



The Argyll Papers, Inveraray Castle

ARG/04/03/65/11

Description of the Island of Tiree by Lachlan McLean, 1748

No 23¹

p.1

May it please your Grace,

Some of the Company who had the honour to attend your Grace when last in this Town told me, that your Grace ordered me to commit to writing the Cause of my having a ffarm in the Island of Tirie with a deduction of the Rent, as well as the particular Methods by which I managed Said ffarm Since my Possession, with anything else needfull to be communicate to your Grace concerning that Affair.

I therefore beg leave to inform your Grace of said particulars, with all the Integrity and Ingenuity I am capable of; and to make the whole Narrative as obvious as possible. I hope it will not be disagreeable to observe the following Method.

And first; to give a Short description of the Island of Tirie. In the next place, I shall mention a few Symptoms of its' fertility. Also the Custom of the Inhabitants with respect to Agriculture, and their gross Mistakes in that as well as in mannaging their Corn, etc.

I am also to narrate the Cause of my first Acquaintance with the honourable Trustees for encouraging Manufacturers etc, and with the Lord Preident of the Session, who, upon Account of the late Duke of Argyle, and to rectifie as far as possible the mistakes Committed by the people of Tirie in their husbandry by Setting a Right Example before them, Prevailed and Agreed with me, to take the ffarm in Tirie which I now possess.

Situation

The Iland of Tirie, situate on the side of the great western Ocean, and the westmost Iland belonging to the Shire of Argyle, in Latitude 56 degrees and about 50 minutes North, is in length from East

p.2

East to west about Eight Miles: the breadth in the west end about 3 Miles, at the Middle 2 Miles, in one place of my ffarm only a half Mile, And the Eastmost End is about one and a half Mile Broad.

Hills

There are in the western End of it three Hills pretty high , and facing the western Ocean, And are seen 10 or 12 Leagues off at sea: there are other 4 or 5 inferior ones in different parts; All the rest of the Iland besides is low ground, and so flat, that in winter time, great many fields

¹ Pages 13-16 are missing from the original document



The Argyll Papers, Inveraray Castle

are under watter, And in the summer season, as the most of the ground is sandy, the heat of the sun, very sensibly exceeds that in most parts of North Britain.

Moss

There is also near the west end of it a Large Moss, about 2 Miles in Circumference, and above 8 feet deep. Here the people possessing the ffarms most contiguous to the Moss, make the most of their Turf for ffireing, the rest of the people who live distant from this Moss, are much diffculted for fireing. There are large tracts of Stonny Barren Muires, in different parts of the Iland, which are a Common, and in former Ages, have been very good Pasture, but as the Neighbouring ffarmes, for Ages past, have neither had Coal or Turf to burn, save what they got by pairing the Surface of those being only a few Inches deep, are become very useless, and little better than Gravell.

The large Green called Reeve

About the Midle of the Island is a large spacious Green, a Common, Reckoned 2 miles in length, And one Mile one fourth broad, and lyes on the South East side of the Iland. Here all the young and Idle Cattle, Horse, Sheep etc belonging to the Inhabitants, pasture during the summer half year. This large field has never been ploughed, it's of a sandy Bottom, and alwise covered with a fine pile of Grass & Natural Clover. There is a small rising Hill nearer the west End

p.3

End than the midle of it, and from west to East, the whole field hath something of a graduall descent by which a small part of the East end is a little Marrishie. If a Man look at three quarters of this Green, which would make it near to Square, it resembles an artificiall Bowling Green, the Grass for the most part of the year not exceeding an inch or half an inch high & Over the whole Space, there is neither Craig, Stone, House, or Tree. The wind has made severall breaches on the sandy parts towards the South Corners of it, which if timously repaired, and more of the kind prevented, shall make this Spot of ground so Completely pleasant, that it can scarcely be paralleled in Europe.

