



*Fig. 12.1* Ullapool, Loch Broom. 1992.

# ULLAPOOL AND THE BRITISH FISHERIES SOCIETY

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## EARLY FISHERY SCHEMES FOR LOCH BROOM

The story of fishing developments on the north-west coast of Scotland is set mainly in the second half of the 18th century, but Loch Broom [Fig. 12.1] was notable some two hundred years earlier. In 1566 strangers applied to the Privy Council for a licence to fish there saying 'it has plesit God to oppin ane greit commoditie to the common weil of the realm throw the fisching of Loch Brume and utheris lochis of the north seyis' (*RPC*. i. 482: see also Clough, this volume, for details of late 17th-early 18th century initiatives by the Mackenzies of Tarbet and Cromartie).

### Ullapool

It was not really until after 1745, however, that any detailed study was made of the western seaboard with a view to encouraging fishing — which was chiefly for herring. Reports to the Commissioners for Annexed Estates stressed the merits of the fishing in Loch Broom, though not in such glowing terms as Loch Hourn where the factor described how:

In the year 1753 a shoal of herring was left by the tide in the inner loch . . . They were computed at half a mile square from three to five feet deep. All the way down to the Sound of Sky the herring were so thick that, a boat going on the loch, the oars made the herring fly out of the water like flying fish (E741/40).

Another great shoal was described in 1784. Even so, the factor listed among the advantages of Loch Hourn that it was 'but a short navigation' to Loch Broom which appeared to be visited by shoals more regularly than most nearby lochs. Captain John Forbes of New, the Coigach factor, went into some detail on the fishing in 1755 which he said 'frequently succeeds well' at Loch Broom:

I am humbly of opinion that a village ought to be erected on this barony at a place called Ullapool, which lyes on the coast and north side of Lochbroom and as well situated for a village as perhaps any place on the western coast. There is a large field of corn land fit to be fewed out for houses and gardens, great plenty of improvable barren ground, and as the herring fishing succeeds so well here, it is mighty probable that numbers of sea-faring people would

LOCH AN  
ALLTAIN DUIBH

Port an Alltain Duibh

Mol Canas an Fhéidh

CAMAS  
AN FHÉIDH

Leac Gille Mhaire

Trigh an t-Sean Bhaile

Seana bhaile

Tighachaoilais

OLD DORNEY BAY

Old Dorney

Ristol  
Acres  
38,800

Caolas Eilean Ristol

Ardoon

Mol Dheas

Meall  
Deárg

Carn an t-Sean Laoich

246

resort to it and be fond of getting small feus for houses and gardens (E729/1/11).

One of the first buildings Forbes wanted to put up there was a prison — so perhaps his view of the human inhabitants was not so rosy.

But it was to be some thirty years before a village was founded at Ullapool. Various schemes of development were tried around Loch Broom in the meantime. A linen station was proposed at Inverlael near the head of the loch but, according to an observer, in 1787 the buildings were all 'a perfect ruin' and no manufacturing appeared to have taken place, so that 'a more flagrant instance of the abuse of public money, which appears to have been all jobbed away, can hardly be produced' (GD9/1/112). It was later found that the buildings, though paid for, had never in fact been completed. A settlement for marine officers at Loch Broom never even got to the practical planning stage but one for soldiers was more successful. After the end of the war in 1763, ex-soldiers were settled as crofters in various parts of Scotland with small bounties, rent-free houses and land. Of the eighty five who chose the Cromartie estate, twelve soldiers reached the farm of Ullapool. Their serjeant, John Mackenzie of Loudon's Regiment, was a diligent worker who remained in the district and later acquired some valuable property and prospered. The rest of the soldiers were employed by the factor in road-making, dyke building and other public work including a waulk mill, but seem to have cultivated their crofts as little as possible, failed to keep in repair the huts and tools provided for them, and soon left the district (E723).

## **Old Dornie**

Among the papers of the Commissioners for Annexed Estates are two proposals from private people for establishing a fishing station in Coigach, both choosing a site at Old Dornie, on the mainland opposite Isle Ristol near the mouth of Loch Broom [Fig. 12.2]. In 1764 Ninian Jeffrey, then Coigach factor, sent in a scheme for building a storehouse for salt and casks and offering free houses to experienced fishermen who would teach the local population good fishing methods (E746/75). Apparently nothing came of this and six years later Colin Mackenzie, who described himself as a kelp merchant of Loch Broom, proposed to establish a fishery there on similar lines (E746/127). Again nothing further happened, but the area was evidently well regarded by possible entrepreneurs.

## **Isle Martin**

It fell to private enterprise to open the way to success in Loch Broom. John Woodhouse of Liverpool had already set up a fishery on the Isle of Man and organised trade from there to the Mediterranean. In March 1775 he applied

to the Commissioners for land for a similar undertaking in the Highlands and suggested Isle Martin as an appropriate place [see Fig. 10.1]. The Commissioners agreed to grant him a 41 years' lease with facilities for obtaining peat and limestone at Ullapool. By July, Woodhouse had chosen ten acres at the south-east of the island on which to build his station, which rose so quickly that in a year he claimed to have spent £3,500 on buildings, vessels, salt and casks (E746/103). But because of complicated salt laws, he soon found that it was impossible to trade from Isle Martin with no customs house nearer than Stornoway. He therefore applied to the Commissioners of Customs who agreed to form an 'incidental establishment' there. A collector and a surveyor were appointed who worked alone until 1789, when the staff was increased to five to extend its authority (GD9/3/209).

