

## THE PITTODRIE ESTATE 'BEDE HOUSE' EXCAVATIONS

Iain Ralston and Colin Shepherd

## INTRODUCTION

The Bennachie 'Bede House' has for a long time been known simply as a spot on the map and accepted uncritically as a local charitable residence for poor people of long ago. Once the evidence is considered, however, its history can clearly be seen to be more complicated and, at times, highly ambiguous. In 2017 the Bailies decided that the time was ripe for a determined assault on the evidence in order to try to sort fact from 'received wisdom'. A three-pronged assault included a consideration of the documentary, social and archaeological evidence. Colin Miller's paper in this publication deals with the documentary evidence whilst the social and archaeological data is assessed here.



*Figure 1. Location of the Pittodrie Bede House.*

## THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

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## BACKGROUND

In Alexander McConnochie's book titled 'Bennachie' (1890, 27) he writes: "... a little above which may be seen the foundations of the "Bede House", or houses rather, for there are said to have been several of them, very small, each with its own little "yardie"'. The 'Bede House', as shown on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey, is situated within 'Bedehouse Wood', south-west of Pittodrie House on the east side of Bennachie at co-ordinates NJ 6933 2356.

Locating the Bede House on the ground was aided by using the 'dry-stane' dykes that are shown on the 1st edition OS map and which still stand to a considerable height in places. When first visited by the author, the site was found to exist mainly as low earthworks with only occasional stones emerging in places to suggest the possibility of walls lying beneath. McConnochie mentions these as "foundations" (*ibid*). But, prior to our fieldwork the site could easily have been walked over and missed (see Photo 1).



Photo 1. View of the 'Bede House' site before excavation.

## OBJECTIVES AND METHOD

A set of aims and procedures were agreed with the Bailies and the landowner in order to attempt to understand the site and its relationship to the historical accounts previously known and recently discovered (see Miller, this volume). These 'project objectives' might be listed as:

1. To uncover by excavation enough of the 'Bede House' structure to characterise its architecture;
2. To produce a large scale plan of this structure and its surrounding enclosure dykes to contextualise its immediate setting;
3. To recover dating and usage evidence;
4. To understand the method of construction of the structural components.

Test pits were initially opened with most being expanded into trenches. In all, 15 trenches were opened across the area of the enclosure and the associated building. Key locations were targeted in the hope of gaining as much information as possible whilst limiting the extent of the interventions. Retention of data for future generations was considered an important factor to be balanced against the needs of achieving the objectives of the project. In fact, the extant archaeology proved to be much better preserved than had been considered likely. Figure 2 shows the siting of the excavation trenches and test pits as described in the text.

## LOCAL GEOLOGY

This eastern end of the Bennachie/Correen ridge - the 'Bennachie Pluton' - is an igneous granitic intrusion datable to the Silurian period. Overlying this intrusion are glacial tills of the Banchory formation. Just below the site to the east lay Psammite and Semipelite rocks of the Aberdeen Formation, similarly overlain by tills of the Banchory formation (British Geological Survey online at [www.mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain](http://www.mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain)).

Overlying the geologies, the farmlands of Pittodrie below the site are characterised as rich, brown forest soils whilst on the hillside, the site sits in a zone of competing podsoles and gleys with the nitrogen-leaching podsoles overlooking the stiffer gleys of the northern slopes of Bennachie (The Macaulay Institute for Soil Research, Soil Survey of Scotland, 1984). The Bede House site should be seen to conform to the fast-draining podsol zone.

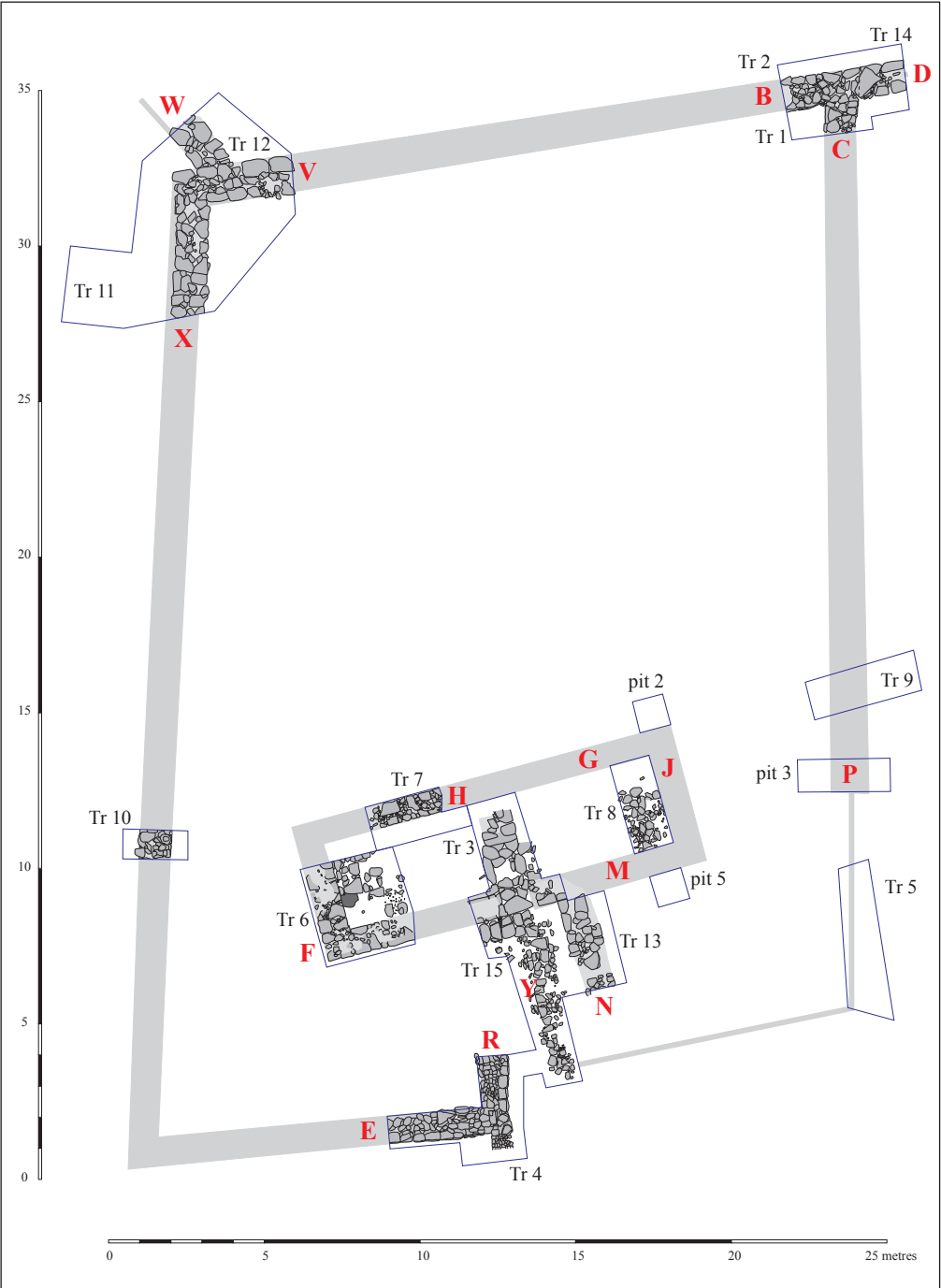


Figure 2. Site plan showing trenches, trench numbers and some feature codes.



## THE EXCAVATIONS OF THE ENCLOSURE DYKES

## Trench 1

The dykes that appear to delimit the Bede House enclosure were found to comprise field clearance stones. They survived in this corner as three courses of drystone construction. The dykes were found to be built directly onto the soft, natural subsoil and stood here to a maximum height of 0.85m with a width of around 0.90m. The soft natural subglacial subsoil recognised here was found to overlay a harder 'till', with this pattern recurring across the site.

It was found that dykes [B] and [C] were earlier in construction than the adjacent dyke [D]. The soil within the dykes was found to be a fine, brown loam. However, although the surviving soil level on both sides of the dyke was similar, the depth internally was greater. This may suggest deliberate management of the soils in order to create a more viable growing matrix. It suggests that subsoil may have been removed in order to deepen the garden soil or that the constant re-working and deeper digging of the garden soils created this deeper matrix. It might also suggest that the garden extended right to the dyke at this point, with no intervening path.

The small finds from this trench consist of: green bottle-glass from context (601), slate writing stylus and pot shard from (602); charcoal and pot shards from (602); incised decorated pot shard from (602).

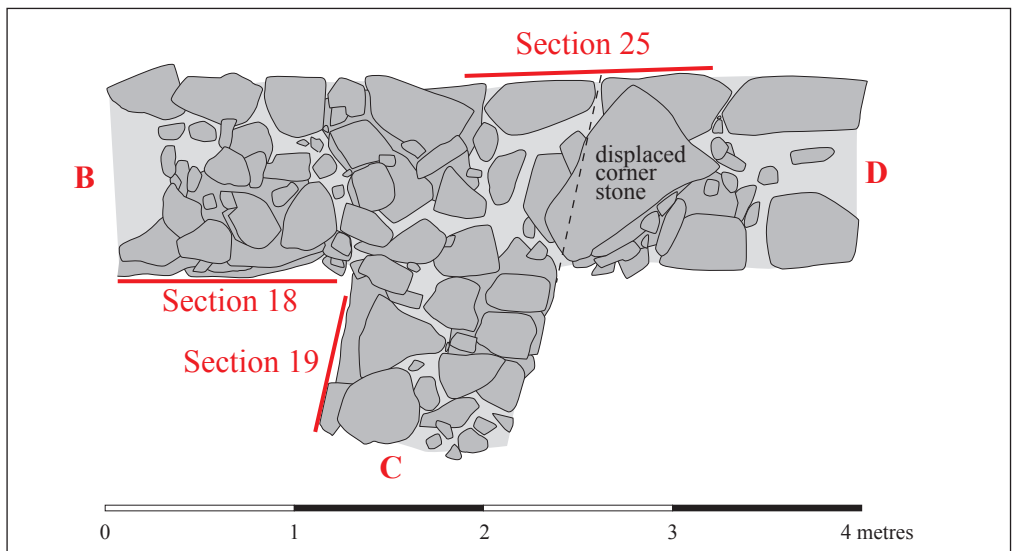


Figure 3. Plan of the intersection of features B, C and D.

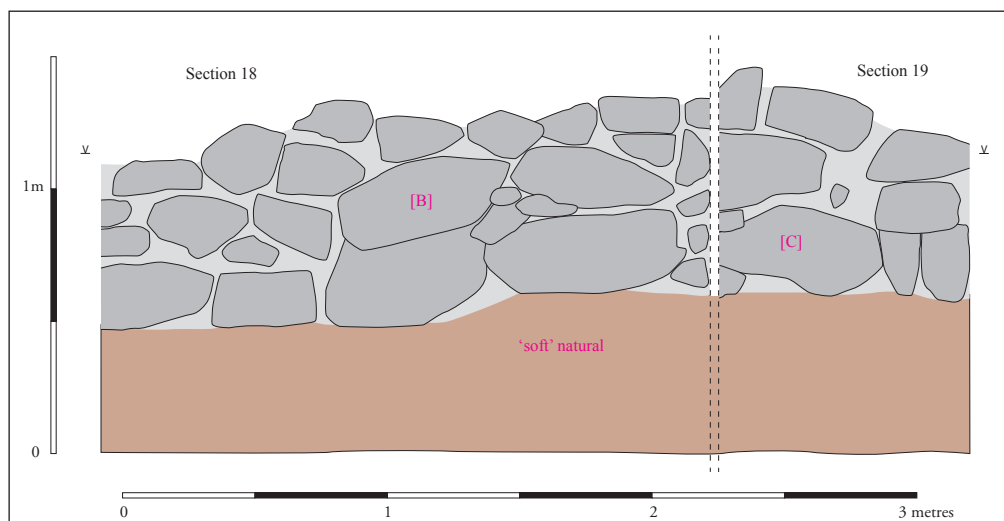


Figure 4. Sections 18 and 19.

### Trenches 2 and 14

These trenches established that the relative date of dykes [B] and [C] was earlier than dyke [D] which clearly abutted [B]/[C]. As the adjoining plantation - Beid House Park - to which [D] presumably belongs, is known to have been in existence by the time of the estate survey of 1771 (MS 2392) - and probably by the time of Roy's survey in the mid 18th century - the Beid House enclosure must predate those dates. [D] had been robbed down to foundation stone level. This may have been when the plantation was subsequently enlarged (see Miller, this publication).

Section 25 shows the abutment of [D] to [B]. The 'displaced corner stone' had been slid out of position, probably during recent forestry activity. The shape of a tree root that had been forced to grow around the stone prior to its movement demonstrated unequivocally its former position.

Again, it is noteworthy that the soil to the outside of this enclosure dyke was found to be poor and very shallow in stark contrast to the garden area within the enclosure. Small finds included slate and green bottle-glass from (660).

### Trench 9, Test Pit 3 and Trench 5

These interventions are considered together as each relies upon evidence from the others in order to attempt to offer a structured narrative of the observations.

