

**Blackmiddens, Cabrach, AB54 4HP
Data Structure Report (DSR)**



**Alison Cameron
Cameron Archaeology
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Cover top: view of partition wall 26 with drain 51 in centre and cobbled surface 32 (foreground); facing S. Bottom: cobbled drain 20; facing ESE

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SUMMARY

Blackmiddens Farm appears on the early editions of the OS map but the distillery does not appear and is only marked 'Distillery' on an estate plan of 1829. From 8-11 April 2019 a small hand-picked team excavated this structure following some clearance of turf and demolition rubble by tracked machine. The weather was mild and sunny throughout. The farm and distillery buildings were surveyed by HES during the excavation and they supplied surveying data and OD heights for the site.

The building was deturfed by machine and some demolition rubble removed from the interior of the building; it was a maximum of 10m long (N-S) and 6.3m wide (W-E) and has been divided into four 'rooms' or working spaces. The walls were in poor condition with the SE and SW corners being the least robbed during demolition as they were constructed from enormous glacial boulders. The W wall was thick and appeared to have been bonded with clay although most had been demolished into the building. The N and E walls had been thoroughly robbed out with just foundations surviving; a short section in the E end of the N wall may be a very poorly preserved section of wall. Bedrock had been located at the N of the building and a wall built using this as a foundation. As this is the topographically highest point of the site it may be that only a low wall was required to support a roof and shelter activity from the wind from the N.

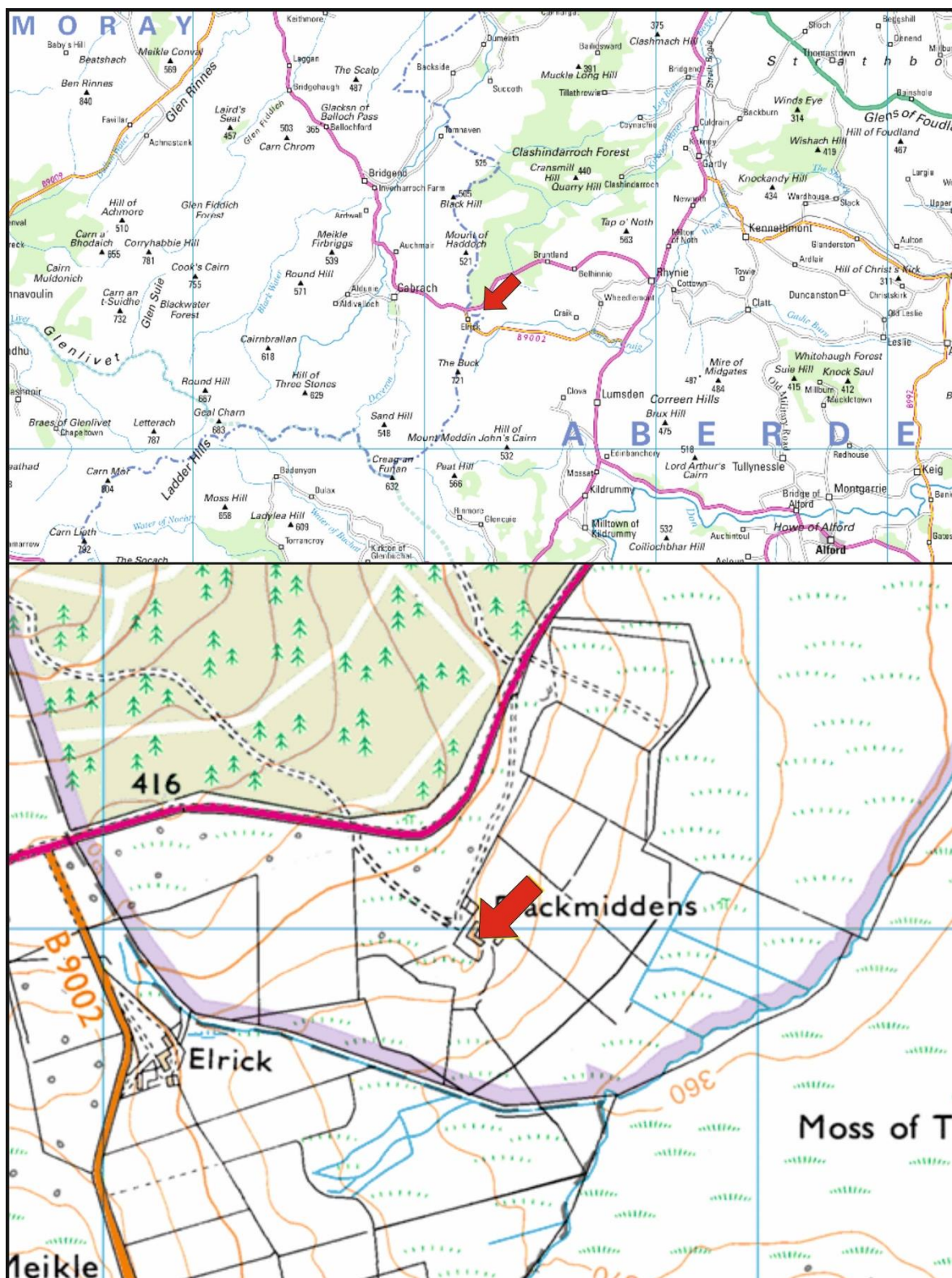
The building was on three levels; Room 4 at the N was an area of compact gravel natural subsoil which appears to have been a floor. There is a pit cut into the floor filled with layers of ash and may have been an area of *in situ* burning or dumped hot ash. The central Room 3 may have been linked to Room 4 as it is on the same level. Room 3 has a rectangular area of paving with associated compact gravel surfaces as well as a circular and semi-circular alignment of stones possibly as bases for tanks or barrels. There is one step down from Room 3 to Room 1 at the S edge of the area of rectangular cobbles and the rest of these steps may have been lost when the partition wall was constructed. Room 2 is at a lower level and has waterwashed cobbles over the S end of the room and compact natural at the N end suggesting the cobbles were a working area and there was a tank or other equipment sited at the N end of the room.

Room 1 in the S of the building is divided from Room 2 with a later Phase 2 partition wall. The floor of Room 1 has cobbles throughout although some have been removed or disturbed. There is a central drain running ENE down to the WSW lined with waterwashed cobbles and edged with rectangular slabs and waterwashed cobbles. The cobbles run under partition wall on the N side of the room. The cobbles on the S side of the room slope up to the south suggesting sloped access required at the side of the room, possibly for animals or rolling barrels. There was no S wall but a partition may have been in place or this may have been an open access.

Finds include stoneware bottles, iron fittings and a buckle and clay pipes which may be contemporary with the distillery phase but there were late 19th-century glass bottles smashed on the floor of Room 2 suggesting that the building was still accessible during that period and probably used by farm employees to sneak a smoke and a drink in this small basement area out of sight of the farm.

