

Chapter 9

Bute from Norse times to the Improvements: some notes on landholdings and rural settlement patterns

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Bute

LOW-LYING and sheltered, with many sandy bays and safe landings, Bute's fertility and accessibility have made it the least insular of islands. Dissected by the Highland Boundary Fault, it is at once highland and lowland. The ebb and flow of military, political and economic power has been a constant factor in island life, and British, Dalriadic, Norse, Gall-Ghàidheil, Anglo-Norman and Scots influences have all played a part in shaping the island's settlement history during the millennium under review.

For an island on the fringe of the highlands, Bute is relatively well documented, and particularly favoured with a fine collection of estate maps. Moreover, where farming is not too intensive, abundant evidence of former settlement survives in the landscape, recorded since 1990 by the Buteshire Natural History Society Deserted Settlement Survey (Proudfoot & Hannah 2000) and more recently through the Scotland's Rural Past project (RCAHMS 2011) and the full record revision undertaken by RCAHMS with the Discover Bute Landscape Partnership (Geddes & Hale 2010). My aim here is to bring together these diverse strands and see what they show about patterns of rural settlement and landholding from the coming of the Norsemen until the agricultural improvements in the eighteenth century.

The evidence of documents

Units of assessment

Aside from their actual meaning, which I have discussed elsewhere (Hannah 2004), the numeric values of Bute's Old Extent assessments reflect the underlying pattern of landholdings, testifying to an earlier landscape of larger fiscal units. Old Extents in merklands usually accompany farm names in documents such as exchequer rolls, charters, retours and rentals from the fifteenth century onwards. I have argued that these assessments were probably imposed in the late twelfth or early thirteenth centuries, with some respect for a pre-existing system (Hannah 2004).¹ Assessments became ossified at an early stage, meaning that new settlements could not be given any value unless by partition of an existing unit, so that some later changes and many minor ones remain invisible from this perspective. However, this very inflexibility has helped to preserve the older pattern.²

Pennylands were probably widespread and perhaps general on Bute in the Norse period and the immediately following centuries, but surviving references are scarce. They are found in the earliest extant charters (c1320: Bute 1945), and also in the names of Lenihall and Lenihuline, two farms in the north of the island. The first element of these names is *leth-pheighinn* ‘half-penny’, and it is likely that Lenihall, Old Extent 1½ merks, was a half-penny land. Lenihuline’s Extent was three merks, but this farm had two foci of settlement and the name may have referred originally to only one of these. The farm figured in the Exchequer Rolls (ER v: 80) from its first appearance in 1440 until 1450 under a completely different name (Altone) which may have referred to the other settlement. Adding the charter evidence that Ardrosdale (later 12 merks) was five pennylands (MSA Cat, no. 2), while Kilmachalmaig (7½ merks) comprised three pennylands (Bute, Marquess of 1945), we may infer that in Bute 2½ or 3 merks of Old Extent equated roughly to a pennyland. This contrasts with six merks to twenty pennylands in Tiree (Dodgshon 1981: 79–81), Uist and Eigg (Raven 2005: 102) and a merk to two pennylands in Kintyre and elsewhere (McKerral 1943: 62).³ However, merklands were a much later introduction in the Hebrides than in Bute, and often imposed more arbitrarily. In Bute, three merks is the most usual assessment for a single farm, while larger holdings were frequently 12 or 15 merks, corresponding to five pennylands.

Toponymic evidence

Place-name analysis helps to tease out successive strands of political control. Several of Bute’s larger settlement units have names at least partially Norse in origin, including Ascog, Langal, Scalpsie, Birgidale, *Rosdale and possibly Scoulag, and must have existed or come into being during the period of Norse occupation (Márkus forthcoming; Márkus this volume). That Viking settlement constituted a significant ‘land-grab’ in the Clyde area is now widely acknowledged, though the Norse tongue was to prove much less durable here than in the Hebrides. Although Bute remained within the Norse sphere of influence for several centuries, it appears that the Gaelic language swiftly re-asserted itself. A few Gaelic names may be pre-Norse, but many belong to the Gall-Ghàidheil period, from shortly after 900 (Clancy 2008: 30), when Gaelic regained its dominance. Others, of course, are later still, as Gaelic continued to be spoken throughout the period under review. Almost all the smaller farms have Gaelic names, often referring to landscape features, though some names remain opaque.