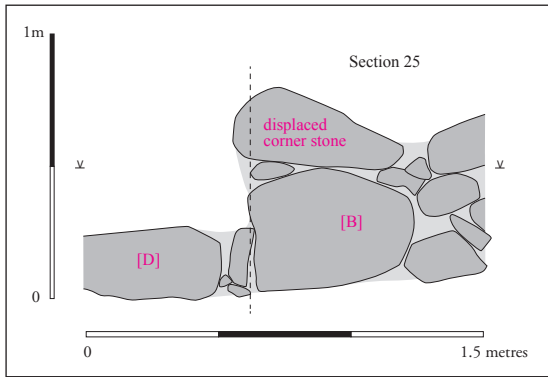


Figure 5. Section 25 (west-facing).

Trench 9 was a 1x3m trench located across the projected alignment of dyke [C]. The dyke was found to be approximately 1m in width and stood four courses high (approximately 0.95m) on its south side. However, just within the trench, the alignment was interrupted. A right angled turn on the inner face headed north. The outer face of the dyke was given a semi-circular corner rather than a

hard right angle (see Photo 2). This appears to have been a well-constructed 'dog-leg' in the alignment created for some unknown purpose. Test Pit 3 was excavated to test this hypothesis. Small finds from Trench 9 was limited to some charcoal from (644).

As noted above, Test Pit 3 was excavated to prove the alignment shown in Trench 9 as well as to confirm that alignment with the remains found in Trench 5. A section of dyke, approximately 0.90m in width and surviving to no more than two stones high, was found where anticipated in line with the adjusted alignment after the dog-leg in Trench 9 (see Photo 3).

Of particular interest was the recognition of a cut [Q] and a 'fill' of yellowy-brown soil (622). This was observed in Trench 9 (Figure 6) and confirmed in this test pit. This appears to reflect an earlier raised earthen bank that predated the construction of the drystone dyke and into which the bank had been cut. A similar



Photo 2. Dog-leg in dyke alignment formed by a hard right angle internally and a rounded corner externally (on right side of picture.)



Photo 3. Test Pit 3 with re-aligned dyke.

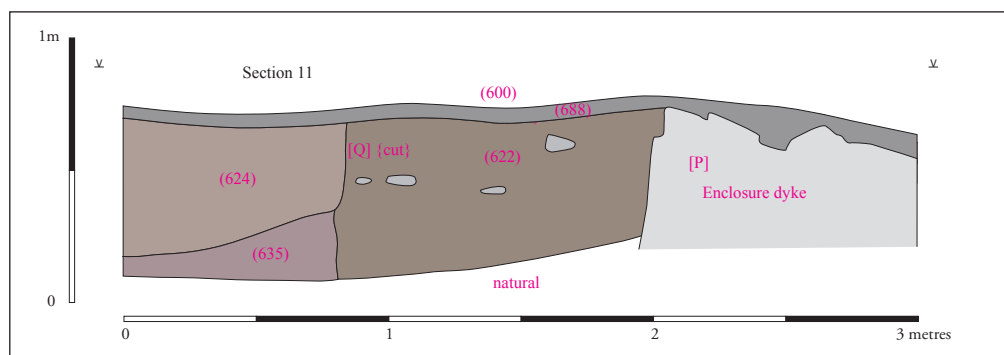


Figure 6. Section 11 (east-facing) showing possible former linear bank cut by dyke.

cut and feature was noted in Trench 12 (see below). What is strange in all three examples is that the dyke appears to have been inserted half-way across the earlier bank on its outer edge. To the south of the cut [Q], the soil was again found to be good garden loam. This seems to indicate that the garden was dug through the remains of the earlier earthen bank. Small finds noted here were window glass and pot shards from (622).

This confirmed alignment helped in the understanding of the remains in Trench 5. Initially a 1m wide trench was dug along the line of a stone scatter that was thought to have been the continuation of dyke [C]. However, the situation



Photo 4. The robbed remains of the dyke in Trench 5.

was not clear-cut owing to the new alignment noted above and the trench was extended several times in order to try to understand the data. The stone scatter appears to have been debris resulting from the robbing of the wall at this corner. The remains of the wall itself was discovered to lie along the new alignment.

However, it had been comprehensively robbed and no corner to the yard was discovered (see Photo 4). The small finds from this trench consisted of green bottle-glass within (610).

## Trench 12

An initial 1x1m test pit was located in the corner of dykes [V] and [X] that progressively enlarged to incorporate dyke [W]. It was noted that an apparent slight rise to the ground surface ran along an east to west axis to the south of the site. This was considered to reflect the line of the south enclosure dyke [X] covered with soil overburden. However, upon excavation it was discovered that dyke [X] lay approximately 1m further to the south than expected. Dyke

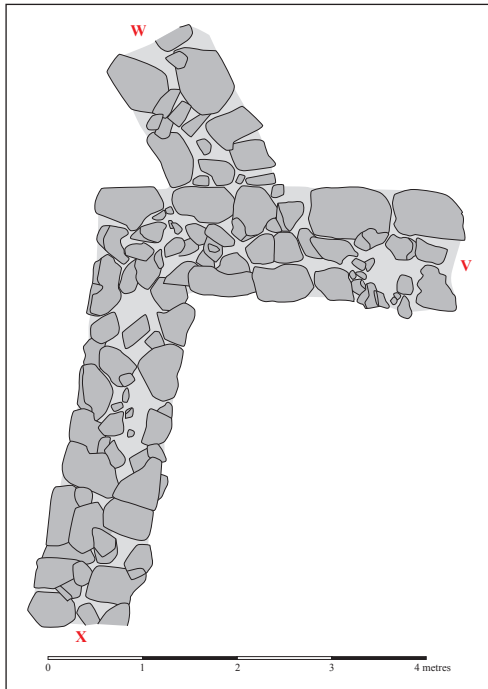


Figure 7. Plan of the intersection of features V, W and X.

[X] was found to cut into and to have followed this earthen bank. It is now thought likely that this feature could be an earlier forerunner of the drystone enclosure dykes, as noted above.

Dykes [X], [V] and [W] were found to survive to only one stone course high. Dyke [V] had a width of approximately 1.30m and dykes [X] and [W] were about 1.20m wide. All three dykes were built directly onto the soft natural subsoil. Dyke [W] is shown on the 1st Edition OS map as having a gap between it and dyke [V]. However, the excavation shows that this was not the case and that dyke [W] abuts dyke [V]. This is important as it demonstrates that [W] must post-date the construction of [V] in the same way that [D] was shown to have superseded [B]/[C] on the adjacent corner of the enclosure.

Both [W] and [D], therefore, appear to be associated with the Beid House Park and utilised the pre-existing Bede House enclosure to help form one of its sides. Small finds from here consisted of slate from (636) and slate, window and green bottle-glass from (637).

## Trench 10

A 1x3m trench was positioned across the projected alignment of dyke [X] revealed in trench 12 further to the west. With the removal of the soil overburden



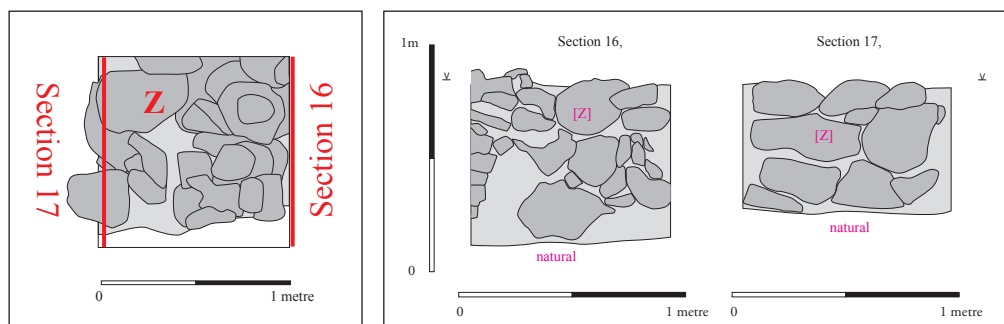


Figure 8. Plan of Trench 10 and associated sections 16 (north-facing) and 17 south-facing.

the lower courses of dyke was encountered. The dyke was constructed of field clearance stones surviving to four stone courses with a height of 0.94m and a width of approximately 1m at the base. It was also built directly onto the soft natural subsoil. Small finds included green bottle-glass and burnt mortar from (640).

### Trench 11

A 2.5x2.5m trench was located across the line of a feature shown on the 1st Edition OS map. This trench quickly established that the soft, natural subsoil lay very near to the surface and no evidence of a dyke was found. This would suggest that either no dyke was ever built there or that all traces of it have been completely removed. Again, it was noted that the organic soil in this area is very shallow compared to the rich garden soil within the 'Bede House' enclosure area. Small finds consisted of a metal button (to be confirmed but, possibly, relating to the Royal Scots Fusiliers) from (648).

### Trench 4

Two test pits - 9 and 10 - were extended along dyke [R] from [E] to form Trench 4. This part of the enclosure is located to the south side of the pathway [Y] leading to the building's front door and was noticeably in better preservation than its northern counterpart. These dykes were also constructed of field clearance stones and proved to have been built directly onto the soft natural subsoil and covered by a dark brown, garden soil build-up. Only the lowest course, or footing stones, now survive on the east-facing side of the dyke with the hearting stones now exposed and disturbed. Also evident from this side are the large, inner, west-facing footing

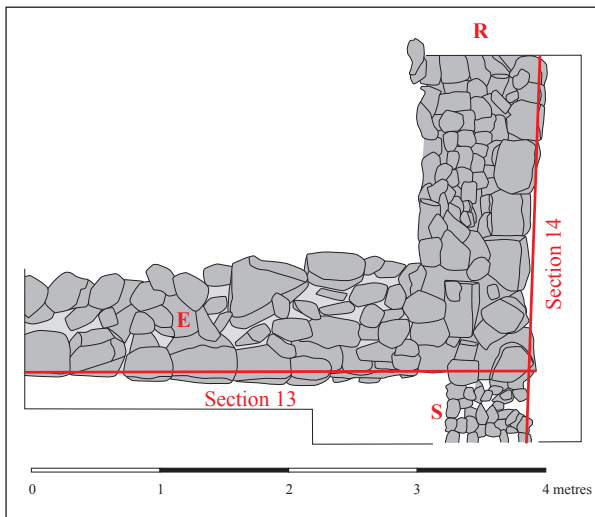


Figure 9. Plan of dykes [E], [R] and [S] to the south of pathway [Y].

stones at two stones high that appear to demonstrate that this was intended as a dyke rather than just a revetment bank. As is the case with the other enclosure dykes, the original height of this dyke remains unknown. A small feature [S] was encountered on the outer corner of dykes [E] and [R] consisting of a layer of smallish stones. One tentative suggestion for this feature might be that it may have been an edging to the trackway leading up to the site. However, a range of other possibilities could be suggested.

An unusual fragment of blue glass was found within the soil that covered this dyke (603) and is thought to be from a late 17th-century bottle. This would fit nicely with the proposed historical dates for the site (see Miller, this volume). Also recovered from (614) was a slate - smoothed on the upper surface - and having a chamfered edge. Chisel marks were also apparent on its underside. Other small finds included green bottle glass and a pot shard from (614), the blue bottle-glass already noted, green bottle-glass and charcoal from (603).

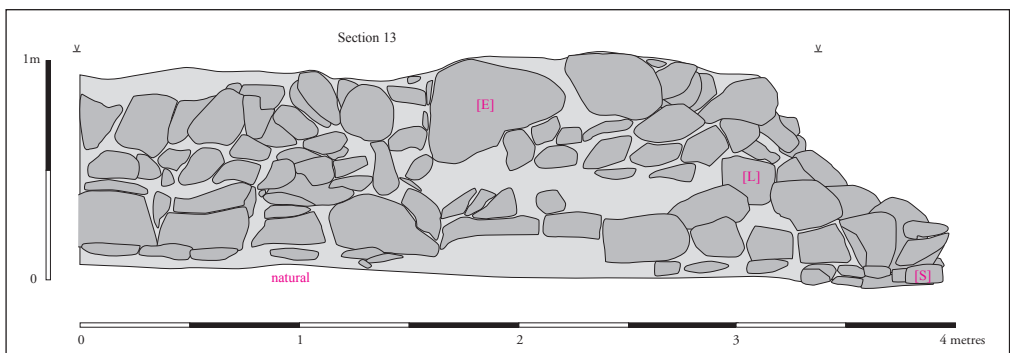


Figure 10. Section 13 (east-facing).

