

NORTH OF SCOTLAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY



**YEARBOOK
2002**

NOSAS YEARBOOK 2002

EDITORS REMARKS

On behalf of the N.O.S.A.S. committee, I would once again like to thank all those who have contributed an article to the 2002 Year Book. As ever, we would welcome more contributions for the next year book. A report does not have to be very long, two or three pages are sufficient to give other members an idea of what projects are being worked on, as well as the contributors line of interests. The articles we have this year vary, from an update of David's Fort and the Loch Hourn project, to exploring areas of Ross-shire, Badenoch and Strathspey.

Sandra Law.

DISCLAIMER

The views and conclusions expressed by the contributors to this year book are not necessarily those of the N.O.S.A.S. Committee, nor the Editor.

INFORMATION ABOUT NOSAS.

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Acknowledgement

I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the NOSAS Committee, to thank the Grantown Museum for the use of its facilities in order that we could print both this and last years book.

Editor.

Reference:

Beaton, A. J., 1882-3 (1883). 'Notes on ancient fortifications in the Black Isle, Ross-shire'.
PSAS 17, 414-423.

The first outing of the year was to Old Kiltearn Church, in Ross-shire, then on to Balconie Point, Newmore Castle, finishing up at the end of the day looking for the large "Cairns" on the hillside above Nonikiln Chapel.

A Winter Day Out in East Ross

13 members and 3 guests gathered at Old Kiltarn Church on Sunday 13th January for the first NOSAS outing of 2002. The weather was exceptionally mild for the time of year, and the occasional shower in the morning did not dampen our spirits.

We had a good look around the ruins of the old church, which fell into disuse after the Second World War, and was finally de-roofed and stripped internally in the 1950s. Unlike nearby Alness Old Parish Church, Kiltearn has been saved (so far) from the indignity of being boarded up, and we were able to roam around inside the building at will. It is thought that the present "T" shaped church was built sometime in the late 18th century although the east gable appears to have parts of an earlier medieval wall incorporated into it. The two corner buttresses of the east gable may also be medieval. There are certainly no buttresses on the west gable, which appears to be entirely 18th century in date. The church is interesting for its double flight of stone steps at the south gable, which led to the laird's loft and two sitting rooms on the first floor. Below the lintel forming the top of the steps is a doorway to the ground floor. The fireplaces of the two sitting rooms are still clearly visible. We understood that many folk who had come some distance, the laird and his family included, made a day of it on Sundays. The remains of the dooks, which are visible all around the walls presumably held in place wooden panels, possibly highly decorated.

Eagle eyes spotted a carved stone that might have been a part of a medieval grave stone, incorporated high up on the inside of a window frame. The church is said to have held over 700 worshippers on a good day.

Kiltearn was one of three Presbyterian churches in East Ross during the 17th century, the others being Alness and Cromarty, and was surrounded by much more numerous Episcopalian parishes. Indeed Kiltearn had a famous covenanting minister, one Thomas Hog, who died in 1692. He lies buried just outside the southeast door of the present church. Rather than an epitaph, his gravestone bears the last of his prophecies that "this stone shall bear witness against the parishioners of Kiltearn, if they bring an ungodly minister in here". During one of the periods when Episcopalians ruled the day, in the 1670s, Thomas Hog disobeyed an Act of Parliament forbidding conventicles and he was captured and imprisoned on the Bass Rock for a spell. Kiltearn achieved the nickname in the 17th century of "The Holy Land" for its religious fervour.

The fate of such a building, steeped in East Ross history and of considerable cultural significance, presents a real dilemma. Is it doomed to crumble and collapse onto the graves of the righteous buried below its walls?

We then walked on and had a look at the ruin of the old salmon bothy on Balconie Point. This structure was raised and embellished during its period of use, and it became incorporated into a flood bank. Whilst we were speculating whether the unsightly brick and concrete rubble facing the flood bank had come from near by WW2 RAF base, a local dog walker informed us that the debris was infact the remains of Evanton Railway Station.

an alehouse, an island (most probably Dunglass, which lies in the center of the River Conon), Crivehouse (its name suggesting its connection to the very important Conon fishings), and the ferry of Skuttel or Skudale, the predecessor of the present Conon Bridge. The lands of Kinkell-Clarsach passed from the Frasers of Guisachan to Mackenzie of Gairloch in 1582; Kinkell castle was subsequently built on part of these lands in 1590, raising their value by 3s 4d! Finally, Bishop Kinkell, its name indicating that the superiority of these lands rested with the bishop of Ross, also had an attached alehouse. While not providing much information directly on David's Fort, our understanding of the history of the Conon estate, the parish of Logie Wester and this part of Ross-shire has been much enhanced.

So what is our current thinking on the function of David's Fort? It seems most feasible to view the site as acting in a strategic capacity. Metaphorically removing the present modern plantation which surrounds David's Fort, reveals a dramatic site dominating the line of the medieval road which leads from the hospital site at Spital, near Tarradale on the south shore of the Black Isle, to the ford across the Conon, close to the old parish church of Logiebride and the present Conon House. The scale of the earthworks reinforces the fact that the construction of this site represents a considerable mobilization of resources – in terms of both people and materials. What we do not yet know is who had the power to make this happen – was it the Earl's of Ross (or their tenants, the Munros), Bishop of Ross or even the crown, given the possibility of a connection with the thanage and burgh of Dingwall? There are still more leads to follow up and more work to be done before a satisfactory context for this unique monument can be established.

this. It seems to me the work of educated military engineers' (quoted in Beaton 1883, 419-20).

Clearly David's Fort presented as many conundrums then as it does today! The few maps and plans which extend up the hill beyond the line of the present main road, show that the area around David's Fort was part of the commonty of Mulbuie. It appears to have been planted with trees at an early date and it is this, which may provide the primary reason for the site's subsequent obscurity.