Larger and older landholdings

I will now look briefly at a number of larger and older estates in order to sketch a history of the enduring framework of landholdings on the island (fig 9.1). Kingarth, being a twenty pound (30 merk) land, and so perhaps half an ounce-land,⁴ had the highest value of any single Bute property (only equalled later by the entire burgh lands of Rothesay), and it may also be the oldest surviving unit. The name is certainly pre-Norse, for it is recorded intermittently in the Annals of Ulster and Tigernach from 660 (Anderson 1922), and it may be pre-Gaelic in origin.⁵ There is good evidence that the monastery dates from the sixth century and may initially have been a British rather than a Columban/Irish foundation, being dedicated to Blane, a British saint’s name (Fraser 2005). It is impossible to say whether or for how long a secular estate pre-existed its establishment. Old Extents testify to subsequent division of the estate into four equal parts, three of which bore the names Garach, Kelspoke and Branser

while the fourth was shared unequally between Lubas and Dunagoil. Most if not all of these names are Gaelic, albeit rather obscure in some cases, suggesting that this division did not take place in a Norse-speaking milieu. Before the end of the fifteenth century all four were further split into farms of between 1½ and 4 merks Extent, similar in size to those found elsewhere in Bute. A better grasp of the relationship between the monastery and the Dunagoil forts (Harding 2004) would clarify the history of settlement in this area, especially in the Norse and Gall-Ghàidheil periods. The surviving ‘hall-type’ buildings at Little Dunagoil, misleadingly classified as long-houses by their excavator (Marshall 1964), testify to significant Norse and early mediaeval occupation, though the succeeding farm of Dunagoil, sited some 300m inland, with only two merks of Old Extent is among the smaller farms of the island.

The postulated unit of *Roscadale, comprising 12 merks of Ardrosedale and 12 of Dunalunt, would have been next to Kingarth in value and possibly also in antiquity, since the name, whatever its exact origin, is clearly Norse. This estate, too, would have been half an ounceland, since half of it was five pennylands in 1320, as mentioned above. When it was divided, the Gaelic *àird* (here signifying a slight promontory rising towards the sea from an inland valley) served to specify one half, while the other was named Dunalunt for a fortified hill on the landward side of the valley. This division therefore took place when Gaelic was again being spoken. Some time later further fission must have occurred, since Ardrosedale has comprised two 6 merk lands and Dunalunt four of 3 merks since documentation began. Nether Ardrosedale will serve as a case study later in this paper.

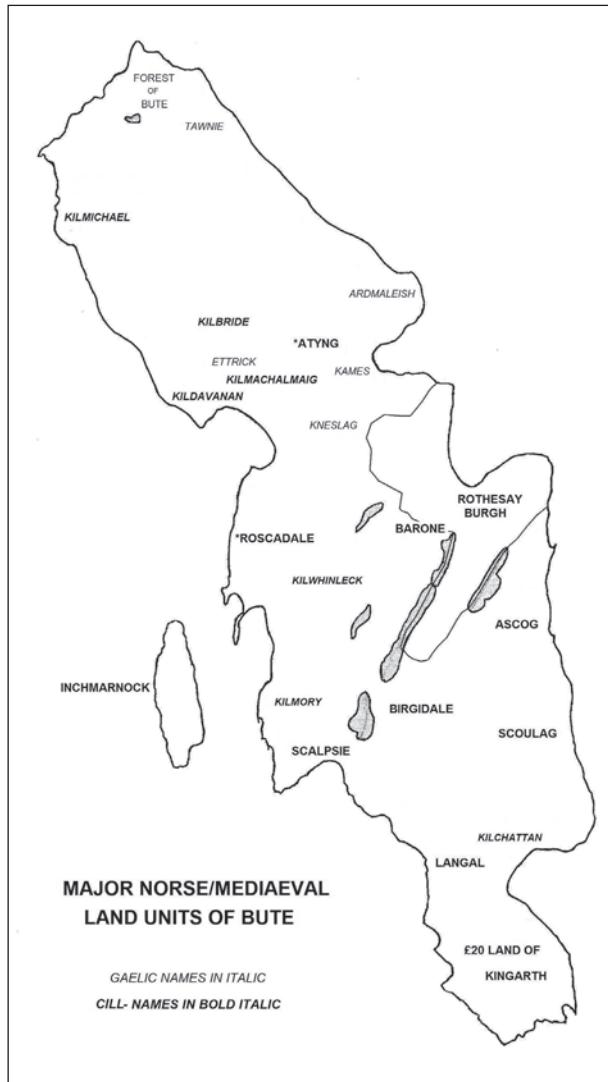


Fig 9.1 Location of the larger or older Bute landholdings, including those with Norse names, cill- names and a few with Gaelic names of topographical reference.

Scoulag may also have been valued at 24 merks, adding the five merks of *Scowlogmore* and three of Bruchag (an otherwise unattached adjacent unit) to the frequently mentioned 16 merklands of Scoulag which comprised four 4 merk farms. Of these, Kerrymoran and Kerryniven were Gaelic personal names prefixed by *Ceathramh*, quarter (Hannah 2000), while the other two simply prefixed *Scoulag* with Scots *Nether* and *Mid*. This pairing implies the existence of Upper Scoulag, a present-day farm not mentioned in older documents. Kerrymoran may have been an earlier name for this farm, leaving Kerryniven to make up the last quarter. Scowlogmore disappears from the record in the late fifteenth century, to be replaced by Kerrylamont, owned separately from the 16 merklands. At this period the names of smaller settlements could change more readily than their boundaries.

