



THE ARKLETON TRUST

***THE PART-TIME HOLDING
— AN ISLAND EXPERIENCE***

by
James Shaw Grant
CBE

THE ARKLETON LECTURE 1983

**THE PART-TIME HOLDING
— AN ISLAND EXPERIENCE**

by
James Shaw Grant CBE

*Lecture given at the Arkleton Seminar on
“Part-time Farming — a Positive Factor in
Rural Development”, 16-23 October 1983*

THE ARKLETON TRUST

THE ARKLETON TRUST uses its resources for the study of new approaches to rural development with emphasis on education and training. It aims to promote dialogue between politicians, administrators and practitioners at all levels on the problems of Europe and the Third World.

The Trust's activities include the holding of high level seminars on specialised subjects of immediate relevance to Europe and/or the Third World and the collection and collation of relevant experience for its publications programme.

The Trust is not a grant making body and it supplements its limited resources in collaboration with other bodies which share its objectives. It is recognised as a charity by the United Kingdom Charity Commissioners.

Further information about the work of the Trust and copies of this report may be obtained from: The Arkleton Trust, Langholm, Dumfriesshire DG13 0HL, Scotland, UK.

The copyright in this report is vested in the Arkleton Trust. It may, however, be reproduced in whole or in part without written permission from the copyright holder provided that acknowledgement is made to 'The Arkleton Trust' and a copy of the publication is provided to the Trust.

CONTENTS

| | <i>PAGE</i> |
|---|-------------|
| PREFACE | 4 |
| THE PART-TIME HOLDING — AN ISLAND EXPERIENCE | 6 |
| APPENDIX 1 — The Lewis Association | 21 |
| APPENDIX 2 — The Highland Village Project | 24 |

PREFACE

The subject of the 1983 Arkleton Seminar was the role of part-time farming in rural development, with particular reference to the less favoured areas of Europe. As is now the custom, the Arkleton Lecture was given during the seminar to an invited audience which included the seminar participants. We were indeed fortunate that James Shaw Grant agreed to give the lecture on *The Part-time Holding — an Island Experience*.

James Shaw Grant is a household name in the Highlands and Islands, indeed in Scotland and beyond. Born in Lewis, in the Western Isles, he was closely associated with a publishing company which published the *Stornoway Gazette*, a paper which he edited for 30 years. He was also the Secretary of the Lewis Association, became a member and later Chairman of the Crofters Commission, was a part-time member of the Highlands and Islands Development Board from 1969 to 1980, was a member and later Chairman of the Harris Tweed Association and, furth of the Highlands, played an active part in the development of the Pitlochry Festival Theatre Company, later becoming its Chairman. Although never himself a crofter, he has had a lifetime's interest and involvement in the crofting areas.

It was a contributor to the *Stornoway Gazette* who once described a croft as a 'small plot of land surrounded by legislation'. Crofting is a form of land tenure unique to the Scottish Highlands and Islands. A mixture of individual and communal tenure, its protected status granted at the end of the nineteenth century has in effect maintained a dense pattern of small holdings the like of which is now almost unknown elsewhere in the UK. Visitors from the Third World recognise it, as do those from many parts of Continental Europe; to most people from Britain, however, it is a curiosity, apparently, although not in fact, a relic from the period prior to the enclosures in England or the clearances in Scotland, closer to the 'Fermtoun' than to modern commercial farming. Nevertheless, with these small holdings there has developed a system of part-time farming, perhaps better described as 'occupational pluralism', or by the French term 'pluroactivité', both on the croft (principally weaving) and off it (fishing, industry and services). The crofting experience, and in particular the Island crofting experience, therefore offers a unique laboratory for those interested in the relationships be-

tween part-time farming and the wider rural economy and society. In this lecture, James Shaw Grant argues the powerful social, cultural and economic role of the croft and crofter, beyond the mere confines of agriculture and, further, that the past and future role of the croft, and the policies which relate to that role, must not be seen only, or even mainly, within a purely agricultural context. It is important that these points are recognised for small scale and part-time farming more generally as we move into the twenty-first century.

Towards the end of his lecture, James Shaw Grant makes a particular proposal for a more permanent form of 'Plockton Seminar', to encourage interchange between administrators from the Third World and those involved with development problems in the Highlands and Islands. This is a proposal which lies close to the Trust's principal aims and interests, and we shall certainly examine the idea closely with those other organisations and individuals involved during the coming year.

The Trust is grateful to the MacRobert Trusts both for their financial support and for permitting us yet again to use their conference centre at Tarland, Aberdeenshire, as a venue both for the seminar and for the lecture.

John Bryden
Programme Director

THE PART-TIME HOLDING — AN ISLAND EXPERIENCE

Having regard to the relativity of all human affairs, I should begin by defining the position from which the experience is viewed.

I am speaking about a special form of small-holding — the croft, as defined by the UK Parliament in legislation, from the first Crofters Act of 1886 to the Act of 1976 which gave the crofter the right to purchase his holding on very favourable terms.

Legally a croft is defined by the tenure on which it is held. In practical terms it is distinguished by its location — in the seven northern counties of Scotland, on the periphery of an industrial society; often on the poorest land in the vicinity; and generally, but not necessarily, combining an element of communal with individual occupation and use of land.

