

The Acreocracy of Perthshire

Who Owns Our Land?

Perth and Kinross Fabian Society, 1971

In this pamphlet the major Perthshire landowners are revealed for the first time since the *Scottish Landownership Survey of 1872-73*. The research was carried out by a few committed land reform activists in the late 1960s. One of the driving forces behind the work of this small landownership group was John McEwen. At the time when the pamphlet was published McEwen was then 83 years old.

The publication of the Perthshire landownership information was the start of a remarkable personal project in which the elderly McEwen with the assistance of his wife Margaret then went onto document the main landholding and ownership pattern for the whole of Scotland. His researches were published in 1977 in a book titled ***Who Owns Scotland.***

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Introduction

This pamphlet derives from a work-in-progress report. Perth and Kinross Fabian Society have been engaged for some time upon a long-term project concerned with the rural depopulation of Perthshire, and this report stems from it at a point where the greatest difficulty was being experienced in getting up-to-date accurate information, or any specific details at all, about the vast acreages still held by private land owners.

We felt it could be clarifying, perhaps even stimulating, to list what could be found out about the past and present ownerships of the great estates, and to add some brief comments on current land utilisation and the effects the prevailing forms of land tenure have had on the social and cultural life of the rural areas.

We have selected the unfamiliar term ***acreocracy*** deliberately as a nonce-word that focuses attention upon the rule of a class which is still capable of holding neo-feudal sway over the great bulk of Perthshire's land surface.

Perthshire – The Big County

Perthshire has been called the Big County of Scotland, but is actually the second largest of those that are completely on the mainland. It is situated solidly at the centre of the land-mass of Scotland and is divided by the great Highland boundary fault into contrasting regions of upland and lowland terrain. It contains within its boundaries several one-time capitals as well as the crowning-place of the country's kings. The lamentable decline from its former high importance was accelerated when the boom

expansion of nineteenth century industrialism was based upon the coal and iron of minerially richer regions further south.

The Highland part of Perthshire with which we are principally concerned, contains over a million acres of hill ground contributing little to the country's economy, and that this is not realising anything near full potential, due to outdated, iniquitous and inefficient elements in the forms of land tenure is what we shall seek to illustrate in the following pages.

But first: who owns Perthshire?

No Comprehensive Record of Land Ownership

It is a most extraordinary fact, that in an age which may well be regarded in this country as excessively statistical, when there has been more data collected together – and sometime even collated – than ever before in our history, yet no comprehensive record has been officially compiled of the owners of land in Scotland in the Twentieth Century.

Why should this be so?

The assessors' *Valuation Rolls* on which taxation is based list properties and give gross annual values as well as rateable values, but very little idea at all can be obtained from them of the total extent of landed estates. Fishings and shootings are also given, but the relevance of these comparatively trifling sums to their sporting values or their moorland area is rarely apparent.

The *Register of Sasines* – kept in Register House, Edinburgh – is the chief security for title to land in Scotland, and began its recording of property transfers in 1617, but as each was entered chronologically and terse minutes mounted up to 100,000 writs in a year, the complexity of this plethora of minute-book entries may be imagined. The difficulty of following up the changes in ownership and boundaries of any particular group of properties became incommensurable. In 1871 separate *search-sheets* were begun for each property, but though these do give continuity, they have now accumulated to over 700,000 and frequently do not include acreages. To search comprehensively over an area the size of Perthshire would be inordinately costly and time-consuming.

There are also 10,000 estate plans at the *Scottish Record Office* on which work is meantime proceeding to bring them within an inclusive filing system, but though they afford a great deal of valuable historical and topographical detail, this does not necessarily reflect the up-to-date position of the properties.

Time and again this land ownership question has been raised in Parliament. For example, in April 1963, John Rankin, MP asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he would take the steps necessary to enable him to announce as soon as possible a report on the present ownership of land in Scotland. Mr Noble replied that he was unable to do so, and added that he was not clear that any useful purpose would be served in any case. Mr Rankin persisted into July of that year, when he was again told that the information could not be obtained without unjustifiable expense of time and

labour. The Labour Government's Secretary for Scotland of a later date has confirmed that though asked more than once in the House for a full list of landholders in Scotland, this simply could not be provided. So much for Parliaments.

The Scottish Landowners Federation has undoubtedly much of the information within its files in more readily verifiable form, but as only to be expected, it has been given confidentially and is not to be freely divulged.

Yet despite the formidable accumulation of bristly difficulties, there has been one reasonably comprehensive return of Scottish landowners published. Oddly enough, it was brought about midway through Queen Victoria's reign, just under a hundred years ago, when the Establishment was more firmly entrenched than ever before or since, and by an extra irony the Survey was instigated by an indignant many-acred Tory Peer seeking to prove that he was only one in half-a-million people who had stakes in the soil of their native land.

To get the historical perspective first.

