

GLEN APPIN

OF SCOTLAND

since 1903



THE STORY OF
HARRIS TWEED



®

Harris Tweed

THE HISTORY OF *HARRIS TWEED*

For centuries the inhabitants of the Outer Hebrides of Scotland, on the islands of Lewis, Harris, Uist and Barra, have handwoven a beautiful and intricate cloth the world knows simply as *Harris Tweed*. In Gaelic it is called 'Clò-Mòr' or 'Big Cloth'.

Originally the handmade cloth was woven by crofters for their own use or sold at local markets. It was ideal protection against the colder climate of the North of Scotland.

By the end of the 18th century finished handmade cloth was exported to the Scottish mainland and traded along with other commodities produced by the islanders such as goat and deer hides.



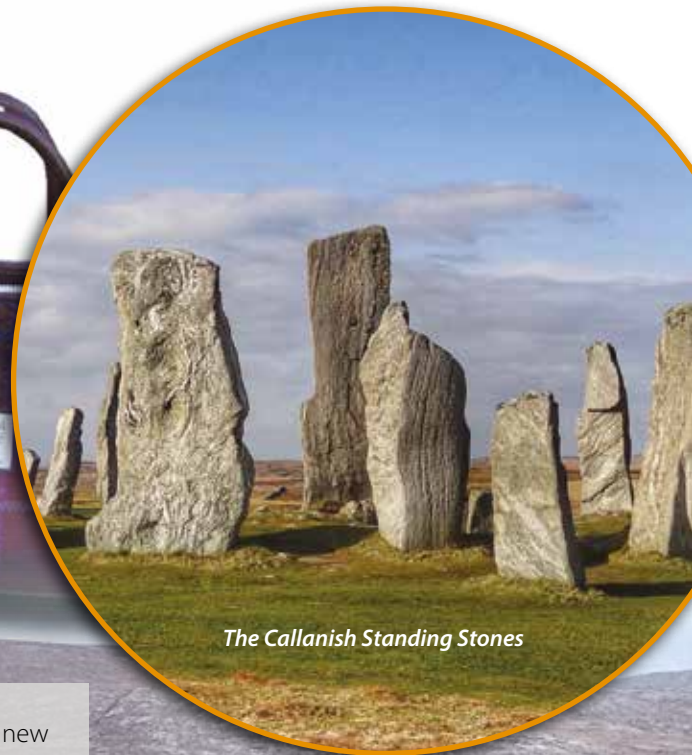
The original name for the cloth was 'tweel', Scots for twill, because it is woven in a twilled rather than a plain pattern. Legend has it that around 1830 a London merchant received a letter from a company in Hawick about some 'tweels'. The London merchant had difficulty reading the handwriting and assumed the cloth must have taken its name from the River Tweed which flows through the Scottish Borders. Subsequently, the goods were advertised as Tweed, and the name has remained ever since.

In 1846 Lady Catherine Dunmore, the owner of the North Harris Estate, sent two sisters from Harris to Paisley to be trained as weavers. They became known as The Paisley Sisters and produced higher quality woven cloth than anyone else on the islands. The Countess commissioned the sisters to weave lengths of tweed in the Murray family tartan. The finished cloth was made up into jackets for the gamekeepers and ghillies on her estate. Lady Catherine saw how hard-wearing the jackets were and began to promote the tweed as a fashionable cloth for hunting and sporting wear. It soon became the fabric of choice for the aristocracy, including members of Queen Victoria's inner circle. Demand had been established for this high quality '*Harris Tweed*' and merchants from Edinburgh to London were keen to supply the privileged classes with the handwoven cloth.

Over the following years the *Harris Tweed* industry grew and grew and by 1906 it became clear steps had to be taken to protect the good name of *Harris Tweed* from imitations. In 1909 The Harris Tweed Association was formed and an application was filed to register the well-known *Harris Tweed* Orb and Maltese Cross with the words *Harris Tweed* underneath. It was registered in 1910 and stamping began in 1911. In 1934 the trademark definition was altered to allow machine-spun yarn and confine all processes to the islands. This also made sure that mainland-spun yarn, imported to make cloth, could not be Orb stamped and called *Harris Tweed*. Despite some initial difficulties with yarn supply the popularity of *Harris Tweed* continued to grow leading to an industry peak of 7.6 million yards in 1966.



