



[Notes on the Harris Tweed Industry]

Clo-Mor, or tweed was made in the Islands and used domestically for clothing and blanketing for generations; no one knows how far back.

It was in Harris that it was first commercialised with the assistance of Lord and Lady Dunmore who were the proprietors of northern Harris around the 1840s.

Noticing the excellence of the local tweed the Dunmores got the local weavers to weave the Murray Tartan for them, and then they used the cloth for themselves and their staff as well as introducing it to their guests from the south.

The first web of tweed that was sold was said to have been made by Marion and Christine Macleod who was born on the Island of Pabbay about 1810, and later on they moved to Strond.

Lady Dunmore took steps to improve the quality and designs of the cloth by paying the expense of sending some Harris girls to Alloa to learn the weaving of intricate patterns.

Now-a-days we would call that a Residential Training Course.

Seeing the tweed was sold in Harris first it was referred to as Harris Tweed and the name was adopted for the tweed from all the Hebridean Islands.

Harris Tweed made an excellent reputation for itself in the second half of the 19th century, so much so that it was imitated in both the British and European markets and it became obvious that it was necessary to register a Harris-Tweed Trade Mark.

The 'Orb' Certification Trade-Mark was registered in 1910. Registered No.319214. The first cloth was stamped in 1911.

Definition of the 'Orb': Harris Tweed is a tweed, hand-spun, hand-woven and finished by hand in the Outer Hebrides, with made in Harris, made in Lewis, made in Uist or Barra etc. added as appropriate.

The Harris Tweed Authority was formed to administer the mark on behalf of the Hebridean Crofter Community. To begin with there were 6 persons on the Committee:

The Duchess of Sutherland	Scottish Home Industries Association.
Mr William Harrison	
Mrs Mary Stewart Mackenzie	The Crofters Agency
Mr George Favourke	
Norman Macleod	The H.T.A. of Harris
Donald Morrison	

Some months later two Stornoway Merchants joined the committee:

Donald Maciver	The Lewis & Harris Tweed Association
Malcolm MacDonald	

A Crofters Cottage Industry: By 1911 The Harris Tweed Industry was well established. It was a hand-spun, hand-woven, crofter industry with a registered Trade-Mark.

Yarn Distaff, Spindle and Whorls, was the earlier method of spinning 'Congall'.

Spinning Wheel, no doubt both of these methods of spinning was used for the marketing of Harris Tweed at the outset.

Carding Mills: Sir Samuel Scott, the proprietor of North Harris, erected a carding mill in Harris about 1900 in order to keep the Harris women with the tedious time consuming task of carding. That was the first step in the

mechanisation of the industry. In 1901, Aenas Mackenzie, a man from Stornoway who had a boat-slip timber yard etc., installed a carding machine in his works. It was run off a belt from one of his machines. Probably it was quite a small thing to begin with.

In time the first carding machine developed into the mill known as Patent Slip Wool Mills or Newalls.

In 1909 Kenneth Mackenzie, whose people came from Bal-a-Cro and later Lochs, set out to build a Cooperage (a barrel making factory) for the herring barrels. However, he changed his mind and installed carding and spinning machinery in his new factory building on Lewis Street. This was the first spinning machinery in the Islands.

The main purpose for the carding and spinning facilities was to service the crofters because the Harris Tweed Industry was growing all the time and most crofters wanted to spin their own wool. It is said that Mr Mackenzie had no intention to manufacture tweed on his own account - at first.

Knitting yarn's long before 1909: Crofters were in the habit of sending their wool to mainland mills for conversion into knitting yarns.

Carding 'own wool' on mainland by crofters: The practice of sending their own wool to the mainland mills for carding began very early in the 20th century.

Spinning 'own wool' on mainland: From carding own wool in mainland mills to spinning own wool in mainland mills was only a short step and as far as we can find out now, that also began early in this century.

Spinning on mainland (without 'own wool'): From spinning own wool on the mainland to acquiring mainland spun yarn without own wool was a short step and we believe that practice had started early this century.

1st half of the 150 years of the Harris Tweed Industry: We see therefore that the industry was changing gradually. You could say that the Industrial Revolution was penetrating though to the Outer Hebrides at the beginning of this century and the mechanisation of the Harris Tweed Industry is still moving forward to the end of the 20th century - a new loom is being developed now.

The changes that took place in the Harris Tweed Industry in the 20th century generated much controversy and we could dwell on these changes much more, if we had time.

Looms: The weaving of the Harris Tweed was quite primitive to begin with 'beart bheag' was the very early method of weaving.

'Beart Mhor' was a greatly improved method of weaving. James Mackenzie of 4 Gravir, (Seumas an Habost) was said to be the first person to acquire a beart-mhor. Then Kenneth Nicolson, 11 Calbost (a self-taught joiner) constructed his own loom, which was the second beart-mhor in Lewis.

The Congested District Board was established in 1897 and they assisted with the supply of looms. They reported that there were 53 own looms in Lewis in 1899, 161 looms in 1906 and 300 looms in 1911. Probably these figures refer to the beart-mhor and there were many more beart-bheags. The Congested District Board also assisted in other ways such as better designs (they had a paid agent going round teaching). They also supplied large dyeing pots.

Hattersley Looms: After Lord Leverhulme bought the Island in 1919, he went on to buy Kenneth Mackenzie's wool mills, and he took 30 Hattersley iron looms to the Island at once - single shuttle 36inch looms. 40inch x 6 shuttle came in about 1924 and Leverhulme also stepped up export to U.S.A.

One thing about Lord Leverhulme's improvements in the 1920s I want you to note is that he intended to build commercial weaving sheds in the villages (a form of factory weaving). At first sight these new weaving sheds might appear to be a very good move, but in fact, that would have meant the end of hand weaving at the Islanders homes, which was rapidly becoming the only crofter process left of the industry that was entirely 'a crofters industry' originally.

