

# Who Owns Mid-Scotland and Fife?

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1989

Based upon research carried out in the late 1980s Richard Leonard examines the land ownership pattern in the European constituency of *Mid-Scotland and Fife*. The constituency comprises the whole of Fife and Central Regions and the Perth and Kinross parts of Tayside Region. Some 83 estates over 1,000 acres are identified in the study and for some of the major estates over 5,000 acres the owners are listed. The paper then goes on to examine a number of issues: *sport hunting; public subsidies; reaping of benefits from public investments in infrastructure; preferential treatment by the state; land prices and patronage*. It concludes by stating that the concentrated pattern of private ownership found in the constituency and other parts of Scotland imposes a direct cost on local communities, the taxpayer and public through: *stunted economic growth and depopulation; socially and environmentally unsound uses of land; the abuse and exploitation of public funds; and the denial of access to natural sites of great beauty*.

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## Introduction

It is hard to believe in an advanced industrialised democracy that a natural asset as basic as land could still be largely controlled by a small band of aristocrats. Yet in modern day Scotland a system of land ownership which is feudal and hierarchical has remained substantially in tact since the 11<sup>th</sup> century. A mere 579 private landowners own 50 percent of all land north of the border, giving Scotland the narrowest concentration of land wealth in the whole of Europe. For this study we have chosen to look at the area covered by the Mid-Scotland and Fife European constituency. This region combines highly populated industrial areas and remote rural terrain in Scotland's central belt. It comprises the whole of Fife and Central Regions and the Perth and Kinross Parliamentary constituency. Table 1 below illustrates the concentration of land ownership in the area under study.

**Table 1. Landownership in Scotland**

REGION	Area of Region (acres)	Number of owners > 1,000acres	Acreage held by these owners	Percentage of Region
FIFE	325,865	41	111,300	34.5%
CENTRAL	666,007	92	331,336	49.7%
TAYSIDE (part)	377,979	23	201,376	53.3%