The name Barone is obscure, even its language being uncertain (Márkus forthcoming), evidence in itself of antiquity. This estate predated the burgh of Rothesay, as part lies within it, and part outside. Five merklands of the latter portion were divided in 1506 (RMS, vol 2: no.2987) among four tenants (with minor errors of arithmetic) in the ratios of one third, two quarters and one sixth. These extents correspond to the settlements of Balilone, Glenchromag, Chapelton and Achamor, all of which appear in the record within the next few years. It is hard to resist the conclusion that these townships had existed and been so named for a considerable time previously. Here is a substratum of settlement which slipped under the radar of official documents, and it may be that some other ‘multiple tenancies’ seemingly implied by charters should be similarly understood⁶. We can deduce that Barone (or this portion of it) was first split into two halves, each of which was again divided, one part equally and the other in a ratio of 2:1. These four settlements taken together are regularly referred to as Greater or Meikle Barone in seventeenth-century records, though confusingly this name was sometimes used later (eg on May’s 1781 map, MSA BU) to designate the farm now called Barone Park or to contrast that farm with Little Barone, neither of which was included in the five merklands of the royal holding.

Cranslag⁷ was a 12 merk land whose antiquity is affirmed by its long-standing division between royal (ie originally Stewart) and Bannatyne lands, indicating that it pre-existed the rise of these powers. It may well have originated in the Norse or pre-Norse periods. Two of the three quarters of this land held by Kames (earlier by Wester Kames) continued in its possession until that estate finally passed to the Bute family in 1863. The ownership history of the third quarter (Cranslagloan) is complex.

Kames became the largest estate with a Gaelic topographic name, but it only grew in power from the thirteenth century. The nuclei of Easter and Wester Kames were each three merks of Old Extent, bordering the bay on Bute’s east coast which gave them their name (and later took it back). We may therefore postulate an older undivided Kames of six merks. These two Kames estates, of the Bannatyne and Spens families respectively, extended their control for some time up to Glenmore and across the island to Cranslag and Ardrosedale. The Sheriff’s (Stewart of Bute) estate also grew steadily from the fifteenth century onwards and has dominated the island since the improvement period, reversing in one sense the earlier centuries of fission, while conserving the identities of individual farmsteads in an island-wide dispersed pattern.

Estates with Cill-names

Among the larger landholdings with Gaelic names, *Cill-* names predominate. The largest was Kilchattan with 14 merks, followed by Kilmory with 12. It is really impossible to know

whether these names and their associated units in Bute go back to pre-Norse times, for there is as yet no convincing archaeological evidence (see Clancy 2008: 43, for a discussion of the situation in Galloway). The strong association of Catan with Blane makes it seem likely in Kilchattan's case.

Kilmory was divided unevenly into five merks of Over Kilmory and seven of Nether. Over (later Meikle) Kilmory remained a single unit despite still showing two distinct foci of settlement on May's map of 1780 (MSA BU), and indeed continued to be farmed as such until about four years ago, being judged one of the best farms on the island. Nether Kilmory was in three equal parts by about 1500, each having the unusual extent of $2\frac{1}{3}$ merks.⁸ The name of one, *Kilmory Chappelton*, retained for some time a reference to the eponymous chapel. This style probably fell into disuse after the reformation, when the chapel would have ceased to function, the farm later being known as Little Kilmory. The age of this chapel is unknown, though the dedication has been thought to tell against a first millennium date.⁹

A good case might be made for the antiquity of Kilmachalmaig (attested as a threepenny land in a charter of c.1313 (Bute 1945),¹⁰ and subsequently comprising three farms of $2\frac{1}{2}$ merks each). Evidence here includes a carved stone cross, thought to be engraved on a more ancient standing stone, and a cemetery of unknown period. The hypocoristic form of the dedication, while not conclusive, lends some support to an early date, while the pennyland valuation indicates Norse influence and may point towards a pre-Norse origin. In the case of Kildavanan, the hypocorism and 'celtic' dedication to Benén, in Latin Benignus (Watson 1926: 301), also argue for an early date, though this holding has only ever been a three merk land.

The dedications of Kilbride (a six merk land which has never been divided) and Kilmichael (five merks) imply little about dating, and arguments based on Kilmichael chapel's supposed inwardly corbelled gable (Hewison 1893: 114; Addyman 2008) have generally been discounted. Kilbride chapel is unlocated, though a nearby field is called *Kirkyard Butt* on May's 1781 map. The name Kilwhinleck is too obscure to afford useful evidence, though we know from documents that its $5\frac{1}{2}$ merk estate included a mill and at least four small outlying farmsteads which lasted well into the eighteenth century.

