

THA HISTORY



1970 Tobermory Harbour was remote and unregulated. There were no pontoons, no marked fairway, no visitor moorings. Local moorings were free but laid randomly. Parking space adjacent to the harbour was limited in a town built for herring boats and ashore, horses and carts. Summer visitors sailed elegantly into the Bay before finally scrambling up vertical wooden ladders to access the Main Street.

Life revolved around the Mishnish pier. Ferries linked Tobermory to Oban, to relatives on Coll and Tiree, to Barra and South Uist and intermittently to Mallaig. Glenline Coasters and traditional puffers berthed regularly, carrying coal for warmth or tar and stone chips to maintain the many miles of single track island roads. Fishing boats landed quantities of fish, scallops and lobsters. Every boat berthing attracted a crowd with willing helpers to unload.

1983 brought dreadful news. Caledonian MacBrayne announced that the Mishnish Pier was unsafe. The companies' solution; close the Pier, remove the rusty, neglected, steel extension and return to the stone structure built in 1862. Finally, terminate all ferry links to Tobermory. The community had other ideas fighting a heroic campaign of humorous civil disobedience and employing commando tactics to disrupt the government owned company to 'save our pier'. A home win and the result was a new pier extension completed in 1985.

Tobermory defends its pier with might and mock mines

By JOHN EASTON

PARA HANDY would probably have approved and if Douge was here he would tell you himself.

The folk of Tobermory on Mull yesterday continued their battle with the nationalised company Caledonian MacBrayne over the future of the town's pier. They enlisted a variety of "weapons" for the latest salvo.

Some 200 residents with placards and petition forms assembled for the proceedings as the Cal-Mac ferry, Columba, headed for the town en route to Coll and Tiree.

The ship herself, as if forewarned, stopped engines some distance from the pier in the shelter

of Calve Island. There was a momentary apprehension that she might run aground, but she didn't.

Launches came out to meet the passengers, who ran into unusual island hospitality. By chove, no less than a few floating mines, a shark's fin, and a submarine periscope that kept going round and round.

About 30 bewildered voyagers were landed ashore from the Columba in full view of the end-of-the-pier show.

The mines, made from black polythene sheets, bobbed about with nasty looking spikes protruding. The "shark" appeared demented, and the dummy

submarine tracked it all with apparent glee.

Then came a blast like a depth charge going off. Someone, said the organisers, let off a tank of compressed air which thundered upwards. Apparently there was a diver down below in the briny.

"It was all peaceful stuff," said the Rev. Alan Taylor, chairman of the Tobermory save-the-pier committee, last night. "We certainly do not want to break the law, but we can promise more picturesque action in future."

The pier is now officially closed to vessels more than 70ft. in length, which includes the Cal-Mac ferry. Yesterday's shot across the bows delayed the Colum-

ba's passage by up to an hour as passengers, including an 84-year-old woman, were taken to the pier by small tender.

Mr Taylor said defiantly: "We will not be content until Tobermory pier is completely repaired. We have heard all sorts of figures ranging from £300,000 to half-a-million pounds. Even if it were the latter, it is much less than it costs to build a mile of new road in these parts.

"Cal-Mac is a nationalised company and there must be money available if it asks for it. In terms of the financial budget of the country, repairs at Tobermory would amount to a mere drop in the ocean."



Protesters pack the pier that MacBrayne's claim is no longer safe.

Coincidentally in 1983 a letter arrived from the Highlands and Islands Development Board asking who represented the Tobermory harbour users. A public meeting was held and the Tobermory Harbour Committee was born. Elected at the first meeting, in the Mishnish Hotel, on the 27th April 1983 were; B. Swinbanks, Chair, R. Turner, Treasurer, D. Mountain, Secretary, plus representatives from the The Coastguard, The Yacht Club, The Sub Aqua Club, Professional Fishermen, Hotels and Shops. A representative from the Community Council was added, Jean Whittaker became secretary and the name was changed to the Tobermory Harbour and Fairways Committee.

At the same time the Crown Estate (CE) decided that the era of dropping unregulated and free moorings on the Scottish seabed, must end. In Tobermory as in many other anchorages around Scotland the CE offered boat owners an opportunity to form Associations which would be granted the right to lay and maintain moorings in their local area in return for a reduced rent. The new committee realised that in return for collecting the rent the community would, for the first time, have rights in the bay. The committee knew that the Bay was vulnerable to outside developers as there was no Statutory Harbour Authority. Other local mooring holders took until December 1986 to see the merits of an agreement with the CE. Before an agreement with the CE could be reached Section 34 Consent was required from the Department of Transport in London.

