Fig. 6.1 Cromarty and the Cromarty Firth towards Invergordon.

THE MORAY FIRTH PROVINCE: TRADE AND FAMILY LINKS IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Ian R. M. Mowat

It remains all too common for even relatively distinguished historians to treat all the territories north and west of an unspecified 'Highland line' as integral parts of a broadly unified, cultural and economic unit. More sophisticated interpreters of the past have drawn their Highland line to exclude more obviously non-Highland areas such as Aberdeenshire and the Laigh of Moray, while few who have looked seriously at the evidence would be prepared to defend the belief that Caithness is Highland, rather than a southern outlier of Scandinavian Scotland.

The delusion that the eastern portion of the present district of Ross and Cromarty has, at all times, been an indivisible segment of the north-west Highlands is more difficult to lay at rest. Undoubtedly, the links between Easter Ross (the two peninsulas circumscribed by the Dornoch, Cromarty, Beauly and Moray Firths) and the land mass to the north and west are strong. Yet it can be argued that the links binding the area in question to the low country on the southern shore of the Moray Firth are at least as strong, and that in historic terms as well as in the view of 1960s' planners, Easter Ross can be held to be part of the province of Greater Moray.

The particular purpose of this paper will be to examine the case for this wider Moray Firth province in the eighteenth century, as seen primarily from Easter Ross.

THE LAND-OWNING CLASSES BY THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Much of the earlier history of the area bears out the strength of the Moray Firth connection, with the close links between the Mormaers and then the first earls of Ross and Moray. It could be argued, perhaps, that these links can be seen within the wider context of the northern Highlands as a whole but, from the thirteenth century at least, some of the connections which bound together the various parts of the Moray Firth littoral also served to distinguish this littoral from surrounding Highland territories.

While the modernizing tendencies of the Canmore dynasty first hit Easter Ross in the twelfth century, with the reorganization of the diocese of Ross and the establishment, by the king, of royal castles at Redcastle and Dunscaith, the following century marks the real point of departure (Watson 1976. xix, xxvi). The foundation of episcopal seats and royal

castles in the western Highlands did not significantly alter the essentially Celtic nature of the local society there in the middle ages. The first Bishop of Ross, Macbeth, would appear from the evidence of his name to have been of Celtic origin, perhaps even connected to the local nobility; and despite David I's best intentions, there must have been a danger that the church in Ross would go native. However, without exception, Macbeth's successors bore non-Celtic names, and the church above all other institutions can be seen as the Trojan Horse by which southern influence penetrated to this part of the world. This role was maintained throughout the centuries, irrespective of irrelevant upheavals such as the Reformation and Presbyterian/Episcopalian controversies. Nor was it only at the top of the ecclesiastical structure that southern influence was felt. By 1227 all but one of the chapter of Ross, composed mainly of parish priests from the Black Isle and eastern parts of Ross, bore English names (ibid. xx).

The imposition of an initial royal presence in the twelfth century was followed by the arrival of other more significant secular influences in the next century. The Freskin family, already well established in Moray and with a scion holding the earldom of Sutherland to the north, had obtained the lands and castle of Avoch by the middle of the thirteenth century and continued to hold it as one of their principal residences during the next hundred years. At the same time the first sheriff of Cromarty known to history makes his appearance, an Anglo-Norman by the name of Mowat (ibid. xix, xxiii).

If the king, the church and incoming landowners represent three main elements of southern influence, the fourth (and in many respects one of the most significant in the long term) was the burgh. Again, the early to mid-thirteenth century was a turning point. Although the burghers of Tain have been known to claim that the status of their community dates back as far as the middle of the eleventh century, the oldest burghal charter for which evidence remains relating to Easter Ross pertains to Dingwall. Alexander II erected the town a royal burgh in 1227. By 1264, Cromarty [Fig. 6.1] also was established as a royal burgh while it is possible that Rosemarkie, which certainly was a bishop's burgh by 1286, received its first charter as early as the first quarter of the century. Although Tain's precise status remained debateable for some centuries, it seems unquestionable that it had privileges equivalent to those of a burgh by the end of the thirteenth century (Pryde 1965. 18–19, 24, 28).

None of these four influences by themselves need significantly have altered the historical development of the area. Royal castles along the west coast were only significant centres of royal influence on those rare occasions when the king chose to visit them; many of the traditional Highland clans descended, or claimed descent from Anglo-Norman barons; and the foundation of isolated royal burghs such as Tarbert in Knapdale did little in the long term to further the economic development of Argyllshire.