Some inferences

Where several neighbouring farms have the same fractional value, Old Extents by themselves can serve to infer an older, larger unit. An example is provided by the four adjacent lands of Rhu, Tawnie, Bronoch, and Bullochreg, along the East Kyle shore, each with a valuation of $1\frac{1}{8}$ merks, which probably comprised a single £5 land when the valuation was undertaken. More speculatively, the next farms down the coast, Shalunt, Cunnashambrug and Stuck, valued respectively at four, two and four merks, may have been once a single ten merk land.

Sometimes a combination of toponymic and assessment evidence allows less obvious conclusions to be reached with confidence. Four adjacent farms, now known as Dunalunt, Ballycaul, Ballianlay and Ballycurrie are shown to have formed a single unit by analysis of the place-name record (Hannah 2000), but the fact that each had a 3 merk Old Extent, making the whole Dunalunt unit worth 12 merks, provides additional confirmation. Its probable relation to the neighbouring 12 merk land of Ardrosca Dale has already been mentioned.

Another Norse estate of 12 merks was Langal, also comprising four farms of three merks each. Three of these (Langalchorad, [Langal]quochag, Langalbuinloch) have names

consisting of Langal specified by Gaelic suffices which varied confusingly through the centuries, in the case of Quochag eventually dropping the generic entirely. The identity of the fourth part (Culevin) can only be inferred from its location and because we know that its Old Extent was three merks and it did not belong to any other large unit.

Bute's royal farms

Exchequer Rolls (ER v: 79ff) furnish the first extant list of Bute's royal farms, which in 1440 occupied about two thirds of the island. The remainder comprised Rothesay burgh (with extensive rural area), the two Kames estates, with ten farms,¹¹ the smaller estate of Ascog and three other units, of which the Sheriff held two. Forty farms are named in the list, ten of these having two or more parts, usually numbered sequentially, a scribal convenience used when the parts were equal in value. The Gaelic suffices *mòr and beag* are used three times and once the Latin *inferior/superior* (for *nether/over*). There is one example of repeated fission in the list, Kilchattan being divided into *mòr and beag*, and **Kilchattan mòr* in turn having three numbered parts.

This list is repeated with minor changes in 1449 and 1450 (ER v: 359ff, 406ff), after which there is a gap of more than half a century before the next list in 1507 (ER xii: 509ff). Here names replace numbers, the estate name being usually retained as a generic, prefixed with such specifics as *uoir/nether, hidder/yonder, mekill/litell* (or Gaelic equivalents *mòr/beag*, etc) while *mid* or *meadhanach* is added where the unit splits into three. Occasionally the tenant's name serves this function, and rarely a previously undocumented name is invoked. Only on linguistic grounds can we guess how long such a name might have been in oral use. Fission since 1440 is evidenced only at Branser and Nether Kilmory, each now listed as three units.¹² This list is repeated with only slight changes in 1527 (ER xv: 302f). To emphasise continuity over five centuries and throughout the improvements, it is worth noting that all the farms in these lists apart from four in Kingarth parish and five in the north of the island were still being farmed as separate units in the mid twentieth century. Bute did not suffer the population explosion and subsequent wholesale clearance which afflicted so many highland areas.

In 1506, a charter (RMS, vol 2: no.2987) lists Bute royal farms for a different purpose, confirming in *feu-ferme* all the king's tenants on the island. 26 farms had a single feu, six tenants held two or three units each, while 46 tenants shared the remaining 23 farms, in most cases equally. In general, this did not cause fresh division of the unit, but seems rather to have reflected its internal structure (cf Barone above). How the fields were shared out is not entirely clear, but no further fission occurred, new names were not created, and the original units continued as entire farms into the centuries that followed, despite being often held for long periods by two tenants or, on rare occasions, two different heritors. Dodgshon has discussed at some length how multiple tenancies operated in various parts of Scotland, but always in a context of open-field systems (1981: 149ff).¹³

Bute had been claimed by the Stewarts since around 1200 and along with Renfrew and parts of north Ayrshire came to comprise their demesne lands. After gaining the throne, their attachment to the island remained strong (Boardman 2006: 99), and it is clear from the Exchequer Rolls that Bute continued to furnish meal and marts for the royal table into the sixteenth century. But the setting of royal lands in *feu-ferme* under James IV marked a significant change, inaugurating a power struggle among the feuars which soon resulted in

the emergence of several small estates, but ultimately in domination by the Stewarts of Bute, constables and hereditary keepers of Rothesay castle and sheriffs of Bute, who were initially granted just the two farms of Ardmaleish and Greenan along with these titles around 1380,¹⁴ Barone being added in 1419 (MSA BU/1/1/15).

