

# Work Journals as Historical Evidence: the Burrell Journals, 1763–1820

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Work journals relating to Scotland's agrarian past are relatively rare and have been notably less employed in historical research than other estate papers such as farm and estate rentals, farm tacks and missives, and personal and business accounts and letters. However, taking the extensive and perhaps relatively well-known Burrell journals as an example, the article argues that such sources offer a distinctive and significant contribution to our understanding of the history of Scottish agriculture. These journals provide a detailed, continuous narrative on farming life and work on the Lanarkshire Hamilton estate during perhaps the most intensive phase of Lowland Scottish agricultural development. Written by estate officials for the working record, the journals were required to present accurate and detailed reports, with realistic assessment of problems and setbacks as well as progress, offering the researcher reliable evidence and clear insights into contemporary management of agrarian change, while the journal format (and the close managerial circle in which the journals circulated) encouraged a confidentiality which deepens our knowledge and understanding of contemporary perspectives to a degree rarely revealed in the more general types of estate papers itemised above.

The so-called<sup>1</sup> Burrell journals have occasionally supported published studies of agrarian development and improvement within the Scottish Lowlands in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>2</sup> The principal purview of the journals is the Lanarkshire estate of the Dukes of Hamilton. This estate – one of the largest in central Scotland, covering around thirty thousand acres and including, in the 1760s, over two hundred farms – underwent a consciously planned transformation to modernity that was comprehensively and sequentially recorded within the accumulated journals between 1763 and around 1820. Consequently, the archive offers a rare if not unique record of estate development in the era of agrarian improvement in Scotland.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the journals, at least until the mid-1780s, mainly follow and closely document

<sup>1</sup> In fact, as the article will show, Burrell was the instigator (and main subject) of the Hamilton work journals begun in 1763, but left the Hamilton estate twenty years later and is not referred to in the journals after c.1785.

<sup>2</sup> Most substantively in T. M. Devine, *The Transformation of Rural Scotland: Social Change and the Agrarian Economy 1660–1815* (Edinburgh, 1994), 93–109.

<sup>3</sup> While many sets of estate papers provide detailed accounts of farm and estate development in this period, the author knows of no other continuous agrarian work journals tracing detailed estate improvement processes as sequentially and comprehensively as in the Burrell journals.

the activities of John Burrell, Hamilton estate ‘Manager of Improvements’, his work on other Hamilton estates at Kinneil (Bo’ness) and Arran, as well as his work with outside landowners seeking his advice on their own estate improvements. The purpose of this article is not however to advocate greater use of the source by researchers (although this might be a justifiable aim), but to examine the particular value to historians, archivists and other interested groups, of the work journal format exemplified in the archive.

The later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries have been characterised as a time of revolutionary change in Scottish agriculture.<sup>4</sup> Much of our current knowledge of farming change in the early-modern era has emanated from surviving estate papers, often in manuscript form and including, for example, farm and estate rentals, business and household accounts, memorandums, surveys, plans and reports, legal papers, and personal and business correspondence. Estate-paper collections have informed in-depth studies, from general texts, referencing a range of such sources, to study papers dealing with specific estates or particular agrarian issues.<sup>5</sup> Written work journals on farming and agricultural development are, as already noted, relatively rare<sup>6</sup> and consequently little-used by researchers; can they add anything to the impressive body of knowledge built up over many decades of research among more readily available estate records and papers?

It is first vital to understand the distinctive nature of work journals. These were, in essence, ‘insider’ accounts, written for the working record by estate supervisors or under-managers, and providing a detailed account of working progress on the estate – what had been done, how it was done, what remained to be done to complete the job or to move on to the next stage. The journals were required to serve as practical progress reports on the business of farming on a particular estate. From 1763,<sup>7</sup> Burrell insisted that leading estate officials and servants – head gardener, chief carpenter, area factors or overseers

<sup>4</sup> A general description of Scottish ‘Improvers’ can be found in T. C. Smout, *A History of the Scottish People, 1560–1830* (London, 1969), 271–81: there are also more localised studies of estate improvement e.g. E. Cregeen (ed.), *Argyll Estate Instructions, Mull, Morvern, Tiree 1771–1805* (Edinburgh, 1964).

<sup>5</sup> As but a few examples, the previously cited study by T. M. Devine uses estate-paper evidence from four lowland Scottish counties, while evidence from Highland and Lowland estate records informs I. D. Whyte, *Agriculture and Society in Seventeenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1979). Some studies such as L. Leneman, *Living in Atholl: A Social History of the Estates 1685–1785* (Edinburgh, 1986) use papers largely from one estate, while some use particular types of estate records, such as estate maps and plans, as in R. Gibson, *The Scottish Countryside: Its Changing Face 1700–2000* (Edinburgh, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Some day-books/work journals in heavy industry have survived, e.g. National Records of Scotland, GD58, GD248 and GD313–5. In agriculture there are only isolated examples, e.g. National Library of Scotland, MSS 29489, ‘Day-books of nurseryman, Hassendeanburn, 1753–64’.

