

## UHI Research Database pdf download summary

### Hardscrabble Heritage

Robertson, Iain James McPherson

*Published in:*  
Landscape Research

*Publication date:*  
2015

*The re-use license for this item is:*  
CC BY-NC-ND

*The Document Version you have downloaded here is:*  
Peer reviewed version

*The final published version is available direct from the publisher website at:*  
[10.1080/01426397.2015.1074986](https://doi.org/10.1080/01426397.2015.1074986)

### [Link to author version on UHI Research Database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Robertson, I. J. M. (2015). Hardscrabble Heritage: The ruined blackhouse and crofting landscape as heritage from below. *Landscape Research*, 40(8), 993-1009. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01426397.2015.1074986>

#### **General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the UHI Research Database are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights:

- 1) Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the UHI Research Database for the purpose of private study or research.
- 2) You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- 3) You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the UHI Research Database

#### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at [RO@uhi.ac.uk](mailto:RO@uhi.ac.uk) providing details; we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

**Hardscrabble Heritage: the ruined blackhouse and crofting landscape as heritage from below**

Iain James McPherson Robertson

University of the Highlands and Islands [iain.robertson@uhi.ac.uk](mailto:iain.robertson@uhi.ac.uk)

Forthcoming: *Landscape Research*, 40:8 (2015)

**ABSTRACT**

This paper explores a particular materialisation of the relationship between landscape, heritage and identity. Understood as heritage from below, the emphasis is on the role of non-elites in the constitutive processes of landscape and the place/space of the past in the present. The landscape at the heart of this study is that of the ruined blackhouse; an intrinsic part and mnemonic of crofting identity in the Scottish Highlands. These quotidian and mundane spaces are constituted by routine habits which, together with the material 'left-behinds' of a past way of life, comprise landmarks to place making from below and within. For members of the crofting community the blackhouse is understood and experienced as inheritance from the past and source of everyday affectual and sensual entanglements. This rural ruin is thus an intrinsic part of the crofting taskscape; the past drawn into the present as a form of cultural heritage from below.

## KEY WORDS

Landscape; heritage; identity; heritage from below; ruins; Scottish Highlands;  
blackhouse; crofting; affect; taskscape; mundane space.

*The window is nailed and boarded  
through which I saw the West  
and my love is at the Burn of Hallaig,  
a birch tree, (Maclean, Hallaig, Scottish Poetry Library)*

Hallaig is both a compelling poem by the Gaelic poet Sorley Maclean and a deserted township (settlement) on the south-east corner of the island of Raasay which lies between the Isle of Skye and the Scottish mainland. The township fell victim to the Clearances of the 1850s and has never been re-occupied. The ruins remain, and in the poem come to represent an association of nature and culture which gives rise to a hardscrabble heritage. Together, poem and the ruined form speak of and to the realisation of the ruin as significant cultural object. Moreover, this paper will demonstrate that the ruined blackhouse as manifestation of hardscrabble heritage effectively disrupts the representational nexus of the Authorised Heritage Discourse (Smith, 2006; hereafter AHD) and brings out a more complex and nebulous form of engagement that is formed in the sense, memory and imagination.

The use of the term 'hardscrabble' is inspired by Caitlin DeSilvey's (2007) paper 'Salvage memory: constellating histories on a hardscrabble homestead', but is used here to invoke something more than a form of near-subsistence farming. As found in the Outer Hebrides, crofting agriculture was always at or just above subsistence level and remains highly marginal. More often than not, it is sustained today as material manifestation of a personal and collective heritage. As such 'hardscrabble' signifies a landscape and environment of survival: a struggle to maintain a way of life and the sense of inheritance deriving from that struggle. The ruins with which Maclean opens

*Hallaig* were formerly houses and across the region the broken blackhouse has become one of the most ubiquitous manifestations of that struggle and sense of inheritance. This paper will reveal the ruined blackhouse as a dynamic and constitutive heritage landscape from below which acts as mental and material resource base for being in the world.

More obvious 20 years ago than today, the materiality of the ruin was a clear manifestation of Olwen Hufton's (1974) 'economy of makeshifts'; a term first coined to describe the survival strategies of the poor in eighteenth century France. Today the Hebridean landscape is a little more tidy and sanitised but in the 1990s the visitor would be confronted by decayed and recycled buildings. Homes (blackhouses) had been transformed into sheds and storehouses or seemingly left to moulder. Evident too were abandoned cars, busses and lorries, apparently dumped in disarray; windows nailed and boarded on houses that were dusty, dirty and surrounded by a sea of mud. How, I was forced to ask, can any of this be anyone's heritage? The answer is, of course, that it is and the reason for this can be found, in part at least, in David Harvey's (2013) assertion that for heritage studies, the landscape approach weakens the hegemony of the site, whilst for landscape scholars an enhanced understanding of the power of both tangible and intangible heritage has led to a parallel acknowledgement of the importance of the affective qualities of memories and mythologies. This paper asserts that the hardscrabble heritage which continues to adhere to the ruined blackhouse carries a powerful affective charge in the form of oral histories of land and identity. Using these histories reveals the power of memory manifest in

ruination to make and maintain both landscape and heritage from below. Further, in contrast to many of the recent culturally- derived studies of ruins (De Certeau & Giard, 1998; Edensor, 2005; Edensor, 2008; DeSilvey and Edensor, 2012), this paper deals not with structures and places that are somehow either residual or unproductive. Rather the ruins under consideration here often remain central to the operation of the crofting space-economy and landscape.

