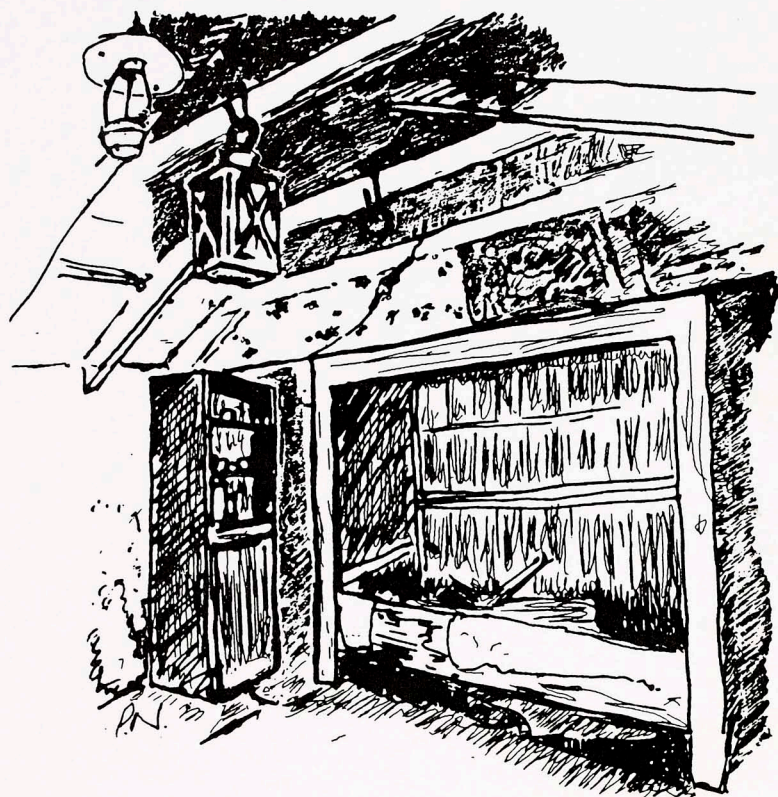


# VERNACULAR BUILDING 22

## Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group

1998



**VERNACULAR BUILDING 22**

**Scottish Vernacular Buildings  
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Cover illustration: But end of first house at South Hamar, Westray, Orkney, by Paul Newman.

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## Preface

Welcome to VB 22. As an 'enthusiastic amateur' myself, I hope that SVBWG members of all degrees of expertise will find much to inform and much to enjoy in the following pages. Firstly, an apology that this, my first issue as Editor of *Vernacular Building*, is published rather later than usual due to 'circumstances beyond my control'. However, I hope that VB 23 will appear by the end of October 1999, so this year members will get the bonus of two VB issues. While VB 23 will concentrate on Shetland, this issue contains a medley of subject-matter which I have much enjoyed working on.

Sir Roderick MacDonald's vivid account of bringing a black house back to life as a permanent home for humans, rather than fieldmice, weasels and woodworm, manages enjoyably to interweave the practical details of conversion with personal anecdote, and some fine illustrations from his own pen. Another example of conversion for modern living, but of a much larger, and industrial, building, is Ken Fawell's adaptation of Carmichael Mill, Lanark. This mill, which members of SVBWG saw during the Spring 1998 Biggar Conference, has an interesting history of multivarious use, domestic accommodation being only the latest stage in a long process of imaginative development of an existing resource which stretches back to the mediaeval period. Ken Fawell outlines the mill's uses as grain mill, foundry, lint mill, second foundry, threshing mill and now once again a workable grain mill, the machinery forming an unusual backdrop to his family's living quarters.

Yet many vernacular buildings remain at risk of disintegration, to be forgotten as soon as the earth reclaims them. In the strong tradition of the SVBWG's commitment to recording such buildings are the articles by Robin Callander, on a hearse house; Sheila Garson, who has recorded a selection of ruinous and intriguing buildings on Shapinsay, Orkney; and Jocelyn Rendall and Paul Newman, who describe buildings at South Hamar, Orkney, which have been purchased by Westray Buildings Preservation Trust and therefore face a brighter future. Paul Newman also gives an encouraging account of individual initiative by the owners of a farm at Rackwick, Hoy, Orkney, for whom a keen group of volunteers from the Scottish Conservation Project Trust rebuilt two roofs in traditional style on a previously roofless steading, the Crow's Nest. *Vernacular Building* 22 is greatly enhanced, as have been previous issues, by Paul's excellent illustrations to these two articles (and on the front cover).

Controversy adds spice, and Harry Gordon Slade's intention in his article on harling is to challenge the received wisdom of harling's 'vernacular' status. In so doing, he gives the texts of two fascinating 18th-century contracts which go into the meticulous details of how to harl, using delightful spellings: can't you just see the 'louse partickles' being swept away? This robust article will hopefully generate animated discussion among SVBWG members.

In addition to thanking the authors, who have been most patient with publishing delays, my thanks are due to Ronnie Robertson for his accounts of the Spring and Autumn 1998 Conferences, and for moral support throughout; to Elizabeth Beaton, for inspiration and inveterate chasing-up of potential authors; and to Veronica Steele and Paul Newman, who have produced some excellent book reviews.

Papers to appear in the next general issue of VB (VB 24, for the year 2000) should be sent to me at the address below by early spring 2000. I look forward to many more enjoyable and thought-provoking hours putting together *Vernacular Building*.

***Beth Ingpen  
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# BLACK HOUSE

## Boyhood dream comes true

Vice Admiral Sir Roderick MacDonald KBE

### *The Dream 1936*

Before World War II, during the holidays, I often stayed with a Highland family on their small croft/farm, helping a bit (I can still use a scythe) and walking the hills. Those were the days when my parents, like many Scots, had jobs in the Far East with home leave only every three years. My kind, Gaelic-speaking hosts used to move into the old house whenever their 'two-up-two-down' was let out to visitors. I had no hesitation in deciding which was the better of the two. I fell in love with the vernacular. My boyhood dream consisted of life at sea in the Royal Navy—perhaps with one or two adventures— followed by happy old age in a 'Black House', painting and playing the pipes, cared for by a loving wife. Being born a survivor with loads of luck, the dream came true.

### *Search 1968 and realisation 1973*

I had asked a contemporary whose home was in Skye, on an occasion when our ships met somewhere in the South Atlantic, to keep a look out for such a house. Old croft houses were, for a variety of reasons, becoming rare and were never on the market. Years later, out of the blue, he alerted me to the exception. Rushing north I got it, but not without all sorts of arcane difficulties, including legal pre-emption by the Feudal Superior, for which unfriendly action many apologies were made subsequently.

Partly due to its unique position, it cost me the then equivalent of two new Range Rovers without even a survey, no key being available. Locals agreed that I had been 'taken to the cleaners' by a rascally Sassenach. Yet ironically the stiff price I paid was what protected me from feudal pre-emption. It was generally assumed that I would replace a wee dilapidated old 'hoose' (which no local would be seen dead in) with a state-of-the-art kit erection.

The house stood on its own, at the time unshielded by even one tree. It measured 38 feet by 17 feet, and was substantially constructed with large, irregular, glacially sculptured basalt boulders, rendered with plaster, but no mortar, no founds (and naturally no damp course), with a 4 feet (at least) double wall, the outer sloping inward (batter), with volcanic black sand infill. It stood well clear of the single-track road and less than 100 yards from basalt cliffs and the sea, with a dramatic view in every direction. Being some distance from the hill it caught the sun all day all year round. Thatch had been replaced (probably twice)



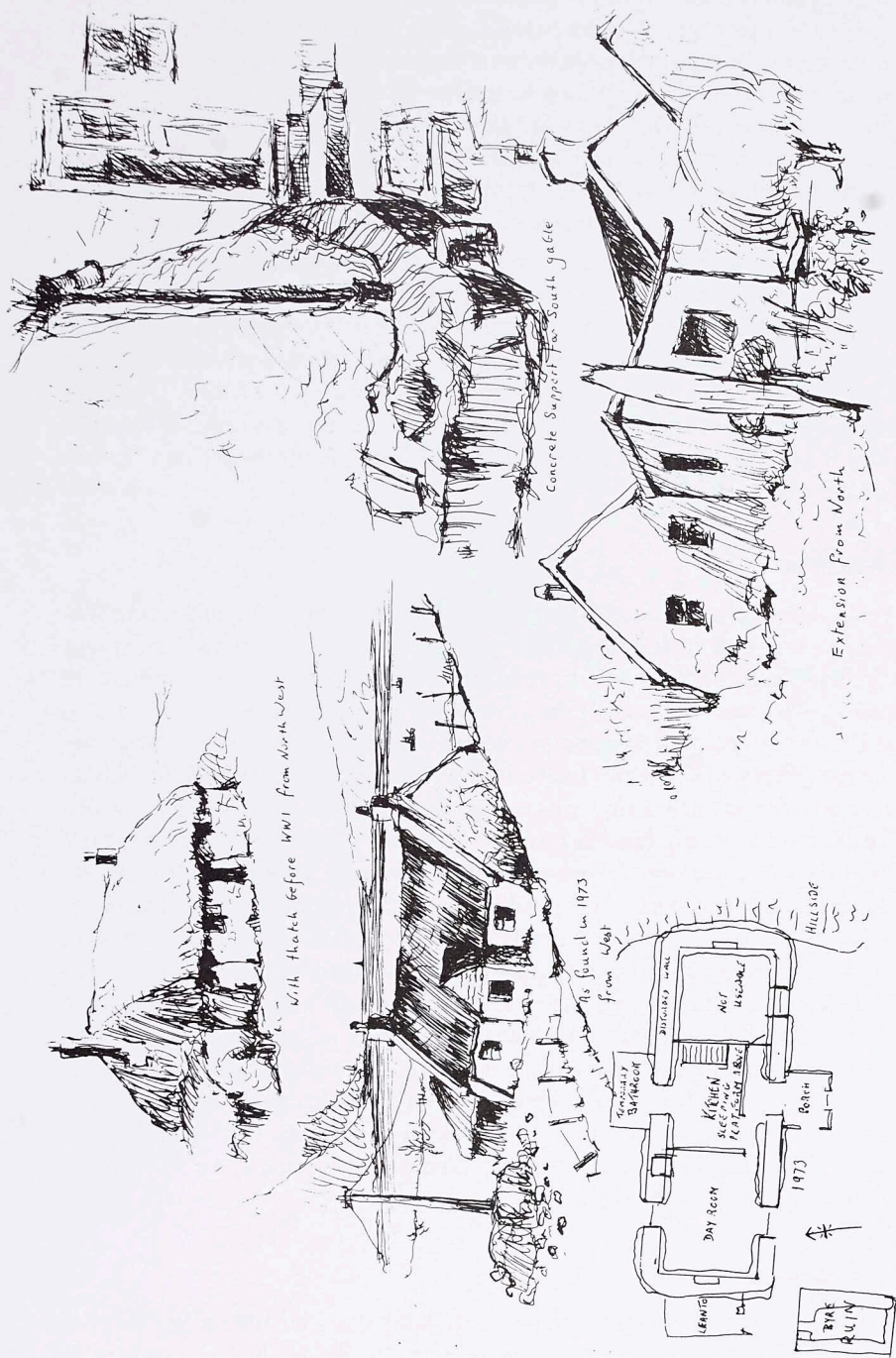


Figure 1 Old House, Braes: (a) with thatch before World War I; (b) as found in 1973; (c) concrete support for south gable; (d) extension from the north.

by bitumen-painted heavy-duty corrugated iron (now rust streaked with a hole here and there) perhaps 70 years before. Gables (from wall up) were poorly constructed, evidently using seashore sand, and their false corners concealed the traditional rounded originals. A long vertical crack disfigured the northern gable. This heaved a visible sigh of relief when its suspended power line was taken below ground. The southern gable was later underpinned and supported by concrete when the ground was levelled to accommodate a garage workshop nearby, because there the lowest course rested on ground higher than the remainder.

The wood floors, presumably contemporary with the roof, were in good order except for wet rot in the area used as a kitchen. The joists, although laid directly on the original bare beaten earth floor, were surprisingly sound due to efficient external rubble field drains. Ceilings in two rooms were white-painted simulated V-lining, i.e. thin planks with a groove driven up the centre. How old the house is we do not know. It is on the first Ordnance surveys and had been the property of Lord Macdonald's estate until World War II, being rented out. Its style is of a larger Skye Black House.<sup>1</sup>

## *Occupation*

The first ten days in occupation (a holiday) proved interesting. When the door was opened, a robin flew in and sang in the attic. It soon became obvious that those who had replaced thatch with tin had forgotten about the loss of inherent insulation. And, with no 'coo' in the other room for central heating, warmth was needed. At this point it became suddenly important to remember what my chemistry master said about how to extinguish a major chimney fire. Wild life was represented by field mice scampering noisily through interstices within the walls, then neutering an electric blanket by nibbling the wire, and eating the cork off a vertical sherry bottle. How? A weasel family set up home in the roof. Woodworm dined happily on the rafters. This resulted in an impromptu descent through the ceiling from the attic. And so I finished the job (and myself nearly) off with Rentokil. The remarkable dry atmosphere was explained by the draughts which found their way down from the gap between the tin roof and the rubble-covered wall top. Cured temporarily with newspaper spills at each change of wind direction, this phenomenon was fixed permanently by a thatch-thick layer of glass wool insulation. Help from a local joiner, and DIY, made things shipshape, with predecessors' 'improvements' being demolished and plans being made for the long term. Plumbing had already been installed, but mysteriously no sewage had ever penetrated as far as the septic tank.