<sup>7</sup> Hamilton Public Library, 631.1/236, Journal Dec. 1763 to Apr. 1769, p. 6. Burrell was chamberlain on the already improving Hamilton estate at Kinneil. On his appointment

– compiled individual ongoing work journals,<sup>8</sup> to be duly inspected by him (delivered weekly, on Saturday evenings), and only approved and countersigned if suitably informative and up to date.<sup>9</sup> The forty-five surviving Burrell journals available to us today are the ‘master copies’ emerging from that process. Several contain over three hundred bound folio pages; a number of smaller journals are around quarto size but most of these are still fairly substantial volumes of around two hundred pages. The longest journal covers a continuous period of six years; the smallest, consisting simply of a few unbound foolscap-size parchments, covers a few days only.<sup>10</sup> In the earlier period between the 1760s and 1790s, journals frequently overlap, providing better than complete coverage (there are gaps post-1790s, however, as discussed below). Since the essential purpose of the exercise for Burrell and his successors as estate modernisers was to record cumulative improving progress, the journals, over a continuous period<sup>11</sup> of more than half a century after 1763, provide a hugely detailed prospectus of all component elements of agrarian change on the developing estate, from tenancy reform through land enclosure to rents monetisation and the emergence of market-responsive farming.

Clearly the sheer size of the archive is an enormous challenge to researchers and archivists alike. The whole collection is fully listed and catalogued (used in the references cited throughout this article). While there are thankfully few problems reading volumes which are almost uniformly in a good state of preservation, with a text generally legible and, for an eighteenth-century document, with relatively straightforward grammatical syntax, only fourteen of the forty-five journals have indexes, and some of these are fairly rudimentary and occasionally incomplete. Since the catalogue listings simply identify the start and end dates of each journal, there are few real subject-related finding aids. Like the even more extensive Sutherland Estates Papers discussed in this journal a few years ago, the massive research opportunities contained within the Burrell journals must be accompanied, in the absence of detailed content lists, by much toil and patient forbearance on the part of the researcher.<sup>12</sup>

as improvement manager at Hamilton in December 1763, he was relieved of some of his ‘more slavish’ Kinneil duties.

<sup>8</sup> HPL, 631.1/236, Journal Dec. 1763 to Apr. 1769, p. 164; 631.1/244, Journal Jan. to Apr. 1772, p. 76.

<sup>9</sup> HPL, 631.1/244, Journal Jan. to Apr. 1772, pp. 74–5. Failure to supply journals resulted in ‘suspension of employment and salary’. Later, cash books and ledgers were also required: 631.1/259, Journal Oct. 1778 to Nov. 1780, p. 57.

<sup>10</sup> The initial journal covers a period of over six years in nearly 320 folio pages (HPL, 631.1/236); the ‘parchment’ leaflet referred to covers only two days (631.1/241).

<sup>11</sup> The forty-five journals are listed from 631.1/236 to 631.1/288 in the HPL catalogue and cover the period December 1763 to December 1819. Eight ‘letter books’ (business and private correspondence) are interspersed within this sequence.

<sup>12</sup> O. Geddes and A. Tindley, ‘Who owns history – archivists or users? The Sutherland Estates Papers: a case study’, *Scottish Archives*, 13 (2007), 29–31.

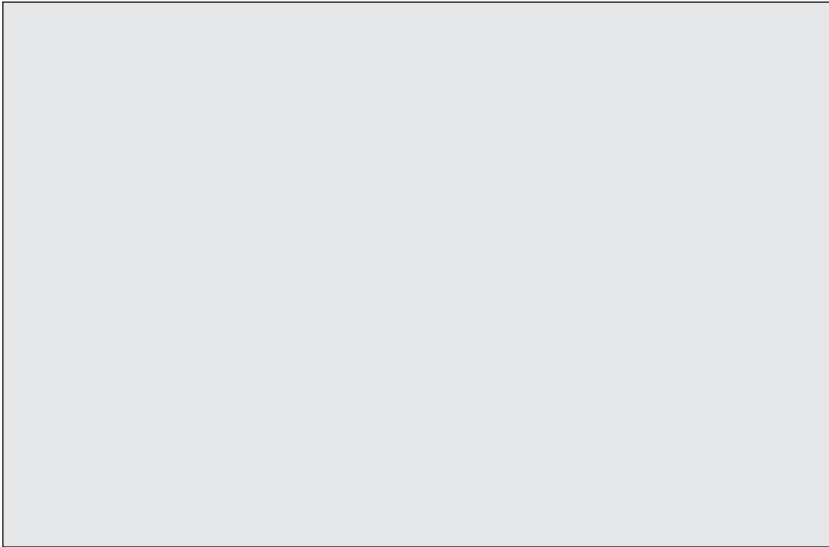


Plate 1 Excerpt from Burrell journal entry of 30 September 1767 (reproduced by kind permission of the Duke of Hamilton).

