

HH 33 (not previously transcribed) Topic **Lord Leverhulme projects in Harris**

Kenneth Campbell recounts working in Obbe when he was young at the time of Lord Leverhulme's developments in Obbe and the rest of his Harris estate.

Kenneth stayed with Catriona, Trinag a' Ghobha, a sister of Donald Roderick who was a blacksmith in Obbe. He was a son of the grandson of Gobha Na Hearadh. There was another brother Donald who was a blacksmith in Amhuinsuidhe and Mairi. Catriona had two daughters, one who was still alive and living in Fort William at the time of this recording (early 80's). Her name was Barabal or Babag. She was at that time at home with her mother and there was another daughter Morag who was not very strong. Kenneth's uncle Aonghas Mhata stayed there too.

Kenneth got a job at the Rubha Mor (quarry) where the gaffer was Iain Sheonaidh Taillear from Strond who was very good to them. They dragged stones from the quarry on the hill which was between the shore today and the Sruth?? It was a large stone quarry and there were no lorries, just large boxes which would carry a lot - with an engine on them. They'd drag them out to the pier which was being extended. There were a couple of houses on the other side of the quarry, one was Ciorstaidh Alasdair's whose son, at the time of this interview, was still living in Northton. Kenneth met a son of his who was married in Barvas.

They started to build a lighthouse at the back of Aird an t-Sruth. A number of workers would leave the pier by boat to get to the light-house to work. There were a few boys from Northton and ones from the Bays. Ruairidh Beag Mhurchaidh was in charge. One morning on leaving the pier two boys put out oars, one from Northton the other from the Bays. When the oars went out Ruairidh said: (as quoted in HH 32) *An uair a shuidheachadh an Taobh Tuath 's e tri teaghlaichean a chaidh ann, a bheartaicheadh each ann an cairt. Agus an-diugh, chaneil tri teaghlaichean ann a chuireas ramh ann am bac*".

i.e. "When Northton was established there were three families who could harness a horse to a cart. Today there aren't three families that can put an oar in a boat." It was Bays peopled that settled in Northton and from the time they could walk children in the Bays would be messing about in boats but when they went to Northton it was all about horses and carts and they lost their seamanship skills.

When the lighthouse was done they returned to the Rubha Mor. Kenneth went home for Spring (croft work).

On returning to An t-Ob he had work on the road that was being built going out to Loch Langabhat. The workers lived in 3 huts. Kenneth stayed in the one closest to Obbe. After the work closed down Eoghainn Fhearchair lived in that hut for years till he built the house he's in now. That was Hut No.1 and 40 men lived in it. Hut No.2 was out where the magazine was and No. 3 was further out at a place they called An t-Sron. All the huts were full of workers. The work was easier than at Rubha Mor.

Kenneth remembered working at the road where he was responsible for keeping the crusher topped up with coal and water. One Monday morning he woke very early and lit the fire on the crusher and filled it with water. Before anyone came out who appeared but Mr Cattanach who was a surveyor in Tarbert before Lord Leverhulme came to Harris. He was a County Engineer in Harris for Invernesshire. He checked the pressure guage on the roller which showed the pressure of the steam and it showed it could start anytime. There still wasn't anyone about - it was a Berneray man, Donnchadh Bantrach, on the Rubha Mor that blew the whistle at 8am. A little while after Cattanach left his brother who lived in Eoghainn Fhearchair's house in Obbe appeared and started chatting to Tormod Sheonaidh, the gaffer. He asked Kenneth, who had now had his breakfast, if he had seen his brother. Kenneth said he had and that the man had blessed the day for him and checked the gauges and left. Cattanach put his hand in his pocket and took out two pound coins and gave them to Kenneth because he had been out so early and got the tension, the roller and crusher all ready for use. After that he got called on to do errands for Cattanach as the man felt he could trust him. He got on well with him.

Kenneth enjoyed the work which was pleasant enough. However, there were sad occasions too. In his hut a boy from Manish got sick with meningitis. Two other workers who were from Manish and related to

him, Aonghas Ruadh and Aonghas a' Ghreusaiche sat with him for two nights in the hut. His sister who worked in Simon's shop in Obbe came up at night to see him. The doctor eventually sent him home to Manish where he died after just two nights at home. He was a clever boy who was in his 2nd or 3rd year in Portree school. There was a hut-keeper to look after the huts and the workers but there was no special treatment. There was a district nurse in Obbe.