In Easter Ross, as in Moray, the combination of all four factors, together with a sympathetic geographic environment, produced a cultural shift

which was to survive. Even so, the survival was touch and go. In the fourteenth century the greater part of the area came under the domination of the Earls of Ross. Robert the Bruce added the royal burghs of Dingwall and Cromarty and the sheriffdom of Cromarty to the already substantial holdings of the earls north of the Cromarty Firth, and it was only with the forfeiture of the title towards the end of the fifteenth century that there was a reversion to the crown. Domination by the earldom was serious enough when the title was held by the male descendants of Farquhar Macintsaggart of Applecross, the first earl, but became an even greater threat to the survival of non-Gaelic culture when the title passed at the beginning of the fifteenth century to the Lords of the Isles. Although it might be unwise to emphasize the Celtic bias of the Macdonalds, the period during which they held the earldom cannot have been noted for any significant extension of southern influence (Reid 1894. 1–10).

It is perhaps significant that English speech and Lowland ways survived most obviously at the eastern tip of the Black Isle, where the Church maintained its position and where the Freskin family was succeeded in Avoch by a number of families with connections across the Moray Firth, such as the Douglases of Balvenie. Certainly by the middle of the fifteenth century English place-names were widespread in the Black Isle, whereas in the rest of Easter Ross their appearance was very intermittent (Watson 1976. 113–46; Cromartie 1979. 110).

After the Reformation the church stronghold in Rosemarkie fell under the influence of the Mackenzies who, from the fifteenth century, had spread rapidly from their original base in Kintail. By 1560, however, the anglicization of the area was too far advanced to be reversed and in any event it may be doubted how far the acquisitive Mackenzies, who continued to add to their holdings in Easter Ross well into the eighteenth century, made serious attempts to retain their links with their Celtic past. Like the Campbells of Argyll and Glenorchy, the leading Mackenzie magnates were, at most, both Highland chieftains and Lowland lairds. By the start of the eighteenth century, although the Mackenzie links with the west remained strong, their presence in Easter Ross was already two centuries old and they could be considered local landowners in the same way as the other dominant landowning families, the Munros, the Rosses and the Urquharts, all of whom had been established since the early middle ages. Some of the Mackenzie proprietors also held property in the Highland areas of Ross and a few even had their main estates there; but the majority of Mackenzie landlords were firmly and exclusively based in Easter Ross (Mackenzie 1885–86. 293–324). Indeed, lairds with no territorial connection outside the area formed the great majority of landowners in Easter Ross throughout the eighteenth century. Most were representatives of families whose connections were of long standing, although the particular branch of the family owning any given estate varied considerably over the centuries.

Representing as it did, therefore, an oasis of fertility in the generally barren desert of the north-west Highlands, Easter Ross for long had been a

magnet attracting incomers from surrounding Highland districts. In the distant past the O'Beolain Earls of Ross and their relatives the Mackenzies of Kintail had taken this route, while towards the end of the seventeenth century they were followed by the Mathesons of Bennetsfield, the Gordons of Invergordon and (somewhat involuntarily) the Macleods of Assynt. Although they made their mark during their period of tenure, none of these families, with the partial exception of the Macleods, proved to have staying power (Mackenzie & Macbain 1900. 30; Macleod 1970. 15, 18; Bulloch 1906. 2, 13–14).

Throughout the centuries there were also landlords who were total incomers to the north of Scotland. Apart from the period immediately after the Reformation, however, when there was a temporary influx of a number of southern families such as the Murrays, Stewarts and Keiths, their number was small before the end of the eighteenth century, and nouveau riche purchasers of estates in Easter Ross almost invariably had an existing family connection with the area. The Davidson who purchased Tulloch in 1762, for example, was a cousin of Kenneth Bayne, from whom the estate had been sequestrated the previous year (Warrand 1965. 68; Ross 1768. 1; Macrae 1974. 58; Mackintosh 1865. 135).

The final element in the composition of the landowning community in eighteenth-century Easter Ross was that of the Moray lairds. Over the centuries the Moray Firth acted as a bridge whereby landowners established links in both directions. The Earls of Ross obtained territory in Moray in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Mackenzies in the sixteenth, the Urquharts from at least the seventeenth and the Munros in the eighteenth. From Moray came a whole sequence of landlords, including many well-established names such as the Cawdors holding Ferintosh in the Black Isle, the Dunbars holding Bennetsfield also in the Black Isle, and the Inneses owning extensive properties in Easter Ross proper (Reid 1894. 1–10; *OSA.* v. 205; Ross 1777. 7; Wallace Brown 1899–1906. 24; Mackenzie & MacBain 1900. 30; Tayler 1946. 132, 187).

Although the number of lairds owning property on both sides of the firth was never more than a small proportion of the total (seldom more than half a dozen at any time in the eighteenth century), several Moray lairds held extensive properties in Easter Ross and they formed the most significant body of landowners after those purely indigenous to the area. In the middle of the century, for example, Urquhart of Meldrum, Forbes of Culloden, Leslie of Findrassie and Rose of Kilravock all figured in the top twenty largest owners of land in the seventeen parishes which make up the area designated as Easter Ross for the purposes of this paper (E 901/28/1).

