

## A Research Framework for Historic Rural Settlement Studies in Scotland

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### Introduction

This document sets out a research framework for historic rural settlement studies in Scotland and has been written on behalf of the Historic Rural Settlement Group ([www.molrs.org.uk](http://www.molrs.org.uk)). The Historic Rural Settlement Group (HRSG) developed from the Medieval or Later Rural Settlement (MoLRS) Advisory Group, set up in 1993 to advise Historic Scotland on its policy and to discuss issues and priorities for rural settlement studies. In 2000, the MoLRS Advisory Group was reconstituted as an independent body – the MoLRS Working Group – which became the HRSG in 2004.

The membership of the HRSG comprises individuals from diverse historical disciplines and includes professional and non-professional researchers, heritage managers and curators. The Group exists to promote understanding, conservation and management, and awareness of historic rural settlement in Scotland.

Historic rural settlements include all habitations from the fifth to the twentieth century, including villages, towns, crofts and shielings. Historic rural settlement studies, however, extend beyond settlement to consider other features in the landscape, such as roads, field systems, head-dykes, parks, woods, hunting forests, mills, meadows, fishings, manor houses and churches. Such studies also seek to place settlements within their associated landscapes and environments.

With particular reference to medieval settlement, the Policy Statement of the Medieval Rural Settlement Group (MSRG) sums up the importance of the historic settlement resource and the opportunities it presents as follows:

*Medieval rural settlements have been the subject of systematic research in this country since the late 1940s, and have been located and investigated in every part of Europe. They must be regarded as sites of the greatest importance. Most medieval people lived in the countryside, and here we can investigate the material culture of the whole range of society, including those who have left the scantiest written evidence. Survey work and excavation can reveal much about the housing, possessions, and environment of the peasants, together with evidence for production, consumption and technology, both in agriculture and in food preparation and in rural crafts and trade. The distribution and layout of the settlements gives insights into social structure and social organisation, and into medieval ideas about order and planning, and the division between public and private space. The constant and often sudden changes affecting rural settlements ... demonstrate the dynamic forces at work during the period, not just the general expansion and*

*contraction of population and agriculture, but many developments in lordship, politics, community organization, commerce and household life (MSRG 1996).*

These arguments hold good for Scotland as for England and many aspects of this summary statement also apply to the study of the post-medieval period. That said, there are many aspects of rural settlement in Scotland that set it apart from the English experience. For example:

- the rural landscape in Scotland is largely a creation of the last 250 years;
- buildings earlier than the eighteenth century have been particularly difficult to locate, and understanding of the earlier landscape lags far behind that of later centuries. Only in particular contexts, such as the Northern and Western Isles in the Norse period, has significant progress been made in this regard;
- sharply contrasting experiences of land management in the highland and lowland zones over the last two centuries have resulted in a striking imbalance in archaeological survival, with abundant preservation in the highlands and almost total destruction (at least of upstanding monuments) in the lowlands.

Such differences give Scotland its own particular context for historic rural settlement studies, clearly different from that based on the 'deserted medieval village' paradigm that has informed the MSRG view of the subject. It is crucial that a robust framework be developed to address these issues with the particular Scottish situation in mind, while still placing Scotland within wider British, European and global contexts.

The framework which follows draws on earlier statements covering similar ground, including those produced by GUARD (Atkinson 1995) and Historic Scotland (1998), and it acknowledges the work of the Medieval Settlement Research Group (MSRG 1996). The immediate impetus for this document came from an HRSG seminar on research into rural settlement held in March 2007 ([www.molrs.org.uk/html/research.asp](http://www.molrs.org.uk/html/research.asp)). That seminar identified the need for a new framework for rural settlement studies in Scotland; in response, this document is intended to provide useful and concise guidance to promote and inform research in the subject.

Many specific research questions were identified during consultation related to the production of this document, and we have introduced these to the main text or included them in an accompanying appendix where possible. However, in constructing the framework, the emphasis has been placed on defining the broader structure of research: the principles, methodologies, practices and contexts of the subject. In adopting this approach, we hope to provide a basis for the design of individual projects and for the consideration of more specific research agendas without unnecessarily restricting the scope for creative research by prescribing a limited set of research questions based on the most prominent current concerns.

## **The Historical Context**

### *The Early Archaeological and Folk Life Traditions*

Scholarship on Scotland's historic rural settlement has deep roots, with origins in the nineteenth century when early archaeologists developed the subject as part of a wider ethnological project (see Dalglish 2002). This period saw the first efforts to record and interpret key elements of the material aspects of recent rural life: blackhouses, shielings, 'craggan ware' and other forms of material culture.

Researchers in this tradition – F.W.L. Thomas (1868), Arthur Mitchell (1880) and their peers – were not interested in contemporary or historic rural life for its own sake. Rather, their aim was the provision of ethnographic analogy to provide a more solid foundation for the emergent discipline of archaeology (defined as prehistory). For them, such analogies aided understanding of the more distant past because 'archaic' forms of settlement, material culture, and social practice were believed to have survived more-or-less intact in certain parts of the country – above all in the Highlands and the islands as opposed to the modernized south and east.

In their belief in an unbroken continuum between prehistory and the (nineteenth-century) present, Scotland's early archaeologists were influenced by wider perceptions of the Highlands and Islands as primitive and unchanging. From the eighteenth century, the historical creation of the Highlands as a romantic icon had reduced the region and its population to a number of tropes: the wild and sublime landscape; the Highlander as 'noble savage', anthropological subject, paragon of martialism; and Highland society as an exemplar of ancient communalism (see e.g. Withers 1992). It was this image of the Highlands which was adopted as a core component of Scottish national identity – the Highland landscape as Scotland's true geography and the Highlander as Scotland's contemporary ancestor, neither altered by history nor marred by modernization.

This image remains a potent aspect of Scottish national identity to this day (e.g. Bryden & Hart 2000; McCrone 2001). The Clearances, for example, have become much more than an element of Highland history. They have been recast as a 'national wound'; as the event which signaled the end of an ancient and deep-rooted community ethos whose characteristic settlement form was the traditional farming township. For many people today, the Clearances are held to have finally dispensed with the 'ancient nuclear community [of the township] whose form may well have evolved from settlement patterns of the Iron Age' (Ascherson 2002, 199).

Just as this image persisted in the popular imagination, it was maintained in academic circles. From the 1920s, Folk Life scholars, such as I.F. Grant, assigned themselves the study of 'traditional' ways of life. Under the Folk Life paradigm, traditional, timeless practices were contrasted with the change of the last few centuries – traditional society was seen as static and modern

society as dynamic. Folk Life scholars did diverge from their Victorian predecessors in arguing that traditional society had not in fact survived into the present but had been lost or was fast-disappearing. However, this difference is overshadowed by the interpretative similarity between the two schools of thought in their agreement on the static nature of pre-modern society. Alongside this, Folk Life scholars inherited perhaps two further key themes from the antiquarian tradition: a perception of pre-modern society as homogenous and cohesive; and a holistic approach to evidence, combining material remains with documentary, cartographic, folkloric and other sources.

