

## CROFTING AND FARMING IN STRATHY AND ARMADALE

### WHAT IS "CROFTING" ?

Crofting as a way of using land is unique to the Scottish Highlands. Crofters hold their land as tenants of an Estate and pay rent annually. However they have the right to pass their land on to their heirs; and, should they wish, to buy the land for a set figure.

Besides possessing a house and the fields of their own croft, all tenants share in the Common Grazing and manage their affairs through a Grazings Committee. Crofters also have rights to cut peat for fuel from the hill-lands of their Estate.

The right to shoot deer or fish for salmon, however, with the rights to any minerals, still belong to the owners of the estate.

Crofters have rarely been entirely dependent on their land for their living. When the Estates allocated 'allotments' to their tenants around 1800, the portions were made deliberately small. Claiming to wish to encourage in their tenants the virtues of hard work, the owners reserved most of the land for their flocks of sheep. Crofts were laid out at the coast, to encourage their families to meet their needs by fishing.

In modern times, working a croft has been additional to working at ~~the croft~~ the local council, or to supplement a pension

A modern historian of crofting has written:

"The crofter is entitled to respect, not as a quaint anachronism who lives closer to Nature's bosom than the rest of us, but as one of that large majority of mankind which, in the face of immense difficulties, still wins a part of its living by its own efforts from the land."

Dr James Hunter

MAP SHOWING ARMADALE, LEDNACULLIN, AULTPHERST AND BRAWL:  
distinguishing  
crofts, common grazing, hill and farm land.

Please note that, apart from roads and footpaths, all our hill-land is used for the grazing of sheep. Dogs must be kept on the lead.

Please respect our community and its living, working environment and leave

### ARMADALE FARM

Between 1790 and 1913, an Edinburgh lawyer, William Honeyman, cleared the Armadale hinterland of the families there and brought Cheviot sheep north with shepherds from Northumberland and the Borders. The sheep flourished here.

After the First World War, the UK government purchased the Strathy Estate, and made the farm lands of Armadale available to the crofters.

After a generation, however, the Farm was sold, and is now again a working sheep farm - one of the very few in north Sutherland.

The rest of the Strathy Estate, apart from land sold for forestry, is still owned by the Department of Agriculture.

WELCOME TO STRATHY 1

STRATHY AND ARMADALE

The people known as 'Picts' lived here at the beginning of known history. Then came the age of the Norse viking earls in Orkney and Gairness [c.900-1250 a.d.] but it is Gaelic and not Norse place-names that still dominate our maps. From c.1400-c.1800 local power belonged to the Clan Mackay, whose lands included Tongue, Strathy and Strath Halladale. Mackay is today the leading name of north Sutherland.

crest of  
Clan Mackay

Apart from roads and footpaths, all our hill-land is in agricultural use for the grazing of sheep and cattle.

When walking, please observe the simple rules of courtesy.  
Please use and shut behind you the gates.  
Keep dogs on the lead.

This landscape has also been formed by man. Thesecrofting townships were settled by families driven from the upper Strathy and Strathnaver at the e Clearances. On Strathy Point, the coves and harbours from which the first crofters fished can still be found.

MAP OF STRATHY AND ARMADALE,  
showing footpaths,  
roads,  
places of interest

WHAT IS THERE TO DO . . . . TO SEE ?

Our beaches are among the finest in the north and are well worth a visit. The cliffs at the east end of Strathy Beach contain "Captain Ivy's Cave", of which various tales speak.

For the enthusiast, south of Strathy Forest lies Strathy Bog, part of the peatlands called the "Flow Country" and designated as a National Nature Reserve.

According to the time of year, Strathy's dunes are a garden to wild flowers. You may be fortunate to spot "Prinula Scotica".

Walkers will enjoy the quiet beauty of our land and appreciate its long history

Strathy and Armadale are quiet, peaceful townships. You are welcome to walk and explore here; but please leave our land as you find it and respect the privacy of those who live here.

It is against the law to take away cut peats or to remove wild plants and flowers.

This plaque has been sponsored by the Strathy and Armadale Community Council, supported by the Highland Region and Gairness and Sutherland Enterprise.

## STRATHY AND THE CLEARANCES

### STRATHY before 1800

Before 1800, the valley of the River Strathy looked very different from today. These were the lands of Captain John Mackay of Strathy.

Mackay's Strathy was laid out like other landed estates. It had a walled garden for growing vegetables, a dovecot, a mill, a home farm called "Strathy Mains" and the laird's residence: Strathy Bighouse, here at the mouth of the river.

The people of the estate, Mackay's clansmen and tenants, lived on crofts of land the length of the Strathy in a series of townships - Daltine, Bowside, Dalangwell, Braerathy.

The rocky coast was mainly uninhabited.

A traveller in 1760 wrote of Strathy.

"We came to a most charming vale between the bogs called Strathy Bay. It belongs to Captain Mackay of the Sutherland Regiment. Here is a good house and offices. This is a fine country situated between the foil of black bogs that hang over it."

map of the Strathy Estate  
showing Armadale.

### STRATHY AS IT IS TODAY

By 1815, those managing Strathy had extended Armadale Sheep Farm over into the upper Strathy.

map of Strathy  
showing  
old settlements

The families living there were cleared to the coast, to Strathy Point, Ballygill, Brawl, Aultiphurst, where they joined families also cleared from Strathnaver.

Strathy Bighouse fell into disrepair. The Mains was divided into crofts - Strathy East and Strathy West as we see them today were laid out in "allotments" or crofts by 1855.

### Armadale Sheep Farm

In 1790 Mackay of Strathy sold his estate to an Edinburgh lawyer, William Honeyman. As a judge of the Court of Session, Honeyman took the title "Lord Armadale of Strathy".

Honeyman was the first to introduce the Cheviot sheep to north Sutherland. He cleared Armadale of its tenants, moving them to the current village, and leased the land to sheepfarmers from Northumberland, greatly increasing the value of his estate.

Continuing a policy of "improving" his estates, the Marquis took advantage of government funds celebrating victory over Napoleon's France to have a new church built for the Strathy crofters. The minister's Manse was sited in the old walled garden.

The Church was designed by the famous architect Thomas Telford.

picture of Telford's  
Church.

In 1815, Honeyman sold the Strathy estate to the Marquis of Stafford, who was then the Countess of Sutherland.

ASS. DOCS

## THE STRATHY STONE

The Strathy Priest-Stone probably marks a grave and may date from 600-700 a.d.

After the foundation of the Abbey of Iona by Columba and his Irish monks, other missionary priests travelled the Highlands. This primitively carved stone is reminiscent of pre-Christian Pictish symbols and is thus thought to date from the early Christian era.

Beside this plaque a copy of the Stone is to be found. The original still lies peacefully in the hill above us. Please respect its tranquility as a grave site, and admire the courage of those who lived and travelled here on foot or by sea in the past.