But even amongst the smaller gentry it was not unknown for property to be held on both sides of the firth. In 1751 Hugh Rose of Geddes, a middling Moray landowner, held a small estate in the county of Cromarty; and during the latter part of the century at least, the Robertsons, seventeenth-century incomers from Inverness who by this time held the small property of Kindeace in the parishes of Kilmuir and Rosskeen, also held the equally small estate of Urchany in Nairn (NLS ms 108.78; GD 146/8).

Family ties, of course, regularly were strengthened by marriage, such as that of Sir Hugh Munro of Foulis to the daughter of Hugh Rose of Kilravock in 1758; and as the century wore on and such older established Moray families as the Roses of Kilravock themselves sold their Ross-shire estates, the links across the water were maintained by the arrival of new names. James Grant, for example, a native of Moray who lived for some time in Cromarty before going south to make his fortune, purchased the estate of Redcastle from the bankrupt Mackenzies at the end of the century to add to his other estates elsewhere (Mackenzie 1898. 145; Barron 1903. I. 42).

'LOWLAND HIGHLANDERS' AND 'LOWLAND BODIES'

While the gentry in Easter Ross constituted a society set apart from their peers to the west (a writer in 1780 lamented the fact that a split amongst the Easter Ross voters had given political control of the county to the gentlemen of the west) (GD 146/14), the pattern was more varied lower down the social scale. It is probably true to say that in the Easter Ross peninsula a thin veneer of Lowland culture sustained by the gentry, the clergy and a few substantial farmers and merchants was superimposed upon a peasant society which remained basically Gaelic in its orientation. The term 'Lowland Highlanders', used some years ago as the title for a history of Tain, is a not inappropriate description of the society in the surrounding parishes as well, and it is possible to point to eighteenth-century Easter Ross as an agrarian, rather than a pastoral, Celtic community (Robertson 1972).

The Gaelic element in this society constantly was being strengthened by immigration from the west, particularly towards the end of the century as those evicted from the Highland straths found new homes in the towns and villages and on the recently-divided commonties of Easter Ross. Even in mid-century, however, this trend is apparent. Of forty-one disbanded soldiers settled at Newtarbet by the Commissioners of Annexed Estates in 1765, only nineteen came from Easter Ross itself. Four were incomers from Caithness (whether Highland or Lowland Caithness is not clear), and no less than fifteen came from Wester Ross and Sutherland. Of the remainder, one came from Banff and, more surprisingly, one from Renfrew. The last of the set came from as far away as Devon though this can be explained on the assumption that the individual in question was probably a retainer of the forfeited Earl of Cromartie who had been exiled to Devon after being reprieved from the sentence of death passed on him in 1746 (E 787/28/5).

The pattern was very different in the eastern Black Isle. In the three parishes of Cromarty, Rosemarkie and Avoch the general population spoke the Moray dialect of English and were regarded with contempt by their near neighbours across the Cromarty Firth, 'being looked upon in a Despicable Light — no more than Lowland Bodies' (E787/24). In their turn the 'Lowland Bodies' were equally contemptuous of those about

Fig. 6.2 Fisher families, Big Vennel, Cromarty. Old postcard.

Fig. 6.3 Hugh Miller's Cottage, Cromarty.

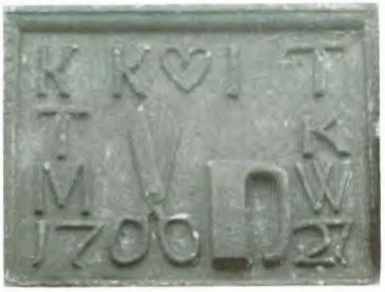

Fig. 6.4 Sculptured stone panel at no. 7 Braehead, Cromarty, dated 1727.

them. The townspeople of Cromarty [Figs. 6.2–6.4] referred scathingly to the country people of Nigg as 'Gaelickers' and the schoolboys of Cromarty in Hugh Miller's day picked fights with the Nigg ferrymen whom they derided for their broken English (Miller 1869. 43; Mackenzie 1928. III. 75).

Even in the Black Isle, however, the flood of landless Gaelic-speaking immigrants could affect the cultural balance. The numbers drawn to Cromarty by the prospect of work in the various industrial enterprises established there, more particularly after 1772, were enough to lead to the construction of a Gaelic chapel to serve their needs. In Avoch and Rosemarkie too, incoming Gaelic-speaking servants and labourers constituted a significant minority (*OSA.* XII. 257; *NSA.* XIV. 27, 30; CH 2/66/7).

MORAY FIRTH LINKS

Outside the Black Isle, as in it, the main bastion of English language, as of Lowland culture in general, was the town. For much of the eighteenth century Fortrose was regarded (though without any official justification) as the capital of Ross, while Tain was pre-eminent on account of its larger population and central position in the richest part of the county. Dingwall, anciently the chief seat of the Earls of Ross and subsequently the officially-recognized county capital, ranked a poor third in the eighteenth century. In fact, in terms of population, wealth and prestige it was inferior also to Cromarty. Cromarty had ceased to be a royal burgh towards the end of the seventeenth century and its succeeding status as a burgh of barony lapsed after the Jacobite rebellion of 1745. Only in the nineteenth century did it regain burghal privileges but this should not disguise the fact that during the second half of the eighteenth century Cromarty was the most active centre of population in the whole area.