In a short paper of this kind, it is impossible to cover all aspects raised in this massively detailed archive; in any case, the real concern of the article is to identify distinctive features of work journals and the characteristic view of changing Scottish agriculture these give, and to gauge whether the Burrell journals tell researchers anything more than might be gleaned from more general estate papers and records. The article will argue that work journals exhibit several distinctive characteristics – detailed continuity of coverage, reliability of reportage, depth of insight and frank confidentiality. The continuity of the journals provides a developing narrative of business and improving progress across the estate, admittedly not quite on a day-to-day basis, but sufficient to provide a degree of linkage not usually found in collective estate papers. Secondly, Burrell’s stipulation that the journals had to provide informatively detailed assessments of improving progress ensured reporting reliability and accuracy. Thirdly, it might be claimed that the journals offer deeper insights into the often fraught management of estate improvement than might be revealed in standard estate records. Written by a variety of estate servants and officials charged with delivering the projected outlines of the proprietary improvement scheme, the journals are neither impartial nor disinterested, but because they were written for the current business record, the journals were also concerned to provide a clear, unbiased picture of how things were working out, what was successful, what required revision and what the next step might be, while recording setbacks and obstacles to improving progress along with

suggested remedies. Finally, there is a degree of confidentiality, largely fostered by the private nature of journal reports which circulated only within a closed managerial corps. This encouraged sometimes surprisingly emotive comment – spontaneously human elements rarely surfacing within general estate papers – giving us a closer view of the inevitable anxieties and stresses accompanying this tumultuous and disruptive enterprise.

The ongoing narrative of the Burrell journals allows us a fairly continuous overview of attitudes to change among managers and tenants as estate improvement proceeded. At the start of the estate improvement scheme in early 1764 we are told of ‘hide-bound’ tenants resisting land enclosures, some demanding that ancient runrig allocations ‘as we got them new’ (*viz.* as in past farm tacks) should be retained.<sup>13</sup> In 1771, Burrell still complained that obdurate tenants were ‘knocking on the head’ the entire scheme of improvements by resisting improving obligations within their farm tacks.<sup>14</sup> The journals record farms still with unenclosed runrig areas undergoing initial improving land division in the 1780s or even later.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, however, the journals report other tenants from the start eagerly adopting modern innovations, some voluntarily enclosing lands in advance of estate schedules.<sup>16</sup> By the 1770s and 1780s, some ambitious tenants, far from resisting improvement obligations, were eagerly seeking to acquire extended ‘improving’ leases, or to engross their developing farms by seeking leases on neighbouring lands.<sup>17</sup>

The narrative overall gives some grasp of the monumentality of the improving operation; Burrell estimated at the commencement of estate improvement in 1763 that ‘the next twelve years will make very great improvement on the estate’,<sup>18</sup> but probably did not imagine that after more than fifty years of improvement and long after his own demise, the journals would be identifying farms ‘not yet divided into regular enclosures’ or recording land surveyors ‘measuring new divisions’ on still-improving farms.<sup>19</sup> But since the ‘long-forgotten and neglected’<sup>20</sup> estate in 1763 retained large areas of land still in ancient infield-outfield divisions and with communally shared, often interspersed runrig strips, it is perhaps not surprising that the work of

<sup>13</sup> HPL, 631.1/236, Journal Dec. 1763 to Apr. 1769, pp. 12, 169.

<sup>14</sup> HPL, 631.1/242, Journal Feb. to Aug. 1771, pp. 7–8.

<sup>15</sup> HPL, 631.1/259, Journal Oct. 1778 to Nov. 1780, p. 288.

<sup>16</sup> HPL, 631.1/236, Journal Dec. 1763 to Apr. 1769, p. 98. Initial ‘best improvements’ for newly leased farms, consisting of enclosure and subdivision were scheduled by the estate; more eager tenants started these off themselves.

<sup>17</sup> HPL, 631.1/259, Journal Oct. 1778 to Nov. 1780, pp. 29–30; 631.1/264, Journal Nov. 1780 to Jan. 1782, p. 117.

<sup>18</sup> HPL, 631.1/236, Journal Dec. 1763 to Apr. 1769, p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> HPL, 631.1/287, Journal Nov. 1816 to Dec. 1817, p. 19; 631.1/288, Journal Jan. to Dec. 1819, p. 153.

<sup>20</sup> HPL, 631.1/249, Journal Dec. 1773 to Oct. 1775, p. 134. Burrell’s description of the estate as it had been in 1763.

improvement – involving in effect the historical modernisation of a largely medieval landscape – was still in active process at the close of the journals in 1820.

