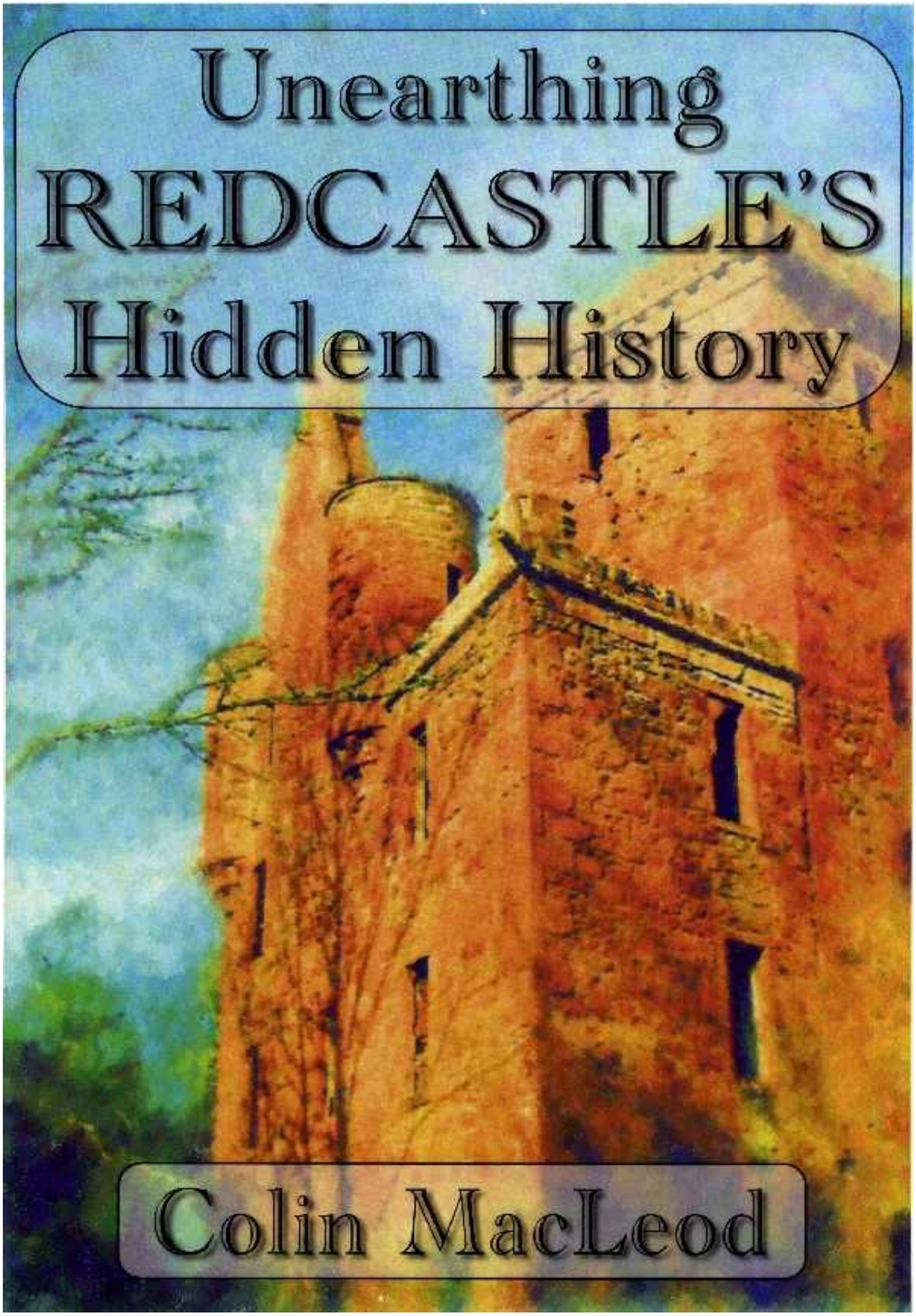
Unearthing REDCASTLE'S Hidden History



Colin MacLeod

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It gives the author, Colin MacLeod, great pleasure to donate this book to Ross and Cromarty Heritage Society, ensuring Redcastle's place in recorded Scottish History.

Colin MacLeod
February 2007

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Colin MacLeod
February 2007

About the author ....

Over a number of years Colin Macleod has penned numerous illustrated features on historical subjects that have been published in Treasure Hunting, The Searcher and in Scottish Memories. He has been featured on BBC Radio Solent, describing the finds unearthed and research undertaken in relation to the tiny ancient hamlet of Bickton. BBC Radio Devon and Dorset invited him to talk in-depth about the customs and origins of Hogmanay.

Now a published poet, he appeared on the BBC Radio 4 programme Poetry Please in 1989, during which he recited McAllister danced before the King which was to become one of the most popular poems ever featured on the programme over a period of ten years, something included in the BBC publication Poetry Please, published in 1991.

Following this he compiled a book of humorous Scottish Poetry, reviving many poems either out of print or simply forgotten. The resultant book, Hoots Mon! was reviewed in The Scots Magazine, copies subsequently being distributed to seven different countries before it sold out - much to the author's surprise!

In past years the author has been lucky enough to have been able to assist a team of archaeologists on a Highland excavation site, through metal detecting, and managed to locate and to unearth a number of significant artefacts for the project.

Foreword

That excellent journalist, Bill Howatson, who penned so many fine articles in his time for the Aberdeen Press and Journal, wrote a memorable feature regarding the work involved in tracing and uncovering the local history of a chosen location. He stated in his feature something that was to constantly remain uppermost in my mind to this day:

> *"What is true of nearly every parish in Scotland when you dig down, is that there is much to be found."*

I realised that he really meant examining in detail archive information, old reference books and accounts, but my searching was always destined to go much further than this.

Countless hours of metal detecting and field walking, carried out with determination and dedication, was, ultimately, to result in significant finds being unearthed - many being claimed under Scottish Treasure trove laws and ending up on display in museums.

It has of course to be recognised always that all archaeological finds in Scotland must be reported to the Crown to allow a decision to take place on whether they should be claimed or not. Also, the legal ownership of found items cannot be obtained unless they have been disclaimed by the Crown.

All of the finds, many illustrated in this book, plus research, have helped to provide some revealing and fascinating clues to the past life and times of Redcastle.

Redcastle is crumbling and will, inevitably, in the not too distant future be reduced to a pile of boulders. However, the author hopes that the reader will also be convinced that it deserves to be remembered and take its place in Scottish history, and that this book will help to ensure that this, ultimately, will happen.

Researching Redcastle's Historical Roots ....

However much time the field searcher might like to spend of his or her available time in the open air, searching for clues of the past, it is of paramount importance that a proper amount of time is taken to trace the history of the building and area you have selected, from whatever source you can.

It is pretty certain that after a few visits to your field walking or metal detecting area you will inevitably become immersed in its historical significance and potential.

This is enhanced ever further by how much history you actually uncover, and in time you really will FEEL the past life of the area around you like a cloak. Knowing its history will help to keep the searcher focussed and determined to unearth that significant artefact that will slot into its history like a finger in a glove.

There are times when conducting your researches when you are genuinely surprised to discover that historical figureheads of the past actually played a part, however small, in its history.

So it is with Redcastle ....

In my opinion we should really attribute the reasons for the building of what we now call Redcastle to a combination of 12th century unrest and rebellion in the highlands, and to King William the Lion who ordered it to be built!