There were 50 to 60 men working in Obbe itself and women too. They worked on the pier and the gutting house. There were about 5 crews. The girls made up the kipper boxes in the kipper house. As soon as they left school they got the chance to learn any trade they wanted. A labourer got 9d an hour, underage (18) got 6d or 7d an hour. Obbe was as good a place as any in the islands then for work.

It was at this time they built the houses on Ferry Road. There were carpenters from Lewis, Uist and Harris. One of them was a MacSween from Miavag - he was self-employed. There were Uist and Lewis stonemasons and Iain Aonghas a' Tailleir and his brother Somhairle. There was work for anyone with a trade. They were building houses at Kintulavig and they were working round Tarbert. They were building a road near where Harris House is today and were going to build houses there. That was about the time Lord Leverhulme died. They had just built the road itself when word of his death came. There was a lot of work going on at Borge Lodge, ones from Northton were working there. The gaffer who was from Northton was one of the "Saighdearain", Eoghainn MacLennan from Luskentyre worked there as a carpenter. Angaidh from Plocrapool and Aonghas Mhor Chalum from Scadabay worked at Borge Lodge. The first ones who went there got on, they'd be gangers or gaffers, but it was a shame when he died all the work stopped. Some of the houses were finished and people moved into them but others were left in bits. The houses in Kintulavig and Glen which had been started first were finished off and people moved into them.

Kenneth worked with a St Kilda family on the Rubha Mor, William MacDonald and his brother Finlay. He took his wife to Harris and they were in a hut on the Rubha Mor. They were waiting for a house and they didn't get one, or if they did it wasn't finished so they moved from Obbe to Stornoway and, according to Kenneth, he has a grandchild married in Aridhbhuich and two daughters in Ness. That was Uilleam MacDonald, a big, strong St Kildan man.

Cattanach, the surveyor in Tarbert, had a 10 year contract from Invernesshire council and so many more years from Lord Leverhulme. He got compensation from the estate of houses and property which he sold and made a good profit from.

The MacFishery Co. which worked the drifters and trawlers that came into Obbe and had a carrier to Fleetwood - it all stopped. There was a piece of that road out of Finsbay to Obbe, where there was going to be 16 feet or so of gravel on one side of it where they were going to run a light railway. It was going to take the fish to Ard Finsbay where they were curing, there was a curing station there and it was Lord Leverhulme's vision to have the pier there to make it easier for the carrier that would be taking the fish to Fleetwood. It was easier to get in there than into Obbe.

The stone for the Ferry Road houses came from a hill that was where the road goes down to the pier, you can see it is quite flat there today but there was a hill between that an Aird an t-Sruth. That was where the big quarry was. Stone came in from the road when it went as far as the Sron, stone for the road to Finsbay. The quarry was so big they were sending stone to Obbe. The wood came ashore at Stornoway, there were always lorries on the move with wood. There were wood stores in Obbe but Kenneth can't recall any wood coming in by sea. The pier wasn't half ready when Lord Leverhulme died. He intended it to be a big pier and that there would be a lock on the Sruth so that the Sruth would be made suitable for getting into it on the tide.

Where the school is today was built by Lord Leverhulme as a hotel. The old schoolhouse was over on the Laimhrig, past the pier road. According to Kenneth it was still there when he recorded this conversation and he thought it had been divided into two, one part having been purchased by a St Kilda man (Donald ?) a Church of Scotland missionary.

The hotel was bought unfinished for use as a schoolhouse by Invernesshire council. There were big

arguments about moving the schoolhouse from the Laimhrig to the middle of Obbe where it is today, concerning the Strond children who came there. Borrisdale had been settled but their children went to Rodel school. However, the County Board in Lochmaddy wanted to move the school even though the Strond folk weren't happy as the children would have to walk further. Rev Robert of the Free Church was on the School Management Committee and he attended these meetings but the school was moved nevertheless.

Kenneth went home to Scadabay once a fortnight. There were lorries moving workers who came from all parts, as far as Tarbert, Ardhasaig, Rhenigadale and Ardvourlie. The workers from South Harris got home each weekend and those north of Kyle Stockinish once a fortnight. He'd go to Northton to visit. If you were staying in the huts or in lodgings they'd expect a young man like Kenneth to help after 5pm with peats and attending to crops. He used to go to visit Lachlann who was an old man then. His wife had died before Lord Leverhulme's work began but, of their children, Lizzie was at home with her father and Coinneach worked in Northton (as little as he could according to Kenneth). The boys (his brothers?) took him to Canada but sent him home after a while. Lachlann would ask about the croft in Scadabay.

** Lachlann Campbell from Scadabay was 43 years old when he gave evidence to the Napier Commission in 1883**