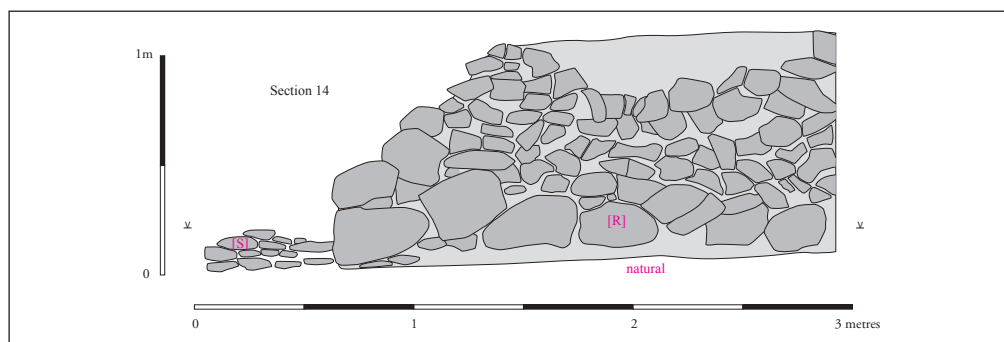


Figure 11. Section 14 (north-facing).

### Trench 13

Initially a 1x1m test pit located to the south-facing side of dyke [N] was extended northwards and westwards to form Trench 13. This trench lies opposite Trench 4, across the entrance passage that led to the door of the building.

Trench 13 appears to demonstrate the development, through time, of this section of enclosure dyke(s). It appears to have been altered in accordance with the build-up of garden soils within the enclosure.

The earlier of two features [AK] consists of large outer-facing stones with smaller hearting within that was built directly onto the natural. This feature survives only to one course of stones high and was 0.93m in width. It would appear that this feature formed part of an earlier dyke. It is possible that it formed a low garden wall demarking and retaining garden soil behind. It is clear that a substantial quantity

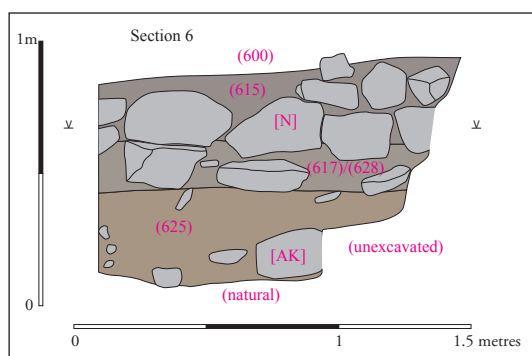


Figure 12. Section 6 (north-facing).  
(Also, see Figure 18 below for plan view.)

of soil build-up occurred during the occupation of the site and currently survives to a considerable depth of about 0.90m in this corner of the site. It is unlikely that [AK] stood very high and the evidence suggests a possible herbal or grass border lay between it and the entrance path [Y] (see below). This is suggested by a soil-filled space between feature [AK] and the edge of the path (see Photo 5). Figures 12 and 13 show the soil

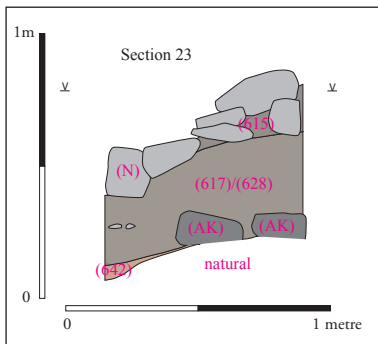


Figure 13. Section 23 (east-facing).



Photo 5. Dyke [N] with [AK] in back right below vertical ranging rod. Note the stones of [N] sitting upon soil build-up between [AK] and the path (below camera).

build-up that occurred after [AK] was built but deposited before [N] was built on top.

The soil accumulation behind [AK] is partly as a result of the area being used as a midden for household waste. It was close to the building's door and would have been a convenient repository for rubbish. This trench proved to be the single most productive area for the recovery of small finds so far excavated. In time, soil had overflowed the first low wall necessitating a replacement. As with feature [AK], [N] was constructed with flattish

stone footings on the 'up-slope' and larger stones on the 'lower-slope' with smaller heaving stones between. A considerable quantity of garden soil had overlain feature [AK] before feature [N] was constructed. Most of the small finds found within the soil overburden covering the cobbled path [Y] are thought also to have originated from the garden soil

(617) once the upper courses of stone from feature [N] were removed.

The small finds consisted of: green bottle glass, pot shard, slate, clear and frosted glass fragment from (615); prehistoric flint scraper, pot shards, charcoal, green bottle-glass, blue glass bottle fragment (perhaps late 17th century but to be confirmed), slate, animal bone, iron door-hinge eye, clear chimney lamp glass, white glazed tile fragment, possible tile, pipe bowl and stem, iron ?cauldron fragment with rivets from (617). Green bottle-glass, slate, charcoal, pipe bowl and pot shard from (625).

## THE EXCAVATIONS OF THE BUILDING

## Test Pit 2

A 1x1m test pit was excavated on the outside, north-west corner of the building wall [G]. The wall consisted mainly of large field stones with smaller ‘fill-stones’ all of which were embedded within an orangey-coloured, sandy-clay material. This material would have presumably made the building draught-proof and would have helped with damp-proofing. This would have been important as the exterior soil-level appears to have been far higher than the internal floor level. This same infill material was found within all the uncovered walls of the building and

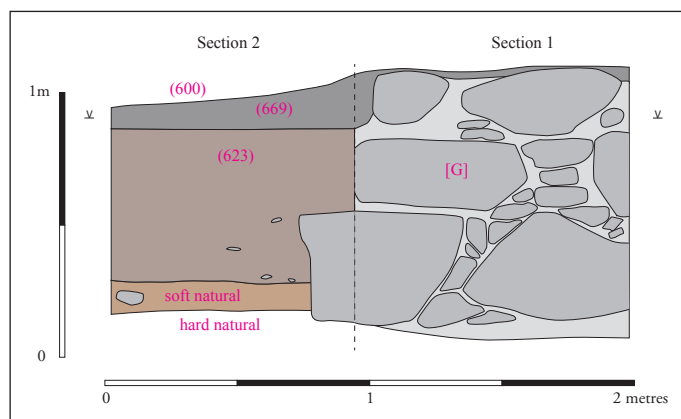


Figure 14. Sections 1 (west-facing) and 2 (south-facing).

was much in evidence within the demolition layer that covered the interior of that structure. The wall was built on a protruding footing which had been laid within a cut [AN] through the soft overlaying natural subsoil and onto the hard subsoil below. (See also the evidence from Trench 8 below.) The wall here survived to a height of 0.91m and was 0.80m in width.

A surprising depth of garden loam build-up was noted surrounding this building and clearly suggests that it had been artificially deepened over time, presumably to enrich its fertility for cultivation. This is in stark contrast to the natural soil depth as evidenced by trenches 2, 11 and 14 outside the yard. This strongly suggests that the yard had, for some considerable time, been used for cultivation rather than as a stock enclosure. The small finds consisted of a pot shard handle and a slate fragment from (623).

## Test pit 5

A 1x1m test pit was located next to the outer east facing wall [M] of the dwelling. Wall [M] was constructed in the same way as the other walls in this



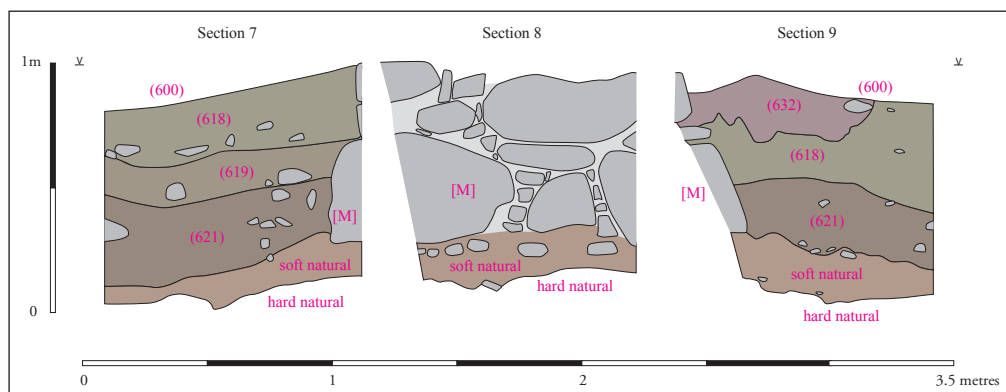


Figure 15. Sections 7 (north-facing), 8 (east-facing) and 9 (south-facing).

structure (see also Test Pit 2 above) but found to be slightly narrower at 0.75m. Wall [M] survived to one course of stones over a footing protruding from the outer side as had wall [G]. Excavation showed that the natural subsoil lay at a depth of 0.64m below the current ground surface which was also the surviving height of the wall. On removing the soft natural subsoil (or possibly re-deposited subsoil) pitting was clearly evident on the hard natural. This was either a glacial weathering surface or pick-axe marks made during preparation of the site for building. The same marks were found in all of the areas excavated down to the hard, natural subsoil within the structure, but not in Test Pit 2. The marks are thought more likely to be evidence of site levelling and their absence from Test Pit 2 suggests the building footprint had been planned prior to the site preparation.

Small finds here included a slate fragment from (618) and slate and charcoal fragments from both (619) and (621).

### Trench 15

An initial 2x2m test pit located between dykes [R] and [N] approaching the entrance to the structure was expanded to become the large Trench 15. Figure 16 shows a plan of the cobbled path [Y], garden steps [AI] and the doorway of the building [O].

The cobbled path [Y] was seen to have been constructed directly onto the soft, natural subsoil. Immediately in front of the doorway [O] and built against the southern end of the east wall of the building was found a series of three steps [AI] leading from the pathway [Y] up to the latest garden ground level. Also uncovered was the doorway threshold step that lay at a higher level than the path [Y]. It

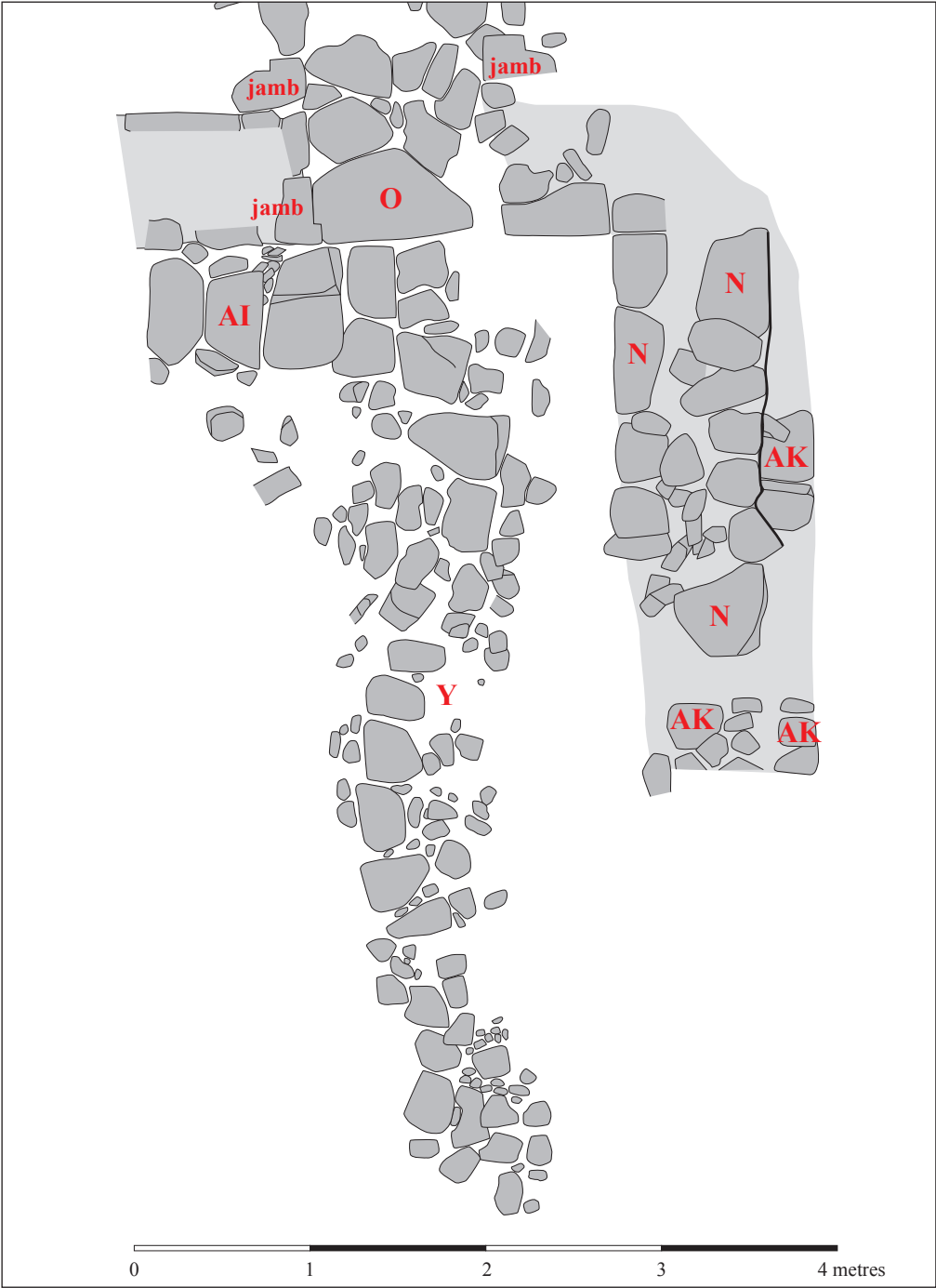


Figure 16. Trench 15: entrance path and steps with northern entrance dyke [N].

was also noted that dyke [N] abutted the building wall [M]. To understand the relationship between the contexts within Trenches 13 and 15 dyke [N] was bisected through damaged areas (see Figures 14 and 15 in Trench 13 above).

