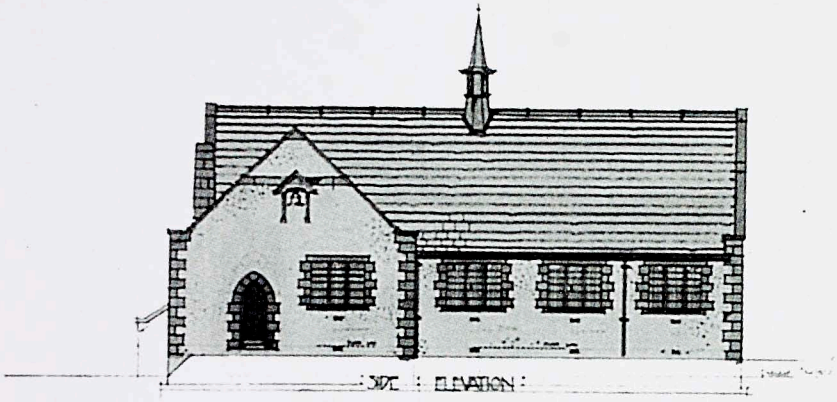
VERNACULAR BUILDING 26

Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group

2002



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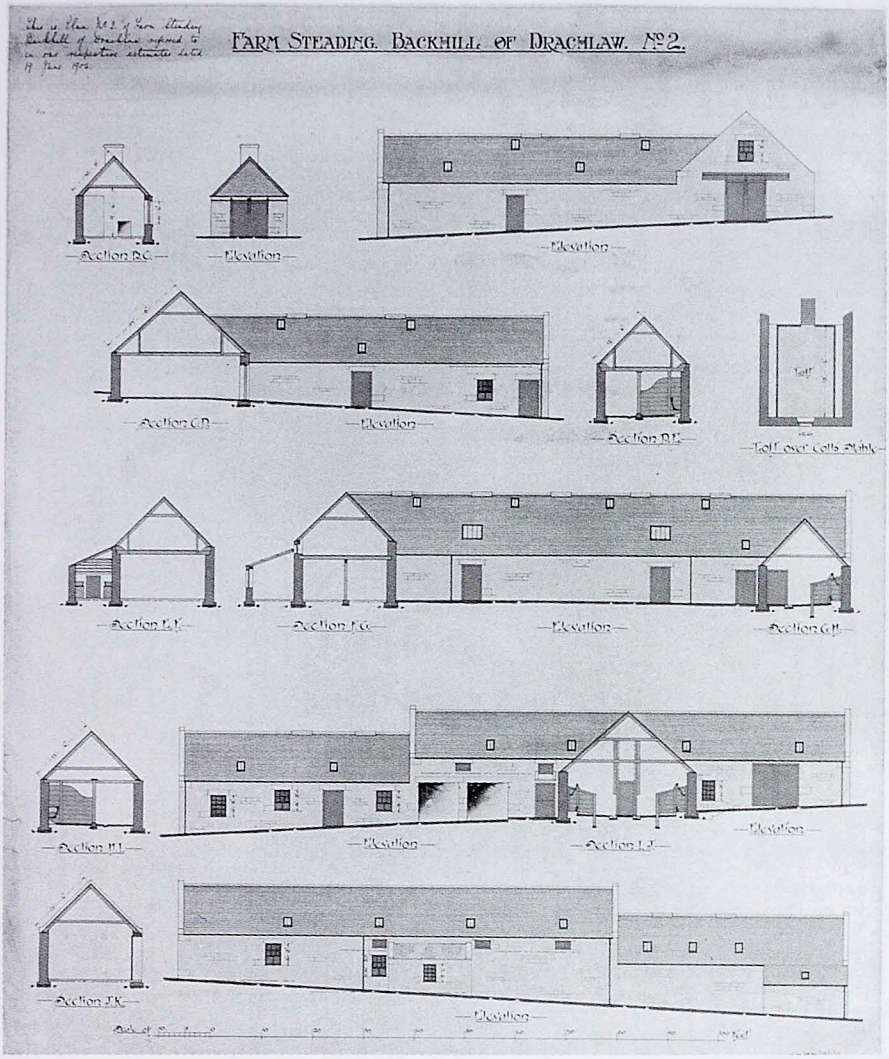
This is Plan No 2 of Farm Steading Backhill of Drachlaw referred to in the inspection estimate dated 19 June 1912

Farm Steading. Backhill of Drachlaw. No 2.



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Cover: Olrig Church, Main Street, Castletown, Highland. Side elevation 1907. Sinclair MacDonald and Son Collection located at the North Highland Archive, Wick. (Crown Copyright: RCAHMS) SC773889 (see pages 15-19).

Frontispiece: Backhill of Drachlaw, Aberdeenshire. Plans, sections and elevations of steading, 1906. Duncan and Munro Collection located at Aberdeen City Archives. (Crown Copyright: RCAHMS) SC675523 (see pages 15-19).

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PREFACE

Welcome to VB26. This issue seems a particularly educational one, with much information to absorb and refer back to. The first paper is a good example: Paul Newman has often talked about 'needled roofs' in papers primarily on other subjects, but his present paper brings the needled roof centre stage. It is the definitive guide to, containing all you ever wanted to know about, such roofs. I think even I could now give a reasonable description of a needled roof, which was certainly not the case before.

The next paper to give me that flash of 'Ah, now I'm glad I read that' was the account of Scottish rural architects' papers which are now being professionally archived under the guidance of the RCAHMS and made accessible near the place of work of the practice concerned. These records are a hugely valuable source of information, and the illustrations to this paper alone show what an important task is being undertaken .

Two papers are concerned with updating. In the first, Elizabeth Beaton reveals how very successful the first year of the doocot recording project has been, with many enthusiasts at work measuring up, photographing, writing descriptions, wading through pigeon poo, all over Scotland. It is hoped to publish the first volume in the doocot series this year. In the second update, Robin Callander would like to know if anyone has seen in Scotland a type of sheep house he saw in Cumbria (which was not included in his earlier VB article on sheep houses). If you have, please write in, with a drawing/rough measurements if possible.

Perhaps the most inspirational paper in this issue is devoted to the restoration of two cottages in Bathgate, by (initially) one man, self-taught and with no funds for the work, who just decided to get on and do it (in his spare time!). It's amazing what you can do when you don't know you can't! Bill Millan found as the work progressed that there was a huge fund of good will in the local community towards his goal; volunteer helpers, free or low-cost building materials (often recycled) and, eventually, funding arrived as the work progressed and the museum now housed in the building is a source of great local pride. I particularly enjoyed editing this paper, as it expanded my vocabulary of useful Scots building terms: dook hole, droved, stugged.. I feel strongly that these words should not be allowed to die out with the stonemasons who once used them - and was very pleased to find lots of dook holes on a stone wall in my own house.

Papers for VB27 (2003) are now invited, and should be sent to me at 10 The Square, Fochabers, Moray IV32 7DF.

Beth Ingpen
Editor Vernacular Building

THATCH TRADITIONS IN ORKNEY FARM BUILDINGS

Paul Newman

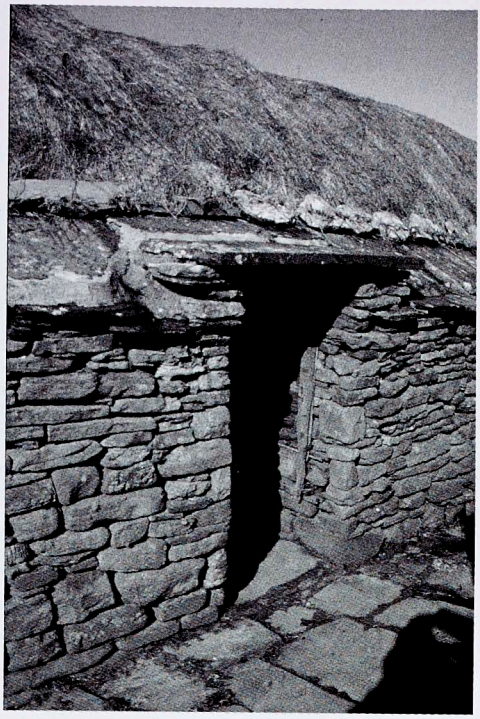
These cottages are generally built with stones and clay, or stones and sods, and covered almost every year with a little fresh straw, very ill applied. Such buildings have often thatch secured by stones suspended on ropes of straw, and hanging on or over the eves of the buildings, which eves are usually supplied with broad flags or slates, resting on the sidewalls, to carry off the rain water as it drops from the thatch. John Shirreff 1814

The old houses are roofed with straw or heath, which is twisted into a rope, locally known as 'simmons'. These 'simmons' are stretched in close parallel lines across the roof from eave to eave; and when the whole roof has been covered in this way, some loose straw is put over all, which is bound down by a second layer of 'simmons'; and alternate layers of straw and simmons are put on until it is considered that the roof is complete. The outer or last row of simmons is weighted down by having long and heavy flagstones placed in the folds of the ropes immediately above the eaves. These flags prevent the thatch from being carried away by the wind. Robert Oliphant Pringle 1874

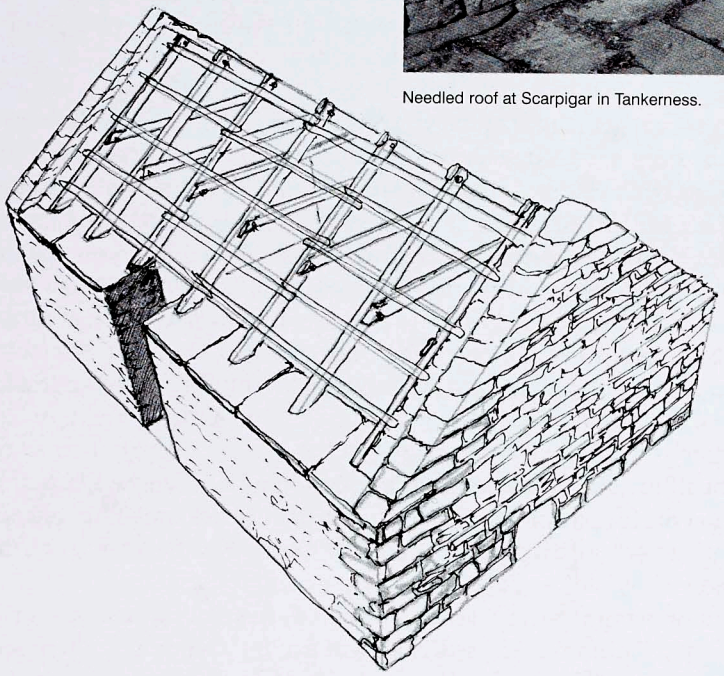
It is now 10 years since the first article on Orkney thatch appeared in Vernacular Building 15. In that article the technique of creating a *needled* thatched roof was described with particular reference to the house at Gimps, a farm in South Ronaldsay. Later a detailed analysis of a sample of thatch taken from the Gimps roof was carried out by Headland Archaeology for Historic Scotland, as reported in *The Archaeology of Scottish Thatch* published by Historic Scotland in 1998. So Gimps has become a significant building in the written record of Orcadian and perhaps Scottish vernacular building. The building itself, like other remaining examples of buildings with needled thatch, has fared badly in the last decade, with little of the thatched roof now left.

In the VB 15 article, the description of Orcadian needled thatched roofs was based on observations at 12 sites. In a brief article in VB 24 reporting the condition of needled thatched roofs in Orkney in the year 2000, the number of sites of known needled roofs had been increased to 21, though this included sites where the buildings or the roofs have been demolished or have disintegrated or there was vestigial evidence of having had a needled roof.

