

AGRARIAN REFORM AND AGRICULTURAL IMPROVEMENT
IN LOWLAND SCOTLAND, 1750-1850

A Thesis
by
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Abstract

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Lowland Scotland underwent massive changes between 1750 and 1850. Agrarian improvement and land enclosure changed the way Scottish farmers and laborers used and thought about the land. This, in turn, had a major impact on industrialization, urbanization, and emigration. Predominantly, those in charge of implementing these wide-reaching changes were middle-class tenant farmers seeking to improve their social status. The power of these estate partitioners, or overseers, increased in the Lowlands throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They were integral to the improvement process in the Lowlands. They often saw both sides of agrarian reform, documenting it as such. By 1850, Lowland Scotland was one of the most industrialized and enlightened sectors of Europe; a century earlier it had been one of the least. It was not simply the work of wealthy landowners who brought these changes to fruition. The role of middle-class partitioners was great, and would significantly influence the evolution of land tenantry patterns across the whole of Scotland.

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Dedication

To my parents, Theodore and Cecelia. Your encouragement is monumental and ceaseless.
And to my sister, Rachael, an inseparable confidant, no matter the miles.

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I. ROOTS OF REFORM – IMPETUS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The Highland Boundary Fault is a physiographic boundary that bisects Scotland from the Isle of Arran in the west to Aberdeenshire in the east. Today, it is a marker commonly used to differentiate between the country's two historical halves. Until the late nineteenth century, however, a purely topographical designation was unnecessary to distinguish the Lowlands from the Highlands. In its place was an older, intangible boundary that for centuries separated two culturally, linguistically, politically, and spiritually distinct populations. The mountainous geography of the Highlands, and its isolation relative to the rest of Britain, prevented the establishment of large urban centers and led to a more evenly distributed population. That is, until the land reform and improving trends of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Modern Scotland is in many ways the product of land reform, a process of modernization that altered much of the nation, and a fact reflected even in Scotland's present demography: the largest city and "capital" of the Highlands, Inverness, has a population of less than 80,000, whereas the Lowlands contain more than two-thirds of Scotland's total population.¹

Preeminent Scottish historian, Tom Devine, and others have argued that land clearance and agrarian improvement in the Lowlands coincided with a widespread "forgetting," meaning that the results of land clearance in the Lowlands are neither

¹ Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd (The Highland Council), *Council Area Population Projections 2008-2033*, Policy and Information Note No. 38, August 2010.

remembered nor studied to the degree of those in the Highlands.² Devine defines three aspects of what he calls Scotland's "great leap forward."³ While both the Highland Clearances and Industrial Revolution have received substantial attention from historians, a third component, sometimes called the Lowland Clearances, has received decidedly less attention. Developments in the Lowlands have been neglected by historians overly focused on events in the north and west.⁴ In other words, unlike agrarian reform in the Highlands, which has "stimulated a veritable scholarly industry," it remains relatively underexplored in the Lowlands.⁵

Before a strong agrarian improvement impetus reached Scotland in the mid-eighteenth century, not only the land but also the people were divided. Highlanders were Gaels. They were clannish, at least nominally Catholic, and often regarded as backward by outsiders. Lowlanders, on the other hand, were staunch Calvinists, predominantly Presbyterian, and had more interaction with England. As such, Lowland Scots tended to experience earlier and more frequent contact with modernizing trends like capitalist agriculture and urbanization. By the early twentieth century, this dualistic configuration in Scotland had vanished. That the more traditional and nuanced view of Scottish society no longer exists is a testament to the transformative effects of agrarian reform on the whole of Scotland. In the Highlands, it brought with it such an extreme reduction in population that the

² T. M. Devine, "The Exile Files," *The Scotsman*, July 18, 2009, http://www.scotsman.com/news/tom_devine_the_exile_files_1_1354618. Also based on a 2003 BBC Radio Scotland program: Peter Aitchison and Andrew Cassell, *The Lowland Clearances: Scotland's Silent Revolution, 1760-1830* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2003).

³ T. M. Devine, *The Transformation of Rural Scotland: Social Change and the Agrarian Economy, 1660-1815* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), vi.

⁴ T. M. Devine, *Clanship to Crofter's War: The Social Transformation of the Scottish Highlands* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 39.

⁵ T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation: 1700-2007* (London: Penguin, 2006), 147.

region now contains only a fraction of its former residents. In the Lowlands, it brought depopulation as well, but also shifted social and economic dynamics.

Authors of polemical improvement literature did a great deal to influence the trajectory of land reform in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scotland. They aspired to improve and modernize, in both the Highlands and Lowlands, not only the land itself and how people thought about it, but the way it was used and worked. This led to similar schemes of reform and experiences of rural depopulation – also known as clearance – throughout the country. There were, nevertheless, distinct regional differences. A comparative analysis of these is largely absent from the historiography of Lowland Scotland. Improvement and land clearance in the Lowlands have received relatively little attention in their own right. The role of the improvers who actively sought and vocally promoted the transformation of rural resources has also been somewhat neglected. Devine argues that Lowland improvement was more destructive to traditional land-use practices and established tenancy patterns than was the case anywhere else in Britain. He calls for a more in-depth examination of Lowland agrarian reform. He notes that the demographic shifts occurring in the region throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were more drastic than in many other parts of Europe.⁶

Concentration of land in large estates begs the question of just how influential improvement ideology was in the Lowlands, and whether the impact of vocal, landowning improvers – such as Sir John Sinclair and Sir Robert Ainslie – can be differentiated regionally. Given that Scottish improvers' ideas about the land were sometimes adopted from outside the country, it is important to consider what preceded and influenced their adoption and implementation. Since many improvers were landowners, and therefore had strong monetary incentives to improve, enclose, and if need be, clear their land, they not only wrote

⁶ Devine, “Exile Files.” Devine, *Transformation*, vi.

pamphlets espousing the benefits of modernization, but also stressed the importance of precisely measuring and documenting various resources and outputs. Thus, numerous pre-census enumerations exist – for example, the vast *Old Statistical Account*, published in 1792, and the *New Statistical Account*, published in 1845 – that provide in-depth data on local populations, arable land, fisheries, and a range of other natural resources. Exploring changes in Lowland land tenure, agricultural methods, and demography is possible by comparing the exhaustive registers in the Lowlands, focusing particularly on regionally representative parishes. This, coupled with juxtaposing analyses of individual improvers’ published works and evidence of their activities from newspapers and estate records, and comparative statistical data, addresses a persistent and significant gap in the discourse on clearance and improvement in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scotland.

Property Theory and the Decline of Common-Use Rights

Beginning with an influential non-British theorist, the seventeenth-century Dutch lawyer and generally recognized progenitor of natural law theory, Hugo Grotius, it is crucial to note that while many agrarian improvement theories were born of Scotland’s native Enlightenment, others can be traced to the Continent. Like most early-modern property rights theorists – Samuel Pufendorf, John Selden, and others – Grotius initially dealt almost exclusively with “use rights,” and specifically with the utilization of what were considered “common resources” like the open sea or commonly held farmland.⁷ He inquired as to whether new private claims to common property could be extended into the realm of “complete property rights”; that is, beyond use and into absolute control and private ownership. Richard Tuck addresses Grotius’s acceptance of private property, arguing that his

⁷ Thomas A. Horne, *Property Rights and Poverty: Political Argument in Britain, 1605-1834* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 10-11.

understanding of it was indeed well-developed and significant, although not central to his general property theory: “there was something natural in the development into the institution of private property of the basic and inherent human right to use the material world, and no agreement was ever necessary.”⁸ Tuck asserts that Grotius understood the importance of private property and its development and maintenance, but was concerned with it for the express purpose of further advancing communal use.⁹

Questions of exclusive ownership rights and claims to private property became increasingly important as international trade became more lucrative throughout the seventeenth century, making rights issues paramount in delineating the history of land possession and land reform in Europe. Grotius’s property theories and his “concern for just war and international order” were the result of a need to outline legal and social norms in a rapidly changing political atmosphere.¹⁰ His anticipatory pre-Enlightenment theories are important for their contributions to the development of natural law theory and later utilitarian approaches to property in the form of land. However, it is the Scottish Enlightenment that effectively bridges early Continental “use rights” theories and the proto-modern improving sensibilities of the Victorian age.

An early form of improvement ideology is present throughout the moral and political works of early-eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment philosopher, Francis Hutcheson. Born in Ireland, educated in Scotland, and equally influential in America and Europe, Hutcheson’s theories were transitional. Though his was a pre-industrial critique, Hutcheson

⁸ Richard Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories: Their Origin and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 69.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Grotius’s particular task was to explain Portugal’s domination of trade in the Indian Ocean, to present it as an illegitimate venture and an assault on natural rights. The impetus for much of Grotius’s early work was in fact his employment by the Dutch East India Company for the express purpose of legitimizing its recent seizures of Portuguese ships and cargo. Horne, *Property Rights*, 11.

addressed the first stages of land commodification. He organized his property rights theory according to the contribution made by agrarianism to the public good. In other words, he investigated the ways in which agrarian laborers propel society forward before dictating theories about improvement and progress. He argued that private claims were applicable only to property on which labor could be expended, and that landownership was justified only when it was productive for subsistence.¹¹ Similarly, he argued that neither individuals nor states possessed the natural right to claim land in order to prevent others from cultivating it. Taking his cue from a contemporary understanding of the “state of nature,” Hutcheson believed it was imperative to limit the growth of private property: “his concern was not only with the rich owning land they did not or could not cultivate, it was also with the rich owning so much land that their economic power threatened the nation’s liberty.”¹²

Otherwise dominated by harsher notions of progress and improvement, eighteenth-century Scottish political philosophy outside of Hutcheson drew on the frequent famines and violent political turmoil of late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century Scotland. Other Scottish intellectuals concluded that an any-means-necessary dual push toward economic and moral improvement was the only way to forge a “polite,” commercial nation from what they saw as a deeply flawed country.¹³ However, it was Hutcheson’s moral and political philosophy that was most influential for the agricultural reformation trends of the nineteenth century. Hutcheson’s rights theory is that of “an economic and moral improver,” but one that attempts to take into account all constituent factors.¹⁴

¹¹ Horne, *Property Rights*, 81.

¹² *Ibid.*, 82-83.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Hutcheson is fundamental to understanding the evolution of natural jurisprudence and property rights theory, both for his justification of property rights by their contribution to the public good as well as his defense of what he saw as sensible agrarian law. He argued that without private property rights, men lacked the ability to “engage the passions of labor” bequeathed by God. Motivating people to labor was central, and improvement was an absolute. It is important to reiterate, however, that Hutcheson’s interest in agrarian reform was not based on “the injustice of many being propertyless.”¹⁵ Rather, he argued for limiting the very wealthy in order to “protect the power of the gentry,” and even asserted that it was in the public’s best interest to gain increasing control over the landless.¹⁶

The Land Question: Physiocrats, Enclosure, and the Landed Aristocracy

Throughout late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Scotland, land was increasingly seen as an asset to exploit, rather than simply as the basis of familial power.¹⁷ Commercialization of the rural economy and dispossession of tenant farmers and landless laborers were key developments, the responsibility for which rested with improvers. Landowners began to widely adopt the Enlightenment theories of Hutcheson and others in the mid-eighteenth century. Soon after, powerful Scottish improvers like politician and author, Sir John Sinclair – responsible for the first of the two abovementioned pre-census enumerations, the *Old Statistical Account of Scotland* – began to promote very particular views of land use. Sinclair, for example, regarded seventy acres as the “very minimum which could be worked efficiently by a single plough-team.”¹⁸ This was disputed by Sir Robert Ainslie, ambassador and contemporary Member of Parliament, who argued that a “viable

¹⁵ Ibid., 82.

¹⁶ Ibid., 82-83.

¹⁷ Devine, *Transformation*, 2.

¹⁸ Ibid., 111.

holding” in Scotland needed to be a minimum of one hundred acres because one plough was only sufficient for fifty acres.¹⁹ Both men – and their heated public exchanges – represent growing interest in agricultural improvement within the governing aristocracy, as well as the difference of opinion that could emerge therein.

Although improvers in the Scottish Highlands would eventually succeed in clearing the land of most of its people, they left some traditional practices untouched. Clearance and improvement in the Lowlands resulted in the widespread urbanization and industrialization of southern Scotland. Yet, of the two regions, the Lowlands have received drastically less attention from historians. As Devine notes, “there are still crofters in the Highlands, but there are no cottars in the Lowlands.”²⁰ Crofting, the traditional form of land tenure and small-scale farming in the Highlands, has managed to survive right up to the present day.²¹ Traditional farming as done by peasants, or cottars, in the Lowlands, however, died out more than a century ago.

Beginning in earnest in the mid-eighteenth century, enclosure – the privatization of common lands traditionally held and worked as such – was responsible for the creation of a “wandering proletariat” in Scotland.²² As landlords sought to reorient agrarian practices to maximize profit, they also attempted to improve the efficiency and output of agriculture by advancing new farming techniques while reducing the number of laborers required. This resulted in large numbers of small farmers being compelled to sell their land or suffer terminated leases as well as forceful removal from property they did not own in a traditional

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ “Scotland’s Forgotten Clearances,” *BBC News*, May 16, 2003, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/scotland/30308_89.stm

²¹ Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd, *Population Projections*.