Land has been the central motif in crofting identity ever since crofting agriculture emerged in the Highlands of Scotland across the second half of the nineteenth century. Moreover, memories of rights to land, land holding and the loss of land form a central element of what remains a strongly oral culture notwithstanding the linguistic transition from Gaelic to English (Burnett, 2011; Craig, 1990; Hunter, 1976; Withers, 1988). To speak of a croft is to speak of an emotional and physical connection to land and (often) sea. The memories that lie at the heart of this paper are thus never simply of croft, house, land or sea; they are always all wrapped into one-another. The heritage which emerges is thus inevitably equally complex and rarely directly expressed. In total some 25 individual and family interviews have been conducted, as part of a wider project concerning the role that the family croft and attitudes towards, and beliefs and emotions surrounding the possession of land plays in local identity formation. The Lochs area of the island of Lewis and the North Harris estate on the island of Harris, were chosen as together they were felt to best represent the totality of crofting experience across the twentieth century. Furthermore, in order to help overcome the barriers presented by

words and transcripts, interviewees were offered the opportunity to be photographed with the material entity which most spoke to them of their 'croft'. Further, discussions also focussed on the presence or absence of blackhouse ruins on the croft and the role of these in any sense of inheritance from the past. Overall, both project and paper aim to make a contribution to ongoing key debates within critical heritage studies around vernacular landscapes and the heritage of the marginalised and excluded (Khabra, 2013, Waterton and Watson, 2013, Winter, 2012). Nevertheless, prior to turning to a detailed exploration of these memories and the heritage from below engendered by the broken blackhouse, this paper will first explore the relationship of heritage and the processes of ruination more generally.

### **Ruining Heritage**

There has been a close relationship between ruins, the process of ruination, landscape and heritage (DeSilvey and Edensor, 2013). The origins of this relationship lie with the medieval humanists. Even if they did not venerate the ruin in the way later intellectual movements came to do, from about the fourteenth century onwards we can see beginning to be built into attitudes towards the historic monument both "the distancing of history" and "the deliberated project of preservation" (Choay and Chastell, 2001, p. 20). This was a necessarily extended process as the proto-humanists of earlier periods, who shared some of these intellectual attributes, lacked the necessary distance to the antique world, which was also blocked off to them by its paganism. The later humanists, however, were able to read the ruins of the

classical civilisations as symbols “of a splendid past and tokens of true antiquity” (Lowenthal, 1985, pp. 148-149). Nevertheless, as Choay and Chastell assert it takes a further three centuries for the historic monument “to acquire its definitive name” (2001, p. 27).

Thus the ruin as cultural object and signifier makes its first appearance in the Renaissance, but it is with the Romantics and the Picturesque that we encounter it at its most potent, and where it is present in all forms of artistic representation including garden design. According to Picturesque principles (Lowenthal, 1985) the impact of the process of ageing on an abandoned building, the moss, lichen and other natural invaders, brought richness and variety of tone. Time and decay removed the visible reminders of the building process and drew the artists’ eye. As Gilpin asserted, “It is time alone, which meliorates the ruin, which gives it perfect beauty and brings it ... to a state of nature” (William Gilpin quoted in Lowenthal, 1985, p. 159). This need to venerate time extended to the creation of purpose-built ruins for landowners keen to enhance both the aesthetic and economic value of their estate.

One of the major consequences of this cultural shift was that a concern for the ruin and our responses to the processes of ruination took a permanently central place in heritage preservation and conservation movements (Lowenthal, 1985; Hewison, 1987). This notwithstanding, cultural attitudes to ruins reveal the complexity and ambiguity that has always lain at the heart of our sense of inheritance from the past and the associated growth of the heritage industry and the AHD - that manufacture and manipulation of the past in the present which admits and naturalises selected aspects of the



past into the heritage canon and thereby serves to obscure “the ‘work’ that ‘heritage’ ‘does’ as a social and cultural practice” (Smith, 2006, pp. 4-11). In their authorised guise ruins are most often the stuff of heritage tourism (Waterton, 2012). The rural-historic ruin is used to locate and express nostalgia for a lost past and foreground regressive rather than resistant engagements (Watson, 2012). Thus, and as articulated by the Ruin Memories collective (online n.d.), the heritage ruin “is often staged, neat and picturesque; providing visitors with a disciplined and purified space”. Such spaces are clearly evident in the Outer Hebrides and here we find also the contemporary manifestations of the National Trust for Scotland’s (largely unsuccessful) attempts in the 1930s to preserve a blackhouse as a piece of indigenous craftsmanship that spoke of the Highlands and the nation (Lorimer 1999).

It is the view taken here, however, that the rural-historic ruined blackhouse is more often the obverse of Smith’s AHD, with the way in which has been primarily utilised across much of the last half of the twentieth century testifying to the fact that non-elites have an active, co-constitutive role in landscape making and maintaining. Moreover, unmediated ruins more generally challenge the celebration of a heritage of decline and are in fact more expressive of landscapes of “going forward” (Dale and Burrell, 2011, p. 110), for, as Andrew Benjamin suggests, “it is not the ruin of form, but the ruin that forms” (Benjamin, 2000; p. 152). Indeed, as DeSilvey (2007) powerfully reminds us “every object left to rot in a dank shed or an airless attic once occupied a place in an active web of social and material relations ...

our identities are tangled up in our relations with the things we surround ourselves with” (p. 403; p. 405). Complex and multi-faceted, ruins manifest a form of time-space compression; whilst they are present in the present, they are also simultaneously of the past. Thus, in the unmediated blackhouse we find the materialisation of what Smith recognises as “subaltern and dissenting heritage discourses” (2006, p. 35) but which is more persuasively understood as a heritage from below.

To view the processes of ruination in this way, as both complex and inherently conflictual, gives rise to the parallel and powerful realisation that the cultural power of ruins is far from fixed (Edensor, 2005; Edensor, 2008; De Silvey and Edensor, 2012). This suggests, moreover, that the relationship between landscape, heritage and ruination is significantly more fluid and engaged than hitherto imagined. “In experiencing a heritage ‘site’”, Crouch suggests (2010 p. 62), “we engage in a process of spacing, with its openness to possibility, disruption, complexity, vibrancy and liveliness. ... Heritage is situated in the expression and poetics of spacing: apprehended as constituted in a flirtatious mode: contingent, sensual, anxious and awkward”. What this finally involves is “a far more multiple, nebulous and imaginative sense of memory” (Edensor, 2005, p. 883) than that of the Authorised Heritage Discourse.