After continued uprisings from 1174 onwards, led by the unruly Donald Bane MacWilliam, who claimed the Crown as both son of Duncan II and grandson of Malcolm III and Queen Ingiborg, and who secured for himself the Royal Castle of Dingwall, King William's patience finally ran out. Subsequently he led an army into Ross-shire in 1179, duly subdued the rebellions and made the decision to have two new castles built in this northern region, namely at Dunskaith (Nigg) and Redcastle.

Eddirdovar as it was then called was, of course, originally a fortalice and was built essentially for military purposes. It acted as a stronghold to help control the warlike clans and to also guard against invasion from the sea.

In the passing of time one of the reasons why King William again came north was the notorious Donald MacWilliam who was pursued, captured near Inverness and subsequently killed in 1187.

By 1230, the castle, now referred to as Edradour, was in keeping of Sir John de Bisset until it seems he blotted his copybook and was duly relieved of it by the Crown. The years progressed and by 1278 the new incumbents were Sir Andrew de Bosco and his wife Elizabeth Bisset. Edradour now became part of the Earldom of Ormond and was now also part of the Douglas dynasty, the Earl taking the title of Lord Edradour.

Around 1427, the Earl joined King James VI who then marched north to deal with the rebellious Alexander of the Isles who had sacked Inverness and burnt its castle down. Following a battle at Lochaber, Alexander surrendered and in turn was humiliated and imprisoned in Tantellon Castle.

In these turbulent times and following the ultimate defeat of the Douglas family, the ownership of Redcastle reverted to the Crown by 1455.

Warring times, sadly, continued, but it is recorded that in 1492 Redcastle was in the hands of Kenneth MacKenzie of Kintail (after it was relinquished by James Stewart, Royal Duke of Ross who became a Bishop!).

It would be nice to believe that a period of stability now took place, but records indicate that this was not the case. Meanwhile it is recorded that Redcastle actually had a visit from no less than Mary Queen of Scots in 1552.

By 1570 it is now recorded that the MacKenzies were firmly in control of Redcastle, this continuing to 1790. The MacKenzies were to become a powerful branch of the Seaforths and supporters of the Royal House of Stuart.

It is said that during the Civil War against Charles I, Redcastle was in fact the last place in Scotland to hold out against the troops of Cromwell, and that it is stated on an old manuscript that the ill-fated Earl of Montrose was encamped nearby when he heard the news of the execution of Charles I in January 1649.

He was, of course, later betrayed, captured and taken to Edinburgh where he was duly executed.

In Margaret Ogg's fine book Killearnan, the Story of the Parish she writes that in 1745 none other than Charles Stuart, 'Bonnie Prince Charles' himself stayed at the castle. It was a relief to read that he did so "without danger to himself or anyone else!"

It was reported back in the 17th century that Redcastle had sometime been burnt down but that nevertheless it continued to be inhabited into the 18th century when it was rebuilt, extended, updated and upgraded.

This continued apace until by the early 19th century the castle itself had improved so much that it was referred to in the Statistical Accounts as "a place for genteel living".

The fortunes of families do not last forever, and Redcastle was sold to the Grants of Shewglie, but its owner, having fallen out with his eldest son, left it in turn to Fettes College.

It is recorded that in 1838 Redcastle was sold to Colonel H D Baillie for £120,000. Sadly his three sons were to predecease him and the castle and estates passed on to the present owners, the Burtons of the Dochfour branch of the family.

During the Second World War years it was requisitioned by the army and it is said that its decline accelerated, the castle being finally vacated and later part stripped in the early 1950s.

Redcastle .... the building and its location

I feel it would be quite remiss of me not to include some excerpts from a most excellent description of Redcastle's construction and location, Mike Salter's book Castles of Western and Northern Scotland.

In my opinion when you find yourself looking at a castle that is rapidly becoming a ruin, along with your natural feelings of sadness at the situation, there is a certain curiosity. One wonders what it was like in its heyday, and about its original state and evolution. This is particularly the case when a castle such as Redcastle is made inaccessible and 'caged off' for safety and security reasons. To have the benefit of Mike Salter's detailed and investigative description of the castle is a bonus indeed.

He describes the castle site as being triangular with the sides sloping on one side down to a fast flowing stream. Also at the base of the slope is an extremely boggy area. The opposite slope contains a variety of trees and rises up eventually near the actual main entrance to the castle.

This contrasts with the ground on the eastern side, which is level, before sloping down to the once beautiful tree-lined garden area and onward to the road and nearby Beauly firth.

On this same eastern side of the castle the masonry is some 2.2 metres thick (!) as it is in the north and eastern walls, continuing as far as the cellar vaults.

Mike Salter also suggests that here may be the remains of a 13th century courtyard about 23 metres wide.

The western walls are 1.9 metres thick above a plinth which he suggests was probably part of a tower house, some 8.6 metres wide and 13.4 metres in length.

At the south-east corner is a polygonal stair turret with a square cap house, whilst yet another turret can be identified on the north-east corner. The stair in the castle would have provided direct access to a private room above the courtyard. The tower itself was actually altered to provide a pair of rooms on each of four storeys which include round bartizans on the southern corner. There is also a square barbizan on the north-west corner whilst the main body of the building now has a square tower rising high above the rest of the castle itself and which provides a fine lookout platform, perfect for monitoring movement on the nearby firth.

Another fine book which includes references to the building changes that took place at Redcastle is Margaret Ogg's Killearnan, The Story of the Parish. In it we read that "Roderick MacKenzie, younger son of the 10th Earl of Seaforth, ordered the rebuilding and exstension of the old keep in the 17th century (1642)". Red (as in Redcastle!) or Devonian sandstone was quarried locally to build the new fortified castle, which unsurprisingly was then known as Redcastle.

Although it was recorded that during the 17th century Redcastle was burnt down, it is also true that it continued to be inhabited, so probably (and more accurately) only a section was actually burned.

It seems clear that through the centuries additions and changes to the building continually took place.

Certainly in 1840 a William Burn further updated the living quarters making it a more comfortable place to live in.

There is one thing beyond doubt and that is, that before the castle was finally vacated in the 1950s it had, despite all the numerous changes and additions through the centuries, acquired both a stylish and stately appearance.

It is claimed with some pride that until it was vacated Redcastle had the distinction of being the oldest inhabited castle in Scotland.

Seeking our more Invaluable Information ....

Armed now with a knowledge of the building evolution of Redcastle, the next quest is to gain as much knowledge and information about the busiest periods in the castle's history, so that when we are searching the fields trying to unearth significant clues of the past we have some idea of what we might find.

One of the best ways to find out how many people were about, what they did for a living, how they lived and what major or minor environmental changes took place at this important time is to examine the Statistical Accounts of the time. These accounts certainly hold a good many facts that do help to create a clearer picture in the mind of how things were in the 18th and early 19th centuries.

It occurred to me that perhaps the best way to appreciate the contents of the statistical accounts more fully was to extricate the facts and try to effectively re-write the accounts in a more up to date way and also, arguably, make them more interesting and readable!

Well, that was the plan ....

The Statistical Accounts Examined

The Statistical Accounts of the parish of Killearnan were written by the Reverend John Kennedy. This was in keeping with the practice of all statistical accounts being written by ministers of their respective parishes at the time.

