

[Note: This document is an unsigned copy of the original report and was written with a typewriter taking the form of a letter comprising 5 single sided sheets brass pinned together. The document has been double folded crosswise, the 5th sheet forming an outer cover.]

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Portmahomack Harbour

Petition to the Highland
Reconstruction Committee

15th February 1919

[Inside]

To
The Highland Reconstruction Committee
National Bank Buildings,
Inverness.

Gentlemen,

Portmahomack Harbour.

At a Public Meeting held in the Carnegie Hall on Saturday, 15th February 1919, specially convened to consider the question of the present condition of Portmahomack Harbour, and to take such steps as were considered advisable in connection with the same, it was unanimously agreed to bring the whole matter before the Highland Reconstruction Committee with a view of securing their sympathy and support. It was accordingly remitted to a local Committee to draw up a Statement of the whole facts of the case, and to lay the same before the Highland Reconstruction Committee.

This Committee now begs, most respectfully, to report as follows:-

Thirty years ago Portmahomack was one of the most flourishing Fishing Villages in the North of Scotland. It had a local fishing fleet of 90 fishing boats, and an imported fleet of other 200 boats during the herring fishing season. There were four large Curing Yards in full operation, and an average of 17,000 crans of cured herring were shipped from the Port annually.

Since then the Village has been steadily declining. The population has decreased over 50 per cent, according to Census Returns; and the Fish Curing Yards have long lain derelict.

The main reason for the decline of Portmahomack was the insufficiency of the Harbour to meet the changed conditions of the fishing industry. In those days the boats in use were small and of light draught, and the water in the Harbour was sufficient for their requirements. With the introduction of the heavier class of fishing boats, however, the Harbour was found totally inadequate to meet these conditions. The larger boats would have to lie outside, for hours at a time, waiting for the tide to bring them in to discharge their cargoes. The consequence was that most of the fishing crews had to leave the locality and prosecute their calling elsewhere.

In order to meet the necessities of the case, it is essential that either the present Harbour be extended until it reached a depth of not less than 8 feet of water at the lowest tide, or, alternatively, (and in the opinion of the Committee, preferably) that a new Harbour be constructed, immediately to the East of the present site, at a spot where the natural rock formation near the shore lends itself admirably for this purpose.

Portmahomack is near the best fishing ground in the Moray Firth, and if a proper Harbour was provided it could be used under any conditions of weather. It has further to be pointed out that within recent years the winter white fishing has been developed to a great extent in this part of the Dornoch and Moray Firths. The new Harbour would, therefore, be in constant use, not only during the rush of the herring fishing season but practically all year round. All the present evidences go to show that the white fishing could be developed to an unlimited extent at Portmahomack if the proper harbour facilities were provided.

But, most important of all, such a Harbour would provide a large sheltered area to which boats from all parts of the East Coast could run in stormy weather.

The Committee would also respectfully point out that a new Harbour would not only increase the fishing industry and induce seafaring men to settle in the district, but would serve an important agricultural purpose as well. In an agricultural district like Easter Ross, the Harbour would serve as a means of transit by sea for their products, such as potatoes, grain etc. For a period of ten years before the War, there was an average quantity of 1,000 tons of potatoes shipped from Portmahomack per annum, and that trade could be easily trebled if the accommodation was provided. Shipping of grain would also greatly increase. The nearest Railway Station is over 12 miles from the East part of the Parish, and coal has to be carted at present from the Station to the Village at a cost of 13/- per ton to the consumer.

Appended will be found a tabulated Statement showing the Imports and Exports, as also the revenue, of the present Harbour from 1863 down to the present time. From this Statement the Reconstruction Committee can see the important part which even the present Harbour, with its restricted capacity, has played in the industrial life of the community.

In all the circumstances mentioned above, the Committee would respectfully urge the construction of a new Harbour at Portmahomack as a work of National Importance. Whilst a new Harbour would undoubtedly revive the fishing industry in the district and would help stem the tide of emigration which has proved so detrimental to the Highlands in the past, it has also to be borne in mind that a new Harbour would be of enormous value to the whole fishing crews of the East Coast. It would have the advantage of situation which would render it a safe refuge under all conditions of weather and tide, and would indeed under certain conditions of weather be the only safe refuge on the two Firths.

There are sent you herewith Petitions in favour of the proposed new Harbour from representative fishermen and others from the following Ports, embracing practically the whole Moray Firth, viz:- Helmsdale, Brora, Golspie, Avoch, Nairn, Lossiemouth, Portsoy and Buckie..

In this connection, the Committee would also like to take advantage of this opportunity of respectfully impressing upon the Reconstruction Committee the importance of a railway to Portmahomack as a corollary to a Harbour scheme. The linking up of Portmahomack with the main Railway system would not only develop a large Agricultural area hitherto untapped, but would provide the required outlet for the greatly increased trade which the new Harbour would inevitably create.

The Committee earnestly trust, therefore, that the Reconstruction Committee will take this Memorial into their favourable consideration,

And your Petitioners will ever pray

signed on behalf of the Local Committee

Portmahomack

7th May 1919