The collector and surveyor were to be provided with land by the Commissioners for the Annexed Estates. After the soldiers had left, the farm of Ullapool was given to the factor 'with a good house, built with stone and lime three stories high and covered with slate'. In 1774 that factor resigned and his successor let the farm to his own brother who died in 1776. Serjeant John Mackenzie, meantime, had established himself on Isle Martin; and when he was ejected in favour of Woodhouse he was given two thirds of the farm of Ullapool. The other third, with the good house, originally built for an SSPCK schoolmaster, was leased to the customs officials, and this was occupied as the customs house, though official records called it Isle Martin until its removal in 1813.

After the advent of the customs officials Woodhouse increased his business very quickly. This was, of course, mainly directed at preserving the fish, for before the days of rail transport and refrigeration, the emphasis was on smoking or pickling. His chief aim was to cure red herrings on the Yarmouth method, for which he built a large shed where it was estimated that he could cure 1,000 barrels of herring at a time. The fish was salted for 30 hours, split through the mouth and hung on a wooden spit 4ft (1.2m) long over a fire for 14 to 21 days. The supplies of wood, generally oak, were sent as ballast from Liverpool, where it was bought cheap as shipyard refuse (Loch 1788. ii. 186). The fish was bought from local boatmen at the rate of 5s 6d per barrel. When cured the fish was shipped to London, Hull and Liverpool, as well as to the Mediterranean and all parts of Europe.

## **Tanera**

Another market for fish appeared in 1784 when a curing station was set up at Tanera [see Fig. 10.5]. This was started by Roderick Morrison, who was described as a 'sober pushing Man' who had property in Stornoway and was said to be 'a man of extensive merchantile talents'. Morrison went into partnership with John Mackenzie, a cousin of Mackenzie of Torridon, who had business in Bishopsgate Street in London. In 1811 Daniell wrote that Tanera had been started by the British Fisheries Society, but this was not so. In 1787, according to Morrison, they erected warehouses for salt, casks, nets



etc., five houses for smoking red herring and a pier where five vessels might unload at the same time. Morrison built himself a house and cultivated 16 to 18 acres of different crops on land which had appeared worthless (NLS MS2619. pl7) [Fig. 12.3].

Mackenzie described his trading methods. The firm owned six decked vessels and about thirty boats:

Our great object was to purchase the herrings from the natives, having laid in annually a great stock of salt, casks, nets and meal, all of which, except the meal, were generally brought from Greenock and sometimes from Leith; the meal came from Caithness and the eastern coast of Ross-shire; the casks and nets from Greenock were generally sent in vessels going to the Baltic at 6d or 8d per barrel with nets in them; the salt chiefly from Liverpool and Lisbon and sometimes Leith was generally brought by our own vessels on return from the markets of Lisbon and Leith, but salt from Liverpool was brought on our own fishing vessels sent on purpose before the fishing season commenced. Our chief object was to supply the West India merchants in London with White herrings and the home market with Red herrings; we found that the fish caught in Great Britain was never equal to the demand for the West India market. (*Reports*. x.235).

Fig. 12.3 The Pier at Tanera Mór, Loch Broom. Print by William Daniell, 1814.



## How to Extend the Fisheries?

Meanwhile Coigach, along with the other Forfeited and Annexed estates, was returned to its former owner — in this case his son, Lord Macleod, in 1784. This was a time of new beginnings in the Highlands and considerable interest in northern affairs. The Highland Society of London was founded in 1778 and one of its objects was to give practical encouragement to fisheries in the Highlands. As one member, George Dempster, rather gloomily put it:

The seas abound with fish and the Highlands with industrious and good people. It will be the business of the legislature to bring these two to meet. But I fear it would in that country be an easier task for mountains to meet, at least they are much nearer together (Fergusson 1934.138).

There was much debate on how this should be done and a fashionable line of reasoning was that villages, of which there were virtually none in the Highlands, would promote employment and encourage the inhabitants in 'the love of Labour and Good Order'. As Professor Smout has written (1970.75) 'The eighteenth century village . . . was expected to provide a completely new framework for human life in the countryside'; and nowhere was this considered more necessary than on the shores of the west Highlands.

At the same time, in 1785, the old fishing regulations of 1750 became due for review and the House of Commons appointed a committee to inquire both into the state of the British fisheries and into the best means for their encouragement and extension. Many reports were made to this committee and, as a result, two acts were passed. The first, in 1785, among other provisions, abolished the old regulations which had naval training in view, which rewarded the sea-going busses rather than the catching of fish and which included the rendezvous required at Bressay and Campbeltown at the start of the summer and autumn season respectively. It also ended the apparently ineffective prohibition on buying fish from local boatmen. The act of 1786 dealt with the important subject of bounties: it introduced a system which combined the old tonnage bounty on larger vessels, now in a reduced form, with a barrel bounty; and it gave some help to local fishermen who used only small boats.

## THE BUILDING OF ULLAPOOL

These new ideas and changes gave great impetus to the Highland Society of London, and in the summer of 1786 a new body was launched by them — called at first 'The British Society for Extending the Fisheries and Improving the Sea Coasts of the Kingdom'. It proved too ponderous a title even for the 18th century, and for years the members contracted it to suit themselves. Gradually it became known, though not officially until 1857, as the British Fisheries Society. I have told the story of the Society as a whole elsewhere (Dunlop 1978), and here will concentrate on Ullapool.