## *Modification 1979 on*

The old house was comfortably adequate for holiday stays, but not for growing old if accustomed to an element of 'gracious living'. We needed somewhere to



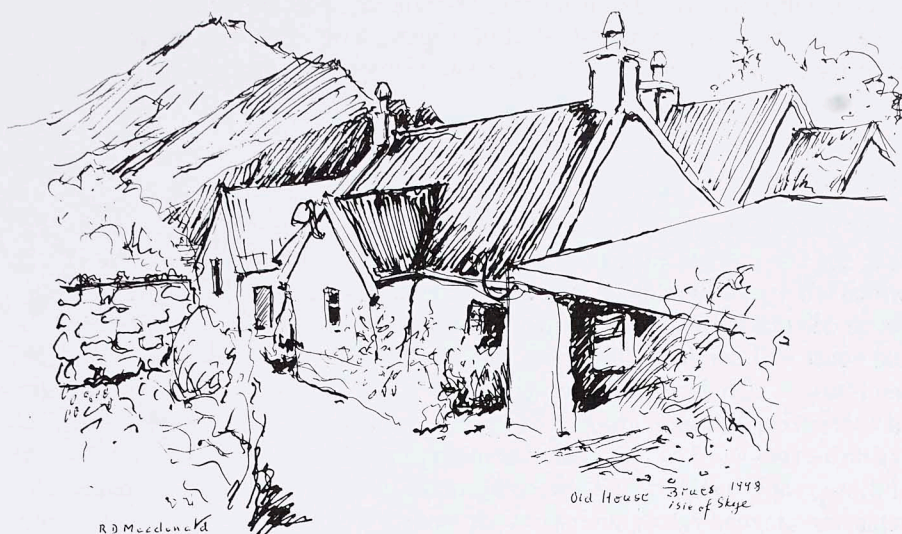


Figure 2 Old House, Braes 1998.

accommodate visiting children, grandchildren and friends. Although the building was not 'listed', it was essential to preserve its character and not overwhelm the simple vernacular style with obtrusive new construction. We settled for what externally resembles a second croft house set behind the first, with a flat roof section between. Height and pitch of roofs are deliberately similar. The new part was designed with skews, a concealed lead gutter and similar chimney and windows to the original. External plaster was worked by hand to echo irregularities of the old house. GRP was used for the flat roof.

The old part now provides three rooms. The dining room, with V-lined wood, is in the centre. To the left is the 'cuddy', with undressed exposed stone walls and wooden ceiling all painted white, and a new skylight above the original window that now peers through to the (extension) kitchen. With a wood and peat open fire on the gable end and book-lined internal wall opposite, this room feels good and we occupy it daily. On the other side of the dining room is the spare bedroom (in which it is not possible to hear even a howling gale); the walls here are boxed in and lined with hessian paper.

The extension comprises a large kitchen (essential afterthought), drawing room, bedroom, two bathrooms, extra loo, drying room, loft and many cupboards which make use of external wall (batter) in juxtaposition with modern verticals. Acquaintance with ship fitting comes in useful. Outside, the ruined small animal byre was rebuilt as a woodshed, while in keeping, a small insulated steading offers beds for two grandchildren. A larger Swedish style log studio painted warship grey stands by the cattle grid.

## *Appearance*

After much thought and investigation of different roofing materials, including real, and even simulated plastic, thatch, a 100-knot hurricane on New Year's Day, which left my 18-foot lugger stranded bottom up on the roof of a nearby steading, illustrated that tin was best (and in appearance now even traditional). The original old house still dominates the scene, and the lie of the land renders the extension unobtrusive. Newcomers entering by the front door are taken aback by the dimensions of the house inside. The illusion is enhanced by the trees and shrubs of the now-established garden. This was made from a bracken-infested croft field by shifting many boulders and spreading much seaweed; planting a shelterbelt; replacing clogged rubble drainage with modern field drains; and of course the instant repulsion of sheep and rabbits, thus regenerating native trees.

It is a pity that most of these often well-built vernacular Black Houses have been deliberately neglected until they become ruins, mainly because they do not meet building regulations, but partly due to misplaced snobbery. I expect that this one will outlive the suburban style kit house which is so popular here today.

## **Reference**

1. Colin Sinclair. *The Thatched Houses of The Old Highlands*. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd.

# REMAINS OF A HEARSE HOUSE AT PARKGATE, KIRKMICHAEL PARISH, DUMFRIESSHIRE - NY 023 883

**R.C.Callander**

Set back from the minor road from Parkgate to Nethermill, near to its junction with the Dumfries/Beattock road, is a ruinous structure shown on the First Edition O.S. Map as a Hearse House.

It is a gable-ended rectangular building measuring 4.9 m NE/SW by 3.1 m transversely within random rubble whinstone walls 0.45 m thick with dressed sandstone rybats. The walls, 2.5 m high, are surmounted by a dressed sandstone wall-plate, on which are laid crossbeams lap-jointed to trusses which are lap-jointed at the apex. The roof is slated with a cut sandstone ridge and plain sandstone skews. There is no sarking, the slates being fixed to stringers laid along the trusses. Along the eaves are cast-iron half-round gutters. The underside of the crossbeams has been boarded to provide a ceiling.

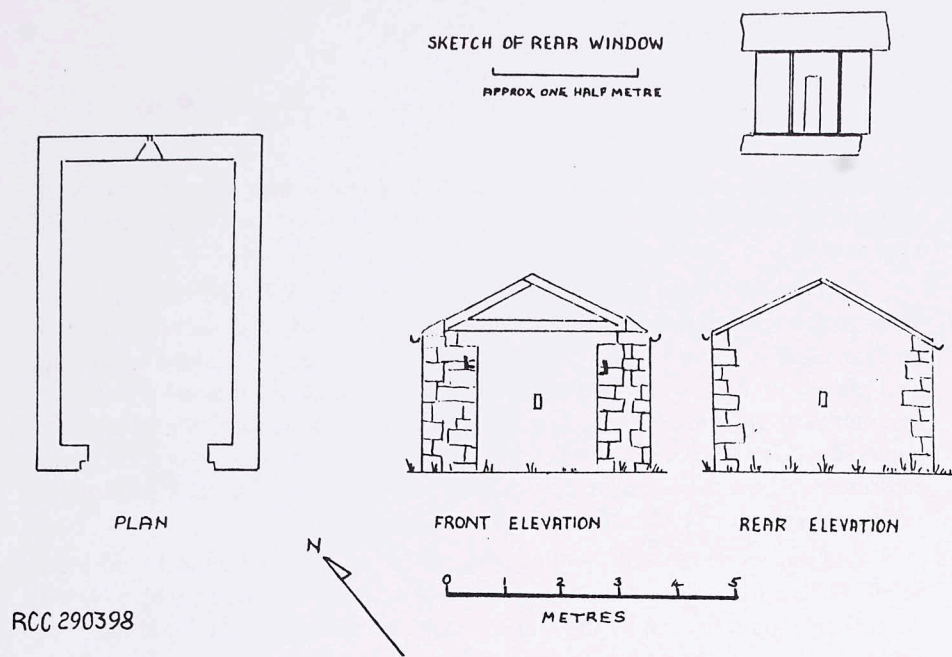
In the front (SW) wall, is the entrance, 2.1 m wide and almost wall-head height. There are rebates at the margins to receive the double doors which closed the entrance, only the upper hinge-brackets now remaining. The lintel over the entrance, probably of wood, is missing and so is the upper part of the gable, which may have been of wood or stone.

There are no window openings in the side walls but almost centrally in the rear wall is a slit about 30 mm wide and 1.0 m high, its sill about 1.0 m from ground level, which is splayed on its inner side.

It is uncertain who was responsible for building the Parkgate Hearse House or when it was built. It probably dates from the end of the 18th century or early 19th century, but there is no mention of it in the *Old* (of 1790–91) or *New* (of 1834) *Statistical Accounts* for Kirkmichael parish, Dumfriesshire. However, it appears that at the end of the 18th century or early in the 19th century several communities in south and central Scotland provided themselves, or were provided by a benefactor, with a vehicle especially for conveying the deceased to a burial ground. This would be in keeping with the attitude to death at that time, when there was a more outward display of mourning extending, for example, to special clothing for the bereaved, and elaborate headstones. The cost of such a hearse, and a place for keeping it and certainly its upkeep, would be met by contributions, probably paid regularly by members of the community who, in return, had use of it at the time of family bereavements.<sup>1</sup>

At the time of the bi-centenary of the birth of Robert Burns, the committee of the Burns Federation discovered, in a barn at Bolton, East Lothian, the hearse used





at the funeral of the poet's mother and which, by some miracle, had survived. The hearse was rescued by the committee and displayed at the (then) Royal Scottish Museum in Chambers Street, Edinburgh. This was probably the 'community hearse' for that area and the 'house' at Parkgate probably housed a similar hearse.

## Reference

1. For further information, see "Hearses and Hearse Houses" in G. Hay, *Architecture of Scottish Post-Reformation Churches 1560-1843*, pp. 238-9. Oxford University Press, 1957.

# THE CROW'S NEST, RACKWICK, HOY:

## An account of the reconstruction of two roofs

**Paul Newman**

The Crow's Nest (or Craa's Nest) is a small farm steading on the steep slope of the hill to the west of Rackwick Bay. Rackwick, in its austere isolation, is a popular place with walkers and an old building near the shore has served as a bothy for some years. Until this summer the Crow's Nest was one of the great number of roofless steadings dotting the land throughout the islands of Orkney.

The old farm is owned by Jack and Dorothy Rendall of Glen, Rackwick. The Rendalls planned the reconstruction of roofs on the old buildings and the project was part funded from the Countryside Premium Scheme for vernacular buildings. The labour was provided by volunteers organised by the Scottish Conservation Project Trust at Munlochy. Advice on construction and the master of works role was carried out by Max Collop, a Hoy-based building contractor who specialises in reconstruction of traditional buildings. My role was to advise on aspects of the construction of traditional buildings in Orkney and to provide the volunteers with information to help put their work into context.



*Figure 1 The Crow's Nest with simmens-covered roofs, taken during one of George Washington Wilson's two visits to Orkney during the 1880s and 1890s; reproduced with permission from the George Washington Wilson Collection, Aberdeen University Library: ref A1831.*



The photograph of the Crow's Nest reproduced here (Fig. 1), from the George Washington Wilson Collection, would have been taken during one of Wilson's two visits to Orkney during the 1880s and 1890s. We see that the roofs of the occupied steading are covered with the traditional *simmens* (ropes of straw or bent) weighted down by *bendlin stanes* located in the loops of *simmens* above the eaves<sup>1</sup>. The *bendlin stanes* would rest on a row of flagstones resting on the wall head flagstones (*aisins*). The roof construction underneath the *simmens* could be of a number of different types. It could be a needled roof where the lowest layer is a supporting "web" of *simmens* wrapped over the laths between the couples<sup>2</sup>. The under layer could have been turf, perhaps heather turf as survives elsewhere on Hoy. Another alternative is that the top layer of *simmens* overlaid a rather roughly constructed overseamed flagstone roof—there are a few survivals in Orkney of this once widespread type of roof. Perhaps the relatively steep pitch of the gable skews favours the possibility that the roof was thatched. Also the amount of flagstone salvaged from the debris within the building walls did not look at all sufficient to cover the roofs.

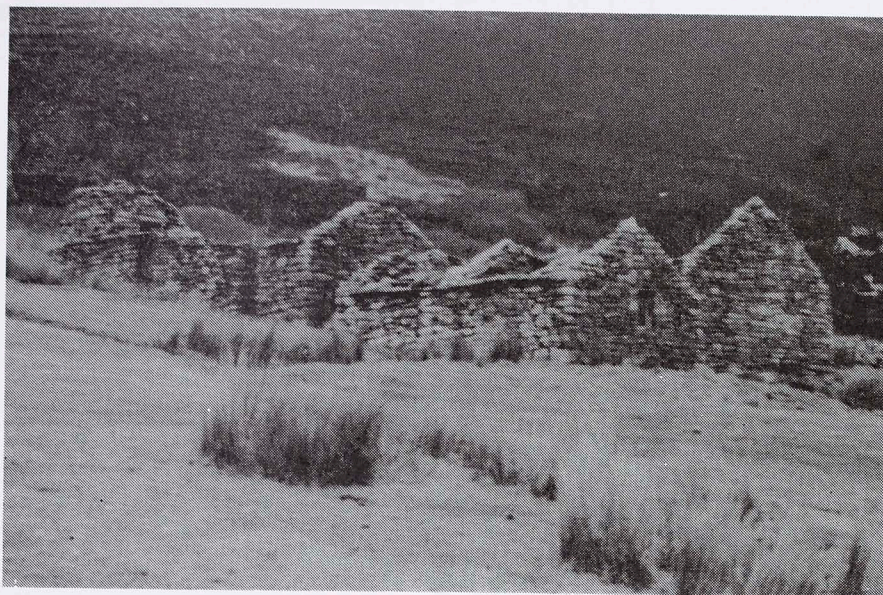
The layout of the steading is traditional in that there are two ranges on either side of a narrow passage or *closs*, which drains down the slope of the hill. On the north side of the *closs* is the two-roomed dwelling. This is roofless and there has been considerable damage to some of the walls and gables. There are a number of features associated with Orcadian traditional farm buildings including a *sae blink* or circular recess near the door for the *sae* or water barrel. On the other side of the *closs* at the downhill end is a small two-celled building. One cell has two windows and it may have been a bothy for farm servants; however, there is no evidence of a fireplace. Uphill is a third building which includes byre, barn with winnowing door and kiln. This complex blocks the *closs* and has entrance doors from the hillside, suggesting that it replaced an earlier narrower building. There are a number of vertical construction joints in the stone walls of the buildings indicating phases of construction and alteration.

Before the volunteers arrived, the buildings were surveyed and repairs to the wall heads were carried out. Supplies were ordered including larch cabers from the Highlands for the new couples. Two of the roofs were to be reconstructed: the barn/byre and a bothy or store. The roof of the dwelling was left to be reconstructed in a subsequent phase.

All the roofs of the Crow's Nest had completely disappeared, so there was not much evidence for the type of roofs the buildings had had in the past (Fig. 2). The Washington Wilson photograph showed external *simmens* and a lower layer of flagstone. But the outer *simmens* could have hidden a needled roof, a turf or a flagstone sarking. The relatively steep pitch of the roof suggests a flagstone roof is less likely than turf, or a *simmens* needling.

Mrs Rendall had wanted the reconstructed roofs to be clad with flagstones; however, a sufficient quantity of suitable stones was not available. It was therefore





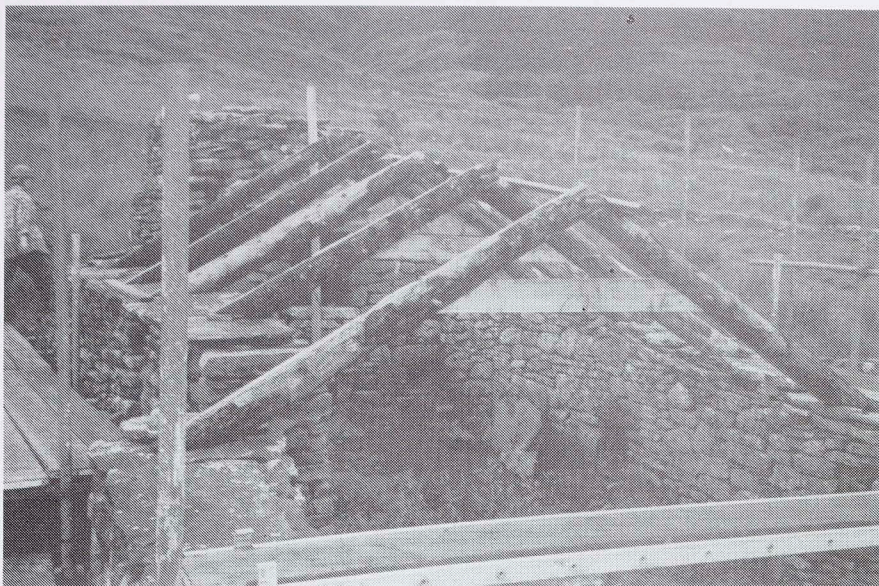
*Figure 2 The roofless Crow's Nest in 1991.*

decided to use the best flagstones to create one course of overseamed flagstone resting on the aisins and then to cover most of the roof with grass turf. There are a few surviving turf roofs in Hoy and elsewhere in Orkney providing examples of this type of construction.

