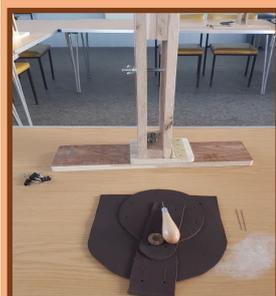


# THE SUTHERLAND LONGHOUSE PROJECT

## Working with Leather

On Monday 17th February, Anna Renouf, award winning saddler, led a group step by step through the process of crafting a leather belt pouch - an object that would have been common in pre-clearance times.

Anna began by describing how, over two hundred years ago, crofters would have prepared leather, curing hides by burying them under leaves and outdoor vegetation. It is likely that the leather would have come from goats rather than cattle, as goat hide was much softer and finer to work with. Either way, all parts of the animal would have been utilised: the thread would have been sinew or linen passed through animal fat to waterproof it (beeswax was not always available); and glue would have been made from boiling down carcasses.



Each participant was given a set of leather pattern pieces, some cotton thread, leather thonging, 2 needles, an awl, a button and a stitching pony.

The stitching pony, or clamp, is used to hold the leather tightly in place whilst stitching. Originally made from whatever was available - sometimes whisky barrel staves - the ones for the workshop were skilfully made by Iain Clyne from leftover oak floorboards after watching a video on YouTube!

The next step was to thread a needle on both ends of the waxed cotton, and then to lock each one off by splitting and going back through the thread.

Anna expertly demonstrated how to use the two needles to create strong double stitching (which to this day can not be achieved on a machine), first using the awl to puncture the leather and then stitching back and forth with both needles in opposite directions through each hole, and moving the leather pieces through the clamp as she went.



Participants had a choice of yellow or brown thread for stitching. In pre-clearance times it was fashionable to use yellow thread to create a contrast with the brown leather in order to show off the craftsmanship in the stitching.

So, with guidance from Anna, much patience, and much stitching, determination and hard work, each participant made a beautiful, hand-stitched, soft leather belt pouch to take home.

