

LAND ASSESSMENTS AND SETTLEMENT HISTORY IN SUTHERLAND AND EASTER ROSS

Malcolm Bangor-Jones

There are those who would argue that land assessments are among the more arid, and certainly more obscure, topics in Scottish history! Yet land assessments are not only of great interest in themselves, but they possess considerable importance for the study of settlement history. This is particularly so when they are set alongside other sources of evidence, landholding, place-names, and archaeology, in what may be termed a retrospective approach — moving back in time from the more recent past. This paper comprises two parts: first, a consideration of the uses, nature, and origins of land assessments, in particular *davochs* and *pennylands*; secondly, a discussion of more specific aspects of settlement history and territorial organization.

THE USES OF LAND ASSESSMENTS

Davochs and *Pennylands*

The earliest references from Ross and Cromarty and Sutherland are to the twelve *davochs* of Skelbo, parish of Dornoch (in Bishop Gilbert's constitution of the diocese of Caithness, 1222 × 1245; Fraser 1892. III. 3–6), and to the two *davochs* of 'Clon' or Clyne, now Mountgerald, parish of Kiltearn (1224 × 1231) (Moray Reg. 333–34). *Pennylands* first appear in 1539 with the three *pennylands* of the island of 'Sanda' and the two *pennylands* of the island of 'Hoae', which were granted along with 'Davach Ereboll' and the lands of Hope, parish of Durness (*OPS*. II. pt. 2. 705; *RMS*. III. no. 2048). Subsequently, references to *pennylands* are mostly confined to estate papers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, while *davochs* continue to be found in a variety of sources well into the nineteenth century.

Davochs and *pennylands* survived, not through the formal recitation of terms fossilized and long-forgotten, but because they still possessed meaning. They were used for assessments related to areas of known extent whose bounds included not only a range of land usages — arable, meadow, and pasture — but also the pattern of settlement (in particular, major settlements and their dependencies or 'pendicles').

Assessments effectively defined a territorial framework which could serve for many purposes, the most obvious of which was the ownership or conveyance of land. This is clearly demonstrated by an agreement of 1275 between Bishop Archibald and the Earl of Sutherland, which lists lands by

their assessments in the parishes of Dornoch, Creich, and Rogart (*Bannatyne Misc.* III. 21–4). Land ownership, however, was burdened with various obligations and it is no surprise that assessments had important fiscal functions: the fourteenth century charter of the davoch of Pitmaduthy, parish of Logie Easter, for example, requiring the grantee to render ‘forensic service to the King such as pertains to a davoch land’ (*Munro Writs*, no. 2). Assessments feature also in the records of ecclesiastical administration, such as when the presbyteries of Tain and Dornoch met in 1649 to discuss the accommodation of Kincardine and Creich with ‘ane trid stipend’, and discovered that there were ‘betwixt Achinduich and Pulrossie . . . nyne miles . . . sexteine davach lands having also 500 yat may be able to communicate’ (McGill 1909–11. I. no. 67).

As might be expected, land assessments were used in the management of landed estates, both for general administration and the letting of land. In the absence of absolute measures, assessments gave an indication of arable capability which provided an idea of the comparative extent of farms and holdings. On a broad scale, for instance, there are abstract rentals of the earldom of Sutherland (1620s) mainly calculated in pennylands (NLS 175/85), and of the barony of Ferrintosh in the Black Isle drawn up under the heads of the ‘daughs’ of Mid Kinkell, Muckle Kinkell, Mulchaich, Dunvornie, and the half davoch of Alcaig (NLS 2971, f. 7–9). Yet individual holdings, essentially of arable but with proportional rights to pasture grounds, could also be reckoned in davochs and pennylands. This was so especially where shareholding tenure associated with the runrig system of intermixed arable strips was practised. Thus a rental of the Crown lands in Ross, as let in 1504, gives the tenants’ possessions in quarters and bovates, being fractions of davochs (*ER.* XII. 660–65). And on the Sutherland estate in 1724 (NLS 313/2133), the farm of Mellaig, parish of Golspie, extending to 6 pennylands, was possessed by:

James Sutherland	with	2¼ pennylands
Donald Sutherland	with	1½ pennylands
Hugh Macpherson	with	1¾ pennylands
Hector Munro	with	¾ pennylands

Rents and services were further dues that could be calculated on the basis of assessments. In 1637 the Balnagown baron court ordered ‘the oxgang sett lands in Invercharron cutt and cary to ye toune as support to the laird twelff cupil’ of timber (McGill 1909–11. II. nos. 1073, 1074). And during the eighteenth century it was still the custom on the Skelbo estate for each pennyland, no matter how possessed, to pay 10s. for peats and 3s. for conversion of other services. Additionally, until 1775, ‘each Penny Land is bound to shear an Acre of Corn’, which in practice meant providing seven hands for the laird’s harvest (SRO CS 235/G/30/1).

Other Land Assessments

There were other, later types of land assessment, however, apart from davochs and pennylands. A number of valuations for the purposes of

apportioning national taxation were made in pounds, shillings, and pence; also in merks, equivalent to 13s. 4d. These gave rise to poundlands, merklands, shillinglands and pennylands. These pennylands are quite different from the pennylands already mentioned; fortunately they are very rare.