Small finds in Trench 15 included a pot shard and slate in (627); window glass, green bottle-glass, slate, probable shank of an iron nail, prehistoric flint scraper, pot shard, charcoal and an iron head from a claw hammer from (628). The claw hammer head was found within the soil overlaying the cobbled path [Y]. This was either used during the occupation of the building or during its demolition. The latter seems more likely. Also, pot shards, mortar/plaster, clear glass (shaped and possibly from a chimney lamp) and green bottle-glass from (641). Green bottle-glass and charcoal came from (642) whilst charcoal was found in (643).

### Trench 3

An initial 1x2m test pit located inside the building's doorway [O] was extended to form Trench 3. Figure 17 shows the plan of the internal stair masonry [AJ] that faced the entranceway [O].

The south door jamb was found to have a drilled, horizontal hole. This is presumed to have been for either a door hinge or a dowel for a wooden door



*Photo 6. South internal doorway with door jamb stone on right, window sill with drilled recesses for bars in foreground and threshold stone above ranging rod. At the left side of the threshold can be seen a carved recess, probably associated with wooden door frame furniture.*

frame. Two further door jambs were found inside the entrance 'vestibule.' These showed the location of the doorways leading into the north and south gable end rooms respectively. None of these three door jambs had opposite counterparts. This would suggest that only the weight-bearing side were of dressed masonry with the other possibly constructed of timber set against rubble construction. However,

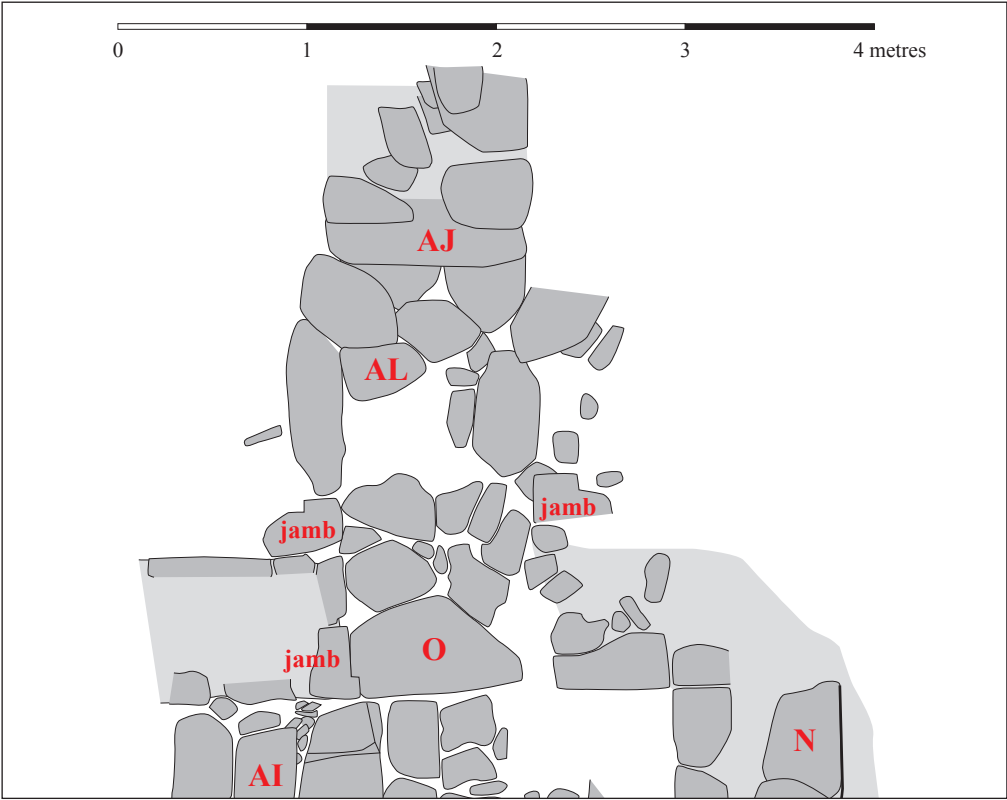


Figure 17. Trench 3: Doorway [O] and probable stair support [AJ].

a carved recess (visible in Photo 6) may be indicative of a setting for a timber fitting, possibly to be associated with a door frame construction. But, it should also be noted that this position coincides with the start of the presumed stairs (see below). Timber supports might also be expected here in order to carry the

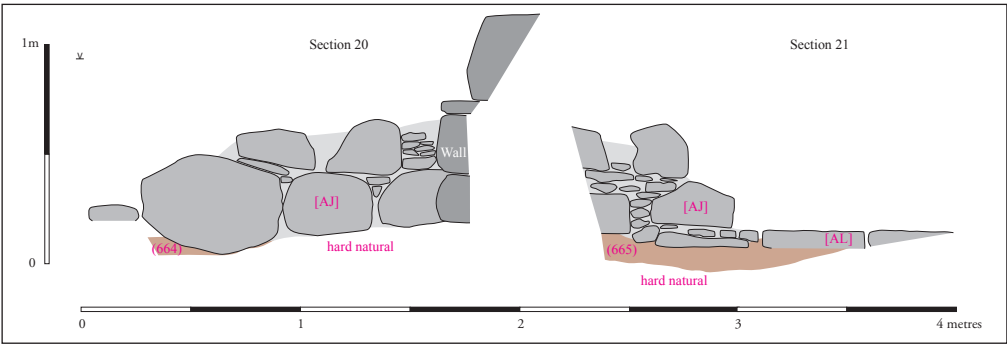


Figure 18. Sections 20 (north-facing) and 21 (south-facing).



Photo 7. Door jamb showing attached metalwork and carved recess for door.

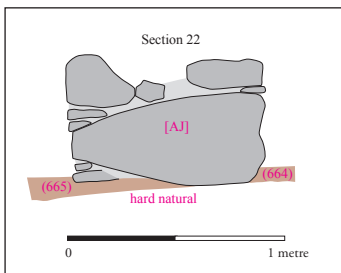


Figure 19. Section 22 (east-facing).

half-floor above the entry vestibule. A further drilled horizontal hole was also found on the north internal door jamb and all three jamb stones had well-executed grooves cut in order to make a snug fit for the doors.

On the top of the southern inner door jamb stone was a dovetailed recess with rusted metal found still to be *in situ*. Part of a metal eye-pivot hinge was recovered from the midden area (Trench 13) located near to the entrance to the dwelling in context (617). This fitted precisely into the recess on the stone (see Photos 6 and 7). If this was the method used for hanging the door, the drilled holes would seem more likely to have been used for mounting a wooden door frame to act as a draught excluder for the closed door to sit against.

A large threshold stone formed a step up into this building with a cobbled floor inside. A worked block of stone was recovered from near this area measuring approximately 0.42m x 0.25m x 0.15m. This had three square/diamond, cut holes evidently for the insertion of window bars (Photo 6). The stone also had a recess on either side - one deeper than the other. These are likely to have been for a window frame or a shutter. This stone block is thought likely to belong to the south gable-end room, though window glass fragments were recovered from both gable ends.

The remains of a masonry structure [AJ] with a width of 0.90m was found in front of the back wall of the vestibule room and is thought to have helped form internal stairs to an upper floor. The stone feature [AJ] rested on the hard natural subsoil on its north side but on soft natural or re-deposited natural subsoil (665)

on its south side. This indicates that a slope existed to the underlying hard natural strata (which may be respecting the natural incline of the hill) and that the site was not levelled to true over the entire footprint of the building. Presumably the re-deposited soft natural would have compensated for this slope and helped to form a level base for the masonry structure. Small finds from here included a pot shard from (633), charcoal, green bottle-glass and a pot shard from (634).

### Trench 6

Trench 6 was located in the south-east corner of the south gable end of the building. Soil over-burden was removed to reveal a substantial wall [F] of 0.90m in width. Excavation extended along and down this wall on its inner, north side. A substantial amount of demolition material was encountered. The wall survived to four courses of stone with a height of approximately 0.90m. Amongst the demolition layer (611) and the layer above (604), roofing slate fragments were found including one piece with a nail hole. This may indicate the type of roof that this building might once have had. Against the south wall [F], a raised 'platform' feature [T]

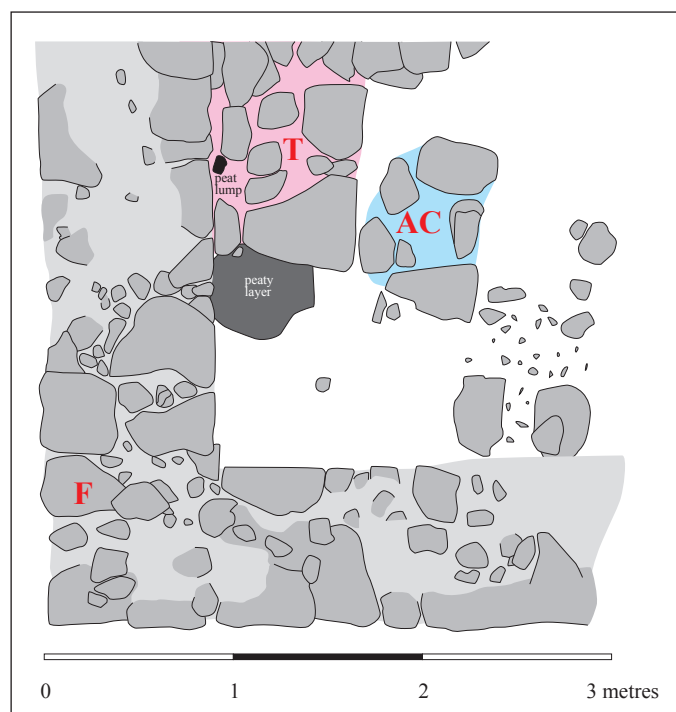


Figure 20. South-east corner of building.

was uncovered. The east end of this feature lay approximately in the centre of the wall and extended westwards towards the corner of the building's back wall. This 'platform' was found to consist of large stones with smaller pinning stones and had a width of 0.80m and height of approximately 0.45m. The currently-excavated length of this feature is approximately 1.70m but it could not be completely uncovered owing to a standing tree in south-west corner of



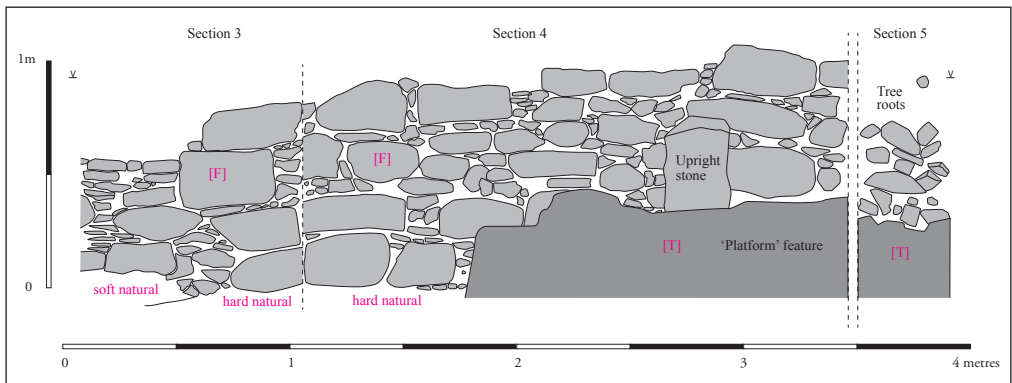


Figure 21. Sections 3 (west-facing), 4 (north-facing) and 5 (east-facing). Section 5 shows surviving demolition rubble covering the western part of the trench.

the building. A lump of peat was found between the stones that formed the top of feature [T] (see Figure 20) but was considered most likely to belong to a later phase and associated with hearth [AC] positioned in front of [T]. Several further peat layers were found on the floor east of feature [T]. It is believed that peat was stacked in this area and used as fuel for hearth [AC]. This hearth may have been created by the workmen during the demolition of the building rather than during the occupation phase. Also recovered from this area were fragments of mortar or plaster, burnt blackened stone and possibly a fire ash-pan fragment. This adds support to the notion that a hearth may have been located in this part of the building (see discussion below). Several iron fragments were also recovered that may have come from kitchen utensils - though this is highly speculative.

