

The 'Crofters' War' of 1886 as reported in *The Times* newspaper

Compiled by Nanette Mitchell & Keith Dash

The Times, 24 July 1886.

The Crofters in Tiree

EDINBURGH, JULY 23.

There is war in Tiree. On Wednesday a force of policemen and commissionaires was landed on the island, which is one of the Hebrides West of Mull, for the purpose of supporting a sheriff officer in the serving of notices of ejection. The people of the island gathered in such force and assumed an attitude so threatening that the invaders thought it prudent to retire. They fell back in good order, and are now intrenched in Scarinish Inn awaiting reinforcements. The Island of Tiree, which belongs to the Duke of Argyll, has suffered more than most of the Western Islands from the continued subdivision of holdings. About 30 or 35 years ago the Duke resolved to change the system, in order to check the evils of over-population and poverty. His plan was to consolidate the holdings gradually and as occasion arose, and thus to create a class of small tenant-farmers, who would take the place of the numerous crofters and cottars. As far as the process has been carried out it has been attended with excellent results, but it has given great dissatisfaction to the crofter community. During the last two or three years the discontent has been carefully nursed by Land League agitators, and latterly the relations between the proprietor and the people have been excessively strained. The Highland Land Law Reform Association has a branch in the island, which has had numerous meetings for the purposes of agitation, and which has now a membership of several hundreds. During the last few months events have occurred which have given the agitators an opportunity of enforcing their doctrines in practice. The tenant of the farm of Greenhill died, and the farm was taken over by a Mr. McNeill at a rental of £150. Mr. McNeill had been, up till that time, an active member of the local Land League. He was in fact the brother of its president, and great was the indignation of the crofters when it became known that a member of their society had taken a farm which is typical of the system of consolidation on which they were making war. To mark their displeasure and to punish the backslider, they attacked his house and threw his furniture out of doors and windows. They drove his cattle from the fields, and put their own stock in their place, thus practically appropriating the farm.

The authorities of Argyleshire resolved that this bold defiance of the law should not go unpunished. With that view Mr. Nicolson, messenger-at-arms, was sent to the island this week to serve summonses on the usurpers of the Greenhill's lands, and notices of ejection on a number of crofters who are in arrears with their rents. Anticipating some resistance, Mr. Nicolson took with him a body of 20 policemen, under the direction of Captain Mackay, of the Argyleshire Constabulary, and also 20 commissionaires. These, with assistants, factors, and attendants, make up the body of 50 men already referred to. It was at first intended to send this force by the *Hebridean*, one of the steamers which usually call at Tiree, but the managers would not take the risk of offending the crofters, and probably of having their steamer scuttled and sent to the bottom of the sea. The *Nigel*, a fishing steamer belonging to

Mr. McLaughan, of Glasgow, was therefore specially chartered for the expedition. The *Nigel* left Oban about 4 o'clock on Wednesday morning. Early as it was, there were a good many people on the pier to watch her departure, but not one of them would lend a hand in throwing off the ropes which tackled the steamer. The inference is that they were sympathizers with the crofters, and would not give any aid to the vindicators of the law. The *Nigel* reached Tiree in the forenoon, and, after some delay caused by stormy weather, all her passengers were safely landed. After a discussion with the Duke of Argyll's factors at Scarinish Inn, the force was marshalled and put in motion in the direction of Greenhill farm. On the way several notices of ejection were served by being pushed under the doors of the cottages. When the force had marched three miles and come within sight of Greenhill, they found a body of 300 men, armed with bludgeons, occupying rising ground behind the house. One suggestion is that the crofters were forewarned by friends in Oban of the intended despatch of the steamer. As soon as it became known that the *Nigel* had landed the policemen the "fiery cross" was sent round the island to assemble the whole croftier population. When the invaders drew near, the Tireenians received them with shouts and jeers and terrific yells. Captain Mackay halted his force to consider what should be done. Delegates from the crofters advanced to parley. They intimated in the most decided way that they will resist to the last drop of their blood every attempt to deprive them of the lands of Greenhill. They were quite willing to pay rent for them, but keep them they would, in spite of all men. The crofters were so numerous and their attitude so determined that it was deemed imprudent to resort to active hostilities, which would have been the inevitable result of any attempt to serve the summonses. The police were therefore wheeled about, and marched back to Scarinish Inn, their departure being the occasion for renewed jeering and cheering. The noise at this juncture caused a fine horse belonging to one of the factors to run away, and the terrified animal committed suicide by impaling itself on a fence. The men are now at Scarinish, where they have to put up with such accommodation as the small inn affords. There they will remain until they receive further instructions or additional aid. After landing them, the steamer *Nigel* returned to Tobermory Bay. This is said to have been done in order to obtain a safe anchorage, the coasts of Tiree and affording no shelter. It is quite possible that the stop may be a precautionary one in another sense, as the men of Tiree had been heard to utter threatenings against any ship that ventured to carry the myrmidons of the law to their shores.

