

## Refurbishment of No. 2, Craignarget Cottages 2019

We first started to let out Craignarget Cottage in the early 1980s, prompted by the change from annual Rates of £125 to a double Pole Tax of £1000 per year on a 'second home'. The Cottage became self-financing and over the years we gradually used the income to maintain and improve the Cottage. However, in the 2010s, we began to have increasing problems with damp, particularly on the fireplace gable wall and also the gable wall in the bedroom. In addition, we had twice injected the internal brick walls against rising damp but we didn't seem to be able to stop the problem.

In 2012 / 13, the fireplace in the living room (not original) was beginning to come away from the wall as the floor underneath subsided and damp issues on that wall were getting more noticeable. We decided to install a new fireplace with wood-burning stove and renew the dry-lining on the fireplace wall with insulation included. On removing the fireplace, we found the old opening which would have originally housed the range, but unfortunately the sandstone slabs at each side had simply been smashed off flush with the stone wall.

We sourced some lovely grey stone from Dring Stone on the North York Moors, and our builder did all the installation work including a chimney lining and newly insulated dry lining. He advised the use of insulated plasterboard effectively stuck to the stone wall – as it turned out, not a good idea although he claimed to have done this successfully in many similar properties including his own. Very quickly, we had damp patches all over the wall and water coming down the chimney onto and into the wood-burning stove! In the process of the work he had checked all the flashings around the chimney and the haunching around the pot and couldn't find any problems. It wasn't until we were on the second lot of roofers we'd got out to investigate the problem that by chance one just tapped the haunching with a cold chisel and discovered that it was merely a paper thin skin. Under the skin was just sodden sand that looked as if it had come from the beach. On further investigation, the pointing on the sides of the chimney was the same – just a thin skin which when removed revealed sodden sand. Basically, the water had been pouring in through the chimney stack for years probably.

This was all rectified and the flashing around the chimney replaced. However, water was still coming down the chimney whenever it rained and ruining the wood-burning stove. The chimney cowl simply couldn't cope with the wind and horizontal rain that we get here. A different cowl guaranteed to keep the rain out seemed to work, but at the end of 2018 the problem returned. We're still battling this one and I suspect the only solution will be a barrel pot such as we have on the centre chimneys.

With the experience and hindsight of the East end chimney, we did the same thing to the centre and West end chimneys, hoping that this would cure the damp problems on the bedroom gable wall, but it didn't. One interesting thing we discovered – using a damp meter to test patches of damp kept giving readings off the top of the scale even though the damp appeared to be drying out. Then by chance one day, we just put the damp meter on a patch of dry-lined wall that was showing no damp at all. The meter still gave a reading off the top of the scale! It was a typical Craignarget day and there was simply so much moisture in the air that wherever you tried to take a reading, it was off the scale. Perhaps this indicates why we're having such a battle with damp.

A similar indicator occurred when we arrived last Autumn and forgot to open the window before going to bed. When we woke up in the morning there were damp patches visible all over the gable wall. The salt that had come out of the plaster as it had indeed dried out, had been absorbed by the wallpaper and was now taking in the moisture in the air from our breathing! When we opened the window and put some heat on the next day, the damp patches gradually dried out. This of course left us with the prospect of having to remove all the plaster from the walls and start again, as our damp had been coming in from above for

years, not like rising damp which can only penetrate 760mm up the walls and can therefore be remedied by removing the bottom 1m of plaster.

So, what is the best way forward? We could strip the plaster, but much of it is lath and plaster so it would mean new plasterboard and skimming. We could try to inject the internal walls again, perhaps with some repointing to help the effectiveness of this process together with stripping the plaster to 1m height. We could strip and replace the wrong solution on the fireplace wall and we could do a number of other things to try to solve the problems. We had a nasty feeling though, that if we did all this we'd probably improve but not fully cure the damp situation.

Or, we could bite the bullet and do a complete refurbishment:-

- New concrete floors with damp-proof membrane and 100mm of insulation under 3" of concrete
- Electric underfloor heating, with Wifi controllers so we can set it from home ('Fibre to the property' internet is due in 2019!)
- New Dry-lining on all the walls with 50mm of insulation
- New highly energy efficient PVCu windows which don't have an annoying bar right at eye level and open outwards from the bottom to act as escape windows in the event of fire
- New ceilings
- New electrics with more sockets in places that were actually accessible and useful
- New sound insulated internal stud walls so no chance of rising damp
- New open plan kitchen with breakfast bar so that the cook isn't cut off from the rest of their party while in the kitchen
- A Mechanical Ventilation Heat Recovery unit which very quietly exchanges all the air in the cottage regularly, extracting the heat from the outgoing air and feeding it back into the incoming air. These systems are quite expensive to install, but only cost about £40 a year to run and the advantage is that the cottage is ventilated over the winter when unoccupied and they have an inherent dehumidifying effect!
- A new front door that at least makes some attempt to stop the draft!

