Horses of the Two Harvests

The horse-power of Tiree

Tiree and Coll Gaelic Partnership, 2010

Introduction

For 1,500 years (from around 500AD to the 1950s) horses were the 'motor' of Tiree's economy - used to bring seaweed from the shore to manure the ground; to pull the ploughs and harrows cultivating the fields; and to pull heavy loads, such as stones for a wall or hay from the field.

Were the horses doing all the work? You could say that the horses were keeping the crofters on their crofts! If they didn't have any horses, how could they have done all their work? (Donald MacIntyre talking to Maggie Campbell, AC391).

Between 1870 and 1939 Tiree also became an important horse breeding centre and young Clydesdale horses became the island's most profitable export.

Horses also held a central part in the culture of the island. Literally, the speed at which horses moved dictated the pace of island life.

Moving hay (S67)

History

We don't know when the first horses came to Tiree. Wild horses roamed wild on the Scottish mainland after the last Ice Age 11,000 years ago. However, being an island, horses could only have been brought to Tiree by man.

Horses were probably first domesticated in Central Asia around 2,000 BC. Although we think of horses today as mainly being used in farming, they were originally used in warfare and transport. Julius Caesar invaded the south of Britain in 55 BC with several units of cavalry and was met by British tribes with horsemen of their own. Ploughing, on the other hand, was done with teams of oxen in Iron Age and Roman Britain.

Iron Age

No horse bones were found in the excavation of the Iron Age broch at Vaul, *Dùn Mòr Bhalla*, which was occupied from 500 BC to 300 AD, while the archaeologists found numerous remains of cattle, sheep and even deer and seals. Neither were there any remains of a horse harness, plough or cart. At the same time there were many signs from impressions of the grain on the clay pots that barley was being grown. This implies fields but these would probably either have been dug by hand or cultivated with a primitive plough pulled by a team of up to eight cattle.

The Gaels

St. Columba, sailed from Ireland and settled on Iona in 563. He later established another monastery on Tiree.

An account of St. Columba's life mentions horses four times (*Life of St. Columba*, Adomnán of Iona, Penguin, 1995) and is one of the earliest written sources we have on the use of horses on the west coast of Scotland. In one miracle a young man is riding across a river in Ireland (*ibid* p. 160), in another "*the saint was still speaking when two men* [arrived] *on horseback*" (*ibid* p. 181). In an account of the saint's death "*a white horse came to him, the loyal work-horse which used to carry the milk pails from the buaile* [fank] *to the monastery* (*ibid* p. 227)". The saint also rebuked a man doing penance with the words "*But the time will come when in the company of thieves in the forest you will eat the flesh of a stolen mare* (*ibid* p. 128)."

The Vikings

The Vikings arrived on Tiree around 800 AD. Horse bones are commonly found at Viking sites in Scotland (*Vikings in Scotland,* Graham-Campbell and Batey, EUP, 1998), and it is probable that horses became more common on the island after this time. We know of at least one from the place name *Ròsdal* in Greenhill, which probably comes from the Old Norse words *hross* and *dalr*, meaning horse field.

These early horses (today we would call them ponies) stood around 12-13 hands high. Their closest relative today is the Eriskay pony.

The Hebridean breed of horses…is small, active and remarkably durable and hardy…strong and nimble, of a good form and proper size for its work, healthy, patient, good-tempered, and very easily kept in good condition…The average height of what are deemed sizeable horses is from 12 to 13 hands, but that of the lower tenants…rarely exceeds 11 or 12 hands. They are handsomely shaped, have small legs, large manes, little neat heads and manifest every symptom of activity and strength. The common colours are grey, bay and black; the last mentioned colour is the favourite (*General View of the Agriculture of the Hebrides,* James MacDonald, 1811, p. 469).

The earliest horses on Tiree are likely to have been similar to the Eriskay pony
(photo courtesy of www.eriskaypony.org.uk)

It has been believed locally that horses on board the Armada introduced Spanish traits to the Tiree horses.

There is a local tradition that the particular breed of horses was, like certain traits of physiognomy observable among the people, a consequence of the Spanish Armada (Outer Isles, A. Goodrich Freer, Archibald Constable, 1901, p.25)

This idea is given short shrift by MacDonald: S*ome people fancy that the breed of horses in Mull and in Tyree has been modified by an intermixture with Spanish horses cast ashore on these coasts in 1588 on board the Florida, a ship of the line belonging to the Armada and which was destroyed in the harbour of Tobermory in Mull. But this seems to be mere conjecture for we have no accounts of any horses having been saved*

from the ships of that fleet; and even though some had escaped and had been divided among the natives, it is not likely that their progeny would preserve their characteristic marks for 220 years (MacDonald, p. 471).

The research of Robert Beck (a retired Tiree vet and an authority on the horses of Scotland) confirms this. He found that the Armada only carried a few pack mules. The Spanish cavalry was waiting in the Netherlands but storms forced the Armada into the North Sea (personal communication).

Introduction of new blood

A visitor to Tiree in the 17th century remarked on the small size of the Tiree horses. *The cows and horses are of a very low size in this isle, being in the winter and spring-time often reduced to eating seaware* [seaweed]… *the horses pace naturally, and are very sprightly though little.* (*A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland,* Martin Martin, republished Birlinn, 1994, p. 295).

Around 1758 the 4th Duke of Argyll sent some larger stallions to Tiree to 'improve' the native horses.

They have now some larger sized and better shaped horses than they ever had, the breed of stallion which the factor brought to the island about 10 or 12 years ago, of the breed of the late Duke of Argyll's horse at Inveraray (Turnbull's Survey of Tiree 1768).

However, the effect of this is likely to have been small and confined to the estate's employees and favourites on the island. There were over a thousand horses on the island at the time, and before the 19th century there was little control over the breeding or the organised improvement of the Tiree horse.

In general the tenants [in the Hebrides] *pay no manner of attention to their stallions or breeding mares, but leave them almost entirely to chance. In summer and early in autumn, one half of their horses and mares range freely and unconfined* [on the *sliabh*] (MacDonald, p. 469, 1811).

Land on Tiree was held in large farms or tacks. The ground was worked in strips or runrigs and the only boundaries were between the crops and grazing, and between the tacks themselves. The control of stock by the herd boys, particularly of fast animals like the horse, must have been difficult. Only wealthy landowners, like the Duke of Argyll, who had access to stables, fields and servants, could afford breeding programmes. After the tacks were broken up into individual crofts from around 1800 crofters would have had more control over their livestock.

Reduction in numbers

At the end of the 18th century the 5th Duke of Argyll became worried about the numbers of horses on the island: *You are to attend to the…multiplicity of unnecessary servants and horses employed in labour* (Instructions to his Chamberlain 1771, p.2).

There are a great number of horses here, many of them small and ill-shaped. The reason for their keeping so many is owing to the number they use in manuring their ground with sea-ware [seaweed]. *They are under the necessity of carrying it in creels on horseback from the shore, which in some parts is coarse and stoney, and in other parts soft sand* (Turnbull's survey 1768).

Numbers were high for a number of reasons:

- kelp manufacture had been introduced to the island in 1746 and rapidly became one of the islanders' main source of income. Horses were used to move the seaweed and the burnt ashes. "*On all the kelp islands we found a swarm of small half starved horses"* (MacDonald p. 478).
- the Tiree soil is very sandy and needs a lot of seaweed to keep its fertility.
- the heavy Old Scots plough took up to seven horses to pull.
- the road and track network was patchy and much haulage had to be done in small creels on the horses' backs rather than using carts with their heavier loads. "*Three-fourths of them* [the horses] *are employed in carrying burdens in baskets or creels on their backs, instead of being harnessed in carts"* (MacDonald, p. 479).

The 5th Duke (who ruled the estate from1771 to 1805) decided to reduce the numbers of horses on the island. Writing to his Chamberlain, he instructed: *You are among other things to attend to the multiplicity of unnecessary…horses employed in labour* (Instructions, p.2, 1771).

Over the next twenty years numbers fell. The Old Statistical Account of 1791 counted 1,400 horses and recorded that numbers had been much higher.

Number of horses in Tiry 1,400
Number of sheep 600
Number of black cattle 1,800
A few years ago the number of horses was much greater; orders were given to reduce them in both islands (Old Statistical Account, 1791, p. 411-2).

But numbers were still too high.

The small island of Tyree keeps 1500 horses, or nearly as many as the great isle of Skye, which is about 20 times its superficial extent… and maintains nearly seven times its population. They are at least thrice as numerous as they ought to be (MacDonald, 1811, p. 478).

Over-crowding caused the horses to be weaker.

The black cattle and horses are mostly in starving condition. The latter, when their pasture is very bare in winter and spring, tear up the ground with their feet to come at the roots (OSA, p. 411-2, 1791).

They are not only ill used and overwhelmed by work beyond their strength during the winter and spring months, but also starved with hunger, drenched with rain, unsheltered from sleet, snow and storms; and in a word, as miserable as is possible for animal feeling and animal life… perhaps one tenth of Hebridean horses die annually (MacDonald, 1811, p. 480-1).

The Duke attempted in some townships to determine how many horses each new crofter could keep: *Every 4 crofters to have one horse to carry wreck* [seaweed] *from the shore to be graz'd in Drumbuy* [Cornaig] *and Drumdearg* [Baugh and Earnal] *commons, to have the use of the horse alternately, casting lots for the order every time his services are wanted by more than one at a time* (Instructions, 1801, p.56).

This obviously met some resistance as the Tiree factor replied the next year: *Every crofter of Scarinish and Hianish has a horse each. At Ballimartin a horse was promised betwixt every two of them by Mr. Ferrier* [the Chamberlain] (Instructions, 1802, p. 68).

Glanders

Glanders is a bacterial infection of horses. It causes a chest infection and is often quickly fatal although it can produce chronic nodules and ulcers on the skin, mouth and nose. It can also be fatal in humans. The disease was particularly common in the Tiree horse population because of overcrowding and poor feeding. However, in a remarkable programme of animal health, the 5th Duke was instrumental in clearing the island of the infection between 1800 and 1804.

In 1800 and 1801 he wrote to his chamberlain, or factor, on Tiree: *Your attention is particularly wanted to…the clearing of the island of the disease amongst the horses which has been so long fatal to them* (Instructions p. 51, 1800)...

Glanders which proved fatal to hundreds of [horses] *annually* (Instructions, p.90).

All glandered horses to be destroyed and supernumery horses banished the island (Instructions, p. 55, 1801).

The chamberlain replied: *There were 63 glandered horses found…and at present none remain as far as can be known. Every mail land has been allowed to keep one horse and 584 supernumerary horses have also been sent off* (Chamberlain's reply, Instructions, p. 59, 1801).

Three years later the chamberlain was able to report: *Having now more grass and pasture on their own farms than they had formerly, owing to the expulsion of their supernumerary horses, which has been attended with the most beneficial consequences in doing justice to their cows and necessary horses, and has completely eradicated the glanders which proved fatal to hundreds of them annually* (Instructions, p. 90, 1804).

The New Statistical Account bears this out: *A prodigious number of small poneys* [sic]*, distinguished for their symmetry and high mettle, were formerly reared in this island and were grazed in the summer on the Reef, which was then used as a common. These are now totally extirpated. More than thirty years ago the inhabitants were prevailed upon, I believe with much reluctance and by the interference of authority, to part with them as an unprofitable stock quite unfit for agricultural labour; and a stronger kind was introduced in their stead* (New Statistical Account, p.203, 1845).

Glanders was only eradicated in mainland Britain in 1928, although it is still common in the developing world. Its eradication from Tiree so early was a particularly impressive effort because there was at that time no test for the disease and it was not thought to be infectious. [The eradication of glanders from Tiree] *appears to have been a truly remarkable, and probably unprecedented, feat of veterinary preventive medicine and public health* (*Scotland's Native Horse*, Robert Beck. p.88).

The New Plough

The 5th Duke also wanted to stop the use on Tiree of the Old Scots plough which required up to seven horses. A report in 1791 had stated: *The method of ploughing by one man, two horses and long reins is used by only two in the parish, but might very easily be practised by getting a stronger breed of horses. Instead of this 4 men and 7 horses often attend the same furrow…When in one farm 4 or 13 ploughs are set going and 30 or perhaps 96 horses with creels sent to carry sea-ware off the shore, besides some idle mares and followers, such a farm takes many hands and horses* (OSA, p. 411-2, 1791).

John and Christina MacPhail, Balinoe, and their two-horse plough (B5)

The Duke encouraged the use of the new lighter plough, designed in Berwickshire by Small in 1763, which used just two horses: *I wish to encourage ploughing with two horses without a driver, and with oxen in place of horses, and shall give a premium to those who shall make an attempt at either* (Instructions, p. 56, 1801).