None of these towns was of major importance in national terms at the beginning of the century. Thirty-eight of the sixty-five royal burghs paid more *cess* than Tain, the largest contributor from Easter Ross, and even by the end of the century Tain's population still did not exceed 1,500 people (*CRBS.* 1870–1918. V. 122, 236, 421–22; VI. 631; *Abstract* 1802. 542).

By comparison with the major burghs to the south of the Moray Firth (Inverness, Elgin and Banff), Tain, Fortrose and Dingwall put up a poor show. None could match the commercial enterprise and social life of the former, and the dowagers of bonnet lairds who constituted the genteel society of late eighteenth-century Cromarty were very small beer compared to the wealthy landlords and nobles whose town houses were such a distinguishing feature of the three large towns to the south during this period (Miller 1863. 307; 1869. 402).

Economic and Trading Links

Although by the eighteenth century the burghs had long since ceased to have a monopoly on trade, in Easter Ross at least they did constitute, along with Cromarty, the main trading centres; and much of this trade was local, within the Moray Firth area. Throughout the century Inverness and Elgin dominated as suppliers of imported goods, and particularly at the start of the period Dingwall, Tain and Fortrose had almost no trade which went beyond these two burghs. In return Inverness above all provided a ready market for the local agricultural produce (*CRBS.* 1870–1918. VI. 640, 659, 662).

After 1748 a new market appeared within the area with the start of work on the construction of Fort George [Fig. 6.5]. It would be difficult to exaggerate the short term impact of Fort George on the economy of the inner Moray Firth. The fort represented by far the largest public work ever undertaken in the north of Scotland and its impact was felt in a number of ways. Local materials, especially stone, were used in its construction, with up to one hundred boats carrying materials from quarries at Munlochy, Cromarty and Covesea. The demands of the large garrison for fresh provisions forced up prices throughout the Black Isle, as well as more locally, and gave the fishermen of Avoch a captive market; and the soldiers themselves, though largely unproductive in economic terms, were used on occasion to improve the economic infrastructure by building roads in the region. Culturally, too, the fort made its mark. The ready availability of the Adam family as masons-in-charge at the fort over two decades meant that more landlords than would otherwise have been likely, had access to the sophisticated architectural styles of the south of Scotland (*SLSP.* 35:33. 2–3; *OSA.* XV. 613, 616; NLS. ms 108. 406).

If Inverness and Elgin were the main trading centres, other Moray ports took their share of the market. Findhorn was important in the first half of the century, while in the 1770s the enterprising merchants of Portsoy [Figs. 6.6; 6.7] sold items such as lime for fertiliser in Easter Ross and bought in return the marketable surpluses of grain from local landowners (Wight 1774–84. IV(i). 258, 268; Sinclair 1795. 63; GD 129/24/81; CH 2/350/1; GD 146/13). For grain was the staple export of Easter Ross. On both sides of the Cromarty Firth and on the Dornoch and Beauly Firths the various estates had girnals where oats, bere and latterly wheat were brought for dispatch to markets outside the region. Much of this business was handled by merchants from Portsoy or from much further afield, but

Fig. 6.5 Fort George across to Chanonry Point and Fortrose.

from the middle of the century Cromarty took an ever more active part in trade across the firth. In 1759 flax was being shipped from Cromarty to Inverness, while in the last quarter of the century Inverness provided the main market for the produce of the Cromarty brewery, built after 1772 by George Ross, the new proprietor of the Cromarty estate and probably the most far-sighted and unselfish landlord to hold property in the area during the century (*BLC.* 10 July 1749; Wight 1774–84. IV(i). 254–56). However, the man who probably deserved more credit than anyone else for the growing importance of Cromarty as a trading port was William Forsyth who, shortly after 1739, bought a freighting boat for coastal trade (Miller 1863. 290; Dunlop 1978. 50–51, 61). During the following decades his example was widely followed.

