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*'210 Rossal, Rogart - an
abandoned croft'*

talk by

Dave Hutchinson

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Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I'm joined at the top by speaker Dave Hutchinson, a man I have a bone to pick with. And I've got my proof sheet in front of me to suggest exactly who I've got this bone to pick with. He's a sculptor and furniture maker, interested in the history of furniture and furniture making on the islands and

islands of Scotland and regularly tours the townships in the far north with displays, workshops and talks on history and construction of vernacular furniture. A member of the Regional Furniture Society, also involved in ongoing research of this heritage. Dave has been awarded a Churchill Travelling Furniture to study the influence of early Scottish settlers on the vernacular furniture of New Zealand. He's going to talk about what he's been doing this year.

Now, the bone I have to pick with you is that this talk was rehearsed yesterday in Rogart, in the hall in Pittentrail with the people he's been working with and unfortunately, it was so popular that the AGM I was trying to hold in the little hall next door was inquorate, so we had to postpone it to February! Over to Dave.

I'll just do my little bit of technology first. The last 12 months, well, not quite 12 months, but certainly most of the last year, I've had the joy of working with Rogart Heritage Society on a patch of land in the township of Rossal. Now, it lies on the south side of the Strath as you go through from Pittentrail to Rogart, and I'll point out exactly where in a minute.

It was a site that I'd seen some years ago, mainly for its reason of furniture that was in there, and Reverend Leslie Goskirk had introduced me to it. And having seen it, I thought there was much more to the site than just the bits of furniture that were in this old cottage. And you can see it's a cottage in disrepair.

The gable end has gone, the barn has gone, and the elements were whispering in, as indeed were the sheep and the rabbits and the birds and probably other things as well, but those were the ones that were evident. The site seemed intriguing and I felt there was much more involved in it than that, than just the cottage. Initially I called on the help of Jill Harden, who's one of the archaeologists for the National Trust for Scotland, responsible for places like St Kilda and Barra, and she came and exuded even more enthusiasm than I had. So that was no good at all, because that was it. I'd got to do everything I possibly could with it. We've since had visits from Hilary White from the Highland Council Archaeology Unit, who was not only enthusing about the property, but also was very flattering about the work that the group were doing, and particularly in the sense that she felt that we were probably spending far more time than the average professional archaeologist gets to look at it.

We were probably breaking new ground in the amount of documentation that was going on about it, which was also encouraging. I have to also thank, as we go through, Malcolm Bangor-Jones, who you will probably know, who works for Historic Scotland, and is the great expert on the Sutherland Papers. He has spent goodness knows how many of his lunch hours in the National Library finding bits that I get by email. Only last week some stuff was emailed to say '*I found all the rentals back to 1811*', and they keep coming through. So there's been a lot of associated professional interest, freely given, thankfully, to the project.

If we look at the location of Rossal, you can see the main road running through, and the railway. Rossal lies here, just by Inchcape, as it's now called. It was called various other things in the past. If you're going through, you may have seen signs for Rovey House, and it lies up on the hill behind that. You can just about catch it in the right light, and you can see there's a cottage with a gable missing sitting in a few trees.

Rossal comes from, the Norse 'Ross and Ron'. I'm not very good at Norse, so that's probably the wrong pronunciation, but there'll be somebody who'll put it right, meaning Horsefield. And the collective opinion is that the Horsefield relates to the head of navigation of the waterway on which that particular place lies.

If you look at Rose Hall on the Navor, Rossal, which we're familiar with on the Fleet, they lie at probably the point where a longboat couldn't get much further. Remember, the Fleet didn't have the Mound in the way in those days. And then they might well have had a field in which they'd have paddocked horses before they went on inland to do all those things that Vikings are famous for doing inland. So it was a sort of holding, we think, and that's the way the word come up.

There's no actual factual benefit in that. It's a case of collective academic opinion. The first maps we've got that show the area that some of you may be familiar with is William Forbes' map, which shows Rossal as being there, look, on Strath Fleet, spelt R-O-S-A-L. Cartographers are wonderful about getting the phonetics the way they want to choose it to be, so you always find different spellings for different places as you look through. And if we take a slightly later map, Thomson's Atlas of Scotland, we've also got Rossal spelt as we spell it today. And the only road that's indicated is this one that goes through, which is roughly in the same pattern as the one that we have today.