Couples are typically at about 3 feet spacing. Most traditional roofs have about five or six laths per side, but turf roofs usually require more support than stone or needled roofs, and therefore use wider laths or more of them. Other old turf roofs in Hoy use heather turf laid root side up. The turf would provide a sarking to a thatching of straw, bent or heather and at the turn of the century the top layer would have been in the form of simmens held in place with bendlin stanes in the loops of the ropes. Later on, nets and then wire netting held the roof covering in place instead of the simmens.

The new couples were made from halved stout larch poles. Joints were made following better examples of traditional construction with a kind of dovetail which locked the *thwartbacks* (or couple ties) into the legs of the couples, with a lapped joint at the apex of the couple. Joints were fixed with hardwood (greenheart) pegs worked from the square section. The thwartbacks were located between a third and a half of the height from the apex to the feet of the couple. This was to give adequate headroom in the bothy and is appropriate in a barn design for hand threshing with the flail.





*Figure 3 Reconstruction in progress: new couples over the barn; note the awkward step and offset in the nearest wall.*



*Figure 4 Reconstruction in progress: turf being placed over the geotextile membrane.*



The buildings sit on a steep hillside, and the south wall of the barn/byre is stepped both in plan and elevation (Fig. 3). This meant that a template had to be made for each couple. All this was done under the eye of Max Collop. The joints were marked with saw cuts and then cut out using hand axes. Traditional eaches or adzes would probably have been easier to use if they had been obtainable.

The team was concerned that weathertight roofs were required to be built by relatively unskilled volunteers. These roofs would need to stand up to extreme weather on an exposed site and at the same time require very little maintenance. For this reason some compromises were made with traditional construction.

It was decided to cover the roof with grass turf and as it was not to be over-thatched with straw, the living grass side would be laid uppermost. To prevent the turf drying out into the interior of the buildings, the turf would be laid on a waterproof geotextile membrane (Fig. 4). Galvanised wire netting would be used to hold the turf in place, laid under the geotextile and then carried over the top of the turf. Stones were then to be fixed in place over the turf and netting to weight down the roof covering against the wind.

Turf was cut from the nearby ground using turfing spades, but not of the traditional broad-bladed type. Traditionally the turf should be cut with feathered edges to produce a roof of constant thickness where the turves are lapped. The turf was very wet so the turf (of constant thickness) was lapped rather like roman tiles, the idea being that the turves would fall into position as they shrank. In practice this has worked out very well and on a recent visit a couple of months after the



*Figure 5 Crow's Nest in October 1998; photograph courtesy of Janet Ireland.*

reconstruction, the turf was found to have flattened and knitted together with the wire netting barely visible (Fig. 5).

During the reconstruction, the top of the round kiln was repaired and then re-roofed in stone, with a wooden box flue and a turf capping. Half a ton of debris was cleared out of the bowl and the flue from the fire hole. A kiln floor is still to be constructed.

Two roofs are still to be constructed over the roofless dwelling. Following the experience of reconstructing the roofs of the barn/byre and bothy, it is likely that the same type of construction will be used again. The reroofing of the two buildings at the Crow's Nest over a 10-day period is a considerable achievement for all concerned, and particularly for the construction team of 10 volunteers, project leader and master of works.

## References

1. Paul and Alison Newman. Roof types in the traditional rural buildings of Orkney. *Vernacular Building* 16 (1992), pp. 39-55.
2. A.Fenton. *The Northern Isles: Orkney & Shetland*, pp.184–6. Edinburgh: John Donald, 1978.



# SOUTH HAMAR, WESTRAY, ORKNEY

Jocelyn Rendall and Paul Newman

Hamar is an Old Norse name referring to a geographical feature (crag projecting from a hillside - Orkney Wordbook). There is a farm called Hammars which lies below the Vins Hamar outcrop on the crest of Fitty Hill, and South Hamar is located about 1 km to the west-south-west of Hammars.

South Hamar on the Tirlet estate in Westray, now in the hands of the Westray Buildings Preservation Trust, is a rare survival of the type of small farmstead that would have been typical in the North Isles of Orkney in the last century, as there seem to have been no additions to the property since the 1860s and no interior modifications to the dwelling-house (lived in until 1990) later than c. 1930. The farm must have been a thriving one in the 1860s as there are a number of other buildings in addition to the two houses, barn, kiln and byre.

The buildings as they appear now (see plan, Fig. 1) probably date from the first half of the 19th century. The complex consists of two houses, barn and corn-drying kiln in a single block, with a small outbuilding projecting at right-angles from the kiln wall. A narrow paved *closs* separates the west house from a byre and pig pens. A ruinous building south of the east house was formerly a smithy. The flagstone roofs survive on the west house barn and byre but elsewhere have mostly fallen in. There is no roof left on the east house.

Typically, the houses have no stone partition walls. The smaller easterly house (Fig. 2), labelled 'second house' on plan and formerly divided by three box beds, was abandoned in 1960 and is now empty of furniture save for the kitchen utensils which still hang from the sweep in one fireplace. The furnishings of the larger house (labelled 'first house' on plan) in so far as they survive, represent the Westray interior of the 1920s or 1930s. Until 1991 two box beds divided the interior into three rooms. At the west end, cooking was done on a small coal-burning iron stove while the ben end was warmed by an open fire. A few items of furniture survive including one of the box beds (Fig. 3), some oil lamps and an 'Orkney barometer', made by inverting a water-filled bottle into a jar.

One family, named Leslie, is recorded living at South Hamar in the 1841 Census. By 1851 it was in the hands of Charles Paterson, farmer of 12 acres, whose descendants lived here for the next 140 years. Presumably Charles added the second dwelling before 1871, as by that time two married sons and their families were sharing the place with their parents and two unmarried sisters, a total of 12 people! In the reorganisation of the Tirlet estate in 1867, South Hamar had been reduced to six acres, so it is not surprising to find that the heads of the second and third households are from now on recorded as making their living as blacksmiths or fishermen rather than farmers.

# FARMSTEAD AT SOUTH HAMAR, WESTRAY



SCALE — 1 METRE

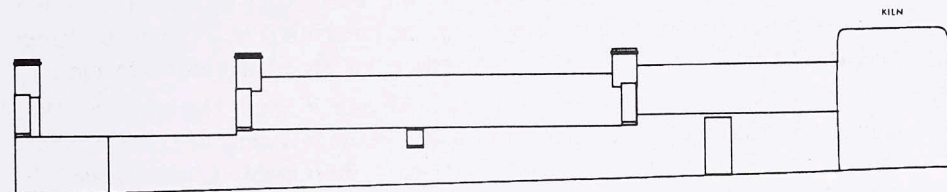
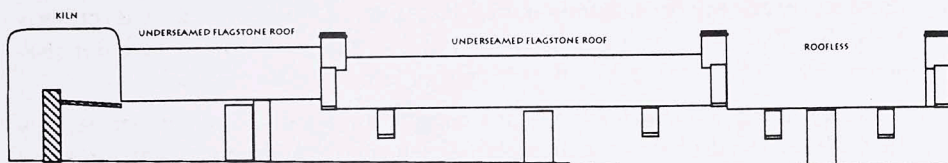
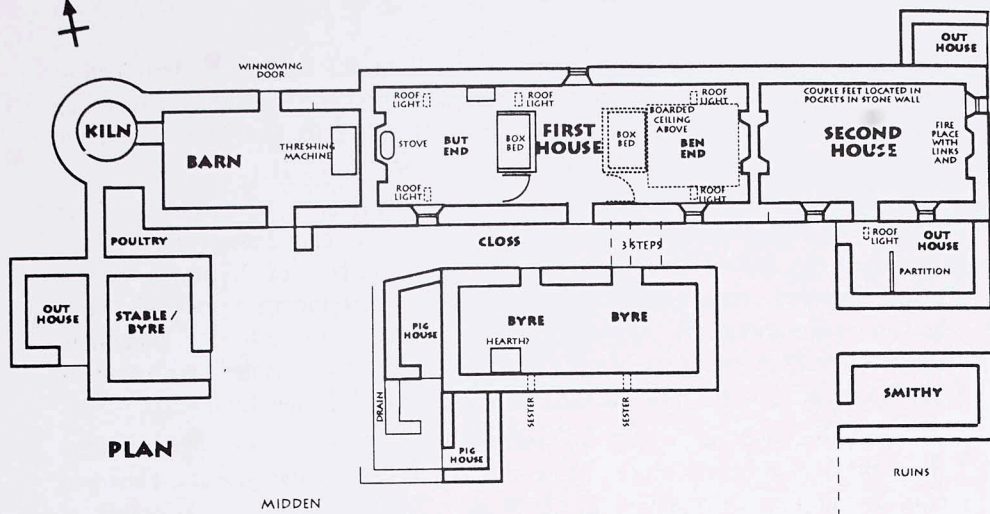


Figure 1 Plan of farmstead.

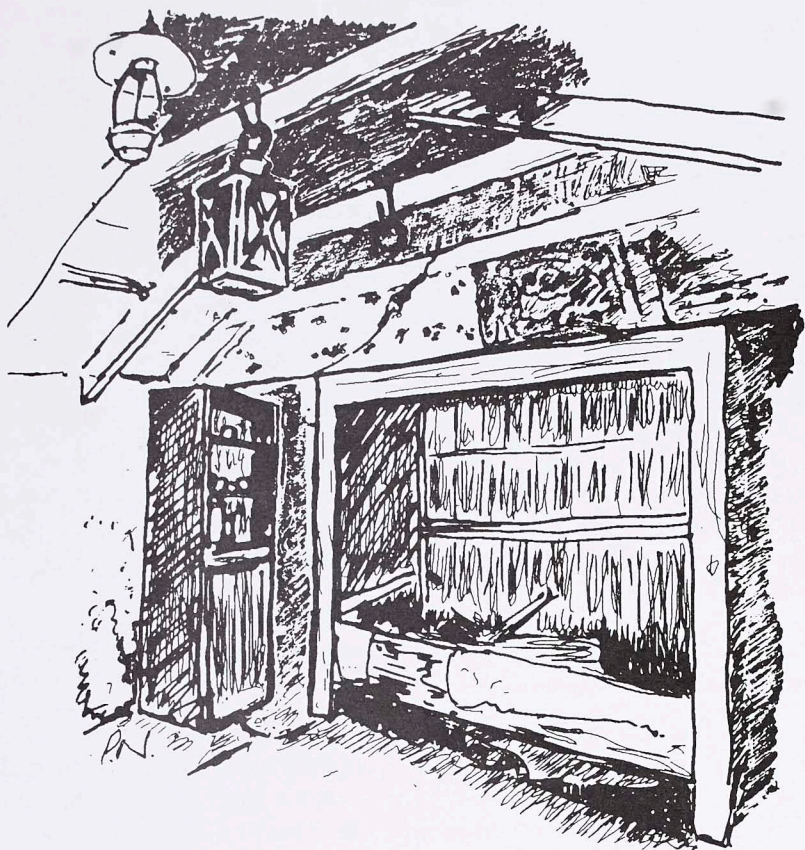


*Figure 2 The roofless second house.*

Early this century the east house was the home of a fisherman's widow, Janet Rendall, and one of her six children lived there alone until his death in 1960. About 1907, George Paterson came to work at the large neighbouring farm of Tuquoy and took over South Hamar (west). He paid £1 a year rent for the house (which he re-roofed) and outbuildings, and continued to rent the six acres of ground on which he managed to keep a milking cow and her followers. His daughter Mary, born in 1910, went to the Westside School until she was 14 and only then travelled as far afield as the village of Pierowall, 5 miles distant. For the rest of his life she kept house at South Hamar (west) for her brother Johnnie, also a farm-servant at Tuquoy and, when he died in 1975, lived there alone until 1990, subsisting on salt fish and salt pork, vegetables from her small yard and the produce of her few ducks and hens.

The roofs which survive are over the byre/stable, the barn and the larger west house. The roof over the house is in the best condition and is an underseamed flagstone roof presumably as George Paterson rebuilt it shortly after 1907 (Fig. 4). The lums have pronounced waterberge stones, suggesting the possibility of

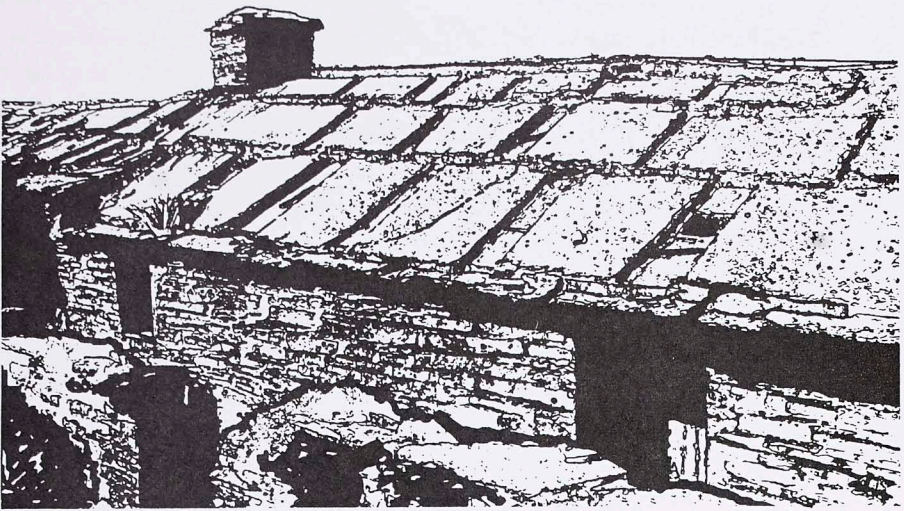




*Figure 3 But end of first house, with box bed.*

overthatching. A roof thatched over flagstones is part of the Orcadian vernacular tradition of which a few examples survive<sup>1</sup>, but it is unlikely that a well-made underseamed roof like this one would be thatched when so much has been done to create such an ordered appearance.

