



[Education and Religion in Pairc]

Gaelic was the first, and indeed, the only language in Park, there was no formal schooling available in any language. In 1796 a small English thatched Parish School was opened near the Parish Church at Keose, but it was too far from most of the children of the Parish, certainly too far from the children of Calbost and the other villages of Park for them to benefit there from in any way.

It was not until the Society for the Support of Gaelic Schools formed in Edinburgh in 1811 that real progress was achieved in educating the people of Park and Lewis through the medium of Gaelic instruction, even then the Gaelic Voluntary Schools did not reach Park until the 1820s. Thatched schools were opened at Gravir in 1822, Marvig in 1828, Loch Shell in 1828 and Cromore in 1829. The statistical account of 1833 tells us that there were only 12 people in Lochs at that time who could write and we may be sure that these twelve were connected with the Manse and the tacks.

The Bible was the main textbook in the Gaelic schools and the teachers were chosen for their piety. In that way these schools were not only educational, they were also religious and character forming. Adults attended as well as children and there was a magnificent response as the people had the opportunity for the first time to read the Scriptures in their own tongue. In that way the truth dispelled the superstitions the people lived in, and influenced the minds and outlook of the people.

Some, at least, of these Gaelic schools were circulatory. They went from village to village, staying for at least a year, but usually more. It was a circulatory Gaelic school that was at Calbost and the walls of the old school building, which was also the village prayer house, may still be seen below the side road leading to crofts 8 and 9, on the boundary between crofts 6 and 8.

It was the Gaelic teachers that pioneered the Sunday School Movement in Lewis, but the origin of the movement is much older and can be traced to Robert Raikes in Gloucester, England. Sunday Schools are still a feature of our culture.

It was the Education (Scotland) Act of 1872 that laid the foundation of a national system of education and the people of Lewis responded well to the new educational opportunities. Planasker School, Marvig served the two villages of Marvig and Calbost. When it was opened on 16th August 1880 the total roll for the first day was 30 pupils and on the second day the roll had increased to 47 pupils. It went on to exceed 100 pupils at its peak. It closed in 1973 and the pupils were transferred to the new Park School at Gravir.

Martin Martin, in his book, 'A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland', published in 1703, gives us a long list of Reformation Churches in Lewis, two or three of which were in Lochs. St. Colm Cille, on the Island of the same name, on Loch Erisort, St. Phearaer, in Kaerness and St. Mary, in the Shiant Isles. There is a degree of uncertainty about where was St. Phearaer of Kaerness and some people maintain that it was at Swordale, near Keose. Some say that the old name for Swordale was 'Cearnish', others maintain that it was much more likely that the church mentioned here is the old church that is at Rearnish (Ranish) in Lochs.

The Reformation of 1560 had a profound influence on our religious outlook in Lewis. The first Presbyterian Parish Church in Lochs was at Swordale near Keose and the first Minister to settle there in 1724 was Rev. Colin Mackenzie. Until the disruption of 1843 there was only one church in the whole of the Parish of Lochs. Thereafter the history of Presbyterianism is dominated by division and there are about a dozen congregations now in the area which was once covered by only one Parish Church.

The Park congregation to which Calbost belonged was sanctioned in 1879 with a membership of 600 people over 14 years of age and a promise to raise a sustentation contribution of £88 a year.

[ends]

AN ARCHIVE RECORD FROM THE ANGUS MACLEOD ARCHIVE www.angusmacleodarchive.org.uk

Author: Angus Macleod

Date:

Original document title: The Man of Park (first part omitted)
Location in physical archive: Series K, File 2, Section 39
NRAS reference: NRAS 4336/1/9/2

© Angus Macleod Archive