The more we thought about it, this seemed the right thing to do for a number of reasons:-

- It was the most likely route to a total cure of damp problems.
- It would greatly improve the Cottage and make it more commercially viable.
- It would not leave our daughter with all this to do in years to come.
- It might mean we could go to the cottage ourselves and have a holiday instead of working all the time to put things right.
- If we were going to do something like this, it needed to be done now while we were still capable of doing most of the work ourselves in order to reduce the costs!
- There is no doubt that the weather has changed. Far more rain – in our 56 years ownership of the cottages, we've never seen so much moss in the grass in the field before, and more storm extremes.

So, in January 2019 the work began. The following is a simple daily diary of the work undertaken, what we uncovered, and the problems we faced. On a sweltering summer day, in the cool of the evening, or tucked up against the wind and rain in front of the wood-burning stove, we hope you may be interested to read the story of the 2019 refurbishment.

## Cottage refurbishment works commence Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> January 2019.

### Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> January:

Arrived with car and trailer about 16:00 to start work. Evening – cleared out things from bedroom and kitchen. Packed things away in boxes and stacked everything in living room. Took out kitchen units and moved them through to living room. Had pre-booked an 8 tonne skip to arrive first thing Monday morning.

### Monday 28<sup>th</sup> January:

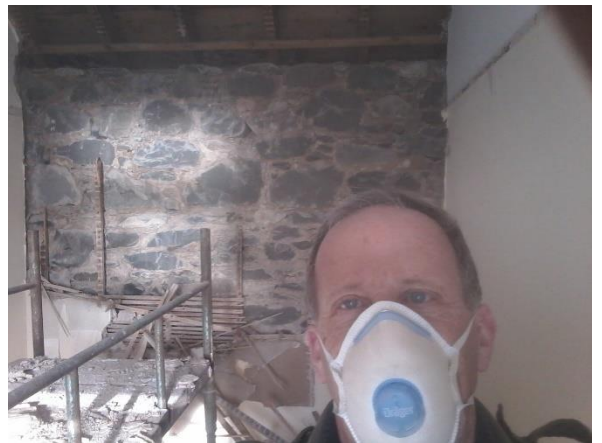
Robert (his family used to own the Cock Inn and he was the chef – lives in bungalow this side of the Lodges), arrived 08:00 to help move the bedroom furniture through to the living room. Beautiful crisp, clear morning with a sharp



frost. A good omen? Contacted Community Reuse Shop in Stranraer, (next to tip, behind Border Cars on industrial estate). They will take cooker and old kitchen units as well as dining table and chairs. Took advantage of Robert's help to load trailer and car up with old kitchen units, cooker, dining table and 6 chairs. Checked with skip company. A driver had rung in sick so it would be pm before they could get to me, so took everything to Reuse Shop straight away – cleared the decks a bit.

Started stripping existing dry-lining from bedroom walls and taking down bedroom ceiling. Lovely job! Time passing and no sign of skip. Finally arrived at about 15:30 by which time I was knee deep in rubbish. Lath and plaster ceilings aren't fun to take down. Bonfire of arms-full of laths – easiest way to get rid of them. Began to clear all the mess and load rubbish into the skip.

Having exposed the rear stone wall, I expected to find lots of loose mortar, but it was actually very good. No obvious signs of damp problems. A bit of rubbish in the coombes where the joists sit on top of the wall, but easily cleaned out to ensure the roof-space will have good ventilation. Different story on the front



wall. Mortar still quite good, but a lot of rubbish behind the dry-lining above the window and loads of wet rubbish in the coombes between the roof joists / rafters. Managed to clear much of this out, but so much that it was difficult to ensure there would be good ventilation for the roof-space. Maybe try hiring an industrial hoover?



Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> January:



Started knocking down the wall between the bedroom and kitchen. Surprisingly easy to demolish! Where the brick wall joined the rear stone wall of the cottage there was of course no damp-proof course so that had been one of our sources of damp – as well as rising damp in the brick wall itself. Actually, the internal brick wall was barely attached to the outer stone wall – a few bricks attached every 6 or 7 courses, possibly to try to prevent damp penetration from one wall to the other. No dpc and no real foundation to the wall. It was just built on the earth with a couple of courses of bricks below floor level. Once I'd got about half the wall down I had to take out the old large built in cupboard in the kitchen. I was expecting this would be quite a job, but a few good swings with the sledge hammer and it was out, revealing lovely flowered wallpaper behind.



With the old kitchen cupboard out of the way it was merely a firm push and the rest of that wall was down! Everything had to be carried out to the skip in tub-trugs. By the time I've fully filled the skip, I'll probably have moved about 6 tonnes of rubbish. Won't bother going to the gym this week then!



Completely demolished all of the bedroom / kitchen and kitchen / hallway walls. Skip pretty much full after clearing all the bricks and plaster from the two walls. Whole kitchen, bedroom and hallway now just one open space.