Pittentrail lies here. Gregory Burnett was the first person to map this part of Scotland trigonometrically, so it was done more accurately than the eye would see. And if you look, you'll notice that there's Rossal, and we've got little blips, and if we actually enlarge those, you can see an attempt was made to put the buildings on the site. They're totally inaccurate. So I think it was a case of, there's one over there, and there's one over there, but unless something incredible has happened to the ground in the meantime, an awful lot of those have been moved around. But if we take the early OS map of the site, if we take the 1879 map of the site, this is the area of particular interest.

The Croft 219 relates to that one there, running down to this little bit here, and there are some, you know, various buildings marked on it which appear or don't appear on the 1906 map. The 1906 map has the advantage of indicating which buildings had a roof on. So if you're looking at maps, at that stage, those with crosshatching on had a roof, and those which have no shading on were just plain ruined buildings.

And the interesting thing to note is this was the croft picture that you saw in the first place, that was that building, which is on this, the later map is there, slightly bigger, and the blip by it is a bigger barn. The other one that fascinated us was the fact that there was a cottage marked there in 1879 which isn't there at all on that map, so it's not even marked as a ruin. It would appear to be nothing worth registering.

As we were wandering round the site, there were various bits and pieces we were intrigued by. We have since found that this strip here was Croft 220, and if you look at the later map, it's been absorbed into another Croft, which was quite common. As you know today, an awful lot of the Crofts are much bigger. Today we have this site, and Croft 219, you can see placed there, and that's as it is quite recently. Bigger pictures later will show you that it's in an even greater state of disrepair than when I first met it. The typical Sutherland estate croft house. And having said that, that is its importance.

It had a fairly well-constructed beginning. It had a very well-improved section in the middle, and then because the tenants, for various reasons, fell into poverty, not a lot was done to it. And that makes it incredibly interesting to the historian, because you actually get pictures of life from before a particular time, because nothing got improved, nothing got moved. The walls haven't been plastered over. Fireplaces haven't disappeared. They haven't become modern homes. It's remained in the condition that it probably was at the turn of the previous century, even though it was inhabited until 1938. Alongside it there was a barn, which we wanted to investigate.

There was a building at the back which we weren't quite sure about, looking at it and the way it was put together, it could either have been domestic or it could have been agricultural, and we're sort of halfway to getting a decision on that at the moment. There was what we now think was the remains of Croft 220, and we found documentary evidence to show that that particular Croft was absorbed into 219 and that the tenant was refused permission to improve, so that it was allowed to fall into disrepair and probably robbed away. We then also have the remains of this early cottage, because there was an indentation on the ground, there were raised areas, and that was where that second circle appeared with nothing. We thought it would probably contain some kind of clue as to what might have been there before. Here we had a very large terraced area, which we were speculating was probably for some sort of growing agricultural purposes, but we weren't sure at that particular time.

So that was our site. It sits probably in two or three acres in what is a seven acre croft, this top bit that we were working with.

The site has existed from way before clearance time. They weren't cleared, neither were they cleared onto. They were affirmed as places that you could continue to live in by the Duke in 1811 and became part of the Sutherland Estate afterwards. People were allowed to stay, which I suppose is a technical way of saying you weren't cleared.

My first visit was back in 2001, and I'd like to share this with you, as there are some photographs about in there, because it was really like going back in a time warp. It was one of the most amazing treats.

The house was in better form. Not a lot has disappeared from this end, but you will see in later pictures that the gable end at the other end was in bad condition. There was this gaping end, which in fact was partly the salvation of all the goodies inside.

Very typical construction. The door on the front was not the original door. This had been put on by the crofter at some stage to keep his sheep out or whatever in, or whatever he was doing with it as a store.

The plans of the building are fairly typical. You'll have met many of these. You're coming through an entranceway, you have a staircase, you have an east room and a west room, and we'll carry on using that sort of Gaelic notation of which part of the house you're in rather than the best room and the front room and such like.

Behind here was a sort of little built wooden area in which probably a sort of closet, or in fact we found a bed, and there was one wee window out of the back. So that

particular construction is fairly typical, and we found later on that the dimensions confirmed very much with what we expect.

As you come through the door you can picture the staircase going up, and this is exactly how it was found on the day we went in. The staircase going up the stairs, and you can just see, I think at the top there, the light of the gable end that's missing. You can see through to the daylight. There was the under-stair cupboard with coal and bottles whose contents we won't mention at the moment, but all kinds of things that probably were part of his demise.

The east room, which was the room where the gable end had broken down, was full of typical bits of furniture. Some of the furniture has been salvageable. In other instances the woodworm 'let go of each other's hands' and the furniture fell apart! So we couldn't do anything with them at all.