### *Post-War Developments*

Folk Life studies were strong in the period following the Second World War, and perhaps the best known work in this field is Grant's *Highland Folk Ways* (1961). In subsequent decades, significant studies stemming from and developing this tradition have continued to appear (e.g. Fenton 1987; Martin 1987). The Folk Life tradition also had a significant influence on the development of the subject in other directions, as rural settlement became a concern for archaeologists, historians of various stripes, historical geographers and others.

However, the post-War period did not see the development of a unified discipline. Rather, the subject came to be studied by separate disciplines, often employing quite different methodologies and frameworks of interpretation.

Alongside those works which grew organically from the Folk Life tradition, a separate approach began to emerge whose roots lay in historical geography and archaeology. This approach developed in the decades (the 1950s and 60s) which also saw a drive for finding deserted medieval villages in England. In this context, the Scottish historical geographer Horace Fairhurst – often singled out as the father of modern rural settlement studies – recognized the prevailing tendency north of the Border for the subject to favour a static past:

*In the absence of documentary proof . . . we are largely projecting into a more distant past the conditions prevailing in the early eighteenth century (Fairhurst 1960, 73).*

With hindsight, Fairhurst's challenge to the theory of static, traditional society represents a watershed. Firstly, it re-directed the subject to the study of the dynamics of history; secondly, in its acknowledgement of a real lack of evidence for pre-eighteenth century rural settlement, it placed archaeology alongside historical geography at the core of the subject. At the time, this meant giving a key role to excavated evidence in furthering our knowledge of Scotland's historic rural past. Amongst other things, Fairhurst's aims for his own excavations at Lix and Rosal included the discovery of evidence for the period before the eighteenth century (Fairhurst 1968; 1969). For the Highlands and Islands, he believed that medieval remains were to be found beneath the visible remains of the region's many eighteenth and nineteenth century townships. In the south and east, the English paradigm of the

'deserted medieval village' was considered more appropriate (Fairhurst and Dunbar 1971).

Perhaps more important than the results of Fairhurst's own excavations or the settlement history paradigms he preferred, was the more general trend in the subject which he inspired. Following his lead, archaeologists became anxious about their lack of knowledge of the era before c.1700 (see e.g. Laing 1969; Dunbar 1971; Morrison 1977; Yeoman 1991). Alongside this archaeological interest, historical geographers also began to devote attention to the dynamic nature of pre-eighteenth-century settlement and landscape, with significant results (e.g. Dodgshon 1998; Whyte 1979).

### *The Character of Rural Settlement Studies Today*

'Finding the Medieval' continues as a core aim of the subject today (Dixon 2007). After Fairhurst's recognition of the problem some 50 years ago, attempts to fill this gap in our knowledge were sporadic and unsystematic. In recent decades, a more concerted effort in this regard has resulted in the discovery and excavation of a small but significant number of medieval sites (e.g. Murray & Murray 1993; Dixon 1998) and some important discussions of broader patterns of medieval settlement and landscape development (e.g. papers in Hingley 1993; Govan 2003). While real problems do remain in identifying the medieval evidence in many parts of Scotland, our understanding of this period has undoubtedly been placed on a firmer footing.

One of the main factors responsible for recent advances in our understanding of the medieval aspect of the subject is the development of a landscape approach. Fairhurst and his immediate successors adopted a strategy focused on the investigation of individual sites, and this concurred with the site- or monument-focused character of archaeology as a whole at that time (as evidenced, for instance, in the Royal Commission inventories of the period).

However, since the late 1980s, landscape has assumed a central position within rural settlement studies. The first key study to be published in this field was the RCAHMS volume *North-East Perth: An Archaeological Landscape* (1990), which was soon followed by the accompanying volume on *South-East Perth* (1994). RCAHMS have since developed their approach to landscape in their major studies of eastern Dumfriesshire (1997) and Donside in Aberdeenshire (2007), as well as in numerous smaller individual landscape studies throughout the country. In the last ten years, the landscape approach has also been adopted by a number of major individual projects – perhaps the most prominent example to date being the *Ben Lawers Historic Landscape Project* ([www.benlawers.org.uk](http://www.benlawers.org.uk)).

Concurrent with these developments in archaeology, other disciplines have also moved towards the landscape level of analysis. This, in turn, has led to a growing concern for inter-disciplinary working. While, on the whole, true inter-disciplinary research remains a goal rather than a reality, the different

disciplines have begun to recognize a common interest and develop a common language (see Dalglish forthcoming 2008).

There is a long-standing interest in the development of the Scottish landscape amongst historical geographers (Parry and Slater 1980), and this interest has produced significant results in recent decades (e.g. Dodgshon 1993; 1998; Whyte 1979). Partly stemming from work in this discipline, a growing recognition of the relationship between people and the environment in the historical past has encouraged the adoption of a landscape perspective and the development of inter-disciplinary working. For example, Parry's (1975) work on the relationship of the declining altitudinal range of settlement and cultivation to the deteriorating climate of the late-medieval and early modern period set a hare running that has taken decades to put to rest. Economic factors now find more favour in explaining the high tide of cultivation, in the light of palaeo-environmental and archaeological survey work in the Cheviots, and combined field survey and documentary work by RCAHMS in the central and eastern Highlands (Tipping 1998; RCAHMS 1990; 1995; 2007).

This concern for landscape and environment has been bolstered by the emergence of environmental history, particularly at the Universities of St. Andrews and Stirling ([www.st-andrews.ac.uk/envhist](http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/envhist); [www.cehp.stir.ac.uk](http://www.cehp.stir.ac.uk)). Environmental history has an obvious connection with landscape archaeology and historical geography in that its core subject matter is the relationship between society and the environment. Within this broad remit, recent foci of research have included woodland history, the history of pollution, land use and cultural landscapes, nature conservation and countryside recreation, and species history.

However, the recent origins of environmental history mean that significant lacunae remain in our understanding of key aspects of the environment in the historical past. For example, we are only beginning to understand just how much effort was put into drastically altering river systems to facilitate the efficient removal of fish from the medieval period onwards (Hale 2003), and it is a similar story with meadows (but see Fraser 2001 for work on water-meadows). Hunting forests have also been neglected ever since John Gilbert's seminal book (1979) almost thirty years ago, and Gilbert's work did not even cover the development of forests in Scotland between c.1500 and 2000. Indeed, it has been archaeological survey by RCAHMS that has led the way in exploring this neglected topic (e.g. Dixon 1997, RCAHMS 1995, 1997, 2007).

Specific problems aside, the subject of landscape has begun to provide various interested disciplines (archaeology, environmental science, history, historical geography) with a common focus. Acting as a catalyst for inter-disciplinary dialogue, the landscape perspective has also encouraged a number of other significant developments.

A focus on landscape brings with it a need to consider the diversity of the material heritage in our present-day countryside – earlier concentration on core settlement sites has thus been replaced by a more wide-ranging interest

which encompasses more ephemeral remains and extensive landscape features, rural industry, environmental remains, and much besides. This has had effects on the nature of research, but it has also served to widen the focus of conservation, heritage management and development control interest beyond the township and farmstead (as seen, for example, in the development of Historic Land-use Assessment).

