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*Published in:*  
Rural History

*Publication date:*  
2016

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*Citation for published version (APA):*

Worthington, D. (2016). Ferries in the Firthlands: Communications, Society and Culture Along a Northern Scottish Rural Coast (c.1600- c.1809). *Rural History*, 27(2), 129-148.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0956793316000017>

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## **Ferries in the Firthlands: Communications, Society and Culture along a Northern Scottish Rural Coast, c. 1600 to c. 1809**

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**Abstract:** This article identifies the social and cultural history of the early modern tidal water ferry, its skippers and passengers, by way of evidence from a northern Scottish rural coast. Evidence from the region's 'firthlands' reveals an amphibious communications network which transformed gradually prior to the early nineteenth century. The article argues that the defining local topography of coastal adjacency both influenced, and was influenced by, the people who lived their lives within and around the littoral. A system of short range communications over and between the estuaries and firths is highlighted from a Coastal History perspective, leading to the examination of a 'pluriactive' microhistorical space, linking south-east Sutherland, the eastern edges of Easter Ross and the Black Isle and the Nairnshire seaboard. The article thereby opens up possibilities for comparison with other peoples, places and periods, in which being 'alongshore' was integral to rural community construction, coalescence, dynamism and friction.

### **Introduction**

On 16<sup>th</sup> August 1809, ninety-nine people perished in northern Scotland in what is perhaps the worst ferry disaster ever to have afflicted the country. A majority of those who drowned on the Meikle Ferry crossing that day were women and girls and came from within a few miles of the coast of the region of south-east Sutherland. Some had been traversing their nearest 'arm of the sea', the Dornoch Firth, to the adjacent burgh of Tain to deposit their and their

family's precious savings, others to trade or enjoy the harvest ('Lammas') fair there, a few with the aim of moving over further stretches of land and saltwater.<sup>1</sup> The immense response of the Meikle Ferry Relief Fund, set up to deal with the tragedy, indicates the depth of mourning and the scale of the loss. Donations came from contributors in: Caithness, east Sutherland, Easter Ross, the Black Isle, Inverness, Moray, other parts of Scotland, London, as well as the diasporic communities of Bengal, Goa, Grenada, and the Cape of Good Hope.<sup>2</sup> The Meikle Ferry continued to operate, and the local, coastal setting even took on new resonance and dissonance after 1809. This article will argue, however, that the tragedy, along with a series of events which occurred within a few years on either side of it, marked the eclipse of what had been, for several centuries, a littoral community. The process has parallels in several other early modern populations along urban and rural coasts. In the case to be analysed here, this was a bilingual (Gaelic and Scots) locale, in which people coalesced not only for trade but also for social, cultural, religious and environmental reasons within a space encompassing the coast of south-east Sutherland, the Easter Ross and Black Isle peninsulas, and the Nairnshire seaboard of the ancient province of Moray.<sup>3</sup>

The Meikle Ferry disaster coincides with the beginning of one of the darkest and most convulsive episodes in modern Scottish history: the Sutherland Clearances. Highland history in general, and Sutherland history in particular, is overshadowed by events and memories of 'Improvers' evicting people from inland valleys (straths or glens), forcing them into unfavourable coastal settings and a precarious and alien life of deep sea fishing, followed by emigration. There are good reasons why historians have presented these events in terms of a dichotomy between a strongly 'Lowland' Moray and an exclusively 'Highland' Sutherland.<sup>4</sup> As the notorious figure of Patrick Sellar set off on the new, weekly 'packet boat' from Burghead to Dunrobin, in the same year as the Meikle Ferry disaster, he conveyed an impression of his destination as a '*terra incognita*'.<sup>5</sup> His words reveal the chasm he

considered to exist between the two locations, and neither this expression nor his subsequent actions suggest any sense of shared community. However, there exists a tension here in that Sellar's point of embarkation, Moray, was partly Gaelic, and his new workplace, south-east Sutherland, partially Scots. The fringe to which he was arriving, which can be seen clearly across the water from Burghead on even remotely clear days, was, by extension, sometimes considered by its own residents as distinct, socially and culturally, from the Sutherland interior.<sup>6</sup> This article will argue that, although the east Sutherland littoral was the initial location to which many of the cleared populations from Kildonan and other glens were forced in the 1810s, it had previously been the home of a viable community with strong ties to both south and east.

South-east Sutherland comprises a part of the 'Firthlands of Ross and Sutherland'.<sup>7</sup> This is a region with one tidal inlet, Loch Fleet, and three further major bodies of saltwater: the Dornoch Firth, the Cromarty Firth and the Inner Moray Firth (incorporating the Inverness, Kessock or Beaully Firths). Their landed edges have been compressed almost together at times to create indented, looping and so, at times, adjacent shores, beaches and firth-side settlements. Three protrusions or peninsulas dominate the easternmost edge, around Dornoch, Easter Ross and the Black Isle. Consequently, the coast is, in its entirety, several times its twenty-four mile, north-to-south length 'as the crow flies'. To its west, there lies a very different, upland terrain, while, to the east, the open sea represented a more challenging environment for everyday communications.<sup>8</sup>

Although coastal transport took centre stage in this setting, historians have underestimated its significance.<sup>9</sup> Works at the national level by Weir and, more recently, Veitch and Gordon, show that ferries retained and even enhanced their position as 'an integral part' of communications in these spaces during the early modern period.<sup>10</sup> This historiography has outlined vital information on government policy, proprietors, fares,

skippers, and shoreside inns, although it has not yet fully explained either how ferries could knit together a broader littoral society, or how these ‘alongshore’ communities can be placed, productively, within an international context. Such a wider perspective might offer not only a contribution to Scottish History but also a route towards establishing, following Isaac Land, a ‘New Coastal History’, founded on social, cultural and environmental approaches.<sup>11</sup>

Amphibious coastal transport has, in many locations, been ‘something so normal that it is barely mentioned’.<sup>12</sup> Tragic accidents aside, it developed in Europe and North America in particular as part of a communications network which changed and adapted by means of ‘transformation’ rather than being suddenly abandoned through ‘revolution’ as has been assumed.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the primacy of coastal ferries has been highlighted in studies of several early modern strait, bay, gulf and estuary settings, especially in port cities such as Istanbul, Venice, Amsterdam and London.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, primary sources relating to the littoral bargemen, boatmen, and, less frequently, boatwomen, to whom so many passengers entrusted their time, faith and capital, have been examined along rural as well as urban coasts, in relation to estuary and inlet environments in British North America, India and Japan.<sup>15</sup>

By employing a combination of church records, government sources, maps and plans, family and estate papers, surveys and travel accounts, this article will offer a microhistorical study of an amphibious, rural, early modern communications matrix.<sup>16</sup> It will show how the system operated, who used it and why. Key starting points towards comprehending the ferry routes in the firthlands are that: they numbered at least seventeen; they reduced the length of journeys between either end of the region by half; they avoided more challenging paths if one assumes the nearest overland route; they were each, potentially, crossings of no more than a mile’s length. In this largely non-urban, coastal environment, a network operated until the early nineteenth century that advanced according to local conditions and experienced gradual transformation. This network, and the littoral

world it influenced, helped develop and depended upon, only began to fade from public consciousness in the years from 1809.

**‘Signals or Smokes’: the practicalities of firthland transportation**

There is evidence of complaints about the quality of the firthland ferries from before the 1770s, as well as requests for better roads and bridges to interconnect or even span them. However, no suggestion is found of any alternative to the entire communications infrastructure aboard, around or ‘betwixt’ the vessels.<sup>17</sup> Merchants, soldiers, ministers, ordinary men, women, children, and, increasingly, tourists, moved as a matter of course through this ‘maritime cultural landscape’, to borrow from Westerdahl’s account of short-range marine transport and Waley’s analysis of early modern Japan.<sup>18</sup> In order to convey the system’s import, it is essential to explore the basics of how it operated over time.<sup>19</sup>



Figure 1. Robert Gordon and Joan Blaeu, *Extima Scotiae septentrionalis ora, ubi Provinciae sunt Rossia, Sutherlandia, Cathenesia, Strath-Naverniae, cum vicinis regiunculis quae eis subsunt, etiamque Moravia / R. Gordonius à Strath-loch collegit et descripsit* (Amsterdam, 1654) <http://maps.nls.uk/atlas/blaeu/page.cfm?id=89>. Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland.

