THE ROAD AND THE MILES TO CRIEFF? SOME THOUGHTS ON ASPECTS OF THE SCOTTISH DROVE CATTLE TRADE

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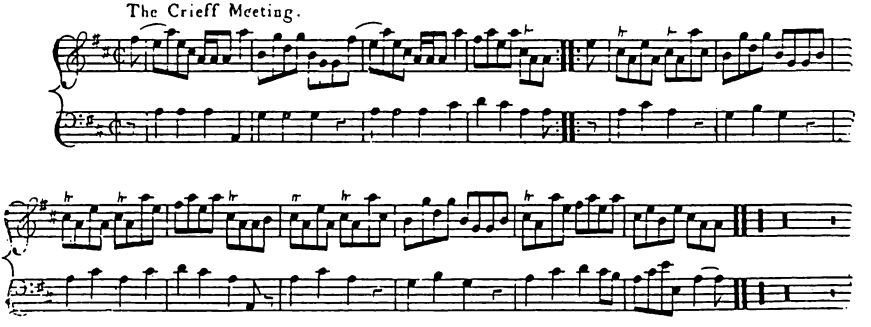


This tune is printed in a book of fiddle music compiled by John Bowie, a Perth-based musician (Bowie 1789). Bowie may have composed some of the tunes, but in common with other late eighteenth-century musicians he collected and included older and popular tunes: 'The Crieff Meeting' may be one of these.

The title of the tune suggests a connection with an event held in Crieff. This may have been a social meeting with music and dancing, or even a sports meeting – a forerunner of nineteenth-century Highland Gatherings and Games – in which foot and horse races were popular events. However, there may be an alternative connection; one in which socialising and entertainment undoubtedly played a significant part, more so if the tune may also have been known as '*The Crieff TRYST*'. In Scots the word 'Tryst' was used to denote an agreement, a solemn bargain or mutual pledge; in turn it came to mean an appointed meeting, an agreed resignation or rendezvous; and ultimately a market for the sale of livestock (Scottish National Dictionary, ix, 430–3). Could this tune then be a musical illustration of the road and the miles to Crieff which culminated in a meeting of people about cattle?

Several fairs were held in Crieff throughout the year but this paper will only discuss the 'Highland Fair' originally held on 29 September, or 10 October after the Gregorian calendar reforms of the mid-eighteenth century were introduced. The 'Highland Fair' or 'Michaelmas Fair' as it was also named, played an important part

in the economic life of Scotland for a considerable part of the eighteenth century. As late as 1761 the Fair was advertised as 'the greatest in Scotland for black cattle' (Edinburgh Almanack 1761). It became noted for the sale of young black cattle reared in the Highlands and suited to a few months' fattening in England before slaughter. Until the dominance of this market was broken by the rise of the Falkirk Tryst in the second half of the eighteenth century, it attracted sellers from all over the Scottish Highlands and buyers from as far afield as England.

In spite of the great national importance of the Michaelmas Fair, very little – apart from the descriptions contained in the Old and New Statistical Accounts – is known about its historical background (Marwick 1890, 36–7). Haldane's classic study of the drove roads in Scotland which mainly deals with the period 1700–1857 touches on the causes underlying the rise and fall of the Crieff Fair, but inevitably borrows a substantial amount of information from the printed parish accounts (Haldane 1952). Since publication of Haldane's book over forty years ago new sources, in particular local family and estate records, have become more easily available for study and shifts in emphasis of views about national economic development have emerged in historical circles. In the context of these changing circumstances and ideas, some revision and reassessment of Haldane's discussion is perhaps necessary.

This paper sets out to piece together a picture of the Michaelmas Fair from the surviving historical records and on the way considers a number of important questions – How old was the Fair? Why did it prosper? Why did it decline? – before reaching an important crossroads: a re-evaluation of Crieff and Falkirk's role as seventeenth-century cattle market centres.

Our recognition of the national significance of the Michaelmas Fair is largely based on the number of cattle sold in the early part of the eighteenth century. Macky visited 'the Highland Fair of Crieff' as he called it, in 1723, and estimated upwards of 30,000 cattle from the Highlands had changed hands, most bought by English buyers (Macky 1732, 190). Macky's estimate may be no wild exaggeration because another traveller, Robert Forbes, the Episcopal bishop of Ross and Caithness encountered a sizeable number of beasts, headed for the town, in 1762 (Craven 1886, 235–7). The Bishop noted in his travel journal how he met eight droves totalling 1200 beasts at Dalwhinnie, followed by another drove a mile-long in the Drumochter Pass and 300 more beasts resting at the mouth of Loch Garry. His account not only helps to emphasise the volume of the cattle traffic passing through the districts of Badenoch and Atholl up to a month before the Fair at Crieff, but also shows that the Highland drovers moved their cattle southwards at a slow, leisurely pace with every intention of maintaining and even improving the condition of the animals before market.

The Anglo-Scottish cattle-trade was one of the few sectors of the Scottish economy to benefit from the Union settlement of 1707. In the immediate aftermath of the 1745 Rising the raising of cattle which formed the mainstay of the Highland commercial economy may have suffered as a result of the destructive military forces that were unleashed on Highland society and land. However, livestock-raising must have made a speedy recovery because it has been suggested that major political troubles in the country failed to disrupt seriously the trans-Border cattle trade and the role played

by Crieff (Haldane 1952, 137). Indeed, the eighteenth century as a whole is often viewed as a time of expansion of cattle exports, when numbers increased to keep pace with feeding a growing population in London and English provincial towns, and stocking Army and Naval stores with salted beef (Haldane 1952, 172–3, 177). The number of cattle sold in Crieff however, never matched the 60,000 beasts put forward at Falkirk towards the end of the century (Haldane 1952, 205). But even after the great days of the Michaelmas market were over, the Fair remained an event where around 1000 Highland horses were sold as well as a similar number of locally reared and fattened cattle, usually to Scottish graziers and butchers. Drovers still brought around 10,000 cattle through the town on their way southwards to Falkirk, reminding the town of its former associations with cattle bred farther afield in the Scottish Highlands (Marwick 1890, 36).