The next development to the loom side of the industry was not until double width looms were brought to the Island in the 1960s and the controversy that raged round the double width loom has not been finally settled 30 years later in the 1990s. Therefore it is very important that we come back to looms later on.

Merchants or small producers: Naturally crofters were not able to set up a sophisticated marketing system so the early stages of the industry depended on a network of philanthropic agencies to provide people as well as local merchants who operated on a commercial basis, but unfortunately practiced the truck system to a great extent.

Among the philanthropists were:

- Lord and Lady Dunmore, Proprietors of South Harris

- Lady Gordon Cathcart, Proprietress of Uist
- Mrs Mary Stewart Mackenzie of Seaforth
- Millicent, Duchess of Sutherland Mrs Jessie Platt of Eishken
- Mrs Thomas, an Edinburgh woman, she moved her depot to London later
- Scottish Home Industries
- Highland Home Industries
- The Crofters Agency

Annual Stamping (yards): It is worth noting that the highest stamping figures were in 1912. Would it be true to say it was a descending industry that brought us to the end of the First World War? The first 80 years or about half the time.

Mill Spun Cloth which was sold under a variety of names such as Lewis Tweed, Harris Tweed, Home-spun, and Crofters Tweeds etc. naturally does not appear in the stamped yardage.

The quality of these other tweeds, such as Lewis-Tweed was not always good and their reputation suffered.

Harris Tweed, however, maintained its reputation, whether the article was genuine hand-spun or tweed made from mainland mill-spun yarn.

Herring fishing declined in the 1920s after the First World War and the people of Lewis stepped up their production of Harris Tweed by improving mainland spun yarn. One of the main reasons for mainland yarn was that the Stornoway spinners (Newall & Mackenzie) were restrictive with the yarn supplies to small producers.

In the 1920s therefore a strong tradition of small producers arose in Lewis and eventually some of these entrepreneurs became fairly large manufacturers of mill spun tweed.

Small producers or independent producers may be defined as people who buy their yarn supplies from Commission Spinners, because they do not have spinning machinery of their own. I believe that practice is common enough in England, where there are spinners who confine their activities to spinning alone.

The people of Harris remained more loyal to the traditional hand spun and they did not like the way the industry was developing in Lewis. They felt it was a threat to the genuine Harris Tweed product.

Actually the nature of the industry was changing, and the question is, would it have died, if it had not changed?

In Harris, it was women who did most of the Harris Tweed work. In Lewis, it was the men who did most of the Harris Tweed work. In Uist the tweed work died away. As time went on much more unstamped mill-spun Harris Tweed was produced and sold than the limited production in hand spun tweed, and the small producers were in the forefront of developing the new industry.

As is so often the case, one man emerged in the 1920s who was largely responsible for Revolutionising the Harris Tweed industry. That man was James Macdonald, 1 Habost, Lochs, a crofter's son who left school at the age of 14 years.

He started work as a fisherman and then went to work at Manor Farm, Stornoway. When the First World War broke out he joined the Royal Navy and rose to be a Petty Officer.

Later on in the 1920s he responded to an advertisement in an Edinburgh newspaper and secured a job as a Commission Traveler in Lewis and Harris for a Wholesale Grocery firm from Leith called J & J Todd & Co. Ltd. J & J Todd & Co. Ltd. was owned by Gilbert Archer, a Millionaire from Leith.

James commenced his rounds of the Lewis and Harris shops with a bicycle but very soon he got a car and he was so successful that the firm built a large warehouse in Stornoway. That building is still there. It is the building in which the Stornoway Gazette is housed at present.

Being a man from Lochs he was familiar with the making and selling of Harris Tweed and very soon he was launched out on a sideline Harris Tweed business as a small producer, using mainland mill-spun yarn. His tweed business was at the back of his J & J Todd business, where the religious book-shop is at present. He was referred to as Jimmy Todd.

The next thing that happened was that James Macdonald and Gilbert Archer became partners in the Harris Tweed venture under the name of James Macdonald Ltd.

They moved down to the disused canning factory of Lord Leverhulme on Cannery Road, Stornoway and installed carding/spinning and washing/finishing machinery.

James Macdonald Ltd was therefore the first manufacturer of Harris-Tweed who was able to carry out all the processes of the manufacture of Harris Tweed in the one unit. All this happened about 1930.

Before that the finishing of Harris Tweed was carried out in crofter's homes (luadh), or in mainland finishing companies such as Seedill, Paisley.

James next move was to start a campaign to have the definition of the Orb stamp amended to allow the Orb stamp to be applied to mill spun yarn.

From one point of view the move was quite realistic. It was recognition of the situation as it had developed. That was not, however, the view taken by everyone, and a raging controversy ensued all over the Island.

The people of Harris wanted nothing to do with the Amendment and the small producers of Lewis wanted to include mainland mill-spun yarn, otherwise they and the crofters of Lewis were against it, because they distrusted the Stornoway spinners, because they felt they wanted to take over the whole industry.

The Lewis small producers were very much against giving the Stornoway spinners a monopoly in the supply of Orb yarn. The whole Island was in an uproar.

Three Lewis Gospel Ministers became involved in what they saw as the vital interest of their people. They were, Rev. Murdoch MacRae, Free Church, Kinloch, Rev. Calum Maciver, Free Church, Crossbost, Rev. Norman Macleod, Church of Scotland, Uigen (a man from Habost, Lochs).

James campaigned for the amendment strongly. He maintained that all the processes in the manufacture of Harris Tweed should be carried out on the Island in order to provide work for the Islanders.

He maintained there was no need to bring yarn in from the mainland as the Lewis spinners were willing and able to meet all the demand for Harris yarn on the Islands and if not they would install more machinery.

