

A Short Visual History of the Highland Clearances for Grassroots to Global “Just Walk”, 2 Oct 2025

William McTaggart, born in Kintyre (1835-1910)



Emigrants Leaving the Hebrides

1883: The Tate, London

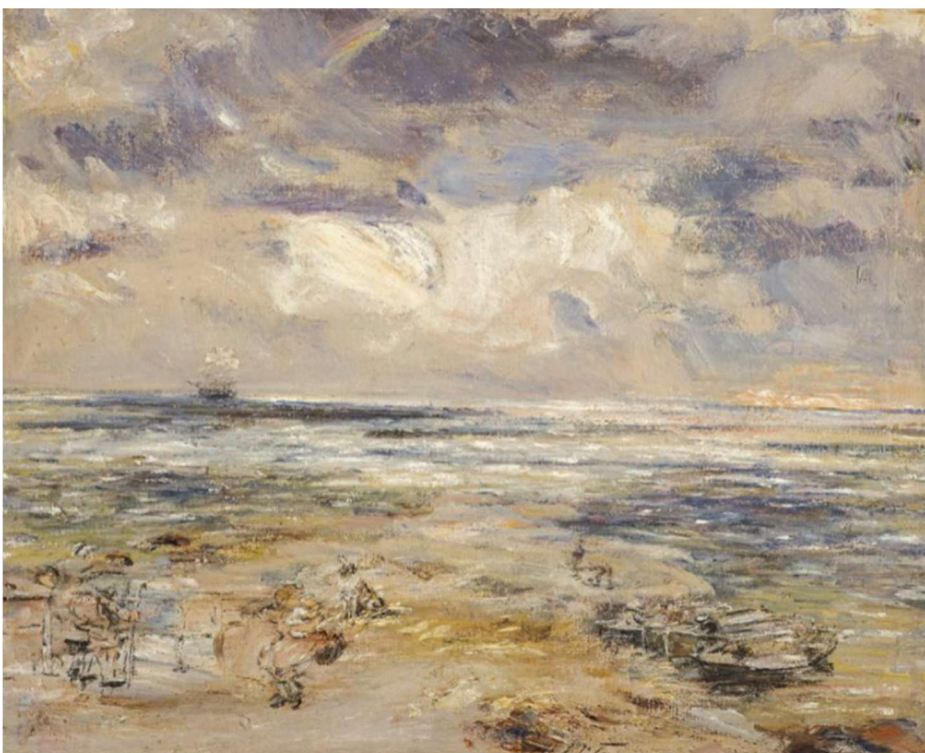
McTaggart came from a Gaelic speaking crofting family in Argyll. He is not to be confused with his grandson, another artist Sir William McTaggart. Building on some earlier themes, he began this 1st work in a sequence in the same year as Alexander Mackenzie published “The Highland Clearances” and the Napier Commission was appointed to enquire into the position of crofters, leading to the passing of the Crofters Holdings (Scotland) Act of 1886, that gave secure tenure.



Crofter Emigrants Leaving the Hebrides

1891: Kirkcaldy Art Gallery & Museum

The info from The Tate describes this 2nd version of the theme as “a small replica ... more loosely handled and impressionistic” than 1st. They’re loading small boats to go out to the waiting ship. But what differences do you notice? Katherine Worthing discusses all 3 in her 2006 PhD thesis, *The Landscape of Clearance*, pp. 198-200 (see left QR, painting right QR).



The Sailing of the Emigrant Ship

1895: National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh

And what differences now, as public awareness of the Clearances sunk in? The NGS says: “Born to Gaelic speaking parents on the west coast of Scotland, the artist felt a deep personal concern for the draining away of the Celtic population from their own land. He painted three variations on the theme of emigration, of which this is the last. An emigrant ship is seen moving off under a stormy sky, with a hint of a rainbow in it. On the shore, older members of the clan have been left behind, desolate.” Via the NGS’s QR, hear the audio testimony of Anne from the Isle of Lewis, and how such social history is keenly felt and carried, even down to this day.





***Last of the Clan*, 1865: Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum & Fleming Collection London**

Thomas Faed, Kirkcudbrightshire (1825-1900)

"When the steamer had slowly backed out, and John MacAlpine had thrown off the hawser [rope], we began to feel that our once powerful clan was now represented by a feeble old man and his granddaughter, who, together with some outlying kith-and-kin, myself among the number, owned not a single blade of grass in the glen that was once all our own."



***Lochaber No More* (1883)**

John Watson Nicol, Edinburgh
(1856-1926)

Fleming Collection, London
See Worthing's PhD, pp. 149-158 etc.

"Many are the poor bothies destroyed on every side./ Where the fire and the children were,/ There the rushes grow highest."

Dr John MacLachlan of Morven, "Beinn Shianta"



***The Emigrants* (1886)**

Dorothy Tennant (Lady Stanley), London
(1855-1926)

Mappin Art Gallery, Sheffield
See Worthing's PhD, pp. 181, 186

"'Twas the thick gloom of Glasgow my happiness stole,/ For the din of her hammers has deafened my soul."

Murdo Macleod of Leurbost, "Eilean an Fhraoich"



***A Coronach in the Backwoods* (1859)**

George W. Simson, Dundee
(1791-1862)

National Museum of Scotland
See Worthing's PhD, pp. 191-192

"Quantify Suffering, you could rule the world. They can rule the world while they can persuade us our pain belongs in some order."

Adrienne Rich, *The Dream of a Common Language*



Faed



Tennant



Nicol



Simson

This is why
land reform
... **MATTERS**
It gives life.