Within crofting, and this is important, I am speaking only of the small part-time crofts, on poor land, found in Lewis and Harris and along parts of the western mainland coast. I am not speaking of areas where the land is naturally productive and crofts are, in effect, small family farms.

For my own standpoint: I am not a historian. I am not an agriculturalist. I am not a sociologist. I am not a statistician. I am not, and never have been a crofter. In fact I am not an expert on any aspect of the subject on which I am to speak. That is not an apology. In an odd sort of way, it might even be a boast. Anyway, it is a fact.

All my life I have been a close, but detached, observer of the crofting scene. Interested but not involved — except during the years when I was a member, and latterly chairman of the Crofters Commission.

At that stage my problem was how to use a restrictive and convoluted Act of Parliament to pursue a policy almost diametrically opposed to what those who had framed the legislation intended. The experience taught me that, difficult though crofters sometimes are, they are generally more realistic, and often more far-seeing, than those who seek to regulate their affairs. It was a wise old friend in the College of Agriculture who said to me once, "I never go out into the field without discovering that I have more to learn than to teach". It is with that learning process I

am primarily concerned, and with my own place in it as a student.

I first became aware of crofting when I was 11 or 12 years old. I was a town boy with no close relatives living on the land. I would have been isolated from nature, and natural forces, but for the fact that, from my earliest childhood, I was familiar with the sea and fishing.

Crofting made its impact when we moved house from one of the quiet streets, in the middle of the town, to the road which was planned by a wealthy proprietor as an elegant tree-lined approach to Lews Castle, but which also happened to be the shortest route between a dozen crofting villages, lying to the east of the town, and their 19,000 acres of general common pasture which lay to the west.

One morning, early in May, I was wakened by what was for a town-bred boy a startling commotion. I could hear the excited mooing of innumerable cows. The barking of dogs almost as numerous and even more excited. The shouting of men and women to the dogs, to the cows and to each other. And the steady tramp of many feet. On the road outside the house, spilling into the gardens, sometimes into the doorways, a sort of miniature Calgary stampede was taking place.

The human population, and the livestock, of a dozen townships was moving, like an organised but somewhat undisciplined army, from the cultivated area of the crofts to the summer grazings, or shielings, on the hill, where each township, and indeed each family, had its own special area, recognised and protected by custom, although in law they all had equal rights in the whole common, and had a joint committee to regulate its use.

The excitement of the cows was not entirely a reaction to the discomfort of being driven along hard and dusty roads. For the older cattle it was the animation of a remembered pleasure. School friends who spent their summer holidays at the shieling have assured me that the cows were as alert as they to the seasons and the signs of preparation. As conscious of the holiday. They were ready to move on the appointed day and, at the end of the summer, they would begin the trek back to the village on their own, as soon as they smelt the smoke of the bonfires in which the thatch and the bedding from the shielings were destroyed, for reasons which today we might classify as "environmental

health", but which, to the young folk of the shieling, was almost a ritual.

I have begun quite deliberately with this picture of the mass transhumance which was a characteristic feature of crofting when I first became aware of it. It is so different from anything that happens in the islands today.

When we talk about part-time holdings in any context — certainly in an island context — we are not speaking about small static parcels of land with which we can play about like pieces in a jig-saw puzzle. We are talking about living communities: dynamic, changing; subject to pressures which have nothing to do with agriculture; but imposing on other aspects of life constraints which arise from involvement in agriculture. Communities in which there is a very special relationship between the individual and his neighbours, regulated to some extent by statute, but to a very much greater extent by custom and consensus; and, of course, subject at times to the frictions and disruptions which are inevitable in any human situation. Perhaps it is in this area of human relations we have most to study and most to learn. I will come back to that later. In the meantime I merely want to emphasise the point I was making about change.

Shortly after I joined the Crofters Commission, the Chief Technical Officer and I walked across the old shieling ground, in the heart of a large general common pasture, in another of the islands. We could see the green patches marking the old shieling sites where the incidental presence of humans and cattle over the generations had permanently fertilised the soil. But there was no one resident in the shielings. There were no cattle on the hill. We became eerily conscious of the fact that there seemed to be an absence even of wild life: animal, bird or insect. No doubt it was in part imagination, exaggerating the stillness, but there was no mistaking the impression that we were witnessing a general decline in fertility, a form of degeneration, if not the actual death that we imagined.

In ecological terms crofting agriculture, as I came to know it first, was complete, cyclical and self-renewing. Even the sooty thatch from the houses was ploughed back into the land. It was a balanced system in which the best use was made of a poor environment and which safeguarded the long-term interest of the communities which occupied it, at the level of which the land

was capable. But it was not a system that could survive unchanged in an industrial society.

In particular it could not cope with the pressure of a growing population. At the time I am speaking of, over and above the crofters with their tiny, and often sub-divided, holdings there were several thousand squatters in Lewis. Families which had no legal right of any sort to the land they lived on. People without security or certainty, surviving on the periphery of the villages and the tolerance of their neighbours. A study of how the various crofting communities handled these pressures, outside the law and largely by ignoring it, might be instructive in the field of human relationships to which I have referred, but it would be difficult now to carry it out because that period in crofting has passed into history.

Almost as soon as I became aware of the existence of crofting, I became aware of some of the pressure that were making change inevitable.