The survey carried out by A. and P. Newman in 1991 and subsequent work, together with Alexander Fenton's earlier descriptions in *The Northern*



Needled roof at Scarpigar in Tankerness.



1. Roof structure of couples and laths in place

Isles, show that the needled roof technique was probably widespread throughout many of the islands. There is enough evidence to suggest variations in the technique, such as the materials used for the thatch, and methods of anchoring the loops of straw rope (simmens).

It would be wrong to suggest that the needled roof, that is, where a sarking or under layer is made of closely packed straw or heather ropes, is the only thatch tradition in Orkney. If all roofs with an organic covering are included as thatched roofs, there is a variety of thatched roof constructions in the vernacular building traditions of Orkney. However, the process of creating a needled roof will be described first.

The sequence of building a needled roof

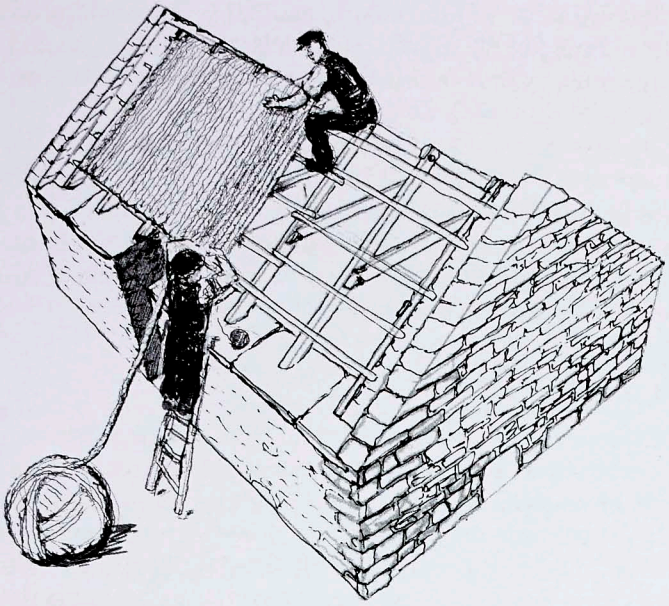
Five drawings show the sequence of construction. The first drawing shows a stone building with a roof structure of pegged couples. It is worth noting that the older pegged couples at Gimps have outlasted the more recent nailed couples. Few buildings still have pegged couples, more often the joints are nailed. The feet of the couples rest on the slightly tilted wall plate (or aisin or tekel). Though this is the more common arrangement, sometimes the feet are let into pockets in the stone walls below the aisins. Typically there will be four or five rows of laths each side of the couples.

The second drawing shows the roof being needled with the first layer of simmens. The lines of simmens are packed tight together to make a kind of tent and also pulled tight and fixed to the bottom lath. The simmens are under a certain amount of tension and in the barn at Derby in Toab, the bottom lath is located in a notch on the upper surface of the couple legs. Three methods of securing the simmens loops to the lower lath have been described: A - common method where loop is tied to the lath with a cord made of bent or latterly with coir string; B - loop is tied around lath in a barrel hitch - only known from Gimps (how this is done is uncertain but probably entails detaching the lath from the couple leg); C - heather simmens looped round lath as at Estabin in Firth, described by G. Hay, RCAHMS 1968.

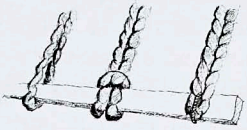
The simmens were made by hand out of bere straw, black oat straw or long stringy heather. The straw needs to be round and not crushed, and this may pose problems for any modern reconstruction. Occasionally the making of simmens could be partly mechanised with the use of a thrawcrook or cranked rope twister.

The third drawing shows a layer of inclined flagstones supported on the aisins and trapping the loops of simmens against the lower lath. A raised doorhead is shown in this drawing - a feature found in some older buildings.

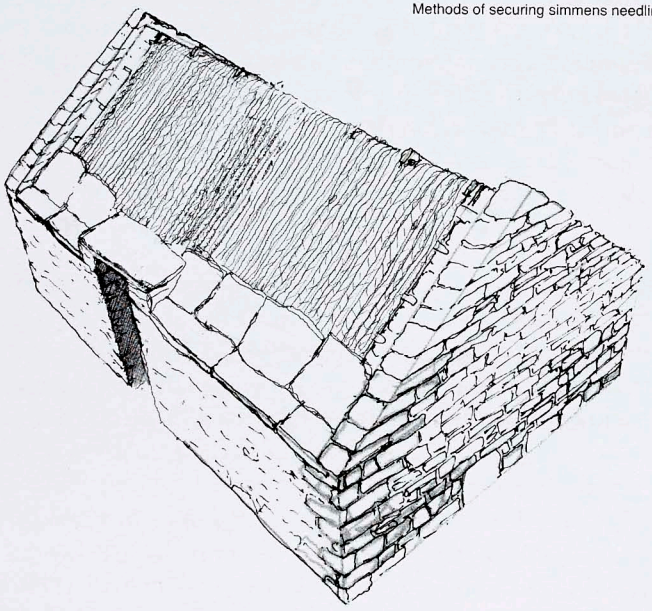
At the stage shown in the fourth drawing, a thick layer of thatch (30 cm thick at Gimps) has been applied. This is laid loose, probably starting near



2. Roof 'needled' with first layer of simmens



Methods of securing simmens needling



3. Inclined flagstones laid against lowest lath

the eaves and working upwards to the ridge. Usually this layer comprised black oat or bere straw, but a variety of other materials would be used if they were locally available. Around Deer Sound this middle layer might incorporate large quantities of boss or eelgrass (Zostera marina). Bent has been prized as a durable thatch material. Rushes may also be used. Analysis of the Gimps thatch indicates that a layer of clay was applied early in the life of the roof; whether this was a common practice in Orkney is unknown.

There may have been a tendency for the middle layer of loose thatch to be thickest midway up the slope. Evidence for this are the occasional thatched buildings where the skews are not straight but have a convex curve. In this respect there are some similarities to the rounded thatch profile of traditional buildings in the Western Isles and the west of Eire.

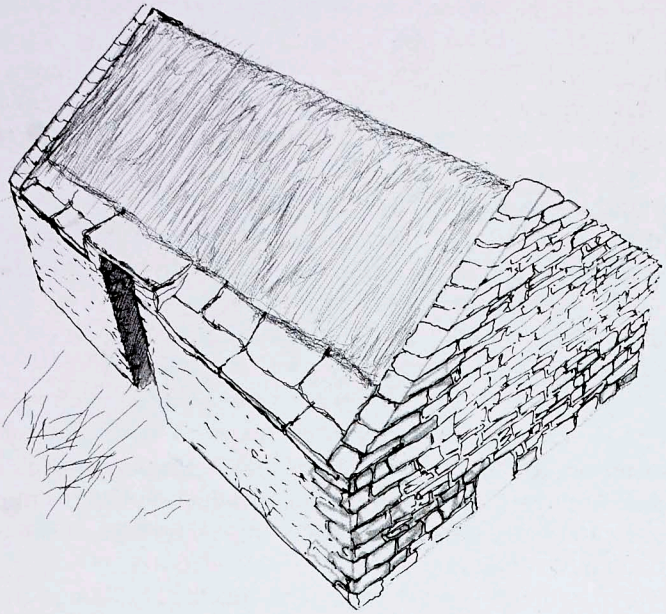
The fifth drawing shows the top simmens being applied with bendlin stanes inserted in the loops of the top simmens. With tightly packed simmens the bendlin stones are barely in evidence. The top simmens could be made from the same range of materials as the under layer. Old photographs of Orcadian thatched roofs occasionally show additional lines of simmens such as a horizontal line a little above the eaves attached to iron pegs driven into the gable walls - a feature seen in some Irish thatched buildings. In one photograph a series of diagonal bands appeared over the vertical bands of simmens. Old photographs also show simmens bands wound horizontally around wooden lums serving central hearths, and also to the wooden flues serving hingin lums.

In 1991 a building with a needled roof of heather simmons existed at Howes in Deerness, although it was completely demolished a few years ago. Another building with the vestiges of heather simmons over a flagstone roof was found at Windbreck in Graemsay.

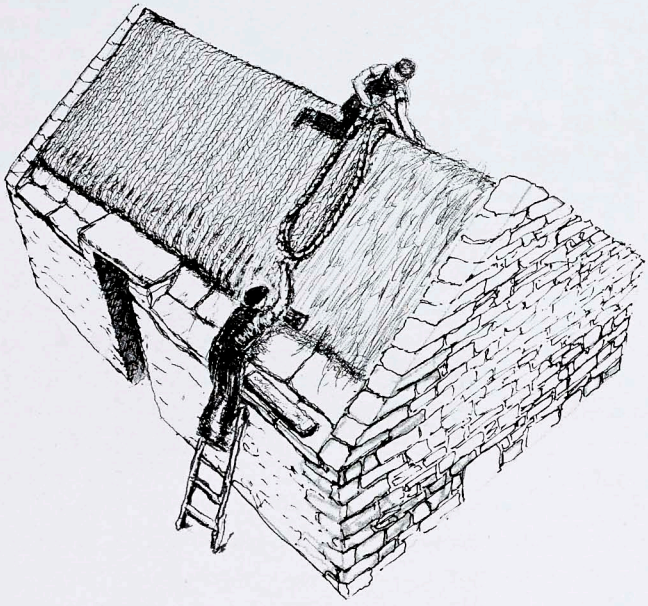
Maintenance of needled roofs

Straw simmens on the exposed top of the roof could be expected to last for a year or two before perishing, while heather simmens should last for about five to seven years. The collapsing roof at Gimps has provided some insight into the maintenance of needled roofs. The inner needling in the older part of the roof at Gimps remained in reasonably good condition over a very long period whilst the house was inhabited. This needling is stained black with peat reek, and a blocked up smoke hole and the presence of a pauntree indicate that this part of the roof existed when the house had a central hearth, suggesting the needling had been in place since the early 19th century.

Fragments of fallen thatch disclosed layer upon layer of decayed simmens (VB 15, page 38), showing that when new simmens were applied, the perished simmens were not stripped off first. The bendlin stanes would be salvaged from the perished simmens and inserted into the loops of new simmens.

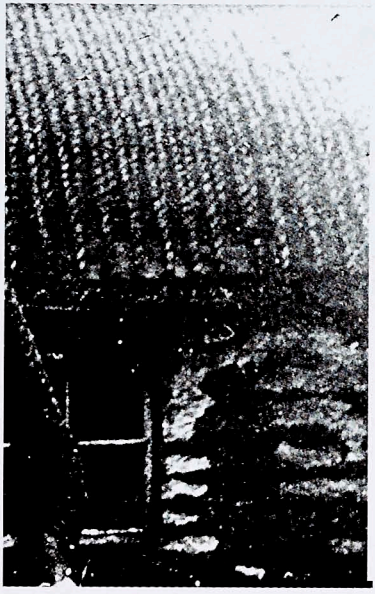


4. Loose middle layer of thatch laid over needling



5. Top layer of simmens being applied with bendlin stanes in the loops

Sketch taken from a photograph in the Royal Scottish Museum Ethnographic Archive showing a roof being rethatched with simmens at Verracott in North Ronaldsay by Willie and Robert Swanney in 1965/6.



Top simmens at Gimps
Photo courtesy of Sandy Scott

The amount of thatch required to make and maintain a needled roof cannot be estimated with any precision. However, it has been calculated that a layer of needling for the roof of a two-room house like Gimps would require about 660 fathoms (3/4 mile) of simmens. It would probably take more than an acre of straw crop to make a new roof for such a house.

