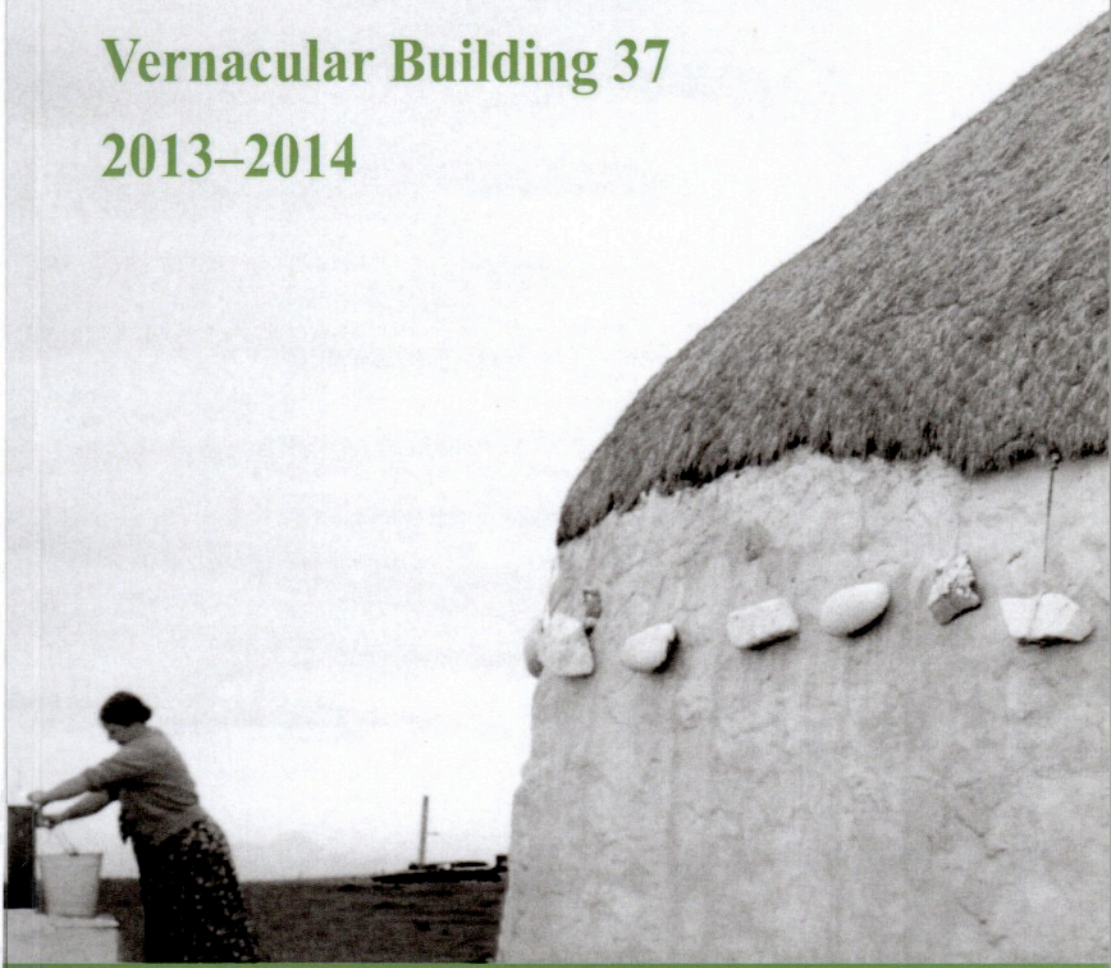
AUL'-FARRANT WYES O BIGGIN

Essays in memory of Sandy Fenton

Vernacular Building 37

2013–2014



SCOTTISH VERNACULAR BUILDINGS WORKING GROUP

ESSAYS IN MEMORY OF SANDY FENTON VERNACULAR BUILDING 37 2013–2014

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VERNACULAR BUILDING 37

Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group

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Front cover: Photograph from the Hope MacDougall Collection (see pp 17–30), taken in Skye in the early 1970s, of a typical north-western blackhouse, with a thatch of moor grass or barley straw secured with a net and weighted with stones against the wind. These houses were single width of stone with the roof timbers generally resting on top of the walls and pegged with a cross-beam. (Reproduced with permission of the Hope MacDougall Collection)

Back cover: Alexander ('Sandy') Fenton (centre; see pp 7–16) surrounded by images from this issue. Clockwise from top left: 'Old Ina's', Papa Westray, showing flagstone roof covered with insulating simmens secured by bendlin stanes (courtesy of Jocelyn Rendall; see p.132); drawing of the gable end of a creel house (from Sir George Steuart Mackenzie, *A Treatise on the Diseases and Management of Sheep*, Edinburgh, 1809; see pp 31–50); Auchmacoy doocot, Aberdeenshire (photo by Professor Richard Laing, RGU; see pp 111–24); prehistoric sunken houses at Knap of Howar, Papay (courtesy of Jocelyn Rendall; see p.127); a hanging range as a space-saving solution for small Orcadian homes (courtesy of Jocelyn Rendall; see p.128); Tudor-style arches at Auchederson Steading, Ross and Cromarty (courtesy of Malcolm Bangor-Jones; see pp 96–7 and 101).

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The Editor wishes to thank all contributors to this volume: for the thought put into the choice of subject matter, to reflect Sandy Fenton's interests and influence; for the care taken in preparing their pieces; and for their swift and helpful responses to queries. Equal gratitude is due to Dorothy Kidd, Crissie White and Veronica Fraser, without whose brainstorming and support such a group of contributors would never have been brought together in the first place; and to Gavin Sprott, who came up with the perfect Scots title for the volume. Further thanks are extended to those individuals and organisations who have generously allowed the reproduction of images belonging to them; and, last but by no means least, to Dave Barber at Robertson Printers, for always ensuring *VB*'s printing slot, and for his sharp eye for formatting.

PREFACE

This special issue of *Vernacular Building* is published in tribute to the late Alexander ('Sandy') Fenton, the long-serving President and co-founder of SVBWG, who died in 2012. Its Scots title, meaning 'old-fashioned ways of building', was aptly proposed by Gavin Sprott, who commonly conversed with Sandy in this tongue. As Gavin recalls, Sandy 'realised that if you quarry away at the words, their roots, variations, regional character, shades of meaning and so on you can also unearth quite a bit about the processes and purposes of what were and are people's everyday world'.

Fascinated from an early age by cultural tradition, language and the built environment, Sandy combined the gifts of a polymath with an ability to engage with people from all walks of life. This volume begins with a biographical account by Margaret Mackay, detailing how, through a lifetime of research, museum work, writing, lecturing and travel, he not only had an unrivalled impact on Scottish ethnological studies but also contributed greatly to the subject's broader European context, encouraging new generations of scholars and enthusiasts as he did so. He was instrumental in setting up not only SVBWG but also the annual *Review of Scottish*

Culture, the National Museums' collections relating to Scottish life and the European Ethnological Research Centre (EERC).

Demonstrating his willingness to advise and assist others engaged in related activities, the second essay, by Catherine Gillies, recounts the invaluable input he offered to Hope MacDougall as she set about organising her own collections of vernacular objects and records, now available for public viewing at Dunollie House.

Alongside Sandy in this advisory role was Hugh Cheape, the author of our third essay, which examines what appears once to have been a ubiquitous feature of the Highland landscape: the creel house. With little or no remaining physical evidence to draw upon, he turns to historical records, poetry, the oral tradition and the Gaelic language itself to build up a picture of these timber-framed structures which largely disappeared in the wake of the Clearances, in an all-embracing research approach that echoes Sandy's own.

Gavin Sprott, in his article on Auld Stronpatrick in Galloway, likewise looks beyond pure structural evidence to piece together a history of this remote farm that covers social and economic as well as physical aspects. His research into the functioning of tenancies and changes in agricultural practice reveals much about the evolution of the constructed landscape – which includes not only roofed buildings but also such items as march dykes and sheep folds (or 'fanks') – as well as the rural lifestyle of past centuries.

More lost heritage is traced by John Harrison in his discussion of buildings on the Bannockburn estate, as revealed by a newly discovered document that offers insight into the considerable number of clay buildings that existed there at the time of its forfeiture to the Crown following the 1715 Jacobite rising.

We then move north for Malcolm Bangor-Jones's account and inventory of vernacular buildings around Muir of Ord, both extant and disappeared. These range from farm steadings to shieling huts, and from buildings in the village itself to croft houses on surrounding land, noting the contrast between the latter and the makeshift dwellings of the poorest members of society.

Next we head east to Auchmacoy doocot, Aberdeenshire, with an article by Nick Brown, whose interest in doocots was first

piqued by one of Sandy's lectures. Following a history of the estate, he reports on a recent survey of the building that involved the experimental use of laser scanning to capture every detail.

Finally, north again, to Orkney and Shetland, as Jocelyn Rendall provides a vivid account of not only the habitations and farms but also the lifestyles and working equipment of these island people, echoing Sandy's personal as well as intellectual sympathies.

In the 'Shorter articles and notes' section, Dorothy Kidd sums up the nature of the Scottish building-related collections that Sandy helped to amass for the National Museums, and Veronica Fraser offers a brief report of the most recent SVBWG conference.

I finish on a personal note. I never had the honour or pleasure of meeting or knowing Sandy; and, having emigrated to Brittany with my French husband a few years ago, I little expected to find echoes of his work beyond the context of my *Vernacular Building* editorship. Living in the small historic coastal town of Roscoff – which rather reminds me of my alma mater, St Andrews – one of the simple pleasures I discovered was the continuing connection to the land and seasons in the form of small-scale agriculture and markets, and in particular the delicious local *oignons rosés*. The sellers of these, known as 'les Johnnies', are the origin of the British stereotype of the Frenchman, cycling around in a stripey top and beret, his bicycle weighed down by strings of onions. One day, my favourite local farmer – whose face lights up whenever I mention a recent or forthcoming visit to Scotland, as he has fond memories of the warm welcome he received when travelling there as a teenager with his father, to help him sell his produce – lent me a book entitled *Onion Johnnies: Personal recollections by nine French Onion Johnnies of their working lives in Scotland*, featuring his father both as the subject of the front-cover photograph and as one of the nine interviewed contributors. How surprised I was, on opening it, to see that it was part of a series ('Flashbacks') edited by none other than Alexander Fenton and published in association with the EERC. Sandy's geographical, social and cultural reach was wide indeed.

Abigail Grater

ALEXANDER FENTON (1929–2012), CBE, MA, BA, LITT, HON DLITT, FRSE, FRSGS, FSA, FSASCOT, HRSA, PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF SCOTTISH ETHNOLOGY

Margaret A Mackay

It is very fitting that a volume of *Vernacular Building* should be published in honour of Alexander (Sandy) Fenton, for his enthusiasm for the subject and his own contributions to its study were outstanding. He gave friendship and guidance in equal measure, generously, to those undertaking its exploration.

Few people have given more to Scotland and to all those with an interest in her people and their lives than Sandy, the name by

© Professor Alexander Fenton

which all here and abroad knew him. This he accomplished through his own deep sense of enquiry and his capacity for tireless research and publication, the encouragement which his example gave to the work of others, and the gentle stimulus he provided to those who were embarking on work in the world of ethnological scholarship. His warmth and his supportive demeanour made him the most approachable of scholars, and the ease with which he engaged with those he met, in farm, classroom or museum, brought him friends and co-workers from Buchan to Bavaria. He was rightly called 'the architect of regional ethnology in Scotland' by Hugh Cheape, in the festschrift he edited in Sandy's honour, *Tools and Traditions* (1993) and 'a master of European ethnology' by Axel Steensberg of Denmark in the same volume.

Although his life and interests were to be shaped by the milieu of his upbringing in the North East of Scotland, Sandy was born in the Central Belt of Lowland Scotland, in Shotts, Lanarkshire. During his childhood, his parents Alexander Fenton and Annie Stronach moved to make their home first at Drumblade by Huntly, Aberdeenshire, and then in Auchterless, where his father made his living as a shoemaker and crofter. He was encouraged at school to pursue his interests in languages and history, and graduated from the University of Aberdeen in 1951 with an honours MA in English and French, followed by a Cambridge BA in 1953 in the Archaeological and Anthropological Tripos.

After National Service in Germany between 1953 and 1955, Sandy worked for four years to 1959 with his fellow North-Easter David Murison, Editor of the *Scottish National Dictionary* (*SND*), as its Senior Assistant Editor. He relished the engagement with words and, with what he described as his 'interest in folk and in their ways of doing and speaking', he began to hone the Wörter und Sachen ('Words and Things') approach, first proposed by Swiss scholars, which was so central to his studies of regional variety and of continuity and change. He gave assistance to the new School of Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh, which had been founded in 1951 and from 1954 shared premises with the two major dictionary projects, *SND* and *DOST* (*A*

Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue), in preparing some of its early questionnaires on aspects of Scottish folk life and lore.

His appointment as an Assistant Keeper at the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland (NMAS) in 1959 took him into a museum-based career for the next thirty years. He was tasked with organising the Country Life Section of the Museum, completing the range of cultural periods for which the NMAS had responsibility, from prehistoric archaeology through the middle ages to the period of agricultural improvement and up to the present day. He went on to become Deputy Keeper in the NMAS, then its Director, and finally Research Director of the National Museums of Scotland.

He set about establishing what is now known as the Scottish Life Archive, a rich resource based on thematic headings and concentrating on material culture and related subjects in rural, urban and industrial Scotland. Photographs, extracts from printed books and papers, newspaper cuttings, letters, drawings, and information from oral sources on topics such as work practices and dialect terminology contribute to a large and unique collection along with a manuscript archive for diaries and notebooks with questionnaire responses, trade literature, special collections from individuals, films, postcards and transparencies.

The growth of the Archive, the assessment of material already in the collections of the NMAS, and the gathering of further objects had their fruitful outcome in new displays and especially a series of temporary thematic exhibitions which Sandy and his colleagues began to mount almost immediately in the Museum Gallery, in Shandwick Place in Edinburgh. Eleven exhibitions were held between 1960 and 1970 on aspects of life on land and at sea and the work of securing the essential elements of life. In 1966 the theme was ‘Hearth and Home’, and an expanded version was mounted the following year. Work towards a later exhibition on ‘Caithness and the Northern Isles’ was to provide the foundation for Sandy’s study *The Northern Isles: Orkney and Shetland* (1978), a detailed and wide-ranging volume which has proved, like so much else he produced, a model of its kind.

At the same time as these annual and temporary displays were being mounted the invitation came from the Directors of the Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland to mount exhibitions during the Royal Highland show. Over a dozen years these were held under canvas, to enthusiastic acclaim from those attending the Show at Ingliston near Edinburgh. A building was erected there in the 1970s as a result of the campaign mounted by the Scottish Country Life Museums Trust, which he had initiated; but a suitable permanent home for a Scottish Agricultural Museum, with scope to illustrate life on the land and to hold, show and interpret material in relevant collections, was still sought. The gift to the National Trust for Scotland of the Lanarkshire farm of West Kittochside offered a splendid solution and, in a joint project with the National Museums of Scotland, the museum now known as the National Museum of Rural Life was created there.

From the time of his appointment to the NMAS, Sandy began to involve himself in activities which took him into the wider sphere of European ethnology, and the 1960s were a time when many lasting friendships were made in that context. His first publication abroad, 'Historical ethnology in Scotland', appeared in the issue which launched the journal *Ethnologia Europaea* in 1967; he was a member of its editorial board for three decades. He began to work with others on the ambitious European Ethnological Atlas Project (now the International Ethnocartography Network). With the Danes Axel Steensberg, himself from a country background, and Grith Lerche, a pioneer in innovative research on historical tool use, he was editor of the journal *Tools and Tillage: A Journal on the History of the Implements of Cultivation and other Agricultural Processes*.

His facility with languages was a boon, and he would take the opportunity offered by attendance at meetings, conferences or symposia to see at first hand the life of the local populace and interact with those he met in the countries he visited. His travels provided him with a strong sense of how Scottish phenomena fitted in to wider European patterns. His camera and notebook were ever at the ready, and observation and recording were allied

to the quest for understanding of the related social and economic context. Many will recall his good company on field excursions and study days as well as at more formal gatherings.

Sandy was always keen to share his findings with others. He brought Albania, a country closed to virtually all but official visitors at the time, to the Scots in a photographic exhibition which mirrored the dignity and resilience that he found among its country people. He wrote about a Polish baptismal feast in the *Turriff Advertiser* (8 January 1982) with as much care as he gave to an article about oats in the Scottish diet in the festschrift for a Hungarian colleague. In fact, he had a very special feeling for Hungary, visited it often and engaged closely with several generations of its scholars over many years. He knew the language and took great delight in publishing a translation of poems by Sándor Weöres, *If All the World Were a Blackbird*, in 1985. His own creative writing gave him and gives the reader great pleasure too. His *Craiters ... Or Twenty Buchan Tales*, published in 1995, were written over a number of years and inspired by many places at home and abroad, but all are couched in the language of Auchterless. Of its natural, unforced forms of speech, he says in the Introduction, 'I have found them perfectly capable of expressing anything I wanted.'

An early contributor to the journal *Gwerin* and its successor *Folk Life*, the organ of the Society for Folk Life Studies, Sandy launched the annual *Review of Scottish Culture* (*ROSC*) in 1984. In 1989 he founded the European Ethnological Research Centre (EERC) within the National Museums of Scotland, to be a focus for the publication of research on Scottish topics, setting these in a wider European and comparative context. Its major projects have been the fourteen-volume series for which he was the General Editor, *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology*, published between 2000 and 2013, and a programme of comprehensive regional ethnological studies which is now underway, beginning with Dumfries and Galloway. In addition, the EERC publishes *Sources in Local History* and the 'Flashbacks' series of autobiographies.

On his retirement in 1989 from the Museum, Sandy was appointed to be the first holder of the Chair of Scottish Ethnology at the University of Edinburgh. He had taught material culture there under the umbrella of Scottish History some years earlier but by the time he returned to the School of Scottish Studies its pioneering full honours degree in Scottish Ethnology was well underway, with a number of joint degrees with other subjects – Archaeology, Celtic, English Language, English Literature, Scottish History, Linguistics, Scandinavian Studies – also attracting students. A lively postgraduate community was also in place, and Sandy brought to the post his wealth of experience in museums, editing, publishing and contacts with experts elsewhere.

When Sandy retired in 1994, one of his gifts from colleagues was a set of tunes – march, strathspey and reel – commissioned from the composer Freeland Barbour. But *Sandy Fenton's Farewell to 27 George Square* did not signal a real farewell, for in due course the EERC was to move from the Museum to a new home in Celtic and Scottish Studies, where it is still located.

In 2009 the EERC published a Bibliography of his 1955–2009 publications to mark his eightieth birthday; the range and scope of its contents, in many languages and for many purposes, are a reminder of the energy which he devoted to the firm establishment of ethnology as a discipline. Two hundred and eighty-five items are listed. More came after 2009, and the total does not include the many reports, reviews and other similar publications with which he was also associated. Amongst the themes included are account books and farmers' diaries, animals and husbandry, buildings and hearths, crops and cultivation, domestic crafts and household equipment, ethnological cartography, the theory and practice of ethnology, farming history, fishing, folklore, food, fuel, language and lexicography, museums, tools, transport, and many more.

It is right to turn now in more detail to his contributions to the study of vernacular buildings. There is no doubt that from his earliest years Sandy took an interest in this subject, a fact reflected in the editors' decision to use a painting by May Beale of his

childhood home, Pitglassie Croft, Auchterless, as the cover illustration for his *Bibliography*. His explorations of home and neighbourhood, the places where life was lived and work carried out, set him on the path he was to follow throughout his career. His notebooks show that he was meticulous in taking down the dimensions of buildings he viewed in later fieldwork, and in the context of continuity and change he was interested in materials, structures, techniques, terminology and functions.

In his chapter 'Towards an atlas of Scottish vernacular building' in *Tools and Traditions*, the 1993 festschrift referred to earlier, Geoffrey Stell wrote of Sandy that 'in Scotland no one has done more in recent decades to place on record many of the characteristics of Scottish building practices, past and present, and to present them in the context of regional ethnology and historical geography'. In the volume, one quarter of the chapters are devoted to vernacular buildings or furnishings, a potent reflection of the association of the subject with the man.

Sandy's concern for the documentation and preservation of Scotland's wealth and variety of vernacular buildings was evident in his museum career. With generous support from the Carnegie Trust, for thirteen years in the 1970s and 1980s the Scottish Country Life Museums Trust provided travelling curators to serve the interests of country life museums in several parts of Scotland. Amongst these was Auchindrain, near Furnace in Argyll, which had been identified by Sandy, Eric Cregeen and Miss Marion Campbell of Kilberry as a unique survival of a joint-tenanted township of the pre-crofting period and established as a museum in 1964. The survey and recording of Auchindrain and vernacular structures in other places for its Argyll volumes by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) in that decade signalled new interest in buildings of this type and their potential for the study of regional variation.

In his presidential address to the annual conference of the Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group in 1986, published in *Vernacular Building* 11 (1987), Sandy charted the roots of the

body which he had helped to establish in 1972. These lay in a Scottish Vernacular Buildings Survey Working Party, formed in 1967 as an initiative of the NMAS, RCAHMS and the Scottish Development Department, to ensure that appropriate attention was given to the vernacular building heritage of the country, largely absent from the statutory lists hitherto. More needed to be known about its nature and extent. That year a pilot survey was undertaken in the Glamis area with the aid of a grant from the National Trust for Scotland. Although the comprehensive national survey which was hoped for did not take place at the time, the Countryside Commission for Scotland undertook work of this type in the late 1970s, illustrated by *Buildings of the Scottish Countryside* by Robert J Naismith (1985).

The stimulus provided by the SVBWG, with its emphasis on survey and recording and the sharing of good practice in methodology and the dissemination of findings in lectures, conferences, field work and publications, can claim to have spurred this on. Robert Scott Morton's *Traditional Farm Architecture in Scotland* (1976) was followed in 1981 by *The Rural Architecture of Scotland* by Alexander Fenton and Bruce Walker, based on material gathered in field surveys by the latter and other data in the Scottish Life Archive, earlier known as the Scottish Ethnological Archive.

This volume dealt with relevant bodies and collections, other sources of evidence, survey methods, building materials, farm building plans, farm workers' housing and the impact of technology on farm buildings, and included useful references and bibliographical aids. It signalled a new and vital element in vernacular buildings research, the teaching of the subject – pioneered by Bruce Walker in the School of Architecture at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art, Dundee – and the growth of a body of students and graduates skilled in both survey and analysis, evident by reports in *Vernacular Building* of work in progress there in the mid-1970s.

Sandy called for attention to regional characteristics, such as that given by Bruce Walker in his study published by Grampian

Regional Council and the Countryside Commission for Scotland in 1979, *Farm Buildings in the Grampian Region: An Historical Exploration*, and for the examination of what differentiates one locality from another. He identified the need for studies of urban as well as rural buildings, and brought the work being undertaken in other countries to the attention of Scottish researchers through regular reports and reviews in *Vernacular Building* and the SVBWG Newsletter. He stimulated the production of monographs on particular themes and topics, such as his own on *The Hearth in Scotland* (1981) in the SVBWG's series, and stressed the vital importance of *Vernacular Building* and of the Group's other publications. 'Scotland is not a "primitive isolate" on the edge of Europe,' he said at the end of his 1986 address. 'The country has a pivotal position between northern and continental Europe. What we produce has international value and colleagues abroad and in neighbouring parts of these islands appreciate it.'

His vision in initiating *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology* was for a series that would explore the many elements in Scottish history, language and culture which have shaped the identity of Scotland and Scots at local, regional and national level. Each of its volumes has a focus on a theme or an institution within Scottish society. All save Volume Five, *The Food of the Scots*, which he wrote himself based on his Rhind Lectures to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, are multi-authored, and as General Editor he ensured that both seasoned scholars and rising researchers, 367 in total, were commissioned to furnish chapters. The second to appear, Volume Three, is on the theme of *Scotland's Buildings*. In Chapter Two Sandy writes about 'Continuity and change', examining materials, forms and functions over a broad sweep of time.

Sandy's final project was published on the day that he passed away. Compiled and edited with Mark Mulhern of the EERC, *A Swedish Field Trip to the Outer Hebrides, 1934* is based on diary entries, photographs and drawings made by Sven T Kjellberg and Olof Hasslöf, material to which Sandy had been introduced in the Gothenburg Museum in 1970. There was great interest in the

building traditions of the northern and western isles of Scotland among Scandinavian ethnologists in the 1930s, and structures of various kinds – and the life associated with them – form a major element of this beautifully illustrated book. Sandy had enjoyed translating the Swedish text when time allowed over the years, and it seems fitting that this book should have come to fruition at the close of a life that was devoted to making Scotland better known and understood by her own people, and by those beyond her boundaries.

Further reading

The reader wishing to know more about Sandy Fenton's work and interests can do no better than explore the items referred to above and others included in the *Bibliography 1955–2009*, published in Edinburgh in 2009 by the EERC, where they are listed both chronologically and thematically. This is readily available on the website of the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore at http://www.siefhome.org/downloads/publications/elibrary/fenton.pdf. One of my personal favourites is 'Aspects of the North-East personality', published first in 1976 in a festschrift but reprinted in the first volume of Sandy's two-volume collection *The Shape of the Past: Essays in Scottish Ethnology* (Edinburgh, 1985: pp 56–67).

SANDY FENTON AND THE HOPE MACDOUGALL COLLECTION

Catherine Gillies

The developing momentum around the gathering of local social history collections throughout the twentieth century formed both a backdrop and a side-arm to Sandy Fenton's work. Varying in approach from the random amassing of quaint objects to serious collecting, these collections have much to offer as windows on the antiquarian soul of the times, expressing, among other things, an urgency to catch the material culture of the pre-war era. Gathered by individual collectors or community groups, they led to a rash of small museums opening across rural Scotland.

Working securely within the establishment of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland (NMAS), and as a new assistant keeper in 1959, Sandy Fenton was tasked with essentially the same brief of 'recording and illustrating passing ways of country life and agriculture',[1] with the endgame of a new open-air museum. The differences between the provincial gatherings of enthusiasts, and Fenton's systematic development of the rural life collection at the NMAS, lay in the methodology and intellectual approach; viscerally they were arguably the same.

The individual collectors were dominated by what could be affectionately described as a fearsome regiment of eight or nine women. Based north and west of the central belt, they were characteristically of county class, mostly unmarried, and of independent if not necessarily wealthy means. Characterful, forthright and intellectual to varying degrees, they could be uncomfortably patrician on their collecting forays – unashamedly discussing techniques in their many publications and in conversation. Their span of operation encompassed the whole twentieth century. They were: Dr Isobel Grant (1887–1983), Highland Folk Museum, Newtonmore (original location Iona and

subsequently Laggan, near Kingussie); Hope MacDougall of MacDougall (1913–1998), Ganavan House, Oban; Margaret (Greta) Fairweather Michie (1910–1985), Glenesk Folk Museum; Barbara Fairweather (1917–2001), Glencoe Folk Museum; Marion Campbell of Kilberry (1919–2000), Auchindrain Open-Air Township Museum; M E M Donaldson, Ardnamurchan (1876–1958), photographer; Lady Jean Maitland (d.1982), Angus Folk Museum; Joy Sanderson, Shetland (still living); and, to a lesser extent, Constance Mitford, a friend of Isobel Grant and member of the famous Mitford family of Nazi sympathisers who donated her collection to Ullapool Museum (dates unknown).

This parallel universe presents a compelling contrast to the mainstream and intellectually rigorous work of Sandy Fenton at the NMAS, who as the son of a souter (cobbler) and crofter also maintained a very different relationship with his source material – if both the communities and objects may be thus described. He was also a man, and in the 1960s and for a long time afterwards, this represented an easier passport to recognition in the nascent and male-dominated field of material culture within ethnographic study. The exception within the women's group was Isobel Grant, often simply known as I F Grant, who gained an honorary LLD from Edinburgh University in 1948, which she self-deprecatingly described as giving her 'a little of the status that as an amateur voluntary worker I very much needed'.[2]

This quote comes from Grant's *The Making of Am Fasgadh*, which was posthumously brought to publication in 2007 by Hugh Cheape, then Principal Curator in the Department of Scotland and Europe at the National Museum of Scotland (NMS), as part of the NMS's 'Flashbacks' book series. Fenton had served as general editor for the book in his role as Professor Emeritus of Scottish Ethnology at the European Ethnological Research Centre, which sponsored the series. This triumvirate of collaboration was among the final flowerings of a linkage between Fenton, Cheape and the women collectors which played an important, even pivotal role in guiding and supporting a methodological approach within these 'amateur' collections.