In Orkney, the dwellings on small 19th-century farms have sometimes evolved by adaptation of an earlier dwelling, with the central hearth of the fire-house being replaced by an inserted internal gable wall with integral fireplace. Alternatively, a new dwelling is built with fireplaces in the end gables, with



*Figure 4 Underseamed flagstone roof of first house.*

windows, and internal division with box beds and wooden partitions—the ubiquitous rural cottage of the 19th century with Orcadian materials. Both of the houses at South Hamar are of the latter kind. There is enough evidence to show that the roofless east house had a flagstone roof of some kind. There are pockets in the walls, below the aisins, to support the couple feet, unlike most traditional roofs which rest on the aisins.

The flagstone roof of the barn is much more irregular though probably originally an underseamed roof. The roof of the byre/stable is an overseamed roof with triangular stones, a local variation in Westray (as at Nether House and Swartaback<sup>2</sup>).

Inside the west house some of the couples are rotten and some have been repaired in the past. Some wooden pegs with traditional square ends are in evidence in some of the couple joints. A ceiling of whitewashed boards has been fixed to the couple backs at the ben end and there is evidence that a similar arrangement existed at the but end. The undersides of the joints in the stone roof have been packed with newspaper at some time, suggesting a draughty existence for the inhabitants. The floor is made of flagstones. There are no public services to the building save for a water tap in the barn.

The couples in the barn roof are in a precarious state, with the thwartbacks, or couple ties, being located very high up the couple and being improvised and patched with unsuitable timber. Traditionally barn couples had thwartbacks located higher than couples in other buildings to give more headroom for the use of the flail. This barn has a threshing floor between the main door and the winnowing door. There is also a portable wooden threshing machine in the barn along with other traditional farm equipment.



The kiln is of the circular drum type<sup>3</sup> with the stones forming the roof still in place. This was used as the model for the reconstruction of the top of the kiln at the Crow's Nest, Rackwick, Hoy, in August 1998 by a team from the Scottish Conservation Project. There is some evidence that the kiln had a turf cap on it at one time.

It is commendable that the building has been purchased by the Westray Buildings Preservation Trust. Much reconstruction work faces the Trust, especially to the roofs. We hope it will be possible to retain the different styles of Westray traditional stone roofs in any reconstruction.

## Acknowledgment

We are indebted to Angie Stout of Westray for information about the occupants of South Hamar.

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# SOME TRADITIONAL BUILDINGS

## HOLLANDSTOUN, SHAPINSAY, ORKNEY

Sheila Garson

Today Shapinsay is the most intensively cultivated island in Orkney and its neat, square fields and large modern steadings do not seem an ideal hunting ground for traditional farm buildings. But the island was a very different place in the mid 19th century and remnants of older traditions still exist if you know where to look.

At the time of the *New Statistical Account* in 1841<sup>1</sup> only 748 of the island's 7,000 acres were under cultivation. Soon after this, the map of Shapinsay was radically redrawn by David Balfour's programme of Agricultural Improvement and by the 1870s the cultivated area had increased to fully 6,000 acres. The island was laid off in 5 or 10 acre fields following a strict grid and taking no heed of existing cultivation<sup>2</sup>. New farms sprang up on what had been the common and many small holdings vanished in the new wave of improvement.

From the point of view of traditional building survival, Hollandstoun seems the most promising area of the island. It was an area of development in the early 19th century<sup>3</sup> and after the island was Improved became a crofting/fishing community with small holdings of 5–10 acres<sup>4</sup>. The main income of this community was drawn from the sea, with farming taking second place and probably not rising above subsistence level. Therefore the area did not warrant



Figure 1 Smithy, Haughland, with chimney hole on right.

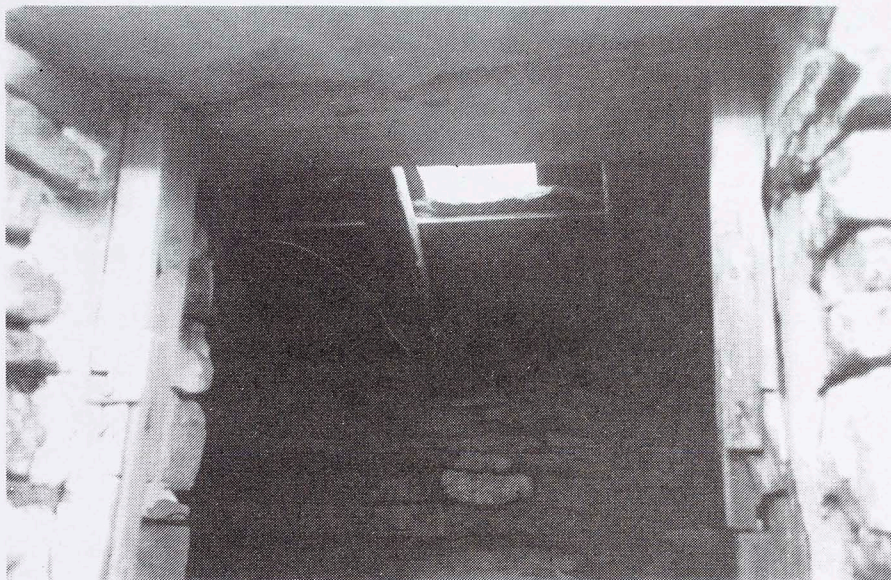


investment in new improved farm buildings. Here, many of the farms stand at an angle to the Balfour grid, which is indicative of pre-improvement buildings and, although a fair number are abandoned, they are in a reasonably good state of repair with few 'modern' additions.

Hollandstoun's first treasure is a small, neatly built smithy tucked away at the back of the steading at Haughland (Fig. 1). It is built of locally quarried sandstone and clay, and measures 12 feet 6 inches by 7 feet 11 inches with the back wall 5 feet 6 inches high and the front 6 feet. The side walls are about 1 foot 8 inches thick and the gable walls are peaked, however the apex is not central, but approximately two-thirds of the way between the back and front walls. There are no windows and one door, 2 feet 6 inches wide, set slightly off-centre of the front wall.

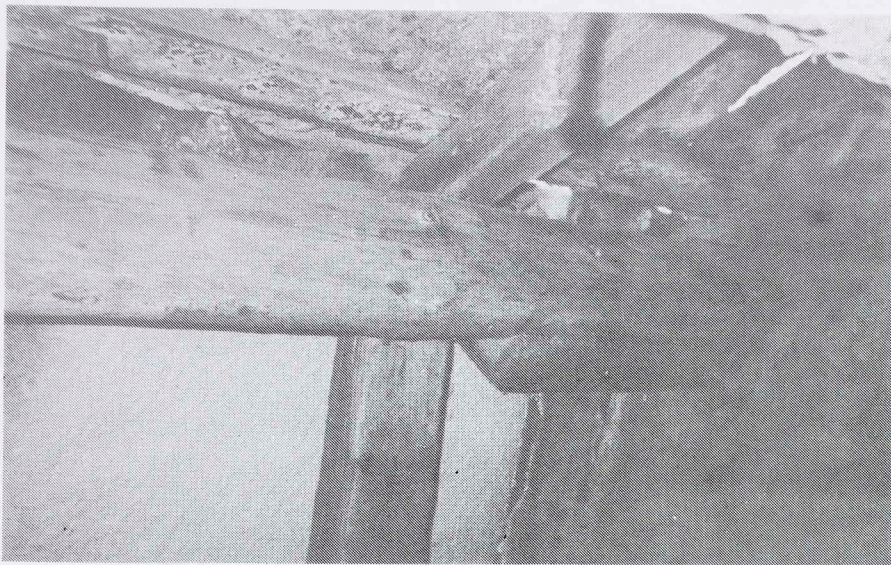
The door has long gone, but the door jambs survive (Fig. 2). These are marvellously innovative, each constructed from two or three pieces of wood, joined together using halving joints. Also in place is part of a 'hook and plate' type hinge fashioned from wood and, on the opposite jamb, two wooden snibs used to fasten the door. The exterior door lintel is of stone and the interior one is of wood.

Inside the building clay is evident between the stonework and in places almost obscures the stone. The best example of this can be seen at the top of the gable walls, where clay has been thickly applied using a technique somewhere between pointing and plastering. The smithy has a simple earthen floor.



*Figure 2 Smithy: rafters and purlins; note detail of door jambs.*





*Figure 3 Smithy: maintree and rafters; clay 'pointing' is also visible.*

The most striking feature of this building is the roof structure of maintree and rafters (Figs 2 and 3), a type of roof structure hitherto found on only one site outside North Ronaldsay<sup>5</sup>. The maintree is round, tapering to one end with a square block added to the other end. It could well be a mast, complete with mast step, or it may simply be a log of driftwood with a block added to make it long enough for the roof. This maintree is built into the gables of the building and forms the ridge of the roof.

Rafters are placed fairly regularly on either side of the maintree, with one end resting on the maintree. The other ends of the back rafters are built into the wall, while the front rafters rest on the wall head. These are quite closely spaced—about 1 foot 8 inches apart—and look as if they are made of recycled wood. Light strips of wood (purlins) are fixed across the rafters, where required, to help support the weight of the flag roof. The flags are under-seamed with strips of tin and pointed with cement.

No wall plates are visible on the outside of the front wall and the flag roof overhangs here. Wall plates comprising long thin sandstones can be seen on the outside of the back wall and the roofing flags rest on these.

There is a small round portable forge to the right of the inner door, complete with tongs (Fig. 4). Further blacksmith's tools hang on the wall nearby. A chimney has been built across the corner above the forge using a triangular-shaped flag supported from below on two iron stakes driven into the wall. By using cement a tight join has been achieved between the flag and the wall. This chimney





Figure 4 Smithy: portable forge with flagstone chimney.

then merges into the stonework of the wall and there is a corresponding hole in the flag roof where it emerges.

Also in the building is a makeshift anvil. This has been made from a rough wooden log about 2 feet high with a length of railway sleeper driven into the top.

The exact age of the smithy is not known, but we do know that the croft of Haughland only came into being after the island was improved in the mid 19th century and first appears on the 1882 Ordnance Survey map. As the smithy is not part of the main building core, it was probably a later addition and an early 20th-century date seems likely.

Haughland also has a small cart house built in the same manner with similar maintree roof construction.

Another interesting group of buildings can be found at Cattybraes, a mile along the road, but here the

buildings are a mixture of pre- and post-improvement. The farmstead stands at an angle to the road and the main building is roofless. The largest building has a typical but and ben at one end which, although roofless, still contains some furniture. It is difficult to say what the other end was used for as it is very ruinous, but the line of the roof is still visible on the gable of the dwelling where a couple leg is fixed to the wall with iron stakes. This roof was peaked, but lower than the but and ben. Above the line of the couples horse shoes are fastened horizontally into the wall to form fixing points. Six are visible, staggered rather than paired, with the position of a further two visible. It would seem likely that these were fastening points for simmens (straw rope), traditionally used to hold down thatch or turf.

The most interesting building in the group is smaller and built of large rounded stones, probably land stones (Fig. 5). Finer stone can be seen in the lower courses and this may be rough quarried stone. It is possible that the building may have been partly rebuilt at some time. It consists of one room with a door in the corner of the gable nearest the house and one small window set in the opposite corner. The window sill is made of a very large thick rounded stone which goes right through the wall, serving as an exterior and interior sill. It has a flag floor and





Figure 5 The most interesting building at Cattybraes; was it a dwelling or a barn?

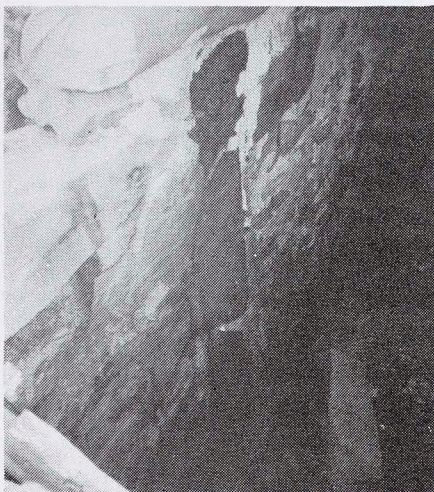
the roof, which by the appearance of the couples is not original, is part tin, part flagstone. There is a cupboard or *aumry*<sup>6</sup> with three shelves in the side wall behind the door (an impractical arrangement?) and a further recessed cupboard in the gable wall near the door.

On the inside gable wall, not quite opposite the door, a large blue flag is built vertically into the wall about 1 foot off the ground and held by metal clips. Corresponding to this on the outside wall is a slit about 3–4 inches wide and 3 feet long with clay clearly visible inside. The slit has a stone lintel and the sides are unfaced (Fig. 6). This slit must have gone right through the wall originally and, when no longer needed, was covered on the inside with a thick layer of clay and sealed with the flag stone. This is a most puzzling feature which does not fit any of the standard patterns known locally. The most likely explanation is that the slit was for the drive of a windmill. Small tripod-type windmills, built entirely of wood, were commonly used on the island. This type of windmill was not substantial or permanent enough to feature on maps and once out of use would have quickly vanished from the landscape and from memory. It is therefore not surprising that there is no local knowledge of a windmill having been sited here, although windmills of this type are remembered in the Hollandstoun area.

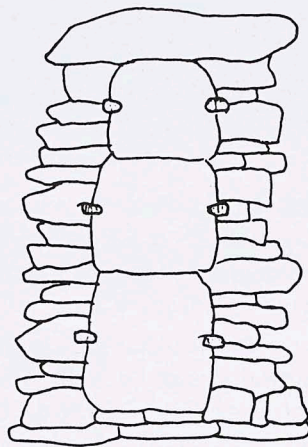
It seems likely that this building was used as a barn, but this was probably not its original function as there is no evidence of a beaten earth threshing floor or a winnowing door. Certainly the cupboards or *aumries* are very typical of traditional dwelling houses. Possibly the building started out as a small dwelling with a



(a)



(b)



(c)

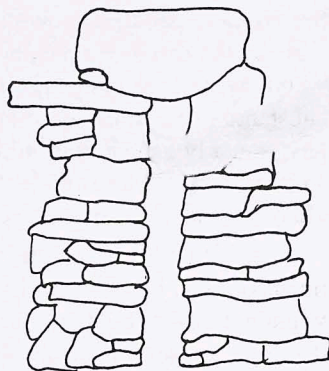


Figure 6 Cattybraes: (a) gable wall showing slit; detail (b) inside, covered with flag held by metal clips, (c) outside, with clay clearly visible.

central hearth and was adapted for use as a barn once the Victorian but and ben had been built.

