

Curtie Toll 1897

**CURRIE & DISTRICT
LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY**

CURRIE CHRONICLE
(The Journal of the Society)

MARCH 2014 No. 81

Hi, Folks,

As I sit (in early March) writing this introduction to the current issue of the Chronicle, the sun is shining, the birds are whistling and, outside my window the crocuses and tete-a-tetes are in bloom. I get the feeling that 'Spring is in the air'. I therefore decided I would use an outdoor theme for inclusion in this issue of the Chronicle. As a result I asked Douglas Lowe and Bill Blair to put pen to paper and give us a written synopsis of their most interesting respective talks on 'Droving in Scotland' and 'Livestock Markets' in this country.

I do hope you enjoy their articles.

Ron Dickson, Editor.

DROVING in SCOTLAND

Most of us who have walked the Scottish hills have, at one time or other, followed drove roads. Wrapped up in our Goretex jackets and safe from the elements, we are following in the footsteps of the hardy, plaid-clad drovers, travelling on routes which lace the country forming the only tangible remains of an industry and trade that was

for many centuries an essential part of the economy of Scotland - droving. At the heart of this trade were the markets; and cattle and sheep were the very lifeblood of the industry.

Local Associations with Droving

We have a number of drove roads passing through, or close to our area.

The Cauldstaneslap: This hill pass above Harperrig Reservoir was an ancient highway whose origins are lost in the mists of time. It earned the title "The Thieves Road" as it gave border raiders ready access to sheep, cattle and horses on the north side of the Pentlands. In the late 16th Century East Cairns and Colzium were raided, shepherds killed and beasts stolen. It was even crossed by Royalty; in 1490 the active James IV rode a horse he had bought at Linlithgow to Linton over the Slap. On Roy's map of 1747 the southern end of this route is shown as "The Road to Queensferry". This route was a major link in the network of drove roads leading south to English markets. In 1631 West Linton, on the south of the Cauldstaneslap, was made a Burgh of Regality which gave it the right to hold markets and fairs. The sheep markets held in June were considered to be the largest in Scotland, and in the early 19th Century were selling over 30,000 sheep annually. They lasted until 1856, when Lanark was found to be a more convenient centre.

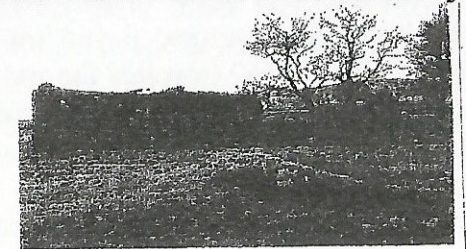
The Maidenscleuch Pass: The two tracks which leave Currie by the Kirkgate and Balerno by Harlaw Farm, going over the Maidenscleuch Pass to Glencorse, would have carried droves of sheep for centuries to another market in our area, House of Muir near Flotterstone. In 1612 the City of Edinburgh was granted the right of holding markets at the House of Muir. These were the sheep markets for the City. They were held on the 1st and 2nd Mondays of April and lasted until 1871. The Kirkgate/Maidenscleuch Pass was also an old road and is shown as the "Road to Biggar" on Taylor and Skinners map of 1775.

Even earlier it was the route followed by Dalziel of the Binns Mosstroopers to attack the covenanting force at Rullion Green in 1666.

The path to Bonaly would also have been a route used by drovers to this market and there are stories of sheep being penned up in these steep-sided valleys before the market.

The path going by Easter Kinleith Farm to Colinton, by the front of Torphin Quarry, is also referred to as a drove road for taking sheep and cattle from the hill pastures to the Edinburgh Markets.

Robert Louis Stevenson in "St. Ives" has his two drovers, Sim and Candlish, going up from Swanston with their herd of cattle by Howden Glen, and crossing the Pentlands going south. They take St. Ives with them and in the Borders have a chance encounter with Walter Scott, the Shirra. Stevenson would have gleaned information about droving from John Tod the shepherd at Swanston, who had been a drover in his youth. The track from Balerno to Leithhead by Buteland was also a droving route and old maps show it joining the Lanark Road close to the start of the Cauldstaneslap route at Little Vantage.