1 BACKGROUND

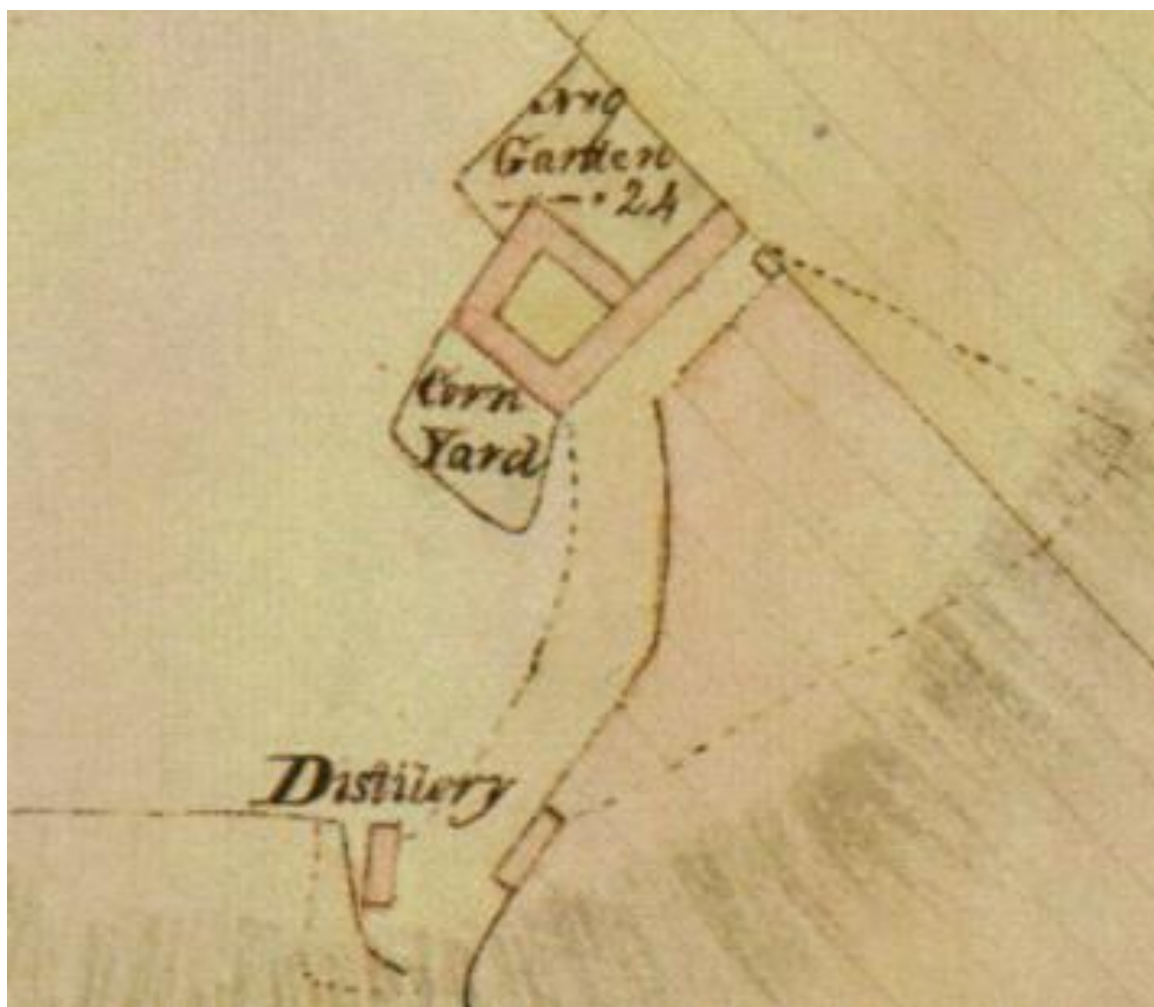
- 1.1 The site (Illus 1) is located S of the A941 to the E of its junction with the B9002. It is centred on NGR NJ 42567 25928, at 380-390m OD in the parish of Rhynie.
- 1.2 The work was commissioned by Peter Bye-Jenson, The Cabrach Trust and is being run as a research excavation directed by the current author. The HES surveying team were on site at the same time recording all the extant structures and upstanding earthworks.



Illus 1 Location plan (Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2019)

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Blackmiddens Farm appears on the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Editions OS map (Illus and is on HES CANMORE database no NJ42NW 11. The distillery does not appear on these maps but is marked 'Distillery' on an estate plan of 1829 (Illus 2) (Bye-Jenson 2018).



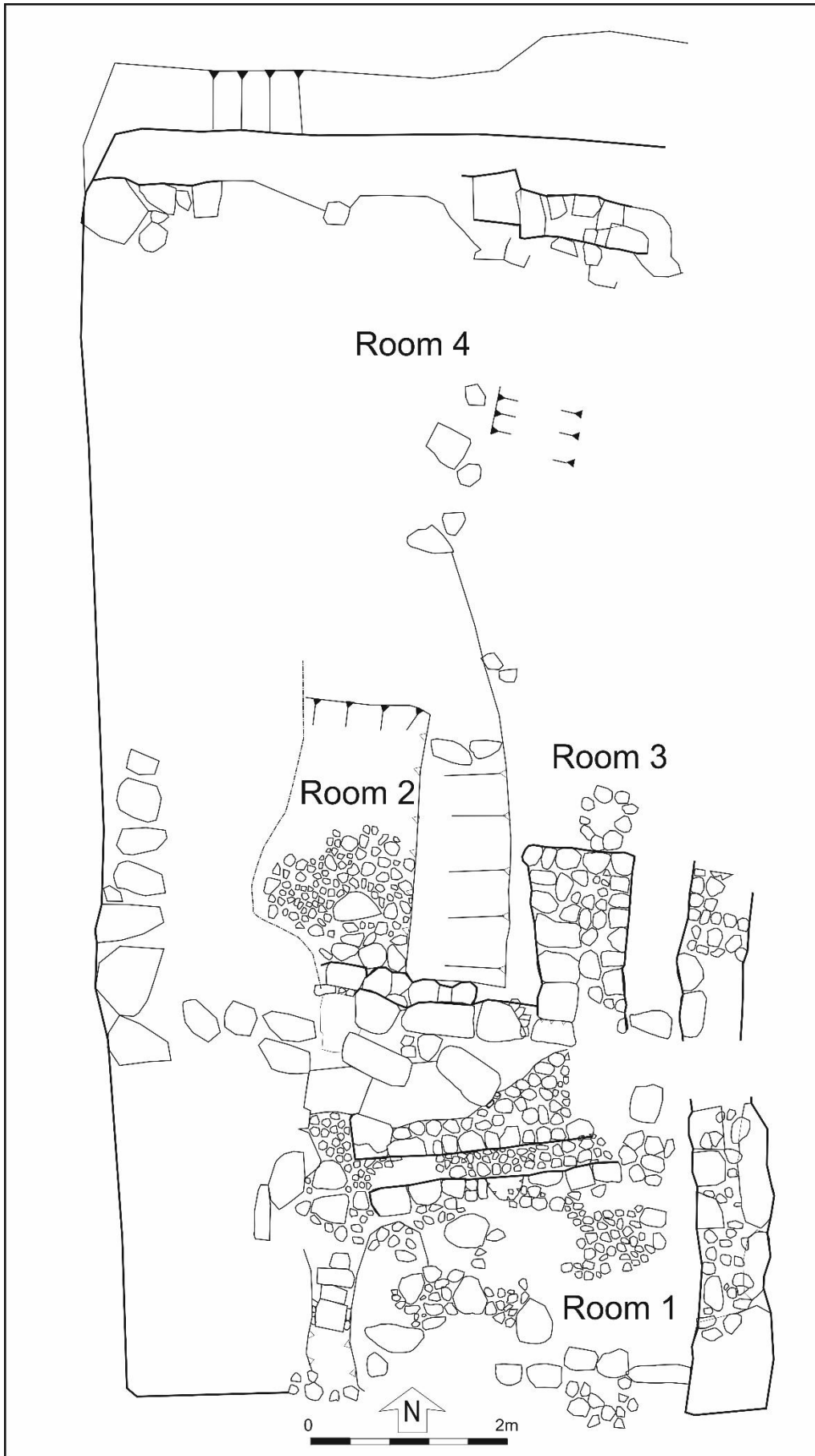
Illus 2 The 'distillery' clearly marked on an improvement map of 1829 (copyright National Library of Scotland).

