encouraged to become fishermen and to settle in villages on the Forfeited Estates which were to be built to hold about 500 sailors in each. Every applicant received a bounty of £3 and a rent free share in a boat, while those who were married were to have in addition a house and three acres of land without rent for seven years.¹

There were many applicants of whom 24 were successfully settled in Stornoway and another colony sent to New Tarbat in Cromarty. Lochbroom was chosen by the authorities as a suitable position for a group of Marine Officers who considered setting up a large scale fishing station under the scheme but negotiations must have broken down as they never appeared and the village was not built. The Commissioners found the sailors unsatisfactory settlers as many of them drew the £3 bounty and then disappeared while others fished for a few months and then took their boats and equipment and sailed away. Few of them kept their boats in repair or bothered to pay their rents after the first three years and the result was a great loss to the Commissioners without anything to show for it.

A similar plan for soldiers was rather more successful. They were settled as crofters in small communities with the same bounties, rent free houses and land. Though they showed less tendency to abscond than the sailors, they were reported as lazy and disinclined to make the most of their advantages. Out of 350 applicants 85 chose the Cromarty Estate and 12 soldiers reached Ullapool, once a farm but by then divided into crofts. Their Serjeant, John Mackenzie of

1. Forfeited Estate Papers. No. 128.

Minute Book relating to Soldiers' and Sailors' settlements.
passim.

Loudon's Regiment, was a diligent worker who later acquired some valuable property and prospered. The rest of the soldiers were employed by the factor in road making, dyke building and other public work. One, a miller by trade, built the Mill at Ullapool but the others cultivated their crofts as little as possible and failed to keep in repair the huts and tools provided by the Board.

Although there are few details of these schemes available, there are enough to show that the sailors left behind nothing but a moral while the soldiers remained in scattered and rather unsatisfactory townships on the Forfeited Estates. The moral repeatedly pointed out to the British Fisheries Society was that it was never wise policy to advance money or equipment, especially boats, without really adequate security and that gratitude alone would not inspire hard work. The Directors were thus impressed that houses and equipment or money must not form any part of the encouragement offered to West Highland fishermen for these produced idleness rather than effort.

Among the papers of the Commissioners for the Forfeited Estates are two proposals from private people for establishing a fishing station in Coigach, both upon a site at the mouth of Lochbroom called Old Dornie. In 1764 Ninian Jeffrey the Factor of the Coigach Estate sent in a scheme for building a store house for salt and casks and for offering free houses to several experienced fishermen who would teach the local population good fishing methods.¹ Six years later, a second application of the same kind was made by a Colin Mackenzie who described himself as a Kelp Merchant of Lochbroom and who proposed to

1. Forfeited Estate Papers. Coigach (3).

establish a fishery at Old Dornie on similar lines.¹ Neither scheme led to any result but they are of some interest as evidence that Lochbroom was considered potentially suitable for a fishing station.

Thus until 1776 the various schemes for the development of Coigach had ended in failure. The Commissioners continued to administer the Estate but owing to lack of funds could not again support a large scale undertaking in Manufactures or Fisheries.

It fell to private enterprise to open the way to success in Lochbroom. John Woodhouse of Liverpool had played a large part in setting up the fishing industry in the Isle of Man and organising trade from there with the Mediterranean. In March 1775 he applied through a friend to the Commissioners for the Forfeited Estates for land for a similar undertaking in the Highlands and suggested that Isle Martin appeared to be a suitable place. The Commissioners agreed to grant him a 41 years lease of the Island (the longest they had power to grant) with facilities for obtaining peat and limestone at Ullapool.² By July Woodhouse had visited Isle Martin and chosen ten acres to the south east of the Island on which to build his station which rose so quickly that in a year he claimed to have spent £3,500 on buildings, vessels, salt and casks.

Woodhouse soon found that it was impossible to trade from Isle Martin with no Customs House nearer than Stornoway. He therefore applied to the Commissioners of Customs who agreed to establish a branch of the Fort William House at Isle Martin.³ A Collector and a

1. Forfeited Estate Papers. Coigach (3).
2. Forfeited Estate Papers. Cromarty No.14.
3. P.R.O. Treasury T 17/27 p.323.

Surveyor were appointed who continued to work under Fort William until 1789 when the staff at Isle Martin was increased to extend its authority.¹

The Collector and Surveyor were to be provided with land by the Commissioners for the Forfeited Estates and were accommodated on the mainland at Ullapool. The farm of Ullapool had been divided among the soldiers but they made nothing of it and by 1773 it had been given to the Factor together with "a good house built with stone and lime, three stories high and covered with slate."² Next year the Factor resigned and his successor let the farm to his brother who died in 1776. Serjeant John Mackenzie had established himself on Isle Martin from whence he was ejected in 1776 in favour of Woodhouse.³ He applied to the Commissioners for the farm of Ullapool and was granted about two thirds of the land. The other third, together with the "good house" was leased to the Customs officials and this arrangement remained in force until the arrival of the British Fisheries Society twelve years later.

After the advent of the Customs officials Woodhouse increased his business on Isle Martin very quickly. His chief aim was to cure red herrings on the Yarmouth method for which he built a large shed in which David Loch, who visited Isle Martin in 1778, estimated that he could cure 1,000 barrels at a time. Loch wrote of the herrings,⁴ "As I am ever open to conviction, I caused some to be broiled for dinner;

1. Argyll III p.209.

2. Forfeited Estate Papers. Cromarty (14).

3. Forfeited Estate Papers. Coigach (4).

4. David Loch. Essays on Trade Vol. II p.186.

and I declare I never tasted any that pleased my palate so well. An epicure, fond of this dish, would think it no trouble to make a journey of 50 or 100 miles to eat the red herrings cured at this place." The method of curing was to salt the fish for 30 hours, split them through the mouth and hang them on wooden spits four feet long over a fire for 14 to 21 days. The supplies of wood, generally oak, were sent as ballast from Liverpool where it was bought cheap as ship yard refuse. The fish was bought from local boatmen at the rate of 5/6 per barrel, and Woodhouse told the Directors that he would be ready to purchase from the Society's settlers at the same price. When cured the fish was shipped to London, Hull and Liverpool as well as to the Mediterranean and all parts of Europe.

So by 1787 when the Directors visited Isle Martin they found a Customs House and a flourishing organisation which provided a powerful argument in favour of Lochbroom over Loch Ewe. Although the Directors had been anxious to keep away from Stornoway, Woodhouse's establishment was in no way a village to rival Ullapool, but rather a curing station to employ the Society's settlers and they welcomed its presence.

Another market for fish was open to settlers at Lochbroom in a curing station at Tanera, another island in the loch. This was started in 1784 by Roderick Morrison who was described by the Factor of Coigach in January 1784 as "a sober, pushing Man" holding an extensive farm in the Laigh of Lochbroom.¹ He was also described as having property at Stornoway and the Statistical Account speaks of Mr. Morrison of Stornoway "a man of extensive merchantile talents".² Morrison went

1. Forfeited Estate Papers. Cromarty (14).

2. Stat. Account. Lochbroom. Vol.X. 465.

into partnership with Mr. John Mackenzie, a cousin of Kenneth Mackenzie of Torridon, who had a business in Bishopsgate Street, London. In answer to the circular letter of 1787 Mackenzie described the progress of their establishment up to that year. They erected "Warehouses for salt, casks, nets etc. and five complete houses for smoaking red herrings, a pier where five vessels may unload at the same time".¹

Morrison built himself a house and Mactavish reported in 1787 that "The Directors saw from 16 to 18 acres of land under different crops of potatoes, bear and oats, which untill within these last four years was in a state of nature and appeared to me who had seen it before to be as worthless as any of the land in that country."²

A study of the trading methods of Mackenzie and Morrison was given by the former as evidence to the Parliamentary Committee in 1798 but referred to the period before 1790. The firm owned six decked vessels and about thirty boats. Mackenzie said, "Our great object was to purchase the herrings from the natives, having laid in annually a great stock of salt, casks, nets and meal, all of which except the meal were generally brought from Greenock and sometimes from Leith; the meal came from Caithness and the eastern coast of Ross-shire; the casks and nets from Greenock were generally sent in vessels going to the Baltic at 6d or 8d freight per barrel with nets in them; the salt chiefly from Liverpool and Lisbon and sometimes from Leith, which was generally brought by our own vessels on return from the markets of Lisbon and Leith, but the salt from Liverpool was brought in our own

1. Extracts. p.10.
2. Argyll I p.110.

fishing vessels sent on purpose before the fishing season commenced. Our chief object was to supply the West India merchants in London with White Herrings and the home market in London with Red Herrings; we found that the fish caught in Great Britain was never equal to the demand for the West India market."¹

The station at Tanera was in process of being established on these lines in 1787 and provided not only a market but an example for the Society. The Directors thus found two new establishments doing very well. The failure of the earlier attempts to manufacture linen and make sailors into fishermen in no way discouraged them for they were explained by the mistakes made by the authorities, by the Board of Manufactures in keeping no supervision on the expenditure of their money and by the Commissioners for the Forfeited Estates in giving away their equipment. The fact that Lochbroom had been chosen repeatedly for such experiments convinced the Directors that the fishing there must be the best in the western Highlands, which was corroborated by local opinion.

Lochbroom having thus been preferred over Loch Ewe, there remained only to choose the particular site for the village. Three sites were inspected, one at the head of the loch which proved to have no good natural harbour, and another on the south bank which was thought to have too little flat land to accommodate the village and both were rejected.² But at Ullapool nearly all conditions seemed favourable.

-
1. Reports X p.235a.
 2. Beaufoy. Speech p.31-2.

There was one objection to Ullapool mentioned by several of the Directors including Sir Adam Fergusson and Hawkins Browne; its distance from the open sea.¹ This became a more serious matter when deep sea fishing was the rule but in 1787 busses caught their fish as far as the head of the loch some eight miles beyond Ullapool. In order to meet the views of some of the Directors and provide a base nearer the sea, especially near the cod bank which stretched north and south along the coast, the Society bought the Island of Ristol at the mouth of Lochbroom. This had a good natural harbour and the Directors determined to build curing and drying sheds on the island to save the bussmen putting in to Ullapool.² This removed the only real objection to the site at Ullapool and satisfied the critics of 1787.

Beaufoy in his speech to the Society in March 1788 gave his London audience a picture of Ullapool as it appeared to him. Quoting from his journal of the tour made during the previous summer he said that he had ridden from Dingwall along a road "which could not be called bad" to Lochbroom, "a beautiful sheet of water in length about 16 miles and in width from 1 to 6. Of the mountains which rise from its banks, one is covered for several miles with wood, others are clothed with a mixture of grass and heath; while others, of a most stupendous elevation are craggy and desolate, the resort of eagles."³ Beaufoy and his surveyor, Aitken, inspected the other sites and proceeded to the farm of Ullapool,⁴ "which is situated on the north east

-
1. Kilkerran MSS. Memorandum. Argyll I p.343.
 2. Beaufoy. Speech p.65.
 3. Ibid. p.30.
 4. Ibid. p.33.

shore of Lochbroom, at the distance of about eight miles from the head of the water and of eight or nine miles from the open sea" and "constitutes a peninsula which forms a beautiful plain and stretches from the bottom of the hill far into the lake. This plain consisting of about a hundred and fifty English acres of good or improveable ground rises from thirty or forty feet above the level of the water and exhibits on three of its sides a terrace of a mile and a half which from the grandeur of the surrounding scenes is perhaps the finest in Britain. From the foot of the terrace to the limit of the highest tide, the beach spreads to the distance of twenty to forty yards; and affords together with an advantageous site for warehouses, the convenience of a pebbly surface for drying the nets of the fishermen. On the terrace, at the distance of thirty or forty feet from the edge, the town should be built with houses towards the loch, and with their several gardens and potatoe grounds behind."

"On the north east of the peninsula is a high hill of at least a thousand acres, which not only secures the peninsula from the eastern blasts and gives it a westerly exposure, but contains inexhaustible stores both of peat and lime. On the north a salmon stream, on which a corn mill is already built, discharges itself into the loch at a small distance from the terrace.

"The harbour, which is capable of holding the largest fleet and the depth of which is from twelve to twenty fathoms, lies upon the south of the peninsula, and is so secure that no vessel within it has ever been known to drive from her anchorage. It is easy of access; and the tide, which rises from fourteen to twenty feet, facilitates

during its ebb especially in calms and contrary winds, the departure of vessels."

On hearing this description of their new settlement it was with complete confidence that the shareholders endorsed the choice of the Directors, and amid almost universal approval the British Fisheries Society negotiated the purchase of Ullapool and the Island of Ristol from Lord Macleod¹ and started to plan the new village and fishing station.

1. Part.Reg.Sasines. Ross. 17. 296.

CHAPTER IV

The Building of Ullapool. 1788-1790

As early as the 17th March 1788, only two weeks after the purchase of the land, the Society received an inquiry from a would-be settler at Ullapool, Mr. Robert Melville. This young man was the nephew of Charles and Robert Fall who owned a large fishery and commercial business in Dunbar.¹ Melville had been a partner in the firm and had organised a branch of the business carried on in Caithness and Sutherland. The firm went bankrupt in 1786, a misfortune which happened "neither from Dissipation, extravagance nor improper lines of trade, but solely by the most cruel losses in the corn trade by the failure of others," and Melville found himself looking for a job.²

On 10th March 1788 he wrote to Sir John Sinclair whom he had met in Caithness, that although "To a person of my Age and description the East or West Indies is the general refuge to recover their affairs, I have always been very much attached to my own country whose interests I have often consulted and I yet hope I may be able to be serviceable both to the publick and myself in Scotland."³ Thinking that the British Fisheries Society would need an experienced man of business to establish the station at Ullapool, he told Sir John Sinclair that he would be willing to make an offer to erect public buildings there and later to take charge of the trade and fishery.

Meanwhile his uncle had been using his influence to help Melville, for later in March George Dempster wrote to Sir Adam Fergusson,

-
1. Fergusson. Letters of George Dempster p.186 note 1.
 2. Argyll IV 29.
 3. Ibid.

"I have a letter from Mr. Fall on the subject of his nephews intention of settling at Ullapool." Dempster considered this to be "a fortunate circumstance for the Society" and after an interview with Melville described him as "a settler of great skill in the fisheries and one who will be supported with considerable capital by his friends."¹

Sir John had forwarded Melville's letter to the Directors of the British Fisheries Society. They ordered the Secretary to send Melville a copy of the Act of Incorporation showing how their expenditure was confined "to the purchase and disposal of lands and erection of buildings." He was invited to draw up a detailed statement of his terms for building and his proposals for a fishery.² Apparently Melville still failed to understand the legal position of the Society and asked Dempster to explain this and help him to draw up a suitable plan.³

The results of this joint effort were sent to the Directors on 22nd March and 12th April. As a basis to his scheme of development Melville wrote, "I think it most indispensable necessary to carry with me proper Artists so as by means of these I might by apprenticeing the youth instruct them properly in the various lines of business immediately connected with the scheme - they may be called properly masters." He enumerated boatbuilders, ropemakers, a net worker, blacksmith, coopers, fishcurers and "several of the most industrious and most experienced fishermen." The building plan therefore included ten small houses

-
1. Fergusson. Letters of George Dempster p.186.
 2. B.F.S. Letters I p.24.
 3. Fergusson. Letters of George Dempster p.189-90.

for these Artists in addition to a house for himself and several public stores and curing sheds.¹

The Directors considered these proposals carefully and wrote to Melville that they would like to discuss the matter with him. On 22nd April they met as usual and were informed that "Mr. Melville of Dunbar attended below". The contract was gone over in detail and the plans of the buildings submitted for approval to the well known architect Mr. Robert Mylne.² After making inquiries in Edinburgh as to the "circumstances of Melville's situation with respect to Messrs. Fall of Dunbar", and finding the answer satisfactory, the Directors entered into contract with Melville early in May 1788.

The final terms of the contract were only slightly altered from Melville's original proposal.³ He undertook to erect for the Society, first a house for himself to cost £100; second, a shed for curing white herring, for £80; third, a smoking house for red herring, at £290; fourth, ten houses for his Artists, for a total sum of £200; fifth and sixth, a shed for mending nets with tradesmen's shops behind, for £80, and a storehouse for salt and casks at about £100, making a total expenditure of £850. The Society was to lease these buildings to Melville at an annual rent of $7\frac{1}{2}\%$ of their value on condition that he became a settler at Ullapool, that he kept the buildings in repair and that he found surety for the fulfilment of his part in the agreement.

Meanwhile the Society had been considering plans for further building at Ullapool. Messrs. Mackenzie and Morrison, the owners of

-
1. Argyll IV 31.
 2. Argyll III 37.
 3. Argyll IV 31. Copy Contract Kilkerran MSS.

the fishing station at Tanera, in their reply to the Circular letter of 1787 had suggested that their own experience in building would qualify them for a contract but they added "We ask no favour, our claim to it will rest on the reasonableness of our proposals."¹ Therefore when the British Fisheries Society advertised for contracts in the spring of 1788, Morrison forwarded proposals for building a pier, warehouse and inn at Ullapool for a total cost of £1063. The Directors found the price "not unreasonable" and wrote to Morrison for further details at the same time consulting with his partner Mr. Mackenzie in London.²

On 15th April without waiting to study Morrison's second plan the Directors resolved "that in the mean time he (Morrison) do take measures for providing materials in such manner as if a contract had been actually entered into on the terms he has offered to undertake the buildings."³ The Society had much to learn in the matter of contracts for, after this arrangement had been made, Morrison's plans were submitted to Mr. Robert Mylne who redesigned one wing of the inn and made considerable alterations to the warehouse. Morrison had then to persuade the Society to allow him more money to carry out Mylne's elaborate plans. But by the time this point had been reached, work had already started at Ullapool and the final arrangements with Morrison were made by the Society's representative in Wester Ross.⁴

When Melville had gone to make his preparations the Directors turned to discuss the best method by which "a society of noblemen and

-
1. Extracts p.13.
 2. Argyll IV 37.
 3. Argyll III 33.
 4. Argyll I 278.

gentlemen meeting in London" could supervise building operations six hundred miles away. They decided that "nothing but an ocular inspection of the place by a judicious and experienced person can secure a proper commencement"¹ and it remained to find someone suitable. Lord Gower, George Dempster and Francis Humberstone Mackenzie all owned houses within reach of Ullapool but they spent too much time in London especially during the early summer which was the best time for building. It was therefore agreed to ask help from a private member of the Society and Donald Macleod of Geanies, Advocate and Sheriff of Ross-shire, was suggested.² Geanies was a friend of Sir Adam Fergusson and known to several other Directors, and though he lived near Tain he rented the farm of Rhidorrach only eight miles from Ullapool. The Secretary was ordered to write asking him "to aid the Society with sound advice and useful co-operation" in visiting the settlement and reporting progress to London.¹ In reply Geanies said that he would gladly be of use to the Society but could only promise to make two visits a year, one in May and one in September when his duties took him to Coigach.³ The Directors agreed that this would be enough as they would soon appoint a resident Agent at Ullapool. By the end of May the Secretary had provided Geanies with ten pages of extracts on all the proceedings of the Society relating to Ullapool, copies of Melville's contract and Morrison's proposals and the survey made by David Aitken in 1787 for Beaufof, and Geanies was ready to begin the series of reports through which we can follow the early history of the settlement.

-
1. B.F.S. Letters I 41.
 2. Argyll III 41.
 3. Argyll IV 74.

Meanwhile the two Contractors had been busy making their preparations. Morrison reported on 3rd June that he had collected enough material and workmen and was ready to begin building when the Directors required.¹ Melville had been equally expeditious and the customs authorities recorded that the sloop Gilmerton loaded for Isle Martin sailed out of the harbour of Dunbar with a fair wind at 2 a.m. on 5th June. On the previous day the cargo had been listed and included 8,000 bricks and tiles (another shipload of these was dispatched from Aberdeen); 1,967 pieces of fir timber; 20 cartloads of lime; six cartloads of household furniture and wearing apparel; two pairs of cart wheels; one cart and one plough. Besides this equipment Melville told the Secretary that the Gilmerton carried 55 people. The working party consisted of seven masons, two joiners, a slater, a blacksmith, a heckler, a netmaker, a fisherman, a cooper and a fishcurer, the remainder of the 55 being their wives and children.²

This party, which was increased by a number of local masons from Dingwall, reached Ullapool on 13th June³ while Melville and his partner James Miller travelled by land and arrived the same day.

On 30th June 1788 Macleod of Geanies arrived on his first visit to Ullapool and found that "Mr. Melville had proceeded much further than he could have expected from the sixteenth day of his arrival."⁴ The land no longer remained to the Collector of Customs and Serjeant John Mackenzie to grow crops and rear cattle, but had begun to develop

-
1. Argyll IV 70.
 2. Ibid. 63.
 3. Ibid. 68.
 4. Argyll I 218.

into a settlement. Geanies reported that Aitken had reached Ullapool on 14th June and that he and Melville "immediately proceeded to mark off the situations of the buildings to be erected this season, and set Masons to work on them, the lines for the streets of the town were traced out agreeable to the plan which Mr. Aitken had formerly transmitted to the Society." The buildings started were the Cooper's and Boatbuilder's shops and the net-drying shed which had reached a height of five feet all round and in some places very much higher. Macleod sent also for Morrison to consult him as to the Pier and Warehouse that he had undertaken ^{which} should be planned in conjunction with Melville's public works. The arrival of Morrison from Tanera, about ten miles away, produced the first clash in the history of Ullapool for the two Contractors failed to agree about the position of the Pier. Morrison refused to build it in the place that Aitken had planned saying, correctly as it appeared later, that the current would drive the shingle against the Pier, while Melville said that Morrison's site, several hundred yards up the loch, would be too far from the village. After reporting the arguments of both parties Geanies decided to leave the building of the Pier until the following year as Melville did not consider it necessary to his trade for one season.

The next report on the progress of Ullapool was dated 9th August after another visit by Geanies.¹ The great shed and the workshops were by then completed and Morrison's Inn was rising quickly under the hands of more than forty Masons. Geanies considered that the stonework was

1. Argyll I 238.

excellent but the climate was unsuitable for the tile roof which Melville proposed for his houses.

The year's building operations were finished when George Dempster visited Ullapool in the Autumn of 1788.¹ The town had been traced out with a plough and the buildings had risen so fast that Melville was confident that another season would finish his contract. Morrison, though he had not begun his warehouse, was well ahead with the Inn. Dempster had been in favour of speed in the development of the settlements and had written to Sir Adam Fergusson "Though I am not for forcing our towns in hot beds yet I think a gentle application of heat might be applied with great success to the walls, especially when the plant is only beginning to sprout in a cold climate and bleak country."² On his return from Ullapool Dempster told the Directors that he was very satisfied with the progress made in one season.

During the winter of 1788-9 the Directors discussed what had been done and made plans for the work to be undertaken during the summer. After hearing the reports of Dempster and Geanies they congratulated Melville on his efforts³ and Geanies on his application to the Society's business.⁴ In January a blow was dealt to the new settlement for, owing to ill-health, Morrison asked to be released from his contract. After some weeks of uncertainty he agreed to finish the Inn while Geanies was to find a new Contractor for the warehouse. He chose William Cowie, a builder and carpenter from Tain of whom he spoke

1. Argyll III 151-2.

2. Fergusson. Letters of George Dempster p.191.

3. Argyll III 155.

4. Ibid. 177.

highly. Melville visited London in the spring of 1789 and was present at several of the Directors' meetings when he was given an additional contract to build "a suitable schoolhouse to answer occasionally for a Chappel (sic) at Ullapool" and a house for the Schoolmaster who was to be appointed by the S.P.C.K.¹

As far as the erection of buildings was concerned, the Directors had reason to be satisfied with the progress of Ullapool, Dempster wrote of it, "If it does not rise to the sound of the lyre, it springs very fast to that of the bagpipe."²

Early in 1789 the Directors started to consider the problem of attracting settlers to Ullapool. The Secretary wrote to Geanies "The operations at Ullapool have been hitherto principally directed to the making a commencement through Mr. Melville. But the Directors will very soon begin to attend to their principal object at that place - the making of it an Asylum for those of the country people who wish to maintain themselves by labour and industry in the Fisheries." He added "We are told that the common people imagine the settlement is intended for the introduction and accommodation of Lowlanders, and the discouragement of the Natives - this would be a fatal mistake if suffered to prevail."³

Nearly every answer to the Circular letter had emphasised the difficulty of persuading the local population to come into villages. The prospects offered by emigration to America were of greater appeal than the less spectacular benefits of a scheme of development at home.

-
1. Argyll III 192.
 2. Fergusson. Letters of George Dempster p.194.
 3. B.F.S. Letters I p.90.

Captain Hamilton, of the Revenue Cutter Prince Henry, warned that "Villages will never answer ... without prior and proper steps being taken to lead these people to their own interest as well as the publics."¹

The Society received a bewildering amount of advice as to what was the real interest of the people. Knox and Anderson had argued that the standard of living in the Highlands would not be raised until a market for fish and agricultural produce could be established in the north west, and that this market would be set up by collecting a few families into a village. This seemed valid reasoning in England but the northern landowners exposed its weakness. The Highlander had always been self supporting, growing his own oats, catching his own fish and supplying his own clothing and household goods, and this economy was in his nature rather than the more civilised one of earning money at a single trade to pay for the other necessities. Thus to move a family into a village involved a complete change in its way of life. Many landowners felt that conditions were already making this change necessary, and, while warning the Society of the difficulties, encouraged the Directors to make the attempt. The Directors considered all the advice and decided to combine as far as possible the communal advantages of a good harbour, a market for fish and an improved supply of equipment, salt and casks with something of the crofter's independence in cultivating his own land for food.

The question of land tenure at the settlements was one of the most important decided by the Society in 1789. One of the first

1. Extracts p.64.

principles of the Directors was that settlers should be given the longest possible leases so that their land might be regarded as heritable property. But it was found impossible to grant long leases for cultivation of land at once because although the settlements were planned in detail, the Society did not know how many lots or which particular lots would be claimed for building. Therefore in the first instance, in case changes should have to be made, leases of five years only were granted which should be replaced by feu charters.

The next problem was how much land should be granted to each settler. This same question had been before the Commissioners for the Forfeited Estates in 1763 and has been discussed at intervals ever since without reaching any conclusion even in the present day. On the one hand the Directors realised that, in the words of Hugh Rose of Nigg, "the herring is a shifting ambulatory fish"¹ and that the settlers must be given an opportunity to grow their own food, for in bad seasons they would be unable to afford to buy it. On the other hand the Highlander preferred to earn his livelihood from his own plot of land and his standard of living was so low that he would support himself without fishing if he were given too much ground. So the Society had to decide the exact amount of land which would produce some, but not all, the food for a crofting family.

The resulting regulations for letting out land at Ullapool were drawn up by George Dempster and Neil Malcolm, Directors, in consultation with Geanies, Maxwell the Society's Agent at Tobermory, and Robert Fraser, a member of the Society often sent to make special reports for

1. Extracts p.21.

the Directors.¹ The earliest version was given in a speech by Dempster to the Society and printed in June 1789, a later version differing only slightly appeared in a Manifesto printed on 17th May 1790² and this was followed by the Society's Agent at Ullapool and was adapted for use at Tobermory and Lochbay.

The land was classified into three types at different values. The first comprised the whole of the town as planned by David Aitken. This was divided into small lots just large enough for a house and a kail yard or garden, and could be leased for 99 years, those nearest the harbour at the rate of £5 per acre and those in other streets at £2.2 per acre. Secondly every settler with one of these town lots was entitled to half an acre of arable land. This was ground that had been cultivated by the farm of Ullapool and lay near the new town ready to be planted with potatoes, bear and oats. The tenants might lease this for five years only (in case it should later be needed for building) at a rate of ten shillings an acre. Thirdly, each tenant might lease for ten years up to five acres of uncultivated land at the rate of one shilling an acre with an undertaking by the Society to repay at the end of the ten years the expense of certain enclosures or improvements. Thus each settler had enough land to produce a part but not the whole of his food.

There remained those parts of the farm of Ullapool that were incapable of raising any crops and these also were to be available to the villagers. "Every settler whilst he lives on the Lot, will have a

1. Argyll III 199.

2. B.F.S. Miscellaneous papers. MSS Regulations.

right to dig peat for his own use in any of the Societys mosses, and also to pasture two cows in Summer on the Societys Muir lands for which he shall be subject to the payment of not more than one shilling per annum for each cow during the first five years. He will likewise have a right to dig and carry away Stone, Limestone and Shelly sand gratis for his own use, subject to restriction for prevention of injuries to the Quarries and Mosses."

Thus the Society's land was divided among the settlers in a way which it was hoped would avoid the two extremes of too little land and no food, or too much land and no fishing.

After settling the distribution of land the Directors began to consider building regulations. As we have seen the contracts for public buildings were already placed and many of the buildings were under construction. Melville had undertaken to put up houses for his own workers but no provision had been made for possible settlers. Dempster recommended that the Society should build some small houses, perhaps six, to be sold by auction to the incoming tenants.¹ This was done by Melville at the Society's expense, but the Directors decided that in the ordinary course the settlers should build their own houses thus avoiding the error of previous experiments by giving houses away or wasting money on houses never to be occupied.

The privately built houses were to conform to the Society's regulations, and were to be built quickly for one rule laid down that if a tenant had not begun to build within eighteen months of taking his lease, then the Society was free to let the ground to someone else.

1. Argyll III p.151-2.

It was also provided that "Each lot (a maximum of 60 feet along the street) shall have a dwelling house, shops or warehouse built upon it along the whole line fronting the street, in which line no Stable Byre or Outhouse or Peatstack shall be erected." If the whole line was not built within 15 years then the tenant must give up that part still free. The rest of the lot was to be used as a garden which stretched up to the next street.¹

Although the Society refused to build houses for settlers, a loan of money at legal interest could be obtained from them on the security of the house. This loan must not exceed fifty per cent of the total value of the house and could not be obtained by the settler until the house was built and certified by the Society's Agent as habitable. It must be repaid within ten years either at once or in instalments. A final rule prevented the Society from spending more than £500 in this way until the results of the experiment were known, A number of settlers took advantage of a loan which in spite of its limitations meant that they could risk all their capital to build a house in the certainty of some return from the Society to help them over the first critical years.¹

Many of the local proprietors urged the Society to offer as encouragement free boats or equipment either as gifts or on loan. It was pointed out that settlers who were too poor to supply themselves with these things would be no asset in a fishing village. The Act of Incorporation was framed to prevent this type of expenditure and the example of former experiments, especially that of the Board of

1. B.F.S. Miscellaneous papers. Regulations.

Forfeited Estates, drove the lesson home to the Directors. They therefore contracted with merchants to provide these things, first Melville and then others. The merchants were free to arrange terms as they liked, either in money or by taking up part of the catch of herring, while the Society insisted that prices should be on the lowest level, unaffected by the scarcity of equipment at Ullapool. Melville asked for no financial aid from the Society for several years but in 1792 an arrangement was made with another merchant by which the Society lent him a small sum of money to buy his stock, on condition that the risk of profit or loss was borne by the merchant only.¹ The point was emphasised when a firm from Whitby attempted to charge the Society for payment of goods bought by Melville. The Secretary wrote that Melville "has on his own account, not for the Society carried on a trade in Fish and other Articles. The Society never authorised him to buy the articles you mention or any other articles whatever on their account."² Nevertheless the Society gave him certain concessions in the matter of rents on condition that he either supplied the settlers on reasonable terms or employed them to fish from his boats. In this way the Society arranged for the provision of the nets, sails, barrels, salt and boats without risk of losses from neglect of equipment or from settlers absconding with their boats.

In order to supervise their affairs on the spot the Directors decided to appoint a permanent Agent or Factor for each of the Society's establishments. During the building of Ullapool Geanies' two visits a

1. B.F.S. Letters II 102.

2. Ibid. 160.

year had been sufficient but when settlers began to arrive it became necessary to have a representative of the Society resident in the village. The Directors wrote to Seaforth in March 1789 asking him, "from his particular acquaintance with the Western Coast of Scotland" to recommend "the person best qualified among the inhabitants of that coast to discharge with satisfaction to the Directors the office of their Agent at Ullapool."¹ Two months later the Secretary asked Geanies whether William Mackenzie "recommended by Seaforth, is still willing to become Agent at Ullapool at something, I believe, about £40 a year and whether you think him a fit person." He added that Mackenzie "was I believe a Clerk at the Gaerloch fishery."²

Mackenzie was approved by Geanies and on 26th June 1789 the Directors instructed him to proceed to Ullapool immediately to take up his new duties. These were explained in a letter from the Secretary dated 7th July³ and again two years later to a new Agent at Lochbay.⁴ The Agent was to act as Factor for the Society. "Being upon the Ground a principal part of your duty will be to lot out the land" according to the Society's regulations. The collection of rents and care of the Society's buildings were intrusted to the Agent, as also the improvement of land and the supervision of the Society's tenants, particularly those under contract. The variety of the Agent's duties may be illustrated from the instructions he received from the Secretary in the course of one month in 1792.⁵ He was directed to survey all the

-
1. B.F.S. Letters I p.97.
 2. Ibid. p.106.
 3. Ibid. p.121.
 4. Ibid. p.227.
 5. B.F.S. Letters II p.82-92.

ground covered with birch with a view to a fir plantation; to collect rents overdue on Melville's buildings; to have the windows of the Inn painted and the walls of the Church harled; to find a suitable tenant for the fishing station on the Island of Ristol; to begin to make a road from the village to the lime quarry and to report on a Memorandum on the means of supplying the villagers with salt. Perhaps it is not surprising that Mackenzie's answer to all this exceeded the limit of a two ounce Frank and cost the Society 9/9 in postage.¹

There was another side to the work of the Agent which had to be combined with the practical work of the settlement and which was equally important in so scattered an organisation as the British Fisheries Society. The Agent was instructed to send in annual reports to the Directors so that they could administer the settlements from London. These reports caused much trouble to Mackenzie, who, though an excellent practical Agent, was told by the Secretary after two years' work that the Directors had received "a very poor impression of you as a pen and ink man".² The reports were expected to be detailed accounts of every aspect of life at the settlements and in 1804 a list of 23 questions was sent to the Agents to give them an idea of the scope of their activities; questions covering houses, rents, vessels, manufactures, trade, agriculture, animals, health, education, morals, roads and emigration.³ In addition to these full scale annual reports the Agent must "answer all letters from the Society in a plain clear full manner,

-
1. B.F.S. Letters II 90.
 2. Ibid. 31.
 3. B.F.S. Letters IV 34.

so as to leave no doubt or uncertainty upon any point whatever of their correspondence."¹

As local representative the Agent was expected to contribute to the Directors' knowledge of conditions in the Western Highlands. "The Society will be much pleased that you suggest as many measures as possible to forward the end you have in view."² The Secretary warned an Agent, "Do not imagine it is expected that in doing this everything you will recommend will be infallible." On another occasion the Secretary advised, "Not only your ideas will be acceptable but likewise those of every other person so far as you can collect them.... The Directors will also be desirous to hear the general notions of the country upon their proceedings, tho' these notions may be sometimes absurd and groundless."²

A third, and to Mackenzie the most difficult, part of an Agent's duties was to send the Directors an annual statement of the accounts of the village, the rents collected and the money he himself had expended. The Secretary explained, "It is by no means necessary to keep your Accounts in a fine nice manner as most Merchants and professed Accountants do; but it is absolutely necessary to keep them in a clear distinct intelligible manner, without mixing various things together; and without stating them in too general a manner, so as to leave a Person who will look over them in doubt and uncertainty!"³ Although this sounded simple enough, Mackenzie's efforts failed to please the Directors, among whom, as the Secretary cruelly reminded him, were

-
1. B.F.S. Letters I p.227.
 2. Ibid. p.121.
 3. B.F.S. Letters II p.31.

several trained Accountants. In 1792 the Society's permanent Auditor sent the Agents detailed instructions and a specimen copy of a balance sheet,¹ but it seemed beyond Mackenzie and in June 1794 a second Agent was appointed in Ullapool to take over the paper work.²

Supervision, reports, accounts formed the basis of the Agent's duties but there was added an even more difficult task. He was expected to represent to the native population, the true objects of the Society in the Highlands. "The great object of the Society," wrote the Secretary, "being, for I cannot repeat it too often, to accommodate the lower class; and it is with a view to promote the means of industry for them that settlers of a higher class such as Mr. Melville are and will be encouraged."³ John Mackenzie, the Secretary, visited Ullapool himself in the autumn of 1789 and found things hardly to his liking. In a letter to Geanies he described the situation and his attempt to improve it. "Mr. Melvill carried on everything at Ullapool so much in the style of sole master of the place, that the Agent was somewhat confounded and did not know whether he ought to summon courage to oppose the little Emperor of Ullapool." In order to give the Agent confidence the Secretary took what he described as "freedoms" with Melville's importance in the presence of the Agent and settlers, "Not that I found he had made any bad use worth mention of his sway; but that it was intolerable to see the Societys meaning so completely misunderstood, which I laboured to make them comprehend was not to set up new Masters in addition to the old ones over the people of the Country

-
1. B.F.S. Miscellaneous Box 1.
 2. B.F.S. Letters III 11.
 3. B.F.S. Letters I 121.

but to find an Asylum for them where everybody might be his own sole Master, providing he worked honestly for his daily bread. This doctrine I crammed and inculcated into our Agent with all my force, and made him understand that it was a principal part of his duty to make it clearly and fully understood in the Country."¹

The Agent's duties thus described, included the practical direction of the settlement, the representation of the Society to the people and a very considerable correspondence with the Secretary. In a later chapter this method of organisation will be discussed with reference particularly to the failure of the Society to employ Agents capable of such varied and responsible work.

While the Agent was settling down in Ullapool and gradually learning his duties, Melville, as we have seen, had already begun to exert his influence in the neighbourhood. He quickly earned himself a bad reputation in Lochbroom. James Roy, a temporary Agent at Lochbay, wrote "Mr. Melvill may be a good man but he is not much obliged to fame in the neighbourhood of Ullapool."² His overbearing behaviour in Wester Ross was forgiven in view of his great industry but soon he began to take the same attitude to the Society in London. The first trouble arose over the method by which the Society paid their Contractors. Melville had been advanced a small sum of money to help him to make a start. Thereafter he obtained periodically a certificate from Macleod of Geanies whenever a certain amount of building had been done. This certificate was sent to London and after the Directors

1. B.F.S. Letters I p.146.
2. B.F.S. Papers: Telford I p.69.

had passed it an order was sent to the Society's Banks in Scotland authorising payment to be made to Melville in Inverness or Dingwall. This was a cumbersome system, made more complicated by a London Company banking in Scotland. Melville complained bitterly of delays and the Secretary confessed to the Duke of Argyll that he himself had doubts about the system although the Directors had insisted upon it.¹ An arrangement was made in later years by which the Secretary was allowed to keep sufficient sums in London to honour these certificates direct.

Although Melville can hardly be blamed for complaining of the difficulties of this type of payment, the tone of his letters showed him to be temperamental and easily offended. He told the Secretary "This matter would totally upset Mr. Miller and I and what we could not by any means agree to, (sic) neither is it at all reasonable that such a trifling object as a few months interest of the small sum we have to receive should be set in competition with the credit and convenience of two young men who have embarked themselves and friends in such an adventure!"²

No sooner had a solution been made for payments by the Secretary than Melville found himself in trouble with the Society once more, this time in connexion with the Pier and Breakwater. As a result of the disagreement between Melville and Morrison over the position of the Pier, it had been decided not to build one immediately. But when Melville was in London in April 1789, he told the Directors that "the surf at present comes with such violence upon the beach as to make it

1. B.F.S. Letters I p.70.
2. Argyll I 202.

utterly unsafe and impracteable during a great part of the year for vessels of any kind to lie or land there."¹ The Directors consulted Mr. Smeaton, who advised them to build a Pier and Breakwater which he described in considerable detail. He was too busy to design it himself but one of the Directors, Mr. Call, had been a military engineer in India and undertook to draw the plans.²

The finished work was described by a Surveyor in 1793.³ The site chosen was that favoured by Aitken and Melville the previous summer, about half way along the southern shore of the point of Ullapool, immediately opposite Melville's storehouse and sheds. The Pier ran from the sloping beach out into the bay to the length of 136 feet with a breadth at the top of 20 feet 9 inches at the land end and 24 feet 6 inches at the head. The slope of the sides was 1 in 6 and at the land end the Pier stood 8 or 10 feet above high water mark. At the head the Pier measured 21 feet to the mud and gravel and stood 4 feet above the highest Spring Tides. The Breakwater was built parallel to the shore 20 feet beyond the head of the Pier, the length was 137 feet, the width about 15 feet and it stood about 1 foot higher than the Pier. All this constructed of local stone, required a great deal of work and considerable skill.

An advertisement for a contract was published but as the matter was urgent Melville agreed to undertake some preliminary work, having himself sent in proposals for a contract. After several months, no other offer having been received, Melville was formally given the contract.⁴

1. Argyll III 183.

2. Ibid. 186.

3. B.F.S. Papers. Telford IV 57-109.

4. B.F.S. Letters I 119.

The Pier was not a success. The designs were drawn without a preliminary survey of the bay at Ullapool and Melville was not a professional engineer. The result was that the foundations of the Pier, placed on too soft a surface, spread out causing the whole structure to be built much larger. This in turn meant that the Breakwater had to be placed in deeper water than was intended and even so allowed only a narrow passage for ships.¹ From the start Melville complained of the "stones rising so very unshapely, it is next to impossible to lay them and they are of so cross and stubborn a quality as baffle all labour in dressing to any shape."² The Directors feared for the progress of the Pier and asked Geanies to appoint a qualified Surveyor to report on what Melville had done. James Maclaren visited Ullapool from 25th to 28th July 1789. His report which specified only a few minor improvements was considered short and unsatisfactory but Melville continued the work.³

The Pier and Breakwater were finished early in 1790 with a very much larger cubic content than was intended. The Directors consulted Mr. Smeaton who blamed Melville for bad workmanship and recommended that the Contractor should bear the extra cost. Melville replied with truth that according to the contract a resident Surveyor was to assist him but the Society had never appointed one and the Agent, who was instructed to sign the certificates, had no technical knowledge.¹

As a result of this controversy the Directors decided that they must have another survey. Melville's work on all his buildings had

-
1. B.F.S. Papers. Telford III 86.
 2. Argyll III 489.
 3. B.F.S. Papers. Telford III 8.

been criticised and the Secretary after his recent visit had complained that "The wretched timber work done by Mr. Melville could not escape the eye."¹ On April 16th Mr. Pulteney, who had been elected a Director the previous month, reported that "he had written to Thomas Telford, a practical Surveyor lately employed at Portsmouth and now at Shrewsbury to know whether he would be willing to visit the Societys settlements as a Surveyor of the Buildings, there, and if he should, upon what conditions. And that the said Thomas Telford has returned for answer that he was willing to undertake the said survey.... and that he required for wages and expenses, one Guinea a day from the time of his setting out till his return inclusive, in full of all Demands whatever."²

This was the beginning of a connexion between Telford and the Society which lasted until the engineer's death in 1834. In 1790 he was thirty three years old having worked for two years on buildings in Portsmouth Dockyard before his friend Mr. Pulteney asked him to supervise alterations to his home at Shrewsbury and obtained for him the post of Surveyor of public works in Shropshire.³ His main work for the Society was the harbour of Pulteneytown at Wick and he planned the village of Lochbay. Tobermory and Ullapool were both laid out before he undertook to work for the Society but he advised the Agents on many points as will be seen later. Although he began by charging fees for his services, he ceased to do so for Rickman says that "While employed by the Government in the Highlands Telford decided he ought to work free for the British Fisheries Society for whom he regularly acted in

-
1. B.F.S. Letters I 147.
 2. Argyll III 467.
 3. D.N.B. Telford.

his profession." Shortly before his death in 1834¹ the Society presented Telford with a handsome silver inkstand and a silver tea service "in grateful acknowledgement of the numerous and valuable professional services gratuitously rendered during a long course of years."