Heavy pressure was applied to the crofters' representatives and the small producers and it was said that one of the larger small producers changed sides and was won over. Also one of the Ministers slackened his former stand providing the position of the weavers was safeguarded by writing into the amendment or new definition 'hand-woven by the Islanders at their own homes'.

The other two spinners promised to build finishing plants. S.A. Newall & Kenneth Macleod, Shawbost (a small producer) combined to build a finishing works on Newall's premises. It was called, the Lewis & Harris Dyeing & Finishing Co. Kenneth Macleod was said to have secured special arrangements for the supply & price of yarn from Newall.

Because of the new clause, laying down that in future all weaving was to be carried out at the 'Islanders homes' the spinners were obliged to remove the Hattersley looms that were already installed and working away in their weaving department on the premises, (all three spinners had a weaving department).

Furthermore Newall's and Kenneth Mackenzie had one or two double width power looms used mainly for blankets. All those looms had to be put away before the definition of the Orb stamp was amended.

Amendment of the Orb mark in 1934: The Board of Trade approved an amendment of the definition of the Orb Trade Mark in 1934 in order to allow the Orb to be applied to mill-spun yarn as well as hand-spun yarn. The new definition was as follows: 'Harris Tweed means a tweed made from pure virgin wool produced in Scotland, spun, dyed and finished in the Outer Hebrides, hand-woven by the Islanders at their own homes, in the Islands of Lewis, Harris, Uist & Barra and their several countenances and all known as the Outer Hebrides'.

Reverend Murdo MacRae, Kinloch, joined the Harris Tweed Authority and Rev. Calum Maciver, Crossbost, retired from the scene, Rev. Norman Macleod, Uigen, also retired from the scene. Some of the small producers were very unhappy with the new definition and they continued to get their yarn supplies from the mainland. The Stornoway spinners were very pleased with the outcome. They got everything they wanted.

The next important development of the 1934 Orb amendment was the embargo case of 1936.

The 1934 Orb amendment divided the industry into various categories (three in particular):

1. The spinners/manufacturers of Orb
2. The Orb small producers
3. The mainland yarn small producers.

Then there were:

4. The weavers (no union).

5. The mill workers (members of T.G.W.U.).
6. The crofters who made one tweed a year.
7. The Hand-spun tweed - mainly in Harris.

Some of the mainland yarn small producers were in business in a fairly big way and were old established businesses - contributing substantially to the economic life of the Island by creating weaving work. Perhaps the two leading mainland yarn small producers at that time were:

1. The Crofter Hand Woven Harris Tweed Co. Ltd (always booked)
2. Maclennan & Maclennan (Orrack).

Despite all the protestations and promises that were given at the time of the Orb amendment, problems arose about the supply of yarn and very soon after 1934 there was a move to stop the supply of mainland mill-spun yarn by force. The unfortunate thing was that the workers allowed themselves to be used as pawns in the hands of invisible schemers.

Both the mill workers and the dockers were members of the T.G.W.U. and it was alleged that the mill workers complained against the importation of mainland yarn as unfair competition, so they got the dockers to boycott mainland yarn by refusing to handle it at the quay. This affected the weavers who were not members of any union and it also affected the legitimate business of a large section of the manufacturers of Harris Tweed.

John Veitch was the Area Secretary of the T.G.W.U. and William Mackenzie (Uilleam na Loch), a man from Point was the Local Secretary of the T.G.W.U.

Legal proceedings were initiated by the firms that were starved of their raw materials - yarn suppliers, and the case was known as the embargo case. The case made legal history.

The contestants were 'The Crofters Hand Woven Harris Tweed Co. Ltd. and others v John Veitch and others.

The Maclean family had a son who was a very clever lawyer and probably he would have had something to do with the case. His name was Stephen Maclean and he died very young - a victim of Tuberculosis.

The small Producers alleged that there was collusion to destroy their legitimate business by the mill workers, mill owners and the T.G.W.U. They said that it was a subtle move to stop mainland yarn coming into the Island and kill off the competition of unstamped Harris Tweed by the small producers.

The case was won by the small producers and the dockers were obliged to desist. It is said that it was not likely that such a case would ever take place again because 'Collusion' by spinners was very nearly proven and that would have been a very serious thing indeed.

Report of the Lewis Association: The next thing was the formation of an association of leading Lewis people to study the economic situation of Lewis and they issued a number of reports. Among the reports they issued was one on the Harris Tweed industry and once again their main report was very critical of the Stornoway spinners and the restrictions on the supply of yarn. Mr Pringle, a member of the Committee and Managing Director of S.A. Newall & Co. Ltd. issued a minority report denying any restrictions and stating that the spinners had enough spinning machinery to cater for any demand that might come for Orb yarn. If necessary they would go on to double shift and even three shifts around the clock. Unfortunately Mr Pringle's optimistic promises did not materialise in practice and law in a position to prove that as well as many other things. The Lewis Association reports may be seen in the Library as they are well worth reading.

The Lewis Association Harris Tweed report made the point that in 1934 the 'Orb' amendment was only secured on the spinners giving a verbal agreement that they would supply the yarn needs of the whole industry. The small producers alleged that the agreement was never implemented and unless enforceable undertakings were given it must be open to the independent producers to buy their yarn from other sources and secure the 'Orb' mark for their Harris Tweed. The 1946 report of the Committee of the Scottish Council of Industry 'crofter woollen industry'. I am not going to say much about this report except that once again this report by independent people is very critical of the yarn suppliers in the Harris Tweed Industry.

Increased production of Harris Tweed after the 1934 amendment: Due note should be taken of the increased stamping yardage after 1934. In 1933 the annual yardage stamped was 22,018 and all of that would have been hand-spun cloth. In 1934, the annual yardage stamped was 93,241 and that would include some, at least of the production of the mills. In 1935 it was 1,485,246 and in 1936 it was 2,331,740.