The earliest such valuation, the *Old Extent*, an assessment restricted to lands holding directly of the Crown, is usually dated to the reign of Alexander III (1249–86). Thereafter, tax burdens were revised, ostensibly on account of the effects of war and devastation, and a major revaluation associated with the payment of David II's ransom was made in 1366. It revealed a fall in land values, which has been attributed both to wholesale deflation and, more plausibly, to a decline in population. The establishment of an entirely new assessment, which became known as the *New Extent*, is thought to date from 1474. The *Old Extent*, however, continued to be used as a basis for taxation up to 1667; and until 1832 one qualification for the vote was the possession of freehold land to the value of forty shillings old extent. These extents were based on the same land units as the davoch and pennyland assessments, and there are references to lands which combine different assessments such as the 4 merkland half davoch of Garve in Kintail (1509) (RMS. II. no. 3313). Church lands, on the other hand, were assessed according to valuations carried out by ecclesiastical authority, the most important being that known as *Bagimond's Roll* (1275) which, with modifications, continued to be the basis for the taxation of ecclesiastical revenues until the Reformation.

Another method, common in some east coast areas, was to reckon land according to the amount of grain required for sowing, thus 'a piece of land extending to 8 bolls' sowing of bere or thereby . . . lying in the south or west part of the town of Tayne' (1571) (McGill 1909–11. I. no. 406). Bolls' sowing was the usual measure, but smaller units, firlots and pecks, were used where necessary. The grain was always bere, rather than oats; the sowing of a boll of bere being 'something more than a Scotch acre' (Creich 1791: OSA). Land could also be reckoned by its rental value, however, especially in eastern districts, where a high proportion of rent was paid in victual rather than in money. A portion of the Mains of Braelangwell, parish of Resolis, was described as 'yt part Lying betuixt yet two Burns called Aldacharmich [Ballycherry?] and Duach [Allt Dubhach] which extends to ye yearly pay of Four Chalders farm victuall' (1728) (SRO RS 38/8, f. 379). Elsewhere, a land conveyance from the parish of Dornoch included an old pennyland assessment, a tenant's name, and the rental value — 'that pennyland of the Lands of Breamorton then possess by Marion Baxter Extending to Six Bolls of Rent yearly of Bear' (1728) (SRO RS 38/8, f. 368).

Such rentals are not necessarily the current value of the land. The valuations give no indication of other forms of rent payment and moreover the bolls' pay may represent a level of accounting which had been in use for a considerable period and achieved an almost customary status.

The measurement of land by area was mainly restricted to burghal properties, both plots and holdings of burgh lands. In some instances only

the length was specified, in others both length and breadth. Thus a piece of ground in Fortrose was described as extending to '13 Scots ells from north to south and 5 ells from west to east' (1728) (SRO RS 38/8, f. 377). From there it was only a short step to measurement by the Scots acre, equivalent to 1.26 Statute acres, and consisting of 4 roods, each rood being of 40 falls, and a fall containing 36 square ells. A grant of lands in the territory of Dingwall included a rood of land in Thombane and an acre in the field of Acris-Scotte (1526) (RMS. III. no. 38), while the countess of Seaforth's lands in Fortrose, 'bewest the Cross', extended to 4 roods, 'twixt Lands & Tenements' (1686) (SRO B 28/7/2, p. 109a). On occasion the acre was used as a loose term for a piece of land, in other words a superficial measure which in such instances should be regarded in the same light as riggs and butts — butts being truncated riggs. As ever, different measures may be found in combination, so that a possession in and about the burgh of Cromarty included 'Thre acres of land in the field called the Goosedeals . . . Five bols pay in the Shortbutts and pepperdeals . . . and The easter one half of the Ormandsheirs' (1710) (SRO RS 38/7, f. 384).

The demise of the davoch, the pennyland and other assessments, was linked to the agrarian changes which, though begun in the seventeenth century, were to culminate in the era of 'improvement'. These changes included reorganization of holdings, developments in land tenure, and the rise of the land surveyor.

DAVOCHS AND PENNYLANDS: DISTRIBUTION AND ORIGINS

The distribution of davochs has been mapped for the northern mainland [Fig. 10.1]. It is simply a map of all the references to davochs, and takes no account of the value of individual assessments. Although the evidence for some areas is very patchy, and the distribution therefore far from complete, it is reasonable to conclude that davochs extended over the whole of Ross and Cromarty, Sutherland and probably Caithness. The complementary distribution of pennylands [Fig. 10.2, for which the same considerations apply] consists of three main areas: Caithness and eastern Sutherland, where there is an almost complete cover, with the odd gap such as Freswick; north Sutherland, where there is extensive evidence for the existence of pennylands, but as the documentary sources are less satisfactory, it is difficult to discuss the pattern in detail; and lastly the west and central parts of Sutherland where there appears to be a genuine absence of pennylands. The overall distribution of pennylands is in accord with the mainland Scottish possessions of the earls of Orkney. It covers the ancient Pictish province of Cat, which included both Sutherland and Caithness. Norse settlement and political control extended south into Easter Ross and though the Norse frontier in this region was essentially a fluctuating one, the pennylands do suggest that the Dornoch Firth and the River Oykel may have been a boundary of more than temporary significance (see Crawford, in this volume).