History of Feudalism in Scotland

Scotland, unlike her southern neighbour, never suffered military subjugation by the Normans, and therefore escaped the systematic Domesday survey which Norman the Conqueror imposed upon England in 1085, largely because he could not trust his Norman followers to render their feudal tributes in full for their new lands, and required a central register to keep check upon them. Somewhat later, younger sons of Norman Barons filtered north to Scotland and either were granted great swathes of lands by Kings who seemed never sweir to pass over into alien hands key-points of the Kingdom or else wed Celtic heiresses who brought ample estates as their tochers. Successive generations of so-called *nobles* so frequently over-reached themselves that it was in the main the Church which painstakingly built up the most enormous possessions. It was estimated that by the time of the Reformation their plunder yielded half the total income of the land in Scotland. The bitterest blow to Knox and the Reformers was when the whole extensive spoils of the Church was seized upon piecemeal by the rapacious Protestant aristocracy. Between 1587 when the Act of Annexation was passed and the inauguration of the Land Register in 1617, twenty-eight temporal Lordships were formed out of the lands of the abbeys, priories, and other religious foundations.

The most notable in Perthshire was probably the Lordship of Scone, granted first to the Gowries, then after their fall in the fatal "*Conspiracy*", transferred to Murray of Gospetic whose present-day representatives, the 7th Earl of Mansfield, Lord Lieutenant of Perthshire, still holds the old lands of Scone. (Judging by the present extensive holdings of the Earl, the family motto – *Spero meliora* – I hope for better things, if considered in relation to material possessions, has not been adopted in vain.)

Nineteenth century Radical agitation included amongst its basic claims that the land belonged or ought to belong, to the people. Never, it was said, had our millions of acres been confined within the hands of so few people. The 15th Earl of Derby, successively Secretary of State for the Colonies, for India, and for Foreign Affairs in Tory Governments (but for all his global commitments securely anchored in almost

70,000 acres of English land worth some £163,000 per annum) – the Earl was so incensed at what he labelled “*the wildest and most reckless exaggeration*” of the land-hungry rebels that he determined to dissipate once and for all this spreading popular delusion that was kindling so much subversive covetousness. He sponsored a motion that passed through the Houses of Parliament in 1872 to make a ***Return of Owners of Lands and Heritages***.

The Scottish Landownership Return of 1872-73

The return was to consist of “*the name and address of every owner of one acre and upwards in extent, with the estimated acreage, and the annual value of the lands and heritages of individual owners.*” To make sure that no proud proprietor, however humble, was omitted it was added that even those with less than an acre could be included.

The Scottish return was published first, in 1874, and though it showed 131,530 owners, this was an early example of the ability of statistics to give distorted impressions by absurd terms of reference. No heckler had shown any nagging concern about properties of less than an acre, but, taking those away, it was found that the great bulk of Scotland was owned or leased by 17,151 individuals the large majority of whom owned less than 20 acres – yet even here the average worked out at 1,100 acres per head. Of those, 106 held blocks of 20,000 acres and over and, to refine even the select few, there were 52 who had at least 50,000 acres each. It added up to 106 people owning nearly half of the country.

In Perthshire, with a population of 127,768 in 1871 (and with inhabited houses amounting to 22,134) there was a grand total of 5,737 owners, but deducting the under-one-acres, only 1,057 remained and of those over half – 552 – had holdings under 20 acres. 153 had 1,000 acres and over, 53 of whom had at least 5,000 acres, and 33 had 10,000 acres or more, sometimes much more.

The Comptroller-General of Inland Revenue for Scotland who organised the return, working through Surveyors of Stamps and Taxes had not found it all easy going: “*The duty imposed on these offices in ascertaining the estimated acreage or extent of properties was one of considerable difficulty, and occasionally, of some delicacy.*” Indelicate or not, the returns aroused tremendous interest. Trenchant critics of the regime pounced upon the figures of “*vast aggregates*” gleefully. Even landowners themselves found country house parties, twixt the Hunting and London seasons went well if the big volumes of *The Modern Domesday* were left lying for inspection on convenient tables.

John Bateman, himself a landowner, was so caught up in the excitement, he made further checks upon every landowner of 3,000 acres worth £3,000 a year, and published in ***The Great Landowners*** (2nd edition, 1879) a revised list, “*corrected in the vast majority of cases by the owners themselves,*” with their incomes from land, acreages, colleges, clubs and services.

In the following list of Perthshire’s principal landowners of the period we have incorporated Bateman’s revised figures.

