



### [Criticism of 'Orb' Amendment Proposal]

The desire to redefine the Orb Harris Tweed springs from the desire to cater for the cheap mass producing end of the making-up trade, by organising the weaving on a factory basis, with greater, if not complete control by the spinner/manufacturer, of the weaving process. The aim is higher weaving efficiency and higher productivity to enable the spinner/manufacturer to compete with any cloth in world markets.

The fallacy of this shallow policy is that, by down-grading Harris Tweed to being a common factory woven cloth, buyers and the purchasing public will inevitably realise that there is no difference between Harris Tweed and any other similar tweed woven in factories anywhere in the world. The glamour and cachet will have gone out of the words 'Harris Tweed'.

Yorkshire and other places cannot produce Harris Tweed so long as it is hand woven or even so long as it is woven in the homes of the Islanders of the remote Outer Hebrides. What is to stop them producing the new Harris Tweed woven as it will be in weaving factories?

A valuable feature of exclusiveness in the weaving of Harris Tweed will be lost with the introduction of factory weaving.

Even if Harris Tweed was factory woven on modern power looms in about a dozen or so areas in Lewis and Harris, the cloth would still not be able to compete on equal terms with similar tweed from the industrial south, because of the added expense of bringing in raw material and sending out the finished product etc.

Above all else, the absence of a sensible marketing policy, and harmony among the spinner/manufacturers, will cancel out any so called advantage gained by factory weaving.

If the spinner/manufacturers and the H.T.A. Ltd continue as in the past, the prospects for the Harris Tweed industry, irrespective of how the cloth is woven, is not good.

The present recession in the industry is not due in any way to the fact that Orb Harris Tweed is single width and not double width. Neither is it due to the fact that Orb Harris Tweed is hand-woven and not power-woven or that this weaving is carried out at the homes of the Islanders in the Outer Hebrides instead of at a dozen or so factories located at certain places in Lewis and Harris.

The present decline in the demand for Harris Tweed is due to the worldwide recession in woollen textiles in recent years together with the damage caused to the image of Harris Tweed by the short-sighted marketing policy of the spinner/manufacturers. A policy in which the H.T.A. Ltd acquiesced.

The marketing policy of the larger manufacturers in the past 20 to 30 years has already caused very great damage to the image and good name of Harris Tweed. The cheap end of the trade was cultivated, without any regard to the status of the buyer. Naturally this was detrimental to the traditional market for Harris Tweed, which was the higher class makers-up. The cheap mass producer of garments always demands his cloth at the lowest possible price, and because volume orders are attractive to the spinner, fierce price cutting among the spinner/manufacturer follows. If trade is slack, price cutting is fiercer and more prevalent.

Both buyers and agents take full advantage of the lack of unity and harmony among the cloth manufacturers.

Price depression reduces profitability and squeeze small producers and even skills out of the industry. Damage is caused to the image of Harris Tweed. High-class buyers drop the cloth from their range and consequently there is a decline in the yardage produced.

The cheap mass producer of garments is attracted to Harris Tweed because it is a high class product in the low price bracket and he often uses the cloth as a loss leader, hence the image of the cloth is bound to suffer.

The cottage weaving was never a bottleneck in the production of Harris Tweed and during recent years, as always, there were far more weavers than there was weaving work for them to do. In fact many weavers had to leave the Island in search of work in recent years.

Crofters and other Islanders have certain moral rights in the Orb Trade Mark and the words Harris Tweed. In 1934

the H.T.A. Ltd and the Hebridean Spinners persuaded the Board of Trade to agree to an Orb amendment restricting the supply of yarn for Orb Harris Tweed to that produced in the Hebrides. A very strong case could be made showing that this restriction was very harmful to producers of Harris Tweed as well as to the purchasing public. Except for a handful of pieces made from remnant lots of yarn the production of Orb cloth is now concentrated entirely with the spinner/ manufacturers. This situation came about as a result of the marketing policy of the large spinner/manufacturers, creating conditions which preclude small producers and crofters from a share in the market for Orb Harris Tweed, because they are unable to levy Orb yarn at a price that will enable them to compete with the orb spinners. If the proposed 1975 Orb amendment is granted allowing factory weaving, the activities of the crofters/weavers and small producers will be still more restricted and their tenuous position eroded still further, whereas the monopoly of the spinners will be made more secure, and even a distinct possibility of the spinners taking over the Harris Tweed Industry entirely.

