



[The Walpole Commission and the Congested Districts Board]

In the heyday of Britain in the 19th century, when it was said she was the richest Nation in the World, the infrastructure that was so necessary for the economic wellbeing of the Western Isles was sadly neglected, such as roads, quays etc. Paradoxically, however, there was plenty of money available for military purposes and Empire building.

In the second half of the 19th century a very large proportion of the population of the Highlands and Islands were denied any of their native land that God created for their use, because the landowners needed it to enrich themselves. Very often the people were forcibly removed from their land and homes and by the 1880s the crofting community was ready for an uprising and small concessions were reluctantly granted to them in order to avoid a rebellion.

It was at a meeting held in Stornoway on 13th December 1882 that a memorial was sent to the Liberal Government of Mr Gladstone, asking for a programme of public works in order to alleviate the conditions of near poverty that existed in Lewis at that time.

A Commission of Enquiry was set up, presided over by Mr Spencer Walpole and commonly known as the Walpole Commission. The Commission visited Lewis, among other places, and following that enquiry the 'Western Highlands and Islands (Scotland) Works Act 1891' passed into law. Again in 1897 the 'Congested District (Scotland) Act' was passed, and the Congested District Board was set up in 1897.

Works were undertaken in terms of the former Act and as necessary were carried on, or extended, by the Congested District Board.

These Acts proved relatively beneficial to South Lochs where there were no roads. Numerous stretches of footpaths were constructed in Park. In that, as in so many other ways, the people were exploited by making it a condition that the people contribute a large percentage of the cost of the projects in free labour, ranging from one third to three quarters of the cost of the roads.

Not only did these roads add to the general comfort of the inhabitants, but also a marked improvement took place in school attendance after the roads were constructed. Alexander MacIennan of Marvig, giving evidence at the Brand Royal Commission in 1894, testified that there was not a foot of road in Park, except a small bit of footpath that was formed for the school children last year. He also said he was nine miles from the nearest road. Evidently he must have been referring to the main road at Balallan.

Among the stretches of footpath that were constructed in Park between 1893 and 1897, were the following:

Date	Location	Length of footpath (yards)	Free labour	Total cost
1893/94	Marvig/Calbost	1000	75	£ 84
	Gravir	750	75	£ 79 13s
	Kershader/Habost	1600	75	£ 83 5s 5d
	Cromore	865	75	£ 89 16s
	Sheildinish	883	75	£ 58 7s
	Garyvard	883	75	£ 88 10s 5d
	Lemreway	560	75	£ 34 1s 4d
1896/97	Lemreway	1826	75	£106 10s 4d
	Gravir	1379	75	£161 10s
	Marvig	1320	75	£100
	Cromore	532	75	£ 59 17s
	Kershader/Garyvard	1702	75	£ 53 3s 9d
	Kershader/Habost	974	75	£ 28 11s 7d
	Sheildinish	Bridge	75	£ 15
1896/97	Kershader/Habost	1600	33 $\frac{1}{3}$	£ 20 10s
	Lemreway	382	33 $\frac{1}{3}$	£ 23 11s 4d
	Completion		33 $\frac{1}{3}$	£ 10 10s 4d
	Gravir south	242	33 $\frac{1}{3}$	£ 16 2s 8d
	Gravir north	506	33 $\frac{1}{3}$	£ 21 1s 8d

Completion		33 $\frac{1}{3}$	£ 4 15s
Marvig/Calbost	1116	33 $\frac{1}{3}$	£ 20 18s 6d
Cromore	995	33 $\frac{1}{3}$	£ 29 10s 6d
Kershader/Garyvard	1425	33 $\frac{1}{3}$	£ 17 16s 3d
Sheildinish	2200	33 $\frac{1}{3}$	£ 9 3s 4d

In 1901 the Congested District Board made a grant of £2,700 for the construction of the Gravir/Cromore Road, and that road was opened on 17th August 1908. The school children of Marvig School attended the opening ceremony on the moor and therefore we presume that that project included the Marvig Road as well. We know that the Marvig Road was constructed about that time on account of people that worked on it, including John Matheson of 15 Gravir (Iain Andra). He was building the wall at the edge of Loch Catisval, just west of Marvig. Iain would have been 18 years old in 1908 when the road was opened.

Lady Sinclair, who was accompanied by Captain Sinclair, opened the road Secretary of State for Scotland.

The Ishkin road was constructed earlier when Sellar was the tenant of the sheep farm. His tenancy expired in 1883. The constructor was John Mackay of Valtos, and cost 2s6d or 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ p a yard to construct. Pickmen from Skye were employed at 1s6d or 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ a day.

The vehicular road around the end of Loch Erisort into Park was not completed until 1928. It was not tarred until after the Second World War.

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