

indication of an earlier stone phase in the chapel was noted, and will be examined in the next excavation season.

February 1976.

An Excavation at Clow Chapel, Watten, Caithness

(ND/233524) August 2 – 8, 1975.

Eric Talbot

The above work was undertaken at the invitation of the University of Aberdeen's Extra-Mural Department. The project had two main aims — to come to a fuller understanding of the development of chapel sites and to provide training in excavation and survey techniques primarily for interested amateur archaeologists in the north of Scotland.

I am greatly indebted to Mr. Don Omand (tutor-organiser in Extra-Mural Studies, Caithness) for the initial invitation to excavate and for help on site and to Mr. Leslie Myatt for practical help at all stages of the project. Mr. David Miller organised the electric fencing. Permission to carry out the operation came from the Ancient Monuments Inspectorate, the Department of Agriculture and the tenant, Mr. Harrold.

Before the excavation was undertaken an extensive documentary search revealed that the site, which is to be found on the E. side of the Scouthal Burn and c. 2 miles to the S. of Watten village, did not appear in written records until the eighteenth century when it was in a ruinous state and was used for the burial of travellers and unbaptised children. The ruined chapel is situated close to the traces of a settlement, complete with a mill, which also has no known recorded history (*Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.*) Vol. 100 (1967-8) 126). Excavation was aimed at throwing light upon the structural development of the chapel and its period of use. The surviving traces indicated a

nave (27' x 16') and chancel (14' x 10') with a doorway in the side of the nave. A slight ridge to the N. of the nave suggested a churchyard enclosure but very low relief ridge and furrow confused the situation. The investigation undertaken was restricted in area and attempted to answer as many questions with the minimum amount of disturbance. The areas investigated were:

1. A narrow cut up to the N. wall of the nave and at right angles to it.
2. The nave's S. door.
3. The S.E. corner of the nave and the S.W. corner of the chancel.
4. The S.E. corner of the chancel.

Area 1. The cut, 2 m. wide and 8.5 m. long, failed to locate an enclosure bank or wall. The main and only feature of interest, proved to be the intriguing discovery of a series of skulls neatly placed in small cists. Eventual detailed study may show whether they are the result of deliberate decapitation or whether they represent token burials or re-burials. An initial study by Dr. Dorothy Lunt of the Dental Hospital, Glasgow University and Dr. A. Young of the Anatomy Dept. of Glasgow University has indicated a wide age range and in a few instances re-burial is in evidence. A wide range is shown in forms of dental decay and oddities represented and Dr. Lunt is preparing a report on this aspect for a specialist dental journal.

Area 2. Excavation confirmed surface traces that the entrance to the nave was on the S. side towards the E. end.

Area 3. The opening up of adjacent areas of nave and chancel was achieved in order to investigate the building sequence. The nave proved to be an addition with a straight joint between it and the chancel. A line of burning towards the S. wall of the of the nave may suggest the earlier presence of a timber church.

Area 4. Both here and in area 3 loose burials in tumble showed graphic evidence for the chapel's eighteenth century usage. At

the chancel's E. end the S. side of a composite stone altar was located. No recess was observed within it. It is proposed to continue the work of excavation in August, 1976, so that the site can be more fully explored. The only small finds of note consisted of arrangements of snail shells and pebbles amongst the cists in Area 1 and a small fragment of claystone, in the same area, upon which are incised lozenges with inset crosses.

15.12.75.

REVIEW — JOHN R. BALDWIN

Alexander Fenton : *Scottish Country Life* (255 pp £6.50
John Donald Ltd. Edinburgh, 1976)

Scottish Country Life is not intended as "a history of the agriculture of Scotland", rather as "a study of some of the major aspects of the changing life of the countryside" from the 17th to the early 20th centuries, particularly the 18th and 19th centuries. Since this is the great period of agricultural change in Lowland Scotland (continuing through to the present-day in some Highland areas) agricultural matters, not surprisingly, predominate.

The book is based primarily on the functional objects of everyday rural life and work — how they were made and used, how they were influenced by environment and outside factors, how they changed.

Thus environment helps determine such factors as crops that can be grown, the tools, techniques and social organisation developed to raise and process these crops, and the diet and eating habits of the people. But outside influences — cultural, political, economic all play their part. The present concentration of settlement on small parcels of highly marginal land in many coastal areas of the Highlands and Islands is hardly due to environmental factors alone, so that the widespread change from