

COUNTY COUNCIL OF ROSS AND CROMARTY

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DINGWALL, 29th March, 19 60.

Angus Macleod, Esq.,
Park House,
Marybank,
Lewis.

Dear Mr. Macleod,

You will remember that, about the middle of February, you were kind enough to spend some time with me discussing the circumstances and outlook for the Harris Tweed industry in Lewis. I learned a lot and was most grateful for your kindness. During those few days I talked in a similar way with several other people with different interests in the industry and, at the end, drew up my conclusions from all I had learned. I send you a copy of these in the hope that they may be of some interest and value.

These are very much my own personal conclusions and so the only value they can have is that they are those of an impartial observer who was freely given much information and a variety of opinion. In the process of putting them together, I shall not be surprised if I have made several mistakes, but these do not invalidate the general conclusions. It is my hope that they may be of some use in getting common ground for action to save the Orb industry, now in serious crisis.

What I would like to see happen now would be an assembly of all the interests in the island industry, under the chairmanship of the Rev. Murdoch Macrae, to consider the present state of affairs and to pool ideas as to what positive steps can be taken. I shall be glad to help if I can, but you will appreciate that what an official can do is limited.

Again many thanks for your welcome, your kindness and your confidence last month.

Yours sincerely,



County Development Officer.

Copies of letter to those with whom I spoke - a slightly different one goes to the other - C.

PERSONAL CONCLUSIONS OF COUNTY DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

ON BRIEF ENQUIRY INTO HARRIS TWEED INDUSTRY, FEBRUARY 1960.

My purpose was to inform myself about the present circumstances of the industry and thereby to equip myself better to offer assistance, if occasion arose. Strengthening of the local economy is my job, and requires me as far as possible not to take sides except on behalf of the industry or the community as a whole. My method was, in the first instance, to talk with a small number of persons with a variety of interests in the industry. At a later stage it may be useful to extend the enquiry to include everyone. While I obviously cannot claim that after this I have all the answers, it may be of value to record the conclusions of an impartial observer to whom a wide variety of views within the industry were generously made known, for the most part freely and fully.

Inevitably the main theme was the competition of the Shield producers and what, if anything, could be done about it.

It is accepted that the several distinct interests in the island industry have all contributed, though in different degree and with different investment, to the success of the industry. There is widespread a remarkable awareness of the social value of the industry which has often been sufficient to temper normal business self-interest. Equally it is accepted that there have been many clashes between the groupings of interest, and also within them; and that, as many of the difficulties have never been resolved, hard feelings and mutual suspicions remain. At this present time of possibly mortal crisis, more than ever the only basis for constructive thought and action is to accept things as they are and, starting there, to try to work out what needs to be done.

Among the very many points made these appeared to be the main ones:-

1. The whole island industry is in danger, though for some sections of it the danger is more immediate than for others. While it is no more in the interest of the Shield producers than of the Orb producers for Harris Tweed to become a mere cloth type, the general fear that this perpetual threat may be brought much nearer realisation by the transfer of two production processes to the mainland seems to be amply confirmed by the recent decision of the U.S. Federal Trades Commission (affecting almost half the total Orb production). The Harris Tweed market is today a very big attraction to competitors elsewhere. If it came to power-loom competition there would be few crumbs left for even the toughest island concern, even similarly equipped.

It therefore seems clear that in the long run everyone concerned in the Orb trade stands equally to lose his stake in the industry, be it large or small. Many people realise this, some very clearly, but the point ought to be brought fully home to everyone concerned. At present it is doubtful if many weavers or mill operatives have a clear idea of the present situation, and this is a great weakness.

2. It appears to be generally accepted now that the difference of nearly 2/- per yard selling price between Shield and Orb tweed is too great for the Orb trade to survive without some major change in circumstances.

attention therefore appears to be due mainly to a feeling that this defensive battle is the only action that can be taken.