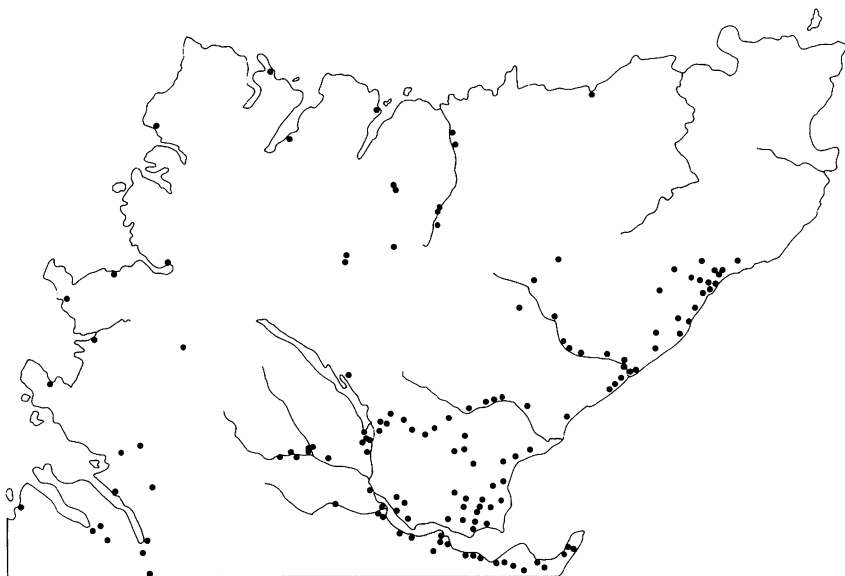


Fig. 10.1 Distribution of davochs: north mainland.

The pennylands of Sutherland and Caithness were not only based on the same land units as the davoch, but there is an exact relationship between the two assessments: a davoch being equivalent to 6 pennylands. There is direct evidence for this in a reference of 1575 to the davochs of 6 pennylands of Swordal, Migdale, Little Creich and Cuthil, in the parishes of Creich and Dornoch (*RMS*. v. no. 112). Furthermore there are numerous instances of other, independent evidence relating to the same lands. Lairg, for instance, was assessed at 18 pennylands (1623) (NLS 175/85), Wester and Easter Lairg each containing 9 pennylands. But Lairg was also known as the 3 davoch lands of Lairg (1611) (NLS 313/477, p. 284), 'Westir Larg' and 'Largestir' each being 1½ davoch lands (1510) (*ER*. XIII. p. 264). The two assessments were interchangeable, therefore, and are found in use side by side, though there was a tendency for them to be used separately in differing circumstances. So the Barony of Gruids, parish of Lairg, was known as 'the six daaches of Gruid' (1682), but the tenants' possessions were calculated in pennylands (NLS 175/85).

The pennyland system had no inherent advantages for the designation of small tenants' possessions, however, for the davoch could also be split up into small subdivisions. In the northern mainland, the davoch was composed of half davochs and quarters or quarterlands, in turn containing two oxgangs or oxganglands, also referred to as oxgates or bovates, which were further divided into four pecks. A davoch thus contained thirty-two pecks. In Culkenzie and Guillies, parish of Rosskeen, however, the peck was replaced by the sheaf, 'Compting twelve sheaves . . . in a quarter of the Davoch' (1721) (SRO RS 38/8, f. 62).

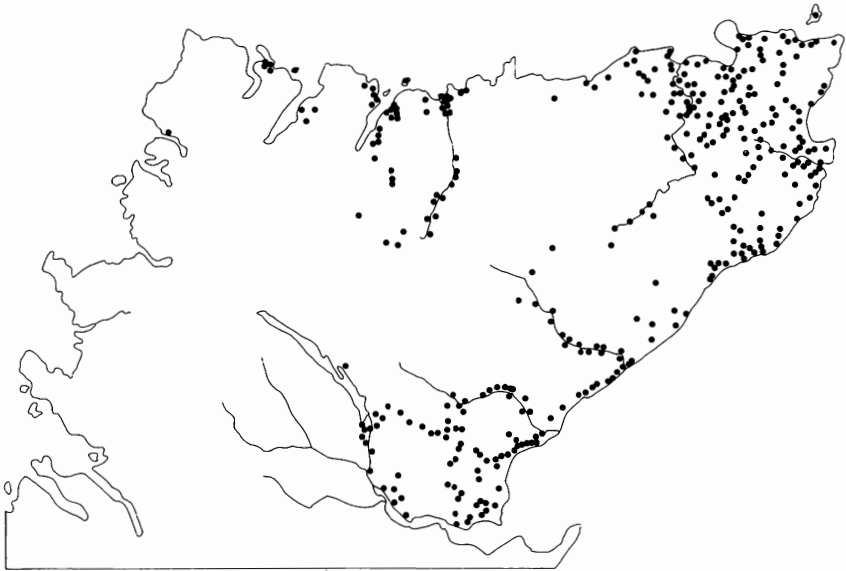


Fig. 10.2 Distribution of pennylands: north mainland.

