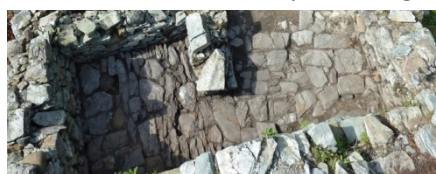


HIGH MORLAGGAN UPDATE

Now that the glorious sunshine/rain/hail/thunder (delete as appropriate, depending which days you came!) at Morlaggan becomes a distant memory, we thought we'd like to keep you up to date with what's been happening since.

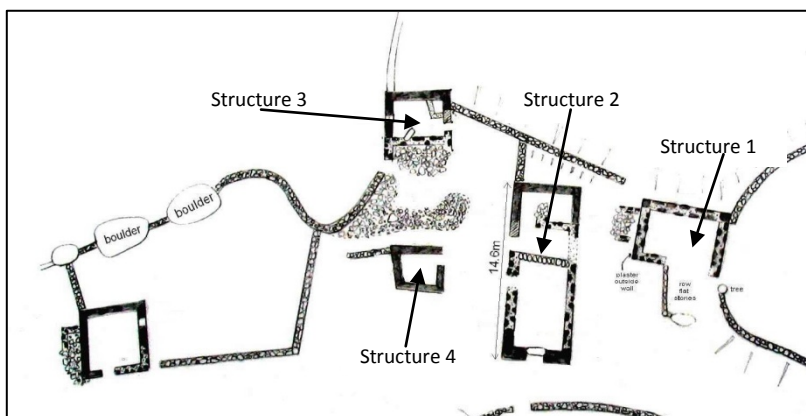
Digging finished in mid-May, and it's amazing how quickly the site has returned to its tranquil self. The trenches that need protecting have been covered with terram (a type of heavy-duty covering),



Structure 2

but all the beautiful cobbled surfaces have been left uncovered and look even better after they've been cleaned by the rain. It's impossible not to be amazed at the effort that must have gone into creating these floors and paths (not to mention the effort that's gone into clearing them again!).

A huge amount of work remains to be done in terms of analysing the finds, collating all the context records and plans, and writing reports, but most of that has now moved on to specialists to deal with. So, where are we up to so far?



Structure 1: This hadn't been excavated at all before this year, but we knew from an old postcard that it was the last house to be inhabited at High Morlaggan, around 1916. Accordingly, very little pottery etc. was found in it – obviously if they broke stuff, they threw it into the ruined building next door, i.e., Structure 2! However, a lovely hearth was uncovered, made of a mixture of bricks and stones. The position of the hearth (not against a wall), shows that the house had a 'hanging lum', which was a funnel-shaped structure built into the thatch to take the smoke out. We'd always wondered what the little 'annexe'



Ceramic egg

attached to this building was – well maybe the discovery of 2 ceramic eggs has answered that. These eggs are used to encourage chickens to lay, suggesting that it was used as a chicken shed! We also found a lovely clay pipe there – maybe someone lost it when they were feeding the chickens...



Pot from Structure 2

Structure 2: This building continues to excite us! When we dug in the west end of it in 2009, we were amazed by the quantity of broken pottery that came out of it (around 2,700 pieces), suggesting that it had been used as a 'midden' for rubbish after it stopped being lived in. Any thoughts that we'd got to the bottom of this layer last time were quickly dispelled as pottery continued to be found by the bucket-load this year. How different might our

memories of Morlaggan been had we decided not to dig in this building!

Below the 'midden' layer, a beautiful, stone-lined drain was uncovered, confirming what we'd always suspected – i.e., that this end of the building had been used to keep cows in. The drain would have taken whatever the cattle produced (!) out through a hole in the end wall. Several holes that had held wooden stakes were also found

corresponding to the positions of wooden stalls to keep the cows in. However, this is very definitely NOT the end of the story for Structure 2!

Below this, the archaeology starts to get complicated, and we'll leave the interpretation to Roddy for his report and talk, but suffice to say, we probably have at least three different hearths on different floor layers, representing different periods of use of the building. In addition to the large straight drain, there was another, smaller curved drain, apparently draining



Excavating Structure 2



Part of drain in Structure 2

ground water away from areas of the floor. A lovely 'post pad', which is a flat stone used to support a wooden post was also found. Star finds for Structure 2? Where do we start?? About 5,000 pieces of assorted pottery; at least 1 piece of 'older' pot (see below); a beautiful black bead (age/material still to be determined); a coin (unfortunately badly worn); *lots* of shoes; and no doubt lots of other personal favourites...

The upper (eastern) part of Structure 2 produced very little by way of finds, suggesting that it was actually in use until a later date, so wasn't being used as a rubbish tip. This end had been subdivided to make enclosures for animals, and the floors had been carefully cobbled to reduce the mud.