If the Department of Prices and Consumer Protection are asked to consider amending the Orb definition at this point in time, the whole historical setting of the Harris Tweed industry should be looked at objectively and the terms of any new amendment should take account of the rights if all Hebrideans to fair and unrestricted trading in the Harris Tweed industry which is their birthright.

Since the Hebridean spinners grossly abused the privileged position conferred on them by the 1934 definition of the Orb, it is fairly clear that only the restoration of mainland mill spun yarn from Scotland could restore free and unfettered trading to crofters and small producers in the Outer Hebrides. The 1934 amendment led to restrictive practices in the supply and price of Orb yarn, as well as the price of Orb cloth on world markets. If Scottish mill spun mainland yarn was admitted within the Orb definition a healthy element of fair trading and competition would be restored as well as acknowledging the historical facts of the traditional use of Scottish mainland yarn in the manufacture of Harris Tweed, from an early date.

Such a step would not present any danger to the industry drifting to the mainland because the essential element, the weaving would be carried out in the Outer Hebrides, and should definitely be carried out at the homes of the Islanders by weavers free from any tie up with cloth producers.

If the Department of Prices and Consumer Protection felt that they should allow Orb Harris Tweed to be woven on power operated double width looms, it is beyond doubt that such looms should be located, as before, at the Islanders homes, in order to maintain continuity with the traditional mode of manufacture of Harris Tweed, the last and only association the fabric still has with the original cottage industry. If this last link is broken by reason of a new amendment it is clear the new fabric would have no right to be described or marketed as genuine Harris Tweed.

Although the words 'Harris Tweed' is not and cannot be incorporated into the 'Orb' Trade Mark, the 'cachet' which belongs to the words 'Harris Tweed' may be affected if the definition attached to the Orb is changed in order to embrace factory weaving. If in this way, the reputation of Harris Tweed is damaged the interests of all sections of the industry throughout the Hebrides is affected just as surely as if world markets were flooded with imitation Harris Tweed manufactured outwith the Scottish Hebrides.

Imitation Harris Tweed remains an imitation irrespective of where it is manufactured. In fact if the imitation is manufactured in the Outer Hebrides it is a much more serious threat to the very existence of the traditional and established reputation of the cloth known as Harris Tweed, than any threat from outside could be.

The amending of the definition of the Orb Trade Mark in order to allow factory weaving raises issues that are greater than any one group of manufacturers. Some of the spinner group of manufacturers have already gone out of business and it is not inconceivable, that because of their mismanagement and short sighted policies, all of them may eventually go out of business. If their last big gamble, the introduction of double width factory weaving fail, the reputation of Harris Tweed will have suffered a death blow, and it will not be possible to rebuild the industry. Great caution should therefore be exercised in any approach to amend the Orb definition, and any amendment should take into account fully, all the issues involved.

The present movement to have the Orb definition amended emanated from the spinner group and as usual the H.T.A. Ltd acquiesced and adopted the wishes of the spinners as their own policy and set about accommodating the spinners and consulting with them as to how the wishes of the spinners could be given effect to. In all these discussions the H.T.A. Ltd made no attempt to consult the small producers or the smaller weaver, manufacturers, or even a cross section of them except for one man who represented no one but himself (he made it clear at the meetings he attended that he attended as a private person). The H.I.D.B. made no attempt to consult small manufacturers and in any case the H.I.D.B. is an interested party, being involved financially in the spinner group of manufacturers. In fact it is questionable if the H.T.A. Ltd is a free agent either because the chairman of the H.T.A. Ltd is a member of the H.I.D.B.