Within a few years the new plough (but not the oxen) had become popular. The Duke's factor reported: *Adopting oxen is a distant prospect, whatever encouragement is given* (Instructions, 1802, p.69). *The tenants now in general plough with two horses, but still retain the driver (it was customary in the Highlands, for a man* [the driver]*walking backwards, to lead the plough team* (Instructions, p. 82, 1803).

The Duke then encouraged ploughing without the driver by giving a prize of £5 to the first tenant *who shall first plough five acres at least with two horses without a driver* (Instructions, p. 87, 1804). This prize was shared between Alexander MacLean, Kirkapol, and Neil, Hugh and Archie MacFadyen, Salum.

It took a good pair of horses to pull what we called a 'mainland' plough (Alec MacLean, Cornaigbeg on Hector MacPhail, AC41, 1997)**.**

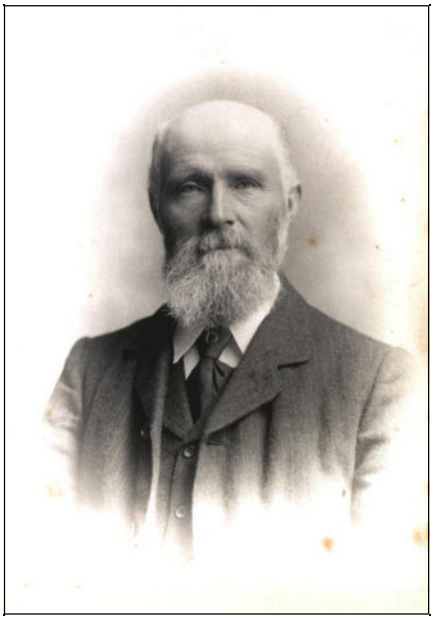
Tom Barr and the introduction of the Clydesdale

The origins of the Clydesdale breed go back to beginning of the 19th century. In 1811 MacDonald describes: *In the county of Lanark there is a very useful description of a horse…being rather under 15 hands high…This favourite Clydesdale breed* (MacDonald, p. 475).

Until the 1850s the farmers of the Lowlands of Scotland used oxen for ploughing and draught work. Heavier horses had been bred on the Continent to carry knights into battle. Using these heavier Continental horses, breeders in the west of Scotland developed the Clydesdale… Compared with other heavy draught breeds the Clydesdale is faster in action, which is very useful for street work. It is also extremely docile (Robert Beck).

This development of heavy breeds was as much to service the needs of the Industrial Revolution and growing cities as it was for farm work. Around 1870, Clydesdale horses were 15 hands. By 1910, they were up to 17 hands.

In 1864, Tom Barr, a young Ayrshire farmer, moved to Tiree to take up a large farm in Balephetrish, Kenovay and Crossapol. He brought with him a Clydesdale stallion. The islanders were quick to take up the new breed.



Thomas Barr (E73)

After they saw the horse that Barr brought to Tiree, then when the Agricultural Society was set up, Tom Barr was appointed to go and select two stallions and bring them back for breeding to Tiree (Donald MacIntyre, Gott talking to Hector MacPhail, AC41, 1997)**.**

Tom Barr was involved in the farming life of Tiree in many ways.

Tom Barr used to castrate the colts for the Tiree crofters. He was very good at that. There were no vets in these days. And his fee was a day's work [from the crofter]. *And Neil Campbell, Kenovay, told me this. Tom Barr employed a man with a horse and cart all the year round bringing up seaweed. The whole year round!* (Robert Beck, AC2).

The Clydesdales of Tiree, being bred with the local horses, were comparatively light and fast. This speed made them very popular in cities. Coll horses were said to have been heavier, as the island had been cleared around 1852 and settled by Ayrshire farmers. Their horses were too heavy to sell in the Oban horse market and they had to be sold in Perth and Lanark.

Postcard of a Clydesdale stallion (K166)

They [the Tiree Clydesdales] *were a lighter sort of Clydesdale than on the mainland. More stamina, but faster…There was a great market for them, especially in towns, because they wanted a faster type of heavy draught horse. People on Tiree have told me they sometimes used to yoke these Clydesdales to gigs. They could trot along good style* (Robert Beck, AC2).

Other breeds of horses on Tiree

As well as Clydesdales, other smaller breeds and crosses were popular on Tiree between 1870 and 1940.

It's actually a misnomer to say 'you're improving the breed' just because you're making it bigger…you're not improving things if you're putting a Clydesdale horse into pulling a trap, for example (Hector MacPhail, AC41,1997)**.**

The Agricultural Census for Tiree of 1920 gives an idea of the different sorts of the 646 horses kept at that time. This was the highest number of horses since records began in 1869:

- 364 working horses and mares
- 168 unbroken horses over 1 year old
- 68 Clydesdale foals and 14 Highland pony foals
- 3 Clydesdale stallions

1 saddle horse
12 carriage or trap horses
2 ‘vanners’ (used to pull a van)

As well as the purer bred Clydesdales, smaller horses continued to be quite common. Many crofters around 1900 bought ponies from Barra. These were probably crosses from the Eriskay pony with bigger ponies, with the addition of some Clydesdale blood (Robert Beck).

Clydesdales were the biggest horses people had here, but there were others, crosses, that did plenty of work too…and Barra ponies as well, smaller horses for spring carts…they came from Barra…During the last war, many men were away, there weren’t many men around to work with the big horses and many smaller horses came in so that women could work with them (Hugh Archie MacCallum talking to Maggie Campbell, AC394).

The Clydesdales were bred with the ponies [on Tiree]. [And] *the smaller horse didn’t disappear altogether. I’ve got a photo, horses cutting barley on the Whitehouse farm…Well, they’re not Clydesdale horses. They’re heavy horses but they’re nowhere as big as a Clydesdale. To the very end there were very few pure Clydesdale horses on Tiree. The majority were what were called cross-Clydesdales* (Hector MacPhail, AC41, 1997)**.**

Smaller horses were cheaper to keep with less feeding and smaller, cheaper horse-shoes. They also put less pressure on the ground.

Hector Campbell, Cornaigbeg: *Some people kept a Highland pony for croft work. They had small feet. They didn’t break the soil.*
Robert Beck: *That’s one of the weaknesses of the Clydesdale. Feet like upside down frying pans…*

Hector Campbell: *An old man was lifting potatoes one day and between flies and clegs and bad temper the horse wasn’t going too well. He was always shouting this, that and the other. ‘How did you miss this one* [a potato]*?’ he said. He must have trampled all the rest!* (during a Robert Beck lecture, AC2)

In 2010 there were 20 horses on Tiree.

Cutting barley at Whitehouse with cross-Clydesdales/Highlands (E11)

The economic value of horses to Tiree

Until the Clydesdale came to Tiree relatively few horses were sold off the island. An estate report from 1794 reports:

State of Gross [Annual] *Sales from Different Farms in the Island of Tiry*:
Kelp £691
Barley £674
350 Cattle (average price £1 10s - £2 12s 6d) £632
31 horses (average price £3-8) £108
Potatoes £60
Linen £40.

Horses therefore made up only 5% of the Tiree agricultural income. The island was actually a net importer of horses.

There are scarce any horses sold out of the island, and tho' some farms sell a few, it does not add to the general produce, and a considerable number are yearly imported from Mull and Coll (Instructions, 1794, p.33). *The above state, which comprehends the gross amount of every article sold by the tenants of Tiry is included the price of …horses sold among themselves. Any horses sold to strangers seldom amount to £10 a year, and those imported are seldom below £60 a year* (Instructions p. 39, 1794).
There are scarce any horses sold out of the island, and tho' some farms sell a few…a considerable number are yearly imported from Mull and Coll. (Instructions p.33, 1794).

This situation continued for most of the nineteenth century. *48 horses exported per year* (Instructions, p. 214, 1845).

In 1802 the estate tried to set up a cattle and horse market on the island (Instructions, p.65). Horses were moved between Tiree and Coll in a small boat.

The factor has frequently had occasion to observe the bad effects of the small boats kept for the purpose of the ferry betwixt Tyree and Coll, in which neither cows nor horses can be ferried without throwing them down and tying them on their passage, a practice that often produces serious effects, and at times the death of these animals (Instructions, 1804, p.95).

Horses were loaded into small boats on the west side of Scarinish harbour. They were run towards the edge and when they saw the drop it was too late to stop and they had to jump down into the open boat.

Clydesdales from Tom Barr's farm at Balephetrish being loaded into a lighter at Scarinish Harbour for transportation to the ferry in the early 1900s (D93)

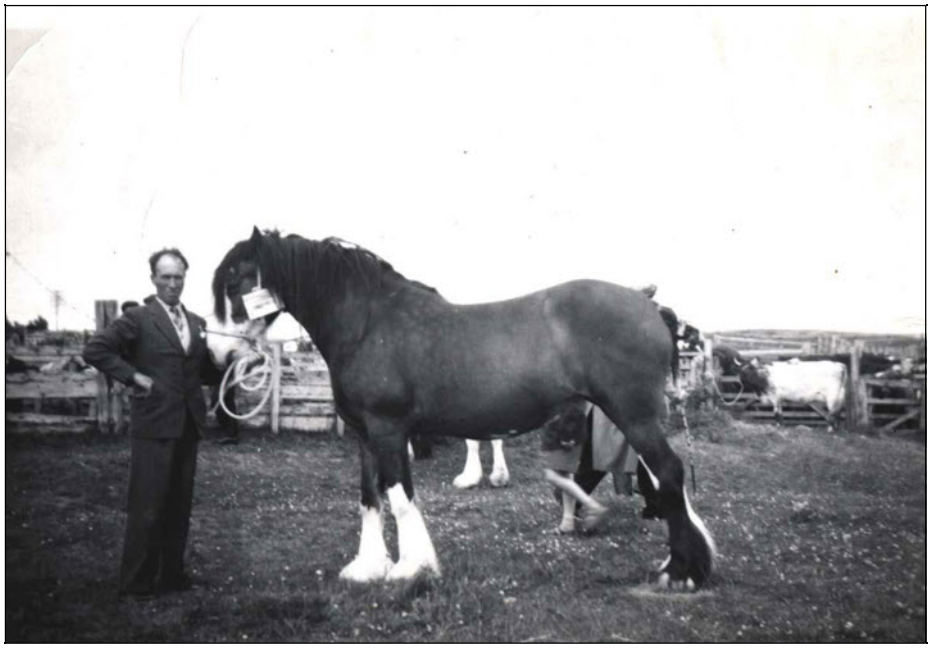
However, the Clydesdale revolutionised Tiree's farming economy, as the industrialisation of Scotland generated a keen demand for the island's new heavy horses. Between 1870 and 1939 the export of young horses from Tiree became the crofters' principal source of income.

There was a double economic importance in Tiree. The horses were needed for the work. The horses did most of the work. But the main economic importance on Tiree was the breeding of foals and the selling of broken horses. The most important part of a crofters' income here was from the selling of these young horses (Robert Beck, AC2).

MC: *It was horses that were getting the best money.*
DM: *It was horses that kept the crofters in their crofts. The money they were getting for cattle and sheep, it wasn't worth talking about - £5-6 for cattle…15 shillings for a lamb…They were going to Oban to sell the horses. There was a horse sale every July…They would keep an eye out to see if the farmers from Lismore were over because they were good at buying horses and breaking them in* (Donald MacIntyre talking to Margaret Campbell, AC189).

Horses were expensive then…during the war and before it you could get £70 for a horse that was broken in (Hugh Archie MacCallum talking to Maggie Campbell, AC394).

The horse not only did the heavy work on the island. It was also the crofters' main source of income. Over a hundred foals were born here every year and these were usually sold out as two year olds which would fetch as much as 5 or 6 two- to three-year-old bullocks...There was a family of MacLeans in Kenovay. They lived where Fiona Maxwell had a craft shop. And one of these men, Charles (Tearlach Ghilleasbuig), he sold a stallion pony before the First World war for £600. That was a colossal heap of money in those days...You know the story. Tearlach Ghilleasbuig got up this morning. And his brother, Ailean, was still upstairs. 'Where are you going?' [he shouted down]. *'I'm going for a wee visit to New Zealand!'* [Tearlach replied] (Hector MacPhail, AC41).