We can now trace, in outline at least, the history of the smaller parcels of land – Logie Wester, Logyreyth, Kinkell-Clarsach and Bishop Kinkell – which make up the Mackenzie estate of Conon. The lands of Logie Wester (separate from the parish), were granted by the Earls of Ross to the Munro family, in the mid fourteenth century. In this charter, Robert de Munro is styled of Logie Wester, suggesting that the family may already have been the occupiers of these lands. In 1562, the Munros exchanged Logie Wester for Ferincrosky, near Bonar Bridge, and the lands passed to the Baynes of Tulloch. The Mackenzies only acquired the lands in 1637. When the latter sale was finalised in 1640, part of the grazings attached to Logie Wester lay at Tollie, on the higher ground above Brahan, but later in the same century, grazings at Erra – within the forest of Wyvis and formally part of Kinkell-Clarsach – were merged in Logie Wester. Logie Wester also had a mill and mill croft, first appearing in the records in 1562; later estate maps indicate that this is the site now called Oldmill on the OS maps, which lies south of Conon Mains.

According to Roy's map, Logyreyth or *Logierive*, was located close to the site of the later Conan House. It was associated with

No sign of the clock though. When will landowners and managers learn that building rubble is a waste of time as a long-term material for sea defence? It is a blight right around the Moray Firth.

Searching around the rest of Balconie Point, we located the position of the last wooden salmon bothy to sit there. We were less sure of the position of the Ice House shown on the 1st Ed OS map, as much of the Point appears to have been messed about with, possibly due to military activity or salmon fishing.

We also speculated where the target butts of the Balconie rifle range shown on the 1st Ed OS map, had been sited. Confusion set in and 3 adventurers took off over extremely wet ground for a closer look. Unfortunately one adventurer fell into a cunningly disguised ditch up to his waist. Only dignity suffered and spare trews were soon acquired at lunchtime. No sign of the target butts was found in the present day bog and it was conjectured that the targets may have been portable. Perhaps, when the offending ditch was cut along the line of the rifle range, no doubt with a modern tracked digger, the butts could easily have been flattened with no one being the wiser. However one of the original firing positions was found and our "range hunter chief" Annette, was fine pleased. Some careful detective work with a metal detector when it is much drier might produce results.

The afternoon took us to see Newmore Castle, a fortalice dating 1625, courtesy of Mr and Mrs Jack, in whose garden the castle lies. Mrs Jack kindly shared with us her knowledge of the castle, which remains as a single storey structure with three vaulted chambers more or less intact, and the remains of a corner tower. The castle once had three or four storeys. It is 'B' listed and has been fully surveyed and recorded by the RCHAMS.

It appears that the castle was built on former glebe lands belonging to St Duthac's Church of Tain, which came into Munro hands around 1581, no doubt as the result of some chicanery. The castle, which was most probably built by a descendant of the mid 16th century Andrew Munro of Milton a legendary tyrant otherwise known as "Black Andrew of the Seven Castles". There are records of his descendant, Andrew Munro of Newmore, being involved in litigation in 1569 and again in 1591, so it may have been the next generation that built the present castle. This also indicates the possibility of an earlier Newmore Castle, built elsewhere. Most Munro chiefs of this period seem to have spent their time getting into debt then fighting on the Continent to get out of debt.

The castle sits today inside the walls of a Victorian walled garden, once belonging to nearby Newmore House. The garden is known to have been productive until recent times, but it is all laid out now to ornamental lawns. Various changes of level and other linear features are visible in the garden, even though we learnt that one late 20thC owner had been in the habit of ploughing it. NOSAS has been invited back with a small team to undertake a geophysical survey of the garden, as under the Victorian features there may well be the remains of a 17th C garden. Unfortunately ivy now covers 90% of the Castle, so there is little to see on the outside other than the bottom few courses of masonry, and a few gun slits and loops. Inside though is still quite an experience as some of the ivy stems have dropped down through a hole in a corner of the main vault roof and a mass of white aerial ivy roots or possibly shoots, covers the floor. This crackles like fresh straw as you walk over it. We debated the pros and cons of removing ivy from old buildings and how that might be achieved without causing damage to the fabric of the ruin. Treatment of either the roots or foliage with a

The last article is an update on the research work on the homestead moat of Davids Fort, which is quietly making progress between work and other projects that Janet, Alan and Marion have undertaken in the last year.

David's Fort

J Hooper, A Mackenzie, M Ruscoe

Research on the homestead moat known as David's Fort has continued to focus on documentary sources. A number of days were spent at Conon House examining the Mackenzie of Gairloch papers. These go back to the sixteenth century and provide a wealth of information on both the Mackenzies' east and west coast estates. Our grateful thanks are extended to John Mackenzie for allowing us access to his family's papers, for his interest in the project and for providing us with copious amounts of tea!

Nineteenth century records have confirmed that, although the name, David's Fort, is applied to two crofts lying just up the hill from the site in the mid-nineteenth century, there is no knowledge in the family of the origin or purpose of the homestead moat. In the words of Sir Kenneth S Mackenzie of Gairloch and Conon:

'There is no tradition about it with which I am acquainted. It is evidently not the work of any people belonging to prehistoric times. I have heard it ascribed to the Romans; I have also heard it suggested that it may have been the camping place of one of the independent companies of which the 42nd or Black Watch was afterwards formed; and also I have heard it said that it was a defensible cattle fold, into which the beasts were driven on the rumours of an approaching raid, but I don't think it looks like

The report also includes

- A description of the woodlands of the survey area with recommendations on dealing with trees thought to be threatening archaeological remains and a discussion of how the woodlands may have been managed in the past.
- Colour photographs intended to show the clearest examples of the main site types.
- Two artists sketches of Kinloch Hourn two hundred or more years ago, at the height of the herring fishing.
- A comprehensive introduction covering acknowledgements, preface, location maps, extracts from the project design and references.

I acknowledge that this brief summary of the project and the report draws heavily on John's own wording in the report. The report will be lodged in the NOSAS library and I would encourage as many NOSAS members as possible to get access to a copy. One last point - I am sure all NOSAS members would wish to congratulate John for taking on the leadership of the project and steering it to a successful conclusion. John - Well done!