4. Another common theme is somehow to bring the Shield producers under certification control also. The main reason for this is a belief that this action must put commercial competition on a more equal basis, ending sub-standard production which is assumed to be the cause of the present disparity of prices. It is suggested that this argument might be developed in the Trade Mark case. Alternatively some think the Shield producers might be brought within the Orb, either by persuading them to instal spinning, etc., and finishing plant in the islands, or by altering the Orb standard to include mainland-spun yarn. Unless other as yet unknown factors come in, I do not see why the Shield producers should find it attractive to share the Orb market at extra cost to themselves, when they have every reason to think that they can take it over completely when they wish.

5. The consciousness of the undoubted value of the industry to Lewis, and of its purchase of so much Scottish wool, leads many to hope that the same argument will bring Board of Trade support for the maintenance of the Orb industry, either as it is or slightly amended to give a better prospect of a compromise being forced upon the Shield producers. Whatever the government might do if it had a fundamentally different approach to the Highlands and to industry, at present such hope of partial intervention seems to me quite unrealistic - it cannot take sides, whatever its private sympathies.

6. Should the outcome of the probably long legal action not be decisively in favour of the Orb, what then? (In the meantime Shield encroachment on markets will doubtless continue). Purely commercial competition seems the only course of action left. This is thought of as desperate measures, as any other measures which it seems can be taken are thought to be in force now anyway. Desperate measures mean some kind of drastic change from present methods, perhaps by reducing or departing from Orb standards, or by uneconomic price-cutting. Almost any of the alternative forms of action visualised would be at heavy cost to the island economy, and would almost certainly end the Orb industry as it has been till now; but it is unquestionably the legitimate right of any firm to take action for self-preservation. Whether any of these measures would succeed or ensure even survival in the long run (para. 1 above) is open to question.

On the assumptions usually made the Orb industry appears to be unable to help itself, save by purely defensive legal action; and to be likely to be forced to destroy itself in the end.

7. One way out does seem possible. It is to prune manufacturing costs and thereby reduce the price of the finished product to a level at which it can compete with the Shield produce. Obviously this has been generally ruled out as a practical proposition, or action would have been taken long ago. The tendency has been to assume that the Shield producers, claiming to produce tweed to identical standards except for processing on the mainland, must be cheating to sell at so much lower a price. The different location does give certain advantages, against which Stornoway producers also have certain advantages, but the total difference should not be as much as about 2/- or a sixth less on the selling price per yard. Any cheating would have to be pretty wholesale to make such a difference.

Some opinion and some evidence supports the idea that, whatever the Shield may do, the Orb price is unnecessarily high. One indicator of this is the price of Orb yarn, which is usually kept steady and is not affected by the fluctuation of the raw wool market. It may be that, on average, standard weight yarn is sold at cost price plus reasonable profit margin, but this is clearly not the case with lightweight and featherweight yarn, the additional

Orb yarn (less usual discounts) has been 9/- and is now 8/7d per lb. Fully comparable yarn from Mainland spinners has been available at prices varying between 7/5d and 8/- per lb over the same period (in both cases freight apparently borne by consignor). Allowing the same profit margin it seems reasonable to conclude that the Orb cost of yarn production is much higher than it should be. Under the special protection of the Orb mark this industry has not experienced the continual keen competition usual elsewhere and the presence of wasteful but accepted practices would not be surprising. Some such are admitted (for instance the employment of unproductive men) and others may exist which account for the extra costs.

The other parts of the process of producing tweed might also be scrutinised again with advantage. Distribution is a costly matter in which reorganisation among the producers, though difficult, might reduce costs as well as being fairer to the weavers. Wage reductions proposals could make but a small contribution which might cost too much in other ways, and it is in other fields that reductions need to be sought. The recent reduction of 5d per lb. for standard weight yarn has not affected the selling price so far.

The industry is a large consumer of Scottish wool, which appears to cost more than comparable wool from other parts. Is this price necessarily so high?

The total of all reductions possible may not bring Orb tweed down to the Shield price. I understand that agents are convinced that the long H.T.A. advertising of the Orb ~~mark~~ ^{mark} has given it a market advantage over comparable cloth worth perhaps 6d or even 1/- per yard. Surely the remaining gap can be spanned by all parts of the industry severally putting their house in order.