Pennylands, by contrast, were subdivided into halfpennylands, farthinglands or fourths, and octos or eighths. Other, more awkward fractions, are to be found in sources such as estate rentals, but there were no two-pennyland units similar to the 'great' or 'double' pennylands of the Western Isles; nor has any evidence been found for the use of Gaelic terminology.

The term *davoch* is derived from *dabhach*, an Old Irish word meaning a large tub or vat. As a land assessment it was a measure of arable land, an application which may have originated in its use as a measure of tribute corn, or less probably of seed corn. The emphasis on arable land is confirmed by the overall distribution of *davochs* in the northern Highlands, with the contrast between the low assessments of the west and central areas where the cultivable ground is both poor and limited in extent, and the much higher assessments of the more fertile eastern straths and coastal areas.

Davochs and pennylands were measures of the productive capacity of the land so that there can be no basis for assuming precise and standard sizes. At the same time, it is reasonable to expect a range of acreages around which these assessments might vary. There are suggestions from a number of areas for a pennyland of 8 Scots acres, although there is also evidence for pennylands of around 12 acres, or ranging from 12 to 18 acres. Pennylands of 8 or 12 acres, therefore, would give *davochs* of from 48 to 72 acres. The *oxgang*, however, of which there were 8 in a *davoch*, is generally assumed to be 13 acres, which would produce a *davoch* of 104 acres, equivalent to a lowland carucate or ploughgate. Some *davochs*,

though, appear to have been considerably larger than this, and should be seen perhaps in the light of evidence from north-east Scotland, where land colonisation in the late medieval period doubled their size (see e.g. the *Scottish National Dictionary* for different sizes and sub-divisions of davochs: Ed.).

Questions of size lead to problems of origins, and it is here that one is on very difficult ground. The pennyland, from its areas of occurrence in the Northern Isles, northern mainland, Hebrides and western mainland and south-west Scotland, is generally assumed to be a fiscal assessment of Norse origin. The davoch, on the other hand, has been given a Pictish association, which would make it the earlier assessment, and the basis for the pennyland assessment. In areas such as much of Caithness, however, davochs have been completely replaced by Norse pennylands.

No *ouncelands* (ON. *eyrisland*, the assessment associated with the Norse naval defence system) have been found for Sutherland, but the few from Caithness appear to be the same as the Orkney *ouncelands* of 18 pennylands. On the strength of this, and given that 1 davoch equals 6 pennylands in the north mainland, it must be asked whether the Orkney *ouncelands* are not in fact equivalent to 3 davochs, rather than to single davochs, as is usually stated.

The 20 pennyland *ouncelands* of the Western Isles are a further complication, apparently equivalent to davochs, but owing their structure, it has been argued, if not their origin, to the Dalriadan 20 house unit. Full elucidation of these early land assessments is still a long way off.

LAND ASSESSMENTS AND SETTLEMENT HISTORY

Reconstructing the pattern of assessments

The study of land assessments and settlement history must begin with a consideration of the problems involved in reconstructing the original pattern of assessments. Some assessments are clearly missing; they have not found their way into the documentary record and are now lost. Errors have also crept into the record, which once acquired have tended to remain; and many references to assessments are difficult to interpret. Early charters, for instance, frequently relate to quite extensive areas, comprising what must have been a number of different land units. The converse, where land had been divided up, perhaps through inheritance, can also be a problem, for the assessments have to be reconstituted. Some settlements have disappeared entirely: land has been eroded by the sea, inundated by blowing sands, devastated by spating rivers, or left uncultivated. On the other hand there has been a considerable amount of colonisation, by the breaking in of new land. But in none of these cases have assessments been materially affected. Expansion of the arable area was not marked by higher assessments; rather was such land incorporated into existing assessments so that in the long term the acreages corresponding to particular assessments tended to rise. There is though, no evidence to support the idea that the infield/outfield system originally corresponded to assessed/non-assessed land. Where infield/outfield

existed in the northern Highlands, and that was only in the more fertile 'lowland' areas, the outfield was considered a part of the assessed land.