Table 1: Crieff Occupational Structure 1716

Maltman	1	Shoemaker	3	Merchant	6
Brewer	8	Glover	1	Chapman	1
Baxter	1	Weaver	2		
Flesher	2	Tailor	1	Notary	1
		Smith	2	Writer	1
		Armourer	1		
		Glazier	1	Indwellers	7
		Mason	1	Widows	3
		Wigmaker	1		
		Barber	3		
		Surgeon	1		
		Cadger	1		

The number and range of services present in early eighteenth-century Crieff did not rival those available in many old-established burghs, yet as Table 1 illustrates the town managed to find enough business for a few specialised tradesmen such as an armourer, a glazier and a wigmaker before 1716. Brewing, satisfying a more every-day need, was a major activity. The eight brewers, who also probably kept inns, along with the maltman, baker and two butchers served the town's small craft community of shoemakers, weavers, metalworkers, glover and tailor, and of course the visitors to the annually-held fairs. The group of merchants, some of whom traded in skins and hides, and the town's notary and writer, more than likely provided useful contacts and agents for financial and legal work, connected with the business of the fairs.

The sale of cattle at the Michaelmas Fair generated a supply of money in the town, out of all proportion to its size. At the time of his visit Macky estimated that over £33,000 was in circulation (Macky 1732, 190). Between 1725 and 1750 the town

developed functions more usually associated with a national financial centre. In 1730 staff from the Royal Bank of Scotland in Edinburgh were sent to Crieff to receive cash and put notes worth £3,000 into circulation (Haldane 1952, 137). Bailie Steuart, a leading merchant in Inverness, wrote to William McLeod of Ebost at the Michaelmas Fair in 1734, instructing McLeod to bring home credit bills, not ready money (Mackay 1915, 386). Undoubtedly, the use of notes and bills was a safer way of transferring capital and assets around those parts of the country where high risks of robbery and theft existed. But as well as financial institutions and businesses, the Fair at Crieff was also an important date in the financial calendar for individuals. The proceeds of the cattle sales raised money for Highland landowners to settle debts and arrange credit, sometimes immediately in Crieff merchants' houses and inns, or a few days later in Edinburgh (Mackay 1915, 339, 361, 385, 388, 401, 408).

Written sources such as estate accounts and barony court regulations provide invaluable information to piece together a picture, but they lack the atmosphere of fairs as people went about their business, that painters successfully capture on canvas. Any fair, though an infrequent event, had to be as well-organised as a weekly market especially where large numbers of people convened. The Michaelmas Fair opened with a great theatrical show, intended as much as a feast for the eyes of the drovers and dealers as for the local people.

Before his enforced exile to France for his part in the Forty-Five the Duke of Perth held a court formally instituting the Fair, followed by a procession of the market guard in which he rode at the head around the precincts of the market place and his other property in the town (Marwick 1890, 37). Earlier records of the 1710s and 1720s suggest that the market guard indeed played a major part in the proceedings. The market guard, usually formed of tenants from the Perth lands around Loch Earnside, was selected several days before the Fair when the factor called a barony court at Meuvie. The guard comprised three companies of men, dressed in 'highland cloth' and armed with halberds. There were ten men in each company, each commanded by a captain who was probably chosen as much for his ability to speak Gaelic and English as his ability to give orders. On the morning of the Fair the guard usually assembled at the Bridge of Turret before it marched up to Milnab or Galvelmore to receive instructions (SRO GD24/1/781/10; GD160/41/vii/10; GD160/41/vii/14). The guard's duty was to provide more than an air of pageantry at the Fair; it maintained law and order in and around the market, a not altogether easy task among crowds in a high-spirited mood.

Money was increasingly used to pay rents in rural areas after the establishment of local markets and fairs. They also helped to generate a cash income for landowners through the payment of custom tolls on sold goods, and sometimes on bought goods as well.

At small, local fairs business may not have been sufficiently brisk to introduce tariffs, but at large, well-attended fairs such as the Michaelmas Fair the revenue from the tolls could be substantial. At the Michaelmas Fair cattle sellers paid 13s.4d. Scots for every 20 beasts brought to the market, approximately 8d. Scots per head (SRO E777/221/1(2)). This money was usually collected on the day of the Fair but

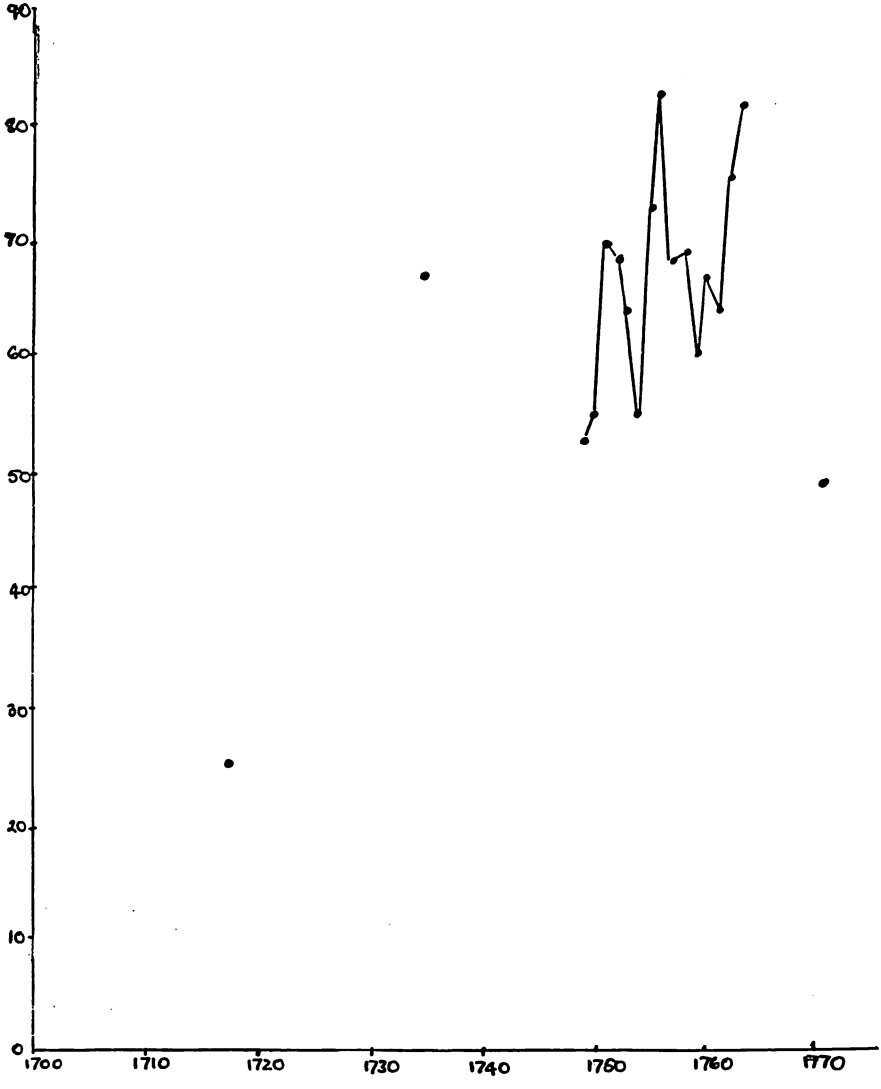
attempts were made in the declining years of the Fair to uplift payment eight days before and after the Fair day, so that drovers who were simply passing through the town would be liable to pay the toll (SRO E777/220/7(1)). Upwards of twenty men were employed to collect the tariffs, strategically placed on the roads leading into Crieff. One of the collecting stations was on the main road near Monzie, making it difficult for Highland traffic travelling south through the Sma' Glen to evade payment (SRO E777/222/3(2); E777/222/3(4)). Fair customs not only became an integral part of an estate rental but also attracted individuals to bid for the right to collect the revenue.