The evidence of estate maps

Using sources such as those mentioned above, we can infer that from around 1300 onwards there were some 80 farms¹⁵ scattered fairly uniformly across the island, with the exception of the generally uncultivable shoreline and the inhospitable higher moorlands. Apart from Rothesay, which grew up around the medieval castle, there were no larger aggregations of settlement. It is likely that the rural population fluctuated between two and three thousand, roughly 20 to 40 persons per farm. But did these people live close together in a compact farm-toun or in isolated cottages scattered among their fields? And is there evidence for change in this pattern, as in various Hebridean localities (Dodgshon 1993; Raven 2005)? From the middle of the eighteenth century, thanks to the third Earl's enthusiasm for agricultural improvement, Bute is furnished with several sets of high quality estate maps. The first of these, drawn by John Foulis in 1759, depicts buildings for the first time in enough detail to answer this question, at least for the immediately pre-improvement period.

Most farms are depicted as having a single focus of settlement, with up to half a dozen or even more buildings in a cluster, often aligned roughly in parallel down the slope, but without strict organisation and with the odd building at right angles. These of course include a variety of ancillary buildings as well as houses. Often there is an additional, isolated house towards the periphery of the unit, and these will be discussed in detail below. Exceptions to

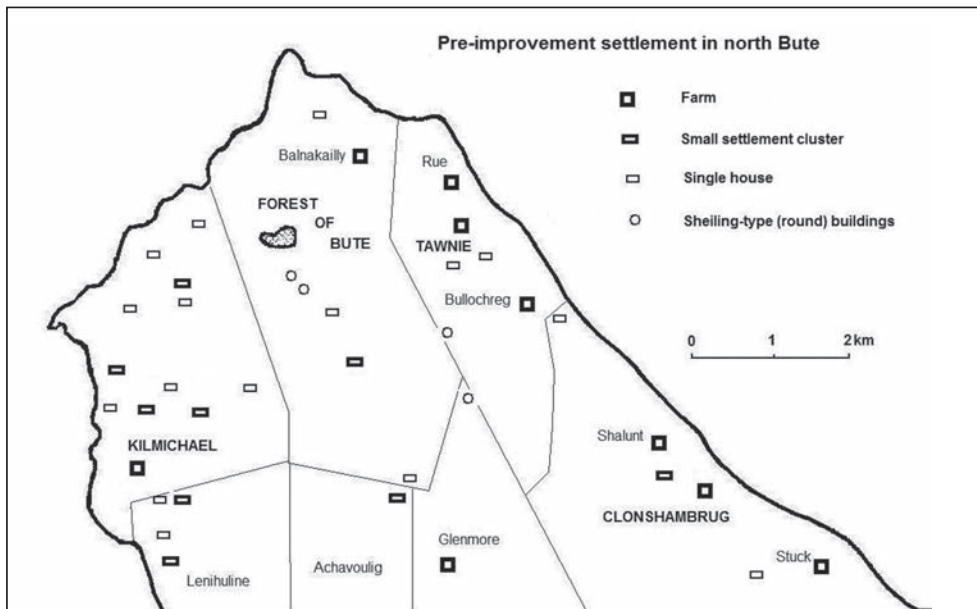
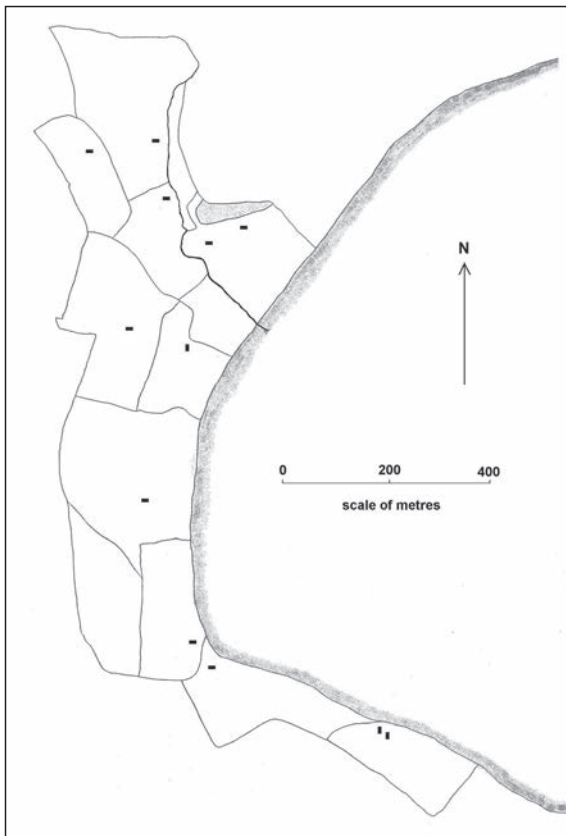


Fig 9.2 Composite map of settlement sites in north Bute, combining the results of field survey with an understanding of the larger settlement units derived from documentary evidence.

the usual unifocal layout occurred in the north of the island, in effectively highland country, where livestock farming was dominant. Here Lenihuline is shown to have had two foci of settlement, while the large farm of Kilmichael had several, apparently long-established sites within a mile of the main steading, but not extending further into the hinterland. Field survey has shown that at some earlier time even more houses were scattered across the hill country of north Bute (Proudfoot & Hannah 2000; Geddes & Hale 2010), and it would be unwise to assume that the pattern shown by Foulis had prevailed across the island in earlier centuries (fig 9.2).