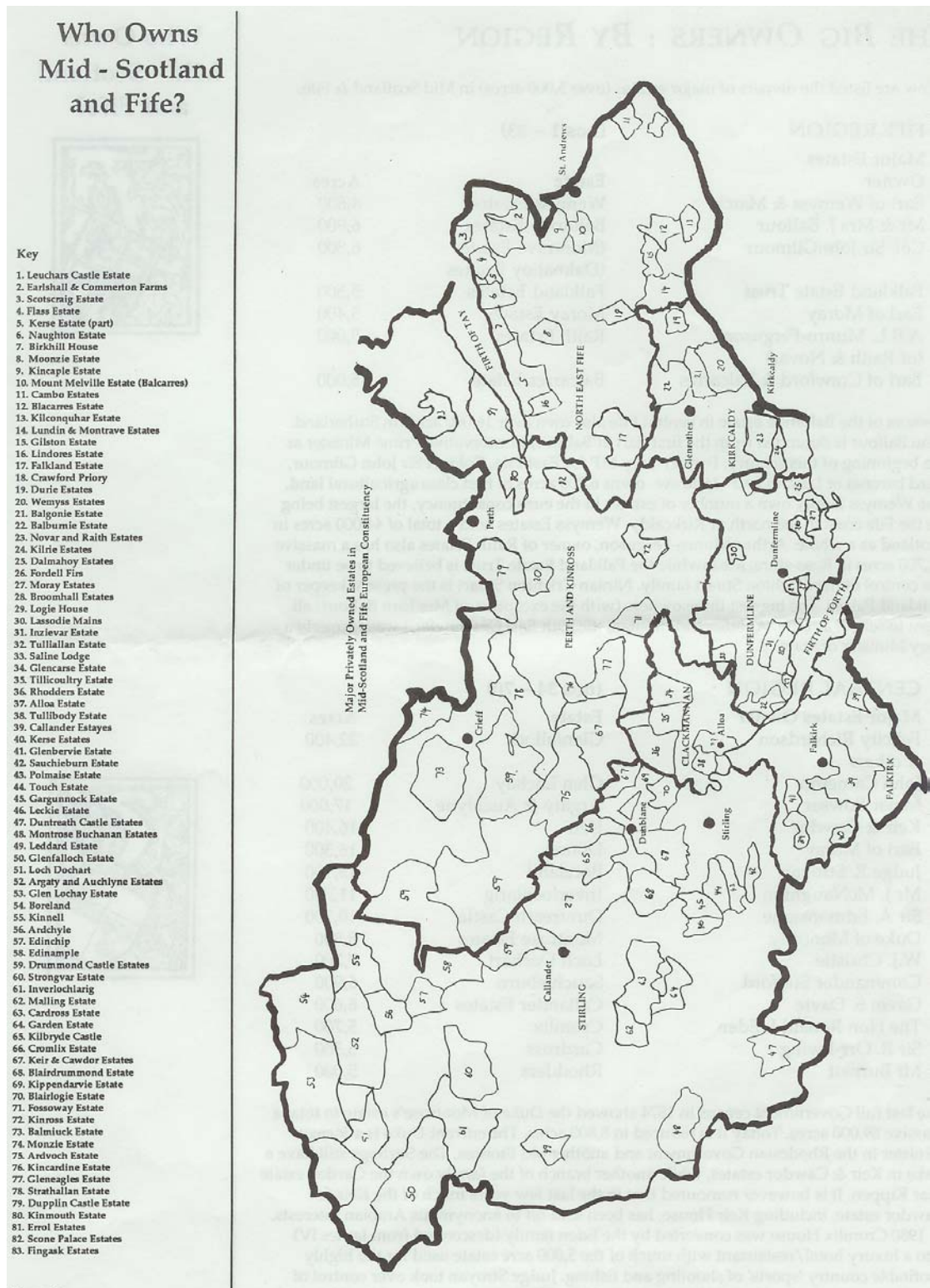
It is clear from the table that even in industrialised parts of the area included in the Mid-Scotland and Fife European constituency, a small group of private landowners and aristocrats still control much of our land. As long as ownership of land is so minutely concentrated, a small number of people are able to disproportionately influence the lives and environment of others. No clearer illustration could be given than Highland landlord, Lord Thurso's decision to invite NIREX (the Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive) to consider using parts of his land as a nuclear dump. But large scale private ownership of land also effects the location and very existence of housing, recreation facilities and economic development. If we are to build a truly democratic society then decisions about our communities should be taken by the community as a whole, and not just by the local magnate.

## A Land Register

Most developed western European democracies compile land registers. In fact all Britain's partners in the European Economic Community (EEC) have some form of land registration. These give accurate details on who owns what, thus creating the opportunity for more open and democratic planning. There is a form of land registry in England and Wales, but it cannot be consulted by the public. In Scotland no such register exists at all. Indeed, the most up to date study of landownership in Scotland was drawn up almost 20-years ago by Dr Roger Millman. His research along with a study carried out by John McEwan (1981) provides the basic data upon which this report is based. Until Millman's work is updated or a proper, publicly accessible land registry is set up, this will remain the best information available.

## Land Ownership in Mid-Scotland and Fife

The map below shows the pattern of land ownership in the Mid-Scotland and Fife European constituency.



## The Big Owners by Region

In the following sections the owners of major estates (over 5,000 acres) in Mid-Scotland and Fife are listed by Region.

## FIFE REGION

Major Estate Owners	Estate [Map number]	Acres
Earl of Wemyss & March	Wemyss Estate (No 20)o	8,800
Mr & Mrs J. Balfour	Balbirnie Estate (No 22)	6,900
Col. Sir John Gilmour	Lundin & Montravie Estate (No 14) Dalmahoy Estate (No 25)	6,800
Falkland Estate Trust	Falkland Estate (No 17)	5,500
Earl of Moray	Moray Estate (No 27)	5,400
A.B.L. Munro-Ferguson of Raith & Novar	Raith Estate (No 23)	5,000
Earl of Crawford & Balcarres	Balcarres Estate (No 12)	5,000