## Selection of Sites

The first step was to select village sites, and in the summer of 1787 a number of Directors set out in two parties to visit possible locations. Before leaving London they decided to begin with only two villages on the west coast — one in the southern and one in the northern division (Skye was to be the site of a third village as soon as possible) (GD9/3/23). Tobermory was quickly chosen for the former and the Directors turned to consider the division between Skye and the Pentland Firth. This included lochs Torridon, Gairloch, Ewe, Broom, Inver, Laxford and Inchard. At Torridon and Gairloch the lairds already had schemes; Lochinver also had a station founded in 1775 by John Joseph Bacon from the Isle of Man and a local partner, although it was later said to have been founded by the British Fisheries Society. Laxford and Inchard were not then popular with either fish or boats. So they quickly eliminated all lochs but two — lochs Ewe and Broom.

It may have influenced them that they all saw Loch Broom first and fell under its spell. Loch Ewe had two great advantages: there was a road to the east coast while Loch Broom then had only a track, and the Stornoway packet boat left from Loch Ewe. The Directors were confident that they could change the packet's route (though it did not leave from Ullapool until the mid 20th century!) and they expected a road soon to be built which would be shorter than the one to Loch Ewe, so neither of these advantages weighed heavily. On the other hand, herring seem to have appeared less regularly than in Loch Broom. In any case none of the three harbours, one at Aultbea and two at the head of the loch, was available as the owners would not part with them. Had Aultbea been for sale in 1787 the Directors might have hesitated, but in the event they were agreed in recommending Loch Broom.

Here they inspected three sites. One at the head of the loch proved to have no good natural harbour and another on the southern shore (presumably Newton of Loggie) was thought to have too little flat land for a village. But all agreed with John Forbes that at Ullapool nearly all the conditions were favourable. The only objection raised — its distance from the open sea — was met by the purchase in 1787 of the island of Ristol at the mouth of the loch, which had a good natural harbour where the Directors planned to build curing and drying sheds. The stations at Tanera and Isle Martin did not offer any rivalry to the Society, but were welcomed as possible markets where the settlers might sell their fish (Beaufoy 1788.65).

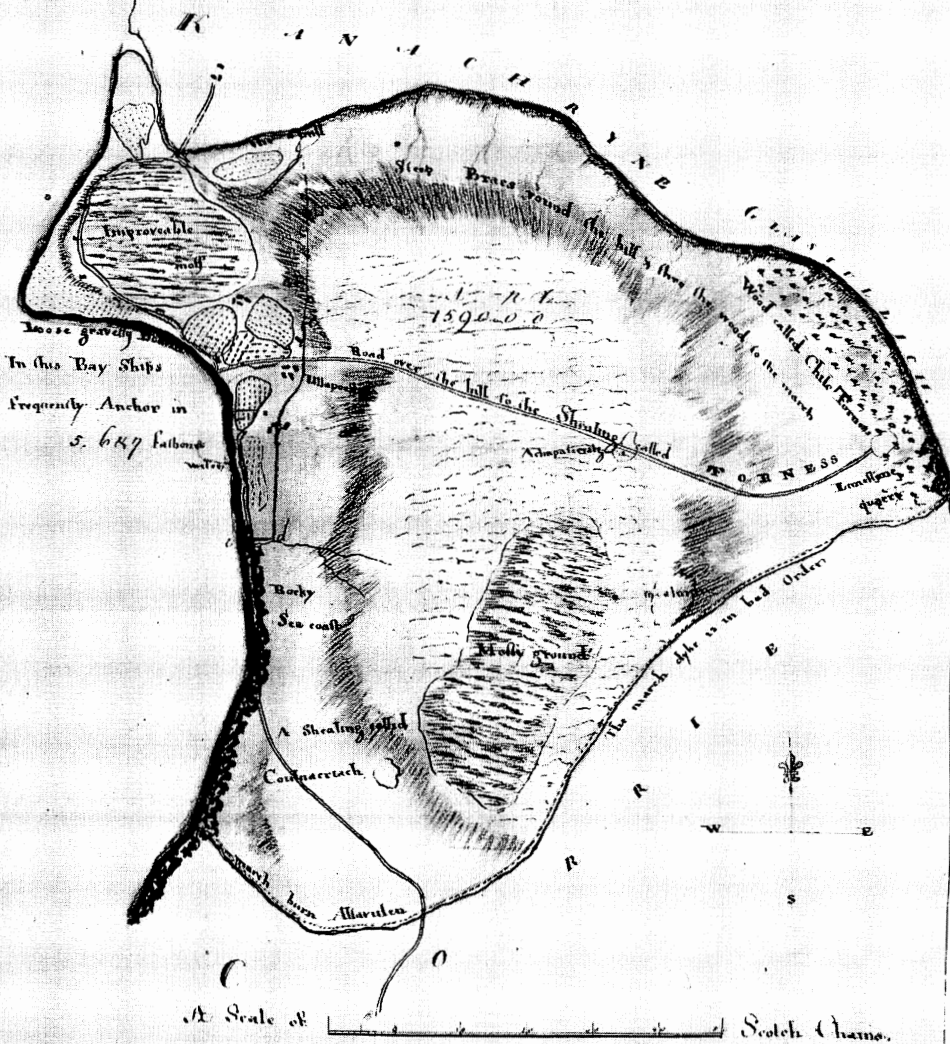
At the Society's annual meeting in March 1788 members heard a lyrical description of Ullapool and endorsed the choice of the Directors. By the end of the month just over 1,000 acres of land, including 57 arable and 74 pasture, were sold by Lord Macleod to the Society [Fig. 12.4, 12.5].

## The First Developers: Robert Melville and Roderick Morrison

During the same month of March the Society received an enquiry from a



# ULLAPOLL.



**Fig. 12.4** The farm of Ullapool surveyed by William Morrison, 1775. At that time Ullapool was a typical joint-tenant farm with a tacksman and sub-tenants, arable strips close to the clusters of buildings and shielings at a distance. There was also a mill on the Water of Achall.

