



## [Employment and Transport]

### Tradesmen

Traditionally, the men of Lochs were fully occupied with agriculture, fishing and kelping and these activities required a high degree of skill. Also they built their own homes using local material whenever possible and therefore they were skilled in stonework as well as a certain amount of skill in woodwork and thatching. Some men were naturally skilled in some of these activities and boatbuilding etc. Such people found openings in the community as jobbers on their own in various trades and skills.

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century young men were better educated and they began to think of earning their living in ways other than in the traditional ways, and in order to be able to do that, they would have to acquire new skills.

### Shoemaking

Shoemaking was among the first trades that became popular in Lochs and the following four young Calbost men acquired the trade of shoemaking in Stornoway:

Donald Kennedy	born 1852	son of Murdo Kennedy	3 Calbost
Alastair Kennedy	born 1863	son of Roderick Kennedy	2 Calbost
Donald Kennedy	born 1864	son of Dugald Kennedy	2 Calbost
Kennedy Macleod	born 1867	son of Angus Macleod	1 Calbost

In due course Donald Kennedy 1852 moved to Stornoway with his family. Alastair Kennedy 1863 emigrated to South America. Both Donald Kennedy 1864 (Domhnuill Dhuill) and Kenneth Macleod 1867 (Coinneach Aonghais) set up shoemaking and shoe-repairing business' at Calbost, where they serviced the whole district of Pairc and indeed they processed orders for leather thigh sea boots for fishermen from the East coast of Scotland from time to time during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century before rubber thigh boots became popular. Kenneth Macleod was a full-time shoemaker at Calbost but Donald Kennedy was a part-time shoemaker and fisherman. Donald Kennedy's customer ledger book is still in existence in the Calbost collection, giving the names of customers and prices.

### Baking

About a dozen young Calbost men went in for baking in Stornoway about the turn of the century as follows:

Donald Mackenzie	born 1872	son of Calum Mackenzie	4 Calbost
Norman Mackenzie	born 1881	son of Calum Mackenzie	4 Calbost
Roderick Mackenzie	born 1876	son of Roderick Mackenzie	4 Calbost
Johnnie Mackenzie	born 1878	son of Roderick Mackenzie	4 Calbost
Donald Macleod	born 1877	son of John Macleod	6 Calbost
Johnnie Macleod	born 1892	son of Kenneth Macleod	6 Calbost
Murdo Morrison	born 1888	son of Neil Morrison	9 Calbost
Angus Morrison	born 1892	son of Neil Morrison	9 Calbost
Kenneth Nicolson	born 1879	son of Kenneth Nicolson	11 Calbost
Roderick Mackenzie	born 1881	son of Donald Mackenzie	12 Calbost
Murdo Mackenzie	born 1884	son of Donald Mackenzie	12 Calbost

Most of these men emigrated and most of them set up in business on their own account in North America and South Africa.

### Tailoring

One man, Roderick Finlayson born 1884 son of Alastair Finlayson 10 Calbost, served his apprenticeship as a tailor. Tailoring was a very popular trade in Lewis in the early part of the century. After working in Oban for many years, he settled down on the family croft at 10 Calbost and opened a tailoring shop there in the early 1920s. To begin with he always employed one person and very often two people making new clothes for both men and women for the whole district of South Lochs until the multiple-ready-made tailors came to Stornoway in the 1930s. Thereafter he was very busy on his own until after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War when he moved to Laxdale, Stornoway with his family and continued tailoring until he retired.

## Weaving

Weaving for domestic use was practiced extensively everywhere in earlier times. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the domestic cloth produced in the Hebrides, including pladding was being commercialised and the congested District Board which was established in 1897 encouraged home industries of all kinds including the weaving of tweed. The Big Loom 'Beart-Mhor' had just appeared in Lewis in the 1890s and the congested District Board appointed an instructor in Lewis and Harris by the name of Alexander Lamont. Besides paying the salary of the instructor and providing large dyeing boilers, they advanced funds through a local committee free of interest for the purchase of improved looms (meaning the 'Beart-Mhor'). In 1899 there were 55 looms in Lewis. In 1906 there were 161 and in 1911 it was estimated there were about 300.