One of the collectors, Hope MacDougall, established a close working relationship with Fenton and Cheape. With the volume of objects rising around her, and with no clear plan, it is perhaps not surprising that she made contact with Fenton at the Agricultural Museum in around 1973–4.[3] The exact import of this first contact does not survive in Hope's archive, but a request for advice will have been at the centre of it. This entered an active stage in 1985, when Fenton wrote to Hope on 4 January following a visit shared with Cheape: 'It was a great pleasure to see you, and indeed the whole family. I also enjoyed renewing my acquaintance with your collection and came away – as Hugh did too – feeling even more impressed than before.' It was thus clearly not their first visit, and the letter indicates that the meeting had a firm purpose, the 'basic question' being:

> what should happen to [your] collection in the future? – I have been trying to think in the most realistic way possible, in relation to what is best for your collection. The collection has local, national and international aspects […] it is a unique collection and I should like to think that its cohesion and individuality could be maintained, as the 'Hope MacDougall Collection'. This could enable its wider use in displays in more places than, though always including the West Highlands as far as can be possible.[4]

This exchange of letters, and the visit they describe, was to influence the direction of Hope's work for almost a decade. They saw the collection in Ganavan House, a substantial dower house designed in the Arts and Crafts style by William Leiper and built in 1888, which formed part of the wider estate of the Seat of Clan MacDougall at Dunollie; Hope was successively youngest daughter, sister, and aunt to the three twentieth-century Chiefs. She never married, and grew up consumed by both her own extraordinary family history and, evidenced through notebooks kept as a young woman, a lifelong interest in the flora, fauna and human life of Argyll. Over forty years of targeted collecting she gathered more than 5,000 objects reflecting the working and

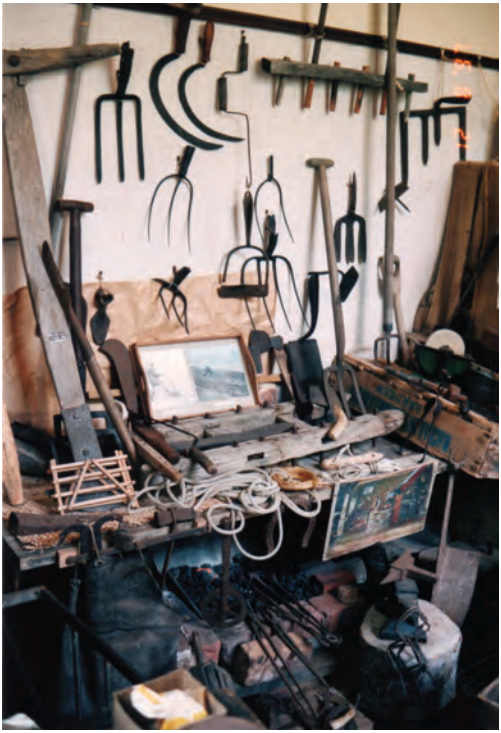


Figure 1. Blacksmiths display at Ganavan House. (Reproduced with permission of the Hope MacDougall Collection)

Figure 2. Hope MacDougall and I F Grant. (Reproduced with permission of the Hope MacDougall Collection)

domestic lives of Highland and rural communities, including comparative material from world cultures.[5]

She moved to Ganavan House in 1966 when her sister Coline assumed the role of Chief, and her already well-established collecting habit entered a deliberate and proactive stage. The space offered by Ganavan House and the release from caring for an elderly parent, allowed her passion to flourish. The single room assigned to her objects quickly overflowed, and by the 1980s her collection had taken over most of the house (fig.1).

Hope had an important mentor in I F Grant (fig.2), who had visited Dunollie frequently on her journeys to and from Iona, where she established her first folk museum in the 1930s. Principally and certainly initially a friend of Hope's mother Colina, Grant offers a window into the active and wider collecting world, the sense of collaboration, and the collectors' hub that was Dunollie:

> I often had the pleasure of staying at Dunollie. Mrs MacDougall of MacDougall's warm love of Highland things was an unusually wide one. She could appreciate and show her appreciation of other people who worked for the Highlands and sometimes were ploughing rather stiff and lonely furrows. For instance, she welcomed to her home Miss Francis Tolmie, the collector of Highland songs, and Miss M E M Donaldson, who wrote such racy accounts of her rambles in the Highlands. To me, she gave the warmest encouragement.[6]

The sense of isolation in her mission is palpable, as is a certain sisterhood. Presumably the overnight stays diminished when she moved the museum to Laggan, near Kingussie, in 1938, but the friendship endured and as she and Colina MacDougall prepared to go on a collecting trip 'one of her daughters managed to go on a drive with me […] she admitted afterwards she had planned it to satisfy herself that I really was fit to drive her mother on the difficult roads we would have to drive upon during our trip. Fortunately I passed this test.'[7] The circumstances of the older

daughters suggest that this may have been Hope, who would shortly afterwards leave home to work as a nursing assistant at Cortachy Castle at Kirriemuir during the war, and then on to part-time work on a farm at Wester Ogil, also in Angus, for six years. She returned to Dunollie on the death of her father in 1953.

Hope noted her own first collecting trip in 1959, with a concentrated and highly fruitful burst of collecting in the islands in the early 1970s (fig.3) which coincided with the first contact with Fenton to seek advice. A decade on, his January 1985 letter continues in advisory tone, counselling a broad view on what makes a collection:

> In thinking of the Collection, it is important to include as part of it the photographic archival material (negatives and prints), whether in albums or not; notes and catalogues that you have made and

1959 Westmorland
1960 Ardnamurchan
Kintyre Gigha
1961 Surrey
1962 Ardnamurchan
Kintyre
1963 North Uist
1964 Holyland
Surrey
1965 Caithness
Sutherland Aberdeen
1966 Holyland
1967 Iona (Bishops walk
1968 Caithness + Sutherland
1969 Iceland
1970 Islay
1971 Harris + Lewis
1971 Skye
1972 Caithness Orkney
Shetland Colonsay
1973 Caithness Shetland
1974 Coll, Arran
Burns year Eglin
1975 Barra Vatersay Eriska
S. Uist, N. Uist Benbecula
Berneray Skye Ramsay
1976 Yorkshire Forres
1977 Ramsay, Eigg Rum
1978 Mull Raasay
1979 Inverness, Dufftown
Carradale Gigha
1980 Islay Jura
Windermere
1981 Coll Tiree
Lochinver
1982 Dervaig
Windermere
1983 Island of Muck
Gardenstown, Old Meldrum
1984 Winderman Isle of Man
Gardenstown Old Meldrum
1985 Orkney Kirkwall
Nairn Old Meldrum
1986 Forres + Cullen
1987 Forres Cullen
The Biggin Cullen
1988 Glen Isla, Angus Arran
1989 Grantown on Spey
Forres, Keith Kirriemuir
1990 Skiathos
1991 Loch Rannoch
1992 Kingussie

Figure 3. Hope's list of collecting trips, showing a bulge of islands in the early 1970s. (Reproduced with permission of the Hope MacDougall Collection)

> compiled in relation to the Archive and Collections; and the relevant books and pamphlets you have gathered. All are part of the unit, it seems to me. I would even include the paintings of buildings, interiors, etc, made by your mother, and even though these may well remain family possessions, perhaps they could be listed and earmarked as being 'on loan' to the Hope MacDougall Collection, in case they should fit in with future displays.

He and Cheape had discussed the collection during the return journey, the letter continued, and 'we feel that, if you wish, we would be happy to be named as joint "consultants" […] in relation to advising on the future housing of the Collection'.

The need to define the collection, and to ensure that all the supporting material was legally encompassed, was advice

Figure 4. Hope gathered the images from her travels in themed files which now form part of the archive; this section comparing peat workings in the Western Isles and Ardnamurchan. (Reproduced with permission of the Hope MacDougall Collection)

which Hope heeded, and thereafter she devoted much energy to organising documentation of both the objects and the archive. On 8 February, Fenton thanked her for her letter, writing: 'it sounds as if you are keeping busy with cataloguing and listing. It is a very good idea to have everything ship shape now, so that all concerned know where things should or might go in the future, whether on loan or otherwise.' He confirmed again that he and Cheape would serve as joint consultants, but suggested there was little else they could offer at this time: 'Really, listing is the main thing.'

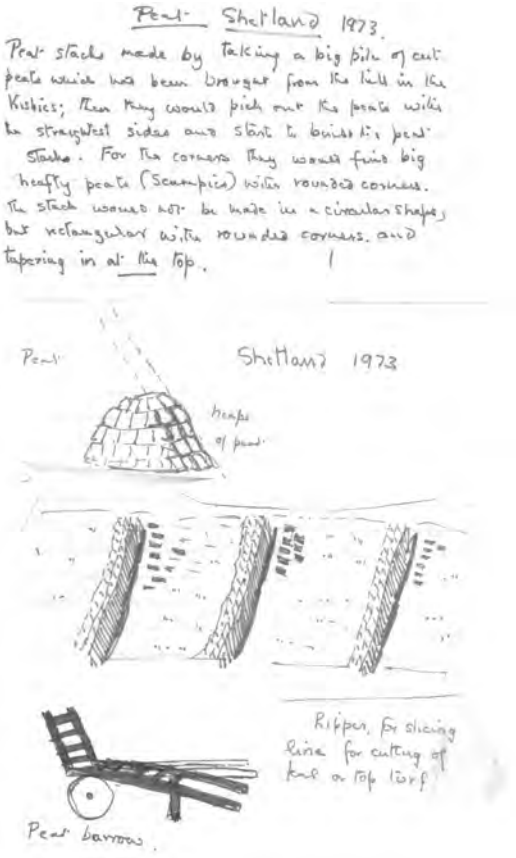


Figure 5. Hope's illustration of peat workings. (Reproduced with permission of the Hope MacDougall Collection)

For documentation purposes, Hope set the official start date to 1966, the year of her move to Ganavan. With the help of her collecting notebooks and itineraries, each object or group was assigned a letter representing a year, and a number. 'A' was 1966, and for her 1973 visit to Shetland the inventory records 'H21 – Shetland Kishie, for carrying peat' (fig.6). The pattern of collecting is thus revealed though the inventory, and equally the large cluster of random material prefixed 'A' (1966) supports the idea that an informal collecting of objects had begun prior to the move.

Peat:
D 9 Peat iron Lairg blacksmith
E 12 Irish peat barrow solid wood wheel + axil
E 13 Turf slane – Irish
F 16 Peat spade, Cowhorn handle Islay
F 20 2-prong fork for lifting peats
G 36 Peat spade Harris
G 39 Peat creel (willow + heather rope.
H 21 Shetland Kishie, for carrying peat
M 10 Peat iron, no handle. Miss MacGill's Croft
M 37 "Ley pur wood en slatted peat carrier Faroe Islands
E 21 Peat spade Achnacree moss
E 22 Peat spade Isle of Lewis
E 47 Peat spade Glenfishie, Inverness
H 25 TUSKAR, – peat spade from Shetland Dunrossness Museum of Scottish
H 26 New blade for Tuskar, bought from Blacksmith in Kinkwall
J 24 Ripper, from Lerwick Smithy, for marking lines in the turf to peat cutting
H 27 Peat spade Ord Distillery
D 9 Peat iron made by Mr Adam, Lairg, of best steel.
K 26 Peat iron from Mr H. Kennedy Isle of Coll
L 3 Peat iron South Uist
D 71 Peat iron from Lismore
F 45 Peat iron, no handle, from rural college, Borve, Lewis
G 31 Saddle for carry peat creel
E 11 Donkey saddle, wooden to carry peat creels from Mr Kilfinick, Creggan Farm, Carrowreagh, West Port Co. Mayo
(Fraser's spade
AB 12 Peat bellows from Mrs Cairns, Creagan Inn

Figure 6. Hope's inventory entries for peat-related objects, each preceded by a letter to signify the year the object entered the collection. (Reproduced with permission of the Hope MacDougall Collection)

Undeniably self-sufficient, Hope clearly kept her head down and worked through the vast inventory without placing undue demands on either Fenton or Cheape. This was a 'documentary' phase in her life, corresponding with her research for and eventual publication of *Kerrera: Mirror of History* in 1979.

There was a long silence in correspondence (at least that which was kept as a record), which was broken on 7 April 1993. Characteristically, Hope kept a copy of her own letter to Fenton and Cheape. It reminded them of their promise to act as joint consultants, and immediately reopened the question of the future, as 'at over 80 I am slowing down – both mentally and physically!' The letter shows her to be by turns conflicted and hopeful about what should happen to the collection and where it should be, and wanting to feel 'that this house would be occupied by someone who would enjoy it and its surroundings as I have always done, and tried to preserve its character'. She threw in various suggestions, one for effectively installing a carbon copy of herself – 'someone doing museum research, or writing a book, who would be prepared to let people see the collection, study archives etc'. She added that Oban needed a museum, and speculated on whether 'there are possibilities of house and collection being under the wing of National Museums of Scotland &/or National Trust for Scotland.' It is a confused and anxious letter.

Both men reignited the conversation, Fenton writing on 5 May 1993 that he was 'still happy to work with Hugh in trying to resolve the future of your collection', even though he was 'no longer directly involved in the world of museums'. Back in 1985 he had raised the possible eventual dispersal to one or more museums, attracting no response from Hope. Now, in 1993, he urged against the collection staying at Ganavan, which he saw as a family house: 'It is an attractive house with a good pedigree and deserves to be lived in, to have people – even young folk – about it.' He suggested it might be easier to find a solution for the collections separately from the house, 'and on this basis, it might be well worth – especially through Hugh in the first instance – opening discussion about the collections with the National

Museums of Scotland'. He anticipated a difficulty, as he had done in 1985, of keeping it together, but 'at least in terms of labelling each item would appear as part of the "Hope MacDougall" Collection'. He saw it, as Hugh Cheape does to this day, as a research collection.

Interestingly, this letter offers a vignette into Fenton's own collecting past: 'When I joined the Museum in 1959, I passed on to it the collections I had begun to build up myself. They have subsequently formed parts of wider collections in the way I have mentioned above, and the main difference is that your collections are so much bigger than mine ever were.'

Hope had long gathered people around her with similar interests, including Sona Campbell of Kilmore who was heavily involved in the development of Auchindrain Township, and first met her in the early 1970s. Campbell recently recalled a conversation twenty years later when she had asked Hope what would eventually become of it all, eliciting the reply: 'You know, I never thought about that.'

This was somewhat disingenuous perhaps, given the correspondence with Fenton, but there is no doubt that the collection's future became the burning issue. With local people at the forefront, and with Cheape and Fenton in support, Hope began the formation of a Trust, discussing a draft deed in 1994 which circulated for approval the following year. Sona's husband Alan Campbell was a prime mover and became the first chair, and by 1995 he was scoping out museum premises with Hope in Oban. Fenton and Cheape had by this stage signed off the inventory which passed to lawyers for the final Trust deed, and remained in touch regarding developments and ideas for the collection.

Professional support had also become available in Argyll with the appointment of Eila MacQueen (now Director of Archaeology Scotland), who was Argyll and Bute Council's first Museums Development Officer in 1995. Local interest in and support for the collection was growing, and the need for the Edinburgh-based advisers lessening.

All too soon the momentum was lost, as in 1996 Hope wrote to Cheape (who was by now the main correspondent, but with Fenton still in support), telling them of the death of Alan Campbell, 'a great loss to my Museum Trust' as well as to the local area. She wrote of fears of the collection being left in an empty house, with the lack of prospects for other premises. 'I know you are very busy, as always, but if you or Sandy have any help to offer in this rather dreich period, suggestions would be welcome'.

I became a Trustee in 1998 – and in fact, Sandy Fenton's last letter to Hope was to approve my appointment. Just before Christmas that year, Hope MacDougall died, and the true scale of the collection was revealed. A team of volunteers, led by Eila MacQueen, worked in shifts for two weeks to record and pack the 5,000-plus objects, and it took a team of local removal men two days to move it into temporary storage.

After her death, her niece and Clan Chief Morag MacDougall of MacDougall offered refuge for the collection at Dunollie House – an option which Hope had firmly discounted, on the grounds that it was the family home, albeit having been empty for some years. The Heritage Lottery Fund funded a retrospective documentation exercise and educational outreach programme, and from 2001 Dunollie became the headquarters for the work on the collection, which proved the catalyst for the eventual opening of Dunollie to the public in 2011 as a complete heritage site with historic house, museum, castle and grounds.

Jacqueline Skeldon was appointed as curator and I took on project management and education. We found it impossible not to trip over the influence of Fenton and Cheape, evident in the structure of that vital inventory, the organisation and completeness of the archive, and the academic and focused approach which Hope had pursued since she first made contact with her advisers.

The Hope MacDougall Collection still faces persistent challenges, but the Trust are moving towards a plan which echoes an idea proffered tentatively by Hugh Cheape to Hope in 1993,

Figures 7, 8 and 9. An industrial handloom is being restored by a group of volunteers at the Hope MacDougall Collection. The project is being led by weaver Marilyn Drummond who dismantled it when it was removed from Ganavan House after Hope's death over fifteen years ago. Built in 1839, it is thought to be the last surviving handloom from the Carse of Stirling mills, and may have originally been used for weaving tartan.
From top to bottom: (fig.7) removing old web and packing it for museum storage; (fig.8) the loom stripped, with new heddles installed; (fig.9) replacing the rotten threads (Marilyn Drummond in foreground).
(Photos: Jill Bowis)

in which he suggested the collections formed a valuable '"library" of material culture combined with a "library" of information'. He said there was 'a great need for archives and collections which have been built up with the eye of experience, sensitivity, humanity, and contemporary knowledge', and that 'we may be in a position to create something very unusual and yet central to education and learning in the future'. This in turn recalls Fenton's early advice to open the idea of a collection to include everything from archive to photographs, paintings and objects, to create a complete story.

If the current plans come to pass, they will be a monument both to the enormous community effort which continues to swing behind the collection, and the solid professional core which was mentored, supported and encouraged by Sandy Fenton and Hugh Cheape.

Notes

1 R B K Stevenson, *Annual Report*, National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, 1960, cited in Hugh Cheape, 'Obituary: Alexander Fenton', Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, vol.142 (2012), pp 1–8 (p 3).

2 I F Grant, A Fenton, European Ethnological Research Centre and National Museums of Scotland, *The Making of Am Fasgadh: An Account of the Origins of the Highland Folk Museum by its Founder*, 'Flashbacks' series, National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh, 2007, p.188.

3 Information from Hugh Cheape, 6 May 2014.

4 All letters referenced in this article are in the Hope MacDougall Archive, Dunollie House, Oban, website: www.dunollie.org.

5 H MacDougall, *Kerrera: Mirror of History* (first published 1979), House of Lochar, Isle of Colonsay, 2004, pp ix–x.

6 Grant *et al.*, *op.cit.*, p.41.

7 Ibid. p.76.

‘EVERY TIMBER IN THE FOREST FOR MACRAE’S HOUSE’: CREEL HOUSES IN THE HIGHLANDS

Hugh Cheape

The recording of vernacular architecture and the specialist documentation of buildings have extended to the study of buildings, people and social organisation in relation to environment – what we might now call the ‘ecology of buildings’. This may be seen as part of a pluralism of approach that has come to characterise material culture studies, an approach which identifies shared interests in the exploration of our physical and social worlds and may look to different theoretical and methodological approaches to support research. ‘Material culture’ tends to draw on methodologies and evidence of different disciplines, and a multidisciplinarity or cross-disciplinarity informs and inspires the material culture genre, enlarges its zone of function and relevance and adds to scholarly rigour. Professor Sandy Fenton essentially marked out this zone and used the conceptual label of ‘ethnology’ to describe a mix of social, economic and cultural history, based on language, locality and region and an integrity supplied by the fresh evaluation of sources in museum and material culture studies.[1]

As ideas about settlement have evolved, the documentation of buildings and settlement research have tended to coalesce to mutual advantage under the influence of scholarly drivers such as the Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group. The extent of research into vernacular buildings throughout the country since the founding of SVBWG in 1972 has added new dimensions and detail. We recognise more nuanced versions of settlements as evolving entities, demonstrating change and diversity as opposed to a fixity, and exploring beyond the ‘big idea’ that might account for everything that had been part of the scholarly inheritance of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The interpretation of

buildings and landscape, for example, might be narrowly based on the model of a farming township or *baile* or on concepts of dispersed versus nucleated settlements, without reaching further to explore environmental issues or how people perceived their own circumstances or their landscape in the past.

This short essay acknowledges the enriching of the debate and moves to further scrutiny of the construction and management of living space as both physical and social phenomena. It focuses however on the architecture and material culture that is no longer there – the 'creel houses' of Highland history, whose absence calls for some sort of 'materialisation' and the proposal of a paradox that such unstable and evanescent evidence may be more significant than is inferred from past study.[2] Written evidence describes houses of wattle, referred to in Anglo-Scots as 'creel houses' or 'basket houses', from which it is reasonably clear that an inner wall of stakes and wattle, an outer wall of turf and a thatched roof, hip-ended and supported on couples, are being described.[3] The evidence of language – as in our title translating *Gach fiodh sa' choill' gu Tigh Mhic Rath*, from the lines of a traditional Gaelic song (see page 38) – materialises the creel house in a cultural landscape.[4] By drawing together evidence from different discourses, the paradox is sustained by suggesting that the absence of material has 'agency', in that it enlists language and literature for its interpretation by giving more recognition to

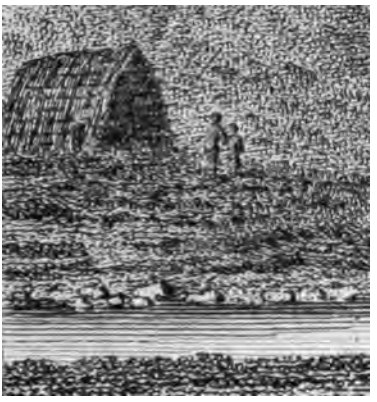


Figure 1. Wattle and turf dwelling house in Strathmore, 1776. (Reproduced from: Revd Charles Cordiner, Antiquities and Scenery of the North of Scotland*, London, 1780, plate 19 'Dun Dornadilla' (facing p.105)*

the culture province of Scotland's *Gàidhealtachd* in which a large part of the evidence of creel houses can be located.

A wider context of modern public perception, or need for the 'big idea' for public debate in our national history, lend weight to the 'creel house' paradox that such lost evidence matters. Perception and debate are led by eye and mind which are drawn to surviving structures and their materials and the imperatives for analysing and recording historic buildings, often under political pressure for their conservation. Such a tendency is exaggerated in the absence of other buildings (such as creel houses) or in an environment of reduced natural woodland cover as in the modern Highlands, denying us an impression of a diversity of building types and techniques or of a resource that was so abundant as to dictate wooden buildings.

Pursuing the archaeology and social history of buildings, whether dwelling houses or other functional buildings or whether of aggregated or segregated functions, creel houses lend themselves to assumptions of the evolution of a building type adapted to environment, climatic conditions and circumstances of availability of building materials. Such assumptions might be more readily demonstrated through traces of timber structures in prehistory such as in the Early Neolithic and in the Iron Age.[5] Some documentation exists on the fringe of history for timber and wattle churches and some oral tradition preserves memory of wattle walls, partitions and doors.[6] Archaeology has suggestions for wattle work. Upstanding remains of buildings in rural settlements are exceptionally rare in Scotland and the limited lifespan of timber buildings is a given. Archaeological fieldwork and settlement research in the Central Highlands township of Lianach in Balquhidder explored a deserted settlement in lands of the earldom of Atholl and on a site in documented continuous occupation from the Middle Ages until the end of the nineteenth century. This revealed a longhouse with stone and clay walls and roof carried on sets of crucks and evidence of possible timber partitions. It was part of an exercise in matching material remains to surviving archive documentation to enlarge our view of the

cultural landscape.[7] A more recent exercise has produced evidence in the soil of internal timber work or partitions. The Morlaggan Rural Settlement Group was formed in December 2009 to explore and excavate the group of former structures at High Morlaggan near Arrochar. Soil discolouration has been a matter for archaeology but a 'modern' historical site calls for pragmatic alliance with other disciplines such as history, literature, ethnology and language.[8] Ambiguity and uncertainty characterise such findings and caution is called for in interpretation. A slight example throws up detail from a language context. Duncan Campbell's description of shielings and animal husbandry in Upland Perthshire in the 1860s identified the circular folds for cattle, sheep and goats – what he termed *crodhan* – as circular and without necessarily any associated hut structures. His cautionary tale of recognition of these features seems aimed at the archaeologist:

> [The *Crò*] was generally surrounded by a strong wall, but in bushy districts it was often fenced in by rough wicker-work, which when it disappeared, only left the circular floor to mark the place. … The folds were in pairs, or sometimes in double pairs, because milking and cheese-making purposes required that calves, lambs and kids should be kept separate from their mothers. What are called 'hut circles' seem to me to be in many, but not perhaps in all cases, the floors of wicker-work folds, which were too near permanent abodes to be associated with regular shieling huts.[9]

In 2001, Glasgow University's 'Rannoch Archaeological Project' chose the so-called 'medieval village' (as marked on the current Ordnance Survey map) of Bunrannoch, at the south-eastern end of Loch Rannoch for exploration. Typically, there was clear evidence of multi-period settlement from approximately the Neolithic or the late second millennium BC. Two sites were chosen for excavation and these were of buildings described as 'creel

houses', apparently more-or-less typical building types and domestic structures of the region. Though assumed to have been the remains of dwelling houses burnt down in reprisals following the last Jacobite Rising of 1745, detailed analysis of the site, including radio-carbon dating, pointed to these being structures of the early historic and medieval period. Taken with later (eighteenth-century) and documentary evidence, it has been suggested that Highland 'creel houses' in this district demonstrate the persistence of a fairly fixed building type for about a thousand years and, as far as can be currently suggested, dating back to an early-historical period of the second half of the first millennium. The evidence of structural posts (to carry a roof), wattle panels and stone and turf footings forming a long and relatively narrow building should not surprise us in a district of woodland evidenced

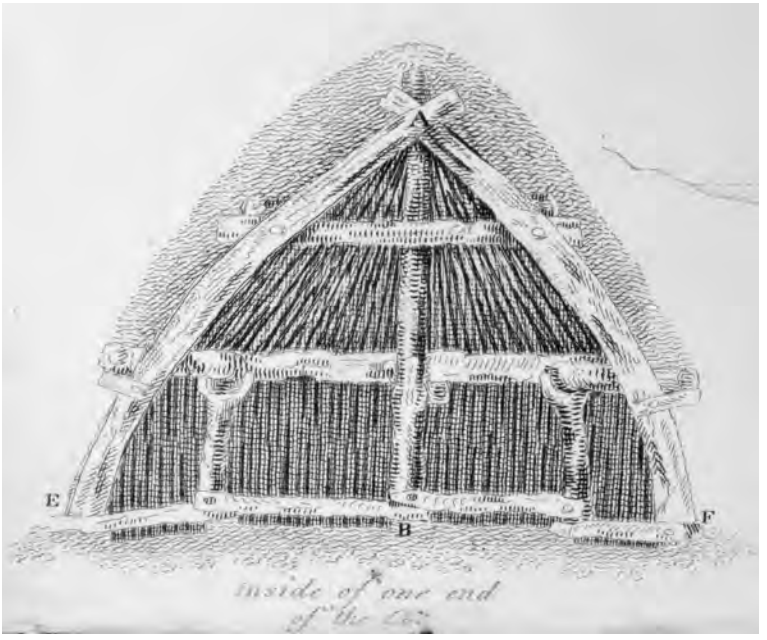


Figure 2. Gable end of a 'creel house' with cruck couple and 'stake and rice' or wattle walls. (Reproduced from: Sir George Steuart Mackenzie, A Treatise on the Diseases and Management of Sheep*, Edinburgh, 1809, pp 90–94 and plate V)*

by the 'Black Wood of Rannoch' and remains of the so-called 'Caledonian Forest'.[10] If this offers some early evidence, the same district gives us a list of the timber components of a creel house at Bunrannoch in 1717. The local saw-miller listed the resources required in a letter to the laird of Atholl, as being '7 couples, 35 pan trees of birk, 20 jests of fir between sole trees and side wall, 2 trees to be forks for the gavels, 100 leads of wands to work the criels, 160 standards with as many cabers besides door checks and windows'.[11]

Creel houses seem well embedded in the cultural landscape in sub-recent periods although they earn few plaudits in the contemporary literature. Unsurprisingly, conventional documentary evidence is sparse measured against documentary evidence for the development of more recent building types, whose adoption or evolution forms a response to change; for example, 'agricultural improvement' of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries included radical changes in building techniques whose results are uppermost in the Highland landscape today. The disappearance of creel houses was predicated also on changes to patterns of settlement. In the Highlands and Islands, the process was intensified by the course and consequences of the Jacobite Wars, the focus of Enlightenment views on society's 'improvement' and fashionable disdain in the literature for what had preceded it. Government plans followed, aimed at realising economic value by encouraging sea fishing, the kelp industry and then sheep farming, most of which was incompatible with pre-existing patterns of settlement. The law of the land offered little or no support to the occupiers of the land and a process of 'clearance' began in the Highlands in the 1790s and continued with varying intensity until the 1870s. The materialisation of creel houses can contribute to the understanding and interpretation of a cultural landscape that was changed in this period, perhaps out of all recognition.