The Committee now entered into direct negotiations with the Department of Transport. Not easy, as the well known RYA raised major objections to community control in Tobermory Bay. The RYA argued that the Committee would have a monopoly and that visitors must be granted 1/3 of the bay in the most convenient and sheltered part. The Committee stood their ground and counter argued that this was a working harbour, used all year round. Moving local moorings into deeper and more exposed waters to make way for 'summer only' visitors was unsafe. Common sense prevailed and on 15 August 1988 the Committee was granted Section 34 consent. Approval from the CE now followed and the Committee was granted the right to lay and maintain all the moorings in Tobermory Bay, except for the Calmac mooring. This had already been granted a position on the seabed.

1984 to encourage visitors afloat the Highlands and Islands Development Board (HIDB) funded free 'Visitor Moorings' in many remote harbours and anchorages. The Tobermory Visitor moorings were installed in March 1985. Though the location was questioned by local boat owners the moorings were well used by visitors. A year later ownership was transferred to Argyll and Bute Council. Unfortunately, by the 1990's, the maintenance programme ran out of money and the riser chains became unsafe.

Following the victory to save the Mishnish Pier the community was energised, the fishing fleet was growing and the town population expanding. The harbour, buildings now painted red, yellow and blue was becoming iconic. Unfortunately demands to central and local government to provide



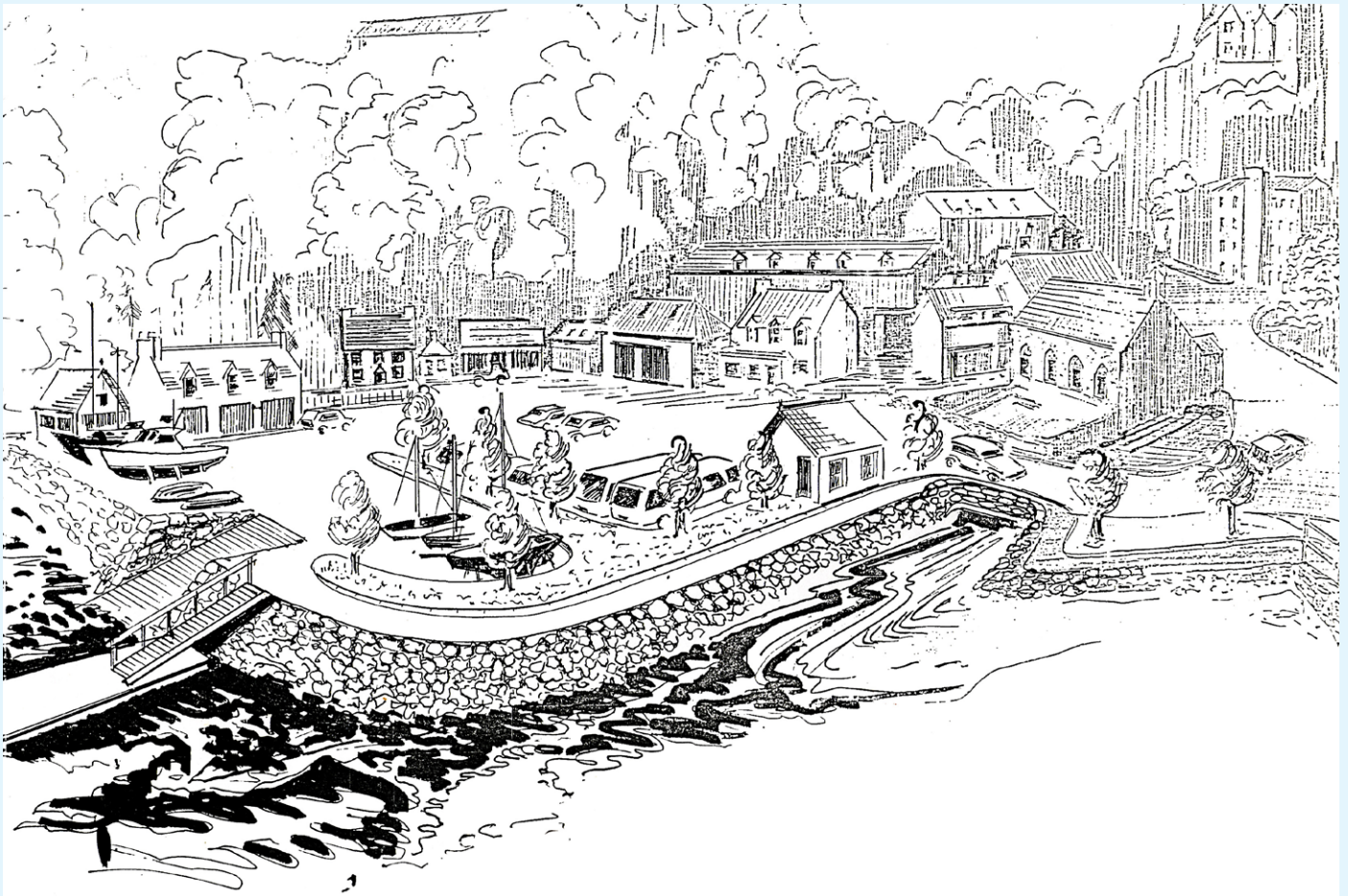
The Committee changed tack, 'we'll do it ourselves'! The Committee's first project, undertaken in conjunction with the local Beach Committee, was to build a new slip down to the small town beach. This slip now allows tractors easy access at low tide, to clean the beach and add more sand.



