



[Reminiscences by Angus]

As children growing up in a rural village in Lewis in the 20th century we were happy and carefree.

We were well fed, and we never knew what real hunger was. We were content in the crofting villages working hard on the land and sea. As long as the meal cist was full, potatoes were in the barn, sheep on the hill, cattle in the byre, hens on the 'spiris', barrels of salt fish in the store, and salted dried whitefish on the 'sioman', we were happy.

Because the food was expensive and money was scarce, every inch of the available land was cultivated.

The sad thing was that the private landowning system under which we lived denied the crofters access to the land of their forebears, and several families were obliged to live on each available croft in an overcrowded condition on sub-standard housing. As children we were not aware of the above difficulty.

Nevertheless, to a great extent, the people were independent as far as food and clothing were concerned. They used the wool from their own sheep by converting it to personal clothing as well as blanketing. Tweed was sold as and when possible. They washed, dyed, carded and spun the wool. The resulting yarn was woven into cloth, as well as knitting some of it as necessary.

There were local shoemakers, tailors, weavers, carpenters, stonemasons and boat builders. Our small village of Calbost had two shoemakers and a tailor as well as quite a number of weavers and carpenters. There were itinerant boat builders calling and staying in the village while there was work for them.

Very often there was a grain-mill on the stream in or near the village. In our village of Calbost our Norse-type watermill was on the stream within the village, and it was making meal until 1902 when my grandfather Kenneth Nicolson moved to Stornoway with his family. It is quite possible that the Norse settler who gave his name to the village erected the mill originally. The suffix 'bost' in the name Calbost means homestead and the prefix 'Cal' or 'Kali' is thought to be the name of the original Norse settler at Calbost.

There were three kilns in Calbost in order to prepare the grain for the grain mill.

As I was born in August 1916 I lived through almost the whole of the 20th century - and there have been more changes in the world in the 20th century than in all the previous centuries taken together. It would take me a long time to refer to all the changes that I saw during my lifetime. Here are a few:

- I was 7 or 8 years old before the first length of road reached our village in 1923/24.
- I was 10 or 11 years old before the road between our village and Stornoway was completed in 1926/28.
- I do not think there were any cars in Lewis when I was born in 1916.
- Messages were transmitted across the Minch for the first time on the cable that was laid by the ship S.S. La Plata on 28th June 1872. That cable remained in service until 1933.
- Telegraphic communication came to Lochs in 1896, first to Crossbost, then subsequently to Balallan, Keose and Gravir.
- There were only 20 telephone subscribers in Stornoway in 1929, and none available outside Stornoway except the post offices. Nowadays everybody, even schoolchildren, carry a phone in his or her pocket.
- Television only became available in Lewis in the 1960s.
- Radios were available before that, possibly in the 1920s.
- Motorcars only came about 1920, but it was into the 1930s before the cars and buses operated from South Lochs to Stornoway.
- All the boats were sailing boats until the 1920s, and there were 'Zulu' sail fishing boats in Lewis until 1945 when the 'Muirneag' was scrapped.

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