The expectation here is that the authorities will now act with the energy and decision that the occasion obviously demands.

The Times, 26 July 1886

The Crofters in Tiree

EDINBURGH, JULY 25.

The whole of the expeditionary force has now left Tiree, together with the messenger-at-arms. The attempt to settle the dispute peacefully has failed and recourse must now be had to more forcible means. It is said that when the force was marching back from Greenhill to Scarinish it was fired upon by a man who showed himself upon the bank above them. The general belief is that the man used merely blank cartridge, but one of the drivers insists that he was fired at before the rest of the party came up, and that he heard the whistling of the bullet through the air. The constables and commissionaires spent Wednesday night at Scarinish inn. All night long the inn was watched by a detachment of crofters to prevent any attempt that might be made to serve notices or summonses under the cover of darkness. On Thursday, about noon, the crofters held a mass meeting in the neighbourhood of Scarinish at which a resolution was passed requesting the police to remove themselves from the island as speedily as possible if they wished to avoid unpleasant consequences. The meeting is said to have been attended by about 1,200 men; at the close of it a body comprising 800 marched to Scarinish inn headed by two pipers to deliver the resolution. They formed a circle round the house, brandished their cudgels, and rent the air with their yells. They challenged the police to go out and fight them, but of course no response was given to the challenge, and the policemen were kept carefully within the house. The mob remained about the house for nearly an hour hooting, bellowing, dancing, and flourishing their sticks. One of the crofters was heard to call out that when they got a Parliament of their own no police or lawyer would be allowed to set foot in the island. The *Nigel* returned from Tobermory on Thursday afternoon, and when the storm had moderated the constables and commissionaires were embarked without trouble by means of the steamer's boats. It reached Tobermory about 3 o'clock, and Oban at half-past 6. The commissionaires left for Glasgow by rail on Friday morning, and the policemen have returned to their respective stations. The crofters are at present jubilant over their repulse of the invaders. They are said to be arming themselves with such weapons as the island affords in anticipation of a more serious attack. Obviously strong measures must be adopted and that speedily if respect for the law is to be restored. At present the island is in a state of utter and undisguised lawlessness. The people have been grievously misled by agitators, and they will be surprised when they find how much suffering they are bringing on themselves. It is expected that a gunboat will at once be despatched to the island with a force of marines sufficient to suppress the present disturbance and to restore order.

Our Plymouth Correspondent telegraphed last night:- Shortly after 8 o'clock on Saturday evening orders were received at the headquarters of the Plymouth division Royal marines from the Admiralty ordering a detachment of Marines, to be got ready at once for embarkation to Oban in consequence of the rising among the crofters at Tiree. The troopship *Assistance*, Captain Eagles, arrived in Plymouth Sound at 2 p.m. this afternoon, and after embarking the detachment sailed immediately. Captain Eagles and Lieutenant Connolly are in charge of the contingent, which consists of two colour-sergeants, six sergeants, eight corporals, four buglers, and 125 men. Each man has 100 rounds of ammunition. Tents, &c., were put on board the *Assistance* to provide for the men camping out.

The Times, 26 July 1886

[*Leading Article*]