1985 and the Committee published their first full report, 'Tobermory Past, Present and Future'. The report identified and listed all Tobermory's major harbour problems from raw sewage being discharged directly into the bay via leaking pipes, to the biggest problem of all, a lack of available land at sea level.

Tourism was now on the rise. The new 'roll on roll off' ferries were encouraging hundreds of thousands of visitors to Mull and many came by motor car. The early Committee had huge foresight and realised that changes onshore must precede changes offshore. In 1987 the Committee detailed a major project to infill a large area of neglected seabed at Ledaig (report; Ledaig Proposals for Development). Ledaig is located in the SW corner of the bay, and in Gaelic and means 'safe-

haven'. The Committee's plans would create a landscaped 100 plus vehicle car park, a large 5 bay bus park, a boat park, a new slip, a small boat landing stage and adjacent buildings, a new toilet block and a landscaped pedestrian promenade. This ambitious project would cover over an unsightly, unused and possibly unapproved rubble pier. This project was far reaching and not for the first or last time the Committee was opposed by others.



1991 and in partnership with the Fishermen's Association and Caledonian MacBrayne, the Committee obtained approvals to mark with port and starboard buoys, a clear Fairway leading to the Fishing Pier. Now clearly shown on every admiralty or digital chart.

For years the 'Ledaig Report' and drawings of the development were circulated. Then came a stroke of 'luck'! Strathclyde Regional Council announced that the narrow, winding road from Tobermory to Salen would be upgraded from single to twin track and the first section would have masses of surplus rock. Unfortunately, at the same time, an application from a local businessman for a pontoon development off the end of the 'rubble pier' was made to the CE. The claims of ownership for a now very 'important' rubble pier reached the courts in Edinburgh! The court ruled that the 'solum' belonged to the Crown Estate and that the rubble infill had no permissions. Finally, following an open and well attended public meeting, the Crown Estate backed the Committees' plans for Ledaig.

The build was rapid, Strathclyde led, the HIDB supported and Ove Arup were used as engineering consultants. The Committee were partners in the landscaping and consulted at every stage of the build. The Ledaig Park was finished in 1996, almost line for line over the Committees' original plans, except there were no funds for new toilets, the boat park landscaping or the 'one way' entrance.

Ledaig was not just a car park. The Ledaig Park was a catalyst for economic development. The Park has become a meeting point, a focus of activity, a place to view the town and enjoy the

harbour. The new infrastructure stimulated inward private investment. A new pub was built, new restaurants added, a new garage built over the old and a new 'visitor centre' added to the historic Tobermory Distillery.



Through the early 1990's maritime traffic to Tobermory was increasing in all sectors and an expanding local population was demanding more local moorings for local boats. In 1991 new car ferry to Ardnamurchan replaced the passenger only link. Fishing changed from wet fish landings to shellfish exports. The number of visitors afloat was rising and these visitors, used to marina berthing, looked for easy access to the town at any state of the tide. Re-organising the Harbour to meet future needs would be radical and the Committee had a plan; a plan to provide 'Facilities for All'.