Here, one of which we have managed to save and do something, is this lovely little Glasgow pattern chair made by a local house carpenter. It's a beauty, the actual construction. It's a simple chair, but a simple chair is an important chair if you happen to be a crofter or similar. The one that is interesting is this one here. Although it completely fell apart, sadly, and couldn't be conserved. If you notice the back's got a shaped back. This is the local carpenter attempting to do a Chippendale on the back of his chair, because he's seen one in a catalogue. Very often that happens.

And here you see a whole pile of rubble, which was where the hearth had been at some stage. So when the wall collapsed, some came in, some went out. To the side, of the hearth, was a nook cupboard, a cupboard actually cut into the stone when it was built, with wooden doors on. Everywhere there were tables and everywhere there were papers, either in book form or torn books or fallen books, mostly in Gaelic, and an awful lot of them of a religious nature.

Lovely little Lowland dresser. I say Lowland dresser even though it was found in the Highlands, because Highland dressers, of which we only have three in the Highlands left, don't have any drawers in the bottom originally. But they soon found that the Lowland dresser was a better dresser than the one they had, the ones with the drawers on the front. Sometimes you have them with a wooden slatted middle, I suppose, like a meat safe today, or would have called it in my younger day, which they called an ormery, which was then part of the dresser.

This is beautifully made. Those drawers had dovetails at front and back, and this is made by the local man, most of it made in the house whilst it was there. There were two of these little tables. I'm pointing this one out here because this, although it had been pecked about a bit there was solid flour. The paper had long since gone, but the flour occupied exactly the same shape as the bag that had contained it, even the wrinkles and the crooks in it as well. Sadly it's been taken by the crows, most of it, in the meantime.

Arrays, arrays and arrays of Gaelic psalm books, either they needed an awful lot of redemption or, you know, it was of importance to them. The box, that little area behind, had a box bed. When you came in you were looking at a series of slides of photographs I've taken from that box bed. It was lined on the side entirely. I remember

I'd just come back from my fellowship in New Zealand when I came to see this, with a 1901 copy of the New Zealand Illustrated, a 1903 copy of the Auckland Times, and some extracts which we couldn't date from the Christchurch News. And all of these have been cut out in their sheets and layered on. Sadly the condition deteriorated as the years went by, but we've rescued most of it. But what is missing, of course, are the slats that would have held the palliasso, the straw mattress that went on there, but the rest of the item is there.

In the West Room, so we're turning left now, there was the remains of the corner of the front door, and you can see the framework to the door there, some corrugated iron which we believe came from the barn, or the byre, to the side of it. And you can just see an open kist there, with an unusual construction in the way it was made. There was a single bed, with its mattress, and with a kist by the side of it. One of the exciting and the saddest things about the bed, archaeologists love to find dating evidence, and they are most happy about coins being found. These people were on the poor register when they died, and underneath that mattress we discovered a silver of 1936, which was probably just before old Angus died, and I'm sure he would have been desperate for that, if he could have found it, and there it was. So you've got this human story of, look what we've found, and then you begin to think, if only he could have spent it, he might have got comfort from it.

We actually went as far as extracting some of the straw from that, and have kept it for analysis, mainly to find out how well it was chopped and how well it was grown, but one great day was spent getting rid of an awful lot of this stuff, because it was fairly pongy, to say the least. So, having seen all of this furniture, and the attic, which you can see there, lovely coat there, there's a picture of the coat on one of these boards, which was very probably the owner's coat for a specific reason, and I'll come to that in a while. Lots and lots of crofting remains, and of course the great views outside.

Well, this year, as I said, Rogart Heritage asked me to go and talk to them about what I'd found in the croft, and I had no idea that I was going to get the enthusiastic response that I did, but all summer they've been working on there. We've had crofting gentlemen in their best boiler suits for the Saturday, digging turfs, and down on their knees, scraping away at the stones and the soil. We've cleared the house, we've saved all the furniture so that we can conserve it. We've had the ladies of the village on finds afternoon, coming and collecting all the finds we've found, cleaning them all up. We've had some that have become specialists on paper, and some that have been specialists on buttons, and people acting as recording officers. It's been an amazing time, and I've had the privilege of being part of it, and it really has been a lovely community effort. At the beginning a plan of action which was built up in conjunction with those archaeologists that we'd consulted in the first place. Our first priority, because the other end was in a really bad condition, was to do something about the furniture. So we took all the furniture out, and for some of those we had to, because nothing other than the chairs and things, everything else had to be dismembered to take out, because it had been built inside.