Alongside the growth of interest in medieval rural settlement discussed above, the adoption of a landscape perspective has given a new prominence to post-medieval rural archaeology and conferred a greater legitimacy on its study. From an early stage, it was recognized that we cannot ignore the more recent centuries if we wish to understand the history of the landscapes that now increasingly form the focus of our attention.

The same could be said of palaeo-environmental studies. In the past, pollen analyses have tended to deal with the earlier Holocene, or with millennial and regional scales which are of limited value for many studies of the historical period. Likewise, existing soil and geomorphological data are very limited in spatial and temporal coverage, and few attempts have been made to understand the patterning or variability of climate and soils during the historical era in Scotland. Now, however, interest in considering the totality of the history of a landscape or environment has placed a new emphasis on the more recent past. Palaeo-environmental researchers are beginning to explore the historical period, bringing an important contribution to the subject in their investigations of the environmental context within which settlement and land-use occurred and their analyses of the dynamics of the environment and of human-environment interactions in the historical past.

Particularly in relation to the post-medieval period, such developments have encouraged and accompanied a new interest in moving beyond foundational work to use the growing evidence of our subject to achieve the goal of writing history. The nature of recent interpretative work is diverse. It includes analyses that seek to understand how people may have experienced their landscape (e.g. Lelong 2000) or how people engaged with their environment or organized their use of the land (e.g. Davies & Watson 2007). It includes those that seek to revitalize the connection between archaeology and the study of folklore (e.g. Gazin-Schwartz 2001; Symonds 1999a), to better understand past social relationships (e.g. Dalglish 2003; Given 2004, ch.8; Symonds, 1999b; 2000; 2003; Webster, 1999) or to interpret the meanings of material culture in rural society (e.g. Barker 2005). But all of this work shares the common belief that in studying historic material culture, settlements and landscapes, we can provide a new perspective on past society.

Hand-in-hand with this, the growing recognition that the subject can further our understanding of rural society in the past has brought with it a new interest in the meaning of that past in the present. Rural settlement studies have always had a close relationship with their contemporary context. This relationship has been recognized as a characteristic of the subject that confers particular value to it (see below). Substantive contributions to the subject by the non-professional sector and an established interest amongst

the wider public are also receiving growing recognition, and these factors add to the impetus to give greater consideration in research to the contemporary context of the subject.

As things now stand, these are the key characteristics of the subject that are likely to continue to form a focus in coming years:

- a concern for the ongoing identification and empirical characterization of rural settlements, landscapes and environments;
- a perspective which no longer focuses on settlements in isolation but considers the connections between places;
- an interest in writing histories, with an emphasis on the dynamic relationship between people and their material world;
- and a willingness to explore the meanings these histories have in contemporary society.

In terms of how best these aims can be pursued, there is now widespread recognition of a need for dialogue between diverse interests – academic, professional and non-professional researchers from a variety of disciplines, various public constituencies (within Scotland and beyond), and a number of public bodies, charitable organizations and trusts.

### **Research Principles**

*Rural settlement studies should encompass all types of historic settlement and should seek to explore the dynamic and complex relationships between different settlements.*

Historic rural settlement in Scotland is diverse. By far the most common type is the township (or toun): a multi-occupancy settlement with its related enclosures, fields and lands. This type of settlement typified the Highlands, Islands, Galloway and the north-east lowlands of Scotland, if not elsewhere. Its main period of abandonment began with the agricultural improvements of the later eighteenth century, and this was a drawn-out process. A recent analysis has identified some 3217 partly or wholly deserted townships on the first edition 6-inch maps of the Ordnance Survey, produced in the third quarter of the nineteenth century (RCAHMS 2002). Some townships continued in use into the twentieth century: Mingulay, for example, was only finally cleared in favour of sheep as late as 1911-12.

The agricultural improvements were also responsible for much of the desertion of other forms of settlement. The main period of desertion of the villages found in the lowlands of the south and east of the country, for instance, was the eighteenth century. While examples do exist, the 'deserted medieval village' so prominent in English settlement archaeology is atypical in Scotland.

In many parts of Scotland, these townships and villages lie together with a diverse range of other common forms (such as the croft, mill, mains farm and grange), creating a complex pattern of settlement. In some areas, townships

from the smallest of three or four buildings to the largest of up to 100 may be found alongside one another and, in the northeast for example, alongside planned villages (RCAHMS 2007). In that region, villages and townships also lie alongside crofts, which were used as a method of intake within the farm or township unit; in addition, the cottars were housed in *cottertouns*, so named to distinguish them from the *fermtoun*. This variation in form, together with the fact that the settlement pattern will also have changed through time, means that the historic settlement of any given area will have been diverse and dynamic.

Given this diversity and dynamism, it is important that rural settlement research gives due attention to all types of deserted settlement, from the large lowland village or market town through the township to the individual farmstead or croft. It is, however, just as important to study still-inhabited villages and townships, some of which have been in continuous occupation since the medieval period (RCAHMS 2007). Modern occupation will not necessarily have destroyed the archaeological evidence and modern streets and boundaries can preserve the layouts of earlier settlement. Also, as the Vernacular Buildings Working Group have demonstrated over the years, there is a wealth of vernacular architectural evidence from earlier periods preserved in present-day settlements.

Beyond this, for a full understanding of Scotland's settlement and landscape history, rural settlement studies must also consider the estate centres to which all of the settlements discussed above will have been connected. Such centres include mottes, moated sites and manor houses, stone-built castles, tower-houses and country houses. Some stood within villages or other settlements; many stood in physical isolation. This in itself is a subject worth analysis: the process whereby the development of hunting parks from the fourteenth century onwards led to the separation of estate centre and settlement, a trend cemented with the development of policies and designed landscapes in the early modern period. As with other types of settlement, is important to acknowledge the full diversity of historic forms. One category of estate centre that has often been forgotten is the monastery and its relationships with its unique form of dependent settlement, the grange (see Hall 2006 for recent summary on the latter).

*Rural settlement studies should situate individual sites within their wider landscape and environment.*

Research into historic rural settlements can cover the whole of Scotland, regions of Scotland, or concentrate on a single site, but whatever the case a study should take into account the lands of the settlement, arable, pasture, meadow and wood and the estate to which they belonged. The inhabitants depended upon these lands and the resources they contained for their livelihood. Their relationship with the land and the laird should be part of any rural settlement study. Research should also look beyond the immediate lands of the settlement to the wider area exploited through transhumance, and to which access was gained for peat and wood. A settlement and its lands should also be seen as connected in less immediately tangible ways to the

wider world, through trade, religion and government, for example, . The way in which townships were arranged is best understood by comparative studies of the types of settlement in the same area. Building techniques, settlement forms and agricultural methods all contribute to the character of an area and define its special qualities. The Ben Lawers Landscape Project is perhaps the best example in Scotland of a multidisciplinary approach to the study of rural settlement that takes a landscape approach.