No roofs now survive with top simmens. Thatch is now held in place with wire netting or fishing net to which the bendlin stanes have been tied. Photographs of Gimps taken in the first half of the 20th century show parts of the roof with top simmens in place. A photograph in the Royal Scottish Museum Ethnographic Archive shows a roof at Verracott in North Ronaldsay being rethatched with simmens by Willie and Robert Swanney . A relative of the photographer (Mary Scott) says the photograph was taken in 1965/6.

Other kinds of thatch in Orkney

There is a byre at Gears in St Andrews parish which has three different types of thatch in the one roof. One end is a needled roof; at the other end is thatch on top of flagstone; whilst the middle section is thatch laid on divots of turf which is supported on laths. The middle section of this listed building collapsed last year. The laths are usually broader or there are more laths than would be found in a needled roof. Other examples of turf, or divots, used as the base layer for a thatched roof have been identified in mainland Orkney and Hoy, but may have been widely distributed at one time. The heather turf roof at Little Muirs in Hoy has heather divots laid up-side-down with the heather visible though the gaps between the laths. The 1991 photograph of a building with a thatched roof at Greens (at HY519041, not to be confused with Greens [both in St Andrews] at HY542031, where Fenton found a needled roof in the 1960s) is an example of a thatched roof with an underlayer of divots. This building has a rounded gable of which there are, or were, examples also to be found in Deerness Holm, Hoy, Westray, Sanday and North Ronaldsay.

Turf as an intermediate layer above straw simmens needling, was found at Greenwall in North Ronaldsay. Straw mats or flackies have been incorporated into some thatched roofs. The use of flackies along the ridge at Estabin in Firth was noted in the constructional drawing by G. Hay, RCAHMS 1968 (reproduced in Fenton's Northern Isles) and was still visible in 1991 before the building was renovated. At Hyndgreenie in North Ronaldsay there was a roof with a sarking layer made entirely of flackies supported on laths.

There are still many examples of flagstone roofs with thatch or vestiges of thatch above the flag stones. The thatch may be taken down to the aisins or down to cover the lowest horizontal joint between the rows of flagstones on the main slope of the roof. Thatch may have been added to a deteriorat-

ing flagstone roof as a remedial measure, or have been an essential part of the roof from the outset. At Verracott, in North Ronaldsay, the byre has an underlayer of irregular flagstones covered by thatch - where the stone would not have been able to provide anything like a weather-tight roof.

Historical considerations

The neat roofs of overseamed and underseamed flagstone which are such a feature of Orcadian traditional farm buildings were built to be seen and not covered with thatch. These roofs are largely products of the 19th century, although the overseamed roof construction is the continuation of an earlier tradition. It would seem that in the 18th century and earlier, thatched roofs predominated, particularly for dwellings, with stone being used for outshots and some outbuildings, though this is largely conjectural. Needled thatched roofs appear to be of venerable tradition, though this too may have changed and developed in the 19th century. The 18th-century House Book of Holm (see VB 17) is a 'surveyors' book for farm buildings on the Graemeshall estate. We may assume that all the buildings surveyed had thatched roofs. Thatch and simmens are mentioned in various places, though there is no mention of needled roofs as such. All the timber components of the roofs are carefully listed. Some roofs comprise couples, maintree and laths, and such roofs could have been needled. However, other roofs also had rafters, and if these are rafters as understood in modern building construction, it is not easy to see how these could have been needled.

Thatched roof with curved skews and divot base layer at Greens in Toab.

In the 19th century and into the 20th century thatched roofs continued to coexist with stone roofs in Orcadian traditional farm buildings. Thatch often seems to be the preferred roof covering for dwellings. Groups of buildings in North Ronaldsay and elsewhere may have barn, byre and outhouses covered with flagstone roofs, but the dwelling has a thatched roof with a steeper pitch than the rest, and maybe curved skews to the gables. There may be later dwellings or rooms added with flagstone roofs. Although thatched roofs require a lot of maintenance they do confer advantages of thermal and acoustic insulation.

In ten years much of the evidence of Orcadian thatching traditions has disappeared through deterioration and demolition. There is precious little left of needled thatch in Orkney. There is a case for forensic deconstruction of the remaining roofs at Gimps and Derby (listed) to gain detailed information about needled roof construction, but it would need to be implemented as a matter of urgency.

SVBWG DOOCOT RECORDING AND PUBLISHING: Progress Report

Elizabeth Beaton

In VB25, Nick Brown and I launched the SVBWG doocot project of recording and publishing Scottish doocots. A year later there is progress to report.

The response to our article in VB25 was positive and varied, just as I hoped it would be. There were offers varying between recording and writing up an area, to fine photographs and descriptions of single buildings.

Ian Temple, Edinburgh, sent copies of his invaluable gazetteer of Scottish cotes, compiled over many years and to which he is always happy to add as items are brought to his notice. This indexed inventory currently contains 90 pages with 950 entries, enumerating fine upstanding cotes besides sites where a building is known to have existed, entered on a historic county by county basis with address, map reference, typology and basic information, if known. The gazetteer has more than proved its worth already, for when there is an offer or enquiry I simply photocopy and forward the relevant page(s). Our copies are dated April 2002, but Ian updates his work regularly.

Edwina Proudfoot, St.Andrews, told us of an archaeological project she and students had carried out some years ago, locating doocots and doocot sites in Fife. This project realized information on several hundred cotes, now stored in ring files: it will provide a basis for further work and hopefully, final publication. John Compton told us about work already published in Angus, while Mike Tait gave information about the Drum doocot, Aberdeenshire, with photograph, measurements and description.

We have established a series title: books are to be called Doocots of Scotland: followed by the name of the area covered. These are largely those defined by local authority reorganisation in 1975 (with some subsequent readjustments), thus simplifying requests to local authorities for financial aid or information.

Work in progress

Publication of Nick Brown's book, Doocots of Scotland: Moray has been delayed, but it should be out this year, boosted by local financial aid amounting to £1450. There are three more in the series now in preparation. David Elder has been recording and photographing in East Lothian. He has around 60 cotes to his credit, many of them visited on his mountain bike! David has built up a fine collection of photographs (he is expert in this field)

and is now preparing the text. Here we are also grateful to Mary Tindall for her interest, for with D. C. Bailey she pioneered a study in East Lothian 40 years ago. Highland and Islands is a team effort over an area stretching north-south from Shetland to Nairnshire; mainland Highland is the size of Belgium and we have the Islands as well! The team comprises Mike Finnie in Shetland (he who masterminded the Shetland visit in 1997); Paul Newman and Jocelyn Rendall, Orkney; Lyn and Geoff Leet, Caithness; Pam and Laurie Draper, Ross and Cromarty with a bit of Inverness thrown in, while Una Lee and I are looking after Sutherland, Nairnshire and part of Inverness. As one of the architects in the team, Una is willing to measure and draw. She has Culloden doocot (c.1800) in her sights – but awaits the clearance of a substantial, above welly-boot layer of pigeon droppings! Both Shetland and Orkney have involved ferry journeys to different islands consuming much time and effort. Owners have almost all been helpful and welcoming. Obviously I'm disappointed by a single refusal but one must respect the owner's wishes.

Already different typological features are emerging in the Highlands and Islands as one should expect from such a large and varied landscape; in Orkney some lectern cotes have the doorway in the return gable rather than the more usual central position in the front elevation, while in Ross and Cromarty there is a preponderance of grandiose farm steading entrance-tower dovecots.

Hopefully East Lothian and Highlands and Islands will be published towards the end of 2003/early 2004.

Frances and Munro Dunn are tackling Lanarkshire while Ken McCrae, with the help of two friends, respectively a farmer and a retired GP, both with special knowledge of the region, has produced an excellent working list from Dumfries and Galloway despite some residual problems from foot and mouth disease. We are grateful to all five for their time and expertise.

Dumfries and Galloway should give rise to a possible interesting and positive partnership. Students from the Scottish Conservation Course, Edinburgh College of Art, are expected to take on Dumfries and Galloway as project work required in their syllabus, the subject introducing varied aspects of vernacular building, farm buildings, traditional materials and techniques besides landscape interest. SVBWG greatly welcomes this move.

All in all there is much promise in our first year!

SCOTTISH ARCHITECTS' PAPERS FROM RURAL PRACTICES IN THE HIGHLANDS AND THE NORTH EAST

Norma Aldred and Neil Gregory

Work is now well underway on the Scottish Architects' Papers Preservation Project (SAPPP) that aims to catalogue and conserve 150,000 Scottish architects' papers. The papers, consisting of drawings, photographs and business records, show the many ways in which architects from all over the country rose to the challenges of designing and restoring buildings for a rapidly changing Scotland between the years 1860 and 1975.

Work began at the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) in October 1999. Supported by the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland, and aided by a grant of £626,500 from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the SAPPP project aims to make the papers of 25 architectural practices accessible to the general public.

Recent work has concentrated on the archiving of three collections of interest to those working in the field of vernacular architecture. These collections of drawings and related material have been housed at local authority archives in the areas from which they originate. Two of the collections feature the architecture of north-east Scotland and both can be studied by the general public at Aberdeen City Archives.

Duncan and Munro Collection

The Duncan and Munro Collection documents the built heritage of rural Aberdeenshire life over more than a century, showing continuity and change in the agricultural north-east. The Turriff-based practice, founded by James Duncan (1828-1902) and continued by his son William Liddle Duncan (d.1951), was responsible for the erection of a significant number of buildings that are a testament to the vast agricultural expansion in the late 19th and the 20th centuries.

Much of the work undertaken by the Duncans and their successor James Munro was commissioned by the estate owners of the Turriff hinterland, for alterations to their own country houses, and for farm buildings in their ownership. The collection features an impressive number of commissions for the erection and improvement of schools, churches, manses and houses and commercial premises, as well as designs for war memorials.

The range of projects tackled by the practice throughout its lifetime reflects the changes that were taking place in the lifestyle of the community it served. Work on farm steadings and rural cottages at the beginning of the

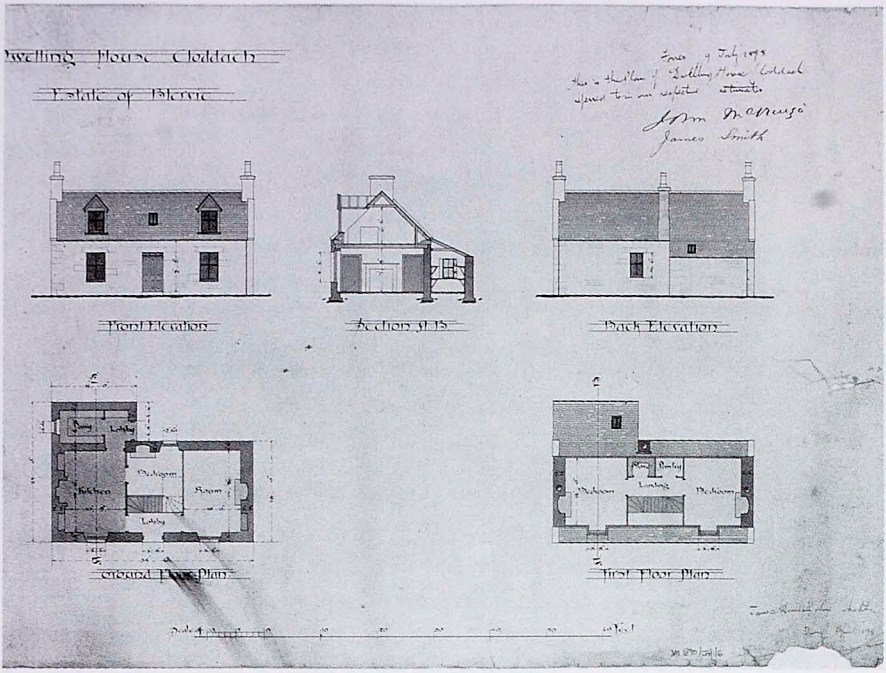


Figure 1 Dwelling house, Estate of Blervie, Moray. Plans, sections and elevations, c.1890. Duncan and Munro Collection located at Aberdeen City Archives (Crown Copyright: RCAHMS) SC675530.