First there was a decline in the fishing industry which traditionally provided the crofter's cash income. Then there was a gradual reversal, less noticeable but more pervasive, of the balance between town and country in the matter of living costs. There was the introduction of the Welfare State, easing the problems of the old, the sick and the unemployed, but imposing patterns on rural communities which had been devised for urban conditions. And there was the revolution in transport and communications which is still in progress, and which is a variable factor, producing plusses and minuses at different stages.

In Lewis the effect of the decline in the inshore fishing industry was all the more dramatic because it looked for a time as if it might be averted. Indeed reversed. Towards the end of the First World War, Lord Leverhulme, the Lancashire businessman who created Unilever, bought the Island of Lewis to develop it. His intention was philanthropic rather than commercial. He was looking for kudos rather than profit. His approach to the Lewis economy was relatively simple. "Acre for acre", he said, "the sea round Lewis is more productive than the land". He proposed to develop a sophisticated fishing industry. Spotter planes would locate the shoals. The herring would be canned instead of pickled. A nationwide chain of shops would sell the product. And it would be promoted by the sort of publicity which had made

Sunlight soap a household name. He planned to rebuild Stornoway as a model town complete even to the Art Gallery. He believed the crofters would desert their thatched houses and unprofitable holdings to occupy the comfortable cottages he had begun to build in town. I lived in one of them for many years and know how far ahead of their time they were.

The new town was never completed. Hardly even started. The spotter planes were never used. The cannery was abandoned almost as soon as it was built. The only permanent outcome of all Lord Leverhulme's grandiose scheme was a chain of fish shops throughout Britain with the improbable name of MacFisheries.

The advent of Lord Leverhulme presented Lewis with an apparent conflict between crofting and industry. Between the urban and the rural way of life. I say "apparent" advisedly. The most important lesson I learned, in retrospect, from the failure of Lord Leverhulme's attempt to industrialise Lewis was that the conflict between crofting and industry which he saw, and the government saw, and which wrecked his plans, did not exist. It was an illusion. A mental construct arising from a misapprehension of the relationship between the crofter and his land.

The generally accepted view is that the people of Lewis opposed Lord Leverhulme's schemes. That they did not want to be wage slaves in a factory. And that the great industrialist retired defeated leaving the humble crofters in possession of the field. That is a myth. A persistent myth. A misrepresentation of history which has had a malignant effect on the affairs of Lewis and of crofting ever since.

The people of Lewis saw no reason why they should not have their crofts and jobs as well, as they had always done since the boom days of the kelp industry. They did not think of crofting as idyllic. It was a hard and precarious life. They were not far removed at any time from the poverty line, and more frequently below it than above it. They regarded the occupation of land as the essential base of family and community life, but at the same time, they knew they could only survive if they had wage-earning employment as well.

Perhaps the most impressive demonstration of crofting opinion was given by the people of Uig when Lord Leverhulme announced that, because of government policy on land settlement, he was giving up his schemes in Lewis and concentrating his attention on Harris. Every able-bodied man in Uig signed a

petition asking that the parish should be disjoined from Lewis and added to Harris so that they could continue to benefit from the employment Lord Leverhulme offered.

The significant sequel to the collapse of Lord Leverhulme's schemes in Lewis was the biggest emigration in the history of the Western Isles. Within a single year three CPR liners sailed direct from Stornoway to Montreal with emigrants, mainly young unmarried men. In addition large numbers went as individuals, or in smaller groups, to the USA, Australia, New Zealand and South America. The departure of Lord Leverhulme was not a victory for crofting but a defeat. The crofters left the land not because Lord Leverhulme gave them jobs in a factory, but precisely because he did not.

Later assessments of the attitude of the crofters to Lord Leverhulme's schemes have been smudged by the fact that the relationship changed as soon as the schemes were abandoned. When Lord Leverhulme was providing jobs, the crofters had a real choice, and they supported him. Once he had withdrawn from the scene their natural antipathy to landlords re-asserted itself. Civil servants and historians can ponder the merits of hypothetical cases. The crofter, thinking of his own personal interest, was more acutely aware of the difference between a live lion and a dead duck.

The interesting thing is that Lord Leverhulme, who was so far ahead of his contemporaries in so many ways, missed two essential elements in the situation. Although he was the first to use motor transport on an extensive scale in Lewis — many a time as a youngster I ran a mile to see his fleet of yellow Fords — he failed to see that the advent of the bus made it possible for the crofter to live in the country and work in the town. His policy of urbanising the island was unnecessary and mistaken. He also asserted that the day of the cottage industry was over. He did not foresee that his own introduction of the Hattersley automatic loom to the islands would enable the weaving of Harris Tweed to flourish as a cottage industry, serving a world-wide market, sixty years after he was dead.

When Lord Leverhulme abandoned Lewis, the crofting villages seemed doomed to a steady decline and eventual extinction. The land by itself could not support the population. It could not support a tithe of the population. The jobs to supplement the land were no longer there, or even in prospect. The young folk

were emigrating en masse. The social life of the island was in disarray. Morale was low. Although we did not know it at the time, the next census figures were to show an over-all drop of more than 11%. And, more importantly were to reveal a grossly unbalanced population, both in sex and age distribution, presaging problems which are with us still. And yet, just six years after the first of the emigrant liners sailed from Stornoway, the social value of the croft was demonstrated in the most dramatic way possible. The Wall Street crash of 1929 showed that large scale industry is more fragile than crofting. Within a decade of their departure from Lewis, with high hopes of prosperity in the New World a small but significant proportion of the emigrants returned. They had learned that it was easier to survive on the croft than in the bread line.