Our statistical accounts were concluded around 1831 but they include references that can be attributed to the mid 18th century when life at Redcastle was arguably at its busiest, most productive and most prosperous. It enables us to have a reasonably clear picture of many aspects of life at Redcastle at this time - exactly what we want and need!

Touching on the topography of the area we read that the clay on the shore was used as building mortar, and it appears, too, that there was quite a variety in the composition of the soil. Some soil is described as 'light loam' whilst some might also include quantities of gravel or even red or blue clay.

Many fields, we learn, were thickly covered in small stones (still are in places!), and that even when removed prior to the field being sown, the same stone removal process had to be repeated the next time the land was to be put under the plough. What a thankless task this must have been for those who had to do it - year after year! There must have been a few aching limbs and sore backs at the end of some days! However, it also seems that any fields 'untended' say for three years were by that time covered by broom. Seems you couldn't win if you chose to let the back-breaking practice stop!

To all intents and purposes the soil rested on red stone which had been continuously quarried, Inverness principally being supplied with quantities of it for its buildings. The stone was also used in the building of the Caledonian Canal's locks. It is reported that the stone had been quarried in the same locations for literally hundreds of years. In later years, of course, the pier (figs 1 and 2) was used constantly to ship the red stone to Inverness by boat.

Fig. 1

From additional small quarries the red stone extracted was used in the building of local farmhouses and houses.

In and around Redcastle, it stated in the accounts (and somewhat surprisingly), the prevailing rain and winds came in from the east coast as opposed from the west.

Whatever the truth is about the weather there were by all accounts some hardy souls about with one man reaching the magnificent age of 106 and who, according to the Rev. Kennedy, attended Church until his 103rd year! It is also recorded that there were several in the parish in their eighties - a good age indeed for this period in history.

Fig. 2

Generally speaking it seems that apart from diseases such as measles, whooping cough, scarlet fever, typhus and asthma, the local inhabitants were "generally healthy". Could their simple diet be one reason for this? It is reported that "mussels and whelks were plentiful" along this part of the Beauly Firth, and whilst they were used by the fishers along the coast at Avoch for bait, for the local folk at Redcastle it was "part of their diet"!

Regarding farming we're told that there were different species of cattle reared. Horses, cows and hogs were raised though the same could not be said for sheep!

Around 1831 we are informed that there were 1565 acres or arable land and 577 acres of pastureland. Incidentally it is an interesting (and not well-known fact) that any artefact dropped on pastureland that is allowed to stay so, will actually drop through the soil one inch per hundred years. This is something I have checked - finding a 14th century groat buried some six inches down. I was able to check the depth through markings on my trowel and also found that, depending on the soil composition, artefacts unearthed in pastureland are often in good condition. In arable land that has been sown, ploughed and harvested for centuries these finds are normally numerous, but because of the constant ploughing etc. their condition quite often is understandably not good. Nevertheless, in truth, the greater the volume of finds unearthed, the more clues of the past will be revealed.

We are told within the report that trees covered 1652 acres. The Rev. Kennedy tells us that the population in Redcastle was 1479. This included "strangers expelled from various parts of the Highlands" who were also accommodated in the Kilcoy region. They were allowed to keep "a horse, a cow with a follower and a few sheep".

It is of interest to read about the employment situation for males in Killearnan and Redcastle and what the female population did and were expected to do.

The breakdown was as follows:

Farmers 15; Cottars 119; Labourers 64; Employed in agriculture 155; In trade and manufacture 60; Auctioneer (or appraiser) 1; Blacksmith 6; Masons 5; Carpenters 7; Wheelwright (above eighty years of age, still found working at his turning-loom) 1; Sawers 6; Millers 2; Innkeepers 6 (retailers of beer and whisky); Shoe and Brogue makers 16; Shopkeepers 2; Tailors 8; Weavers 170.

On the female scene we are informed:

> *"There were 52 female servants in constant service. The other female members of the parish are employed to work from time to time in the fields; otherwise they would be expected to be employed in the home industries of flax or wool spinning or to simply stay at home - carrying out domestic duties."*

So there you have it! When we look at the Redcastle and Killearnan area of today it is contrastingly (and unrecognisably) different. This is why the unearthing of artefacts of all kinds is to me so important, since they will always be the tangible reminders of an age well and truly gone but saved for people in years to come to both look at and enjoy seeing.

Local Agricultural Changes in the 18th and 19th Centuries

By the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries huge changes in agriculture took place. The layouts of fields changed dramatically and land, we read, was "laid out and cultivated in the most modern style".

This, in real terms, meant it was the end of farming on small arable strips, the land mass being lumped together, divided up and resultantly left in the possession now of only six farmers.

Another big (and welcome) change was that, instead of scores of land remaining covered in broom or heath, it was now cultivated using horses - from two to six pairs per farm. Plenty of evidence supporting this change has been unearthed.

Where you have Shire or Clydesdale horses dutifully performing their tasks regularly year after year for many years you should be able, using a metal detector, to locate and unearth the inevitable harness and bridle losses. The fields of Redcastle are no exception to this and a wealth of various finds has turned up. A variety of strap ends and double loop Victorian (and earlier) harness buckles have been unearthed (fig. 3).

Fig. 3

Harness buckles obviously vary greatly in size from an inch square to as large as three by four inches. Prior to the horse 'brasses' of the Victorian period, the earlier ones were made of latten, an alloy of copper, zinc and tin. The reason that almost all buckles found do not have a pin is simply because it was made of iron and subsequently corroded and rusted away to nothing! One or two brass studs used to further adorn the harness have also appeared.

I have unearthed quite a few horse brasses (fig. 4), and also brass rosettes (fig. 5) of varying sizes. These would have been fitted to the harness below the horse's ear.

One find, claimed by the Crown under the Treasure Trove law, was a medieval harness bell (fig. 6),

Fig. 6

whilst another small brass saddle bell of the Victorian period was also unearthed. Saddle brasses, sadly with no owner's initials present, have also turned up as did two plain pendants (fig. 7), probably late medieval in date.


Fig. 7

Needless to say horseshoes (fig. 8) have also been located.

Fig. 8

There can be no doubt that the heavy horse played its part during this revolutionary period of agriculture. It seems to me, sometimes, that this era of the heavy horse evokes romantic ideas of the farming life - as often depicted in pictures. However, I do not see it that way. For example, in the 1800s and up to 1900s a large farm might employ 100 or more men and this would mean 50 horses would be needed to help do the job and produce the food. As someone who helped with the harvest in the early 1950s and who planted seedlings, pulled swede from the ground and topped them with a chopper - when my hands were so cold I could not feel them - I confess I found farm labouring hard, strenuous and frankly repetitive and boring work. I am sure that in the early 1800s and into the Victorian period it was probably worse and working conditions would have, in truth, been unacceptable today.

The introduction of the tractor and mechanisation made a huge impact on agriculture, particularly in the economic production of food and in labour saving.

It is a thought that when it came to sowing into the furrows made by the plough one hundred or more years ago a man and a horse would in truth, plough an acre a day. Contrast this with a man and a tractor today that could do forty or more acres in the same time - and in unrecognisably better conditions.

The advent of the tractor effectively made the heavy horse redundant almost overnight. When this happened the horse harnesses were disposed of since their value had dropped to next to nothing. Some of the brasses attached to them were stripped off for sentimental reasons and then, in many cases, the harnesses were disposed of - often burnt in the fields. What was metallically left on the harnesses sunk into the soil forever - unless found by someone like myself and preserved as reminders of this bygone age.

