

VERNACULAR BUILDING 32

Scottish Vernacular Buildings

Working Group

2008–2009



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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	4
Preface	5
Miles of simmens and an army of volunteers: a traditional thatched roof project in Orkney, 2002–4	7
<i>Paul Newman</i>	
The Caithness Redundant Buildings Inventory	21
<i>Andrew P K Wright</i>	
A comparison of the horizontal water mill at Dounby, Orkney with those found in Shetland	31
<i>Graeme J Collie</i>	
Whin mills – a uniquely Doric phenomenon?	41
<i>Graeme J Collie</i>	
The conservation of the old schoolhouse at Logie, Montrose	57
<i>Stephen Copp</i>	
The Violet Banks Collection	67
<i>Veronica Fraser</i>	
The early days of the SVBWG: some personal recollections	79
<i>Ingval Maxwell</i>	
Shorter articles and notes	89
Obituary: Elizabeth Ann Robertson – <i>Jean Archibald</i>	89
A visit to the horizontal water mills on the Clumlie Burn, Troswick, South Mainland, Shetland – <i>Ann Dean</i>	91
The Big Cousland Dig – <i>Sheena Irving</i>	92
Scotland’s Rural Past – going strong! – <i>Tertia Barnett</i>	94
Furnished vernacular dwellings in Scotland open to the public – <i>Crissie White</i>	95
The SVBWG Doocots Project – <i>Elizabeth Beaton</i>	96
SVBWG conferences and meetings	97
Reviews	101
Contributors	113
About SVBWG	115
Membership details	116

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PREFACE

In an issue with a certain geographical bias towards the north, we present articles ranging from personal recollections to structural analyses and addressing subjects from construction to conservation and from politics to photography – all relevant to the SVBWG’s work.

We begin with a long-awaited report by Paul Newman on a project undertaken in Orkney several years ago to reroof three small stone buildings using thatching techniques that have all but died out in recent years. Describing the process in detail, from the rebuilding of the supporting structures to various methods of fastening the simmens (straw rope), the article illustrates how crucial willing volunteers are to the perpetuation of traditional craft skills.

In Caithness, too, simmens were once used to finish thatched roofs which commonly had an underlay of turf. Andrew P K Wright’s account of the Caithness Redundant Buildings Inventory reveals this and many other insights on the construction techniques and building typologies of an area far richer in architectural heritage than it is often given credit for. After outlining the rise and fall of the region’s industries and their impact on its built environment, Wright goes on to examine the various materials in common use – not only local flagstone, but also sandstone, clay, lime, slate and imported timber. Whilst ‘improved’ cottages constitute the majority of the buildings included in the Inventory, meal mills stand out as some of the finest examples of vernacular architecture in the area.

Mills are the subject of two essays by Graeme J Collie. The first, following on from his study of vertical water mills in *VB 31*, introduces the less common horizontal form of this building type, focusing on the only remaining one in Orkney – that at Millbridge, near Dounby – and comparing it with its counterparts in Shetland. The paper reveals intriguing differences between the built forms and mechanisms in the two locations. Collie’s second essay reports the findings of his initial investigations into whin mills, which have

virtually disappeared from the landscape. These mechanisms – used to bruise gorse shoots in order to make them suitable as animal fodder – may mostly be gone, but Collie’s research work should ensure that they are not forgotten.

Following these is an article on the recently completed restoration of the early-nineteenth-century, earth-built school-house-cum-church in Logie, Montrose – the latest addition to the already impressive list of buildings saved by the National Trust for Scotland’s Little Houses Improvement Scheme. As well as describing the practical aspects of the work that was carried out, Stephen Copp’s text summarises the reasoning behind the particular conservation approach that was taken.

Old photographs can be a great help in uncovering the story of traditional buildings, and the collection of some 800 images by photographer Violet Banks that was recently donated to the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland bears much valuable evidence in this respect. Veronica Fraser’s article offers an overview of and illustrates highlights from amongst the images, predominantly of Scotland’s Highlands and islands, which are presumed to date from the 1920s and 1930s.

The main articles conclude with an account of how and why the SVBWG came into existence. Ingvál Maxwell, a former SVBWG Chairman, sets out the political and other factors that led to the Group’s formation, highlighting key players and outlining its founding principles as well as recalling his own role in its development.

Our shorter articles begin with a tribute to Liz Robertson, long-standing graphic designer of SVBWG publications, who sadly passed away in December and will be greatly missed.

Further short pieces include recollections of a visit to a water mill at Troswick in Shetland; news on the progress of various research and archaeological projects that will be of interest to SVBWG members; three additions to the list of furnished vernacular dwellings open to the public that was published in *VB* 30; and details of recent and upcoming events of the Group.

Abigail Grater

MILES OF SIMMENS AND AN ARMY OF VOLUNTEERS: A TRADITIONAL THATCHED ROOF PROJECT IN ORKNEY, 2002–4

Paul Newman

Describing the traditional needled thatch of Orkney in print is all very well, but actually making one of these roofs reveals a lack of detailed practical information, especially regarding the techniques of this particular type of thatching. As the last needled roof to be thatched was constructed around 1965, there is now no one alive who has direct experience of this technique. Fortunately Mary Scott photographed the Swanney brothers thatching a house at Verracott when visiting her family in North Ronaldsay. The drawing shown here (fig.1) is based on her colour photograph which is in the Ethnographic Collection of the Royal Scottish Museum.¹

In June 2004 the project to thatch the roofs of three small buildings on the farm of Glen at Rackwick on the island of Hoy was completed. The project had started in 2002 when the planning



Figure 1. The Swanney brothers re-thatching at Verracott, North Ronaldsay in the mid-1960s. (Drawing by Paul Newman from a photograph in the NMS collection)



Figure 2. Black oats.



Figure 3. Leslie Foubister harvesting black oats with a vintage reaper-binder.

began, and the first crop of black oats had been harvested by Harry Flett of Estabin, Harray.

Crucial to the project was the bringing together of skills and resources. The British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) provided the workforce at various stages in the project. We knew that volunteers, with no previous experience, could be trained to make traditional roofs following two earlier projects to re-roof the old farm buildings at the Craa's Neuk or Crow's Nest at Rackwick, where turf roofs were constructed.² These earlier projects had brought a team together comprising Kerry Jones, then heading BTCV Scotland; Tanya Fletcher, BTCV field officer; Max Collop, builder and conservation specialist, as construction manager; and myself, a retired architect, as advisor on traditional construction. The same team organised the needed thatch project.³

Course 1: making simmens

The BTCV programme for 2004 included three working holiday courses in Orkney. The first course, 'An Introduction to Orcadian Straw Crafts', took place at Corrigall Farm Museum in March 2004. The eight volunteers came mainly from England with one each from Wales, the USA and Scotland. The course included an introduction to the making of traditional straw baskets and other straw items but the main object was to learn to make simmens (two-stranded straw ropes) and to become rapidly proficient at it, making the 3 kilometres (nearly 2 miles) of simmens required for the subsequent re-thatching of the buildings in Hoy.



Figure 4. The first team making 3 kilometres (nearly 2 miles) of simmens.

Peter Leith, the most experienced maker of simmens in Orkney, instructed the volunteers in the traditional way of making the twisted straw rope with a slight counter-twist to each strand. The technique of adding in ‘taets’ (small bundles) of straw had to be mastered. Harry Flett, then custodian of Corrigan Farm Museum, provided a great deal of support to the team. He had also provided much of the black oat straw, and seed for growing more oats for the project. We experimented with the use of a thrawcrock to twist straw, but all the simmens used in the project were made by the traditional hand method. The volunteers enjoyed the course, which culminated in a successful public open day at the Corrigan Farm Museum with straw work, music and refreshments. Janette Park, social history curator of the Orkney Museum, launched her book *Simmans, Sookans and Straw Backed Chairs* at the open day.

Course 2: preparing the buildings

The second course in March 2004 involved four BTCV volunteers working with Tanya Fletcher to dismantle the existing roofs of three small adjoining buildings (a byre, a lamb house and a calf house) at the farm of Glen in Rackwick, a remote community on the island of Hoy. Coinciding with this work was the transport of 35 clews (large balls) of simmens and a large lorry load of sheaves of black oats (a traditional variety) from the Mainland of Orkney to the island of Hoy. An old boat was gifted to the project by Major Malcolm Macrae for the reconstruction of an outhouse



Figure 5. Buildings at Glen before the project began.



Figure 6. Roof covering stripped off to reveal couples and stalls.

nearby which had originally had an inverted boat roof; this had to be brought from the Mainland too.

The old buildings were stripped of the existing roof coverings (a mix of stone and thatch) and all timber. The timber roof structure was fairly rotten and poorly constructed in places, and would have been unsafe to work on. Repairs were necessary to the tops of the walls and an end gable collapsed, requiring to be rebuilt.

Course 3: the new ‘old’ roof

The final course took place at Rackwick at the beginning of June 2004 and brought together eight volunteers from Scotland and England and one from Germany. Tanya Fletcher, the BTCV field officer, organised the volunteers and acted as safety officer on the site. Max Collop directed the programme of building work while I provided technical support on vernacular building construction.

New couples (A-frames) had to be made individually and put



Figure 7. Assembling the new couples.



Figure 8. The new couples and first lath in position over the byre.

into place on the walls at roughly 1-yard (1-metre) intervals but arranged to accommodate the raised lintels over the three doorways. Getting the couples properly seated on the flagstone wall heads, and with the ridge accurately aligned, required a lot of careful adjustment.

The couples were made with traditional fishtail joints where the thwartback (tie) meets the couple legs, and all joints were secured with wooden pegs. My observation of existing buildings shows that pegged joints tend to outlast nailed joints. The fishtail joint tightens up when the roof is loaded and avoids too much shear force being applied to the wooden pegs. We wanted to make a robust roof which would last indefinitely.

Once the couples had been placed in position, horizontal laths were nailed to the backs of the couples. A problem with these particular buildings was that the gable skews did not project above the couples as much as we would have liked. This meant that the top surface of the thatch would tend to stand proud of the stone skews and therefore the thatch at the gables would not be well protected from the wind.

Now the roof structure was in place, we could begin to apply the first layer of simmens. For the byre and the lamb house, this first layer was tied to the lower laths using seagrass, this being the usual technique found in old Orcadian thatched roofs. However, in the construction of the calf house roof we used the newly

understood ‘Gimps’ method of knotting the lower layer of simmens to the lower laths on either side of the roof.

Conventional needled thatch

The team had practised the needled thatching technique on a mock-up section of roof. The traditional needled thatch roof is a sandwich of two layers of closely packed simmens with a deep filling of loose straw between them. This middle layer of straw, although loose, is placed methodically to aid the shedding of water. Handfuls of straw are carefully aligned and lapped to direct moisture to the outside of the roof. The bundles are laid starting at the eaves and working up to the ridge.

The first layer of simmens is secured to the lowest laths on each side of the roof, leaving a gap between the lath and the flagstone wall head. The common method of securing the simmens is to tie the loops of simmens to the lath with seagrass or coir cord. Max Collop and I examined a disintegrating needled thatch roof at Derby, in Toab in the East Mainland, to understand this tying method. Examining the disintegrating roof made me realise that my previous description of the lashing method given in my 2002 article on thatch traditions in Orkney⁴ needed to be revised. Seeing



Figure 9. The lower simmens being applied.

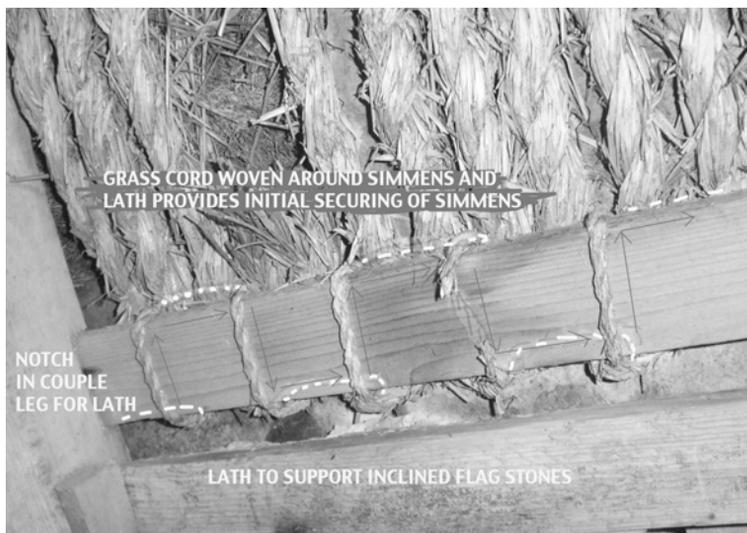


Figure 10. The 'Derby' method of securing lower simmens.

the cord threaded through the loops of simmens gives the idea of thread going through the eyes of giant needles, and maybe this is why this style of thatching is called 'needled thatching'.

The 'Derby' method, which is found in nearly all examples of needled thatched roofs I have seen in Orkney, uses cord to secure the loops of simmens to the lowest lath. The simmens has to be fairly taut to avoid the roof sagging into the interior of the building during the thatching process. However, when the inclined flagstones are laid on the wall heads these stones trap the loops of simmens firmly against the lower lath, so the integrity of the cord lashing is no longer critical for maintaining the tension in the lower layer of simmens.

The 'Gimps knot' method

Another method of securing the lower layer of thatch had been recorded at Gimps in South Ronaldsay, where cord is not used to secure the simmens, as the simmens themselves are wrapped around the lowest lath.⁵ I had thought that the simmens were tied in a barrel hitch but could not imagine how this was achieved. We decided to attempt to recreate this method of securing the lower

simmen part of the roof we were reconstructing on the buildings at Glen. It was Magnus Watson, a colleague of Max Collop, who realised that the Gimps knot was actually more like a crochet stitch and could be achieved without loosening the lower laths to accept barrel hitches.

The technique is easier to understand through watching it being done than through descriptions of the process. The end of the simmen is tied to the lower lath on the near side of the roof. A loop is passed over the ridge and down to the lowest lath on the far side. The simmen is tightened and a short loop wrapped around the lath and temporarily secured with a peg. The return simmen is tightened at the lower lath on the near side with a small loop wrapped around the lath. While tension is maintained, a new long loop is formed which is threaded through the eye of the small loop and extended to be long enough to pass over to the far side of the roof. At the far side the peg is removed and, without loosening the tension, the new long loop is passed a short way through the eye of the previous loop and a new short loop wrapped around the lower lath and again temporarily pegged.

The process is repeated until the whole roof is covered and the final length of simmen taughtened and secured to the lath. If the clew of simmen runs out before the roof is complete, the end can



Figure 11. Fragments of lower simmens from Gimps, South Ronaldsay.



Figure 12. The lower simmens over the calf house being applied using the 'Gimps' knot method.



Figure 13. Diagram showing the 'Gimps' method being applied. (Drawing by Paul Newman)

be simply spliced to the new simmen from the next clew. Like simple crochet or knitting, the simmen layer is not fully secure until the final length has been knotted or spliced around the lath. In theory you could take the loose end of simmen from an incomplete roof and, by pulling it hard enough, unravel the whole construction! The parallel lines of simmens should be packed tightly together so that little or no light can be seen from within the building. Looked at from the inside of the building, the loops of simmens look like a series of barrel hitches, as they did in the old roof at Gimps.

Leaning flagstones

Once the lower layer of simmens is in place, there remains a gap between the flagstones (teckles, aisins or aiswas) on the wall head and the lower laths. This gap is closed with flagstones which rest their lower edge on the wall head and upper part on the simmen-covered lower laths. Sometimes the gaps between the vertical joints of the flagstones are covered with narrower stones – called 'under-seamers' if they lie behind the joints in the larger stones (as found at Derby). Roof lights are sometimes incorporated in thatched roofs and this is done by using a longer stone which will extend up to the second lath above the eaves. The lower layer of



Figure 14. The lower simmens in place with flagstones filling the gap between the wall head and the lowest lath. The inclined flagstones lean against the lower lath, trapping the loops of the lower simmens against it and providing long-term security.

simmens is attached to this higher lath for one couple spacing, and the stone has a rectangular hole cut into it to provide a roof light between the two laths. Two such roof lights were incorporated in the reconstructed roofs.



Figure 15. A small roof light opening cut into an inclined flagstone.



Figure 16. The interior of the byre, with pierced stone slab roof light.



Figure 17. Making simmens with the assistance of a 'Tiny' hand-threshing machine.

More simmens

We found that we had underestimated the amount that we would need, so the thatchers interrupted the thatching process to make more clews. During this process, a 'Tiny' hand-threshing machine loaned from Orkney Museums was used to clean the grain from the oat straw.

Middle and top layers of thatch

In old needled roofs in Orkney there is a thick middle layer of loose thatch which in ruined buildings looks as if it were simply strewn over the roof. In fact the middle layer is applied with a technique which has some similarity to the way thatched roofs are made in southern and inland areas of Britain. The middle layer is laid with bundles of straw starting at the eaves and working up to the ridge so that water descending under gravity is shed outwards. However, there is no pegging of the middle layer, as it will be held in place with the stone-weighted layer of top simmens.



Figure 18. The upper simmens and middle layer of thatch being simultaneously applied. The bendlin stanes weighing down the upper simmens are just visible.

The top layer of thatch is started at a gable with a closed loop of simmen (it is easy to splice simmen to itself). The clew of simmen is unwound as open loops of the rope are thrown from one side to the other by a thatcher sitting on the ridge. Thatchers at the eaves insert long smooth stones (bendlin stanes) into the loops to hold the top layer of thatch in place. Old photographs of needled roofs sometimes show additional angled or horizontal ropes which may be interwoven with the top simmens to give extra security to the exposed thatch. In our project we added an additional horizontal simmen interlaced with the top layer and secured at the gables.

We used black oat straw exclusively for the simmens and middle layer in this project, with seagrass cord for tying. However there is evidence for the use of other materials such as heather, eel grass, bent, rushes and turf in certain localities where they were readily available. Coir cord is also found as an alternative to bent or seagrass cord.



Figure 19. The needled thatch of the lamb house and byre complete. The boat in the foreground is soon to be put in place on the curved shed walls.



Figure 20. Eaves detail, showing protruding bendlin stanes.

The boat roof

Adjacent to the thatched buildings was a small stone outhouse with curved dry stone walls. The plan was boat shaped, indicating that this was an example of another kind of Orkney vernacular building: the shed roofed with an inverted boat. We concluded the reconstruction at Glen by fitting a new boat roof to the stone shed.



Figure 21. The Glen buildings re-thatched with traditional Orkney needed thatch construction. The boat is now in position, forming a roof for the shed.

Conclusion

How have the buildings at Glen and their new roofs fared since the project's completion? With a straw thatched needed roof in Orkney you would expect to have to make substantial repairs to the top layer every two years or so, longer with heather simmens. After the first winter at Rackwick the top layer had been damaged by the weather, with bendlin stanes cutting through loops of simmen in places. This suggests that the stones were not rounded enough. Repairing the roof would again entail bringing together finance, organisation and volunteers, which are difficult to sustain. Max Collop has since organised the covering of the roof with heather as a practical measure to prevent rapid deterioration.

Orkney and Shetland once had many thatched-roofed buildings. Few of these survive even in ruinous condition in Orkney, and even fewer in Shetland. What Shetland has, however, is a Croft Museum with a roof thatched in the local manner using heather simmens. It had been hoped that a needed roof could have been constructed on a roofless building at one of the farm museums in mainland Orkney; it would have been much more accessible than Rackwick and many more people would have seen it. Some Orcadian children saw simmens being made at the Corrigan open day and learnt to make it. They also were able to see a prototype section of needed roof. However, a planned school trip to Rackwick to see the construction in progress had to be cancelled.

The project provided a great opportunity to gain practical experience of thatching a roof in a traditional Orcadian manner. Taking the project from the sowing and harvesting of black oats, through making simmens and reconstructing the wooden roof structure, to covering the roof with straw and stone has given us an appreciation of the resources and work that went into these traditional roofs. The project was awarded a Green Apple Silver Award in 2005.

Acknowledgements

Profound thanks are due to BTCV, Historic Scotland, Orcadian enthusiasts and a small army of volunteers who made this project a success. It would not have been possible without the enthusiasm and skills of Harry Flett, Peter Leith and Leslie Foubister in Orkney and Kerry Jones at BTCV, and neither would it have been possible without Jack and Dorothy Rendall providing suitable buildings to thatch.