The Number of Merk Lands

The Extent of Lands, or old valuation of Tyrie, is called a hundred and Twenty Merk Lands and each Merkland is subdivided into 8ths, or, as called by the Inhabitants in their Language, fferinvoill or one Boll's sowing, by which it would appear, that the Common Sowing of a Merk Land in Tirie of old, was only 8 Bolls. Each of these fferinvoiles, or 8ths of a Merk land, should Graze 3 Cows, or three Horses, And in this Age, any ffarmers possessing 2, 4, or 6 of these fferinvoils, or 8ths of a Merk land, do Commonly, in the best Ffarmes, sow one Boll Bear, and 4 of small Corn; But about one third of the ffarmes of Tyrie, being much inferior to others, both in Number of fields, and especially in the goodness of the Soil, does not come up to the said sowing, particularly those which are much demolished by the Sand-Drift, which I think are about 9 or 10 of 36.



The Argyll Papers, Inveraray Castle

I begg leave here to form some Conjecture of the Number of Acres the Arrable Land of Tirie Consists of. I presume to do it thus. There are in

p.4

in Tirie as aforesaid 120 Merk Lands, which produces of 8ths or fferinvouils 960; I suppose each fferinvoill, good and bad, One with Another, may Sow one Boll Bear and one Boll one fourth of Oats, or, three ffirlets bear, And one and a half Oats, which considering their large Measure, And thick manner of Sowing, I compute May take up 3 Acres one fourth; If so the whole of the Arable Lands of Tirie will Amount to 3600 Acres, besides the famous Common of Reeve, which is the name the Inhabitants call the Large field by, And which without doubt will measure at least 1000 Acres. But as this Computation is purely Conjecturall, I dare not recommend it for exactness.

Nature of the Soil

The soil of Tirie generally has been of old Equally Rich with Any in North Britain, but through bad Management, for some past Ages, their Grain is become exceeding Poor and Small.

Symptoms of ffertility

The Symptoms of the Naturall ffertility of the ground of Tirie is, when the ffarmers happen to let any of their Field rest, or go Lee, And after some years do lay on proper Mannure, Such fields do commonly yield four or ffive Crops of Corn, and two of Bear without Any Additionall Dunging, Tho' in the mean time, this is bad Management in the Main, as it renders the Ground poor, And prevents the growth of Grass, for some time after.

The next Proof of the good Naturall qualitis of this ground is, when the people Sow Any Quantitys of Bear in the Beginning or Midle of Apprile, the same is in readiness to be cut Down the first week of july thereafter. The people are also Accustomed to prolong their Bear Labour till about the 16th of june, And what they Sow then is ready to be cut Down the Latter End of Septr.

p.5

September. The last Sign I shall mention of the naturall heat and strength of that Ground when well managed is, with regard to the Extraordinary growth of Cabbage Keal and Garden Roots. The Cabbage seed which the People sow in Aprile and of which they sett the plants in june, do render them Commonly as fine and Large Cabbages in the Month of September following, as any Gardiners in Scotland have out of winter plants; & the growth of Garden Roots in Tirie, when the ground is Managed to Any Right purpose, is alwise earlier and Larger than is any where to be Seen in the Neighbouring Countreys. Some of the Turneeps which grew in any ffarm last season were of a very Large Size.

Situation of the villages

The ffarmes or Villages of this Iland are situate round about it on the Sea Coast, and Separated from the foresaid Commons, by what they call Head-Dykes, which are a kind of ffence built



The Argyll Papers, Inveraray Castle

of ffeal, or Earth, And are so insufficient of themselves, that the possessors of each have their proportions yearly to repair, or rather rebuild.

There are only three ffarmes in Tirie, in the west End of it, which Consist Chiefly of Clay grounds and do make by far the richest ground in the whole Iland, the rest of the ffarms are part Sandy Grounds, partly a Rich Black Mould, in some parts Gravelly, And in others a mixture of the most of All these.

The next thing I am to mention is, the Gross mistakes committed by the Inhabitants in their manner of Agriculture, which are as ffollows. The first great Error they commit with regard to the Labouring is, that they Commonly every year plow all the Arrable Lands within their ffarms, except perhaps one Sixth or Eighth part left to rest, or for Grazing and Consequently the Produce much poorer than otherwise it would have been. The

p.6

The next Error they commit in Agriculture is the great number of Cropts they Endeavour to have out of one Duning, a piece of Management which is owing to Sloth and Ignorance, and help in a great Measure to disappoint them.