War time conditions: The crofters were allowed to keep their own wool. The mills were restricted and some of their spinning lay idle. Clothing was in short supply nationally. Clothing coupons were introduced. Crofters needed clothing coupons before they could produce tweed. It soon became a sellers market where the producer could sell all the cloth he could produce without difficulty. The orb stamp was not necessary in these conditions. Mainland yarn as well as Orb yarn was in great demand. The price of Harris Tweed was controlled at 5s/6d a yard (27½p).

Selling on pattern bunches was not necessary.

End of sellers market: The war time sellers market continued until 1949/50 and then normality came in a dramatic way. There was a slump in 1951 when the stamped yardage dropped by one million yard from 3¾ million to 2¾ million, approximately one third drop. Fortunately the stamped yardage rose again the following year in 1952.

The 1950/51 slump and the return of normal commercial conditions that most of the crofters and the very small producers, who only did a few pieces a year, went out of the industry because they were not geared to marketing their cloth on a pattern bunch through commission agents in the home and overseas markets.

My recollection of the situation in the early 1950s and from then on was that there were about a dozen small producers left in the industry and only three spinners. The small producers were:

- Kenneth Macleod Ltd., Shawbost
- Bruce Burns Ltd.
- Angus Macleod & Co. Ltd., Shawbost
- John Macleod & Co. Ltd., Shawbost
- David Tolmie & Co. Ltd., Stornoway
- Alex Macaulay & Co Ltd., Stornoway
- Angus Macleod & Co. Ltd., Marybank, Stornoway
- Angus Nicolson & Co. Ltd., Holm Road
- Clansman Tweed & Co. Ltd. (Mr MacAinish & Dr. Tolmie)

And perhaps a few other small ones.

The spinners were:

- S.A. Newall & Sons Ltd.
- Kenneth Mackenzie & Co. Ltd.
- James MacDonald Ltd.

The mainland yarn producers were:

- Maclennan & Maclennan
- Pat Macfarlane
- St Ronan Tweed (but they had been doing Orb Tweeds as well)
- D.R. Mackenzie, Airivruaich (who may have been doing orb as well)

The home market: The small producers were priced out of the home market altogether by the spinners low prices soon after 1950.

The postwar period: Far from being a tranquil period as one might expect, the postwar period in the Harris Tweed industry turned out to be a very traumatic and difficult period.

The difficulties came from within the industry. One of the difficulties was the fact that the Harris Tweed Association Ltd. Failed to co-ordinate their advertising campaigns with the tweed manufacturers and in that way they created a demand in places where the industry may not have been geared to fulfilling the demand. Also the industry was not made aware of the H.T.A. advertising programmes fully so that the various manufacturers might co-ordinate their own advertising effort along with the H.T.A. campaigns. The H.T.A. Ltd felt that they should maintain their independence strictly and not be seen to be involved with the manufacturers. Eventually they modified their outlook a little. Their head office which was always in London was moved to Inverness and more recently to Stornoway where it should have always been. The small producers campaigned long and hard for the H.T.A. headquarters to be in Stornoway. It is an open question as to whether the H.T.A. advertising policy contributed to the rise of the 'Shield Producers'.

James Macdonald, 1 Habost, Lochs 1946: The irony is that James Macdonald, who only 12 years earlier was mainly responsible for the amending of the Orb definition in 1934 and the establishment and developing of a substantial Orb stamped mill-spun yarn industry in the Outer Hebrides changed sides in 1946, because he seemed to have fallen-out with his company in Stornoway, and he then moved to Oban to set up a new woollen mill to produce tweed similar to Harris Tweed.

Macdonald's wool mill in Oban was still producing in the late 1940s when the seller's wartime market conditions still prevailed. He acquired Hattersley looms similar to those in use in the Harris Tweed Industry and wove his tweed in Oban. He sold it mainly in the home market to begin with, some of it at least, as Argyll-shire Tweed. The Macdonald family of Oban formed a new company called 'Argyll-shire Weavers' about this time, and we shall be hearing more about that company later.

In 1951 it was reported to the Harris Tweed Association. Ltd. that Macdonald's of Oban was offering tweed on the home market with a label called Harris Tweed. You will recall that 1951 was the year that the first post war slump set in. When challenged James Macdonald explained that he had taken premises in South Uist where he was weaving Harris Tweed from yarn produced in Oban.

The Harris Tweed Association Ltd. were alarmed when they understood that Macdonald's production was running at 1¼ million yards a year and they dispatched one of the H.T.A. stamping inspectors to Uist to check and report on the situation.

The inspector reported that there were 50/60 looms in a building in Eochar in South Uist, as well as about 120 looms belonging to the Macdonald's distributed among the weavers of Uist. By this time there was no weaving being done in Oban. The warping and beaming for Uist was done in Oban and the weft leabbins were also filled in Oban.

The Independent Harris Tweed Producer's Ltd. in 1958: Three mainland mills interests formed a group called the 'Independent Harris Tweed Producers Ltd', they were: Argyll-shire Weaver's of Oban, A.&J. McNaughton of Pitlochry' and Scottish Crofters Weavers of Aberdeen or Leith. McNaughton's of Pitlochry was a traditional supplier of mainland yarn to Lewis small producers. Scottish Crofters Weavers Ltd. was associated with Robert Laidlaw Ltd Wool Mills of Leith who was also a traditional supplier of mainland yarn to Lewis small producers.

Also in 1958 the Independent Harris Tweed Producers Ltd announced a group emblem which was in fact a heraldic shield registered by Argyll-shire Weavers earlier. This shield was used as a trade mark by the Independent Producers.

By 1958 there were therefore two kinds of Harris Tweed on the market and two associations promoting them: the Orb Harris Tweed promoted by the Harris Tweed Association Ltd. and the Shield Harris Tweed promoted by the Independent Harris Tweed Producers.

What is the essential difference between these two Harris Tweeds? The definition:

Both of these tweeds were to be made from pure virgin wool.