Table 1: Perthshire's principal landowners 1872-73

	Owner's Name 1872-73 (revised to 1879)	Estate and/or Address	Estimated Acreage of Property	Gross Annual Rental
1	Breadalbane, Earl of	Taymouth Castle	234,166	£35,977
2	Athole, Duke of	Blair Castle	201,640	£42,030
3	Willoughby D'Eresby, Baroness	Drummond Castle	76,837	£28,955
4	Menzies, Sir Robert, Bart.	Castle Menzies	68,248	£11,647
5	Moray, Earl of	Doune Lodge	40,553	£10,800
6	Home-Drummond-Moray, C.S.	Abercairney	38,797	£29,720
7	Stewart, Sir Archibald D. Bart.	Murthly Castle	33,274	£18,040
8	Steuart-Menzies, Wm. G.	Meggernie Castle, Glen Lyon	33,000	£3,824
9	Montrose, Duke of	Buchanan Castle	32,294	£6,131
10	Mansfield, Earl of	Scone Palace	31,197	£23,052
11	Williamson, David Robertson	of Lawers, Crieff	30,094	£6,205
12	Robertson, Mrs Mary Stuart	of Struan (at Fortingall)	24,000	£1,239
13	MacDonald, Wm. MacDonald	of St Martin's Abbey, Perth	22,600	£9,191
14	Carnegie, David	of Stronvar, Balquhidder	22,205	£3,558
15	Farquharson, Lt-Col. J.R.	of Invercauld, Braemar	20,056	£1,508
16	Robertson, Alexr. Gilbert	of Struan, (in Jamaica)	18,000	£1,038
17	Murray, Sir Patrick Keith, Bart.	of Ochertyre, Crieff	17,876	£11,051
18	Butter, Archibald	of Faskally, Pitlochry	17,586	£5,670
19	Menzies, Wm. B. Stewart	of Chesthill, Glen Lyon	16,117	£2,723
20	McInroy, James Patrick	of Lude, Blair Athole	15,680	£2,460
21	Robertson, Edgar Wm.	of Auchleeks, Blair Athole	14,732	£1,632
22	MacDonald, Col. Alexr. MacIan	of Dunalastair, Strath Tummel	14,000	£2,675
23	Ramsay, Sir James Henry, Bart.	of Bamff House, Alyth	12,845	£3,394
24	Kinnoull, Earl of	Dupplin Castle	12,657	£15,413
25	Buchanan-Baillie- Hamilton, John	of Cambusmore, Callander	12,172	£3,207
26	Patton, Mrs Margaret Malcolm	of Glenalmond (at Perth)	11,074	£1,995
27	Garden-Campbell, Francis W.	of Troup, Glenlyon House	10,516	£1,620
28	Place, Edward G.	of Lochdochart, Killin	10,500	£1,130
29	Abercromby, Lord	Airthrie Castle	10,407	£7,007
30	Rollo, Lord	Duncrub House, Dunning	10,148	£8,418
31	Stewart, Major Robert	of Ardvorlich,	10,001	£2,654

		Lochearnside		
32	Hemming, Richard	of Rachael and Glaschorie (and of Bently Manor, Bromsgrove)	10,000	£155
33	Keir, Patrick Small	of Kindrogan, Strathardle	10,000	£2,445
		TOTALS	1,143,308	£306,564

This must have been an enlightening list a century ago, enough to strike an answering spark, we hope, even though a steely one, from the flint of many an honest plebeian heart whose owner was forced to contemplate the fact that more than a million acres, two thirds of the total area of the entire country, were in the hands of two Dukes, four Earls, a Baroness, half-a-dozen lesser nobles and twenty untitled landed gentry representatives, who may well have deserved equal honouring had only their predecessors stood closer to Court, or indeed even if peerages had been as easily bought as they were to be within the next half-century under the liberalising influence of Prime Ministers such as Lloyd George.

It is noteworthy that the principal names are still predominantly those of the great Perthshire families – Campbells, Murrays, Drummonds, Menzieses, Robertsons, Stewarts, etc – whose ancestors were chiefs or chieftains having rights originally only to part of the produce of the soil. Through time their possessions hardened into ownership (was perverted into ownership is a more precise term). The early importance of simple possession in giving title to land is well illustrated in Professor Rankin’s comprehensive *Law of Land Ownership in Scotland*, which opens with a chapter on Possession, carries on to Possessory Remedies, and clinches with Positive Prescription – a formula which derives its power from nothing more legal than a lapse of time.

Surely one of the saddest lapses for the now largely landless commonality of Scotland.

An 18th century Perthshire Laird with a smaller patrimony encompassed by more abundant acreages was said to have intoned regularly a litany directed at his neighbours:

*“From the greed o’ the Campbells,
From the ire o’ the Drummonds,
From the pride o’ the Grahams,
From the wind o’ the Murrays,
Gude Lord, deliver us.”*

He would be delivered in the long run only by the customary laws of mortality; the preceding list shows how little his supplications affected the land-owning issue.

The list has only two purely English owner’s names plus Mansfield, which covers a Murray, whose Lord Chancellor ancestor found it most profitable to tie up his title in Notts., and the mountainous Willoughby D’Eresby which conceals a molehill of

Drummond on the distaff side, by which Drummond Castle and estates, forfeited by the main line following the '45, eventually came to the Earls of Ancaster (Heathcote-Drummond-Willoughbys, no less).