3 THE EXCAVATION

From 8-11 April 2019 a small hand-picked team excavated this structure following some clearance of turf and demolition rubble by tracked machine. The weather was mild and sunny throughout. The farm and distillery buildings were surveyed by HES during the excavation and they supplied surveying data and OD heights for the site.

The building was deturfed by machine and some demolition rubble removed from the interior of the building. The area to the N of the structure was scraped to natural subsoil looking for a water source and several trenches opened by machine in the surrounding area investigating linear features.

One building was uncovered. It was a maximum of 10m long (N-S) and 6.3m wide (W-E) and has been divided into four rooms for the purposes of this report (Illus 3).



Illus 3 Plan showing main structures and four main room numbers used in this report

3.1 Room 1

Phase 1

Room 1 is at the S end of the building. It is the full width of the building and c 4m long (N-S). there is a large stone wall on the E side (11; Illus 5) and a stone wall foundation on the W (17; not excavated due to health and safety reasons). The room has a cobbled floor. There is a drain or runnel (Illus 7-9) through the centre running downhill from the ENE to the WSW. It is 0.26m wide, 0.05m deep and a maximum of 3.6m long. The base is set with small rounded waterwashed cobbles (20). The sides are formed with larger, often rectangular flat stones with some cobbles (19 on the N and 22 on the S). This type of drain or runnel is used in buildings where there is a lot of liquid which needs to drain or be cleared out of a building (such as seen in cowsheds in Aberdeenshire farms – called a grepe). Small waterwashed cobbled surface 21 on the S side of the room was disturbed but sloped down from the S to the N suggesting a surface for access possibly rolling barrels into and out of the room.

There is a line of stones 48 at the S of the room (Illus 6); this is not substantial enough for a wall foundation as seen on the other walls of the building. This is therefore being interpreted as a base of a wooden partition or a low wall. This may have been an open access area, however, and the area between the S edge of cobbles 21 and these stones was filled with compact natural gravel and this may be a repair to the floor of this room and would have allowed for barrels to be rolled from the centre of the room to the S edge of the building. There is also a semi-circular setting of large and small stones (50; Illus 6) in the centre of the S edge of the building and this has compact gravel natural subsoil in the centre and was probably a base for a tank or barrel.

There is a steep slope to the S of the building; there is stone (46 and 47) which is either a revetment or may be the remains of demolition material fallen down the slope (Illus 6).

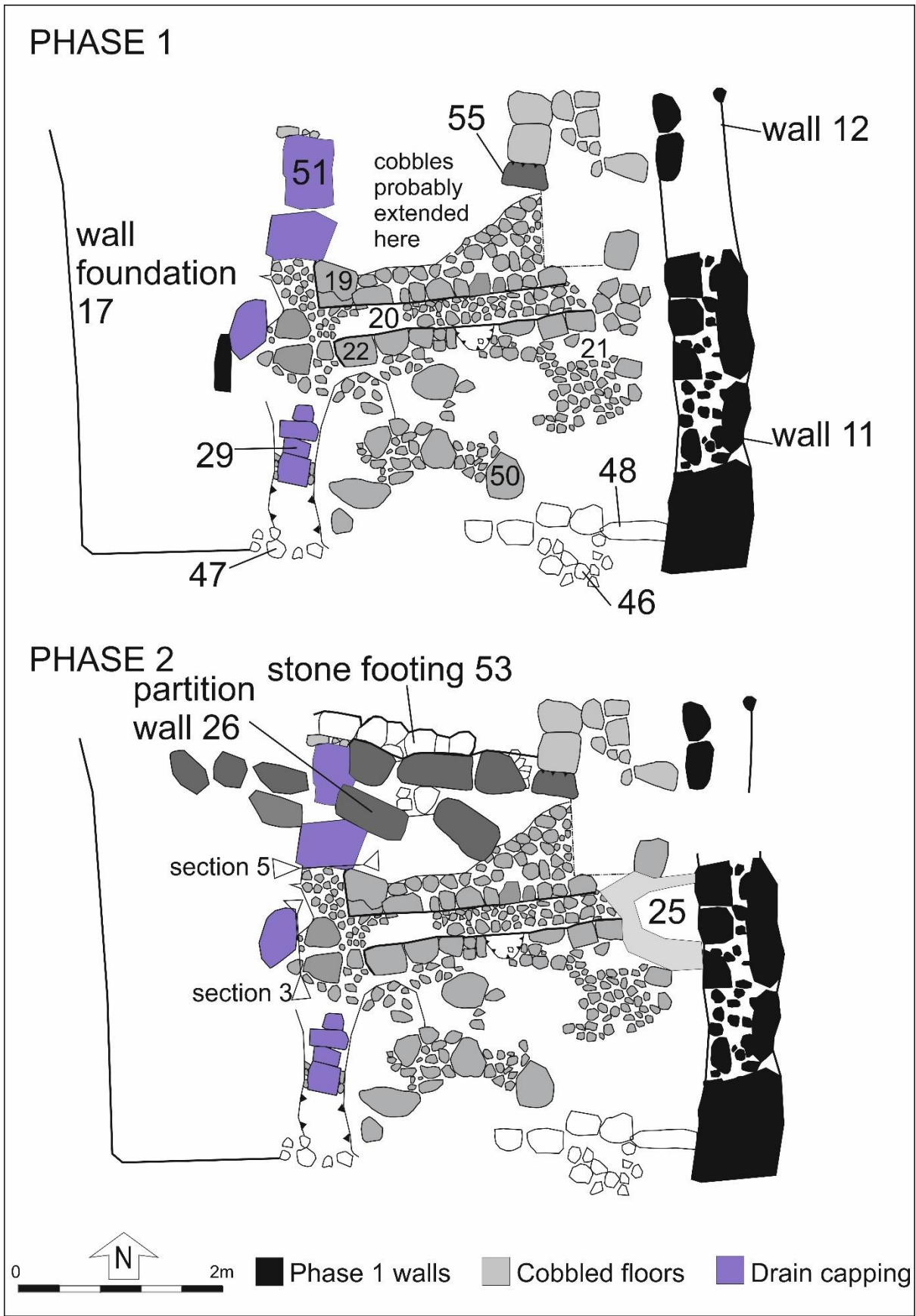
Cut through the natural subsoil at the S of the building is drain 29. The S end is cut into the compact natural gravels and most of the feature is capped with flat stones. The drain goes under the floor of Room 1 and into Room 2 to the N. When partition wall was constructed a culvert (51) was created under this wall. The drain also heads W through wall foundation 17 but this area was unsafe to excavate at the current time.