Since this project was completed I have moved from mainland Orkney to Angus. Moving has interrupted my Orkney vernacular building studies; however, I must apologise to all involved in the project for taking such a long time to write it up.

Notes

- ¹ P Newman and J Rendall, 'Verracott, North Ronaldsay: A case for rescue and conservation', *Vernacular Building*, No.20, 1996, p.36.
- ² P Newman, 'The Crow's Nest, Rackwick, Hoy: An account of the reconstruction of two roofs', *Vernacular Building*, No.22, 1998, p.13.
- ³ For a survey of needled roofs, see Paul Newman, 'Needled Roofs in Orkney', *Vernacular Building*, No.24, 2000, p.26. For the sequence of making a needled roof, see P Newman, 'Thatch Traditions in Orkney Farm Buildings', *Vernacular Building*, No.26, 2002, p.3.
- ⁴ P Newman, 'Thatch Traditions in Orkney Farm Buildings', *Vernacular Building*, No.26, 2002, p.3.
- ⁵ P Newman and A Newman, 'Simmens and Strae: Thatched Roofs in Orkney', *Vernacular Building*, No.15, 1991, p.31.

THE CAITHNESS REDUNDANT BUILDINGS INVENTORY

Andrew P K Wright

One of life's maxims is that you should at least know what you have before beginning to make plans for it. Sponsored by HRH the Duke of Rothesay's North Highland Initiative, the preparation of the Caithness Redundant Buildings Inventory¹ set out to establish the extent to which the traditional buildings of Caithness might be at risk. With the fieldwork undertaken during the summer of 2007, by the end of the programme around 1,350 sites had been recorded, representing a far greater number of buildings as some of the sites included several redundant structures at the same location. The exercise was never intended to be exhaustive: for inclusion in the inventory the structure should be capable of either continuing in the original use for which it had been created, or supporting new uses. Monuments were excluded, as were bridges and harbours.

Taking in redundant country houses, churches, retail premises, mills, storehouses and girnals, schools and the larger designed farms, the study was never intended to be confined to vernacular buildings, but it is no surprise that they make up by far the largest number of entries for the inventory. The sheer number of them has permitted an evaluation to be made of factors such as rarity, local traditions of building, materials, forms, and building typologies, and it is hard not to draw the conclusion that here is a unique and diminishing resource of which the true value has not been recognised adequately to date.

To illustrate the point, R W Brunskill in his pioneering *Traditional Buildings of Britain* (1981) had lumped Caithness in with the building traditions of the whole of the Highlands, including Argyll. Had the Northern Isles been shown on his map of Britain, no doubt they would have been included for good measure. Robert J Naismith, who knew the buildings of Caithness rather better,

acknowledged indebtedness to Brunskill in his *Buildings of the Scottish Countryside* (1985), but in his map Caithness and the northern part of Sutherland are shown sharing the same building traditions as the Northern Isles. In fact, those of Caithness are not only unique to the former county (and quite different to those of the Northern Isles), but there are very marked local variations even within parishes. Elizabeth Beaton, through her RIAS-published *Caithness: An Illustrated Architectural Guide* (1996), has been a lone voice in correcting perceptions of how the buildings of Caithness are not the same as elsewhere, but prejudices have proved hard to dispel. Without raising awareness of the importance and value of this little-known untapped resource, the combined agents of natural decay, wilful neglect and a terminal weakness in the local economy will continue to take their inevitable toll.

The Caithness economy

The intrepid travel writers of the eighteenth century were unprepared for what they encountered in Caithness. They noticed the fertility of the cornlands in a landscape devoid of trees stretching out towards long horizons, in which buildings provided a sense of scale. Writing in the early 1700s Daniel Defoe considered that ‘the people were extremely well furnished with provisions of great plenty’. The coastal communities supplemented their livelihood by fishing for salmon and white fish, but it was the exploitation of the herring shoals that led to the development of the harbours, with the British Fisheries Society investing heavily in Pulteneytown in the first years of the nineteenth century. Goods exported from Caithness included a net surplus of livestock, grain, salt beef, hides, seal oil and sealskins, goose feathers, cheese, butter and tallow, in addition to the countless barrels of cured fish. From the 1820s, to the list of exports were added the products of the mechanised pavement industry. Polished Caithness slabs were exported to the far corners of the globe.

Inspired by the indefatigable polymath Sir John Sinclair of Ulbster (1754–1835), the agricultural improvers left an indelible mark on the face of the county, with the enclosed field systems

defining the fertile landscape of the coastal plains. It is only in the northern parishes that the characteristic dykes of upright flagstones, driven vertically into the ground, appear. The planned settlements added another layer to the superimposition of regular planning grids on the landforms, and were created as the agents of social engineering, Sir John having observed that those living in the rural hamlets were ‘generally more ignorant, duller and more uncouth than those who are assembled in villages’. The improvement of the land had not been achieved, however, without considerable social upheaval: the small tenants, unable to pay increased rent, migrated towards the marginal uplands, or sought employment in the staple industries supporting the new planned settlements. The gulf that had grown up between the tenants and those prospering from a highly capitalised and labour-intensive farming industry was revealed in the evidence given to the Napier Commission in 1883. Agricultural buildings – from the crofts to the largest of the showpiece farms – reflected practices in animal husbandry and cereal farming that were more highly developed when compared with the rest of the North Highlands. The Commission recorded the common practice of keeping pigs, and in the previous century the Welshman Thomas Pennant noted the animals were ‘tethered in almost every field’.

The three props of the Caithness economy – fishing, agriculture and the pavement industry – collapsed simultaneously in the 1920s and 1930s. The effect on the local economy was devastating, and was only partially mitigated in the immediate post-war years by the nuclear establishment at Dounreay. Abandoned and left to decay, structures from these failed industries have great poignancy, and this is experienced nowhere quite so strongly as on the island of Stroma, once a thriving community with a population of 375 when at its peak in 1901. Stranded offshore in the Pentland Firth, it was abandoned only in the 1960s, leaving an archaeological resource of the highest order.

Vernacular building: materials and techniques

Virtually everything that has so far been written about the traditional building techniques of Caithness has revolved around the use of



Figure 1. Variations in flagstone walling.

flagstone (see fig.1), forcing comparisons with the better-recorded vernacular buildings of the Northern Isles. Although the Devonian fissile sandstone seams extend across the whole of the county, it is only in the northern parishes that they occurred close to the surface in a form that could be readily exploited for building purposes. A characteristic flagstone masonry unit has been defined as having a face size of a ratio between 1:4 and 1:8, whereas the ranges encountered during the fieldwork varied from being close to a square block (1:1) to the other extreme of slivers at 1:20. The variations can be remarkably local, occurring often over an area of just a few square miles. Flagstone became a building material of considerable versatility: in addition to supplying walling, roofing slates and slabs, pavements and field dykes, it was used for internal partitions in cottages, shed walls, mill lades, stalls within byres, and for lintels capable of long spans when laid on edge. The precision with which the material could be quarried and sawn led to a distinctive form of roofing unique to Caithness, used only for byres and outbuildings, consisting of large flags laid to a flush

surface. Except in the re-roofing of buildings that had previously been thatched, roofs would be formed to a steeper pitch than is commonplace in Orkney.

Wherever the available materials permitted, there was always a preference to build in the manner of the adjoining counties on the fringes of the Moray Firth. In the Wick and Latheron parishes, where the indigenous flagstone was not so readily available, the commodities of sandstone and blue roofing slate were imported through the harbours of the coastline. Larger masonry units are far better suited than flagstone to forming rybats at wall openings and quoins at gables, and so similar methods of construction were adopted in the northern parishes of Olig and Thurso where limited quantities of sandstone were available from a quarry at Scrabster, accessible only at low tide. Blue slate was adopted as the preferred roofing for the Latheron parish, and for the principal settlements of Wick, Thurso and Castletown. It was specified exclusively across the county for the institutional buildings such as banks, churches and schools. As beautiful as a roof of Caithness stone slate may seem now to our eyes, it was reserved originally for the more humble vernacular buildings of the town and countryside.

Longhouses were erected on unimproved land well into the nineteenth century by the tenants, and were constructed mainly of rounded field stones. Originally thatched, some have been re-roofed in corrugated iron or asbestos. Timber was not, of course, indigenous to the county. As a commodity it was always in short supply, and the tenants had to rely on 'master wood' supplied by the laird, supplemented by salvaged wood from other buildings, or from old boats. Once, thatched roofs of straw with an underlay of turf were a common sight in the Wick and Latheron parishes, but now they are rare, and very few thatched roofs are in good repair. The practice of finishing a thatched roof with 'simmens', or straw ropes, appears to have died out some years ago. During the fieldwork the remains of a gable peak infilled with turf divots was recorded at an outbuilding at Guidebest near Latheron but, being unprotected, it is unlikely to survive for any length of time (see fig.2).



Figure 2. Byres with turf-infilled gable, Guidebest.

Lime mortars were only ever used sparingly for pointing face work, as the core binder of the walling would be clay. Few examples of original lime harling were encountered, but rendered surfaces made a fresh appearance in the late nineteenth century, often as a symbol of enhanced social status when a plain building would be embellished with decorative features run in mortars of early cement, imported in bulk through the harbours. They were easier to work than mortars based on naturally occurring lime. In the early nineteenth century, higher-status properties in the major settlements were given successive thin coats of coloured limewash in preference to harling.

Other than where roofs have been reclad in corrugated iron, or where redundant wartime structures may have been recycled, iron was only ever used sparingly. Clay pantiles had once been used extensively for roofing buildings close to the harbours, but there are now no known surviving examples other than a small, isolated building standing in a farmyard at Clyth. Slate roofs of any type were finished in yellow clay ridge tiles. Given the widespread availability of flagstone for walling, and with the nearest brickworks along the coast at Brora, bricks were used sparingly for late-nineteenth-century industrial buildings such as workshops, and for tall freestanding chimney flues.

The extensive use of stone roofing slates in the second half of the nineteenth century led to a consciously derived architectural style which is unique to the county. It infiltrated those areas where

blue slates continued as the preferred roofing material. Earlier buildings followed the long-established tradition of finishing the walls of gables with crowsteps, or flat stone skews, to protect the edges of a slated roof from wind damage in conditions of extreme exposure. With a heavy Caithness slate, however, it proved feasible to dispense with skews altogether and so, with the introduction of clipped eaves, the pure planar forms and volumes for the long, low roofs that fit so well into the folds of the landscape came to be celebrated and admired. No other explanation can be given as to why changes in the direction of roofs were achieved by close-mitring the slates, which was highly skilled work. Hipped tiles would have been much easier in constructional terms, but they would have disturbed visual continuity in the roofscape.

Selective building typologies

Sites incorporating former longhouses are of archaeological interest. While in most areas they have been ploughed out, they have survived in reasonable numbers on the edges of the barren uplands, and in the more remote parts of the Latheron parish. They are at greatest risk of loss because in the majority of cases they were abandoned long ago, after which the roofs of thatch decomposed rapidly. Longhouses are often found in groups, readily identifiable by the manner in which the structures follow the natural fall in the ground. The linear form that these byre-dwellings assumed permitted further cells to be added over time but, in general, they are not well suited to securing new compatible uses. Occasionally

Figure 3. A large farm at Skiall, Reay Parish, where the linear plan form of the traditional longhouse has been adopted, arranged here in two parallel ranges enclosing cattle courts.





Figure 4. The Corr, near Latheron, with courtyard form and surviving thatch.

a courtyard would be formed, as exemplified by The Corr, near Latheron, where some of the original thatched roofs have survived (see fig.4). As a rare survival of past rural life in the North Highlands, it is undoubtedly of Northern European significance. Worryingly, the site is vulnerable, having been abandoned only recently.

When the parish ministers compiled their entries for the *New Statistical Account* in the late 1830s, the state of the hovels in which the tenants played out their lives was lamented, and they applauded the arrival of the ‘improved’ cottage (see fig.5). Enduring well into the twentieth century with remarkably little change, as a type it had been introduced at the turn of the nineteenth century by the landowners. Based on symmetrical pattern-book designs and laid out with an innate sense of good proportion, the single-storey improved cottage had either a thatched or a slated roof, with chimneyheads serving rooms at each gable. The linear form of the earlier longhouses would often be adopted whenever there was a need to extend the basic living unit. Numerically, at well over six hundred, improved cottages form by far the largest quantity of structures recorded for the inventory, with more than sixty of them recorded on Stroma alone. Many still have their slate roofs intact, albeit often in a decaying state.

At well over four hundred, redundancy in the farms of Caithness accounts for the next largest category of entries for the inventory. In not a single traditional farm were the ranges in full use, except in those rare cases where new uses have been found. Farm buildings highlight past land uses, and with the ranges responding satisfyingly to the topographical features of the landscape they become prominent features within it. Many sites have distinctive cartshed openings with barns and haylofts above them, often approached by forestairs. Henhouses, granaries, piggeries, byres, dairies and stables are commonplace. Occasionally corn-drying kilns are incorporated within ranges, and two of the medium-sized farms of the Wick parish have rare bottle kilns. Several sites incorporate bothies, or ranges of cottages, to house key workers. Unlike the later planned farms, these units have grown in an additive way as different practices were introduced or, as happened in the late nineteenth century, if there was a switch from cattle rearing to growing cereal crops or root vegetables. The farm buildings of Caithness are not only of considerable historical interest – they are also undeniably picturesque.

As distinctive as the farm buildings undoubtedly are, arguably the finest surviving examples of vernacular architecture in Caithness



Figure 5. 'Improved' cottage on Stroma with porch and animal byres, with the habitable area extended.



Figure 6. The mill at Watten, one of the finest surviving meal mills in Caithness.

are the meal mills. Most will have been extended on several occasions to respond to the increased demand for cereal products throughout the course of the nineteenth century. Too many were seen languishing in a dreadful state with their machinery removed, but a few have been converted successfully, giving a ray of hope for the future. Among the finest is the mill at Watten, the origins of which go back to 1742 (see fig.6). Although an unlisted building, it is a *tour de force*, having great presence in an open landscape of fields and water, and raising vernacular architecture to new heights for which the advice of no architect had been sought. The mill at Huna, near John o’Groats, ceased operations only a few years previously and still has its machinery intact.

For reasons of brevity it has not been possible to cover the full range of vernacular buildings at risk in Caithness set out in the inventory, but it is hoped that sufficient has been highlighted here to demonstrate that these buildings represent a very considerable latent resource of the utmost interest, with the potential to make a positive contribution to the regeneration of an area which has been largely bypassed historically. This is reflected in the stark fact that so few of these structures are protected through legislation of any kind. The time for changing perceptions is, therefore, long overdue.

Note

¹ Andrew P K Wright, *Caithness Redundant Buildings Inventory*, published for the North Highland Initiative, July 2008.

A COMPARISON OF THE HORIZONTAL WATER MILL AT DOUNBY, ORKNEY WITH THOSE FOUND IN SHETLAND

Graeme J Collie

Estimates of the number of horizontal water mills which once existed in Orkney vary widely. What can be stated with certainty is that only one now remains: at Millbridge, near Dounby (HY 3253 2284). The purpose of this paper is to compare this sole survivor with horizontal mills which still stand in Shetland. To this end, Dounby Mill was thoroughly surveyed and recorded. During a field trip to Shetland, 52 mills were visited and recorded. The contrast between the mill at Dounby and its Shetland cousins is described, and a possible explanation for the differences given.

The mill at Millbridge was built relatively late, between 1822 and 1824, and is said to have replaced an earlier mill of a similar construction.¹ The present mill was restored by the Orkney Archaeological Society in the 1930s, and it subsequently passed into the care of the Office of Works who carried out further repairs.²

A level 2 survey³ was conducted of the mill at Millbridge. A field trip was then made to Shetland where 52 horizontal mills were visited, 24 of which were subjected to a level 2 survey (see table 1 and fig.8).⁴

The building at Millbridge is small (5.71 by 3.16 metres (18ft 9in by 10ft 4in)) and rectangular, with a basement under one end (see figs 1, 2 and 3). The single room is divided into two areas. The 'inner end', furthest from the door, features a raised floor which supports the *tun* – the box which encloses the millstones. Also placed on the floor is a wooden frame which supports the *hopper*. Attached to the bottom of the hopper is the *shoe*, by which means the grain is transferred to the *eye* of the millstone. Protruding from the upper millstone (the *runner*) is a peg which, with every rotation,

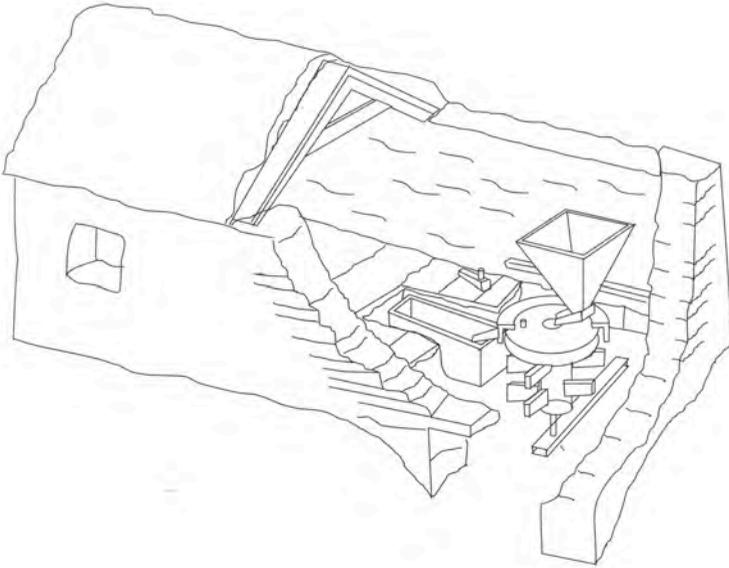


Figure 1. Horizontal mill, Millbridge (after Historic Scotland).



Figure 2. External view of the mill at Millbridge showing the bypass burn, window and outflow from the under-house. Also visible between the window and the under-house is the pier used to divert water away from the wall of the building.



Figure 3. External view of the mill at Millbridge showing the lade, door and upstream gable.

Figure 4. Internal view of the mill at Millbridge showing hopper, supporting frame, shoe, millstones and tun. At bottom left can be seen the top of the metal lightening tree which passes through the wooden sword. The separation of the millstones is controlled by placing wedges between the sword and the mill floor.



Figure 5. Internal view of the mill at Millbridge showing the peg in the upper millstone which, on rotation, joggles the arm causing the grain to flow via the shoe to the millstone eye.



hits an arm that joggles the shoe (see figs 4 and 5), ensuring a continuous flow of grain.

The coarseness of the meal depends on the distance between the runner and the lower, fixed, *bedstone*. The distance between the stones is altered by raising or lowering the *lightening tree*, which protrudes through the floor, the height being controlled by manipulating wedges below the *sword* (the horizontal wooden block through which the lightening tree passes) (see fig.5). Having been ground, the flour emerges from the tun by a spout to be deposited in the *flour box* which, at Millbridge, is housed in a purpose-built stone-lined pit (see fig.6).

The basement of the mill, known as the *under-house*, runs for approximately half the length of the building (see figs 1 and 2). The under-house accommodates the horizontal wheel (the *tirl*), and the *sole tree*, which supports the axel and the lightening tree (see fig.7). The axel passes from the tirl, through a wooden bearing in the bedstone to the *sile*, a two-legged cast-iron driving dog



Figure 6. Detail of flour box at Millbridge. The size of the flour box, and the fact that provision was made for it within a specially created stone-lined floor-pit, suggests that a large volume of meal was expected.



Figure 7. The under-house of Millbridge. The horizontal water-wheel at Millbridge is not typical of horizontal mills; it features 12 blades arranged in two rows. Also visible in this view are the sole tree, the wooden arm on which the bottom of the axel or spindle is positioned. The chute, down which the water will pour, can be seen just behind the tirl.

which engages in a recess in the runner and supports the weight of this stone.