The third Error they make is in the Modell of their Plows, which, I am perswade, is among the most insufficient can be found Any where; The Machine has but one hand, the Irons & Side-Broad, pitifully little, and unskillfully placed; The Plowman walks on the Inside, and directs the plow with one hand & Right Thigh. Another Man leads the Plough, walking backwards in the centre of the front of ffive Horses, Commonly, not exceeding, one with another, ffifteen Shillings price Each. This bad Method has a Considerable Share in the poorness of the Peoples Success.

Another Practice of the People of Tirie is, They alwise pull their Bear in Harvest, instead of Cutting it with the Sicle, which leaves the Ground open, deprives it of the Nourishment it would otherwise Gather by the Stuble left upon the Ground; And this practice also prevents it from coming soon to a Sward of Grass, and renders it every way Poorer.

The Inhabitants of Tirie, have not changed their Bear, or Corn Seed in the Memory of any Man now living, which, together with their Mismanagement Already Mentioned, has made their Grain degenerate so far, that it is the very poorest and smallest Any where to be found.

The last piece of gross mismanagement I shall mention in the Conduct of this People, with respect to husbandry is, their burning the Corn and Bear on the Straw, when they prepare it for Meal' the Effect of which is, that they loose all the good and use of so much Straw, and the Meal Though

p.7

Though not unwholesome in the Bread, yet is so black, Coarse and disagreeable in Appearance, that among Strangers it must be sold for a very low price, except in the time of very great Scarcity.



The Argyll Papers, Inveraray Castle

It is now high time I should Account for the reasons of my having a ffarm in Tirie, with a Deduction in the Rent etc. In the month of August 1737, the late deceast Lord President of the Session, was imployed by the late Duke of Argyle to go to Mull and Tirie and Sett that Estate and give new Tacks. Accordingly the President, Accompanied by several Gentlemen of the Name of Campbell, and Mr Ronald Dunbar writer to the Signet, went to that Country and gave new Tacks.

When the Lord President was at Tirie, his Lordship was at great pains to observe the naturall disposition of the ground to ffertility, as well as the gross mistakes of the people in their Methods of Agriculture and Husbandry.

The following year, it happened that Three merchants of this Town and I, began a project of ffishing among the Highland Iles. And as I was the person best acquainted, being a Native of the Parish of Tirie, I was prevailed upon to give in a Memoriall to the honourable Trustees for encouraging ffisheries and Manufactures in Scotland, of which I send herewith a printed Cobby. Sometime after I gave in the Memoriall, I happened to be at Edinburgh, was calld before the Board of Trustees where the Lord President sat Pr[]ss And where his Lordship was pleased to Examine me, with regard to the Situation of the western Iles, their harbours, Bearings, Distances and best ffishing Places; All which I answered to as good purpose as Consisted with my knowledge; And this Project of ffishing, the Company and I did follow for three years Successively; but finding the Irish wherrys, which then were beginning to fish amongst our Iles, had Boats, Lines, Experienced hands, and every thing

p.8

thing else necessary, incomparably better than our Boats, Hands etc, we sent a Commission to a gentleman in Dublin to purchase one of these wherrys for us, And to engage two of their hands for our use, for the space of three years, in order to have our Countrey people Instructed; But our factor Acquenting us he could find no wherry to purchase, much less Any hands to serve in this Country, they being all bound who were employed that way to Serve for a number of years, And finding ourselves disappointed in this, we gave up the project of ffishing, after three years tryall, the Trustees having paid us fourty Pounds Sterline per year for our Encouragement, we Serving them duely with journals of every Voyage with Account of Harbours, Banks ffishing Places & other Discoveries, etc.