Haldane suggested that the Highland Fair at Crieff may have experienced a rapid rise in its fortunes (Haldane 1952, 136); however, the extent to which this may have happened is difficult to determine because of the serious gaps in the rental evidence. It seems likely that the rapid rise, if it happened, probably occurred between 1717 and 1734. Diagram 1 shows that in 1717 all the fairs on the Perth Estate were valued at £25 Sterling or £300 Scots, with the highest proportion of this value almost certainly derived from the profits of the Michaelmas Fair at Crieff. Even in 1763 in the early years of its decline this fair still accounted for over 80% of the tolls collected in that year (SRO E777/220/2). By 1734 the rental value of the Fair had jumped to nearly £67, a figure, however, still well short of the maximum figure of £83 recorded in 1755. The success of a fair could also be the source of its downfall, more so if landowners gave freedom to the Custom Collecter to fix tariff rates. In 1761 drovers stayed away from the Michaelmas Fair after the introduction of a tariff on cattle entering the market and another on all sold cattle, in effect an attempt to double the custom income (SRO E777/220/1; E777/221/1(2)). The intention of the Custom Collecter may have been to recoup swiftly his initial financial outlay, but his actions backfired with damaging repercussions for the future of the Fair. By 1770 the roup value of the Fair had dropped to £50, and even this was still considerably more than the £32 collected in toll receipts (SRO E777/220/4(1))!

Undoubtedly the hey-day of the Michaelmas Fair belonged to the eighteenth century, but establishing its date of foundation and charting its subsequent growth may not be so straightforward as may seem at first. The earliest known reference so far to the actual sale of cattle at the Fair is in an uninteresting letter of confirmation to an Edinburgh lawyer dated 30 September 1702, the day after the Fair (SRO GD221/ Bundle 1). By 1709 Viscount Stormont of Scone purchased as many as 232 beasts at the Fair and wintered them on his estate near Ruthwell in Dumfriesshire, before sending them off to Norfolk for sale the next summer (Earl of Mansfield MSS, Bundle 590).

The fair is considerably older than these records suggest though its national prominence may have been a comparatively late development. In 1672 the Scots Parliament confirmed the Earl of Perth's right as the heritable Steward of Strathearn to hold a weekly market and three fairs including the Michaelmas Fair in the town (Marwick 1890, 36). A weekly market had certainly flourished here for at least the previous fifty years; by 1614 an unofficial Thursday market was held around the parish kirk, and probably was in existence before the end of the sixteenth century

Diagram 1. Michaelmas Fair Rents



(Murray of Dollerie MSS, Bundle 6/2). In 1584 fairs already operated in Crieff, Fowlis Wester and Dunning, undoubtedly using their proximity to churches to draw trade (RPC, iii, 690). The extent to which these fairs served only the parish and the immediate local area is uncertain but intervention by the Privy Council to ban the fairs – in order to contain the spread of plague in 1584 – perhaps hints that these fairs had assumed a wider regional trading importance before the end of the sixteenth century. In the case of the Michaelmas Fair, it tried if not succeeded in attracting buyers and sellers from farther afield by the 1630s, with its inclusion in a printed list of national fairs (Prognostication for this yeare since Christs birth 1632).

Cattle trading at the earliest Michaelmas Fairs may not have been on the scale of the later Fairs, but most probably it would have been difficult to detect noticeable differences in the droving methods and techniques used to drive the cattle to market. A drover from the Flodigarry and Kingsburgh Estates in north Skye described to Bishop Forbes how every drove had up to four men and some boys to look after the cattle. He also informed the Bishop that when the drove was large it was the custom to subdivide the animals into smaller groups, making it easier to handle the cattle in narrow passes and on bridges. The cattle covered up to twelve miles a day though the actual distance must have varied with the terrain and the weather conditions. Drovers rarely pushed their beasts hard allowing them to graze as they moved along, and usually stopped their animals for a mid-day rest after four hours on the hoof. Even where inns were available, most drovers perhaps slept outside in the open air and watched the cattle (Craven 1886, 236–7; Haldane 1952, 35).

In the eighteenth century cattle from Skye reached the Crieff Fair by way of Kintail and then either by Lochaber and Rannoch, or Badenoch and Atholl (Haldane 1952, 84; Craven 1886, 235–7). These routes were also used in the seventeenth century except that the journey to market continued south of Crieff. Estate accounts show that cattle drovers on the Dunvegan Estate in 1670 incurred expenses at Sconser, Kyle, Kintail, Glen Garry, Glen Quaich, Sheriffmuir, Dunblane, Stirling and Falkirk: Crieff is conspicuous by its absence from the list of places (Macleod 1938, 210). Map 1 attempts to illustrate the routes that may have been used. The reconstruction of the journey is of interest not least because some members of the party seem to have split up from the main body and the cattle, and sailed from Sconser to Kyle. This most probably was the laird, who even in the later eighteenth century was more likely to travel independently and seldom rejoined his drovemaster before the sale venue (Craven 1886, 237). Nor is the southward journey on the mainland exactly clear. If the Glen Garry mentioned in the list of expenses is the glen in Perthshire, the cattle most likely followed the road by way of Glen Moriston, Fort Augustus and Dalwhinnie. However, if it is the Glen Garry in Inverness-shire, the cattle may have made for Spean Bridge, before crossing Rannoch Moor and into Glen Lyon. Both these routes meet north of Crieff, and it may be that the 'Glainquaick – neir Dunblane' is a phonetic spelling of Glen Quaich, west of Amulree and just twelve miles north of Crieff (Macleod 1938, 210). Dunblane, Sheriffmuir and Glen Quey – incidentally another possible contender for 'Glainquaick' – all lie on or near drove roads south of Crieff. It is possible, though unlikely, that the drove on reaching

Spean Bridge headed in the direction of Tyndrum and Stirling and spent some time grazing on the upland pastures around Sheriffmuir and Glen Quey in south Perthshire, recovering from the trek before being driven on to the market at Falkirk.