1. The Orb Tweed was to be made from 'Scottish' wool only, but the Shield was not at first confined to 'Scottish' wool, but I think they changed later to 'Scottish' wool.
2. The Orb Tweed was to be spun, dyed and finished in the Outer Hebrides only, but the Shield Tweed could be spun, dyed and finished in the Outer Hebrides or elsewhere in Scotland.
3. The Orb Tweed was to be hand woven by the Islanders of Lewis, Harris, Uist etc. 'at their own homes' whereas the Shield Tweed was to be hand woven by the Islanders of the Outer Hebrides (there is no mention of their own homes which means that the Shield cloth could be woven in factories in the Islands and the home weaving might be lost). That was a big weakness in the Shield definition.
4. The Shield cloth was to be finished in the Outer Hebrides or elsewhere in Scotland, whereas the Orb finishing had to be done in the Islands.

May I now say a word about the wisdom of confining Harris Tweed to Scottish wool only. I do not think it was a wise thing because the Scottish wool clip is limited and therefore dearer at times than similar wool from elsewhere. The Harris Tweed industry used almost a third of the whole Scottish clip. The carpet industry uses a lot of Scottish rough wool. Scottish wool could therefore be a restricting factor in Harris Tweed. Therefore with two kinds of Harris Tweed and two kinds of definition the industry was on a collision course by the late 1950s.

In 1962 court proceedings were initiated by the Orb side against the Shield producers, in an English Court.

In Feb 1961 court proceedings were initiated by the Shield group in the High Court of Edinburgh, Scotland.

Meantime there was another development concerning the Macdonald mill at Oban. The entire shareholding of Macdonald Tweed Ltd Oban and Argyll-shire W eavers Ltd, Oban was purchased by Grampian Holdings Ltd. at £500,000 - satisfied as to £355,000 in cash and £145,000 in shares.

So James Macdonald retired from the scene of the Harris Tweed controversy, which he did so much to create. I believe his health was not good. He was not now involved in the court proceedings - but the court adjourned and took evidence from him in his home because he was not well.

The 1961/64 Lord Hunter Harris Tweed case in Edinburgh High Court was between Argyll-shire Weavers and others v -A. Macaulay (Tweeds) Ltd. and others.

It was the longest court case in Scottish legal history. Lord Hunter may be said to have found against the Shield group. Lord Hunter's opinion was that, a tweed to be legitimately described and marketed as Harris Tweed had at least to conform to the definition approved by the Board of Trade in relation to Certification Trade Mark No 319214 which is the Orb Trade Mark.

You will notice that his Lordship is not so very definite when what he says is 'at least to conform'. In my opinion his Lordship did not define what was or was not Harris Tweed only that Orb Tweed was certainly Harris Tweed. The Shield group did not appeal.

The Lord Hunter decision therefore gave the Orb spinners a complete monopoly - unless someone else cared to challenge the decision which is not likely.

The naïve well wishers of the Orb Harris Tweed industry felt that the Lord Hunters decision was the ideal decision because it gave the Orb Industry full protection,

The Small Producer section had no illusions not even those who felt they had to support the Orb side. They knew full well that they would soon be out of the industry.

What nobody realised was that these foolish spinners would within a few short years knock each other out in a fight to finish in the market place - by a price war of undercutting each other quite unnecessarily.

The aftermath of the Lord Hunter case in the 1950s: In order to get an accurate global picture of the Harris Tweed Association industry in these crucial years, we have to look at the average annual stamping figures for the 10 year period of the 1950s, which was 5,000,000 yards a year average. In other words the Orb industry was very prosperous in the 1950s.

The 1960s: Things were even better in the 1960s when the annual 10 year average was 6,000,000 yards per year which was up by 1,000,000 yards or one fifth higher than in the 1950s.

We should note that the 1960s were the busiest period in the history of the industry. 1966 was the highest year ever with 7¾ million yards.

Furthermore 1964 was the year the Orb won the Lord Hunter case and secured full protection for the Orb.

The strange thing is that it was in the 1960s that the Orb spinners bled each other white in the market place - undercutting each other quite unnecessarily. The demand for Harris Tweed was never so good as in the 1960s yet three of the six spinners looked to the wall by the end of the 1960s and early in the 1970s. Some sixty per cent of the spinning capacity of the Lewis spinners went to the scrap heap. Even in the first five year period of the 1970s stamping figures were 4½ million yards accountably.

All the small producers were knocked out for good and the door to mainland mill spun yarn was closed. The door to Orb spun yarn was also closed because if one could buy yarn at all, one could not buy it at a price that would enable one to get anywhere near competing with the price the mills sold their tweed at. The price of Orb yarn was high and the price of Orb tweed was low.

Single width tweed: It is a complete delusion and falsehood to suggest that the mills went out of business because Harris Tweed is a single-width cloth. Single width had nothing to do with it.

Double width tweed: If we were to assume that Harris Tweed was a double width cloth in the 1960s it would not have made a shadow of difference because it was by price cutting that the mills committed suicide.

Shield: The real threat to the industry in the 1950s and 1960s was not the Shield producers. (the threat came from within).

Price: If there is demand for Harris Tweed the manufacturers of the cloth will get the price they ask for because Harris Tweed cannot be obtained anywhere in the whole world except the Outer Hebrides.

Competition: Harris Tweed is not in competition with any other cloth anywhere in the world.

The small producers: Always made a valuable contribution to the economy of the Island, as may be seen from Professor H.A. Mousley, writing in 1961 in Volume 37 of the 'Economic Geography', who gave the following interesting figures:

Tweed woven in the Hebrides in 1961

For the Lewis mill spinners	56%	a little more than half
For the Orb small producers	28%	half as much as the mills
Total	84%	

Mainland yarn small producers	2%
Mainland yarn producer in Lewis	7%
Mainland yarn producer in S. Isles	7%

Total

16%

Weavers: Let us now look at the situation from the point of view of the weavers. Returning ex-servicemen after the Second World War could not get membership of the union and in consequence some of them had to leave the Island. I know of people who sold their looms, abandoned their crofts and homes and left the Island. The Harris Tweed industry is the heritage of every Lewis man and there should not be a conspiracy to keep him out of the industry.

