

## The arrest and imprisonment of the Herbusta Crofters 1887

This is a song written by William Beaton, who was one of the seven Herbusta Crofters found guilty for 'rioting', 'mobbing' and deforcing a Sheriff's Officer on the 25<sup>th</sup> October 1886 in Herbusta.

A crowd of crofters had gathered and blocked the Sheriff, Factor and the policemen (who had come to 'serve a writ for rent arrears' on the crofter John MacIntosh) from entering the village. They threw clods of earth at them and chased them from the village. The Sheriff returned two days later with a much larger force (70 Soliders and Police) on the Gunboat HMS Seahorse, which anchored at Bornasikitaig, Kilmuir. But, all of the crofters had abandoned the village before they came, and hid in the hills. Only John Beaton (a cattle herd) My Great Granfathers uncle, had stayed to look after the cows. He was unlawfully arrested by the Sheriff and taken back to Portree and imprisoned for four days. (John Beaton afterwards sued the Sheriff for false arrest. It was a famous court case: *Beaton vs Ivory*, Which is still used by lawyers today)

William Beaton wrote a verse for each of the imprisoned crofters (including himself).

*'S muladach mi 'n diugh 's mi 'g éirigh*

*Séisd:*

'S muladach mi 'n diugh 's mi 'g éirigh  
Anns a' phrìosan an Dun Eideann;  
'S muladach mi 'n diugh 's mi 'g éirigh.

1 A Dhòmhnail Ruaidh ud ann a Hàise,  
Walkigeadh air feadh a' ghàrraidh,  
'S olc a thig an deise bhàn dhuit,  
Ged bu shràiceil air an fhéill thu.

2 Uilleam MacArtair's e cho gòrach,  
'S eagal aige roimh na bòcain;  
Cha tìg gin dhiubh troimh 'n a' chòmhlaidh,  
'S cha téid bòrd dhith às a chéile.

3 Tha Iain Ceannaiche nas fheàrr dheth,  
Pailteas aig' de Bheurla 's gràmair;  
Nì e stòraidh ris a' warder  
Feuch an ann as fheàrr a ghréidheadh.

4 Uilleam Peuton 's e cho scòlta,  
Ged nach eil a Bheurla dòigheil;  
Abraidh e 'Sir' riutha an còmhnaidh,  
Mar bu chòir a bhith 'sa Bheurla.

5 O, a Thearlaich 'Ic an Tòisich,  
'S mairg a chunnaic ort an còmhdach:  
'S snasail rachadh tu 'nad fhòram,  
Dol Di-Dòmhnaidh dè'n éisdeachd.

6 Facal beag mu bhean mo nàbaidh—  
Thug iad i do'n chùirt as àirde;  
Nuair a chunnaic iad a h-àilgheas,  
Cha bu dàna leo a h-éighcach.

7 Seonaidh MacAoidhein 's e cho brònach,  
A' caoidh Anna Nic an Tòisich;  
Chan fhaigh ciobair i no Nòrman  
Chaidh ri bheò gum faigh e fhéin i.

8 Ged a tha mo leabaidh fuar ann,  
Ealag agam airson cluasaig,  
Nuair a thilleas mi ri m' chuachaig,  
Cha bhì fuachd a' déanamh éis dhomh.

9 Ged a chuir sibh mi 'n a' phrìosan,  
A' seasamh còir airson mo sgìre,  
Gheibh mi fhathast as ur n-ingean,  
'S bidh mi sinte ri mo cheud-ghràdh.

10 O, a Mhàiri Mhór nan Oran,  
'S math an drama thug thu dhòmhsa;  
Ach ma thilleas mise beò as,  
Gheibh thu còig airson na té ud.

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### Translation

*Sad am I as I rise today*

*Refrain:*

Sad am I as I rise today  
in the prison in Edinburgh;  
Sad am I as I rise today.

- 1 Red-haired Donald who hails from Haise,  
walking there throughout the garden,  
the white suit befits you badly  
although you were pompous at the market.
- 2 William MacArthur is such a silly fellow —  
he's afraid of ghosts;  
none of them can come through the door,  
and not one board of it will break.
- 3 Iain the Merchant is better off —  
he has an abundance of English and grammar;  
he will tell the warder a story  
to see if he'll get better attention.
- 4 William Beaton is such a cunning man;  
although his English is not up to much,  
he will always say 'Sir' to them  
just as it should be said in English.
- 5 O Charles MacIntosh,  
pity the one who saw you in such attire;  
you would go splendidly in top dress  
on your way to church on Sunday.
- 6 A brief word now about my neighbour's wife  
whom they took to the highest court;  
when they observed her proud condition,  
they did not dare to summon her.
- 7 Johnnie MacAoidhein is so sorrowful  
since he misses Anna MacIntosh;  
neither a shepherd nor Norman will get her;  
he will have her all the days of his life.
- 8 Although my bed is cold in prison  
with a block acting as my pillow,  
when I return to my dear one,  
the cold will not be troubling me.
- 9 Although you have put me in prison  
for standing up for the rights of my district,  
I shall yet escape from your talons,  
and I shall lie beside my first love.
- 10 O Big Máiri of the Songs,  
what a splendid dram you gave me!  
But if I return alive,  
you will get five in return for that one.

Over the next month, the police and soldiers were constantly raiding the village day and night to try and find the crofters, but they never caught them. The crofters eventually gave up the fight and walked to Portree overnight and surrendered voluntarily at the Police Station. This also denied the police from getting a medal from Sheriff Ivory for capturing them. They were all bailed (Which was paid for by the people of Portree), but then taken to Edinburgh. At the High Court there on the 4<sup>th</sup> January 1887, they were tried and found guilty by the jury for 'rioting' 'mobbing' and deforcing a Sheriff and sentenced up to 2 months imprisonment. (The wife of one of the crofters, a Mrs Ann MacMillian (22 years old) was also charged and taken to court, but she was not tried, as she was found to be pregnant at the time).

(verse 1)	Donald Beaton	Crofter	(54 years old)	1 Herbusta	2 Months
(verse 2)	William MacArthur	Crofter	(51 years old)	2 Herbusta	1 Month
(verse 3)	John Mackenzie	Crofter	(50 years old)	3 Herbusta	1 Month
(verse 4)	William Beaton	Fisherman	(33 years old)	4 Herbusta	1 Month
(verse 5)	Charles MacIntosh	Crofter	(23 years old)	5 Herbusta	1 Month
(verse 6)	Alex MacMillian	Cattle Dealer	(30 years old)	7 Herbusta	2 Months
(verse 7)	John MacDonald	Fisherman	(27 years old)	8 Herbusta	2 Months

Donald 'Ruaidh' Beaton one of the imprisoned crofters was my Great Great Grandfather. Our croft in Herbusta that we still rent, has always been known as 'Haise' (which is Norse: for farm on a sloping land).