[Place-names – The Inbye Area]

Croft Names, as used before the crofts were numbered in the 1880s:

Reference no. 1: Cnoc a Runnsan (Runnsan Hill)
The hill on which the dwelling house of croft 1 stands is known as 'Cnoc a Runnsan' and therefore that was the name usually applied to the whole croft. 'Runnsan' is a Gaelic word, which means the tail of an animal. In one version of the folk-tale 'Loch Àirigh na h-Aon Oidhche' the kelpie or sea monster's tail was cut off by his pursuers at Cnoc a Runnsan, hence the place name. (See ref. 280).

Reference No. 2: Càrn a Leathair (Leather Cairn)
Croft No. 2 was usually known by this name, but the name applies specifically to the hill above, and to the east of croft 2. At the top of that hill there is an assortment of boulders, normally referred to as 'cairn'. There is a crevice among these stones that was used as a dump for the off-cuts of leather cast away by generations of shoemakers who worked in the area of croft 2. Càrn a Leathair is on the boundary between croft 2 and croft 8.

At one time there was a shoemaking business, which employed three or four shoemakers, and they served the whole area of Park. They manufactured new footwear for men and women as well as thigh high leather sea-boots and a footwear repair service. The tradition of shoemaking continued in Calbost till the late 1930s when Donald Kennedy, born 1864, croft 2 Calbost, ceased to work from his home. Also, Kenneth Macleod, born 1867, croft 1 Calbost, ceased to work from his home about the same time.

The writer remembers well a stream of visitors from the nearby villages, coming to the Calbost shoemakers and usually staying overnight in the village as they were walking before cars became popular, and people had time to visit their friends.

Earlier shoemakers in Calbost were Alexander Kennedy, born 1863, son of Roderick, who subsequently emigrated to South America, and Donald Kennedy, born 1852, son of Murdo, croft 3 Calbost. He later moved to Stornoway.

Reference No. 3: 'Cnoc a Bhuanna'
This low ridge is the location of croft 3, 4 and 5 Calbost. 'Cnoc' is the Gaelic word for hill and 'Buanna' is the Gaelic word for picked warriors who were the bodyguard of the 'Lord of the Isles'. Their duty was to keep close to him and protect his person. Usually they were quartered or billeted with the local people for free.

In retirement the buannas liked to continue to live their old way of life by continuing to live off the people of the village. In return they entertained the people as comedians and jesters, telling stories and performing tricks to amuse the people.

In due course the word 'buanna' came to mean a mocking sort of person or an idler. There is no local oral tradition that might indicates the place name 'Cnoc a Buanna' in Calbost was named after a genuine member of the bodyguard of the 'Lord of the Isles', or just an idler who amused his fellows.

Reference No. 4: 'Cnoc na Ceardaich' (The Hill of the Smiddy or Smithy or Blacksmith)
This hill is on croft 6 and obviously there must have been a smiddy at this location at one time. Croft 6 was referred to as Cnoc Na Ceardaich. There is no local oral tradition to indicate who operated the smiddy or when it was in use. We never heard of a horse being locally owned by any Calbost people. However, it is of interest in this respect that there is a 'fuaran' or well on croft 6, which was known as 'Fuaran a Chapull'. The word capull is Gaelic for horse.

Reference No. 5: 'Loba a Loch' (The Field of the Loch)
This place name in Gaelic identifies croft 7. In local Gaelic terminology 'loba' means a cultivated field. 'Feannag' is a lazybed, usually long and narrow – 'talamh taomaidh'. A loba is a bigger cultivated field.

It seems that in the case of croft 7 Calbost loba was applied to the whole croft. Perhaps that was because this croft, unlike any of the other crofts in the village, was set out in the middle of the village as an isolated round field surrounded by the other crofts which were set out in long narrow strips of land with direct access to the common grazing through their own gates. Strangely, but croft 7 did not have direct access to the common grazing and therefore they had to pass across other crofts to gain access. That arrangement was unsatisfactory.

The croft bordered on 'Loch Dubh' and therefore it seems appropriate to refer to it as the field of the loch. Also, it was smaller than the other crofts in the village and one is tempted to ask if the estate or the people responsible for setting out the crofts at the time of the second lotting deliberately discriminating in this case?

Reference No. 6: 'Creag a Choin Dubh' (The Rock of the Black Dog)
This place name identifies croft 8. The rock from which the croft gets its name is a high rocky ridge extending along most of the west boundary of croft 8.

There is no surviving oral tradition to indicate why this ridge was named after a black dog, but probably there is more to it than meets the eye.

Crofts 8 and 9 extend north/south from Loch Na Learg to the north to Loch Dubh to the south, whereas crofts 1 to 7 extend east/west from the west boundary of the village to the west boundary of croft 8. In that way croft 8 shares a boundary with most of the other crofts of the village.

Reference No. 7: 'Glaic na Sìoman' (indicating croft 9)
'Glaic' means a hollow or narrow valley. It is a Gaelic word and it is descriptive of the area of croft 9. 'Sìoman' is also a Gaelic word meaning a rope of twisted heather or straw.

There is no local tradition to indicate why this area was designated 'the valley of the heather rope', unless the folk living there made a business of making heather rope. Certainly the writer remembers our ceilidh house host, Angus Morrison, 9 Calbost, making heather rope in the 1920s.

First of all he went out to the moor to bring home a load of selected young shoots of pliable heather. Then he sat next to the peat fire using his skill of marrying these twigs together as he twisted them into very strong rope.