But is the report the last we will hear of Loch Hourn? I don't think so - so, as they say, watch this space!

oOo

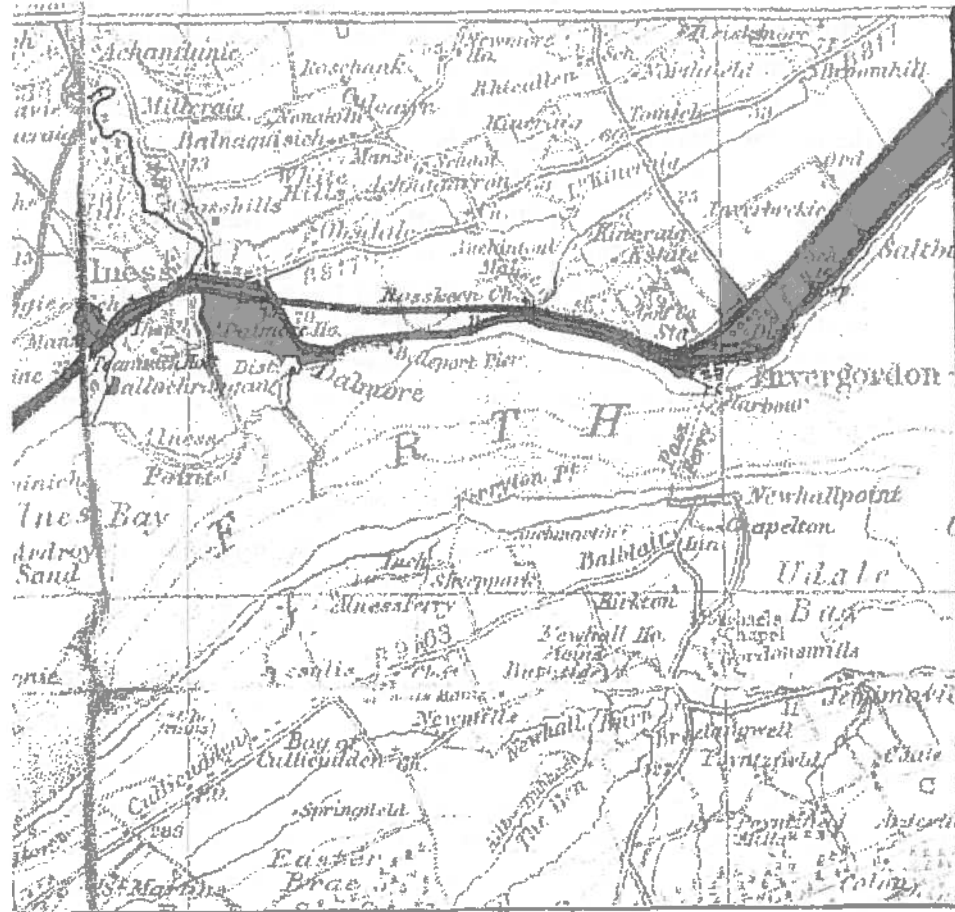
total herbicide was suggested to kill the ivy first, then allow it to desiccate before making any attempt to pull it off the structure. The Olivers are happy that the ivy disguises the castle from the nearby public road and deters inquisitive sightseers from intruding into their private garden.

We were allowed to explore the woods behind the castle and, whilst there are some features of interest there, we did not have the time to make much of it. Numbers then thinned out somewhat, but several hardy souls moved on to have a look at the nearby chapel at Nonikiln. The middle part of the chapel has long been demolished and the original west gable has been incorporated by the addition of a new wall and some reconstruction to form a small burial aisle. On one, the eastside, wall seems too have been constructed or reconstructed to form a larger burial aisle. The chapel lies in a burial ground that has been raised in excess of 2m on the lower side, to allow for more burials. Most graves are unmarked, although there is ample evidence for buried recumbent slabs.

We still had energy left and set off 100m or so around the corner of the chapel site to find St Columba's Well, which is shown on the OS maps. This was soon found built into a field wall, covered by an old wooden door, half hidden by earth. Even then the day wasn't over, as we speculated on the line of massive stone "cairns", clearly visible on the hillside above Nonikiln Chapel, stretching along a contour through Millcraig, Nonikiln and Culcairn Farms. A few theories emerged as to their likely origin, and whether they could be classed as archaeology. One theory put forward was that the possibility of the "cairns" being tunnel rock coups, from some sort of mining activity. It was later learnt that two Alness men, now deceased, who were sworn to secrecy under the Official Secrets Act,

worked on WWII storage tunnels somewhere up behind Alness.
Watch this space for the next instalment.

John Wombell.



After the field work came the very hard work. John retreated homeward with a heap of recording sheets and films for processing and those who had made plans and surveys took their drafts away to make fair copies. The information was sifted and sorted and the plans were drawn up. Details of all sites were entered into the Highland SMR in August 2002. John and a number of the survey team members met occasionally to resolve issues of interpretation, report format and intended recipients etc. and, despite a number of house flits, John finalised the report and had a master copy ready for printing in May 2003. Copies are now (Summer 2003) being made for distribution to relevant interested parties such as Historic Scotland, Highland Council SMR, Kinloch Hourn Estate, the survey team members and of course the NOSAS library. In addition a brief summary of the project has been submitted to "Discovery and Excavation in Scotland".

The principal parts of the report are a Gazetteer and a group of A4 maps and plans. The sites are listed generally from east to west and the descriptions include the NGR, the SMR reference and a description, which where relevant, includes interpretive information and the extent and nature of erosion and vegetation infestation. The Gazetteer is sub-divided into named sub-areas with introductory notes for each. The maps show the site locations; they are derived from Highland Council SMR after the site details were entered onto it. The Gazetteer ends with an analysis of site types, a statement of conclusions and a wish list of suggestions for further investigation. 32 different site types were recognised. The most numerous structures (68) were "Huts - possible temporary fishermen's dwellings or stores" Some 163 sites appear to have been associated with seasonal herring fishing in the loch in the 18th and 19th centuries. Other maritime site types noted were cleared landing places, boat nausts, piers and jetties.

The field work was originally scheduled for April 2001, but the foot and mouth epidemic intervened and the work was re-scheduled for one week in mid-April 2002. The week was chosen carefully to try to get optimum conditions – later, hopefully for better weather, but sooner to avoid bracken growth, while it was known that the midges generally get going around the second week in May. In the event the survey week was wet, windy and cold, except for only one fine dry day.