*Studies of medieval and post-medieval rural settlement should not exclude consideration of other periods.*

It is after all evident that there has been settlement in most parts of Scotland since the Neolithic and that prehistoric settlement will have influenced medieval patterns of settlement, which in turn will have influenced the modern settlement landscape. The experience of field survey in highland Perthshire, where early medieval settlements (Pitcarmick-type houses) have been located amongst prehistoric landscapes, highlights this need to be inclusive. Furthermore, rural settlement studies should not exclude the Improvement and post-Improvement periods.

Therefore, while the current rural landscape has been extensively changed in the last 250 years to the extent that earlier landscapes are, in some areas, difficult to identify, there is a need to emphasise the totality of human interaction with our landscapes over the last 1500 years and to refer to the material remains of earlier periods as well.

*Rural settlement studies should pursue a combined disciplinary approach.*

The general value of combined disciplinary working is now widely recognized and is a principle of research in many subject areas. In relation to rural settlement studies, the potential of disciplinary collaboration has become most clear in the development of landscape approaches. Various relevant disciplines now place a significant emphasis on landscape and human-environment relationships, not least archaeology, historical geography, environmental history and palaeo-environmental analysis. The diverse membership of the HRSG is itself testament to this. Furthermore, it has become common in recent years for individual research projects to bring together archaeologists, historians, and environmental scientists in their analysis of specific landscapes, examples being the *Ben Lawers Historic Landscape Project* and various studies by RCAHMS (e.g. RCAHMS 1997; 2007).

Such studies have indicated the great potential of collaboration. However, to realize this potential, greater discussion is needed of the implications of collaborative working for research (Dalglish forthcoming 2008). For instance, while we might agree on landscape as a common interest, different disciplinary evidence on this topic and different methodological approaches to its study can mean that disciplinary research questions often do not align and the data and interpretation produced by the individual disciplines can be hard to integrate.

Effective collaboration thus requires greater debate about the kinds of questions we ask, the nature of our evidence and the ways we approach that evidence. Inter-disciplinary working has the potential to take research into new avenues as long as the disciplines can develop an integrated methodology. The interpretative questions that this raises should be seen as a stimulant to research rather than another 'head in the sand' rejection. This dialogue could be pursued through a Centre for Historic Rural Settlement that combines the three main disciplines of documentary history, archaeology and environmental sciences. This could take a dispersed centre approach to avoid the divisiveness that the placing of a new venture that arises from a common enterprise would perhaps cause. This could, for example, be a collaborative venture involving the Higher Educational Institutions like Glasgow or Stirling or Academic Analogues like RCAHMS that are represented in the HRSG at present.

*Rural Settlement Studies should seek to develop links with related areas of research*

Rural settlements and populations did not exist in isolation and the subject should seek to foster greater dialogue with related areas of research, such as artefact studies, industrial and urban archaeology and history, and battlefield and conflict studies. The history of Scotland's landscapes should also be set in wider comparative context through engagement with settlement and landscape studies elsewhere in the U.K. and Europe, and with related research beyond Europe, for instance in those parts of the New World settled by emigrants from Scotland.

*Field research should lead to synthesis and interpretation*

Certain empirical issues will continue to be important in research in future years – not least the identification and characterization of medieval settlements and landscape elements.

However, the creation of meaningful research requires that empirical concerns are integrated with the aims of synthesis and interpretation. Greater value has, for instance, been realized in the landscape surveys of RCAHMS with the move from a classificatory or gazetteer-oriented approach (e.g. RCAHMS 1990) to one which focuses more on the writing of landscape history (e.g. RCAHMS 2007). In the latter, the archaeological evidence is combined with historical research and consideration of the environment to produce historical narratives which could not be constructed from empirical characterization alone.

*Research in rural settlement studies should actively engage with the meanings of its subject matter for contemporary society.*

For some 15 years, the conservation and management of the country's historic rural heritage have been high on the agenda in Scotland (see e.g. Hingley 1993; Historic Scotland 1998). This is, in part, due to the recognition

that rural settlements and historic landscapes form a significant component of Scotland's heritage, and are thus worthy of conservation or management for that reason. It also stems from a realization that this historic rural heritage has a particular public value at the local, regional, and national levels within Scotland, because of its very immediacy and visibility, and at the international level as well.

Research on historic rural settlement can support best conservation and management practice by providing a solid base of information and by developing deeper understanding of this aspect of Scotland's heritage, so that the value of its particular components can be recognized and evaluated. Furthermore, such research can also serve to address and promote wider public interest in the subject and can itself benefit from the active engagement of non-professionals in the recording and research process (see below for further discussion).

### **Research Methods**

The following sections outline some of the key contributions made to the study of rural settlement by employing different methods. However, as outlined above, due emphasis should be placed on truly inter-disciplinary working and the role of individual methods should be considered in this wider context. It should be assumed that even a project involving only a single excavation will wish to adopt a landscape approach, integrating knowledge about the site with knowledge of its setting in time, space and a changing society. The adoption of such an integrated approach should be considered at the earliest stage in project planning; projects will only be successful in integrating diverse contributions if the value of each is recognised from the design stage. This does not mean, however, that adopting common research goals will preclude individual researchers from pursuing specific questions within the framework of the project.

#### *The Contribution of Survey*

Systematic survey programmes are an important method of locating new sites and for increasing our understanding of known sites. Techniques here include the use of aerial photography, field prospection and survey (including the use of GPS mapping - preferably differential - as well as the creation of site plans), the study of estate plans and other cartographic sources, documentary research, pick-up surveys in lowland areas, and environmental analyses of geomorphology, soils, pollen and other forms of evidence. Each of these while valuable in itself, is best used in combination. Indeed it is in the synthesis of these data that the best understanding will be achieved, of which *In the Shadow of Bennachie* by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments is the most recent example of best practice (RCAHMS 2007). Survey is also an essential first step in the curation of sites and the prerequisite of any excavation project.

The First Edition Survey Project (1995-2001) was conceived by HS and RCAHMS in order to address the inadequacy of the national record of

deserted rural settlement. A desk-based study, it recorded nearly 26,000 sites with unroofed buildings or structures in the RCAHMS database and showed that there were distinct regional differences in the distributions of site types (e.g. township, farmstead, etc.) as well as a divide in site survival between the improved farmland areas and the upland areas.

The FESP project has thus made a worthwhile contribution to the subject, although there are limitations in that use of the first edition survey as a source can mean that some settlements and their associated shieling systems are not identified. Such map-based research provides a good basis for further research and should not be conceived as a replacement for field work. The FESP report identified a general need for more systematic survey of rural settlement, particularly in the Outer Isles which had special characteristics revealed by the survey, but also recognized that conservation needed to reflect national trends as well as regional characteristics (RCAHMS and HS 2002, 75). RCAHMS has addressed this lacuna by carrying out surveys of Mingulay in 2003 and the survey of St Kilda, started in 2007, while HS has addressed the conservation issue in a new approach to scheduling (see below). It was also noted that survey has shown that many farmsteads still roofed on the first edition OS map have since been abandoned and are therefore a declining resource, which should be a priority for further work. The Scottish Farm Buildings Survey (1992-2007) based at RCAHMS has addressed this through a regional sample approach and will be publishing a book synthesizing the results in 2008-9, but this leaves much work still to be done.