It was heather rope that was used to hold down the thatch on the houses and barns. It was looped back and fore from side to side with an anchor stone in each loop. Later on Charles Morrison's shop on Point Street in Stornoway, which is still going strong, offered rolls of coir rope for sale and as money became available the people went over to coir rope, which became known as 'Sìoman Thearlach' (Charles's rope).

Our ceilidh house host, Angus Morrison, told us that when the crofts of Calbost were allocated about 1850, each prospective crofter put a token in the hat for the draw. His ancestors' token was a sealskin tobacco pouch (spluchan ròn). When the presiding person drew the sealskin pouch, he announced that seal naturally liked to be beside the sea (is fheàrr do an ròn bhi cois na mara) and he allocated croft 9, which is beside the sea, to the Morrison's.

Reference No. 8: 'An Allt Dubh' (The Black Stream)
This stream, which originates on the common grazing in the 'Rudha Iosal', empties itself into Loch Dubh in the middle of the village. It marks the boundary between crofts 10 and 11 and the place name is usually applied to both crofts.

Reference No. 9: 'Baila Phàil' (Macphail's Village)
In more recent times this place name was applied to croft 12. However, if we refer to the 1760 map we find 'Airidh Mhic-Phàil' marked on the map on the common grazings, a little to the south of the village boundary opposite croft 12. That dates this place name sometime before 1760.

The 1851 Ordnance Survey notes 'Baila Phàil' as a village with two houses and a small portion of arable land and some moorland attached to it.

There is a vague tradition that the name 'Baile Phàil' was sometimes applied to the whole village of Calbost. Could it be that the original name for Calbost was 'Ball Phàil' before the Norse renamed it 'Calbost'. That, of course, cannot be confirmed, but it is obvious that there were Macphail families living in the area in the distant past.

Reference No. 10: 'An Allt Ruadh' (The Brown Stream)
Indicating croft 13, the Brown Stream divides croft 13 into two areas. This croft was of old a joint tenancy. The original tenant was Kenneth Macleod, 1776 – 1837 (Coinneach Mor Iain Chalum Òg), who came from Borriston, Carloway, originally.

As a young man he was press ganged into the Seaforth Highlanders, against his will, by the Lewis Proprietor's agent, and he fought in the campaign known locally as 'Cogadh na Tuirc' (The Turkish War), because the British fought the Turkish Army in Egypt, led by Muhammet Ali in alliance with Napoleon of France. The British were in Egypt in order to protect their lines of communication with the Indian sub-continent.

Among other places Kenneth at El Hammed, on the Nile, in 1807 and was listed as missing, killed or taken prisoner. Fortunately he survived but was severely affected by ophthalmia and he was discharged in 1809 as a Chelsea invalided soldier with a disability pension for blindness.

Local oral tradition relates that he Seaforth Proprietor of Lewis desired to give the best and largest crofts to disabled soldiers. Yet another local tradition maintains that Calbost was meant to extend to fifteen crofts, but croft 13 embraced two crofts, hence the actual number of crofts in the village was fourteen. Whatever the truth about these traditions, the fact is that croft 13 was a very large croft in comparison to some others. Later on it sustained five families.

Reference No. 11: 'A Bhuala Glas' (The Green Field)
Indicating croft 14, 'A Bhuala Glas' in Gaelic means 'The Green Field', or possibly it means 'the green cattle fold'. It is possible that a green cattle fold existed there in earlier times. Croft 14 is the last croft in the village.

Reference No. 12: 'Am Mulla'
This is the high ridge to the west of the village marking the west boundary of crofts 3, 4, 5, 6 and 14. The word 'mulla' might have some relation to the Gaelic word 'mullach', meaning top or summit. However, we feel that mulla is not a Gaelic word and therefore more research is needed here.

Reference No. 13: 'Clach na Cuthaig'
This is a round boulder perched precariously on the highest part of the hill known as 'mulla'. It was the favourite perch for birds, particularly the cuckoo.

Reference No. 14: 'Bealach na Limrich'
This place name in Gaelic literally means the gorge or glen of the flitting. It is the gap or glen between Am Mulla and Creag Na Cuidhlichean, which is the high ridge to the west of the village where the village west boundary wall stands. There is a pathway through this glen.

Obviously the question arises as to who was flitting through this glen and why the place was commemorated by the designation 'flitting' or 'imrich'.

On suggestion put forward was that this is the way the people of the village left for their summer grazing at the sheilings (àiridhean). This proposition is supported by the fact that most of the sheilings were in the Catisbhal area. Further credence may be given to the above proposition when we remember that the dwelling house of Robert Weir, the Calbost tacksman, was directly opposite this gap and the life of each village revolved around the tacksman of the village. At that time there was no road through croft 14 and on to Gravir, as there is the case now. In fact there were no roads anywhere in the area of Calbost at that time.

Reference No. 15: 'Creag na Cuidhlichean'
This is a continuation of the high ridge to the north west of the village and it marks the west boundary of croft nos. 1 and 2 in particular. There is a very strong echo or sound wave reflected from this ridge and probably that is why it got the name of cuidhlichean 'wheels'.

The ridge is to the west of the cultivated area known as 'Lòn a Ghruagaich' as one comes into the village from the direction of Marvig to the north. Once again 'gruagaich' in this case probably alludes to the kelpie in the folk-tale of 'Àirigh Na h-aon Oidhche' already referred to.

Reference No. 16: 'Gàradh Loch a Ghruagaich'
The Gaelic word 'gàrradh' is applied locally to a cultivated field or lazybed, as in this and several other places in Calbost. The word also is applied to home pasture or sheiling and possibly gàrradh was applied to this area before the area was divided into six croft enlargements for crofts 1 to 6.