There were, however, areas which, while they cannot strictly be considered as non-assessed land, were often treated apart from the assessed land. 'Crofts', as small discrete patches of land held individually, being often associated with mills, alehouses or specialist craftsmen were sometimes excluded as they did not form part of the common arable. Lothbeg, for instance, consisted of 'Fifteen penny land, a miln and two crofts' (NLS 213/2113). Of course crofts did not necessarily have a permanent identity; in time they might become part of the general arable, and perhaps be commemorated in a field-name. 'Wards' and 'loans' were also sometimes considered as non-assessed land. In the 'Bischopis-warder' in Dornoch (1627) (*RMS*. VIII. no. 1045), the term ward probably referred to a piece of enclosed ground; more frequently it was interchangeable with loan, in the sense that both referred to land which, while maybe enclosed, was essentially 'improved', either for pasture or for cultivation. Loans were generally on the wetter ground, a meaning derived from the Gaelic *lòn*, a marsh or bog. Wards and loans are mostly confined to the historical record, as for instance the 'Lands of Craggan & Inver ... with the new ward of the samen', parish of Alness (1728) (SRO RS 38/8, f. 388), but some have survived as place-names. The Loans of Rarichie, parish of Nigg, and the Loans of Tullich, parish of Fearn, are both on low-lying ground which has been well-drained. Occasionally such reclamation is well-documented, as for the 'loan called Loanmore' of Ospisdale, parish of Creich. Between 1755 and 1775, Robert Gray of Airdens reduced some 25 acres of what had been 'an useless spot partly a Bog or Ougmire and partly a useless Moss and partly covered with bushes' to arable and grass grounds for hay and pasture, in what must have been a 'very expensive and laborious work twixt rooting of wood, ditching & sunk drains' (SRO CS 235/G/30/1).

A very important point is that the relationship between assessments and their actual layout on the ground was not always straightforward. Where land was held in consolidated units assessments generally refer to compact blocks of land; but under runrig or shareholding an assessment might well be made up of intermixed strips, whether held by a landlord (proprietary runrig) or, more commonly, by a multiple tenant (tenant runrig). An example of proprietary runrig is provided by a disposition by Alexander Ross of Pitkerrie (1712) of the 'Just and equall half of the toune and lands of Leachclovag Salachie and Clashnamuck & Kinletter', comprising the davoch of Gledfield, parish of Kincardine, possessed by him and his 'tenants and Servants in Comune with William Ross of Aldie heritable proprietor of the other half' (SRO GD 274/7/22).

Land Units and Settlement History

With these considerations in mind, it is now possible to proceed to an examination of the internal structure of land assessments.

Some subdivisions are referred to without any indication of their status, so much so that they appear to be the whole land unit rather than merely a subdivision. Frequently, however, subdivisions are identified by designations, as for instance the 'laich' and the 'over' or 'upper' quarters of Rogie, parish of Fodderty (1695) (SRO RS 38/6, f. 43), or the 'easter' and 'wester' quarters of the half davoch of Pelaig, parish of Kiltearn (1719) (SRO RS 38/8, f. 2). It is also common for quarters and like subdivisions to have actual names: Nigg contained a quarter called Culnald and an oxgate called 'The Torran', otherwise to be referred to by the names of their present possessor or past occupier (SRO RS 38/8, f. 333); the davoch of 'Mid Cunlich', parish of Rosskeen, included 'three half oxgang lands called Clanhendricks Lands' (1684) (SRO RS 38/6, f. 105).

There is considerable evidence to suggest a distinction between the 'highland' areas, where arable tended to be limited to small isolated patches and assessments frequently comprised a number of quite separate parts, and the more fertile areas where large blocks of arable land gave rise to more compact assessments. All assessments, however, appear to have possessed some form of internal structure, sometimes quite complex. 'Lowland' assessments comprised several separate though perhaps contiguous units; it is merely that in the 'highland' areas, especially where landholdings were smaller, such structure is more evident. Knockarthur, parish of Rogart, was described in 1787 as 'twelve pennys land which go under the several separate names and possessions of Achork 1 pennyland, Tanachy 1, Rhilochan 1, Dalreoch 1, Shunvail 2, Inchomry 3, Achuvoan 1/2, Achogeil 1/2, and Breakacky 2 — an example of a 12 pennyland, or 2 davoch, land unit subdivided into four 3-pennylands, or half davochs (NLS 313/81, *Decreet of Sale ... Skelbo ... 1787*). A more 'lowland' example is provided by Meikle Clyne which in 1712 comprehended 2 quarterlands called 'Calleachdu' and 'Rinmore', 3 oxgangs *two viis* otherwise called 'Lie Droman', 'Laite and Belnagvie', the 2 half oxgangs of 'Paapanoch and Badenags' and the pendicle of 'Leadnacarn' (SRO RS 38/8, f. 109).

Where it is possible to discover the full internal structure of assessments, it is clear that they are closely adjusted to the physical capability of the ground and the pattern of landholding. Yet the relationship between land assessments and actual settlement is not so straightforward, and just how complicated is well demonstrated by estate plans which survive from the pre-improvement era. Most importantly, the settlement pattern derives from the structure of landholdings. At the extremes, there is a great contrast between the large farm, held by an individual and comprising farmhouse and perhaps labourers' cottages, set against the multitude of small tenants who might live in several townships with associated cottar settlements.

A further consideration is that the limits to settlement have not remained constant. It is probable that there was a significant amount of colonization during the medieval period, but evidence from elsewhere suggests that rather than a continuous upward trend, there have been

marked phases of colonization. Indeed the margins of settlement may have fluctuated. Even in the late eighteenth century the taking-in of new land could be a risk, as witness the fate of some fields on the farm of Morvich in Strathfleet, 'Formerly improved now waste' (NLS 313/3616). The fact that land does not appear to have been reassessed in response to colonization, means that assessments can account for neither the enlargement of existing settlements nor for when part of the assessed land of one settlement becomes the focus of a new settlement. Moreover, settlements frequently 'split' into two, or sometimes three or more subdivisions, reflecting the need for smaller, more manageable runrig units. One cannot ignore, therefore, the variability and dynamism of past settlement. Individual settlements might expand, divide, contract, disappear or even shift about. Land assessments can only give a broad impression of actual settlement.