We know that Cattybraes was a very small holding, broken out of the common, before the island was squared as it appears on an 1831 Plan of the Commonty<sup>7</sup>. Once the island was improved Cattybraes became Braeholland<sup>8</sup> but was still a croft rather than a farm. With this background it is not surprising to find buildings adapted from their original purpose.

This small sample would seem to indicate that Shapinsay has a surprisingly rich variety of building traditions despite the island having been radically improved. The innovative building traditions found in Hollandstoun are a reflection of the area's marginal agricultural base. For example, a maintree roof made from driftwood and locally quarried flags would have been much cheaper than the more usual roof of couples and slate. The wooden door jambs on the smithy at Haughland are further evidence of this resourcefulness, as is the adaptation of the building at Cattybraes. All this is not surprising when you consider that in a crofting fishing community where you ate all you grew or caught, there was nothing to spend on improving your lot. The only way forward was to use the natural resources available, land or locally quarried stone, flagstones, driftwood and, of course, your own and your family's labour.

## Acknowledgment

The photographs illustrating this article were taken by Louise Hollinrake, and are used with her permission.

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## **HARLING AND VERNACULAR**

### **or 'WE ARE ALL GENTLEMEN NOW'**

**Harry Gordon Slade T.D., F.S.A.Scot.**

For many years it has been received wisdom that one of the purest proofs of vernacular building has been the use of harling. But it is becoming apparent to some cynics that harling, instead, is a technique which has percolated down from the higher to the lower levels of building. It should have been self-evident that so expensive a technique, with its lavish use of lime, would hardly have been freely used among people who were too poor to employ lime in their mortar.

One of the earliest uses of the word that I have come across is in the 1701 contract between the Earl of Strathmore and John Shirras, for the casting and harling of the old and new work at Glamis Castle, Angus. As enlarged in the 1620s, it is clear that the castle had been harled with the exception of the new carved work and the great round stair tower. As built, all the carved work on the tower had been carefully set in as it was built with the ashlar. However, when Patrick, Third Earl of Strathmore added the new entrance doorway and second tier of heraldic panels, he slapped them into the wall without any regard to the ashlar, and piercing them in roughly with heathens. His intention was obviously to preserve the carved stone and heraldic panels against a plain harled background. This was left to his son to finish. It completely changed the appearance of the castle. To confuse matters further, it was the fashion in the 19th century to strip harling altogether and the result was that the effect of the richness of the carved work was largely lost.

### ***Contract between the Earl of Strathmore and John Shirras, 1701***

At Glamis the last day of March one thousand and seventeen hundred & one. It is concluded & agreed upon betwext a noble Earle John Earle of Strathmore & Kinghorne Viscount Lyon etc. on the one part and John Sherres Sklaitor in Brechin on the other hand as follows to witt the said John Sherres binds & obliges him to cast and harle the said noble Earles Castle of Glammis old & new work thereof with lyme on the front sides and round the same as also to poynt & make water-tight the roof of the said Castle old and new work thereof so soon as lyme other materialls & necessary engines shall be furnished for the work which he is to perfect & finish betwext the date hereof and the first day of September nexto come lyk as on the other part for the performance of the said whole work the said noble Earle binds & obliges him to have in readines with

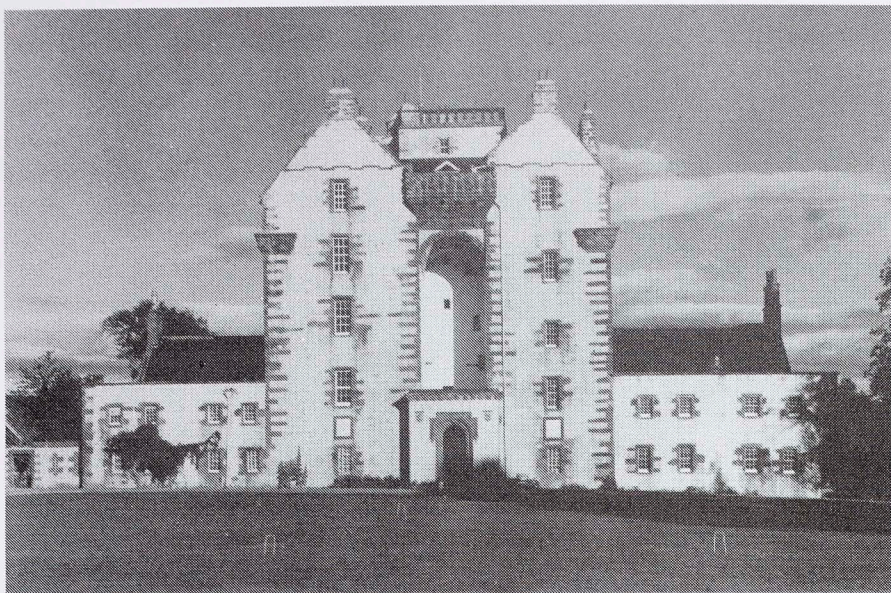
all speed & diligence as much lyme to be mixed with sand sufficient and sowered as shall cast and harle the said castle and lyme sufficient for poynting etc the roof of the same. Together with a sufficient strong cradle for holding two men for working & harleing strong rops & pullyes suteable & necessary for the upper part of the work. Together also with two strong ladders for working and harling below so fare as can be worked upon the same as also to provyde thrie or four workmen according as need shall require for service and constant attendance with every thing also that may be found necessary to the perfecting of the said harleing which the said noble Earl is to provide and have in readines in due time [by the twenty day of May next] before the said day appoynted for finishing of the said work so as the said John Sheres shall not be retarded in the same. And further the said noble Earle Binds & obliges him to content & pay to the said John Sheres the summe of thrie hundred & fiftie merks scots money and ane chalder of good and sufficient meall whereof one hundred merks at the beginning of the work another hundred one month thereafter and the remnant one hundred and fifty merks in complete payt. of the said money at the finish of the work. And the said meall as the said John Sheres shall have to doe therwith and call for the same. And both parties bind & oblige them him to other and the partie failir to pay to the partie observer or will to observe the summe one hundred merks by & attour the performance of the promises and for the more securitie the said parties are content and consent that these presents be in gros in the books of counsell and session or of any other competent. In witness thereof have the said presents written by Mr. Jon Lyon shirreff clerk of Forfar place day month and year of god above mention. Before these witnesses the said Mr. John Lyon and James Luke servant to the said noble earle

Jo Lyone witnes  
Ja Luke witnes  
Box 141 Bundle 11

Strathmore  
John Sheires

Nor was the concern confined to the treatment of the main house and estate buildings. When later in the first half of the 18th century some new cottages were required on the estate, although mud-built, this was not left to the tenantry to do. Their unaided efforts were not considered good enough, and a contractor who specialised in such buildings and who also harled them was called in from Forfar to execute the work.





*Figure 1 Craigston Castle; the harling was used to emphasize the massive quoins.*

Another recent and fortunate survival has been the harling on the great tower of Craigston, Aberdeenshire (Fig. 1). The earliest drawings of the castle *c.* 1730 show the great tower as it is today, with the massive quoin stones of red Turriff sandstone fully exposed, obviously with the intention of giving the impression of enormous strength to the building. During recent work at the castle, it was suggested by those who really should have known better, that the new harling should be extended across the quoins to provide a unified finish to a standard four-inch margin. Fortunately the late Major Bruce Urquhart had, in addition to his own knowledge, access to advice other than that of the official preservation body, and refused to countenance such a solecism. Craigston still retains its original appearance.

The question of a satisfactory harl or render exercised the mind of landowners throughout the 18th century, and there were constant attempts to devise an improved method of making buildings weatherproof. One such is to be found in the Mount Stuart Archives. This is dated 1761 and was endorsed by John Campbell, Fourth Earl of Loudon, sometime Captain General and Governor in Chief of Virginia. Whilst it has many virtues, it is singularly cumbersome in its application, and hardly conducive to preservation of window panes. The method did, however, receive the approbation of his lordship's signature.

## *Directions for Roughcasting stonewalls in the new way*

Let the walls to be roughcast be made perfittly clean of all the old lyme and louse stons on the wall be wasted thos must be broached over with a tool to take away the sandey parts.

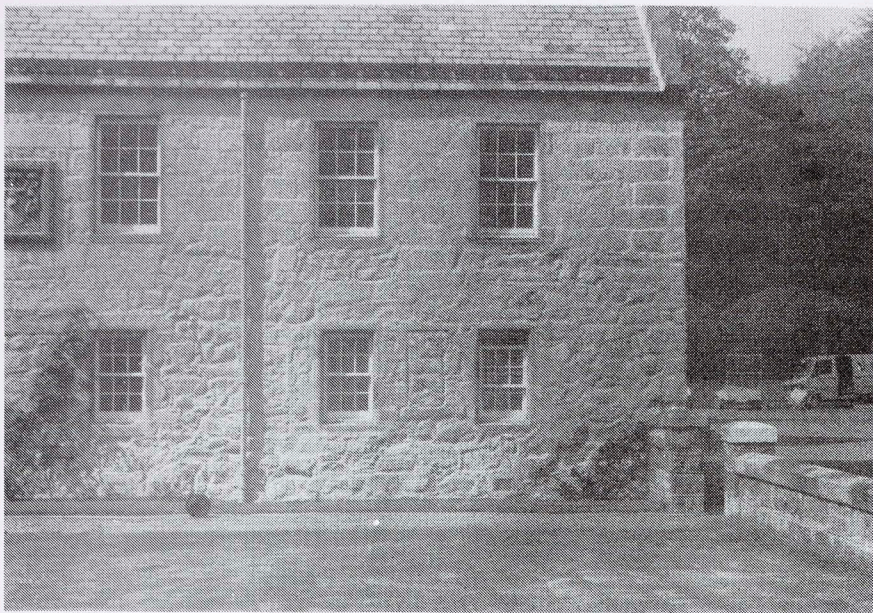
Let the walls be swept clean and watered with a brush so as everey louse partickle may be removed befor the plaister be laid on.

Let all the holou parts of the wall be closely and carfully made up with building lyme and smoke stons in such a manner as the wall may be brought to as near a straight as possable so as when the plaister is laid on it may be of an equall thickness, and care must be taken that thos holous so made up must be perfittly firm, I mean that the little stons put in with lyme in to the hols in the wall, ... by cleaning it, must be put in firmly least if any of them be left louse will be in danger of making the plaister separate from the wall.

Let a sifetient quantety of lyme of the best kind to be sifted as for plaister to which add a like quantety of the cleanest and best sand free of arth sifted through the same leve to which add a small quantety of plaister hair about 1 1/2 ston to each boul of lyme let all be mixed and sured up with water for about three weeks then bet it all over with a wooded beter. Then begin at the top of the wall and lay on the plaister still beting it in persails as it is laid on, bet it on a wooden board or dor least it take up arth from the ground, lay on the plaister about 1/4 of an inch thick or so, not exceding 3/5 least it be to havie and seperant from the wall, and ought to be laid on straight for ornaments sake and whill the plaister is wett. Throw it over with pibls afterwards to be described, throwing still as many as the plaister will receive and press them a lil with the back of a troual into the plaister but not so much as to sink them intiyrly. And as a yard or thereby of plaister will be sufetient to be laid an at a time till it be thrown with pibls care moost be taken that it be not too dry when thrown otherwise will not receive a sufetient quantety of quibls and likewise care most be taken that the plaister thus laid on at seperat times be made to joyn closely that ther be no crack, at the joynings which may be prevented by using water.

In order to prepair the pibls take a quantety of course flintey sabn or gingle and sift it in a small leve to take out the small partiekels and after that sift it through a courser ridle and what passeth through the ridon is the kind to be used in the rughcast. After the pibls is thus sized let them be whitened with the flour of the lyme and water one mor lyme nyserry amongst them then only to make them white. As the work most be don by piecemale if it be found that ther is any vacancys or cavetys amongst the pibls let a lil thin lyme be thrown





*Figure 2 Grandhome; in the original treatment, a fine slurry did not hide the masonry.*

on the wall by a brush after it is finished but so as not to touch the wall least it rub off the pigments and this ought to be repeated as it is observed the pigments lose their whiteness and recover their natural color if the work be sufficiently and carefully executed and this whitewashing repeated when needful it will defend the worst of walls from the insults of the weather and will last for a very long time.

When Grandhome, Aberdeen (Fig. 2) was enlarged in the mid 19th century and given a new front, the whole house was rehauled to produce a generally neat finish. However, during the course of work carried out in the latter part of the 20th century, it became clear that although altered many times in previous years, Grandhome gave no appearance of having been originally hauled. It is a building of many periods and alterations, some carried out in rubble and some in carefully coursed and dressed ashlar. The preferred solution here seems to have been a thick limewash, a somewhat whimsical solution, but one which has considerable charm. It protected the masonry without deadening the appearance of the building and was well in accord with the idiosyncrasies of John Patton laird of Grandhome. Again, the present laird was under considerable pressure to adopt the policy of blanket hauling so beloved of officialdom.





*Figure 3 The slaughter house, Craigston; harling was only used on the rubble walling, not on the front.*

My final example is that of Castle Fraser, Aberdeenshire. When this great building was stripped of harling during its restoration, Major Michael Smiley was persuaded to reharl the castle on a selective basis. There was no sound reason for this other than the advice given to him by the late Dr Douglas Simpson. Dr Simpson, a man of very strong prejudices, had taken strongly against the advice of Official Scotland and decided for no other reason than the one of sound prejudice that Castle Fraser should not be reharled in its entirety. This is an example of prejudice winning the day over reason. It cannot be denied that in its present piebald condition, Castle Fraser is of great help to the architectural historian. It cannot, however, be said that the result is an entirely happy one.

Three other buildings raised doubts about the received wisdom on harling. The first is Castle Menzies: when the 19th-century additions were demolished, it was discovered that when they were built they concealed an earlier corner round. This retained its original harling, not only on the rubble but also on the dressed stonework. This is contrary to the accepted view that dressed stonework was meant to be seen against the different colour of the harl. Again, it is received wisdom that rubble walls were always harled, both for structural and for aesthetic reasons. Yet at Barra Castle in Aberdeenshire there is no evidence of harling, and the tradition is that the building was never harled. Clearly, at Barra there was no feeling that the structure needed the protection of the harl, and since the building is



virtually devoid of any decorative dressed stonework, there was no need to use harling for decorative reasons.