So the box bed, usually box beds are flat pack, MFI is not new, it's been going for years! You have two wonderful end boards and cross members which are mortised in with huge mortises, the kind of mortises you get on a door where you get two going

into the frame. And usually they're nailed in but the nail isn't driven home. Sadly over the years these had rusted in so we couldn't get them out anyway.

But you can drive them apart by systems of long lengths of timber and car jacks being careful to pressurise the thing until finally they ping open and come out. Because they're not glued, nothing was glued, it was all dry jointed. So we've taken all the beds apart and we've managed to save all the beds.

The dresser is being saved and conserved and two of the chairs and one of the kists was whole and another kist in part. So we may be able to reconstruct it. One of the window frames because they had sash windows which we thought we ought to look very carefully at.

The building itself, and if we go back to our site plan and look at first of all Croft 219, we felt it was important to get as much recording about this as we possibly could. So lots of measurements were taken, lots of drawings were made, lots of photographs were taken and in amongst it we wanted to find the human story because that was also important.

We know from documentary evidence like census returns who might have lived there over the time. We do know that Mrs Christy Hamilton whose name is on that little slip from the post office was there. She is the first and earliest recorded that we have physical paper evidence of being in there. That belongs to her as opposed to belonging to the Crown. And we did also find, a letter from Angus Hamilton. He was the last person that stayed and died there in 1938. Sadly we have had no success in finding photographs of any of the people that lived in it as yet. I am in touch with Customs and Excise Office because Angus was a Customs and Excise Officer. So I am rather hoping that there might have been one of those large pictures of officers of that particular year in which we might get a picture of him.

When we first looked at the cottage we were a little confused about its construction but rather hopeful that it was, most of it was certainly prior to 1850 but other bits had clearly been looked at. And we almost reached the stage of thinking our approach was wrong until Malcolm Bangor Jones, bless him, discovered this letter from Christina Hamilton writing to the factor, or in fact writing to the ground officer. The system being you had a ground officer that looked after a small number of townships and then beyond the ground officer there would be the factor in the estate. She was asking if the next time the factor was west of the strath he might call on her property and look at it and have it improved. Beautiful writing isn't it. And we have here a letter from the factor to the carpenter specifying the timber requirements for the improvements. And a second letter of 1893 saying there are one or two other bits that we are ordering those as well. There are two important things. One, was this in the same hand but not in the same pen as it were, that says 70 years ago, which therefore we are presuming predates the cottage to 1820. And that fits in with what we found in the way of the building.

And there's this lovely bit at the bottom that says Alexander, who was the ground officer, says this body, who called in person, is not badly off. Has a daughter living with her and a well-to-do son, he thinks, in Glasgow. Her rent is £6, £6 in 1893.

Multiply that by the factor of 200 and you've roughly got the same value of that £6 today. A huge amount of money, but all the crofts seem to be a similar sort of price and that's how they could afford to repair them and maintain them no doubt. But there, in here, we have the term I called on the carpenter.

Now that the carpenter is likely to be one of two people who have both had the same name which makes it even more interesting. And that's O'Donnell Mackay who was the senior carpenter for Dunrobin. But there was also a carpenter of exactly the same name who lived in Rogart for which we can never find, he never wrote his address on any of the documentation.

So there's the wee bills and the wee bits of paper but he was O'Donnell of no fixed abode or I'm not telling you sort of stuff. I don't think there were any income taxmen to run away from in those days but there we are. In the same way.

What we have since found, which really from the point of view of this whole particular job makes it nice is we found a voucher from Dunrobin Sawmill because they had an internal accounting system that specifies all those items for delivery. So we've actually found all of these little pieces and put together. It seems that down in Golspie, roughly behind the railway station, beyond where the fisherman's cottage is where the old gas works used to be, Dunrobin had a 'Home Base' or if you like a 'B&Q' type store for the whole of the estate and everything was cut, stacked or delivered or brought in and kept there.

When you look at papers there are three classifications of timber put into buildings. There's Baltic redwoods which has obviously been shipped in. There's Speyside which seems to be the next level down. And then at the bottom of the pile is Dunrobin which in the main seems to have been sawn timbers. Some of the timbers in the house were much better than sawn and we can look at those in a minute.

