

Bringing Archives and Archaeology Together: Community Research at the Bennachie Colony

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This article arises from the Bennachie Landscapes Project, a collaboration between the Bailies of Bennachie and staff from the University of Aberdeen. It examines the interaction of archival and archaeological investigations by community researchers concerned especially with the Bennachie ‘Colony’, a settlement of crofters on the hill of Bennachie (located near to Inverurie, Aberdeenshire) in the nineteenth century. An exercise partly in community archives, community archaeology, social history and historical archaeology, this project has sought to explore the everyday lives of the Bennachie ‘colonists’, in order to understand more closely their social and economic experiences and context. In doing so, archival and archaeological research methods have come together in a direct way which has raised new questions about life in the Colony. The project demonstrates a clear example of how textual and non-textual records may work together, in what might be described as an exercise in ‘community archives-archaeology’.

Since 2011 a collaboration known as the Bennachie Landscapes Project (*Bennachie Landscapes*) has conducted a range of investigative activities focused on the hill of Bennachie, ‘the centre stone of the county of Aberdeen’, located nineteen miles north-west of the city (see Plate 1).¹ The leading partners in this collaboration are the Bailies of Bennachie (a conservation and amenity group founded in 1973), and investigators (including – among others – archaeologists, historians, and archivists) drawn from a range of departments at the University of Aberdeen. In 2012–14, *Bennachie Landscapes* joined with other organisations and won two research grants (2012, and 2013–14) from the Arts and Humanities Research Council’s (AHRC) ‘Connected Communities’ call and the ‘Research Grant’ route to investigate a variety of aspects of the hill and its surrounding countryside. Prominent in these funded projects were both archaeological and archival investigations.²

¹ A. W. M. Whiteley (ed.), *The Book of Bennachie* (n.l., 1976), preface by Lord Aberdeen.

² AHRC Connected Communities, Community Heritage Grant, AH/J013447/1, awarded 2012 (Gordon Noble PI); AHRC Research Development Grant, AH/K007750/1, awarded 2013 (Jeff Oliver PI); information available via Gateway to Research, <http://gtr.rcuk.ac.uk>. Other participating organisations included Forestry Commission Scotland and the Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service.

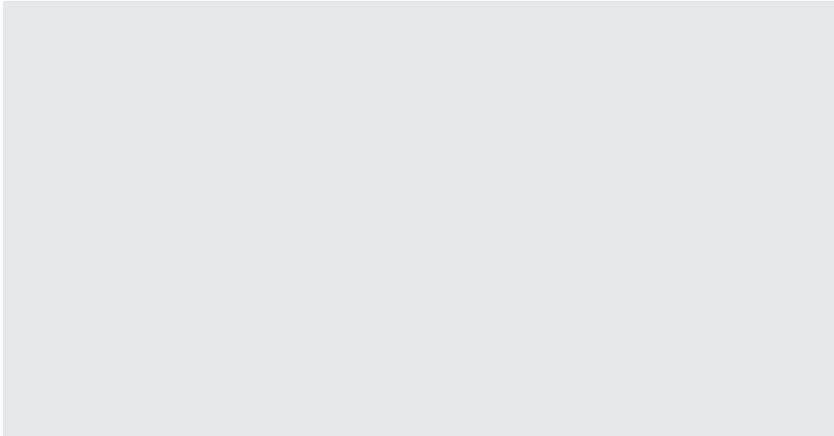


Plate 1 Location map of the Colony, by Alison Sandison.

The so-called Bennachie ‘Colony’ has been a focal point of investigations from the early stages of the project; however, the winning of the AHRC Research Grant in particular enabled a deeper level of engagement with it. The Colony was a nineteenth-century settlement of ‘squatters’ which came to be established on the hill for a few generations. Its first members are firmly recorded in the 1830s, although the immediately preceding decades have conventionally been associated with the earliest arrivals.³ This settlement occurred in a context of increasing itinerancy experienced by agricultural wage-labourers. From the perspective of the aristocratic landowner or greater farmer, ‘colonies’ of tenant crofters were an opportunity to improve productivity on marginal land.⁴ For the displaced, unimproved uplands might be an attractive location to settle and to put down roots by cultivating the land. In many cases elsewhere in Scotland (as at the Forest of Corrennie in Aberdeenshire, Cowie in Kincardineshire, and Island Roan (Eilean nan Ron) off the Sutherland coast), informal settlement was established and in some cases tolerated to the extent that it fostered land

