



[The Pairc Deer Forest]

The Park Sheep Farm was originally set up in 1802 on a modest scale, and over the years it extended its borders from time to time until it covered an area of 44,000 acres of former crofters' land. The last lease of the Park Sheep Farm, to Patrick P. Sellar, terminated in 1883 and as another tenant could not be found for the farm, it was advertised as a sports deer park and was let as such to Joseph Platt, an English industrialist, in 1886.

In earlier times the sporting rights of the farm were held by the tenants of the sheep farm, and they in turn sublet the sport for a very high figure, sometimes earning in excess of the total rent they paid for the lease of the farmlands.

In 1878 a Mr Bonham Carter held the sporting rights of the farm for £1,000 and when his term ended the Platt family had it for two or three years. Then they were absent for three years, owing to the Eishkin Lodge, which was then a wooden building, being burnt down in 1883.

In 1884 a prefabricated wooden building was taken to Eishkin when the present stone lodge was in the course of construction, and two rooms were reserved for Mr & Mrs Platt's use. Thereafter the wooden building was occupied by one of the Estate employees.

When the present shooting lodge was ready in 1886 Joseph Platt returned and was the tenant of the sporting deer park until Lord Leverhulme sold the hitherto single estate of Lewis in lots in 1923 because he could not find a buyer for it as a single unit. The Platts bought the Eishkin sporting estate then at a bargain price. The relationship between the Platts and the people of Park was always cordial. It was the land-owning system and the land management policy of the Estate that the crofters maintained was manifestly wrong. Mrs Platt, whose maiden name was Thorneycroft, passed away in 1975.

Anticipating the expiry of the last lease of the Park Sheep Farm in 1883, some 32 landless families from Gravir, Calbost and Marvig petitioned the Lewis Estate for permission to re-occupy the former crofting townships of Steimreway and Orinsay. Nearly a year later the management of the Estate had not replied to the petitioners. They wrote again on 5th October 1882 and still no reply so they wrote again two and a half months later on 23rd December 1882, as follows:

Lady Matheson of the Lewis,

Honoured Lady, on behalf of a number of fishermen residing at Calbost, Marvig and Gravir, in the Parish of Lochs I beg leave most respectfully to send you herewith, copy of a petition addressed by us to your Ladyship, through Mr Mackay, Chamberlain of Lewis, last January, and to which we have had no reply. Trusting we may not be led to resort reluctantly to such steps as many of our unfortunate countrymen are forced to adopt.

May I take the liberty of asking that you be so good as to let the petitioners know your own views regarding the matter contained in the petition?

I have the honour to be, your Ladyship's obedient servant.

Kenneth Nicholson

Then came Lady Matheson's reply from her London residence at Cleveland Row, dated 3rd January 1883, as follows

Lady Matheson regrets that the above named respectable class of Lewis men should have been led to address her on a subject of such importance as that contained in the petition, by adding it to a letter which causes her to set aside their request.

Lady Matheson is too devoted to her Queen, and the laws which her Gracious Majesty is the representative, to listen for one moment to a petition accompanied by a threat by them to infringe the laws by which all are governed, and by the support of which, as individuals, the well-being of the land and its communities at large can alone be protected.

Then in 1886, the Lewis Estate converted the land use of Steimreway and Orinsay, comprising about 3,200 acres, into a grazing unit, and let it to Roderick Martin, the farmer of the viable farm of Crobeg, some 9 miles away on the shores of Loch Erisort.

In 1891, five years after Orinsay was attached to Crobeg farm as a grazing unit, some 18 landless men from Crossbost, land-raided Orinsay and they were arrested and imprisoned at Inverness.

Again in 1921, about 35 years after Orinsay was attached to Crobeg farm, both Orinsay and Steimreway were land-raided by landless Cottar families, and Orinsay was constituted into an official crofting township, but the establishment declined to acknowledge Steimreway as a crofting township.

The 44,000-acre Park Sports Deer Forest remains to this day in the occupation of absentee overseas landowners.

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