The internal structure of assessments nonetheless supports the view that settlement was much more extensive than the charter evidence, for instance, suggests. The names which occur in many charters are not, as the assessments remind us, those of settlements, but rather of land units which include both major and minor settlements. The latter, being dependent or satellite settlements, often referred to as 'pendicles', only attained independent status at a comparatively late date. As for Domesday England, the fact that such settlements do not feature in the documentary record is not evidence for their non-existence at such an early period, but rather that they were 'hidden' within larger land units. This is confirmed by those assessments, mainly from the more upland areas, which are not named after any settlement, being instead the names of land units or territories containing a number of settlements. Just how early such settlements are is a different question, to be explored jointly with archaeology. It may be concluded, however, that the evidence of land assessments points to a well-developed and extensive settlement pattern in the northern Highlands, certainly by the early medieval period, if not considerably earlier.

Broadscale fluctuations in the margins of settlement appear, then, to have taken place within the framework provided by the pre-existing pattern of land units, as identified by the land assessments. More profound changes in the settlement pattern on the other hand, came with the integration of the northern Highlands into the national economy between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. The introduction of commercial agriculture brought a certain amount of settlement contraction. But while sheep farming was associated with the clearance of whole areas, the creation of large arable farms, as in Easter Ross and on the eastern coast of Sutherland, was accompanied by a much greater degree of settlement continuity. For, although many of the smaller settlements disappeared, the new farmsteads tended to be situated on the older and more favoured sites. At the same time, the availability both of non-agricultural sources of income and of areas for colonization such as the Dornoch Moors and on the Black Isle, encouraged landlords to retain their small tenant population on the more marginal land (see Houston, in this volume).

Territorial Organization

A particularly interesting aspect to emerge from the study of land assessments is the evidence for early territorial organization — in essence the defining of large land units by the grouping together of a number of assessments, perhaps two to six or more davochs or an equivalent number of pennylands. So there are the four davochs of Rarichies, parish of Nigg (1333) (SRO GD 297/165), or the six davochs of Rovie in Strathfleet (1364) (RRS, VI, no. 320). There is no apparent regularity in the size of such units, but there is no doubting their cohesion, evidenced not only by the ties between central settlements and their dependencies, but also by the links between settlements and grazings. Strathoykel, with its pattern of major settlements in the lower strath and smaller dependent settlements and grazings in the upper reaches, identifiable in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is particularly illuminating. These territories were not only the basis for settlement organization, of course; they were also the units of lordship, from which the inhabitants rendered rents and services to the landlord at his castle or hall.

Discounting a certain amount of fragmentation and re-arrangement, there is no doubt that such territories are quite ancient. Indeed the pattern of land units (although not necessarily of land ownership) may well show a much greater degree of continuity than actual settlement, many of the earlier parishes appearing to have been based on the pre-existing territorial organization. But just how ancient this organization is in the northern Highlands is highly speculative. The appearance of defensive structures during the first millennium BC, suggesting a markedly stratified society with a largely service population, may not be irrelevant!

A Case Study: Golspie

The pennyland assessment for the parish of Golspie, in Sutherland [Fig. 10.3] has been derived from estate rentals, particularly that of 1623 (NLS 175/85); with the possible exception of Little Ferry it gives a complete cover. The very regular pattern of pennylands is clearly demonstrated, with such references to 'a davach of Bakys' (1471) (*OPS*. II pt. 2. p. 673) and the two davochs of 'Cragtoun' (1509) (*ER*. XIII. p. 264) providing an exact match with the davoch assessment.

The map gives a good picture of the layout of the various lands. Hints as to the existence of larger units are provided by Culmaily and by Golspie itself, both interestingly associated with the name of the parish, known formerly as Culmaily. The lands of Culmaily, while 'extending to thrie davach of land' (1577) (NLS 313/213/166), are known to have included the six pennylands of 'Sallach' or 'Sallichtown', possibly Rhiorn, as well as the nine pennylands of Culmaily itself. Golspie comprised the Tower, Golspie Mor, Kirkton, and possibly other lands (NLS 313/2101, 2111, *Plans of Golspie*). The three pennylands of Golspie Kirkton (Clynekirkton was also three pennylands) were probably a late subdivision in much the

