

THE SUTHERLAND LONGHOUSE PROJECT

DIGITISING THE PAST

As a part of the ongoing Sutherland Longhouse Project, Historylinks Museum hosted an event led by Jacquie Aitken, Digital Curator for Timespan Museum at Helmsdale, about digitising the past. Jacquie explained how it was possible, by using virtual world technology, to create a reconstruct of a pre-clearance site.



From her own experience of digitising a longhouse excavated at Caen, Kildonan in 2013, Jacquie described the step-by-step process of bringing the past to life again.



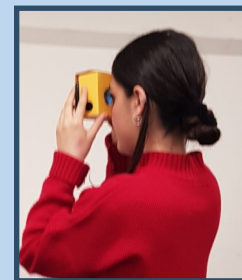
In contrast to the wealth of data shedding light on Sutherland's past in earlier eras, Jacquie explained there is a dearth of research available to consult for information and comparison on Sutherland longhouse living in the eighteenth century. Projects such as those at Caen are therefore important in their contribution to closing the gap in recorded knowledge.

The first stage of the virtual reality process was to accurately create the topography of the longhouse landscape in digital form, and Jacquie demonstrated how the site archaeology was multi layered through both successive settlements and complicated patterns of movement. Information about various factors such as material objects, pollen samples, soil type, vegetation and trading links as well as statistical and agricultural accounts recording crop type and rotation practices, helped to build the picture.

An enthusiastic and informative account led the group's focus from digitising topography to 3D scanning of everyday objects to be placed on the landscape and



within the longhouse. Jacquie also explained the use of photogrammetry and magnetometry, and



how the digitally-created world viewed through a virtual reality headset - or oculus rift - allows the viewer to 'see' or 'be' in the past by providing a 3D immersive experience.

Following a refreshment break came discussions about the degree of accuracy possible (and factors affecting accuracy) in the digitising process, the limitations of immersive technology, and the amount of subjectivity involved in each.

After an evening full of new information, revealing new potential for our own project, the unanimous response was positive: an enjoyable event for all.