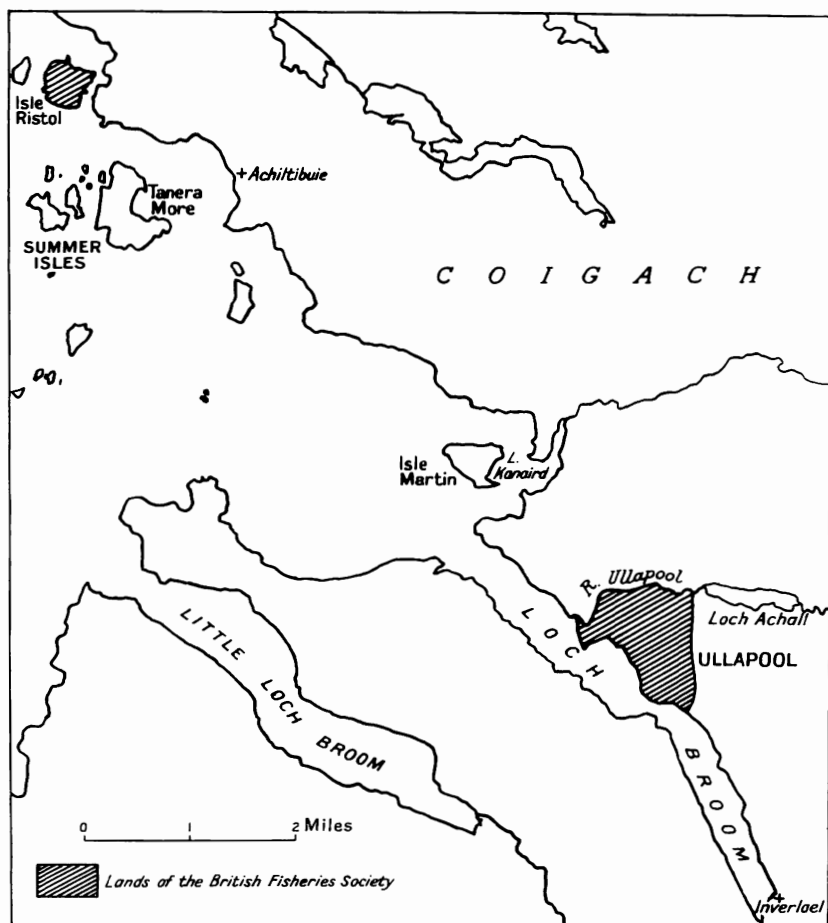


Fig. 12.5 Lands of the British Fisheries Society at Loch Broom.

would-be settler at Ullapool. Robert Melville was a nephew of Robert Fall, who owned a large fishery and commercial business in Dunbar. Melville had been a partner in the firm, but owing to losses in the corn trade Fall had recently gone bankrupt and Melville was looking for a job. He told Sir John Sinclair that he would be willing to make an offer to erect public buildings at Ullapool and to take charge of the trade and fishery. His uncle had been using his influence with George Dempster who thought Melville's intention 'a fortunate circumstance for the Society' and, after an interview, described Melville as 'a settler of great skill in the fisheries and one who will be supported with considerable capital by his friends' (Fergusson 1934.186).

As a basis for his scheme of development Melville wrote that he thought 'it most indispensable necessary to carry with me proper Artists so as by

means of these I might, by apprenticing the youth, instruct them properly in the various lines of business'. He enumerated boatbuilders, ropemakers, a net worker, blacksmith, coopers, fish curers and 'several of the most industrious and most experienced fishermen'. The building plan therefore included ten small houses for them. The Directors entered into a contract with Melville early in May 1788 by which he undertook to erect for the Society: *first* a house for himself to cost £100; *second* a shed for curing white herring for £80 (which was never built); *third* a smoking house for red herring for £290; *fourth* ten houses for his 'Artists' for a total sum of £200; *fifth* and *sixth* a shed for mending nets with tradesmen's shops behind for £80, and a storehouse for casks and nets at about £100 — making a total of £850. The Society was to lease these buildings to Melville at an annual rent of 7½ % of their value on condition that he became a settler at Ullapool, that he kept the buildings in repair, and that he found adequate surety (GD9/4/31).

Meanwhile the Society had been considering plans for further building at Ullapool. Mackenzie and Morrison from Tanera had already suggested that their own experience in building would qualify them for a contract, adding 'We ask no favour, our claim to it will rest on the reasonableness of our proposals'. Morrison forwarded plans for a pier, warehouse and inn for a total cost of £1,063. The Directors found this 'not unreasonable' and wrote for further details, at the same time consulting with his partner John Mackenzie in London. But without waiting to study his second plan the Directors resolved 'that in the mean time Morrison do take measures for providing materials in such a manner as if a contract had actually been entered into on the terms he has offered' (GD9/3/33). The Society had much to learn in the matter of contracts for, after this arrangement had been made, Morrison's plans were given to Robert Mylne, who redesigned one wing of the inn and made considerable alterations to the plan of the warehouse. Morrison then had to persuade the Society to allow more money for him to carry out Mylne's more elaborate ideas.

### **Donald Macleod of Geanies: the Society's 'Supervisor'**

By this time work had already started in Ullapool. When Melville had gone away to make his preparations, the Directors turned to consider how a society of noblemen and gentlemen based in London could supervise building operations six hundred miles away. They knew that they needed an experienced person on the spot and, although several of the Directors had houses within reach of Ullapool, they spent too much time in London, especially during the early summer when building would be going on. It was therefore agreed to ask help from a member of the Society, Donald Macleod of Geanies, advocate and sheriff of Ross. He lived near Tain but rented the farm of Rhidorroch only eight miles from Ullapool, and agreed to visit the site and report on progress twice a year, in May and September, when his duties took him to Coigach. By the end of May 1788 Geanies had been

supplied with ten pages of extracts on all the Society's proceedings on Ullapool, copies of Melville's contract, Morrison's proposals and a survey made by David Aitken in 1787. He was thus ready to begin his series of reports (GD9/4/74).