Although much of the commercial intercourse between the two sides of the firth was concerned with the exchange of commodities, there was also an exchange of services. Inverness continued to be a centre for lawyers and physicians, while at a lower level tradesmen from both Moray and Easter Ross competed with each other for business both in the north-west Highlands and in their own backyards. Even at this social level, therefore, there were opportunities for social intercourse across the water (Meldrum 1935. 6; Miller 1869. 191–92; Chambers 1827. II. 307). Thus William

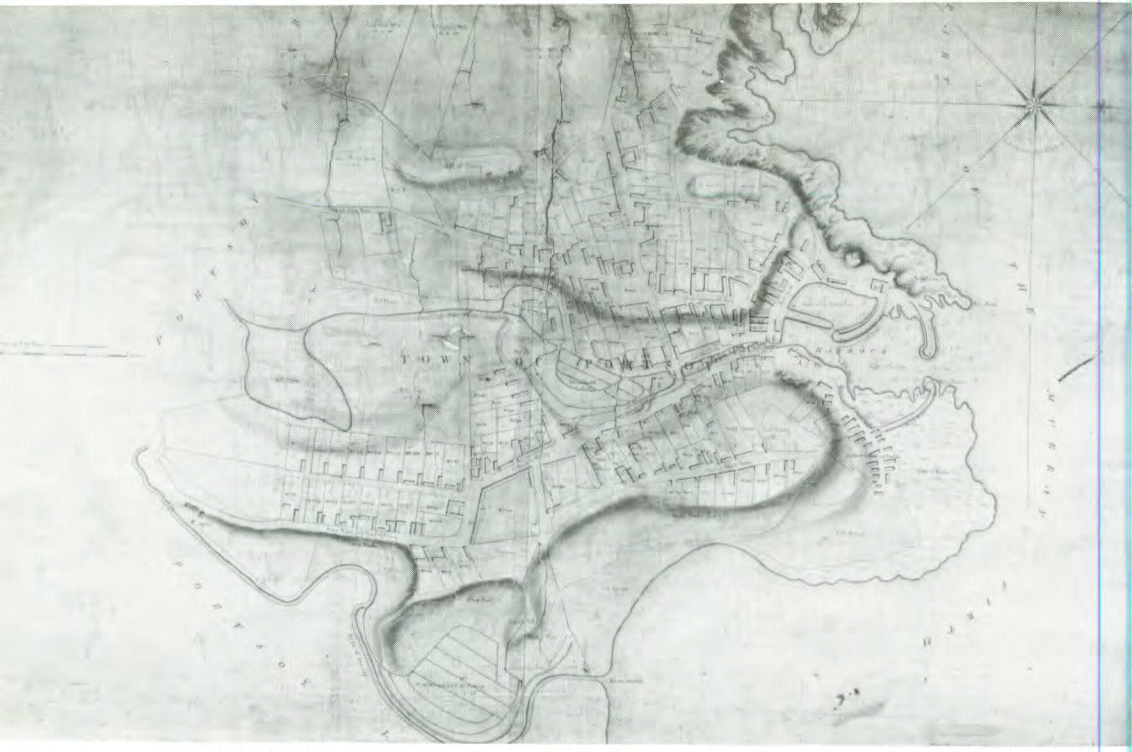

Fig. 6.6 Feu Plan of Portsoy, Banffshire. Robert Johnston 1802 (Cullen House Drawings).

Fig. 6.7 Shorehead, Portsoy.

Forsyth's father, James, a mason and builder who had settled in Cromarty before 1722 when a herring boom brought temporary prosperity to the town, was a native of Moray. William himself, though born in Cromarty, returned to Moray for his wife, Elizabeth Russell of Earlsmill, the daughter of the Chamberlain to the Earl of Moray. Similarly, another Moray mason, James Anderson, formerly of Forres was settled in Milton of Newtarbat on the north side of the Cromarty Firth by 1785 (Miller 1863. 285–306; E 766/45).

Professional, Cultural, Political and Ecclesiastical Links

Inevitably, when family and trading connections were strong, cultural bonds were also of importance, quite apart from the use of a common dialect. Even in the early seventeenth century, masons from the north-east clearly found their way across the water to build castles at Cromarty and Castle Leod which were of a degree of sophistication unmatched elsewhere in the Highlands at the time (Cruden 1960. 170; Mackenzie 1947. 60–68). At the end of the same century the architectural link may have been maintained in a far more significant way. It has long been known that Colin Campbell, the main exponent of neo-Palladianism, the architectural style favoured by the early eighteenth-century British Whig establishment, was a member of the Cawdor family. It is now suggested that James Smith, who is held to be his stylistic mentor, may have belonged to a family of Moray masons settled in Easter Ross at the time when Viscount Tarbat was engaged in erecting his splendid new mansion of Newtarbat (Colvin 1974. 8).

More generally throughout the eighteenth century Moray and Easter Ross were distinguished from their Highland neighbours by the comparative excellence of their educational establishments. Even before the creation of a rash of academies at Inverness, Fortrose, Tain, Elgin and Fordyce at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, the burghs of the region had made considerable efforts to maintain better-than-average grammar schools. The existence of established schools in almost every parish, a feature not matched in the north-west Highlands as a whole, was supplemented by a whole range of private establishments; dame's schools, charitable schools, subscription schools and the like. While most of these schools served only their own immediate community, the top schools attracted students from a much wider area.