Present-day Inventory of Estates

The present-day inventory of estates that follows contains almost the same number of names, as it happens, but must be taken as rather more approximate as the information, we again stress, cannot be compiled from any official return available to the public. The gross annual rentals are not given this time. In the 1872-73 survey they were recognised as representing fairly closely the actual rentals enjoyed by landowners from their properties, but in the interim these valuations have been divorced so completely from acreages that there is no longer any correlation with what an estate may bring in.

Table 2: Perthshire's Principal Landowners 1970

	Owner's Name 1970	Estate and/or Address	Estimated Acreage of Property
1	Atholl, Duke of	Blair Castle, N. and S. Atholl	140,000
2	Ancaster, Earl of	Drummond Castle, + Glenartney, etc	81,250
3	Wills, Sir Edward	Meggernie Castle, Glen Lyon	66,500
4	Mansfield, Earl of	Scone Palace, + Logiealmond, etc	24,950
5	Steuart-Fotheringham, H.	Grandtully Castle + Drumour	27,000
6	Lowes, E. J. and R. N.	Glenfalloch	24,000
7	La Terriere, Capt. I. C. de Sales	Dunalastair + Crossmount	21,500
8	Wimborne, Viscount	Caiganour, Rannoch	20,700
9	Farquharson, Captain A.A.C.	of Invercauld, Braemar (Glenshee + Rhiddorach)	20,250
10	Doune, Lord	(Moray Estates Development Company)	20,000
11	Bowser, Mrs Judy	Auchlyne, etc., Glen Dochart	18,700
12	Pilkington, Major R.W.	Dalnacardoch and Sronphadruig	18,000
13	Stroyan, Mrs R.	Boreland, Killin	16,500
14	Hutchison, J. Douglas	Bolfracks, by Aberfeldy	16,000
15	Ben Challum Ltd	Glenlochay, by Killin	15,000
16	Colvin, Brigadier R.B.R.	Talladh-a-Bheithe, Rannoch	14,500
17	Amory, Sir John Heathcoat	Glenfernate, Strathardle	14,000
18	Hornung, Mrs W.A.	Dalnaspidal	13,500
19	Steuart- Fotheringham, Don.	Murthly Castle + Strathbran	13,300
20	Priestley, Jas. F.	Innergeldie, by Comrie	13,000
21	Whitaker, Sir Jas.	Auchnafree, Upper Glen Almond	11,630
22	Mackinlay, I.F.	Auchleeks, by Calvine	11,000
23	Spearman, Sir Alexander, MP	Fealar, by Enochdhu	11,000

24	Cadogan, Earl	Glenquiach and Snaigow	10,700
25	Rootes, The Lord	Glen Almond	10,500
26	MacNaughton, John	Inverlochlaraig (Braes Farming Company)	10,100
27	Berry, Colonel	Ardtalnaig, Lochtayside	10,000
28	Curzon, John	Dunan, Rannoch	10,000
29	Forteviot, Lord	Dupplin Castle	10,000
30	Cameron, John B.	Glenfinlas	10,000
31	Roberts, Sir James Denby	Strathallan Castle	10,000
		TOTALS	727,450

The most notable difference this time is that we add to the above list of private owners, two public – the first is the largest landowner in Scotland, and also the largest meantime in Perthshire - the Forestry Commission

The Forestry Commission – who control state forests in nine groups entirely within the County and seven groups partly in Perthshire – altogether amounting to approximately 160,000 acres.

Secondly Glasgow Corporation Water Works, now under Lower Clyde Water Board, acquired the hill ground around Loch Katrine, some 19,000 acres to the watershed, which is principally under sheep and trees, though for some years they have also let the ground for deer-stalking.

Commentary on the Surveys

Of the two bulkiest estates of the older survey, that of the Breadalbane Campbells has been completely dispersed, largely gambled away, we understand, in the casinos of Southern France. No matter how the discrepancy may eventually be resolved, there is an inherent immorality in the basis of a system wherein the well-being of an association of workers can be in any essential respect governed by the hazards of a gaming-wheel.

The other great concourse of estates under the Duke of Atholl has dropped nearly one-third of its acreage, but is still a formidable holding which has been currently given an invigorating injection of fresh capital through the marriage of the duke's heir, who was killed during the war, with a daughter of the extremely wealthy Pearson family. The mother of the present duke is not only sister to the richest Baron in Britain – Viscount Cowdray, who through a network of family trusts controls a powerful industrial empire – but is herself an able business woman, director of a number of family enterprises, and chairman of Westminster Press Provincial Newspapers. Her son's list of similar family directorships gives the Atholl dukedom something of the status of a Pearson subsidiary.

