



[The Scandinavian Occupation]

It is said that the Scandinavians first made their appearance in the Outer Hebrides about the end of the 8th century. Probably Vikings raided the Island before that. Skye was pillaged in 794 A.D. and in 1098 A.D. King Magnus Bareleg of Norway plundered Lewis and devastated the Island with sword and fire.

After the battle of Largs in 1263 the Norwegian grip on the Hebrides relaxed and in 1266 the Islands were ceded by Norway to Scotland. The Viking domination of the Western Isles over a long period left a profusion of local place names derived from the old Norse language. The survival of these Norse place names to the present day proves that the area was occupied continuously ever since the Norse left the area officially in 1266. Following the departure of the Norse, it is felt that a large influx of Gaelic speaking Celtic settlers came to the Western Isles. The two peoples, the Norse and the Celts blended in time, but it seems that the Celtic culture and language predominated.

The Norse influence is also said to be very evident in the design of our traditional thatched homes in Lewis. The Viking long houses bear a strong resemblance to our thatched houses.

At one time there was a watermill for grinding oats and barley on almost every stream in Lewis and it is said that these mills are based on ancient Norse models. The origin of our Calbost watermill is lost in the mists of time, but it is possible that the Calbost watermill was originally set up by the original Norse settler at Calbost who gave his name to the village. The meaning of the name Calbost, the suffix 'bost' means a landholding and the prefix 'Cal' or 'Kali' is thought to have been the name of the original Norse settler at Calbost.

The Calbost grinding watermill may have been working continuously since Norse times until the last Calbost Miller, Kenneth Nicolson, of 11 Calbost on whose croft the mill was sited moved to Stornoway with his family in 1902. The mill ceased to produce then. The last set of round grinding stones, which came from a quarry at Dalbeg on the west coast of Lewis in the 19th century, may still be seen within the mill at croft 11 Calbost. The previous set of grinding stones were very much smaller than the present set. They were subsequently used as hearth stones for the fire in the middle of the floor in village thatched houses.

There were three seed drying kilns in Calbost on each of crofts 6, 8 and 11 as there were in all villages on the Island. They went out of use when the grinding mills stopped and the people obtained their meal and flour from the merchants at Stornoway in bolls of 140 lbs weight.

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