The impact of past settlement upon the present has played a significant part in the design and development of the Historic Land-use Assessment (HLA) project as a tool for describing the past influences on the present landscape in order to inform decisions about the management of the landscape. It maps the extent of land-use features, past and present, as long as they are extensive enough to map at 1:25000 (i.e. greater than 1ha), and characterizes and dates their period of origin (HLAMAP). To date two-thirds of Scotland has been mapped (i.e. by April 2007). For example, 7684 areas of medieval or post-medieval settlement and agriculture have been mapped in this way and present a huge resource for researchers and land managers.

*Interdisciplinary research is likely to yield the most satisfying results. The material evidence should be investigated through field survey, excavation and analysis of environmental samples. Documentary evidence should be studied alongside the material culture. Significant advances in knowledge are likely, on the basis of past experience, to proceed from dialogues between archaeologists, historians, geographers, place-name scholars, students of vernacular architecture and those who work on bone and plant remains. (MSRG 1996).*

These are concepts with which HRSG can concur. Recent work by the Centre for Environmental History at the University of Stirling has done much to pioneer the use of scientific methods such as pollen analysis and soil science alongside documentary research (<http://www.stir.ac.uk/cehp/>). However, this

has not been integrated with archaeological survey and the physical context that archaeological survey can provide. On the other hand it has shown that environmental data can stand on its own and to pose research questions that stimulate and indeed require further work by archaeologists and historians. Yet it is in the integration of the research by these disciplines that a much better understanding of past environmental changes will be achieved.

### *Excavation Strategies*

Horace Fairhurst was the ground-breaker in the excavation of rural settlements during the 1960 and '70s. He was working in the context of the fashion for finding deserted medieval villages that emanated from the work of Beresford and Hurst in England in the 1950s and 60s. His work at Rosal and Lix, however, set the research framework that has defined rural settlement studies ever since; the essential core of which is that medieval settlements are not found because they were built and rebuilt with turf and other perishable materials and so leave no trace, and those that we now see belong to the immediate pre-clearance and desertion generations, i.e. 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Dunbar and Fairhurst 1971). This paradigm has been challenged through a critique of Fairhurst's methods by Lelong, who has argued that excavation strategy is at fault in focusing too narrowly on the surviving buildings and not removing them to get to grips with what may lie underneath (Lelong 2003). Developments in scientific techniques also offer other approaches that may provide answers to the Fairhurst conundrum. The Ben Lawers Landscape project is a multi-disciplinary project designed to address some of the questions that Fairhurst posed. Its strategy in the selection of sites for excavation has been to sample a range of settlement types from the core settlement areas to the shielings. This has been productive in dating shieling-huts and some round-ended turf buildings to the medieval period on the fringe of the settlement area (Atkinson 2005). While this has been a notable contribution to our ability to identify medieval structures from survey and excavation, the scientific analyses that have been developed alongside this have yet to be integrated with the excavations or the RCAHMS field survey data; while the excavation of settlement in the core areas would need to have been pursued more tenaciously with Lelong's critique of Fairhurst in mind to address the question of the missing centuries of settlement.

However, this was a highland research framework, which does not apply to the lowlands of the south and east. Here a 'deserted medieval village' paradigm was considered by Dunbar and Fairhurst to apply (Dunbar and Fairhurst 1971). The excavations in the 1980s by Dixon at Springwood Park, Scottish Borders, and by Murray and Murray at Rattray, Aberdeenshire, have demonstrated the potential of well-preserved lowland village sites for the understanding of rural medieval settlement in these areas (Dixon 1998; Murray and Murray 1993).

The modern spate of development around urban centres and village cores with the demand for housing have produced a rash of village sites such as those at Halhill, near Dunbar and Eldbotle near Dirleton in recent years that have produced medieval buildings. These have been preserved variously by

the build-up of deep plough-soil or sand-blow, but indicate the continuing potential for the location of lowland medieval village sites in beneficial conditions. Ironically it is the progress of development that is most likely to recover such sites rather than fieldwork since they rarely leave visible earthworks. While documentary and cartographic research should locate many if not all such sites, only excavation can confirm it. Equally it is only by excavation that the dispersal of settlement in the late or post-medieval period can be confirmed (see above).

Alongside a continued need for excavations in order to improve our understanding of the medieval period in the Highlands and Lowlands, there is a need for excavation to be employed as a method to increase our understanding of post-medieval settlement. Modern excavations of post-medieval settlements began with Fairhurst's work at Lix and Rosal and the incidence of such excavations has increased in the last 10-15 years, with recent examples including the excavations at Easter Raitts (Lelong & Wood 2000) and those undertaken as part of the Ben Lawers Historic Landscape Project and by Sheffield University in the Hebrides (e.g. Branigan 2005; Symonds 2000). Projects such as these have begun to show the potential of excavation to develop new understandings of post-medieval daily life, community and society. Given the large number of settlement sites surviving from this period and the significant variation in such sites across the country, further excavations are required in order to achieve a deeper understanding of the nature of rural society in post-medieval Scotland.

Many other types of site such as shielings, mills, corn-drying kilns, forges, bloomeries, potteries and others that are essential parts of rural settlement have been excavated in the last 35 years and have expanded our understanding of rural settlement (Dixon 2002). More needs to be done in all these areas, but a good start has been made with shielings through the Ben Lawers Landscape Project.

### *The Contribution of Documentary Research*

What distinguishes historic from pre-historic rural settlement is the availability of historic documents. While the nature and potential of documentary study requires a basic training in palaeography, diplomatic, medieval Latin and Scots, the wider context of the documents and the biases of the writer also need to be understood. The former are specific skills, which are essential if the sometimes sparse and difficult documentary resources are to be most effectively used, but the latter are best appreciated through knowledge and experience.

The archival resource might include many sources other than 'estate papers'; for example, testaments, registers of deeds, court records and so on. Arguably, creating a greater awareness of the archival potential is the most important single task facing documentary historians in Scotland. Not even the fullest documentation will yield a perfect correlation with field surveys or excavation but there are many areas where documentary evidence is uniquely useful. For example:

- Precise dating of events (e.g. clearance) and processes (settlement, enclosure, abandonment)
- Precise identification of occupants and other individuals (ideal for interpretation)
- Property issues (highly complex layering of feudal ownership; estate 'policy')
- Social and organisational context of sites and districts (parish, davoch, arachor, merkland, husbandland, ounceland, pennyland, estate, officary, shared or individual tenancies)
- Resources of rural settlement (peat banks, meadow, fishing, timber, mills, sea-wrack, industry, shielings, high mountain grazings)
- Evidence of tension, dispute or change (divisions of commonty, feuds, changes in transhumance, tenants' petitions, court books)
- Agricultural productivity (livestock v arable; capitalisation; stocking levels and markets).
- Material culture (purchases, testamentary inventories, court disputes).