The plan was radical. All moorings would be removed from the bay and replaced by a Community owned grid of mooring blocks. All for hire to local members at very reasonable rates. The new mooring plan positioned small boats inshore, and large boats offshore, almost doubling the number of moorings available for local boats. An area of seabed would also be cleared of old ground chains to create a free anchoring area for visitors. Finally, 20 moorings with easy 'pick up' chains would be installed for hire to visitors using the old council mooring ground chains which would be purchased from Argyll and Bute Council by the Committee. A small number of local mooring holders with reservations were finally persuaded by the Crown Estate to back the Committees' plans.



1999

and the project was underway, funded jointly by the Argyll Enterprise Company and the Committee. The Committee used a substantial Clydesdale bank loan 'Guaranteed by 4 Committee members'. A brave move! This was now the start of a model of Community business dedicated to managing the Harbour on behalf of the Community and reinvesting in 'Facilities for All'. Facilities to bring benefits to Tobermory and to the wider Isle of Mull. A Moorings Officer was now contracted to collect the fees from the moorings and a part time Administrator soon followed. A Projects Officer was then employed and finally, a 'year round' Marine Manager.

The Committee now believed in a sustainable Community business model that would generate income and profit. Income to run the Company and profits to be reinvested in the Harbour for the benefit of All. The profits would come from rental income generated from infrastructure. The Infrastructure was to be constructed with Grant Aid, with public and private sector partners, with public donations and with reinvestment by the Committee.

2000

far from Tobermory, devolution was changing Scotland. Responsibility for Scotland's Seas was transferred to Marine Scotland and the responsibility for Ports and Harbours to Transport Scotland. The shorter links to Edinburgh helped the Committee, as the old London based DTI had once told the Committee that the file on Tobermory had passed its shelf life and had been 'destroyed'! Both parties took this in good humour when the Committee Chair replied that 'Tobermory is the jewel in the Scottish Crown and would never pass its shelf life'!

2001

and the Ledaig Boat Park, unfinished in 1995, was landscaped and five compounds added for hire to Local Businesses. In 2002 a small landing stage shown in the original drawing was added, sponsored by both local and off Island Businesses. The Committee was now a growing concern and in 2003 the Committee voted to change from an 'Association' to a Company Limited by Guarantee. At the same time the name was changed to The Tobermory Harbour Association to be known as the THA.

2004

and the small landing stage was replaced by a 20 berth pontoon and visitor numbers doubled!



2006 for years the THA had lobbied for a new sewage system for Tobermory. All Tobermory's waste was discharged directly into the sea at the north end of the bay. 'Smell point' was the local name! The problems were further compounded by leaks through the harbour wall at certain states of the tide. At last, a number of options were proposed by Scottish Water. Here local knowledge from THA Directors insured that the processing site was re-located out of town and that the uplift pipe was located under the seabed, straight down the Fairway. A final folly; at Ledaig 5 properties were to be left still discharging into the Bay! Intervention from the THA secured the funds and a second pumping station was installed. The water quality throughout the bay is now transformed.



2005 with a secure income stream, it was now time for the THA to finish the Ledaig Project and build facilities ashore; toilets, showers, and a small laundry. A parcel of land had been retained at Ledaig for a public building. The land ownership was complex but an agreement to develop the site was rapidly reached with Argyll & Bute Council, with the Crown Estate and Forestry Enterprise.

A big question loomed, "How will the THA fund, maintain and clean toilets for 364 days a year?" The THA solution was to cross-subsidise the 'Public Facilities' by bolting on significant income streams. The THA added and pre-let, a Visitor Centre, 6 Offices, a Garage for the MCA Coastguard, a Compressed Air Station for divers and finally, Offices for the THA. The THA also added 20 more berths to the pontoons. An architectural competition was held and John Renshaw chosen on condition that the design would enhance and compliment the iconic harbour architecture of Tobermory. The building concept was perfect, a round 'lighthouse' tower with white accommodation wings. The quotes were in and The Big lottery, the Enterprise Companies all agreed significant grant aid. Unfortunately costs were escalating faster than the THA could raise finance! Once again, the THA returned to the Crown Estate who agreed to purchase the pontoons to raise capital for the building project. The pontoons were immediately 'leased' back to the THA and a future profit share agreed by both parties.

