The Legend of Brigadoon: Architecture, Identity and Choice in the Scottish Highlands

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Since the nineteenth century two distinct domestic architectural traditions in the Scottish Highlands have been interpreted in Britain as representative of Highland and Scottish identity. But Scotland's positive national identification with both the indigenous turf-walled and thatched Highland blackhouse and the imposed white, regular forms of the eighteenth-century "improved cottage" and farmhouse have failed to account for the historical relationships between the two architectural traditions and Scottish Gaels, or Highlanders. The aim of this article is to examine these historic relationships, to consider the misinterpretations of romanticism and the folklorists, and to question the Scottish government's current regionalist planning policy.

Through the twentieth century, city dwelling architects, planners, folklorists and academics have sought to define the cultural identity of the Scottish Highlands through its domestic architecture. The region has two architectural traditions: the millennia-old indigenous blackhouse and the imposed Classical farmhouse and cottage. As a consequence of the transformative process of agricultural improvement during the eighteenth century, the latter now dominate the Highland landscape, while the former persisted into the twentieth century only in impoverished coastal crofting communities, and have now largely disappeared.

The historic relationships between these two architectural traditions and Scottish Gaelic culture are complex. The blackhouse is an indigenous, Gaelic, house type promoted by folklorists and architects in the 1930s as a Highland cultural icon. However, by the twentieth century the blackhouse was viewed by Scottish Gaelic society in general as an embarrassing symbol of backwardness. These improved farmhouse emerged in the Highlands as a symbol of Britishness and modernity. The houses were built in the late eighteenth century by tenant farmers whose new wealth was founded upon the mass

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eviction of Scottish Gaels. The improved cottage likewise emerged as a form imposed by landowners — in this case, to rehouse evicted Highlanders in industrial planned villages. Ironically, however, the same eighteenth-century Classicism that typified the imposed farmhouse and cottage became the choice of Scottish Gaels forced to emigrate, and who settled in North America.

Current Scottish regional planning policy stipulates that the design of new domestic architecture references the physical characteristics of regional historic building stocks. This policy claims to reflect and reinforce "local and Scottish identity." However, it does not consider the social contexts of the Highlands' historic building traditions or their relative cultural value within Scottish Gaelic culture. The result is a policy that enforces the eighteenth-century architecture of improvement that dominates the Highland built environment.

THE INDIGENOUS HIGHLAND HOUSE

The term "blackhouse" has been used by English speakers since the mid-nineteenth century to describe the indigenous dwellings of the Scottish Highlands. It is a mistranslation of the Gaelic word *tugadh*, which simply means "thatch," but which is phonetically similar to *tigh dubh*, or "black house." The blackhouse is a longhouse dwelling type adapted to the adverse weather and harsh, treeless environment of the Highland region and the social practices and rituals of Scottish Gaelic, or Highland culture. It was the common dwelling prior to the permanent transformation of the Highland landscape and society through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In the early eighteenth century the Scottish Highlands were home to a Gaelic-speaking society based around the social structure of the clan. According to historian Robert Dodgshon, "By its very nature, a kin-based society transformed physical space into a social space, one that was identified through and structured by the groups or clans that occupied it."[1] Below the chief and clan elite, or "fine," the body of the clan consisted of ordinary clansmen and women who were loyal to the chief and lived and farmed on his lands, though they were not necessarily of the same name. However, clanship was not a straightforward economic relationship between a landowner and his tenants; it was a paternalistic, communal culture based upon the concept of *duthchas*, or common heritage, i.e., the land traditionally held by a clan. Historian Tom Devine has explained that *duthchas* was "central to the social cohesion of the clan because it articulated the expectations of the masses that the ruling families had the responsibility to act as their protectors and guarantee secure possession of land in return for allegiance, military service, tribute and rental."[2]

The blackhouse was a semi-permanent dwelling linked to the perambulatory settlement patterns of extended family groups within a clan's lands. Traditional settlements, known as *clachan* or *bailtean*, consisted of small irregular clusters of blackhouses. The Scottish Vernacular Building Group has described blackhouses as "integrated structures within the landscape . . . [whose] form, shape and colour merged naturally with the fields."[3] The external structure, interior space, and site orientation of the blackhouse were developed to minimize the effects of the windy and wet Highland environment and create a warm, dry living space.