Notions of spacing found in visual representations of heritage ‘sites’ lie at the heart of the idea of heritage from below. This also draws on, as Helgadottir (2011) reveals in her study of the Icelandic sweater, the interaction and dynamism of the relations between heritage as projected and

as ongoing and constantly in renewal. Perspectives such as Helgadottir's demonstrate quite clearly that the debate which understood the twentieth century rise of heritage from either a wholly pessimistic (Hewison, 1987; Lowenthal, 1985) or significantly more optimistic perspective (Samuel, 1994), is now somewhat bypassed. Nevertheless, the progress which has allowed Bella Dicks (2000) and Laurajane Smith (2006) to take a far more nuanced view of the benefits, consequences and implications of the deployment of the past in the present has remained regrettably attenuated in some vital areas. One such area has been the failure to recognise that there exists a layer and expression of heritage that offers the possibility of alternative constructions of the past to that of the hegemonic. Here characterised as heritage from below, it is equally important to acknowledge that expression of counter-hegemonic heritage is more often latent than realised and is inevitably shot through with dissonance (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996; Johnson, 2013).

This notwithstanding, in expressions of heritage from below the absence of the creation of monuments and other outward mnemonics offers up an un-heralded and non-celebratory version of the past in the present, as found, perhaps, in the shack settlements of Western Australia (Jones and Selwood, 2012). This is something of an exception, however, as heritage studies in general has failed to pay sufficient attention to the (relatively mundane) home as site of memory work. Nevertheless as Buciek and Juul's (2008) exploration of the house in the context of the 'contribution of immigrants to the nation-building process' (p. 107) in Denmark reveals, houses, together with the artefactual memories they embody, are one of the

most important loci for the performing of heritage from below (Setten, 2012).

In these domestic spaces, the heritage is brought into being by embodied practice and the performed repetition of everyday tasks. In this view, moreover, the past in the present, and cultural heritage especially, is always grasped multi-sensually, with individuals engaging in a 'spatial dance' between past and present. Working through illusive and often ephemeral "sights, sounds and atmospheres", what emerges are "involuntary memories" (Edensor, 2008, p. 325) shaped by the modalities of emotions and affect.

Domestic spaces – and ruined domestic spaces - routine material culture and the mundane, are thus prime sites of everyday memory work and therefore of a sense of heritage expressed from below. It is to an exploration of the sense of local identity and heritage found in the makeshift memories of the ruined blackhouse andcrofting landscape that we now must turn.

### **The broken blackhouse as heritage landscape**

#### **INSERT FIGURE ONE HERE**

In its origins, the blackhouse was almost certainly the regional and vernacular architectural (and, indeed, social and cultural) response to the agricultural transformation of the Highlands from the mid-18th through to the mid-19th centuries. As Figure one demonstrates, the blackhouse (*tigh dubh*) was generally oblong in shape, single-storey, with few doors or windows. Even into the twentieth century the central hearth without chimney was retained although many had moved to a chimney in the gable end. Walling comprised "a double skin of large, undressed but reasonably regular stones ... [with] ...

the inner gap filled in with soil and rubble” (Thompson, 1984, pp. 52-53).

Thatching used whichever most suitable material was most readily available, and sat on the scarce and, therefore, highly valuable roofing timbers. Of equal practical and emotional worth was the granite door lintel. Internally, the floor was “mainly earthen” (Thompson, 1984, p. 53) although flagstones were popular for the living areas. Of greatest significance was the fact that livestock were over-wintered indoors, with little by way of internal division between the two sets of living quarters.

A final, crucial factor affecting the nature of the blackhouse is that, prior to the Crofters Act of 1886 it was widely understood as having an existence that verged on the transitory. In the words of one of the most influential public historians of the crofting way of life

For the first 150 years of crofting land tenure, the crofters held their land on a year-to-year basis without any form of security. They were people without rights and were subject to eviction at short notice at the whim of inconsiderate landlords or their tyrannical factors ... Crofters could not ... build substantial costly houses as they might be evicted at short notice ... They had to be content with homes of simple construction built by their own hands from local materials ... As a favour they were sometimes allowed to carry their roof timbers away with them when evicted (Angus Macleod quoted in Hirst, 2008, p. 23)

The Crofters Act of 1886 brought radical change to many aspects of Highland society, not least to the nature of the house. With security of tenure came security of housing and the concomitant desire to improve living standards. Ultimately it was this desire, accompanied by a drive for enhanced health and hygiene in the Highlands, that was to give rise to the new form of Hebridean dwelling-place – the *tigh geal*, or ‘white house’ (Burnett, 2011).

In this transition we therefore encounter the first of two forms of blackhouse ruination: abandonment of the form in the face of local and national social welfare initiatives and the full integration of the Highlands into the national space-economy occasioned by advancing commercialisation and improved communications (Burnett, 2011). Whilst this form of ruination was not always undertaken willingly, it was at least undertaken from within the crofting tenantry. In the second form, ruination, came earlier and was considerably more forced and was a central aspect of that wider process we have come to call the Highland Clearances. As captured variously by David Craig (1990, p. 8, & p. 26):

The eviction was carried out forcibly throughout the township of Suishinish with the usual cruelty by the land officers of Lord Macdonald’s estate. The milk basins being poured outside and the cottages wrecked .... She remembered being woken by her mother and taken to the window, and she looked out into the darkness and saw a red glow in the hills opposite. She asked what it was, and her mother said in a grim voice, ‘They are

putting fire to Lettaidh ... my MacKinnon relatives were evicted from Morsaig ... in the early 1850s. The place was burnt while all the men were away at the fishing.