Phase 2

This room would originally have been one with Room 2 but a partition wall (26) was inserted in Phase 2. The wall consisted of at least 5 large stones on the N face and two stones on the S face had been dislodged, presumably during demolition. Between these stones were small stone hearting but this has been heavily damaged in the past. This wall is set on cobbles 19 on the S side but there is a drop of level into Room 2 and so this side of the wall had to be built up with a rough stone footing (53).

On the E wall of Room 1 a layer of redeposited natural gravels was laid over cobbles 21 and then a semi-circle of stones and clay (25; Illus 13) were attached to the E wall. There was no burning so this is not a hearth and it may be a setting for a barrel or tank. It was insubstantially built.

A semi-circular section of cobbles 22 was removed (44; Illus 11) and this may have been used as a base for a post but it is not deep enough for a post-hole.



Illus 4 Room 1 Phases 1 and 2 showing locations of sections 3 and 5



Illus 5 E wall S end (11) showing large boulders used in construction; facing NW



Illus 6 Room 1 S edge with stone alignment 48 (bottom) and circular stone alignment 50 (centre); facing W



Illus 7 Drain 29 (foreground) and drain 51 (centre) through partition wall 26; facing N



Illus 8 Drain 29 facing S



Illus 9 W end of drain 20 with drain 57 (left) and drain 51 (top); facing N



Illus 10 Stoneware bottle sherds from W end of drain 20 (fill 38)

Finds from drain 20 fills included stoneware bottle sherds (Illus 10), bird leg bones and clay pipe stem. Other finds from this room include metal plates and a buckle from context 41 (Illus 12) on top of cobbled surface 19 and under demolition material 31.



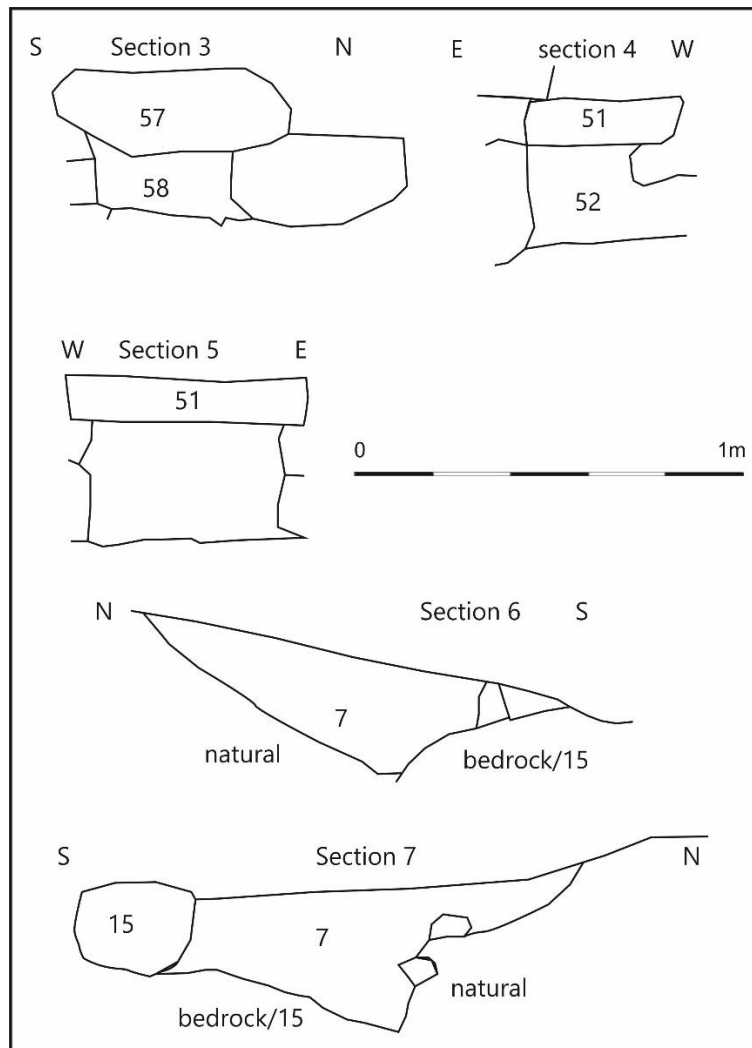
Illus 11 Void in cobbles 22 (44); runnel 20 (centre), cobbles 19 with partition wall 26 (top); facing N



Illus 12 Iron buckle from above floor 19 and under demolition material (context 41)