The blackhouses of the "Baile Geane" *clachan* re-creation at the Highland Folk Museum, Kingussie, give the clearest indication today of the appearance and experience of a historic blackhouse **(FIG.1)**.[4] The walls and roof of the blackhouse enclosed a well-insulted, warm and dry living space. The orientation of the blackhouse also contributed to the warmth of the interior: its rounded, narrow gable end faced the prevailing wind, and any openings, such as the door, were placed on the south-facing side toward the sun. These provisions coincided with the Gaelic proverb, "*An iar's an ear, an dachaigh as 'fhearr — cul ri gaoith,'s aghaidh ri grein*," or "East to west, the house that's best — back to the wind and face to the sun."[5]

Inside, the long, low, rectangular form of the blackhouse provided a single living space. This was heated by a peat fire in a simple stone hearth in the center of the floor, with the heavy peat smoke escaping slowly through the thatch **(FIG.2)**. Functional determinism does not fully explain the form and function of the blackhouse, however. The central hearth was the social heart of Gaelic culture. The Highland *ceilidh*, or gathering, originated in communal storytelling, singing, and music sessions held around the glow of the central hearth through the long, house-bound winter months. Scottish Gaelic culture is principally based upon this intangible heritage, and the central hearth and enclosed space of the blackhouse framed and informed the centripetal social ritual of the *ceilidh*.[6]

FIGURE 1. *Baile Geane, reconstruction of an early eighteenth-century Highland settlement,* clachan *or* bailtean, *Highland Folk Museum, Kingussie, Central Highlands. Photo courtesy of Highland Folk Museum, 2006.*

FIGURE 2. *Interior of reconstructed blackhouse, Highland Folk Museum. Photo by author.*

The blackhouse was a traditional building type common to most ranks of Scottish Gaelic society. The term "traditional" is generally taken to indicate that the form, structure and materials of the blackhouse were a response to the specifics of a place, Highland Scotland, and a people, Scottish Gaels, over time (a shifting dynamic between environment, function and cultural practices).[7] This understanding of "tradition" leads to notions of place and ethnicity (or more broadly national, regional and subregional identities) within settled communities (often but not always rural and peasant in origin). It involves a post-romantic study of folk architecture. In this regard, Alan Colquhoun has written that the study of folk culture "represents an attempt to preserve a regional essence that is seen to be in mortal danger and [its aim is] to uphold the qualities of Kultur against the incursions of a universalizing and rationalizing Zivilzation."[8]

It is this relationship between people and place within prevailing notions of the vernacular that has attracted public policy-makers seeking to reinforce or re-create cultural identities through regional historicist planning regulations. However, advocates of this view in Scotland frequently overlook the fact that the clan system began to collapse in the eighteenth century under economic pressures resulting from the region's contact with early-modern Britain. Across vast areas of the Highlands the blackhouse and *bailtean* were forcibly eradicated by clan chieftains turned commercial landowners. Communities were evicted, and a new commercial agricultural landscape and an early-modern, British built environment were created, which remain predominant in the region to this day.

The Highland blackhouse tradition did continue into the early twentieth century within settlements known as crofting communities. The crofting system emerged in the early nineteenth century as a nonsecure form of tenure through which many displaced communities were relocated by landowners to smallholdings on marginal land. Crofting was viewed as a last resort: a ghetto of poverty on unprofitable wasteland, often on previously uncultivated coastal strips on the outer margins of great estates. For the ordinary Gael, crofting did mean a chance to remain close to ancestral lands and a familiar way of life, but it also brought a constant threat of starvation due to the infertility of the land and the constant possibility of eviction. Until the introduction of secure tenancies and government grants to crofters in the twentieth century there was little money or will to build new homes. Therefore, within the boundaries of these communities poverty and impermanence, not choice, ensured that the blackhouse persisted into the twentieth century.

In these crofting communities, the early-twentieth-century blackhouse was only slightly evolved from its historic origins. Interior improvements were made, such as planked wooden flooring and wall paneling, glazed windows, mass-produced imported furniture, and the replacement of the central hearth with gable-end hearths (often fitted with cast-iron stoves). However, the poverty and lack of social mobility within traditional Highland society and the restrictive nature of the crofting system all combined to ensure that the blackhouse did not evolve into a permanent high-status building in the manner of other indigenous longhouse traditions in Britain, such as the Devon longhouse. By the twentieth century the blackhouse was seen by Scottish Gaels as an object of shame, a symbol of backwardness, and a reminder of a history of poverty and oppression.

THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY HIGHLAND HOUSE

Although it is the indigenous dwelling type, there are very few extant blackhouses in the Scottish Highlands. As early as the later eighteenth century, in his *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*, Dr. Samuel Johnson observed that the blackhouse was rapidly disappearing from the Highland landscape.

By the mid-twentieth century, on return from a tour of the Highlands in search of a suitable village as a location to film, Arthur Freed, the producer of the 1954 Lerner and Loewe musical *Brigadoon*, commented that he could find "nothing that looked like Scotland." Freed's view of the Highland settled landscape is not uncommon. Visitors still come in search of kilted Gaels living pastoral lives in picturesque clusters of thatched cottages nestled comfortably within a dramatic mountain landscape. They are generally disappointed.