The ferry routes in the firthlands during the period from c. 1600 to 1809 can be seen in Figure 2.<sup>20</sup> There were common elements to the experience as one moved through the area. Clearly, for many travellers, it would be a mistake to see the crossings as one of single

instance or simple return journeys. Instead, frequently, they were part of a longer, staged period of transit or even a temporary migration process that took people in two or more steps across the peninsulas. This comprised a regular, recognised itinerary which both simplified the terrain and halved the distance with respect to travel between Little Ferry and Ardersier. Moreover, for those seeking to go further north or south within the wider 'Moray Firth' arena, it had the advantage of greater frequency and reliability than open sea crossings.





Figure 2. Ferries in the Firthlands, c. 1600 to c. 1809. Contains OS data © Crown copyright 2016.

Navigation through the network, end-to-end, could still involve upwards of a day of travel. For this reason, sustenance, and, in many cases, rest and accommodation, had to be found en route. Architectural and documentary evidence informs us of numerous ferry embarkation and disembarkation points, these ‘liminal’ phases and spaces between land and sea often constituting a long pause for those on the move. Sometimes, in the absence of anywhere to wait on or around the contested foreshore, those in transit struggled to find ways to pass the time. In 1743, for example, one traveller who had been consigned to carry a ‘cask of spirits to convey to the ferry of Cromarty to be shipped to London’ could not resist temptation on Nigg beach and so ‘he and accomplices pierced it with a gimlet and embuzled 10 or 12 Scots pints’.<sup>21</sup> More typical gathering places may have been local girnals (storehouses) for accumulating and distributing rentals in the form of grain. There were at least eight of these along the coast from c. 1600 to 1750, most of them adjacent to ferry sites, and they could, at times, serve a social and political function.<sup>22</sup> Certainly, they acted as nodes, start and end points for ‘limited crossings in relation to the local seascape’.<sup>23</sup> There were other spaces in which to while away the time, however. Frequently integrated within the same building were beach- or pier-side inns, ‘change houses’, alehouses or ferryhouses. Sources exist for such buildings at Meikle Ferry (1762) / Cambuscurrie (1653), Invershin (1776), Nigg (1731, 1762), Inverbreakie (proposed only, 1756) / Balblair (c.1803), North Kessock (1790s) and Ardersier (1689, 1770).<sup>24</sup> As Veitch and Gordon have shown, the local landed family and ferry proprietor usually provided the ferryman with this building, obliging him to supply ale and food along with overnight accommodation.<sup>25</sup> There is a reference, from 1664, to ‘James Innes hous at the ferrie syde’ in Inverbreakie being used to sleep in, although the nearest, or, for upper class travellers, the most desirable, hostelry was sometimes at least a mile away from the foreshore.<sup>26</sup> In 1762, Aberdeenshire-born Robert Forbes (1708-75),

episcopal bishop of Ross and Caithness, sought every possible comfort while moving through the region and, in general, seems to have found and paid for it. After alighting at Chanonry on his northwards journey, he moved on to Fortrose before stopping in ‘the house of Kenneth Mathieson, one of the best taverns I was ever in’.<sup>27</sup> Prior to taking the same crossing again in June 1770, Forbes settled his stomach at ‘Grant’s the best Inn’ in New Campbelltown, making a ‘pretty drive of about a Mile to the Boat at Fort George’. Once on the other side, ‘Rev. Mr Allan Cameron received us on the Beach, and conducted us to Fortrose’ where he spent the night.<sup>28</sup> It seems then that Forbes bypassed the more basic shoreside lodgings available at Ardersier and Chanonry, perhaps on the assumption that they were scarcely more comfortable than they had been a century earlier. In the 1670s, Englishman Thomas Kirk had found, on arriving in Ardersier late one evening, ‘neither guides nor lodging to be had’ and that ‘none made reply but their dogs’ so had moved on to Inverness.<sup>29</sup> Moray Presbyterian minister, James Allan, had been more successful in 1689, although he was not overly impressed with his stay, prior to crossing, in a ‘smoky chamber at Elphingstoun’s inn’ in Ardersier.<sup>30</sup>

Even assuming that rest and relaxation could be found at the firchside ferryhouse, and making the most of the other services on offer there, it was not necessarily straightforward to take the next step of arranging for a boat to disembark. One barrier for those travelling from Moray, Banffshire, Aberdeenshire, Caithness or places further afield, could be language. In contrast to the bilingual burghs of Nairn, Inverness, Cromarty, Dingwall and Tain, toponymy suggests that many of the smaller coastal communities of the region had strongly Gaelic-speaking populations.<sup>31</sup> It was not so much the language or phrases used by the skippers but the commonality in terms of length and landscape of the most-used crossings, which led to a shared system of signs or semaphores developing.<sup>32</sup> Dependent on relatively clear weather, this could, nevertheless, be crucial to ensuring

efficient use of the network.<sup>33</sup> Given the similar scale and scope of the crossings, which often involved only one vessel in service, neither a shout or cry from the opposite shore, as occurred on the Lower Thames, or the ringing of a bell, as at certain Scottish river ferry nodes, was viable. Instead, the system in place, at least at the Meikle Ferry, Nigg and Chanonry crossings, was more akin to that at the ‘signal house’ at North Quensferry, where potential passengers across the Firth of Forth created a ‘blaze’.<sup>34</sup> In 1689, Reverend James Allan remarked, while attempting to negotiate with the ferrymen at Ardersier, that, although he ‘kindled no smoak’ he was obliged to pay. Clearly, Allan’s expectation was that signalling, made possible by ensuring the ferryhouse fire remained stoked all year round or else by provision of basic flint and steel tinderboxes, created an extra expense and that regular ferries did not require a cash payment from foot passengers if this was not specially requested. The system was not without other critics and, in some cases, ferrymen were reported to have ignored smoke or fire signals. Such a situation may have added to Bishop Forbes’s indignation in 1762, at being ‘obliged to wait long at the Mickle-Ferry, as the Boats were all on the other Side’.<sup>35</sup> Seventeen years on from that, the system was subject to an attempted overhaul. There survives a copy of a regulation from 13<sup>th</sup> October 1779, from the Justices of the Peace and Commissioners of Supply for Ross, ordering the ferrymen at Meikle Ferry to ‘keep a Lookout and Observe and Obey all signals that may be made for their Boat’. This was in response to a letter presented by Mr Baillie of Little Tarrell on the Fearn Peninsula:

Complaining of bad service from the Ferrymen of the Rossshire side of the Meikle Ferry, particularly of the practice which they have adopted of refusing to obey signals or smokes where put up on the Sutherland side, at the time that Boat may be on her passage or may happen to be neaped or while she may be repairing, as supposing themselves to have no concern with the transporting of Passengers from that side.<sup>36</sup>

Rather than backing the more generous option of subsidising new boats and piers, the commissioners ordered that ‘Stages or Gangways’ be erected immediately on either side of the Meikle Ferry crossing so that passengers could, at least, be comforted by the prospect that a wider body of local boats might be relied on for safe boarding and alighting. Should there be future cases where signals were ignored, the ferryman or operator in question could expect to face a ‘penalty of one pound sterling for each Offence’.<sup>37</sup> Although all of this suggests growing demand for and professionalisation of the service, the situation may not have changed much in the long term. As late as the early twentieth century, the Meikle Ferry service, which by this time was in terminal decline, required that a flag be hoisted on the south side by northbound travellers, while in the mid-nineteenth century travellers at Cromarty continued to summon the ferry from the other side (Nigg) by bringing a fire to blaze.<sup>38</sup>

