

HISTORIC RURAL SETTLEMENT WORKING GROUP

**Minutes of Meeting Held on Thursday 6th October 2005 at 2pm
in the RCAHMS Offices, John Sinclair House, 16 Bernard Terrace, Edinburgh**

Present: Derek Alexander (DA) (NTS)
Iona Anthony (IA) (HS)
Steve Boyle (SB) (Chair) (RCAHMS)
Chris Dalglish (CD) (GUARD)
Althea Davies (AD) (University of Stirling)
Mairi Davies (MD) (HS)
Piers Dixon (PD) (RCAHMS)
Richard Tipping (Rti) (Minutes) (University of Stirling)
Robin Turner (Rtu) (NTS)

1. Apologies: John Atkinson, Malcolm Bangor-Jones, Donald Davidson, Jill Harden, Rod McCullagh, Alex Morrison, Bob Powell, Bidy Simpson, Jack Stevenson, Fiona Watson

2. Chair of the HRSG

In the absence of John Atkinson, Steve Boyle was asked to chair the meeting.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting (24th May 2005)

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved. The Group thanks Martin Brann for 'stepping in' temporarily and furnishing such a complete record.

4. Matters Arising

RTi asked whether the role of Historic Scotland (HS) in the group (24th May 2005: Item 7) had been resolved. MD indicated that HS would support initiatives taken by the Group, and would continue to be represented through MD and IA. The Group appreciated the continuing support of HS in its affairs.

5. The Scotland's Rural Past (SRP) Project: Update

RTu reported that many developments had occurred since the last meeting of the Group. The Planning Project had been accepted in its entirety and without demur by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). The role of RCAHMS as lead-body in the full bid to HLF had been confirmed, and the SRP working group (RTu, SB, RTi) had been joined by Rebecca Bailey (RCAHMS) and by John Lawson representing ARIA. It has recently been confirmed that Highlands & Islands Enterprise would support the project with a very substantial financial contribution, in addition to support already promised by the National Trust for Scotland (NTS). The Group thanked RTu and Rebecca Bailey for securing these critical contributions. An application to HS for financial support had been made, and it was noted how closely the project matches the aspirations of HS as expressed in its Corporate Plan. Together, these contributions would allow the bid to request <50% (and <£500 000) of the award from HLF, which is seen as helpful. The bid continues to be close to that discussed and approved by the HRSG on 29th November 2004, for a 5 year project employing 4 staff. The full application to HLF will be submitted in early November 2005, with an anticipated start-date in November 2006, allowing an appropriate time in that winter for staff training before field projects with local community groups commenced.

Action Points

- SRP Working Group to ensure submission of full HLF proposal in early November 2005.

6. HRSG Web-site: Developments

CD reported that the Group web-site continued to be expanded. There were issues over the change of name of the Group, from MOLRS to HRSG, but the web-site will continue to be maintained through the Council for British Archaeology server: name-changes could be accommodated by the redirection of enquirers to the new designation. RTu reported that continued funding support for maintenance of the web-site had been sought from HS.

RTi asked whether the News Page of the site could indicate more clearly the date of an advertised event and less emphatically when the advertisement was logged onto the site: CD agreed with this. SB asked whether the photographs stored in the Gallery page might be larger and of higher resolution, to be used, for example, in *Powerpoint* presentations: CD agreed to review this with the Group web-coordinator, Katinka Stentoft. SB also indicated that .pdf files from the 2003 publication edited by Sarah Govan were stored at too low a resolution to be useful. MD suggested that access to this document at higher resolutions might be made through the HS web-site, currently under review, and CD suggested that a hyper-link from the MOLRS site to the HS site could be made.

CD indicated that the Message Board facility of the site had little activity, and that there was value in encouraging its use by Discussion Group members and others. SB asked whether the Bibliography, supplied unstintingly by Alex Morrison and which now exceeds 800 references, might be made easier to search, by for instance, key words, but CD suggested that this would be a prodigious task. A solution, CD suggested, might be to identify a series of key texts that served as 'recommended reading' for different aspects of historic rural settlement.

DA asked whether the existing site would be adopted in the proposed SRP Project. RTu confirmed that this was anticipated, but that this would be managed without imposing additional work on colleagues in the Group.

Action Points

- CD to resolve issues over the name-change
- CD to revise the News Page
- CD to discuss revision of the Gallery Page with Katinka Stentoft
- MD to discuss access to Sarah Govan's publication with HS web-site staff
- ALL Group members to consider increasing traffic on the Message Board facility.

7. Report on the HRS Training Weekend 10th & 11th September 2005

SB reported on a very successful weekend at Newtonmore. The decision to meet at Newtonmore came with the recognition of serious deterioration in standing buildings in Strath Nairn, as a consequence of building stones being robbed for sale in local garden centres: RTu suggested that a note to Scottish Archaeological News on this practice would be constructive.

Fourteen representatives from local societies attended, two more than the twelve planned for and demonstrating the continuing popularity of the training. SB reported that the training weekends are already 'bearing fruit' in the high-quality recording of monuments in recent reports prepared by trained groups, a very

gratifying development. Four staff from RCAHMS gave generously of their time, supported by Ross Noble and Bob Powell: grateful thanks to these helpers were accorded by the Group, and particularly to SB for arranging the weekend.