How people perceived their Highland landscape in the past is abundantly clear in Scottish Gaelic. Trees were a highly recognisable element in a Gaelic cosmology, a vital part of

the natural order and their loss represented disruption of the social contract between ruler and ruled. This is a constant note in surviving panegyric verse from the medieval period and extends to allegory in praising the qualities and attributes of individuals. Notable examples are Sileas na Ceapaich's elegy of 1721 for Alexander MacDonald of Glengarry whom she characterises as 'choice of tallest oaks', and an elegy of about 1685 for the laird of Applecross who is recalled as 'the highest tree in the forest'.[12] The symbolism of the natural order and well-wooded landscape received more recent formulation in Alexander MacDonald's praise of the Mainland territories of Clanranald, *Fàilte na Mòrthir*, of about 1750.[13] A more 'modern' view of a balance and harmony between nature and the occupiers of the land is preserved in Duncan Bàn Macintyre's 'last farewell to the mountains' of 1802, where he characterises the loss of woods and heather as an upsetting of the old harmony. He is more specific about cause and effect:

> *S a' bheinn as beag a shaoil mi*
> *Gun dèanadh ise caochladh,*
> *On tha i nis fo chaoraibh.*
> ['And the mountain, I little thought that it would be changed since it is now under sheep'][14]

The allegory of trees extended to different values accorded to different timbers, so that oak or yew were noble woods while alder or hazel were base woods, a comparison that could be applied metaphorically and satirically to people. A poetic riposte to Alexander MacDonald's *Fàilte na Mòrthir* from the Uist poet John MacCodrum overturned the fulsome representation of the Clanranald oakwoods:

> *S mairg a mhol*
> *A' Mhòrthir sgnogach*
> *Air son stoban calltainn.*
> ['Alas for the one who praised the shrivelled Mainland for some sticks of hazel'][15]

This played to the understanding also that hazel was an unlucky timber. Other forbidden timbers were ivy and bird-cherry, as in the song from which our title is taken:

> *Gach sgolb 's gach sgrath*
> *Gu Tigh Mhic Rath,*
> *Gach fiodh sa' choill'*
> *Gu Tigh mhic Rath,*
> *Ach eidheann mu chrann 's fiodhagach.*
> ['Every peg and divot for MacRae's House, every timber in the forest for MacRae's House, excepting ivy on a tree and bird-cherry']16

The prevalence of timber in the natural history and cultural landscape of the West Coast and Atlantic zone gave rise to a proverbial expression in Scottish Gaelic which infers the same sense of absurdity in the notion of taking coals to Newcastle: 'That would be like taking wood to Lochaber' – *B' e sin a bhiodh 'toirt fiodha do Lochabar e*, or alternatively, *B' e sin a bhiodh 'toirt giuthas* (i.e. pine trees) *do Lochabar e*. A relatively humid climate and natural woods of oak, birch, aspen, rowan, hazel, holly and willow on indented coastline and fjord-like lochs and mountains seem to have been the last home of creel houses. Old mixed deciduous forest characterised the west coast and pine forests were found towards the east – east, that is, of the Great Glen – though there were extensive pine forests nearer the West Coast such as 'Locheil's Forest' on the shores of Loch Arcaig and in Glen Loy and pine woods round Loch Hourn and in Glen Barrisdale in Knoydart. Surveys of the Annexed Forfeited Estates in the wake of the 1745 uprising commonly describe creel houses: 'The whole houses of the country are made up of twigs manufactured by way of creels called wattling and covered with turf.'17 The widely reported destruction of housing by the government army of occupation in the wake of the Battle of Culloden rings true if so many of the buildings were of timber. Margaret MacDonnell of Ardnabie, Glengarry, recalled that her son was a week old when Cumberland's troops arrived:

Losg iad mo shabhal 's mo bhàthaich,
'S chuir iad mo thaigh-clàir 'na lasair.
['They burnt my barn and my byre, and they put my wooden house to the flames'][18]

A significant detail to emerge from accounts of the Highlands, particularly from the pens of travellers and visitors to the region, is that, apart from the larger masonry structures such as castles, housing was undifferentiated across a social spectrum. Samuel Johnson and James Boswell made reference to creel houses in 1773, and, in 1762, Bishop Forbes described the hospitality in a public house at Boleskine on Loch Ness:

> We returned to our Creel House […] where we dined sumptuously upon Venison, a piece of Roe, dressed partly in Collops, with sauce, and partly on the Grid-Iron, a leg of fine Mutton, two good Pullets, Flour Bread, good Claret, White Wine and Goose-berries after dinner; and the Landlady, a Forbes by her Father and a Fraser by her Husband, was extremely fond to see a Forbes in her Creel House, and though an old body, she sang like a nightingale and danced to her own music.[19]

It might be a matter of surprise to visitors, or certainly a matter of comment, that the house of the local chieftain or tacksman seemed indistinguishable from the other houses in a community. This point is made by Edward Burt in the early eighteenth century.[20] In this respect, basket or wattlework was not generically

Figure 3. Romantically inclined interior of Lochaber house by R R McIan, 1851. The original McIan painting was sold at Sotheby's (Gleneagles), 30 August 2000, and showed a wattlework wall or partition behind the seated group. (Reproduced from: James Logan, Highlanders at Home, or Gaelic Gatherings*, Glasgow, 1900)*

of low status, as is inferred in our title. According to tradition, the principal residence of Mackenzie of Gairloch, the *Taigh Dige*, was a house of wattle construction. At Tom-an-t-Sabhail, Inverwick, Grant of Glenmoriston lived in a house of wattle and turf, described as *tigh caoil*. The daughter of Campbell of Cawdor had eloped with Grant of Glenmoriston, being the chieftain of lower status, and this prompted her father ultimately to build *An Tùr* or 'The Tower', being a stone and lime building.[21] Mary Mackellar, writing in 1889 on the 'Traditions of Lochaber', described 'Locheil's castle of the '45, burnt by the Duke of Cumberland [following the Battle of Culloden], was all of wattle, excepting the bit of wall where the fire-places were, and which still stands'.[22] This special 'monument' was photographically recorded for the National Monuments Record in 2005 (fig.4) but invites more detailed study, particularly to work out the proportions and internal space of a once formidable creel house. Another nearby

Figure 4. View from the south-west of the massive freestanding fireplace and chimney at Achnacarry, by tradition 'Locheil's castle of the '45' and possibly the surviving gable of a creel house. This may be the largest monument of its type in the cultural landscape and a silent symbol of the former status of the creel house and of the high regard for timber in the Gaelic tradition. (RCAHMS image SC1157356. © Crown Copyright: RCAHMS. Licensor www.rcahms.gov.uk)

Cameron house was Erracht House which was described in the late eighteenth century as 'creel and turfed on the outside'. John Ramsay of Ochtertyre recalled a conversation with a Perthshire friend of his who was buying cattle in Morvern before 1745 and was invited to the laird's creel house. Diverging attitudes between east and west seemed to make this more remarkable.[23] A useful description of the dwelling of Cameron of Glendessary at Acharn, written in August 1843 by the Revd John Macleod, was included in the *New Statistical Account*:

> He resided at Ach-a-charn, and occupied a house of very peculiar construction; formed of oak beams placed at regular distances, the intervening spaces being closely interwoven with wicker-work. The outside was wholly covered with heath, and the interior was divided into several apartments, and finished in a style of taste and elegance corresponding with the enlightened refinements of the occupants.[24]

Creel houses were then becoming old-fashioned, even when not condemned by the 'improvers'. They came to be noticed by a more romantically inclined eye or by the antiquarian. MacDonnell of Glengarry, the aptly titled *Alasdair Fiadhaich* ('Alexander the Fierce'), spent a few weeks every summer at Inverie on Loch Nevis. The main part of his house was of stone and lime but one wing was built in a traditional wattle style to his express orders, with couples of 'Scotch fir', a clay floor and infill of basketwork of hazel. The young artist, music-collector and antiquarian John Leyden commented on this in 1800: 'MacDonell of Glengarry has constructed, on the side of Loch Nevis a little above Scothouse, a wicker house in the ancient manner, to serve as a hunting-box. The form of the house and the position of the rafters seem to be exactly imitated, and there is no ceiling but the roof.'[25] In 1866, Sir Arthur Mitchell described wattled partitions plastered with clay and outside walls, though generally for sheds or byres, in Kintail, Glengarry, Glenmoriston and Lochaber.[26]

The management of fodder for animals was critical in the over-moist climate and Atlantic zone of the West Coast and creel barns evidently served a special purpose. The naturalist James Robertson made a distinction in building technique in 1768:

> Their barns and houses are built in the same manner as hath been described, only the former have no turf fastened on their outer side from the ground up to the easing, so that the wind blows through all parts of the barn with freedom, and dries their corn.[27]

Sir George Stuart Mackenzie's 'County Agricultural Report' for Wester Ross also mentioned creel barns:

> We find creel-barns everywhere erected. These are constructed partly of stone, with large apertures in the walls, which are filled up with wicker-work. Sometimes they are made entirely of wicker-work, except the roof, which is always close.[28]

The barn beside the present main road at Kirkton, Balmacara, whose recent repair was grant-aided, recalls the creel barn type. It has louvre panels on the gables, and side panels of wattlework with hazel and heather. Other successors to the creel barn can still be seen in the Kintail district. In the textbooks, this is sometimes described as 'stake and rice', and the same term was used historically.[29] Houses at Letterfearn on the south side of Loch Duich, photographed by the Aberdeen photographer George Washington Wilson in the late nineteenth century, illustrate this technique and suggest that this was normal in the area. This seems to be confirmed by Alexander Carmichael, writing in his paper published in 1884 on *Grazing and Agrestic Customs*, added to the Crofters' Commission Report at the special request of its Chairman, Lord Napier:

> In wooded districts throughout the Highlands, where materials can be found, doors, gates, partitions, fences, barns, and even dwelling houses, are made of wattle-work. In the case of dwelling houses and

> their partitions, the wattling is plastered over on both sides with boulder clay, and whitewashed with lime, thereby giving an air of cleanliness and comfort to the house.[30]

Recognition of a material status quo is significant in such an albeit partisan account, not least because it offers an insider view – *bho shealladh a' Ghàidheil* (i.e. a Gaelic viewpoint). In assembling evidence on relict material culture through an era of dramatic change, it is encouraging to hear voices which normalise the creel house trait and bracketing a period of almost two hundred years. In James Robertson's tour of the West Coast and Inner Hebrides between May and October 1768, he described 'creel houses' in Moidart and Arasaig with the observing and dispassionate eye of the scientist:

> The houses in which they live they call basket houses. The method of building them is this: they first mark out both breadth and length of the house, then drive stakes of wood at 9 inches or a foot [23 to 30 centimetres] distance from each other, leaving 4 or 5 feet [120 to 150 centimetres] of them above ground, then wattle them up with heath and small branches of wood, upon the outside of which they pin on very thin turf, much in the same manner that slates are laid. Alongst the top of these stakes runs a beam, which supports the couples, and what they call cabers, and this either covered with turf, heath or straw.[31]

Details of creel houses were recorded by Calum MacLean in Lochaber in the 1950s for the newly founded School of Scottish Studies. His informant in this instance turned out to be one of his outstanding tradition-bearers. He was 'Little John MacDonald of Highbridge' or 'John the Bard' (1876–1964) who was a *seanchaidh* (historian, storyteller, tradition-bearer) and poet in his own right. Calum MacLean has painted a vivid pen-picture of how a rich rapport was established in Gaelic between recorder and informant:

‘We continued to meet once weekly for a whole five months. Day after day he came and poured out the unwritten history of Lochaber. Everything that ever took place there seems to have left some imprint on his memory.’[32] The following extract from one of the recordings is an abbreviated version of the Gaelic text:

> I saw wattled houses, and this was the way they built them. They set up strong *casain* (posts). I believe they would be about nine inches [23 centimetres] each way – strong. It was oak they used for them pretty often. They would be as high as they wanted to have the wall – no more than six feet [180 centimetres] high. They set the *casain* so firmly that they could place the *cupaill* (couples) on them to keep the roof up. And then they put on the *taobhan* across them – timbers along the side. *Taobhan* was what they called them. They wouldn’t be very thick at all, the *taobhan*. They did not mind at all if they were round and they did not mind what sort of

Figure 5. Turf-walled house in Lochaber, possibly a ‘creel house’, in the home district of John MacDonald who gave an account of creel-house building to Calum MacLean of the School of Scottish Studies in 1958. (Photo courtesy of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig)

> timber it was – anything but the *fiodhagaich* (bird-cherry); it was taboo. They were full of superstitions. And then they went and got the *slatan* (rods), alder for the *slatan*. It wouldn't matter what length the *slatan* were. And they would draw them back and forth through the fire – they were singed brown. And then this alder would become so soft and so supple. This would make the *slatan* flexible so that they could go in among the *taobhan* – perhaps two inches [5 centimetres] apart. And then when the *slatan* were plaited up among the *taobhan*, they got clay and cow dung and straw. And they mixed it with shovels till they got it right. And then they pressed it on with the shovels, and it went through. The *slatan* held it, with the straw. And they made it as smooth on the outside as it could be. Then they did the inside, in the same way. It would take a day or two for it to dry. All that had to be done now was to put the *cupaill* on the *casain*. If they could get it at all they liked pine or oak for the *cupaill*. Then they put on the roof.[33]

The early folk museum movement, exemplified in Scandinavian prototypes of the late nineteenth century, made vernacular architecture its business and building structures and interiors were collected and re-created. In spite of scholarly discrimination for regional variation and the specialisms of open-air museums, rescuing the remains of the past has been expensive and has tended to the perpetuation of stereotypes and single examples rather than a needful selection to demonstrate variation. Vernacular buildings were a popular ingredient of European national trade exhibitions before the opening of Skansen, in Stockholm, in 1891 and the Highland Village, *An Clachan*, in the Glasgow 'Empire Exhibition' of 1938 served an entertaining and didactic purpose. I F Grant was an adviser for this display and it may be that the Highland dwellings were meant to offer a stereotype. Such symbols took no cognizance of wattle or creel houses, but, in the spirit of discrimination that I F Grant introduced into the study of regional

types of vernacular building, her Highland Folk Museum has taken up the material culture of the creel house.

Such a building type was explored and re-created by Ross Noble and his team at the Highland Folk Museum in 1997. A creel house was constructed from the layout and floor plans of an original building excavated on the site of the former township of Mid Raitts to the north of Kingussie. Archaeology was expanded with ethnological research including fieldwork, documentary evidence and the material evidence of building parts held in the museum collection. This was a substantial structure with internal dimensions of 16 metres (52 feet) in length and 5 metres (16 feet) in width, with a single entrance door into a byre-end section of the building. The roof was carried on seven pairs of crucks or couples, infilled with wattle panels of willow and hazel. Eighteenth-century tools such as axes, saws, adzes and augers were used. This experiment in reconstruction has yielded invaluable insights, not least an impression of the creel house offering commodious dwellings rather than the 'smoking dunghills' as described in the literature of 'improvement'.[34]

Cultural attitudes are still hard to shift and the Highlands and Islands particularly have been locked within a dominant narrative. Landscape and scenery have been romanticised for tourist and 'heritage' consumption and, arguably, the inhabitants patronised, perhaps not currently but certainly historically. The historical narrative is dominated by political tensions between crown, government and the Highlands and Islands, the debacle of the Jacobite Wars, and the onset of the Enlightenment, with accounts of Highland life stressing the need for change and the concept of 'improvement' dominating the ideological currency of the age. We can sense the 'condescension' that emanated from this and we can learn to delve deeper. The ubiquity of creel houses (in all their variety) remains to be better understood.[35] Exploring the materiality of absence has potential to enlarge our knowledge of an often ambiguous human geography and of the interaction between nature and culture in the historic environment.

Notes

1 See Alexander Fenton (general editor), *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology*, 14 volumes, John Donald and the European Ethnological Research Centre, Edinburgh, 2000–2013.

2 Materialisation may be exemplified in Aaron Allen, 'Production and the missing artefacts: candles, oil and the material culture of urban lighting in early modern Scotland', in *Review of Scottish Culture*, vol.23 (2011), pp 20–53; and see N G Allen, 'Walling materials in the eighteenth-century Highlands', *Vernacular Building*, vol.5 (1979), pp 1–7.

3 Alexander Fenton, 'Continuity and Change', in Geoffrey Stell, John Shaw and Susan Storrier (eds), *A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology: Scotland's Buildings*, European Ethnological Research Centre, Edinburgh, 2003, pp 9–23, especially pp 14–16.

4 William Matheson, 'Traditions of the Mackenzies', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, vol.39–40 (1942–50), pp 216–17.

5 See for example Gareth Chaffey, Alistair Barclay and Ruth Pelling, *Horton Kingsmead Quarry Volume 1*, Oxbow Books and Wessex Archaeology (forthcoming 2014).

6 W J Watson, *Bàrdachd Ghàidhlig: Specimens of Gaelic Poetry 1550–1900*, second edition, Stirling, 1932, p.193; A T Lucas, 'Wattle and straw mat doors in Ireland', in *Arctica: Studia Ethnographica Upsaliensia XI*, Uppsala, 1956, pp 16–35.

7 J H Stewart and M B Stewart, 'A Highland longhouse – Lianach, Balquhidder, Perthshire', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, vol.118 (1988), pp 301–17.

8 Morlaggan Rural Settlement Group, www.highmorlaggan.co.uk

9 Duncan Campbell, 'Highland shielings in the olden times', *Transactions of the Inverness Scientific Society and Field Club*, vol.5 (1895–9), p.69.

10 Gavin MacGregor, 'Legends, traditions or coincidences: remembrance of historic settlement in the Central Highlands of Scotland', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, vol.14 (2010), pp 398–413, especially pp 399–401 and 409–11.

11 A Bil, *The Shieling 1600–1840: The Case of the Scottish Highlands*, John Donald, Edinburgh, 1990, p.240; the ubiquity of woods and

timber in the status quo ante is sketched in Hugh Cheape, 'Woodlands on the Clanranald Estates', in T C Smout (ed.), *Scotland since Prehistory: Natural Change and Human Impact*, Scottish Cultural Press, Aberdeen, 1993, pp 50–63.

[12] Ronald Black (ed.), *An Lasair. Anthology of 18th Century Scottish Gaelic Verse*, Birlinn, Edinburgh, 2001, pp 100–105; Colm O Baoill and Meg Bateman, *Gàir nan Clàrsach. An Anthology of 17th Century Gaelic Poetry*, Birlinn, Edinburgh, 1994, p.172; for a recent summary of tree symbolism see Michael Newton, 'The Great Caledonian Forest of the Mind: Highland woods and tree symbolism in Scottish Gaelic tradition', in Virginia Blankenhorn (ed.), *Craobh nan Ubhal: A Festschrift for John MacInnes*, Scottish Studies vol.37, Edinburgh, 2014, pp 164–73.

[13] Derick S Thomson (ed.), *Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair. Selected Poems*, Scottish Gaelic Texts Society / Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh, 1996, pp 183–6.

[14] Angus MacLeod (ed.), *The Songs of Duncan Ban MacIntyre*, Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, Edinburgh, 1952, pp 390–91.

[15] William Matheson (ed.), *The Songs of John MacCodrum*, Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, Edinburgh, 1938, pp 50–51 and 244.

[16] Matheson, 'Traditions of the Mackenzies'; see also William Mackay, *Urquhart and Glenmoriston*, second edition, Inverness, 1914, p.425.

[17] Virginia Wills (ed.), *Reports on the Annexed Estates 1755–1769*, HMSO, Edinburgh, 1973, pp 49–52 and 99–101.

[18] Keith Norman MacDonald, *MacDonald Bards*, Edinburgh, 1900, p.34.

[19] J B Craven (ed.), *Journals of the Episcopal Visitations of the Rt Rev Robert Forbes*, London, 1887, p.231.

[20] Edward Burt, *Letters from a Gentleman in the North of Scotland to his Friend in London*, two volumes, William Patterson, Edinburgh, 1876.

[21] Alexander MacDonald, *Story and Song from Loch Ness-side*, Inverness, 1914 (new edition 1982), p.22.

[22] Mrs Mary Mackellar, 'Traditions of Lochaber', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, vol.16 (1889–90), p.26; see RCAHMS Site No. NN18NE 2 (Achnacarry Castle, Kilmallie Parish, Inverness-shire). My thanks to Abigail Grater and Veronica

Fraser for assistance in obtaining the photograph of this building's remains.

[23] Mary Miers, *The Western Seaboard*, Rutland Press Edinburgh, 2008, pp 30–31; Alexander Allardyce (ed.), *Scotland and Scotsmen in the Eighteenth Century*, vol.II, Edinburgh, 1888, p.83.

[24] Revd John MacLeod, 'Parish of Morvern', *The New Statistical Account of Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1845, vol.VII, p.177; see also Norman MacLeod, *Reminiscences of a Highland Parish*, second edition, London, 1868, pp 177–8.

[25] James Sinton (ed.), *Journal of a Tour in the Highlands and Western Islands of Scotland in 1800 by John Leyden*, Edinburgh, 1903, p.175; see also Norman H MacDonald, *The Clan Ranald of Knoydart and Glengarry*, privately printed, 1979, p.134.

[26] Arthur Mitchell, 'Vacation notes in Cromar, Burghead and Strathspey', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, vol.X (1872–4), pp 608–11.

[27] D M Henderson and J H Dickson, *A Naturalist in the Highlands: James Robertson, his life and travels in Scotland, 1767–1771*, Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh, 1994, p.101.

[28] Sir George S Mackenzie, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Ross*, London, 1813, p.232.

[29] See Bruce Walker, *Scottish Turf Construction*, Historic Scotland: Technical Conservation, Research and Education Group, Edinburgh, 2006, pp 34–5.

[30] Alexander Carmichael, *Grazing and Agrestic Customs of the Outer Hebrides*, Edinburgh (Parliamentary Papers), 1884, p.454.

[31] Henderson and Dickson *A Naturalist in the Highlands*, p.81; see also James Robertson, *General View of the Agriculture in the County of Inverness*, London, 1808, p.58.

[32] Calum I MacLean, *The Highlands*, Club Leabhar, Inverness, 1975, pp 20–21.

[33] Edinburgh University, School of Scottish Studies Sound Archive SA 1958.20.A11. I am most grateful to Dr Margaret Mackay for supplying me with this summary; additional material recorded from John MacDonald is now available on www.tobarandualchais.co.uk e.g. SA 1961.048.

[34] I F Grant, *Highland Folk Ways*, London, 1961, pp 175–6 and 207–9;

R R Noble, 'Turf-walled houses of the Central Highlands', *Folk Life*, vol.22 (1983–4), pp 68–83; R Ross Noble, 'Creel houses of the Scottish Highlands', in Trefor M Owen (ed.), *From Corrib to Cultra: Folklife Essays in honour of Alan Gailey*, Institute of Irish Studies, Belfast, 2000, pp 82–94.

[35] See *Transactions of the Inverness Scientific Society and Field Club*, vol.IV (1888–95), p.117 for reference to an unpublished paper on a wattled house at Kinlochewe by Dr B N Peach of the Geological Survey of Scotland. This could not be traced in the 'Peach and Horne' papers in the British Geological Society in Edinburgh University.

AULD STRONPATRICK: AN OLD GALLOWAY FARM

Gavin Sprott

Today, Stronpatrick is the name of a dwelling house and steadings near the old schoolhouse at Stroanfreggan. The Stroanfreggan Burn is a tributary of the Water of Ken in the north-east of Kircudbrightshire, Galloway. Until recently the house accommodated the shepherd and his family.

The present Stronpatrick was once the farm of Stroanfreggan and was called that into the early twentieth century. The house now called Stroanfreggan was once Stroanfreggan School, the former site of a smiddy, and adjacent to it the now vanished roadman's house at Stroanfreggan Brig. The schoolhouse became Stroanfreggan as the 'Auld Stroanfreggan' became the present Stronpatrick. The original Stronpatrick is now a ruin a mile away up the hill to the north-east, and lost its name to the new house and small steading built probably about 1865–70. For the purposes of this study, the ruin will be referred to as 'Auld Stronpatrick'.

I worked as an assistant during the lambing at Stronpatrick for several years, superseding previous annual lambing and clipping work at Auchenstroan, a neighbouring farm over the watershed to the east. This way one becomes aware of the ground and even of relatively small features and details in a quite intimate way. One such feature was the ruined house and steadings of Auld Stronpatrick. They lie just above the 240-metre (800-foot) mark. Connected with these ruins are signs of one-time cultivation both below and above that level (between 200 and 270 metres (650 and 900 feet)), not to mention the various dykes, one pattern sometimes superimposed on another. I also mended various dykes as occasion required. What at a casual glance may look a fairly uniform structure is more something like an old sock that has been repeatedly darned, but it constitutes a recent detail in a place that has been changing ever since people first arrived. Working in this

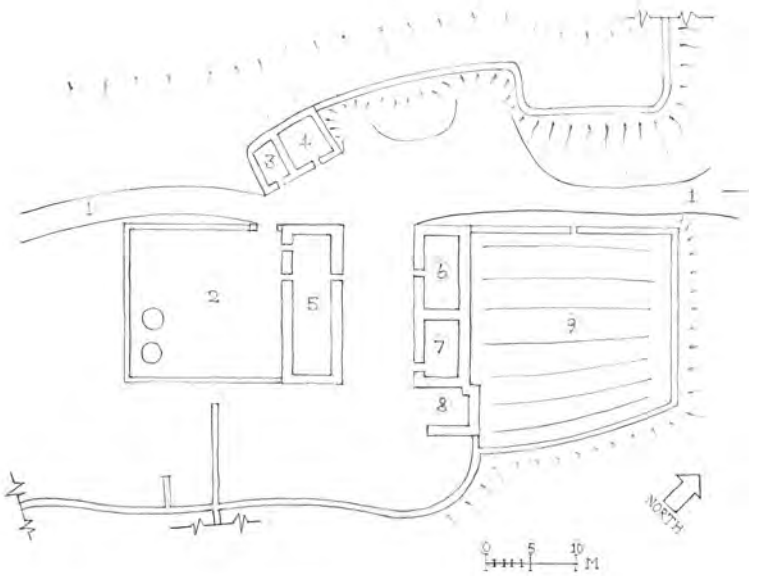


Figure 1. The remains at Auld Stronpatrick: (1) road, (2) stackyard, (3) ?byre, (4) ?dwelling house, (5) barn, (6) dwelling house, (7) byre, (8) shed, (9) lazy-beds.

ancient landscape aroused my curiosity and prompted me to enquire further. How were people able to farm in this high remote place?

One answer is the natural drainage. Auld Stronpatrick is straddled by a fan of four burns partly created by the natural curvature of the hillside. Also, some of the fields that once belonged to the neighbouring Auld Stroanfreggan are hung along the brae-face like a row of sheets from a washing line, enabling an easy run-off of water. Reinforced by the careful alignment of the rigs, it was thus possible to get around the old enemy of ill drainage.

Antiquity

The far history of farming in this location has yet to be defined. Auld Stronpatrick and Auld Stroanfreggan are marked – as 'Stronpatrick' and 'Stronchreigan' respectively – in Blaeu's Atlas (1654), based on the work of Timothy Pont (1560?–1614?). One

may surmise that these places were noted by Pont in the late 1590s. The *Stron* or *Stroan* is an old variant on the Gaelic *sròn* for 'nose', promontory or sticking-out point. *Stronchreigan* points to the original meaning of *chreagain* or 'rocky', thus 'rocky outcrop'. The Gaelic '*an t-Sròn Chreagain*' suggests how the T sound was there and changed to F in the scotticised version.[1] A closer physical location appears on General Roy's map (1752–5). Here Stroanfreggan is named 'Stronfregan', with an indication of cultivation. Auld Stronpatrick is marked for a dwelling and cultivation but not named. The names of the farms running up from Carsphairn are a mix of Scots and Gaelic: Brigmark (now half-anglicised to Bridgemark), Culmark, Blackmark on the south side, Smiton, Stroanfreggan, Stronpatrick, Cornharrow, Carroch (Kerroch as in older records, and still the local pronunciation) on the north side, not to mention the Gaelic names that populate the Water of Ken. Interestingly, there is only one 'toun' in that list, otherwise it is a rake of 'marks' or marches, or descriptions of place. The *patrick* of Stronpatrick speaks for itself. One naturally wonders if there was some dedication or connection with *Naomh Pàdraig* (Saint Patrick) himself. Auld Stronpatrick lay on a pilgrims' route leading south from Sanquhar. In the years before 1865 the 'old shepherd's cottage' at Stroanfreggan was pulled asunder, and a door lintel revealed bearing an image believed to be that of the Virgin Mary. It was said to have been found earlier in a pool in the nearby Stroanfreggan Burn. This was once where two pilgrim routes to Whithorn, one from Sanquhar and one from Moniaive, converged. The one from Sanquhar passed through Auld Stronpatrick, just up the hill.[2]

Older culture

Evidently, this district was once Gaelic in speech, and subsequently changed to the Lowland Scots tongue. Various studies have circled round this matter, and have found it hard to settle on more than cautious generalisations as to when the old tongue finally vanished. The consensus is late eighteenth century or perhaps even later. It is reckoned that the tongue was akin to the Gaelic of Ireland,

Man and Arran. Interestingly, Andrew Symson's 1684 account of Galloway makes no mention of Gaelic or Irish, but notes peculiarities of Lowland speech that shadow those of Irish speakers pronouncing English as a foreign tongue.[3] A sign of this was the frequent earlier spelling of Moniaive as *Monihive*.

The Levellers and after

The popular explosion of 1724 connected with 'the Levellers', where the local population in a lower coastal part of Galloway cast down dykes erected by a few lairds, was a product of the cattle trade with England. Tenants had been evicted to create big holding parks for beasts from both Ireland and Galloway. It did not affect the remote hill areas of the muirmen to the north and east. If anything, the shock made the landowning interest more circumspect in the way they pursued change in the following decades.[4] The upper Water of Ken and its tributaries was a land of small single-tenancy farms, although what would now appear to us as small would by the standards of the past have counted as substantial holdings. The reason for this pattern is beyond the scope of this study. But with its nearly 5 hectares (13 acres) of arable, nearly 1.6 hectares (4 acres) of enclosed meadow ground and at least 24 hectares (60 acres) of 'holme and meadow', not to mention a large and unquantified outrun and (perhaps) commonty, Auld Stronpatrick was one of them. There is no trace of joint-tenancy touns, but there is ample evidence of a numerous race of *cottars* or subtenants living on into the 1820s. This population included numerous *herds*, who would mutate from *cottars* to fee'd shepherds. Considering the pre-Improvement structure of single tenancy, and that many of these farms in this area have continued as working units into the present, this speaks of a remarkable continuity.