Instructions for Telford's first commission from the Society were drawn up on 5th May 1790. He was to visit all three settlements and make detailed reports of the building operations, his attention being drawn to certain important points at each place. Telford reached Ullapool on 29th June but his report was written from Langholm six weeks later. The Secretary wrote to Pulteney on 31st July, "From the copies sent of letters from Melvill and the Agent at Ullapool, there is reason to look for a more favourable report concerning Melvill's works than was expected. Indeed if Telford's integrity were not so well established as it is by your experience of him, one would be apt to say from his reports that he has a kind feeling for Contractors."²

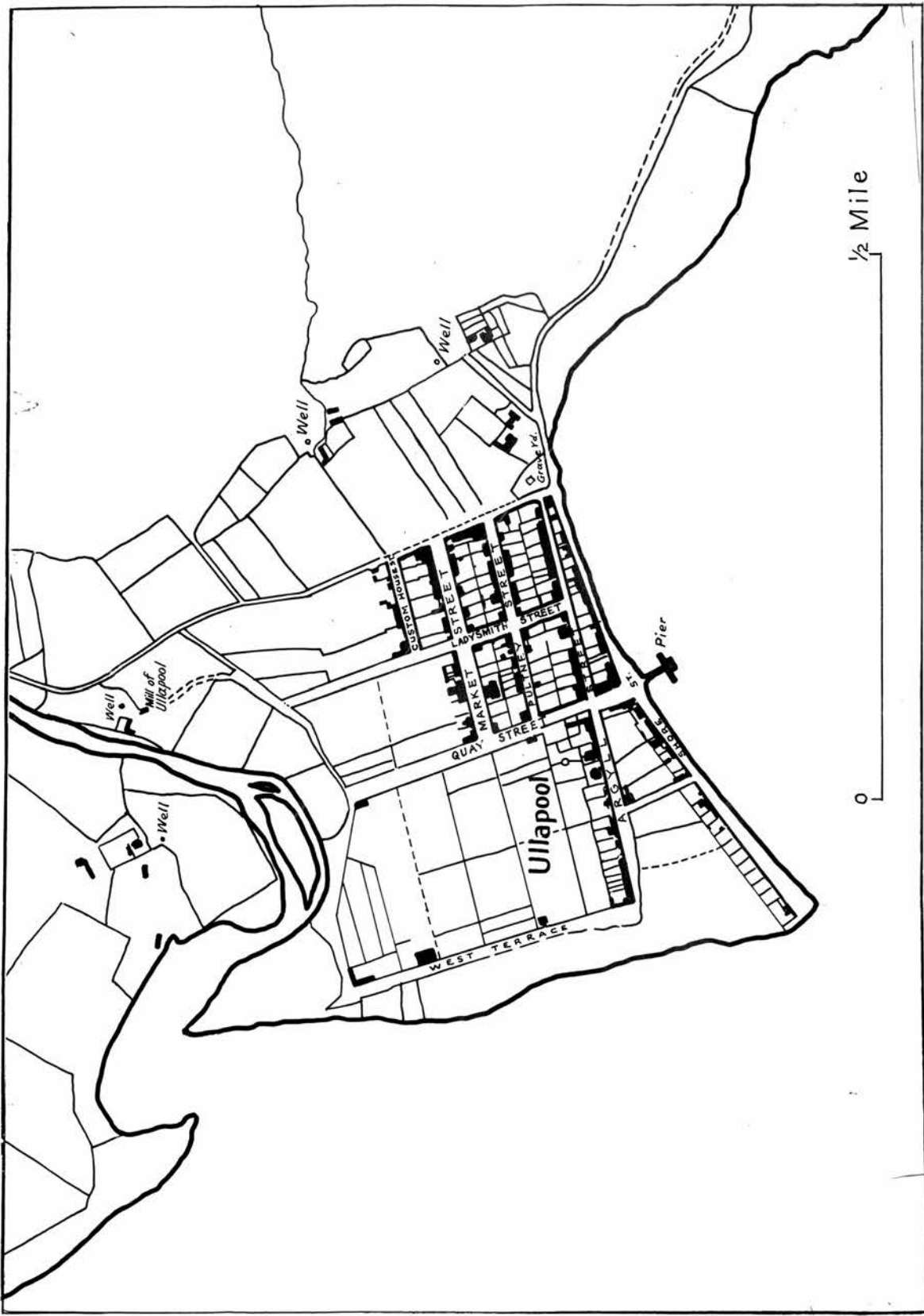
The report, when it arrived, was not so lenient with Melville. Telford complained of the woodwork of all the buildings and several other features which Melville tried to pass off as "the paltry differences of the former Contract, they are so very trivial as give me not the least concern."³ By June 1790 Melville had completed his first contract with the exception of the white herring house which was cancelled, and Telford surveyed a red herring house, ten Artificers' houses, a shed for drying nets with Boatbuilder's, Cooper's and Smith's shops

-
1. B.F.S. Minutes IV p.129.
 2. B.F.S. Letters I 182.
 3. Argyll III p.583.

behind, and a storehouse for salt and casks. Melville had almost completed his own house. Since 1788 he had also undertaken a schoolhouse and dwelling house for the Schoolmaster, a shed on the Island of Ristol and Pier and Breakwater. Telford's verdict on the latter was that Melville was justified in enlarging the Pier but not the Breakwater and therefore the Society was not liable for the total increase in cost.

Morrison's Inn was reported to be very well built but too expensive. He was an industrious honest man but a professional builder could have produced the same results for less money. Cowie's storehouse was also commended and Cowie himself considered to deserve "notice of the Society in any further operations," for he had shown himself "a very sensible and well-informed man."

Telford's survey included a section which dealt with the general lay-out of Ullapool. The plan of the village has been commended as an example for modern times and its origin is therefore of some importance. The main features of the plan were simple. The Society's land sloped from high ground towards the north shore of Loch Broom ending in a point running southwards into the loch. It was on the point that the village was built and the plan followed the lines of the shore. The five main streets ran from north east to south west parallel with the south eastern shore of the peninsula. Cutting these streets at right angles were five communicating roads which divided the village into a series of rectangles. This plan had the merit of being adaptable to any size by adding more main streets and it is not clear how many of these were originally intended. The street fronting the loch and harbour was reserved for storehouses and public buildings but the others were intended



1/2 Mile

0

for dwelling houses and the streets were placed wide enough apart to allow all gardens to be behind the houses whether they faced north or south on to the street. The communicating roads had no houses on them and ran along the sides of the settlers' gardens. The frequent wide cross roads added greatly to the sense of space which characterised the Ullapool plan.

The main features of this arrangement were laid down by David Aitken the Surveyor from Tain who accompanied Beaufoy to Ullapool in 1787.¹ Unfortunately none of his drawings have survived but it was he himself with Melville who traced out the lines of the streets in 1788.² Aitken intended that the street fronting the harbour should run parallel to the second street rather than follow the curve of the bay. But Melville built his Warehouses and his own house along the shore and when Telford reported this to the Directors he advised them to continue with this line as the ground at the point could only be used for building.³ He also recommended an increased number of cross streets to connect the main streets with the harbour and the shore. One other suggestion from the Report was that an elaborate Market place should be built at the junction of what are now Quay Street and Argyll Street. There was to be a large circle within which "there is a row of houses with arcades or stalls in the inside and shops or parlours behind which may look into the street all round." The row was to be divided so that a solid wall stood opposite each street, "which will prevent there being that through current of air which would unavoidably rush along

1. Dempster. Speech p.23.

2. Argyll I 218.

3. B.F.S. Papers. Telford I p.41.

the streets and render the Market Place intolerably cold." The Directors approved this scheme but it was never executed and markets were held in an open space behind the town.

Thus Telford's part in planning Ullapool was confined to a few improvements and alterations on Aitken's original designs. In 1790 he helped the Agent to draw out the settlers' lots which had been inaccurately measured and to place the line of each street from neighbouring landmarks but his main work was reserved for Pulteneytown.

The disagreement between Melville and the Directors was not ended by Telford's survey. In June 1791 Melville was still refusing to bear any of the extra cost of the Breakwater and the Secretary wrote "Mr. Melvill will not bear the pruning knife with patience and I suspect we shall have a law suit with him."¹ The Secretary did all he could to dissuade Melville from this. "Though I am a lawyer I would not recommend you to try what my Brethren can do for you in the affair in question."² By 1795 a solution seemed possible. "I am hopeful" wrote the Secretary, "that matters may yet be settled without your wading deep into the Muddy waters of the law, where, tho' an excellent fisher, you will hardly I think catch anything of the value of one of your own good red herrings."³ Unfortunately no agreement was reached and Melville, although the Society had ceased to press for payment and even made him a further loan, remained in debt to the Society until his death in 1812. Telford wrote of him, "His activity was intitled to great profits if he had been content with the reward of his real merit

-
1. B.F.S. Papers. Telford III p.1.
 2. B.F.S. Letters II 229.
 3. B.F.S. Letters III 77.

without aiming at extra advantages."

Melville's conduct was not the only trouble connected with the harbour at Ullapool. It will be remembered that Morrison had objected to a central position for the Pier on the ground that the current would wash the shingle against it. Mr. Smeaton and Mr. Call had overruled this but by the beginning of 1791 it became apparent that Morrison was right. The Directors asked John Rennie to go and inspect the harbour but he declined to make so long a journey while concerned with the Crinan Canal and John Bain a Surveyor of Edinburgh was commissioned instead. Bain was described by the Secretary as a clever man in his business but "rather of a peculiar temper" and the Agent was warned, "I hope he will have nothing to do with Melvill for he would be apt to ruffle him."¹

Judging from Bain's survey, which reached the Directors early in 1794, his reputation as "an odd genius" came from an intense interest in the countryside.² Unlike most travellers of the period he was attracted by mountains and not only learnt their names but described them accurately as to height, shape and geological structure while his contemporaries merely shuddered at the vast expanses of bare rock and scree. His report makes fascinating reading but the Directors did not pay a Surveyor to tell them that one of the mountains "is called locally Dundonalds night-cap and when the clouds settle upon it they forebode ill weather". On the subject of the harbour Bain recommended the addition of defenders on each side of the Pier to introduce a new current

1. B.F.S. Letters II 135.

2. B.F.S. Papers. Telford IV p.57.

or backwater which would wash the shingle in another direction. The latter suggestion was not tried but defenders planned by a Colonel Dibbiege and approved by Telford were executed by a Mason from Rosemarkie and proved fairly successful.

By 1792 the Society had thus provided all the public buildings considered necessary and the houses erected after this date were the work of the settlers themselves. In 1791 the number of private houses was 7; in 1793 there were 15 and nearly 40 in 1796. In addition to the "fixed and regular settlers" in these houses there were by 1796 "40 other inhabitants of houses, for the most part thatched huts or little better, who have not property to build houses and become regular settlers but who are nevertheless useful labourers fishermen and traders."¹ The story of the settlers in Ullapool and the life they led there will be treated in the next chapter.

For a total cost of £7,778, of which nearly £6,000 was paid to Melville, the Society established at Ullapool two storehouses, a shed for drying nets, a school and schoolmaster's house, a red herring house, a shed on the island of Ristol, an Inn, a Pier and Breakwater and a number of houses and shops for tradesmen.² The Society's building policy during the first ten years at Ullapool had been to avoid elaborate schemes which would be a risk of loss if the village did not prosper but to erect public buildings which would be adequate in the event of the settlement increasing rapidly. Although many travellers in the nineteenth century reported Ullapool to be in ruins, a large number of the houses date from the 1790's and the storehouses in use at the present time are those built by Melville and Cowie.

1. Reports X 245b.

2. Ibid. 245a.

CHAPTER V

The Development of Ullapool. 1790-1798

While the previous chapter dealt mainly with the building of Ullapool and the regulations for accommodating settlers, this chapter is concerned with the Society's plans for the inhabitants of the village and their life as a community for the first ten years of their residence at Lochbroom.

The number of settlers seems to have increased rapidly from the original fifty who accompanied Melville in 1788,¹ though exact figures are not available for the earliest years and the number varied enormously between fishing and non-fishing seasons. In June 1790 the Agent reported that there was a great crowd of people without accommodation.² The Statistical Account noted an increase in the population of the parish of Lochbroom from 2,211 in 1755 to 3,500 in 1793 but did not specify what proportion of that number lived in the village of Ullapool.³ Bain, the Surveyor, reported the population as about 200 in that same year.⁴ In 1798 the Earl of Kinnoul told the members of the British Fisheries Society⁵ that the settlement provided ten vessels for the fishery with a total of 87 men in addition to 25 or 30 boats each manned by a crew of 3 or 4, which with their wives and families involved a further increase in population to over 1,000 though these were not all regular settlers.

It is equally difficult to discover from what part of the

-
1. see above p.77.
 2. B.F.S. Letters I p.176.
 3. Old Statistical Account. Vol.X p.463.
 4. B.F.S. Papers. Telford IV p.17.
 5. Reports X p.246a.

country these settlers came. It had been expected that fishermen from the east coast would move into Ullapool, since they came to the west every year in pursuit of the herring, and this may well have been so for no record of even the names of the early settlers has been preserved. By 1810 when the Parish Register begins, the residents of Ullapool include almost every Highland name, the highest proportion being the local Mackenzie.¹

There can be no doubt that most of the settlers were connected from the beginning with the herring fishery. By August 1788 the Secretary told a new member that "a colony of experienced Fishers are collected to commence operations"² and though Summer and Autumn fishing failed in Lochbroom that year, December brought so great a quantity of herring that, according to Melville, enough could have been taken to supply the markets of all Europe and the West Indies. This sudden appearance and disappearance of shoals of herring meant that the settlers in Ullapool had to follow a strangely unorganised life. The people of Ross-shire were used to this for Hugh Rose wrote of them that although "there are none of the people on these coasts that make fishing their profession" yet "Should herring appear on the coast, then the men go all hands in search of them."³

The experiment of 1788 was repeated with success in the ensuing seasons. After a visit to Ullapool in 1794 the Secretary wrote to Telford describing the "progressive state" of the fishery there. He noticed that the encouragement given by the Society had already resulted

-
1. Parish Register Lochbroom.
 2. B.F.S. Letters I 66.
 3. Extracts p.20.

in rousing the local population "to make small tryals which have been successful with those on the spot concerned." At the same time Adventurers who worked from a distance through "second hands" had not done so well so that "there is a general disposition.... to small adventures in fishing."¹

These small adventures became very popular at the settlement. The Earl of Kinnoul told the Society in 1798, "The population consists of artisans, small dealers in various articles wanted for the use of the country, fishermen and labourers. But when the shoals of herrings come to the neighbourhood, the whole inhabitants of the village may be considered as fishermen and fish curers; for they are all then more or less concerned in that business; some employing their personal labour and some their property in fishing Adventures. The natives in general may be considered to be fishermen on those occasions for all of them who can be spared from necessary occupations on their farms, come down to partake of the profits of the herring fishery, according as their slender means and best endeavours enable them."²

Melville, the chief employer of the local boats in Ullapool, has left no description of his affairs, but John Mackenzie of Bishops Gate Street, London and late of Tanera gave the Parliamentary Committee of 1798 an account of his organisation in Lochbroom. He owned a number of decked vessels which he used as floating storehouses but the fishing was conducted entirely from boats, the property of his own firm or of the local fishermen. The herring were caught in the lochs and brought to the vessels for packing or taken straight to the curing sheds

1. B.F.S. Papers. Telford IV p.44.

2. Reports X p.245b.

on shore. Boats varied in size from one to two tons and Mackenzie reported that they "went to the extremity of Lochbroom, which is about 15 miles long and were able to go and return when empty and to turn the headlands but not with safety when full loaded: I believe that they have followed the fish from loch to loch but not to any great distance."¹

This description emphasises the uncertain nature of the boat fishery for if the shoals did not appear as usual the boatmen were unable to go far in search of them.

As has been pointed out already, the Society was forbidden by its Act of Incorporation² to take any part in the buying and selling of fish or stores and at first the commercial side of the industry at Ullapool was in Melville's hands alone. In this he seems to have done very well for the Secretary wrote of him, "His activity and spirit of adventure are undoubtedly the principal support of the employment and traffic at Ullapool."³ In spite of this, it was definitely not the Society's policy that he should have a monopoly of the trade at Ullapool. Arrangements were soon made with other traders, especially with one David Cooper of Whaligoe in Caithness, to supply salt and casks to the boatmen and the Society worked hard to attract other curers and coopers to offer alternative employment to the settlers.

One branch of the fishery which was urged by the Society and not supported by Melville proved a failure, that was the white fishing for cod and ling. When the Society bought Ullapool it also purchased the Island of Ristol several miles nearer the sea, from which the cod

1. Reports X p.236a.
2. 26 Geo. III cap.110.
3. B.F.S. Letters III 234.

fishery could be attempted when the herring were not near Lochbroom.¹ A shed for stores was built on the island and let to Mr. John Macaulay a fish curer. Macaulay was never able to establish himself there and three years later became insolvent. The lease then went to a Mr. Macdonald of Tanera who had a good reputation as a fish curer, but contrary to the terms of the contract he sublet the island for its grazing and the fishing was neglected for many years.²

The lack of practical interest of the Society in the fishery at Ullapool meant that Melville was not responsible to the Directors and did not report his progress to them. No figures of catch reached the Society from Ullapool. It is therefore impossible to reach an accurate conclusion on the size or reliability of the shoals of herrings during these years. Annual figures for each port were not published until the Fishery Board was established in 1809 and I have been unable to find the Customs records for Isle Martin after 1780. From casual references in the Secretary's letters it seems that the herring appeared annually in Lochbroom at some time between August and December until 1795. In September of that year he wrote to Melville saying that he was glad that he was doing well "because the experiment shows that the natural circumstances of the west of Scotland are not so bad as to deny success to skilful exertions." But the next two years brought a turn of fortune for the Secretary noted "the failure of this years (1796) both summer and winter fishings." The winter of 1797-8 seems to have produced another change for the Earl of Kinnoul told the

1. Dempster. Speech p.26.

2. B.F.S. Letters IV 204.

Society that after two or three poor seasons the last one had been excellent.¹

In 1798, then, the Society had no cause to expect the prolonged disappearance of the herring from Lochbroom and had good reason to be pleased with the state of the fishing industry there. They had, however, already prepared for the unpredictable movements of the shoals and had attempted to provide alternative employment for the Spring months and for the occasional bad season which affected every fishing port.

Farming had always been the companion to fishing on the west and it took no persuasion by the Society's Agent to make the settlers take up the ground offered them. The Society's property consisted of 57 acres of arable land, 74 acres of pasture and 900 acres of heath and wood.² A description of the type of land at Ullapool has already been given and it will be remembered that the Surveyors for the Forfeited Estates commented on the poor soil and the indifferent climate which produced excellent grazing but no good crop except potatoes.

The Directors of the Society were convinced that the land at Ullapool could be improved to support other crops and that much of the waste land could be brought into cultivation. Many of them had achieved great success in their own properties further south with land which appeared equally unproductive but had in reality a far greater depth of soil and a better climate than Coigach, and they therefore attacked the agricultural problem with confidence.

1. Reports X p.246a.
2. Ibid. p.245a.

This part of the Society's business was the responsibility of the Agent to whom the Directors with their usual zeal passed on a mass of information on all the latest experiments in agriculture. Mackenzie at Ullapool was given a considerable amount of land of the same type as that leased to the settlers and he was expected to cultivate this as an example to them. The Secretary wrote to a new Agent that the Directors encouraged him to experiment and "show the settlers and inhabitants of the country in general what can be done by industry and skill for the improvement of such land as they commonly deem incapable of all improvement. To such an experiment the Directors I am persuaded would lend every reasonable aid providing the plan of improvement were such as could be imitated by the poorer class of the natives."¹ This was a very important point for an expensive agricultural policy which might have been profitable to the Society in raising the value of their land was never seriously considered because it would be of no benefit to the tenants.

The Directors outlined for the settlers what they considered to be the best and most profitable way of managing their ground. It will be remembered that the Society allowed each tenant three types of land, the lot in the village to include his house and small garden, half an acre of arable land on the flat near the village and five acres of uncultivated land on the hill. The settlers were advised "to raise in their gardens besides a spot for Hemp, Onions, Turnips and Carrots, Pease, Beans and early Turnips Potatoes and Cabbages. To divide the half acre into three parts and to use the following succession of crops,

1. B.F.S. Letters III 184.

Potatoes, Bear and part Flax and Clover and then to return to Potatoes on the Clover land, but not to attempt to raise oats on account of the wetness of the season. The Bear straw and Clover would probably be sufficient winter food for one cow and an acre out of the five would produce hay for the other cows which with the remaining four acres of pasture would furnish them with milk and every necessity but oatmeal which they must purchase with the produce of their labour."¹

This question of whether or not to raise oats was an important one, and the Secretary wrote to the Agent at length on the matter.² The Society wished to render the village as self-supporting as possible and oats were one of its greatest needs. But "As oats are so uncertain a crop in that country, the Society believe it would be better to sow nothing but Bear which is early ripe and therefore better suited to the climate and that the inhabitants should trust for their oatmeal to other countries and purchase it from the profits of their industry and fishing." Even early oats were considered unsuitable as they shook in a windy climate but "if the experience of the people induces them to think that crops of oats will be profitable, the Society can have no objection provided they do not take so many white crops running as to exhaust the land.... I am assured however that it would be more profitable on the whole to raise chiefly on such land and in such climate green crops such as potatoes, turnips, cabbages and sown grass."

The garden plots required little in the way of preparation since that part of the peninsula had been cultivated in the farm of

1. Argyll III 657.
2. B.F.S. Letters II 45.

Ullapool. The half acre lots needed enclosing and draining as the water collected from the high ground and flooded the peninsula. The tenants were instructed in making these fields but were expected to bear the expense themselves with a system of repayment if they removed during the first ten years.¹ The soil of these plots was to be treated with lime and shell sand, both easily and cheaply obtained in the neighbourhood.

The arable land thus dealt with, the Directors concentrated upon trying to improve the uncultivated ground. "It happens that the improvement on a small scale of very coarse mossy heath at Ullapool by way of example to the country as well as for the immediate profit, is a favourite object with the Society."² Instructions were given to the Agent in 1790 "to lay upon the Heath without breaking up the surface, a proper quantity of shelly sand or lime after proper drains are made, running right across the declivity and open, as it is well known that this manure will destroy the heath and produce good pasture grass in three years, and will make the pasture much better even the first year."³ Another treatment suggested was to burn the moss out of the ground and use the ash as manure, as they apparently did in Berkshire. Ploughing up peat moss was said to produce rushes in such a moist climate. In his General Survey of Agriculture in the Highlands⁴ Sir John Sinclair mentioned the Society's efforts to treat mossy ground in these ways and complimented the Directors, of whom he was one, on "laudably

-
1. Argyll IV 404.
 2. B.F.S. Letters I 229.
 3. Argyll III 657.
 4. Sinclair. General Survey p.120.

endeavouring to exhibit a specimen of the great effects of industry even in a moist climate without any particular richness of soil."

Like most of their contemporaries the Directors wanted to plant trees. Telford reported that part of the high ground could be enclosed and planted to the extent of twenty acres and recommended Larch as "quicker growing, more hardy and much better wood than the Scots Fir."¹ Although in December 1791 it was decided to plant at once, nothing was done for a year. By then the twenty acres were needed for arable and another place was chosen further from the village. Here it was agreed to plant Ash, Beech, Birch, Hazel and Fir as well as Larch but the Agent was overwhelmed with other work, the trees were not planted and in 1793 this land also was taken for cultivation.²

Livestock of most kinds was encouraged at Ullapool. It has already been noted that the Society wished settlers to keep cattle. The Directors were by no means opposed to the policy of keeping sheep in the Highlands but suggested to their tenants that swine could be reared on fish refuse and thus needed less ground than sheep. Horses were considered extravagant for the Secretary told the Agent "Do as much work as you can by hard labour and avoid horses as they consume the chief profit of a farm."³

This agricultural policy appears to have brought results as early as 1793 for Bain reported in his survey that the flat land which had recently been covered with moss, was then growing corn, grass and gardens though it was still in need of drainage.⁴ The Agent's efforts

1. B.F.S. Letters II 40.

2. Ibid. 182.

3. B.F.S. Letters IV 118.

4. B.F.S. Papers. Telford IV p.86.

were continued and produced the favourable conditions described by the Earl of Kinnoul in March 1798.

"Agriculture has commenced at this settlement with a very agreeable degree of success, both with respect to the practice introduced into the country and the effect it has already operated on the Society's property. When the 57 acres of arable land above mentioned came into possession of the Society, they were cultivated in a miserable manner but nevertheless equally well with the other arable land of that part of the country. Now they are not only filled with good enclosures but are in a considerable degree covered with crops formerly unknown to those parts, such as turnips, cabbages and grasses which, to the surprise of the natives who deemed such things the produce only of happier climates than their own, are found to succeed remarkably well at Ullapool." The 57 acres had been increased to 92 but by concentrating on the arable land the settlers had devoted less work to their five acre lots of uncultivated ground, in fact only eleven of these had been taken besides the Agent's own portion upon which many experiments had been made.¹

The Earl of Kinnoul reported on the increased value of the Society's property as a result of these improvements but the Directors regarded the main feature of their agricultural policy as experiment by way of example to the people of the Highlands.

Farming was not the only alternative to fishing encouraged at the settlements. In one of his earliest letters to Macleod of Ceanies the Secretary told him that the Society hoped to attract "people who

1. Reports X p.246a.

will come to settle at Ullapool in order to get a living not by agriculture but by some art or craft or manufacture which must for the present be the art of fishing only and the relative crafts. But it is the hope and certainly will be the endeavour of the Society to introduce other kinds of industry in due time."¹ Agriculture would provide settlers with food during a bad season (and herring had been known to desert a loch for as long as twenty years) but to prevent the people from leaving a new village at such a time the Society had to provide alternative employment in manufactures.

A number of possible industries were considered, among them a Soap manufacture but according to the Statistical Account the general voice was in favour of spinning.² Many of the women were already able to spin a little for their own use and Dempster wrote "Linen and wool-len yarn are perhaps the most vendible commodities on the face of the earth and the art is taught in a week and practice very tolerably in a month or two."³ The Commissioners for the Forfeited Estates had tried to establish linen making at Inverlael but since that time Dr. Anderson had been demonstrating the possibilities of wool, the raw material being more easily produced in the Highlands than flax. Hemp was another suggestion as this could also be provided locally and was in great demand for fishing nets and equipment, a valuable consideration when it is remembered that the freight charge both for raw materials and finished articles was so high. Thus the Directors were offered a wide choice of possible industries for Ullapool.

1. B.F.S. Letters I 42.

2. Old Statistical Account Vol.X 466.

3. Fergusson. Letters of George Dempster p.192.

While the village was being built the Society laid aside the question of extra employment. Melville was said to have imported some flax which had been bought by the local people and spun into yarn, but he did not undertake this on a large scale. By the summer of 1790 there were enough people in Ullapool for the Agent to consider a manufacture. He was supported by Telford who suggested that the Society should encourage spinning and "in a little time weaving might be introduced." "Something should be undertaken" he added "as the inhabitants are at present most perfectly idle and next to starving."¹

The Directors agreed to make a beginning. On 24th December 1790 it was resolved that "some species of industry" must be provided "for those who are not employed in the Fisheries and for those who are when the Fisheries are not carrying on." The first step was to install a teacher for those "willing to learn to spin wool, flax hemp and particularly yarn fit for nets and to learn the weaving of nets."² Telford was consulted by the Directors who "don't mean to build anything new for this purpose at present but they expect you will contrive to find room somewhere in the storehouses for a Mistress and some scholars."³ A plan was provided by Telford on March 7th 1791 by which, after adding a few partitions, an inside chimney and an extra window "there would be a kitchen, small bedroom and scullery on the ground floor, a room of 30 feet by 15 feet for a Spinning Room on the first floor with two small rooms adjoining, one for raw materials another for spun yarn."⁴ Four months later Telford sent Mr. Pulteney plans for

1. Argyll III 603.

2. Ibid. 657.

3. B.F.S. Letters I 224.

4. B.F.S. Papers. Telford II p.46.

small houses with one large room each so that the pupils could work at home. A loom required 7 feet by 6 feet and 6 feet 6 inches in height, warping about the same and while linen weaving could be done in a damp atmosphere, wool required to be absolutely dry and a fireplace must be included in the room.¹ The houses were not built by the Society but by settlers themselves while the Society undertook to alter the storehouse at once.

The buildings were thus easily attended to but the provision of capital to supply raw materials and equipment was more difficult. The Act of Incorporation restricted the Society's outlay to land and buildings and commercial enterprise was strictly forbidden. It was decided, however, that the Society was at liberty to impress money into the hands of their Agent "for the purpose of commencing the said manufactures,"² the Agent to be accountable and "the risk borne privately by him as will be the profit and loss." The Directors felt that he should associate with someone else, partly because "they wanted to divide their encouragement among all settlers" and a Mr. Black was suggested as partner.³ He and the Agent were expected to find security for the loan but interest was not to be charged for the first few years. This last concession had to be withdrawn nine months later when the legality of these loans was questioned. It was then agreed by the Directors that loans were justified only on good security and "at an interest not less than is allowed by the several banks in Scotland for the Society's money." Another clause was added stating "that no advantage should be

1. B.F.S. Papers. Telford II 13-14.

2. Argyll III 531.

3. B.F.S. Letters I 253.

taken by means of any such loans from the Society to establish any kind of monopoly in favour of the borrowers."¹ On these conditions the Society lent Mackenzie and Black £150.²

The final negotiations for the new industry were with the Board of Trustees for Manufactures and Fisheries. As has already been mentioned, the Board administered a fund to encourage this type of adventure. On 28th February 1791 the Secretary wrote to Robert Arbuthnot, Secretary of the Board of Trustees, requesting "the benefit of the advice and assistance of your Board."³ This was later defined, "It is the wish of the Society that the salaries of the person or persons to be sent by your Board to Ullapool should be found by the Board, this Society finding them as already said, with the necessary Houses and Land."⁴ The Trustees agreed to pay the teacher annually for three years an allowance of 5 shillings for each scholar not exceeding 30 in number, and to provide 3 dozen wheels and 1 dozen reels for linen or woollen yarn to be distributed among the settlers at the Society's discretion.⁵ The payment of the allowance of 5 shillings was the result of a long process described by Arbuthnot as follows. "The person who taught the scholars at Ullapool to spin, must send to this office a list of those taught annually with an Affidavit taken before a J.P. or the Parish Minister as to the truth of the list." John Mackenzie in London must then attest that the teacher was employed that year by the British Fisheries Society, "after which, but not till then, the promised premium

1. Argyll IV 407.

2. Ibid. 395.

3. B.F.S. Letters I 226.

4. B.F.S. Letters I 241.

5. Board of Manufactures. Letters Vol.16 p.162.

will be paid to any person who presents the receipt or receipts of the teacher signed by two witnesses."¹ This method of payment shows that Melville had very little to complain of in the Society's rules about the production of certificates, which were much simpler and quicker of action than the Board of Trustees system.

The wheels and reels were sent to Ullapool in 1791 but it is not clear when the teacher arrived there. A letter from the Board of Trustees in December 1795 suggests that she had only recently come to the village and had not begun to take scholars though the cause of the delay was not mentioned.

Mackenzie and Black seem to have made good progress. The Statistical Account in 1793 described a Spinning School "which is carried on upon a very small scale by two of the settlers at Ullapool merely for the purpose of furnishing employment to a few idle hands."² The next year Maxwell at Tobermory was told that the Manufactures were "going on successfully at Ullapool."³ In 1796 the Agent reported "The Spinning Manufacture has provided constant employment for 40 persons, who, on account of there being no fishing must otherwise have remained idle."⁴

From these remarks the development of the manufacture can be traced but there are unfortunately no more detailed records. Mackenzie and Black were no more responsible to the Society in this connexion than Melville for the organisation of his fishing trade. They do not appear to have informed the Society on any of the essential points, so that we

-
1. Board of Manufactures. Letters Vol.17 p.500.
 2. Old Statistical Account X p.466.
 3. B.F.S. Letters II 260.
 4. Reports X 246a.

do not know what articles were made, where they were sold and in what quantity. It seems most likely that the local spinners used hemp grown near at hand to make fishing nets and equipment for sale in Ullapool, but there is no proof of this, except that the Manufacture seems to have made no impression elsewhere. Whether the two undertakers made a profit is not mentioned but since they did not apply for a further loan or any other assistance from the Society, it may be presumed that their losses were not great. What is certain is that the Directors succeeded in introducing industry to the settlement and that, during the bad seasons of 1795 and 1796, the tenants were able to keep their families from starving.

Having thus arranged for the settlers to be employed at the Fisheries or at the Spinning School and to be guided towards an improved agriculture, the Directors turned to consider what we should now describe as the social services, education, public health and the administration of justice.

We have already seen that in January 1789 Melville contracted to build a church and schoolhouse at Ullapool. In the same month a request was forwarded through George Dempster to the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, for "a fit teacher for instructing their children and assisting the inhabitants in the performance of religious duties."¹ On 2nd April Mr. Robert Munro late Missionary between Creech and Kincardine was appointed to Ullapool with a salary of £20 a year.² The policy of the S.P.C.K. was to provide supplementary schools in remote villages, which were too far from the parish school; in this case it

1. B.F.S. Letters I p.92.

2. S.P.C.K. Minutes Vol.19 p.232.

was nine roadless miles away at the head of Lochbroom. The S.P.C.K. teacher was required to instruct each pupil for two years to read English, to write and to do accounts (Latin was forbidden) and religious instruction represented a large part of the curriculum.¹ He was not allowed to charge fees. £5 a year was added to the usual salary of £15 for Munro, in view of the fact that he had to preach every Sunday, part of the sermon to be in Gaelic and part in English.² It was a condition with the S.P.C.K. that the teacher should be given a dwelling house, land for a garden, fuel and grazing for a cow by the Heritors of the Parish. Seaforth's Factor defined the grazing, "As to the Croft, the regulations say it must support a Middling sized Cow summer and winter."³ Munro was given the same quantity of land as the settlers but rent-free, and his salary was increased by a further £10 a year from the Fisheries Society.⁴

The relations between the two Societies were cordial. The details of a new schoolhouse planned in 1793 were submitted to the S.P.C.K., the Secretary explaining to Telford, "They will like the compliment of being consulted and might perhaps suggest something useful."⁵

But in spite of this Munro was not a success. Telford, on visiting the settlement, reported unfavourably of him and the Secretary complained to Mr. Kempe of the S.P.C.K. that Robert Munro was not qualified to teach children. "He is certainly deficient in one great requisite, a good handwriting; as appears from his letters."⁴

1. M.G.Jones. The Charity School Movement p.186.

2. S.P.C.K. Minutes Vol.19 p.232.

3. Seaforth MSS. Vol.1795. Fairbairn to Seaforth. 29 January 1796.

4. B.F.S. Letters I 215.

5. B.F.S. Letters II 187.

The Agent reported to Telford that while the inhabitants of Ullapool were "tolerably pleased with him as a preacher" they complained of his inattention to the children. According to the Agent he was expected "to call his scholars at 7 o'clock in the morning, not to allow them to go in and out till 9 of the clock, then convene at 10, dismiss at 12 and convene again at 2 o'clock and dismiss at 6; to all these rules he pays little attention and when I attacked him on the Business he said that he went entirely by rules of his own." Mackenzie added "I would also recommend that he ought to read prayers to the scholars morning and evening, teach them the mother Catechism by heart and pay a great deal more attention in learning them English."¹ Telford's reply was to enquire whether there was not "something about Drinking and encouraging other people to do so," and he urged the Agent not to "let the public suffer out of a false delicacy for it is a very important point in a new establishment to have a proper schoolmaster."² The S.P.C.K. considered the complaint but having received a favourable report of Munro from Davidson of Tulloch, a local proprietor, the matter was dismissed and Munro remained at Ullapool until his death in 1809 to provide the settlers' children with the rudiments of education at the joint expense of the S.P.C.K. and the British Fisheries Society.

The Directors were quick to realise their responsibility in regard to public health in a new settlement. Cleanliness was one of the main features of Telford's contribution to the town plan. It was laid down that there must be a lane 18 feet wide running behind each house

1. B.F.S. Papers. Telford II p.60.

2. Ibid. p.68.

into which rather than into the street was to be put dirt and dung. In answer to those who complained of the loss of garden space, the Secretary wrote, "This is of more importance to the neatness and cleanliness of the town than adding a few more feet to their gardens."¹

In front of the houses the street was to be 49 feet wide. Each settler was to dig a ditch at least 6 feet from his door, the whole length of his lot, with a level footway covered with shingle to a width of 3 feet between his house and the ditch. The earth from the ditch was to be laid in the centre of the street which would then slope towards the ditch, and 7 feet in the centre of the street was to be covered with shingle. The regulation ended "It is not expected by the Society that this be done immediately but by degrees and according to the convenience of the settlers."²

Telford included a system of drains and sewers in his town plan, the drains to be open running along the surface and leading to the harbour or the river. No report was made of their construction but since the Agent was ordered to follow the plan exactly, it is most likely that they were made in this way.

The water supply of Ullapool became a serious problem for a few years. Telford included twelve public fountains in his plan and the digging of a well was discussed and thought to be an unnecessary expense while there were only a few settlers.³ By 1794 there was a serious shortage of water with complaints of the extreme badness of what little

1. B.F.S. Letters II 49.
2. B.F.S. Papers. Regulations.
3. B.F.S. Letters III 26.

there was. Bain, who was sent to survey the village, reported that there were suitable springs and that a reservoir could be made for one of the burns with pipes laid to the village. The estimated cost for this was £159.17 and the Directors considered it too expensive. Another surveyor reported on the possibility of piping springs, using the burns or digging a well but all methods appeared too costly.¹ "The village of Ullapool has not yet grown to that size that would justify the expense of bringing in water by any method that has hitherto been proposed."² One Director even suggested refining rainwater. It was the rain which finally solved the problem for after several wet seasons the water supply from the old springs again proved sufficient for the village and an expensive new scheme was rendered unnecessary for the moment.

The Society also responded to the local demand for a doctor. In 1791 after "mortality" at Ullapool from an unknown cause, the Directors agreed to co-operate with the local gentry in raising a fund to support a doctor.³ Further illness in April 1792 made the Society undertake to pay all expenses, beyond the first £20 which was raised by private persons, and to appoint a suitable man.⁴ An advertisement for a Surgeon received as many as five applicants at once⁵ although it was made clear that "the use of Erse will be necessary for a medical man in that country to understand the account his patients will give of their

-
1. B.F.S. Letters III p.118.
 2. Ibid. p.165.
 3. B.F.S. Letters I p.242.
 4. Argyll IV p.421.
 5. B.F.S. Letters II p.141.

complaints."¹ The appointment was made in 1794 and the Society undertook to provide free lodgings with some land, a shop at the Inn and a salary of £10 a year for at least five years in addition to the doctor's prospects from the local subscription money. This arrangement was continued until 1800 when the Society appointed an Agent who was a qualified doctor and thus saved themselves the house, land and extra salary.²

After education and public health came the administration of justice where the Society was rather less successful. It has already been mentioned that Ullapool lay at a considerable distance from the law courts which were held at Dingwall. In January 1790 it became obvious that "some regular method of deciding the small controversies among the people will be immediately wanting at Ullapool." "If it were possible to devise some mode of performing this bussiness by Juries summoned from among the people themselves the novelty as well as the impartiality of those popular decisions would make one of the list of inducements for settling in our new Towns."³ In this matter the Directors were not concerned with fishery offences which, as will be seen later, came under a separate organisation, but with ordinary civil cases. It soon became evident that an efficient system could only be introduced by an Act of Parliament. In the meanwhile Captain Mackenzie of Cromarty was approached to appoint a special Baron Bailie for Ullapool "as a temporary Judge, as the Society will put that matter on a better footing by and by." It seems that Cromarty was unable to do this as Ullapool remained under Dingwall until 1804.

1. B.F.S. Letters II 233.
2. Ibid. 234.
3. B.F.S. Letters I 149.

The Directors worked hard to reach some permanent settlement for the administration of justice at their stations. In 1795 an Act was passed declaring it lawful, in spite of the Heritable Jurisdictions Act of 1747, "to erect such independent Boroughs of Barony in such parts of the Sea Coast of Scotland where the Fisheries are or shall be carried on, in the usual manner practiced before the passing of the said Act."¹ In order to erect these Baronies the Superiors feuing land to the Society had to take out the necessary charters and then feu them to the Society, in other words the Society could only act through the medium of their Superiors.² It was upon this point that the scheme failed. Ferrier suggested that the Society should purchase the feu duties and become Superiors themselves and, after some hesitation because the price was high, the Directors agreed to do this.³ The Superiors, or some of them, refused to sell and after many years of negotiation the Society had to give up the whole scheme. No complaints of disorder or delay in justice seem to have reached the Directors during this time but in 1805 they arranged for the Society's Agent to be included in the Commission of Peace for Ross and Cromarty,⁴ thus providing what they had wanted from the first, the local administration of justice.

Apart from encouraging settlers, the Society was anxious to attract visitors to Ullapool both on business and pleasure, for they brought money with them. In this the Inn played a very large part for many travellers used Ullapool en route for Stornoway although the

-
1. 35 Geo. III cap.122.
 2. B.F.S. Letters III 107.
 3. B.F.S. Letters IV 114.
 4. B.F.S. Letters V 76.

official packet started from Poolewe. An attempt to change its route was resisted by Seaforth and had to be abandoned because, though more direct, the passage from Ullapool to Stornoway was dangerous. As we have seen the Inn was planned by Robert Mylne, cost over £800 and was described as "too good for the probable resort to that place."¹ The furniture, which was valued at £113.3.4, was sent from London. The Agent was installed as Innkeeper, adding yet another job to his overfull programme though it was hoped that his wife would be responsible for part of this work. The Inn was always recommended by the Secretary as most comfortable but after staying there Torridon and Cromarty complained that the common people used the travellers' quarters and recommended the building of an extension for a common bar. This was ordered in April 1793² and the Agent began to visualise Ullapool as a fashionable resort while Bain praised the local hunting and bathing, the latter he considered to be both convenient and romantic. The good Inn, he thought, would attract visitors, invalids and idlers.³ Unfortunately his contemporaries not sharing his admiration of mountain scenery were apt to be deterred by the journey and there is no record of a constant stream of tourists through Ullapool.

While visitors were to be attracted by the Inn, the local population was encouraged to make use of the advantages of the settlement. The Society found tenants for the newly built bakehouse, brewhouse and smithy, carried out repairs on the mill and installed a miller for the

-
1. B.F.S. Letters I 144.
 2. Argyll IV 522.
 3. B.F.S. Papers. Telford IV 86.

benefit of the whole neighbourhood. After that "the idea of establishing a weekly fair, also a tryst for cattle" was approved. Although Telford's complicated design for a market place was not carried out, markets were arranged at Ullapool and on 9th December 1793 the Secretary referred to a recently published advertisement of a market and three annual Fairs.¹ This market for local produce it will be remembered was one of the main items on Knox's programme for raising the standard of living in the Highlands, and was therefore quickly established by the Directors.