Alasdair Brown, Balephuil, with a prize-winning Clydesdale at the Tiree Agricultural Show, Crossapol, in the 1950s (S71)

Donald MacIntyre develops this last story: *Charles MacLean* [Kenovay] *was a stud groom in the employment of one of Scotland's most famous Clydesdale horse breeders, David Adams, Auchencraig, Dumbarton. Now in his day Mr. Adams was the main exporter of Clydesdale horses to Canada, Australia and New Zealand… When a consignment of over twenty mares and fillies was shipped out it took six weeks in a boat, which required a groom to feed water and replace clean bedding. Furthermore every horse had to be exercised daily. Charles MacLean was the groom responsible for the daily care of these valuable Clydesdales. As a token of good will Mr. Adams allowed Charles to select and buy for himself up to four Clydesdale fillies, which were included in M. Adams' consignment free of charge, and it was a well-known fact that buyers would be waiting at the dock where the boat berthed…and Mr. MacLean's fillies were bought at a very high price before they left ship* (AI 2003.130.14).

There was also a direct trade, using smacks, with these ponies from Tiree to Northern Ireland…and that was still continuing into the [20th] *century....In 1901 my grandfather Hugh MacPhail sold a horse for £45* [to Donald MacDonald, the 'Contractor']. *It was the horse he had been using for pulling the grocery van, but it was too good a horse and it was being wasted pulling a little grocery van about. Now £45 was more than enough to build you a three bedroom, two storey house. A farm labourer's wage in 1901 was only £6 a year. The reason horses were at such a colossally high value was because of the Boer war. In wartime the army used to buy up tens of thousands of horses. Again the price went up in the First World War. The Second World War was the first major conflict that did not affect the price of horses* (Hector MacPhail, AC41, 1997)**.**

The number of horses on Tiree fell during the First World War (from 513 in 1910 to 483 in 1915) due the demands of the war effort, before bouncing back to 646 in 1920.

Hector Campbell: *There was a man here* [*Ailig Bhòdaidh* Mairi C] *very keen on dealing with horses, buying and selling them. And he sold a horse in Oban for £100. A great big price. And he went back the next year and he saw the man who bought the horse and he got talking. 'See that horse you sold me.' 'Yes. What about it?' replied the Tiree man. 'I went out one night and he was dead' said the buyer. 'Well he never did that the whole time I had it!' said the man* (Robert Beck AC2).

The father of Alec MacNeill, Balevullin sold a black mare to MacGregor of Oban for £140 in 1919.

Hector MacPhail: *There were a lot of Tiree crofters, including your own grandfather, Tearlach Eòghainn, who were particularly adept at buying horses and selling them at a profit. They would buy a horse here on Tiree, use it perhaps for a year, and then take it away to the sales in Oban and make a healthy profit. The first cattle buyer to come here, a man called Touch, he began to buy horses too, and he had at least two agents here. They used to buy horses and keep them for him, until he had maybe 20 or 30 to ship away. In the old days the majority of Tiree horses were sold at the Salen fair in Mull, and then it became Oban. The old Salen horse fair was a major event.*

Angus Munn: *When I was a young boy in Scarinish school* [in the 1930s] *what I would call the travelling people, tinkers, bought horses here and they broke them in on Silversands and Baugh beach. These people, although they were obviously poor, they were expert handlers of horses…They took about fifty horses away from here each summer* (Hector MacPhail, AC41, 1997)**.**

Stallions

After Tom Barr had brought the first Clydesdale to Tiree, breeding stallions were brought to the island every summer, up until July. 'Walking the stallion' means taking the horse from place to place in order to serve mares. Even after the introduction of motor-drawn horse-boxes, the stallions were walked to keep them fit.

Robert Beck: *Three stallions walked this island…two Clydesdales and a Highland pony. There was a gentleman called Hector Campbell* [from An Àirigh, Cornaigmore] *who walked with one of them. The late Iain Alasdair Iain (John MacLean, The Brae, Cornaigbeg)* [had another] *and Donald MacIntyre walked the Highland pony. One stallion had the premium from the local Society.*

Hector Campbell, Corrairigh: *In the early 1900s, maybe the late 1800s, there was a Tiree Heavy Horse Society formed here. And the purpose of that committee was to select a certain stud on the mainland to travel here all summer. And that one had a premium. And one year that horse left 80 foals on Tiree. But there was what was called a poacher around as well and of course as you mentioned a Highland pony. The* [groom] *fee for service from the Highland stallion was £1, and the heavy horse stallion was £2 for service with a further 6 /- when the mare proved in foal. That would be more than 100 foals born on Tiree in a year easily. Plus the garrons - the Highland ponies - would have 20-30 as well. Because the smaller crofters couldn't afford the* [Clydesdale] *service fee.*

The Tiree Heavy Horse Breeding Society brought selected Clydesdale stallions to the island.

The chairman read to the members present letters from various stallion owners in reply to an advert in the Scottish Farmer for Clydesdale stallions to travel the district during season 1947. A reply from Mr. James Holmes, Greenock, offering last season's horse 'Windlass Priority' was given consideration. It was unanimously agreed to accept this horse for the coming season if the percentage of foals left by him in the district during 1946 proves him eligible for a D.O.A.S grant (Minutes of Society's AGM, 1947).

John MacLean, Cornaigbeg, with a Clydesdale stallion in the 1930s or 1940s. John was the Secretary of the Tiree Heavy Horse Breeding Society (B24)

The Department of Agriculture for Scotland provided an annual grant of £57 a year to the Society under the Scheme for the Encouragement of Heavy Horse Breeding, which was still running in 1947. In 1946, 38 mares were served by the Society stallion. Within a few years the tractor would have taken over.

For the last few years [the 1930s] *the Department of Agriculture for Scotland has, at the request of smallholders, sent a Highland pony stallion for use on the island, and I have no doubt that the cross between the Clydesdale mares and the Highland sire will bring home the advantage of keeping a medium-sized horse, that will do their work equally well and will save about fifty per cent in the cost of food* (*Highland Ponies*, John MacDonald, Eneas MacKay, 1937, p.66).

Hector MacPhail: *The stallion came here every year…Jimmy Holmes was the last man to send stallions in. He came from a family in Greenock. He had a transport business. The family owned over a hundred horses pulling heavy drays around the Greenock-Port Glasgow area. They had their own stallions and they sent one over to Tiree every year. Someone would go round the island. It was called 'travelling the stallion' and they would go from croft to croft.*

Alec MacLean: *There was a big black stallion called 'Orwell' came here in 1936. He left over 80 foals on Tiree. Other stallions were 'Cantilever' and 'Windlaw Gartley'.* "*They had fantastic names"* (Hector MacPhail, AC41, 1997)**.**

Holmes always stayed with John MacLean, *Iain Alasdair Iain*, in Cornaigbeg. Archie Weir sent stallions to the island and he was followed by Jimmy Holmes, who always stayed with John MacLean, *Iain Alasdair Iain*, in Cornaigbeg.

The stallion Hector Campbell walked usually came from David Adams, Auchencraig, Dumbarton. He was out two or three days a week with it. The stallion carried two old flour bags tied to its girth and these would be filled with a special feed. At dinner time the stallion was given this.

Donald MacIntyre walked the Department Highland stallion. The east end crofters would mostly come to him but he walked out two days a week, once towards Balephuil and once towards Balevullin. If the mare was ready, servicing could take as little as fifteen minutes.

One accident in 1917 underlined the danger that could be involved in handling stallions. Alec MacLean, the son of *Iain Alasdair Iain*, Cornaigbeg tells this story. A groom, Andrew Clanahan (or Clenahan, Clenachan), 36, often came to the island. He once arrived on Tiree with two stallions and walked down the pier leading one in each hand. *'Wasn't he brave!'* One day he was at Alec's father's croft with a stallion. The mare being served kicked out, catching the groom in the stomach. He was able to stagger inside but he died the next day – 10 am on 21st May 1917:

FATAL KICK BY A HORSE

> *Mrs. Clenachan, Crossmichael, received a telegram on Monday stating that her husband, Mr. Andrew Clenachan, had been kicked by a horse, and the following day another telegram arrived to say that he had died. Mr. Clenachan, who was an experienced horseman, had been employed as a stud groom by Mr. Archibald Crawford, Broughton Mains, Wigtownshire for several seasons, and left home for Isle of Tiree about a month ago in charge of two stallions. In a letter received by his wife in the end of last week he said the horses were the most quiet animals he had ever been in charge of. No details have yet been received as to the circumstances attending the accident. Much sympathy is felt for his widow, who is left with five young children, the eldest, a boy, being only ten years old.* (Dumfries and Galloway Standard and Advertiser, 26th May 1917)

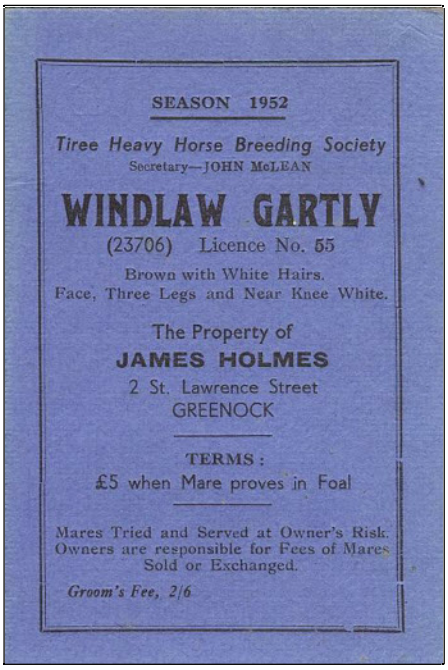
The cause of death was given as peritonitis. He is buried in Kirkapol graveyard in an unmarked grave.

Stallions would often fight together. One afternoon Hector Campbell was walking with his stallion on the Cornaig *sliabh* on his way home to Balemartine. There he met Jimmy Holmes with his stallion. The horses started to fight and Hector only regained control by using a piece of wood to hit one horse on the head. He then managed to tie the lead rope round the telegraph pole (Lachie Campbell, Crossapol).

Some Tiree crofters kept stallions of their own. Donald MacIntyre's uncle, Calum had a pedigree Clydesdale stallion in 1911 called the 'Laird of Gott'. Another uncle, Seumas, had a stallion called 'Rory of Mull'.

The last Clydesdale stallion to come to the island under the auspices of the Tiree Heavy Horse Breeding Society was 'Windlaw Gartly'. He arrived in 1952 and was described thus: *A big, stylish horse with beautiful broad bones, a grand big foot, and a phenomenal wealth of straight silky hair. He is every inch a draught horse, a real swell…breeders should not fail to take the opportunity of using this outstanding horse at such moderate terms.*

Terms in 1952 were £5 'when Mare proves in foal', with a groom's fee of 2/6.
His owner, James Holmes of Greenock, was paid a premium of £60 for the hire of the stallion by the Society.


SEASON 1952

Tiree Heavy Horse Breeding Society
Secretary—JOHN McLEAN

WINDLAW GARTLY
(23706) Licence No. 55

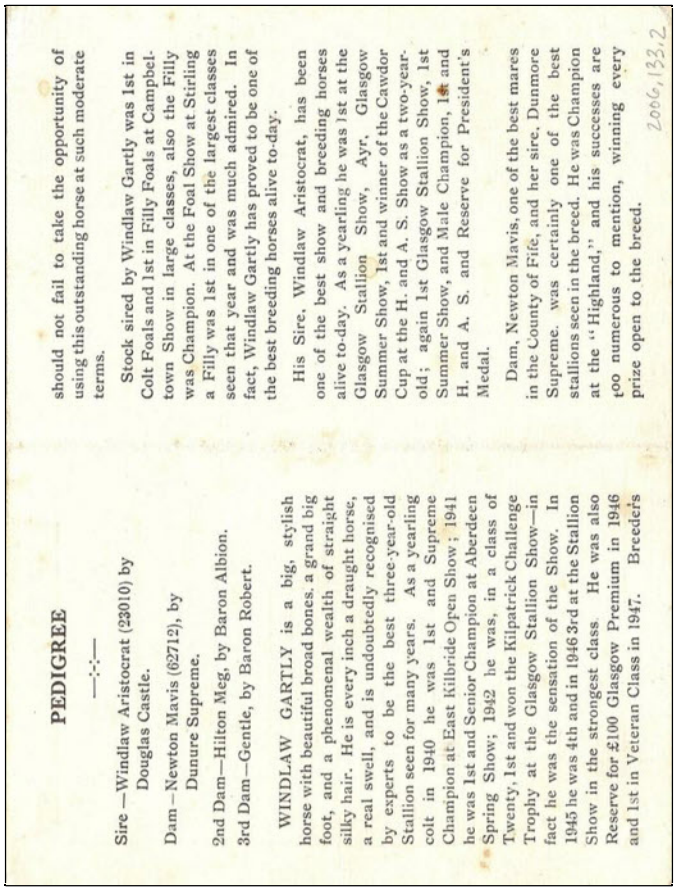
Brown with White Hairs.
Face, Three Legs and Near Knee White.

The Property of
JAMES HOLMES
2 St. Lawrence Street
GREENOCK

TERMS :
£5 when Mare proves in Foal

Mares Tried and Served at Owner's Risk.
Owners are responsible for Fees of Mares Sold or Exchanged.