As everyone knows there was a serious shortage of work in Lewis in the 40s, 50s, and 60s, yet the Harris Tweed Association and the Stornoway spinners expected the weavers to stop weaving for the Shield group. They were not prepared to offer them alternate weaving or some other work.

Price agreements: I have indicated to you that the downfall of the Harris Tweed industry was caused by price cutting in the market place and I feel sure you want to ask - why did the manufacturers not meet and agree on a reasonable price for the cloth?

Meetings: They meet regularly ever since the end of the war and I am sure before that as well. I attended innumerable meetings and export prices were agreed (we were not allowed to agree on home market prices). At no time ever did the majority of the Harris Tweed manufacturers keep to the price they agreed on.

Double width Harris Tweed: You will recall that both single and double width looms had to be put away by two mills before agreement could be achieved for the Amending of the 'Orb' in 1934.

It was not until about 30 years later in 1963 that double width power looms came to the Island to weave tweed similar to Harris Tweed.

It was Crofters Tweed Ltd - a private company, proprietor Alex Macleod, that brought a number of double width power looms to Lewis and installed them in Sandwick Hall. After a while he moved the Looms to the disused buildings of Moss End Hospital.

In the mid 1960s Crofter Tweeds were bought out by a Stornoway Orb spinner. This move by an Orb spinner/manufacturer of single width tweed constituted a new dimension in the industry if he was to improve imitation Harris Tweed double width.

I believe he maintained that he was diversifying -but how could he claim that, if he was producing tweed that was in all respects similar to Harris Tweed? Was he selling double width tweed to the same market as single width Orb stamped tweed? Could it be that the same customers used both tweeds? Why was it necessary for an Orb Spinner to embark on double width in the 1960?

Wool: was it possible for the H.T.A. to monitor the wool supplies of this spinner. Orb yarn must be made from Scottish wool only, whereas double width could be made from any wool (colonial?). Did the spinner have two wool stores to keep wools separate? Should the Harris Tweed Association have taken some action to defend the Orb? Eventually double width power looms were installed in the premises of some of the Orb spinners.

Mrs Perrins bought the old established small producer Maclennan & Maclennan (Orrack) and she diversified on to a different double width cloth. No one quarrelled with that.

Geocrab Mill was used by Mrs Perrins for weaving her double width tweed.

Garry Weavers took over Geocrab Mill later on but the Highlands and Islands Development Board refused to give him financial assistance and he was obliged to sell out.

In about 1972 again a Stornoway Orb spinner bought Garry Weavers out with their double width power looms. If double width similar to Harris Tweed was to be produced in Geocrab mill, the buyer was entitled to say that he bought his tweed supplies in Harris. It was a very short step from that to selling it as Harris Tweed.

In the meantime in 1968 when the stamping figures were nearly 6¾ million yards a year, the second highest year ever, the old established Stornoway mill of Thomas Smith went out of business.

Clansman Holdings: The Burns Mill family bought Clansman Tweeds from Macainish/Dr Tolmie (or his sister Mrs Mackenzie) and converted it with a Holding Company with the embracing Burns Mill and Thomas Smith Mill (later on others including Newalls) Mill.

Another private company was set up by Murdo Macleod, Newvalley and double width power looms were installed in Sandwick. Murdo had no previous connections with tweed manufacturing in the Harris Tweed Industry. Continually he failed and Kenneth Mackenzie Wool Mills took over his looms and his factory. All that double width power weaving activity was going on in the Harris Tweed Industry, only a few years after the Orb side gave considerable evidence to Lord Hunter's court case - showing how necessary it was to have Harris Tweed woven in accordance

with the definition of the Orb mark 'Hand woven by the Islanders at their own homes'.

New and tighter rules on weaving were made by the Harris Tweed Association at the time of the Lord Hunter case:

1. No concentration of weaving sheds.
2. Not more than two looms in any one shed.

The concentration of weaving sheds on Cannery Road and several other places were dispersed.

The H.T.A. came down heavily on small motors on Hattersley looms and some people were suspended for good from weaving.

Instead of reinstating the Stornoway spinners the H.T.A. felt that they would have to go along with the spinners by converting the whole industry to double width power weaving in the mills and end the cottage weaving for good.

That was the final object of the re-structuring proposals of 1973-76.

We will refer to that later.

Excess spinning capacity: On several occasions in the history of the Harris Tweed industry there was talk about the small producers erecting a spinning mill for the small producers and crofters. In actual fact it was not a **lack** of spinning capacity that was wrong with the industry. The downfall of this industry was helped by **excess** spinning capacity and another small producer spinner would only have aggravated the situation.

The war ended with four spinners, these were: Newalls; Kenneth Mackenzie; James Macdonald & Thomas Smith. By the 1960s the spinning capacity of the four mills was far in excess of any demand that was ever made on them. Yet because of the restrictive outlook of these spinners two of the small producers installed spinning machinery of their own, they were: Kenneth Macleod Ltd of Shawbost & the Burns family of Stornoway.

The situation of excess spinning capacity was then further aggravated.

Foot operated double width domestic loom: During the boom period of the 1960s, the H.I.D.B. intimated studies into the feasibility of a foot operated double width loom. The excuse given at the time was that the weavers were finding the single width Hattersley too heavy and many of them were leaving to go to the oil. It is rather difficult to see how a double width loom would be lighter to operate than a single one.

It certainly could not be said that there was a slump or lack of demand for single width in the late 1960s. In 1968 and 1969 the stamping figures were running at about 6½ million yards.