²² The terminology is clearly Marxian, but the sentiment is actually rather less so. Kathryn Beresford, “‘Witness for the Defence’: The Yeomen of Old England and the Land Question, c. 1815-1837,” *The Land Question in Britain, 1750-1950*, ed. Matthew Cragoe and Paul Readman, 39.

sense. It prompted a shift not only toward increased short-term leases, but helped create a large, landless group that would eventually fill industrial positions in the rapidly expanding urban centers of Scotland's Central Belt.²³

This group is directly linked to the Swing Riots of 1830-1831, which exerted the most intense pressure for sympathetic agricultural reform legislation after the onset of enclosure.²⁴ The riots, in fact, marked the first truly noteworthy assertion of, or outright demand for, political land reform in the post-Napoleonic War period. Preceding by two years the First Reform Act, which gave thousands of British men the vote, they sparked a political dialogue that revealed much about the failure of government to facilitate and compensate for improvement. Cracks in the aristocracy's seeming political unity were evident. Among other issues, disagreement over the legitimacy of allotment provision – the bequeathing of smallholdings to tenant farmers by landowners or the government – was pronounced.

As David Martin notes, however, even smallholders, those subsistence farmers with comparatively tenable and defensible ownership rights to meager portions of land, were at times the most outspoken critics of allotment expansion.²⁵ They believed that “even a small amount of land would make the laborer too independent and give him ideas above his station.”²⁶ Large-scale landowners, on the other hand, especially those with experience in the maintenance of small-scale private provisions, often believed the system to be broadly beneficial. This point is particularly important for understanding the lack of investigation into land clearance in the Scottish Lowlands. One of the assumptions often made about agrarian

²³ This issue, i.e. the emergence of an urban labor force from this “wandering” group of landless tenant farmers, is too vast to do justice here. See Beresford's “Witness for the Defence” and David Turnock, *The Historical Geography of Scotland Since 1707* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

²⁴ Jeremy Burchardt, “Land and the Labourer: Potato Grounds and Allotments in Nineteenth-Century Southern England,” *Agricultural History* 74, No. 3 (Summer 2000): 678-679.

²⁵ David Martin, “Land Reform,” *Pressure from Without in Early Victorian England*, ed. Patricia Hollis (London: Edward Arnold, 1974), 131-133.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

improvement and land clearance in Britain is that it was resisted by all but the landowners. As J. R. Wordie explains, the first occasions of “compromise” on the issue of land provision by the elite landed classes appear like “brilliant rearguard actions,” schemes purposefully calculated to create the impression of paternalism and benevolence.²⁷ By making a few “timely concessions, and thereby losing a few minor battles,” landowners assumed they were in the process of “winning the war” for improvement while preventing uprisings like the Swing Riots.²⁸ By allowing tenants to possess small quantities of usually poor land, they indirectly provided additional protection for their own interests while also providing incentive for laborers to steel themselves against the sins of “poaching and drunkenness.”²⁹ The allotment movement was thus construed by the aristocracy as “insurance against unrest,” and reform thereof was presented as a way to ease tension between laborer and landowner, lessen the lower classes’ participation in reformist movements and uprisings, and promote an air of altruism.³⁰

Critics of the landed interest in nineteenth-century Scotland were also vocal in their opposition. John Stuart Mill reserves some of his harshest chastisements for large-scale landowners.³¹ He refers to landlords as those who “grow richer, as it were, in their sleep, without working, risking, or economizing.”³² He goes so far as to question the right of landowners and proprietors to such wealth: “what claim have they, on the general principle

²⁷ J. R. Wordie, “Introduction,” *Agriculture and Politics in England, 1815-1939*, ed. J. R. Wordie (London: Macmillan, 2000), 23.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ According to Ian Waites, this was most often “waste” land. Ian Waites, “The Common Field Landscape, Cultural Commemoration and the Impact of Enclosure, c. 1770-1850,” *The Land Question in Britain, 1750-1950*, ed. by Matthew Cragoe and Paul Readman, 22.

³⁰ Martin, “Land Reform,” 131-133.

³¹ David Martin, “The Agricultural Interest and Its Critics, 1840-1914,” *Agriculture and Politics in England, 1815-1939*, ed. J. R. Wordie (London: Macmillan, 2000), 129.

³² John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy With Some of Their Applications to Social Philosophy* (1848), Reprint (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1872), 492.

of social justice, to this accession of riches?”³³ Contrary to accepted practice, especially with regards to land tenure in Ireland, Mill writes that “the land of Ireland, the land of every country, belongs to the people of that country. The individuals called landowners have no right, in morality and justice, to anything but the rent.”³⁴ Luther Carpenter emphasizes the furtherance of this perspective in the form of the British Physiocrats, a group of proto-socialist critics of market-governed agrarianism who opposed what they saw as the impending dominance of market capitalism.³⁵ Their criticisms were economically and morally grounded, and most agreed that the only way to mitigate the perceived social costs of early industrialization, urbanization, and the exploitation of laborers was to monitor and control market capitalism closely or modify it in some way as to benefit, or at least not abuse, the poor. Christian Gehrke and Heinz Kurz note that Karl Marx was somewhat ambivalent about the physiocratic agrarian model, which held that literally all wealth is derived solely from the land, from agricultural production. He did, however, emphasize its relevance as a link to his own economic theories. Marx respected David Ricardo and Adam Smith, both of whom influenced the philosophies of British Physiocrats. Marx also believed that “the Physiocrats are to be credited with having anticipated the concept of surplus,” one of the most basic concepts in the theory of value and distribution.³⁶

Noel Thompson presents the British Physiocrats as proto-socialists whose perception of the market was influenced by the unparalleled growth of the “landless proletariat” that occurred in Scotland and England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 200-201.

³⁵ Luther P. Carpenter, Review of *The Market and Its Critics: Socialist Political Economy in Nineteenth-Century Britain* by Noel Thompson, *The American Historical Review* 96, No. 2 (Apr. 1991): 511.

³⁶ Christian Gehrke and Heinz D. Kurz, “Karl Marx on Physiocracy.” *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 2, No. 1 (Spring 1995): 55.

Increasingly, traditional rural paternalism had come under threat and small landholders began to face challenges to their land claims. Early anti-commercialists like Charles Hall, Piercy Ravenstone, and William Godwin believed it was this innately destructive disconnection from the land that led huge parts of the population into either unemployment or harsh urban overemployment. Unlike rural paternalism, they argued, the relationship between employer and laborer in manufacturing and industry was mediated almost entirely by “market forces untrammelled by non-monetary and non-market considerations.”³⁷ The new urban system lacked the duty and obligation inherent in traditional rural paternalism. Thompson is careful to note that at least some significant parts of British physiocratic thought were inspired by a romanticized, largely ahistorical agrarian past. He inquires if the Physiocrats, perhaps, were representative of a general revulsion among those unable to accept the direction of historical land reform, a direction not yet as clear in the early nineteenth century as it would be later, and thus not overshadowed by a sense of inevitability.³⁸

On the other side of the reforming spectrum, the Anti-Corn Law League attempted to divide the landed interest by “showing the tenant farmer that he really was the rural equivalent of the urban middle class.”³⁹ The movement inspired by the League sought to abolish protectionist agrarian trade laws that they argued were responsible for exacerbating famine by preventing the importation of cheap grains. As Jeremy Burchardt emphasizes in his investigation of allotments and land reform, the early to middle decades of the nineteenth century were characterized by politically ineffectual attempts at agricultural reform. The first act, for example, to have even minor ramifications for State-controlled expansion of allotments, rather than strictly landlord-controlled, was the Select Vestries Act of 1819. One

³⁷ Thompson, *The Market*, 10.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁹ Martin, “Land Reform,” 144-145.

of two related pieces of legislation – known together as the Sturges Bourne Acts for William Sturges Bourne, Tory MP and Poor Law reform Committee Chairman – the act did not address allotment management specifically. Rather, it contained certain clauses that permitted parishes to use existing holdings, or purchase or rent additional land, to provide employment for the poor and landless. This minute provision, which itself went largely unheeded, remained the singular noteworthy instance of relevant legislation in Britain until the Swing Riots prompted further action. It was, Burchardt writes, “an isolated episode, little attended to in the country at large,” and even less so in Parliament.⁴⁰

In opposition to the dominant trends of eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought, British anti-commercialists argued that by commandeering land for profit, property owners were effectively destroying the natural right of others to exploit it for subsistence purposes. They believed that those individuals who became most successful in their accumulation of land would then have free rein to exercise coercive economic power over everybody else. Without the traditional safeguards and values believed to be inherent in the traditional agrarian system, Hall and Godwin, among others, feared the market would further incentivize capitalists’ exploitation of those already deprived of land for the sake of profit.

Examination of the British Physiocrats offers as a window into early modern thoughts about agriculture and land reform. Previous historians have often been too quick to paint the anti-commercialist perspective as rudimentary in Scotland. Unlike later anti-capitalists, what many early Ricardian socialists witnessed firsthand was the advent and rise of market capitalism and the harsh land reform policies of early improvers, as well as the widespread rural depopulation and destruction of traditional agrarianism that followed. Unlike mid- to late-nineteenth-century socialists, however, pro-agrarians had yet to see the full force of the

⁴⁰ Burchardt, “Land, Labour, and Politics,” 99-100.

trends that occurred in the early nineteenth century and thus had more of a reason to believe that traditional ways, however much they might have been romanticized, were still viable alternatives. Integration of the market into the lives of laborers, landowners, and capitalists alike would drastically shift the critique of capitalism.

David Martin notes one near-universal belief in eighteenth-century Scottish society: “land is power.”⁴¹ Taken from Mill, this seemingly obvious sentiment represents a view held by land reformers, the elite landed interest, and farm laborers alike. That each group recognized the ramifications of landownership for control, enfranchisement, and the creation of wealth and poverty in Scotland is significant. Throughout the nineteenth century, many people believed that a “territorial aristocracy” was essential for maintaining a stable society. This, coupled with the aristocracy’s understanding that land conferred on them a mandate to rule and improve, alludes to the fact that land and landownership were the bedrock on which the right to rule was constructed. As Thomas Horne notes, often “the relationship between exclusive property and these values was stressed to defend the current holdings of a particular society.”⁴² It is, in fact, central to understanding the different reactions of reformers, socialists, and the landed classes to the emergence and dominance of land improvement in the eighteenth century.

Like the landed interest, early resistance to agrarian reform was by no means monolithic.⁴³ The physiocratic model saw rural hierarchy as preferable to urban destitution and oppression. It was, they argued, the best alternative to urban wage-slavery. Although Physiocrats were in some ways traditional, and eager to romanticize a society defined by agricultural labor and basic subsistence rather than one controlled by the capitalist

⁴¹ Martin, “Land Reform,” 131-133.

⁴² Horne, *Property Rights*, 252.

⁴³ Martin, “Land Reform,” 131-132.

marketplace, they believed it was a more tenable and vastly superior solution to what they saw occurring in the early decades of the market's rise to prominence.

Upon witnessing the rationale of proto-capitalist improver-politicians, such as Ainslie and Sinclair, as well as the dramatic effects that actual implementation of their ideas had on the countryside, British Physiocrats argued that the impoverishment of labor was rooted in the unequal distribution of land. This, they argued, stemmed from individual misappropriation in an economy dominated by the market. The exclusive, or private, individual right to land stands in direct opposition to inclusive, or communal, rights. The nature of this dichotomy, between common possession and absolute ownership, is evidenced by the latter's ability to "define and enforce mine and thine," thereby giving those who possessed large quantities of property, or desired to gain more, the ability to do so and to use their property as they pleased.⁴⁴ Exclusivity created for early anti-commercialists the conditions under which early-nineteenth-century laborers were forced to submit to the will of the propertied, moneyed aristocracy. As such, they had little recourse to refuse the conditions imposed on them.⁴⁵ Since he would otherwise be deprived of or incapable of acquiring the bare essentials of life, the landless laborer was forced to participate in a progressively powerful, increasingly oppressive system governed by market forces that profited from his exploitation. As Thompson notes, "the economic relations engendered by this market-oriented behavior were necessarily exploitative and the social relations necessarily antagonistic."⁴⁶ Eighteenth-century anti-capitalists believed that the further the market expanded, the more it would exacerbate social conflict and exploitation.

⁴⁴ Horne, *Property Rights*, 26.

⁴⁵ Charles Hall, *The Effects of Civilisation on the People in European States* (London, 1805), 57-58.

⁴⁶ Thompson, *The Market*, 23.

Malcolm Chase's argument that Chartist leader Feargus O'Connor, himself a landowner, had a personal "hostility to centralization" and government intervention, exhibits an interesting parallel with tenant farmers' perspective.⁴⁷ Burchardt argues that a similar fear of impending intervention – and thus, a loss of traditional local autonomy, power, and privilege – was one of the key motivating factors for farmers' resistance to the allotment movement, which begs the question of whether tenant farmers were acting on principle or in self interest. Chase asserts that their refusal to implement legislation was largely responsible for the ineffectiveness of later acts. This relates to Wordie's argument that agricultural reform was so long in coming to Scotland, and ineffectual when it eventually arrived, because enforcement was most often left in the hands of those who stood to gain little from it, those who had enjoyed local and autonomous power for generations, especially in the countryside. For Burchardt, the key reason for the failure of agricultural reform in Scotland prior to 1846 was that, with little foresight, responsibility for enforcement was delegated to these "unsuitable authorities" with mere local concerns.⁴⁸

One of the strongest bases of landed power in early-nineteenth-century Scotland was tied to the perception that the landed classes naturally comprised the ruling class. As "the class that had been born to rule," and was trained and educated to do so, the landed classes "occupied their station with complete confidence, utterly assured of their place in the social hierarchy."⁴⁹ Most significant was the fact that this opinion of the nature of their governing role was the dominant one, prevalent outside as well as within the landholding classes. The lower social ranks looked upward for leadership: "if they were not to rule, then who else

⁴⁷ Malcolm Chase, "Chartism and the Land: 'The Mighty People's Question,'" *The Land Question in Britain, 1750-1950*, ed. by Matthew Cragoe and Paul Readman, 65.