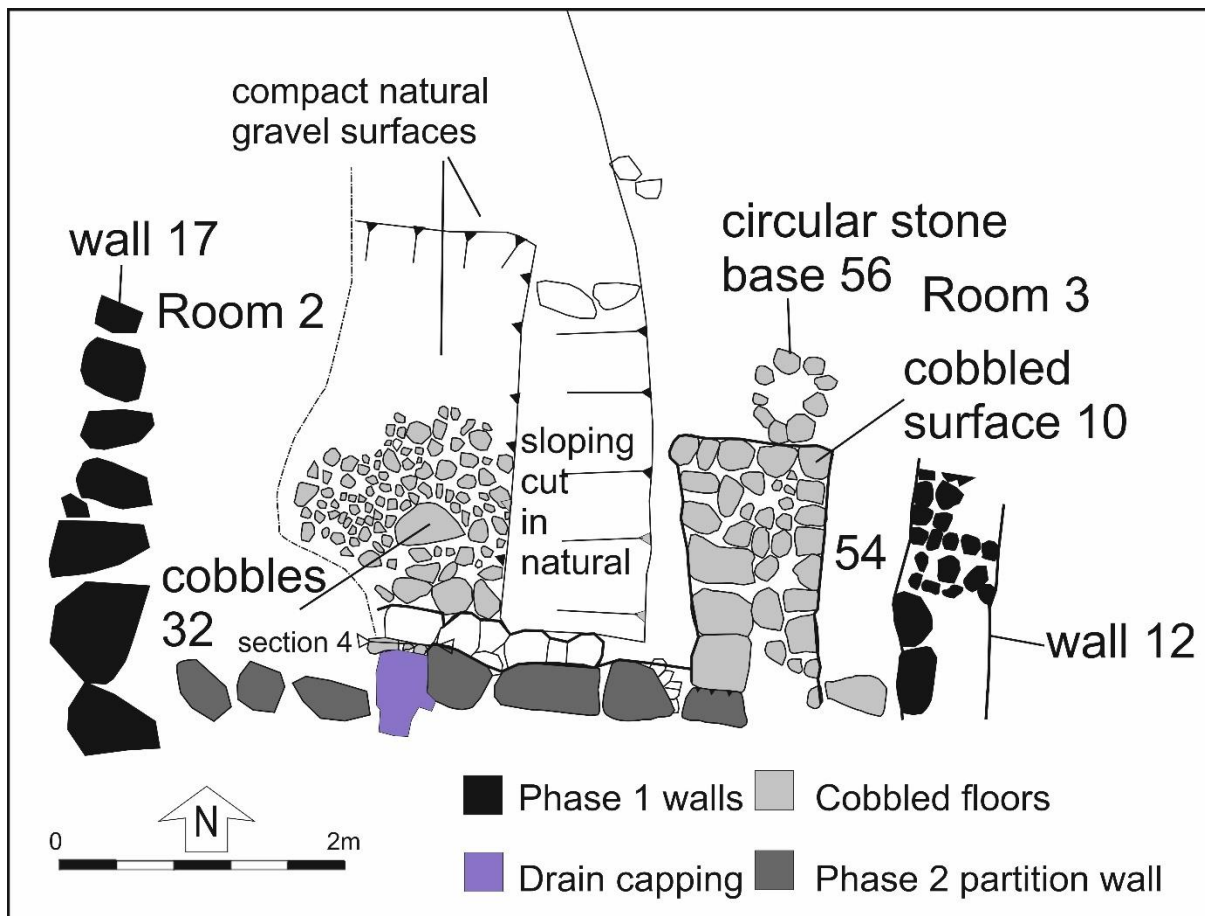
Illus 13 Phase 2 stone setting (25) with sloping cobbled surface 21 (right) and wall foundation 11 (top); facing E



Illus 14 Sections 3-7

3.2 Room 2

Room 2 is a lower level room on the W side of the building. It was partially excavated as there was demolition material/wall foundation (17) on the W side and this did not allow for full excavation.



Illus 15 Rooms 2 and 3 plan of main features showing location of Section 4

The room was constructed by cutting down into the natural gravel on the N and E sides creating a steep slop on each face. Medium rounded cobbles (32; Illus 16) were laid on the S end of the room with larger flat stones placed at the junction of this room with the phase 2 partition wall 26. Soil, brick and stone had been dumped in the N edge of this room (40; Illus 16) and soil and brick trampled onto the N end of the room. When this was removed natural compact gravel was located underneath. Latterly the room had clay pipes and glass bottles smashed on the floor (Illus 17); the glass has been dated to the 1860/70s at the earliest, 1880s/90s at the latest (Colin MacKenzie, Cabrach Trust trustee pers comm) and this activity post-dates the distillery. It is likely that this room was still open and may have formed a refuge for farm staff to drink and smoke before the room was backfilled to ground level with large stone and brick demolition rubble.



Illus 16 Room 2 cobbled surface 32 (left) and stone, brick and soil rubble 40 (right); facing W



Illus 17 Glass bottles post-dating the distillery from the floor of Room 2

3.3 Room 3

Rooms 3 and 4 may have essentially been one working area. Room 3 is on the E side of the building and is set at ground level. There is a steep slope down to Room 2 from here. There is a rectangular area of large flat slabs and small stone cobbles (10; Illus 18) and there is one step down from this level to Room 1 (55; Illus 15).