Amhuinnsuidhe Castle, Isle of Harris – Built in 1865 for the 7th Earl of Dunmore – the son of Lady Catherine



The Callanish Standing Stones

In the 1990s the industry set out to modernise itself by producing a new double width loom, re-training weavers, improving quality standards and marketing a new, wider, softer tweed. In 1993 The Harris Tweed Authority took over from the Harris Tweed Association with the passing of an Act of Parliament to further protect the cloth. The Act states *Harris Tweed* must be made from 100% pure new wool dyed, spun, handwoven at the home of the weaver and finished in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland. The Act ensures all cloth certified with the *Harris Tweed* Orb symbol complies with this definition and is genuine *Harris Tweed* – the world's only commercially produced handwoven tweed.

Luskentyre Beach, Harris

By 2006 production of *Harris Tweed* was in decline and the industry was in trouble. K M Harris Tweed Group was split and sold off. Kenneth Mackenzie Ltd was sold to a Yorkshire textile manufacturer and the idle mill of Kenneth Macleod (Shawbost) Ltd was sold to a group of locals. The Shawbost mill was re-equipped and opened as Harris Tweed Hebrides in December 2007.



Harris Tweed Hebrides introduced vibrant new colours and patterns and led the resurrection of *Harris Tweed*. Today the industry, which had dropped to a total annual production of just under 500,000 metres in 2009, is in good health. Only three mills remain. Harris Tweed Hebrides is the largest mill by a considerable margin and offers many colours and the ability to produce new patterns for customers. Carloway is the smallest mill, and the only mill on the island to provide tours, and Kenneth Mackenzie Ltd is a busy mill but offers a limited choice of around twelve classic patterns. The demand for *Harris Tweed*, for the first time, is being driven by the accessory market and not jackets and the fashion industry. However Vivienne Westwood and other design houses continue to support the *Harris Tweed* industry. The famous *Harris Tweed* label can be seen on a vast range of products from dog collars to hip flasks and the cloth is growing in popularity and recognised the world over.

PRODUCING THE CLOTH

The creation of *Harris Tweed* begins with fleeces of pure virgin wool. Most of the wool comes from the mainland but islanders still shear local sheep to add to the mix. The scoured (clean) wool is delivered in bales to the mills.

Harris Tweed is available in many vibrant patterns and colours because the wool is dyed in base colours and practically any shade of yarn can be produced by blending the coloured wool. These intermingled yarns make *Harris Tweed* unlike any other fabric. Other fabrics are made from yarn dyed in just single, solid colours. It is this unique mixing process which gives *Harris Tweed* its extraordinary richness.



Blended wool



Wool waiting to be spun



One of the spinning aisles

The freshly coloured and undyed white wools are weighed in predetermined proportions and then thoroughly blended by hand to exact recipes to obtain the correct hue. It is then carded between mechanical, toothed rollers which tease and mix the fibres thoroughly before it is separated. The soft, fragile 'slubbings' are then spun to give it maximum strength for weaving. The spun yarn is wound onto bobbins. Next over 1400 individual warp threads or 'ends' (vertical) are gathered in long hanks in a very specific order and wound onto large beams ready to be delivered, together with yarn for the weft (left to right), to the weavers. All *Harris Tweed* is handwoven on a treadle loom at each self-employed weaver's home, either on a Griffith's double width rapier loom for 99% of the industry's cloth, which is then sold by the *Harris Tweed* mills, or on a Hattersley single width loom by the independent producers who work on their own, selling their own patterns. The weaver will 'tie in' by knotting and feeding each end of yarn through the eyelets of their loom's heddles in a specific order and then begin to weave, fixing any mistakes or breakages that occur until completed.

The tweed then returns to the mill in its 'greasy state' and here it passes through the hands of darners who inspect the cloth and correct any flaws.