Just the bedroom door, frame and wall above left in place (just visible at right of picture) because the consumer unit and fuses etc are attached to the wall above the door.



Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> January:



Took load of wood (old kitchen cupboard etc) to the tip in Stranraer first thing. Then continuing to take down the ceiling in the kitchen and clear the rubbish. Had managed to squeeze the plaster into the skip, but left with hundreds of laths to burn. Had a day long bonfire at the back of the field. Took all the old fibreglass insulation out of the loft and managed to load it all into the trailer with a sheet over everything to keep it in. Another load to the tip at the end of the day.

End of the day view into the cottage from the front door – looking straight through and out of the kitchen window. Doors to the cupboard with the hot water tank visible – all taped up to keep out dust and rubble. This cupboard will go to be replaced by a tall kitchen unit, with another unit on top, cut to the shape of the coombes. The total height of the ceiling is almost exactly the same as that of the tall unit and base cupboard on top. With a bit of adjustment of the leg height this will be the housing for the hot water tank with a storage cupboard above that will house all our paints and things, and will conceal the pipework going up to the cold water storage tank which will relocate to the loft to give us a bit better hot water pressure.

This is the plan for the new open-plan kitchen – hopefully everything will work out ok. We'll rebuild the stud walls to fit the kitchen design.



Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> January:

Iain, (nephew), arrived 08:00 to help with preparation for concreting the bedroom and hallway floors. Rang to get the skip up-lifted as can't really get any more in. Iain took down the last of the kitchen ceiling, temporarily relocated the electrics by 'suspending' them from the ceiling joists and took out the bedroom door and frame, while I started taking out the old wooden bedroom floor.



Only took about 20 minutes to take out the entire bedroom floor! Joists rested on a small 'foundation' at the front and back walls. No intermediate supporting foundations and joists basically laid on the earth. At each end, the earth was about half way up the joists and the joists were rotten. Nevertheless,

the joists and floor boards will be re-used in due course in rebuilding the low shed that houses our small boat at the back of No. 1 cottage! Benefit though is that there'll be little need for digging out in order to get the necessary depth for a layer of hardcore, damp-proof course, 100mm of insulation and 75mm of concrete. This revealed the foundation of the kitchen floor which we'd got a local builder to replace with concrete a few years ago. Confirmed that the kitchen floor had insulation under the concrete so no need to relay this floor.

Rang to try to book the concrete for tomorrow – Luce Bay Plant Hire able to provide a load of readymix at 11:00 Friday – confirmed! Just need to advise the exact quantity required in the morning.

In afternoon, continued preparation by taking out the concrete floor in the hallway. Not a difficult job – only about two – three inches of concrete straight on top of the earth. A few blows with the sledge hammer was all that was required. No more room in the skip, so all this went into the trailer to take to the tip later. Earth under the concrete was sodden! No doubt the source of the rising damp in the hallway wall facing you as you entered the cottage. Removed the last bricks from the base of the bedroom / kitchen and kitchen / hallway walls.

Prepared hallway and bedroom floors by laying dpc and insulation. Iain set a timber about 1' away from the fireplace wall at the right level so we could level the concrete across from the existing kitchen floor to this using a long length of 4"x2" timber. Then, as we reach the front corner of the bedroom, the timber would be removed and the strip where it was is filled and floated to level off with the rest of the floor – and so on. Sounds good to me! We'll see if it works in practice tomorrow.



Trailer load of rubble and earth from the floors to the tip last thing. Skip up-lifted about 16:00 thankfully as we needed it out of the way for the concrete lorry tomorrow.

Friday 1<sup>st</sup> February:



Measured up for concrete and calculated 1.1 m<sup>3</sup>. Decided we'd order 1.3m<sup>3</sup> to be on the safe side. Rang Luce Bay Plant to advise – "There might be a slight delay, the plant is frozen up this morning. We've been working on it since 07:00 but we haven't got the water flowing yet".

Final preparations for laying the concrete. 2 wheelbarrows ready for barrowing the concrete into the cottage. You only get 30 minutes to off-load before they charge you for the extra time. If you have a full load of 6m<sup>3</sup> there may well be 8 people with wheelbarrows if it needs to be barrowed!



All concrete off-loaded within half an hour, and laid within about 1.5 hours. Operator picking pieces of ice out of the concrete as it comes down the chute into the wheelbarrow! Short by about one barrow full. I think we probably miscalculated by not allowing for settlement and compression as the concrete went on top of the insulation. You learn by experience! Quickly nipped into Stranraer to get a couple of bags of aggregate and some cement. Able to finish off the complete area we wanted to do in one pour.



Looks good to me! I'm able to leave about 15:30 having measured up for all the timber, insulation, plasterboard etc. that we'll need next time to start on the dry-lining and the stud walls.

Left a convector heater on in the cottage overnight just to take off the worst of the chill. Don't want any risk of the concrete freezing overnight!



Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> February:

Had an inquisitive visitor last night!

I'm guessing the most likely is a rabbit – have to search the internet.