Groom's Fee, 2/6


should not fail to take the opportunity of using this outstanding horse at such moderate terms.

Stock sired by Windlaw Gartly was 1st in Colt Foals and 1st in Filly Foals at Campbeltown Show in large classes, also the Filly was Champion. At the Foal Show at Stirling a Filly was 1st in one of the largest classes seen that year and was much admired. In fact, Windlaw Gartly has proved to be one of the best breeding horses alive to-day.

His Sire, Windlaw Aristocrat, has been one of the best show and breeding horses alive to-day. As a yearling he was 1st at the Glasgow Stallion Show, Ayr, Glasgow Summer Show, 1st and winner of the Cawdor Cup at the H. and A. S. Show as a two-year-old; again 1st Glasgow Stallion Show, 1st Summer Show, and Male Champion, 1st and H. and A. S. and Reserve for President's Medal.

Dam, Newton Mavis, one of the best mares in the County of Fife, and her sire, Dunmore Supreme, was certainly one of the best stallions seen in the breed. He was Champion at the "Highland," and his successes are too numerous to mention, winning every prize open to the breed.

2006.133.2

PEDIGREE

—·:·—

Sire—Windlaw Aristocrat (23010) by Douglas Castle.
Dam—Newton Mavis (62712), by Dunure Supreme.
2nd Dam—Hilton Meg, by Baron Albion.
3rd Dam—Gentle, by Baron Robert.

WINDLAW GARTLY is a big, stylish horse with beautiful broad bones, a grand big foot, and a phenomenal wealth of straight silky hair. He is every inch a draught horse, a real swell, and is undoubtedly recognised by experts to be the best three-year-old Stallion seen for many years. As a yearling colt in 1940 he was 1st and Supreme Champion at East Kilbride Open Show; 1941 he was 1st and Senior Champion at Aberdeen Spring Show; 1942 he was, in a class of Twenty, 1st and won the Kilpatrick Challenge Trophy at the Glasgow Stallion Show—in fact he was the sensation of the Show. In 1945 he was 4th and in 1946 3rd at the Stallion Show in the strongest class. He was also Reserve for £100 Glasgow Premium in 1946 and 1st in Veteran Class in 1947. Breeder's

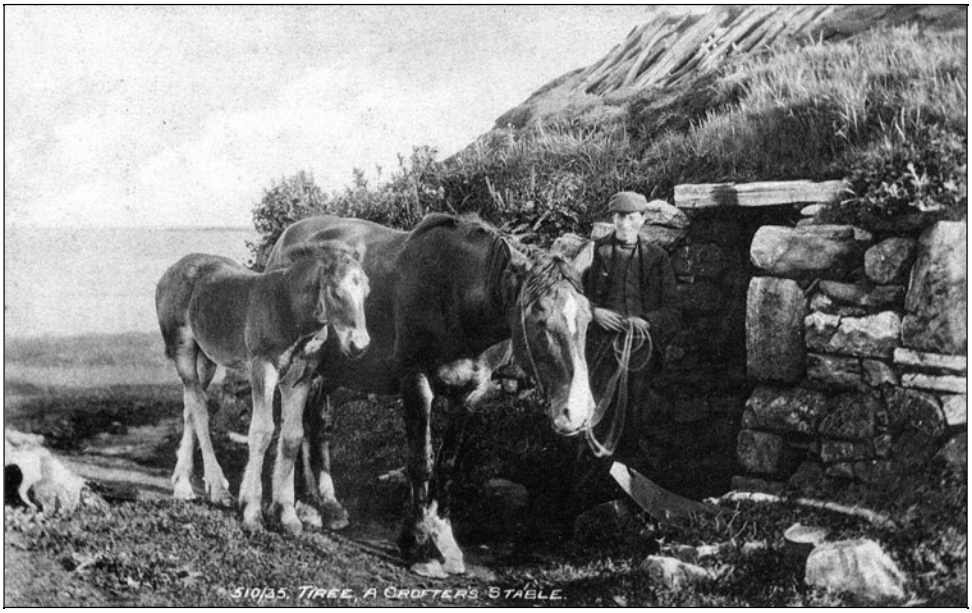
Brochure for Clydesdale stallion 'Windlaw Gartly' (2006.133.2)

Delivering foals

The general picture on a croft was that there would be two mares and a gelding. And the mares would be put in foal every second year, something like that. And the gelding was always there for a pair if your mare was foaling. Mind you, they worked the mares right to the end. They didn't give them very heavy work. But there are one or two cases I've heard about when they suddenly had to loose a mare to let her foal on the main road! (Robert Beck, AC2).

The mare carries her foal for 11 to 12 months.

MC: *How do you tell when the mare is about to deliver?*
DM: *You keep an eye on the mare's teats. The first sign is a sort of 'wax' coming out of the teat. About two days later the milk starts, running down over the mare's feet. Then you know the foal will be born four or five hours later. Then you have to have your eyes peeled and be with the mare when she foals. If anything goes wrong you have to help her straight away. Many's the foal that's been lost. Mares are strong, large animals…if everything goes well the foal can be born in ten minutes. With a cow or a sheep you've got plenty of time* (Donald MacIntyre talking to Maggie Campbell, AC189).



Clydesdale mare and foal outside a stable thought to be the old smiddy by Kirkapol Church (V33)

Something else with a foal – you must start handling it. The first thing I do when the foal is seven days old is make a small halter for it, stroking it until it stands for me. When they get older I put the mare and foal out together, each with a halter [tied together] *with a length of rope and the foal follows the mare…You must also start lifting its feet for it and stroking them, lifting them up a little at first and then a bit*

more…Then I take a small hammer and tap the hoof here and there – no nails or shoe. Maybe I'll be three weeks working like that, then I file the hooves. Then I make small shoes and I can shoe the foal on my own (Donald MacIntyre, AC189).

[A mare has] *just two teats. They're not big like a cow's udder. If you watch a foal it sucks for two or three minutes and then stops, but it sucks often. The mare makes a lot of milk in short time, and it's very strong, mare's milk. Another thing, a foal can be a long time, sometimes two hours, trying to find the teat. And that's something you have to keep a careful eye on if you're attending the birth. Sometimes you have to help the foal find it…when it's found it once it'll never have a problem again* (Donald MacIntyre, AC189).

Mares [that had given birth] *were working and the foals put in. Cutting hay in the autumn is what they were mainly doing. They needed two horses for the reaper. They would be missing their foal right enough, but they weren't working terribly long at one time and then they would get back together* (Hugh Archie MacCallum talking to Maggie Campbell, AC394).

Breaking in

When a horse was a year old they would start to break them in, either for working or selling…a few of the neighbours would come over and the harness would be put on…it was a lot of work and dangerous work, breaking in horses (Hugh Archie MacCallum talking to Maggie Campbell, AC394).

Donald MacIntyre has broken in many horses. The process started almost at birth. The foal became used to being handled, stroked and talked to. During the first year a small halter was slipped over the foal's head and after several weeks the foal was taken outside with the mare, both in halters and led up and down.

Between a year and eighteen months the horse was taken out and put in a specially made small collar, or *sùgan*, hooked up to chains and a small length of wood. At first the young horse was lead by the head and later reins were used from behind.
A horse would be 2 ½ or 3 years old before it started to work properly. The young horse would be taken out to plough with an older one. Land ploughed the year before was chosen so as to be easier work. The older horse took the furrow, *an sgrìob*, the younger the lea (unploughed grass). Sometimes a length of wood, a *maide*, was put between the two horses' halters to keep them the correct distance apart.

Finally the young horse was taken down to the beach and backed into the traces of a cart which was tilted back down so as not to put too much weight on the animal at first. Two men sat in the cart, which was sometimes loaded with gravel or sand. If the horse bolted, which it often did, it was allowed to run until exhaustion. For around six weeks one had to be careful handling a newly trained horse as they could still take fright and run. Often the horse that was quiet at first could be troublesome later, while those who were jumpy at the start settled down best of all.

Jean MacCallum remembers her family painting the cart green when the young horses were taken down to *An Tràigh Bhàn*, Balevullin, as they believed green was the most calming colour for a horse. John Fletcher remembers horses being taken down to *Tràigh Shòrabaigh*, and the grandfather of Alec MacArthur, Heylipol, used the beach at the end of Happy Valley.

Horses were also trained to follow a cart so that one driver could bring two carts with two horses up from the beach.

One way to control a horse is to catch their upper lip in a small loop of twine which is mounted on the end of a stick. This is known as a twist or twitch. The stick is twisted until the band is tight around the lip and the horse will stand quietly as though it is 'stunned'. This was used in the smiddy, and Robert Beck remembers castrating a Clydesdale colt under local anaesthetic using just a twist.

Feeding and stabling

Before the middle of the 19th century, horses on Tiree largely looked after themselves on the rough grazing, summer and winter. The upper part of *Beinn Haoidhnis* was called *Beinn nan Each*, hill of the horses, where they were kept in the open. Gales were described on Tiree as being strong enough "to take the tails off horses/ *bheireadh i na h-earbaill bhar nan each*" (*The Gaelic Otherworld*, ed. R. Black, p.569).

Writing in 1811 one commentator described how:

It is scarcely possible for a Scots lowlander, or for an Englishman, to believe the cheapness of an Hebridean horses' keeping…The quantity of food allotted to a Hebridean tenant's horse at an average of ten years…would not fetch £4 per annum. In Berwickshire it is from £30-40…The food given to horses in the Hebrides in winter is straw and hay. Oats are rarely granted until the seed time [ploughing] *commences in April…at the rate of ¼ peck* [half a gallon] *for each horse morning and evening* (MacDonald, p. 480).

In fact £4 would have been a lot of food for a horse at a time when a Tiree crofter was getting £1 10s. for a bullock and £3 15s. for a ton of kelp (Instructions, p. 36).

A Tiree proverb appears to bear this out: *Tuarasdal each an Tirisdeich, straic de' taod m' on bhus /* the wage of a Tiree man's horse is like the slap of the bridle in my mouth (Angus MacLean). This seems to imply that the horse was not getting much 'pay' (food).

However, by the beginning of the 19th century it was recognised that horses needed more feeding because they were doing so much physical work. *A horse's grass is considered equivalent to that of two cows* (Instructions, p. 213 1845).

On the other hand, a Clydesdale took a lot more looking after, both in time and farm produce. *The maintenance of a Clydesdale. These things eat you out of house and home. They ate a lot. They need stabling too* (Robert Beck, AC2).

Willie MacLean, Balinoe, reckoned to keep half the harvest in his stackyard for his horses. They would be given three sheaves (*sguaban*) of oats or barley three times a day in a manger (*frasach*). If the corn still had its seed it would make a good meal. More commonly the sheaf would be threshed first, after which it was called a *froiseachan*. The horses might also get hay from meadow grass (*feur lòin*), which contains a mixture of grasses and herbs to keep horses healthy, along with carrots or turnips.

Building the corn stack – winter feed for horses (B7)

Great care was taken of the horses…they got the best feed – hay, small oats, occasionally sheaves that had been threshed. They might be at the shore all winter. They had to get good feed. Oats were good for them. They were giving them barley too, but the worst thing about barley is the 'beard' which got stuck in their cheeks and you had to pull it out by hand. They couldn't swallow it.
(Hugh Archie MacCallum talking to Maggie Campbell, AC394).

Some horses were better at swallowing the barley than others. If the beard (*calg*) did get stuck, you had to pull it out by hand.

John MacLean, Kilkenneth, was known as *Gaffer a' churrain*, gaffer of the carrots, because he grew carrots for the horses used by the Glassary seaweed factory in Sandaig (Alexander MacKinnon, Kilkenneth - *Sandaidh Ghobhainn*).

You had to feed them and you had to be sure to give them plenty of water…in spring especially you were ploughing all day, you stopped at dinner time to give the horses their food. Then when you were ready to go out again – you would give them an hour anyway – you would take them to a tub of water and that would keep them going until the evening… When the days were hot I would plait their tails up. They were like animals going to the Cattle Show, but it was to make them comfortable (Donald MacIntyre talking to Maggie Campbell, AC391).

Not every crofter was so good to his horses. John Fletcher, Balemartine, tells the story of an old man in Hynish who never fed his pony. One day he was given a load of hay and he piled it into his cart and set off home. Half way the pony collapsed – it was starving. All the old man could say was 'Up to its old tricks again!'

The horses were kept in the stable, from the end of September until the end of May or the beginning of June, after the spring work (*obair earraich*) had finished.

They would often be put in early, at the start of October if a horse was working (Hugh Archie MacCallum talking to Maggie Campbell, AC394).