Little Vantage

EARLY DAYS

The further back our research goes, the more tentative the evidence for commercial droving becomes. However, in the 13th Century, travellers on the King's Highway, as well as a common law right to spend one night on common land, also had the right to pasture their beasts there. Early Charters mention some tracks as Virdis Via (green ways) and in 1359 we have a letter of safe conduct being given to Scottish drovers allowing them to travel through England for a year.

Cattle were virtually the sole form of realisable wealth of the Highlands, and the trade was to grow to become an essential part of the economy of Scotland.

There is evidence that much of the early trade was not in live cattle but in skins and barrelled, dried or salted beef. In the year 1378 a figure of 45,000 hides were exported. It is wrong to suppose that all droving traffic went to England as there was early evidence of the poorer Northern and Western districts exporting beasts to the Lowland and Eastern Lowland markets owing to the lack of feeding to overwinter them. There would undoubtedly be a certain amount of continental trade from the eastern ports. The Scottish tanning industry would also take its share of the hides.

The droving traffic also moved south to north, on occasions, with English dealers pasturing their cattle in Scotland as there is evidence in the form of an Order from the Scottish Parliament forbidding this practice. Throughout these turbulent centuries the droving trade continued to slowly grow. There were various orders issued which mirror the turbulent times; forbidding the export of cattle/sheep to England, then in 1369 (towards the end of the Wars of Independence) cattle again were allowed to be sold in England; 1451 trade to England only allowed in cash; 1480, owing to a famine, southbound droving traffic entirely forbidden. Subsequent years brought complaints that customs dues and taxes were not being paid, various orders were made to try to regularise and control droving traffic. There were attempts to channel droving traffic through certain exit points to England, so that customs dues could be levied. But they were dealing with drovers who had to withstand great rigours and the constant threat of thieves – they dealt with daily hazards and problems – and unenforceable orders from the Scottish Parliament would have meant little to them. The continuing orders and complaints show that the attempts to extract the dues from the droving traffic was not altogether successful.

The Highlands with their primitive farming methods, with vast crofting tenantry overstocked with cattle, meant that at least up to the middle of the 19th Century an annual stock reduction was necessary. These tenant crofters would not have been able to retain any great number of beasts, over winter, owing to a lack of feeding so an annual shedding of cattle was required. It would also have provided much needed money for the family to survive. These cattle would have been aged at least 3 or 4 who would be able to undertake a long trek and still realise the best prices. The fact that England, the natural market for Scottish beef, was engaged in almost continual wars and needed to feed its large army and navy, the increase in droving over the coming centuries was assured.

In the early years the tenantry of the Highlands as well as cattle had farmed small quantities of sheep, mostly for their fleeces. The cattle could be walked to market over great distances, be taken over rivers, or swam if necessary. The sheep would not be able to walk the distances required, since roads for the most part did not exist, nor would they be able to cope with anything other than the merest stream as there were virtually no bridges to speak of in the Highlands – but change was on its way. Firstly in the form of General Wade and the military road building programme, and ultimately in Telford, and the Commissioners for Highland Roads and Bridges.

GROWTH

Droving grew constantly from the 16th Century up to its high period between 1700 to 1850.

In the 17th Century Scotland was regarded as little more than a large grazing field for England.

Regular droving traffic is indicated by the numbers of cattle recorded as being sold at markets. However cattle droving was very much a commercial enterprise and the growth of tolls on bridges and roads, throughout Scotland, following the Turnpike Acts from 1750

onwards had an effect. The drovers, however, being cost conscious would go to many lengths - providing their cattle were not put in any danger - to avoid the tolls. The placing of a toll on Stirling Brig only led some drovers taking their herds by the way of a traditional route that would have been well-known to their cattle rieving ancestors, particularly Rob Roy, crossing the River Forth at the Fords of Frew, near Gargunnoch. To illustrate the extent of droving traffic, one dispute over toll charges on Stirling Brig backed cattle up as far as Bridge of Allan. These cattle would have been bound for Falkirk Tryst.

