

Scorrybreac Sheep Farm

By Norma MacLeod, SRP Storr Lochs, July 2011

By the mid-nineteenth century, Scorrybreac Sheep Farm was one of the largest sheep farms in Scotland, covering an area of c12,500 Scots acres which extended from Portree in the south to the Lealt River in the north - a distance of over 17km. It was formed by the amalgamation of the former tacks of Scorrybreac, Tottrome, Rigg, Upper Tote, Nether Tote and Lealt. The land owner for this area, and most of the north end of Skye, was Lord MacDonald of Sleat.

The Clan Nicolson of Scorrybreac had held lands in Trotternish from at least the 16th century as tacksmen / tenants of Lord MacDonald. Their ancient seat was in the present-day township of Torvaig, to the N of Portree. Traditionally, such tacksmen / farmers made most of their income from the sale of black cattle and later from the sale of sheep, but a fall in the price of black cattle, poor weather, and steep rent rises caused financial difficulty for many from c1800. There had been talk of re-renting Scorrybreac with Tottrome for £250 per annum in 1800: by 1816, it had risen to £600.¹

Although the land was apparently advertised for let in 1816, Donald Nicolson remained in possession until 1827. The former tacks of Scorrybreac, Tottrome and Rigg, held by the Nicolsons, along with those of Upper & Nether Tote and Lealt to the north, were again advertised for let in 1824-1827, but it was not until 1827 that a suitable tenant was found. At that time the existing crofter-tenants of the Nicolsons were cleared to make way for the sheep and from then, apart from the shepherds and others who worked for the lease-holder, very few people remained in this area.

Accounts of the Entailed Estates (MacDonald of Sleat, NAS SC29/64) record the cost of various building and dyking works undertaken at the 'Farm of Scorrybreck', 1829-30, including the building of a sheep fank (£58.16.00), the building of a byre and cart shed (£93.00.00), the roofing of a barn (£66.00.00) and the cost of building additional accommodation to the Farm House of Scorrybreac (£250.00.00). The Farm House (now Scorrybreac House) is on the north shore of Portree Bay. It is said that there were seven shepherds associated with the sheep farm. These are thought to include North Holm (NG 51855 51722) and Armishader (NG 50200 50225), and possibly also Bearreraig (NG 51300 53098) and Tottrome (NG 50048 52615). The accounts do not specify where the other building works took place, but the sheep fank may refer to the sheepfold at Armishader (NG 50127 50133). An advert for the lease of the farm in 1853 indicates that it had, by then, been further 'improved by enclosing and drainage to a considerable extent' (Inverness Advertiser - 2 Aug 1853). For details of leases, 1824-1853, see the following pages.

The former Scorrybreac tack was within Portree parish. The tacks of Tottrome and Rigg were part of Snizort parish; the south boundary being where Tottrome met the Scorrybreac tack, and the north boundary being the Lealt River. Sometime after the late 1960s, the north boundary for Portree parish was moved to the Lealt River, and now Portree parish includes the former tacks of Tottrome and Rigg.

¹ W David H Sellar and Alasdair Maclean, *The Highland Clan MacNeacail: A History of the Nicolsons of Scorrybreac* (1999), p 20. In December 1816, Lord MacDonald's chamberlain wrote 'It is the wish of Lord MacDonald and his Commisioners, to let the farm of Scorribrek with Rigg and Tottrom entire, as it now stands, with the exception of a small pendicle of it, which they will probably reserve for the accommodation of Mr Nicolson and his Family - the Farm is still advertised, and will be let to the Highest offerer, should he be considered an eligible Tenant - The present rent is £600 ...' The pendicle of land which Lord MacDonald intended excluding from the sheep farm is assumed to be at Torvaig.

The Board of Agriculture for Scotland bought the Scorrybreac Farm from Lord MacDonald c1927. Crofts were created in the townships near Portree (at Torvaig and Achachork) and the land north of this (the former Scorrybreac tack, including Holm and Armishader) became common grazing for the South Scorrybreac Sheep Stock Club. The former tacks of Tottrome and Rigg (including Tottrome and Bearreraig) became common grazing for North Scorrybreac Sheep Stock Club.