Already the two contractors had been busy. Morrison reported on 3rd June that he had collected enough material and workmen and was ready to begin. Melville had been equally expeditious, and two days later the sloop *Gilmerton*, loaded for Isle Martin, sailed out of Dunbar at 2 a.m. with a fair wind. The cargo included 8,000 bricks and tiles (another shipload of these was dispatched from Aberdeen); 1,967 pieces of timber; 20 cartloads of lime; six cartloads of household furniture and wearing apparel; two pairs of cartwheels, one cart and one plough. In addition the sloop carried 55 people — seven masons, two joiners, a slater, a blacksmith, a heckler, a netmaker, a fisherman, a cooper and a fish curer; the remaining 39 being wives and children. The party, which was increased by a number of masons from Dingwall, reached Ullapool on 13th June, while Melville and his partner James Miller, travelling by land, arrived on the same day. The farm was no longer left to Serjeant John Mackenzie and the customs officers (GD9/4/63).

On 30 June Geanies arrived on his first visit to Ullapool and found that Melville had proceeded much further than he could have expected. Aitken had appeared on 14th June and he and Melville had 'immediately proceeded to mark off the situations of the buildings to be erected this season, and set Masons to work on them, the lines for the streets of the town were traced out agreeable to the plan which Mr Aitken had formerly transmitted to the Society.' The first buildings were the cooper's and boatbuilder's shops and the net drying shed which, by the time Geanies saw it, had reached a height of five feet all round and in some places much higher. Geanies also sent for Morrison to consult with him about his work. The arrival of Morrison from Tanera produced the first clash in the history of Ullapool, for the two contractors failed to agree about the position of the pier. Morrison refused to build it in the place that Aitken had planned saying, correctly as it turned out, that the current would drive the shingle against it; Melville meantime said that Morrison's site, several hundred yards to the east, would be too far from the centre of the village. After reporting the arguments of both sides Geanies decided to leave the building of the pier until the following year, as Melville did not consider it necessary to his trade for that season (GD9/1/218).

The next report, early in August, told of Morrison's inn rising quickly under the hands of 15 masons — one wing being nearly finished. But when Mylne's plans arrived, Morrison found that 'the greatest part of all the mason work we had got done must be all pulled down before we could conform in any degree with his ideas'. On his next visit in October Geanies found that Melville's shed and workshops were all complete. He had commented in August that Melville's stonework was strong and substantial, but that:

he was sorry to observe that these buildings were meant to be covered with

tiles, a kind of roof that will not suit that variable and tempestuous climate. The buildings both on Isle Martin and Tanera are covered with blue slate and will be found in the end cheaper than a tile roof though the immediate outlay is undoubtedly greater (GD9/3/151).

Melville would be accustomed to the pantiles of East Lothian and it was probably at his wish that the Society did not insist on slate roofs as they did at Tobermory. As late as April 1806 a cargo of tiles was sent to Ullapool, but in the course of the following year two loads of slates from Easdale and one from Ballachulish appear in the customs accounts (E507/19/1/511).

### **Further Developments: William Cowie and John Smeaton**

Good progress had thus been made during the building season of 1788 and the Directors began to plan the work for 1789. In January a blow was dealt to the new settlement when Morrison asked to be released from his contract owing to ill-health. After some weeks of uncertainty he agreed to finish the inn, which he did before his death in 1790, while Geanies found a new contractor for the warehouse in William Cowie a builder and carpenter from Tain. Melville visited London in the spring and was given an additional contract to build 'a suitable schoolhouse to answer occasionally for a chapel' and a house for the schoolmaster who was to be appointed by the SSPCK (GD9/3/192). As far as the erection of buildings was concerned, the Directors had reason to be satisfied with the work of the first season and Dempster wrote 'If it does not rise to the sound of the lyre, it springs very fast to that of the bagpipe' (Fergusson 1934.194).

Work continued at a good pace in 1789 and the season saw the completion of Melville's contracts and of Cowie's warehouse. In addition there was the problem of the pier and breakwater postponed after the difference of opinion the previous summer. When Melville was in London he had told the Directors that 'the surf at present comes with such violence during a great part of the year upon the beach as to make it utterly unsafe and impracticable during a great part of the year for vessels of any kind to lie or land there' (GD9/3/183). The Directors consulted John Smeaton who advised them to build a pier and breakwater which he described in considerable detail. He said that he was too busy to design them himself but one of the Directors, John Call, who had been a military engineer in India, undertook to draw the plans. An advertisement for a contract was published, but as the matter was urgent Melville agreed to do some preliminary work, having himself sent in proposals for a contract. After some months, no other offer having been received, Melville was formally given the contract (GD9/8/119).

The pier was not a success, although it lasted until 1854. The designs were drawn without a preliminary survey of the bay at Ullapool, and Melville was not a professional engineer (there were very few of these at that time). The result was that the foundations of the pier, placed on too soft



a surface, spread out causing the whole structure to come out much larger than planned. This in turn meant that the breakwater had to be placed in deeper water than was intended and even so allowed only a narrow passage for ships. From the start Melville had complained of the 'stones rising so very unshapely, it is next to impossible to lay them and they are of so cross and stubborn a quality as baffle all labour in dressing to any shape' (GD9/3/489). Geanies was asked to appoint a qualified surveyor to report on the work and one James Maclaren duly visited Ullapool and provided a report which the Directors found short and unsatisfactory. When the pier and breakwater were finished in 1790 the cubic content was much larger than intended and Smeaton, blaming Melville for bad workmanship, considered that he should bear the extra cost. Melville replied with truth that according to his contract a resident surveyor was to assist him, but the Society had never appointed one and the Agent, who was instructed to sign the certificates of progress, had no technical knowledge (GD9/32/3/86).