We learn with satisfaction that prompt measures have been taken to deal effectively with the outbreak among the Tiree crofters. On Saturday evening orders were received at Plymouth for a detachment of the Royal Marines to be got ready at once to proceed to Oban. No time has been lost in carrying out these orders. The troops sailed yesterday, well equipped in every way for the work before them, and in numbers amply sufficient to bear down resistance, should the crofters be ill-advised enough to attempt it. The armed interposition of the marines will be none too soon. The affair at Tiree has passed already through several stages. We published on Saturday a detailed account from our Edinburgh Correspondent of the lawless proceedings of the crofter population of the island and of the resistance they have been offering to an attempt of the police to interfere with them. A further telegram which the same Correspondent sends us this morning shows that the advantage at present remains with the crofters, who have driven the police from the island, and so it will probably continue until the marines appear on the scene. We must go back some years in the history of the island to explain the circumstances of the case and the occasion of the present outbreak. Tiree, one of the Hebrides, the property of the DUKE of ARGYLL, has had the common experience of crofter settlements. The holdings have been continually sub-divided, and the pauperizing process was carried so far that it became necessary to put a check upon it in the interest of the crofters themselves. It is now some 30 or 35 years since the needful reformation was set on foot. The plan followed was to consolidate the holdings by degrees, and thus to create a class of small tenant farmers to take the place of the crofters. The change, however expedient, was not to the mind of the crofters, and during the last few years their dislike of it has become more open and intense. Their discontent has been industriously fanned by emissaries of the Land League, and the Highland Land Law Reform Association has established a branch in aid of the agitators' work.

With a soil thus prepared for mischief, an outbreak might occur at any time. The occasion alone was wanting, and this came some months since on the death of the tenant of the Greenhill farm and the passage of the land to a new occupier, a brother of the president of the local land league, and up to that time an active member of the league himself. Great was the indignation of the league against this deserter from the crofters' cause, and signal was the punishment which they had been taught to consider that such an offence deserved. The new tenant's house was attacked; his furniture was thrown out of window; his cattle were driven away, and the land which he rented was shared out among members of the league. But outside Tiree, this high-handed reversal of the DUKE of ARGYLL's plan for improvement of the island was less favourably viewed. The Argyleshire authorities, when they heard what had been done, sent off a messenger-at-arms with a *posse comitatus* of some fifty men to serve summonses on the intruders and to issue various notices of ejectment on tenants whose rent was unpaid. The course of this little expedition was attended with difficulties from the first. The managers of the local steamboat were afraid to give them a passage. The fishing steamer which they succeeded in chartering set off from Oban last Wednesday, and arrived duly at Tiree in the course of the forenoon. For some way after their landing their passage was unopposed. They marched accordingly to Greenhill Farm, serving notices of ejectment as they went, but when they came within sight of the farm they became unpleasantly aware of the kind of reception which was awaiting them. A body of some three hundred men armed with

bludgeons were in possession of the disputed land, and seemed determined to keep their hold upon it. CAPTAIN MACKAY, the superintendent in command of the invaders, on coming to a parley with the crofters was told that they would resist to the last drop of their blood every attempt to deprive them of their Greenhill farm. They were willing to pay rent for it, but the farm they would not give up. The rest of our Correspondent's story is soon told. It was deemed imprudent for the police to make any attempt to carry out the object for which they had been sent. Prudent counsels prevailed. The men received orders to wheel about and to march back to the place from which they had started, and there accordingly they remain, having effected a safe retreat amid the jeers and shouts of the foes on whom they had turned their backs. The steamer which had brought them to Tiree had been like minded with themselves, and had consulted its safety by taking its departure while it could do so unmolested. It has returned since and has taken them away, and thus ends the first act in the campaign.

We can offer no opinion on the conduct of the police in this miserable affair. They were right not to provoke a conflict which would have ended in a defeat. But we can hardly think that the big words of the crofters need have been taken quite literally, or that a body of police properly armed would have had much difficulty in dispersing the mob opposed to them. However this may be, the islanders will not be wise to try conclusions with the marines. The work will now be done, even if some heads have to be broken in bringing the crofters to their senses. We gather from our Correspondent's message that the Greenhill property has not been consolidated for the first time in the hands of its present occupier – if occupier he can still be called. It was held as one farm by the tenant before him, so that there has been no change made except a change of occupiers on the death of the former tenant. There has been no room therefore given for the operation of the Crofters (Scotland) Act. What the crofters are seeking at Greenhill is to undo a change which stands good under law, and which the law will be strong enough to uphold by force of arms if the crofters will not suffer it to be done quietly and peaceably. We can attach no blame to them for standing out for what they have been taught to consider their rights, or for acting on the belief that resistance to the law is the surest way of getting the law altered to suit them. They have been striving, in their simple way, to bring their claim on the Greenhill farm within the range of practical politics. The fault is with their teachers, and with those who have furnished precedents to bear out their teachers' case. But the lesson has been a bad one, and it must be unlearned, and if the poor deluded fellows suffer while this is being done, they must thank the instructors who have misled them.