The survey team of 12 was based at Kinloch Hourn and was split into a number of small groups. Boats were used to transport personnel to suitable landing places, weather permitting. Otherwise access to the sites was by foot along the rough and often steep shoreline. For health and safety reasons, each party was equipped with a two-way radio. Each site was recorded on a specially devised recording sheet and photographed. A sketch plan of one densely featured area was made along with a large-scale plan of the largest building there. In addition to these activities on the north shore, the opportunity was taken to explore two other areas of interest close to Barrisdale on the south side of the loch. A number of sites were recorded at what is likely to have been a temporary fishing station and a plane table survey was made of a part of Eilean Choinich, a burial isle with rows of graves on a flat grassy area and with other graves scattered on higher rocky ground. The island is very exposed and the plane tabling work was severely impeded by bad weather and could not be completed. It is hoped to return to the island soon and finish the survey. If any medals had been available, I think they should have gone to the plane tablers of Eilean Choinich for valour in the face of wind and rain with no shelter. Another member of the team surveyed the woodlands of the survey area on the north shore.

The second outing by NOSAS members was to survey the woods of Balblair where Meryl had identified several interesting features.

Field Survey of Archaeological Features in the north part of Balblair Wood, near Beauly – 17th Feb 2002

The aim of the project was to identify, survey and record the archaeological features in an area of north Balblair Wood. A chambered cairn had previously been recorded in the area and mention had been made of hut circles, but no recording of these had been done. The area is situated on a gravel river terrace to the north of the River Beauly and has a south-easterly aspect. This site lies at a height of roughly 20m OD and is 6km from the point at which the River Beauly enters the Beauly Firth to the northwest. It is believed that the site was located close to the lowest crossing point of the river. There is evidence that the river may have changed its course over the years, now running some distance from the site.

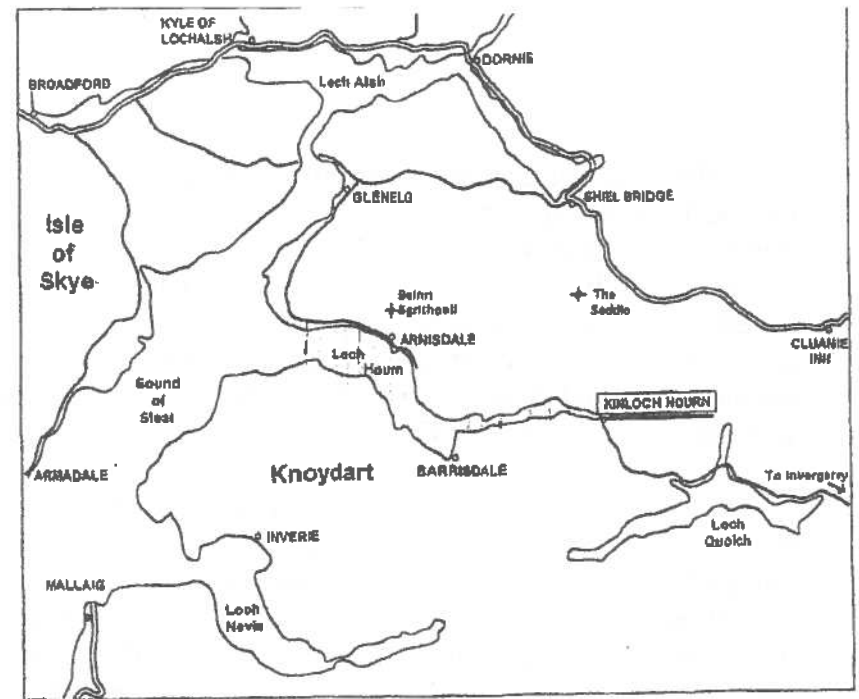
A cist burial containing 2 beakers, was discovered 400m to the east, and was excavated in 1990. A Pictish class 1 stone was found at Wester Balblair 600m to the NE, in 1969. At least five hillforts and duns are located in the hills 3km to the north of the site and a further settlement and field system is to be found at Farley, 5km to the west. This area is therefore rich in prehistoric remains

The targeted area is roughly 500m long by 100m – 150m wide. It is over planted with spruced pine trees and has a forest floor of short heather and grass with moss and bracken patches. Visibility is generally good, but not good enough for photographs. The wood is used occasionally by dog-walkers.

The chambered cairn has been recorded on the SMR(NH54SW0100) and the NMRS(NH54SW064). A field survey was made in Nov 1999, by CFA (The Centre for Field Archaeology) of an adjacent area to the south and west ahead of a proposed gravel quarry. This identified 2 possible chambered cairns, four hut circles, many clearance cairns and an earthbank (which continues into the project area). Three of the hut circles (SMR nos. – NH54SW0116, - 0117 – 0118) lie immediately to the south-east of the project area. The gravel quarry now exists to the south-east of these hut circles and it is understood that it is to be extended to the south-west.

The project was undertaken on a cold, overcast February day by 12 members.

1. The areas' longitudinal axis was traversed by the group, walking in parallel at 10 – 15m intervals, as per field walking. Each feature was marked with a cane and allocated a unique number. Thirty six features were identified and marked in this way.
2. Six pairs of individuals were allocated between 5 and 7 features each to record. They were supplied with 30m tapes, steel tapes, and marker flags. The details of each feature including rough sketches were noted on a pro forma. Sheet. Where appropriate GPS readings were taken, but the trees made photography unsuitable.



The aims of the project were

- To establish the present condition of eroded foreshore and backshore sites, to assess the risks of further damage to them and to suggest how they might be stabilised and conserved.
- To identify the extent of the various periods of settlement and to gather environmental information to give an insight into the economy of former populations.
- To identify the full extent of seasonal fishing camps and fishing stations to verify Pennant's observation (in 1792) of "multitudes of little occasional hovels and tents on the shore"
- To see if there is evidence that Loch Hourn, in dividing two great estates, represented a cultural divide in earlier times.

As you read through this next article you will see that there is still a lot more work to be done on this project, and funding is the next priority for NOSAS, if this valuable work is to carry on.

THE LOCH HOURN PROJECT

JIM MARSHALL

282 sites surveyed and recorded and publication of an 80 page report - that, very briefly, sums up the Loch Hourn Project! But of course the full story is a bit longer and this very short article is intended to describe the project and the subsequent report to those who were not immediately involved.

