



[Changing Shopping Habits]

Like most things in our lifetime, shopping habits have changed. Until the main road around the end of Loch Erisort was completed in 1928, all traffic to and from Park was by sea, and there was at least one small shop in every village. These merchants usually had a boat with which they made a weekly trip to Stornoway for supplies, and they also carried paying passengers and freight. Other fishing boats from the various villages also made trips to Stornoway for supplies from time to time.

Although there was a small grocery shop in every village the crofters and fishermen of Lochs purchased most of their domestic supplies in bulk from the Stornoway wholesalers and sometimes from the local merchants, such as 140lb bolls of oatmeal and flour, cwt bags of sugar, 56lb boxes of margarine, ¼ barrel measures of rough salt, and cattle feeding stuff, etc.

'Bùth Choinnich Odhair', or 'Innocent', was a wholesaler on North Beach Street, Stornoway. Kenneth MacIannan Ltd, a man from Tolsta Chaolais, originally was the wholesale business that mainly supplied the Lochs fishermen, perhaps because he was located near the quay.

The men of Lochs could be seen with a handcart or truck trundling their supplies down to their boats at the quay, where a group of migrant 'Lochie' dockers might be greeting their countrymen with the usual, 'Am bheil tòrr agaibh a bhos an diugh?' (Is there a lot of you over today?)

In due course that phrase became a humorous by-word. A large contingent of Lochs people lived in the Point Street area. Very few of them made it to the elevated position of Matheson Road.

There were no loaves available in the rural areas except where a local baker might have set up in business. Cromore was the only village in South Lochs where there was a baker, but it is doubtful if his business was viable, because every family baked their own bread on the girdle on the open peat fire. They did not make scones. They made bannocks, 'bonnachs' which were the full size of the girdle, about 10/11 inches in diameter. After cooking the bannock was stood up against the heat of a bright peat fire, supported by a couple of peats at the back of the bannock. They also made oatcakes, 'aran corc', one side of which was baked on the girdle.

Dry tea was sometimes taken home on the post from Glasgow, as well as an occasional roll of smoked bacon, at the time of the spring work in particular. 'Cochrane' was one of the Glasgow suppliers of tea.

Incidentally, the white cotton bags in which the bolls of flour came was re-cycled into many uses, such as bed sheets, pillow cases, sails for small boats, and even bodices for ladies' petticoats, with a knitted underskirt, 'còta bàn', attached to the 'poca flùr' top. One of these garments may be seen in the Calbost Collection of artefacts. The flour bag bodice advertised the brand of the flour, such as 'National Flour', and '140lbs' in large letters across the front or back. The flour bag bodice was an object of satire and verse among the humorous village bards.

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