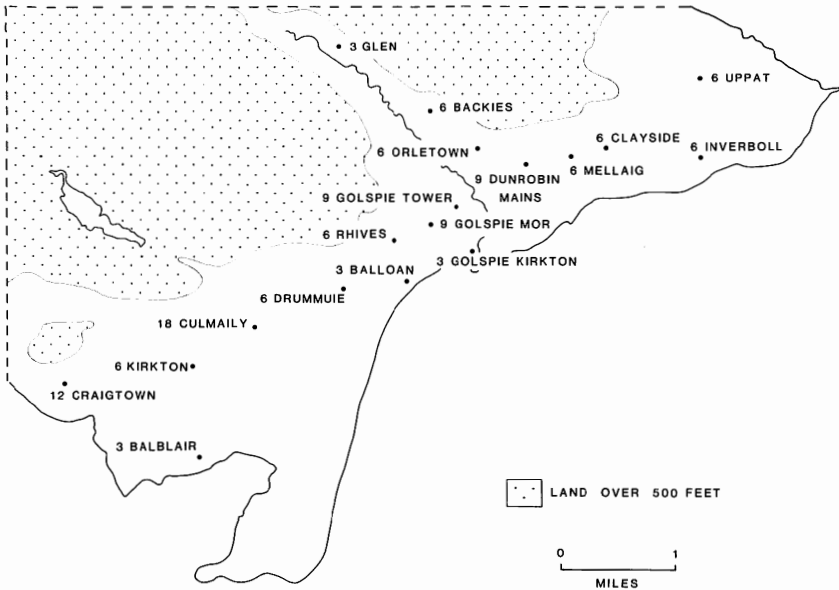


Fig. 10.3 Land assessments from estate rentals, parish of Golspie. Unit size is given in pennylands.

same way that, of the twelve pennylands of Kildonan, 'thair are thrie pennie land assignit to the minister for his gleib' (NLS 313/85).

A number of other important settlement features occur. Inverboll, referred to as 'Innerbo Heiche and Laiche' in 1563, indicating a split settlement, is found later as a single township (RSS. v. no. 1463). There is also the usual development of small crofts, which were considered as non-assessed land; the inevitable alehouse crofts, but appropriately a gunsmith's croft near to Dunrobin (NLS 313/2101). Farlary, a pendicle of Uppat, was a small settlement which only achieved a separate tenurial existence at a quite late date, but was probably first colonized at a much earlier period (NLS 313/225/242; 313/2101). By contrast, a number of settlements disappeared in the expansion of the Dunrobin policies. In 1735 a part of Orletown, or Allertown, was 'inclosed in the park under my Lords cows', and another part was 'now laboured by my Lord being enclosed in the new parks' (NLS 313/2133). By 1750 Orletown was effectively within the Mains and by the end of the century Mellaig, Clayside, and Inverboll had all been absorbed. Finally there are the changes associated with the major period of estate improvement which were to make an even stronger break with the pattern of land units associated with the early assessments; the small tenant settlement behind Backies, the establishment of Golspie village, and the creation of the large arable farms at Rhives, Drummuie, Culmaily, and Kirkton (NLS 313/2111, 2133; Adam 1972).

A Case Study: Meikle Allan

The davoch of Meikle Allan, parish of Fearn, was broadly coincident with the present-day farms of Allan and Clays of Allan: all that has taken place is some straightening of marches in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (SRO RHP 219, 239, 20000/247). In the more distant past, however, Meikle Allan and Little Allan formed a single unit of the two davochs of Allan (*OPS.* II pt. 2. 445–46; *RMS.* XI. no. 97). Meikle Allan comprised the west quarter of Wester Allan or Balinroich and the eastern three-quarters of Knocks or the Hill quarter (*Kerrownaknock*); also the south or Summerwell quarter (*Kerrow-tobber-hawrie*) and the Clay quarter (GD 71/79, 80, 95, 100(1), 101, 132, 143(6), 267; GD 128/16/5/7). The disposition of the quarters is in part a reflection of the local topography. The Hill quarter is presumably named after the rising ground on which Allan is situated, the Summerwell appears to be a well to the east, while the Clay quarter occupied the lower ground. However, the particular landholding history of Allan is also an essential factor, for while Balinroich does lie on the west of Allan, it was also for some considerable period of time under separate ownership and a settlement in its own right (SRO RHP 239; Watson 1924. 43). It may be noted in passing just how many *baile-* names, being actual settlements and the subdivisions of land units, had quite small assessments.

A mid-eighteenth century survey of Allan indicates the manner in which the arable fields were allocated between the various quarters (SRO GD 71/82). Not surprisingly Balinroich formed a single unit; but the Hill and Summerwell quarters, while generally comprising fields of their own, also shared a number of fields in runrig. At the same time the Clay quarter was divided into two halves, the oxgate of the Clay (or half Clay) and Feagolich (SRO GD 71/76, 95, 119, 182). These two halves also shared a few fields between them. Thus although the ‘easter three oxgangs’ (1623) (SRO GD 71/34) or the ‘just and equal half, of the three easter quarters’ (1737) (SRO GD 71/156) may well have comprised three compact blocks of arable, there may have been an element of runrig in their disposition.

The quarters did not necessarily include, however, all the arable land of Meikle Allan, as a reference to the ‘quarter of Knocks and Tailyore Croft’ confirms (1671) (SRO GD 71/75). The croft was probably at one time an individual holding, but by the mid-eighteenth century it had become a part of the general arable. More important were the areas on the lower ground, prone to wetness and known as the wards or loans; they were evidently considered to be distinct appendages. Thus ‘the Clay quarter with the wards of the same’ (1692) (SRO GD 71/101).