This leavening of men and women who had worked abroad for a number of years provided a yeast which helped to bring about change within the island. That was important, but much more important for me was the message that crofting, which I had seen as a hang-over, an anachronism, had enduring values I had not previously recognised.

The question which has nagged me since is this: how far has the extension of the social services removed the need for the cushion which crofting provided in the crash of 1929? The position of those out of work in Britain then was much harsher than it is today. Conditions in America were harsher still. Has the experience of the Great Depression, which has helped to form my views of crofting, any validity now?

I think it has. The effects of unemployment cannot be alleviated wholly by unemployment benefit. Just as important as cash is having a purpose in life. Being part of an organic community. Not an outcast. Not a discard. The great virtue of the part-time holding in times of industrial depression is that it leaves the unemployed with things they can do to help themselves. The effect on their income may be minimal. In strict commercial terms it might even be negative. But at least it gives one an occupation. A purpose. The chance to fight back. Or the illusion of fighting back.

When I had a small printing business in Stornoway several of my employees were crofters. I used to say they got their pay packets from me but their status from the activities in the crofting villages where they lived. This question of status, of activities

outwith one's employment will become increasingly important as the working week gets shorter and shorter.

This is a speculative field. I know I am theorising. But there is evidence to support my thesis that status and occupation are as important as cash. While I was preparing this address "The Scotsman" published a report on the work of Stephen Platt, a sociologist with the Medical Research Council in Edinburgh.* He has found that unemployed people are eleven times more likely to commit suicide than those in work. The long-term unemployed are nearly twice as likely again.

There are complicating factors, of course. In the depression of the thirties suicide rates for those out of work were at an all time high, but the suicide rate among the retired also increased. It might be argued from this that economic uncertainty rather than unemployment *per se* is the cause. Platt does not fully accept this argument. He is also sceptical of the argument that parasuicides and the unemployed are linked by personality disorders which make it difficult for them to hold down jobs. He believes quite simply that unemployment lies at the root of the problem.

Even if unemployment is only part of the problem, it seems to me that the man who can busy himself cutting peats, or growing crops, or handling stock, is less likely to be depressed, less likely to feel that his life has no meaning, than a man who has empty days to fill in the back streets of an industrial town.

Further confirmation of my thesis can be found in a comparison carried out in 1975 between the mental health of North Uist women and women in the London borough of Camberwell. In a paper delivered in 1978 at a Conference on Island and Coastal Communities Dr Una Maclean, who supervised the 1975 study, said it showed quite conclusively "that North Uist women had less depression than their Camberwell sisters. Over the course of the year prior to the interviews only 8% of island women could be categorised as being depressed in a psychiatric sense as compared with 15% of Camberwell women".† Even more significant was the finding that, within North Uist, cases of depression were four times more frequent among women who lived in council houses than among those who followed the traditional crofting pattern on the land. At the same time the Island women

* "The Scotsman" issued dated August 2nd, 1983, page 9.

† The Fraser of Allander Institute Research Monograph Number 9, "Island and Coastal Communities", paragraph 85.

showed greater signs of what might be called normal anxiety. They were deeply involved in the welfare of their families — apprehensive that something might go wrong.

I see no reason, in the light of these reports, to abandon the conclusion that my own experience of life in the islands has led me to. Whatever the economic and administrative problems of crofting, it has a social and sociological value which should give pause to those who seek to destroy it, or who see no virtue in enabling it to survive. And I believe it will survive, well into the future unless it is destroyed either as a deliberate act of governmental vandalism, or by inadvertence and well-intentioned stupidity.

What then are the main problems of crofting today in the areas I have delineated?

The answer must be that they have nothing to do with crofting as such, and little to do with agriculture, although there are agricultural problems. The basic problem is still, as it was in Lord Leverhulme's day, lack of industrial employment, or employment in the service industries within reach of the crofts. No one will now make the mistake of thinking that industrial employment is "impossible side by side with crofting", but it is still possible to make the contrary mistake of thinking that agricultural improvements by themselves can make a significant contribution towards a permanent solution of the crofting problem. There are some traces of this persistent error in the Integrated Development Programme for the Western Isles.

As far as one can foresee at the moment, the IDP will make a valuable contribution to the development of fish farming, which is one of the natural growth industries for the area. It will also help to improve the general infrastructure. It is already leading to a resumption of the land improvement work carried out by the crofters in the sixties, with the help of the College of Agriculture and the Crofters Commission, working closely together. The IDP is welcome, as anything which ameliorates conditions in the area, however marginally, must be welcome. But it is still approaching the problem from the wrong end.

The weakness of the IDP does not lie within crofting. It does not lie with the team which is striving to implement the programme. It lies with the politicians at different levels, right back to Brussels, who still believe in the efficacy of high-sounding names.

The IDP has value. Great value. As the land improvement drive in the sixties had value. But it is in sustaining morale, keeping alive the seed of self-help, rather than providing permanent solutions.