20th century often included details of new water supplies and during the 1940s the practice found itself busy working on sanitary improvements to the schools they had designed years earlier. The plans of the steadings show clearly the changes taking place in farming methods as the century progressed. The poultry houses the practice designed in the 19th century had turned into battery sheds by the 1940s. Cartsheds and stables were altered as the horse was replaced by the tractor. The different housing types worked on by the practice indicate the shifts taking place in the society of its time. Early work on farm cottages was replaced by work on the suburban villas and social housing of the 1940s. The 1950s saw the car come into more general use and the practice supervised the installation of petrol pumps with their illuminated signs throughout the countryside.

George Bennett Mitchell & Son Collection

The second collection available for study at Aberdeen City Archives is that of George Bennett Mitchell (1865-1941) & Son (1896-1964). The practice, based in Aberdeen, began in 1904. Ten thousand drawings and business records from the period 1904-39 have been catalogued and conserved,

including all of the original drawings for the Royal Insurance Company Building in Union Street, Aberdeen, currently a Starbuck's coffee shop.

Though many of the papers featured in the collection are for urban projects, there are also designs for a number of rural commissions including villas around Deeside and alterations to churches and manses. In the first decade of the 20th century Mitchell was in charge of improvements on several large Deeside estates, namely Aboyne, Birse and Glentanar, and this type of work can be seen throughout the practice's history. During the 1920s and 1930s, the practice continued to receive rural commissions, in particular sensitive restoration work on the chapel at Cluny Castle which was damaged by fire in 1926, and at Haddo House which also suffered a similar fate in 1930.

Sinclair Macdonald & Son Collection

Similar to the Duncan and Munro collection in terms of content is the Sinclair Macdonald & Son Collection. This collection consists of approximately 8000 drawings and business records (1889-1939), which are located at the North Highland Archive, Wick. Barbaretta Sinclair Macdonald (1859-1930) undertook his training first in Aberdeen and later under Alexander Ross in Inverness, before opening an architectural office in Thurso in 1889.

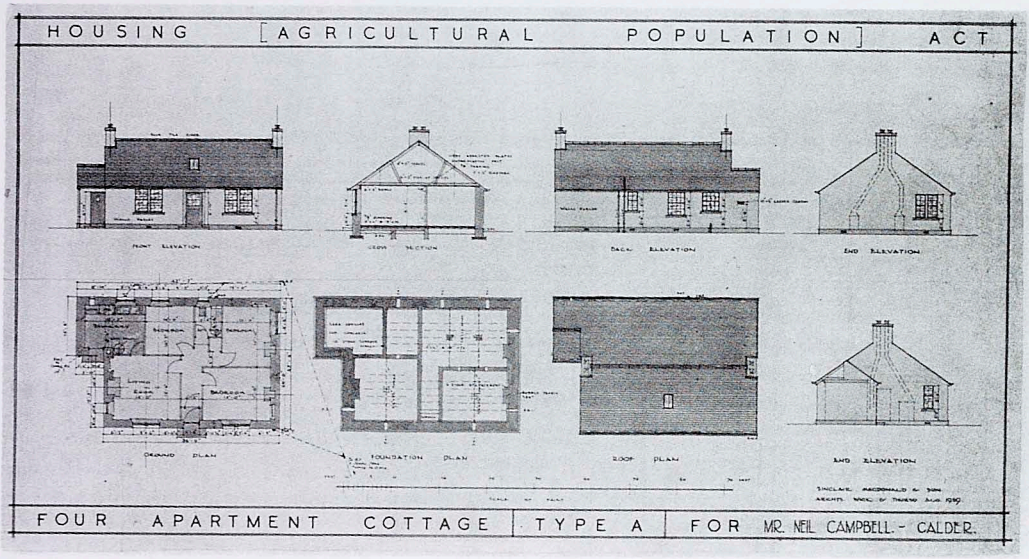


Figure 2 Old Calder, Highland. Foundation, floor and roof plans, sections and elevations of four-apartment cottage type 'A' showing reconstruction under the Housing (Agricultural Population) Act, for Mr Neil Campbell, c. 1939. Sinclair MacDonald and Son Collection, located at the North Highland Archive, Wick (Crown Copyright: RCAHMS) SC773891.

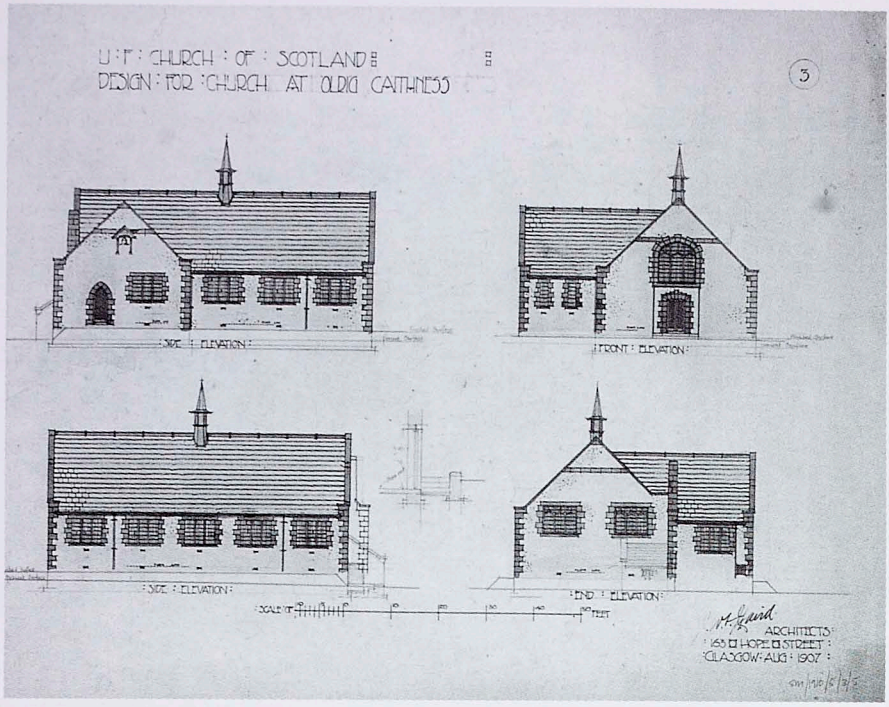


Figure 3 Olrig Church, Main Street, Castletown, Highland. Elevations, 1907. Sinclair MacDonald and Son Collection located at the North Highland Archive, Wick (Crown Copyright: RCAHMS) SC773889.

Following his father's death, Hugh Macdonald (1903-1979) became a partner in 1932. Sinclair Macdonald's first commissions were mainly municipal, and the traditional, vernacular façade of Clyne School, Brora, is typical of his style during this period. A significant part of the collection consists of their later designs for housing.

The 1926 'Rural Workers (Scotland) Act' advocated improvement to croft dwellings throughout the country, and Sinclair Macdonald won the contract for reconditioning work in Caithness. Improvements took the form of re-roofing, flooring, sanitary additions and the installation of electricity. Small extensions were often necessary when the minimum accommodation required was not available within the existing building and often two neighbouring cottages would be altered to form one dwelling with adequate accommodation. The work carried out by the practice on these rural commissions allowed Sinclair Macdonald & Son to build their reputation in this area of low cost community housing and this led to their appointment as architects to several Burgh Council schemes, most notably in Thurso, but also further afield in Stornoway.

The George Bennett Mitchell & Son and Duncan & Munro Collections of drawings and manuscripts are held by Aberdeen City Archives, Dunbar Street, Aberdeen AB24 3UJ. For access to the Collection please contact Aberdeen City Archives on 01224 481775 archives@legal.aberdeen.net.uk. The Sinclair Macdonald & Son Collection is held at the North Highland Archive, Wick Library, Sinclair Terrace, Wick KW1 5AB. They can be contacted on (01955) 606 432 Brenda.Lees@highland.gov.uk. All three collections may also be consulted through the Canmore database, www.rcahms.gov.uk. For further information on the SAPPP project please contact Siobhan McConnachie at RCAHMS, John Sinclair House, 16 Bernard Terrace, Edinburgh. Tel: 0131 662 1456 siobhanm@rcahms.gov.uk

NOTE ON A SHEEP HOUSE, SHAP WELLS, CUMBRIA

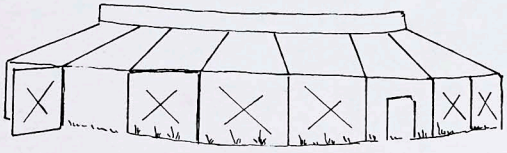
Robin Callander

Robin Callander published an article on sheep houses in Midlothian County in Vernacular Building 12. He recently found one of a type he had not previously encountered, and provides details below. He hopes that it may be of interest to some members, and will be to him if such sheep houses are to be found in Scotland.

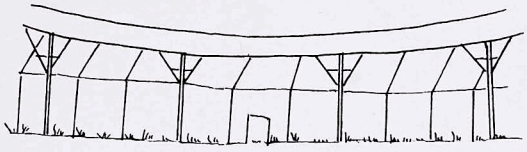
SHEEP HOUSE, SHAP WELLS, CUMBRIA (NY 576098)

The structure is circular, approximately 9 metres in diameter, and has an outer wall of 25 metal panels each about 1.1 metres wide and 1.3 metres high. In this outer wall at ground level are four 'doorways', two panels forming the double door of the main entrance and three smaller doorways, one opposite the main entrance and one on either side, each about 0.4 metre wide and 0.45 metre high. Within the structure, the central area, which is unroofed, is surrounded by six slender metal pillars supporting a roof of metal sheets sloping outwards to cover an area 2 metres wide around the whole of the interior

SHEEP HOUSE, SHAP WELLS, CUMBRIA



EXTERIOR - LOOKING NORTH-EAST



INTERIOR - LOOKING NORTH

RCC 140902

A SURVEY OF THE BUILDINGS 9–11 MANSEFIELD STREET, BATHGATE

Bill Millan

Bathgate is situated midway between Edinburgh and Glasgow. The earliest settlement here was in 1157, taking the form of a monastery. Robert the Bruce had a castle at the edge of the wetlands in Bathgate, in 1315, and in the 1770s the road linking Edinburgh to Glasgow was driven through the town. In 1845 the Edinburgh to Bathgate railway line was laid down, and in the 1850s the Airdrie line was built, linking Edinburgh to Glasgow through Bathgate. This last fact may well have contributed to the demise of hand-loom weaving in the town, which could boast of 550 working hand-loom weavers in 1840.

A Bathgate resident, Judd Smith, recalled that as a young boy he had played among looms still in place in the roof-spaces of derelict buildings in the High Street (the Auld Toon). My mother was born in a building in Marjoribank Street, next to the EU Kirk manse's garden. This building was known as Emmoch Hill—the old Scots for 'ant hill'. It was so named by the locals as it was inhabited in the 19th century by weavers. Their industry impressed their neighbours so much that they were likened to busy ants on an ant hill.

Figure 1 Back of the building in 1980, showing east wall and north gable.