These croft enlargements were carried out in the late 1880s by the first Crofters Commission, which was set up following the first Crofters Act of 1886. These are independent enlargements of about 50 yards wide, stretching from the village west boundary wall, eastwards to the west boundary of croft 8 and 'Loch na Learg Ruadh'.

While croft enlargements were welcome, what really was needed in Calbost and the other villages nearby at that time were new crofts. There were about 190 souls in Calbost at that time, living on 14, 5-acre crofts, giving a total inbye area of 70 acres or approximately one third of an acre per person.

The famous Park Deer Raid followed the 1886 Crofters Act in 1887 because the 40,000-acre Park Sheep Farm made up entirely of former crofter land was converted into a sporting deer forest in 1886, the very year of the first Crofters Act.

The widespread 1891 land raiding in Park and elsewhere in the Island followed the Park Deer Raid four years later. Landless Calbost families took part in both the Park Deer Raid and the land raiding but that did not earn them any additional crofts although there was an average of two and a half families on each Calbost croft at that time.

Apparently the priority of the landowners and the establishment including the Government was to set aside nearly 50,000 acres of former crofter land as a sterile sporting deer park as a playground for the rich from the industrial south, while the deprived crofter community of Lewis struggled hard to avoid death by starvation.

Ironically, Britain at that time was said to be the richest Nation in the World.

Reference No. 17: 'A Ghàradh Ard' (The High Field)
This is the cultivated area at the foot of 'Cnoc Thormoid'. It is part of the croft enlargements of the late 1880s.

Reference No. 18: 'Cnoc Thormoid' (Norman's Hill)
This is a fairly high hill in the village to the north, bordering on Loch Na Learg Ruadh. It is not known who was the Norman that gave his name to this hill, or why.

Reference No. 19: 'Glaic a Mhearlaich' (The Robbers Glen)
This is the area above the main road at the 1880s enlargement of croft 3 at 'Loch a Ghruagaich'. The area is also associated with the Robbers Well 'Tobair Glaic a Mhearlaich'. There is no oral tradition as to who the robber was or when he occupied this glen.

Reference No. 20: 'Cnoc a Runnsan' (The Hill of the Tail)
The story of this hill is covered under reference 1 & 280.

Reference No 21: 'Cnoc Càrn a Leathair' (The Hill of the Leather Dump)
The story of this hill is covered under reference 2.

Reference No. 22: 'Creag a Choin Dubh' (The Cliff of the Black Dog)
A Gaelic name. See reference 6.

Reference No. 23: 'Creag an Fhasgadh' (The Sheltering Rock)
This feature of the topography is a high ridge in the middle of croft 8 above the road. It provided shelter for stock from the prevailing southwest winds. There is a cultivated plot on the lee side of this ridge known as 'Feannag an Fhasgadh'.

Reference No. 24: 'Cnoc Alastair' (Alastair's Hill)
This is the hill on the boundary between crofts 8 and 9 above the road. We do not know who the man was that this hill was named after, or why.

Reference No. 25: 'An Druim' (The Ridge)
A Gaelic place name. It is a low hill or ridge to the east of croft 9 at the village boundary wall.

Reference No. 26: 'Cnoc a Chlachan'
This is the Gaelic place name given to the pebbly beach where the fresh water 'Loch Dubh' empties itself into the sea. To the south of this short stream is croft 10 and to the north is croft 9. The hill known as 'Cnoc a Chlachan' is on croft 9 just above Clachan Beach.

Reference No. 27: 'Leanna a Chlachan' (The Clachan Lawn)
A Gaelic place name. It is the flat green area at the point where the Loch Dubh empties itself into the sea. It is part of croft 10. It was here that boat building was carried on from time to time and there was a sawpit here as well. See reference 45.

Reference No. 28: 'Creagan a Chritheann'
This Gaelic place name is on croft 7 at the border of Loch Dubh. Creagan means a small rocky place of eminence and the word Critheann is a poplar or aspen tree with leaves that shake in the wind. The first part of the word Critheann means shaking. It would appear that a poplar or aspen tree grew here at one time. During our youth a willow tree grew on this rocky eminence.

Reference No. 29: 'Clach Cheit' (The Cat's Rock)
This is a pillar of rock on croft 8 at the border of Loch Dubh. There is no tradition to indicate why this rock was known as the cat's rock.

Reference No. 30: 'A Stighe'
This is a Gaelic place name descriptive of a narrow rocky pass. In this case the 'stighe' is part of the path across the lower part of croft 8 giving access from croft 6 and 7 towards croft 9 and the shore. 'Cadha' is a similar Gaelic word and either would be descriptive of this feature of the landscape.

Reference No. 31: 'A Chreag Bheag'
This place name marks the ridge just below the road at the boundary between croft 8 and croft 5. It used to be a meeting place where young people sat and engaged in conversation on fine summer evenings.

Reference No. 32: 'Tiodhlacadh Dhomhnuill' (Donald's Grave)
It is about in the middle of croft 8 in a cultivated area between two lazybeds. It is over 200 yards above the road. We normally referred to the whole area as Tiodhlacadh Dhomhnuill.

The writer understood that Iain Sheoc (John Macleod 1842-1924) stumbled on this grave and disturbed it while tilling the ground there. John was a Church Elder and he went for fellow Church Elder, Roderick Mackenzie of croft 4, and they re-buried the remains in a dignified way.