Stories such as these reappear constantly in individual and collective memory. According to CM, his family moved four times in approximately 30 years. They were first cleared to make room for a sheep farm but, once that had failed, his grandmother returned to the same blackhouse she had left 32 years previously.<sup>1</sup>

One of the central characters in these intensely local political dramas was the factor. This 'on-the-ground' middleman has been much vilified in the literature (see for example, Hunter 1976) but their role has only most recently been subject to systematic and rigorous examination (Richards and Tindley, 2012; Tindley 2012; Tindley and Richards, 2012). This, however, should not blind us to the undoubted power commanded by these figures and the abuse with which some of them treated their position, preserved, as it can be, in popular memory. This is best exemplified in *Children of the Black House* (Ferguson, 2003). This book is neither oral history nor public history, or, strictly speaking, history from below, although it combines elements of all three, alongside something of the approach of the ethnographer. What emerges from this is an intensely personal rendition and recollection of a way of life and belief system as held within the Gaelic community. One of the many stories woven into this narrative reaches back to the 1860s and captures something of the power of the Factor, in this case Donald Munro Factor to Sir James Matheson the then owner of the island of Lewis.

As soon as the officials were sighted approaching the outskirts of the Ard, children scurried from door to door, informing everybody who cared to listen that the 'Black Munro' was coming to town! Standing in the open doorways of the black-houses, they called in stage whispers, 'Tha an Rothach Dubh a'tighinn gu baile!' and watched fully grown adults tremble ... the Factor delivered his notices to four tenants ... Followed breathlessly by his two companions, he then rode ... until he reached Ceanna Loch, the outermost cluster of houses in the township ... One of his assistants had run forward to ... the hill overlooking Ceanna Loch and came back to report to his master that ... four cottars had built *bothans* on the common. Munro was incensed ... With his jaw hardened, he led the mare and his assistants to No. 2, and like a kestrel swooping on a sparrow, descended on the tenant ... As punishment ... Munro reduced the area of Iain Ruadh's croft from four to three and a half acres. (Ferguson 2003, 22)

In the crofting economy of makeshifts a reduction of half an acre could have been enough to push that particular holding (and the families it supported) below subsistence level and therefore the blackhouse towards ruination.



Thus one strand of the blackhouse discourse is that of a vernacular response to local environmental and socio-cultural conditions. Such conditions were, of course, to lead to its ruination and restoration as domestic form. Indeed, it is important to keep at the forefront of any discussion the fact that the blackhouse was always home and this it is as vernacular and quotidian house and home that it effects (and affects) much of its memory work. And yet, in virtually the only paper to focus wholly on the blackhouse as form of heritage Hayden Lorimer (1999) concentrates on linking the pioneering deployment of the blackhouse as the locale for a folk museum and the wildly-popular re-creation of the form as part of the 1938 Glasgow Empire Exhibition. For Lorimer in these actions the blackhouse ceases to be any blackhouse and becomes *the* (definite article) blackhouse – an icon of national remembrance. It is important not to forget, moreover, that our ongoing encounter with the blackhouse landscape is far more often as ruin than as restored national heritage icon. Similarly, blackhouses that have been preserved and reconstructed, have been subject to the usual questions of authenticity – both from within the Hebridean community and amongst institutions of the Authorised Heritage Discourse - and these representations are now firmly fixed stops on the tourist trail (Historic Scotland, n.d.; Gibson, 2006).

The arresting of decay and the expunging of extraneous matter has always been the imperative of modern heritage management and is clearly evident in the Outer Hebrides. The restored blackhouses at Garrannan (Garrannan, n.d.), for instance, offer accommodation as well as the museum

'experience', whilst at Arnol (Historic Scotland, n.d.) the 'offer' is confined to ruins and the reconstructed blackhouse as museum. In both instances the 'display' of these ruins and reconstructions involves interpretation, the neatly clipped grassy sward held in place by reinforcement mesh, and the turf-topped stone wall of the authorised heritage experience (see Figure Two). This can be vividly contrasted with the unmediated ruin (see Figure One) in which can be found the extraneous matter, the plants, debris and dirt otherwise either excluded from the authorised blackhouse or, if present, admitted only as part of attempts to anchor the simulacra in time and locate it within tropes of perceived authenticity. But even here can be found the 'ghosts in the machine' of the Authorised Heritage Discourse. In this 'below-stairs' realm reside the unexpected memories and un-looked-for encounters that will always intervene to destabilise attempts at authorised and hegemonic memory work (Edensor, 2005). The Arnol blackhouse complex (Historic Scotland, n.d.; Visit Scotland, n.d.) is the most visited site on the island of Lewis. Less so today, but certainly in the very recent past, the approach to and route away from this site passed through a completely un-restored makeshift landscape of abandoned croft houses and re-worked and ruined blackhouses. The Arnol setting, therefore, and the route in and out constantly challenges the romanticised, heritage experience.

**INSERT FIGURE TWO HERE**

What this further suggests is that the blackhouse heritage discourse can take another, perhaps more powerful form. It is certainly a form that

adopts aspects of counter-hegemonic discourses. By returning the blackhouse to its origins within crofting and the crofting community this additionally foregrounds the heritage of the marginalised and excluded. It is also important to recognise that blackhouse building took place well into the twentieth with at least two interviewees suggesting that as their families had been given the opportunity to re-settle previously cleared sites their first action was to build new blackhouses<sup>2</sup>.