Bute is too small for transhumance to be a major feature; just two groups of rather slight shieling huts are known (Proudfoot & Hannah 2000). These do not figure on estate maps, neither do many of the more frequent footings of sub-rectangular buildings, scattered singly or in pairs across the landscape in places where grazing might be found, but without accompanying cultivation. It seems reasonable to postulate that these represent an attempt to exploit the pastoral potential of the land when a market was developing for livestock, and at the same time crops were less dependable, during the 'little ice-age'. These buildings may well belong to that period, between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the Hebrides similar sub-rectangular huts with rounded gables have been dated to the later medieval period (Raven 2005: 380–1). Excavation might help to date the Bute houses, as well as determining whether their occupation was brief or seasonal, or if they reflect a more drastic albeit temporary change in farming practice.



Butts

There is one widespread exception to the clustered disposition of Bute's lowland farmsteads. We learn from documents that many farms had an associated 'butt', a term which seems almost peculiar to Bute when used in this way. Estate maps make clear that the reference is to a patch of land near the periphery of the farm, with its own isolated house, roughly equivalent to the more familiar *pendicle*.¹⁶ *Buttmen* had a definite status, intermediate between tenants and cotters, reflected, for instance, in the sums they paid in hearth tax (BtM L04-1027 B41.4) and roads labour remission (BtM L04-1037 B41.5). Earlier, there may have

Fig 9.3 The 'hamlet' of contiguous butts around Kilchattan Bay in 1760, redrawn from Foulis' map (by kind permission of Mountstuart Archive).

been a commitment to some days' work on the main farm. The existence of butts provides additional confirmation that houses were otherwise clustered about the steading.

Detachment of the butt was an aspect of the fission process which never gave rise to full-scale farms, and was quite different from equal division into fully viable units. There is no evidence for when butts were first established, but in a few areas, notably around Kilchattan Bay, they were numerous by the late seventeenth century, in that area no longer associated with any farm, but let individually by the Estate on an annual or longer-term basis (James Stewart rental 1695–1700, MSA BU/ BE 1). Proliferation of butts probably depended on the availability of other work, as cultivation of the butt could barely have provided a livelihood on its own. Very locally their preponderance created a dispersed pattern of settlement, amounting to a scattered village, unique on the island and marking the culmination of a very specific fission process (fig 9.3).

A pre-improvement case study: Nether Ardroskadale

Figure 9.4 shows part of Nether Ardroskadale in 1781, a farm typical of many in Bute. Although north of the highland boundary fault, it is in some respects a lowland farm, occupying a low ridge between the sea and a glaciated valley, with some fine arable and pasture land, as well