'**Copperbottom**'

Only at the end of the eighteenth century can we begin to unite the physical with the written record and get a rounded account. This starts with William Forbes.[5] His grandfather George Forbes

had set up as a coppersmith in Aberdeen in the late seventeenth century, and his father, also William, had continued the business, which was subsequently inherited by the younger William and his elder brother George in a loose partnership. The two brothers set up a branch in London in 1771 which was managed by William. Four years later the formal partnership ended, with George concentrating on the Baltic trade and William on the English side. William became a substantial supplier of copper to the Royal Navy, through which he accumulated a considerable fortune, earning himself the nickname 'Copperbottom'. William was evidently a man of energy, character and shrewd judgement, and who drove a hard bargain. In 1783 he set out on the road to property and gentility by converting a portion of his fortune into real estate with the purchase of Callendar House, then just outside Falkirk, and eventually 3,200 hectares (8,000 acres) of mostly unimproved West Lothian farmland. He set to enclosing, straightening the rigs and putting in drains. But he was far from finished. In 1786 he bought the lands of Earlstoun and Barskeoch and three other farms, paying a total of £27,617. This included all the ground that lay above Carsphairn on the Ken and Stroanfreggan waters. In present-day money that was a king's ransom, but for William Forbes it made sense. It was (as he stated) simply the annual rental multiplied by twenty, plus the value of the standing timber.[6] The canny Aberdonian 'Copperbottom' well understood that with but a little judicious management and careful investment the Lands of Earlstoun could be improved and would over the years yield substantially more. What he could not predict was that the French Revolution would shortly initiate years of seemingly endless war, and with that a handsome return to farmers and – when the *tacks* or leases fell for renewal – to the laird.

But it was not just a matter of crude financial calculation. William Forbes came about the place and took a personal and practical interest in it. And in the purchase, he had a further interest. 'My motive was a good settlement for James [a younger brother]. This came up to his best expectation.'[7]

For several years James would be parked at Earlstoun as

something between a factor and a viceroy. His salary would be £200 a year[8] – the same as the stipend of a reasonably provided-for minister, and almost four times the salary paid to Robert Burns as a respectable exciseman. Reading between the lines, James was an attractive and perhaps also a milder man, and with sufficient intelligence and character to advise his more imperious brother where his policies would be counterproductive. What was the point of turning out subtenants when they would as a matter of custom have made suitable arrangements with an incoming tenant? As the man on the ground, he was having to cope with blunt defiance: 'A widow and having no cow nor any other thing to disturb any, nobody will bid her go. Several think she should not be turned out.'[9] Not that James had 'gone native'. He would stand up for the virtues of tenants who made intelligent improvements against the grousing of the oldsters. 'I hear him spoken against in all places yet I think him a sensible man. I hear his methods ridiculed yet they appear to me to be proper.'[10] It was ever thus! Yet also people were not obdurately stupid: 'Rich and poor in this country [landward Galloway] now find more profit by having land understocked than overstocked.'[11]

Any high-handed revolutionary policy was also blunted by practical circumstance, in particular the *hefting* of sheep. Sheep develop an intimate relationship with the ground that they inhabit, certainly on the more Spartan reaches of the Scottish hills where they have to seek out their sustenance. Shift them about in a casual way, and they will not thrive. For that reason it is customary to maintain a core population of sheep that know their way around. A change of tenancy could cause a problem if there were also to be a clean sweep of the tenant's stock. Any transition had to be thought through, and certainly on the Earlstoun Estate, and probably in line with neighbouring usage, this put a brake on any casual change of tenancy. As John Craven, the overseer at Earlstoun, put it to William Forbes, the factor (and a kinsman of 'Copperbottom'), in 1824 over the difficulty of changing tenants at Lorg on the upper Ken, 'it would take 3 years before a new tenant could heft stock on these farms', while the neighbouring

Auchrae was ‘an easier farm to stock than the rest’ because it was mostly cattle with plenty of hay to winter them with.[12] The result was that, as the minister of Carsphairn observed in 1839, ‘The farmers have generally succeeded their fathers, and have been accustomed to follow the same mode of management. Their being continued in their farms by landlords […] is a proof that the latter [the landlords] could not be much benefited by any change in the mode of farming.’[13]

It is evident that old-style farming continued as the norm during the first William Forbes’s time. That meant a fairly intensively cultivated inner core of arable and an outrun or surrounding of permanent pasture. It was the only way to make sense of the wide variation of quality between the best and poorest land. (On hill farms that pattern has never totally ceased, in that now the cultivable land is used to produce hay, silage or turnips. The difference is that in the present day the cultivated crop is for the subsistence of animals rather than animals and people.)

The obvious and significant change that took place under William Forbes was the creeping amalgamation of smaller farms with bigger neighbours. After William’s death in 1815 the inevitable estate stocktaking included a comprehensive physical survey by James Anderson, an Edinburgh-based surveyor. On the east side of the upper Ken, Anderson noted several ruined farm steadings, including Altrye, Blackcraig, Polchaskie, Banbreck, Hamire and Little Auchrae.[14] This would be the eventual fate of Auld Stronpatrick in the mid-nineteenth century, absorbed into the ground of Auld Stroanfreggan, but bringing with it the ancient saint’s name, and also the wester side of the Cornharrow ground when it was added to the present Stronpatrick in the twentieth century.

The mainstay of the farming was blackface sheep, with some Galloway and ‘Highland’ cattle. A fundamental difference in the sheep regime between now and then is that the wool crop was valuable. To within living memory (just) the wool clip was deemed sufficient to pay the shepherd’s fee. That value has been destroyed by the now ubiquitous man-made fibres. Coupled with

that, there was a different taste in flesh, with mutton as popular as and cheaper than lamb. Sociologists with a knowledge of farming history might care to ponder how the pejorative expression of 'mutton dressed as lamb' came to have a female rather than male linkage, because in the past, a considerable source of mutton from the Scottish hills was from the large *wedder* flocks (a *wedder* being a *libbed* or castrated male sheep beyond second clipping). Also, if there was a source of 'lamb', it was mainly from the *dinmonts* (male sheep between first and second clipping, i.e. about one and a half years old; *gimmer* is the female counterpart). The *dinmonts* and *wedders* could be sold to be fattened on lower ground for the Edinburgh, Glasgow and Northern English markets. But wool was the main product, reflecting the more canny pre-Improvement preference for living off the by-products of the livestock rather than the more profligate practice of rearing them to kill and eat them.

In the seasonal round, tupping, lambing, clipping and smearing (dipping only came in in the late nineteenth century) were the major landmarks, but there were others no less time-consuming such as the winning of peats and muir hay or droving sheep to a market. Winter would demand endless vigilance and strenuous work, foddering the stock, getting it into the shelter of the *stells*, the dyke rings that still dot the hills, and that are sometimes still maintained. Sheep can sense a storm in the air when it is *dryin up for snaa*, but they are also easily driven before a blast and *cruiv't up agin a dyke* to perish. Much of a year's work can be lost in a few days. One may also read between the lines, and guess that for the tenants, the command to pay their rents at the Kings Arms tavern at Dumfries was more than a discharge of duty.[15] One assumes that, like Tam o' Shanter's mare, their *naigs* knew the 'lang Scots miles' home.[16] Symson's account of late seventeenth-century Galloway suggests that even then, when it came to enjoying a good day out, the godly walk and conversation of the Covenanting tradition did not inhibit folk when occasion offered. But the estate record is about the bigger economic framework of the *lands* and the *over-tenants*, and there are only hints of the

buzzing underlay of that at least two thirds of the population, the numerous *cottars* and *herds* and their families on which this life rested.

If William Forbes spent money, it appears to have been on dyking, and a little on liming of the in-by cultivable ground. The main effort was on erecting march dykes – for the first time. It was commonly the tenants who approached the laird to get this done, and usually this was agreed. A good march dyke, and for the first time a farmer did not have to constantly herd and gather his stock away from his neighbour's. He could get by with less labour, perhaps fewer *cottar fowk*. He could think more carefully about which tups ran with which *yowes* and the character of the progeny. We shall come to the march dyke betwixt Cornharrow and Auld Stronpatrick.

From the eighteenth century, dyking was evidently a good-going trade in Galloway. There were recognised dykers with their squads who would provide written quotations. There were obvious variables, the two main ones being the cost of labour and the supply of stone. In the 1780s it was a seller's market for labour, and it would be even more so during the long French wars. As James described it to his brother William in July 1788, 'you cannot in a populous country like Stirlingshire have any idea of the thinness of this country. Nobody is to be got to do anything but with the greatest difficulty especially in the summer season when the people keep themselves up for piecework.'[17] The piecework would include working for a dyker.

There was a dyking season encompassing the longer days of spring and summer, a clear-cut rigmarole of contractual definitions, conditions, standard variations, and of course expectations. A fairly standard march dyke in upland Galloway in the 1780s was 'six quarters of an ell [1.4 metres] high. Two and thirty inches [81 centimetres] at the grass with two inches [5 centimetres] of a scarcement on each side. Three quarters double and three quarters single,' and fourteen inches' [35 centimetres'] breadth at the bandstone.[18] Depending on the variables, from this period into the 1830s this could cost between 6 and 8 shillings a rood ('rood'

being synonymous with *fall*, which in the Galloway context was defined in 1830 as 19 feet (5.8 metres)).[19] The drop in the cost of dyking in the 1830s may have been a function of the improvement in transport, allowing the sourcing of quarry stone. Earlier, 'digging the stones' was obviously a major element in the process, and a spell of dry weather was an opportunity to quarry stones from out of the burns.[20] Observation suggests that the stones would come not just from the stream bed but from the exposed sides, where they could be levered from the natural strata still relatively un-rounded by the action of the water and thus easier to work with. Other variables were horses and timber for building sleds to shift the stones, and also timber to build a shed for the squad to sleep in. (The late Ian Fleming told me of speaking to Ettrick dykers who would sleep out on the hill in the open. This would refer to the early twentieth century.)

Despite some bad seasons and on occasion even near famine, the period of the French Revolutionary and then Napoleonic wars was one of good income for tenant farmers. If their dwellings and steadings were in want of repair, the estate would offset the cost of repairs in the annual rental, or, one suspects, leave the tenants to shift for themselves. This would be consistent with the fact that much of the building was still home-made, and the general expectation may have been that it would continue to be so. For instance, in the 1820s – a decade after the cease of the French hostilities – where buildings were thatched, the upkeep of the roof was considered the responsibility of the tenant, not the estate.[21] At the same time, if a building were re-roofed in slate, that would be an estate matter. But therein also lay a catch, because a wall of clay mortar was not usually deemed stout enough to carry the weight of slate, so that seems to have initiated a rolling 'modernisation' or rebuilding of dwelling houses and steadings.

The post-war years

When William 'Copperbottom' Forbes of Callendar died in 1815 at the then old age of seventy-two, he had possessed the lands of Earlstoun for twenty-nine years. 1815 marked the onset of a rough

time for farming. William's brother James had long since moved on, and William's loyal overseer Samuel Clark was also getting on, as his reports and handwriting indicate, and he faded first into a retirement tenancy, then obscurity. As William's son William was still a nine-year-old minor (the product of a second and late marriage), the estate was administered by trustees. The administrator who emerged as factor was William Forbes, an Edinburgh writer or lawyer based in Castle Street and then Drummond Square, and one might guess that he was a kinsman. Not much of his voluminous correspondence is extant, but the tone is reflected in the regular exchanges with John Craven, who became the overseer of the Galloway estate based at Earlstoun. On both sides there appears to have been a humane competence in keeping matters in order but tempered with vigilance against any abuse of liberty, decent by the standards of the time and an extraordinary contrast to what was then taking place in the Highlands and Islands.

The immediate post-war years were a *via dolorosa* of pleas for abatement of rent, reflecting the hard times. The abatements were often but not always granted.[22] But then, as things began to pick up in the mid-1820s, came the day-to-day problems, the main ones being the state of the dwellings and steadings, and the continuing call to build dykes. In 1826 John Craven described the houses at Blackmark (opposite Auld Stronpatrick) as being 'in a very frail state, the walls are split in a great many places & does not appear that they will stand any length of time the wood is all birch, the side lintels are all birch in place of stone they were built 17 years ago & I am informed cost £100 now they are not worth five'.[23] Other similar descriptions crop up, although it would be rash to assume all the old buildings were so ramshackle. Many would have been kept up in the traditional home-made fashion. As we shall see, that was probably the case at Auld Stronpatrick.

If many of the buildings appear to have been on the antiquated side, that may also have been the perception of changing fashion. When a farm came up for a renewal of the tack, or the current tenant raised the matter of renovation, there were evidently new

expectations. In 1824 Mr Kennedy at Lorg, a remote place in 'a very high and stormy country' at the head of the Ken, wanted a new house, byre and smearing shed.[24] He also wanted a comfortable parlour in which he could entertain sheep and wool dealers, or was it the *guidwife* who fancied a nice modern and respectable space beyond the functional racket of the kitchen? Indeed, she got it, and the specification defines a modest but essentially modern dwelling with two rooms for the ground floor – a kitchen and the prized parlour with closet squeezed in between – and two bedrooms above reached by a wooden stair, presumably arching over the closet. And the *guidman* got his new byre (with small milkhouse?) and smearing shed, complete with floored loft in which to store wool when foul weather and swollen waters would not permit its export over twelve fords to the public road 11 kilometres (7 miles) away.[25] And Kennedy also got a new *sheep fold*, that is a sheep handling facility where the clipping and other jobs could take place in a more organised way, as opposed to a *sheep ree*, a simple dyked ring enclosure. The standard procedure was for the estate to put up the money and the tenant to pay the interest; or, if the place was being let anew, the expenditure (and increased value) would be reflected in a higher rent. Yet what had sunk beyond what was by then acceptable dwelling for a tenant farmer might be deemed – just – passable for a *herd*.[26]

From the mid-1820s the estate embarked on a slow process of serial renewal not just of the buildings, but also of the land. Even before tile drainage was available, there was in the southern hill farms in the 1820s a new fashion for putting in field drains, and in 1824 this and also house extension and improvement was suggested by the tenant at Cornharrow, a close neighbour of Auld Stronpatrick. John Craven the overseer was sympathetic: 'Drains are the only improvement that can be made on high wet farms.'[27] But they had to be kept clean, a condition to be written into the lease. Of the requested building improvements which included a timber floor in the kitchen, presumably clay until now, and flags in the lobby, and proposed extension and milk house, Craven commented wryly that 'very few tenants are up to what they want

til they see the house built […] Muir farmers keeps so much […] lumber that they require a great house room.'[28] It is worth noting that in the Scots tongue, *hous* is not necessarily a dwelling house, but can be a compartment of a building. William Ramsay got 5,000 rood (29 kilometres (18 miles)) of drains, priced at six shillings and thruppence per 100 rood (580 metres (630 yards)).[29] It was a fashion being taken up on a large scale by the Duke of Queensberry on the not far distant Drumlanrig lands on the upper Nith. One might guess that they were put down in the *bauks* between the *rigs* or cultivation ridges. They were lined in this instance with Parton (in Dumfriesshire) slate, a variation on the stone box drain, and if successful, they caused 'a kind of rushes called sprat [literally "spear"] and white fog [moss]' to die back.[30] An interesting point is that the discernible remains of rigs on former Cornharrow ground still show the old curved and 'unimproved' plan of those worked by the old Scots plough. Nevertheless, Craven reckoned that once the drains had defeated the *rashes* and the *fog* in a few years, it would add £10 to the rent. The rushes are still struggling to reconquer the long-neglected Cornharrow *rigs* today.

By the 1840s sheep drains would also appear. These were simple and widely spaced open drains on the rough grazing, still a common expedient, and still a hazard for feeble lambs. The *New Statistical Account* for the upland parishes of Galloway, compiled for the most part over the 1830s, suggests a step change from an old pre-Improvement world. As an old-style farm with a core of permanent arable, perched at the upper limit of cultivation, Auld Stronpatrick was fading into history.

The remains

The ruins of the dwelling house and steadings are in such a tumbledown state that it is often difficult to be certain of where their entrances were, and windows are impossible to account for. However, there are two touching signs of ancient habitation: the now split and ancient rowan tree, once a common flag of blessing on a household, and a handsome *braird* of fresh-shooting nettles,

a sign of ground enriched over the years by household debris or animal *muck* or droppings.

The remains of the dwelling house and byre sport a considerable grassy cladding. One might guess that this is a sign that the walls were once a combination of *fail* or turf and stone. An estate plan from 1815 (fig.2) shows a parallel set of three buildings, while the First Edition Ordnance Survey (OS) map prepared in 1850 (fig.3) indicates a set of only two and a half. The middle of the three buildings is now gone; a barely discernible mounding in the ground may account for part of it. It would have

Figure 2. Detail from James Alexander's plan 'Stronpatrick, Stronfreggan and Little Auchrae', 1815. It shows greater detail of the burns and natural drainage than the later Ordnance Survey six-inch map (fig.3; surveyed 1850), reflecting how important that was. At this stage 'Stronfreggan' may have contained subtenants. The houses shown here are probably the 'ruin' marked on the 1850 OS map. (Falkirk Archives A.932.096)

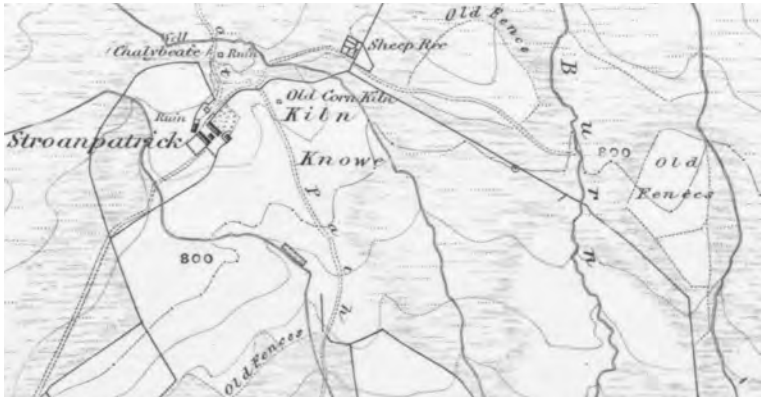


Figure 3. Extract from the Ordnance Survey, six-inch to the mile / 1:10,560 (not reproduced to scale), First Edition map (Kirkcudbrightshire, Sheet VI, surveyed 1850, published 1853). Here the road (cart-track) runs to the south side of the steadings. Besides the two nearby ruins, old fences and old corn kiln, the just-built 1842 sheep fank is also shown. The fank is in the angle formed by the new march dyke of 1810. Most of this splendid structure is still standing. (Reproduced by permission of the National Library of Scotland)

left but a narrow alley between that and the dwelling house, which is probably why by 1850 that part in front of the dwelling house had been removed. There is the possibility that the dwelling house and byre entries then faced outwards, but that would be contrary to convention. It may be that in 1815 these three parallel buildings were spaced further apart and that two of the three or even all of them were cast down and rebuilt in the years after 1815 when Auld Stronpatrick's arable ground was still being worked. Unlike the 'modern' lime-mortar and slated houses, the old-style home-made buildings were more like stone and *fail* tents, thrown up in but a week or two.

The barn and *cornyaird* or stackyard behind are an arresting sign of Auld Stronpatrick as a place with a core production of grain. The extant stack-founds are about 2.4 metres (8 feet) in diameter. Separated from the main complex for good reason – because of the risk of fire – is the old corn-kill, now marked on the modern OS map as Kiln Knowe, the sole official representation of Auld Stronpatrick. There are a small range of

housses to the north, and two curious hollows into the natural banking that might have served as a place for middens.

Two 'ruins' are marked on the 1850 OS map near the standing buildings, but there is no obvious trace left.

There is a spectacular rake of seven enclosed broad lazy-beds, still extant, backing onto the easter side of the dwelling house and byre. At 2 metres (6 feet 6 inches) from crown to crown, they seem almost outsized for potatoes which was by then a common field crop. Flax, hemp or kail are possible alternatives, but for want of more evidence it is impossible to say.

Physical traces of the former Auld Stronpatrick rigs are hard to discern on the ground today. The most evident are on the wester side of the burn to the west of the buildings. More marked are the roundels and swards of good grass that still mark the once cultivated fields, and *hain't* or protected meadow.

Among the most intriguing elements of the 1850 OS map are the references to 'old fences'. There is a crooked trace that once marked the foot of fields between Auld Stronpatrick and Auld Stroanfreggan. The rest are now quite hard to find, but the traces are the remains of *fail* dykes, that is a mixture of *fail* and field-stone. The extant network of dykes is one pattern added to or laid over another and, beyond the tale of Auld Stronpatrick, is outwith the scope of this account.

The 1850 OS map marks an 'old' *sheep ree* about 400 metres (a quarter of a mile) to the north of the steadings. None of the original remains, only a nearby short length of dyke that was once a crude refuge from the blast, superseded by the nearby square of spruce plantation, a simple but effective fashion of the first half of the twentieth century. There is a small scatter of the remnants of *buchts* (small stone-and-*fail* shelters), some of which within living memory were used to house *yowes* and their lambs in time of need.

There is a range of features that were new in the last days of Auld Stronpatrick, or postdate it. The most striking is the 1842 *sheep fold* – in common Scots parlance the *fank*, or in Stronfreggan speak, the *dipper* – built just before the 1850 survey. A plan held

Figure 4. Auld Stronpatrick looking south-east. Left to right: dwelling house and byre, close, barn, stackyard. In the middle distance the ground of Cornharrow, Carroch and Blackmark.

in the Falkirk Archives specifies the details and is interesting in affording a measure of how such structures weather and subside over the years.[31] The present structure is recognisably the original, with the *dipper* added on the outside later. The oldest parts of the original walls stand to just over 1.53 metres (5 feet), which, allowing for almost one and a half centuries of subsidence, accounts for the specified 1.68 metres (5 feet 6 inches). A telltale sign of settlement is the distinct concavity that develops on the face of the lower double part of the wall. There are still traces in the 'shearing fold' of the specified lime render on the wall face. In all, considering the battering that a *fank* will take with a crush of sheep rattling round inside, it has stood the test of time remarkably well. This *fank* is a significant watershed between the Auld Stronpatrick and the new.

Putting together a story

To piece together the history of Auld Stronpatrick, we also have to chart what was happening in the neighbouring Cornharrow and Auld Stroanfreggan.

In 1793 Samuel Rowan was granted the tack of Stronpatrick for '19 years & tenant's life' at a rental of £118 10s 6d.[32] This tack appears to be unique in the lands of Earlstoun. The rest were either for a maximum fifteen or nineteen years, besides the various smaller *cottars* etc. that elsewhere were still evident in the 1820s with either simple and informal notes of tenancy or no written agreement. The reason for Samuel Rowan's unusual position is so far unknown. Nor is it clear whether the 'Stronpatrick, Stronfreggan and Little Auchrae' as in the 1815 plan represent a single tenancy. 'Little Auchrae' to the north over towards the Water of Ken is now 'in ruins', and 'Stronfreggan' is surrounded by just over 1.2 hectares (3 acres) of arable. It may be that 'Little Auchrae' has become an outrun of rough grazing and 'Stronfreggan' survives as a subtenancy, the resident *cottar* or even *cottars* obliged to provide labour to Samuel Rowan, for the plan shows two distinct buildings at 'Stronfreggan'.[33] Conversely, there is no indication at this stage of a separate tenancy at Auld Stronfreggan.

In 1810 came the matter of a march dyke betwixt Auld Stronpatrick and Cornharrow to the east. On 11 June Samuel Rowan and William Ramsay (Cornharrow) wrote a joint letter to the laird William Forbes, stating that they had agreed that a march dyke would be of great benefit to both farms. They wanted the go-ahead for the estate to accept an offer to build it for five shillings and sixpence per rood, which was a good price.[34] However, on 28 June 1810, William Ramsay wrote a second and personal letter to the laird, concerned that Samuel Rowan had written another supposedly 'joint' letter, but 'in his name in a different strain'.[35] He was obviously bothered that his neighbour was trying to get the path of the dyke to take in more ground than he was entitled to. It was an important matter, because some of the then best Cornharrow ground marched with that of Auld Stronpatrick. In the event the dyke was built, showing on the estate plan of 1815,[36] and Samuel Rowan payed his contribution of £3 12s to the interest on the capital.[37] We will never know whether indeed Samuel was a rascal or William Ramsay just paranoid. Meanwhile in 1813 William Ramsay had also got march dykes built between

Cornharrow and Craigleiran and Carroch. Subsequently he and his succeeding son James would persuade the estate to spend money on drains, renovations, new buildings and a new road.

By way of contrast, there is no record of anything being spent on Auld Stronpatrick. The last we hear of Samuel Rowan is on 14 November 1824, when the factor noted that he and various others were due to remit their rents.[38] So Samuel Rowan was still there after thirty-six years, and perhaps continued for long enough, indeed getting the best out of his bargain of a lifetime's tenancy. But in contrast to his neighbour, the lack of expenditure suggests that he guddled along with old-style buildings of his own devising and perhaps old-fashioned ways of doing. To continue as a farm with a then conventional arable component would have required investment that by then the estate would have regarded as a waste of money. The tracks to the place required either fording the considerable Stroanfreggan Burn or toiling up a hill and over wet ground. To upgrade them into roads would have been possible, but a considerable expense that would not have provided any return. In social terms, one wonders if that high remote place with its old-fashioned regime was one of the last places to maintain *cottars* or subtenants, and where the Galloway Gaelic was last spoken.

By 1841 Samuel Rowan was gone, for who appears in the census (Dalry Parish) but John Ramsay, forty-five years old and an agricultural labourer, with Marion Ramsay, eighty-five years old, either his mother or an aunt, together with a labourer and two female servants, and a horse dealer. One presumes he was one of the Cornharrow Ramsays, now in Auld Stronpatrick. In neighbouring Auld Stroanfreggan is William McKill, described as a farmer, implying that he is a tenant, with his wife and young family of five and two female servants. Is this the point where the situation was being reversed, and Auld Stronpatrick was becoming a subordinate part of Auld Stroanfreggan?

Then in the following year, 1842, comes the building of the new *sheep fold* at Auld Stronpatrick. In the subsequent census of 1851 all is changed. The Ramsays have vanished. James Robertson

(forty) is there as an agricultural labourer with Isabella his wife and seven children, the youngest two of which were born in Balmaclellan, so they had only moved back to the neighbourhood about 1845. This was the last family to occupy Auld Stronpatrick.

Meanwhile, down the hill at Auld Stroanfreggan there is a shepherd, an employee of the estate. Auld Stroanfreggan had also reached the end of the road as a tenanted farm.

The fading of Auld Stronpatrick

As we have surmised, there were signs that by the 1840s Auld Stronpatrick was a remote and old-fashioned place. The dykes round the cultivated parts were falling into disrepair. Despite the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, the price of grain would remain much the same into the late 1860s; this was the product of the 'high farming' of the Lowlands, where a relentless improvement in productivity reduced costs, but in remote and landward parts, corn production would continue for its subsistence value only. In terms of inputs, it would be increasingly expensive to produce to a point where it did not repay the effort. But sheep farming did pay. From the 1850s the development of wool production in Australia and New Zealand (often fuelled by the expertise of emigrant Scots) would begin to erode the profitability of the great Highland sheep runs built on the ruins of the cleared farms, but the long-established skills and continued evolution of Galloway and Borders sheep husbandry would prove to be more resilient.

William Dickson, the new shepherd in what was still known as Stroanfreggan, was a man of thirty-four from Penpont, there with his wife Wilhelmina and two sons. Three generations of the Dickson family would work there as shepherds. In the 1881 census it would be described as 'a farm of 1,300 acres [530 hectares]'. Older buildings would be cleared away, the present dwelling house and steadings would be built, added to and 'modernised', and finally Auld Stronfreggan would take the name of the old farm up the hill and become the present Stronpatrick. But that is another story.

Acknowledgement

I am grateful to the staff of the Falkirk Council Archives at Callendar House, Falkirk, for all their kind assistance. The documents consulted here were given by the Forbes of Callendar family, and include the extant material for the Lands of Earlstoun relevant to the period dealt with, such as estate plans, correspondence, cash and rent books and tradesmen's estimates. Despite there being some chunks missing, they contain enough vital material to construct a narrative.

Notes

1 I am indebted to Professor Hugh Cheape for guidance on this matter.

2 John M Corrie, 'Notice of two Early Christian monuments from the parish of Dalry, Kirkcudbrightshire', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, vol.46 (1911–12), pp 258–63.

3 A Symson, *A Large Description of Galloway* (1684), printed Edinburgh, 1823, pp 97–8.

4 For an interesting account, see: A Livingston, *The Galloway Levellers – A Study of the Origins, Events and Consequences of their Actions*, unpublished MPhil dissertation, University of Glasgow, 2009.

5 For a detailed account of this first William Forbes, see E Reid, 'William Forbes of Callendar: businessman and landowner', *Scottish Industrial History*, vol.19 (1999), pp 50–62.