By 1798, as a result of these diverse activities by the Directors and the Agent, the position of the individual settler at Ullapool was good. He owned his house and had a 99 years' lease of a small piece of land with shorter leases of arable and waste land. He could find employment under Melville or fish his own boat and sell the catch to Melville, Woodhouse and Morrison (or later Macdonald) at Tanera. His wife could make money by spinning and his children were educated free in the village. All these advantages played their part in attracting settlers and the Directors and Proprietors of the Society had reason to feel satisfied with their progress up to 1798.

1. B.F.S. Letters II 244.

CHAPTER VI

The Society in the Highlands. 1786-1798

Having studied in detail the development of Ullapool to the year 1798, it is necessary to follow the activities of the Society elsewhere in the Highlands and to discover how far their other settlements followed the same general pattern, how far they developed their own individuality and to trace the growth of independent villages and fishing stations.

The first settlement to be considered is Tobermory which was purchased, planned and developed simultaneously with Ullapool. The main feature of attraction at Tobermory was the excellent harbour which Knox described as one of the best in Great Britain not only for its shelter for trading or fishing vessels but also for its strategic possibilities in combining easy defence with a suitable base for operation against America.¹ A Memorial from nine of the principal tenants of Mull reported that Tobermory harbour was "always frequented with all trading vessels from the Baltic and Western Islands etc."²

Tobermory was also brought to the notice of the British Fisheries Society by its owners, one of whom was their Governor the Duke of Argyll. He offered the Society 400 or 500 acres at one side of the harbour on payment of 23 years' rent on a very low rate and gave further proof of his generosity in undertaking, in case of failure, to buy back the land on the same terms and to pay the Society two thirds of the money laid out on buildings.³ The ground on the other

1. Argyll I p.93.

2. Ibid. p.132-4.

3. Argyll III p.11-12.

side of the harbour was owned by Campbell of Knock and was considered more suitable for the site of the village. He also agreed to treat with the Society and asked the Duke's factor to arrange similar terms for both parts of the land.¹

Before departing for Scotland, in May 1787, the Directors recorded their opinion that Tobermory appeared to be "a proper place for establishing a village and port"² and after a visit to Mull they came away even more impressed. In spite of the poor quality of the soil, the steepness of the banks and the distance from the fishing lochs, no other harbour appeared so worthy of development. Negotiations were opened at once and in March 1788 the Society acquired 2,000 acres of land at Tobermory on payment of an annual feu duty.³

The building of Tobermory followed the same general lines as that of Ullapool. James Maxwell, factor to the Duke of Argyll in Mull, was appointed Agent in May 1788 proving rather more efficient than William Mackenzie while the part of Melville as Contractor was played by Mr. James Rodgers of Stanley near Perth. When Telford visited the settlement in June 1790 he reported that "Everything here wears the face of prosperity". The public buildings were "composed of good and sufficient material and performed in a workmanlike manner" but were less far advanced than at Ullapool since a breastwork and Customs House were needed in addition to those built on Lochbroom.⁴ By October 1791 the Society's buildings at Tobermory were completed

1. Argyll I p.38.

2. Argyll III p.17.

3. Part. Reg. Sasines Argyll. 13. 135 and 13.136.

4. Argyll III p.553.

including the Customs House and a residence for the Customs Officers, two storehouses, two sheds, shops for boatbuilder and blacksmith, an Inn and the Breastwork round the harbour. After completing his Contract Rodgers withdrew from Mull and did not undertake a fishery business as Melville and Miller had done.

The most important early settlers were Mr. Stevenson of Oban who founded a branch of his business as general merchant and Mr. Macphail who set up in a mercantile line. In addition to these two men, settlers were attracted to Tobermory at a steady rate. The Earl of Kinnoul reported that the population in 1792 was 27, in 1794 was 35 and in 1797 was 47. He added that this figure referred only to male settlers and that most of them were married men with an average of five children.¹

The plan of Tobermory was essentially the same as that of Ullapool but the town had to be divided into two parts by the steepness of the ground. Along the shore was a flat space which was reserved for storehouses and larger shops while the settlers' lots and gardens were laid out above the bank. The lotting regulations were similar for Ullapool and Tobermory but as the ground was of a much inferior quality there were many complaints at Tobermory and in March 1794 the settlers sent a Memorandum to the Society stating that unless their rents were reduced they would be forced to give up their lots.²

The problem of the poverty of the soil marks one of the differences between Tobermory and Ullapool. The Earl of Kinnoul's report on Ullapool dealt largely with the improvement of the land, with the

1. Reports X p.244a.

2. B.F.S. Tobermory Abstract I. 9 March 1794. Agent's letters.

extension of arable and the enrichment of pasture by manuring and drainage. Nothing of that kind was carried out at Tobermory where most of the land seems to have remained under grazing. In July 1797 it was agreed that settlers might have 5 acre lots rent free for two years for the sake of improvement, but there was no general lotting of the uncultivated moorland or large scale plan for agricultural development.¹

Manufactures were encouraged at Tobermory after the example had been set at Ullapool. In February 1791 Maxwell wrote² that he wished to start some spinning and by June he had found a Contractor to undertake this work. The Society was to lend him £100 and further capital was to be raised in Mull by means of subscription since the Contractor could not find a large enough sum himself as Black and Mackenzie had done.³ By the time the necessary sum was raised the Contractor had withdrawn and another could not be found. It was not until 1795 that the "Society for encouragement of spinning woollen yarn in Mull" was formed among the settlers and landowners, which soon engaged a spinning mistress and provided the necessary equipment.⁴ Three years later Kinnoul reported that a manufacture had begun on a small scale, but neither spinning nor agriculture was required to support the settlers at Tobermory.

It has already been mentioned that the travelling Directors considered Tobermory far from the fishing grounds and for this reason

-
1. B.F.S. Tobermory Abstract I. 6 July 1797. Minutes.
 2. Ibid. 28 February 1791. Agent's letters.
 3. Ibid. 5 July 1791. Minutes.
 4. Ibid. 30 July 1795. Secretary's letters.

the fishery there differed from that at Ullapool. As we have seen, Rodgers did not remain in Mull to organise the fishery. By November 1790 Maxwell told the Secretary that he felt the Society's ordinary plan for establishing a fishery could only be applied where the lochs could be fished in small boats.¹ Tobermory, he declared, was too far from the lochs for boats to be used with safety or advantage "because they could not carry through the intermediate sea, such a cargo as would recompense the Individuals concerned for the risk and loss of time." For this reason he was afraid that settlers attempting to fish from Tobermory would need to follow the example of the Clyde and use busses which would carry boats and stores to the distant lochs. This would mean that only a man of capital could own a vessel and that the actual fishermen would have to work for wages and lack the independence which it was the aim of the Society to give them. Maxwell suggested a scheme by which each fisherman could have a share in the profits of the voyage but this was never put into practice. The result was that settlers at Tobermory had either to be owners of busses and larger vessels or else paid hands employed on the busses, while those at Ullapool were mostly independent owners of small boats.

Tobermory did not have to rely on the busses for employment and wealth. As early as January 1789 the Society had been successful in obtaining an order for the establishment of a Customs House and though the Contract was made through the Society, the Treasury paid for the buildings while the Society provided rent free accommodation

1. Argyll III p.629.

and land for the officers.¹ Lying so conveniently near the trade routes, Tobermory Customs House was soon a busy place. Figures for April to October 1792² show that already more trading than fishing vessels visited the harbour from Liverpool and ports all over Scotland. The outward cargoes mainly consisted of kelp and salt, a little wool and a few cargoes of herring and cod, while the inward entries included corn, coal, wine and spirits. Kinnoul reported that in 1797 38 vessels cleared in and 55 cleared out. He added "One circumstance is likely to promote the traffic of this place soon and considerably, that is the opening of the Crinan Canal, which will occasion many vessels to pass through the sound of Mull and of course to call at Tobermory that would otherwise hold further out to sea."³ This proved true when the Canal was opened in 1801 and again later when the Caledonian Canal, begun in 1803, was opened half finished in 1822, offering the settlers a chance to employ their capital or their fellow villagers in commercial enterprise.

From this short description it will be seen that the settlement at Tobermory developed its own characteristics. The concentration on trade rather than on boat fishery was, of course, the most important of these for it attracted a different type of settler. The poverty of the soil and the slow start in manufactures were not therefore so important as they would have been at Ullapool for the settlers could afford to be independent of both. From the earliest days Tobermory was financially the most successful of the Society's three western stations. The feu duty was smaller and the rents more regularly paid than elsewhere. The

-
1. P.R.O. Treasury. 17/24 p.140.
 2. Argyll IV p.387 et seq.
 3. Reports X p.244a.

natural harbour meant that the Society need not build a Pier or Break-water so that expenditure was only just over half what was needed at Ullapool. In addition to this Tobermory was very much nearer civilisation than Ullapool or Lochbay so that freight charges, a formidable item elsewhere, did not hamper the settlement. Again there were proprietors in Mull ready to contribute to the cost of doctors' fees, local roads and bridges, building and a postal service, all of which had to be supported by the Society at Ullapool.

But in spite of these facts and that Tobermory alone of the stations showed any profit during the first ten years, it cannot be regarded as completely successful. There can be little doubt that Tobermory did less than Ullapool to benefit the poor but industrious highland fishermen, whose welfare was the essential object of the British Fisheries Society.

It has been pointed out that the Society resolved to begin with only two settlements for which Ullapool and Tobermory were chosen. But during their tour in 1787 the Directors were impressed with the possibilities of a site at Lochbay in north western Skye near Dunvegan. George Dempster considered that it needed only a Pier to be "one of the first situations for a seaport town in Europe"¹ and Mactavish commented upon the "level tract of land upon the north side of a good quality and considerable extent, a great part of which is already in a state of cultivation."² Dempster seems to have taken it upon himself to forward this extra settlement and explained his reasons to Sir Adam Fergusson.³

-
1. Fergusson. Letters of George Dempster p.181.
 2. Argyll I 105.
 3. Fergusson. Letters of George Dempster p.188.

"They (Lochbay and Canna) are precipitated a little out of the intended plan of the Companys proceeding for the sake of endeavouring to prevent emigrations from both places which without this interposition will certainly take place." He considered that the Society should find out whether a party of emigrants about to leave Skye "could be induced to abandon their design of going away and if they would incline in preference to settle at Lochbay."¹

Dempster was far ahead of events when he discussed a settlement at Lochbay. The owner of the land was Colonel Macleod of Macleod who was then serving in the army in India, but the Society approached his Trustees who replied that they would be pleased to co-operate² as a settlement "would materially contribute to the improvement of the estate."³ Maxwell and another member of the Society both visited the district in 1788 and reported favourably on the site and in April 1789 the Society agreed to take 1,000 acres of land including the farms of Stein and Lusta.⁴ The terms were fixed by Commissioners in October but a long delay was caused by a misunderstanding as the Society thought that Colonel Macleod did not share the views of his Trustees.⁵ However the Colonel returned home early in 1790 and attended several of the Directors' meetings and an agreement was reached in May. Even then the final disposition did not reach the Society for another eight months during which time no works could be begun at the settlement at Lochbay.⁶

1. Fergusson. Letters of George Dempster p.176.

2. Argyll III p.139.

3. Ibid. p.195.

4. Part. Reg. Sasines Inverness. 17. 267.

5. Argyll III p.473.

6. B.F.S. Lochbay Abstract I. 15 September 1790. Agent's letters.

The delay in gaining possession of the land proved disastrous to the first aim of the Society in Skye, to prevent emigration. Whether the original party, referred to by Dempster, ever set forth is not clear but in March 1790 another party was planning to go. Mr. Macdonald of Lyndale wrote to Hawkins Browne that the people had lost faith in the Society's intentions and that 200 men of Skye with their families had agreed to emigrate to America. Only "vigorous and early proceedings" at Lochbay would divert them.

Instead the Society was faced with further delays and disappointments and it is difficult to find out who was most to blame for them. Having finally gained possession of the land in December 1790, everything seemed ready to begin building for an Agent had been appointed, Telford had visited Skye and drawn up certain plans recommending Stevenson of Oban to execute them. These plans were for a harbour, storehouses, a Customs House and an Inn for there were already many people on the nearby farms who would take advantage of these things.¹ But the Directors decided that further surveys were necessary before beginning the harbour; the Secretary explained that "In the course of last Spring the Society found from experience that they had suffered very considerably from too much haste and the want of local information in other works of the same nature" referring to Ullapool.² Mr. John Rennie agreed to make a survey for the Society but found that he could not leave his work on the Crinan Canal. A substitute was found in Mr. Bain of Edinburgh who, though he visited the site at once, was very slow

1. Argyll III p.577.

2. B.F.S. Lochbay Abstract I. 30 August 1791. Agent's letters.

in presenting his report to the Directors. The local stone was then discovered to be too soft for building a Pier or Breastwork and another quarry had to be opened.¹ By this time Stevenson had withdrawn from the Contract and someone else had to be engaged. The distance from the mainland ports involved such heavy freight charges that the estimates for work were enormous and the Secretary found himself continuously paying out sums of 20 guineas in travelling expenses for possible Contractors.² The lack of a Customs House was a further difficulty in collecting material especially timber but in the Summer of 1792 an arrangement was made by which importers could pick up a Customs Officer in Stornoway and take him to Skye where he superintended the unloading of the cargo.³ It was not until the late summer of 1794 that a suitable Contractor was found.

The effect of another three years' delay intensified the distrust of the Society among the natives of Skye. It had forced the original Agent to return to his real job in the Tobermory Customs House⁴ and his successor, Charles Robertson of Wellhill near Forres, showed little interest in the settlement and was frequently absent leaving affairs in charge of a deputy which led to much confusion and did not inspire confidence in the local population. In October 1791 Robertson reported that 34 people had applied to take lots⁵ but nine months later 15 of them had withdrawn⁶ and the general opinion among the poor people

1. B.F.S. Papers. Telford IV p.25.

2. Reports X p.244b.

3. B.F.S. Lochbay Abstract I. 30 July 1792. Secretary's Letters.

4. Ibid. 28 January 1791. Secretary's letters.

5. Ibid. 20 October 1791. Agent's letters.

6. Argyll IV p.426.

and country gentlemen was that the Society was not in earnest. In August 1793 the situation seemed so serious that even the Agent believed a rumour that the Society was to abandon Lochbay because works could not be carried out there at a reasonable cost.¹

The Contractor engaged in 1794 proved to be very satisfactory. He was Mr. Forsyth from Avoch near Fortrose and in addition to being approved by Telford, he had an excellent reputation among the country people of the north. A storehouse, schoolhouse and Inn were planned by Telford and quickly executed although the first was damaged in a gale in December 1795 before it was properly finished and had to be built up again. While it was still incomplete the Society accepted an offer from a Mr. Macneil "to supply the natives with meal, salt etc." and granted him storing space and the loan of £200. By 1797 it was reported that a schoolmaster had been appointed to act also as missionary Minister on the Ullapool pattern.²

The construction of the Pier and Breastwork at Lochbay had an interesting consequence. In order to counteract the softness of the local stone Telford made experiments with a special type of cement invented in 1796 by Mr. Parker of Lambeth who called it Roman Cement.³ Telford reported⁴ that its exceptionally quick drying action made it efficient for works under water and where the tide ran. The trials at Lochbay proved so successful that the preparation known later as Parker Cement was used extensively for the Ellesmere and Caledonian Canals and

-
1. B.F.S. Lochbay Abstract I. 12 August 1793. Agent's letters.
 2. Reports X p.245a.
 3. B.F.S. Letters III p.127.
 4. Ibid. p.128.

is regarded by Sir Alexander Gibb as one of Telford's most important pieces of research.¹

Thus by 1798 the settlement at Lochbay had a storehouse, schoolhouse, Inn, Pier and Breastwork. There were also 23 settlers who had built their own houses on a town plan similar to Tobermory and Ullapool and held lots of ground on the same terms. But in spite of the close parallel in development, Lochbay had already its own characteristics.

The fishing in northern Skye was for cod and ling rather than for herring. A grant of £15 had been given to the Society in 1793 by the Board of Manufactures for distributing hand lines and hooks to the poor in the Lochbay area.² In spite of this and of excellent fishing grounds nearby the Society was no more successful in establishing this branch of the fishery than it had been at Ristol. The settlers were reported in 1798 to be mainly fishermen but two years later the Secretary was discussing plans for "forming a numerous assemblage of actual fishers there" either by bringing men from Avoch and Nairn or by insisting that every settler must have at least a share in a boat.³ Since no settlers are reported to have left Lochbay during the intervening years it would seem as if Kinnoul's statement in 1798 represented the wish of the Society rather than the facts.

The reason for the failure to establish a fishery in Skye was mainly the old difficulty, foreseen by so many in 1787, of granting too much land. Lochbay settlers were given the same lots as those in

-
1. Sir Alexander Gibb. The Story of Telford p.268-9.
 2. Board of Manufactures. Minutes Vol.28 p.242.
 3. B.F.S. Letters IV 75.

Ullapool but whereas the ground in Wester Ross was of medium quality, it was excellent in Skye. Three quarters of the total land there was good pasture and the rest was divided equally between cultivated and uncultivated land.¹ Thus while at Ullapool the settlers were forced to support themselves by fishing or manufactures, those at Lochbay could and did live by their crofts alone. This was not clearly recognised by the Directors in 1798 and indeed the settlement was in such an early state of development that the matter was not as yet very serious. Had another Melville been found for Lochbay its subsequent history might have been very different.

By 1798, then, each settlement had produced its own kind of population. Ullapool bred poor fishermen as the Society intended that it should, Tobermory supported wealthier men dealing in trade and commerce while Lochbay allowed a crofting community to live mainly by agriculture.

The settlement at Canna was even further outside "the intended plan of the Companys proceeding" than Lochbay had been and it was Dempster who was almost solely responsible for this venture.

He visited Canna with the other Directors on 7th July 1787 and "seemed to be so much satisfied as to incline them to recommend it as a fit station for one of their villages."² A formal offer of a site on the island was made by Macdonald of Clanranald at Benbecula four days later.³ In spite of its excellent harbour, praised by all visitors,

1. Reports X p.244a.

2. Argyll I p.97.

3. Argyll III p.137.

the Society did not immediately accept the land. Later, however, the Society learned that the fishing population, surprisingly large for the size of the island, was on the eve of being removed by an engrossing tenant unless the Society came to their aid.¹ It appears that the people of Canna approached Maxwell at Tobermory for help from the Society. Clanranald was induced to increase his offer to a grant of 14 acres free of rent or feu which was accepted by the Society in June 1789.² Thus at Canna as at Lochbay a scheme of development was aimed at preventing emigration.

During the summer of 1789 the Directors, as we have seen, had already undertaken a very full programme of works at Ullapool and Tobermory. On 19th June they divided themselves into Committees for administering the various settlements during the recess.² Names were not mentioned in the Minute but later it became obvious that Dempster was to be in charge of Canna in conjunction with Clanranald who was not a Director but an ordinary shareholder.³

Clanranald told Dempster that in addition to the 55 tenants of Canna, a number of young men from the mainland were willing to settle at the Society's station and that if Dempster would send him plans a beginning could be made at once. But before anything could be built an arrangement had to be made with "the engrossing tenant"⁴ Mr. Hector Macneil, whose lease of the Society's land had still twelve years to run. Macneil was approached for terms and informed Clanranald in September 1789 that he would not accept under £400 unless he was employed

-
1. Argyll III 450.
 2. *Ibid.* 222.
 3. B.F.S. Letters I 134.
 4. Argyll III 449.

as Agent at the settlement. It was agreed that he was unsuitable for this post but Dempster thought he could be made to accept £100.¹ This deadlock lasted throughout the winter until the Directors met again in February 1790. After consultations at which Dempster was not present, having resigned from Parliament though he remained a Director of the Society for some years, it was resolved that Macneil's lease must be bought before the settlement be founded and that no more than £100 be offered him. Secondly it was resolved to extend the authority of Dempster and Clanranald for a further year, that is until April 1791.²

When the Secretary informed Dempster of this decision he forwarded all relevant papers to him and to Clanranald saying "The result, I hope, will be a Grant of a more extensive surface to the Society which of course will encourage them to lay out the more money."³ Who first brought up the question of more land at Canna is not very clear. Maxwell visited the site and reported that he considered it would be impolitic to attempt a settlement without a larger extent of ground, 14 acres being about one tenth of the ground acquired at the other stations.⁴ Whether this view made the Directors consider the problem or whether it confirmed their own suspicions was not stated. The point was taken up again in June when Pulteney explained the position in a letter to Dempster. "We have desired 5 or 600 acres from Clanranald not as a present like the first but at the full present value on a perpetual Rent to be settled by Surveyors upon oath.... We do not want all good land

-
1. Argyll III p.451.
 2. Ibid. p.466.
 3. B.F.S. Letters I p.159.
 4. Argyll III p.341 et seq.

but pasture and Muir and such good spots as lie intermixed and the nearer the harbour the better; without this we could not make the poor people perfectly independent hereafter."¹ Dempster replied to the Secretary a week later, "I fear it is over with Cannay. We have a perfect right to refuse John (Hector) Macneils exorbitant Demand, but I doubt if it be right after voting a sum for Cannay and adopting it as a Societys settlement to annex as a condition a farther cession of land which will not I am persuaded be acceded to, so farewell bonny Cannay the best fishing station in the Highlands and the most tempting spot for a settlement - farewell poor inhabitants. This is a mere private Rhapsody, I will write to Mr. Secretary when I hear from Clanranald."²

Dempster was right and the additional land was first refused and then offered for an enormous sum though the original 14 acres were still available to the Society. A long letter from the Secretary to Pulteney in August 1790 discussed the possibility of carrying on on this small basis for "This station is so uncommonly well placed for the Fisheries that it would be almost inexcusable in the Society to suffer it to slip through their fingers."³ The answer to this does not appear among the Society's papers but the principle was laid down that settlers must be able to be independent of their landlords since a later generation of proprietors might not give such generous terms to the Society. On March 13th 1791, therefore, the Secretary informed Clanranald that the Society refused to consider his price for Canna and "it was intended to have made some enquiries as to the value, but as you have increased

-
1. B.F.S. Letters I 172.
 2. Argyll III 487.
 3. B.F.S. Letters I p.184.

your price and may perhaps increase it again it is thought unnecessary to be at the trouble and expense of making enquiries."¹ No mention was made of the original 14 acres and Canna ceased to be considered for a settlement. Whether it would ever have been successful is beyond conjecture but the attempt shows how much the Society wished to prevent emigration and how many new ventures they were willing to undertake for this object.

Ullapool, Lochbay and Tobermory and Canna were the four stations chosen by the Society but they were not the only lands offered to the Directors. In June 1788 the Secretary made a list of these offers.² One of the first was made by Clanranald during the Directors' tour in 1787 and included, not only Canna as already mentioned, but also "any quantity of land round the harbour of Skipport from 1 to 500 acres in a free gift." Another offer made during the tour came a few days later on 31st July from Captain Macleod of Harris. This concerned "all the ground which lies between the lochs (East and West Loch Tarbat) and is fit either for building or cultivation with the ground between West Tarbat and Bonaveniter Harbour and round that harbour." Ground on the mainland was suggested by Mr. Fraser of Lovat for a free gift of 100 acres on the side of Loch Nevis or an equal quantity near Morar. Finally in May 1788 Mackenzie of Seaforth, one of the Directors, proposed a site on his own estate. He offered 500 acres on any part of the banks of Loch Roag or Loch Carloway "as the Directors and their Surveyor may judge most adapted to furnish a stance for a village." He also

1. B.F.S. Letters I 233.

2. Argyll III 137-144.

promised to build a road from the east side of the island to Barvas and to promote the new town "to the utmost of my power."

No more was heard of Lovat's offer which may have been withdrawn or possibly refused by the Directors who felt that 100 acres was too little ground, or that their next station should be somewhere in the Long Island. The offers of Clanranald, Macleod of Harris and Seaforth were answered by the Society to the effect that the Directors thanked the landlords for their liberality, of which they were unable to take immediate advantage, but that they would make arrangements for an Agent or Surveyor to report upon the ground as soon as possible.¹

It was intended that this Survey be made during the summer of 1788 and in June the Directors asked Maxwell of Tobermory to undertake the journey accompanied by a qualified Surveyor. In addition to the Long Island surveys, Maxwell was to report on Canna and Lochbay over which the Directors were negotiating at the time. His instructions were based on the Resolutions of May 1787 which had guided the travelling Committee in the choice of sites. Attention was to be paid to the quality of soil, situation of the harbour, presence of fresh water, firing and building stone and a total of 1,000 acres including arable and waste land was considered to be the minimum for a settlement.² In view of the many duties imposed upon Maxwell as Agent in Mull, it is not surprising that he was unable to leave the operations at Tobermory until November. The Society being anxious lest "the Gentlemen in the Islands might perhaps consider themselves as disappointed and slighted

1. Argyll III 48.

2. B.F.S. Letters I 43-5.

if something more or less were not done in consequence of their offers,"¹ the Duke of Argyll arranged for Mr. Robert Fraser a member of the Society and an authority on the Fisheries to go at once to ^{the} Hebrides and for Maxwell to follow in the Autumn.

This double arrangement worked well as Fraser was unable to find a vessel to take him to Lochs Tarbat and Skipport while Maxwell was prevented by bad weather from visiting Loch Roag. The surveys of Tarbat, Skipport and Roag appeared very similar with excellent harbours but very shallow and poor soil and, at Tarbat and Skipport, too little flat ground.² Whether the Directors would have undertaken another new station if any had been very favourable is a matter for speculation since they had only recently agreed to take Lochbay and Canna. The lack of enthusiasm of both reporters on the Island sites decided the Society to reject the offers.

In August 1789 the Secretary wrote to Macleod and to Clanranald that the Society would not accept their offers anyway for the present and would not interfere if the landlords wished to develop fishing stations for themselves.³ Seaforth as a Director would have received a copy of the Minutes which contained this decision, for he was not present at the meeting. Macleod, as we shall see later, was already at work on his estate. Clanranald had written to Dempster that he was anxious to encourage the Fishery and he was later reported to have made a beginning⁴ but his venture cannot have got very far as no mention of it appears in the Statistical Account or in any contemporary description

-
1. B.F.S. Letters I 51.
 2. Argyll III 346-57. 293-4.
 3. B.F.S. Letters I 134.
 4. Argyll III 449.

of the Long Island. Seaforth also made an attempt to develop Loch Roag which met with very little success.¹

The Society was greatly blamed both then and later for not accepting a site in the Hebrides but having chosen their four stations the Directors felt that they were not justified in starting any more villages until these were properly established. None of those offered was especially tempting and the Long Island was already served by the Customs House and market at Stornoway. Also they had already begun to respond to pressure for a site on the East Coast of Scotland.

In addition to the lands thus described, the Directors had received an offer of a rather different kind. Kenneth Mackenzie of Torridon asked the Society to take over responsibility for a private Company he had formed with Colonel Mackenzie of Coul and several other gentlemen. The Memorial addressed to the Society on 23rd May 1788 described the progress already made by the Torridon Company.² The date of the foundation of the Company was not given but must have been after 1783 when Kenneth Mackenzie purchased the Estate from his uncle's Executors and before 1786 when Knox reported that the buildings were begun.³ By 1788 they had built "a wharf and stage with salt and storahouses, Curing house" and other houses for tradesmen. Fraser noticed that the warehouses were made of wood as in Labrador⁴ and Beaufoy remarked that though cheap they lasted very well.⁵ Six boats

1. See below p.149.

2. Argyll III p.142.

3. Knox. Tour through the Highlands p.214.

4. Argyll III p.288-91.

5. Beaufoy. Speech p.53.

and "a small vessel to attend them" had been built and fitted out and Mackenzie of Torridon had made arrangements with his tenants to fish for him, had engaged a few experienced fishermen and made a Contract "with a respectable House" to take all the fish caught at a standard price.

The Society was not legally entitled to buy up another Company which appeared to be already well established. The programme in Torridon was very similar to that of Ullapool and Tobermory and the Directors wished to encourage rather than compete with private adventurers and small companies.

The later history of Torridon's venture is not very clear. Kenneth Mackenzie, himself a member of the Society, continued his interest in the fisheries and in 1789 sent a petition to the Board of Manufactures for a Justiciary Bailie to keep order in Loch Torridon and another petition to the Board of Customs for a Customs House there.¹ In a Memorial to the Society in 1807 he mentions employing fishermen at 20/- per month in 1793 and 1795,² but in 1797 he sold the estate to his younger brother John, "excepting always the fishing station established in the said lands of Annat by which is understood the buildings and stores of the late Company."³ This sounds as though the station continued to operate though the Company was disbanded but I have been able to find no proof of this.

The station at Torridon introduces the subject of independent ventures in the fisheries which, highly approved by the Society, were

1. Argyll III 229.
2. Breadalbane Box C.30.3. Torridon to Breadalbane. 13 March 1807.
3. Register of Deeds. 278. f.1591.

appearing along the coast. A private scheme was operated by Sir Hector Mackenzie at Gairloch, a few miles to the north of Torridon. A full account of this venture was given by Sir George Mackenzie in his "General View of the Agriculture of the Counties of Ross and Cromarty."¹ The author was a friend of Sir Hector's and feeling that his modesty "has induced him to conceal his good deeds even from his neighbours" decided to take the liberty of publishing "his great and patriotic exertions in supporting the fishery".

The catch at Gairloch was not herring but cod and ling and the average produce for over fifteen years was 20,000 fish per year though the Statistical Account gave the figure as high as 30,000 to 40,000.² Mackenzie reckoned that only about 20 boats were employed owing to scarcity of bait, the cod, of course, being caught on hooks and hand lines. The boatmen received 5d for each ling and 3d for each cod.³ Sir Hector provided his tenants with wood for boats, gave an annual premium of 20 guineas for the best fishermen and took upon himself to guarantee the price of fish to the boatmen which in very good seasons involved him in considerable loss. He engaged a firm of curers from Inverness who sent the fish, either pickled or dried, to Ireland, Liverpool, London or Spain. The station, established about 1782, survived the war years at least until 1813 when the above account was written. A letter of 1837 mentioned that Gairloch "was once a famous station but had not been productive for eight years."⁴ This date may

-
1. Mackenzie. General View p.262.
 2. Old Statistical Account Vol.III p.90.
 3. Mackenzie. General View p.261.
 4. R.Graham to Mr. Fox Maule. 6 May 1837. Appendix I First Report of Select Committee on Emigration 1841. p.217.

not be completely accurate but it shows that Sir Hector's establishment was founded on practical lines which survived for over forty years.

Captain Macleod of Harris, who offered Tarbat, was already at work on a scheme of his own at Rodel. A native of this parish, Macleod had made a fortune in the East India Company and on his return bought the estate in 1778 from his relation Colonel Macleod of Macleod. In 1783 according to the Statistical Account¹ "He took up his residence in the country and commenced a scheme of improvement." He deepened the small harbour at Rodel and built two quays and a breastwork there. He paid some of his tenants to make roads, others he employed as fishermen and installed a spinning mistress and provided spinning wheels for the women. Unfortunately he died in 1790 and his son, who was serving in the army in India, was unable to complete the scheme which, though excellent in theory, had not been established long enough to take root at Rodel. While the Torridon and Gairloch fisheries were on more ambitious lines, Macleod was doing at Rodel what many landlords could afford to do. There is no doubt that many similar works were being carried out along the coasts and, taken together, contributed a great deal to the growth of the fisheries on the West.

An attempt by Mackenzie of Seaforth to develop Loch Roag has already been mentioned. This was undertaken after the Society had finally decided against a settlement there and was part of Seaforth's policy to concentrate his limited resources on the development of Lewis rather than his estates on the mainland. In December 1793 his factor,

1. Old Statistical Account Vol.X p.388.
and Forfeited Estate Papers. General Management II Improvements No.2

Peter Fairbairn, reported 70 or 80 sail in Loch Roag, a loch which had always been famous for the quality of its herring.¹ Fairbairn suggested that supplies of salt and cask ought to be kept there and the provision of these things was undertaken by Alex MacIver of Stornoway, commencing either in the summer of 1794 or 1795. In the Seaforth papers² is a sheet of Accounts giving a complete picture of the economics of what was known as "the Loch Roag Establishment". The expenses were borne jointly by Seaforth and MacIver and the profits shared equally, though MacIver was in complete control of the commerce.

MacIver leased a quantity of land, probably free as the rent does not appear in the Accounts, and paid £7.10 in rent for storehouses. No other building was mentioned and the plan was not concerned with attracting settlers. The total expenses amounted to £376.7.2 which included £154.11 for 281 barrels of salt, £51.4 for 194 new empty barrels and £4 for hoops. The season was not particularly good and these barrels were not all used, 93 of salt and 52 empties only being needed. MacIver bought his fish, whether from boats or busses was not mentioned, for a total of £97.5.8. He bought 3180 cod at 2d each, 3095 ling at 4d each and 64 crans of green (uncured) herring at 6/- per cran. For cooperage and gutting (which must have included curing) he paid only £1.17.4 and for freight to Stornoway £10.10.

The fish was sent to Liverpool, Dublin and Belfast. 2,200 cod and 18 barrels of herring were sold by Mr. Iver MacIver at Liverpool for £93.11 which after deducting £7.15 for freight, £12.7.3 for salt

-
1. Seaforth Vol. 1775-98. Fairbairn to Seaforth. 28 December 1793.
 2. Seaforth Papers Vol. MSS 1798-1801.

duty and duty charged by the town and £2.6.4 commission, showed a profit of £71.2.5. The Irish sales which included an export bounty of £3 per ton of cod and ling brought in £150.7.5 and £65.8.5 respectively. Therefore the result of the year's commerce was an income of £463.6.8 against an expenditure of £376.7.2 so that MacIver and Seaforth each raised £43.9.6 from the profits.

This detailed study of one year's economics, interesting enough in itself, is also of value since Melville at Ullapool has left no records. His transactions, though on a larger scale, must have followed much the same lines and been conducted in the same way.

Although there are no more details, MacIver evidently tried to carry on for several years,¹ but Loch Roag, with the other western lochs, was deserted by the herring at the end of the century and the Establishment faded out of existence. It does not appear to have been in any way unusual as a fishing station and its accounts show that capital could be invested profitably in fishing equipment and stores since the demand for these things was very great.

These fishing stations at Torridon, Cairloch, Rodel and Loch Roag were by no means the only ones attempted on the north west coast during the 1780s and 1790s. Isle Martin has already been described and Woodhouse maintained his organisation there for many years. Tanera continued to flourish and, after Morrison's death in 1790, was sold to Mr. Macdonald a fish curer.² About the same time Mr. Macdonald bought the station at Culag on Lochinver which had been founded in 1776 by

1. Seaforth Papers 1795-6. Fairbairn to Seaforth. 14 December 1796.
2. B.F.S. Letters IV 204.

Mr. John Joseph Bacon from the Isle of Man and a local partner Mr. Donald Ross.¹ The Statistical Account mentions a Company founded by Mackenzie of Findon to "quicken and improve" the fishing at Applecross "by affording a ready market and an example for improvement to our fishers."² Further north in Lochs Laxford and Inchard there seem to have been small fishing organisations, while Macleod of Raasay had built a storehouse on Rona. In fact the mainland coast abounded with small fishing Companies most of which must have been founded shortly after 1785 for Knox and Anderson refer to few of them.

In addition to fishing stations, a number of villages were established at this time. Seaforth's factor wrote in 1794, "I shall be under the necessity of imploying D. Urquhart, the Surveyor, to lay out the villages of Plock (Plockton) and Dornie."³ Seaforth was also responsible for building Jeantown⁴ and Lord Macdonald founded Kyleakin several years later.⁵ The inhabitants of all these villages were expected to combine the care of their crofts with small scale fishing.

We have seen that the British Fisheries Society's settlements varied in character. At the same time their general plan of development was similar to that of Plockton, Dornie, Tanera and Lochinver and the rest. It is not surprising therefore that even as early as 1820 there was confusion as to which stations were established by the Society and which by private owners and companies. William Daniell wrote that

-
1. Old Statistical Account Vol. XVI p.173.
 2. Ibid. Vol. III p.373.
 3. Seaforth Papers Vol. 1795-6. Fairbairn to Seaforth. 1 March 1794.
 4. Mackenzie. General View p.248.
 5. J. MacCulloch. History of the Highlands III p.445.

Macdonald had bought Tanera and Lochinver from the Society¹ and many similar mistakes have been made since. This emphasises the fact that the policy of the Society was a popular one and that the influence of Knox and Anderson, and later of the Directors themselves, was widespread. Thus the Society's work in Ullapool, Tobermory, Lochbay and Canna did not remain unique but was followed in many other parts of the north west by local landowners.

1. Daniell. Voyage round Great Britain IV p.72 and 74.

CHAPTER VII

The Society in London. 1786-1798

Although much has been said about the achievements of the Society in the North, little attention has been paid to its own organisation in London. It will be remembered that the British Fisheries Society was founded in 1786 by members of the House of Commons Fishery Committee and of the Highland Society of London. When the Act of Incorporation¹ was passed in that year there were already 87 members whose names appear in the preamble of the Act. This number increased very quickly for although a further list of members was not printed until 1819 when there were nearly 500 most of these had been enrolled during the first four years.

Each member was required to hold at least part of one share of £50 and none might hold more than 10 shares.¹ Fourteen people held the maximum of 10 shares² but the most usual number was one, two or three. In addition to the private members there were five Corporations holding shares in the Society: the Cities of Edinburgh and Glasgow, the town of Perth, the Highland Society of Scotland and the Company of Fishmongers in London. The private members came from all parts of the country, those with Highland connexions being in the majority. They were predominantly of the landowning class and included some of the leading Scottish peers, for example the Duke of Argyll and the Earls of Breadalbane, Moray, Abercorn and Gower. There were also a number of merchants from London and Scottish ports, several Ministers of Highland

1. 26 Geo. III cap.106.

2. B.F.S. Miscellaneous papers. Printed list of shareholders 1819.

parishes, Army officers and many members from the East India Company in which a branch of the Society was run by Messrs. Charles Grant and John Fergusson with the support of Sir Archibald Campbell Governor of Madras.¹

Several members were particularly valuable to the Society from the official position they held. Among these were Henry Dundas, Viscount Melville, Nicholas Vansittart later Chancellor of the Exchequer, W. A. Edmonstone, Secretary to the Board of Trade and Thomas Calvert, Comptroller of Salt Manufactures, as well as many members of Parliament whose special work for the Society will be examined in a later chapter.

The members or Proprietors of the Society met annually on 25th March. This meeting was held at the Parliament Street Coffee House and was followed by a Dinner at the London or Crown and Anchor Taverns in the Strand. On at least one occasion, in 1794, this Dinner was held as a joint affair with the members of the newly formed Board of Agriculture.² Attendance at General Meetings for the first few years averaged nearly 40, but this fell to 20 during the 1790's and diminished more gradually after that. At the meeting the usual procedure was followed; an account was given of the Society's work during the previous year and of the state of the funds, votes of thanks were offered to Directors and any non-members who had been specially helpful to the Society, such as Thomas Telford. During the first few years extra meetings were held so that members could approve new calls on their subscriptions which were needed at other times of the year than in March.

Voting was done according to the number of shares held. One

1. B.F.S. Letters I 132.

2. Argyll IV 550.

or two shares entitled the member to one vote, 3 or 4 to two votes and so on until 10 shares gave five votes. Members could vote by proxy, provided the proxy was a member of the Society and did not already hold five votes.¹

In some ways the most important item on the Agenda for the Annual General Meeting was the election of the Society's officers for the following year. For this each member or his proxy was asked to give the Secretary several days before the meeting a signed list of his choice of officers,² and the election was announced on 25th March.

Apart from the paid Secretary and Accountant, all the voluntary officers of the Society were elected every year. These officers included a Governor, Deputy Governor and thirteen Directors, all of whom had to be share holders. Since these Directors had great influence on the Society, it will be valuable to consider them personally.

Up to the year 1798 there appear to have been 21 gentlemen elected to the office, 9 of them serving for the whole period of twelve years. The first Governor of the Society was John, 5th Duke of Argyll who as a member of both Highland Societies was already connected with improvements in many forms. The Duke remained Governor until about 1800 and took a very active part in the Society's affairs, especially during the first few years when he attended nearly every meeting of the Directors. His Deputy Governor was the Fourth Earl of Breadalbane, who later became Governor and held the position from 1805 until his death in 1834. As Governor he was less personally concerned with the

1. 26 Geo. III cap.106.
2. B.F.S. Letters I 4.

Society's affairs than the Duke of Argyll had been, leaving daily business to his Deputy, but this may have been due to the development of a routine by which the Secretaries required far less supervision than at first.

The Earl of Moray was one of the original Directors who, as a Representative Peer for Scotland and a member of the Board of Manufactures, proved very useful to the Society. A colleague in the Society's business was Isaac Hawkins Browne, the younger, M.P. for Bridgnorth and Sheriff of Shropshire. He had no apparent connexion with the Highlands but was described as a "very worthy and very good young man" and the Secretaries had frequent cause to be grateful for his hard work. He remained a Director until 1818 and seems to have specialised in proposing votes of thanks at General Meetings. Sir John Call, who on completing a distinguished career as a military engineer in India had returned home to be M.P. for Callington and Sheriff of Cornwall, was another of the original Directors who served until after 1798. George Dempster and Henry Beaufoy will be remembered as two of the most important founders of the Society. After 1788 Beaufoy became engrossed in his many other interests but Dempster continued to follow the business of the Society even after his retirement from Parliament in 1790.

These seven Directors had as colleagues¹ in 1786 the Marquis of Graham, then President of the Board of Trade; the Earl of Abercorn; Earl Gower, husband of the Countess of Sutherland; Sir Adam Fergusson, M.P., Advocate and improver; and Lord Suffield who as Sir Harbord

1. Argyll III p.1.

Harbord had been M.P. for Norwich. William Wilberforce managed to spare time from his many philanthropic activities to be a Director of the British Fisheries Society as was Francis Humberstone Mackenzie, later Lord Seaforth; while Neil Malcolm of Poltalloch who was devoting a Jamaican fortune to improvements and to encouraging the Crinan Canal project was succeeded on the Board of Directors in turn by his son and his grandson.

From this list it will be seen that the early Directors were a distinguished and influential body of men and their successors maintained the same standard. In 1789 Lord Suffield was replaced by William Smith,¹ M.P. for Sudbury and later for Norwich, friend of Wilberforce and Fox. Among his many interests the British Fisheries Society took an important place for he was Deputy Governor from 1806 to 1835 and had great influence on the later development of the Society. The next year another important Director was elected, Sir William Pulteney.² Born a Johnstone of Westerhall, he had married the heiress to the Earldom of Bath and had taken the name of Pulteney. He owned property in America, was reputed to be the richest Commoner in Britain and spent his fortune on encouraging Highland development. Pulteney was Governor of the Society for a few years before he died in 1805. Finally Sir John Sinclair of Ulbster joined the Board of Directors in 1792³ and until his death in 1823 aided the Society with his knowledge and experience of agriculture.

-
1. Argyll III 177.
 2. Ibid. 462.
 3. Argyll IV 411.