One particular find that I made emanated from the Victorian era and was a brass badge on which was printed "Fraser Saddler Dingwall" (fig. 9). Contrast this with another manufacturer's plate I unearthed. It read "Wild Thwaites Muck Spreader"!

Fig. 9

Farm mechanisation has certainly come a long way, but as I trudge across the soil looking for artefacts I constantly feel that although it may have meant redundancy for many farm labourers who would have suffered financially, and faced worry and upheaval, it was at the end of the day for the best, because there's no doubt that we could not be without mechanism in today's demanding agricultural scene, market place and society.

The Success of the New Large Farms

The six new farms at Redcastle, which occupied the area that up to fourteen previously had enjoyed, were successful. They yielded heavy crops of wheat, barley, oats, rye, peas, beans, potatoes, turnips and even clover!

Both the tenants and crofters, it is recorded, got leases from nineteen to twenty-one years - so both stability and a real incentive to invest in their farms resulted.

Horses, cattle and sheep (in folds) were reared by the farmers in their new holdings and a percentage sold each year. It is stated that at the end of harvest they purchased numbers of young cattle, fed them up with straw etc and made healthy profits by selling them on at summer markets.

Cattle and sheep were also fed on turnips - it is reported - and later sold to the slaughterhouses in Inverness.

One gets the feeling that in this period, as now, there were also quite a few canny farmers about!

One interesting artefact I unearthed might well be directly related to the official dividing up of the land. The experts of the National Museum identified it as a survey tag or Government marker (fig. 10).

Fig. 10

The true date of it is unknown, but it would have been used at this time.

New steadings were also built at this time from local red stone, as were dwelling houses, which were described as "comfortable".

For some, particularly the six new progressive farmers, this was clearly an exciting and successful period, although as is always the case for others, now disposed of their crofting lands, it was the opposite. Perhaps this was the start of the large farms we see today.

Yet More Revelations from the Statistical Account

It appears that there were no ships, as such, in anchorage at Redcastle in the 18th and 19th centuries. However, there is reference to some local boats, which apparently sailed to Caithness for some "risky herring fishing" returning, it seems, with mixed results.

As now, Inverness was the nearest town to the parish of Killearnan and Redcastle. Over this period there was no post office, no proper bridges, and no harbour (although it is stated that "vessels of considerable tonnage could safely unload on the Eastern shore of the parish").

There was, of course, the busy turnpike road that fringed the shoreline to the ferry point at North Kessock.

The author of our Statistical Account, the Rev Kennedy, cannot resist using the opportunity to highlight his personal anger at the state of both the Church building and the Manse. Describing the

Church itself as a *"most uncomfortable place of Worship"* he adds it was *"most ruinous to the health and incumbent"*. He doesn't stop there and continues to berate the condition of his manse, describing it as *"far from being either comfortable or commodious; and if it were not for the incumbent's own outlays upon it he would have little satisfaction in it"*.

That really was spelling it out - clearly an unhappy and extremely angry man!

The adjoining glebe field, he writes, was five to six acres in size and *"entirely arable"*.

Well, the glebe field may have been arable but my detecting forays on it have resulted in the solitary find of a Victorian penny to date, so somehow I don't think a great deal of time was spent properly utilising this particular corner of Redcastle.

Having dealt with his grievances over the Church building and the Manse, the Rev Kennedy now criticises his stipend, which he desceibes as being *"the smallest in Ross with no means for augmenting it"*. You wonder why he put up with his position as Minister when it seems that there was so much clearly upsetting him.

There was, he states, *"One hundred and fifty Church Members at this time, including the Elders"*. He describes the residents of Killearnan and Redcastle as *"generally a Church-going people"*. Whilst this is good to hear he refrains, it seems to me, from adding "but not generous enough in their offerings and practical support!"

Indeed he goes on to give a glowing report of the local people whom he describes as *"being cleanly in their habits, industrious, sober, religiously disposed, moral in their conduct, teachable and tractable, punctual in their attendance of public worship, believing in the Divine authority of the Bible and taking it for the rule of their faith and practice"*.

He adds, finally, *"we have a few solitary exceptions, but they are few. There is no temptation to poaching (I found a gin-trap in a wooded area!) and smuggling is almost entirely abandoned. Within the last three years there has been but one illegitimate birth in the parish"*.

If the section in Reverend Kennedy's Statistical Account concerning the behaviour and attributes of the local population of Killearnan and Redcastle is both accurate and to be believed, then he most definitely should have been better looked after, since his influence was clearly wonderfully effective. On the other hand, he might just have been a bit blinkered and ignorant, I suspect, about a few things going on, probably right under his nose! Who's to tell?

During this period there were in existence two schools in the parish. One was "endowed" (sponsored) by the "Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge" and the attendance figure of pupils at each school was between 80 and 100.

The attendance figures seem curiously indeterminate although I suspect that some children attending school were also helping out on farms and in certain seasonal times were absent. Parents, however, had to pay school fees of between one shilling and four shillings, although the children of the poor were taught free. In fact, "the number in the parish", we are informed, receiving parochial aid, was as high "as between sixty and seventy", all of whom received "six shillings to twelve shillings each, per year".

From the field adjacent to one of the schools I have unearthed to date three stylus (pens) - discarded or lost it would seem from this period.

It is reported that there were two large public fairs held in March and July each year. We know, too, that Martinmas and Lammas fairs were held somewhere at Redcastle through the years, plus other regular markets. For a detectorist this is exciting news and provides great motivation to locate the likely field area where these fairs and markets took place. This site would obviously contain many artefacts and coins below the soil and be invaluable in our quest to find the clues of the past life and times of Redcastle.

In this part of the field I have unearthed well over three hundred coins, mainly Georgian in date, along with many more artefacts not claimed by the Crown, all of which are included in my own personal collection and which provide a wonderful insight into Redcastle's past.

Other artefacts and a coin now reside in Inverness or Groam House museums.

Discovering Some of Redcastle's Military Connections ....

It must be true to say that any castle that has stood for a few hundred years will have at least some military connections. The question for the metal detectorist is always the same - are the clues buried in the ground around the castle or in one of the nearby fields where the military may well have congregated (for whatever reason)? In Redcastle's case the field with the most military connections - based on the volume of finds - runs parallel to the road, opposite Carron Cottage.

A number of metallic artefacts, all with a distinct military background, have repeatedly emerged from the soil after each separate ploughing, and I am convinced there are still more to be found. However, those found to date have provided some real evidence about what has taken place in these castle fields over the last two or three hundred years.

As is often the case, one of my first finds was an exciting one - a scabbard chape (fig. 11).

Fig. 11

I am grateful again to Stuart Campbell of the Treasure Trove Secretariat for his description of it, following his examination. He describes the chape, which measures 67 millimetres in length, as follows:

"This chape is of a distinctive type, known to be on military scabbards from the 18th century until the Napoleonic period."

Yet another chape was located in this same area, once again copper alloy in composition but shorter in length at 48 millimetres. It was dated by Stuart Campbell to the medieval or early post-medieval period. (fig. 12)

Fig. 12

It was actually made from double skinned sheets of thin metal with a central decorative boss made by stamping up and through the sheets and sealing the protrusion with a blob of copper. Stuart also states *"This chape's rather crude manufacture suggests that it is of amateur rather than artisinal production"*.