These aren't rabbit. Not sure what they are, but I know someone who probably will know. Four toed I think are cats and dogs? Anybody recognise these?

Expert opinion on the prints is Dog. "The prints are confusing as they are 'registered', which means that rear footprints are on top of fore prints. Animals do this as they reuse the stable spot found by the forefoot and also reuse the hole made in the snow by the forefoot etc."

Strange one this as I was up at first light to check that the concrete had survived the very cold night without freezing

and to get an early start on clearing up, so was someone walking a dog at dawn and peering into the cottage to see what we were doing?

Cleaning up in No. 1 Cottage and measuring up for things we'll need next time, before setting off for home about lunchtime. Iain confirmed that he'd ordered all the timber, plasterboard and insulation that we'll need next time for delivery on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> February.



Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> February:

Arrived back home from daughter Katherine's after a long weekend with her doing some jobs around the house for her. Unloaded the car and loaded up again ready for departure to the cottage first thing tomorrow.

Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> February:

Iain arrived at the cottage about 12:30pm. Delivery of 30 sheets of plasterboard, 35 sheets of insulation and dozens of lengths of 2"x2" and 3"x2" timber arrived about 13:00. I arrived about half an hour later after everything was unloaded!



Started putting up new dry-lining on the bedroom walls. Got 2 walls done with me cutting timbers to length and Iain assembling sections which were then up-ended into place and fixed to the roof joists at the top and to the new concrete floor at the bottom. No contact with the stone wall at all! The frame has a damp-proof membrane fitted to the back of it before being fixed into place. Fortunately, Iain has a nail gun – wonderful piece of kit! So, that allowed us to stack all the sheets of insulation in one corner of the bedroom. They had just been unloaded into a large stack on the front lawn. Plasterboard had to wait in Iain's trailer overnight with battens underneath and two sheets on top. Thankfully, a dry night was forecast.



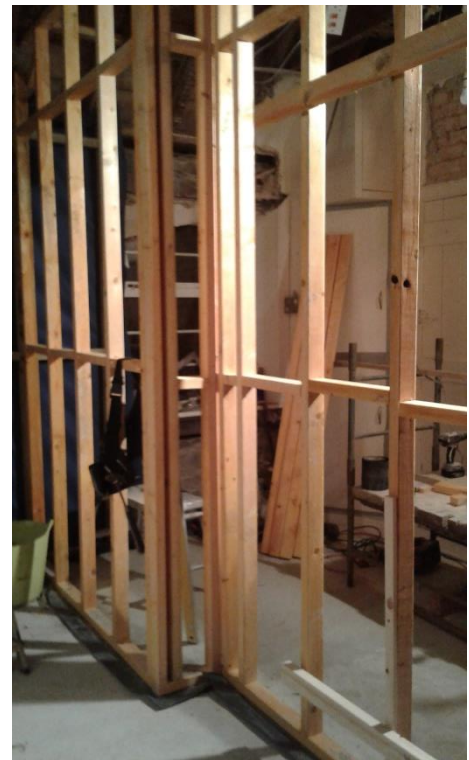
Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> February:

More dry-lining. Make the framework; attach the damp-proof to the back; fix to the ceiling joists and floor; on to the next section.



Finished the dry-lining by lunchtime, then started on the new stud wall between the bedroom and kitchen, and between the kitchen and hallway. Had to measure everything very carefully to ensure that the layout of the stud walls matches the dimensions of the planned new kitchen units etc. Discovered that the cottage isn't actually rectangular – it's a slight rhomboid shape! I guess when the cottage was built, they'd just have paced it out and laid out the foundation stones by eye, or maybe with the aid of a bit of string! Will be interesting when it comes to fitting the kitchen units and worktops!

Finally got the last bit in place about 19:00 – the door frame for the bedroom door. The door will open against the front wall so it doesn't encroach on the room space in the same way. This is very simply achieved by putting the living room door on the bedroom, and the bedroom door on the living room! Very late tea today.



Friday 15<sup>th</sup> February:



Early start again. Finished fixing the bedroom door frame and attaching the battens we need to be able to fix the plasterboard up to the frame on all sides. Then started putting in the noggins (Yorkshire) / dwangs (Scottish), between the ceiling joists to which the edges of the plasterboard will be screwed. Can't believe how much timber goes up in preparation for plaster boarding – I've cut miles of 2"x2" rough sawn timber over the last few days!

Got the plaster board fixed to the ceiling. A relatively easy job with two people when you've got a pile of insulation sheets to stand on. Only 3 ½ sheets for the whole ceiling so quite quick to do. Then put up the plaster board on the bedroom side of the new stud wall – beginning to look like a room again.