The second claim is that the journal format, written largely by estate managers, offers perceptive insights into key issues and problems in the practical management of change in the era of improvement. These insights are sharpened by the characteristic frankness encountered within the journals. Problems of non-availability of necessary materials and lack of capital investment are earnestly and urgently reported in earlier journal entries covering the first stages of the estate improvement scheme. Baron Mure, chief estate commissioner and Burrell's closest improvements collaborator, is quoted in late 1765 as having admitted that a critical shortage of thorn saplings (to create essential subdivision hedges on improving farms), along with difficulties in supplying lime to farms, was seriously threatening the entire improvement plan.<sup>21</sup> Three years later in December 1768, he confessed to the journal 'the greatest strait the estate is in for money'.<sup>22</sup> This more serious crisis was only alleviated by selling off several farms in the remoter Kilbride barony to raise investment capital.<sup>23</sup>

But the biggest threat to the Lanarkshire estate improvement scheme emerged in the 1770s and 1780s when serious harvest failures brought about by summer flooding and subsequent 'parching drought' left many tenants unable to meet their annual rents.<sup>24</sup> Burrell's 1774 estate survey showed forty-three of around two hundred Hamilton tenants in 'serious' arrears, while in the early 1780s, forty-one tenants had debts thought 'irrecoverable' – arrears being on average more than twice annual rents.<sup>25</sup> His emotive response to the earlier of these devastating crises, in a note to Baron Mure in early January 1775, illustrates in most graphic terms Burrell's attempts to support struggling tenants while simultaneously pressing them for rent payments, and confessing his own near-paranoid anxiety as the perceived 'cause of all the disasters':

I give credit for every article of lime the tenants have laid on their grounds ... for every new building they have erected ... every part of the fences they have made at their own expense. By all which and the money we in the most modest and sometimes most harsh manner pressed them to deliver will we hope before the month of June [to] make all rejoice ... and no body I wish for more than you and me who are said to be the cause of all the disasters.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>21</sup> HPL, 631.1/236, Journal Dec. 1763 to Apr. 1769, pp. 78, 165.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 308.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 311–12. The farms, within the 'unentailed' area of the estate, were sold by public roup in May, 1769.

<sup>24</sup> HPL, 631.1/249, Journal Dec. 1773 to Oct. 1775, p. 134.

<sup>25</sup> HPL, 631.1/249, Journal Dec. 1773 to Oct. 1775, pp. 41–8; 631.1/264, Journal Nov. 1780 to Jan. 1782, pp. 52–8.

<sup>26</sup> HPL, 631.1/249, Journal Dec. 1773 to Oct. 1775, pp. 134–5.

The journal format, reporting such ‘private’ correspondence alongside more formal records, takes us inside the heads of those involved in a way general estate papers rarely do. In this case, it reveals the internal struggle which must have been fought out in many improvers’ minds between the modernist desire for rapid, radical reform and the proprietary obligation to protect tenants, retained in the vestiges of traditional ‘paternalism’ – the mutual bond of loyalty between the laird and his tenants. The ‘credits’ Burrell refers to went beyond the allowances paid to tenants for liming lands, or building or repairing farms or fences mentioned in his note, extending at different times to compensatory payments to tenants for failure of the estate to enclose lands where this was stipulated in improving tacks,<sup>27</sup> and occasional allowances for ‘fall in markets’ (usually falling grain prices) making farms temporarily ‘too high-rented’.<sup>28</sup> But alongside these sometimes markedly generous allowances, Burrell and his successors continued to present their ‘modest and sometimes harsh’ demands for rent arrears repayment; tenants were often ‘pressed’ for payment, while in more serious cases, ‘security’ – guarantees of payment from friends or relatives of the indebted individual – was demanded. In the worst cases ‘due diligence’ was applied, involving valuation and ultimately sequestration of farm livestock and crops to secure unpaid arrears.<sup>29</sup>

Such measures were common and are often well documented in estate records across the country. What is exceptional here is that the characteristic ‘insider’ observations provided in the journals explain how the alternately supportive and demanding approach towards struggling tenants was a complementary facet of the underlying paternalistic versus businesslike, tough versus pragmatic management of improvement. In another example, Burrell’s more ruthless business instincts encouraged ideas of removing tenants he saw as uncooperative or indolent, but he still had to comply with the paternalistic ‘Hamilton custom’ of ‘giving preference’ on farms due for lease to sitting tenants.<sup>30</sup> On several occasions in the later 1760s he tried to import new farmers ‘of skill and substance [capital]’ to replace the less industrious indigenous tenants (and ensure more adequately stocked farms),<sup>31</sup> but in the eventuality he had to admit that ‘very little’ by way of introducing outside farmers was

<sup>27</sup> ‘Want of enclosing’ allowances were most frequent in the 1770s and 1780s, e.g. HPL, 631.1/249, Journal Dec. 1773 to Oct. 1775, pp. 38, 98; 631.1/269, Journal Jan. 1782 to Nov. 1783, pp. 25, 36, 210.

<sup>28</sup> For example in the 1780s, e.g. HPL, 631.1/269, Journal Jan. 1782 to Nov. 1783, p. 342; 631.1/274, Journal Jul. 1784 to Jan. 1787, p. 226, and in the depression after 1816, e.g. 631.1/288, Journal Jan. to Dec. 1819, p. 74.

<sup>29</sup> Again most numerous in the 1770s and 1780s, e.g. HPL, 631.1/249, Journal Dec. 1773 to Oct. 1775, pp. 31, 92–5; 631.1/269, Journal Jan. 1782 to Nov. 1783, pp. 344, 355.