So if we look at the measurements of the building that roughly coincides, similar measurements, with most estate houses of that period. But what has happened is that they've taken a building which was up to the lintels in the main 1820ish. It's earth-mortared up to there. They've had subsequent pointing and harling put on the outside but up to that level is earth-mortar. Above that level, by earth-mortar it's mud, just to fill it in, and dry stone. But above that level it's lime-mortar and we have found an account for six bowls of lime to be delivered to the site obviously for that kind of work. So they've raised the roof. The stone structure is superb. If you look at this window opening, some of these inputs and outputs on these corners are really massive. All local, all dressed locally. This is pre-quarry time, the quarry came to Rogart much, much later. So these are field stones that have been dressed and worked on. These lintels we think are 1890s. Although they weren't specified in the woodwork, they may not have been of course, but they're slightly trimmer than the one at the back which is clearly earlier. They were wooden lintels, so you've got the usual picture of stone wall, stone wall, rubble, stone lintels, wooden lintels on the inside wall. So all the construction was done on the inside for the inner part of the house.

And I think the fact that the gable end was missing has been its salvation in many ways because it's allowed the air to get in and keep everything okay. So we have the door and we have this wonderful sash window with the top part fixed. Constructed in

the 1890s, so there were sash windows on it. There was never anything new was there. On the rear there was a casement window, you can see the lintel is there much bulkier, much more a found piece of stone rather than a mason actually dressing the stone. The roof was of Welsh slate, and that's what really threw us, because Welsh slate didn't get up here until the end of that century. And the skew puts on the corner would all have been carved and cut out and then run all the way up the chimney, to the top. All the nails in it were handmade, and the roof structure, it's solid and it's trimmed, there were 18 sets of pairs that ran all the way down there. All of them in the top jointed in, so there was none of this sort of nail and hope job, they were jointed and then nailed afterwards, but they were actually jointed in.

And there were high collars so it went right to the top. There is the wood lintel on the inside of this is the door, and stones were put in to create a level, the joists were dropped in and filled in between, and then the rest of the roof was built on top. So they got the old cottage, which was a sound one, and then they raised the level up a little bit. Now, one of the things that intrigued us greatly when we first saw it was a small piece of wood which stuck out from the end. We had this hope that that might go all the way along, perhaps this is some way of keying in the roof trusses into the joists.

Because there was no wooden roof plate, which you normally find today, and most of the last century you've had a wooden roof plate that sat on top of all those stones and everything fixed into that wooden roof plate. And it was the day Hilary White came over to look at it. Roy part of our team was up hacking away into the lime on top of one in between these joists. And there was a sudden, 'Yes it is!' And down he came, and Hilary was quite amused by these mature gentlemen, she said, getting excited over finding bits of wood in the roof of an old house. But it did run all the way along. this particular piece of wood, was jointed into the joists. Now I've not seen it since, I'm hoping I will find it again. It's actually documented as a roof plate, so it was either the carpenter's idea of what a roof plate should be, and that's the way he always made, or it was standard practice.

But not many people allow you to rip off their ceilings and go in and hack away, so if ever you get to an old building that you know you can have a poke at, check it out for me, will you, and see if there's a roof plate running along at the same time. The roof of course had the usual sarking on, and you can see all those hand-cut nails poking through. The attic floor was loose fit boards without any sort of tongue and grooving, they were just close fit. And the thicknesses varied slightly, but the shrinkage on the whole width was very little in all those years, but that may also be due to the fact that they've got that gentle breeze coming through all the time.

The other exciting thing is when you find little bits of scribble, "12 x 6 x 2.5" on the joists, which matched exactly with the list of paper that we'd had from the sawmill.

And there was another one " 8 x 1.5" for the joists that were fitted in too. Then we came across this, and were desperate to make that into a name, because I'd earlier found this in a different place, which says "William Mackay", not the same Mackay at all, carpenter to his grace the Duke of Sutherland, and was behind a wall up in Golspie Tower area in some cottages up there. So it was clearly the sawmill mark. Someone

had gone along, put all the stuff, counted, that can go. It could have been a Campbell, we were hoping for a maker's scribble, but in a sense it's just as interesting a story.

The central wooden bit is fascinating too, because that's been built entirely out of timber, and it was here that we realised just how much money was thrown at this building at its time, in the first place. The lining around it was all red pine, all Baltic pine. Beautiful stuff.

And the construction was such that it was done with a tongue on one side, and a groove on the other end, and a V groove taken down the middle to make it look as if it was two boards, planed beautifully on one side, and sawn on the back side. The sawn side happened to be the inner wall of the bedroom that the old lady lived in, in the box bed, so she didn't even get a decent wall for her side. But the other thing that befuddled us in the beginning was this random length of timbers at the end. When you see the other stuff that the carpenter did, it becomes a bit, why did he do that? This is the stairwell, beautifully laid in, lovely piece of OG moulding. This was ostentation in a simple craft of 1890. They were showing off a little bit, you know, at that particular time. And the mitres on the architrave round the doors are perfect, absolutely perfect. And all of this would indicate that they were going to spend a lot of money on it. But the money ran out.