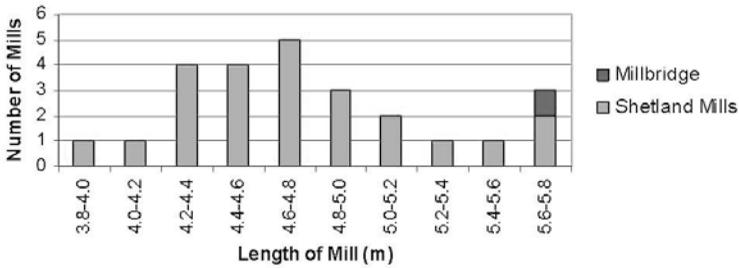
The mill at Millbridge is related in design and construction to those of Lewis and Shetland; however, there are many differences which suggest that Millbridge was a development, not merely a copy, of the Shetland mills.

The Millbridge mill is of a superior construction. It is slightly larger (see table 1 and fig.8) and the quality of the stonework appears to be better than in the majority of mills in Shetland. It features a pier which deflects the flow of the bypass water away from the wall and tailrace of the mill (see fig.2). At Millbridge the door is placed in one of the longer walls (see fig.3); in all but

	Length – outer	Width – outer	Height – lower gable	Length – inner total	Length – inner half	Width – inner half	Length – outer half	Width – outer half	Wall thickness	Door width	Under-house width	Under-house length	Millstone diameter	Millstone eye	Tirl hub diameter	Height – high gable	Height – under-house	Width – under-house	Height of door
Scousburgh 6	4.33	2.85	2.10			1.48		1.75	0.85	0.58	1.07	2.18				1.51	1.01		
Scousburgh 7	4.34	3.40							0.62	0.68	1.21	3.23					1.01		
Skelberry 2	4.77	3.06				1.91		1.81	0.63	0.66									
Skelberry 1	4.52	2.87	2.01	3.37		1.76		1.76	0.56	0.64			0.78	0.13		2.69			1.32
Skelberry 4	4.50	3.19	1.20	3.11		1.91		2.03	0.49	0.76	0.97	2.79	0.75	0.11					
Croft House 1	4.20	3.22	2.52	2.85	1.38	2.12	1.47	1.97	0.65	0.60	0.95	2.93	0.78	0.11			1.16		1.22
Croft House 2	4.32	4.49	1.68						0.70		0.91	2.21							
Croft House 3	3.93	3.78	2.38	2.79		1.96			0.58	0.63									1.24
Ireland 2	5.20	3.41	1.76	3.82		1.89		2.01	0.53	0.68	1.18	2.57	0.82	0.12		1.75	0.66		1.43
Ireland 3	4.75	3.28							0.66		1.11	2.58							
Ireland 4	4.27	3.10		3.11		2.10		2.20	0.61	0.58									
Costa	4.66	3.40	1.77																
Torswick 1	4.83	3.86		3.40		1.78		2.37	0.71	0.81	1.40	2.71				1.89			1.27
Torswick 2	4.69	3.61	0.79	2.83		2.24		2.24	0.75	0.67	0.99	3.07	0.88	0.16		2.58	0.96		
Torswick 3	4.40	3.43			2.10				0.65	0.67			0.88	0.12					
Torswick 4	4.66	3.29	1.73		2.24			2.07		0.71	1.24		0.88	0.12					1.18
Torswick 5	5.10	3.79				2.41			0.61				0.88	0.11		2.47			
Torswick 6	4.47					2.24			0.59	0.69			0.82	0.11					
Torswick 7	4.98	3.40	2.22							0.77	1.24	2.02			0.33	3.01	1.00	1.00	1.20
Huxter Upper	5.53	3.15	2.39	4.23		1.61		1.77	0.71	0.70	0.94	2.62			0.24		1.14		1.23
Huxter Mid	5.12	2.92	2.15	3.85		1.68		1.64	0.65	0.73	1.15	2.00				2.88	1.18		1.21
Huxter Lower	5.02	2.80	2.04		2.10	1.94	1.55	1.57	0.67	0.68	1.21	2.39	0.84	0.13	0.24	2.81	1.25		1.32
Houlland Upper	5.63	2.95	0.90			1.68		1.68	0.67	0.68	1.01	2.40							
Houlland Mid	5.75	3.00	1.00			1.98		2.25	0.78	0.68	1.61	2.71							
AVERAGE	4.75	3.32	1.79	3.34	1.96	1.92	1.51	1.94	0.65	0.68	1.14	2.56	0.83	0.12	0.27	2.40	1.04	1.00	1.26
MAX Value Shetland	5.75	4.49	2.52	4.23	2.24	2.41	1.55	2.37	0.85	0.81	1.61	3.23	0.88	0.16	0.33	3.01	1.25	1.00	1.43
Millbridge	5.71	3.16	2.11	4.01	1.48	2.07	3.21	2.06	0.55	0.77	1.21	2.71	1.22	0.18	0.33	2.21	0.86	1.21	1.41

Table 1. Comparison of the dimensions of horizontal mills in Shetland with that at Millbridge in Orkney.

Overall Length vs Frequency



Width of Underhouse vs Frequency



Diameter of Millstones vs Frequency

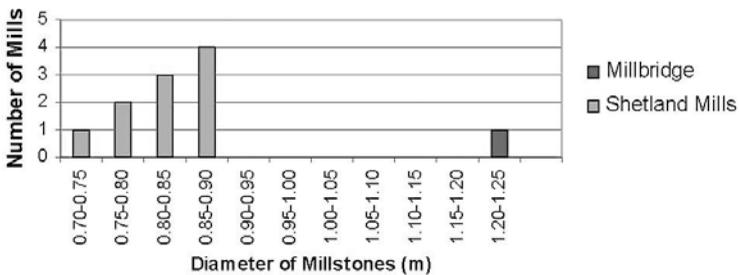


Figure 8. A comparison of the main features of the horizontal mill at Millbridge with those in Shetland.



Figure 9. The horizontal mill at Huxter, Shetland, showing the common positioning of the door in the gable furthest from the under-house.

three of the 52 mills surveyed in Shetland the door was located in the gable furthest from the under-house (see fig.9), an arrangement which Gilbert Goudie, writing in the 1880s, indicates was ‘almost invariably observed’.⁵

Millbridge features an aperture opposite the door (see figs 1 and 2) which has been identified as a *wind-door*, needed for the removal of chaff, a feature absent from all of the Shetland mills surveyed.⁶

The size, and unusual design, of the water wheel at Millbridge (see fig.7) – the Millbridge tirl carries not one but two rows of paddles, a feature not seen in any of the Shetland mills – may have been necessitated by a desire to maximise production of meal by using large millstones. The stones at Millbridge are 1.22 metres (4ft) in diameter, 50 per cent larger than typical Shetland stones (see table 1 and fig.8). The decision to use larger millstones had a knock-on effect on the architecture of the building; the size of the water wheel dictates the width of the under-house which, at Millbridge, is larger than the majority of mills surveyed in Shetland (see table 1 and fig.8). The large volume of meal expected might

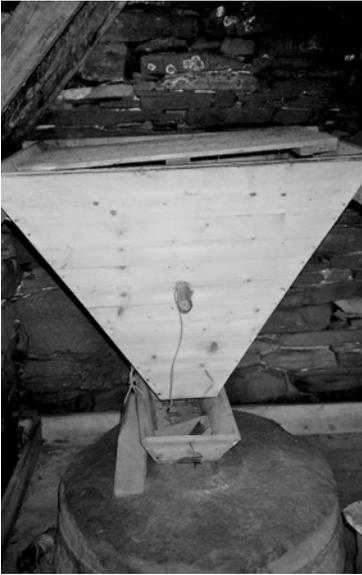


Figure 10. Interior of South Voe, Shetland. On the right-hand side of the picture it is possible to see the top of the lightening tree. Although its operating principle is the same as at Millbridge, it is manufactured from wood and is located on the downstream side of the mill.

explain the need for the large flour box, with its own bespoke location in the mill floor – features not encountered in any of the mills surveyed in Shetland.

Other, detail differences between Millbridge and the Shetland mills include the design of the lightening tree which, at Millbridge, is placed at the inlet side of the mill rather than the outlet, and the fact that the lightening tree rod is of ferrous metal rather than wood (compare figs 4 and 10); both of these refinements may have been dictated by the extra weight of the larger millstones. The hopper is supported by a floor-mounted wooden frame at Millbridge rather than being suspended from the roof as was the case in the Shetland mills. The shoe at Millbridge is joggled by a peg protruding from the runner – mills in Shetland did not feature this peg, but relied instead on the roughness of the millstone creating vibrations which, when passed to the shoe, shook grain down into the runner (compare figs 5 and 11).



Figure 11. Interior of South Voe, Shetland. A detail of the shoe, which was joggled not by a peg located in the runner but by a piece of wood which was kept in constant contact with the rough upper surface of the runner. Also visible is the box surrounding the stones. Altogether a less sophisticated system than that found at Millbridge in Orkney.

Some of the changes to the mechanism may have been anomalies introduced during restoration; however, differences in the fabric of the building are unarguably part of the original construction.

So why is the horizontal water mill at Millbridge different from those surveyed in Shetland?

It may be that the building at Millbridge represents the final stage in horizontal mill evolution, and that those in Shetland were representative of an earlier period. However, it seems more likely that the Millbridge building was unique. Although the surviving mill was not the first horizontal mill on this site, it seems likely that both its immediate precursor and its near neighbour, which exists now only as a series of earthworks, were the result of reintroduction of horizontal milling technology to Orkney after a gap of many years. This is unlike the situation in Shetland where the use of horizontal mills appears to be an unbroken tradition. The farming community at Millbridge was, at one time, fairly remote; it is possible that although they paid multures (fees for grinding grain) to a (perhaps not-so-) local vertical water mill, they may, nevertheless, have chosen to avoid a trip to the (possibly distant) vertical water mill by grinding their cereals in their own horizontal mill – a situation known as ‘dry multures’. The passing of the Thirlage Act of 1799 – which allowed the proprietors of lands thirled to a particular mill, and the proprietor of the mill to which the land was thirled, to have the thirlage commuted (i.e. a payment made by the farmer to the mill operator released the proprietor of the land from his obligation to have his cereal ground at a particular mill) – may have encouraged the Dounby farmers to invest in the construction of the present mill as a replacement for the two earlier, less sophisticated mills.

The remote location of Millbridge may have meant that the farmers continued to find it convenient to use the horizontal mill, despite its relatively inefficiency, until the construction of a direct road in the late nineteenth century which connected Dounby more conveniently with the infrastructure of the Orkney mainland.⁷ The new road would have allowed grain to be carted in quantity to the larger vertical mills. This is the point, it is suggested, at which the horizontal mill would have fallen into disuse.

Notes

- ¹ RCAHMS Canmore database, <http://www.rcahms.gov.uk/pls/portal> [accessed 1 June 2006].
- ² S H Cruden, 'The horizontal water-mill at Dounby, on the Mainland of Orkney', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, Vol.81 (1947), pp 43–7 (p.2).
- ³ Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England) [RCHME], *Recording Historic Buildings: A Descriptive Specification*, RCHME, Swindon, 1996, p.4.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ G Goudie, 'On the horizontal watermills of Shetland', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, Vol.20 (1885–6), pp 256–97 (p.270).
- ⁶ Cruden, *op.cit.*, p.44.
- ⁷ T Kent, 'Clack-Mills', *Country Life*, 14 May 1904, pp 709–11 (p.709).

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WHIN MILLS – A UNIQUELY DORIC PHENOMENON?

Graeme J Collie

In 1925 the Sociblety of Antiquaries of Scotland published a paper by one James Ritchie, in which the author documented the practice of using gorse (*Ulex Europeans*, also known as furze or whins) as supplementary animal fodder.¹ Ritchie described mills which were specially designed to bruise the whin shoots so that they could be given to livestock in an edible form. His study concentrated on Aberdeenshire. He noted that, by the first quarter of the twentieth century, these mills had fallen out of use and, as is the way with agricultural buildings which have outlived their intended purpose, they were being dismantled and were gradually disappearing from the landscape.

This paper revisits the subject of whin mills almost a century after Ritchie's review. The primary aims of this paper are: to confirm the location of as many whin mill sites as possible; to consider their distribution pattern locally and nationally; and to identify mills which may still be extant. The secondary aim of this paper is to bring these structures to the attention of a wider audience, in the hope that hitherto unknown mills will be identified and may subsequently be recorded. This paper draws on information from many sources: Ritchie's original paper; information held by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS); notes in Sites and Monuments Records (SMRs); cartographic evidence; oral history; and data gathered during recent site visits.

Ritchie recorded two forms of mill – the 'roller type' and the 'wheel type', the former of which preceded, and was subsequently replaced by, the latter. Both forms of mill rely on the weight of stone to crush the whin shoots, and both require a draft animal to turn the device around a central pivot. Although they operate on similar principles, the two forms of mill leave behind very different archaeological footprints.

Roller-type whin mills

The roller-type mill (see fig.1) consisted of six main components: the roller; the central pillar; the swivel; the track on which the roller ran; the course on which the draft animal walked; and the harness for the draft animal. Ritchie explains that the roller, usually manufactured from granite, was tapered to allow it to more easily describe a planetary motion around the central pillar. Typical dimensions for the roller are 1.25 metres (4ft) in length, 25 centimetres (10in) inner end diameter, and 40 centimetres (1ft) outer end diameter, although there is some variation between sites.² The central pillar, also of stone, was normally 33 centimetres (13in) square in cross section and 60 centimetres (2ft) long. The central pillar was orientated vertically, and embedded into the ground with only around 30 centimetres (1ft) protruding. The top of the central pillar normally featured an iron pin around 10 centimetres (4in) long and 2.5 centimetres (1in) diameter. The smaller end of the roller featured a swivel which was attached to the pin on the central pillar. Ritchie gives no description of the nature of this swivel. The roller track would be a paved area of around 2.64 metres (8ft 8in) inner diameter and 4.78 metres (15ft 8in) outer diameter – as described by Ritchie at Blairbowie (NJ 726 228). Outlying this would be the course for the horse, which would presumably be cobbled to provide grip and around 1.2 metres (4ft) wide. The total diameter would thus be 7.18 metres (23ft 6in).

It seems unlikely that any roller-type mills survive intact. When Ritchie put pen to paper early in the twentieth century he had

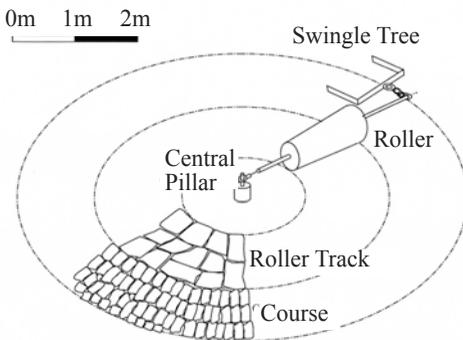


Figure 1. Diagram showing the general arrangement of a roller-type mill.

not been able to find a single extant example. All we can reasonably hope to find nowadays are archaeological remains. The feature of the roller-type mill least likely to survive is the central pillar: standing proud of the ground, its presence, following the mill's fall into disuse, would simply serve to impede access, and its removal would therefore be merely a matter of time. In some instances the roller stone may survive, perhaps having been moved from its original location. The most impressive archaeological footprint left by the roller-type mill would be the roller track. The combined size and shape of the roller track and course can lead to the area being confused with the remains of a horse gin. In the field the two may be distinguished as follows: horse gins are normally closely associated with large rectangular buildings (the threshing barns), whereas whin mills will be set on their own, sometimes in the farmyard; horse gins tend to be cobbled over the whole area, whereas the roller track tends to be paved only in the area where the roller ran, and may have been cobbled where the draft animal walked; and the outer diameter of the whin mill course tends to be smaller than that found in horse gins.

Wheel-type whin mills

Although there are again variations in the dimensions of components at different wheel-type mills,³ Ritchie's study revealed sufficient consistency to facilitate a description of a typical example (see fig.2). The wheel-type mill featured a large circular stone, typically 1.22 metres (4ft) in outside diameter, 23 centimetres (9in) in inside

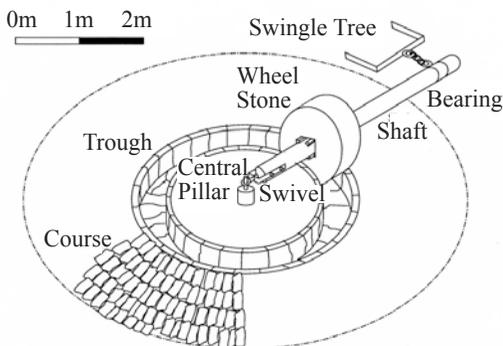


Figure 2. Diagram showing the general arrangement of a wheel-type mill.

diameter and with a thickness of around 38 centimetres (1ft 3in). The stone might have a smaller diameter on the side facing towards the pivot, in order to facilitate the motion of the shaft around the central pillar; and an additional second stone, of smaller diameter, might be added alongside the first to add weight and so increase the crushing force. The stone was fixed, by means of wedges, to a wooden shaft measuring approximately 4.27 metres (14ft) long and 20 centimetres (8in) diameter. One end of the shaft featured a spindle and swivel arrangement which facilitated rotation of the shaft (and hence the wheel) around its own axis while simultaneously allowing rotation of the wheel/shaft assembly, in the lateral plane, around the pillar. At the free end of the shaft, harnessing allowed a draft animal to impart the motive power. Typically the wheel would be located around 1.2 metres (4ft) from the free end of the shaft. The wheel ran in a circular stone-lined trough 60 centimetres (2ft) wide and 45 centimetres (1ft 6in) deep, the whin shoots being placed in the bottom. The trough would typically have an inner diameter of around 2.5 metres (8ft 2in).

A very similar technology was used in Shropshire to crush apples as part of the cider-making process.⁴

At the time of Ritchie's paper a few of these mills were still extant – most notably Whitelums (NJ 520 322), although even here the device had become dilapidated and the wooden shaft rotten.⁵ Today it seems unlikely that any wheel-type mills have survived complete and in working order. What remains is the archaeological footprint. In the twenty-first century this will most likely comprise no more than the wheel stone, and even these are often displaced from their original site; the presence of the wheel does not therefore guarantee that a whin mill existed on or near to that location. The trough may survive, and perhaps even the central pillar, although the central pillars of wheel-type mills were just as vulnerable to uprooting as those of roller-type mills, and for the same reason.

Amendments to Ritchie's paper

To his credit, Ritchie did an excellent job, collecting the names and descriptions of many whin mills, and his paper remains the only

widely accessible catalogue of such buildings. Unfortunately his technical specifications do not always stand up to close scrutiny. In order to provide the current reader with an unambiguous description of the two forms of whin mill, it is necessary to update his work.

Position of the wheel on the spindle

Describing the wheel-type mill at Skatebrae, Ritchie states: ‘The shaft ... is 14ft long, the revolving stone being wedged 10ft from its inner end and 4ft from the outer end.’⁶ This cannot be correct; if the stone were placed 4 foot from the outer end, the minimum inside diameter of the trough would be 20 foot. Assuming a trough width of 2 foot⁷ and a course width of 8 foot⁸, this would result in an outer course diameter of 40 foot. This does not tie in with the outer dimensions given by Ritchie, these being 22 foot, 22 foot 8 inches, and 26 foot 2 inches.⁹ Only if the stone were attached 4 foot from the inner end could an outer course diameter of between 22 foot and 26 foot 2 inches be achieved.

Geometry

We need to be a little careful of Ritchie’s measurements; at one point he describes a wheel stone as having a diameter of 2 foot 10 inches and a circumference of 11 ½ inches, which is impossible.¹⁰ He also provides a measured example of a trough where he estimates the distance from the central pillar to the trough’s inner edge as being 2 foot 10 inches.¹¹ Conversely he describes a wheel as having a diameter on one side of 4 foot 2 inches, and on the reverse, 3 foot 8 inches.¹² Given the wheel’s thickness of 1 foot 8 inches, this would produce a natural turning circle of radius 3 foot 6 inches (assuming a central stone height of 1 foot). The trough radius given by Ritchie does not equate with the turning radius calculated above, nor does it agree with the placement of the wheel stone 4 foot from the free end of the shaft. It has to be assumed that Ritchie’s measurements of the trough were in error.