<sup>30</sup> HPL, 631.1/259, Journal Oct. 1778 to Nov. 1780, pp. 81, 314.

<sup>31</sup> HPL, 631.1/236, Journal Dec. 1763 to Apr. 1769, pp. 28, 167, 168. The ‘outside’ tenants were from Ayr and Polmont.

actually achieved.<sup>32</sup> Thereafter characteristic pragmatism took over and he had to settle for educating existing tenants in the ways of improvement – ‘bringing on the tenantry by degrees’.<sup>33</sup>

The journals, however, reveal a less inhibited application of non-paternalistic ‘business’ values in Burrell’s improvement plan devised for the Hamilton estate on the island of Arran in the early 1770s. Appearing in July 1769, the plan drew up ‘Heads of Resolution’ for estate improvement, including abolition of ancient runrig, amalgamation of farms where feasible, radical reduction of tenants through ‘fair ejection’ and no subletting of farms.<sup>34</sup> The larger northern part of the estate (just over thirty-one thousand acres) was to be ‘appropriated for sheep and goat walks’ with another eighteen thousand acres set aside for black cattle and horse breeding; both areas were ‘reserved ... for His Grace’.<sup>35</sup> In smaller arable areas, 215 ‘full tenants’ from an existing complement of tenants and subtenants numbering well over one thousand would emerge as single tenants in farms of around 120 acres, following a two-stage reduction, in the first of which around 465 former tenants, ‘much better employed in fishing or common labour’, would be forced off the land.<sup>36</sup> Burrell and Mure were still discussing the plan in 1774,<sup>37</sup> and a few farms in the Sannox and Lochranza areas of Arran were advertised for improving lease in 1782.<sup>38</sup> In effect, however, although black cattle were regularly shipped from Arran to the Hamilton estate grazing parks for fattening from the later 1770s,<sup>39</sup> the plan appears to have proceeded very slowly and hesitantly, only drawing more public attention at a much later date when families ejected from holdings in the Sannox area were resettled in Canada, in 1829.

Burrell’s somewhat terse analysis of the Arran ‘problem’ that the island was ‘oppressed with too many people ... too many cattle’, and his belief that, emigration having failed to alleviate the situation, ‘we could do more to reduce numbers’<sup>40</sup> might seem harsh, even shocking to later generations, but, as is well known, such views were not uncommon among eighteenth and early nineteenth-century landlords. Burrell’s Arran plan is remarkably similar to that adopted in the later Sutherland Clearances,<sup>41</sup> and the journals report that it was

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> HPL, 631.1/240, Journal Feb. 1769 to Jan. 1770, pp. 21, 116–33.

<sup>35</sup> HPL, 631.1/246, Journal Jul. to Nov. 1772, pp. 101–2.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>37</sup> HPL, 631.1/248 Letter book Dec. 1773 to Apr. 1776, p. 37.

<sup>38</sup> HPL, 631.1/269, Journal Jan. 1782 to Nov. 1783, p. 145.

<sup>39</sup> First cattle shipment from Arran was in July 1779, HPL, 631.1/259, Journal Oct. 1778 to Nov. 1780, p. 152.

<sup>40</sup> HPL, 631.1/246, Journal Jul. to Nov. 1772, p. 100.

<sup>41</sup> See E. Richards, *The Highland Clearances: People, Landlords and Rural Turmoil* (Edinburgh, 2000), 119–82. Richards also links the Hamilton plan for Arran and the later Sutherland improvement schemes within the sub-chapter headed ‘Parallels and precedents’ (p. 61).



admired by ‘Captain Campbell’, an erstwhile ‘client’ of Burrell who sought to apply the main elements of the plan in improvement of his ‘Highland estates’ in Kintyre.<sup>42</sup> The confidentiality encouraged by the journal format here allows us deeper insights into contemporary proprietary perspectives, while depicting Burrell, on a personal level, as a significant and influential improver well beyond the boundaries of his own home base and bailiwick, as will be discussed later.

Although in no real sense a personal diary, Burrell’s activities as ‘General Overseer of improvements’ are so assiduously recorded in the pages of the journals until his disappearance in the mid-1780s<sup>43</sup> that we have as thorough a description of his character as we might gain from a memoir or diary. The uncompromising toughness exhibited in the more ruthless aspects of the Arran improvement plan was tempered by a characteristic pragmatism (for example the previously mentioned acceptance that improvement had to proceed via indigenous Hamilton farmers rather than imported tenants). But modernism was the more constant creed; he sought to abolish the traditional ‘thirling’ of farmers to use and maintain local grain mills,<sup>44</sup> while vestiges of archaic payments made by feu-tenants, such as payment of ‘sergeant’s corn’, were scorned. Indeed, the entire concept of feudal land grants was gradually replaced by modern, fixed-term leases.<sup>45</sup> He expedited the abolition, already begun on the Hamilton estates, of ‘in-kind’ rent payments such as live poultry, suggesting that tenants, in a truly market-responsive farming economy, should sell their own produce and pay their rents in money only.<sup>46</sup>