The Dunvegan drove must have passed very close to Crieff but by 1670 the town had yet to develop as a national market. Crieff may already have acted as a major local gathering centre for cattle from upper Strathearn, going south to markets in the Scottish lowlands and England. Thomas Morer, writing about his travel experiences in Scotland only some twenty years later in 1689, described how the Highlanders brought down their cattle to towns on the edge of the highland country for sale and returned home with supplies of meal (Morer 1706, 5, 12). The Earl of Perth realised the potential of Crieff as a meeting-place for Highlanders and Lowlanders, and embarked upon developing his estates in the vicinity of the town towards this end. Shortly after acquiring his market and fair rights in 1672 he set about challenging the rights of a neighbouring small landowner, Murray of Dollerie, to hold customary markets and fairs around the old Kirkton. Disputes about the markets and fairs dragged on from 1674 to 1704, even after the Scots Parliament recognised the Dollerie markets and fairs in 1681. Throughout the litigation the sale of meal and victual – not cattle – in the town was the central issue of the dispute (Murray of Dollerie MSS, Bundle 6).

In 1682 the Earl of Perth purchased from a near relative, George Drummond, ground at the west end of the Kirkton and set about its development as a market. He laid out a market place, erected a tron and cross, and built a tolbooth which also acted as a courthouse and prison (SRO GD160/63/17). In 1685 the earl further purchased from his relative the open slopes of the Knock which became the cattle stance for the Fair (SRO GD160/63/21). The earl's efforts to establish Crieff on the drovers' map seems to have met with moderate success before the end of the century. In 1692 it was estimated that the yearly turnover of trade in Crieff was around £6,000 Scots or £500 Sterling (Marwick 1890, 36). In the second half of the eighteenth century the Custom Collecters would stress that most of their income was derived from the sale of black cattle at the Michaelmas Fair, but in the seventeenth century substantially more meal, barley, malt, seed corn, and hides and skins may have been sold (SRO E777/220/1; E777/220/2; E777/220/4(1)). It is difficult to estimate the volume of cattle sold at the Fair at the end of the seventeenth century; as few as 600 beasts may have been sold if we assume that the average autumn price of a Highland stott was around £10 Scots. Quite clearly by the end of the seventeenth century the Earl of Perth successfully laid the foundations of a market town and cattle market that would take off in the next century.

The foundation charters of burghs protected market and fair privileges and ensured that the burghs enjoyed a monopoly of trade throughout the medieval period. By the early seventeenth century a considerable amount of trade was still concentrated in such settlements as Perth, Coupar Angus and Dunblane but unfree fairs and markets emerged in the hinterlands of the burghs, often in the vicinity of churches as at Strageath, Crieff and Kilmahog (Prognostication for 1632). Most of the marketing centres were situated either in the lowland district or along its boundary

with the uplands. Towards the end of the seventeenth century weekly markets and periodic fairs, authorised by Act of Parliament, proliferated but the broad geographical distribution of earlier times remained. Maps 2–5 show that they initially developed in the carselands of Gowrie and other eastern districts where growing surpluses in arable farming and domestic cottage industry may have stimulated greater commercial opportunities. After 1660 upland and highland Perthshire was integrated into the expanding network of fairs. By 1684 a fair was advertised at Kinloch Rannoch and by the 1720s fairs were active as far afield as Balquhidder, Glen Lyon and Atholl. The highland fairs marketed livestock and to a lesser extent yarn and home-produced cloth, using the cash proceeds to pay rents. In the eighteenth century estate factors in highland districts often waited anxiously for their local cattle markets to uplift rents, complaining about a constant shortage of money beforehand (Duke of Atholl MSS, Atholl Chartulary, i, 2 February 1708; Box 45 (1) 146; Box 54 (1) 227; Box 54 (1) 234; Earl of Moray MSS, Box 8/1096). Many of these small highland fairs, held close to main droving thoroughfares, may have originated as local gathering centres for cattle. Opportunities inevitably arose for passing drovers to purchase beasts but Perthshire-based droving families such as the McLarens may have monopolised the trade, making great use of their local knowledge and contacts.

Why did the Michaelmas Fair thrive in a countryside dotted with numerous fairs of roughly comparable age? Chance and circumstantial factors undoubtedly exerted an influence, but there were intrinsic factors strongly acting in Crieff's favour.

Any fair located at the interface of highland and lowland country possessed an immediate economic advantage; in the case of Crieff it was reinforced further by geographical advantage. For many parts of the Scottish Highlands Crieff was the shortest distance to a lowland market. Map 6 shows clearly that Crieff was the focus of a number of drove roads that fanned out into the Highlands, following natural tracks through the hills. Drove roads from the north of Scotland, from Skye and the Western Isles, and from Morayshire, Aberdeenshire and Angus converged on the town. Map 7 based on the surnames of drovers who passed through the town in the early 1770s illustrates that drovers from all these areas headed for Crieff, even if going on to a more southerly lowland market town. The town's geographical advantages, however, were not so clear-cut for drovers from Argyll and the south-west Highlands. Crieff was easily reached from Mull and northern Argyll but after the upgrading of the road between Stirling and Fort William by the early 1760s (see Map 8) drovers from these areas preferred to strike southwards at the head of Loch Earn, instead of turning east along upper Strathearn towards Crieff. The rest of Argyll, particularly in its more southerly parts, were more conveniently served by Dumbarton and Falkirk, although in the great days of the Michaelmas Fair drovers from this part of the country may have been attracted by high prices and buyers.