Definition of the course

Ritchie is not consistent with his definitions of the features of the whin mill. When describing wheel-type mills he uses the term ‘course’ to mean both the circular groove in which the stone of the wheel-type mill ran,¹³ and the metallated path on which the draught

Site Name	National Grid Ref	Type*	Sources†	Visited since 1984	Extant at time of visit
Balbridie, Crathes	NO 737 957	w	R		
Balnakelly, Cushnie	NJ 502 111	w	R, C		
Bandoddle, Midmar			R		
Barrock House Home Farm, Wick	ND 282 625		C	RCAHMS, 2000	Stone Only
Berryhill, Memsie, Rathen			R		
Blackhill Farm, Castle Fraser	NJ 716 127	w	R, C	Author, 2009	NO
Blairbowie	NJ 726 228	r	R, C, S	Author, 2009	NO
Bogenjohn, Strichen	NJ 938 524		R		
Bogside, Premnay	NJ 638 241	w	R, C		
Brackla, Auchleven	NJ 618 255	r	R		
Brankholm, Lumphanan		w	R, O	Oral, 2000	NO
Bransbog, Strichen	NJ 949 559		R		
Broclach	NJ 618 225	r	R, C		
Broomend	NJ 779 191	w	R, C	Author, 2009	Stone Only
Broomhead, Kintore		r	R		
Burrels aka Westside of Premnay	NJ625 255	w	R, C, S	RCAHMS, 2003	NO
Comers, Midmar	NJ 673 076	w	R, C		
Eslie, Banchory	NO 716 923		C	RCAHMS, 1984	YES
Easter Skene	NJ 800 082	w	R		
Essie Church	NJ 467 279	r	R, C	RCAHMS, 1996	YES
Frosty Nib, Strichen	NJ 959 578		R		
Glack Whin Mill	NJ 457 275	r	C	RCAHMS, 1996	YES
Glacks of Culmellie	NJ 518 128	w	R, C		
Glack of Essie	NJ 456 274		R		
Glenkindy House	NJ 423 145	w	R, C	RCAHMS, 1997	NO
Hill of Bandodde	NJ 659 068	w	R, C	RCAHMS, 2002	NO
Hill of Fetternear	NJ 618 247		R		
Kirkton of Tyrie	NJ 930 624	r	R		
Knowhead, Oyne	NJ 661 272	w	R, C	Author, 2009	NO
Little Whitecross, Garioch	NJ 709 227		R		
Mains of Boyndlie	NJ 913 622	w	R		
Mains of Leslie	NJ 588 253		R		
Mains of Whitehills, New Deer			R		
Menie House	NJ 978 206	w	R, C		
Newpark	NJ 904 157	r	R, C	Author, 2009	NO
North Behinties, Cushnie	NJ 546 104	w	R, C		
Quittlehead	NJ 568 046	w	C, O	Oral, 2000	Stone Only
Scurdarg, Gartly			R, O	Oral, 2007	Stone Only
Shevado	NJ 907 494	w	R		
Skatebrae, Badenscoth	NJ 693 387	w	R, S		
Strichen			R		
Templand, Auchterless	NJ 708 406		R		
Tillyching, Lumphanan	NJ 596 043	w	R, C, O	RCAHMS & Oral, 1990	Stone Only
Tombeg	NJ 680 143	w	R, C, S	Author, 2009	NO
Upper Broomhill	NJ 606 079	w	R, C		
Upperton, Glenbuchat	NJ 364 179		C	RCAHMS, 1997	NO
Waulkmill, Parkhill			R		
Wester Roseburn, Dess	NJ 557 001	w	R, O	Oral, 2004	Course Only
Westerside of Inverbervie	NO 825 725		R		
Wellside, Auchleven	NJ 618 247		R		
Whitelums	NJ 520 322	w	R, C, S		

Table 1. All known whin mill sites – location, mill type, sources and status

* w=wheel, r=roller

† R=Ritchie, C=Canmore, S=SMR, O=Oral

animal perambulated.¹⁴ In this paper *course* is reserved for the draft animal's path, and *trough* is adopted to mean the groove in which the stone ran.

When describing roller-type mills, Ritchie again uses the term 'course', this time meaning the paved area on which the roller ran. In this paper the roller runs on the *roller track*. To maintain consistency the *course* of the roller-type mill is defined, as above, as the cobbled path on which the draft animal walked. Ritchie does not take account of this cobbled path in his descriptions, thus the outer diameters of roller mills given by Ritchie must be increased by around 2.5 metres (8ft 2in) to give the true footprint.

Documentary search

The search for documentary evidence began with Ritchie's work. Ritchie lists 47 whin mills – 7 roller type, 23 wheel type, and 17 of type unknown (see table 1).

A search of the RCAHMS Canmore database using the key words 'whin mill' produced 39 sites.¹⁵ Of these, 14 were rejected as they represented duplications. Of the remaining 25 records, 20 also appear in Ritchie's original paper. Canmore thus added five mills to those listed by Ritchie. Further searches on other web-based databases failed to uncover any other whin mill sites.

An examination was then made of the SMR for Aberdeenshire.¹⁶ The SMR lists five whin mills (see table 1), all of which were mentioned in Ritchie's 1925 paper. No further sites were revealed.

Oral evidence

Oral evidence was gathered from members of the farming community, whose family history stretched back to early-twentieth-century Aberdeenshire. These sources mentioned five mills: Brankholm; Quittlehead; Tillyching; Roseburn; and Gartly (see table 1).¹⁷ All these mills were listed by Ritchie. Further oral evidence confirmed the use of whin mills in Aberdeenshire into the early twentieth century, but did not provide specific locations.¹⁸

With the exception of Barrock House near Wick (ND 282 625),

all the whin mills revealed up to this point in the research lay within the boundary of present-day Aberdeenshire. The net was now widened via an informal, and wholly unscientific, survey to try to establish whether similar mills existed in other parts of Scotland. Buildings archaeologists, local historians and farmers working in Orkney, Angus, Fife and Dumfries & Galloway were shown sketches of whin mills, and asked if they had seen, or heard of, these types of structures in their area. Archaeologists from Historic Scotland and RCAHMS's Scotland's Rural Past project were also questioned. From these interviews only one possible lead was identified outwith Aberdeenshire: a possible wheel-type crushing stone held at the Angus Folk Museum, Glamis.

The stone at Glamis initially excited interest. Although it had clearly been used originally as the upper stone in a conventional water-powered cereal mill, an unusual pattern around the rim may have suggested that it had had some other subsequent use. While millstones could have been pressed into service for the purposes of crushing whin shoots, the stone at Glamis seems too narrow to have been part of a whin mill. It was therefore excluded from this study.

Distribution analysis

Before considering the distribution analysis, some background information is warranted on changing county boundaries. New county boundaries were drawn up in Scotland in 1890. The shape of Aberdeenshire known to Ritchie in 1925 would be that shown on J G Bartholomew's map of 1892.¹⁹ In 1975 county boundaries were again redrawn, and Aberdeenshire, Banffshire, Kincardineshire and parts of Moray were amalgamated to form Grampian Region. This situation remained until 1996 when Grampian was split into Aberdeen City, Moray and Aberdeenshire, although the twenty-first-century shire is considerably larger than its nineteenth-century namesake.

A cartographic analysis was conducted in order to establish whether there was any pattern to the distribution of the mills, beyond the obvious fact that, with the exception of the single outlier mentioned above, all the known examples are found in modern

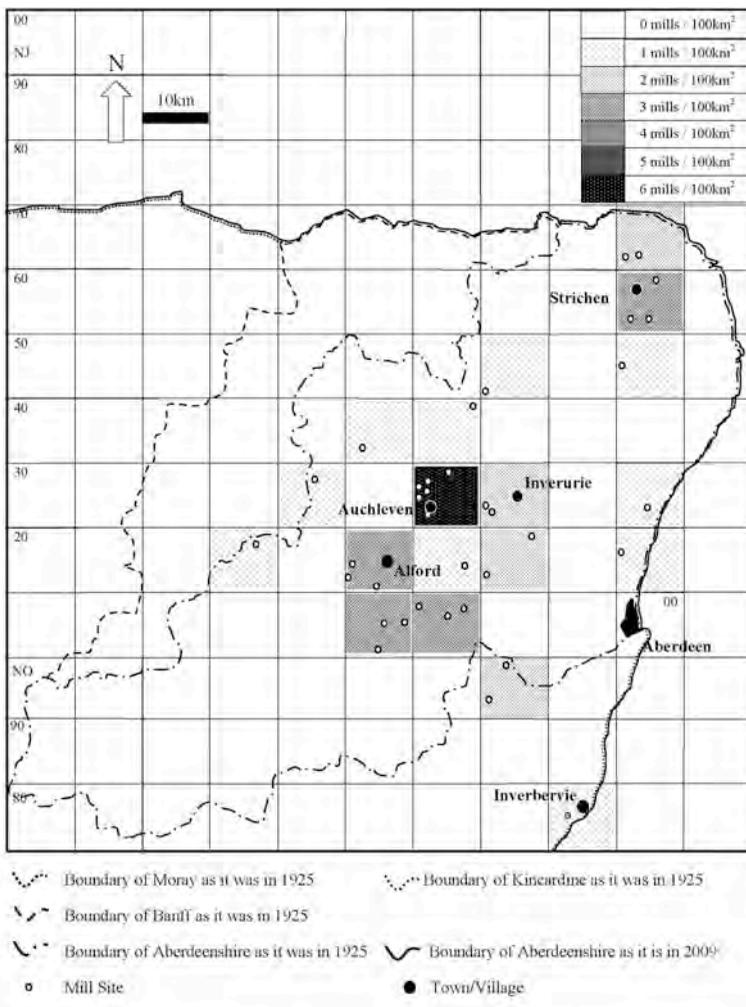


Figure 3. Map of North-East Scotland showing the distribution of whin mill sites. The highest density of mills occurs around Alford and Inverurie and in the area between. Localised clusters occur around Auchleven and Strichen.

(i.e. post-1996) Aberdeenshire. The Canmore database provided Ordnance Survey (OS) National Grid references for 24 mills, including 20 of those listed by Ritchie.²⁰ Using Ritchie's descriptions it was possible, using modern 1:25,000 series OS maps²¹ and Third Edition OS maps²², to positively identify the location of a further

19 mills mentioned in the 1925 paper. All the mills for which locations could be identified with a degree of certainty were plotted on modern 1:50,000 OS maps.²³ From this it was clear that the mill sites were not evenly distributed across Aberdeenshire. A disproportionate number (47 per cent of the Aberdeenshire mills whose location had been identified) were found near Alford or Inverurie or in the area between the two towns (see fig.3). Within this area clusters of mills are apparent around Milton of Cushnie (NJ 520 113), Lumphanan (NJ 585 045), and especially Auchleven (NJ 625 245) where six mill sites lie within 5 kilometres (3 miles) of the village. One other, smaller area of higher mill concentration is found around the village of Strichen (NJ 950 560) further north.

When the map of 1925 Aberdeenshire is overlain on the distribution analysis (see fig.3), three other mills are seen to fall outwith the boundaries of the county: Westerside of Inverbervie (NO 825 725); Balbridie, Crathes (NO 737 957); and Eslie, Banchory (NO 716 923). Ritchie made no mention of this, probably because all three lie close to the county border. In any case, all mills fall within modern Aberdeenshire and are therefore included in this study.

Explanations for the distribution pattern were considered. It could be that there are particular geographic, topographic or socio-logical circumstances which favoured the use of whin mills in certain localities. Possible factors include reduced access to winter fodder, poor farms producing insufficient additional income to buy in extra fodder, ready access to areas where whins could be cut or availability of cheap labour. Another explanation is that the successful use of whins by one enterprising individual engendered copycat behaviour by his neighbours. It should be remembered however that the mills shown in fig.3 are survivors of a farming practice which was already outdated in the first quarter of the twentieth century. What we have is a pattern of survival rather than of original distribution, and whin mills built on farms which were subsequently abandoned or subsumed into larger units are less likely to suffer the ignominy of being uprooted. Alternatively, the distribution pattern of whin mill sites may be an anomalous reflection of the method by which data was gathered; Ritchie's

paper unashamedly considers only Aberdeenshire. Ritchie clearly states that one of his primary sources was his father-in-law, who farmed in the area. Later in the paper he names other individuals who provided him with lists of mills. It is in the nature of things that farmers tend to know disproportionately more about the affairs of their immediate neighbours than of those further afield. It is entirely possible therefore that the distribution pattern is representative more of the local knowledge of individual contributors, than it is truly representative of the actual distribution of whin mills.

What survives?

The final question which this paper attempts to address is: what survives? Of the 25 sites listed on Canmore, nine have been visited by RCAHMS since 1984; four of the nine were found, during these visits, to have been destroyed. Personal communications with farmers in the area noted the destruction of one site which had been listed as a survivor by Ritchie in 1925 (Brankholm) and one site which had been listed as a survivor by RCAHMS in 1973 (Quittlehead). The same contacts also noted three partial survivors from Ritchie's list (stone only at Tillyching and Gartly; course only at Roseburn).²⁴

During January 2009, fieldwork was carried out by the author. It was decided to visit six mills (Blackhill, Broomend, Knowhead, Newpark, Tombeg and West Blairbowie), the sample size being equivalent to 12.5 per cent of the total number of sites listed in this paper. This survey brings the total number of sites visited since 1984 up to 19 (or roughly half of the Aberdeenshire mills in this paper). Sites were selected to include wheel-type mills (Blackhill, Broomend, Knowhead and Tombeg) and roller-type mills (Newpark and West Blairbowie). The sample included mills described by Ritchie as being largely complete in 1925 (Tombeg and Blairbowie), as well as those described by him as surviving only as courses or stones (Broomend, Blackhill and Newpark). Mills were included which appear in the SMR (Tombeg and West Blairbowie). All the mills visited are recorded in RCAHMS's Canmore database. Five of the mills are located in the area of

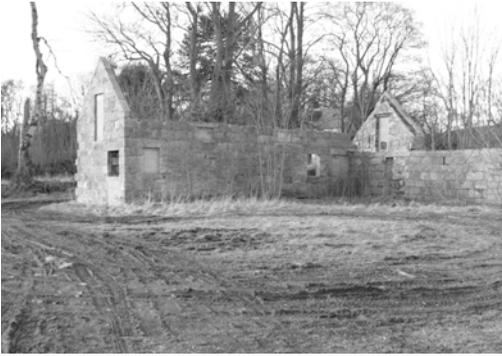


Figure 4. Tombeg – possible site of the wheel mill.

highest mill concentration – between Alford and Inverurie (Blackhill, Broomend, Knowhead, Tombeg and West Blairbowie).

The results of the site visits can be seen in table 1. Disturbingly, of the mills visited by the author which had been described by Ritchie in 1925 as still complete, none now survives, although at Tombeg an outline exists on the ground of the abandoned farmyard which may represent the position of the mill (see fig.4). Of those visited by the author which had been described by Ritchie in 1925 as surviving only as the course, none now survives. Of those visited by the author which had been described by Ritchie in 1925 as surviving only as the stone, only one could be found, this being at Broomend; and even here, the stone is no longer on the farm where it was originally used, having been first moved to a paper mill, and subsequently to the modern house of Alanshaw where it has been pressed into service as a gate marker (see fig.5).



Figure 5. Wheel stone from Broomend Farm.

Site visits alerted the author to the difficulties inherent in interpreting the archaeological evidence for whin mills. Ritchie cites several examples of where only the roller stone survives. He also notes that whin mill rollers were sometimes redressed to produce cylindrical field rollers. On examining granite field rollers of unknown provenance it quickly became apparent to the current author that, in Aberdeenshire, field rollers have very similar dimensions to those provided by Ritchie for whin mill rollers (see fig.6). In addition the raw material of choice for field rollers in the north-east is granite, the same material which Ritchie suggests would have



Figure 6. Field rollers.

been used for whin mill rollers. Given these similarities, and given that granite field rollers were in common use in Aberdeenshire farms well into the twentieth century, it would be a brave archaeologist who would be prepared to state categorically that any given field roller had started life on a whin mill. This has implications for ongoing work; if in the future a roller stone is found without an irrefutable association with a mill, and if measurements show it to be cylindrical rather than tapered then, on the balance of probability, it must be assumed that the find is a field roller, and not a whin mill roller. This line of reasoning unfortunately also sows the seed of doubt regarding some of the loose rollers identified by Ritchie as originally coming from whin mills.

A further problem arises from discrepancies between sources. An exemplar is the mill known as ‘Blairbowie’ by Ritchie and ‘West Blairbowie’ by RCAHMS. In this instance Ritchie has it right.

There is a farm known as West Blairbowie at the Grid Reference given by RCAHMS (NJ 720 225);²⁵ however, the farm at West Blairbowie was built in 1880,²⁶ and therefore postdates the 1830 date given by Ritchie for the construction of the whin mill.²⁷ The name of the farm and the Grid Reference given by RCAHMS are thus in error. A visit to the site of Blairbowie (NJ 726 228) revealed that not only had the mill disappeared, but the farm buildings were now tumbled walls which appear to have been largely robbed out.

One common trend observed during the site visits was that the farm steadings in which the whin mills had originally stood had, in most cases, been renovated and/or converted to housing (Newpark, West Blairbowie, Blackhill, Broomend), their present incumbents largely having occupations unrelated to the land. It is therefore unsurprising that the remnants of our agricultural history which were the subject of Ritchie's paper were removed, unrecognised and unloved, during construction work, to make way for an infrastructure more in keeping with the buildings' modern use.

Summary

Evidence collected so far suggests that whin mills were most common in and, perhaps with very few exceptions, unique to, Aberdeenshire. It seems likely that no complete roller- or wheel-type whin mills have survived to the present day. Many of the mills described by Ritchie – whether as complete, dismantled or surviving as disarticulated components – appear to have been completely lost.

Future Work

The author plans to visit as many of the known sites as possible during the 2009 season and to record what remains. While the attrition level for whin mills is unarguably high, it is just possible that a few whin mill components – especially rollers and wheel stones – which were not previously recorded, survive, unrecognised, in the landscape.

The author continues to collect oral histories and, through

these and other means, to attempt to locate and record the remains of hitherto unknown mills. To this end, any information on these endangered, possibly extinct, structures would be gratefully received by the author.²⁸

The distribution analysis highlighted some interesting trends and this is worthy of a more in-depth study.

Notes

- ¹ J Ritchie, 'Whin-mills in Aberdeenshire', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, Vol.59 (1924–5), pp 128–42.
- ² Ibid. The rollers described by Ritchie have inner end diameters varying from 25 centimetres (10in) to 46 centimetres (1ft 6in), outer end diameters varying from 40 centimetres (16in) to 60 centimetres (2ft), and lengths varying from 1.1 metres (3ft 8in) to 1.2 metres (4ft 1in).
- ³ According to Ritchie (ibid), the outside diameter of the stone could vary from 75 centimetres (2ft 6in) to 1.5 metres (5ft); the hole in the stone could be circular or square, and vary from 15 centimetres (6in) diameter to 30 centimetres (1ft) square; the thicknesses of the stones were recorded as being from 25 centimetres (10in) to 50 centimetres (1ft 8in); the outside diameter of the course was recorded as varying from 4.88 metres (16ft) to 8 metres (26ft 2in), the trough width from 38 centimetres (1ft 3in) to 60 centimetres (2ft), and the trough depth from 30 centimetres (1ft) to 60 centimetres (2ft). The pivot bearing might be mounted on top of a central pillar (see fig.2). The RCAHMS drawing of Quittlehead (see RCAHMS Canmore database, http://www.rcahms.gov.uk/scotland_screenres_800/346637.jpg [viewed 14 December 2008]) shows a rather more complex arrangement.
- ⁴ *Pers com* Acton Scott farm.
- ⁵ Ritchie, *op.cit.*, p.135.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Ibid. p.141.
- ⁸ Ibid. p.138.
- ⁹ Ibid. pp 136 & 138.
- ¹⁰ Ibid. p.138.
- ¹¹ Ibid. p.137.