Illus 18 Cobbled surface 10; facing W



Illus 19 Circular stone setting 56; facing N

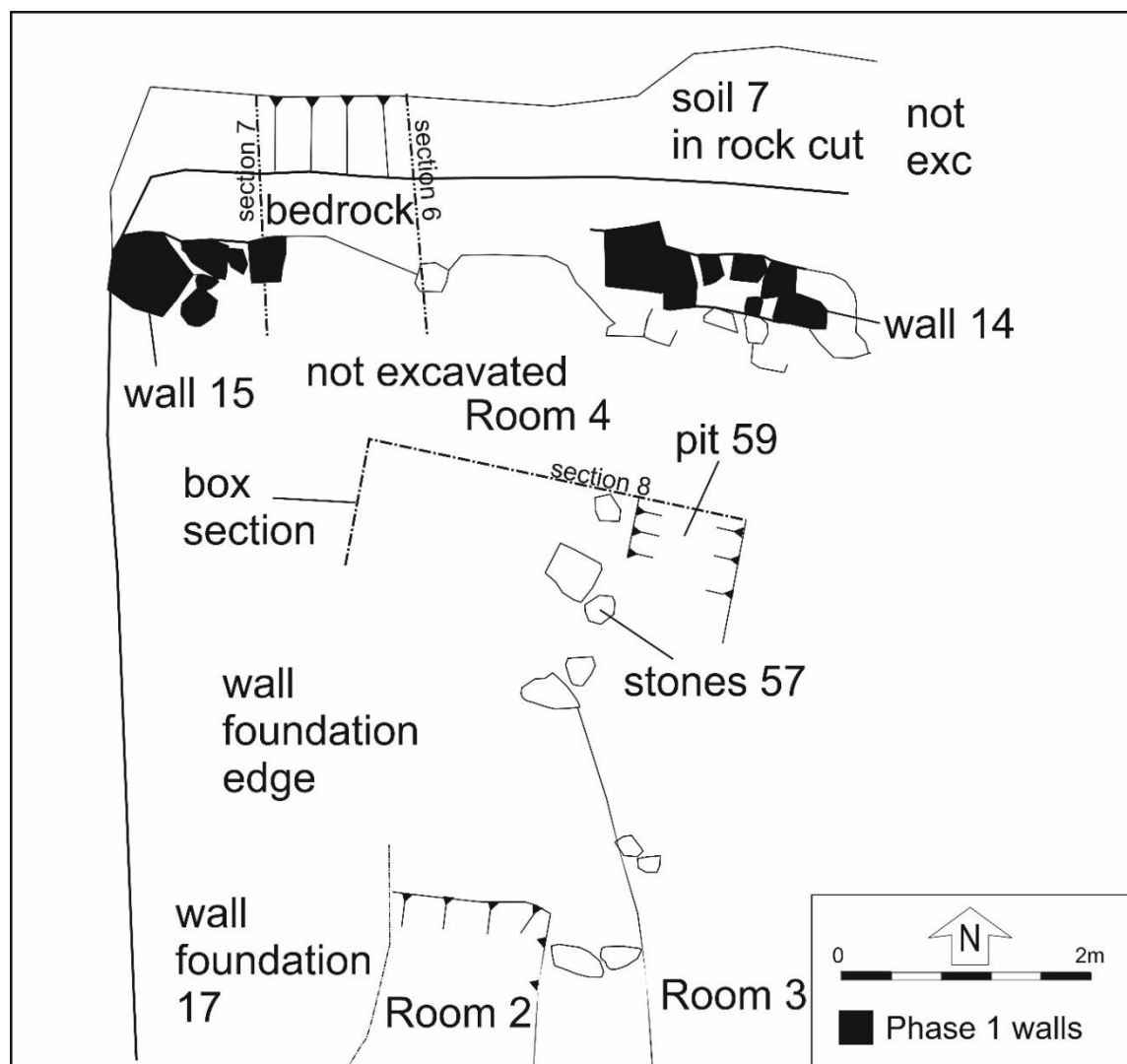
There are also a number of stone settings including circular area 56 (Illus 19) and semi-circular setting 24 as well as linear stone spread 39 which continues to the exterior of the building. The former areas may have been settings for tanks or barrels and the stone

spread 39 covers the E wall foundation and may be associated with the demolition or later use of the building.

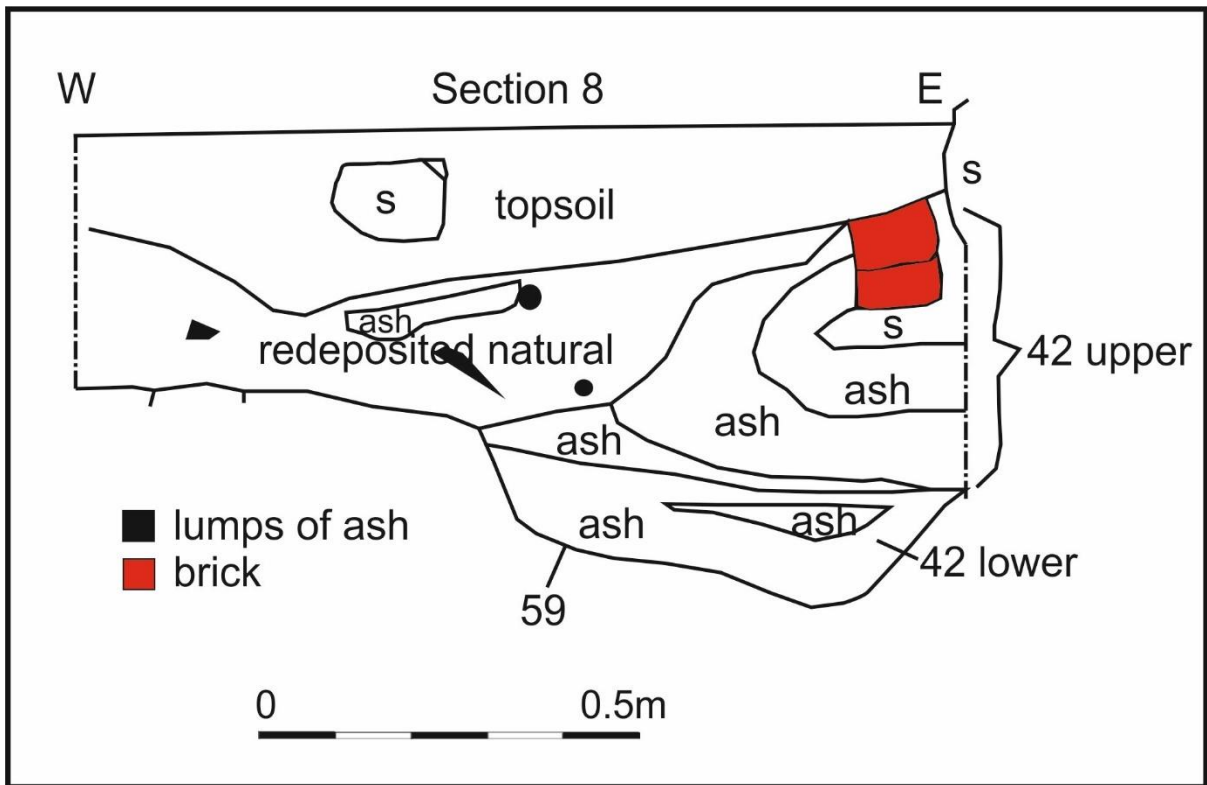
3.4 Room 4

Rooms 3 and 4 may have essentially been one working area. Room 4 is at the N end of the building and appears to have been across the full width of the building. Demolition material was left in the N end of this room and the walls were not fully investigated. The W wall 17 is as above, a thick wall of rubble bonded with clay. The NW corner has some larger stones surviving (15) and these may be *in situ* wall/wall foundation. The N wall is in poor condition but there is a trench on the N side of the building filled with context 7 (Illus 20; Sections 6 and 7 Illus 14). It appears that during the construction this trench was excavated to determine the depths of bedrock and that this bedrock was used as a base for the wall foundation. The wall may not have been high as this was topographically the highest point of the site and it may have been that a low wall was required as a support for roofing.

There is a pit (59) cut into the floor of this room. It is 0.65m W-E and 0.5m deep but the contents have overflowed on the W side of the pit; the N and E sides of the pit were left unexcavated. The fills were dumps of ash (Illus 21, 22)



Illus 20 Room 4 showing location of Sections 6, 7 and 8



Illus 21 Section of pit 59



Illus 22 Pit 59; facing N

4 REFERENCES

Bye-Jenson, P 2018 Blackmiddens Project Design.