A memorial from the Burgh of Fortrose to the Commissioners of Annexed Estates in 1772, for example, pointed out that 'Now, and generally, there are from seventy to eighty boys attending the Grammar School of the Burgh; among whom are several gentlemen's sons, not only from the Country around, but from other counties at a considerable distance' (E 787/16/1). In the following decade the school of Mr Strath in Nairn had a high enough reputation to attract the sons of at least one Rossshire gentleman, Robertson of Kindeace; although by 1793, John Robertson, the youngest of Kindeace's sons and still at school, had transferred to the recently established academy at Fortrose (GD 146/8; GD 146/8[a]).

Politically the counties of Ross, Cromarty, Inverness, Nairn, Moray and Banff each had their own individual Members of Parliament, but there were links which bound the two shores of the firth together. Cromarty and Nairn, it should be remembered, alternated MPs, with each county in turn being disenfranchised for the length of a Parliament (Ferguson 1968. 134). Though the linking of the two counties was on account of their small size, the geographical link was close as well since the estate of Ferintosh in the Black Isle, lying almost adjacent to the main portion of the fragmented county of Cromarty, was administratively part of Nairn (*OSA.* v. 205). And at the level of the burghs there was a further connection, with Fortrose being included in the Inverness group of burghs electing a member of Parliament (Pryde 1962. 54).

Another feature possibly common to both Moray and the Black Isle may be the pattern of ecclesiastical allegiance. After the abolition of Episcopacy in 1688, most of the north of Scotland remained antagonistic to the new Presbyterian regime. However, beginning with a series of revivals in early eighteenth-century Nigg, an enthusiasm for evangelical Calvinism quickly swept through the north-west Highlands with the Easter Ross peninsula very much at the heart of the movement (Forbes 1886. 157, 217–19, 276; CH 1/2/95; Hall 1807. II. 491–93). By way of contrast, large numbers of both landlords and tenants in the Black Isle and in the neighbourhood of Dingwall remained attached to the Episcopal Church, as did many in Moray and the north-east of Scotland in general (Forbes 1886. 16, 66, 68, 103, 122–24, 126–28, 131–32, 273; Pryde 1962. 102; Cant 1976. 153). Whether this common religious affiliation is merely coincidental or part of the more general cultural correspondence it is hard to say.

Transport and Communications

The principal element pulling the north and south shores of the Moray Firth together was the firth itself. Nowadays, it is all too easy to see water as a barrier to communication but in the eighteenth century, as earlier, water transport was much easier than transport on land. It is said that no wheeled transport was seen anywhere north of Inverness before the end of the first quarter of the eighteenth century, and even as late as 1740 an attempt by Fraser of Lovat to travel by coach from Inverness to Edinburgh ended in ignominious failure when, after numerous breakdowns, the coach finally disintegrated (Gardiner 1961. 44–45).

Roads and, more particularly, bridges remained less than satisfactory throughout the century, although within Easter Ross itself there were improvements on a fairly dramatic scale. Most of the major rivers and many of the minor streams were bridged and the main roads at least were capable of taking wheeled transport by the middle of the century. Exaggerated reports of the dreadful state of roads in Easter Ross were found by Bishop Forbes in 1762 to have been quite misleading, and even an eccentric like Sir John Gordon of Invergordon is unlikely to have taken the air in his carriage in 1773 if it involved risk to life and limb, or even a

strong chance that he would not be able to complete his journey (Forbes 1886. 150; GD 146/13[a]). Nonetheless, occasional stretches of passable road did not make a good road system. Even in the latter part of the century movement by road was very restricted and not until 1771 did the Ross-shire Commissioners of Supply attempt a major initiative to improve the roads in the Black Isle. Only in 1777 was a road made for wheeled traffic from Geanies, the seat of the most road-conscious laird in the county, to the public road; and in 1778 it appears that it was still commonplace for goods to be transported on men's backs (SC 24/21/7; GD 146/13[b, c]).

By way of contrast, it was easier to get around by water in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries than it has been since. Within the bounds of the Presbytery of Chanonry (the area of the Black Isle), there were no less than six ferries operating in 1766. Some of them, at least, operated on Sundays, much to the disgust of the Presbytery. Four of these ferries operated in the Cromarty Firth — Cromarty to Nigg, Balblair to Invergordon, Resolis to Alness and Alcaig to Dingwall; the remaining two covered the Beauly Firth — Chanonry to Ardersier and Kessock to Inverness (CH 2/66/7[a]). By the end of the century, at least two additional services were running, from Castlecraig to Foulis and at Scuddale (*OSA.* v. 214). Quantity of course did not guarantee quality, and opinions varied as to the services on offer. Some of the ferries, such as that from Alcaig to Dingwall, were never more than passenger ferries; and because of the absence of harbours and slipways, use of even the more significant ferries could cause some inconvenience. As late as 1825 travellers on the Cromarty ferry had to be carried ashore on the north side on a woman's back (Sutherland 1825. 88). Travellers from the south regularly commented unfavourably on the size and seaworthiness of the ferryboats, comments which were occasionally all too drastically confirmed by major accidents. Bishop Forbes in 1762 found that the Chanonry ferry was not large enough to take horses, carriage and passengers all in one trip, while Sir John Sinclair in 1795 held all the ferries to be in a wretched state. He attributed the blame, interestingly enough, to the fact that they were in private ownership. Well into the nineteenth century little had changed, with the Chanonry ferry being described as a 'crazy boat' (Forbes 1886. 151; Sinclair 1795. 46–47; Sutherland 1825. 77).