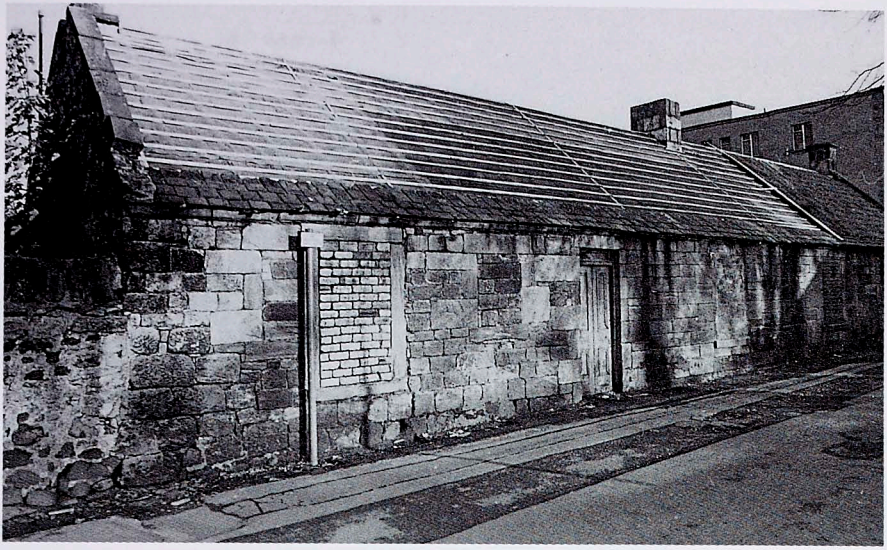


Figure 2 West-facing facade in 1980.

The weaving industry began to wane in the mid 1800s, and one can imagine the various buildings associated with the industry (9–11 Mansefield Street included) being abandoned or taken over, as with Emmoch Hill, for housing; hence my mother's birthplace in 1903. Elsewhere, workshops could be extended to make comparatively useless buildings more adequate to the needs of an expanding population.

The building

The building at Mansefield Street consists of a row of two houses built entirely of stone and having a pantiled roof. It was built directly onto the road; before restoration there was no evidence of a pavement. A visual examination of the facade reveals three distinct types of stone (although all sandstone) used in the construction. The first goes as far as the door of No. 11; the remainder of the front wall is divided equally lengthwise between the other two types.

Initial work

The initial process of restoration began in 1980 and involved stripping the building down to the bare walls. All wooden parts - safe lintels, floors, lathes, roof beams and skirtings - affected by dry rot and/or wood-boring insect infestation were removed and destroyed. Examples of skirting and facing mouldings were kept, as were ceiling mouldings. Rot-free internal shutters

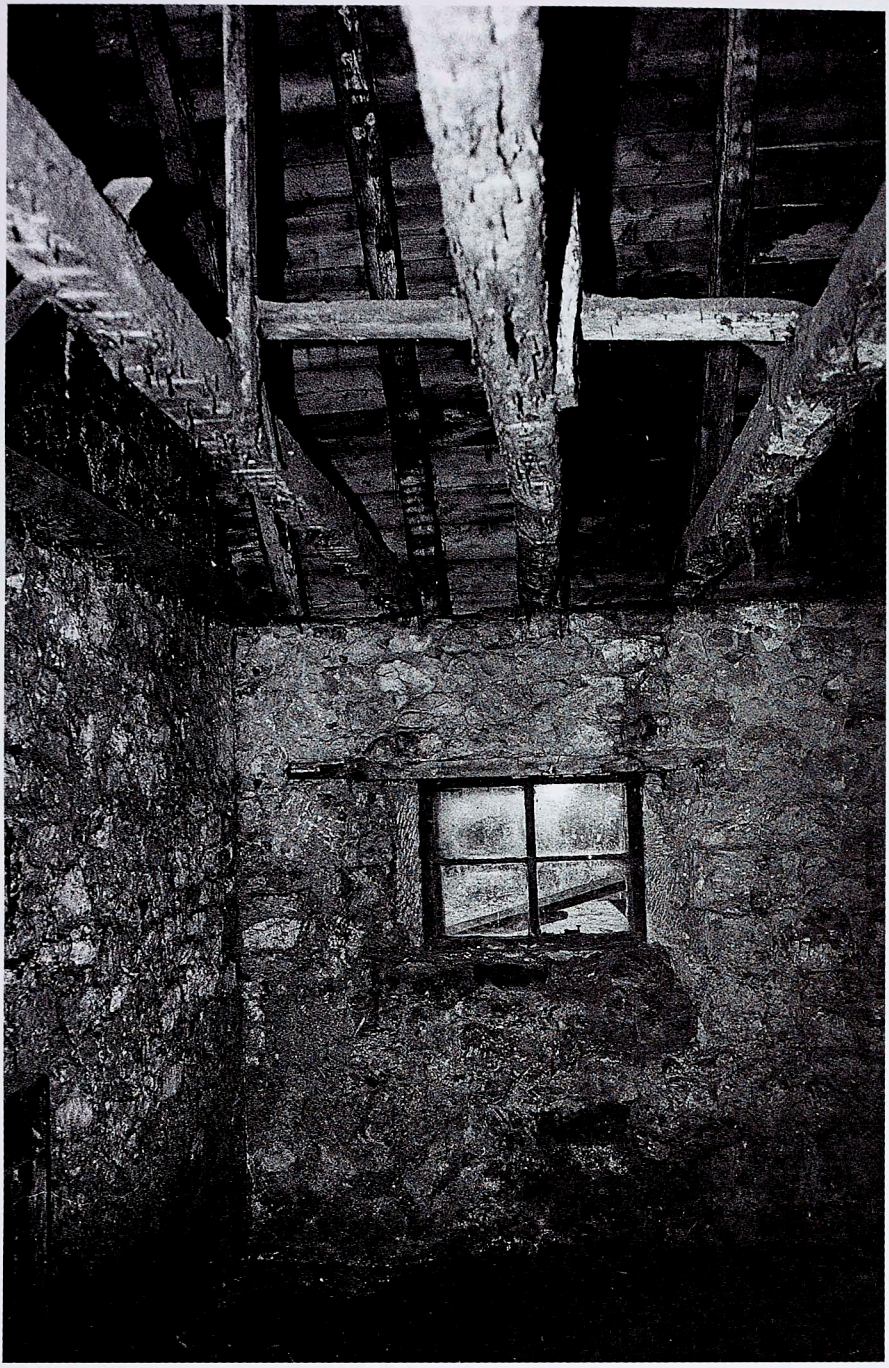


Figure 3 Interior of No. 11, showing the tree beams near the northeast corner of the north gable.

and doors were restored and re-sited. Windows at the back were sound and were also restored and re-sited.

The roof timbers

The roof timbers at No.11 from the gable to the door were trees, tapering slightly to one end and square in section. They had been worked on with an adze, the shipwright's tool, to give a flat face for resting on the wall head (Fig. 3). According to photographs taken of these original beams, two appear to have been replaced with 6x2 sawn timber, possibly when (as surmised) the original building was extended and upgraded.

These tree beams were very heavy to handle, despite their worm-eaten condition, suggesting that they might be red or even pitch pine. If, as is estimated, this end of the property was built in the late 1780s, the question arises: 'Was there a local supply of such timber for building purposes?', since the building appears otherwise to be built with very basic materials - just what was to hand.

Continuing the survey of the roof timbers, from the door of No. 11 onwards to the gable of No. 9, those resting on the wall head were 6x2 or 6.5x2 sawn timbers of a finer quality than those of No. 11. The timbers up in the roof space still displayed tree characteristics, with rounded surfaces and bark (Fig. 4).

At the time of the restoration, all these roof timbers were got rid of as soon as possible, because of their condition. There was, in any case, nothing at that stage to suggest that the building was of any special interest, or had a significant history. This view was to change, once work on clearing out the solum yielded unexpected results. The significance of anomalies, such as the preponderance of trees as opposed to sawn timbers at one end of No. 11, had then to be reassessed.

Clearing the solum

It was decided to clear out all of the man-made debris such as scraps of wood, ashes, small stones etc. from the solum. Volunteers were therefore organised to dig out an inch or two of the natural solum to make way for a deposit of levelling-off ash prior to concreting.

As they moved from the north gable at No. 11 towards the central dividing gable, and just before the door of No. 11, they encountered several large stones. These were embedded in the solum and ran across the room from the door to the site of the fireplace on the back wall. These stones were on a comparable level to the side wall foundations, now just visible and which were left in place. It seemed that the stones were the foundation of a long-since-vanished gabled wall. The discovery suggested that the building had some secrets to yield up.

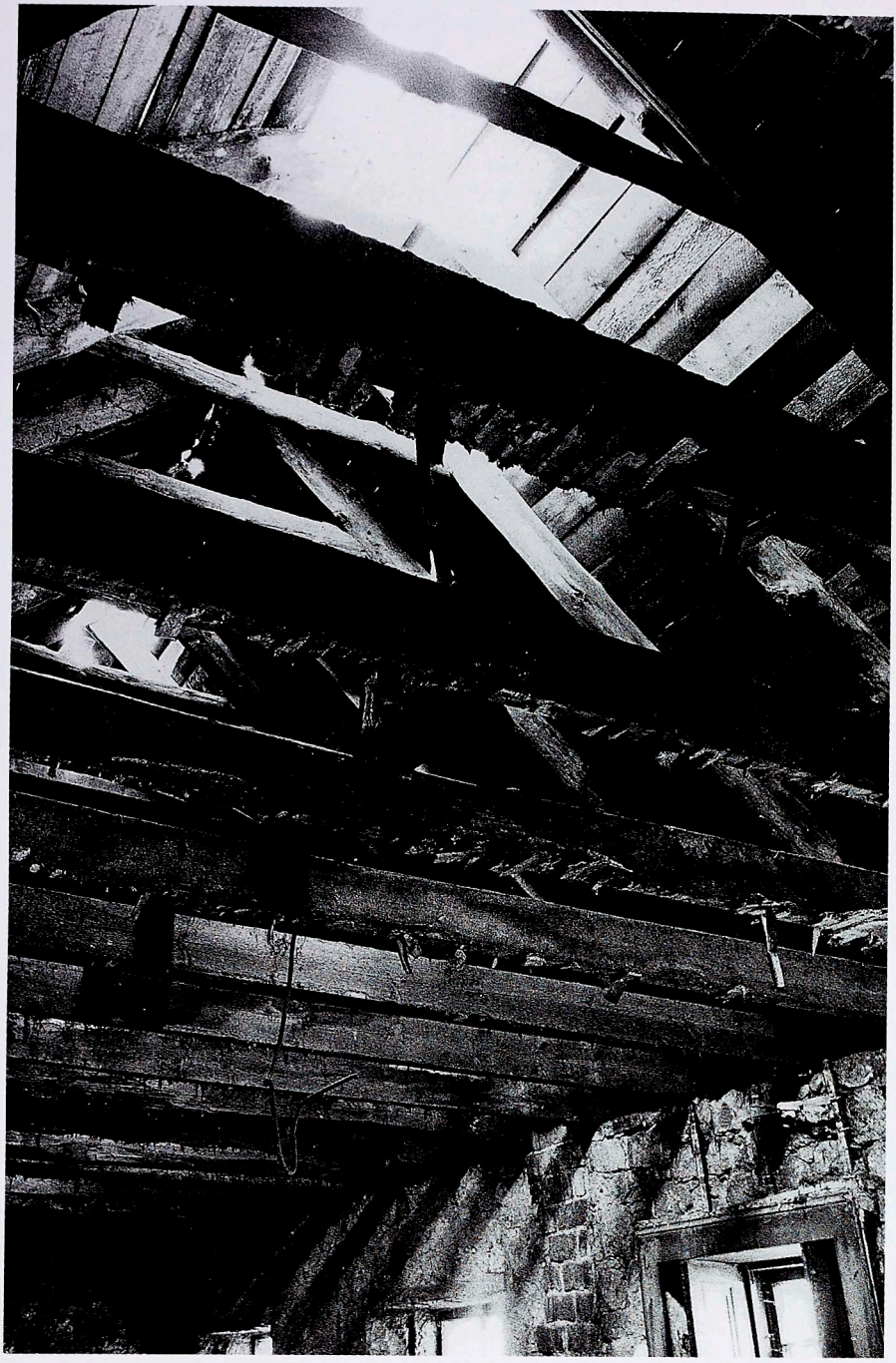


Figure 4 Interior of No. 11, showing tree-like timber in the roof space.