Wall [F] was found to be constructed directly onto the hard natural. There were possible pick-axe marks found here as suggested for Test Pit 5 and Trench 8, though not in Test Pit 2 - all indicative of site-leveilling only across the footprint of the building. A good stratigraphic sequence was obtained from this area, revealing episodes from building inception through to its dismantling. This can be summarised as follows:

- [AN]: Cut made by site levelling and preparation;
- (651): Orange layer of re-deposited soft natural to infill pick-axe hollows formed during site preparation;
- (653): Lower peat layer - approximately 0.01m in depth - is thought to originate from a hearth used during the construction of this building but before the floor level was raised to its final height;

- (647)/(620): Approximately 0.10m of orangey re-deposited soft natural forming a possible floor surface or bedding for a dismantled cobbled floor;
- (650): Thin demolition layer containing copious slate fragments. One larger fragment next to feature [T] had an iron object adhering to its underside. This iron fragment is tubular in shape and may be a pan handle fragment. It would appear that the building was in the process of being demolished with roofing slate fragments laying on the surface before the peat layer (649) was deposited on top. Alternatively slate working/trimming might have taken place within this room during its occupation.
- (649): Upper peat layer approximately 0.03m in depth with slate fragments found immediately beneath on the interface with (650).

Small finds in Trench 6 consisted of: a large animal bone, 1257gms of slate (including one piece with hole), mortar/plaster, green bottle-glass from (604); 4569 gms of slate (including another piece with hole), green bottle-glass, iron object, peat, iron pan handle fragment from (611); peat lump from (649); 579 gms of slate (one piece with tubular iron object [pan handle?]) from (650); slate fragments from (647); peat from (653); pot shard, pipe bowl and stem and more peat from (662). In all 4.2 kgs of roofing slate fragments, seemingly of local provenance, were recovered from Trench 6. Most fragments were left on site.

### Trench 7

Trench 7 was located towards the south-west end of the back wall [H] of the building and separated from Trench 6 by a standing tree. As with all the walls of this building, wall [H] had much demolition material filling the interior from the extant wall height down to the interior floor level. Wall [H] was found to be 0.74m in width with a surviving height of approximately 1m. The extant wall stands to two stone courses high on the east-facing side and appears to be up to three stone

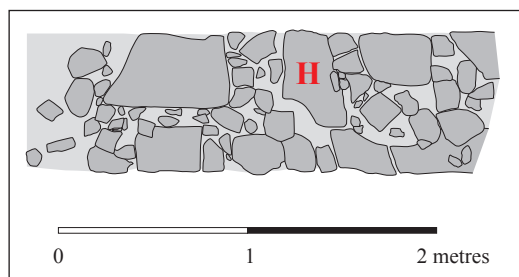


Figure 22. Plan of west wall of building.

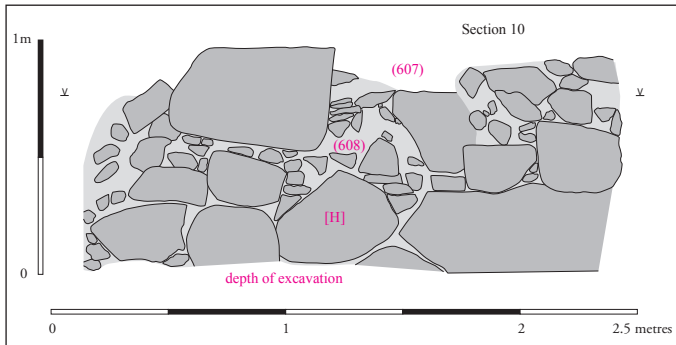


Figure 23. Section 10 (east-facing).



Photo 8. Back wall [H] of building.

courses high on its west-facing side (see Photo 8). The lowest stones of the wall lay directly onto the hard, natural subsoil with re-deposited soft natural subsoil abutting the wall. No cobbled flooring was found in this part of the room.

Small finds from here included window glass, slate and mortar/plaster from (607); slate, chimney-lamp glass, green bottle-glass and pot shards from (608).

#### Trench 8

Trench 8 was located along the north-west corner of the north gable-end of the building. Wall demolition material

filled the interior to the height of walls [G] and [J] down to floor level. Amongst this demolition material was found plaster/mortar and window glass. It would seem that the north and south gable-end rooms were very similar in size and layout with each possessing a window - probably along the east side. Wall [G] was found to be 0.79m in width with an extant height of 0.80m. Wall [J] was found to be 0.87m in width with a surviving height of 0.60m at the west end of the wall and 0.45m at the east. However, this final measurement was only the height from the possible cobbled floor - here left *in situ*. Externally, Test Pit 5 showed the surviving height to have been 0.74m.

On the floor of this room was found hearth [K] lying on top of the floor cobbles and containing burnt material (see Photo 9). Plaster/mortar fragments had fallen on top of this hearth. Also noted were ephemeral traces of a possible

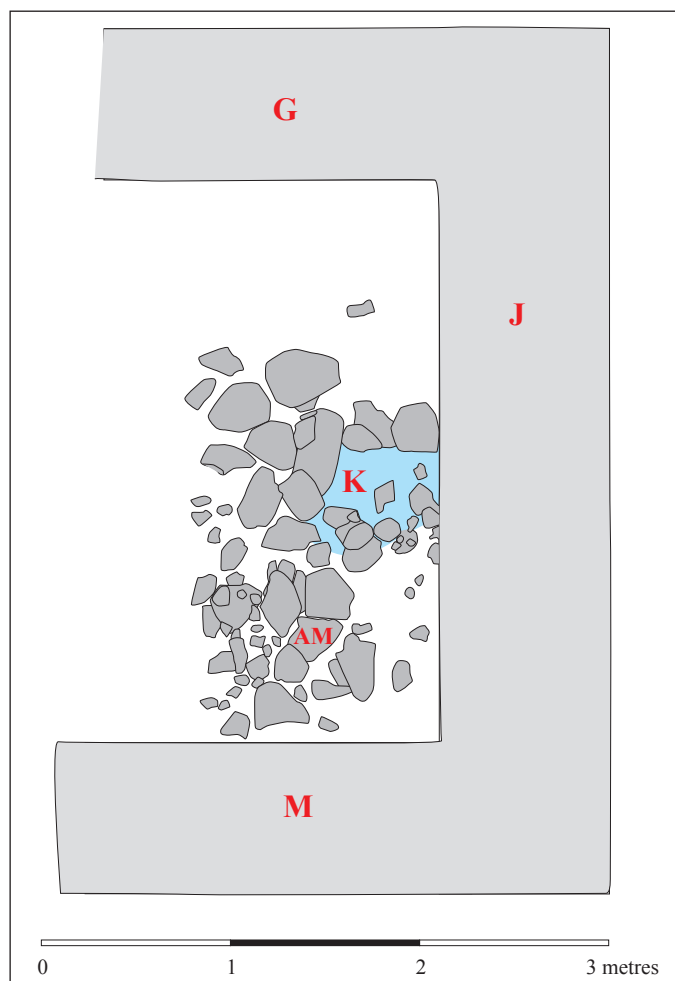


Figure 24. North gable-end of building.

soot outline on the face of wall [J](see Photo 10). This may be indicative of the position of an original hearth. It is considered that feature [K] may be late in date and was a simple hearth used during the demolition of the building by the workmen employed. This is also suggested for the southern end of the building (see above). The surviving cobbles of [K], along with possible associated stones lying to the east, were left *in situ*. Further excavation was only continued in the north-west corner which contained no surviving cobbling.

Walls [G] and [J] were constructed directly onto the hard, natural which was lower on this side of the wall than was found to be the case on

the other side in Test Pit 2. As noted above, this indicates that the site had been levelled prior to the construction of the building. Further probable pick-axe marks were evident on the hard, natural surface which was later given a covering of re-deposited natural in order to provide a flat, finished surface. Peculiar to wall [G] is an internal, protruding foundation stone. Although wall footings were observed on the external sides of the building's walls, an internal protruding stone is, so far, unique on this site.

Amongst the small finds recovered was a metal top from a possible perfume bottle with a protruding dispenser tube, along with window glass, mortar/plaster

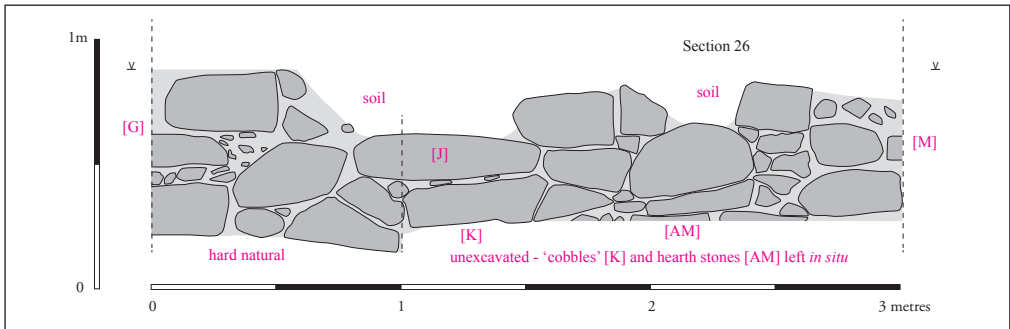


Figure 25. Section 26 (south-facing).



Photo 9. Hearth setting with worked stone at bottom left by root.



Photo 10. Possible black soot marks on wall stones behind hearth stones.

and slate from (605); mortar/plaster from (606); window glass, green bottle-glass from (609) and mortar/plaster from (613).

Also of interest was the recovery of three, worked stone fragments. One of the fragments was recovered from around the hearth [K] (see Photo 9) but is thought likely to have originated elsewhere. It may also be worth noting that a fourth similar fragment was found amongst the stones of dyke [D] in Trench 14. The pieces appear reminiscent of parts of a water trough, though this is speculative.



## SMALL FINDS

Very few domestic finds came from the main area of excavation - the building. This may reflect a well-ordered end to the site's usage. As noted above, the removal of structural remains appears to have been carried out tidily and comprehensively. The lack of small finds may indicate that the building did not go through a phased process of abandonment that would have seen the gradual accumulation of debris. It may well be that when the estate decided to stop the charitable funding of the house, it was rapidly removed in order to prevent unwanted squatting or simply to landscape the area in accordance with a new management régime.

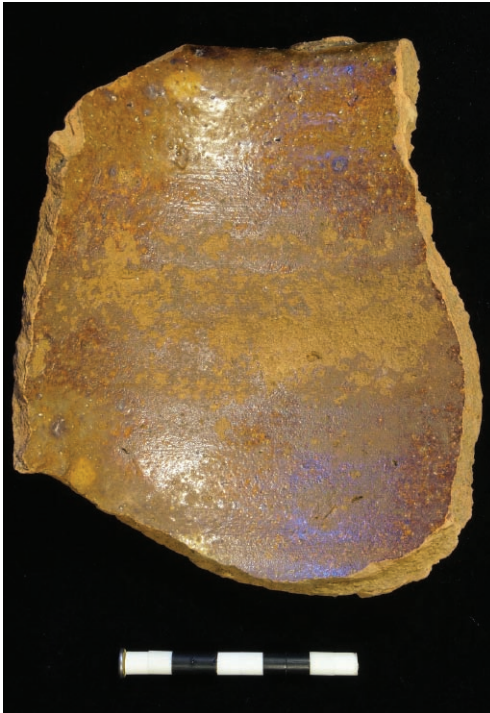
Further excavation of the garden area might produce a greater number of finds relating to the period of occupation. It was common practice, until relatively recently, to dispose of household waste in a 'midden' located convenient to a door and thence, periodically, to the garden as compost. Only one likely midden location was encountered at the Bede House site although others may have existed. This midden area was conveniently located near the front door of the building to the north side of the path and within soil context (617). This context provided us with the bulk of our diagnostic small finds: primarily pottery shards and glass. All of the shards recovered would appear to be in keeping with the suggested date range of between the 17 and late 18th centuries.

The following is a brief description of the finds most appropriate to the discussion concerning the period of site usage. A complete catalogue of the small finds, including photographs, is available from the Bailies of Bennachie website. (Editor's note: Please credit any use of the images to Iain Ralston.)