Both these historically interesting and rare chapes were claimed as Treasure Trove by the Crown.

Further searching on this field also resulted in the unearthing of the part of a "flaming grenade" badge (fig. 13) such as that still worn by the French Gendarme, but which was also a popular motif for military uniforms in the 18th and 19th centuries. The size of this badge, which had been die cut from sheet metal, indicates that it is most likely to be 19th century in date, when ornaments were used to decorate the front of pouches and other accoutrements.

Fig. 13

Two military-type buttons unearthed from this site were dated to the Victorian era. Whilst it has not been possible to identify one of them as yet, the other depicts a horn, which was the symbol of the Rifle Brigade. Others unearthed turned out to be 20th century General Service buttons, fairly easily identified, since they bore the King's Crown on them, dating them from 1901-1952! They would have been worn on armed forces greatcoats.

Yet another two button finds have been declared Treasure Trove. The first - the "King and Constitution" button was made of copper alloy, and gilt. It was 22 millimetres in diameter, stamped and engraved (fig.14).

Fig. 14

Indications are that buttons like this example were at one time produced on a mass scale; however, on closer examination, it appears that an anchor was added to the design. The question arises: could this have been done by someone to commemorate, for example, the victory at Trafalgar?

This button (fig. 15), like the "King and Constitution" one is the only one apparently known, others having been originally produced but, it seems, lost in the passage of time.


Fig. 15

Once again it is made of copper alloy and is gilt, bearing the legend "Ross Local Militia" set around a Royal Crown with a "1st" below.

The button retains some gilding indicating it was intended to be worn by an officer. The button is dated to 1808-1816, the Ross Militia being raised as a local defence unit.

Little or nothing is known about the Ross Militia and Stuart Campbell acknowledges this find, stating *"it is a rare and interesting survival from a Militia unit"*.

Not surprisingly a variety of musket balls and shot have been unearthed on this particular same field section, although many, many more have constantly turned up on the adjacent field as well.

Apart from early musket balls of 10 or 12 bore, 18th century military musket balls, weighing an ounce, and 16 bore have also been unearthed along with a variety of bullets such as pre-1914 Enfield rifle bullets, and some early 19th century experimental bullets (fig. 16).

Fig. 16

Fig. 17

Repeated finds of minie (fig. 17) bullets on this same castle field both surprised and interested me, being bullets from an early muzzle loading rifle and used by the Rifle Volunteer Movement in the 1850s and 1860s. I have been amazed at the variety of ammunition finds on this particular section of the field and if it was not for the efficient performance of my White's XLT detector these fascinating finds would have undoubtedly remained buried and this little bit of history would subsequently have remained untold.

Out of the blue, on this field strip, I unearthed a Jaws harp (fig. 18). I confess that I wasn't too excited about it initially since I knew from my detecting times in England that they were not uncommon finds. However, once again my thinking was wrong! I was surprised when Jenny Shiels of the Treasure Trove Secretariat advised me that it *"conformed to a Kolltveit's class 4a, both in material and size, dates to the 18th century, but that only 17 other (pre-Victorian) Jaws harps are known to have been discovered. Eight of these are known to have been found during excavations on castle sites"*. It was declared Treasure Trove. I smiled when Jenny added *"a cheap wee thing a soldier can stow in his kit and take out now and again to keep his spirits up perhaps"*! Could a Redcoat hundreds of miles from home have lost this Jaws harp?

Fig. 18

A romantic thought .... but then again, who knows!

I have unearthed a number of fine Dandy buttons around Redcastle. These larger than normal buttons were used to set off the clothing worn by young men in the Georgian period across the whole country but not part and parcel of highland dress and are resultantly an interesting find for this particular area.

Revealing Buttons!

I have unearthed scores of various kinds of buttons from Redcastle's fields. One might feel that this is not a particularly exciting revelation history-wise, but in fact this assumption is quite wrong.

Researching the many buttons found gave me a fresh, new insight into Redcastle's past. Like coins, buttons can be identified and in fact are an excellent dating tool. Buttons were lost in the main by workers, labouring in the fields, and also by others in the pursuit of riding out, hunting and other activities.

Commonest finds at Redcastle have been smock buttons, dating from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries (fig. 19).

Fig. 19

Of course, visitors from the South may have lost some buttons like these (fig. 20), but I prefer to believe that at least some Northerners were determined to show that they too were fashion conscious and wore these stylish fashion accessories!

Fig. 20

Some buttons bore intriguing designs, including one that depicted a figure that was deemed to be that of "the man in the moon"! A late 18th or 19th century button (fig. 21) had the initials "DLN" on it. But who was this?

Fig. 21

The oldest button I have unearthed so far was not particularly attractive - in fact quite the opposite - but it was 17th century after all and was simply a purely functional one. A few Victorian buttons have also been unearthed but perhaps the most interesting and informative buttons found have been livery ones. The design on a livery button often means that the family can subsequently be traced.

One such button depicted an eagle and had originally been lost by someone from the nearby Munro clan. Present Clan Chief, Hector Munro of Foulis, identified the livery button and it now rests, quite properly, at Foulis Castle.

Another button find depicted a dragon holding an arrow (fig. 22), and experts felt it could belong to one or two families which included the Watsons or Coles, who could have lost it when visiting Redcastle.

Fig. 22

Livery buttons are fascinating, and another one unearthed showed two dogs (fig. 23), one reclining. However, it is not yet known to which family it might belong.

Fig. 23

Fig. 24

Another unidentified button depicted the image of a plough on it. Continued searching on this same field resulted in an unusual find. It was a gilded button (fig. 24) with a motto on it in Latin, which translated to "This way to the Stars" (Aeneid). Sadly, so far, we cannot say for certain to which family it belongs since a number of families use this design and legend.

However, two livery buttons that I unearthed had the same crest on them - a Boar's head - and to my surprise were from totally different periods. The larger one was believed to be from the 18th century whilst the smaller was from the 19th century. One of the families named to whom they could belong was the Baillies, who were in fact one-time residents at Redcastle, in the 19th century. However, once again it could have belonged to the Campbells, Forbes or Gordons, all of whom also had the crest of the Boar's head!

I am sure that there are more livery buttons still awaiting discovery and that they will be equally interesting and will give us, hopefully, a further interesting insight into the life and times of these fields in a time gone by that we will not see again.

Lead and its Many Uses ....

Although most people probably quite rightly think of lead as a heavy grey metal, it is equally softish, malleable, and has little tenacity. Although it tarnishes quickly in moist air, a layer of oxide protects the surface from further changes.

Lead is (or was) used in sheet and other forms, and although in the past it was used for roofing, pipes etc and in industry, I know it was also used in many other ways including agriculture - and warfare. The fields I have detected over the years bear testimony to that claim and I have never ceased to be amazed at the large number of lead artefacts that I have amassed so far. Many lead shapes continue to puzzle the museum experts, who can often only surmise what the find actually was used for, and I would be the last to criticise them for that!

I have unearthed from these Redcastle fields lead steelyard weights (fig. 25) which in some cases date back to the medieval period.

Fig. 25

I was a little puzzled as to what exactly the lead strip (fig. 26) could be but an expert opinion is that it is possibly a plumb bob for guidance as a straight line.