What was the project and how did it come about? In mid-January 2000 John Wombell explored the north shore of inner Loch Hourn and came on the numerous un-recorded sites that became the subject of the survey. John subsequently invited the NOSAS committee to join him in a reconnaissance visit in December 2000. A stormy and wintry voyage down the loch in an open boat provided a foretaste of the conditions experienced some 16 months later! It was quickly agreed that there should be an attempt made to put together a project to survey and record these sites. Contact was established with Tom Dawson of the Scottish Archaeological and Palaeoenvironmental Trust (SCAPE) who expertly guided the project inception, particularly our contacts with Historic Scotland (HS). HS in turn kindly supported the project with an offer of financial help, which was quickly accepted.

3. A survey of the whole area at a scale of 1:2,500, using compass and pacing technique, was carried out by MM, marking in the archaeological features in relation to one another. This was 'drawn up' using Ocad, an orienteering cartographic drawing programme, the symbols having been modified to represent archaeological features.
4. A document containing a synopsis of the features, the original recording forms and the plan of the area, together with a copy of the previous entry on the SMR/NMRS, and the CFA report of the adjacent area is to be deposited in the NOSAS archive. Copies of the synopsis and plan are to be sent to the SMR, the NMRS, the Beaulieu Heritage Society and the Kilmorack Heritage Trust. A shortened version will be sent to the CSA for inclusion in 'Discovery and Excavation'.

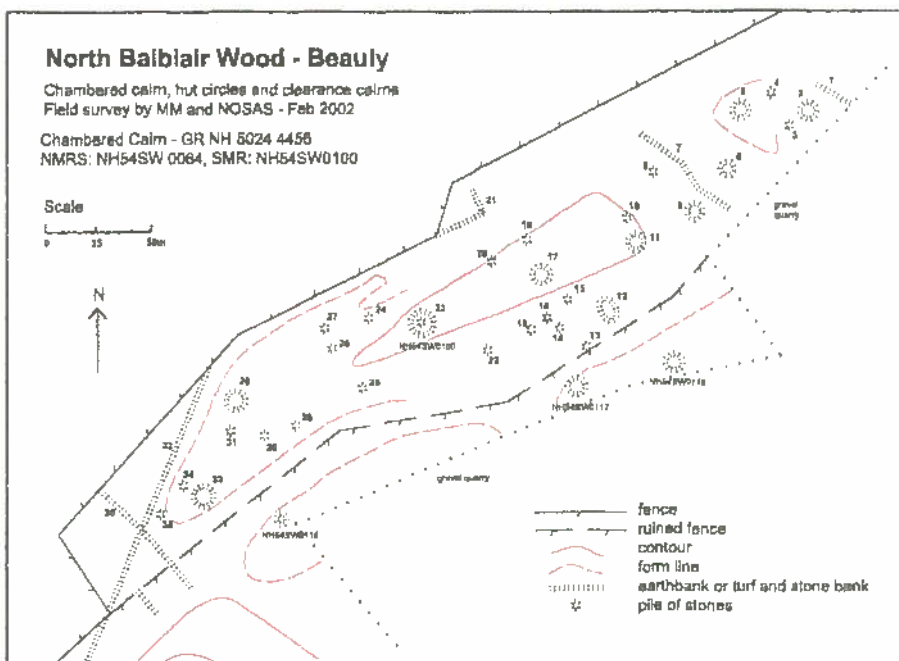
Results

Thirty six features in total were identified and recorded;-

- the remains of seven circular 'round houses': Five measured between 8 to 9m in diameter and two oval enclosures measured 10 by 7m and 11 by 6m. The walls of the structures had spread to 2m wide and were generally 0.3-0.5m in height. There was evidence of an entrance in the south-eastern or southern arc of all of the structures.
- two smaller circular enclosures with diameters of 9m and walls 0.5m in height. These enclosed quite small internal areas and lacked evidence of entrances, they may have been burnt mounds
- 22 clearance cairns, some quite substantial and varying in diameter from 4 to 8m and in height from 0.4 to 1m.

- 5 linear earth baulk. Two of these are possibly contemporary with the settlement, the other 3 maybe medieval.

