

MoLRS WORKING GROUP

Minutes of Meeting held on Wednesday 27th August 2003 at 13.30, Historic Scotland Main Offices, Edinburgh

Present: John Atkinson (GUARD, Chair)
Steve Boyle (RCAHMS)
Donald Davidson (UoS)
Chris Dalglish (GUARD)
Piers Dixon (RCAHMS)
Sarah Govan (HS)
Lesley Macinnes (HS)
Aonghus MacKechnie (HS)
Rod McCullagh (HS)
Alex Morrison (GUARD)
Ross Noble (Former HFM)
Richard Tipping (UoS)
Robin Turner (NTS)
Ian Shepherd (AC)
John Wood (HC)

Also in Attendance: Mairi Davies (HS)
Donna Stewart (HS, minutes)

Apologies: Derek Alexander (NTS)
Jill Harden (NTS)
Malcolm Bangor-Jones (HS)
Jack Stevenson (RCAHMS)
Tim Yarnell (FC)

1. Minutes and Matters Arising

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved subject to the following amendment under 'Work in Progress'. The MPhil reported by AM will look at the economic archaeology northwards to Gourrock and running approximately two miles inland. The work, however, had been suspended due to illness. There were no further matters arising.

2. Report on Website Progress

CD reported little progress since the last meeting. Members were urged to pass their contact details to CD as soon as possible otherwise they would be posted on the website without clearance. The 'New Projects/News' portion of the site had remained static though CD hoped to receive some updates from contacts soon. He urged the Group to submit ideas for the 'Sites to Visit' section highlighting the need for including a greater geographical spread of accessible sites. If these areas of the website were not updated regularly, user interest would quickly wane. In terms of future design, software was now in place which could facilitate the setting up of a message board and the posting of PDF files on the site with unlimited server space.

The minutes of the previous Discussion Group meetings (DG) had been posted on the site. It was agreed that the minutes of the Working Group meetings (WG) should also be posted once they had been approved by members at the succeeding meeting. It was hoped that this would stimulate public interest and keep them informed of progress.

The Website Designer, currently employed by AOC, was leaving but the project would remain with her on a freelance basis. This did not pose a problem for Historic Scotland funding.

SG confirmed that there had been an article about the website in the Scottish Archaeology News and that she had forwarded further details to the Society of Antiquaries for their September mailing. Details of DA's Ben Lomond Hidden History Trail, RN's forthcoming local history walk and any MoLR-related Archaeology Month events will be posted on the site.

3. Training Day

SB reminded the Group that this will take place on Saturday 6th September 2003. There had been 15 applications for 12 places. The 12, mainly from Highland and Argyll, will be split into four groups of three and will spend a half day on each of the sites to be recorded at Tombreck on the slopes of Ben Lawers. Most of the recording will be done by the participants themselves, with the professionals providing guidance and facilitating discussion on the nature of recording sites. The training day will produce a 250 scale plan of the farmstead, a satisfaction questionnaire and an article in the CSA news.

SG pointed out that the geographical concentration of the applicants probably reflected the fact that the DG mailing list had originally been drawn from the SLHF database, however, the list was being revised using a CSA contact list and should target a wider audience in future. It was suggested that factsheets and guidance on items such as the use of GPS, Plane Table survey information and other mapping information could be posted on the website.

4. Scotland's Rural Past Project

(a) Report of Meeting with HLF

RT reported that the outline ideas document previously circulated represented the outcome of discussions within and feedback from the Sub-Group about the viability and potential/pitfalls of a large MoLRS project. The list of potential activities was a guide and not a definitive list. HS was precluded from acting as the lead body in any HLF bid, RCAHMS did not wish to take up the role and therefore the NTS appeared to be the most viable conduit for the project. The NTS Management Board had approved this in principle and if the WG were in agreement then the sub-group would move forward on this basis. It was noted that a number of the items under 'Development Programme' (Page 4) had been completed.

A 150 word project summary had been submitted to the HLF to gain a measure of the amount of revenue funding which may be on offer (potentially up to £500K). JA and RT would document the next meeting with the HLF and thereafter seek to raise funds for the Project Planning Project for a Stage 1 submission by the NTS as lead employer in April 2004. The project plan could then be built up for Stage 2 approval over a 6 month period.

(b) Wider Discussion of Aims and Objectives

RT acknowledged that some of the outline aims may not be as targeted as the WG would like,

however, the SRP would be bound by the objectives of its potential funders. Although the HLF placed greatest emphasis on public benefit and did not therefore support individual research projects, it could facilitate research with an element of public input. This type of research did have a downside but lessons could be drawn from the Ben Lawers project. The principal guiding light for the SRP project would remain the key objectives set out on Page 1.

PD was concerned that the remit of the project would duplicate the work of RCAHMS on a less professional basis. RN suggested that any data collected via the SRP project could be filtered through, for example, local farming museums, as less of a qualitative concern than the information held on the national databases. He further suggested that a body like the proposed Scottish Country Life Museums Trust could run a database in parallel to the local Sites and Monuments Records/National Monuments Record. It was acknowledged that recordings by members of the public could be of varying quality and it was the aim of the SRP project to address this by providing outreach training and consultancy services. The project would also seek to foster confidence amongst local groups in order to tap into existing but undisclosed archives and also to engage new interest by raising local awareness of MoLRS. It was mooted that any training facilities should ideally be de-centralised or at least established as a Central Advisory Unit as opposed to being dictatorial in nature. There could be various levels of training on offer, for example, a level one (basic recording, walkaround with FESP) and level two (more comprehensive, field camps) which could be reported in local journals such as the Caithness Field Society. Beacon organisations, for example, the Rose of Mull Historical Society, could be used to train other local groups whilst gaining a sense of achievement and encouragement in their own work. SG reminded the Group that the project would have to produce a material product and be able to measure its achievements in order to maintain funding. This could take the form of, for example, counting the number of sites surveyed and number of groups involved.