Figure 5 Interior of No. 11, looking toward the north gable, showing solum before clearing.

Evidence for an earlier gable and thus a smaller building

The fireplace on the back wall of No. 11 opposite the doorway (Figs 6, 7) was dismantled, revealing where the stone had been raggled out to create a chimney vent. The raggled area was, presumably, the infill of rough stonework between the outer and inner faces of the gable.

On the opposite side, at the door, stonework was actually still in place (Fig. 8) above the wall-head level between the last tree rafter (this would be the last rafter before the gable) and the sawn rafter (this would be the first in the extension). Also at this point, there is a distinct line running down the wall, defining an area between it and the beginning of the door hole. This suggests the width of the gable wall. So putting these discoveries together: the 'solum stones', the 'chimney vent', the remaining stonework above the wall-head level and the change from rough-hewn to sawn ceiling timbers, it seems certain that a gable-end existed at this point, and that the building was originally, measuring from the existing north gable to the door into No. 11, 20 feet by 20 feet in size.

To support this theory further, there are more clues on the exterior of the back (east) wall (Fig. 9). Just beyond the second window from the north gable, five large cornerstones interrupt the irregular effect of the random rubble, their geometric rectangular shapes coinciding with the position of the chimney vent.

At the front of the building, there are shaped wall-head stones with a

Figure 6 Interior of No. 11, close-up of east wall fireplace at supposed gable.

Figure 7 Interior of No. 11, showing general view of the east wall fireplace.

convex moulding up to the beginning of the No. 11 doorway. Thereafter the wall head is concave. Yet another clue is the evidence for the former existence of a window, now blocked up and with the existing sash and case cut through it (Fig. 20), which would once have matched the remaining four-pane light at the door.

Putting all of these observations together, it could be argued that the part of the present-day building from the north gable to the No. 11 doorway was all that existed in the late 1700s. This date has been determined from the fact that previous owners, the Bennie family, had titles for the area going back to the late 1700s, and there is recorded evidence of a building on this site in the 1790s.

There is no evidence of a door at the existing north gable or side walls, so presumably this building, if it existed in a smaller form, was entered through the vanished gable. This part of the present building is very rudimentary, being constructed mainly of whinstone, field boulders and rough-hewn sandstone, especially at the back (Figs 9, 10). The facade, however, is of not-too-finely-cut sandstone blocks, crudely stugged, and the stonework around the windows is simply droved and stugged for the sake of appearance. When the back window (Fig. 3) nearest the north gable was being worked on, a stone with a moulded edge was noted, which bore no relation

Figure 8 Interior of No. 11, west wall and door, with (to the right) evidence of gable material between the rafters, and vertical line suggesting some sort of change in the west wall.

Figure 9 Back (east) wall of No. 11, showing rectangular corner stones.

Figure 10 Back (east) wall of No. 11, showing rough masonry.

Figure 11 Interior of No. 11, showing north gable fireplace; note the larger space filled-in with bricks and the keystone arrangement above the Victorian fireplace lintel.

to its position in the ingo and which had obviously been recycled from elsewhere.

Fireplaces

The fireplace in the north gable (Fig. 11) was probably once larger than the 'Victorian' one in the photograph. It could well have been an open hole with a swee above a floor-level hearth. Note the bricks down the left-hand side and the two courses above the late-Victorian lintel. Above this, two large stones are held in place by a key-stone in the middle. The original fireplace might have had a heavy beam in place of the courses of brick underneath the key-stone arrangement. There is evidence on the lower parts of the walls that the plaster was put straight onto the walls in this earlier building, with no lathes being used.

Further study of Figure 11 shows a distinct location of the chimney vent from its hearth to the chimney brace. Could this indicate that the builders of the extension who raggled out the space for a chimney vent in the east wall

Figure 12 Interior of No. 11, showing back (east)-facing windows before loose material and stonework was removed from the sills.

did the same at the north gable, then built a hearth and set larger stones in place to create the vent? This would then conform to the practice of a weaver's workshop being without heating, as humidity was an advantage when weaving. There is a cupboard or press in the north gable, which originally had a wooden safe lintel. This could have been a through door. There is no evidence that this possible workshop had any next door accommodation for the workers.

Windows

Probably the most fascinating aspect of No. 11 is the pattern of the interior windowsills. When the building was taken over, the back (east) windows were intact as far as the view from outside was concerned. Inside, they had been obliterated by being boarded up with lathe and plaster to create an unbroken surface (probably at the time of the extension of the building; see below). When this covering was removed, the four-pane lights had, as expected, the usual windowsill (Fig. 12). However, these sills were made up of very loose material, which it was decided should be removed. Beneath, in each case, was a stepped-up window ledge with the plaster still in place.

More intriguingly, there was a niche at the left-hand corner of the lower part of each sill with plaster following the contours (Fig. 13). Similarly, the four-paned light in the front (west) wall (which had been blocked up; see

Figure 13 Interior of No. 11, showing sills of east-facing windows now cleared of loose material, revealing original stepped sills with niches.

Figure 14 Interior of No. 11, looking toward north gable, showing rough masonry and a blocked up window in the western wall (left).

Fig. 14) when cleaned out was also found to have a stepped sill with niche and plaster work intact. No doubt the fourth window, at the front, also had all these characteristics. In the restoration, this stepped design and niche were retained as a feature of the three remaining original windows.

The extension of the original building

A time came when someone decided to extend the first small building. The gable-end was knocked down and the stone used to continue the random rubble stonework of the back (east) wall. Here, where no-one would see them, there was no point in taking out the large corner stones of the old gable, except at the top in order to tie in the extended wall to the existing rubble build.

The facade, on the other hand, required a little more attention to appearances; it was possibly constructed from two other defunct buildings, with the available stone determining the way in which the extended facade was built - hence the apparent 'join' (Fig. 19).

As the front was to have sash and case windows, the two small, square lights in the original building were blocked up. However, one sash and case was positioned partially where one of the four-pane lights had been, and there is telltale evidence of what was formerly there (Figs 14, 20).

Figure 15 Interior pre-restoration, looking north; note ceiling scars delineating the lobby and room arrangement after the enlargement of the building.

Inside, the fireplace was reduced in size to form a 'bedroom-type' arrangement. Perhaps, as mentioned earlier, two ceiling beams had to be replaced with 6x2s. The back windows were covered over with lath and plaster, as were all the walls except the middle gable between No. 9 and No. 11, which was plastered right onto the stone. The door into No. 11 was built just beyond the point where the south gable of the old workshop had been (Fig. 20).

A lobby was situated here, as indicated by the scars on the ceiling (Fig. 15) and ceiling mouldings, with doors at least to left and right, the former leading into a bedroom-cum-sitting room. The other door led into a large kitchen with evidence of a swee in the fireplace, a sink at the front window, terracotta floor tiles and possibly a window at the back where the present-day double door is situated. The wall between No. 11 and No. 9 was a gable thick enough to contain two fireplaces back-to-back (Fig. 25).

The need for stonework for the internal gable at the west side of the fireplace was avoided by the installation of presses or cupboards which served both No.11 and No. 9 (Fig. 17). According to the ceiling scars in No. 11, there was a separate room at the back, with a fireplace (Figs. 6, 7, 25)

Figure 16 Interior pre-restoration, looking southeast.

built where the south gable of the original workshop had once met the east wall.

Number 9 would be entered by the shop-hung door, which is still in place. A similar lobby to that described above would ward off draughts. A door on the left would have led into a kitchen with a floor-level cast-iron sink and water supply built into the wall between the window and lobby. A door on the right led into the bedroom. This house was much smaller than No. 11.The closets (toilets) were outside, adjoining the coal house in the case of No. 9 (Fig. 26) and at the north gable-end in the case of No. 11 (Fig. 18).

These dwellings were inhabited up to the 1930s.

Observations and conclusions

My provisional explanation for the discoveries made on site was that after the original, small building became redundant as a workshop (possibly because it had been used for weaving, which died out locally in the 1840s), it was extended to provide two dwelling houses. A visit from Dr J. Shaw, Curator of Environmental Social History at the National Museums of Scotland, provided the impetus I needed to record what was in my mind, and

Figure 17 Dook hole between No. 9 and No. 11 at supposed back-to-back presses (cupboards).

Figure 18 Closet attached to north gable; this gable contains a high proportion of field boulders.

unravel the information locked up in the copious record photographs taken of the building during restoration.

Dr Shaw's opinion was that the so-called 'original' edifice closely resembles the weavers' workshops of the 18th and 19th centuries to be found elsewhere in Scotland. This would almost certainly explain some of the idiosyncrasies of construction of the building. A loom could have been sited at each of the four-pane window lights. The stepped sills and niches could have held weavers' tools. It might also explain the rather basic materials used in the construction; a workshop need not be built to the same standard as a home.

Following restoration, the building was once again able to fill a useful role, as the premises of Bennie Museum, which opened in 1990 and focuses on local history, widely interpreted.

Acknowledgement

I am indebted to Dr John Shaw for his scrutiny of this document after visiting the building concerned, and for initiating its publication.

Figure 19 Present-day facade.

Figure 20 West wall of No. 11, showing evidence at side of larger window of a small blocked-up window which matches the small window to the right.

Figure 21 1930s interior of north gable bedroom at No. 11, showing fireplace

Figure 22 West wall of No. 11, showing blocked up small window (left).

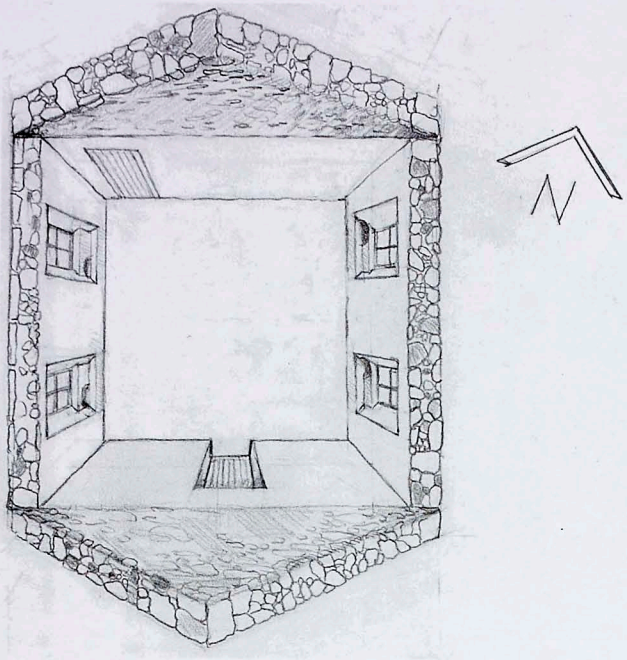


Figure 23 Artist's impression of original weaver's workshop, now part of No. 11.