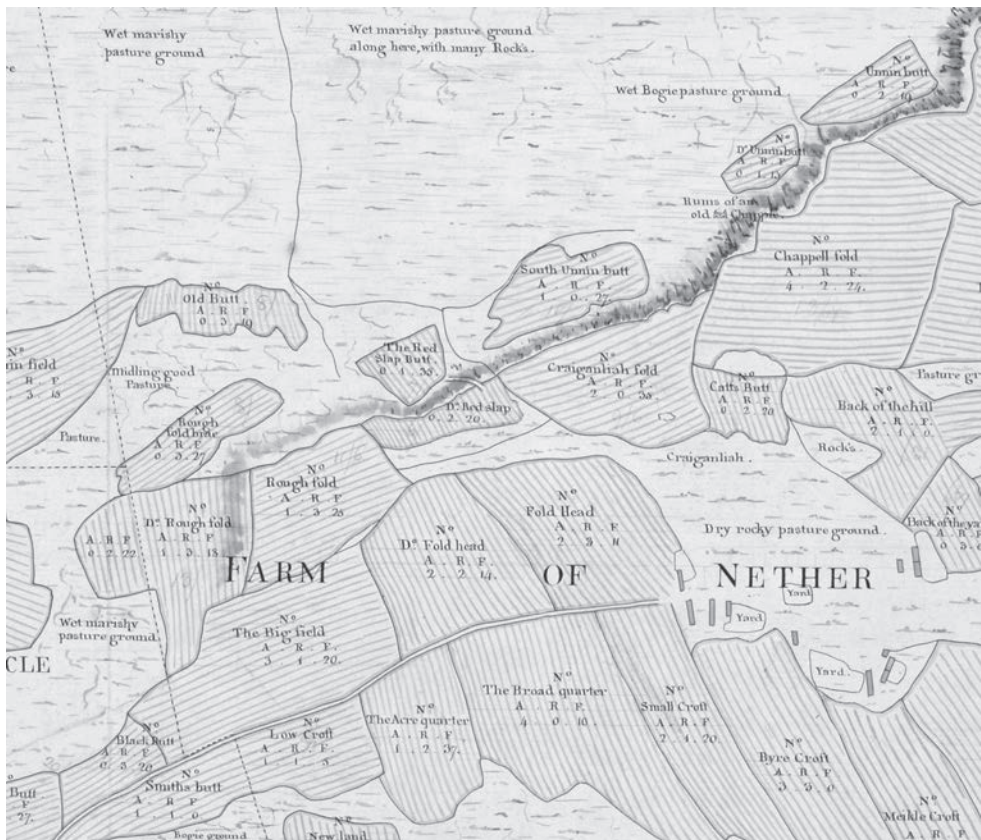


Fig 9.4 Part of Peter May's plan of Nether Ardroskadale, 1781 (RCAHMS DP075154; © The Bute Collection, Mountstuart Archive)

as rough grazing. May's plan depicts its immediately pre-improvement layout. The straight dashed line on the left shows where it was proposed to cut off a new pendicle.

The steadings occupy an area of elevated, rocky ground which could not be cultivated but would always be relatively well-drained. Below this to the east, the land slopes gently down to a broad valley, wet in the bottom. The slopes immediately below the farmstead were the best arable, comprising the infield of the farm, in Bute as elsewhere generally called *croft* land. These fields were long enough for a plough team to operate efficiently, but usually relatively narrow. They grew the oats which were the backbone of the lowland rural economy, feeding the people and the draft horses, and paying the bulk of teinds and rents, as well as barley, needed for feu-duty and for brewing or distilling and later as a cash crop. Above the cliff, on the higher ground to the north (right on the map), were *folds*. These often had a rounder shape, enclosed from hill or woodland for folding livestock. The usual boundary was a stone and earth dyke, topped by a fence or dead hedge. Once adequately manured, these outfields would be cultivated periodically.

After *croft* and *fold*, *butt* is by far the most frequent field-name generic on May's Bute maps (Hannah 2008). Butt fields are often peripheral, but they are not outfield, nor necessarily of recent origin. They are distinctive in being usually specified either by a personal name or an occupation, or by the use to which they were put. This is often a cash crop, here (unusually) onions (*Unnin Butt*), whilst other examples from Bute include hens, geese, potatoes and tobacco. Reference to a trade, as here the Smith's Butt, indicates that the butt field was cultivated by an individual for whom it furnished only part of an income, and relates this usage of 'butt' to the meaning of pendicle discussed above.

May's plan shows that here agricultural improvement has scarcely begun. The old landscape remains intact. But it does more than that. Both the forms and names of the fields add historical depth to the map. We see that some boundaries are older than others, and that subdivision of fields has taken place. For instance the large fold to the north of the steadings has been divided into three fields, perhaps in two stages. This may signify a division among tenants, or have been to facilitate rotation of folding and cropping. The map shows three separate steadings within the farm nucleus; these may represent successive stages of growth.¹⁷ Nether Ardrosdale was among Bute's largest farms, six merks of Old Extent, and might have made three viable units, but was never split up.

The six crofts comprising the infield also seem to differ in age. Successive extension southwards is indicated by the shape of their boundaries, and probably again a subdivision of earlier, larger fields. Note also that some pairs or groups of adjacent fields have the same name, again suggesting that they were formerly a single field. However, this does not amount to evidence for an earlier open-field system, though a scaled-down version of the lowland medieval system may have operated on some of Bute's larger farms. Most farms were small, and held by a single tenant. Where two or more tenants were sharing they seem (as here) to have divided the fields with more or less permanent boundaries, unlike the Hebridean run-rig system of the immediately pre-improvement period.

Some phrases on the map define the historical dimension explicitly: 'Has been in tillage' indicates a change within living memory. This phrase describes an outset no longer needed, or found unsuitable for sustained cultivation, hinting that a peak of economic or population pressure may have passed. The South Onion Butt presupposes the Onion Butt; Old Butt and New Land appear self-explanatory.¹⁸

A large fold to the south west of the farm, above the road, has also been split into three smaller fields. This fold was bounded by an old head-dyke, and an outset beyond this, called the Rough Fold, has itself been subdivided. Beyond this, a further area, called the Rough Fold Brae, has been enclosed. We can thus see five phases of activity on this portion of the farm: first the large fields within the head-dyke, then the threefold division of these, followed by extension on to the rough ground, the subdivision of that field and finally a further outset on the steep slope below. It is impossible at present to attach a chronology to this sequence, which indicates a progressive attempt to increase production and may reflect some increase in population, though returns would diminish as ever-smaller areas of less good land were brought in.