⁴⁸ Burchardt, "Land, Labour, and Politics," 115.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

would?”⁵⁰ Even the middle classes, at least into the 1840s – and much longer in certain rural areas – generally believed in the right of landowners to rule. Thus, an abiding respect for the landowning classes buttressed their political and economic power.

Provisioned both by government decree and natural law philosophy, this perspective was entrenched in Scottish, and British, society. Even as the slow initial expansion of reform and radicalism gained momentum, it was the “policies, rather than the personnel of government” that the people sought to change.⁵¹ In some sense, Scottish society retained a “fundamental trust in the efficiency of landed rule,” and did so throughout most of the nineteenth century. In fact, Wordie asserts that common people “did not so much overcome landed power during the nineteenth century as escape from it.”⁵² This flight from the countryside, where landed power lingered longest, and from the strong arm of blatant landed dominance, brought many to the cities, “where the squire’s writ did not run.”⁵³

Martin notes that many contemporary political economists, like Mill, held the British landed interest responsible for a series of serious offenses, most notably their monopolization of land. Through entails and primogeniture, substantial landowners were able to preserve estates that “under the natural forces of competition, would have been dispersed more widely.”⁵⁴ This, in turn, resulted in the intense concentration of landownership specified in the *Return of the Owners of Land* in 1876. At the time of the survey, seventy-five percent of British land was owned by around five thousand people, with twenty-five percent of England and Wales belonging to a mere seven hundred.⁵⁵ It is little wonder, then, that many continued

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Wordie, “Introduction,” 6-7.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁴ Martin, “Land Reform,” 131.

⁵⁵ Matthew Cragoe, and Paul Readman, “Introduction,” *The Land Question in Britain, 1750-1950*, eds. Matthew Cragoe and Paul Readman (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 2.

to view land reform as a prerequisite for political reform. R. J. Olney notes that “the possession of vast acres was a passport to political power” well into the Edwardian period.⁵⁶ Agricultural and political changes came very slowly and were often characterized more by decline and simple shifting circumstance than revolutionary or even modest discontinuities. Even as the nineteenth century waned and landowners were more frequently characterized as “feudal survivors,” Olney notes that the bases of landed power, however terminal, remained somewhat intact.⁵⁷

Runrig, Ferm Touns, Cottars, and Crofters

In 1814, John Shirreff, a local improver and proponent of agrarian reform in the Orkney Islands – an archipelago off Scotland’s northern coast – published a list of thirteen obstacles to improvement on the islands. Among the most important issues for Shirreff were “lands lying in common,” “neglect of herding livestock,” “want of inclosures,” “smallness of farms,” and the “deficiency of capital stock.”⁵⁸ The following year, Berwickshire minister and author, George Barry, added to this list with his *History of the Orkney Islands*, in which he emphasized the inadequacy of the prevailing farming techniques, referring to them as “this most absurd admixture.”⁵⁹ Following the trend of early-nineteenth-century improvement thinking, both men concluded that mere subsistence agriculture was outmoded and could even prove destructive in some cases. By Barry’s calculations, one-fifth of all crops in Orkney failed, often resulting in widespread destitution.⁶⁰ Thus, he recommended that the

⁵⁶ R. J. Olney, “The Politics of Land,” *The Victorian Countryside, Vol. I*, ed. G. E. Mingay (London: Routledge, 1981), 58-60.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Gilbert Schrank, *An Orkney Estate: Improvements at Graemeshall, 1827-1888* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1995), 6-7. Examples from Shirreff’s *General View on the Agriculture of the Orkney Islands with Observations on the Means of their Improvement* (Edinburgh, 1814), 19.

⁵⁹ George Barry, *The History of the Orkney Islands* (2nd edition, Kirkwall, 1867), 336.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

islands abandon entirely the farming of certain “weak” grain crops. Noting that “every action and practice here seems prejudicial to farming,” he entreated Orkney farmers to seed their hillside plots instead with the hardy “sown grains” known to thrive in similar northern climates.⁶¹ He promoted the establishment of pastures and creation of a cattle-based economy for the islands as a whole, in the hope that it would replace the agrarian system known in the Lowland Scots vernacular as *runrig*. Barry and Shirreff both went on to denounce Orkney tenants’ hesitation to accept such recommendations of their own accord. The opinion of mid-nineteenth-century Orkney improvers, then, was that the traditional “old-style” system had to be supplanted by an entirely new agriculture.

Prior to the agricultural transformations of the early to mid-nineteenth century, Scottish farmers in the Highlands, Lowlands, and outlying islands alike relied on cooperative “strip farming” techniques. Similar in application to the “ridge and furrow” tradition common in England and Wales at the time, *runrig* was normally conducted by groups of families living around commonly held land. They used the “infield/outfield” technique, whereby each plot of land was divided into a “constantly cultivated ‘infield’ adjacent to the farmhouse” and an “‘outfield’ where most of the land at any given time was not cultivated.”⁶² Essentially, farming in Orkney, Inverness, or on the outskirts of Glasgow before the 1830s was subsistence farming.⁶³ As the process of enclosure was being ratcheted up in the Highlands, concurrent changes were taking place in the Lowlands: “just as the Highland *bailtean* were broken up, so also were the *ferm touns* of the traditional Lowland society.”⁶⁴

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² T. M. Devine, *Clearance and Improvement: Land, Power and People in Scotland, 1700-1900* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2006) 6-7.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Devine, *Crofter’s War*, 39. *Bailtean* is the nominative plural of *baile*, meaning “township” in Gaelic. Devine, *Transformation*, 33. *Ferm toun* is the Lallans or Scots phrase for “farm town,” which is defined as a small

Portraying these traditional farming practices as comparatively unproductive, historians long argued that they in fact hastened the formation of multiple improvement groups and eventually forced the creation of an improvement movement.⁶⁵ However, Devine notes that it was not the “backwardness” of Scottish farming that created the transformative trends of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but rather the new incentives that beckoned landlords and smallholders to invest in capitalist ventures. He argues that pre-improvement agrarian systems were not at all ineffective, and that they were likely more than adequate to meet the needs of the growing population.⁶⁶

Gilbert Schrank argues that, on a much smaller and more local scale, the impetus for rapid, wholesale improvement on Graemeshall Estate – the largest contemporary Orkney estate – was the coming of age of the new laird, Alexander Sutherland Graeme.⁶⁷ Upon inheriting Graemeshall in 1827, Graeme made it known that his wish was nothing less than the entire restructuring of his land. Impressive improvement statistics are given for the islands, though it is interesting to note that no positive change corresponds to the early years of Alexander Graeme’s lordship. Although Graeme almost immediately set in motion drastic plans to improve Graemeshall, it was not until the 1840s that the estate experienced a notable expansion of arable acreage. This swinging back and forth was generally not the case in other parts of Scotland, especially in the Lowlands, where proto-improvement processes had been at work for decades and slow, piecemeal improvement was the norm.

settlement “of little more than twenty households.” T. M. Devine, *Scotland's Empire, 1600-1815* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2003), 114-115.

⁶⁵ Richard B. Sher, “Scotland Transformed: The Eighteenth Century,” in *Scotland: A History*, ed. Jenny Wormald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 191-193.

⁶⁶ Devine, *Clearance and Improvement*, 6-7, 12-13.

⁶⁷ Laird is the Lowland Scots word for lord.

In fact, the early stages of improvement at Graemeshall were rather disastrous. Between 1842 and 1866 arable acreage increased by over 75%, but the 1820s and 1830s saw nothing of such change.⁶⁸ As was the case elsewhere in Scotland, the landlord's drive to improve the islands resulted in attempts to reform across the board. These were met in turn by protests and hostility from the tenants.⁶⁹ Schrank and others are careful to note that the early phase of improvement was implemented during a period of perilous economic conditions, both on the islands and across the whole of Scotland. The kelp market, which had been an important part of Orkney's economic subsistence since the 1720s, was shrinking quickly, removing "the commodity which had hitherto supported the estate finances."⁷⁰ There was also a serious gap in improvement logic: where was the single product of the new pastoral system – livestock – to be marketed? Very little thought was given to such concerns until the 1840s, due in large part to the ineffectiveness of Alexander Graeme and his on-site factor, David Petrie. As they sought to improve Graemeshall as rapidly as possible, they were met with a great deal of resistance from the farmers on the estate, who did as much as they could to sabotage Graeme and Petrie's vision without defying their laird outright.⁷¹

Devine also indicates that improvement was not uniform, a point central to Schrank's investigation of one large Orkney estate. Schrank argues that, coupled with the comparatively intense nature of improvement there, Orkney's relative remoteness provides a unique window into agrarian change in a place that was at the same time distinct from and similar to the mainland. He maintains that improvement in Orkney was also distinct from the rest of

⁶⁸ Schrank, *Orkney Estate*, 8.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 80-81.

⁷⁰ Ewan A. Cameron, Review of *An Orkney Estate: Improvements at Graemeshall, 1827-1888* by Gilbert Schrank. *The Scottish Historical Review* 76, No. 201, Part 1: "Writing Scotland's History": Proceedings of the 1996 Edinburgh Conference (Apr. 1997): 148-149.

⁷¹ Schrank, *Orkney Estate*, 83.

northern Scotland specifically. In much the same way, he asserts that the early stages of improvement at Graemeshall estate were unique within Orkney. Other regions, such as Shetland and the Hebrides, experienced a far less extreme, or at the very least less pronounced, transformation and Schrank notes that “agricultural modernization in Orkney simply could not take the form of improving the old-style, runrig, scattered-strip, grain-growing system.”⁷² This veers from the typical conception of mid-century northeast Scotland insofar as the region is usually addressed as a totality, with a number of important theories characterizing it as such and consciously including Orkney, Shetland, and the Hebrides alongside Caithness and Sutherland. In his discussion of planned villages and agrarian change in northeast Scotland, for example, Douglas Lockhart is careful to include the Orkney Islands in his calculations. He notes that between the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries over one-fifth of Scottish planned villages, complete with enclosed “lotted” agricultural lands to be rented and worked by tenants, were established in the northeast and that the same principles at work on the mainland were also influential in Orkney.⁷³

Graemeshall was different from many mainland estates in that it had experienced virtually no improvement up to that point, and therefore reform would have more drastic and noticeable consequences. Schrank notes that neither the technology nor the techniques used to improve Graemeshall were remarkably uncommon in Scotland. Rather, he writes that “uniqueness lay in the scale, the scope and the timing” of reform.⁷⁴ The improvement process specifically on Graeme’s estate was also different from other estates in Orkney. According to a generalized timeline of improvement in Orkney, agrarian reform at Graemeshall appears to

⁷² Ibid., 8.

⁷³ Douglas G. Lockhart, “Lotted Lands and Planned Villages in North-East Scotland,” *The Agricultural History Review* 49, No. 1 (2001): 37-40.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 40.

have taken place “unprecedentedly early.” Schrank notes that the *New Statistical Account* of 1842 depicts the islands broadly as in the earliest stages of improvement and clearance.⁷⁵

In his discussion of Highland improvement, R. A. Gailey notes that rapid improvement happened throughout the region, although the speed with which reform took place there was made possible in large part by the “short leases and the frequent and large turnover of the tenantry.”⁷⁶ In Orkney, these factors did not play a significant role. Instead, Schrank stresses other reasons for the occurrence of rapid improvement and, especially, for its initial “failure” at Graemeshall. On the Graemeshall estate, multiple causes such as the decline of revenue from other sources as well as the spending habits of its laird were key and, as Schrank notes, “unless timing and execution were properly coordinated, agricultural improvements were a perilous, and potentially fatal, undertaking for an estate.”⁷⁷ It was the drive to improve immediately and the fact that the Graemes attempted to do so in isolation and completely out of step with the rest of Orkney that led to serious consequences. It is also important to note that the Graemes did not have a powerful partitioner on whom to rely. Early improvement at Graemeshall was, then, premature, financed, as it was, largely by the Graemes. Like landowners elsewhere in the north, they encountered substantial tenant resistance that effectively delayed the profit increase, massive or otherwise, that had been the original justification for the undertaking.

Agricultural reform, especially drastic forced improvement, produced varied and unpredictable results. It could be almost ruinous, as in the case of Graemeshall before the 1840s, or it could meet and exceed the expectations of those pushing for it, as was the case in

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁷⁶ R. A. Gailey, “Mobility of Tenants on a Highland Estate in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *The Scottish Historical Review* 40, No. 130, Part 2 (Oct. 1961): 141.

⁷⁷ Schrank, *Orkney Estate*, 113.

Orkney in the mid- to late nineteenth century. In Orkney, as in Scotland generally, improvement was really carried out in a series of phases, often characterized more by shifting circumstance than dramatic, pronounced change. There was also the issue of simple absenteeism and the inability of lords such as Graeme to comprehend the subtleties of a place and people they viewed as mere revenue generators. Schrank notes that David Petrie, although he worked tirelessly to construct his laird's vision of the "new" Graemeshall, voiced private disdain for his employer. He wrote often, for example, of how "the laird lived a profligate lifestyle."⁷⁸ It was these "agents of change," their personalities and motivations, that Schrank asserts were most important in the transformation, for better or worse, of traditional agriculture in Orkney. This matters even more so, perhaps, than the methods by which they attempted to achieve their goals.⁷⁹

The Intricacies of Improvement

Ewen Cameron's work on the land question in Scotland during the latter half of the nineteenth century reveals that demands for land reform – that is, land distribution conducted by the State rather than by landowners – were weakest in times of prosperity. Aside from this common theme, however, much about land reform in Scotland differs according to location. The Highland-Lowland dichotomy is most striking of course; but other, less geographically clear-cut issues manifested themselves as well. The Highland land question is often the issue with the "greatest visibility," both at the time and in collective memory.⁸⁰ In the Highlands,

⁷⁸ Ibid., 49.