As well as trying to eradicate traditional feudal institutions, Burrell strove to modernise work and labour practices at Hamilton: the traditional practice of not commencing ‘field’ work such as ploughing until 10 a.m. he raged against in the journals (‘this absurd common practice of the country’) and had largely eradicated by the 1780s.<sup>47</sup> But his most persistent aim was to convert traditional ‘day’ wages to ‘modern’ piecework payments: for example, masons erecting dykes or carpenters making stob-and-rail fences to be paid per yard completed, rather than per day.<sup>48</sup> The massive annual operations of harvesting and general clearing-up across the estate – exercises involving literally hundreds of men, women and children – could not, in Burrell’s time, be converted from traditional day-wage rates to work by the piece, but more detailed accounts for

<sup>42</sup> HPL, 631.1/240, Journal Feb. 1769 to Jan. 1770, pp. 127, 188.

<sup>43</sup> His last direct journal reference records a visit to Arran in July 1784 (HPL, 631.1/274, Journal Jul. 1784 to Jan. 1787, p. 1). He is referred to as ‘deceased’ in October 1797 (631.1/280, Journal Jun. 1796 to Dec. 1797, p. 228).

<sup>44</sup> HPL, 631.1/259, Journal Oct. 1778 to Nov. 1780, p. 240; 631.1/264, Journal Nov. 1780 to Jan. 1782, p. 186.

<sup>45</sup> HPL, 631.1/282, Journal May 1801 to Aug. 1803, p. 397.

<sup>46</sup> HPL, 631.1/240, Journal Feb. 1769 to Jan. 1770, p. 79–80.

<sup>47</sup> HPL, 631.1/259, Journal Oct. 1778 to Nov. 1780, pp. 56–7.

<sup>48</sup> HPL, 631.1/259, Journal Oct. 1778 to Nov. 1780, p. 270; 631.1/280, Journal Jun. 1796 to Dec. 1797, p. 163.

such operations were introduced from the 1790s, and the practice of inviting job tenders was extended; both developments clearly intended to more carefully record and analyse costs.<sup>49</sup>

Burrell's rage for modernity energised his efforts to construct a modern collegiate estate management structure, with a hierarchy stretching down from the proprietor and estate commissioners through a general overseer and estate chamberlain to ranks of subordinate overseers with responsibility for supervising whole areas of the estate or groups of farms, and sub-managers for livestock operations, and for key services such as nursery and carpentry provision.<sup>50</sup> But within this modernist structure, traditional barony-court officials – baron-bailies and officers, formerly chief magistrates and executors of those ancient local courts – were surprisingly retained. Burrell in effect redeployed the ancient offices in support of estate policies, including farm improvement – on one occasion actively seeking to replace a less than enthusiastic bailie, seen as 'rather against us as for us' with a tried and tested improver.<sup>51</sup> While retention of barony officials long after the ostensible abolition of the local courts under the Heritable Jurisdictions Act of 1747 has been noted on other estates across the country,<sup>52</sup> employing tradition to effect change was perhaps typical of the characteristic pragmatism Burrell revealed in the journals. Baron officers were still operating on the estate as late as 1819.<sup>53</sup>

The journals depict Burrell as something of a restless perfectionist, continually patrolling the estate, frequently chiding tenants for lack of care or insufficient application. But his under-managers were just as likely to receive his criticism; head-gardener Rutherford was rebuked for lax supervision of ditching and hedging labour teams in the autumn of 1768, while some time later Stuart, an area overseer, was similarly castigated for authorising careless fencing work.<sup>54</sup> On a more serious level, in early 1774, Burrell confided to the journal his suspicion that an area overseer in Rutherglen barony had colluded with two local tenants in a 'combination' to limit bids for a farm due for lease and thus secure a lower rent for the favoured bidder.<sup>55</sup> He was forced to work

<sup>49</sup> HPL, 631.1/281, Journal Jan. 1799 to Mar. 1800, pp. 36–42; 631.1/287, Journal Nov. 1816 to Dec. 1817, pp. 1–28. By 1819 labour-team accounts were provided monthly (631.1/288, Journal Jan. to Dec. 1819, pp. 66–70).

<sup>50</sup> Applicants for overseer posts were interviewed by the General Overseer, e.g. in July 1772 (HPL, 631.1/245, Journal May to Jul. 1772, p. 121). The applicant was queried on past experience and literacy skills.

<sup>51</sup> HPL, 631.1/244, Journal Jan. to Apr. 1772, p. 58.

<sup>52</sup> For instance in Smout, *History of the Scottish People*, 262–3; T. M. Devine, *Clearance and Improvement: Land, Power and People in Scotland, 1700–1900* (Edinburgh, 2006), 49.

<sup>53</sup> HPL, 631.1/288, Journal Jan. to Dec. 1819, p. 21.