The other amongst the earlier top four estates which has entirely disappeared is the Menzies one. The father of Sir Robert Menzies who died in 1844 had settled his Rannoch estates on his widow, a daughter of Baron Norton, and this her fiery-tempered son left a mere 32,784 acres, fiercely resented. He kept law-suits going

against her for 20 years without avail. She was known in Rannoch as “*an Leddi Ruadh*” so probably had a red devil of a temper also. As Sir Robert was an eminently litigious in numerous other directions as well, this may have been exceedingly gratifying to lawyers but effectively ruined the estate. He came into Rannoch at his mother’s death (1878) but a few years after his own (1903) the estate, heavily burdened with debts was sold to an Ipswich brewer. The parish historian summed up Sir Robert: “*He was a strict game-preserved and strongly asserted his rights as a landlord. Nevertheless in his own way he could be kind to his tenants and dependants and to such others as knew how to flatter him.*” A cup of kindness that proves a bitter draught to swallow.

Comparing the two lists, it may be noted that from a similar number of estates the total acreage has nevertheless dropped by about one-third (415,858 acres). Approximately half of this amount has been diverted to the public ownership of state forests and water board undertakings. The remainder may reflect a more stringent pruning by estate controls, but if there has been a certain reduction in the largest of estates, in the next category – 5,000 to 10,000 acres – there are now half as many more estates again as in the 1870s, so that the commanding position of the bigger landowners is by no means desperately stricken by the upheavals of more recent years.

There is a basic difference in that estates themselves are no longer so much a primary source of power as a representation of it. It is significant that three of the great money-spinners of modern times are represented in Perthshire’s land-ownership by Wills (tobacco), Forteviot (whisky), and Rootes (motor cars). A fourth resource is urban properties and their development. Earl Cadogan sold off his Wiltshire estates to buy land in Perthshire, but need feel no property insecurity so long as he retains ownership of the part of London which provides his wealth as well as his subsidiary title – Viscount Chelsea.

Most of the other head companies, have directorships, are prominent on the stock exchange; in general, acquire their incomes from the richer aspects of industrialism not from any intensive application of the latest in thought, techniques and organisation which might be applied to the development of the highest potential in land use.

We sketch very briefly the main features of Perthshire’s land use before returning to the necessary inter-relation of it with the acreocracy.

Land Use in Perthshire

Perthshire has approximately 1,600,000 acres, some 300,000 of which is good lowland agricultural ground. This does not come to any great extent within the area of the big estates, and we need not give it consideration in this outline. Forestry, recreation, urban development, and minor miscellaneous purposes account for a further 200,000 acres. The remaining 1,100,000 acres of rough or hill land is largely under sheep, predominantly of the Blackface breed. This area includes some 300,000 acres of exposed mountainous terrain, substantially unfertile and uneconomic for any normal husbandry, and perhaps 200,000 acres of better quality marginal land and enclosed parks.

This last figure is more difficult to gauge accurately as practically every Perthshire glen shows bracken infesting a very heavy acreage of good-quality lower hill slopes. Bracken's rhizomes have an unerring feel for richer soils, and if, as the old saying has it, "*There's gold beneath the bracken*," we may bitterly reflect upon the increasingly valuable hoard our lack of policy in land use has succeeded in happing up beneath those insidiously spreading ferny fronds. This condition continues to spread despite grants for eradication and the pioneering efforts of a few farmers here and there in Scotland who have found it amply rewarding to reclaim bracken infested ground.

Perthshire Highlands have somewhere in the region of a quarter million sheep, and as their ancestors have been feeding steadily over these acres for some 200 years, this long period of extractive grazing has resulted in the pastures gravely deteriorating, a fact that has given sheep-men and advisory bodies much concern for a considerable time. Hill sheep farms could not keep going but for heavy Government subsidies. A report on the finances of 50 East Scotland hill farms by W. B. Duthie (1967) showed that in five years – 1961 to 1966 – the farms, averaging under 3,000 acres of which 2 percent was arable, made an average annual profit of £1,640 of which £1,506 came from subsidy.

Hill cattle, the mainstay of the first Highland graziers, have made some slight return to their old pastures under the influence of heavy subsidising over the last quarter century as it was considered they would prove complimentary to sheep in being less selective graziers on free range and therefore likely to help bring the land back to better heart. Neither numbers nor methods of keeping have been good enough under present conditions to alter the over-all outlook.

Forestry has been, without doubt, the only growth point of any consequence in primary land-use within the Perthshire Highlands since the establishment of the Forestry Commission in 1919. There are at present some 145,000 acres in the County actually under trees, and of those, 80,000 acres are State-owned. The Commission has had an uphill job in more ways than one in its half-century of activity. They had a remit which was neither comprehensive enough nor resilient enough to overcome the formidable difficulties which a radical alteration in the balance of land use was bound to bring. Even though each land purchase was vetted by the Department of Agriculture to ensure that good sheep ground was not taken over for trees, there was some antagonism from hill farmers. Changes of Government and short-term policy alterations had a grievous effect upon the planting programmes of the most easily injured because of the slowest maturing of all crops. Forestry has given employment to more men per acre than any other form of rural work, and in Perthshire alone there are now thousands of acres under a scientific afforestation plan that were previously neglected or under much more haphazard culture. The Commission's use of land improvement machinery has been highly praised as an outstanding example of reclamation by modern heavy machinery methods.