### **The Involvement of Thomas Telford**

As a result of this controversy the Directors decided that they must have another survey which would include Melville's other work, which had been criticised, and all buildings at Ullapool (and at Tobermory also). Sir William Pulteney, a recently appointed Director, wrote to Thomas Telford, who agreed to undertake the whole survey for one guinea per day from the time of his setting out till his return — to cover both salary and expenses.

This was the beginning of the connection between Telford and the Society which lasted until the engineer's death in 1834. He began by charging fees, if very modest ones, but soon ceased to do so and his biographer records that shortly before his death the Society 'forced upon him a very handsome gift of plate, which, being inscribed with expressions of their thankfulness and gratitude towards him, he could not possibly refuse' (Rickman 1838.283). The Society minutes record that this was a silver inkstand and tea service.

On his first commission for the Society Telford reached Ullapool on 29th June 1790, his report being dated from Langholm six weeks later (GD9/3/583). In it he complained of the woodwork of all Melville's buildings and of several other features which the contractor tried to pass off as 'paltry differences'. Telford surveyed a red herring house, ten small houses, a shed for drying nets with boatbuilder's and cooper's shops behind it, and a storehouse for salt and casks; also the school/chapel and schoolmaster's house, the inn, and of course the pier and breakwater. Telford's verdict on the latter was that Melville was justified in enlarging the pier but not the breakwater, and therefore the Society was not liable for the total increase in cost. The report goes into considerable detail — the pews in the chapel were at least two inches too narrow; the floors in the storehouse were of flagstones and should be of brick; Melville's timberwork throughout was poor. His own house was inhabited though not quite finished — when it was put



*Fig. 12.6* Fishery warehouse converted to a tourist gift shop and museum 1992.

*Fig. 12.7* Fishery warehouse and harbour, ca. 1940.



up for sale in 1808 it was described as having three floors, with kitchen quarters separate and two acres of garden. Telford thought Morrison was an industrious, honest man but a professional builder could have produced the same results for less money. The inn came in for some criticism on detail — the windows had no pulleys or catches, the chimneys smoked, and there were no bells connecting the kitchen to the main house. He thought Cowie's warehouse too high and thin in its proportions but he commended the 'masterly and compleat manner in which every part of the building has been finished. The masonry of the walls is, I think, the best I ever saw of the sort, and the carpenters and joiners work is, if possible still better, in short I never saw better work in any building.' He suggested an outside crane or pulley on the gable at the harbour end [Figs. 12.6-12.9].

The report included a section on the general lay-out of Ullapool. The plan had the merit of being adaptable to any size and it is not clear how many streets were originally intended. The street fronting the harbour was reserved for store houses and public buildings but all the others were intended for dwelling houses [Fig. 12.10]. The east-west streets were placed wide enough apart to allow for gardens to north or south of the houses, while the communicating streets running north and south along the side of the gardens had no houses fronting them. The main features of this arrangement were planned by David Aitken in 1787, and laid out by him and Melville in July 1788. Aitken had intended that the whole street fronting the harbour should run parallel to the second street rather than follow the curve of the bay. But Melville had built his warehouses, shops and his own house along the shore line and Telford advised the Directors to continue the same plan. He suggested an elaborate market place in circular form within which there should be a row of houses with arcades or stalls in front and shops or parlours behind. The Directors approved the scheme provided it was shaped in a square, but it was never built. Thus Telford's part in the planning of Ullapool was confined to improvements and alterations on Aitken's general design and his original work for the Society was reserved for Pulteneytown (GD9/32/1/41).

## **ATTRACTING THE NEW SETTLERS**

By 1790 most of the stone and lime was in position in the public buildings, and the Directors had to turn their attention to attracting settlers to make use of them.

### **Leases and Land Tenure**

In the matter of land tenure the Directors were determined to give the longest possible leases, but this was not easy at first while they did not know how much of the land would be needed for houses. So the first leases were for five years only with much longer ones promised for later. The next problem was how much land should be granted to each settler. It was not a



Fig. 12.8 Surviving harbour buildings, Ullapool. 1992.

new one — on the one hand it was known that the herring was ‘a shifting ambulatory fish’ so that the settlers must have enough land to grow food to cover a bad season; but on the other hand the Highlander was thought to prefer a low standard of living to hard work, and if he was to fish at all he must not have enough land to live on entirely.

The resulting regulations were drawn up in 1789 and printed in 1790 (GD9/24). The land was classified into three types, at different values. The *first* was the town as planned by Aitken, divided into small lots just large enough for a house and kail yard, to be leased for 99 years — those nearest the harbour at £5 per acre and the rest at £2 2s per acre. *Secondly* every settler with one of these town lots was entitled to half an acre of arable land from what had been cultivated as the farm of Ullapool — this at first could only be leased for five years at ten shillings an acre. *Thirdly* each tenant might lease up to five acres of uncultivated land for ten years at one shilling an acre, with an undertaking by the Society to repay the cost of enclosures and improvements. *Fourthly*, there remained those parts of the farm incapable of raising crops and these too were available to the settlers — each was to have the right to dig peat, to pasture two cows in summer and to have stone, limestone and shelly sand freely for their own use.