In fact, the historic farmhouses, cottages and planned villages of the twenty-first-century Highland landscape are monuments to the powerful social and economic forces that

transformed the region through the long eighteenth century, c. 1700–1850. The drive for higher rents by Highland landowners has often been depicted as a betrayal of Gaeldom and the sanctity of *duthchas* (the bonds of family, community and tradition) by Gaelic clan chiefs who squandered the revenue of their Highland estates on London-based lifestyles in order to gain status as British gentlemen and aristocrats. Financially, however, enclosure was the only viable option available to most Highland landowners in face of inevitable changes heralded by the "irresistible market pressures emanating from Lowland industrialisation and urbanisation."[9]

For many years, James Hunter's *Making of the Crofting Community* (1978) has been considered the definitive history of the Highland's socioeconomic transformation. However, the history of the Scottish Highlands has also been the object of recent revision by writers such as T.M. Devine, Robert Dodgshon, Allan Macinnes, and Chris Whately.[10] A considered position is that Highland history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries needs to maintain a balance between the drama of the Clearances and the detailing of economic land reform. Nonetheless, commercial landlordism in the Highlands did result in the clearance of thousands of *bailtean* to make way for single-tenant sheep farms. A new breed of professional tenant farmer, generally from the Scottish Borders and northern England, took root and built themselves modern British farmhouses. On the new sheep ranches, numberless blackhouses were replaced by lone early-modern British farmhouses.

The period 1775 to 1825 saw a Highland building boom, when more than three hundred farmhouses were built — a figure that accounts for 73 percent of all extant listed rural domestic architecture in the region constructed between 1600 and 1850.[11] As the geographer David Turnock has observed, "the results of [this] massive building programme are still clear for all to see."[12]

The improved tenant farmhouse was an active agent in a transformation of the Scottish Highlands that has been described by T.C. Smout as the "great divide which meant the end of rural life as it had been lived since time immemorial and the beginning of rural life as it has been ever since."[13] It represented a clear change in cultural practice: a building tradition based upon a direct response to the Highland environment was superseded by a house type, construction methods, materials, and building skills imported from the Lowlands. And it was brought about by a change in the house-building population — or in the case of many tacksmen, a change in social and economic perspective. In direct relation to agricultural improvement, the Highland building boom gradually gained momentum through the eighteenth century, reaching its peak at the turn of the century, and subsequently tailed off toward the middle of the nineteenth century.

Highland tenant farmhouses are relatively large, two-story buildings with a three-cell rectangular plan typical of late-eighteenth-century British everyday Classicism. Many of these improvement-era farmhouses were depicted in William Daniell's contemporary travelogue, *A Voyage Round the Coast of Scotland* (FIG. 3).[14] A sample of more than a thousand photographs of the front elevations of farmhouses from across Scotland was analyzed by Robert Naismith for the Countryside Commission of Scotland in 1985.[15] Naismith's analysis of each building's overall facade and its doors and windows showed that the location and size of more than 57 percent of

FIGURE 3. *William Daniell, "Berrydale, Caithness," from* A Voyage Round the Coast of Scotland and the Adjacent Islands, 1814–1822. *Courtesy of National Library of Scotland.*

these elements were comprehensively controlled by proportional principles based upon formal geometric relationships.

The exterior walls of the new tenant farmhouses were built of square-cut stone blocks laid in regular courses, covered with a protective white harl. The roof was made of evenly sized slates, and the high gable-end walls were terminated by characteristic broad chimneystacks. The ground-floor facade had a door in the center and a rectangular window on either side. The upper story had three windows placed directly above the ground-floor windows and door. In some cases, the house would have matching single-story wings to each side.

The standard rectangular floor plan of the typical improved farmhouse was at least double the size of the typical blackhouse since it was commonly two rooms deep (i.e., it had two to the front and two to the back, and the same layout of bedrooms upstairs). The arrangement of rooms on both floors was symmetrical, featuring a central passageway flanked by living rooms on the ground floor (such as the parlor and kitchen), and bedrooms upstairs **(FIG.4)**. All rooms were plastered and finished with simple Classical architectural moldings, such as cornices. The internal structure of the roof frame, floors, partition walls, skirting boards, and stairs required large amounts of timber. In addition, the house contained any number of manufactured items that had to be bought, including nails and hinges, door handles, fireplaces, grates, window frames, and glass.