These criticisms must be taken in perspective. While Ross-shire roads were compared unfavourably with those elsewhere, Ross-shire ferries might be as good as those operating in other parts of the country. Kessock ferry, for instance, which came in for its own share of criticism, was nonetheless found by Southey (1929. 167) in the early nineteenth century to be the best in Scotland. His enthusiasm, it has to be said, in the words of W. S. Gilbert, was only a form of 'modified rapture' for he went on to acknowledge that 'the best ferry is a bad thing'. Poor though they may have been, the multiplicity of ferries did provide ready means of crossing the firths and their numbers compare favourably with the number of crossing points which are in use today.

It was not until the early nineteenth century and the arrival of steam that a regular service was established crossing the Moray Firth proper, but well before 1800 it proved relatively easy to travel by sea, even when no established route existed. In 1780 Sir John Gordon's plans to cross from Invergordon to Balblair, en route to Cromarty, being thwarted by unfavourable winds and tides, he hired instead a boat which took him directly from Invergordon to Cromarty. The previous year it was suggested to Robertson of Kindeace that he might take a fishing boat across from Cadboll to Nairn as an alternative to returning home by chaise, while in 1787 Captain David Ross of Tain determined to transport himself to London in the company of Admiral Hood and Lord Reay 'by the first smack that sails from Cromarty', because of the great expense of travelling to London overland (GD 235/7; GD 146/13[d]; Macgill 1909. I. 215).

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Even the remotest Highland areas maintained some contact with the outside world, whether through the trade in black cattle, through the kelping industry, or by seasonal or semi-permanent migration to southern farms. Such contact was intermittent, however, and for most of the population was extremely limited. Even for the large number of soldiers serving in Highland regiments, contact with non-Highlanders was restricted by language.

Nevertheless, the ready availability of sea transport gave an outward-looking orientation to society around the Moray Firth, and in both Easter Ross and in Moray the picture was very different. If external trade from Easter Ross was dominated before 1700 by Inverness and Elgin, as the eighteenth century progressed the local inhabitants took an increasingly independent role in marketing their own produce and in importing the outside goods they required. Grain was always the main export commodity of the area, although until the middle of the century, when Britain as a whole moved from surplus to deficit production, southern markets cannot have been easy to find. From at least the 1750s, however, grain was supplied to a wide variety of United Kingdom markets. In 1757 Ebeneezer Munro of Glasgow purchased local bere and meal; in 1759 it was the turn of an Edinburgh merchant; while by 1778 cargoes were being dispatched to Perth and North Uist. Towards the end of the century increasing quantities were sent to the industrialized cities of England, particularly Newcastle, Sunderland and above all London (GD 146/11; 146/11[a]; GD 146/13[b]; *Farmer's Mag.* 1811. XII. 128).

It would be a mistake to think of trade as restricted only to contact with the rest of Britain. Cargoes of grain were sent to Hamburg as late as the last quarter of the century, and the European littoral of the North Sea was probably the major market, directly or indirectly, for much of the exports from Easter Ross in the preceding century. Moreover, for much of the second half of the eighteenth century the Baltic trade was an important element in the Easter Ross economy. This Baltic trade, of course, was

primarily associated with the linen industry (Macgill 1909. I. 187; *BLC.* 10 July 1749). Archibald Menzies, the General Inspector to the Board of Annexed Estates in 1768 reported that there was 'hardly a person in Fortrose and Rosemarkie who is not a weaver (E 787/24. 11). He elaborated with the statement that in the east of the Black Isle flax had been raised for centuries past, and that the spring market at Fortrose had supplied all the north with coarse linen from time immemorial.

In fact, by 1768, the importance of Fortrose had already declined because of the spread of the industry elsewhere in Easter Ross. The expanded industry was dominated by southern firms such as the British Linen Company and Sandemans of Perth, and unlike the earlier Black Isle weavers it did not depend upon home-grown flax. Instead, Baltic flax was imported from St Petersburg and Riga. At first it was taken into Edinburgh and sent north by coastal vessels, but gradually the north became more directly involved. In the late 1750s Cromarty developed as the entrepôt port for much of the north of Scotland, with cargoes of flax disembarked for trans-shipment to places at least as far apart as Wick and Inverness; and by 1770 the British Linen Company was refusing to order yarn from Riga for William Forsyth, believing that he could do it as advantageously himself (*BLC.* 10 March 1770).