M. Marshall

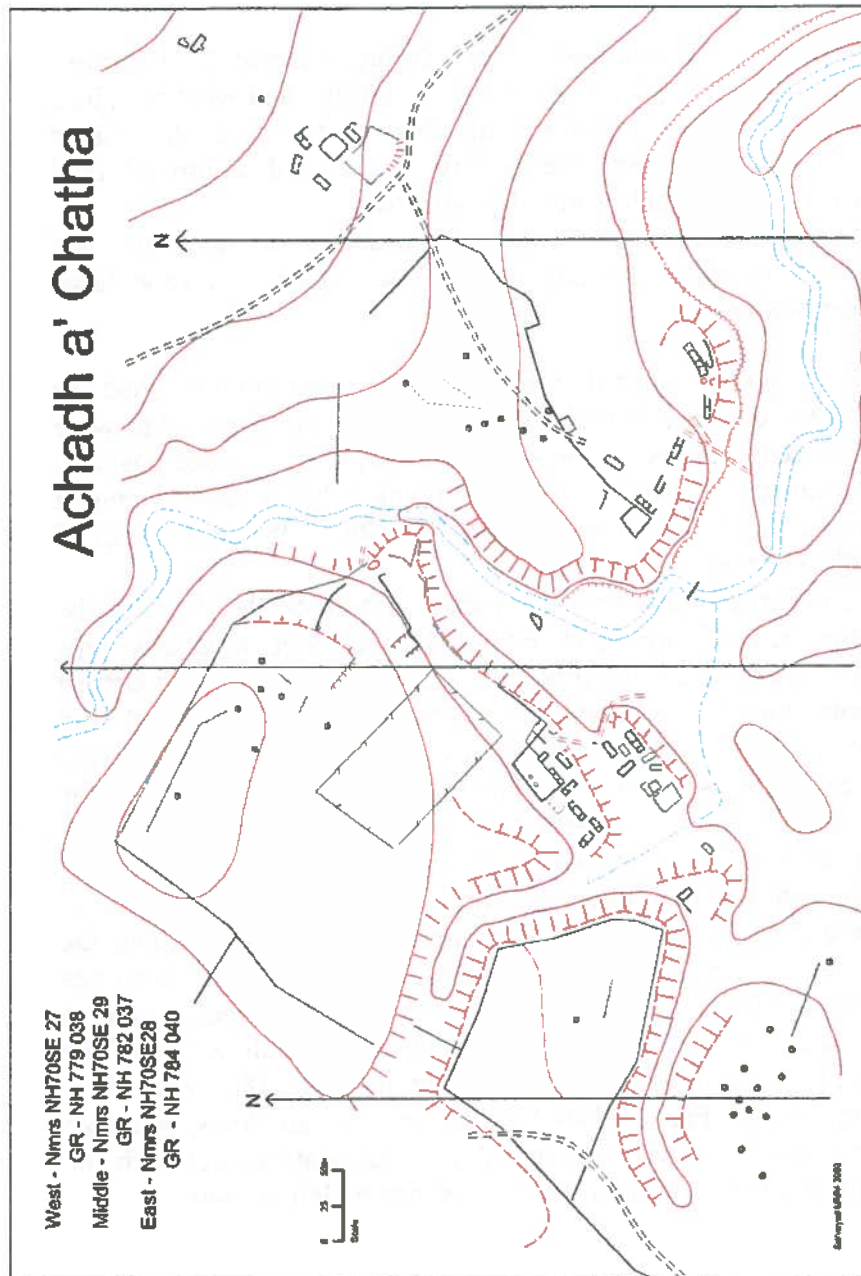


It is difficult, if not impossible to say when the settlements were established, how long they continued in use and when they were deserted. There was so much movement of the rural population during the 18th + 19th centuries. It may be that our settlement of Achadh a`Chatha was established when people were cleared from other areas, certainly the name would infer that. But for the other settlements, of West and Mid Raitts, there is evidence of a longer history both appear on the earlier maps of Blaeu and Gordon of 1645. Much more consultation of the documentary evidence needs to be done.

Meryl Marshall.



Achadh a` Chatha from the south west.



This contribution is a resume of the project undertaken by Clyne Heritage Society at Clynekirkton Graveyard in Sutherland.

The Clynekirkton Graveyard Project.

As many of the readership will be aware, Clynekirkton Graveyard is situated around 2 miles to the NW of the East Sutherland coastal village of Brora in the parish of Clyne. It forms the last resting place of probably several hundred, if not thousand, more people than the 711 who can be determined to be there from the evidence presented by those of the gravestones themselves on which there is legible information. Incidentally, with 27% of the above total Sutherlands form the greatest percentage of people in the graveyard, and the oldest person recorded, a Mary Ross was a Sutherland before marriage, lived to the extraordinary age of 103, before she died in 1905.

The Clynekirkton site consists of a disused historic graveyard, a ruined church, an inhabited former manse, a bell-tower, a watch-house and a coffin road, which meanders over the hills from the church to Oldtown in Strath Brora. The ruined church dates back to 1775, however, the site probably dates back to at least early Christian times, as three Pictish Stones were found there in the late 18th Century.

Parishioners came to the parish church from all over the then heavily populated Strath Brora, and in the 17th Century they were called there by the ringing of a bell, hung in a free-standing circular bell tower which stands opposite the church, on a possibly man-enhanced glacial mound.

The Graveyard is now owned and maintained by the Highland Council, who took it over in 1921. The Graveyard went out of use in the 1890's when it was superseded by Clyne New Cemetery, but it is still actively visited by members of the local community and relatives (many of whom live abroad) who have ancestors buried in the graveyard.

Within the local community the church and graveyard are still talked about as part of village folklore, especially grave-robbing stories and pirates' graves. Clynekirkton Graveyard still contributes an important role to village life and before the project started the potential of the whole site soon became apparent.

During Autumn 2001, Clyne Heritage Society was approached by an Internet-based organisation, somewhat oddly acronymised as POSH (Preserve Our Sutherland Heritage), which sprang from an excellent website called Highland Hearts (www.highlandhearts.com) The organiser, Christine Stokes, had spent the previous 15 years on a crusade to track down every conceivable branch of her Murray ancestry in the Rogart area, which then became little less than an obsession covering any piece of information relating to St Callans Graveyard in Rogart. POSH now has its own website – www.sutherlandheritage.com)

Many contributors to her Highland Hearts and Sutherland Rootsweb discussion groups had been concerned with the deteriorating nature of many of the Sutherland graveyards, cemeteries and burial grounds and especially Clynekirkton. Visitors to these graveyards had been, at worst, deeply shocked at the state of neglect in which they found the cherished resting places of their ancestors. This, sometimes poor state of affairs, does not reflect well on the local community, contrasting often

It comprises 7 buildings, a corn drying kiln and 2 enclosures. There is also a spring within a stone setting, and what may be a mill or possibly a whisky-still close to the burn. Associated with this settlement there were 3 areas of improved land bisected by the melt water channels, two of them are enclosed or partially enclosed by stone and turf dykes, the third although not enclosed contains several large clearance cairns.

The group continued up the burn for a further kilometre and the remains of what is probably a Victorian shooting lodge were inspected. Situated on the 400m contour, in an exposed position, this substantial building of 28 m in length, has fantastic views of the south. It is depicted on the 1st edition OS survey map of 1872 as being roofed.

We returned south on a good track and descended through the settlements of Upper and "Easter" Raitts. These three townships – of Upper Raitts, Baldow (just to confuse us this is the correct name for the excavated settlement of Easter Raitts) and Kerrowdubh (or dow), occupy a gently sloping terrace overlooking Kingussie and have a splendid view of over the spey to the west. To confuse us even further, it is believed that Upper Raitts was known as Wester Raitts, while Baldow and Kerrowdow were known as Mid Raitts prior to 1800. Why all these changes of names? For those interested in pursuing the names further, a list of the place names and their meanings exist, kindly supplied by Bill Ramsay, whose forebears lived in the area and who now lives in Kyle of Lochalsh. A list of the people removed from the townships between 1801 and 1806, from Charles Fraser Mackintoshes Antiquarian Notes, added an extra touch, in that we were able to associate names with the settlements it is thought that the last person left in 1840.