Another point in the journey at which sparks could fly was when potential passengers and ferrymen negotiated the fare. Given that ferry proprietorship was so varied, due to the intricate family networks of the region and the legal complexities of the foreshore, costs fluctuated. Unlike, for example, in the Dutch United Provinces, where complex fiscal controls were in place for coastal transport, cash was not always required, with Hugh Miller recalling ‘ferrymoney’ in the form of peat on some of the ‘ephemeral watercraft’ plying between Nigg and Cromarty, while, on some other routes, the cost of the fare was paid in whisky.<sup>39</sup> The Reverend James Allan paid a ‘shilling sterling’ for his crossing at Ardersier.<sup>40</sup> Isaac Forsyth, towards the end of the period, complained about ‘the very considerable revenue exacted from him [the traveller] by the different proprietors of the respective ferries, above what is requisite for the support and navigation of the boats’.<sup>41</sup> The increasing traffic of carriages was creating a new problem by the middle of the eighteenth century, regarding which a 1765 case relating to the Scuddale ferryman is instructive. Petitioner, William

MacKenzie of Belmaduthy, claimed that the fare for ‘wheel machines’ [chaises] and horses on the ‘unfit’ service across the tidal Conon was ‘grossly extravagant’ at ‘no less than two shillings and six pence sterling for each time’. He contrasted this unfavourably with the Queensferry crossing which cost the same despite being ‘within 7 miles of the Metropolis of this part of the united Kingdom’ [Edinburgh], and ‘where the fery is so broad and the Boats so good’.<sup>42</sup> In response, the Commissioners of Supply demanded simply that the Scuddale ferryman reduce his fares and ensure that he had a ‘good and sufficient ferry’.<sup>43</sup>

While the issue of carriages on ferries provided a growing challenge in the eighteenth century, problems with the transportation of livestock and animals more generally were of longer standing.<sup>44</sup> Bishop Forbes ‘had two Crossings’ at Little Ferry ‘as the boat could not contain us and the Horse all at once’, although this problem appears to have been addressed there by the 1790s.<sup>45</sup> Certainly, Donald Sage, a less experienced passenger, on venturing south-eastwards from the Strath of Kildonan for the first time, did not have the same concerns once aboard.<sup>46</sup> Moving southwards, Bishop Forbes crossed at Meikle Ferry with all his essentials, although he was surprised to encounter ‘an abandoned Chaise’ on the north side, apparently ‘one of Lord Reay’s but useless in Strathnaver’, indicating again some of the problems associated with this form of transport in the north, even when it was possible to convey it across water.<sup>47</sup> Yet this issue was again addressed successfully and by the 1790s the crossing had ‘a large boat for transporting carriages, horses, and other cattle; as also a yawl for the accommodation of foot passengers.’<sup>48</sup> Still, the Meikle Ferry and Nigg to Cromarty and Kessock services were probably the only ones on which both horses and chaises could be taken over together, even in this rather haphazard way, prior to 1809.

On the Nigg to Cromarty crossing, in the 1670s Thomas Kirk ‘took in three horses (there being scarce room for them), and before we got a hundred yards from shore, they were ready to leap overboard, and overturn the boat’ so he had to try for a second time.<sup>49</sup> Reverend

Allan preferred to travel as a foot passenger in 1690, but even then he had to go for two miles ‘on foot to Newmore after crossing the ferrie of Inverbrackie, for I could not get a horse for hire’.<sup>50</sup> Further south, despite calling the Kessock ferry the ‘best in Scotland’, Forbes noted that ‘they have no good means of getting carriages on board, and there was considerable difficulty with one of the horses’.<sup>51</sup> He was ‘long detained’ at Ardersier too where ‘the Boat could not take over the Passengers that appeared, the Horses and the Chaise all at once’.<sup>52</sup> Despite the adaptation of the vessels at Little Ferry and Meikle Ferry, the inability of coastal vessels to transport chaises reliably was evidently becoming an increasingly sore point for upper class passengers. James Loch’s horse and carriage were only ‘slowly and unskillfully put into the wretched boats’.<sup>53</sup> Well into the nineteenth century, Robert Southey claimed that passengers on the Invergordon to Cromarty service were ‘sometimes obliged to mount their horses nearly a quarter of a mile from the shore, and ride mid-leg deep in the water’.<sup>54</sup>

### **Ferry skippers and passengers**

#### *A ‘pluriactive’ people?*

Saunders’ work on slaves in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Portugal reveals how diverse the skippers or crews of short-range coast-hugging or estuary vessels were and how illustrative their history can be of wider social and cultural trends.<sup>55</sup> Elsewhere, historiography can provide diverse information about the operators and passengers of early modern waterborne coastal transport.<sup>56</sup> A key, general point to emerge is how frequently coastal ferrying was combined with other tasks and how politicised the profession could be. In the firthlands too, there is evidence of ‘pluriactivity’,<sup>57</sup> although this is difficult to research, partly due to the growth of occupational stereotypes but also because of the sheer variety of terms used to refer to the ferry operators, including ‘boatman’, ‘waterman’, and ‘ferrier’ and numerous Scots and Gaelic versions of these terms.<sup>58</sup> At times, however, a distinction is made between ‘Fish and

Ferry Boats' and also between 'Ferriers and Fishers'. These two categories of vessels and people were considered separately on the Invergordon estate in the 1760s.<sup>59</sup> There, and it seems elsewhere, specialisation was the norm. Yet the comparative paucity of major ports, apart from Inverness and Cromarty, meant that ferries, their crew, and their passengers were still clearly linked with commerce, the military and tourism, as well as much broader social features.

Ferryman played an often controversial role in the economy, transporting goods from larger vessels to shore, and sometimes onwards to gairnal, as part of the still largely unexplored 'coasting trade' of the region.<sup>60</sup> Despite the wishes of Sir John Gordon of Invergordon, some such vessels were used for the movement of grain and fish, as well as transporting livestock, stone and other building materials, coal, peat, wood, and mail.<sup>61</sup> Evidently, outside the few burghs of the region, its coastal dwellers were multi-tasking members of what Gillis has termed a 'protomaritime' economy.<sup>62</sup> However, trade via the firths was treated as legally equivalent to trade by open sea, meaning that customs duties could be exceptionally demanding.<sup>63</sup> Disputes over this could ignite violence. In May 1733, the Customs House officer in Inverness reported that his warehouse had been broken into, his boat carried 'across the ferry, cut in two, and half of it disposed to the waves' while a person under suspicion of being an informer had been 'dragged across the Firth and his ears cut out, and hints every day given to myself to take care of my life'.<sup>64</sup> Sometimes these disputes merged into inter-family or ethnic rivalry. In 1679, Thomas Urquhart, ferrier at Inverbreakie, was at the centre of a violent shoreside conflagration, which set Mackenzies on one side against Rosses and Munros on the other.<sup>65</sup> Apart from these dramatic flurries, firthland ferries were only occasionally put to military use in the early modern period: in the 1640s; in the days before the Battle of Culloden; and in the construction and development, using Black Isle stone, of the Fort George garrison near Ardersier in the years that followed.<sup>66</sup>