Reference No. 33: 'Gàradh Cùl a Chnuic'
This is the cultivated area towards the top of croft 8. There was also a peat bank there. The soil was very peaty and needed a lot of byre manure in order to get a satisfactory yield.

Reference No. 34: 'Gàradh Mòine Thomas' (Thomas' Peaty Field)
This is the cultivated area towards the top of croft 9. It is peaty soil and there is evidence that the village boundary wall at this point is developed from old peat banks. It is quite plausible therefore someone called Thomas may have cut that peat here at one time. The area was cultivated in our time. There is no verbal tradition to indicate that there was a person by the name of Thomas living in this area at any time. It is likely that this place name may be very old.

Reference No. 35: 'A Leann Mhor' (The Big Green)
This is the Gaelic word for a green grassy flat area (or lawn). This place is below the road where crofts 8 and 9 share the boundary.

Reference No. 36: 'Poll a Chùraidh'
The Gaelic word 'poll' normally means a peat bank, or bog, but the second part of this place name is more difficult because for one thing we never saw this word in writing and we are therefore not sure how it is spelt. 'Culaidh' may mean a garment but we doubt that it is correct in this context. 'Pulaidh' may mean hero or champion as if boxing or strength. The writer is however quite sure that both he and his neighbours always pronounced the second part of the name with a 'c' sound at the beginning and not a 'p'. It is therefore more likely that cùraidh is the correct designation. 'Cùraidh' means a champion, hero or warrior.

The location of this place name is on croft 9 where the Loch Dubh narrows before reaching the sea and particularly at the point where the local women washed clothes and dyed wool on a communal boiler positioned there in order to heat the water for washing purposes. There is a flat rock at the waters edge that the women would have used for this purpose.

Reference No. 37: 'Clach na Deoch' (The Drinking Rock)
This flat-topped rock is located on the footpath leading to 'Mol a Ghò' beach just before one passes through the gate in the boundary wall. There is a hollow in the surface of the rock, which retains rainwater, and doubtless various animals and birds drank from this water – hence the name.

Reference No. 38: 'Tigh Rob Weir' (Robert Weir's House)
Robert Weir was a tacksman at Calbost. He was there from at least 1784 because he wrote a letter from Calbost to the Lewis Presbytery under that date. Probably he was at Calbost since 1776 until he died there in 1821 (about 45 years).

We notice the ruin of his house because not only was it at one time the centre of Calbost, but one of a handful of houses that were years and years ahead of their time in the whole of the Parish, both in plan and construction.

The second statistical account for Lochs in 1833, written by the local Parish Minister, Rev. Robert Finlayson, states that:

> Apart from the Manse at Keose the only other house in the Parish of Lochs which is built of stone and lime is the sheep farm house at Valamus in southern Park. There are three dwelling houses in the Parish built of stone and clay which are occupied by farmers, of which only one has a slate roof, which is the farmhouse/Inn at Loch Shell.

Certainly Robert Weir's house was built of stone and clay and we believe it was one of the three houses referred to above by Rev. Robert Finlayson. It had two gable ends with chimneys both upstairs and down. A very knowledgeable village lady told us that she felt the house was roofed with thatch but she was unsure if the estate had built it.

In the accompanying inventory of the articles in the sale of the household effects of Robert Weir in 1821 there was a roof of a house bought by Donald Smith. If we assume that it was the roof of Robert Weir house, we know that the house was re-roofed at a later date and lived in by a local family for many years until they in turn built a prestigious new house, also ahead of it's time, in about 1908. We refer to the family of Malcolm Mackenzie 'Calum Ruadh', son of Norman Mackenzie 'Tormod Òg', who was the first tenant on croft 4, which was created in

the second lotting of the village about 1850 when the village was enlarged from seven to fourteen crofts by the Proprietor James Matheson.

Calum Ruadh's new 1908 house was known to our generation as 'Tigh Florraidh' (Flora's House), the last of the family of three daughters and six sons, six of whom emigrated to various parts of the World. The agents of Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar demolished the walls of the house a few years ago.

In the 1850 re-organisation of the village crofts Robert Weir's house happened to be on croft 3. The ruins of the house may be seen west of the main road behind the Department of Agriculture croft house on croft 3 and bordering on croft 4.

When Robert Weir died in 1821 his next of kin was given as Alexander Mackenzie Vintner, Stornoway. His household effects were sold at auction on 25th February 1821, presumably at Calbost. The inventory of the articles in the sale throws some light on the standard of life of a Lewis tacksman just before the tacksman system finally passed out of the historical view in Lewis. The following is a list of the goods on sale and the names of the buyers:

Buyer	**Village**	**Item Purchased**	**Price Paid**		
			£	s	d
Charles Simpson	Keose	1 cow	4	4	0
Murdo Macleod	Sheildinish	1 table		9	0
		1 table		3	0
		1 cupboard		7	6
Alexander Macleod	Calbost	1 chest		5	0
Donald Maciver	Marvig	1 cupboard		9	0
Murdo Macleod	Sheildinish	1 desk		5	0
Alexander Mackenzie	Marvig	1 chair		1	0
Duncan Maciver	Marvig	1 chair		1	7
Norman Macfarlane	Marvig	1 chair		1	0
Alexander Mackenzie	Marvig	2 chairs		1	9
Mrs Morrison	Lemreway	1 feather bed	1	1	0
Kenneth Maclean	Calbost	1 bed cover		7	6
John Macleod	Valtos	2 candle sticks		4	0
		1 tray etc.		7	6
Alexander Mackenzie	Marvig	1 pot		2	1
Murdo Macleod	Sheildinish	1 chest of drawers		14	0
John Macleod	Valtos	2 fire irons		1	8
Alexander Mackenzie	Stornoway	1 barrel bean seed		10	0
Donald Mackenzie	Stornoway	1 barrel bean seed		9	0
Murdo Macleod	Sheildinish	1 cask		1	6
		1 chest	1	13	0
John Macleod	Valtos	1 table cloth		3	6
Murdo Macleod	Sheildinish	1 table cloth		3	3
		3 hand towels		1	6
Lewis Smith	Marvig	1 peat iron			11
Donald Maciver	Marvig	1 bucket and spade		1	6
John Macleod	Valtos	1 barrel		2	0
		1 tea boiler		5	0
Murdo Macleod	Sheildinish	27 barrels potatoes	3	12	0
Donald Smith	Calbost	1 roof of the house	1	5	0
Norman Mackenzie	Calbost	1 boat	1	10	0
		1 fishing frock		12	0
	Total		19	15	9
	Deduct funeral expenses and servants wages		9	10	0
	Balance		**£10**	**5**	**09**

Note: If the roof of the house sold above to Donald Smith was the roof of Robert Weir's house, then the house was re-roofed later because the family of Calum Ruadh Mackenzie, 4 Calbost lived in that house until they built a new house about 1908.

By the time Robert Weir died the Seaforth Proprietor under the new system of land tenure called crofting already lotted Calbost into croft landholdings. Crofting was introduced between 1814 and 1818 and to begin with Calbost was lotted into seven crofts, which were given to the seven kelp worker/smallholders who were already in the village along with the tacksman Robert Weir.

Reference No. 39: 'Lios Rob weir or 'Lios Mor' (Robert Weir's Garden or Stack Yard)

Mr. Weir was said to be one the most progressive entrepreneurial tacksmen in Lewis in his day. He was active in fishing and he had a white fish salting station at 'Mol a Ghò', the pebbly beach where the boats are hauled up onto the beach. Pebbly beaches were very suitable for drying the salted fish in the sun and wind.

Mr. Weir was also active in kelping as well as agriculture and we believe that he ruins of his kelping kiln may be seen on Eilean a Ghò, which is actually a small peninsular, not an island. His fish-salting house stood in the neck of Eilean a Ghò where a sectional wooden fishing shed stands at present belonging to the Macleods of croft 8, Calbost.

As a tacksman Mr. Weir attracted a number of settlers to his tack because of the opportunity of employment as kelpers and fishermen and the land of course under the former clan system of tenure known as Run-Rig. He was one of the tacksmen who were deprived of their land and status when the new crofting system of tenure came to Calbost about 1814 -1818.

His Gàrradh Mor extended across the width of crofts 2, 3 and 4 and oral tradition relates that there is soil that came from Ireland in Robert Weir's garden. Apparently that is probably true because it was the custom to use Irish soil as ballast in ships that were returning 'light' (without cargo) after delivering a cargo of salted fish or kelp to Ireland. That soil was then unloaded at places like Calbost before a new cargo of fish and kelp was taken onboard ship. The servile smallholders, who were dependant on the goodwill of the tacksman, would then set to work carrying the precious Irish soil to the master's garden.

Reference No. 40: 'Creag na Càrn'
This is the rock on the upper border of the road leading to Gravir at the point where it passes through croft 5 just before it joins the road through the village.

Reference No. 41: 'Tigh Agus Sabhal Megilin Agus Tormod Òg'
(The House and Barn of Matilda and Norman Òg Mackenzie)
Norman 'Òg' Mackenzie was the original crofting tenant on croft 4. He was the son of Norman 'Buidhe' Mackenzie, croft 3.

The ruins of their house may be seen at the bottom of the 'Mulla' hill just a little west of, and above, the stream, before it passes into the culvert under the Gravir road, as it joins the road through the village at the boundary between crofts 4 and 5.

We feel that the ruin of the house of this romantic couple should be commemorated with a plaque, because of the unusual way that they came together in marriage in the Parish Church in Keose in 1839 for the story of 'Pòsadh Megilin Agus Tormod Òg' [The Wedding of Matilda and Young Norman].

Reference No. 42: Càrn 'Seonag Choinnich Thormoid'
The Cairn is a heap of ordinary stones, which marks the spot where the body of young 15-year-old Johanna Macleod, daughter of Kenneth Macleod (Coinneach Thormoid), 6 Calbost, was found after losing her way in a blinding snowstorm in 1915.

Johanna, who was lame in one leg, was walking home at night from a neighbour's house when she became disorientated in the snowstorm. Somehow she missed all the houses on crofts 1, 2, 3 and 4 and climbed the hill to the east of croft 1, until she succumbed to exhaustion and died near the boundary of croft 8 at the extension of croft 2.

When it was realised that she was missing the whole village turned out with paraffin lanterns to search for her, but without success. Her remains were discovered on the following day. We always felt that the place where her body was found should have been marked in remembrance of the young life that was tragically lost and in circumstances that saddened not only her family but also the whole community.

Reference No. 43: 'A Seann Tigh Sgoile' (The Old Village Schoolhouse / Prayer House)
The ruins of this institute, the walls of which are still in fairly good order, may be seen at the east boundary of croft 6 at the point where adjoins croft 8. The site was chosen probably because there was an east/west pathway passing by the end of the building making it more convenient to approach than it is today.

There was no provision for education in the villages of South Lochs until the 1820s, when several small thatched schools were erected following the founding of the Voluntary Gaelic Schools Society in Edinburgh in 1811. The object of the Society was to teach the people of the Highlands and Islands to read the Scriptures in Gaelic, their mother tongue.