Lord Leverhulme's aphorism still holds the key to the Lewis problem. Acre for acre the sea is more productive than the land, despite the damage human greed has done to the herring fishery, and threatens to do to the stock of mackerel as well. Paradoxically, more could have been achieved for crofting in Lewis, on a permanent basis, by a regional policy for fisheries than by all the money being spent on agriculture through the IDP.

Lewis and the Western Isles in general have suffered greatly through the folly of successive governments in negotiating for a fisheries policy within the EEC on a national instead of a regional basis. Given the existence of a European community, there is no good reason, in equity or commonsense, why a fisherman from Fleetwood or Grimsby should have precedence in Hebridean waters over a fisherman from Hamburg or Brest. There is, however, an irrefutable case for giving a greater degree of protection to fishermen resident in the Hebrides and the North of Scotland generally. And there are good international precedents for doing it. The folly was in failing to realise that more could have been achieved for the nation, within the EEC, by protecting regional interests, than could possibly be achieved for the regions by protecting national interests.

We must look even further from the croft than fishing, however, to find the root cause of the crofting problem. Fishing and fish-processing, and all other industries which could provide off-the-croft employment face problems of their own. Problems of remoteness. Physical remoteness and political remoteness. Remoteness from the industrial centres of Britain, and the ports through which imported goods enter the country, are reflected in the high cost of living. In the high costs of developing. Political remoteness is an artificial constraint, arising from the excessive centralisation of government and the multiplicity of layers of decision-making which have been erected between the problem and its solution.*

The existence of a body like the Highlands and Islands Development Board is an acknowledgement of the existence of the problem. It is also a valuable contribution towards its ameliora-

* See Appendix 1 on The Lewis Association.

tion. But it is not a solution. However successful the Board is in identifying development opportunities, providing capital and training, buildings and equipment, giving assistance with promotion and marketing, every enterprise set up has still to pay the penalty of remoteness, and will go on paying it long after any injection of grants and loans has been exhausted. Moreover the penalty of remoteness has been artificially increased by the quite deliberate act of Government in charging VAT on transport and distribution costs. In theory VAT is a tax to promote efficiency. In reality it is an added burden on those who are already geographically disadvantaged.

The solution of the crofting problem requires more than the input of money into agriculture. More than the input of money into industry. It requires a fundamental change in the balance between the urban and rural areas. In particular it requires a more flexible approach to taxation, and the operation of the social services.

It is not likely we will ever achieve such a radical solution. But, if we did, what would the position of crofting be?

Many people are deeply concerned about the neglect of crofting land. I am sometimes sad myself when I visit villages I knew in my youth. I have a picture of them in my mind — tilled from the edge of the sea to the boundary fence, a tidy, changing pattern of ordered use. Now some of them look unkempt, neglected, despite the fine new houses and gardens which are springing up. The contrast is a misleading one. The real comparison is not with the use that was made of the land sixty years ago, when poverty was the great dictator, but with the use of similar land, on large estates, in the same area today. The neglected appearance of so much crofting land is not a reflection of current under-use, but of too intensive use in the past, when land was put under the plough, or rather the spade, which no one who had freedom of choice would ever have broken in.

If there was plenty of off-the-croft employment, and a reasonable balance between the cost of living in town and country, there would be no need to drum up interest in agriculture through schemes like the IDP. People could be left to make their own decisions with no greater subsidy than is available to farming in general. That would be a very much healthier, and more rational approach to land use in the crofting areas than the system that pertains today when people are encouraged by grants

and subsidies to do things that are sometimes agriculturally absurd.

If we are to continue with a system of grants for specific operations on the land we must ask ourselves whether, in many crofting areas, we would not get better land use, and a greater benefit to the nation, if we grant-aided amenity planting on the in-bye land to improve the appearance of the villages. The cost to the state would be the same. The effect on the crofters' income would be much the same. But instead of a dubious and uneconomic increase in agricultural output, we would have a general uplift both for the permanent resident and the passer-by.

When I was Chairman of the Crofters Commission we carried out a modest experiment in encouraging school children in crofting areas to improve the appearance of their villages. The response was impressive. The children showed imagination and diligence. Eventually the scheme ran under curriculum pressures, dictated by an over-all national policy quite unrelated to the needs of the crofting areas. But, at least, it lasted long enough to show that the potential and the will were there. This is a subject to which more thought should be given, and I can think of no better organisation to pursue it than your own.

Two important points would, I think, emerge from such a study: the damage done by a misguided obsession with conformity in centralised educational systems, and the importance of private money — free money! — in breaking down bureaucratic barriers.*

It is the prerogative of retired people like myself, who no longer carry responsibility, to speak of ideal and hypothetical solutions. Those who are still charged with responsibility have, unfortunately, to make do with the instruments that are politically available to them. Can I toss in a thought which might, perhaps, alter the political perspective, if we could get it across?

The problems of crofting may be insoluble in terms of practical politics, but, if we look at them in the right way, we may find that they themselves are a resource. A resource of the nation, indeed of the Western World, and so, potentially, a resource of the region.

In the past few years I have been involved in a Seminar for senior administrators from the Third World studying at British

* See Appendix 2 on the Highland Village Scheme and the Macaulay (Rhodesia) Trust.