- ¹² Ibid. p.138.
- ¹³ Ibid. p.137.
- ¹⁴ Ibid. p.138.
- ¹⁵ RCAHMS Canmore database, <http://www.rcahms.gov.uk/pls/portal> [accessed 5 November 2008].
- ¹⁶ *Pers com* Moira Greig.
- ¹⁷ *Pers com* Scott & Ann Raeburn, June Armstrong, Raymond Donald.
- ¹⁸ *Pers com* Moira Greig.
- ¹⁹ J G Bartholomew, *Tourist's map of Scotland Showing the New County Boundaries*, Edinburgh, 1892 – available at <http://www.nls.uk/maps/scotland/detail.cfm?id=780>
- ²⁰ RCAHMS Canmore database, *op.cit.* [viewed 5 November 2008].
- ²¹ Ordnance Survey Explorer Series, 1:25,000 Scale, Southampton, 2008: Sheet 405, *Aboyne, Alford and Strathdon*; Sheet 406, *Aberdeen and Banchory*.
- ²² Ordnance Survey Third Edition, 1 inch to the mile, Southampton: Sheet 66, *Banchory*, 1908; Sheet 67, *Stonehaven*, 1908; Sheet 76, *Aberdeen*, 1909; Sheet 77, *Inverurie*, 1909.
- ²³ Ordnance Survey Landranger Series, 1:50,000 Scale, Southampton: Sheet 29, *Banff & Huntly*, 2008; Sheet 30, *Fraserburgh*, 2008; Sheet 37, *Strathdon & Alford*, 2007; Sheet 38, *Aberdeen*, 2008; Sheet 44, *Ballater & Glen Clova*, 2008; Sheet 45, *Stonehaven & Banchory*, 2008.
- ²⁴ *Pers com* Scott & Ann Raeburn.
- ²⁵ RCAHMS Canmore database, *op.cit.* [viewed 5 November 2008].
- ²⁶ *Pers com* current owner.
- ²⁷ Ritchie, *op.cit.*, p.132.
- ²⁸ Any such information can be sent c/o Veronica Fraser, RCAHMS, John Sinclair House, 16 Bernard Terrace, Edinburgh EH8 9NX.

THE CONSERVATION OF THE OLD SCHOOLHOUSE AT LOGIE, MONTROSE

Stephen Copp

Introduction

Logie Schoolhouse is located in the small village of Logie, some 5 kilometres (3 miles) north-west of Montrose in Angus. Dating to the first decades of the nineteenth century, the building survived as a rare and remarkably complete example of a late vernacular earth-built schoolhouse which also served its community as a Sunday school and church. Following the last church service in 1990, the building fell into neglect which began to threaten its vulnerable clay fabric. Facing the prospect of imminent demolition, the schoolhouse was saved through the efforts of the local community and the conservation services of Angus Council, who quickly secured a category A listing – and thus statutory protection – for



Figure 1. Logie Schoolhouse in 2005, prior to works. (© The National Trust for Scotland. Reproduced courtesy The National Trust for Scotland)

the building. The schoolhouse was acquired by the National Trust for Scotland's Little Houses Improvement Scheme (LHIS) in 2005 with the mandate of finding a viable new use for the property. Following four years of meticulous conservation work, Logie Schoolhouse has now been sensitively converted into a charmingly idiosyncratic though perfectly comfortable home, which should ensure its preservation for years to come.

History

The earliest evidence for the village of Logie dates to the thirteenth century with the dedication of the nearby church of St Martin, although it was not until the second half of the eighteenth century that the area began to prosper. Agricultural improvements and the establishment of several mills on the North Esk River soon began to support a growing agricultural community. By the early nineteenth century, compulsory education and a growing school-aged population necessitated the construction of a new school which was undertaken by the local landowning estate and situated adjacent to a recently redundant manse.

In keeping with its vernacular origins, the construction of Logie Schoolhouse is characterised by the use of well-established craft skills and an economical use of locally available materials, which were rationally employed in order to form a simple three-room structure. The bulk of the floor plan was dedicated to a single classroom space which was provided with ample daylight and ventilation, while the rear was divided into two small private rooms for the schoolmaster. In an area lacking suitable stone, the traditional building method was to form a low base in field rubble set in a clay mortar and pointed in lime. Upon this was placed a carefully mixed combination of locally sourced clay, aggregate and straw to form massive load-bearing walls; materials were lifted into position with a fork and methodically shaped *in situ* without the use of formwork. Stone, lime mortar and brick were used sparingly and only where there was a specific performance requirement such as protective coatings. With Logie Schoolhouse this economical approach to materials is evident in the position of

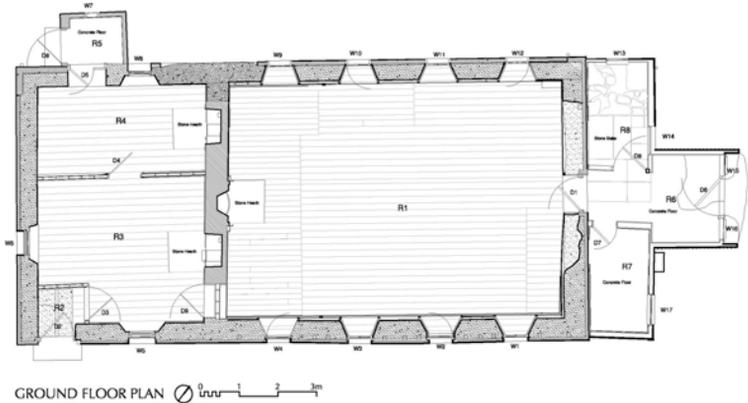
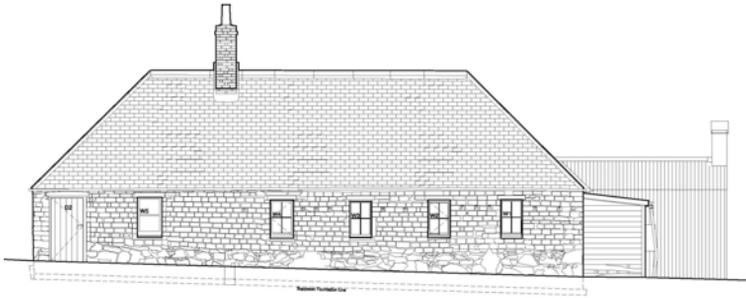


Figure 2. Survey plan of Logie Schoolhouse. (Illustration by Arc Architects. © The National Trust for Scotland and Arc Architects. Reproduced courtesy The National Trust for Scotland)

fireplaces. Each of the rooms was provided with a chimneypiece in dressed stone, and these were rationally set within a single partition made up in handmade brick with a single chimney stack above, in what was otherwise an earth structure.

When the building became a Sunday school at the turn of the century, a series of alterations were undertaken, with the overall intent of tidying up the building which must have been showing signs of age. By 1850 the railway came to Logie, and its arrival completely altered the construction environment by making available mass-produced and cheaper building materials. A new sawn timber roof structure replaced the original roof and was covered in sarking boards and Welsh slates. The exact form of the schoolhouse's original roof is open to some debate, as a thackstane is preserved at a higher level on the chimney stack. Straw thatch was a likely candidate, although repair works to the wall head indicated that it had been levelled by means of large stone slates which were presumably recycled from the original roof. As well as a new roof, the exterior of the building was also provided with a protective cladding: made up of handmade bricks laid on edge as well as thin sections of stone, it was then covered in an integrally coloured yellow lime render. Again economics dictated the placement of materials, with the more regular brick



SOUTH ELEVATION

Figure 3. Survey elevation of Logie Schoolhouse. (Illustration by Arc Architects. © The National Trust for Scotland and Arc Architects. Reproduced courtesy The National Trust for Scotland)

being used for the public elevations. By this time, the exposed clay wall must have weathered to such a degree that it became necessary to trim back the surface and apply a cladding. This was bonded to the underlying earth wall through the use of occasional headers which were set into slots cut into the mudwall with a lime mortar. Historic map evidence indicates that there were a series of lean-to extensions to the north elevation. The presence of one of these at the time the cladding was applied (now missing) has preserved an exposed section of the mudwall in an otherwise fully clad structure.

At the same time as these external alterations were undertaken, the classroom was lined out with dado boarding with lath and plaster above. The two rear rooms were left as they were, retaining their sculpted quality of lime plaster applied directly to the mudwall. The general effect of these alterations was to regularise the building in a manner which tended to obscure its humble origins behind a veil of manufactured materials.

With the building's change of use to a United Free Church in 1929, little of the interior was altered. The main intervention consisted of sealing up the fireplace to the classroom space. Externally, the only significant alteration was intended to create an entrance appropriate to the new use. Here an existing timber-framed lean-to porch was modified in a somewhat haphazard manner, employing a variety of cladding materials to form a gable-

ended entry with small bellcote above. The former classroom space served the congregational needs of the church, while the two rear rooms continued to be occupied for some time by lodgers. Logie Schoolhouse's continuous use by groups with limited means undoubtedly saved it from excessive modifications which might have destroyed significant amounts of its historic fabric or drastically altered its layout. Instead, the building has remained remarkably complete, evolving in a subtle and idiosyncratic manner over time which reflects the charmingly parsimonious spirit of the original build.

Condition and stabilisation

With the funeral of its last parishioner in 1990, Logie United Free Church was abandoned. The inevitable failure of roof flashings and rainwater goods ultimately led to partial collapse of the east wall (see fig.4) and dangerous structural distortions. If kept dry, an earth structure will last indefinitely, but once enough water has penetrated, the material will return to a plastic state with disastrous consequences. Abandonment posed the greatest risk to the schoolhouse and an alternative use had to be found. Preserving the building as a living testimony to rural education in Scotland was attractive, but there was little guarantee that a venue open to the public would be successful. Instead sensitive conversion to housing was deemed the best means to ensure a viable long-term future for the building. Continuous occupation would impose a regime of simple maintenance and create environmental conditions conducive to the preservation of the building's clay fabric.



Figure 4. Partial collapse of east wall. (© The National Trust for Scotland. Reproduced courtesy The National Trust for Scotland)

Emergency works stabilised the structure by removing all loads on the walls through the use of timber props and taking measures to ensure that drying would occur. A critical element of this process was the removal of a cement roughcast which had been applied in the 1970s and was trapping moisture in the underlying earth wall. As these works progressed, a professional team was assembled and extensive research undertaken on the building fabric. This work culminated in the preparation of a Conservation Plan by Tom Morton of Arc Architects, which would offer a better understanding of the building and inform any interventions. Key to the project's eventual success was securing the services of professionals with an intimate knowledge of earth construction and its repair, working in partnership with a local builder who showed an interest and ability to work alongside specialist consultants. Expertise in earth repair was provided by Little & Davie, specialists in stone, earth and lime construction; while joiners and builders Thomson & Douglas served as general contractors.

Conservation strategy

Informed by the Conservation Plan, it was decided at an early stage that any adaptation should cause as little damage as possible to the historic building fabric. A long history of economy in construction meant that the building was filled with idiosyncratic details which were deemed irreplaceable. Almost every door was reused from somewhere else, and several were hung upside down with redundant ironmongery. The windows were an assortment of types, often reworked sashes from 6/6 sash and cases. Logie Schoolhouse provided the National Trust for Scotland with a wonderful opportunity to employ a 'conserve as found' methodology, where fabric would be repaired rather than replaced. Where adjustments had to be made, the new would accommodate the existing, and original fabric would retain a patina of age with little attempt to tidy up appearances.

The spatial integrity of the building was also of primary significance, and would be respected, as new uses were to be sensitively accommodated in existing spaces. New openings

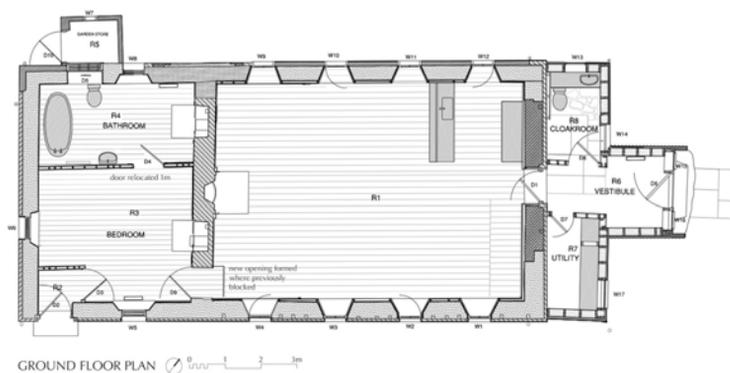


Figure 5. Plan as proposed. (Illustration by Arc Architects. © The National Trust for Scotland and Arc Architects. Reproduced courtesy The National Trust for Scotland)

would be formed only where earlier ones existed or where their impact would be minimal. These constraints dictated that the schoolhouse be converted into a one-bedroom dwelling, with the former classroom serving as a large open-plan living space with kitchen units which were to be read as freestanding furniture. The two smaller rooms to the rear were converted into a double bedroom and generous *en suite* dressing room. The front porch retained its function as the main entry, with ancillary rooms being used as a cloakroom and a utility room providing much-needed amenity space.

Repairs

Works began in August 2007, with considerable effort spent on elements which would not be immediately apparent but were crucial to the building's future wellbeing. Sections of wall which had deflected due to excessive damp in the underlying clay soil were underpinned, and a complex land drainage system was installed to ensure that the problem would not repeat itself. Similarly roof repairs ensured that the schoolhouse was fitted with a robust means of rainwater disposal. In addition to drainage, the building was provided with a passive ventilation system which encourages air movement from the solum to the attic, passing over the inner face of the earth walls and carrying away moisture.



Figure 6. Stitched-in repair to exposed mudwall. (© The National Trust for Scotland. Reproduced courtesy The National Trust for Scotland)

As these works progressed, repairs to the earth walls were undertaken. There are significant difficulties in making wet repairs to earth walls due to the unavoidable shrinkage of any infill material. Instead, areas of decay were first trimmed back and pre-manufactured air-dried blocks then stitched into position and held in place with a clay mortar (see fig.6). The earth for the manufacture of these blocks was made up of materials recycled from collapsed sections of wall and sourced from a nearby field. Portions of the repairs necessitated the temporary removal of the brick cladding, which was subsequently reinstated in its original position. Following these repairs, the principal elevations were provided with a protective lime harl which will allow moisture to evaporate from the building.

With the schoolhouse now wind- and watertight, internal works could be carried out through the winter. This involved the temporary removal of the linings to the classroom and the installation of all services, which were done as discreetly as possible. Each of the three fireplaces in the schoolhouse had at some point been fitted with cast-iron inserts, and these were repaired by P Johnson & Company of Ratho Byres Forge. The two in the rear rooms were fitted with cooking ranges, while that in the classroom was more unusual. When disassembled for

repairs, it became obvious that the grate was cantilevered off a complex rack-and-pinion mechanism positioned behind the right-hand plate. This also operated a separate mechanism which simultaneously opened and closed a damper that had been lost. The system would allow the rate of combustion to be adjusted by means of a hand crank which could be inserted into a hole in the decorative surround. This fire was once again made operational, while the fireplaces in the rear room were restored for decorative purposes only and their flues used to ventilate the attic space.

A key aim of the internal works was to create an environment conducive to the long-term health of the building's clay fabric. Fortunately these conditions are the same as those required for human comfort, and materials were chosen which would create a warm well-ventilated space. To this end the building has been well insulated with cellulose- and hemp-based insulations, and both central heating and mechanical ventilation have been installed. Paint analysis determined that limewash was the dominant surface treatment, and colours were reinstated in traditional materials to match decorative schemes which had previously existed. All internal finishes are both natural and breathable.



Figure 7. View of the bedroom after restoration. (© The National Trust for Scotland. Reproduced courtesy The National Trust for Scotland)



Figure 8. The restored Schoolhouse. (© The National Trust for Scotland. Reproduced courtesy The National Trust for Scotland)

Conclusion and acknowledgements

The project was completed in October 2008 and, in keeping with the conditions of grant funding, will be made available to a member of the local community at an affordable rent. For almost two centuries, Logie Schoolhouse has stood at the heart of its small community, forming an integral part of the social fabric of the village. Saved through the efforts of concerned neighbours and a supportive local authority, a viable new use for the building has been provided by the Little Houses Improvement Scheme which should ensure its preservation for many years to come. These works would also not have been possible without the generous financial support of Historic Scotland, the Scottish Government and Angus Council.

THE VIOLET BANKS COLLECTION

Veronica Fraser

In May 2006, the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) was gifted a collection of photographs, mostly of the Hebrides, taken by Violet Banks in the 1920s and 1930s (Accession Number: 2006/120). The photographs had been found in a sideboard purchased with a collection of furniture by Mr John Dixon of Georgian Antiques, Edinburgh; Mr Dixon generously gifted them to RCAHMS to ensure their accessibility to the public.

There are some 800 photographs in the collection, with nearly 700 in albums, and the remainder unmounted. The loose photographs are mostly of major buildings in Edinburgh and its surroundings, in addition to several churches in the Borders. The albums feature photographs of buildings, landscapes and people which will greatly interest researchers in the vernacular buildings of the west of Scotland, and the lives associated with them. They provide an immediate and attractive record of aspects of island life on, among others, Coll, Barra, North and South Uist, Eigg and Sanday.

Violet Banks (1896–1985) was born near Kinghorn, Fife, and educated at Craigmount, Edinburgh, and at Edinburgh College of Art. In 1927 she was senior art mistress at St Oran's, a private school in Drummond Place, Edinburgh. She was sufficiently significant a painter in oil and watercolour and decorator of pottery to merit an entry in the *Who's Who in Art* of 1927, and also in subsequent editions. She gives her recreations as walking and photography, and was to become a commercial photographer from 1935 to 1949. She was a life member of the Edinburgh Photographic Society from 1935. In 1927, her address was given as Sunnyhill, Kirkcaldy, with her working premises at The Blue Studio, Central Chambers, Kirkcaldy; by 1929 her domestic address was 70 Comiston Road, Edinburgh. Her business was based at 21 Charlotte Square from



Figure 1. View of (presumably) Violet Banks on Eriskay. (RCAHMS, DP050870; Crown Copyright: RCAHMS, Violet Banks Collection)

1934 until 1949, when she ceases to appear as a photographer in the Edinburgh street directories. In 1938, her domestic address is 9 Bruntsfield Crescent, Edinburgh; copyright stamps on the reverse of her photographs include the further addresses of 11 Randolph Place, Edinburgh and 39 Corstorphine Hill Gardens, Edinburgh, her home at the time of her death. There are several uncaptioned photographs throughout the albums which could be of Violet Banks. One such shows her drinking from a spring on Eriskay (DP050870; see fig.1).

As Violet Banks was a commercial photographer, examples of her works will exist in both private and public collections. Professor Murdo Macdonald, in the plenary address to the ‘Lie of the Land’ conference, held in Stirling in July 2006, mentions her in the context of the following photographers of the Western Isles: Robert Moyes Adam (1885–1967) (whose collection is held by the University of St Andrews); amateur photographer and ethnographer Dr Werner Kissling (1895–1988); and American photographer and filmmaker, Paul Strand (1890–1976). Examples of some of her photographs of the Western Isles have been published in *The Western Isles – A Postcard Tour, 1: Barra to North Uist* (Bob Charnley, 1992). This

collection provides the first examples of Banks's works to be held by RCAHMS; it proves a useful continuation of RCAHMS's existing collections on the area, for example the photographic and recording work of Erskine Beveridge (1851–1920).

The main part of the collection is housed in small albums, presumably compiled and mounted by Violet Banks herself. They are titled as follows: 'Isle of Harris and Lewis'; 'Coll and Tiree'; 'A Book of Barra'; 'Eriskay and Benbecula'; 'North Uist'; 'The Small Isles'; 'Islay, Jura, Gigha, Colonsay'; 'Ardgour, Ardnamurchan, Kilmartin, Kilmore, Trossachs, Loch Lomond' and 'Sutherland'. While none is dated, it is assumed that the views were taken during the 1920s and 1930s. The photographs are arranged with three or four on a page, and mostly measure 8.5 by 13 centimetres (3 $\frac{3}{8}$ by 5 $\frac{1}{8}$ in), though there are some smaller ones; Violet Banks's camera would have been a box-type, with 15-by-23-centimetre (5 $\frac{7}{8}$ -by-9-in) film negatives. All photographs are black and white, with about half identified or captioned. It is not clear whether the photographs were all taken on one journey, or were compiled from several visits.