⁷⁹ Douglas G. Lockhart, review of *An Orkney Estate: Improvements at Graemeshall 1827-1888* by Gilbert Schrank, *The Agricultural History Review* 44, No. 2 (1996): 246.

⁸⁰ Ewen Cameron, "Setting the Heather on Fire: The Land Question in Scotland, 1850-1914," *The Land Question in Britain, 1750-1950*, ed. by Matthew Cragoe and Paul Readman, 117.

Cameron notes, the general goal of land reform was the same as it was in many parts of Ireland: to introduce “Britishness” to a potentially dangerous part of the United Kingdom.

Two acts are central to the land question in the nineteenth-century Highlands: the Crofters’ Holdings Act of 1886 and the Small Landholders Act of 1911. Modeled on the Second Irish Land Act of 1881, which established dual ownership of tenants and landlords and compensated tenants and laborers for their improvements, the Crofters’ Act created the first Crofters Commission and gave security of tenure to crofters. Later, the Small Landholders Act caused tension, especially in the Lowlands, because it extended many of the provisions contained within the Crofters’ Act to the whole of Scotland. In the Lowlands, however, most improvements were owned by proprietors and most land was held on long leases. Therefore, a majority of Scots saw the act as unnecessary.

Like Cameron, R. H. Campbell argues that a great deal more attention has been paid to agrarian transformation in the Highlands than in other regions of Scotland. This, he thinks, inhibits a better understanding of the Lowland and urban Scottish land questions.⁸¹ Cameron follows Campbell in that vein, suggesting that, for instance, the Game Laws controversy in the Lowlands represents one of the most extreme examples of the “politicization of the relationship between landlord and tenant” in all of Scotland.⁸² However, he argues that the Scots most harshly affected by land reform were those living in Lowland centers. He also claims that because there was less in common between Scottish and English cities than between Scottish and English farm communities, the urban Scottish land question was the most unique in the country.

⁸¹ Roy H. Campbell, “Too Much on the Highlands: A Plea for Change,” *Scottish Economic & Social History* 14, No. 1 (May 1994): 60-62.

⁸² Cameron, “Heather,” 117.

II. IMPROVERS: LANDOWNERS AND PARTITIONERS

Distinguishing the region from the rest of Britain, agricultural improvement in the Scottish Lowlands owed as much to partitioners as it did to landowners. Partitioners were individuals who were responsible for implementing the substantive day-to-day changes that made improvement possible and profitable. They were in charge of creating and enforcing the detailed plans that led to wholesale land reform. Partitioners were often selected from the tenantry. They tended to be well-respected and comparatively successful farmers who demonstrated a comprehensive knowledge of agriculture and a belief in the values of agrarian improvement. As overseers, they controlled the logistics of reform. It was a position of great authority and notoriety. Partitioners were generally autonomous in their dealings with tenant farmers and laborers, rarely having to answer to landowners as long as improvements were continuously made at a steady pace. Examining the particularly significant role of Lowland partitioners is essential to understanding how improvement occurred in the region.

Andrew Wight was born into a family of tenant farmers in 1719.⁸³ He spent most of his life in Haddingtonshire County. At the time of his birth, his family had lived and labored on Cockburn Estate for generations.⁸⁴ Located approximately twenty miles outside of Edinburgh, in and around the village of Ormiston, Cockburn Estate was for years owned by a locally powerful Border family. The village of Ormiston itself was founded by the family's

⁸³ Sebastian Mitchell, "Wight, Andrew (*bp.* 1719, *d.* 1792)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

most prominent member, John Cockburn, who was one of the first agrarian improvers in Scotland.⁸⁵ Unlike the Cockburns, Andrew Wight was a member of an emerging stratum of Scottish society that was wedged somewhere between laborer and landowner. Wight himself was neither. Although he would eventually rise to become de facto partitioner of improvement and land reform on Cockburn Estate, he was, like his father and grandfather, first and foremost a farmer. However, contemporaries lauded him as a particularly driven, innovative, and efficient one, with a penchant for understanding and eloquently extolling the virtues of agrarian improvement.⁸⁶

Arthur Young, a prominent English agrarian reformer and author of the influential multi-volume *Annals of Agriculture and Other Useful Arts*, referenced Wight frequently in his writings about Scotland.⁸⁷ Young also attempted many of Wight's own agricultural experiments. In his account of one particularly successful experiment, Young referred to Wight as "a very ingenious gentleman and most useful writer upon agriculture, with whom I have been sometime in correspondence."⁸⁸ These experiments were based on entirely new cultivation methods and were invented by Wight to be tested on a small, garden-sized scale. They were meant to test the effectiveness of new improvements on traditional agricultural practices, and to see whether new ideas might have wider application. That Wight's experiments made the leap up the social ladder and over the border to a man of Young's standing is significant. It represents the adaptability of early improvement methods in Britain.

⁸⁵ The Royal Scottish Geographical Society, *The Gazetteer for Scotland*, "Ormiston, East Lothian," 2013, www.scottish-places.info/towns/townfirst282.html.

⁸⁶ Arthur Young, "Experiment, No. X," *Annals of Agriculture and Other Useful Arts, Volume I* (London: H. Goldney, 1784), 167.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 167.

Wight himself encapsulated late-eighteenth-century Scotland's emerging middle classes. He was a member of a group that was, for all intents and purposes, in charge of implementing the increasingly important land reforms, such as enclosure and forcible removal of the tenantry. In 1773, Wight was appointed to compile information about the status of a number of estates in Haddingtonshire.⁸⁹ The man who selected him was Henry Home, Lord Kames, a visible and vocal purveyor of agrarian improvement in eighteenth-century Britain. Kames is an important figure, especially insofar as he is representative of a particular approach to agricultural improvement in the Scottish Lowlands.

Though he had clearly economic interests as well, Kames was also motivated by social concerns. He worried, for instance, about inequality in the countryside and its impact on improvement and progress.⁹⁰ He worried about the impact of income inequality on the rising middle classes, on men like Wight. In his discussion of "Scotch entails," Kames argued that "money, having at command the goods of fortune, introduced inequality of rank, luxury, and artificial wants without end."⁹¹ Entails, or fee tails, were used to control the inheritance of property in much of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scotland. They ensured that property could pass only to the owner's heir or heirs, thus safeguarding large estates from being broken up. Kames blamed such monetary disparities for a "great alteration in the human heart," and wrote that they were responsible for creating the boundless "artificial wants of men."⁹² At a time when market forces were becoming increasingly important in driving the speed and severity of improvement, Kames was in the minority, which tended to view yield-profit arguments as the most persuasive.

⁸⁹ Wight, *Present State*, 2. Mitchell, "Wight, Andrew." Note that Haddingtonshire corresponds almost exactly to present-day East Lothian.

⁹⁰ Horne, *Property Rights*, 108.

⁹¹ Henry Home, *Sketches of the History of Man, Volume 4* (Edinburgh: William Creech, 1788), 447.

⁹² *Ibid.*

This is not to say that Kames's sensibilities were immovably precapitalist, a position taken by Thomas Horne.⁹³ Horne argues that Kames's approach to improvement was entirely social and non-economic. He argues that because Kames was active during the middle decades of the eighteenth century, he could not have comprehended the as yet unforeseen impact of market forces that would overtake Britain toward the end of the century.⁹⁴ However, this characterization of Kames is wide of the mark. Kames's works and their significance must be properly contextualized. Although his social concerns are important and must be taken into consideration, it should be noted that he was also concerned with economic issues. Kames's approach to land reform is an important milestone in the steady march toward wholesale agrarian improvement in Scotland. His fierce criticism of entails reveals much about his economic perspective. He based his property theories on the assumption that "only the industrious and frugal middle-sized proprietor was interested in economic and moral improvement."⁹⁵

Kames was not, however, concerned with liberating everyone from rural iniquity. He believed that both the very rich and the very poor were, partially because of their economic positions, prone to idleness. Furthermore, he believed that both groups contributed to social, economic, and moral decay in Scotland. This is evidenced by the fact that Kames not only decried the decadence of the landed elite, but also fought intensely against the Poor Law, which was, at least in theory, intended to provide a safety net for the lower classes.⁹⁶ For Kames, the institution that enabled inactivity on the part of the very rich was the entail. For the meager conditions at the bottom of society, he blamed the Poor Law. Most importantly,

⁹³ Horne, *Property Rights*, 108.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Home, *Sketches*, 440.

he believed that those in the middle existed to thread together and reinforce society. He believed that men like Andrew Wight – who were often seen as the most reliably productive members of society, because of their perceived commitment to lifelong labor, as well as personal and societal betterment – formed the basis of improvement.⁹⁷

Kames's works, like Wight's, but for rather different reasons, touched on a central narrative in the history of Scottish agrarian reform. Although he was clearly not possessed of the more liberal sense of duty and right to government support that would emerge in the works of Thomas Paine and others, Kames devoted considerable attention to both social and economic stratification. His patronage of men like Andrew Wight was governed by his distaste for the very rich and the very poor.⁹⁸ For Kames, those in the middle were the key to social and economic improvement. An important distinction that Kames and others drew was between those deserving of improvement in Scotland, called the "deserving poor," and the meritless poor who had little hope of ever improving their situation. Kames's early approaches are an integral component in the development of enclosure and agrarian improvement.⁹⁹ Kames's decision to select Wight to spearhead the enumeration in Ormiston is important to understanding the role of partitioners in Lowland land reform. Kames appointed men like Wight because he believed that those at opposite ends of the socio-economic spectrum were unworthy of such control.¹⁰⁰ He believed that diligent, dedicated men like Wight would be the cornerstones of improvement.

Andrew Wight was thus in the uncommon position of being on multiple sides of the significant land reform patterns that began in Scotland during the eighteenth century. He

⁹⁷ Ibid., 354.

⁹⁸ Horne, *Property Rights*, 108.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 101-102, 106-109.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 108.

participated in and documented them.¹⁰¹ In his later capacity as partitioner on the Cockburn Estate, he also controlled how improvement occurred. Wight witnessed the inauguration of land reform trends, as well as the speed with which they were adopted in the Lowlands and Borders. He was responsible for documenting how those changes occurred. He was also responsible, at times, for implementing those changes himself.

The Thirteen Annexed Estates of Scotland

Cockburn Estate was one of a group of estates known collectively as the Thirteen Annexed Estates of Scotland. Of varying size and significance, these estates were originally entirely independent entities. Each had been forfeited in 1745 as punishment for the treasonous allegiances of its owner during the Jacobite rising. Thereafter, they were controlled by an organization called the Commissioners of the Annexed Estates.¹⁰² Overseen by an organization rather than a series of individuals, the Thirteen Estates considered together can be seen as an epicenter of early agrarian improvement in Scotland. The interplay between improvements on each of the individual estates linked all of them together to form an important microcosm of improvement in Lowland Scotland. Improvement was more progressive, effective, and swift on the Annexed Estates. There was also less chance of disrupting the traditional paternalistic relationship between landlord and tenant, essentially because it no longer existed.

In late 1773, the Commissioners of the Thirteen Annexed Estates attempted to establish standardized, coherent agrarian land improvement and land management strategies throughout the Lowlands. Their “rules and articles” were intended to influence not only

¹⁰¹ Mitchell, “Wight, Andrew.”

¹⁰² Wight, *Present State*, 317.

landowners, but also tenant farmers and laborers.¹⁰³ Their declarations were also noticeably tailored for estate partitioners. The Commissioners sought to abolish many traditional practices. For example, they succeeded in ending the practice of thirlage, the legal obligation of tenant farmers to grind their grain at one specific mill.¹⁰⁴ However, they noted in the *Rules and Articles* that “by granting new leases of mills without astricted multures, then the said tenants shall not only pay whatever diminution of the mill-rents shall suffer thereby, in proportion to the rents of their several astricted lands, but shall also continue to perform such of the present mill-services as shall be reserved in the said leases of the several mills.”¹⁰⁵ Thus, while the Commissioners did get rid of archaic practices like thirlage, this did not necessarily seek to improve the situation of the Scottish tenantry.

The second rule implemented by the Committee was that all tenants were required to “straighten marches” and “exchange pieces of ground with one another” whenever asked to do so.¹⁰⁶ Essentially, this meant that tenants on the Thirteen Estates were required to begin improving their plots at their own expense, and that they would be required to forfeit their plots when asked to do so by the Commissioners.¹⁰⁷ This is significant evidence of shifting land exchange practices, which was one of the hallmarks of early improvement in the Lowlands.