6 Falkirk Archives A.727.231.3, A.727.231.5.

7 Falkirk Archives A.727.231.3.

8 Falkirk Archives A.727.309.32.

9 Falkirk Archives A.727.309.12.

10 Falkirk Archives A.727.309.24.

11 Ibid.

12 Falkirk Archives A.727.1133.3.

13 Revd David Welsh, 'Carsphairn', *The New Statistical Account of Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1843–5, Vol.IV, p.278.

14 Falkirk Archives A.932.141.

[15] Falkirk Archives A.727.956.27.
[16] A reference to Robert Burns's 1790 poem 'Tam O'Shanter'.
[17] Falkirk Archives A.727.309.19.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Falkirk Archives A.727.3528.
[20] Falkirk Archives A.727.309.19.
[21] Falkirk Archives A.727.1150.11.
[22] Falkirk Archives A.727.1120.
[23] Falkirk Archives A.727.1167.5.
[24] Falkirk Archives A.727.1133.7.
[25] Falkirk Archives A.727.1133.9.
[26] Falkirk Archives A.727.1133.19.
[27] Falkirk Archives A.727.1133.4.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Falkirk Archives A.727.1133.6.
[30] Falkirk Archives A.727.1133.16.
[31] Falkirk Archives A.727.3168.30.
[32] Noted in 1815, Falkirk Archives A.727.3514.
[33] Falkirk Archives A.932.096.
[34] Falkirk Archives A.727.956.8.
[35] Falkirk Archives A.727.956.12.
[36] Falkirk Archives A.932.096.
[37] Falkirk Archives A.727.3514.
[38] Falkirk Archives A.727.3535.

CLAY AND THE BUILDINGS OF THE BANNOCKBURN ESTATE IN 1716

John G Harrison

The basis of modern understanding of clay-wall building and clay thatch in Scotland was laid in a paper by Sandy Fenton.[1] That paper, published in 1970, a characteristically wide-ranging piece, drew attention to analogous traditions in England and Ireland and described the methods used including the regional variations within Scotland. For some areas of Scotland, Fenton had extensive detail including descriptions and surveys of surviving buildings. He identified Stirlingshire as an area with a significant tradition from comments by R Belsches of Greenyards who, in 1796, noted that the old houses in the Stirling area were:

> in general formed of clay tempered with chopped straw. They were built upon a foundation of rough stones, and the timbers which supported the roof were carried down to the bottom of the clay wall.[2]

They were, Belsches thought, best put onto the compost dunghill. Also in the 1790s the minister of Gargunnock had noted how much better the newer, stone farm houses were than 'those thatched cottages of half stone and half clay, which begin to decay almost as soon as they are reared'.[3] In 1812 it was noted that local farmhouses were:

> wretched huts, thatched with fern or straw, having two apartments only, the one a kitchen … the other a sort of room denominated a spence, and this only in the better sort of houses, where strangers were occasionally received and where the heads of the family generally slept. The byre and stable were generally under the same roof; and separated from the kitchen by a partition of osiers wrought upon slender wooden posts and plastered with clay.[4]

A newly located manuscript source provides more detail for the Bannockburn estate in 1716 and suggests that clay was even more important in the Stirling area than implied by the examples above. This paper[5] will examine the new source. Like so many other publications on a wide range of Scots material culture this is really a supplement to Sandy Fenton's work.[6] The source is not very detailed but it covers a large number of buildings, many built of 'mud and stone'.[7] It was compiled following the forfeiture of the estate of Sir Hugh Paterson of Bannockburn consequent on the Jacobite Rising of 1715, a bureaucratic process which generated records of many aspects of the estate including lists of the householders, rentals and legal documents.[8]

The barony of Bannockburn was bounded by the baronies of Plean, Skeoch (including Greenyards), Touchadam, Sauchie and Auchenbowie and, at its northernmost point, was contiguous with the village of St Ninians. The land of this area is undulating, falling from around 90 metres (300 feet) in the south to around 40 metres (130 feet) in the gorge of the Bannock above the village of Bannockburn.[9] During the seventeenth century, proprietors of Bannockburn had acquired parts of Skeoch, including the mill of Skeoch and adjacent areas, later assimilated into the village of Bannockburn; these areas were also forfeited, though not legally part of the barony of Bannockburn.

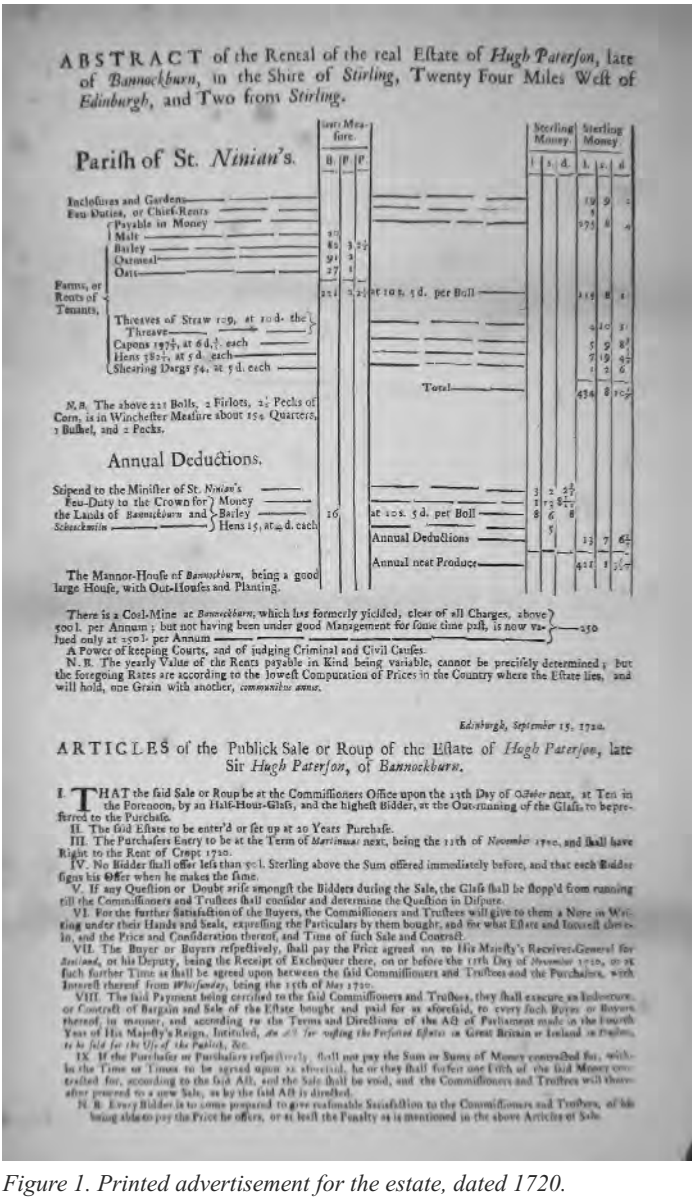
The mineral resources of the estate clearly had the potential to influence buildings. A stone quarry at Catcraig existed from at least the 1570s. Coal was being worked in the fifteenth century, probably earlier. Limestone (geologically associated with the coal) was worked at least intermittently, though the major local lime source was further up the Bannock Burn, on the estates of Touchadam and Sauchie.[10] Some parts of Skeoch were on the carse clay at or below 15 metres (50 feet) but the soils of Bannockburn itself were mainly tills interspersed with fluvio-glacial sands and gravels.[11] No clay pit has been identified.

The Hearth Tax return of the early 1690s names around sixty-five heads of household in the barony of Bannockburn.[12] The 'place' of Bannockburn (the house of Sir Hugh Paterson, the laird)

had eighteen hearths, probably including some non-domestic hearths and others used by senior servants. Thirty-two households in the barony had just one hearth. Other entries, however, combine tenants and subtenants into a single entry. So, William Marshall was liable for eight hearths in John Robin's land but, in 1716, whilst John Robin certainly owned one of the most substantial houses in the barony, he also owned nine 'little cott houses', presumably occupied by cottars or subtenants. Nor can Alexander Hales have occupied all the ten hearths assigned to him, nor James Rollo all of his six. The poor were not liable and were often omitted altogether from the lists. The 131 assessed hearths in the barony must relate to around 100 households and must include some hearths such as kilns. The Valuation Roll for the parish of 1691 assessed Bannockburn at £1,433 Scots out of £20,861 for the extensive parish.[13]

The printed advertisement prepared for the sale of the estate in 1720 (fig.1) describes 'The Mannor-house of Bannockburn' as 'a good large house, with Outhouses and Planting' and assessed house and garden as worth £19 9s 2d sterling per annum. Feu duties (the small annual payments due for heritable leases) brought in £5 sterling per year. Agricultural rents, in cash and grains with assorted services by the tenants, such as a duty to help with cutting the laird's crops, were worth £434 8s 10d, though that really depended on the price of grain from year to year and, it was noted, this was a low estimate. The coal mine, which had once yielded £500 per year, now yielded only £250 on account of 'being under bad management'.

In 1696 Sir Hugh Paterson had obtained an Act of the Scots Parliament, licensing two annual fairs and a weekly market 'between Skeochmuir and the Town of Nether Bannockburn'.[14] Feus were being sold in the 'new village' of Newmarket at least by 1703, the first recorded feuar encouraged to trade as a merchant, wine dealer and spirit seller.[15] The development was symptomatic of the growing commercialism of local estates at this period. The laird of Polmaise and Touchadam had established a new fair at Brocksbrae (near the Borestone and so very close to



ABSTRACT of the Rental of the real Eſtate of *Hugh Paterſon*, late of *Bannockburn*, in the Shire of *Stirling*, Twenty Four Miles Weſt of *Edinburgh*, and Two from *Stirling*.

Parish of St. *Ninian's*.

	Scots Measure. B.	P.	P.	Sterling Money. l.	s.	d.	Sterling Money. l.	s.	d.
Incloſures and Gardens							19	9	2
Feu-Duties, or Chief-Rents							1		
Payable in Money: Malt	20						975	8	4
Barley	80	3	2½						
Oatmeal	91	3							
Oats	27	1							
Farms, or Rents of Tenants	221	1	2½	at 10 s. 5 d. per Boll			115	8	1
Threaves of Straw 129, at 10 d. the Threave							4	10	1
Capons 197½, at 6 d. each							5	9	8½
Hens 382½, at 5 d. each							7	19	4½
Shearing Dargs 54, at 5 d. each							1	2	6
				Total			434	8	10½

N. B. The above 221 Bolls, 1 Firlots, 2½ Pecks of Corn, is in Winchester Meaſure about 154 Quarters, 1 Buſhel, and 2 Pecks.

Annual Deductions.

Stipend to the Miniſter of St. *Ninian's*					3	2	2⅔	
Feu-Duty to the Crown for the Lands of *Bannockburn* and *Schaickmilin*	Money				1	13	6⅔	
	Barley	16	at 10 s. 5 d. per Boll		8	6	8	
	Hens 15, at 5 d. each					5		
			Annual Deductions				13	7	6⅔
			Annual neat Produce				421	1	3⅓

The Manor-House of *Bannockburn*, being a good large House, with Out-Houſes and Planting.

There is a Coal-Mine at *Bannockburn*, which has formerly yielded, clear of all Charges, above 500 l. per Annum; but not having been under good Management for ſome time paſt, is now valued only at 250 l. per Annum — 250

A Power of keeping Courts, and of judging Criminal and Civil Cauſes.

N. B. The yearly Value of the Rents payable in Kind being variable, cannot be preciſely determined; but the foregoing Rates are according to the loweſt Computation of Prices in the Country where the Eſtate lies, and will hold, one Grain with another, *communibus annis*.

Edinburgh, September 15. 1720.

ARTICLES of the Publick Sale or Roup of the Eſtate of *Hugh Paterſon*, late Sir *Hugh Paterſon*, of *Bannockburn*.

I. THAT the ſaid Sale or Roup be at the Commiſſioners Office upon the 13th Day of *October* next, at Ten in the Forenoon, by an Half-Hour-Glaſs, and the higheſt Bidder, at the Out-running of the Glaſs, to be preferred to the Purchaſe.

II. The ſaid Eſtate to be enter'd or ſet up at 20 Years Purchaſe.

III. The Purchaſers Entry to be at the Term of *Martinmas* next, being the 11th of *November* 1720, and ſhall have Right to the Rent of Crops 1720.

IV. No Bidder ſhall offer leſs than 50 l. Sterling above the Sum offered immediately before, and that each Bidder ſigns his Offer when he makes the ſame.

V. If any Queſtion or Doubt ariſe amongſt the Bidders during the Sale, the Glaſs ſhall be ſtopp'd from running till the Commiſſioners and Truſtees ſhall conſider and determine the Queſtion in Diſpute.

VI. For the further Satisfaction of the Buyers, the Commiſſioners and Truſtees will give to them a Note in Writing under their Hands and Seals, expreſſing the Particulars by them bought, and for what Eſtate and Intereſt clear'd, and the Price and Conſideration thereof, and Time of ſuch Sale and Contract.

VII. The Buyer or Buyers reſpectively, ſhall pay the Price agreed on to His Majeſty's Receiver-General for *Scotland*, or his Deputy, being the Receipt of Exchequer there, on or before the 11th Day of *November* 1720, or ſix ſuch further Time as ſhall be agreed upon between the ſaid Commiſſioners and Truſtees and the Purchaſers, with Intereſt thereof from *Whitſunday*, being the 15th of *May* 1720.

VIII. The ſaid Payment being certified to the ſaid Commiſſioners and Truſtees, they ſhall execute an Indenture, or Contract of Bargain and Sale of the Eſtate bought and paid for as aforeſaid, to every ſuch Buyer or Buyers thereof, in manner, and according to the Terms and Directions of the Act of Parliament made in the Fourth Year of His Majeſty's Reign, Intituled, *An Act for veſting the Forfeited Eſtates in Great Britain or Ireland in Truſtees, to be ſold for the Uſe of the Publick, &c.*

IX. If the Purchaſer or Purchaſers reſpectively, ſhall not pay the Sum or Sums of Money contracted for, within the Time or Times to be agreed upon as aforeſaid, he or they ſhall forfeit one Fifth of the ſaid Money contracted for, according to the ſaid Act, and the Sale ſhall be void, and the Commiſſioners and Truſtees will thereafter proceed to a new Sale, as by the ſaid Act is directed.

N. B. Every Bidder is to come prepared to give reaſonable Satisfaction to the Commiſſioners and Truſtees, of his being able to pay the Price he offers, or at leaſt the Penalty as is mentioned in the above Articles of Sale.

Figure 1. Printed advertisement for the estate, dated 1720. (NRS E607/3, courtesy of National Records of Scotland)

the southern boundaries of Bannockburn) about 1681.[16] The village of St Ninians was also growing and increasingly prosperous.[17] There were several carriers and carters operating in the late seventeenth century. One of the driving forces of this economic development was a significant local programme to improve road surfaces and bridges conducted in the 1670s and 1680s.[18] Smithing (including nail-making), weaving and tobacco-pipe making were amongst the artisanal trades recorded in Bannockburn around this period, though most artisans also had agricultural interests.[19]

The Report of 1716

Such, then, was the Bannockburn estate in 1716, modest in scale, predominantly agricultural but with significant mineral extraction and manufacturing industry and a modest but developing commercial sector. It was a community of a few hundred people situated about three kilometres (two miles) from Stirling. The new documentation includes several lists, each made for a different purpose. There are some seventy-five houses or householders in the list scattered across twenty-two different locations. Twelve of these are in 'Bannockburn', seven in Milton (of Bannockburn), six in Nether Bannockburn, eight in Newmarket, three in Overtown of Bannockburn and four in Skeoch or Skeoch Mill; the rest are scattered in ones, twos and threes across the estate. The great majority of those giving statements were tenants; some mention their subtenants, who were not called to give evidence and are not named. Many statements just mention cott houses without structural details. John Wright said he had 'six or seven bey of houses including barn and byre', using 'house' to refer to almost any built structure (fig.2); a few refer more explicitly to a 'sitt house' or 'dwelling house', distinguishing the home from the farm buildings.

John Robin owned a feu (fig.3). His house was two storeys high and about 40 feet [12 metres] long, on an acre [0.4 hectare] of ground enclosed in 'yards' (gardens). But, evidently within that area, were also nine little cott houses occupied by his tenants. All the houses were thatched with straw. The structural materials are

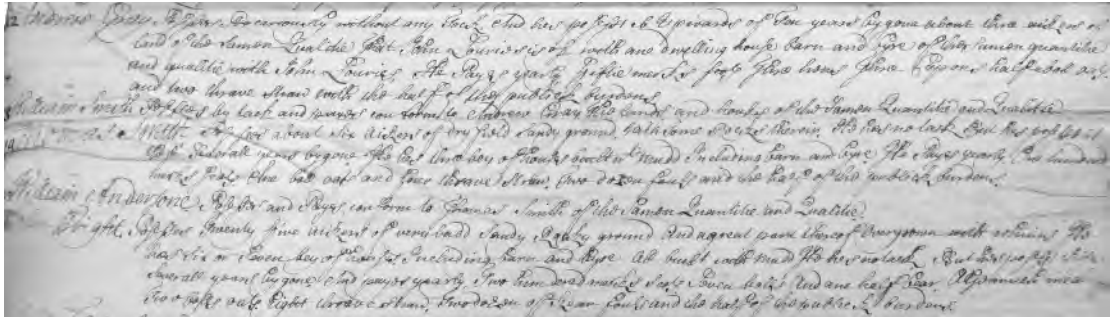


Figure 2. John Wright (bottom) had 'six or seven bey of houses including barn and byre, all built with mudd'. (NRS E616/1, courtesy of National Records of Scotland)

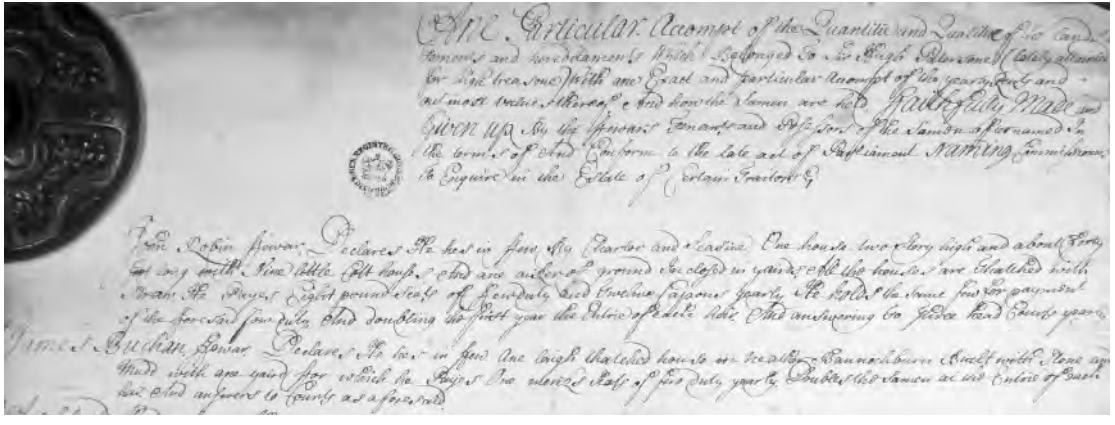


Figure 3. John Robin (under superscript) had 'one house two story high and about forty foot long with nine little cott houses'. (NRS E616/1, courtesy of National Records of Scotland)

not given in this case but it should not be assumed that the two-storey house was stone and lime.

William Dollar and his wife had the lease of Skeoch Mill for nineteen years from 1700. The mill was two storeys high, about 40 feet [12 metres] long, built of stone and lime and was slated; there were two associated corn kilns and a ruinous malt barn which lacked even a roof. All were built of stone and mud and thatched with straw. There were a barn, byre and stable and 'several' cott houses, altogether about twelve bays long according to Dollar's evidence, and all built of stone and mud and thatched. However, Dollar and his wife also had a feu of two or three acres [around 0.8 to 1.2 hectares] of land on which were two more substantial houses of two storeys, both about 60 feet [18 metres] long, built of stone and lime and thatched with heather or straw.

James Walker was the tenant and miller at Milton of Bannockburn with a lease of nineteen years from 1700. The two mills at Milton both had lofts and were built of stone and lime. They were about 70 feet [21 metres] long and thatched with straw or bent (course grass). There were a malt barn and kiln (with a little loft) and a barn, byre, stable and several cott houses about 50 bays long, all built of stone and mud and thatched with straw. The dwelling house for the miller, one of the largest dwellings described, was also stone and mud, about seven bays long and thatched with straw or bent.

Archibald Wordie was another feuar, owning as many as nine little houses, all thatched with straw and all built of stone and mud though one of them was two storeys high; not all these were necessarily dwelling houses. James Buchan was more typical of the rest of the feuars: his 'laigh' (low, single-storey) thatched house in Bannockburn was of stone and mud and was in a yard, seemingly with no ancillary buildings or cott houses. David Brown had a feu of a yard and two or three acres [around 0.8 to 1.2 hectares] of land with a house of two-couple length, built of stone and mud and thatched with straw; he also rented a further three acres [1.2 hectares]. Five further feuars had a total of seven 'houses' or parts of houses, all built of stone and mud, most with

yards or small areas of potential arable. But John Steil's was only 'one room' of a house, and John Lockhart, Henry Hill and William Gillespie stressed that theirs were 'little' houses though without specifying how many bays or couples.

So, even the houses of these small property owners were mainly small, single storey and built of stone and clay. That was universally the case for the houses and farm buildings of the tenants which were all thatched with straw. James Burden had a substantial 15 acres (6 hectares) of rented land at Sinks, his 'little' dwelling house, barn and byre of mud of only 'about four bays' and John Laurie, Andrew Gray and William Smith in Over Bannockburn had houses, barns and byres 'of the like quality' with Burden. John Wright, who farmed 25 acres (10 hectares) of 'very bad' rocky ground, had a house, barn and byre all of mud but extending to six or seven bays. One of the largest farms was Foot of Green where two tenants had a total of around 56 acres (22.6 hectares) of dryfield, sandy ground, part overgrown with whins; one of them had a house, barn and byre which comprised about four or five bays, all mud; the other had a house, barn, byre, malt kiln and cott house, all of mud, thatched with straw and of about fifteen bays, the most extensive sets of buildings recorded.

But many people had very little space. Thomas Smith, William Dow, William Jaffray and William Anderson each had house, barn and byre squeezed into only three bays of mud wall. Others had cott houses, often described as 'small'. A group of these cott houses, which paid no rent to the estate, were occupied by the coal miners who worked directly for the laird. Abraham Walker was 'oversman' in the mine and his house, yard and two acres were allowed him free on that account.

A few buildings, such as Stephen Watson's house, barn and byre are said to be of 'mud wall' but there is no reason to think that these differ from 'mud and stone'; indeed, Helen Logan had a thatched house, built with mud wall and stone of about four bays. In contrast to the substantially built grain mills and millers' houses discussed above, James Hutcheson rented the walk mill

(for fulling cloth) and a little thatched dwelling house, all built of mud wall, the dimensions not given.

The only areas of the estate to encroach onto the clay soils of the adjacent carse were some parts of Skeoch. John Hall in Skeoch had about 25 acres (10 hectares) of land, about one third being carse clay ground and the rest dryfield sandy ground; his buildings (house, barn and byre, all thatched) comprised about six bays of mud and stone. Isobel Russell had similar ground and buildings, also in Skeoch, but had a malt kiln in addition.

Entries later in the list are less detailed and the holdings even smaller. John Richardson in Catcraig was one of many to have 'a little cott house' with no further details. Other details have clearly been omitted, too. There are no workshops for the artisans, no smiddy and no storage other than barns and the lofts of the mills. The absence of such details is particularly tantalising in the case of Robert Paterson in Newmarket. Paterson, known from other records to be a tobacco pipe-maker, appears as a pipe-maker in one of the lists of tenants, but no details of his houses or other building are recorded, though he must surely have had some sort of workshop and an associated kiln.[20] The return does include Gabriel Andrew in St Ninians village whose house comprised four bay of mud wall thatched houses which, though geographically outside the Bannockburn estate, belonged to the laird.

Discussion

Even the archaeological remains of pre-modern peasant houses are rarely identified in Scotland. An extensive, nationwide survey found only one example of upstanding farm buildings of possible late-seventeenth-century date.[21] Such paucity of physical evidence makes documentary evidence all the more important. Clearly, the buildings in the report were typical of a wide area. That said, some stone and lime buildings are described, notably the mills and some of the feuars' houses. Easter Greenyards was adjacent to Bannockburn and a lease in 1659 specifies a house, barn, stable and byre of stone and lime, to be built by a mason; the 'sit house'

was in the same range as the barn and comprised only ‘a couple room’.[22] Six or seven houses of stone and lime had been built at Fisher Row, just outside Stirling, in 1696 (fig.4).[23] Whilst clay build might have been expected on the nearby stone-free carse lands, stone and lime were both readily available in Bannockburn, making the choice of clay particularly intriguing. But it was not always associated with poor building and poverty: clay-bonded buildings of two and even three storeys and are known, and even a cruck frame did not always preclude a second storey.[24]

One of the mills was slated, otherwise all the buildings were thatched. Straw was overwhelmingly the main thatching material; the mentions of heather and bent suggest that some, at least, were of mixed materials. In 1708 the baron court of Touchadam and Polmaise had forbidden tenants to use their fodder (straw) for thatch – a restriction often written into leases, as well.[25] Probably such enactments were little more than pieties, though it is curious that the broom, of which so many of the tenants complain, spreading over their land, does not appear as thatch.

It is implicit that the basic structure of most of the houses, barns, byres and stables was similar. The description of so many

Figure 4. One of the Fisher Row houses built of stone and lime in 1696. (Author’s collection)

in terms of couple lengths or by the number of bays suggests that these were cruck-framed buildings, as also implied by Belsches' description (page 73, above). But many witnesses are oddly vague about the actual numbers of bays or couples.[26] Most must have been of just one room and with just one hearth. A ruinous cruck-framed building with walls of rubble masonry laid in mud mortar existed at Hallquarter, just outside the Bannockburn estate, in 1955.[27]

It is not clear why the reporters on the Bannockburn estate – unlike those on other estates forfeited at this period – thought it necessary to record all this detail; they note, for example, that the houses were generally in good condition, that the possessors maintained their own houses, except for those of the coal miners which were upheld by the laird. But they give no assessment of their value, either individually or collectively. The great value of the 1716 report for vernacular building studies is that it gives basic information about a wide range of buildings across a substantial area. The stone-built house at Greenyards and the documented example of Fisher Row, built just outside Stirling in 1696, show that stone-built peasant housing was not unknown in the area at this period. But the Bannockburn material gives a general picture of what had gone before – and would, for a century or more, continue to sit alongside – the 'improved' buildings which do survive. Documents, indeed, have more potential than is often realised to augment our understanding of 'the vanished vernacular'.

Notes

1 A Fenton, 'Clay building and clay thatch in Scotland', *Ulster Folklife*, vol.15–16 (1970), pp 28–51.

2 R Belsches, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Stirling*, Board of Agriculture and Internal Improvement, Edinburgh, 1796, pp 21–2.

3 J Robertson, 'Parish of Gargunnock', *The Statistical Account of Scotland*, vol.XVIII, 1790s, pp 90–124 (p.104).

4 Patrick Graham, *General View of the Agriculture of Stirlingshire*,

drawn up for the Board of Agriculture and Internal Improvement, Edinburgh, 1812, pp 77–8.

5 Some of the material in this essay was included in 'Archives and the Vanished Vernacular', a talk at the SVBWG conference at RCAHMS on 3 October 2013.

6 Fenton, *op.cit.*; A Fenton and B Walker, *The Rural Architecture of Scotland*, John Donald, Edinburgh, 1981, pp 76–83; B Walker, 'Claywall', in A Riches and G Stell (eds), *Materials and Traditions in Scottish Building*, SVBWG, Edinburgh, 1992, pp 48–51; H K Murray, 'Clay and bool construction near Urquhart, Morayshire', *Vernacular Building*, vol.31 (2008), pp 41–52.

7 National Records of Scotland (NRS) E616/ has 34 sections; the relevant material is in E616/1. But see also NRS E607/3 for a printed summary rental and draft advertisement for the sale of the estate in 1720.

8 For the earlier history of the estate, see: John C Gibson, 'The baronies and owners of Sauchie and Bannockburn', *Transactions of the Stirling Natural History and Archaeological Society*, vol.56 (1934), pp 61–129 (pp 123–6); J S Fleming, *Ancient Castles and Mansions of the Stirling Nobility*, Gardner, Paisley, 1902, pp 283–4; Register of the Great Seal of Scotland, Edinburgh (RMS), vol.I, entry 357; RMS vol.II, entries 1878, 1960 and 3363; RMS vol.V, entry 710; RMS vol.VI, entry 1243; RMS vol.VII, entry 2152. For the forfeiture, see: Fleming, *op.cit.*, pp 284–5; Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, *Stirlingshire: An Inventory of Ancient Monuments*, Edinburgh, 1963, p.331.

9 For an outline of the estate, see fold-out map in T Miller, *The Site of the Battle of Bannockburn*, The Historical Association, London, 1931.

