

Cromarty Courthouse Crumbs of Justice 6

The Wife

who writes history?

Date

1841

Background

In the past, men were more usually powerful than women. They were also more literate, because they were generally the ones to receive the most education, so history tends to be written and recorded from a man's viewpoint rather than that of a woman

Using the *Smiddy Prisoner* script which is based on the Kirk Session records for Resolis, explore what happens to Cursty, the wife of Hugh Sinclair, the blacksmith of Resolis. She is pregnant and a mother to seven children already.

Cursty is arrested for assaulting the bailiff who has evicted them from the Smiddy which had been their family home for generations, and who has even 'poinded' her blacksmith husband's tools and the few rows of tatties with which she could have fed her family.

It was hardly an assault. She threw a peat at him which scratched him on the head.

Pupils can write a story in the first person from Cursty's point of view, written the day after the court case was heard (they can assume that she was acquitted, so released without charge, but that Hugh was imprisoned instead of paying a fine).

- How might Cursty herself have seen her situation?
- How might she have regarded Hugh's actions in stealing back the smiddy tools?
- What might Cursty have thought of her landlord, Major Gun Munro?
- What might Cursty have thought of her husband being imprisoned?

The story could begin *Michty me, what a time this has been for us!* It can be enhanced with some of the Fishertoun and other dialect phrases to be found within the Learning Zone.

Vocabulary

assault: to injure someone with the intention of hurting them

The Highland

Clearances: period of history between the mid-18th and 19th centuries when many Highlanders chose or were forced to emigrate to the New World

Michty me! Oh dearie me (literally Mighty Me, calling on The Almighty – God). A frequent Resolis expression.

poinded: (pronounced pinded) to take in payment of a debt with the intention of selling

smiddy: blacksmith's shop (there are two in this part of the Black Isle, one at Newhall Bridge and one above Rosemarkie)

Extension activity

This activity would sit well within a broader study of the Highland Clearances.

Desperation drove some people to seek a life overseas and ambition drove others. It is likely that some of the eight Sinclair children would have ended up emigrating to Canada, America, Australia or New Zealand.

Landlords were harder on their tenants than in previous generations because, 100 years after the Jacobite Rising, the older, more tolerant connections between clan lairds and their clansfolk had been well and truly broken. Lairds were often now educated in the south, not tutored at home as had once been traditional.

These wealthy men often became absentee landlords, spending part of their lives in Edinburgh or London, and they often felt disconnected from their family lands. Factors were brought in to manage their estates and these men were in turn judged on how much profit they could generate. They had little sympathy with those who fell behind with the rent.

Absentee landlords are still an issue in the Highlands today.