The owners of the Balbirnie Estate in central Fife also own over 16,000 acres in Sutherland. John Balfour is descended from the first Earl of Balfour, Conservative Prime Minister at beginning of this century. Former Tory MP for East Fife, Colonel Sir John Gilmour, third baronet of Lundin and Montrave, owns 6,800 acres of first class agricultural land. The Wemyss family own a number of estates in the Euro constituency, the largest being on the Fife coast to the north of Kirkcaldy. Wemyss Estates holds a total of 44,000 acres in Scotland as a whole. Arthur Munro-Ferguson, owner of Raith Estates also has a massive 28,700 acres in Ross-shire. Meanwhile the Falkland Estate Trust is believed to be under the control of the Crichton Stuart family. Ninian Crichton Stuart is the present keeper of Falkland Palace. The biggest three owners (with the exception of Mrs Jean Balfour) all went to school at Eton. Another old Etonian, the 29<sup>th</sup> Earl of Crawford was formerly a Tory Minister of State.

## CENTRAL REGION

Major Estate Owners	Estate [Map number]	Acres
Felicity Richardson & others	Glenfalloch Estate (No 50)	22,400
John Cameron	Glen Lochay Estate (No 53)	20,000
Major Bowser	Argaty & Auchlyne Estate (No 52)	17,000
Keir & Cawdor	Keir & Cawdor Estate (No 67)	16,400
Earl of Moray	Doune Estate	16,300
Judge R. Stroyan	Boreland Estate (No 54)	15,100
Mr J. McNaughton	Inverlochlarig Estate (No 61)	11,700
Sir A. Edmonstone	Duntreath Castle Estate (No 47)	10,200
Duke of Montrose	Montrose Buchanan Estate (No 48)	8,800

W. J. Christie	Loch Dochart Estate (No 51)	7,200
Commander Stafford	Sauchieburn Estate (No 42)	6,900
Gavin S. Davie	Callander Estate (No 39)	6,600
The Hon. Ronald J. Eden	Cromlix Estate (No 66)	5,700
Sir R. Orr-Ewing	Cardross Estate (No 63)	5,300
Mr Burnett	Rhodders Estate (No 36)	5,000

The last full Government land ownership survey was in 1872-3 and showed the Duke of Montrose's estate to total a massive 69,000 acres. Today it is reduced to 8,800 acres. The current Duke is a former Minister in the Rhodesian Government and another old Etonian. The Stirlings still have a stake in Keir & Cawdor Estates, while another branch of the family owns the Garden Estate near Kippen. It is however rumoured that in the last few years much of the Keir & Cawdor Estate, including Keir House, has been sold off to anonymous Arabian interests. In 1980 Cromlix House was converted by the Eden family (descended from James IV) into a luxury hotel and restaurant with much of the 5,000 acre estate used for the highly profitable country 'sports' of shooting and fishing. Judge Stroyan took over control of Boreland Estate on the death of his mother in 1985. The Judge is another chip off the old establishment block, being educated at Harrow. Big Perthshire landowner Major Bowser also went to school at Harrow, and is a former Tory councillor on Perth County Council. The Major is one of a number of military men in control of huge estates in Central Region. Others include old Etonian, Sir Major Orr-Ewing of Cardross, Commander Stafford of Sauchieburn, and Colonel James Stirling of Garden.

### TAYSIDE/Perth

Major Estate Owners	Estate [Map number]	Acres
Baroness Willoughby de Eresby	Drummond Castle Estate (No 590)	65,000
Earl of Mansfield	Scone Palace Estate (No 82)	33,800
W. J. Denby Roberts	Strathallan Estate (No 78)	12,500
Lord Forteviot	Dupplin Castle Estate (No 79)	12,100
A. Chinnery Haldane	Gleneagles Estate (No 77)	5,000

The Drummond Castle Estate, owned by Lady Willoughby de Eresby is the largest in the Perth and Kinross area of the Euro constituency standing at 65,000 acres. Part of the Earl of Mansfield's 33,800 acre Scone Palace Estate also lies within the constituency. The Earl is yet another old Etonian with Tory party connections. He served as an unelected Conservative member of the European Assembly (1973 –

1975) and as an unelected minister in the Scottish Office between 1979 and 1983. In 1985 the Earl took over from Fife laird the Earl of Crawford as First Commissioner and chair of the Crown Estate Commissioners. This gives him responsibility for managing 100,000 acres of Crown Estate lands in Scotland alone. Old Etonian and Dewar's whisky magnate Lord Forteviot owns over 12,000 acres in mid Perthshire.