Additionally, a significant number of interviewees revealed a strong reluctance of elderly relatives to leave the blackhouse and, perhaps inadvertently, their own reluctance to wholly abandon it<sup>3</sup>. Nevertheless it would be infelicitous to ignore the fact that in many instances the traditional house form was abandoned and lost. According to DM in her township at its most populous (the first two decades of the twentieth century) “there were over 500 people in the village ... And there were 33 thatched houses ... There’s not one today. There’s even very few of their ruins left”<sup>4</sup>. Whilst there may be an element of regret for the loss of powerful mnemonics of a passed way of life in these statements and memories, there is equally little evidence of nostalgia or romanticising sentiment. What, indeed, serves further to locate such views and the awareness of the ruination of the blackhouse as expression of heritage from below can be found in another strand of the *Children of the Black House* narrative. Tuberculosis, then known as the *Caitheamh* (the Wasting) was a major cause of early mortality in the Gaelic population in the early decades of the twentieth century. In Port Mholair one in three families were affected and many blackhouses were abandoned as a

consequence. “Successive generations of parents have forbidden their children, to enter the ruins or play in their vicinity. Indeed, until this day, nobody has removed any of the stones not disturbed the sites in any way. They remain as reminders” (Ferguson 2003, p. 247) and testimony to the power of a sense of inheritance from the past on an island where, up until comparatively recently, building materials were scarce. Most significantly, there has been no attempt at overt memorialisation here; no interpretive panels. The memory traces performed by and embodied in the ruined form generate a sense of inheritance from the past that is the antithesis of the romanticised nostalgia generated by the Authorised blackhouse reconstruction.

These memory traces are also as much a material resource as they are a mental resource. Indeed, this is perhaps the single most important indicator of the ruin as heritage from below. The crofting way of life has been clearly based upon heterogeneous associations of human and non-human. In that it offered living space to both human and animals the blackhouse was the material manifestation of these associations. With the withdrawal of the human from the house in many instances it has become solely shelter for the croft’s animals. Grants are available to construct new barns but many prefer the blackhouse byre. DM’s family only moved once her great-grandmother had died. After a respectful period it was converted to stabling. Similarly, KJM’s ‘granny’ refused to move out of the backhouse when his uncles moved into the present house in 1954. Again after the grandmother’s death the old house ultimately became a byre. “And when you went in there to milk the cow or

feed the cows it was beautiful and warm. When I go into my byre now to feed the cows it's freezing cold in there"<sup>5</sup>.

It is this intense connection between past generations and quotidian practicalities which frames the power of the ruin as heritage.

*Respondent* - I have got another croft down the other side of the village.

*Question* - And that is another relative's croft, is it?

*R* - That was my grandfather, my father's father's croft.

*Q* - Does anybody live on it?

*R* - No.

*Q* - And yet you've still kept the croft.

*R* - Yes.

*Q* - So would that be out of anything other than it will help me make a living, or was it more than that?

*R* - It was more than that, yes.

*Q* - And are you able to say what more than that?

*R* - Just like I said before, generations of our people stayed there.

*Q* - Yes. You feel it in here. [thumps chest]

*R* - Aye ... The old house is falling down. Every single person that's related to me wants me to knock it down, get it together.

And I have been resisting.<sup>6</sup>

The blackhouse remains visible in the crofting landscape as a ghostly presence and power precisely because of this individual and collective sense of inheritance from the past. As KRM relates,

the land itself is telling us so much. There are, you know, things you don't see that are so obvious when they are pointed out to you ... but when someone points out the boundaries, points out old houses, you realise that these places were attached to them and they were important to them ... the history of these peoples embedded in the land here<sup>7</sup>

And by extension, "the history of these peoples embedded in" the ruin also. It is effectively impossible to separate out the ruin from all other affective influences which shape individuals' sense of self.

Revealed here, therefore are significant proactive rather than regressive engagements with the past and artefacts from the past. It is equally important to be aware, however, that the affectual jolt of the broken blackhouse is not wholly affirmative. Interviewees reported tensions within families around who should inherit croft, land and house. In one such instance AC was unable to obtain a house on the family croft (on his mother's side) and was living on a neighbouring one. He had also inherited a croft from his father's side of the family but felt much less attached to this as it "was bare, it had nothing on it ... nothing attached to it ... no sheep ... my grandfather was a fisherman and, of course, there was no boat ... it had all rotted." All there was was a "tumble-down" house and yet

I did feel immediately that I should renovate the house, which I did ... I spent a year or more of my own labour

working on it ... I took all my materials in by boat and carried all the stuff up to the house. I just felt I just felt that if I don't do it it's going to go, the house is going to just fall totally into rack and ruin and then I've lost all connection with the croft and land ... I didn't want that. There was furniture in there and things which I looked after. There were some nice chairs and tables. Just a connection.<sup>8</sup>

This connection is made to very distinct and local times and spaces, in which the ruin plays a full part and generates deep sensual and affective jolts. One interviewee characterised this connection as with his "patch" and summarised it in a compelling way:

*Question* - What is that patch made up of? Break it down, if you can, into its bits and pieces. What's it made up of? Is it made up of people? Is it made up of...?

*Respondent* - Well, it was. Probably made up of people that were a part of it. But there's no people now, really. People, the land, the house, the sheep, the dogs. Everything.

*Q* - Yeah. The sea?

*R* - The sea, the hills. Well, the land, I suppose the hills, then.<sup>9</sup>

In using the blackhouse in whatever way people choose they are performing and embodying memory and drawing it into the present. In this revisiting and thus refiguring of memory time and space are also transformed

performatively. In each performance of the blackhouse landscape the activities this involves become tangled up with the individual's ideas and a new meaning and remembering emerges. If heritage is involved, and it emphatically is, then it is made anew by this meshing of ideas and activities. Following Crouch (2003), memory is best understood as less performed than it is in performance. In that these blackhouses speak to the individual of family, home and that which is passed, this heritage from below assists in the ongoing making and maintaining of local identity. Through their bodies current-day crofters expressively perform who they are by drawing on a near-subliminal sense of inheritance from the past. What is further revealed here is feeling and remembering through doing and the remembering affects the doing. Quotidian inheritances from the past such as this produces fluid hybridities exemplified in the way individuals do, discover and speak the ruined blackhouse heritage landscape into being.