A third curiosity is to be found in one of the outbuildings at Craigston Castle. This is the small slaughter house which clearly has ideas above its station (Fig. 3). The rear and gable walls, which are built of rubble, are harled. The front wall is not harled, but it is built of coursed Turriff conglomerate or puddingstone, and the horizontal joints are additionally protected and enriched by the use of cherry cocking or galleting. This now raises some interesting questions. Is the present view on harling a late 20th-century rationalisation, which has more to do with the preserves of old buildings than their builders? Was it never true vernacular work in the sense that it was of the people, by the people and for the people? Was it a functional device or a decorative treatment? Or was it dependent on the whim of the individual owner or builder, and did it suffer as it descended in the architectural scale from misapplication to a quite ruthless degree?

The question must be asked as to the origin of the harling mystique, and the writer has a very questioning mind. It is difficult to believe that harling is a truly vernacular technique. All the evidence suggests that it descended 'de haut en bas'. When building at the lower social levels, harling seems to have been the prerogative of the educated classes, and the reasons for its uses were many and varied. It does not seem to have come into general use until the agricultural revolution of the late 18th century, and was largely confined to buildings on the improved estates. Its elevation to an art form practised by the poorer classes seems to have been a piece of inverted snobbery on the part of many students of historical architecture and social building — two subjects which can easily be confused.

## Acknowledgments

My thanks are due to the trustees of the Glamis and Mount Stuart archives, for permission to reproduce material in their possession. I must also acknowledge my great debt of thanks to James Hope, who has taken down the foregoing and corrected its more obvious imperfections.

# CARMICHAEL MILL

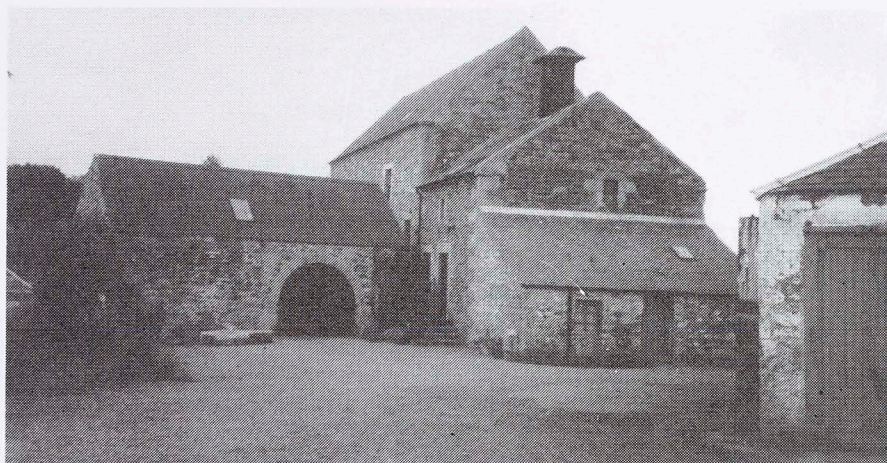
**Ken Fawell**

*Carmichael Mill was visited by SVBWG members during the Spring Conference at Biggar in April 1998.*

Carmichael Mill, at Hyndford Bridge, Lanark, is the last workable water-powered grain mill on the whole of the River Clyde and its tributaries, indeed in the whole of Lanarkshire. It may also have been one of the first, as excavation has revealed possible milling activity back to mediaeval times *c.* 1200. Until about 1720 the site was known as Cloburn Mill.

The mill (Figs 1, 2) is situated just off the A73 Lanark to Biggar road, half a mile from Hyndford Bridge and about three miles upstream of the famous New Lanark cotton mills. It displays a fascinating progression of the use of water power. The earliest site has possibly two grain mills using horizontal waterwheels to drive single sets of mill stones. The first vertical waterwheel grain mill, with attendant circular drystone grain drying kiln, was followed by the first foundry for making metal castings in iron and possibly bronze. (It is stated in the Carmichael Estate record that the bell in Carmichael church was cast at this location in 1660.) All these are on the same site some 200 yards upstream from the present mill building.

Immediately adjacent to the present mill building was the first site of the second vertical waterwheel-driven, pre-improvement grain mill, but about 1760, when the Government introduced grants for the production of flax for crushing to manufacture linen, this site was converted to that use (Fig. 3). Another small,



*Figure 1 Carmichael Mill: approach to main buildings.*



single-storey building was then converted to grain milling, with an internal vertical waterwheel, and a new lade was constructed to supply water power. To convert the second grain mill building into a lint mill for crushing flax, a side lade had to be constructed to take the water supply from the original lade to the new building, through the belly of the previous mill building. A new vertical waterwheel was installed inside and a drive shaft was positioned from the centre of the wheel to drive flax preparation machinery in a series of buildings now demolished.

Lint milling was abandoned with the introduction of cotton mills around 1795, and at this time the lint milling machinery was removed. A second iron foundry was then started, with the construction (over a period until about 1860) of two cupola sites for melting pig and scrap iron to cast simple agricultural and mill machinery parts (Figs 4, 5). The same drive shaft used for lint production was now used for powering bellows and possibly tilt hammers, and certainly grind stones for sharpening edge tools, which are known to have been produced here. It is also known that metal grave markers were made at this foundry and examples have



*Figure 2 The mill building comprises (left to right) lean-to kiln fuel store, later converted to farm dairy; grain-drying kiln; main mill with domestic dwelling incorporated in left-hand side and fully workable mill machinery retained to the right; lean-to waterwheel house. The main road used to pass between the mill and the farm buildings on the left.*





*Figure 3 Pre-improvement grain mill c. 1720, originally with an external waterwheel on the gable wall nearest the river. It would have had a single set of millstones and primitive gearing. It later became a lint mill (c. 1760–90), with a wheel mounted internally, then the site of an iron foundry (c. 1790).*

been found in four local cemeteries. The *New Statistical Account* mentions the Master Millwright and Foundry Master James Paterson, and his initials, with the date 1820, are incised on the lintel of a first-storey window of the existing mill building.

After the foundry ceased to function, the drive shaft from the waterwheel was repositioned at 90 degrees and passed, in its present position, some 40 yards under the then main Ayr to Edinburgh road and the existing farm yard, into a farm building where a threshing mill was positioned and used by the farmer. It is known from living memory that at times of low water there were heated arguments between the miller and the farmer as to who got the water.

The present mill building, with its original small single storey now completely below existing external ground level, has been extended upwards and outwards at least four times to create four storeys with attached grain drying kiln. It first ceased to function as a grain mill in 1926, but reopened at the start of World War II and finally ceased working commercially in 1957.

In 1988, we heard that the farmer owners intended to demolish the mill. They planned at that time to create holiday cottages in redundant farm buildings and as far as they were concerned the obsolete mill building blocked the view from the proposed cottages to the River Clyde. They had even invited a builder to take the slates from the roof; the builder had gone to the mill, looked up to its four





*Figure 4 The remains of the foundry site, showing the drive shaft from the waterwheel repositioned at 90 degrees to transmit power to drive a farm threshing mill. It originally passed straight out from the centre of the waterwheel to drive foundry machinery including bellows, tilt hammers and grindstones for edge tool production. Centre left is the foundation of a cupola, with slag heap behind and casting floor to the front; the broken kibbling stone leaning against the wall was used as the cupola base.*

lade now flowing, we decided to repair the waterwheel and get it turning again, by installing new wooden paddles to the 12ft diameter by 4ft wide low breast-shot wheel; it ran perfectly true. It then proved irresistible to try to get the internal millstones and ancillary machinery working and this was duly achieved. There are now one pair of solid shelling stones and three pairs of French Burr milling stones, with sack hoist, bucket elevator, meal dresser and fanner, all in working condition. An added bonus was that most of the miller's and millwright's tools for adjusting and repairing machines and dressing the millstones were still there. The drive to what was a kibbling mill or pot barley mill is still intact, but the vertical stone had been removed to its present position leaning against the front wall of the kiln.

storeys and said "I am not removing slates at that height". The mill was as close as that to being destroyed. We knew when we bought the building and surrounding land that the majority of the original machinery was still in the building, and that the metal frame of the breast-shot waterwheel still remained in the lean-to wheel house, but we anticipated simply making a dwelling within the mill building. We intended to retain the machinery but did not dream that it might be again usable.

However, after we gained permission to make a dwelling and commenced work on that, one of the farming partners from whom we had purchased the mill decided that he wanted to see the lade flowing again, and reinstated the flow of water from the dam across the Clyde by clearing about a 4ft deposit of silt from it. One thing led to another. With the





*Figure 5 Second cupola site base; note chute for pouring molten cast iron.*

The kiln itself had been totally gutted and the front wall removed by a previous farmer to create parking space for his combine harvester. We rebuilt the kiln to provide living space. Other adjacent buildings include one which would appear to be mediaeval (Fig. 6). It has a corrugated tin roof but is originally thought to have been thatched, and had two storeys. This is thought to have been the mill workers' bothy. There are also livestock buildings; all millers kept livestock which they fed for nothing on other people's meal. A lean-to building attached to the kiln was used as a fuel store for the kiln furnace, and the corner of this building on the approach to the main door of the mill is curved, with a shed-

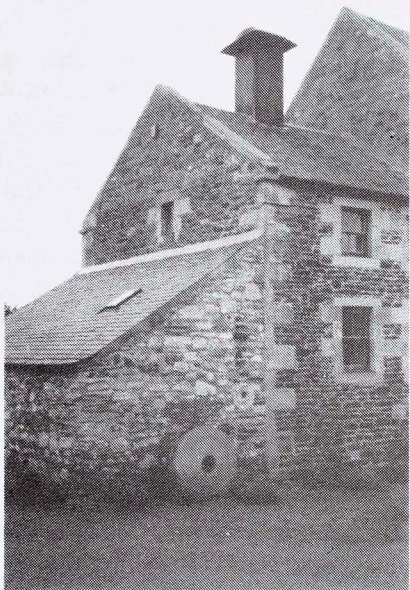
ding stone at ground level, to ensure horse carts cleared the corner of the building when turning (Fig. 7). Another interesting feature on the site is a flood mark some 5 feet up the wall at the front of the mill, with the incised inscription: 'Clyde rose to here March 19th 1782'.

On and adjacent to the site there is evidence of seven different lades and eleven different roads, testimony that Carmichael Mill and its surroundings not only tell of a very protracted and complicated use of water power, but were also a





*Figure 6* Possibly the earliest building on the site. Perhaps once a two-storey farm building, then converted to a bothy for the mill workers, it had a doorway in the gable end adjacent to the mill and a stairway leading to the back door of the mill. Later still, the first floor was removed and the ground floor raised, possibly because of flooding (as was the main mill floor), and it became a cattle byre and cart shed. The corrugated metal roof sheeting and roof pitch could indicate its being originally thatched



*Figure 7* Fuel store; note rounded corner for cartwheel hub access, and kibbling or pot barley stone, removed from within the mill, leaning against wall.

centre of communications to Ayr and Edinburgh and all points between. The present main road was constructed by Thomas Telford about 1820.

Anyone wishing to visit the mill, which is not open to the general public, is welcome to do so by appointment (tel: 01555 665880).



# 1998 CONFERENCE REPORT AND AUTUMN MEETING 31 OCTOBER 1998

## Ronnie Robertson

The Spring Conference, 24—26 April 1998, was a much scaled-down event following the epic Shetland Conference in 1997. Ironically this smaller conference was held in Biggar! based in the Elphinstone Hotel. This hotel was rather short of accommodation and most delegates were in local bed and breakfast establishments. Unfortunately one of them was rather further than a 'short stroll' and required transport. The house was by William Leiper and the rooms were described as palatial, so no one complained!

The principal theme for the event was Bastle Houses, and in particular the extensive remains at Glenochar Fermtoun. Sadly, following dinner on Friday evening, Brian Lambie and Tam Ward came to introduce the area to us, and announced that due to lambing near Glenochar it was impossible to visit the site! Disappointing though this was, it was compensated by an excellent talk on Bastle Houses by Tam and delegates received a copy of his publication on the Glenochar site. By Saturday morning, Brian and Tam had devised an alternative tour, which included Carmichael Mill, a substantial three-storey mill where the working machinery has been retained and combined with domestic accommodation. The owner's enthusiasm for his project was such that he has prepared an article for the 1998 issue of VB.

Following lunch in the Elphinstone we set out for Lamington village. Lamington dates back to the 12th century when 'Lambinstoun' was founded by a Flemish settler, Lambin, upon whom King David conferred territory. The Baillie family have been associated with Lamington since 1367 when, by charter, David II granted the lands to Sir William Baillie. The village we see today developed between 1830 and 1890 by replacing the turf roofed bothies with picturesque estate cottages linked to Lamington House (demolished). Set within the mature landscaping of the estate the village is a riot of decorated bargeboards, bracketed canopies, neo-Tudor mouldings, lying and lattice pane glazing. St Ninians Parish Church, Lamington, occupies a site in use from pre-parochial times within a circular churchyard. The present building dates from about 1724, after the union with Wandel Parish, and at one time contained east and west galleries for the lairds of the respective parishes. In that state it was visited by Robert Burns, whose lines, on leaving, read: 'As cauld a wind as ever blew, As cauld a Kirk and in't but few, As cauld a minister ne'er spak, Ye's a'a be het, ere I come back.' The walls were heightened in 1828, the west gallery removed in 1870 and the interior refitted to its present form. Biggar Museum Trust now owns the Kirk, as well as Lamington Holy Trinity Episcopalian Church, and has let the east end to the artist Crear

McCartney as a stained glass studio. Holy Trinity Chapel, also in the village, was built in 1857 by Alexander Baillie Cochrane, to a design by John Henderson. Over a period of years the interior was embellished by Mrs Baillie Cochrane, Annabella Drummond, a daughter of the successful London banking family. Titled relatives gave stained glass, pulpit and encaustic tiling. The interior, candlelit for our visit, formed the final visit of the afternoon, just in time for a dash for the coach before a torrential downpour dampened spirits.

Spirits were revived before and after dinner and the AGM on Saturday evening. Sunday morning was spent exploring Biggar and its museums. The immediate area of Biggar is important in terms of early settlement and evidence of later Norman influence, and fortification is seen in the surviving Motte Hill. The history of Biggar is strongly tied with the Fleming family who had strong feudal powers over a defined area known as a Barony, and evidence of whose wealth can still be appreciated in the ruins of nearby Boghall Castle. The creation of a nucleated settlement or Burgh is, however, directly linked to the Royal Charter of 1451. The town we see today is, however, largely the product of the wealth and changes by the 18th and 19th-century revolutions in agriculture, industry and communications. Biggar Collegiate Church of St Nicholas was founded and endowed in 1545 by Malcolm, Lord Fleming, the Lord Chancellor of Scotland. This church, like many of the collegiate edifices erected prior to this time, is cruciform in plan, consisting of chancel with apsidal east end, transept and nave, with square tower over the crossing. Several members of the Group took the opportunity to attend communion in the kirk, where we were welcomed by the minister. Biggar is particularly well endowed with excellent museums, which include Moat Park Heritage Centre, fascinating Gasworks Museum and Gladstone Court where fragments of shopfronts and interiors have been assembled complete with contemporary contents.