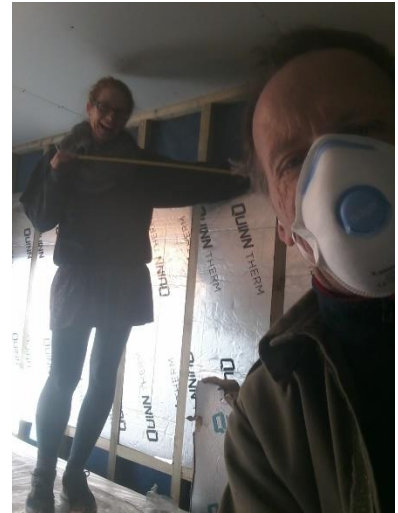
Brought in all the rest of the sheets of plasterboard and stacked them in the kitchen area – not an easy task because somebody's put up a stud wall in the way! Iain managed to leave for home about 16:00 having ordered the new windows for delivery 26<sup>th</sup> February at start of next visit. I carried on finishing off the ceiling. Putting in extra screws – always like to go for overkill – making sure all the screws were fully driven home so that the plasterer doesn't catch his trowel on anything. Then, a lot of clearing up as I had to create space to store all the remaining timber inside. We'd had lovely weather since Tuesday, so had been able to leave it all outside. Just planning to finish at about 18:00 and get the tea on when Katherine arrived for the weekend to help, having managed to get away early at 15:00. Didn't make her start work that evening, but nice for her to see the work in progress so that she understands what's underneath the surface when it's all finished.



Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> February:

Katherine to Port William first thing for a few provisions and some bits and pieces at the Ironmongers, as I get everything ready for putting in the insulation.

Spent the entire day putting insulation into the dry-lining of the bedroom walls. Only break was to wire for 5 No. sockets in the bedroom, plus a short walk along the beach to find wood for tonight's fire – very successful. Stopped for tea about 17:30 when we could no longer see to cut the insulation boards outside. No room to do this inside and better outside anyway, as it's not pleasant stuff when you're cutting it.



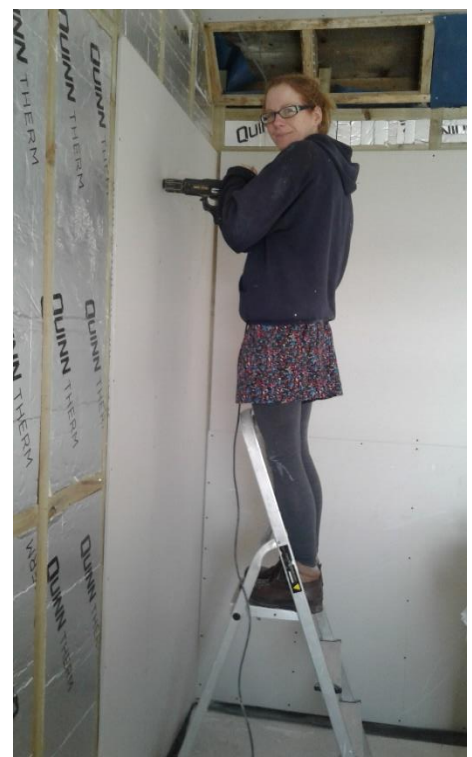
Masks are needed, but not outside with the wind that was blowing today! Gales forecast tonight with winds of 50mph plus, so everything battened down and weighted with rocks. Booked for tea at the Clansman tomorrow night 18:30. We'll have earned it by then.

Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> February:

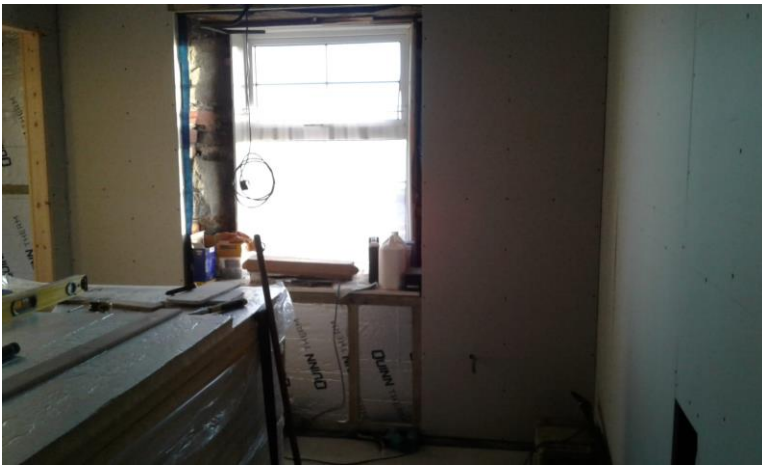
Continued fitting insulation into the dry-lining. Very windy and wet so had to make space to cut everything inside. Very awkward and slow. Faired up in the afternoon and the sun came out making things much easier. Finished all the insulation by lunchtime and then started on the plasterboard.



Katherine spotted damp on the rafters at the bottom where they rest on top of the outer cottage stone wall. Suspect this is caused by all the damp rubbish in the eaves. Had already cleared as much as possible, but very difficult to get it all out. Will try to hire an industrial vacuum tomorrow (Monday) to see if that helps.