In terms of tourism, Donald Sage's nery crossing of Loch Fleet as a child, where he was 'horror-struck, on looking over the edge of the boat' needs to be considered alongside the simultaneous, imaginative appeal to him of the routes. Coming from inland Kildonan, Sage was fascinated by the 'ocular feast' provided by the east Sutherland coast and tantalised, while being ferried, by the 'sea-ware of every size and colour', the 'star-fish intermingled with the long tails of the tangle which by the under-swell of the sea heaved up and down, and presented the appearance of a submarine grove, retaining its fresh look by the greenish colour of the sea-water'.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the natural history of the firthlands had long attracted the attention of visitors and locals. Although he described the Inverness to North Kessock route as 'exceeding hazardous' and 'rugged', with 'luxuriant tides, and aggravating winds, that violently contract the surff of the sea', mid-seventeenth century visitor, Richard Franck, spent more time expressing his wonder at the 'porposses' [porpoises or dolphins] that he thought were in danger of leaping into the boat, in his account.<sup>68</sup> Thomas Kirk from Yorkshire remarked, in the 1670s, on 'the good boat' with which he had crossed from Chanonry to Ardersier, which had allowed him to spot 'many polarks, sharks, or porpoises, for they are called by all these names', seeing 'four of them several times leap up together a yard above water'.<sup>69</sup> Likewise, in the 1760s Bishop Forbes devoted as much of his text to extolling the coastscape, 'one of the finest Prospects in the World' with 'pretty Bays opening here and there', as he did to complaining about delayed, expensive or ramshackle ferries.<sup>70</sup> Other attempts were made to bring visitors in to enjoy the local environment. At Inverbreakie in the 1740s and 1750s, Sir John Gordon clearly considered the firthland's transport network to have potential as a way of attracting travellers for leisure. Gordon sought to erect 'Bath Machines' on the fashionable Scarborough model, costing them, clearing the beachside of all 'Cobles and Crieves', and planning the precise sizes and locations for several 'large stone Houses at the Shore', each of which would function as a 'Pleasure Boat House'.<sup>71</sup>

Of course, the local environment was a threat at times, perhaps exacerbated as the climate changed in line with the later phase of the Little Ice Age. This is shown in the case of the Culbin estate in the 1690s and just a handful of years earlier James Allan had reported sand-drifts while en route to Ardersier from Moray.<sup>72</sup> Certainly, any analysis of the firthland ferries and their users reveals a multiplicity of functions and an interplay with ecology and environment. The final part of this article will concentrate on one further function, which is revealed by the Church of Scotland's presbytery and kirk session records: the use of ferries both within religious networks and, intersecting that, for religiously proscribed reasons, by ordinary people.

#### *'Church Ferries'*

An insight can be gleaned into the role of ferries through examining their significance in the transportation of Protestant clergy and parishioners around the region following the Reformation. Ferries promoted the movement of bishops and other men of the cloth in the case of the Episcopal church, and of ministers and elders in the case of the Presbyterian kirk that would cement its place from 1689 and become the Established Church in 1690. In the case of the Episcopalian church, officers in the three relevant dioceses of Moray, Ross and Caithness required ferry transport at times, partly due to their lack of numbers, as seen in Bishop Forbes's efforts to travel through the north Highlands. This situation was exacerbated when the three dioceses were united into one bishopric in 1777. Meanwhile, in the Presbyterian church, parishes towards the east coast of the northern Highlands in the synods of Sutherland, Ross and Cromarty and Inverness, tend to become smaller and smaller around the littoral, suggesting that these areas had relatively sizable, Presbyterian congregations. Extant presbytery and kirk session minutes and other records for the period reveal something of the geographic mobility of the Church of Scotland's ministers and elders. Records also

survive of more radical, itinerant Presbyterian activity, including ‘conventicling’ or open-air preaching, spanning out by ferry from Easter Ross, emphasising that, from early on in the Scottish Reformation, the influence of reforming ideas could be from north to south as well as from south to north, and was sea-borne as much as land-borne.

Thomas Hog (1628–92) was a Tain born and Aberdeen (Marischal College) educated chaplain to the earldom of Sutherland from 1654, later minister of the Easter Ross parish of Kiltearn, and active thereafter in western parts of Moray, being imprisoned, notoriously, in Forres, in 1668.<sup>73</sup> Once in Moray, he influenced Katherine Ross (c.1635–97), the evangelical memoirist, while he is also mentioned in the diary of Alexander Brodie as part of a small stream of Presbyterian passengers who passed into the Lowlands and back again via the Black Isle.<sup>74</sup> Local memory of Hog and those influenced by him was retained into the eighteenth century, while the itinerant, cross-firth nature of his preaching features in other, later reports relating to Cromarty Firth parishes. The diary of Rosskeen minister John Calder (1743-83) records his taking for granted the availability of transport across the firth to Findon, Culbokie and Balblair, sometimes just for an evening and also on the Sabbath, during the 1770s.<sup>75</sup> By the 1790s, it seems that ‘church ferries’ were functioning.<sup>76</sup> This kind of travel appears to have been used by Donald Sage on his becoming minister in the Black Isle parish of Resolis, just across the firth from Kiltearn. Using various tidal water routes, Sage had travelled back and forth between Sutherland and Moray to attend university in Aberdeen and he had also ‘slept and supped at the Inn of Balblair in this parish [Resolis]’ when only fifteen, so that, on becoming a minister there later, he was renewing an earlier familiarity with the communications network within this littoral environment.<sup>77</sup>

The Presbytery records of Chanonry show the movement of ministers to supply parishes from Ardersier to Kirkmichael, as well as a focus on repairing manses around the Black Isle and into Easter Ross for which ferries must have been key.<sup>78</sup> In 1712, their

Dornoch equivalent reported on a case when a Mr Brodie, a local minister, ‘was necessitate to stay in Ross and preach at Tain for Mr Hugh Munro’ the latter being ‘necessarlie called to Kincardin to see his brothers family’.<sup>79</sup> As for parishioners, they too sometimes used ‘church ferries’, and by the end of the eighteenth century were able to do so without fear of any social consequences. They had certainly long relied on short-range marine transport to attend weddings and funerals, to take part in ‘profane’ activities, and to attend fairs and markets. The estate papers of the major families of the region with cross-firth ties, both Episcopalian and Presbyterian, might shed further light on this. Episcopalian families seem to have favoured firthland ‘progresses’, regarding which one gains an insight from an account of the Lovat Frasers from November 1666.<sup>80</sup> Lovat returned home from this jaunt for a ‘solem, handsom, opulent Christmas feast’ to which again, neighbours travelled over land and sea from other parts of the region, while upon the death of his wife, Anna Mackenzie, in 1667 the funeral guests similarly included ‘all Ross and Murray gentlemen, and their two bishops present’.<sup>81</sup>

Presbytery records and, more particularly, kirk session minutes, illuminate the travel through the firthlands of a wider variety of people. This emerges as a widespread concern, being associated with Sabbath profanation for trade, drunkenness, adultery, or other illicit acitivity.<sup>82</sup> In 1731, the Nigg Old Kirk session was taken up with the case ‘Anent Colin Simpson, Donald Gally and Robert Dallas’, who had crossed from Cromarty on the Lord’s Day, and then met with the crew of a visiting English vessel. The Englishmen had offered to buy two of Simpson’s cows, a negotiation which led to them diverting to ‘the Change House at the Ness’ for refreshment, albeit this hiatus allowed the English crew to take two of the cows and put them aboard their boat.<sup>83</sup> At Kirkhill, on the south shore of the Beaully Firth, a case from 1779 relates to ‘breach of sabbath by drunkenness’ when a group of local men and women:

Having crossed the ferry of Beauly and returning late that evening towards Drumchardnie went into the house of John Urquhart shoemaker at Newton and drank ale and aquavita until they were intoxicated that many of them had their clothes so dreged with dubs and clay as if they had been drawn through it.<sup>84</sup>