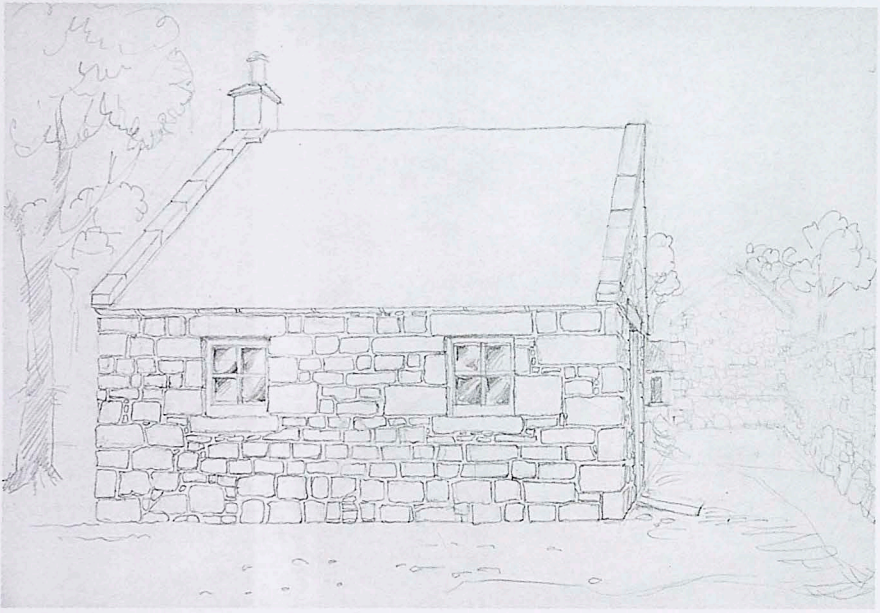


Figure 24 Artist's impression of west facade of the workshop.

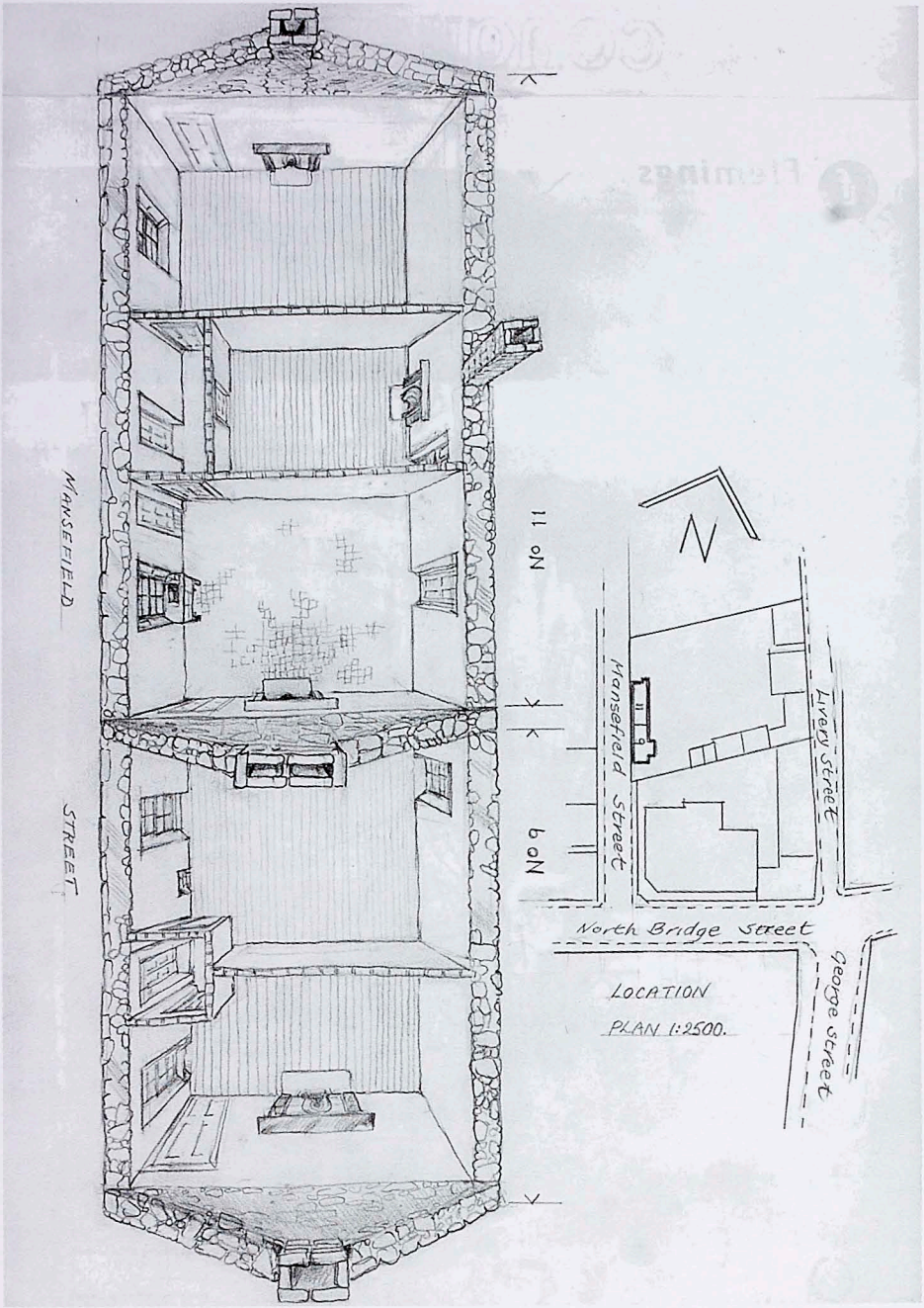


Figure 25 Artist's impression of layout of the rooms in Nos. 9 and 11, following enlargement of the building to create two dwellings.

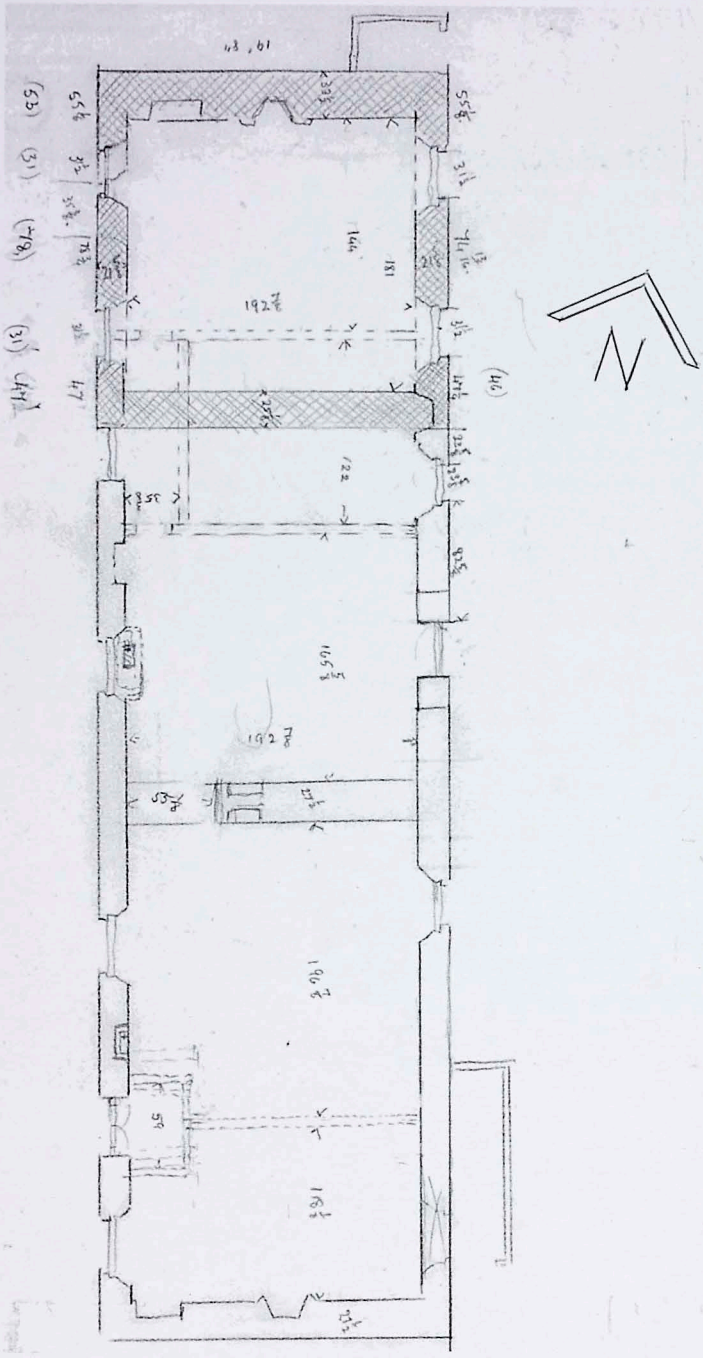


Figure 26 Plan of workshop, superimposed on plan of Nos. 9 and 11.

OBITUARY: GEOFFREY HAY, 1922-2002

Geoffrey Stell

It is a matter of sadness to record the death, on 23 June 2002, of Geoffrey Duke Hay, architect and member of RCAHMS staff from 1954 to 1987. As many SVBWG members will know, during his long and distinguished career with RCAHMS, Geoffrey did much to establish the standards of graphic excellence and rigorous building analysis which are at the heart of the Commission's field recording discipline. RCAHMS publications such as the Inventories of Stirlingshire (1963) and Peeblesshire (1967) and Monuments of Industry (1986) contain many of his best drawings, and it is hoped that an exhibition of his works, many of which are lodged in the NMRS, will be organised in the not-too-distant future.

Geoffrey was a long-standing member of the Vernacular Architecture Group (of England and Wales), though not of SVBWG. However, he did contribute a seminal paper on Scottish timber building to the Group's 1974 Conference which still remains the best overview of the subject. Timber construction remained among his first and last loves, and at the time of his death he and I were working on a paper relating to the remarkable roof over the great hall of Darnaway Castle, Moray, which is closely dated to 1387. This paper will be published posthumously in the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

REVIEWS

Edited by Dorothy Kidd

Rural Architecture in the North of the Isle of Man

Sue Cannell, ed. by Patricia Newton. Regional and Thematic Studies 6. Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group. 2001. vi + 118pp. £5.00. 1 901971 01 5.

The 1993 SVBWG conference on the Isle of Man made a great impression on the Group, and is still much mentioned during current meetings. The excursion notes for the study tour were based on an unpublished thesis on the rural buildings of the north of the island by Sue Cannell, then training as an architect at Duncan of Jordonstone College, University of Dundee. Following the conference, the decision was taken to make this thesis available to a wider readership, and the volume under review is the fascinating result. Throughout the book, parallels or differences with similar buildings in Scotland and Ireland, with which the Isle of Man shares a common Norse heritage, are highlighted, thus emphasising its own unique style of vernacular building, shaped by its landscape, geology and natural resources. Local knowledge and personal memory as well as the evidence of the buildings themselves were used to create this study, which features excellent illustrations, including informative plans of the buildings, many by the author herself.

The book begins with a brief description of the island as a whole, and the traditional system of land ownership is discussed. The land was divided into treens, which were administrative units ranging in size from 200 to 600 acres, which would have a high-quality house and farm at its centre. These would often have a mainland influence, with features such as a quadrangle layout. The treens were divided into quarterlands (farms) and intacks (crofts), with the most basic dwelling being a steam, often inhabited by a single elderly person. The types of building found on each of these land divisions, whether lowland or highland, are analysed in turn, with the development of typical examples demonstrated, and the building materials discussed. Building construction is analysed in great detail, and the great diversity of materials used is demonstrated, from building stone and local brick, to shore stone, ships' timbers and sod (supposedly this last was still used in the 1930s). Some of the building stone used was of poor quality, and there was little lime available for mortar; one of the distinctive features of the island's buildings are slates hung to protect the stonework. Slate would also be used on a thatched roof to protect the chimney area. The unique Manx

style is a house with central access, and a gable end fireplace, often consisting of a chiollagh - an ingleneuk, usually with two flanking cupboards or a fireside storage area, and, where there was little stone available, with a wattlework canopy along the lines of a hanging lum.