Planning floor in Structure 2

Structure 3: It's strange how it often seems to be the bits that you don't expect to be interesting that turn out to be fascinating.... We'd tended to assume that Structure 3 was once a longer building a bit like Structure 2, and that it had subsequently been shortened, with the eastern end being used for animals. But as is often the case, excavation can raise more questions than it answers! There are no signs of longer walls, or even any indication of where



Floor in Structure 3

they might have been, so maybe it was always relatively small. Excavation has revealed an incredibly complicated series of floors – at least 2 layers of cobbled floors, covered by about 3 layers of earth floors. A drain down the centre, as in Structure 2, would have been used to collect urine, though here this was associated with the extra detail of a wooden bucket, placed under the outflow to collect what drained out. Animal (and human??) urine was a valuable commodity used to ‘mordant’ wool before dyeing it, which helped it to retain the colour from the dye. The drain continued in a rough form before disappearing under Structure 4...



‘Urine bucket’ in Structure 3

We have to admit to always having referred to **Structure 4** as ‘the crappy little building’... Its walls were very poorly built, and not even at right-angles, but again, how wrong can you be?? Someone had invested a huge amount of effort into flooring this building, and had even laid stones along one wall that look like they might have been used for seating. Was this so that people could sit down while tending animals kept here? There’s no sign of any windows, so it’s unlikely (though not impossible) that anyone actually lived in it.



Floor of Structure 4

Platform area: Structure 4 sits on a raised platform area that looks distinctly ‘man-made’. After the last dig, we wondered if it might have been the site of an earlier, more substantial building. However, although several days’ digging established that it was an artificial platform, no evidence of earlier walls could be found. *However*, several bits of ‘older’ pot were recovered from it, so maybe it still has stories to tell...



Platform area

The well: What can we say?? Morlaggan has always presented two main mysteries – where did they get their water from, and why can’t we find a grain-drying kiln (they obviously cultivated a large area for growing crops)? With only a few days of digging left, whilst collecting bracken to soak up the mud



Morlaggan’s elusive well?

on the path, Roddy uncovered an unusual-looking pile of stones. Determined and frantic digging by Alistair revealed a wonderful semi-circular structure with a drain running out of it, which we believe must be the remains of a covered water source, probably once supplied by a spring. We’ve often wondered if the building of the West Highland Railway line disrupted the flow of water to Morlaggan, and maybe this discovery supports that idea – it seems likely that the water supply got cut off at some point. (We still haven’t found the kiln, but we’re sure there must be one somewhere!)

Structure 5: We’ll have to come clean and admit that we still don’t know what this is. Prior to planning and excavating it, suggestions from very well-informed people had varied from an animal enclosure to a high-status medieval building! It all just goes to show how little is really known about rural Scottish archaeology, and makes understanding sites like Morlaggan all the more important. This rectangular feature seems to be made up of a stone and earth bank that has had wooden stakes

embedded in it. The hearth continues to puzzle – it's in a very unusual position for a hearth in a building, but has been quite well-constructed. Excavation revealed no signs of accumulated turf that we might have expected from a collapsed turf building, and the strangely uneven floor looks like it's always been uneven! Think we're veering towards the idea of a sheep enclosure, maybe with a hearth for boiling the mixture that was used to daub sheep to keep pests off. (We were very unimpressed at someone's suggestion of a base for a polytunnel, though will try to stay open-minded!)



A use for the 'hearth' in Structure 5?

Pottery is definitely the trademark of High Morlaggan – we reckon there's probably been about another 7,000 pieces to add to the 2,700 found in 2009. These have gone to pottery expert George Haggarty in Edinburgh to analyse. He'll sort them into different types and be able to identify where and when some were made. We're not prepared to stick our necks out at this point, but although the vast majority of the pieces are likely to date to the 1800s and early 1900s, we were very excited by a few pieces possibly dating to the early 1700s, and even more excited by some tentatively dated to the late 1400s!! You'll have to wait to hear more....



Washed pottery heading for Edinburgh!

We also found lots of glass – some very small fragments, possibly of window glass, but also lots of almost intact bottles with enough writing on them to allow their contents and origins to be determined. We hope that the glass will also go to a specialist to look at.



Bottle from the well

Several clay pipes were found, some with lovely designs. Some of these seem to have been 'cutties', which were pipes with short stems, supposedly much easier to keep in your mouth whilst working!



A 'cutty'

Lots of intriguing pieces of metal came to light, most completely unidentifiable due to the amount of rust. A few of these have been sent to the National Museum in Edinburgh to be X-rayed, to see if we can get any clues about what's hiding under the rust.



Metal (and a shoe)...



A pollarded rowan tree

The story of Morlaggan isn't just about its buildings, but also about the land around it and how the people used that land. We hope to be able to get a few clues about that by looking at some of the older trees on the site. They might be able to give us some hints about hedges, and about trees that were cut to make hurdles or tools. A woodland historian has already been out to visit the site, and we're contemplating getting some information from tree rings (it's possible to do this from just a thin core of wood, without cutting the trees

down).

A huge **'THANK YOU!'** to *everyone* involved in Dig Morlaggan 2011, in whatever capacity!



May Day music at Morlaggan

We hope you enjoyed it. Look out for further updates, and put **Saturday 14th January** in your diary. There'll be things happening at the Village Hall in Arrochar all day, including an exhibition with some of the finds, talks for kids and adults by archaeologist Roddy Regan, a pottery identification session with expert George Haggarty (as well as the chance to get him to tell you a bit about any of your own favourite bits of pottery that you'd like to bring along!), kids' activities, music, food, quizzes and more.... A great way to get over those post-Christmas blues!

See you there,

Sue and Fiona