The '**Isle of Harris and Lewis**' album features 80 photographs which show the buildings and landscape of the Long Island as well



Figure 2. View of cottage at Leverburgh, Harris. (RCAHMS, SC1115002; Crown Copyright: RCAHMS, Violet Banks Collection)



Figure 3. View of thatched cottage at Ardhasaig, Harris. (RCAHMS, SC1115003; Crown Copyright: RCAHMS, Violet Banks Collection)



Figure 4. View of settlement on Coll, probably Totamore. (RCAHMS, DP050857; Crown Copyright: RCAHMS, Violet Banks Collection)

as illustrating fascinating detail of the textile production for which it is famed. One view shows a croft at Leverburgh, with shorn fleeces drying on lines in its small walled garden (SC1115002; see fig.2); a nearby outbuilding has timber walls and a corrugated iron roof. Another photograph shows a thatched croft with the finished fabric draped over a low wall to air (SC1115003; see fig.3). They form part of a sequence depicting the process of textile production from drying fleeces, spinning wool and dyeing the wool over an outdoor fire, to weaving on a loom inside a croft and then airing the finished woven fabric. Other sites included in this album are St Clement's Church, Rodel, and the stone circle of Callanish, as well as general views of the island scenery.

The **'Coll and Tiree'** album is only half full with 31 photographs, and none actually shows Tiree. The album begins with the main street of Arinagour, the island's only village;

the remainder of the photographs comprise views of the island's coastline including Old and New Breachacha Castles, a thatched house by the shore, and cattle on the beach. Of greatest interest is a view of a small settlement, probably Totamore (DP050857; see fig.4). It features a well-maintained and inhabited white house with lean-to outbuilding; beside it stands a slightly dilapidated house of a similar style, presumably used for agricultural purposes. Beyond stands a later slate-roofed building, again with lean-to outbuilding.

'**A Book of Barra**' contains 109 photographs, and presents a detailed picture of life on the island at the time. Activities such as peat gathering and fishing are featured, with herring girls working on the quay at Castlebay; the Barra Games are also captured, as is an aeroplane at rest on the beach at An Tràigh Mhòr. The survival of what appear quite primitive dwellings is recorded; a photograph captioned 'Our next door neighbours at Borve, and Beinn Mhartuin' shows two figures outside a massive-walled low thatched house (DP050860; see fig.5). Some similar houses survive to this day on the island, but have been reroofed. Ponies are illustrated being used to transport peat and, most interestingly,



Figure 5. View of Borve, Barra. (RCAHMS, DP050860; Crown Copyright: RCAHMS, Violet Banks Collection)



Figure 6. View of pony carrying rushes for thatching, Barra. (RCAHMS, DP050865; Crown Copyright: RCAHMS, Violet Banks Collection)



Figure 7. View of a crofter's dwelling at Daliburgh, South Uist. (RCAHMS, DP050862; Crown Copyright: RCAHMS, Violet Banks Collection)

rushes for thatching from the Dark Glen (DP050865; see fig.6). Other dwellings featured include a dressed-stone slate-roofed cottage with corrugated iron extension. A tour of the island takes in views of the old church at Cille-Bharra and the extensive beaches. The album also contains distant views of South Uist, and buildings on that island, including a view of a crofter's dwelling at Daliburgh (DP050862; see fig.7). As well as showing an interesting array of houses and associated structures, Banks has managed to include a peatstack and carts.

The '**Eriskay and Benbecula**' album features 59 photographs, divided equally between the two islands. Fishing activities, peat gathering and the use of ponies also appear. Modernisation in a traditional context is illustrated in a view of the telegraph and post office on Eriskay, with the telegraph pole mounted on a traditional thatched house (DP050868; see fig.8). An accompanying

photograph is possibly of Dougal MacMillan, postmaster on Eriskay from 1885 to 1945. Behind the post office stands a similar building with excellent details of the weighted rope network used to secure the thatch. A photograph of the crofting township at Liniolate on Benbecula shows a development in styles (DP050871; see fig.9); it features a thatched-roofed house with recent chimney-pots, while behind stands a house with only a small chimney can and possibly a turf roof. In the distance is a dressed-stone house with dormer windows. Other views of Liniolate show buildings with thatched roofs, but without the limewashed finish. Another interesting view of traditional life on the island is that of a tinker's family crossing the South Ford to South Uist by pony and trap on a route now crossed by a causeway.

The 'North Uist' album contains 63 images, and is particularly rich in views of island life. Scenes include cattle crossing a ford,

Figure 8. View of telegraph office at Balla, Eriskay. (RCAHMS, DP050868; Crown Copyright: RCAHMS, Violet Banks Collection)



Figure 9. View of Liniolate, Benbecula. (RCAHMS, DP050871; Crown Copyright: RCAHMS, Violet Banks Collection)



a postman on a pony, a girl dwarfed by a massive peat stack at Carinish, and communal sheep dipping. The photographs show a range of buildings, including a cluster of a thatched croft house and its associated buildings at Clachan (DP050874; see fig.10). The drystone construction of one of the smaller buildings is especially obvious; in addition, none of the buildings is limewashed. A photograph of the construction of a dressed-stone building illustrates the retention of earlier structures. The new building abuts a thatched one which was probably an extension to an earlier, now demolished, building (DP050875; see fig.11).



Figure 10. View of Clachan-a-Luib, North Uist. (RCAHMS, DP050874; Crown Copyright: RCAHMS, Violet Banks Collection)



Figure 11. View of Kirkibost, North Uist. (RCAHMS, DP050875; Crown Copyright: RCAHMS, Violet Banks Collection)

*Figure 12. View of
Cleedale, Eigg.
(RCAHMS,
DP050866; Crown
Copyright: RC-
AHMS, Violet
Banks Collection)*



*Figure 13. View of
cottage on Sanday.
(RCAHMS,
DP050867; Crown
Copyright: RC-
AHMS, Violet
Banks Collection)*



The ‘**Small Isles**’ album features 91 photographs, with several devoted to the dramatic landscape of Eigg and the sea stacks to the north of Canna. Among the views of buildings is one showing ‘The only inhabited thatched house (on Eigg)’ (DP050866; see fig.12). The croft is shown with outbuildings, including one with an open front, and peat stack. Another illustration shows an improved cottage on Sanday, ‘Miss MacIsaac’s Cottage’ (D050867; see fig.13). Here the walls are limewashed, a porch has been added, the window openings have been enlarged to accommodate sash windows and the traditional thatched roof has been replaced by corrugated iron complete with skylights. A lean-to wooden shed has been retained. Another semi-permanent structure is featured in views of a shelter for the storage and repair of lobster-fishing equipment on Sanday.



Figure 14. View of street in Port Wemyss, Islay. (RCAHMS, DP051883; Crown Copyright: RCAHMS, Violet Banks Collection)

‘**Islay, Jura, Gigha, Colonsay**’ holds 89 photographs, about half of these being of Colonsay. In contrast to the many isolated crofts shown in the other albums, this one includes larger settlements, including Port Wemyss (planned in 1833), in a view showing a street of limewashed single-storey houses with the Rhinns of Islay Lighthouse in the background (DP051883; see fig.14).

‘**Ardgour, Ardnamurchan, Kilmartin, Kilmore, Trossachs, Loch Lomond**’ contains 121 photographs. On the mainland Violet Banks photographed the same subjects of land- and seascapes, and of people carrying out traditional activities. In Ardnamurchan, Banks photographed the house of M E M Donaldson at Sanna Bheag; it would have been newly built at the time, and was to be destroyed by fire in 1947. Banks’s recording of farming techniques on the islands focuses on traditional methods, but in photographs of Kilmore Farm she shows a tractor at work pulling cut logs.

‘**Sutherland**’ features 50 photographs, all of sites in the western half of the county. As well as recording the Inchnadamph and Kylesku Hotels, she photographed the exterior of the caves at Inchnadamph which have since been excavated for evidence of early habitation.

Further information

The photographs in the albums have all been catalogued by RCAHMS volunteer Anne Runnalls and entries appear on the Canmore database at www.rcahms.gov.uk along with a selection of the images. Digitisation of photographs featuring buildings continues. The albums are available to view by appointment at RCAHMS, John Sinclair House, 16 Bernard Terrace, Edinburgh EH8 9NX (info@rcahms.gov.uk).

RCAHMS would be most interested in receiving further information on the life and work of Violet Banks to complement this collection of photographs. Any such notifications should be addressed to Veronica Fraser, RCAHMS Collections, RCAHMS (address as above), 0131 662 1456, veronica.fraser@rcahms.gov.uk.

Acknowledgements

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Some useful information on Violet Banks is contained on the website www.edinphoto.org.uk.

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THE EARLY DAYS OF THE SVBWG: SOME PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

Ingyal Maxwell

As a student of architecture at the Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art, Dundee during the 1960s, I became increasingly interested in vernacular architecture at a time when academic interest in the topic was limited to a few organisations. By 1968, as I neared qualifying, a groundswell reaction was starting to take place in an attempt to redress this anomaly, and to push for the recognition of the need to comprehensively integrate the recording, study and analysis of this major part of Scotland's built heritage. Steadily gaining ground in having its voice heard, the net effect led to the creation and development of a much-needed Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group.

Since 1947 the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Acts have provided the outline framework for any official interest in vernacular architecture to develop. Initially interest was virtually non-existent due to the emphasis that the Acts placed on modern development. But, as some small degree of awareness of the need took hold, it was specifically the 1953 Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act, together with the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Acts of 1969 and 1972, that provided the focus for real change. In particular, the directions that were given in the 1969 Act, which were incorporated in and expanded by the 1972 Act, required the Secretary of State for Scotland to compile lists of buildings of special architectural or historic interest, or to approve such lists made by others. In addition to considering the building, the 1972 Act required other factors to be taken into account, namely:

any respect in which its [the building's] exterior contributes to the architectural or historic interest of any group of buildings of which it forms part;

and the desirability of preserving, on the ground of architectural or historic interest, any feature of the building consisting of a man-made object or structure fixed to the building or forming part of the land and comprised within the curtilage of the building.



Figure 1. Ackergill, Caithness. A good example of how comprehensively the farmhouse, steading range, cottages, access roads and field boundaries integrate with the landscape in a manner that exemplifies the listing criteria in planning legislation.



Figure 2. Arnol, Lewis. Using materials directly won from the immediate locality, the interwoven integration of buildings and landscape is more explicitly revealed by the Lewis Blackhouse; the significance of this growing recognition in official circles resulting in nearby 42 Arnol being taken into State Guardianship in 1965 as an Ancient Monument.

This significant legislative change opened up the need to better, and fully, understand buildings in their setting, their function and their detail. Importantly, in the evolution of listing categories, it was particularly the stated definition of category C structures which allowed the identification of ‘good buildings which may be considered altered, other buildings which are fair examples of their period, or in some cases buildings of no great individual merit which group well with others in categories A or B’. That potentially wide span gave officials the remit to start considering that the more modest vernacular structures could be of sufficient merit to warrant statutory listing.

Prior to these legislative directions, some considerable interest in the subject area had already been established and developed in a few locations. Since taking an active interest in the preservation of the character and quality of the villages of Culross and Dunkeld in the 1920s, the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) went on to develop its innovative Little Houses Scheme (later the Little Houses Improvement Scheme), and sensitively preserved numerous



Figure 3. Crail, Fife. The well-recognised indigenous quality of the coastal architecture in the East Neuk has its pedigree in what the NTS achieved through its Little Houses (later Little Houses Improvement) Scheme. Repair works on such structures were frequently grant-aided by funding from the Historic Buildings Council for Scotland following its inception in 1953.

structures that would otherwise have been lost to development and other pressures. Through the scheme's success, the NTS had provided the direction and inspiration that many followed.

The National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland's Scottish Country Life Archive held a substantial amount of relevant material on buildings in the countryside, and this was complemented by Edinburgh University's impressive archive in its School of Scottish Studies. However, it was only after the transfer to the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) of the Scottish National Buildings Record in 1966 that RCAHMS started to make a serious inroad into undertaking proactive surveys of vernacular buildings, extending its activity from the 1970s to the recording of rural landscapes and thereby enhancing its archive of the subject. At the time, an underused resource in the form of the RAF's vertical and oblique air photographic record of virtually the entire country during the post-Second World War period of the mid-1940s also existed. This

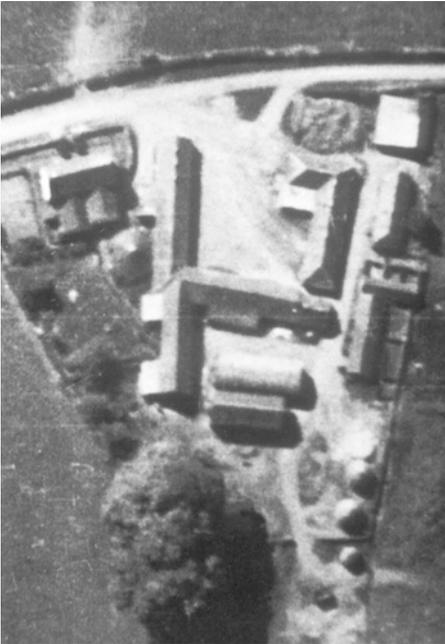


Figure 4. Greenbeck, Annandale: detail from RAF vertical air photo c.1948. (Courtesy of RCAHMS (RAF Air Photographs Collection))

provided a unique and detailed insight into Scotland's rural buildings and their settings at the point of major changes in agrarian practices. Having been previously held by the then Scottish Development Department, that record has since been transferred and amalgamated with the RCAHMS archive. Other relevant sources included the collection of Estate Plans held in the then Scottish Records Office, and the countrywide collection of maps (including the mid-nineteenth-century highly detailed cartographic masterpieces of the First Edition 25 inch, 6 inch and 1 inch to the mile Ordnance Survey sheets, with subsequent editions) held by the Map Library of the National Library of Scotland.

Although such contextualising archives could readily be consulted by the interested individual, publications, such as John Dunbar's *The Historic Architecture of Scotland* in 1966, started to place the country's small rural houses, farms and villages into their wider historic framework. A decade later Robert Scott

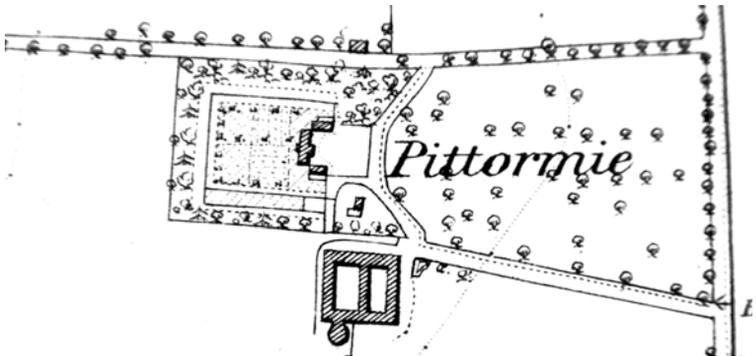


Figure 5. Pittormie, Fife and Kinross Sheet 6 (1855): enlarged detail from Ordnance Survey First Edition 6 inch to 1 mile. The exemplary cartographic skills evident in the First Edition OS maps, coupled with a rudimentary understanding of the functional relationships that exist in the steading layout, enable a reasonable interpretation of the drawn building form. Here, the polygonal horse engine house locates the adjacent threshing barn bordering two open courtyards, independent cottages and farmhouse with an enclosed garden. Comparison with information obtainable from the 1940s RAF vertical air photos or, more recently, imagery from Google Earth, can greatly inform the interpreted detail from such desk-based analytical work.

Morton's 1976 photo essay, *Traditional Farm Architecture in Scotland*, revealed the wide regional diversity that also existed, and this awareness was further enhanced following the publication of Robert J Naismith's *Buildings of the Scottish Countryside* in 1985.

Building upon a variety of previous works and studies, and using survey drawings, photographs and a closely documented text, in 1981 Alexander Fenton and Bruce Walker published *The Rural Architecture of Scotland*. Emanating from the stables of John Donaldson Publishers, it was one of a series of informative, in-depth publications on Scottish vernacular topics that Donaldson's printed from the mid-1970s.

Against this disparate, but remarkable, background of numerous individual players, each with their own agenda to follow, with hindsight it becomes self-evident why no particular effort was put into creating an integrated national survey of Scotland's rural buildings. But this was to change. In 1967 the then Scottish Development Department (who were responsible for creating and holding the statutory lists of listed buildings in the country) joined forces with the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland and RCAHMS to set up a working party – the Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Party – to look at the issues involved. Membership of the Working Party grew to include representatives from the Ancient Monuments Inspectorate, Edinburgh University's Department of Architecture and School of Scottish Studies, Edinburgh College of Art's School of Architecture, and the National Trust for Scotland. Taking into account what facilities already existed, the Working Party's remit was to consider how the extent of neglect in the identification, recording and awareness of Scotland's rural buildings could be remedied. After seeking advice from the leading exponent of the survey and interpretation of vernacular buildings, Dr Ronald Brunskill at Manchester University's School of Architecture, it was concluded that, to cover the whole of Scotland, a possible solution would involve a five-year focused survey. In anticipation of this, and grant-aided by the National Trust for Scotland, a four-week trial survey of the Glamis Estate, Angus was undertaken in 1968.



Figure 6. Preston Mill, East Linton. Dating from the 17th and 18th centuries, the mill is one of the oldest mechanically intact water-driven meal mills in Scotland. Major renovation work was carried out in 1760 and a cast-iron mill-wheel installed. The machinery is modern, having been repaired and replaced following the 1948 flood which brought the mill's commercial use to an end. In recognition of its importance, the mill was given to the National Trust for Scotland in 1950.

Having reached their conclusions, the Working Party held a well-attended one-day conference in Edinburgh in 1968 at which they promoted their findings, and took views from other interested parties. Distilling the interests and aspirations expressed by the various speakers and representative bodies as an attending student, I was given additional personal inspiration, awareness and confidence to undertake my own survey work of 40 farms on the Airlie Estate, Angus as part of my final-year thesis in 1968–9.

Whilst the Glamis survey predominantly focused on farm houses and cottages, my unpublished work on Airlie (which was lodged in the Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art Library in 1969) adopted a much more comprehensive approach and attempted to put the farmhouses, cottages and steading buildings into their functional context of working the land. (I subsequently went on to carry out similar detailed surveys of 26 farms on the Hopetoun Estate in West Lothian, and over 200 farms in the Midlothian District Council area.) In a parallel exercise, a limited release of relevant information also occurred with the availability of an *East Lothian Farm Buildings* pamphlet from East Lothian

County Council in 1968. Carried out for the County Planning Committee, this small publication presented the summary findings of a funded survey of 130 farm steadings from the eastern half of the county. This was followed by a further publication, *East Lothian Water Mills*, in 1970. Presented as a contribution to European Conservation Year, some 45 water mills were surveyed and reported on across the county to establish information on their state of completeness.

Unfortunately, despite the interest and work that was carried out for and following the 1968 Edinburgh conference, the Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Party was unable to secure any further funding to carry out the national overview that they had anticipated was so necessary. However, in 1979 the Countryside Commission for Scotland initiated and sponsored a ten-per-cent sample survey of all rural buildings across the country dating from between 1750 and 1914. Chosen at random, this survey amounted to some 23,500 small buildings being examined, photographed and recorded. Aided by computer analysis, the amassed data provided the basis of Naismith's 1985 volume.

Given the lack of resources following the 1968 conference (and, as it turned out, the fact that it took over ten years before any progress was made towards undertaking anything like the nationwide survey anticipated by the Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Party) an alternative strategy needed to be devised. Consequently some Working Party members, together with other interested individuals (myself included), decided to formalise the situation and established the Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group. As a precursor to SVBWG's annual round of peripatetic conferences, initial meetings were arranged in Edinburgh during 1972 on the topic of 'Rural Buildings', and in Dundee in 1973 on 'Village and Urban Architecture'. During this period, as interest and membership grew, the SVBWG committee formalised its intention of uniting lay, academic and professional interests by setting out some common aims:

- Providing a meeting point for individuals and institutions concerned in some way with the architectural, historical



Figure 7. St Mary's, Fife: horse engine house. The architectural quality and superb craftsmanship embodied in vernacular buildings is perhaps nowhere better revealed than in the construction of the horse engine house. Function determined the need to provide a clear circular floor plan on which harnessed horses could rotate the drive gearing to power an adjacent threshing mill. The need was to protect the machinery from the elements and to keep the working animals cool. Numerous variations, including this hexagonal and pyramidal-roofed version, were devised to meet the criteria. All are worthy of study in detail.