2008 and the completed harbour building was opened by The Princess Royal (Princess Ann) on 3rd July. The name chosen was Taigh Solais, Gaelic for 'Lighthouse', a great day, with perfect weather for a town party. The THA community improvements have brought, pleasure and enjoyment to hundreds of thousands of visitors afloat and ashore. Local benefits have followed, jobs have been created, supported by an increasing seasonal spend from our visitors afloat. The harbour improvements have also enhanced the quality of life for all. Tobermory has a growing population and many of our young people are now choosing to stay or returning to raise families

in a perfect place. The work of the THA was acknowledged in 2010 by the Academy of Urbanism who visited and awarded Tobermory Harbour, 'The Great Place Award 2010'.



2011 and the tenants leasing the Visitor Centre indicated that they would now relocate. The THA Directors and Staff were enthusiastic to bring this space back 'in house'. A THA sub-group produced an exciting concept to design and build an informative, permanent, Marine Exhibition to illustrate the local maritime heritage and local marine ecosystems through print and digital media. The project would educate and entertain and was backed by the Enterprise Growth Fund and by Leader. Officially opened in 2012 by Gordon Buchanan, originally from Tobermory and now a BBC wildlife presenter and filmmaker. Over 20,000 visitors have already visited the Marine Exhibition.



2012 and the outside world so remote in 1970 had arrived in Tobermory. The THA were now assuming more and more authority for the Port. The International Ship and Port Facilities Security (ISPS) Code was implemented in 2013 and The Port Marine safety Code will soon make the THA accountable for the majority of the Harbour. To secure the Bay on behalf of the Community the THA now propose to apply for a Harbour Empowerment Order, known as an HEO, which will create a single Harbour Authority over the whole Bay. An HEO requires the support of all interested parties. The THA are already consulting stakeholders, the community and national statutory consultees. The THA are also working closely with Transport Scotland and with CMAL, owners of the harbour infrastructure around the Mishnish pier, Tobermory. (see THA Future Projects - Phase 6 Report)



THE FUTURE all around Scotland, new pontoons and enhanced facilities to encourage Marine Tourism, are being approved and constructed. Tobermory is uniquely positioned to give advantage to many of these more remote harbours. The THA proposes to transform Tobermory into a major Hub, Guest Harbour and Marine Conduit that will deliver major benefits not just to Mull but to other Islands and mainland ports.

The THA proposes

- To create a protected and 'safe' inner harbour where visitors afloat will wait for weather windows to sail or motor further, which in turn will deliver benefits and gains to the ports north of Ardnamurchan.
- To build harbour infrastructure on the south-side of the bay to encourage freight by sea to

and from local fish farms and other light island industries, to mitigate the need for road freight through the town and over the historic harbour wall.

- To deliver a Harbour Empowerment Order on behalf of the Community which ensures that the Port of Tobermory is owned by and managed by the Community in perpetuity.
- To sustain the local Fishing Fleet and encourage 'on shore' processing and delivery of very high quality shellfish products, direct to local hotels and restaurants.
- To encourage, through delivered harbour infrastructure, local businesses to grow and expand. This expansion will create new jobs, which in turn will encourage our future generations to return to full time jobs on our island; post mainland experience, post apprenticeship or post university.
- To facilitate new fast passenger links by sea to Oban, to other adjacent islands and to other mainland harbours.
- To remove boat maintenance away from the foreshore and the town beach to protect the environment from pollution.
- To separate Cruise Liner passenger traffic away from the visitor pontoons, via a dedicated landing berth, to meet the needs of modern Port security plus Health and Safety regulations.
- To build a safe new low gradient, straight, wide, slip to replace the 'dangerous dog leg shaped' present slip at Ledaig.

1983 - 2013 ends the first thirty years of the THA. Huge thanks are due to the wonderful people of Tobermory who love this perfect bay; who live and work by the rhythms of the sea and who have supported the work of the Tobermory Harbour Association. Plus a 'thank you' to all Directors past and present, to all helpers past and present. Finally thanks go to all THA funders who have supported the projects and helped The Tobermory Harbour Association build "Facilities for All" in our iconic Harbour.

Brian Swinbanks - Chair