5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Peter Bye-Jenson, Cabrach Trust for initiating this project and to Bruce Mann, Aberdeenshire Council Archaeology Service for his advice during this work. Thanks to the digging team Irvine and Veronica Ross, Moyra Simon, Darroch Bratt, Mary Dower and Rosemary Feilden. Thanks to Graeme of Ian Harrold Plant Hire. Thanks to HES staff John Sherriff, Ali, Heather and Kat Gilmour for supplying surveying and OD height data.

Cameron Archaeology
45 View Terrace
Aberdeen
AB25 2RS
01224 643020
07581 181057
cameronarch@btinternet.com
www.cameronarchaeology.com
Company registration no 372223 (Scotland)
VAT registration no 990 4373 00

APPENDIX 1 CONTEXTS

Context no	Description
1	Cleaning/machining over N wall
2	Cleaning/machining over Room 2/3
3	Cleaning/machining over Room 1
4	Cleaning/machining over W wall
5	Cleaning/machining over S end of building
6	Cleaning/machining over E wall
7	Soil in trench on N of building - foundation trench to cut down to bedrock to form N wall
8	Compact gravel over cobbles 10 - still base?
9	Loose line of stones next to 8 - possible rough surface
10	Flat stones around 8 and extends under 9 - cobbled surface rectangular 1.7 x 0.92m in size
11	E wall S end - large stones on exterior with small stone hearting and some clay infill
12	E wall - centre- less well defined all the large stones have been removed just leaving the hearting in a trench. Not exc
13	E wall N corner - most of large stones removed leaving loose rubble and trench
14	N wall E end large stones and hearting but disturbed
15	N wall centre area - hearting in a trench only
16	NW wall corner - large stones possibly some in situ walling - not excavated
17	W wall foundation - stones and clay bonding at lower levels
18	Flat stone in drain
19	Flat rectangular and waterwashed cobble surface N of drain 20
20	Cobbled drain 3.6m long, 0.26m wide and 0.05m deep running ENE-WSW across Room 1
21	Cobbled stone surface on S side 20 sloping down from S to N
22	Flat rectangular and waterwashed cobble surface S of drain 20
23	Black loam between stones 9
24	Circular stone with grey loam - base for tank/barrels?
25	Circular stone base - stones roughly bonded with clay and laid on top of cobbles redeposited natural (28) on top of cobbled surface 21
26	Partition wall between Rooms 1 and 2 consisting of 4 stones with 2 more moved out of position, and 4 more in W wall 17
27	Footing for 26
28	Redeposited natural under 25 on top of cobbled 21
29	Drain - stone capping on top and side with cobbles on base
30	Fill of 29 dark damp grey brown loam
31	Small stones dumped in NE corner Room 1 - hearting dumped during demolition over cobbled surface 19
32	Cobbled surface on floor of Room 2
33	Wall footing under wall 26 = 27
34	Mixed demolition material and clay - trampled during demolition on top of natural gravel
35	Compact reddish-brown gravel with loam under 8. Cobbled 10 underneath
36	Circular area of stones - base

37	Arc of stones around 24 - base for barrel, tank?
38	Stones in damp soil at W end drain 20 removed to reveal the cobbles on the base of the drain
39	Area of rough cobbling E of E building wall Room 3
40	Stone and brick rubble in cut in natural in Room 2
41	Under 31 medium angular stones demolition rubble from 26?
42	Ash and burnt clay fill of pit 59
43	Stones adjacent to 42 - sitting on natural subsoil - associated with pit 59??
44	Semi-circular void in cobbles 22 - not a post base or feature - area where cobbles removed
45	Fill of drain 29 - redeposited natural
46	Stone revetment or demolition on downslope S of S wall of house
47	Stone revetment or demolition on downslope S of S wall of house
48	Line of stones S end of Building - not a wall but line of stones possibly for a wood partition or low wall?
49	Compact redeposited natural gravel; infill of 50
50	Semi-circle of stones - base for barrel, tank??
51	Top slab of drain (capping) Section 4
52	Fill of drain 51 - dark damp loam
53	Stone footing on N side 26
54	Hard gravel base between wall 12 and cobbles 10 - floor Room 3
55	Step at S end of 10
56	Circle of stones
57	Drain running W into section under wall foundation 17
58	Fil of 57 - dark loam not excavated
59	Pit filled with burnt ash and clay
60	Black loam under cobbles 19
61	Redeposited natural between stones 48 and cobbles 21- levelling up of floor E end Room 1?

APPENDIX 2 SAMPLES

Context	Sampled for
23	Black loam between stones of 9
30	Drain 29 fill
42 top of fill	Pit fill, burning and peat
42 base of fill	Pit fill, burning and peat

APPENDIX 3 FINDS

Context	Details
1	China frags x 2, mortar lumps
2	3 green glass bottles, rectangular in section, necks x 2 one with A.J.WHITE stamped on side. 1860/70s at the

	earliest, 1880s/90s (Colin MacKenzie, Cabrach Trust trustee pers comm) 1 iron bucket handle 3 clay pipe one virtually complete with brown ?glaze around rim, one stem and heel, 1 bowl with heel broken off, no stamps or marks 7 clear window glass 2 brown bottle glass 7 ceramic inc 1 earthenware, 1 stoneware, 1 mocha ware 3 brick, 6 iron, wood frags, 1 iron barbed wire (old)
4	Window glass, mortar
5	Several frags roof slate
6	Iron ring – horse harness?
7	1 iron nail, 1 clay pipe stem
8	Machine made red brick with holes
12	Granite with drill hole
24	Brick and wood
28	Floor slab x 2, iron plate with rivets, mortar, 3 iron nails, 5 sherds stoneware jar, brick, 1 clay pipe stem
31	Brick frags
34	Wood, 2 hand made brick frags, 1 stone floor slab, 2 window glass, iron nails
35	Iron nail x 1
38	12 stonewares sherds including neck of bottle, 1 clay pipe stem, 2 bird bone (immature femorae)
40	Brick, iron nail, window glass, wood
41	Iron plate x 3, wood, iron buckle
42	Wood, iron plate, brick x 4
u/s	Copper alloy sheet, bent over (scrap)



Illus 23 Iron ring (context 6)



Illus 24 Iron band with rivets (context 28)



Illus 25 stoneware bottle (context 28)



Illus 26 Clay pipe with brown ?stain around rim (context 2)



Illus 27 Late 19th century glass bottle AW WHITE (context 2)



Illus 28 Clay pipe bowl (context 2)

APPENDIX 4 PHOTOGRAPHS

Photo no	Description	Facing
6689	Site pre-machining	N
6690	Site pre-machining	W
6691	Site pre-machining	S
6692	Site pre-machining	W
6693-5	Partition wall 26 starting to appear	W
6696	Stoneware bottle in context 2	
6697-8	Iron plate with rivets context 2	