³ On the earliest colonists, see J. Fagen, *The Bennachie Colony Project: Examining the Lives and Impact of the Bennachie Colonists*, Bennachie Landscapes Series, 1 (Inverurie, 2011), 23–6, 49; A. Kennedy, ‘Bennachie Landscapes Project’, *Aberdeen and North-East Scotland Family History Society Journal*, 130 (2014), 41–6. A colourful story of the marriage of John Esson to the unnamed first settler’s unnamed daughter (somewhat reminiscent of Lewis Grassie Gibbon’s Chris Guthrie) is found in N. L. A. Campbell [1939], ‘The Story of “the Colony” on Bennachie’, in (ed.) Whiteley, *Book of Bennachie*, 104–6 (104).

⁴ M. Gray, ‘North-East Agriculture and the Labour Force, 1790–1875’, in (ed.) A. A. MacLaren, *Social Class in Scotland: Past and Present* (Edinburgh, 1976), 86–104 (93).

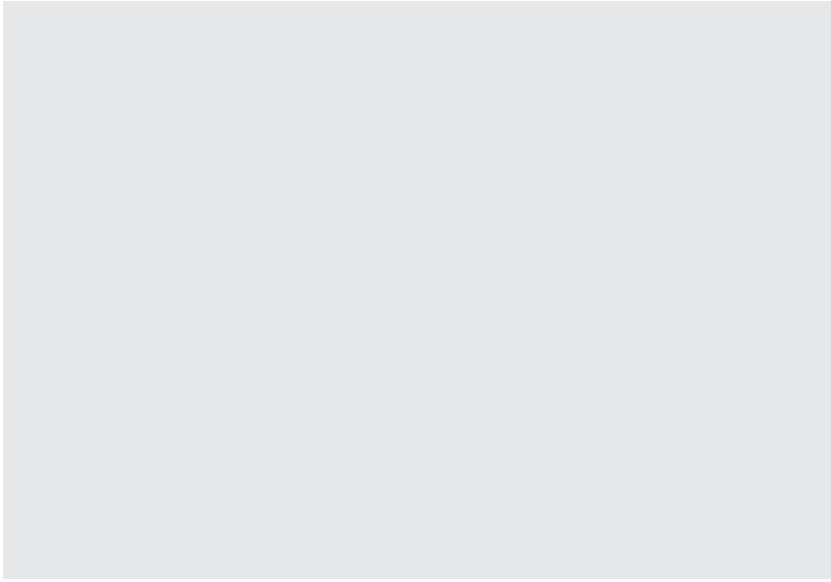


Plate 2 Plan of the Colony based principally on the Ordnance Survey published in 1869. Place names are derived from census information. Those in quotations have been formed through modern conventions. Adapted from a base map by Colin Shepherd. By kind permission.

reclamation.⁵ By the middle of the century, a gathering of crofting ‘colonists’, numbering some 56 souls in 1851, had become established as an independent community on Bennachie’s lower eastern slopes (see Plate 2). By 1859 the several owners of Bennachie (including among them the Leslies of Balquhain) controversially arranged to change the legal status of the land to which they held title on the hill, and imposed burdensome leases upon the colonists. This eventually led to the demise of the settlement; by the late 1880s, it was all but abandoned.⁶ It is in part the liminal nature of the Colony which has ensured it a prominent place in local folk-memory. For centuries this part of Scotland

⁵ G. Kay, ‘The Landscape of Improvement: A Case Study of Agricultural Change in North-East Scotland’, *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 78 (1962), 100–11. For informal settlements at Corrennie and Cowie, see I. Carter, *Farm Life in Northeast Scotland 1840–1914: The Poor Man’s Country* (Edinburgh, 1979), 65. For Island Roan, see J. G. Mackay, *The Story of Island Roan* (n.l., 1962), <http://www.skerray.com/island-roan/story>.