10 For coal, see: E H Francis, W A Read and M Armstrong, *The Geology of the Stirling District*, HMSO, Edinburgh, 1970, pp 190–92; NRS RD1/9 f228r-229r; RMS vol.V, entry 710; Exchequer Rolls of Scotland, Edinburgh, vol.XII, pp 141 and 640; *Scottish Antiquary*, vol.VII (1893), p.84; Stirling Council Archives (SCA), B66/16/1, 19 February and 16 March 1602; SCA B66/16/2, 10 January 1610. For stone from Catrcaig, see: NRS E82/55/5, May to July 1576; J Imrie and J G Dunbar (eds), *Accounts of the Masters of Works for Royal Palaces and Castles 1616–1649*, HMSO,

Edinburgh, 1982, p.174. For lime near Bannockburn, see: NRS SC67/50/1, 1628–1657, Bundle 1652; NRS SC67/49/1, pp 115–17, tack dated at Easter Greenyards, 1659. For lime in Stirling area, see: K J H Mackay, 1977, 'Limestone working: A forgotten Stirlingshire industry', *Forth Naturalist and Historian*, vol.2 (1977), pp 81–105; J G Harrison, 'Lime supply in the Stirling area from the 14th to the 18th centuries', *Forth Naturalist and Historian*, vol.16 (1993), pp 82–9.

11 Soil Survey of Scotland, Stirling, Sheet 39 and part of Airdrie, Sheet 31, Ordnance Survey, Southampton, 1968, published for the Macaulay Institute for Soil Research, Soil Survey of Scotland.

12 NRS E69/22/1, Hearth Tax return, St Ninians parish.

13 SCA CRHP/92A, double of the Valuation of the Shire of Stirling [1691].

14 'Act in favors of Sir Hugh Paterson for 2 fairs and a mercat', in K M Brown *et al* (eds), *The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707*, St Andrews, 2007–2014, 1696/9/220, http://www.rps.ac.uk/1696/9/220 (accessed 18 May 2014).

15 NRS GD193/879; GD193/881.

16 SCA PD189/ Box 68, Item 1,14 May 1681, 15 May 1683; *R Renwick, Extracts from the Records of the Royal Burgh of Stirling, AD 1667–1752*, Glasgow, 1889, pp 105, 107, 110–12.

17 R Sibbald, *Sibbald's History & Description of Stirlingshire, Ancient and Modern, 1707*, Shearer, Stirling, 1892, p.23; SCA CH2/ 722/7, p.222.

18 J G Harrison, 'Improving the roads and bridges of the Stirling area *c*.1660–1706', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, vol.135 (2005), pp 287–307.

19 J G Harrison, *Notes on the History of the Nail Trade in Scotland 1500–1800*, 2013, available for download from http://www.johnscothist.com/research-and-reports.html.

20 D B Gallagher and J G Harrison, 'Tobacco pipemakers in 17th-century Stirling', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, vol.125, (1995), pp 1131-1142.

21 P Dixon, 'Champagne Country: A review of medieval rural settlement in Lowland Scotland', in S Govan (ed.), *Medieval or Later Rural Settlement: Ten Years On*, Historic Scotland, Edinburgh, 2003,

pp 53–64; O Lelong, 'Finding medieval (or later) rural settlement in the Highlands and Islands: The case for optimism', in Govan, *op.cit.*, pp 7–16; J A Atkinson, 'Settlement form and evolution in the Central Highlands of Scotland, ca. 1100–1900', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, vol.14 (2010), no.3, pp 316–34; M Glendinning and S Wade Martins, *Buildings of the Land: Scotland's Farms 1750–2000*, RCAHMS, Edinburgh, 2008.

22 NRS SC67/49/1, pp 115–17.

23 J G Harrison, 'Fisher Row: an investigation of a seventeenth-century building project from accounts', *Vernacular Building*, vol.12 (1988), pp 26–32.

24 Fenton and Walker, *op.cit.*, pp 80–81; J G Dunbar, 'Pitcastle: a cruck-framed house in northern Perthshire', *Scottish Studies*, vol.4 (1960), p.113, cited by P Dixon, 'The medieval peasant building in Scotland: The beginning and end of crucks', *Ruralia*, vol.IV (2003), pp 187–200.

25 SCA PD189/Box 68, Baron Court Book, 4 October 1708.

26 Dixon, 'The medieval peasant building in Scotland', *op.cit.*, discusses the emergence, evolution and decline of crucks in Scotland.

27 RCAHMS, *Stirlingshire*, *op.cit.*, p.385.

SEARCHING FOR SURVIVORS: VERNACULAR BUILDINGS AROUND MUIR OF ORD, ROSS AND CROMARTY

Malcolm Bangor-Jones

This essay describes the results of a search for vernacular buildings in an eastern corner of Ross and Cromarty. The area around the village of Muir of Ord is not renowned for its vernacular survivals but this might be attributable to a lack of scrutiny.[1] This essay is not the report of a systematic survey: it is the results of an exploration undertaken, through fieldwork and study of the historical documentation, to assess the nature of the resource. An inventory of the sites examined follows as an appendix.

A broad approach has been taken to the meaning of 'vernacular'. There are arguments for following a narrow definition, not least the advantage of avoiding slippery concepts such as 'traditional'.[2] The approach taken here is partly inspired by the context provided by government policy and current concerns around the supply and demand for craft skills and traditional materials, improving energy efficiency, and planning. It is assumed, for instance, that broadly speaking pre-1919 traditionally constructed buildings comprise the bulk of Scotland's vernacular buildings.[3] As a cut-off date, this is very rough and ready and indeed the Scottish Rural Development Programme 2007–2013 provided financial support for the repair of vernacular buildings erected prior to 1940.[4] Despite the reservations which may be raised, such approaches are reasonably aligned with building technologies and are recognisable to local communities. They also honour the aims of the Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group's founders.

Background

The landscape around Muir of Ord, in the parish of Urray and Kilchrist, reflects its position on the edge of lowland and upland.

The lowlands of Easter Ross are characterised by substantial farms – both arable and livestock, crofts and smallholdings, and plantations, interspersed with villages – most of which are planned or estate villages. It is a landscape heavily shaped by human endeavour. To the west, upland farms and smallholdings shade into moorland, hills and distant mountains. The uplands, once occupied by shielings and grazings under a traditional economy, were later reorganised into sheep farms but are now largely devoted to non-agricultural uses.

Agricultural Improvement was underway in Easter Ross during the eighteenth century and accelerated towards the end of that century. While the agricultural depression which followed the end of the war in 1815 may have affected the pace of change, improvement continued and cannot be assumed to have been complete by the 1830s.[5] From the 1840s the eastern lowlands of the Highlands underwent a second agricultural revolution which included drainage, colonisation of wasteland, and application of artificial manures or fertilisers. The area fully participated in the era of 'high farming' characterised by high expenditure, high rents and high yields, which lasted until the 1870s: the agriculturalists of Easter Ross took pride in being a 'go-ahead' people.[6] There was significant investment in estate improvements, sometimes going far beyond what would give a good financial return, especially when prices fell. A useful insight into farm improvement, particularly in the earlier period up to the 1830s, is provided by Sandy Fenton's study of the Easter Ross Farmers' Club.[7]

The settlement of mailers or crofters on the more marginal land began in the mid-eighteenth century. Crofters were planted on the 'thinner soils and higher lying tracts of land' where colonisation took years of 'patient toil and untiring energy'.[8] It was an essential element of agricultural improvement in Easter Ross, in part because the crofts provided a flexible labour force for the larger farms. But it is important to bear in mind that, during the nineteenth century, crofts were subject to rearrangement, or eradication when they became part of larger farms. An example is provided by the improvement of the Arcan estate in the parish

of Urray in the 1850s when crofts and farms were amalgamated into larger holdings, a new farm steading erected, and new crofts created for 'industrious' crofters on an area partly moor and partly bog-land.[9] Contemporaries associated the coming of the New Poor Law in 1845 with the systematic policy of throwing several crofts into one holding, allowing only one house to be occupied, and thereby achieving clearance in a piecemeal fashion.[10] In more recent times many crofts have been abandoned or amalgamated.[11]

The influence of local building materials is evident. Most of the older croft houses and some farm steadings were built with rubble walls of roughly worked field boulders. Most steadings and many croft houses were subsequently given worked sandstone margins. Farmhouses of the Improvement and dwelling houses and other buildings in Muir of Ord village were built using dressed sandstone from the local Tarradale Quarry.

Pre-Improvement buildings

Evidence for pre-Improvement buildings in the area is very limited. Some insight is provided by valuations or 'comprisements' of the 'biggings' or buildings on part of the estate of Sir Alexander Mackenzie of Coul in the adjoining parish of Contin dating from 1761.[12] The valuations vary in terms of what was being assessed but most considered the main timbers or couples and any stone- or mason work. To give two examples:

> Alexander Bouys house 5 Oak Couples Eighteen Shillings Stonework 3 Sh 4 pence two Barns Six Oak Couples one pound St[erling] two Small houses three Oak Couples Six Shill[ings] Kailyard 20 pence
>
> Alexander Maclachlan's Biggings consisting of Dwelling House of Six Oak Couples and to Tail forks valu'd at £1 10
> Itt four Oak Couples & 16 Rails lying 14[s]
> Itt a Byre with 4 fir Couples & two Oaken forks 16
> Itt a Kiln with 2 Oak Couples 3
> Itt a Barn with 2 Oak Couples 4

The number of valuations is small but even so it suggests the range of buildings which a tenant might occupy: several tenants had more than one barn and there is also mention of small houses, stables, kilns and a sheep cot. Byres are not generally mentioned, indicating that most houses were byre-dwellings.[13]

The number of couples in a house ranged from four to seven, with the majority of houses having five; the number in barns ranged from two to five; in kilns from one to two; and in stables from one to two. Most of the couples were of oak with the odd exception of birch or pine. The references to 'tailforks' or 'forks' suggest that at least some of the buildings were hip-ended – either both ends or possibly just one end.[14]

The valuation of stonework might suggest that those houses without any were essentially creel houses. Alternatively it might suggest the presence of stonework as opposed to a mixture of turf and stone.[15] It is noteworthy that parts but not the whole of a house might have stonework, and there are a few examples of stone 'gavels' or gables. The presence of stonework is clearly an indication of improvement. In one particular case the tenant's house of three couples and byre of six couples were comprised separately. The tenant also possessed a bere (or 'bear') barn, an oat barn, and a garron stable. The distinction between bere and oat barns was not uncommon in the area.[16]

Another source of evidence is provided by David Aitken's 1788 plan of Tarradale Estate.[17] The plan depicts a number of buildings with outshots: most appear in the centre of buildings although a couple combine with the main section of the building to form an L-plan. Outshots, ranging in size from shallow 'bed outshots' to additional rooms, are to be found attached to significant numbers of pre-Improvement or pre-Clearance byre-dwellings in east Sutherland. Outshots are also to be found as far south as Perthshire, although most of the examples in the southern Highlands appear to be no larger than bed outshots.[18] In the Muir of Ord area attention should be drawn to the building in Gleann Goibhre described in the inventory.

The field evidence includes a small number of possible byre-

dwellings, the most likely being one of the buildings in Auchmore Woods. Archaeological excavation would assist in confirming other examples. However, the Tarradale estate plan gives an indication of the number of pre-Improvement buildings which probably existed in the area at the turn of the nineteenth century. Whatever the number of byre-dwellings for which some evidence has survived, no matter how slight, it can be but a very small proportion of the numbers there once were.

The best surviving evidence for pre-Improvement settlement is provided by the upland landscape of Gleann Goibhre, in particular the shielings. Shieling huts are generally regarded as occurring in groups or clusters.[19] However, the sites in Gleann Goibhre demonstrate that, while such groups are to be found, there are many examples of single or pairs of huts. It is noticeable that most of the single huts examined are larger in size than the huts within the two groups. Some of the larger huts may have been occupied by herds responsible for grazing of yeld or milkless stock as opposed to the more labour-intensive management of the milking stock. Other factors should be considered in assessing hut size and numbers, but previous studies have probably given insufficient attention to the distinction between milkless and milking stock.

One shieling site, in altitude the lowest in the glen and closest to Auchederson, contains two shieling huts and a dyked enclosure with a small building, probably a dwelling, and clearance cairns. Part of the shieling site became an outlying area of arable. Nearby there is an illicit whisky still which probably belongs to the period from the late eighteenth century to the 1820s when 'smuggling' was endemic in the area rather than the late nineteenth century when it once more became common around Aultgowrie. It is therefore contemporary with the many sites documented in the NOSAS survey of nearby Strathconon.[20]

Houses of the small tenants, crofters and cottars

The establishment of moorland crofts had commenced by the mid-eighteenth century in Easter Ross. In the early 1790s the minister of Urray referred to mailers or cottagers as 'poor people

who build huts on barren ground, and improve spots around them'. There were 248 in the parish of which 148 had settled in the last 40 years.[21] In the absence of evidence to the contrary, it seems reasonable to assume that the houses associated with these early crofts were byre-dwellings, particularly where colonisation was piecemeal and unplanned.

To Sir George Mackenzie of Coul, a doctrinaire Improver, the Highland tenantry of Ross and Cromarty lived 'in the midst of smoke and filth'. As for cottagers, a term which probably covered both small tenants and landless cottars, the same roof covered 'men, women, children, cattle, dogs, pigs, poultry, &c.'. Neat cottages were being erected in several parts of the county but Sir George considered that 'it will be long ere the people will learn the comforts of cleanliness, and the use of chimneys. In many places where these have been constructed, the people do not use them, but prefer breaking a hole in the roof of the house, and lighting their fire on the floor.'[22]

The introduction of improved houses associated with croft settlement was taking place in the early 1800s: when the Muir of Ussie was advertised in 1808 for letting in crofts to 'industrious Highlanders', the landlord, Lord Seaforth, stipulated that the tenants 'must build a house of stone, and if the Tenant wishes to build a Barn or Byre, or both, according to the size of his possession, Lord Seaforth will furnish and lead wood for it.'[23]

Landowners with a shared interest in the Mulbuie Commonty had been encouraging new improvements which had been eating away at the fringes of the commonty for several decades. However, the division of the commonty in 1827 was certainly a spur to landlords to plant their shares with crofters. Dr John Mackenzie of the Mackenzies of Gairloch was factor for the Conon and Redcastle estates, both of which had shares in the commonty. Mackenzie is better known for his controversial rearrangement of the townships around Gairloch on the west coast into crofts in the late 1840s, but it appears that he had undertaken a similar initiative near to Muir of Ord in 1841. In 1874 it was stated that the 'numerous crofts, with their comfortable cottages and

outhouses, and gardens, as laid out and designed' by Dr Mackenzie were out of lease. The landlord, Sir Kenneth Mackenzie, granted leases 'to all the old holders or their descendants now in possession, at very easy rents, with the exception of four, who are in arrears for a considerable number of years, and for these house accommodation will be provided.' The success of the crofters as improvers was mixed, although it was admitted that the land was probably among the worst of the commonty.[24]

The houses of the crofters, which at this period varied in quality, contrasted with the houses of poorer families. In 1843 Dr Mackenzie stated that on the estate of Tarradale the poor 'generally occupy an old rickety shed put up at the end of some cottar's house.' Such 'sheds' were said to be 'universal throughout this part of the country.' The paupers were also said to be very ill off for furniture. The landlord had in some instances built houses when such dwellings had fallen down. It was noted that 'when two or three crofter's lots have been thrown into one, the vacant houses are sure to be immediately occupied by the poor people, who patch them up in the best way they can, unless the proprietors are quick in preventing it.'[25] In due course such habitations were erased by farm or croft improvement, unless the ground was planted: for instance, the structures found in the Auchmore and Faebait Woods may well accord with the significant numbers of paupers recorded in the 1841 Census as living at Faebait.

While the living conditions of paupers might be assumed to have improved after the introduction of the New Poor Law, it is clear that this was not always the case. A description of paupers' houses in the adjoining parish of Contin in 1862 refers to 'wretched hovels' in a state of disrepair. Entering one such habitation by 'a hole used as a door, and proceeding with great difficulty along a winding passage […] with innumerable props to support the yielding roof […] one finds oneself in the only apartment, dark and gloomy, and with no light but what comes in at the opening intended for a chimney.'[26] As would be expected, no such structures have been found, although it is possible that archaeological excavation will reveal traces.

The great majority of present-day croft houses on the western flank of the Black Isle, including Ord Muir, Muir of Tarradale and Drynie Park, are either upgraded versions of the improved croft house or are wholly modern. Those which have been abandoned are usually of the ungraded variety or have been demolished and consist of little more than wall footings. There is one abandoned croft house at Ord Hill (NH 5390 5133) which gives hints as to its earlier form: it has a battered gable wall against which an improved byre has been constructed. The house and byre were thatched in 1909 but were soon afterwards further improved and roofed with corrugated iron.[27]

There are one or two abandoned small tenant houses on the Fairburn estate which are of interest. In 1909 the buildings at Cornhill (NH 4648 5174), which were inhabited by two households, included an older inhabited thatched croft house, a slated croft house built in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and an older byre and stable with corrugated iron roof. The buildings, which largely survive to their wallheads, all have walls with an earth mortar core. But while the newer house follows the classic plan it has a window in one of the gables and is altogether grander in appearance.[28]

The croft house at Corry of Ardnagrask with the cruck slots described in the Inventory appears to be a unique survivor in the area. While the steading had a lower roof line than the house, there is the possibility that this house is a modified byre-dwelling.

Improved farm steadings

As Mackenzie of Coul stated in his agricultural survey of Ross and Cromarty, 'Wherever farms have been laid out on a proper scale, and are occupied by substantial and well educated men, we find the farm-houses and offices handsome and commodious.'[29] In 1812, for instance, the Mains of Tarradale in the parish of Urray was described as consisting of '91 acres [37 hectares] of prime land, well walled and fenced, and having a good house and superior offices.'[30]

New steadings continued to be built in the parish of Urray: in 1847 the farm of Muirton Mains had a new farmhouse and offices;[31] in 1848 the farm of Broomhill on the Ord estate, which contained 130 acres (53 hectares) of arable land and some improvable land, had a 'new and very commodious Square of Buildings, and a Thrashing-Mill, with water-power on the Farm; and a large sum has been expended on buildings and improvements during the last two years'.[32] The same year the farm of Dreim (now known as Barevan) on the Highfield estate, containing 183 acres (74 hectares) of arable and a large wood outrun, had been subdivided with stone dykes and it was promised that a substantial square of offices and dwelling house would be built for a new tenant.[33]

These examples, however, should not disguise the fact that significant numbers of new steadings were built during the 1860s and 1870s. As was noted in 1880, a large percentage of the farm steadings in Ross and Cromarty had been built in the last twenty-five years while others had been improved and enlarged during that period. The coming of the railways had provided a strong stimulus to cattle feeding in Easter Ross. Increased accommodation for the feeding of cattle became the main feature of the new steadings: indeed by 1880 covered cattle courts were 'quite the order of the day in old as well as new steadings'.[34] Later additions, however, tended to be of cheaper timber and corrugated iron in keeping with the diminished returns from agriculture.[35]

Most of the new steadings of this period in the Muir of Ord area were architect-designed:

1858 Chapel of Highfield: Andrew Maitland, Tain[36]

1859 Achnasoul: Ross & Joass, Inverness and Dingwall[37]

1861 Auchederson: Ross & Joass, Inverness and Dingwall[38]

1869 Faebait Andrew Maitland, Tain[39]

1869 Auchmore new Cart-Shed and repairs to steading: Andrew Maitland[40]

1872 Aultgowrie: W C Joass, Dingwall[41]

1873 Coul of Fairburn: W C Joass, Dingwall[42]

1878 Fettes: Matthews & Lawrie, Inverness[43]

Most steadings were U-shaped but with additional accommodation according to farm size. Auchmore steading was F-shaped with the former farmhouse forming the fourth side of an enclosed square. By 1909 there were several wood and corrugated-iron additions including a cattle fold. The U-shaped steading at Faebait contained a barn and threshing mill, a ten-stalled byre, a five-stalled stable and loose box, and a separate cart shed. Additional buildings by 1909 included a stone and corrugated-iron cattle fold. In 1909 North Balvullich had a corrugated-iron-roofed U-shaped steading containing a cattle court, six-stalled byre and three-stalled stable and barn. South Balvullich contained a three-stalled stable, seven-stalled byre, loose box, covered fold, and barn. It had a corrugated-iron roof except one wing which was slated. The cart shed was of wood and corrugated iron.[44]

There were water-powered threshing mills built on most farms. The exceptions appear to have been a horse-gang-powered mill at Culach and the lack of any mill at Balno and at the smaller farms of North and South Balvullich. In the majority of the steadings with mills, the walls around the water wheel were built with regular dressed sandstone blocks for strength as compared with roughly squared rubble elsewhere.

The presence of pantiles on a small part of a low range at Ord Mains and traces of pantiles on a similar range at Broomhill suggest that pantiles may have been more common until replaced by more durable but more expensive slate.[45] The footings of the pre-1870s house (earth mortared) and steading survive at Culach and the pre-1870 house at Auchmore.

The farmhouse of Auchederson is occupied, but the farm buildings are unused and steadily decaying, a process no doubt hastened by the removal of the slates from the older ranges (fig.1). The fields are used for grazing livestock, the hill land is given over to deer. The regular fields, drains and water channels, and

Figure 1. Auchederson Steading looking eastwards.

Figure 2. Tudor arches in the connecting range of the 'U' at Auchederson Steading.

stone clearance heaps testify to decades of effort and investment. In 1881 the tenant, Donald MacLennan, was described as a farmer of 800 acres (324 hectares), of which 60 acres (24 hectares) arable, employing three men, a boy and two women. The regular U-shaped steading of 1861 with six Tudor-style sandstone arches (fig.2) was later supplemented by a central cattle court. By 1909 the steading contained a byre for eight cows, turnip shed, fold, threshing mill and straw barn, four-stalled stable with labourer's room above (all stone and slated), timber and corrugated-iron central cattle court, and timber and corrugated-iron cart-shed. Stone footings now mark the site of the two farm labourers' cottages.[46]

Muir of Ord village

Muir of Ord began as a planned village founded with the coming of the railway in 1862 and eventually taking its name from the major livestock market on the Muir of Ord. The focus of the village was, as it still is, on the crossroads where the Parliamentary Road from Beauly to Dingwall met the Black Isle Road. The oldest building in the vicinity had been the White House or Muir of Ord Inn (on the site of the current Ord Arms). The White House or 'taigh bane' was described as retaining its 'simple primitive character'. It was hoped that the 'western room, with its unique flooring, its carved chimney stone, and wire enclosed windows, will be left as it is, including the massive table from off which, during the last sixty years, the Caithness drover, with unsparing appetite, has seen many a joint disappear; and where, during the same period, the dealers of the west have had their social meetings.'[47]

Not long after the coming of the railway, Mackenzie of Ord commissioned David Gordon, a land surveyor from Beauly, to survey and lay out fourteen building plots on the west side of the main road. Quite a few were taken on a speculative basis by local builders: Donald Macdonald, residing at Tarradale and connected to the Tarradale Quarry; Duncan Maciver residing in Dingwall

Figure 3. Muir of Ord village looking southwards.

and later Maryburgh; and William Mackintosh, a house carpenter residing at Redcastle. Other plots were taken by men such as William Munro the farm grieve from Ord Mains. Muir of Ord is quite a late planned village, and probably unique in the northern Highlands as owing its origins to the railway.[48] In time, the land on the east side of the road, known as Tarradale and owned by the Baillies, later Lords of Dochfour, was also developed. Although the older buildings in the core are not devoid of embellishment, as the occasional string course proves, they are not as sophisticated as some of the later buildings which were the work of established architects. The Station Hotel, dating from 1881, was designed by John Robertson from Inverness and the police station, dating from 1892, was designed by W C Joass of Dingwall.[49] Local materials continued to be utilised into the 1930s although concrete lintels appear with traditional stonework in buildings of the 1920s and 1930s (for instance on the Station Hotel extension). It was not until 1946 that, faced with post-war shortages of building materials, Ross and Cromarty County Council built houses of 'non-traditional construction'.[50]

Survival?

Pre-Improvement byre dwellings certainly existed in the Muir of Ord area prior to 1800. The possibility of improved elements being introduced to such structures, such as stone-built gables, has to be borne in mind. As the documentary evidence suggests, houses of this period may also have possessed outshots. While byre-dwellings no doubt continued in use into the nineteenth century, the sole possible survivor in Auchmore Woods is of considerable importance.

Survival of pre-Improvement structures is, as might be expected, to be found in the more upland part of the area. It is, however, limited to shieling huts, buildings with enclosures and an illicit still. It should also be noted that repeated heather burning may well have diminished the peat and increased the amount of stone exposed on structures containing peaty turf. There has also been survival within areas of woodland, especially when

hand planted, although surviving remains may be vulnerable to mechanical harvesting and restocking.

Many of the small dwellings in the Inventory are located in areas of crofter colonisation which are now marginal. Even so, and despite the evidence consisting largely of turf-covered foundations rather than standing buildings, they appear to be of improved cottages rather than byre-dwellings, although some consisted of a range of separate compartments. The remains of such houses apparently dating from the first half of the nineteenth century – both where the land was turned over to plantations or where holdings were amalgamated into a large farm, as at Auchmore – suggest the use of hingin' lums or canopy chimneys. The use of earth mortar was widespread, and it was even used on the buildings of small farms as at Culach. Lack of evidence makes it difficult to assess how common was the application of limewash or harl but it was presumably extensive.

Earlier versions of the improved cottage or with earlier elements and standing to wallhead height are rare, the only examples found being the house with cruck slots in Corry of Ardnagrask, the earlier house at Cornhill and the disused croft house at Ord Muir. It is noteworthy that only one building with cruck slots has been discovered. Moreover, the majority of surviving croft houses in the area are relatively modern: the process whereby earlier croft houses were replaced warrants further investigation.[51]

There has been national recognition of the urgent need to survey and record farm buildings as being vulnerable to redundancy or demolition. This urgency is demonstrated at the local level as only a few of the nineteenth-century steadings in the Muir of Ord area remain in agricultural use. The steading at Auchmore has been demolished; at Faebait only the connecting range and cart-shed survive. The steadings at Auchederson, Ord Mains, Broomhill and South Balvulich are largely or wholly disused. Broomhill is partly unroofed and there are proposals for conversion to residential use which appear to be marked by a lack of progress. While the 'vernacular' nineteenth-century buildings

of Muir of Ord village are not suffering from obsolescence, demolition or gradual decay, some show the distressing signs of lack of appropriate repair or even dereliction. The need to regenerate such properties is pressing.

INVENTORY

The measurements in the following inventory were made in often challenging circumstances, frequently on vegetation-obscured ruins, and in one case made with a discarded antler for a tape measure. Precision is not claimed.

Auchederson

NH 4757 5077

Within natural birch woods, remains of three-compartment building measuring 23.5 by 4.7 metres (77 by 15 feet) overall. Depicted as unroofed on the 1876 First Edition Ordnance Survey (OS) map, 25-inch Ross and Cromarty Ross-shire Sheet XCVIII.8. Nearby buildings: [NH 4758 5077] measuring 7.3 by 4.9 metres (16 feet) overall and [NH 4762 5075] measuring 6.5 by 4.7 metres (15 feet) overall.

Auchmore Farm

NH 4884 4984

Occupying area between burn and field dyke, turf-covered stone wall footings of building measuring 9.1 by 4.5 metres (30 by 15 feet) overall. Gable walls 0.9 metre (3 feet) wide; main walls thinner. Nearby building measuring 8.1 by 4.7 metres (27 by 15 feet) overall set into bank on two sides. Not depicted in 1872 on the First Edition OS, 25-inch Ross and Cromarty Ross-shire Sheet XCIX.5. The map depicts two unroofed buildings and associated buildings within the fields of Auchmore Farm: the remains of at least one building are still evident.

Auchmore Wood (plantation)

NH 4798 5081

Low turf-covered stone wall footings of two-compartment building which measure 8.7 by 4.7 metres (29 by 15 feet) and 22.1 by 4.7 metres (73 by 15 feet), giving an overall length of 30.8 metres

(101 feet). Small yard adjoins the building which trends downslope and contains a number of trees. Upper compartment appears to have had separate entrance.

NH 4790 5078

Turf-covered wall footings survive up to about 0.5 metres (1 foot 8 inches) high of building measuring overall 7.6 by 4.7 metres (25 by 15 feet).

NH 4793 5093

Turf-covered wall footings of building measuring overall 8.7 by 4.9 metres (29 by 16 feet). Bisected by footpath.

NH 4788 5090

Turf-covered wall footings of building measuring overall 10.0 by 5.3 metres (33 by 17 feet). Small adjoining addition 3.5 metres (11 feet). Straddled by fallen tree.

None of these buildings are depicted on the 1876 First Edition OS, 25-inch Ross and Cromarty Ross-shire Sheet XCVIII.8.

Balno Farm

NH 4811 5134

Remains of a building containing five compartments measuring 30.8 by 5.2 metres (101 by 17 feet) overall with walls surviving up to 1.0 metre (3 feet) high. Main compartment 10.5 metres (34 feet) long. Depicted as roofless on the 1876 First Edition OS, 25-inch Ross and Cromarty Ross-shire Sheet XCIX.8.

