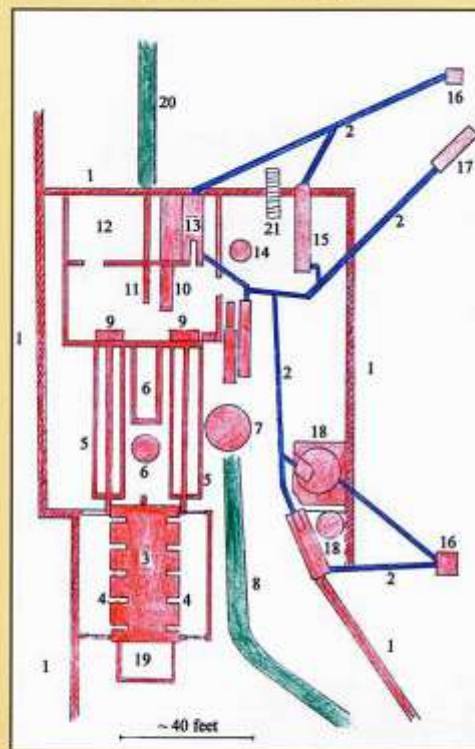


4 wall and left to pursue a brilliant career in the world of pharmaceuticals.

Paul's departure signalled a change in the development and running of the Lewis Chemical Works: business management practice, commercial venturism and scientific research were to take on new meanings. James MacFadyen was a brick-maker at Garrabost who was working his notice due to constant insobriety, fired by Paul just before Paul left. By dint of flattery, blarney and guile, MacFadyen was appointed chemist, with Henry Caunter elevated to the position of general manager. Caunter, although an enthusiastic and ambitious amateur, had little business enterprise or leadership qualities and was easily deceived and manipulated by the wily MacFadyen. It took a while for the pair to figure out how to make saleable lighting oil, in the process causing bad pollution of the fishing and shoreline of Broad Bay. MacFadyen soon realised that there was a ready market for the product on his doorstep - the local villages around Broad Bay - which could be supplied on a cash-only, no-records basis. The problem for MacFadyen was that the crude tar was being sold directly from the Creed Works to the markets on the mainland - as an anti-fouling agent, as axle grease and for the shale oil industry: only part of the tar was refined at Garrabost. MacFadyen proceeded to sabotage the markets and divert all the crude tar to Garrabost. The grease market was scuppered by adulterating the tar with water. Next, MacFadyen convinced the impressionable Caunter that refining the tar improved its anti-fouling properties and backed up his assertion with bogus results from contrived experiments. The resulting pitch that was sent to Liverpool was unfit as an anti-fouling agent and orders were stopped enabling MacFadyen to produce more paraffin for his local markets. It suited Caunter not to send the tar to the Shale works - he was spending large sums of James Matheson's money on an improved refinery for the unrealistic objective of extracting dyes from peat. This would be redundant if all the tar was sold. MacFadyen encouraged Caunter in this project as it kept Caunter away from the Garrabost refinery: he even interfered with Caunter's experimenting to give the impression that results were positive. MacFadyen was eventually found out and in 1869 he left and with his large family emigrated to America, leaving his brother in charge at Garrabost. The Lewis Chemical Works carried on until 1874 when it was shut down.

How did this apparently chaotic enterprise manage to survive for so long? James Matheson, who was in his declining years, was a hands-off proprietor, preferring

Ground plan of the Lewis Chemical Works showing the brick foundations, gas flues and tramways



- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| 1 retaining wall | 12 store |
| 2 gas flues | 13 steam boiler |
| 3 kilns | 14 grease mill |
| 4 ash pits | 15 lime furnace |
| 5 seats for condensers | 16 stack |
| 6 receiving and settling tanks | 17 gas burner |
| 7 vat | 18 evaporating boilers |
| 8 tramway to tar pits | 19 lime store |
| 9 condensers | 20 tramway to peat banks (continues over the kilns) |
| 10 steam engine | 21 stair |
| 11 drum for rope hauling machine | |

5 to leave the running of his businesses to his managers which allowed Caunter to pursue his own interests rather than discharge his responsibilities. The refinery at Garrabost, where MacFadyen was in charge, gave employment to a number of people at a time when paid work was scarce. Perhaps he was some sort of Robin Hood character dispersing part of the proceeds from his clandestine commercial venture to the needy locals who would be only too keen to keep him in post - one worker was actually dismissed for trying to expose the dishonesty.

The Lewis Chemical Works was important. Although its commercial success cannot be gauged, it provided many islanders with desperately needed employment for nearly twenty years. We are lucky that this intriguing tale of Victorian enterprise survives, chronicled in 1897 by the works foreman, Donald Morison of Stornoway, who was also the builder of the Works and who successfully developed and kept them running after Paul left. His journal tells a story full of incident, drama, comedy, farce and pathos, inhabited by what appear to be variously scoundrels, buffoons, gentry, academics and Hebridean heroes. Dr Paul presented papers on the development of the Lewis Chemical Works to the British Association and to the Society of Arts although, in later life, he appears to have chosen to forget his time in Lewis.

What remains of the Lewis Chemical Works? A large part of the Garrabost brickworks remains standing: a substantial building built, naturally, of Garrabost brick. The miles of tramway line were recycled as fence posts and can be seen around the Marybank area of Stornoway. There are echoes in various geographical locations. Peat banks near the site of the works which are cut for domestic fuel are still referred to as the paraffin banks. The corner of the main road at the Cabarfeidh Hotel and opposite the house where Henry Caunter lived is known as Caunter's Corner. At Garrabost, there are places called Garadh Pol (Paul's enclosure) and Buail Macphadhain (MacFadyen's enclosure) as well as the Paraffin Road leading to Bayble and the nearby hill of Cnoc nan oil.

The story of the Lewis Chemical Works remains an important episode in the history of Lewis: more a tale of toil and strife, of success and failure, of monies lost and made, of the adventure of enterprise but, above all, of man's quest for something new to improve himself and society that seems to drive the exploitation of natural resources.