<sup>54</sup> HPL, 631.1/236, Journal Dec. 1763 to Apr. 1769, pp. 264–5; 631.1/247, Journal Dec. 1773 to Dec. 1774, p. 62.

<sup>55</sup> HPL, 631.1/249, Journal Dec. 1773 to Oct. 1775, p. 4. Burrell noted several such misdemeanours in the journals.

through principal tenants to try to enclose and subdivide multiple-tenancy farms, but simultaneously despised those principal ‘tacksmen’ who used their position to sublet ‘at twice or three times His Grace’s rent’.<sup>56</sup> While such private observations might be confided in the journals, the practical, pragmatic approach of accepting the situation and moving on was usually the chosen course.

Burrell’s improving endeavours beyond the Hamilton estates are occasionally documented within the journals. His advice was eagerly sought by landed proprietors, including Lord and Lady Dundonald, seeking to develop their Lamarka estate,<sup>57</sup> the Earls of Eglinton and Eaglesham, and Lord Hume. His advice to Captain Campbell on improvement of the latter’s Kintyre estate has already been noted. In 1771 Burrell drew up a plan of improvement for the mixed pastoral and arable estates of Sir George Colebrooke in south Lanarkshire, following this with several supervisory visits in the two succeeding summers.<sup>58</sup> These extracts from the journals, along with the Arran interludes, provide agrarian historians with detailed accounts of contemporary improvement programmes for varied types of estates (lowland arable and mixed farming, Highland pastoral), supplementing the comprehensive description of the developing Hamilton estate, which is the central focus of the collective journals. Private memos within the journals indicate that Burrell’s introduction to these outside landowners was via Baron Mure, head of the Hamilton estate commissioners, acting at the behest of the Duke of Hamilton. The significance of such aristocratic networks in promoting national agrarian development might be somewhat underreported within the historiography of the period, as perhaps is the considerable contribution of estate factors and managers like Burrell, whose activities involved important and formative policy-making both in his outside consultations and at Hamilton.<sup>59</sup>

Given the close focus on Burrell within the work journals it is easy to understand why the archive is usually referred to as the ‘Burrell journals’, but, as previously noted, Burrell in fact ceased his connection with the Lanarkshire estate in the mid-1780s, and so was absent for well over half the duration span of the journals (1763–1820). In effect, Burrell’s central role was taken up in the ‘post-Burrell’ journals by his successors as improvement managers. J. Henry Cochrane, chief estate commissioner, took over from Baron Mure as Burrell’s

<sup>56</sup> HPL, 631.1/236, Journal Dec. 1763 to Apr. 1769, p. 246.

<sup>57</sup> Four visits to the Dundonald estate are recorded. Surprisingly, Lady Dundonald was the ‘improver’, her spouse having ‘no great inclination’ in that direction (HPL, 631.1/244, Journal Jan. to Apr. 1772, p. 180).

<sup>58</sup> HPL, 631.1/242, Journal Feb. to Aug. 1771, pp. 127–43 (plan); 631.1/243, Journal Jul. 1771 to Jun. 1772, pp. 1–189; 631.1/245, Journal May to Jul. 1772, pp. 1–171. (The last two journals dealt only with Crawford developments.)

<sup>59</sup> It has been noted that Highland factors in the post-Clearance period were often responsible for ‘formulation of (estate) policies’. A Tindley, ‘They sow the wind, they reap the Whirlwind’, *Northern Scotland*, 3 New Series (2012), 79.

main improvement collaborator from around 1780, continuing in post until 1800.<sup>60</sup> John Henderson supervised improvements within the large Hamilton Parks area from around 1803, working with Robert Russell who was employed in Burrell's former office of chief overseer of estate-wide improvements.<sup>61</sup> The journals continued to document estate development until 1820, all the while offering contemporary views, perspectives and insights which, it has been argued throughout the article, are among the major assets of the intrinsically 'confidential' journal format. However, continuity, also seen as a most valuable characteristic of regularly recurring work journals, was somewhat diminished in the 'post-Burrell' years, with several lengthy periods without journals, notably between 1792 and 1795, 1803 and 1807, and in years 1810 and 1816.

'Letter books', containing written correspondence chiefly between estate factors, and from factors to and from the proprietor, might be said to fill in some of the 'gaps' indicated above. These letters reflect the normal business of the estate – rent collections, state of growing crops, current farm leases and, occasionally, legal case correspondence – with here and there, passing references to 'outside' matters concerning the country at large.<sup>62</sup> Unfortunately, surviving letter book correspondence covering the gap in the journals between 1803 and 1807 is almost entirely concerned with the Kinneil estate, with little reference to Hamilton.<sup>63</sup> A subsequent letter book does, however, make repeated reference to declining livestock markets after 1815 and growing financial strains for the Hamilton estates as rent arrears mounted in 1816 and 1817.<sup>64</sup> Letter books share some of the characteristics of work journals, especially intrinsic confidentiality and, more than other types of estate papers, can extend and complement the journals. However, the correspondence they contain covers a wider subject area, with less sustained focus on the process of estate development.