Figure 8. Stenriesshill, Annandale: horse engine house. This view, looking up into the roof structure, reveals the skill involved in creating a conical roof that could be supported only by the peripheral walls. Close analysis reveals that the roof construction involved fixing 12 rafters spanning from wall head to apex, followed by placing 12 horizontal bracing pieces, two-thirds up the roof rise, to form a continuous compression ring. A further 12 sub-rafters were secured at the midpoint on each bracing piece to extend down the roof slope to wall head level. These, in turn, were stabilised, and the roof strengthened, by 24 additional bracing pieces placed at one-third up the roof rise (creating a further compression ring) following which sub-sub-rafters were fixed in a similar manner between the lower bracing pieces and wall head. Concentric battens were then attached to the outer faces of all the rafters, into which slates were nailed. The entire conical roof depended upon the secure fixing of all the rafters at the wall head, and the integrity of the two compression rings formed by the continuously aligned bracing pieces. The need to survey, understand and promote such constructional technologies and details lay at the heart of devising SVBWG's original aims.

and social aspects of vernacular buildings

- Meeting at regular intervals in different parts of the country to discuss specific topics within the field of the subject
- Diffusing knowledge of the subject through discussion and through publication of information
- Stimulating more systematic activity in the surveying and recording of vernacular buildings in their regional and social settings
- Encouraging the study and teaching of the subject in the curricula of universities and colleges of architecture

As confidence and commitment to its stated objectives developed, in 1975 SVBWG published *Vernacular Building 1* (this slim volume was reprinted, and combined with *VB 2* and *VB 3*, in 1981). The first three *VBs* succinctly recorded how matters were starting to grow following the creation of the Group, and regularly included an impressive list of ‘Work in progress in Dundee’ under the leadership of Bruce Walker. Since then *VB* has continued to grow from strength to strength, and is ably supported by an exemplary range of monographs.

Over the last 40 years the SVBWG is to be congratulated in fulfilling its original aims in such a remarkably productive and informative manner. It has much to be proud of in the way it has traversed the country with its meetings and conferences; its increasingly diverse and established membership; and through its methodology to develop and promote that broader understanding of Scotland’s wide range of vernacular buildings. It has successfully influenced the significant changes that have occurred in officialdom’s awareness and perception of and commitment to recognising and addressing the needs of these buildings, and has uniquely provided the vehicle for a wide range of researchers to promote the outcome of their investigations to the lay, academic and professional audience.

SHORTER ARTICLES AND NOTES

Obituary: Elizabeth Ann Robertson (29 December 1942 – 24 December 2008)

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Liz Robertson and I were close friends for 20 years in Edinburgh. Yet by some odd coincidence, we had worked in close proximity in London for many years before that, but without knowing each other – she in the BBC in Marylebone High Street and I in an antiquarian bookshop almost opposite. We both subsequently worked in the British Museum building in London, again without coming to know each other – although we must have passed in the street, and even more likely in the staff tea room. We did not meet until a mutual friend in London who knew I had a small flat in Edinburgh asked me if I would let a friend of hers – Liz, as it turned out – use it, as she had taken up a new post at the Royal Scottish Museum. I had to say that, actually, I too had just accepted a job in Edinburgh, and needed the flat myself. Later we must have looked at hundreds of one-bedroom flats for her, before she finally decided to buy one of the very first that we had seen.

She always said that settling in the Stockbridge Colonies had been the best choice possible because, having no family nearby, she found herself among good neighbours who were particularly friendly, helpful and supportive. And she came to love Scotland and all things Scottish.

Born in Pakistan, raised and educated in South Africa, Liz came to Britain in her early twenties. She was a very able graphic designer who, baptised by the fire of working in the hothouse of the British Museum Exhibitions department, brought with her to Edinburgh a work ethic and perfectionism that was almost obsessive. But away from her work, she was a person of varied interests: a very enthusiastic hill walker (she had been a member of a mountaineering group in London and she dragged me up my first Munro); a keen swimmer, delighted to be living next door to a swimming pool; a regular theatre-, cinema- and concert-goer; a talented artist who greatly enjoyed her membership of the Dunfermline Print Workshop (and how pleased she was to learn in hospital that one of her wood engravings of the Colonies houses had been sold at their current exhibition); an enthusiast for everything outdoor; and of course a rabid allotment gardener (how often have I regarded a gift of cabbage or miscellaneous greens with suspicion and foreboding, knowing how many organic slugs would be lurking there?).

She was unconventional but highly principled – and also very good company. I have spent thousands of hours blethering with Liz, at home, or in the Filmhouse or the Cameo (our favourite haunts), wrestling with questions of world significance and of more pressing importance – whether we should have two tray bakes or just split one. We all have our own memories of her and her foibles – and she had many. Who else could take so long to eat a sandwich on a hill walk break? And those sandwiches, those mysterious fillings. And how did she manage to create so much washing up after one single breakfast? But we also remember her decency, her kindly nature and her sense of outrage at waste, extravagance or injustice.

Jean Archibald

A Visit to the Horizontal Water Mills on the Clumlie Burn, Troswick, South Mainland, Shetland

Ann Dean

This visit in October 2008 resulted from my reading Elizabeth Beaton's article on the mills on the Clumlie Burn in *Vernacular Building* 23 (1999, pp 28–9). The SVBWG conference was held in Shetland in 1997: the mills were visited then.

Summer 2008 was the best in Shetland for over 20 years but by the end of September normal weather had returned. My fortnight's holiday of rain, wind and snow was preceded by one fine day and ended at the beginning of October with an even more glorious day of sunshine!

Shetland Museum and Archives provided endless hours of fascinating study, and in the Archives Search Room in the reference library were issues of *Vernacular Building* 20 and 23 (1996 and 1999). There was neither the weather nor the time to visit the haa houses of Shetland (*VB* 20, 1996, pp 39–52), but one clear day was sufficient for an inspection of the extraordinary collection of eight nineteenth-century horizontal water mills on the short length of the Clumlie Burn between the Loch of Clumlie and the sea at Troswick, South Mainland (OS sheet 4, HU 40 16). With their lades and sluices, they are an impressive sight.



It was on the gable wall of the fourth mill south of the road that the first ‘lunt stane’ was noted – the projecting stone slab 46 centimetres wide and 23 to 30 centimetres deep mentioned in Beaton’s article in *VB* 23. It could easily be missed, as much of the building is covered with lichen, blurring the clarity of the stonework. Once seen, its function is obvious, so simple and so practical – a resting ledge for a full sack of grain or meal at a convenient height near the entrance door to the mill, to aid the bearer when he was lifting up or setting down his burden.

One wonders how many people in Shetland are aware of the ‘lunt stanes’ projecting from the walls of the mills on the Clumlie Burn, Troswick (and maybe elsewhere in Shetland). As Beaton has suggested in her paper, why not keep alive the tradition of the ‘lunt stanes’, by incorporating them into the walls of ‘camping bods’ (Shetland hostels) to ease lifting heavy rucksacks? The expression ‘lunt stane’ – from the old Norse ‘lint’ or ‘lin’, meaning rest or rest upon, etc. – would not then disappear from common use and knowledge.

The Big Cousland Dig

Sheena Irving

In November 2007 Cousland Local History Project (CLHP) were just about to start the Big Cousland Dig. Thanks to volunteers from the village and all over the Lothians we metal detected, geophyzed, dug, washed finds, measured, drew, photographed, filmed and had a lot of fun clocking up an impressive 900 hours of volunteer time in three sessions between November 2007 and July 2008.

The full results of the dig have been produced in a 70-page printed report which has been taken into the RCAHMS, Historic Scotland, National Museums of Scotland and Midlothian and East Lothian Local Studies collections.

The expert’s conclusion in the report states that the HLF-

funded project ‘exceeded expectations’, effectively rewriting the history of Cousland from the early Medieval period around 1110 AD to the beginning of the eighteenth century and outlining its importance as a place that was not only affected by decisive events in Scottish history, but that actually hosted some of its own.

Examination of the Castle field revealed that the Castle itself was probably built around the end of the fifteenth century by the Ruthven lords, who later constructed a Residence there which hosted the Confederate lords – and perhaps even Mary Queen of Scots – in 1567. Most of the Castle was quarried away during construction of the Walled Garden in the early eighteenth century, during ‘improvements’ made by the Dalrymples who had taken over the lands of Cousland in the 1690s, although the Residence remained until at least 1760. As the report states: ‘There is definite proof of structures in the south field, though these may be connected with later quarry works. The Residence, although demolished, does have surviving archaeology remaining to the south, and could provide evidence for construction, use and layout.’

Also of great interest is the Windmill which, along with the Smiddy, was another of the Dalrymple improvements. It sits on an unusual mound which has been the subject of investigation. Nearby are known long cist burials believed to date to between the ninth and the eleventh centuries, which the report states ‘could at last be the final clue to the location of an early Christian religious establishment’.

Another remarkable find of great importance is the Pottery field, where geophysical analysis has indicated the presence of kilns and possible waster pits that bear witness to one of the earliest whiteware potteries in Scotland. As the report observes: ‘Examination of the technologies used, as well as the pottery produced here, will be of immense value to the study of Ceramics in Scotland.’

This project has grown legs and there is clearly a lot more to find. Geophysical examinations carried out in the Pottery field in January by Edinburgh Archaeological Field Society showed a large range of buildings and more kilns, so CLHP’s volunteers

must now decide whether we have the energy to continue with the investigations. But one thing is certain: we need more space to display our collection. The possible third phase of the Smiddy complex, involving the restoration of the remaining building and the creation of an archive storage and research space for the whole village, will be a welcome joint project.

The report can be found at www.scribd.com/doc/7378480/Big-Cousland-Dig-2008 and printed copies are available from CLHP (cousland.localhistory@virgin.net or 0131 663 2730) at £15 each.

CLHP will have a stand at Midlothian Homecoming Fair at the Scottish Mining Museum, Newtongrange on 3 May and at the Scottish Community Archaeology Conference at Queen Margaret University on 16 and 17 May.

Scotland's Rural Past – going strong!

Tertia Barnett

As the Scotland's Rural Past (SRP) project enters its third year, the results of its investment in people are starting to become apparent. With nearly 50 separate community projects underway or completed across the country, over 500 participants are now actively engaged in surveying and researching abandoned rural sites. The vast majority of participants have received expert training from SRP and RCAHMS staff, and many have been involved since the early days of SRP.

As projects mature, a growing number of new records are being submitted to the RCAHMS database via the SRP online form. These records, which range from individual buildings to entire glens, are of a consistently high standard and level of detail, and are helping to enhance our understanding of the vernacular architecture and social history of these rural areas. Many of the groups involved are also helping to promote rural heritage within their communities and among visitors to their areas through exhibitions, publications, guided walks and leaflets.

In 2009, SRP will also be going further afield, with projects planned in Shetland, the Western Isles and Caithness. Greater emphasis will be placed on training young people through the SRP education programme which links into the new Curriculum for Excellence. School and Young Archaeologist Club projects across Scotland will help make rural history and archaeology more accessible and exciting for these age groups.

Throughout the coming year, SRP will provide opportunities for participants to share their ideas and results, such as the SRP website (www.scotlandsruralpast.org.uk), the SRP conference (14 November 2009) and a host of other activities that will be publicised on the SRP website during the year.

Furnished Vernacular Dwellings in Scotland Open to the Public

Crissie White

Sixty furnished dwellings and room settings within museums were identified by area in the 2006 special issue of *Vernacular Building* dedicated to 'Furniture and Fittings in the Traditional Scottish Home' (Volume 30). The aim was to broaden access to a wider public. Three other significant buildings have come to light since publication of that volume, and are included here. Full addresses and access details are available by the name of the building or trust from websites, local-authority sources and tourist information centres.

Ayrshire

Museum of Ayrshire Country Life and Costume, Dalgarnen Mill, Kilwinning (Dalgarnen Mill Trust). The restored grain mill is the sole survivor in Lowland Scotland. Country life is illustrated in nine galleries over three floors. The 1880 lifestyle of the mill-owner is presented in a re-created parlour and bedroom. The kitchen with box bed houses a rare collection of eighteenth-century furniture and fittings.

Dumfries and Galloway

Museum of Lead Mining, Wanlockhead (Wanlockhead Museum Trust). Two period cottages are dressed as at 1740 and 1890. The 1740 cottage consists of one room with box bed, table, chairs, blanket kist and crockery. In the other, the kitchen-cum-living room has box bed, bed linen and quilt, cooking range, dresser, table, chairs, rocking chair, rag rugs, ornaments, bible, photographs and suchlike. The second room is dressed as a period shop complete with a selection of items including bottles, scales and cookery implements.

Fife

Andrew Carnegie Birthplace Museum, Dunfermline (Carnegie Dunfermline Trust). The cottage is fully furnished as an eighteenth-century weaver's home, as in Carnegie's time. The upper floor includes the room where he was born and a room with storyboards recounting his family background and emigration to America. One downstairs room is furnished as Mrs Carnegie's Victorian parlour; the other, the loom room, houses a Jacquard handloom from the same era.

The SVBWG Doocots Project

Elizabeth Beaton

Doocots, the Scots term for dovecots, are among the oldest farm building types in Scotland. They were built to house pigeons destined for the dinner table, and were sometimes combined with henhouses. Although the buildings vary in size, they often stand alone. Recording them is therefore normally a fairly straightforward process that can be undertaken as an individual project by one or two people.

Doocots are found all over Scotland and can be a good index of building traditions, local materials, masonry skills and styles, in addition to the interest engendered by their locations. They are usually to be found on estates, because only lairds with a reasonable

amount of land had the right to build: in doing so the landowner acquired a certain amount of prestige in the bargain!

Nick Brown, from Cullen, drew on his thesis to launch the SVBWG's series of publications on the subject with *Doocots of Scotland: Moray* (2004). Obviously only a small part of the material could be included in the published text. Several SVBWG members were then inspired to undertake individual projects. Munro Dunn – with much input from his wife, Frances – compiled *Doocots of Scotland: Lanarkshire* (2006), with a companion volume devoted to East Lothian soon to be printed. In the meantime, my own *Doocots of Scotland: Highland, Orkney and Shetland* was published in 2008. Edwina Proudfoot of St Andrews is working on doocots in East Fife and is also interested in Angus, from where Canon Dendle Young has kindly sent a detailed list.

Beyond the standalone publications, the SVBWG would be interested to hear of any research into individual dovecotes, which may be considered for inclusion in forthcoming issues of *VB* – see page 115 for details of how to submit articles.

SVBWG CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS

2008 Annual Conference Inveraray Revisited, 25–28 April

The 2008 Annual Conference was held in Inveraray, 24 years after the last visit by the Group. The base was the Loch Fyne Hotel, a perfect location from which to enjoy the loch and to walk to the planned town of Inveraray.

On Friday evening two talks were given, the first by Margaret Mackay as an introduction to Auchindrain Museum and the second by Dave Hutchinson on the vernacular chairs of the Highlands and Islands. Saturday morning saw the Group, not deterred by the less-than-clement weather, tour the fascinating Auchindrain

Museum, where a wide variety of farming village buildings have been furnished to show life and work during its history. One was aware of the constant struggle with the elements and the land to maintain only a subsistence way of life. The work of the Museum, which has just achieved accreditation status, is to be commended. After a tour of the site, we were treated to a discourse on the furniture within the Museum's collection by Dave Hutchinson.

After lunch at the hotel, the weather turned to allow a perfect tour of Inveraray and its fascinating buildings, including the Jail, the streets restored by Ian Lindsay, and the Parish Church, designed c.1800–05 by Robert Mylne to house separate Gaelic- and English-speaking congregations under one roof. After dinner, a talk was given by Ian Fisher on the Inveraray estate.

The weather was superb on the Sunday, and, following the AGM, we set off for the Inveraray Estate, led by Ian Fisher. After an introduction at the Castle, we walked, taking in bridges and gates, to the doocot, complete with white doves. We then visited a kiln and the walled garden, before seeing the magnificent Great Shed, a three-storeyed workshop dating from 1774. We returned to the Castle via stables, and then, following lunch, visited Maam Steading. In the evening, a talk was given by Joanne Howdle, curator of the Auchindrain Museum

On the Monday morning, the meeting drew to a close with some members touring the interior of Inveraray Castle, and visiting the Here We Are local history project at Cairndow.

2008 Autumn Meeting

Stanley Mills and Murthly, 1 November

For the 2008 Autumn Meeting, SVBWG members gathered at the unique venue of Stanley Mills on a perfect bright winter day. Chris McGregor of Historic Scotland, who has for many years been closely involved with the restoration of the mills, gave a presentation on their founding, flourishing, demise and

subsequent rescue. It was a story of the successful exploitation of an ideal position on the River Tay, followed by changing economic demands, and the near loss of the buildings. They were rescued through national, private, local and royal efforts in a process which involved community partnerships, the sourcing of appropriate materials and the work of highly skilled craftsmen. We then toured the site, which comprises the education and interpretation centre, and blocks which have been converted to residential use. The accommodation ranges from privately owned penthouses to housing association dwellings. Dramatic features are made of the natural setting and the elements of the industrial past; lades and other components are kept on view, and add to the dynamism of the complex. The presentation areas tell the story of textile working at Stanley with excellent interactive devices demonstrating water power.

We left Stanley considering it a most special place, and moved on to another dramatic edifice at Murthly Castle. This building dates from the fifteenth century and its many phases are reflected by architectural styles varying from defensive to elegant. Our host led us on a tour of a magnificent interior which featured historic wooden panelling re-created in the twentieth century, mementos from an ancestor who had braved the Wild West and brought back bison to prove it, and a nineteenth-century music room which has recently been used as a recording studio. Another important phase of the building's history has disappeared entirely; the palatial James Gillespie Graham replacement, begun in 1827 and never entirely completed, which was demolished in 1946. All that remains is a level piece of ground, and some decorative features that have been reused in the original house. The *pièce de résistance* of the visit was the Gillespie Graham- and Pugin-designed Chapel of St Anthony the Eremite of 1846 (the first Roman Catholic place of worship to be opened in Scotland since the Reformation). Lavishly and brightly coloured, it contrasted with the severity of the incorporated sixteenth-century mortuary chapel, complete with hatchments.

After a full day, events were rounded off with welcome tea and shortbread at the Tayside Hotel, Stanley.

2009 Spring Meeting Glasgow, 25 April

This year sees a reversal of the usual SVBWG practice of holding a long-weekend Annual Conference in the spring and a one-day Meeting in the autumn. The change of plan is due to the illness of two of the key organisers of the conference that was due to take place in Brechin in late April; we wish them both well. It is hoped that an event in Brechin may be organised for a future year, but for this year the Glasgow Building Preservation Trust kindly hosted a one-day conference for us on Saturday 25 April, featuring a morning tour of Greater Easterhouse including Blairtummock House and Provan Hall, and an afternoon walk exploring the theme of ‘Tobacco, Slavery and Abolition’, as well as the AGM. A more detailed report will be included in next year’s issue of *Vernacular Building*.

2009 Autumn Conference Drumlanrig Castle and Wanlockhead, 9–11 October

Following on from the replanning of this year’s SVBWG events, the Autumn Meeting this year becomes the Autumn Conference, with a long weekend in Dumfries and Galloway. One day will be spent examining the bothies, shepherds’ cottages and farm buildings on the Queensberry and Buccleuch Estate at Drumlanrig Castle; another will take us to the mining village of Wanlockhead where we will visit the mine, the library, the miners’ cottages and the fascinating graveyards.

REVIEWS

Edited by Veronica Fraser

The Making of *Am Fasgadh*: An Account of the Origins of the Highland Folk Museum by its Founder

Isabel Frances Grant. Flashbacks Series. General Editor Alexander Fenton. Edinburgh. European Ethnological Research Centre and National Museums of Scotland. 2007. 192pp. £8.99. 978-1-905267-20-0.

This, as the title suggests, is the story of the conception and establishment of the Highland Folk Museum, told by its founder, Isabel Grant (1887–1983). She describes her motives for making a collection, and the process of amassing objects; throughout, her passion and dedication are apparent. Several chapters of the book deal with Highland social and economic history, and the history of the buildings in which the items would have been used, showing a clear understanding of the reasons behind variations in the vernacular buildings of the area.

