

We're watching reruns of Monarch of the Glen at the moment. Do you remember the television series? When it first came out I was living in England and used to watch it as a substitute for being here. It helped me keep alive the dream of my little cottage in the country or, on a good day, being mistress of the big house. Like Dr Finlay's Casebook or Hamish Macbeth it painted pictures of a community where everyone got along, with just one little incident a week resolved in an amusing way before all the characters joined together for a cheery wee drink.

Now that I live where I do and am watching it for a second time, I can feel the Clydeside Socialist rising up in me. My republicanism isn't being helped by the barbed wire that a local landlord has put over a gate on a favourite walk. I think it's back-up for his 'Beware of the Bull' sign. The countryside code means that anyone who wants to can follow the (signposted by the council) path as long as they do not do any damage to the land or wildlife.

Landowners (absentee or otherwise) are not allowed to stop anyone from walking on their land, and discouraging walkers by putting obstacles in their way is against the spirit of the legislation. Yes, I have seen beer cans and bonfire debris left lying, dogs messing and chasing wildlife, and damage to plant life or crops where people have taken shortcuts away from paths. But in my experience most visitors take care of the land they are walking on.

I know the owner a little and am afraid he is no Archie MacDonald. He definitely lacks the looks and the charm, but has the same commitment to the family land, and a determination to protect his inheritance at all costs. Like Archie he's not the happiest man in the world, but maybe he just has different worries to the rest of us.

Years ago I worked on an estate, and the owner was a good enough man. His elderly father needed a fair bit of looking after, but his (wealthy) wife and he never got on. I was at university with one of his sons who was a terrible snob, although maybe he was just wary of anyone he thought might have been after his inheritance.

It must be a terrible burden to feel obliged to live your life having to take care of a valuable asset. Both father and son were making compromises all the time, just to protect their stupid estate. The father may or may not have married for money, although more than once he told me that it was only his wife's money that kept things going. The son knew that anything he did was only killing time until he took on responsibility for the land. He lived it up at university more than the rest of us as he didn't appear to mind if he graduated or not.

As Prince Charles celebrated his birthday the other week, the burdens of his birthright are all too clear. Here is a man, born into a privileged life not even having to put his own paste on his toothbrush, and yet locked into a future which was set out for him before he was even born. Like his mother and like his sons, everything he does is in the knowledge that his sole purpose in life is to look after an entity passed to him from earlier generations and which he is obliged to keep in good order to pass on to his own children.

The politics of land ownership and inheritance do not change the pressures on the privileged. Royalists and republicans alike can agree that Prince Charles is not in an enviable position. Like Archie he feels the burden of his heritage, and like Archie he practices a form of benevolent paternalism that makes me feel put down.

No, even if I would like a little bit more wealth for myself, I don't envy the landed gentry.