Universities. A group of 25 or 30 is gathered each year at Plockton in Wester Ross by the British Council, the ODA and the Highland Board. The purpose of the Seminar is to examine problems of mutual interest, using the Highlands and Islands as a case study and a laboratory. Each year I have been struck by the repetition of the same pattern of reactions.

There has always been a special — an intense — interest in crofting. The land is basic everywhere. Crofting is an unusual form of tenure. Almost eccentric. But it carries resonances of a tribal pattern of land-holding from which many of the countries represented at the Seminar are only now evolving.

There has always been an element of surprise at the discovery that Britain is not wholly urbanised. There has been pleasure in the relaxed atmosphere of an area free from racial and colour prejudice, and with a tradition of hospitality. Every year several of the participants have said to me, "I have been studying in Britain for a year, but this is the first time I have been inside a British home".

Even more relevant to the point I am making is the sudden realisation that this, as the name implies, is really a United Kingdom: a composite and diverse, not a monolithic structure. And above all the discovery that there are parts of the UK which share with them a history of colonial or quasi-colonial exploitation, and where people speak of development problems in a language they understand. The fact that there are parts of Britain which have clambered out of real poverty, and primitive housing, within the lifetime of my own generation they see as a hope and a challenge.

The strongest card Britain has in dealing with the Third World is not that it is a burnt-out empire, but that it is a peaceful union of diverse nations, regions and cultures, some of which share with the Third World a common historical experience, and so can speak to them in a manner in which London, or the prosperous south-east corner of England, never can.

The ebb and flow of Scottish Nationalism, the running sore of Northern Ireland do not invalidate my thesis. The failures and errors merely highlight the over-all success. The UK with all its faults represents one of the great reconciliations of history. We take it for granted, but it is important that the emergent nations of the Third World — themselves, many of them, deeply divided culturally, linguistically and genetically — should see what we

have achieved, and where we have fallen short.

If the activities of the British Council, and the ODA, mean anything, they are part of a battle for the hearts and minds of other nations. We are at a disadvantage in Britain in that we do not have a revolutionary doctrine to preach: a vivid message that promises an unattainable millenium. But we have something much more important — a practical lesson in the achievement of political stability after centuries of hate and bloodshed, both within the UK and in the EEC. We can also offer a practical example of the conquest of poverty in areas which were, and to some extent still are, subject to a form of quasi-colonial exploitation. These achievements can be demonstrated in the remoter areas, with all their current problems, in fact, because of their current problems, in a manner in which they cannot be demonstrated in the great centres of industrial and political power. It is in islands like the one I have been talking of that one can best speak to the emergent nations about their problems in a relaxed, a hospitable and an egalitarian atmosphere, and against the background of a shared experience. That is no small service to offer to the Western World.

That is what I mean when I say that the problems ofcrofting, and other rural problems, are in an odd, but very real sense, a national resource. A resource which, in the better meaning of the word should exploited.

The Plockton Seminar, which I have used as an example, is a fragile plant. It is peripheral to the interests of the Highland Board, and it makes considerable demands on the time of Board Staff. It is even more peripheral to the British Council and the ODA. Despite the British Council's regional offices it is essentially London-based and urban-orientated.

There is, I believe, a strong case for encouraging more administrators from the developing countries to participate in seminars of that sort, while at the same time trying to reduce the very heavy demand that would make on the time of people primarily engaged in other tasks. That implies the establishment of some form of institute — if that is not too grandiose a word — some form of organisation, more permanent than a one week *ad hoc* seminar, such as we have at present. An organisation capable of attracting international attention, to which people would come as much for the opportunity of discussion with other visitors, as for the opportunity of seeing the Highland problem at first hand.

What I am talking of is, I suppose, the sort of progeny one might expect from a mating between the Arkleton Trust and the government-sponsored Plockton seminar.

These ideas will not be popular in certain quarters. It is difficult to persuade those who exercise authority in conventional terms that there are other forms of power than theirs: more diffuse but more pervasive; less aggressive but more enduring, to be found in small towns and rural villages. In what are often regarded as backward areas.

However difficult it may be, it is worth the effort, both for our own sake and for the sake of the emergent nations of the world.

One of the major problems confronting us is how to diffuse power without creating anarchy. How to build a just and equal society without bureaucratic conformity.

The seminal thinking on this problem is much more likely to come from the periphery than the centre.

APPENDIX 1 — The Lewis Association

A pioneer attempt to overcome the problems of political remoteness was made in Lewis in 1943 when the Lewis Association was set up "to survey and study the social and economic needs of the Island and to draw up progressive plans of development". The Association was non-political but was prepared to use political means to make its voice heard.

The initial impetus came from the Managing Director of one of the largest of the Harris Tweed manufacturers — the son of a crofter and himself a fisherman in his early days. The Association was, however, given its distinctive shape and its constitution by the first chairman, Rev. Ian Carmichael, a Gaelic-speaker from Lismore who was a minister in Stornoway at the time, and who had had considerable experience of welfare work in industry, and had been for some years vice convener of one of the largest local authorities in Scotland.