The officials of the weavers branch of the T.G.W.U. attended the discussions that took place concerning the proposed change from weaving at the Islanders homes as at present, to power weaving in factories, but again Mr Raymond Macdonald the Scottish secretary of the T.G.W.U. sits on the H.T.A. Ltd and it is not unreasonable to suspect the possibility of H.T.A. Ltd influence percolating down to the weavers officials level. In any case it would hardly be correct to say that the weavers were properly consulted, if indeed it could be said they were consulted at

all, we know a great many of them who only know what they learned from the press and again the press is not always objective.

Neither the H.T.A. Ltd nor the H.I.D.B. made any attempt as yet to inform the weavers as a whole, giving full details of the proposed new weaving scheme and the way the new scheme is to affect the individual weaver. In all this, the H.T.A. Ltd has acted predictably, and true to form, and therefore has proved once again that they are biased and unduly influenced by the spinner group of manufacturers as always.

Considering that the policy of the H.T.A. Ltd, was always to remain detached from the practical side of the Harris Tweed industry, it is strange to some of us who participated in the industry, to see the H.T.A. Ltd taking a very active part in the present negotiations, which is meant to lead to the amending of the definition of the Orb Trade Mark.

One would think that the proper procedure would be for the H.T.A. Ltd to wait until a detailed proposition for the restructuring of the industry was put to them by a body representative of all sections of the practical side of the industry, and if there is general agreement on the need for an amendment of the Orb definition, then seek such an amendment from the Department of Trade and Industry on behalf of the whole industry and community. Instead of proceeding along these lines we learnt from the press that the H.T.A. is about to, or even already has approached the Dept. of Trade and Industry in order to amend the definition. The terms of the proposed amendment was not released to the press and the H.T.A. is not prepared to disclose it or admit or deny applying for an amendment. The amending of the definition attached to the Orb Trade Mark is a matter of tremendous concern to the Hebridean community at large and it is quite wrong for the H.T.A. to be so secretive about the negotiations or the terms of any proposed amendment.

Cloth similar to Harris Tweed was first woven on double width power looms, in the Hebrides when one of the spinners acquired some 2<sup>nd</sup> hand double width power looms and set them up in a building near his spinning plant in the mid-1960s. The spinner concerned strongly maintained that his double width cloth was marketed under a name of its own and was not in competition with Harris Tweed in any way. He also maintained he had a right to diversify to a cloth that was not Harris Tweed.

Some, at least of the so-called new cloth only differed from Harris Tweed in that it was a double width cloth woven on power operated double width looms and therefore did not qualify for the Orb stamp. This new cloth was therefore as close to imitation Harris Tweed as one pea is to another except that it was double width most of the time and it did not bear the Orb stamp. Of course, the application of the Orb stamp is optional even when the cloth complies with the terms of the Orb definition, and indeed some buyers do not wish their cloth stamped and do not want the official H.T.A. garment labels.

To begin with the H.T.A. Ltd, the spinners and the small producers strongly criticised the introduction of double width power weaving by one of the manufacturers of Harris Tweed. After a while two small producers were excluded from the discussions that took place on this subject at industry level, but they maintained all the time that the H.T.A. Ltd should take steps to protect the Harris Tweed industry from the possible consequences of this new innovation.

The new double width cloth was sold through the same marketing channels as the double width Orb stamped Harris Tweed. It was sold by a manufacturer of Harris Tweed and it therefore follows that there was a distinct danger that even with the best will in the world on the part of the manufacturer, the double width cloth might be used as Harris Tweed particularly if the buyer bought Orb stamped single width Harris Tweed from the same source.

Eventually the practice of manufacturing double width cloth similar to Harris Tweed in texture spread to other Orb spinners. Some of them, it is said, carrying out the weaving on the mainland. Also, strange as it may seem, some of the double width cloth was woven with a selvedge along the centre of the cloth and the cloth was later divided into two single width cloths.

It stands to reason that double width cloth, similar to Harris Tweed, manufactured and sold by Harris Tweed manufacturers, sells on the back of Harris Tweed, if indeed it does not end up as being passed off to the consumer as genuine Harris Tweed.