⁶ Fagen, *Bennachie Colony*, 4–5, 8. See also N. Q. Bogdan, P. Z. Dransart, T. Upson-Smith and J. Trigg, with J. MacKay, *Bennachie Colony House Excavation 1999: An Extended Interim Report*, http://www.academia.edu/9847267/Bennachie_Colony_House_Excavation_1999_an_extended_interim_report_-_part_one.

has maintained a sense of separateness; indeed from the Reformation to the twentieth century that distinctiveness was reflected in matters of religion: a number of local landed families retained their Roman Catholic identity. To this end, from 1799 to 1829 (the year of the Catholic Emancipation Act), the Balquhain estate was home to a small Catholic seminary at Aquhorthies, situated between Bennachie and Inverurie.⁷ Thus in the decades in which the Colony was established the wider locality was already familiar – even comfortable – with quietly accommodating the complexities of culturally ‘irregular’ groups.

The problem for investigation of the Colony took two strands. The first concerned a microhistory of the social and economic conditions of life in this community. This strand presented itself as pertinent given an identity imposed upon the colonists since the nineteenth century, that of moral outcasts known for poaching, thieving and licentious behaviour. Local kirk session records highlight illegitimate births and ‘fornications’ among the colonists.⁸ Such perceived indiscretions helped to explain other failings: a number of ‘paupers’ lived in the Colony and were supported, at one time or another, by Oyne parish, some of whom, due to ill health, were removed to the parish poor house at Ryehill. In the worst cases, impoverishment also led to illicit behaviours, fostering an ill reputation captured by writers such as Alex Inkson McConnochie in the late nineteenth century.⁹ All the same, such negative views contrast with a more romantic appraisal: a characterisation of the colonists as hardy, innocent folk who symbolised perseverance and independence of spirit.¹⁰ In the later 1880s, during a period coloured by crofter land agitation, ‘the theft of Bennachie’ of a generation earlier and the subsequent evictions of some of the colonists came to provoke class-conscious social action. This included what came to be known as the ‘raid on Bennachie’, which took the form of a protest on the hill itself in September 1889. The reputation and perception of the colonists has long been a contested and controversial topic. Studies of crofter agitation have not tended to give significant attention to Aberdeenshire and Banffshire, and in this light, comment on the Bennachie Colony offers a small step towards enriching this wider scholarly discussion.¹¹

⁷ Aberdeen University Special Collections Centre (hereafter AU), MS 2249; AU, Scottish Catholic Archives, Historic Collections, CS/2.

⁸ Fagen, *Bennachie Colony*, 20, 28–9, 38–9. See also T. C. Smout, ‘Aspects of Sexual Behaviour in Nineteenth-Century Scotland’, in (ed.) MacLaren, *Social Class in Scotland*, 55–85 (78).

⁹ A. I. McConnochie, *Bennachie* (Aberdeen, 1985 [1890]), 108.

¹⁰ Campbell, ‘The Story of “the Colony” on Bennachie’, 106; Carter, *Farm Life in Northeast Scotland*, 62–5.

¹¹ I. Carter, ‘The Raid on Bennachie’, in (ed.) A. W. M. Whiteley, *Bennachie Again* (n.l., 1983), 119–25. See also *Aberdeen Journal*, 24 September 1889. On crofting agitation generally, see J. Hunter, *The Making of the Crofting Community* (Edinburgh, 1976); E. A. Cameron, *Land for the People? The British Government and the Scottish Highlands, c.1880–1925* (East Linton, 1996). For more detailed information on the research design and context of the

The second strand concerned the method of investigation itself. The collaboration between the Bailies of Bennachie and members of the University of Aberdeen was well positioned to respond to the agenda set by the AHRC awards for ‘the co-production of research’. This agenda was interpreted to mean a partnership between ‘volunteers’ and ‘academics’ in which volunteer community researchers, drawn especially from the Bailies of Bennachie, took a leading part in elements of the work conducted. Since 2011 *Bennachie Landscapes* has developed a model of working that places our community volunteers as key participants, to the extent that many of them are now involved in aspects of the academic research or in their own research projects, which both support and/or extend our original aims and objectives. This has been reflected in the publications that have recently emerged from the work undertaken.¹² More generally, it is worth observing that a collaborative project such as this fostered and supported the relationships developed between a university and those external organisations based in its wider ‘hinterland’ community.