### Settlers’ Houses

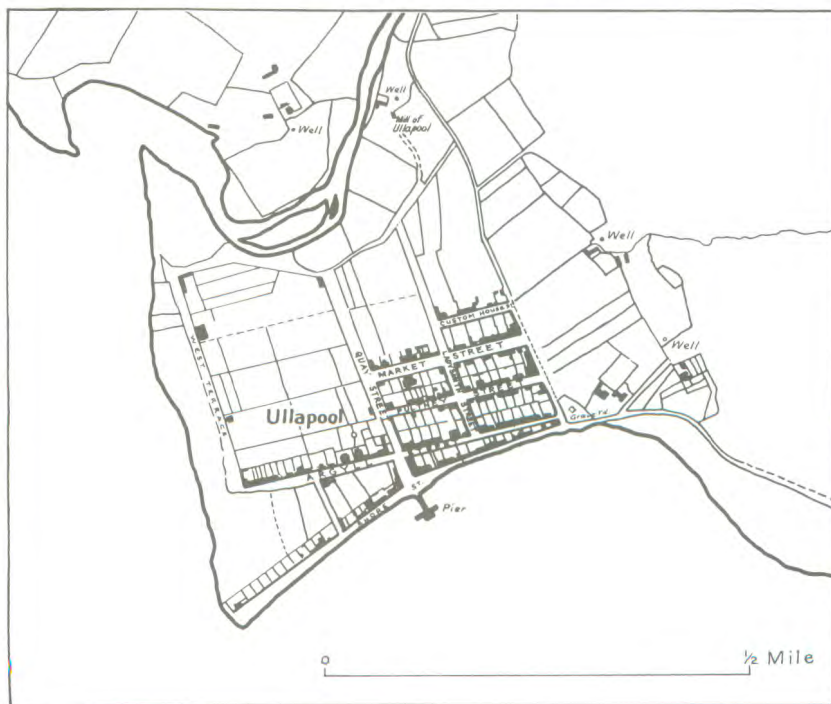
After settling the division of land the Directors began to consider building





Fig. 12.9 The old Custom House, Ullapool. 1992.

Fig. 12.10 Ullapool in 1875 (based on the Ordnance Survey).







*Fig. 12.11* Pulteney Street, Ullapool, crossed by Ladysmith Street, in the direction of Mill Street, ca. 1940.



*Fig. 12.12* Pulteney Street/Ladysmith Street crossroads, 1992 — tarred road, kerb and pavement, grass verge given over to car parking, corner house raised, street lighting.

regulations for the settlers. Although six houses were built by Melville at the Society's expense for sale to incomers, it was decided that in the ordinary course the settlers should build their own to conform with the Society's regulations for simple white houses. They were to be built quickly. If a tenant had not begun to build within eighteen months of taking his lease the Society was free to let the ground to someone else. Each lot (a maximum of 60ft, 18.3m, along the street) was to have a dwelling house, shops or warehouse built along the whole line fronting the street, and on that line no stable, byre, outhouse or peatstack was to be erected. If the whole line was not built within 15 years the tenant must give up the part still empty. No detail survives of the building of houses, but in 1796 there were 39 houses, of which 28 were tiled or slated; there were also 40 thatched huts [Figs. 12.11-12.14].

Although the Society refused to build houses for settlers, a loan of money at legal interest could be obtained on the security of the house. This loan must not exceed 50% of the total value of the house and could not be given to the settler until the house was built and certified as habitable; and it must be repaid within ten years either at once or by instalments. A final rule prevented the Society from spending more than £500 on these loans. All this seems unfair to the settler, but the Society always worked under the shadow of former schemes where all the money was used for unfinished buildings.

The Directors were quick to realise their responsibility in regard to public health at the new settlement. Cleanliness was one of the main features of Telford's contribution to the town plan. There was to be a lane 18ft (5.49m) wide running at the back of the houses. When some of the settlers objected that this reduced the size of their gardens they were told:

The reason for making the lane . . . is that they may have a place behind for laying out the dirt and dung of their houses instead of putting it in the street in front; and the back lane ought to be so wide that carts may pass each other when necessary and this is of more importance to the neatness and cleanliness of the Town than the adding of a few feet more to their gardens (GD9/9/49).

In front of the houses the street was to be 49ft (15m) wide. Each settler was to dig a ditch at least 6ft (1.8m) from his door, the whole length of his lot with a level footway covered with shingle to a width of 3ft (0.9m) between his house and the ditch. The earth from the ditch was to be laid in the centre of the street which would then slope towards the ditch, and a strip of 7ft (2.1m) in the centre of the street was to be covered with shingle. The regulation on this ended 'It is not expected by the Society that this be done immediately but by degrees and according to the convenience of the settlers' (GD9/24). Telford included a system of drains and sewers in his town plan (sadly no early plan of the village survived and all we have are tantalising references to yellow and red lines on 'the enclosed plan') — the drains to be open and leading to the harbour or river. The water supply of Ullapool became a serious problem for a few years. Telford included twelve public fountains on his plan, and later it was suggested that a reservoir might be made from the burn or that springs might be piped. One Director even sug-





*Fig. 12.13* Pulteney Street, Ullapool, between Quay Street and Ladysmith Street, 1992. The single-storey house was one of several house types erected. It had a direct parallel in the improved crofter's house and represented the simplest of those laid out on Aitken's 1789 plans.

*Fig. 12.14* Numbers 2 and 4 Custom House Street, Ullapool. 1992.



gested refining rainwater, and it was the rain which solved the problem, for after several wet seasons the water from the old wells proved sufficient for the new village.