While much of the article has set out the merits of the journals as a source for research, there are of course less helpful elements. The missing years in the post-1792 journals have already been noted. Another shortcoming is that the voices of ordinary folk are rarely heard within the journals; a popular refrain of social and economic historians is that this failing is in fact redolent of eighteenth and early nineteenth-century contemporary sources as a whole.

<sup>60</sup> HPL, 631.1/259, Journal Oct. 1778 to Nov. 1780, p. 328; 631.1/281, Journal Jan. 1799 to Mar. 1800, p. 310.

<sup>61</sup> Russell continued on after Henderson's death in 1807 (HPL, 631.1/284, Journal Jul. 1807 to Aug. 1808, p. 96).

<sup>62</sup> HPL, 631.1/278 letter book 1794 to 1796. Letters are included on militia defence against revolutionary France, and Hamilton 'lobbying' to persuade government to connect Bo'ness (near Kinneil) to the Forth and Clyde Canal.

<sup>63</sup> HPL, 631.1/283 letter book 1804 to 1810.

<sup>64</sup> HPL, 631.1/286 letter book 1815 to 1819; in one letter dated 5 April 1817, the estate factor suggests to the Duke that he might wish to curtail 'improvements' (mainly road-building plans) given the shortage of available cash.

To some extent, particularly with regard to farm tenants, the Hamilton work journals indeed offer more than do many such sources; as already noted, from the start of the improvement scheme in 1764 through to the final entries of 1820, tenant responses to estate reform proposals, from obdurate opposition to cautious welcome, are frequently recorded along with significant changes in tenant attitudes over time. Additionally, the relevant sections of the journals record, often in graphic detail, the desperate struggles of indebted farmers to retain their tenancies as rent arrears mounted ever higher in the 1770s and 1780s. While such information was of course originally designed to provide managers with accurate intelligence on the progress of improvement across the estate, it offers invaluable evidence for socio-economic researchers as well as for local and agrarian historians.

Nevertheless, the journals provide only occasional glimpses into the work and lives of the subtenant rural underclass of cottars and farm labourers. Of course, the major preoccupation of reformers like Burrell was in reducing and redeploying such groups, very numerous on some larger Hamilton farms in the 1760s and 1770s.<sup>65</sup> But direct references to individuals in these underclasses are infrequent; a cottar is recorded in the journals as having been excused a fine 'because of his extreme poverty', having raised a crop in contravention of his rules of tack in order to make money to clear his annual rent.<sup>66</sup> In similar vein, appeals are recorded from two labourers with small potato crops ruined by storms, 'who live by their labour' and had hoped to pay their house rents by selling the crops.<sup>67</sup> But these fleeting pictures of individuals struggling for material survival are only rarely encountered within the journals: in general the trials and travails of those unfortunates and their families on the lowest strata of the rural social structure are as little reflected in the journals as in other contemporary sources.

The article has argued that the Burrell journals, with their relative continuity of narrative, deep insights into contemporary management perspectives, and frank, frequently confidential observations on the real problems and difficulties of improving a large and initially relatively undeveloped eighteenth-century farming estate, offer much that is of interest to a wide range of researchers, including social, economic, agrarian and local historians and historical geographers. Work journals were essentially insider accounts of business progress, by necessity accurate, with honest, frequently critical and sometimes emotive comments and reflections, offering a perspective quite different from that provided in the more objective, factual accounts usually found in general estate papers and records. Archivists might reasonably argue that the research potential of the immensely detailed journals could be significantly enhanced

<sup>65</sup> For instance in the 1760s, Flemington farm had eleven subtenants and Moffathills sixteen 'cottars and subtenants' (HPL, 631.1/236, Journal Dec. 1763 to Apr. 1769, pp. 65, 83).

<sup>66</sup> HPL, 631.1/264, Journal Nov. 1780 to Jan. 1782, p. 177.

<sup>67</sup> HPL, 631.1/277, Journal Feb. 1790 to Jun. 1792, p. 176.

by adding content-finding aids to catalogue listings, but lack of these cannot diminish the exceptional richness of the archive itself.

Naturally, as with all contemporary sources, the journals have limitations and the quite serious 'gaps' in continuity in the post-1790s journals have been noted. The journals overall, deriving from a managerial perspective, are less insightful on the real impact of change on the very lowest ranks of rural society. Perhaps the most obvious limitation is the absence, from the later 1780s, of John Burrell himself, chief instigator and leading figure within the journals. But, perhaps partly due to the journal format which presents us with a remarkably well-rounded picture of the man, his characteristic zeal for improvement, boundless energy, deep understanding of his trade, even his private thoughts, prejudices, values and ideals, it is Burrell who seems to stand out above all else in the journals, commanding our attention. The contrasting aspects of his personality – sometimes the tough master, sometimes a generous conciliator, a radical for change but an often pragmatic reformer – mirror the underlying tensions between traditional paternalism and ruthless modern commercialism that must have confronted all agrarian improvers of the time.