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate the way in which the use of archival and archaeological materials have intersected in work on the Colony. Both social historians and historical archaeologists attempt to understand the conditions of everyday life, typically on a local scale. Historians may use certain types of documentary record to shed light on the fine grain of human experience. Similarly, focusing on material culture and other ‘things’ that past people have left behind, archaeologists address the problem of understanding more closely the details of everyday experience. While all this is well established and understood, deeper steps may be taken.¹³ Less commonly do historical archaeologists and archivally oriented historians work together directly; perhaps even less often are they led by community researchers in such projects. In the same way that archival and archaeological evidence can be used independently to address historical questions, they can also be used together in a more holistic manner. We believe such a relational approach prompts reflection on the possible ways by which the past may be interrogated, and knowledge of the past may be created.

The work of this project does not follow the conventional model of a (solitary) academic researcher, typically a professional historian, reading

Bennachie study, see J. M. Oliver, J. W. Armstrong, K. Milek, J. E. Schofield, J. Vergunst, T. Brochard, A. Gould and G. Noble, ‘The Bennachie Colony: A Nineteenth-Century Informal Community in Northeast Scotland’, *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 20 (2016), 341–77.

¹² Kennedy, ‘Bennachie Landscapes Project’; K. Ledingham, ‘An Aberdeenshire Estate Rental Book: The Estates of Leslie of Balquhain, 1875–84’, *Scottish Local History*, 89 (2014), 15–26; C. H. Miller, ‘Bennachie, the “Colony”, Balquhain and Fetternear – Some Archival Sources’, *Northern Scotland*, 6 (2015), 70–83. See also C. Shepherd (ed.), *Bennachie and the Garioch: Society and Ecology in the History of North-East Scotland*, Bennachie Landscapes Series, 2 (Inverurie, 2013).

¹³ C. E. Cleland, ‘Historical Archaeology Adrift?’, *Historical Archaeology*, 35 (2001), 1–8.

documents in an institutional archive. Rather it is a group endeavour, inflected with the ‘community archives’ model of research that has grown over the last four decades. To that end, *Bennachie Landscapes* involved a ‘history and archives group’ of community researchers whose primary focus of attention has been on documentary records relating to Bennachie and its context. The main repositories of relevant material are the archives held by the Bailies of Bennachie (at the Bennachie Centre),¹⁴ and by the Special Collections Centre (SCC) at the University of Aberdeen. To the extent that a ‘community archive’ collection may be defined either by the subject matter of that collection being a community of people (the Bailies of Bennachie themselves), or by the process of creating that collection having involved the community, then the collections of the Bailies meet both criteria (duly acknowledging the fluidity of the term ‘community’ in particular).¹⁵ More generally, however, it is the work undertaken with these collections, together with those held at the SCC, that makes this partly a ‘community archives’ project. The community researchers have focused their efforts on enquiry into a historical topic concerning a shared locality of interest. Indeed the researchers’ activities ‘of documenting, recording and exploring community heritage’ – particularly in the exploration of the Colony and its context – ‘in which community participation, control and ownership of the project is essential’ meet the criteria set by one writer on the topic.¹⁶ There are of course wider issues at play in the relationship between ‘mainstream’ and ‘grass-roots’ archives and heritage initiatives, and indeed in the potential for the latter in particular to enable social activism.¹⁷ The present case has been relatively straightforward. The impetus in this aspect of the partnership came from the ‘community’ and the role of ‘academic’ participants was to support and facilitate the work of volunteers, not least with regard to identifying potentially relevant archival materials for investigation in the SCC, and in fostering the accessibility of these materials to the community researchers.¹⁸ The history and archives group met in person, and collaborated in a ‘virtual learning environment’ provided initially through the University of Aberdeen’s e-learning resources (using the Blackboard Inc. platform). At the time of writing (2015) that online collaboration is now conducted through the facility of Google Drive.

¹⁴ The Bennachie Centre, Chapel of Garioch, Inverurie AB51 5HX.

¹⁵ Community Archives and Heritage Group, <http://www.communityarchives.org.uk>.

¹⁶ A. Flinn, ‘Community Histories, Community Archives: Some Opportunities and Challenges’, *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 28 (2007), 151–76 (153).

¹⁷ A. Flinn, M. Stevens and E. Shepherd, ‘Whose Memories, Whose Archives? Independent Community Archives, Autonomy and the Mainstream’, *Archival Science*, 9 (2009), 71–86; D. K. Wakimoto, C. Bruce and H. Partridge, ‘Archivist as Activist: Lessons from Three Queer Community Archives in California’, *Archival Science*, 13 (2013), 293–316.