The stable (*stàbal*) was divided into stalls (*stallaichean*) where the horse would be tied using a harness known as a *prangas* (see below). The stalls were floored with round stones (*buthagan*). The byre (*bathach*) was where cattle were housed, and the barn (*sabhal*) was where the corn was kept and processed. The horses were let out during the day to go for water. At Main Road Farm, Balephuil they would go down to the stream at *An Drochaid Mòr* to drink.

They were kept active through the winter going for gravel, sand and seaweed from the shore and spreading manure on the fields. Before the spring work started they were fed pure grain (*sìol glan*) to build up their strength.

In the summer they were let out to graze on a 20 yard tether (*feist*) attached to a swivel (*udalan*) on an 18 inch metal stake (*cipean*), which was banged into the ground with a round stone (*buthag*). It was better to keep the horses well apart in case they started fighting (Willie MacLean, Balinoe). The horse wore a *brangas*. This was a rope head collar with two wooden cheek pieces which were designed to dig into the horse if it pulled. Neil MacArthur, Moss, remembers making these from oak whisky barrel staves which were about two inches wide and had the right curve. In the old days on Tiree, an islander who had broken the rules of the Church of Scotland was paraded in front of the congregation wearing a *brangas* (Angus MacLean, Scarinish).

Some crofters took the comfort of their horses to greater lengths: *One evening my father went ceilidhing at the house of the Balemartine bard on a horrible cold winter's evening. The bard had a good fire going and he was sitting by it. Behind the chair what was there but a mare. The mare was in the room by the fire!*
(Donald Sinclair, SA 1968 – 31, track 21).

Work done by horses

Horses provided the 'horse power' that allowed the crofter to make a living. As the late Hector Campbell, Cornaigbeg said: *The wives of crofters were working hard. One old man said 'If I don't get married this year I'll have to buy a horse!'* (Robert Beck AC2).

Crofters kept between one and four horses, depending on their circumstances. Willie MacLean's family in Balinoe had three horses, with one mare at a time in foal. Many of the crofters in West Hynish, where the crofts were small, had only one horse and needed to borrow from their neighbours to make a team. The uncle of Donald John Kennedy, West Hynish, had a horse called 'Polly'. Unfortunately, she died after being fed too much rye. He always said he killed her with too much kindness. Alec MacDonald, *Ailig Bhòdaidh*, bought a replacement pony for him which had belonged to the priest in Barra (DJ Kennedy).

L-R: Donald MacKechnie, Kilmoluaig and Alasdair MacDonald, Kilmoluaig with horses Rosie and Polly in 1953 (G17)

Sledges and creels

Before there were good roads on Tiree, horses would pull sledges or carried two creels (*cliabh*). There used to be footpath on the south side of Ben Hynish, between Hynish and *Baile Mhic 'Eotha*. There is a narrow section where the creels had to be taken off the horses to allow them to squeeze through the gap. It is still called *Creag nan Cliabh* (rock of the creels).

DCB: There was a large straw mat on the back of the horse called a peallag. And there was a strong straw rope keeping them in place. Because the horse had a peallag on either side, the creels or cliabh never hurt it. And there was a wooden saddle, or srathair, on the top of the peallag, called iris a' chliabh.
IM: Was the iris made with hemp rope?
DCB: No! It was made of straw. Oh! I saw plenty of hoses carrying creels. There's none left now in Tiree.
IM: What were they carrying?
DCB: Seaweed! Seaweed! There's seaweed in places you can't get a cart to, but with a horse and creels you can get to it.
(Donald Sinclair, *Dòmhnall Chaluim Bàin*, West Hynish, talking to Iain MacInnes in 1968, tape SA 1968-21 track 16)

Carts

The two-wheeled horse-drawn cart, *cairt obrach*, was the backbone of transport on the island from the 1800s to the 1950s.

A major winter task was to collect seaweed from the beaches. This was spread on cultivated ground and the *machair* to increase its fertility. When Donald MacIntyre was a boy in the 1930s he remembers quite commonly seeing twenty carts down at the shore at Vaul. The horses were usually taller than the carts, which therefore sloped backwards. There was a knack to loading it and sticking the fork, *graip*, in at the right angle to stop the seaweed falling out.

Sledge used to move hay ricks at Corrairigh, Cornaigbeg, with Flora Clark nèe Campbell, Hector Campbell and nephew Colin (C120)

You also had to be careful to load a cart correctly, putting enough of the weight onto the horse. Neil MacArthur (*Niall Sheumais Alasdair*) was once moving mud and stones from an old steading in Moss. As he was going up the road the load shifted backwards, almost lifting the horse into the air. He had to cut the belly rope to free her.

One driver could take two carts and two horses down to the beach for seaweed or sand.

They would be working the seaweed with two carts, the horse pulling the second one following the first…especially those that had crofts further from the shore (Hugh Archie MacCallum talking to Maggie Campbell, AC394).

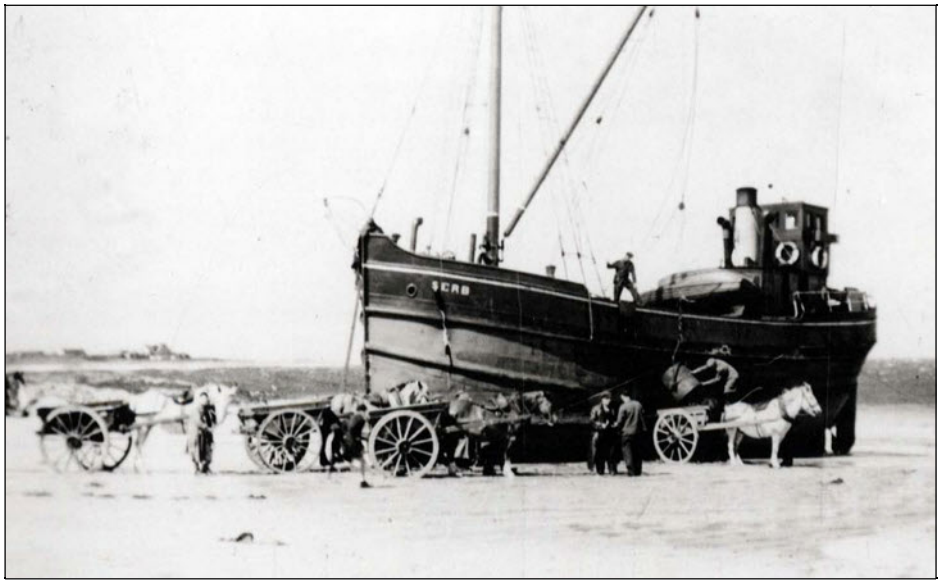
Collecting seaweed from the beach (V43)

Crofters with no direct access to the shore sometimes had a long journey to find seaweed. Neil MacArthur's father in Moss (*Seumas Alasdair*) would, at times, have to go some five miles to *Abhainn a' Bhàigh*, the beach near Baugh bridge.

Carts would also be taken down to the puffers that came into several beaches on Tiree.

A horse would have to be pretty docile to go to the coal puffers. Some of them [took fright] *going past the side of the boat when the tide was out, and some would refuse to go on if there was water round their feet. I saw that happen* (Hugh Archie MacCallum talking to Maggie Campbell, AC394).

The puffers would sometimes sink into the sand, leaving a deep pool which could be dangerous for the horses when they sailed.



Off-loading coal from a beached coal puffer in the 1930s or 1940s (V46)

In 1863 Edward Stanford came to Tiree to build a seaweed-processing factory at the Glassary in Sandaig. He landed coal at the pier in Hynish.

We were obliged to land lime and timber at Scarinish and the cartage over 10 miles of villainous road to the sites chosen for building was very expensive. There are 600 horses and carts in the island but the tenants asked so much that I purchased 4 horses and 6 carts at sales etc. and they [the prices] *then fell to 3 shillings per day at which we had 30 at work at once carting coals* (Edward Stanford report, 1863, AI2003.177.7).

Horses taking corn to the Cornaig mill were tethered to a stone and ring at the roadside which can still be seen east of the mill.

Horse-pulled carts had to have a number plate, just like a car today.

Margaret Campbell: *Why were there plates with the number of the crofts on?*
Donald MacIntyre: *That was the law of the land. If you were on the main road, the same way as with a car, if the policeman met you without your number on the cart, you could be arrested…you didn't need to pay for them* (Donald MacIntyre talking to Maggie Campbell, AC391).

At a traditional Tiree funeral, a horse drawn cart (*cairt na cosgais* – literally cart of the expense) followed the coffin as it was carried by mourners. This carried biscuits, cheese and whisky for the men carrying the coffin.

Malcolm MacArthur transporting groceries in 1904 (T71)

Plough

Because ploughs were always pulled, the harness for a plough had no *briogais* over the back of the horse. At the back of a plough there was a board with a peg (*smuiseal*) to adjust the width of the furrow. Usually this was 8", but lea ground, which had not been cultivated for four or five years, would need a 7" furrow because it was more compacted (Hugh Archie MacCallum).

Lachie Campbell tells this story. The old men were terribly particular about their ploughing. It had to be just right. John MacLean (*Iain Alasdair Iain*) once ploughed his croft for potatoes. He wasn't happy with a slightly crooked furrow in one corner of his croft in Cornaigbeg. He harrowed the whole field and ploughed it again. *'The potatoes wouldn't have minded!'* Lachie says now.

Ploughing was done by men as it took a lot of strength, particularly lifting up the handles to dig the point in at the start of the furrow. However, in living memory, Mary MacKinnon from Seaside in Vaul ploughed her croft (Margaret MacInnes).

Other horse drawn machinery

Formerly, much of the work on farms was done in the Lowlands by oxen and in the Highlands by teams of native ponies. The work was slow and very labour intensive. The development of the heavy horse enabled the use of new, much more efficient, iron ploughs and other implements. It also stimulated the invention of many labour-saving machines such as reapers for cutting corn and hay, swath turners, horse rakes, horse mills and seed broadcasters. The invention of the binder, pulled by three horses, rendered redundant great squads of sheaf tiers, usually women. Even for years after the Second World War it was commonplace to see these horse powered machines at work (Robert Beck).

Robert Beck: *A horse fork for building stacks. A very simple apparatus. The most complicated thing you needed was the horse! You had a big pair of shears and this pair of shears went into the hay and lifted about a quarter of a ruc* [pile of *hay*]. *And there was a tripod and a pulley block and the rope came down from the pulley block to the horse.* [When] *the horse moved forward* [the shears closed] *and up and up it went and somebody on the stack levered it round to where you wanted it to go. You pulled the rope, the shears* [opened] *and* [the hay] *fell. A great thing!*

Hector Campbell: *Tom Barr was hiring labour for haymaking. He was paying them 10 pence a day, and they wanted a shilling. And he wouldn't* [pay]. *So he sent for one of these forks…and the horse did the work of ten or twelve men…There was a big hayshed. He paid his men 10 pence a day. No food, nothing. They had to walk home at dinner time. They weren't good old days* (Robert Beck, AC2).

The horse drawn hayrake (*ràsal mòr*) pulled the cut hay into long lines which were hand raked into piles (*prapagan*).

John MacLean of Kilmoluaig, using a hayrake in the 1940s (S31)

Gott Bay Pier

The Gott Bay pier was built in 1913 with a set of rails running down it. A pony belonging to Alan MacFadyen, *Ailean MacDhonnchaidh*, Gott, pulled a small bogey from the boat to the store.

The Gott Bay pier pony taking a break in the late 1920s or early 1930s (D112)

Horseflies

Horseflies, or clegs, tormented the horses in summer.
It wasn't easy for the horses to work all day in the summer with the horseflies. You had to work just in the early morning and late in the evening. They were eating them. You had to stop (Hugh Archie MacCallum talking to Maggie Campbell, AC394).

The lifespan of a heavy, hard-working horse was relatively short – a ten year old working horse was considered old. Ponies were longer lived - some lived to over 30 (Robert Beck, AC2). Once a horse was too old or ill to work they were sometimes killed. The late Alasdair MacDonald, Druimasadh, told of a spot between Balevullin and The Green where the path runs near the cliff. Horses were backed over blindfolded when they could no longer work.

Neil MacArthur, Kilkenneth, remembers his father telling him of how he and John MacArthur, Middleton, had to bury Archie Kennedy's horse in Kilkenneth. The ground was hard and the hole was too small. There was nothing for it but to cut the horse's head off before burying it.

The teacher, the Lady, postman, factor and doctor

Schoolteachers on Tiree in the 19th century were expected to keep a horse as well as a cow or two.

Both upon Hilapole and Kirkapole school crofts…having two cows' grass and a horse's grass (Instructions, 1803, p.81).