These, then, were the Directors who met regularly to guide the Society in its early years. Between January and June of every season they met, on an average once a week; in 1790 they held 27 meetings between 9th February and 8th June.¹ By 1795 the average had fallen to once a fortnight.² The Minutes of the Directors' meetings between 1795 and 1808 are missing and by 1808 only four meetings a year were being held.³

The Directors met at Waghorn's Coffee House, Old Palace Yard, Westminster, in a private room for which they were charged about nine shillings per meeting. In some ways it was inconvenient for the Society not to have a room of its own and in July 1789 the Secretary was ordered to "hire a Chamber for keeping the Society's papers and Records and that it be recommended to him to look out for a proper office for the Society near to the Houses of Parliament."⁴ Three weeks later he reported that "he had made diligent and particular enquiry for Apartments near the Houses of Parliament to serve for an office for the Society - that he could not find any Apartments whatever to be let in that Neighbourhood except one in Cotton Garden of small dimensions, having the entry thro' a kitchen and otherwise of bad access."⁵ The Directors turned this down and continued to meet at Waghorn's (and after 1806 in Oliver's Coffee House) while the Secretary's hired Chambers in Fig Tree Court, the Temple were used to keep the Society's "papers and Records".

-
1. Argyll III 453-63 and 465-83.
 2. Argyll IV 565-600.
 3. Minutes III 1-19.
 4. Argyll III 232.
 5. Ibid. 234.

In January 1787 the excellent intentions of the Directors resulted in a Resolution that "for the better enforcing Attendance on the Meetings of the Directors, any Governor, Deputy Governor or Director failing to attend any meeting of the Directors, duly notified, within 15 minutes after the hour appointed for the said meeting, shall forfeit five shillings to be paid to the Secretary and applied towards building school Houses in any towns to be founded by the Society."¹ This excellent resolution lasted only five years² during which time a considerable sum of money should have been collected. After 1789 attendance declined rapidly but by then the major problems of the Society had been solved and the business became more a matter of routine.

Unfortunately the Minutes of the Directors' meetings contain nothing but a list of the resolutions passed and instructions given to the Secretary with an occasional note to the effect that a certain decision was reached only after "lengthy conversation". A letter from the Secretary to the Duke of Argyll on 27th May 1790³ gives a fuller picture of the more recent meetings. "Till lately" he wrote "though there have been many meetings called and a great deal of time spent in waiting at Waghorns, yet the Directors whose names are on the list of present, look'd in for a little time only, and that not at once but one after the other, so that no great time had been bestowed on the actual consideration of business. For the last six weeks it has been otherwise. Mr. Pulteney (a Director only since 25th March 1790) has been

-
1. Argyll III 5.
 2. Argyll IV 419.
 3. Argyll III 498.

very diligent and attentive, and is besides decisive and judicious; so that really unless he had been amongst us I don't know what would have become of matters. Mr. Browne attended next best. He was the only resource if Mr. Pulteney had not come, but he is not equally well acquainted with Scots affairs. Mr. Malcolm though a good attender does not take a lead. Mr. Beaufoy had almost given us up."

Occasionally during the first few years the Directors divided themselves into Committees, for example three of them were asked to be jointly responsible for editing letters or papers intended for publication.¹ Also individual Directors with certain experience were occasionally asked to handle special business, as when the Earl of Moray acted as a link with the Board of Manufactures² of which he was a member and George Dempster was asked to conduct the correspondence with the Scottish Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge,³ probably because he was a friend of the Secretary of that Society and known to several members of the Board. In most cases the Directors attending each meeting dealt with all necessary questions.

The Minutes show how great a variety of business was brought before the Directors. Not only were matters of policy decided by them but they were even consulted on such trivial matters as to how the chimneys of the Inn at Ullapool could be prevented from smoking, how the Church there was to be heated and whether the shed on the Island of Ristol should have iron bars over the windows. The

1. Argyll III 5.

2. Board of Manufactures. Minutes Vol. 27 p.80.

3. Argyll III 156.

Secretary's Agenda at the beginning of 1790¹ showed 21 items of general interest in addition to over 40 for the three settlements. The general matters concerned the importation to Scotland of Rock Salt, the making of new charts for the North West Coast, the date and extent of the next call for subscriptions, new roads in the Highlands, the form of leases for Society's premises, a new office for the Secretary and the setting up of judicial arrangements in the three settlements. We have already seen how the Directors instructed their Agents in building, farming, fishing, and manufactures. Gradually it became possible for much of this work to be done by the Secretary with special backing from the Deputy Governor but there is no doubt that between January and June each year the Society was run from Waghorn's.

There were, however, no meetings during the rest of the year for during the recess of Parliament many of the Directors went home to run their own estates and incidentally several of them visited the Society's settlements. This scattering of the Directors was not so inconvenient as might be imagined because the year's work at the settlements, especially when it involved building, had to be planned in April so that the Agent could receive his instructions by the beginning of May. Thus the Directors had issued all necessary orders before their meetings were discontinued. For the first two years a few Directors were made responsible for each settlement² but by 1790 this was found to be unnecessary for the Secretary remained in London and dealt with all the business in correspondence with the Governor or Deputy Governor.

1. Argyll III 441-3.
2. Argyll III 43 and 222.

In 1788 the Secretary complained that he was left with insufficient money to meet all demands during the recess¹ but once this was put in order there was only trouble on the rare occasions when the Directors' signatures were needed. For example in 1792 Mackenzie described² his progress round London with a Treasury Warrant. "I am going today to the City to see if both or either of the Mr. Smiths are now in Town and to try to procure their Signatures." and later "I mean to ride out to Croydon tomorrow morning to see to get (sic) Mr. Montgomerie Campbell to begin subscribing." Having been to Croydon, Mackenzie had to trace Mr. Beaufoy to Acton and had then to send the Warrant to Mr. Robert Smith near Royston who kept it for several days before signing and returning it. On another occasion when he needed the signature of a Director Mackenzie complained that though he met several of them in the street, he had been quite unable to find one "with a pen in his hand".

This account of the activities of the Directors has shown how wide was their influence upon the policy of the Society. It has also shown how many of them already had great responsibilities and could spare little time for work and meetings. This problem was solved by the Secretary who, as we have already noticed, was a paid official of the Society. In an organisation such as the British Fisheries Society, he alone could keep together the various parts of the whole. The office of Secretary and its difficulties were described in 1790:³ "Not an old settled uniform business lying within a narrow Compass;

1. B.F.S. Letters I 72.

2. B.F.S. Letters II 103.

3. Breadalbane Box C.30.3. Proposal dated March 1791.

but where on the contrary every measure must be a new one, the object being to remove old habits and grievances and to introduce a new and better course of things over an extensive face of the country; it is surely obvious that the operative person must possess information acquaintances and other advantages which a person willing to officiate as a clerk cannot be supposed to have. This would hold true even if the Directors were to make the understanding a regular professed business and were to sit down to it duly and constantly as an official board; but as such a degree of attention is not to be mentioned but as supposition only.... the above observations on the duties of an operative person will have additional force."

For this task there could have been no more suitable "operative person" than John Mackenzie.

The son of Alexander Mackenzie of Lentran,¹ near Inverness, he was related to the Torridon family and to the Mackenzies of Delvine. All these junior branches of the Mackenzies owned small estates and were connected both with the Highland gentry and with the lawyers and merchants of the north. John, as a younger son, was sent to Edinburgh where he studied law probably at the University and certainly under the guidance of his cousin John Mackenzie of Delvine W.S.² Two of his uncles had also read law and one of them had gone to London where he held a clerkship in 1752 and four years later had set up in his own chambers in the Temple.³ The other uncle, John, had given up the law

1. Scots Magazine Lxv 583
2. Delvine papers 1350. f.43.
3. Ibid. f.38.

to take part in two whaling expeditions to Greenland¹ and had later bought a Commission in the army.

After training in Edinburgh the future Secretary of the Fisheries Society came to London in 1772 and for several years tried without success to become partner with a firm of solicitors, but as he had neither capital nor experience he was unable to find what he wanted.² By this time his father and elder brother had died and John was owner of the properties of Lentrane, Arcan, Rhindoun and Tarradale. While in London he was engaged for a few pleas in the House of Lords and in 1776 was consulted,³ together with several members of his clan then in London, on the affairs of the Earl of Seaforth who was proposing to return to Scotland after a long absence. The next year John Mackenzie made an unsuccessful effort to obtain the Agency of the newly formed Seaforth Highlanders.⁴ Thus by 1778 he had made acquaintance with most of the Scots in London and his legal knowledge combined with his small Highland property and a great interest in that country made him a suitable choice for the Secretaryship of the new Highland Society of London. It was a short step from this position to a similar one in the British Fisheries Society at its foundation eight years later and Mackenzie remained Secretary of both Societies until his death in 1803.

His technical qualifications for the post were excellent. A knowledge of the law, both Scots and English, was combined with personal

-
1. Delvine papers 1350. f.7.
 2. Ibid. f.48 and 175.
 3. Ibid. f.214.
 4. Ibid. f.225.

friendships on both sides of the Border and connexions with landowners, lawyers and merchants with whom the Fisheries Society had to do business. Added to this Mackenzie's personal qualifications were outstanding. He was awarded a medal by the Highland Society in 1794¹ for the able and judicious manner in which he had performed his work and the unwearied attention that he had given to the Society's affairs. This was true of his work for the British Fisheries Society also. His letters were long, detailed and very clear in their instructions while his handling of the Society's Agents and Contractors showed great tact and sympathy. On several occasions he stood between an Agent and the wrath of the Directors and his patience with such difficult workers as Melville was amazing. His greatest asset was his sense of humour which enabled him to make light of another man's temper and softened the rebukes that he was often forced to administer. With the Directors Mackenzie was natural and dignified and his letters lack the subservient tone adopted by some of his successors. If the Society owed much to the position of its Directors, it owed even more to the personality of its first Secretary.

An examination of the books of the Society gives the best idea of the scope of the Secretary's work. He was, of course, the link between the Directors and the outside world and his most exacting duty was to translate the resolutions of the Directors into instructions for the Agents at the settlements. Similarly he received the reports from the Agents and answered many of their questions without recourse to the Directors.

1. Sir John Sinclair. Account of Highland Society of London p.4 note.

Mackenzie was given a salary of £200 a year¹ from which he was required to provide so much that the statement published in his obituary notice that he acted gratuitously was correct in fact if not in theory. Mackenzie was responsible for hiring rooms for the Directors' meetings which in 1790 cost him £15.9.0, and for hiring Chambers to keep the Society's books which in the same year cost him £42. Transport of books and papers to meetings was quite a large item involving a porter in fine weather and a carriage on wet days, the total reaching £10.9.9 for 1790. The charge for copying papers (but not charts) was also paid by Mackenzie. The Directors refused to pay a clerk and "the common stationers price for outdoor writing" was 1/- per hour. In 1790 the bill for this item amounted to 2,183 $\frac{3}{4}$ hours, or £109.3.8. Penny postage only was paid by the Secretary, the larger sums being put in the general expense account and only £3.5.9 was required for penny postage in 1790. The final charge payable by the Secretary was £7 per year for stationery.¹

After a few years another expense was added to the list for Mackenzie engaged a clerk. The first clerk, J. Everitt, was business-like and inoffensive but the second one appointed about 1799 was pompous and conceited. Left in charge of the Society's affairs during the Secretary's absence in Scotland, he wrote to Sir William Pulteney,² "I have the conscious pleasure to say that the business of the Society has not been nor shall it be neglected while I have the honour of a Commission to attend to it" and continued in this vein for several pages.

1. Breadalbane Box C.30.3. Proposal and answer. March 1791.
2. B.F.S. Letters IV 47.

Apparently the Directors could bear no more of this for two years later when the Secretary was again absent his nephew Colin Macrae was appointed Assistant Secretary.¹ Macrae continued to hold this position and a similar one in the Highland Society of London after his uncle's death in 1803 until he became Secretary of the Fisheries Society himself about the year 1816.

Mackenzie paid these assistants himself (allowing Macrae £70 a year)² and it will be seen that his salary of £200 would give him little profit. In 1791³ he begged the Directors to pay him differently and specify what was due to him for his time and trouble as distinct from "what they mean to allow for all sorts of writing, Bookkeeping, Charges for places of meeting etc as specified in their proposal; because it is but just that he should not be supposed to receive to his own use what in fact he would not receive, and that it might appear clearly and decidedly that the matters of bookkeeping writing etc would be performed in a manner proportioned to the utmost farthing that should be allowed for them." In spite of having "mentioned his dislike of it as often and as much as decency and proper occasions would admit" he failed to persuade the Directors to change their system and they continued to pay him £200 for both expenses and salary.

This summary of his duties serves to emphasise what every episode in the Society's history shows, the value of John Mackenzie as Secretary and the influence of his work. His obituary notice spoke of his natural benevolence which, "while it embraced all mankind, was yet

-
1. B.F.S. Letters IV 134.
 2. B.F.S. Letters V 129.
 3. Breadalbane Box C.30.3.

particularly directed and fixed on his own countrymen, the Celtic race in Scotland," and ended "There are few men and none perhaps in his station whose death will be more extensively felt and deeply lamented."¹

The only other paid official in the British Fisheries Society was the Accountant Mr. Black or Blake of Black Friars Road, London who was appointed in 1791² to look after the Society's books of Accounts for £25 per year, yet another item to be found from the Secretary's £200. He was not a full time worker for the Society and admitted in 1808 that his salary was less than one fifth of his income.³ Indeed he was only employed in February and March when the books were being prepared for inspection at the Annual General Meeting. This inspection was made by five Auditors elected each year on the same system as the Directors.⁴ They usually included among their number at least one banker, for example Sir Robert Herries to whose House subscriptions could be paid, Sir Claude Scott and later his son Samuel were Auditors for many years. In spite of being "from various occupations somewhat slow in disposing of the Societys Accounts"⁵ Black seems to have given satisfaction and was several times complimented on the state of the Society's books. He remained Accountant until after 1815 when he requested and obtained a rise in salary.⁶

Having now considered the distribution of work between the Directors, Secretary, Auditors and Accountant, it is time to study the

-
1. Scots Magazine LXV 588.
 2. Argyll III 515.
 3. B.F.S. Letters VI 146.
 4. 26 Geo. III cap.106.
 5. B.F.S. Letters IV 85.
 6. Minutes III 188.

finances of the Society during this first ten years of its existence.

By the Act of Incorporation the Society could raise a capital joint stock not exceeding £150,000 or 3,000 £50 shares.¹ In March 1798 a total of 729½ shares had been taken,² nearly 500 of which had been bought before March 1789 and a further 120 were transmitted from India later the same year.³ The money was called in in four separate lots of 10, 20, 30 and 40% respectively. The dates of these calls were January 1787, April 1788, June 1789 and June 1792 and anyone buying a share after that date was required to pay his £50 in a single sum. Subscriptions were paid by shareholders to the Bank of Scotland, the Royal Bank of Scotland or the Thistle Bank but money could be deposited at the Banking Houses of Sir Charles Raymond and Co., Sir Robert Herries and Co. and Pybus Call and Co. in London and of Sir William Forbes and Messrs. Ramsay and Co. in Edinburgh.⁴

In 1798, then, the income from shares was £36,475 but of this £3,646.5 was in arrears,² partly because of the confusion in which the names had been taken down. In 1789 the Secretary complained⁵ "A good deal of embarrassment has arisen from several persons of the same name appearing in the returns of payments without any distinction or designation, and some persons whose names appear without designation being known to the Society by those returns only." Nor was this the sole reason for non-payments and in 1793 the Directors gave orders for "prosecutions to be commenced against all Subscribers that are still in

-
1. 26 Geo. III cap.106.
 2. Reports X 246b.
 3. B.F.S. Letters I 140.
 4. Argyll I 296.
 5. B.F.S. Letters I 117-8.

arrears."¹ A few of these seem to have been sent, Directors were asked to bring in subscriptions from their own parts of the country and in 1795² a Committee was appointed to report on the arrears but in spite of all this at least 72 shares remained unpaid in 1798. In that year the sum of £472.10 was written off with the comment "Arrears considered as bad debts; some of the subscribers having proved insolvent, a few others not to be found and some who refuse payment and whose subscriptions cannot be proved."³

Thus £32,356.5 had actually been deposited with the Society. It has already been mentioned that the Scottish Banks agreed to pay 4% interest on the Society's money and for the first twelve years this amounted to £4,407.8.9.³ A further sum of £198.16.11 was received as interest on loans to settlers, which will be considered later. So the total income of the Society including arrears had reached £41,081.5.8.

Of this just over one half was spent during the first twelve years. The total expenditure, £22,015.12.10, was divided into five sections, General Expenses, loans to settlers, and the costs of the three settlements Ullapool, Tobermory and Lochbay.

The general expenses of the Society required £4,913.3.4 for the period to 1798 and seem to have kept a steady average of about £400 a year after the first year when expenses were very low. Half this annual sum was paid to the Secretary in salary and we have already examined its many uses.

An analysis of the remaining £200 per year tells more of the

-
1. B.F.S. Letters II 185.
 2. B.F.S. Letters III 69-70.
 3. Reports X 246b.

Society's activities.¹ The largest items, though these do not appear very regularly, are the surveys. When these were made for one particular settlement the expense was marked off against that settlement but there were several general surveys and tours, for example the journeys of enquiry made by Fraser and Maxwell in 1788 for which they were given £70 and £57 respectively. Telford appears to have presented a bill for £116.19.6 in 1791 after his surveys of the previous summer.

The Directors were anxious to encourage marine surveys for Dr. Anderson had told the Fishery Committee in 1785 that "all charts of those coasts are full of inaccuracies and errors."² £20.15.6 was paid to Lieutenant Pirie for soundings and drawings which he made on the Directors' voyage to the Hebrides in 1787. The accounts do not specify who Lieutenant Pirie was, for he was not a Director, but he was probably attached to the Customs service whose cutter the Directors used for their tour. Two years later Captain Joseph Huddart, one of the elder brethren of Trinity House and a famous Hydrographer went on a short survey of the fishing banks of the north west.³ On his return the Secretary told him that⁴ "the Directors consider the Society much benefitted and obliged by your Survey and Chart; of which they have resolved to take 6 copies for the use of the Society." They gave him £54 for his expenses on this trip and their generosity was rewarded for the same letter goes on, "Your having immediately paid back into the stock of the Society the money that was offered for your expenditure in the

-
1. B.F.S. Papers. Secretary's Ledger passim.
 2. Reports X 76b.
 3. B.F.S. Letters I 113.
 4. Ibid. 236.

service of the survey, they consider as a mark of a peculiar liberality of disposition." Huddart later became a Director and his experience of chartmaking was very valuable to the Society.

In 1794 a Mr. George Eunson of Kirkwall submitted a new chart of the Orkneys to the Society who on the advice of Huddart paid £25 towards the expense of publication "as a gratuity, expecting only in return a copy or two of the chart itself."¹ Eunson was also anxious to conduct some experiments in the fisheries and asked the Society to help him, and the Directors agreed to lend him £100 on good security though they were not permitted by the Act of Incorporation to conduct experiments themselves.

The copying of charts, plans and surveys which had to be copied presented a small but fairly regular item of expenditure, nearly £10 a year. The cost of printing accounted for about £30 every year although the Directors determined to economise on this and after the first few years refused to print any statement after the Annual General Meeting or furnish general reports. As early as May 1788 a Memorandum addressed to the Duke of Argyll commented unfavourably upon this policy.² "If the publick were acquainted with the nature and objects of the Society ther is reason to think that subscriptions would come in very abundantly, because so far as these explanations have proceeded which is the length of the immediate acquaintances of the original founders, the subscription took place with very remarkable alacrity - but there it stopped; for a good reason, that the institution is almost utterly unknown but

1. B.F.S. Letters III. 130
2. Argyll I 269.

by name beyond the circle of the private acquaintance just mentioned." To bear out this statement, in 1803 a proprietor was found to be under the impression that the Society was insolvent and only after considerable persuasion agreed to pay his arrears of subscription.¹

The Directors however had good reason to fear the price of printing, especially advertisements. Notices for general meetings were usually put into five London newspapers at a cost of 12/- or 13/- each,² apparently, for one issue only. Glasgow and Edinburgh papers charged about the same rate for the advertisements for contracts and lease of buildings, while Aberdeen papers generally charged 14/-. In 1793 a bill for printing for the year came to £36.12.

This included the parchment used in making out feu charters which, with the stamp, cost about twelve shillings each. These and other legal business cost the Society a good deal and the earliest bill was one for £204.13, the cost of passing the Act of Incorporation in 1786. Later regular bills were received for legal work in connexion with arrears on Scottish subscriptions. It is impossible to give an annual average for these legal expenses as the various bills are very irregular in their appearance, but in 1794 £24 and £50 were paid in quick succession and this does not appear to have been an exceptional year.

Finally there was postage and stationery. The Secretary paid the penny postage but the Society was left with a bill of about £8 per year for the rest, presumably for excess weight and large packages as

1. B.F.S. Letters IV 215.

2. B.F.S. Papers. Secretary's Ledger.

ordinary letters went on M.P.s' franks. As far as stationery was concerned the Secretary paid the day to day requirements only and the Directors ordered for the larger items. Four tin boxes for the Society's papers appear in 1788 at a cost of £2.5 and the previous year £16.16 had been paid to Mr. Barnes, Engraver, for one large and one small seal on which were shown "Three Herrings crowned and enveloped with a net... with the Title of the Society for a Legend."¹ The Directors began with exalted ideas on the quality of their Minute and Letter Books. The former was described as "handsomely bound in Morocco and Gilt and Super Royal etc." When a second volume was needed in 1795 they instructed that "a similar book is to be provided but that it is not necessary that the Binding shall be equally splendid." It seems that the Secretary disregarded the economy for the ledger says that £3.19.6 was paid for a volume "uniform with the first volume." Another attempt at economy was made in 1808 when the third volume was ordered "the back to be bound similar with the two preceding volumes but in other respects the binding to be less expensive". In this case the ledger described the book "elegantly bound in Morocco, extra gilt back and edges," the price £5. This may not have involved disobedience to the Directors for prices had risen and the Letter Books, whose quality appears to have remained the same, had advanced in price from 10/6 in 1794 to £2.6 in 1808.²

These items then accounted for an average of £200 per year in general expenses which added to the Secretary's £200 produced a total of £4,913.3.4 by 1798.

1. Argyll III 3.

2. B.F.S. Papers. Secretary's Ledger.

The second section of expenditure was classified as loans to settlers and covered £1,076.17.4 which, as we have seen, brought in £198.16.11 in interest by 1798. Some of these loans were given to help the settlers to build their houses according to regulations but, as explained in an earlier chapter, the Society could only expend £500 in this way.¹ The remaining £676.17.4 was advanced in larger sums as for example the £150 lent to Mackenzie and Black to set up the Manufactures at Ullapool² and the £120 provided³ to help David Cooper of Whaligo to supply salt and equipment to the same settlement. These loans do not appear in the accounts before 1791 for the settlements were not sufficiently advanced before that date. The rate of interest on the loans is not given and cannot be worked out since there are no details of how long the settlers took to repay their money, but the theory was that money laid out in this way must not bring in less than the four per cent paid by the Banks.

Thirdly there were the expenses of each of the three settlements (Canna seems to have been included in Tobermory and never reached the expensive stage). Out of a total sum of £16,115.12.2 over half was spent on Ullapool, £9,214.13.1.⁴ In an earlier chapter it was noted that £7,778 was spent on building there of which nearly £6,000 went to Melville and the rest was divided between Morrison and Cowie. The remaining £1,436 was spent on salaries, the Agent received £40 a year, the Schoolmaster £10 from the Fisheries Society and later the Doctor

-
1. 26 Geo. III cap.106.
 2. Argyll IV 395.
 3. B.F.S. Letters II 102.
 4. Reports X 247a.

£10 a year; there was also some expenditure on the purchase of supplies of food in 1791, '92, '94 and '96 which was not always repaid by the settlers. Finally there were repairs to buildings, a small item before 1798 although the Customs Officers' house, which it will be remembered dated from 1772, required about £90 worth of repairs in 1795.¹

The expenditure on the other two settlements was £5,183.6.10 on Tobermory which had required no pier and where freight charges had been much lower than at Ullapool, and £1,627.12.3 on Lochbay whose development had only begun in 1796. The annual outlay on these three settlements was very irregular during this period, the highest total being nearly £7,500 in 1789, when Ullapool and Tobermory were being built, which sank to an average of about £800 a year after 1794.²

Thus after spending one half of their capital the Directors had two settlements in full working order and a third in process of building, which satisfied them very well. The only complaints of expense were over the Inn and Pier at Ullapool, the former being too good for the locality and the latter having proved so troublesome in construction. In all other respects the Directors considered that they had had full value for their money and the proprietors had no criticism of the Society's expenditure.

In theory the shareholders would have expected a dividend from the Society but in practice there was no method but the collection of rents by which to raise an income.

In 1798 the situation, with regard to rents, was decidedly hopeful. The Accountant was able to show that in the previous year the

1. Argyll IV 580.

2. B.F.S. Papers. Secretary's Ledger.

settlements had each produced rents which exceeded their feu duties.¹ Tobermory paid the largest feu duty at £78.17 but had produced £167.19.8 in rents in 1797. The feu duty of Ullapool was £50.9.11 and the rents £114.7.6 while Lochbay cost the Society £49.0.11 and had brought in £73.19.0. Thus in 1797 the Society had gained £177.18.4. While the feu duties would remain fixed and the administrative charges of the settlements were low, the rents would increase as more settlers were attracted to the villages and agricultural improvement raised the value of the land. Whether these rents would ever increase enough to repay all the expenses of the settlements was by no means certain but the chances seemed good. In 1801 the Secretary wrote² "No dividend has yet been made nor is soon likely to be made by the Society though there may yet be such a thing according as the Society's settlements may rise into a degree of prosperity sufficient for that purpose. None of the subscribers have expressed impatience on this Head, as the money was from the first intended for the public improvement of the country and not for private profit tho' in time the latter may likewise take place."

Viewed in this light the finances of the Society up to 1798 were sound and the Directors were satisfied with the results of their expenditure. In central organisation, as in the administration of the settlements, progress had been continuous and satisfactory and the prospects for the Society's work in the new century were regarded by Directors and Proprietors as excellent.

1. Reports X 247a.
2. B.F.S. Letters IV 126.

CHAPTER VIII

The Society in Parliament. 1786-1808

Having studied the progress of the British Fisheries Society in the Highlands and in London from 1786 to 1798 it is time to consider its work in Parliament. An earlier chapter has shown that the foundation of the Society was closely linked with the House of Commons. It had its origin in the Fishery Act of 1786,¹ part of its inspiration from a Committee of the House on Fisheries and many of its leading proprietors were members of either the House of Lords or the House of Commons. The Society was thus set to play its part at Westminster.

Debates of the period are very inadequately reported and it is not always easy to distinguish between the action and policy of the Society and those of individual members. For example in 1789 George Dempster introduced a Fishery Bill which he explained was "to correct the shocking alterations Beaufoy, unknown to any of us, had made in the old one."² There is no evidence as to which of these two Directors the Society officially supported for at the request of the Prime Minister and the Marquis of Graham, another Director, Dempster withdrew the fishery clauses before an issue could be made.

This incident may also be taken to illustrate the non-political character of the Society's position in Parliament. Not only the members but the Directors were drawn from both political parties. The Marquis of Graham, Robert Smith and Vansittart, later Chancellor of the Exchequer represented the Tory party while the majority of the Directors were Whigs including Beaufoy, Dempster, William Smith, Sir John Sinclair

1. 26 Geo. III cap.106.

2. Stockdale. Debates 22 June 1789.

and Sir William Pulteney. Party distinction cannot be stressed at this period and the political views of individual Directors do not, on the whole, concern this thesis. What is more important in the history of the Society is that the Directors were prominent members of Parliament and active in debates and committees on many different subjects. Thus they had considerable influence at Westminster and many, including Wilberforce, had close personal connexions with Pitt, Dundas (himself a member of the Society) and other members of the Government.

This link with the King's Ministers provides the key to the Society's Parliamentary work during its first twenty years. The members do not appear to have organised any large scale debate on Fisheries during this time, although Committees of the House were called in 1798 and 1800 to renew the existing Fishery laws.¹ The Directors accomplished a great deal for the fishing industry by acting as technical advisers to the Government on fishery questions almost to the extent of an unofficial Ministry. The Court of Directors received petitions or complaints from fishermen and merchants and acted on them themselves or forwarded them to the Treasury, Customs or appropriate authority. They recommended suitable action to the Government and in important cases, after collecting evidence, pressed for and even drafted new legislation.

By way of illustrating the position and technique of the Directors it will be useful to examine their handling of four important questions. On the salt laws and Justiciary Bailies they were attempting on one hand to alter the existing laws and on the other to initiate new legislation. The building of the Ullapool road illustrates the

1. Reports X 300-390.

semi-official position of the Society while the matter of the imports of foreign herring shows the relations between the Society, the merchants and the Treasury.

First comes the Society's effort to alter the salt laws.

The Treaty of Union between England and Scotland imposed upon Scotland the very much higher duties on salt then levied in England. Scottish fish curers were provided with "the same Eases, Premiums and Drawbacks as are or shall be allowed to such persons as Export the like fish from England".¹ Salt manufactured in Scotland was produced by crystallising sea water and was considered too weak for preserving fish. Scots were prohibited from importing English salt so that all salt must be brought from abroad. At first the Curers paid full duty on their salt and obtained a refund when they produced a barrel of herring preserved ready for export. This appeared simple and straightforward but it was found that curers were making a profit for themselves by using a smaller proportion of salt for each barrel of herring and claiming refund of duty on the regulation scale. By 1719 this practice was giving the British fisheries such a bad name for improperly preserved fish that a new Act had to be passed. By this law, salt for the fisheries was to be sold free from duty but in order to prevent it from being used for non-fishing purposes curers were required to import their salt only through Customs Houses, keep it under lock and key and make a detailed account of what they used.² By 1735 it was also found necessary for curers to give security for the proper use of their salt.³ Thus a

1. A.P.S. XI 408b.
2. 5 Geo. I cap.18.
3. 8 Geo.II cap.12.

detailed system of checks and balances safeguarded the Customs officials but hampered the fish curers.

For the next fifty years no major alterations were made in the salt laws. Attempts to encourage the fishing industry after 1750 had shown according to Mr. Patrick White, a Commissioner of Customs in Wester Ross, that the salt regulations were "Millstones round the neck of the Fishing Trade."¹ This opinion was so generally held that these laws were investigated at an early session of the Committee of the House of Commons on Fisheries in 1785.

One of the first witnesses called before this Committee was Dr. James Anderson who, it will be remembered, had been sent by the Treasury in 1784 to study the fishing industry in Scotland. Dr. Anderson gave the members of the Committee what he claimed to be a simplified version of the salt laws. He said that² "All importers of Foreign Salt were required first, to land it at a Customs House, where it was carefully weighed by the proper officers and the importer required to make oath that it was to be employed solely for the purpose of curing fish, and was further required, with two sufficient sureties to give bond for the whole value of the duties, if he could not either produce the Salt itself before the 5th April thereafter, or cured fish in such quantities as were sufficient to exhaust the whole of the salt, which fish he was required to declare upon oath had been cured with so much salt for which he had given bond. It was only after all these forms had been duly complied with, that the bond could be recovered; and these bonds when

1. Reports X 143a.

2. Ibid. 69-70.

they came due, must be regularly returned to the Commissioners of the Salt Duties by whom action must be instantly commenced for the recovery of the penalties of the bonds. If any salt remains unused, a new bond in the same terms must be granted for it, however small the quantity; nor can it be moved from the place where it is lodged without an express order from the Customs House; nor can a bushel of Salt in any circumstances be sold to any person without getting a new bond from the Customs House for that quantity and getting so much of the former bond cancelled as answered to the quantity sold. All these things are required with a multiplicity of other regulations."

Not only were these regulations cumbersome but several witnesses maintained that the burden of them fell unevenly within the fishing industry.¹ The laws were far too involved for the average fisherman to understand and were enforced with fines heavy enough to ruin the small-scale trader. He suffered also since the amount of security demanded by the Customs officers did not vary according to the quantity of salt imported but was a fixed sum which it was very much harder to find out of limited means. Also the law required that curers should keep their salt locked in storehouses of which there were few in the West Highlands and not many fishermen there who could afford to build one, while the situation was further complicated by the fact that many fishermen lived at least a hundred miles from the nearest Customs House. These difficulties greatly reduced the fishing in the West Highlands. Shoals of herring were apt to appear in the lochs without warning and while it was difficult and expensive for the fishermen to keep salt ready for

1. Reports X 141 et seq.

such an emergency, it was impossible to find a market for fresh fish in the Highlands. This evidence given to the Committee of 1785 showed the salt laws to be not only obstructive but unfair to the fishing industry in the Highlands. The lack of Customs Houses and storehouses was deplorable and the absence of fish curers in the Highlands with a large enough business and capital to buy fresh fish from the local boatmen was considered very serious.

After considering all the evidence the Committee reported that they could find no remedy. It was held to be impossible to remove or alter any of the regulations. While the value of a ton of English salt stood at £1 the duty charged was £12 or 1200% and the duty on foreign salt stood even higher in relation to the prime cost.¹ So long as Parliament continued to impose such a tax the strictest regulations were clearly required to prevent abuses and the only alternative would have been to abolish duties on salt imported for all purposes. But the salt tax provided a large part of the revenue and the American War together with the increased cost of administration had left the Government very short of money. All commodities then considered suitable were already taxed so that the country could not afford to abolish or even to decrease the duty on salt and in spite of the recommendations of many influential members of Parliament, such a measure was not even discussed in the House. So the Committee, after showing the serious effects of the salt laws on the fishing industry, failed to bring about any improvement.

Thus the matter stood at the Incorporation of the British

1. Reports X 15b.

Fisheries Society which found the salt laws one of its major problems. The Directors determined to obtain better laws but since they realised that this would be a lengthy matter, they also took steps to mitigate the severity of the existing regulations.

The Committee of 1785 had pointed out that the erection of Customs Houses at various places on the north west coast would ease the situation. As early as 1789 the Society obtained permission from the Treasury to build a Customs House at their new settlement at Tobermory, provided the Society undertook to erect the necessary buildings and to grant leases of houses and land to the officers.¹ A few months later the Directors also arranged for the appointment of additional staff for the Customs House at Isle Martin, a few miles north of Ullapool, which had been only an extension of the establishment at Fort William and unable to deal with salt.² A later attempt to set up a Customs House at Lochbay failed because the settlement was not large enough to justify the expense but the Society had already increased the Customs Houses on the north west from one, at Stornoway, to three which helped the fishermen considerably by shortening their journey to fetch and register the salt.

Another very important benefit conferred by the Society on the west coast fishermen was the building of storehouses at each of their settlements. Fishermen living near Tobermory, Ullapool and Lochbay could rent a space in these storehouses for their salt which was thus kept under lock and key according to the regulations.

1. Argyll III 159.

2. Ibid. 209.

These two practical steps were taken by the Society without Parliamentary action or influence though the position of the Directors may have helped them to obtain the Treasury warrants for the Customs Houses with unusually little correspondence and negotiation.

Meanwhile though the Directors realised that there was little prospect of forcing a complete new Act through Parliament in the immediate future, they determined to keep the question of salt laws before the Government. In November 1788 the Secretary wrote to the Duke of Argyll,¹ "The present is probably as good a time as any season of the year to remind the Lord Advocate of the proposed laws for the importation of Rock Salt and the conveyance of coals in Scotland, as he will now again be thinking of business and its hurry is still at some distance. Perhaps the same may be the present period of Mr. Dundas's engagements." The salt laws were mentioned in the House of Commons when George Dempster proposed amendments to the fishery Acts in 1789.² He told Parliament that he would like to see the duty taken off salt for the curing of Cod and Ling as well as for Herring, but realising that this would be opposed on the part of the Revenue and feeling "too old to engage in any Parliamentary controversy that is likely to cause much trouble" he had refrained from bringing such a proposal before the House. Reports of debates for this period do not give a complete picture of events in Parliament but the Society's papers show that further references to the salt laws were made in the House from time to time. The Directors also executed a publicity campaign

1. B.F.S. Letters I 29.

2. Stockdale. Debates 22nd June 1789.

by reminding members of the Government of the unsatisfactory state of the laws. The Melville papers contain several Memoranda written by members of the Society and on at least one occasion Wilberforce was asked to discuss the subject with the Prime Minister. The Earl of Breadalbane laid a complaint from the Tobermory fishermen before the Customs Commissioners in Edinburgh and found that the situation had arisen from a misunderstanding by the Customs officers at Tobermory which was easily put right.¹

This publicity campaign resulted in a number of administrative concessions which were embodied in an Act of 1798 transferring the salt duties from the Customs to the Excise departments,² a move which does not appear to have been particularly advocated by the Society. Although they were not recognised by law until that year, these concessions appear to have been in force before then. One of these was a relaxation of the official action against uncanceled bonds. In 1785 Mr. White had complained that as a Customs officer he was bound to prosecute a curer, who had brought in neither salt nor fish, immediately after the 5th April however mitigating the circumstances. Clause CII of the Act of 1798 gave the Excise officers considerable latitude in this matter which must have been most helpful to the curers.

Secondly in 1795 after pressure by the Society upon the Committee of the Council of Trade, delivery of salt was authorised by the Treasury in certain cases to Curers who had no warehouse.³ This was

-
1. Breadalbane Box C.30.3. Memorandum dated 1791.
 2. 38 Geo. III cap.89.
 3. B.F.S. Letters III 141.

officially recognised in Clause XCII of the same Act for the benefit of those dwelling in "thinly populated parts".

Six clauses later the same Act sanctioned the transfer of salt from one curer to another without payment of duty which had been strictly prohibited in 1785. The Society was clearly making use of this concession in their own settlements before 1798 for as early as 1792 an arrangement was made with Mr. David Cooper of Whaligo to supply fishermen at Ullapool with salt and casks,¹ which without some special ruling would have been illegal under the Acts of 1785 and 1786.

Another point, which appears a minor one, was that bonds for salt were no longer subject to stamp duty which would have saved the fishermen between nine and twelve shillings on each bond. This was a favourite economy of the Society for the Secretary gave repeated orders to the Agents that as few documents as possible should be written on stamped paper.

These four changes brought about either directly or indirectly by the Society's propaganda, together with more Customs and storehouses in the Highlands, had so improved matters for fishermen that in 1798 the Earl of Kinnoul was able to report² that "the repeated applications of the Directors in behalf of the Fishers have procured such a practical mitigation of the rigour of restrictions that no complaints on the subject have lately been made which is of itself a matter of the highest consequence especially to Fishers of small property who chiefly felt the inconvenience of these regulations."

1. B.F.S. Letters II 102.
2. Reports X 242a.

The 1798 Committee of the House of Commons on Fisheries did not discuss salt very fully but during the short peace of 1801 a Committee was appointed to investigate the whole matter of the laws in all aspects of agriculture and industry as well as fisheries. This Committee included among its twenty six members at least eight Directors of the British Fisheries Society.¹ Evidence suggested that so far as the fisheries were concerned the laws were working well. All the same the Society urged that the salt duties and the accompanying regulations be abolished and it was strongly supported by the agricultural and industrial witnesses. The Committee recommended this in principle but the Report added that "the urgent necessity of supporting the revenue in a crisis like the present" could not be disregarded.² No campaign of publicity could combat this point and before anything further could be done, war had broken out once again. By 1805 the duty had been increased.³ It was not until 1818 that abolition, recommended in principle in 1801, was once more discussed.⁴ As a result of the work of another Committee, on which the members of the Society again played their part, an Act was passed in 1825⁵ which finally abolished all duties on the import of salt.

Although the Fisheries were subject to salt regulations until 1825 the work of the British Fisheries Society between 1786 and 1798 not only removed many grievances but convinced the authorities that the abolition of the duties was the right course in time of peace.

-
1. Journal of the House of Commons Vol.LVI p.410.
 2. Reports X 508b.
 3. 45 Geo. III cap.14.
 4. Accounts and Papers 1818. V p.3 et seq.
 5. 5 Geo. IV cap.65.

The continued use by the Directors of their Parliamentary and personal influence to bring complaints to the notice of appropriate authorities and to recommend solutions went far to remove "the Millstone from the neck of the Fishing Industry."

The same procedure may be illustrated from the Society's fight for Parliamentary recognition of Justiciary Bailies.

Until the middle of the eighteenth century the duty of appointing an officer to keep order among the herring fishers of the west coast of Scotland was carried out by the Duke of Argyll.¹ The east coast fishery was not then considered great enough to need an officer. The Dukes of Argyll had wide powers of jurisdiction over their own estates and were also hereditary Vice-Admirals of the western coasts of Scotland by which authority they could exercise civil and criminal jurisdiction in mercantile and maritime cases. Again they held from the King a grant of the Assize or duty paid by the herring fishermen. An officer appointed at first to collect this money came to be also employed by the Dukes in keeping order and was given authority by them to hold courts and exercise a petty jurisdiction similar to a Baron Bailie. This was the origin of the Justiciary Bailie and at the time it was not questioned whether the authority was granted by the Dukes as Vice-Admirals or by virtue of their hereditary powers in Argyll, in other words whether the courts were under Admiralty or civilian jurisdiction.

After 1747 the situation changed. In that year hereditary jurisdictions in Scotland were abolished² including that of the Duke

1. Breadalbane Box C.30.3. Account by Lord Advocate. 28 April 1789.
2. 20 Geo. II cap.43.

of Argyll. Eight years later in 1755 the Duke resigned his right to collect the Assize of Herrings for as a member of the Society of Free British Fishery he was actively concerned in the encouragement of the industry and considered the tax impolitic. With the tax went the officer and for several years no-one kept order at the herring fishery.

In 1763 as a result of complaints from the fishermen, William Findlay of Campbeltown was appointed Justiciary Bailie¹ by a Royal Commission under the Privy Seal of Scotland. Findlay was given power to "affix, affirm, hold and continue Courts of Justiciarie... for the administration of justice and the punishment of Transgressors." No authority was stated save that of the King nor was the scope of his jurisdiction defined so that the relation of the Bailie with the Admiralty and the Court of Session was no clearer than it had been under the Dukes of Argyll.

The situation was further complicated by the need for a salary for the Bailie. The fines taken from offenders were intended to be received by him to meet expenses, but he found that he had to give the money away as rewards to informers. The Commissioners for the Forfeited Estates therefore agreed to pay Findlay a small salary and though they had no authority over the judicial work of the Bailie they required an annual report of his movements.² When it became necessary for Findlay to appoint two deputies, as he had authority to do, the Commissioners issued instructions regarding the area to be covered by each. After 1784 when the forfeited estates were returned to their

1. Breadalbane Box C.30.3. Copy Contract.

2. Forfeited Estate papers. General Management II. Improvements No.8.

owners, the Bailies were paid by the Board of Trustees for Manufactures and Fisheries,¹ a body whose limited income had to be divided between all the industries of Scotland. It followed that when the fisheries increased the Board of Manufactures had to be thoroughly convinced of the necessity of another Bailie before agreeing to pay the extra salary. Thus although the principal Bailie alone had power to appoint deputies, applications for those deputies were sent first for approval by the Board. The Bailies, then, held their authority from the King and drew their salaries, after 1784, from the Board of Manufactures.