¹⁸ A useful point of reference, not least for the interaction of archives and archaeology, was *Scotland’s Rural Past*, <http://www.scotlandsruralpast.org.uk>, although no formal link exists with this project.

Bennachie Landscapes' approach to its archaeological work has been similarly inclusive and community focused. In fact, a number of the 'history and archives group' volunteers also gave their time to participate in archaeological activities. This approach builds on a growing collaborative field that has come to involve a wide range of participants, including 'volunteers, practitioners, and professionals (academic and otherwise)' in heritage engagement and outreach projects, which extend to a diversity of 'excavation, management, stewardship, evaluation, interpretation and presentation' activities.¹⁹ The three main areas of fieldwork conducted on the Colony site included mapping the built environment, assessing the field systems using test-pitting and soil science, and archaeological excavation. In these activities professional and academic archaeologists coordinated volunteers in the work conducted on- and off-site. This allowed for the identification and clarification of features in the landscape, including homesteads and outbuildings, as well as the investigation of manuring and other soil improvement practices deployed by the colonists. In the summer of 2013, excavations were conducted at two Colony settlements known as Shepherd's Lodge and Hillside. Thus, in addition to being partly a 'community archaeology' endeavour, the focus of effort in this project has by definition been on 'historical archaeology'. On a basic level that means *Bennachie Landscapes* has concerned a historic rather than a prehistoric society. More precisely, it is to say that it has directed attention towards the micro level of analysis, which is preserved in the abandoned physical remains of the 'individual domestic house'.²⁰ It is here that the experience of the fabric of everyday life can be detected, and also is the possibility of a direct dialogue between the archival and the archaeological evidence.

To the extent that our first strand of investigation is concerned with the social and economic conditions of life in the Colony, and the wider perceptions of the colonists, reductively portrayed as either disreputable 'squatters' or rustic hero-victims, much revolves on the understanding of their moral and legal rights in the land which they inhabited. This in turn depends on interpretation of the opaque Scottish legal term 'commonry' – the classification of the land on which the colonists first settled, and which was extinguished with the partition of 1859. In Scots law commonry means 'land possessed in common by different proprietors'.²¹ In origin commonries typically encompassed waste uplands for

¹⁹ S. Thomas, C. McDavid and A. Gutteridge, 'Editorial', *Journal of Community Archaeology and Heritage*, 1 (2014), 1–4 (1).

²⁰ C. E. Orser, 'Twenty-First-Century Historical Archaeology', *Journal of Archaeological Research*, 18 (2010), 111–50 (118).

²¹ R. A. Houston, 'Custom in Context: Medieval and Early Modern Scotland and England', *Past and Present*, 211 (2011), 35–76 (52–3); I. H. Adams (ed.), *Directory of Former Scottish Commonries*, Scottish Record Society, new series, II (Edinburgh, 1971), vii; R. F. Callander, *A Pattern of Landownership in Scotland: With Particular Reference to Aberdeenshire* (Finzean, 1987).

grazing situated beyond the infield and outfield of a town or settlement.²² The proprietors of a common (and their tenants) may exploit its resources, chiefly in the form of fuel, stone and grazing. Although other types of common property existed in nineteenth-century Scotland, such as that occurring in burghs, in runrig lands, or in rights of common grazing, common is not the same thing as common land.²³ Common land is ground over which tenants exercise (by long usage) 'rights of common', such as the right to pasture animals, which constrain the ownership of a landowner. In England, such common lands were subject to the Enclosure Acts of c.1700 to c.1850, by which improving landowners took common lands into unconstrained private ownership. It is tempting, but misleading, to equate such 'privatisation' measures of enclosure to the division of Scottish commons.²⁴ The comparison of common and common land is a matter of general similarity on the one hand and specific difference on the other.²⁵ In Scotland, commons were always in private ownership, even if that private ownership was shared among a few aristocratic landowners. After 1695 the division of commons was that of already private land; the purpose of division was not to extinguish tenants' communal rights (that is, rights exercised before the partition of 1859 and identified in the instrument of that year as 'servitudes' assigned to the proprietors).²⁶ From one perspective, the 1859 division sought to normalise the presence of the crofting colonists, making them tenants with rights rather than squatters without. All the same, the superficial similarity between the terms 'common' and 'common' invites an elision of these concepts in general terms, and one could speculate that this was just as tempting in the nineteenth century as it is today. The period of parliamentary enclosure in England caused social distress and debate,²⁷ which

²² R. A. Dodgshon, *Land and Society in Early Scotland* (Oxford, 1981), 157, 165, 191, 194; I. D. Whyte, *Scotland Before the Industrial Revolution: An Economic and Social History, c.1050–c.1750* (London and New York, 1995), 137, 141, 330, 340.