Fig. 26

Other finds include what appear to be a nut, a holed disk and a small wedge (fig. 27). Lead bag seals (fig. 28) are unearthed from time to time.

Fig. 27

Fig. 28

Unlike any other I have found at Redcastle or elsewhere, one particular seal displayed a strange U-shaped mark, its origin being unable to be identified.

More lead finds include beads, writing tools (styli), weights (round and square), a spoon-like object, lead peg and lead decoration of some kind (fig. 29).

Fig. 29

Lead lids were not unknown and I have managed to unearth the lead lid of a Georgian tobacco box (fig. 30).

Various sizes of musket balls and shot have been common finds at Redcastle (fig. 31), as have discarded pieces of dross of all kinds! (fig. 32)

Fig. 31

Fig. 32

So far, five lead spindle whorls have been unearthed and Jenny Shiels of the Treasure Trove Secretariat has been most helpful on this subject. She feels *"that generally speaking their dating and true purpose still remain somewhat obscure due to their apparent absence from archaeological contexts"*. She adds, *"They are most frequently ascribed as being medieval or post-medieval in date"*.

One particular spindle whorl which had a rather ornate design on it that I located at Redcastle caught the attention of the experts when I forwarded it to them. It was in perfect condition with an ornate design on it. It was rare enough to be claimed by the Treasure Trove. Jenny also feels that *"apart from their practical function there is evidence in many cultures to support a more symbolic significance associated with mythologies relating to woman and spinning"*.

Some artefacts sometimes give you a smile when you discover them and two lead artefacts did just that, the first one being a tiny lead button which had been silvered to make it look like the real thing. Was it lost by someone experiencing some hard times and who didn't want this known - hence the subterfuge? The other was a lead kilted highlander (fig. 33) who has sustained fairly severe damage through the years - or maybe this is how he was when discarded, until my detector did its job and he returned to duty.

Fig. 33

The Search for Artefacts Continues ....

On most fields, metal detecting cannot be carried out all year round for the very simple reason that when planting takes place detecting must stop! Then one's searching efforts and attentions must be re-directed towards pastureland, woodland areas and any other available scrap of land within your permitted boundaries.

Metal detecting and field walking is subsequently undertaken at times on ploughed or harvested fields in almost all weathers, due to searching time restrictions, in order to give oneself every chance to find any clues of the past lying or buried in the ground.

When the pressure is on, there really are times when you have to dredge up reserves of strength, determination and dedication.

Indeed, I can recall clearly the time when I had commenced detecting on my first Redcastle field and how bitingly cold that October wind was on my face as I clumped my way through the freshly ploughed muddy furrows, hoping silently that a significant ancient find would soon be pinpointed and lifted from the soil. The truth, of course, is that you always silently hope for this to happen, but thankfully, after practising metal detecting for some eighteen years, I realise only too well that you

have got to keep your expectations and natural enthusiasm controlled when searching, adopting instead a philosophical and practical approach to it all.

As it happened, it was on this particular occasion that I was to be rewarded with a promising signal from my detector that resulted in some careful digging. At a depth of between five and six inches I could see a glint of silver peeping through a muddy clot of earth, and as I carefully retrieved it, I assumed that it was a silver coin. I was happy to be wrong. It turned out to be the bezel of a 17th/18th century Scottish silver ring (fig. 34). It was heart shaped and I could make out the inlaid initials "MN". Who, I wonder, could "MN" have been?

Fig. 34

At that moment little did I actually realise that this find was destined to be the first of nearly fifty various finds to be claimed as Treasure Trove under the Scottish law.

I pressed on and in poor weather conditions I unearthed a very good example of the half of a medieval swivel junction (fig. 35) belonging to a hunting dog's leash.

Fig. 35

This find was also claimed by the Crown being declared Treasure Trove. Close to the area where this find had been made I unearthed a bronze pin, now known to be an 18th century sporran peg (fig. 36).

Fig. 36

From another field and in much better weather conditions I unearthed, over a few visits, a total of five thimbles (fig. 37).. There is at this time a number of opinions held as to why numbers of thimbles are found in fields.


Fig. 37

Whilst the traditional use of the thimble is for it to be used for protection against needles during sewing, there is also a growing feeling in some quarters that they were also used by female workers in the field to protect fingertips from getting chaffed or cut. In a different area altogether from Redcastle I once unearthed no less than twenty-two thimbles dating from the 18th and 19th centuries from one single field, which was indeed food for thought.

Later, on this same Redcastle field, I unearthed my oldest thimble so far, which is believed to date from the late medieval period (fig. 38), and was open topped. Another small brass thimble with waffle shaped indentations on its top was a good example of a mass produced thimble manufactured in the mid to late 18th century. Brass thimbles were designed to be of three sizes: girl's, "maids", and women's, whilst the example shown (fig. 39) is, in fact, a child's one.

Fig. 38

Fig. 39

Fig. 40

Another thimble unearthed had a steel top on it (fig. 40) and was popular in the 18th century. The steel was made since the thimble manufacturers had originally produced a thimble whose top was too thin for intensive use and the steel top (deep drawn from sheet metal) rectified the problem. Finding examples of ostensibly humble old thimbles led directly to me finding out some surprising and interesting information about their style and background, and subsequently changed my attitude towards any new thimble discovery!

Yet another intriguing find from this same field that had been responsible for the afore- mentioned thimble finds was a silver finger guard (fig. 41), dating from the Victorian age. It was unearthed in the entrance of the field, but unfortunately had been squashed. Nevertheless one can see clearly the

beautifully inscribed design added to the original plain design by the owner and wearer. One wonders who indeed was the seemingly wealthy owner of this fine finger guard!

Fig. 41

Opposite the site of a house believed to have been built during the late 17th or 18th century (which is now a pile of stones) I unearthed a silver spoon handle (fig. 42).

Fig. 42

After carefully extracting it from the soil I could see that the handle contained a maker's mark. George Dalgleish at the National Museum advised that the spoon/handle was early 19th century and bore the stamp of Alexander Stuart (AS), silversmith of Inverness and Tain. Alexander Stuart operated from 1800-1812 and the inscribed initials "DM" and "AM" suggest it might belong to the Macleods of Geanies (near Tain). Once again a question of ownership is not yet answered!

After finding a pewter knife handle I was delighted to see that there were details on the handle that would allow it to be dated and identified. Although the maker's stamp and hallmark engraved on the middle of the handle looked quite genuine to me, George Dalgleish of the Scottish Decorative Arts Department of the National Museum of Scotland examined it and pronounced it to be - a fake! Yes, it dated from the 17th century but it was an example of a 17th century scam. It eseems nothing is new - fraudsters must have traversed the Highlands selling these fake knives to unsuspecting souls and could very well have got away with it, amassing a small fortune along the way!

In a different area of this same field I was both surprised and thrilled to locate and unearth an artefact that was, according to the experts at the National Museum, unique at the time it was found. It was a small brass padlock (fig. 43). Circular in shape, it bore an engraved decoration, symmetrical in pattern and bearing a style quite widespread in the 18th century.

Fig. 43

It was a well-made padlock and the main body and face were fastened together by two snap-on lugs set on one side. The face of the padlock was decorated with a design of floral sprays whilst on the reverse there was a skilfully engraved legend "W1773" in a calligraphic hand.

Although the padlock, when examined, was the first of its kind to have been found at the time, by some strange coincidence a few months later a similar one - though not in such good condition - was unearthed by a metal detectorist some 50 miles north of Redcastle!