The availability of extensive pasture on the road and around Crieff was another important factor in its favour. According to the author of the Old Statistical parish account drovers paid no grazing charges along the way to market until the second half of the eighteenth century (Marwick 1890, 36). This may have been the case in the

northern Highlands of Scotland, but by the early 1700s grazing tolls had been introduced in the southern margins of the Highlands where remote hill pastures were increasingly used for the summer fattening of lowland oxen (Duke of Atholl MSS, Box 45 (4) 243; Box 44 IV A6; Box 51 V 5). In the Atholl district from 1711 onwards drovers were charged for pasturing and resting overnight on ground adjoining traditional drove roads. These grazing tolls were collected on the main road from Inverness, north of Tummel Bridge, and along the south side of the Tummel valley (Duke of Atholl MSS, Atholl Chartulary, i, 21 December 1711). Another toll point was set up in 1712 in Glen Almond, making it difficult for North East drovers coming across Strathbraan to avoid payment (Duke of Atholl MSS, Atholl Chartulary, i, 3 September 1712). Undoubtedly this road became a popular route after the bridging of the Almond at Newtown in the Sma' Glen after 1706 (Duke of Atholl MSS, Box 45 (6) 27). From the outset the bridge was planned to assist the drovers at a difficult river crossing, particularly in flood condition. Glen Almond belonged to the Atholl Estate but the drovers from the north, west and east of the country who passed across its extensive lands paid only one toll. Nevertheless, the payment of grazing tolls increased the costs of droving, but their relative proportion of the droving expenses is not known; in England where expenses were always relatively higher, grazing tolls accounted for 67% of the costs incurred by a drove from Comlongon in Dumfriesshire to the St Faith's Fair near Norwich in 1714 (Earl of Mansfield MSS, Bundle 590).

In many respects the relative locational advantage of Crieff is accentuated by the difficulties faced by Perth in setting up a new autumn cattle market. Traditionally Perth was an important market for south-bound cattle from Angus, Kincardine and Aberdeenshire which did not follow the Strathbraan route. In 1670 the St Dennis Fair was held on the outskirts of the burgh on the North Inch and Blackfriar lands (Perth Burgh Records, B59/16/8 f.90). The Town Council responded to the limited success of the fair by circulating advertisements as far afield as Aberdeen and Inverness to attract 'drovemasters' and 'southern merchants' (Perth Burgh Records, B59/16/8 f.100); B59/19/1/1). The Town Council also levied no custom tolls in 1671 and 1672, and again from 1674 to 1676 (Perth Burgh Records, B59/16/8 f.100; B59/16/9 f.40). By 1687 the fair was described as 'turned altogether unprofitable for the inhabitants' and continued custom free until 1694 (Perth Burgh Records, B59/16/10 f.85). The sluggish nature of this Perth fair acts as a good reminder that cattle fairs were never a guaranteed success.

Lt. John Grant of Lurg, a Scottish drover of the later eighteenth century and a regular traveller through Crieff pinpointed a distinct break with the past that heralded the demise of the Michaelmas Fair (SRO E777/222/8). He recalled how the English cattle dealers deserted the town and insisted that the drovers bring the cattle south to Falkirk in the 1760s. At the time of Macky's visit to Crieff in 1723 the town was the terminus of the Highland drove journey, though the dealers might bargain with the Highlanders to drive the cattle on to England for a wage of one shilling per day (Macky 1732, 190). How did this boycott of the Michaelmas Fair come about?

The decline of the Fair probably was as swift as its rise. In many respects there is no real surprise about the speed given that market forces prevailed and determined

conditions. Local landowners around the town made efforts to revive the Fair in 1773 but even the offer of a new market stance on the western outskirts of the town met with no enthusiasm for the drovers (SRO E777/220/5). The Fair, however, never completely decayed; by the end of the century it simply became a smaller, localised market.

Diagram 2 helps to show that between 1750 and 1760 the Fair rents followed an overall upward trend despite the rents varying from year to year. These variations were no straightforward reflection of the experienced difficulties; year to year fluctuations were to be expected in a situation where rents were based on roup bids, and roup bids in turn based on personal experience, opinion and intuition. Every Custom Collecter expected to receive a revenue which would exceed the actual collected tolls and the costs of administration; unfortunately what proportion of profit constituted a satisfactory return is difficult to gauge. The crux of the trouble experienced by the Custom Collecters from 1761 onwards was that in this period the gap between the expected and actual toll revenues widened. The income raised at the Fair often amounted to less that half of its roup value – for example in 1761 £40 was taken in tolls while it was rouped for £76 – and prompted petitions from the Custom Collecter to review original bids (SRO E777/220/1). A similar problem beset other fairs in the neighbourhood of Crieff; at Fowlis Wester in 1767 the Collecters brought in slightly more than half of the roup figure and were prepared to write off their expenses in collecting the tolls if their roup agreement was revoked (SRO E777/220/3 (1)).

The black cattle which produced the bulk of the custom income in the fairs by the mid-eighteenth century were the reason for the troubled markets. In the initial disastrous year of 1761 the Custom Collecter blamed the fall in revenue on the north and west Highland dealers who arrived in the town and departed before the Michaelmas Fair, thus evading the tolls (SRO E777/220/1). Subsequent Collecters also stressed the importance of the cattle to the toll income (SRO E777/220/2; E777/220/4 (1)).

The number of cattle sold in the difficult years after 1760 can perhaps be estimated if we base our figures around the calculation that 1800 cattle netted £5 Sterling in custom revenue. The 1761 rent suggests that the sale of over 27,000 beasts was expected but maybe only around 15,000 were sold, dropping to around 12,000 beasts by 1770. These estimated figures may not fall far short of the real numbers: in 1772 over 13,000 cattle – worth £37 in lost custom – passed through the town on their way to market at Falkirk (SRO E777/220/7 (1)).

The Michaelmas Fair underwent a noticeable decline in the 1760s, caused by the growing discontent of the drovers. Curiously, in less than twenty years the blame for the decline of the Fair was shifted from the Highland drovers to the English dealers (SRO E777/222/8)! The disenchantment of the drovers may have showed first signs in the early 1740s when land on the edge of the town at Culcrieff – traditionally used for grazing drove cattle – was enclosed to form parks, subdivided by inner dykes and eventually cultivated (SRO E777/60; E777/61/6(1); E777/221/3). By the late 1770s there were plans to enclose and plant the site of the Fair stance too (SRO E777/222/8).