8. A feature of the industry most striking to someone outside is its disunity. There is remarkably little sign of common purpose or of common reaction to the present undoubted crisis. Complete unanimity is not to be expected, of course, but while a few favour the present fluid state of affairs it does seem to me a grave weakness that so many with essentially the same interest should not even know what the others are thinking about the present crisis. The only general organisation for the industry, the H.T.A., is remote and keeps out of internal affairs, while of the group interests the small producers' organisation has collapsed and the weavers' union appears to have a very limited grip on its membership. With this state of affairs it seems that the prospects of effective price reduction such as has been suggested above, or of any other action on behalf of the whole Orb industry, will be seriously hampered, if not worse.

Whatever the past history of such matters in the industry, I think that some kind of regular forum for the whole industry is badly needed. An impartial chairman with accepted status would be needed - and is available. The present crisis makes imperative what was already needed, a joint and continuous effort to improve the efficiency of the industry. Part of its work will be to clear up the difficulties, inequalities and distrust which have dogged it so long and which have in various ways made this prosperous industry so surprisingly vulnerable to the Shield attack. The unique protection of the Orb Trade Mark has allowed this state of affairs to survive so far, but now change seems indispensable.

C.J. Harley

County Development Officer.

6/10/60.

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The following abstracts are taken from a book lent to me for a few days by Mr. Moisleley. It is a book from the University Library, Glasgow and titled "Home Industries in the Highlands and Islands", a report by W.R. Scott published 1914 price 11½d. "Report to the Board of Agriculture for Scotland".

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A careful consideration of some of the chief social and industrial problems of the Highlands at the present time shows that these have had their origin in events of a comparatively remote past.

As early as the fifteenth century, coarse cloth appears to have been made in the Highlands while before the end of the next century plaiding is mentioned in a contemporary document as constituting a species of rent on Harris and Lewis, showing that as early as this the weaving industry was already recognised there as an important one.

The most important Highland and Island Industries in the sixteenth century were the fishing and the cattle trades.

In 1598 James VI granted Lewis to the Fife Adventurers because it was alleged that the inhabitants had failed to pay their Rents to the Crown but also through their neglect to attend to the agriculture and fishing or allow others to make use of it.

Fife Adventurers had power to erect burghs, markets, free-fairs seaports and havens.

The attempt to colonise Lewis was a failure and the Adventurers disposed of their title in 1611.

Early in the 17th Century the making of coarse cloth had made considerable progress in Aberdeenshire and Invernessshire. The beginnings of an export trade had been built up, but before long abuses were complained of, and in 1622 it was found necessary for the convention of Royal Burghs to institute an enquiry. It was discovered that inferior yarn had been introduced, and that the Spinners and Weavers of the North Country were the chief offenders. In 1631 it was ordained that prosecutions should be instituted against persons in fault before the Sheriff.

It is felt that even in the 17th century the Hebrides were not able to feed the population in as much as a part of the proceeds of the Sale of Plaiding and Hides was spent on provisions.

An effort was made to transform the rather backward industries of Scot into a highly organised one towards the end of the 16th century. It was proposed to transfer the surviving domestic Industries at one bound into Industries working on the factory system, as it then existed.

The chief emphasis was laid on a change in the Woollen trade. Instead of producing the coarse cloth known as plaiding a resolute effort was made to create manufacturers in or near Towns of fine Broadcloth which would compete with that woven in England. Before the end of the century upwards of a dozen of these manufacturers had been started. Some paid wages to 750/1,000 workers/

workers. In addition to cloth works, factories for making linen, silk, paper, stockings, sailcloth, ropes and cordage were established also sugar mining and hardware works.

In 1722 Kelp was first started in Orkney against much opposition and extended to the Hebrides between 1726 and 1735, first to North Uist. Prior to this it was pointed out that the people in the Hebrides had not a competent knowledge of agriculture and it was suggested that people be brought from the South to teach better methods of agriculture.

On the estate of Sir Donald MacDonald in North Uist in 1718 most of the tenants paid a part of their rents in Flaid or blanketing.

As early as 1762 Blackface Sheep had been introduced into the Hebrides with a view to supplementing the "aboriginal variety" which was believed to have come in the first instance from Norway.

Emphasis was now placed on the growing of Wool in the Highlands and Islands and the practice of replacing men with sheep in some places.