Turning to more site- and area-based studies, rescue archaeology might unavoidably relate to sites and areas for which documentation is sparse or non-existent for periods critical to understanding. Ideally, where the choice of area is elective, no project should choose an area with no or very limited archival potential. Furthermore, documentary work is comparatively cheap, non-destructive and can achieve significant gains fairly quickly; archival work carried out early in a project, but informed by knowledge of the concerns of others on the project, can produce important results in its own right and also has the potential to highlight sites most likely to yield relevant results, to avoid duplication in excavating several closely-comparable sites, to suggest the range of site types (industrial, domestic, agricultural and so on) likely to be found and something of their dating.

Projects addressing more general issues will clearly be organised in strikingly different ways. There are key issues around regionality, for example and (perhaps even more intriguing) sub-regional or even very local differences which remain to be explained such as those between the different glens within the Ochils and the Cairngorms. Again an integrated and multi-disciplinary approach is called for or key areas of evidence will be overlooked.

An important aspect of documentary research is the analysis of place-names. Place-names are generated by the interaction between humans and their environment and analysis should therefore be an integral part of any detailed rural settlement research (e.g. Taylor 2006). Although Scotland is poorly served with toponymic studies, unlike England, this should not deter the rural settlement researcher, since there is a growing body of scholars at the universities of Glasgow, Edinburgh and UHI (Sabhal Mor Ostaig), as well as expertise which can be accessed through the Scottish Place-Name Society. Ideally, this work should be carried out on basic toponymic principles that identify:

1. in what language a place-name was coined

2. what it means
3. what its original referent was
4. and when it was coined

### *The Contribution of Palaeoenvironmental Research*

These comments are restricted to pollen, soil, geomorphology and climate and do not include the range of environmental archaeology techniques generally associated with archaeological excavation.

While much of rural Scotland appears to be well-served by pollen analyses, most of these deal with millennial and regional scales and are therefore of limited value in the historical period, when much finer temporal and spatial resolution and more secure chronologies are required. Existing soil and geomorphological data are very limited in spatial and temporal coverage, and few attempts have been made to understand the patterning or variability of climate and soils during the medieval and later periods in Scotland. Consequently, the palaeoenvironmental research base for historical rural settlement needs to be developed in tandem with archaeological and documentary approaches, as the specific environmental and resource settings within which settlement and land-use occurred, and the dynamics of both systems, are integral to rural settlement studies. Understanding human-environmental interactions allows archaeological evidence to be set into regional and global contexts, rather than remaining a parochial and partial view of the archaeological evidence in an environmental vacuum.

Due to the continuity of pollen sequences, they provide the most powerful source of evidence for vegetation and land-use dynamics and resource use. An improved understanding of the spatial relationships between pollen dispersal and plant communities means that it is possible to reconstruct land-use at the scale of archaeological sites. There are many opportunities for such fine-resolution pollen work in the rural Highlands, but this becomes more difficult in drier, more heavily 'improved' lowland, urban and southern upland areas. Even unpromising and taphonomically complex sediments from on-site contexts can yield pollen data which, with macrofossil and sediment chemistry analyses, can provide insights into the function of features and deposits.

Buried soils, sediment accumulations and geomorphological features provide information essential to understanding the choice of location and range of environmental factors affecting settlement and land-use dynamics. This includes evidence of soil type, erosion, fluvial and industrial activities which may underlie the phasing, placement or character of the archaeology. Soils were a managed resource fundamental to the sustainability of rural communities, often with wider resource management implications (e.g. peat and wood use). As such soils may preserve evidence of human/environment interactions at both the site and landscape level. Soil geochemical and micromorphological analyses can provide valuable insights into the function of areas in and around archaeological features, as well as aiding understanding of soil management, resource utilisation, and waste management practices. A wide range of palaeoclimatic proxies exist and 'off-site' lake and peat

sequences have an important role to play in reconstructing past climate as we have at present far too limited an understanding of climatic variations across a topographically diverse region. Applying central England temperature records, popular 'events' (e.g. Little Ice Age) or coarse resolution, millennial-scale data to archaeological and historic data is an out-dated, overly simplistic and potentially misleading means of examining drivers of and responses to change.

It is essential that sampling strategies and scales are coordinated between the disciplines, and that the recording and sampling of palaeoenvironmental data is undertaken by qualified personnel on-site during excavation and survey. This will maximise the quality of information obtained, including the appropriate spatial and temporal resolution and secure chronological controls, and ensure that archaeological features are not analysed within an environmental vacuum.

### **The Contemporary Context**

We believe that it is important to recognize the value that the public places on its rural past and to critically evaluate the role of rural settlement research in contemporary society. This recognition of a wider context for research will be discussed here in relation to two themes: conservation and heritage management; and public access to and the value of the historic rural past.

#### *Conservation and Heritage Management*

*The purpose of conservation is partly to preserve the storehouse of information about the past that is contained within undisturbed settlement sites for the benefit of future generations who will wield much more sophisticated techniques of research than are currently available to us (MSRG 1996).*

The key to effective conservation and heritage management is good information deriving from substantive research. Conversely, future research relies on the effective conservation of settlements and landscapes.

Scotland is well-served by Sites and Monuments Records, whether locally or nationally managed, which provide a good basis for much conservation and heritage management work. The recent development of Pastmap in bringing together the various data relating to the built heritage is to be welcomed ([www.pastmap.org.uk](http://www.pastmap.org.uk)). This includes Scheduled Sites with their site areas, Listed Buildings, the RCAHMS National database (Canmore), and some local Sites and Monuments Records (SMRs).

However, the usefulness of these records for conservation and management purposes is defined by the extent, character and quality of the data contained within them. Not all sites are yet included in these national or local datasets and a long-term aim should be the further enhancement of rural settlement data in the NMRS and the SMRs.

In addition, all rural settlements have extents and are not just locations. The Aberdeenshire SMR includes site areas and has shown the way in presenting this data. A coordinated approach by RCAHMS and local SMRs with Historic Scotland to complete the polygonisation of the records would be of great value to the Planning process and the public appreciation of the extensive nature of these settlements.

Improvements in the coverage, character and quality of information on rural settlement sites in the SMRs and Canmore will provide a more solid foundation for conservation and management, and research projects should aim to enhance such information. Improvements in the information held by regional and national databases will also provide new opportunities for research into these sites. An example of this two-way relationship between research and conservation and management is the *First Edition Survey Project* (FESP), which has allowed the recognition of some regional characteristics in settlements depicted on first edition Ordnance Survey maps (RCAHMS and HS 2002). This research has implications for our understanding of the pattern and nature of settlement, but also for the way we manage rural settlement remains, allowing us to define more closely the regional and national character of past settlement.

We also wish to further emphasize that settlements depended upon their farmland for their existence and that the field system of a township if undisturbed is also valuable, if not as valuable as the settlement itself. Settlements also need to be situated in their wider landscape and the environmental context to be fully understood.