Another find, and like the last one also claimed as Treasure Trove, was a fine example of the 17th century book clasp (fig. 44). What was remarkable was that there was, despite its age, some leather still attached to it from the original bookbinding.

Fig. 44

The variety of finds continued and from yet another field gateway, and at a depth of nearly 6", I extracted from hard packed gravel a coin weight (fig. 45) for an English Gold Noble of Henry VI, which Nicholas Holmes, coin expert at the National Museum, stated was actually Dutch! It was necessary for merchants and traders to be sure that the coinage received in payment for goods was of the correct full weight. It became necessary to introduce coin weights for most large and silver

denominations. They often had the portrait of the reigning monarch on the reverse. Most European gold coins of this period had brass coin weights produced for them.

Fig. 45 © Crown Copyright

Only a short distance from this find my trusty White's XLT detector proved again how effective it was by pinpointing a tiny 18th century bronze fob for a watch chain (fig. 46).

Fig. 46

I did wonder at the time if the stand of arms indicated that it had a military connection, but I was wrong. Stuart Campbell, of the Treasure Trove secretariat, explained that this was in fact a popular motif at this time. Nearby I unearthed an ornate and well-made cane clasp (fig. 47), which dated to the 19th century and because of its quality was possibly lost by a member of the local gentry.

Farm labourers and field workers without a doubt worked up thirsts from their labours and two examples of 19th century barrel taps have been so far unearthed (fig. 48), as have two barrel cock keys which were used to prevent too thirsty workers getting to the barrel's contents too easily!

Fig. 48

However, I would guess that it was cold more often than warm out there in these Redcastle fields and I had to smile when I unearthed a large 19th century whisky bottle lid on which was engraved "Long John Whisky, Ben Nevis Distillery". There's no doubt that the contents would have both warmed up the lucky workers and lifted their spirits on a raw day in an open field.

As I carefully extracted from the muddy soil a twisted wire brooch, my heart flipped for a moment when I suddenly noticed a green stone set in the heart of it. I later forwarded it just as it was - mud encrusted - to the National Museum believing it to be ancient, but it wasn't (fig. 49). The experts confirmed it was - Victorian. However, they made the point to me that they appreciated the fact I had made no attempt to clean it up (which they prefer) but had sent it to them exactly as found. A good tip for the finder of anything he believes might be quite old and possibly valuable - don't clean it, leave that to the experts!

Fig. 49

Certain artefacts turn up quite regularly, like coin/weight measures (fig. 50) which dated from the 18th and 19th centuries. Numerous fragments of spoons, twisted spoons and even undamaged spoons are regular finds (fig. 51), and although often unattractive are still never- theless reminders of how many people once frequented these old castle fields.

Fig. 50

Fig. 51

South of the Border crotal bells (fig. 52) are a fairly common find, but only one single fragment of one has so far been turned up on these Highland fields.

Fig. 52

From time to time mounts are unearthed and are welcome finds. They vary in shape, style and age.

One mount (fig. 53) was that of a headless grouse or pheasant and dates to the Victorian period, whilst two others found are of earlier dates - late 17th century and 18th century. A small mount was believed by the experts to be late medieval belt decoration whilst another mount was deemed, incredibly, to be none other than a coffin mount!

Fig. 53

As you might well expect, when searching these ploughed fields you frequently observe broken shards of coloured pottery or china, and also fragments of broken glass, often dark green in colour and dating to the 17th and 18th century.

Occasionally, however, you do come across whole, undamaged bottles and it is nice to find these intact examples (fig. 54). One earthenware bottle in good condition is stamped with "R White - No Deposit Charged" and this is one reason I guess why it was "dumped"! Another has "John Campbell of Perth" on it, whilst a local bottle displays "MacKintosh, St Abbans, Inverness" on both its side and on its still present bottle top.

Fig. 54

At the time of writing I have at last been directed to the location of the castle's bottle dump. However, a depth of two metres of current day rubbish lies on top of it meanwhile, but it is the location of further past clues to the life enjoyed at the castle in bygone days and should be investigated. In time it certainly will be.

Buckles and Fastener ....

One find that turns up with considerable regularity is the humble buckle. Like coins and buttons, buckle finds are most useful for both dating purposes and providing clues to the past history of the field in question. Redcastle's fields have not disappointed this searcher in this respect.

It was, in fact, in a corner of one of the fields, which had previously proved bereft of finds of any kind, that my oldest artefact yet found was to turn up. It was an excellent example of a 14th century annular ring brooch (fig. 55).

Fig. 55

After carefully removing the brooch from the soil, I realised that it must date from 13th or 14th century, and although appearing to be in perfect condition I handled it with great care. Once again it was an artefact that was sent to the Treasure Trove Secretariat administrators, still mud encased! They later indicated its condition was so good that it must have been lost shortly after it was originally acquired, sometime in the 14th century. I cannot speak for others, but it gives me a real glow of satisfaction when I unearth an artefact that had, for example in this instance, not seen the light of day since it was lost over 600 years ago and that I had been instrumental in it being saved, preserved, and displayed for others in future to enjoy and, hopefully, to note that it came from Redcastle!

The earliest buckle unearthed dates to the 17th century (fig. 56). It is bronze and is a fine example of a spur buckle.

Fig. 56

One particular buckle unearthed (fig. 57) had a grey coating on it, which intrigued me. The experts who examined it stated, " .. this was the result of lining which served to give the buckle an attractive finish as well as a rust inhibitor".

Fig. 57

Several bronze buckles unearthed were dated to the 17th century (fig. 58), whilst copper alloy harness buckles have turned up from time to time on different fields (fig. 59), also copper alloy 18th and 19th century shoe or clog clasps (fig. 60).

Fig. 58 Fig. 59

Fig. 60 Fig. 61

Many belt buckles turn up in a damaged condition - the probable reason that they were discarded or found their way to the ground! One 17th/18th century belt buckle did have its pin present (fig. 61), which made a pleasant change from usual!

In the 18th century hat buckles were worn and these too have been unearthed in Redcastle's fields.

Coins Lost in Redcastle's Fields ....

Unearthed coins are arguably one of the best finds you can make when trying to simply date a location. This is not just because in most cases they are dated, but because of the other information they can give. For example, if there are large numbers found on a field - was it a past Fair site? Where were the coins minted and how many countries are represented? What is their general condition, have they been abused or made into love tokens? Coins have been used for target practice, would you believe, and also holed and made into pendants! We must not overlook, too, that there will also probably be counterfeit coins waiting to be found.

The first coins that can be described as Scottish were not minted until the middle or end of the 12th century - coincidentally at the very time Redcastle first emerged as a fortalice. There is certainly not, however, an abundance of coins from this period and not surprisingly I have found none so far!

The oldest coins I have unearthed to date at Redcastle have been two long cross Edward I hammered pennies, minted in London. I did unearth what I sincerely believed was a Bishop Kennedy or "Cros Raquel" penny dating to the 15th century. However, it was in poor condition and on this occasion the experts were not able to confirm that it actually was this.

Another old coin unearthed was a "hardhead" of James V (1513-1542) but, it has to be said, in poor condition.