A study of the annual reports of the Bailies² shows almost equal confusion in the practice of their duties. Each Bailie was responsible for one part of the coast and his instructions required him to attend the herring fleet regularly whenever it appeared within his area. Bailie MacIver, a merchant of Stornoway, was the deputy in charge of the north west whose district included the mainland from the Pentland Firth to Cairloch together with the Islands of Barra, North and South Uist, Harris and Lewis.³ The fleet might appear in any of the innumerable sea lochs in his area and the Bailie had no information of its whereabouts other than chance meetings with local boatmen. MacIver reported that the season was sometimes well advanced before he met the fleet which might easily be scattered among several of the bays and lochs with busses moving continually. The procedure of the Bailie on arrival with the fleet was very vague. A serious offence could be

1. Board of Manufactures. Minutes Vol.25 p.29.

2. Forfeited Estate Papers. General Management II. Improvements No.8.

3. Board of Manufactures. Letters Vol.15 p.177.

taken before a Magistrate on shore but in most cases a Jury of fishermen of equal status with the offender was appointed by the Bailie to hear the charge, receive the evidence and acquit or sentence him according to custom for there was no law by which to judge fishery offences.¹ These two practical difficulties of finding the fleet and of judging offences combined with the uncertain jurisdiction of the Bailies to render their Commissions almost ineffective.

The first step towards improvement came from a suggestion made to the 1785 Committee of the House of Commons by James Maxwell of Campbeltown. After reporting that the Bailies were too few, their authority too uncertain and that they were seldom with the fleet, he suggested that temporary Commissions or Deputations might be given to senior Bussmasters to act in the absence of a Bailie when many busses were collected in one loch.² The Committee did not act at once but Maxwell's suggestion was put into effect in 1787 when a temporary Bailie, to the scale of one Bailie for every 500 tons of shipping, was allowed. This went far to counteract the first practical difficulty, for the Bussmaster acted until the proper Bailie had reached the fleet.³

At this point the British Fisheries Society took up the question of Bailies. The Directors had already consulted fishermen, landlords and revenue officers on many aspects of the herring industry in the Highlands. In March 1788, after the Society purchased their land at Ullapool and Tobermory, it turned to the problem of keeping order in the lochs. Beaufoy told members of the Society that "the object of

-
1. Breadalbane Box C.30.3. Account by the Lord Advocate. 28 April
 2. Reports X p.99a. 1789.
 3. Board of Manufactures. Minutes Vol.26 p.61.

exertion with the crew of every vessel is not so much the taking of the greatest quantity of fish as of preventing as much as possible their fellow adventurers from taking any."¹ The Directors resolved as a start to apply to the Board of Manufactures for the appointment of a third deputy Bailie to be employed on the mainland coast between Torridon and Lochinver.² Sir Ilay Campbell, the Lord Advocate and a member of the Society, presented the case to the Board who agreed to the appointment.³

Before the office of third deputy had been filled, the British Fisheries Society was advised that further action was required. After studying the complaints of the fish curers and merchants of Greenock and Rothesay, the Directors resolved, on 17th May 1788,⁴ to appoint one of the Society's proprietors, Mr. Robert Fraser of London, to tour the fisheries during the summer and consider the behaviour of both fishermen and Bailies. Fraser's report, dated from Isle Martin in October 1788,⁵ described how fishermen stole each other's catch and destroyed each other's equipment, buoys and nets. Bussmen were blamed by boat fishers for an offence with more far reaching consequences. It was accepted as a fact among the fishermen that if herring were disturbed during the first few days after their arrival in a loch, they were likely to leave the neighbourhood immediately, while if they were left in peace for several days they might remain in the same loch for several weeks. It was therefore important for the boatmen, who could only

1. Beaufoy. Speech p.69.

2. B.F.S. Letters I 31.

3. Board of Manufactures. Letters Vol.15 p.207.

4. Argyll III p.44.

5. Ibid. p.254.

fish in their own lochs, that the herring should not be disturbed. It was said however that the bussmen refused to wait the few days and after making large catches prepared to follow the shoal to another loch. Fraser also included in his report a proposed set of regulations, with appropriate penalties, drawn up and signed by forty three Bussmasters and Boatmen. The report thus furnished the British Fisheries Society not only with a full statement of the abuses but also with a possible solution.

During the winter of 1788 Fraser's report was considered by a Committee of the Society which submitted to the Directors a revised version of the Bussmen's regulations in the form of 35 resolutions.¹ The details of procedure, fines and offences were based upon the customs then in force but the number of Bailies was to be increased so that each officer would have a smaller district. The resolutions were to be introduced to Parliament to provide the basis of an Act to legalise the authority and procedure of the Bailies.

Before taking their resolutions to Parliament the Directors of the British Fisheries Society sent them to the Lord Advocate. Sir Ilay Campbell consulted the Crown Agent in Scotland, Mr. John Davidson, W.S., and Mr. Arbuthnot, Secretary of the Board of Manufactures. As a result of their advice the Lord Advocate wrote a Memorandum¹ on Bailies. After tracing the origin of the office to private appointment by the Dukes of Argyll, he stated that in his opinion the office and jurisdiction of Justiciary Bailie were "unknown in the Constitution of Scotland". He agreed that this must be remedied but while the Society

1. Breadalbane. Box C.30.3. Copy of Resolutions.

resolved to create a new jurisdiction by Act of Parliament, he proposed to adapt an existing one by requesting the Judge of the High Court of Admiralty to grant Commissions to the Bailies which would enable them to hold Admiralty Courts.

In spite of the opinion of the Lord Advocate, the British Fisheries Society forwarded the resolutions to the Board of Manufactures in Edinburgh. Here they were referred to yet another Committee on which the Lord Advocate sat with the Lord Justice Clerk and the Solicitor General.¹ Copies of the resolutions were sent to the fishermen of the Clyde who supported them, and to Lachlan Mactavish, General Surveyor of Fisheries to the Board. Mactavish agreed that the existing arrangements were inadequate and favoured a Commission for the Bailies from the Admiralty as the Lord Advocate had done rather than one based on a new Act of Parliament.² The Committee does not appear to have reported any opinion, for in March 1791 Arbuthnot informed John Mackenzie of the Fisheries Society that he had still not received an answer on the subject of the Bailies.³ Four months later the Principal Bailie died and his successor was appointed with the previous authority and instructions and no reference to the resolutions.⁴ The Society had so far achieved nothing practical but its work was important in that it caused the problem to be clearly stated for the first time and two possible solutions had been put forward, one by Act of Parliament and the other by Admiralty Commission.

-
1. Board of Manufactures. Minutes Vol.27 p.81.
 2. Breadalbane Box C.30.3. Report of Lachlan Mactavish.
 3. Board of Manufactures. Letters Vol.16 p.152.
 4. Board of Manufactures. Minutes Vol.27 p.396.

For several years after this nothing further was done for one result of the recent publicity was that the Bailies were paying more attention to their duties. This state of affairs was not very satisfactory because the position of the Bailies was still unsound and so long as no official complaints reached the Society they were unable to reopen discussions with the Board of Manufactures. There was a reference to the subject in the Minutes of the Board of Manufactures for March 1799¹ when a clause "relative to the appointment of a Justiciary Bailie" was proposed to be introduced into the new Fishery Act. This Act was delayed until after the Union with Ireland and since the clause was not given in full in the Board's Minutes or elsewhere, it is impossible to say what form the appointment was to take.

1802 saw a complete change in the situation. It has already been remarked that Bailies had not been required for the east coast but in 1793 there was a sudden increase of fishing in the Forth, to which herring had returned after an absence of more than fifty years. Complaints of disorder among the fishermen led, in January 1801, to the appointment of Robert Crookshank as Justiciary Bailie for the east coast.² After a few months in office Crookshank reported to the Board of Manufactures that fishermen were employing two new methods of catching fish, one by trawling and the other by fixing nets upon stakes, and that he considered them both "highly detrimental to the success of the Fishery at large."³ He also reported that fishermen who knew the limits of his authority were defying his attempts to forbid these methods.

-
1. Board of Manufactures. Minutes Vol.30 p.52.
 2. Board of Manufactures. Minutes Vol.31 p.6.
 3. Ibid. p.89-90.

The Board agreed that these practices were harmful but decided that without an Admiralty Commission Crookshank had no authority against them. Therefore the new Lord Advocate, Charles Hope of Granton, and the Solicitor General were requested "to meet with the Judge Admiral and to assist him in putting this business on a clear and proper footing".¹ As a result of this meeting a Commission was issued to Crookshank on 3rd February 1802 by which the Judge Admiral authorised him to "take cognisance of the Frauds and misconduct of those engaged in the Herring Fishery on the East Coast".² He was given the support of a naval gunboat to enforce his authority. The appointment as Admiral Depute was for one year only since it was regarded as an experiment. Thus for the first time definite jurisdiction was granted to a Bailie.

Since Crookshank was paid by the Admiralty he no longer reported to the Board of Manufactures and we therefore know little about the effect of the new Commission though since it was renewed every year until 1808 it must have been regarded as satisfactory. The Board agreed that if the experiment was a success an Admiralty Commission would be obtained for the west coast Bailies also, but when the British Fisheries Society applied for this it was refused.³ Next year both the principal Bailie on the west and the deputy for Stornoway died and the Board decided not to replace them immediately "there being an intention of applying to Parliament to have the Superintendents of the

1. Board of Manufactures. Minutes Vol.31 p.94.
2. Ibid. p.114.
3. Board of Manufactures. Letters Vol.19 p.1.

Herring Fishery put upon an entirely new footing".¹ This probably meant that work on the new Fishery Act was in hand in London at the time. The decline of the fishery on the West since 1800 may also have made an immediate reappointment unnecessary. After 1803, then, the position was that the east coast was ruled by an Admiral Deputy while on the west there remained only one of the original three Bailies.

At last in 1808 came the long awaited Fishery Act,² so long awaited indeed that its appearance seems to have caused very little comment as though everyone was tired of the subject and had turned to other things. Among other important provisions the Act abolished the office of Justiciary Bailie and divided the responsibility for keeping order at the fisheries between the Admiralty and the Sheriffs. A commissioned officer of His Majesty's Navy was to be Superintendent of Deep Sea Fishing appointed, paid and instructed by the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty. For in-shore fishing the office of Admiral Deputy was abandoned and the jurisdiction of all Sheriffs was to be extended to cover "all persons engaged in catching, curing or dealing in Fish" on shore or within ten miles of the coast. In practice the Sheriffs gave substitutions to gentlemen especially for dealing with fishery cases. The first Fishery Sheriff was Coll Macdonnell of Barrisdale who had been a Bailie since 1787 and continued in his old district from Gairloch to Mull.³ Similar officers were appointed for Lochinver, Lochbroom and the Firth of Forth. The result was therefore that the Admiralty through a naval officer was in control beyond the

-
1. Board of Manufactures. Letters Vol.19 p.207.
 2. 48 Geo. III cap.110.
 3. Fishery Board Minutes Vol.1 p.35.

ten mile limit while the civil courts through the fishery Sheriffs worked within ten miles of the coast.

The Act had done nothing to define fishery offences for the Sheriff Courts though the deep sea fishermen came under naval law, so that the Sheriffs' task was little easier than the Bailies' had been. It seems that they were not successful in checking disorder, for in 1815¹ the Act was altered to provide for a naval officer to be appointed "Superintendent of the British Herring Fishery carried on in the lochs and upon the coast". From 1815 therefore, the Admiralty took over complete responsibility for keeping order among the fishermen and offenders were tried by naval officers in Admiralty Courts.

This organisation was continued with success for seventy years until the Act of 1882² reformed the Fishery Board and gave back the jurisdiction of coastal fishery to civilian officers while the deep sea fishery developed an international character.

In this history as in the matter of the salt laws we can see the Directors' influence at work between 1786 and 1798 in collecting evidence and presenting it to the appropriate authorities, a function for which they were very well suited for the fishermen lacked the ability and the Government had no nation-wide organisation from which to gain technical knowledge. The Society on the other hand had direct contact with both the industry and the Ministry. This contact was used to call attention to the lack of order in the fisheries and although the Society's resolutions never became an Act of Parliament and

1. 55 Geo. III cap.94.
2. 45 and 6 Vict. cap.78.

though the final solution was different from what the Directors had advocated, yet the result was what they had pressed for - order in the fisheries.

The same close contact between the Society and the Government may be illustrated from the building of the Ullapool road. Before studying the making of this particular road, however, it is necessary to glance at the general position with regard to Highland roads in 1786.

Most of the roads south of Inverness were military in origin but after 1770 the responsibility for their repair was given to the counties, though soldiers continued to be employed on them for a number of years. Beyond Inverness, although there had been a number of surveys, no military roads had been made. The usual tax of one shilling in the pound was quite inadequate for building roads through such difficult country where twenty pounds per mile was the estimated cost, and local proprietors and Justices of the Peace from Ross, Caithness and Sutherland applied to the Commissioners for Forfeited Estates for aid. The Ross-shire gentry wrote in 1768¹ that they had made a road from the Orrin river near Beauly towards Poolewe "in order to render the Post Communications more accessible," and now requested funds for a bridge over the Orrin without which the road was often useless. Three years later the Justices of the Peace of the same county applied for a pier at Inverbreakie (near Invergordon) because the ferry there was used on the road from Inverness to Wick.¹ These petitions show that the local gentry were making roads without military aid, though some of the roads, including that from the Orrin to Poolewe, were of so low a standard

1. Forfeited Estate Papers. General Management II. Improvements No.2.

that they had to be remade within a few years. The petitions also give an idea of the road map of the Highlands in the 1780's. There was a road from Inverness to Wick with ferries at many points but suitable for a carriage at least as far as Dornoch. The Cromarty area had a good system of roads but the east to west communication north of Inverness appears to have been only on riding tracks.

The building of roads of communication from the east to the west coast was strongly recommended by the House of Commons Fishery Committee in 1786¹ as a means of promoting trade, particularly the west coast herring fishery. Nothing was done by the Fisheries Society until the summer of 1789 when George Dempster brought up the matter in the House of Commons.²

Accounts of this debate include only Dempster's fishery proposals already mentioned followed by non-committal speeches by Pitt and the Marquis of Graham. The Fishery Bill then went into Committee. However on 2nd July the Chairman of the Committee moved that the House present a humble address to his Majesty³ begging him to direct the Commander in Chief in Scotland to "cause a survey to be made, together with an estimate of the expence of making Roads of Communication between the Eastern and Western Coasts of Scotland through the Shires of Inverness, Ross, Sutherland and Caithness." The address received royal attention a few days later.

An explanation of this was given by Dempster several years later.⁴

-
1. Reports X 145b.
 2. Stockdale. Debates 22nd June 1789.
 3. House of Commons Journal XLIV 515.
 4. Fergusson. Letters of George Dempster p.214-5.

"The last year I was in Parliament I wished the Directors of the Fisheries to bring in a new Bill.... I had resolutions for the purpose. One of 'em was additional to have the Highland roads benorth Inverness survey'd in order to propose afterwards that they should be made by Government like those already made, such a task far exceeding the faculties of the counties themselves. I wrongheaded it as you may remember, brought on the question in opposition to the wish of all my brethren, and while moving my questions in the House the Marquis of Graham crossed the House with a message from Mr. Pitt that if I would drop all the other articles at that time he would consent to my motion respecting roads. On this occasion my head turned right again. I agreed..."

The Directors of the British Fisheries Society were consulted as to the most essential roads and recommended eight:¹ from Ullapool to Dingwall, to Dornoch and to Portmahomack; from Inverness to Loch Ewe, to Terridon and to Loch Carron; from Loch Lowie (?Loyal) to Dornoch and from Helmsdale by Loch Naver to Laxford. Surveys and estimates for all these were made for the Commander in Chief by Mr. George Brown of Elgin in the Autumn of 1790 but for some reason they did not reach London until the following May. In August 1791 Pulteney, on behalf of the Society, studied them at the Secretary of State's office. As soon as the Society met again, in February 1792, Mr. Brown's work was discussed "particularly the line of road from Dingwall to Ullapool as being the most important and necessary to be first executed". The Directors wrote to Dundas that,² while they approved the general line chosen by

1. Argyll III 456.

2. Melville Papers 354A f.5.

Brown they enclosed an alternative and apparently much lower estimate prepared by David Aitken for the Society in 1787. The letter continued, "We have had occasion to converse with Mr. Kenneth Mackenzie of Torridon now residing in Argyll Street on the subject of that road, and find that he is well acquainted with the situation of it, and with the manner of executing roads in that country having made some roads at his own expense." Torridon offered to contract for the whole road, including the eight bridges required, at Aitken's estimate and the Directors begged "leave to submit to your (Dundas's) consideration whether it would not be proper to contract with Mr. Mackenzie for the immediate execution of the Road at the reduced price."

Although the surveys and estimates were expected to go before Parliament so that a Grant might be made towards the expense there is no record that they did so. But before the middle of May 1792¹ the Directors entered into an agreement with Torridon to make the road from Contin, near Dingwall, to Ullapool and to have the contract "ready to be executed whenever the Directors are furnished with a warrant for receiving the publick money".

The Contract was signed on 17th May 1792.² The length of the new road was estimated by Aitken at 40 miles and he charged between 4d and 8d per yard according to the nature of the ground, though the stretch from Glascarnoch to Inverlael was so steep at one point and so mossy at another that he charged 15/- per yard for that section. £400 was laid aside for tools and £250 for wages for professional overseers.

1. Argyll IV 422-3.
2. B.F.S. Letters II 94.

The eight bridges needed were estimated at £1,550, being £100 for a single arch and £250 for a double arch. Torridon's total charge, based on Aitken's survey, was £4,117.14 but the Treasury later increased the sum to £4,582 to cover bankers' and Treasury fees. This sum was to be credited to the Directors of the British Fisheries Society by instalments related to the progress of the road. £1,000 was to reach them immediately, another £1,000 when one third of the work was finished, probably in November, a further £1,000 after two thirds was made in the Autumn of 1793, £500 on completion of three quarters of the distance and the last £665 when the road and bridges were finished, probably in August 1794.

The position of the Society in the contract was that of intermediary between the Treasury and Torridon, having no prospect of gain or loss, being answerable for the latter's expenditure of public money and negotiating for the prompt issue of warrants at the stated intervals. This last duty required considerable skill and application and the Society's Secretary spent much time at the Treasury while Torridon remained to supervise work in the north. Indeed before the end of May 1792 the Secretary reported¹ "Monday, yesterday and today, that is every weekday since you went, the warrant has been solicited at the Treasury; today I have been with Mr. Dundas, and with the Secretary of the Treasury and with the Treasury Clerk, Mr. Remus all upon this business which I hope and think is now put into a regular official course for passing smoothly and speedily, till today it certainly was not in that channel." The warrant² reached the Society's bank on 16th June 1792.

1. B.F.S. Letters II p.95.

2. P.R.O. Treasury Papers. 17/25 p.52.

By early July Torridon could report¹ considerable success with his plans. He retained Aitken's services to mark out the road and found that the country people showed a surprising readiness to work, without his "being obliged to solicit the influence of the great folks of the Neighbourhood." By 10th July he had engaged 200 labourers and the 7 miles from Contin to Garve was already half finished.¹ A week later Pulteney told Dundas that the first third of the road would be completed earlier than November and Torridon wrote "The number of our labourers has increased and our progress continues great in proportion, so that instead of one third there is every possibility that more than two thirds of the whole line of road will be ready for the Inspectors before the Harvest will deprive us of many of our labourers."²

Torridon's method of organising his labour was to divide the proposed road into five convenient stages, each stage being the responsibility of an individual or company of contractors who supplied a given number of men, varying from 30 to 150 according to the length of the stage. In addition to Aitken Torridon had engaged a few professional roadmakers.

The first inspection was undertaken in September 1792³ by a number of local landowners or their factors including Cromarty, Davidson of Tulloch, Mackenzie of Achilty, Geanies and the factors from Coul and Strathgarve. They met at Contin on 18th September and after examining Brown's survey, Aitken's estimate and Torridon's contract they rode thirteen miles towards Ullapool. The Inspectors sent a very

-
1. P.R.O; Home Office 102. Vol.V. Torridon to Pulteney. 10 July 1792
 2. Ibid. Torridon to Mackenzie. 28 July 1792.
 3. Ibid. Mackenzie to Nepean. 3 October 1792.

favourable report to the Society. They considered the line excellent and though steep, quite suitable for a carriage and the surface was pronounced to be well formed. The road was 16 feet wide and the top covered with gravel while the base was presumably built of local stone (though the Inspectors do not say so) for while shiploads of timber and tools are mentioned no arrangements for the transport of stone appear to have been made. The surface of the road had already been commended by Davidson of Tulloch¹ who drove his wife and daughters over the first thirteen miles of the road in a Post Chaise with "the greatest safety and with as much expedition as upon any part of the Highland Road from Edinburgh."

The second warrant had already been issued by the Treasury and the Directors took advantage of such favourable reports to pay Torridon the second instalment, not due until November. He continued to make rapid progress and gave notice that he would be ready for a second inspection in November 1792, an inspection which was not due until the Autumn of 1793. He told Pulteney that he had finished "and very substantially" what he thought the most difficult piece of the road through the moss tract near Glascarnoch. The third warrant was issued on 10th December, and a meeting of inspectors was held at Dingwall² a week later to sanction its payment.

Contrary to plan Torridon found that "the avidity for labour and the necessities of the Poor were powerful inducements for me to employ them during the winter."³ He chose a stretch of road in the

-
1. P.R.O. Home Office 102. Vol.V. Davidson of Tulloch to Mackenzie. 19 August 1792.
 2. P.R.O. Home Office 102. Vol.VI. Report. 17 December 1792.
 3. Ibid. Torridon to Mackenzie. 19 December 1792.

Strath of Lochbroom to be worked on until the weather improved again. During December he received proof of the quality of his work for he told the Secretary that "our Road is so firm and excellent after the most extraordinary Floods ever remembered.... while all other roads in the country are almost totally destroyed."¹

Progress seems to have been slower during 1793 and 1794 but it is probable that since he was so far ahead of schedule, Torridon employed fewer labourers and the bridges caused delay. Telford was consulted on their construction and Torridon probably employed a Mr. Robertson of Banff to build them.

By September 1794 the road was ready for a final inspection by a professional surveyor, but there was no-one immediately available for the job. In August 1795 the Directors received a report, through Seaforth, from a Major Rudyard of the Engineers who had recently travelled along the road.² This was an informal affair but in 1796 the Directors secured Rudyard's services professionally. He advised the addition of parapets at the steeper parts of the road and complained that the Bridges³ "were built by common Masons who had made use of round stones laid in too great a quantity of Mortar, and that the foundations were formed by putting stones into frames." Torridon added the parapets but he does not appear to have rebuilt the bridges though unspecified "improvements" to them were mentioned.

At all events by 1797 the road from Contin to Ullapool was complete and the Society had contributed greatly to the amenities of

1. P.R.O. Home Office 102. Vol.VI. Torridon to Mackenzie.

2. B.F.S. Letters III 140.

19 December 1792.

3. Ibid. 191.

the western Highlands. It does not appear that any of the other roads surveyed by Brown in 1790 were built until after 1802. In that year the Commissioners for Highland Roads and Bridges were appointed by Parliament to perform much the same function as the Society had done in 1792-6, arranging surveys, payments and inspections of the roads under construction. The seven Commissioners included five Directors of the Society, Vansittart, Pulteney, Hawkins Browne, William Smith and Charles Grant.¹ The achievements of this Commission do not concern this thesis but its formation may very well have come about as the result of the Society's propaganda on the need for Highland Communications and the example given to the Government by the Directors' handling of the Contin-Ullapool road.

The fourth illustration of the work of the Society in Parliamentary affairs concerns a question which arose suddenly and required immediate attention in contrast with the long drawn out negotiations over salt and the Bailies.

During the early 1790's the British Fisheries Society was in contact with the Treasury over a grievance of the exporters of fish. The case was first presented to the Society on behalf of the curers by John Mackenzie of Bishopsgate Street in May 1790.² The Irish Parliament had shortly before that time passed an Act allowing the importation of foreign herrings into Ireland at a duty of 13/4 per barrel, which duty was returned when the herrings were re-exported. In other words it allowed herring to be imported and re-exported duty free. At this date the Swedes were catching their fish at very low cost (partly by

1. 43 Geo. III cap.80.

2. Argyll III 482.

netting the fiords from one bank to the other) and Irish merchants bought barrels of Swedish herring at 7/- or 8/- per barrel. They could therefore afford to sell them to the West Indies fleet at 15/- while the lowest British price was 21/-. The West Indies was the chief market for British herring and it should be remembered that duty free salt for curing herring for the home market was not yet available.

Mackenzie asked the Society to press action in one of three ways. One was the immediate repeal of the Irish Act, the second was to order the West Indian authorities to confiscate foreign herring and the third was to permit foreign herring to be imported into Britain.

A Committee of the Directors considered this matter and Beaufoy took a Memorandum¹ to the Treasury. A note in the margin of the Minutes says, "Mr. Rose (Secretary to the Treasury) to write in the strongest terms to the Irish Government." In August the Secretary told a petitioner on the same subject from Rothesay that the Directors had applied to the Administration² and "there is every reason to think that the attempt of importing those Foreign Herrings into our West Indies will receive obstructions there which they don't wish or expect." The Secretary continued "If in the course of this Season I should learn any important particulars on this subject, I will not fail to inform you what they are, and I beg that you will deal with me in the same manner, for the information of the friends of the Fisheries in London."

Of Mackenzie's three suggestions the third one was rejected by all; the second, confiscation, appears to have been followed and only

1. Argyll III 485-6.

2. B.F.S. Letters I 192.

British or Irish caught herrings were permitted into the West Indies though some curers felt that further proof of the herrings' origin than an oath by the exporter should be required. The Irish Parliament continued to allow Swedish herrings into Ireland but Mr. Rose mentioned a 9/- duty which was substituted for duty free re-export. This result of Mr. Rose's strong letter to the Irish Government seems to have satisfied the curers for the moment.

These arrangements with Ireland were made for one season only but in 1792 after renewed petitions to the Society and their representation to the Treasury by Beaufoy, the Secretary reported that Mr. Rose had shown him a letter from "the proper person in the Administration of Ireland" extending the 9/- duty.¹ After this no further petitions were received by the Society on the matter and the Earl of Kinnoul told shareholders in 1798 that "upon representation by the Directors of the abuse, it was removed."² Evidence before the Fishery Committee of the same year suggests that this was an optimistic view for the West Indian Market was still dominated by foreign caught herring although, thanks to the Society, their importation was illegal. The point to be noticed however is that the events of 1790 and 1792 show how easy was the access, on the one hand of the curers to the Society and on the other of the Directors to the Treasury officials. In this case as in several others, such co-operation brought relief to the curers in a few months which in less fortunate circumstances might well have taken years.

1. B.F.S. Letters II 74.
2. Reports X 241b.

In this chapter the work of the British Fisheries Society in Parliament has been examined, the bulk of which was carried out before 1798. After that date, as will be shown in a later chapter, the character of the Society both in the Highlands and in London changed considerably. Therefore it is important to remember that in its first twelve years the Society contributed much more to the fishing industry than the building of three villages in the Highlands. This greater contribution may be summed up in the words of the Society's Secretary:¹

"If any law ought to be repealed or a new regulation adopted for the several benefit of the Fisheries, this Society will interest themselves for that purpose upon receiving information and proof upon the subject, and the Directors of the Society being members of both Houses of Parliament there is little doubt of their success in every proper application to the Legislature. It is in short the Patronage of the Fisheries they have undertaken."

1. B.F.S. Letters I 136-7.

CHAPTER IX

The Western Settlements. 1798-1808

The history of the British Fisheries Society from 1798 to 1808 is one of transition in every field of its work. We have seen that in 1798 the Directors reviewed their achievements with satisfaction feeling that their money was well spent, their settlements flourishing and their work already bringing benefits to the fishing industry. By 1810 the picture is rather different. In that year a further report was given to the Proprietors at their annual general meeting on 25th March, a report which, like that of Lord Kinnoul in 1798, covered 12 years of the Society's development. On the latter occasion the general feeling was one of depression, the life seemed to have ebbed away from the Society both in its central organisation and, with one great exception, at its settlements. The story of these years will show how the change came about, partly within the Society and partly as the result of circumstances beyond its control.

The first and most obvious consideration is the personnel of the Society. When the Earl of Kinnoul made his report the leaders of the Society were still mainly those who had been Directors since its foundation. Beaufoy died in 1795 but nine of the most influential Directors including the Governor and Deputy Governor were those who had served since 1786.

By 1810, however, only three of the original Directors remained, the Earl of Breadalbane, Hawkins Browne and Neil Malcolm. It has already been noticed that Hawkins Browne was not well acquainted with the Highlands and that Neil Malcolm "though a good attender, does not take the lead" in the Society's affairs.

The Duke of Argyll resigned the Governorship of the Society shortly after 1798 and his successor, Sir William Pulteney, held office until his death in 1805. Although he did not become a Director until 1790, Pulteney was closely connected with the founders of the Society. He was most influential in Scotland and at Westminster and had a wide personal knowledge of the Highlands. For a number of years before his resignation the Duke of Argyll had taken a smaller part in the Society's affairs and Pulteney had become the chief influence among the Directors.¹ On Pulteney's death in 1805 the Governorship was given to the Earl of Breadalbane who had been Deputy Governor since 1786. As Governor, the Earl did not attend the Directors' meetings and does not seem to have been active in framing the Society's policy.

The effective control of the Society, therefore, fell on the Deputy Governor Mr. (later Sir) William Smith, elected in 1805, who held office until his death thirty years later. It has already been mentioned that Smith was M.P. for Norwich. His career in Parliament was devoted to Finance,² to supporting Wilberforce in his anti-slavery movement and to obtaining relief for Dissenters both Catholic and Protestant. His only previous connection with the Highlands was that his father had sent presents of tea and other luxuries to Flora Macdonald when she was in the Tower. In 1802 William Smith was appointed a member of the Highland Roads and Bridges Commission, probably for his financial advice. Though he was genuinely anxious to benefit the Highlands he had not the personal knowledge of either the land or

1. Argyll III 498.

2. Dictionary of National Biography.

the people and the tone of his letters and all his relations with Agents and settlers reflected this drawback, He devoted much time to Fishery business but under him the Society seems to become just another of his many rather impersonal charitable designs.

This tendency was increased by the changes of Directors during this time. Sir John Sinclair remained a Director but his energies were confined to the new settlement at Wick, the story of which will be told in a later chapter. His general work for the Highlands seems to have been done through the Highland Societies of Edinburgh and London, rather than through the British Fisheries Society. The Earl of Seaforth resigned in 1802 when appointed Governor of Barbados¹ and George Dempster resigned between 1798 and 1805, as did the Earl of Moray.

The newly elected Directors included Nicholas Vansittart, later Lord Bexley. His position as Secretary to the Treasury in 1804 and 1806-7 and as Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1812-28 was very useful to the Society but he was of mediocre ability and little personality and, like the Deputy Governor, his connection with the Highlands only began with his service on the Highland Roads and Bridges Commission. Other Directors included Charles, 8th Baron Kinnaird who spent much of his time abroad in search of treasures for his art collection and George Vansittart whose career in the army cannot have spared time for many outside interests. The list contained several names whose owners had failed to distinguish themselves in any way. Captain Huddart, who it will be remembered had already given the Society good service by his work on charts and surveys, was elected to the Board but the only

1. Dictionary of National Biography.

Director of the old school, Highland proprietor and Member of Parliament, was Charles Grant. He had made a fortune in the East India Company and became Chairman of their Court of Directors in 1805. As owner of a property in Skye which marched with Lochbay, and as M.P. for Inverness-shire from 1804 to 1818, his personal knowledge of the Highland country and people was unmatched by the other Directors of the Fisheries Society but unfortunately much of his time was taken up with Parliamentary affairs.

Thus by 1810 the character of the Board of Directors had changed and those like Seaforth and Dempster who lived near enough to the settlements to pay regular visits were badly missed.

The death in 1803 of the Secretary, John Mackenzie, was an even more serious loss to the Society. His successor was efficient enough but belonged to rather a different class. Gilbert Salton was born in Edinburgh in 1770, his father being a glazier in the Grass-market.¹ His mother was granddaughter of John Flemyng of Polcalk, Advocate and perhaps for this reason Gilbert was trained as a writer. He was left no money or property by his parents and soon after his marriage in 1791 seems to have made his way to London where he served as a writer with Mr. Spottiswoode of Sackville Street. At some period of his career he visited the West Indies to the permanent injury of his health. Why the Society appointed Salton rather than Colin Macrae Mackenzie's nephew and assistant is not revealed. Salton was an excellent lawyer but his service to the Society was spoiled by the same lack of personal knowledge of the Highlands and by continual illness

1. Old Greyfriars Parish Register. 16 July 1770.

and signs of lethargy which contrasted with Mackenzie's sparkling enthusiasm.

This change of personnel was quickly reflected in a wider field. In 1798 the Society was concerned with every branch of the fishing industry and, as has been shown, provided a valuable link between fishermen and the Government. A Committee of the House of Commons on Fisheries which sat from 1798 to 1800, though failing to put through any major changes in the industry, showed that the Society was doing excellent work.

The position of the Society in this respect was largely dependent on publicity, for the fishermen must be kept aware of the Society's work before they would present their complaints and petitions. Even before 1798 the Directors had been criticised for their lack of publicity and their reluctance to print any proceedings.¹ During the early years attention was drawn to the experiment because it was new and organised by so many people who were important in Scotland but gradually the interest of the public subsided. The Fishery Committee of 1798 and the address of the Earl of Kinnoul in the same year, which was printed and sold, reminded the public of the Society's work for a few months but the war once again claimed attention. A series of accidents, the deaths of Pulteney, Kinnoul and Mackenzie and local complications at the settlements postponed a second full scale report by the Society which was intended for delivery in 1804² and was not in fact given until 1810 by which time the report itself was gloomy and the public interest far less.

1. Argyll I 269.

2. B.F.S. Letters IV 233.

This decline in publicity was emphasised by the activity of the Highland Society of Edinburgh during the same period. Later in the chapter the influence of emigration in the west of Scotland will be considered more fully, but in this connection it is enough to say that in 1802 the situation was reviewed by a Committee of the Highland Society, which received reports from many parts of the country including detailed statements from the Agents of the Fisheries Society.¹ The Highland Society then applied to the Government for regulations to improve conditions on board emigrant ships and at the same time recommended that employment be found for Highlanders in road-making and fishing. This activity on the part of the Highland Society led, in 1806, to its receiving several petitions on the renewal of the bounty laws,² which several years earlier would certainly have been addressed to the British Fisheries Society.

By 1806, then, the prestige of the Fisheries Society was declining both as a result of changes in personnel and lack of publicity. Two years later the Fishery Act³ still further diminished the scope of the Society's activities. We have already seen that the same Act altered the jurisdiction of fishery offences, but its most important measure was to establish official organisation for the fishing industry. In place of the 21 members of the Board of Trustees for Manufactures and Fisheries there were now to be 28, of whom 7 were appointed to be "Commissioners specially for overseeing, directing and better improving the White Herring Fishery". The Commissioners were to employ a

-
1. Highland Society. Minutes Vol.III p.444.
 2. Highland Society. Minutes Vol.IV p.96.
 3. 48 Geo. III cap.110.

Secretary, Clerk, Messengers and two general Inspectors and to report annually to the Board of Trustees in Scotland and to Parliament. In addition to the general Inspectors, local Fishery Officers (whose qualifications included service as coopers and skill in curing and packing herring) were to be appointed by the Treasury to work under the Commissioners. The Act contained many detailed regulations on the size of barrels, the mesh of nets, curing and bounty rules recommended by the Committee of 1798,¹ which the Fishery Officer had to enforce. An interesting point about the Act was that the industry was placed under the Board of Trustees which had no authority outside Scotland, yet in 1809 a Fishery Officer was appointed for Yarmouth² and the Commissioners immediately made themselves responsible for the industry in the rest of Britain.

One effect of this Act was to cut out almost one half of the Society's work, since the Directors were no longer needed as a link with the Government when an official Inspector was resident in every station and when the Government was already concerned with all branches of the fishing industry.

The reaction of the British Fisheries Society to this Act was complete silence. Neither in their official letters nor in the Minutes is there a single reference to the new Act either immediately before or after its passing. It is true that the Act was a very long time in consideration and that the Society's views had been clearly stated in 1798, namely that stricter regulations were needed in curing

-
1. Reports X 301.
 2. Fishery Board. Report 1809.

and packing and new laws for keeping order among the fishermen. The immediate preparation of the clauses in 1806 and 1807 was undertaken by George Rose,¹ Secretary to the Treasury, (not himself a member of the British Fisheries Society but familiar with it after his negotiations over the Swedish Herring question in 1792) aided by reports from a special Committee of the Highland Society of Edinburgh. Since they took no part in framing the Act, the lack of comment on its passing by the Directors and Secretary of the Fisheries Society is strange, and makes it impossible to tell whether or not they approved of the new organisation.

Whatever their successors may have thought of the Act of 1808, it was an undoubted triumph for the founders of the Society. The policy of Beaufoy and Dempster was to unite the fisheries of all coasts into one industry and to bring the importance of that industry to the special attention of the Government. The work of the Society and the Fishery Committees of the House of Commons had, within twenty two years, been successful enough for the industry to be taken over by an official body with wider scope and funds than any Society of private members could have. The result was to strip the Society of much of its importance, leaving it to concentrate on the settlements, though this as we have seen was already happening. For this reason the failure of the three Western Settlements and occasionally the happier fate of Pulteneytown is all that is remembered of the Society while its successful work for the industry as a whole has been forgotten.

Thus far we have seen how the changed leadership combined with

1. Highland Society. Minutes Vol.IV 325.

the activity of other organisations to lessen the public position of the Directors; it is now time to consider the Society's internal organisation.

As an introduction to a study of the Society's administration of their own property, a glance at the accounts from 1798 to 1810, as compared with the preceding 12 years, will be helpful. With regard to shares there was little difference in the two periods. A drive for subscriptions in 1802, which included a dinner with speeches from the leading Proprietors,¹ had produced only 12 new members. Much work had been done in following up those in arrears of subscriptions but very little money had been collected. In 1798 the shares paid up reached £32,356 with 72 shares unpaid while in 1810 £32,460 had been paid and only 55 remained in arrears, the inference being that nearly all the new members remained in arrears and many of the old defaulters had been written off as hopeless.

In 1798 the total remaining funds had amounted to £19,065.12.10 all of which was invested in Scottish Banks at 4% interest.² In May 1804³ Walter Spens, at that time one of the Auditors, suggested that the Society's funds could be more profitably laid out and the Directors agreed to purchase £4,000 worth of Exchequer Bills paying 5%.⁴ Four years earlier £6,000 had been laid out in India bonds on the same rate.⁵ By 1810⁶ £3,022 worth of loans had been given as compared with

-
1. B.F.S. Letters IV 150-151.
 2. Reports X 246b.
 3. B.F.S. Letters V 21.
 4. Ibid. 35.
 5. B.F.S. Letters IV 24.
 6. Minutes III 49.

£1,076.17.4 twelve years earlier. More than half the sum was made up of small loans to settlers either for building their houses or for buying up stock. A loan of £1,200 was made to the Thurso Harbour Company¹ which was composed of Caithness gentlemen under Sir John Sinclair and whose purpose was to raise funds to build a safe harbour at Thurso. The estimated cost of the harbour was £13,000. The proposal that the Caithness subscriptions to the British Fisheries Society should be loaned at 5% interest for the harbour was first made in 1800 and the loan was finally granted in 1804. The Society continued to raise interest on this loan for nearly twenty years. A similar loan was proposed and actually made to the Crinan Canal Company in June 1799² to the extent of £6,000. The Society was to receive interest and the security was all the Tolls, Rates, quays, houses and lands belonging to the Company. In July almost immediately after the loan was granted the Government voted £25,000 to the Canal Company and the Society's loan, no longer required, was repaid with interest in May 1800.

A substantial addition to the funds of the Society was a Government grant of £9,454.0.3 for the harbour at Pulteneytown. In July 1806 by the Act 46 Geo. III cap.155, which divided the funds of the Forfeited Estates among various bodies in Scotland, the Society received £7,500 for Pulteneytown and the rest was paid later. This settlement will be discussed in a separate chapter but the grant will explain why the funds of the Society stood at £19,065.12.10 in 1798 and at £18,641.12.4 in 1810³ in spite of very considerable expenditure.

-
1. B.F.S. Letters V 45 and 190.
 2. B.F.S. Letters IV 24.
 3. Minutes III 48-9. Full statement of accounts 1786-1810.

The analysis of expenditure can be made on the same basis as that for 1798. The general expenses were £3,039.1.4, nearly £2,000 less than the earlier period. £200 per year still went to the Secretary but there were fewer surveys and less outlay on stationery. Also there was very little spent on charts or experiments which were out of the question in time of war.

The expenditure on the settlements was also lower than for the preceding 12 years, the total being £14,639.0.6 as compared with £16,115.12.2. Neither Ullapool nor Tobermory cost the Society very much since the Agent was expected to bear the cost of repairs and improvements out of the rents he collected. £380.6.7 seems to have been the total outlay on these two settlements. Lochbay scarcely begun in 1798 required £5,838.14.8, while the new settlement at Pulteneytown received £8,419.19.3. The complete expenditure of the Society was £17,678.1.10. The earlier period had a total of £22,015.12.10 but in comparing the two it must be noted that in 1798 the loans to settlers were regarded as expenditure while in 1810 they were included with the India Bonds and Exchequer Bills as assets of the Society.

For reasons which will be seen later the rents at the settlements had not increased as was hoped in 1798. At Tobermory the rent was £252.18.3, the expenses including feu duty and Agent's and other salaries £191.9.0. At Ullapool the profit was less with £150 of rent and £122 worth of expenses while Lochbay had £188 rent and £112 of expenses. Even the apparent income to the Society shown in these figures was seldom realised for the rents of all settlements were in arrears and the expenses given represented only the minimum and did not include special items such as repairs after a storm.

Thus the accounts show on the whole a static position but the Directors felt that they had achieved far less at the Settlements in the later period.

Before studying the progress of the individual settlements there were several circumstances which affected all three and may more easily be taken together.

The first and most important was the war. Ullapool and Tobermory were not very far developed and Lochbay scarcely begun when war was declared in 1793. It will be remembered that one of the arguments used to encourage the fisheries was that they were a nursery for seamen and the British Fisheries Society had received a message of thanks from Lord Rodney on behalf of the Navy for its work in this way.¹ There is no doubt that fishermen were pressed into service in the navy and in 1804 the Board of Trustees reported that men were reluctant to go out fishing for fear of the press gangs.² The proportion of fishermen from the West who were taken for the Navy was much smaller (though figures are not available) than from the East for the simple reason that the former spoke only Gaelic and few Captains however short of men could find an interpreter for them.

For a few years the war came even nearer to the Western fishermen for in 1795 MacIver of Stornoway wrote³ to the Earl of Seaforth that enemy ships were cruising in the Minch and that no fishing could be attempted unless an escort vessel could be provided. A Sloop of War

1. Argyll III 207.

2. Board of Manufactures. Minutes Vol.31 p.311.

3. Seaforth MSS. 1788. Gillanders to Seaforth. 17 June 1793.

was sent to Stornoway¹ but the menace of enemy ships combined with the fear of being pressed for service on our own vessels must have caused many fishermen to stay at home and work their crofts in safety.

After Trafalgar the seas were opened to fishermen once more but by that time the blockade of Europe and the demands of Naval shipyards had combined to raise prices to five or even six times the peace time level and had cleared the market of many necessary articles for boats and equipment notably timber from Scandinavia and hemp. Fishermen whose boats had been laid up during the period of naval war were thus unable to do the necessary repairs to make them seaworthy and the high costs deterred adventurers from new undertakings. Trade with Europe was at a standstill owing to the blockade and the necessity of waiting for convoys must have ruined many cargoes of herring for the West Indies in the days when curing was by no means uniformly good.