The introduction and extended use of the potato as staple article of food enabled the same amount of labour to support a larger population.

Nevertheless there was too little to support the population and emigration took place in a very large scale in the Highlands and Islands in the period 1760 - 1780.

It is estimated that from 1763 to 1775 no less than 30,000 persons had left the Highlands and Islands. As many as 12,000 left the Hebrides for Canada/America in 1772 to 1791.

Populations.

	<u>1755.</u>	<u>1801.</u>	<u>1811.</u>	<u>1821.</u>	<u>1831.</u>
Lewis:	6386	9168	10,092	12,231	14,541
Harris:	1969	2996	3569	3909	3900
N.Uist:	1909	3010	3863	4971	4603
S.Uist:	2209	4595	4825	6038	6890.

Percentage of increase in Population 1755/1831.

Lewis.	127 per cent
Harris	98 " "
N.Uist	141 " "
S.Uist	211 " "
Northern & Western Counties	48 " "

Note Kelp was produced much more in Uist than in Lewis price per ton of Kelp in 1730 was £1. 0. 0.
 " " " " " " 1791/1800 £20. to £22.

The price of Kelp remained high until 1812 and by 1815/16 it averaged £10. per ton. In 1822 price of Kelp was as low as £4.10. 0.

About 1823 Bank notes were issued at Stornoway on behalf of the proprietor "Twenty Shillings".

The/

The decline of the Kelp Industry caused great hardship in the Hebrides and in Uist emigration was found necessary. Fishing was taken up where and when.

As yet (1817) the chief significance of "the industrial revolution" in so far as it affected the Highlands was the need for distinguishing between the factory system and Home Industries. As yet there was no apparent conflict. The weaving of cloth among the Crofters was mainly or altogether for a purely local demand, and as the beginning of the 2nd quarter of the 19th Century, there is no direct evidence that the competition of Machine made goods was being experienced. At the same time it may be inferred that there were the beginnings of a subtle form of such competition in so far as the more prosperous people seem to have considered a mark of social distinction to possess a suit which was made in the South - an exact inversion of some of the causes which brought the Harris Tweed Industry into prominence at the end of the Century.

About 1840 Wool sold at between 10d. to 5½d. per lb., Coarse Country cloth sold at 2/- per yard. Weaving 4d. per yard.

The price for Kelp continued low £3. a ton in 1834 but a new lease of life was in for the Kelp industry when it was discovered that seaweed was a good source of Iodine; previously Kelp was used in connection with Glass and Soap trades where alkali was needed.

The failure of the potato crop together with bad Seasons resulted in a period of most acute distress in those districts where the standards of living was very low. The beginning of the time of extreme scarcity came in 1836/37 and during the next nine years, in some parts of the Highlands and Islands the people were faced with the terrors of starvation. Out of this time of want, there grew certain movements which constituted the origin of several home industries in their modern form. At this period the employment of women in gutting herring increased considerably. The long Island and particularly Harris had long been known for the excellence of the Weaving done there. In 1844 the Earl of Dunmore directed some of the Weavers in Harris to copy the Murray tartan in Tweed and the result was so successful that he adopted it for his keepers, Gillies, and other retainers besides using it for his own wear. It was seen that a material could be produced for which an outside sale might be hoped, and Lady Dunmore devoted much time and thought to the introducing of the Tweed to her friends, and then to the improving of the process of production.

From this period may be dated the beginning of the Harris Tweed Industry, though the ultimate course is to be traced still further back to the skill in Spinning and Weaving of the workers and their natural taste in the blending of colours. The first Tweeds of the Harris type seem to have rather pronounced checks of a rough type in texture, and it was necessary to devise new blends of the natural dyes and to diminish the too great irregularity in spinning and weaving.

Mrs. Thomas, Wife of Captain Thomas R.N. took an interest in 1857 and assisted the Islanders with their tweeds and their knitting. In 1857 Lady Dunmore stated stocking and embroidery industries, for which an Instructress was brought to the Island and a workroom built.