Carmichael saw the Association as a "Royal" Commission on the affairs of the island with the people of Lewis as the members of the Commission. The Association was open to anyone resident in the island who was prepared to pay the annual subscription of one guinea. A list of the social and economic problems which could be identified was drawn up by the Executive Committee and approved by the full Association. The problems were then studied one by one in order of urgency. The first stage in each investigation was to list the information the committee required before it could reach a valid conclusion. Carmichael wanted to avoid the risk of plucking remedies out of the air and then casting round for arguments to support them, which, he said, was the common practice in local authorities. When the facts had been gathered, the Social or Economic Committee, as the case might be, prepared a report which was then submitted to a full meeting of the Association. When approved, it was circulated to government departments and the press.

The main reports published by the Association were: A General Economic Survey; Town Planning; Rural Planning; External Transport; Harris Tweed; Public Health; Internal Transport; Fishing; and Agriculture. Shorter papers were published on the proposals for a National Health Service; Hydro Electric Development; the demobilisation problems confronting Lewis servicemen; the Water (Scotland) Bill; the National Insurance

Scheme and a proposal to reclaim a large area of tidal land for agriculture. The Association also published a detailed rebuttal of what was regarded as an offensive and misleading book about the island by a writer of popular travelogues.

The Association had a good press. Both "The Scotsman" and the "Glasgow Herald" commented favourably on the reports in leading articles. The "Saltire Society News Letter" welcomed the Association as "a rare example of local initiative". The "Fabian Quarterly", making the same point, added that it was "pleasantly free from that form of local megalomania which sometimes mars otherwise praiseworthy local efforts". Neil Gunn saw it as a manifestation of "the only spirit which can truly build and enrich social life".

The Association did not achieve much in the way of concrete results but the reports stand up well to the passage of time. They anticipated a number of significant developments which subsequently took place, like the setting up of a local authority for the Western Isles which has had a stimulating effect on the whole life of the area. They also identified, before they arose, a number of problems which are still unresolved, such as the anomalous position of Harris Tweed weavers under the National Insurance legislation.

The great majority of those who took an active part in the work of the Association were natives of Lewis, and several of those who did not belong to the island were Gaelic-speakers from similar areas. Most of them were professional or business men but a high proportion had been brought up on a croft.

Rather surprisingly the language issue was not raised in any of the Association's reports. The general view seemed to be that the important thing was to get the economic and social base right and the language would look after itself. The position of Gaelic has deteriorated dramatically in the intervening forty years and it is now argued convincingly that a local language is itself a development tool.

The most controversial issue the Association handled was Harris Tweed where there was a sharp conflict between competing commercial interests. The Association faced up to the conflict, but lost one of its founder members in the process. Although there is some good material in the report on Harris Tweed it stand up less well than some of the others to the passage of time. The Association's view was influenced by war-time

scarcities, and there have been subsequent changes in the structure of the industry.

At its peak the Association had around 250 members, most of them full members resident in Lewis, but there was a small number of associate members who received reports but did not participate in their formulation. The associate members included, among others, Sir Frank Fraser Darling and Charles Cadzow of the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society. At one stage the Association established a useful dialogue with the Tennessee Valley Authority.

The Association was wound up in 1954. There were several reasons for this. Most important was that the Association had lost a high proportion of the key members by death or removal from the area, and failed to attract the younger men coming home from war service who found an outlet in more direct political activity.

The situation in the islands is now fundamentally different because of the existence of Comhairle nan Eilean — the Western Isles Islands Authority — which has much greater resources both for investigating local problems and doing something to solve them, than any voluntary organisation possibly could, but the question remains whether the technique devised by the Lewis Association still has validity.

APPENDIX 2 — The Highland Village Project

In 1965 the owner of a West Highland estate generously offered £5,000 to the Crofters Commission to finance an experiment in afforestation by crofters. It was found, however, that crofters were ineligible for the grants which the Forestry Commission made to encourage private planting, and crofting tenure inhibited the growing of trees for commercial purposes. With the consent of the donor, the Commission applied the fund instead to encouraging secondary schools in the crofting areas to carry out schemes for the improvement of the village environment.

The aim was to encourage the pupils to devise their own schemes and carry them out. There was no element of competition between the schools. No attempt to test the unaided ability of the pupils. They had to take the initiative, but they were encouraged to seek technical guidance wherever they could get it.

Twelve schools submitted satisfactory proposals and each was given £400 to help carry out its project. They were free to raise funds elsewhere if they could, and one at least got a substantial sum from a local authority which would not have supported a project of that nature if it had not come to them from their own school children. The largest school taking part in the scheme — Inverness High School — had 1,432 pupils on the secondary roll. The smallest — Happyhansel in Shetland — had 15.

Among the projects carried out were the creation of two folk museums; the laying out of public parks and gardens; a nature trail; a childrens' playground; the restoration of an old "Norse" mill, and the laying down of a car park for a small craft shop.

The Scottish Civic Trust awarded each of the participants a commemorative plaque because of the quality of their work, and the British Tourist Authority made an award for the over-all scheme.

The scheme was continued with finance from HIDB but the level of input and achievement dwindled because of a change in the curriculum of rural Highland Schools.