The well-ordered, symmetrical, three-bay facade visually maintained a household's standing within the community. It was a statement of modernity and wealth, social aspiration and conformity. Nicholas Cooper described much the same phenomenon in a parallel English context: "in building uniform houses . . . which conformed to architectural norms . . . members of eighteenth-century [society] expressed their standing and their sense of community."[16]

FIGURE 4. *The parlor, Glassingall Farm House, Perthshire. Photo by author.*

When the difficulty and great cost of importing the necessary skilled labor, tools, materials and components required to build these fashionable, and poorly adapted, farmhouses in a remote and inaccessible country is considered, an impression is gained of the aggregate economic power of the Highland tenant farmers. This demonstrable willingness to pay also shows the importance placed upon high-quality contemporary house building within the process of agricultural improvement. In the Scottish Highlands the combination of individual social anxiety and a sense of collective social pride among tenant farmers produced more than three hundred farmhouses that looked very much the same in outward appearance: white geometric boxes in a mountainous landscape. The Classical proportioning of farmhouse facades further demonstrated both an aspiration to modernity and the need to conform — through architectural decorum — to the social structures associated with the transformation of rural Scotland.

THE HIGHLAND HOUSE IN NORTH AMERICA

Research into the houses built by Highlanders who left Scotland to settle in Nova Scotia, Canada, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, has shown that, like the new class of tenant farmers in the Highlands, Scottish Gaels, when given the choice were keen to modernize. Their settlements in Canada brought a rapid and total rejection of the blackhouse in favor of contemporary British American architectural fashions.[17] Stylistically, their houses in Canada adopted the same everyday Classicism evident in the improved cottages and farmhouses of the Scottish Highlands **(FIG.5)**.

Canadian architectural historians Peter Ennals and Deryck Holdsworth have argued that "it is clear that the Scottish . . . folk dwelling did make its way to Atlantic Canada . . . quite simply stone and thatch were abandoned in favor of wood."[18] While this transition may be true for materials and related construction, the presence of a broadly rectangular floor plan and a tendency toward bilateral symmetry in the Highland blackhouse does not translate into the careful Classical proportions and architectural moldings of the eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century British American farmhouse. The interiors of timber-framed colonial farmhouses of Nova Scotia were clean, light and airy, in contrast with the muddy, dark, and smoke-filled interior of the ordinary Highlander's blackhouse. The transition from the stone-and-turf blackhouse to a timber-framed, Classically-styled house type represents a deliberate break with tradition and a desire to embrace an emergent contemporary British American consumer society.

The rejection of the blackhouse tradition does not appear to have represented much of a loss to the Gaelic settlers' shared cultural identity. Settlers and their descendants fiercely maintained their Scottish Gaelic culture through lan-

FIGURE 5. *Classical ornamentation to early-nineteenth-century Highland settler's house in Canada. MacGillivary House, Upper South River, Antigonish County, Nova Scotia, Canada. Photo by author, 2003.*

guage, literature, music and dance — a valued intangible heritage. Yet, while Scottish emigrants' songs and poetry make repeated reference to their sense of loss for their former communities and lands, there are no nostalgic references to the blackhouse. A contemporary house expressed a modern and improving attitude within a culturally vibrant Gaelic colonial society. New architecture was of great cultural significance and readily embraced as a social indicator of the emigrant Scottish Gaelic community's new wealth, status and modernity as colonial farmers and landowners. The sole blackhouse in Canada is the Lone Sheiling, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. It is a scale replica, a monument built by the descendants of Highland settlers in 1947. As Marjory Harper and Michael Vance have observed, "the thought of assembling the necessary stones in order to construct a remembrance of home could only have occurred to later generations with sufficient resources and leisure to indulge such sentimental inclinations."[19]

It is ironic that the common design of the typical British American farmhouse in Canada employed the same everyday eighteenth-century Classicism as the improved farmhouses of the new tenant farmers in the Scottish Highlands, whose financial success was directly linked to the eviction and subsequent emigration of many of the settlers. The formal origins of early farmhouses of Nova Scotia can, of course, be traced to New England. The architectural link was first noted in a 1962 article by pioneering historian Alan Gowan, in which he simply noted that, "if you come to houses . . . from Nova Scotia, they will remind you of something you have seen in Maine or Massachusetts."[20] More recently, Ennals and Holdsworth have also observed that "housing solutions conveyed to the region by early colonists or planters and Loyalists offered a powerful model which was quickly absorbed by later arrivals from Britain."[21]

In recent years, historians of early-modern Britain and North America, such as Bernard Bailyn, Nicholas Canny, and Jack P. Greene, have explored the possibility of a "British Atlantic World" that emerged in the seventeenth century and became established through the eighteenth century.[22] The historiography of this colonial cultural diaspora has involved interpretation of the socioeconomic themes of trade, migration, religion, ethnicity and social status from an Atlantic perspective.[23] Despite the physical and documentary evidence, the British Atlantic is not a familiar perspective in architectural history. Yet, the principal movement within this British Atlantic World was an outward ripple from London and the English Home Counties — the center of eighteenth-century British politics, economics and culture — to a federation of subnational groups spread throughout Britain and the British Atlantic.[24]