Moving beyond the settlement-focused approach of FESP, Historic Land-use Assessment (HLA) data which has recently been developed as a tool for describing past influences on the present landscape in order to inform decisions about its management, now extends to 70% of the landscape and is available to cultural resource managers as a desk-top dataset and online through HLAMAP ([www.rcahms.gov.uk](http://www.rcahms.gov.uk)). This is new data that looks at all human influences from prehistory to the present, giving equal weight to all periods, up to and including the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as well as the remains of post-medieval settlement. For example, the variations in crofting between lowland small-holdings and crofting townships are identified as are variations in improved fields, especially where these diverge from the Improvement norms, such as those that exhibit reverse-S shape field boundaries, reflecting pre-improvement field-systems.

A recent study carried out for Historic Scotland on the management of rig recommended the extension of Historic Land-use Assessment to other areas of Scotland, the creation of a 'landscape' category in SMRs in order to be compatible with the *Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997* and the inclusion of the scientific sampling of rig into SMRs (STAR 2001, 8).

HLA data, together with other resources such as the SMRs and the Canmore, present a valuable resource for researchers and heritage and land managers. However, to be effective, the information provided by these resources has to

be acted upon in the Planning process and in other management and conservation contexts.

Improvements in planning guidance (with NPPG 5 and 18) have been most productive in this respect, and it is hoped that the attention directed to rural settlement and landscape in the planning process will continue to grow.

In addition, Historic Scotland has recently changed its approach to scheduling and has adopted a regional and contextual method, which has a greater likelihood of protecting representative examples of the rural settlements in any given area (Historic Scotland 2006). This is especially important since the countryside is varied topographically and in land use terms, and settlements merit scheduling by dint of being characteristic of a region. A further welcome recent development is the co-ordination of the programme of scheduling with the area archaeological field survey programme of RCAHMS (e.g. East Renfrewshire).

One area that has not been addressed by specific conservation measures is the modern village that occupies the site of a pre-improvement village or town. The survival of these villages and the continuity of layout that this includes may be the result of an organic process of agricultural change due to the residual rights of some tenants. It also makes them important sites both as fossils of the medieval landscape and as residues of archaeological data. However, because they are still occupied such sites are not considered suitable for scheduling, nor are their buildings necessarily worthy of listing. They are consequently not protected unless the local authority uses the *Town and Country Planning Act* supported by the local SMR to create planning controls limiting the type of development in these settlements. To date, 79 of these sites have been identified by the HLA project, for example, a number that will rise to over 100 in due course as the mapping of Scotland is completed, to which, perhaps, should also be added the smaller burghs.

The creation of the two new National Parks has provided a unique opportunity to ensure the conservation of archaeological landscapes and particularly historic rural settlement, since the primary brief of the Parks is the care of the cultural and natural heritage. Both the Cairngorms and the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Parks (CNP and LLTNP) have begun to address the issues and have consulted widely to ensure that they are doing the right thing. LLTNP in particular has made great strides in this respect and has created a definition of the Special Qualities of every part of the Park, which includes archaeology, buildings and historic land use features as well as biodiversity. The *Planning Act (Scotland) 2006* makes new provisions for National Scenic Areas which should be used to help manage the historic environment of these areas.

The conservation and management of the rural landscape in Scotland also falls to a number of governmental and non-governmental national bodies that have estates that include rural settlement remains and who are well-placed to develop suitable conservation strategies. HRSG would like to see guidance in best practice for land managers in these organizations. To put this in

perspective, the National Trust for Scotland has been a leader in developing projects in partnership with RCAHMS and other bodies to ensure the base-level survey of its major estates, while it has also led the Ben Lawers Landscape Project. The Forestry Commission (FC) has also taken opportunities to present deserted townships on its estate to the public, and its strategy now acknowledges the importance of the protection of cultural heritage ([www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-6aggzw](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-6aggzw)). In this respect the establishment of an archaeological post in Scotland to advise FC is to be welcomed.

*Public Access and the Value of the Historic Rural Past*

Alongside the symbiotic relationship between research, conservation and heritage management, there is a further relationship arising from the public value of rural settlements and landscapes.

The HRSG wishes to encourage and engage with public appreciation of historic rural settlements and landscapes, and to recognize and promote public involvement in researching and conserving the historic aspects of Scotland's countryside. To this end, a web site was set up to improve access to information about historic rural settlement ([www.molrs.org.uk](http://www.molrs.org.uk)).

It is also recognized that, while web sites are useful tools in the dissemination of information, significant work remains to be done in promoting the subject amongst the wider public and innovative approaches must be developed to achieve this aim.

In this context, much good work is also already being done by Local Authority archaeological services, whether based in Planning Departments or with local Amenity Trusts, in raising awareness of rural settlement.

A number of active non-professional groups, such as Association of Certificated Field Archaeologists ([www.acfabaseline.info](http://www.acfabaseline.info)) or the North of Scotland Archaeology Society ([www.nosas.org.uk](http://www.nosas.org.uk)), have for some years now been making a significant contribution to the subject by carrying out surveys of rural settlement sites. Groups such as these also have a valuable contribution to make to the promotion of wider awareness of rural settlement in Scotland.

To encourage and promote such active wider involvement in the subject, the HRSG promoted the establishment of the Scotland's Rural Past (SRP) project, begun in 2006 and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Historic Scotland, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the National Trust for Scotland and RCAHMS ([www.scotlandsruralpast.org.uk](http://www.scotlandsruralpast.org.uk)). This project is based at and managed by RCAHMS. Its essential task is the training of local groups in the researching and surveying of rural settlement. It is also an innovative project that attempts to develop new audiences, including school children through the national curriculum, and to provide them with the skills required to record and survey historic rural settlements themselves. In particular it has been part of

its brief to build on the work of FESP in recording the remains of partly or wholly deserted sites depicted on the first edition Ordnance Survey.

Beyond individual initiatives in public access or active public engagement, such as SRP, there is a need for greater understanding of the broader value and meaning of Scotland's historic rural heritage to contemporary society. The constituencies for whom this heritage has particular meaning are diverse within Scotland, and are also to be found within the wider U.K. and abroad, such as amongst the Scottish diaspora. To date, work in this field has focused on questions of heritage and identity (e.g. Basu 2000, 2001, 2004; MacDonald 1997a, 1997b) and there has been some discussion of the politics of Scotland's rural archaeology (Dalgligh forthcoming 2010).

As a whole, this research has explored the social significance of rural settlement sites and landscapes (such as cleared townships and glens), the different perceptions that exist of the rural past, and the place of rural heritage in contemporary political debate (e.g. the recent land reform debate). This and future research will allow a greater understanding of the influence of contemporary pre-conceptions on research and the implications of research for wider society.

### **Appendix: Specific areas of current concern**

The principles and other statements detailed in the research framework provide a broad framework for future research in historic rural settlement in Scotland. In designing the framework, we have sought to provide a structure and direction for the subject as a whole.