Gaelic schools were also set up in Gravir in 1822, Marvig and Loch Shell (probably Lemreway) in 1828, Cromore and Kershader in 1832. We do not have a date for the Calbost School, but as the schools were circulatory (they moved from village to village to ensure no village was left uncared for), perhaps the Calbost School was part-time to begin with.

The only Gaelic resident teacher we know of at Calbost was Malcolm Morrison, whose name appears in the 1851 census figures (Mac Thormoid Shaighdear), born in Uig, Lewis. His family is given as wife and four children. At various times Mr Morrison served at Carinish, Inaclete, Kershader, Laxay and Branahuie.

These small schools were built and maintained by the community and they were of simple construction but very effective. The walls were in undressed natural stones with a thatched roof. They were sparsely furnished with homemade stools and the lighting and heating was poor. In some places these schools were referred to as 'Tighean Leughaidh' (Reading Houses).

Teachers were appointed for their Godliness rather than their academic qualifications. The Bible was the main textbook and therefore they served the double purpose of catering for the spiritual as well as the educational needs of the people. This was the formative period of sound Evangelical religion in Lewis and the Gaelic schools of the Edinburgh Society played a prominent part. The first Evangelical Minister, Rev. Alexander Macleod, came to Uig, Lewis in 1804.

The ruins of these small village Gaelic schools are hallowed memorials of institutions that had a profound impact on our manners and culture as a people.

The Gaelic teachers' guidebook stated that a Sabbath school for the children was to be held in the forenoon of Sunday, and on the Sabbath afternoon there was to be a one-hour session for the adults. On the Sabbath evening after 6pm a prayer meeting was to be held in the school building for the benefit of all who attended.

In that way the institution of the village mid-week and Sunday evening prayer the voluntary Edinburgh Society promoted meetings in Lewis and elsewhere. Of course the origin of Sunday schools was much earlier and can be traced to the pioneer work of Robert Raikes of Gloucester, England.

It is said that the first four copies of the full Gaelic Bible, that were first translated into Gaelic in 1801, came to the following four tacksmen of Lochs; Crossbost, Valtos, Crobeg and Lemreway. The Bible was a closed book to the Gaelic-speaking people of Lewis because they could not read until the advent of the Gaelic Society schools.

At the time of the second statistical account in Lewis in 1833, half of the inhabitants of Lochs, aged between 12 and 24 years could read the Gaelic language. That illustrates the impact that the Gaelic schools had on the people in a short time. The statistical writer for the Parish of Lochs stated that the inhabitants of Lochs seem to hold the benefits of education in very high estimation.

Adults as well as children attended the Gaelic schools. There were five classes in each school, as follows; The Alphabet Class, Syllabus of two or three letters, Reading and Spelling Book in Gaelic, The New Testament and Psalm Book, The Gaelic Bible in general. We assume that all these took place in the old Calbost Gaelic School as in the other similar Gaelic schools.

The old schoolhouse (Tigh Sgoile) in Calbost was in use as a prayer house until the early years of the 20th century. When it fell into disrepair the village prayer meetings were then held in the spacious home of Calum 'Beag' Mackay, 7 Calbost, until the mid-1920s when the people of the village erected a new purpose-built prayer house using voluntary labour and voluntary financial contributions.

The passing of the 1872 Education Act and the building of five large modern schools in the district about 1880, in Kershader, Cromore, Marvig, Gravir and Lemreway, all of which peaked at over one hundred pupils each at one time, rendered the small village Gaelic schools superfluous. The Calbost and Marvig children attended Planasker Primary School in Marvig henceforth until depopulation caused the closure of all five Gaelic schools, which were replaced by one large school in Gravir for the whole district in 1973.

The new school was opened by a son of Calbost, Group Captain Rev. Dr. Murdo Kennedy Macleod, who was himself one of the early pupils of Planasker School, Marvig, following the 1872 Education Act.

Reference No. 44: 'Tigh Coinneamh ùr a Bhaile (The New Village Prayer House)
The congregational Church for the district was sited in Gravir in the middle of the district and the people of the outlying villages attended the Church in the mornings. The main Church building was too far away for them to attempt to walk the return journey of ten miles there and back, across the moor twice a day, hence the reason for the villages' prayer houses, where the Church Elders usually took the service.

As already stated the new hall, or prayer house at Calbost was built around 1926. As everybody knows the 1920s were a time of national and international depression and the economic situation in Lewis was extremely hard, yet the people made a magnificent voluntary effort, both in labour and money, to enable them to build the hall.

Originally the hall consisted of two stone gable-ends with timber sides and roof and covered in corrugated iron sheets. Very soon it was found to be too small to accommodate all the worshippers and it was extended and refurbished on three occasions, the last time in the 1970s.

By the 1970s the population of the village had dropped seriously but there was concern that the winter gales would damage the corrugated iron structure and the building would become a danger to the public as well as become an eyesore. As a token of respect for the institution, a committee was formed and the community agreed to refurbish the hall and bring it into a good state of repair. Once again the community responded magnificently by providing the means with which to bring the hall up to standard even though it was beginning to fall into disuse because the village population continued to drop.

The hall is not locked and visitors are welcome to enter for prayer and spiritual contemplation.

