



[More about Planasker School]

It is said that the name 'Planasker' derives from the site known in Gaelic as 'Blar an Eas Duibh'. 'Blar' is a field and 'Eas' is a waterfall. There is a stream near the school with a waterfall on it called 'Eas Dubh'.

When I finally plucked up the courage and accepted the invitation of the headmaster to visit my old school at Marvig sometime ago, I approached the old building with trepidation, probably because my sub-conscious mind recalled the atmosphere, and childish image I cherished of the place from my youth. Holding my breath I knocked the door nervously as I used to do when I arrived late for school, which was not infrequent. After a few moments, which seemed like days the cheerful headmistress appeared and my nervousness soon disappeared as both she and the children made me very welcome indeed.

My very first impression was of the relaxed and informal atmosphere in the school. The pupils were obviously very well disciplined, were at the same time, confident, free from any shyness, proud of their school, proud of their teacher, working together in a happy and contented team. I think it would be true to say that my generation was not so contented at school. My recollection is that we lived for that proud day when we would attain to the age of 14 and gain our freedom from school. For that reason many of us did not take full advantage of the opportunity we had at school. We learned our mistakes and regretted our folly ever since.

Had we paid closer attention to our teachers we might have been better fitted educationally to face the struggle of making our way in the world. Of course conditions have improved since we were at school. Unlike today neither the children nor their parents felt any compelling need to learn much more than the ability to read and write. After leaving school at 14 most of the boys of our generation at Lochs followed the older generation into the fishing industry, not quite appreciating the hardship that awaited us in a smelly fishing boat. As cook and coiler, harassed by seasickness and sleeplessness for a whole summer season for £6 or £7, doubtless it was a good introduction to the hard struggle of life.

It seems the relationship between teacher and class is much more relaxed today and there is more co-operation and participation from the pupils, and all this makes for a happier school. The conditions of the old building inside is still very good and there is an impressive list of teaching aids, which is a tribute to the industry and perseverance of the headmistress, not being content until she secures all the aids possible for the benefit of her classes. A television set, a radio set, a piano, an electric tape recorder and for outside work a battery recorder, a film projector and a supply of educational films, a sewing machine and a ironing table, an electric iron as well as other teaching aids, all of which was obligingly displayed by the pupils without any trace of self consciousness. Before long I was so absorbed and at home that I prolonged my stay long past my expectations.

The room next to the school dwelling house is now converted into a school canteen and gymnasium and a new toilet is now provided inside the school building and the porch or cloakroom at the classroom entrance has a geyser and two wash hand basins.

At that time the school roll was 16 pupils. That number contrasts sharply with the child population of the school district when a count was made prior to the building of the school. In December 1873, shortly after the formation of the School Board for the Parish of Lochs, the number of children aged between 5 and 13 years were: Marvig 57 and Calbost 41, making a total of 98 children ready for the new school which was to open on 23rd July 1880.

I came from my visit to Planasker School last year feeling very happy and wishing that many more former pupils would pay a visit to the old school and see for themselves what is being done for the children of today.

I am fully convinced that the children taught in the several rural schools have much better opportunities and are better off in every way than those who are, in the name of progress, taken from their home environment and placed in big schools and big classes where they get less individual attention. I also feel that the parents and children of Planasker owe a debt of gratitude to their headmistress who is so hard working and dutiful.

We, as former pupils, also feel a debt of gratitude towards the old school and the teachers who taught us there, and we would like to believe that the school had a good record of achievement in its 90 odd years of life. Many of the former pupils of Planasker held responsible positions in many walks of life, in various parts of the world. Not all the pupils became learned academics but then we must remember that the main purpose of good education is to fit the pupil to become a good citizen and be able to lead a fuller and better life. Judged by that standard I feel most of us would give high marks to Planasker school. Life is full of changes and the changed circumstances of

the district of Park caused the authorities to propose a new school at Gravir to serve the area at present catered for by the five old schools in the area, which will be closed when the new school is opened later on this year or early next year. Many of us will remember with nostalgia and pleasant memories the happy and carefree days of our youth at these old schools. However much some of us would prefer that to go on I suppose we must be realistic.