Corry of Ardnagrask

NH 4963 4845

Situated at Cnoc na Luibhe, the remains of a small tenant or croft house, gable-ended and rectangular (fig.4). Measuring 11.9 by 5.0 metres (39 by 16 feet) overall with one gable surviving to full height. Appears to conform to 'Improved' pattern of central door and two windows in the front with small central window at rear. Additional small window in the rear wall lights the larger kitchen fireplace formed of dressed sandstone; smaller fireplace at other end of the house. Walls earth-mortared throughout; exterior sneck-harled with lime mortar; cement render on some areas, especially the west gable. Traces of interior lime plaster. Three

Figure 4. Croft house at Cnoc na Luibh, Corry of Ardnagrask.

cruck slots survive to varying completeness: one pair of crucks would have possibly been larger than the other. Larger and best-preserved slot suggests cruck 21 centimetres (8 inches) in diameter springing from within the wall. The adjoining low footings of a probable steading measure 14.2 by 4.7 metres (47 by 15 feet) overall. It shares a common rear wall with the dwelling house but would have had a lower ridge line. Depicted as roofed in 1904 on Second Edition OS 25-inch Ross and Cromarty sheet 99.9.

NH 4991 4860

In clearing in modern plantation, turf-covered footings of building measuring 23.5 by 4.6 metres (77 by 15 feet) overall. Building at right angles measuring 8.9 by 5.1 metres (29 by 17 feet) overall. Depicted as roofed in 1904 with two apartments on Second Edition OS 25-inch Ross and Cromarty sheet 99.9.

NH 5018 4861

In small clearing within modern plantation, building measuring 10.4 by 5.1 metres (34 by 17 feet) overall. Probably earth-mortared stone walls survive to several courses: no indication of fireplace in either gable. Small annexe at west gable. Depicted as roofed in 1904 on Second Edition OS 25-inch Ross and Cromarty sheet 99.9.

Corry Wood

NH 5006 4965

Within a clearing in modern plantation and bisected by footpath, turf-covered wall footings surviving up to about 0.5 metre (1 foot 8 inches) high of a building measuring overall 19.2 by 5.7 metres (63 by 19 feet). Depicted as roofless in 1872 on the First Edition OS, 25-inch Ross and Cromarty Ross-shire Sheet XCIX.9.

NH 4995 4961

Within a broad hollow in an old beech plantation, footings of a building measuring 9.4 by 5.1 metres (31 by 17 feet) overall. Not depicted in 1872 on the First Edition OS, 25-inch Ross and Cromarty Ross-shire Sheet XCIX.9.

NH 4991 4945

Set within an old oak and beech wood, turf-covered stone walls standing up to 1.0 metre (3 feet) high of a building measuring 12.9 by 4.5 metres (42 by 15 feet) overall: one gable 1.0 metre (3 feet) thick; the other gable and a side wall set into the slope. Nearby small building measuring 4.3 by 3.5 metres (14 by 11 feet) overall and yard abutting stone and feal dyke. Not depicted in 1872 on the First Edition OS, 25-inch Ross and Cromarty Ross-shire Sheet XCIX.9.

Culach Woods

NH 5013 4984

Situated within mature birch woods, there are the remains of a single-compartment building measuring 12.1 by 6.4 metres (40 by 21 feet) over turf-covered stone wall footings. Large worked boulders earth bonded with traces of lime mortar. A nearby building, set at right angles to the principal building, measures 9.8 by 5.2 metres (32 by 17 feet) over turf-covered stone wall footings. Both buildings depicted as roofless in 1872 on the First Edition OS, 25-inch Ross and Cromarty Ross-shire Sheet XCIX.9.

Faebait Wood

NH 4862 5101

Situated to the west of the track to Balno Farm, a building reduced to turf-covered wall footings measuring 8.7 by 4.7 metres (29 by

15 feet) overall with adjoining 2.2-metre (7-foot) addition with large tree growing in remains of outer wall. Not depicted on the 1872 First Edition OS, 25-inch Ross and Cromarty Ross-shire Sheet XCIX.5.

Gleann Goibhre (Glen Gowrie)

NH 4055 4854

Single rectangular shieling hut on the northern edge of Lùb na Luachrach measuring 6.9 by 4.1 metres (23 by 13 feet) overall.

NH 4025 4800

Group of shieling huts on a north-facing terrace overlooking Lùb na Luachrach surveyed by North of Scotland Archaeological Society (NOSAS). According to the Society's report, the group comprised the remains of fifteen huts, two enclosures and a pen.[52]

NH 4129 4794

Sub-rectangular shieling hut near Allt Creagach measuring 6.9 by 5.4 metres (23 by 18 feet) overall. A turf mound nearby (NH 4129 4797) probably marks the site of a smaller hut.

NH 4214 4844

Group of shieling huts on south-facing slope above Allt Goibhre surveyed by North of Scotland Archaeological Society (NOSAS). According to the Society's report the group comprised the remains of four huts, two possible stores and two enclosures.[53] The large enclosure is probably a natural feature, possibly modified.

NH 4418 5009

Single shieling hut at Airigh na Lite measuring 7.7 by 6.0 metres (25 by 20 feet) overall.

NH 4505 4998

On the east bank and within the gulley of Allt na Crionaiche, the remains of a rectangular 'illicit' still, set into the bank on two sides and measuring 4.5 by 2.5 metres (15 by 8 feet) overall.

NH 4513 4979

Above Allt na Crionaiche, the footings of an oval-shaped shieling hut measuring 7.1 by 3.6 metres (23 by 12 feet) overall, possibly of two compartments.

NH 4533 4981

The turf footings of a rectangular shieling hut measuring 6.5 by 3.9 metres (21 by 13 feet) overall.

NH 4517 4976

Within a feal-and-stone-dyked enclosure running parallel to Allt na Crionaiche, the substantial wall footings of a rectangular building measuring 10.0 by 4.0 metres (33 by 13 feet) overall (fig.5). An outshot, measuring 3.2 by 3.7 metres (10 by 12 feet) overall, attached to and entered from the main structure, creating an L-shaped structure. The enclosure contains a small yard and a number of clearance cairns.

Figure 5. Rectangular building with outshot at Gleann Goibhre.

Notes

1 For a general introduction see Geoffrey Stell and Elizabeth Beaton, 'Local building traditions', in Donald Omand (ed.), *The Ross and Cromarty Book*, Golspie, 1984, pp 207–18.

2 See the approach by Ian Tait who regards the 'true vernacular' as 'structures made by the farmers themselves in indigenous styles that adhered to cultural preferences, using native resources, and answering the needs of subsistence.' Ian Tait, *Shetland Vernacular*

Buildings 1600–1900, Lerwick, 2012, p.xxxiii.

3 Scotland's Historic Environment Audit 2012. See http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/sheareport2012-2.pdf

4 See: http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/farmingrural/SRDP/RuralPriorities/Options/Managementofvernacular

5 Malcolm Bangor-Jones, 'Settlement, Society and Field Systems in the Improvement Era', *Farming and the Land*, *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology* Volume 2, Edinburgh, 2011, pp 133–52. Background to Easter Ross is provided by Ian R M Mowat, *Easter Ross 1750–1850: The Double Frontier*, Edinburgh, 1981; Eric Richards, 'Agrarian change, modernization and the Clearances', in Donald Omand (ed.), *The Ross and Cromarty Book*, Golspie, 1984, pp 159–82; David Alston, *My Little Town of Cromarty: The History of a Northern Scottish Town*, Edinburgh, 2006. Only Alston, however, considers the period of 'high farming'.

6 *Inverness Advertiser*, 20 Aug 1861.

7 A Fenton, 'The Easter Ross Farmers' Club, 1811-1898', *Review of Scottish Culture*, vol.16 (2003–4), pp 115–30.

8 James Macdonald, 'On the Agriculture of the Counties of Ross and Cromarty', *Transactions of the Highland and Agricultural Society for Scotland*, 4th series, vol.XII (1880), pp 118, 161.

9 The improvements had been partly delayed by a life-rent tack held by a tenant who died in 1852 at the age of 104. John Mitchell, 'Report of improvements on the estate of Arcan, in the County of Ross', *Transactions of the Highland and Agricultural Society for Scotland*, new series (1855–7), pp 108–18.

10 *The Northern Ensign*, 3 June 1858.

11 Joy Tivy, 'Easter Ross: a residual crofting area', *Scottish Studies*, vol.9 (1965), pp 64–84.

12 National Records of Scotland (NRS), Mackenzie of Coul Papers, GD1/1149/27. For an introduction to such material see Ian D Whyte, 'Rural housing in Lowland Scotland in the seventeenth century: the evidence of estate papers', Scottish Studies, vol.19 (1975) pp 55–68.

13 By contrast the documentary evidence suggests that byre-houses were not common in Donside in the eighteenth century: RCAHMS, *In the Shadow of Bennachie: A Field Archaeology of Donside, Aberdeenshire*, Edinburgh, 2007, p.203.

[14] For tailforks, see Alasdair Ross (ed.) 'Two surveys of vernacular tree usage in the lordship of Strathavon, Banffshire, 1585–1612', in *Miscellany XIV*, Scottish History Society, 6th series, vol.4, 2010, (2013), pp 1–60; Ross Noble, 'Creel Houses of the Scottish Highlands', in Trefor M Owen (ed.), *From Corrib to Cultra: Essays in Honour of Alan Gailey*, Belfast, 2000, pp 82–94.

[15] For a discussion of cruck houses and creel houses see Piers Dixon 'Pre-Improvement Rural Buildings', *Farming and the Land*, *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology* Volume 2, Edinburgh, 2011, pp 307–25.

[16] See for instance NRS, Dingwall Sheriff Court records, SC25/22/14 Comprisement of William Dingwall's Biggings in upper Dachcarty 1796.

[17] Highland Council Archives, D274/1.

[18] A plan of plan of a byre-house with an outshot at Camserney Farm, Perthshire is provided in RCAHMS, *Buildings of the Land: Scotland's Farms 1750–2000*, Edinburgh, 2008, p.10.

[19] RCAHMS, *In the Shadow of Bennachie*, Edinburgh, 2007, pp 204–6.

[20] Meryll Marshall, *Strathconon: The History and Archaeology of a NE Highland Glen*, [NOSAS] 2011.

[21] *The Statistical Account of Scotland 1791–1799: Volume XVII Inverness-shire, Ross and Cromarty*, Wakefield, 1981, p.677.

[22] George S Mackenzie, *A General Survey of the Counties of Ross and Cromarty*, London, 1810, pp 73–4.

[23] *Inverness Journal*, 29 January 1808.

[24] *The Highlander*, 14 February 1874; James Macdonald, 'On the Agriculture of the Counties of Ross and Cromarty', *Transactions of the Highland and Agricultural Society for Scotland*, 4th series, vol.XII (1880), p.119.

[25] *Poor Law Inquiry (Scotland) Appendix, Part II: Minutes of Evidence*, Edinburgh, 1844 p35.

[26] *Ross-shire Independent*, 11 December 1862.

[27] NRS, Inland Revenue Survey, IRS80/193 no 257.

[28] NRS, IRS80/191 no 90; Ordnance Survey 1st and 2nd editions 25-inch; Census returns 1881, 1891, 1901.

[29] George S Mackenzie, *A General Survey of the Counties of Ross and Cromarty*, London, 1810, p.73.

[30] *Inverness Journal*, 28 August 1812.

[31] *Inverness Courier*, 14 September 1847.

[32] *Inverness Courier*, 22 February 1848.

[33] *Inverness Courier*, 18 January 1848.

[34] James Macdonald, 'On the Agriculture of the Counties of Ross and Cromarty', *Transactions of the Highland and Agricultural Society for Scotland*, 4th series, vol.XII, pp 96, 171.

[35] Susanna Wade Martins, 'Farm Buildings of 'Improvement', *Farming and the Land*, Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology Volume 2, Edinburgh, 2011, p.344.

[36] *Inverness Courier*, 28 January 1858.

[37] *Inverness Courier*, 14 April 1859.

[38] *Inverness Courier*, 18 July 1861.

[39] *Inverness Courier*, 29 April 1869.

[40] *Inverness Courier*, 12 August 1869.

[41] *Inverness Courier*, 8 August 1872.

[42] *Inverness Courier*, 16 October 1873.

[43] *Inverness Courier*, 11 July 1878.

[44] NRS IRS80/193 nos. 223, 224, 284.

[45] Documentary evidence for Sutherland indicates that pantiles were used as a roofing material much more widely in the nineteenth century than the surviving remnants would suggest; for a similar lack of pantiles in Caithness, see A Wright, 'The Caithness Redundant Buildings Inventory', *Vernacular Building*, vol.32 (2008–9), p.26.

[46] *Inverness Courier*, 22 April 1869; NRS IRS80/191 no.91; Census Return 1881.

[47] *Ross-shire Independent*, 13 February 1862.

[48] Details of the plots are taken from the *Ross-shire Abbreviated Sasines*; *Inverness Courier*, 6 December 1866.

[49] *Inverness Courier*, 22 September 1881; 11 March 1892.

[50] Highland Council Archives, Ross and Cromarty County Council Minutes, CRC/3/1/67, p.46.

[51] There may well be parallels with the 'Great Rebuilding' of Welsh cottages in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: Eurwyn Wiliam, *The Welsh Cottage: Building Traditions of the Rural Poor,*

1750–1900, Aberystwyth, 2010, p8.

[52] North of Scotland Archaeological Society, *Archaeological Remains of two Shieling Sites in Upper Gleann Goibhre near Muir of Ord*, 2003, http://www.nosas.co.uk/gleanngoibhre.asp?pageid=221900.

[53] Ibid.

AUCHMACOY DOOCOT, NEAR ELLON, ABERDEENSHIRE

Nick Brown

I first developed my interest in doocots in the late 1980s, when I was asked to survey a sixteenth-century freestanding 'beehive' doocot at Findlater Castle, near Sandend, in north-west Aberdeenshire, for restoration by Banff and Buchan District Council. Already qualified in architecture and beginning to specialise in building conservation, the doocot project rekindled my youthful interest in ornithology. The doocot at Findlater, with its monocoque masonry construction and tardis-like interior, was more than intriguing and, indeed, slightly perplexing at first, so I diligently tried to find out more. This proved much harder than I expected and, at the time, I was only able to source Elizabeth Beaton's concise *Doocots of Moray* booklet and a slimline Shire Album series booklet on *Scottish Doocots* by Tim Buxbaum.[1] A quest to look at other doocots in the vicinity – such as another smaller 'beehive' at Glasshaugh to the south of Sandend, and the square-plan structures at Boyne Castle and then Durn at Portsoy – was also both fascinating and disturbing: the doocots were all markedly different in age, scale and design, but all in a terrible state of repair. Spurred on by Elizabeth's catalogue, I then chose to visit several of Moray's doocots in 1990–91, such as New Elgin, Findrassie and Lesmurdie, and was again struck by their range of design, but very poor condition.

Then, in 1992, Elizabeth and Conference Secretary Ronnie Robertson fortuitously encouraged me to attend SVBWG's Annual Conference in Aberfeldy (along with my wife and new baby!). Without doocots on my mind, I listened to a compelling lecture by its President Sandy Fenton who, with his soft enthusiasm and striking knowledge, drew me into the group's core aims and objectives about 'recording the nation's unsung buildings before they were lost'. In his own inimitable way, Sandy was putting

out a clarion call to its membership to embrace the 'survey and document' purpose of SVBWG, irrespective of the standard or method. Whilst his evident specialist knowledge was slightly daunting to a young man, his gentle, encouraging manner was even more affecting. As he spoke, my mind wandered towards thinking how I might contribute to the vernacular building cause. It did not take long to conclude what I should do and, after discussing it with my wife and Ronnie on the way home, I set about a four-year process of measuring, photographing and drawing all the doocots in my local area.

In 1995, I found myself giving a presentation on doocots to an esteemed SVBWG audience that included the likes of Sandy Fenton, Bruce Walker, Jim Souness, John Hume, Harry Gordon Slade, Lyn Leet and Geoffrey Stell. A daunting prospect indeed!

Under the experienced tutelage of Aberdeen Professors Seaton Baxter, Magnus Fladmark and Bill Brogden, I developed my doocot survey work into a university research project. At the end of it in 1999, I found myself in the privileged position of presenting my findings and theories to David Walker, Elizabeth Beaton and Ian Shepherd. Contained within my various recommendations was the idea of 'recording' as being a 'potential solution to a national Buildings-at-Risk problem'. Sandy would have been proud of me!

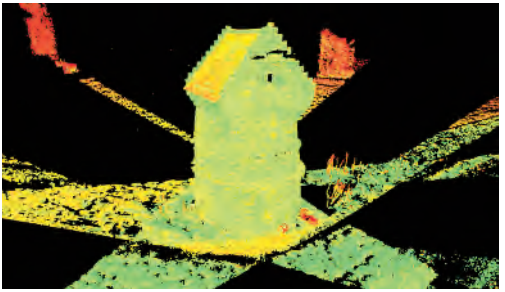
Two years later, Elizabeth and I launched the SVBWG 'Doocots of Scotland' national recording project, with Elizabeth co-ordinating the national campaign and me establishing a series template. *Doocots of Scotland: Moray* was published in 2004 and as well as containing new insight, became the first accessible book on the subject in two and a half decades.[2] Since then, 'Doocots of Scotland' has successfully covered Lanarkshire, East Lothian, the Highlands and Islands, and the Borders.[3] They have also been itemised into a useful national gazetteer by Ian Temple, which brings Niven Robertson's work in the late 1950s to life.[4]

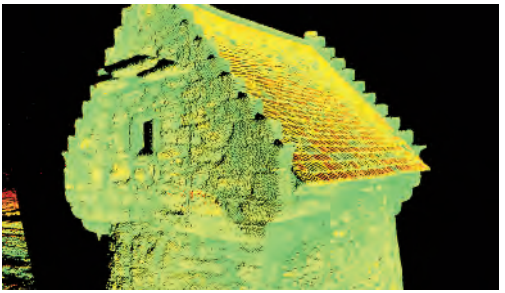
After an initial spurt, activity in recording Scotland's doocots for booklet publication has presently slowed down, but it continues

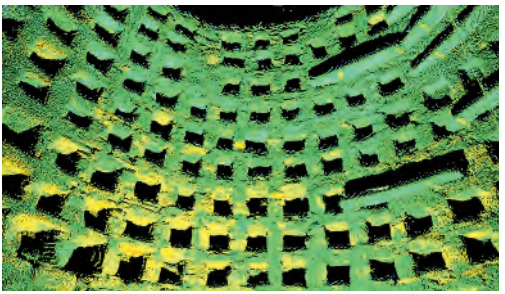
towards its original goal. In Aberdeenshire, staff and architectural technology students at Robert Gordon University (RGU) are trying to survey the many doocots in the north-east with my support as an ongoing effort. Auchmacoy doocot, near Ellon is one such doocot, and was first surveyed by RGU in 2007–8 using the doocot as a pioneering experiment for state-of-the-art scanner technology developed for the oil industry (figs 1–4).[5] Occurring not far from his birthplace, Sandy would likely have been delighted to witness this successful coming together of one of the area's oldest buildings and one of its newest technological products.

This article, which individually records and documents Auchmacoy doocot, is, therefore, dedicated to Sandy and is a tribute to all that he campaigned for. Hopefully, it is also an article that will encourage some of its readers to take up the challenge and record a doocot, or two, of their own.

Figure 1. The south-west elevation of Auchmacoy doocot, showing Dr Jonathan Scott from RGU carrying out a survey in 2007 with the aid of a 3D laser scanner. (Photo by Professor Richard Laing, RGU, reproduced with permission)







Figures 2, 3 and 4. Laser scan images of the exterior and interior of Achmacoy doocot, from the RGU survey. (Images by Dr Jonathan Scott, RGU, reproduced with permission)

Auchmacoy doocot

Auchmacoy doocot is found on the historic Auchmacoy Estate, near Ellon, in Aberdeenshire, on the north side of the Ythan River and only about one mile upstream of its North Sea estuary. Described by Grant Peterkin in his *Scottish Dovecotes* booklet (1980) as the 'finest dovecot in Aberdeenshire',[6] the doocot is a striking example of a modified 'beehive'-type structure associated with a now-lost fortified house, and stands today as proud testimony to the design and construction skills of its sixteenth-century makers.

Estate background

Auchmacoy was a seat of the Earls of Buchan since the time of a Robert Bruce charter in 1318, and they held their own court at Ellon during the fourteenth century.[7] In 1503, Andrew Buchan gained regal recognition of his nobility status when granted a barony charter by James IV. In 1598, in further acknowledgement of loyalty to the king, James VI granted a freehold charter to seventh laird Alexander Buchan, thus extending exclusive rights to agricultural production.[8] Alexander acquired additional land from the Earl of Errol, and the Buchans were clearly a family of status and prosperity throughout the sixteenth century. Timothy Pont's map of Buchan *c.*1583 shows a fortified house occupying a sizeable space of land between two tributaries on the north side of the Ythan mouth. The records of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) refer to this as the 'Old House of Achmacoy' (Grid Ref NJ 991 308) and indicate the existence of an early house just to the south-east of the doocot. RCAHMS records and the Aberdeenshire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) both document a 'pre-reformation Chapel' building (Grid Ref NJ 9908 3147) very close to the doocot site (Grid Ref NJ 9897 3141), whose foundations were 'still visible in the late 18th century',[9] and there were apparently two chapels on the estate for use by the Buchans.[10]

Robert Gordon's Map of North-East Scotland *c.*1640 shows 'Achmacoy' as a seat near the confluence of the 'Burn of Achmacoy' and the Ythan, and also near to the site of 'Abbotshall'. However, in 1633, Charles I diminished the Estate's income when he repealed Robert Buchan's patent for pearl fishing rights in the Ythan River. Nevertheless, the Buchans remained staunch royalists and supporters of the House of Stuart and James Buchan stood against the uprising of the presbyterian Covenanters in 1644.[11] As a consequence of James's loyalty to the king, he 'incurred much injury to his estate' during this period of Civil War.[12] In 1669, Alexander Buchan became a priest and gave up the estate to younger brother James.[13]

In the eighteenth century, the Buchans of Auchmacoy were

Figure 5. Extract from the Ordnance Survey, six-inch to the mile / 1:10,560 (not reproduced to scale), First Edition map (Aberdeenshire, Sheet XXXIX, surveyed 1867, published 1871), showing the 'Dove Cot' in open ground at the north-west corner of the square formed by the landscaped policies around the 'new' house. The original 'Old House of Achmacoy' is thought to have been nearer to the doocot, to the south-east of the 'Site of Chapel'. (Reproduced by permission of the National Library of Scotland)

still recognised as chiefs of the area, and Roy's Military Map *c*.1750 shows a large rectangular estate facing south towards the Ythan. However, by the time of Robertson's topographical map of Aberdeen, Banff and Kincardine, in 1822, the new late-eighteenth-century 'Auchmacoy House' (i.e. no longer a 'fortification') was surrounded by a circular area of woodland. To the north-west was Ducket-Tack Farm, the name an obvious reference to the historic doocot nearby.

The second Auchmacoy House, *c*.1770 – thought to now form part of the Factor's Office – was replaced by the present mansion for the fourteenth laird, James Buchan, to the design of Edinburgh architect William Burn, in 1833.[14]

Previous records

Auchmacoy doocot sits proudly in an open field on the upper level of hillside that contours down to the south of the mouth of the Ythan River.[15] It was described by Niven Robertson, following his survey in 1957, as having a 'large barrel-shaped lower part surmounted by a rectangular portion with a ridge-roof and crow stepped gables'.[16] Robertson's description, along with the dating 1638, has subsequently been adopted and repeated in the Scottish Development Department list (1960), the Historic Scotland Listing (1971), Grant Peterkin's booklet (1980), the Aberdeenshire SMR (NJ93SE0025), and the RCAHMS records (NJ93SE 45.02).

Doocot survey

The doocot is circular in plan form, some 4 metres (13 feet) in diameter, with a small door measuring approximately 1,400 by 650 millimetres (55 by 25½ inches) at ground level facing in the general direction of the old fortified house and chapel (refer to estate history above). The doorway retains evidence of the early iron hinges and locking device of its former door, which may have been of solid oak or even iron yett design (fig.7). The lower part of the doocot, described by Peterkin as 'tun-bellied',[17] has three distinct stone-built stages, each some 850 millimetres (33½ inches) thick, which are marked by two angled stone perimeter ledges as each stage curves increasingly towards the

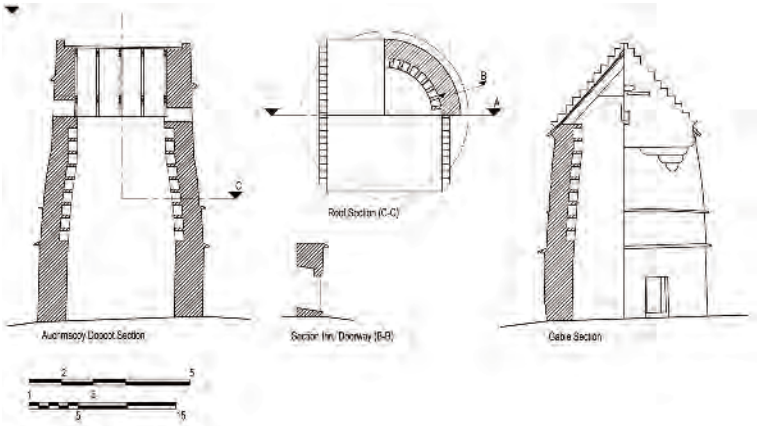


Figure 6. Sections of Auchmacoy doocot. (Drawings by Dr Jonathan Scott, RGU, reproduced with permission)

Figure 7. The doorway in the north side of the doocot, showing remnants of iron hinges and a locking device. (Photo by Professor Richard Laing, RGU, reproduced with permission)

centre. In its original form, the doocot would have curved to a roof with an opening at its centre known as an 'oculus', which would have provided the doos with a landing area, access and egress, and ventilation. This concept has its origins in the designs of Roman *columbaria* and, following the Norman invasion, its adaption for the Scottish environment meant that the stone 'beehive' doocot became prevalent in ecclesiastical and noble circles from the thirteenth to early seventeenth centuries.

Despite superstitions surrounding doocots – some believed that demolishing a doocot would bring bad luck – many beehive structures were demolished and replaced by more fashionable solutions, such as the 'lectern', 'conical' or 'octagonal' designs. However, in the case of Auchmacoy, as in the case of the likes of Phantassie or Drylawhill in East Lothian, it was cleverly adapted by altering its upper level to incorporate a pitched roof in Scots baronial style, which was ingeniously corbelled out at its corners to integrate the rectangular form with the circle below. The result is an overall design that Peterkin describes as 'eccentric',[18] and it is certainly an unusual and distinctive building in the rural landscape. In its days as a food factory for the Buchan lairds and their guests, the structure was likely even more striking with a limewashed harl coating, and this would have emphasised its stone dressings and crowstep form. Even without its lime coating, and aside from some signs of movement cracks on the southerly aspect, the doocot is still in fine condition.

When newly constructed, the seventeenth-century pitched roof may have had a stone, or sizeable slates as its final covering, but the roof structure was entirely reconstructed in the late twentieth century using five A-frame factory-sawn trusses and regular slates on 125-by-25-millimetre (5-by-1-inch) sarking boards. The two gables of the later roof are constructed using pinned split boulder rubble some 500 millimetres (20 inches) thick, with granite margins and crowsteps. Each gable has a single aperture measuring approximately 400 by 300 millimetres (16 by 12 inches), with three stepped stone projecting ledges above them (fig.8).

Internally, the doocot is, like most beehive structures that

Figure 8. The south elevation of Auchmacoy doocot, showing an entrance aperture in the gable. (Photo by Professor Richard Laing, RGU, reproduced with permission)

retain their nest boxes, an impressive sight. Concentric rings of around thirty stone boxes stack up on each other and elegantly taper in towards the ceiling (see fig.4). Originally entering and leaving the doocot from a central hole in the beehive's top, birds from the mid-seventeenth century onwards came and went through the upper section's gables, which provided a much safer and drier solution than the central hole. The adult birds were free to go as they pleased, but the juvenile birds were mostly harvested for the table just before being able to fly. Access to collect these squabs would have been done by makeshift scaffolding within the cote, or by a more ingenious revolving central ladder (sometimes known as a 'potence'), and most likely conducted by young, agile males. There are almost 300 intact nest boxes, some of which still have projecting wooden ledges fixed with metal brackets to help

the adult birds alight and take off. The lime-plastered sandstone boxes – each 250 millimetres (10 inches) in width, and 300 millimetres (12 inches) in height and depth – begin at head height above the floor level and rise all way to the wall head, and also into the roof's gable walls (which are less thick than the main circular walling). Whilst it is common to find nest boxes raised above the floor level to allow for the accumulation of guano, the example at Auchmacoy, with the ability of standing full height below the boxes, suggests the possibility of a former timber floor with a ground-floor store, but this is unclear.

Dating

Without firm records to call upon, it is speculative to consider when the doocot was first built and also when it went out of use. Linking the architectural evidence with the historical background, it appears that it was first built during the sixteenth century at a time when the Alexanders Buchan were prosperous, and it would make some sense for the doocots to connect with either of the royal barony charters in that century (see 'Estate background' above, pp 115–17). The alteration of the roof almost certainly occurred in the 1630s and, if so, was executed by eighth laird James Buchan and his wife Margaret Seton.[19] Both RCAHMS (NJ93SE 45.02) and the Aberdeenshire SMR (NJ93SE0025) cite the doocot as 'dated 1638' and take reference from Niven Robertson's typescript on old dovecots,[20] and this would also coincide with the Auchmacoy still enjoying prosperous conditions just before the Civil War.