The Times, 27 July 1886

The Tiree Crofters
To the Editor of *The Times*

Sir, - In your leading article on the Tiree case to-day it is stated that the object of the police was to "serve summonses on the intruders and to issue various notices of ejection on tenants whose rents are unpaid." Will you allow me to explain that the last part of this statement is erroneous? No notices of ejection have been issued for non-payment of rent. The legal processes issued have been exclusively confined to summonses to appear before the tribunals for the violent seizure of land in the legal possession of other tenants by members of the local conspiracy in the island.

Your obedient servant,

Danbury, Chelmsford, July 26.

ARGYLL

The Times, 29 July 1886

The Disturbances in Tiree

Yesterday the only news received of the Tiree crofters was brought by a fishing smack to Tobermory. The report is that the people are quite peaceable, and seem surprised at the formidable force to be brought against them. They declare that no opposition will be further offered to the messenger-at-arms in serving the interdicts.

A telegram from Oban says:- The troopship *Assistance*, with the marines for the expeditionary force to Tiree, arrived in the bay about 9 a.m. The ship entered by the sound opposite Dunoly Castle, having sailed up the Firth of Lorn keeping the west side of the island of Kerrara instead of the east side, as is usual in entering the bay. The steam-launch was sent ashore for letters. The officers report having experienced very fine weather during the voyage from Plymouth, which port they left on Sunday evening. The commander landed about 10.30, and has been in consultation with Commander Irvine, in whose hands rests the direction of the expedition. It is understood that the expedition will start this afternoon after the receipt of certain despatches which are expected to arrive by the 1 o'clock train. The police force has been reinforced. There are now about 50 police ready to start for the island. The extra force of police leads to the belief that a number of arrests will be made of those who deforced the police on Wednesday last. The marines and police will, if necessary, camp out on the island, and the intention is first to land the marines and then to push on with the police force independently. Should the police be again resisted the Riot Act will be read and the marines brought up.

The steamer *Hebridean*, which left Tiree at 4 o'clock on Sunday afternoon, reports the island quiet. A large meeting of natives was held yesterday, and it is expected that no resistance will be offered. She also reports the safe arrival of a smack conveying reporters, after a stormy passage of 12 hours, which in ordinary weather can be accomplished in three hours.

The *Ajax*, attached to the Reserve Squadron, has left Portsmouth with a detachment of marines for Oban.

The Times, 30 July 1886

The Tiree Crofters

EDINBURGH, JULY 29.

The news that the Government had sent a troopship to Tiree with a body of Marines on board reached the island on Tuesday and caused much excitement and some consternation. Every effort was made to conceal the fact, but it leaked out when the *Trojan* made its usual call at the island. A mass meeting was held in the evening, at which divided counsels were revealed. The more eager spirits were for resisting to the last, but the cooler heads seem to have begun to realize the seriousness of the difficulty in which they have placed themselves. They are trying to minimize their offences by declaring the accounts published in the newspapers to be exaggerated, and even untrue. The fact remains, however, that the messenger-at-arms was obliged to leave the island without accomplishing the purpose for which he was sent there, and that the military expedition has been sent in consequence of his report to that effect,

and not in consequence of statements in the newspapers. The police force which accompanied him was sent to Tiree, not for the purpose of fighting with the crofters or of making arrests, but merely to protect the messenger in the discharge of his duty. When he declared himself deforced, they had no choice but to return with him to Scarinish.

The troopship *Assistance* reached Oban on Wednesday morning, and was an object of great interest during the day. The piers were crowded with spectators and the bay was alive with small boats, the occupants of which eagerly scanned the ship as it lay at anchor near the island of Kerrera. The *Assistance* was expected to start for Tiree this morning along with the fish steamer *Nigel*, conveying the messenger at arms and the police, but according to the latest intelligence received this evening she is still in Oban Bay. It was at first supposed that the start was delayed in expectation of the arrival of a despatch from the Lord Advocate, but news reached Oban yesterday of the despatch of 100 more Marines in the turret ship *Ajax*, and it is concluded that the expedition will not now leave Oban until her arrival. The *Ajax* is expected to reach Oban to-night at a late hour, and the whole expedition will probably start for the rebel island early to-morrow.

There can be little doubt that as soon as the military appear in Tiree the offenders will give themselves up peacefully. Yesterday Lord Colin Campbell telegraphed to MacDonald, the Iona guide, as follows:- "Make for Tiree; beg the people, from me, not to break the peace. On receipt of this sail without delay."