There was no ceiling on this room at all. And that's probably why they were left random, because they were left random above the height of the joists, and had they put a ceiling in, that would have covered all those up. There was no lime plaster on the walls, there were scratchings, it's clearly where the coat was going to go on, but that never got done.

And there were other indications as we went round, that the money that was there, this well-to-do son, was no longer a well-to-do son, you know, the money was not being spent. But having said that, those bits that were made in the first place, the staircase, you know those staircases you always had through your childhood, or your adolescent hood, with that step you had to step over in case you woke mum up when you came in so late, because you didn't want to be heard about? None of those here. Absolutely, after all the years, it's in amazing condition.

And here's the construction that was obviously made on site, you see, a board, another board, nailed in, and then instead of the sort of little bits and pieces that we have stuck in between, full pieces holding each one up on either side, all the way up, all the way round, round and up that twist, and the noob posts were strong and solid all the way up. All of these timbers were sawn on a circular saw at the mill. When you look at sawn timber in an old building, you will usually have two kinds of trace marks on it from the mill. Either they'll be slightly curved, and it's very difficult for them not to be there on an old saw blade. Modern saw blades cut things far too finely so you can't quite tell, and they'll be slightly curved, whereas those that were on a much later bandsaw will be vertical lines that you'll get. So you can usually tell, and that's a fairly useful exercise if you turn a chair upside down, an early chair won't be dressed underneath and you'll be able to tell what sort of period it was by the cut marks of the saw that sawed the timber before it actually got to the workshop.

There were lots of lovely fittings. The sash windows had brass fittings with porcelain knobs on them, beautiful little things. The standard fittings for doors, which were quite

common, we've actually been asked if we will allow the top one to go to the Highland Folk Museum because it's an unusual one that they haven't got a copy of before.

On one wonderful day, when in fact we were working on clearing all the dross and the debris from the floors, we'd taken the main pieces out, and we were working our way through where there were wooden floors. Some of them had decayed and gone because they were very close to the earth floor beneath. Rabbits would rather help the situation by giving us lots of stuff all over the place, and the sheep would have been in there too. We did find the lock to the front door, and the key to the front door separately. As we were trowelling away, we found the letterbox with A. Hamilton written on to the front door in another pile of dirt. But the climax of all finds was the mummified cat in the corner, which we put on display. One of the other things we wanted to do was to take that pile of stones and see if we could find what the hearth was like behind, so that it could be measured and documented. Now you can see there we have the mantelpiece, and other various bits that were formed there, and it fitted quite nicely into where the stones were later. And we took away most of the soil so that you can still see. We were photographing records and doing all the stuff that, archaeologists do as they go along, which must be a confounded nuisance to people who want to get to the next bit, but you have to do it.

And there beneath it at the base, in what was a curved hearth, we found the grating. We also found a crook inside it for hanging your pots and pans and it had been bent down at the front slightly because of the weight of all those stones that had dropped on it. Underneath it we had two wonderful slabs of Caithness stone that were clearly the hearth in front. So it was a very cosy room I would have thought, in its day, and probably the room where most people lived.

Let's go round the site and have a look at some of the other bits. We've done a little work on the barn, not very much. We know it's a barn because of its disposition east-west.

It lies north-south, but there are two opposing doors on the east and west of the building, which was the standard practice for when you'd gathered your harvests, and flailed your oats, and you were winnowing it. You wanted the chaff to blow away so you opened both doors, and if you know anything about Rossal and that part of the Strath, you've no problem there. The wind would just come straight through and take away all the bits that you didn't want and leave all the stuff you needed for milling through the winter, or for feed.

You can see that this is made very differently from the house. Most of this is field boulder, most of it is round. Although you've got nice dressed ones in the corner, the rest of it is field boulder, and not a sign of mortar anywhere in it. Bits of earth mortar, occasionally, but most of that has gone.