The following year, I had the honour to wait of the Lord President when his Lordship desired me to enquire about Glasgow, for An honest Skillfull ffarmer of Substance to go and Settle in Tirie, in order to shew the Inhabitants a Better Method of Agriculture And who should have Reasonable Encouragement from the Duke of Argyle for So doing. I Accordingly Made Enquiry, but could prevail with no proper person, which after sometime I reported to his Lordship, who then, vizt in November 1739, and not before, proposed to me to take a ffarm in Tyrie, and Send down proper hands and Utensills from Glasgow or about it, in order to show the People a Right Example of Agriculture and Husbandry. My Answer to his Lordship was that tho' I was Acquented with the Inhabitants of that Countrey, their Grounds and Methods of



The Argyll Papers, Inveraray Castle

Doing, yet the distance of it from Glasgow and the Expence which must of necessity be incurred in travelling there once

p.9

once in the year, Sending down proper Hands, Utensills, and Different kinds of Seeds, would undoubtedly exceed the whole Rent of the ffarm, which I have by experience found Since pretty much verified; However, in about 12 Months time, vizt. in November 1740, I was prevailed on to undertake the thing, which I did, as much, or rather more from a desire to Serve the Duke of Argyll, to introduce Industry to the Countrey, and to please the Lord President, than from any View of gain to my Self, which so small an undertaking at that distance could not possibly produce. Accordingly the Lord President ordered Mr Ronald Dunbar to give me an open Letter to Mr Campbell of Balimor then ffactor of Tirie, desiring him to put me in Possession of the ffarm of Ruaig at the term of Whitsunday 1741 years which was accordingly done. And I was then told I should have my Tack from the Duke himself how soon his Grace came to Scotland which happened in the Month of August ffollowing, when I was ordered to go to Edinburgh, where, after Eight days Stay, I got my Tack and Missive Letter Signed by the Duke Securing me to Eighteen Pounds Sterline per annum, of an abatement out of the Rent, which besides Cess and Teinds was made to amount to the sum of Twenty four pounds Eight Shillings & two pence Sterline, while I continued to to perform my part. Both were signed by his Grace at Caroline Park the 28th day of August 1741 years. It was at this time and not before, that the Lord President and Mr Ronald Dunbar told me that the Premium of Eighteen pounds which was agreed in the year before, was to be insert in a separate missive Letter of the Dukes own Signing, And not in the body of the Tack as I expected, which Method I readily agreed to.

p.10

It will not be improper to observe here that no single Tacksman possessing the ffarm of Ruaig, was ever known to have paid above Sixteen pounds Sterline or three hundred Merks Scots money of yearly Rent for it. It's true that other ffarms in the Iland Equall in quality to it, pays about ten Shillings for every Meal Land, or every Eighth of a Merk Land; but that only when planted by a Number of small Tenents, and never when possessed by a singleTacksman. Every Merkland in Tyrie pays yearly of Cess 12 sh Sterl, which in my ffarm amounts to three pounds six Shillings Sterl per Annum.

In june 1741 I viewed the ffarm, found it had been ill managed by plowing wholly, which made the ground all Light. The first piece of Management I practised was to mark out One Sixth part of the whole Land for Labouring. And let five six parts go Lee, or to rest, then I stocked it with Black Cattle and fourteen Horses for ploughing and leading the Manure.

In November thereafter, I sent from this a proper person to be Grieve or Overseer Over the Labouring, and Another Servant Man Practized in Agriculture here, having engaged three more men servants upon the Iland to Serve under the Grieve, to whom I delivered written Directions for managing the several grounds marked out for Labouring.



The Argyll Papers, Inveraray Castle

In Spring thereafter, I sent from this three Carts, and two of Lummies ploughes, being the same I still use. Also white Oats Seed, Barley Seed, flax Seed, Beans and Peas, with all the necessary Plowing Graith & Utensills. About this time I was obliged to pay ready money for all the Cott Houses Upon the ffarm, which it seems has been Customary in that Iland.

The Barbarous Custom of Pulling the Bear, and not Cutting it with the Sicle, And Carrying it to the Stack yards with the Roots on, has furnished the whole ffarmes in Tirie with vast Quantitys of Excelent Mannure of which they are yet scarcely Sensible; ffor as the Bear is carried from the fields, with the Roots on, the quantity of Earth sticking

p.11

sticking to the Roots of the Straw and left in the Stack yards of which there is a Number in every ffarm, and this being the Custom for Centurys past, do now appear in large Heaps or Hillocks. And as this is a Stock of Mannure that will not run out for Ages to come, so I am perswaded it is little Inferior to Marle or Lime. It answers every kind of Soil and especially it is the only remedy left to restore the light sandy Grounds if at all Recoverable to Sward and Grass.