In his pen portrait of William Forsyth, Hugh Miller suggested that Forsyth imported his flax from Holland, but there is no contemporary evidence for this and all eighteenth-century pointers indicate that the Baltic was the main source of supply. Miller may have been more accurate in his recollection that Forsyth imported iron from Sweden and tar and wood from Norway, products which would certainly have been required by the nail and spade manufacturers and the coopers of Cromarty (Miller 1863. 293; *BLC.* 10 March 1770). There is no direct evidence of what was sent to the Baltic and Scandinavian ports in return, but the local products most likely to have been successful in these markets were once again grain and salted herring.

As the century progressed, the range of products being exported expanded. London was supplied with pigs killed and cured in, and shipped from, Cromarty, while the Ferintosh whisky industry supplied large quantities of liquor to the capital even after the revocation in 1786 of the excise privilege it had enjoyed since 1688. And of course the linen yarn and sacking produced from all the imported flax and hemp went mainly for sale outside the region, much of it latterly to London (Wight 1778–84. IV(i).254–56; *Sc. Dist. Duties* 1798. 5; Hall 1807. II. 490; Mackenzie 1810. 335).

Despite the trading connections, personal links between Easter Ross and the Baltic and Scandinavian countries appear to have been fairly limited. In the seventeenth century the army of Gustavus Adophus of Sweden, Lion of the North during the 30 Years War, had been but an enlarged Clan Munro on the march; and it may have been a residual recollection of this which persuaded Lord Macleod, the heir of the forfeited Earl of Cromartie, to follow a military career in Sweden after 1746 (Fraser 1876. II. 243–44).

Moreover, early in the eighteenth century the estate of Ankerville in Nigg was purchased by 'Polander' Ross who had made his fortune as one of the innumerable Scottish merchants trading in Poland at the end of the seventeenth century (Meldrum 1935. 95). Such links were isolated, however, and did not indicate a close-knit, continuing contact.

Obviously the closest social links established outside the region were with the rest of Britain, and Easter Ross exiles were established as merchants in Glasgow, professionals in Edinburgh and businessmen in London from the start of the century and before. After 1707 and the Union of the Parliaments, the English connection could at last be broadened indisputably to become the empire connection. To take but one example, by the end of the 1780s Charles Robertson of Kindeace had one son in London, a second in India, a third in the West Indies managing a Jamaican estate, and a fourth in business in New York (GD 146/15; 146/15[a, b]). By the end of the century at least one Carribean island was covered with estate names stemming from Easter Ross, and such connections were used for the benefit of the area itself. Financial support for the new Fortrose Academy, for example, came from as far afield as Bombay, Calcutta and the island of Granada, while returning exiles used fortunes made in far-flung places to improve their old or newly purchased estates (Barron 1903. 1. 42). Sir Hector Munro of Novar, at one extreme, is said to have spent over £100,000 on the Novar estate on his return from India, while at a more modest level were numerous small proprietors such as James Fowler, whose Jamaican-generated wealth allowed him to purchase the estate of Raddery near Fortrose and set himself up as a comfortable country gentleman (Southey 1929. 120; *SRO* CH 2/66/7[b]).

Even lower down the social scale the amount of foreign experience was surprisingly varied. Much of it was derived from service in the armed forces (the navy press-gangs were active in Easter Ross, as well as the recruiting sergeants for the Highland regiments), but if Hugh Miller's Cromarty was not wholly exceptional, there were numbers of civilians with sometimes extensive experience of foreign travel (Miller 1869. 2, 35, 55, 58, 246).

CONCLUSION

A short account of limited aspects of the history of Easter Ross in the eighteenth century can do little more than point to some of the more obvious characteristics linking the area with Moray. More detailed parallels could be instanced: shipbuilding at Fortrose in Ross and at Kingston in Moray, afforestation at Balnagown in Ross and at Darnaway in Moray, the construction of harbours at Cromarty and Lossiemouth, common access to the fisheries in the Moray Firth and so on. Many of these developments could be matched throughout Lowland Scotland, but only a limited number in the Highlands and then seldom in any concentration. In Easter Ross the development took on a local flavour which was similar to, and often inspired by, practice in Moray, so that although much

agricultural improvement in Easter Ross, for example, was spearheaded by farmers from the Lothians, improved stocks were brought across the firth from Moray.

There can be no doubt that the eastern Black Isle was to all intents and purposes an extension of Moray across the water. If the position of the rest of Easter Ross was less clear cut, its links with its southern neighbour were still very strong. Given Easter Ross's close trading links with the Baltic in the eighteenth century, it is perhaps fitting to suggest that the Baltic provided a close parallel, although on a very much larger scale. Easter Ross could be likened to a Scottish Lithuania, attached to a Poland composed of Moray and the eastern Black Isle.

Acknowledgement

Figures 6.2–6.5 and 6.7 are reproduced by kind permission of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland; Figure 6.6, the Scottish Record Office; Figure 6.1, the Scottish Tourist Board.

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