When Storr Lochs Power Station was created in 1951-52, the water level of Loch Leathan was raised, slightly reducing the common grazing available to the South Scorrybreac Sheep Stock Club. The raised water level also cut off footpath access, via the north end of Loch Leathan, to the sheepfold at Armishader, which had continued to be used by the South Scorrybreac Sheep Stock Club until that time. The North of Scotland Hydro Electric Board built a new sheepfold to replace it beside the A855 Portree-Staffin road at the S end of Loch Fada (NG 49241 48538).

Inverness Journal, 31 December 1824

A VALUABLE AND EXTENSIVE FARM, RESIDENCE, Etc. ON LORD MACDONALD'S ESTATE, IN THE ISLE OF SKYE AND COUNTY OF INVERNESS

To be LET, entry at Whitsunday 1826

THE FARM of SCORRYBRECK, with RIGG, TOTTROME, UPPER TOTT, NETHER TOTT, and LEALT, lying partly in the Parish of Portree, and partly in the Parish of Snizort. Scorrybreck, Rigg, and Tottrome, have for several years back been occupied as one Farm. It lies in the immediate vicinity of the Village of Portree, commands a view of the Harbour, and extends for several miles along the sea-shore, having at the same time the benefit of a very extensive range of excellent Hills. It is at present stocked with several thousand Sheep of the best quality, and some hundred head of Black Cattle; and as it marches with the other three Farms, it is proposed to unite them, so as to make the whole one of the most complete Sheep Walks in the Highlands, and an object for a Tenant of respectability, capital, and enterprise. These Lands are particularly well suited for the Cheviot breed of Sheep, both on account of the quality of the grass, and the mildness of the climate; and as there are some other Farms in the neighbourhood out of Lease, the Proprietor may feel disposed to accommodate a suitable Tenant with such other additions as he may consider expedient. *There is an excellent HOUSE on the Farm of Scorrybreck*, which has recently been completely repaired at a considerable expense, with some Office Houses, to which additions may be made if necessary. The Sheep Stock upon the Farm of Scorrybreck, Rigg, and Tottrome, will be delivered to the Tenant at a valuation, and if required, it is believed an arrangement may be made with the present Tenant of Scorrybreck, Rigg, and Tottrome, to give up his right to the Farm at the Term of Whitsunday first, when possession may also be given of the other Farms above referred to.

Offers for these Lands will be received by John Archd Campbell, Esq. W.S. Albyn Place, Queen Street, Edinburgh, and by Mr Macpherson, Lord Macdonald's Chamberlain at Portree, who will give directions for pointing out the boundaries of the Farms.

Portree, 17th December 1824.

Inverness Journal, 8 December 1826

VALUABLE AND EXTENSIVE FARMS, RESIDENCE, Etc ON LORD MACDONALD'S ESTATE OF MACDONALD, IN THE ISLAND OF SKYE AND COUNTY OF INVERNESS

To be LET, entry at Whitsunday 1827

THE FARM of SCORRYBREACK, with RIGG, TOTTROME, UPPER TOTT, NETHER TOTT, and part of LEALT, lying partly in the Parish of Portree, and partly in the Parish of Snizort. Scorrybreck, Rigg, and Tottrome have for several years back been occupied as one Farm. It lies in the immediate vicinity of the Town and Harbour of Portree, commands a view of the Harbour, and extends for several miles along the sea shore, having at the same time the benefit of a very extensive range of excellent Hills. It is at present stocked with several thousand Sheep of the best quality, and some hundred head of Black Cattle; and as it marches with the other three Farms, it is proposed to unite them, so as to make the whole one of the most complete Sheep Walks in the Highlands, and an object for a Tenant of respectability, capital, and enterprise, and to the which every accommodation will be given. These Lands are particularly well suited for the Cheviot breed of Sheep, both on account of the quality of the Grass and the mildness of the climate: and as there are some other Farms in the neighbourhood out of Lease, the Proprietor may feel disposed to accommodate a suitable Tenant with such other additions as he may consider expedient. *There is an excellent House on the Farm of Scorrybreck*, which has recently been completely repaired at a considerable expense, with some Office Houses, to which any additions required may be made. The Sheep Stock upon the Farms of Scorrybreck, Rigg, and Tottrome, which is in excellent condition, will be delivered to the incoming Tenant at a valuation.