Once ready the cloth is finished. Dirt, oil and other impurities are removed by scouring in soapy water, then milling the fabric before it is dried, steamed, pressed and cropped.

The final process is the examination by the independent Harris Tweed Authority which visits the mills weekly, before application of their Orb Mark Trademark which is ironed on to the fabric as a seal of authenticity.



The Harris Tweed Authority's stamp



A beam ready for a weaver



A weaver at work



Steamed and pressed cloth

GLEN APPIN OF SCOTLAND AND HARRIS TWEED



Glen Appin of Scotland, under its former name Bulloch Cowell & Company, offered customers *Harris Tweed* headwear as early as the 1970s. In 2012 we began producing *Harris Tweed* handbags and purses in just six classic patterns. The initial order sold very quickly and we added more colourful patterns. Today Glen Appin of Scotland offers a large range of *Harris Tweed* bags, accessories and clothing and the company is one of the biggest *Harris Tweed* customers in the UK.

We buy *Harris Tweed* cloth from Kenneth Mackenzie Ltd for our Gents headwear. The rest of the cloth, for every other product, is purchased from Harris Tweed Hebrides as they offer a very wide choice of colours and patterns and work with us to develop new ones. We visit Harris Tweed Hebrides' Shawbost mill in Lewis at least once a year to spend time in the Pattern Room working on new colours for the following season.

We are proud to be a big supporter of the *Harris Tweed* industry and the island community which produces the cloth.



HARRIS TWEED LABELS

In 2019 The Harris Tweed Authority re-designed their famous labels. They are now a square shape, rather than rectangular, they are clearer and they have a faint herringbone pattern to the background.

Many products will continue to show the old labels for some time. This is partly because production is planned many months in advance and also to use up stocks of the old labels. Both label designs guarantee the cloth is genuine, handwoven *Harris Tweed*.

HARRIS TWEED – INTERESTING FACTS:

- There are 3 mills – Harris Tweed Hebrides, Kenneth Mackenzie Ltd and Carloway.
- All the mills are situated in Lewis but the self-employed weavers work from home in both Lewis and Harris.
- Lewis and Harris are in fact one large island and are not separated by water.
- The Harris Tweed Authority is the legal guardian of *Harris Tweed* and the Orb Trademark. Inspectors from the Authority carry out checks and stamp each piece of finished *Harris Tweed* cloth.
- The cloth inspectors from The Harris Tweed Authority use a regular electric domestic iron to iron on an Orb transfer to the back of the cloth showing it has been certified.
- Only products which are made with genuine *Harris Tweed* and adhere to the strict Harris Tweed Authority guidelines can show the famous *Harris Tweed* label.
- Some island roads are narrow and a challenge for the large mill lorries delivering the steel beams, with warped lengths, to the weavers' homes and then collecting the cloth to return to the mills for finishing.
- Weavers leave a white bag, with empty yarn tubes, at the door to their weaving shed to show the lorry driver cloth is ready for collection.
- There are presently about 240 self-employed weavers. Some weave cloth from beams issued to them by the mills and others are independent producers and sell their cloth directly to the public.
- An experienced weaver can weave about 25m of cloth each day.
- The natural oils in the cloth make *Harris Tweed* water resistant.
- Vivienne Westwood's logo is remarkably similar to the *Harris Tweed* Orb Trademark. In the 1990s The Harris Tweed Authority reached an agreement with the British fashion designer which allowed her to keep using her logo. She has been a big supporter of *Harris Tweed* for a long time and continues to be a valued customer.
- Around 70% of overall output of *Harris Tweed* cloth is exported.
- The biggest export market for *Harris Tweed* cloth is Japan.



Harris Tweed Hebrides' Shawbost Mill



GLEN APPIN OF SCOTLAND LIMITED

6-8 Bessemer Drive, East Kilbride G75 0QX

Tel: + 44 (0)141 445 0095 Fax: + 44 (0)141 440 5824

Email: info@glenappin.com

www.glenappin.com



Designed and printed by Prontaprint, Edinburgh