²³ D. M. Walker, *Principles of Scottish Private Law*, 4 vols (Oxford, 1970), 1266–7; A. B. Wilkinson, W. A. Wilson *et al.* (eds), *Gloag and Henderson's Introduction to the Law of Scotland*, 9th edn (Edinburgh, 1987), 689–95. See also M. Gray, 'The Abolition of Runrig in the Highlands of Scotland', *Economic History Review*, 5 (1952), 46–57 (47); M. Gray, 'The Consolidation of the Crofting System', *Agricultural History Review*, 5 (1957), 31–47 (39–40); A. L. Jarman, 'Customary Rights in Scots Law: Test Cases on Access to Land in the Nineteenth Century', *The Journal of Legal History*, 28 (2007), 207–32 (208).

²⁴ Further confusion arises given that English enclosures also extended to open fields and moorland pasture: Adams (ed.), *Directory of Former Scottish Commons*; I. H. Adams, 'The Legal Geography of Scotland's Common Lands', *Revue de l'Institut de Sociologie*, 2 (1973), 259–323; and comment in Jarman, 'Customary Rights', 211–12.

²⁵ The misleading comparison is implicit in a statement like 'the idea of common is that land is shared as a common resource': Fagen, *Bennachie Colony*, 42, although a much more subtle view is offered at p. 48.

²⁶ McConnochie, *Bennachie*, 105.

²⁷ J. M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England, 1700–1820* (Cambridge, 1993).

coincided with the upheavals of Scotland's infamous clearances and in broad terms both were part of the same agricultural transformation. What is more, in the twentieth century, the concept of 'the commons' continued to inform understandings of resource sustainability, with moral implications for human economic behaviour and environmental stewardship.²⁸ It is the general that has prevailed over the specific: the belief that the Bennachie commonty was 'common land', and that the division of 1859 was a 'theft' or unjust private appropriation, remains alive. There is an urge to understand the story of the Colony in these terms. This contested interpretation of commonty emerged during the course of the study and merits further investigation in its own right, as an important – even fundamental – aspect of how the Colony and its inhabitants have been understood and represented over time.

What have the *Bennachie Landscapes* investigations revealed about the local effects of the division of the commonty in 1859? The most exciting archival discovery was perhaps that of the 'conditions of lease' set to the colonists as new tenants of the Balquhain estate in 1859. The 'Rental Book of the Estates of Balquhain, Fetternear and Inch, 1852 to 1890', held within the Davidson and Garden Collection at the SCC, contains a single sheet of lined paper folded into four pages and affixed within the back cover of the volume.²⁹ Volunteer Ken Ledingham identified these pages (three of which contain handwritten text) while working with this and other estate ledgers.³⁰ These notes set out the onerous terms of 'Conditions of Letting Crofts, along the Clochie Burn and Kewlie How on Benachie' in 1859, and are followed by details of the nine householders and prospective tenancies involved. Among the conditions of lease set on top of those applicable to all Balquhain tenants, the colonists were required to cut a boundary ditch six feet wide – an exceptional and unnecessary burden imposed upon the subsistence crofters. Failure to do so was to result in 'removal' forthwith. It seems clear from this evidence that the partition of 1859 was intended as a step towards forcing the colonists off the hill.