But to return to our walk.....

About 2 kilometres to the north of Easter Raitts and lying close to the Raitts Burn at an altitude of 350m, the extensive remains of a settlement called Achadh a' Chatha are to be found. This was the first objective. It is reached by a pleasant track through the birch wood, running up the east side of the Raitts Burn from the present Balavil House – the original house was extensively damaged in a fire in 1904. About half way up the track the remains of an old lade cross the track. The lade can be traced from just below Achadh a' Chatha, where it takes off from the burn and contours round the hillside towards Balavil House for a distance of 2km, this is probably the water duct for an early hydro-scheme, now defunct.

Achadh a' Chatha, which has been variously translated as “field of the struggle” or “field of the sheep or sheepcote”, lies within an extensive area of improved land on the south facing slopes, with panoramic views of the Cairngorm Mountains. The land appears to be relatively fertile and well-drained, a significant feature being the deep melt water channels, remains of the last ice-age, which cut through the area. There are remains of three clusters of buildings: the eastmost settlement (NH70SE 28 – NH784040) is on the right of the track and comprises of 6 buildings and 2 enclosures. The middle settlement (NH70SE 29 - NH782037) is situated 400m to the southwest, on a terrace above the burn and comprises of 6 buildings, 2 enclosures and a platform. The west settlement (NH70SE 27 – NH779038) is situated on a glacial terrace on the west bank of the burn. There are two groups of buildings, each on its own terrace. The lower settlement has 7 buildings and 1 enclosure. The buildings appear to have been robbed of smaller stones, many of the remaining stones being quite sizeable. The upper settlement appears to be the more recently occupied.

With the esteem and general high state of care and maintenance afforded to graveyards overseas. POSH was born from this concern, with the idea of annually sponsoring the tidying and restoration of some of the more needy cases using financial contributions from relatives, in many cases now abroad, of those interred. Clynekirkton was selected as being arguably the most worthy case and the wheels were set in motion, with Clyne Heritage Society being the local workhorse at the sharp end of the operation.

The aims of the partnership were to record the inscriptions of all the gravestones, including information on their current condition, and this was to form the basis of a ‘Conservation Plan’ for the graveyard. The long-term aims are the selective repair of some of the gravestones and future interpretation of the site for all visitors to the area.

The information collected during the first phase will help to determine the gravestones which are in need of conservation, and with help from POSH, the Society would raise the necessary money to stabilise or repair some, or all of them.

The project policy at the outset was to tidy the graveyard, not to uncover or dig for gravestones. We were aware that we would be working in a sacred burial area and it was our responsibility to maintain a high standard of work and sensitivity at all times. We were eager that the Clynekirkton Project would be a ‘Community Project’ and bring together an enthusiastic band of workers.

So, on Sunday 3rd March 2002, Clyne Heritage Society committee members congregated at the graveyard, and the local Highland Councillor, Rita Finlayson, official pronounced the start of the project.

The current maintenance remit to the Highland Council is for cutting the grass and removing any loose or broken stones to the periphery of the graveyard. Clyne Heritage Society and 'POCH' members believe that the current level of care is not comprehensive enough and the current policy has actually enhanced the deterioration of the gravestones themselves. We were also concerned about the methods used over the years to manage the site. The woody vegetation in the recent past had been left to grow completely out of control, unmanaged, and as a result whole parts of the graveyard were engulfed and without any means of access. Quite frankly, we didn't know where the graveyard began or ended!!!

Ivy was the main problem. It had been left growing unchecked for many years and had gained a formidable grasp on the burial enclosure iron railings, as well as choking the mature trees. The ivy roots had invaded nearly every part of the graveyard floor, the stone boundary walls and the fabric of the enclosures and church.

Ivy can also be very damaging to the monuments themselves, especially on the soft, sedimentary rocks such as sandstone. Needless to say, the majority of gravestones in Clynekirkton Graveyard are carved from this formerly locally quarried material, and these are the monuments most at risk through deterioration of inscriptions and wholesale erosion of the stones themselves.

Tidying up smaller areas was less time consuming and resulted in an almost immediate improvement to the appearance of the graveyard. The more demanding areas showed a gradual reduction in vegetation and helped bring more sunlight into the graveyard. The feedback from the volunteers, who carried out

Archaeology Month, this time exploring an area which is very familiar for those of us who were involved with the dig at Easter Raitts.

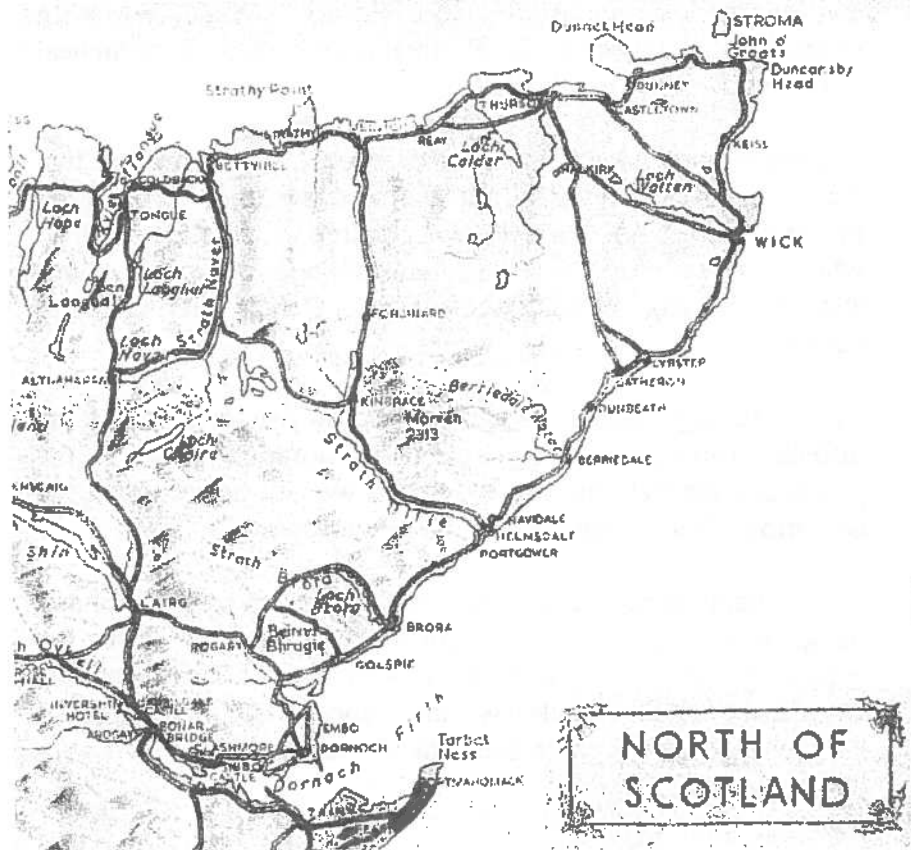
A Walk up the Raitts Burn, Lynchat near Kingussie.