There were many private woodlands previously, but far too many were managed as auxiliary to sporting interests, giving shelter to deer and game-birds with little or no thought to timber values. Only since the dedication scheme and other Government planting and maintenance grants were introduced has there been any consistent attempt by the majority of private landlords to make solid planting for production pay.

In acquiring vast stretches of land over a comparatively short period, the Commission have taken over much that is not immediately suitable for forestry, at least not under the present remit. If suitable for agriculture it is then either continued under tenant-farmers or factored by the Department of Agriculture. Of the Commission's 160,000 acres in Perthshire, half has already been planted, 10 percent more is programmed to be under trees in due course; much of the remainder is too steep, exposed, or infertile for economic planting. It has been sometimes let to sporting interests, but now under the present Government's policy of realising quickly on relatively unused assets, it is proposed to sell these lands back into private ownership. This would be a serious retrograde step even if only from the point of view that what is needed is comprehensive planning to cover the whole of the hill lands. An increase in multiple ownership would make increasingly difficult the implementation of an overall policy that is so desperately needed.

True the income from sporting activities on the great estates is again upsurging. Their heyday was the later Victorian and Edwardian times when even the sheep farms were cleared of stocks to give deer absolutely free range. Predators were ruthlessly eliminated on a sickening scale. The deer forests of Scotland soared up from 1,709,000 acres in 1883 to 2,958,000 in 1908. Between 1881 and 1911, when the number of farm servants decreased from 135,966 to 86,538, *i.e.* by nearly 50,000 men, over one-third of the total labour force, the number of gamekeepers increased from 4,246 to 5,919, approximately 40 percent – but a total loss to the countryside of nearly 48,000 workers.

This in itself, long before the coming of farm mechanisation, is a sufficient indictment of the impact of sporting landlords upon the life of the countryside, but let the last word be from the Chairman of the Departmental Committee on Deer Forests (1919), himself proprietor of the famous deer forest of Corrour, though one of the more forward-looking lairds of his generation:

"It may be true, I believe it often is, that a deer forest employs more people than the same area under sheep. It certainly brings in a larger rent. From a purely parochial point of view it may therefore be claim to be economically sound; but from no other. It provides a healthy existence for a small group of people, but it produces nothing except a small quantity of venison, for which there is no demand. It causes money to change hand. A pack of cards can do that. I doubt whether it could be said of a single deer forest, however barren and remote, that it could serve no better purpose."

Sir John Stirling-Maxwell, Bart of Pollock
Chairman of Departmental Committee on Deer Forests (1919)

We would qualify that, only in regard to the sale of venison, still truly of no consequence in this country, but a luxury dish in West Germany, where the Duke of Atholl, for example, consigns deer carcasses that bring him £8,000 a year. (Sutherland, *The Landowners*, 1968)

Maybe we should not take issue with the exclusive sporting and recreational rights of a wealthy landowning class without taking stock of the spreading penetration of remoter country areas by many of the great mass of urban dwellers seeking

recuperation from too much time spent in cities. They have sought the glens in ever-increasing numbers since the internal combustion engine made travel quick and easy. Planning organisations have been compelled of late to recognise the influence of this massive force upon the purposes of land use. The most notable single enterprise so far has been the Cairngorm Sports Centre, in and around Aviemore, centred upon the expansion of skiing in Scotland. An interesting survey of the effects of development in this area has been made in *Ecology and Land Use in Upland Scotland* (McVean and Lockie, 1969), where it is noted that ski-lifts and tows have denuded some 800 acres of vegetation and created erosion dangers mainly because of roads driven straight up steep hillsides against basic ploughing principles and because to make chair-lifts pay they are kept going all year round and so give plant regeneration no chance. Omelettes are inconceivable without the breaking eggs, and we mention these flaws in an outstanding project simply to emphasise our argument that all new developments of land use should be brought within the orbit of an all-embracing planning authority.

The Forestry Commission have recognised the need to provide opportunities for public recreation in their forests since 1964 and one of the main forest parks is within Perthshire's boundaries, but the few facilities offered seem timid compared to the revolutionary possibilities outlined by Professor Richardson in his Chairman's Address to the Forestry Sub-Section of the British Association at Durham last year. In this, he faced up to the possible future fact of productive forestry becoming relatively uneconomic in this country as underdeveloped countries exploit their vast, virgin forests. The emphasis then would be on resort or environmental forestry, woods frequented by the populace for recreation above all things, with timber production a poor second. He instances a Danish forest already in use in this way on the outskirts of Copenhagen, which has deer-park, hotels, restaurants, race-course, old people's home and amusement park – the whole yielding some £180,000 per annum as against barely £40,000 from timber. This ought to make our forestry commissioners think extra hard.