## **Why We Need Greater Public Control of Land - The Lottery of Inheritance**

The private ownership of land has allowed a tiny minority of people to control economic and social activity in Scotland. In many cases these are people who gained control of large areas of the country by the lottery of inheritance. Often their forebearers murdered and stole for their estates or were awarded land as payment from a monarch. The Drummond Castle Estate lands in Perthshire for example, have been passed down the generations to Baroness Willoughby, daughter of the last Earl of Ancaster. The Ancaster's acquired the land by marrying into the Drummond family. The Drummonds were gifted much of these vast estates by courting the favour of Robert the Bruce and then Robert II. The first Earl of Moray was the illegitimate child of James V and given numerous titles by his father. The Moray family's estates were, according to Tom Johnston, stolen from the Church. Much of this land still remains under the control of the current Earl whose late wife was the elder daughter of the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Mansfield.

## **Country Sports**

Landowners often abuse the land and environment. Land which could provide extensive leisure and recreation facilities for the many is turned over to exclusive facilities for the few in the form of grouse moors, deer forests and pheasant coverts. Indeed sporting estates are currently changing hands at record prices. Not surprising since it can cost a party staying in a large house £25,000 for a weekend's stag and pheasant shooting.

## **Forestry**

The recent explosion of forestry in Scotland is another classic example of land misuse. Whilst for the landowner the switch from grazing land to quick growing conifers produces a three fold increase in the value of land, for the rest of us it increases unemployment and speeds up rural depopulation, threatens already endangered flora and wildlife and destroys breath-taking scenery.

Furthermore, these dark, impenetrable forests discourage recreation and tourist based developments. In the Glen Lochay Estate recently acquire by former Scottish National Farmers Union (SNFU) President, John Cameron, only a well co-ordinated public campaign has so far prevented 1,600 acres in the *"last unspoilt glen in central Scotland"* being destroyed by the planting of alien conifers. Big landowner John McNaughton of Inverlochlarig Estate near Balquhider in Central Region is also attempting to plant 1,200 acres of conifers. Such a move would endanger the habitat of golden eagles and deprive hill walkers of one of the most popular routes in Scotland.

## **We Pay – They Gain**

The big private landowners continue to reap the benefits of public investment in infrastructure. In July 1984 the Scottish Office gave the final go ahead for the Dunblane bypass motorway at a cost of £14.16m. The route runs next to land owned by Keir & Cawdor Estates Ltd thus significantly increasing the value of that land without any effort on the part of the owners. In June 1988 the Estate company submitted a plan for a 100-acre countryside leisure complex next to the new road. This development, if given the green light, will generate profits for the private landowners, profits only possible because of an investment by the whole community.

## **Coal**

The proposed development of open cast mining at the Frances colliery in Fife entails using land owned by the Wemyss Estates. If the plan goes ahead Wemyss can expect a large payment of public money including a levy for every tonne mined. The Coal Board's plans envisage 46.5 million tonnes of coal being produced. It would not be inconceivable for Wemyss to receive 10-pence for every tonne mined. Simple arithmetic shows that the estate company would receive several million pounds in "*compensation*".

## **Conservation Grants**

Landowners also receive handouts under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act if they agree not to destroy sites of great natural beauty. Attention has recently been focussed on former John Cameron (referred to above) who is reputed to be claiming up to a million pounds as "*compensation*" for not planting trees on a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) on his Glen Lochay Estate. There is much secrecy surrounding such payments. The Government claim details of payments are confidential, but the last Nature Conservancy Council report indicated that in 1986-7 almost one million pounds was awarded to landowners in Scotland under the scheme.