After some debate the work of developing a new domestic double width loom was given to Hattersley. The cost was to be shared by the H.I.D.B. and the spinners. All Hattersley did was to modify the single loom and naturally it was far too heavy.

Again in 1971 the project of a double width manually operated loom came up for discussion and another developer was approved -Wilson & Longbottom, England. In due course a new loom was ready for tests in 1973/74. After extensive testing that one was found to be far too heavy and once again the project was dropped.

Double width power woven Harris Tweed 1973/74: After years of wasted effort and money trying to develop a foot operated double width loom failed to come up with a suitable domestic loom, the H.T.A. Ltd. obviously felt that the spinners had forced their hand, and that there was no alternative but to amend the definition of the Orb mark and convert the industry to double width power weaving.

On March 20th 1976 the Chairman of the H.T.A. Ltd., Mr. J.A.Grant, speaking at a public meeting in Stornoway Town Hall said:

The question is not whether double-width tweed will be made or not. It will be made, in the weight and texture, and the patterns of Harris-Tweed whether we like it or not. The only question is, will it be made in a way that is advantageous to the weaver's, or will it be made by others while we fight among ourselves for a shrinking market in single width.

The Harris Tweed Association's vision in the 1970s was therefore, that power-woven double width unstamped imitation Harris Tweed was going to replace 'Orb' stamped single width genuine Harris Tweed. That being so, it was as well to cave in to the spinner's pressure. That was a panic decision by a weak H.T.A. committee.

A re-structuring committee was set up in 1974 comprising of the following people:

Rear Admiral David Dunbar Nesmith	Vice-Chairman of the HIDB
Mr Macaskill	Secretary of the HIDB

Mr Lane	HIDB
Mr J.S. Grant	HIDB and Chairman of H.T.A.
Mr Renfrew	Secretary of the H.T.A
Mr John MacLeod	Principal of Castle College & H.T.A
Mr Raymond MacDonald	Secretary T.G.W.U. & H.T.A
Mr William Macleod, Shawbost	Chairman of the Weavers Union
Mr Murray	Secretary of the Weavers Union
Mr Harris Mackenzie	Kenneth Mackenzie Wool Mills
Mr Bruce Burns	Clansman Holdings
Mr Murdo Morrison	Clansman Holdings
Mr Derrick Murray	Kenneth Macleod Ltd., Shawbost

The small producers were more or less out of the industry but Angus Macleod, Park-House, Marybank, as the last chairman of the small producers association, was asked to come on to the committee and he declined. Later on Kenneth Macleod of Seaforth Harris Tweed Ltd attended some meetings in order to find out what was being discussed, and when he was unable to attend later on Angus Macleod, Marybank went in his place.

Consultants were employed to prepare feasibility reports, 'Inbucon' (International Business Consultants) part of the plan was to set up one marketing organisation for the whole industry,

A great many meetings took place in the three years from 1973 to 1976. In the course of these meetings many things were raised and discussed and the press at the time will show how confused much of the thinking was and how far from reality was what reached the public. For instance, the rosy unrealistic picture that was given out to the public at the outset was that a new era of enlightened working conditions in large airy bright sheds in every village, or at least in every district, with pleasant social conditions as the weavers of the village were to be grouped together instead of being in poky wee sheds with no facilities.

The reality of the restructuring proposals had to be revealed towards the end of the discussions in 1976. It was revealed that only 36 double width power looms were needed to cope with peak production in the industry.

The mills refused to go along with the idea of sheds in each village operated by a weaving company controlled by the weavers. The mills insisted on being in full charge of the weaving in sheds and looms belonging to them and the weavers being their employees.

The final proposals were that each of the three mills in existence in 1976 would have a weaving shed each (in other words a weaving dept.). There was to be one shed in Shawbost, one in Ness, and one at Back. One does not need too much imagination or knowledge of Stornoway spinners to know that it would not be long until they would move their weaving dept. to their own premises for so-called convenience and efficiency, and who could stop them from relocating one of their own departments.

Information became available in the course of testing the modern double looms at Stornoway that the new looms were geared to 200 picks a minute and were working at 60% efficiency as Angus Macleod, Marybank pointed out in a letter to the Stornoway Gazette on 10th April 1976, 'a conservative estimate of the manpower needed to operate 36 looms in three sheds - on double shift might be about 60 persons'.

After a while therefore, when double width would replace single width as expected the rest of the weaving force would be redundant. Even the 60 workers in the new weaving sheds was to be mill employees, so in fact, the reality of the re-structuring prospects was the end of the cottage weaver.

How could Mr. J.A. Grant, the chairman of the public body that was set up to administer the Orb Trade Mark on behalf of the whole community of the Western Isles, state in the Town Hall in March 1976 (as already moved): 'The only question is, will it be made in a way that is advantageous to the weavers?' when he was advocating the end of the cottage weaving that the wise people who framed the amendment of 1934 wrote into the definition of the Trade Mark 'Hand woven by the Islanders at their own homes'. Obviously the re-structuring proposals were not thought out at the outset by the enthusiastic promoters (or were they?). The proposals could not be implemented without amending the Orb Trade Mark. Weavers from Shawbost and Bragar protested to the Board of Trade Weavers and others from Harris were said to have protested (or were about to protest to the Board of Trade).

Rev. Murdo Macrae, Kinloch, had negotiated special concessions for hand woven Harris Tweed in the USA, I think under the Lanham Act. What would happen if the industry went over to double width? No one was prepared to talk about the USA market.

Marketing: A separate sub-committee was set up on marketing and numerous meetings were held, but as everyone knows nothing came of it - despite the fact that it was in marketing, that the industry destroyed itself. I shall leave the subject at that and tell you that on Friday 23rd April 1976 the Harris Tweed Weavers voted on the restructuring proposals, and they gave a resounding 'No'. 94% of the weavers voted against - 497 against, 55 in favour - 652 votes. The weavers therefore saved the Harris Tweed Industry from being COMPLETELY, taken over by the Orb spinners and that was only 12 years after Lord Hunter gave full protection to the industry against outside mainland

yarn.