The Times, 31 July 1886

The Tiree Crofters

EDINBURGH, JULY 30.

Her Majesty's ship *Ajax* arrived at Oban about half-past 1 this afternoon, and anchored opposite to Danolly Castle, at the northern end of the Bay. Her contingent of marines will be transferred, it is understood, to the *Assistance*, and then she will go on to Tobermory. The detachment of police from Inverness-shire is still at Oban. Sheriff Irvine has been in consultation with several of the officers, and the expedition is expected to make an early start for Tiree. All is very quiet there now and the people have resolved not to make any demonstration when the force arrives, but to go on with their ordinary work. According to the latest news from the island, the crofters have removed most of the cattle from the Greenhill pastures, and it is anticipated that the whole will have been withdrawn before the arrival of the military. The *Assistance* steamed out of Oban Bay this afternoon in the direction of the Sound of Mull. She was followed at half-past 4 by the *Nigel*, having on board 60 constables and commissionaires, as well as a messenger-at-arms, Sheriff Irvine, and the chief constable. At 5 o'clock the *Ajax* also weighed anchor and sailed towards the Sound of Mull. It is not expected that the expedition will go further than Tobermory to-night. It is possible that after settling affairs at Tiree the expedition will pay a visit to Skye, which has been for many months in a state of lawlessness.

The Times, 2 August 1886.

The Tiree Crofters

The mail steamer *Trojan* arrived at Oban from Tiree on Saturday afternoon and reported that the turret ship *Ajax*, the troopship *Assistance*, and the chartered steamer *Nigel* steamed slowly from the Sound of Mull during the night, and at daybreak the three vessels appeared off the island. The morning was favourable for landing operations, and when the *Trojan* left Tiree the police and marines were being disembarked at the port of Scarinish, prior to marching to the townships of Bailemartin and Bailephail for the serving of Court of Session summonses by the Messenger-at-Arms. Few persons were to be seen in the neighbourhood, and it was evident that no opposition was to be offered to the expedition. The military force first formed into square with fixed bayonets, and after a few evolutions proceeded in marching order, headed by the police. The distance to be walked is eight miles. Mr Sproat, the Procurator Fiscal, has completed his precognitions in connexion with the late deforcement proceedings. Evidence was freely tendered, and it is believed that the ringleaders will shortly be apprehended. The steamer *Grenadier*, which arrived from Staffa and Iona on Saturday night, kept a look-out for the war ships, but as she did not see them it is believed that they are still lying off the Tiree coast, where, however, there is no anchorage.

Intelligence reached Oban last night that a vessel has arrived at Tobermory conveying word that the naval and police forces were permitted to march peacefully through the island, and the work of serving the legal notices on 70 individuals was completed without the slightest trouble. The demeanour of the crofters, meantime, has entirely changed.

The Times, 3 August 1886

The Tiree Crofters

OBAN, AUG. 2.

As stated yesterday, the proceedings at Tiree passed off with the utmost quietness. The number of Marines put ashore from the *Ajax* and *Assistance* was 250. The officer in command of the force was Colonel MacKay Heriot, and under him were Captains Eagles, Wylde, and Lang, Lieutenants Clavell, Anderson, Curtoys, Connolly, Pulter, and Dr. Todd, R.N. After forming quarter column in light marching order, each man being supplied with a day's ration and 20 rounds of ammunition, the Marines, accompanied by 50 policemen, marched a distance of eight miles along the island. The Court Session notices were served at the respective townships with the utmost ease, and the expedition returned in the evening to Scarinish. Much amazement was aroused in the minds of the crofters by the military display, but under the circumstances they showed great friendliness to the Marines, and freely offered milk to all who would partake of it. The *Ajax*, it is expected, will now leave to act as guardship on the Clyde. A heavy north-westerly wind has sprung up to-day, and as the expeditionary vessels have no proper anchorage at Tiree it is believed they must have sought shelter in Lochnakeal on the west coat of Mull, or in Tobermory harbour. The ringleaders in the late deforcement of the messenger-at-arms are to be apprehended, but no action can be taken until instructions are received from Crown counsel in regard to the Procurator Fiscal's report of the proceedings.

The Times, 4 August 1886.

The Tiree Crofters

OBAN, AUG. 3.