An extensive glossary of Manx building, and a glossary of Manx place names, are included in the appendix, which serve to further the understanding of the island's buildings given by the book. The fact that some time has passed since the first preparation of the text means that comment can be made on the threat to the rural buildings of the Isle of Man; mention is made of buildings that have been lost in the intervening years. Fortunately, Manx National Heritage are able to preserve some examples, and this publication, one of the first on the subject, should help to raise awareness and increase knowledge of a unique heritage.

The Hearth in Scotland

Ed. by Marion Wood. Regional and Thematic Studies 7. Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group. 2001. 111pp. £5.00. ISBN 1 901971 02 3.

The Hearth constitutes the proceedings of the SVBWG conference held in January 2000, and provides a welcome permanent record of most of the papers given on that day. Edited by Marion Wood, the volume provides a detailed study the of many facets of a basic and essential feature, now taken for granted, or omitted, but previously of supreme significance – physically, spiritually and symbolically.

Alexander Fenton examines the physical development of the hearth, making comparisons within and outwith Europe, and looks at the many uses of the fire. He examines how a building would develop around the hearth which was at first merely a central fire within a dwelling; the addition of a backstone ultimately led to the internal division of the dwelling. The type of fuel involved would also lead to physical changes in the home; the use of coal led to the coal-fired grate, precursor of the kitchen range. Hugh Cheape stresses the social importance of the hearth, the focus of any gathering of people, and traces the development of the building in which the hearth stood. He looks at dwelling houses in the Hebrides and West Highlands, using evidence of travellers from the seventeenth century onward. The hearth itself served a multitude of purposes – heat, light, cooking, with the ashes being used for manure. The sooty turf and thatch would be unroofed each year, and applied as manure to the potato ground.

Ian Gow examines the development of the chimneypiece, often citing architect-designed examples to which the more vernacular would aspire. As the fire in the hearth was the focus of warmth and society, so it was also often

the focus of the decorative scheme and could be the most ornate item in a room. The Scottish chimneypiece was subject to influence and imports from England and beyond; such imports would be copied in cheaper materials, with more local interpretations of the design, thus creating a home-made idiom.

John Morrison explores the significance of the hearth in 19th-century painting. The hearth was a useful piece of shorthand, the presence or absence of which could convey the mood and message of the scene portrayed. In the paintings of such as Wilkie, the hearth meant home, hospitality and comfort; the position of a figure in relation to a hearth was crucial in understanding the story of a person, or the level of society that they represented. Gary J. West looks at fire's spiritual importance, underlined by the fact that today many homes cannot do without the 'flame effect' fire. The hearth made a house a home, and played an important part in community life; it was extremely important only to deliberately extinguish fires at significant times of the year, for example, Hogmanay. Fire would also be used for prophecy and for traditional protection; on Skye a newborn child would be passed around the fire as a protection against the fairy folk.

George R. Dalgleish discusses a Freedom Box made to contain a document granting the freedom of Dumfries to Dundas of Melville in 1793, for his part in repealing a duty on coal, which had threatened Scotland's incipient industrial development. The box also bears two vignettes, one depicting the transportation of coal by ship and thence by cart to a house. The other, in great detail, shows a thriving, domestic interior, with the coal being burned on a raised iron fire-grate. This fascinating object relates to the politics and also the domestic life of the late 18th century.

A Jarful of Seedcorn: Portrait of an Island Farm

Jocelyn Rendall. Kirkwall. The Orcadian Ltd. 2002. xxvi + 119pp. £9.99. 1 902957 16 4.

This excellent book is a remarkably detailed telling of the history, and current story, of the farm of Holland on Papa Westray, Orkney. However, it is not only a study of one farm, but also of farming in the islands of Orkney as whole. The present time is a particularly difficult one for the farming industry, but throughout the book, it is stressed that survival has been achieved by constant hard work, and adapting to even the most dramatic of changes. It is emphasised that this is the latest chapter in a long history of farming and cultivation in the area.

Jocelyn Rendall lives and farms at Holland, and tells the story of the farm through the people involved with it, whether landowners, farm man-

agers, farm workers, or eventually, independent farmers. Much personal reminiscence is used from contemporary accounts, records and diaries, through which many powerful personalities and colourful characters emerge. While focussing on the individuals, the development of farming in Orkney is also examined. Holland can be seen as a typical example and somewhere unique; it lies at the centre of this book, but its place in the world around it is also stressed.

Near Holland Farm are the remains of Knap of Howar, the oldest standing house in northern Europe, which dates from c.3800 BC, an early stage in the long tradition of farming in the area. Holland's recorded history starts in the 17th century when its land became part of an estate which spread over several islands, owned by the Traill family, who were to be involved with Holland until 1954. The farm buildings are a rich architectural legacy, dating from the 17th century, with the farmhouse being built in 1810, and further building work being carried out during Improvement, including a horse-driven threshing mill, a two-storey threshing barn and a terrace of houses for the farm servants, each with a kailyard. The first half of the 20th century was a period of conservatism with no new buildings appearing between 1900 and 1974, though later developments saw byres and silos constructed; diversification in the late 20th century also saw the bothy become a museum.

The history of the farm is, like many others, one of change and development, with advances often being followed by hardship in a cruel reversal of fortune. The beginning of the 19th century was a time of success; though agricultural yields were poor due to inefficient farming methods, natural resources such as kelp, fish, rabbit skins and quills for pens made for a thriving export economy. However, the collapse of the kelp industry in 1820 forced the introduction of Improvement to the farming lands of the islands. Farming methods had been non-scientific, and could be describe as near-medieval; the homes of some of the small tenants were not much advanced on the fourth millennium BC Knap of Howar. The programme of enclosure, drainage, liming and building made Holland a model farm that was much admired, and the development of Improvement on Papa is demonstrated in detail, including contemporary advertisements for the latest in farming machinery. In 1841, there were 72 people working on the farm. However, bankruptcy struck in the 1880s, due to the extravagance of its owner, Thomas Traill. The estate was owned by trustees until 1922; Holland was to change hands until it was purchased in 1967 by the Rendall family, who continue to farm there to this day, with their achievements including a prize-winning cattle herd. Sheep farming is also carried out, with flocks grazed on the island of Holm of Papa Westray. The whole local community participates in 'Holmie Day' in July, when the sheep are gathered and shorn. This is an attractive publication, well illustrated by line drawings (by Inga

Hourston) and archive photographs which record the people and activities related to the farm, which at once demonstrate the developments and timelessness of the farming history of Holland. The book is also well referenced throughout, and includes a useful glossary and index. Readable, informative and thought-provoking, it tells a fascinating story.

Discovering Your Old House: How to trace the history of your home

David Iredale and John Barrett. Princes Risborough. Shire. 2002. pp17. £6.99. ISBN 0 7478 0498 2.

This book may be familiar to some, in one of its earlier incarnations, first published in 1968, rewritten in 1991 and again in 2002, it is at once an essential guide to anyone researching their home, and an informative read for those with an interest in the subject of the history of the British house. A regular revision is essential for this volume, given the explosion in interest in local history, both by researchers in this country and overseas, and in the amount of information available to researchers in the form of databases on the Internet. This is a book that is full of advice, from understanding legislation, down to the basic equipment needed when attempting a survey of a house, or visiting an archive or repository of information. Most refreshingly, it covers the whole of Britain, with equal weighting being given to Scotland, particularly focusing on the north-east. Wales and the whole of Ireland are also covered.

The book may initially appear frighteningly dense, but for a reference book of this type, it is very readable, and is well organised under its particular chapter headings. It begins with a brief but informative description of the development of the house from c.1150, then explains how to extract information from the various components of the house, while at the same time enlarging on the historical background. At all times, account is taken of regional variations, and the spread of materials and building types. Taking the plan, walls, roof, relationship to other buildings, style, and fixtures and fittings - windows, fireplaces, stairs and water sources - in turn, it demonstrates how a detail can give a vital clue to understanding the building. Many helpful, and otherwise hard to find pieces of information are revealed in the process - statutory house-numbering began in London in 1767, in Scotland from 1833, and in the remainder of Britain and Ireland from 1847; a typical Wealden house required 330 trees for its frame; powered domestic refrigeration became available in 1913. Useful book titles are mentioned where appropriate. As well as photographs of a wide variety of building types, it makes helpful use of diagrams of varying types of roof, cruck frames and brick joints.

Following this examination, the book goes on to provide a guide to the often bewildering array of possible sources of information, whether published sources, information from images, place and house names, or from archives. The various types of archives and the information found in them are treated in detail, including local libraries, local authority archives, and central government records and libraries; useful advice is also given about how to use these archives efficiently. Basic advice is given on how to carry out a survey of a building, which usefully includes an explanation of archaic measurements. Finally, it provides advice on further reading, useful addresses (including Internet addresses), and a glossary of building terms.
In short this book is an invaluable distillation of a vast array of information, quickly providing a first step in a process of discovery.

But the Walls Remained

Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland/Historic Scotland. Edinburgh. 2002. 80pp. £6.00. ISBN: 1-902419-27-8.

This very nicely produced, glossy publication is the result of a detailed desk-based investigation of the unroofed structures depicted on the first edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map of Scotland, carried out and published from 1843 to 1878.

The aim of the survey was to increase knowledge of Scotland's medieval or later rural settlement (MoLRS), and in this it has amply succeeded, contributing over 22,000 new sites to the National Monuments Record of Scotland database. The publication includes over 150 maps, tables and photographs illustrating the survey's findings, and regional differences are also examined. Particularly well explained are the terms used to define different types of site (for example: township, crofting township, farmstead, field wall, head-dyke, boundary dyke etc).

This survey should prove an invaluable resource to planners, architects and historians, and perhaps encourage local historians to research the people who actually lived in and used some of these buildings.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

Elizabeth Beaton is an independent architectural historian.

Robin Callander, now retired, has been involved in archaeological excavations and field survey work for many years. He is a member of ACFA and a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

Bill Millan, a retired teacher, has had a lifelong interest in all vernacular building techniques, which he has put to practical, largely self-taught use in renovating several homes for his family. His infectious enthusiasm for bringing derelict buildings back to life saw its ultimate reward in the premises which became Bennie Museum.

Paul Newman lives in Tankerness, Orkney. He is interested in the construction of vernacular buildings, especially the old farm buildings of Orkney.

Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group

The Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group was set up in 1972 to provide a focus for all those interested in the traditional buildings of Scotland.

To some, Scottish 'vernacular' may mean cottages, croft-houses and farmsteads; to others, its essence may be urban tenements or terraces, industrial watermills and smithies, or even the 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 settlement social patterns, as well as those who have a specialised interest in building function, or in traditional buildings and crafts. The subject brings together architects, surveyors, archaeologists, historians, geographers, ethnologists, and above all, those who simply want to know how and why the traditional buildings of Scotland have such variety and character. The Group thrives on this refreshing blend of interests and attitudes, all of which are clearly evident in its activities.

Members of the Group are invited to attend annual conferences held at different venues, mainly in Scotland, each year. The 30th Conference was held in the Spring of 2002 in Arran, and the Autumn Meeting was at Traquair, in the Borders.

The Group's publications include Vernacular Building, an annual miscellany of articles issued free to members, and to which members and interested readers are invited to contribute, and a series of Regional and Thematic publications.

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