



[Letter to the 'Stornoway Gazette' about Double-width Tweed]

Power-woven double-width tweed

Sir - This is not a takeover by the mills, says Mr J.S Grant in reply to Halford Macleod (Gazette, March 20). Would it be more accurate to call it a sell-out to the mills by the HTA in the face of the presence of the spinners, or more particularly one spinner, who introduced power-woven double-width imitation Harris-type tweed in the mid-1960s, on the pretence of diversifying his production at a time when the industry was at its busiest period ever and therefore almost stretched to the limit of its yarn-producing capacity, coping with the demand for single-width Harris Tweed.

Continued Mr Grant, 'Imitation Harris Tweed made outside these Islands is subject to control because we can show it was not made within these Islands. But if we have two tweeds identical in texture, weight and design, issuing from the same island, perhaps the same firm, one genuine and the other not, no power in the world can protect the public from deception'.

It is morally wrong for a Lewis mill which is engaged in the manufacture of Orb-stamped Harris Tweed to undermine the protection afforded to genuine Harris by the Orb trademark, by manufacturing an imitation power-woven double-width identical to genuine Harris in all respects and selling it at a lower price in the same market-place in competition with the hand-woven genuine tweed and at the expense of employment of the domestic weaver.

The mill concerned was taken to task by the HTA and every mill and small producer in the industry at the time.

In the Gazette of March 27, Mr Grant says that Kenneth Mackenzie Ltd threatened to manufacture a similar cloth recently. It is to the great credit of Messrs Mackenzie that they did not soil their hands with this utterly reprehensible practice and when it was agreed to stop the production of double-width temporarily for tactical reasons it is amazing that Mr Grant, who saw in this practice 'a threat to the future of the industry and in the livelihood of the handloom weavers', sympathises with the manufacturers for 'the very considerable financial sacrifice for them'.

The double-width imitation was an abuse of the trademark and it is the plain duty of the HTA to protect the Orb trademark from abuse from without or within these islands and not condone it in any way or apologise for any financial loss mills suffer as a result of the cessation of what was an immoral practice.

The HTA do not come out of this business very well and now we find the chairman of the HTA taking up the case of the mills and urging weavers to support an amendment of the Orb definition in order to legalise and accommodate the under-hand double-width activities of the mills at the expense of the livelihood of the handloom weavers.

On the admission of Mr Grant himself, the double-width was against the interests of the domestic weavers in the past and how can it be in their interest in future? Two wrongs do not make a right. The end result in both cases would be the complete concentration of all the processes of manufacture in the hands of the mills and because power-woven Harris tweed can be manufactured by a fraction of the weavers needed for the same quantity of hand-woven, it will be marketed at a lower price in the future as it was in the past, and will therefore displace the dearer hand-woven as soon as enough of it is available.

It is meaningless nonsense to say that when double-width is re-introduced under the Orb, it will be directed to the markets which cannot take single-width.

If the HTA is unwilling or unable to protect the communal cottage industry and trademark from unscrupulous gross abuse which is going to lead to a complete concentration of the industry in the hands of the mills, then the way out is not to sell our heritage and birthright for a mess of pottage but to stand up and be counted and say, thus far and no further, to both the mills and the HTA. The industry and the trademark belong to the community and not the HTA or the mills.

Mr J.S. Grant takes Halford Macleod severely to task for forecasting the loss of five hundred jobs to handloom weavers if these proposals go through. That, says Mr Grant, is scaremongering of a reckless and reprehensible kind.

Strong language, but Mr Grant carefully evaded the issue and I wish to challenge him on this point by stating the technical information given to me, and let him confirm or deny the following.

The new loom is geared to 200 picks a minute. In order, therefore, to work out, a one hundred per cent performance efficiency one takes 200 picks a minute x 60 minutes per hour x 40 hours per week x 2 shifts x 12 looms per shed x 3 sheds and divide by 18 picks to one inch and by 36 inches to one yard, and that will give a total yardage of over 53,000 double-width for three units of twelve looms in one week double shift.

In practice, however, one would not expect a loom to work at 100 per cent efficiency and let us therefore reduce the performance to 60 per cent efficiency which can surely be achieved, and we get a production of 32,000 double-width yards in a 48 week year, which is the equivalent to the present production of 3,000,000 single yards.

With regard to manpower, it is suggested to me that three to four weavers will operate a twelve loom shed per shift, but depending on what additional work was carried out in the shed, there may be approximately a total of ten persons per shift. This would work out at sixty persons employed to operate three sheds of twelve looms each on double shift, capable of producing the whole of the present production, and a redundancy of five hundred weavers as soon as the three sheds are operating.

Yours etc
Angus Macleod
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Marybank

[Note. In Angus Macleod's handwriting on the photocopy of the Gazette letters page below the above letter: 'J.S. Grant also called Halford Macleod all the names he could think, despite the fact Halford Macleod was right and JSG quite wrong, and surely he knew it'.]

[ends]

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

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