

Book Review

by Charles Hunter, Oban

STRONEFIELD AND OTHER DESERTED KNAPDALE TOWNSHIPS

By Jean C. MacLeod

Jean C. MacLeod* has drawn on a profusion of historical records to examine the history of the Mid-Argyll peninsula of Knap and specifically the remote settlement of Stronefield during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, until the lands were deserted in the twentieth. The 'four merk land' of Stronefield was recorded as part of the Campbell lands of Kilmorie from 1567; the Knap estate was subsequently owned by several Campbell families including the Campbells of Inverneill from the late 1700s.

Jean is interested in all aspects of the lives of the generations of ordinary people who subsisted on the land, but left little trace of their names. The 1841 census records that Stronefield then had 28 inhabitants, mostly McAlpines and McKellars. The numbers declined gradually until by 1901 only one family of seven incoming McLachlans had replaced the Brodies in the farmhouse. Jean finds no evidence that Stronefield was forcibly 'cleared' in mid-century and no specific grievances relating to Stronefield were aired to the Napier Commission when it took evidence at Tarbert in 1883. The slow decline in the number of people living on the land continued, here as elsewhere, into the twentieth century, and the reasons are closely examined.

Although specifically about Stronefield, Knapdale, this study is relevant to a much wider audience; the same factors that affected Stronefield also affected many other rural townships in the Highlands.

This is a fine example of the history of a place, rather than of any one family. Traces of the buildings are photographed in full colour and the report has been beautifully produced in A4 format and published, as part of the wide-ranging Dalriada Project, by the Natural History and Antiquarian Society of Mid Argyll (NHASMA). It is available from the Argyll Book Centre, Lochgilphead and from Kilmartin Museum.

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