The Commissioners also declared that tenants on the Thirteen Annexed Estates were “obliged to keep the houses now upon their respective farms, or which may hereafter be built upon them, as well as their fences and gates, in sufficient repair.”¹⁰⁸ Thus, when they were

¹⁰³ Commissioners of the Thirteen Annexed Estates of Scotland, *Rules and Articles for the Improvement of Lowland Farms, and for the Encouragement of Tenants Upon the Said Estates* (Edinburgh, 1773), 5.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

required to forfeit their land, tenants were also required to leave their residences in an improved condition. Each of these new requirements was to be paid for by the tenants themselves.¹⁰⁹ This statute is particularly important when considered alongside evidence from Andrew Wight's court cases, which show his involvement in the processes mentioned above. Whereas most of the Commissioners of the Annexed Estates were absentee landowners, Andrew Wight was familiar with the tangible realities of agriculture and improvement.¹¹⁰

The Commissioners required tenants to clean and redistribute their ditches in addition to upkeep and improvement of other dwellings on the Thirteen Estates. They also required tenants to weed their hedges regularly and whenever partitioners demanded. If a tenant failed to do so, the overseer of that particular estate would "cause the same to be done by other persons."¹¹¹ In other words, a tenant who failed to produce the requested structural improvements was responsible for the costs of the improvements done by their fellow farmers: "the tenant so failing shall be obliged to repay the expenses thereof to the Commissioners."¹¹² It is important to note that tenants were required to repay the Commissioners and not their peers who had done the work. This is particularly important because it demonstrates the shifting degree of labor dissemination among tenants on improving farms.

The Commissioners went so far as to prevent tenants on the Thirteen Estates from farming sheep unless given express permission by the partitioner. If permission was obtained,

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Wight, *Present State*, 317.

¹¹¹ Commissioners, *Rules and Articles*, 5.

¹¹² Ibid.

tenants were required to build fenced stone enclosures at their own expense.¹¹³ Furthermore, the Commissioners decreed that tenants could no longer “plough up any of their meadow ground without a written order from the factor.” The penalty for doing so was five pounds Sterling per acre.¹¹⁴ This further demonstrates the power allotted to Lowland estate partitioners.

The Commissioners also used their *Rules and Articles* to distinguish the most substantial roles played by partitioners. In many cases, an estate overseer like Andrew Wight ended up bearing the brunt of tenants’ outcries. Since they were responsible for the day-to-day running of farms, as well as the long-term reforms of custom and practice implicit in improvement, the duties of a partitioner could sometimes become skewed. On the Thirteen Estates, when a partitioner required a tenant to vacate their residence and land, or be otherwise expelled from it, the tenant had to leave at least two fifths of the entire enclosed arable land previously leased by them under grass cultivation.¹¹⁵ If tenants refused to comply, the *Rules and Articles* are clear about the penalties: “in the event of their not leaving, at their removal, two fifths parts in grass, as said, they shall be obliged to pay at the rate of two pounds Sterling for every deficient acre, and diligence shall pass for these sums, in the same manner as for rents.”¹¹⁶ This meant that tenants, when they were notified of their expulsion, were required to improve their land if they had not already done so, or pay out of pocket for the improvements. The partitioner was solely responsible for ensuring that these payments were received. When a tenant was dismissed from their leases on one of the Thirteen Estates, there were strict penalties for removing any resources from the land when they left: “no

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 7.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

removing tenant shall carry off straw or dung that may be on his farm at his removal from the house.”¹¹⁷ The Commissioners noted that they were not “liable to any claim of damages on that account.”¹¹⁸

Improvement of an estate meant that all of its resources came under intense scrutiny. Whether fallows, waterways, or mines, any previously unutilized resources were to be improved. Indeed, this was one of the main reasons for undertaking the *First and Second Accounts of Scotland*. In pursuit of the ideal of wholesale exploitation of land and resources, the Commissioners reserved the ability to “search for and work all mines and minerals, coal, lime, marl and free-stone quarries” on the Thirteen Estates.¹¹⁹ This is particularly important because it further complicated the role of partitioner, as seen in the multiple court cases brought against Lowland estate overseers.

Another important part of improvement on Lowland estates was enclosure of common lands. Although it was common practice to do so in the Lowlands, overseers and partitioners began penalizing tenants who were discovered sowing seeds or grazing livestock on land belonging to fellow tenants. In one of the only instances of specific penalties in the text of the *Rules and Articles*, the Commissioners noted that any tenant who failed to maintain livestock enclosure was to be fined “half a merk Scots for each beast found upon a neighbor’s ground or farm.”¹²⁰ Tenants who failed to control their animals faced the possibility of having their livestock “pounded and detained,” in which case the tenant was required to “submit to the regulations of the baron courts about herding.”¹²¹ The Commissioners further reserved the right to “name persons for pounding the cattle of one

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 8.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 9.

farm found on another farm.” They also reserved “the power to draw the penalties of the statute.”¹²² This responsibility, however, usually fell to the estate overseer.

The Commissioners also announced detailed changes to the types of cultivation practices that would be allowed on estate lands. For instance, they established a three-acre minimum for single plow teams, meaning that each team was required to work at least three acres, and preferably more. Fallows – portions of arable land left unplanted in order to reestablish soil fertility – were regulated as well: “tenants shall be bound to fallow annually, in regular course, not under three acres of ground for each plough kept by them upon their several farms, and proportionally for half a plough or less, giving such fallow four ploughings at least.”¹²³ The Commissioners paid close attention to detail on this issue: “tenants shall sow two acres at least every year with red clover for each plough; and shall have, as soon as can be, and thereafter always keep, two fifth parts at least of his inclosed arable grounds in grass, which shall have been sown with good and sufficient seeds.”¹²⁴

Although such examples of increased attention to and control of specific farming techniques is another common hallmark of agrarian improvement and agricultural reform, it is important to note the often laissez-faire attitude of the Commissioners. Although their declarations were specific, there is no evidence to suggest that the Commissioners had specific ideas about to how to enforce their new rules. The important implication is that this was, instead, left up to the partitioners. In the Lowlands, landowners dictated regulations, while the task of enforcing them was left to overseers like Andrew Wight. Men like Wight, in order to rise in an increasingly stratified Scottish society, took on the real responsibilities of agrarian improvement.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid., 6.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

During the later years of the eighteenth century, the Annexed Estates together comprised one of the primary centers of tangible agricultural improvement in Scotland. Between 1773 and 1778, Wight investigated them and meticulously documented their operations and productivity.¹²⁵ He interviewed estate managers and compiled data about acreage, yield, and profit margins. Much of his prose reads as if Wight himself had internalized the increasingly common opinion of his employers: that his once-fellow tenant farmers were in need of civilizing. He frequently stated his duty as being, at least in part, to help “civilize the people of the estates, and by kind treatment to make them good subjects.”¹²⁶

Wight presented himself as a liege to those “patriotic gentlemen” and landowners for whom civilizing and land improvement were one and the same, and he repeatedly indicated that his opinions and conclusions were in line with their own. He wrote, for example, that “their example cannot fail, in time, to have its effect,” and he was convinced that “when the spirit of improvement is ratified among the tenants, it will diffuse itself rapidly, to their own benefit, and to that of the nation in general.”¹²⁷ Wight was thus remarkably situated to speak to three important issues: pre-improvement Scottish land tenure, the improvement decades, and the transitional period between the two.

Cockburn Estate

The Cockburn family’s best-known member was John, who was one of the most important Scottish agrarian reformers of his time. Cockburn himself attributed Scotland’s increased standard of living in the late eighteenth century to land improvement. His 1804

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, v.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

memoir opens with the declaration that “Scotland, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, was abject and miserable.”¹²⁸ Although he was among the earliest to voice this sentiment, he was certainly not alone in his thinking. Throughout his life, he maintained a particularly close relationship with Andrew Wight, whom he favored above his other tenants. As noted, Wight voiced the same sentiments. While he lived in England, Cockburn wrote to Wight often of matters both professional and personal. Their relationship was rooted in tradition, as both John Cockburn and his father, Adam Cockburn, had maintained a close relationship with Andrew’s father, Alexander.¹²⁹ Decades before agrarian improvement reached Scotland, John wrote to Alexander expressing his feelings for his tenants: “no father can have more satisfaction in the prosperity of his children than I have in the welfare of persons situated upon my estate.”¹³⁰ It is important to note that, in contrast to later improvers, John Cockburn’s opinion of land reform and agrarian improvement was overlain with philanthropic and paternalistic connotations. That is, while most improving landowners were influenced by increasing market forces, much of John Cockburn’s improvement work was done to aid the tenants to whom he felt obligated. It is clear that Wight inherited this sentiment, and carried it over to his duties as overseer.

Wight’s in-depth four-volume assessment of the state of agriculture in Haddingtonshire, in addition to being useful as a clear documentation of precise numerical values, represents the growing strength of improvement ideology and its impact on tenant farmers. His description of pre-improvement Ormiston depicted a rather different place than what is represented in both the *First* and *Second Statistical Accounts of Scotland*: “the lands

¹²⁸ *Farmer's Magazine* 5 (7 May 1804), “Memoirs of John Cockburn,” 129. Hereafter *FM*. See also T. C. Smout, “A New Look at the Scottish Improvers,” *Scottish Historical Review* 91: 125-149.

¹²⁹ Wight, *Present State*, 1.

¹³⁰ *FM* “Monday, 7. May 1804. No XVIII,” 129.

of Ormiston were originally about two thirds of moorish soil, a considerable part of which was covered with a dwarf heath.”¹³¹ Only the remaining third, he wrote, was “good, healthy land.”¹³² Wight thus described a rather impoverished and backwards region, which was the opposite of what the contemporary *First Statistical Account* asserted. In addition to the careful description of the estate and lands that he himself had farmed earlier in life, Wight was in a position to describe the improvements and mindset of John Cockburn.

Wight noted that improvement began in Ormiston at a time “when the art of agriculture was imperfectly understood.”¹³³ He implied that John Cockburn possessed an ability to see both the needs of his tenants and possible future profits. In addition to the obvious capacity to expend capital on untested improvements, Wight noted that Cockburn was possessed of “much knowledge and dexterity” with which to pursue reforms.¹³⁴ By no means does this imply that John Cockburn was himself aiding in the improvement, or that his was necessarily the brainpower behind it. Landowners like Cockburn, often regardless of the strength of their support for improvement, provided capital for substantial improvements to be undertaken by the partitioner.¹³⁵ On Lowland estates, often landowners had broad ideas about improvement, and it was left up to their overseers to implement them. Since tenants were usually deemed incapable of properly upgrading pastures, structures, and farming techniques, landowners also often provided the means by which to educate them. Wight wrote that “it could hardly be expected that substantial improvements would be undertaken

¹³¹ Ibid., 132.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

by [the tenants] unless their minds were previously enlightened, and their conditions improved.”¹³⁶ Yet it was up to the partitioner to see that the education got done.

Wight’s physical description of Cockburn Estate – which he often called “the Ormiston Estate” – is useful because it provides perspective on the geography and demography of a pre-improvement Lowland estate. Analyzing the dynamic of estates in transition is particularly important to understanding the impact of early improvement and the role partitioners played. “The Ormiston Estate,” Wight wrote, “lies on the south side of the River Tyne, and rises gradually from the water to the hills.”¹³⁷ He wrote that “ten tenants and their cottagers” resided in the village itself, and that the ground to the north was occupied by “tenants in *rundale*,” and was “agreeable to the mode of holding which existed in these barbarous days.”¹³⁸

Wight noted that in this era before improvement there “prevailed many unprofitable customs, particularly that of keeping the whole cattle belonging to the tenants in one common drove, tended by one or two men.”¹³⁹ This was a description of pre-enclosure land use, and it is especially important because it points to the shift from communal land use to the privatization of estates and the fracturing of the tenantry. Many of the methodological improvements implemented on Lowland estates addressed these communal – and, according to contemporary improvers, unprofitable – farming and herding practices. Wight’s description of the transition of the “agriculture of the estate” is also valuable. He described the estate “at a time when several of the tenants having failed, though the lands were low-rented, particularly about the village a new system was adopted; the runfield plan was

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid., emphasis in original. The *rundale* farming system is simply the Irish version of the runrig. It was common in Ireland and featured many of the same characteristics as the Scottish method.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

abolished, and the lands divided into proper sized farms, each having a steading built in a convenient situation.”¹⁴⁰

Wight noted that, in order to deter communal farming and grazing, “enclosing by ditch and hedge, with trees on the bank, was instantly set about.” Once this process had begun, it “could not fail to make a lasting impression on the minds of the neighbors.”¹⁴¹ Wight described early and isolated, but significant, enclosure of the commons. He emphasized the uniqueness of these improvements, especially given the status quo of the Scottish tenantry, which knew little of improvement beyond what landlords requested. Although his characterization was at times hyperbolic, Wight’s account described important changes. Demonstrating his in-depth comprehension of agricultural traditions and his firsthand experience with them, Wight referenced the particularly rough harvest seasons of the 1690s that so harshly affected Lowland farmers. He argued that “at the above era, the tenantry of Scotland, those of a few fertile spots excepted, had been nearly ruined by the calamitous seasons which prevailed at the end of the seventeenth century.”¹⁴² Furthermore, he wrote that “capital stock had thereby been wrested out of their hands; and the proprietors, generally speaking, were still too proud perhaps too ignorant to interest themselves about the amelioration even of their own domains.”¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 133.

¹⁴² Ibid., 132.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 130.