Reference No. 45: 'Sgaid an Sàbhaidh (saw pit)
Apparently a sawpit stood here, on the flat grassy green area 'Leann a Chlachan' (the clachan lawn) on croft 10 where Loch Dubh empties itself into the sea. Such saw pits were common enough in Lewis at one time. They were used in order to saw driftwood logs as well as logs that the people acquired in order to build boats etc. Very often they were sited where it was customary to build boats, as was the case here. Boats were built at this place in Calbost from time to time. It is said that the idea of sawpits came from Canada originally.

Our ceilidh house host, Angus Morrison, 9 Calbost, told us about the Kennedy Calbost boat. It was being built at the 'Sgaid a Sàbhaidh' and almost complete when a gale blew up and it was blown away and smashed into bits on the foreshore.

Also, the Smith Calbost family boat 'Penguin' with which we were very familiar in it's berth, drawn up on the pebbly beach at 'Mol a Ghò' in the 1920s and early 1930s, was also built at the 'Sgaid a Sàbhaidh' at Calbost. Ruaraidh Mor Smith, 5 Calbost, brought the wood home with him on the offshore fishing boat from the Caithness fishing for the 19 foot 'Penguin SY22' and one of the Smith family of boat builders at Leurbost came to Calbost as an itinerant tradesman to build the boat.

The Penguin was used extensively for inshore fishing at Calbost over a long period of years. It was Donald Smith (Domhnuill Allan), 5 Calbost who was the last skipper to use the boat continually after he returned from the First World War in the early 1920s, until he went to Glasgow for surgery and sadly died on the operating table.

Reference No. 46: 'Meall an Eoin' (The Hill of the Birds)
This is the hill at the southeast boundary of croft 10. The village boundary wall surmounts this hill. 'Meall' is a Gaelic word meaning a hill or eminence. 'Eoin' are birds.

Reference No. 47: 'Mullach Buidhe' (Yellow Hill)
This is the small hill where there is a track between croft 12 running onto crofts 10 and 11 'frith rathad'.

Reference No. 48: 'Gàradh na Creaga'
Gàrradh Na Creige is the rocky ridge over which the croft 11 part of the boundary wall is built.

Reference No. 49: 'An Allt Dubh' (The Black Stream)
This is the stream that forms the boundary between croft 10 and 11. The term is usually applied to the whole area of the two crofts.

Reference No. 50: 'An Drochaid Bheag'
This is the bridge across the Allt Dubh where the road ends on croft 10. We refer to this road as the Marvig/Calbost road and it was built about 1923. It was the first road to reach Calbost. It was built on the principle of allocating short lengths of the road on contract to a few people. It was then up to the workers how fast they completed their contract for a given sum of money. All roads in the area were built with a substantial element of free labour, including the Calbost/Gravir road, which commenced in 1936 and the labour force downed tools when the first payment of tuppence halfpenny an hour came to cover the first six weeks work. The road was not completed until 1941. It was not until then that the Calbost people could get their peats home by tractor or lorry for the first time ever.

Reference No. 51: 'A Leas Ard' (The Stackyard)
This is applied to the ridge in front of the dwelling house of croft 11. It was used as stackyard, hence the name.

Reference No. 52: 'Creagan a Chorc'
The Gaelic word 'creagan' means a rocky place, or small rocky hillock. It is located in the middle of croft 11 above Loch Dubh where the road passes through the croft. The area around it was cultivated; hence we assume the word 'corc' which is Gaelic for oats.

Reference No. 53: 'Muilinn Bhleith a Bhaile' (The Water Mill)
This is a watermill located on croft 11 just before the stream goes into Loch Dubh. At this point the stream is usually referred to as 'Amhainn na Muile' but it originates in Loch Catisval on the common grazing and is referred to as 'An Amhainn Mhor' before it passes through Loch Mhircabhat bordering on crofts 13 and 14.

In all probability the Norwegian settlers of the village, or even before that established this mill. The last millar was Kenneth Nicolson, croft 11 and his father before him operated the mill as well. Kenneth kept the mill going until he moved to Stornoway in 1902. His daughter, Kate, told us that she remembered being in the mill all night when the volume of water was suitable for grinding.

The last millstone, which is still lying in the ruins of the mill, came from a quarry at Dalbeg on the west coast of Lewis, where millstones were processed. They were brought to Stornoway by cart and thence to Calbost by open boat and manhandled from the shore at Calbost to the mill.

Prior to that, the millstones that were in use were much smaller and were ultimately used as hearthstones in two of the village thatched houses. They are still there.

Reference No. 54: 'Amhainn na Muile' (The Mill Stream)
This is the name usually applied to the stream that supplies the water that operates the mill.

Reference No. 55: 'An Drochaid Mhor' (The Big Bridge)
It is called the big bridge in order to distinguish it from the small bridge nearby. It is on the main road spanning Amhainn Na Muile at the bottom of croft 12. In the 1920s and 1930s it was a popular venue for the nightly village 'danns an rathad' (dancing on the road).

Reference No. 56: 'A Bhuala ùr' (The New Field)
This applies to the field on croft 13 between the streams 'Allt Ruadh' and 'An Amhainn Mhor'. The fact that is called new field indicates that it was not part of the inbye land of the village to begin with. We do not know when it was incorporated into croft 13 but we assume that it was at the first lotting of the village in 1814 – 18, or at the second lotting about 1830.

Incidentally, the word 'lot' for croft, and 'lotting' for the creation of crofts, came into our vocabulary when the crofting system of land tenure replaced the earlier Clan system of run-rig land tenure. In the Clan system one third of the arable land of all villages were reallocated every year in order to give each family a fair chance at the available good land. Drawing lots allocated the land from a hat and the individual portion of inbye arable land, which is now called a croft, still retains its old Gaelic name of 'lot' among the older generation.