This building we've done very little to other than look at it and think about it, really. It's a case of how much energy we can put into different things during the year. So this is a piece for this coming year. It's divided into sections with stone, we think. And it may well be one's the barn and one's the house. I doubt if it's entirely agricultural, but we have no evidence either way, and until we start looking at it, there would be no reason for it to be there agriculturally on its own, because none of the crofts were that big

enough to have a barn further away. And that's not the nature of the way things were done. And this is slightly further away. But we have to prove the point. This particular one, again, we have done nothing with, we've recorded it, we know it's there, and at some stage it would be quite nice to go back and look at that one. What we did do is spend time looking at this one. The raised area that might well coincide with where we hoped the walls would be. We dug some turfs. The usual thing, you know, mark out your plot, cut off some turfs at the top to check.

And we found, eventually, on that first investigation, that we had the beginnings of a wall. All neatly laid in line, not random, they couldn't fall there. And they were dressed on one side, and there was a slight, just perceptible taper forming at the beginning. And of course they would have tapered in.

So when some of our exterior experts came and looked at it, they said, fine, yes, as much as you want to go for, dig, said Hilary White. Well that was like, you know, giving the local crofters the present they'd been waiting for all year. I've never seen anybody clear turfs so quickly.

You don't need archaeologists to cut turfs, you want a crofter with a spade, they work far better. There were traces of walls, but they'd been robbed out. So that, in fact, every now and then we got a piece of wall, then it had gone, and they'd been robbed out to build other pieces with. But we did get an overall dimension. And we did find, further up the Strath, another building of exactly the same size as this one, which had been an earlier croft house. So we're fairly certain that this was a domestic house at the time. It was disposed the right way too, and not the way for an agricultural building.

If we really stretch our finds to the extreme, we did find some stones with blackening on them that could well have been something to do with a hearth. But we were probably, as Malcolm Bangor-Jones used to say, not entirely sure that that's credible. He's our great sceptic. Every time we get too enthusiastic, Malcolm says, hang on a minute, which is great to have really. So this has in fact occupied most of the Saturday mornings in the autumn. But out of it has come the fact that we know roughly what the size of the cottage was. We did at one stage think that we weren't going to get anything very exciting about it, because so much of it had been taken. A lot of the stones may also have been taken to be used in the walls that run around.

There are Galloway dikes everywhere. Most dikes that you'll find, particularly the more urban, where the stones run along the line of the dike, and you get two of them and bits in between. A Galloway dike runs the other way. So you actually put stones down and lock the next one, and you can see through them. And I understand from the crofters that that in fact makes it less likely that a sheep will try and climb it, because it's a little bit worried. I don't know how much personification is going on here, but they find that sheep don't go over Galloway dikes, whereas they do scabble over ordinary dikes at times, and there are quite a number of them in that particular strath. The remaining area was this terraced which we'd suspected was a growing area.

There's a tiny terraced area by most of the buildings, which was probably a kale yard, but this was a big one. And we did some augering on it, and we've got depths of up to two foot of soil in places, but mostly at least 18 inches or so of soil. So that had been

built up over the years, probably is for growing oats or something similar, but until we do further analysis we wouldn't know that.

The moles did an awful lot of work on there, and have lifted bits up, so we went round the mole hills and looked at those, because they're the great friends of people who want to find out what's under the ground. So there's the terrace and you can see it's quite a raised area. And there you can see some bits of Galloway dike.

Now we know who stayed in the Croft, because we have this lovely letter, and this was nice, because I know I was teased last night about the talk, but we did actually have Alistair McKeever at the talk last night, who's a Crofter who lives on the ground now. He was in his seventies and was brought up in the house next door, now new built and rebuilt, in the Vass family. And this letter is complaining about the fact that the neighbour's cattle are coming onto their ground, which was his great-grandfather's cattle, so it was quite an amusing little bit.

And we have a rather sad one on the other end, and it's the last one, with Angus saying, *"I can't pay me rent. You know, you can have four pounds of it, but I can't make the full amount"*. And that's in 05, December 05. Christie had gone by then, and Angus was in fact in charge. These letters we found in the Sutherland Papers, not in the house.

We know that George Leslie was the first occupant of the house. The Leslie is the Leslie that Leslie Goskirk, gets his first name from, using a previous surname as the beginning of a first name. And Margaret Mackay, his widow, had it in 1820, and the Hamiltons, who then carried on all the way through, had it in 1832. Then, as we run down the census records, we've managed to find all of the people that lived there and I've got records of all the family if anyone wants to look at them, until 1901 of course, when we don't have any more census records. But we do know that Angus Hamilton stayed in there until 1938, when he died. And we also had found a wonderful, obviously a modern, write-up of the 1883 crofting returns.