Double width failed: In 1976 when the restructuring proposals were thrown out by the weavers there were only three mills out of the six left in the industry. Kenneth Mackenzie Wool Mill Ltd had been taken over long before that by S.E.A.T. M/s Kenneth Macleod Ltd., Shawbost.

It was reported that the Highlands and Islands Development Board and others sustained and reorganised Clansman Holdings, which comprised of what was left of the old established Newalls Mills, Thomas Smith Wool Mills and Burns Wool Mills. It is a really strange thing that, not a single word was heard about double width cloth in Lewis for the next 9 or 10 years after the failure of 1976. J.S. Grant was wrong when he predicted that, 'the question is not whether double width tweed will be made or not. It will be made (he said) in the weight and texture and the patterns of Harris Tweed whether we like it or not'.

Did the Harris Tweed Association and the Highlands and Islands Development Board lean on the prospective imitators of Harris Tweed - or was the excursion into double width, after all, a complete failure - all participants gave it up -after struggling with it from 1963 to 1976 -13 years, during which time incalculable damage was done to the good name of Harris Tweed.

A 10 year prosperous period: The prophets of woe predicted the demise of single width Harris Tweed between 1960 and 1970. The only salvation for Harris Tweed, they said, was a switch to double width.

It is interesting that a top designer in Edinburgh, who knows and works in Harris Tweed, disagrees.

The reality is, that after 13 damaging years talking about double width the severely contracted industry had a most prosperous 10 year period after 1976.

Annual stamping figures:

1977	3,499,201
1978	4,055,536
1979	4,244,043
1980	4,395,204
1981	4,071,120
1982	3,611,099
1983	4,493,770
1984	5,362,066
1985	4,829,297
	38,561,336

About 4¼ million yards annual average over 10 years from 1976, for half the spinning capacity. Average over 9 years 4,280,148 yards.

If one is to consider that production was achieved by a contracted industry of less than half of the 1960s industry, the average annual production over the 10 year period was miles higher than anything ever achieved before.

Apparently the industry was not happy with that and in 1984 they got down to some strategic thinking according to Donald Mackay, Chief Executive of the Harris Tweed Association, as quoted in an article in the Free Press dated 16th October 1992.

Present proposals 1985: A study was carried out in 1985 by Leeds University and then a working party was subsequently set up. The H.T.A was the secretariat for the working party which took in: (1) The mills, (2) The H.T.A., (3) The Weavers Union, (4) Comhairle Nan Eilean (neither LEC or WIE are mentioned in the Free Press article).

Apparently the idea of the Leeds University study was to show what energy the weaver expended and the result was that a weaver expended 10% more energy than a miner: That was a strange comparison and I do not know what was the object of the exercise.

The next step was another study by the 1985 Woollen Industrial Research Association in 1985 in order to modernise the Hattersley loom by adapting it to a rapier system. That exercise was to cost £1000, 000. Eventually W.I.R.A. failed.

In 1986, the industry agreed to a request from John Griffiths a Sunderland based engineer to be allowed to design a new loom from scratch (according to the press).

In 1988 the Bonas-Griffiths new single rapier loom prototype was ready and it came to Lewis for testing in 1988. It had bicycle type pedals and it was reported that it was easy to pedal. The implications for the Orb mark had to be cleared because the edge of the cloth was different. The Orb mark is now registered in 38 countries.

By 1988 there was a decline in the stamping figures to around 2¼ million yards, and presumably that was because of the world wide depression we hear so much about.

Double width foot operated loom - 1990: Once again after 14 years since 1976 a meeting was held with 40-50 weavers in order to discuss the possibility of developing the new Bonas-Griffiths single width rapier loom into a double width and it was said that the consensus was that, 'If it was a double width loom that it took to turn the industry round, then it should be tried'. That does not sound like a deep consideration of all the issues involved and a cautious decision by a well informed meeting. If it is the double width that is needed, (to turn round the industry), if it is, the implications are that it is the lack of double width that is holding the industry down. History does not leave that out.

In 1990 John Griffiths was asked to build a new double width foot operated loom.

In 1991, the new loom was ready for testing and Lewis Weavers went to Sunderland to test the loom.

In 1992 the first double width loom arrived at the Castle-College Stornoway.

H.I.E., by this time, had taken the initiative that double width looms were expected to cost £12,000.

Closing remarks:

A new Bonas-Griffiths foot operated double width loom is being developed. It is a bicycle type movement. The tests are expected about September. It is expected to cost about £15,000 including V.A.T. Naturally it needs a large weaving shed. A European package of financial aid is being prepared. The impact on USA market is being studied.

Single width cloth has a tariff concession, entering USA. Double width beams are heavy. Traditionally there were 2 lengths on each beam but there is talk of 3 lengths on this one.

3 double length = 6 single width @ 80 lbs each = 480 lbs = 4½ + cut beam

2 double length = 4 single width @ 80 lbs each = 320 lbs = 2¾ + cut beam

1 double length = 2 single width @ 80 lbs each = 160 lbs = 1½ + cut beam

Weight of beam alone.

Question: Considering the weight of beams and woven tweed is it practical for one person to operate double width weaving?

If not will this lead to concentrating weavers in large sheds?

If large weaving sheds come in, will the next step be a demand by the mills for the weaving to be carried out in weaving dept. of each mill?

[ends]

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

Author: Angus Macleod

Date: 1993

Original document title: Harris Tweed

Location in physical archive: Series D, Files 1-14, Section 14

NRAS reference: NRAS 4336/1/4/15/2

© Angus Macleod Archive