## FISHING OPERATIONS

All this seems a long way from fishing, and in fact no detail survives of the operations at Ullapool because the Society was forbidden to take an active part in them, and Melville and his colleagues did not report to the Directors. But Mackenzie described his fishing at Tanera during the 1790s. He owned a number of decked vessels which he used as floating storehouses and the fishing was conducted entirely from boats, the property of local fishermen — Ullapool settlers probably among them. The herring were caught and brought to the vessels for packing, or taken straight to the curing sheds on Tanera [Figs. 12.15-12.17]. Boats varied in size from one to two tons and Mackenzie reported that they 'went to the extremity of Lochbroom, which is about fifteen miles long and were able to turn the headlands but not with safety when fully loaded; I believe that they have followed the fish from loch to loch but not to any great distance' (*Reports*. x.245). This description emphasises the uncertain nature of the boat fishery, for if the shoals did not appear as usual the boatmen were unable to go very far in search of them. The herring were always unreliable and even in 1788 the summer and autumn fishing failed in Loch Broom, but December brought so great a quantity that according to Melville enough could have been taken to supply the markets of all Europe and the West Indies.

In 1798 it was said that the population of Ullapool:

consists of artizans, small dealers in various articles wanted for the use of the country, labourers and fishermen. But when the shoals of Herrings come to the neighbourhood the whole inhabitants of the village may be considered as Fishermen or Fish Curers; for they are then all more or less concerned in that business; some employing their personal labour and others their property in Fishing adventures. The natives in general may be considered as Fishermen on those occasions, for all of them who can be spared from necessary occupations at their farms, come down to partake of the profits of the Herring Fishery, according as their slender means and best endeavours enable them. Last season the Herrings visited the coast in great abundance, and the settlers and neighbourhood may therefore be considered at present as in a state of comparative opulence, of which the effect will probably appear in the rise of more houses at the station than have been erected for the last two or three years, which were years of scarcity of Herrings on that coast (*Reports*.x.246).

Alas, 1797 was to prove the exception rather than the rule, and by 1800 it was becoming clear that the east coast rather than the west was being favoured by the fish. It was also evident (*ibid.*) that:

when the Herrings are in plenty in the Neighbourhood, every thing else wanted by the inhabitants is so also. The vessels follow the shoals bringing along with them a supply of all necessary articles; but when there are no shoals, the Directors have sometimes found it necessary to lend from £50 to

£100 to some person of credit at the settlement, for the purpose of importing a cargo of meal to be sold by retail to the settlers at short credit.

And this was to become the predominant pattern.

## THE DECLINE OF ULLAPOOL

By 1798 there were, in addition to about 30 boats belonging to settlers, three vessels of between 20 and 70 tons which belonged to Ullapool (one having been built there), and several more visited the station for import and export. But gradually, with poor seasons of fishing, the village ceased to be in a state of readiness, so that when shoals did suddenly come to Loch Broom necessary supplies and equipment were not to be had there — salt could not be obtained quickly so the curers could not operate, boats were no longer seaworthy when herring came, and nets and barrels were not available.

There were many reasons for the decline of west coast fishing as well as the non-appearance of shoals. The markets were disappearing. In the West Indies most of the fish had gone to feed the slaves and as the number of slaves declined, those paid wages preferred to spend their money on better food sent from America. For the standard of British red herring was so low, especially when barrels had been delayed in their wartime passage of the Atlantic, that only slaves would eat them.

The war and the blockade of Europe not only interfered with markets, but enemy ships and the fear of press-gangs cut down the enthusiasm of boat fishermen; in addition, emigration had begun to affect the Highlands. Also at this time the general influence of the Society was lessening — partly because the original Directors began to die off and were replaced by men with excellent qualities but with little connection with the north. For example when Sir William Pulteney (who was a Scot and began life as a Johnstone of Westerhall before marrying the heiress of the earl of Bath) died in 1805, his successor as governor was Sir William Smith, a member of Parliament, financier and supporter of Wilberforce (and incidentally grandfather of Florence Nightingale). His only apparent previous connection with the Highlands was that his father Samuel Smith had sent presents of tea and other luxuries to Flora Macdonald when she was in the Tower of London. Smith did valuable work for the Society, but he seems to have regarded it as one among his many rather impersonal charitable designs. The Society also had much of its influence transferred to the new Fishery Board set up in 1808, which took over all regulation of the industry and passed to official inspectors most of the intervention with the government. This was a triumph for the original aims of the Society, but curtailed its later activities.

Ullapool gradually sank from its hopeful beginnings, and in the first half of the 19th century there was little work and much hardship there. The Society finally withdrew from its western settlements. Tobermory was sold in 1844 and Ullapool went in 1847 to Sir James Mathieson of Achany for





*Fig. 12.15* Gutting the fish. Rags were bound around the fingers to try to protect cuts and raw skin. Ullapool, 1940s/50s.



*Fig. 12.16* Preparing herring for curing. The vat on the left contains salt. Ullapool, 1940s/50s.

*Fig. 12.17* Packing the herring in barrels for export. Ullapool, 1940s/50s.







*Fig. 12.18* The pier at Ullapool filled with boxes of herring. 1940s/50s.

*Fig. 12.19* Motor lorries would take the herring to the curing yards. Ullapool, 1940s/50s.



£5,000 — the money being devoted to the Society's successful venture at Pulteneytown. Ullapool had to wait another hundred years before the fishing once again came its way and many of the Society's buildings could be used as they had been planned [Figs. 12.18, 12.19].

### *Acknowledgement*

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# **ULAPUL DÀ CHEUD BLIADHNA**



# **1788-1988**



# **ULLAPOOL BI-CENTENARY**