Yet by 1871 the Colony was still relatively intact, albeit with a population reduced to between 30 and 40 inhabitants from an estimated maximum of 56 recorded residents in 1851. Volunteer Alison Kennedy traced the colonists in the census of that year, identifying details for members of the Littlejohn family at Shepherd's Lodge, and for one Margaret McDonald at Hillside.³¹ By 1878 the Littlejohns had ceased to pay their rent, and came to be forcibly evicted before the end of July that year. The eviction story has become part of the lore of the Colony: sheriff officers, policemen and estate workers were paid to remove the inhabitants from Shepherd's Lodge. The oldest tenant, Alexander

²⁸ G. Hardin, 'The Tragedy of the Commons', *Science*, 162, no. 3859 (1968), 1243–8. More recently, see A. Wightman, *The Poor Had No Lawyers: Who Owns Scotland and How They Got It* (Edinburgh, 2015), 268–91.

²⁹ AU, MS 2769/I/76/2.

³⁰ Ledingham, 'An Aberdeenshire Estate Rental Book', 23.

³¹ Kennedy, 'Bennachie Landscapes Project'. See also Fagen, *Bennachie Colony*, 5, 63.

Littlejohn, aged 84, was reportedly carried out from the house clinging to his bed, and after this a course of masonry was removed by estate workers to cause the house to collapse. Some accounts of the eviction story also note that fire was set to the remains.³²

An important question for the project was how the physical evidence of the archaeological record might be brought to speak to the written evidence of the archival record.³³ To that extent, the excavations of 2013 at Shepherd's Lodge and Hillside were an important opportunity to examine the remains of these homesteads, and by extension the eviction story itself. What the sites reveal about social and economic conditions of life is a picture of local contrasts. Whereas the remains of the original dwelling at Shepherd's Lodge indicate a smaller two-room cottage with an earthen floor and walls built directly on the soil, the McDonald house at Hillside reveals a more complex design. This was a two-room dwelling with a cobbled floor, incorporating an ample fireplace and hearth in the 'kitchen' end, while at least three windows bathed the interior in light. In contrast with the muddy surrounds of Shepherd's Lodge, the croft at Hillside had a sunken midden in the courtyard defined by a cobbled perimeter, helping to keep the crofters' feet out of the muck. Overall, while both dwellings fit within what we might expect for mid-nineteenth-century crofting architecture, they also accommodate an important degree of variability. With its more improvised foundations and later abutting apartments, which appear to have been added as the Littlejohn family grew, it could be suggested that Shepherd's Lodge exhibits a greater emphasis on homespun design, while the 'improved' conditions of the McDonald house are a good candidate for a pattern-book house.³⁴ The immediate story is thus one of a contrast in living accommodations within the Colony itself, indicating a more complex and heterogeneous reality than is suggested by accounts of all the colonists as homogeneous marginal poor, living on the edge of subsistence. Moreover, the archaeology at Shepherd's Lodge can be examined in relation to the story of the Littlejohn eviction of 1878. There indeed was a fire, but based on the reading of complex stratigraphy, the fire happened years after the building was used a house. This is attested by a burning layer identified immediately above

³² Campbell, 'The Story of "the Colony" on Bennachie', 105; Fagen, *Bennachie Colony*, 7, 40; Ledingham, 'An Aberdeenshire Estate Rental Book', 21–2 (noting the payment to the sheriff officers).

³³ For details of archaeological work, see J. Oliver, 'Archaeology and the Bennachie Colony: Excavation of two 19th-century crofts', in (ed.) C. Shepherd, *Bennachie and the Garioch: Society and Ecology in the History of North-East Scotland*, Bennachie Landscapes Series, 3 (Inverurie, 2015), 83–98; Oliver *et al.*, 'The Bennachie Colony'.

³⁴ P. Dixon and I. Fraser, 'The Medieval and Later Landscape', in (ed.) I. Fraser, *In The Shadow of Bennachie: A Field Archaeology of Donside, Aberdeenshire*, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (Edinburgh, 2007), 137–214 (212). We would like to thank the historian John R. Barrett for initially suggesting the possibility of a pattern-book house.