Nova Scotia's position within the British Atlantic World was reflected in newspapers such as the *Halifax Gazette* and the *Colonial Patriot*, which regularly covered stories from locations such as London, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dublin, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Williamsburg, Charleston, Bermuda and the Caribbean. At a smaller scale, the geographer James T. Lemon's description of the position of the average colonial farmer within eighteenth-century British North America applies to the situation found in Scottish Gaelic settlements in Nova Scotia:

[North] America was still a part of England and of Europe; in fact, from one perspective it was England and Europe on the move. Americans of European origin and descent organised themselves into households, local communities, and regional structures. At the household level, most lived much of their lives within nuclear families on dispersed farms largely held in freehold tenure . . . farmers were linked through political, religious, and economic institutions and social and cultural ties to England and to the larger Atlantic world.[25]

Classicism in the eighteenth-century Scottish Highlands represented oppression and imposition, but in North America it represented the freedom to choose fashion over tradition. These were new houses for a new life — as British colonial farmers and landowners. The change in social status from that of tenant, or more often subtenant, in Scotland, with no legal security of tenure, to that of independent landowner was a massive cultural and economic shift for the typical Scottish Gaelic settler, and it was the principal attraction of emigration to Nova Scotia. Given the freedoms of land ownership and relative wealth, Highland settlers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries chose in their architecture to identify themselves as members of contemporary British colonial society.

THE ROMANTIC HIGHLAND HOUSE

Within the context of early-nineteenth-century Europe's fascination with folk *kultur* and remote mountain peoples such as the *banditti* of Sicily, the national — both Scottish and British — phenomenon of Romantic Highlandism, and the popularity of the heroic figure of the Scottish Gael or Highlander, gained momentum with the historical novels of Sir Walter Scott.[26] Scott's novels had a huge impact on the public's perception of Scottish history — notably the Highland romps *Waverley*, 1814, and *Rob Roy*, 1817. He also stage-managed George IV's Highland-flavored visit to Edinburgh in 1822.

The reimagining of the Scottish Highlands as a place of ancient and noble wildness began with the romantic appeal of James Macpherson's *The Works of Ossian*, 1765. It inspired picturesque thatched Highland "rustic" retreats such as James Playfair's Lynedoch Cottage, 1790, Bridgeton, Perthshire. However, the indigenous Highland blackhouse was an object of horror to early British travel writers of the eighteenth century such as Thomas Pennant. Pennant offered his opinion of a blackhouse in *A Tour in Scotland*, 1776:

The Houses of the common people in these parts are shocking to humanity, formed of loose stones and covered with clods, which they term devots, or with heath, broom, or branches of fir; they look, at a distance, like so many black molehills . . . The most wretched hovels that can be imagined.[27]

Through the nineteenth century, the reconstruction of the Highlands and the Highlander as a heroic romantic figure was driven by the success of the Highland regiments serving overseas within the British Empire and through the example of Queen Victoria's Highland-fantasy existence at Balmoral Castle, Aberdeenshire. The Victorian era established a particular Highland shooting-estate form of Gothic Revival architecture centered upon the excessive use of antlers and rough-log porch columns. As elsewhere in Britain, the early twentieth century saw Scottish cultural activities turn to folk culture. The study of Scottish folk culture was led by the School of Scottish Studies at Edinburgh University. But a key independent figure in the collecting and study of Highland folk culture was Isabel Grant, founder of the Highland Folk Museum at Kingussie, Speyside, and author of the popular *Highland Folk Ways*, 1961.[28] As in the case of traditional songs, stories, rituals and material culture, to the city-dwelling folklorist, the blackhouse was an icon of traditional Highland culture to be sought out, documented and preserved.

Scottish architects of the British Vernacular Revival repeatedly sought to reintroduce the blackhouse form, materials and construction into contemporary house design.[29] One of the earliest examples was J.M. McClaren's Kirkton Cottages at Fortingall, Perthshire, 1889. The thatched, terraced cottages of shipping magnate Sir Donald Currie's model-estate workers' village also provided an eclectic mix of English and Scottish "vernacular" elements. Later, in the 1930s, German Scottish-folklorist Werner Kissling's Royal Institute of Architects in Scotland offered a more accurate reproduction of the blackhouse, based upon field studies (Kissling is better known for his ethnographic photographs of Highland crofting communities). In a competition entry, Kissling proposed a two-story cottage featuring traditional dry-stone walling, cruck frames, and thatch held with stone-weighted ropes **(FIG.6)**.