### **Conclusions: blackhouse memories and landscape heritage**

This paper has taken a particular rural landscape of ruination as its focus. In part this has been a deliberate attempt to write against the grain of virtually all the most recent literature on ruins which tend to focus on the post-industrial city (DeSilvey and Edensor, 2013). This paper goes further too in identifying the ruin as mnemonic (from within) of a very particular form of heritage and in drawing on oral histories and both individual and collective memory to claim the broken blackhouse as expression of heritage from



below. In so doing, close attention has been paid to the affective and sensual experiences these particular ruins are associated with and generate.

In this view the past in the present is understood as always grasped multi-sensually, with individuals engaging in a 'spatial dance' between past and present. Clearance and crofting taskscapes and the ruins they have engendered, speak of a symbiotic relationship between order and disorder; past and present. As suggested by Edensor (2008), order is the rhythm of regulated and controlled regimes; whilst disorder takes the form of Scott's (1990) hidden transcripts. This is obviously the case for the blackhouse landscape, but there is an additional layering of order/disorder present here. This is of the order imposed through the creation of the crofting way of life and the Clearances, in turn haunting and working through present-day spatial arrangements and out of which the process of ruination emerged. But also lurking here are spectres of past disorderly behaviour: the action of crofters and cottars in seizing and recovering land to which they believed they were entitled by the fact that it had been held by their ancestors (Robertson, 2013).

This belief is clearly influential in the decisions of some to retain the ruin, rather than completely remove it. The connection to family and land thereby materialised in the ruin manifests both individual and collective cultural heritage but at the same time, the blackhouse can fulfil an important role in an everyday life that is multi-sensual and involving heterogeneous associations of humans and animals, if used as animal shelter or storehouse. Thus, for present-day members of the crofting community the blackhouse is understood and experienced as both heritage and everyday artefact, which, encountered in a bodily way, is used to inform memory. Taken together, and

following the thinking of John Urry (2002), we might successfully reconfigure these spaces as 'sense-scapes', and understand these present-day engagements with the ruin as 'the classically phenomenological manoeuvre of placing the self in the body and embedding the body in landscape' (Wylie, 2005, 240).

In these sense-scapes the dirt and the dust; the rusting corrugated iron roof; old plastic sacks and all other material deposited in the blackhouse ruin is latently practical. Disruption emerges from such formations and offers the possibility of new functions and landmarks to memory. This possibility has consistently and constantly been taken up by those living on and aspiring to live on the croft. To those who take up the offer, however, and to the student of the heritage thereby created, the memory work thereby performed can defy overt articulation. This is because, as DeSilvey (2007) emphasises, these discarded and devalued material 'left-behinds' are too fragile and marginal to offer up their stories directly. This everyday artefact, then, is far from irrelevant, wholly of the past, or excluded from heritage discourses. Instead, the ruined blackhouse insistently, urgently and constantly demands attention. It materialises a hardscrabble heritage – an accidental archive, repository and mnemonic of a heritage often hidden from plain sight but preserving a memory of minor events and everyday decisions. The heritage represented by the blackhouse ruin is one that is "lived with as an existential and 'thrown' condition" offering involuntary modes of remembering; impossible therefore, to either forget or ignore (Olson n.d n.p.).

The mundane spaces here claimed for heritage from below are constituted by routines, habits and seemingly unreflexive practices. In these responsive domains people conduct their everyday business perhaps disconnected from the stuff of the past and that is even more likely where the blackhouse form has been wholly eradicated. Nevertheless in that individuals often regret and mourn eradication and, as a form of temporal collage, the past may well be said to haunt the present by its absence (Edensor, 2005; Edensor, 2008). This, however, is a rather clumsy way of seeing this relationship as undeniably continuity does not deny change but each moves to a different rhythm. Adaption and transformation of mundane space is never total, and disposal need ever be only partial. What is left behind can serve as landmark to place making from below and within.

Where the broken blackhouse remains present it does so as an entity performed through, in which everyday bodily engagements speak of, perform tasks and conjure up affective jolts. Where the ruin is no longer physically present, their absence then speaks of a form of ghostly haunting. Thus present-day crofting practices and tasks carry with them ghostly echoes and memories of previous and passed practices and tasks.

In performing tasks and memory in this hardscrabble landscape, crofters exemplify the claim made by Jones and Garde-Hansen that people's immersion in familiar landscapes is not simply "between current body and current space", but is also "temporal and memorial as well as performative, embodied and spatial" (Jones and Garde-Hansen, 2012, p. 10; Jones, 2011, p. 879). From this flows the recasting of landscape as taskscape, in which the

task (Ingold, 1993), is both experienced as a muscular engagement in the present and draws on the past in the form of experience and memory. The blackhouse as storage and milking shed is both locus for present-day muscular performances and memory site of both past muscular engagements and family. In this reading, therefore, landscape – and heritage landscape in particular – is always in the process of becoming and our grasping of it is always to perform memory and remembrance as fundamental aspects of this process “intimately entwined with space, affect, emotion, imagination and identity” (Jones and Garde-Hansen 2011, p. 1). Sedimented into and physically inscribed on place, the perpetual reproduction of routines, times and materiality binds past crofting and clearance taskscapes into the present.

Blackhouse ruins almost wherever and whenever they are found are metonyms for those elements of the crofting way of life that are now solely phantasmagorical, but these non-exorcised ghosts are neither suppressed nor diminished. In the rural blackhouse landscape the meaning and purpose of these ruins and the process of ruination is sensed, known and understood as a mundane form of inheritance from the past that informs identity. As has been very well attested to, on the national scale, landscape encounters are both iconographic and emotional; shaping geographies of identification (Graham, 1998; Graham, Ashworth and Tunbridge, 2000; Tolia-Kelly 2013). It is surely no different, as this paper has demonstrated, for everyday and mundane landscapes and their relationship to local identity. Crofting memory and place, if perhaps not in harmony, work together to make and maintain an affective sense of inheritance from below to shape localised identities.