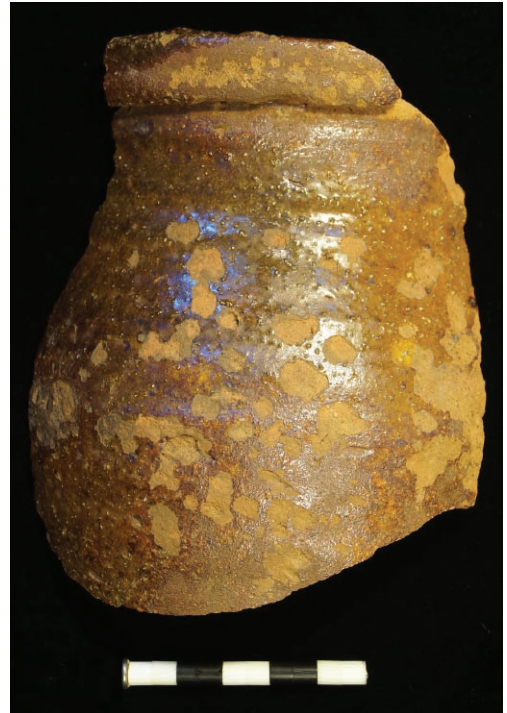
**Pottery**

As noted above context 617 was particularly rich in pottery shards with 44 being recovered from here and was a far higher concentration than from anywhere else on the site. It is generally regarded that Scottish pre-modern pottery dating is still in its infancy (see Haggarty, Hall & Jones, 2011) and is further complicated by fabrics and styles having been consistent for a long periods of time and, therefore, difficult to date with any precision. However, Photos 11 and 12 show a sherd (small find number 26; catalogue number 130) of what appears to be Scottish Post-Medieval Oxidised Ware (PMOW). The final form as indicated by the sherd is shown in Figure 26 though, as most of the pieces are missing, it is not known whether or not it was a jug - though this is likely. These wares became most common between the late 16th and middle of the 18th century (Haggarty, 2017, 16). (I am





*Photo 11. Inside of PMOW sherd 26.*

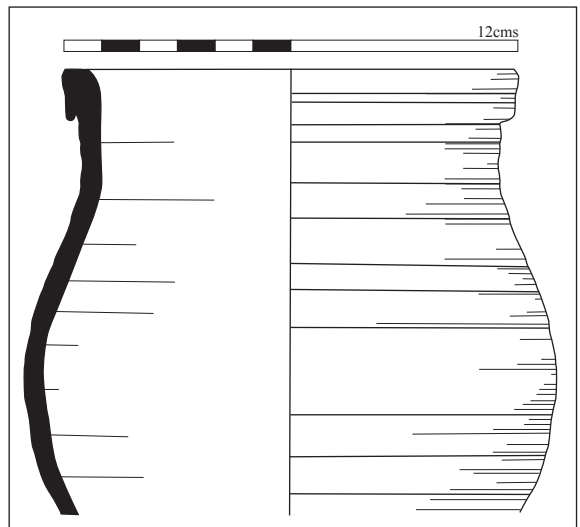


*Photo 12. Outside of PMOW sherd 26.*

indebted to Gordon Noble for help in identifying this fabric). This particular sherd was sealed beneath dyke [N] and would appear to date to early on in the site's historically-attested occupation.

**Glass Vessels** (Grateful thanks to Penny Dransart for providing the following consideration of the fragments of bottle glass.)

Two pieces of blue glass appear to date between the late 17th and the mid- to late-18th century. Finds number 17 and



*figure 26. Form of PMOW pot as evidenced by the sherd 26.*

finds number 29. They may have been used during the lifetime of the structure. However, Murdoch (2008, 54) says these wine bottles were used for ale and beer as well as wine. Liquids were decanted into them and they may have been kept in use for a long time. This limits their potential for dating purposes.

The two green base fragments of wine bottles (finds numbers 33 and 84) with part sidewall are similar to the base of a bottle from Fetternear (small find no. A4685). There are four chronological groups in Murdoch's Fetternear report, and in dating A4685 to the late 18th or early 19th century, he assigns it to the end of his Group 3. The Bennachie bottle base fragments are different sizes, both slightly larger than the Fetternear one and are of a similar glossy green. The two Bennachie bases have significant wear on the base ring and may, therefore, have been re-used.

### **Window Glass**

Approximately 31gms of what is proposed to be window glass was recovered from within the building. It is thought likely that a small window existed at each gable end room.

### **Metalwork**

Metalwork would seem to include domestic items, structural elements, such as door hinge fragments and nails and the the head of a claw hammer. The latter may have been residual from the demolition process.

### **Slate**

Approximately 6,846gms of slate was recovered from the south gable room in Trenches 6 (contexts 604, 611, 615, 650) and 7 (contexts 607, 608). This relatively large quantity contrasts with only 274gms of slate being recovered from context (605) in Trench 8 from the north gable end room and none at all from the central 'vestibule'. This may indicate that the southern area was used in the processing or stacking of slates during the demolition of the building. Alternatively, the roof may have already partly collapsed prior to demolition. But, it must also be noted that there is evidence that some of this material may have come from slate working within the building during its occupation or construction.

The recovery of a further 1,231gms of slate material from the proposed midden area in context 617 may indicate that slate working had taken place within the building during its occupation with the waste material being deposited along with the rest of the household's rubbish. However, the late dating of glass bottle

fragments noted above may indicate that the midden area was still being used up to the turn of the end of the 18th century. This would accord with Miller's analysis (this volume) of the building's timeline.

**Flint** (Grateful thanks to Angela Groat for providing the following descriptions of the flints.)

Small Find No 25, Context 617.

Small primary flake of dark to light brown with cream cortex. No signs of retouch. 22mm long by 19mm wide.

Small Find No 7, Context 617.

Inner flake of brown flint. No signs of retouch, 29mm long by 17mm wide.

Small Find No 11, Context 628.

Secondary flake of grey flint with remains of cream cortex. 35mm long x 17mm wide.

It is thought likely that the three flint finds might be residue from a much earlier site phase or more likely have been imported onto the site with loam soil gathered from elsewhere and deposited to build up the garden area. It should be noted that Bronze or Iron Age hut circles are known in the near vicinity.

## DISCUSSION

Covering the entire site was a naturally-generated, build-up of organic soil created by the decay of forest litter, i.e. pine needles and other herbaceous debris. Below this covering was found either relict soil from the yard or demolition debris from the dismantling of the building and some of the dykes: orangey, clay-bonding from the building walls and displaced stones from the dykes.

The excavations have shown that the building was 12.58m long by 4.46m wide along the external, north gable wall and approximately 4.50m along the external south gable wall. Internally, the ground floor consisted of a room at either end with an entrance 'vestibule' and staircase between. The two rooms appear each to have had windows - possibly with glass - and one, at least, appears to have had window bars. The survival of slates with nail holes along with many other



*Photo 11. Trench 6 at the south end of the building. In the corner can be seen the original floor level and, next to the ranging rod, a small baulk showing the occupation layers topped by a peat deposit. This peat store is considered to have been associated with the secondary hearth stones seen bottom right. Behind these stones is a platform that may have been the site of an earlier hearth.*

fragments, suggests the building had a slate roof. All slate may well have been sourced locally. The vestibule was cobbled and some parts or all of the two rooms may also have been similarly floored. (Though there is more evidence to suggest this to have been the case in the northern room.)

The main entrance door opened inwards as did the two inner doors from the central vestibule. The doors seem to have been hung on iron eyes hinges that were embedded in the masonry of the door jambs. A wooden frame may have been fitted by using the horizontally-drilled holes. This would have sealed the door against draughts when shut. The fit would have been made particularly snug by a neatly-cut groove carved into the stone jamb. Similar carpentry appears to be demonstrated by the stone with window bar holes that also had grooves carved for the fitting of either a frame, shutters or both.



The well-built, stone platform at the rear of the 'vestibule' suggests the existence of internal stairs giving access to an upper storey. It is hard to believe that the platform was simply a support for wooden stairs. It is more likely that steps were built upon the platform but that these were robbed. This would have created a stepped structure more commonly found situated externally on buildings of this period that gave access to an upper storey. This 'internalisation' of such a structure suggests an interesting architectural development.

The excavations have also indicated probable building techniques employed, at least for the surface and floor preparations (see Photo 11). Firstly, the site was stripped of organic soil and approximately 0.20m depth of soft, natural subsoil was shovelled off for re-use. The hard, natural subsoil was levelled to the required building footprint, probably, by pick-axe, resulting in a pitted surface. The wall lines were laid out, the lower courses constructed and the (probably) previously-removed soft natural subsoil was re-introduced to level the pitted surface (651). A thin, peaty layer appears to reflect a short-lived occupation phase (653). This may well have been a simple worker's hearth used during the construction process. However, there was no evidence of building debris mixed in with the peat. The other possibility is that this was a first phase of proper occupation covered over when a new floor was introduced (647/620).

The demolition of the building appears to have been undertaken with care with materials removed, presumably, for use elsewhere. Only fragments of roofing slate survived and most of the useable stones were taken away. The rough hearths at either end of the house appear to be the result of the presence of the demolition squad or other people subsequently seeking a bit of shelter on the hill. Either, whilst working on the hill, as rough shelter for seasonal workers or even as 'picknickers'. The green bottle-glass found within the destruction layers (e.g. 609) may have belonged to any such people.

The lack of 19th-century artefactual remains speaks volumes when contrasted with the evidence from the squatter colony just around the hill (Oliver *et al*, 2013, 110-111). There, copious amounts were found; here virtually no such evidence was discovered. It cannot be doubted that this structure was out of use by 1800.

There are other interesting details to be seen within specific architectural features associated with the building. The steps [AI] leading from beside the door gave access to the garden area. No other means of gaining access to this area is evident. There was no 'back door' from the dwelling nor any notable sign of a gate along the garden dykes. Further excavation would be required to establish if steps [AI] are laid directly onto the garden soil without foundations or if stone

foundations are present. No foundations would indicate that the steps were laid as and when required as the ground level rose and were only ever intended for garden access. Foundation stones may indicate that external stairs may once have existed here to access the upper floor. Whether such stairs complemented or were earlier than the internal stairs would be a moot point. Dalmaik Old Parish Church at Drumoak had two means of accessing the upper floor, albeit both were external in that instance.

The relationships of the entrance path [Y], the garden dykes [N] and [AK] and the building are also interesting and suggest a staged development. It appears that the building was initially laid out with a cobbled path [Y] leading up to its doorway. Part of the original plan, excavation would suggest, included a narrow garden 'border' between the path and the dyke. This is demonstrable for the north side and may be suggested for the opposite side of the pathway as well. The northern border was backed by the retaining dyke [AK] - its basal course being at the same level as [Y].

In time, the garden level rose to a substantial height and this necessitated the building of another retaining dyke [N]. Where this soil came from is an interesting question. Such 'plaggen' soils are known from many sites around Scotland and within the immediate locality at the Colony (Oliver *et al*, 2016, 359). Historically, the Barony Book of Forbes frequently fulminates against the 'casting of divots' from the local meadows and fields - thereby enhancing an individual's soils at the expense of the community's.<sup>1</sup> Usually such soils derive from the stripping of turf from less agriculturally productive ground in the vicinity. In this case, this may well have been from higher up the hill - it being more practical to transport it down from agriculturally less-used land than carry up good soil from the productive fields below.

On the removal of stone from the site during the demolition phase, it is presumed that dyke [N] was reduced, along with the other dykes of the garden enclosure, down to ground level and leaving only the lower courses of stone behind. This gives us a good indication of the quantity of soil present and highlights the contrast between the garden area and the thin soil outwith the enclosure dykes. The dyke between [N] and the north-east corner was completely removed and only the soil lynchet indicates its former position. Interestingly, this was not in line with its opposite number between the entrance-way and the south-east corner of the yard.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, page 254 in the *Barony Book for 1664* [Scottish History Society, 1919]: "... ordaines the haill tenentis according to formall act maid yairanent who cast faill or deffiores eithe rwith foot spades of flatteres spades in meadow or lone or in hening, they sall pey..."



It is also worth noting at this point that this discrepancy is not apparent from the Ordnance Survey drawing as also is the fact that the building does not sit squarely within its enclosure as shown on that plan. The latter point may add credibility to the notion that the building and yard are not contemporary. The suggestion that the dykes were preceded by an earlier earthen bank may be important to this line of reasoning.

The garden dyke [N] could be seen to simply abut the building rather than being bonded into its stonework. This is not surprising as it has just been noted that [N] was a replacement dyke for [AK]. Unfortunately, the relationship of [AK] could not be seen owing to the roots of a mature standing tree.

More problematic are slithers of evidence that merely hint at further architectural details. For instance, fairly substantial amounts of plaster were found in particular situations within the building: at either end and, especially, around the main doorway. The latter may be the result of the passage of the demolition team in and out of the building or it may be related to the door structure itself. The concentration in the north room appeared to be at the end where any hearth might be expected. Earlier suggestions concerning the necessity for a 'hanging-lum' may be relevant to this concentration. (Clearly, a two-storey structure would need to have some venting mechanism if there was a fire on the ground floor.)

Internal and external ground levels around the building are also puzzling. It has been noted above that the extant height of the back wall survived to approximately 1m high internally and this was after the removal of the stone to the contemporary garden surface. Clearly, the ground floor, at the end of its period of use, was a metre below ground level. This would have resulted in a serious damp problem. But, as Section 23 shows (page 117), the top of the surviving dyke [N] was a good 0.50m higher than the surviving stones of the earlier wall [AK]. It is not impossible that, in its earliest form, the ground floor may have been much closer in level to the outside ground level. Any difference may have been mitigated by keeping the immediate area around the house free of topsoil - in fact, providing a walkway around. Such an arrangement would bring it into line with the later Colony structures. Shepherds Lodge can be shown to have had a pathway separating the house from its garden (Foster, B., this volume) and Burnside still has a gully behind the house to help prevent penetrating damp. If this was the case, the question begins to centre on why the landscaping changes occurred. Why was there a decision to try to increase the productive capacity of the ground and why was the comfort of the inhabitants sacrificed to those ends? Or, did that increase of soil occur after the desertion of the house during a period when the rich garden

soil was still being used by an absentee gardener. The finds relating to the very end of the 18th century may suggest such a possibility

Finally, there are still questions relating to the enclosure dykes to be answered. What is the meaning of the strange ‘dog-leg’ noted in Trench 9? And why were the dykes north and south of the entrance-way so offset? The structure as a unit - dykes and building - will have formed an impressive statement in the landscape as viewed from below across a fairly wide area. Was there a design element to this ‘off-setting’ that, at present, evades us? As ever, many questions have been answered, but many new questions have consequentially arisen. But, that’s just archaeology, I suppose!