This point again emphasises strongly that in such a time of flux when change is affecting the uses of our countryside in innumerable ways, it is more than ever essential that a single comprehensive planning authority have power to initiate a flexible forward-looking policy and make sure that it is carried into effect. A further point made about Denmark in the same Address is that an Act was passed in 1969 requiring free access of the people to all forest over 9 hectares (22 acres) in extent – and this in a country that is not madly revolutionary, which has a population density lower than Britain's and which gives its private landlords not a penny towards tree-planting and maintenance. Yet imagine the outcry in this country if it was suggested that the public should be allowed to roam within woodlands which are being planted and maintained for private owners with the generous aid of public monies.

From a study of the increasing secondary use of the land by urbanites for recreative purposes, we move to the diminishing number who still live full-time in the areas with which we are concerned. In Perthshire, as in most of the Highland regions, the old culture has gone or is fragmented beyond repair. There is little new coming up naturally from the people themselves, as in all true cultures, to take its place. Numbers are so far down, the community spirit has not now the same vivid coherence. The educational system is pointed straight at the cities, and for generations now it has been

implanted that the way to get on is to get out. We discover, for instance, that 153 Starthardle pupils educated at Blairgowrie High School from 1950 to 1964 only 28 (18 percent) still live and work in the same district. So far as the rehabilitation of their birthplace area is concerned they might as well have gone to Eton. This extractive process in terms of human life is equivalent to what has happened to the land.

There is no great scope, of course, for the country worker in his employment once he has settled as shepherd, forestry worker, keeper or estate man. He may move about amongst employers, but little upward progression is possible. Further education is a rarity in the glens. It was difficult enough before current price escalations to get land of his own, now it is next door to impossible. In Denmark there has long been a system whereby the State has first option to purchase in all sales of land of any size, and applicants who want holdings can usually obtain them without great delay providing they have some small capital to cover, not more than a working man might save from his earnings. Even the demand for land to work has lost its old strength; so many who wanted this at one time have had to seek their satisfaction elsewhere. Highland Perthshire's situation has particularly suffered in this respect, as, despite a land situation not unlike that of the counties to the north, it does not come within the boundaries of the Crofting Act.

A Summing Up – The Perthshire Acreocracy

To sum up all this in relation to the strangle-hold of the big landlords – *the Perthshire Acreocracy*.

We do not suggest that we can set down here the complete answer to the big and complex question of what might be done to re-invigorate the vast acres of Perthshire's upland terrain. Even students and authorities who have given close examination and penetrating analysis to the factors that have combined to bring about the present state of affairs are not in agreement by any means on every point; but the important thing is that one and all are agreed that the land is by no means being utilised to its full potential.

The big landowners have had absolute control over a very long time now, and whatever reservations might be made in a number of particular instances, they have failed in general to operate any system to keep the land, and consequentially the people who live by it, from decay.

The dwindling number who represent the old families of the area have had the methods by which all too many of them obtained, retained and augmented their lands scathingly exposed once for all by Tom Johnston in *[Our Scots Noble Families](#)* sixty years ago. Many others came north in the 19th century in the wake of Queen Victoria and railway expansion, mainly for prestige and sporting interests. No thought at all for primary land use or its people's basic needs. Exclusion was the order of the day. A noteworthy and decisive Scottish rights-of-way case, fought by the Duke of Atholl in an attempt to keep pedestrians out of Glen Tilt, in Perthshire, typified the arrogant attitude of the time.

The whole basic outlook of the landowning class was, and is, alien. Reared in a completely different milieu, educated at Eton or Harrow and Oxford or Cambridge or

the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. There after they go into the Guards, the Inner Temple, the Stock Exchange, directors' boardrooms and other purlieus of their peculiar power build-up. It is typical and significant that *Who's Who*, no matter how condensed its entries, still enumerates their clubs as conveying an essential element of their environment.

Could one think of any more ludicrous background to make a clique of power-wielders attuned to the grave difficulties of a vast land problem and the country people with whose natural environment they have seriously tampered?

Could one? – the question has been echoing hollowly down too long a corridor of time to neglect an answer in the near future.

If we could see landlords putting their children to the nearest comprehensive school, then perhaps on to agricultural or forestry college, and after that back to work full time in the realistic and imaginative management of their estates, this would take a good deal of the sting out of our analysis; but as a current colloquialism has it: *that would be the day*.

It is true that within the list of present-day landlords we have given, there are one or two who are primarily engaged upon the agricultural development of their extensive holdings. A number of other live upon their estates more or less permanently and may be intimately involved in their farming, forestry and sporting interests (not always in that order), but for the majority, the real core of their concern lies elsewhere. If there were not so serious a problem overshadowing the countryside, perhaps this absentee attitude could get by; but the land still wastes, rural communities keep contracting.