29th September 2002

Many NOSAS members have been involved in the excavations at Easter Raitts. This walk explored the settlements further to the north of the familiar location. But first a little about the history of the area. In 1452, the lands of Badenoch, including Raitts, had passed to the Earl of Huntly (later Duke of Gordon), but by the end of the 15th century, Raitts was held in feu from the Gordons by MacIntosh of Borlum. In 1698 Brigadier MacIntosh, a Jacobite, is described as living in a typical Highland longhouse on what was the site of Raitts Castle and which was later to become the site of the mansion of Belleville House. In 1715, the barracks at Ruthven, just 3 kilometres to the southwest, was constructed, and by 1730 the military road, which crosses the lower part of Raitts Burn, had been built by General Wade. Raitts was sold in 1788 to James McPherson, translator of gaelic poetry, and it was he who built the elegant mansion of Belleville. He died in 1796 and the lands passed to his son, also James. It was during the ownership of this James, between 1801 – 1806, that many of the people were cleared from the settlements around Raitts and it is thought that many would have gone to Lynchat or Kingussie.

Should you wish any further information about the project or the graveyard, or can supply any information about the church and the people buried there (as the Society is hoping to publish a history of the church and graveyard and its people), please contact either:

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the work, was a sense of real achievement and pride and some were lucky enough to make some of the major discoveries.

The NW corner of the graveyard had been unseen for generations and it initially took 3 volunteers, 2 weekends to cut down the jungle-like tangle of ivy, which helped to reveal 4 stone and iron railing enclosures. The next step was to ascertain the condition of the enclosure walls and then to continue clearing the ivy. One of the enclosures had a memorial plaque commemorating a James Hall (an early sheep farmer from Scriberscross) attached to its 2m high back wall, and surmounting this there was a canopy of ivy a further 1.5m high. It took nearly a day to carefully remove this mass of vegetation and a great cheer followed its final descent.

This area of the graveyard has been the focus for many of the fascinating discoveries. A watch-house window was revealed in the western wall of the churchyard, facing the entire graveyard. The earliest dated stone in the graveyard prior to the vegetation clearance was 1747; a simple slab dated 1720 has now replaced this.

The most intriguing discovery was a tablestone with a beautifully carved inscription in English, celebrating the lives of William and Mary MacKay of Dalvait, who both died in 1779, which was uncovered from the dense undergrowth. Next to it was discovered a flatstone with an inscription carved in the same script and presumably by the same mason, commemorating a John Mackay, also of Dalvait, who also died coincidentally, in 1779. Nothing too unremarkable in this, until it is explained that the latter inscription is in French! In full it reads 'Isit corps de John Mackay Dalvait mort l'annie 1779' (Here is the body of John MacKay Dalvait died in the year 1779).

After many lines of inquiry, including to the National Museum of Scotland, The Council for Scottish Archaeology, Highland Family History Society, as well as expert local historians, it appears that no other gravestone in the Highlands has been recorded as being inscribed in French. This indicates that this one maybe absolutely unique and, therefore, very important from an archaeological and family history perspective.

At the moment, however, the Society can only speculate about its significance, but it may be that there is a military reason for this particular French connection. Maybe John MacKay was a mercenary or served with the French forces after the Jacobite decline. But why carve an inscription in probably what was not his native tongue? How did the mason know what to carve? Maybe John MacKay had a French wife? There were links with France still at this time, but what this man's link with the 'Auld Alliance' is stumoiing the Society members. This mystery still baffles the minds of many experts!

Once the major clearance work had been completed, we had to start thinking about the conservation of the stones in the graveyard. The work carried out in the graveyard over the Spring has highlighted the need to monitor the condition of the stones. After initial inspection, a considerable number of the stones were identified as unstable (wobbly). During the course of our tidying up programme, one gravestone had to be taken apart for safety reasons, the sandstone layers had split along the alignment of bedding planes and the inscription had been entirely lost. A capstone was dislodged from another gravestone during the time we were in the graveyard, and this type of incident has been all too common over recent years.

Many recent visitors to the graveyard have recalled incidents,

where stones have toppled over in the last few years, showing that without frequent and regular monitoring, this sad fate will be the inevitable outcome for more stones in the graveyard.

The Society contracted Dr Susan Buckham, the Carved Stone Advisor for the Council for Scottish Archaeology, and learnt more about the Carved Stone Decay in Scotland Project and why it was important for our society to participate in the survey.

A programme of Practical Workshops on recording, managing and conserving gravestones has already commenced, with sessions at Clynekirkton, Portmahomack and Kirkmicheal Churchyard on the Black Isle.

The workshops have been a great success and confirmed that there is a strong interest in graveyard conservation through out the Highlands. An Outreach Programme is being developed which aims to inform a list of interested individuals and groups about forthcoming projects and events as well as offering expert advice.

Clyne Heritage Society is currently drawing up a list of the different categories of gravestone deterioration found in the graveyard and over the winter months we will be recording the condition of all the now accessible gravestones.

Future maintenance work should be regarded as curatorship and be governed by a sensitive 'Conservation Policy'. From the experience gained through the project we will approach the Highland Council and discuss a more appropriate programme of maintenance for the graveyard. The Clynekirkton Project is only just beginning!