Many of us have seen much more unlikely garments cleverly displayed on racks in city stores, sold under the banner of Harris Tweed, sometimes with H.T.A. Ltd advertising material and sometimes even with a strip of H.T.A. garment labels displayed.

My information is that a great deal of unstamped Harris Tweed is on world markets at present. I do not know if the H.T.A. Ltd is aware of the sources of such imitation Harris Tweed, or if they are doing anything about it.

The Harris Tweed Association does not submit an annual report of its activities and I have never known a letter to the secretary to produce information on any point.

Any Orb Harris Tweed manufacturers who maintains he wishes to diversify and simply weaves Harris Tweed yarn into a single or double width cloth on motorised double width looms under factory conditions, can hardly be said to

be very original in his diversification ideas. There is plenty of scope for diversification without bordering on irresponsible imitation.

It was at this point that double width cloth was introduced to the scene of Harris Tweed, and it was not introduced because the spinners concerned could not sell single width orb stamped Harris Tweed. In fact it was introduced about the time of the peak production of Orb stamped single cloth.

Significantly it was also introduced a few brief years after the spinners and the Orb industry obtained increased protection and privilege as a result of the Lord Hunter judgement in the Court of Session in 1964.

Why was it felt necessary for an Orb spinner to introduce double width power woven cloth similar to Harris Tweed at this time? I leave that for the observer to speculate on.

### **New System of Weaving**

The proposed new system of weaving in small factories is likely to cause depopulation in rural areas because:

- A. Weaving will not be available after a few years in many remote areas.
- B. Weaving will not be available to the part-time weaver.
- C. The new system will tend to concentrate the weaving in a certain few areas.
- D. The new system is more concerned with a return on investment than it is with the welfare of the Hebridean population, the social structure of society in the Islands, not to mention the unquestionable heritable rights of the Hebridean to participate in the Harris Tweed industry either as a weaver, a crofter/weaver or a small producer or mill owner.

The Harris Tweed industry does not belong to any one section of the community, it belongs to the community as a whole, the spinners made a contribution to the development of the industry but so did others, the weavers, the crofters, mainland yarn, the merchants, the philanthropist was greatly helped to create a market originally, the Harris Tweed Association Ltd and others. If an attempt was made to assess the most important contribution to the development of the industry I do not think it would be the spinners, in fact it is quite conceivable that the Harris Tweed industry would have developed without any Hebridean spinner. It would not however, have developed without the crofter/weaver. The industry was created by generations of crofter/weavers and therefore their rights must be safeguarded.

The movement towards the registration of a Trade Mark was originally a merchants and crofter/weaver movement and not an initiative from the spinners because they did not exist at the time. The Orb Trade mark was therefore applied for, and granted to the Hebridean people. The H.T.A. was formed in order to apply for the Orb Trade Mark and administer it. The company to have complete control over the Trade Mark. It was never meant however, that the H.T.A. Ltd be an autocratic self-perpetuating body acting without proper consultation and agreement with the elements in the community which called them into being.

The establishment of a new Hebridean industry based on double width power woven cloth, which would not be an imitation of Harris Tweed, would, no doubt, be most welcome by all Hebrideans. The nucleus of such an industry is already in existence, in that Hebridean spinners manufacture and sell double width power woven cloth for some years now. This industry should register its own distinctive Trade Mark, and it would provide a good opportunity for genuine diversification of some of the existing production capacity. It is most important that no steps be taken which would jeopardise the existing protection of Harris Tweed, either by allowing Hebridean manufacturers to produce and sell non-standard double width imitation Harris Tweed, or amend the regulations governing the production of Orb Harris Tweed in such a way as to remove one of the key clauses in the present definition, 'woven at the islanders homes', which gives the meaning and substance to the description of cottage industry. The clause in the definition confining the weaving to the Islanders homes is as essential today as it ever was, both from the social angle as well as the preservation of an additional source of revenue to crofter families.

[ends]

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