DD reported his personal approval of the SRP project based on its key elements of involvement, understanding and appreciation and added that the current fad for outdoor activities could prove to be an untapped resource. SG reiterated the need for the aims of the project to remain focussed, acknowledging that there would be scope to bring in other options, for example, television, publications, at a later date. The main problem would be how to narrow down the project objectives into realistic, achievable goals. RN indicated that this role would fall to the staff employed upon securing Project Planning Project funding from HLF et al. LM felt that other funders could be sourced for the project and that HS may not be able to secure the 20% stated. The 20% income in-kind also appeared onerous. RT reminded the Group that the project would run over 4-5 years and therefore could be flexible. He suggested that some of the aims of the SRP may draw other funders in, however, more funders would mean more hoops.

(c) Discussion Group Session, Perth Museum, 15th November 2003

It was agreed that the proposals for the SRP project would be the main item on the agenda as public backing for the project was fundamental and could feed into the HLF bid. It was agreed that the programme should begin with a selection (2/3 x 20 mins) of guest speakers from local history groups (suggestions included Tam Ward, Jim Kirby, John Wombell, RoMHS – members to e-mail RTi within 2 days), leading on to a presentation of the SRP proposals. After lunch, workshops would be set up to facilitate discussion. A cover charge of £5 would be levied to cover the cost of refreshments and speakers' expenses. RTi will provide CD with a short paragraph for the web advising that the meeting is taking place with details to follow. Invitations should be issued by the

end September. RM suggested that pictures of the meeting could be posted on the web and issued to press offices.

5. Discussion Group Meeting, Auchendrain, Spring 2004

This would take the form of an indoor morning meeting in Inveraray (venue and speakers tbc) and an afternoon walkaround of the Auchendrain site guided by AN and JA. Saturday 17 April 2004 was proposed as a date for the meeting. SB would contact CSA to confirm that this was suitable.

6. Work in Progress – Round Table Reports

- DD reported that the chemical sampling of 6 MoLRS sites in the UK, including 4 in Scotland, had been now been completed by Claire Wilson and analyses were now underway with some interesting results, including high levels of tin in byres.
- RN informed the Group of the sudden demise of the Highland Vernacular Building Trust (HVBT) on 01 August due to a funding crisis. A skill base of 7 years growth had been lost and even if the craftsmen went freelance they would lose their charitable funding status. He hoped that the matter would be highlighted at the next Historic Environment Advisory Council for Scotland (HEACS) meeting and asked members to direct any notes of concern to the Highland Folk Museum. It was felt that the necessary Trust funding was available but that events had happened too quickly for any alternative strategy to be initiated in time.
- A Gaelic translation of the St Kilda website, excluding reports and publications, would go live on Friday 29 August. RT confirmed that it had a considerable focus on MoLRS.
- (i) JW stated that the Highland SMR was now available on-line and that the infrastructure was in place for a Gaelic translation though this had yet to be implemented.
- (ii) He is currently in discussions about writing up the results of the Newtonmore experimental-based Easter Raitts archaeological field school which had run for 5 years until 2000. It was possible that the results could be used as part of the DG meeting in November.
- (iii) The Strathnever Trail, which had recently been opened up to the public, is proving popular.
- (iv) As part of Scottish Archaeology Month/Highland Archaeology Week, HC are conducting an 'Archaeology Challenge' inviting locals to photograph their archaeology for the SMR.
- (v) There tends to be a public perception that deserted settlements should be razed with Planners often encouraging/favouring rebuilding on these former sites. JW is trying to devise a policy to counter this trend using the planning system.
- 'Timefliers' are filming a programme about the Highland Clearances around Ben Lawers. JA reported that Meg Waters from Birmingham University was currently writing up the results of a geophysical survey of the Meall Craig shieling Group.
- PD elaborated on the recent RCAHMS survey of Mingulay, focussing on the 1840's village of Bay. The settlement contained strip fields and two droveways to moorland, one of which led to a formal peat drying ground (rectangular stone bases) and the other to a shieling group and burn to the south. It appeared that pre-croft settlement centred on 4 or 5 small buildings of 3.5 x 2.5m in contrast to the later blackhouses of 10-15m in length. A discussion ensued about the reason for this contrast and also why formal peat drying beds were required. Small cultivation terraces were noted on the machair area and the presence of numerous phases of field systems. The site was well documented from the 18th Century onwards as it formed part of the Cluny Estate whose owner was a well-known clearer in the 19th Century. The last RCAHMS visit to the island recorded 4 sites. This visit has yielded about 500.
- RT spoke of his recent visit to Canna to witness Jill Harden/Aberdeen University's experiments on the firing of a kelp kiln. JH is interested in techniques of firing whereas AU was focussing on the soil

analysis.

- RM reported that a recent meeting of the Scottish IFA had centred on the increasing problem of paleo-analysis and the disposal of human remains. There will be a seminar on the erosion of medieval cemeteries in November. Details to follow.
- DD told the WG of Bruce Glendinning's recent uncovering of a medieval site near Dunbar. No further details were available.

7. AOCB

Nothing to report.

8. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the MoLRS WG will take place on Tuesday 2nd December 2003 at 2pm in the RCAHMS Offices, Bernard Terrace, Edinburgh.

Please note that this ties in with a talk to be held at 5.30 pm on Tuesday December 2nd 2003 in the Main Conference Room, Historic Scotland. The speaker is Dr James Fraser of the Departments of Celtic Studies and Scottish History, University of Edinburgh. The talk is to the First Millennia Studies Group and is titled:

What has Bede's Pictish origin legend to do with archaeology?

Everyone is welcome to attend.