Finished all full sheets of plasterboard by about 16:30, leaving me just bits and pieces to do to finish off. Nice meal at the Clansman.



#### Monday 18<sup>th</sup> February:

Katherine set off 04:45. I got another couple of hours sleep. Into Stranraer after booking plasterer for next week. No industrial vac to be hired anywhere in Stranraer so will have to rely on our trusty old green cylinder Hoover. Collected 7 bags of Multi finish plaster and one bag of bonding for forming the curve to the coombes. Didn't get started until after an early lunch. Finishing off all the part sheets of plasterboard takes ages. A very late finish and still got one bit of plasterboard to do underneath the window sill. Fell backwards off the scaffolding at about 19:00! Don't know how it happened – I think I was leaning backwards into a corner to get a screw in the edge of the plasterboard and the small scaffolding tower I was working on rolled away from under my feet. I fell backwards through the bedroom doorway, and although it was only about 5 feet above floor level, I had plenty of time to think 'This is going to hurt, I could be in trouble here'. What am I going to do if I break something?' I hit the new concrete on my right side. Fortunately, I had so many layers on I think that saved me. Not only did I survive, but my drill driver which was in my right hand and crashed onto the concrete, also survived! Tea at 20:00 and gingerly to bed. Can't lie on my right side but other than bruising and a badly scraped right elbow, I seem to have got away with it.

#### Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> February:

Early start and a bit battered and bruised. Decided to leave the last bit of plasterboard until first job next time. Cleaned up and set off about 10:00, calling on my brother and sister-in-law near New Abbey on the way home. Hopefully returning next Monday to fit new windows and for the plasterer later in the week. I'll have a couple of slack days in the middle of the week, so planning if we can, to replace the dilapidated boathouse in the middle couple of days next week. It's stood for about 54 years give or take a year or two, so it had a god innings. The framework was new timber but everything else was planking off the beach. This time, the framework will be our old bedroom floor joists minus the rotten ends and the planking will be the old floorboards. Up-cycling is the height of fashion!

## Monday 25<sup>th</sup> February:

Travelled up am. Rang plasterer on arrival and booked them for Friday 08:00. Went into Stranraer for materials for the plastering, scrim, (the self-adhesive web tape that reinforces all the corners and joints between boards), and angle beads for the external corners. Also got 1/3<sup>rd</sup> tonne of aggregate for the foundations of the new boathouse, for the grand sum of £5. Shan't have much I can do before Friday so taking the opportunity to rebuild the boathouse this week.

On arriving back from Stranraer, there was a car parked on the front lawn. Asked if I could help and the driver queried if I was the owner of the cottage and whether I'd owned it for long? Turned out to be the son of Jack and Brenda Norse with his wife. Jack and Brenda regularly stayed at the cottage years ago. In fact, Jack died while on holiday at the cottage and his ashes were scattered on the beach – as were the ashes of their dog a couple of years later. It was he who painted the Craignarget Cottage plaque which we've had in the window ever since. They were very interested to have a look around and see the work we were doing. They took lots of photos to show to Brenda when they got back.

Nice afternoon, so did a bit of work to the rear fence at the back of the field. Needed new posts and the wires tensioning. Early night ready for a bright and early start in the morning. Iain will be arriving about 08:00 with the new windows he picked up today. Need to get two fitted tomorrow including raising the sill height in the kitchen.

## Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> February:

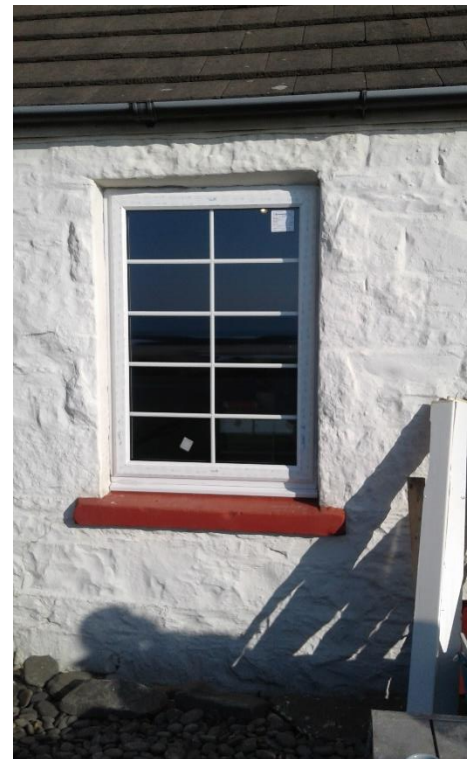
Iain arrived just before 08:00 with 3 new windows. I'd got the bedroom window ready for him to start on straight away. Came out fairly easily – too easily as there were signs of water ingress around each of the bottom corners of the window. New window in fairly quickly. Looks great without the thick bar across the middle which came just at eye level and blocked the lovely views. However, they haven't fitted the restrictors which both prevent it being blown fully open in the wind, causing damage, and allow it to operate as an escape window in the event of fire. They'll have to come out to fit these next time we're here. Not paying the bill until this is done.