Sunday lunch at the Elphinstone Hotel brought the Conference to a close and we were grateful to Brian Lambie and Tam Ward whose commitment and enthusiasm made the Conference such a success and will encourage members to return to Biggar.

## **Autumn Meeting 31 October 1998**

‘South Bank of The Forth’ was the location for the autumn day meeting, and we assembled in the shadow of the Forth Rail Bridge on a cold, but wonderfully clear Saturday morning. A welcome hot cup of coffee was provided in the ‘Scotch Corner Coffee House’, then we braved the cold to explore South Queensferry. The day meeting was particularly well attended and we split into three groups to visit the various sites. 1 Mid Terrace is a very complete merchant’s house recently repaired under the NTS Little Houses scheme. Such changes required for modern living have been effected very sympathetically, and the present owners clearly



adore the building. I am sure that many of the Group would happily take it off their hands if they ever decided to sell. The nearby graveyard had a large collection of table tombs including two with recumbent skeletons under the top slab.

The museum and remainder of the town were self guided before we set off in a convoy of cars for Hopetoun House Steadings. Here we heard of the estate's plans for the repair of the impressive range of barns and ancillary buildings. The abandoned kennels made an ideal sheltered spot to picnic, and the fact that some of the space had been used to store redundant tables and chairs meant that we lunched in some comfort and style!

After lunch the convoy descended on Bo'Ness, where once again we split into groups to follow the Bo'Ness Town Trail, with some highly original work by a local architect, Mathew Steele, around 1900, including the first purpose-built cinema in the country. Now owned by the Scottish Buildings Preservation Trust, it faces an uncertain future. Small groups were shown the interior of the A-listed Dymock's Building, recently acquired by the NTS for restoration. Dating from 1650 and much altered over the centuries, some early panelling with a buffet recess survives on the first floor. It is a daunting project for the Trust, and we look forward to a future visit when work has progressed. Afternoon tea at the 'Scotch Corner' rounded off a very successful day, with thanks to Judith Anderson, Graham Douglas and John Shaw.

## REVIEWS

### **Memoirs and Confessions of a County Planning Officer**

**Frank Tindall. Pantile Press. Ford, Midlothian. 1998. xv + 325pp. £25.00. ISBN 0 9534013 0 8.**

The name of Frank Tindall is synonymous with the conservation of East Lothian's architectural history. Renowned for his involvement with Mavisbank, Bankton, and Haddington's burghal architecture, he spent just as much energy in the preservation of East Lothian's vernacular architecture. Sadly he died before the publication of his memoirs of his period as Planning Officer for East Lothian, but they provide a fascinating insight into the man and his experiences.

Frank Tindall recognised the importance of good planning in the process of revitalising an area; he looked at every aspect of life in the county, and assessed how good building location, use and design could benefit it. He understood that buildings could not be treated in isolation from the people who would live in and use them. In common with other planners, Tindall followed the guiding philosophy of Patrick Geddes, and looked at communities with Geddes' provisos: 'Folk—Work—Place'. Tindall was closer than others to Geddes in that he began his career in East Lothian with Sir Frank Mears, Geddes' son-in-law and collaborator, as East Lothian's Planning Consultant.

He describes how he addressed the wider issues of rural living—schools, roads, employment—in order to help preserve the buildings. His aim was to provide an environment for buildings and their inhabitants to thrive in. He worked hard to keep rural areas alive, not just to be dormitories of Edinburgh. Throughout the book he stresses that he was not encouraging fossilisation, and advocated practical not pedantic treatment of historic buildings. Thus an environment was created where architects such as Alan Reaich designed extensions to traditional buildings that were in harmony rather than slavishly imitating, and where Basil Spence could work in his own version of East Coast vernacular. Within practical solutions he maintained attention to detail, with the use of pantiles being an example. At first new pantiles from Dorset and Yorkshire were used, but then a campaign was instituted to save and reuse old local tiles, which were married up into uniform roofs. He also pushed for the use of non-interlocking pantiles. These efforts earned him the title of Frank 'Pantile' Tindall from the local builders.

Tindall describes the various ways of raising public awareness about the importance of old buildings, through legislation and through information. He was able to write protection of such buildings into the county's Development Plan, thus adding an extra dimension to merely advising on Listed Building Application. He used the Civic Amenities Act 1967 to designate fifteen conservation areas which safeguarded the historic cores of towns and villages and also their approaches and



surrounding countryside. Through information notices in towns, booklets, a miniature Architectural Heritage Centre in Lady Kitty's Doocot in Haddington, and unobtrusive plaques on listed buildings, the interest and value of the buildings of East Lothian was stressed to inhabitants and visitors.

East Lothian is particularly rich in interesting farm steadings; in 1968 at a time of interest and concern regarding vernacular buildings which also saw the beginning of SVBWG, Tindall instigated a Farm Buildings Survey which took in 130 farms in the eastern part of the county. These were visited in turn, photographed, and had their features noted. A grading system took account of alterations, state of repair and architectural and historic interest. Empty cottages suitable for conversion to holiday homes were noted. A booklet with plans and photographs of the finest steadings was produced. This action helped to encourage the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries to give grants for re-roofing farm buildings with original materials rather than the cheapest asbestos cement sheets. Ten of the 'best' farms were listed and a small fund was established to help preserve non-functional but picturesque features such as chimneys and horse-threshing mills. He was also concerned with East Lothian's rich legacy of doocots. His architect wife, Mary, with Douglas Bailey, carried out the survey of East Lothian doocots (*Transactions of the Ancient Monuments Society* Volume 11, 1963), part of a movement which saw East Lothian County Council acquiring and aiding in the restoration of doocots and producing an information booklet. A further booklet was produced as part of a survey of watermills. The preservation of Preston Mill, West Saltoun Barley Mill, and Sandy's Mill (with a pearl barley mill with vertical wheels for polishing grain) are dealt with in detail. Heavier industrial buildings also benefited from Tindall's energy. He recommended Prestongrange Beam Engine for listing (and regrets that he did not have the subsequently demolished beehive pipe kilns listed). He was very active in the establishment of the Scottish Mining Museum at Lady Victoria Colliery and in the restoration of colliery houses in Newtongrange.

In addition to preserving evidence of East Lothian's industrial past, Tindall also worked at a time of industrial development, and he recounts the processes through which Cockenzie Coal-fired Power Station, Torness Nuclear Power Station and Dunbar Cement Works were eased into the landscape, softening their visual and environmental impact. He was particularly conscious of the landscape which was the birthplace, and boyhood home, of John Muir; thus again the energy which was used to preserve buildings was put into saving the dunes and beauty of the coastline and sensitively encouraging tourism.

Throughout this book one is aware of a colossal energy, an attention to detail, and a determination to do the best for the people and buildings of East Lothian. As one travels through the county, one is thankful for all the efforts of Frank Tindall.

*Veronica Steele*

## **Scottish Farm Buildings Survey**

**Report 1: East Central Scotland. Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, National Museums of Scotland. 1998. 24pp. £3.00. ISSN 1462-284X.**

**Report 2: Orkney. Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, National Museums of Scotland. 1998. 32pp. £3.00. ISSN 1462-284X.**

If we are looking for a millennial project for traditional farm buildings, the Scottish Farm Buildings Survey is surely it! When the survey is complete, data will cover over 3,000 sites from around 32,000 agricultural holdings and the many more abandoned sites throughout Scotland. The survey, initiated in 1993, is focused on 15 areas rich in historically significant farm buildings, which when taken together should reflect the variety of farm buildings with their differing styles of building, types of farming and geographical context. Areas which are rich with interesting buildings are often those which have become rather marginal in the context of contemporary farming.

The first two sections of the survey have recently been published with 13 parts to follow at the rate of two per year. These interim documents will eventually be consolidated into a comprehensive report which we might expect to see published around 2005. The purpose of the survey is to record a representative selection of historically significant farmsteadings dating from 1750 to 1950 with photographs, plans and detailed drawings, and with links to other documentary evidence. The entries for the farm buildings contain four types of information: the site and its location; a summary description; a list of National Monuments Record of Scotland (NMRS) survey material; and a list of other documentary evidence. The reports are, in effect, catalogues to the growing survey archive, each with an explanatory preface and an introduction to the agricultural history of the area with specific references to sites included in the list.

Illustrations are drawn from survey material and give some indication of the kind of drawings and photographs held in the archive. Only some of the farms are illustrated and if illustrations cannot be provided for all the farmsteads, it would be helpful to the user of the survey if a thumbnail axonometric sketch could be included with each entry in the final document to aid identification.

### ***Report 1: East Central Scotland***

The first report covers a strip of Fife between the Tay and the Forth taking in the parishes of Dunbog, Monimail, Ceres, Kilconquhar and Elie. This is described as an area where the home farms of owner/occupiers predominate. Judging from the illustrations included in this report the original buildings largely date from the first



half of the 19th century and show the implementation of the ideas of the agricultural improvers with their 'courts of offices' and an early commitment to mechanisation. The exception is North Scotstarvit, a linear range, with earlier origins than the other farms in Ceres parish, and which may suggest the layout of farmsteads which preceded the courtyards of the improvers.

Items of fixed machinery are recorded, like threshing machines and the 'engines' to power them. Threshing machines had been introduced to the area by 1800, proliferating throughout the century. The surveyors found little evidence of hand-threshing. This is in contrast to Orkney, where barns often retain evidence of hand-threshing and where portable threshing mills did not become available to the smaller farms until after 1850. The interiors of dwellings are not included in the survey.

There are 25 farms included in the first report, about a quarter of which are marked 'Awaiting detailed survey' under the NMRS survey material heading. Hopefully this information will be available in the comprehensive report.

## ***Report 2: Orkney***

The island of Sanday has been chosen to represent Orkney farm buildings. This island with its sandy but fertile soils was once considered the granary of Orkney, though by the time of the first regular ferries in the 1840s there was a decisive shift to beef production throughout Orkney. In comparison with the Fife survey, the wider range in size of the surveyed farms is immediately apparent to anyone familiar with Sanday. We have the grand scale of the estate owner's farm of Stove, a model of improvement in its time, and at the other extreme the small traditional farms of No 4 Lettan and Clickimin. The type of small farm layout which may have its roots in the Norse Middle Ages, is the farmstead with two lines of buildings separated by a closs just wide enough for the kie to make their way between byre and pasture. All the buildings would be accessed off the closs including the windowless house with its central hearth. The thatched byre of Boloquoy is a survival of this kind of farm, though the range on the other side of the closs is gone.

Between the extremes of size are farms which are basically traditional in layout but with double storey barns such as Nearhouse, and alternatively the rectangular layout of farms like Tresness with its hexagonal horse-engine house. Unique as far as layout is concerned is New Ortie, where four crofts were created adjacent to an existing farm, with all the dwellings and barns being built in an extended line. There is evidence that some of the roofs of these buildings had the especially Orcadian thatch construction known as *needled* roofs with an internal 'tent' of straw rope or simmens constructed over the couples and laths of the roof structure. This construction is shown for the farm of Skithow, although this illustration is not typical of needled roofs. In this case it appears that an enveloping

flagstone roof has been superimposed on an older needled roof, and then an outer layer of thatch applied to the part of the roof illustrated. Also at Skithow there is an example of a *flackie*, or woven straw mat, being used as a sarking material. This use of flackies was well illustrated in a building at Hyndgreenie which is mentioned in the introduction but not included in the catalogue (and may now have been demolished).

How complete a record of Scottish farm building will the Survey be? If Orkney has to be represented by one island then Sanday is a good choice, farming having flourished in the past but not subject to the same pressures for modernisation as on the Orkney mainland and linked isles. The selection of sites on Sanday covers the range from the laird's large estate farm to the farm of the smaller tenant farmer. However, there are aspects of Orcadian vernacular tradition which will not be included, such as the remarkable group of farms in North Ronaldsay with their *maintree* roofs, distinctive square kilns and angular layout; the triangular overseamed roofs of Westray; or the heather turf roofs of Rousay. This means there is still a task for local researchers to do in recording the traditional construction of the area; indeed students of Aberdeen University's Orkney local studies courses have recently researched the farms of No 4 Lettan and New Ortie included in this report.

A real disappointment with the second report is the absence of summary descriptions for 30 out of the 44 farms in the catalogue; these are for sites which were not on the original list. It is to be hoped that these descriptions will be present in the final document, otherwise the user is left to guess what kind of building has been recorded. There is some mention in the excellent introduction of different types of vernacular roofs. For the user, it would be useful to have the different types of roof and other salient features identified in the summary description for each site, or accessible through a computer-based index.

## *Accessibility*

Thinking about access to the archive for the people living well away from Edinburgh, it is important to get a good idea of the material in the archive and the quality of information before making the journey to RCAHMS at John Sinclair House. It would also be very useful to be able to search the data for particular features like thatched roofs, stables, courtyards, threshing machines, waterwheels and so on, without having to plough through the whole archive. In the preliminary report *Scottish Farm Survey: Report, Assessment and Proposals*, there is mention of the possibility (subject to resources being available) of computer-based databases for the **documentary database** — an index to plans, illustrations, manuscripts, recordings and publications; and the **site survey database** containing information gathered on site with an index to survey drawings and photographs. Work has progressed with these, and they will ultimately be



available for reference on the Internet, which will increase accessibility enormously and make it easier to link in references to other sources. One can also go a stage further and think of the survey as open ended with other researchers being able to submit new material.

Altogether the survey is an ambitious undertaking which is likely to be of great value. It is to be hoped that RCAHMS will complete the survey on schedule, and that they will be able to make the best use of computer technology to make the archive readily accessible to all interested in Scottish farm buildings.

*Paul Newman*

## **An Isle Called Hirte: A History and Culture of St Kilda to 1930**

**Mary Harman. Maclean Press. Watnish. 1997. xiv + 338pp. £35.00. ISBN 1-899272-03-8**

## **Eigg: The Story of an Island**

**Camille Dressler. Polygon. Edinburgh. 1998. xii + 211pp. £12.99. ISBN 0-7486-6224-3**

The geographical situation of an island presents the opportunity to study development in isolation. It is a finite area which to some degree is unique. St Kilda is an extreme case, but Eigg too has defining characteristics which set it apart from the mainland and its neighbouring islands. These publications are fascinating and well-researched studies of two islands and their populations, both of which have faced hardship, oppression and adversity at the hands of man and nature. In the case of St Kilda the struggle was given up nearly 70 years ago, but the people of Eigg, having bought their island, are now filled with new hope.