Further, contained within the 'moral orders' of landscapes are the bases to both empowerment and alienation, and therefore issues of power. Since at least the 1886 Crofters Act and most tellingly after World War One, relations of power in the Highlands, and in the Outer Hebrides in particular, have been in flux. Increasingly, the power of landlordism has been challenged, checked and ultimately near-emasculated. The signifiers of this are, successively: the croft houses built and occupied as a direct consequence of the land seizures of the 1920s; the staging of the play (McGrath, 1973) *The Cheviot, The Stag and The Black Black Oil*, coupled with the publication of James Hunter's *The Making of the Crofting Community* (1976); the creation, in the 1990s, of memorials to the land disturbances; and most contemporaneously, the land buyout movement which is transferring large tracts of the Outer Hebrides from private to community ownership. Taken together this has undoubtedly had a transformative impact on peoples' everyday emotional encounters with their landscape.

As site of habitation from which embodied experiences of disorder would have been launched and out of which clearance would have registered most forcefully, the blackhouse has become an icon of alienation and cultural transformation. As mnemonic of a 'world we have lost' only in their Authorised Heritage form does the ruin evoke only predictable nostalgia. More routinely, blackhouse ghosts are active, dynamic and constitutive elements of being in the world; essentially embedded in everyday habitual tasks. Blackhouse ruins are an intrinsic part of the habitual realm of the crofting taskscape within which people carry out quotidian practices

associated with dwelling, working and leisure. Component of and resource for everyday existence, the practical nature of their utility draws the blackhouse into the present replete with the ghostly hauntings of memories, stories, emotions and heterogeneous associations which together comprise a powerful rendering of a heritage from below which emerges from a situated and contextual way of knowing.

#### REFERENCE LIST

- Benjamin, A. E. (2000). *Architectural Philosophy*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Burnett, J. A. (2011). *The Making of the Modern Scottish Highlands, 1939-1965: Withstanding the colossus of advancing materialism*. Dublin: Four Courts Press.
- Buciek, K. & Juul, K. (2008). 'We are here, yet we are not here': The heritage of excluded groups. In B. J. Graham, & P. Howard, (Eds.). *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*. (pp. 105-124). London: Ashgate.
- Craig, D. (1990). *On the Crofters Trail*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Choay, F. and A. Chastel. (2001). *The Invention of the Historic Monument*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Crouch, D. (2003). Spacing, performing, and becoming: tangles in the mundane. *Environment and Planning A*, 35(11), 1945-1960.

- Crouch, D. (2010). The perpetual performance and emergence of heritage. In Waterton, E. & Watson, S. (Eds.). *Culture, Heritage and Representation*. (pp. 57-74). London: Ashgate.
- Dale, K., & Burrell, G. (2011). Disturbing structure: Reading the ruins. *Culture and Organization*, 17(2), 107-121.
- de Certeau, M., & Giard, L. (1998). Ghosts in the city. *The practice of everyday life*, 2, 133-143.
- DeSilvey, C. (2006). Observed decay: telling stories with mutable thing., *Journal of Material Culture*, 11.3, 318-338.
- DeSilvey, C. (2007). Salvage memory: constellating material histories on a hardscrabble homestead. *Cultural Geographies*, 14.3, 401-424.
- DeSilvey, C., & Edensor, T. (2013). Reckoning with ruins. *Progress in Human Geography*, 37(4), 465-485.
- Dicks, B. (2000). *Heritage, Place and Community*. Cardiff: Cardiff University Press.
- Edensor, T. (2005a). The ghosts of industrial ruins: ordering and disordering memory in excessive space. *Environment and Planning D*, 23.6, 829-849.
- Edensor, T. (2005b). *Industrial Ruins: Space, aesthetics and materiality*. London: Berg Publishers.
- Edensor, T. (2008). Mundane hauntings: commuting through the phantasmagoric working-class spaces of Manchester, England. *Cultural Geographies* 15.3, 313-333.
- Fenton, A. (1987). *Country Life in Scotland: Our rural past*. Edinburgh: John Donald.

Ferguson, C. (2003). *Children of the Black House*. Edinburgh: Birlinn.

Garrannan. Garrannan Blackhouse Village. Retrieved from <http://www.garrannan.com/>

Gibson, R, (2006). *The Highland Clearances Trail*. Edinburgh: Luath Press.

Graham, B. (Ed.). (1998). *Modern Europe: Place, culture and identity*. London: Arnold.

Graham, Brian, Gregory John Ashworth, and John E. Tunbridge. (Eds.). (2000). *A Geography of Heritage: Power, culture, and economy*. London: Arnold.

Harvey, D.C. (2012). Landscape and heritage: emerging landscapes of heritage. In Thompson I, & Waterton E. (Eds.). *The Routledge Companion to Landscape Studies*. (pp. 152-165). London: Routledge.

Helgadottir, G. (2011). Nation in a sheep's coat: The Icelandic sweater. *FORMakademisk*, 4(2). 59-68.

Hewison, R. (1987). *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a climate of decline*. London: Methuen.

Hirst, C. (2008). *Back to the Wind, Front to the Sun: The traditional croft house*. Stornoway: The Islands Book Trust.

Historic Scotland. The Blackhouse, Arnol. Retrieved from [http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/propertyresults/propertyoverview.htm?PropID=PL\\_034](http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/propertyresults/propertyoverview.htm?PropID=PL_034)

Hufton, O. H. (1974). *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France; 1750-1789*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hunter, J. (1976). *The Making of the Crofting Community*. Edinburgh: John Donald.