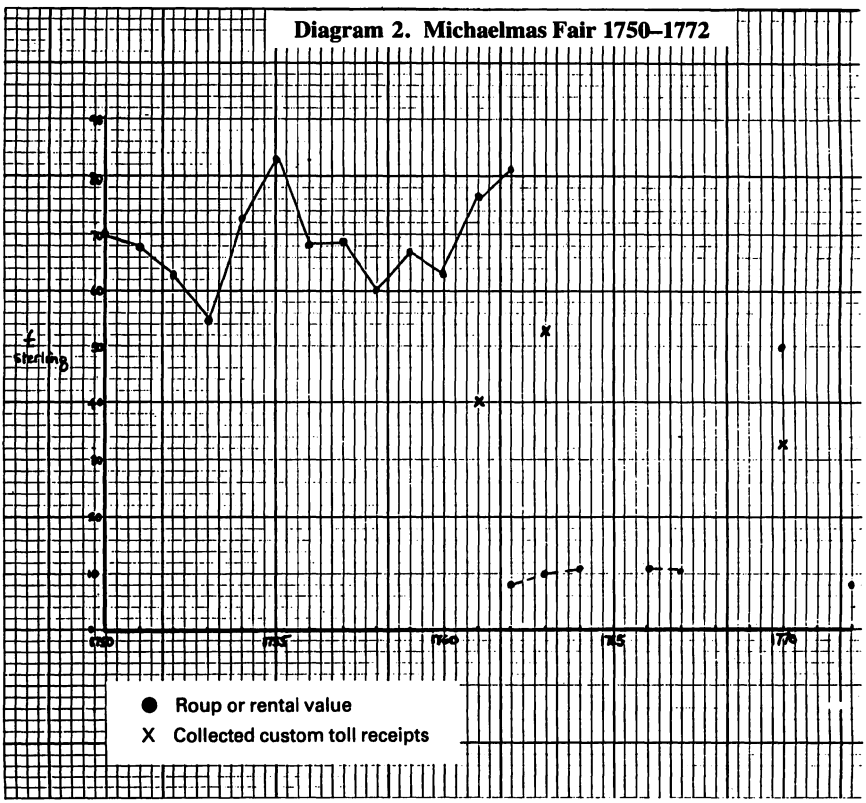


Diagram 2. Michaelmas Fair 1750–1772
£ sterling
1750
1755
1760
1765
1770
● Roup or rental value
X Collected custom toll receipts

The imposition of increased custom tariffs, however, lay at the core of the drovers' real grievances. Revenue doubled after the Custom Collecters exacted a toll on cattle brought to the Fair and a new additional toll on sold cattle (SRO E777/221/1 (2)). This particular toll most likely led to the boycott of Crieff by the drovers, or the dealers if the latter were the intended target of the new toll. As late as 1773 local heritors believed that if lower custom rates were fixed and collected directly by the factor, the decline of the Fair might be reversed (SRO E777/220/5).

Crieff also found it increasingly difficult to compete with other fairs. A new cattle fair was established at Doune on the day before the Michaelmas Fair in the 1760s (SRO E777/320). Inevitably this new fair syphoned business from Crieff, forcing drovers to make a deliberate choice of market as these fairs were not within a day's reasonable travelling distance nor on the same route. The Doune fair, however, probably hurt Stirling's cattle trade more than Crieff. Under the terms arranged with the local landowner, the Earl of Moray, no customs were chargeable for twenty-one years. The fair was further enhanced by its situation on the main road between Stirling and Fort William; a route increasingly used after the road was improved, by drovers from southern Inverness-shire and northern Argyll as a quicker and cheaper route to markets in the south (SRO E777/221/1 (2)). At Doune as in the case of Crieff, unsold cattle could also be taken on to Falkirk a few days later for sale. Fairs that fitted in better with the timing of the Carlisle market began to play a greater role in the later eighteenth century (E777/221/1 (2)). The advantages of Falkirk and to a lesser extent Doune too, was their more southerly situation and their greater accessibility for home dealers based around the growing urban centres in Central Scotland and English dealers.

Falkirk is often cast in the history books as an upstart market centre which successfully hived off the Anglo-Scottish cattle trade that once belonged to the Michaelmas Fair at Crieff. The increased cost of droving, the need to adopt the quickest routes for the English markets and the number of English dealers who travelled northwards helped to make Falkirk a more convenient and central market (Haldane 1952, 137–8).

The Falkirk Tryst was held on the second Tuesday of October, two days after the Crieff Fair. Haldane suggested that it had developed from an informal agreement by cattle dealers to meet (Haldane 1952, 138). His suggestion seems to be correct because neither the Tryst itself nor its approximate dates are recorded in the Falkirk burgh charters which date back to the beginning of the seventeenth century (Marwick 1890, 53–4). Throughout its history the Falkirk Tryst was never authorised by Act of Parliament and remained an unfree event unlike the Crieff Fair. Haldane looked for origins in the early eighteenth century, shortly after the 1707 Union (Haldane 1952, 138). By 1716 the Tryst was held on muirland near Polmont, probably encouraged by the Duke of Hamilton who appointed agents to collect a custom toll. It remained at this venue until it moved to near Rough Castle in the early 1770s, and finally Stenhousemuir in 1785 (Haldane 1952, 138–9). In spite of this documented history the Falkirk Tryst is omitted from lists of fairs in almanacs until the early 1770s (Aberdeen Almanack 1774).

The recent study of West Highland family papers has uncovered evidence of Falkirk playing a role in the droving trade before the eighteenth century. By 1670 cattle from the Dunvegan Estate in Skye were taken as far south as Falkirk, and over seventy years later this estate still had associations with the town and its Tryst, as well as the Michaelmas Fair (Macleod 1938, 210; Macleod of Dunvegan MSS, 4/280). Likewise from the 1680s droves of cattle – sometimes 1500 strong – were raised on the Campbell of Cawdor lands in Islay and taken to Falkirk for pick-up by pre-arranged buyers or sale (Earl of Cawdor MSS, Bundle 590/47; Bundle 590/41; Bundle 484/4). And in this period too Lochaweside cattle were sold at Falkirk by mainland Argyll drovers to English buyers (RPC, xiii, 303–4). The surviving records seem to hint that Falkirk – though an unofficial meeting place for cattle dealers – was a more important centre for the cattle trade than Crieff. Its seventeenth-century importance, however, may have been regional in character, attracting drovers and their cattle from Argyll and parts of the Western Highlands as far north as Skye, and also perhaps cattle that were ready for sale before autumn. Nevertheless, its mid-way position between the rapidly growing burghs of Glasgow and Edinburgh, and its closer proximity to England, offered the prospect to become the national autumn market centre of the future.

Our final task remains to place the Crieff Michaelmas Fair and the Falkirk Tryst under the wider framework of the droving trade and to suggest the direction that future historical enquiry may take in a reassessment of their importance. Undoubtedly both evolved out of informal meeting places for cattle dealers into regional centres, and ultimately markets of national significance. Speculation though it may be, it is very tempting to view Crieff as a centre which mainly served the North of Scotland, and Falkirk as a centre which focused on Argyll and the Western Highlands.