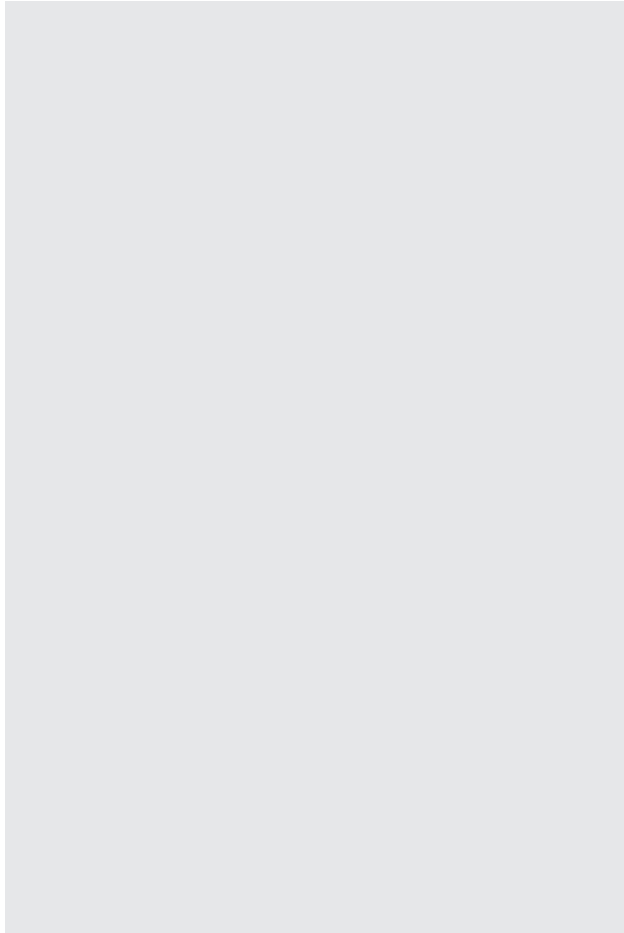


Plate 3 Ceramic dairy bowl, found on the original floor surface of the McDonald house, underneath layers of building debris. Photograph by Jeff Oliver.

truncations that post-date the house floor. It is far more likely that the fire happened years after Shepherd's Lodge was used as a dwelling; possibly during a later incarnation as an animal pen. This finding serves as a salient reminder of how oral history, while a useful and important source of information, is as much about forgetting as it is about remembering. It is in fact Hillside that presents the clearest evidence of a turbulent end to habitation, despite there being no popular tradition of such an episode at this house. The final days of excavation revealed in archaeological terms what can only be described as a smoking gun for a second eviction event. The whole of the interior of

the McDonald house was found littered with shattered but mostly complete ceramic and glass vessels, as well as fragments of other possessions, notably metal fittings and nails from items of furniture (see Plate 3). This suggests a sudden and possibly violent event, in which the inhabitants were forced to leave in a hurry. Finally, both houses seem to have been quickly destroyed by pushing their gable ends inward, collapsing the houses and fossilising their stories until we encountered them in the dig. Further archival evidence from the Balquhain rental record for 1877–78 shows that Alexander Littlejohn and James Littlejohn were by then listed as ‘now removed’ from the property (Shepherd’s Lodge). The same rental book entry reveals a similar story for Margaret McDonald at Hillside, listed with rent in arrears and ‘now removed’.³⁵

Of course both the archival and the archaeological record can be used independently to address historical questions; however, this project illustrates how they may be used together more holistically. Such a relational approach prompts reflection on the possible ways with which to question the past. First, it is clear that while textual records (in the form of archival evidence) and non-textual records (in the form of archaeological evidence) may be deployed as a means to answer research questions, they also serve mutually to inform each other, and indeed to raise new research questions. For instance, what archival evidence might be found to give further colour to the heterogeneity of living conditions within the Colony itself? How accurate are the accounts of the eviction events that have survived in popular memory? What degree of ‘improvement’ did the crofting colonists bring to the land they occupied? With these questions in mind by way of example, one may also consider what the meaningful boundaries between textual and non-textual records might be in addressing such historical problems. Secondly, with regard to method of research, it is fruitful to consider just what type of enquiry *Bennachie Landscapes* entails. It incorporates elements and approaches of community archives, community archaeology, historical archaeology and social history. To that end, the project is not simply a matter of the ‘history’ framing a research context for the ‘archaeology’, and indeed neither is it a case of archaeological evidence ‘filling in the gaps’ in the historical narrative. Rather, we prefer to see it as demonstrating a clear, fine-grained example of how textual and non-textual records may work together. Indeed, they perhaps even work together best in the hands of volunteer researchers, in what might be described as an exercise in ‘community archives-archaeology’.

³⁵ AU, MS 2769/II/22/I, discussed in Ledingham, ‘An Aberdeenshire Estate Rental Book’, 21–2.