Since pigeon meat was still being consumed in the eighteenth century, the doocot probably still functioned when the 'Old House' was demolished and a new one built. When this house was also replaced in 1833, the 'old dovecot' was most likely becoming more of an estate antiquity than a functioning food larder.

Legacy

Unlike many other private owners, the Auchmacoy Estate has cared responsibly for its doocot down the years, and the Category A-listed building remains in the 'good condition' that Niven Robertson noted in the late 1950s.[21] Whilst the doocot is not open

to the public, it is visible from the road, and is in view and accessible to estate visitors, by appointment.

Although no longer functioning as a farm building, the doocot is the lone survivor on the estate of its historical beginnings and, as such, retains considerable local significance. By conforming to type, the beehive structure exemplifies the Scottish building tradition of the period. Its roof alteration provides a local twist to the national prototype and, by creating an idiosyncrasy, gives deeper meaning and intrigue.

The capturing of the doocot by RGU using the latest scanning technology22 ensures that, in the documentary form at least, Auchmacoy Doocot will survive for many generations to come.

Acknowledgements

This article has been made possible by the co-operation of the Auchmacoy Estate, and the assiduous survey work conducted by Professor Richard Laing and Dr Jonathan Scott of RGU. The information contained within has been facilitated by information gleaned from staff at Ellon Library, Aberdeenshire Council, RCAHMS and the NLS. Aside from Sandy Fenton, the article also owes particular inspiration to the late Ian Shepherd.

Notes

1 E Beaton, *Doocots of Moray*, Moray Field Club, Elgin, 1978; T Buxbaum, *Scottish Doocots*, Shire Album 190, Princes Risborough, 1987.

2 N Brown, *Doocots of Scotland: Moray*, SVBWG, 2004.

3 M Dunn, *Doocots of Scotland: Lanarkshire*, SVBWG, 2006; M Dunn and D Elder, *Doocots of Scotland: East Lothian*, SVBWG, 2008; E. Beaton, *Doocots of Scotland: Highlands, Orkney and Shetland*, SVBWG, 2009; M Dunn, *Doocots of Scotland: Scottish Borders*, SVBWG, 2013.

4 I Temple, 'Gazetteer of Scottish dovecots', unpublished typescript, SVBWG, 2005; A N Robertson, 'Old dovecots of Scotland', unpublished typescript, Edinburgh Library, 1960, pp 355–7.

[5] Brown *et al.*, 'Doocots of Aberdeenshire: application of 3D scanning technology in built heritage', *Journal of Building Appraisal*, vol.4, no.4 (2009), pp 247–54; M R Freeman, 'Improvements in the accuracy of digital recording of historic buildings, using doocots as an exemplar', unpublished dissertation for CIATT Technical Award, RGU, Aberdeen, 2013.

[6] G Peterkin, *Scottish Dovecotes*, Culross and Sons, Coupar Angus, 1980, pp 20–21.

[7] Revd Charles McPherson, 'Ellon District: Logie-Buchan', *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland,* vol.VII: *The County of Aberdeen*, 1960, pp 467–71 (p.467).

[8] Revd G Cruden, 'Logie-Buchan', *The New Statistical Account of Scotland*, vol.XII: *The County of Aberdeen*, 1834–45, p.423.

[9] RCAHMS Canmore database, www.canmore.rcahms.gov.uk.

[10] The old chapels are thought to be next to the doocot and the old yard. Source: 'View of Diocese of Aberdeen', cited in Revd J Pratt,. 'Logie-Buchan', Revd F Scott (ed.), *The Vale of Ythan*, Free Press, Aberdeen, 1895, pp 41–51 (p.46).

[11] Revd Mr W Paterson, 'Parish of Logie-Buchan', *The Statistical Account of Scotland*, vol.IV: *The County of Aberdeen*, 1791–9, p.423.

[12] Revd W Temple, *The Thanage of Fermartyn*, D Wyllie & Son, Aberdeen, 1894, p.89.

[13] *Third Statistical Account*, *op.cit.*, p.467.

[14] I Shepherd, *Gordon: An illustrated Architectural Guide*, RIAS, Edinburgh, 1994, p.71; N Bogdan & I. Bryce, 'Castles, manors and "town houses" survey', *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland*, 1991, p.29. See also First Edition Ordnance Survey map, Aberdeenshire sheet XXXIX, 1871 (fig.5 of this article).

[15] Freeman, *op.cit.*, notes that the open exposure of the doocot makes it a good case study for using 360-degree laser scanning and/or photogrammetry technology.

[16] Robertson, *op.cit.*, p.355.

[17] Peterkin, *op.cit.*, p.21.

[18] Ibid.

[19] A and H Taylor (eds), *Valuation of County of Aberdeen in 1667*, Third Spalding Club, Aberdeen, 1883.

[20] Robertson, *op.cit.*.

[21] Historic Scotland, Listing No.9089, 1971.

[22] Staff and students conducted a study exploring the potential for using a high-definition 3D scanner to improve the efficiency of architectural recording and design in existing environments. The study used examples from the built heritage to explore how the technology, and associated software, can be used to gather information about the surface and appearance of structures, and, moreover, how this can then be utilised both to rapidly develop a record of the existing situation and to provide a permanent and accurate (to 2 millimetres (almost $^{1}/_{16}$ inch)) 3D model to be used for reference purposes in design and analysis.

THE NORTHERN ISLES: TRADITION AND RENOVATION

Jocelyn Rendall

In his introduction to *Scottish Country Life*, Sandy Fenton writes that he has chosen his illustrations to show people wherever possible. 'Even when posed […] people tell us much about themselves through the way they stand, the tilt of their bonnets, the thumb in the galluses […] .'[1] It is, I think, very characteristic of this remarkable man that he emphasises from the beginning that his book is not just about the buildings and tools and techniques of the countryside but about the people who made and lived in and used them, 'their homes, their pastimes, their beliefs, their social and economic interactions'.[2] His astounding scholarship is infused with a deep sympathy for the people who inhabited the Scottish countryside that he loved, for the 'age-old inbuilt rhythms of life'[3] and for the disruption and estrangement that were suffered when these were broken.

When Sandy was recording in Orkney and Shetland in the 1960s and 1970s he was aware of the urgency of his task, but he was in time to describe a traditional way of life still being lived. Since then, almost every aspect of the farming he described in *The Northern Isles* (published in 1978) has vanished into history. Although Orkney's landscape is still very much one of fertile and productive farmland, the size of the farms has increased dramatically and, in inverse proportion, the number of people engaged in farming. While this trend is just as evident in the North Isles, traditional buildings, techniques and dialect have tended to survive a little longer there than on Mainland and in the South Isles, especially in North Ronaldsay and Papa Westray (Papay), the two smallest and most northerly islands.

From physical and literary evidence, we know that Orkney buildings changed little over thousands of years. The rocky shores are easily quarried by hammering wedges into the seams, the slabs

*Figures 1 and 2. Slots in doorjambs at the Knap of Howar, Papay (*c.*3800* BC*) and at Micklegarth, Papay (*c.*1800) to hold a bar for bolting the door.*

Figure 3. Bulsteens *in a byre at Mayback, Papay, 19th century.*

splitting neatly into large flagstones for flooring, roofing or partitions. This material allowed Neolithic builders to develop architectural traditions that were hard to improve on. The aumbry in a wall at the 6,000-year-old farmstead, the Knap of Howar, on Papay, or the slots in the doorjambs to accommodate a bar to bolt the door (figs 1 and 2), remained standard house features, as the vertical flags partitioning neolithic 'stalled' burial cairns performed the same function as the *bulsteens* (or bulstanes) separating beasts in a byre (fig 3). Until recently it was thought that stone roofing slates were relatively modern, only becoming common in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and then only on town houses and lairds' homes. However, the excavations at the Ness of Brodgar have discovered that one of the buildings at this huge ceremonial site was at least partially roofed with rectangular stone slates 5,500 years ago!

Figure 4. The houses at the Knap of Howar on Papay have been dated to 3800 BC. The site has been dug into the midden of an earlier settlement, so only the roofs would have been visible.

The site of the farmstead at the Knap was scooped out of the midden of an earlier settlement, so that the houses are mostly underground, and invisible until you find yourself standing upon their walls (fig.4). It is likely that this method of maximising shelter and insulation continued for a very long time. Fenton quotes Richard James who visited Orkney in the early seventeenth century and described the houses as built underground, with only the heather-covered roof visible, and a barrel or similar serving as a smoke-hole for the central hearth.[4] The closest surviving parallels I have seen are in North Rona, where the labyrinths of house, byre and barn are approached down low winding intramural passages – quite unlike Hebridean 'black houses'. The geologist John Macculloch visited the island in 1815 and spoke to the shepherd whose family were then the only inhabitants:

> I had not observed that our conference was held on the top of the house; roof it could not be called. The whole spot seemed to consist of an accumulation of turf stacks, and the lowest of these … was the house itself … the entrance … was an irregular hole, about four feet [1.2 metres] high, surrounded by turf; and, on entering it … we found a long tortuous passage, somewhat resembling the gallery of a mine, but without a door, which conducted us into the penetralia of this cavern.[5]

I imagine that both the Knap and the houses which James saw may have looked rather similar.

Walter Traill Dennison wrote that, well into the nineteenth century, there were houses in Sanday dug into a south-facing bank, with the north wall just one skin of stone deep. The gables were often built of turf and the side walls at most 5 feet [1.5 metres] high, and without windows, the only openings being a door closed with a straw mat and a lum-hole for the smoke. He noted that a great improvement was the gradual replacement of the neuk bed – an earth-floored alcove built either in the thickness of the wall or as a small outshot – by the wooden box bed. In 1847 he took shelter in a house measuring 14 by 12 feet [4.3 by 3.7 metres], home to a cottar and his wife and six children who all slept in the one bed 5 feet 8 inches [1.7 metres] long by 3 feet 10 inches [1.2 metres] broad!

> The wife and I lie wi' our heeds at the head o' the bed, the twa eldest lie wi' their heads at the foot o' the bed, the peerie t'ing – that is the baby – lies i' his mither's bosom, the ain next the peerie t'ing lies i'mine, and the middle twa lie on a shelf in the foot o' the bed, over the heads o' the eldest twa. An' truth I can tell you we are no' cauld gin I close the bed doors.[6]

In two-roomed houses, box beds back to back formed the only partition between rooms.

One of the earliest descriptions of Orcadian houses appears in Richard Hakluyt's account of Martin Frobisher's second expedition

Figure 5. When houses were so small, there was little room for moveable furniture, even if it could be afforded. One solution was the range, a plate-rack designed to be suspended between two roof couples.

Figure 6. Mayback, Papay. Although not technically 'longhouses', Papay houses certainly tended to be long as the original one-room home was extended by another room when a son or daughter married. In 1851 Mayback was home to 14 people in three houses. Another North Isles characteristic can be seen in this photo: the house sits on a prominent 'farm mound', the midden accumulated by many generations building on the same site.

to find the north-west passage to Cathay, which landed on Orkney in 1577:

> Their houses are verie simply buylded with pebble stone, without any chimneys, the fire being made in the middest thereof. The good man, wife, children and other of their familie, eate and sleepe on the one side of the house, and their cattell on the other, very beastly and rudely, in respect of civilitie. They are destitute of wood, their fire is turffes and Cowe shardes.[7]

The oldest farmhouses surviving in Orkney could all fit this description. Mossetter in Rendall, where people and cows shared the same door, a low curved wall directing the cows to turn into the byre rather than the scullery, was lived in until 1920,[8] but it is not clear when the 'longhouse' became the standard plan. It is quite different from any of the prehistoric buildings that have been

excavated in Orkney, and Fenton has pointed out that is not likely to have been a Norse introduction: the 'Viking longhouse' was actually a feature of parts of Scotland and England and Wales but with no long tradition in Scandinavia or its Greenland and Iceland colonies.[9] (I found this fact surprising, as anyone who has battled from house to byre through an Orkney winter gale can appreciate the convenience of having one's cows under the same roof!)

When the Orkney ministers wrote their reports for the *Statistical Account of Scotland* (known as the 'Old Statistical Account' and referred to hereafter as 'OSA') in the 1790s, the accommodation of people and cattle under one roof was still too common to deserve comment, though the Revd George Barry contrasts the 'Improvements' brought about by the current laird with the past miserable living conditions of the Shapinsay people in 'miserable hovels … which were not fit to shelter from the rigours of the climate a few ragged inhabitants, dirty through indolence, lean with hunger and torpid by despair.'[10] However, there is evidence that Orcadians often emerged from their 'hovels' far from ragged. The extra cash that was entering the economy at this time through the many men working in Hudson's Bay, or at the whaling, was allowing their families to become very fashion conscious. In his entry for the OSA, the Revd George Low conjures a delightful image of his congregation wending their way between reek-filled homes and dilapidated kirk in their Sunday best: 'The women, on Sundays or holidays, come out neatly dressed in calicoes, calimancoes, or neat stuffs, with grey or brown cloaks, scarlet cloaks and a great number of beautiful scarlet plaids.'[11] I am reminded of the immaculately dressed children that emerge from shanty shacks or huts in India or Africa today.

More evidence of the discrepancy between living conditions and dress comes in an inventory of the possessions of Margaret Vedder who died in Holm in 1788. A poor widow who paid an annual rent of two shillings and sixpence for her two-room house with a central hearth, and struggled to pay her debts, she left few items of furniture but an astonishing collection of clothes: seven gowns and five petticoats, and a scarlet plaid and a brown cloak,

which were valued at £4 4s 4d. As Sheena Wenham remarks in an article on Vedder's possessions: 'The proceeds from the sale of this flamboyant wardrobe would have paid Margaret Vedder's rent and bere multures for a quarter of a century, a second hand value which would seem inflated even to the customer of a Paris fashion house.'[12]

The next generation of ministers, who wrote the *New Statistical Account of Scotland* (NSA) in 1841, were a much more prim and censorious bunch than the writers of the OSA. Invariably, they commented critically on their parishioners' living conditions in windowless, chimneyless, smokey and sooty houses, where 'cows, calves, pigs, geese, and fowls share the benefit of the peat fire, placed on the middle of the floor for the accommodation of all'.[13] The Revd Adam White adds: 'Yet the present form of houses [in North Ronaldsay] is much superior to what was possessed by the last generation,'[14] presumably because they were now stone, rather than turf-built, but in many ways little had changed since Frobisher's visit. 'Cowe shardes' were still a principal source of fuel in North Ronaldsay ('cow-dung converted into what are called scons,' sniffed White[15]), as they remained well into the twentieth century. There was little alternative, for the nearest peats were in Eday, 24 kilometres (15 miles) distant. (The author was shown a 'scone house' in North Ronaldsay in the 1990s, and John Rendall of Papa Westray recalled the schoolchildren collecting 'scones' and drying them in Papa Westray in the 1930s.[16]) Cow dung was also used for plastering interior walls (as it is today in, for example, Nepal).

In 1841, the standard roofing material everywhere in Orkney was straw or heather thatch.[17] Paul Newman has described in detail in this journal the technique of thatching with a loose layer of straw or heather sandwiched between two layers of simmens, twisted straw rope.[18] When Newman and a team of conservation volunteers rethatched three small outbuildings at Glen in Rackwick they consumed as many as 35 clews (3 kilometres, or nearly 2 miles) of simmens, and a lorry load of sheaves. The quantity of straw used in this type of thatch (which required to

Figure 7. 'Old Ina's', Mayback, Papay. Often the upper halves of flagstone roofs were covered with turf or simmens for insulation and to protect the flags from frost. Here the simmens are anchored in place by bendlin stanes. (Author's collection)

be renewed virtually every year) is astonishing when one considers that throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and frequently in the nineteenth, bad weather led to repeated disastrous harvests and serious shortage of food for man and beasts. The records and letters of the times (when winter fodder crops like neeps were still unknown) are a depressing catalogue of dying animals and starvation. Even the lairds were often desperate to find fodder for their animals at any price. In January 1786 Thomas Balfour wrote to William Watt: 'I will give Money, Bent, Iron or Salt for Straw deliverable in Kirkwall … I have two Horses and two Cows starving for want of it.'[19] Food for thought, when one looks at a straw-thatched roof.

Shortly after the NSA was compiled, the agricultural boom years of the mid-nineeteenth century did bring a huge increase in income to estates, leading to higher wages for labourers and an improvement in living conditions. When the crofters of Papay gave their evidence to the Crofters Commission in 1888, many of them reported that they had built new homes and outbuildings in the course of the last forty years or so, often with the laird providing materials such as glass and lime.[20] As early as 1822, Samuel Hibbert noted in his *Description of the Shetland Islands* – with an irony seemingly directed at vernacular building enthusiasts – the changes happening in Shetland homes: '[T]he antiquary will be often chagrined in observing such provoking modern improvement as slate roofs, regular windows, and detached cow-houses, all of which have been introduced into the country by that

Figure 8. Jeremiah and Isabel Seatter, 1890s, at Hundland, Papay, the farm they created from scratch. In 1888 they reported to the Crofters Commission that they had broken in their 25 acres [10 hectares] of arable land from the hill and built all the houses. Poverty and land-hunger drove their son Robert, and many others from the island, to emigrate to New Zealand or Canada to find work. (Author's collection)

foe to archaeological sources of pleasure, ever stimulating to innovation, – a sense and desire of increased comfort.'[21] However, modern improvement did not happen uniformly. A house survives with a central hearth on Mainland (now the Kirbuster Farm Museum) that was inhabited into the 1950s, and the last house on Papay where the kitchen connected directly with the byre was not modified until the 1960s. New houses were being roofed with stone slates in Papay in the nineteenth century, but others remained roofed with flags, or thatch and flags, well into the twentieth.

Figure 9. Re-roofing Bayview with flagstones, Papay, 1998. Before tractor power was available, it must have been a laborious process heaving the massive flagstones onto a roof; sometimes they were so large that the whole pitch was covered with a single slab. It is still a heavy job and demands considerable skill.

The enormously labour-intensive processes of growing, harvesting, storing, drying, threshing and milling grain dictated the range of outbuildings even on the smallest farm. The bottle-shaped drying kiln on the gable end of a barn is easily recognised, but there was a great diversity in kiln designs. I found at least seven distinct shapes of kiln in Westray, and sometimes kilns were built entirely within the barn walls and so invisible from the outside. Threshing engines started to appear on some large Orkney farms in the 1820s (fig.10), but the flail was not replaced by the mill until much later than this on small ones, where hand-turned mills came into use from the 1850s. There were also wind-, water- and horse-powered threshing mills, with significant regional variation in the technology adopted. 'Windygear' mills (fig.11) were very common in Papay and Westray, and the stone piers which housed the gearing at the back of the barn often survive (fig.12), but they had a very restricted distribution. Graham J Douglas and Miles K Oglethorpe recorded them only in the North Isles, where they were in use until the 1940s: six in Papay (there were at least eleven, probably more), four in Westray and two in Sanday. I recorded one in Eday and none at all in North Ronaldsay, where I was informed that almost every farm had a mill-court, an uncovered circular course for the one or two horses powering the mill in the adjacent barn. (One was well preserved at Sangar in the 1990s.) Windygear mills were gradually supplanted by petrol engines from the 1920s

Figure 10. A horse-powered threshing machine was installed in a circular mill-tramp at Holland, Papay by 1820. The conical roof was reslated in 1994: here John Gray and Alistair Hourston fix the last slates, using galvanised nails rather than the wooden pegs that would originally have been employed.

Figure 11. The Rendall family at Cuppin, Papay, with the sails on the windygear mill, 1940s. (Author's collection)

Figure 12. The characteristic stone pillars at the back of the barn are evidence of a windygear mill, here well preserved at Sangar in Westray.

onwards,[22] an innovation that must have contributed to domestic harmony as well as saving labour, for it was the wife's job to hold the brake on the mill inside the barn while her man was standing on the roof tying on the canvas sails – which whirled into motion the moment the brake was released.

Most of Orkney has been hard-hit by a kit-house epidemic, and few traditional buildings remain except as ruins or outhouses. I feel sure that Sandy Fenton would have been pleased to see the old houses in Papay that have recently been renovated as homes (figs 13 and 14), their traditional features such as decorative tapered overseamers on flagstone roofs carefully restored, and to know that traditional building and roofing techniques are alive and well.

Figure 13. Amanda Manouvrier and her children at North Via, Papay. Where the flagstones were not intended to be covered, the overseamers were often tapered to create a neat and decorative effect characteristic of Westray and Papay buildings.

Figure 14. Paul Griffiths and Marie Lewis restored the derelict house Breckaskaill in 2009. The wooden 'spoots' or 'rhones' are a traditional feature Paul copied from old Papay houses.

Notes

1 A Fenton, *Country Life in Scotland: Our Rural Past*, Edinburgh, 1987, p.6.

2 A Fenton, *The Shape of the Past 1: Essays in Scottish Ethnology*, Edinburgh, 1985, p.24.

3 Fenton, *Country Life in Scotland*, *op.cit.*, p.1.

4 R James, *Description of Shetland, Orkney etc*, 1592–1638, quoted in A Fenton, *The Northern Isles*, Edinburgh, 1978, p.141.

5 Dr John Macculloch, quoted in R Atkinson, *Island Going*, Edinburgh, 1995, p.143.

6 W T Dennison, *Remarks on the Agricultural Classes in the North Isles of Orkney* (report for the Crofters Commission), 1884, reproduced in *Proceedings of the Orkney Antiquarian Society*, vol.XI, 1933, p.54.

7 R Hakluyt, *Voyages and Discoveries* [1552?–1616], Penguin edition edited and abridged by J Beeching, Harmondsworth, 1972, pp 188–9.

8 Fenton, *The Northern Isles*, *op.cit.*, pp 118–21.

9 Ibid. pp 113–14.

10 Revd George Barry in OSA = *The Statistical Account of Scotland*, reprinted in J S Clouston, *The Orkney Parishes, containing the Statistical Account of Orkney 1795–1798*, Kirkwall, 1928, p.358.

11 Revd G Low, 'United Parishes of Birsay and Harray', in OSA, *op.cit.*, p.159.

12 S Wenham, 'Margaret Vedder, Orkney 1788: her household goods and body clothes', *Review of Scottish Culture*, vol.10 (1996–7), pp 128–31.

13 Revd C Clouston, 'Parish of Sandwick', in NSA = *New Statistical Account; The Statistical Account of the Orkney Islands by the Ministers of the Respective Parishes*, Edinburgh, 1842, pp 58–9.

14 Revd A White, 'Parish of North Ronaldsay', in NSA, *op.cit.*, pp 107–8.

15 Ibid.

16 J Rendall, 'Scone House at Garso, North Ronaldsay', *Vernacular Building*, vol.20 (1996), p.38.

17 Revd J Smellie, 'Parish of St Andrews', in NSA, *op.cit.*, p.179.

[18] P and A Newman, 'Simmens and strae: thatched roofs in Orkney', *Vernacular Building*, vol.15 (1991), pp 27–40; P and A Newman, 'Roof types in the traditional rural buildings of Orkney', *Vernacular Building*, vol.16 (1991), pp 39–55; P Newman, 'The Crow's Nest, Rackwick, Hoy', *Vernacular Building*, vol.22 (1998), pp 13–18; P Newman, 'Thatch traditions in Orkney farm buildings', *Vernacular Building*, vol.26 (2002), pp 3–12.

[19] E MacGillivray (ed.), 'Letters of Thomas Balfour to William Watt 1784–87', *Orkney Miscellany*, vol.3 (1956), p.71.

[20] W R Mackintosh, *The Orkney Crofters; Their Evidence and Statements*, Kirkwall, 1889.

[21] S A Hibbert, *A Description of the Shetland Islands*, Edinburgh, 1822, p.116.

[22] Fenton, *The Northern Isles*, *op.cit.*, pp 366–9.

SHORTER ARTICLES AND NOTES

Building materials, fixtures and fittings in the collections of National Museums Scotland

When Sandy Fenton came to the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland in 1959 to develop what were then called the Country Life collections, he had an almost blank canvas to fill. Over the next thirty to forty years he and his colleagues collected from all over Scotland and tried to represent all of country life, including its building materials, techniques and traditions.

Today the National Museums hold a unique collection of artefacts relating to buildings and their fixtures and fittings: from bricks, roofing timbers, thatching materials, roofing tiles and slates to doors and locks, windows, hearthstones and internal walls and partitions.

I had hoped to be able to put together an illustrated catalogue of the collections for this issue of *Vernacular Building* and in honour of Sandy's pioneering work, but pressure of my own work has made this impossible. However, I intend to turn my attention to it during 2015 when the collections should be in more accessible storage and can be photographed. It can perhaps be added to the SVBWG website at a later date.

Dorothy Kidd

SVBWG AGM and conference, 3 October 2013

The 2013 conference was held at RCAHMS in Edinburgh on 3 October; it was excellent to see so many members and also new faces. Following the AGM, a series of short presentations by a wide variety of speakers produced a fascinating and highly

successful day. Three speakers focused on particular building types: Malcom Bangor-Jones on pre-Clearance houses in Sutherland; Niall Logan on hearth-entry houses in Stirlingshire; and Eve Boyle on shielings. John G Harrison threw light on the wealth of information in archives that can re-create the vanished vernacular, while Chris McGregor discussed in detail the restoration of Sunnybrae, Pitlochry. Coralie Mills's presentation highlighted the project to gather information on buildings through dendrochronology. Brian Wilkinson and Andrew Nicoll discussed their RCAHMS projects on Britain from Above and Scotland's Places respectively. The final part of the day involved a visit to the RCAHMS Search Room and Print Room, where collections relating to vernacular buildings were highlighted.

Veronica Fraser

CONTRIBUTORS

Malcolm Bangor-Jones is an independent researcher with a particular interest in the northern Highlands.

Nick Brown is an architect and town planner with a PhD in architectural conservation. Having worked in both the public and private sectors across Moray and Aberdeenshire, he now runs his own consultancy practice based in Cullen, Banffshire, specialising in conservation, rural ecological design, small-town regeneration and community development.

Hugh Cheape teaches a postgraduate programme, MSc Cultar Dùthchasach agus Eachdraidh na Gàidhealtachd ('Material Culture and Gàidhealtachd History'), at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, the National Centre for Gaelic Language and Culture. He holds a Research Chair in the University of the Highlands and Islands. The MSc has grown out of a career in the National Museums of Scotland (1974–2007) where he started as Sandy Fenton's Research Assistant.

Catherine Gillies is a museum curator and former journalist who worked for many years in Argyll and Orkney. A chance meeting with the collector Hope MacDougall in Oban in 1996 triggered a career change, and she spent the next sixteen years bringing Hope's collection and the Dunollie heritage site into public access. She now works as a museums and heritage consultant based in Edinburgh, and is researching for a PhD.

John G Harrison is a freelance historian who lives in Stirling. His work has included working with Historic Scotland on the Stirling Castle Palace Project. He has been a member of SVBWG for many years. His particular vernacular interest is in the documentary sources for early modern buildings.

Margaret A Mackay was born in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada and is a graduate of the University of Toronto (BA Hons) and the University of Edinburgh (PhD). Since 1967 she has been associated with the latter's School of Scottish Studies as a postgraduate, research fellow, lecturer and senior lecturer in Scottish Ethnology,

and latterly as its director, director of its archives and of the European Ethnological Research Centre. Since retiring in 2010 she has been an honorary fellow in Celtic and Scottish Studies. She is a long-standing member of SVBWG and recently edited, with the late Sandy Fenton, *An Introduction to Scottish Ethnology* (Edinburgh, 2013), completing the fourteen-volume series which he instigated and for which he was general editor, *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology*.

Jocelyn Rendall lives on Papa Westray, Orkney where she helps her husband run the 400-acre Holland Farm. She has contributed articles to earlier issues of *Vernacular Building* and recorded Orkney doocots for the 'Doocots of Scotland' series with Paul Newman. She has published articles on Orkney history and two books: *A Jar of Seed-Corn: Portrait of an Island Farm* (Kirkwall, 2002) and *Steering the Stone Ships: the Story of Orkney kirks and people* (Edinburgh, 2009).

Gavin Sprott was born in Dundee in 1943. Having 'learned nothing at school', he worked on the railways, at a sawmill and in various other jobs before being educated at Edinburgh University, where he studied History and Literature. He spent the following years enjoyably employed in the Country Life Section of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, which became part of National Museums Scotland. The godfather of the National Museum of Rural Life, Kittochside, he has always been interested in hill farming, from childhood experience in Strathardle, Perthshire to helping farmer friends in Galloway.

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 *VB* 38, please contact the Editor, *Vernacular Building*, c/o Veronica Fraser, RCAHMS (address overleaf). 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. Articles for the main section of the journal should normally be between 1,500 and 3,500 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 as digital files; the latter should measure at least 1200 pixels across. Please save text and images as separate files, indicating the suggested position of illustrations through notes in the text.

The journal is currently lacking a Reviews Editor. Any member who would like to volunteer for this role, or indeed submit a book review, should contact Veronica Fraser (address overleaf).

Further information is available at www.svbwg.org.uk

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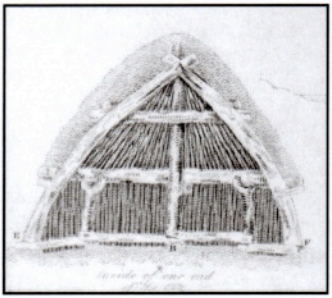

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