Ingold, T. (1993) The temporality of the landscape. *World Archaeology*. 25.2, 152-174.

Johnson, L. (2013). Renegotiating dissonant heritage: the statue of J.P. Coen. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 20(6), 583-598.

Jones, O. (2011). Geography, Memory and Non-Representational Geographies. *Geography Compass*, 5(12), 875-885.

Jones, O., & Garde-Hansen, J. (Eds.). (2012). *Geography and Memory: Explorations in identity, place and becoming*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Jones, R. and Selwood, H. J. (2012). From 'Shackies' to silver nomads: coastal recreation and coastal heritage in Western Australia. In Robertson I. J. (ed.). *Heritage From Below*. (pp. 125-146). London: Ashgate.

Khabra, G. (2014). Music in the margins? Popular music heritage and British Bhangra music. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 20(3), 343-355.

Lorimer, H. (1999). Ways of seeing the Scottish Highlands: marginality, authenticity and the curious case of the Hebridean blackhouse. *Journal of Historical Geography*, 25(4), 517-533.

Lowenthal, D. (1985). *The Past is a Foreign Country*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Maclean, S. (2011). Hallaig In C. Whyte and E. Dymock (Eds.). *Caoir Gheal Leumraich / White Leaping Flame: collected poems in Gaelic with English translations*. Edinburgh: Polygon. Retrieved from:

<http://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poetry/poems/hallaig>.

McGrath, J. (writer). (1973). *The Cheviot, the Stag, and the Black Black Oil*, [play].

Olson, B. Sticky Heritage. Retrieved from

<http://ruinmemories.org/2013/07/sticky-heritage/>

Richards, E., & Tindley, A. (2012). After the Clearances: Evander Mclver and the 'Highland Question', 1835–73. *Rural History*, 23(01), 41-57.

Robertson, I. J. (2008). Heritage from below: class, social protest and resistance. In B. J. Graham, & P. Howard, (Eds.). *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*. (pp. 143-158). London: Ashgate.

Robertson, I. J. (Ed.). (2012). *Heritage From Below*. London: Ashgate.

Robertson, I. J. (2013). *Landscapes of Protest in the Scottish Highlands After 1914: The Later Highland Land Wars*. London: Ashgate

Ruin Memories. Project Description. Retrieved from

<http://ruinmemories.org/about/project-description/>

Scott, J. C. (1990). *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden transcripts*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Samuel, R. (1994). *Theatres of Memory*. London: Verso.

Setten, G. (2012) What's in a house? Heriatge in the making on the South-western coast of Norway. In Robertson, I. J. (Ed.). *Heritage From Below*.(147-176). London: Ashgate.

Smith, L. 2006. *Uses Of Heritage*. London: Routledge.

Tindley, A. (2012). 'They sow the wind, they reap the whirlwind': Estate Management in the Post-clearance Highlands, c. 1815-c. 1900. *Northern Scotland*, 3(1), 66-85.

Tindley, A., & Richards, E. (2012). Turmoil among the crofters: Evander McIver and the 'Highland Question', 1873–1903. *Agricultural History Review*, 60(2), 191-213.

Tolia-Kelly, D. (2013). Landscape and memory. In P. Howard, I. Thompson, & E. Waterton, (Eds.). *The Routledge companion to landscape studies*. )pp. 322 – 344). Abingdon: Routledge.

Thompson, F. (1984). *Crofting Years*. Edinburgh: Luath Press.

Tunbridge, J. E., & Ashworth, G. J. (1996). *Dissonant heritage: The management of the past as a resource in conflict*. London: John Wiley & Sons.

Urry, J. (2002). *The Tourist Gaze*. London: Sage.

Visit Scotland. Arnol Blackhouse. Retrieved from

<http://www.visitscotland.com/info/see-do/arnol-blackhouse-p299561>.

Watson, Steve. (2012). Country matters: the rural historic as an authorised heritage discourse in England. In R. Staiff, R. Bushell and S. Watson (Eds.). *Heritage and tourism: Place, encounter, engagement*. (pp. 107-126). London: Routledge.

Waterton, E. (2012). Heritage tourism and its representations. In R. Staiff, R. Bushell and S. Watson (Eds.). *Heritage and tourism: Place, encounter, engagement*. (pp. 64-84). London: Routledge.

Waterton, E. & Watson, S. (2013). Framing theory: towards a critical imagination in heritage studies. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 19, 546-561.

Winter, T. (2012). Clarifying the critical in critical heritage studies.

*International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 19, 532-545.

Withers, C. W. (1988). *Gaelic Scotland: The transformation of a culture region*.

London: Routledge.

Wylie, J. (2005). A single day's walking: narrating self and landscape on the South West Coast Path. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 30(2), 234-247.

Wylie, J. (2012). Dwelling and displacement: Tim Robinson and the questions of landscape. *Cultural Geographies*. 19(3), 365-383.

#### FIGURE CAPTIONS

**Figure 1** The ruined blackhouse

Source photograph author's own

**Figure 2** The Arnol authorised blackhouse

Source photograph author's own

---

<sup>1</sup> Land, Identity and Heritage in the Scottish Highlands (hereafter LISH) interview, CM, 22/03/12

<sup>2</sup> LISH interview IMS, 31/10/12; interview CBM, 16/05/13

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, LISH interview KJM, 15/05/13

<sup>4</sup> LISH interview DM, 13/03/13

<sup>5</sup> LISH interview DM, 13/03/13; LISH interview KJM, 15/05/13.

<sup>6</sup> LISH interview KJM, 15/05/13.

<sup>7</sup> LISH interview KRM, 14/06/12

<sup>8</sup> LISH interview AC, 29/05/13.

<sup>9</sup> LISH interview IMS, 31/10/12