“A Practical Farmer”¹⁴⁴

The will of landlords like John Cockburn to improve their holdings eventually became the biggest reason for agricultural reform in Scotland. The reasons for this were many, but often had to do with the increase in monetary opportunities that accompanied estate-wide enclosure and improvement. George Robertson was a prominent author who was employed by the Scottish Board of Agriculture to prepare an account of the state of agriculture in Midlothian for Sir John Sinclair's *General Report*. He provided important information about this change. In his 1793 *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Midlothian*, Robertson suggested that if landlords themselves were wholeheartedly to “undertake the whole business of enclosing, they might securely trust their being amply recompensed by the rise in their rents that would naturally follow.”¹⁴⁵ He argued that this would “clearly point out the value of improvement [...] without causing the least murmur.”¹⁴⁶ The “murmur” minimized by Robertson actually anticipated the disparity between what landlords wanted and what the tenantry was used to. In late-eighteenth-century Lowland Scotland, the property rights of tenant farmers and laborers had changed little for centuries. When partitioners and landlords started to reform lease patterns and farming traditions, they sometimes inadvertently brought about resistance from the tenantry.

Like Wight, Robertson was from comparatively humble beginnings.¹⁴⁷ He was employed by a substantial body interested in agrarian improvement. Robertson was a farmer first, but also an author with knowledge of Lowland agriculture and an interest in land tenure

¹⁴⁴ Quoted from R. H. Inglis Palgrave's description of George Robertson in Robertson's entry in his *Dictionary of Political Economy*, Vol. III, N-Z (London: Macmillan & Co., 1908), 315.

¹⁴⁵ George Robertson, *A General View of the Agriculture of Midlothian, With Observations on the Means of Its Improvement* (Edinburgh: Board of Agriculture, 1795), 81.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Palgrave, “George Robertson,” 315.

and agrarian reform.¹⁴⁸ He lived for many years on a farm in the Granton district of outer Edinburgh.¹⁴⁹ In later life, he moved to Kincardineshire, and then to Ayrshire. Thus Robertson lived in and witnessed improvement in three different Lowland counties. Two decades after his *General View*, he published his *General View of the Agriculture of Kincardineshire*. Then, in 1829, Robertson published *Rural Recollections, or, The Progress of Improvement in Agriculture and Rural Affairs*, a work that was comprised of observations in all three counties in which he had lived. He also contributed to Arthur Young's *Annals of Agriculture* (1808), and to the publications of the Highland Society. Although he was not a partitioner, and thus did not have the same experience as Wight, his opinions on the subject of improvement were influential.

Poor Alex Brown

In his role as overseer of land improvement in Ormiston, Andrew Wight was a target in multiple court cases. There is ample evidence that the laborers of Ormiston saw Wight as overly harsh in his implementation of the broadening improvement schemes of the day. One particularly lengthy case involved a group of tenants on Cockburn Estate. The main person engaged in suing Wight was a farmer and dyer named Alex Brown. Brown, who is almost exclusively referred to in the court proceedings as “poor Alex Brown” or “poor Alexander Brown,” had a significant disagreement with Wight over the use of waterways on the property. Brown’s lease, dated back to January of 1749, included “24 feet of square ground upon the watercourse” that allowed for “the privilege and liberty of the water.”¹⁵⁰ However,

¹⁴⁸ Thomas Seccombe, “Robertson, George (1750?–1832),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁴⁹ Palgrave, “George Robertson,” 315-316.

¹⁵⁰ Court of Session 231/W/4/1, “Answers for Andrew Wight” (1788), 2. Hereafter CS.

the contract between Wight and the landowners of Ormiston stated that “Andrew Wight shall be in sole charge of making the intended alterations, and shall be bound to carry off the whole surplus water in times of floods.”¹⁵¹ Both Brown and Wight thus had a legal claim to the management of the same parcel of land, as well as the resources it contained. The responsibility for controlling and improving the waterways and irrigation channels of Ormiston was delegated to Wight in his role as partitioner, and it was also his responsibility to draw up new rent contracts and to take care of the details inherent in such contracts. Wight’s contract with Alexander Brown stated that “he shall be bound to relieve Alex Brown of any damage that the inhabitants of the village of Ormiston may suffer from the water drowning each upon their houses or property, and also any damage that may arise to the Tenants or possessors of the mill.”¹⁵² It was not often that tenants were so favorably considered in contractual land agreements. Wight was in a position to control the pace of improvement, and the ways in which improvement could negatively impact those dwelling on the land. The court proceedings noted that “[Andrew Wight] was bound to build good and sufficient improvements upon the foresaid piece of square ground within the said watergate and up within the said house a good a sufficient watermill and to make proper and sufficient waterleads to and from the same and to keep and maintain the watermill and the water leads in good and sufficient repair and order and to leave when so removed.”¹⁵³

Brown’s case against Wight also revealed that John Cockburn entrusted his most notable tenant with the responsibility of controlling and improving the “Bleachfield of

¹⁵¹ CS231/W/4/1, “Representation for Poor Alexander Brown,” (1788), 3.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 3.

Ormiston,” the first bleachfield in Scotland.¹⁵⁴ A bleachfield was a large open area on which dyers and linen workers bleached large quantities of textiles. They were necessary to the efficient running of water-powered cotton mills.¹⁵⁵ The presence of a large bleachfield at Ormiston points to the emerging market-based improvement economy then developing in the Lowlands. The court proceedings also indicated that John Cockburn had been “anxious to establish a weekly Corn market at Ormiston,” and that he placed Andrew Wight in charge of “erecting a corn mill upon the old mill lead of Ormiston which runs naturally through the Bleachfield.”¹⁵⁶

Since Bleachfields were essentially large tracts of land that could not be tilled, they were sometimes seen to be standing in the way of proper land use. Alex Brown claimed the parcel of land, and the waterways running through it, for his own use.¹⁵⁷ But Wight, at the express behest of the landowner, claimed use rights in order to construct a new and improved corn mill to hasten the establishment of a corn market on the estate. In other words, Cockburn placed Wight in charge of overseeing the improvement of agriculture on the estate at the expense of other industries.

The judge noted that “The Representer,” Brown, was bound to “build a good and sufficient house upon the foresaid piece of square ground within the said watergate and up within the said house a good a sufficient watermill.”¹⁵⁸ He was also bound to “make proper and sufficient waterleads to and from the same and to keep and maintain the watermill and

¹⁵⁴ *Second Statistical Account of Scotland*, “Haddingtonshire: Parish of Ormiston. Presbytery of Dalkeith, Synod of Lothian and Tweeddale,” (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1845), 139. Hereafter *SSA*.

¹⁵⁵ Robin Smith, *The Making of Scotland: A Comprehensive Guide to the Growth of its Cities, Towns, and Villages* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2002), xxv.

¹⁵⁶ CS231/W/4/2, “Representation for Poor Alexander Brown” (1788), 1.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ CS231/W/4/4, “Answers for Andrew Wight to the Representation of Poor Alexander Brown, Dyer in Ormiston and Charger” (1788), 3.

the water leads in good and sufficient repair and order and to leave when so removed.”¹⁵⁹

Alex Brown’s simple plea to the Court was that he had “a right by his lease to the full use of the water.”¹⁶⁰ In other words, Brown argued that his lease gave him both legal and traditional authority to utilize his rented portion of Cockburn Estate as he saw fit, and as he had done for decades. This is particularly important because it points to the rift between partitioners like Wight – once farmers or laborers who, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries began climbing upward by attaching themselves to emerging improvement strategies in the Scottish Lowlands – and men like Brown, who faced firsthand the changes and challenges of improvement, positive, negative, and neutral. The court eventually ruled in Wight’s favor.¹⁶¹

In June of 1783, a larger group of tenants brought a suit against Andrew Wight. Wight was summoned “at the insistence of George, John, Christian, Jean, and Thomas Brunton, only children in life of the deceased John Brunton, flesher in Dalkeith.”¹⁶² The tenants hoped to show that they were the “heritable Proprietors of all and whole the dwelling house fronting the street of Dalkeith, with the old thatch house immediately behind the same with a stable lying to the southward.”¹⁶³ Dalkeith was another small Midlothian town very close to and very much like Ormiston. The verdict in this particular case was, uncharacteristically, in favor of the Bruntons. The judge ruled that Andrew Wight was “justly owing to the Pursuers several sums as Rents and Duties.”¹⁶⁴ The verdict was, then, in this instance, that a partitioner had unlawfully collected rents from a group of laborers.

Essentially, although the mother of the abovementioned, Alison Brunton, was earlier ruled to

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 17.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 35.

¹⁶² CS228/B/6/65, 1.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 3.

“have right to said subjects by Disposition from her said husband dated the 2nd day of november 1784,” Wight, the “Partioner of Ormiston,” is listed as “possessed of the Pursuers’ said titles to the foresaid subjects.”¹⁶⁵ He was required to compensate the tenants from his own pocket.

Thus, while he was partitioner of Cockburn Estate, Andrew Wight was responsible for the successes and failures of improvement. Although it was rather commonplace in the Lowlands, his position between tenants and landowner was unusual in the wider context of British land reform. It goes against the traditional argument that landowners controlled improvement. It is clear that John Cockburn was instrumental in the first wave of agrarian improvement in Scotland. However, Andrew Wight was in a sense the more important figure. It was Wight who found himself in court, and it was Wight, a tenant farmer, who controlled how the Cockburn Estate was improved.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

III. THE STATISTICAL ACCOUNTS

Between 1791 and 1799, Sir John Sinclair compiled information on every parish in Scotland. Together, these local accounts formed the *First Statistical Account of Scotland*. Sinclair was a landowner and a fervent supporter of agrarian improvement. He was particularly interested in documenting the state of Scottish agriculture and agrarian reform. Decades later, between 1834 and 1845, the Scottish Board of Agriculture built on Sinclair's massive undertaking with another enumeration, called the *Second Statistical Account of Scotland*. Comparing the two provides important information about agrarian improvement in the Lowlands. It also reveals how land reform worked, who was involved in it, and how it impacted the general Scottish population.

Sinclair borrowed the term “statistical” from Germany.¹⁶⁶ He explained how, during a 1786 trip to the Continent, he found educated Germans “engaged in a species of political inquiry to which they had given the name of *Statistics*.”¹⁶⁷ Sinclair stressed, however, that his own use of the term had slightly different connotations: “by Statistical is meant in Germany, an inquiry for the purpose of ascertaining the political strength of a country or questions respecting *matters of state*.” He, on the other hand, used it to refer to “an inquiry into the state of a country *for the purpose of ascertaining the quantum of happiness enjoyed by its inhabitants and the means of its future improvement*.”¹⁶⁸ There are two significant

¹⁶⁶ FSA, “Introduction,” Volume XX, *xiii*.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, emphasis in original.

implications in his statement. First, it is important to note the distinction between the two uses, and second, the connection made between “happiness” and improvement.

In his *Analysis of the Statistical Account of Scotland*, Sinclair remarked that “patriotic noblemen and gentlemen may exert themselves on their own farms, or in particular parts of their estates; but what are a few solitary spots to a whole country?”¹⁶⁹ It is significant that his analysis was not published until 1831, more than three decades after the publication of his enumeration. At first, Sinclair’s sentiment is hard to understand within a Lowland context because it appears to be negative, whereas in both *Statistical Accounts* there is an omnipresent sense of positivity about the successes of improvement. For example, the Ormiston compilers for both accounts were adamant about the positive impact of improvement. It is also important, however, to note that Sinclair’s analysis was published at a time when the land reform trends that had already overtaken the Lowlands were just beginning to reach the Highlands and Islands. In the mid-nineteenth century, improvement and land clearance in the Highlands was a rather more difficult undertaking than it was in the Lowlands.¹⁷⁰ This fact was almost certainly the origin of Sinclair’s somber attitude.

The publication of Sinclair’s secondary analysis also related to the growing interest in improvement that eventually led to the *Second Statistical Account*. By the 1830s, many of the sweeping changes described by Andrew Wight, John Cockburn, and the Commissioners of the Annexed Estates had been solidified in the Lowlands and were making their way across the country. In fact, the scope and scale of change was greater than any earlier observers envisioned.

¹⁶⁹ Sir John Sinclair, *Analysis of the Statistical Account of Scotland; with a General View of the History of That Country and Discussions on Some Important Branches of Political Economy* (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1831), 312.

¹⁷⁰ See Devine, *Crofter’s War*.

“A stranger entering the parish is apt to mistake it for England”¹⁷¹

Reverend Alexander Colvill was a Presbyterian minister from Northern Ireland. He studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh, and essentially inherited the position of minister when his father died, leaving it vacant. He ended up presiding over the parish of Ormiston.¹⁷² Colvill was selected to be the compiler and preparer for Ormiston in the *First Statistical Account*. In his opening account of the town’s “Situation, Surface, Soil, &c.,” he referred to the region as “very irregular” in form.¹⁷³ Colvill wrote that the length of Ormiston was “about 5 miles” and that the breadth varied from three miles to only half a mile.¹⁷⁴ He described it as a “flat” country “inclosed with hedges of white thorn, mixed with sweet briar, honeysuckle and hedgerow trees.”¹⁷⁵ He often compared Ormiston to England quite favorably, an important point to note. This connection with England – demonstrated as well by the exchange of improvement ideas and ideology between Andrew Wight and Arthur Young – tended to be strongest in the areas that experienced the earliest improvement schemes, such as Cockburn Estate. Colvill also stressed the pedigree of livestock bred in Ormiston by noting that successful farmers tended to breed their draft mares “with strong made stallions from the north of England.”¹⁷⁶ He acknowledged that this connection was a source of pride for Ormiston farmers.

Colvill provided a sizeable amount of detail about the agriculture and livestock of Ormiston. He noted that the “best lands” were leased by acre, and that these were “let from

¹⁷¹ FSA, “Ormistoun,” 166.

¹⁷² Alexander Gordon, “Colvill, Alexander (1699/1700–1777),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁷³ FSA, “Ormistoun,” 166.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 167. The importance of draft horses is a common theme in the *First Statistical Account*, especially in Lowland parishes.