Conclusions

For all the diversity of influences to which settlement in Bute has been subjected, a strong thread of continuity can be traced throughout. There is little evidence of drastic change in the organisation or distribution of rural settlement, and most farms have remained on or close to the same site for many centuries. At a finer scale, field survey suggests that significant changes may have occurred in the degree of settlement dispersion on at least some farms, and archaeological work is needed to help determine this issue. Some deserted sites have been identified where excavation might yield useful results. From the documentary side, the considerable resources of the Mountstuart archive remain largely untapped, affording an opportunity for greatly enhanced understanding of the pre-improvement rural economy. Bute's strategic significance and agricultural value made the island a contentious possession among neighbouring powers, and consequently work on any of the surrounding regions is likely to shed further light on Bute. Conversely, research focused on the island will have a broader impact on our understanding of the various political, economic and linguistic hegemonies which have held sway in the Firth of Clyde through the centuries.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Andrew Maclean, Barbara McLean and Lynsey Nairn at Mountstuart and to Jean McMillan at Bute Museum for help in accessing archival material, to The Bute Archive for permission to reproduce figures 9.3 and 9.4, and to RCAHMS for access to digital imagery. I am indebted to Gilbert Márkus, George Geddes and John Raven for commenting most helpfully on drafts of this paper, and to John Baldwin for encouraging me to contribute in the first instance.

Notes

1. A full list of Bute Old Extents culled from a wide range of sources is given in Hannah 2004, Appendix.
2. Ross (2006: 66) draws attention to the value in this respect of similarly ancient *dabhach* assessments and boundaries in Moray.
3. Lamont (1957, 187) argues that this was a later imposition, in Islay at least, and that earlier a quarterland had been equated to 20 shillings, making an ounce-land (20 pennylands) worth six merks as in the other cases.

4. Assuming the equivalence discussed above, that three merks on Bute make up a pennyland, 30 merks would be half of a twenty pence ounceland. 12 or 15 merks, frequently the assessment of a larger unit on Bute, would then correspond to a quarterland, an important ancient unit in some Hebridean and Irish contexts.
5. See Márkus (forthcoming) for a discussion of the evidence for an underlying Old Welsh name.
6. I know of no other instance where the sub-units had entirely separate names, but there are several cases where holdings were divided into discrete parts which acquired their own specifics. For instance, it is probable that the twentieth-century farms of East, West and Mid St Colmac were direct descendants of the three pennylands of Kilmachalmaig. Dodgshon (1981: 151) draws attention to the frequency of touns being shared among feuars, but without considering the case where each share comprised a discrete, pre-existent settlement. Later, however, he refers to cases where ‘the township assessment appears to have been thrown around...a number of small dispersed sites’ comprising ‘a pattern of tenure and settlement...both more detailed and older than the framework of assessment embracing it’ (Dodgshon 1998: 149). Barone seems to have been an example of this.
7. *Cnarsay* and *Knaslak* are among early forms of this rather obscure name (see Márkus forthcoming, for a full discussion).
8. This sum is equal to 41 shillings 1½ pence, and the threefold division explains this seemingly odd assessment.
9. This has been questioned by Márkus (pers comm), citing a Virgin Mary cult in eighth-century Iona.
10. Lord Bute dates this charter to c1320, but detailed analysis of witnesses may allow a more precise dating to 1313 (see Molly Rorke this volume).
11. The Bannatynes of Easter Kames held Kilmachalmaig, Ardroscaedale, Etrick, Kilbride and Glenmore, the Spens family of Wester Kames had Edinmore, Edinbeg, and three quarters of Cranslag (Cranslagmory, Cranslagloan and Acholter).
12. It is impossible to know whether this represents a real change or merely a greater attention to detail on the part of the authorities.
13. I have found no evidence for open field systems on Bute, which of course is not proof that they never existed, but it is clear from estate maps that across most of the island the fields were quite small enclosures in the immediately pre-improvement period. This is in striking contrast to the situation in Arran as described by Headrick (1807). See further discussion in main text.
14. No definite dating is known for this grant, and here I follow the fourth Marquess’s comment ‘about 20 years previously’ (ie before Robert III’s confirmation charter of 1400) in Bute 1945.
15. I use ‘farm’ here to mean an aggregate of rural settlement working a defined area and regarded as a fiscal unit for administrative purposes.
16. It is worth emphasising the primacy of land over house in this context. Estate maps name many *butt* fields (see discussion in main text), but relatively few have an associated house. In those cases, the house and field together acquire the title of *butt*, which then comes to have the meaning of pendicle or smallholding.
17. If so, this growth took place quite early, since the three pennylands which probably pertained to this farm in 1320 (out of five for the whole of Ardroscaedale) may well correspond to these three nuclei, indicating that the process was complete before that date, and indeed before the imposition of merklands a century or so earlier.
18. Appearances may deceive. A draft version of this map bears the seeming oxymoron: ‘new land known as the old butt’. Presumably, a former butt field had been let to go out of cultivation and was returned to it after a lengthy interval, but before the memory of its earlier use had been lost.

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