Mary Harman is well known for her studies of St Kilda, and *An Isle Called Hirte* could be considered the essential text on the islands. Thoroughly, even exhaustively, she examines each facet of the islands' topography, history and people, under such headings as Place Names; Population and families: birth, marriage and death; Religion, Education and Health; and most interestingly for SVBWG, Homes, Shielings, Bothies and Storehouses. She tells the story of the group of people in Britain who were most shaped by their location.

Throughout this book it is impossible to escape the fact of St Kilda's remoteness, and its people and buildings were a product of that state. It was an archipelago which was often obscured on early maps by descriptive scrolls, and indeed the meanings of its name, and that of the main island, Hirte, are not fully understood. Harman details many of the historical explanations given, the most sinister of which is that Hirte equates to Old Irish *hirt*, meaning death, linking it to

the fact that the island was regarded by the Hebrideans with dislike or even fear. As well as being absent from maps, there is also a period from the 14th to the 16th centuries when there were no literary references to the islands. Even early this century, the islanders relied on mailboats during emergencies to summon assistance; generally these 'messages in a bottle' would land in the Hebrides, but others went further to Shetland, and a few to Norway. The period when the islanders enjoyed most contact was during World War One, when a radio station, established by the *Daily Mirror*, was taken over by the Admiralty (it was at one point shelled by a German U-boat, damaging the Store, Church, Factor's House and two houses). This increased contact with the outside world was instrumental in the final decision to evacuate the islands.

The St Kildans did not live in complete isolation; the islands were owned by mainland proprietors, whose tacksmen visited the islands to collect rent; there were visits to the islands by mappers, missionaries and writers such as Martin Martin, who are quoted at length; the islanders did travel to the Hebrides and the mainland; and increasingly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries cruise ships would call. Not all of these contacts were beneficial to the islands; in August 1727, the clothes of an islander who had died of smallpox on Harris were brought back to the islands, thus introducing the disease. Only four out of 21 families survived. Three men and eight boys had been left on Stac an Armin to catch gannets just before the disease left the population unable to launch a boat; they survived on that inhospitable rock until the following May when the Steward visited from the mainland.

Gannets and other birds were the staple food of the islanders; fishing was too dangerous, and in addition, the islanders believed that the consumption of fish led to pimples! Harman details the processes of bird catching, and also the many uses to which birds were put: gannet stomachs were used as containers; wings as hearthbrushes; necks as shoes; oystercatcher bills as fastenings for clothes; puffin carcasses as fertiliser; and feathers as export.

St Kilda village was demolished and rebuilt in the 1830s; some stone vestiges remain of the earlier houses. Evidence from the descriptions of Martin Martin, Edward Daniel Clarke, Neil MacKenzie and Kenneth MacAuley can be used to create the pre-improvement dwellings. They were built for warmth and strength to withstand high winds, and to house both people and animals. They had a high wall height of about eight or nine feet, to accommodate the deep litter which accumulated during the winter months. Beds were made in the thickness of the walls. Living conditions must have been similar to those elsewhere in Scotland, but Lord Brougham was moved to comment in 1871 that 'nothing in Captain Cook's voyages comes so low (as Hirta)'. In the 1830s the village was relocated and rebuilt, the dwellings still having accommodation for livestock. Further rebuilding had to take place in the 1860s after hurricane damage, with zinc sheeting being used in place of thatch; the livestock were left the damaged 1830s



houses. The newer buildings again proved inadequate against the Atlantic storms, and the zinc roofs were replaced by tarred felt roofs. The earliest homes may not have been the most hygienic, but they seemed to be superior to their successors in resisting the elements. During the summer months, shielings were used by those tending the sheep flocks, and bothies were used for fowling, on the stacks as well as the main island. Cleitean, used for storage, are generally regarded as unique to St Kilda, but there are similar structures on Rum and Islay. On Hirte about 1,100 cleitean survive; they were used for drying and preserving birds, for preserving eggs in peat ash, and for storing peats. Harman, in addition to her verbal analysis of these building types, reproduces comparative plans, sections and elevations, distribution maps and tabular details. Such analysis is used throughout the book, giving statistical information on stocks and crops, population, dates of teachers, family trees, and the location in museum collections of woollen fabric samples from the islands. However, in a book with such attention to detail, it is to be regretted that there is no index.

In contrast to Harman's thematic analysis, Camille Dressler has taken a narrative approach to the story of Eigg. And what a story it is, where an island dominated by its amazing geology has had to face hardship at the hands of both enemies and owners, before, as is breathlessly told, the islanders were able to follow the example of the Assynt crofters and buy the land they worked. Unlike St Kilda, whose inhabitants are long gone, the story of Eigg can be told through those who live there, telling what their parents and grandparents knew. Thus Dressler with her intimate knowledge of the island brings its story to life, from the first settlers of c.5000BC, to the buying of the island in 1997.

Eigg did not suffer from the isolation of St Kilda, but its history was nonetheless not an easy one; it is noted for losing its entire population through the violence of clan rivalry, not once, but twice. In the mid 16th century, the MacLeods killed all the inhabitants, hiding in a cave, by suffocating them with smoke. The island was quickly repopulated, but in 1588 Maclean of Duart, aided by Spaniards stranded after the Armada, killed the new population with fire and sword. From such experiences, the resilience of the current population must have grown. Dressler also details the other outside forces to have an influence on the island, ranging over Viking raiders, pirates, laws from Edinburgh and London, the Jacobite uprisings, the two World Wars, potato blight, and forced migration. As Dressler tells the story, that resilience was much needed to face the varying types of owner that the island had, ranging from benignly paternalistic to misguided. The purchase of the island by the islanders brings a future not free from difficulty, but which will see them in control of their destiny. Like the purchase of Assynt, Eigg is a landmark in the struggle for communities to own their land.

Details of the islanders' habitations emerge through the telling of the island's history. In 1770, profits from sheep and kelp allowed Lachlan Mackinnon to build the first house of 'lime and glass' on Eigg, with a vast kitchen on the

ground floor, and bedrooms upstairs. Again there are descriptions from writers and other visitors to the island—Martin Martin, Dr Johnson, Hugh Miller. This last saw on Eigg, at the time of the 1840s migration to Cape Breton, a home of an elderly couple which he considered one of the most basic houses he had seen on his travels with ‘walls and roof formed of damp grass-grown turf, with a few layers of unconnected stones in the basement tier (seeming to) constitute one continuous hillock, sloping upwards from foundation to ridge’. At the end of the century, under the proprietor Robert Thomson, crofters were being built new houses by the estate, with roofs of Ballachulish slate, wooden panelling and cast-iron ranges. Existing buildings were also improved, with thatch being replaced by tin roofs, drystone walls being plastered inside and out, earth floors being covered by wood and linoleum. Other improvements are noted in the 1930s when a Bill was passed allowing roof and house improvement grants. At that time many families were still living in one bedroom, fitted with several box beds. Grants allowed concrete floors to be laid, cement to be applied to the dry stone walls, a second floor to be added with gabled windows, and a dry toilet to be built in a lean-to shed (the *taigh beagh* — the little house).

Throughout Camille Dressler’s telling of the story of Eigg, one becomes intimately acquainted with the land and its people, the hills and beaches, the superstitions and folklore, the songs, their homes, and, through evocative photographs, the faces. It succeeds in making the past as vivid as the present.

*Veronica Steele*

## **Harbour Lights in Scotland**

**John Hume. Regional and Thematic Studies No 4. Edinburgh. Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group. 1997. 44pp. £6.00 (£4.00 to members of SVBWG) ISBN 1-901971-00-7**

This is the latest volume in SVBWG’s Regional and Thematic Studies Series. John Hume looks at an aspect of the Scottish harbour that is essential, but often overlooked, that of the light at its entrance. As with lighthouses, these features are being modernised, and this timely volume takes stock of survivors, some of which date back to about 1810. The most recent light featured is at Burghead, dating from 1986-7, where a concrete light is modelled on an earlier wooden tower. A distribution map shows clusters at the Forth and the Moray Firth, in keeping with harbour distribution.

Following an introduction outlining the history of the development of harbour lights and their construction, the main part of the text is a gazetteer featuring around 120 lights. This is illustrated by line drawings which capture the variety of these structures, and show them to have been more than functional.



Ayr's inner light of 1841 was unusual in having accommodation in the form of a single-storey dwelling house; at the other end of the scale, Ferrytown light was supported by curved wrought iron legs. Some lights are reached by internal spiral staircases, others by the more basic means of a ladder. This is an ideal introduction to the subject, and it should, as the author hopes, stimulate others to more detailed research.

*Veronica Steele*

**Review of Scottish Culture. European Ethnological Research Centre, National Museums of Scotland. eds Alexander Fenton, Hugh Cheape, Rosalind K. Marshall (Volume 1 issued 1984)**

ROSC has passed its tenth issue, and it is appropriate for *Vernacular Building* to acknowledge this fact by celebrating the range and diversity of articles which appear in this publication. It was established to study the material aspects of Scotland's social and economic history and its influences, both inward and outward. ROSC contains many articles specifically concerned with vernacular buildings, others indirectly related, and others again which are of interest to anyone concerned with Scotland and her past. 'Rose' has a double meaning in Gaelic, relating to seeing, and what is seen, and the journal certainly enhances the reader's perception of history. The range and treatment of subjects appeals to the specialist and general reader alike.

Such is the wealth of subjects dealt with by ROSC, it is well nigh impossible to summarise it succinctly; suffice to say, the journal deals with 'all things Scottish'. It is a forum for the exchange and dissemination of information, both publishing and encouraging research. The range includes buildings, occupations, language, place names, song, customs, medicine, farming, food, sport, weapons, photography, historical figures, museum collections, and such projects as the Scottish Burgh Survey (Volumes 4 and 10), and The William Will Fellowship Data-base Project, looking at the terminology of fishing, boats and related subjects (Volume 9). The inspiration for the articles is as varied, ranging in scale from Hamilton Palace ('The Plenishings of Hamilton Palace in the Seventeenth Century', Volume 3) to a cashbook ('A Farm Manager's Cashbook 1843-1854', Volume 5), and the people discussed range from monarchs to farmworkers, taking in individuals, groups, and whole strata of society.

There are many articles of direct interest to the readers of *Vernacular Building*, with Volume 1 being particularly rich. It features wooden tumbler locks, Lewis shielings, tenements, 'box beds and bannocks', and Agricultural Improvement Societies. In Volume 2, Geoffrey Stell outlines the forces leading to 'The Collapse of Mediaeval Buildings', and Hugh Cheape celebrates the work of Dr Isabel Grant, founder of the Highland Folk Museum.

Further volumes go on to discuss 'Domestic Architecture in Mediaeval Shetland' (3); 'Sketching Country Furniture' (3), 'A Primitive Bridge in Birsay, Orkney' (3); 'Pigeons as a source of Food' (4); 'Bee Boles and Past Beekeeping in Scotland' (4); 'Wooden Locks from Finland' (4); 'Thomas Finlayson, Flax Raiser and Dresser at Grangehaugh Lintmill 1750-1775' (5); 'Swedish Ethnographic Surveys in the Western Isles of Scotland, 1939-1948' (6); 'The Decline of the Shielling Tradition in Perthshire' (6); 'Biggar Museum Trust Archives' (7); 'A Norse Horizontal Mill in Orkney' (8); 'Form and Function in the Scottish Home 1600-1950' (8); 'The Garrabost Meal Mill, Lewis' (8); 'The Kirkintilloch Bothy Fire Tragedy of September 16 1937: An Examination of the Incident and the Resulting Legislation' (9); 'A Century of Farms and Farming on the Sutherland Estate 1790-1890' (10); 'Drains, Middens and Cesspits; Public Hygiene and Drainage in Stirling and other early modern Scottish Towns' (11); 'Steep Hills, Strong Winds and Wealthy Sportsmen; Aage Roussell and his Journey to the Scottish Isles in 1931' (11); 'The Speyside Charity School Grantown on Spey 1795-1975' by Elizabeth Beaton (11).

In addition to this range of subjects, others hold another kind of fascination; who can resist such articles as 'The Wearing of Wedding Rings in Scotland' (2); 'Effigy and Portrait in Sixteenth Century Scotland' (4); 'The Ross-shire Witchcraft Case of 1862' (5); 'Irish Versions of some Proverbs found in Scots' (6); and 'The Kipper Fair and the Cadgers' Races at Newton-on-Ayr' (9)?

As well as longer articles, ROSC also features obituaries of important figures in Scottish studies; shorter notes of interest dealing with Scottish and European matters drawn together as the Ethnological Noticeboard from Volume 6 onwards; listings of contents of recent journals (including *VB*); and draws attention to publications by SVBWG, National Museums of Scotland and the European Ethnological Research Council.

*Veronica Steele*



## CONTRIBUTORS

**Sir Roderick MacDonald KBE**, Vice Admiral, retired after 40 years in the Royal Navy. He was educated at Fettes, Edinburgh. As an artist, he has had one-man exhibitions in London, Edinburgh and Naples. His paintings, including architectural subjects, are in private and public collections. He is also an author (*The Figurehead*), Executive Trustee of the Clan Donald Lands Trust, Armadale, Sleat, and Chieftain of the Isle of Skye Highland Games.

**Paul Newman** lectured in architecture at Heriot-Watt and Edinburgh Universities. His current research interest is Orcadian traditional building. He now lives in Orkney where he has delivered a course on the Traditional Farm Buildings of Orkney for University of Aberdeen Centre for Continuing Education.

**Jocelyn Rendall** farms at Holland, Papa Westray, Orkney.

**Sheila Garson** farms at Waltness, Shapinsay, Orkney and has a continuing enthusiasm for architecture (especially gasworks).

**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.

**Ken Fawell** qualified as an agricultural engineer. He is now employed by the Health and Safety Executive as one of the two Principal Inspectors of health and safety in the agricultural industry in Scotland.

**Harry Gordon Slade** trained as an architect, and worked as an architect and inspector with English Heritage. He has published papers on a variety of Scottish architectural history subjects including vernacular buildings.

## 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 in Scotland each year. The 26th Conference was held in the Spring of 1998 in Biggar, and the Autumn Meeting was at South Queensferry.

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.



## Annual Subscription Rates 1998-99

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