£1, 10 s. to £1, 15 s.”¹⁷⁷ He stressed that the parish was comparatively well provisioned, and lacked only in productive fisheries. The average agricultural yields were so abundant, in fact, that Colvill frequently emphasized Ormiston’s role as a supplier region in the 1790s. He wrote that “[Ormiston] sends out supplies to the metropolis, and neighboring towns.”¹⁷⁸ He attributed this, at least partially, to the fact that farmers in Ormiston tended to sow earlier than in other regions, “in the months of March, April and May, and generally begin to reap in the first week of September.”¹⁷⁹ The argument made by Tom Devine that many Lowland estates had relatively high productivity in the later decades of the eighteenth century is thus also supported by Colvill’s account.¹⁸⁰

Colvill noted that 193 families lived in Ormiston at the time of the first enumeration, a total of just fewer than 900 individuals.¹⁸¹ Although it was the first nationwide enumeration in Scotland, compilers for the *First Statistical Account* often relied on earlier local figures. Based on local accounts for Ormiston, Colvill asserted that the population had changed little in the last century.¹⁸² Prior to the *First Statistical Account*, most of Scotland’s local records relied on baptismal registers. Like many early improvers, Colvill was conscious of the problems this created: “in general, throughout Scotland, it is not a register of births that is kept by the clerk of the parish, but a register of baptisms.”¹⁸³ This meant that previous local enumerations could not account for children who were not officially baptized. The inability of poorer families to “pay the dues of the clerk,” a legal requirement for legal baptisms,

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Devine, *Transformation*.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 168.

¹⁸² Ibid. This assertion is disputed by Bannerman, the Ormiston compiler for the second enumeration. *SSA*, “Ormiston,” 131.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

further complicated the issue.¹⁸⁴ Colvill, along with other compilers for the *First Account*, attempted to account for this discrepancy by being as thorough as possible, and by interacting with the entire local population to prevent discrepancies. As the parish minister, Colvill had a working knowledge of the populace, even those who were unbaptized. He was also keenly aware of the beginnings of rural land clearance, and noted its impact: “some persons have emigrated in quest of better encouragement.”¹⁸⁵

Ormiston was the most significant center in the region; Colvill called it “the only village in this parish which deserves the name.” He argued that the situation for laborers in Ormiston proper was better than for those living in the surrounding areas. He noted that laborers on Ormiston estates enjoyed “almost every natural and moral advantage for domestic comfort.”¹⁸⁶ Furthermore, he described the general health of the village-dwelling population as “very favorable” compared to other regions in Scotland.¹⁸⁷ Agricultural laborers in Ormiston could expect to earn, on average, “from 9 d. to 1 s.,” and Colvill noted that married common laborers received the same.¹⁸⁸ He believed that a “frugal and industrious” laborer in Ormiston could “maintain and educate his family very well.”¹⁸⁹ Quite simply, Colvill’s description of Ormiston presented the archetypal improved parish that many reformers talked about. This rather positive image of Lowland laborers is in contrast to Andrew Wight’s portrayal of them as uncivilized. It is also counter to Sinclair’s sentiment later in life that improvement had not yet had the impact he hoped it would.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 169.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

Ormiston's Eminent Men

Colvill's account of Ormiston's "eminent men" focused almost exclusively on the Cockburn family. He provided an extensive account of their religious affiliations and political alliances, describing them as "a Protestant family at the Reformation, and Whig afterwards."¹⁹⁰ He described John Cockburn, the landowner who maintained such a close relationship with Andrew Wight, as a "statesman and patriotic representative of his country."¹⁹¹ Colvill attributed the relatively high standard of living in Ormiston almost solely to John Cockburn. He noted that Cockburn was a distinguished member of the Lords of the Admiralty, and that, as such, he had dedicated much time to "promoting the general commerce of Britain, and preserving unsullied the honour of the British Flag."¹⁹²

Colvill noted that when John Cockburn retired from public business later in life, he set about promoting the cause of improvement: "wherever his presence was necessary to excite a spirit of improvement in agriculture and linen manufacture, there you found Mr. John Cockburn."¹⁹³ As previously mentioned, John Cockburn was responsible for initiating many of the early improvements in Lowland Scotland. Colvill attributed the relatively high level of material comfort of Ormiston's laborers to the "works of public utility" inspired by John Cockburn.¹⁹⁴ It is important to point note that Colvill did not reference Andrew Wight. His version of Ormiston gave credit only to John Cockburn. This paradigm would shift a great deal by the publication of the *Second Statistical Account*, in which Wight features prominently.

¹⁹⁰ FSA, "Ormistoun," 170.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 170-171.

Despite Colvill's assertions that the population of Ormiston was generally economical and possessed of the necessities of life, he did point out a few of problems in the parish, although these can mostly be attributed to the fact that, in reality, improvement in Haddingtonshire had not yet come to full fruition. Colville's assessment, while positive, is actually slightly less favorable than that of the *Second Account* half a century later, which is unusual in comparisons between the *First* and *Second Accounts*. Although John Cockburn's public improvements were significant, Colvill noted that there were yet many roads and bridges in disrepair.¹⁹⁵ He discussed problems with transport and trade. He also wrote of the problems associated with the low turnover rate of land possession in Ormiston, a fact he blamed on entails, much like Kames: "property in land has been more fixed in this parish than in most others."¹⁹⁶ Colville also noted that Ormiston faced a particularly lean period between 1782 and 1783, during which time "the poor no doubt suffered."¹⁹⁷ It is important to note that although he portrays a rather positive image of John Cockburn, Colvill did not hesitate to point out what remained to be done in Ormiston.

Two Accounts

Although their structures and goals were similar, the differences between the *First* and *Second Statistical Account* are significant. Nearly half a century after Reverend Colvill compiled his account of Ormiston, Scotland conducted its second enumeration. The biggest difference, and one which has been given little attention, is that the *First Account* focuses less on resources and more on demographics. The *Second Account*, on the other hand, while it does contain useful population data, contains a much larger quantity of information about

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 171.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

natural resources. Reverend James Bannerman, compiler for Ormiston for the *Second Statistical Account of Scotland*, opened his assessment by noting that the area was “every where well supplied with water abounding in springs of different qualities.”¹⁹⁸ In contrast to Colvill, who focused more on the political, religious, and demographic characteristics of Ormiston, Bannerman gave natural resources pride of place. This shift is significant because it represents the impact of improvement during the early decades of the nineteenth century. Although it was conducted, at least in part, to account for the natural resources of Scotland, much of the information in the *First Statistical Account* is about population and noble families. In the decades between the two enumerations, agrarian improvement had drastically changed both the landscape of the Scottish Lowlands and the way people thought about the land. Demographic change was commonplace in the Lowlands by the 1840s, and the more important issue for contemporaries was resource exploitation. While he did indeed account for the parish’s population, Bannerman’s sections on geology, mineralogy, and hydrology were much more precise.

Bannerman provided an in-depth account of the region’s resources, how they had been exploited, and how they could be exploited further in the future. He was particularly concerned with the fruitful mines of Ormiston. He wrote that “the parish abounds with coal and limestone,” and provided a particularly exhaustive account of mines in the area.¹⁹⁹ This is significant because it is indicative of the fact that improvements to infrastructure had eclipsed improvements to agriculture. Bannerman noted that in 1812 a large and notably productive coal mine had been constructed in Ormiston.²⁰⁰ By the time Scotland’s second national enumeration was published, “three workable seams of coal” had been opened in the

¹⁹⁸ SSA, “Ormiston,” 131.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 132.

region.²⁰¹ Bannerman noted that at the time of an earlier local account, “it was not known that there was either lime or coal in the parish, or even in the neighborhood.”²⁰² In 1808, a vast limestone quarry was opened in Ormiston. It was so large that it supplied most of the stones for building the House of Ormiston Hall, as well as many other large buildings in surrounding counties.²⁰³

For Bannerman, the diversity of soil types and crops was also central to describing Ormiston in the early 1840s. He noted that the most productive soils were found “on either side of the Tyne,” and that cultivation on this land in particular had been expanded in the early decades of the nineteenth century.²⁰⁴ The least productive soil was the less common “stiff clay,” which was primarily used as “waste” land.²⁰⁵ Unlike Colvill, Bannerman provided precise measurements of the amount of arable land in Ormiston. He noted that the exact number of acres in the parish was 3,245. The total number of acres “in cultivation” at the time was 2,938. Of those, 132 were in “constant meadow and pasture,” while a mere 5 were “waste” and 170 were left “under wood,” or forested.²⁰⁶ He further noted that the “average rent of arable land is very low.”²⁰⁷ These figures support the assertion that Ormiston was a relatively productive and well-provisioned region.

Bannerman noted that, even with the variety of soil types, most of the land of Ormiston had, “by good management,” been “brought from a barren moor to a state of high cultivation.”²⁰⁸ He wrote that some of the most significant agrarian improvements had been undertaken in the “southern and higher part of the parish.” This was land that had not

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid., 133.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ See Waites, “Common Field Landscape.”

²⁰⁶ SSA, “Ormiston,” 144.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 134.

previously been cultivated regularly – either because of an inability to do so, or because the demand was not great enough – before the reforms of the eighteenth century.²⁰⁹ Although a great deal of improvement had occurred in the years between the two *Accounts*, Bannerman noted that individual tenants were still laboring intensely to improve their land. This was, however, a significant observation. The important difference was that they no longer had to be told to do so. He wrote about “the present tenant at West Byres,” for example, who was building an embankment to prevent the river from overflowing onto his farm at the time of the enumeration.²¹⁰ This same unnamed tenant had also recently attempted to convert his “meadowground” to tillable land, which he had plowed and sown, but which had not yet been proven to work. The tenant was, in effect, experimenting. This is evidence of the fact that common farmers were, by the 1840s, attempting their own experimental improvements. Bannerman carefully noted that in the case of the aforementioned anonymous farmer, the “experiment” had not yet “had sufficient time to shew its effects,” but that he would be sure to note future developments.²¹¹

Another significant change in Ormiston was the cultivation of large gardens. Bannerman noted that farmers on many of the larger Haddingtonshire estates were cultivating fruit gardens and flower gardens.²¹² This is telling because it points to a difference in the way people were thinking about utilizing the land. Flower gardens would have been unthinkable in earlier decades, because they would have occupied land that otherwise could have been used to grow food for consumption. Bannerman wrote particularly favorably about

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

the garden at Ormiston Hall, which was “chiefly taken up by fruit trees.”²¹³ He gave credit again to John Cockburn for planting fig trees, noting that they were “superior to any that are produced in this country.”²¹⁴

It is important to compare Bannerman’s account of the Cockburn family to Colvill’s in the *First Statistical Account*. Significantly, Bannerman also gave a great deal of credit for the improvement of Ormiston to Andrew Wight. Like Colvill, he praised John Cockburn’s improvement efforts, and had four more decades of improvement progress on which to base his account. During this time, Wight’s legacy had grown. Unlike Colvill, whose account focused primarily on the Cockburns’ political successes, Bannerman hailed John Cockburn’s facilitation of agrarian improvement as his greatest achievement, and called him “the celebrated agriculturalist.”²¹⁵ He noted that Cockburn was “chiefly distinguished by his benevolent exertions to promote the improvement of his native country.”²¹⁶ Bannerman wrote that, because of Andrew Wight and John Cockburn’s efforts, Scotland was “now equally, if not better cultivated than England.”²¹⁷ Before Wight and Cockburn began their quest to improve the estate, Scotland was deemed “far behind the sister kingdom.”²¹⁸

Bannerman also demonstrated the link between the two nations’ improvement schemes. He attributed John Cockburn’s enthusiasm for improvement to “his residence in England,” which he believed allowed Cockburn to become “well acquainted with the agricultural improvements that were going on.”²¹⁹ In fact, Bannerman attributed most of Cockburn’s improvement zeal to his time in England. He noted that when Cockburn retired

²¹³ Ibid., 135.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 137.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

to his estates he was “anxious to introduce [improvements] into Scotland,” and that he “spared no labor nor expense to accomplish an object so desirable.”²²⁰ Bannerman asserted that the improvement methods on Cockburn Estate were also rooted in John Cockburn’s familiarity with reform in England. Before Cockburn returned to Scotland, leases on Cockburn Estate were comparatively short, which was the tradition on Haddingtonshire estates. Traditionally, leases were “seldom of longer duration than five years,” which meant that proprietors often had “great difficulty in getting proper tenants to cultivate their lands.”²²¹ Drawing on his knowledge of emerging English improvement ideology, John Cockburn began granting leases of “thirty-eight years duration, with a renewal of it for nineteen years more at the expiry of that term, and so on from nineteen to nineteen years in all time coming.”²²²

Bannerman noted that soon after Cockburn implemented the new leases, “all the farms in the barony of Ormiston were let in the same manner.”²²³ He stated that Cockburn’s goal was explicitly to “encourage his tenants to greater improvements.”²²⁴ The central idea was that the longer one family occupied a specific plot of land – Bannerman noted that, after the increase, this could be upwards of “a tenure of three lives” – the greater the incentive would be for them to improve their lands.²²⁵ When the *Second Account* was published, in 1845, two-thirds of the leases in Ormiston followed the long-term pattern established by John Cockburn more than half a century earlier.²²⁶

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid., 137-138.