As well as the heavier work carts, there were a number of faster two-wheeled gigs on Tiree in the 19th and early 20th centuries. These depended on the construction of smoother tracks or roads.

Horse and trap with unknown women in early 1900s (X99)

Lady Victoria was the sister of the Duke of Argyll and was a frequent visitor to the island, coming first in 1878. She had had polio at the age of 4 and walked with the aid of two sticks. She kept a fine buckboard on Tiree pulled by a coach horse, not a local pony. John MacKinnon, Lodge Farm, Kirkapol was retained as her horseman. Once in 1908 she had to put a message on the ferry which, because of the weather, was forced to leave in a hurry: *'Is John downstairs?* [she asked her attendant] *Is he ready to go? Has he had his breakfast? No? Then take him this.' And the tray, daintily set with the fare provided for her slender appetite, was hastily thrust into the hands of the messenger, with the command that John was to be instantly fed, and to make all speed* (*Lady Victoria Campbell, A Memoir*, Frances Balfour, Hodder and Stoughton, p.330). For John, as for many people on Tiree at the time, English was very much a second language. Lady Victoria remarked one morning that the glass (barometer) had fallen that night. John asked "Did it break?" (Annie Kennedy, Scarinish).

[In Lady Victoria Campbell's time] *there was no pier. You went out in a wee boat. But she wasn't fit to do this. She had a Texan buckboard…And they brought the boat round into Gott Bay and this horse went out right up to its belly and she was lifted off the buckboard into the boat. A Texan buckboard! You see them in the cowboy pictures!* (Robert Beck, AC2).

From Lady Victoria's diary of 1899 we can see she led a busy life on Tiree, directing a range of charitable works:
Jan 1st. Dropped nurse after Hylipol [service].
Jan. 2nd. Went to Green and far end.
Jan. 3rd. Far end. Balephuil. Two invalid women. Got caught…
Jan. 12th. Took nurse west. Found doctor. Caught in wet.
Feb. 13th. Taken ill. Very stormy. Sent John on horseback. Dr. came in afternoon.
(Lady Victoria Campbell, p.298).

The post was delivered by horse drawn cart until the 1950s.

There were five postmen here with wee gigs. Some were dogcarts. Neil Carachan [Neil MacLeod] *remembers driving a governess cart on his post round* (Robert Beck, AC2).

Mr. Taylor, the Baptist minister, lived in Balemartine in the house known today as Catrim Cottage. He had a pony and cart and the remains of the stable can still be seen behind the house. He was known as a kindly man who would get off the cart to spare the horse when going uphill.

Riding

By and large, if someone on Tiree before the Second World War wanted to go anywhere on the island, he or she walked. Riding seems to have been relatively uncommon, even on an island with hundreds of horses. Partly this may have been due to the type of work-horse used on the island which were used to pulling or picking their way slowly over rough ground with a load. Partly it may have been because horses were such a valuable resource and crofters were reluctant to use up their energy.

Few crofters owned a riding saddle. If they did mount a horse they would sometimes sew two flour or potato bags together, put them over the horse's back and fasten stirrups to them.

Children, however, were often put on a horse in the field at harvest time as it went back and forwards to the stackyard and people often rode a horse to and from the smithy to be shod. Hector MacPhail, Balephetrish, remembers riding a very reluctant horse to the smithy in Cornaig, but coming back in a flash!

Some people would ride them as well. If you were going to the smithy with a horse you would ride it (Hugh Archie MacCallum talking to Maggie Campbell, AC394).

There were exceptions. In the first half of the nineteenth century Flora MacDougall, Balephuil, remembers people riding round the island to alert people to the arrival of a group of whales offshore: *Men on horseback have galloped swiftly over the island shouting "Whales! The whales!" In answer to this cry every fisherman has manned his boat* (Autumn Leaves, 1925, AI 1998.243).

Children astride a pair of yoked Clydesdales at Ruaig (V12)

Near Vaul in Tiree, a man riding home at night with his son (a young boy) seated behind him was met by a number of cats. The boy had his hands clasped round his father, and the man, pressing them to his side to make sure of the boy's hold, urged his horse to its speed. The cats sprang, and, fastening on the boy, literally devoured him. When the man reached home at full gallop, he had only the boy's arms left (The Gaelic Otherworld, p. 191).

In the nineteenth century there was a public house at The Green which was frequented by a number of east coast fishermen. One in particular was causing trouble by fighting local men. One of these, *Gilleasbuig Làidir* rode to collect a famous Tiree prizefighter from Brock, known as the 'Currier'. The 'Currier' jumped on the white mare and rode to Kilmoluaig before fighting and severely injuring the east coaster.

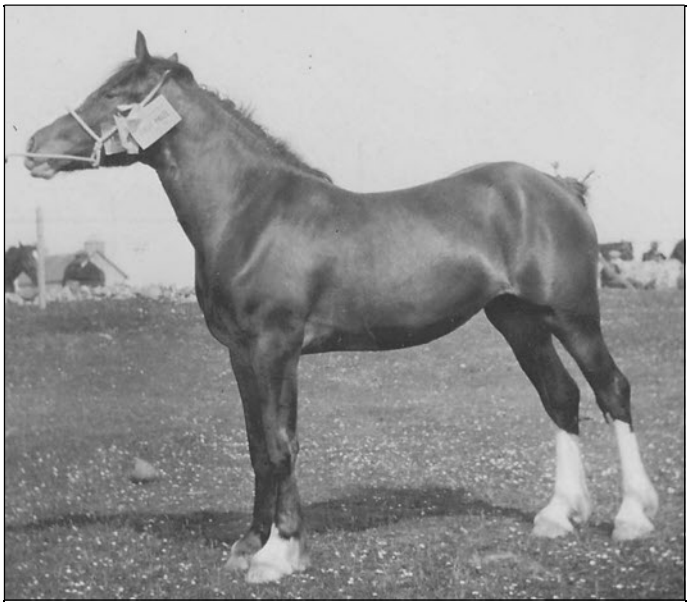
Robert Beck also remembers Colin MacPhail, Crossapol, to have been a "terrific horseman" as he rode around the Reef working as a shepherd.

Shows

The Cattle and Horse Show was held at Scarinish school until 1938, and was quite an event.

The Cattle Shows on Tiree when I was young were just as good as the Highland Show. There were terrific horses in classes. One year there were over twenty fillies in one class, and eight or ten mares in each class. Judges from the mainland would say that Tiree horses could compete at any show in the Highlands…The show at Scarinish school was particularly good. The playground at the back was where the horse judging took place. There would be hundreds of people around the school yard wall watching. You would make a plait of the tail, put ribbons in the mane and wash and dry the hooves to make them stand out (Donald MacIntyre, AC189).

Folk have seen as many as 22 yeld mares ['yeld' means empty - mares which were neither pregnant nor lactating] *at the show in one class* (Robert Beck, AC2).



Champion Clydesdale belonging to John MacNeill, Greenhill at the Tiree Agricultural Show in 1927 (B199)

Foals that looked as though they would show well had special horseshoes with the grip on one side only.

They were shoeing the foals at three months of age – the ones that were going to the shows. The ones that are going to be good and get prizes, the back legs should be touching together. The closer they are the better the 'action', the walking…For a foal there's nothing on the inside and a cràgais [the flange at the end of the shoe] *on the outside of the shoe. That puts the foal's legs in. At that age the foal's bone's are still*

soft and they turn in and stay that way [as the horse grows up] (Donald MacIntyre, AC189).

The carts too were scrubbed and painted, the chains were polished (*air an glàsadh*) and three bells were sewed onto the point of the horse collar (*sùgan*). These jingled as the horse walked. The tails were plaited with ribbons. Alec MacNeill, *Ailig Bhòdaidh*, Main Road Farm, was well-known for preparing horses for the show. He kept a special harness just for show time. Another successful family was *Clann Alasdair*, Baugh, whose house was decorated with winner's certificates.

Donald MacIntyre, Gott still bred pedigree Clydesdale horses until 2000. A cutting from 1978 reports: *A four-year-old Clydesdale mare bred by Mr. Donald MacIntyre on his farm at Gott won fourth prize in her class at the Royal Highland Show. This was considered quite an achievement as there was a large number of Clydesdales competing. Mr. MacIntyre was at the show to exhibit her himself* (AI 1997.147.3).

The Scottish Horse Regiment

Alasdair Sinclair: *Before the* [Second World] *War quite a few people on Tiree were members of the Scottish Horse Regiment, the equivalent I suppose of a Territorial battalion, but they were mounted infantry. I believe they went for training at some camp on the mainland, and they took their horse with them. You did your training and you had a holiday, more or less. But before you went back home again, you sold your horse. The cost of transporting your horse was born by His Majesty's Government!*

Hector MacPhail: *For a period of some thirty years there was a strong connection between Tiree and the regiment the Scottish Horse. They were away every summer for a month to Perthshire.* [One day] *they were on manoeuvres out in the hills near Perth when fog came down. It caused a lot of confusion – thick fog when you're halfway up a mountain is no fun and games. Two Tiree men got lost, they got left behind and it took them two days to find their way back to the camp. And when they got back they were told by the sergeant 'You'll be lucky if you're not shot, you're going to be court-martialled for this carry-on.' And when the officers heard these two missing men were back they were called up in front of the colonel. And they went in and the colonel was sitting behind a long table and the adjutant and a big, long row of officers. And the colonel barked at the vet 'Go and examine their horses!' Everybody stood and sat there in total silence for ten minutes. And the vet came back. 'What condition are the horses in?' barked the colonel. 'The horses are in perfect condition, Sir!' the vet replied. And instead of being court-martialled, the colonel gave them a very high commendation for the way they had looked after their horses in the two days. But that would only be natural to Tiree men of the day. You fed and watered your horse before you fed and watered yourself* (Hector MacPhail, AC41, 1997)**.**

What horses meant to people

A song written by Donald MacDougall, Balephuil, shows the affection Tiree crofters had for their horses. MacDougall had bought the Clydesdale mare 'Sally' from the factor when the horse was getting old. At 18 hands she was noted for her strength, having brought the huge lintel, which can still be seen in the cart shed at Island House, from the pier at Hynish:

Now since Sally has died on me it is time for me to sing verses
And to tell of the state I am in without a mare at this time.
Who will do good work on the shore? Who will plough the clay?
Or who will mend the road that lets me cross the moor dry-shod?

When she lay down in the stable the tackle was set up.
I gathered the lads of the township to drag her to her grave.
Some suggested that she should be laid out and shared around bit by bit,
And Calum MacArthur remarked, 'Her ear would make a fair load for me.'

One day when I was on the sea shore and she was pulling valiantly,
The farmer's son said, 'What a disgusting object is behind you!
Get her down to a swampy place and do not leave her bones above ground,
In case she brings plague and pestilence to every pony round.

But though you were a drover, oh! The greatest in the land,
And though you had enough gold to put a coat on your back,
Why should you mock the finest mare in all the countryside,
When your father never had the like of her in the whole of his life?

But if you had seen Sally before old age weighed her down,
Many a foal she produced before she wore away to a shadow:
She left behind her progeny, the finest steed in the land,
And she is over at Vaul with Neil, son of Calum, son of Neil.
(Tocher 32, p.83).

Smiddies

The 5th Duke of Argyll brought tradesmen, including blacksmiths, to Tiree in the 18th century.

I am told that a good smith and Cartwright are both much wanted on the island. You must be at pains to get both, as it is impossible that any good husbandry can go on without them. I will be at any reasonable expense to establish them, and I desire that you will not delay or slur this over but attend to it immediately and earnestly (Instructions to the Baillie of Tiry 1792, p. 25).

*There have been a smith and a cart-maker provided and are stationed in the centre of the island. The former is carrying out his business daily, but the latter is presently idle for want of timber (*Baillie's reply, 1792, ibid, p.27).

This development seems not have lasted, for eight years later the Duke was again ordering: *I have long understood that a Cartwright and smith are much wanted in Tiry and have been willing to encourage the establishment of both* (Instructions, 1800, p. 51).

In 1802 a blacksmith was among those given a croft in Balemartine (Instructions, p.68).

The smiddy at Kilkenneth (E2)

Within living memory there were at least ten smiddies on Tiree. There the blacksmith shod horses, and made and repaired all the iron implements used on the island:

- **Hynish** (*Cèardach Haoidhnis*): the original smiddy was built during the construction of Skerryvore lighthouse and is now part of Morton Boyd House. It still has bars on the window and the remains of the forge. It was reopened by Donald MacKinnon (*Dòmhnall a' Ghobhainn*) who later emigrated to Australia.

- **Balinoe** (*Cèardach Cù' Dhèis*): the blacksmith here was Hugh MacKinnon, *Eòghann a' Ghobhainn*, from Farm House, Balemartine. He made the girders for the bridge by the graveyard.