The sale of Hose and Tweeds was carried on by Mrs. Thomas in Edinburgh till 1888 when she moved to London and opened a small depot in Berners Street where/

where she carried on for 3 years until she married and moved from London to St. Leonards.

At one time the knitters in Harris numbered 400 and the industry extended to Skye and South Uist, being started in the former by the Macleod & Macleod, and in the latter by Lady Gordon Cathcart. The hosiery trade in South Uist was started in 1882; and in 1877 the making of Tweed for sale in London was begun.

The circumstances of Lewis at the time of the famine was exceptional. Sir James Matheson had purchased the property on 1844 and when the distress came, he advanced £33,000 for meal and seed potatoes. In addition very large sums were expended in provided employment and in effecting improvements for developing the resources of the property. Roads and bridges were made, a steamer service was organised, brick works started, and also a chemical works for the manufacture of paraffin oil from peat. Adding the outlay in various buildings there was expended £372,508. This provided work in Lewis but Sir James dies in 1878 and it is said that it was following this the Lewis people really took an interest in Tweed (one source state that the first Web to be offered for sale outside the Island was in 1881).

In Harris, beside the depot in London, a trade had been established with some of the dealers in cloth in large towns in England and Scotland.

Mr. Norman Macleod of Tarbert, Harris, sold tweed to various Wholesale Houses in 1879 price 4/6d. per yard. In 1875 St. Kildar was selling a small quantity of Tweed.

In 1889 the Scottish Home Industries Association was founded under the patronage of H.R.H. Princess Louise and the presidency of the Countess of Rosebery. The object of this body was to found a market for the products of Home industries, improve quality, circulate information.

Partly as a result of the formation of Scottish Home Industries Association, a meeting was held at Inverness on 29th April, 1889 at which it was decided to establish another body, known as the "Highland Home Industries & Arts Association" embracing the Counties of Inverness, Ross & Cromarty, Sutherland, Caithness, Elgin & Banff.

After a time it was found that the Scottish Home Industries had to undergo some changes and accordingly it was decided to register the Association as a limited Liability Company. This took place in 1896 with a nominal capital of £10,000 on which dividends were limited to 3 per cent. The Board of Directors consisted of nine members under the Presidency of the Duchess of Sutherland who had visited the Tweed producing districts in the Hebrides. Besides the depot in London others were opened at Tarbert in Harris, Stornoway, Edinburgh and Golspie. A travelling Inspector was appointed with a view to improving the quality of the Tweeds. The sales of the Scottish Home Industries Association during period ending 31st December, 1897 amounted to £10,638.15.3½ and on the following year to £10,824. 0. 0.

At the time the Scottish Home Industries Association was turned into a limited Liability Company there was some difference of opinion as to what was best in the circumstances and eventually a second selling organisation was established, by Mrs. Stewart Mackenzie of Seaforth which was described as/

as the "Crofters Agency".

When the congested Districts (Scotland) Act was passed in 1897, the Board thereby constituted, was brought into relation with Home Industries. Under the fourth section of the Act the Board had powers to apply its funds in aiding and developing spinning, weaving, and other home industries in congested districts, and also in aiding and developing fishing.

In reference to the former object, the Board decided in 1898 to set apart a sum for the giving of practical instruction in Lewis. To supervise the working of this scheme a Committee was formed by those in the locality who were interested in the movement of which Sheriff Campbell (then resided in Stornoway) was Chairman.

After a preliminary report, Mr. Alexander Lamont was appointed Inspector by the Committee, his salary being provided by the Board.

It was found the Crofters were handicapped through having to make very small batches of dyed wool and two large boilers of 30 gallons each were sent to Uig in Lewis.

In the early years of the Industry the wool had all been carded by hand. This process took a long time, and the practice had grown up of sending wool to the Mills in the mainland to be carded, but there was a great temptation to have it spun also and returned in the form of yarn. Thus the only hand-work in the Tweed made of such yarn was the weaving and in fact a different fabric; as compared with the original Harris Tweed, would be produced. It was thought that the erection of a Mill (which did not spin the carded wool) on the Islands would prevent the introduction of Mill Spun Yarn, and accordingly Sir Samuel Scott erected one outside Tarbert, Harris in 1900 and by 1903 another had been started at Stornoway by Mr. Aeneas Mackenzie.