Grant was of Highland descent, born in Edinburgh and raised in London and the north of Scotland. She was immensely proud of her Highland roots, and returned to them in her first book, *Every-day Life on an Old Highland Farm* (1924), which was based upon the eighteenth-century account books of her ancestor, William Mackintosh of Balnaspick, near Kingussie. Travel in Europe during her childhood and the 1920s fostered a love of museums, and in particular the open-air museums on the continent. Aware that traditional ways of Highland life could disappear, particularly in a time of world change, she began to record the associated domestic and agricultural materials, plugging the gaps of ignorance that were opening between the near and distant past. In 1930, she organised the Highland Exhibition in Inverness Town Hall, amassing loans from throughout the country. This activity whetted her appetite,

and she began to collect items in earnest, originally with the intention that the founding of a museum to display them would be carried out by others. However, this was not to be the case.

Among the most interesting aspects of this fascinating book are Grant's descriptions of the collecting process, as she gathered items from spoons to ploughs to cradles. She bemoaned her lack of 'charm and tact', but she was persuasive, and accumulated many items, whether as gifts or as purchases from her own purse. She had a network of contacts throughout the Highlands who would notify her of particular items; she would also frequent rousps and 'scrappies'. There are stories of timely rescues – the cradle about to be turned into a hen coup; and also misses – the broken flail and the wickerwork door lost before she could return for it, and later, when the Museum had been established, the loss of an entire house through fire. There was also an illicit still which she was advised to leave alone. She encountered problems along the way; an embarrassment in people to be associated with 'rubbish and troke' which told of an impoverished and primitive past, and also the sensitivities involved with the possessions of the dead. She made a point of collecting more perishable items, such as straw, leather and wickerwork, aware of their fragility. Her natural curiosity is apparent in youthful attempts at dyeing cloth, and later attempts at spinning.

Throughout the collecting process, Grant reveals her personality; she was utterly dedicated to what she did and disregarded personal comfort, travelling miles in her Morris 8 car, by small boat and on foot. She considered herself shy – a 'dowdy nobody' in comparison with Lady Maitland, founder of the Angus Folk Museum – and was nervous of Miss M E M Donaldson, but she was obviously a considerable force herself. While impatient with many people, she acknowledges the generosity she encountered, and her generosity in purchasing when faced with genuine poverty is apparent. Her love of the Highland landscape is evident in several lyrical passages, as is her joy when a museum object could conjure in a visitor memories of childhood or youth.

By 1935, frustrated that there was no movement to found a

museum, she resolved to travel abroad; however, as she prepared to go to Egypt, she learned that the Free Church on Iona was for sale, and in a quick decision, she resolved to do the job herself. She began to deploy the first of three premises of the Highland Folk Museum, carrying out this activity within her annual income of £400. The museum was called *Am Fasgadh* – the Shelter. She continued to collect, and to carry out activities such as the furnishing of the Highland Room in the Historical Pavilion at the 1938 Empire Exhibition in Glasgow. In that same year, deciding that the location of Iona was too remote and unsufficiently ‘Highland’, she purchased a church and manse in Laggan to house the collection. This was a temporary home, and in 1943 she purchased The Lodge in Kingussie, with its three acres (1.2 hectares) and outbuildings, where the Museum remains to this day. The house was used for displays of associated groups of items and ‘room settings’ and reconstructions of traditional buildings were built on the surrounding ground. To show regional variations in buildings, there was a Glen Urquhart house, a Lewis house and a Harris mill; where possible she employed craftsmen from the particular areas, but she was frustrated by the fact that despite the use of traditional materials, the methods would be tinged with modernity. By necessity there were nails instead of wooden pegs, and sawn planks instead of hewn woodwork. She acknowledged that she was producing ‘a genuine replica of a period of survival but not of more primitive earlier times’. She would also have wished to show more aspects, such as drainage systems, but realised that not everything could come within the scope of the Museum.

She was immensely proud of the educational aspect of the Museum, as more than just a collection of ‘homely ancient things’; she stressed that it was used for academic research, and was keen to learn from her visitors. Her interest in the background to the items is apparent in her determination to provide captions, setting them in context. In 1954, concerned about the future of the Museum, she oversaw its transfer to the four Scottish universities, and returned to Edinburgh to continue with her writing, including her seminal work *Highland Folk Ways* (1961), which draws upon

many of the items that she had collected. The Museum was to be transferred to Highland Regional Council in 1975. In 1950, Grant's contribution to the field was acknowledged by an invitation to give the Rhind lectures, and she was also awarded an honorary LLD from Edinburgh University in 1948 and an MBE in 1959.

This is a most readable book, and is engaging for its revelation of its author's personality and motivation, as well as the processes behind the founding of such an important record of Highland life and buildings.

Reviewed by Veronica Fraser

Aberdeenshire: Donside and Strathbogie – An Illustrated Architectural Guide

Ian Shepherd. Edinburgh. The Rutland Press. 2006. 223pp. £11.95. 1-873190-55-7.

Each volume in the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland series of guides provides an invaluable introduction to the architecture and wider environment of the subject area. The first edition of this particular book, originally published as *Gordon: An Illustrated Architectural Guide*, has travelled many miles around Aberdeenshire with me since its appearance in 1994. This is a revised edition, re-titled following the local administrative reorganisation of 1996 which abolished the district of Gordon, and expanded to include some 15 new buildings.

The landscapes of the Don and the Bogie range from the wind-scoured dunes of Belhelvie, through the rolling arable landscape of the lower Don, the curious natural amphitheatres of the upper Garioch and the Howe of Alford, to the swelling heather-clad bulk of the eastern edge of the Grampians. The region is still predominantly rural, with urban settlement limited to small towns and villages. Outwith the National Trust for Scotland properties and the royal sites of upper Deeside, much of Aberdeenshire is curiously off the beaten tourist track. For all that, Donside and

Strathbogie are rich in architectural heritage and amply repay the explorer.

Shepherd's volume provides a concise, but also comprehensive, survey of the region's buildings, great and small. The book conveys an impression of a sober, functional solidity and symmetricalness, common to farmhouse, preaching barn and urban house, in part dictated by the prevailing available stone, granite and slate. This, however, only serves to throw into higher relief those more spectacular and eccentric buildings, such as Skene House's outsize baronial gate lodges, or the romance of Wardhouse's Palladian ruin, conspicuously set on a hillside overlooking the Garioch, and, on a smaller scale, the improbable Spanish cupola of Inverurie's townhouse, presiding over the town square.

Aberdeenshire is most celebrated for its great houses, and in particular for the exuberant Renaissance architecture of those such as Craigievar and Castle Fraser. The county is indeed thronged with fine examples of the architecture of the elite. A great house of an older period can be seen at Kildrummy, which, although sadly ruined and quarried, remains a remarkable example of a castle of enclosure. As National Trust for Scotland and Guardianship monuments, the future of these buildings is secure. The future of many others is less certain: once derelict they become increasingly vulnerable. Among later medieval towers, Hallforest and Balquhain are ruinous and continue to deteriorate visibly. Shepherd himself carried out a last investigation of a ruined towerhouse at Lethenty, the remains of which were removed as recently as the 1980s. An alternative future, albeit still controversial, is well exemplified in Aberdeenshire: numerous sixteenth- or seventeenth-century houses, such as Tillyfourie, Leslie, Pitfichie and Tillycairn have found a renewed span of life in restoration.

Many of these houses underwent a splendid regeneration in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and recast themselves as modern mansion houses. Westhall, Knockespoock and Fetternear, the latter now a shell, provide pocket histories of architectural and domestic evolution from the late Middle Ages to the twentieth century. Yet the houses were only one element, if the principal one,

of wide estates, which saw successive phases of improvement and rebuilding from the early eighteenth century. Most improved farmsteadings are of prevailing austere character, but there are also more elaborate model farms, such as Bethelnie, built on the very eve of the agricultural downturn of the 1870s.

Throughout the area, one finds the plain, box-like parish kirks, such as Bourtie or Leslie, many of which date from between 1790 and 1820. These may lack the drama of the Gothic Revival, but on closer inspection are treasuries of vernacular architecture and craftsmanship. Unassuming and under-appreciated, these are now also seriously under threat as more and more churches are declared redundant and available for conversion to private housing.

Less conspicuous are the last few traces of the earlier dispensation, the medieval kirk, which these buildings had swept away. Fine examples are still to be seen at Auchindoir and Kinkell, both Historic Scotland Properties in Care. Auchindoir's fabric tells a story, probably common to many other now vanished buildings, of successive modifications to an early core, first altered in the mid-sixteenth century with the insertion of one of the elaborate sacrament houses characteristic of the period and district, and then in the mid-seventeenth century with extension and rearrangement to cater for the demands of Reformed worship. Another modification was the addition of a bellcote: a regional characteristic is the elaboration of this feature frequently at apparent odds with the general simplicity of the building upon which it stood.

One of the great achievements of this series of books is that it causes one to stop and reappraise scenes that one may have come to take for granted. Huntly, for example, is best known for the superb ruin of the palace of the Earl of Gordon, and for Archibald Simpson's Gordon Schools, which preside over its approach. This volume, however, brings to the fore the many less well-kent buildings of the nineteenth-century town. Appropriate to the size of the town, most are modest in scale, such as Rhind's neo-Perpendicular Brander Library, but they nevertheless succeed

in compressing into this both detail and drama: if the town is horizontal in emphasis, it is also punctuated with frequent towers, pinnacles and finials, as exemplified by Kyle's extraordinary Baroque St Margaret's Roman Catholic Church, and Marshall Mackenzie's Scott's Hospital.

Although more recent architectural projects such as the subterranean visitor centre of Archaeolink display considerable imagination, Shepherd is less impressed by the area's modern building idiom. The Don and the Bogie remain predominantly agricultural, at least in appearance, if no longer in economic significance: yet their character is inevitably changing under pressure from Aberdeen's own abrupt evolution to a major modern urban centre. To the passer-by the number of recently derelict farmsteadings in the area is striking. Even more so is the amount of new building and of conversion of old steadings and kirks to commuter housing. This is most extensively displayed in the creation of Westhill Garden Suburb, which saw Aberdeen leap the green belt that had so severely constricted it, to create a new town in what was virtually open countryside. The new town is an informative example of the unequal relationship between the urgent demands of planning and the aesthetic considerations of architecture.

Ian Shepherd's volume provides concise descriptions for the most significant buildings of the area, illuminating these with a rich scattering of marginal anecdote and historical narrative. Inevitably considerations of space in such an accessibly priced book prohibit detailed discussion of the complexities of individual architectural development. However, the wealth of illustration – black and white throughout the text, together with a colour section – provides ample compensation. As is tradition with the series, the academic tone is lightened by a wealth of anecdote, curiosities and humour, such as the story of Margaret Forbes Sempill encouraging her house guests to assist in the demolition of Archibald Simpson's wing at Drumminor.

Reviewed by Iain Fraser

The Western Seaboard – An Illustrated Architectural Guide

Mary Miers. Edinburgh. The Rutland Press. 2008. 400pp. £15. 978-1-873190-29-6.

This book continues the RIAS and Landmark Trust's wonderful project to publish illustrated architectural guides to the whole of Scotland. This is the sixth within the series dedicated to the Highlands and Islands, and also the largest.

Mary Miers is passionate about her subject, and writes both beautifully and enthusiastically about it. Interspersed with the bulk of the text on the buildings and their architectural details are fascinating sections providing notes on political and social history, geology and topography. The 'tour' of the area starts in Lochaber, at Fort William, and then on through Ardgour, Morvern, Ardnamurchan and Moidart to the Small Isles; then to Skye and Lochalsh; before finishing off in the Outer Isles. All types of building are covered, from domestic – old and modern, small and large – through archaeological remains, ecclesiastical and civic buildings, to industrial ones.

This is a vast area to cover and, packed with facts and illustrations as this book is, does make it rather heavy at 400 pages to pop into one's pocket to be used as the handbook it was clearly intended to be. This is my main criticism: it should really be two books, but I suppose the amazing retail price of £15 is justification enough for this. My only other caveat concerns the number of illustrations and lack of maps: some of the former are so small that they could have been dispensed with in order to allow others to be more readable, and there is only one map – on the last page – of the whole area covered by the book. I found it quite difficult to orientate myself and would have liked more topographical information.

Overall this is a wonderful book and outstanding value for money.

Reviewed by Dorothy I Kidd

Scottish Vernacular Furniture

Bernard D Cotton. London. Thames & Hudson. 2008. 304pp. £48 hardback. 978-0-500-23857-8.

The publication of this work had been anticipated for some considerable time before the unexpected announcement that Thames & Hudson had undertaken it and that it would be launched with an exhibition at Lyon & Turnbull's auction house in Edinburgh. In furniture history circles this was an event of some consequence, and the book fills a gap that is singularly conspicuous. The question now is whether a parallel work addressing urban fashionable furniture made in Scotland is publishable or whether *Scottish Vernacular Furniture* will be followed by a yet more comprehensive study of non-genteel forms and traditions.

Bernard Cotton is a major figure in furniture history and this book is the fruit of thirty years of intermittent recording and research. His enthusiasm is for the vernacular, which he defines as 'the domestic furniture of the majority of the people ... furniture that is primarily useful rather than decorative'. Such furniture may possess decorative qualities but it is never superfluous to the life of the home. Cotton wastes little time in any discussion of context beyond the relationship between furniture, people and hearth in the typical rural house. The structure of the book is transparent and goes straight to the heart of the matter: that which defines a Scottish piece in relation to its cousins from any other part of the world, and that which identifies the regional variations within Scotland. Starting with beds and cradles, storage and display items such as kists, presses and cupboards are followed by tables and seating, and the whole concluded with clocks, spinning wheels and small household goods. Almost exactly half of the book is concerned with seating, a characteristic of most studies in this discipline.

Although the thorough technical recording of examples is the methodology for which Cotton is renowned, good use is also made of genre painting. There is no extended discussion of visual sources

in the manner of Claudia Kinmonth's work on Irish furniture and interiors, but there is a refreshingly clear focus on elucidating the function behind the form or explaining the appearance of an artefact by reference to the needs of its user and the resources available to its maker. In that hard-to-define territory marked 'vernacular', the close connection between making and using is exemplified by self-production (DIY) but is still strongly present in joiner-made work, where design was entirely under the control of men immersed in the requirements of the environment in which the object would function. Custom, in other words, is functional.

From the outset Cotton divides his subject into Highland and Lowland, perhaps over-simplifying the geographical complexity of Scottish material culture. There is an impeccable reliance on the illustration and discussion only of material which the author has examined, but the consequence of this is that some geographical areas are overlooked and others – notably the Northern Isles – feature almost too prominently. Cotton is strong on the Scandinavian connections present in Shetland, for example, but illustrates very little from the south-west or border counties. Those areas which benefited from concentrated museum collecting in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s emerge as dominant voices in these pages.

There are other criticisms of this fine book that must be made. So alert to what artefacts reveal about their origins under technical analysis, Cotton is far less sensitive to many aspects of Scottish history and culture. To refer to the stick-back chairs of the western Highlands as Celtic Windsors confuses typology with issues of origin and identity, and in words likely to offend delicate sensibilities. More profoundly, the emphasis on the nineteenth century unintentionally limits much of the analysis to a time when genteel and common furniture had irreparably diverged. The dichotomous Highland–Lowland regionality fits earlier periods even less well than it does the nineteenth century. Occasional errors of fact have also crept into the work, presumably a result of assembling so much material over such an extended period of time. One example would be the description of a chair as 'originally owned by the Aberdeen Shore Porters' Society' – a misconception

resulting from a misreading of this well-known removal company's shipping label. Such slips, readily apparent to the Scottish reader, will inevitably pass on unnoticed when the work is referenced by authors elsewhere.

As a book, *Scottish Vernacular Furniture* can be very highly commended: the layout is logical, the format generous and the photographs are of good size, well composed and expertly exposed. Captions are full of content, sending the eye back to the picture and the features of the piece in question. Cotton is very good at describing what one sees in terms of the methods by which it was made. The appendix on woods is essential reading and the product of great familiarity with the subject.

The good news, then, is twofold: here is a major work bringing to a wide audience many of the distinctive forms of Scottish furniture in a publication of real quality, but nor is it the final word on regionality in Scottish furniture, and there is plenty of scope for others to continue the debate in print.

Reviewed by Stephen Jackson

CONTRIBUTORS

Graeme J Collie graduated with an MA in Archaeology from the University of Leicester. He now works as a freelance archaeologist, while writing up his PhD at Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh. Graeme's time is divided equally between Scotland and the Republic of Congo.

Stephen Copp is a project manager with the National Trust for Scotland's Little Houses Improvement Scheme (LHIS). The LHIS functions as a revolving fund-building preservation trust which acquires, restores and sells on historic properties which would otherwise be lost. One of the founding mandates of the scheme is to help protect Scotland's vernacular buildings.

Veronica Fraser is a Collections Curator at the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, working with architectural collections. She is Secretary of SVBWG, and is currently Reviews Editor of *Vernacular Building* having previously served as its Editor.

Ingval Maxwell is a past SVBWG Chairman and Treasurer, and has a long-standing interest in vernacular architecture. In his official capacity within Historic Scotland he enabled the production of a number of Technical Advice Notes on vernacular building topics, and set up the Rural Buildings Conservation Initiative leading to the production of a Guide for Practitioners on the conversion of farm buildings in the Lothians. He was awarded an OBE in 2003 and retired from Historic Scotland in August 2008 after 39 years of public service.

Paul Newman was an architect and academic at both Heriot-Watt and Edinburgh Universities. From student days he found a particular interest in vernacular building traditions having discovered the stone farm buildings of Swaledale and Wensleydale whilst on National Service at Catterick. On early retirement he moved to Orkney to develop his interest in Orcadian vernacular farm buildings. He has written articles on Orcadian vernacular buildings as sole or joint author since 1991. He now lives in Montrose.

Andrew P K Wright has been based in Forres for over thirty years and is an accredited conservation architect and an architectural historian. He writes conservation plans and acts as a conservation adviser to Building Preservation Trusts. His report on the redundant buildings of Caithness was prepared for the North Highland Initiative and was launched at the Castle of Mey in August 2008. He was awarded an OBE for services to architecture and the built heritage in Scotland in 2001.

Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group

The SVBWG was set up in 1972 to provide a focus for all those interested in Scotland's traditional buildings. To some, 'vernacular' may mean cottages, croft houses or farmsteads; to others its essence may be urban tenements or terraces, industrial water mills and smithies, or even older traditions of tower-house buildings. All – and more besides – find a place in SVBWG.

The group embraces those whose interests are centred on general settlements or social patterns as well as those who have a specialist interest in building techniques or function, or in traditional building crafts. The subject brings together architects, surveyors, archaeologists, historians, geographers, ethnologists and, above all, those who simply want to know how and why Scotland's traditional buildings have come to possess such variety and character. This refreshing blend of interests and attitudes is clearly evident in the Group's activities. Members are invited to attend annual conferences held at different venues, mainly in Scotland. SVBWG's publications include *Vernacular Building*, an annual miscellany of articles issued free to members, and a series of Regional and Thematic works.

For contributions to VB33 please contact the Editor, *Vernacular Building*, c/o Veronica Fraser, RCAHMS, John Sinclair House, 16 Bernard Terrace, Edinburgh EH8 9NX. An initial enquiry indicating the nature of the proposed piece would be helpful; we ask that original photographs or drawings are not sent in the first instance, although photocopies of these are useful at this stage. Articles for the main section of the journal should normally be between 1,500 and 2,500 words long, while more brief pieces can be included in the 'Shorter articles and notes' section. Any text submitted should be as far as possible in the style of this volume, and should be supplied in digital form on a CD or by email. Illustrations may be provided as professional prints or transparencies, or as digital files. Please note that digital images should measure at least 1200 pixels across in order to be of publishable quality. Please save text and images as separate files, indicating the suggested position of illustrations by way of notes in the text rather than embedding images.

We also welcome publications for review. These should be sent to Veronica Fraser, SVBWG Reviews Editor, RCAHMS (as above).

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