Such behaviour became especially pronounced, or at least was most remarked on by kirk sessions, on market days and fairs. In 1689, ‘a fatal accident fell out in this parochin [Kirkhill]’ when ‘two young women able servants Christian Rain and Margaret nicklauchline in Phopachy’ were drowned in the inner firth returning from a market at what appears to be Ferintosh on the Black Isle, although it is not clear if they had been attempting to swim or wade, or had been aboard a boat.<sup>85</sup> In 1782, Tain Presbytery dealt with the case of Alexander and Christian MacKenzie, from Cromarty, and Robert Ross, a farmer from Wester Rarichies north of Nigg where the annual ‘Hugh’s Fair’ took place. Ross had entertained Alexander MacKenzie and a woman presumed to be Christian, his wife, at his house during the festivities, although it was alleged by Alexander MacWilliam, in Cromarty, that the woman who had taken the ferry with MacKenzie over to Nigg was in fact ‘a widow in Cromarty and that there was no good report of her’.<sup>86</sup> Further north, in 1734 the Golspie kirk session considered the paternity of the child of local woman, Ann Macleod, agreeing to conduct a search for ‘Robert Baxter, a married man, who had been guilty with her in the Time of Barsfair [St. Barr’s Fair] last by the way coming from Dornoch’.<sup>87</sup> Eight years later, Katherine Gun in Coxtown ‘confessed that she had been guilty of uncleanness in Tain with Hugh Ross, merchant there when in his service and that about the time of Michaelmas market’.<sup>88</sup> In a 1750 case, Angus Murray and Margaret Bain were ‘reported to have crossed the ferry *Solus cum Sola* under the silence of the night after the people of Ferryoons [Unes, Little Ferry] had gone to bed’ when returning from a ‘Session for Scandalous Cohabitations’ in Dornoch and then with a Robert Murray and Isobel Bain who had ‘crossed the ferry at

unseasonable hour *Solus cum Sola* when returning from Dornoch' where they had been attending the Session 'on a process of Scandal against them'.<sup>89</sup> George Murray in Pronsie declared, in 1708, that his wife had left him in the mid-1690s but 'that she died in Ross about Lochslin thirteen year ago and that Alexander Merchant in the paroch of Tarbat was in knowledge of her death'. However, the session was unconvinced and sent Murray across the firth to 'go to Ross and get testificate of his wife's death'.<sup>90</sup> Other accounts refer to both 'fugitives' from the region living in other parishes and newcomers entering the firthlands by ferry, suggesting the potential of the records as a source for studies of eighteenth-century migration.<sup>91</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In 1808, George Dempster of Dunnichen (1732–1818), agricultural improver and then resident at Skibo on the northern edge of the Dornoch Firth, just inland from the Meikle Ferry, wrote a 'Familiar Epistle' to his well-known friend, Sir John Sinclair (1754-1835). It contained a message about the inadequacy of ferry boats that was very much of its time and also troublingly prophetic. As he wrote:

How many lives are on our ferries lost?  
How oft have all of you been on them tost?  
Sitting for Cornwall or for Johnny Groats,  
Your life is spent in open ferry boats:<sup>92</sup>

The growing embarrassment and shame associated with the firthland ferries, detectable from the late eighteenth century in relation to their unreliability when carrying the most modern carriages, was already coming to a head before the Meikle Ferry disaster. That tragedy coincided with a shift away from amphibious modes of transport in the firthlands. Spreading from the south-west, the building of the Caledonian Canal (opened in 1822), the Mound over

Loch Fleet (completed in 1816), Conon Bridge (1809), Bonar Bridge (1812) and Lovat Bridge (1814), the advance of roads and, eventually, railways, while not avoiding the use of ferries entirely, led to the creation of more land-based itineraries for those heading from the south or west and encouraged the creation of less ‘pluriactive’ fishing communities. The eastern edges of the Black Isle, Easter Ross and Dornoch lost out. Meanwhile, the growth of a ‘packet boat’ service linking Burghead with Little Ferry caused travellers from the south-east to approach and enter the far north of the Highlands directly from lowland Moray, thereby again circumnavigating the bicultural, transitional, littoral world of the eastern Black Isle and Fearn Peninsula. For all concerned with the firthlands, all of this lessened dramatically the sense of a common community ‘betwixt the ferries’<sup>93</sup> and minimised the agency of the peoples of the region’s more northerly part, in particular, in defining their connection with the outside world.

As late as 1776, Charles Cordiner had noted at Invershin, just a few miles to the west of the Meikle Ferry:

A pleasant prospect: the rich banks of the firth, crowded with farms, and animated with all the appearances of industry; small vessels sailing up and down; people busy for preparing and unloading them; fishermen attending their nets; the ferry boats ready at a call; the extensive prospects of the rich-lands in Rossshire and a good inn seen among trees on the opposite shore.<sup>94</sup>

The system of tidal water transport which has been outlined in this article, and was extolled by Cordiner, left a mixed and, in many ways, a troubled legacy, a record of human tragedy as well as of agency and entrepreneurialism. Comparative studies of the social and cultural pasts of littorals elsewhere will develop from the New Coastal History. While urban coasts and port towns are currently attracting attention and some exceptional work, in time, new research trends will allow for greater examination of the interplay with the countryside, as

well as firmer conclusions around the wider role of ferries, their skippers and users.<sup>95</sup> In terms of rural history, was it only along the winding, adjacent shores of the firthlands, that the early nineteenth century marked the end of an enduring mode of countryside, foreshore and offshore travel by foot, horse and boat? What is certain is that, in this case, it was an interdependence which had been crucial in the early modern period. Ferries were paramount in providing a form of communication which was inspiring fondness and nostalgia, as well as bewilderment and dismay, long before it beached on its final shore.

### **Acknowledgements**

The staff at the Highland Archive Centre, National Library of Scotland (Manuscripts Division and Map Reading Room), National Records of Scotland, Dingwall Library, and also Professor Isaac Land, Dr Amy Todman, Dr Thomas Brochard, Dr Elizabeth Ritchie, Wade Cormack, James Miller, Dave Selkirk, Jim Mackay, Crane Begg and Verity Walker.

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### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> 25<sup>th</sup> August 1809, D77/1 Meikle Ferry Relief Fund, First Report, The Highland Archive Centre; 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1810, Second Report; 5<sup>th</sup> November 1811, Third Report.

<sup>2</sup> Meikle Ferry Relief Fund, Third Report. For more on ‘repatriations’ from this region’s diaspora, see S. Karly Kehoe, ‘From the Caribbean to the Scottish Highlands: charitable enterprise in the age of Improvement, c.1750 to c.1820’, *Rural History*, 27:1 (2016), 37-59; David Alston, ‘A Forgotten Diaspora: The Children of Enslaved and ‘Free Coloured’ Women and Highland Scots in Guyana before Emancipation’, *Northern Scotland*, 6:1, 49-69.



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<sup>3</sup> For a ‘Moray Firth’ historiography, see James Miller, *The Gathering Stream: The Story of the Moray Firth* (Edinburgh, 2012); David Worthington, ‘The Settlements of the Beaulwick Coast and the Historiography of the Moray Firth’, *The Scottish Historical Review* (forthcoming). For the ‘firthlands’ more specifically, see David Alston, *My Little Town of Cromarty* (Edinburgh, 2006); Marinell Ash, *This Noble Harbour: A History of the Cromarty Firth* (Bristol, 1991); John R. Baldwin, ed., *Firthlands of Ross and Sutherland* (Edinburgh, 1991); Ian R.M. Mowat, *Easter Ross, 1750-1850* (Edinburgh, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> James Hunter, *Set Adrift Upon the World: The Sutherland Clearances* (Edinburgh, 2015), pp. 59-60.

<sup>5</sup> Eric Richards, *Patrick Sellar and the Highland Clearances* (Edinburgh, 1999), pp. 32.

<sup>6</sup> Donald Sage, *Memorabilia Domestica; or, Parish Life in the North of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1889), p. 117.

<sup>7</sup> Baldwin, *Firthlands of Ross and Sutherland*.

<sup>8</sup> William Skene, ed., *John of Fordun’s Chronicle of the Scottish Nation* (Edinburgh, 1872), pp. 31-2.

<sup>9</sup> Eric Graham’s valuable work on maritime history focuses on national and international politics and commerce. See, Eric Graham, *A Maritime History of Scotland 1650-1790* (East Linton, 2002). For Durie’s land-focused analysis, see Alastair Durie, ‘Movement, Transport and Travel’, in Elizabeth Foyster and Christopher Whatley, eds, *A History of Everyday Life in Scotland, 1600 to 1800* (Edinburgh, 2010), p. 254.