I have also unearthed a small quantity of tiny French coins. The simple explanation for this is that at the end of the 16th century and beginning of the 17th century the small change in circulation in Scotland was inadequate, and as a result French double tournois coinage was imported and utilised to offset the deficit. However, by 1613 this practice was forbidden by an Act of the Privy Council. Amongst the French coinage unearthed were those of Louis XIII Royal Provincial, some of Marie de Montpensier de Dombes and other provincial coinage. About this period Dutch Doits were appearing in Scotland and I have also unearthed two examples of these at Redcastle.

What I believed must be a hammered silver coin, when I first unearthed it from the gateway area of a field, turned out to be a Penny (of Elizabeth I). It turned out that it had been tinned with the intention of passing it off as a groat. The experts felt that the Irish design was intended to make the counterfeit more readily "acceptable" and I have a feeling that somehow it succeeded!

I have been fortunate enough to unearth some coinage of James VI in the shapes of two-pence and one-penny coins and a fine 1624 silver sixpence (fig. 62), which was declared Treasure Trove.

Fig. 62

A copper two-pence, farthing, turners and single bodle of Charles I (1625-1649) have so far been the only coinage of this sovereign unearthed. However, many turners (fig. 63) of Charles II (1660-1685) have appeared with great regularity, along with a number of bawbees (fig. 64).

Fig. 63

Fig. 64

Three sixpences of William III (1695-1701) have so far been unearthed, though all were in either worn or bent condition, though the same cannot be said of the three shillings of Queen Anne (1702-1714). Two of them, dated 1707, were minted in Edinburgh (fig. 65), one of them now resting in Inverness Museum.

Fig. 65

The coinage of George II (1729-1760) has been unearthed in great numbers, consisting of dump farthings, farthings, halfpennies, Hibernia (Irish) halfpennies and even a counterfeit halfpenny. However, by far the greatest number of coins lost and recovered in these Redcastle fields has been from the reign of George III (1760-1820). They include a bullhead shilling (1816) (fig. 66), halfpennies and pennies (fig. 67), including Irish examples, cartwheel pennies, farthings and a counterfeit half-crown (fig. 68).

Fig. 66

Fig. 67

Fig. 68

From the George IV era (1820-1830), a single penny and a farthing dated 1825 are my only finds to date, whilst from Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901) halfpennies, pennies and a three-pence piece, a pierced four-penny coin, sixpence and three shillings (fig. 69) have emerged.

Fig. 69

Modern coinage from the turn of the 20th century has been unearthed in comparatively small quantities. This includes Edward VII (1901-1910), George V (1910-1936), George VI (1937-1952) and of course coinage of our present Queen Elizabeth II, including a 1993 £5 commemorative coin in good condition - sadly probably somebody's unfortunate loss from that particular time.

A Medieval Royal Visitor

Probably the vast majority of serious metal detectorists privately hope that one day he or she will unearth some special artefact that will result in doubts being cast on the previously known and accepted history of the area - and even to change it!

I was overjoyed when this did actually occur whilst I was carrying out a similar historical research project on an ancient hamlet located on the banks of the River Avon in Hampshire, England. However, I doubted somehow that I could be fortunate enough for this to happen again in the future.

However, whilst detecting on a ploughed field in the Spring of 2002 at Redcastle, I unearthed what I believed for a moment or two was part of a model dinky car, since I could only just perceive some bright enamel peeping out from this mud-encrusted find. I popped it into my finds bag where it remained until I returned home. After washing it in some soapy hot water, to my surprise it turned out to be a very fine example of a shield-shaped horse pendant. It measured approximately two centimetres in width and I could see clearly three white lions against a red enamelled background,

the reverse side being gold gilded (fig. 70). Needless to say, I carefully packaged it and sent it on immediately to the Treasure Trove in Edinburgh.

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Fig. 70

As expected, it was declared Treasure Trove. The heraldic pendant was described as a particularly nice find and a good example depicting the arms of England and likely to date around 13th to 14th century.

Naturally excited about this marvellous piece of news, I decided to return to the same spot where the pendant had been unearthed with the express purpose of seeing if I could locate anything else there.

Just when I was about to give up on what had been a slow, painstaking and fruitless search, I received a signal from the soil, which my trusty detector "told" me to dig. I could scarcely believe it when I found myself extracting from the muddy soil something I instantly recognised - a hammered silver coin! It was in excellent condition and was later examined and found to be a penny of Edward I, c.1281-82, and had been minted in London.

The excellent condition of both finds prompted a suggestion that I had to agree with - that they were lost at the same time. Could Edward I or someone in his entourage, close to him, have lost these items whilst visiting Redcastle? Research proved that Edward I did in fact at this exact time (1286) travel north into Scotland, records and route indicating that this was as far as Elgin. Since he was positively known to have reached Elgin, did he, or indeed one of his entourage, make the comparatively short ride to Inverness and to Redcastle? Did a mishap occur whilst they were riding out and these two artefacts were lost after a tumble? There are those who would laugh or smile at this suggestion - but what are the alternative suggestions regarding just how these artefacts could have somehow got there?

They were both in such excellent condition that I believe they must have been lost comparatively shortly after both had been originally produced. They were also located close to each other - surely

not a coincidence? However, I have to accept that there are those more qualified than I who state that you cannot necessarily link the two finds.

It was known, after all, that there was a castle at Redcastle at the time of King Edward's visit, so one wonders why they wouldn't be interested in giving it a look over or quick visit. I rest my case!

As I mentioned before, when you set out to find the clues to the past life and times of an old castle and its area, you always carry the hope in your heart that you will find something really significant that will, in turn, pose questions about its known history - and I believe these finds have done just this.

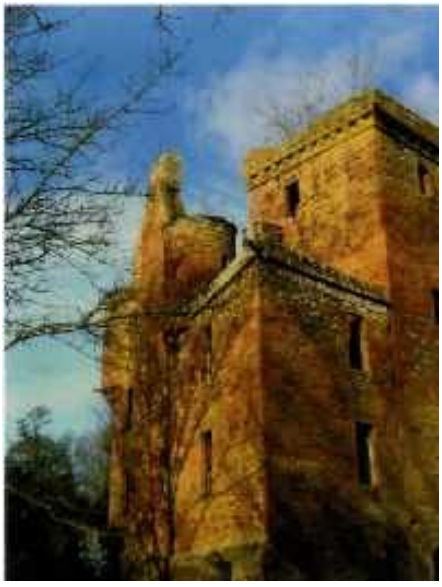
James Naughtie wrote in his introduction to Aberdeen's history (1800-2000) something that has since remained with me .... "History is about what a place has made of itself and where the answer lies ... somewhere in the people and the way their lives have been shaped, in the landscape itself and in the buildings ..." When I read this I immediately thought how true this was. However, I also feel that history is about evidence. By that I mean tangible evidence that is really documented and has been in the main examined and dated by the experts in their fields.

History is also about the many clues relating to the past that lie buried beneath your feet, just waiting to be located and unearthed. When identified they can tell you so much ....

The End?

At this stage we should be reaching the end of my Redcastle story. However, this story has no end to it since at the turn of the plough each year the fields of Redcastle will still present the searcher with further clues to its past. I have no doubt there are some fine artefacts still waiting to be found. It will continue to be this way when I've departed this world!

Meanwhile, patient reader, if there's an ancient or old building, castle or even area near you that you feel deserves to be researched - not just through archives but also by field-walking backed up with metal detecting - why not seriously consider taking up this challenge yourself? I know if you do, you'll never regret it.



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