The latest information from Tiree by mail steamer to-day is to the effect that Her Majesty's ship *Ajax* and the steamer *Nigel* are still lying off Scarinish Harbour, while the troopship *Assistance* has proceeded to Tobermory. An armed force is to be stationed on the island for some time, and tents and other requirements have been landed for the accommodation of 150 marines and 15 constables. Several apprehensions are expected to be made in a few days. For the present the interdicted crofters have removed their cattle from the farm of Greenhill, but the islanders make no secret of their intention of resorting to their former illegal behaviour as soon as the naval expedition leaves their shores.

The inhabitants are showing great hospitality to the marines, and already quite a friendly feeling has been established with the representatives of the law. However, no countenance is given, and any islander rendering them assistance in any shape is rigidly boycotted. The innkeeper at Scarinish has suffered severely from this sort of persecution, and would have been in sore straits had it not been for the resources of his own farm and the aid of the various steamers that ply to the island. Stores for the *Ajax* and the *Assistance* are being sent from Oban by the steamer *Trojan*.

The Times, 6 August 1886.

The Tiree Crofters

OBAN, AUG. 5.

The troopship *Assistance* returned to Tiree from Tobermory on Wednesday night. Much concern was expressed by the crofters on her arrival, as from the presence of Sheriff Irvine on board it was feared that immediate arrests were to be made. Nothing, however, of this nature occurred, as the Procurator Fiscal has not yet completed his precognitions. About 60 Marines were landed from the *Ajax* and marched to Gott Bay and back, presumably to impress fresh upon the islanders the authority of the law, as it is a well-known fact that several of the crofters, although so recently interdicted with all the pomp of military display, are still grazing their cattle on the farm of Greenhill. Fifteen Inverness-shire constables have been quartered on the island today, but the remainder of the police force still remains on board the *Nigel*. The next movement of the expedition is unknown. At a mass meeting of the crofters it was decided, in the event of the ringleaders being apprehended, to engage the services of Mr. Kenneth Macdonald, Town Clerk of Inverness, for their defence. Mr. Macdonald successfully defended a number of the Skye crofters last year.

The Times, 9 August 1886

The Tiree Crofters

OBAN, AUG. 8.

The expeditionary force at Tiree has so far terminated its labours by the apprehension of six of the crofters engaged in the late deforcement of the Messenger-at-Arms. Two hundred Marines and 45 policemen made a sudden march throughout the island on Friday, under the direction of Sheriff Irvine and Chief Constable Mackay, and by 9 o'clock at night five arrests had been effected without the slightest show of resistance. The names of the men were Donald Sinclair, president of the local Land League, Hector MacDonald, the secretary; Donald Mackinnon, Colin Henderson, and Lachlan Brown. The sixth man wanted, Alex Maclean, Balimartin, could not be found, but he afterwards proceeded to Scarinish and gave himself up to a detachment of police which was in waiting to see that none might escape by the steamers *Trojan* or *Aros Castle*, which were discharging goods in the bay. No demonstration was made, the natives being apparently resigned to the inevitable. On reaching Scarinish the police and prisoners were put on board the chartered steamer *Nigel*, which left at midnight for Oban, arriving at half-past 6 o'clock on Saturday morning. The prisoners were quietly conveyed on shore, there being few people about, and placed in the cells at the Court-house. After a formal examination by Sheriff Irvine the prisoners were taken to the railway station and placed in a special reserved carriage of the 10 o'clock train. The public were excluded from the station, but outside cheers were frequently given for the prisoners and groans for the police. At Dalmally the prisoners were detained and conveyed by special coach to Inverary, where they were consigned to gaol. At Tiree a body of Marines has been landed, and tents have been erected for the accommodation of the force during its stay on the island. The turret-ship *Ajax*, in obedience to instructions from the Admiralty, left at 10 o'clock on Saturday for the Clyde, where she has again taken up her position as guardship.

The Times, 10 August 1886

The Tiree Crofters

An Admiralty order was received at Sheerness yesterday directing Her Majesty's troopship *Humber*, 1,640 tons, 490 horse power, Commander Arnold J. Errington, to proceed to Tiree, where she is to be employed as depôt ship for the Royal Marines who are stationed there on account of the crofter agitation. The *Humber*, which was to have been docked yesterday for repairs on her return from the Mediterranean station, at once took in coal and made preparations for her departure.