<sup>10</sup> M. W. Weir, ‘Ferries in Scotland between 1603 and the Advent of Steam’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1985); Marie Weir, *Ferries in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1988); Kenneth Veitch and Anne Gordon, ‘Traditional Ferries’, in Kenneth Veitch, ed., *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology – Volume 8 – Transport and Communications* (Edinburgh, 2009), pp. 191-226; Anne Gordon, *To Move with the Times:*

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*The Story of Transport and Travel in Scotland* (Aberdeen, 1988), pp. 65-77. A forthcoming work, 'The Highland Ferries of Inverness, the Black Isle and Easter Ross', by local historian, Jim Mackay, will, without doubt, supply significant additional information.

<sup>11</sup> Isaac Land, 'Tidal Waves: The New Coastal History', *Journal of Social History*, 40:3 (2007), 731-43; <http://porttowns.port.ac.uk/blog-32/> (accessed 31<sup>st</sup> October 2015); John Gillis, *The Human Shore: Seacoasts in History* (Chicago, 2012); John Gillis and Franziska Torma, eds, *Fluid Frontiers: New Currents in Marine Environmental History* (Cambridge, 2015); David Worthington, ed., *The New Coastal History: Environmental and Cultural Perspectives* (forthcoming). This latter publication has developed out of the 'Firths and Fjords' international conference which took place in Dornoch, Scotland, from 31<sup>st</sup> March to 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Filippo de Vivo, 'Prospect or Refuge? Microhistory, History on the Large Scale', *Cultural and Social History*, 7:3 (2010), 391.

<sup>13</sup> Hamish Scott, 'Travel and Communications' in Hamish Scott, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern European History, 1350-1750: Volume I: Peoples and Place* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 167-9, 186; Gordon, *To Move with the Times*, p. 65; Lars Kröger, "'Crossing the River": Ferries as Part of the Maritime Landscape of the Main River, Germany', in *Ships and Maritime Landscapes* (forthcoming).

<sup>14</sup> Maurice Cerasi, 'Istanbul, 1620-1750: Change and Tradition', in Salma K. Jayyusi, Renata Holod, Attilio Petruccioli, André Raymond, eds, *The City in the Islamic World* (Leiden, 2008), p. 477; Guglielmo Zanelli, 'The Ships, Shipyards and Ferries of Jacopo de' Barbari', in Michele Emmer, ed., *Imagine Math 3: Between Culture and Mathematics* (London, 2015); *Navi, squeri, traghetti da Jacopo de' Barbari* (Venice, 2011); Jan de Vries, *Barges and Capitalism: Passenger Transportation in the Dutch Economy, 1632-1839* (Utrecht, 1981); Maarten Hell, 'Trade, Transport, and Storage in Amsterdam Inns (1450-1800)', *Journal of*

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*Urban History*, 40:4 (2014), 751. Christiaan van Bochove of Radboud University is currently undertaking a research project which will reveal more on coastal ferries and finance within the Dutch context. For London, see Neil Wigglesworth, *The Social History of English Rowing* (London, 1992); David Blomfield, 'Tradesmen of the Thames: Success and Failure among the Watermen and Lightermen Families of the Upper Tidal Thames 1750-1901' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Kingston, 2006); Joan Tucker, *Ferries of the Lower Thames* (Stroud, 2010); Peter Ackroyd, *Thames: Sacred River* (London, 2007), p. 127.

<sup>15</sup> For North America, see, Edward Salo, 'Crossing the Rivers of the State: The Role of the Ferry in the Development of South Carolina, circa 1680-1920s' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Middle Tennessee State University, 2009); David S. Cecelski, *The Waterman's Song: Slavery and Freedom in Maritime North Carolina* (Chapel Hill NC, 2001); Lynn B. Harris, *Patroons and Periaguas: Enslaved Watermen and Watercraft of the Lowcountry* (Columbia SC, 2014); Clara Ann Simmons, *Chesapeake Ferries: A Waterborne Tradition, 1636-2000* (Baltimore MD, 2009); Andrew Lipman, *The Saltwater Frontier: Indians and the Contest for the American Coast* (New Haven CT, 2015). For a conceptually sophisticated ethnographic analysis of a modern ferry network in British Columbia, see Phillip Vannini, *Ferry Tales: Mobility, Place, and Time on Canada's West Coast* <http://ferrytales.innovativeethnographies.net> (accessed 20<sup>th</sup> January 2016). For India, see, Nitin Sinha, 'Contract, Work and Resistance: Boatmen in Early Colonial Eastern India, 1760s-1850s', *International Review of Social History*, 59 (2014), 11-43; Jangkhomang Guite 'From Fishermen to Boatmen: The Mucquas of Madras, 1650-1750' in Yogesh Sharma, eds, *Coastal Histories: Society and Ecology in Pre-Modern India* (Delhi, 2010), pp. 181-207. For Japan, see Paul Waley, 'By Ferry to Factory: Crossing Tokyo's River into a New World' in Nicolas Fiévé and Paul Waley, eds, *Japanese Capitals in Historical Perspective: Place, Power and Memory* (London, 2003), pp. 208-32.

<sup>16</sup> John Brewer, 'Microhistory and the Histories of Everyday Life', *Cultural and Social History*, 7:1 (2010), 89. For a recent survey of early modern Scottish historical writing focusing on social and cultural themes, see Foyster and Whatley, *A History of Everyday Life in Scotland*.

<sup>17</sup> CRC/1/1/1/2, Commissioners of Supply Minutes – Ross, 1765-1926 [less 1798-1804], Highland Archive Centre; CI/1/1/1, Commissioners of Supply Minutes – Inverness, 1761-1890, Highland Archive Centre; CS/1/1/1, Commissioners of Supply Minutes - Sutherland 1736-1929 [less 1791-1812], Highland Archive Centre.

<sup>18</sup> Christer Westerdahl, 'The Maritime Cultural Landscape', *The International Journal of Nautical Archaeology*, 21:1 (1992), 6; Waley, 'By Ferry to Factory', p. 208.

<sup>19</sup> While there is nothing to compare with Dutch artistic depictions of ferries and barges from the period, visual sources such as paintings, maps and estate plans can be employed to indicate something of the way the matrix worked. These are also revealing of ferry sites and crossings if not of boats or their users. For John Slezer, 's 1693 work, see,

<http://digital.nls.uk/slezer/engraving.cfm?sl=34>; (accessed 21<sup>st</sup> March 2016);

<http://digital.nls.uk/slezer/engraving.cfm?sl=43> (accessed 21<sup>st</sup> March 2016). See also,

National Library of Scotland, EMS.s.493, Gerard van Keulen, *Afteekening van de Noord*

*Oost hoek van Schotland, Vertoonende The Firth of Murray, en daar in de Riviere*

*Inverness, Cromertie, Tarbet of Tayne: t'vervolg van de Kust by Ord Head met de Letter 'A'*

*geteenkent, vervolgt boven met de Letter 'A' tot de hoek* (Amsterdam, c.1734); Acc.10497

Wade.58d, George Wade, 'Plan of the Murray Firth and Cromarty Firth, with Parts of the

Shires of Inverness, Sutherland, Ross, Nairn, and Elgin' (1730); MS.1650 Z.46/57c, Charles

Shipley, 'A Proposed Prolongation of the Pier head, by a single row of Piles, & Planking, to

be drove with the same Slope, as the Pier Viz: one foot in five [Fort George Ardersier]'

(1787); MS.1650 Z.46/57d, Andrew Frazer, '[Plan of Fort George, Ardersier, showing]

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Present Road leading Through the Gancion[?] [and] Proposed Road to the Ferry' (1787). See also National Records of Scotland, RHP 37985, 'Copy of a Plan of the Lands and Estate of Invergordon, Delny (Delnie) and Rosskeen with the Lands of Priesthill, All Belonging to Sir John Gordon'; RHP3513, 'Plan of the Estate and Barony of Findon the Property of Sir Roderick Mackenzie of Scatwell'. Also useful is Sir John Sinclair, *A General View of the Agriculture in the Northern Counties and Islands of Scotland* (London, 1795).