In South Harris and Uist a new Industry sprang up and continued for a time 1899 - 1900 etc. that of Hand weaving of rugs, tapestry, and carpets. After a short while it died out.

For a considerable time the practice of "Truck" was continued in the Highlands and Islands and often aggravated the position of the people.

In 1902 The C.D.B. made a grant of £300 to Scottish Home Industries Association towards the providing of instructions in N. Uist and the opening of Depots at Lochmaddy and in 1903 opened further depots at Uig in Lewis Obbe in South Harris, Lochboisdale and Creagorry Pier in Benbecula. The latter store was erected by Lady Gordon Cathcart at her own cost. The C.D.B. made a further grant in 1904 of £500 and the sales of the Association reached their highest point in 1904. There were indications that their working capital was insufficient to finance the increased turn over with complete ease.

The production of Tweed made in Lewis had increased with great rapidity estimates given were as follows:-

1903	£8,000
1904	£15,000
1905	£20,460.

average price 2/8 yard.

C.D.B./

C.D.B. provided funds for the purchase of Looms. These cost £6. to £8. each
In 1899 there were 55 Looms in Lewis.
" 1906 " " 161 " " "
" 1911 " " 250/300 " " "

and by 1906 the Tweed Industry had made great strides and further evidence of this is provided by the conviction of a person in London who sold an imitation power loom fabric as Harris Tweed in 1906.

The Harris Tweed Industry did not escape the changes of fortune to which larger trades are liable. In 1903 it was reported that the workers could not supply the whole demand and the rapid growth in the output in 1904 and 1905 indicated the danger of overproduction. But, while this phase of the trade would have been distressing to the workers, there was a more serious element in the situation, which would be likely to influence the whole future of the Industry. The rapid increase in output in Lewis suggests the reflection which is confirmed by other evidence, that Mill Spun Yarn was being introduced in considerable quantities. In 1907 the S.H.I. Association began to find that the amount of Tweed made by Hand Spun yarn obtainable in Lewis, did not justify the expenses of the depots there, and steps were taken to close these gradually. The Crofters Agency, on the other hand, kept one of its depots at Balallan, open. Production of Tweed in Lewis kept increasing but hand spinning was declining. The Carding Mill at Stornoway added Spinning Machinery and a second Mill of similar character was started. There was then two kinds of hand-woven tweed - the one containing all or part of mill spun yarn and the other all hand spun yarn. Most of the Harris Tweed makers produced the latter kind.

An application was made to the Board of Trade for a Trade Mark to distinguish Harris Tweed.

This Association began to apply the Trade Mark early in 1911. In November, 1911 a case was brought against a tailor by the Harris Tweed Association who was charged with selling Tweed made of machine spun yarn as genuine Harris Tweed. This summons was dismissed.

There remains a third type of Tweed, in which all processes, up to and including the Spinning, have been performed by Machinery. Thus the person who proposes to offer a Web for sale purchases the yarn from the Mill, has it woven, and hand finished. This industry was being prosecuted vigorously in Lewis during the earlier part of 1911.

Tweed made in Lewis from machine spun yarn, hand woven and hand finished 1911 or 12 cost 1/9 or 1/10 yard and there is a profit of 1/- and or £3. per tweed.

Inferior quality Tweed was sold from Lewis and for a time London Merchants gave it to the Trade termed Stornoway Tweed which covers all Tweed from Lewis. Estimated production of Tweed in 1911 was 350,000 yards and may have realised £45,000.

In Harris and Uist the output in 1911 was 233,840 yards earning £21,000 for labour as against £7,700 for labour in Lewis - three times as much. In 1912 the Stornoway Merchants joined the Harris Tweed Association and attempted to re-instate the hand spinning to the position it held 10 years ago. If/

If this succeeded it would cut off a great part of the trade of the local Mills and to prevent this the owners of these would naturally do all in their power to secure an outlet for machine spun yarn. Yet a further consideration of this intricate situation reveals that there is no necessary opposition between these different interests.

Harris Tweed Association, Ltd., registered Trade Mark in Canada and U.S.A. in 1912.