²²⁴ Ibid., 138

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

Bannerman's in-depth treatment of changes in Ormiston tenantry patterns points to a growing understanding of the impact of agrarian improvement in the Lowlands. Although Colvill wrote about improvement in Ormiston, and had firsthand knowledge of the changes taking place, he mentioned neither the leases nor the specific activities of John Cockburn. He also failed to give any credit to Andrew Wight. Bannerman, on the other hand, demonstrated the dominant positive perception of improvement because he was able to draw on five decades of successful reform. Bannerman insisted that the new, longer leases "held out great encouragement to the tenants to improve their lands to the utmost extent."²²⁷

In order to create a brand new layout for the fields of his estate, John Cockburn hired a talented English land surveyor named Lewis Gordon.²²⁸ Gordon crafted a plan that divided the land into smaller portions by enclosing them "with thorn hedges and hedge-row trees."²²⁹ This practice, too, was soon emulated throughout the parish, and soon throughout the entire county of Haddingtonshire. Contrary to Colvill's assertion that many roads and bridges remained in disrepair in Ormiston, Bannerman wrote that "Mr. Cockburn did not overlook the public roads."²³⁰ This disparity demonstrates another shift in the contemporary perception of improvement. After half a century, John Cockburn and Andrew Wight were interpreted as more influential than they had been in the 1790s. Not only did Cockburn address the situation of Ormiston's poor roads, but Bannerman noted that "by his exertions in making them and keeping them in a state of repair, he set an example which has contributed as much as anything else to the prosperity of the country."²³¹

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid., 139.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid. *FSA* "Parish of Ormiston," 171.

²³¹ *SSA*, "Ormiston," 139.

Bannerman was clear about Andrew Wight's contributions to agrarian improvement in Ormiston. Echoing court proceedings, Bannerman wrote of how Wight was responsible for carrying out the day-to-day aspects of improvement on Cockburn Estate. He discussed how Wight was responsible for erecting the first brewery and distillery in Ormiston. He also demonstrated the importance of the strong relationship between Cockburn and Wight. He described Andrew Wight as a tenant "with whom [John Cockburn] was in the regular practice of corresponding about country matters, and to whom he gave the most liberal encouragement."²³²

One of Andrew Wight's first forays into improvement was his promotion of the cultivation of flax, which he accomplished by obtaining "premiums from the Board of Trustees for encouraging its culture."²³³ It was in this way that Wight first demonstrated his commitment to land reform, and his ability to effectively foster improvement. Bannerman notes that he was rewarded with an "annual salary," which was highly unusual for a tenant farmer at the end of the eighteenth century.²³⁴ Bannerman noted Wight's involvement in establishing the first bleachfield in Scotland, which would later lead to problems for Wight. Before the construction of Ormiston's bleachfield, linens from Haddingtonshire had to be shipped to Holland for bleaching and dressing.²³⁵ Bannerman noted that the bleachfield was one of the most important leaps forward in the development of industry in the Lowlands.

Bannerman observed that the population of Ormiston began to fluctuate in the early nineteenth century. He wrote that "there seems to have been a gradual decrease in the population till 1810," which conflicts with Colvill's earlier assertion that the population had

²³² Ibid., 138.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

changed very little over the same period.²³⁶ Bannerman noted that, from then on, Ormiston's population experienced "a gradual increase, arising from the progressive agricultural improvement of the parish."²³⁷

Echoing the *First Statistical Account*, Bannerman observed that Ormiston's farmers and laborers were comparatively well situated. He wrote that "the great bulk of the people are contented and comfortable in their circumstances."²³⁸ He observed that "they are cleanly in their habits, respectful in their manners, industrious, and attentive to the ordinances of religion, and the education of their children."²³⁹ Following the tendency of other improvers, Bannerman attributed this to agricultural improvement, and specifically to Andrew Wight and John Cockburn.

Bannerman referred to Ormiston as "one of the earliest and best cultivated parishes in Scotland."²⁴⁰ Again, he attributed this to the work of John Cockburn and Andrew Wight. In what he called a "striking peculiarity," Bannerman noted that most of the perpetual, or long-term, leases set up by Cockburn and Wight in the 1780s were still held by the same families to which they had been initially granted.²⁴¹ He wrote that all tenants were "acquainted with the most improved modes of husbandry."²⁴² Decades of reform by organizations like the Commissioners of the Thirteen Annexed Estates and partitioners like Andrew Wight had made improvement the rule rather than the exception in Haddingtonshire. Both Bannerman's and Colvill's accounts of Ormiston demonstrate a relatively well-off population. They both praised John Cockburn, and decades of hindsight allowed Bannerman to credit Andrew

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 143.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

²⁴² *Ibid.*

Wight equally. By the mid-nineteenth century, the role of a middle-class partitioner was an easy topic of discussion.

Sinclair's Analysis

In his introductory explanation of “the advantages which Scotland has already derived from the statistical inquiries,” Sir John Sinclair listed six specific areas in which he had intended the enumeration to be successful.²⁴³ In doing so, he also contextualized the efficacy of his work. He noted the interaction between landowners and partitioners in driving Lowland agricultural improvement. He pointed out the importance of improving clergymen, like Colvill and Bannerman. He argued that certain ministers’ open commitment to improvement “induced [the government] to adopt measures for placing that most useful body of men in a more independent situation.”²⁴⁴ Sinclair was alluding to two things: a large Royal Grant presented to the clergy “for the benefit of their families,” and the implementation of laws “for the augmentation of their livings.”²⁴⁵ In other words, the clergy of Scotland received support for improvement of Kirk lands.

Sinclair claimed that the *First Statistical Account* facilitated this act, and that they in turn took up the mantle of improvement in Scotland. He noted that the *First Account*, and the “numerous facts therein contained,” functioned to prove the “decayed state of education in Scotland.”²⁴⁶ Sinclair wrote that the *Account* brought other grievances to light as well.²⁴⁷ For example, it revealed restrictions on farmers and millers. A great deal of a farmer’s crop could be “rigorously exacted” when the farmer was, “by a strange perversion of the law,” held

²⁴³ Sinclair, *Analysis*, 2.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

liable for unreasonable dues by partitioners.²⁴⁸ This was an abuse that, according to Sinclair, was stopped when it was brought to public attention by his enumeration.²⁴⁹ He carried this discussion on to include a fourth issue, that of a duty tax on coal moved inland from the coast. He pointed to the “miseries the tax occasioned,” and the eventual government action he believed was spurred by it. He also believed his *Account* proved the “practicability of obtaining an accurate statement of the population of a country.”²⁵⁰

In 1800, the Speaker of the House of Commons, Charles Abbot, brought forward a plan to conduct “a general census of Great Britain,” one which was soon thereafter “extended to Ireland.”²⁵¹ Sinclair argued that his enumeration had been an important catalyst for Abbot’s enumeration. He wrote that the *First Statistical Account* had placed the state of the empire “on a footing of certainty which it never before attained.”²⁵² Perhaps most importantly, Sinclair claimed that the main advantage of his enumeration was the foundation it laid.²⁵³ He emphasized that information from the *First Account* eventually enabled the improvement of industry, as well as the improvement of “the agricultural prosperity of the empire.”²⁵⁴ It is important to note that Sinclair includes England and the rest of the United Kingdom in his assessment, meaning that he believed the successes of his project were even influential in spheres of improvement outside Scotland.

Sinclair’s opinion of the part played by the *First Statistical Account of Scotland* in widespread agrarian reform is significant. As a tool for the express purpose of quantifying the impact of improvement in Scotland, it was something to which Sinclair and other

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ *Ibid.* Clare Wilkinson, “Abbot, Charles, first Baron Colchester (1757–1829),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

²⁵² Sinclair, *Analysis*, 5.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

improvers could point as evidence of the condition of Scottish agriculture. Furthermore, it could be made to represent the functionality, successes, and ease of implementation of agrarian improvement. In other words, it could be used as evidence of the many benefits of agricultural improvement.

CONCLUSION

Reverend Bannerman noted that Andrew Wight's early improvement activities were not limited to cultivation reforms. In conjunction with the creation of a bleachfield at Ormiston, he established a school for young girls that provided intensive instruction in linen spinning.²⁵⁵ He also founded a society "to disseminate a spirit for agricultural improvement," which included "noblemen, gentlemen, and farmers."²⁵⁶ The club, which met once a month to discuss questions of "rural or political economy," was one of the first of its kind in Scotland.²⁵⁷ It was active for decades after his death. Wight's involvement in agrarian improvement eventually gained him a rather high degree of notoriety, and he undertook multiple projects of his own accord.²⁵⁸

Wight is characteristic of the transitional phase that existed in Lowland Scotland in the late eighteenth century. He witnessed both pre-improvement traditions and well-established improvement patterns. His name is not mentioned in the *First Statistical Account*. However, by the mid-nineteenth century, his role was considered significant enough to warrant a detailed analysis in the *Second Statistical Account*. Attention to his role grew during the early decades of the nineteenth century, eventually putting him in the same category as John Cockburn and other improvers.

²⁵⁵ SSA, "Ormiston," 139.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 138-139.

²⁵⁷ Ibid. 139.

²⁵⁸ Young, "Experiment," 167.

Like other Lowland estate partitioners, Andrew Wight was an intermediary in the improvement processes that affected the Scottish Lowlands in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. He was familiar with traditional methods of husbandry and believed that improvement was universally beneficial. He benefitted personally from improvement, and he was as committed to it as the most vocal landowning improvers of his day. An effective partitioner like Wight was also a bulwark against resistance to agricultural improvement in the Lowlands. Court records demonstrate that there was indeed a degree of vocal resistance to improvement on the Thirteen Annexed Estates. These records demonstrate the importance of overseers in the improvement process. Thus the depiction of Lowland agrarian reform in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as “silent” is not quite correct.²⁵⁹ The influence of middle class improvers, like Wight, was great in Lowland Scotland, as was the relationship between landowner and partitioner. This relationship helped make agrarian reform a success. On the Thirteen Annexed Estates, consolidation of lands by enclosure enabled an increase in productivity. All of this was made possible by partitioners.

Improvement in other regions of Scotland has long been the focus of in-depth scholarship. Land reform in the Highlands, for example, occupies a significant place in Scottish history. Sweeping changes from the mid-eighteenth to the early nineteenth century resulted in the wholesale modernization of tenantry patterns and agricultural practices. In the Lowlands, men like Andrew Wight were responsible for these changes. Thus improvers in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scotland were not limited to the landowning class. Tenant farmers and ministers were also integral to the process.

²⁵⁹ See Aitchison, *Scotland's Silent Revolution*.

Tom Devine suggests that population loss as a direct result of land reform was most drastic in southern Lowland parishes.²⁶⁰ He focuses much of his work on Haddingtonshire and Lanarkshire, and he argues that dispossession in these zones was particularly widespread. Devine notes that on Ayrshire estates, “the reduction of small farms in upland districts was very extensive compared to the limited incidence of displacement elsewhere.”²⁶¹ This argument is supported by court records and by the *Statistical Accounts of Scotland*. However, Devine does not explore the role of partitioners and other middle class reformers who played such an important role in reforming Lowland land tenure and husbandry patterns and practices.

Agricultural improvement may in fact have been the most important development in Scotland’s transformation from a poor, largely peripheral country to an industrial world-leader. The sheer scale of reform in the Lowlands indicates its importance, and evidence from the *First* and *Second Statistical Accounts* further supports this by demonstrating just how dramatic the changes were. Neither urbanization nor industrialization could have developed as it did in nineteenth-century Scotland without a profound agrarian shift that enabled food and raw materials to be supplied to the growing manufacturing centers. Some scholars have gone so far as to argue that the dramatic agrarian processes that engulfed Scotland in the eighteenth century effectively changed the Lowlands into one of the most commercialized and enlightened parts of Britain.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ Devine, *Transformation*, 125-126.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 126.

²⁶² Ned C. Landsman, “Border Cultures, the Backcountry, and ‘North British’ Emigration to America.” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 48 (Third Series), No. 2 (April 1991), 255.

Over the span of a few decades, Scotland went from “one of the least urbanised societies” in Europe in the early eighteenth century, to one of the most.²⁶³ Scotland’s population in 1755 was 1,265,000. In 1801, despite large-scale emigration, the figure was 1,508,000. By 1821, the population had risen to 2,091,000, an increase of two-thirds over 1755.²⁶⁴ This was due, in large part, to the agrarian improvements of powerful Lowland partitioners.

As a recently defined and currently developing concept, there are a number of major issues that require further investigation regarding Lowland land reform. It is clear, however, that the role of an emerging middle class dedicated to improvement was significant. Partitioners played a particularly important role, one that has so far been unexplored. In fact, this is perhaps the most important distinction between land reform in the Lowlands and contemporary land reform elsewhere. Although they formed a somewhat nebulous interest group, improvers like Andrew Wight, Alexander Colvill, and James Bannerman were responsible for both implementing and documenting the improvements that led to massive changes in nineteenth-century Scotland.

²⁶³ Devine, *Transformation*, 34.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

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Vita

Joshua Haddix was born in Richmond, Virginia. He attended high school in Mariemont, Ohio. He enrolled at the University of Cincinnati in September 2004, graduating in 2009 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Anthropology and Linguistics. After graduation, he moved to New York City to take a position at an investigative due diligence firm. In the fall of 2011, Mr. Haddix accepted an assistantship at Appalachian State University as a graduate student in history.

In 2012, he received an international research grant to travel to Scotland to complete his work on Scottish agrarian reform. Mr. Haddix served as president of the Graduate History Student Association at Appalachian State University from 2012-2013. He was elected graduate senator, representing the History Department in Appalachian State University's Graduate Student Senate during the same period. He received his Master of Arts degree in May 2013 from Appalachian State University. He is a member of Phi Alpha Theta National History Honors Society.