### CONCLUSION

The low, earthen lumps hid a surprising depth of well-built, stone walling that supplied good evidence for the construction and architecture of the building. More than enough survived to permit an assessment of the remains and to compare them to the few but telling descriptions and dates provided by the documentary sources (see Miller, this volume). It is hard not to be drawn to the conclusion that this extremely well-constructed, slate-roofed, two-storeyed building with window bars was built by the Erskines on their estate. The artefactual evidence suggests it was built in the 17th century and was out of use by the end of the 18th. Its siting adjacent to ‘Beid House Park’ suggests an association with a charitable function. In all, it is difficult not to be persuaded that this is, in fact, the ‘hospital’ built by the Erskines in or around 1639 and that its later association with a notion of it being a ‘Bede House’ developed from that initial foundation.

### FURTHER SITE DATA

Further data is available in digital format from the Bailies’ website. Please feel free to download it from there. The additional files are:

1. XL spreadsheet containing further information about individual contexts.
2. Word file containing a full list of small finds and their contexts.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to the Bailies of Bennachie for sponsoring the project and to Jackie Cumberbirch for her personal support. To Finlay Morrison, Estate Manager of the Pittodrie Estate and to Macdonald Hotels for permission to work on the land. A special thanks are due to Barry Foster for proposing this project to the Bailies of Bennachie and a sincere thank you to all the Bailies of Bennachie that helped with the fieldwork. Of those Colin Miller must receive a special mention for organising and carrying-out the brashing of spiky branches on site prior to work beginning for the purposes of creating safe working conditions for diggers and visitors. Penny Dransart very kindly imparted many words of wisdom regarding the small finds as well as offering much insightful knowledge concerning the wider historical landscape. Also I wish to offer my sincere gratitude to all the volunteers that participated in the digging; without them this project could not have succeeded. In no particular order: Brian Cornock, Colin Miller, Andrew Wainwright, David Irving, Barry Foster, David Peter, Irvine Ross, David Richards, Steven Cromar, Alistair Stenhouse, Ann Baillie, Charlotte Baillie, Allan Will, Richard Gordon, Max Williams, Jamie Falconer and Peter Thorn. I also wish to add a special thank you to Nadine, my daughter and a junior Bailie. Her keen eye-sight and reasoning abilities were helpful and impressive in pre-excavation stages. Nadine noted many features that otherwise might have been overlooked and came up with many viable interpretations of those features.

## THE SOCIAL AND LANDSCAPE CONTEXT OF THE PITTODRIE HOSPITAL

Colin Shepherd

There are two things wrong with the title noted above. Firstly, when the hospital was commissioned by the Erskines in 1639 (see Miller, this volume), the estate was known as the barony of Balhalgardy rather than Pittodrie. Secondly, by the time Pittodrie became the recognised address for the 'Bede House' the word hospital had ceased to be used. So, to be correct, we should either refer to the Balhalgardy Hospital or the Pittodrie Bede House. Whether there was ever a relationship between the two or whether the site of either can be recognised were aims of this project.<sup>1</sup>

What we know is that a building on a shoulder of Bennachie on the Pittodrie Estate has now been partially excavated. It appears to have been two storeys in height. The documentary evidence suggests that the Balhalgardy hospital was also of two storeys (*ibid.*). A sentence in the 'View of the Diocese of Aberdeen' (*ibid.*; Collections for a History of the Shires of Aberdeen and Banff, 1843, 657-658) written in the early 18th century says it was three units in width. This also suits the excavated remains. But, that is where the descriptive evidence stops. We do know, however, that the artefactual evidence from the excavation suggests the structure to have been in use between the late 17th and the end of the 18th centuries. This would also fit with our account of its date of foundation and McConnochie makes it clear that the Bede House had fallen out of use a long time before he wrote and survived only as footings and folk memory (1890, 27). The construction of the excavated building itself is certainly in keeping with the quality anticipated of a substantial landowner aiming to impress.

One major objection may be that the hospital was said to have lain in the Chapel of Garioch, whilst the excavated remains sit just over the parish boundary in Oyne. However, as the hospital was built from the revenues of holdings historically belonging to the Chapel of Garioch (Act of Scottish Parliament 17/11/1641), this might be considered sufficient reason for it to have been thought of as comprising part of the Chapel of Garioch<sup>2</sup>. Countless examples of portions of one parish

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1 *A more complete analysis of the documentary background to this project is supplied by Colin H. Miller elsewhere in this volume.*

2 *That the estate was named Balhalgardy rather than Pittodrie should cause no surprise: a rental of 1771 (MS2392) shows that the former comprised 6 ploughlands compared with Pittodrie's 2. That this was also the case over a hundred years earlier can be shown by a rental for 1636 (MS3043/70).*

sitting isolated within an adjoining parish survive across Britain. Examples in the North-east include Philorth (Fraserburgh), Aberdour and Methlick. This example, therefore, should not occasion too much surprise<sup>3</sup>. Also, as the endowment was of a personal nature, it is likely that the recipients were residents of the estate rather than the parish - the two not being coterminous.

The terminology used for the building - hospital - raises questions. In medieval usage, such a term can fulfil a variety of outcomes. Within a post-medieval, post-Reformation world the use of the term becomes increasingly worrisome. Cowan and Easson (1976) have compiled, to date, the most complete record of pre-Reformation religious establishments in Scotland. Canmore, the HES database, can be used to supply further post-Reformation examples that have an extant archaeological or architectural record. By utilising both, the following figures are derived:

|                                                                                                |     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Pre-Reformation hospital foundations                                                           | 144 |
| Post-Reformation hospital foundations                                                          | 12  |
| Pre-Reformation uses of the term 'bede'                                                        | 7   |
| Post-Reformation uses of the word 'bede'                                                       | 21  |
| Pre-reformation use of word 'poor' in foundation charter                                       | 48  |
| Use of words 'sick', 'infirm' or 'leper' in foundation charter                                 | 25  |
| Use of words 'traveller'/'pilgrim'/'guest' in foundation charter                               | 7   |
| Use of word 'alms' in foundation charter                                                       | 37  |
| Number of charitable institutions that survived till 17th c.                                   | 33  |
| Number of pre Reformation institutions defunct by mid 16th c.                                  | 37  |
| 'Guesstimated' number of institutions that fell foul of the Reformation (144 - [33 + 37] = 74) | 74  |
| Approx. number extant at time of Reformation (144 - 37)                                        | 107 |
| Approx. number in existence post Reformation (12 + 33)                                         | 45  |

(These figures may not be entirely correct owing to the inability of this writer to access all of the original charters. Great emphasis has been placed here upon Cowan and Easson's faithful reproduction of precise terminology. However, the balance of the figures is unlikely to be badly awry and should be suitable for the simple diagnostics suggested here. A further caveat is that we just do not know the foundation dates and destruction dates of many of the institutions. These factors help to account for the discrepancies apparent in the totals noted above.)

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3 *Even isolated chunks of Banffshire could be found floating adrift in eastern Aberdeenshire into the second half of the 19th century.*



It is worth mentioning that place-names can be used to indicate former hospital sites but, as with all place-name evidence, need to be treated with care. Not too far away, between Inverurie and Whiterashes, is a small farm named 'spital'. Although, in many instances, this place-name does indicate former hospital sites, it can also simply refer to land that was gifted to a hospital situated elsewhere in order to generate income for its needs. This is the most likely explanation in this instance. Spitalmyre in Banff, however, does accurately note a post-Reformation foundation for 8 poor women whilst Spitalhill in Aberdeen marks the area of the medieval leper house in Aberdeen.

What may be noted regarding the figures quoted above is how many foundations for the poor, sick and needy were created before the Reformation and how many were created afterwards. Work by Penny-Mason & Gowland (2014, 162-194) in their study of skeletal disease in cemeteries from across Britain has drawn attention to the high mortality occasioned by the Reformation and how long it took for the removal of the social service supplied by the Catholic church to be replaced by the new regime. The thrust of Scottish laws regarding the poor was, from a statute of James I in 1424 onwards, primarily an attempt to limit the numbers of wandering 'vagabonds' and 'idle men'. The laws were designed to segregate the 'needy poor' from these 'vagabonds'. In 1503 the 'aged and the infirm' were to be aided by collections within their own parishes and were permitted to beg only within those limits. Enshrined within the laws was the concept that all who could, should work and, laudable as this may sound, the methods employed - whipping, though stopping short of torture - sound a tad extreme to modern ears. During the course of the 16th and 17th centuries, the legal provisions became increasingly harsh (Nicholls, 1856, 7; see Appendix for further detail).

A further consideration may be the popularity of Sir Walter Scott's writings during the course of the 19th century and the influence his works had on the use and understanding of the term 'bede'. This is particularly pertinent to the notion of the 'blue gowners' as noted in 'The Antiquary'. Another is the package of 'Enlightenment' values associated with Adam Smith, Malthus and even our own home-grown Archibald Grant in which poverty was equated with poor character (Shepherd, 2015, 64-67). A 'bedesman' might be considered worthy of alms whilst a 'poor' person/potential 'vagabond' might not. Pre-Reformation foundations abound with words associated with 'giving', though with little evidence of reciprocation being required: 'poor', 48 times; 'alms', 37 times and the various categories of 'sick', 25 times. In other words, 110 out of 144 foundation charters of institutions during the pre-Reformation period recorded charity requiring no

repayment. Of the 45 in existence after the Reformation, 21 employed the word 'bede' signifying a '*quid pro quo*' arrangement - even though, in a post-Reformation environment, the notion of helping lairds and their families through purgatory with prayer must have been fairly anachronistic.

In Samuel Johnson's dictionary (1756) a 'beadsman' was defined as 'a man employed in praying for another'. This suggests active employment rather than the receiving of 'alms'.<sup>4</sup> Even within the context of James VI and the now famous 'gowns of blue cloth' claimed by Walter Scott in 'The Antiquary' to be for the 'King's Bedesmen', the wording in the accounts of Sir Robert Melvill, the Treasurer-Deputy of King James VI notes payment to the King's 'Almoner' of money to buy 'twentie four gownis of blue clayth, to be gevin to xxiiij auld men...' This sounds more like a gift of alms. The same can be said of the 'twentie fyve pund sterling, to be gevin to the puir be the way in his Majesteis progress' - this time by the deputy 'Elimozinar' (Almoner) to his majestie. Again, this is a gift of alms with no expectation of *quid pro quo*.

In Edward Phillips' dictionary, first published in 1658, 'hospital' is defined as 'properly an House of Charity founded by the Prince or State, for the Entertainment and Relief of Poor, Sick, Impotent, or Aged Persons: an Alms-house'. His definition of 'bede-house' is: 'an Hospital, or Almes-House for Bedes-Men, or poor People, who pray'd for their Founders and Benfactors'. 'Alms': 'whatever is freely given to the Poor for God's Sake'; 'Alms-House': 'a House built by a Man or Woman in a private Capacity, and endow'd with a sufficient Revenue for the Maintenance of a certain Number of poor, aged, or disabled Persons.' (Phillips, 1720.) These definitions are important as they relate to a time very close to the foundation date of the Pittodrie 'hospital'. The 'hospital' of Pittodrie may be considered to have been founded by the state in as much as it was the state that granted the permission. By 1758, the construction of the Royal Naval Hospital at Stonehouse, Plymouth must have consigned the word's other definitions to the past. This was a place designed to care for the sick and wounded in special 'wards' and laid the blueprint for today's hospitals (Military Hospitals in the United States, 15). Therefore, whilst an older definition of 'hospital' may have persisted till Johnson's dictionary of 1756, within a few short years, such usage had been superseded. This may well explain the change of name for the Pittodrie 'hospital' so that, by the time of the 1771 rental, the 'hospital' had become a 'bede house'.

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4 He defines 'hospital' in two ways: '1. a place built for the reception of the sick, or support of the poor. 2. a place for shelter or entertainment.'

5 Note the past tense used for 'pray'd' - post-Reformation, such a thing might not have been considered 'politically correct'.

Why the name chosen was ‘bede house’ rather than ‘alms-house’ or ‘poor house’ may well be wrapped up in sentiments already discussed as present in the Scottish Poor Laws since the 16th century. In brief, ‘Bedesmen’ could be seen as supplying a service for their payment and, thus, socially acceptable. ‘The term ‘Alms-house’ appears to have almost fallen into disuse, probably because no such thing existed. ‘Poor Houses’ by this time were, in effect, the forerunner of the later ‘workhouses’ where all were expected to contribute towards their keep. They may have hinted too much of potential ‘vagabonds’ in the neighbourhood for ‘polite’ usage.