When we think about markets or trysts we think mostly about Crieff and Falkirk, but markets were held all over the country, providing gathering places for beasts in the sparsely populated rural districts, and often spaced a convenient few days, or weeks, apart allowing the dealers and collection of beasts to move from one to another. Sometimes the small tenant farmer signed on with the dealer as a drover helping to move cattle from one market to the next, making welcome extra cash, and often purchasing goods at subsequent markets to see his family through the winter. Some even continued as drovers with the growing herd as far as the Lowland markets, or even as far as the English markets. With some even seeking seasonal harvesting work to earn extra cash. In the early days English dealers did not venture deep into Scotland to do business, relying on Scottish dealers to bring the cattle to southern markets.

There were scores of markets, often seasonal, of varying sizes all over the length and breadth Scotland generally, however, the drovers would be heading to Crieff (or Falkirk) before heading on to the English markets. Crieff as a market for beasts was set up with an Act of Parliament 1672 granting James, Earl of Perth, "an yearlie fair and weeklie mercat" at Crieff, thus concentrating much of the trade in one spot, which would suit the dealers. Crieff was also a site of easy access so it also suited the drovers who were, sometimes, dealers in

their own right. In 1723 the number of cattle reported sold at the autumn fair was 30,000. The "1745" did not appear to have affected Crieff or droving at that time, but after the English dealers wanted a share of the market and a more convenient site was sought. As Falkirk grew Crieff declined; by 1770 Falkirk had taken Crieff's place as the greatest cattle market in Scotland. By the end of the century sales of 100,000 were being reported and by the early years of the 19th Century figures of 150,000 were being recorded along with sheep in increasing numbers.

With the military road and bridge building programme, sheep droving over long distances became a feasible proposition for the first time.

Wade and Caulfield, when planning their roads, decided the routes on military needs, but most of their roads followed the traditional lines followed by the locals and the droves. Over the Corrieyairack to Dalwhinnie and through the Drumochter Pass heading for Crieff and Falkirk; Fort William, Kinlochleven over the Devil's Staircase to Kingshouse, Tyndrum, Crianlarich, again heading for Crieff or Falkirk are two of the obvious ones. The roads being built where they were, following the traditional droving routes, caused many complaints by the drovers, as the hard gravel wore away the cattle's hooves. To get over this problem the drovers at certain points of the route had to have their cattle shod.

Thomas Telford when planning his roads and bridges paid great attention to the droving traffic that would be using it - proving what a substantial and vital part of the economy it had become.

All through the second half of the 18th Century, the "Highland Clearances" effectively removed many of the cattle-rearing crofting tenantry and replaced these with large sheep farms. The Highland landlords sought improved farming methods and larger more economical sheep farms.

The increase and spread of sheep, continued, and by the first decades of the 19th Century, sheep and cattle were in equal numbers. The growth of sheep farming continued, making a great change in stock patterns in the Highlands, leaving Skye, the outer islands and the far North and West still predominately cattle, with a reducing minority elsewhere. The reason for this was economics. In 1795, with cattle, the landlords expected a rent of two and a half pence (approx.. 1p) per acre, however under sheep, with their high density grazing they expected 2/- (10p) per acre.



There was an inbuilt problem with heavy sheep grazing that the landlords did not appreciate; the sheep grazed in greater numbers than cattle and also cropped the grass shorter; the cattle fertilised the ground as they went, the sheep less so. Cattle grazed on the growing bracken and the vast tenant population cropped the bracken for bedding and thatch. Sheep did not eat the bracken and the glens had been emptied. With the lack of fertiliser to the grass the bracken flourished. They had inadvertently started to create the great Highland deserts, reducing the grazing land and leaving much fit only for the vast underpopulated shooting estates of the 19th/20th Centuries.

However, stock patterns were changing and we have Thomas Telford planning his Kylerea to Killin road and estimating that it would be used by 80,000 sheep and 20,000 cattle each year; this was 1803. During the 19th Century, with the improvement of highland roads and bridges, greater numbers of sheep were now being driven on these roads to market.

Drovers Methods and Beasts

No investigation into droving would be complete without a look at the men who made them move – the drovers. What did it need to be a

drover in those days? Knowledge of the country would be a requirement as there would be no maps to guide him. Knowledge of beasts and men – he would be trying to get all his cattle and his fellow drovers safely to market.

Patience as he would have to coax the cattle over hundreds of miles, travelling an average of 10 miles per day.