It has been said that the Society succumbed to the war and that after 1793 its failure was certain. While this is an exaggeration, wartime conditions certainly increased the difficulties of fishing in Scotland.

The second factor to affect all three settlements was the emigration which has already been mentioned in connection with the Highland Society's reports. Immediately after the American War of Independence there had been a movement towards emigration to America on the part of the Tacksmen or larger tenants. By 1801 reports of their happiness and success had reached their friends in the Highlands and the Peace of Amiens renewed the opportunity to go. In 1801 the numbers departing

1. Seaforth MSS. 1788. Gillanders to Seaforth. 13 August 1793.

were small (estimated at about 1,000) but 1802 saw the number doubled and by 1803 6,000 were reported to have left the Highlands.¹ Skye and the Islands were mainly affected but ships left for America and Canada from Isle Martin and Fort William.

The investigations of the Highland Society showed that many emigrants still belonged to the property-owning class while others had left jobs or given up their crofts before the leases were out. Therefore, although the new sheep-farming was changing the face of the Highlands the emigration was not forced on Highlanders at this period by unemployment or destitution. The cause of the early emigration seems to have been the reports from the New World, and the Highland Society showed that most of these reports were false ones circulated by Agents among the Highland people. When investigated the reputed writers of most letters denied having sent them while those who returned in person brought tales of greater misery in America than at home. The Society report² tells of a Highlander who having emigrated wished to warn his relations against following him. He was aware that a letter of this kind would not be delivered so he wrote home urging his friends to come to him on condition that they brought with them his Uncle James. It was known to those at home that Uncle James had been dead many years before his nephew's emigration and the warning was therefore understood.

It was agreed by most of those connected with the Highlands that the loss of man power and capital by emigration must cease, and that employment should be found to occupy the people at home. The

1. Highland Society. Minutes III pp.475; 531; 643.
(Reports of Committee on Emigration).

2. Ibid. p.480.

Directors of the Fisheries Society upheld this view in 1802 and congratulated the Ullapool Agent on "the prospect of increasing the village and of giving accommodation to persons who might otherwise emigrate".¹ A year later this policy was somewhat modified for the Secretary wrote² "I think it is no advantage to any country to retain those who are discontented". By June 1st 1804 the Secretary gave³ further instructions to the Agent at Ullapool. "I was directed to write to you that no pains ought to be taken to dissuade the settlers from Emigrating. You should on the contrary give them to understand that the Society consider themselves as conferring upon them an obligation by holding out such advantages as they do in the event of their remaining. The more you attempt to dissuade the higher will their ideas be raised of their own importance and probably the more bent will they become on leaving the settlement."

The Highland Society requested the Government to pass rules for the better organisation of emigrant ships. This was criticised by many as likely to increase emigration but the policy was sound enough. If the ships were regulated as to numbers and the cost of the passage limited, the profit to the Agents would be greatly cut down, as it was suspected that the Agents were responsible for much of the discontent and even resorted to bribery to attract emigrants, an attack on their profits was essential.⁴ A second argument in favour of regulated passages was that the Highlanders took a delight in opposing their

1. B.F.S. Letters IV 138.

2. Ibid. 218.

3. B.F.S. Letters V 22.

4. Highland Society. Minutes III 477.

landlords and to appear to sanction emigration might lessen the tenants' desire to go.¹

The Fisheries Society was certainly concerned in the results of the policy since the movement for emigration tended to attract young men with a little capital to America or Canada rather than to the Society's settlements, which were still in need of such men. It is not clear whether any of the settlers from Ullapool, Tobermory and Lochbay actually emigrated though it is certain from Agents' letters that they were considering such a step. In 1804 the population of Ullapool was estimated at 700² while in 1808 the figure given was 669,³ but the former was not accurate enough to prove that settlers had left the settlement.

There was a third circumstance added to war and emigration to promote general unrest in the Highlands, the failure of the herring fishery on the North West coast. At this date no exact figures are available and the evidence of reports is often conflicting but the year 1797 appears to have been the last good fishery.⁴ A few years earlier herring began to appear regularly in the Moray Firth and another of those unexplained changes in the course of the shoals took place. Certainly from the turn of the century the North East coast attracted the fishermen and the North West was deserted.

This does not mean that after 1800 no fish were ever caught in the Minch though there were nearly ten years of failure, but the centre

-
1. Highland Society. Minutes III p.485.
 2. B.F.S. Letters VI p.91.
 3. Ibid. p.234.
 4. Minutes III p.52.

of the industry was no longer there. It will be remembered that the regulations made it difficult for curers to obtain salt quickly so that when, as happened occasionally, a small shoal appeared the fishermen were not prepared to cure them. A few bad years had ruined their boats which were no longer seaworthy when the herring came and curers and coopers did not consider it worth while to keep supplies or equipment on the West.¹

After a few years of this changed situation the herring trade altered partly by coincidence and partly by design. It has already been shown that a large proportion of both white and red herring was exported to the West Indies to feed the slaves there. During this period the number of slaves began to decline and those who were paid wages preferred to spend their money on better food sent from America; the standard of British red herring, especially when the barrels had been delayed in their war time passage of the Atlantic, was so low that only slaves would eat them.²

The decline in the West Indian market was gradual at this time but was accompanied by the appearance of new markets in Europe. Holland had been unable to keep her hold on the herring trade and as the various countries of Europe were rescued from Napoleon, Britain managed to take over the Dutch markets.² This was made more convenient by the rise of the East coast ports from which herring for Europe could be despatched easily while the deserted West, especially the Clyde ports, had a rapidly shrinking demand. Thus the Society's three

1. Minutes III p.22.

2. Report on the Herring Fisheries of Scotland. 1878.

Buckland, Spencer Walpole and Young p.IX-X.

original settlements were affected by war, emigration and lack of herring as well as by the changes within the Society.

By 1798 the settlement at Ullapool was completed in so far as the Society's buildings were concerned, fishing and manufactures had been started and an improved agriculture was increasing the value of the land.¹ In any circumstances the following period would have seen slower progress but owing to war, emigration and the disappearance of the herring, the Directors were barely able to keep the settlement in a stationary condition and at one time the Secretary reported it to be "vibrating between life and death".²

There seems to have been little change in the number of settlers at Ullapool after 1800 though a few individuals did join the community before 1810. In 1808 the population is given as 669 souls consisting of 229 men, 266 women and 174 children under the age of 10.³ No rent roll exists for this period but in 1816⁴ details are given of those in arrears which in that year covered 100 settlers. The total sum in arrears for that year was very little less than the complete rental and since, of the 229 men counted in 1808, 82 were between the ages of 10 and 20, there can have been few rent payers beyond the 100 shown. Of this number 11 paid less than £1 per year and 8 paid more than £5. The average annual payment was £2 to £3 which means that most of the settlers owned the regulation pieces of ground, the village lot, half an acre of arable land with hill grazing for perhaps two cows, and a little cultivated land at a very low rent.

1. Reports X 245.

2. B.F.S. Letters VI 190.

3. Ibid. 234.

4. B.F.S. Papers. Ullapool Box. Memorandum dated 1816.

The larger tenants, whom the Society wished to attract, did not appear in any number, for the eight over £5 tenants included the Agent, Innkeeper, Schoolmaster and a tenant who rented the grazing on Ristol. Melville and Miller whose "activity and spirit of adventure are undoubtedly the principal support of the employment and traffick at Ullapool"¹ found themselves in financial difficulties soon after. In 1801 they asked a further loan of £400 from the Society and offered to build a Wet Dock for shipbuilding at Ullapool.² The offer was rejected because the Directors feared to increase Melville's monopoly but the loan was given. Three years later Melville was arrested for a debt³ of £700 owing to creditors in the South and the Directors were never repaid their loan and Melville's buildings were left in poor repair and the Society lost heavily on their sale. George Black who had shared with Mackenzie the responsibility of the manufactory also died insolvent but the Society managed to sell his houses at a profit.

In 1800 the Society had inquiries about land at Ullapool from Messrs. C. & P. Redpath, a fishing company from Berwick. Melville tried to defend his monopoly by turning the settlers against Redpath but the Directors encouraged the new Company to buy land and storehouses but the failure of the fishing prevented them from establishing a large scale business. Another new tenant in 1800 was Murdoch Mackenzie who seems to have had some capital and probably intended to try the fisheries but remained in Ullapool as a general merchant.

-
1. B.F.S. Letters VI 86 and 147.
 2. B.F.S. Letters V 59.
 3. B.F.S. Letters IV 59.

By 1810 in addition to the 11 tenants paying less than £1 in rent, there was a considerable population of squatters whose numbers were never given.¹ Six years earlier, unknown to the Directors, the Agent had allowed these people to build black huts on the waste land near the Ullapool river. They paid an infinitesimal rent for the land but were not entitled to settlers' privileges of grazing or gathering fuel and stone from the Society's property. In 1806 it was urged that these people should be driven away² but they were useful as labourers and therefore allowed to remain until the land was required for better tenants. Apart from the black hut squatters and a few individual tenants there were no new settlers in Ullapool before 1810 and consequently no building, beyond repairs, was required.

The history of the settlement during these twelve years may be conveniently divided into three parts, since there were three Agents.

Mackenzie, who had been Agent since the foundation of the settlement, continued to hold the office until 1800 when he became insolvent and died a few months after his resignation.³ There was no change in the Society's policy in Ullapool during this time, a few more settlers were attracted and agricultural improvement continued on the same lines as before in half acre and five acre lots. On Black's death in 1799 the Secretary told Mackenzie that the manufacturing at Ullapool must now stand on its own feet with no more loans from the Society. Nothing more was heard of the manufacturing until 1808 when it was reported to

-
1. Minutes III 52.
 2. B.F.S. Letters V 149.
 3. B.F.S. Letters IV 84.

be a total failure. The only real change at Ullapool before 1800 was that Mackenzie's accounts became even more chaotic and it was found that the interest on loans as well as the rents were hopelessly in arrears. The Directors asked John Macrae, writer at Dingwall, to undertake to collect these arrears and become responsible for the finance of Ullapool,¹ which duty he continued for several years.

Mackenzie was succeeded as Agent by John Malone, a half pay naval surgeon,² who decided to let the Inn to a tenant and combine his Agency with the work of local doctor. For the first two years Macrae continued to collect the rents and arrears, so Malone's instructions concerned the repairs to buildings including the Inn, a plantation of ash and elm on the flat and of larches and firs at Torness near the Ullapool river and the ownership of cattle allowed to graze on the hill; in fact very similar to those given to Mackenzie. For several years it was believed that the herring would return to Loch Broom and in 1802 the Directors were trying to attract a Net maker to the village.³

In September 1802 Malone was appointed sole agent at Ullapool and although Macrae was retained as Law Agent at Dingwall⁴ he seldom visited the settlement. In 1803 the Directors took up the case of the Island of Ristol⁵ which had been intended as a station for fishing the banks of cod and ling nearby. The first tenant, Macaulay, had become bankrupt before he had taken effective possession and the island had been let to Macdonald, Morrison's successor at Tanera. Instead of

-
1. B.F.S. Letters IV 9.
 2. Ibid. 62-3.
 3. Ibid. 141.
 4. Ibid. 169.
 5. Ibid. 204-5 and V 98.

fishing, Macdonald had let the grazing of Ristol and the Directors objected to this and wanted to dispossess him. After a long correspondence Macdonald gave up his lease and a new tenant was installed on condition that he used the island as a fishing station, but the island was never used successfully in this way.

The death of the Society's Secretary interrupted the Agent's reports in 1803 and for the next two years neither Salton nor the Directors obtained a clear idea of the state of Ullapool. Malone evidently began to drink and his authority over the settlers declined. Rents and loans remained in arrears, though Macrae had cleared this up for 1802, and Malone granted unofficial leases or missives to settlers for land without heed to the town plan. During this time too the black huts appeared on the flat land near the river.

Early in 1805 Malone was ordered back into the Navy and the Directors could only obtain four months' delay in which to install a new Agent.¹ Malone was due to go in August but his fear that he was not "sea-worthy" was justified and he died before taking up his appointment.² He was undoubtedly a bad Agent and did great harm to the Settlement, but some blame must be attached to the Directors and Secretary who allowed three years to pass without visiting the Settlement or obtaining proper reports on its position.

The task which faced the new Agent was made more difficult by the lack of orderly papers and his first duty was to interview every settler and find out how much rent he had paid and how much was due.

1. B.F.S. Letters V 83.

2. Ibid. 95 and 121.

This new Agent was George Simpson a writer from Dingwall who had been nominated by Malone and recommended by several local landowners.¹ Simpson was not a doctor and complained that the Society's salary of £40 per year was too little for the Agency. The Directors explained² that they allowed their Agents 20 acres of land for their provision and that since the duties were not extensive the Agents were expected to have other sources of income in the district, for example Mackenzie had been Innkeeper. This question of the extent of the Agent's duties leads to an examination of Simpson's instructions which had a different tone from Mackenzie's and Malone's. The latter had paid little attention to agricultural improvement, the manufacturing was already dead and the Agent had never been expected to take an active part in the fisheries. Simpson's duties were almost entirely confined to the collection of rents and the issue of feu charters which gave him a different position in the community and a far less personal influence on the settlers than Mackenzie had had. It is clear that both he and the Society were regarded with suspicion as landlords, where in the early days they had been more in the nature of friendly advisers.

The question of feu charters was a new one. Originally the settlers had been granted leases for 99 years of the lots in the village upon which their houses were built.³ It was found that although in Scots law houses were heritable property, a title to purchase or security could only be held if the party were infert which he could not

-
1. B.F.S. Letters V 96.
 2. Ibid. 125.
 3. B.F.S. Papers. Regulations 1791.

be upon a lease. The result of this to the Society was that a settler's house was no security for a loan or debt. In March 1808¹ it was therefore resolved that owners of property of over £100 value in the settlement must in future take a feu charter in spite of the cost of this in stamp duty which was as high as £4 on Charter and Sasine. The order applied at once to new settlers and Simpson was asked to persuade the existing tenants to obtain charters but he does not appear to have been successful before 1810.

By 1808 the Directors were discussing a rise in rents,² for the settlers had paid the same since 1788 while tenants in the surrounding country had had their rents more than doubled. The rent of Ullapool was only £28 more than the annual expenses.³ It was agreed not to enforce any rise until the fishing improved although the Directors argued that the Highlanders were inclined to work as little as possible and that if the rents were raised they would work hard enough to pay the higher rate and thus increase the improvement of the land.² It was felt that the low rents for arable land and grazing as compared with those in the surrounding country encouraged the settlers to regard the Society as a charitable organisation for the support of indolent people.

This impression was still further given in the Spring of 1808 and 1809 when the Society was forced to provide meal for the inhabitants, both settlers and black-hutters.⁴ Simpson was instructed to demand

-
1. Minutes III 1.
 2. B.F.S. Letters V 149.
 3. Minutes III 31.
 4. Ibid. 9 and 21.

payment in either money or labour from all who received meal, but his position was difficult and he could not refuse food to starving people.

In the Summer of 1809 the Deputy Governor visited Ullapool and at the next Annual General Meeting had "pleasure in reporting that his hopes from this settlement exceed what they were".¹ The reason for this was that in 1809 and early 1810 there were signs of the herring returning to Lochbroom and Smith told the Proprietors that "there are about 150 fishermen (with 20 boats) in Ullapool and I was highly gratified by their exertion and perseverance". The land was not much improved but Smith described the town as well laid out and of a fine appearance, the houses being "exceedingly decent".

Although he could report little progress at Ullapool since 1798, the Deputy Governor convinced his hearers that the prospects for future prosperity in the fisheries there were good, and that the period of unemployment for the people and loss to the Society might be ending.

The situation at Lochbay in 1810 was similar to that of Ullapool in that the failure of the herring fishery and the emigration had led to arrears of rent, little business and considerable discontent, but the prospects in Skye were very much worse than those in Wester Ross.

Unfortunately the pier and storehouses at Lochbay which had been built much later than those of Ullapool and Tobermory were not finished before the herring left the Minch and therefore good practical fishermen had never settled at Lochbay. The inhabitants of the Society's houses were given the same quantity of land as those at Ullapool

1. Minutes III 52.

but the quality of the soil was so much better that they could live on their crofts without applying themselves to an improved agriculture, fishing or manufactures.

Like Ullapool, Lochbay suffered too many changes in the Agency during this period. Charles Robertson, who by 1798 was already proving unsatisfactory by continued absenteeism, was dismissed in July of the following year but sued the Society for various sums of money and refused to hand over the official books and papers to his successor.¹ This was Dr. Porter who, like Malone, was a naval surgeon and had been recommended by the Duke of Atholl.² During the first few years of his Agency Porter did very well. Under him the building of Lochbay village was completed at a total cost of £5,838 as compared with £5,183³ for Tobermory and over £9,000 for Ullapool. The works at Lochbay included a Pier and Breastwork, a long house for four fishermen and their families, smithy, Inn, Storehouse, Schoolhouse and Agent's house with out-buildings while at least six houses of over £100 value had been built by tenants several of whom also built shops or storehouses.⁴ By 1810 the rents of Lochbay stood slightly above Ullapool at £188 where in 1798 they had only been £73.19.

As an example to the settlers Porter cultivated nearly 20 acres of ground. He also worked hard to encourage the fishing for cod and ling which was plentiful near Lochbay. In 1803 he floated a small company of his own, with the moral support of the Directors,⁵ for the

1. B.F.S. Letters IV 18.

2. Ibid. 12.

3. Minutes III 48.

4. B.F.S. Papers. Lochbay Box 1. Agent to Secretary. 12 December

5. B.F.S. Letters V 43. 1807.

prosecution of this fishery and had some success but owing to ill-health and lack of money he was unable to continue the scheme in 1804. About this time his mother-in-law arrived in Skye from Jamaica bringing with her a considerable fortune and Porter, who had lived on his salary and land until then, became extravagant. In the Autumn of 1804 without the knowledge of the Directors he left Lochbay on a visit to Jamaica to raise more money by selling some slaves belonging to his wife. He was unfortunately robbed by a Privateer on the way home so that the expedition was not a financial success.¹ On his return to England in 1805 he was recalled to the Navy, as Malone had been, and when he joined his ship in the Mediterranean he inadvertently took the Society's books and papers with him.²

After Porter's departure Donald Macdonald of Grieshernish near Dunvegan held the office of Agent until his death in May 1808 when he was followed by Duncan Grant of Ullinish.³ Macdonald, though handicapped by ill-health, made great efforts to persuade the Lochbay people to fish but in 1807 he had to report to the Directors that there were only two boats in the village and no trade or manufacture of any kind.⁴ The settlers remained indolent and scraped a living from their crofts until the harvest failures of 1808 and 1809 robbed them even of that. In November 1808 the Secretary wrote of them⁵ "These lubberly tenants, as a sailor would term them, seem to have no wish but to vegetate like the plants of the field; but this simile is not apt in one sense, for the vegetation of the latter is of the utmost utility."

1. B.F.S. Letters V 56 and 116.

2. Ibid. 220.

3. Minutes III 19.

4. B.F.S. Papers. Lochbay Box 1. Report of 1 January 1806.

5. B.F.S. Letters VI 195.

When the Deputy Governor visited Lochbay in 1810 he found it wholly unimproved and the inhabitants too indolent to take advantage of the temporary return of the herring which had raised great hopes at Ullapool. He and the Agent considered that the apathy was so inveterate that the Society would never succeed at Lochbay.¹

Tobermory, the settlement which had been flourishing in 1798, continued to progress, but with commercial rather than fishing activity. Maxwell remained as Agent during the whole period and was described by the Deputy Governor in 1809² as a "man of knowledge and ability, superior indeed to the situation in which he is placed". Maxwell's grasp of affairs was so good that apart from correspondence over the accounts, he received very few instructions from the Society and administered Tobermory almost singlehanded.

Although affected by the failure of the fishing and in 1808 and 1809 by poor harvests, the settlers at Tobermory were not dependent on either their fishing or their crofts. Indeed the only complaints ever received from that settlement concerned the lack of grazing which was very scarce in Mull. In 1809 a merchant commented on the neatness, cleanliness and general prosperity of Tobermory and especially the industry of the women and children.³ Although the soil was thin over the rock, settlers had cultivated every inch of it with an application which was commended to the inhabitants of Lochbay and Ullapool whose land was so much more improvable.

The Customs House and harbour remained the centre of Tobermory

1. Minutes III 51.

2. Ibid. 45.

3. Ibid. 25.

and as expected the opening of the Caledonian Canal increased the activity there. As an example of the settlers at Tobermory the Deputy Governor described¹ one "a Mr. Sinclair who came there a young man with a very few hundred pounds and is now possessed of a well stored warehouse supplied by 3 or 4 vessells of his own which trade to Greenock and Port Glasgow and he is said to be worth from £5,000 to £6,000."

In spite of this wealth the Society drew little income from Tobermory since the rents had been fixed in 1788 and leases had not yet expired. Though prosperous, Tobermory was not really regarded by the Directors as a success for its basis was commercial and the village was of very little use for the Fisheries. It was even considered in 1810² that the Society might sell the place but the Deputy Governor advised the Directors to retain the land for another 9 or 10 years by which time the leases would have expired and the increased rents would put up the value of the property.

Thus Tobermory alone of the western settlements was in a prosperous condition, Ullapool being regarded as hopeful and Lochbay already a failure. From none of the villages did the Society derive a reasonable income and owing to several unfortunate circumstances such as the war and emigration the expenditure of the Society was failing to promote the fisheries as originally intended. By 1810 it began to be apparent to the Directors that this state of affairs was likely to be permanent and this, combined with the loss of prestige mentioned earlier, nearly defeated the Society. It was saved from extinction at this period only by the hope of a new effort at Ullapool and by its successful operations at Wick.

1. Minutes III 50.
2. Ibid. 49.

CHAPTER X

Pulteneytown. 1803--1830

While the Society's settlements on the west were "vibrating between life and death" a new venture was undertaken in Caithness which from the first was a great success.

The fishing on the north east of Scotland had not developed very far before 1785 since busses that had to rendez vous in Shetland generally remained there and neglected the almost equally rich fishing ground along the Caithness coast. The abolition of this rule proved a great advantage to the north east. By 1790 the fishing boats had increased so quickly that the very great need for a safe harbour on the north east coast was widely recognised. The sea lochs of the north west provided natural shelter but on the east there were only a few small bays none of which were adequate for fishing vessels.

The original prospectus of the Society confined itself to the coast between the Pentland Firth and the Clyde but when the Directors engaged Thomas Telford to survey Ullapool, Tobermory and Lochbay in May 1790, they asked him also to tour the north east and report on any small harbours worthy of improvement.

Telford's report¹ reached the Directors in November 1790 and gave a full account of conditions in the coastal areas of Caithness and Sutherland. The survey covered the coast from Duncansby Head to Portmahomack and included ten possible anchorages. At Keiss, north of Wick, a small fishery was carried on by the local tenants and a few miles further south at Staxigoe there were red herring houses, the

1. B.F.S. Papers. Telford I 11-30.

property of Alexander Miller who was rapidly becoming a prosperous merchant. At Sarclet there was one small curing house while at Clythe a Mr. Henderson had built two storehouses and improved the anchorage slightly. Dunbeath was reported to have one storehouse but a poor landing and a small fishing community was mentioned at Forse. Telford considered that, though most of these could be improved for a few hundred pounds apiece, they were all too small to be worth even that expense.

Further south there were three larger bays. Helmsdale, over the Ord into Sutherland, was said to have been the scene of a herring fishery 30 years before but had had none for at least 11 years. There was, however, a salmon fishery belonging to the Countess of Sutherland with the appropriate buildings. Smacks from London evidently came to Helmsdale to collect the salmon but they did not enter the harbour at the river mouth and Telford estimated that the expense of a convenient harbour would be at least £2,000. Brora harbour was considered possible but the entrance was very narrow between sandbanks. In spite of this drawback there was some commercial activity "by a Mr. Houston who keeps a storehouse there and supplies the country with merchandizing articles, he imports annually from 20 to 30 tons of flax which he has spun into yarn by the country people." Mr. Houston told Telford that he exported 1,000 bolls of grain, 24 lasts of salmon, 50 tons of kelp and 20 to 30 tons of yarn annually while in addition to £6,000 worth of "merchandizes" he imported timber for building, iron, coals, and salt. The last two items were only recently required there for "there formely was a coal work opened about $\frac{1}{2}$ a mile to the south of Brora and a salt work carried on but the coal would not answer so it was given up and

the salt work of course along with it." Thus both Helmsdale and Brora though more hopeful as anchorages had rival industries and commerce already established and would be less suitable as fishing stations.

More promising than any of the former places was Portmahomack. Telford thought this a very favourable situation for a fishing station as there was a natural mound or pier which had already been somewhat built up, and there was good flat land with terraces for houses and plenty of stone, fuel and water. With improvement he estimated that 12 vessels of 60 to 100 tons could easily use the harbour which would thus be a useful subsidiary station.

Telford's recommendation to the Directors in 1790 was that they should improve the natural harbour at Wick. Here there was already a small fishery for he reported finding 24 vessels that had cleared out on the bounty and a number of local boats. There had been a good fishery in 1789 and the supplies of salt and casks were fairly adequate. On 29th July 1790 1,200 barrels of fish were brought into Wick in one night and during the next seven days until the boats were defeated by the weather, on 8th August, enough herring was caught near Wick to fill 10,000 barrels. The harbour, when cleared, could hold 150 vessels of 80 to 100 tons, the total expense of the improvement being estimated at £3,500.

Telford was not alone in seeing in Wick a suitable station for the British Fisheries Society. The Statistical Account mentioned the fishing there in 1792 which had increased from the previous year. The harbour was unsafe for any vessels but boats and there was great need of storage for salt and casks. "This last is an object worthy of the

attention of the British Fishing Society, as many thousand barrels might often be caught in one night here; but from its uncertainty, private adventurers cannot afford to have by them so great a stock of salt and casks as would be necessary for such occasions."¹ The Statistical Account mentioned the lack of "real fishermen whose sole business and interest should be to carry on all sorts of fishing." A few of these professionals came for the season but for the most part herring was caught by local tradesmen including "weavers, taylors, shoemakers, house and boat carpenters, blacksmiths, masons etc., in this and neighbouring parishes, having made a little previous preparation, repair to the fishing boats, go to sea in the night, the only time for catching herrings and spend all day in sleep by which their customers are sure to be ill served. Husbandmen and even small farmers hire themselves out during the fishing season for 8d, 10d or 1s. per night; and during the course of about 3 months are at a considerable loss for servants to carry on the business of their farms."

From this account it is apparent that though there was no organised fishery the neighbourhood of Wick was prosperous and had a considerable population. The parish total in 1793 was 5,000 inhabitants of which the town was said to have 1,000 including 50 coopers, 12 shopkeepers and 9 or 10 shipmasters. There was already a market, Church and several schools in Wick and the country nearby was fertile and much of it well cultivated. For these reasons as well as its local reputation as the centre of the fishery Wick was represented as a good choice for the British Fisheries Society.

1. Old Statistical Account. Vol.X p.11 note.

Although their Western policy had been to choose uninhabited country for their settlements, the Directors favoured Wick since the need for a harbour there was so obvious. Indeed they reacted very quickly to Telford's report in spite of heavy commitments at Ullapool, Tobermory and Lochbay. As early as November 1790 the Secretary was writing about possible negotiations with Sir Benjamin Dunbar of Hempriggs through Sir John Sinclair.¹ Sir John did not become a Director until 1792 but had been an original member of the Society and was active in encouraging a settlement of fishermen at Sarclet near Ulbster. Sir Benjamin Dunbar, not yet a member of the Society, had also established an infant fishing station at Louisburgh,² just north of Wick. His estate of Hempriggs included the south bank of the river at Wick where Telford had pointed out over 600 acres of suitable ground.

No immediate decision was reached. It seems that at one time the Directors were considering an improvement of Clythe instead of Wick but in August 1797³ this was given up and the Directors turned again to their plan of undertaking a harbour at Wick. By 1802 the matter was almost settled and the contract between Sir Benjamin Dunbar and the Society was signed on 11th March 1803.⁴

By the Contract the Society acquired 390 acres of land on the South side of the mouth of the Wick river including the headland, the hill of Old Wick as far as the Castle and the lands of Harrow. The feu duty for this land was at first fixed at £69 per annum but after

-
1. B.F.S. Letters I 207.
 2. Old Statistical Account. Vol.X 16.
 3. B.F.S. Letters III 200.
 4. Part.Reg.Sasines Caithness 6 f.95.

twenty years of argument over the Society's rights to salmon fishing, kelp etc. the feu duty was raised to £169¹ and included all possible advantages. The whole property was made up of 46 acres arable, 22 lay land, 27 moss and 295 acres of pasture.² Nearly the whole of the pasture was considered improvable into arable land. Above the river the ground rose into terraces which could be adapted to the lay-out of the new town. In conformity with the old Minute of 1787,³ the Directors had made certain that there was stone for building on the site, some wood and peat for fuel though coal was considered preferable and cheaper than carting peat, and opportunity for bringing a supply of fresh water from the loch of Hempriggs on Sir Benjamin's estate. This property was very much smaller than the Society's western settlements, 390 acres as compared with 2,000 at Tobermory, 1,600 at Ullapool and 1,000 at Lochbay but it contained very little waste ground and the fertility of the soil was incomparably greater.

It was not only in size that the new settlement differed from the western villages. There was already a town in the neighbourhood so that although only 7 families lived on the Society's property, there were potential fishermen as well as tradesmen and labourers in Wick. Here, therefore, the Directors were not faced with the problem of creating a new community on a "Heathy desert" as in the west, but their task was rather to provide facilities for a population already in the neighbourhood. The situation also differed from the west by the fact that the eastern fishery and trade was starting on the upward movement

1. Part.Reg.Sasines Caithness. 10 f.186.

2. B.F.S. Papers. Pulteneytown Box I. Secretary to Agent. 26 April

3. Argyll III 17.

1804.

while the west declined, though this was not yet completely apparent in 1802. In these circumstances the first and greatest need of the new settlement was not, as before, storehouses and dwelling houses but a harbour.

The need for this harbour was the subject of a report by Telford to the Treasury in 1802.¹ He wrote "On the west coast of Scotland, every Loch is a Harbour and no vessels can ever be at a loss to find protection but the case is very different on the N.E. coast, at present there is no place where a vessel can run into or even lye with safety; from the bay of Cromarty in Murray Firth to the Roadstead of Scrabster on the Western side of the Pentland Firth. Vessels frequenting the Herring Fishery in this Quarter lye in the River of Wick but they are confined within a shallow Bar in a Narrow Channel, and so exposed to the N.E. that they dare not wait the equinoctial Gales, and instead of Fishing for a whole season they push off as soon as they can get anything like a Cargo. They have no place but the Beach on which to land and stack their Fish, and they frequently cannot get over the Bar, even to reach their Beach, but lye with their Fish in their open boats exposed to the Sun until they are spoiled. It is generally allowed that the deep Sea fishing might be carried on in this Quarter, but no person will risk his vessel and Capital while there is no place of security for them to run into in case of Stormy weather nor any convenience whatever to enable them to carry on their business with advantage."

Meantime constructional costs had risen very considerably since the estimate of £3,500 of twelve years earlier. Although the provision

1. B.F.S. Papers. Pulteneytown Box I. Copy Report. Telford to Treasury. 25 May 1802.

of such a harbour was within the powers of the Society under their Act of Incorporation, it was decided that "our Capital is now so reduced that some Assistance will be absolutely necessary, considering the great expenditure which in other respects this Establishment will require."¹ It was proposed¹ that at least £1,000 should be raised by subscription and money gradually refunded from the proceeds of small tolls to be levied for the use of the harbour. This method of repayment was found to be illegal but before any other course was found the Directors were relieved of their anxieties. In 1806 by an Act of Parliament² the money collected from the Forfeited Estates was divided up among various bodies in Scotland. A grant was made to the S.P.C.K., the Highland Society of Edinburgh received £800 a year for 10 years and money was given for a gaol in Inverness and a bridge at Cockburnspath. Mainly on the recommendation of Telford, the British Fisheries Society was granted £7,500 towards the building of the harbour at Wick.

At the same time another grant was obtained by the Society for building a new Bridge over the river at Wick. The Commissioners for Highlands Roads and Bridges, among whom were several Directors of the Fisheries Society, following their usual practice agreed to pay one half of the total cost of £2,000 provided the Society would find the other half.¹ It was not considered allowable under the Act of Incorporation for the Society to take £1,000 from Capital but a subscription among the local landowners raised the full sum by early in 1806 and in June of that year the Commissioners gave over their contribution

1. B.F.S. Letters V 85.

2. 46 Geo. III cap.155.

together with the entire responsibility for building the new bridge, to the Directors of the British Fisheries Society.¹

Thus by 1806 the Directors had collected £9,500 of which all but £1,000 was public money, to be spent on their new settlement which had already been named Pulteneytown after the Society's late Governor. This allocation of public money also gave Pulteneytown a unique position among the Society's settlements and influenced its later development.

The bridge over the Wick river was the first item to be undertaken for the old wooden bridge had to be demolished before harbour improvements could begin. The Directors were responsible for the building but the bridge when finished was no more the property of the Society than the Ullapool-Contin road. The bridge was designed by Telford and executed by George Burn, a local architect who was reported to be "a skilful workman but not in affluent circumstances." By March 1807 Burn had already laid the foundation and had completed one of the three arches; the whole work was finished during the next year.

Meanwhile Burn had also undertaken to construct the harbour on Telford's plan.² Although it was said later that Burn had had no previous experience in harbours, he was highly recommended by Telford and evidently gave him satisfaction at Wick for he employed Burn again on similar works at Kirkwall. The question of payment under this Contract was simpler than that for Melville and other western contractors for Burn received half his money when he began work on condition that he was finished by the time stated which was December 1811.³ Telford

1. B.F.S. Letters V 149.

2. B.F.S. Letters VI 18.

3. Ibid. 30.

visited Pulteneytown several times for consultations and therefore the problem of inspections and certificates of work done, which proved so troublesome at Ullapool, was easily solved. By August of 1808 the new works were already providing a certain shelter for boats and in 1809 the Deputy Governor saw 20 to 30 busses in the Harbour.¹

While Burn was engaged on the two piers and breastwork, Telford was evolving a suitable town plan for the new settlement. Of all the Fisheries Society's villages Pulteneytown is the only complete example of Telford planning since Ullapool and Tobermory were not originally designed by him and Lochbay was never completed. The main section of Pulteneytown was built within twenty years and no major alteration in the plan was made during that time. As at Tobermory, the lay-out of buildings followed the natural contours of the land so that storehouses and curing grounds were to be built below the bank and dwelling houses on the higher ground. The first plan resembled Ullapool in that the long streets were bisected at regular intervals from north to south, but before building was begun it was realised that this was unsuitable for so windy a climate and the cross streets were therefore broken in the middle.²

The town above the bank was divided into building lots of 50 by 100 feet³ (about the same as those in the other settlements), to be let on a 99 years lease. 72 of these lots were originally laid out and those overlooking the sea or in Argyll Terrace were to pay 25/- rent and the rest to pay 20/-, nearly four times the rent of the Ullapool

1. Minutes III 51.
2. B.F.S. Letters VII 128.
3. B.F.S. Letters VI 84.

lots. The houses were to be completed within two years "the former (on 25/- lots) to be two stories high and covered with slates, the latter one story and covered with slate or tiles; and both agreeable to Mr. Telford's elevations". Although Telford gave suggested plans for the inside of his houses, the tenants could do as they liked.

Below the bank 21 larger lots for curing houses were laid out on what had been links. The lots were 60 x 120 feet and the curing houses had to be at least 60 x 22 feet and 18 feet high with proper sheds and cellars. Further east, but still below the bank Telford planned "an extensive grass plot for repairing and backing of nets, a sufficient space for erecting of frames to dry them; and a healthy walk for the inhabitants commanding a full view of the bay and the offing".¹ This grass plot was unfortunately lost when the harbour had to be enlarged.

Thus far the conditions at Pulteneytown resemble those of Ullapool and the other western villages but there were several new features in Caithness. The occupation of the rest of the Society's land was rather different in character for the whole of this was to be enclosed. Settlers would thus have no common ground for pasture.² It was then to be divided into fields of about five acres and let for 21 years, the rent being 2/6 for the first 7 years, 10/- for the second and 20/- for the third. There was no rule against a settler holding more than one five acre lot and the Society encouraged farmers who would grow food on a large scale for others besides themselves so that the land came gradually into larger units.

1. Minutes III 4.

2. B.F.S. Letters VI 83.

There was, however, a very strict rule in the new settlement, that no fisherman or cooper might own land in the town other than his own small lot.¹ This aimed at producing a class of professional fishermen. This was a possibility in Caithness because, unlike the West, the high state of cultivation enabled food supplies to be bought cheaply by fishermen and coopers. To encourage fishermen or coopers to become settlers, those who did so were given town lots free of rent for the first three years.² This was a very important piece of legislation by the Society since it meant that every settler must declare himself to belong to one profession whether labourer, fisherman, farmer, cooper, blacksmith or any other and the crofter class was thus excluded. This would certainly have been desirable on the west also but apart from the poor quality of the ground it was considered unlikely that west coast people would become settlers on conditions to which they were temperamentally unsuited and, perhaps more important, the fishing industry was still in too undeveloped a state in 1788 to support many professionals. Thus although the policy of separating farmers and fishermen was always favoured by the Society, it was only at Pulteneytown that the Directors were able to do it and even there in the early years there was doubt as to whether settlers would accept the conditions. The Agent remarked on "the dangers of any attempt to change in too sudden a manner the habits of the lower ranks"³ and William Macleay of Wick wrote to Telford that "in this country we have no real fishermen except

1. B.F.S. Letters VI 119.

2. B.F.S. Letters VIII 16.

3. B.F.S. Papers. Pulteneytown Box I. Agent to William Smith.
20 May 1805.

three or four Boats crews who reside in Thurso and no encouragement which could be offered to them would entice them to leave that Town"¹ and he plainly considered that no one else would wish to become real fishermen at Pulteneytown.

The very swift increase in population at Pulteneytown was soon to prove the Agent, Macleay and all those who doubted the Society's policy, to be wrong. The first inquiry for a lot in the new town came in 1803 from Alexander Miller of Staxigoe.² We have seen that he had already some fishing business and a certain capital and in that way he was typical of many of the early applicants. In 1807 Burn,³ the architect, undertook to build a good house near the end of the pier and David Bremner³ from Wick showed considerable enterprise in erecting a cook-shop which must have been very popular among the workers on the bridge and harbour. Town lots were laid out in 1810 and two years later about 60 had been taken.⁴ The list of feuars included 10 fishermen, 7 coopers and 4 farmers. These owners of ordinary town lots seem all to have been local in origin from Wick, Louisburgh, Newton, Harrow and Stunster. They began building at once for in June 1811 the Agent described the stone quarry "like a rabbit warren, all alive".⁵

Meanwhile several of the curing house lots on the links had been taken also. As an entirely new practice, never tried at Ullapool, Tobermory or Lochbay they were put up to auction in 1808.⁶ The result

-
1. B.F.S. Papers. Pulteneytown Box I. Macleay to Telford. 18 May 1808.
 2. Ibid. Miller to Secretary. 24 March 1803.
 3. B.F.S. Letters VI 86.
 4. Minutes III 70.
 5. B.F.S. Papers. Pulteneytown Box I. Agent's Report 1811.
 6. Minutes III 26.

was extremely successful and on one day 11 curing house lots were let at a total rent of £49.8.0 per annum. When the Deputy Governor visited Caithness in 1809 several had already been built. The feuars of these lots were not all local since several curers from further south, especially Leith, established branches at Pulteneytown.

After 1810 the increase of population was very rapid, 300 inhabitants by 1813, 400 by 1814 and 852 by December 1818 with 108 houses completed, while in 1819 the population was 1174. In 1818¹ out of 247 adult males 49 were fishermen, 42 curers, and 37 labourers so that the settlers were mostly of the type wanted by the Society. Not only did the settlers follow the right professions but they were evidently rich enough to build their own houses quickly and on Telford elevation. It was not until 1820 that any of the taken lots were forfeited for failure to build and the arrears of rent for the settlement at that date were almost negligible.

By 1817 all the curing house lots were taken and the Agent laid out an open space near the quay into 25 new lots which were let by public roup in July of that year.² It is not clear whether these lots ever had buildings on them; the plan seems to have been to let them annually by roup, for they made £110 in 1817, £580 in 1819 and continued to increase every year.

Although many of the settlers came from the neighbourhood of Wick and a number from the town itself, this was in many ways a benefit to the original town. Apart from the facilities afforded to Wick

1. Minutes III 231.

2. Ibid. 225.

merchants by the new harbour, the increased fishery brought many visitors during the season. As early as 1809 the Deputy Governor reported "From the great resort of persons employed in the Fishery, a Guinea and a Guinea and a half per month was paid for a mere lodging room at old Wick and even at that unexampled price a lodging was difficult to be procured."¹ These rents were far greater than those which had been paid by the few fishermen who moved to Pulteneytown and the situation continued to bring money to the inhabitants of Wick even after Pulteneytown had increased in size.

At first the Society appeared rather amazed that the population had increased so quickly. The Agent wrote² "Tho' at all times sanguine, the rapid increase of settlers far exceeded my expectations" but he continued "In my early operations as the Society's Agent I had to bear the scoffs of many who from malice or selfish motives ridiculed the idea of such a settlement on such a scale; I may now be permitted without arrogating too much to myself to claim some merit in having at so early a period feued off one third of the village." This Agent was James Williamson, a retired soldier turned farmer, who lived at Upper Ackergill near Wick.³ He was of a Caithness family and his brother owned Banniskirk in the same county. On the whole he seems to have been an adequate though not outstanding Agent.

The truth was that the Society and the Society's Agent had comparatively little to do with the sudden popularity of their new settlement. The real cause was the continued success of the fishery.

1. Minutes III 51.

2. B.F.S. Papers. Pulteneytown Box I. Agent to Secretary. 5 November 1810.

3. Ibid. Sir B. Dunbar to Secretary. 12 November 1803.

We have seen that by 1790 the fishery had begun to develop and from then on the herrings appeared with great regularity on the coast of Caithness arriving in July and remaining into September. At first it was mainly local boats that caught them and owing to a misunderstanding the larger vessels were deprived of the bounty.¹ The Scottish Customs officials, presumably intending to maintain a standard of seamanship, declared that Caithness busses to qualify for the bounty must catch their fish in western lochs while busses from Orkney or the Moray Firth might fish off Caithness. Miller complained to Sir John Sinclair in 1802 that "we must leave our own fishing grounds on the Caithness coast, where the herrings are to be had in plenty and go to seek them elsewhere where there is no certainty of success, if we intend to reap the benefits of the Bounties allowed by law". Three years later this had been rectified and of 300 boats at the Caithness fishing, one quarter came from Banff, Inverness and Ross-shire while the remainder were from the scattered villages along the coast of Sutherland and Caithness.²

The next year, 1806, saw another milestone in the development of the north eastern fishery when three larger vessels from the Firth of Forth attended near Wick and their reports of success brought 17 vessels the next year.³

The construction of the harbour at Pulteneytown naturally encouraged both native and southern boats to fish. The Deputy Governor

-
1. Breadalbane Box C.30.3. Alex. Miller to Sir J. Sinclair.
20 December 1801.
 2. B.F.S. Papers. Pulteneytown Box I. Alex. Miller Report to
Highland Society. 17 January 1805.
 3. Ibid. Telford Report. 9 August 1807.

had good reason to tell the proprietors of the Society in 1815¹ that "It is admitted that, unless for the Society, no harbour would in all probability have ever been constructed at Wick and that until the South Country boats were attracted by the harbour to fish upon the coast, there could hardly be said to be any fishery. The Caithness boats dared not venture to sea where alone the fish, in any quantity, could be procured, until those South Country Boats kindly undertook to conduct and protect them." By 1814, the season on which the Deputy Governor was reporting, boats had come from Wales, the Isle of Man and Shetland as well as the Forth and 4,000 strangers were reported in Pulteneytown for the fishing.