The field-names that have survived present a fascinating mixture of Gaelic and Scots: ‘Knockmeidan’, ‘Bardinordish’, ‘Achnacoill’; ‘The Hen Croft’, ‘Thistle Field’, ‘The Clay Riggs’. Sometimes both forms are given, as ‘Crooked Riggs or Cromghales’. Some are plain descriptions of natural features; others incorporating terms such as ‘rigg’, ‘field’ or ‘croft’ — the latter frequently associated with a former possessor, for instance ‘Andrew Roys Croft’ (SRO GD 71/182).

Of the actual settlements, Allan, Balinroich and Feagolich occupied the higher ground formed by a tongue of glacial drift. The lower ground was probably settled later; indeed some of it at a comparatively late date. Much is underlain by raised beach deposits whose present productivity is largely the result of artificial drainage, a process which had begun by the mid-eighteenth century with the cutting of the new canal and a number of major drains. The other settlements (1756) appear more as individual houses, reflecting what was probably piecemeal colonization; later (1786) they were grouped together under place-names such as Groam, Bardcroich and Bard Fearn. These names, which were clearly former field-names, eventually disappeared with farm amalgamation (SRO GD 71/217; RHP 239).

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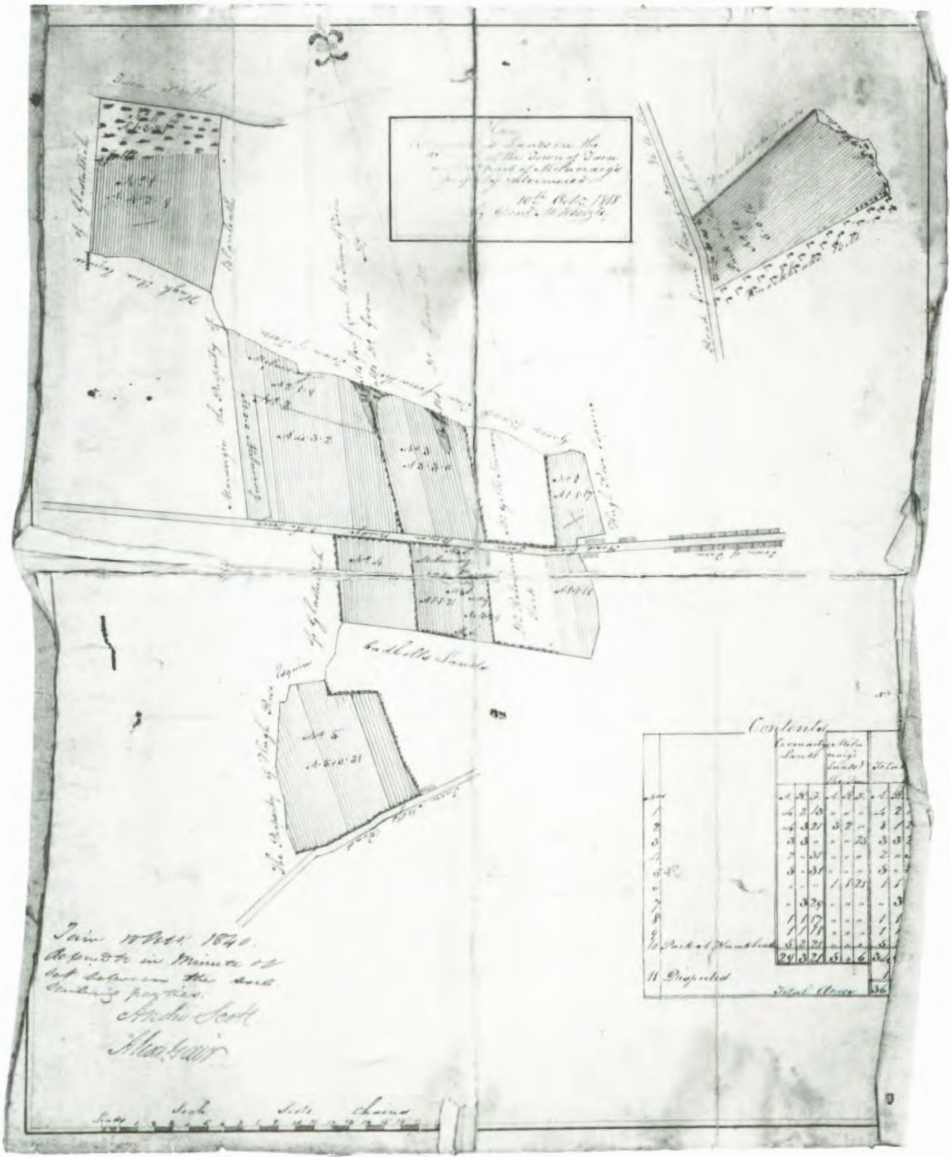
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Given 10th Oct 1898.
 Attest in presence of
 the following witnesses
 and the parties.
 Arthur Scott
 Sheriff

See also the other sheets