There were weavers in Calbost prior to the 1890s when the Beart-Mhor came on stream, the writer's mother was one of them and the original tenant on Croft No 9 was known as Murchadh Brebadair 1797-1870. At least the following ten heads of families were domestic weavers on the 'Beart-Mhor' (flying-shuttle type of loom) in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

John Macleod	No 3	Kenneth Macleod	No 6
Kenneth Mackay	No 7	John Mackay	No 7
John Macleod	No 8	Angus Macleod	No 8
Calum Morrison	No 9	Murdo Morrison	No 9
Kenneth Nicolson	No 11	Murdo Nicolson	No 11

The big wooden loom began to be replaced by the Hattersley iron loom in the 1920s and the last two Hattersley single shuttle looms came to Calbost in 1933, one to Johnnie Macleod 8 Calbost and one to John Nicolson 11 Calbost.

The last wooden 'Beart Mhor' that operated continuously in Calbost was that of Malcolm Morrison 9 Calbost. 'Calum Alastair Mhurchaidh' 1875-1944. When Calum died suddenly he had tweed in the loom and it was completed by Murdo 'Peter' Macleod 8 Calbost. By that time a number of Hattersley looms had come to the village, as follows:

Angus Macleod	No 1	Kenneth Mackay	No 7
John & Murdo Macleod	No 8	John & Angus Nicolson	No 11
Donald Mackenzie	No 12		

## Kelp

The Calbost Tacksman Robert Weir was very active in both kelping and fishing and when the village was first lotted about 1818 it was the seven kelp workers that were already in the village and working the land under the Run-Rig system of land tenure that became the first seven crofters: Alexander Macleod, Donald Kennedy, Norman 'Buidhe' Mackenzie, Donald Smith, Kenneth Macleod, Malcolm Finlayson and Kenneth Maclean. The last named moved to Gravir later on.

The term kelp is sometimes applied collectively to seaweed, but it is also used to describe the calcined ash of seaweed when it is burnt in a Kiln. The calcined ash of seaweed yield alkali which was used extensively in the manufacture of soap and glass etc in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Therefore the kelp industry came to be a very important industry in the Hebrides and other places with a suitable coastal fringe, which was referred to as a 'Golden Fringe'.

The harvesting and production of kelp was carried out by the small tenantry and they were obliged to sell the finished product to their Tacksman because he controlled their land tenure and therefore all aspects of their lives under the old Run-Rig system of land tenure. In the absence of competition kelping was very profitable in the early period, during the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. When the landlords realised how profitable kelping was they dismissed the tacks men and introduced direct tenurial control over the small tenantry, hence the first lotting.

The small tenantry cut the seaweed with sickles and piled it into kilns built of loose stones near the shore. In these kilns, fired with peat, the seaweed was being stirred continuously with long irons until it became a liquefied mass. It was then covered to protect it from the rain until it was ready for shipment to the Southern market.

Kelping work was very arduous and it went on all day and night during the short season of part of the summer. The whole family, young and old, male and female, were engaged in the work because it was one of the few means available to small tenantry to earn some money. The earnings were therefore highly appreciated, although small in comparison with the effort needed.

The following interesting observation from a neutral person, Rev John Cameron, Parish minister of Stornoway appears in the statistical account of 1833:

The toil of cutting, drying, burning the seaweed and watching it day and night until the ware is converted into a boiling lava, is terrible and would require extraordinary wages. This process, of not injurious to health is certainly ruinous to the eyes.

The average earnings of the whole family for the season was about £7 in the best years, whereas the market price for kelp during the peak years was about £20 a ton. The kelp workers were therefore exploited ruthlessly and they were helpless as they were obliged to work for the Tacksman at whatever price they offered for the finished product.