The fishing continued "exceptional" and "good beyond all experience" until after 1830 by which time the resident population of Pulteneytown was over 2,000 with an addition of about 7,000 to the neighbourhood in the fishing season, including crews from Norway, Holland, France, Cornwall and Ireland.²

In twenty years from the commencement of the harbour the total catch rose from 10,000 barrels¹ to nearly 200,000³ barrels per annum and fortunately the markets expanded to absorb this increase. It has already been explained that the Baltic and European markets had been taken over from Holland during and after the Napoleonic War. The new Fishery Officers, established in 1809, raised the standard of curing by strict inspection. By 1819⁴ it was the general practice to gut the fish

-
1. Minutes III 181.
 2. Minutes IV 66-7.
 3. Ibid. 19.
 4. Minutes III 247.

before curing where a few years earlier it had only been done "when considered necessary". By these improvements the British curers continued to satisfy the European market. Even so, by 1830, there were years when curers suffered loss owing to a glut of herring and Pulteneytown was especially vulnerable because her fishing season was earlier than Ireland or Shetland and prices depended on success in the later fisheries. The fishermen themselves continued to prosper and their number increased every year.

From this description of Pulteneytown it is clear that the harbour was the centre of the new community and a more detailed study of its history is therefore necessary.

Burn finished the original harbour, designed by Telford, in 1811 for a total cost of £14,000, nearly half of which was provided from the Society's capital and the rest from the Government Grant. As soon as it was completed a difficulty arose when the Corporation of Wick claimed a share of the harbour dues.¹ By the Act of Incorporation the Society had no power either to levy harbour dues or to share them with any other organisation but the Directors now applied to Parliament for permission to do this. In 1814 a new Act² authorised the Directors not only to draw up a scale of charges for ships and merchandise in their harbour but also to make rules for those using their quays and enforce the rules with fines. It was provided that £40 per year of the harbour dues be paid to the corporation of Wick while the rest of the money collected, after paying the salaries of harbour master, pilots

1. B.F.S. Letters VII 178.

2. 54 Geo. III cap.191.

and the necessary carters and labourers, should be devoted only to the upkeep of the harbour and should not be regarded as part of the Society's income. Nevertheless, these dues were a great financial advantage to the Society since after meeting the cost of upkeep of streets, the Agent's salary and contributions to schoolmaster and Minister, the rents of Pulteneytown were now clear gain. The harbour dues increased steadily from £550 in 1816¹ to £1,280 in 1830.²

Meanwhile the original harbour was proving insufficient for the trade of the new settlement. Almost immediately it was found that sand accumulated in the narrow entrance but for a few years this was kept in check by dredging. At the same time vessels were getting larger. According to a report in 1848³ "After the termination of the war the rates of freight rapidly declined, and to such a degree that vessels of small tonnage, which alone the harbour was capable of accommodating, could no longer be profitably employed, and recourse was had to the construction of vessels of larger size, and, of course, requiring a great draught of water, which this harbour was not capable of affording. The old harbour moreover, did not afford sufficient accommodation for the number of herring boats frequenting it."

In 1823 therefore Telford designed a new and outer harbour together with certain improvements to the existing inner one.³ Considerable progress had been made in these by local contractors when, in September 1827, a storm washed away much of the harbour which had therefore to be begun again and was eventually completed seven years later.

1. Minutes III 268.

2. Minutes IV 77.

3. Report to Governor and Directors of the British Fisheries Society on Pulteneytown. 1848. p.11.

The work was evidently good and the inspecting Engineers in 1848 reported that "having, with very trifling comparative damage, stood the test of so long a period as fourteen years, these works may be considered as substantial and safe".¹ The total cost of the second harbour, £15,000, was wholly met out of current harbour dues up to 1834, so that no further drain was made on the Society's capital.

As we have seen the harbour benefited not only fishing vessels but also those in coasting and foreign trade. The great concourse of boats in the fishing season very quickly created a demand for equipment. In 1808 the South country boats are reported to have brought everything with them but in course of time they found that they could buy their goods at Pulteneytown. At first the Caithness merchants could only buy from home markets as there were no customs facilities for import trade in Pulteneytown. In 1819, however, the Deputy Governor² persuaded the Treasury to direct that "two officers of the customs shall be established at Wick with powers to enter and clear out vessels from and to Foreign Ports as well as coastwise" and this opened the way to general trade.

Results followed at once. In the same year the Agent reported³ "By a Company which has recently been formed with a considerable Capital, a Rope and Sail Manufactory on an extensive scale.... is immediately to be established at Pulteneytown and with the view of encouraging an undertaking so obviously calculated to promote the prosperity of the settlement the Directors have been pleased to grant to the Company, on

-
1. Report on Pulteneytown. p.12.
 2. Minutes III 246.
 3. Ibid. 245.

moderate terms, a Feu of a piece of ground near the village, on which the necessary buildings are forthwith to be erected. It is the intention of the Company to import Hemp direct from the Baltic; the hitherto insuperable bar to a Foreign Trade at Pulteneytown being now removed." Nine years later this example was followed by a company of settlers who established a Timber trade with America.¹ A Brewery and Distillery were early additions to the Settlement and also several companies of shipbuilders. In April 1813 George Burn told the Directors that he had completed his sloop "Brothers", the first ship built at Pulteneytown.² David Bremner also took up this trade at the settlement and, beginning with boats and a few decked vessels, by 1826 was said to be building several large ships³ which were equipped by the Rope Company, and three years later he was constructing a floating dock. Thus the fishery, by creating the demand, built up several flourishing manufactures in the new settlement which became added attractions for a further increase in population.

By 1830, after twenty seven years of ownership by the Society and twenty four years of development, Pulteneytown had reached its peak for the moment with a resident population of 2,200⁴ where there had been only 7 families. The number of houses was by then 240 and all the original lots in the town had been taken. So great was the crowd of strangers in the fishing season that a dwelling house of two rooms only 15 x 13 feet each could yield an annual rent of £10 to its owner.⁴

-
1. Minutes IV 43.
 2. Minutes III 143.
 3. Minutes IV 45.
 4. Ibid. 66.

The Society's land was also increasing in value and nearly all the fields were placed under cultivation without further encouragement by the Society. The rents collected from Pulteneytown in 1830 amounted to £983 for the town lots with only £30 in arrears, £1,157 for the Curing lots and £1,280 in harbour dues.

In the words of the Agent "the inhabitants are treading in the road to independence", an independence which characterised the whole development of Pulteneytown. The Directors issued no instructions for improved agriculture or manufactures and gave no loans for fishing or manufacturing companies or even for settlers to build their houses and the Society itself built no public buildings for rent as at Ullapool. Indeed the role of the Society and its Agent at Pulteneytown was mainly passive, not from indifference or ignorance but because no other action was necessary than to provide land, collect rents and look after the harbour. Out of a total expenditure of £29,960 on the settlement up to 1834, £29,000¹ was devoted to the harbour. Once this was built, the development of Pulteneytown was like a snowball which rolled of itself downhill increasing in size and speed, with the Directors who had launched it on its career requiring only to run behind.

1. Minutes IV 125.

CHAPTER XI

The decline of the Society. 1808-1848

Having followed Pulteneytown on its triumphant course as far as 1830, it is time to consider the general history of the Society and its western settlements from 1810 to 1848, extending the tale of Pulteneytown also to that year which saw considerable change in the Society.

For many years after 1810 the Society's personnel, with the exception of the Secretary, remained the same. Salton obtained special leave in 1810 to accompany a Government Commission to the West Indies and during his absence Colin Macrae, the nephew and assistant of John Mackenzie of Arcan took over his duties.¹ Although Salton had returned by 1813 he did not continue long with the Society, owing to poor health, and Macrae held the position of Secretary until 1821. Macrae was succeeded by Samuel Smith, younger son of the Deputy Governor, William Smith.² In some ways this was an excellent arrangement because Smith had easier access to his father than a stranger could have had and the Deputy Governor was a very busy man often forced to consider the Society's business in odd moments. On the other hand nearly all decisions were being left to the Deputy Governor, Directors' meetings were few and those held, which averaged two or three a year, were very poorly attended. We have already seen that William Smith was conscientious but that he lacked intimate knowledge of the Highlands, and his son was equally ignorant though he visited the settlements a number of times while he was in office and worked hard for the Society.

1. Minutes III 59.

2. Ibid. 276.

Of the many Directors who sat on the Board between 1810 and 1835 few made any impression on the policy or administration of the Society. Charles Grant was mentioned in an earlier chapter as being an active member and at his death in 1823 the Secretary wrote that he was the Director who took most interest in the Society.¹ Alexander Macleay, whose brother, a banker in Wick, was for some time the Society's Agent in Pulteneytown, was also an active Director. Macleay paid many visits to Caithness and also reported on Ullapool but unfortunately he was lost to the Society when appointed Colonial Secretary of New South Wales in 1826. Lord Bexley, the former Nicholas Vansittart, continued to interest himself in the Society and remained a member of the Board until after 1846. With these exceptions the Directors do not appear individually in the Society's affairs and most of the business was conducted by Smith and his son.

The non-attendance of the Directors and shareholders reached its worst point in 1816 when only three Directors and no shareholders whatever appeared on 25th March,² nor were any other Directors' meetings held during the year. The next year showed an improvement and in 1818 a resolution was passed "That each year the seats of the three Directors who shall attend least frequently be considered as vacated and that others be elected in their place, that when more than three shall be in the same predicament in point of attendance the seats vacated are to be determined by lot."³ This does not seem to have been enforced, as changes in the Board were occasioned almost entirely by death, but

1. B.F.S. Letters X 180.
2. Minutes III 189.
3. Ibid. 237.

attendance at meetings improved. The need for such a resolution shows how far the Society had gone from the active co-operation of all fifteen Directors in 1787 and 1788.

There came a change in the direction of the Society with the death of the Earl of Breadalbane, the Governor, in 1834 and of William Smith in the following year. The Duke of Sutherland was elected Governor and James Loch Deputy Governor. Loch had only become a Director three years before. He was not a Highlander but very well acquainted with the north of Scotland as he represented the Northern Burghs (which included Pulteneytown) in Parliament and had been Commissioner for the Estate of the Duke of Sutherland. He was very active in office and his frequent visits to Caithness both on business and pleasure, for he owned Uppat at Brora near the Sutherland boundary, were very valuable to the Society.

By an Act of Parliament in 1844¹ the Board of Directors was reduced from 15 to 7. With the change in personnel, the reduction of the non-attending Directors and the sale of the western settlements during the 1840's the Society took on a new lease of life as though it had previously been carrying too much dead weight. Allowing for considerable reduction in the scope of the Society's affairs, the Directors of the 1850's were far closer to those of 1787 than to those of the middle period. In 1846 the Board consisted of the Duke of Sutherland, James Loch, the Earl of Rosebery who was appointed in 1835 and was very active, Lord Bexley, Mr. Traill M.P. for Caithness, Mr. Taylor also from that county and Mr. George Loch the son of the Deputy Governor.²

1. 7-8 Vict. cap.52.

2. Letters XIII 4.

These Directors met on an average once a month during the session of Parliament and though, having no Minutes after 1839, we cannot check the attendance, it is certain that all members of the Board contributed to the Society's decisions.

A new official was increasing in importance as the Society's attention became more closely fixed on landed property; this was the Law Agent. Salton had conducted some of the legal business himself, for example he drew up the leases and other documents, only occasionally employing a lawyer, but when Smith became Secretary this duty was transferred to Charles Gordon, an Edinburgh Writer to the Signet. In addition to Gordon a local Writer was appointed as Society's lawyer for each settlement. Gordon died in 1845 and after the sale of the western settlements had been completed by his partner, Mr. Stodart Macdonald, the Society's Law Agency in Edinburgh was given to Mr. Donald Horne of Langwell.¹ As the younger son of Mr. Horne of Stirkoke in Caithness, his personal connexion with Pulteneytown combined with his legal experience to give him a much greater influence in the Society than his predecessor. A routine was formed in legal matters, which had previously caused some trouble and confusion, and Horne visited London frequently to attend the Directors' meetings.

The Society's Accountant Mr. Black remained in office until his death in ~~1842~~¹⁸²⁴ when he was succeeded by his nephew, yet another Mr. Smith.² Although on Smith's sudden death in 1852 the Society's papers were found to be in great confusion,³ there were few complaints during his lifetime of his conduct of affairs.

-
1. B.F.S. Letters XIII 27.
 2. B.F.S. Letters X 217.
 3. B.F.S. Letters XIII 244.

The finances of the Society remained in a rather static condition between 1813 and 1848. The western settlements needed little expenditure but for many years they brought in even less rent. Pulteneytown rents were profitable but in spite of the collection of harbour dues the settlement remained £6,679 in debt to the Society for the harbour alone. The income from investments of capital covered the London expenses as the income from the settlements paid the salaries of Agents, Ground Officers and Ministers there. Thus the funds of the Society which stood at £18,641.12.4 in 1810 and had fallen by over £10,000 in 1813 when the Pulteneytown harbour was being built¹ remained between £7,000 and £8,000 until 1838.

It is evident from these figures that no new shares were taken during this period. Indeed in the few cases where shareholders wished to sell their shares, the price was as low as £10 to £15 for a £50 share, only rising to £40 in 1831.² This record sum was received when there was a very strong possibility of the Society's paying its first dividend. In 1830 the rents of Pulteneytown, excluding curing lots and harbour dues, were £983. It required £1,408 to pay a dividend of 4% on each of the 750 £50 shares and the Directors agreed that there was a good prospect of raising this sum in rents. Unfortunately 1832 saw cholera at Pulteneytown and the settlement lost trade and never quite recovered its pre-eminence in the fishing industry. By 1835, however, after the several sources of income had been reviewed the Directors decided to pay a dividend. "It is true that the primary

1. Minutes III 139.

2. B.F.S. Letters X 265.

object of the Society in its institution was rather public utility than private emoluments, but a sufficient sacrifice has already been made by the individuals who have allowed the sum of £35,000 to remain unproductive for a period of nearly 48 years. To their strong claims for a return of interest no answer can now be made..."¹

It was one thing to announce a dividend and quite another to pay it. The Directors were already aware of the "difficulties attending the making of a dividend upon a capital subscribed in so small shares as £50 at so great a distance as 1786 by so numerous and scattered a class as the proprietors of the Society".² Many of the original proprietors were dead and after nearly 48 years their executors failed to recognise the value of the Society's receipt, if indeed they found one. Thus of the £1,408 needed to pay the full dividend only £300 was paid in the first few months. Five dividends of 4% each were paid in the years immediately after 1840 and one in 1853 by which time the proprietors had nearly all been traced and were claiming their money.

After 1838 the expenses of the Society decreased. The western settlements were gradually abandoned while Pulteneytown maintained itself from its rents and harbour dues though there was the prospect of a further very costly improvement to the harbour. It was partly in order to meet this demand that the western settlements were sold. Lochbay raised £2,800 in 1838, Tobermory £5,000 in 1844 and Ullapool £5,250 in 1848 bringing the Society's stock to just over £20,000.

The financial state of the Society provides an introduction to

1. Minutes III 116.

2. Ibid. 113.

the more detailed history of the four settlements up to the year 1848. As before, it is Ullapool that will be treated first.

The population of Ullapool which had been 669 in 1808 increased during the following years in spite of the lack of employment, and as the numbers increased the situation grew worse. By 1829 there were about 900 people on the Society's property.¹ Three years later an analysis was given by the Agent. Out of 134 male settlers on the land only 38 held regular stances while 14 lived in houses belonging to the Society (mostly bought by the Directors in settlement of debts and let again because no purchaser appeared). The rest were described as "cottars in possession of lots of land in the suburbs". Most of these lived in black huts. 37 settlers followed a regular trade, 8 were carpenters, 6 shoemakers, 4 masons and others included no less than 5 licensed retailers of spirits, while nearly 100 were connected with fishing.²

Continued depression at Ullapool was said to be caused by the complete failure of the fisheries but the Society's records show that the herring appeared at times on the coast. In 1809 shoals arrived on the west coast of Skye but "our Ullapool boatmen have never gone so far in quest of herring; they are prevented not only by distance which is great for an open boat but also by the uncertain and contradictory reports in circulation."³ Three years later the herring visited Lochbroom and "the whole population of the adjacent country flocked from their habitations to the shore of Loch Kennart and Isle Martin to

-
1. B.F.S. Letters XI 190.
 2. Minutes IV 88.
 3. Minutes III 22.

gut and pack herrings by which women, boys and girls were enabled to earn from 3/- to 5/- per day, wages heretofore unprecedented in that country."¹ After this the fishing remained moderate until 1819 when for nearly ten years it was very poor. In 1827 it was reported that the herring visited Lochbroom for two nights only but that the settlers caught enough to support themselves for the winter.² In 1832 there were 30 boats in the settlement manned by 3 or 4 men with 12 nets to each boat, but lack of speculators to buy the catch and organise its disposal made Ullapool unproductive.

By 1825 it was recorded that Ullapool men took their boats to Caithness;³ in that year 30 or 40 boats are said to have gone, and a few went annually after that. This was the regular fishing that was attracting curers and merchants to Pulteneytown and other places along the north east coast to the detriment of Ullapool.

There was a new and increasing difficulty for which the eastern fishery was also responsible: the prevalence of deep sea fishing. This had become the rule where there were no shallow sea lochs and the practice when transferred to the west prevented the shoals from ever setting into the lochs. For example the fishing of 1819 was unprofitable for the Ullapool men though "Lochbroom was the principal rendezvous of the Buss fleet". "Although in general provided with good boats and a sufficient quantity of netting, yet the herrings being most frequently found in deep water, their nets were not of sufficient depth to reach them. The Society's settlers assert that they cannot manage a

1. Minutes III 126.

2. Minutes IV 26.

3. B.F.S. Letters X 262.

greater weight of netting than they generally carry with them without the aid of decked vessels for receiving and drying them."¹ Thus after 1832 when the herring returned to the west (without deserting the east entirely), the fishermen collected at Stornoway and fished in the Minch from larger boats. Not only could the Ullapool men not afford these boats, but the settlement itself was not well placed for the new fishing grounds.

It will be remembered that in 1787 the objection that Ullapool was too far from the open sea was met by the purchase of the Island of Ristol. We have seen that Macdonald of Tanera had been dispossessed for using the island only for grazing.² His successor Murdoch Mackenzie intended to prosecute the fishery from there but after receiving various loans from the Directors he admitted in 1816 that he had lost £1,000 "in merchantile concerns at Ullapool", and that he was insolvent.³ After discussing various offers received for the island, the Directors decided that they would not allow it to become a rival station or even independent from Ullapool since fishing would in future be undertaken mainly from the island. For this reason they rejected a good offer from Nicholson of Tanera⁴ but their chosen tenant, Macdonald of Skeabost, owned the fishing station at Lochinver and "all the Fishing farms on the adjacent coast".⁵ He remained on Ristol until after 1848 but his tenancy does not appear to have benefited Ullapool nor did he employ the Society's tenants.

-
1. Minutes III 243.
 2. see above p.234.
 3. Minutes III 194.
 4. B.F.S. Letters X 83.
 5. B.F.S. Letters IX 250.

Another great blow had been dealt to the Ullapool fishing as early as 1812 when, after 14 years of little trade, the Customs House was removed. The Agent told the Directors that this would "arrest the progress and prosperity of the settlement".¹ He explained that "Ships which formerly took out their registers and purchased their stock of salt and casks at Ullapool must now direct their course to Stornoway or elsewhere for that purpose and Shipmasters entering the port of Ullapool with goods liable to duty must also follow the same track or proceed to Inverness before they can unload or obtain their clearances; exposed to heavy expenses on the voyage and risk of mismanagement thus the new Adventurers will be discouraged from settling in Ullapool or along the coast, since the only facility to trade has been withdrawn from it."

The Society applied to the Board of Customs to continue the House without success. A Customs House might have attracted some fishermen and merchants to Ullapool rather than Stornoway in the 1830's and its absence combined with the poverty of the settlers and the new deep sea fishing to withdraw from Ullapool the benefits of a returning herring fishery.

It is impossible to explain the decrease of the fishing solely upon outside circumstances. The settlers themselves were certainly to blame in their indolence. In the early years of the settlement Melville employed local fishermen, but the long years of depression and idleness after 1800 had not improved their spirit. The Directors continued to bewail that they had not "hitherto discovered the active

1. Minutes III 125.

industry and hardy perseverance... which certainly exists in a much greater degree in the Fishermen on the east coast".¹ It was the same spirit which made the people regard the Society's settlements as "charitable institutions" and prevented them from making any effort to pay their rent or co-operate in schemes for payment by labour.

The practical drawbacks to a renewal of the fishery were realised in 1839 when the Secretary wrote to a local proprietor for advice saying "Does it occur to you that the Directors do wisely in looking to the fishing (now principally carried on at Isle Ristol) as the main source of employment, or may they hope, in your opinion, for any success in the establishment of a coarse woollen or other manufacture? or lastly must the settlement be looked on as one that is to be maintained from the produce of the soil only?"²

Manufactures did not prosper at Ullapool and from the time of the failure of Mackenzie and Black's scheme soon after the foundation of the settlement, the Society never financed another scheme and there is record of few private ventures, and none of long duration. Lack of communications was partly responsible for this as the Society's road had fallen into disrepair and there was no regular sea passage to Ullapool.

The produce of the soil was thus the only means of livelihood and a series of poor harvests reduced Ullapool, in common with the rest of the Highlands, to a desperate poverty. 1817 was the first of the years of complete failure when the causes of the distress at Ullapool were said to be "the unproductiveness of the late Harvest, the failure of the Fishery, low price of cattle, the general decline of Trade and

1. B.F.S. Letters XI 6.

2. B.F.S. Letters XII 168.

the circumscribed accommodation given by the Banks".¹ Many landlords decided to lower their rents in these conditions but the Society, whose rents were less than those of their neighbours, considered that lowered rents encouraged non-payment and tended to "relax the nerve of industry". The Ullapool harbour dues were, however, remitted but rents continued to fall into arrears. In 1823 a plan was drawn up by which the land was redivided into smaller crofts to reduce the rent of each settler in the hope that he would be able to pay the smaller sum.²

Two years later, before the re-division was accomplished, the "utter apathy and indolence of the inhabitants" caused the Directors to adopt a scheme for the payment of rents in labour. Until this time Simpson, as Society's Agent, had been in full charge of affairs in Ullapool. The Deputy Governor continued to have faith in Simpson but each Secretary in turn warned him that the Agent was not only lazy but far too sympathetic to the inhabitants, never pressing for rents or putting into effect the few repressive measures ordered by the Directors. When the labour scheme was introduced it was agreed that Simpson should not manage it and a Superintendent was appointed.³ Donald Fraser who became Superintendent was active in his job and managed to turn the labour to good effect in drainage schemes and other improvements in the settlement. Unfortunately the harvest of 1826 was again a failure and the labourers had to be paid in meal so that for several seasons the Society's arrears did not diminish. In 1824 the tenants were £1,780 in arrear out of an annual rental of about £300.⁴

-
1. B.F.S. Letters IX 121.
 2. Minutes IV 1.
 3. B.F.S. Letters IX 216.
 4. Minutes III 292.

These were never cleared off though they were reduced to £1,161 in 1834¹ and between £800 and £900 in 1846.²

In 1830 Simpson was finally dismissed and Fraser was appointed Factor and Superintendent (he was not called Agent), which office he filled until his death five years later. Simpson was certainly not an effective Agent but the Directors gave him little help during a very difficult term of office. A series of instructions drawn up to guide Directors visiting Ullapool in 1818³ shows how very little they knew about the state of the settlement, for they wished to find out how much ground was under cultivation, the real value of the land, the state of the buildings and the cost of repairs in Wester Ross. Frequently the advice of the Agent was asked on matters of policy and measures were left to his discretion. Thus when Fraser arrived in the north he found that the Society's interests had taken second place and that Simpson was considering only the wishes of the settlers. This was not confined to Simpson and several years later Lord Rosebery drew attention to this essential weakness when he spoke of "the want of information respecting it (Ullapool) among the Board whose accounts are all drawn from the resident Agent and must necessarily be received with much allowance for the habits and feelings consequent in a constant resident among the parties."⁴

Not only were the Directors ignorant of the conditions in Ullapool but they knew too little of the Highlands generally to produce

-
1. Minutes IV 142.
 2. B.F.S. Letters XIII 27.
 3. Minutes III 215-223.
 4. Minutes IV 183.

a new policy. With the failure of the fishery the original programme for Ullapool needed changing but the Directors did not seem to realise this until 1838 and too often they told the Agent to copy the actions of the local heritors in subscribing to poor relief or buying meal for distribution among the hungry. In its early days the Society's policy led the western Highlands but between 1810 and 1840 it followed the more moderate landlords, who refrained from eviction but had no permanent solution to offer.

One reason for this lack of policy by the Society was the ever present chance that the herring might return to the lochs of the north west. Ullapool had been the most nearly established fishing station of the Society's western settlements and the Directors were determined to preserve it as long as they could in case a return swing should ruin Pulteneytown. The reasons for failure, the practice of deep sea fishing, the removal of the Customs House and the natural indolence of the people were still regarded only as temporary evils. As late as 1830 the Secretary was writing "If Ullapool should recover its character as a fishing station, there can be no good reason why its population should not be double or treble what it now is," adding "but while the settlers depend (as at present) mainly upon their crofts for their subsistence every additional inhabitant without capital is a supernumary."¹

Inhabitants with capital were few and those who had settled in Ullapool failed to prosper. "How happens it that the private speculations carried on at Ullapool have been uniformly unsuccessful? Melville and Murdoch Mackenzie were both of them men of great activity

1. B.F.S. Letters XI 244.

and enterprise personally and yet each failed. It is only by the means of men like these that the Directors have any hope of rousing the spirit of exertion among the Ullapool settlers."¹ To Melville and Mackenzie was added Henderson of Clythe who tried to employ the settlers but the experiment did not save him from financial embarrassment elsewhere and lost the Society £1,000 in loans.² Later Methuen from Leith, described as "the most enterprising (and judicious as considered) among the speculators in the fish curing", was attracted for a few seasons after 1838³ but he soon turned to more profitable fishing stations. The reasons already stated for the failure of the fishing and particularly the natural indolence of the native population either drove speculators away or ruined them.

It has been said that the Society lacked policy until 1838 and it was in that year for the first time that emigration was mentioned with favour. In the earlier period, in 1806, the Directors had advised their Agent not to attempt to detain those who, dissatisfied with conditions at home, wished to emigrate. In 1838 the Earl of Rosebery went so far as to say that "he considered the existing circumstances of the settlement as hardly to be alleviated without recourse to extensive measures of emigration", that the Society should provide settlers with information and possibly sums of money to help them to go and, most important, "that if such assistance be given means must be taken to prevent the vacancies so made from being instantly filled up".⁴ No action

1. B.F.S. Letters XI 6.

2. Ibid. 41.

3. B.F.S. Letters XII 118.

4. Minutes IV 184.

was taken on the subject as by 1839 the inclination of the inhabitants to emigrate had diminished as conditions improved again slightly.

Two years later came the first intimation that the Directors would sell Ullapool if they received a good offer. Meanwhile they gave their new Agent, Hector Mackenzie, the clearest instructions (if rather negative in effect) they had issued for some time. "The Directors can only give you their general views for your guidance - viz that they wish by all fair means to prevent the further increase of the population and to improve the condition of those whose removal is impossible or not looked for - They wish as much as possible to discourage the offering rents which the parties have not a hope of paying, and they would prefer pulling down the houses that come into their power, to allowing them to remain as inducement for every pauper of the neighbourhood to flock to the village. They would therefore be very cautious in allowing any new houses to be built."¹ A more complete reversal of the original plan of the Society could hardly be found, though no action was ever taken to force settlers to move.

In 1846 came the worst harvest failure and the setting up of the Destitution Fund Committees for the Highlands. At first the Government would not accept responsibility for the Ullapool settlers and the Society was forced to buy yet more meal for the people but in 1847 the Committee purchased the meal from the Directors² and included Ullapool in its co-operative schemes of road-building.³

1. B.F.S. Letters XII 206.

2. B.F.S. Letters XIII 68.

3. Report of Central Board of Management. 1847 p.17.

Ullapool had already been up for sale once when the Directors failed to raise the upset price of 5,000 guineas but on 20th July 1847 this price was received from James Matheson of Achany and the Lews.¹

All tenants were guaranteed the same terms from the new owner as from the Society and the Directors felt that the settlers would not be evicted or exploited by him. Since for so many years the Society had been in the position of an ordinary landlord with nothing further to offer the settlers in the way of occupation, the tenants would have felt little change. It is significant of the changed position that the withdrawal of the Society from the west in 1848 passed without comment as compared with the purchase of Ullapool amid much publicity sixty years earlier. After spending over £19,000 on Ullapool, the rents never rose above £400 a year and the arrears at the time of sale stood at nearly £900.

Lochbay was the first of the Society's villages to be sold. Since it had already reached a static condition by 1810 its later history is almost without incident. Until his death Charles Grant of Waternish, the active Director, had advised the Society's Agents. His own property lay alongside that of the Society and in 1818 he obtained a long lease of some of the Society's pasture to incorporate into his own sheep farm.² Since the population of Lochbay was slightly under 200 in 1815³ and did not increase abnormally after that date, the settlers had plenty of pasture left. Indeed until the harvest failures, there was little distress at Lochbay since the land was rich enough to

1. B.F.S. Letters XIII 75 and Old Gen.Reg.Sasines. 2406.80.

2. B.F.S. Letters IX 247.

3. Ibid. 9.

live on and the settlers were unaffected by the failure of the herring fishery. By the time the shoals appeared again in the Minch, Lochbay had ceased even to pretend to be a fishing station. Harbour dues were never enforced at Lochbay as they were at Ullapool for there was no hope of payment at the Skye settlement. Total rents never rose above the £188 registered in 1810. Although the arrears of rent were proportionately less than at Ullapool, the policy of paying rent in labour was introduced at Lochbay in 1825 under the supervision of the Agent.¹

From its early days Lochbay was unlucky in its Agents, though there was little to be done by such an official. For the thirty years that followed the appointment of Duncan Grant of Ullinish, no Agent lived at the settlement. Grant remained at Ullinish some twenty miles away while his successor Mackinnon of Corry lived at Broadford on the south east of Skye and his son, who took over the office in 1826, was not even resident on the island but travelled from Glenelg on the mainland to collect the rents.

In 1822 there were rumours that the Society would sell Lochbay and the settlers began to be afraid that their land would be taken away for sheep runs. The Directors denied the intention of selling and refused an offer from Captain Macleod of Gesto to lease the whole property, including liabilities for repairs, for £60 a year.² The Board agreed that even in face of more generous offers they would not sublet and expose the tenants to greater exactions of rent for which the Directors would be morally responsible.³ By 1829, however, the Secretary

-
1. B.F.S. Letters X 246.
 2. B.F.S. Letters XI 300.
 3. Ibid. 275.

told Mackinnon that the character of the settlement must change or the Directors would not feel justified in keeping it on. Pulteneytown required the expenditure of all available capital so the Directors would only leave money locked up in Lochbay for a short time longer.¹ While they wished to retain at least one west coast station, Lochbay's richer land would be more likely to sell than either Tobermory or Ullapool apart from the fact that it would never make a fishing station.

The decision to sell at the first good opportunity was communicated to the Agent in April 1831 and the high price obtained for the neighbouring estate of Waternish in the previous year raised the Directors' hopes.² Several private offers were received but it was decided that in fairness to the shareholders the sale must be by public roup so as to insure that the property went to the highest bidder.³ The total expenditure of the Society on Lochbay was £7,144 while the annual rent stood at about £170. The upset price was fixed at £2,100 and at the sale of 27th December 1837 the property of Lochbay was sold to Macdonald of Skeabost for £2,800.⁴

In some ways Tobermory presented a contrast to Lochbay, though they had one thing in common, that neither settlement was very much affected by the failure of the fishery. By 1810 we have seen Tobermory relying on her harbour and Customs House to live on trade rather than the far distant fishing grounds. In 1813 the Commissioners of Highland Roads and Bridges undertook to supervise an extension of the pier and

1. B.F.S. Letters XI 191-2.

2. Ibid. 286.

3. B.F.S. Letters XII 100.

4. Minutes IV 185 and Old Gen.Reg.Sasines. 1940.250.

contributed just under half of the £3,800 which the work cost.¹ The Society's outlay on the pier brought their total expenditure on Tobermory to above £6,000 between 1786 and 1814 but from that date the settlement maintained itself on the rents collected. After that date also Harbour dues were levied regularly which remained large enough to cover repairs to the pier and breastwork.

The improvement of the harbour led to an increase in the permanent population of Tobermory which by 1821 had reached nearly 900² and this presented a further problem. It will be remembered that in contrast to Lochbay, croft land was in short supply at Tobermory by 1810, pasturage had to be curtailed and in 1812 as much as 40/- an acre had been offered for very poor cultivated land while the richer land of Lochbay brought in less than 10/- an acre.³ To meet this ever growing demand the Directors authorised the Agent to take the line that applications for building lots in the village did not necessarily carry a right to croft and pasturage.⁴ This was the only time that the Directors rescinded the printed regulations of 1791 on which the administration of the settlements was based. For a few years there were references to petitions from the crofters and in 1823 a re-division of the land was proposed. There is some doubt whether this measure was ever put into effect as the local proprietors objected to the plan but after 1825 the complaints disappeared.

Tobermory may also be contrasted with Lochbay in the excellence

-
1. B.F.S. Letters VIII 80-81.
 2. B.F.S. Letters X 115.
 3. B.F.S. Letters VIII 4.
 4. Ibid. 148.

of her Agents. Maxwell, who had served in the office since the foundation of the settlement, was followed by his son. Robert Maxwell was told on several occasions,¹ no doubt to spur on his energies, that he was less efficient than his father but the administration of the settlement was left entirely in his hands with very little interference from an apparently satisfied Board of Directors. From 1822 to 1825 Tobermory suffered from the only exception in the run of good Agents. In spite of arriving with an impressive list of references from among the local gentry,² Duncan Campbell was soon in trouble with the Directors for failing to remit the rents collected at Tobermory. At the end of three years it was found that Campbell was deep in debt and had been collecting the rents with great severity and paying them to his creditors. In this way the Society lost over £400.³ The Secretary and Accountant may be blamed for taking no action after nothing appeared in rent for 1823 but all settlements were in arrears at the time and the Directors were anxious to give settlers a year or two to pay their rents and it was taken for granted that Campbell had been unable to raise the usual sum. After the truth was known he was speedily replaced by James Nisbet, a writer who practised locally and who managed the settlement with the calm efficiency of a Maxwell. In 1833 Nisbet was granted leave of absence and finally left the settlement and the Agency was transferred to his brother, Henry,⁵ who continued to satisfy the Directors until they sold the property in 1844.

1. B.F.S. Letters X 92.
2. Ibid. 125.
3. Ibid. 257-8.
4. Ibid. 258.
5. B.F.S. Letters XII 15.

There is no doubt that Tobermory was an easier Agency than Ullapool, since with the exception of a few years of distress the rents were paid with tolerable regularity and the population had no need to be urged to activity. Those men so urgently needed in Ullapool, the speculators with capital, were resident at Tobermory. The southern settlement had all the advantage of good communications, proximity to markets and a Customs House. Sinclair, who had settled in Mull with only a few hundred pounds and prospered, continued to expand his interests and was mentioned as a possible purchaser for the whole settlement in 1838.¹ A great step forward had been made by 1826 when a regular steam boat was run from the Clyde to Tobermory. Not only did merchants like Sinclair reside in the village but manufacturers, so vainly longed for in Wester Ross, established a sewing school, a spinning and carding mill and a "female school of industry" while in 1829 space was requested for a boat builder's yard. Further evidence of activity was furnished when the residents asked the Society to arrange for a Lloyds Agent to settle there.²

The growth of trade and wealth in the village brought its tragedy, for when the harvest failures reduced the dwellers on the nearby estates to starvation, they invaded Tobermory. In 1831 the richer settlers helped the poor and launched a relief fund for cholera which was expected to reach the village shortly.³ Five years later the destitution was beyond local aid and the Society gave money to a general fund while the Tobermory relief was administered by Nisbet

-
1. B.F.S. Letters XII 122.
 2. B.F.S. Letters XI 250.
 3. Ibid. 295-6.

under the Committee for Destitution Relief. By 1839 the settlement included several hundred souls not connected with the Society who had flocked in from adjacent districts.¹

Meanwhile the Directors had decided to sell Tobermory. Although the settlers flourished, the Society drew less than £400 gross rent annually of which over £100 was required for the payment of feu duty and salaries. Little change was expected in the settlement and there was no likelihood of its becoming a fishing station. Therefore immediately after the sale of Lochbay, Tobermory was advertised but only one offer, of £3,359, was received and the notice was withdrawn.² A private offer of £4,000 was made by Sir Charles Gordon, the Society's Law Agent, but the Directors felt as they had done with Lochbay that the sale should be by public roup, especially in view of Sir Charles' connexion with the Society.³ The upset price was £5,000 as compared with the total expenditure of £10,500 and an annual rent of £300. On 17th July the settlement of Tobermory was bought by Mr. David Nairne of Drumkilbo for £5,000.⁴ This sale did not include the pier, for the Directors could not alienate their right to the harbour dues and they therefore retained the whole breastwork and Sinclair's quay as well as the rights and dues from the pier until 1892.⁵

The proceeds from the sale of Tobermory were actually paid into the Society's bank at Wick⁶ when it seemed likely that the Pultaneystown

-
1. B.F.S. Letters XII 146.
 2. Ibid. 154.
 3. Ibid. 287.
 4. Ibid. 295 and Old Gen.Reg.Sasines. 2300.106.
 5. Part.Reg.Sasines Caithness. 72.141.
 6. B.F.S. Letters XII 297.

harbour would require immediate expenditure. For various reasons the works were not undertaken for some years and the £5,000 was transferred to London, but the original deposit showed that the western settlements were sold to free the capital for improvements in Caithness.

In the previous chapter we saw that Pulteneytown was flourishing in 1830. The Directors realised that prosperity depended on the fish remaining on the east coast and on the harbour being kept in repair and free from sand. Tragedy came in 1832 from neither of these causes but from cholera.

On 2nd June 1832¹ the Directors addressed a petition to the Treasury which outlined the conditions at Pulteneytown every summer from overcrowding and the gutting of herring in large numbers in insanitary places. At that date the cholera had not reached the settlement but the Society begged for funds to prevent its outbreak there. In July the Agent reported that the curing lots had let very well but by September the disease had arrived² and there was a large scale exodus of fishermen and merchants. As a result of the Directors' efforts and of public aid the deaths were not numerous, but the effect of the epidemic on the settlement lasted for many years.

The great success of Pulteneytown and Wick was partly due to the harbour being the first on the coast. Curers and merchants who were early attracted to it and found continual prosperity in the 1820's saw no reason to try a new station. In 1832, however, "The alarm was very great; many crews broke their engagements with the curers and

1. B.F.S. Letters XI 300.

2. Ibid. 311.

fled, many curers broke up their establishments and withdrew.... Some of the crews prosecuted the Fishery on their way homewards and succeeded so well as to encourage them to try the same ground the present season (1833); others have embarked in the same speculation at the Orkneys where no rent for the Curing stations is exacted and from these two causes combined a difficulty has already been experienced in completing the complements of the Fishing vessels for the season 1833 and a considerable reduction both in rents of the Curing stations and the Harbour Dues must be anticipated."¹

In addition to these losses, which continued for a number of years, the herrings failed to appear in 1834 but by 1836 the Agent was confident that the settlement would soon recover,² though commercial confidence had been badly shaken. To add to the Society's difficulties, the new harbour which had been completed in 1834 began to fill with sand and within four years an engineer was sent to report on the situation.³ The low rent of curing lots which had fallen from £1,157 annually before 1832 to about £200 and the similar diminishing of the harbour dues did not encourage the Directors to spend further large sums on the works. On the other hand there were rumours of a rival harbour being planned at Ackergill to the north of Wick. The difficulty at Pulteneytown was that sand was always liable to be washed up on the shore and so some new feature to prevent this was necessary. In 1842 it was pointed out that⁴ "A considerable portion of the coastal trade

1. Minutes IV 102.

2. Ibid. 153.

3. Ibid. 187.

4. Report on Pulteneytown. 13.

is now carried on by means of steamboats; and ultimately, I have no doubt, the whole of that trade with the exception of coal and lime, will be carried on by steam; and in order to accomplish this in as cheap a manner as possible, the steamboats will be built as large as the extent of the trade they are engaged in will admit of." Thus to keep the coastal traffic Pulteneytown must enlarge the harbour.

Several proposals for the elimination of sand were laid before the Directors and it was at this time that the money for Tobermory was deposited at Wick, but it was found that the schemes would require at least £16,000 to execute. The Directors were in a quandary since the prosperity of the settlement depended upon the utility of the harbour while the present state of Pulteneytown did not warrant undue expenditure of the shareholders' money, of which nearly £1,000 was spent on employing destitute labourers in the winters of 1846 and 1847.¹ The Act of 1844² which reduced the number of the Directors had also partially repealed the clause preventing the Society from borrowing money but the highest limit now permitted was only £10,000 which did not cover the cost of new harbour works. The Directors called for six different reports from four engineers between 1838 and 1847 but none of them could recommend a course of improvement within the scope of the Society's funds and few of the solutions could be guaranteed to be successful.³ Thus with the risk, the expense and the prospect of the existing harbour being out of action for many months during reconstruction, the Directors decided to postpone any improvement.

-
1. Report on Pulteneytown. 38.
 2. 7 and 8 Vict. cap.52.
 3. Report on Pulteneytown. 17.

Unfortunately on 19th August 1848 a severe storm hit Pulteneytown and lives were lost and damage done to the shipping within the harbour.¹ This raised considerable criticism of the Society locally and a paragraph even appeared in the London Times² to the effect that the Directors had failed to maintain Pulteneytown harbour because they wanted the money to pay dividends. In order to answer this charge and to prove that the Society had "satisfactorily fulfilled the objects it has proposed to itself" Samuel Smith and Donald Horne the Law Agent presented a report to the Directors which was published in November 1848.³ After tracing the history of the settlement and the harbour they produced figures showing that £22,860.17 of the Society's funds had been spent on the harbour in addition to the grant of £7,500 from Parliament and £31,192.11 raised in harbour dues. It was also pointed out that the Society was concerned with improvements before the disaster and passages from several of the surveys and reports were quoted.

In spite of this rather hasty self-justification, the Directors realised that their administration of Pulteneytown was inadequate. As early as October 1848 therefore,⁴ they discussed the appointment of a naval officer as harbour master with complete control of all works connected with the harbour and four months later in February 1849 this officer was chosen.⁵

The appointment of this officer and certain other arrangements for increased local government already made changed the status of the

-
1. John O'Groat Journal. 25 August 1848.
 2. B.F.S. Letters XIII 114.
 3. Report on Pulteneytown. 25.
 4. B.F.S. Letters XIII 117.
 5. Ibid. 127.