In this appendix we discuss in more detail a series of specific research questions or issues which are of current concern and which have been raised in the sections above. However, it is important to realize that the significance of specific questions or issues will change and that no list can be definitive. The range of questions and issues which might be addressed is broad and varied and we feel that it would be counter-productive to creative research to set a firm and specific agenda here – it is for individual projects and initiatives to define their own aims and for the value of such individual research to be assessed on its merits. The following questions or issues should, therefore, be taken to represent recognized areas of current interest and not as a restrictive agenda for future research.

#### *The Regional Character of Rural Settlement*

The historic rural settlements in highland and upland areas identified by FESP that were deserted during the agricultural improvements require systematic field survey to record what exists on the ground. While this is being addressed by Scotland's Rural Past project to some extent, more area field survey by RCAHMS and other professional archaeological bodies is needed and a clear national strategy is required that includes the production of syntheses as well as survey.

However, there is not just one story here; there are distinct regions, which have had different trajectories in their settlement history. Understanding and interpretation of these regional trajectories is, at present, under-developed. To further our understanding of regionality, appropriate approaches will need to be developed. The methodology that is appropriate in the highlands will be different in the southern uplands where an earlier phase of desertion occurred, which itself is different from the surrounding lowlands; while Norse settlement areas of the north and west have settlement histories and contexts that mark them out from the rest of Scotland. Regional variation should be reflected in the research strategies that are adopted. For example, few lowland sites that were swept away in the wake of the agricultural improvements have been identified; by their very invisibility a different strategy is needed. A document-based approach is the essential starting point for locating these sites, combined with the use of aerial photography and cartographic sources.

Developing regional approaches to research should assist in the better conservation and management of historic rural settlements and landscapes. Since 2006 Historic Scotland has adopted a regional approach to scheduling sites of all periods that is to be welcomed and offers a more realistic and representative basis for the selection of sites. However, this process will take many years to complete and other techniques of safeguarding important sites are also needed. The Scottish Rural Development Programme (SDRP) offers an opportunity to ensure the conservation and management of deserted rural settlements by the farming community. The creation of the two National Parks with their brief to conserve the cultural heritage presents them with important opportunities for the maintenance of historic settlement sites, in which they need to be supported by other heritage bodies at both local and national level.

*The Exploration and Conservation of Continuously-occupied Settlements and their Historic Landscapes*

The invisibility of deserted settlement is one side of the lowland problem. The other is the village settlement that has remained in occupation since the post-medieval period and may be of medieval origins. However, the existence of this type of site has barely been acknowledged, and the particular problems of management that they represent have not been addressed. This is not an issue that is peculiar to Scotland. MSRSG (1996) have recognized the nature of the problem, to quote:

*The still-inhabited settlements are subject to constant and repeated threats as there is often pressure for infilling, the addition of modern estates, and absorption into suburbs. We need to devise urgently, a method for judging how much archaeological evidence these places contain, and a strategy for influencing planning decisions concerning new development.*

In view of the divergence of Scotland from England in its planning regulations there may need to be a particular Scottish solution to this, but the principle is the same. Indeed NPPG 18 may offer the best course for managing change

in village cores of medieval origin. Anticipating the quality of data that is likely to be found there might be informed by the experience of the urban archaeology of small towns. That is to say it will vary from total destruction to well-preserved deep stratigraphy. The quality of the data when it exists can only be analysed by practice. The preservation of the pre-improvement landscape of these settlements is also best dealt with through planning controls. This also applies to the reverse-S and pre-improvement field boundaries that have been recorded by HLA in lowland areas, reflecting the pre-improvement layout of the fields.

### *Settlement Nucleation and Dispersal and the Formation of Medieval and Modern Estates*

As in England and northern Europe, the nucleation of settlement in the south and east of Scotland in the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries needs to be understood, and how this relates to the formation of vills, davachs and merklands, whose pattern needs to be more precisely mapped. The late medieval reaction to the Black Death in rural areas is clearly different in Scotland to that in England and needs to be better understood. In particular why there was a late- and post-medieval dispersal of settlement in lowland areas as opposed to the nucleation process of earlier centuries (Dixon 2003). For the post-medieval period, related key issues are the development of the modern estate, the commercialisation of the rural economy and changes in the nature of rural society and rural communities in the period from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. The regional differences referred to earlier need to be studied at all levels, from building types, settlement layouts to field-systems, agricultural practice and the changing environment.

### *Connecting Research and Public Interest*

Perhaps more important than anything else is the raising of public awareness and the understanding of historic rural settlements and landscapes in order to ensure their long term preservation. This needs to be addressed at more than one level. Relics of pre-improvement buildings and vernacular architecture represent unique survivals of the past for display and interpretation to the public, as at Auchindrain, but require proper funding to be maintained. A local educational role here is vital. The reconstruction of a township at Newtonmore by the Highland Folk Museum is a rather more experimental and expensive method of public presentation of rural traditions, but integrates research, interpretation and education. Scotland's Rural Past is addressing the issue of how to incorporate the study of historic rural settlement in the national curriculum and in particular the forthcoming Curriculum for Excellence.

The wider involvement of the public in the recording and care of rural settlements is also being addressed by Scotland's Rural Past, which includes the development of a web site that provides guidance notes on how to carry out survey. It includes the development of a data entry form that allows local groups to send in the results of their survey direct to the RCAHMS, and the technical ability to 'blog' the RCAHMS database is already a reality through

the HLF funded Scotland's Treasured Places. Such individual initiatives in the presentation of rural settlement and the active involvement of the public in rural settlement studies should be placed in context through further studies of the value and meaning of Scotland's historic rural heritage to contemporary society.

### *Synthesizing Research – An Atlas of Rural Settlement*

As MSRSG (1996) have stated, research questions 'can be addressed partly by applying new approaches and theories to evidence already published, and partly by constructing new syntheses.' While research questions will continue to be addressed at the individual site or project level, results also need to be synthesized over larger areas for some of our research questions to be addressed (e.g. RCAHMS 2007).

A particular strand in the improvement of the synthesis of and access to information for research and educational purposes that HRSG wishes to develop is an atlas of rural settlement. Previous attempts at this have been in traditional book form (e.g. McNeill & McQueen 2000). With the incorporation of the thesaurus to the RCAHMS database, it should be possible to create interactive maps of selected categories of monuments that will be updated as new sites come into the database. However, it should not just be a set of distribution maps, but GIS based, linked to a handbook of site types and vernacular architecture and to the new initiative between the universities of Glasgow and Stirling to produce an on-line medieval parish site for Scotland.

A second key part of this strategy should be the recording and mapping (as far as is possible) of all the different units of land assessment since these would have had a key impact on economic strategy and the exploitation of the countryside since c.800.

### *Interaction with the Environment*

The academic research agenda will tend to address current issues such as those discussed above, but also needs to look forward and address new questions. Our relations with the natural environment must stand at the top of this agenda, in particular, how people in the past have interacted with climate change, or have contributed to the present environment by their actions. This requires lateral thinking in research design and inter-disciplinary studies.

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