As this year is the centenary of the 1872 Education Act as well as the year it is proposed to close the five old schools of Park, may I be permitted to give a few facts relative to education in Lochs? Old records state that in 1833 there was a Parish school erected in Lochs (locality unknown) probably Keose, and 4 schools maintained by the Gaelic School Society. The Crofters Commission report of 1909 states that after the Disruption of 1843, the Free Church established schools throughout the Island, as also did Sir James Matheson after he became Proprietor of Lewis in 1844. Therefore it is possible that there may have been more schools in the Parish at this time.

I remember old folks speaking about a school in Gravir and one in Cromore and there was one in Lemreway, probably one of Sir James Matheson's schools. With the exception of the Parish schools all the other schools were provided and maintained by voluntary benevolence up to the passing of the Act of 1872. Following the passing of the Education Act of 1872, the first School Board for the Parish of Lochs was elected on 28th March 1873. Donald Munro, Solicitor and Chamberlain, Stornoway, Roderick Miller, Surgeon, Rev. Ewan Campbell, Minister at Keose, Rev. George Lewis Campbell, Crossbost, Donald Macdonald, tenant, Crobeg, John Mackay, tenant and ground officer in Balallan, Walter Rose, Inspector of the poor, Stornoway were Board members. Owing to his post, Mr Rose had to desist membership and Mr Kenneth Mackay, Gaelic teacher at Carlway was appointed in his place. The first meeting was held at Soval Lodge on 9th April 1873. Mr Munro was appointed chairman and Mr Ross, Solicitor, Stornoway was appointed to the conjoined offices of clerk and treasurer.

In December 1873 the children aged 5 -13 were as follows:

Habost	25
Kershader	20
Garyvard	18
Caversta	10
Cromore	55
Crobeg	2
Torestay	4
Marvig	57
Calbost	41
Gravir	83
Lemreway	101
Total	416

I am sure the total population of these villages today does not greatly exceed the school population figures for 1873 given above.

Incidentally the population of Gravir in 1911 was 468, and in the whole of Park in 1911 there were 1,922.

The scale of school fees set out at the meeting of 10th June 1874 was fixed as follows:

Reading and writing /per quarter	1s/-
Religious instruction and arithmetic	6d
Grammar, geography and composition	6d
Latin	6d
Greek	6d
Mathematics	6d

But in all the cases of parents having four or more children attending school, fees were to be reduced by half.

At the School Board meeting of 2nd June 1876 it was agreed to accept a contract offer for £3,325 from Mr Alexander Macdonald, contractor, Lindale, Skye for 9 schools in the Parish including five schools in South Lochs:

Kershader and Keose schools opened in 1878
 Balallan and Cromore schools opened in 1879
 Marvig School opened in 1880
 Gravir and Lemreway schools opened in 1881

At the meeting of 28th February 1879 it was decided to give 8 weeks school holidays - 5 in spring commencing 28th March, and 3 in autumn commencing 12th September.

A minute of the Scottish Education Dept. required Gaelic to be taught in all schools from June 1885.

Free breakfast of porridge was provided to all school children in the Parish from January 1888. Oatmeal was distributed in the district for this purpose. Also in 1888 it was decided to give a pair of clogs to every pupil of school age who showed satisfactory attendance at school. There was no school transport, and the Calbost children walked nearly two miles to school, and back, every day, bare-footed in the summer. There was no canteen, so the Calbost children had to be content with a piece of bread for lunch. During our time at Planasker cocoa was provided by boiling a big kettle on the open coal fire which heated our school room. The practice of bringing a peat to heat the school in the morning ceased in the early 1920s. Corporal punishment continued liberally, but we felt we deserved it.

Shawbost was added to the Parish of Barvas and Carlaway to Uig by the Boundary Commission in 1881. The school fees were abolished for 5-14 year olds in 1890 and the School Board approved the Nicolson Institute for secondary education in 1895.

The last meeting of the old School Board was held at Knockandhu School on 13th May 1919, and the new Education Authority took over.

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<http://www.hebrideanconnections.com/Details.aspx?subjectid=44873>