Bishop Gavin Dunbar’s foundation charter for his hospital at Aberdeen in 1531 makes no mention of the word ‘bedesmen’ or even of the *quid pro quo* of ‘prayer for cash’. But, perhaps more importantly, his notion of Christian charity in the 16th century stands in stark contrast to earlier perceptions. In the words of Gavin Dunbar (translated by Prof. McAleese, 2012, 1, 5), “...when something is left after supplying the needs of the church and our own life, ...give of thy bread to the hungry and the poor...” (*ibid*; REA I, 401-406). During the 13th century, in cases of hunger attended by the lack of money to buy food, theft was not considered, by the Catholic church of Thomas Aquinas, to be a crime since ‘nede ne hath no lawe’ (Firth Green, 2007, 11). Clearly charity had nose-dived from an obligation to share worldly goods to become an ethic of giving away just some of the surplus. During the next hundred years, the concept of Christian charity was to plummet to an all-time low. Wills from other parts of Britain show a developing apathy towards making bequests for the poor. At the beginning of the 16th century, such bequests appear to be common. By the end of the 16th century such bequests were rare (Dallas and Sherlock, 2002, 93-107).

The situation was not helped by the crown. James I appears to have had a genuine interest in the reform of religious foundations (Cowan & Easson, 1976, 16) and an Act of Parliament (1425/3/3) required them to adhere to their original purposes. This was repeated by James II (1458/3/13) in which Act a list of local persons responsible for visiting the royal foundations in each diocese was noted. For Aberdeen this responsibility fell to Lord Forbes and the Abbot of Deer. But, royal ‘reform’ increasingly became little more than an excuse to appropriate religious holdings for dispersal amongst royal favourites (Cowan & Easson, 1976, 21-4). By Act of Parliament (A1516/11/2), the hospital of St. Mary the Virgin near Montrose was ‘refounded’ by James V in favour of the Dominicans as a place where prayers could be said by the clerics for the souls of his family and some of the lands alienated to loyal henchmen. However, in this instance, the hospital was later reconstituted to its former purpose as a place of refuge for the poor by Mary

in 1559x60. This particular hospital even managed to survive for a while after the Reformation (Cowan & Easson, 1976, 186).

Regarding the Pittodrie foundation, it may be important that the Erskines were still, during the 17th century, supporters of the Catholic faith, in keeping with many other great families in the North-east at this time. It is certainly not inconceivable that their sentiments were more in tune with pre-Reformation ideals than with any proto-enlightenment notions.

In turning to the landscape siting of the 'hospital', there are a few concerns relating to how the building may have been used. The building is isolated and not apparently close to a water supply. However, lades built during the 19th century for the Pittodrie Estate and subsequent drainage activities may well have removed a former supply. So, this issue remains moot. In the present day, the building is remote and, whilst wooded, appears isolated. This is, in large part, also a product of subsequent landscape management. It sat upon two locally-important routeways. One survived to be included in Robertson's map of 1822 and the other has survived as 'The Turnpike' (see Figure 26). To the south these routeways linked Pittodrie with two crossing points across the River Don, at the Boat of Forbes at Keig and at Fetternear. Both places were also sites of regional power: a major residence of the Forbeses at Keig and the Leslie 'palace' at Fetternear. The two routes - once joined near the hospital - led north and west around the shoulder of Bennachie to where they divided once more to lead west to meet the Mar Road to Kildrummy and north-west via Inch to Huntly and the north. South-east from Pittodrie led the main route back to Aberdeen. In other words, the hospital site sat in the middle of a well-established route network linking 'the great and the good' of the region. From its perch on the shoulder of Bennachie, it would also have glowered over the landscape to the north and east - its doorway viewed through an impressive entrance-way flanked by stone dykes. It was clearly making a statement in the landscape, presumably related to the role of the Erskines in the vicinity. But, its positioning also suggests a pre-occupation with a former attribute of 'hospitals' prior to the mid 18th century - that of providing a place of rest for travellers. A recently excavated 'almshouse' was endowed by James McFarlane at Creag a'Phuirt on Loch Lomond between 1612 and 1625 with the sole purpose of supplying shelter to travellers passing through (James, 2017). The stone sill with holes for window bars discovered at Pittodrie (see below) might suggest a refuge for travellers during the uncertain times of the 17th century rather than exclusively the home of 'poor' folk. Hospitals frequently fulfilled both roles.

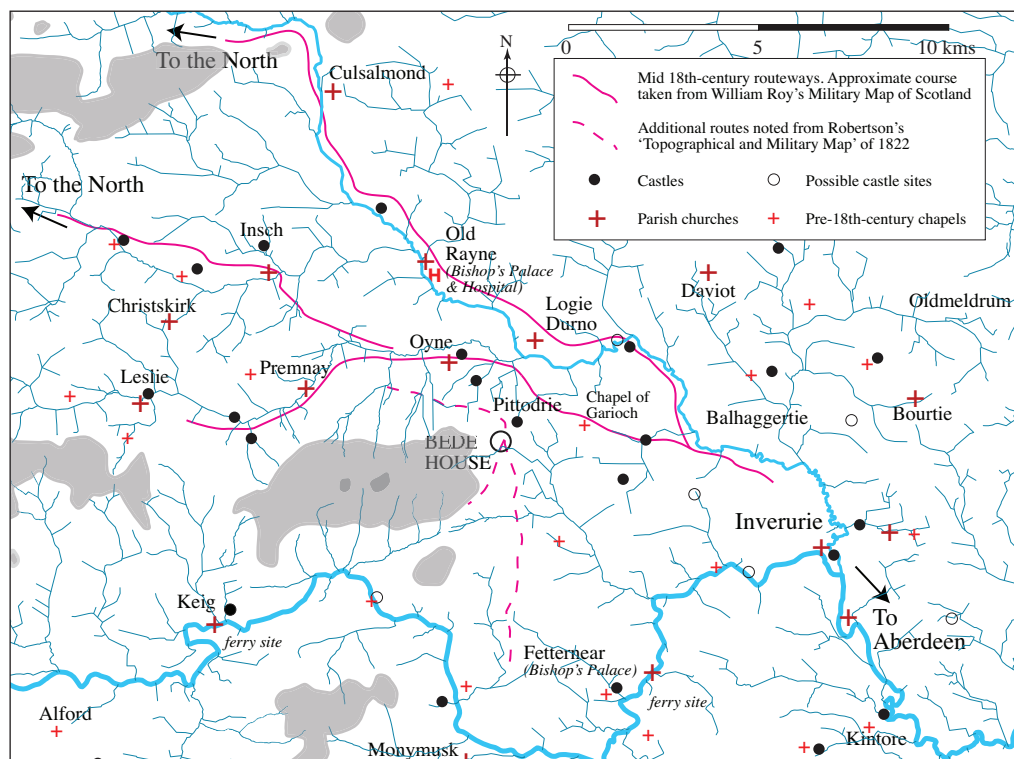


Figure 27. The area around the Pittodrie Estate. Higher ground shown by grey shading.

Consideration of the immediate surroundings of the 'hospital' may also be instructive. Surviving plantation banks still delineate woodlands present in the 18th century. The estate rental of 1771 (MS 2392) lists these plantations. Only one - Beidhouse Park - shows any alteration in size to that defined by the rental. Colin Miller has demonstrated that it was formerly bounded on its east side by the faint remains of a plantation bank but that, during the ensuing years between 1771 and the Ordnance survey of 1866 x 1867, it had grown so that its eastern boundary had become the present 'Turnpike' (pers. comm.). Beid House Park was later to become Bede House Wood. North of Beid House Park lay Farquharson Park and, to the north of that, lay Maiden Castle Park.

These areas of woodland are clearly depicted on the early 19th-century maps of Robertson and Thomson but also appear to be alluded to in Roy's survey of the 1740s - though not in detail. The parks appear to have been constructed with the intent of articulating with the existing routeway passing the Bede House - wide 'loans' being left between Farquharson's Park and Maiden Castle Park. The use of the term 'park' at this time in the North-east is suggestive. By the mid

19th century it was well-established as indicating an enclosed field, usually for grazing. Its medieval usage had been to define an enclosed area pertaining to the lord's resource management. This included (but was not limited to) deer and other animals 'of the chase' as well as timber stocks and areas of woodland pasture. It is the last that suggests how this definition may have changed from medieval to modern usage. By the time of the Ordnance Survey, these areas of timber were recorded as 'woods' rather than 'parks'. However, the earlier name does hint at another possible use for these enclosed areas rather than as simple plantations.

Be that as it may, the excavations appear to show that the 'yard' associated with the Bede House preceded the plantation dykes. So, if the 'hospital' was built - along with its yard dykes - in the 1640s, the plantation dykes would have been built later. But, the excavations also showed that the yard dykes appear to have cut through an earlier earthen linear feature. So, the 'hospital' may have been built within a pre-existing enclosure that pre-dated the mid 17th century. At the moment this is mere speculation and further archaeological work is required to test these possibilities. What does seem certain, however, is that when the hospital was built in the 1640s, it would have been the most prominent feature on this part of the hill with no trees to diminish that prominence.

It is appropriate, finally, to consider the question of how common these hospitals were across the North-east at this time. As noted above, there were very few founded after the Reformation. Charters for a 'hospice and guesthouse' for weary travellers at Old Rayne was granted to Bishop Elphinstone in 1493 and 1498<sup>6</sup> but this does not necessarily mean that it was ever constructed. It was to be for travellers going between Elgin and Aberdeen. There were clearly houses for the poor and infirm at Aberdeen and a hospital for poor men was established by William Forbes at Tarves. Cullen had a couple of foundations and the leper house of Rathven appears, ultimately, to have become a 'bede house'. An undated abstract rental from the estate (GD225/1029) notes the laird's obligation to the poor there as follows:

'The heritor pays yearly to 6 Beadmen in the hospital of Rathven 6 bolls of meall @ 8st. and 10/- sterling in money for which no deduction is made in the within rental as the priviledge of presenting these poor men is to be disposed with the estate.'

(It should be noted that obligation is owed by the estate and not the parish. This would seem to be the same situation as at Pittodrie, noted above. At 64 pecks to the boll (<https://www.sizes.com/units/boll.htm>), the payment at Pittodrie and

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6 *I'm grateful to Eileen Clare Grant for drawing my attention to this reference.*



Rannes seem fairly similar with the Pittodrie bedesmen receiving 52 pecks of meal and 26 pecks of malt per year. At Rannes, each had 64 pecks of meal but 10/- in cash instead of the 26 pecks of malt - presumably to be converted to liquid malt at the local inn!).

It is, therefore, interesting to note that the North-east appears to have contained a relatively large proportion of the post-Reformation hospitals in Scotland and it is probably not inappropriate to see this as being the result of pre-Reformation religious tendencies in the area. If Aberdeen maintained at least three of them well into the post-Reformation period, the total for the North-east would be in the order of 10 out of the national figure of around 45. (Though this is based upon the, admittedly, incomplete and estimated numbers noted above.)

The Balhalgardy hospital appears to be one of the last examples in Scotland of a charitable foundation that has its roots in a pre-Reformation religious mindset. It appears to reflect an attitude of personal piety and obligation to the community in a period before such care became seen as a secular responsibility. Its apparent name change to the 'Bede House' may reflect the period of social ambivalence and exclusion that we now term 'the Enlightenment'. That it failed to survive this callous interlude is, perhaps, not surprising.

Appendix<sup>1</sup>  
(taken from Nicholls, 1856)

Under a statute of 1579 Parish inhabitants were to be taxed to the level required to sustain their own poor. However, if the appointed parish overseers considered any of the poor capable of work, they were forced to undertake it. From 1592 the kirk sessions became sole arbiters of the law for relief (32), though by 1662 the responsibility had been passed to justices to appoint overseers. This new act permitted manufacturing companies to seize 'vagabonds' and to set them to work for no wages. Moreover, the companies would be paid by the parish of domicile of the 'vagabond' for each day's labour for the next 3 years (64). They then had to work for a further seven years for the company for their meat and clothing. (Though this Act appears to have been short-lived if operational at all, it does give the measure of the general mindset regarding poverty at the time.) In 1672 came the 'correction houses' in which the 'indigent poor' were to be housed and set to work<sup>2</sup>. Genuinely ill people were to be housed at the parish's expense but, if not enough funds could be found, they were given a badge and permitted to beg around their own parish. Poor children were given to those who wanted them for work and would have to stay with them and work for 'meat and clothes' till 30 years of age (69). Authority for overseeing this was placed back in the hands of the kirk. Few burghs appear to have built such houses, however, and a further Act of 1698 re-inforced the call for them (83). It has been noted that the lines demarcating 'deserving poor' from 'vagabonds' was forever in a state of flux (89). Nicholls quotes Alison's 'Remarks on the Poor Laws of Scotland,' (1844, 8):

"They grant to the poor in almost all parts of the country an allowance utterly inadequate to their maintenance, knowing perfectly that the only means by which this deficiency can be supplied is common begging; and then they punish as criminals, persons who have been reduced to this degradation by their own maladministration of the laws designed for the protection of those very persons." (108)

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1        *It is to be noted that this report was written in 1856 - not normally a time renowned for its soft, socialist views.*

2        *Overseers were permitted to whip them but had to stop short of torture (70).*

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