About 40 creels of seaweed were needed to make one cwt of kelp. Between 15 and 20 towns of seaweed was needed (depending on how wet it was) to make one ton of kelp, yet some buyers demanded two cwts extra to every 20 cwt ton of kelp in order to offset any impurities that might be in the finished product. It was also alleged that some landlords fixed their croft rents deliberately high in order to provide for part of their kelping bill.

The end of the Napoleonic Wars heralded the end of the kelp industry in Scotland because alternative commodities came on the market such as the imports of Barilla from Spain, which yielded four times as much alkali as kelp. Between 1822 and 1825 the Government reduced various import duties on competitive products and that caused kelp prices to drop very considerably to as low as £5 a ton. Although Lochs was still producing 100 tons of kelp a year in 1830, the price continued to fall and there was very little profit in kelp by then.

Although the work of kelping was arduous and the income was small, the crofting community felt the loss of income keenly at a time when the fishing was poor and the potato blight of the 1840s followed.

The ruins of kelping kilns may be seen by the shore in various places in Lewis. We believe that it is the ruins of the Calbost kelping kilns that may be seen at 'Eilean-a-Ghò,' near the pebbly beach where the village small boats were always hauled up on the beach at 'Mol-a-Ghò.'

After the decline of the Kelp industry during the early part of the nineteenth century, white fishing assumed a greater importance than ever. The Herring industry in Lewis in the early part of the nineteenth century was not correspondingly profitable because neither the Boats nor the nets hither to in use were suitable for deep-sea fishing. It was later on in the nineteenth century that the Herring fishing developed.

#### **Traveling shops**

The opening of the main vehicular road round the end of Loch Erisort in 1928 changed the way of life in South Lochs in many respects.

Traveling shops serviced all the villages of South Lochs, before the advent of traveling shops there were one or more small shops in every village. It was Roderick Finlayson the Calbost tailor that had the last shop in Calbost. Before that Iain 'Bheag' Morrison 9 Calbost and John Mackay 7 Calbost had local shops. Competition from the traveling shops knocked the small village shops out and competition from the large multiples knocked the traveling shop out.



*(Above: Domhnall Iain's traveling shop in the 1960s)*

#### **Mail delivery**

The opening of the road round the end of Loch Erisort spelt the end Loch Erisort mail-boat crossing because the Royal Mail vans began to service South Lochs direct from Stornoway. A Post Office was opened at Stornoway in

1756 and a Sub Post Office was opened at Crossbost in 1874. In 1883 a South Lochs mail service for the summer months only (for the first eight years) was commenced from Crossbost on a sail boat ferry to Cromore and on through to the other villages. In 1884 a Sub Post Office was opened at Gravir, it was operated by Mr Neil Macphail at an annual salary of £4.00. A sub Post Office was opened in Cromore in 1914. A daily delivery of mail did not come to South Lochs until 1928 when the main road to the district was completed. At that time a Post Office was opened at Marvig to service Marvig and Calbost. It was operated by Ishbel Macfarlane.

#### **Bus service**

As soon as the vehicular road to South Lochs was completed private entrepreneurs from several villages opened up a passenger bus service between the district and Stornoway. After a while the age old method of traveling to Stornoway by boat, usually the local merchants boat such as Norman Morrison 20 Marvig or Angus Macleannan 18 Marvig's regular weekly boats. The alternative was to travel via Loch Erisort postal ferry from Cromore. 'Air a Phost'. No one would think of traveling from Lochs to Stornoway by boat nowadays.

#### **Lorries**

Freight went from the sea to the roads in 1928 as well. Private operators in almost every village in South Lochs acquired Lorries thereby providing job opportunities. The horse and cart and the Gig were made redundant and the annual supply of peats were taken home by the lorry. In the course of time the tractor superseded the peat lorry.

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