Cattle droving formed part of local and regional trading activity in Scotland for at least a century before it developed links with south of the Border. In the sixteenth century cattle from Argyll were taken to the Scottish lowlands, and in the north cattle from parts of Skye like Trotternish were driven to markets on the Scottish mainland as far away as Eastern Scotland (Haldane 1952, 14). Home markets remained important in the seventeenth century, but this was also a period of trading expansion and links with markets in England, initially for Galloway and the Borders, and eventually the Scottish Highlands. Population growth in London, the lowering of border custom duties and the introduction of parliamentary legislation in England banning the import of Irish cattle, helped to foster the Anglo-Scottish cattle trade (Whyte 1979, 237). North of the Border a corpus of legislation was passed by the Scots Parliament also largely designed to promote the drove cattle trade. The exclusion of Irish livestock from Scottish markets in 1666 not only protected home producers from the better quality Irish cattle, but also curbed the illegal transport of Irish cattle into England. In 1672 restrictions on individuals to trade cattle outside Scotland were lifted, followed by a Commission in 1680 to encourage the export of cattle and other trade with England (Whyte 1979, 237; RPC, vi, 431). Cattle producers and dealers in Galloway, the Borders and the Highlands responded swiftly to the new trading opportunities, opened up by the legislation. In 1667 an Inverary merchant bought 200 cattle in Islay, intended for sale at Carlisle (Earl of Cawdor

MSS, Bundle 590/71). And by the mid-1680s there were plans to take Islay cattle as far south as East Anglia or Middlesex if no buyers were found at Falkirk (Earl of Cawdor MSS, Bundle 590/41). At this stage of the proceedings it is difficult to conclude how typical the Cawdor Campbell droving activities were of West Highland landowners in general. The majority of landowners may have ventured no farther south than Falkirk, preferring to entrust the risks of a trip to England to those who knew the English roads and markets better. By the end of the seventeenth century the Scottish custom border toll records show that 30,000 cattle passed across the Border, though it is impossible to estimate the numbers that originated in the Scottish Highlands (Whyte 1979, 240). And by the end of the next century the cattle traffic to England climbed to around 100,000 beasts – a threefold increase – with around 60,000 beasts bought at Falkirk alone (Haldane 1952, 205).

Later seventeenth-century Falkirk perhaps was more important than Crieff as an Anglo-Scottish cattle market. Under the Earl of Perth's patronage the Crieff Michaelmas Fair may have grown to overshadow the Falkirk Tryst which then found it difficult to re-establish its former position until the second half of the eighteenth century. Such a scenario would certainly fit in with our impression of the adaptability of drovers. Just as they changed the methods of their droving and the use of drove roads to suit the needs of their trade, so too their markets may have changed from time to time to suit the prevailing political, social and economic conditions. In the early years of the Anglo-Scottish cattle trade the Highland drovers may have chosen the road and counted the miles to Falkirk, not Crieff!

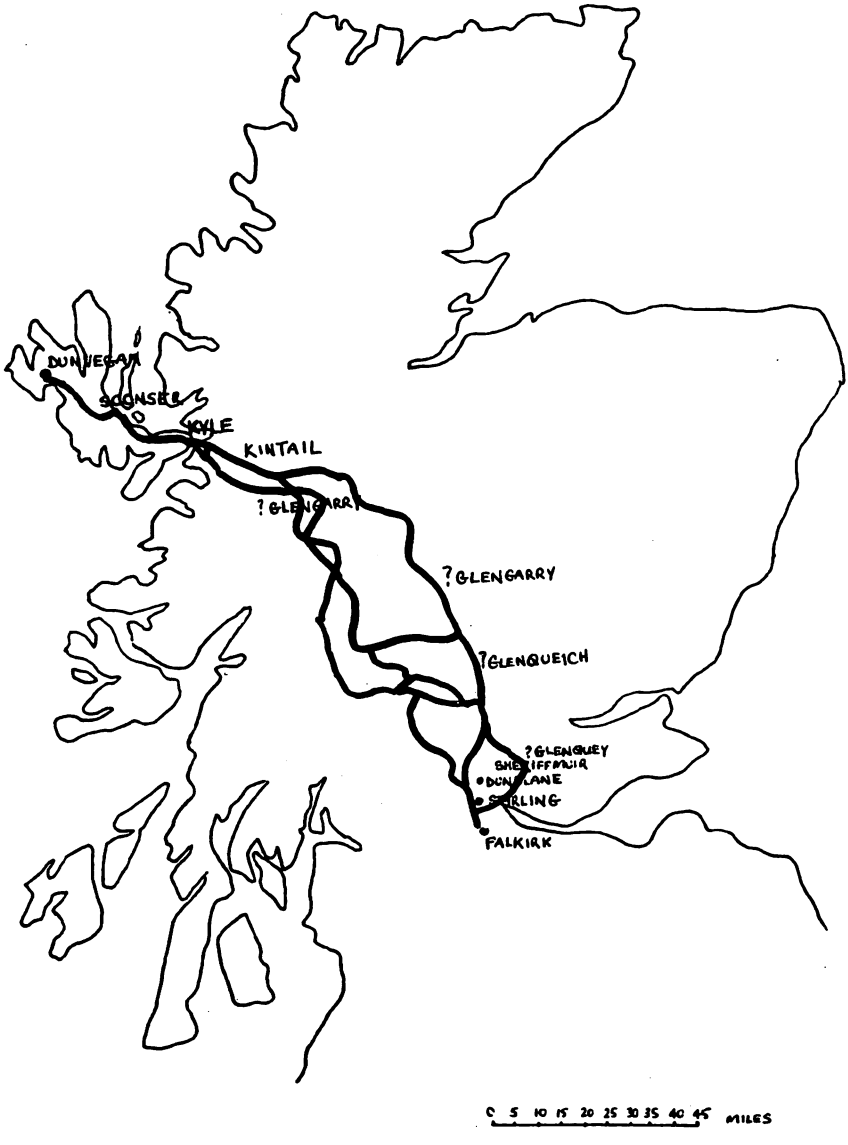
The idea of Falkirk as Scotland's leading cattle market in the seventeenth century is attractive, more so if we are prepared to base our judgements on estate papers in contrast to the accounts of travellers. In any real assessment of Crieff's and Falkirk's role in droving history it is imperative that there is a fuller examination of the seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century records of estates in Inverness-shire, Ross and Cromarty, Sutherland and Caithness – areas certainly drawn to Crieff in the mid-eighteenth century – to establish when these northern parts of Scotland became involved in the cattle trade and where their cattle were sold. Was Crieff the original terminus for the North of Scotland cattle is an important question which remains as yet unanswered.