Hamilton's Croft had three cattle, three sheep, and one pig. It may be that that's all they wanted to bother with, because certainly somebody with less land down the bottom here, the Vassies, had got 20 sheep, on a similar plot of land. So, it may speak realms that the Vassies family and their descendants now croft the whole lot, and the Hamiltons went into extinction, as it were, because certainly in the latter days it was a spinster and a bachelor that lived there.

So let's have a look at some of the finds. Finds are always the fun bit of any dig, aren't they? And I know we say dig, but standing archaeology is just as important as under-the-ground archaeology in many ways. It all comes on the same base. There was a lovely day when this was done in Roy's garage up in Pittentrail. There was this tin rather like a mustard tin, you know, a dry mustard tin, a tall one, very rusty, and when it finally opened, out spilled all of Angus' buttons off his Customs and Excise uniform, as bright as the day they were last polished. This fitted the coat, perhaps, that was hanging up, because it wasn't an over-coaty coat, it was quite clearly a mourning coat.

Also in this same tin was a letter from a friend, clearly, asking how his mother was, saying it was rather sad that she'd not been very well. We don't have the rest of the

story but wrapped up inside that letter were coins of the Victorian era. What we need to do now is work out where they all came from, and how would a Customs Excise officer come by them. They were clearly his because this was definitely his tin.

And then we had evidence of medication. About thumbnail size, a pillbox on which was written one tonight, and the other tomorrow night. We had no idea what was in there, and I'm not quite sure how you get the second pill, because tomorrow night just isn't going to come, is it really? But there we are. There was a personal notebook of his, which was obviously from his days in Glasgow, because of the items that were involved in it, things like a suit, and various bits of clothing. He was obviously a pipe smoker and all the prices of these items were listed too. In the same intriguing notebook was a double-page spread of ladies' names. He was a bachelor, so we could understand why he would have the list, but somehow it didn't quite work because he remained a bachelor, or perhaps that's what he wanted to do.

We found a psalm book belonging to Christy Leslie of 1841, which was intact, which was really rather lovely, and her name penned across the top. There were lots of other bits and pieces, endless bills from different local tradesmen.

One was for coal, which was clearly bought from the motor and motorcycle agent. There was a little catalogue in which there were pictures of clocks, though there was no evidence of any timepiece anywhere in this house. Perhaps it was a sort of fancy one of those one-year 'I will have' sort of thing.

In the dresser, and this again was another one of those sadnesses that you think, of the eggs had been counted. Now some of you may know that trading was done by egg in those days, so that if you got your eggs and you swapped those for groceries or you swapped those for meat, so the record of the eggs would be listed. It only had about four pages written on it, and we found it down the back of the drawer of the dresser. You can imagine they'd been sold out.

There were lots of bits of cutlery. Hundreds and hundreds of buttons. I don't have a picture of them, but all kinds of buttons and bits of sayings. There was this lovely, beautiful seed catalogue, colour-printed. What must have been a commonly bought seed, for turnips. And there was this, and this matches up with that other little notebook I said before. A book of how to write love letters, and '*Miss Cameron done fleece*' written along the side.

The sad thing is that poor Angus isn't here to tell his story, and we're all inventing stories that may be completely wrong. But he was a member of the Glasgow Society, and we found him listed in there, '*Hamilton A. Her Majesty's Customs House*', so all these lovely bits tie up. And one lovely bit which rounded it off for us all the other day when we discovered it, was a board with Rogart on. Well, that's quite nice. That paints the right picture. But under the floorboards in the West Room, we found a broken ruler, a carpenter's rule. I checked it with catalogues and it dates to around about 1870 -1880. That was a special moment. Mackay, the carpenter. So, the man who built the house didn't sign the boards, but he left his mark somewhere for us to find.

And that's not of the cottage, it's of a neighbouring cottage, pre-improvement, with a, what's written on as a Rogart worthy outside. So that would have been what it was like beforehand. Where does the project go from now? We shall spend some of the time over winter, once all the festivities have got out of the way, looking at some of the bits of furniture.

We are intending next year, we're applying for funding and we're hoping very much that we will get a travelling exhibition which will include some of that furniture and the finds. And we can put together a talk to go with it, and that we may be able to produce a book in the community as a consequence of it if we can get the funding to do it. I had confirmed today that a paper I've written for vernacular building has been accepted, so it will be documented in the next copy of the Journal of Vernacular Building.

It's been a wonderful year, and I think it will go on. I think one of the most joyful things for me has been the way the community took the project on, and how excited they've got over the simplest little things as they've been working their way through. And it was rather nice to see people being involved in history in a real hands-on way.

Thank you.