He would have to be trustworthy, as he was often dealing with other people's livelihoods. Some drovers would be given cattle on trust at smaller markets, and be trusted to take them to larger markets, and to realise as good a price as possible for them, money only being paid over to the owner of the beasts on the drover's return from market.

Some of the drovers would get the benefit of the occasional bed and cooked meal at any inn or farmhouse that the drove had stanced, but mostly they would spend the nights beside the beasts in their charge. They wore clothes that would, like themselves, withstand the hardships they would endure along the way. A plaid would be a necessity as the droving period of the year lasted from May through to October. In the early years of the 19th Century they are described as being in "a coarse plaid"; by the end of the century as being in "homespun tweeds" "so thick that those that wore them looked like bears".

Their food as described in contemporary records mirrors the condition of the Highlands at the time oatmeal, some onions and a ramshorn of whisky. Sometimes they would bleed the cattle on route and with the mix of blood make onion and oatmeal black puddings – a traditional Scottish dish. Sometimes they would have ewe's milk, cheese and bannock.

From early dubious beginnings drovers grew to be respectable members of society. So much so that drovers were exempted from

the Disarming Acts of 1716 and 1748. During the '45 this exemption continued. Wade issued 230 licences in 1725 to drovers and dealers in cattle belonging to clans who had surrendered their weapons, thus enabling them to carry "gun, sword and pistol".

With a drove of cattle there would be one drover to each 50/60 head of cattle plus dogs. Sometimes the dealer, mounted on a pony carrying supplies, and sometimes a Topsman, or head drover, whose job was to find the best route and good overnight stances for beasts with a plentiful supply of grass. As well as taking their beasts to market, they would also take home made goods for sale. As the drovers made their careful way along, some were occasionally seen to be knitting on the move.

The working drovers, as opposed to the dealer drovers who had a personal interest in all or part of the herd, often would stay in the lowlands of Scotland or in England to make more money by hiring themselves out to help with the harvest. A tradition grew from this of drovers dogs being realised to find their own way back home to the Highlands, resting and being fed at the farmhouses or inns the drove stopped at on the way south.

Wages for the drover are recorded as 1/- per day in the early 18th Century, rising to 3/- or 4/- per day early in the 19th Century.

Decline in droving

Droving had always been a commercial enterprise. The initial costs of the beasts and the costs of the drive itself, (drover's costs, number of days, food, shoeing the cattle) had to be weighed against the return expected at the market, and there had always been the market costs to take into account.

There was, however, an economic change with agricultural improvements sweeping the country. The Highlands had their

clearances where large sheep farms had been created (1770) onwards. Earlier, in the Lowlands, the various Enclosure Acts had led to the landowners taking possession of and enclosing and improving slices of common lands and incorporating them into their own estates. There was more enclosing of land, which led to the free lines of passage and in some instances the right to use certain routes being challenged, some court cases ensued. Now that the drovers were being restricted to certain routes the Turnpike Acts allowing for tolls to be erected on certain roads and bridges was having a more costly effect, with the ability and freedom to travel alternative routes curtailed.

These growing restrictions meant that the drovers freedom to avoid tolls being eroded, and toll charges and the growing charges for grazing rights had then to be taken as an additional, if unwelcome, expenses of droving.

The drovers now found themselves restricted to certain routes with the acceptable drove roads now marked off by drystone dykes or turf. Often the drove roads we walk today are recognisable by these features (at East Kinleith, at Broughton and over Kirkhope Law south of Peebles). The freedom the drovers had enjoyed in the early centuries were being eroded and the need to graze their herds en route were often being restricted or challenged.

There had been a certain amount of droving traffic going by boat to market, but this was very expensive as all the feed and water had to be carried. It had been cheaper to walk the beasts to market as they had found grazing and water for free en route. However the new farming methods has produced heavier and softer beasts that could not walk long distances to market, so the new large steamer ships began to be used to take increasing amounts of cattle and sheep to market.

Rail made the biggest change as it expanded round the Highlands.

The advent of the railways was not initially a bad thing for the droving trade. The railway companies, alive to the need to develop their potential customers, set up collection/gathering points for cattle and sheep at a number of locations, thereby shortening the drovers distance to market. Drovers took cattle and sheep to railhead collection points and the beasts were speedily transported to market. Often the cattle from the islands and the North-West were taken by steamer to the new railheads at Mallaig and Oban to be entrained to the markets. The railway companies had to adapt their trucks, padding the sides to protect the beasts and also providing food and water.

