

YESTERDAY'S NEWS.6

TIREE'S ROADS (1)

After the recent road works on the island, I thought it might be interesting to look at how things were done in the old days.

The Duke wrote to the Tiree chamberlain in 1802 complaining that: 'I gave you a copy of the Act of Parliament [the 1800 *Act for repairing the Highways and Bridges in the Shire of Argyll*] ... from which you will see what the tenants and cottars are bound to do. I doubt if any man in Tyree has been called upon to do that important work. At any rate, you must in future call all of them out regularly.' These were the so-called Statute Labour Roads, where islanders could work instead of pay.

The 1878 Roads and Bridges (Scotland Act) made things more formal, appointing a Road Board to manage road building and maintenance in their county, paid for from the rates. In 1882, islanders were not happy with their new Board: 'Tiree: Mr McBain, the inspector, arrived here last week, and the present state of some of our roads, especially the pond on the main road at Heanish [a low-lying area to the west of the Home known as *Mòinteach Thomaidh* or *Àit' a' Chullaich*], must have been an edifying sight to him' (*Oban Times and Argyllshire Advertiser*, 18 November 1882, 4).

Three years later, things had got worse—or at least more militant: 'At the meeting held in Bough Church of [the Land League, an association fighting for better rights for crofters and cottars] on the 24th December, it was resolved not to pay road-money until the roads were better repaired. The roads here are in a bad state, and require immediate attention. The present state of things would never do' (*Oban Times and Argyllshire Advertiser*, 7 February 1885, 6).

Argyll County Council was established in 1890. The following year, it was reported:

'THE PUBLIC ROADS

At last, the County Council are allowing that they exist, by getting the roads at Ballyphetrish and Ballyphuil put in good order. Those parts of the roads were all along until now repudiated as public roads under the jurisdiction and management of the Road Trust and the County Council, but through the energy and determination of our representatives, the Council are spending a considerable amount of money upon them, and for the future they will no doubt be maintained in good repair' (*Oban Telegraph and West Highland Chronicle*, 2 October 1891, 3).

The Tiree road network was developed in bits and pieces: 'The new road along Reef Farm is now open for traffic. It is a very substantial piece of workmanship, and renders vehicular traffic easy. We hope to see this road extended to meet the Balemartine Road, as between the two an almost impassable piece of rough ground intervenes' (*Highland News*, 2 March 1901, 12).

In 1816 the Scottish engineer John Loudon McAdam had published a road design that rapidly became the gold standard. A base of large rocks was covered with gravel and then bound together with fine slag. The whole was raised above ground level to help it drain. This was the famous 'macadam road'.

'Mr MacBain, road surveyor of the Mull district, has paid a visit to the Island, in company with Mr Burns, who superintends the works done by the Congested Districts Board in the Highlands [the main funder of roads in country areas]. The inspector, it appears, is much pleased with the excellent roads Mr MacBain has constructed on the Island. The Reef road will be of much benefit to the people of the west end of the Island, and it will be a good road when the gravel hardens. A large roller has been at work on it for some days past' (*Oban Times and Argyllshire Advertiser*, 16 March 1901).