## **Preferential Treatment**

There are other ways in which big landowners have been given preferential treatment by the state: the cost of farm machinery can be written off against income tax; cheap oil is available for farming; agriculture is exempt from VAT; farmland is not rated for local authority taxes; and of course the EEC's Common Agricultural Policy guarantees farm income through import levies and price support. Some of these policies have contributed to the rise in the highly specialised, intensive farming which has threatened wildlife and curbed access to the countryside. All of them have inflated the value of land and played into the hands of the big landowner.

## **Land Prices**

Land prices have increased dramatically since the early 1970s. The 1,200 acre Auchleskine Estate in Perthshire was recently sold for an unrevealed sum of well over the offer price of £160,000. Land and property has become a low risk target for

investors of our pension and insurance funds. Money which could have been invested in UK industry thereby creating jobs has instead been directed toward buying up land with very few job spin-offs. Indeed another major consequence of the rise in land values has been that local people can no longer afford to buy farms. Young people have increasingly been forced off the land and rural populations have continued to decline.

## **Patronage**

The Conservative Party uses its patronage to appoint major landowners to influential positions on public bodies such as the Forestry Commission, River Boards and the Countryside Commission. Between 1972 and 1982 Mrs Jean Balfour was chair of the Countryside Commission for Scotland. She has also been a member of the Forestry Commission, the Nature Conservancy Council and is a former vice chair of the Scottish Wildlife Trust, the latter two positions being held despite her hobbies (listed in Who's Who 1988) including sports shooting and fishing. The present chair of the Forestry Commission is Sir David Montgomery, owner of the Kinross Estate and Loch Leven. Sir David has a big influence on tourism in the area, owning the Green Hotel and controlling fishing on the Loch. The National Trust for Scotland was established in 1931. Its aim is to provide "*the permanent preservation for the benefit of the nation of lands and buildings in Scotland of historic or national interest or natural beauty.....*" Yet its Executive committee is hardly representative of "*the nation*". Once again the big landowners have an undue influence. President of the Trust is the Earl of Wemyss. Vice Presidents include the Duke of Atholl and the Marquess of Bute. Between the three of them they own 199,000 acres in Scotland. One of Malcolm Rifkind's appointees on the Forth River Purification Board is the third baronet of Harling and owner of the Blair Drummond Estate near Stirling, Sir John Muir. Sir John hit the headlines a couple of years ago when he sacked and evicted four of his farm workers and their families from his estate. One of the labourers rendered homeless and jobless had worked on the estate for over a quarter of a century.

## **Conclusions**

Our study has shown that even in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century a small number of aristocrats and estate companies still own much of Mid-Scotland and Fife, and they continue to occupy key positions on public bodies charged with looking after our countryside. The cost to the community can be measured in:

- stunted economic growth and rural depopulation;
- socially and environmentally unsound uses of land;
- the abuse and exploitation of public funds by private landowners for their own narrow benefit; and
- the denial of access to natural sites of great beauty.

We believe it is high time that rural and land use policies started to reflect the needs of the whole community. All decisions on land use should automatically involve full consultation with the local community. At the moment forestry and agriculture are exempt from local authority planning controls. Planning permission is not required to



change land use from grazing to forestry. In future landowners should submit plans to the local community, via the local authority so that full account is taken of their impact on the rural environment. However local people themselves should be encouraged to develop their own initiatives for land use rather than simply reacting to plans drawn up by private developers or landowners.

As a start a land registry, containing accurate information on land ownership, should be established. The onus should be placed on land owners themselves to register their holdings. Computer technology would allow such a register to be easily updated and readily accessible. This would dispel the current veil of secrecy and would aid the introduction of positive land reforms to benefit the whole community. Using the information available through the land register a full land survey could then be conducted. This would consider social and economic needs and plan the use of land to meet them.

Our land should be used for a diversity of purposes: conservation; forestry; food production through mixed farming; housing; recreation and tourism. All developments must be environmentally sensitive and be grounded in increased public control. Inevitably there should be a move toward the common ownership of land in order that the benefits of what is after all a natural gift can be once again shared by the whole community. Those who cry foul of such a move should remember that in most cases the community would only be taking back something which has been stolen from it. In a democracy, power over land use cannot be left to a handful of people. We have not come very far in 900 years, it is time we dragged land ownership into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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## Further Information

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