Even on the national and international stage, at the Empire Exhibition in Glasgow, 1938, the self-image that Scotland presented to the world was of a highly imaginative re-creation of a Highland village. The Clachan of Edinburgh-based architect Basil Spence, in the foreground of Thomas Tait's Tower of Empire, was an architectural fantasy of composite Scottish vernacular house elements that epitomized the national romanticizing of the Highlands **(FIG.7)**.[30]

Despite their academic interests in the folkways of the Highlands, the folklorists, artists and architects of the mid-twentieth century held a patrician's picturesque view of the Highlands as a "timeless" people and landscape.[31] But attempts by urban interest groups to revive the blackhouse as an icon of Highland culture failed to address the reality that for the ordinary Highlander in the twentieth century, the blackhouse had come to represent an enforced, dark, damp and dirty existence associated with endemic poverty. To Scottish Gaels the blackhouse was not a chosen romantic icon of Highland identity; it was a social embarrassment.

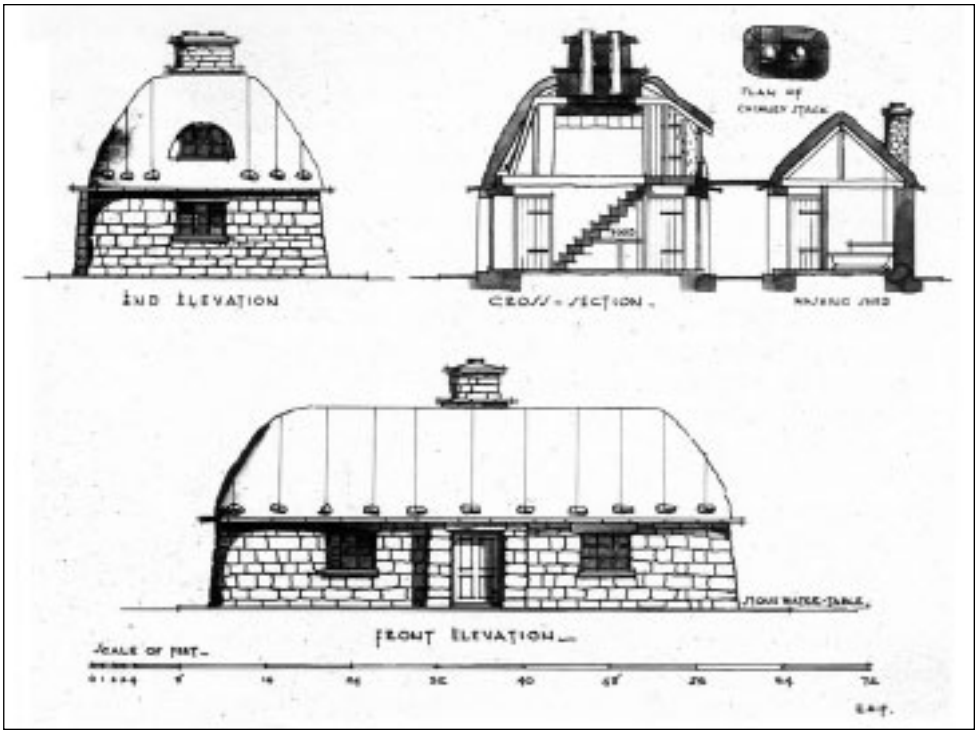

FIGURE 6. *Werner Kissling, design for a two-story cottage based upon a traditional Highland blackhouse. Competition entry, Royal Institute of Architects in Scotland, 1930s. Crown Copyright.*

FIGURE 7. *Basil Spence, The Clachan, Empire Exhibition. Glasgow, 1938. Courtesy of National Museum of Scotland.*

THE HIGHLAND HOUSE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

In 2001 Scotland launched its first national policy on architecture and planning, "Designing Places," intended "to help raise standards of urban and rural development." A key principle of this policy was that house design "should reflect its setting, local forms of building and materials."[32] The Scottish government's Directorate for the Built Environment stated that:

> *We believe that the way in which the new built environment can respond to issues of national and local identity and to our built heritage should form an important part of Scotland's policy on architecture. The question of identity and of addressing the need for distinct and appropriate character in place-making is one which is reinforced in [government-produced] Planning Advice Notes.*[33]

A total of 13,600 new homes were built in the Highlands from 1997 to 2007, and a further 12,600 new homes are

planned for the next ten years. Under national government guidelines, the design of all these new houses will be controlled directly by the Highland Council's 2001 Structure Plan, according to which "housing in the countryside of an appropriate location, scale, design and materials may be acceptable."[34] This position is further consolidated by the Highland Planning and Development Service's 2005 Design Statement: "design is a material planning consideration . . . it is therefore important that before a design solution is chosen careful analysis of the site and its surroundings is undertaken."[35]

