

when Young's patent on the process had run out, other operators moved in and the distillation of shale was carried out on a vast scale. It was discovered that the addition of refined peat tar would greatly improve the burning of this shale oil and the operators would take all the peat tar they could get.

However, Paul's aim all along had been to produce paraffin from peat. This involved taking the peat tar and refining it in much the same way as, nowadays, crude oil from the North Sea is refined to make the products with which we are familiar - petrol, diesel paraffin, etc. Paul developed a refinery on the site of Caunter's original works and as a result produced a saleable lighting paraffin oil which was sold in Glasgow under the brand name 'Lignole' at a competitive price. Refining also produced pitch which was suitable for roofing and as a coal substitute and finally candle wax. It is said that the first paraffin wax candles burned in the Houses of Commons were produced from Hebridean peat tar and burned with a bright, odourless flame. When in operation, the Lewis Chemical Works were known locally as the Candle Works. While Paul was developing the Chemical Works and the refinery he was developing a larger refinery at Garrabost, some 8 miles from the Lewis Chemical Works. This was the site of the Brick Works established by Matheson in 1844 to make bricks and tiles from the abundant natural deposits of clay in the area. The extensive covered sheds provided a suitable site for the expensive refinery although an extension had to be built in the glen behind the Garrabost Mill to site stills as there was not enough water at the brickworks. Water was essential for the operation of the stills and as a raw material.

Demand for the products was high; the markets for the peat tar seemed broad and endless as were the tracts of peatland providing the raw material for the process itself. All seemed to be set for James Matheson to make another fortune and realise his hopes for the island and its inhabitants.

In 1862 Paul suddenly left the works. Whether he was frustrated at the lack of progress and the vagaries of the weather or the workforce or his own thwarted ambitions is not known. Perhaps he was fleeing from a ladyfriend; the oral tradition of Garrabost suggests this may be the case. The most likely reason is the discovery of crude oil in the U.S.A. and the subsequent import of paraffin which, within three years, was to bring crisis to the paraffin industry. Paul, who was a rising star in the communication of matters scientific, including energy technology, probably saw the writing on the



- 1 Peat banks. The peat was cut, dried and stacked in the same way as for domestic peat. Cutting took place from May to September although the Works was in operation continuously.
- 2 Tramway. Over three miles of tramway were laid through the moor. Originally, the small wagons were man-handled but later on a steam winch was used. There is evidence that ponies were used at Garrabost.
- 3 Canal. This was used to transport peat to Caunter's original works. Parts of this still exist.
- 4 River Creed.
- 5 Lewis Chemical Works.
- 6 Cartway. The peat tar was allowed to cool in tar pits and then taken by horse and cart to Garrabost.
- 7 Stream.
- 8 Bridge site.
- 9 Car park with memorial plaque incorporating tramway line and Garrabost brick.
- 10 Creed Lodge. Donald Morison, builder, operational foreman and chronicler of the Lewis Chemical Works lived here.
- 11 Caunter's original works.



Recycled tramway line used as a fence post

For centuries the peat lands of the Hebrides have been essential for man to exist and thrive, providing the main source of energy for heating the home and for cooking.

The last twenty years have seen a major decline in the cutting of domestic peat with changing lifestyles and expectations. Over the years attempts have been made to exploit the vast peat lands of the Hebrides and the North of Scotland; as recently as 1977, plans were being considered for a peat-fired power station in Stornoway, but to no avail. 150 years ago, as with today, the search for new sources of energy was under way and led to a remarkable attempt to develop the peat lands on a major scale - the day of the peat had come.

Published by:
Dr R. A. Whiteford, 10 Graham Avenue,
Garrabost, Isle of Lewis. HS2 0PY

Printed by:
Shore Print & Design Ltd, 2 Inaclete Road, Stornoway, Isle of Lewis HS1 2BR