The Maid of Islay Steam Vessel, which is capable of carrying all sorts of Merchandise, comes regularly once a week to Portree, and lands Passengers there the third morning from Glasgow.

The Herring Fishing in the Sound of Scalpa, near Portree, is generally to a great extent; and the other Fishing on the Coast is of the best description.

Skye is in one place separated from the Main Land by a Ferry of a quarter of a mile, and the landing places are excellent.

Offers for this Farm will be received by John Archibald Campbell, Esq C.S. Albyn Place, Queen Street, Edinburgh; and by Mr Macpherson, Lord Macdonald's Chamberlain, at Portree, who will give directions for pointing out the boundaries of the Farms.

Portree, December 1826.

Inverness Journal, 5 Jan 1827

VALUABLE AND EXTENSIVE FARMS, RESIDENCE, Etc ON LORD MACDONALD'S ESTATE OF MACDONALD, IN THE ISLAND OF SKYE, AND COUNTY OF INVERNESS

To be LET, entry at Whitsunday 1827.

1st THE FARM OF SCORRYBRECK, Lying partly in the Parish of Portree, and partly in the Parish of Snizort. Scorrybreck, with Rigg and Tottrome, was for several years occupied as one Farm, but at Whitsunday last an arrangement took place, by which large additions were made to it, and it may now be considered one of the most complete Sheep Walks in the Highlands of Scotland. It lies in the immediate vicinity of the Town and Harbour of Portree, commands a view of the Harbour, and extends for several miles along the sea shore, having at the same time the benefit of a very extensive range of excellent Hills.

It is at present stocked with Sheep, partly Cheviot, and partly Blackfaced; and from the quality of the Grass and mildness of the climate, it is particularly well suited for the Cheviot breed: and it is in every respect an object of consideration to a Tenant of respectability, capital and enterprise. There is an excellent House upon the Farm, which has lately been repaired at a considerable expense, with some Office Houses, to which additions, if required, may be made. The Sheep Stock will be delivered to the Tenant at a valuation.

2nd The FARM OF DUNTULM and URGAG, ...

3rd AIRD and BRUNISTAT, with the ISLAND of TRODDAY, ...

The Maid of Islay Steam Boat, which is capable of carrying all sorts of Merchandise, comes regularly once a week to Portree, from the beginning of April to the end of October, and lands Passengers there the third morning from Glasgow.

The Herring Fishing in the Sounds and salt water Lakes in Skye, and the neighbourhood, is generally very productive: and the other Fishery on the Coast is of the best description.

Skye is separated from the Main Land by a Ferry of about a quarter of a mile bread; and the road from the South to the Ferry, as well as the landing places and roads through the whole Island, are excellent, having all been made by the Parliamentary Commissioners.

Offers for this Farm will be received by John Archibald Campbell, Esq., C.S. Edinburgh: and by Mr John Macpherson, Lord Macdonald's Chamberlain, at Portree, who will give directions for pointing out the boundaries of these Farms.

Portree, December 12, 1826

Inverness Advertiser, 2 August 1853

DAY FIXED FOR TAKING IN OFFERS

VALUABLE AND EXTENSIVE SHEEP FARMS ON THE MACDONALD ESTATES IN SKYE
TO BE LET, For such number of years as may be agreed on, Entry at Whitsunday 1854,

- I. THE FARM OF SCORRYBRECK, in the parishes of Portree and Snizort, as presently possessed by Mr Macleod, extending to 12,500 Acres Scots or thereby.
- II. The FARM OF KINGSBURGH, in the parish of Snizort, as presently possessed by Mr Macleod, extending to about 5,000 Acres Scots.

These Farms have recently been improved, by Enclosing and Drainage, to a considerable extent.

The Stocks are well known in the Southern Markets as being superior, and the incoming Tenant will be required to take them at valuation.

The Buildings are modern and commodious.

- III. The GRAZINGS OF SARTLE and BALLAMEANACH ...

There is Steam communication three times a week betwixt Skye and the Clyde.
Offers may be lodged betwixt and the 22nd August next, with Mr Brown, Trustee on the estates of the Right Honourable Lord Macdonald; Messrs Browns and Pearmon, accountants, 128 George Street, Edinburgh; or with Robert Ballingal, Factor, Portree, who will show Plans, and give directions for pointing out the boundaries of the different Farms.

Portree, 21st July 1853.