



[Questions Regarding 'Orb' Amendment Proposal]

The proposal to restructure the Harris Tweed industry by introducing far reaching changes in the mode of manufacture of the cloth as well as contemplating a fundamental change in the 'Orb' definition should surely be accompanied by a full and frank discussion with all the interested parties, and that includes the weavers, the crofter producers and the general public in the Outer Hebrides. No such discussions took place and indeed only the minimum outline of the proposals was released to the press. There are many questions to which answers should be given before any attempt is made to amend the 'Orb' definition. Among them are the following:

1. What is the real reason for wishing to change from weaving at the Islanders homes to weaving in a limited number of small factories?
2. Is it true that the present proposals envisage at the most, about a dozen weaving factories in the whole of the Hebrides, and even that many will only be necessary if there is a large increase in the demand for the cloth? Considering that there are scores and scores of villages in Lewis and Harris where there are active weavers at present, will it not be very inconvenient to reduce the weaving centres to about a dozen?
3. What locations throughout the Islands are earmarked for the siting of the new weaving factories?
4. What is the order of priority arrived at for the setting up of the new weaving factories in the various locations?
5. Is it disputed that the introduction of double width power weaving will result in a considerable contraction of the present weaving force?
6. Would it be correct to say that double width factory weaving deprives the part-time weaver and the crofter/weaver of the opportunity to engage in weaving?
7. Is it not anticipated that the introduction of double width power woven Harris Tweed would cause a fairly rapid run down in demand for single width Harris Tweed in all markets except the U.S.A. and almost the complete disappearance of single width altogether within a decade?
8. What is the timescale for setting up the new weaving factories and when is it expected the building and equipment programme will be completed?
9. Many of the weavers do not own their own transport and because they often live in places where there is only very infrequent public transport, is it not true to say that many weavers would be unable to attend daily work at the proposed weaving factories and would therefore be deprived of participation in weaving once the demand for single width falls away in a short space of time?
10. If, unfortunately, double width power weaving was to come in, why could the weavers not operate at their own homes as at present?
11. Is there any good reason why the weavers could not own and operate 2nd hand power double width looms instead of the expensive new looms spoken about?
12. Who is to select from among the present weaving force those fortunate weavers who are to man the new weaving factories?
13. Will the double width loom be leased to the weaver under the new system? And if so is the weaver to pay a weekly rent or a levy per piece? Or on earnings?
14. Is shift work anticipated on the new double width power looms, entailing the moving of weavers from loom to loom? Are weavers to be paid on hourly rates or piece rates?
15. Has a system of distribution of available work been devised setting out fair sharing as between factory and factory and weaver and weaver?
16. Assuming that town weavers are allowed to participate in the new scheme are there any plans drawn up setting out a fair distribution of work between town and rural areas?
17. Will the mills be permitted to weave double width Harris Tweed on mill premises or premises under their control elsewhere?
18. If the proposed weaving factories are set up can double width Harris Tweed weaving be carried out at private premises, say in weavers premises?
19. In the event of weaving taking place on mill or weaver premises, how is it proposed to operate a fair distribution of available work?
20. Are the spinners to be permitted to continue weaving cloth similar to Harris Tweed on power looms on their own premises or elsewhere, and if so, what is to prevent such cloth reaching the consumer as imitation Harris Tweed, without the 'Orb' stamp?
21. Hebridean Mills have already produced cloth for stamping as Orb Harris Tweed that is very different from the accepted and traditional Harris Tweed. Is there not a danger that this trend will continue until we end up with another demand to amend the definition to accommodate a cloth that may be totally out of the traditional character of Harris Tweed?

22. If power woven double width Harris Tweed is to be introduced, is there any provision made to avoid or minimise the chaos and considerable damage that would cause to the image of Harris Tweed in World markets, when buyers would naturally insist on placing their orders in double width cloth and refuse to accept single width if their competitors were already supplied with double width?
23. If as a result of the proposed restructuring of the Harris Tweed industry weavers in many remote areas are to be thrown out of work, is there any form of compensation or redundancy proposed for such weavers?
24. No matter what is done for the Harris Tweed industry, if manufacturers continue their individual marketing methods as in the past, the industry will only continue to decline, because the image of the cloth is being destroyed in all World markets. Has there been any firm agreement among manufacturers towards centralised control of marketing?
25. Is it expected that all Harris Tweed, single and double width, be allocated through the holding company and woven by weavers employed by the holding company?
26. Is power to be allowed on the single Hattersley?
27. Is it proposed to widen the definition of the Orb to allow wool other than Scottish?
28. Will the new Orb definition allow mainland spun yarn?
29. Usually there is only one operator to a few power looms. Is it expected that a weaver will look after more than one loom, and if so how many looms?
30. Is the warping to be carried out at the weaving factories?

[ends]

AN ARCHIVE RECORD FROM THE ANGUS MACLEOD ARCHIVE www.angusmacleodarchive.org.uk

Author: Angus Macleod

Date: 1975

Original document title: Questions

Location in physical archive: Series D, Files 15-22, Section 21

NRAS reference: NRAS 4336/1/4/22/1

© Angus Macleod Archive