A radical change is imperative

There may be no easy answers, but a few things at least are clearer.

First, that any long-term solutions lie with those whose entire concern is with the future of land use, and that it must be accordant with the fullest possible material and cultural enrichment of those whose existence is bound up completely with the land; otherwise land workers are little else but pawns in a power-game. Vast areas should no longer be governed by any who reduce them in essence to an enjoyable framework for exclusive sporting adventures, a convenient source of tax relief and or a prestige symbol.

It may seem that the social ferment at work in the nation in other ways has grown powerful enough to drive the old-style, large-scale land-ownership into its last ditch, but a succession of 10,000 acre ditches constitutes still an impossible obstacle to the all-embracing, unified planning essential to bring our hill-lands up to anything like their full productivity.

There is no escaping the conclusion that this can be best accomplished by some form of nationalisation of the land. For generations one of the strongest planks in reformers' platforms, this has been consistently by-passed of late. At the formation of the Scottish Labour Party in August 1888, the eight point in their strong programme was Nationalisation of Land and Minerals. The way ahead has already been indicated:

by the painstaking method of approach of post-war planning surveys; by the aid of commissions and associations which have devoted considerable time to the study of Scotland's natural resources, land developments, etc.; and by those who have researched into soils, hill farming, human resources, plant breeding, and practically every other relative aspect worth close study. Sustained application of tenets derived from these co-operative investigations, together with an imaginative vision that need not lack warmth though it be clear-sighted are essentials, but by far the most important is the need for an administrative body with ample power and flexibility to shear through initial difficulties. Given these things or a fair enough approximation and a generation could see a regeneration.

There has been of late a revival of interest in the ownership and boundaries of the large estates of Scotland. Of work being done in several different ways, the only one we have seen in print so far has been in the *Scottish Geographical Magazine* (December 1969, and December 1970), part of an academic study conducted from Aberdeen University, by Roger Millman. At the end of his first commentary the author sums up: "*It should be stressed that the publication of the map and inventory is in no way intended to prejudice the concept or tradition of the private ownership of land in Scotland which, despite many defects in both the attitudes of owners and the management of estates, continues in the opinion of many rural management consultants to be the most expedient form of land occupancy.*"

We hope that we have made it clear by now that we have come to a different conclusion, though we must confess it was achieved without taking opinion from any rural management consultant. (We are intrigued by the idea of any consultant who does not believe in private ownership; he must be having a thin time if his prejudice has become known).

We would stress, however, that we have consulted as many printed studies and reports on Highland land-use as we could find, and have listened to scientists, agriculturalists, students, and foresters on this theme: whether or not they could see the remedy – all were agreed that the potential is far from being realised. Let anyone travel slowly up a Perthshire glen or smaller strath and view the bracken menace; if this represents a form of land tenure that is the most expedient, then Heaven help the Highlands. We have devilled in Scripture and remember Paul wrote to the Corinthians – "*All things are lawful to me, but all things are not expedient,*" this in the same passage where he goes on to say, "*The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.*" Maybe the terminology is outmoded but whatever extremes modern Biblical exegesis may have gone to, even the most liberal mind could not transform this into "*The Earth is the Lairds*" – though the fullness thereof has not passed by their pockets.

Professor Richardson in the address previously mentioned, quoted a fine Nigerian credo:

"Land belongs to a vast family of which many are dead, a few are living, and countless numbers still unborn."

He adds "*This must apply even in a capitalist society or that society will not survive.*" The Socialist Movement could do to return to a stronger degree of the old idealistic spirit. Reanimated by a similar creed and armed with fresh zeal and perseverance, the

full use of our marginal and hill lands which has proved for so long one of the most intractable of primary problems will yet be brought to greater fruition in a way that will regenerate the land and exalt the people. But, make no mistake, this great change will not be effected, nor the degradation of our countryside brought decisively to an end, unless the representatives of the old regime are driven out. There must be a categorical termination to the still extensive powers of Perthshire and Scotland's acreocracy.

About the Pamphlet

This pamphlet was the work of a landownership group of the *Perth and Kinross Fabian Society* in the late 1960s early 1970s. It worked over a significant period of time on a range of topics to do with resources and depopulation in rural Perthshire.

The pamphlet was drafted by a committee of 3 people – James Fergusson, John McEwen and Alasdair Steven (who was the main author). In 1977 John McEwen published the first *Who Owns Scotland* (Polygon, Edinburgh)

This part of the pamphlet concludes with an invitation to land owners to submit a return. “*We would also be pleased to hear from any landowner with a claim to 10,000 acres or over in the county whose name may have been inadvertently omitted from the list herein, so that his statistics might be incorporated in a later edition.*”