The first Directions I gave Concerning the Mannure was to Cause my Servants lead up Shelly Sand from the Sea Shore and to mix that and whatever Dung was gathered for the grounds, with Straw, Earth and Sea weeds, And all other useless Excrescence that could be gathered, Which I find to Answer a great deal better for nourishing the ground, than Any One of these by it Self Alone. I did in particular make an Experiment upon four Acres of Sandy grounds, the surface of which had neither Grass nor Sward of Any kind, and did Cause lay on plentifully of this old Earth, after which it gave one Cropt of Bear, One other of Small Corn, And now it Appears with a Closs Sward of ffine Grass and Naturall Clover. The Sea weeds or wrack thrown on the shore of this Iland by the winter Storms is the Chief mannure used by the Inhabitants, And Answers very well, but especially when laid on early in the Season, and mixed with any other sort of Dinging rather than by itself. This last Method is what I order my Servants to observe. I did also Order some Quantity of Moss , in the month of july, to be laid out upon some light ffields, which were very near run out, and in the following spring to lay out some of the forementioned Mannure before ploughing, this method also has helped to restore the ground to it's former Richness.

I alwise take after every dunging, only one Cropt of Bear and one of Oats, And sows my Peas the next year after my Oats, As I do my flax Seed after the Bear, All which and Discharging to pull the Bear, being much Contrary to the Methods used by the Inhabitants, has a visible and Sensible Effect upon my ffarm to the Better. So much for my Method of Mannure.

p.12

I believe there is no part in the World so illmanaged with regard to plowing as Tirie. There machines for that End are so poor and insufficient, that their Land, for ages past, could not miss to suffer by them. I have Chosen for my Modell, that Contrived by one Mr Lummy, a Lancashire Man, who in the 1736 and 1737 years, sold great numbers of them in Scotland. It's



The Argyll Papers, Inveraray Castle

a Machine that saves a dale of trouble to the plowman, in Comparison to the best Common kind used in this Countrey, as it lays the Clod Cleanly Over, And without stressing the hand, makes it Broad or Small, Deep or Shallow, as the plowman pleases and in Light grounds is workable by two Horses.

As I found the most of the Land of my ffarm so fflat, that the waters in winter time, had no levell to fall off, so I ordered to plow all those spots Cross and for three or four years successively, to gather the Ridges to the Midle, by which means, all those Spots are now much more productive And not near so lyable to be rendered useless by excessive summer Droughts, or winter Rains, as formally they were, and as in the case with many Large fieldes of the Same Position over the Iland. These Plows, of which I sent down before now ffive, cost me, as the are made by Alexander Govan of this place, thirty shillings Ster. each besides Carriage.

As I wanted ffields in the ffarm that were sufficiently rested or Lee, so I had no oportunity to order summer fallow till june last, when I appointed five Acres to be managed that way, which is done, and will probably Encourage that Method. So much for Plowing.

As to the Seeds which I have tryed in Tirie, I must observe with regrate as I hinted formerly, that the people of Tirie have not, for Centurys past changed any of their Seeds, which has rendered their Grain miserably Small and Poor. I therefore sent down Quantities of the best white Oats Seed, the Produce of Blenchly, and Barley, with Peas and Beans seeds from ffalkirk, also fflax seeds of sundry kinds of

[pp.13-16 missing]

p.17

hands ready to be employed in ffishing, spinning and manufacturing, I say these things Considered, it would be of great Consequence to the Government, and of vast use to the Countrey , that these Branches were encouraged.

I hope and earnestly begg to be excused for this digression, and now that I may make it appear that my Accepting of the ffarm in Tirie, did not flow intirily from a view of Bettering my own private Interest, which Could not well be the case, Considering.