The stipulation in the Highland Council's Structure Plan that housing design must be "of an appropriate location, scale, design and materials" has led to a narrow interpretation of the historic built environment based solely upon a visual survey of prevalent historic materials and forms. This method of determining the appropriateness of design is common to local government design guides throughout Britain. In Scotland, this patrician-picturesque understanding, which sees historic and new housing as a visual aesthetic not as a record and expression of a settled people, was promoted in the influential 1991 book *Tomorrow's Architectural Heritage*, endorsed by HRH Prince Charles. *Tomorrow's Architectural Heritage* sets out familiar "principles of good practice" for contemporary house design, including "Respect the Natural and Cultural Heritage: observe the time-honoured response to climate and landform in vernacular architecture; respect original style and detailing."[36]

This form of regional design control maintains an architectural aesthetic through the perpetuation of the physical characteristics of a region's extant historic buildings. In the Highlands, this emphasis has inevitably resulted in new housing that takes its architectural precedents from the region's predominantly eighteenth-century buildings. For example, West Drummond View is a six-bedroom house recently built near the village of Whitebridge, Inverness-shire, which references the improved cottage (FIG. 8). West Drummond View displays the "appropriate" visual qualities of a white-rendered symmetrical main elevation, rectangular plan, and gabled, slated roof with gabled roof dormers. Significantly, however, it fails to observe the underlying system of proportion that controlled the size and scale of its eighteenth-century predecessors.

Across Britain, the predominant style of new house building since the 1980s is what can be termed "neotraditional." The origins of this historicist architecture, which has come to dominate the British (English, Welsh and Scottish) built environment, can be traced to the backlash against what was perceived as the characterless "modern" architecture of the 1970s, and to the widespread introduction of historicist or tradition-informed design guides by regional planning authorities.[37] Current planning policy in the Scottish Highlands has resulted in a neotraditional domestic architecture that safeguards the memory of a specific time — the late Georgian period; and a specific people — principally, "incomer" Lowland and English commercial tenant farmers. This is an accurate response to the prevalent architectural character of the region's historic building stock, but it does not take into account the experiences, values and intentions of the occupants of those buildings. David Kolb has described the significance of buildings as components of a regional or national cultural identity in terms of the notion of the "lifeworld":

> *The lifeworld is that background of beliefs, values, and practices that provides a horizon of meaning for our*

FIGURE 8. *Newly built housing following design guide regulations. West Drummond View, Whitebridge, Inverness-shire, Central Highlands. Photo courtesy of Innes and Mackay, 2008.*

> *actions. It is a cultural construct that must be renewed and handed along to provide community identity. Buildings embody and help form the distinctive practices and values of a community.*[38]

The scenographic architecture generated by regionalist planning policies, as per the Scottish Highlands, has been dismissed by Juhani Pallasmaa as "sentimental provincialism." Eleftherios Pavlides has also criticized this form of "folkloric regionalism" as the "culturally counterproductive repetition of historic references in which government regulations preserve 'local character' by relying on the folkloric conception of type as representative of a region."[39] Pavlides cited Paul Oliver when voicing concern that a concentration on form and materials has separated buildings from their social contexts.[40] It is valid, therefore, to question the Scottish government's claim that current planning policy "reinforces local and Scottish identity."[41]

Historicism, the neotraditional, and a problematic relationship between tradition and modernity has, of course, not been exclusive to contemporary domestic architecture in late-twentieth-century Britain.[42] The search for symbolic affirmation of identity in the historic built environment is an international phenomenon. According to Paul Claval:

> *[a] crisis of modern ideologies is a major problem for the contemporary World, and more specifically for Western civilization, because it is there that the transformation of vernacular cultures has been the deepest and where national identities have played the most significant role. People react to such a situation and develop new strategies to preserve memory and create identity . . . giving new found importance to the role of heritage.*[43]

However, just as the cultural meaning of the blackhouse was misinterpreted in the 1930s, it is unclear how the present prescription of housing design, stylistically based upon the homes of eighteenth-century commercial farmers from Lowland Scotland and northern England, positively reinforces the identity of the Gaelic population of the Scottish Highlands in the twenty-first century. The example of Scottish planning confirms Nezar AlSayyad's view that arguments for the need to preserve "tradition" against the contemporary forces of globalization are generally weak — "invoked to preserve particularly national or regional agendas."[44]

The Scottish Highlands and Scottish Gaelic culture has produced two distinct architectural traditions: the indigenous blackhouse and the introduced improvement-era farmhouse and cottage. Each of these architectural traditions has a different set of "cultural determinants" and a different set of values placed upon them within Highland culture. Both traditions have historic validity, but that history, and its memory, must be fully understood if the Scottish government hopes to relate housing design to "local identity" in the Highlands. Similar concerns associated with the identification of Highland history with Highland identity and memory have been discussed by Ian Robertson and Tim Hall in the context of the region's commemorative monuments, observing that in the Scottish Highlands there is "a malleability to heritage and its relationship to landscape, that derives in part from the dialectical relationship between memory and identity."[45]