For this journal it is most appropriate to end on a North of Scotland note where the key to any reassessment of Crieff's seventeenth-century significance may lie. There is a poem entitled, 'Oran Mur Gu'M B'Ann le Drobhair Araid D'A Leannan' - in English translated as 'A Drover To His Sweetheart' – and is traditionally sung to the Lowland air Logie o' Buchan (Morrison 1899, 145). This poem was penned *circa* 1735 by Rob Donn Calder or Mackay, a famous Gaelic poet and could quite easily be retitled 'The Road and the Miles from Crieff'. It deals with the poet missing his loved one and home in the Reay country in north-west Sutherland. The sentiments of sadness and regret expressed in the poem, though for quite different reasons, may also have been shared by the inhabitants of Crieff in the 1770s when they realised that the days of the Michaelmas Fair and the business it brought to the town was a fading memory of the past.

Easy is my bed, it is easy,
But it is not to sleep that I incline;
The wind whistles northwards, northwards,
And my thoughts move with it.
More pleasant were it to be with thee
In the little glen of the calves,
Than to be counting of droves
In the enclosures of Crieff.
Easy is my bed, &c.
Great is my esteem of the maiden,
Towards whose dwelling the north wind blows;
She is ever cheerful, sportive, kindly,
Without folly, without vanity, without pride.
True is her heart – were I under hiding,
And fifty men in pursuit of my footsteps,
I would find protection, when they surround me most closely,
In the secret recess of that shieling.
Easy is my bed, &c.
Oh for the day for turning my face homeward,
That I may see the maiden of beauty:–
Joyful will it be to me to be with thee,
Fair girl with the long heavy locks!
Choice of all places for deer-hunting
Are the brindled rock and the ridge!
How sweet at evening to be dragging the slain deer
Downwards along the piper's cairn!
Easy is my bed, &c.
Dear to me are the boundaries of the forest;
Far from Crieff is my heart;
My remembrance is of the hillocks of sheep,
And the heaths of many knolls.
Oh for the red-streaked fissures of the rock,
Where, in spring time, the fawns leap;
Oh for the crags towards which the wind is blowing –
Cheap would be my bed to me there!
Easy is my bed, &c.
Great is my esteem for the maiden
Who parted from me by the west side of the enclosed field;
Late yet again will she linger in that fold,
Long after the kine are assembled.
It is I myself that have taken no dislike to thee,
Though far away from thee am I now.
It is for the thought of thee that sleep flies from me:
Great is the profit to me of thy parting kiss!
Easy is my bed, &c.

(Quarterly Review, xlv (1831), 371–2)

Map 1. Dunvegan Drove Route 1670



Map 2. Listed Fairs and Markets 1632

● Fair and Market Centres

Map 3. Listed Fairs and Markets 1684

● New Fair and Market Centres 1632–1684

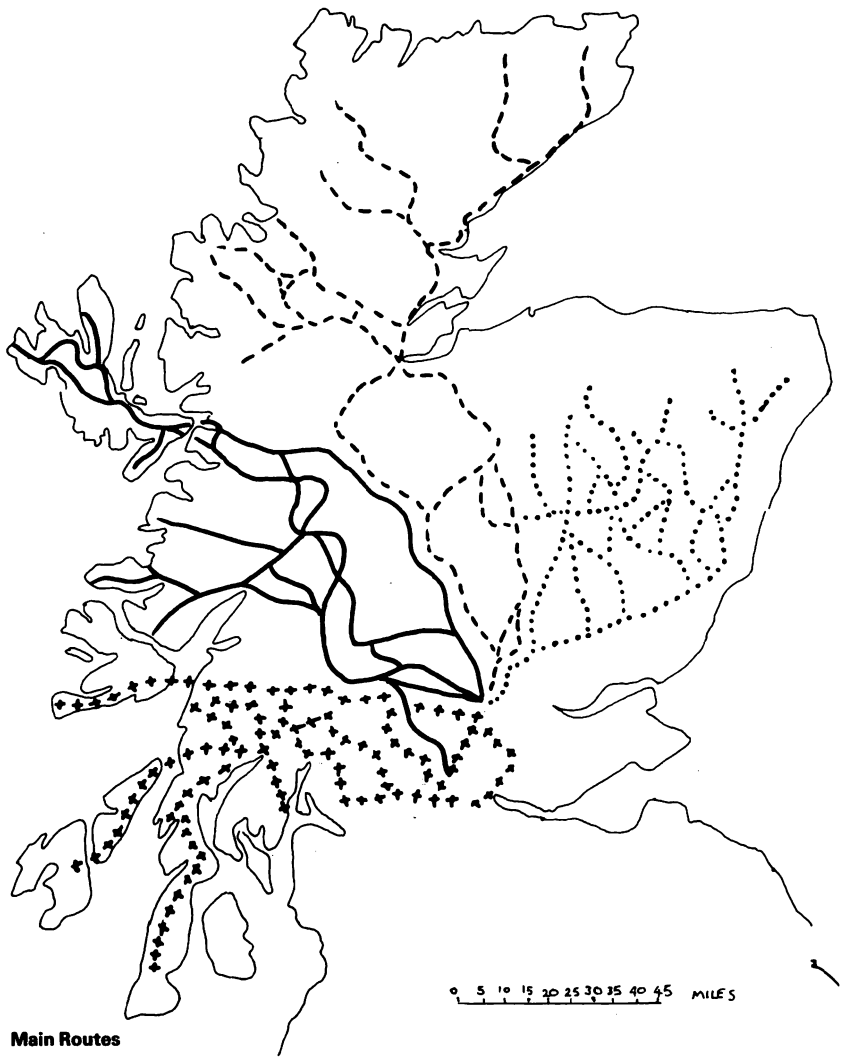
Map 4. Listed Fairs and Markets 1727

● New Fair and Market Centres 1684–1727

Map 5. Unlisted Fairs and Markets Authorised by Seventeenth-Century Parliamentary Acts

X Unlisted Fair and Market Centres

Map 6. The Drove Roads of Mainland Scotland



Main Routes

- from the North
- from Morayshire, Aberdeenshire and Angus
- from Skye and the Western Isles
- from Argyll

(after Haldane)

Map 7. Surname Origins of Drovers Passing through Crieff 1771–2

Map 8. Origins of Drovers Passing through Tombea 1771

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