- **Middleton**: there was a *Baca na Cèardaich* (sand dune of the smiddy) on the Middleton machair.

- **Kilkenneth** (*Cèardach Theònaidh Ghobhainn*): John MacKinnon, *Teòn Iain a' Ghobhainn*, the blacksmith at Kilkenneth and the father of *Sandaidh Ghobhainn,* was shoeing the horse of *Iain Bhiltidh*. While this was being done the horse fell asleep and when John stepped away the horse fell over, fortunately not far as it was standing next to the wall (Sandy MacKinnon). There were two forges in this smiddy so that two smiths could work side by side (Robert Beck).

- **Kilmoluaig**: there were three smiddies at different times. Kenneth Matheson had one opposite Greenbank; *Criù Eachainn a' Choll*, Angus and *Teòn* MacKinnon, had one opposite Angus MacKinnon's house (*Cèardach Theònaidh Eachainn a' Choll*); there was another on the 'Club' east of the *ùtraid*.

- **Cornaigbeg** (*Cèardach mhic Eachairn*): the MacEachern family were well-known blacksmiths. Archie MacEachern had come to Tiree from mid-Argyll in the early 19th century and his family worked in the Cornaigbeg smiddy for four generations. Robert Beck's horse 'Wee Dapple' was the last to be shod in this smiddy:

  [Wee Dapple] *was a small pony, 11.2 hands, which was ridden to school at Scarinish by Drew, our middle son every day. The playground was grass and extra fodder was kept in the front porch of the teacher's house (then empty). On Saturday, Sunday and holidays 'Wee Dapple' stood at the gate snickering because he wanted to go to school. The other pupils, and a great many folk, gave him a lot of kind attention. Normally our ponies were not shod, but 'Wee Dapple developed laminitis; hence the very specialised shoes made and fitted by Mr. MacEachern. He was very highly skilled* (Robert Beck, personal communication).

James MacCallum, (*Seumas Mòr*), had a smiddy in front of Hugh MacLeod's house.

- **Cornaigmore** (*Cèardach Nèill Bhàin*): *Niall Bàn* had a smiddy where the Magees live today. He moved to Caolas because there were too many smiths nearby.

- **Balephetrish**: in front of Margaret McDowall's present house.

- **Earnal** : Hector MacDonald (*Eachann mac Chaluim*) had been delivered by a stranger and forever had one blue and one brown eye. His trademark when shoeing horses was to have five nails on the outside rim and the usual four on the inside (Hector MacPhail's township histories, AI 1998.44.4).

- **Gott** (*Cèardach Ghot*): the MacIntyres had been brought to the island from Lochaber by the estate.

  The Gott smiddy was at the side of the road. You can see the ruins still just south of the gate going up to the church…that's where my great, great grandfather, [and] *my grandfather* [worked]. *Niall, my grandfather's brother, he was the last smith there.* [His son] *Calum taught me* (Donald MacIntyre, AC189).

  Neil MacIntyre (1843-1908), known as *An Gobhainn Beag*, had worked for many years in France and Italy, specialising in making frames for street gas lights.

  The story goes that a puffer which had been discharging coal on Gott bay suffered an engine breakdown because the connecting rod (three inches in diameter) from the piston had snapped in half. The skipper came ashore with the broken rod and asked Neil MacIntyre if he could carry out a repair that would allow them to proceed home to the Clyde. The blacksmith forge-welded the rod, not only enabling the skipper to depart for home and arrive safely, but prompting a visit two years later when the same puffer returned to Tiree and the skipper was able to inform the blacksmith that his 'temporary' repair was still working perfectly! Apparently, Neil's repaired rod was driving the engine until the puffer finally went to the scrapyard (Hector MacPhail's township histories, AI 1998.44.4).

- **Caolas**: *Niall Bàn* moved here from Cornaig. He was the great grandfather of Willie MacIntosh. Malcolm MacDonald, *Calum a' Ghobhainn* was *Calum Alasdair Nèill Bhàin*.

There was a big fire in the smiddy with a bellows. You had to get special coal – gual cèardach. You'd be getting it when the coal puffer came in, but you had to order it specially (Donald MacIntyre, AC189).

Shoeing horses was the main trade of the blacksmith. Until the 19th century few horses on Tiree had horse-shoes. A report in 1811 said of Tiree horses: *They are not shod at all* (MacDonald, p. 481).

However, the horseshoe gave the horse more grip. The shoe had a small flange at both ends, called *an cràgais*: *The same as the tread on a tractor tyre, the horse shoe gives a horse more grip, more power, especially if the ground is wet, but also if it's dry* (Donald MacIntyre talking to Maggie Campbell, AC391).

Horses would be shod every three months: *There was a great skill* [shoeing horses]. *The first thing when the horse came into the smiddy you would look to see what hooves it had. Some of them, when there hadn't been much attention paid to them…the shoes had been lost and the hooves were broken. If the horse had been well looked after it was easy enough then. You took a length – gada – of iron an inch wide. If the hoof was eight inches wide you took an eighteen inch length, a seven inch hoof seventeen inches and so on. You put the length of iron in the fire until it was hot and the first thing you do is put it over the back of the anvil – innean – and bend it round until the two ends came together. Then you have to make holes for the nails. The hole on the bottom has to be wide enough for the head of the nail* [so that it doesn't protrude]. *You then turn the shoe over and the hole on the hoof side has to be smaller. The shoe nails (tairnean cruidh) are quite narrow at the point. If the hole is too wide the shoe will move and it won't last long.*
MC: *Are the nails sore going into the hoof?*
DM: *No! No! It's horn, the hoof. They don't notice it. Then to get it right…you put the shoe into the fire until it's glowing and when you put it back on the hoof smoke comes out. Lots of people think it's burning* [the horse] *but it's only horn and you have to burn it like this so that the shoe fits snugly. Then you put the nails in. Four shoes on each horse, especially for the spring work. It'll take an hour to do two shoes… But often the smiths would have the shoes ready-made because they knew the horses coming down and their measurements….You can do it in 1 ½ hours then. An older horse is used enough to the smiddy. But younger horses – and it was usually three year olds that were shod at first – some of them had never had their feet lifted until they went to the blacksmith….They said that the smiths in our family – and it was the Duke that brought our family to Tiree – if they had a horse that looked if it was going to be difficult and dangerous, they had a bit. They would cut a small piece of tobacco and tie it to the bit and put the bit in the horse's mouth and leave it in for five or ten minutes. The horse can't spit out the juice. It had to swallow it. And the nicotine in the tobacco was doping the horse…it didn't know what was happening to it!* (Donald MacIntyre, AC189).

RB: *There's a lot of cold shoeing now, especially lighter horses. In the old days you used to have to take the horse to the smiddy. And sometimes it was a very welcome rest! You were awful pleased if the horse lost a shoe!*
Hector Campbell: *It was alright if the horse hadn't lost half its hoof when it lost the shoe. The blacksmith wasn't very happy then.*

RB: *And you got the odd one* [horse] *who'd get into the habit, quite deliberately, they'd get the shoes caught in the wire of the fence. They'd work away and work away and get it off, so they'd get a holiday too!* (Robert Beck, AC2).

Although shoeing horses was a big part of a blacksmith's work:
MC: *There's a lot of other work in the smiddy.*
DM: *Oh! Ploughs, harrows. Everything else to do with the land was made in the smiddy, wheels having their rims put on* (Donald MacIntyre, AC189).

Hector Campbell: *The blacksmiths here put the fire around the wheel. And the fuel they used was the clods off an old thatched house. Coal was no use.*
Robert Beck: *And you couldn't get the draught to it for coal.*
Hector Campbell: *They picked a day for it…The measurement of the iron* [hoop]. *It had to be spot on. They measured the wheel* [rim]. *They put a mark on it with chalk, and then they measured the iron leaving it a wee bit shorter than the wheel so that when it went on it squeezed the whole thing together* (Robert Beck, AC2).

Tiree smiths were in demand on the mainland.

The late Archibald MacEachern of Cornaigbeg was employed by the LNE railway as a blacksmith, shoeing horses during the Second World War. He often had to work over 12 hours a day owing to wartime shortage of blacksmiths… until the 1950s much haulage in towns was still done by horse drawn lorries and vans. For example, at the time of railway nationalisation in 1948 the LMS railway alone had over 500 horses in Glasgow (Robert Beck show text).

The smiddy was also a warm place for men to meet and talk.

A smithy in the old days was the centre of society – a very busy place. People were always coming with horses every day and coming for other work to be done. Some people just came to sit and enjoy the conversation (Hector MacPhail, AC41)**.**

Today there are no more smiddies on the island.

Smiths are no more on Tiree. I'm the only person left on Tiree who can shoe a horse. When I go, that'll be the end of smiths on Tiree. The horses went, the tractors came and there was no work for smiths after that (Donald MacIntyre, AC189).

Other trades connected with horses

There were an awful lot of trades connected with the use of horses – saddlers, wheelwrights, coach builders, blacksmiths (Robert Beck, AC2).

Most of this work was done by skilled craftsmen on the mainland. However, there were cartwrights in Vaul, Balephuil, and Kenovay (*Eòghann Eachainn's* father). There were no saddlers on Tiree but crofters did make their own *sùgan* (collars) out of straw and canvas (Hector Campbell, AC).

Superstitions about horses

The water-horse, *each uisge*, was an evil spirit which lived in water, disguising itself sometimes as a horse, sometimes as a man:

The belief in the existence of the water-horse is now in the Highlands generally a thing of the past, but in olden times almost every lonely freshwater lake was tenanted by one – sometimes by several – of these animals (*The Gaelic Otherworld*, p.109).

There are several stories about water-horses on Tiree.

On the north side of this loch [Loch Bhasapol]*…there was a farm, where there are now only blowing sandbanks, called the town of the Clumsy Ones* [Baile nan Cràganach] *from five men who resided there, each having six fingers on every hand. They were brothers, and it was said that the Water-horse came every night, in the shape of a young man, to see a sister who stayed with them.*

With the tendency of popular tales to attach themselves to known persons, this incident is related of Calum Mòr Clarke and his family. Calum had three sons, Big Fair John (Iain Bàn Mòr), Young Fair John (Iain Bàn Og), and Middle Fair John (Iain Bàn Meadhanach). The four conspired to beguile the young man from the loch, who came to see the daughter, into the house, and got him to sit between two of them on the front of the bed. Upon a given signal these two clasped their hands round him and laid him on his back in the bed. The other two rushed to their assistance; the young man assumed his proper shape as Water-horse and a fearful struggle ensued. The conspirators cut the horse in pieces with their dirks, and put it out of the house dead (*The Gaelic Otherworld,* p. 114-5).

In another story: *A son of one of the chamberlains* [factors] *of the island last century* [i.e. the 18th] *found a horse on the moors, and being struck with its excellence, mounted it. The horse tore away at full gallop and could not be stopped. It galloped all round the* [island] *till at last one side of the reins broke and the horse rushed out on Loch Bhassapol, carrying its ill-fated rider with it."* (*Superstitions*, John Gregorson Campbell, p.211).

Again: *A man working in the fields in Caolas, in the east end of the island, saw a water-horse coming from Loch an Air, a small marshy lake full of reeds. He ran off in terror and left his coat behind. The water-horse tore the coat into shreds and then made after the man. The dogs came out when it came near the house and drove it away* (The Gaelic Otherworld, p.113).

Fairies were seldom said to use horses.

In the Highland creed the Fairies but rarely have horses…In Tiree two fairy ladies were met riding on what seemed to be horses but in reality were ragweeds…When horses neigh at night it is because they are ridden by fairies and pressed too hard.

The neigh is one of distress, and if the hearer exclaims aloud "Your saddle and pillion be on you / do shrathair 's do phillein ort" the fairies tumble to the ground (*Superstitions*, p.30).

Horses were one of a crofter's main possessions and were constantly under supernatural threat.

When taking delivery of a horse from one of whom you are not sure, you should come deiseal [sun or clockwise] *between him and the horse and take hold of the halter inside his hand, that is between him and the horse. Otherwise the seller's eye will be after the beast* [bad luck will follow] (*Superstitions*, p. 245-6).

When a stranger having the evil eye meets a rider or person leading a horse, and praises the animal's points, the effects of his looks are soon evident. Before he is out of sight the horse is suddenly taken ill and falls down. The rider should return after the evil-eyed stranger and boldly accuse him of having done the mischief. The more 'bitterly and abusively' he does so the better. On coming back he will find the horse all right (*The Gaelic Otherworld*, p. 202-3).

In spring the horses, harness and plough were sprinkled with water which had been in contact with gold or silver using a wisp of straw, the *sop seile* (*The Gaelic Otherworld*, p.137). The horses would also be given a special sheaf of corn. This was called the *cailleach*, the last sheaf to be cut the previous year.