<sup>20</sup> At its northernmost point, the Little Ferry (Unes) to Embo connection, unsurprisingly, relied on one short crossing. The Dornoch Firth services comprised five to six crossings, if you include all tidal water routes as far inland as Invershin, albeit with a heavy reliance on the Meikle Ferry-Portnaculter (Cambuscurrie) service. Moving southwards, the Black Isle was a major intersection point, connecting at least six routes to the north via the Cromarty Firth, and four via the Inner Moray Firth. The former group of ferry sites are: Nigg to Cromarty; Inverbekie (Ness) to Balblair; Alness to Ferryton or Alnessferry; Foulis to Castlecraig or Findon; Dingwall to Alcaig or Scuddale (over the tidal River Conon). Those spanning out from the south part of the Black Isle are: Chanonry to Ardersier (Blacktown); North Kessock to South Kessock, and the River Beauuly estuary service. The routes towards the outer firth limits, so near the eastern edge of the peninsulas in question, are more frequently referred to in contemporary sources than the ones further inland, and are those which lend themselves most, according to surviving evidence, to the concept of a dynamic east-Sutherland-west Moray communications, social and cultural network.

<sup>21</sup> William Macgill, ed., *Old Ross-shire and Scotland, As Seen in the Tain and Balnagown Documents*, 2 volumes (Inverness, 1909), 1, p. 96.

<sup>22</sup> Donald Beck Adamson, 'Commercialisation, Change and Continuity: An Archaeological Study of Rural Commercial Practice in the Scottish Highlands' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2014); Kenneth J. Logue, *Popular Disturbances in Scotland, 1780-*

1815 (Edinburgh, c.1979), p. 43; Elizabeth Beaton, 'Late Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Estate Girnals in Easter Ross and South-East Sutherland' in Baldwin, *Firthlands of Ross and Sutherland*, pp. 133-45.

<sup>23</sup> Adamson, 'Commercialisation', p. 296.

<sup>24</sup> 15<sup>th</sup> November 1731, Tain Presbytery, Nigg Old Kirk Session, CH2/1438/1, Highland Archive Centre, p. 173; National Library of Scotland, MS.108, 'The Diary of Sir John Gordon', f. 154; John Horne Stevenson and William Kirk Dickson, eds, *The Register of the Great Seal of Scotland under the Commonwealth, AD 1652-1659* (Edinburgh, 1984), p. 50; J. B. Craven, ed., *Journals of the Episcopal Visitations of the Right Rev. Robert Forbes* (London, 1923), p. 169; Sage, *Memorabilia*, p. 187; 'Kilmuir and Suddy, County of Ross and Cromarty' in Sir John Sinclair, ed., *The Statistical Account of Scotland 1791-1799*, 20 volumes (Wakefield, 1973-83), 12, p. 266.

<sup>25</sup> Euan W. Mackie, 'Some Eighteenth Century Ferryhouses in Appin, Lorn, Argyll: the Development of the Single-Storeyed Mortared Stone Cottage in the West Highlands', *The Antiquaries Journal*, 77 (1997), 243-89; Simmons, *Chesapeake Ferries*, p. 44.

<sup>26</sup> Macgill, *Old Ross-shire*, pp. 211-12.

<sup>27</sup> Craven, *Journals*, p. 151.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 271.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Hume Brown, ed., *Tours in Scotland, 1677 & 1681* (Edinburgh, 1892), p. 27.

<sup>30</sup> John R. Barrett, ed., *Mr James Allan: The Journey of a Lifetime* (Kinloss, 2004), p. 119.

<sup>31</sup> Local place names attest to the coastal perspective as well as the linguistically-diverse nature of the region's population in the pre-Clearance period. See, W. J. Watson, *Place Names of Ross and Cromarty* (Inverness, 1904).

<sup>32</sup> Noell Wilson, *Defensive Positions: The Politics of Maritime Security in Tokugawa Japan* (Cambridge MA, 2015), p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> For the slang of River Vistula boatmen, see Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, Third Edition (Aldershot, 2009), p. 77.

<sup>34</sup> Veitch and Gordon, 'Traditional Ferries', p. 207.

<sup>35</sup> Craven, *Journals*, p. 176.

<sup>36</sup> 13<sup>th</sup> October 1779, 'Copy regulation by Ross JPs and commissioners of supply, ordering ferrymen at Meikle ferry to obey signals from the Sutherland side', National Records of Scotland, JP32/7/2, p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Weir, 'Ferries in Scotland', p. 446.

<sup>39</sup> Veitch and Gordon, 'Traditional Ferries'; Hugh Miller, *My Schools and Schoolmasters, Or, The Story of My Education* (Boston, 1857), p. 44.

<sup>40</sup> Barrett, *Mr James Allan*, p. 119.

<sup>41</sup> Isaac Forsyth, *A Survey of the Province of Moray: Historical, Geographical, and Political* (Aberdeen, 1798), pp. 338-9.

<sup>42</sup> 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1765, CRC/1/1 Commissioners of Supply Minutes – Ross 1765-1926, pp. 8-9.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> At times, cattle were taken across to Moray, however. See 15<sup>th</sup> November 1731, Tain Presbytery, Nigg Old Kirk Session, Highland Archive Centre, CH2/1438/1, p. 173.

<sup>45</sup> Craven, *Journals*, p. 178; 'Dornoch, County of Sutherland' in Sinclair, *The Statistical Account*, 8, p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> Sage, *Memorabilia*, pp. 146-7.

<sup>47</sup> Craven, *Journals*, p. 216.

<sup>48</sup> 'Dornoch, County of Sutherland' in Sinclair, *The Statistical Account*, 8, p. 2.

<sup>49</sup> Hume Brown, *Tours in Scotland*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>50</sup> Barrett, *Mr James Allan*, p. 274.

<sup>51</sup> Craven, *Journals*, p. 167.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>53</sup> James Loch, *An Account of the Improvements on the Estates of the Marquess of Stafford* (London, 1820), pp. 17-19.

<sup>54</sup> C. H. Herford, ed., *Robert Southey, Journal of a Tour in Scotland in 1819* (London, 1929), p. 121.

<sup>55</sup> A. Saunders, *A Social History of Black Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal, 1441-1555* (Cambridge, 1982). See also, Douglas Catterall and Jodi Campbell, eds, *Women in Port: Gendering Communities, Economies, and Social Networks in Atlantic Port Cities, 1500-1800* (Leiden, 2012).

<sup>56</sup> See footnotes 14 and 15 above.

<sup>57</sup> Hugh Miller, *Scenes and Legends from the North of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1869), pp. 323, 478-9; Macgill, ed., *Old Ross-shire*, 390; Christophe Cérimo, Aliette Geistdoerfer, Gérard Le Bouëdec and François Ploux, eds, *Entre terre et mer: Sociétés littorales et pluriactivités (XVe-XXe siècle)* (Rennes, 2004). For an interpretation of this latter work by Isaac Land, via his excellent 'Coastal History' blog, see: <http://porttowns.port.ac.uk/the-coastal-history-blog13/> (accessed 28<sup>th</sup> February 2016).

<sup>58</sup> 26<sup>th</sup> November 1750 / 25<sup>th</sup> June 1751, Tain Presbytery, Tain Kirk Session Minutes, Highland Archive Centre, CH2/349/1, pp. 90-3, 101.

<sup>59</sup> MS.108, 'The Diary of Sir John Gordon', National Library of Scotland, pp. 217, 394.