But all of these factors caused a sharp decline in the droving trade from its high point in the first half of the 18th Century to its virtual death by the end of the 19th Century. The markets moved to accommodate the changing times. Drovers were still required shifting beasts from the islands onto boats and taking them to railheads to be loaded onto trains for the southern markets

And what of the drove roads

Disused, initially they fell into decline, some became overgrown and disappeared, and then the growth of recreation in the 20th Century brought these ancient routes back to life.

D.N. Lowe,
Secretary, CDLHS



Droving Highland cattle in Wester Ross

LIVESTOCK MARKETS in SCOTLAND

The movement and trading of livestock has been going on since 'time immemorial'.

Breeders of livestock have had to find ways of selling the livestock they did not require and adapt to selling them by the method prevailing at the time. The trysts or fairs had been established in bygone days, and cattle and sheep were moved from the higher land to the fertile land that was round the larger cities. During Victorian times the Industrial Revolution was taking place and people were moving from the villages and hamlets into the larger towns where factories of many kinds were being created. Most of these towns and cities had market places for all of the commodities that were required by their residents.

The advent of the railways provided the necessary service to transport commodities from their source of production to traders in the towns. The pioneers of the auction market system were quick to recognise this new fast and dependable means of moving livestock from their point of production to the more fertile lands that could fatten the stock to feed the growing urban population. The main railheads were in city centres and that is where most of the livestock markets were established.

There was not a town from Thurso in the North to Dumfries and Lockerbie in the South that did not have at least one or even two Livestock Markets. In the East of Scotland there were markets in Berwick, Reston, East Linton, Haddington and Dalkeith but they closed some time ago. The biggest Ram Sale in the World is held annually at Kelso in Springwood Park, beside the River, on the second Friday in September. The first auction sale was held in 1838 when 120 rams were sold at prices from £3 to £6 per head. A far cry from the sale in 2013 when over 5000 rams were sold to average £635 !!

Edinburgh had three markets situated in Chesser Avenue. The markets in Edinburgh are most likely to be of interest to the readers of this article. The first market was in the Grassmarket.

In 1843 the City Council moved the cattle and sheep market to a four acre site in Lauriston Place - this is where the new Fire Station was built and everyone will have seen this building. There were two other markets in the City - one at Haymarket which was eventually used as a Curling Rink and another in Valleyfield Street near Tollcross. In 1897 the Town Council proposed that the markets be moved because of the mess created by the livestock being moved through the streets.

This proposition was met with protests from the farmers, cattle salesmen, dairymen and other users of the cattle market. A new market and slaughter house complex was built by the Council in Chesser Avenue in 1912. This included three markets, one with a building to house 240 dairy cows, an abattoir and two railway sidings; the railway sidings fell out of use when livestock began to be moved by road. One of the railway sites was used to accommodate the Fruit Market when it was moved from Market Street.

You may wonder why there is a rise in the road in Chesser Avenue - this is because it enabled livestock to be taken from the railway siding to the markets without disrupting the traffic. We could have done with planners like that in the present tramway disruptions!!! Regrettably all the markets at Gorgie were closed several years ago.

The livestock markets in Scotland are still very active. In 2012 the value of the throughput was valued at £520 million, and they handled three million head of livestock.

**Bill Blair, M.B.E.
CDLHS.**

CURRIE & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

2014 SUMMER OUTING

This year's Summer Outing has been arranged to visit
The National Museum of Scotland
in Chambers Street, Edinburgh

Date: Wednesday, 11th June, 2014

Time: Meet at Main Door of Museum at 3.30pm

Peter Cowlshaw, our Past Secretary and a present day Museum Guide, will arrange a guide(s) for the appropriate number in the party, who will then take the CDLHS group round the different sections of the Museum. Each group is limited to 12, so if you are intending to join the outing could you please email Peter at

pdcowlishaw@hotmail.com
or by telephone – No. 0131 449 2520 or
email Douglas Lowe at
douglaslowe51@btinternet.com

Peter will then arrange with the Museum authorities for the necessary number of guides to be on attendance in our behalf
