

Dunollie House, Oban

12 November

Seven members of the RFS Scottish Group met by courtesy of Madam Morag MacDougall of MacDougall, chief of Clan MacDougall, at her home and were greeted with the very best of highland hospitality. The visit was arranged by Catherine Gillies, project director of the Dunollie Trust, which sets out to identify and record the many objects in the house with the view to enabling wider access.

Dunollie House sits in a bay below the fortified ruin which is Dunollie Castle, the seat of Clan MacDougall. In Scotland the house would be known as a laird's house, referring to laird (lord) in its original meaning of keeper of life, keeper of the grain. Bonnet lairds as they were called, not to be confused with titled gentry, were landowners to

whom tenants owed loyalty and paid rent mostly in kind, including grain. Clan (family) ties dilute as the influence of education, the union of crowns and the era of enlightenment influenced Scotland in the later 18th century.

The survival of objects for living from 1745 to the present day is so extensive and varied, it means this unique house has more to commend it than many a stately home. Continuous occupation by one family with a capacity to collect and reluctance to dispose, means the house includes furniture bought for it, family fabrics, clothing (including uniforms) and archives to back it all up. Among the highlights are material evidence of the lives of the many descendants of Alexander, their foreign travel and military service, garments painted in portraits, and the highland dress in MacDougall tartan worn by the chief for George IV's visit to Edinburgh.

Dunollie House was built in 1745 by Alexander MacDougall, son of John Ciar MacDougall, a Jacobite chief involved in the 1715 rebellion. It sits in a raised hollow looking to the sea, below the castle. It incorporates the factor's house in use when the castle was occupied. It was extended in the later 18th century, and finally in the Georgian manner in 1836. The MacDougall family lived at home and abroad, gathering mementos and clearing space by packing things away, to the nation's benefit.

The RFS group count it a privilege to have visited Dunollie House at this early stage when discoveries are still being made

Crissie White