Horse-shoes protected against the powers of witchcraft.

[The horse-shoe] *must be found by accident. It was put above the byre door…it preserved horses when put above the stable door and ships when nailed to the mast* (*The Gaelic Otherworld*, p. 178).

In Tiree a person lost several stirks by the stakes falling and strangling them in byre. A 'wise' woman, reputed a witch, advised…that the right hand part of a fore horseshoe with three nails in it should be put below the threshold of the byre along with a silver coin (*The Gaelic Otherworld*, p. 179).

Horses were believed to have more sensitive 'second sight' than humans.

A horse in Vaul, ordinarily a quiet beast, used when carting to be most unaccountably startled, especially when passing a certain boat drawn up on the beach [which was already thought to be unlucky]*…and it was ultimately sent back to the lenders who again sold it to people in the west end. Here a melancholy loss of life occurred in it. A gale off the land suddenly sprang up when the boat, with six of a crew, was within a few hundred yards of the shore. The men were seen hard to bring the boat to land, but they had at last to give up the attempt. Some days after the boat came ashore in Coll with only one of the crew in it. He was reclining in one of the thwarts, dead. It was the*

horse and cart mentioned that took home his body. After that day the horse was never known to be unaccountably startled or frightened (*The Gaelic Otherworld*, p. 262).

A crofter from Balevullin told this story. He was returning home one day with a young horse hitched to a cart. He was at the crossroads at Cornaigmore. The horse stopped and would not go on towards the mill. It reared and neighed as if frightened and the crofter reached to calm the horse. As soon as he touched the beast he could see two coffins at the mill. He had to take the horse round by the school and when he reached home the horse was sweating. He got Duncan MacLean, the vet, to check the beast over and the horse was put in the stable with water and half a sheaf of corn.

It was thought to be unlucky to see the first foal of the year with its back towards you. A Gaelic proverb, well-known on Tiree, goes: *Chuala mi a' chuthag gum bhiadh nam bhroinn, chunnaic mi searrach 's a chùlaibh rium, thuig mi nach rachadh a' bhliadhna math leam /* I heard a cuckoo with no food inside me, saw a foal with its back to me and I understood the year ahead was going to be unlucky.

Donkeys

In living memory there were three donkeys on the island. John MacDonald, Heanish (*Teonaidh Nònian*) had one that was so old when it died that no one could remember it coming to Tiree. John MacKay from the *Bail' Ùr*, Balephuil, had another. He had been wounded in the First World War and limped badly. The donkey, who John always maintained was a 'hard worker' pulled a small cart with himself and his wife (*Bean MhicAoidh*) when they went collecting tangles at *Ceann a' Bharra* (Nan McClounnan). Lachie MacKinnon from West Hynish had a third.

Johnny MacKay, Balephuil, collecting dry tangles (seaweed) by donkey and cart in 1957 (U23)

Alasdair Sinclair, Balephuil, wrote this song about one donkey. Part of it goes:

Oran na h-Ass

Buadh 's piseach a bhith leantainn na Brùnaich [John Brown, Scarinish Hotel, who procured the ass]
Chuir ann am rathad a leithid de chùmhnadh
'S tric a their Lachainn rium "Laighidh a sùil oirr'
Gun gin anns an dùthaich de seòrsa

Tha giullan 'nsa bhaile seo, fhuaras gu feum i
Ma gheibh thu acfhuinn, cairt agus clèibh dhi.
Seas as do gheallaidh, ceannaich an creatur
Cha bhodaradh spèiridh 'rid bheo i.

Song of the Ass

Let there be advantage and profit to the Browns
Who provided such a help to me.
Often Lachie says to me “They will regard her with envy
There’s nothing in the district like her”.

There’s a groom [Archie MacLean, *Gilleasbuig Bàn*] in this township who will put it to use
If you provide harness, cart and panniers for her.
Stand by your promise, buy the creature
She won’t suffer from arthritis of the legs [a disease of horses] in your lifetime.

(written by *Alasdair Nèill Oig*, Alasdair Sinclair, Balephuil. Taken down from Mabel Kennedy and Alasdair Brown. Translated by Flora MacPhail).

Horses and the pace of life

Horses had another effect, and one just as profound, on life on the island. The pace horses walked and worked dictated much of the pace of life in the days before the internal combustion engine. Horses need a lot of time and patience to train, feed, clean and work with them. Today our pace of life is determined by the motor car, the phone and the computer.

[With horses] w*e worked in first gear. Now it's second and third gear* (Donald MacIntyre).

Hector Campbell, Corrairigh, told the story of how he was driving in a cart up the road with a second cart following during the Second World War. Preston Potts, the Commanding Officer of RAF Tiree, and famous for driving his jeep at top speed around the island, roared up behind him trying to get past. "Don't you know there's a war on!" he bellowed at Hector.

Tractors, mechanisation

When the Tiree airport was being built at the start of the Second World War much of the work was still done by horses.

Many of the crofters owned horses and carts and the contractors working on Government projects such as airfields and roads would hire a horse, cart and a driver for the fantastic figure of £1 a day. To airmen earning two or three pounds a week this seemed a fortune (George Holleyman, Life in the RAF 1941-3, p.6, AI 1998.12.1).

A few tractors came onto the island during the Second World War. Within ten years the tractor had taken over most of the work of the horses.

It was only during the war the first tractors came here. They were sent by the Department of Agriculture…they were sending in these old Fordson tractors. They had no hydraulic systems [but] *could pull ploughs and pull binders. In the early '50s the little grey Fergusson began to appear on the scene…The change when it came was really very sudden…When I was a boy, every crofter in Balephetrish had two horses. Then, when the tractors started creeping in they left the tractors to do the heavy work- the ploughing – and cut down to one horse and then some of them cut down altogether* (Hector MacPhail, AC41, 1997)**.**

Willie MacLean, Balinoe, was one of those who worked for the Department. Crofters paid by the hour for the tractors to plough, harrow and bind.

[When] *the tractor came things changed. People could see that it was easier to do things with a tractor. A tractor gives you freedom. With a tractor you've only got to sit and work levers, instead of working with a plough, walking all day after the horses. Anyway, walking never did anyone any harm!* (Donald MacIntyre talking to Maggie Campbell, AC391).

Hector MacPhail told this story. An old man and his son were arguing about whether to buy a tractor in place of the family's trusty horse. 'Look! A tractor doesn't cost anything when it's not working,' argued the young man. 'But the horse doesn't cost anything when it is working!' replied his father.

Hector Campbell, Corrairigh, sold his last horse in 1953, Donald MacIntyre last used a working horse on his croft in Gott in 1955, and Hugh Archie MacCallum, Whitehouse, in 1956-57. A few of the older crofters continued to use a horse for some jobs around the croft into the 1960s. Alec MacNeill, Balevullin got his first tractor in 1960.

Duncan MacPhail, Balephuil, was a young man of 20 when he sold his last horse. At that time there was a Corson's horse sale in Oban every March, but the weather was stormy and the boat could not reach Tiree. He sold the horse by phone.

Not that we had a phone, but word got to us anyway. It went to an old man in Dunbar, near Edinburgh who wanted it for his daughter [on a small farm]. *At that time you couldn't just put a horse on the boat. You had to go with it. When I got to Oban and put the horse on the train, the last thing it did, it neighed. They're wise. It was the saddest thing I ever did.*

Hugh Archie MacCallum remembers horses being sent off the island "in droves" in the 50s and 60s. The younger ones went to the Forestry Commission, while the older ones were usually sent to the knackery.

I remember one Clydesdale horse yoked to a cart here [in the 1960s] *and that was Ailig Bhòdaidh's. I think that was the last one* (Robert Beck, AC2).

Neil MacArthur tells this story. An old crofter, James MacArthur (*Seumas Alasdair*), was ploughing in Heylipol one day in the 1950s. A young boy, Alec MacArthur (*Ailig Beag*), was walking past on the way home from school and joined the old man. "Would you like to plough with horses one day" asked the crofter". "No", replied the boy. "There's no seat!"

Epilogue

There's something else, and it's very sad - that [the younger generation] *will never realise the glory, the beauty, the pride* [of the horse]. *I know I'm romanticising a wee bit. There was an awful lot of very, very hard work, there were very long hours, there was exposure to the weather. But they weren't lonely, stuck in the cab of a tractor listening to wireless. We could talk to our horse! Aye! And a horse was the talking point. And everybody and I mean everybody would know all the points of the horses and could criticise them very intelligently. That's gone. Very sad. !* (Robert Beck, AC2).

I miss the horses a lot. Horses were doing everything…they were the backbone of the island altogether (Hugh Archie MacCallum talking to Maggie Campbell, AC394).

Perhaps in twenty or forty years time people will listen to this tape to hear what it was like to shoe horses and work with them in a bygone age. And maybe the day will come yet when horses are needed to work again on Tiree (Donald MacIntyre, AC189).

Donald MacIntyre, Gott, with 'Lady' in 2006 - the last remaining Clydesdale on Tiree (L173)

Horse place names on Tiree

There are at least 16 place names on Tiree connected with horses. Six are sea features. It was quite common to name offshore rocks after animals (*), presumably because of some resemblance, for example *An Coilleach*, meaning the cockerel, a cockscomb of a rock off Mannal:

- Caolas: *Pairc nan Each* (field of the horses)
- Ruaig: *Sgeir nan Each** (skerry of the horses); *Tobar nan Each* (well of the horses); *Cru' an Eich* (horseshoe of the horse).
- Soay: *Sloc an Aon Eich* (gully of the one horse – possibly it was so narrow that only one horse at a time could fit down it while collecting seaweed)
- Baugh: *Loch nan Chapull* (loch of the mare); *An t-Each Dubh** (the black horse); *An t-Each Bàn** (the white horse)
- West Hynish: *Sloc Leum nan Eeach* (gully of the horses' leap); *An t-Each Gobhlach** (the crooked horse); *Tobar nan Each*; *An t-Àigeach** (the stallion)
- Balephuil: *Beinn nan Each* (hill of the horses)
- Barrapol: *Loch Garradh nan Capull* (loch of the mares' enclosure)
- Greenhill: *An t-Each Dubh**; *Ròsdal* (Viking for horse field).

These names don't tell us very much, except that horses sometimes had their own enclosures and wells at which they habitually were given water.

Gaelic words connected with horses

Searrach foal (under one year)
Loth filly (young female horse under the age of four)
Each colt (young male horse under the age of four) **or** gelding (castrated horse)
Òigeach stallion
Capall, Làir mare

Bliadhnach yearling
Dòbhliadhnach two year old, ready to start work
Trìbliadhnach three year old
Seisreach team of two horses (Neil Brownlie)

Creibhire mhòr / eich horsefly (Willie MacLean)
Creibhire chumanta cleg (Willie MacLean)
Urball biting part of cleg (Willie MacLean)

***Acfhuinn* harness**
Brangas head collar with two wooden cheek-pieces.
Sròinneach band around nose
Smeachan band under chin
Udalan swivel
Cipean metal stake, about 18" long for tethering horses
An Fheist rope between cipean and udalan
Taod rope head collar

Healtar halter
Na hems hems
Sùgan collar
Srathair cart saddle
Druimeal chain over saddle
Strap/ iris bhroilleich belly rope (Donald Sinclair)
Briogais
Cromagan na briogais breeching hooks (Neil Brownlie)
Guailnean cartach draw chains (Neil Brownlie)
Na trims
Loidhnichean / tarraing, tairgnean reins
Loidhne cùl reins of the following riderless cart (John Fletcher)

Plough
Two *Greallagan beaga* (swingle trees)
Amal main swingle tree
Sìnteagan chains or traces by which the horse pulled the plough
Smuiseal board with 8-10 pins to control the width of the furrow

Losgann sledge (Neil Brownlie)

Cliabh pannier
Peallag mat under pannier

Diollaid riding saddle

Peallag clump of dirt matted into a horse's hair
Claigeann forehead
Muing mane
Slinnean withers
Bròg hoof
Bus snout
Coinnleanan nostrils
Urball tail (Tiree pronunciation of *earball)*
Tòn rump
Smigead chin
Gluinean knees
Speir hough
Feathar (Donald MacIntyre) */ mogan* (Donald Hough) the feathers

Strìochd, a' strìochdadh or *Bris a-steach* to break in a horse
Spoth, a' spothadh to castrate

Cairt obrach working cart
Cairt copaidh tipping cart

Definitions

A **draught horse** is one which is used primarily for pulling, to distinguish it from a riding horse or a pack horse.

A **pony** is any horse less than 14.2 hands high at the withers, or 147cm. at the highest point of the animal when it is grazing (Robert Beck show text).