Several gentlemen at Inverness, out of sympathy for the Tiree crofters now incarcerated in the town, have arranged that they shall be supplied with meals other than the prison fare

The Times, 21 October 1886.

The Crofters

Yesterday morning, in the High Court of Justiciary, Edinburgh, Lord Mure gave judgment in the case of the eight Tiree crofters who were on Wednesday found guilty of mobbing and rioting and deforcing an officer of the law while in the execution of his duty. In addressing the prisoners, his Lordship said that in one respect the evidence on which the verdict proceeded was favourable to them, inasmuch as it did not appear that actual violence was used against the persons of the officers engaged. The writ was a very harmless writ. It was nothing more than to let the people know that the question had arisen between them and the landlord as to the possession of the hill, and to give them notice that they were to appear and explain what their rights were in order that the civil action might be disposed of. It was not many years ago when deforcement of this sort would have been treated with a very serious punishment indeed. He had known cases even in his own time where transportation had followed, but of late years the punishment had been more lenient. Having regard to the recommendation of the jury, he thought he was warranted in giving a lighter than would have been given some years ago when cases of this sort were more frequent. He had no doubt they were under some strange misapprehension and were ill-advised to take the steps they took to prevent the ends of justice being carried out. He sentenced each of the five who were the leaders in the matter – Alexander Maclean, Colin Henderson, Hector Macdonald, George William Campbell, and John Sinclair – to six months' imprisonment. With reference to the other three – John M'Fadyen, Gilbert Macdonald, and Donald Mackinnon – he thought they came more under the category of people who were standing by and seeing what was going on. The sentence on them would be four months' imprisonment.

The Times, 25 December 1886.

THE DUKE OF ARGYLL AND HIS CROFTERS. – The following letter from the Duke of Argyll to his crofter tenants in Tiree, in reply to a communication from them regarding the withholding of arrears until the crofters question is dealt with by the Land Court, has been published in Oban:- "Inverary. John Campbell, John McKinnan, and others, - Until about three years ago I had no reason to complain of any of you, but since that time some of you have been taking advantage of lawlessness to avoid paying your just debts. I am quite willing to allow for bad market during the past year. You are mistaken about the intentions of the Crofters Act. It was never intended to encourage tenants to withhold rents which they can pay till the Commission comes. I am going to apply to the Commission, as well as you, and I am quite willing to leave one-third of your arrears to remain unpaid till the rents are settled by commission; but the amount you are withholding, sometimes more than two years' rent, is quite unreasonable. I hope the time will soon return when you will have pride in discharging your obligations like other honest men. – ARGYLL."

Postscript. George Douglas Campbell, the 8th Duke of Argyll, succeeded to the title in 1847. He presided over the mass emigrations of people from the Argyll Estate in the 1850s and was the proprietor of Tiree in the 1880s at the time of the Napier Commission of Inquiry and the 'Crofters' War'. He died in 1900 and was succeeded by his son, John Douglas Sutherland Campbell, Lord Lorne, who had been Governor-General of Canada from 1878 to 1883. In 1902 the new Duke of Argyll offered the island of Tiree for sale by auction, but there were no bids. A transcript of the report of the auction in "The Times" of 15 July 1902 is on the following page.

The Times, 15 July 1902.

THE ISLAND OF TIREE – At the Mart, Token-house-yard, yesterday, Messrs. Chancellor and Sons, by direction of the Duke of Argyll, offered for sale by auction the Island of Tiree, Argyllshire. Mr. Albert Chancellor, who conducted the sale, described it as a freehold domain known as the "granary" and "flower" of the Hebrides, reached by frequent steamers from Oban, Greenock, and Glasgow, and comprising an area of 21, 471 acres. The gross rental was about £1,600 per annum. A great feature of the property was the vast body of white, pink, and green marble, of which the island was largely composed. The snipe shooting was the finest in Europe. The island was particularly suitable to a private purchaser as a unique possession, returning at the present time about 3½ per cent. on a capital sum of £100,000, or for a syndicate for the purpose of development – (1) As a health resort; (2) in the quarrying of its marble and stones; (3) for sheep, cattle, and agricultural production; (4) as headquarters for catching and curing fish. The property was of a class which seldom came into the market. At the outset the auctioneer suggested £100,000, and afterwards asked £90,000, £80,000, and £50,000. As no bids were forthcoming he withdrew the property, observing that from the number of applications that had been made he had little doubt that some one would come forward and purchase privately.

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