

## **THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF BIRSE PARISH**

*A Report to outline BCT's interest in the cultural heritage of Birse parish and so assist the development of BCT's first Cultural Heritage Action Plan. The production of this report is part of BCT's Rural Challenge Fund Project.*

*The Report has four parts - What, Why, When & How*

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### **1. WHAT** *(is the cultural heritage of Birse)*

'Heritage' can be defined straightforwardly as "what is or may be inherited". The heritage of a locality can be divided into its natural and cultural heritage.

'Natural Heritage' can be defined as the "flora and fauna, geological and physiographic features and natural landscape" of the locality (eg. as in Act setting up SNH).

There appears, however, no such ready definition of what is meant by 'cultural heritage'. The Oxford Dictionary is, for example, of little help as it essentially defines 'culture' as a verb (to culture, in sense of 'to grow').

For BCT's purposes, the cultural heritage of Birse might be seen in general terms as encompassing the customs, traditions and local history of the parish and all the associated physical artefacts and other products of that.

Thus, 'cultural' is taken to be 'of society' (or in a particular locality, 'of community'), as opposed to 'of nature' in natural heritage.

A locality's cultural heritage also incorporates its natural heritage to the extent that the natural heritage or landscape is a product of the locality's human history.

This links to the idea of 'cultural landscapes' – landscapes that are valued for what they show about local history (eg. landscapes around Woodend & mills or in Commonty).

Thus, in the terms above, the cultural heritage of Birse is a very wide and all embracing concept covering all aspects of 'people & place', both now and previously.

## **2. WHY** (*is it important to BCT*)

An interest in the cultural heritage of Birse parish is inherent in both BCT's charitable objectives and its mission 'to promote the common good of the inhabitants and deliver wider public benefits'.

This interest can be seen as being at two levels:

- *firstly*, the responsibility to conserve the valued components of the local community's cultural heritage for 'their own sake' and,
- *secondly*, the opportunity to develop the contribution that the local cultural heritage can make to community development more generally.

With the former, the 'specialness' of the components to be conserved may not just be their local value, but their national or international significance (eg. the mills and pinewoods are designated as being of European importance).

The contribution of cultural heritage to community development can be in several forms. These include, for example, the capacity of key local heritage assets to generate funds for their conservation and so also provide local employment.

However, the main importance is the contribution that cultural heritage can make to the identity of a locality and through that, to the community's sense of itself and the level of self-confidence that are required to underpin successful community development.

Birse is a 'community of place' (not 'interest') and increased awareness of the cultural heritage strengthens the sense of involvement and responsibility of members of the community with and for that place and its community.

Therefore, while fulfilling its responsibilities to conserve the cultural heritage of Birse, BCT also has powerful reasons to promote the cultural heritage as a key part of its commitment to the well being of the local community.

## **3. WHEN** (*does BCT plan to address it*)

In the Strategic Plan for 2001-04 adopted by BCT, the conservation and promotion of the parish's heritage (natural / cultural) was included as one of the two main themes under which the Trust will develop projects: the other being well-being (social / community).

Then, to take forward the heritage theme, the development and implementation of Actions Plans for both the natural and cultural heritage of the parish was incorporated as part of BCT's Rural Challenge Fund (RCF) Project 2001-2003.

In line with the RCF Project, BCT has already carried out in 2001-02 the first of three annual Natural Heritage Action Plans, agreed its second Natural Heritage Action Plan for 2002-03 and made outline proposals for a third Natural Heritage Action Plan in 2003-04.

With cultural heritage in the RCF Project, the first requirement is to produce a report (this paper) as a pre-cursor to the development and implementation of BCT's first annual Cultural Heritage Action Plan for 2002-03.

While the RCF Project ends in 2003, SNH funding has already been secured for the third Natural Heritage Action Plan in 2003-04 and BCT plans to apply to the Heritage Lottery Fund for support to continue a programme of annual Cultral Heritage Action Plans.

**HOW** (*does BCT propose to tackle it*)

While BCT has been involved with a range of cultural heritage matters since its very beginning, annual action plans will help BCT to develop a more comprehensive, co-ordinated and effective programme of work.

The aim of that programme will be 'to investigate, conserve and promote the cultural heritage of Birse parish' and, as this aim reflects, the work will involve three basic approaches to support effective delivery:

- (a) *investigation* (including survey and research)
- (b) *conservation* (including restoration) and
- (c) *promotion* (including dissemination).

The programme will, to help focus the work, be applied to three main areas of interest:

- (a) the *existing sites* where BCT is directly involved in the management;
- (b) the *wider landscape* over and above the BCT sites;
- (c) *local history* more generally (eg. archives and artefacts)

The key existing BCT sites for cultural heritage projects as part of annual action plans are: the Commonty, Mills, Corsedardar, Old School, Souter's Shop & Slewdrum.

Within the wider landscape, action plan projects will be based initially on developing BCT's existing work, for example:-

archaeology on a parish wide basis; historical and traditional routes; place names; woodland culture; cultural landscape assessment.

A related part of the focus will be maintaining a particular interest in the listed buildings in the parish, together with other designated sites and places of particular local note.

Local history, which is the most diffuse of the three areas of interest, is given particular focus by BCT's archive at the Old School, including its 'collections' such as:

maps, photographs, geneological records, music songs & poems, publications, other documentary and historical records, artefacts of different types, ...

In conclusion, and as outlined above, BCT's first cultural heritage action plan will be developed pragmatically around:

the 3 approaches, the 3 areas of interest and BCT's existing project base