Reference No. 57: 'An Allt Ruadh' (The Brown Stream)
This is the name of the stream that enters croft 13 from the hills to the south west of the croft. The name is usually applied to the whole of the croft.

Reference No. 58: 'Loch Fheoir' (The Grassy Loch)
As the name indicates, this is a very shallow loch. In the winter it rises into a substantial loch. It is located on the bottom part of croft 13 towards the north.

Reference No. 59: 'Amhainn Mhircabhat'
This stream flows out of Loch Mhircabhat and creates the Loch Fheoir on croft 13 when the winter rain comes. From Loch Fheoir the stream continues on to Loch Dubh. The grain mill is on it just before it enters Loch dubh.

Reference No. 60: 'Loch Dubh' (The Black Loch)
Loch dubh is the name given to the freshwater loch in the middle of the village and bordering crofts 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11. It is slightly above sea level and although there was once an attempt to open up a channel between the loch and the sea it was never completed. Presumably, the gathering of stones into a bank that is still to be seen on the south side at croft 10 is evidence of the attempt to open up a channel for small boats sometime in the 19th century. There are submerged rocks in the narrow neck of the loch leading to the sea, which would have to be blasted away. The waters of the loch itself cover a peaty bottom and the edges are very boggy in some places.

If, therefore, the sea was to gain access to the loch, it might through time and the actions of the tides and wind clean out the loch and make it a tidal anchorage for small boats.

Sadly the community was forced to leave this beautiful place through lack of employment and facilities, and it is not likely that the channel will ever be opened.

In 1824 a number of places in Lewis were surveyed with a view to providing piers for the fishermen. Among these places was Calbost, and although piers were built at Ness and Uig about 1835 – 1837, nothing was ever done for the Calbost fishermen, or for that matter, for the fishermen of any other village in Pairc, except the small private and communal piers the fishermen built for themselves with free labour.

Portnaguran Pier was first surveyed in 1828 but it was over one hundred years later that a pier was actually built there, and by that time the urgent need for a pier was not so pressing.

Reference No. 61: 'Ath or Atha Thormoid Choinnich' (Norman Macleod's Kiln)

An ‘ath’ was a kiln for drying grain. This one was sited on croft 6. A kiln was a popular ceilidh place for the young of the community in the winter because it was a warm place, hence the sentimental saying, ‘nuair a bha sinn‘s an ath le cheile,’ (when we were in the kiln together).

However, by their very nature kilns were liable to be burnt down sooner or later, hence the old Gaelic saying, ‘’s e deireadh gach ath a losgadh’ (kilns are liable to end by being burnt down). This particular one did not end in a fire but the ruins of it were rudely destroyed and replaced by a sheep-dipper in the 1960s as may be seen beside the main road.

Local oral tradition (beul-aithris) informs us that sometime after this particular kiln ceased to be used for its normal purpose, a member of the travelling fraternity (ceard) chose to set down his roots in the building. Peter (Padruig) was a piper who’s normal trade was tinsmith; he also made domestic articles, such as spoons etc from horn. Padruig took part in the normal activities of the village with the other men, such as local fishing in the small open boats, and the young men were inclined to play humorous tricks on him. They conferred the so-called honour of seating him in the stern of a boat, the place normally reserved for the skipper, and as soon as the boat touched the beach they had a rule that everybody had to jump out at once from where they were seated in order to haul the boat up onto the beach. Poor Padruig had to jump out into the sea at the deep end and, in the absence of thigh-high boots, get himself wet.

However, he got his own back when the boys wanted him to play a tune on his bagpipes. He laid down a rule that he would only play if he was given a piece of black twist tobacco, and the larger the piece of tobacco, the longer the tune would be (mar is motha am pìos, ‘sann is motha am puirt).

There were three kilns in Calbost.

Reference No. 62: ‘Ath an Sheoc (John Macleod’s Kiln, Croft 8)
John Macleod’s kiln was sited about 200-300 hundred yards below the road on the boundary between crofts 8 and 9 where part of the ruins may still be seen. John Macleod was the writer’s grandfather but the kiln had ceased to be used long before the writer was born.

Reference No. 63: ‘Ath Mhurchaidh mac Dhomhnuill ic Thormoid’
This kiln was sited on croft 11 and traces of the ruin may still be seen above the main road in the middle of the croft above ‘cnoc a corc’. He was the writer’s great grandfather.

Reference No. 64: ‘Leudachadh a Bhaile a mach do’n a Bhuala’ (extending the village northwards out to the common)
Following the First World War the landless ex-servicemen were angry and disappointed that they had to continue to live in substandard accommodation on their relatives land while there was plenty of former crofter land lying fallow on their doorsteps and land raiding broke out all over the Island because the new Lewis landlord refused to release land for resettlement as according to the Smallholders (Scotland) Act of 1911. Three Calbost families moved out to the common grazing outside the village boundary wall with the approval of the crofters of the village.

Murdo Morrison and Angus Morrison set up home and reclaimed new landholdings in Buala Chalaboist outside the north gate. The ruins of their homes may still be seen there and the last person to be born in Calbost, Christopher Mackinnon, was born in the former home of Murdo Morrison in 1956.

Reference No. 65: ‘Leudachadh a Bhaile do’n an Iar’ (extending the village towards the west)
John Mackenzie, who lived on croft 5 as a third family, moved out to the common grazing outside the west gate in the mid-1920s and the ruins of his family home may still be seen there, on the landholding he reclaimed from the virgin land. There were two schoolteachers, a head teacher and a building contractor in that family.

[ends]