Society in Pulteneytown and provides a convenient break in the history of the settlement, especially since it coincided with the sale of Ullapool. From 1848 Pulteneytown was the sole object of the Directors' thoughts and their money.

The phase of the Society's history just considered, stretching from 1810 to 1848, shows the decline of its authority and the shrinking of its influence. We have already seen that for various reasons by 1810 the Society had begun to lose prestige and was being left to concentrate on the settlements rather than on the fishing industry. This was increasingly obvious under the leadership of William Smith and the Directors became absorbed in the collection of rents, admittedly a difficult task. In 1829¹ there arose a question of the legality of certain methods of fishing and a landlord in Wester Ross suggested that the Society should join him in pressing for a new law on the matter. The Secretary replied that while the Directors agreed with the measure and would gladly assist Mr. Mackenzie of Coull, they were unwilling to become involved in the expense of legislation and felt that the matter should originate from "the Society in Edinburgh" by which he probably meant the Highland Society. He further remarked² that the Society was a mere private association of subscribers in the same way as other landholding corporations and had no weight with the Fishery Board.

A clearer indication of the change of attitude between 1786 and 1829 would be hard to find. The above statement shows that the later position of the Society was due to a deliberate policy as well as to the

1. B.F.S. Letters XI 204.

2. Ibid. 212.

circumstances of the time. The Directors apparently wished to remain a "private association of subscribers". By 1847 Samuel Smith told an official of the Customs Board¹ that the Society was founded to prevent emigration and in forwarding a petition from the fishermen of Inverallochy he explained to the Fishery Board that it was addressed to the British Fisheries Society "under an evident mis-apprehension of the objects for which that Society was founded". Judged by the standards of the early Directors it was rather Mr. Smith who was suffering from misapprehension.

Between 1810 and 1848, then, the Directors concerned themselves not at all with the general fishing industry. William Smith and his few active supporters worked hard to encourage Pulteneytown as a flourishing fishing station and took what measures they could first to make the western settlements profitable and later to mitigate the destitution by employing the poor and by subscribing funds and arranging for supplies of food to be sent to the starving populations.

First the agricultural Lochbay and the commercial Tobermory were sold to liberate the Society's capital for the expansion of Pulteneytown and finally Ullapool "which for twenty years was considered as the most promising of the Society's establishments and that to which their resources ought to be devoted".² By 1848 the Society had changed in outlook from the original aims of 1786 and had substituted Pulteneytown for the three western settlements.

1. B.F.S. Letters XIII 56.
2. Minutes IV 120.

CHAPTER XII

The last years of the Society. 1848-1893

After 1848 the British Fisheries Society owned property only in Pulteneytown. For this reason, although the Society's headquarters remained in London, its organisation took on a semi-local character for nearly all the Directors were connected with Caithness and we shall see that there was even a transfer of some of the shares to the residents of Wick and Pulteneytown.

The beginning of local influence on the affairs of the Society can be fixed in 1844. There has already been some reference to an Act of Parliament¹ passed in that year which altered the composition of the Society's board of Directors. The main purpose of the Act, which seems to have been brought in by the Directors without very much pressure from the settlers, was to give Pulteneytown a measure of self government. An elected body known as the Pulteneytown Improvement Commission was given authority to impose rates on the settlers in return for which the Commission provided such amenities as street lighting and cleaning, drains and a police force. The Society's Agent was ex officio chairman of the Commission but the elected members were by no means subservient to the Directors, standing up for what they considered to be their rights equally against the encroachments of the Wick Town Council and against the Society. This was the first time that the Directors had delegated powers of self government to their settlers and the result was greatly to increase the already apparent independence of Pulteneytown.

1. 7 and 8 Vict. cap.52.

Another step in the same direction was taken four years later. On the morning of 19th August 1848 came the storm,¹ which has already been mentioned, in which at least 37 fishermen were drowned within the harbour. "What is the British Fisheries Society about, that men to whom we are so much indebted are so wholly uncared for?" asked the local newspaper and criticism of the Society's harbour policy was harsh and outspoken. We have seen that the result of this criticism was the appointment of a naval officer as Harbour Master.² Captain Eden was paid by the Directors and responsible to them, but the fact that he was a professional sailor gave his opinions considerable weight in the Society. He corresponded direct with the Lords of the Admiralty,³ who began to take a much increased interest in harbour matters at Wick and within a few years the Directors were leaving all harbour business to the discretion of their Harbour Master. Thus in a few years the scope of the Directors' immediate authority was much restricted, local government and harbour matters being delegated to others.

It has already been stressed that the harbour was the most important feature of the settlement at Pulteneytown and this is illustrated by the fact that soon after Eden's appointment the Society's Agency,⁴ which involved chairmanship of the Pulteneytown Improvements Commission among other duties, was combined with that of Harbour Master while the former Agent, Josiah Rhind, was appointed cashier with no other official duties than the collection of rents.

1. John O'Groat Journal. 25 August 1848.

2. B.F.S. Letters XIII 127.

3. Ibid. 165.

4. Ibid. 142.

Unfortunately discretion was not one of Captain Eden's many qualities and while none denied his very efficient work in the improvement of the harbour his relations with the resident population and especially his behaviour on the Pulteneytown Improvements Commission forced the Directors to demand his resignation. The Secretary admitted that Eden's job was "no bed of roses"¹ but the Society was no longer in a position to dictate in the settlement and a more diplomatic Harbour Master and Agent, Captain Tudot, was appointed in 1854.²

Opposition to the Society came to a head at the Annual General Meeting of 1855. The cause of the trouble was partly genuine and partly stimulated by politics. It has been shown that the Society was criticised in Captain Washington's report of 1848 and later charged with saving money on the harbour in order to pay dividends to London shareholders. Captain Eden's conduct did not tend to smooth over the differences between the Society and the local merchants and although only one dividend was paid between 1848 and 1855 little work was done to improve the harbour and the sense of grievance grew stronger.

There is no doubt that politics played a considerable part in the controversy. From the foundation we have seen that many Directors of the Society were members of Parliament and in an earlier chapter it was shown that they were both Whigs and Tories. As the gulf between the two sides of the House of Commons grew wider, combination between parties became more difficult and fewer enterprises remained outside politics. William Smith, as M.P. for Norwich, was not primarily

1. B.F.S. Letters XIII 179.
2. Ibid. 283.

regarded in Caithness as a politician. But with James Loch as Deputy Governor, the position was altered. Loch had become Liberal member for the Northern Burghs before he was elected a Director of the Society and in the 1840's he was joined on the Board by Mr. George Traill, the Liberal member for Caithness county. Loch's frequent visits to the north combined political with Fisheries Society business and it is not therefore surprising that his opponent in the constituency, Samuel Laing, should have associated himself with the Society's opponents in Pulteneytown.

In 1854 an effort had been made by some of the local merchants to buy shares in the Society,¹ hoping to acquire a controlling interest at Wick rather than in London. This they failed to do but in 1855² and 1856³ deputations from Pulteneytown, including Mr. Laing who had defeated Loch in the election of 1855, attended the Society's Annual General Meetings to voice their opinions. Much of what was said was merely factious and much was personal criticism of Mr. Loch, but there emerged from the speeches some true facts about the position of the Society.

At this time the organisation was nearly 70 years old and though the times had changed considerably the Society had altered very little in its method of business. Recent events had emphasised two things - first that the Society's capital, even when increased by the power to borrow up to £10,000, was insufficient to deal effectively with harbour construction on a modern scale though it had been more than enough to build the three western settlements. Secondly the appointment first

-
1. B.F.S. Letters XIII 300.
 2. John O'Groat Journal. 6 April 1855.
 3. Ibid. 4 April 1856.

of the Pulteneytown Improvements Commission and then of Captain Eden suggested that private gentlemen such as the Directors were neither acceptable as administrators in local affairs nor technically competent as organisers in harbour matters. Mr. Laing had thus a basis of truth when he said¹ "The Society, in fact, looks like a relic of the middle ages. If we had the thing to begin a-new no man in his senses would think of constituting a Society of this kind of noblemen and gentlemen of high standing in London. The result of our anomalous position seems to be this: that we are neither a commercial company, looking to dividends nor yet a body of elected public Commissioners." "A great many things are done that would never be done if we were either a body of Commissioners elected by the Constituents or if we were either a Railway company or a Dock company.... In fact you have had to administer an antediluvian Society based on wrong principles... and I am only surprised that the Directors have made so few blunders." Laing even went so far as to suggest that an Act of Parliament should transfer all the Society's functions to local Commissioners but this proposal, though surprisingly supported by the Earl of Rosebery, was not upheld by the other Directors and does not appear to have been backed by more than a small minority in Pulteneytown.

By 1857 it had become clear that the Society, antediluvian though it might be, could still be of greater service to the settlement than local Commissioners. This was, yet again, in connection with the harbour. Although their capital was not large by modern standards the Directors had by now a fair sum of money at their command. Immediately

1. John O'Great Journal. 6 April 1855.

after the sale of the western settlements the total stock was in the region of £20,000¹ and while no dividend was paid this increased annually at the rate of £800 to £1,000 from rents and about £600 from interest every year.² When in 1856 yet another plan for harbour was drawn up by Messrs. D. & T. Stevenson of Edinburgh,³ the Directors offered to pay £25,000 out of a total cost of £46,500. It was proposed to ask Parliament to lend the balance. When Stevensons' report was submitted to the Admiralty and then to the Board of Trade this loan was refused because the Admiralty did not wish the whole of the bay of Wick to be in private hands.⁴ At a special meeting of the proprietors of the British Fisheries Society, it was agreed to undertake a limited form of Stevensons' improvements without a loan.

Although the Pulteneytown Harbour Act of 1857⁵ gave the Society authority to do this work and to levy increased harbour dues in return for the expenditure, nothing was done for several years. This was because a nation wide scheme for building harbours of refuge and national coaling stations was under consideration and in 1858 a Royal Commission inspected Wick bay. The result of this was a deadlock for the Commissioners saw the advantages of the bay and recommended the building of a breakwater at a cost of £125,000.⁶ In spite of this the Government refused to provide the money while the Admiralty would not sanction the Society's plans for construction on a smaller scale as they feared this would spoil the bay for future improvement.

-
1. B.F.S. Letters XIII 141.
 2. John O'Great Journal. 28 April 1854.
 3. Ibid. 17 July 1857.
 4. Ibid. 20 March 1862.
 5. 20 and 21 Vict. cap.93.
 6. John O'Great Journal. 15 March 1860.

This deadlock continued until 1862 and was responsible for much criticism of the Society in Pulteneytown. By that date the accumulated funds of the Society had reached £42,000 and the Directors suggested that if they could obtain a loan of £60,000 from the Public Works Loan Commission under a new Harbour and Passing Tolls Act of 1861,¹ they themselves would contribute £40,000 towards a more extensive scheme.² At last in 1863 it was announced³ that these plans had been approved by the Admiralty and the Board of Trade and an Act of Parliament had authorised the Society's undertaking. The loan was arranged in three instalments to begin after the Society had spent their £40,000 and was repayable at 3% interest.⁴

The work on the new harbour, which consisted mainly of building a new outer breakwater, was begun in 1864 but proceeded slowly with continual damage by storms. The first instalment of the loan was not received until the late summer of 1867 by which time the Society's capital had been reduced to £6,000. On 6th February 1870, after £82,000 had been spent on the work, a storm caused what was estimated at £8,000 worth of damage.⁵ Engineers reported that the original plan was not strong enough and that although it was recommended to shorten the breakwater the additional strength needed would cost another £10,000 at least.⁶ The Directors applied for an increase in the loan but although they were exonerated from the charges of inefficiency and haste

-
1. 24 and 25 Vict. cap.47.
 2. John O'Groat Journal. 20 March 1862.
 3. Ibid. 19 March 1863.
 4. Ibid. 24 March 1864.
 5. Ibid. 24 March 1870.
 6. Ibid. 23 March 1871

in their undertaking, the money was refused. The Society had therefore little choice but to meet the cost by a deeper plunge into capital and by a loan from the Bank for which the Directors became responsible.

The final blow was administered when in a report on 14th February 1873 the engineers pronounced the now completed works to have failed in their object and that after so much money had been laid out, the harbour was still not a safe refuge. The Directors reported that¹ "It has always been the view of the Directors that the construction of a breakwater in Wick bay was partly a national undertaking, and was too large for private individuals. On this ground they regarded the assumption of so great a responsibility with hesitation and reluctance and undertook it against their better judgement. Experience has shown that they were justified."

The consequences of failure were twofold, first that the higher tariff authorised again by the Act of 1862² could not be imposed because the works did not fulfil the requirements so that the means of repaying the loan was removed. Secondly the failure of the breakwater enormously increased the local opposition to the Society.

At this period the fishing industry at Wick and Pulteneytown was suffering a depression³ and many of the local residents blamed this on the failure of the breakwater. In vain did one of the Directors remark that the diminished catch of herring was due to "the eccentric habits of the fish"⁴ and the Editor of a local newspaper wrote,¹ "The

-
1. John O'Groat Journal. 13 March 1873.
 2. 25 and 26 Vict. cap.80.
 3. John O'Groat Journal. 6 March 1873.
 4. Ibid. 20 March 1873.

truth is that if we could only catch the herrings things would not be so badly with us. That we do not catch them as we used to do is the immediate source of our trade depression."

On 18th January 1873¹ a joint meeting of the Wick Chamber of Commerce and of the local shareholders of the Society forwarded a series of resolutions to the Directors criticising the Society's harbour policy and demanding the transference of harbour management to local magnates. On this occasion it was considered that the resolutions were politically inspired and at the shareholders' meeting only three votes were registered in favour of the plan.² For several years the local opposition continued to voice its opinion but no action was taken by either side. It was not until the Annual General Meeting of the Society in 1878 that matters were brought to a head.

At that meeting³ Sir Tollemache Sinclair, M.P. for Caithness county, proposed that the Society should confer with representatives of Wick, Pulteneytown and Caithness county organisations for the transference of the Society's property into local hands. He referred to the remarks made in 1855 on the unsuitability of the Society's organisation but said that while the Directors had a large capital at their disposal there was a sufficient reason for the British Fisheries Society to continue its existence. He then pointed out that the Society was now actually in debt to their bankers to the extent of nearly £5,000, that its reputation had been lost over the breakwater and that it had now no good claim for existence. Although some Directors objected to

-
1. John O'Groat Journal. 13 February 1873.
 2. Ibid. 20 March 1873.
 3. Ibid. 21 March 1878.

Sinclair's remarks on the Society's future, a resolution to transfer harbour management to local representatives was passed by the shareholders.

Throughout 1878 and 1879 negotiations for the transfer were conducted between a Joint Committee of the Pulteneytown Improvements Commission, the Wick Town Council and the local Chamber of Commerce on the one hand, and the Directors of the Society on the other. In Caithness local agreement on representation was not reached at once, but the main cause of trouble with the Directors was financial.¹ The Society agreed to abandon all claim to the sum of £40,000 expended on the harbour since 1863 and the Joint Committee agreed to be responsible for the debt of £60,000 to the Public Works Loan Commission, which it was hoped might also be waived. There remained the sum of £14,092 which represented the balance of the Society's expenditure on the harbour before 1863 over their receipts in harbour dues to that date. It was not until a special meeting of shareholders in March 1879² agreed to abandon this claim also, that a Bill could be framed which was acceptable to both sides.

The Act received Royal assent in August 1879.³ By its provisions the administration of the harbour was to be transferred to a body of trustees, one of whom was to be the Society's Agent and the rest to be elected. The Trust was to come into force on 1st November but the British Fisheries Society were named as Trustees until the elections could be held. The first meeting of the new Trustees was held on 29th

1. John O'Groat Journal. 12 December 1878.

2. Ibid. 20 March 1879.

3. 42 and 43 Vict. cap.49.

January 1880 and on that day local management became an accomplished fact.¹

This was the third stage in the reduction of the Society's scope and was very much more far-reaching than the foundation of the Improvements Commission or the appointment of Captain Eden. The harbour rates not only brought in nearly three times the total rents of Pulteneytown but the bay was the most important feature of the settlement. Thus the Directors were left with no capital, very little income and no authority except in the collection of rents. Their connection with the fishing industry was gone for ever.

The town of Pulteneytown, whose administration was now the only responsibility of the Directors, did not increase very much between 1851 and 1893. The population was given in the former year as 3,800 while the annual influx of highlanders and foreigners in the fishing season was sometimes as high as 8,000.² The Society was criticised in 1865³ for not encouraging further building and by 1884 the Directors reported that several new streets had been laid out to relieve the overcrowding of the existing houses. The rents from these houses, and from the farms on the estate, was £1,573 in 1882 and the expenditure £1,001 in salaries and repairs.⁴ This balance of £572 represented the total annual income of the Society after 1879.

At this important point in the history of the Society, it will be suitable to consider the personnel of the Directors during these years. Although between 1848 and 1879 the Pulteneytown settlers were

-
1. John O'Groat Journal. 15 January 1880.
 2. Ibid. 11 April 1851.
 3. Ibid. 23 March 1865.
 4. Ibid. 16 March 1882.

repeatedly informed that the Society's objects were not confined to Caithness and that capital ought to be reserved for possible settlements elsewhere, no serious project of this kind seems to have been entertained. Therefore the Directors continued to be, as in 1846, predominantly connected with north east Scotland. James Loch was succeeded as Deputy Governor by his son George, while the Earl of Caithness followed the Duke of Sutherland as Governor the next year. Mr. George Traill gave up his position as Director to his son Mr. J. C. Traill and other vacancies were filled by Samuel Smith, Alexander Matheson of Lochalsh, Sir Graham Graham Montgomery, Mr. Horne of Stirkoke and Sir William Miller of Manderstone while the Marquis of Breadalbane and Lord Abinger were also Directors for a time. Smith was elected a Director on his retirement from the Secretaryship in 1855 when he was succeeded by Macleod of Macleod,¹ who retained the office until the end of the Society. The firm of Horne and Rose, later Horne and Lyell, continued to do good work for the Society in legal matters.

In 1882 it was resolved to draw up a revised list of shareholders "to facilitate the future realisation of the Society's property".² This was done by means of an Act of Parliament³ which also gave the Directors power to sell the whole of their stock. But it was stressed that⁴ "Although the Directors will obtain... increased powers of sale, they think it desirable to state it will not be necessary to make use of these powers at an early or at any definite date. They will take

-
1. B.F.S. Letters XIII 342.
 2. John O'Groat Journal. 16 March 1882.
 3. 46 and 47 Vict. cap.9.
 4. John O'Groat Journal. 15 March 1883.

such action in the matter of sale, as will best conduce to the ultimate advantage of the shareholders."

Meanwhile dividends of £1 per share were paid at intervals until by 1893 £49 out of every £50 invested in 1786 had been returned. By the Act of 1884 the list of shareholders had to be published in the Gazette and other papers and within three years 67 further shareholders,¹ descendants of the original holders, had laid claims and £3,209 was paid to them in dividends.

On March 4th 1887 a special meeting of shareholders confirmed the final list and it was announced that² "The Society being now in the full possession of the powers of sale... the Directors are of opinion that any favourable opportunity of advantageously disposing of the Society's property and dividing the proceeds among the shareholders should be taken advantage of." The Directors, however, thought that the estate of Pulteneytown was capable of being developed further and they would not hasten to sell during a time of depression. This depression of trade at Pulteneytown, combined with the general poverty of the crofting community in the Highlands at this period, had caused the Directors to remit 10% of all rents at Pulteneytown in 1887² and this concession was granted annually until 1893.

A valuation of the estate was approved by the shareholders on 15th October 1890³ and after it had been offered and refused by the Trustees of the Hempriggs estate of which Pulteneytown had originally

-
1. John O'Groat Journal. 23 March 1887.
 2. Ibid. 21 March 1888.
 3. Ibid. 17 March 1891.

formed a part, the property was advertised for sale. The upset price was fixed at £19,700 while Tobermory pier, which had been retained since 1844 bringing in about £14 annually in dues, was valued at £300. For two years no suitable offer was received but in November 1892 the estate of Pulteneytown was bought by Mr. John Usher of Norton.¹ Mr. Usher also bought the pier at Tobermory and paid the Society the required £20,000 for the two estates.¹

On 20th March 1893² the shareholders attended their last Annual General Meeting and on 10th June of that year the remaining capital, which must have amounted to less than £15,000 when all debts were settled, was divided among the holders of the 478 shares.

The British Fisheries Society existed no longer.

1. Part.Reg.Sasines. Caithness 72.141.
2. John O'Groat Journal. 28 March 1893.

CONCLUSION

We have now followed the Society throughout its career from 1786 to 1893 and have seen the various changes in the fortune which overtook it. For the first twelve years the western settlements were under construction, the Directors' influence was at its peak and hopes ran high for the newly revived fishing industry. The new century saw a sudden change in the course of the herring shoals from west to east, the rise of Pulteneytown and the decline of Ullapool and Lochbay. Meanwhile the appointment of the Commissioners for the Herring Fishery in 1808 curtailed the Society's scope and the later Directors allowed the initiative in matters of emigration and even fishery laws to pass from their hands to the Highland Society of Edinburgh. By 1830 Pulteneytown had reached the highest point of its career when an outbreak of cholera diverted the fishermen to other east coast ports, from which many did not return. Famine and apathy on the west persuaded the Directors to sell their property during the 1840's in order to raise funds for the new harbour works in Caithness. A change in the Directorate and the shedding of responsibilities in the west revived the Society for its long battle with the authorities over Pulteneytown harbour, a battle which ended in tragedy for the Society with the failure of their breakwater in 1873. In face of this, the local and political opposition pressed for and obtained control of the harbour and the Society gradually faded from the scene.

It has already been shown that the disappearance of the herring after 1798 ruined Ullapool while at Lochbay, although the village was

not so far advanced and therefore less directly concerned, it destroyed all hope of establishing a prosperous fishing station. The failure also had several less obvious effects on the Society which will appear later. Since this played such an important part in the history of the Society, it should be considered whether the Directors ought to have foreseen and provided against such an event. Fishermen had warned them that there were frequent local failures when the shoals deserted a certain district for as many as ten years but Lochbroom was regarded as a more constant resort than any in the north west. By establishing three stations along the coast the Directors hoped to escape the effects of these local failures but they gave the settlers land and the chance of alternative employment in industry to help them over occasional bad years. Thus the Directors provided for temporary failures but they did not provide for the almost complete desertion of the whole west coast. The history of the herring fishery contains examples of sudden migrations of which the departure of shoals from the Baltic in the fifteenth century is perhaps the most famous while a similar movement deserted the Forth and Tay during nearly the whole of the eighteenth century. In 1786 these migrations were known but since the causes had not been discovered and the periods between them were extremely irregular, it was impossible for the Directors to forecast a migration. The only insurance against such an event lay in keeping out of the fishing industry altogether.

All the Directors' plans for the west were based on the growing success of the fishery. Owing to the unexpected disappearance of the herring so soon after the settlements were founded these plans were

never adequately tested and the intervening century has not produced a more successful scheme of development by which to judge the Society. It therefore becomes a matter of guesswork whether their plans would have turned out to be practicable.

The failure of the western settlements emphasised the clash of interests which was inherent in the foundation of the Society. In order to raise money for the encouragement of the fisheries in the Highlands subscribers were formed into a Joint Stock Company on commercial lines. The Directors were elected to administer the Society's funds to the greatest advantage of the fisheries. There was conflict in this, for the Directors aimed to establish settlements but to reserve some capital for general encouragement of the industry in experiments on improved equipment and chartmaking. Again, once the three settlements had been founded their interests clashed with each other and with future stations which the Directors were always prepared, if occasion offered, to establish on any undeveloped part of the coast. Thus the Directors were faced with the task of balancing the interests of the settlers of each station and of the fisheries in general. The original subscribers were satisfied at seeing their money laid out at the settlements and the success of Ullapool, Tobermory and Lochbay would have provided small dividends from the rents, as was forecast in 1798. When the west failed some shareholders resented seeing their money spent on poor relief when it could have been profitably invested at Pulteneytown, thus introducing a new clash between the interests of the subscribers and the aims of the Society. The Directors appreciated this but hesitated to abandon the settlers for whom they felt responsible

or to sell their stations in case the herring returned to the west. Thus in following the original aims of the Society the Directors were forced to waver between charity and profit. In a successful venture charity would have been slightly profitable which was all that was demanded in 1786 and the Society could have pursued a more direct, though maybe no more successful, course.

In administration the organisation of the Society was unsatisfactory from the beginning since the Directors in London could only exercise a very remote control over their settlements. In 1786 it took more than a week to send a letter from London to Ullapool and nearly three weeks to obtain an answer. It was not until 1850 that the postal service became fast enough to provide efficient administration on the Society's pattern. The Directors were dependent on letters for knowledge of conditions in the north during the months when Parliament was in session, for while the Board was meeting regularly none of them could leave London. In the event of the settlers sending in a petition, or indeed of any decision being required, nearly a month elapsed while the Directors consulted their local Agent and at least another week passed before their instructions reached the settlement. When these referred to action, such as repairs or building, this delay sometimes wasted the whole of what was in any case a short season. One remedy would have been to remove the Society's headquarters to Edinburgh or Inverness from where a more direct contact with the settlements could have been maintained, but this would have severed the close connection between the Society and Parliament. The Directors regarded the latter as one of the most important aspects of the Society and therefore they

remained in London and the system of remote control was preserved.

The only hope for such an organisation lay in employing good Agents. The Society paid its Agents £40 per year expecting in return only part time service with a very high standard of honesty and intelligence. In theory the Agent was either a country gentleman of independent means and a strong sense of duty who lived near the settlement or else a member of the professional class resident in the village who supplemented an already moderate income by working for the Society. In practice the former proved very rare, only Williamson at Pulteneytown being satisfactory, and from the latter class came the successful Agents Macleay and Rhind in Caithness and the Maxwells and Nisbets at Tobermory. Lochbay and Ullapool had no resident professional class and for the former the Society chose a series of country gentlemen who lived too far away and consequently neglected the settlement. At Ullapool the Agents, several of whom had been trained as writers but had no scope to practise in Wester Ross, had no other occupation, failed to preserve sufficient authority and became too far identified with the settlers to give the Directors the unbiased advice they needed. All the Agents were considered to have had excellent personal qualifications and it appears that the difference between good and bad Agents rested mainly on their having an independent position in the settlement. Had Ullapool and Lochbay developed according to plan bankers and writers would have settled there from whom suitable Agents could have been chosen. So failure, which made greater demands on the Agents' powers than well planned success, removed the most likely source of good candidates and impaired the working of an already weak administrative system.

The difficulty of administering the settlements was increased by the Directors' refusal to allow their Agents authority to make decisions. The local men were expected to provide information and give advice to the Board in London but they could not act without instructions. We have seen that bad communications imposed delays on the Society's organisation and a possible remedy for this lay in giving the Agents power to act without waiting for the Directors' commands. This was refused in principle, because the Directors felt themselves to be trustees on behalf of the subscribers and directly responsible for all matters of administration. The distance between London and the settlements and the infrequency of visits of inspection would afford the Society little check on the Agents' actions, a lesson which had been demonstrated by the failure of the Board of Manufactures' linen stations where local undertakers had embezzled the funds. Where the settlements developed according to plan, the disadvantages of the Society's system of administration were less obvious for the Directors could make their decisions in advance, but where sudden action or changes of policy were required remote control broke down.

At the settlements the Society's policy of expenditure of money and land was severely criticised during the nineteenth century but here again the migration of the herring confuses the issue. As regards money, the Directors were charged with wasting large sums on unnecessary building while reserving nothing for the provision of equipment and boats. The Inns at Ullapool and Lochbay certainly did not justify their cost. The storehouses and curing sheds of Ullapool were planned on a generous scale to meet the needs of a successful fishing station,

to avoid rebuilding after a few years of prosperity, and in the circumstances it was not until 1949 that the sheds came into their own. In addition to the money spent on public buildings, the Society lent small sums to help their tenants to build the good houses that the Directors demanded. Thus a large proportion of the Society's capital was spent on buildings of one sort or another. From this deliberate policy there grew the villages whose well planned streets of solid houses continue to be admired today but were certainly beyond the needs of Ullapool and Lochbay in 1790. On the other hand the Society's standard was so high that, since the loans covered only half the value of the house, the settlers exhausted their capital in building leaving nothing to pay for boats or nets. It has been shown that before 1776 a scheme of giving free equipment or advancing money for its purchase had been tried without success for no satisfactory protection had been devised against the neglect and abuse of the articles given. The Directors decided against grants or loans for this purpose for they expected that companies from the south would be attracted by the prospects of successful fishery, the spacious buildings and good houses and would establish branches at the settlements to provide equipment and employ tenants, a system which was adopted by Melville before 1798 and which flourished at Pulteneytown and which might well have proved right in the west if the herring had remained.

The Directors were attacked from opposite viewpoints for their land policy. First they were blamed for giving too much land to the settlers and later for giving them too little. The case for too much land was that the settlements would not prosper until there emerged a class of professional fishermen as distinct from crofter-fishermen since

the essential work of hay and harvest always came at the height of the fishing season. This proved true on the north east where great progress was made as soon as the two occupations of farmer and fisherman were separated, which began to happen after 1800. On the west, not only was the supply of food for landless fishermen more difficult, but the inclination of the people was very strongly against the division. The Directors found that they had to give some land or they would have attracted no settlers. They therefore allowed each man a garden for vegetables, arable to grow potatoes and fodder, and grazing for one cow. This did not produce enough food to live on and the tenant was expected to spend the money he earned at the fishery on oatmeal and other necessities brought from the south by trading companies. The movement of the herring overthrew this economic balance leaving the settlers dependent only on their land. The Directors were condemned for collecting people into villages without adequate means of support from the land, and blamed for the consequent destitution which was more serious in Lochbroom than in any other highland parish except Gairloch.

So much has been written on the subject that everyone is now familiar with the qualities and defects of the highland temperament, particularly its brilliance in attack and fatalistic acceptance of adverse circumstances, including poverty. The Directors, well aware of the former through the Highland Regiments, were unprepared for the latter. In 1786 it was reasonable to suppose that the low standard of living in the west highlands was due to lack of opportunity in the way of markets and communications. The British Fisheries Society made one of the earliest attempts to employ the people and it was expected that

they would react to encouragement as their eastern and southern neighbours had done. Indeed it appears that, up to 1798, at least some of the people of Wester Ross did work for Woodhouse, Morrison and Melville, though how long they would have continued to do so must be a matter for speculation. After the disappearance of the herring the people of Ullapool and Lochbay accepted poverty and even starvation with their usual fatalism and relapsed into helpless dependence on their crofts and on the Directors' charity. Whether initial success would have carried the highland fishermen through the few inevitable years of failure, as it did for their east coast counterparts, will always remain doubtful and on this the Society's success would have depended.

While there may be confusion between cause and effect in the failure of the western settlements, the practical results are only too clear. All the good that the Society bequeathed to Ullapool and Lochbay was the well planned streets and buildings while the example, which was to have been of even greater importance than the settlements themselves, was swept away in the destitution of 1847-50. Tobermory fared better, for, as has been pointed out, the harbour and Customs House had introduced general trade and brought a certain prosperity. Once the Directors realised that Tobermory was unlikely to become a fishing station, they ceased to spend their capital in Mull and the Society made no profit from their only independent western settlement. It was a failure measured against the Society's objective, but by fortune and for extraneous reasons, was not the disaster of Ullapool and Lochbay.

The Directors succeeded in establishing one important fishing station, at Pulteneytown. Continued trouble over the breakwater

clouded the later years of the Society's ownership so that the Directors never received their share of the credit for the progress of the settlement but the fact remains that the building of the first harbour, for which the Society alone was responsible, laid the foundations of what soon became the leading Scottish fishing port.

The success of Pulteneytown justified the Society in many respects. We have seen that the Directors found suitable Agents there and the administration worked smoothly. Independent traders, instead of the Society, built sheds and curing houses and provided equipment for the local fishermen and the fishermen thus lived by their industry rather than on their land, remaining undaunted by occasional years of failure. Finally the Society received high rents not only for building lots but also for open spaces to be used as curing grounds while fishing and trading vessels produced a large annual sum in harbour dues.

Thus the settlement developed along the lines sketched out for Ullapool and found prosperity. The essential difference between the two stations was that at Pulteneytown merchants and curers from the south flocked to establish themselves within a few years while at Ullapool they had not done so by 1798. The same terms were offered by the Society at both places, fishing prospects seemed equally good and trading conditions were apparently more favourable in 1788 than in 1808 when the war had already lasted 15 years. The richer land of Caithness and the proximity of the town of Wick may have reassured those who were unwilling to brave the "heathy deserts" of Wester Ross. The return of the herring to the Forth and Tay after 1792 had certainly provided the east coast merchants and curers with money to expand their businesses

which had been lacking in 1788. But why did the big firms from the Clyde not establish branches at Ullapool? Reasons are not apparent but the facts are clear that Pulteneytown attracted Capital at an early stage where Ullapool failed to do so.

After Pulteneytown the second item to the credit of the Directors was their successful "patronage of the fisheries". It has been shown how their intervention in matters of the salt laws, the justiciary bailies and the export trade improved conditions in the industry and how they sponsored new maps and charts. Perhaps more important than any of these activities was the general encouragement afforded by the example of so many eminent men giving their time and money to the fisheries. The Acts of 1785 and 1786 would themselves have increased the fisheries but without the political activities and influence of the Society it seems improbable that within 20 years the industry would have acquired such a national rather than a local importance, as was recognised in the Act of 1808.

The tale of successes may be short but the fundamental theory upon which the Society worked has been accepted and followed in all subsequent and comparable schemes. Combined with the encouragement of the fisheries the Society aimed at helping to solve the highland problem which existed in 1786 in the same form as it does today, namely "to encourage people to live in the Highlands by making it possible to secure there, in return for reasonable efforts, proper standards of life and the means of paying for them."¹ The Directors believed that the solution

1. Government White Paper. Highland Development. 1950 p.1.
H.M. Stat.Off.Cmd.7976.

lay in collecting people into villages and providing employment in manufactures and fisheries. Immediately after the destitution of 1847-50 there was an outcry against this plan but by 1884 the Crofter Commission was advocating a programme very similar to that of the British Fisheries Society. After mentioning ways of increasing the fishing among crofters, particularly by building piers, the report continued:¹ "We would recommend that in selecting a particular site, preference should be given to the spot on which not only a safe and commodious harbour might be made at the least expense but also where suitable ground for fishermen's houses and gardens would be available, and where the harbour could be best utilised for the convenience of the surrounding country. At every station where a harbour might be constructed, and in the case of piers where there is suitable ground in the neighbourhood, we recommend that a certain amount of ground would be acquired. The arable portion of the ground would be feued out to persons intending to employ themselves entirely as fishermen in plots from half an acre to an acre in extent. The pasture would be held as a common with the right of a cow's grass to each family."

Since 1884 several experiments have been made along the general lines followed by the Society including the famous Leverhulme scheme. Today a similar effort is being made to establish a crofter community at Scorraig in Wester Ross within ten miles of Ullapool.

1. Royal Commission on the Highlands and Islands. Accounts and Papers.
1884. XXXII p.58.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. MANUSCRIPT

1. British Museum

Add. MSS 15154-15165: Papers of the Society of Free British Fishery.

2. Public Record Office.

(a) Treasury Papers: T 17. Out Letters North Britain.
T 85. Scottish Harbours.
T 86. Highland Roads and Bridges.

(b) Home Office Papers: H 102. Vols IV, V and VI.

3. H.M.General Register House

(a) British Fisheriss 13 Vols Letters 1789-1854.
Society Papers: 4 Vols Telford Letters 1790-1795.
2 Vols Secretary's Ledger.
1 Vol Regulations.
1 Vol Original Subscriptions.
1 Vol Minutes for General Meeting 1873.
1 Vol Pulteneytown Harbour Expenses.
6 Vols Abstracts of individual Stations.
8 Boxes Miscellaneous Papers.

(b) Board of Minute Books.
Manufactures Papers: Letter Books.

(c) Forfeited Estates Cromarty and Coigach Papers.
Papers: General Management II Improvements.

(d) S.P.C.K. Papers: Minute Books.

(e) Customs Records: Incidents and Accounts Isle Martin.

(f) Fishery Board Letter Books.
Papers: Minute Books.

(g) Breadalbane Papers: Box C 30.3 Fisheries (West Coast).

(h) Seaforth Papers: MSS Letters 1788-1800.

4. National Library of Scotland

- (a) Delvine Papers: 1250. Mackenzie of Lentrane.
- (b) Melville Papers: Nos 640 and 345A.
- (c) MSS No 2619: Extracts of Answers to the British Fisheries Society 1786-1787.

5. Edinburgh Public Library

- (a) 2 Volumes Minutes of the British Fisheries Society 1808-1839.
- (b) Journal and Ledgers of the British Fisheries Society.

6. Royal Highland and Agricultural Society

Minutes of the Highland Society of Edinburgh from 1784.

7. Argyll MSS (on loan from the Duke of Argyll to H.M. General Register House)

4 Volumes Miscellaneous Papers of the British Fisheries Society.

8. Kilkerran MSS

Letters and Papers of Sir Adam Fergusson in the possession of Sir James Fergusson of Kilkerran, Bart.

II. CONTEMPORARY PRINTED

Amicus.	Tracts on Emigration.	1806
Anderson. G.P.	Guide to the Highlands.	1834
Anderson. J.	Account of the present state of the Hebrides.	1784
	Observations on the means of exciting National Industry.	1777
	The True Interest of Great Britain considered.	1783
Beaufoy. H.	Speech to the British Fisheries Society.	1788
Bell. H.	Observations upon Scottish Fisheries.	1792
Brown. R.	Strictures on the Earl of Selkirk.	1806
Browne. J.	A Critical Examination of Dr. MacCulloch's work.	1825
Buchanan. J.L.	A General View of the Fishery of Great Britain.	1794
	Travels in the Hebrides.	1793
Buckland, Spencer	Walpole and Young.	
	Report on the Herring Fisheries of Scotland.	1878
Daniell. W.	Voyage round the coasts of Great Britain.	1814
Dempster. G.	Discourse to the British Fisheries Society.	1789
	Letters to Sir Adam Fergusson (Ed. James Fergusson 1934)	
Fall. R.	Observations on the Report of the House of Commons.	1785
Fraser. R.	Letter to the Rt.Hon.Charles Abbott.	1803
	Review of the Domestic Fisheries of Great Britain and Ireland.	1818
Gray. J.	Reflections on establishing Fisheries.	1789
Heron. R.	Journey through Scotland.	1793
Irvine. R.	Inquiry into the causes of Emigration.	1802
Knox. J.	Discourse on the expediency of founding fishing stations.	1786
	Observations on Northern Fisheries.	1786
	Tour through the Highlands.	1787
	View of the British Empire and Scotland.	1784
Lindsay. P.	The Interest of Scotland considered.	1733
Loch. D.	Essays on Trade.	1778

MacCulloch. J.	History of the Highlands and Islands.	1824
McCulloch. L.	Observations on the Herring Fisheries.	1786
Mackenzie. G.S.	Survey of the Agriculture of Ross and Cromarty.	1814
Melville. R.	On the Fisheries of Scotland.	1791
Monson. W.	Naval Tracts. Book VI.	1640
Raleigh. W.	Observations touching Trade and Commerce.	1653 (pub)
Selkirk. Earl of	Observations on the present state of the Highlands of Scotland.	1805
Sinclair. J.	Account of the Highland Society of London.	1813
	General Survey of Agriculture in the Highlands.	1814
(Ed)	Old Statistical Account	
Thomson. J.	The value and importance of Scottish Fisheries.	1849
White. P.	Observations on the present state of the Scottish Fisheries.	1791
Williams. J.	On promoting the Fisheries.	1799
Wilson. J.	Voyage round the coasts of Scotland.	1842
Anon.	Letter to the Directors of the British Society. (sic)	1787
	The Necessity of founding villages contiguous to Harbours.	1786
	Prospectus of the British Fisheries Society.	1786
	Report to the Governor and Directors of the British Fisheries Society on Pulteneytown.	1848
	Records of the Convention of Royal Burghs.	
	Reports of the Edinburgh and Glasgow Destitution Relief Committees.	1847-50
	The John O'Groat Journal.	1848-93

III. PARLIAMENTARY REPORTS

Reports of the Committees of the House of Commons.	Volume X.
Survey of the Coasts of Scotland.	1802/3 IV.
Report of the Committee on Salt Duties.	1818 V.
Royal Commission on Emigration.	1846 VI.
Royal Commission on Trawling.	1863 XXVIII.
Royal Commission on the Highlands and Islands.	1884 XXXII-VI.
Royal Commission on the Highland Home Industries.	1914 XXXII.
Government White Paper on Highland Development.	1950.

IV. SECONDARY

Day. J.P.	Public Administration in the Highlands and Islands	1918
Elder. J.R.	Royal Fishery Companies of the Seventeenth Century.	1912
Fryer. C.E.	Relations of the State with Fisheries and Fishermen.	1883
Fyfe. J.G.	Scottish Diaries and Memoires 1746-1843.	1942
Gibb. A.	The Story of Telford.	1931
Grant. I.F.	The Economic and Social Development of Scotland to 1603.	1930
Hume Brown. P.	Early Travellers in Scotland.	1925
Jones. M.G.	The Charity School Movement	1938
Macdonald. D.F.	Scotland's shifting population 1770-1850.	1937
Millar. A.H.	Forfeited Estate Papers.	1909
Pagan. T.	The Convention of Royal Burghs.	1926
Wilson. C.H.	Anglo-Dutch Commerce and Finance in the Eighteenth Century.	1941

V. PERIODICALS

(a) The Bee

Piscator. Account of a Voyage to the Hebrides. Vol VIII and IX.

(b) English Historical Review

Lloyd. E.M. Raising the Highland Regiments in 1757. Vol XVII.

(c) Proceedings of the Institute of Civil Engineers

Bremner. J. Account of the town and harbour of Pulteneytown.
1844.

(d) Scottish Historical Review

Adam. M.I. Eighteenth Century Highland landlords and the
problem of poverty. Vol XIX.

Dickie. J. The Economic position of Scotland in 1760. Vol XVIII.

Mason. J. Conditions in the Highlands after the Forty Five.
Vol XXVI.

(e) Scottish Journal of Agriculture

Leigh. M.H. The Crofting Problem 1780-1883. 1928.

NOTE ON MATERIAL

The official proceedings of the British Fisheries Society include the 13 volumes of the Letters formerly in Dunvegan Castle and now deposited by Flora, Mrs. MacLeod of MacLeod in H.M. General Register House. These letters cover the years 1786-1854. They are referred to as "B.F.S. Letters", and all papers in this collection are described as "B.F.S. Papers".

Two volumes of Minutes in the Edinburgh Public Library include the years 1808 to 1839.

The Argyll Papers contain copies of the Minutes of all meetings from 1786 to the end of 1795. For the purposes of reference the volume entitled "Fishery Papers" has been called Volume I, "Fishery Reports" Volume II, "Abstract Minutes" Volume III and "Correspondence" Volume IV.

After 1854 the proceedings of the Society are only to be found in the annual report issued by the Society and printed in the John O'Great Journal.

Other abbreviations are "Extracts", used to describe the volume of Extracts from Answers to the British Fisheries Society in the National Library of Scotland; and "Reports X", which refers to the Reports of the Committees of the House of Commons, Volume X.