8. Communication in the HRS Discussion Group

SB raised the issue of communicating information to the Discussion Group, noting that conventional postal routes were time-consuming and increasingly expensive. RTi confirmed that the mailing list for DG members inherited from HS contained over 180 names but only postal addresses. In addition, it was unclear how many members on the list continued to be interested since the list appeared an essentially *ad hoc* compilation. Whilst web-based communication is most efficient, it is unclear how many members had access to this route. SB's proposal was to move to e-mail based communication. MD indicated that, to conform to data protection requirements, permissions would need to be granted by members. RTi recognised that he would need, as Secretary, to write by post to members, inviting them to confirm their continued interest, and provide and approve the use of e-mail addresses where possible. IA thought that members might also be able to 'register' *via* the web-site: CD thought this possible.

Action points

- RTi to write to all listed DG members, requesting them to 'register' their continued interest, drawing their attention to the MOLRS web-site, using the opportunity to appraise them of forthcoming events, developments and new opportunities (e.g. through the SRP Project), inviting them to submit e-mail addresses or indicate that postal communication was still preferable
- CD to explore 'registration' *via* the web-site.

9. Annual Conference: May 2006 – Update

RTi confirmed that arrangements were being made to hold the annual conference in Kelso on May 6th 2006. The programme would be as in previous years, with a morning of talks by both professional and amateur contributors, and an afternoon field excursion. At present, John Dent (Borders Region Council) had been contacted, who was encouraging, but speakers had not yet been invited. The field excursion might take in excavated Medieval sites at Springwood (PD) and Roxburgh (with Richard Oram (Stirling University) and Colin Martin (St. Andrews University)). A first circular and downloadable Registration Form had been placed on the web-site, and a second circular would indicate the programme in more detail.

Discussion moved to thinking of later meetings. SB reminded the Group of the invitation from the Buteshire Natural History Society (BNHS), which had not been taken up in 2005 but might in summer 2006.

Action Points

- RTi to continue arranging the May 2006 conference
- SB to pursue links with the BNHS for summer 2006.

10. The Way Forward for the HRS Group – Discussion

The HRSG meeting of 24th June 2005 had included discussion (Item 7) concerning the role of the Group in the light of HS' new role as supportive of (Item 3: above) but not instrumental in the activities. RTi argued that the role of the Group was now poorly defined, and that this lack of definition was impacting adversely on

our activities. He reviewed the purposes of the group from its formation as advisors to HS in 1992 to its evolution as a Working Group in 2000 and 2001. By June 2001 the role of the Working Group had moved to (a) a concern to engage with local communities and the promotion of local-scale activities, (b) the stimulation of awareness in historic rural settlement and (c) correct what was perceived to be a lack of cohesion in studies of historic rural settlement in the broader academic community. RTi and RTu suggested that points (a) and (b) were being addressed fully within the SRP Project. SB agreed that activities were becoming too staid, and that as a consequence, enthusiasm was in danger of ebbing. RTu suggested that the role of the Working Group was now to galvanise support within the research community.

There was general agreement on this point. CD proposed that the Group might promote and coordinate conferences intended to unite the different disciplines within the subject: the Scottish Archaeological Forum provided a model for this. MD suggested that an equally successful model lay in the more modest but more frequent meetings of the 1st Millennium Studies Group, with a regular programme of meetings which became ‘habit-forming’. Both models have proved effective at galvanising interest and commitment to inter-disciplinary studies, it was agreed.

RTu suggested that a start might be made with a conference aimed at researchers, with keynote speakers intended to attract colleagues from all disciplines, with the aim of defining research agendas. RTi argued that most researchers understood their agendas, and that it was dangerous for the Group to be seen to direct behaviours. DA identified a value in such a conference achieving something concrete, problem-solving, rather than defining an agenda still to be solved. RTu preferred a conference at which researchers resolved to work together, using the successful Ben Lawers Historic Landscape Project (BLHLP), but RTi, drawing on his experiences with a comparable group engaged in coastal archaeology, warned that networks would naturally evolve but might not easily be manufactured. The need, CD suggested, was to stimulate interest and activity, and IA argued, the need was for collaboration across disciplines.

PD volunteered to refine the development of a programme for a conference with discussants within the Group (CD, RTi, others). Returning to the need to maintain enthusiasm generated from such a conference, SB suggested he would explore how a series of regular meetings, using the 1st Millennium Studies Group, might be developed.

Action Points

- PD to coordinate discussion with colleagues on the objectives and timing of a research-based conference engaging all interested disciplines
- SB to explore the potential and practicalities of more regular, more informal, meetings.

11. Projects and Developments (‘Round Table Reports’)

1. DA reported on a successful meeting in September of the BLHLP, and provided Annual Reports for 2004-5 of this project.
2. CD mentioned the SAF conference on October 29th-30th 2005 at Glasgow University on ‘The Archaeology of Islands’.
3. RTi mentioned a forthcoming day-meeting (12th November 2005) at Stirling University on the Medieval site and environs of Roxburgh.
4. RTu reported that he had been invited to represent archaeological interests at a forthcoming meeting (15th November 2005) on

‘Recording Vernacular Architecture’, organised between the Institute of Field Archaeologists and the Institute of Historic Buildings (IHBC).

5. RTu also reported the successful recognition of the largely post-Medieval settlement on St. Kilda as a World Heritage Site, a very significant statement on the global significance of Scotland’s historic rural settlement.

12. AOB

There were no other points raised.

13. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be on 2ND MARCH 2006, at 2.00 pm, to be held in the Department of Archaeology at Glasgow University.

Action Point

- CD to coordinate and communicate to the Secretary.

Meeting ended at 4.30 pm.