

RURAL SOCIETY IN THE  
AGE OF REASON

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RURAL SOCIETY IN THE  
AGE OF REASON

An Archaeology of the  
Emergence of Modern  
Life in the Southern  
Scottish Highlands

*by*

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# Preface



My interest in the archaeology of the Scottish Highlands began long before I had any formal training in the subject. Growing up on the eastern fringes of the southern Highlands, close to Loch Lomond, it was not hard to stumble across ruined buildings, old field boundaries, and other traces of everyday life in the past. This is especially true if you spend much time, as I have done, climbing the nearby mountains and walking and driving through the various glens that give access into the Highlands. At the time, I had no real understanding of these remains, simply accepting them as being built and old.

After studying archaeology for a few years at the University of Glasgow, itself only a short commute from the area where I grew up, I became acutely aware that I still had no real understanding of these familiar, yet enigmatic, buildings and fields. This and a growing interest in Scotland's historical archaeology drove me to take several courses on the subject of *rural settlement studies*. These courses allowed me to place what I now knew to be houses, barns, mills, shieling (transhumance) settlements, rig-and-furrow cultivation, and other related remains in history. Overwhelmingly, they seemed to date from the period of the last 300 years. I also began to understand how they all worked together as component parts of daily rural life in the past.

While an undergraduate, I undertook to write a dissertation on this period of archaeology on Loch Lomondside and later began research towards a Ph.D. in the subject. By the time I came to start that Ph.D. research I had come to find the empirical nature of much work in Scottish rural settlement studies unsatisfying. Such past work is of course invaluable for the data and empirical interpretation it provides. However, when compared with the issues discussed by documentary historians of this period—issues like the Highland Clearances, agricultural Improvement and commercialization, and the demise of clanship—a wide gap in interpretation becomes obvious. Having studied prehistory and having developed an interest in historical archaeology outside of Scotland, my interest became the exploration of the social archaeology of the Highlands; to move beyond an empirical understanding to an understanding of how people's houses and fields formed an integral part of their social life.

My approach to this social archaeology of Scotland's recent past has therefore grown from a background in Scottish historical archaeology, and in particular the field of rural settlement studies. It has been influenced by recent work in British prehistory and, leading from there, by readings in anthropology and social theory. Equally important for me have been the ways in which other historical archaeologists, in Britain and around the world, have tackled the major social issues of the modern era, particularly that of capitalism. I can remember at one point being surprised, but excited, to find that work on contemporaneous archaeology as far afield as the United States or Australia had something to offer in understanding the Scottish Highlands.

I hope that this brief biography will go some small way to explain how this book came to be as it is. The book has grown from my Ph.D. thesis, though with substantial revisions. It has been written with two main audiences in mind. Firstly, there are the growing number of those in Scotland and in the British Isles as a whole interested in the archaeology of the recent past. My hope here is to offer something to fuel discussion of how we continue to progress this archaeology with a social agenda foremost in our minds. Secondly, the book is aimed at historical archaeologists and others in other parts of the world. I am glad that this book is published in the *Contributions to Global Historical Archaeology* series for a number of reasons. I have already mentioned my own debt to the work of archaeologists in other countries and continents. I hope that this book offers a return contribution in making more widely known Scottish material from a period when Scots, for good or bad, were playing a significant role in shaping the modern world. I also hope that it offers a contribution to the more general, theoretical debate on the construction and constitution of capitalist societies.

# Acknowledgments



As this book has grown out of my Ph.D. thesis, I wish to acknowledge those who gave support and advice both during my time as a research student and subsequently in the drafting of this book. First, my parents, Janet and Ian, have proved a constant source of support and encouragement and continue to show an interest. In the same breath, and for the same reasons, I wish to thank Katinka, who also persevered with draft versions of the text, and provided invaluable critical comment, help with the illustrations, and general moral support. It has taken some time to progress from the initial unpublished thesis to a stage where I am happy with this text as it is and, with major re-writes and changes in direction, this has been a labor-intensive process. It would have been much harder to achieve the end result without everyone's continued understanding and encouragement.

Matthew Johnson, of the University of Durham, read a draft of the text and I am grateful to him for his positive, incisive, and constructive comments.

Both during the period of my original research and since, I have benefited immeasurably from discussions with members of the academic staff of the University of Glasgow Department of Archaeology, most notably Stephen T Driscoll and Alex Morrison. It was Alex Morrison who first sparked my academic interest in the recent past of the Scottish Highlands and Stephen Driscoll who supervised my subsequent research in such a way that I was free to take it in the direction I wanted, though encouraged to think critically. He also kindly provided material for Figures 8, 9, 15, and 16 and permission to reproduce it. I have also learnt much from working and conversing with the staff of Glasgow University Archaeological Research Division, and in particular I would like to single out John A Atkinson, Olivia Lelong, and Gavin MacGregor. Whilst studying at the University of Glasgow, I benefited from the interest of my peers in my own work, their willingness to discuss their research, and their practical assistance and advice. For numerous discussions and all their help I wish to thank Martin Carruthers, Meggen Gondek, Caroline Hale, Stuart Jeffrey, and Kylie Seretis in particular.

Terry Nelson provided much practical assistance and advice that allowed me to complete my Ph.D. In particular, he steered me through the minefield of computer technology—no small feat in my case.

Murdo MacDonald of the Argyll and Bute District Archive, Lochgilphead, and Mike Davis, of Argyll and Bute Libraries, were both extremely helpful in leading me to significant manuscript sources. Figures 5 and 13 are based on copies of material kindly supplied by Murdo MacDonald.

The staff of various other institutions also deserve thanks. The National Monuments Record of Scotland has proved a vital source of information and the staff of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland have always proved helpful. Figures 4, 6, 7, 10, and 14 are based on material supplied from the National Monuments Record and reproduced with the permission of the Royal Commission. Of the many libraries and archives where I have conducted research, the Mitchell Library in Glasgow and Glasgow University Library deserve special mention.

I hope you all think the end result is worthwhile.

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