6699	E wall S end (11)	W
6700	E wall S end (11)	NW
6701	E wall S end (11)	N
6702-6	S Room 1 cobbled floor and runnel 20	E
6707	Cobbled floor 21 (right), circular mortared stone wall 25 (left)	W
6708	25	W
6709-12	S Room 1 cobbled floor and runnel 20	W
6713-14	20 W end context 38	W
6715-17	S Room 1 cobbled floor and runnel 20	W
6718	S Room 1 cobbled floor and runnel 20	W
6719-20	S Room 1 cobbled floor and runnel 20	E
6721-22	Cobbled floor 21 (right), circular mortared stone wall 25 (left)	E
6723	Site from partition wall 26	N
6724	E wall S end (11)	NW
6725-6	Room 2 cobbled floor 32	W
6727-8	Room 2 cobbled floor 32	S
6729	Building under excavation	S
6730	Building under excavation	SE
6731	N wall foundation 15	E
6732	W wall foundation 17 with cobbles 32 (top)	E
6733	Cobbles 32 Veronica uncovering 10	E
6734	Cobbles 32 , soil 34 (left)	E
6735	W wall foundation 17 with cobbles 32 (top)	E
6736-39	N wall foundation 15	E
6740-41	N wall E end 14	W
6742-3	Surface 10 partially revealed	S
6744	N end of building context 7	W
6745-6	N end of building context 7	S
6747-9	N end of building context 7	E
6750	Building under excavation	SE
6751-3	Surface 10 partially revealed with wall foundation 12 in foreground	W
6754-55	Stones 39 - rough paving?	W
6756-8	Flagstones 10 (left) wall foundation 12 (right) showing area of compact gravel 8 - still base?	N
6759	Stones 39 - rough paving?	W
6760-2	Circular area of gravel surrounded by stones 24	N
6763	Circular area of gravel surrounded by stones 24	W
6764	Circular area of gravel surrounded by stones 24	N
6765-6	Stones 43 with 42 (right)	N
6767	Stone rubble in 7 (Rosemary's section 6/7)	W
6768	Stone rubble in 7 (Rosemary's section 6/7)	S
6769	Stone rubble in 7 (Rosemary's section 6/7)	E
6770-2	Press day	SSE
6773	Veronica and Irvine investigating S 'wall' area	WSW
6774	Room 1 Moyra planning (right)	W
6775-6	Drain 20	W
6777	Veronica and Irvine investigating S 'wall' area	WSW
6778-82	Drain 20 with semi-circular void in cobbles 44 (left)	W
6783-85	Drain 20 with semi-circular void in cobbles 44 (right)	E
6786-7	W end drain 20 showing cobbles at base	E
6788-89	working shots from S of building	N
6790-1	from SW corner	NE
6792-5	drain 20	E
6796	Veronica uncovering drain 29	E

6797-800	Moyra planning Room 2	SSE/SE
6801	Stone revetment 46, stones 48 (top)	N
6802	Stone revetment 46, stones 48 (right)	W
6803-4	Stones in top of drain 29 with redeposited natural gravel on top	N
6805-6	Stones in top of drain 29 with redeposited natural gravel on top	W
6807	S 'wall' 44 with Rosemary and Peter	N
6808	Peter excavating 25	NE
6809	48 foreground 50 (top)	W
6810-11	stones removed from top of 29	N
6812-13	drain 29 with revetment 47 (left)	W
6814	drain 29	S
6815	drain 29	W
6816-17	remains of stones and soil 38 left at W end of drain 20	W
6818	Room 2 cobbled floor 32 (left) stones 40 (right) prior to removal by Moyra	W
6819-20	Room 2 cobbled floor 32 (top) stones 40 (bottom) prior to removal by Moyra	S
6821-23	stones, soil, brick 40	W
6824-5	wood in 34	W
6826	40	N
6827	wood in 34	W
6828-30	Section 4 wall 26 top footing 53 below with drain capping stone 51 (centre)	S
6831-34	Cobbles under 25 with wall 11 (top)	E
6835-6	Cobbles under 25 with drain 20	W
6837-8	25 removed showing remains in wall 11	E
6839	wall foundation 12 (bottom) cobbles 10 (top)	W
6840-1	wall foundation 12 (left) cobbles 10 (right)	S
6842	small stone base 56	S
6843	cobbled surface 10	N
6844	cobbled surface 10	W
6845-7	compact natural gravel 54 removed, SE corner Room 3 (top)	SE
6848	Peter and Irvine investigating partition wall 26	SW
6849	40 removed to reveal compact gravel natural cut	S
6850	stones 57	E
6851-3	stones 57 (foreground) cobbled surface 32 (top)	S
6854-57	W section of wall foundation 17	W
6858-9	W section below wall foundation 17 wood on top of cobbles 32	W
6860-64	Section 4 wall 26 top footing 53 below with drain capping stone 51 (centre)	S
6865	cobbles under 38 in base of W end of drain 20 with drain 57 through wall foundation 17 (top left) and drain 51 (right)	W
6866	cobbles under 38 in base of W end of drain 20 with drain 57 through wall foundation 17 (right) and drain 51 (bottom)	S
6867	cobbles under 38 in base of W end of drain 20 with drain 57 through wall foundation 17 (left) and drain 51 (top)	N
6868	51 detail from S (section 5)	N
6869-72	51 detail from N (section 4)	S
6873-4	section 3 drain 57	W
6875-6	pit 59	N
6877	pit 59	W
6878-9	cobbles under 25	E
6880	cobbles under 25	W
6881	cobbles under 31 (right) 44 excavated (centre left)	W
6882	cobbles under 31 (left) 44 excavated (bottom right)	E

6883	cobbles under 31 (top) 44 excavated (bottom left) with partition wall 26 (top)	N
6884	cobbles under 31 (bottom) 44 excavated (centre top) with partition wall 26 (bottom)	S
6885	44 excavated	S
6886	pit 59	W
6887	pit 59	N
6888	pit 59	S
6889	pit 59	N
6890	pit 59	N
6891	pit 59	S
6892	pit 59 and section 8	N
6893	pit 59	S
6894	Hand-made bricks	
6895	sandstone slab	
6896-99	pit 59	N
6900	pit 59	W
6901-2	pit 59	E
6903-5	Cobbles 34 with section 4	S
6906-8	Section 6 through 7 with wall foundation 15 (right)	E
6909-11	Section 7 through 7 with wall foundation 15 (left)	W
6912-14	Drain 29 with drain 51 (top)	N
6915-6	Site from the lower south slope	N
6917-18	Wall foundation 12 (bottom) stones 39 (top)	E
6919-22	Wall foundation 12 (right) stones 39 (left)	S