This raises the question whether the education of children in rural communities is prejudiced by the imposition of a curriculum devised for urban conditions. The normal response to that suggestion is that children in rural schools must not be denied the educational opportunities which are open to other children. The

denial of opportunity which would arise from the operation of a different curriculum is not, however, inherent in the educational process. It arises from the examination structure which regulates the issue of certificates and admission to higher education, and the rigidity of that structure is a bureaucratic, not an educational requirement.

It is significant, too, that the Crofters Commission, even during the period when the scheme was viable within the curriculum, could only operate it because of a gift from a private individual. Although the Commission is a statutory body with a wide remit to promote the interests of crofters, it is so tightly bound by the rule of "ultra vires" and treasury control, that it could not devote a miniscule sum to an experiment the results of which were endorsed by the Chief Inspector of Schools for the North and Highland Division, who wrote "I should very much like to see continued the special educational merits of the scheme, challenge without competition, linkage of school and community in common effort, availability of expert advice to schools as they link theory with practice, financial assistance for bigger projects, commitments which continue". *

The importance of private funds in breaking through administrative barriers can be seen in other aspects of island life. The Outer Isles Fishery Training Scheme operated by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, and which was, in effect the pilot project for the very much more ambitious schemes of fishery development inaugurated by the Highlands and Islands Development Board, was dependent on funds contributed by the Macaulay (Rhodesia) Trust and the Highland Fund. Indeed the initiative came from the Macaulay Trust, established under the will of a Lewisman who died in Rhodesia, and operated by Barclays Bank on the advice of a local committee.

* "Highland Village 1970." published by the Crofters Commission.

ARKLETON TRUST PUBLICATIONS

EDUCATING FOR THE YEAR 2000 — AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

Report of a seminar held in Scotland 1978.

A4 40pp price £1.50 U.S. \$3.50 including postage

THE WORK OF THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS DEVELOPMENT BOARD WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE ROLE OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The Arkleton Lecture 1978 by Prof. Sir Kenneth Alexander.

A4 28pp price £1.50 U.S. \$3.50 including postage

DISADVANTAGED RURAL EUROPE — DEVELOPMENT ISSUES AND APPROACHES

Report of a seminar held in Scotland 1979.

A4 48pp price £1.50 U.S. \$3.50 including postage

French edition also available

THE AGRICULTURAL POTENTIAL OF MARGINAL AREAS

The Arkleton Lecture 1979 by Prof. J.M.M. Cunningham.

A4 24pp price £1.50 U.S. \$3.50 including postage

RURAL PRODUCTION COOPERATIVES IN SOUTHERN ITALY

by Giuliano Cesarini.

A4 80pp including five colour plates price £4.50 U.S. \$10.00

including postage.

SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL IN EDUCATION TOO

The Arkleton Lecture 1980 by J.G. Morris.

A4 24pp price £2.00 U.S. \$4.50 including postage

RURAL DECLINE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM — A THIRD WORLD VIEW

A report by a Third World Group on three rural development programmes in the U.K.

A5 32pp price £2.00 U.S. \$4.50 including postage

CAN EDUCATION CHANGE RURAL FORTUNES?

Report of an international seminar held in Scotland in 1980.

A5 44pp price £2.00 U.S. \$4.50 including postage

*OUR OWN RESOURCES — COOPERATIVES AND
COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL
CANADA*

Report of a study tour by Roger Clarke.

A5 84pp price £2.50 Can. \$5.75 including postage

*RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN LEWIS AND HARRIS — THE
WESTERN ISLES OF SCOTLAND*

A commentary by Keith Abercrombie on a seminar held in Scotland in 1980 by the international advisory committee of the Arkleton Trust.

A5 32pp price £2.00 U.S. \$4.50 including postage

*SCHEMES OF ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS IN LESS
FAVOURABLE AREAS OF THE EEC*

Background paper for the 1982 Arkleton Seminar on institutional approaches to rural development in Europe.

A4 72pp price £2.75 including postage

*BIBLIOGRAPHY ON COMMUNITY AND RURAL
DEVELOPMENT IN EUROPE*

The Bibliography of abstracts includes approximately 1,700 references classified by subject. The period covered is 1978 to 1981. Published material from both East and West Europe is included.

A4 258pp price £4.75 including postage

*PEOPLE AND POLICIES IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT —
INSTITUTIONAL PROBLEMS IN THE FORMULATION
AND IMPLEMENTATION OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT
POLICIES IN THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY*

The Arkleton Lecture 1982 by Michael Tracy.

A5 56pp price £2.75 including postage

*SERVOL AND ITS EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES IN TRINIDAD AND
TOBAGO, WEST INDIES: AN OBSERVATION*

Report of a study tour by Angela Morrison

A5 80pp £2.75 including postage

*INSTITUTIONAL APPROACHES TO RURAL
DEVELOPMENT IN EUROPE*

Report of a seminar held in Scotland from 17-22 October 1982
A5 60pp £2.75 including postage

*DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTIONS AND APPROACHES IN
THREE RURAL AREAS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM*

Report of the 1982 Study Tour of Mid-Wales, the Western Isles,
and the Grampian Region of Scotland by a Third World Group
A5 104pp £3.75 including postage

Ref: 84/1/E Price £2.00 (including postage)

Published by the Arkleton Trust at Arkleton, Langholm, Dumfriesshire DG13 0HL,
Scotland, UK.

Printed by John G. Eccles Printers Ltd., Inverness.