A complex and problematic relationship between the preservation and promotion of cultural identity and the consumption, production and reproduction of built heritage is not unique to Scotland. Peter Groote and Tialda Haartsen have argued that, as in Scotland, in Holland a "naive assumption" prevails that "that there is an object truth in the landscape." They find that Dutch heritage policy planners "have more problems with dealing with the inherent socially constructed and plural nature of heritage as well as regional identities than do agents in the lay and popular discourse."[46] Fabio Todeshini and Derek Japha found a similar willful misinterpretation of historic housing traditions in the politically driven reconstruction of cultural identities in the preservation and historic reconstruction of the multiethnic Bo-Kapp area of Cape Town, South Africa.[47]

Perhaps the most considered approach to the question of contemporary house design and Scottish Highland identity has been that of the award-winning, Isle of Skye-based, architectural practice of Dualchas Building Design (DBD).[48] DBD's houses have been lauded by the Scottish Government as "high quality modern designs which maintain a sense of place and support local identity." DBD's Tigh na Drochaide, Skye, was also featured in the government-sponsored, 2002, "Anatomy of a House" exhibition at the Lighthouse, Glasgow, which aimed to explore the historical precedents for contemporary housing design in Scotland. *Dualchas* is the Scottish Gaelic term for hereditary rights; DBD's stated design ethos is that, "by combining modern ideas and technology, with a respect for the past, we offer architect-designed solutions which complement our natural and built environments."[49] In the pursuit of this ethos, DBD have produced designs for houses based upon both the blackhouse and the eighteenth-century cottage.

Founded in 1996, one of DBD's early projects was the Barden House, Coll, Isle of Lewis, Outer Hebrides, 1998 **(FIG.9)**. The Barden house employs the form and external materials of the indigenous Highland blackhouse. The deliberate blackhouse references are significant, as the house was built for Dr. Alasdair Barden, a Scottish Nationalist Party activist. In its use of materials, the Barden House, of concrete-block construction clad in a dry-stone outer wall, typifies folkloric regionalism. It can also be argued that the house perpetuates the urban nostalgia for the Highlands of the 1930s. But DBD recognizes that the blackhouse is still seen by "many Gaels as an example of backwardness and poverty" at the same time that the pre-improvement blackhouse can be described as the environmentally adapted, indigenous home of the Highland middle class.[50]

FIGURE 9. *Dualchas Building Design, Barden House, Coll, Isle of Lewis, Outer Hebrides, 1998. Photo courtesy of Dualchas Building Design.*

In contrast, Druim Bà, Camuscross, Sleat, Isle of Skye, Inner Hebrides, 2004, is a single-story, timber-frame box rendered white with a slated gabled roof enclosing a centrally planned open living space. The whole is entirely glazed to the south-facing side with full-height panel doors opening onto a steel and oak verandah **(FIG.10)**. The design of the house takes advantage of the formal similarities between eighteenth-century everyday Classicism and Modernism to produce a synthesis of the Highland improved cottage and a twentieth-century design aesthetic. In their most recent work DBD have developed low-cost timber-framed, timber-clad kit-houses for low-income rural areas such as the crofting communities. DBD acknowledge the complexity of Highland history and its social contexts and continue to explore these themes in their work.

FIGURE 10. *Dualchas Building Design, Druim Ba, Camuscross, Isle of Skye, Inner Hebrides, 2004. Photo courtesy of Dualchas Building Design.*

THE DILEMMA OF HERITAGE

The historic domestic architecture of the Scottish Highlands falls into two distinct traditions: the indigenous blackhouse and the imposed eighteenth-century forms of the improved cottage and farmhouse. The cultural value of both traditions within Highland society has been misinterpreted by those keen to promote the Highlands, and Highlanders, as a keystone of Scottish identity. In the early to mid-twentieth century the blackhouse was championed by Scottish folklorists and Vernacular Revival architects as a symbol of Scottish Gaelic culture. This romantic interpretation of Highland culture failed to acknowledge that the blackhouse was viewed by Scottish Gaelic culture at that time as a symbol of poverty and backwardness.

Equally, current regional planning policy that defines appropriateness to Highland history and identity by references to the forms and materials of the region's predominantly eighteenth-century historic building stock cannot claim to represent Highland cultural identity. Planning policy needs to be clear whether new houses are intended to identify with the Highland region through its natural environment and the fabric of its historic buildings, or through its people. It should then recognize that their conclusions will not necessarily be the same.

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REFERENCE NOTES

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