That before I got any Cropt of my own, I was of money out of Pocket in maintaining men and women Servants Twenty four pounds Sterline, and of wages to Said Servants the Said year ffourteen pounds fourteen Shillings, Ballance of Rents first year, Six pounds Eight Shillings and twopence, Cess or Land Tax yearly Three pounds Six Shillings, My Travelling Charges by two journeys the first year, and going to Edinburgh to get my Tack Cost me Twelve pounds. The first Parcell of Utensills I sent to Tirie, Amounted to Nine Pounds Eight Shillings and Sixpence, The Seeds I sent from this Cost me Six Pounds four Shillings, and the quantity I bought in the Countrey Nine pound Ten. The price I paid for the Cott Houses upon the ffarm, and some others I built, Amounts to Six Pounds fifteen Shilling; so that I laid out of a real dead Stock, before I was Eighteen Months in Possession, Ninty two Pounds Sterling. besides Black Cattle & Horses.



The Argyll Papers, Inveraray Castle

The following two years my Cropts only served to maintain my Servants, Horses, and afford seeds for my grounds, so that I paid out of Dead Charges each of those two years, upon Servants wages, Utensills, building some small office Houses, Rent, Cess, travelling and remaining sometime upon the Iland, about thirty ffive pounds Sterline, And until I go once more to the

p.18

the ffarm I cannot exactly Condescend upon what the Inclosing of the ten or twelve Acres of Low grounds, or the building of the Barn Cost me. So much for Development.

And now for the Benefit I have drawn from the whole. It stands thus. Since I begun to Labour those grounds which I did let go to rest, and Cultivate them in the proper Manner, And the Cattle upon the ffarm are come up to yeild some Increase which has only happened for the two years of 1746 and 1747, I Reckon I have Twenty five pounds Sterline per annum free, All Demands of Rents, Cess, Charges etc being paid. In the beginning of the year 1742, I sent a young man to the Trustees, to be Instructed for preparing the ground for fflaxseed, and pulling, wattering etc the Lint; this young man was stationed in Tirie, and got seven pounds ten Shillings by the year of Sallary from the Trustees. He managed my fflax to good purpose for the first three years, And Sold it out for me from nine to ten shillings the Scots Stone weight, which is 22lib English; but in the Latter End of the year 1744, the young Man was seased with Sickness, and Rendered incapable to break, Swingle, or scutch the fflax, by which I lost the Lint Cropts of 1745 & 1746, for want of house Large and proper enough to receive and preserve the fflax, And a person to dress it in due time, so that my benefit by the fflax has not yet exceeded my Depursments on that Article.

I sent in September last a strong bodied young man to the Trustees, to be Instructed in the Same business, and to be stationed in Tirie when qualified; But if all the ffarms and People of Tirie were made to raise the Quantity of fflax, that they can with Conveniency do, without wronging any other part of Husbandry; in that Case, no less than a Lint Mill, And ffive or six skilfull Hands will be needful, besides Heclers to manage the whole. I have

p.19

I have now ended this long and tedious Account, which I have taken upon me to send to your Grace, with regard to Tirie, and my Concern in it, And as I have made ffacts my Rule, as far as my Accompts and Memory could Serve me, so if Any doubts happen to remain I shall most willingly be subjected to the inquiry of any person, one or more of Established Probity your Grace shall be pleased to appoint in order to Examine the Affair; And if it be found that I have observed Paction, and acted an honest part in the Charge I got in Tirie, And also sent now a genuine Narrative of the whole; In this Event, I most humbly hope to have your Grace's Countenance and Encouragement which I hereby oblige my self, and promise to use for your Grace's particular Interest, as well as the Good of the Countrey in General; And in the meantime I most humbly begg your Grace may be pleased to order the present ffactor of Tyrie to Grant me Discharges, agreeable to the Tenor of the late Lord Duke of Argyle's Letter to me, Relative to which there was a warrant signed by his Grace, delivered to Mr. Campbell of Balimor the late ffactor, whose receipts or Discharges now in my Custody do Expressly



The Argyll Papers, Inveraray Castle

Mention Said Eighteen pounds of Deduction in my favours, and the Reasons of Allowing them.

I am with most humble respect and utmost integrity, My Lord Duke, Your Grace's most faithfull & most obedient humble Servant,

La: MacLean

Glasgow

4th Jany 1747/8