<sup>60</sup> Sutherland Papers, Dep. 313, National Library of Scotland, has extensive detail on trade between south-east Sutherland and the rest of the firthlands. Another excellent starting point is William Mackay, ed., *The Letterbook of Bailie John Steuart (1715-1752)* (Edinburgh, 1915). The south-western part of the Highlands, so effectively brought to life by Neil



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Munro's 'Para Handy' stories, offers further possibilities in this regard. For recent studies of the early modern 'coastal trade', variously defined, elsewhere in the Anglophone world, see John Armstrong, ed., *Coastal and Short Sea Shipping* (Aldershot, 1996); John Armstrong, *The Vital Spark: The British Coastal Trade 1700–1930* (St John's NL, 2009); James F. Shepherd and Samuel H. Williamson, 'The Coastal Trade of the British North American Colonies, 1768–1772', *The Journal of Economic History*, 32 (1972), 783-810; Stephen Hipkin, 'The Coastal Metropolitan Corn Trade in Later Seventeenth-Century England', *The Economic History Review*, 65:1 (2012), 220-55; Bronwen Cook, "'A True, Faire and Just Account": Charles Huggett and the Content of Maldon in the English Coastal Shipping Trade, 1679-1684', *The Journal of Transport History*, 26:1 (2005), 1-18; Tony Barrow, 'Corn, Carrier and Coastal Shipping: The Shipping and Trade of Berwick and the Borders, 1730-1830', *The Journal of Transport History*, 21:1 (2000), 6-27; Peter Skidmore, 'Vessels and Networks: Shipowning in North-West England's Coasting Trade in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries', *Mariner's Mirror*, 99:2 (2013), 153-70.

<sup>61</sup> 12<sup>th</sup> July ?, Darnaway, Lady Anne Stewart to David Ross, Balnagown Castle manuscripts, Tain Museum, fo. 115; ? 1686, Balnagown, the same to the same, Balnagown Castle manuscripts, fo. 117; 7 Jun 1686, Balnagown, the same to the same, Balnagown Castle manuscripts, fos. 175-6.

<sup>62</sup> Gillis, *The Human Shore*, p. 76.

<sup>63</sup> CI 1/1/2 Commissioners of Supply Minutes – Inverness 1774-84, Highland Archive Centre, pp. 120-2. This concerns a January 1784 'application to be made to Parliament for having the limits of the Estuary Rivers or Friths in Scotland ascertained to distinguish them from open sea' in relation to coal duty. As regards the firthlands, the focus was grain, regarding which it was 'the smallest quantity of Corn the natural produce of the Northern

Counties cannot be put in a Boat to cross any of the five, narrow ferries twixt this and the county of Caithness much less any part of the Murray Frith, without being liable to seizure’.

<sup>64</sup> 18<sup>th</sup> May 1733, Robert Middleton to the Customs Commissioners of Inverness, Custom House, Inverness, in William A. Shaw, ed., *Calendar of Treasury Books and Papers (1731 – 1734)* (London, 1898), p. 381.

<sup>65</sup> Macgill, *Old Ross-shire*, p. 88.

<sup>66</sup> <https://nosasblog.wordpress.com/2015/11/20/the-stone-that-built-fort-george/> (accessed 14<sup>th</sup> March 2016); William Fraser, ed., *The Sutherland Book*, 3 volumes (Edinburgh, 1892), 1, p. 414; William Fraser, ed., *The Earls of Cromartie; Their Kindred, Country, and Correspondence* (Edinburgh, 1876), 1, p. 207.

<sup>67</sup> Sage, *Memorabilia*, pp. 146-7.

<sup>68</sup> Richard Franck, *Northern memoirs, calculated for the meridian of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1821), pp. 205-6.

<sup>69</sup> Hume Brown, *Tours in Scotland*, pp. 26-7.

<sup>70</sup> Craven, *Journals*, p. 150.

<sup>71</sup> MS.108, ‘The Diary of Sir John Gordon’, National Library of Scotland, pp. 221-2, 396, 471.

<sup>72</sup> Barrett, *Mr James Allan*, p. 105; Sinclair Ross, *The Culbin Sands — Fact and Fiction* (Aberdeen, 1992).

<sup>73</sup> L. A. Yeoman, ‘Ross, Katherine (c.1635–1697)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/45821> (accessed 30<sup>th</sup> January 2016); *Memoirs of the Life of Mr. Thomas Hog, Minister of the Gospel at Kiltearn, in Ross* (Edinburgh, 1756), p. 10.

<sup>74</sup> *The Diary of Alexander Brodie of Brodie, MDCLII-MDCLXXX., and of his son, James Brodie of Brodie, MDCLXXX-MDCLXXXV* (Aberdeen, 1863), p. 378.

<sup>75</sup> MS 14279, 'The Diary of John Calder', National Library of Scotland, pp. 35, 39, 60, 65, 73.

<sup>76</sup> Gordon, *To Move with the Times*, p. 72.

<sup>77</sup> Sage, *Memorabilia*, pp. 117, 187, 247, 348.

<sup>78</sup> Synod of Ross, Chanonry Presbytery, CH2/66/1, Highland Archive Centre, pp. 69, 133, 191, 264; Synod of Sutherland, Dornoch Presbytery, CH2/1290/1, Highland Archive Centre, p. 99.

<sup>79</sup> Synod of Sutherland, Dornoch Presbytery, CH2/1290/1, Highland Archive Centre, p. 118.

<sup>80</sup> William Mackay, ed., *Chronicles of the Frasers: The Wardlaw manuscript entitled 'Polichronicon seu policratica temporum' or 'The true genealogy of the Frasers', 916-1674* (Edinburgh, 1905), p. 471.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 492.

<sup>82</sup> Dornoch Presbytery, Golspie Kirk Session Minutes, CH2/615/1, Highland Archive Centre, p. 103; Tain Presbytery, Nigg Old Kirk Session, CH2/1438/1, Highland Archive Centre, pp. 55, 57. For an analysis of the travelling poor in England during this period, see David Hitchcock, 'Editorial: Poverty and Mobility in England, 1600–1850', *Rural History*, 24:1 (2013), 1-8.

<sup>83</sup> Tain Presbytery, Nigg Old Kirk Session, CH2/1438/1, Highland Archive Centre, p. 173.

<sup>84</sup> Inverness Presbytery, Kirkhill Kirk Session Minutes, CH2/675/1, Highland Archive Centre, p. 121. Thanks to Debbie Potter, archivist at the Highland Archive Centre, for this reference.

<sup>85</sup> 'Bill of Mortality – containing all yt died Natives and Strangers in 48 years', Old Parish Register Inverness, 52, Highland Archive Centre. Thank you to Dave Selkirk for his comments on this.

<sup>86</sup> Tain Presbytery, Nigg Old Kirk Session, CH2/1438/2, Highland Archive Centre, p. 91.

<sup>87</sup> Dornoch Presbytery, Golspie Kirk Session Minutes, CH2/615/1, Highland Archive Centre, pp. 42-3.

<sup>88</sup> Golspie Kirk Session Minutes, CH2/615/1, Highland Archive Centre, p. 85.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>91</sup> Dingwall Presbytery, Kiltearn Kirk Session Minutes CH2/569/1, Highland Archive Centre, pp. 61, 90; Tain Presbytery, Nigg Old Kirk Session, CH2/1438/2, Highland Archive Centre, p. 17; Dornoch Presbytery, Golspie Kirk Session Minutes, CH2/615/1, Highland Archive Centre, pp. 38, 63.

<sup>92</sup> Sinclair, *A General View*, p. 287.

<sup>93</sup> The phrase is from the Reverend James Allan, cited in Barrett, *Mr James Allan*, p. 274.

<sup>94</sup> Charles Cordiner, *Antiquities and Scenery of the North of Scotland, in a Series of Letters to Thomas Pennant* (s.n., 1780), pp. 65-6.

<sup>95</sup> Brad Beaven, Karl Bell, and Rob James, eds, *Port Towns and Urban Cultures* (Basingstoke, 2016).