Car stopped as we were finishing off the bedroom window about 09:45. Greeted me with "Are you John?". "No, I'm Robert" I replied. "Last time I saw you was 47 years ago" he said! Turned out to be Ronnie McCutcheon whose parents farmed at Craignarget Farm in the mid 60s. As boys, John and I played with Ronnie and his cousin Andy when we were here in the Summer holidays. I think he was wrong with 47 years. I

reckon it was over 50 years! Had a long and interesting chat including all about his round-the-world trip on a motorbike. He intended to be away 9 months and was gone 7 years. He can't half talk. Then I made the mistake of mentioning that my helper was John's older boy – "Oh well, I'd better have a word with him then". That was another half hour. Heard all about members of the McCutcheon family that I only very vaguely recollect. It's obviously my week for living in the past.

Cup of coffee, and then kitchen window out.

Wanted to raise the sill by about 18" so the window isn't below sink level but there were two massive blocks of granite built into the wall on either side above the sill. In the picture, you can see where the right hand lug was and can just make out the large block of granite above. No way were we going to get those out! Best option was to cut the lugs off the sandstone sill at each side enabling us to stand a chance of getting the existing sill out more or less in one piece. Once



out, Iain built up the external wall in stone – like doing a jigsaw with pieces that don't really fit together at all! Then we lifted the sill back onto the top and bedded it in with mortar at the desired height for the new window. Lunchtime while things set a bit.



Iain able to fit the new window after lunch. Nothing was going to move around with the weight of that sill on top of it. Finished about 15:30. All looking good. When it's all set, I'll point up the new stonework in the wall and get it painted and it'll hardly show that it's been altered.



Meanwhile, I'd prepared the foundations for the new boathouse, simply by digging a trench around the outside of the existing structure, hence making the new shed slightly wider and slightly longer than the existing one which is what we wanted. I say 'simply', but bearing in mind that the field is essentially a raised beach, nothing with a spade is simple in the field. Half an hour the other day to dig a new hole for one fence post. 'Dig' isn't really the correct term. Mining by removing one stone at a time might be more accurate.



Set about concreting the foundations and finished about 16:45 after which Iain set off for home. A couple of hours of clearing everything away before finishing for the night.

### Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> February:

An easier day today. Started by cutting up all the waste timber from the windows etc. and put the last piece of plasterboard on in the bedroom. Also put up the angle beads on all the corners ready for plastering. Cleared everything out of the bedroom including moving all the remaining sheets of insulation through from the bedroom onto the pile in the kitchen.

Went over the entire bedroom again, making sure all plasterboard fixings were properly sunk, and putting in additional fixings wherever I thought it looked a bit sparse. Moved all tools through to the kitchen area, swept the bedroom floor twice, and then brushed it over with a 4:1 mix of water / pva to seal the new concrete floor. Everything now ready for the plasterer on Friday. Left the floor to dry over lunch.



Started on the rebuilding of the boathouse. Took a few minutes to demolish the old structure. The corner posts and side boarding were all rotten, but the side rails that weren't in contact with the ground were still perfectly alright. Sure we'll be able to reutilise those somewhere! Got all the replacement timbers cut ready. Creosoted everything liberally – I have an old 5 gallon drum of proper creosote. Excellent stuff, but stinks to high heaven and you smell of creosote for a week afterwards no matter how much PPE (Personal Protective Equipment as per Health & Safety rules) you wear! Finished just as it was getting dark and left everything to dry a bit ready for tomorrow.

Birds singing away on the hill face behind the cottage as if it was a Spring morning. Poor things are a bit confused by this glorious weather.

### Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> February:

Wide awake at quarter to six this morning. Had to wait until it got light to be able to start work. What a change in the weather! I'm basically working in the cloud this morning. Could hear the cormorants flying over and the ravens croaking on the hill, but couldn't see any of them. Quite weird.

All day spent on building the boathouse. Got the new 'frame' up by lunchtime, - made up from the bedroom floor joists for the side and end rails, and some old 3"x3" posts from a demolished shed for the uprights.





Just finished lunch when there was a knock at the door. SBS come to change the hinges on the windows for the restrictor hinges that should have been fitted originally. Five more minutes and I'd have been on my way into Stranraer. Came all the way from Dumfries and never checked there'd be someone in before setting out!

Only took about an hour to change all three sets of hinges. I'm still not paying the bill until Iain's seen them and he's happy with the result,



Trip to Stranraer with a trailer load of rubble from the trenches for the boathouse foundations and an old dustbin on which the wheels had seized solid. They brought us a new dustbin some years ago, but never took the old one away.

Got back about 15:00 and started cladding the sides of the boathouse with the old floorboards. Relatively quick and easy to do. Creosoted everything, so I now smell even worse! John and Wendy, (Brother & Sister-in-law) are coming tomorrow bringing new sheeting for the roof of the boathouse. Finished clearing away just as it was getting dark at nearly 18:00.



