



## [Pairc Schools]

It was not until after the reformation of 1560 that the creation of a national system of education was seriously considered in Scotland. John Knox, the Scottish religious reformer, visualised a school in every parish, but that vision took a long time to materialise in Lewis.

There was an English school at Stornoway in 1680 and an English parish school was opened in Keose, Lochs in 1796, but in a scattered parish like Lochs, very few people benefited from the parish school. Various other schools were established in Lewis but the impact on the whole population was limited.

A breakthrough was achieved when on the 16<sup>th</sup> January 1811 a voluntary society was set up in Edinburgh, for the express purpose to teach the inhabitants of the Highlands and Islands to read the Scriptures in their mother tongue. The society was called 'The Edinburgh Society for the Support of Gaelic Schools'. Subsequently similar societies were set up in Glasgow in 1812 and in Inverness in 1818.

The first Edinburgh Gaelic School in Lewis was opened in Bayble in 1811 and it proved very successful. From then on Gaelic schools were opened all over the Island. A school was opened in Gravir in 1829, one in Marvig and one in Loch Shell in 1828, one in Cromore in 1829, and one in Kershader in 1832.

All these schools were small thatched buildings with poor heating lighting and seating. Wood was scarce and expensive and it is said that the Gravir people got their first school when a large log was washed up on the shore, which was suitable for cutting up for roof timbers.

Adults as well as children attended these Gaelic schools all over Lewis and there was a magnificent response as the people had the opportunity for the first time to read the Scriptures in their own tongue. In that way it was said that the truth soon dispelled the superstitions the people lived in and influenced the minds and outlook of the people.

Some, if not all, of these schools were circulatory, that is, they moved from village to village, after a year or so, leaving the brightest of their pupils to continue the good work.

Both Ministers and people were said to derive great benefit from the pious self-sacrificing Gaelic teachers, for, not only did they read Scriptures and Catechism to the people on Sundays, but they also kept Sunday schools.

It was the Education (Scotland) Act of 1872 that laid the foundation of a national system of education and the people in Lewis responded well to the new educational opportunities.

The first meeting of the Lochs school board was held at Soval Lodge in April 1873 and the following members were present:

Donald Munro	Solicitor and Chamberlain, Stornoway
Roderick Miller	Surgeon, Stornoway
Rev. Ewan Campbell	Parish Minister of Lochs
Rev. George Lewis Campbell	Free Church Minister of Lochs
Donald Macdonald	Tenant at Crobeg Lochs
John Mackay	Ground officer, Balallan
Kenneth Mackenzie	Gaelic teacher, Carloway

At the Lochs School Board meeting of 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1876, it was agreed to accept an offer from Mr Alexander Macdonald, contractor, Lyndale, Isle of Skye for £13,325 for the building of nine schools in the Parish of Lochs including five schools in South Lochs, all with dwelling houses included, an average of about £1,500 per school building, all nine schools opened about 1880. The five schools in South Lochs opened as follows: Kershader in 1878, Cromore in 1879, Marvig in 1880 and Gravir and Lemreway schools in 1881.

Following the passing of the 1872 Education Act the children aged between 5 and 13 years old were counted in the catchment area of the five schools in South Lochs as follows:

Kershader - 20	Habost - 25	Garyvard - 18	Caversta - 10	Total	73
Cromore - 55	Crobeg - 2	Torostay - 4		Total	61
Marvig - 57	Calbost - 41			Total	98
Gravir - 83				Total	83
Lemreway - 101				Total	101
				<u>Total</u>	<u>416</u>

Subsequently each of these five schools exceeded 100 pupils under the age of 14 years. In 1973 these five schools were closed and replaced with one new purpose built school with a roll of 52 pupils. Due to depopulation the school roll of Pairc School is now about 20 pupils. In that way the school roll of Pairc in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is down from over 500 to about 20 pupils.

[ends]

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