

Supporting the roof in pre-improvement vernacular buildings in Scotland



A NOSAS Seminar

5th April 2025 0915 – 1315

Highland Folk Museum, Newtonmore

£15 NOSAS members, £20 others

This NOSAS seminar brings together speakers from across Scotland who will contribute to an understanding of the ways that the roof was supported in pre-improvement vernacular buildings in Scotland. Cruck-framed construction has been a traditional method of doing this in Scotland. But there were areas of Scotland where there is little or no archaeological evidence of cruck-frames. What preceded crucks? And why were they superceded in the late 18th and early 19th centuries?



Morning Seminar 0945-1315. The speakers for the morning seminar:

- **Malcolm Bangor Jones** (Historian): *The evidence for crucks in the Northern Highlands*
- **Piers Dixon** (ex-RCAHMS): *Bridging the gap: how do we interpret archaeological evidence for cruck roofs in the light of architectural survival?*
- **David Newman** (retired architect): *Roof construction in Hebridean Thatched Houses*
- **Coralie Mills** (Dendrochronicle): *Tree-ring evidence for vernacular roof structures in Scotland* (Video presentation)
- **Derek Alexander** (National Trust for Scotland): *Crucks Slots - Gaps in our understanding or a void in the evidence?*
- **Daniel Postma** (Archaeo Build): *Typology or not typology, that's the question. Archaeological evidence for 5th-13th century crucks in the Netherlands*

A more detailed synopsis of each speakers talk can be found on page 3 of this advert.



Afternoon 1415 - 1630:

In the afternoon we will be guided round the constructed pre-improvement buildings at the Folk Museum by Bob Powell, who was a previous Principal Museums Officer.

Timetable

- 0900: Coffee & Registration
- 0930: Welcome and Introduction
- 0945: Presentations and discussion
- 1115: Coffee
- 1145: Presentations and discussion
- 1315: Lunch

- 1430: Tour of the constructed pre-improvement buildings in the museum with Bob Powell



Food and Catering

- Coffee/tea is included and will be available on arrival and mid-morning.
- An optional sandwich lunch @ £9 is available for those who pre-order it.
- Alternatively, participants may bring their own lunch and eat it within the seminar building, or use the Folk Museum's café which is in a separate building.

The **Highland Folk Museum** is outside Newtonmore on the road NE to Kingussie. Details about the museum, its history and location can be found on [their website](#). There is a café on site.

The seminar will take place in the modern administration block to the east of the main entrance. Google Maps location is [here](#).



Accommodation in Newtonmore in Speyside on the edge of the Monaliadh mountains offers many opportunities for accommodation, walking, cycling, etc. Some of the participants on this seminar will be staying at the [Balavil Hotel](#) in the main street. There is a [camping and caravanning site](#) at Kingussie to the north.

Cost

- £15 for NOSAS members
- £20 for non NOSAS people



Further Information can be found on the [NOSAS website](#)

Any queries? Contact: roland.spencerjones@gmail.com



Supporting the Roof Seminar April 5th – Synopsis of the talks

Malcolm Bangor-Jones

The evidence for crucks in the Northern Highlands. His presentation will consider evidence gathered from fieldwork and documentary material for the use and disappearance of crucks

Piers Dixon

Bridging the gap: how do we interpret archaeological evidence for cruck roofs in the light of architectural survival?
If this question was easily resolved we would not be still talking about it. It may safely be said that crucks were used to support the roofs of rural buildings from mainland Scotland and some of the Inner Hebrides in the 17th and 19th centuries, before being overtaken by Improvement. The question is what is the evidence for them before the 17th century? Archaeological evidence from the medieval and post-medieval periods will be explored and discussed in relation to architectural survivals and documentary sources.

David Newman

Between 2015 and 2020 David Newman and his field survey colleague Roger Auger surveyed nearly 250 former blackhouses on Uist in the Outer Hebrides. (These are known locally as *taighean-tughaidh* or thatched houses). Their work culminated in David's 2020 book 'The Thatched Houses of North Uist' which aims to both chart the development of and dispel some of the myths around what has been described as an example of a 'true vernacular building' rooted in the specific traditions and materials availability in the Outer Hebrides. The houses' distinctive roofs, which give the building type its name within the Uist community, are an important part of that development process in a part of Scotland with a relatively extreme climate, and this talk will explore that process including the earliest records, and how the use of thatch continued well into the 20th century including on the first post WWI government designed and sponsored 'Department' houses.

Coralie M Mills

In this video presentation, Coralie will summarise the tree-ring evidence from vernacular roof structures in Scotland. The numbers of Scottish vernacular buildings which have been subject to dendrochronology is very very small, a situation which drastically needs to change given such buildings continue to be lost or altered without record. However, some valuable evidence has been obtained from a number of pine cruck cottages in the eastern Highlands and Upland Aberdeenshire areas, sampled as part of the SCOT2K research project in 2013-2017. Longer ago, some tree-ring evidence was also obtained from two cruck frame cottages in Perthshire which used species like ash and elm amongst others. The presentation will summarise the extant results and will also consider future research priorities, as recently distilled in the new ScARF Dendrochronology Research Framework for Scotland which can be read about in the Historic Buildings section here: <https://scarf.scot/thematic/dendrochronology/4-dendrochronology-in-historic-buildings/>

Derek Alexander

Crucks Slots - Gaps in our understanding or a void in the evidence?

The National Trust for Scotland has a number of vernacular buildings in its care that clearly display the use of crucks for supporting the roof structure. Most of these buildings such as Weavers' Cottage, Beaton's Cottage, Moirlanich longhouse and Leanach are of 19th century date. During our work on the Ben Lawers Historic Landscape Project we excavated a few sites with cruck slots and have recently found more in a 19th century cottage at Torridon. While the cut back remains of crucks in the wall of a cottage have recently been found in a cottage on Iona. The archaeological evidence for pre-Improvement cruck roofs is scarce. The recently built replica turf house at Glencoe incorporates a mix of roof supports including crucks at one end, perhaps reflecting the possibility that pre-Improvement roof structures varied depending on the availability of resources.

Daniel Postma

In this presentation, Daniel presents his research on cruck roofs in early-medieval longhouses in the Netherlands. While earlier explorations of crucks on the Continent were limited by typological classifications of historical timber framing, typological analyses of excavated ground plans have helped to recognise a cuppill-like building system in archaeological evidence from the 5th-13th century. The resulting reconstruction models suggest an older origin and wider spread of cruck construction than is commonly accepted and explains why this building practice was lost in the Netherlands during high- and late-medieval times. It is concluded that similar typological research, informed by practical experiments, is needed to clarify the origins and development of crucks in the UK, meanwhile informing building conservation guidance and the use of roundwood in newbuild.