Filled up 4 tub trugs with water before finishing for the day, ready for the plasterers tomorrow.

### Friday 1<sup>st</sup> March:

Plasterers arrived just before 08:00. Immediately encountered a problem. I can't understand a word the boss says! His Scottish accent is very strong. The first thing he said, I only recognised the word creosote, but correctly guessed that he was commenting on the smell coming from me!

Straight on to forming the curves of the coombes using a small mix of bonding. Then a cup of tea while that sets slightly. Afterwards, on with the skimming, starting on the window wall, going straight up and over the ceiling and back down the rear wall. Younger guy on stilts to do the ceiling – takes a break by sitting on a tower of 5 milk crates because it's such a job getting the stilts on and off. Break for lunch then on to the side walls, finishing about 15:00. Very pleased with it. It looks very good, they've done a nice job with the coombes.

Sent him away with a small bottle of creosote which he wanted for his pigeons! He'll drill a small hole in the bottle top and stand it under the nesting boxes in the coup. Apparently it keeps their sinuses clear! It should think it's more likely to kill them.

Meanwhile, John & Wendy arrived about 10:30 with the new sheeting for the roof. I'd got a new door for the boathouse made during the morning between keeping the plasterers fed and watered, so we were able to start straight away on the roof. Some measuring and cutting to do before we could get started, so once we'd finished all



that, we broke for lunch. Roof fitted pm. Looking very smart. They were able to leave about 16:00 and I finished off by cutting and fitting the new door. Finished about 18:00 – once again, just as Katherine arrived to help again over the weekend.



### Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> March:

Katherine and I got all the surplus old wood cut up for logs and cleared away by lunchtime. There was a lot of it, including the old bedroom floor of which we'd only used a little. Coal bunker and wood shed pretty much full. A good stock ready for next winter. The new boathouse has only 4 intermediate roof-supporting beams which are new timber. All the rest is re-purposed secondhand timber. Swapped the padlock from old to new. It's still going strong after 50+ years.

Started blowing a gale and raining as we broke for lunch at 12:30. Afternoon off – trip to the Gem Rock Museum in Creetown, which we last visited some 16 years ago. Back then, we were the expensive adults and she was the cheaper child rate. Now she's the expensive adult and I'm the cheaper 'concession'. Where does the time go?

Back to a dry evening and sunshine at 17:00, but still blowing a gale. Put a heater on overnight in No. 2 cottage bedroom to help dry out the plaster, then door closed firmly and fire lit.

### Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> March:

Plaster dried out significantly overnight. Just patches left to dry now, particularly the coombes where the thickness is greatest.



Put the old underlay down on the bedroom floor, which showed us that the bedroom is exactly the same size front to back, slightly narrower where the storage heater used to be, but critically about 4" wider at the narrowest part beside the bed. Exactly what we'd hoped to achieve.

With Katherine's help, managed to move everything through from the living room to the bedroom. Took off the skirting boards in the living room and straight away we could detect the smell of damp. Started taking up the laminate floor, hopefully for reuse. Obvious signs of damp, but only to be expected with no dpc. With the underlay taken up and the concrete floor exposed, there became visible a significant damp area extending from the front



window, across the corner of the room by the door, and finishing half way along the kitchen wall (behind the small settee), exactly matching the extent of the obvious rising damp in that wall. Looks like we've had water coming in around the front window for some considerable time. We'll find out when we take that window out. It'll probably be the same as we discovered in the bedroom.

Made a small foray into the dry-lining to the left of the window – the area in the corner which has been damp for some time. As suspected, the gap between the lath & plaster and the stone

wall was full of rubbish, making a bridge for moisture.

Moved the living room door to the bedroom – had to trim it very slightly for both height and width. It now opens against the front wall. Much better.

Interestingly, the doors in No. 1 cottage have

always opened that way. Why not in No 2 cottage as well? Couldn't have done the move from living room to

bedroom without Katherine's help. She's away back to work in Edinburgh 04:45 tomorrow morning to get there for 08:00. I've a few odd jobs to do in the morning then I'll be off as well, back home for a short rest before returning the next week.



#### Monday 4<sup>th</sup> March:

Mixed a bit of mortar to point up the new wall underneath the raised kitchen sill, then clearing up

No. 1 cottage and set off about 11:00. Called on the way out to see our caretaker Iona who works at the Cock Inn Caravan/Lodge Park. She's just had a kidney transplant with her partner acting as donor. Pleased to say both are now back at work and doing well. Long may it last. Cock Inn pub continues to thrive under the stewardship of the new owners and excellent reports of the food. No pub in Port William now the Monreith Arms has closed. We're hoping that Iona's daughter Jade will provide a cleaning and laundry service at the cottage when we're back up and running, so visitors won't have to bring their own bedding etc. and won't have to clean up at the end of their stay!